Online and in the Office:

The State of Technology-Based Learning in the Nonprofit Sector

Key Findings

Welcome to our first State of technology-based learning report! NTEN and the Cornerstone OnDemand Foundation set out to learn how nonprofits use technology—in the form of webinars, videos, eLearning, and more—to educate their stakeholders. We also wanted to understand how technology is complimenting in-person learning and how nonprofits plan to use technology to meet education needs in the future.

Our survey revealed technology-based learning is a critical way in which nonprofits engage their stakeholders, but many are struggling to realize the cost savings of online learning and many lack the expertise to deliver training more advanced than webinars and videos. While in-person training remains a staple of internal and external education programs, how nonprofits evolve their technology-based learning strategy will be a critical success factor in the coming years.

Some key findings include:

• Although more organizations still offer some form of in-person training, almost 80% of nonprofits have offered some form of technology-based learning in the past year.

• Webinars are the most popular form of technology-based learning, followed by eLearning courses, and video. Among these options, webinars were viewed as the least effective.

• Technology-based learning is viewed as more cost-effective than in-person learning, however the perception is that it takes about the same amount of time to develop.

• Among organizations not using technology-based learning, lack of expertise was the most cited reason.

• Nonprofits cite the ability to reach a broader audience as the greatest benefit of technology-based learning and see the greatest need existing within programs and services.

As a provider of technology-based training for nonprofits, NTEN is especially interested in your observations, ideas and requests for future research in this arena.
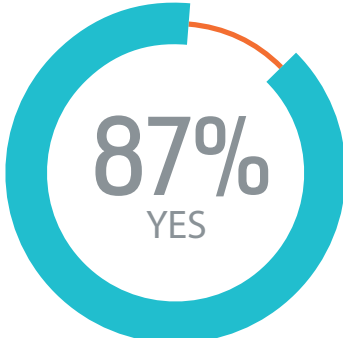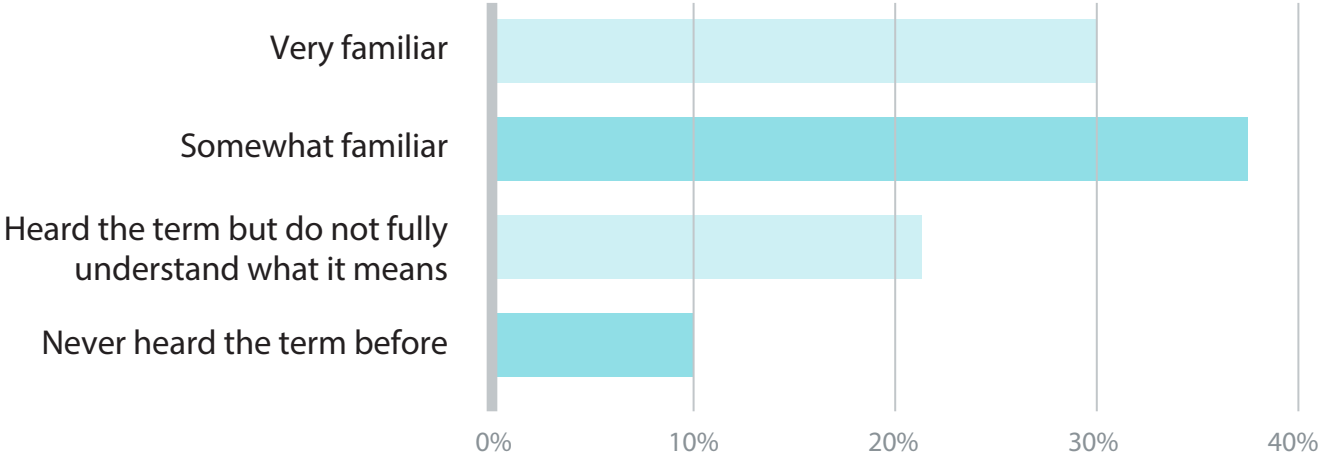
Learning Opportunities Offered

There are many different definitions of "technology-based learning." For the purpose of this survey, assume "technology-based learning" refers to structured opportunities to learn via all electronic technology, including the Internet, intranets, video conferencing, Internet conferencing, webcasts, webinars, E-learning, and computer-based instruction. Using this definition, 441 organizations responded to the following questions.

Q1 In the past 12 months, has your organization offered some form of in-person learning at least once to anyone associated with your organization?
(431 responses)

87%
YES

Q2 How familiar are you with the term "technology-based learning?" (431 responses)

|	
Very familiar	
Somewhat familiar	
Heard the term but do not fully understand what it means	
Never heard the term before	

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%

Q3 Based on the definition provided, in the past 12 months has your organization offered some form of technology-based learning at least once to anyone associated with your organization?
(424 responses)

Nearly 90% of respondents offered some kind of training to their staff in the past year. Approximately 10% more offered in-person than offered technology-based learning but both options are popular. More than two-thirds of respondents indicated some familiarity with technology-based learning. All of them offered technology-based learning in the past year, as did most of those who indicated limited familiarity with the options.

This response rate shows that participants in the survey had an especially high use of technology-based learning. A comparable study from eLearning Industry, *The Top eLearning Statistics and Facts for 2015 You Need to Know*, found that 77% use e-learning tools.
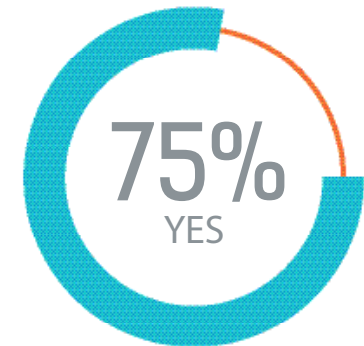
"We are on our own. (The) company does not provide (training)."

—Development/fundraising worker at an arts organization

75% YES

Applications of Technology-Based Learning

**Q4** In the past 12 months, what types of technology-based learning has your organization provided? Please check all that apply.   (329 responses)

Technology-based learning comes in a wide variety of options, and respondents who offered technology-based learning in the past year have tried all of them. Webinars were the most popular, with nearly twice as many uses as the second most-used type, E-learning courses. Six of the ten options were used by more than 10% of respondents. The "other" responses were a mix of options using a combination of types or home-grown systems.
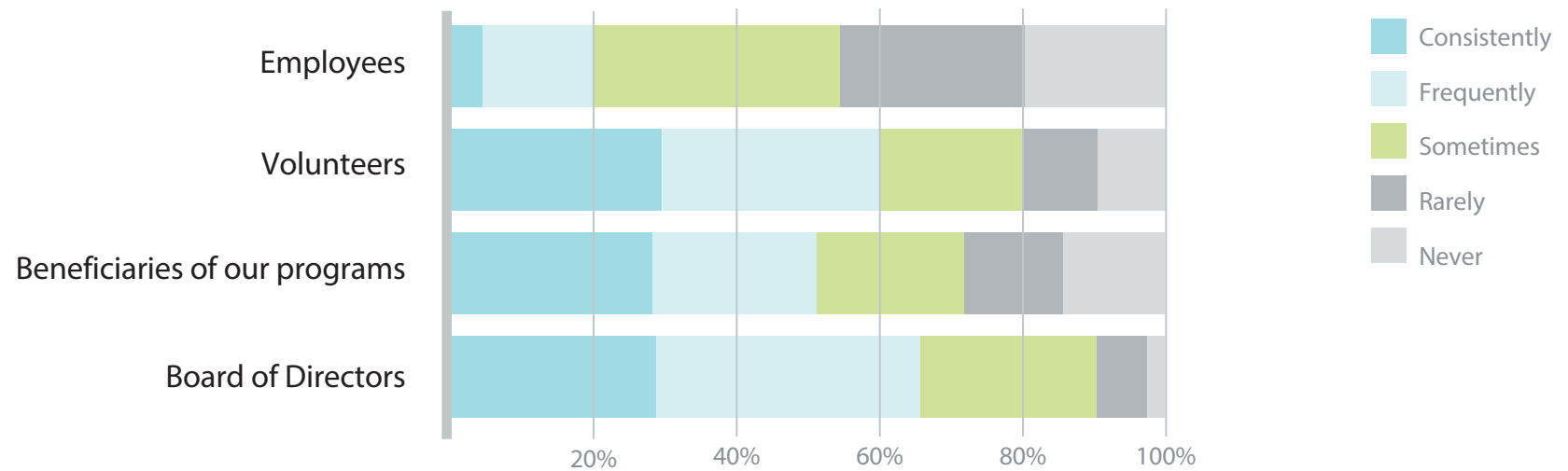
Q5 How would you rate the effectiveness of each form of technology-based learning used by your organization? (318 responses)

Rated on a scale of 1 to 7 with 1 being "not at all effective" and 7 being "very effective." Results for each type represent the average effectiveness rating.
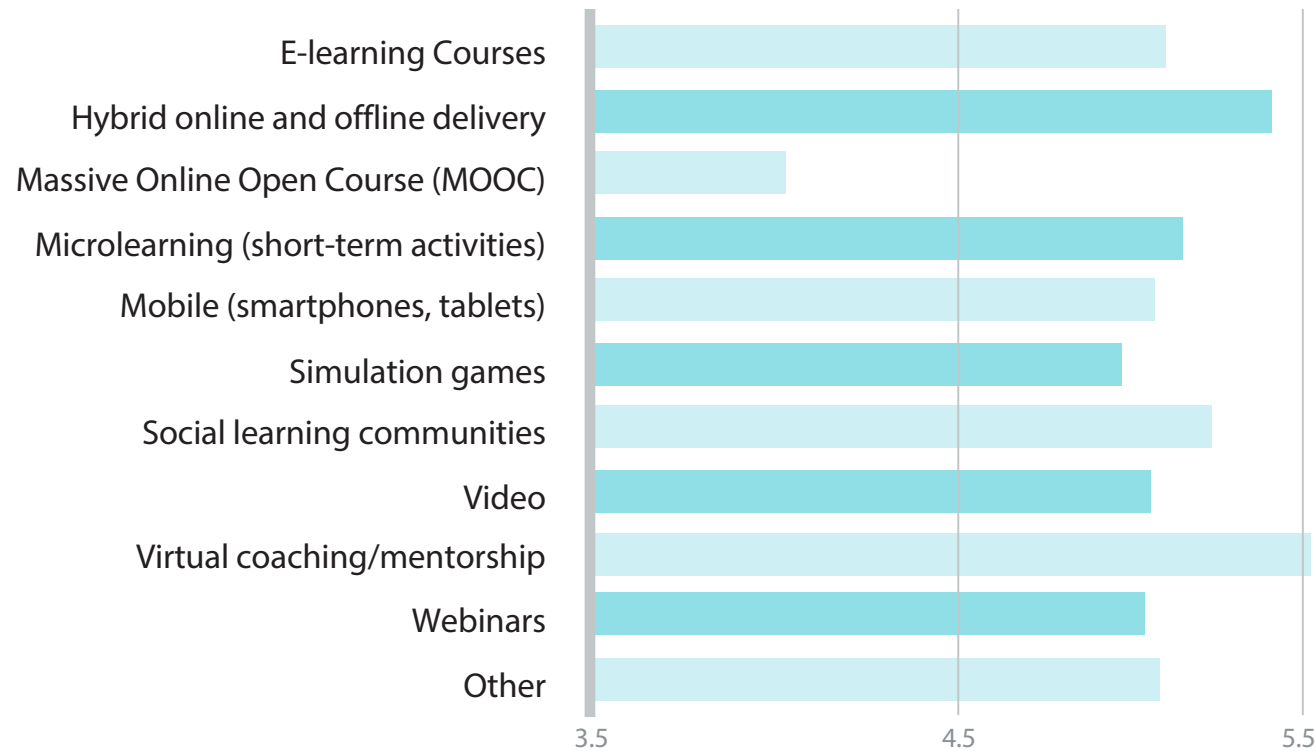
While "effective" was left to the interpretation of the respondent, results for this set of questions are remarkably consistent. Based on user impressions, all methods are seen as reasonably effective. The two methods that include some sort of offline component are seen as slightly more effective, while MOOCs come in the lowest. It's worth noting that MOOCs also have relatively low use, which is consistent with other research showing an 8% adoption rate of this technology. Otherwise, levels of use did not significantly correspond to stronger impressions of efficiency.

Q6 Please rate how often you use technology-based learning to educate the following stakeholders. (307 responses)

Legend:
- Consistently
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Categories (top to bottom): Employees, Volunteers, Beneficiaries of our programs, Board of Directors

X-axis: 20%, 40%, 60%, 80%, 100%

Technology-based learning is most often used with employees, with nearly 80% receiving training at least "sometimes." Participants of programs are closer to 50% use, while volunteers and boards come in the lowest, below 40% for each. Not surprisingly, training is most often offered to the people directly performing the day-to-day work who are regularly present in the workplace.

How Does Technology-Based Learning Stack Up?

Respondents were asked to compare technology-based learning to in-person learning using four criteria: Cost, effectiveness, development time, and learner preference.

Q7 Compared with the cost of other training, how cost-effective is technology-based learning? (296 responses)

Less 6.42%
Equal 21.96%
More 71.62%
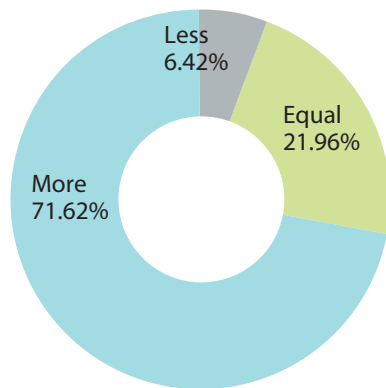
Q8 When comparing the effectiveness, would you say technology-based learning is… (296 responses)

More 9.46%
Equal 45.95%
Less 44.59%
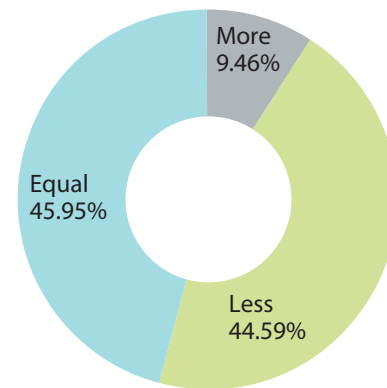
Q9 When comparing the development time, would you say technology-based learning is… (296 responses)

Less 22.30%
Equal 39.53%
More 38.18%
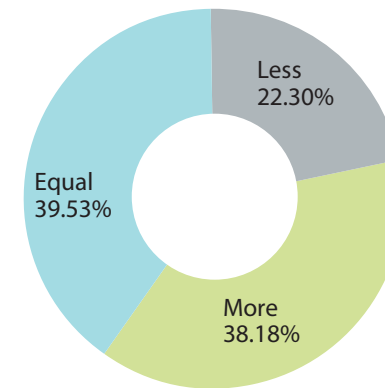
Q10 When comparing the learner preference, would you say technology-based learning is… (296 responses)

Less 30.74%
Equal 46.28%
More 22.97%
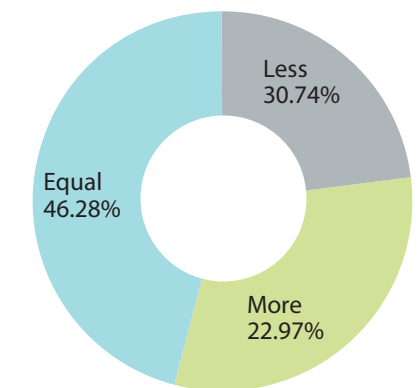
Respondents clearly feel that technology-based learning is cost effective, with only about 6% saying that it is less so than in-person learning. Responses on the other categories were more mixed, with between 40% and 45% finding all three criteria equal for technology-based learning and in-person. Development time and learner preference were fairly similar, with just over 20% indicating that they felt technology-based learning was preferable. Overall effectiveness revealed the most concern, but seems to be offset by lower costs for most organizations that offered technology-based learning in the past year.
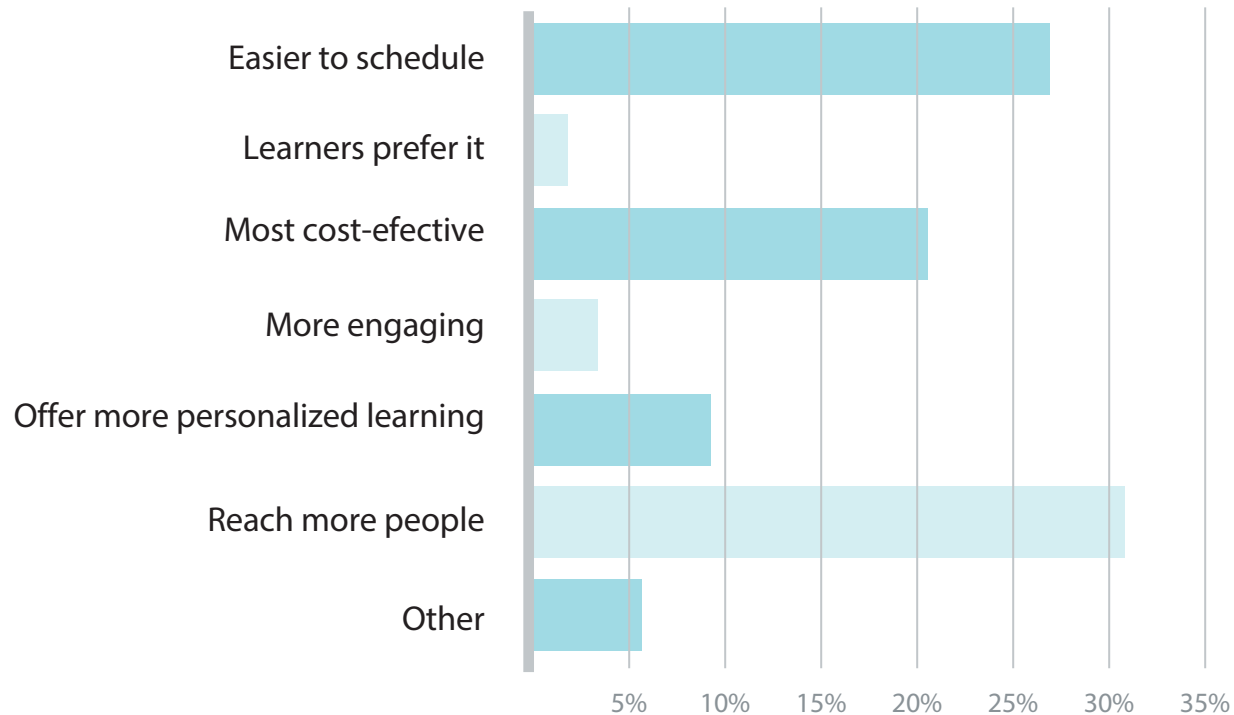
Technology-Based Learning Needs

This section asked for feedback on four different topics related to the use technology-based learning.

Q11 If you do not use (or do not plan to use) technology-based learning, which of the following best reflects the primary reason for this decision? (91 responses)
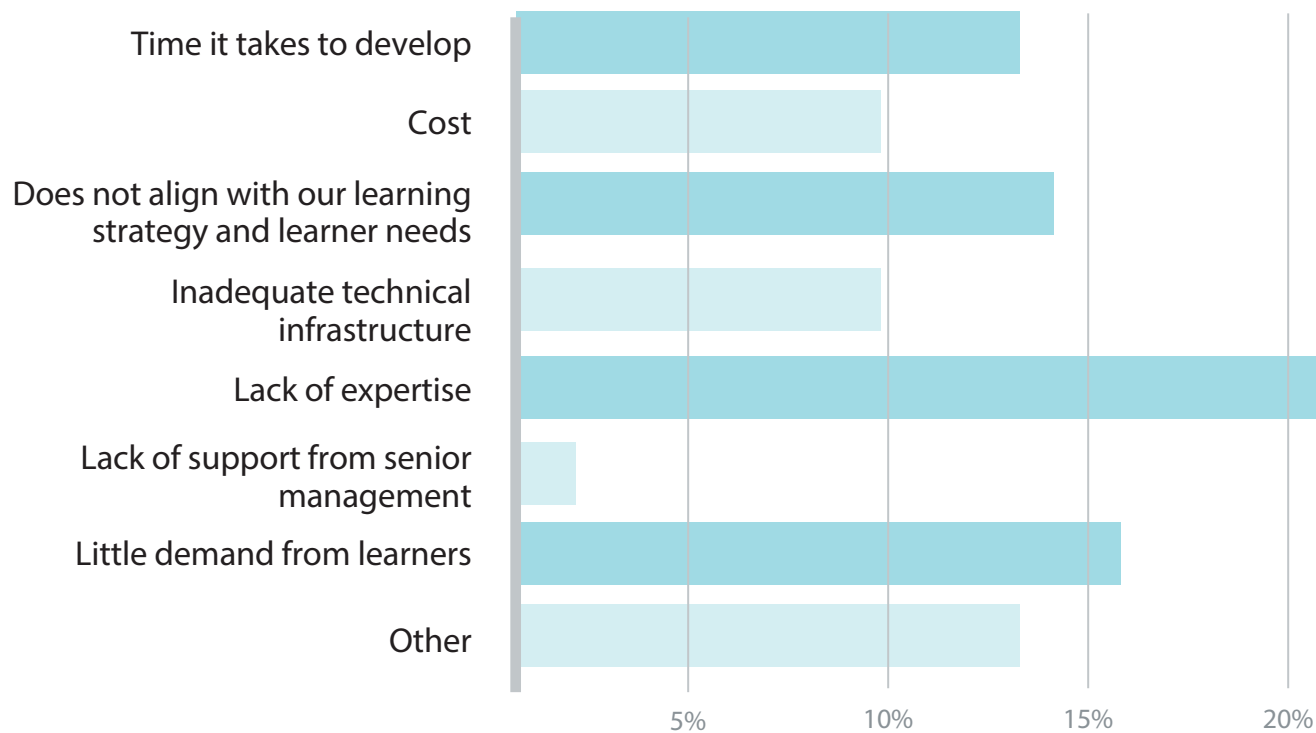
Non-users indicated a balanced set of reasons. Lack of expertise was the most significant, followed closely by lack of demand, poor fit with the organization's learning strategy, and lack of development time. The latter of these aligns with the earlier feedback that technology-based learning can be time-consuming to implement. Responses in the "other" category were evenly split into three categories: Organizations that intend to implement technology-based learning in the near future, dislike of the platforms and options, and perceived lack of immediate need.

Q12 What is or could be the greatest benefit of technology-based learning for your nonprofit? (376 responses)

Bar chart showing responses:
- Easier to schedule: ~27%
- Learners prefer it: ~2%
- Most cost-efective: ~20%
- More engaging: ~4%
- Offer more personalized learning: ~9%
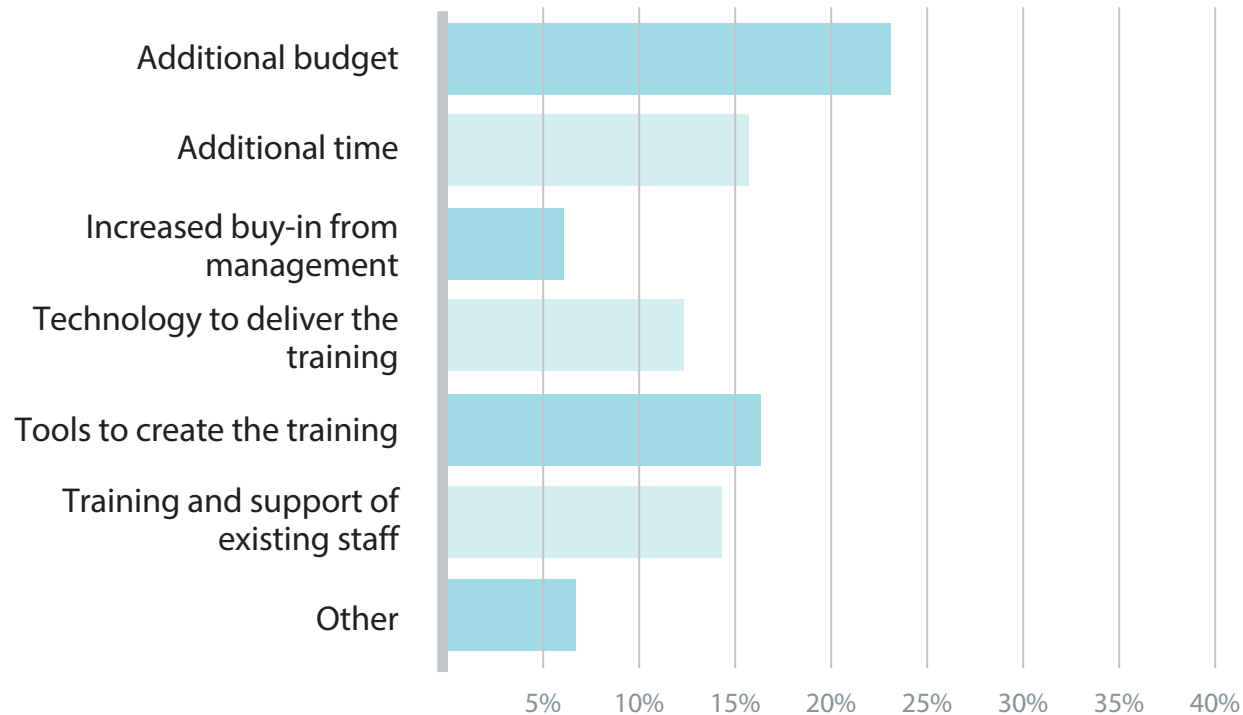- Reach more people: ~31%
- Other: ~6%

These responses focus on user and organizational convenience. Reaching more people and ease of scheduling account for more than half of the responses, with cost accounting for another 20%. Answers in "other" were variations on time and convenience responses.

Q13 Where in your organization does the biggest need for technology-based learning exist? (376 responses)
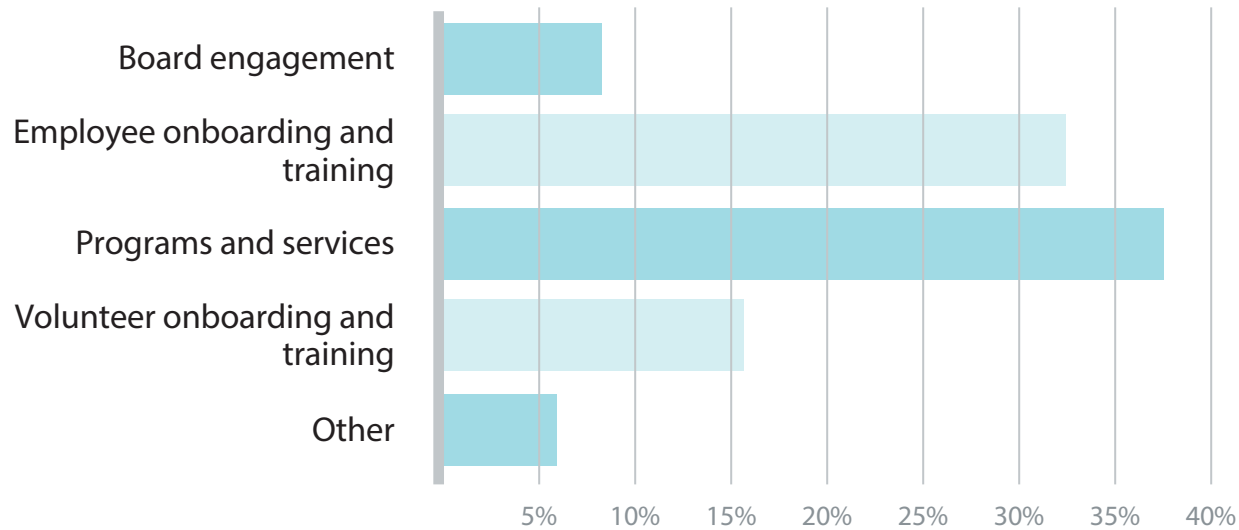
This question also has two significant responses. Training on programs and services is the largest category, which makes sense as it could apply to multiple learner groups: Employees, service users, and others. Employee training, especially for new hires, is also significant. That aligns with the feedback about who most often receives technology-based learning. In this case, "other" was highly varied, with most responses being very specific to individual organizational needs.

Q14 Which of the following would best enable you to use (or more effectively use) technology-based learning? (376 responses)

Additional budget
Additional time
Increased buy-in from management
Technology to deliver the training
Tools to create the training
Training and support of existing staff
Other

5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30% 35% 40%

This question provides a corollary to the first of the set, with the need for resources – time, money, staff – garnering the largest responses. Replies were fairly evenly divided, with funding leading the pack. Interestingly, the "other" responses were almost entirely some variation of "all of the above." Organizations interested in using more technology-based learning feel they are hampered by tight resources.
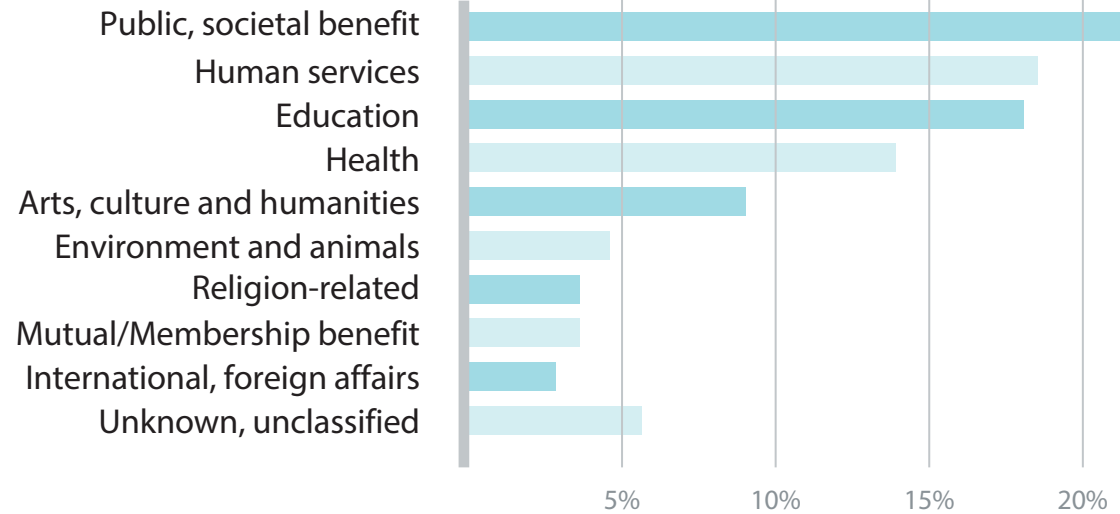
"We have hand-me-down PCs and (a) slow, congested network."

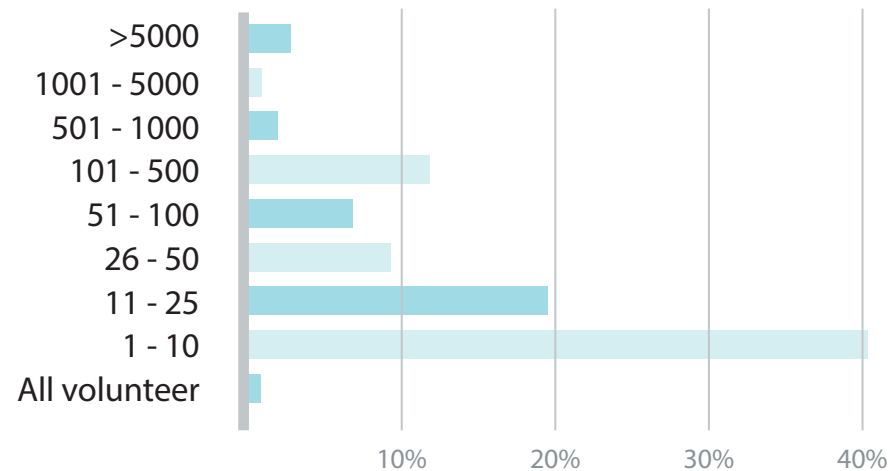—Finance/Administration/HR worker from a city art department

Respondent Demographics

Here's a snapshot of the organizations that responded to our survey.

Q15 What best describes your organization's primary issue area? (441 responses)

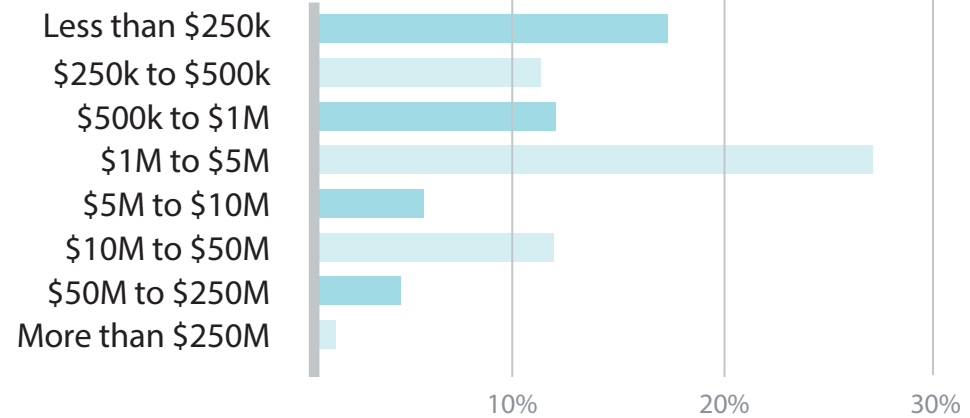|	
Public, societal benefit	
Human services	
Education	
Health	
Arts, culture and humanities	
Environment and animals	
Religion-related	
Mutual/Membership benefit	
International, foreign affairs	
Unknown, unclassified	

5% 10% 15% 20%

Q16 How many total staff are employed by your organization? Please consider part time staff in Full Time Equivalents (FTEs). (441 responses)
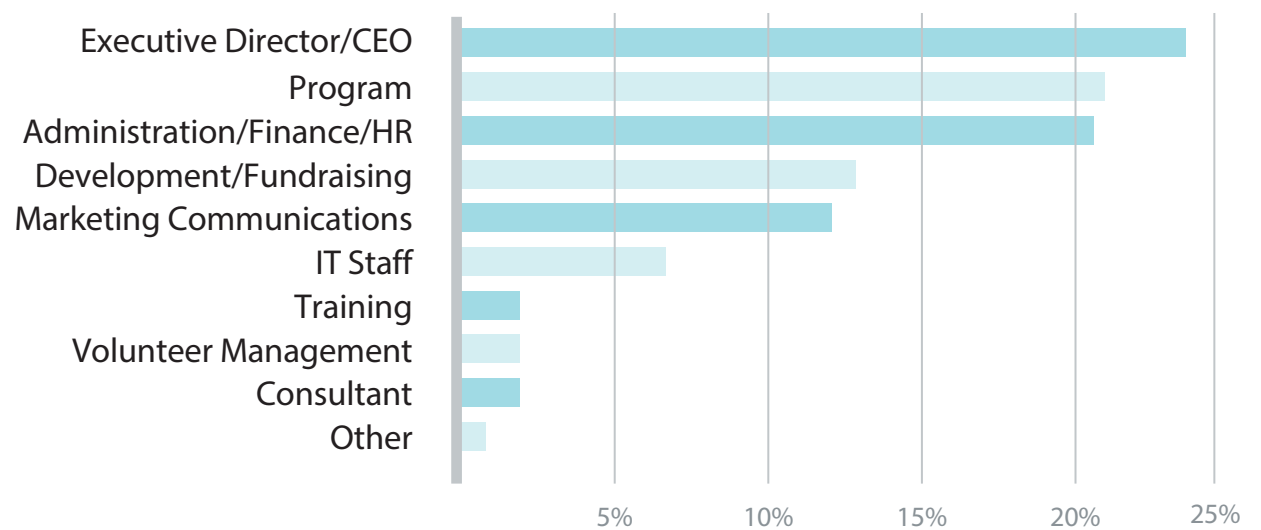
>5000	
1001 - 5000	
501 - 1000	
101 - 500	
51 - 100	
26 - 50	
11 - 25	
1 - 10	
All volunteer	

10% 20% 30% 40%

Q17 What is your organization's total annual operating budget?

(441 responses)

Budget	
Less than $250k	
$250k to $500k	
$500k to $1M	
$1M to $5M	
$5M to $10M	
$10M to $50M	
$50M to $250M	
More than $250M	

10%   20%   30%

Q18 Which best represents your role or department at your organization?   (441 responses)

Role	
Executive Director/CEO	
Program	
Administration/Finance/HR	
Development/Fundraising	
Marketing Communications	
IT Staff	
Training	
Volunteer Management	
Consultant	
Other	

5%   10%   15%   20%   25%

About the Nonprofit Technology Network (NTEN)

NTEN is the membership organization of nonprofit technology professionals. Our members share the common goal of helping nonprofits use all aspects of technology more effectively. NTEN training includes the Nonprofit Technology Professional Certificate, which is delivered online.

About Cornerstone OnDemand Foundation

The mission of the Cornerstone OnDemand Foundation is to transform the way people help people. Through the contribution of our talent management technology, our capacity building programs, and the support of our entire ecosystem, we strengthen nonprofit organizations around the world by enabling them to develop, engage, and empower their employees and the people they serve.