nten

2025 Data Empowerment Report

Discover how nonprofits collect, manage, use, and govern their data.

An NTEN Report
by Katya Abazajian

What's inside

Introduction

Our research consistently reveals a gap between an organization's intentions—reflected in its policies or strategic plans—and the actual adoption and implementation of data practices.

There are few conversations about nonprofit programs, services, strategies, and impact that aren't supported or informed by data.

Whether you're redesigning your website, expanding a program to a new location, or engaging in annual strategic planning, data informs better decisions. For example, website analytics reveal which pages are attracting visitors and where they drop off. Program evaluations and community data guide service expansion. Qualitative and quantitative data strengthen strategic planning and help organizations stay aligned with their mission.

Over the last two decades, NTEN has published research on how nonprofits use, manage, and strategize around data. While the sector continues to evolve, our research consistently reveals a gap between an organization's intentions—reflected in its policies or strategic plans—and the actual adoption and implementation of data practices. The 2025 Data Empowerment Report, the third in our Data Empowerment series, is no exception.

How we made this report

We conducted an online survey during late 2024 and early 2025 with 220 organizations participating. In addition to their responses, we collected organizational demographic data, including budget size, staff size, mission area, geographic focus, and years of operation, which were used to cross-evaluate the responses to each question and identify any divergences or trends based on these factors. As is often the case in our research, we found that only in a few instances were there significant differences when it comes to those aspects. For the most part, organizations of all sizes and types experience many of the same realities.

Trends to consider

While the full set of questions and responses is included in the report, here are some of the key trends that organizations should consider.

1. Training must be tailored, not one-size-fits-all.

While not every staff member needs to be a data expert, everyone should have a basic understanding of data practices to support effective organizational data management. Consider offering varied formats and levels of training that align with staff roles. Internal data

For the most part, organizations of all sizes and types experience many of the same realities.

practices—such as evaluation or planning—are high priorities for many respondents, and they require consistent attention across departments, regardless of prior skill level.

2. Capacity and resources remain a barrier.

Despite improved appreciation for the value of data across staff, leadership, and boards, many organizations still lack the funding and capacity to fully integrate data into their operations. Most respondents feel confident using data to report to funders, but they want to expand its use in strategic planning and day-to-day decision-making. Without investment in staffing, systems, and training, progress in these areas will remain limited.

3. New priorities reflect growing maturity.

While organizations appear to be more comfortable with collecting data, broader education around analyzing and sharing data effectively still needs work. Most organizations have at least one full-time equivalent (FTE) staff member responsible for data, (note that this does not mean a title or exclusive job description of data collection, but that the equivalent of at least 1 FTE has those duties). However, fewer have robust practices around consent, privacy, or advanced data use. Passive consent (e.g., privacy disclosures without opt-in options) remains common, and few organizations provide clear opt-out mechanisms. As interest in AI tools grows, the need for clear governance policies and ethical frameworks becomes even more pressing.

NTEN's courses, community groups, and resources offer year-round opportunities for learning, sharing, and advancing your organization's use of data and technology. I encourage you to join the Data online group to explore these findings, ask questions, or share your experiences.

Wherever you and your organization are in your data journey, I would love to hear about it. Thank you for being part of the NTEN community.

Amy Sample Ward
CEO, NTEN

About NTEN

We are creating a world where missions and movements are successful through the skillful and equitable use of technology.

We build transformative power by connecting people who are putting technology to work for social change. We strengthen their individual and collective capacity for doing good by offering expert trainings, researching effective approaches, and providing places where relationships can flourish. We relentlessly advocate for the redesign of the systems and structures that maintain inequity.

NTEN reports support the growth and development of the sector through benchmarking the technology goals and challenges of nonprofits, and by identifying areas of need.

For more, visit nten.org/publications.

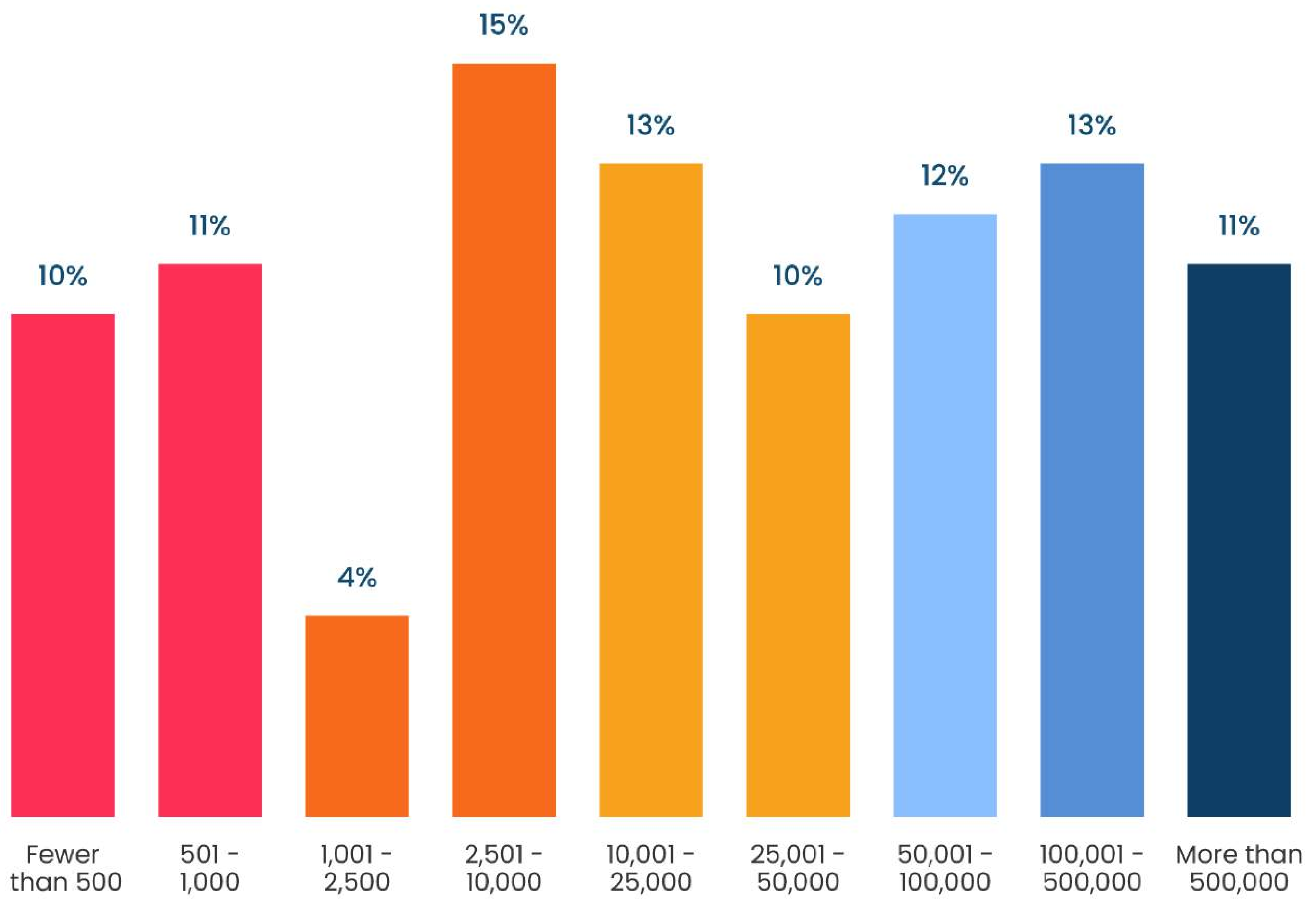
Records management

How are nonprofits managing data storage?

Nonprofits collect constituent records to improve their programs and services, measure their impact, and obtain funding. But *how* they collect and store their records can influence how they interpret or use that data. Using a variety of software tools, nonprofits can design solutions for data storage and access that reflect their goals and values. Exploring different strategies for records management is fundamental for organizations to build a robust culture of strategic and effective data use.

FIGURE 1

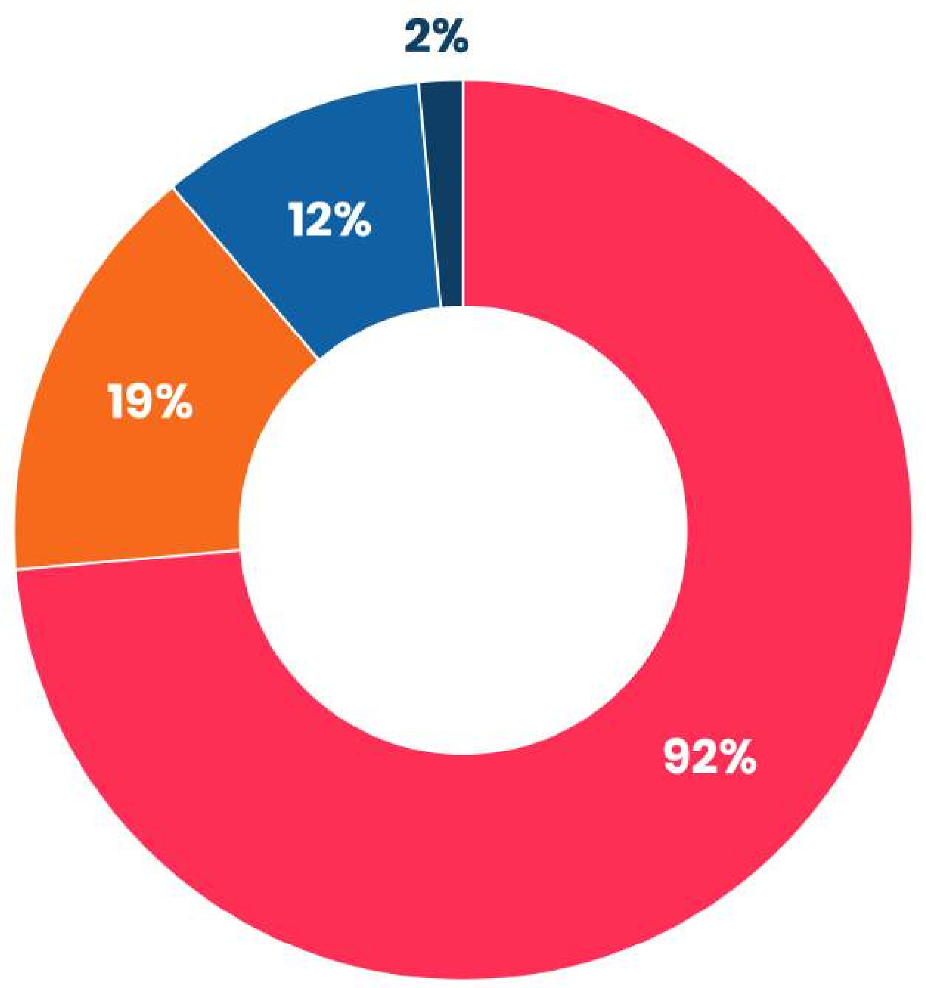
Roughly how many constituent records does your organization manage?



Most respondents manage data with a relatively small number of constituent records. About 25 percent manage fewer than 2,500 records, and the rest of the respondents are evenly distributed across the range of record volume. Record volume usually corresponds to organization size. Most organizations managing fewer than 2,500 records also have fewer than 25 or sometimes fewer than 5 staff. Most organizations managing more than 500,000 records are organizations of over 250 staff.

FIGURE 2

How is your data accessed?



Responses	%
Data is in a cloud-based CRM/ database that staff access online	92%
Data is on individual computers for access only by that individual	19%
Data is in a locally-hosted CRM/ data that staff access when in the office	12%
Other	2%

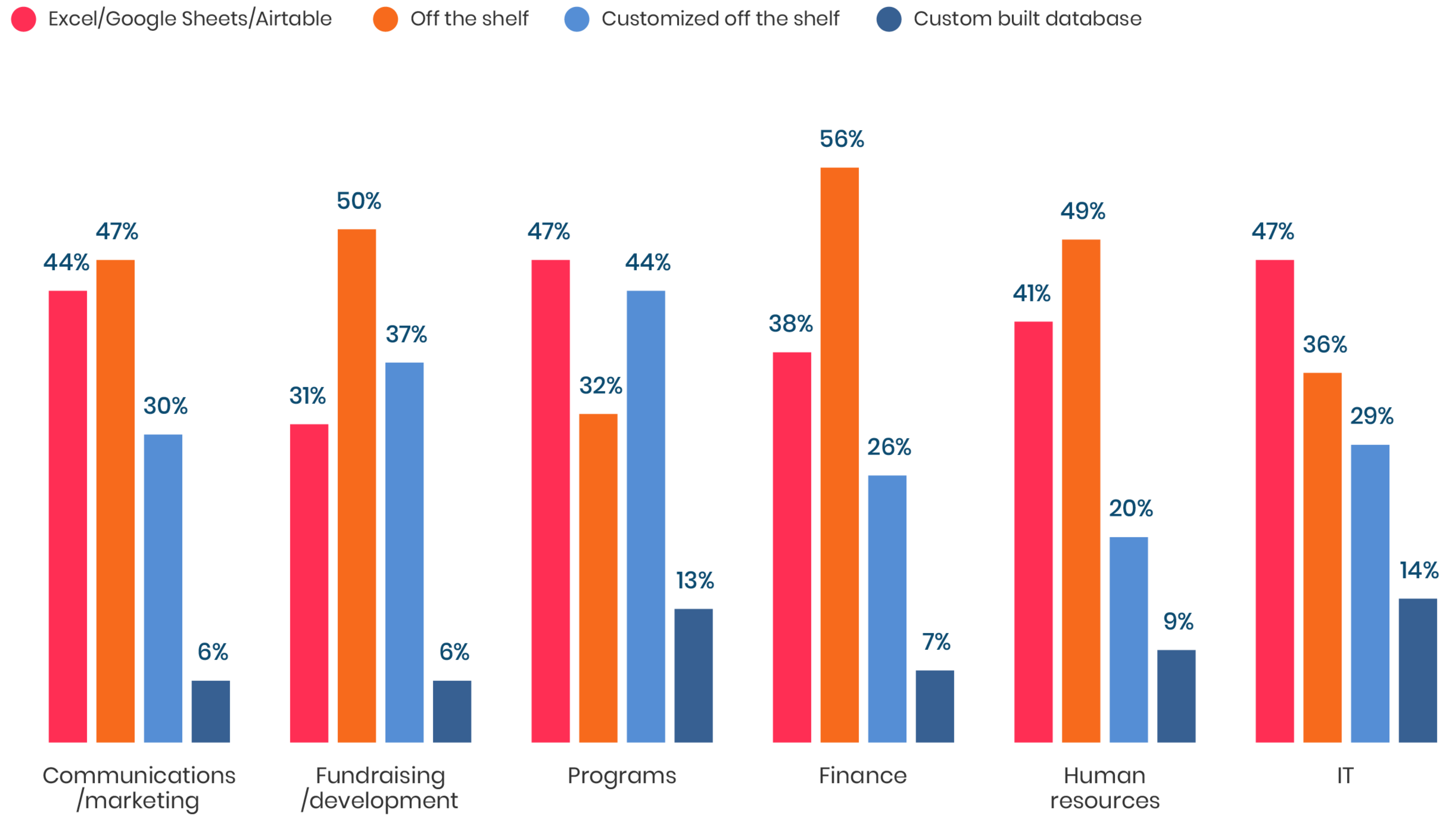
When nonprofits collect large amounts of valuable data, it's important to select a data hosting or storage solution that allows staff to access data easily. Almost 92 percent of respondents make their data available to staff through cloud-hosted databases that provide online access. A number of respondents still store data on individual computers only accessible to that individual, about 19 percent, which has not changed significantly since 2022's Data Empowerment survey. Nearly 12 percent of respondents are using locally-hosted CRM/databases than in previous years, fewer than in previous years.

Different teams at nonprofits can benefit from using data storage systems that are catered to their unique needs. However, this can also lead to hurdles in data-sharing if staff are not aware of ways to combine and analyze data across different departments or programs. Across respondents, communications, fundraising, programs, finance, human resources, and IT teams are all increasing their use of cloud-based services like Excel, Google Sheets, and Airtable compared to previous survey data. At the same time, certain teams still prefer certain approaches to data storage. Finance, fundraising, HR, and marketing teams appear preferential to customized off-the-shelf databases designed for their organization's purposes, while IT and Programs teams seem to prefer tools like Excel, Google Sheets, or Airtable.

Overall, nonprofits appear to be buying more off-the-shelf databases with or without customization, as opposed to just using available free tools or purchasing fully bespoke solutions. Use of completely custom data storage solutions has more or less stagnated, which may be indicative of an overall avoidance of expensive, bespoke data storage solutions, and a wider range of off-the-shelf options that meet nonprofits' needs.

FIGURE 3

What is the primary type of data storage system used for each of these departments?



Collection

How are nonprofits collecting their data?

Nonprofits use a wide variety of methods to collect data about their operations, communities, and impacts. While they should design data collection processes based on their stakeholders' needs and opportunities, sometimes funders or policymakers can have an outsized influence on how data should be collected. As a result, organizations may have to balance a variety of concerns when planning their data collection efforts. Overall, data collection processes align to organizational mission and values can ensure that organizations build trust with their stakeholders and use data effectively.

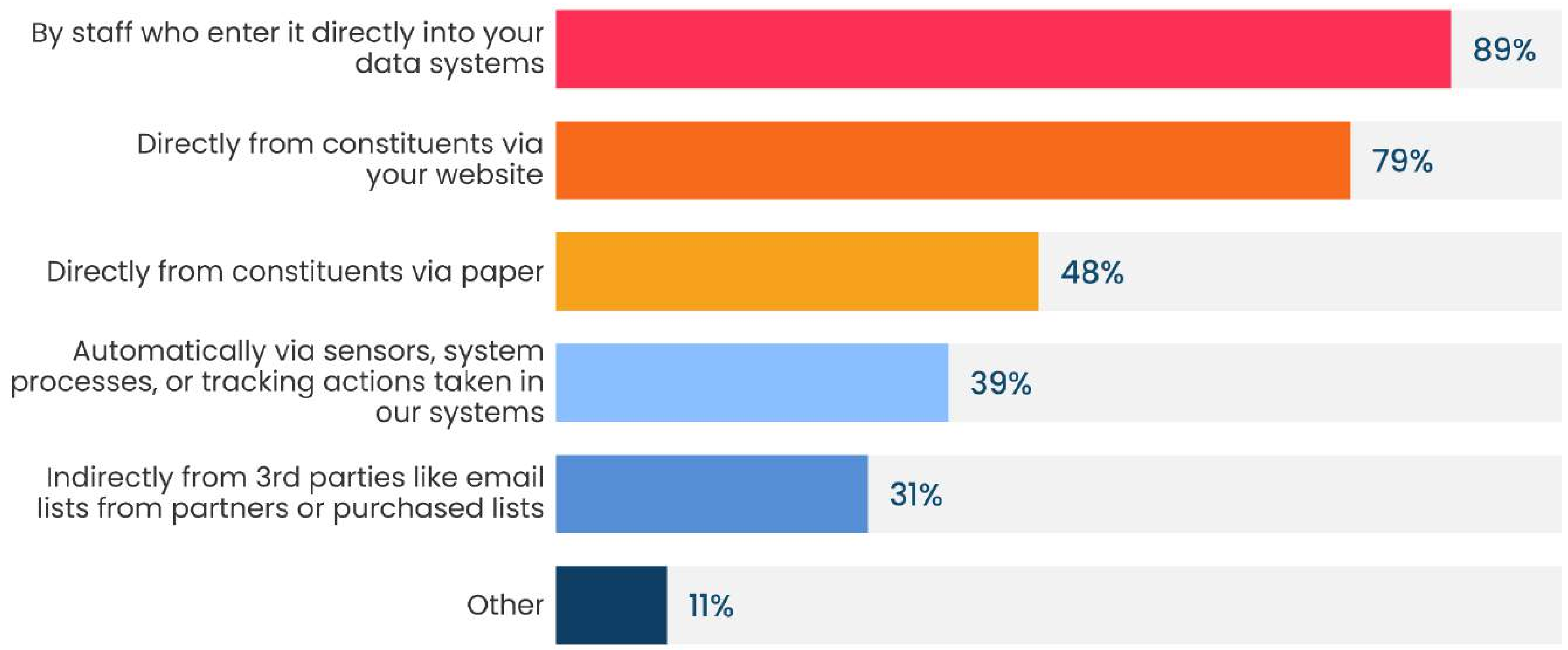
Manual data entry is still the most popular form of collecting data. Almost 90 percent of respondents have staff who directly enter data into their data systems. This number has gone up slightly since 2022 while the number of respondents collecting data via their website has gone down slightly. Almost 79 percent of respondents collect data via their website. A broad majority of respondents use more than one method to collect data. Of the respondents who chose “Other”, most collect data through digital surveys.

Notably, the percentage of respondents collecting data by sensors, tracking, or other automated processes has also gone up since the previous survey. About 40 percent of respondents collect data from sensors or tracking systems, while almost 31 percent gather data from third parties, for example through purchased lists. However, these two methods are still less popular than paper, electronic, or manual data collection, which is understandable given the broad public skepticism around surveillance through tracking systems or purchased databases that erode consumer privacy.

While there can be a variety of individual and organizational influences on what kind of data nonprofits collect, we surveyed people to understand how issues like funders’ priorities stack up against internal organizational demands like improving marketing or outreach. Similar to trends in previous years, respondents ranked funders’ priorities or grant reporting requirements as highly influential in data collection, as well as motivations to improve program outcomes.

FIGURE 4

How does your organization collect data?



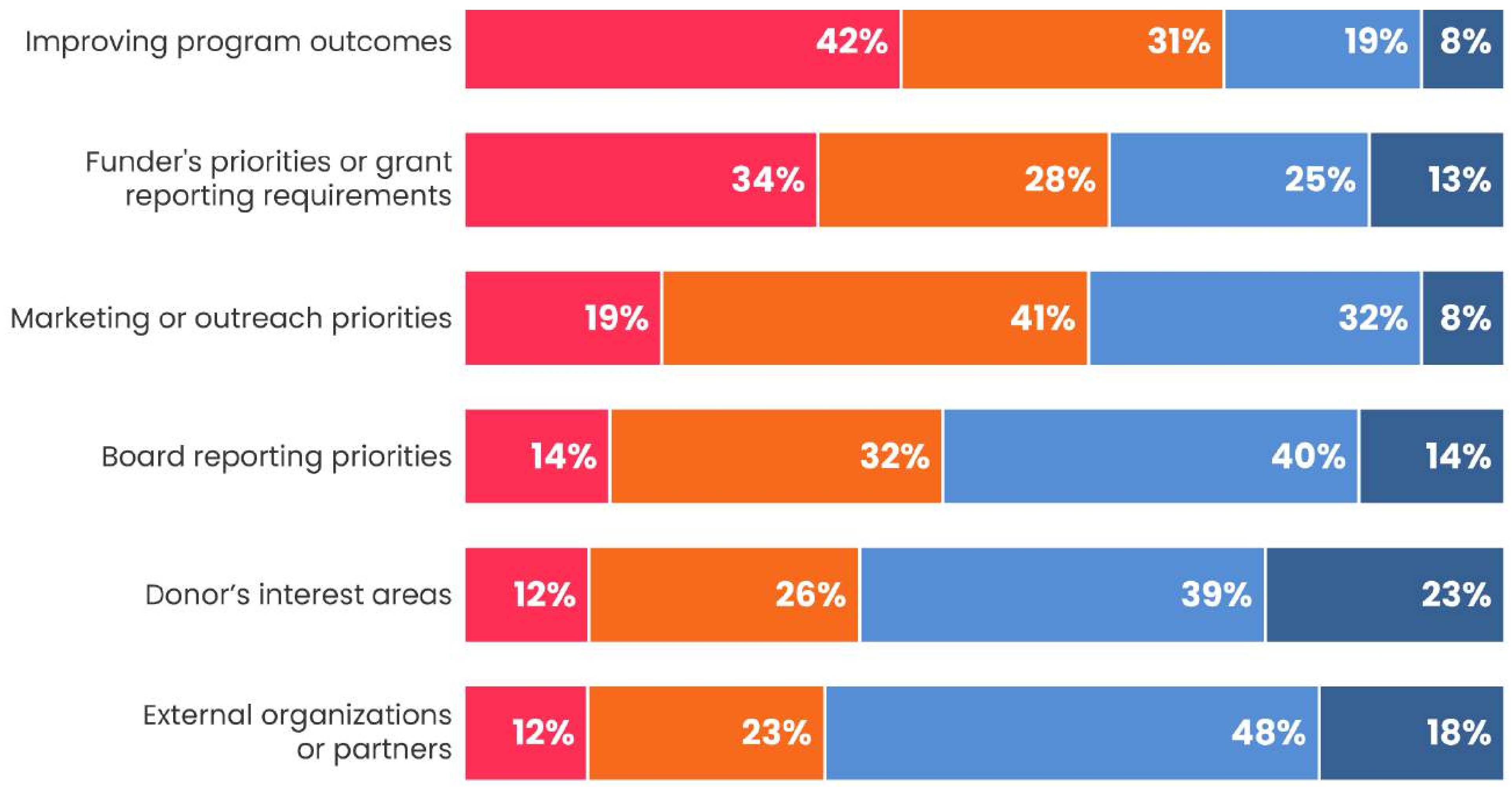
Marketing and outreach priorities were reported as significantly influential, possibly due to the importance of social media and audience acquisition to drive reach and impact. Donors' interests and external organizations or partners remained least influential. Respondents listed other possible influences as coming from beneficiaries or community members, federated partners when data collection is driven by cross-organizational standards, or external evaluators.

How people responded regarding influence from funders as opposed to marketing priorities varied slightly by the nonprofit's mission area. Of those who said that funders' priorities had a major influence, a majority were Human Services organizations. Of those who said marketing priorities were a major influence, a majority were Environmental/Animal Welfare organizations. Of those who said improving program outcomes was a major influence, a majority were Education nonprofits.

Similarly, how people responded regarding influence from funders or grant reporting requirements varied depending on the respondent's organizational budget. Of those who reported that funders' priorities or marketing and outreach priorities were a major influence on data collection, a majority were organizations with budgets over $10 million. The broad majority who reported major influence from funders on data collection had budgets over $1 million. Based on our analysis, this generally means that the larger the budget, the more important funder or grant reporting influence on data collection becomes.

FIGURE 5

How have the following factors influenced the data you collect?

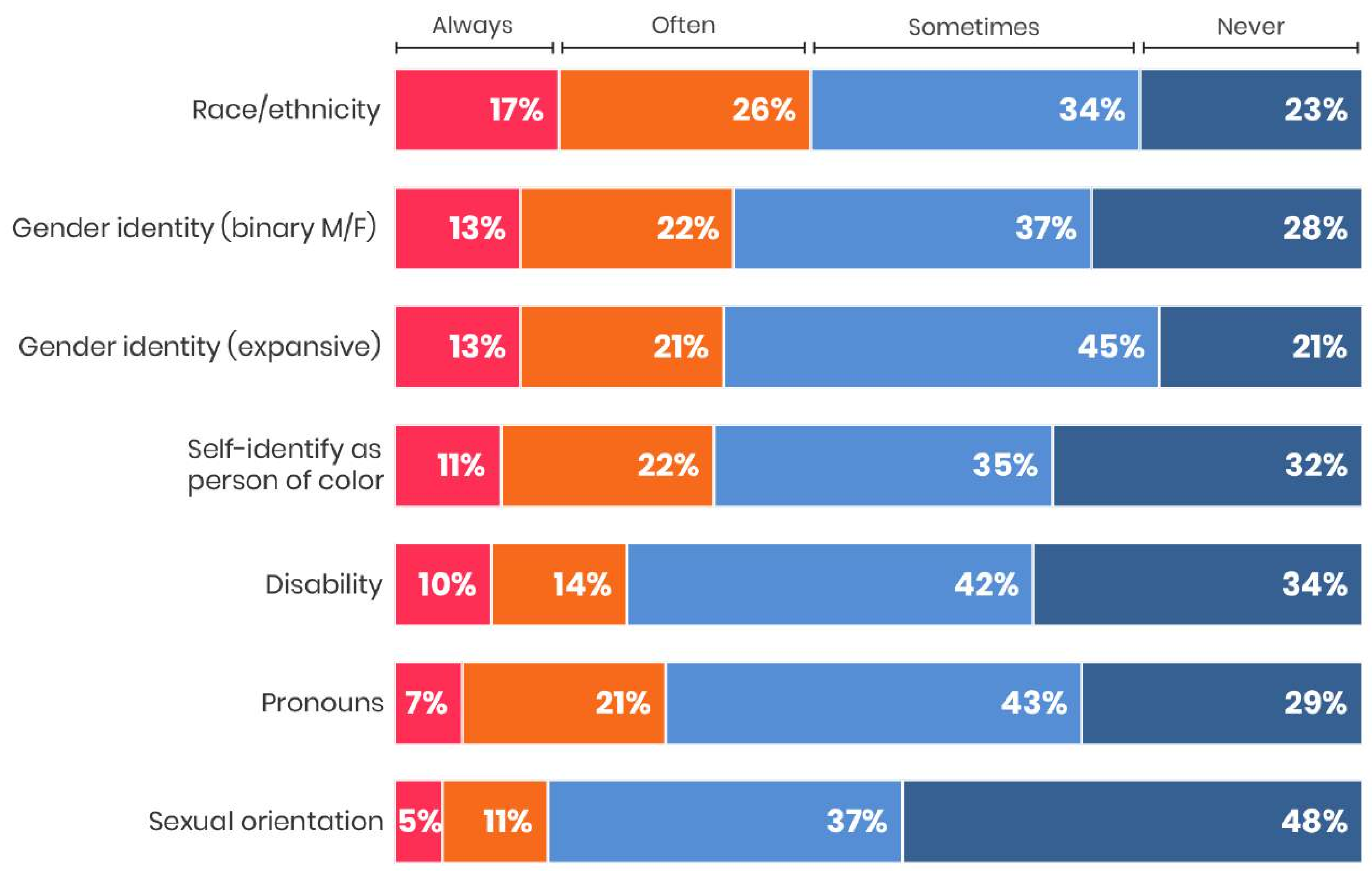


The most consistently collected data across respondents are race/ethnicity and gender identity (binary M/F), but only 17 percent of respondents say they "Always" collect race/ethnicity data, and 13 percent "Always" collect gender identity data, either with binary or expansive options. Fewer respondents than in previous years are consistently collecting data on self-identification as a "person of color" which may indicate a shift toward more granular forms of racial/ethnic identity.

Since 2022, a number of respondents have shifted from never collecting data on expansive definitions of gender identity to sometimes collecting this data, which suggests a shift in how organizations seek to understand gender. Only 20 percent of respondents say they never collect data on gender with expansive definitions. Similarly, some respondents have shifted from never collecting data to sometimes collecting data on disability and sexual orientation. Only 34 percent say they never collect this data. There has also been a general shift toward more consistently collecting data on pronouns, with many respondents shifting from never or sometimes collecting this data to collecting it often or always.

FIGURE 6

Do you collect any of the following types of data?

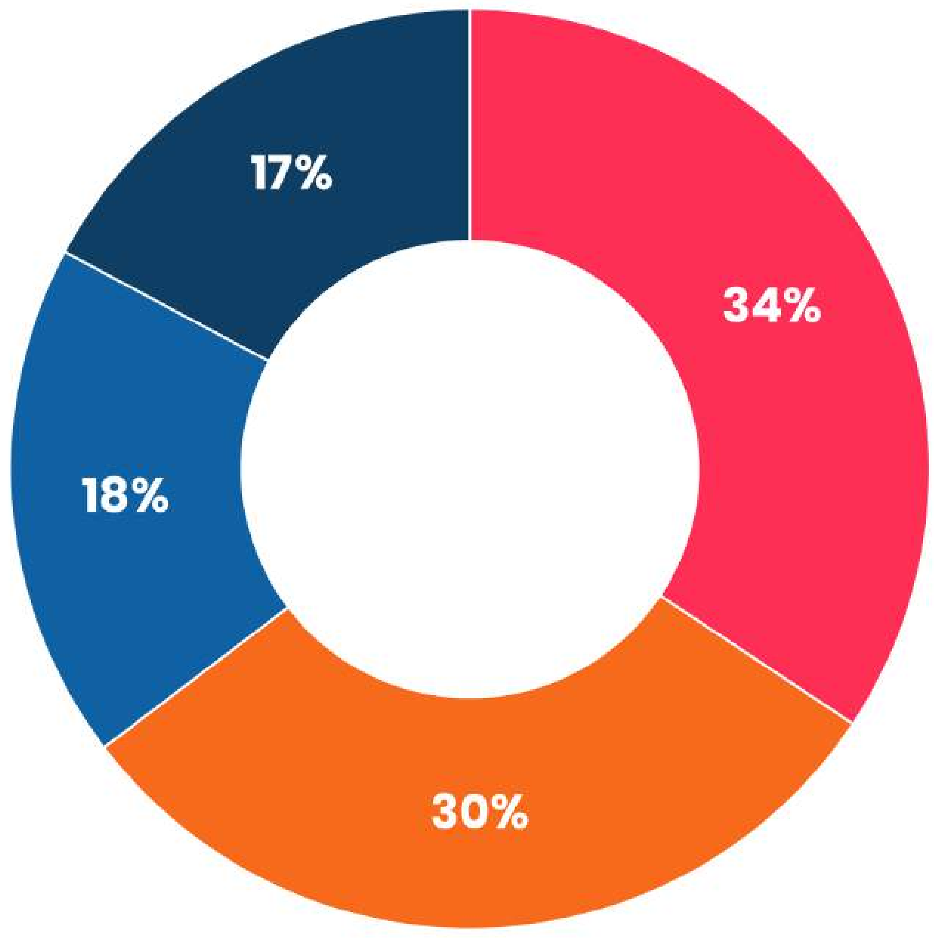


Overall, there has been an increase in respondents who collect demographic data since previous survey years. Some are transparent about how they use data to inform service or program delivery, and some are not. Over 34 percent of respondents use demographic data to make decisions about service and program delivery and do talk about how they use it publicly. About 30 percent do collect and use demographic data, but don't talk about it publicly. Transparency in how nonprofits use data is an important aspect of building trust with stakeholders around organizational data practices.

Manual data entry is still the most popular form of collecting data.

FIGURE 7

If you collect data on demographics including race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, or age do you use this data to make decisions about service or program delivery?



Responses	%
Yes, and we talk about our demographic data publicly	34%
Yes, but we don't talk about our demographic data publicly	30%
No	18%
We don't collect this data	17%

Informed consent

How are nonprofits asking for consent to collect constituent data?

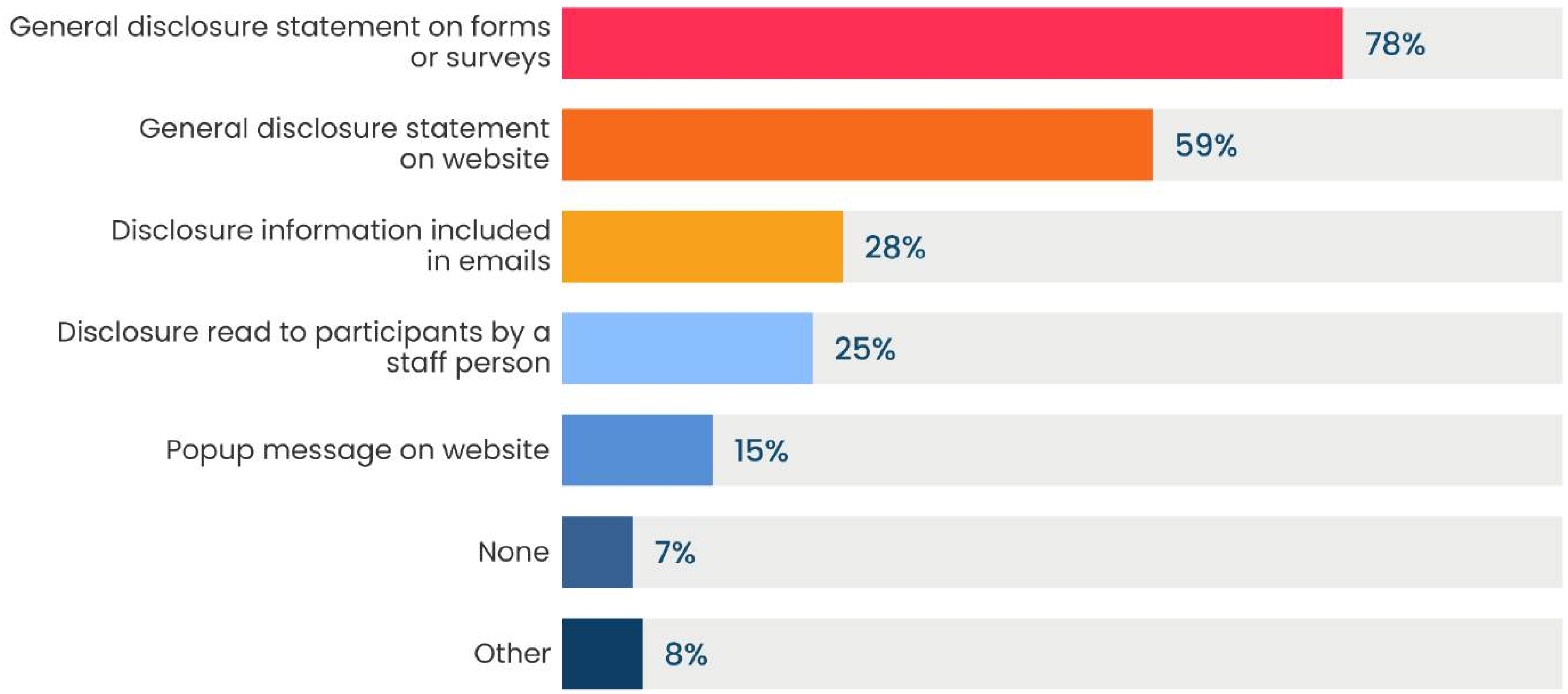
Constituents represented in organizations' datasets have a right to decide whether they want their data being collected and to inform how it will be used. Organizations that give constituents the opportunity to consent or opt out of data systems can also be more effective at building trust with communities. Good governance requires designing data systems to prioritize consensual participation in data collection.

The majority of respondents, 78 percent, rely on general statements to obtain consent from people before collecting their data on specific forms or surveys. About 59 percent provide general disclosures that are presented on organization websites. Alternatively, about a quarter of respondents have disclosures that are read by staff or sent out in emails. Fewer people are using email to share their disclosures than in past years.

When respondents reported "Other" forms of obtaining consent, this included digital checkboxes or buttons to accept terms and conditions that allowed participants to opt-in to sharing their data. Some respondents also use specific consent forms that are collected on paper or electronically.

FIGURE 8

What systems does your organization use for gaining consent to collect and use data?



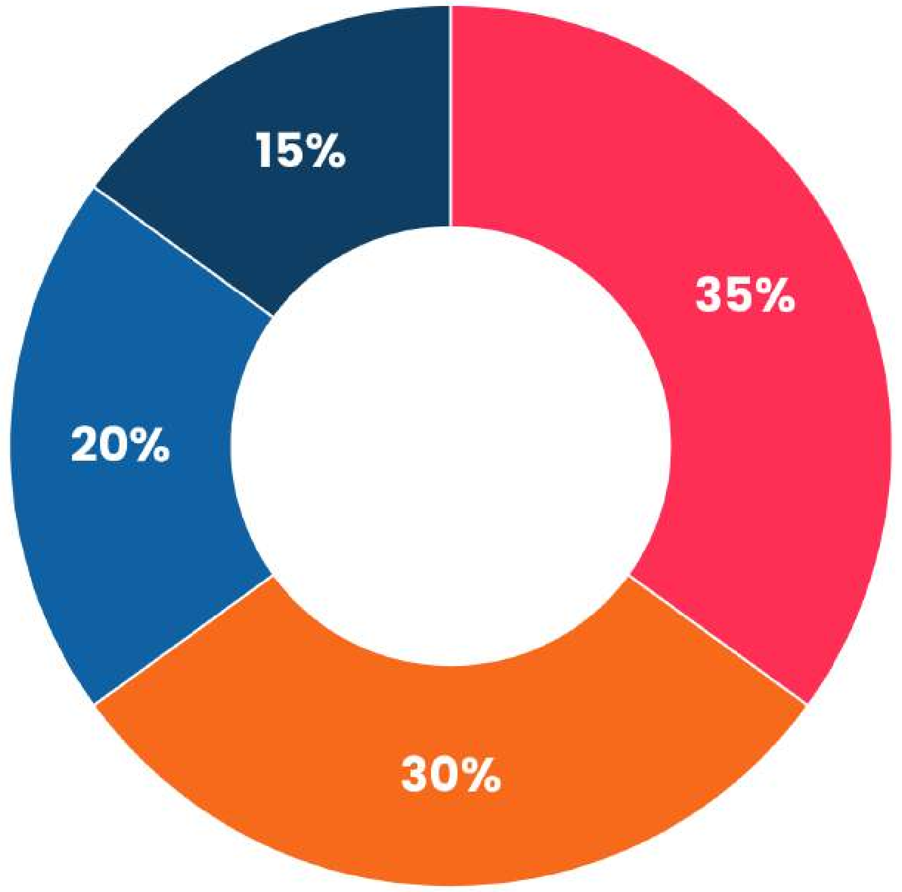
Disclosure of privacy practices amounts to passive consent while inviting people to opt-in to data collection means collecting active consent. When people passively consent, they should also be given the opportunity to opt-out of data collection later on. About 35 percent of respondents provide an opt-out form for constituents to be removed from data systems. About 20 percent provide a specific email address for opt-outs.

About 30 percent of respondents only provide general contact information for people to opt out of data collection, and 15 percent of participants do not allow people to opt out at all. About a fifth of respondents to the overall survey skipped this question.

Organizations that give constituents the opportunity to consent or opt out of data systems can also be more effective at building trust with communities.

FIGURE 9

How does your organization allow constituents to opt out of having their data stored or used by your organization?



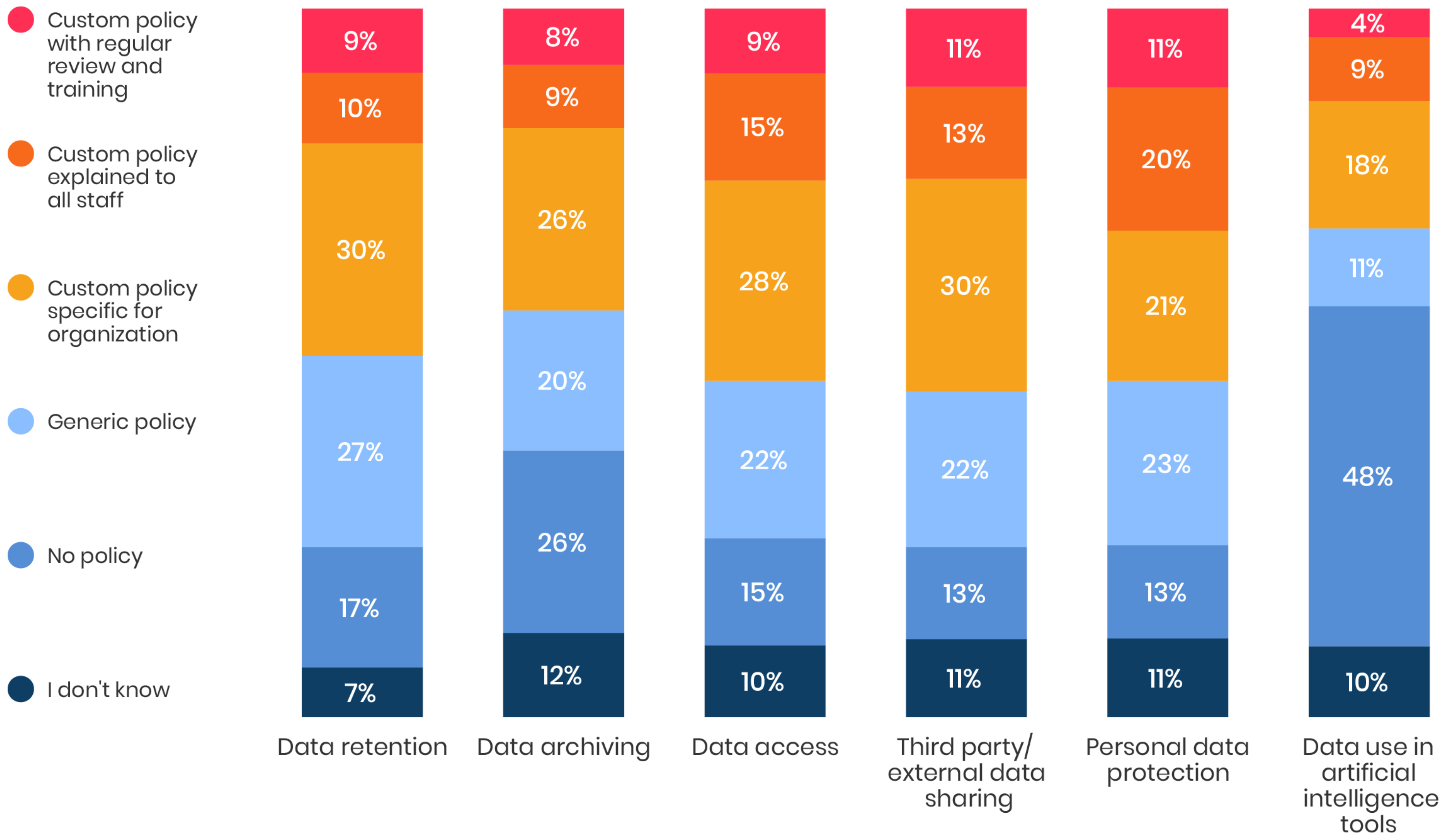
Responses	%
Through opt-out form	35%
By providing general contact information for the organization	30%
By providing a specific email address for opt-outs	20%
Does not allow	15%

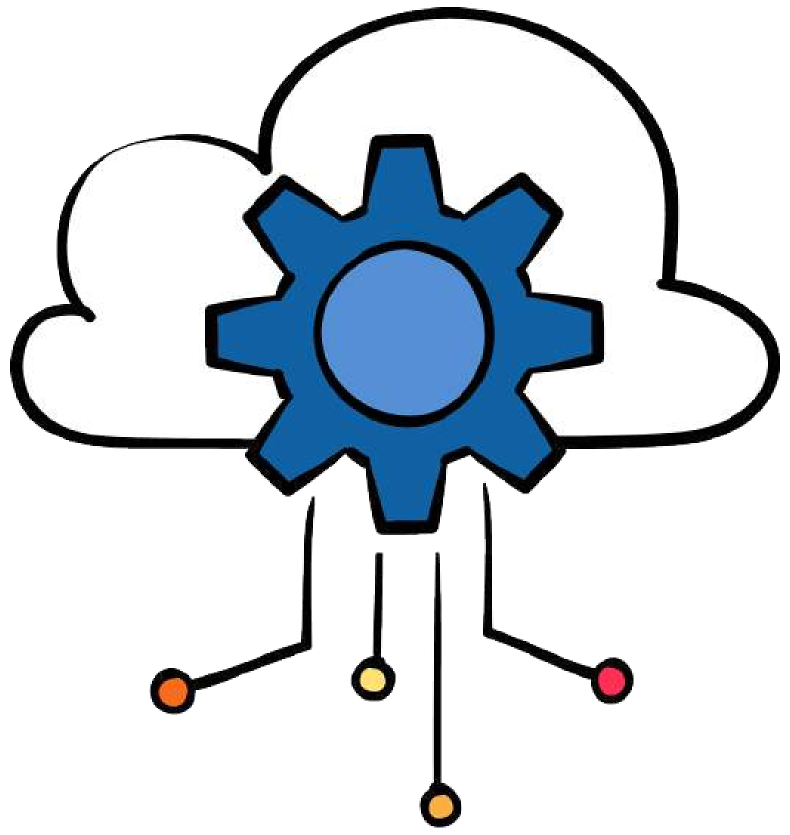
Personal data protection policies are the most common policies for nonprofits to have in place. A total of 31 percent of respondents have a custom policy with regular review or training, or that is specifically explained to all staff. Data use for artificial intelligence tools are the least implemented policies, with almost 48 percent of respondents having no policy.

Most respondents have at least one of the following custom policies: personal data protection, external data sharing, data access, and data retention. Many respondents also have generic versions of these policies, with just below 25 percent of respondents overall having no policy or not being aware of a policy at the organization. This speaks to a broad success in implementing basic data management policies across organizations.

FIGURE 10

What policies related to data does your organization have in place?





Use of data

How are nonprofits using data?

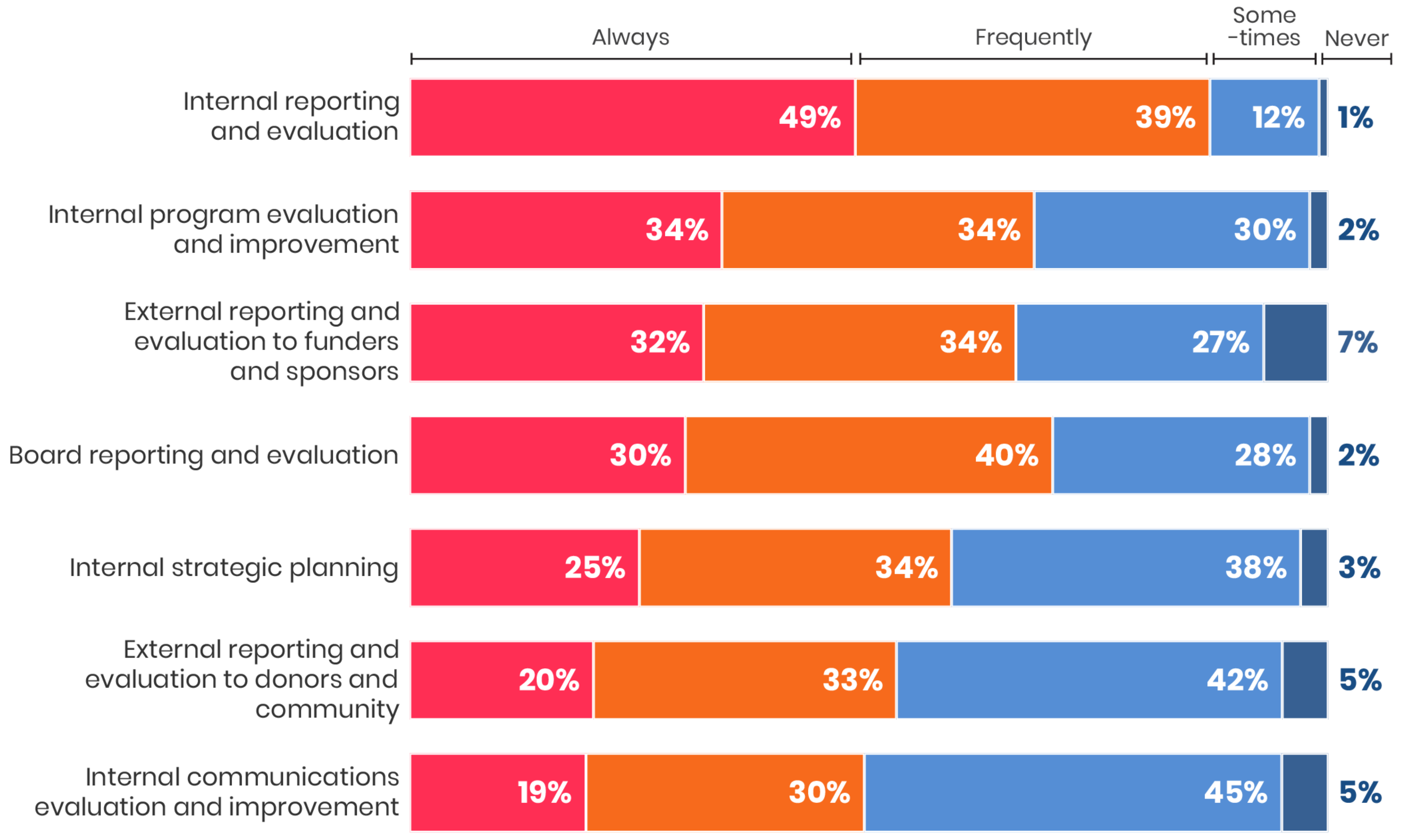
Using data effectively can have an exponentially positive effect on organizations' work and impact. Data can be used to hone and refine programmatic decisions, track progress, or identify gaps. Nonprofits can also share data with partners to gain mutual insight and strengthen collaboration. Whether internal or external, integrating data into communications, grant reporting, program evaluation, and other practices can help organizations use data intentionally and strategically.

Internal reporting and evaluation, program evaluation and improvement, and external reporting to funders and sponsors are the most consistently practiced uses for data among respondents. Respondents also broadly reported that they sometimes use data for internal strategic planning, communications evaluation, or for reporting out to donors and community, but less frequently. Overall, respondents seemed to use data for a wider variety of purposes than in previous survey years, with fewer respondents reporting that they "Always" use data for any one specific purpose across the board.

Whether you're redesigning your website, expanding a program to a new location, or engaging in annual strategic planning, data informs better decisions.

FIGURE 11

In which of the following ways do you or your organization use data generally?

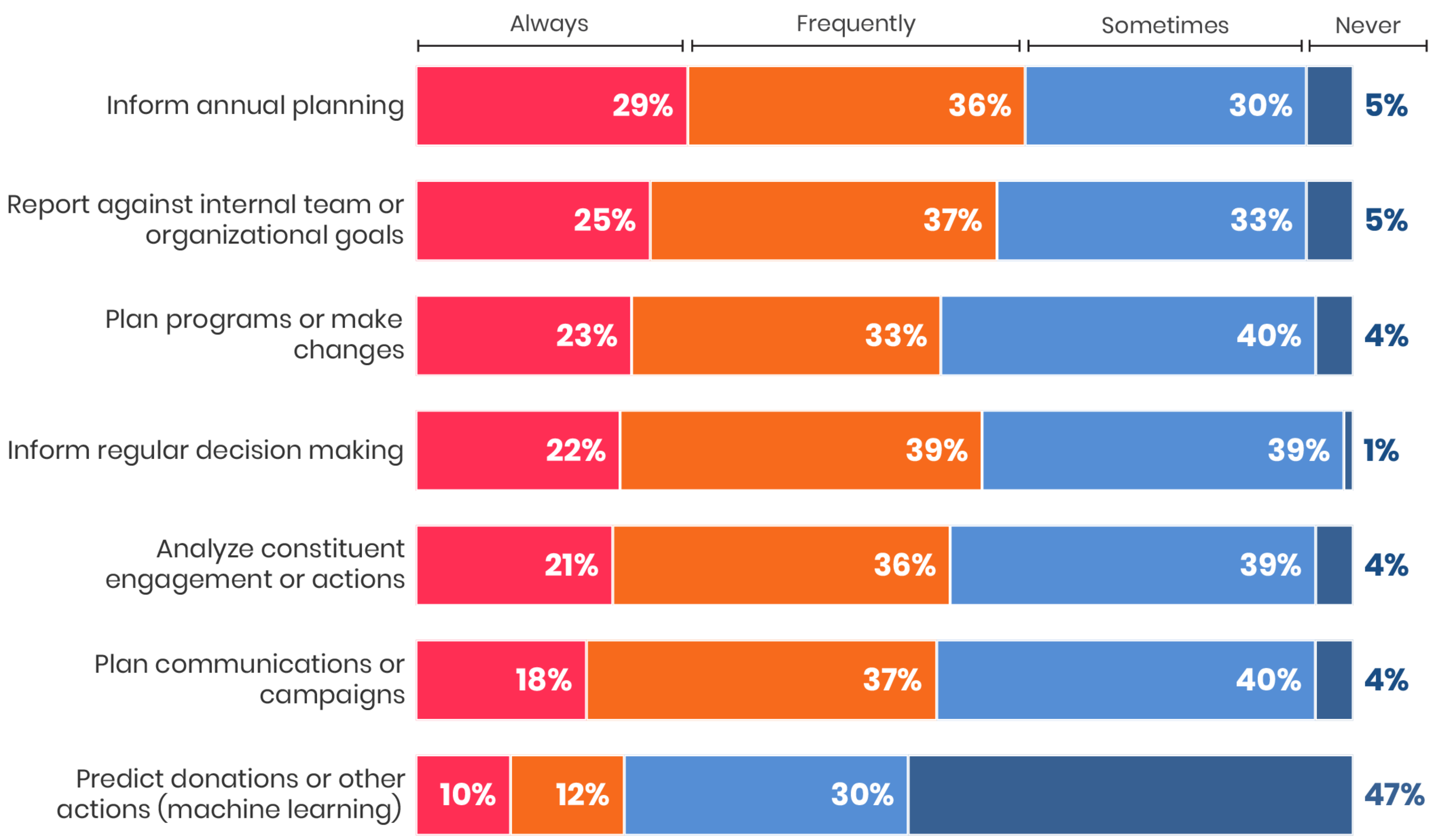


Respondents are most consistently using data to strategically inform annual planning, organizational goals, and planning programs or making changes. There has been a promising increase since previous survey years of respondents saying they always use data for program planning. Notably, 47 percent of organizations use machine learning to predict donations or other actions.

Other strategic purposes for which respondents say they sometimes use data are planning communications or marketing campaigns, informing regular decision-making, analyzing constituent engagement, and program planning. This might be due to the fact that these efforts tend to be cyclical and data is only sometimes required. Overall, there are very few respondents who never use data strategically, except when it comes to machine learning. Fewer respondents than in previous years are using machine learning at all to predict donations or for other actions.

FIGURE 12

In which of the following ways do you or your organization use data strategically?

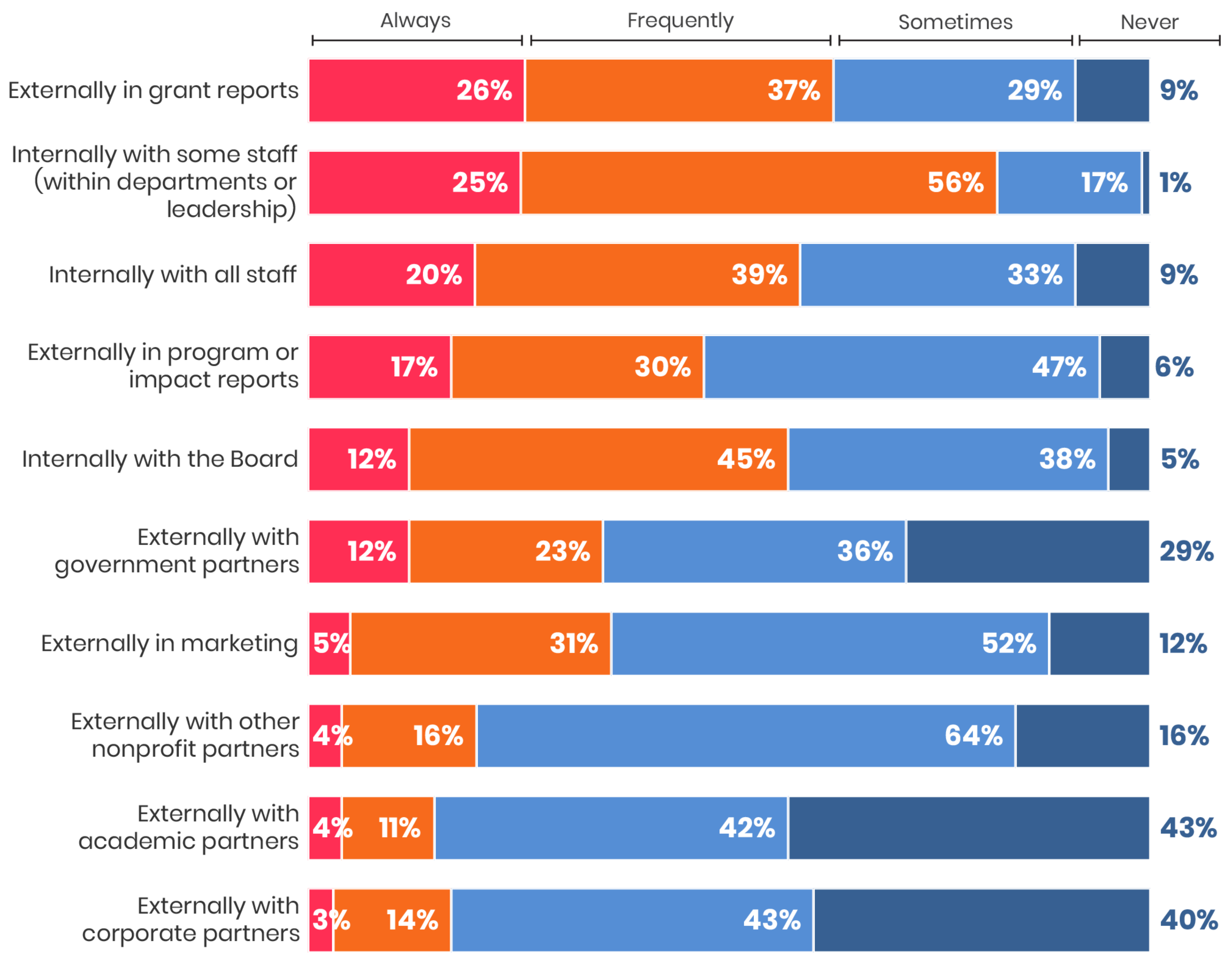


The most consistent way that respondents share data is internally within departments or leadership, with over 81 percent frequently or always sharing data internally with some staff. Over 61 percent always or frequently share data externally through grant reports. Respondents are more consistently sharing data with any staff internally than in previous survey years, and are less consistently sharing data externally in marketing. Respondents are also frequently sharing data with their board.

This year, our survey broke out the types of external partners with whom respondents choose to share their data. When it comes to external data sharing, respondents most commonly seem to share data with government partners, and to a lesser extent with other nonprofit partners, academic partners, or corporate partners. Academic organizations are the least popular partners for external data sharing, with almost 43 percent of respondents never sharing data with academic partners.

FIGURE 13

In which of the following ways do you share data?

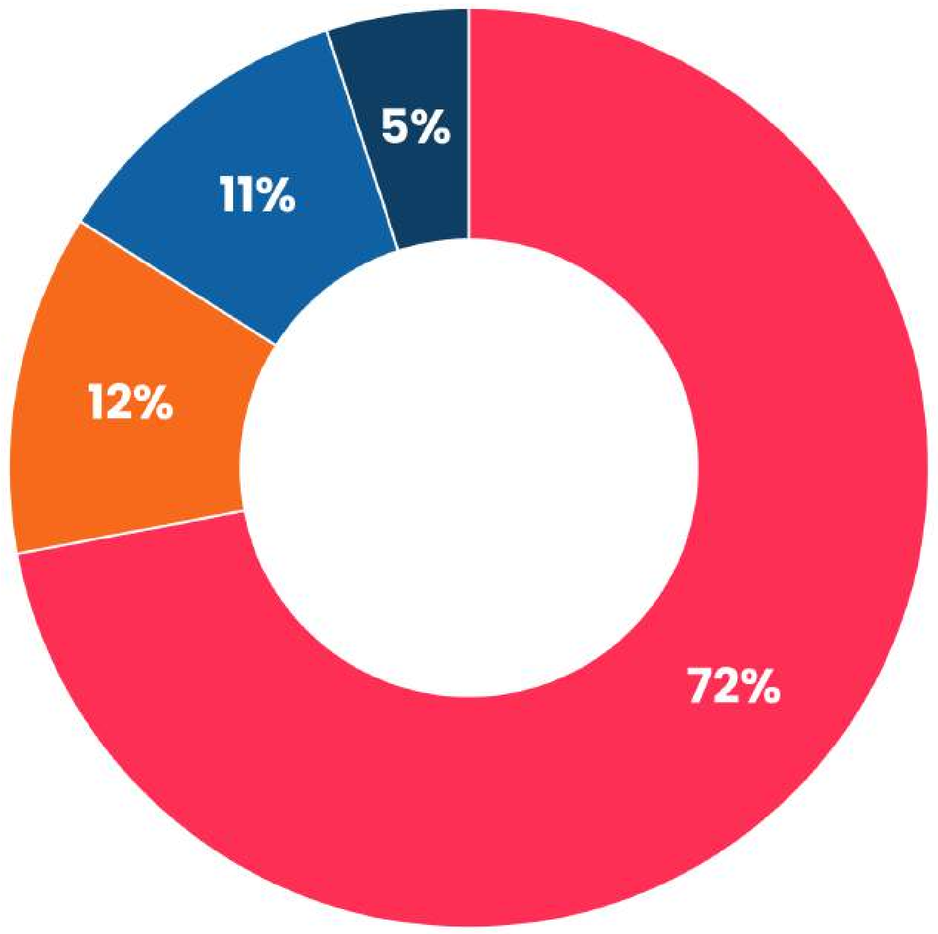


When it comes to grant reporting, only about 11 percent of respondents are able to provide standardized reports on programs or organizational data, three points more than in previous years. A broad majority of respondents, over 72 percent, provide customized reports to match each funder's unique reporting requirements.

Internal reporting and evaluation, program evaluation and improvement, and external reporting to funders and sponsors are the most consistently practiced uses for data among respondents.

FIGURE 14

If you provide data for grant reports, which of the following options most closely aligns with your process?



Responses	%
We provide custom reports of our program or other organization data to match each funder's unique reporting requirements.	72%
I don't know	12%
We provide standardized reports of our program or other organization data so reporting for all funders is the same.	11%
Other	5%

Staff and data

Who is responsible for data management and decisions?

For organizations to become truly data-driven, each team and team member should understand their relationship to data and how it is used to support organizational goals. Staff in different roles may have unique approaches to collecting, managing, or sharing data. In order to be effective, they have to coordinate their approaches to data management to ensure that standards are practiced across areas of the organization.

About 90 percent of respondents have 2 or fewer staff at their organization with the word "Data" in their title, with 42 percent having no such staff at their organization. While some are hoping to create positions or sometimes hire temporary consultants or interns with these titles, this suggests that some organizations may rely on very few staff to act as data experts for entire teams. Accordingly, the largest group of respondents, over 40 percent, said that less than a tenth of their staff have the skills and access to create and run customized reports from data.

FIGURE 15

Number of roles with "Data" in the title.

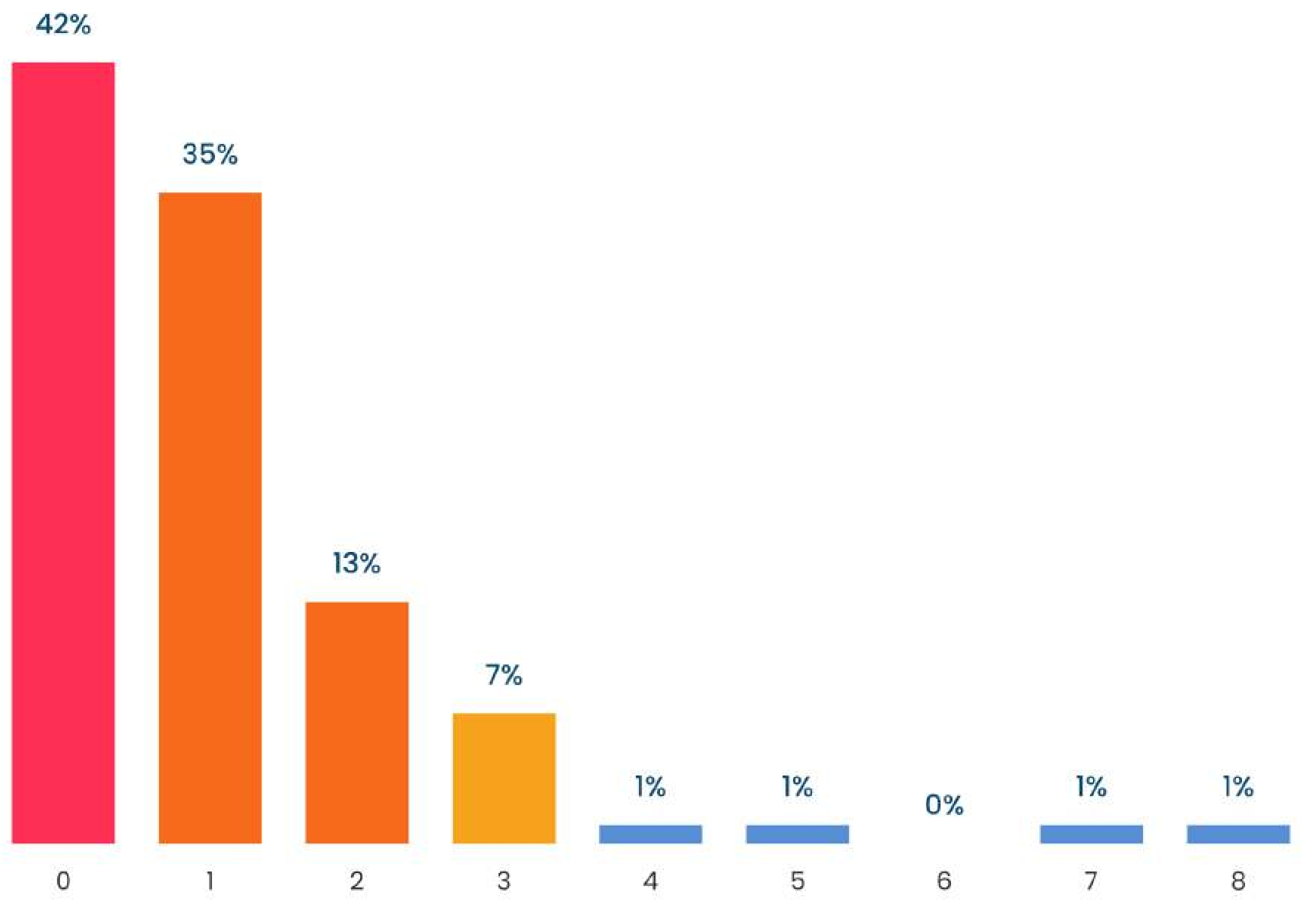
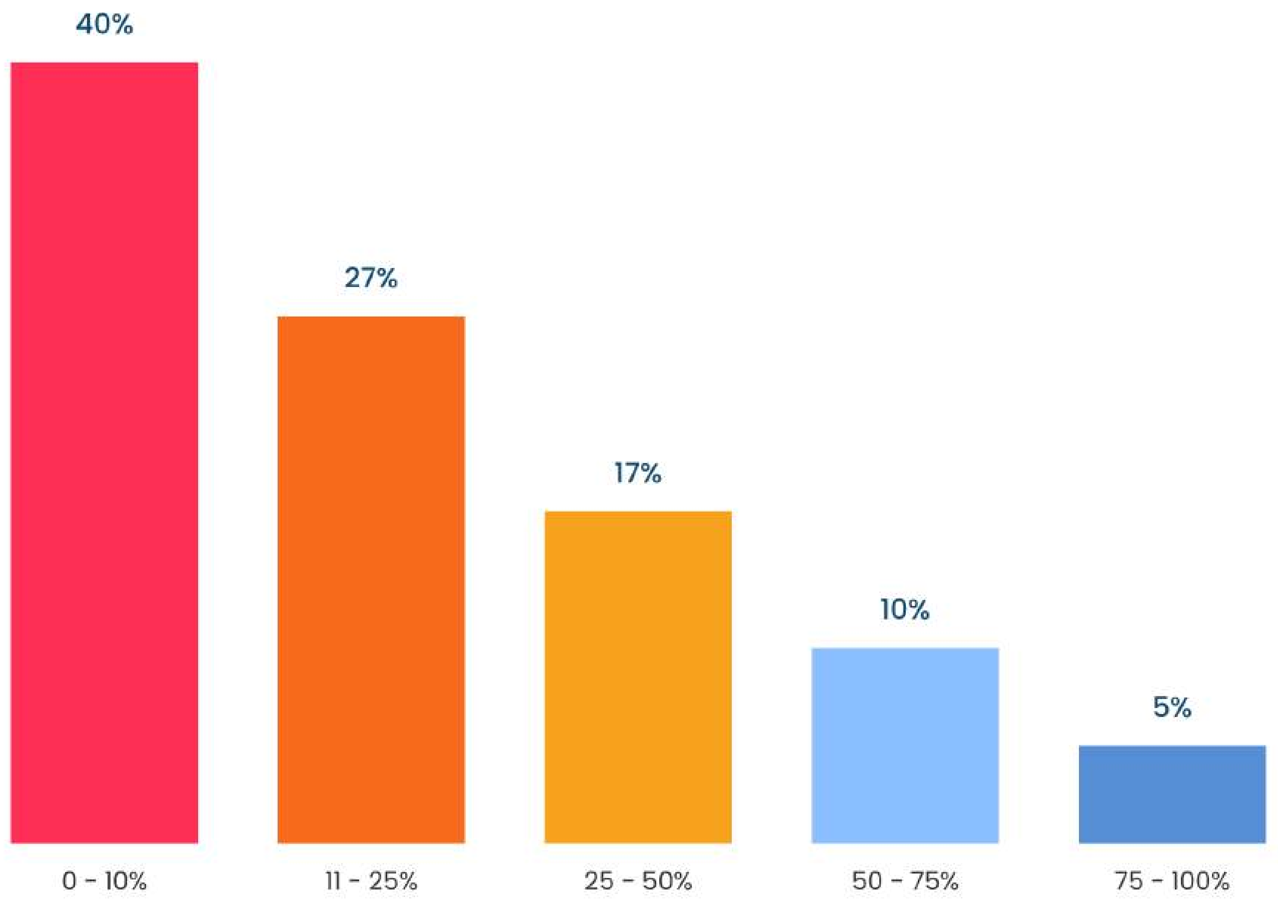


FIGURE 16

What is the percentage of staff at your organization with the skills and access to create and run customized reports from your data?



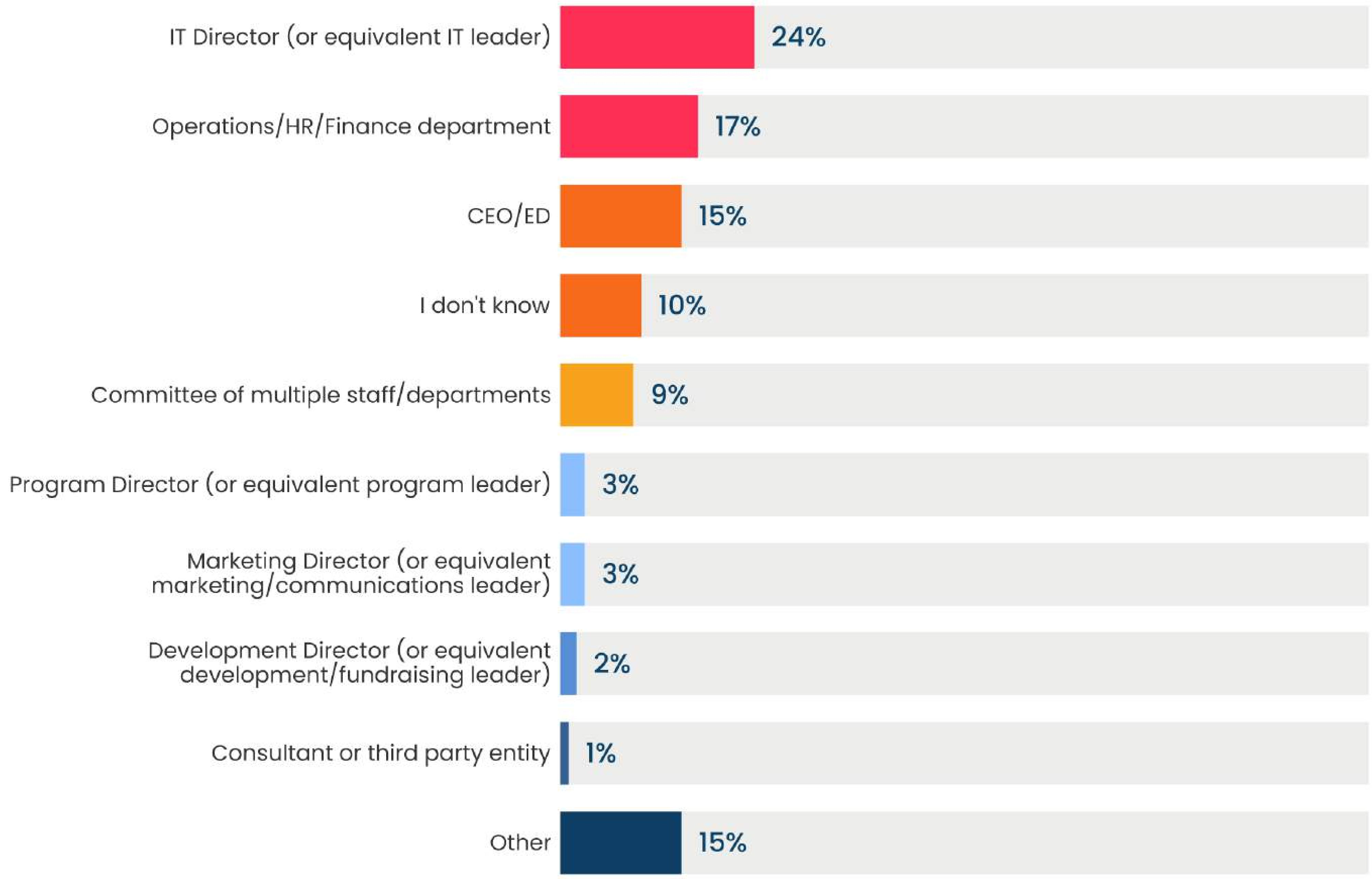
Most respondents rely on their IT Director, Operations staff, CEO or Executive Director to oversee compliance with relevant laws or data policies. For over 50 percent, the person responsible is the IT Director. For 48 percent it is the CEO or Executive Director.

Fewer respondents than in last year's survey are using staff committees across departments to manage compliance, but more respondents are leaning on other leaders like legal departments, compliance managers, board members, or research and technology teams. Overall, 52 percent of respondents skipped this question, so authority over compliance may be unclear in many organizations.

About 90 percent of respondents have 2 or fewer staff at their organization with the word "Data" in their title.

FIGURE 17

Who in your organization is responsible for ensuring the organization is compliant with relevant laws or data policies?

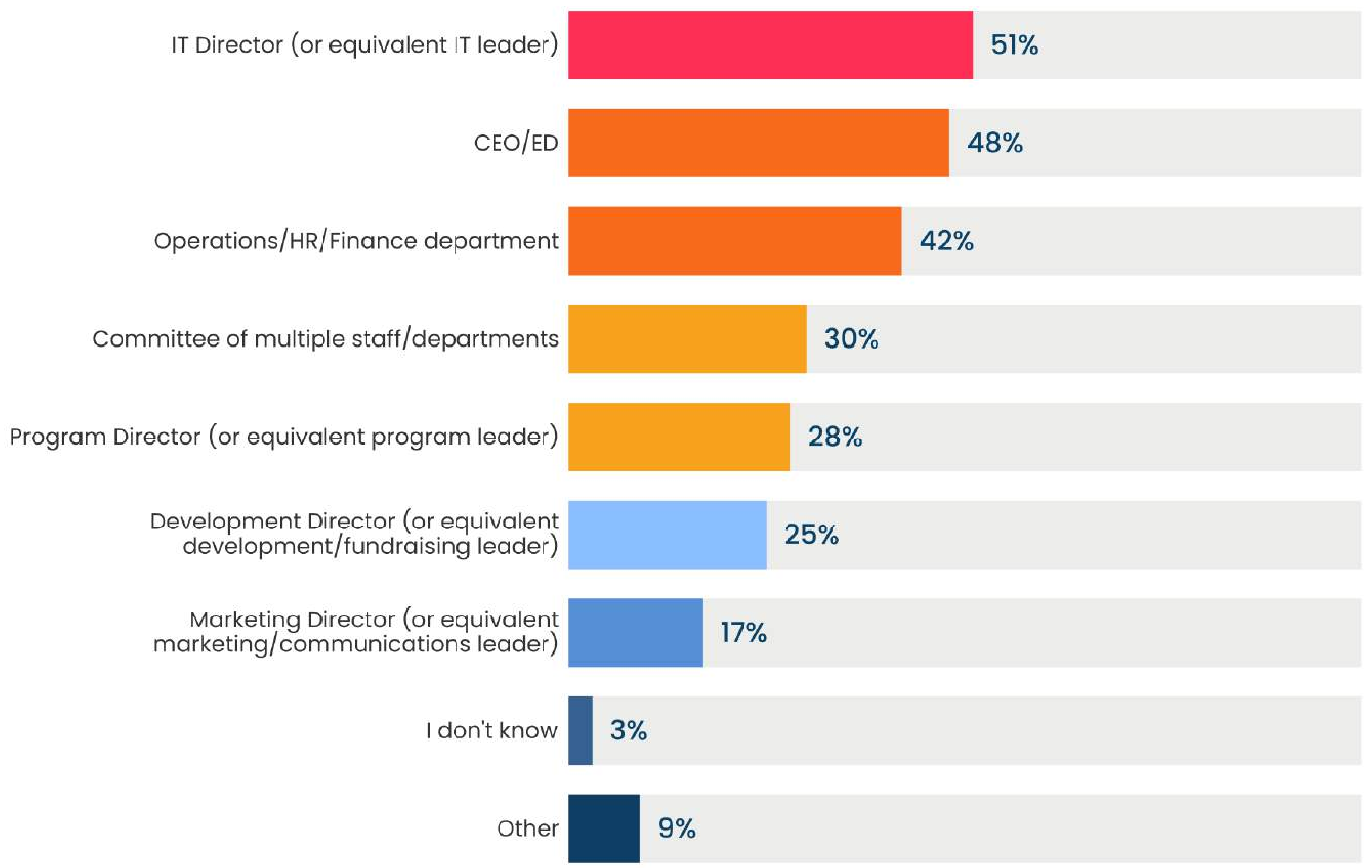


The same roles tend to be responsible for adoption of new technologies as for compliance. Responsibility often goes to the person or area that will be implementing and monitoring the technology, usually alongside one of the three top-level decision-makers. Those who indicated "Other" frequently have a committee or department dedicated to the review and adoption of technology.

52 percent of respondents skipped this question, so authority over compliance may be unclear in many organizations.

FIGURE 18

Who has authority for adopting new technologies that could have impacts on data collection or use?



We asked respondents how much of a Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff person's time is dedicated to data responsibilities. For example, if two staff spend 20 hours per week on data collection, the answer to the question would be 1 FTE.

Respondents tend to rely more on internal staff than on consultants for managing their organizations' technology and/or data. Data collection is the most time-intensive activity both for internal staff and for consultants or third parties, followed by report creation. Respondents tend to lean on consultants or third parties for database administration more than internal staff, contracting support for about two thirds of an FTE's time. Oh the other hand, data quality control and impact analysis and evaluation are more commonly managed in-house.

In most cases, respondents said that one to two internal FTEs are responsible for all tasks except for data collection. For data collection, some organizations have upwards of 300 FTEs dedicated to collecting data, raising the average to over 10 FTEs.

FIGURE 19

Please provide the Full Time Equivalent (FTE) amount for the following responsibilities fulfilled by a staff person inside your organization.

FIGURE 20

Please provide the Full Time Equivalent (FTE) amount for the following responsibilities fulfilled by a consultant or third party entity responsible for your organization's technology and/or data.

Challenges

What challenges do nonprofits face in collecting and using data?

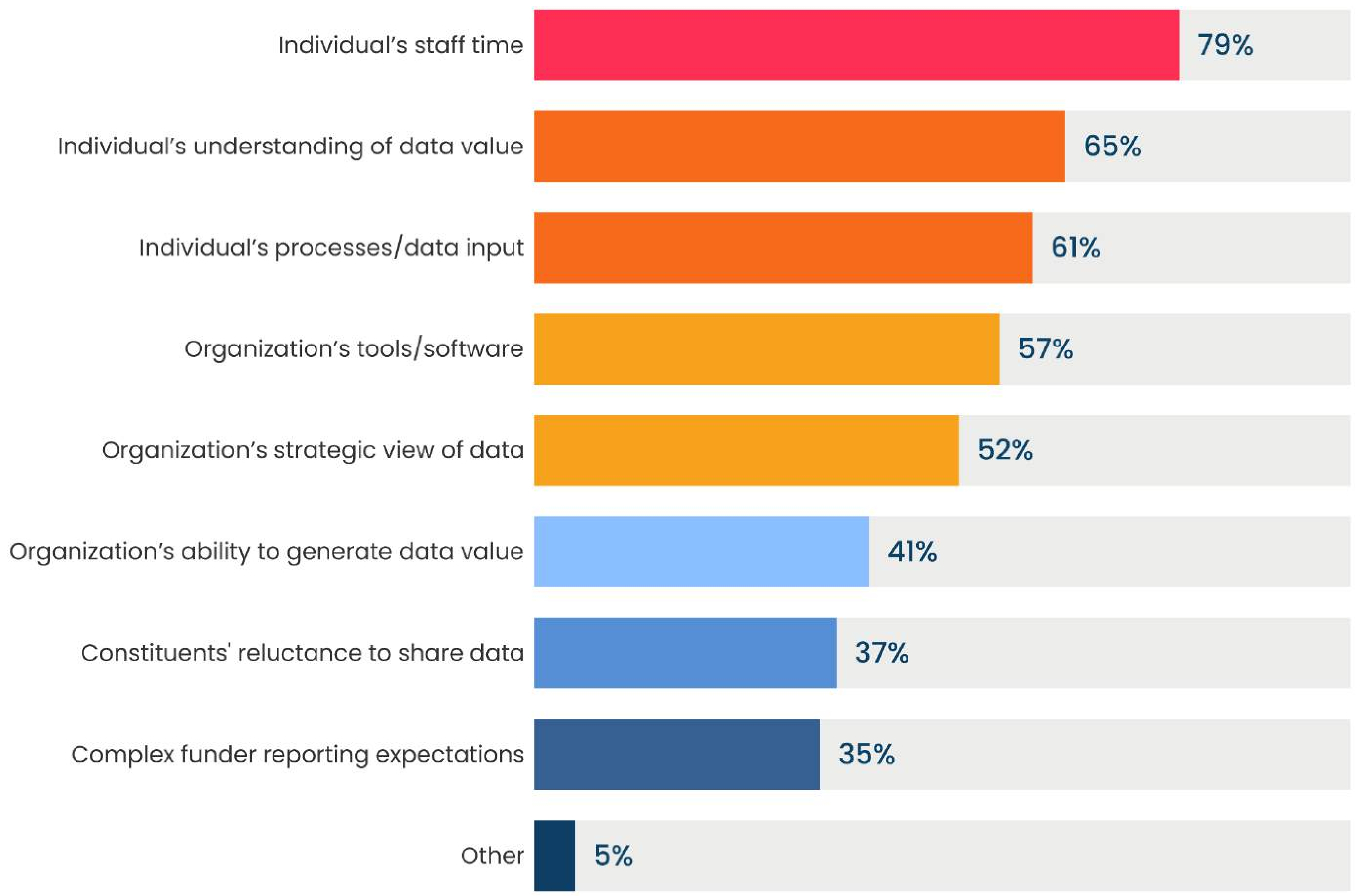
Barriers to collecting and using data can come in all shapes and sizes. Nonprofits may face limited resources, lack data expertise, and have tech tools that don't meet their needs. However, by addressing these challenges, nonprofits can ensure that data are used responsibly and effectively toward their missions and communities.

The most common challenge related to data collection at organizations is individual staff time. A broad majority of respondents listed this as a challenge, over 79 percent. The next most common challenges are individuals' understanding of data value and with processes used to input data (such as data entry or data governance practices), with 65 and 61 percent of respondents listing these as challenges, respectively. Organizations' existing tools and software were also a challenge for 57 percent of respondents.

Having in-house staff who can manage or implement technology remains the biggest challenge for respondents when it comes to data use.

FIGURE 21

Which of the following are challenges for you and your organization in data collection?

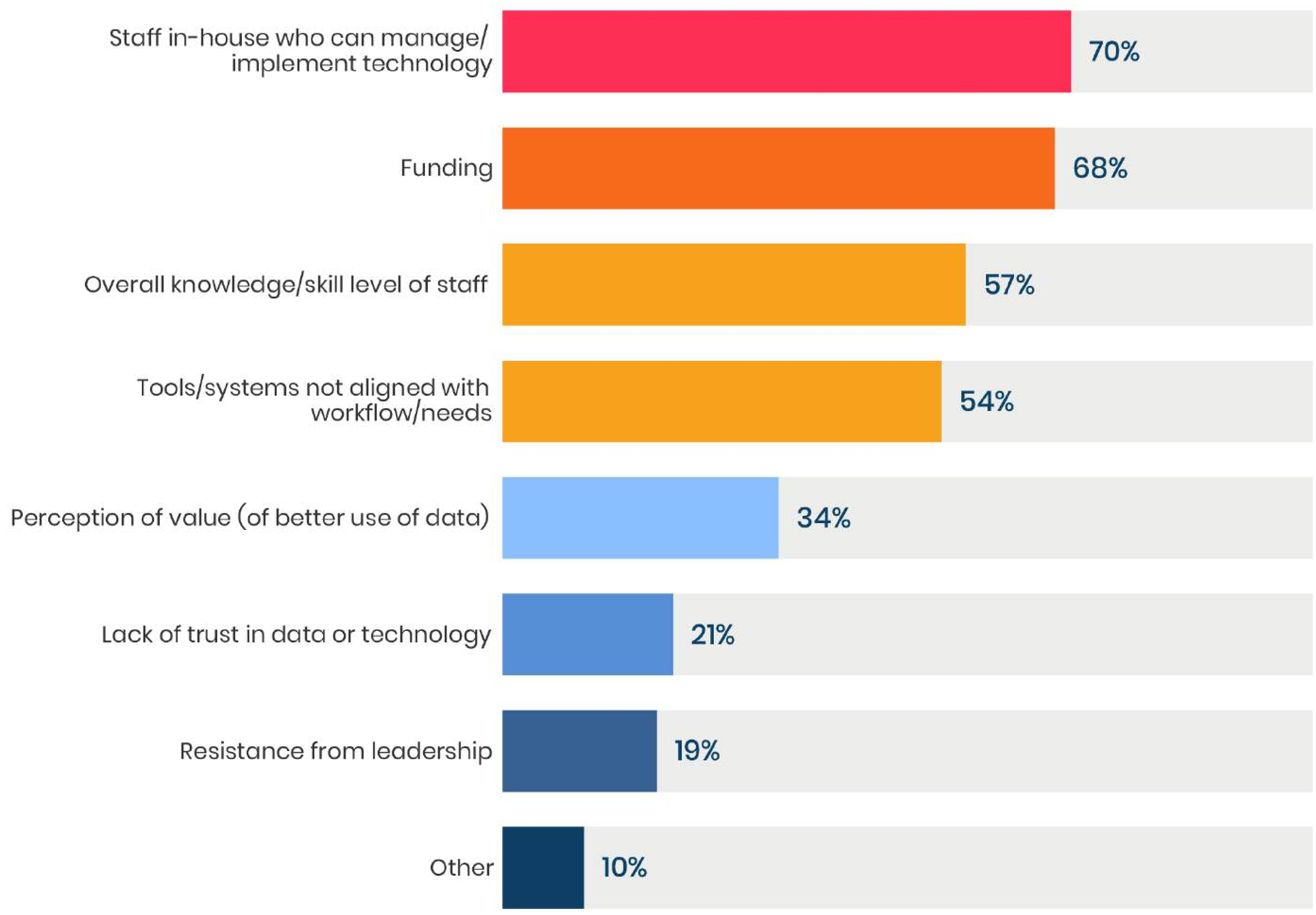


When it comes to technology adoption that supports successful data use, the most common challenge is having in-house staff who can manage or implement technology, with almost 70 percent of respondents listing it as a challenge.

Notably, organizations vary in the challenges they face based on factors like staff size. For example, funding is more often a challenge for organizations with between ten and 250 staff. For organizations of between 51 and 100 staff, perceptions of the value or better use of data, and misalignment of tools to workflows were the most commonly listed challenges. Difficulty understanding funder reporting expectations or dealing with constituents' reluctance to share data were not widespread issues, but were more often issues for mid-sized organizations and less for very small or very large organizations.

FIGURE 22

Which of the following are challenges for you and your organization to successfully adopt technology (that supports successful data use)?

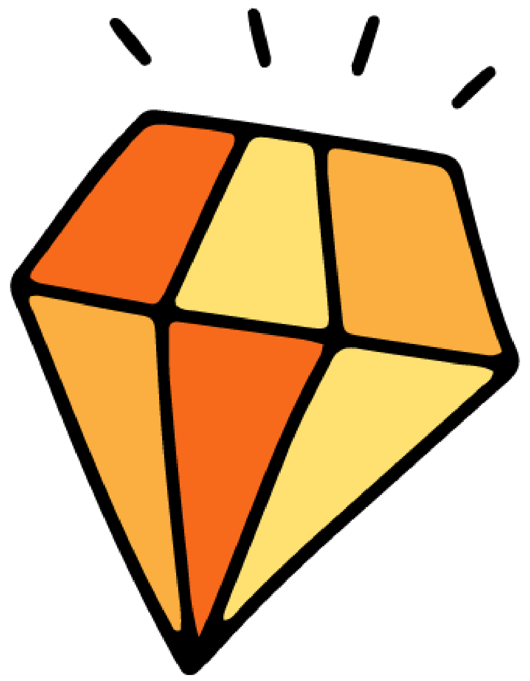


Having in-house staff who can manage or implement technology remains the biggest challenge for respondents when it comes to data use, consistent with previous survey years, which may also correspond to staff capacity. Funding has jumped up to the second biggest challenge, showing a slight increase from previous years. But overall knowledge or skill level of staff, which was listed as a challenge among 72 percent of respondents in 2022 has dropped down to 57 percent, indicating that organizations may have had success upskilling their staff in data practices. Perceptions about the value of better data use and resistance of leadership have also slightly dropped from previous surveys.

Respondents said that the most impactful challenges for their organizations are silos across departments, and then individuals' data literacy or skills, individuals' ability to strategically apply data, and managing data quality. While finding the appropriate tools or software was listed as a common challenge for respondents, they listed it as less impactful on their organizations overall. Challenges with funder reporting expectations appear to be the least impactful of all challenges to successful data use.

FIGURE 23

Please rank the following challenges in data use in order of impact for your organization. 1 = the highest challenge; 6 = the lowest challenge



Resources

How do nonprofits resource their data efforts?

Organizations need resources to maintain a data-driven culture. Funding, policy, staffing, and other infrastructural capacities can help enable data collection, management, and use. Data practices also need to adapt to emerging needs, meaning that resources need to be adaptable and aware of changing realities. Many organizations use strategic planning to identify high-value data projects and improvements to resources.

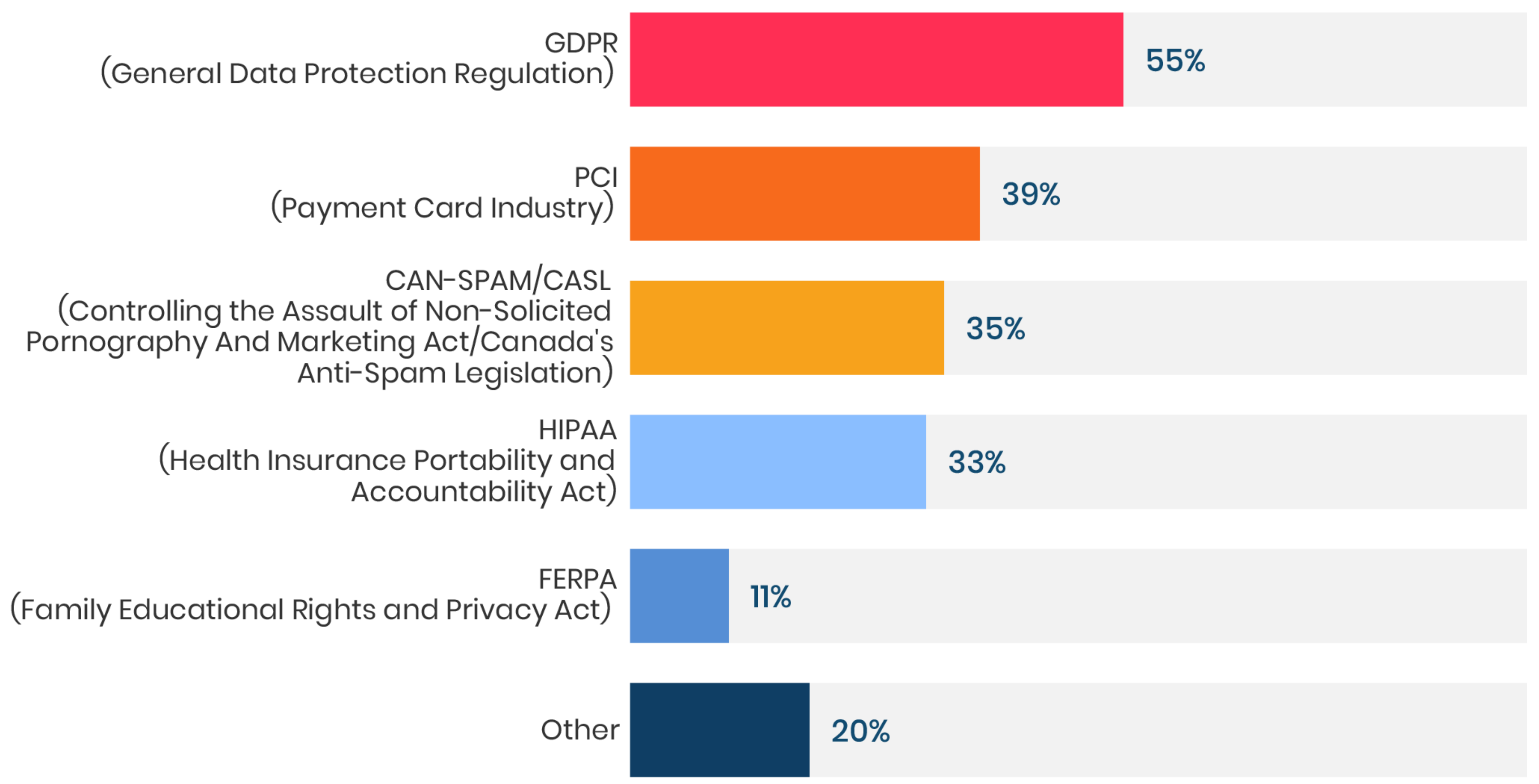
Monitoring of policy standards has slightly decreased since the last survey, but remains high among respondents overall. The most highly monitored policy is the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation. Since 2022's survey, monitoring of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) has decreased significantly with other policies like Payment Card Industry (PCI) and Canada's Anti-Spam Legislation (CAN-SPAM/CASL). Monitoring of policies like FERPA has also decreased.

Among respondents who responded "Other", responses included various state and local privacy laws, consumer protection laws, and other ethical codes. Some also cited industry specific standards aligned to their organizational mission.

Smaller organizations are more likely to lean on their entire staff, especially for planning for data collection or use, and for training staff with data systems or use.

FIGURE 24

Which of the following data standards or policies do you monitor?

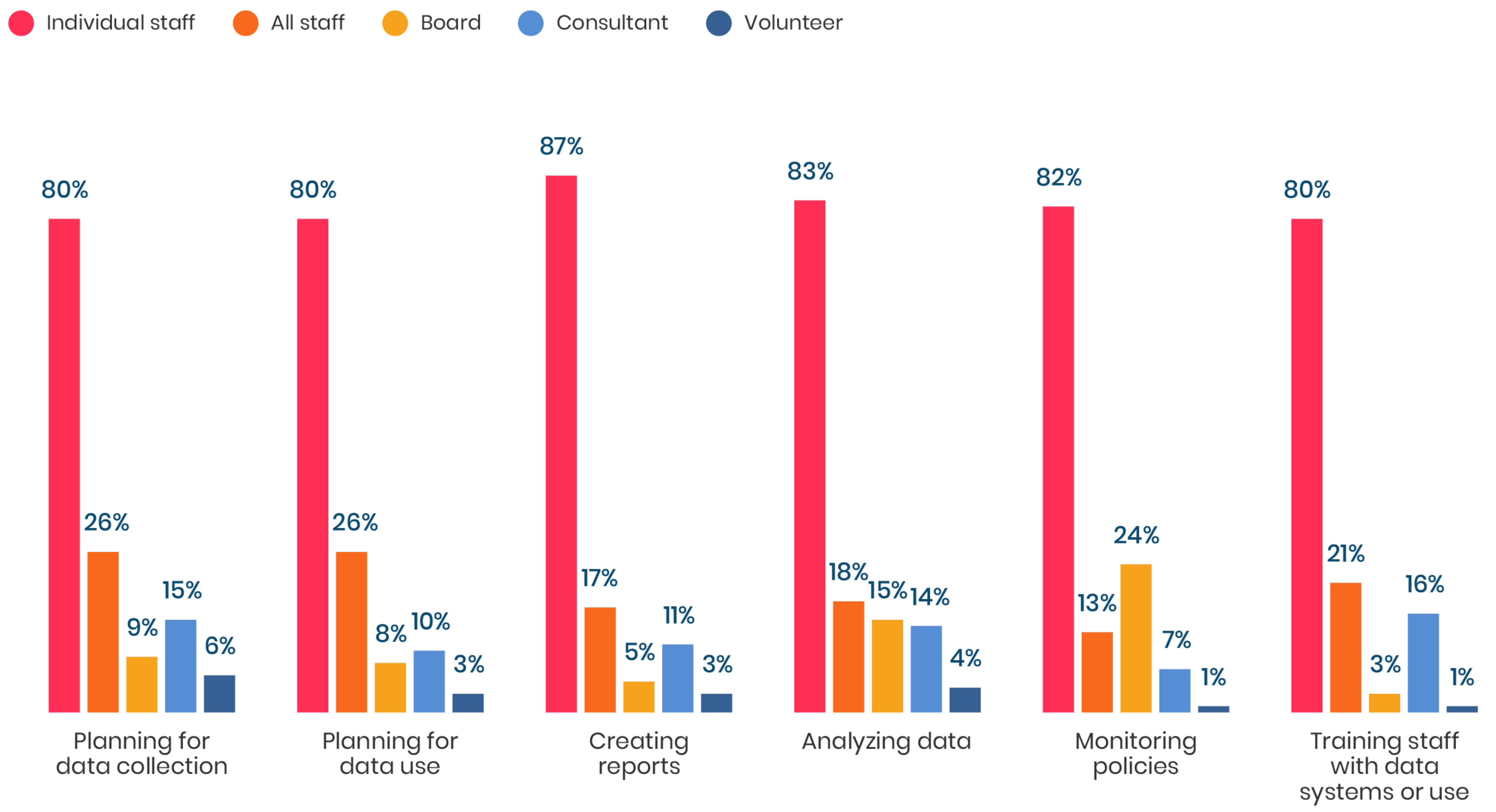


At least 80 percent of respondents reported that individual staff are responsible for each one of the data activities surveyed. This is consistent with past surveys. Smaller organizations are more likely to lean on their entire staff, especially for planning for data collection or use, and for training staff with data systems or use.

Boards are most often engaged in monitoring data policies, although they are sometimes also involved in analyzing data for 15 percent of respondents. Volunteers are rarely used for any of these activities, except for the 6 percent of respondents who are working with volunteers to plan for data collection.

FIGURE 25

Who participates in the following activities at your organization?



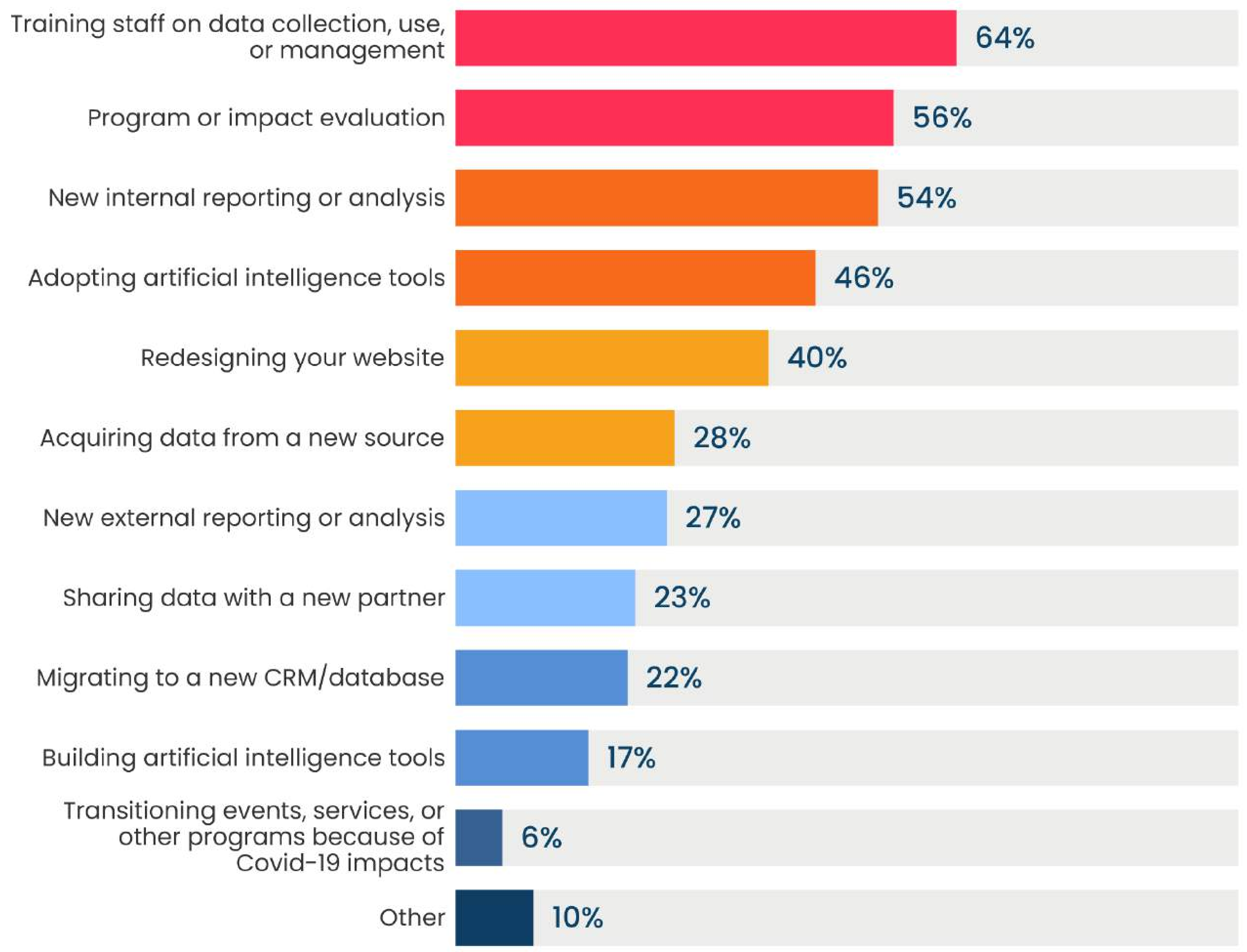
Most respondents only have plans to undertake a few data projects in the coming year. Training staff on data collection, use, or management is the top priority for a majority of respondents, alongside program or impact evaluation and internal reporting or analysis. These top three priorities are consistent with previous survey years. Adopting artificial intelligence tools, a new addition since the previous survey, has jumped to the next highest priority, surpassing website redesigns.

The most valuable resource to most organizations would be dedicated funding for data management or analysis. The next most valuable resource would be updated tools or systems. These findings are consistent with the previous survey from 2022. Data policy and governance support is a new addition to this year's survey and is the fourth most valuable resource according to respondents.

Based on responses to previous questions, respondents have varying perceptions of the need to train staff on data issues. Staff skills, knowledge, or literacy were noted as a challenge in technology adoption and data use for many organizations, as shown in Figures 22 and 23. When asked which resources would be most valuable, nearly 61 percent of respondents said staff on general data skills would be valuable or very valuable. This year, we also differentiated between staff training on general data competencies as opposed to staff training on specific

FIGURE 26

In the coming 3–12 months, which of the following investments or projects do you or your organization plan to undertake?

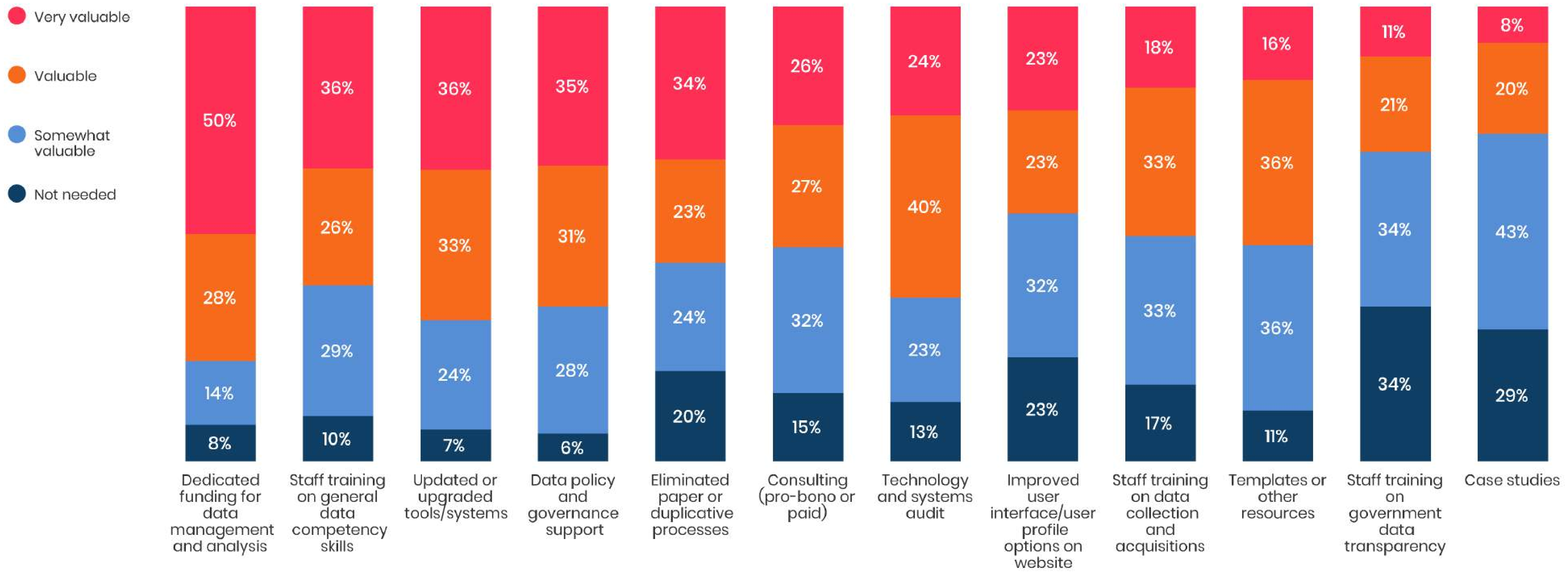


data collection processes or training on government transparency. Training on general data competency skills was ranked much higher as a valuable resource than training on data collection, which only 18 percent reported as very valuable.

Referring to previous questions, at over 40 percent of organizations, less than a tenth of staff have the skills to access data and run customized reports. At 67 percent of organizations, less than a quarter of the staff have these skills. Combined with these responses on data training needs, this suggests that while it is important to have a few specialized staff at organizations, it is also helpful for the remaining staff to have general awareness and overall skills in understanding and applying data.

FIGURE 27

Which of the following resources would be most valuable to your organization?



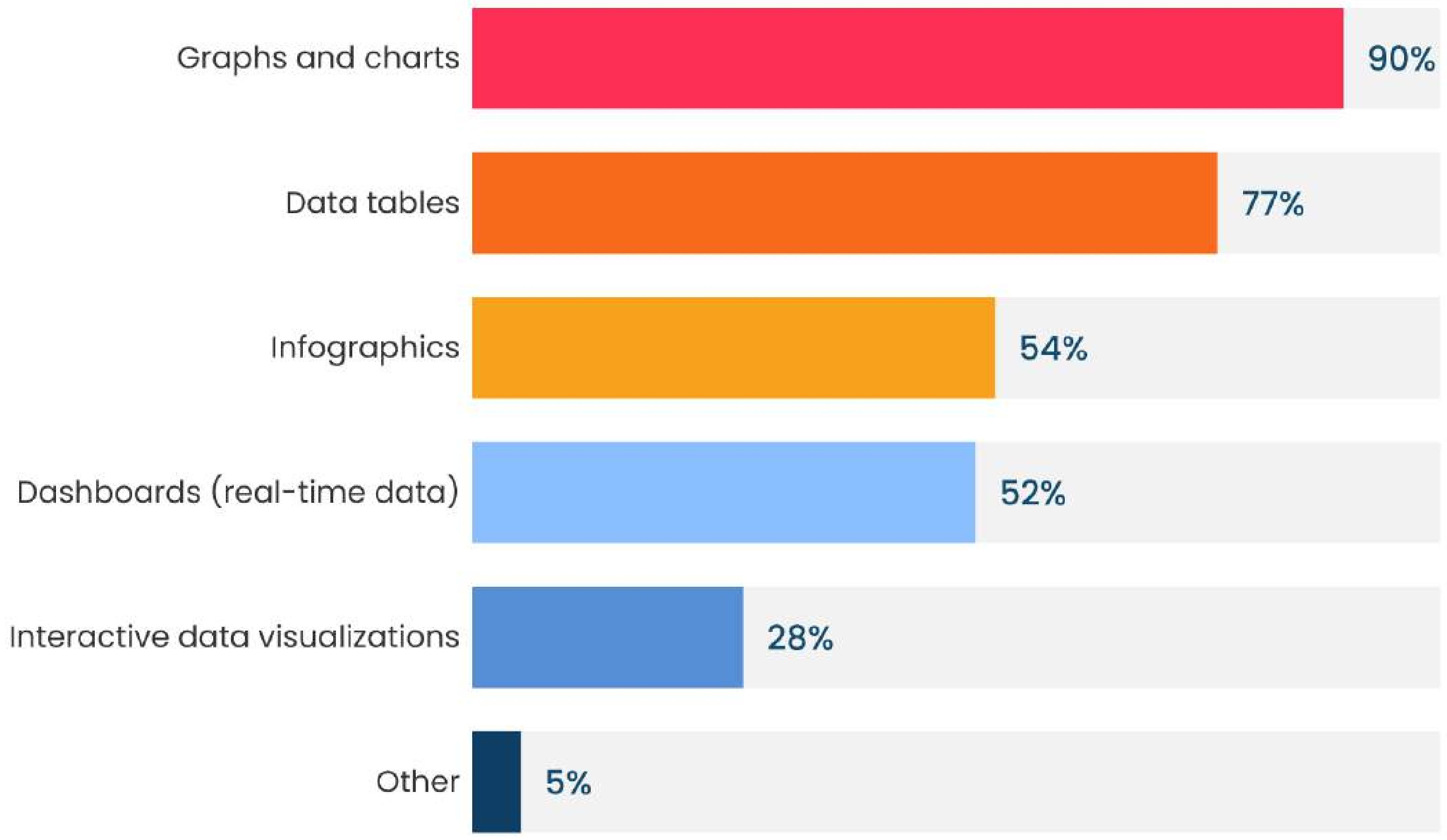
Analysis

How do nonprofits analyze and communicate data?

Data analysis and communication can be adapted to reach specific audiences in specific contexts. Organizations can learn to apply data analysis by observing which forms of data visualization or sharing are appropriate for different organizational goals. Strong data analysis and visualization can help generate engagement and impact.

FIGURE 28

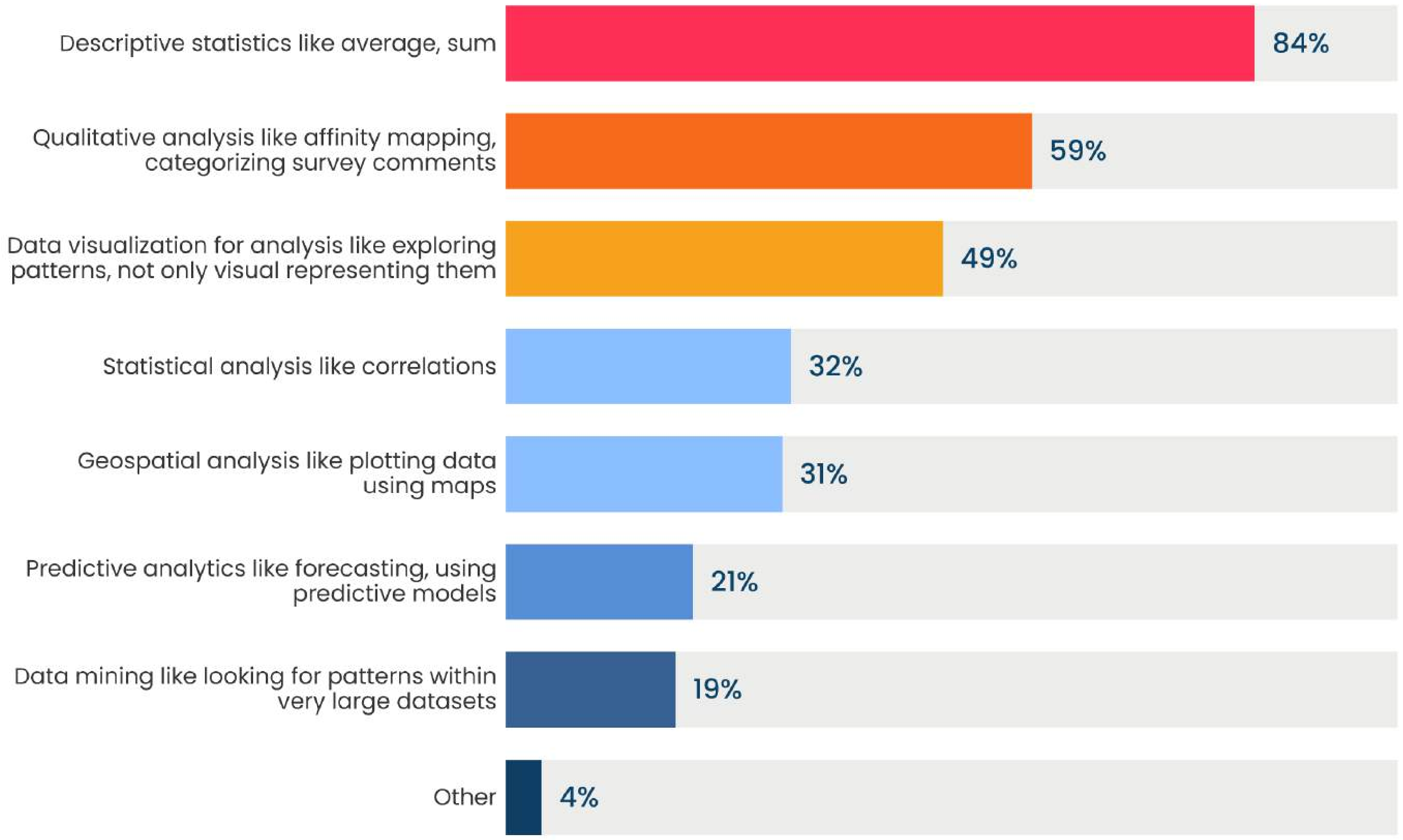
In what formats do your staff present data internally or externally?



Almost 9 out of 10 respondents use graphs and charts to present data, and a broad majority also use data tables. Dashboards with real-time data and data tables have gone down slightly in popularity, and interactive data visualizations have gone up in popularity. People who responded “Other” almost all responded that they present data through narratives, summaries, texts, stories, and presentations.

FIGURE 29

What is included in your organization’s data analysis?



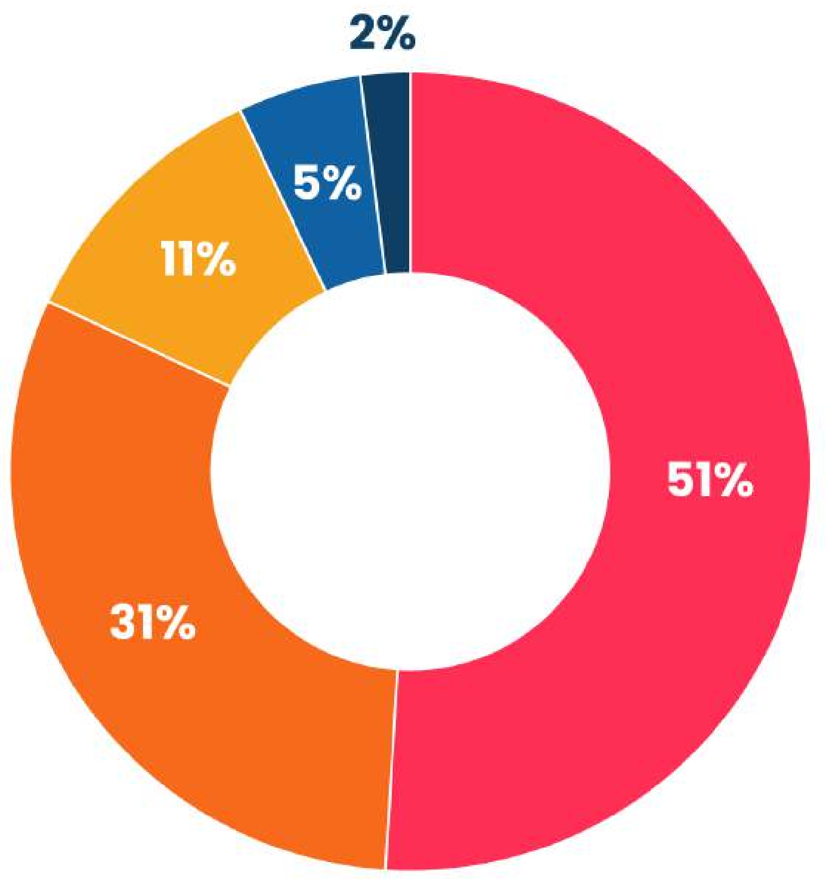
Elements included in respondents’ data analysis are mostly descriptive statistics, with over 84 percent including descriptive statistics in their analysis. These results are consistent with previous survey years. Approaches like qualitative analysis and data visualization have grown in popularity, with almost 59 and 49 percent of respondents using these approaches, respectively. Statistical and geospatial analysis have also grown in use since previous years, but less popular compared to other approaches.

Predictive analytics has significantly fallen in popularity in organizations' data analysis of program data, which may be because predictive approaches are often only applicable to unique needs. Only about 2 percent of respondents are using predictive analytics for program data. It is the least popular approach compared to descriptive statistics and inferential approaches, with descriptive approaches being the most popular.

When respondents do use machine learning or artificial intelligence, which can be used for predictive uses, it is most often for technical or administrative customer service. Less than 10 respondents out of over 200 are regularly using AI or machine learning for anything other than customer service. Notably, about a sixth of respondents are planning or testing AI or machine learning uses for each of the above purposes.

FIGURE 30

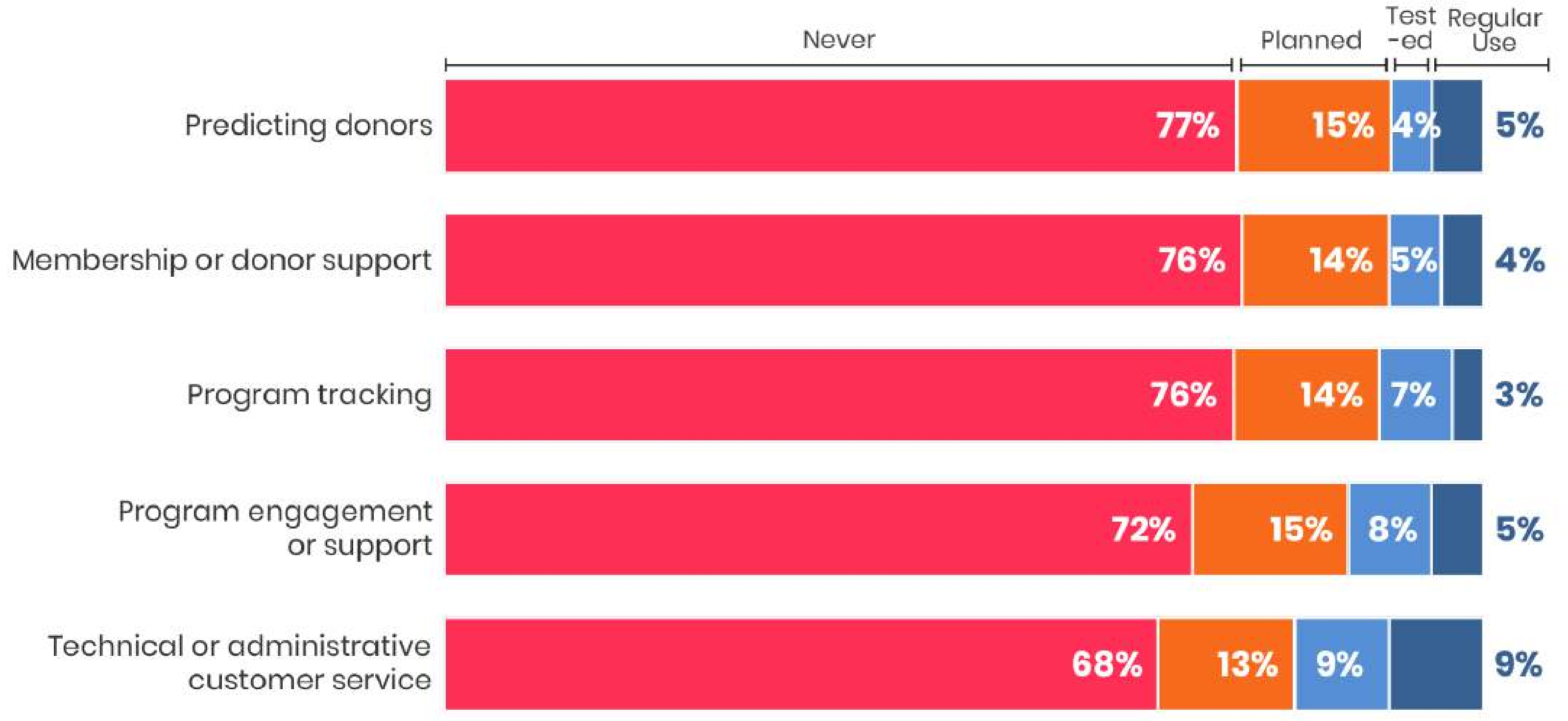
Does your organization perform statistical analysis on program data?

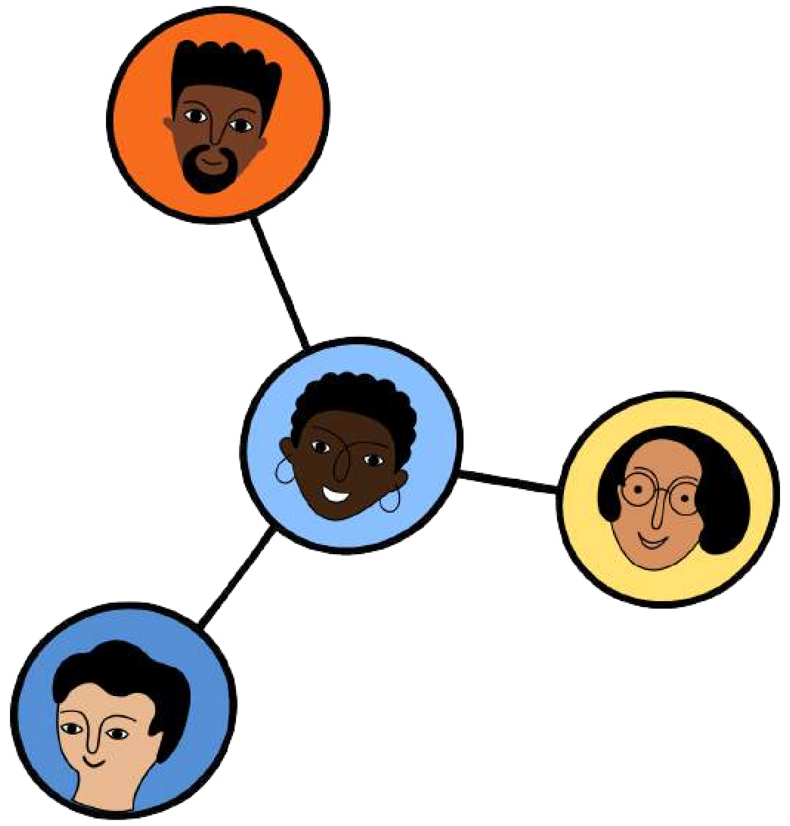


Responses	%
Descriptive only like average, sum	51%
Inferential like using statistics to understand the impact of various variables on program outcomes	31%
All	11%
Other	5%
Predictive like using statistical models to predict individual program outcomes before they happen	2%

FIGURE 31

Has your organization used machine learning or artificial intelligence for any of the following tasks?





Survey participants

Who responded to our Data Empowerment survey?

Over 220 people responded to the survey, representing a wide variety of nonprofits in the NTEN network. The diverse variety of responses to this survey showcases a broad and growing community emerging into applying data-driven culture for social good across sectors.

Almost 65 percent of organizations represented in this survey have existed for over 20 years. Education, human services, and environment/animal welfare are the most common mission areas represented. Over 53 percent of organizations have between 10 and 100 staff, and 20 percent of organizations have fewer than 10 staff. Nearly 75 percent of organizations have a budget of over $1 million. Finally, a majority of the respondents to this survey directly handle data or manage organizational databases. Over 75 percent of respondents generate reports, dashboards, or analysis, and nearly 63 percent directly input or edit data in a database.

FIGURE 32

What best describes your organization's primary issue area?

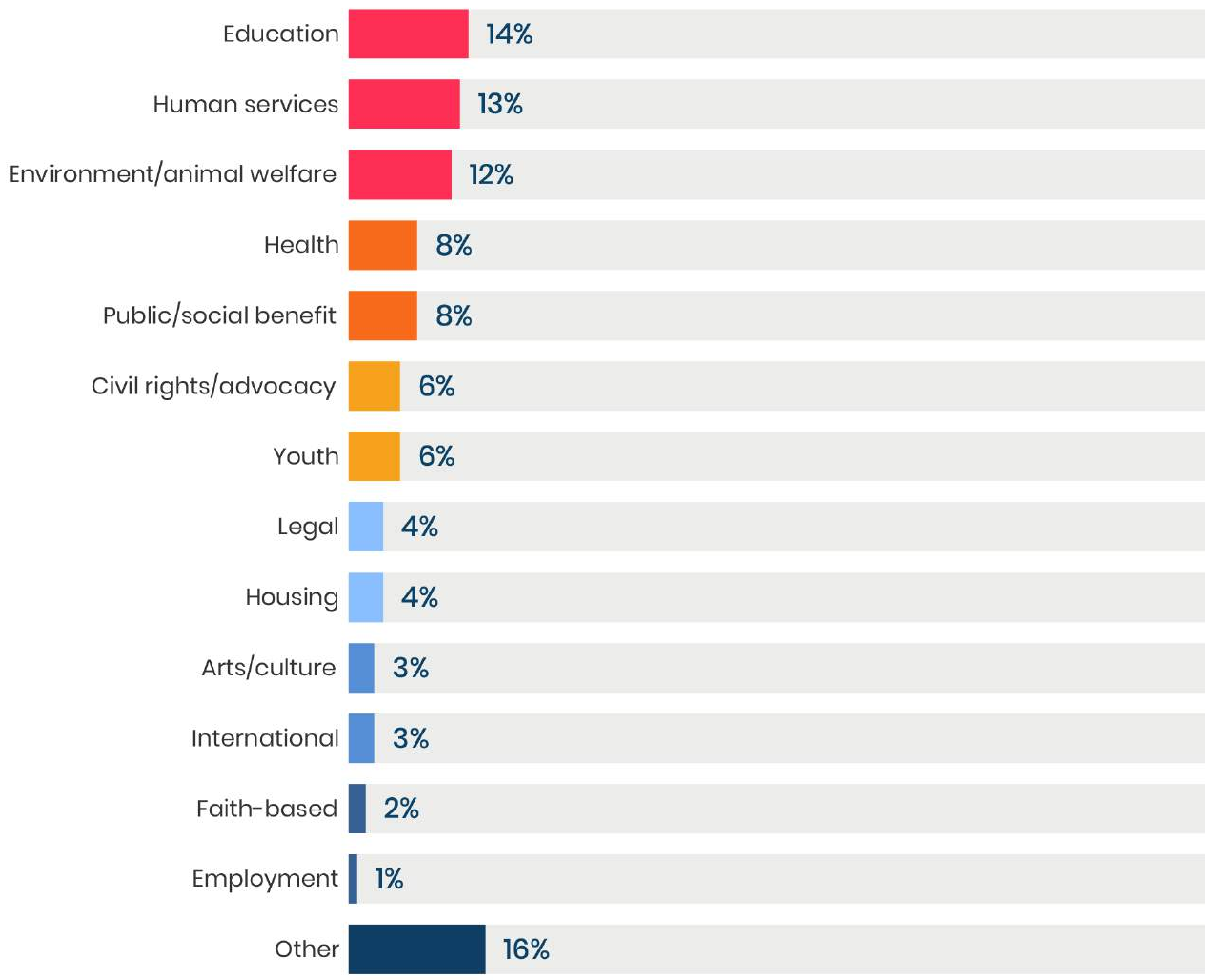


FIGURE 33

About how long has your organization existed?

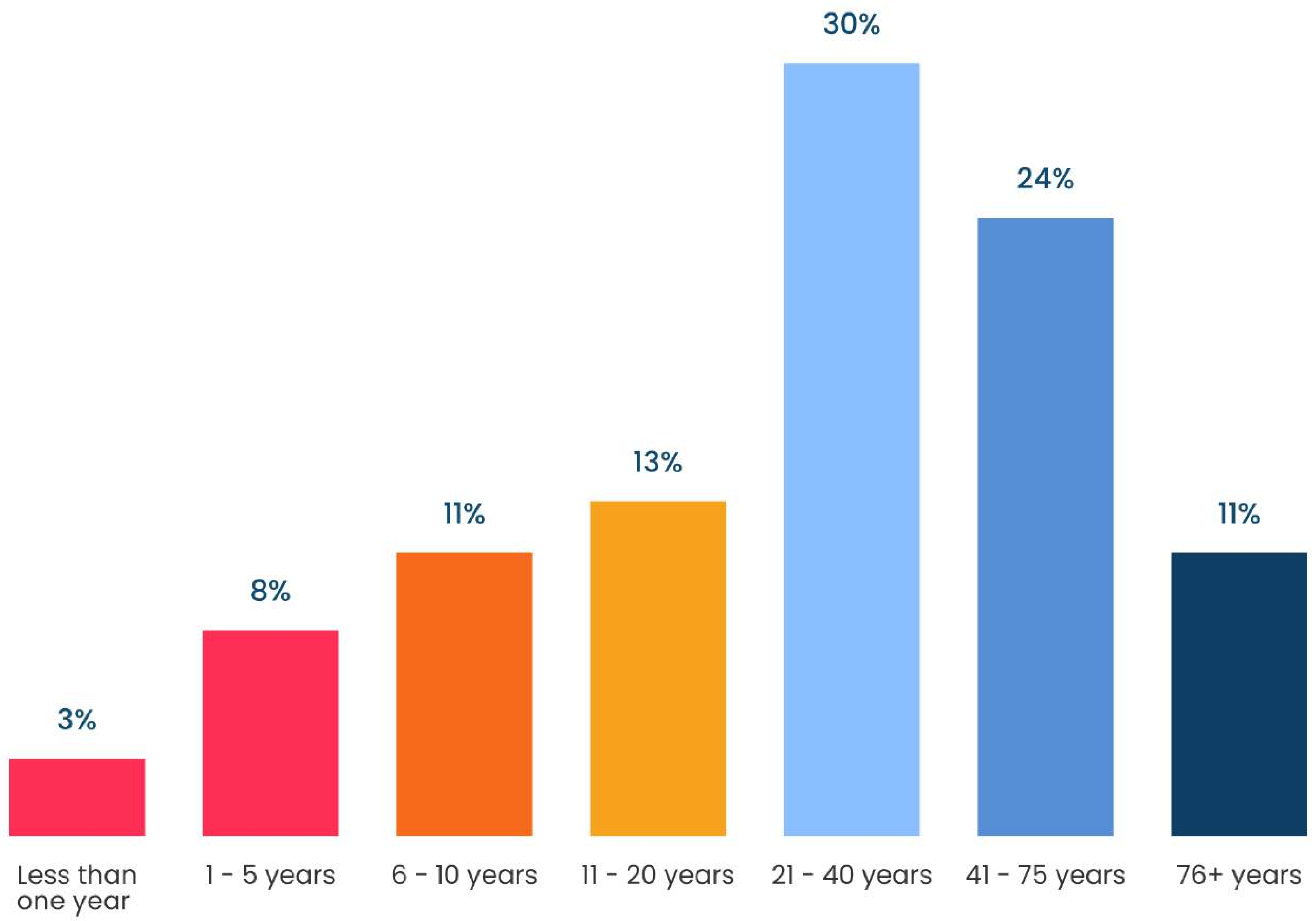


FIGURE 34

What is the size of your overall organization staff?

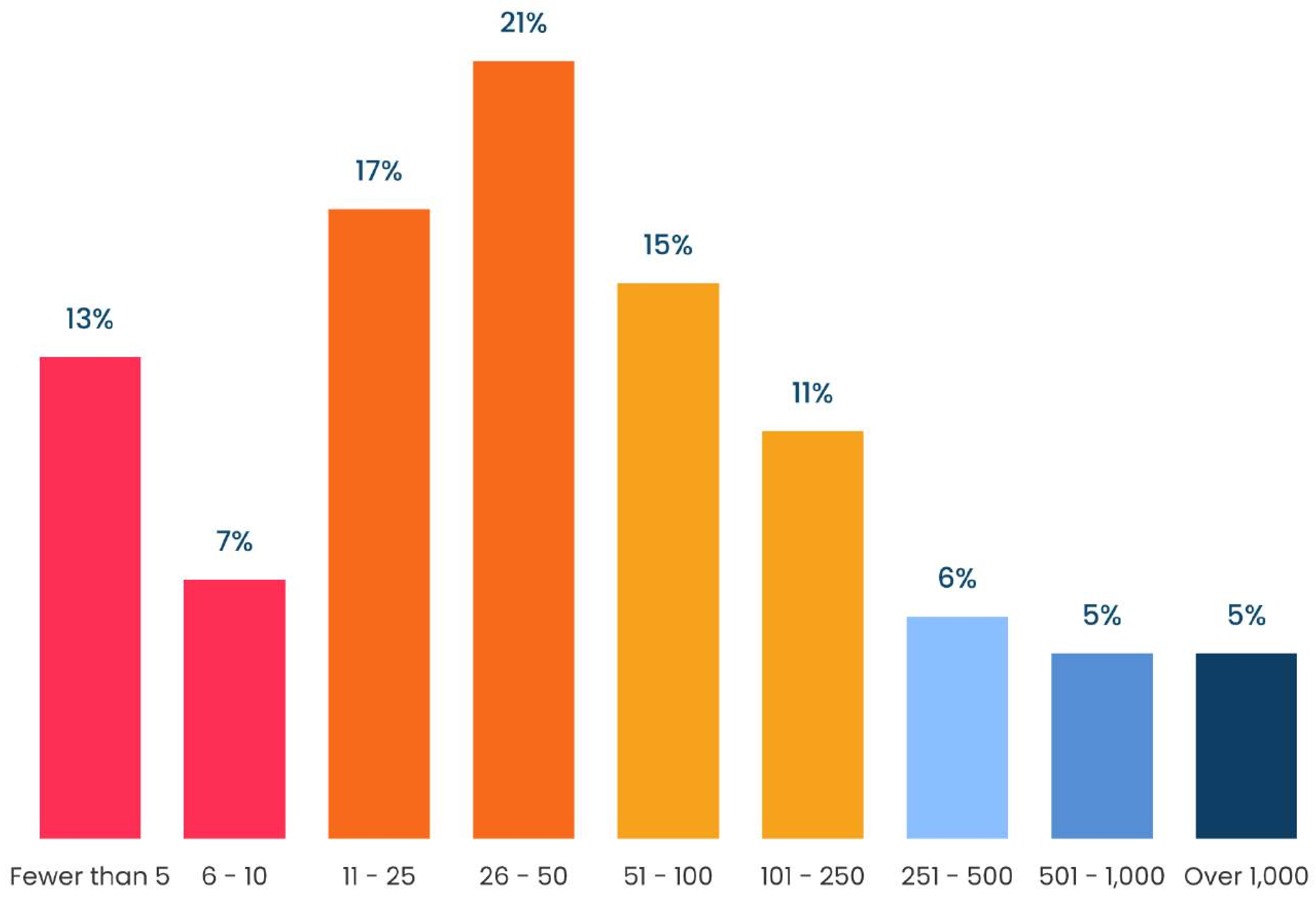


FIGURE 35

What is the approximate annual budget of your organization?

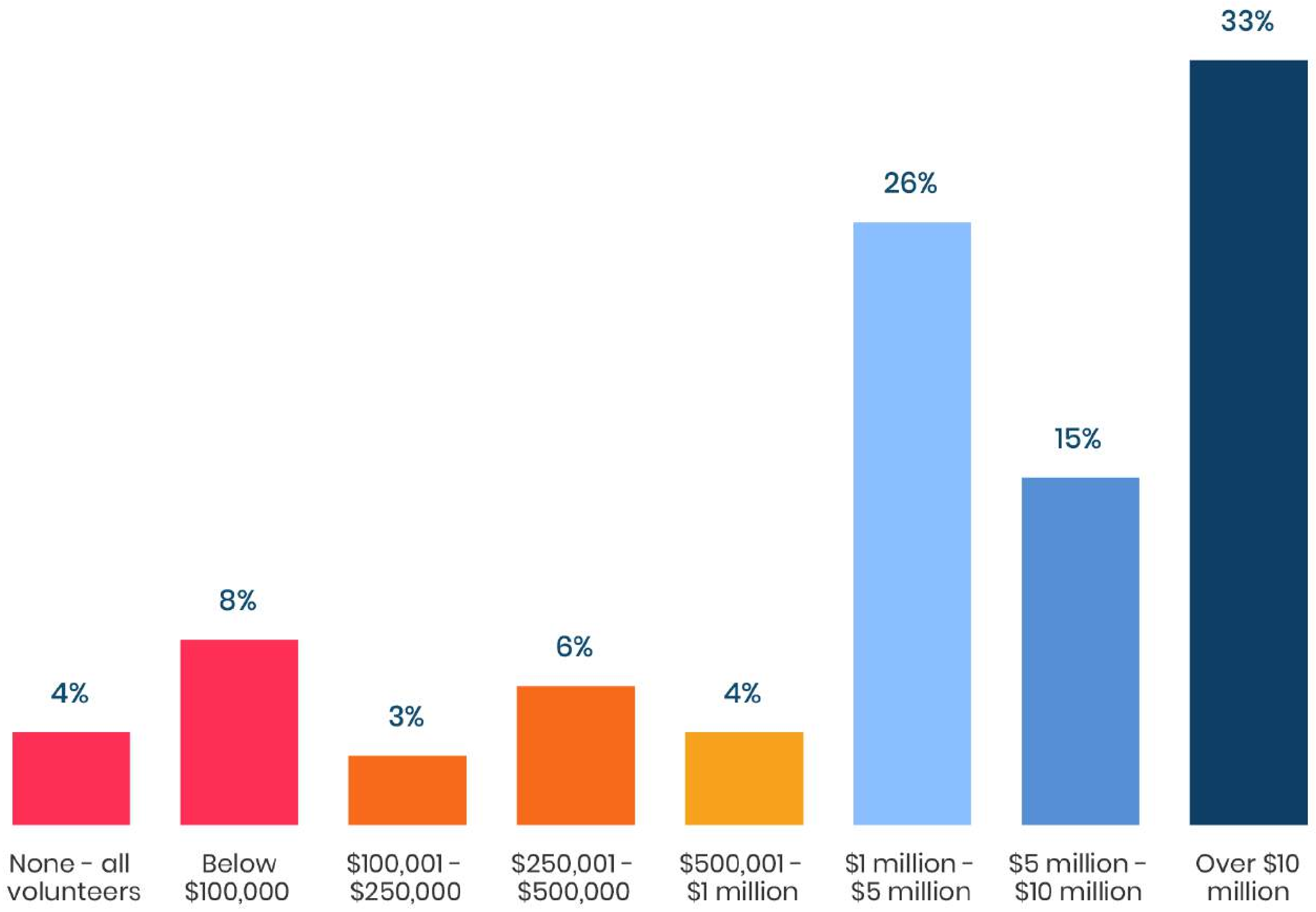
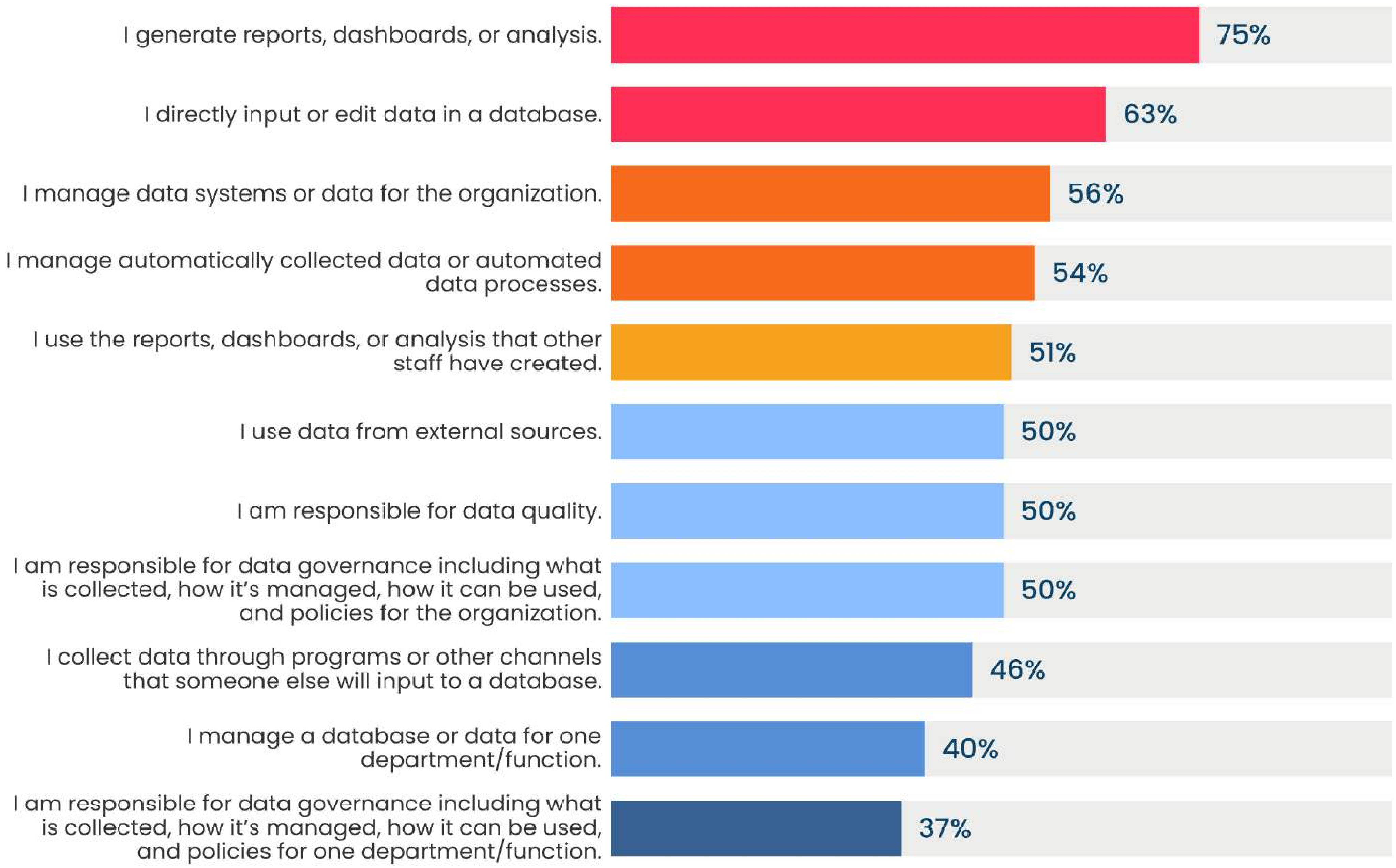


FIGURE 36

What is your relationship to your organization's data?



While not every staff member needs to be a data expert, everyone should have a basic understanding of data practices to support effective organizational data management.

Appendix

Data Tables

The following tables are provided to increase the accessibility of this report for readers with disabilities. Each table corresponds to the chart with the same number in the narrative of this report.

TABLE 1: Roughly how many constituent records does your organization manage?

Responses	%
Fewer than 500	10%
501 - 1,000	11%
1,001 - 2,500	4%
2,501 - 10,000	15%
10,001 - 25,000	13%
25,001 - 50,000	10%
50,001 - 100,000	12%
100,001 - 500,000	13%
More than 500,000	11%

TABLE 2: How is your data accessed?

Responses	%
Data is in a cloud-based CRM/database that staff access online	92%
Data is in a locally-hosted CRM/data that staff access when in the office	12%
Data is on individual computers for access only by that individual	19%
Other	2%

TABLE 3: What is the primary type of data storage system used for each of these departments?

Responses	Excel/Google Sheets /Airtable	Off the shelf	Off the shelf customized	Custom built database
Communications/marketing	44%	47%	30%	6%
Fundraising/development	31%	50%	37%	6%
Programs	47%	32%	44%	13%
Finance	38%	56%	26%	7%
Human resources	41%	49%	20%	9%
IT	47%	36%	29%	14%

TABLE 4: How does your organization collect data?

Responses	%
Directly from constituents via paper	48%
Directly from constituents via your website	79%
By staff who enter it directly into your data systems	89%
Indirectly from 3rd parties like email lists from partners or purchased lists	31%
Automatically via sensors, system processes, or tracking actions taken in our systems	39%
Other	11%

TABLE 5: How have the following factors influenced the data you collect?

Responses	Major influence	Significant influence	Some influence	No influence
Improving program outcomes	42%	31%	19%	8%
Funder's priorities or grant reporting requirements	34%	28%	25%	13%
Marketing or outreach priorities	19%	41%	32%	8%
Board reporting priorities	14%	32%	40%	14%
Donor's interest areas	12%	26%	39%	23%
External organizations or partners	12%	23%	48%	18%

TABLE 6: Do you collect any of the following types of data?

Responses	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
Race/ethnicity	17%	26%	34%	23%
Gender identity (binary M/F)	13%	22%	37%	28%
Gender identity (expansive)	13%	21%	45%	21%
Self-identify as person of color	11%	22%	35%	32%
Disability	10%	14%	42%	34%
Pronouns	7%	21%	43%	29%
Sexual orientation	5%	11%	37%	48%

TABLE 7: If you collect data on demographics including race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, or age do you use this data to make decisions about service or program delivery?

Responses	%
Yes, and we talk about our demographic data publicly	34%
Yes, but we don't talk about our demographic data publicly	30%
No	18%
We don't collect this data	17%

TABLE 8: What systems does your organization use for gaining consent to collect and use data?

Responses	%
General disclosure statement on forms or surveys	78%
General disclosure statement on website	59%
Disclosure information included in emails	28%
Disclosure read to participants by a staff person	25%
Popup message on website	15%
Other (please specify)	8%
None	7%

TABLE 9: How does your organization allow constituents to opt out of having their data stored or used by your organization?

Responses	%
Through opt-out form.	35%
By providing general contact information for the organization.	30%
By providing a specific email address for opt-outs.	20%
Does not allow.	15%

TABLE 10: What policies related to data does your organization have in place?

Responses	I don't know	No policy	Generic policy not adapted to organization	Custom policy specific for organization	Custom policy explained to all staff	Custom policy with regular review and training
Data retention	7%	17%	27%	30%	10%	9%
Data archiving	12%	26%	20%	26%	9%	8%
Data access	10%	15%	22%	28%	15%	9%
Third party/external data sharing	11%	13%	22%	30%	13%	11%
Personal data protection	11%	13%	23%	21%	20%	11%
Data use in artificial intelligence tools	10%	48%	11%	18%	9%	4%

TABLE 11: In which of the following ways do you or your organization use data generally?

Responses	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Never
Internal reporting and evaluation	49%	39%	12%	1%
Internal program evaluation and improvement	34%	34%	30%	2%
External reporting and evaluation to funders and sponsors	32%	34%	27%	7%
Board reporting and evaluation	30%	40%	28%	2%
Internal strategic planning	25%	34%	38%	3%
External reporting and evaluation to donors and community	20%	33%	42%	5%
Internal communications evaluation and improvement	19%	30%	45%	5%

TABLE 12: In which of the following ways do you or your organization use data strategically?

Responses	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Never
Inform annual planning	29%	36%	30%	5%
Report against internal team or organizational goals	25%	37%	33%	5%
Plan programs or make changes	23%	33%	40%	4%
Inform regular decision making	22%	39%	39%	1%
Analyze constituent engagement or actions	21%	36%	39%	4%
Plan communications or campaigns	18%	37%	40%	4%
Predict donations or other actions (machine learning)	10%	12%	30%	47%

TABLE 13: In which of the following ways do you share data?

Responses	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Never
Externally in grant reports	26%	37%	29%	9%
Internally with some staff (within departments or leadership)	25%	56%	17%	1%
Internally with all staff	20%	39%	33%	9%
Externally in program or impact reports	17%	30%	47%	6%
Externally with government partners	12%	23%	36%	29%
Internally with the Board	12%	45%	38%	5%
Externally in marketing	5%	31%	52%	12%
Externally with academic partners	4%	11%	42%	43%
Externally with other nonprofit partners	4%	16%	64%	16%
Externally with corporate partners	3%	14%	43%	40%

TABLE 14: If you provide data for grant reports, which of the following options most closely aligns with your process?

Responses	%
We provide custom reports of our program or other organization data to match each funder's unique reporting requirements.	72%
I don't know	12%
We provide standardized reports of our program or other organization data so reporting for all funders is the same.	11%
Other (please specify)	5%

TABLE 15: Do any staff at your organization have the word "Data" in their job title?

Responses	%
0	50
1	41
2	15
3	8
4	1
5	1
7	1
8	1

TABLE 16: What is the percentage of staff at your organization with the skills and access to create and run customized reports from your data?

Responses	%
0 - 10%	40%
11 - 25%	27%
25 - 50%	17%
50 - 75%	10%
75 - 100%	5%

TABLE 17: Who in your organization is responsible for ensuring the organization is compliant with relevant laws or data policies?

Responses	%
IT Director (or equivalent IT leader)	24%
Operations/HR/Finance department	17%
CEO/ED	15%
Other	15%
I don't know	10%
Committee of multiple staff/departments	9%
Program Director (or equivalent program leader)	3%
Marketing Director (or equivalent marketing/communications leader)	3%
Development Director (or equivalent development/fundraising leader)	2%
Consultant or third party entity	1%

TABLE 18: Who has authority for adopting new technologies that could have impacts on data collection or use?

Responses	%
IT Director (or equivalent IT leader)	51%
CEO/ED	48%
Operations/HR/Finance department	42%
Committee of multiple staff/departments	30%
Program Director (or equivalent program leader)	28%
Development Director (or equivalent development/fundraising leader)	25%
Marketing Director (or equivalent marketing/communications leader)	17%
Other	9%
I don't know	3%
Consultant or third party entity	1%

TABLE 19: Please provide the Full Time Equivalent (FTE) amount for the following responsibilities fulfilled by a staff person inside your organization.

Responses	Average
Data collection	10.25
Impact analysis and evaluation	1.49
Data quality	1.37
Database administration	1.28
Report creation	1.28

TABLE 20: Please provide the Full Time Equivalent (FTE) amount for the following responsibilities fulfilled by a consultant or third party entity responsible for your organization's technology and/or data.

Responses	Average
Data collection	1.32
Report creation	0.67
Database administration	0.61
Impact analysis and evaluation	0.54
Data quality	0.41

TABLE 21: Which of the following are challenges for you and your organization in data collection?

Responses	%
Individual's staff time	79%
Individual's understanding of data value	65%
Individual's processes/data input	61%
Organization's tools/software	57%
Organization's strategic view of data	52%
Organization's ability to generate data value	41%
Constituents' reluctance to share data	37%
Complex funder reporting expectations	35%
Other	5%

TABLE 22: Which of the following are challenges for you and your organization to successfully adopt technology (that supports successful data use)?

Responses	%
Staff in-house who can manage/implement technology	70%
Funding	68%
Overall knowledge/skill level of staff	57%
Tools/systems not aligned with workflow/needs	54%
Perception of value (of better use of data)	34%
Lack of trust in data or technology	21%
Resistance from leadership	19%
Other	10%

TABLE 23: Please rank the following challenges in data use in order of impact for your organization. 1 = the highest challenge; 6 = the lowest challenge.

Responses	Average
Individual's data literacy/skills	4.09
Individual's strategic application of data	3.96
Organization's data silos by department or team	3.92
Organization's appropriate tools/software	3.53
Data quality	3.38
Complex funder reporting expectations	2.25

TABLE 24: Which of the following data standards or policies do you monitor?

Responses	%
GDPR - General Data Protection Regulation	55%
PCI - Payment Card Industry	39%
CAN-SPAM/CASL - Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography And Marketing Act/ Canada's Anti-Spam Legislation	35%
HIPAA - Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act	33%
Other	20%
FERPA - Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act	11%

TABLE 26: In the coming 3-12 months, which of the following investments or projects do you or your organization plan to undertake?

Responses	%
Training staff on data collection, use, or management	64%
Program or impact evaluation	56%
New internal reporting or analysis	54%
Adopting artificial intelligence tools	46%
Redesigning your website	40%
Acquiring data from a new source	28%
New external reporting or analysis	27%
Sharing data with a new partner	23%
Migrating to a new CRM/database	22%
Building artificial intelligence tools	17%
Other	10%
Transitioning events, services, or other programs because of Covid-19 impacts	6%

TABLE 25: Who participates in the following activities at your organization?

Responses	Individual staff	All staff	Board	Consultant	Volunteer
Planning for data collection	80%	26%	9%	15%	6%
Planning for data use	80%	26%	8%	10%	3%
Creating reports	87%	17%	5%	11%	3%
Analyzing data	83%	18%	15%	14%	4%
Monitoring policies	82%	13%	24%	7%	1%
Training staff with data systems or use	80%	21%	3%	16%	1%

TABLE 27: Which of the following resources would be most valuable to your organization?

Responses	Not needed	Somewhat valuable	Valuable	Very valuable
Staff training on general data competency skills	10%	29%	26%	36%
Staff training on government data transparency	34%	34%	21%	11%
Staff training on data collection and acquisitions	17%	33%	33%	18%
Updated or upgraded tools/systems	7%	24%	33%	36%
Eliminated paper or duplicative processes	20%	24%	23%	34%
Improved user interface/user profile options on website	23%	32%	23%	23%
Case studies	29%	43%	20%	8%
Templates or other resources	11%	36%	36%	16%
Dedicated funding for data management and analysis	8%	14%	28%	50%
Consulting (pro-bono or paid)	15%	32%	27%	26%
Technology and systems audit	13%	23%	40%	24%
Data policy and governance support	6%	28%	31%	35%

TABLE 28: In what formats do your staff present data internally or externally?

Responses	%
Graphs and charts	90%
Data tables	77%
Infographics	54%
Dashboards (real-time data)	52%
Interactive data visualizations	28%
Other	5%

TABLE 29: What is included in your organization's data analysis?

Responses	%
Descriptive statistics like average, sum	84%
Qualitative analysis like affinity mapping, categorizing survey comments	59%
Statistical analysis like correlations	32%
Data visualization for analysis like exploring patterns, not only visual representing them	49%
Data mining like looking for patterns within very large datasets	19%
Predictive analytics like forecasting, using predictive models	21%
Geospatial analysis like plotting data using maps	31%
Other	4%

TABLE 30: Does your organization perform statistical analysis on program data?

Responses	%
Descriptive only like average, sum	51%
Inferential like using statistics to understand the impact of various variables on program outcomes	31%
All	11%
Other	5%
Predictive like using statistical models to predict individual program outcomes before they happen	2%

TABLE 31: Has your organization used machine learning or artificial intelligence for any of the following tasks?

Responses	Never	Planned	Tested	Regular use
Predicting donors	77%	15%	4%	5%
Membership or donor support	76%	14%	5%	4%
Program tracking	76%	14%	7%	3%
Program engagement or support	72%	15%	8%	5%
Technical or administrative customer service	68%	13%	9%	9%

TABLE 32: What best describes your organization's primary issue area?

Responses	%
Other	16%
Education	14%
Human services	13%
Environment/animal welfare	12%
Health	8%
Public/social Benefit	8%
Civil Rights/advocacy	6%
Youth	6%
Legal	4%
Housing	4%
Arts/culture	3%
International	3%
Faith-based	2%
Employment	1%

TABLE 33: About how long has your organization existed?

Responses	%
Less than one year	3%
1 - 5 years	8%
6 - 10 years	11%
11 - 20 years	13%
21 - 40 years	30%
41 - 75 years	24%
76+ years	11%

TABLE 34: What is the size of your overall organization staff?

Responses	%
Fewer than 5	13%
6 - 10	7%
11 - 25	17%
26 - 50	21%
51 - 100	15%
101 - 250	11%
251 - 500	6%
501 - 1,000	5%
Over 1,000	5%

TABLE 35: What is the approximate annual budget of your organization?

Responses	%
None - all volunteers	4%
Below $100,000	8%
$100,001 - $250,000	3%
$250,001 - $500,000	6%
$500,001 - $1 million	4%
$1 million - $5 million	26%
$5 million - $10 million	15%
Over $10 msillion	33%

TABLE 36: What is your relationship to your organization's data?

Responses	%
I generate reports, dashboards, or analysis.	75%
I directly input or edit data in a database.	63%
I manage data systems or data for the organization.	56%
I manage automatically collected data or automated data processes.	54%
I use the reports, dashboards, or analysis that other staff have created.	51%
I am responsible for data quality.	50%
I use data from external sources.	50%
I am responsible for data governance including what is collected, how it's managed, how it can be used, and policies for the organization.	50%
I collect data through programs or other channels that someone else will input to a database.	46%
I manage a database or data for one department/function.	40%
I am responsible for data governance including what is collected, how it's managed, how it can be used, and policies for one department/function.	37%
None of the above	0%

Find the latest version of the Data Empowerment Report, along with companion resources and templates to guide stronger data management for your nonprofit.

nten.link/data-empowerment

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