Annual Grants Management Survey

Results and Analysis

FEBRUARY, 2020

REI SYSTEMS

Reliable. Effective. Innovative.

REI Systems, NGMA, and GWU Conduct a Grants Survey

Identify issues and priorities

Let you see how you fit

Help advocate for what you need

What Are the Biggest Findings?

More time spent on compliance than anything

Variation in admin spend: < 2% to > 20%

Many can't measure performance, or don't know if it improved (more than 40%)

Everyone wants more Fed/State data sharing

Contents

REI Systems, GWU, NGMA

The National Grants Management Association provides tools and resources for grants professionals to support and maintain high levels of grants management competency and to establish standards of excellence for grants managers. *Visit ngma.org*

The Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration is a focal point for public affairs education, research, and public service at the George Washington University. *Visit tspppa.gwu.edu*

REI Systems provides grant management solutions, analysis and advice. We digitize government to produce healthier citizens, safer communities, and better lives. *Visit reisystems.com*

Introduction and Methodology

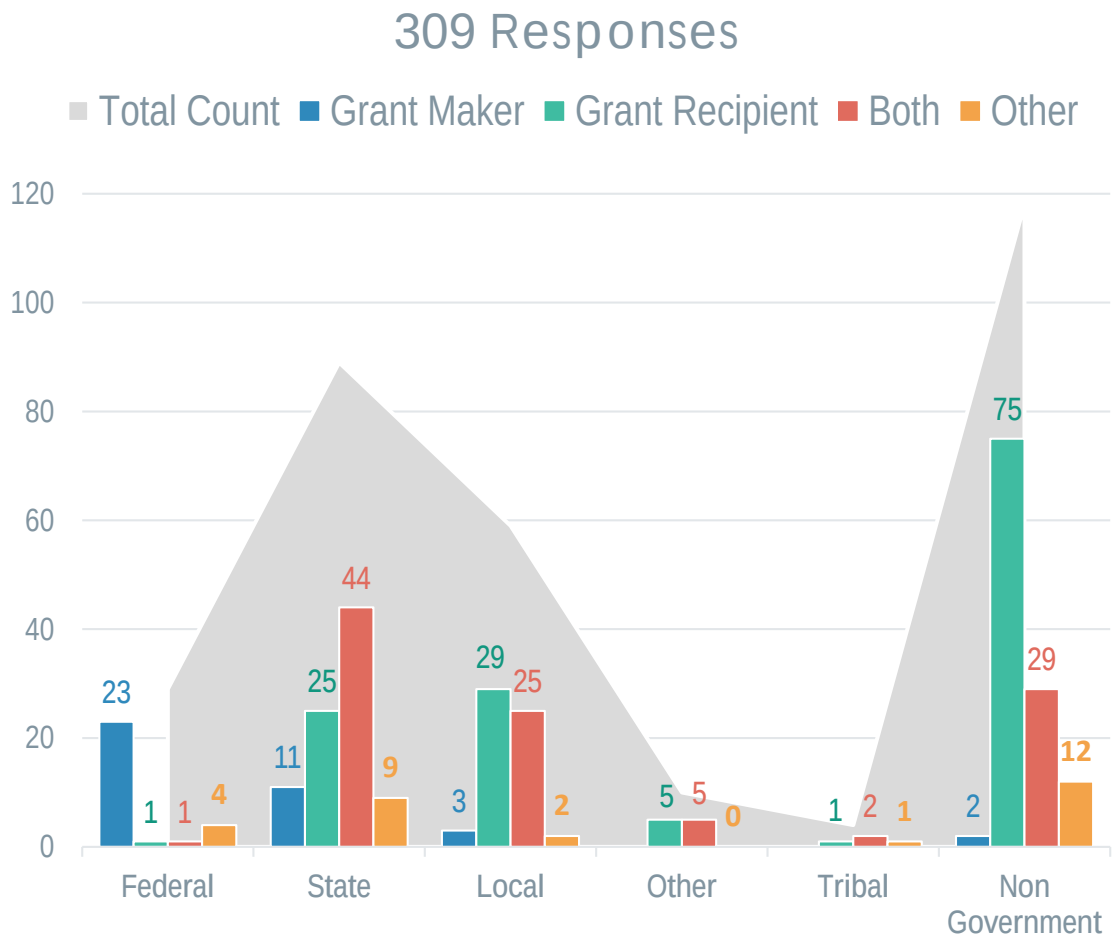
Purpose: The purpose of the grants management survey and analysis is to inform the grants community of cross-cutting issues and trends so as to help improve grants management, and to support advocates for better grant management

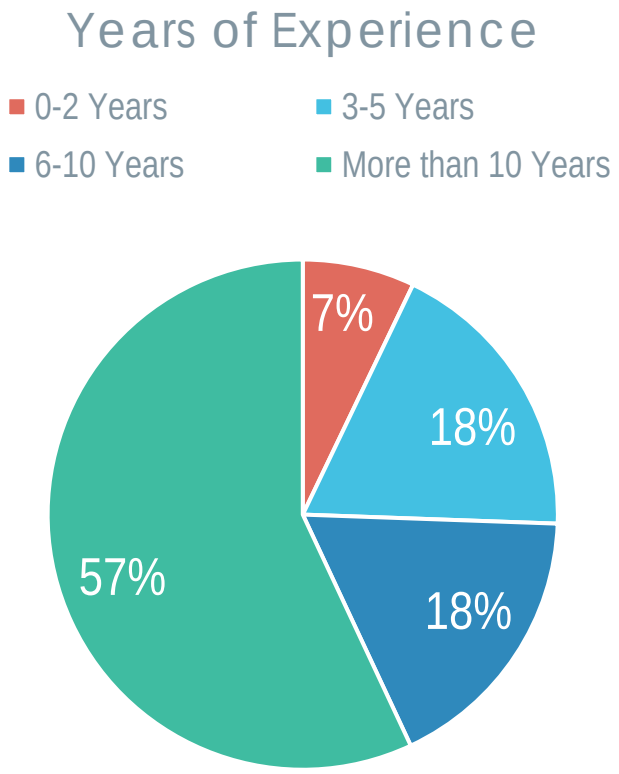
Survey Design: GWU, REI, and NGMA developed a survey of grant managers in 2016 to help identify key practices, major challenges, and related topics that could help inform the grants management community. Few revisions were made to the survey for 2017, 2018, and 2019, to maximize the opportunity to evaluate the trend of responses over time

Survey Administration:

- During November 2019, we invited more than 5,000 professionals in grant management and related fields to take the survey online. Others (OMB, Grants.gov) also distributed the survey on our behalf
- Those invited to respond included NGMA members, attendees of Grants Management Breakfast Forum events, and other grants professionals that REI and GWU have been able to identify. Those receiving the survey were encouraged to forward it to colleagues
- Responses were anonymous, though respondents were offered the chance to receive these survey results if they chose to share their name and email address (208 of 309 respondents did so)

Respondents Included a Mix of Federal, State / Local & Non-Profit Grant Managers



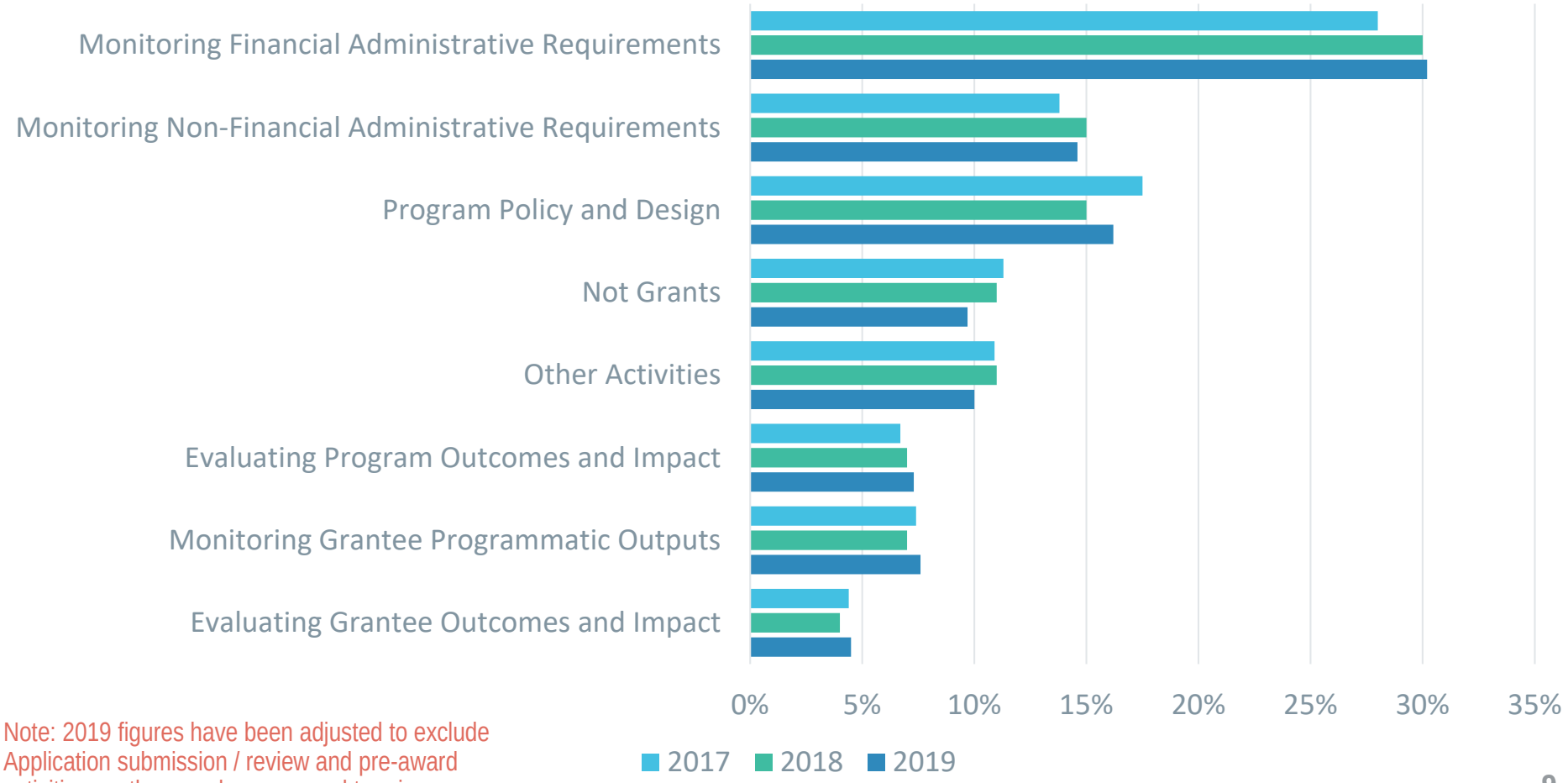


How Grant Managers Spend Their Time

The Time Grant Managers Spend Monitoring Compliance Has Stabilized

But compliance still requires more time than any other single activity

1.3. How much time do you spend on the following grants management activities?

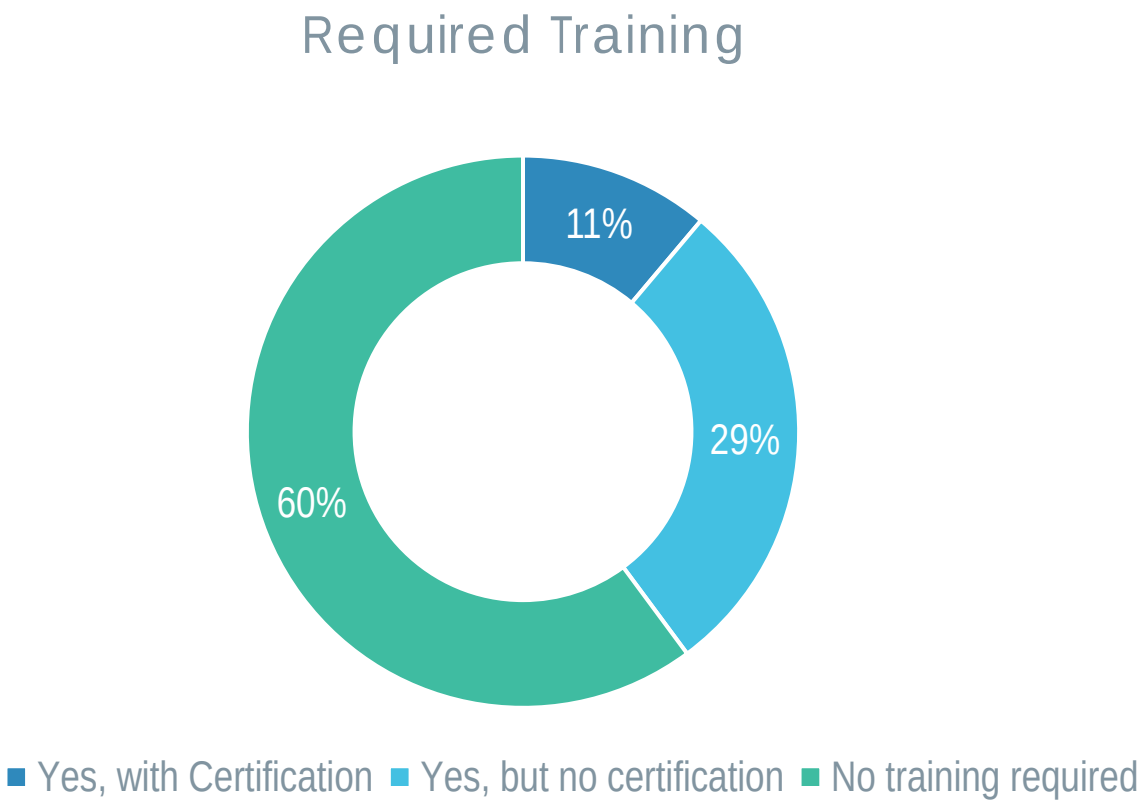


Note: 2019 figures have been adjusted to exclude Application submission / review and pre-award activities, so they can be compared to prior years.

Few Organizations Require That Their Staff Receive Grants Management Training

and certification requirements are even more rare

1.8. Does your organization require formal grant training of your staff?

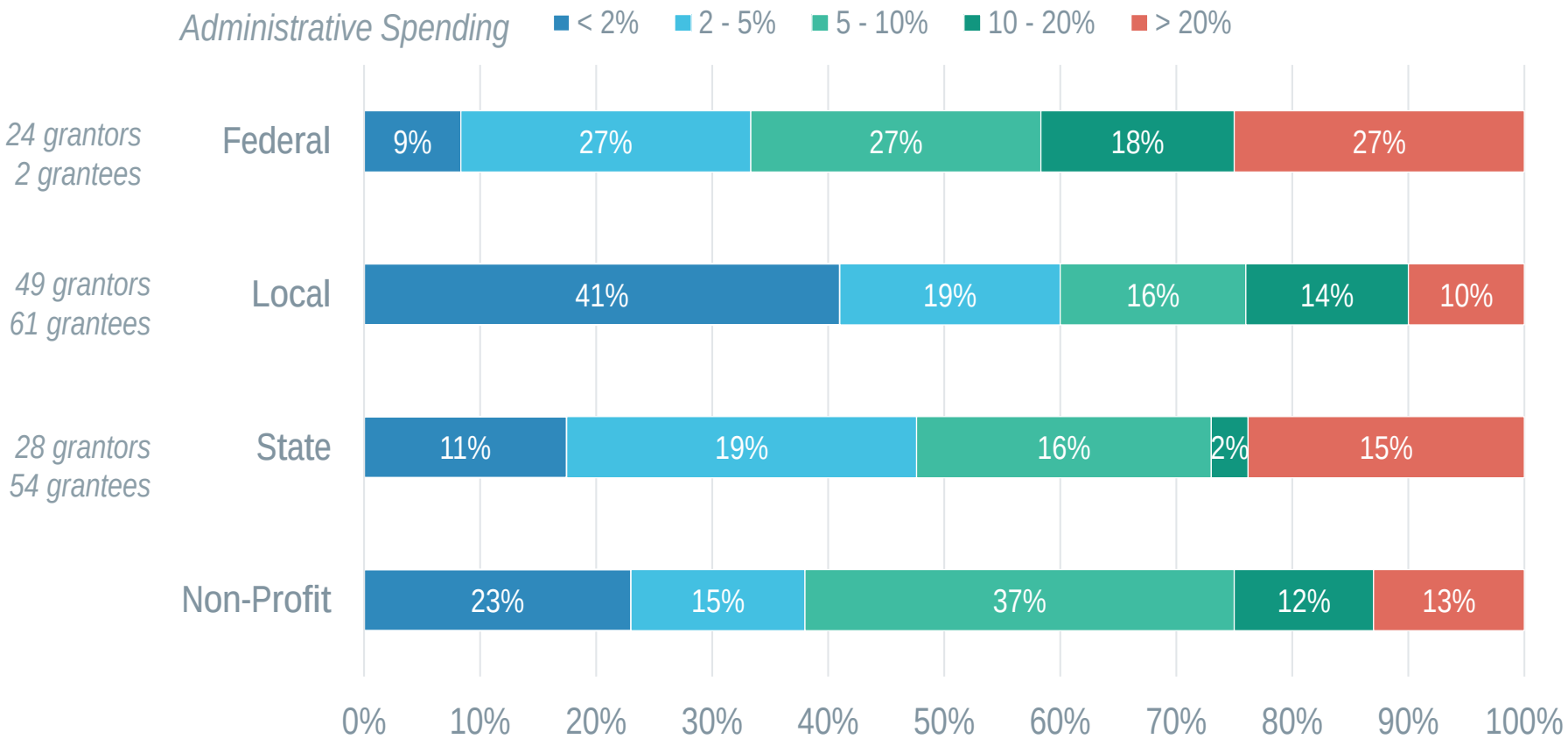


Administrative Spend on Grants Management

There is Wide Variation In Administrative Spending on Grants Management

Perhaps heavy spenders can learn from those who are more frugal and those who have been frugal need more resources

1.7. What percentage of the annual value of grants processed by your organization does [your organization's] administrative budget constitute?

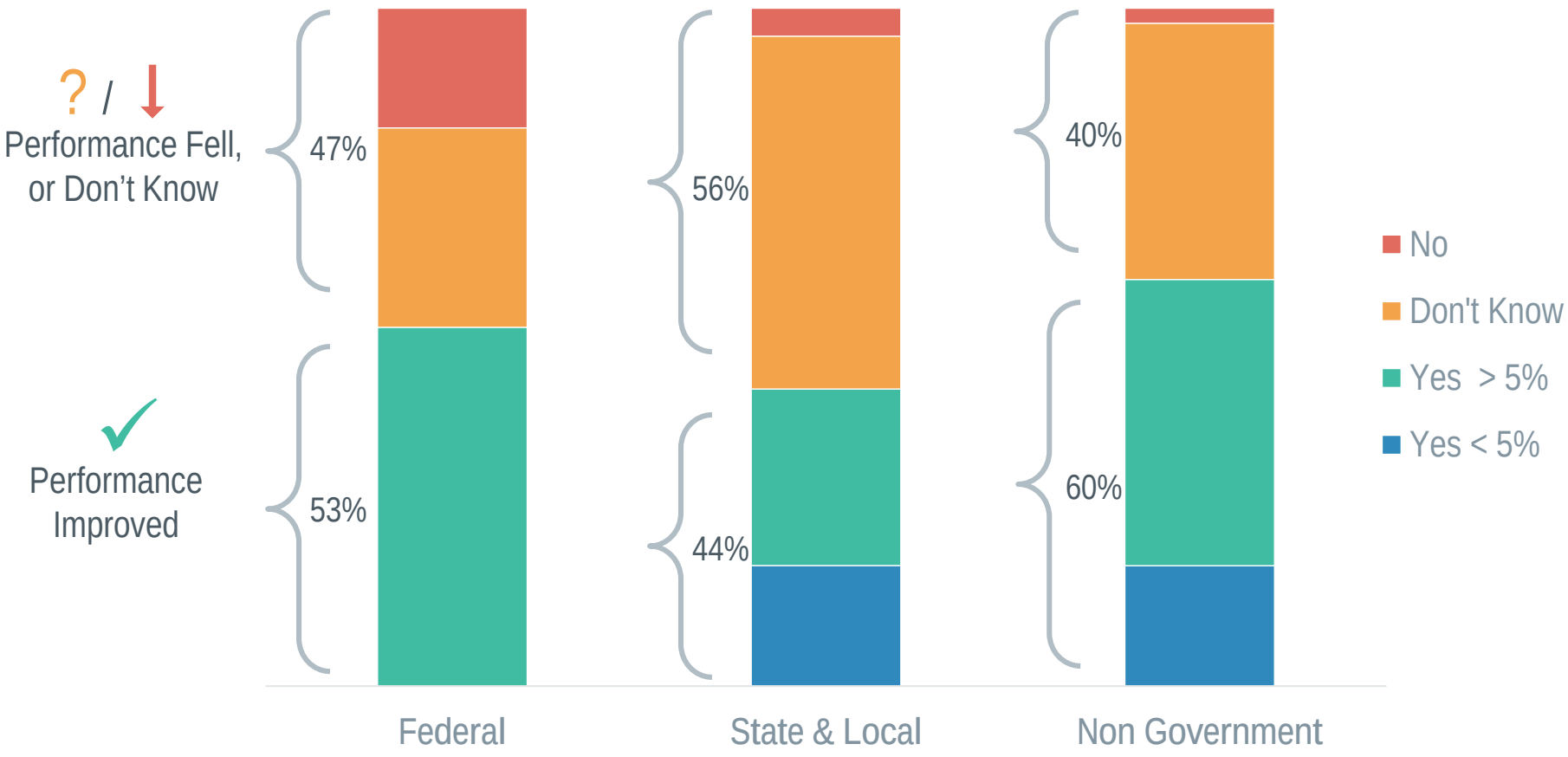


Performance and grantee burden

Only Half of Government Respondents Say Outcomes Improved Last Year

More non-governmental respondents reported improved outcomes

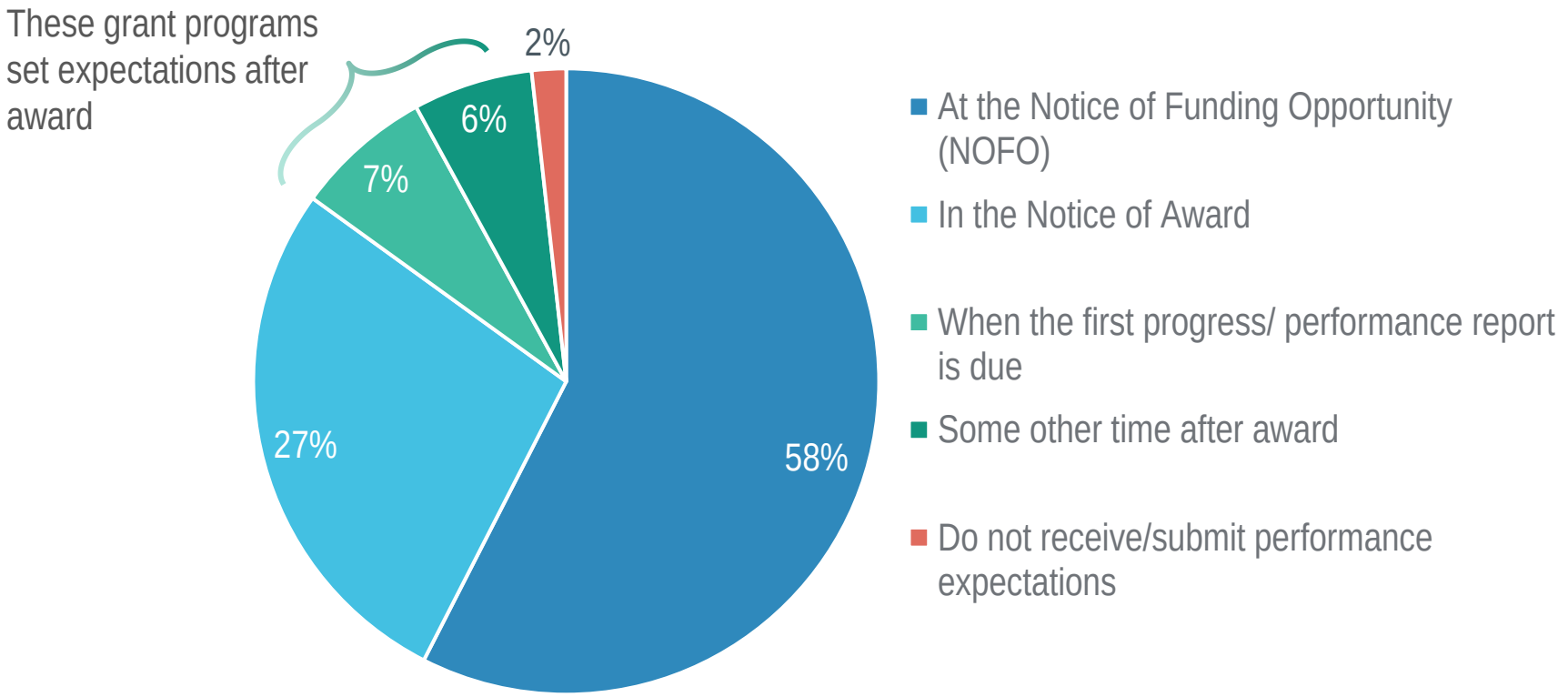
6.3. Have your organization's / your grantees outcomes improved over the past 12 months?



Most Grant Programs, But Not All, Set Performance Expectations Up Front

More non-governmental respondents reported improved outcomes

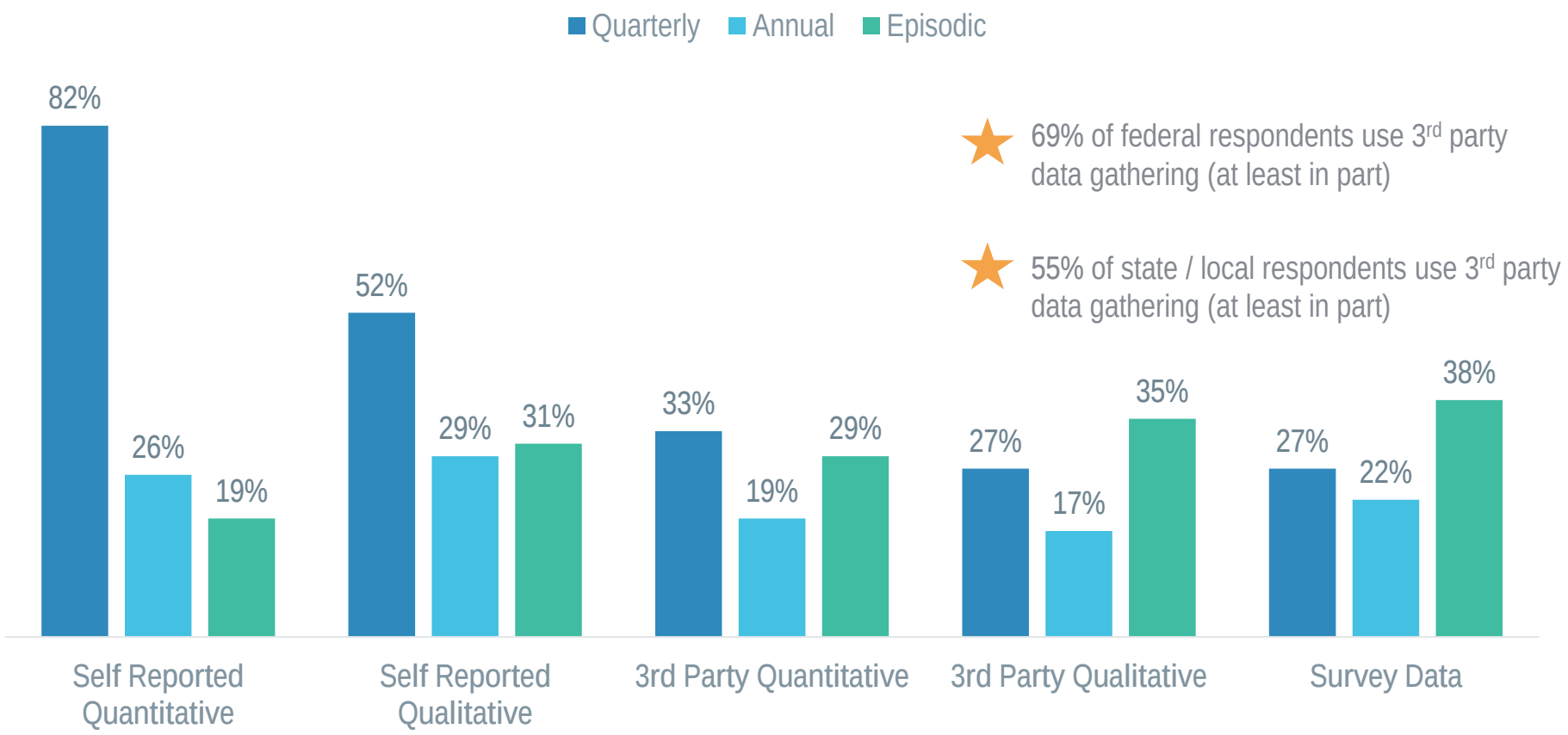
6.4. When do you first communicate or receive performance expectations for your grant?



Grant Managers Use More Self Reported Than Third Party Gathered Data

…but most government grant managers rely in part on data gathered by a 3rd party

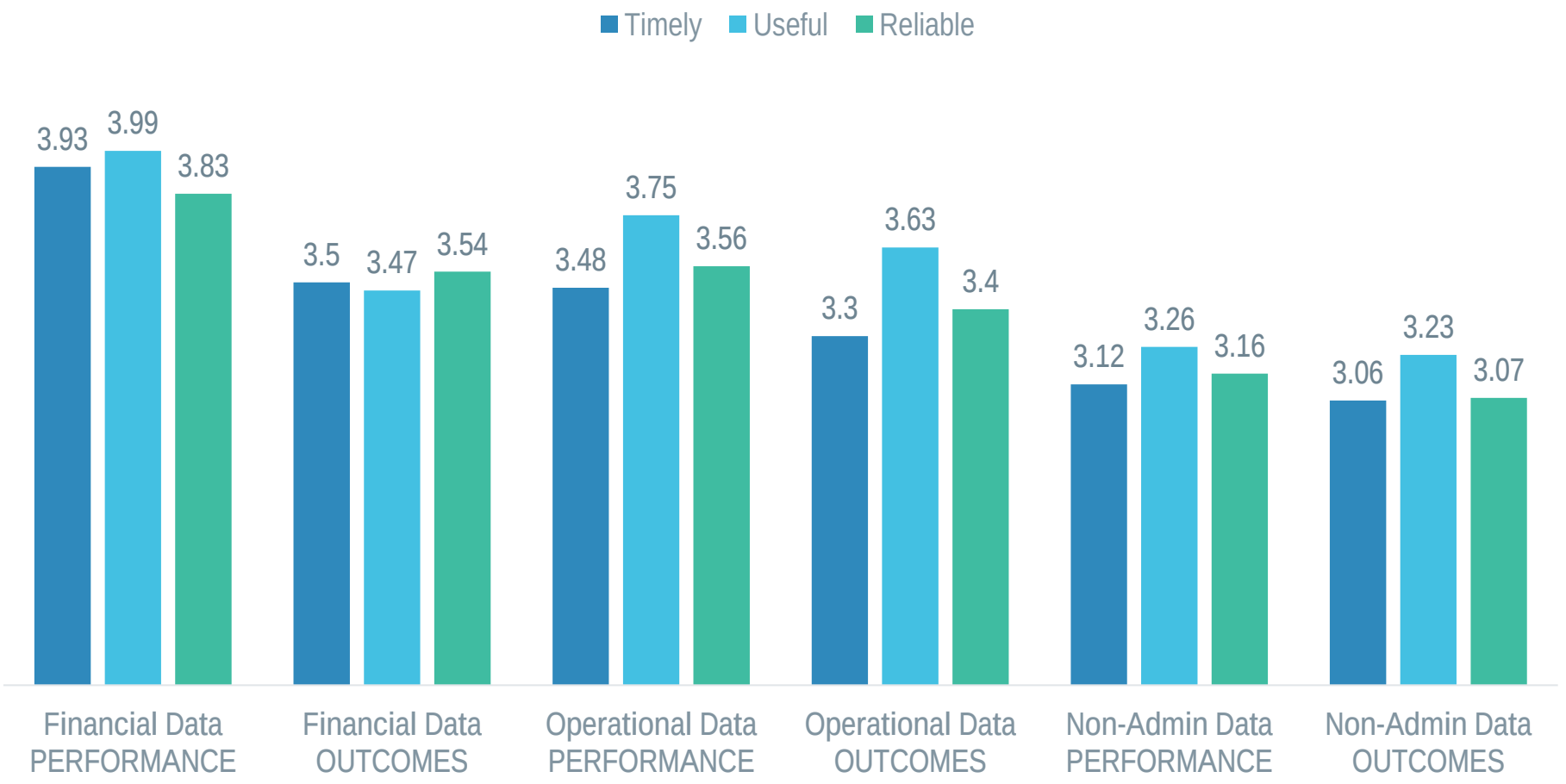
3.1. Please indicate the frequency with which you submit (or expect your grantees to submit) various types of data.



Note: Most respondents use more than one type of reporting source

Financial Data Collected Continues to be Perceived as Most Timely, Useful & Reliable

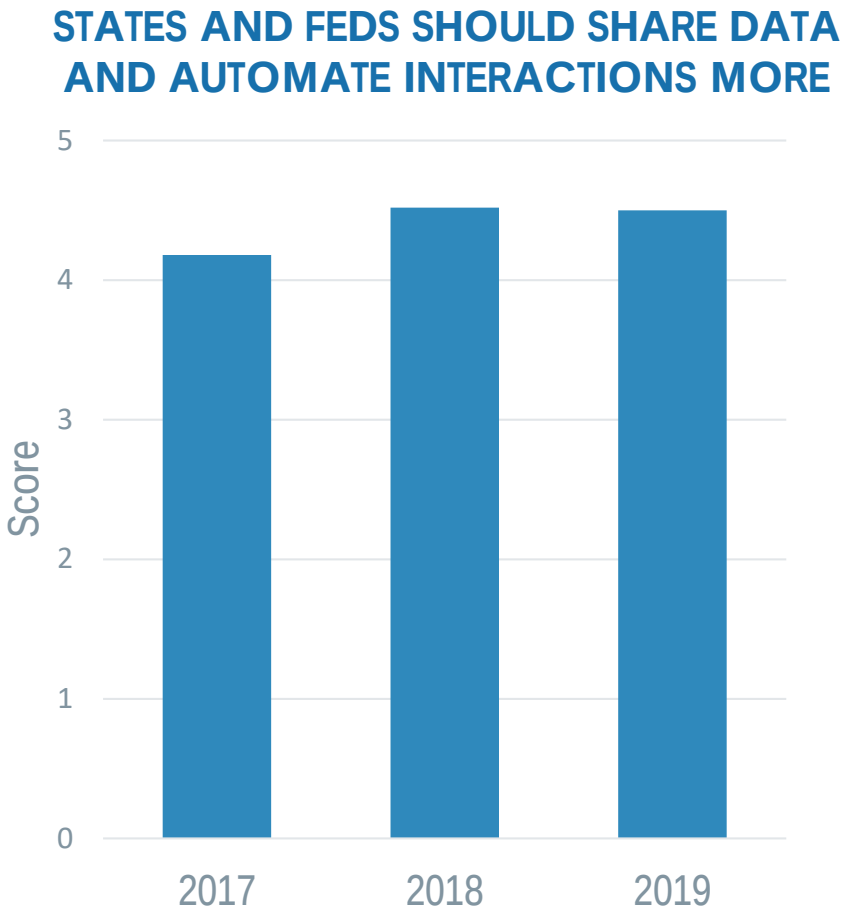
3.2. Please tell us how timely, useful and reliable different types of data are for your program.



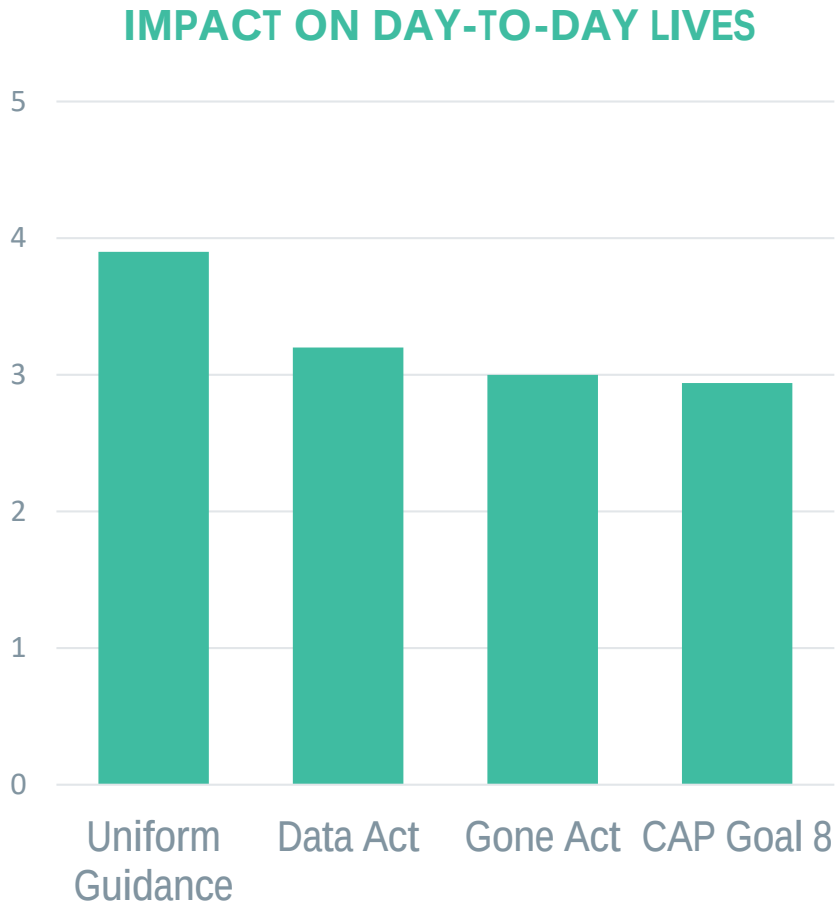
Strongly Supported Issues – and Those That Are Not…

Of All Survey Topics, Respondents Feel Strongly About

6.5. Should state governments and federal agencies share data and automate interactions more than they do today?

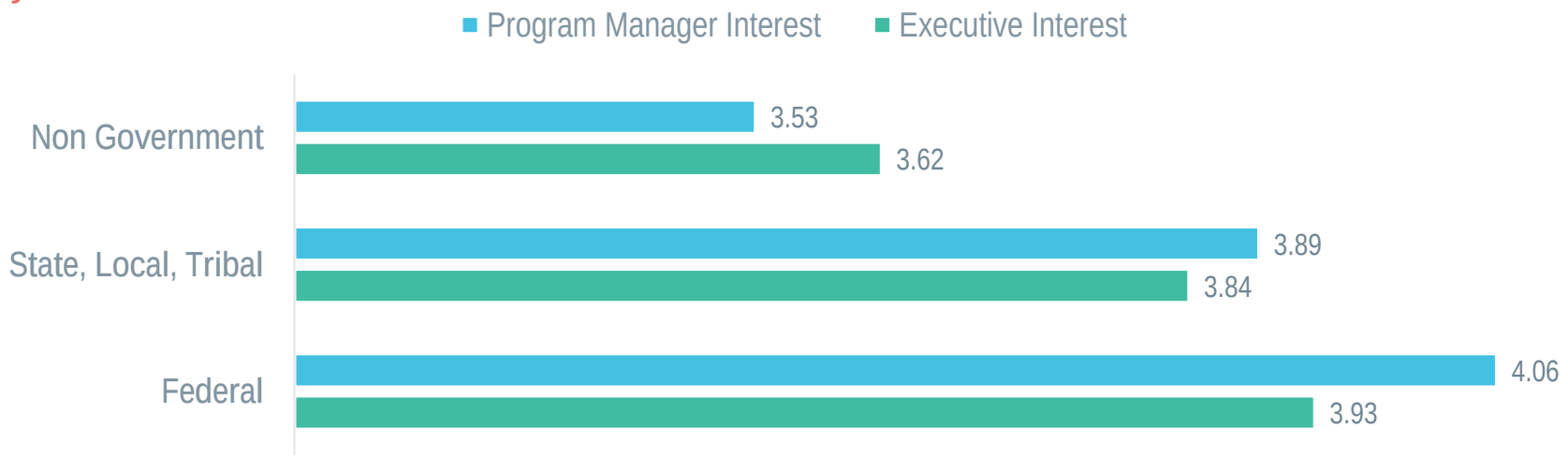


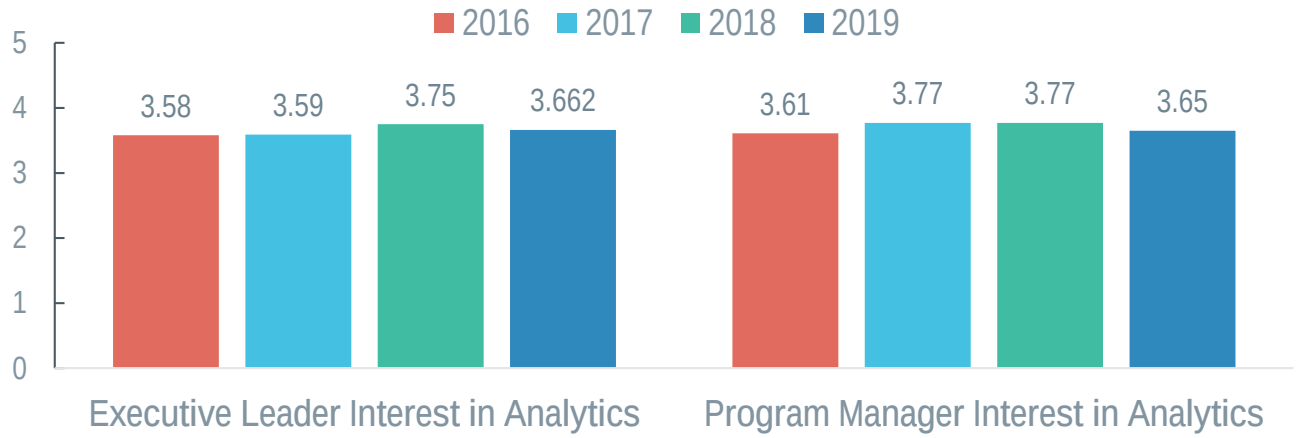
5.2. Please rate the impact of the executive and legislative directives on your day-to-day lives



Leadership is Interested in Data and Analytics

4.1. To what extent are your executive leaders and managers interested in evaluation and data analytics?

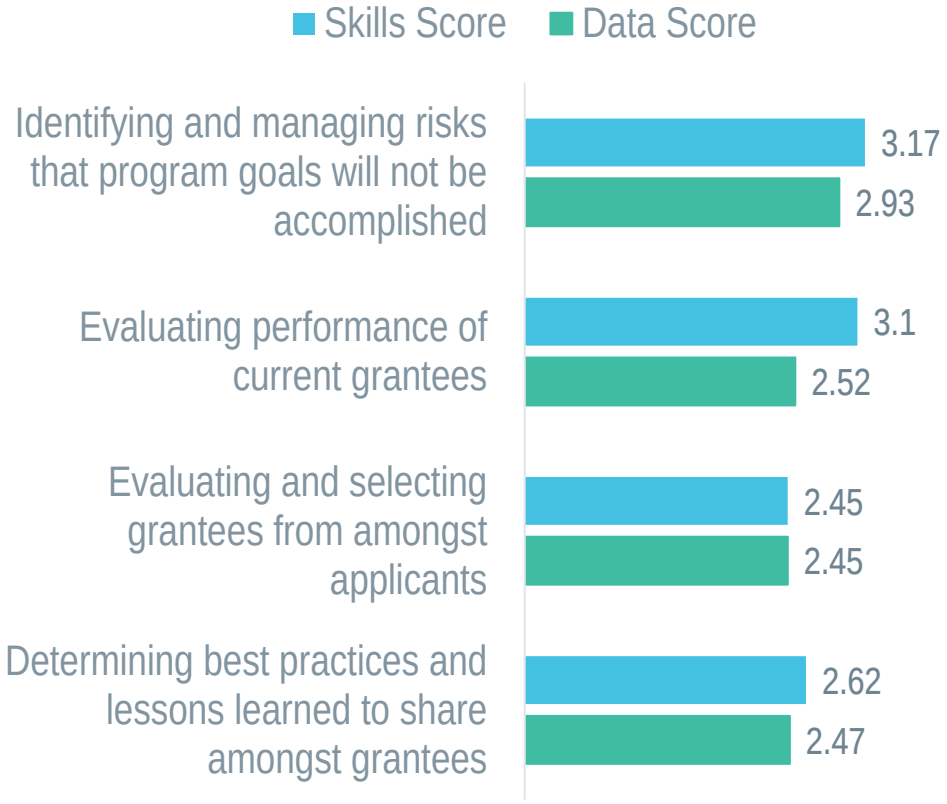




Respondents Also Seek Improvement

2.5. To what extent does your organization have the data available and skills needed to develop analyses?

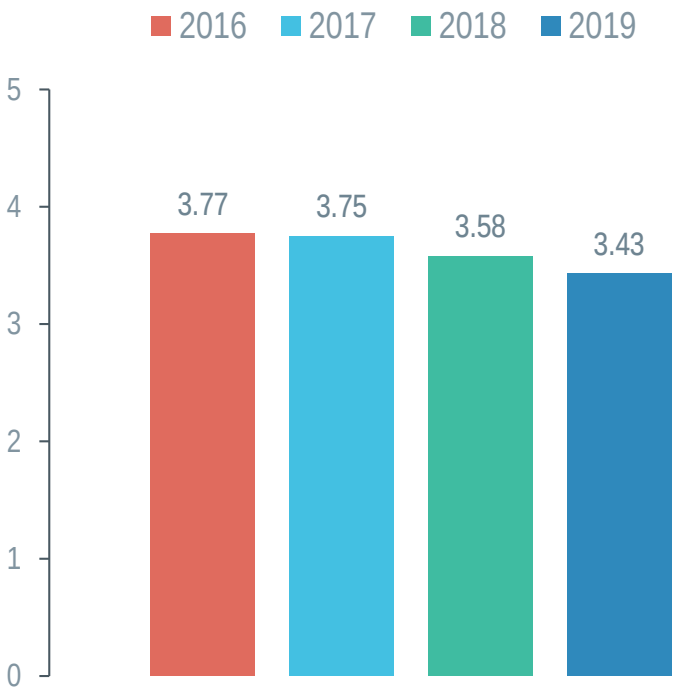
SATISFACTION WITH SKILLS AND DATA IS NOT HIGH…



Key: 5 = extremely satisfied 1 = extremely dissatisfied

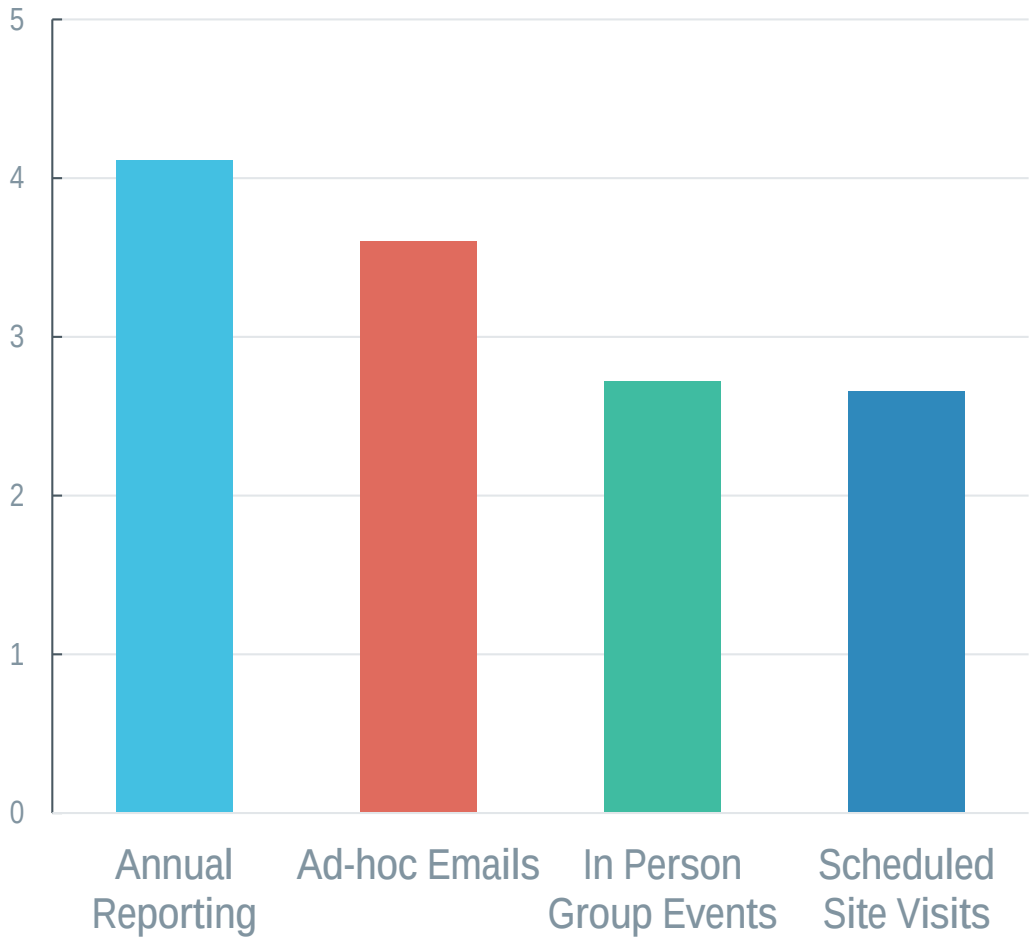
5.2. How well equipped do you feel your organization is to successfully meet your grant program's mission?

CONFIDENCE IN ABILITY TO MEET GRANT PROGRAM MISSION IS HIGH, BUT CONTINUES TO SLIP



Feedback Mechanisms Rely Most Heavily on the Annual Reporting Process

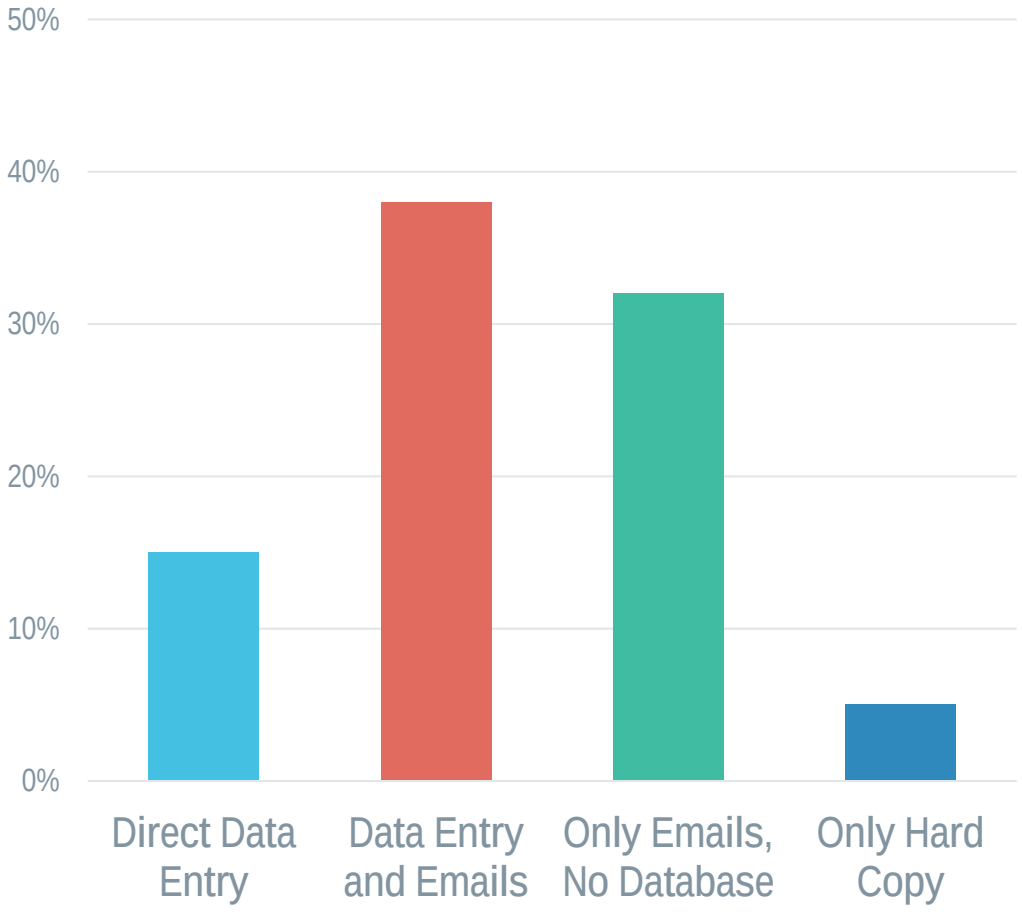
2.6 To what extent do you use formal or informal mechanisms to receive or provide feedback about the grant-making and reporting process?



- ★ Formal written reports continue to be relied upon
- ★ Reporting more often than annual can be burdensome
- ★ Few grant managers provide in-person feedback

Grant Reporting Automation Still Has Some Ways to Go

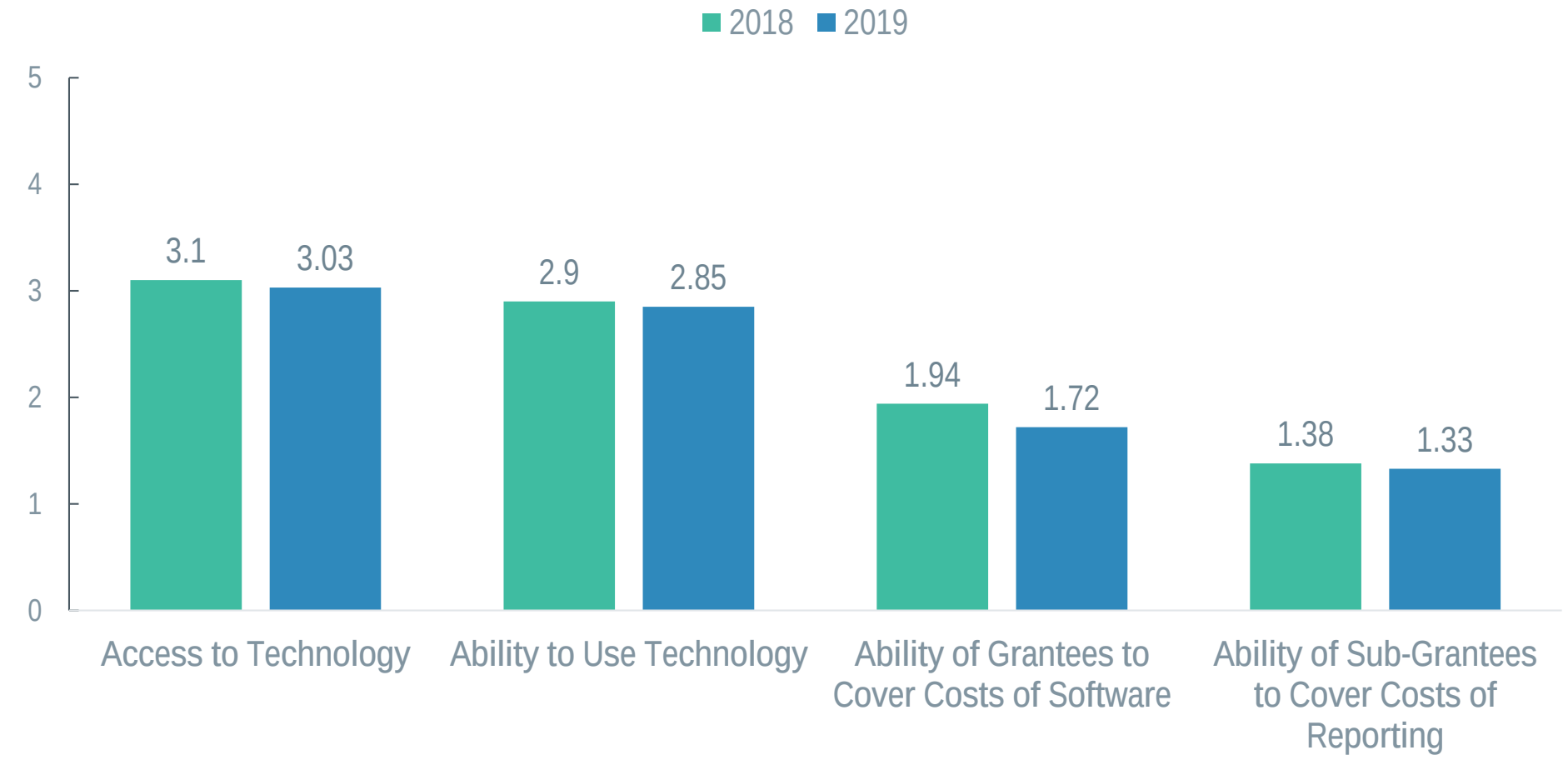
2.2 How would you describe the method used by your grantees to submit reporting



- ★ Grant reporting isn't sophisticated or efficient
- ★ Reporting varies by grant, and even by grantee

Satisfaction With Technology is Low – Especially Among Grantees

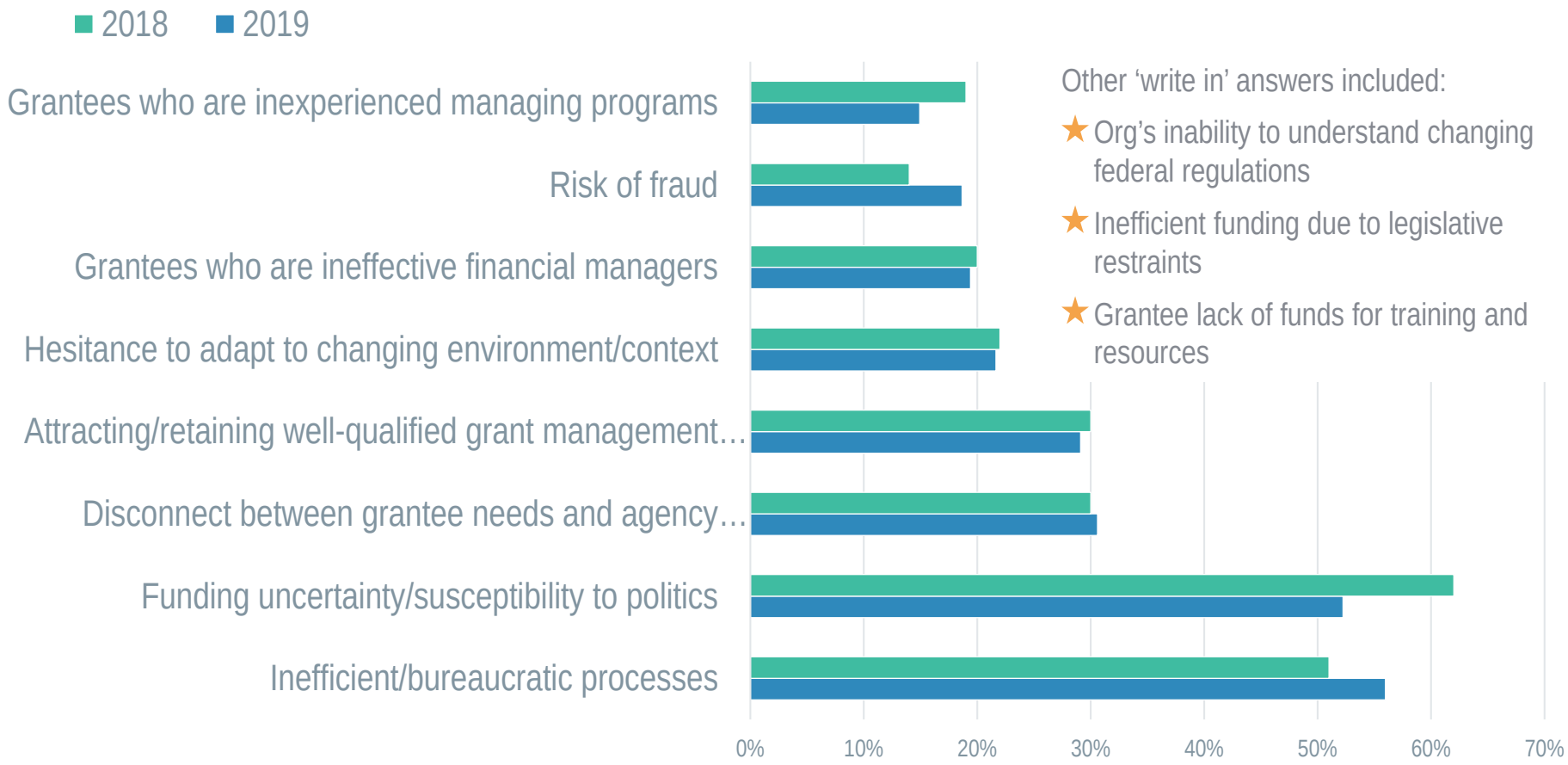
2.1 Rate your satisfaction with the technology, your program or organization's use of it and the technical assistance provided to your staff, grantees, and sub-grantees to use it.



Significant Challenges and Success Factors

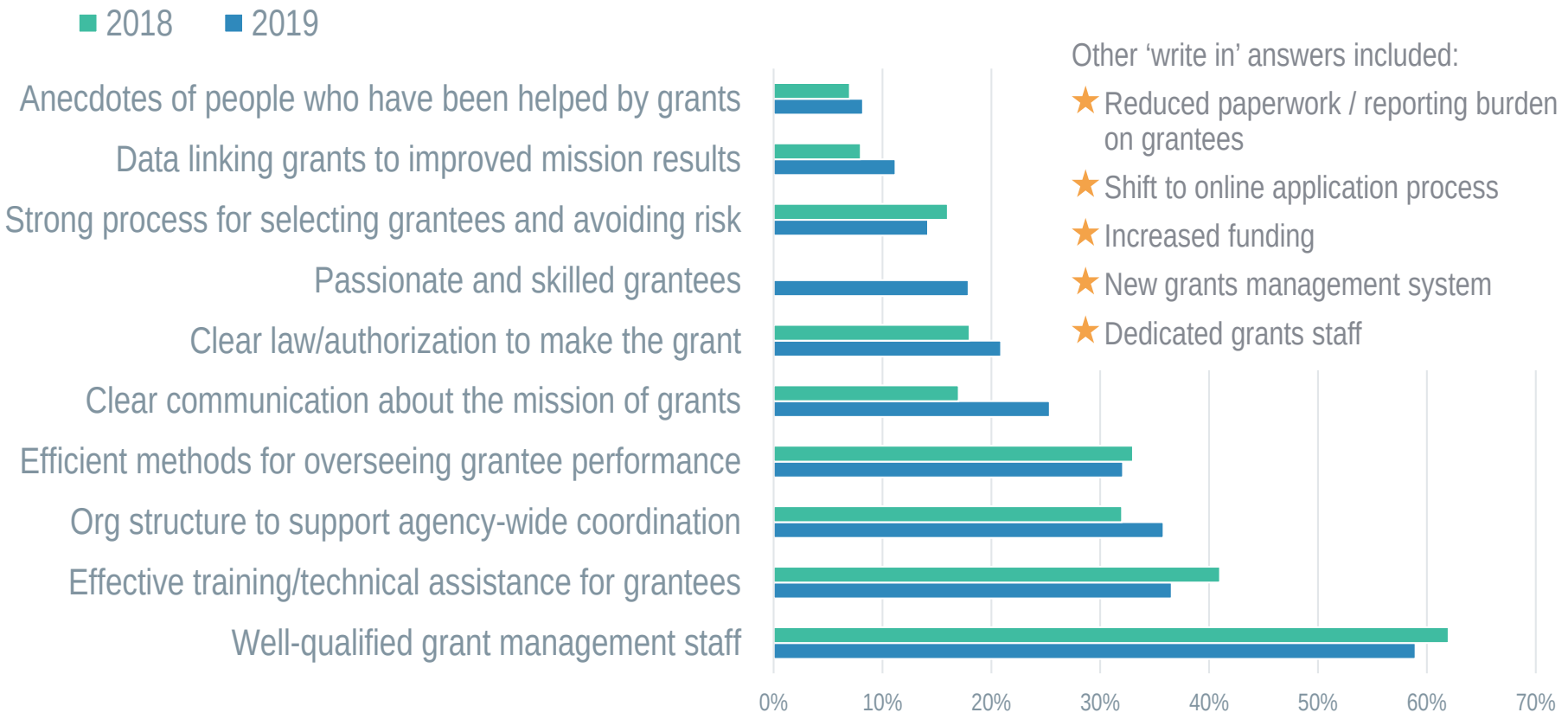
Challenges: Funds Uncertainty Recedes a Bit, Concerns Over Bureaucracy Increase

6.2. What do you think are the most significant challenges facing grants management?



Qualified Staff, Tech. Assistance, and Org Structure are Perceived Keys to Success

6.1. What are the most significant factors in the success(es) your organization has had in grants management in recent years?

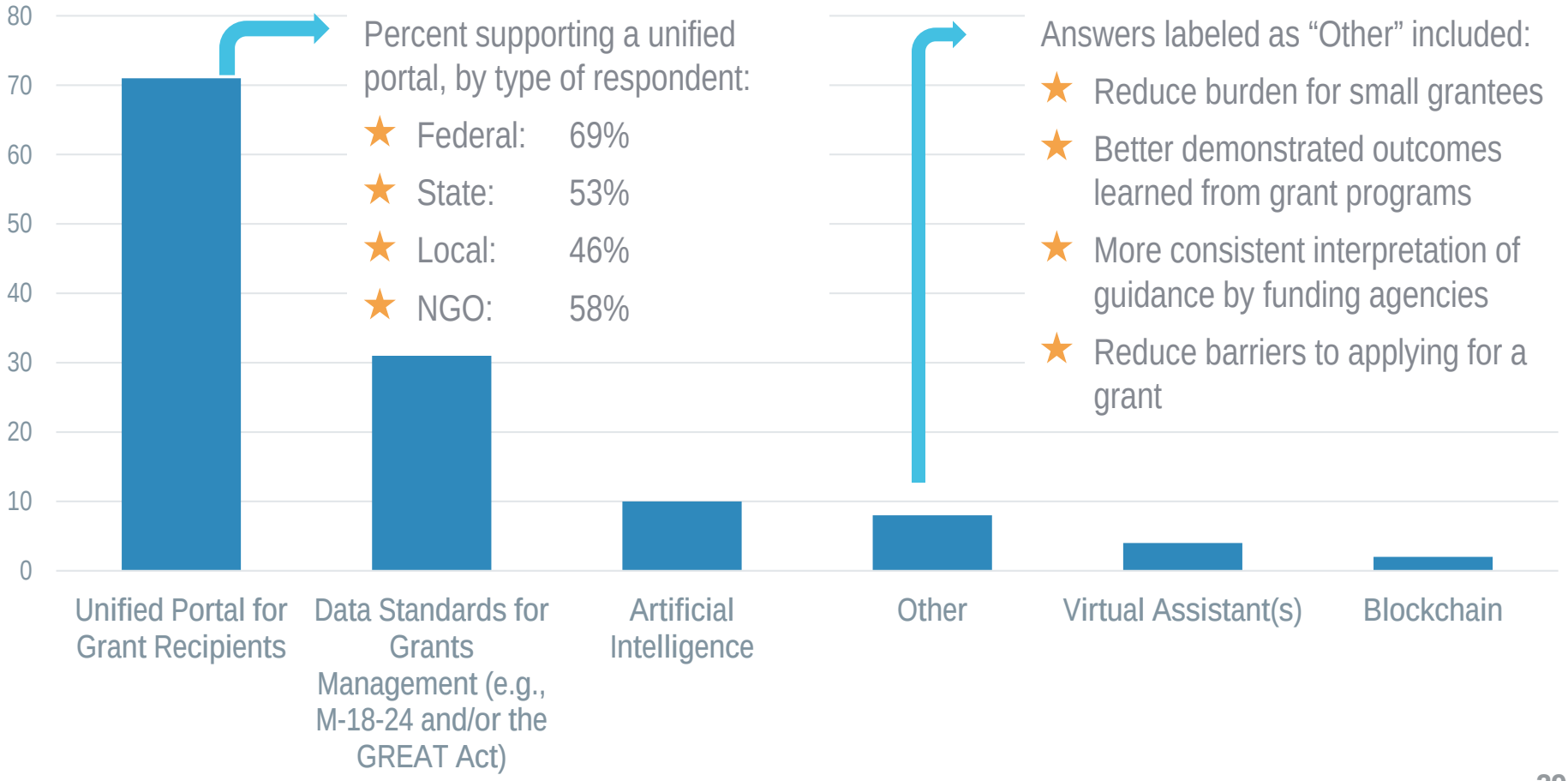


Key Takeaways

The Highest Improvement Hope is a Unified Portal Across all Federal Grantors

Surprisingly, desire for a unified portal was strongest among Federal respondents

6.1a. What do you think holds the most promise for dramatic improvement to grants management in the next five to ten years?



Takeaways from Our Analysis

- There is variation in admin. spend percentage for grants management (as a % of grant value), pointing to potential value from comparisons as the GREAT Act is implemented.
- Grant managers continue to spend more time monitoring compliance than any other activity; this has continued to increase over the years.
- Many respondents say their organizations can't measure performance, or don't know if performance improved in 2018 (56% of state / local respondents, 47% for federal, and 40% of non-profits say the same thing).
- Grant managers want data sharing / automated Fed-state interactions more than any other priority.
- Grant managers aren't happy with their technology, particularly accessibility and cost.
- There is overwhelming support for a unified portal for grants recipients who interact with the Federal Government.
- There is a strong, latent interest in knowledge sharing (best practices, not just practices you're proud of) – in better ways and through easier-to-use forums than currently exist.

Suggestions From Survey Respondents – What They Can Offer to Help Peers *(cont'd)*

6.6. Which of your current grants practice(s) would be most valuable to other organizations that may not already have employed them? *(cont'd)*

An organized community:

- Quarterly organization-wide grant roundtable meetings

Data sharing:

- Better sharing of financial information between federal government and state government.
- Data sharing among agencies.

Establish effective processes:

- Start the monitoring and evaluation of a grant at the end of the first quarter.
- We utilize a monthly activity summary to track time per grant and activity. Activities are recorded by the quarter hour each day to add up to 100% of a staff persons time. We use this for staff percentages to grants.

A user centric focus:

- Doing more intentional outreach and support to make sure our grant opportunities are more accessible and inclusive.
- Providing racial equality and implicit bias training for all panelists prior to their service on our panels.
- Changing the diversity of our panelists so that 75% or more represent communities of color.
- Significantly increasing the pay for people who serve as our panelists.
- Reviewing all our grantmaking practices through a racial equity lens and shifting our practices to be more racially equitable.
- Conducting on-site visits and program reviews.

Suggestions from Survey Respondents- Priorities for Effort to Improve

6.7 What do you think should be the highest priorities / best ways to improve grant mgmt?

Capture and share lessons learned:

- States are the laboratories. The wisdom that comes from experience is too often ignored or disregarded.
- [We need] A system for both grantees, and federal and state [grantors] to share information.
- Standardization as well as availability, submission and tracking of grant related information (i.e. NSF FastLane / Research.gov portal vs. FedConnect)
- Continuous communication between funding agencies and grant recipients.
- Improve data-sharing systems between grant-makers and grantees.

Strengthen focus on outcomes:

- Build capacity in outcomes measurement.
- Allow visibility of financial and programmatic data together.
- Require more exacting performance data.
- Close out should include comparison of pre-award and final output data.
- Obtain and train grant mgmt / program mgmt. staff on data analysis and evaluation.
- Understanding performance expectations and reporting at point of RFP.

A user-centric perspective across grantors:

- As a grantee organization I would say more consistency among grantors.
- Adequately staff or resource grants management activities.
- Besides better sharing of financial information, less complex and varied federal systems + some entity to resolve federal - state interpretations of grant rules and regulations.
- Simplify grant application processes. Clearly link expenditures to the original funding request. Funding agency site visit to close out grant on site.

Suggestions from Survey Respondents- Priorities for Effort to Improve *(cont'd)*

6.7 What do you think should be the highest priorities / best ways to improve grant mgmt? *(cont'd)*

Get better technology, and train people to use it – for example:

- There should be one unified system for all federal agencies.
- Automate grant administration requirements
- We need automated systems that interface with each other.
- Actual classroom training with instructors on how to use grant software; 2) with lecture, a course manual, and hands-on activities; 3) that spans the course of a couple of days. It would be great to see grant orgs and software co get together to organize a conference.
- A centralized system for federal and state grants (NOFOs, application, reporting, close-out) that would link all reporting up the chain, connect budget to performance, train grant managers how to be financial managers
- Ensure that all federal agencies have modern, highly functional electronic grant making and grants management systems in place.
- Government Established Grant Management Processes, Training, Software.
- Use common software for reporting.
- Would love to use grant management technology. Unfortunately, they (State government) are not interested in that, either at the state or agency level.
- One standardized federal database to apply and report. Grant management staff spend too many hours learning new databases as the government implements new and ineffective methods.
- Local grant management reporting systems
- One, universal, federal-wide portal for all grant proposal submissions--including one budget format--and award report submissions
- Standardize Grants management software free to all levels of government.
- Standardized data measurements including geographical boundaries.
- Unified standard payment and deobligating system, reporting system (performance and financial), and outreach
- Universal grant management system.

Suggestions from Survey Respondents- Priorities for Effort to Improve *(cont'd)*

6.7 What do you think should be the highest priorities / best ways to improve grant mgmt? *(cont'd)*

Improved training from grantors:

- Greater training and technical assistance from federal funders. There has been little to no technical assistance or training provided by our federal agency (FTA). Training was provided on the Uniform Guidance, but it lasted less than 2 hours. Managing subrecipients was a learned process with no help.
- MI needs standardized, comprehensive training for Grants staff with clear role delineation.
- Provide more on-line grant training options.
- Training and certification of grants management personnel. Far too many people fall into their role in the grant's life cycle.
- Training by competent trainees outside of D.C. area
- Training on management and law compliance

More consistent communication from grantors:

- Clear communication on sanctions for grant fraud.
- Clear expectations

Career paths:

- There should be a career path for grants management so folks can move up the ladder instead of being at a dead in for each stage of grants management.

More resources to manage grants:

- Higher indirect rates; multi-year funding; greater flexibility.

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