

# Needs Assessment to Identify Hidden Collections Documenting America's Diverse Culture and History



Shift Collective / NHPRC Community-Based Archives Collections Survey Report

Report Authors: Lynette Johnson and Bergis Jules

March 2021



# Contents

1. Overview	<b>3</b>
2. What we learned: 7 key findings	<b>5</b>
3. Conclusions and recommendations	<b>10</b>
4. Methodology	<b>17</b>
5. About Shift Collective	<b>18</b>
6. Summary of data	<b>19</b>
7. Data: Survey questions and responses	<b>26</b>



ATTRIBUTION CC BY

This report is available under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license and was commissioned as part of NHPRC Grant Award RQ-102995-19.

# 1.

## Overview

Since 1974, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) has awarded more than 2,500 records grants in support of archival organizations, repositories, and other records programs across the U.S. While some states and regions have received substantial support for projects over the past four decades, several states have received very few grants. Likewise, certain kinds of historical records collections are under-represented among the grantees. The call for this needs assessment sought to identify those records collections documenting America's diverse culture and history that are difficult for people to discover, access, and use. These may include records of people of color, rural communities, religious minorities, social movements, etc., as well as those records not housed in archival repositories. This study focuses on diverse collections with that definition of diversity in mind.

### Project description

The NHPRC launched a needs assessment project in 2019 targeting under-represented collections. To assist the NHPRC's work in this area, Shift Collective administered a survey in 2020 to collect information about functionality and sustainability issues facing these collections. The small and diverse archival collections surveyed include community-based archives, small museums, archives in rural and urban public libraries, archives in tribal libraries, and archives in community organizations such as civic and activist groups.

This report outlines the findings of the Shift Collective survey, and identifies areas where resources are needed in order to provide improved access to small and diverse archives.

## Project goal

The aim of this project was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the landscape of collections in small and diverse archives, and to identify their discovery, access, and use issues. The responses to this survey will help the NHPRC address one of the commission's major strategic goals: "To enhance the capacity of small and diverse organizations with historical records collections."

## Survey purpose and description

The survey conducted by Shift Collective collected data from small and diverse archives practitioners to help inform the NHPRC about the state of the archives they maintain in terms of funding, collections discovery, access and use, and how these issues impact their long-term sustainability.

Description of the survey instrument:

- The survey opened April 14, 2020; it closed October 19, 2020. (Note: The entire survey was conducted during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic crisis.)
- Targeted organizations: community-based archives; historical societies; historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and other academic institutions; public libraries; tribal libraries; small museums; and culture-based community programs.
- Survey questions: 32 (includes some multi-part questions)
- Approximate time needed to complete survey: 15 minutes
- Response: 45 completed surveys submitted
- States represented: 14 (includes the District of Columbia)
- US geographic regions represented: Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, South, Midwest, Southwest, West.

For more information about the survey instrument, see section 4, *Methodology*.

## 2.

# What we learned: 7 key findings

A total of 45 respondents completed the survey. Survey participants represent community-based archives, historical societies, public and rural library archives, tribal archives, archives in small museums, and archives in community organizations such as civic and activist groups.

### 1. Funding

*“[We need] financial support for general operations/ unrestricted funds. Programming funds are relatively easier to obtain, both locally and grant supported. Keeping the doors open, lights on, and stipends are less glamorous but it allows us to continue great programming and maintaining the archives.”*

– SURVEY RESPONDENT

**Community-based cultural heritage organizations need funding for general operations, and they need more stabilized sources of funding.** Surveyed organizations rely heavily on public funding, which is subject to frequent reallocation. The largest single source of income (at 29%) is funding from the budgets of agencies of federal, state, and local governments. (An additional 8% comes from government grants, which adds up to 37% of income from public funding.)

Overall, the outlook for funding from government budgets is uncertain, especially in light of 2020’s pandemic. At the state level, Grantmakers in the Arts reports that “most [states] are experiencing some increase in total appropriations for the arts,” although [as of 2019] 17 states were projected to keep flat or decrease funding for the arts in FY2020.”<sup>1</sup> At the local level, while arts funding is at an all-time high overall, funding growth has stalled recently, mirroring slowing revenue growth

<sup>1</sup> Ryan Stubbs and Patricia Mullaney-Loss, “Public Funding for the Arts, 2019,” published in Arts Funding Snapshot: GIA’s Annual Research on Support for Arts and Culture, Volume 31, No. 1 (Grantmakers in the Arts, Winter 2020), 9. <https://www.giarts.org/sites/default/files/31-1-vital-signs.pdf>

in cities and towns. At all levels of government, funding precarity exists as fiscal conditions and political priorities shift. Organizations that rely on grants and other support from government agencies are “indirectly affected by revenue growth and fiscal stability,” or the lack thereof.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, organizations reported a need for unrestricted funds to pay for staff and space. One respondent said their organization’s greatest concerns were “overhead maintenance costs” and “to pay for the space which houses the collection.”

## 2. Collections assessment

### **Despite financial, staffing, and capacity restraints, organizations are pro-active in terms of adding to their collections, but need help assessing those collections.**

A large majority of respondents (89%) say their organizations are “usually” or “sometimes” proactive in adding new materials. A slight majority of organizations (53%) holds intellectual rights for most materials in their collections. But community-based archives need help assessing their collections. More than one-third of respondents say they do not know the size of their collections (in linear or cubic feet). They say they lack staff, time and other resources to properly evaluate the extent of their holdings.

*“Our most urgent needs are in building our collections and developing and strengthening relationships with underrepresented communities (for us, women, people of color, and trans folks).”*

– SURVEY RESPONDENT

## 3. Representation

**Small collections surveyed are broad, and represent a varied cross-section of marginalized and mainstream American communities, but more data is needed from across the field to see how widely representative this is.** Racial and ethnic groups represented by the survey sample of small and diverse organizations include African American, Hispanic, Native American, Asian American, White, and Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian. Other groups represented include low-income people, activists, immigrants, LGBTQ folks, religious minorities, incarcerated people, refugees, youth, victims of state violence, those affected by HIV/AIDS, and the unhoused. Collections offer a wide range of topics that include history, education, art, agriculture, women’s

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 10.

issues, music, historic preservation, language, the environment, social justice, economic justice, and public health. See page 37 for a complete list of topics cited by respondents. More data is needed in this topic area to see how representative these findings are, particularly in regards to racial diversity. Other surveys have seldom inquired about holdings topics or racial representation, nor is there any type of uniform self-reporting of such statistics (the latter would of course be difficult given already strained resources).

## 4. Collections access

### **Small collections lack resources to adequately describe their collections.**

Access to collections depend in part on having clear descriptions for users to discover materials. Small and diverse archival organizations expressed a need and desire to enhance the discovery, access, and use of their collections. Less than half of respondents (47%) say most of their collections are described so that internal staff can know what they have. And only 38% of respondents say most of their collections are described so that outside users can know what they have. The most commonly used method of describing collections is through inventories in spreadsheets or word processing documents. Among the “greatest needs” related to the collection, respondents wrote: “*finding ways to make the materials more accessible to [the] public;*” “*to store and identify what we have and organize [it so] that [it] is easily accessible to patrons;*” and “*funding to make the archive materials available to the public.*”

*“... long term care of the collection is always an open question, as the collection grows and grows, who will have the resources to house, care for, and make sure it’s accessible for researchers, especially non-academic researchers.”*

— SURVEY RESPONDENT

## 5. Preservation concerns

### **Most of the responding small organizations are “highly concerned” about preservation issues, but are not well prepared to handle them.**

Most respondents (76%) said they are “highly concerned” about digital preservation. Other major preservation concerns include fragile items, humidity, and temperature. Respondents listed “*people and funds to do the preservation work,*” “*off-site redundancy,*” “*security,*” “*potential loss through theft,*” “*vandalism,*” and “*adequate storage*” as additional areas of high concern. However, only 11% said they are “very well prepared” to handle their preservation concerns; 16% said they are

*"[We have] limited staffing and technical knowledge to deal with ever-changing digital needs in maintaining our digital archive."*

– SURVEY RESPONDENT

*"We need a master strategy to organize, digitize, and insure our assets."*

– SURVEY RESPONDENT

"not at all prepared." One respondent listed *"renovation of storage area to be climate controlled and improve storage options"* as one of their organization's greatest needs. Another said among their greatest needs was *"funds ... to continue preservation/maintenance of collections."*

## 6. Digital preservation

**Organizations need a master plan and technical assistance for digital preservation and access.** Only a small portion of respondents' collections can be accessed digitally: 62% of respondents said only 10% or less of their collections are available digitally; 84% said half or less of their collections are available digitally. Before collections can be made available through digital means, they must first be digitized. Several respondents stressed the need for help with digitizing their collections, and with technology in general. Among their greatest needs and concerns: *"digitizing all of the items in our paper collection;" "digitization of newspapers, books, photographs and monographs;" "developing digital collections infrastructure;"* and *"especially concerned about digitizing the collection."* Respondents pointed to a lack of staffing, training, and financial resources as major stumbling blocks regarding digitization of their collections.

## 7. Sustained development

**Small community-based archives need funding, increased capacity, and long-term strategies for sustained development in order to continue serving their communities.** Through their diverse collections, surveyed community-based cultural heritage organizations are focused mostly on preserving the arts, histories, and cultures of underrepresented people. These organizations help protect the physical and intangible culture of people in non-mainstream populations, and in doing so, they contribute to the cultural, economic, and social health and vitality of their communities. Many of these organizations create or support local jobs, or own, maintain, or are housed in historically significant buildings. Many work to preserve endangered languages and oral traditions. Many tell stories and share histories and perspectives that are largely



unknown, but deserving of amplification. The overwhelming majority of organizations surveyed (92%) offer public programs related to their collections. Among respondents, 62% offer use of space in their buildings to other organizations. Through programming and sharing of resources, organizations generate positive direct and indirect economic and social impacts on their communities. Several respondents stressed the need for financial and human resources, as well as strategic planning, to continue and improve on this work. “[We need] capital to continue what we are doing,” wrote one respondent; another said, “we are overwhelmed with interest and needs of the community (which is wonderful) but don’t have a path to increase staffing.”

# 3.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Following are proposed action items for enhanced discovery, access, and use of small and diverse community archives; and ways to better support small archival organizations as they work to enhance the discovery, access, and use of their collections.

### Funding

#### **Provide unrestricted funds.**

The NHPRC could develop funding programs for small archives that would provide unrestricted financial support for general operations. Unrestricted funds allow small archives to be creative in the ways they manage their operations related to collections care and access, building maintenance, programming, and staffing. Funding is often the top need for small archives. One survey respondent wrote: “all work is done on a volunteer basis and funded by those volunteers.” Utilities, rent, supplies and building repairs are the most common recurring expenses for small archives but grant funds are typically not allowed to be spent on these expenses.<sup>3</sup> As a result, many of these archives struggle to keep the door open, which creates a potential loss of materials to other larger, more well funded institutions when a small archive can no longer cover the rent or utilities. Or collections are put in danger of loss from environmental factors because a small archive is unable to fix a leak, address mold, or other problems with the building. Unrestricted funding allows small archives to cover the base

*“{Our concern is} overhead maintenance costs, to pay for the space which houses the collection. .”*  
— SURVEY RESPONDENT

<sup>3</sup> Jules, Bergis, Shift Collective, Final Report: Architecting Sustainable Futures: Exploring Funding Models in Community-Based Archives, February, 2019. <https://shiftdesign.org/content/uploads/2019/02/ArchitectingSustainableFutures-2019-report.pdf>

needs of the repository (to remain open and keep the lights on) while they allocate more time to programming, collection development, and collections access.

### **Create a funding program specifically targeted to small archives.**

Small archives have unique issues that require a different set of solutions from larger, well funded organizations. Grant programs that are usually developed with larger, well resourced cultural memory organizations as the beneficiary generally do not serve the needs of small archives. The NHPRC can continue to engage with small archives to learn more about their needs and develop funding programs specifically targeted towards those needs. Other funders are already exploring this model of targeted support that can guide the NHPRC's efforts. The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation created the Community-Based Archives grant program<sup>4</sup> to provide direct support to community-based archives, including funding to cover operational expenses. The Institute for Museum and Library Services has developed the Accelerating Promising Practices in Small and Rural Libraries program<sup>5</sup> which can also serve as a guide to the NHPRC for developing its own program.

### **Develop grant programs focused on sustainability.**

Support for effective and attainable sustainability planning and also implementation of those plans is often overlooked by grant funders but these issues are vital to the long term health of small archives. The NHPRC could promote sustainability as a priority and develop grant programs supporting sustainability planning and the implementation of the plans in small archives.

### **Adopt equitable grant application and grant reporting guidelines.**

Guidelines governing program eligibility, application procedures, and reporting requirements are often prohibitive factors for

---

4 Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Community-Based Archives Grants, <https://mellon.org/programs/public-knowledge/call-for-proposals-community-based-archives/>

5 IMLS, Accelerating Promising Practices in Small and Rural Libraries, <https://www.imls.gov/grants/available/accelerating-promising-practices-small-libraries>

most small archives when it comes to applying for grants. Additionally, the coronavirus pandemic will have a lasting adverse economic impact on revenue growth in arts and cultural memory organizations. As small archives are already strained due to understaffing, it will be vital to streamline the grant application process to make them equitable so that these archives can have more success in accessing grant funding. The NHPRC can conduct a thorough review of their grant eligibility guidelines to ensure they do not include unnecessary barriers that will keep small archives from applying for and benefiting from grant programs. Some of those barriers can include limits on organization status, grant proposal length requirements, unclear and unnecessarily technical language, or unreasonable grant and budget reporting requirements. Streamlining the grant application process and eligibility guidelines creates new access opportunities for small archives.

### **Engage intentionally with small and diverse archives.**

The NHPRC might create opportunities to engage with small and diverse archives on a regular basis. Small archives generally do not have the resources to engage in the formally established networks of professional organizations that allow traditional and well resourced cultural memory organizations access to NHPRC staff or other funders. The NHPRC might engage directly with small archives to better understand their needs and what they have to offer to the broader cultural memory community. The NHPRC can create opportunities for engagement in several ways including staff visits to small archives across the country, convening thematic meetings where NHPRC staff can engage in knowledge sharing and solutions based activities with groups of small archives, or invite small archives to advise the commission on program development.

## **Collections access**

### **Provide funding for collections processing and description.**

Access to collections first depends on whether an organization has the labor resources to organize and describe the materials

in their collections. While archival collections processing is a challenge for both large and small archives, as backlogs of materials continue to be collected and sit unorganized, small archives face a bigger challenge in that they experience a greater lack of resources which means collections processing is often not prioritized. The majority of our survey respondents said that a majority of their collections are not described to an appropriate level that would allow internal staff or outside users to know what they have. While more well resourced organizations can often have staff apply for grants or solicit funding from library administration for processing or allocate staff time to processing activities, smaller archives might prioritize programming, community support services, and operations before collections care work that can lead to more access. More often than not these small archives are also under staffed and existing staff may not have the expertise and time to carry out collections processing and description, nor would they have access to technology and tools that can make their collections more widely accessible. Materials that house processed collections such as archival boxes, folders, sleeves, etc, are also costly and often need to be purchased in large quantities. Enhanced collections access is also about collections care. Most small archives do not have adequate environmental conditions at their facilities to support optimal collections care, i.e. temperature controls, fire and water damage prevention, building security, pest control, etc. A majority of the survey respondents were highly concerned about these preservation issues, so funding also has to address the conditions in which collections are housed. A comprehensive funding program at the NHPRC can ensure that all of these efforts related to processing and description are addressed.

### **Provide funding for training, tools, and technology.**

Small archives often do not have the training or access to the tools or technology that can make their collections more accessible. For example, small archives may not have the staff expertise or access to the professional networks that can help them get their finding aids or collection descriptions

into a regional or national finding aid aggregator such as the Online Archive of California (OAC) which would provide a more broad reach to their materials. Only 17% of survey respondents reported having finding aids for their collections.

Related, small archives will likely not have the expertise to install and run their own versions of content management software, which is often a first step to enhanced access. Only 13% of our survey respondents say they use ArchivesSpace, an archives information management application, to manage collections, while 16% use PastPerfect, a museum collections management software. Staff at these small archives also likely do not have access to digitization equipment, digital storage capacity necessary to handle large numbers of digital materials, or digital asset management tools necessary to make collections available to digital content aggregators such as the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA). Small archives are essentially cut out of these opportunities because of lack of resources and access to mainstream cultural memory networks that sometimes are gatekeepers of this knowledge and these resources. The NHPRC could provide funding for staff at small archives to attain training in the tools and technologies that can help them enhance access to their collections. The NHPRC can also ensure that funding can go towards supporting the purchase of equipment such as digitization equipment, computers, or digital storage technology, and archives content management applications that can provide wider access to collections.

## Digital preservation

### **Provide funding for digitization, storage, and access.**

Digital preservation is labor intensive and cost prohibitive. Most of the available grant funding for digital preservation only supports the digitizing of materials while ignoring critical costs associated with long term storage of digital content. Costs associated with providing access to digital content are generally not covered. The NHPRC could prioritize funding digital preservation that goes beyond converting analog

materials to digital. Storage costs and collections access tools, software, and staffing should also be considered vital areas of support for long term preservation of digital content. The majority of our survey respondents said that less than 10% of their collections are available digitally — if future funding only covers the digitization of those materials then only part of the problem is solved and lack of public access to the materials will continue. An effective digital preservation funding strategy would address the entire life cycle of the digitized materials.

## Programming

### **Support creative uses of collections.**

The NHPRC could support programming at small archives that goes beyond research or exhibits and promotes creativity in the ways collection materials can be used. There are tremendous opportunities for small archives to activate their collections and inspire new uses and new users for the materials by inviting audiences to engage with the materials or by inviting existing audiences to engage with the materials in new ways. For example, how might artists, activists, musicians, dancers, and other members of a community engage with collections at small archives if given the opportunity. Some community-based archives like the Southern California Library and the South Asian American Digital Archives are already developing creative ways to activate their collections including inviting artists, musicians, activists, and community organizers to imagine new ways to utilize their collections.

## Further research

### **Support research that helps steer the field toward more inclusive archives.**

The NHPRC and other funding agencies could support research that would help give the field a better understanding of representation of under-represented people in the wide variety of local, regional and national archival holdings, both inside and outside of traditional archival repositories. This research could be simply indicative at first, based on collection topics already documented, but refined over a period of years.

If the intention is to better preserve the history of traditionally under-represented people, then the return on investment likely would be far greater in investing more money in these small and diverse collections rather than attempting to diversify the largely homogeneous holdings in bigger and better funded institutions.



# 4.

## Methodology

Shift Collective gathered the data for this report through our “Community-Based Archives Collections Survey,” for which responses were accepted between April 14, 2020 and October 19, 2020. Shift Collective sent the survey to archives practitioners across the field, and collected 45 responses. The majority of the organizations were familiar to Shift Collective (through working relationships, networking, etc.), although some were unfamiliar. All practitioners who responded have a primary mission to serve underrepresented communities. Shift Collective asked each respondent to report on the following:

- Your organization, including staff and budget
- The topics of the materials in your archival collections
- The format of those materials
- How those materials are described
- The condition of the materials
- Access to the materials

The method used to collect data was an online survey powered by Qualtrics. The survey link, along with an offer of a \$25 gift card as an incentive, was sent via email to 152 archives practitioners in the field, and yielded 45 responses (30% response rate). The survey collected both qualitative and quantitative data. It contained primarily single answer multiple choice questions.

The analysis in this report is based on the direct responses (counts and percentages) of survey respondents. For Questions 8, 9, 10a, 13 and 24, mean calculations are used for analysis. All responses to the one open-ended question (Question 32) are included (lightly edited for spelling and capitalization).

# 5.

## About Shift Collective

Shift Collective is a New Orleans-based 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. We support and design community-driven initiatives to increase social, cultural, and resource equity. Through our work on projects like Architecting Sustainable Futures, Cultural Heritage and Social Change Summit, Moving Beyond Colonial Models of Digital Memory, Historypin, and the Sustainable Futures Blog, we are committed to an inclusive record of our shared cultural heritage, and collaborative and equitable approaches to community-based initiatives.

Shift Collective's work with community-based archives and small museums has informed how a number of foundations are approaching this space and determining how to strategically broaden their pool of applicants to better reflect a more broad representation of organizations doing essential collection and preservation work. For example, the Mellon Foundation and the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) used our work to inform their funding strategy related to community-based archives. The Mellon Foundation announced a new grant program, informed by our work, on April 22nd, 2019 that directly addresses funding in community-based archives. We have also done similar work with the US National Archives and Records Administration and the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center.

### Project team



Bergis Jules



Lynette Johnson



Jon Voss

# 6.

## Summary of data

---

### PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

- **45 respondents** completed the survey.
- **33%** of respondents' organizations are **community-based archives**.
- **20%** of respondents' organizations are **small museums**.
- Other organizations represented: historical societies, public libraries, tribal libraries, and archives at academic institutions; and at least one digital library, volunteer community organization, activist organization, culture-based community development organization, forest service heritage program, and state humanities council.
- Most organizations (91%) have a physical location.
- The organizations are located in **14 states** in the **Western, Southwestern, Midwestern, Southern, and Northeastern/Mid-Atlantic** regions of the US.
- Most organizations (80%) are **501(c)(3) nonprofits**.
- None of the organizations is a for-profit.

The **vast majority** of collections (92%) are maintained by **10 or fewer people**.

For a **significant majority** of organizations (79%), collections are maintained by **5 or fewer people**.

On average, **about half (49%)** of people working for the respondents' organizations **are not paid for their work**.

On average, **68%** of people working with collections **have no formal training** in libraries and/or museums.

Note: Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number, and so in some cases, totals may not add up to 100.

---

## FUNDING

### 1. Philanthropy provides nearly half of organizations' funding.

- **27%** of funding comes from **individual donors** through small donations, dues, and major gifts.
- **Private foundation grants** make up another **20%** of organizations' funding.
- **Corporate gifts** represent **2%** of funding.

### 2. On average, the **largest single source** of funding for respondents' organizations comes from **government budgets**, which can have a high degree of precarity, depending on the current local, state, and national economic climate.

- **29%** of funding comes from **government budgets (taxes)**.
- Another **8%** comes from **government grants**.

### 3. **Only 10%** of funding is **earned income** from fees or services, and admissions or event tickets.

### 4. **Hardly any** organizations (2%) report having **endowments**.

---

## REPRESENTATION

Organizations' collections represent a varied cross-section of communities. **Percentage of respondents reporting that the following communities are represented in their collections:**

African American <b>12%</b>	Hispanic / Latino <b>11%</b>	Native American <b>9%</b>	Asian American <b>8%</b>	Native Hawaiian <b>2%</b>
Low income <b>12%</b>	Activists <b>10%</b>	Immigrants <b>9%</b>	LGBTQ <b>8%</b>	Religious minorities <b>6%</b>
Incarcerated <b>4%</b>	Refugees <b>3%</b>	Unhoused <b>3%</b>		

---

## TOPICS COVERED BY COLLECTIONS

In addition to diverse communities represented, organizations' collections cover a wide range of subjects. **Common topics among the collections include:**

- history
- education
- art
- agriculture
- women's issues
- music
- historic preservation
- language
- the environment
- social justice
- economic justice
- public health

---

## MATERIALS IN COLLECTIONS

Respondents report that their organizations' collections are **mostly** comprised of **paper** (36 of 45), **photographs** (33 of 45), **newspapers** (21 of 45), **books** (18 of 45), and **magazines** (17 of 45).

Organizations report that their collections include at least **some artworks** (32 of 45), **oversize paper** (30 of 45), **analog audio/visual materials** (28 of 45), and **cultural objects** (24 of 45).

**Less than half** (20 of 45) say their collections are **mostly digital**. About half (20 of 45) say their collections include some digital materials.

---

## SIZE OF COLLECTIONS

**38%** of respondents say they **do not know the size of their collections** (in linear or cubic feet).

---

## INTELLECTUAL RIGHTS

A **slight majority** of organizations (53%) holds intellectual rights for **most materials** in their collections.

Only **9%** hold intellectual rights for **all materials**.

**7% do not hold rights** to any materials in their collections.

---

## ADDING NEW MATERIALS

A **slight majority** of organizations (53%) are “**usually proactive**” in adding new materials to their collections.

**36%** are “**sometimes proactive**.”

Overall, **89%** of organizations are “usually” or “sometimes” proactive.

---

## DESCRIPTIONS OF COLLECTIONS (INTERNAL)

**Less than half** of respondents (47%) say **most of their collections are described** so that internal staff can know what they have.

Only **16%** say **all of their collections are described** so that internal staff can know what they have.

---

## DESCRIPTIONS OF COLLECTIONS (EXTERNAL)

Only **38%** of respondents say **most of their collections are described** so that outside users can know what they have.

Only **9%** say **all of their collections are described** so that outside users can know what they have.

---

## METHODS USED TO DESCRIBE COLLECTIONS

Respondents’ most commonly used methods:

- Inventories in spreadsheets or word processing docs, **22%**
- Archival finding aids/collection guides, **17%**
- Digital collections/digital repositories, **16%**
- Paper files, **12%**

---

## SOFTWARE USED TO MANAGE COLLECTIONS

Respondents' most commonly used software:

- PastPerfect, **16%**
- ArchivesSpace, **13%**
- Other, **47%**

**16%** report they **do not know** what software is used to manage their collections.

**24%** of respondents say they have **no digital collections**.

---

## ACCESS TO COLLECTIONS

**64%** of respondents' organizations **use a wide range of digital tools and platforms** to provide access to their digital collections.

The tools and platforms include:

- Omeka
- CONTENTdm
- Archive-It
- The organization's website
- Historypin
- PastPerfect

---

## DESCRIBING MATERIALS

**40%** of respondents say their organizations describe materials at the **item** level.

**33%** describe materials at the **box or series** level.

**11%** describe materials at the **collection** level.

**16%** say their materials are **not described** at any level.

---

## STORAGE

**66%** of respondents say their collections are stored **on site**;

**30%** say **off site**.

---

## PRESERVATION CONCERNS

**Most respondents** (34 of 45) are **highly concerned** about **digital preservation**. Other areas of concern for organizations:

- Fragile items (21 of 45)
- Humidity (18 of 45)
- Temperature (17 of 45)

Respondents also listed the following as areas of high concern:

- *people and funds to do the preservation work*
- *off-site redundancy*
- *security*
- *potential loss through theft*
- *vandalism*
- *adequate storage*

Organizations are slightly concerned about:

Mold (23 of 45)

Pests (19 of 45)

Light (19 of 45)

---

## PREPAREDNESS TO HANDLE CONCERNS

Only **11%** of respondents say they are **very well prepared** to handle their preservation concerns.

**16%** say they are **not at all prepared**.

**73%** say they are **fairly well** or **somewhat prepared**.

---

## ACCESS TO COLLECTIONS (IN-PERSON)

**98%** of respondents say their collections are **open to the general public**.

**85%** say users can access their collections **in person**.

**73%** say their collections are **available at least one day a week**. (20% say they have no in-person collections.)



---

## ACCESS TO COLLECTIONS (DIGITAL)

**62%** of respondents say **only 10% or less** of their collections are **available digitally**.

**Only 15%** of respondents say the **vast majority** (at least 75%) of their collections can be **accessed digitally**.

---

## PROGRAMMING

**The vast majority** of organizations (92%) **offer programs** related to their collections.

**62%** of organizations **offer use of space** in their buildings to other organizations. (18% do not have space to offer.)

# 7.

## Data

The following section lists questions and participants' responses to the Shift Collective/NHPRC Community-Based Archives Collections Survey.

Note: Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number, and so in some cases, totals may not add up to 100.

## What is your organization's name?

*Participating organizations listed by name*

Ashé Cultural Arts Center  
Asian and Pacific Islander Americans in Historic Preservation  
Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History  
Chinese Historical Society of Southern California  
Clifton Public Library  
DC Public Library  
Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project  
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum  
Gerber/Hart Library and Archives  
Guardians Institute  
Gulf Coast Archive & Museum of GLBT History, Inc.  
Gutierrez Hubbell House History & Cultural Center  
Historic Castalian Springs  
Interference Archive  
The International Four Corners Archaeological Research Archive  
John J. Wilcox, Jr. Archives at William Way LGBT Community Center  
Kate Sharpley Library  
Ko Education and Research Center, Heritage Center  
La Historia Society Museum  
Laguna Public Library  
The LGBT Community Center  
Lincoln County Historical Society  
Lincoln National Forest, Supervisor's Office  
Manitos Community Memory Project–New Mexico Highlands University  
Martha Woodroof Hidden Memorial Collection, Newport News Public Library  
Media Mobilizing Project (soon to be Movement Alliance Project)  
Mescalero Community Library  
Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University  
New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs, New Mexico Museum of Space History  
New Mexico Humanities Council  
The Obsidian Collection Archives  
San Antonio African American Community Archive and Museum (SAAACAM)  
San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society  
San Juan County Museum Association  
Santa Clara Pueblo Community Library  
Shaping San Francisco  
Shorefront  
Silver City Museum  
South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA)  
Southeastern New Mexico Historical Society  
Southern California Library  
Spelman College  
Texas After Violence Project (TAVP)  
Western Illinois Museum  
Women's International Study Center

Q04a

## Does your organization have a physical address?



Total count: 45

## Where is your organization located?

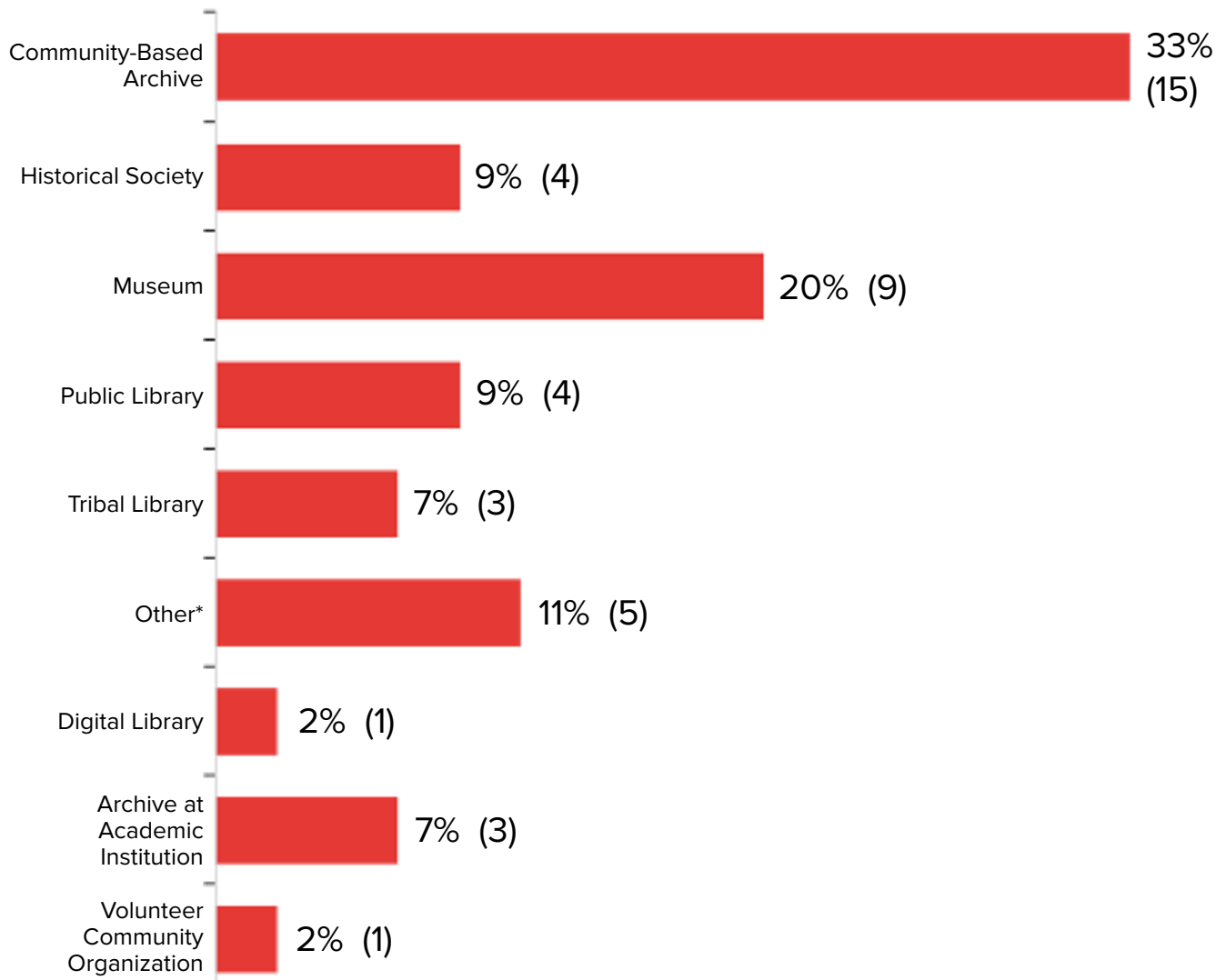
*Participating organizations listed by state*

La Historia Society Museum	El Monte	CA
Kate Sharpley Library	Grass Valley	CA
Asian and Pacific Islander Americans in Historic Preservation	Los Angeles	CA
Chinese Historical Society of Southern California	Los Angeles	CA
Southern California Library	Los Angeles	CA
San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society	San Francisco	CA
Shaping San Francisco	San Francisco	CA
DC Public Library	Washington	DC
Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University	Washington	DC
Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History	Atlanta	GA
Spelman College	Atlanta	GA
Ko Education and Research Center, Heritage Center	Honokaa	HI
Gerber/Hart Library and Archives	Chicago	IL
Western Illinois Museum	Macomb	IL
Shorefront	Evanston	IL
Ashé Cultural Arts Center	New Orleans	LA
Guardians Institute	New Orleans	LA
Clifton Public Library	Clifton	NJ
Lincoln National Forest, Supervisor's Office	Alamogordo	NM
New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs, New Mexico Museum of Space History	Alamogordo	NM
Gutierrez Hubbell House History & Cultural Center	Albuquerque	NM
New Mexico Humanities Council	Albuquerque	NM
San Juan County Museum Association	Bloomfield	NM
Southeastern New Mexico Historical Society	Carlsbad	NM
Lincoln County Historical Society	Carrizozo	NM
Santa Clara Pueblo Community Library	Espanola	NM
Laguna Public Library	Laguna	NM
Mescalero Community Library	Mescalero	NM
Georgia O'Keeffe Museum	Santa Fe	NM
Women's International Study Center	Santa Fe	NM
Silver City Museum	Silver City	NM
Interference Archive	Brooklyn	NY
The LGBT Community Center	New York	NY
John J. Wilcox, Jr. Archives at William Way LGBT Community Center	Philadelphia	PA
Media Mobilizing Project (soon to be Movement Alliance Project)	Philadelphia	PA
South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA)	Philadelphia	PA
Historic Castalian Springs	Castalian Springs	TN
Texas After Violence Project (TAVP)	Austin	TX
San Antonio African American Community Archive and Museum (SAAACAM)	San Antonio	TX
Martha Woodroof Hidden Memorial Collection, Newport News Public Library	Newport News	VA
Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project	Seattle	WA

Four organizations responded 'no physical address': Gulf Coast Archive & Museum of GLBT History, Inc; The International Four Corners Archaeological Research Archive; Manitos Community Memory Project–New Mexico Highlands University; and The Obsidian Collection Archives.

Q05

## Which best describes your organization?



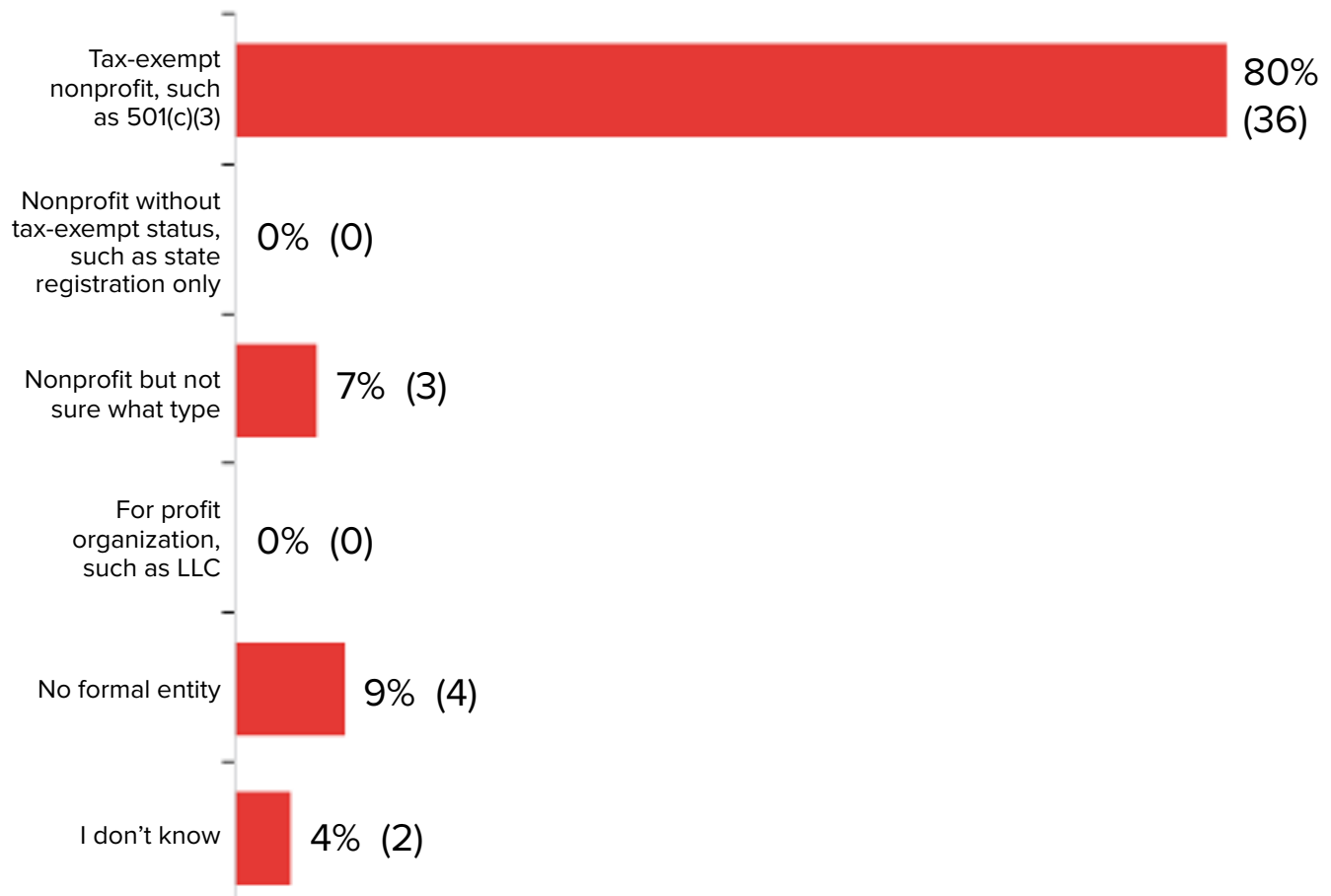
Total count: 45

\*Other (entries submitted by respondents):

- State Humanities Council
- Small House Museum
- Forest Service Heritage Program
- Culture-Based Community Development
- Activist Organization

Q06

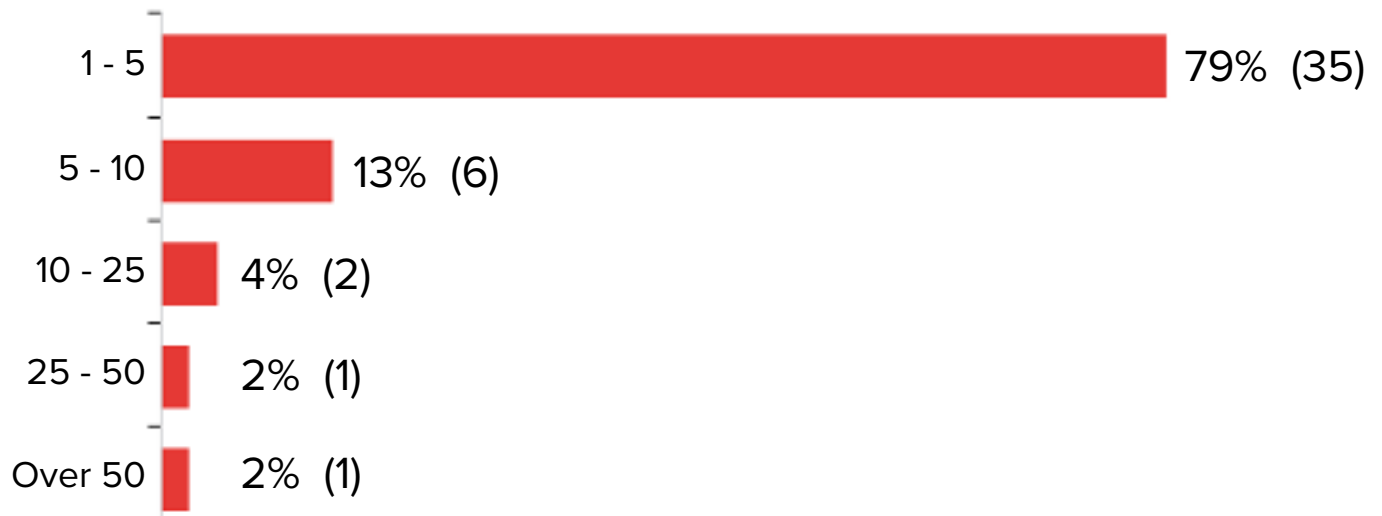
## Which entity best fits your organization?



Total count: 45

Q07

## How many people actively work on maintaining your organization's collections?



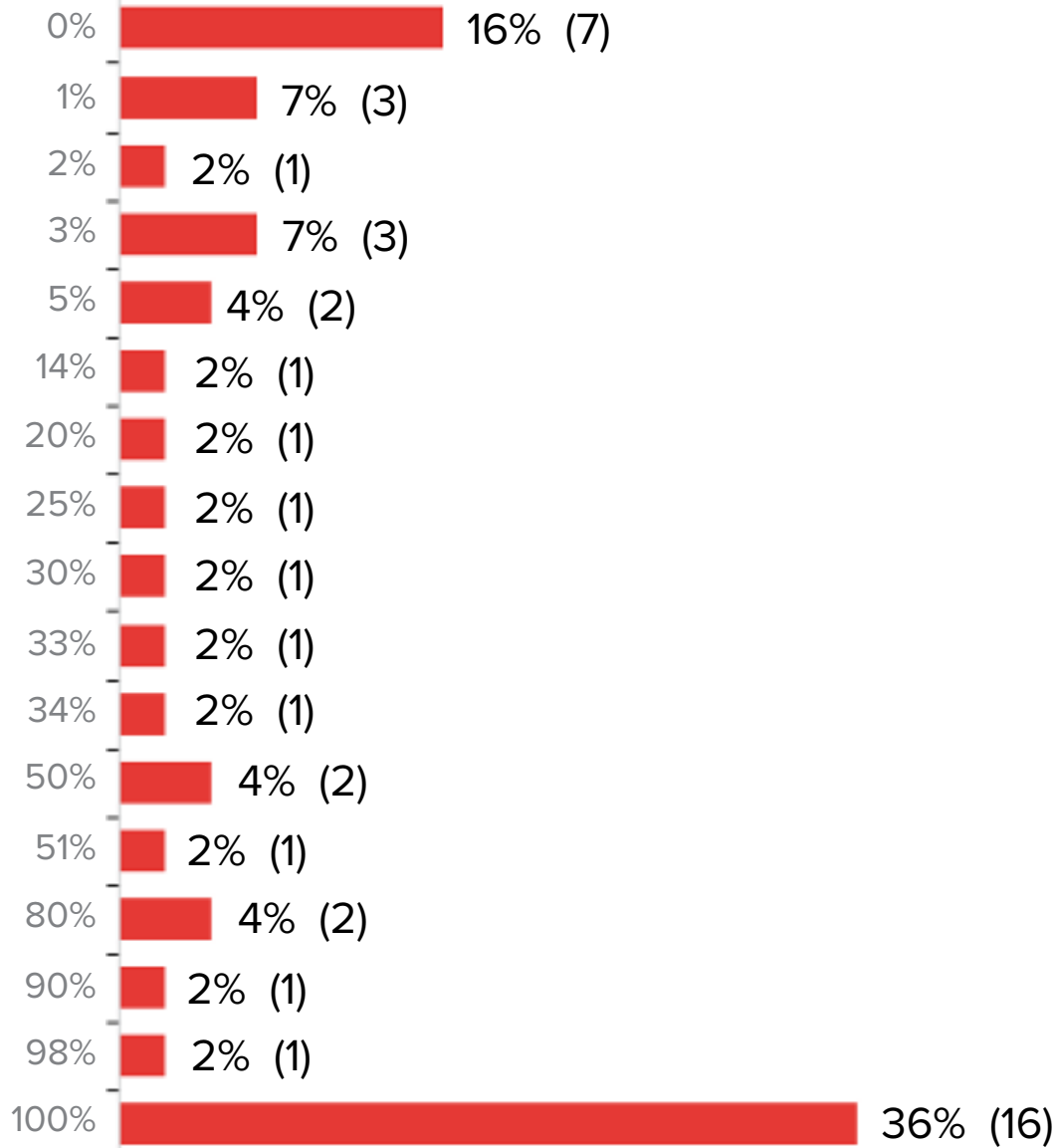
Total count: 45



Q08

## What percentage of those people are paid for their work?

Percentage of  
those paid

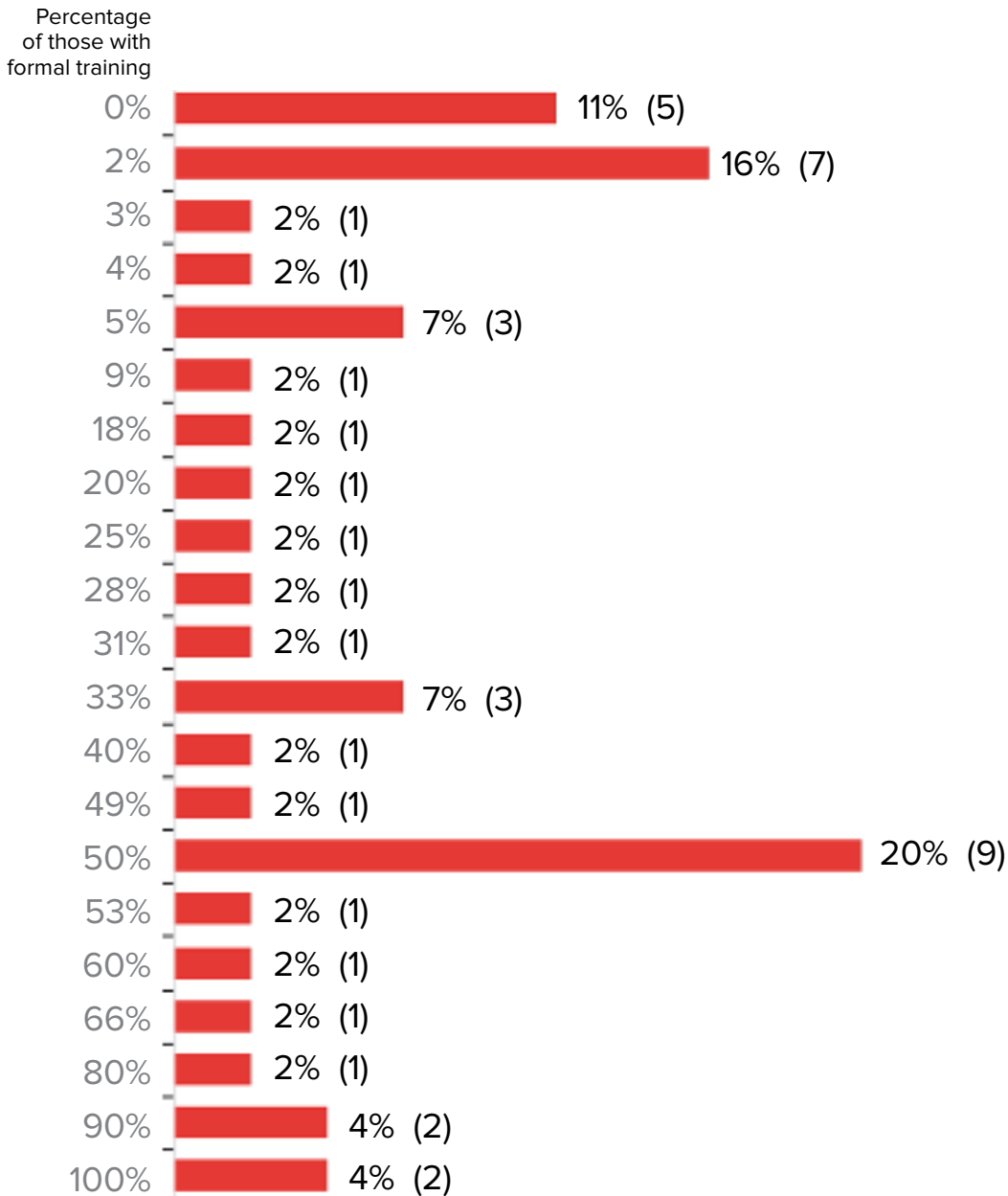


Total count: 45

On average, **51%** of people working for the respondents' organizations are paid for their work.

Q09

## What percentage of people working with collections have formal training in libraries and/or archives?



Total count: 45

On average, **32%** of people working with collections have formal training in libraries and/or archives.

Q10a

## Do you know how your organization is funded?

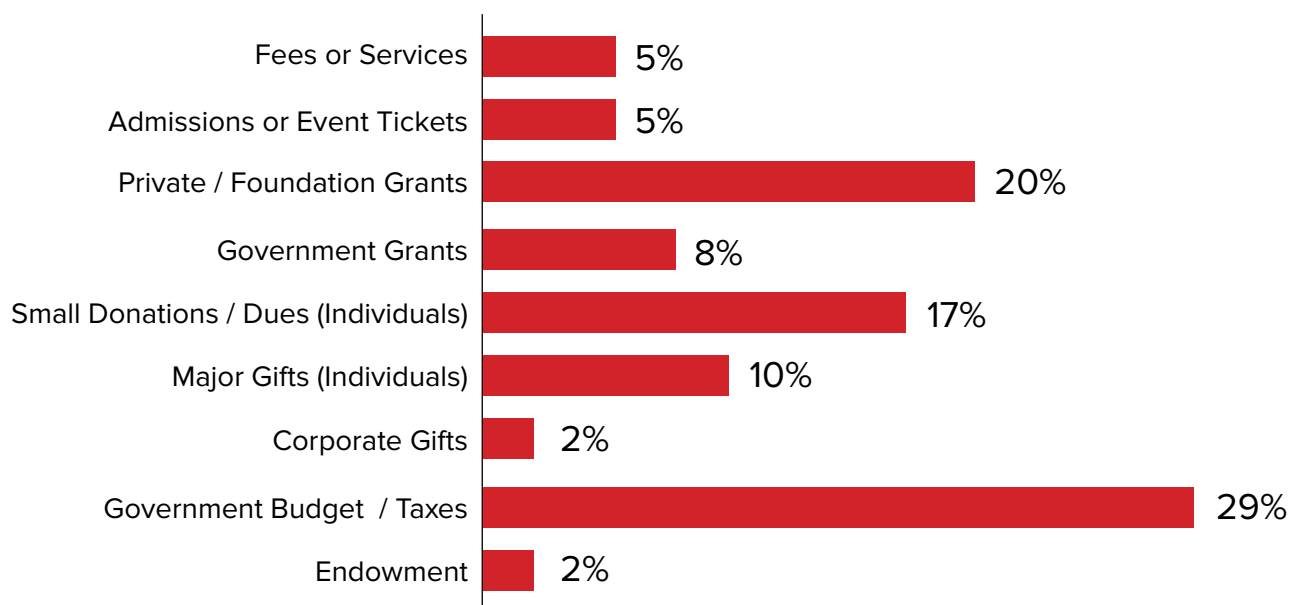


Total count: 45

Q10b

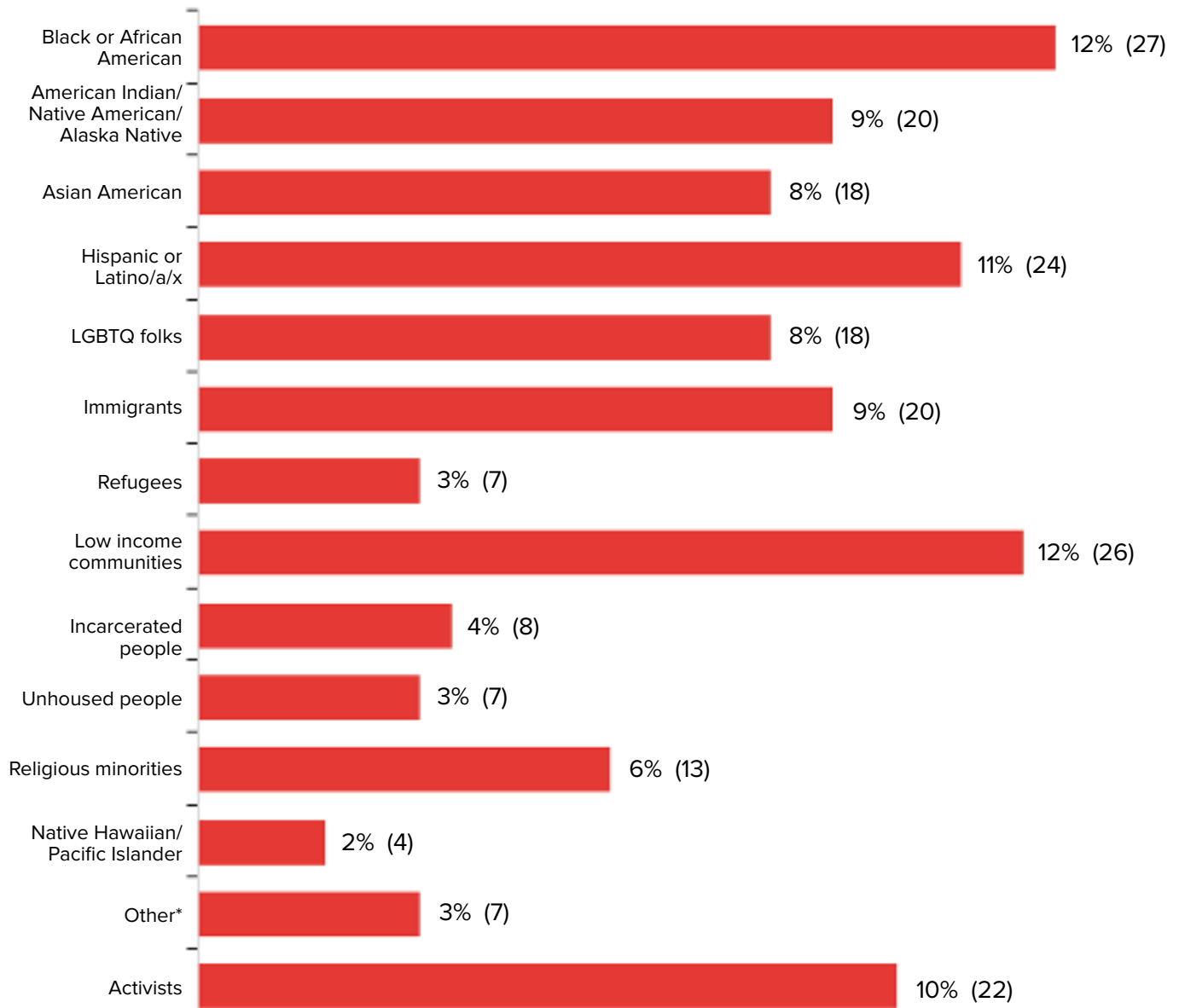
## Approximately what percentage of your overall budget comes from the following sources?

The average percentage of budgets coming from the sources listed (all respondents):



Q11

## What communities are represented by your organization's collections? Select all that apply.



\*Other (entries submitted by respondents):

- There are representation of LGBTQ, as well as BIPOC, immigrants, etc, but hasn't been organized to understand what percentages as of yet
- White
- US/Russian Space Programs
- Those affected by HIV/AIDS
- Youth
- Victims/survivors of other forms of state violence, e.g. police violence

## Beyond the communities represented, please list up to 5 main topics or subjects covered by your organization's collections.

**Agriculture, women's history,** manufacturing, veterans **history,** rural life

Foreign language materials; Citizenship and ESL materials; **History** of labor movements in the area; **History** of immigrant groups to our area.

Local **history,** genealogy, organization's **history**

Pre-contact Hawaii, impact of tourism, unions, WWII impact on Hawaii, **agriculture**

Anarchists and anarchism in the US; anarchism in the UK; anarchists and anarchism globally, but mostly based in Europe and Latin America

Labor, Ecology, **Women,** Public **Art,** Transit

Rural life, mestizos, **agriculture,** land grants, **artists**

**Education,** Genealogy, **History,** Bataan POWs, Dam & Irrigation Construction, Carlsbad Caverns, Civic Organizations, Local Industry (Potash & Oil)

**History,** ie newsletters, tribal announcements, tribal oral histories, videos, tribal music, management plans, indigenous language, planning documents.

**Historic preservation,** **Historic** sites, Cultural resources, Intangible heritage, Ethnic studies

1. Enslaved population 2. Late 18th/Early 19th century 3. Health tourism 4. Plantation life 5. **Historic preservation**

Language, **education,** genealogy, **arts** and crafts, **history**

**Art** works, furniture, books, private journals

Archival, artifacts, language, **preservation**

Southwest history, Native American **History,** Trinity atomic site, paleo **history,** Geology & mining

**Agricultural history** / labor **history;** local **history;** vernacular architecture

The environment, ranching, mining, **arts** and culture, segregation, health care

Archaeology; Multilingual Records

Military Organizations, Scientific Research Communities.

Archaeology, **History,** Southwest Studies

Rocket Development; Space Program beginning in 1945; Astronomy and Astronomers; Science Fiction as pertains to

Science fact; Astronaut biographies

**Artists, art history,** Northern New Mexico **history,** museum **history**

Liberation movements; Prison abolition; Radical Left; Social Movement Culture; Squatting

**Art,** Civil Rights, Literature, Philadelphia, Public Health.

Local publications, local clubs within the local GLBT community, videotapes, audio

New Orleans **History;** Ceremonial attire associated with the Mardi Gras Indian tradition; Contemporary Jazz; Female participation in Carnival Dress **Art;** African Retentive traditions

**Educational**

Economic justice; Carceral issues; cultural practice; environmental racism

**History,** modern and editorial

**Agricultural** and food heritage, Indo-Hispano **history** and traditions, genealogy

1. African Diaspora **Art & Artists** 2. Indigenous New Orleans Cultural Traditions 3. Placemaking &

Placekeeping 4. Equitable Economic Development 5. Cross-cultural Collaboration

Black **women,** higher **education,** black families, intellectual **history**

WWII incarceration, racism, social justice

People With AIDS; LGBTQ+ civic and social organizations; gay liberation movement; West Village life; LGBTQ+ periodicals

1. Impacts of interpersonal and state violence on individuals, families, and communities 2. Different ways retributive justice systems succeed or fail to meet the needs of victims and survivors of violence 3. Disrupting toxic narratives and myths about what constitutes victimhood, e.g. seeing formerly incarcerated people, families of victims of police shootings, etc, as victims/survivors of state violence 4. Highlighting the ways retributive justice systems compound harm and feed endless cycles of traumatic repetition in the aftermath of violence 5. Framing forms of state violence as urgent public health issues

Civil rights, African American **education,** African American civic and fraternal organizations

Civil Rights, Redevelopment, Pioneer Days/Early San Francisco, (local) Fine **Arts,** and Traditional folk **arts**

**Preservation,** Landmark Recognition, Research and Publication, **Educational** Outreach

Military, barrios, schools, family life, community activities

Musicians, muralists (**artists**), photographers, minority businesses/owners

Black **Education,** Black Politics, Black Religion, Black **History,** Black Sororities/Fraternities

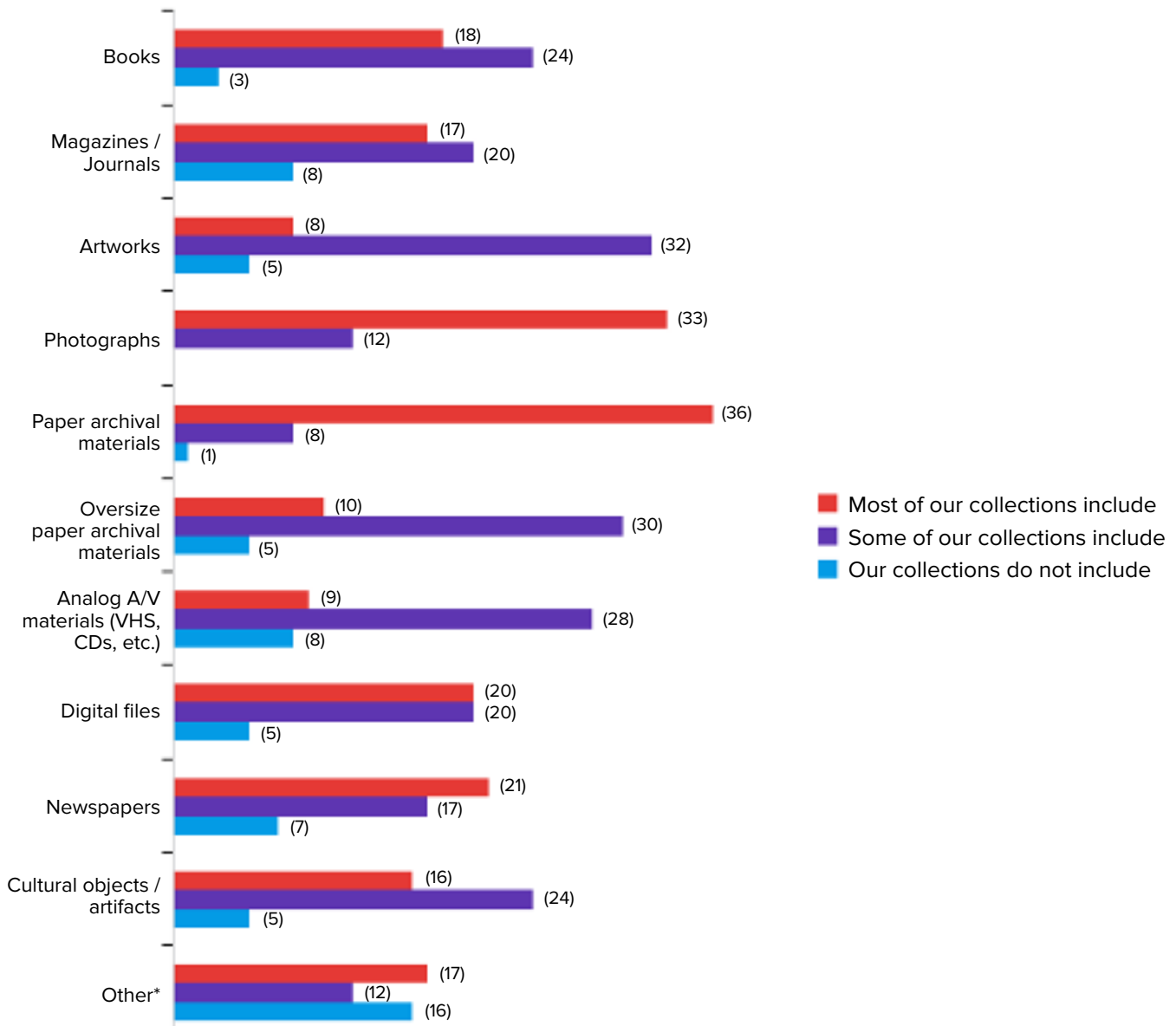
Organizations, Clubs, Churches, Families, Culture

Drag, Sports, Music, Media

Immigration **history,** Community formation, **Arts,** **Women's History,** Transnationality

Labor organizing, **education** organizing, immigration organizing, economic (in)equality, racial justice organizing

## What types of materials are represented in your collections?

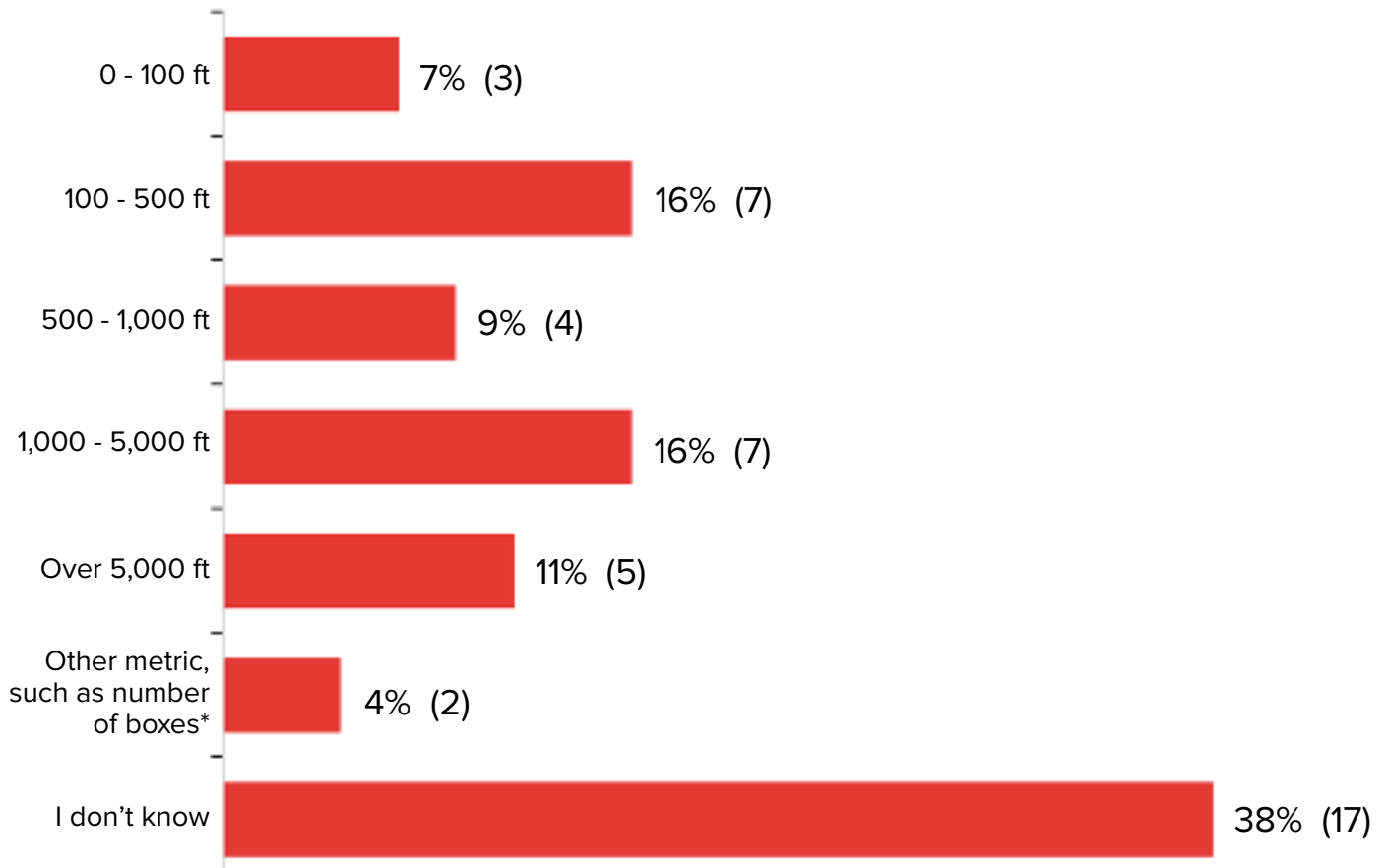


\*Other materials represented in collections (entries submitted by respondents):

- Oral history collections – *most include*
- Ephemera, pamphlets and zines – *most include*
- Seeds – *some include*
- Audio files (oral histories) – *some include*
- Trc – *most include*
- Historic structure; living collections (heritage trees) – *most include*
- T-shirts, buttons, stickers, banners, vinyl records – *most include*
- Posters – *most include*
- Not sure – *do not include*
- Oral histories – *most include*
- Clothing – *some include*
- Oral histories – *most include*
- Clothing – *some include*
- Furniture – *do not include*
- Scrapbooks, garments – *most include*
- Oral history interviews – *most include*
- Digital video – *most include*

Q14

## What is the size of your collection, in linear (or cubic) feet?



Total count: 45

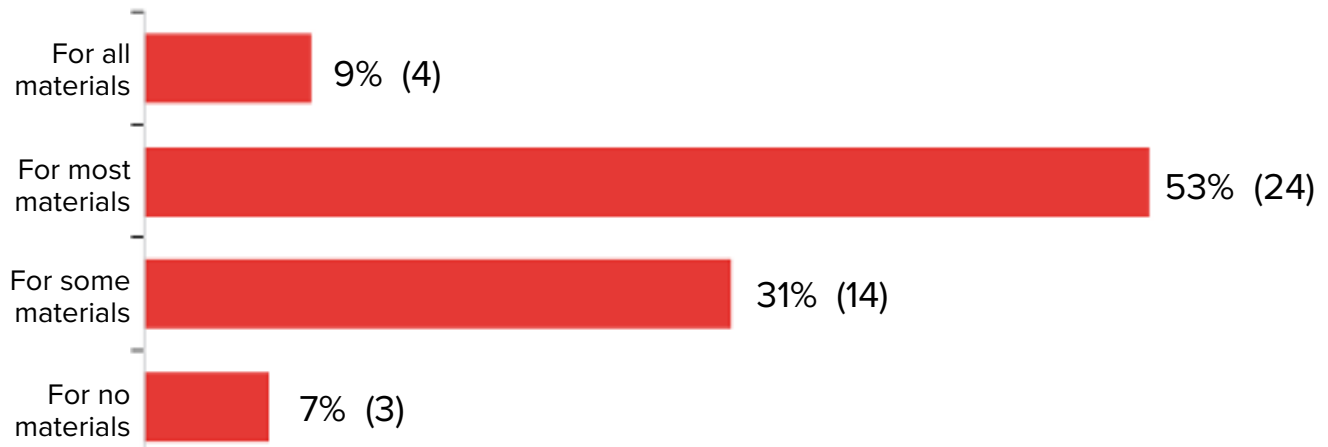
\*Other metric, such as number of boxes (entries submitted by respondents):

- ~90k digital objects
- Hundreds of boxes of all sizes



Q15

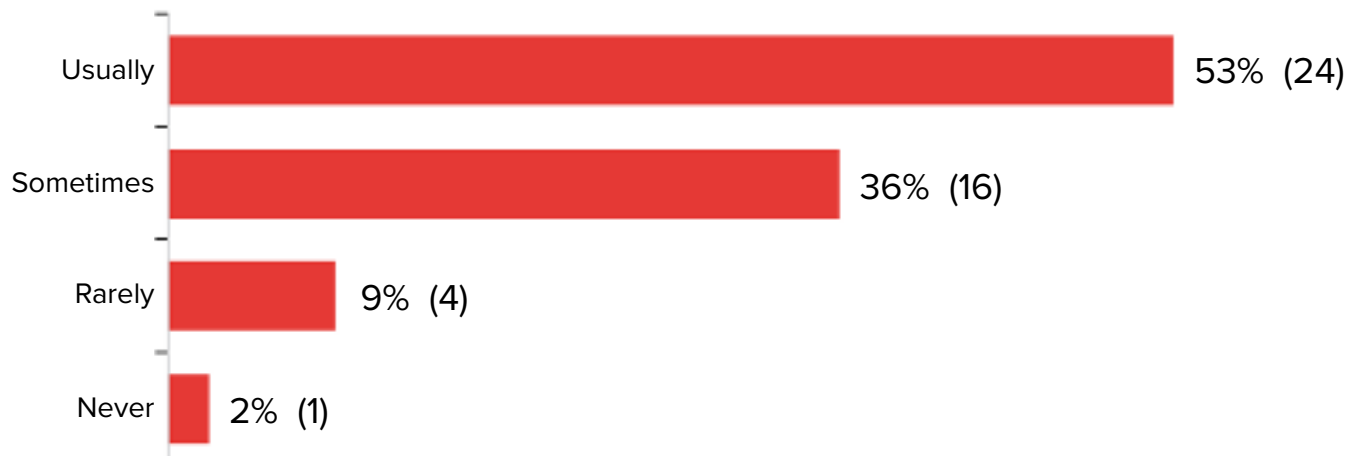
## Does your organization hold intellectual rights to the collection?



Total count: 45

Q16

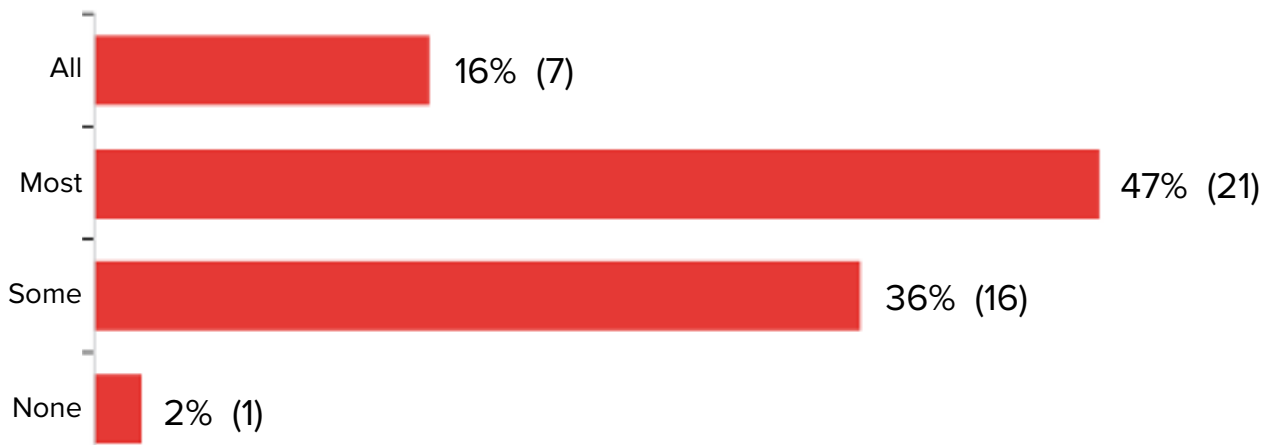
**Would you say that your organization is proactive in adding new materials to the collections?**



Total count: 45

Q17

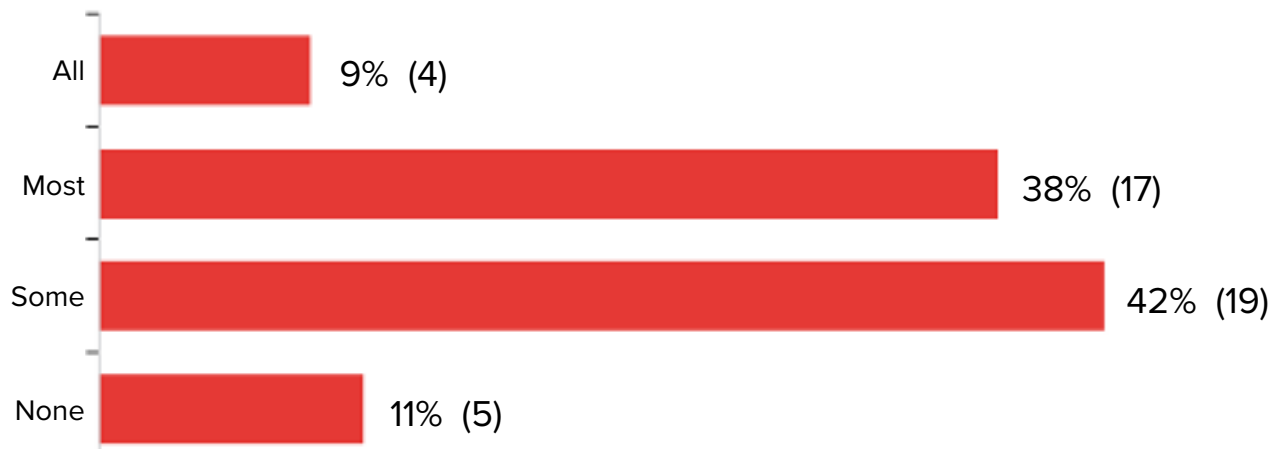
**How much of your organization's collections are described in a way so that internal staff can know what you have?**



Total count: 45

Q18

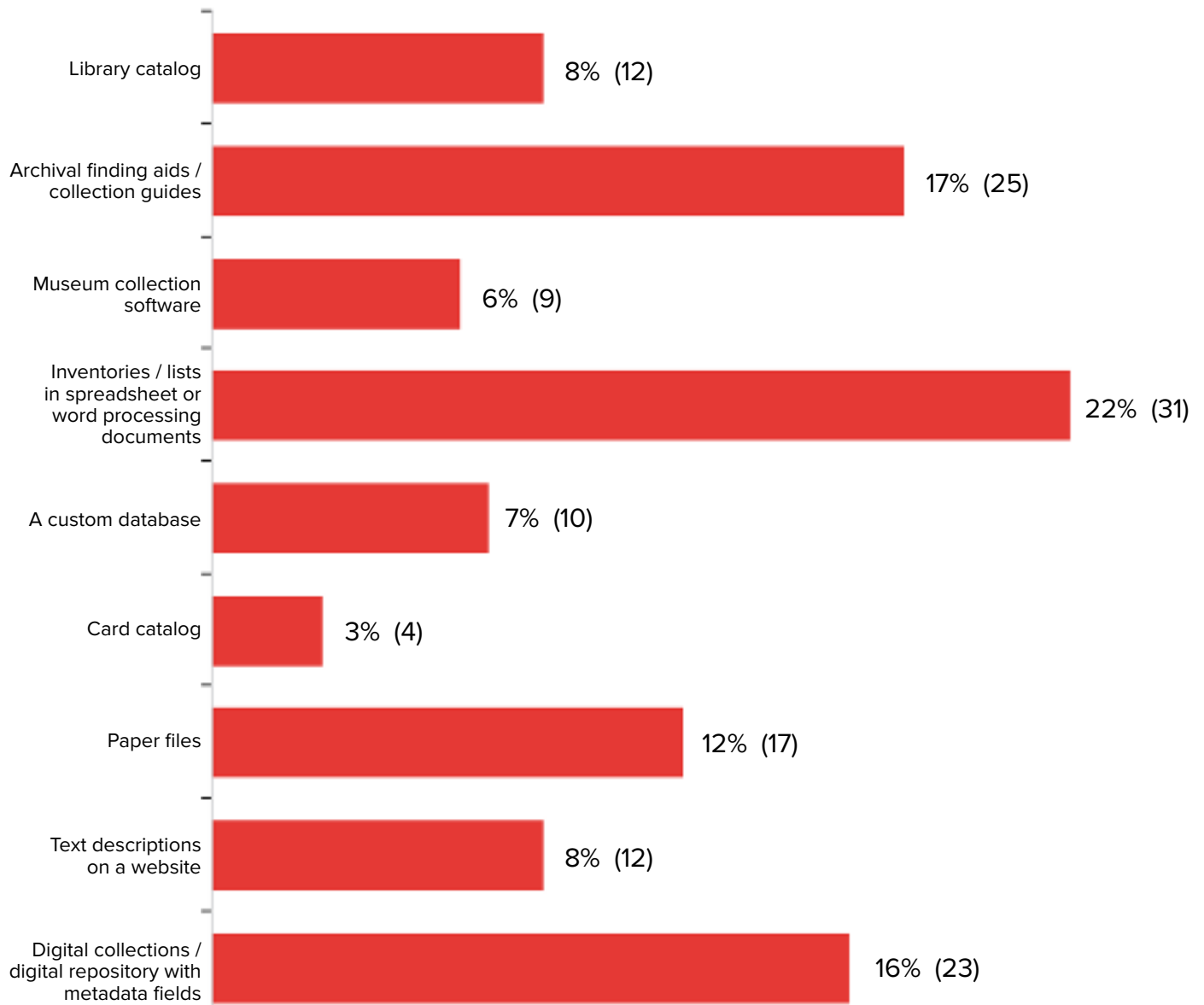
**How much of your organization's collections are described in a way so that outside users can know what you have?**



Total count: 45

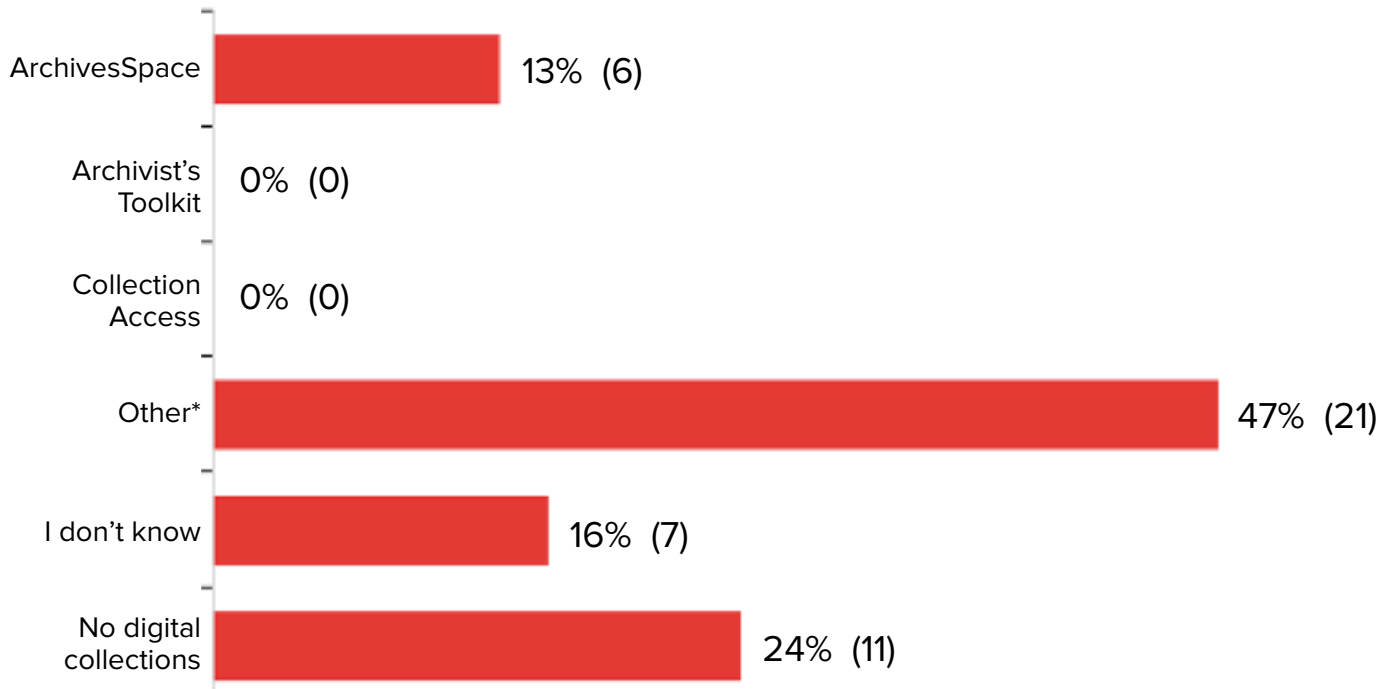
Q19

**Which of the following does your organization use to describe its collections? Select all that apply.**



Q20

## What software or tools do you use, or have you used to manage your collections?



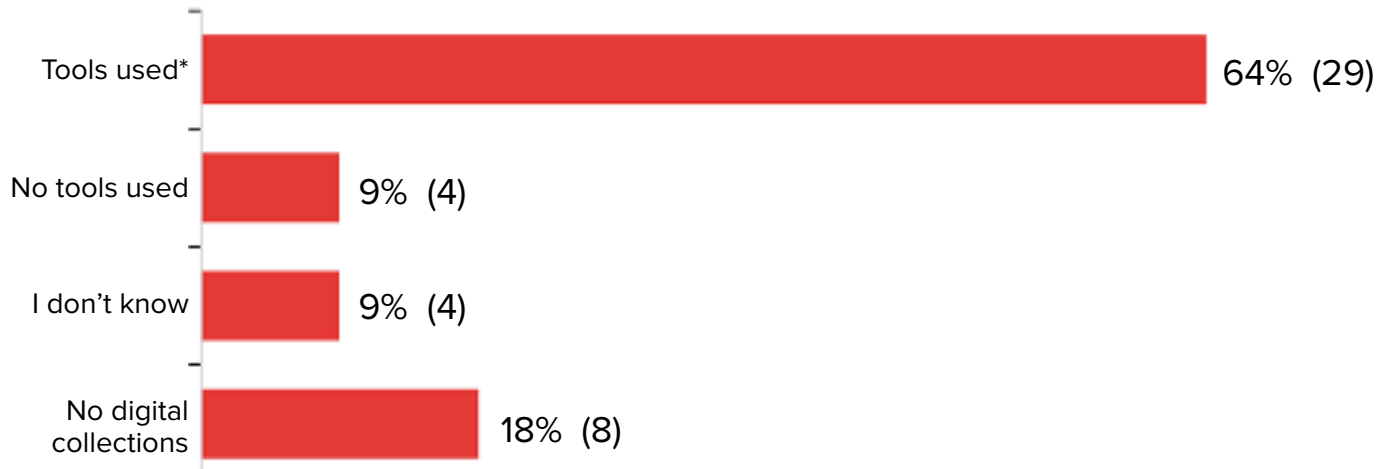
Total count: 45

\*Other software tools used to manage collections (entries submitted by respondents):

- *PastPerfect*
- *Past Perfect software*
- *PastPerfect*
- *a database driven/catalog + website and a wiki*
- *MediaWiki*
- *omeka s*
- *Historypin*
- *PastPerfect*
- *insignia*
- *Past perfect*
- *Past Perfect*
- *Past Perfect V*
- *Collective Access*
- *Custom software*
- *Currently Excel*
- *In-house creation*
- *Lucidea DB Textworks*
- *Excel, Glifos*
- *Drupal (custom built)*
- *EntermediaDB*

Q21

## What platforms or tools do you use to provide access to your digital collections (such as Omeka, organization's website?)



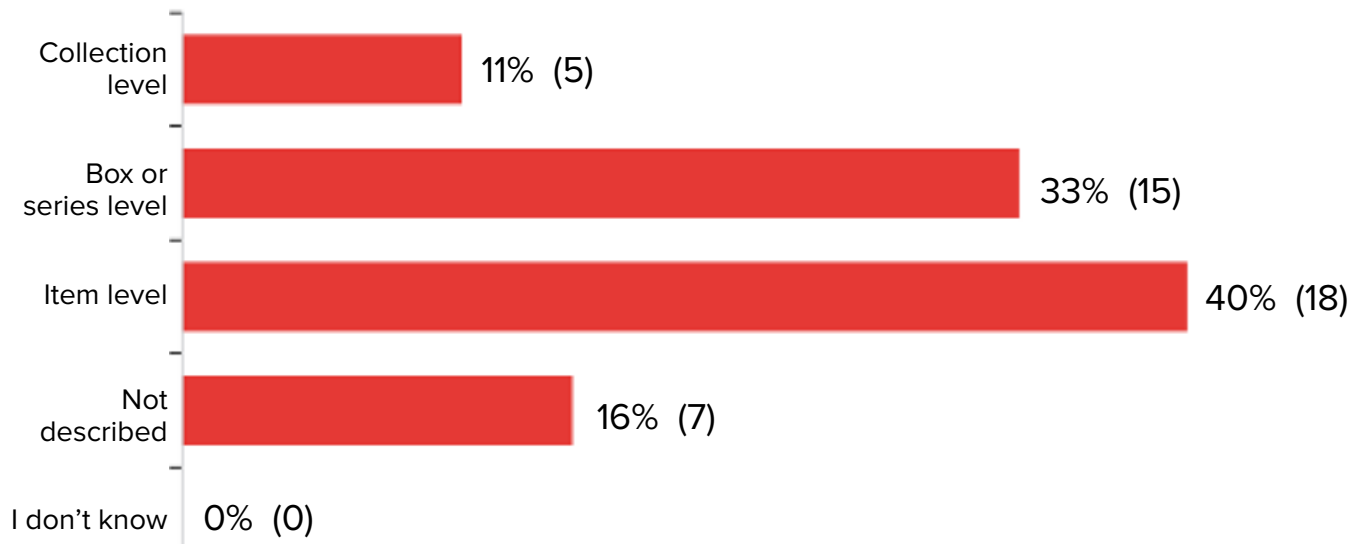
Total count: 45

\*Tools or platforms used to provide access to digital collections (entries submitted by respondents):

- Organization's website
- contentDM
- MediaWiki
- omeka s
- Historypin
- PastPerfect
- Omeka (starting this year), website, Friends' website
- website and Past Perfect
- Organizational Website
- website
- Organization website
- CONTENTdm, museum website
- Collective Access
- Islandora
- website
- AWS
- Omeka
- archives website
- In-house creation
- Google Arts & Culture; Omeka
- org's website, Omeka, Glifos
- website
- Organization's website, Online Archive of California, USC Digital Library, and custom built data base for digital assets
- Contentdm, Archive-it
- Website
- Organizations website
- Wordpress website
- Drupal (custom built)
- Wordpress - Website

Q22

**Does your organization typically describe materials at the...**

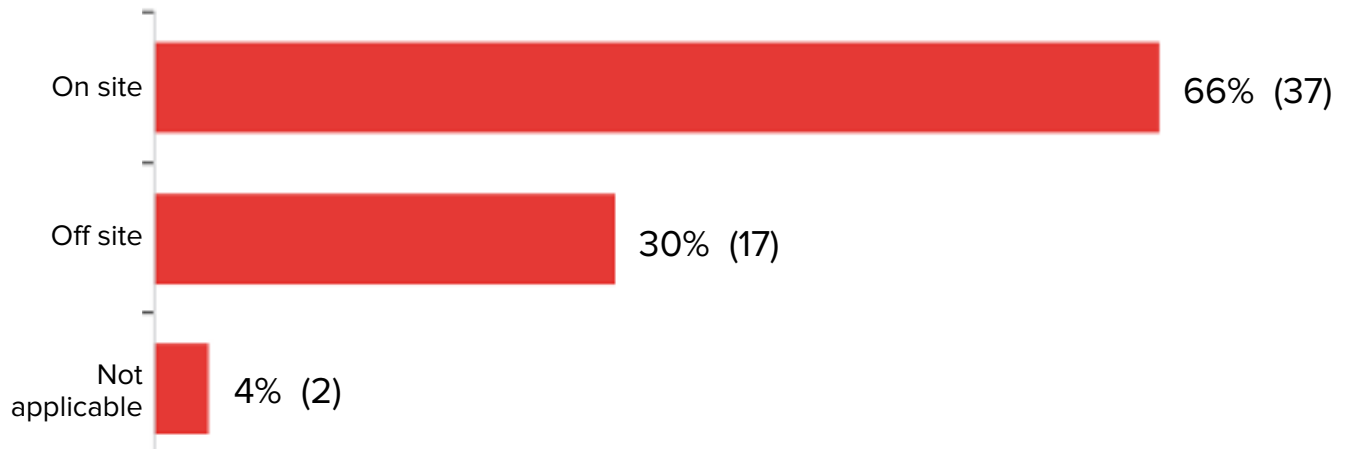


Total count: 45



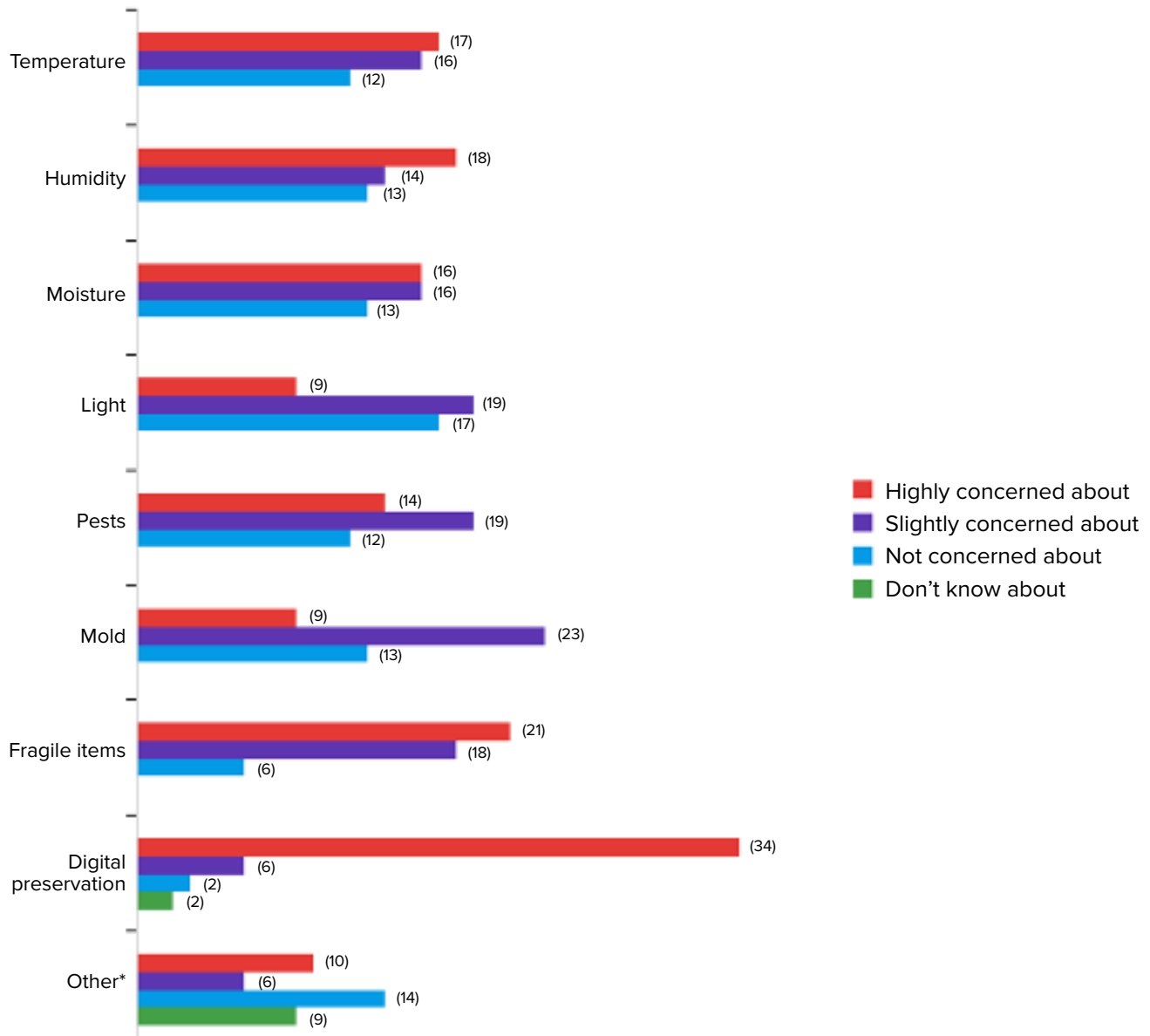
Q23

**Where are collections stored? Select all that apply.**



Q24

## Which of the following preservation concerns do you have about your collection?

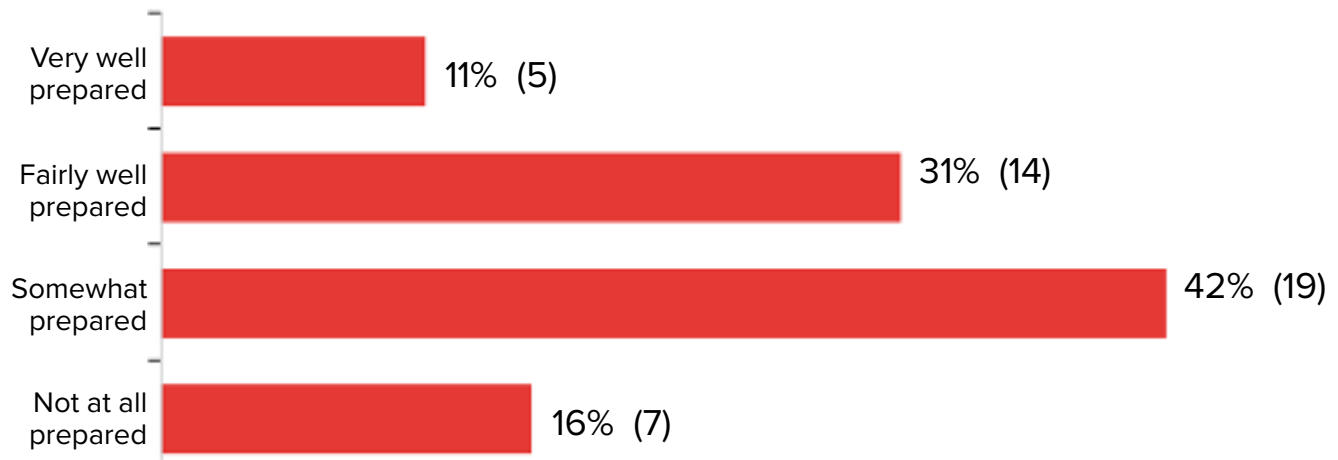


\*Other preservation concerns (entries submitted by respondents):

- Adequate storage – *highly concerned*
- People and funds to do the preservation work – *highly concerned*
- We work with many different organizations, each of which has challenges – *don't know*
- Potential loss through theft – *highly concerned*
- Vandalism – *highly concerned*
- Security – *highly concerned*
- Off-site redundancy – *highly concerned*

Q25

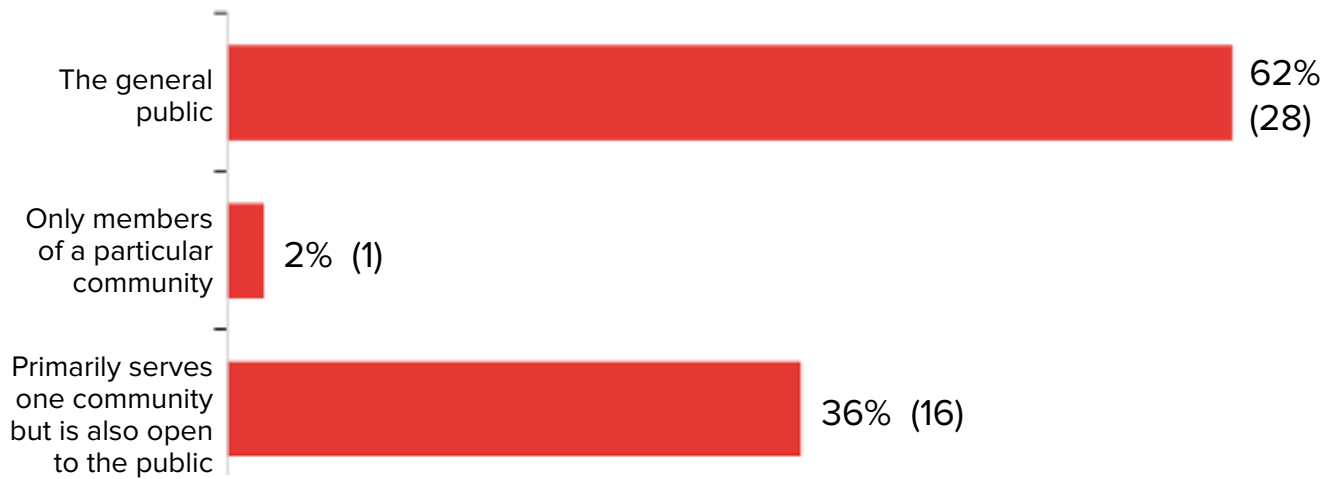
**How prepared do you think your organization is to handle the above concerns?**



Total count: 45

Q26

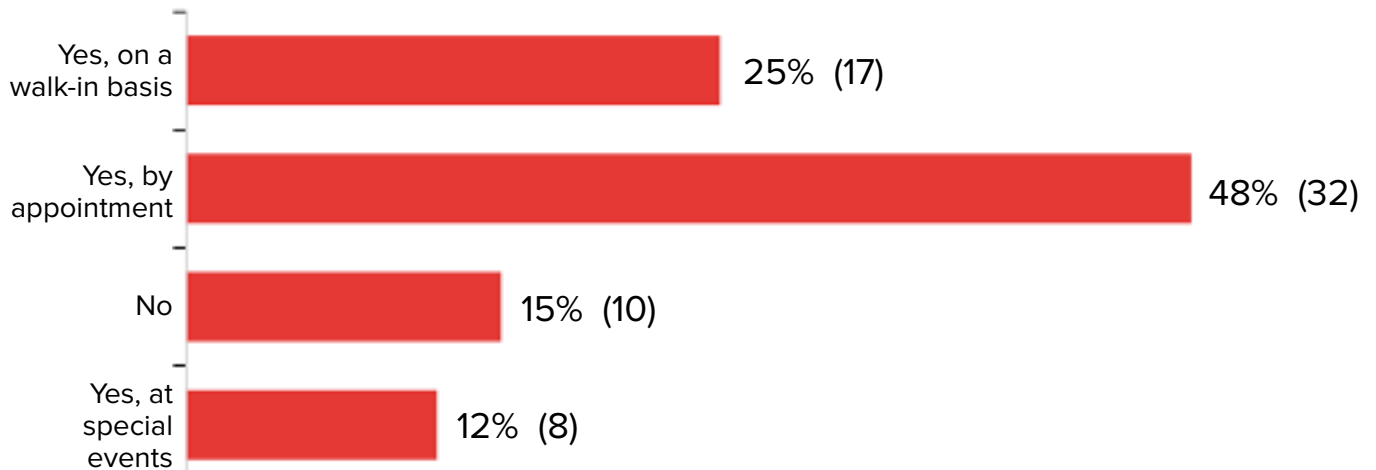
## Who does your organization serve?



Total count: 45

Q27

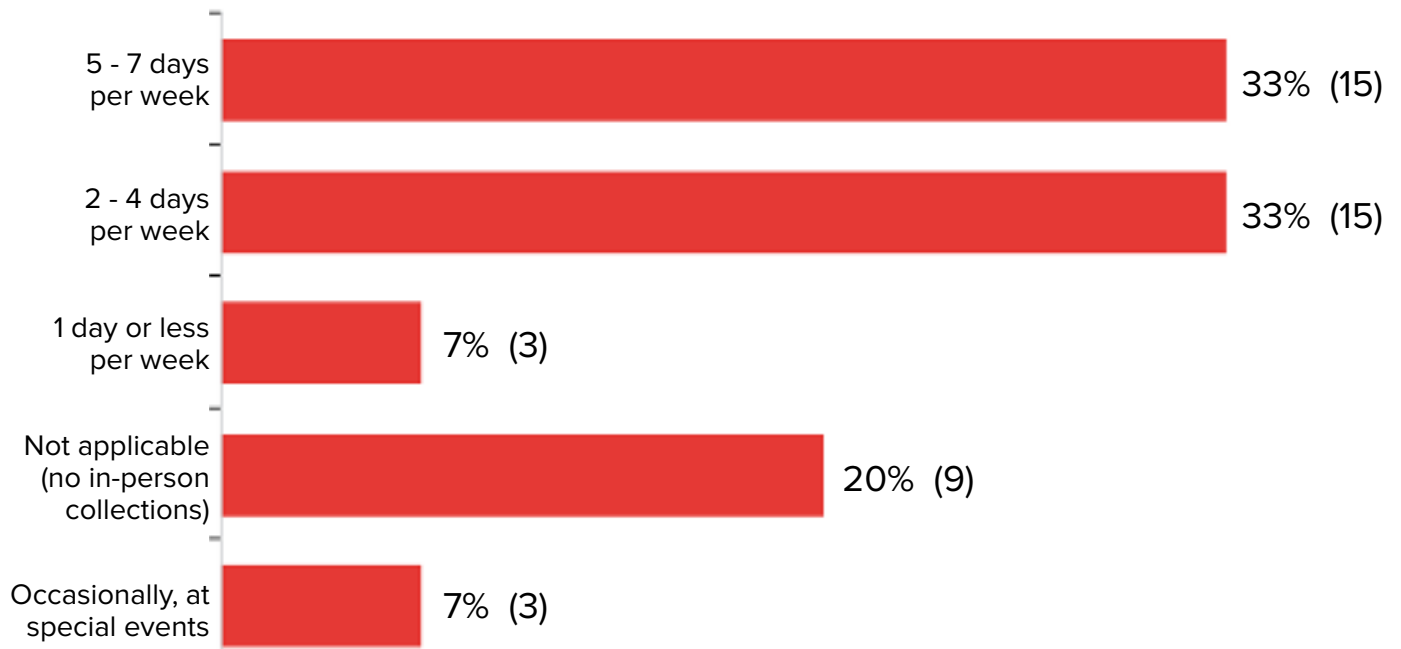
**Can users access your collections in person?  
Select all that apply.**



Total count: 45

Q28

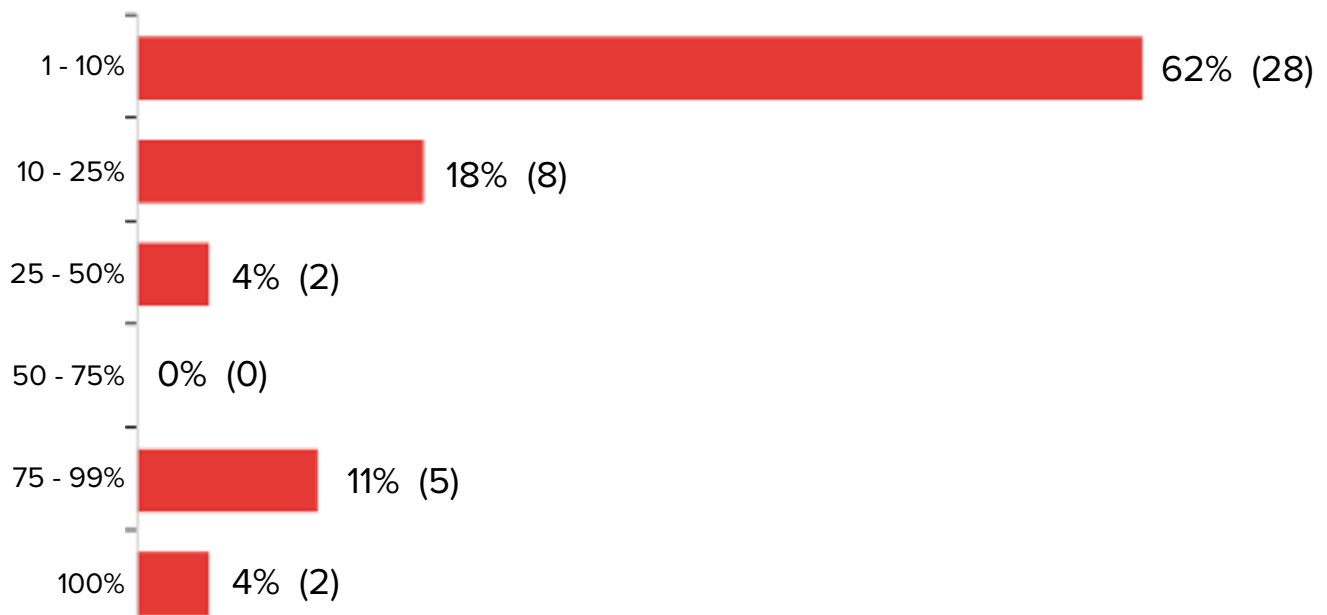
## How often are in-person collections available?



Total count: 45

Q29

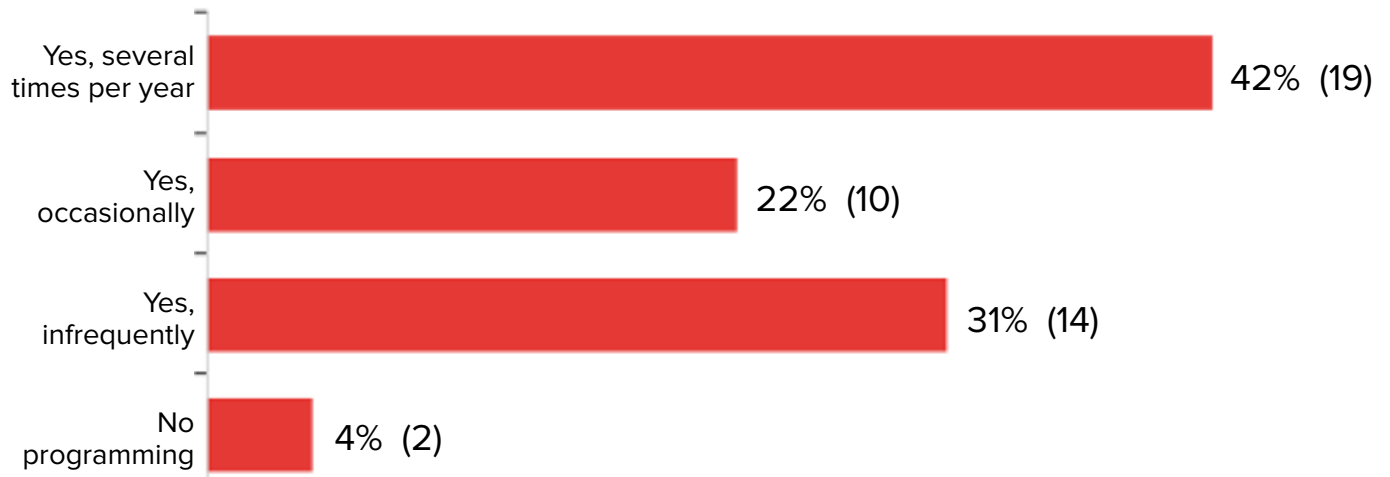
## What percentage of your collections can be accessed digitally?



Total count: 45

Q30

## Does your organization offer programs related to the collection?

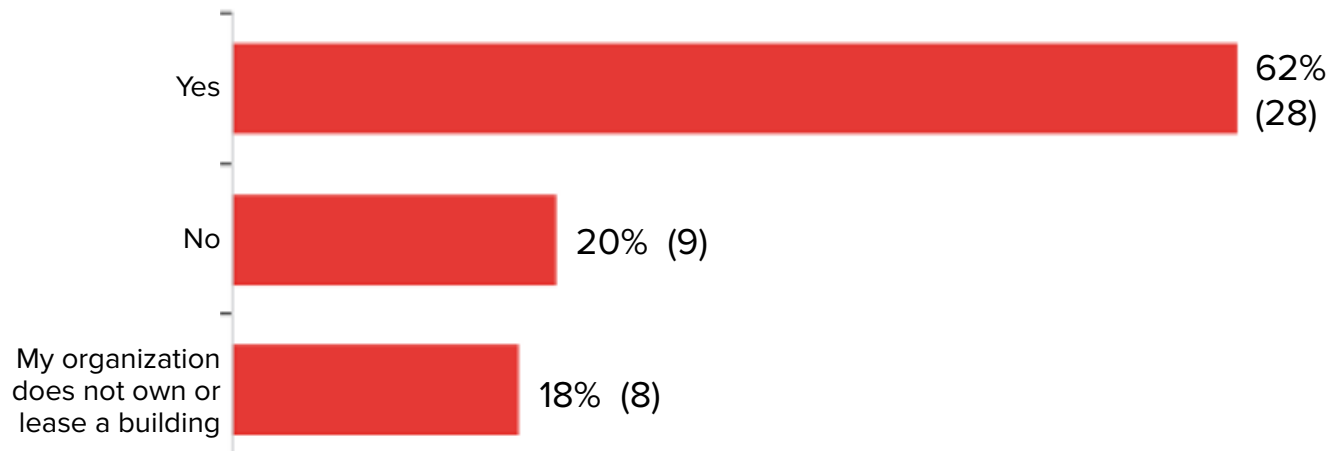


Total count: 45



Q31

## Do you offer use of space in your building(s) to other organizations?



Total count: 45

## What are your organization's greatest needs related to the collection?

Page 1 of 2

*Renovation of storage area to be climate controlled and improve storage options.*

*Space, time to organize collection, money for proper housing of materials, money and time for digitization, training of staff on safe handling, finding ways to make materials more accessible to public.*

*Money: funds to continue to pay staff, to continue preservation/maintenance of collections*

*Dedicated time, all work is done on a volunteer basis and funded by those volunteers. One thing to note is the desire NOT to be regulated by the state, so no formal non-profit status, etc. Another thing, the description levels was hard to answer because, probably like many community archives, we're actually made up of books, newspaper and journals, a/v, ephemera, etc as well as traditional "archival collections" so different parts of the collection are described to different levels. I think an ongoing issue for the collection is that as a labor of love and commitment to a particular social movement, long term care of the collection is always an open question, as the collection grows and grows, who will have the resources to house, care for, and make sure it's accessible for researchers, especially non-academic researchers.*

*A broader, more diverse community of contributors, those who see themselves as having a place in history to be able to conceive of contributing. To understand better the obstacles the general public face in adding content and contributing their memories.*

*We are working with several small institutions who are seeking to digitize collections and are building competence around this process and what it means for the rural communities of the Indo-Hispano homeland where we are working. We are seeking project stability, in terms of funding and in terms of the platform.*

*We need a physical space to house our collection and a curator to oversee it. The collection should be available to the public on a regular basis. We also need someone to revamp our website and make it more user friendly.*

*How to scan documents quickly; how to store and identify what we have and organize that is easily accessible to patrons, and how and if to catalog items.*

*Limited staffing and technical knowledge to deal with ever-changing digital needs in maintaining our digital archive. Relevancy to younger audience for participation (in contributing to the crowdsourced archive) and in engagement (interest). Connection and access to in-person archives given COVID.*

*Climate control and staffing/resources.*

*Finding someone who can concentrate on working strictly on archives. The person would need to be trained. Training someone from the community.*

*Digitizing all of the items in our paper collections.*

*Building and space needs*

*Archival boxes and storage for our large (100 years) collection of Lincoln County News original newspapers acquired in 2018*

*With a new staff-of-one, we have no accessioning process or real database of collections or full understanding of ownership, loan documents, etc.*

*Cataloging and making accessible digitally.*

*The greatest needs related to my collection are enabling access to the collection, while respecting the confidentiality of many of the items.*

*Learning how to make them accessible to the general public.*

*Our organization needs to continue to curate and properly store select portions of our collections.*

*Digitization of newspapers, books, photographs and monographs.*

*Overhead maintenance costs, to pay for the space which houses the collection.*

*continued >>*

## What are your organization's greatest needs related to the collection?

Page 2 of 2

*Our most urgent needs are in building our collections and developing and strengthening relationships with underrepresented communities (for us, women, people of color, and trans folks). Next is staffing -- we are overwhelmed with interest and needs of the community (which is wonderful) but don't have a path to increase staffing. Technology is probably our next most important need -- both site-wide infrastructure as well as the ability to do much with online exhibits, digital collections, etc.*

### *Funding for storage*

*Financial and human resources. Especially concerned about digitizing the collection. The space is small and will not allow physical distancing. Therefore we are limited in sharing the collection.*

*Volunteers and equipment to do the oral interviews. Training of volunteers.*

*Capital to continue what we are doing.*

*Our organization is actually a consortium or peer network of rural libraries and community non-profit organizations, so the answers to these questions are estimates and reflect a sense of collective status. Right now the greatest need I see is for technical assistance and time and to devote to digitization and memory gathering.*

*We need a master strategy to organize, digitize, and insure our assets.*

*We need an updated disaster management plan (currently being edited), long term strategies for digital preservation and access, completion of an internal inventory of collections (currently being completed), transfer of analog A/V materials, long term considerations for offsite storage*

*Having up-to-date equipment and software to allow us to process collections in the most time-effective way. Having enough staff to manage the technical side of the digital collections.*

*It was an interesting challenge to complete this survey because the archive I manage is located within a larger,*

*multiservice organization. I can only answer according to my department. There is relatively good support of the archive from our leadership team, but as a solo archivist it can be tricky to advocate for the archive's needs. Glad to be invited to participate in this survey!*

*1. Funds for collection development and physical storage.*

### *Digital preservation and physical collection processing*

*Expertise in archiving, preservation and digitization. Funding to make the archive materials available to the public. Interpretation / educational ideas on how to use the archival materials to educate the public.*

*We are currently creating a multimedia library to manage and share our digital assets. We will need an archivist to help us maintain, publicize and share our digital archives. We are also in the process of creating finding aides for our physical archives that will be uploaded to the Online Archive of California. We will need a team of archivists to help us with this project. Lastly, our library has been cataloged in Libib, but has not been made public. We need a librarian who can help us manage our library.*

*Organization, identification, digitization, collection of materials.*

### *Personnel Funding*

*Financial support for general operations/unrestricted funds. Programming funds are relatively easier to obtain, both locally and grant supported. Keeping the doors open, lights on, and stipends are less glamorous but it allows us to continue great programming and maintaining the archives.*

*Proactive collection development, developing digital collections infrastructure.*

*Funding/capacity to support sustained development and archival programming.*