

'The Work Has Gotten Very Difficult'

Survey analysis by Magdalena
Atanassova and Michelle Russell



The Meetings Market Survey was made possible
by the financial support of Visit Greater Palm
Springs, VisitGreaterPalmSprings.com.



Introduction

The last time we conducted the Meetings Market Survey — the results of which had been published every year, without fail, in *Convene* for 29 years — it was November 2019, and in the public mind, the pandemic referred to early-20th-century influenza, not a global health crisis we were on the brink of experiencing.

When we brought back the Meetings Market Survey this summer, we knew the questionnaire couldn't be a cut-and-paste from previous years, but had to reflect new realities, including the rise of virtual events as a result of pandemic shutdowns, the explosive growth of generative AI, the ongoing climate crisis, higher expenses, and staffing shortages that linger following

pandemic-induced layoffs, to name a few.

So, unlike in previous survey analyses, there isn't much point in comparing this year's survey results to those of the previous one. Not only do the questions not match up, but we can agree that COVID divided history and changed society, making such comparisons less relevant.

Still, a look back at the survey results we published in early 2020 yields some interesting insights. While many planners pivoted for the first time to digital events during COVID, three out of 10 percent of 800 respondents in late 2019 said they had featured a virtual/hybrid element at their largest event, which represented an 11-percent increase over the previous year, so we were already starting to see hybrid and virtual events taking a larger role in the industry.

As far as how social media has changed, nearly half say they are more active on social media in their roles than pre-pandemic. Facebook and Twitter (now X) were planners' top channels to engage audiences in 2019; this year, LinkedIn is the clear favorite, followed by Instagram.

And in a win for progress

in our industry, three out of five planners say they are more intentional about designing events with sustainability initiatives than before the pandemic. Further evidence of this shift: While only 14 percent of planners in 2019 said they include sustainability elements in their RFPs; 31 percent do so today.

**There's lots to unpack
in this year's results.
Let's get started.**

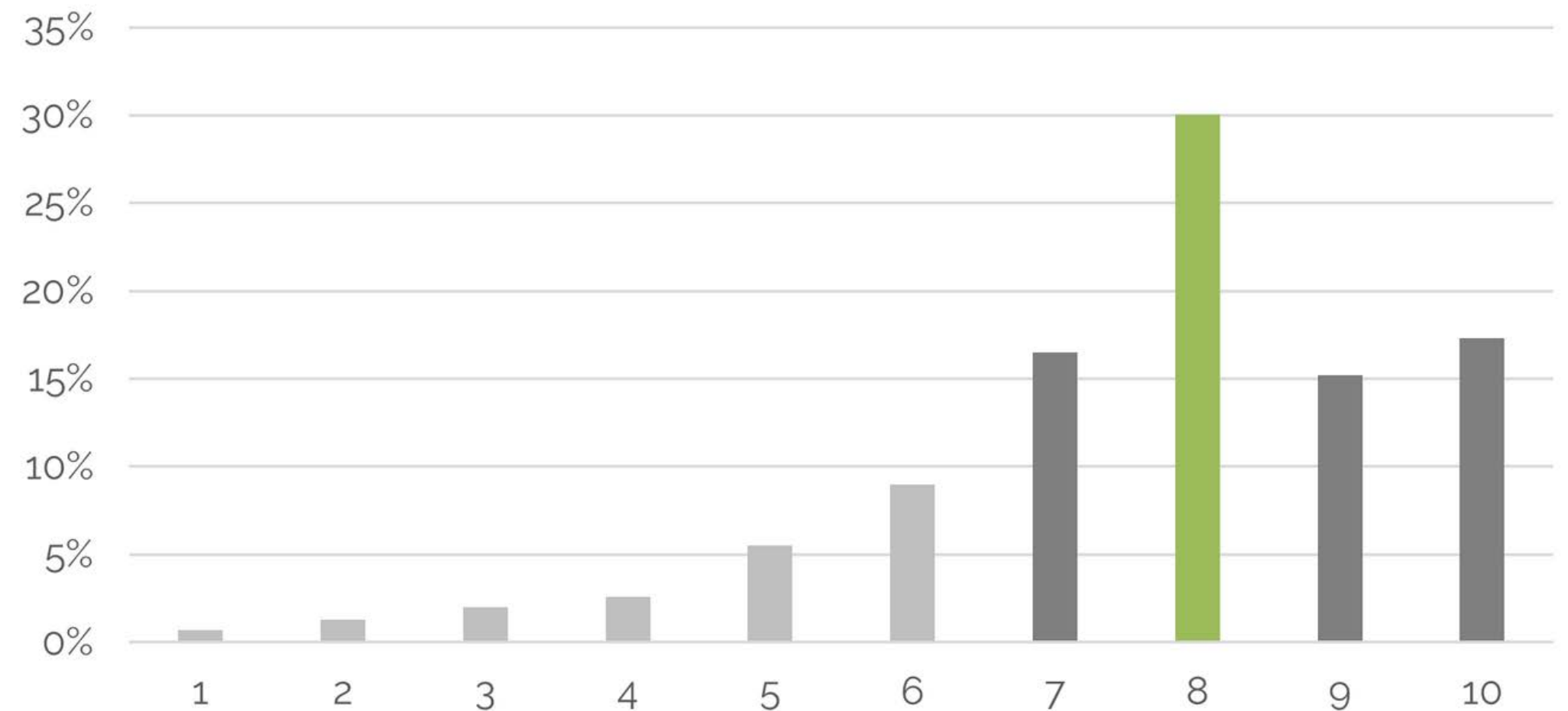
“I feel fairly positive,
however, there is still a lot
of uncertainty to contend
with.”

How We're Feeling

How positive are you feeling about your job right now?

Most respondents are feeling good about their job right now. The average level of positivity on a scale of 1 to 10 (from least to most positive), was 8. Job satisfaction was the main reason why participants said they are feeling so positive, followed by a healthy work environment, and then optimism about the industry and its potential for growth.

How positive are you feeling about your job right now?



Those who scored lower on the positivity scale highlighted challenges, including budget cuts, staffing shortages, rising costs, excessive workloads, and supplier issues. Other factors affecting job satisfaction had to do with the fast pace of change and high expectations for both

face-to-face and hybrid experiences.

As far as the future, nearly half (47 percent) said they are both worried and excited about the future. Thirty-eight percent said they are more excited; 15 percent said they are more worried.

“I don’t think my organization fully embraces the importance of meetings and events.”

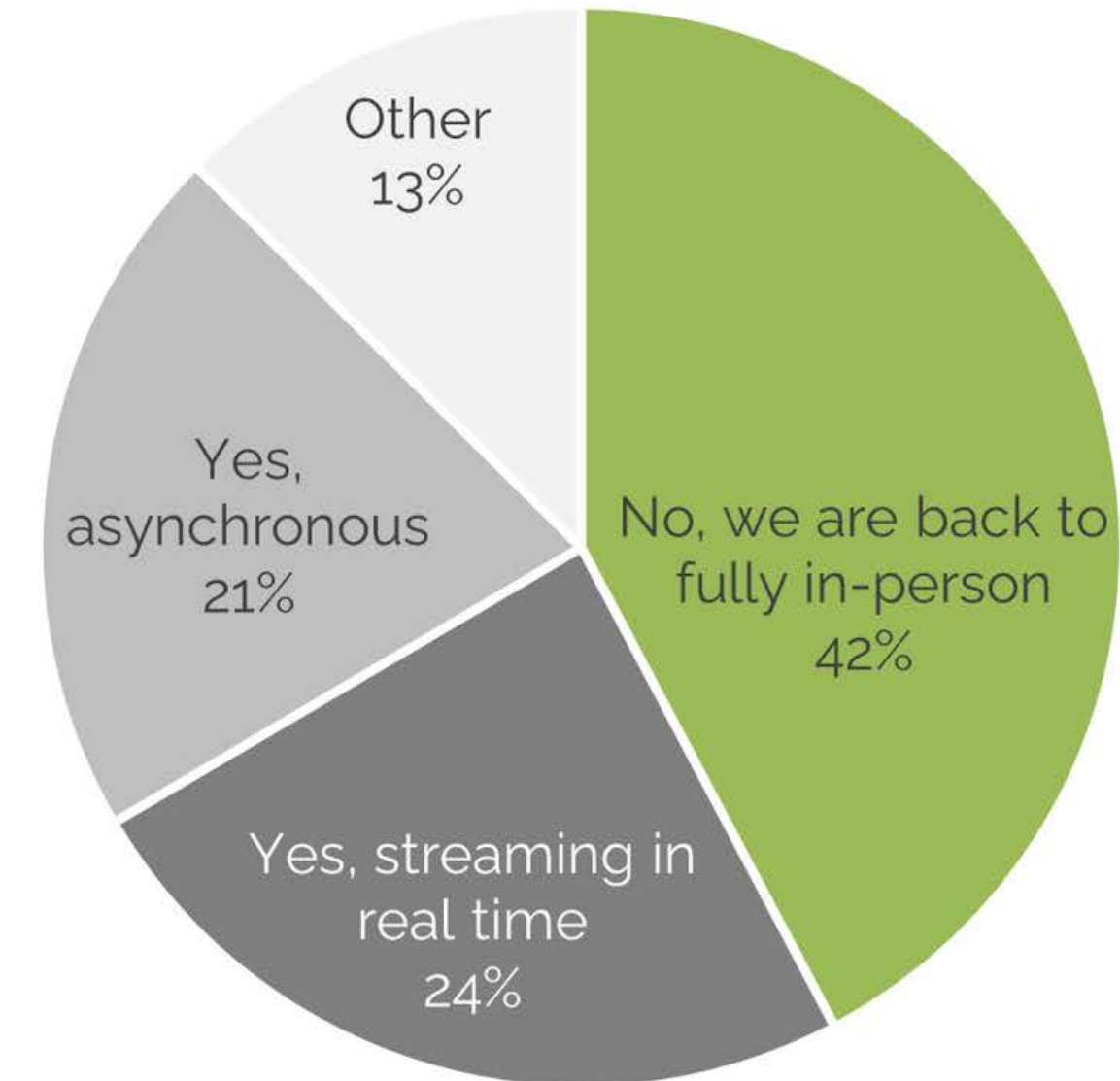
Digital and Hybrid Meetings

On average, respondents have organized 31 digital and hybrid events since March 2020, and they are planning to organize an average of 15 over the next year.

Do you offer a digital version of all or a portion of your in-person event(s)?

More than two out of five respondents are back to fully in-person events only.

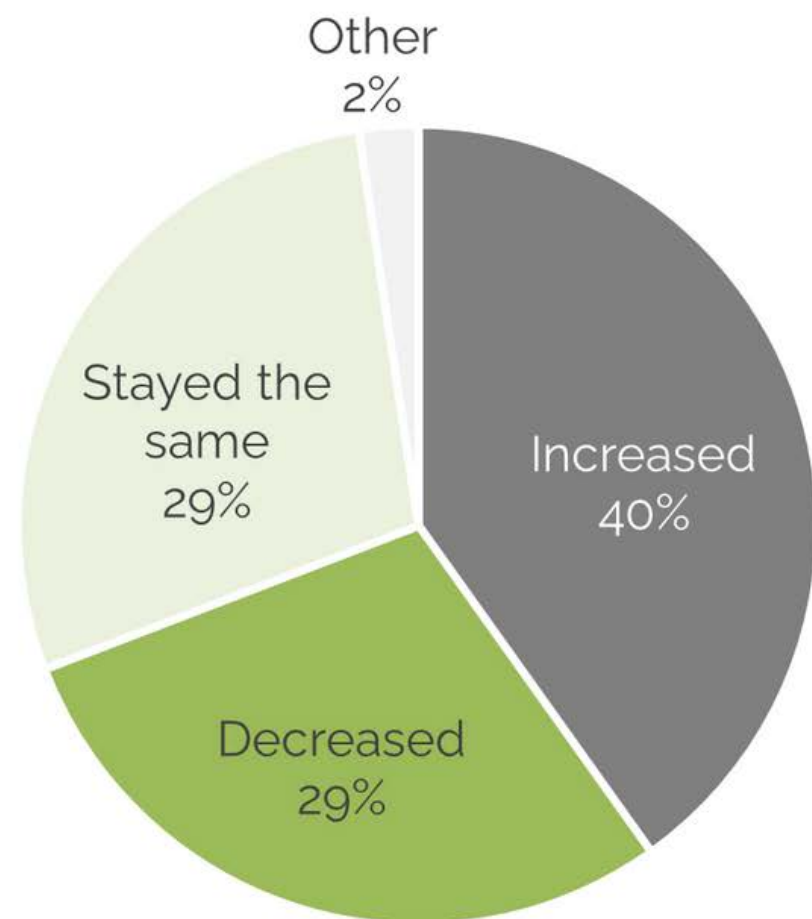
Digital version of events on offer



“We live and work our mission and virtual/hybrid helps us reach exponentially larger audiences.”

Attendance

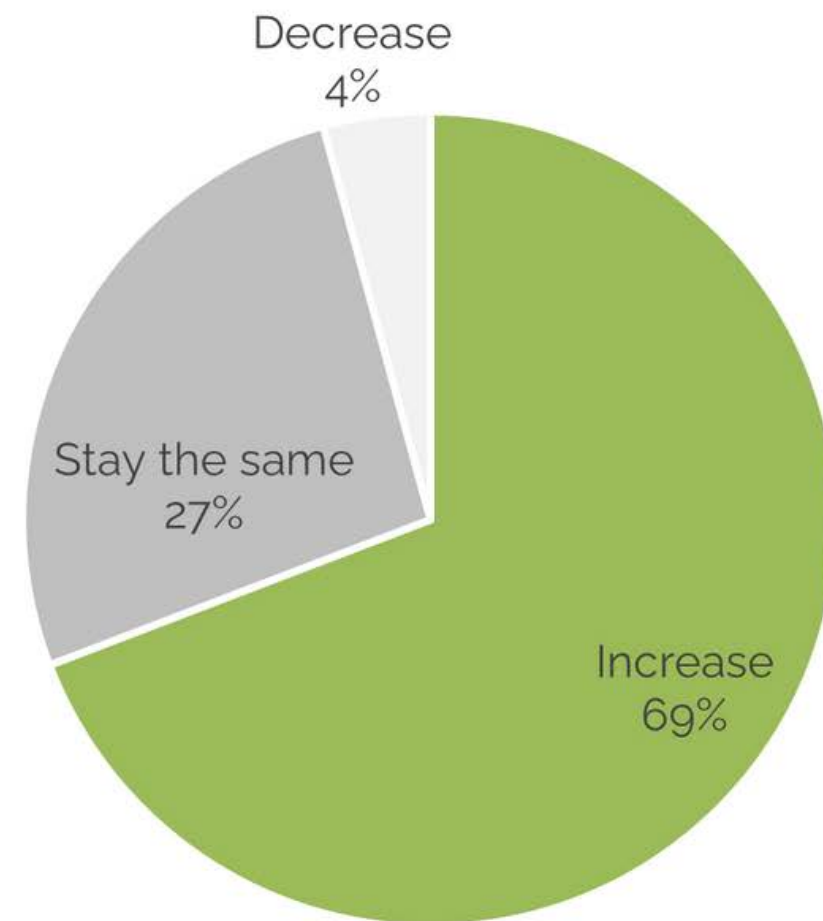
Attendance comparison to pre-pandemic



How did attendance at your in-person meetings in 2023 (or 2022 if you haven't yet met this year) compare to your last pre-pandemic event?

Two out of five respondents said attendance — still the leading indicator of success — grew at their latest event vs. pre-COVID, by an average of 23 percent. Attendance declined an average of 24 percent for those who said they've seen participation decrease.

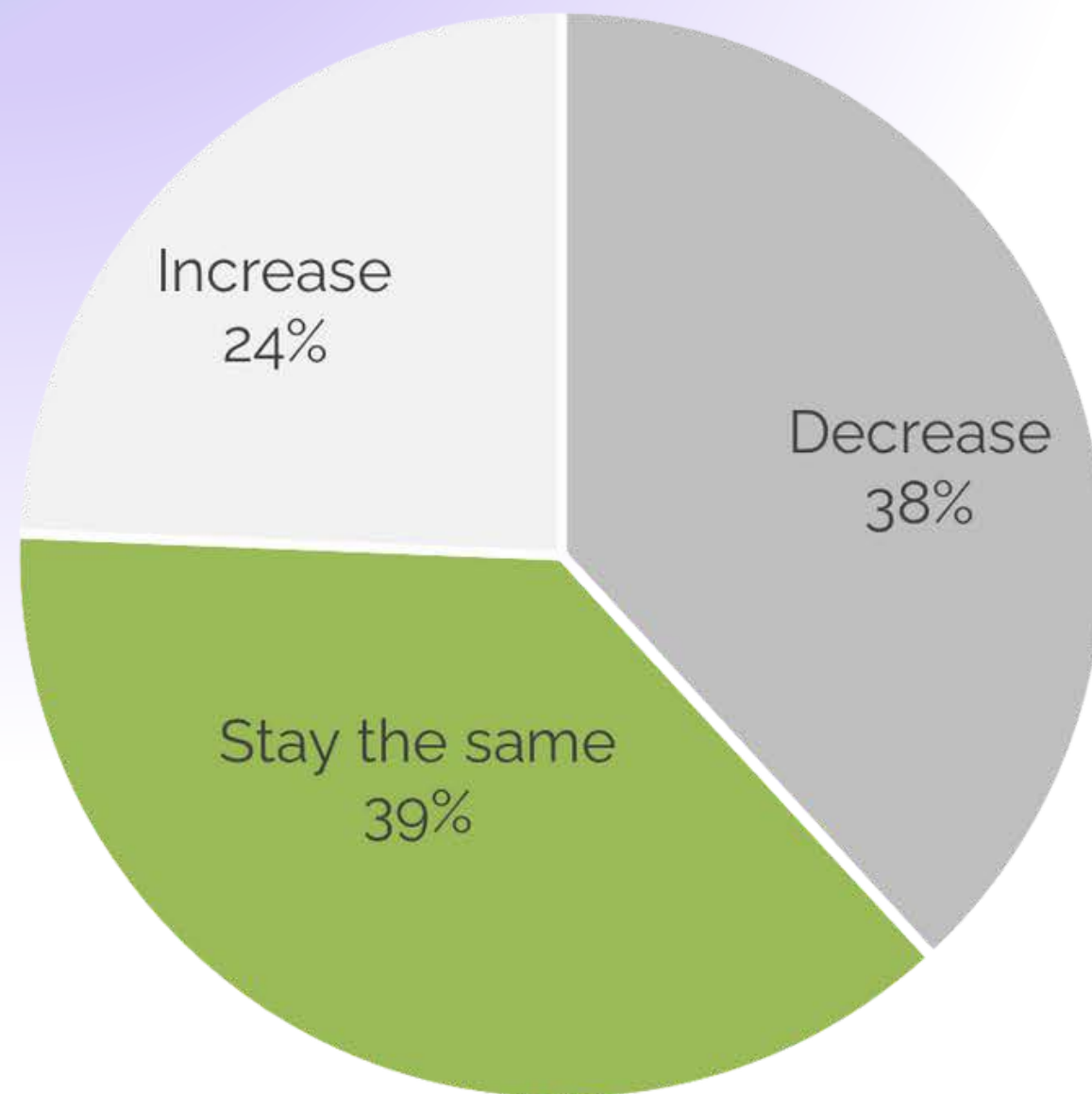
In-person attendance in the next two years



What do you anticipate in terms of in-person attendance in the next two years?

Nearly 7 out of 10 respondents expect to see a growth in attendance, by an average of 19 percent. Those who anticipate fewer attendees project an average decline of 25 percent.

What do you anticipate in terms of digital attendance in the next two years?



Fewer than one-quarter foresee a growth in digital attendance in the next two years, with most of the remaining respondents evenly split between expecting attendance to go down and stay the same. Those who anticipate a decrease estimate digital attendance will shrink by 41 percent on average.

“Job is very secure but
workload is way too
much.”

**Changes. Lots of
Changes.**

Business Model

Two out of five respondents said their organization's business model has changed since the pandemic, with both hybrid work environments and hybrid events becoming the norm for many. Some respondents said their organizations have made strategic shifts, diversifying their revenue streams beyond events and targeting different audiences and members, for example. And others mentioned a greater focus on the attendee experience — everything from designing events that foster a greater sense of community to addressing wellness and accessibility needs.

Audiences

The majority — 68 percent — expect that their event program will change in response to the fact that there are now five generations in the workforce.

Joining Forces

More than three out of five planners foresee that they will collaborate with other organizations on their events, either co-locating or in other ways.

Biggest Challenges

Survey takers filled in their biggest work challenges in open-ended responses, which fell into several main categories:

Staffing shortages — often attributed to budget constraints that limited hiring despite larger workloads.

Budgetary woes — insufficient budgets and financial resources, while expenses continue to rise, were a common theme.

Demonstrating ROI — planners often cited difficulties justifying event costs and value to stakeholders.

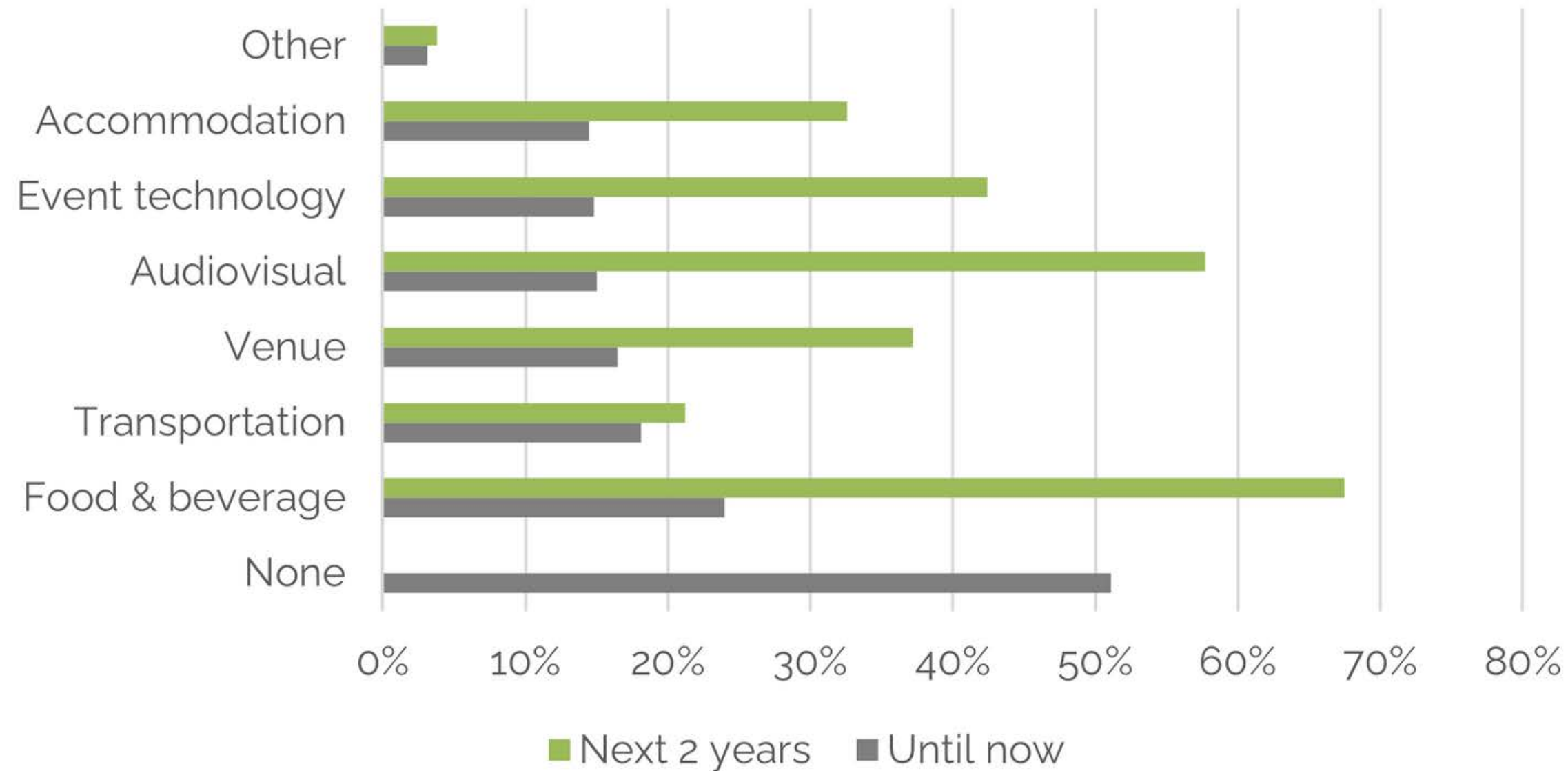
Operational frustrations — slow vendor/hotel responsiveness and lack of accountability were recurring complaints, causing delays and extra work. Also cited: process inefficiencies like outdated systems and manual work.

Strategic concerns — declining event attendance and attracting registrants as well as adapting events for new attendee expectations and keeping events innovative and engaging were highlighted by respondents as pain points.

“We have a large board that wants to keep things the same in a rapidly changing world.”

Budgets

Trimming event budgets



Which expense items in your events budget have you been able to trim?

Half have not been able to cut back on any expenses.

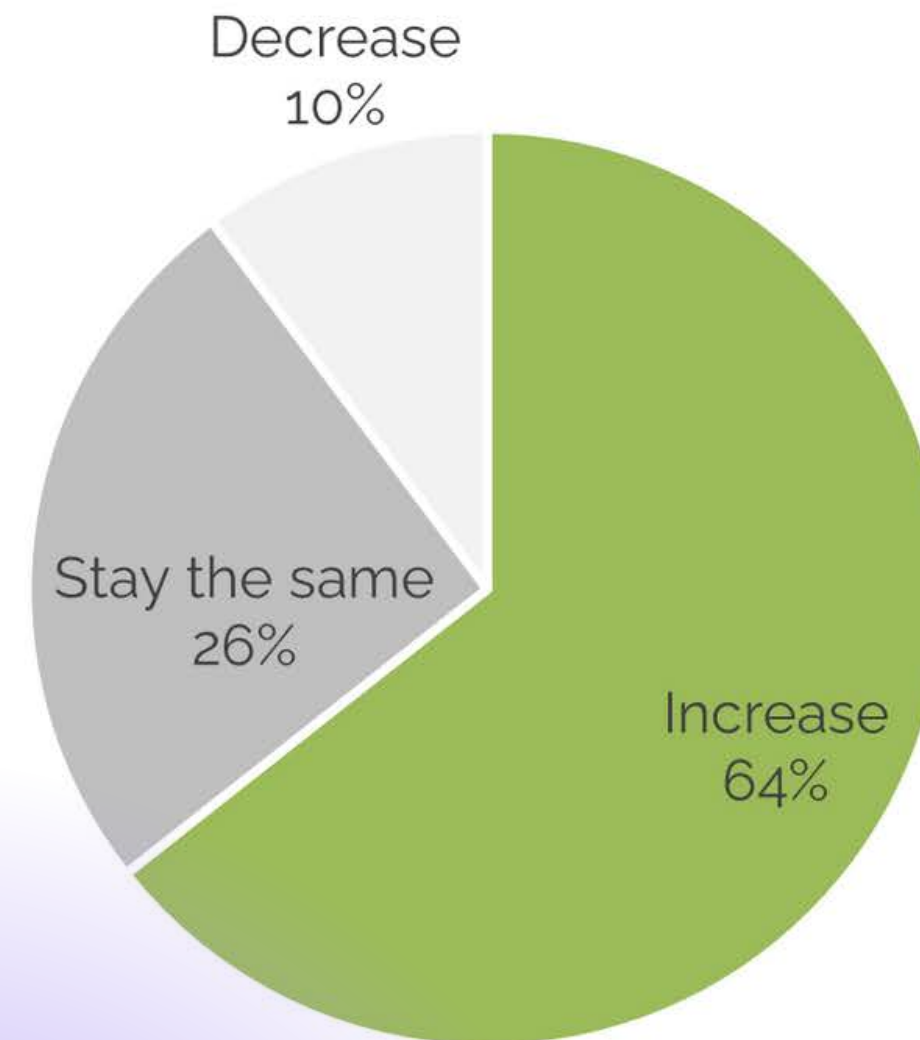
What do you foresee to be the biggest expense item in your events budget in the next two years?

Nearly seven out of 10 said F&B will take the biggest chunk out of their budget.

How do you foresee your overall events budget changing in the next two years?

Sixty-four percent of respondents expect their overall events budget will increase over the next two years by an average of 21 percent. One-quarter think their budget will remain the same and 10 percent of event professionals expect their budget to shrink by an average of 8 percent.

Budgets changing in the next two years

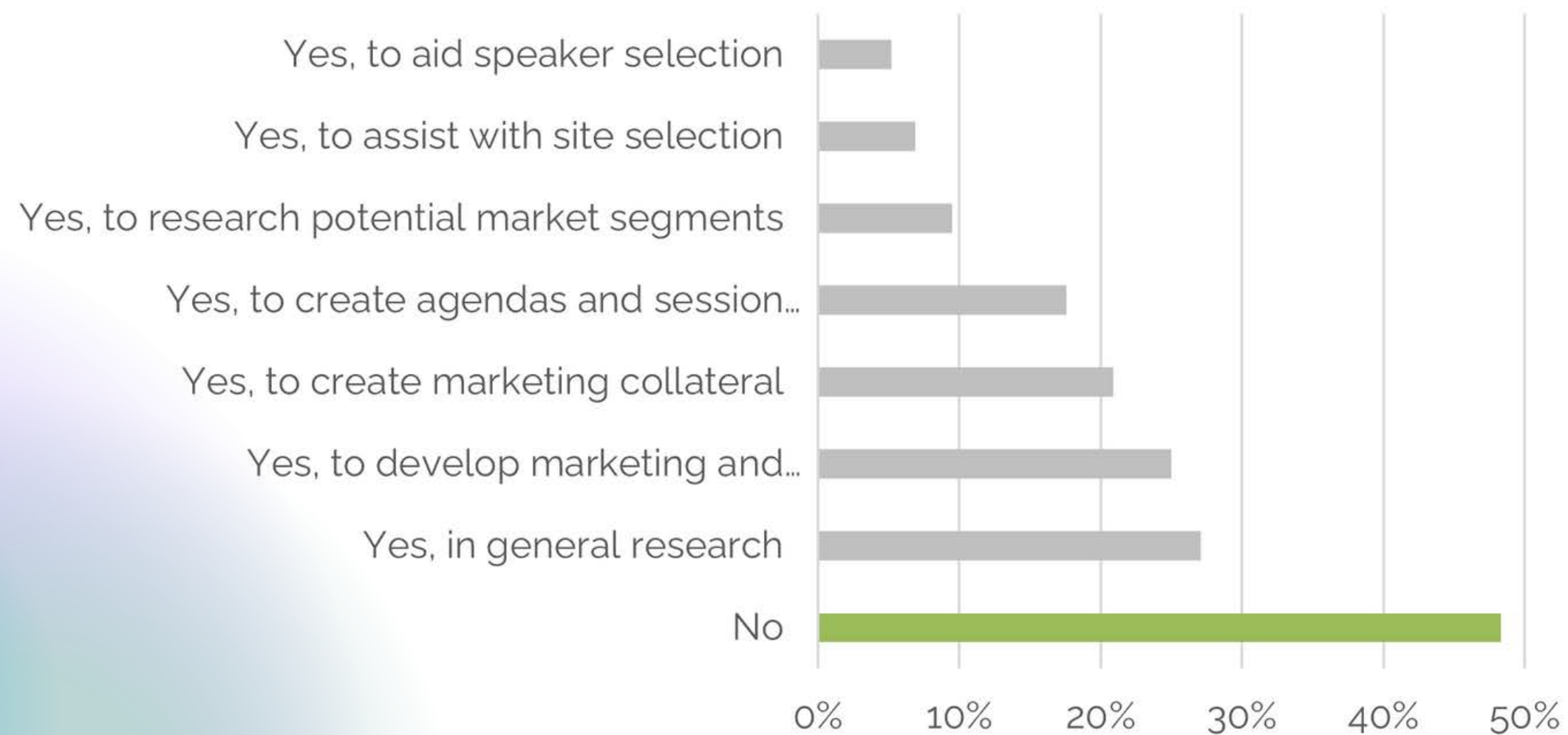


“I worry that COVID is coming back and will halt the events industry.”

Using Artificial Intelligence

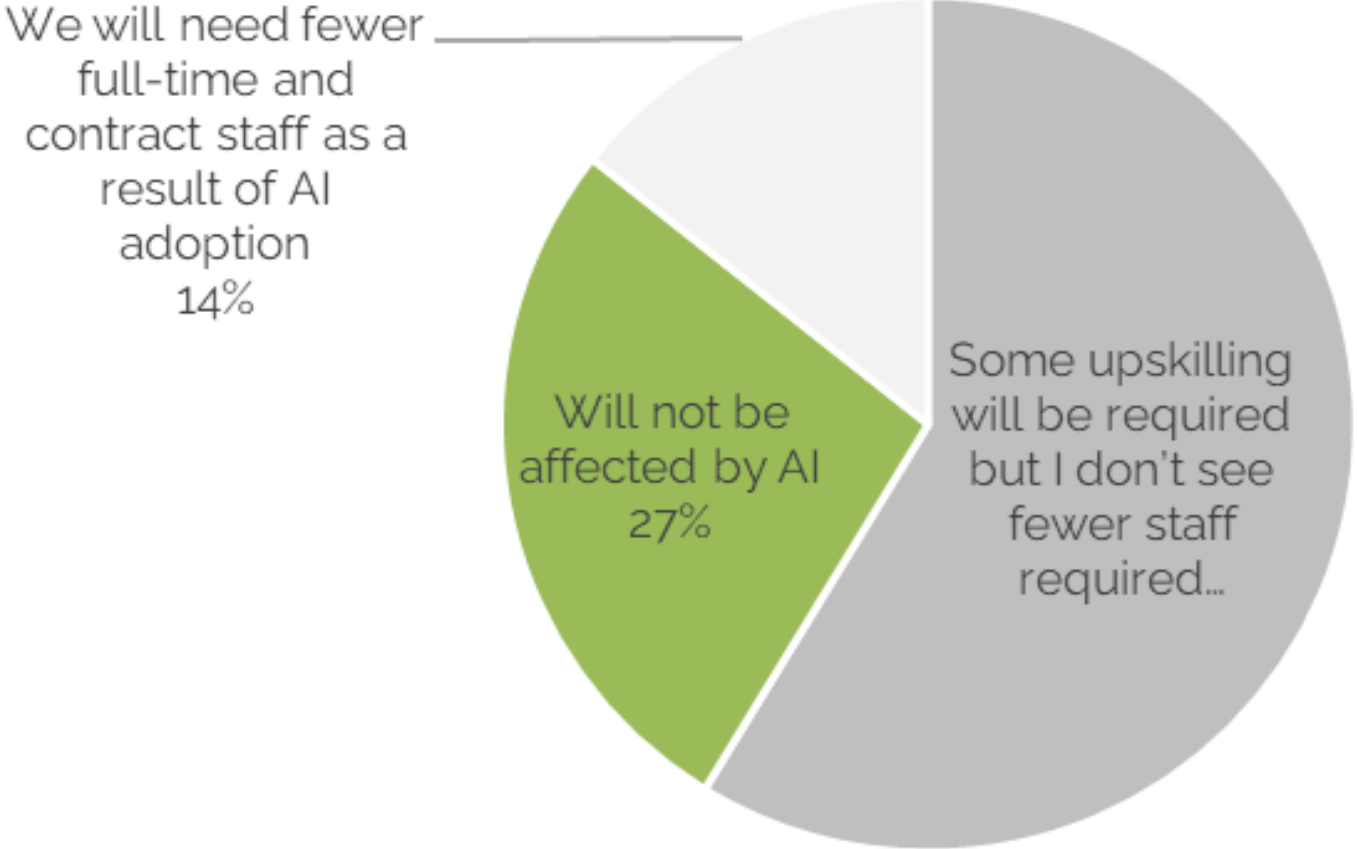
Are you using AI tools to assist in any aspect of your job?

Use of AI on the job



Nearly half (48 percent) of event professionals are not currently using AI, but 68 percent believe it will become a crucial tool for event pros in the next two years. Of those who are already using AI, the primary uses are for general research and marketing.

Staffing changes due to AI



How do you see staffing changing in the next couple of years as a result of AI and technology?

Nearly six out of 10 planners don't think AI will result in a lower staff head count.

“Events have become a lot more labor-intensive to plan and manage, with the expectation that a virtual/hybrid option be offered.”

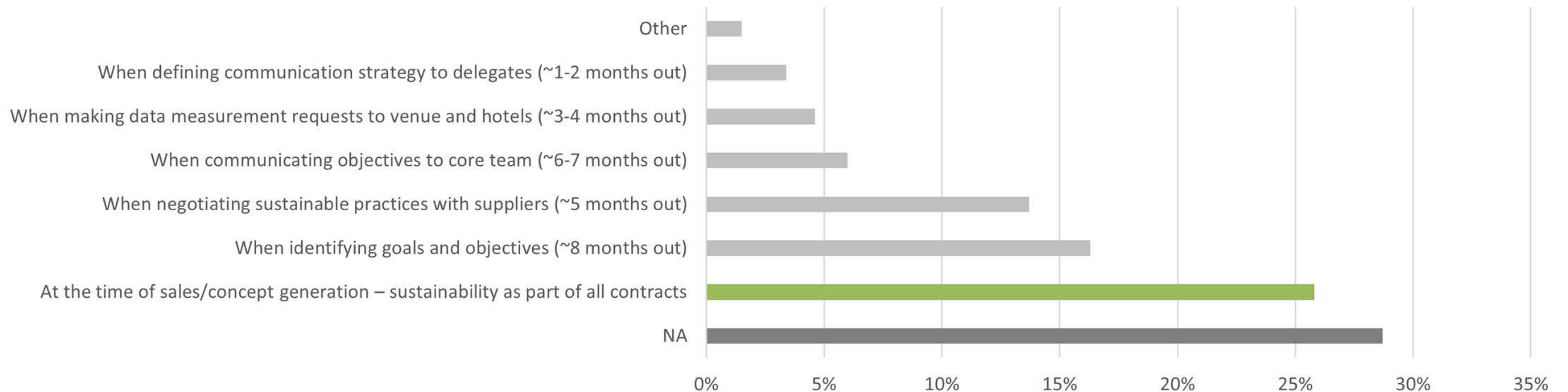
Focus on Sustainability

Three out of five planners said they have made sustainability practices more of a priority since the pandemic.

In which event phase do you start to actively design with sustainability in mind?

Of those who design events with sustainability in mind, more than one-quarter do so at the time of sales and concept generation.

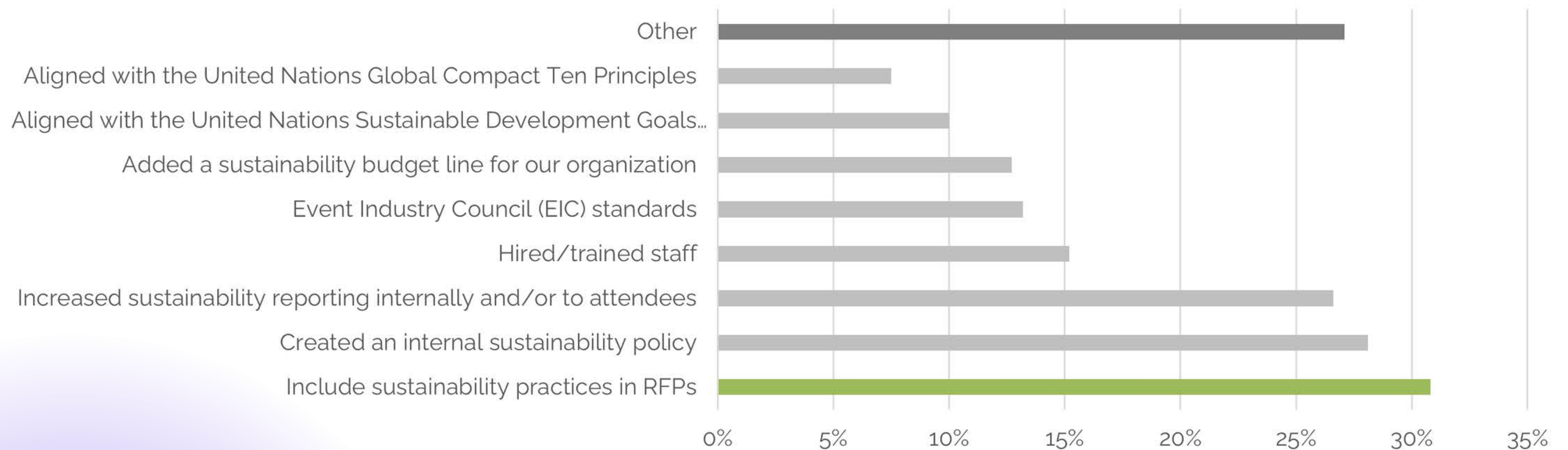
Event phase to start to design with sustainability in mind



What sustainability practices have you adopted post-pandemic?

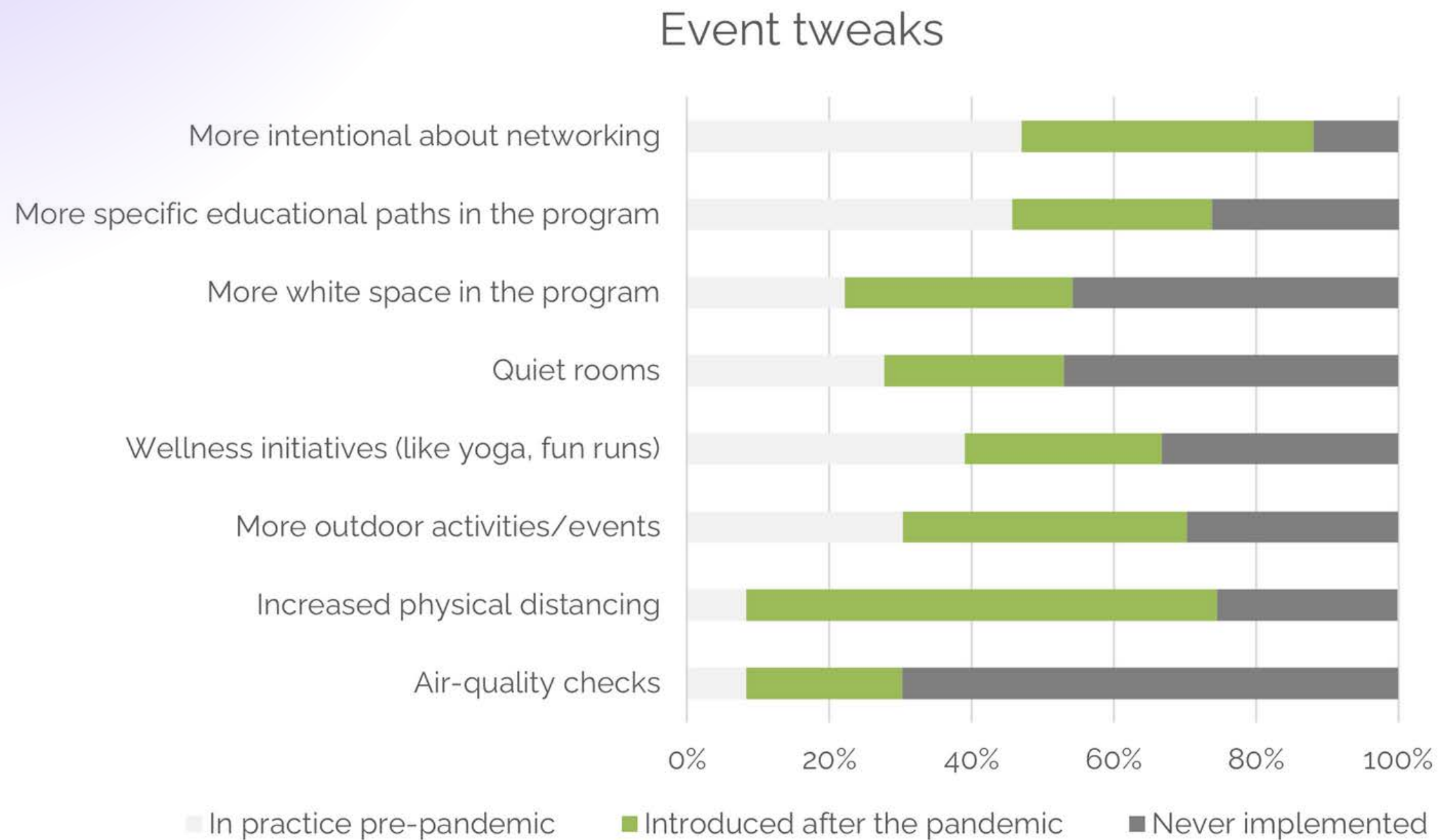
Thirty-one percent include sustainability practices in their RFPs.

Sustainability practices adopted post-pandemic



“I enjoy the work and the people I work with. But the work has gotten very difficult. Hotels and suppliers are non-responsive, understaffed, and offering poor-quality work.”

New Event Tweaks

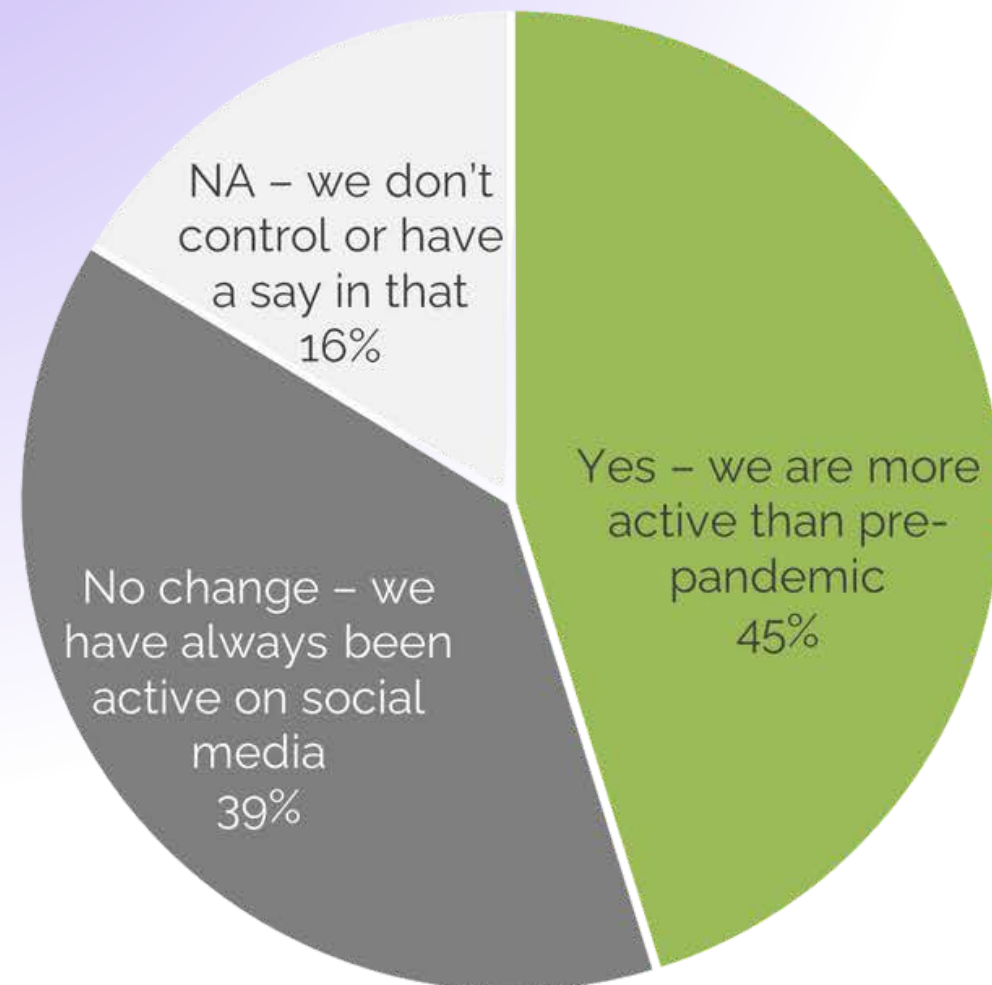


What tweaks have you introduced to your events after the pandemic?

Increased physical distancing and air-quality checks were part of the return to physical events, but organizers have also become more intentional about networking and wellness.

“Event marketing needs to undergo a transformation — many people are not approaching events in the same way and it does not drive the same type of business outcomes as it used to.”

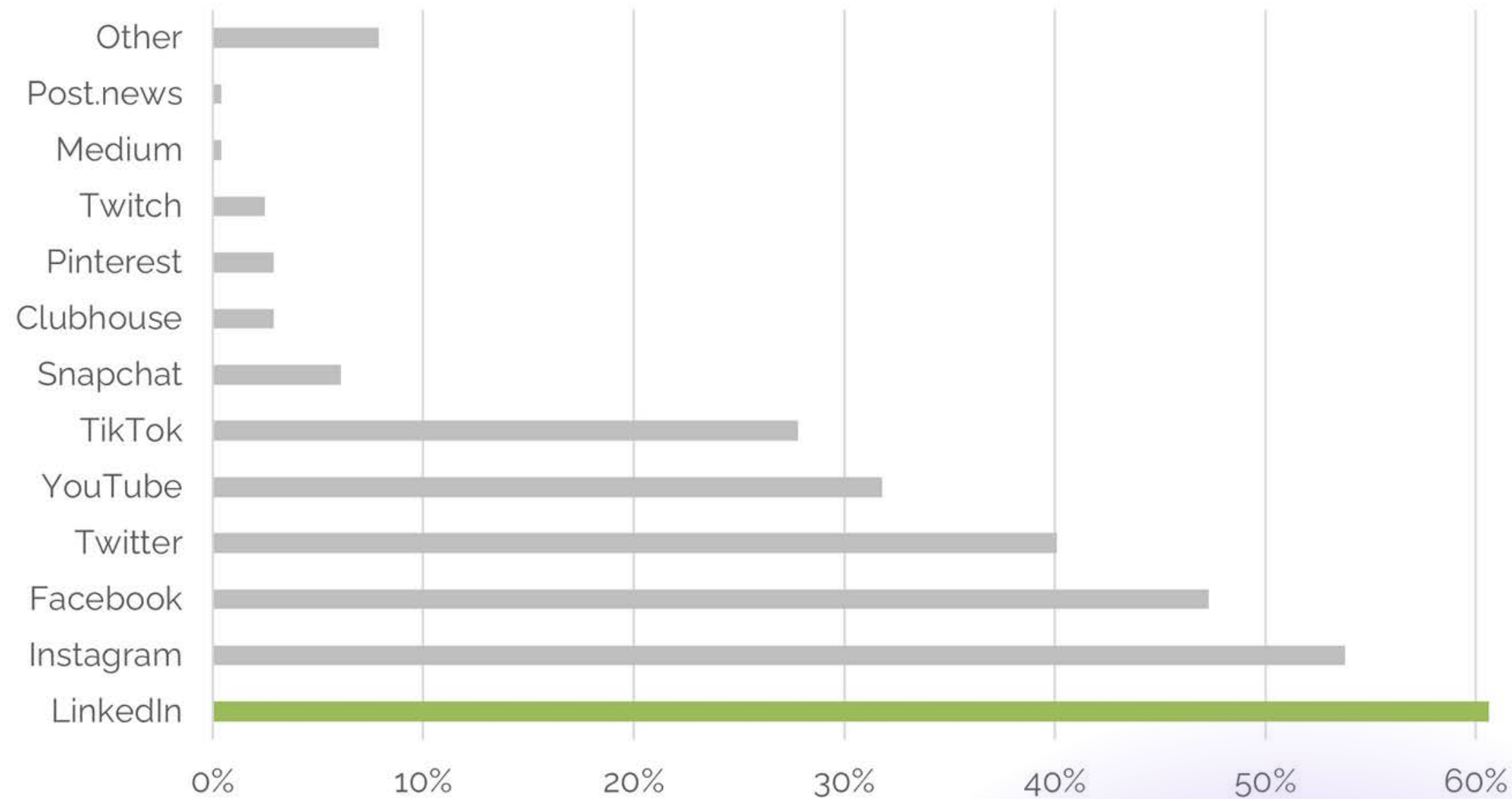
Social Media



Have you changed your social-media strategy for your events?

Forty-five percent say they are more active on social media than for pre-pandemic events.

Newly adopted social media channels



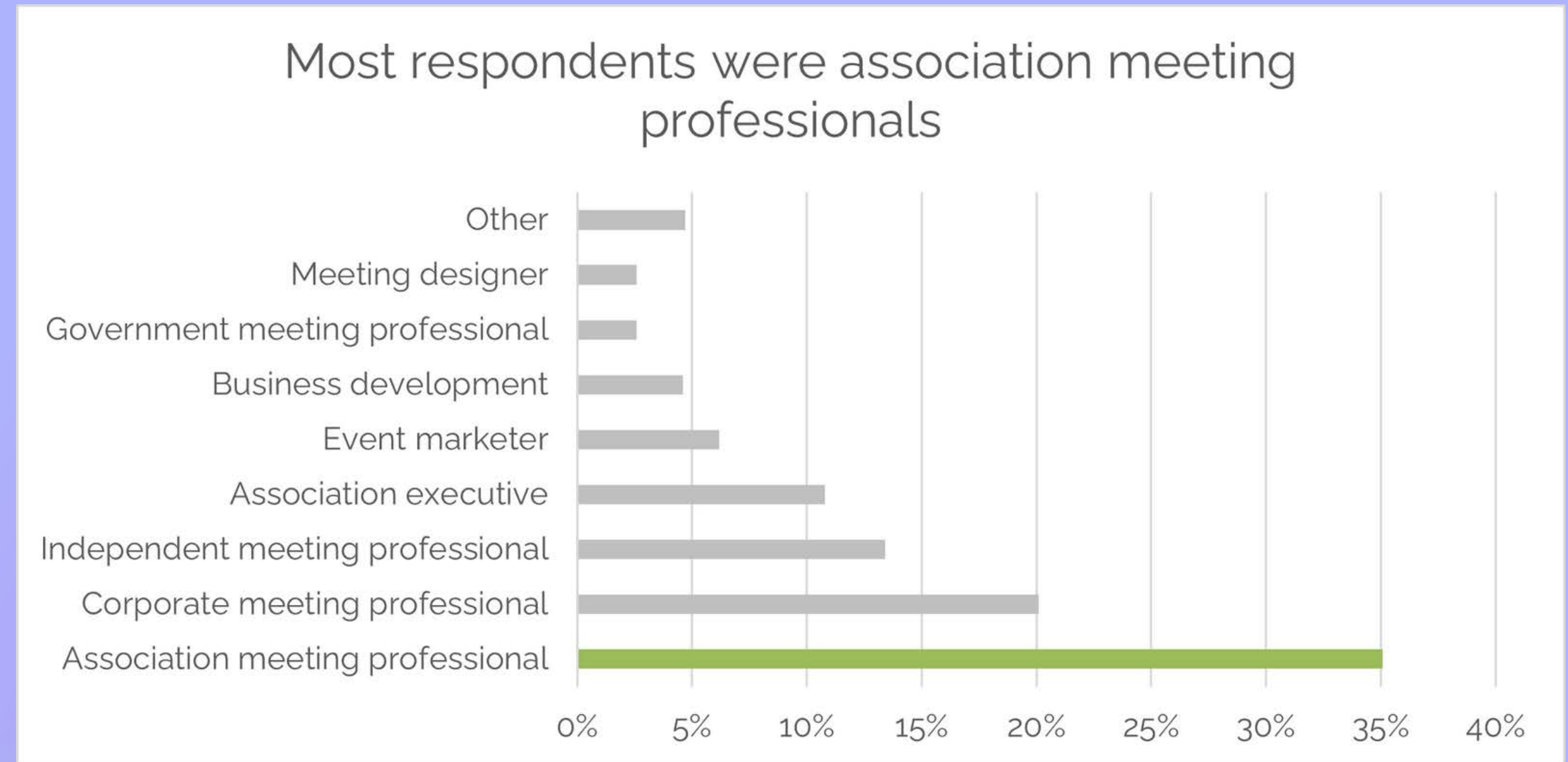
What new channels have you adopted?

LinkedIn is the most popular channel, followed by Instagram.

“With what we’ve learned over the last three years, I believe the sky’s the limit for what we can offer our attendees. The pandemic compressed 10 years of tech advances into just one or two.”

About Our Survey and Participants

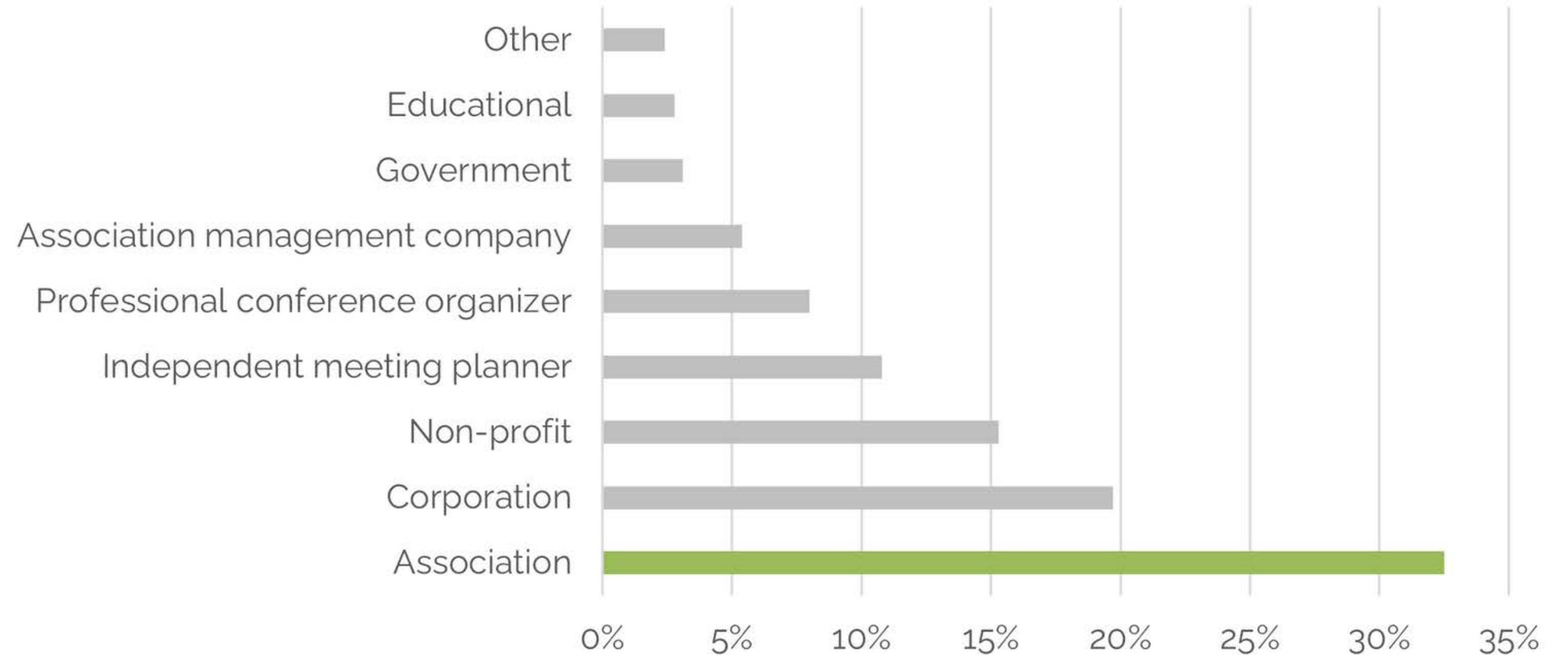
The 30th Annual Meetings Market Survey was conducted from late July to early September, following a nearly three-year pause as a result of the pandemic. A total of 788 event professionals responded to our questionnaire, which was updated from our previous survey to reflect how quickly the world has changed. Here is a snapshot of the participants:



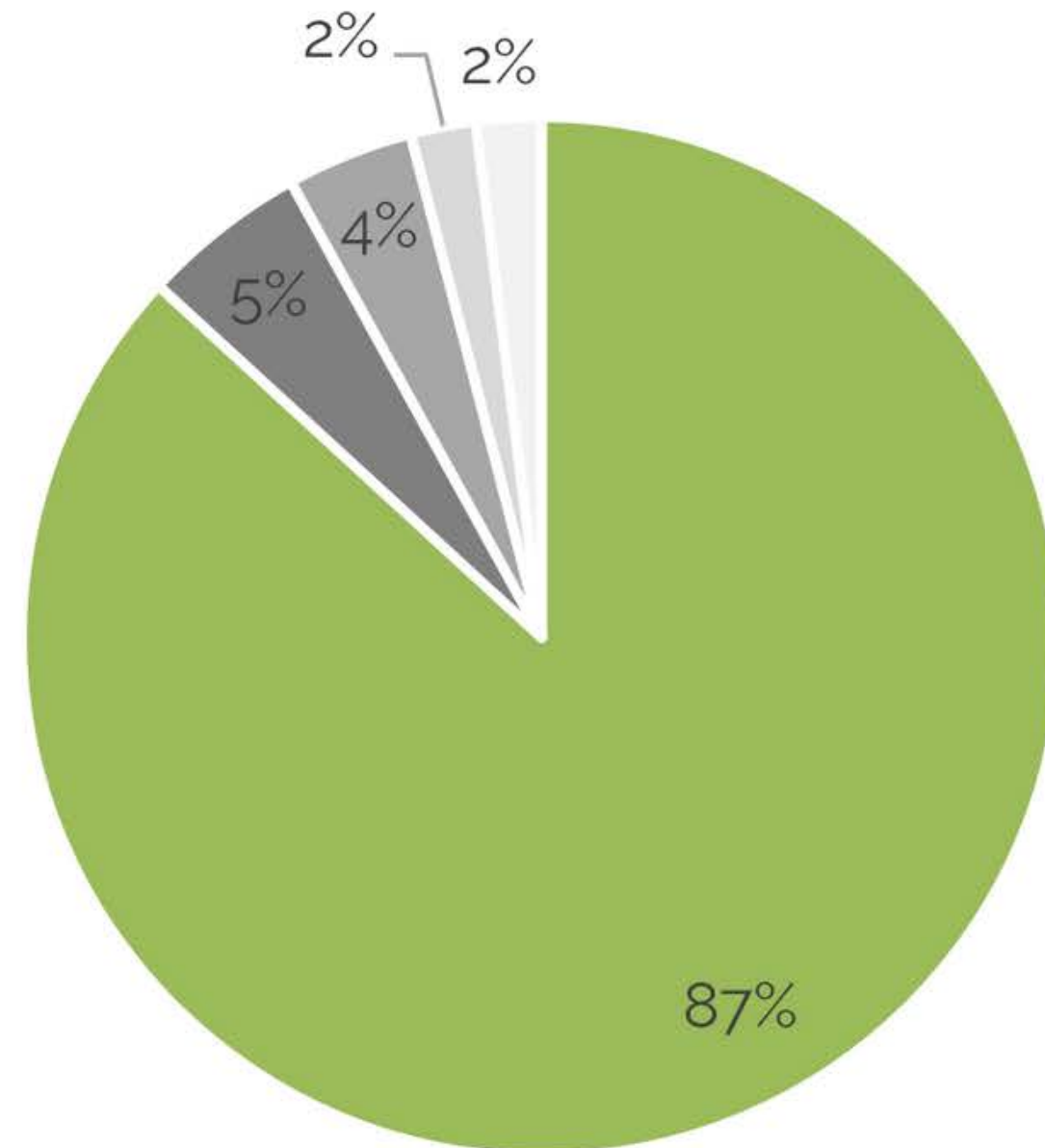
What describes your current role?

What best describes your organization?

Most respondents worked for associations



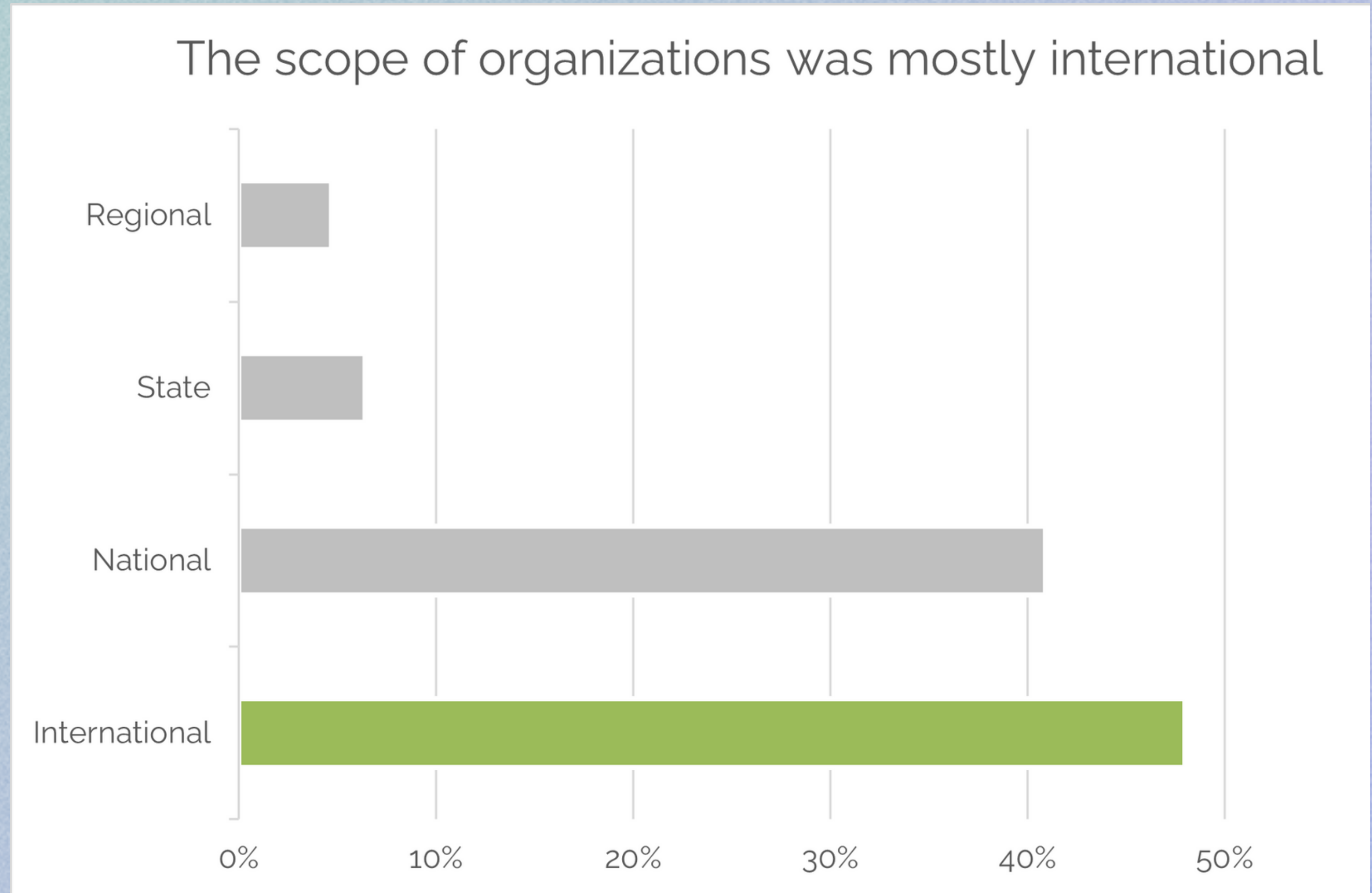
Respondents were largely from North America



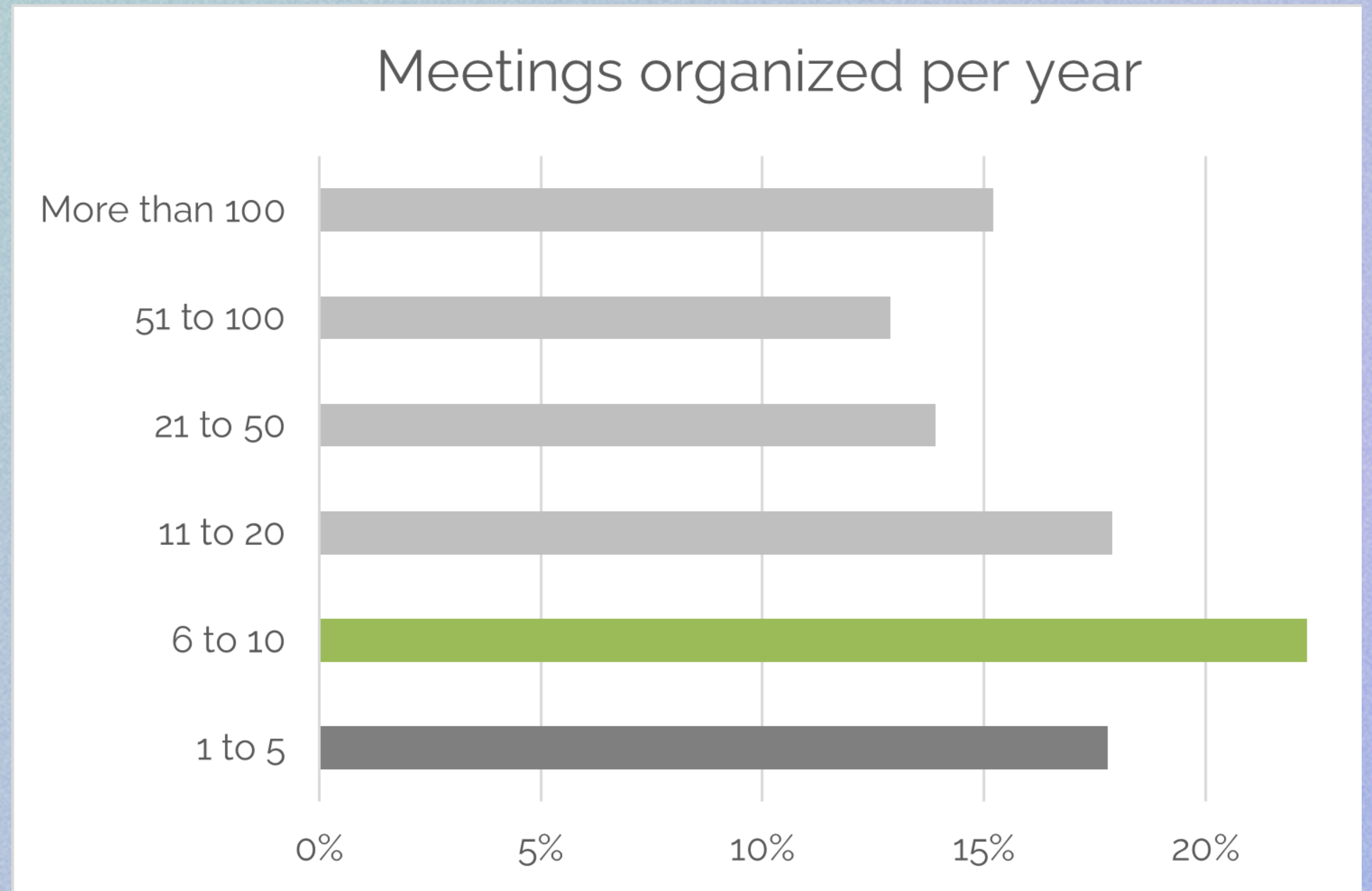
- North America
- Europe
- Asia Pacific
- Central America
- South America

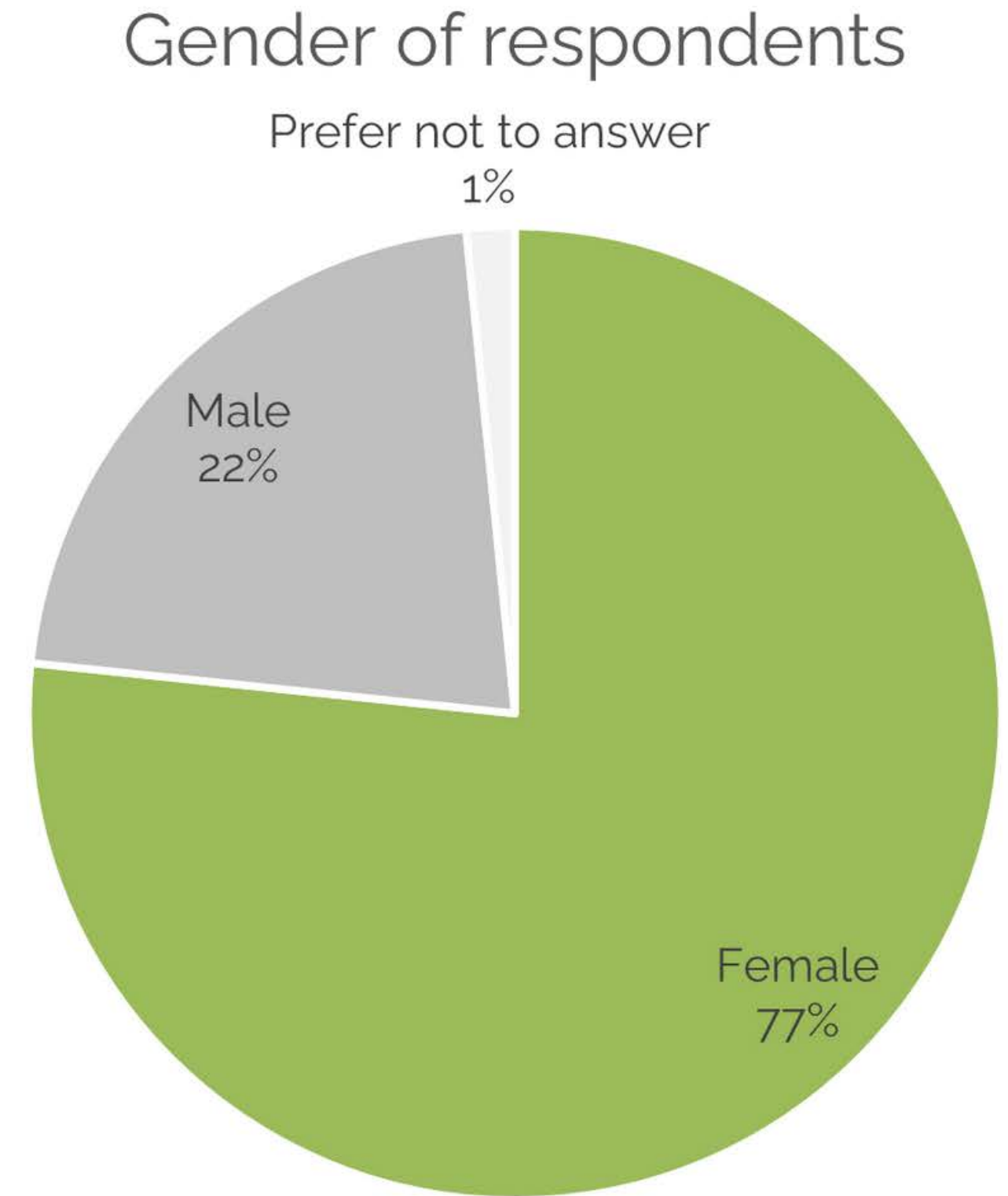
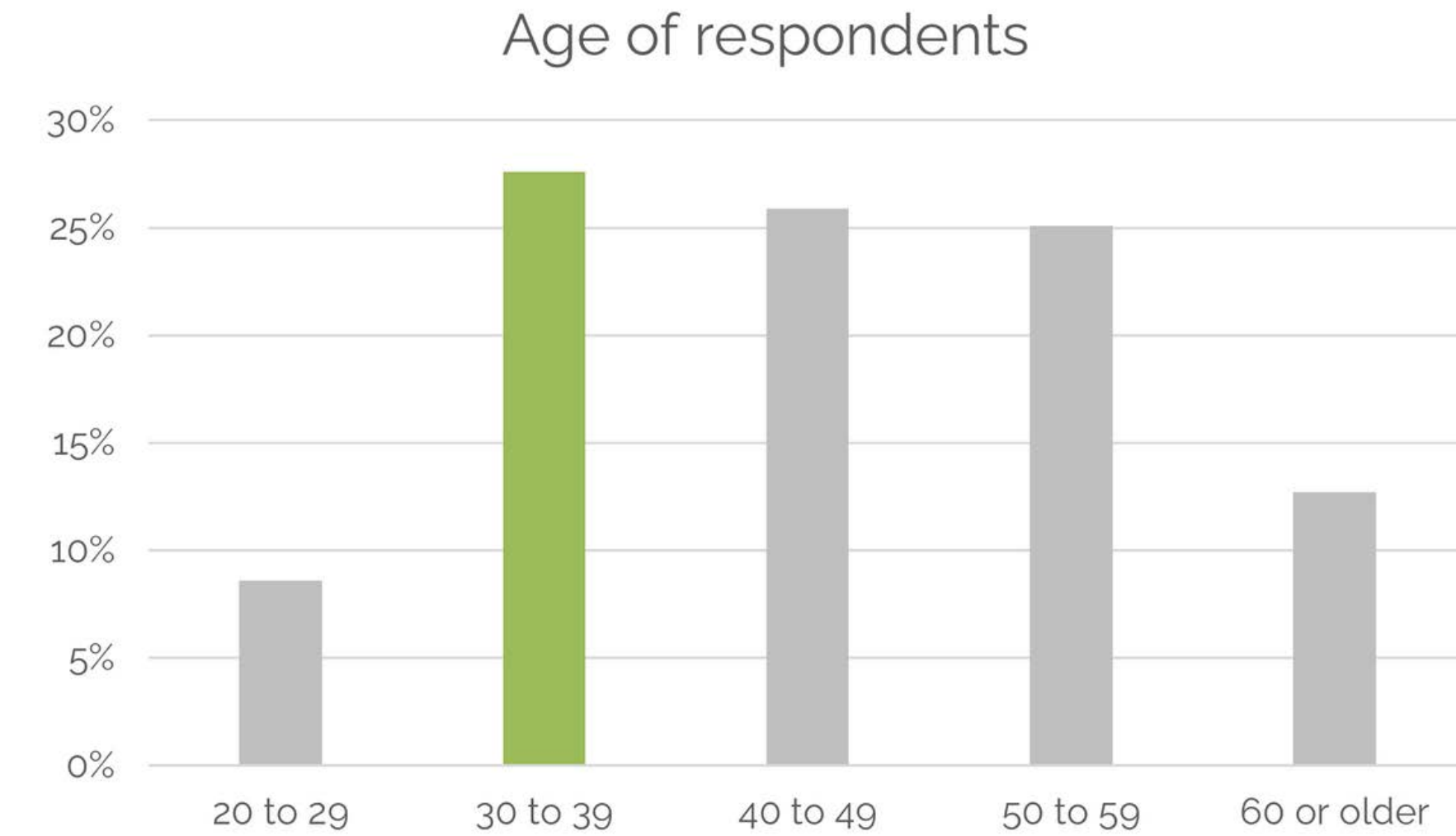
Where are you based?

Which best describes the scope of your organization?



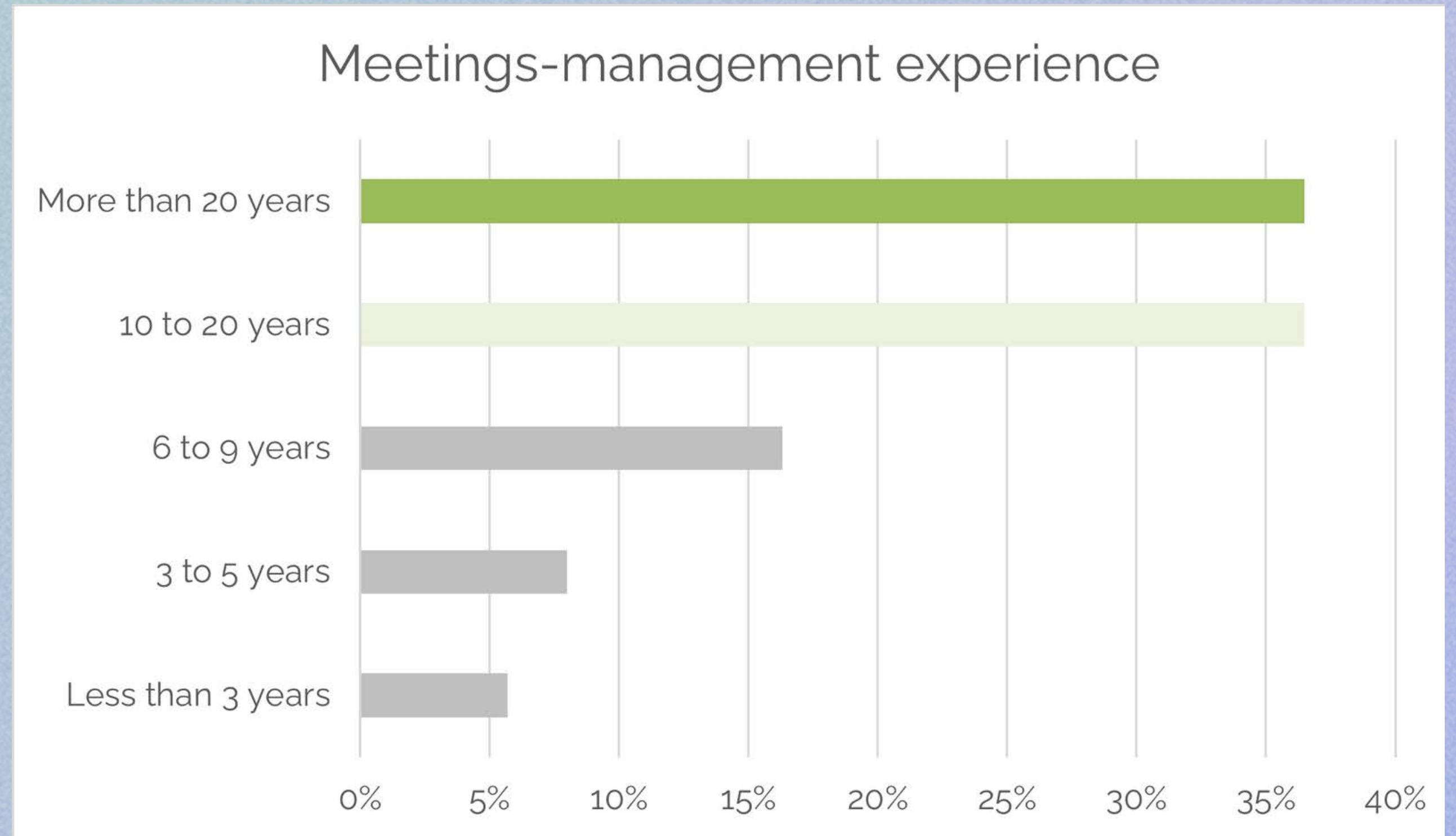
How many meetings does your organization plan each year?





What is your age and gender?

How many years of meeting-management experience do you have?



Magdalena Atanassova is Convene's digital media editor. Michelle Russell is Convene's editor in chief.

We used Sparkit.ai and ChatGPT for some of the survey analysis, including categorizing open-ended responses.

PCMA **convene**®