Hybrid Meetings & Council Operations

Current Practices, Barriers, and Opportunities

Fall Meeting - Council Coordination Committee
October 19, 2022 - Washington, D.C.

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Session Goals

- Share information on current meeting practices.
- Identify best practices coming out of pandemic.
- Discuss benefits and barriers to remote and hybrid meetings.
- Identify next steps (e.g., best practices guidance for hybrid meetings, vision statement about remote participation, etc.)

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Hybrid Meeting Operations
Question/Answer Categories

- Council, Committee, and Advisory Body Meeting Formats
- Meeting Platforms & Strategies for Increasing Effectiveness
- Council Member Participating & Voting
- Public Participation & Comment
- Advisory Bodies
- Advantages and Disadvantages
- Barriers
- Optional: Translation Services and Costs to Host In-person, Hybrid, and Remote Meetings

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Council Meetings

- Most Council meetings now held in-person but allow members to join/vote virtually on ad hoc basis.
- Various approaches for remote and in-person participation
  - One Council uses remote meetings to cover informational topics.
  - One Council considering holding one remote meeting per year to reduce costs.
  - One council set up host locations in more remote locations where Council members in those areas participate in person at satellite locations.
  - No Council is regularly holding traditional hybrid meetings.
- All Councils allow virtual public participation
  - Variation in level and type of participation

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Platforms/Strategies

- Platforms currently used:
  - WebEx
  - GoToWebinar & GoToMeeting
  - Zoom
  - Ring Central
- Strategies:
  - Platform that allows the organizer to control public participation.
  - Assigning a "help desk" staff to assist the public.
  - Assigning a dedicated IT staff member monitor the webinar and address technical issues.
  - Guidance reference memo prior to the hybrid meeting.
  - Separate live video stream for public.
  - Hybrid meetings need structured meeting flow.

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Members - Voting

All councils provide options to participate and vote virtually

- Format and approach varies among councils

Key insights - Council voting operations

- For some Councils, webinar participants called on for voice votes.
- One Council requires all members (both in-person and remote) to be logged into webinar and use raise hand function to speak and vote.
- One council considering requiring in-person attendance to vote.
- At least one council is considering electronic voting technology.
- One council provides online comment portal for members to provide written comment before and during the meeting.

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Public Participation

- All Councils allow virtual public participation

  - One council provides for comment via email, an e-portal, via phone or via webinar.

  - One council allows the public to comment by phone, though they can listen in via webinar.

  - One council prioritizes in-person public comments.

  - One council states that most of the public participation is virtual.

- Most councils have not seen increase in public participation with virtual option, though virtual allows participation in specific agenda topics.

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Advisory Bodies

- Wide variation among Councils
  - Several hold Advisory Panel and SSC meetings remotely, especially for shorter meetings or particular topics.
  - One holds fully in person or fully remote, but not hybrid.
  - Several discourage remote participation and cite challenges with hybrid formats (including staffing/technology).
- Some noted that virtual public participation in advisory body meetings is particularly challenging.
- One Council noted that public participation in advisory body meetings would be enhanced with remote access.

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Advantages

- Cost
- Allows for participation even if sick
- Increased productivity - less time spent on travel
- Ease of stakeholder participation
- Reduces overall time and costs (e.g., public can attend for specific agenda topic)

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Disadvantages & Barriers

Disadvantages & Barriers

- Technical challenges (audio quality issues, unmuted participants, internet disconnections) can hinder discussion and generally slow down the pace of meetings.
- Increased planning and preparation by staff and Chair for hybrid meetings.
- Difficult for virtual participants to fully participate (e.g., have sidebar conversations).
- Lack of relationship building among members and with public.
- Time zone differences and reliability of internet in remote locations.
- Only those with technology can participate.

Costs

- Hybrid meetings can be more expensive to run because of additional internet and administrative costs.
- Remote council meetings cost less but added IT needs and administrative staffing requirements

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Summary - Current Meeting Practices

- Most Council meetings are now held in-person but allow members to join/vote virtually on an ad hoc basis.
- No Council is regularly holding traditional hybrid meetings.
- Some unique approaches are being used (e.g., remote meetings for informational topics).
- All Councils allow virtual public participation with variation in approaches.
- There is wide variation in structure of advisory body meetings.

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Discussion Questions

- Given the information presented, are there ideas you want to further explore to improve remote / hybrid meetings?

- IT/Technical issues and staffing were cited as big barriers. Are there opportunities for Councils to collaborate to address some of those issues?

- Given the information presented, are there best practices you want to formally document (e.g., guidance, vision statement, etc.)
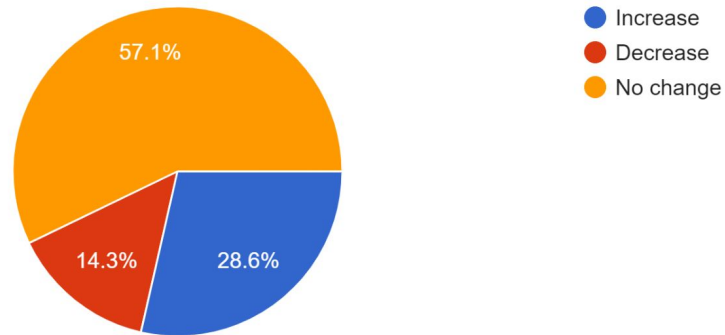
Additional Information

Public Participation

12.a. Over the past two years (since fall 2020), have you seen an increase or decrease in the amount of public attendance at council or advisory body meetings?

7 responses

- Increase
- Decrease
- No change

57.1%

14.3%

28.6%

13.a. Over the past two years (since fall 2020), have you seen an increase or decrease in the amount of public comment at council or advisory body meetings?
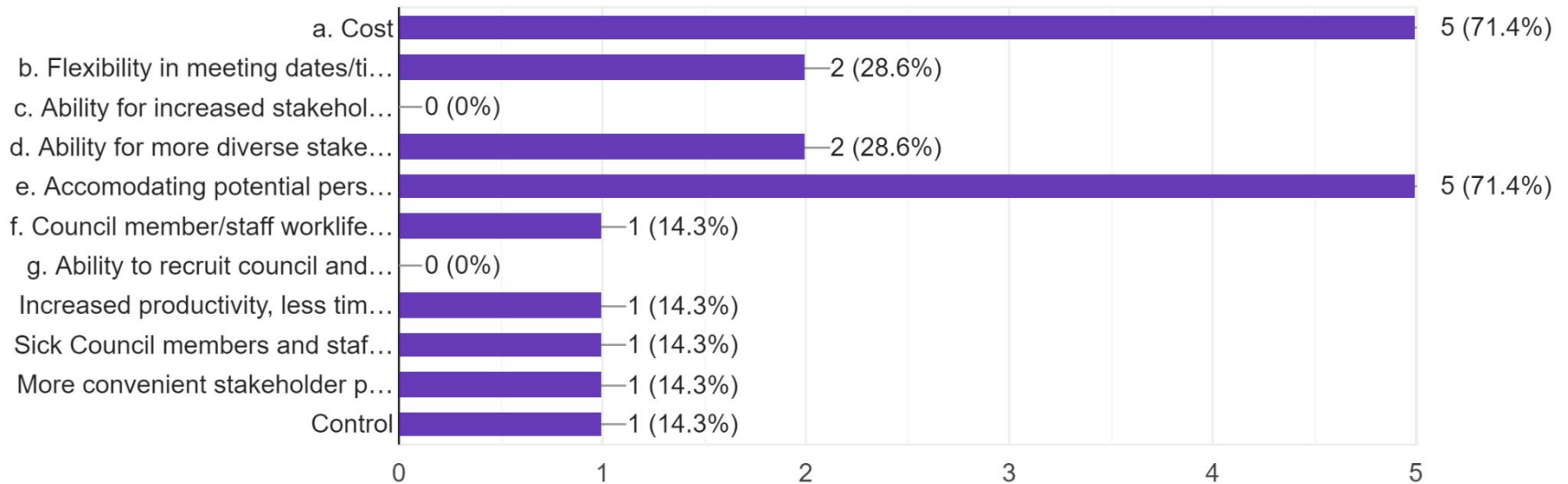
7 responses

- Increase
- Decrease
- No change

85.7%

14.3%

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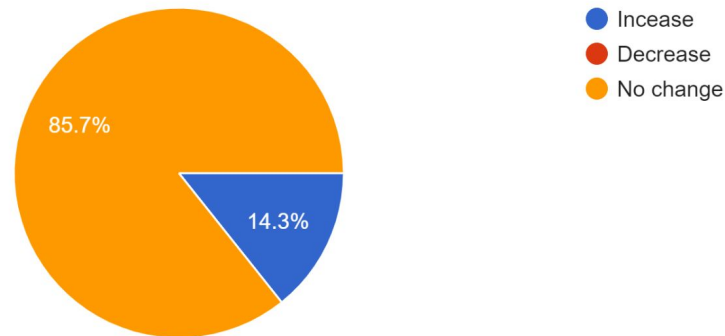
Advantages

14.a. What are the top three advantages to holding hybrid or remote council meetings?

7 responses

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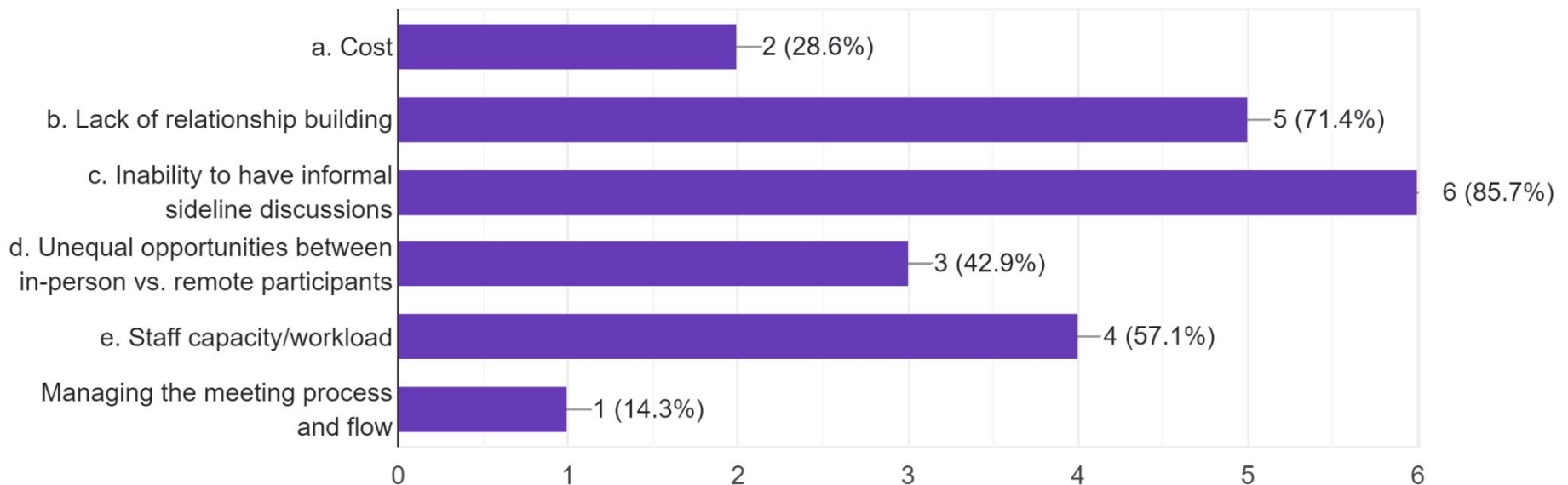
Disadvantages

15.a. What are the top three disadvantages to holding hybrid or remote council meetings?

7 responses

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Barriers

16.a. What are the top barriers for holding hybrid council meetings?

7 responses

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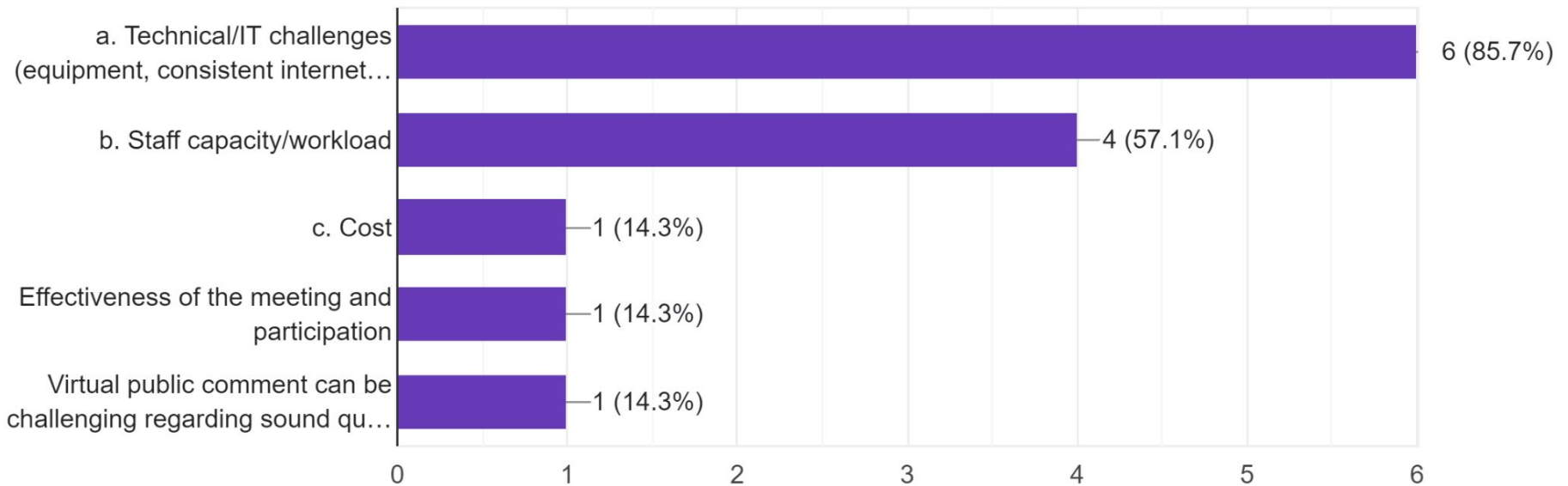
Optional Questions - Costs & Translation Services

- No council has offered translation services as part of their council or committee meetings
- Hybrid council meeting costs
  - Dependent on the number of travelers vs. remote participants (travel costs & venue costs)
    - One council stated that hybrid meetings cost about $20,000 more than in-person meetings due to added internet service and administrative contracting
- In-person council meeting costs
  - $80,000-250,000 (for councils that provided ranges)
  - Depends on factors such as travel costs, location, seasonality
- Remote council meeting costs
  - Varies, though main cost is council member stipends
  - Less than in-person, but do have additional IT needs and/or additional administrative staffing requirements

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