

# **BBS 2011 Community Engagement Survey**

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## 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Surveys on community engagement typically focus on practitioners, what we do and how we can improve our practice.

But that only tells half the story.

Successful community and stakeholder engagement relies on the community. We rely on community groups to be engaged, to contribute new thinking and to help us create better decisions and better solutions, whether it's in policy or infrastructure projects.

For the fourth time, BBS has conducted an annual community engagement survey with Queensland community groups to understand how community engagement can be improved across the state.

The telephone survey involved 40 representatives from community, environmental and interest groups throughout Queensland.

BBS is an Australasian award winner in community engagement, and one of Queensland's most experienced communications consultancies.

Our work on the Urban Land Development Authority's Northshore Hamilton urban development area also won an IAP2 award.

The consultancy has managed community engagement programs for some of Queensland's largest developments, including government projects, water recycling, arts developments, residential communities, public spaces, road infrastructure, airports and commercial developments.

BBS worked with the Brisbane City Council's Neighbourhood Planning team to create a new city plan. This included the CityShape Conference, which was awarded the Public Participation Process award by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) – the highest community engagement award in Australasia.



## 2.0 KEY FINDINGS

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### **Substandard Intent to Engage Creates Most Outrage**

The way in which community groups perceive the intent of projects when engaging is more likely to cause outrage than the way in which groups are engaged, or the impact of the engagement on the final decision.

One in four groups said the factor most likely to cause outrage was the intent of the community engagement, with 25% outraged when they believed the engagement was a token effort and 17% outraged when they believed the decision had already been made.

### **Poor Transparency About What's Non-Negotiable**

Despite one in four saying that knowing the negotiables and non-negotiables were the most important factor for a successful engagement program, only 8% said they were often or always advised of the project non-negotiables.

### **Hard Copy Feedback Preferred to Online**

Open-ended feedback forms in printed version were preferred over all other feedback methods, rating almost seven times more popular than website feedback forms.

### **Keep it Simple**

Community groups said they prefer more traditional, simple techniques such as face-to-face briefings, public meetings and telephone hotlines for engagement over more cutting edge or deliberative techniques such as citizen juries. These more popular techniques enabled community groups to ask questions from staff, which they found effective.

### **Providing the Right Information is Vital**

Information was regarded as the most important factor in delivering a successful engagement program, over people, time and techniques.

### **Government Vastly Outperforms the Private Sector**

For the first time in the history of BBS' community engagement survey, the government has been a clear winner over the private sector. Traditionally, the gap between the public and private sector has been small, with the winner changing from survey to survey.

### **Online Popularity Increases but Not for All**

Preference for online communication channels is growing by community groups for engagement, but not for all age groups and definitely not as a means for providing feedback from the community to project teams.

While 38% liked to receive information via online channels, only 9% prefer to provide feedback via websites.





Although those in their 30s preferred to receive information via online channels, respondents in their 40s were more likely to prefer face-to-face, while those in their 60s preferred print-based channels.

### **We Are Not 'Closing the Loop'**

Closing the feedback loop remains a challenge, with 84% of the respondents saying that organisations are either poor or average in informing the community about the feedback received and how it impacted on a decision.

In addition, 29% of community groups were most likely to be outraged when the community's input did not impact on a final decision. This may be related to either the real impact or the ability of the project team to effectively communicate how community input affected a decision.



## 3.0 THE SURVEY

*“the who and the where”*

### Survey questions

1. When you've been invited to take part in community and / or stakeholder engagement, how often have you been told what the negotiables and non-negotiables are?
2. How many community and stakeholder engagement projects are you currently being asked to provide feedback or input on?
3. What is the most important factor for a successful engagement?
4. When you are asked to provide feedback, which method do you prefer?
5. In your experience, who do you think does a better job at community engagement?
6. Do you believe community feedback is taken into consideration when developing projects?
7. What outrages you about how community engagement is carried out?
8. How would you prefer projects to communicate or engage the community?
9. How effective are organisations at informing the community or stakeholders about what feedback they've received and how it's impacted on a decision?
10. What techniques would you prefer developers/government to use when engaging community interest groups in their planning process?
11. Can you think of a good example of community engagement? What made it good?
12. Can you think of a bad example of community engagement? What made it bad?



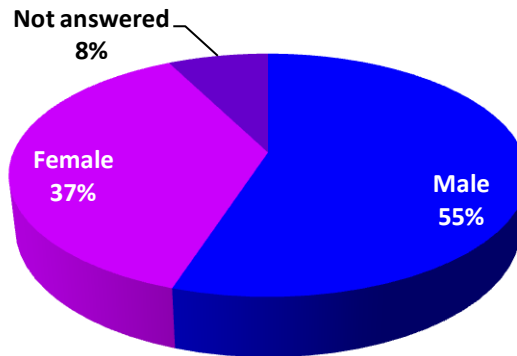


## 4.0 DETAILED FINDINGS

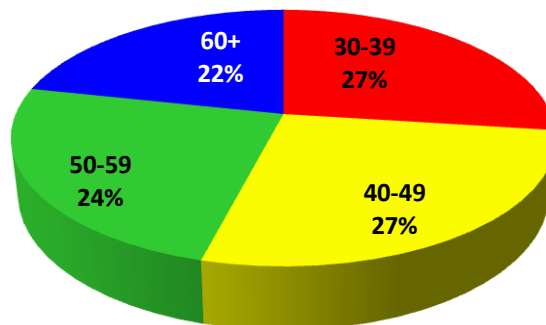
*“the results”*

### Demographic Profile

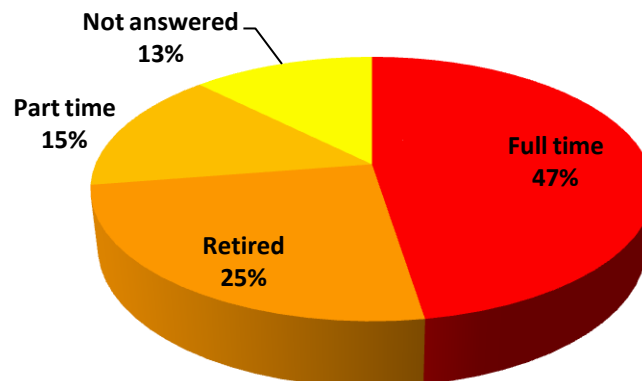
**Gender**



**Age Group**



**Work Status**



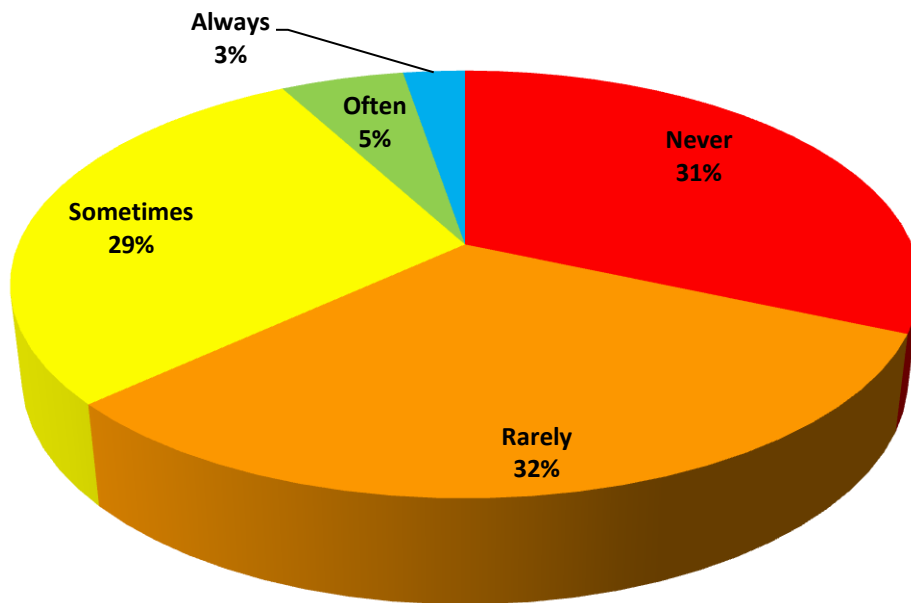


**Question 1: When you've been invited to take part in community and / or stakeholder engagement, how often have you been told what the negotiables and non-negotiables are?**

Over 60% of groups surveyed said they had 'never' or 'rarely' been told the negotiables of a project. Almost a third of respondents answered with 'sometimes' with less than 10% answering with either 'often' or 'always'.

**"It would give you a clearer idea about what the discussions are [about]."**

**"Usually you're just presented with a draft plan or policy...but you're not told what the negotiables or non-negotiables are."**

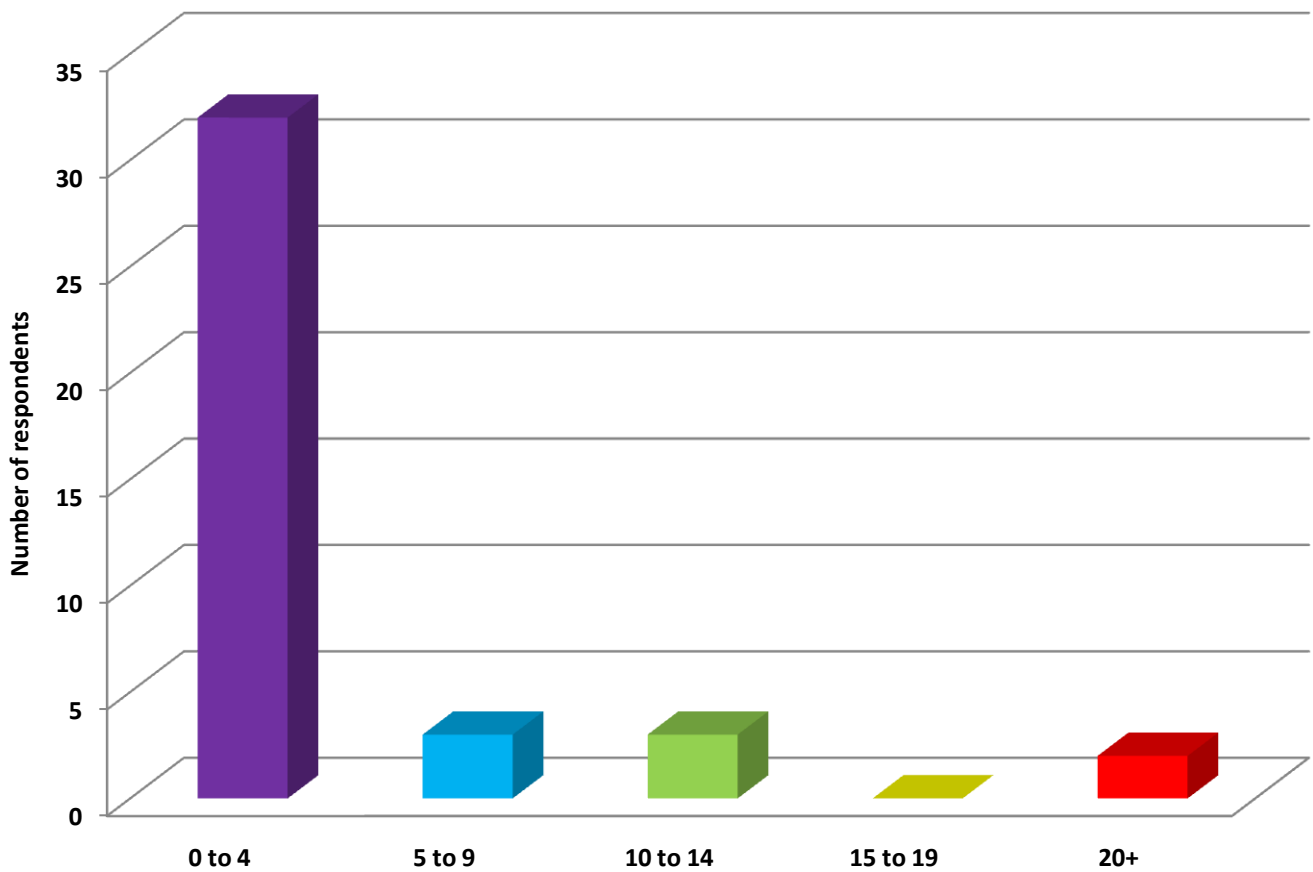




**Question 2: How many community and stakeholder engagement projects are you currently being asked to provide feedback or input on?**

The vast majority of respondents were providing input for 0-4 engagement projects, with 62% of community groups having input on at least two separate projects.

Although only a few groups were simultaneously involved in more than 4 engagement projects at the time of the survey, it is interesting to note that some groups are being asked to contribute a lot of time and resources on multiple engagement projects in any one point in time.





### Question 3: What is the most important factor for a successful engagement?

Respondents were asked to nominate one of five factors as the most important for a successful engagement program.

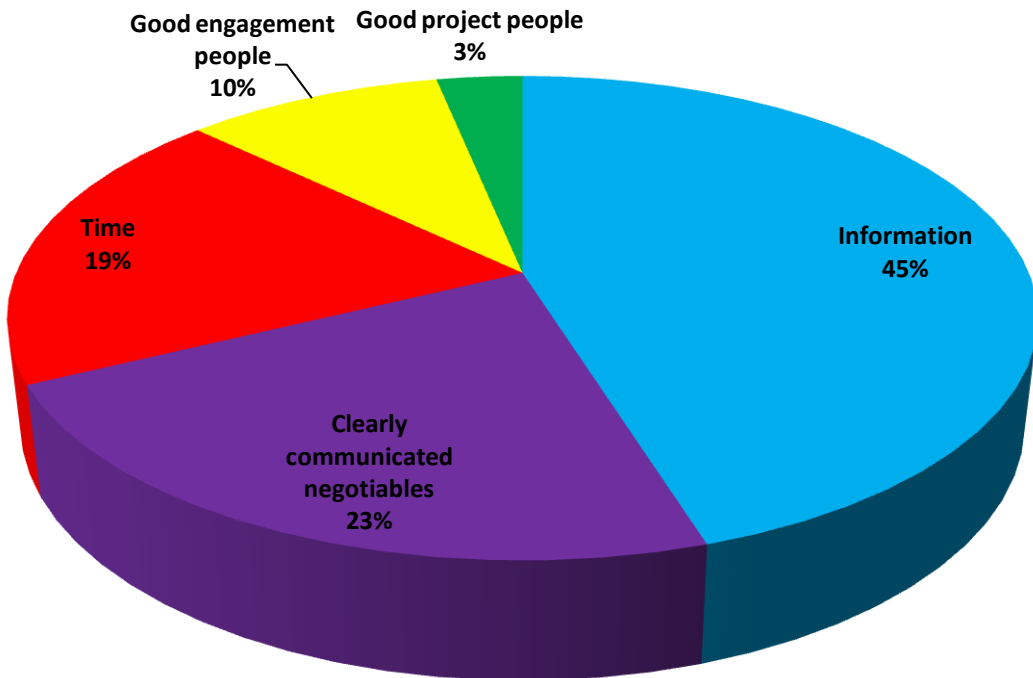
Just under half of the respondents nominated 'information' as the most important factor for successful engagement, however 'clearly communicated negotiables' and 'time' also had a strong response.

Respondents who provided additional comments on this question generally agreed that all the factors played an important role in the engagement process, but the availability of accurate and clear information was seen as the most important thing to get right.

**“Too often, consultation is undertaken at a later stage, and as a result it is informative rather than dialogic.”**

**“The most important thing is that the organisation allows for 2-way communication, rather than just telling them what is about to happen.”**

### **What is the most important factor for a successful engagement?**





#### Question 4: When you are asked to provide feedback, which method do you prefer?

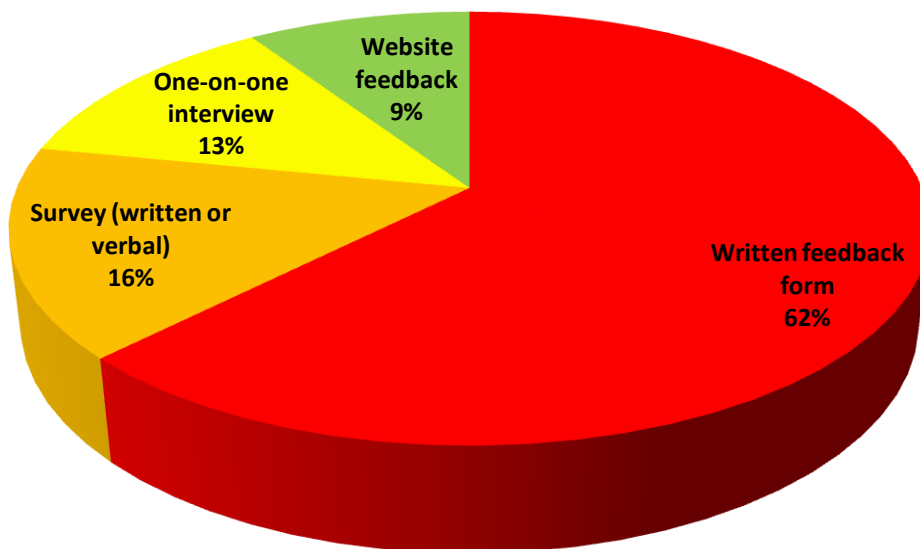
Over 60% of respondents agreed that a written feedback form was the preferred method to provide feedback.

A more formalised survey with specific Q&As rated second to the more open-ended feedback form.

Although written forms are a more traditional means of providing feedback, they were still the most popular choice compared to the more modern option of website feedback. This trend was displayed across all age groups.

“Written is the most effective because at least then there is a record.”

“Depends on the project and the size of the community.”





**Question 5: In your experience, who do you think does a better job at community engagement?**

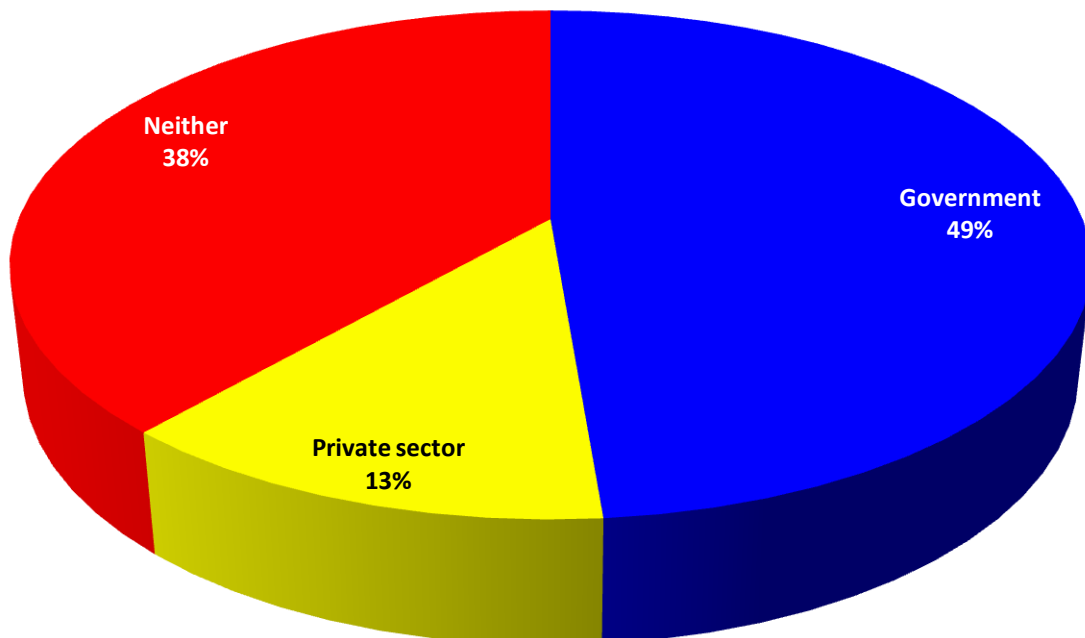
Just under half of the survey respondents nominated government as doing a better job at community engagement. Only 13% thought that the private sector were better in this field.

Interestingly, 38% of respondents believed neither group did a better job and chose instead to abstain from nominating either one.

Common themes displayed in the alternative answers included non-profit organisations and community engagement consultancies.



**Who does a better job at community consultation?**





**Question 6: Do you believe community feedback is taken into consideration when developing projects?**

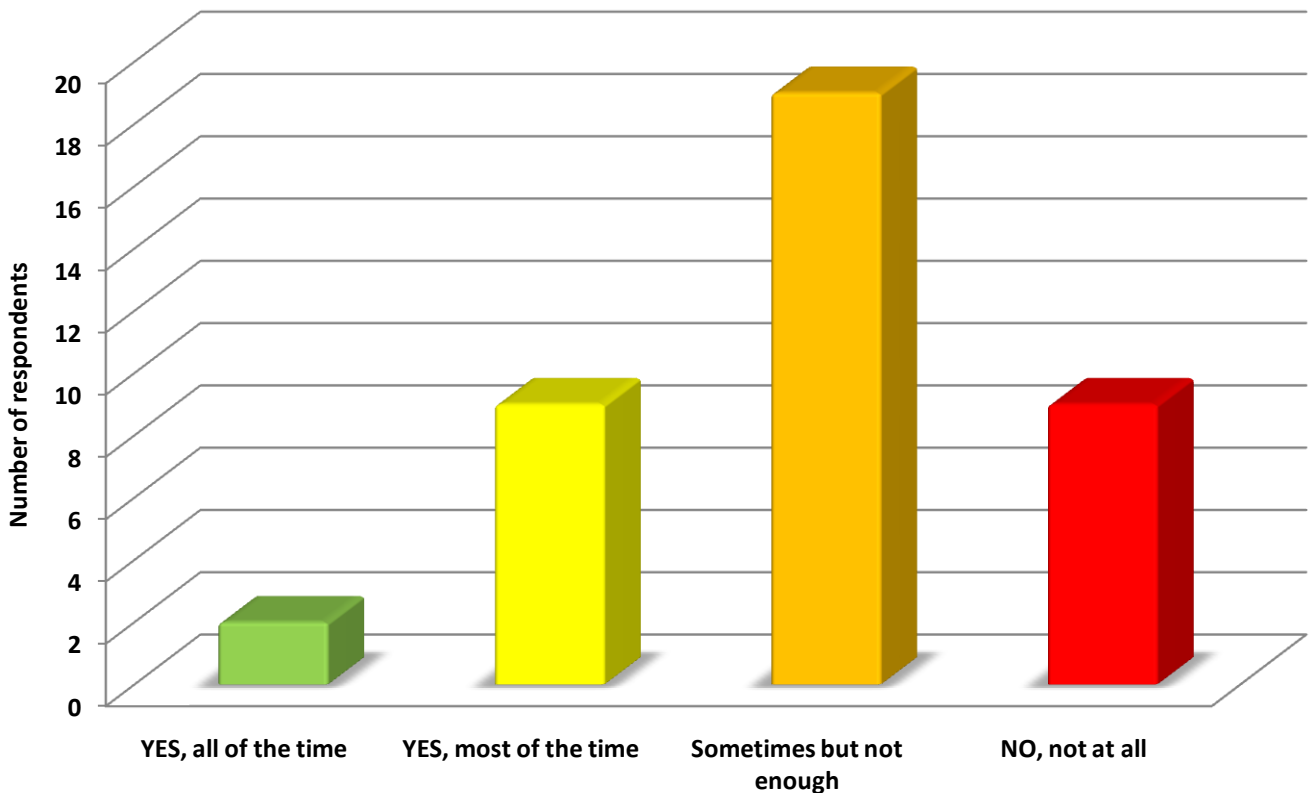
For the first time in BBS' surveys, the number of respondents who believed their feedback was taken into consideration all or most of the time was greater than the number that said it was not taken into account at all.

However, the majority of groups (70%) said feedback was not taken into account enough.

**“Only when it is in accordance with their current way of thinking. When community feedback does not match up with what the consultant wants to hear, it is not taken into consideration.”**

**“They tick the boxes - are they holding engagement? Yes. Are they engaging us? Yes. But the results/outcomes are usually not successful [for us]. A lot of organisations use the community consultation process as a “feel good” exercise to pacify concerned parties.”**

**Do you believe community feedback is taken into consideration when developing projects?**





### Question 7: What outrages you about how community engagement is carried out?

On face value, the results appear fairly evenly spread, however the most common factor that causes outrage is the community's perceived intent of the community engagement by the project. A total of 42 per cent were outraged by intent (token effort at 25% and decision made at 17%).

The second most common response relates to actual impact of engagement on the final outcome (29%).

In addition, 14% of respondents were outraged by the way in which projects related to stakeholders (no attempt to understand my position and when only one group is being heard).

Interestingly, when these results were cross tabulated with the age group of the respondents, some telling findings emerged.

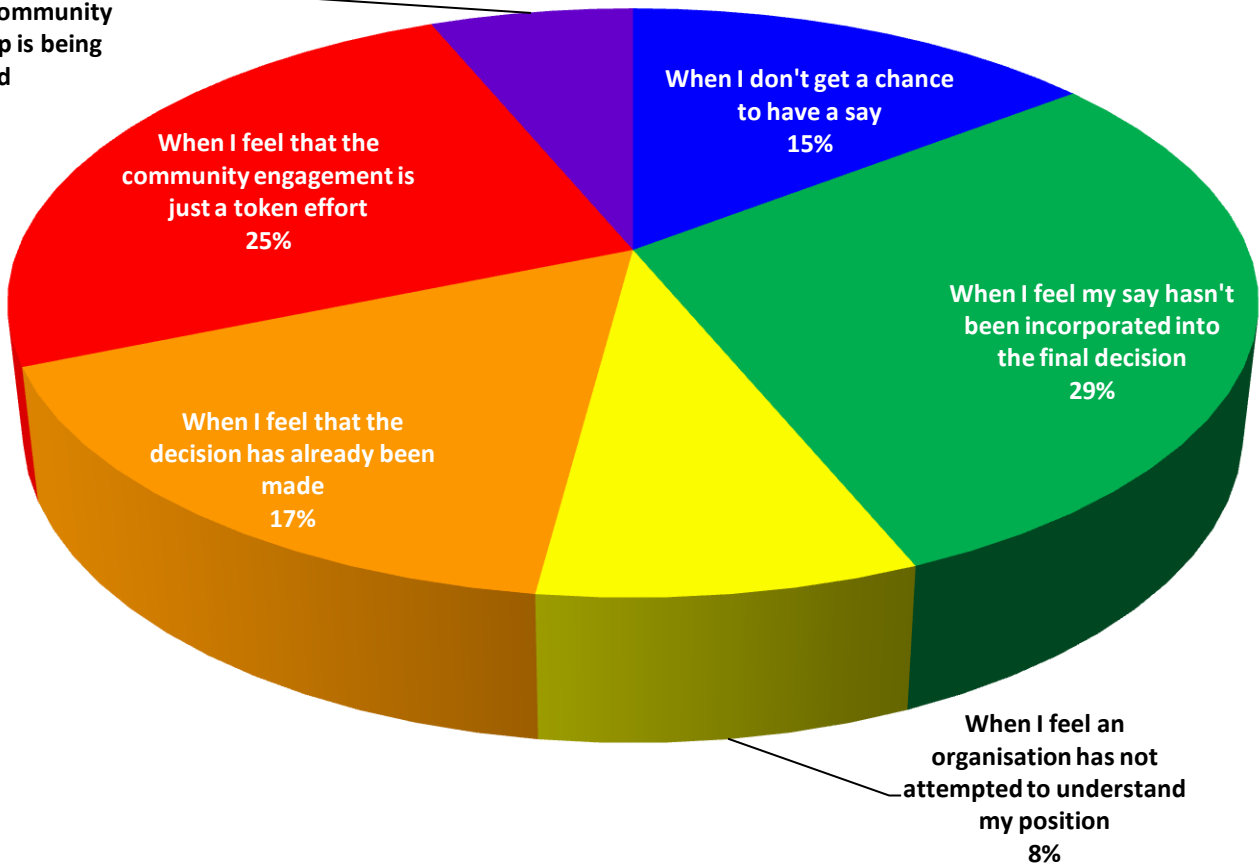
100% of respondents aged 30-39 identified 'when I don't get a chance to have a say' as the most enraging option.

In the age group 40-49, respondents were split evenly between 'when I feel that the decision has already been made', 'when I feel my say hasn't been incorporated into the final decision', and 'when I don't get a chance to have a say'.

The respondents aged 50-59 were split evenly between 'when I feel an organisation has not attempted to understand my position' and 'when I don't get the chance to have a say'.

In the age group 60+, 75% of respondents answered 'when I don't get the chance to have a say', with 25% opting for 'when I feel that the decision has already been made'.

When I feel that only the voice of one community interest group is being heard  
6%





### Question 8: How would you prefer projects to communicate or engage the community?

Print, online and face-to-face channels yielded similar support.

When the data was cross-tabulated with the aged of the respondents, it became apparent that most age groups displayed a preference for a particular method.

Fifty per cent of respondents in the 30-39 age bracket nominated 'online' as their preferred method of engagement communication.

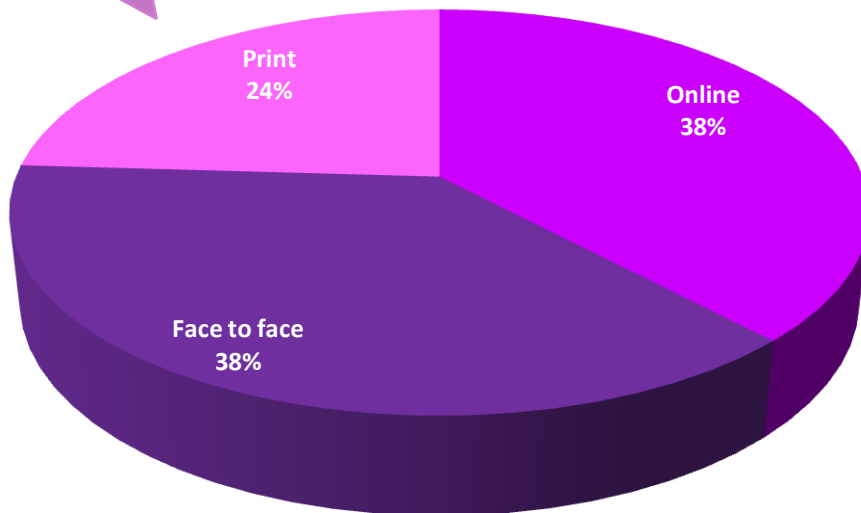
Almost 40% of respondents in the 40-49 age bracket preferred 'face to face', but this age group proved to be the most well rounded, with the rest of the respondents divided between 'online' and 'print'.

The 50-59 age bracket displayed no particular single preference, however none of the respondents in this bracket nominated 'print' as their preferred option.

Almost 60% of the 60+ age group nominated 'print' as their preferred method.

“Print offers people who miss out on the web the chance to have their say, such as the disadvantaged and elderly.”

“Online is quick, easy and consistent.”



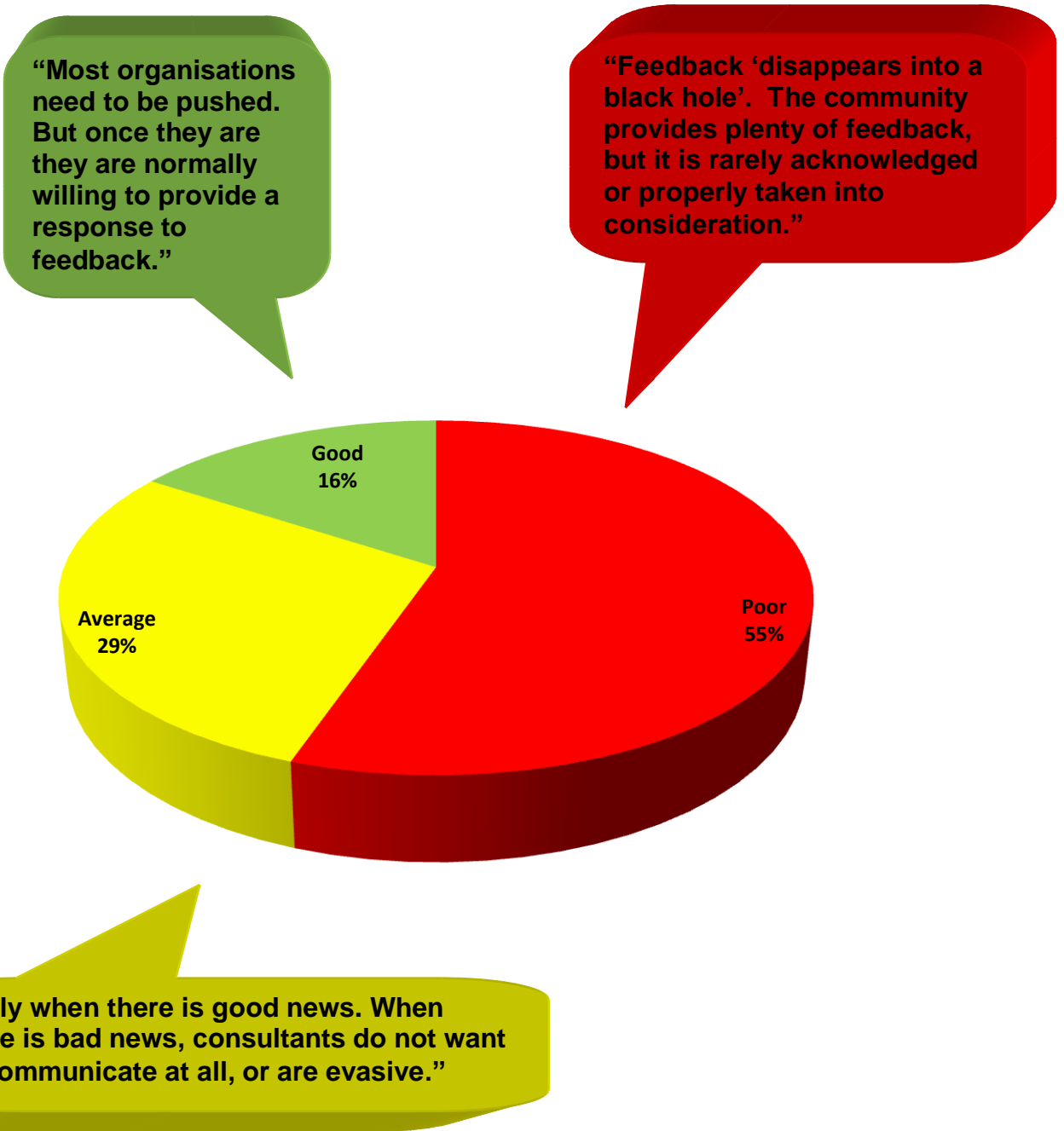
“Face to face is time-consuming but can offer the opportunity to ask questions.”



**Question 9: How effective are organisations at informing the community or stakeholders about what feedback they've received and how it's impacted on a decision?**

Over half of respondents said that organisations were poor at informing the community about how feedback has impacted upon the final decision.

Only 16% of the respondents agreed that organisations were doing a good job in this area, with almost a third indicating that the performance in this area is average, with definite room to improve.

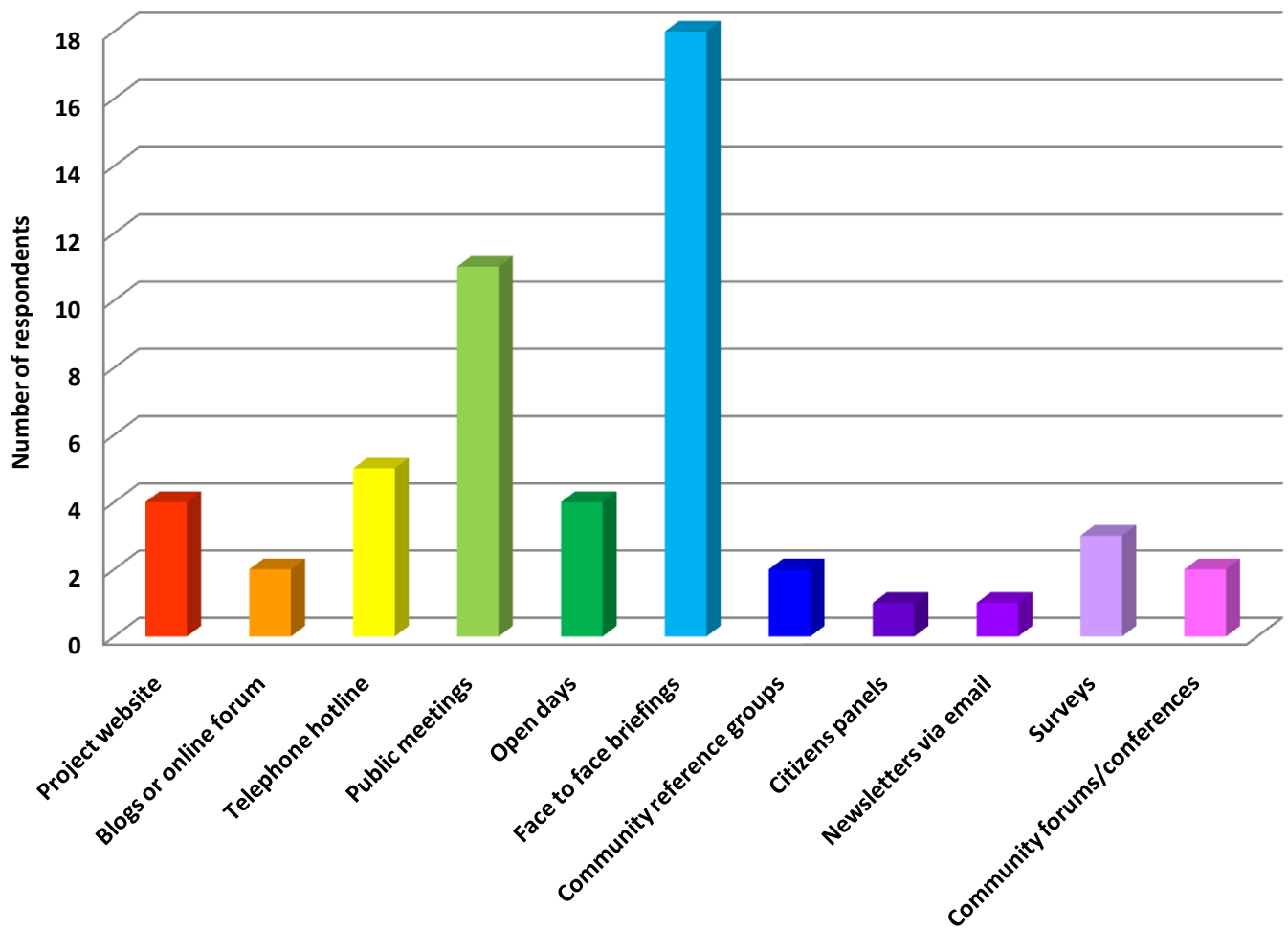




**Question 10: What techniques would you prefer developers/government to use when engaging community interest groups in their planning process?**

Survey participants were asked to nominate techniques without any prompting. The most common answer across the board was 'face to face briefings', which was nominated by almost 50% of respondents.

Respondents could nominate more than one answer, with the most common techniques being those where the community could talk to project or engagement staff either in person or on the phone.





**Question 11: Can you think of a good example of community engagement? What made it good?**

“The main thing that made it successful was the fact that their approach made it very clear that this was a proposal/draft, and not the finished product.”

“Good relationships and communication are the key. If a consultant says they are going to call at a certain time, or provide information by a certain date, they should actually do that.”

“Understanding what you want to present to the community, and presenting it in a clear and concise manner.”

“...all facilitators were highly approachable and listened to concerns.”

“...is doing an excellent job of consulting with the community because they came in at a very early stage and took a consultative approach. Furthermore, they are involved in funding community development projects to the benefit of society.”

**Question 12: Can you think of a bad example of community engagement? What made it bad?**

“People think they are doing the best, their intentions are good, but they don't know enough about the people who live there”

“Without mentioning specific organisations, bad community engagement occurs when it occurs at a very late stage.”

“The process is a charade of community consulting, when the decision has already been made.”

“When community engagement takes place even though the decision has already been made. Therefore, they are doing it because they have to rather than because they want to.”

