# Using Customer Satisfaction, Experience, and Engagement Data to Improve the Ease of Applying to WPO's Funding Competitions

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## Abstract

**The Weather Program Office (WPO)** hosts annual funding competitions, encouraging academic and private sector stakeholders to submit research proposals focused on advancing weather forecasting, enhancing knowledge, and creating weather-related products and services.

As part of an ongoing commitment to improve the proposal submission process, WPO developed the **Applicant Customer Experience and Satisfaction (ACES) survey** to gain valuable insight into how applicants engage with funding opportunities. The ACES Survey was launched after final proposals were submitted to the Fiscal Year 2023 funding opportunity.

## Introduction

**The ACES survey gathered feedback** on WPO's FY23 funding competition proposal submission process. By incorporating insights from applicants, WPO refines its processes, optimizing the NOFO proposal submission. Research questions guide data analysis, exploring patterns between Minority-Serving Institutions and Large Research Institutions. Recommendations will enhance the NOFO process for future funding competitions.
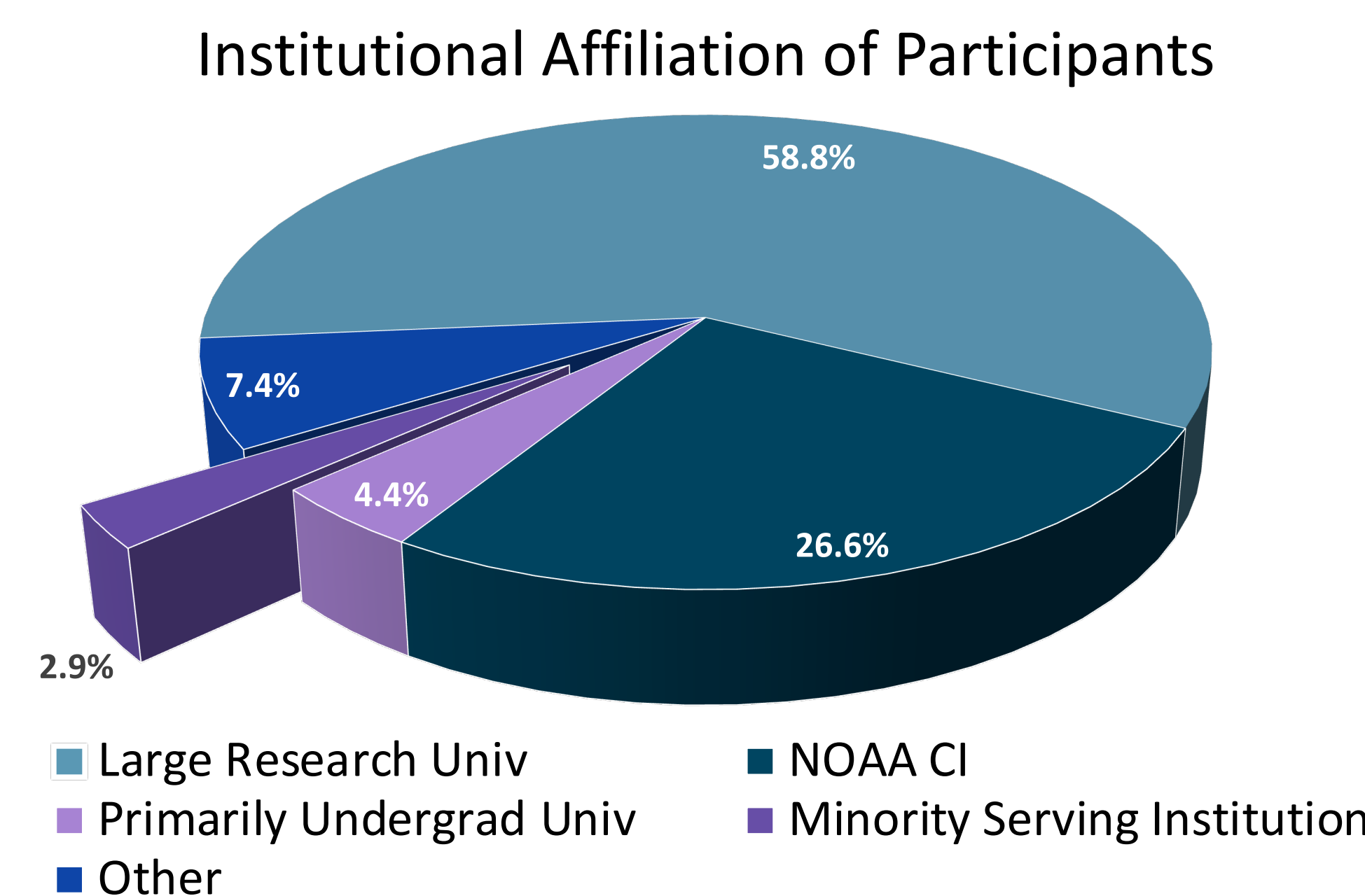
## Methods and Materials

The Weather Program Office (WPO) formed an 8-member team, including WPO employees and social scientists, to **develop a survey aimed at gathering critical feedback from applicants** about their experience with WPO's funding competitions.
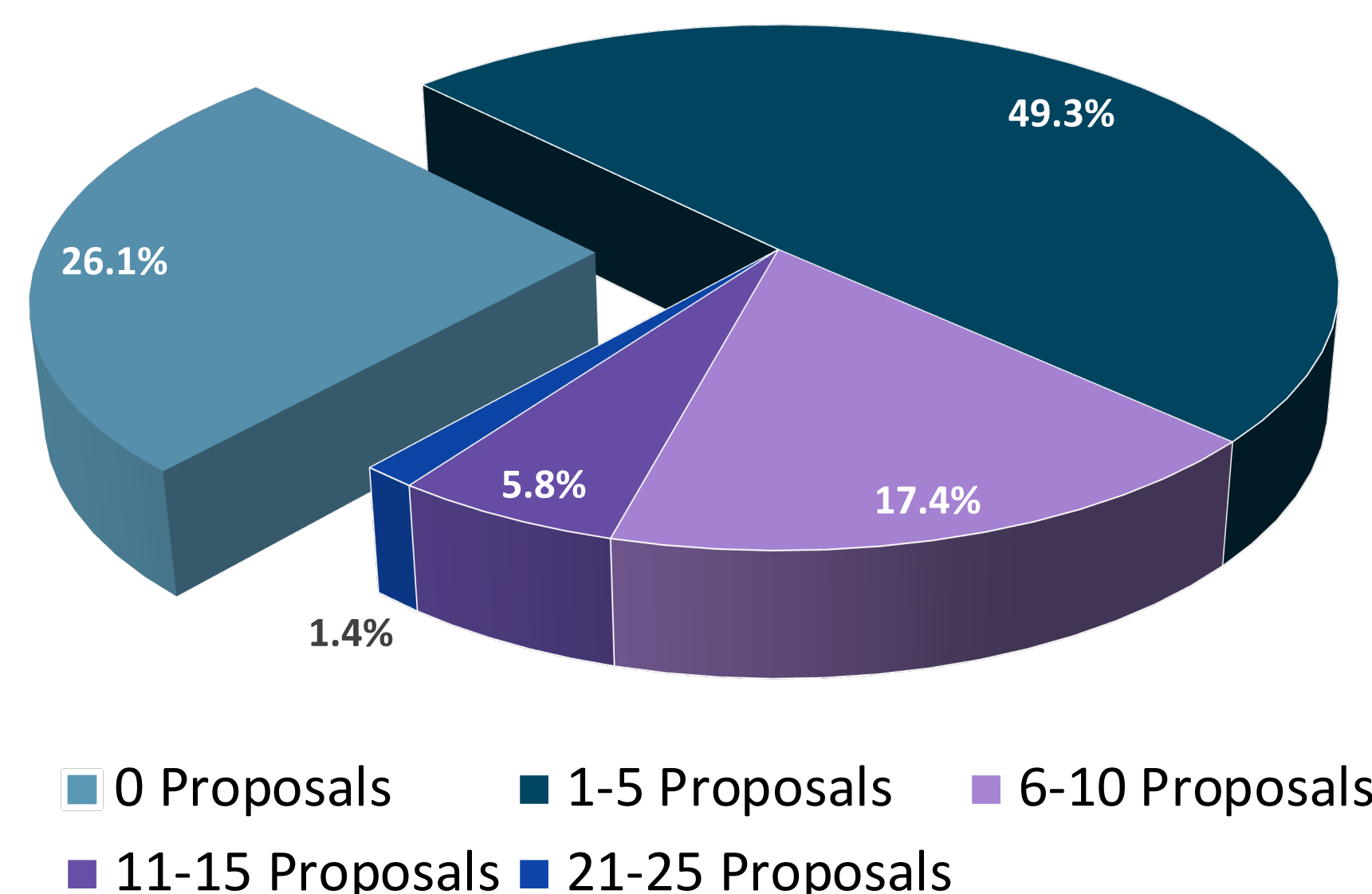
Launched on November 22, 2022, the survey achieved a 41% response rate, with 69 complete responses. Data analysis, involving both quantitative and qualitative methods, started in June 2023 and concluded in mid-July 2023, revealing prominent themes.

The author utilized Microsoft Excel, PSPP for quantitative analysis, and NVivo for qualitative analysis to draw insights from the survey responses.

## ACES Participant Demographics

### Institutional Affiliation of Participants



- 58.8%
- 26.6%
- 7.4%
- 4.4%
- 2.9%

Legend:
- Large Research Univ
- Primarily Undergrad Univ
- Other
- NOAA CI
- Minority Serving Institution

### # of Prior Proposals Submitted at NOAA



- 49.3%
- 26.1%
- 17.4%
- 5.8%
- 1.4%

Legend:
- 0 Proposals
- 11-15 Proposals
- 1-5 Proposals
- 21-25 Proposals
- 6-10 Proposals

## Formatting Open Feedback

- **36.2%** of survey participants had difficulty finding formatting instructions in the NOFO announcement (closed-ended)
- **24.6%** of survey participants struggled to understand how to properly format grant proposals (open-ended)

This issue is particularly prominent among applicants from smaller research institutions or first time applicants of a WPO NOFO (26.1% of survey participants).

*"It would be **great to have templates** for things like the budget table and budget justification as well."*

*"Perhaps include in the NOFO **links to formatting**, page limits, and readiness levels."*

*"The templates were very helpful to me as an **early career researcher** with **no prior experience** submitting these."*

## LOI Feedback Results

On a scale of 1-5, rate your agreement with the following statements:
My LOI feedback was _____.

| Competition: | Constructive | Clear | Returned in a Timely Manner |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Observations** | 2.67 | 4.56 | 4.67 |
| **Innovations in Community Modeling** | 3.61 | 3.89 | 2.78 |
| **Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences** | 2.92 | 3.25 | 3.17 |
| **VORTEX-USA** | 3.88 | 3.88 | 3.5 |
| **Combined LOI Feedback Average** | **3.28** | **3.70** | **3.14** |

Rating is below combined average

Strongly Disagree 1 3 5 Strongly Agree
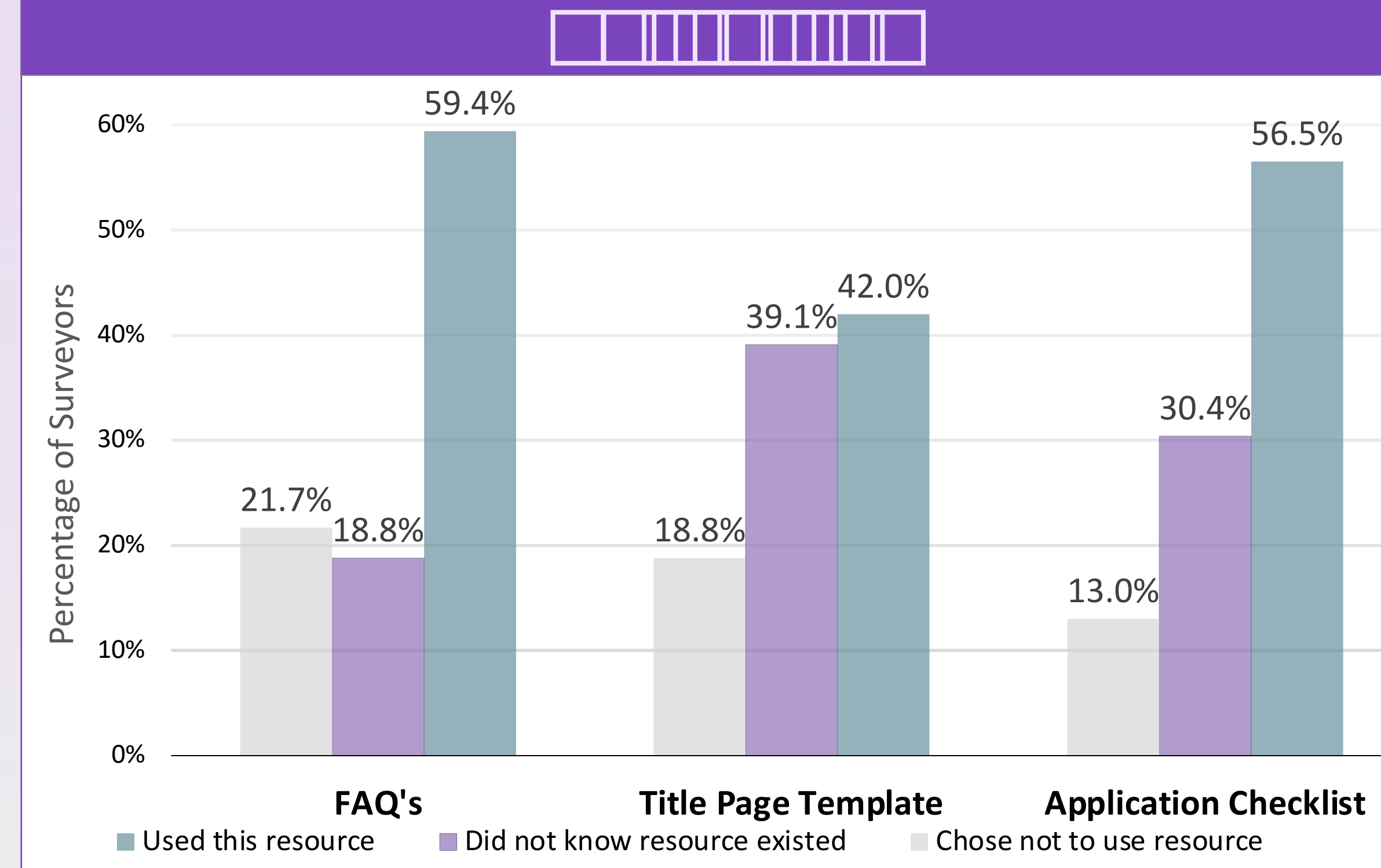
## LOI Timing Open Feedback

*"Ideally having **at least another month** between LOI feedback and proposal submission is important."*

*"**More time is a must.**"*

*"**Four weeks is really fast** given institutional deadlines to have the final packet for review about 5 days before the due date."*

## Applicant Usage of NOFO Resources



| Resource | Used this resource | Did not know resource existed | Chose not to use resource |
|---|---|---|---|
| FAQ's | 21.7% | 18.8% | 59.4% |
| Title Page Template | 18.8% | 39.1% | 42.0% |
| Application Checklist | 13.0% | 30.4% | 56.5% |

## Results

These are key statistical findings from the FY2023 ACES Survey.

**Key Finding 1: Outreach**

Expand outreach efforts for Minority-Serving Institutions (MSI) and non-traditional research institutions.

**Key Finding 2: Letter of Intent (LOI) Feedback**

Create a feedback system to address LOI submissions across all competitions in a consistent manner.

Reschedule key dates in the application process timeline to allot applicants at least two more weeks to complete their full proposal after receiving LOI feedback.

**Key Finding 3: Formatting Issues**

Provide a specific layout and/or template for grant proposals (and other documents) on WPO website.

*For complete survey results and analysis, please scan the QR code*

## Conclusions and Recommendations

**1. Lack of Diversity in Applicant Pool**

Recommendation: WPO should enhance outreach to increase diversity.

**2. Time Constraints for Proposal Development**

Recommendation: Reschedule key dates, allowing at least two more weeks.

**3. Inconsistent LOI Feedback**

Recommendation: Create a consistent feedback system for all competitions.

**4. Formatting Challenges for Applicants**

Recommendation: Provide templates and examples to aid applicants.

**5. Underutilization of WPO Website Resources**

Recommendation: Specify in NOFO announcement to check WPO's website for additional resources.

**6. Optimizing Future ACES Surveys**

Recommendation: Ask surveyors to rate each information sheet separately to avoid data misinterpretation.

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## Acknowledgements: