



2024

State of the Clerk's Office Survey





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A Note from the CEO

In an era where digital innovation increasingly shapes our lives, the imperative to embrace technological advancements resonates more profoundly than ever before. The transformative impact of the pandemic, a veritable "black swan" event, compelled communities worldwide to reevaluate how they conduct meetings – and the public sector is no exception. The acceleration towards digital inclusivity and accessibility has irreversibly altered the trajectory of municipal operations.

As we all must navigate this digital frontier, we must also acknowledge that there is no turning back. The paradigm shift toward a more digitally connected future is not just a consequence of necessity but an opportunity to redefine how we serve our communities. The adoption of digital solutions in the administration of public meetings, while posing initial challenges such as change management, new processes, and stakeholder buy-in, opens the door to a myriad of opportunities and benefits.

Among the rewards awaiting those who embrace this digital transformation are time and cost savings. The efficiency gains achievable through streamlined processes and automated workflows are a testament to the power of innovation. Moreover, embracing digital solutions fosters greater accountability, transparency, and adherence to regulatory frameworks, reinforcing the bedrock of trust between municipal bodies and the communities they serve.

This report serves as a compelling call to action. I challenge each of you, inspired by the opportunities revealed here, to champion the cause of moving our communities into better digital engagement. Let us not only meet the demands of the present but actively shape a future where our municipalities thrive through the seamless integration of technology and civic responsibility.



Best Regards,
Paroon Chadha
CEO | eScribe

Introduction

As many local governments contend with budget constraints, souring public sentiment, the repercussions of high inflation, and a host of other challenges, municipal clerks serve a vital role as stewards of public information and access in their communities. It is a role that is becoming increasingly complex due to evolving technologies, ongoing inefficiencies, and mounting demands from both elected officials and the public at large.

Results of the first State of the Clerk's Office survey found that clerks in offices across North America face common challenges and aspire to make similar improvements to more effectively execute their civic duties. More than 500 municipal clerks in Canada and the United States shared their insights for the first annual eScribe State of the Clerk's Office Survey, which was designed in partnership with the Research Committee of the International Institute of Municipal Clerks (IIMC). Respondents answered a range of questions about the responsibilities, goals, and challenges of modern municipal clerk's offices.



Introduction

Many of the survey questions centered on the critical work of the clerk's office in preparing and administering public meetings, which are keystones to community involvement and accountability in local government. A need to improve efficiencies, overcome barriers to progress, and leverage new technologies to grow access and public engagement were consistent themes throughout the responses.

When asked to identify the biggest challenges facing clerk's offices today, respondents noted:



Time management



Managing historical data, records, and timely publication of such materials



Meeting council members' demands



Managing meeting agendas; compiling and creating minutes

The following report details the survey findings and what they reveal about the current state of municipal clerk's offices.

Public Engagement

In their role as the record keepers of municipal government, clerks work to ensure transparency and public access in the communities they serve.

Yet, more than half of those surveyed (55%) feel the public is not engaged with local government. Clerks from smaller communities were more likely to feel the public was not well engaged, including two-thirds of survey respondents from communities of less than 10,000.

→ **At the same time, more than a third of all survey respondents (35%) said they observed growing hostility from community members who are engaged.**

Numerous factors could be contributing to heightened public negativity, such as a polarized political climate, misinformation, or frustration with government inefficiencies.

Clerks noted a number of challenges in keeping the citizenry informed and engaged, including the need to improve access to information on meetings, associated materials, and historic records, including the actions of elected officials.



Do you feel the public is well engaged with local government in your municipality?



NO



YES



Public Engagement

Common Barriers to Public Engagement

Clerks across the U.S. and Canada face common barriers in trying to boost public engagement with local government. The most prevalent issue was a lack of easy access to government information. An overwhelming majority of respondents cited the public's inability to search for specific information as the primary obstacle.

Other common challenges noted by the respondents include delayed or untimely publication of meeting schedules, agendas, and materials (30%), and late publication of meeting minutes (26%).



85%

The public's inability to search for information on a specific elected official (decisions, voting records, meeting attendance, speeches, video clips, declarations of conflicts of interest, etc.)

80%

The public's inability to search for information on a specific topic (projects, draft legislation, etc.)

74%

The public's inability to search for information on a specific body or committee

Ensuring Transparency

Many clerk's offices use technology to foster access and public engagement in their communities.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of those surveyed said they live-stream meetings or post video recordings of the meetings online for public viewing. Twenty percent said they use social media to promote meetings, while just 9% said they continue to rely on paper flyers or signs to share meeting information.



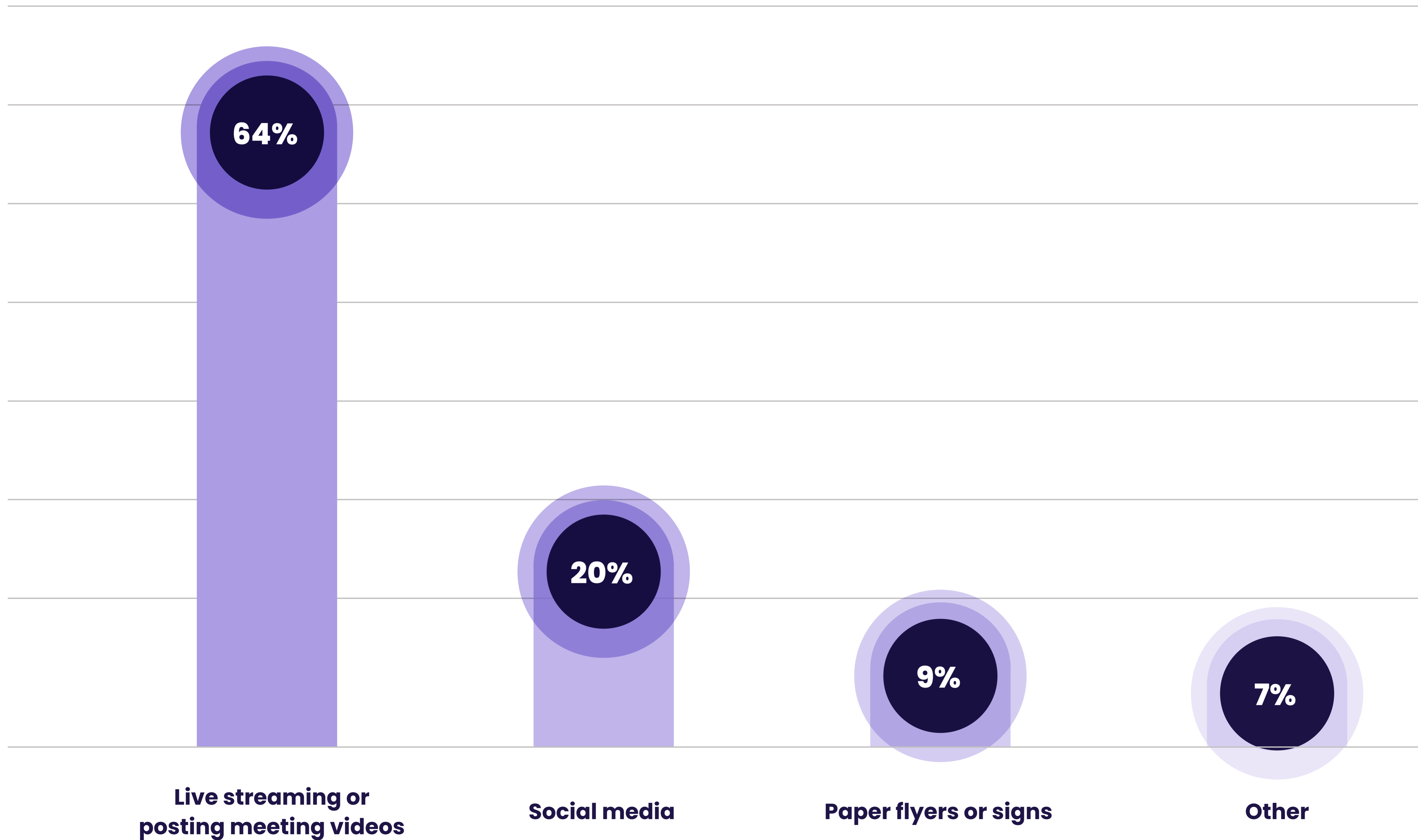
However, clerks have an opportunity to learn and improve meeting management by asking for feedback from people who participate in those meetings, including speakers, elected officials, and attendees. Unfortunately, nearly three-quarters of those surveyed said they do not collect feedback from participants to guide future meeting improvements.



Ensuring Transparency



What measures do you use to improve public engagement with meetings?



Making Public Meetings More Effective

Most clerks surveyed have a relatively straightforward definition of a successful meeting — one in which all agenda items are completed in a timely manner, with action steps taken and clear follow-ups. Achieving those criteria, however, is not so straightforward.

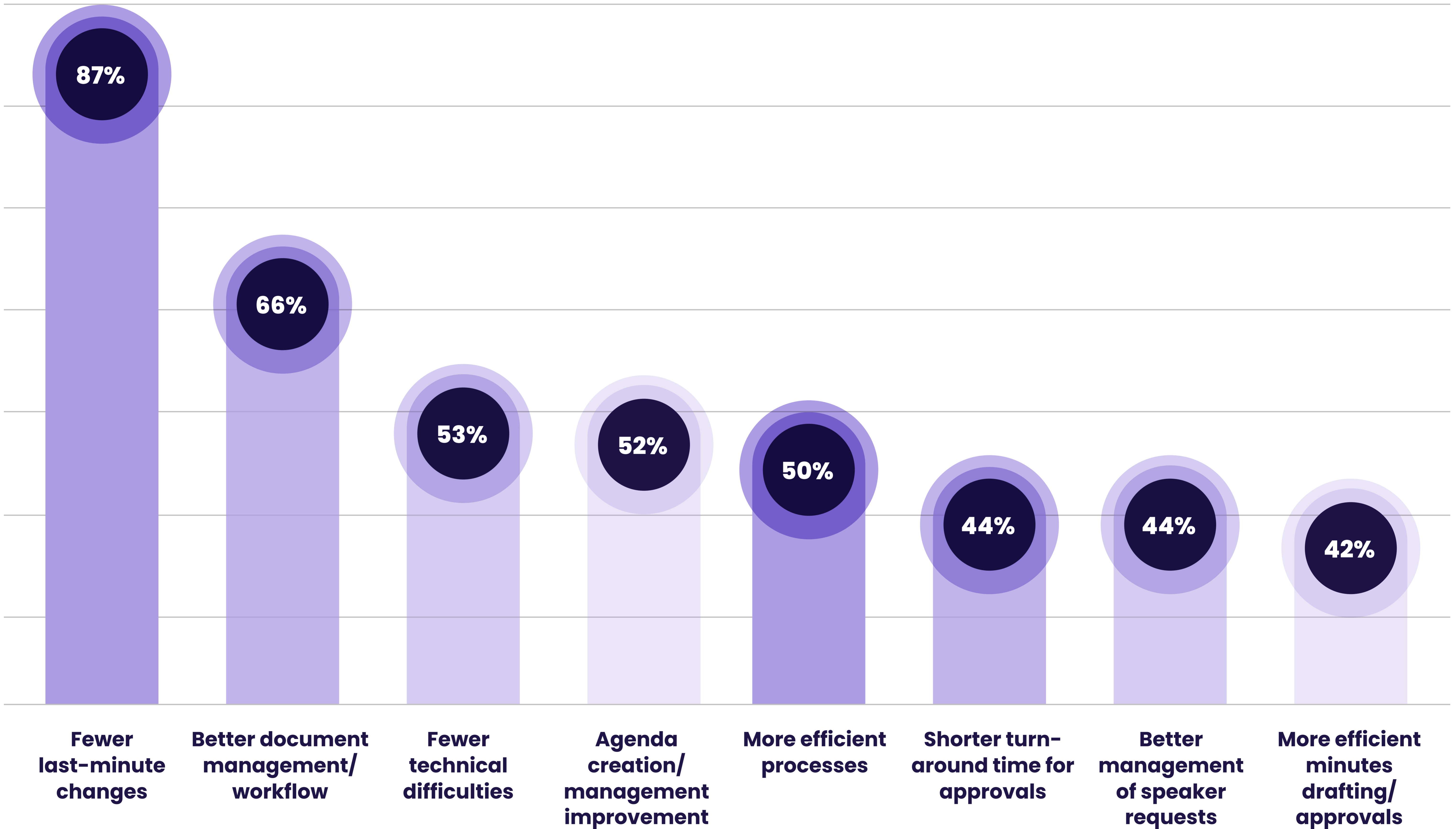
Clerk's offices face numerous challenges when it comes to ensuring effective meetings.

According to survey respondents, the top five factors ranked as most important to bolstering the effectiveness of public meetings are:

- 1 Fewer last-minute changes
- 2 Better document management and workflow
- 3 Fewer technology difficulties
- 4 Better processes for agenda creation/management
- 5 More efficient processes



What aspect would have the most impact on improving the effectiveness of your meeting (select top five)?

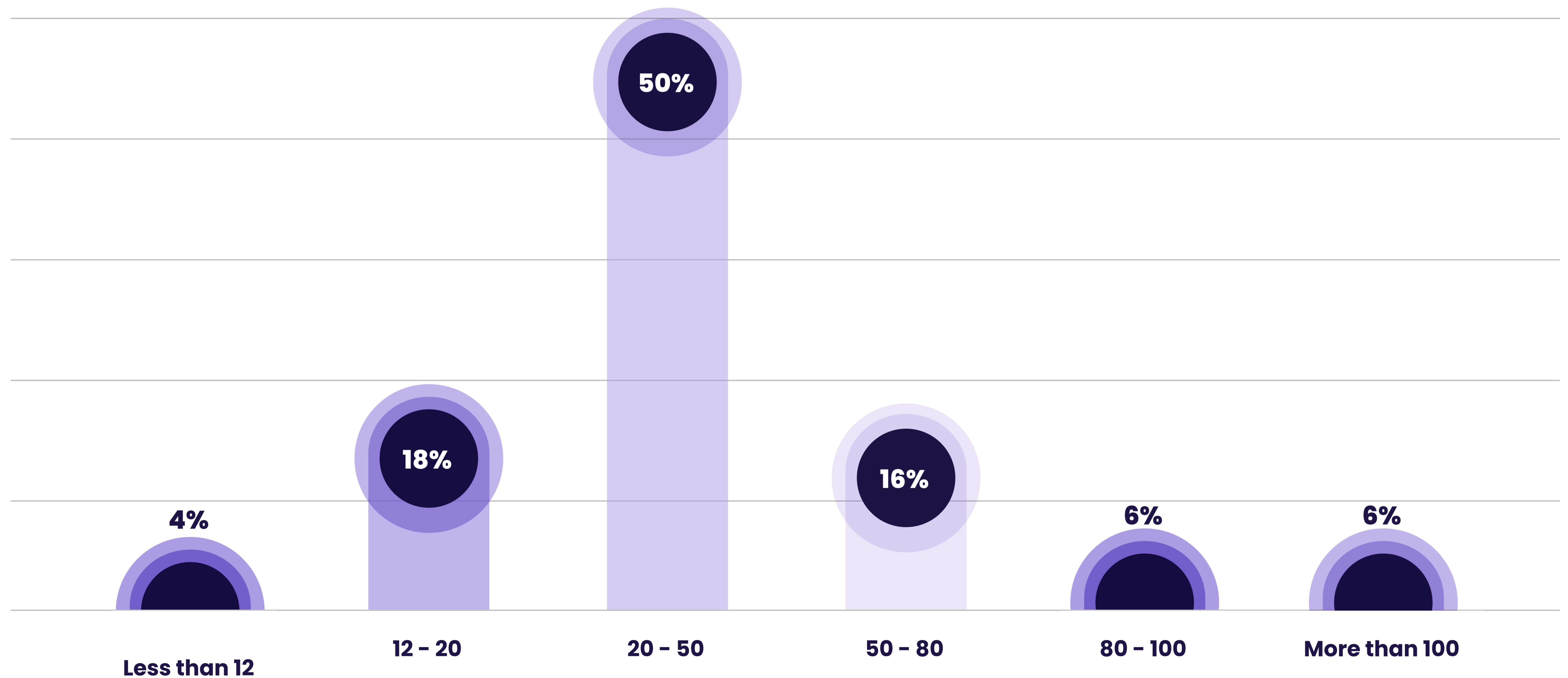


Managing a Heavy Meeting Load

Compounding the challenges of ensuring effective meetings is the sheer volume of meetings clerks help to manage each year. Half of survey respondents (50%) said their office handles as many as 20 to 50 meetings per year, 16% said 50 to 80, and 12% said more than 80 meetings a year.



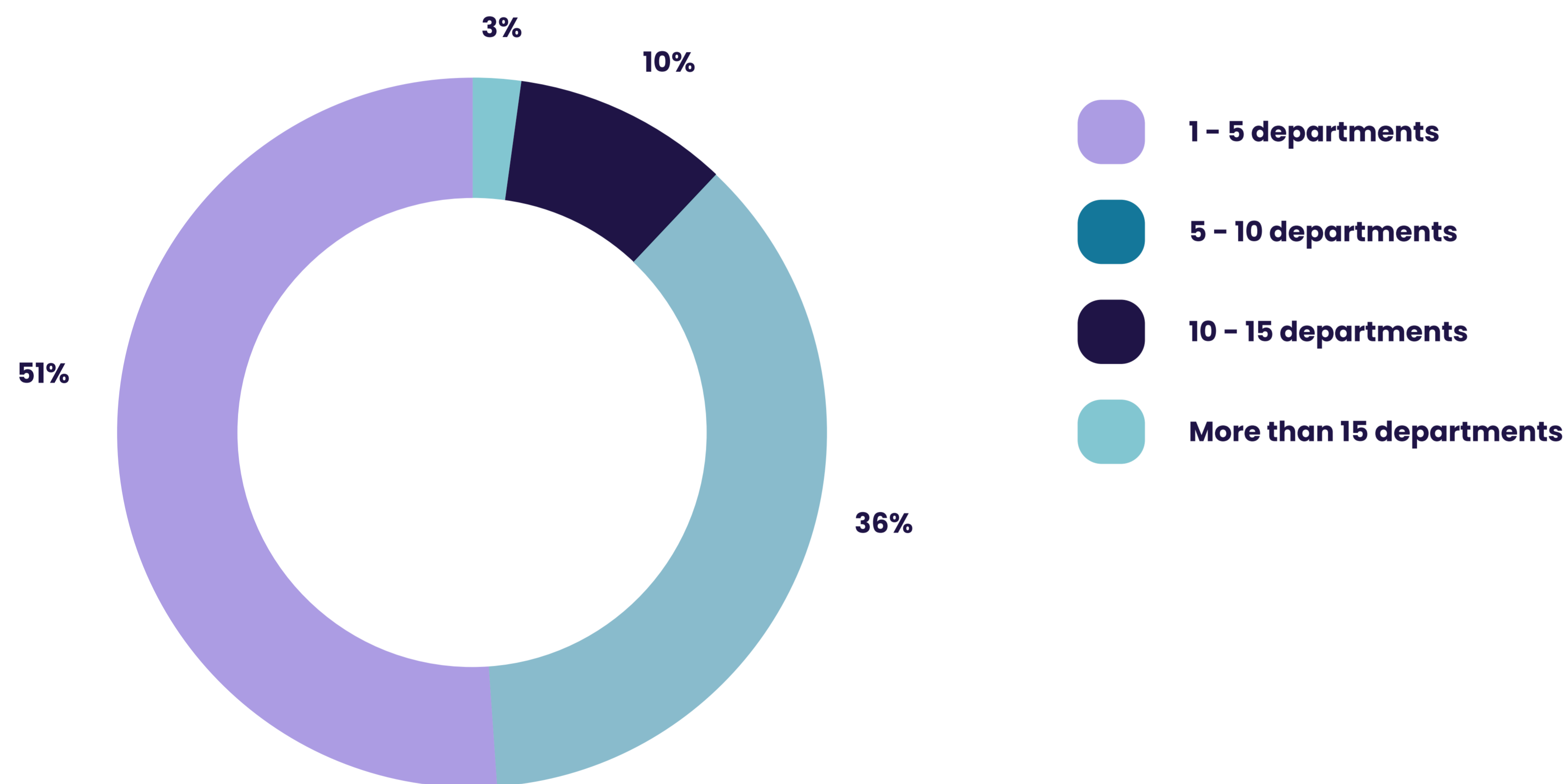
Approximately how many meetings does your clerk's office help manage each year?



Managing so many meetings demands significant time and coordination with multiple departments. More than half of survey respondents (51%) said they collaborate with up to five departments at any given time, while (36%) said they coordinate with five to 10 departments.



On average, how many departments are you collaborating with at any given time?



Thirteen percent said they coordinate with more than 10 departments at a time.

Not surprisingly, clerks from smaller communities routinely coordinate with fewer departments, and vice versa. For example, 73% of clerks from communities of 10,000 or fewer work with one to five departments.



Time Management & Meeting Prep

As noted earlier, time management was the No. 1 challenge facing clerk's offices today, as cited by more than 80% of survey respondents. Most respondents (86%) also work in offices of just one to five people, meaning they must juggle their sizable workloads across relatively small teams.



Does the time spent preparing for public meetings make it difficult to give sufficient attention to other responsibilities of the clerk?



Preparing for meetings takes up a significant amount of clerks' time. **More than 40% of respondents said they spend five to 10 hours per week preparing for public meetings**, while 20% spend 10 to 20 hours and 8% spend more than 20 hours.

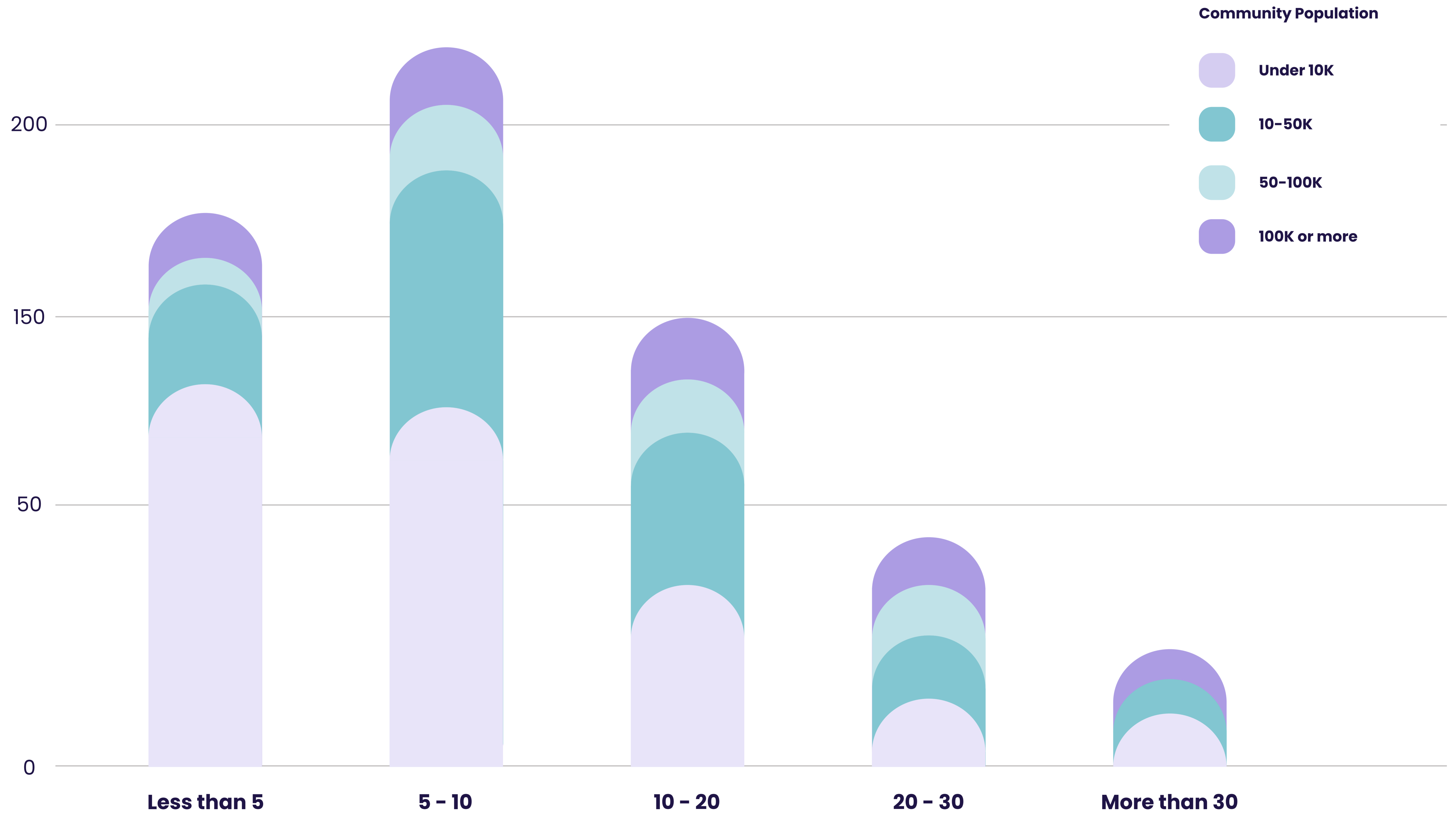
Assuming a 40-hour workweek and at least 10 hours each week spent on meeting prep, most clerks surveyed spend 25% or more of their time preparing for meetings.

More than half of clerks surveyed (53%) said the time demands of preparing for public meetings make it difficult to give sufficient attention to their other responsibilities.





How many hours each week do you spend preparing for public meetings?



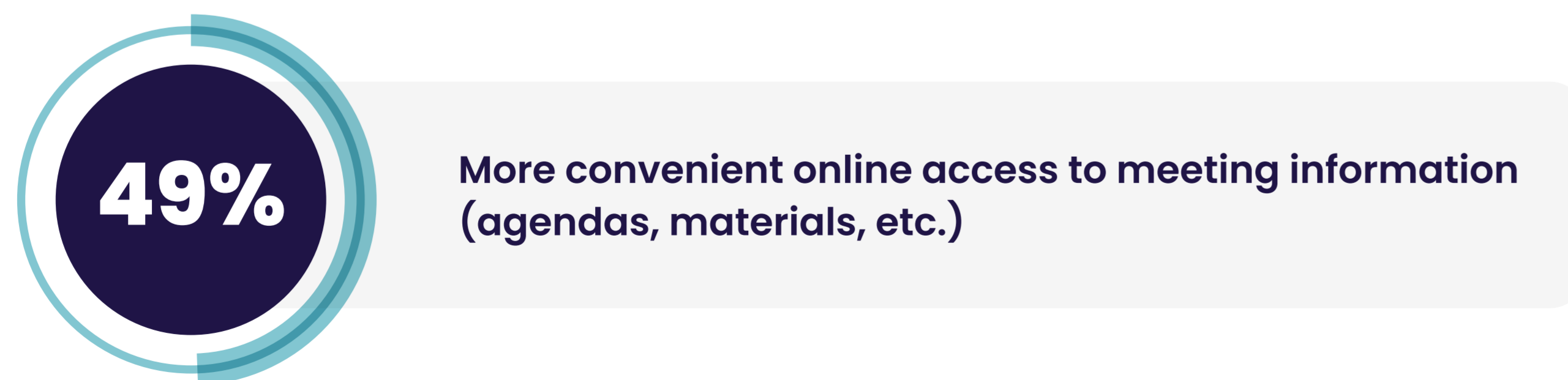
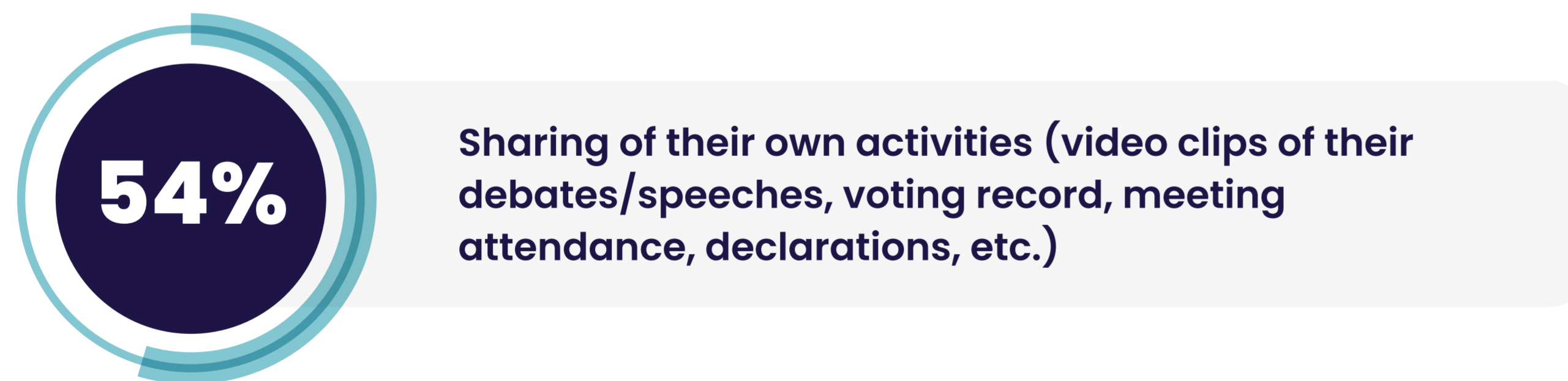
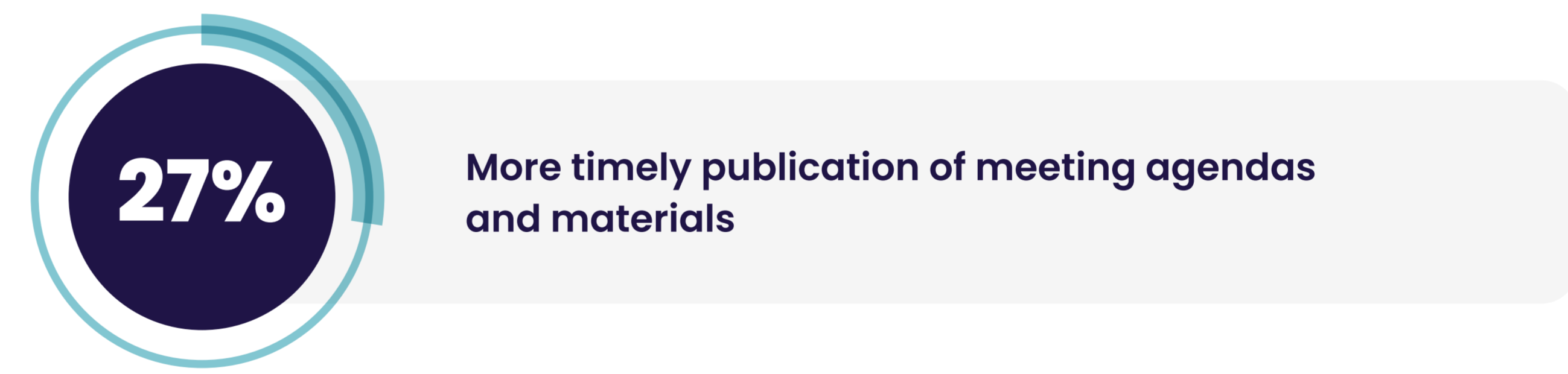
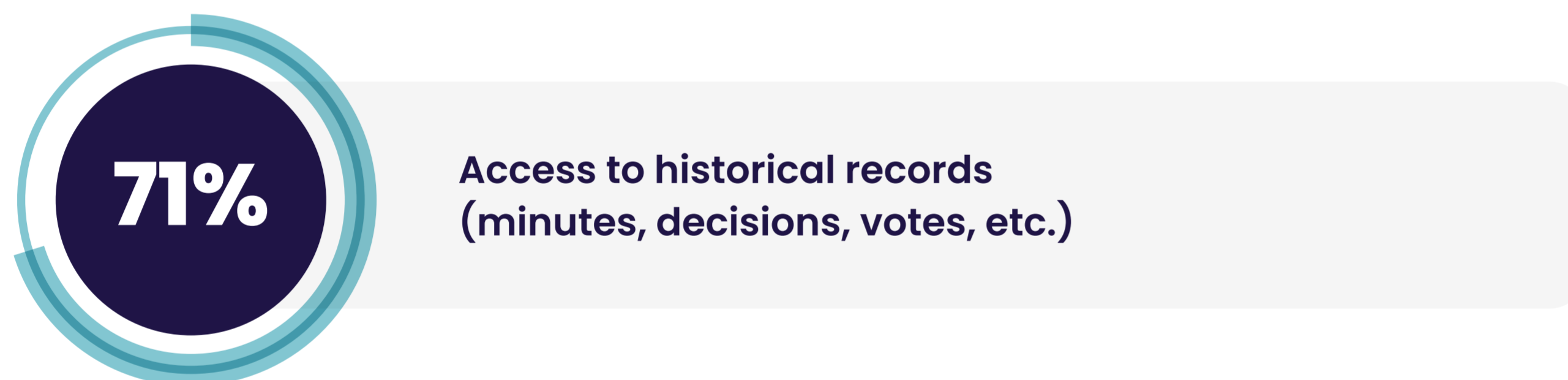
Managing Officials' Demands

In addition to their own ideas of how to make meetings more effective, clerks face abundant inquiries and demands for improvements from elected officials.

Survey respondents said the most common improvements elected officials request include better access to historical records, more convenient access to meeting information, and that clerks share more information with the public on what they are doing as public officials, such as posting their voting record or video clips of their debates or speeches.



What information access improvements do your elected officials want?



Common challenges administering meetings

Survey respondents said they face many difficulties in administering meetings. The most common challenges cited were last-minute changes to the agenda or other meeting materials (69%), technology difficulties (37%), and inefficient document management and workflow (36%).



What are the top three challenges to administering meetings?

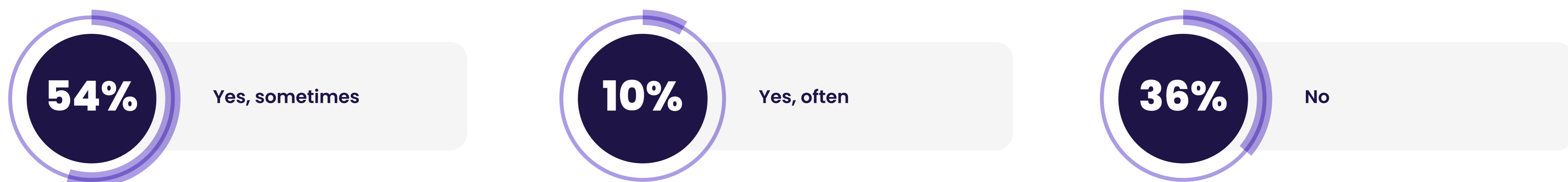


Other common challenges included inefficient processes (32%), managing speaker requests (29%), slow turn-around time for approvals (27%), inefficient agenda creation and management processes (25%), and minutes drafting (23%).

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64%) also admitted they often or sometimes have trouble finding records from previous meetings.



Do you have difficulty tracking down historical meeting records?



Potential Benefits of Meeting Management Technology

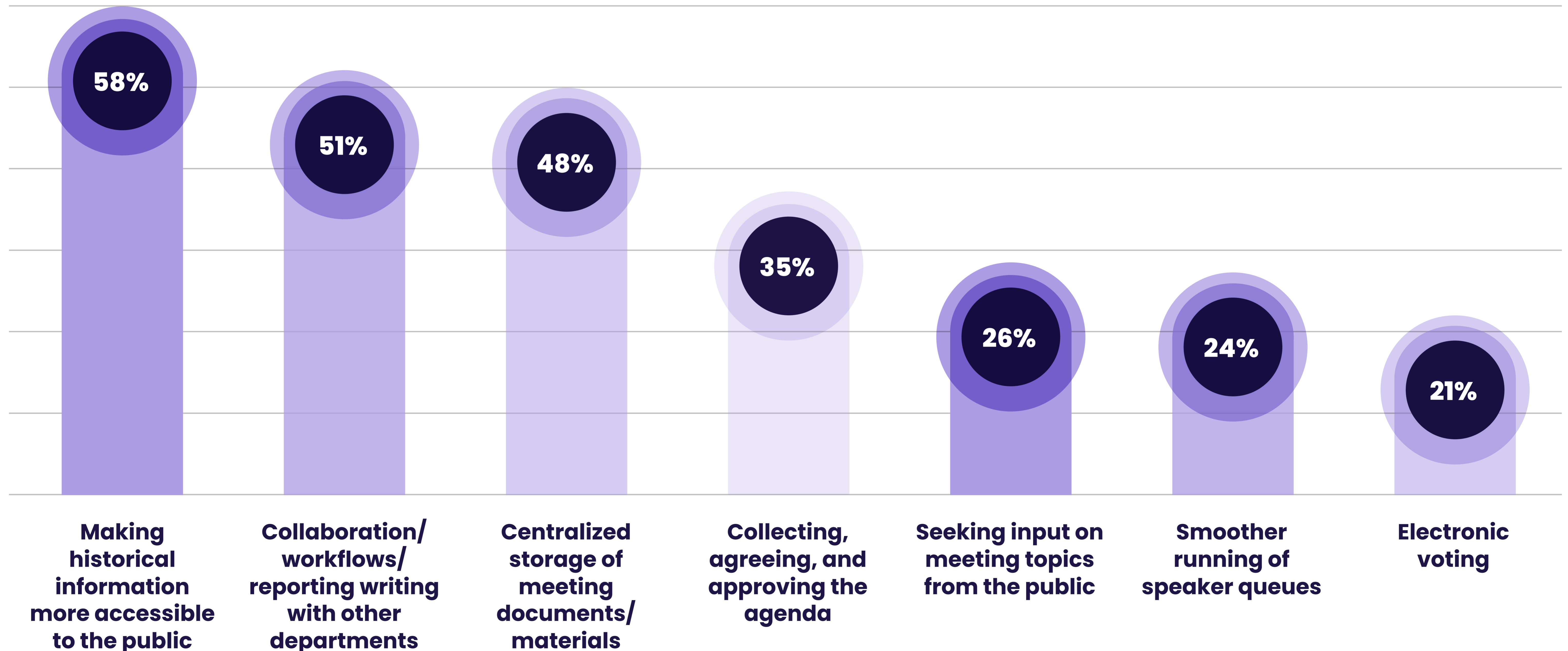
Survey respondents noted numerous areas in which technology could help enhance processes associated with preparing for and managing meetings.

Roughly half or more of the clerks surveyed said they would like to see technology help them with:

- Making historical information more accessible to the public (58%)
- Collaboration/workflows/report writing with other departments (51%)
- Centralized storage of meeting documents/materials (48%)



How would you like to see technology help improve your meeting management processes?



Other possible applications of technology noted by respondents included managing the collection and approval of agenda items, gathering public input, streamlining speaker queues, and enabling electronic voting.

Many Clerks and Communities Lack the Potential Benefits of Meeting Management Software

While survey respondents are optimistic about technology's potential to help them better manage their meeting responsibilities, **nearly three in five (59%) do not use any type of meeting management software in their clerk's offices.**

A lack of financial or institutional support were the main reasons for not having such software. Fewer than one in three respondents said they don't use meeting management software because they feel their current processes work.

Clerks in smaller communities were more likely to say they did not need the software. For example, 92% of respondents who did not use board management software were from communities of 50,000 or fewer. The survey results also suggest a link between efficiencies and software use — 60% of respondents who said they spend too much time preparing for meetings do not have board management software.

If you don't use meeting management software, why not?



Budget constraints



Haven't found the right solution



Lack of buy-in from stakeholders



59% do not use a meeting management solution



Conclusion

In an environment that is constantly evolving politically, economically, and socially, clerk's offices across the U.S. and Canada have shared goals of helping communities navigate change by improving access, growing public engagement, and reducing inefficient processes. The State of the Clerk's Office survey results highlight the potential for technology to help drive more efficient and effective meeting management processes, boost digital engagement, eliminate barriers to information, and offer more seamless connections between local governments and the citizens they serve.

Finding effective ways to integrate technology into everyday functions is crucial for successful public engagement in the Digital Era.

Some key takeaways from the survey findings include the need for clerk's offices to:

- Seek regular feedback from meeting participants and other stakeholders to guide continuous improvements
- Improve public access to meeting materials and other government records for greater transparency and public understanding
- Develop systems that allow the public to search for information on a specific elected official, government body or committee, or another defined topic
- Leverage technology to improve meeting processes, including providing centralized storage, facilitating collaboration among departments, and making historical records more easily accessible



About eScribe

Founded in 2011 in Markham, Ontario, eScribe is a cloud-based meeting management software that was created with a singular focus: To make public meetings easier for city clerks and their communities.

Serving hundreds of communities of every size across the United States and Canada, eScribe customers consistently rate their experience as reliably easy, convenient, and effective. It's one reason clerks and their communities choose eScribe again and again, resulting in a customer retention rate of more than 95%.

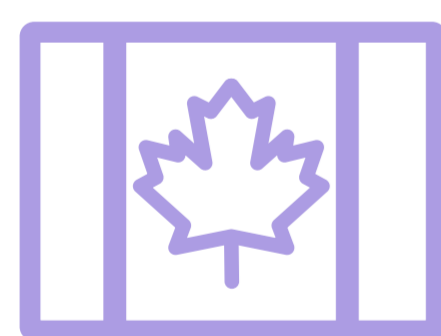
About the 2024 eScribe State of the Clerk's Office Survey

Designed in collaboration with the International Institute of Municipal Clerks, this first-ever State of the Clerk's Office report features results from a survey of 507 current, active clerks and municipal administrators. Respondents hailed from across North America, representing communities in 48 of 50 U.S. states and six of 10 Canadian provinces.

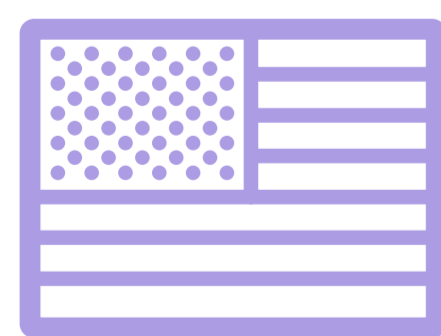
Respondents' titles varied depending on where they worked. Some examples include City Clerk, Clerk to the Board/Council, Deputy City Clerk, Town Clerk, Village Clerk, County Clerk, or Recorder.



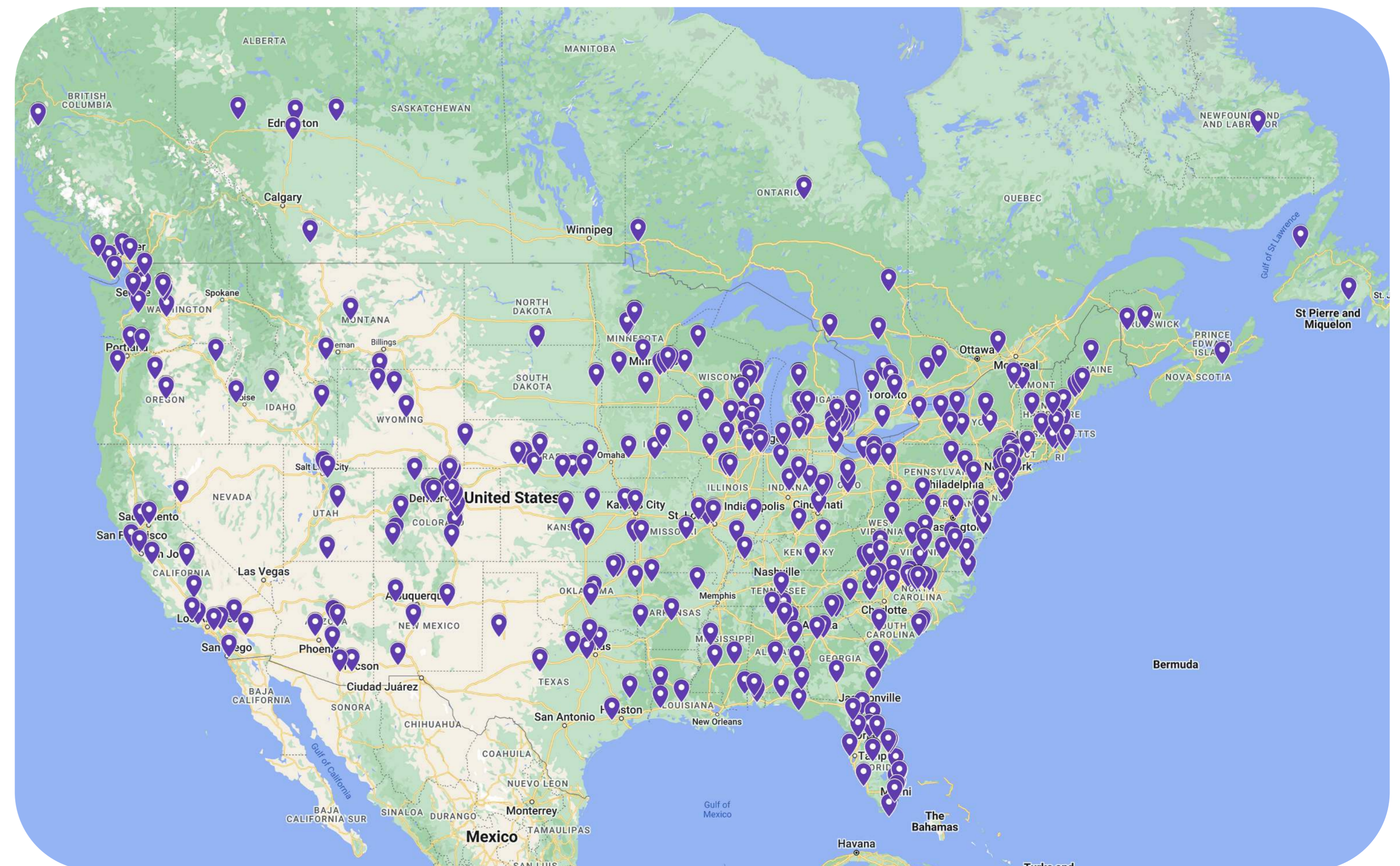
507 responses from current, active clerks



Communities and clerks from 6 of 10 Canadian provinces



Communities and clerks from 48 of 50 U.S. states



About the 2024 eScribe State of the Clerk's Office Survey

Roughly half of those surveyed have worked in municipal government for more than a decade (48%), while 29% had been in government service for one to five years.

More than half (53%) of the clerks surveyed were from communities with populations of 10,000 or fewer, and 31% were from communities of 10,000 to 50,000.



How long have you worked in municipal government?



What is the population of the municipality your work you?

