

The 2016
**Board Engagement
Report**





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Executive Summary

Year after year, our survey results demonstrate that strong board management practices have a positive influence on member talent utilization, satisfaction and impact.

Basic improvements in meeting-material delivery, expectation-setting and communication channels can translate into a better-engaged board. And a happy, involved board means better fundraising and community relations, good governance, and clear strategic direction.

The best part: adjustments to board processes are easy with technology. Board portals not only remove many of the administrative burdens associated with meeting, document and member management, they also link board activities to your organization's strategic goals.

Want to revamp your organization's board management? Read on for the recipe to success.

Sincerely,

Adam Roth

Founder & CEO, StreamLink Software



Introduction

StreamLink Software solicited a survey about board management and engagement, and invited board members, administrators and executives to respond. We found that sound board management leads to more engaged and effective boards. This report frames the issues nonprofit and board leaders must face to improve board satisfaction and fully leverage the board's potential in their organizations.



Methodology

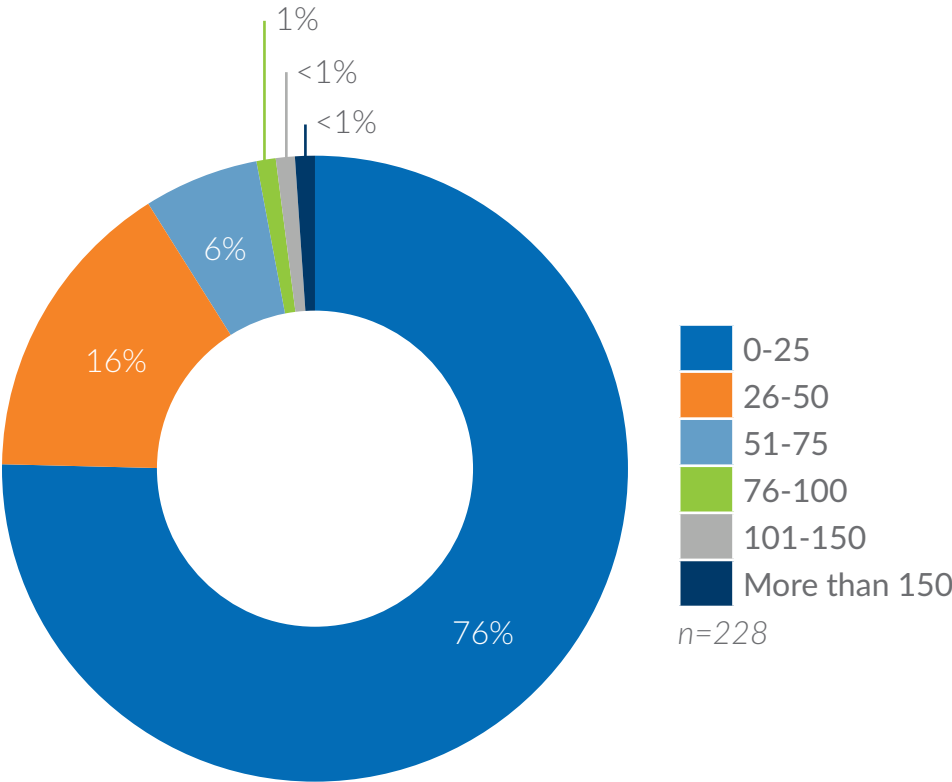
StreamLink Software conducted a nationwide survey to better understand the expectations, engagement level and challenges of active board members.

The survey consisted of 22 questions collected via SurveyMonkey in September 2016. Responses were solicited through the StreamLink Software website, social media and email. A total of 229 board members, executives and board administrators responded to the survey.

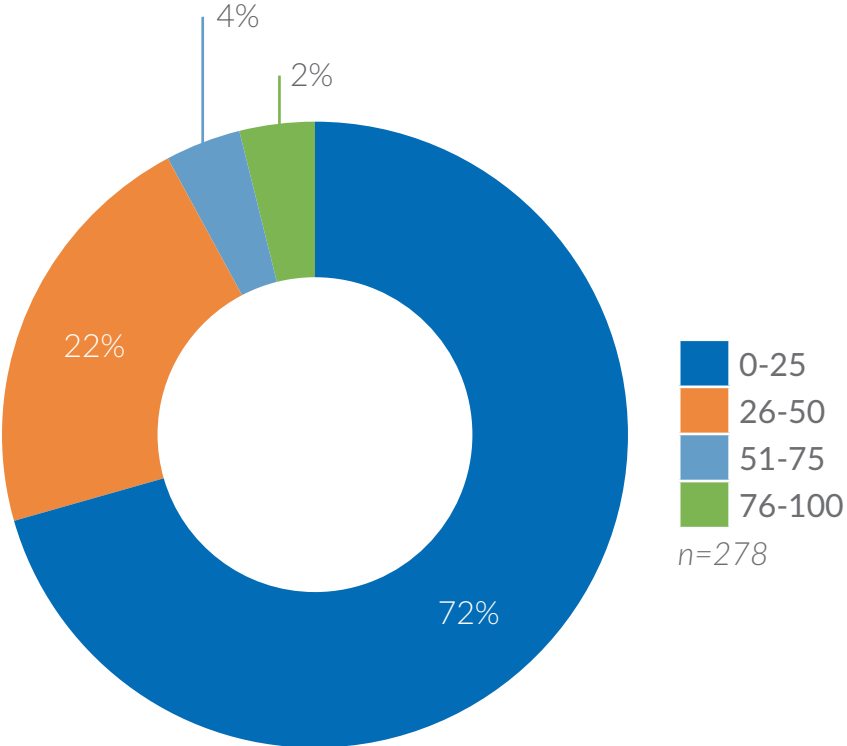
Responses are compared to the 2015 survey conducted by StreamLink Software, published in September 2015. Download [The 2015 Board Engagement Report](#) to view the report in its entirety.

The vast majority (76%) of organizations (n=228) surveyed have 25 board members or fewer. Sixteen percent have 26 – 50 board members. Compared to last year's findings, boards surveyed are similar in size.

How many people serve on your nonprofit board? - 2016



How many people serve on your nonprofit board? - 2015





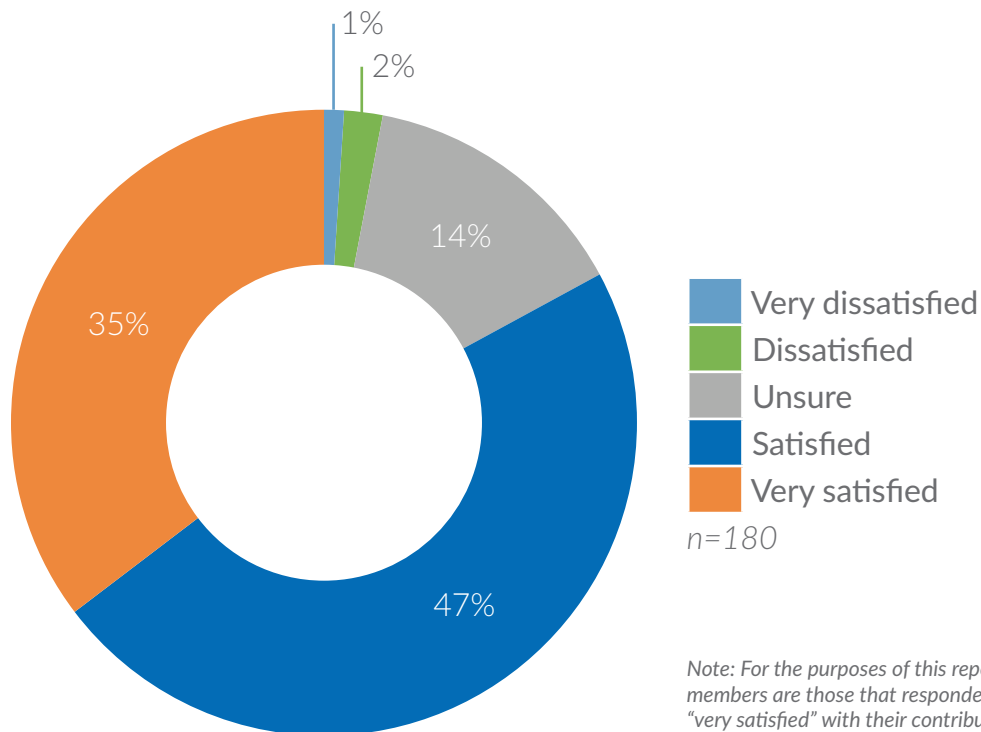
Section 1 | The State of Boards

Organizations are better leveraging board skills and talents than in recent years. Eighty-seven percent of respondents (n=180) believe theirs are being used effectively, compared to 83% last year (n=229) and 78% in 2014 (n=198).

Effective use of talent has a strong influence on board member satisfaction. When respondents believe their skills and talents are being used effectively (n=157), 86% were satisfied with their contributions. When they weren't used effectively (n=23), only 57% were satisfied.

Therefore, it makes sense that with talent utilization up this year, so too was board satisfaction. Overall satisfaction (satisfied or very satisfied) was 82%, compared to 75% last year (n=180). Thirty-five percent of board members (n=180) were very satisfied with their contributions, up from 29% last year (n=229).

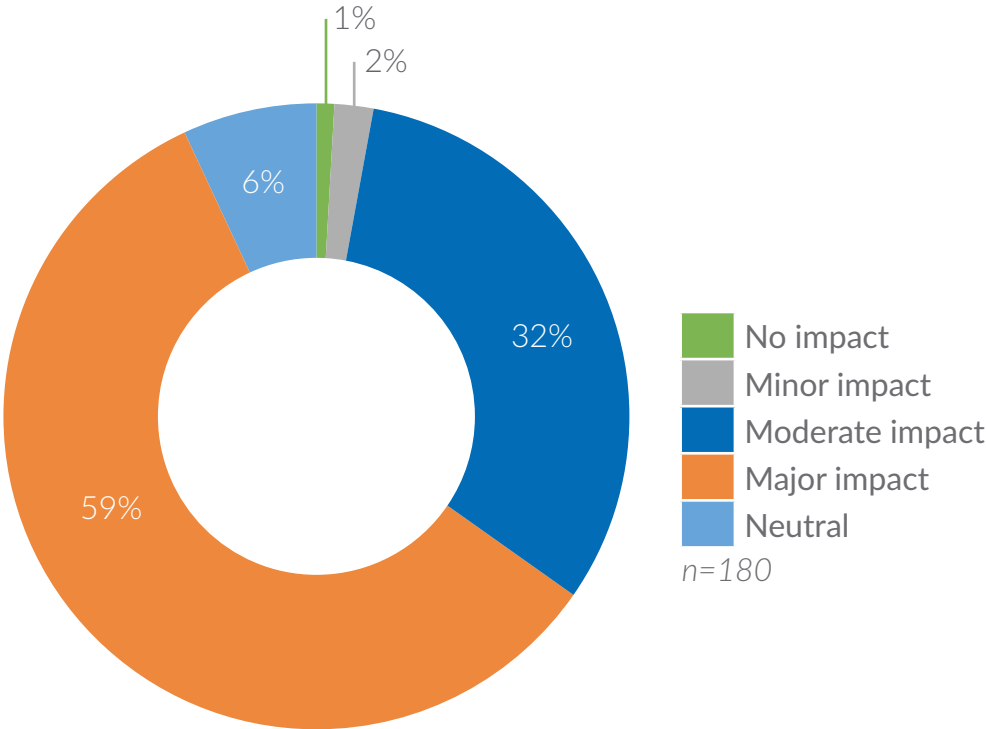
Are you satisfied with your contributions as a board member?



Effective use of talent also affects how much impact a board member feels they have on strategy. When talent is used well (n=157), 96% of respondents believe they have a major or moderate impact on the organization's strategic direction. When their talents are not used well (n=23), this drops to 57%.

With effective use of board member skills on the rise, board members' perception of strategic impact also improved. Ninety-one percent of respondents (n=180) believe their board has a major or moderate impact on the organization's strategic direction. This is up from 87% last year (n=229) and 82% in 2014 (n=198). Though there is still room for improvement, those that believe their board has little-to-no impact (neutral, minor or none) is also falling. It went from 18% in 2014 and 13% in 2015 to 9% this year.

What impact do you feel the board has on the organization's strategic direction?



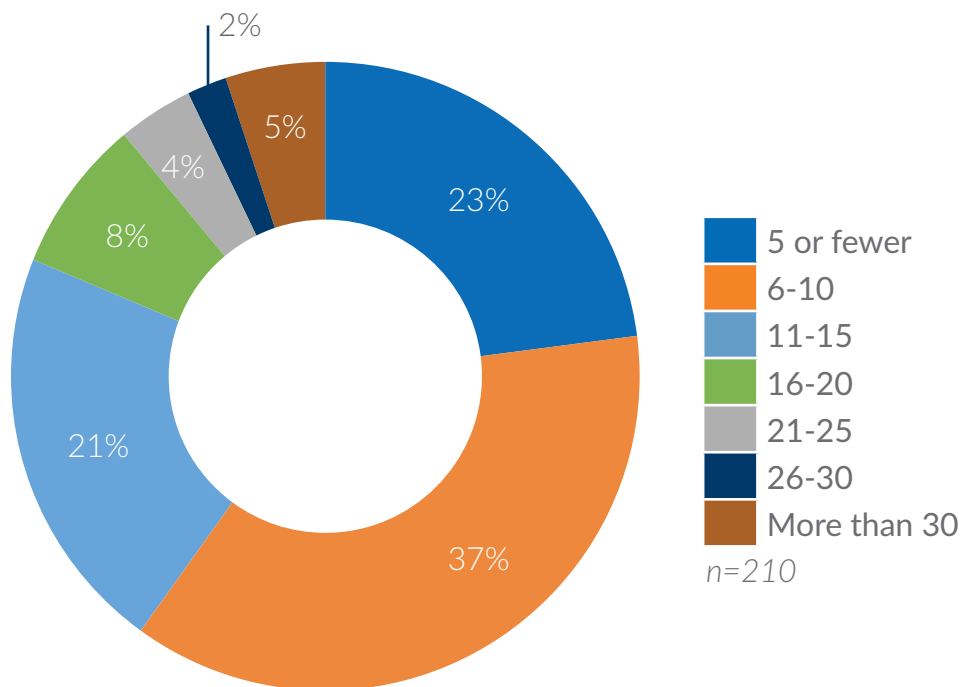
Though most board members seem satisfied with their contributions and impact, less than half (48%) (n=180) recommended or personally recruited members to their boards in 2016.



Section 2 | Board Meetings

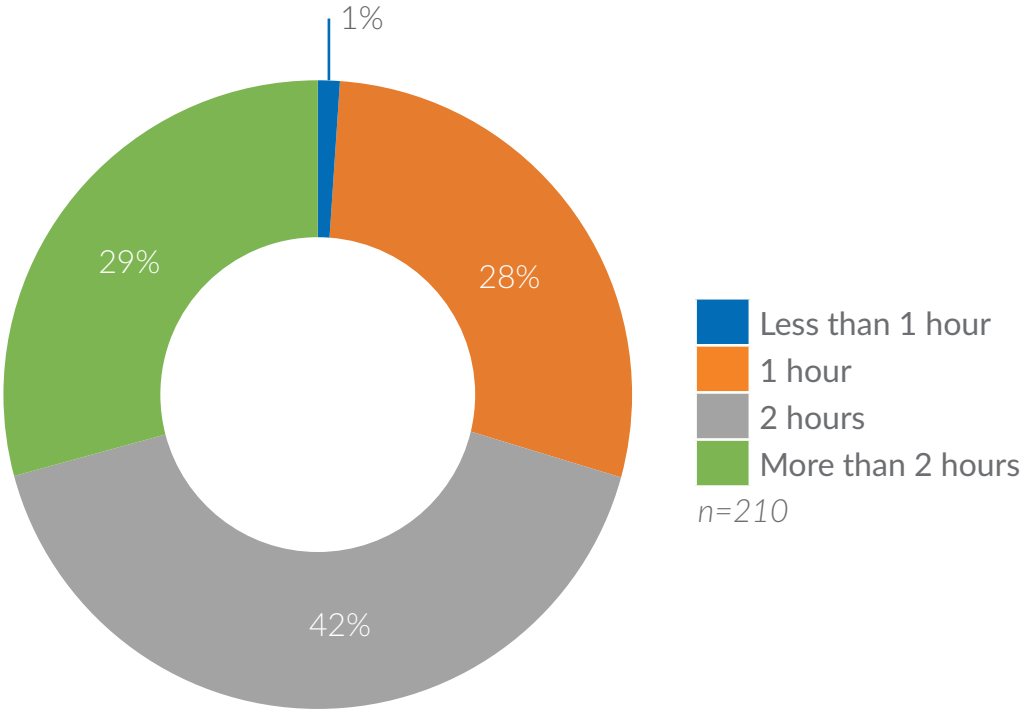
Effective board meetings keep members informed, on task and engaged. They provide an opportunity to discuss strategic plans, divvy up responsibilities, provide status updates, vote on organizational issues, and voice praises and concerns. Thirty-seven percent of board members (n=210) are expected to attend 6 – 10 board and committee meetings annually—the most-popular response of those surveyed.

During a 12-month period, how many board and committee meetings were you expected to attend?



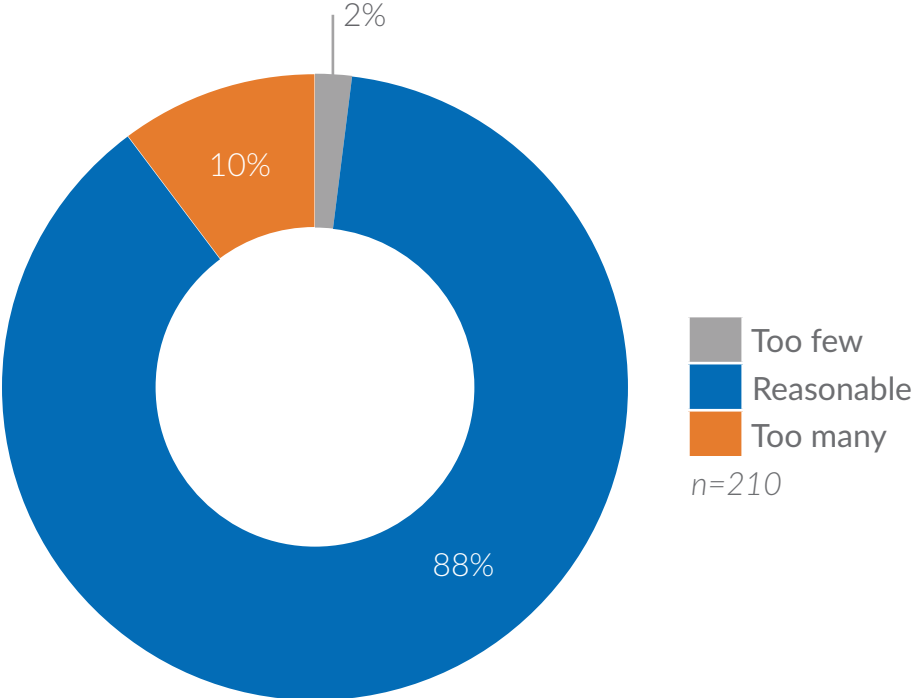
The typical board meeting lasts two hours (42%, n=210). However, meetings longer than two hours are becoming more common. This year, 29% were more than two hours versus 26% in 2015 (n=255) and 18% in 2014 (n=198).

How long are your organization's average board/committee meetings?

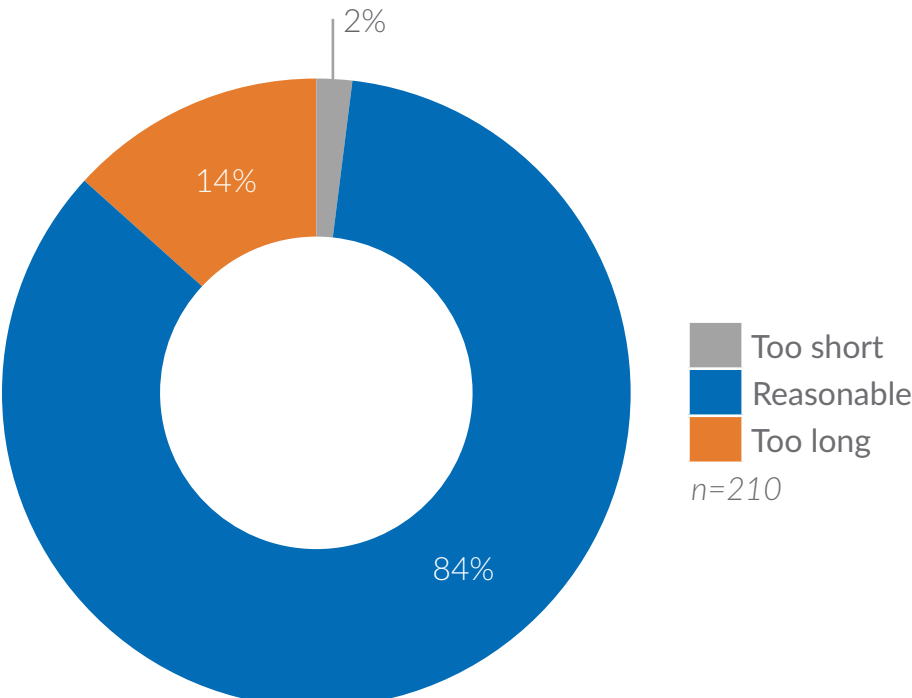


Most board members (88%) believe the number of meetings they are expected to attend seems reasonable (n=210). However, dissatisfaction in meeting duration is on the rise. As a result of longer meetings, 13% of board members (n=210) agreed that board and committee meetings are too long. This is compared to 11% in 2015 (n=255) and only 6% in 2014 (n=198).

The number of meetings you are expected to attend seems:



The length of meetings you are expected to attend seems:





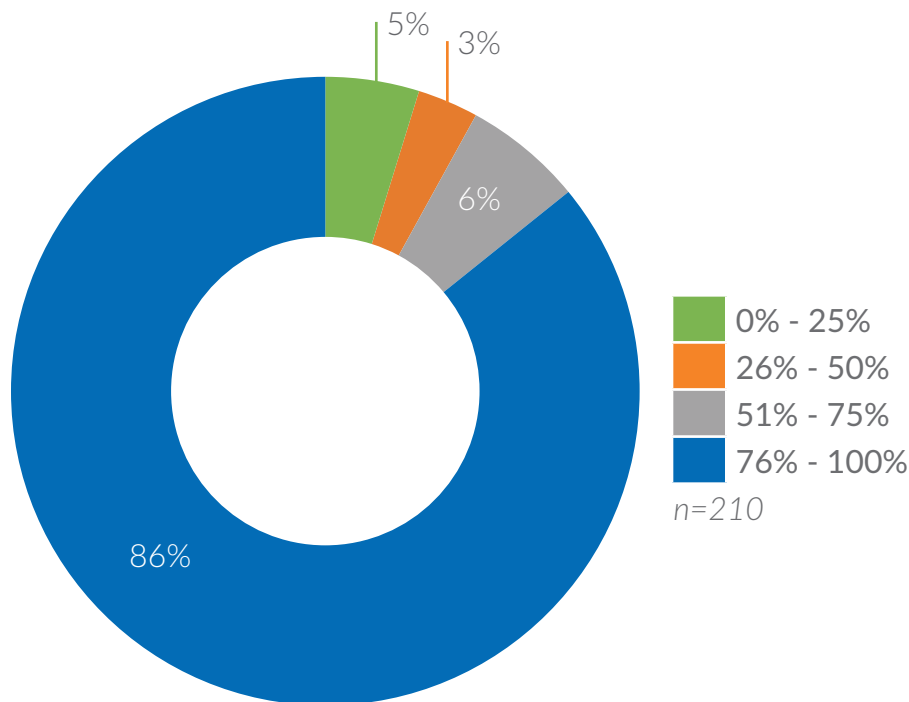
Keep Meeting Length in Check

To shorten long meetings and better engage board members, organizations should:

- [Stick to an agenda](#); assign each discussion topic a set timeframe.
- Send background information in advance so members come prepared.
- Use [online voting for consent agenda items](#) to save time.
- Start meetings on time.
- Note off-agenda topics for discussion at a later date to avoid tangents.

Meeting Attendance

Similar to last year, board attendance was high. Eighty-six percent of board members (n=210) attended 76% - 100% of board and committee meetings over the past 12 months, up from 81% (n=255) in 2015.



Active participation in board meetings influences board member happiness. **Board members that attended 75% or more meetings were more satisfied (73%, n=181) with their contributions than those who attended less than 75% of meetings (52%, n=29).**



Improve Meeting Attendance

Five percent of survey respondents attended less than 25% of meetings (n=210). How can your organization up attendance rates, and thereby member satisfaction?

- Give at least one-month advance notice of meetings.
- Sell your meeting's value; highlight the benefits of attending.
- Sync meeting invites with board members' personal calendaring systems.
- Send reminders with pertinent meeting details—e.g. location, agenda, participants' roles, etc.
- Keep meetings focused, on schedule and interactive.
- Track attendance, and acknowledge active participants.

Meeting Organization

Though getting members to meetings is important, it's also necessary to keep them engaged once they arrive. Lay the groundwork for success with optimal organization of meeting materials. This way, members can concentrate less on logistical nuances and more on the topics discussed.

Eighty-three percent of respondents (n=202) indicated that meeting materials are usually delivered in a timely manner, down from 88% last years (n=249). When this is the case (n=149), 86% of board members were satisfied with their contributions. When meeting materials were not delivered in a timely manner (n=31), only 65% of respondents stated satisfaction with contributions.

In addition, having meeting information in an organized, centralized and easily accessible place improves board satisfaction levels from 73% to 85% (n=41, n=139). Three out of four (76%) respondents (n=202) agree that archived meeting minutes, organizational data and other resources are accessible to board members, logically organized and easy to use. This is slightly up from last year (74%, n=249).

Sticking to an agenda also correlates with satisfaction levels. Ninety-five percent (n=202) believe that the majority of meetings are focused, productive and adhere to an agenda (up from 90%, n=249). When focused and productive (n=191), 74% of members are satisfied with contributions versus 55% when they are not (n=11).



Ensure Well-Run Meetings

Keep your meetings organized with the following tips:

- Send electronic versions of board packets, agendas and other materials in advance of meetings.
- Record and post comprehensive meeting minutes.
- Employ project management technologies to assign members tasks for completion.
- Use a board portal to store information in a centralized location.
- Keep historical archives of past meeting materials for reference.

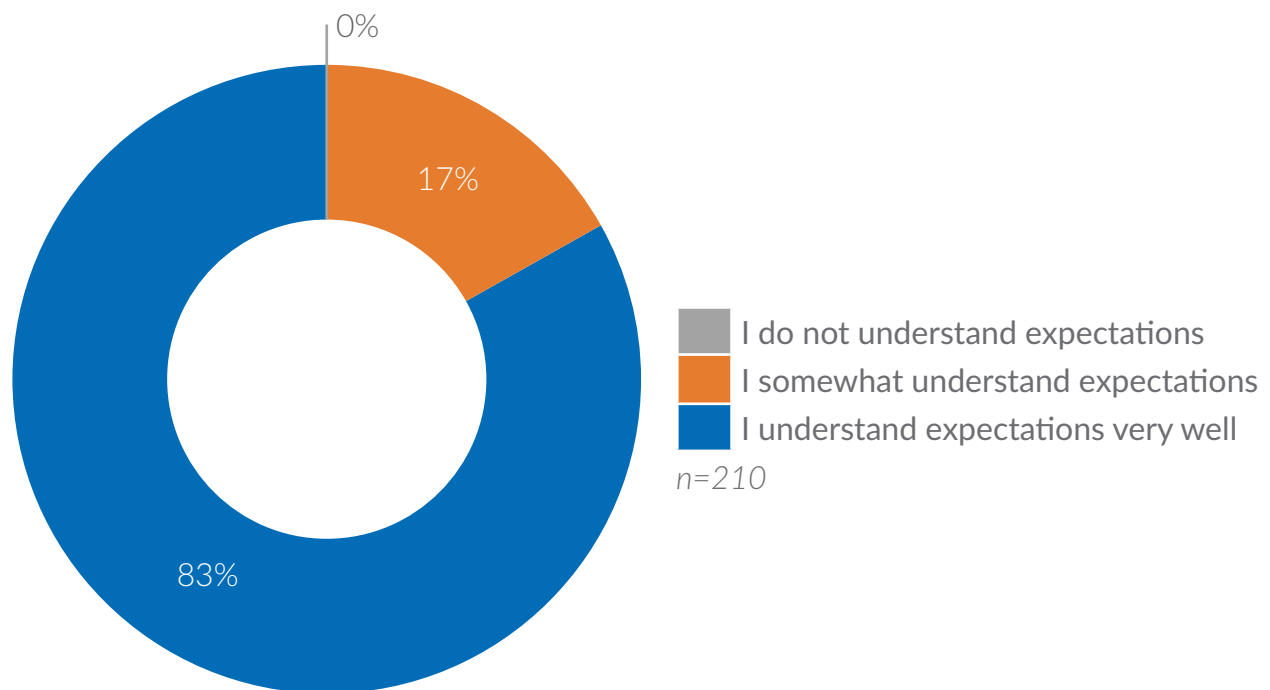


Section 3 | Board Communication

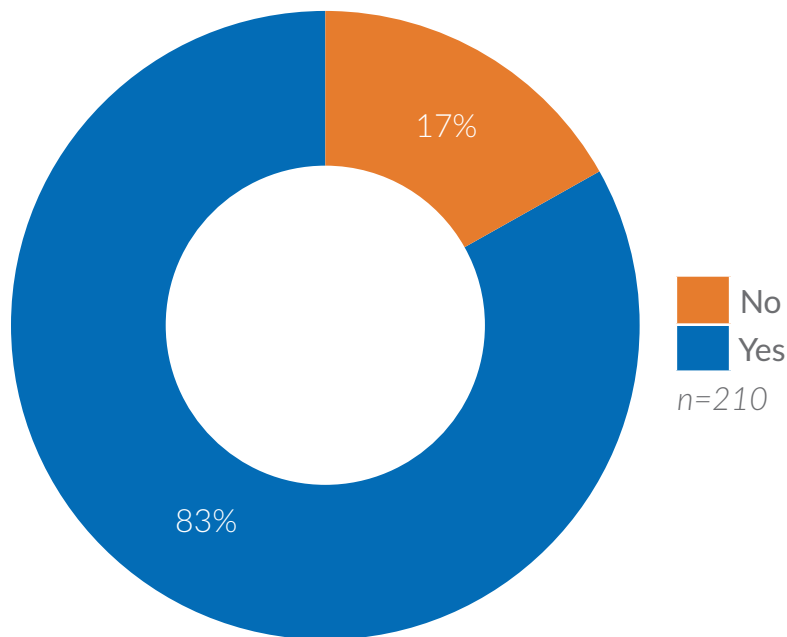
Another key factor in successful boards is communication. For organizations, this often means laying out board member expectations clearly, and then implementing feedback channels to gauge member happiness, performance and overall alignment with the nonprofit's goals.

The majority of board members (83%, n=210) said they understand board expectations very well. This is likely because organizations are doing a good job communicating them. Eighty-three percent of respondents (n=210) indicated that board expectations and responsibilities are clearly defined by the organization for which they serve.

How well do you understand board member expectations?



Are board expectations and role responsibilities clearly defined by the organization you serve?



When expectations and responsibilities are clearly defined (n=174), 74% of board members were satisfied with contributions. This drops to 56% when they are not clearly defined (n=36).

There was also a slight improvement on boards' abilities to [solicit member feedback](#). Sixty-nine percent of respondents (n=202) agree that their board has processes in place to collect, evaluate and implement board and committee suggestions, up from 64% (n=249) last year. With processes in place (n=128), 88% of respondents were satisfied with their contributions, compared to 69% when they were not (n=52).

However, this still means 31% do not have feedback loops in place, flagging this as an area where many boards can still improve.

Solicit Board Feedback

Feedback on board meeting format, agenda items, management methods, roles, performance and more can help your organization continuously improve over time. Encourage your board members to speak up:

- Explain your feedback goals: what you will collect and why.
- Provide outlets to submit feedback (in-person meetings, online surveys/polls, etc.).
- Don't punish members for providing poor feedback or noting areas for improvement.
- Take action based on suggestions. Show that feedback is valued by your organization.

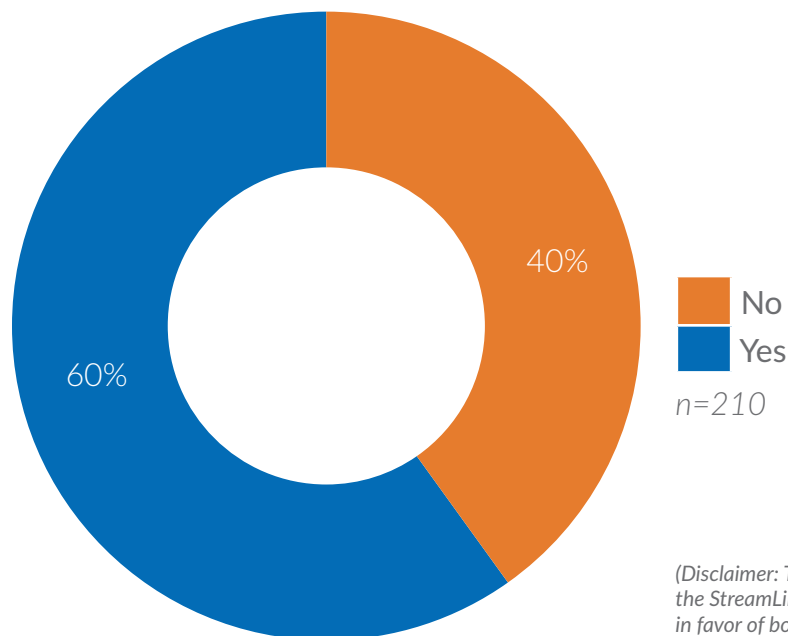
Member-to-member communication has remained steady with last year's results. When asked if the board makes it easy for members to communicate with one another, 83% of respondents (n=202) agreed, compared to 84% (n=249) last year. **Boards that make it easy to communicate (n=150) have higher satisfaction rates than those that do not (n=30), at 85% and 67%, respectively.**



Section 4 | Board Technology

Sixty percent of respondents (n=202) use a board portal or other board management software, up from 53% in 2015 (n=249) and 36% in 2014 (n=198).

Does your organization use a board portal or other board management software?



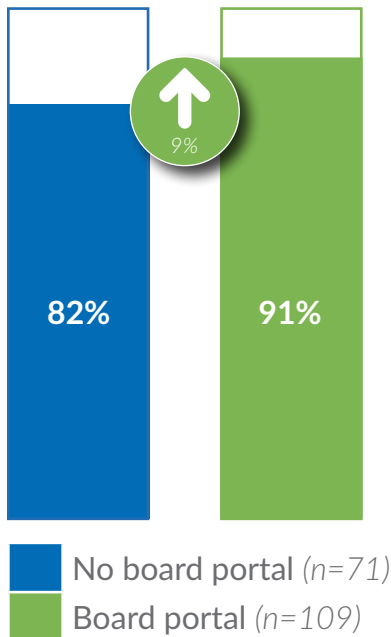
(Disclaimer: The majority of survey responses were solicited via the StreamLink Software network. Responses may be skewed in favor of board portal users.)

Board portals provide the tools needed to keep board management on track:

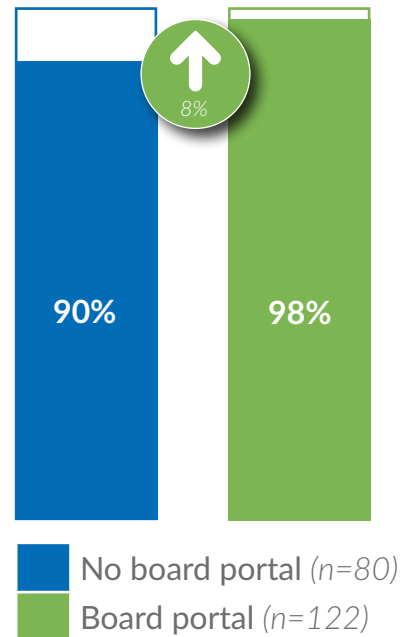
- House meeting materials, member profiles, bylaws, policies and compliance documents in a central, online repository
- Send meeting invites and reminders, and track attendance.
- Collect feedback via polls and online surveys.
- Upload multi-year strategic plans, and tie to meetings members and tasks for improved performance tracking.

As such, they have a positive impact on many of the factors that contribute to more satisfied board members, including talent utilization, meeting organization, expectation setting and communication.

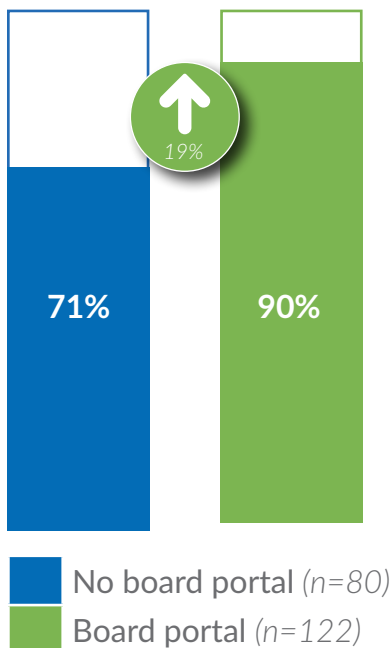
Board member skills and talents are effectively used by the organization.



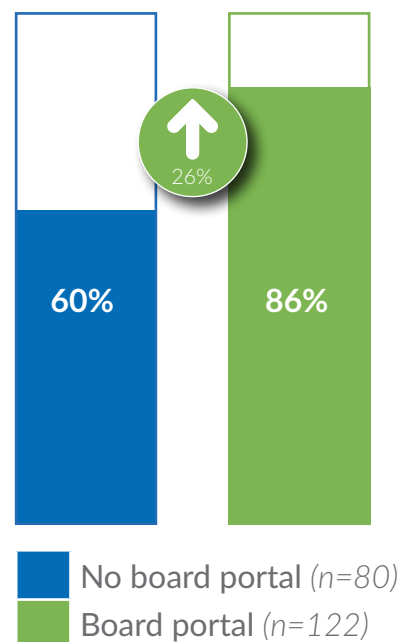
The majority of meetings are focused, productive and adhered to an agenda.



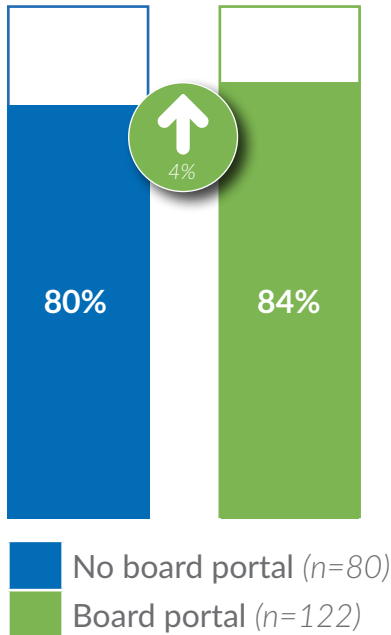
Meeting materials are delivered in a timely manner.



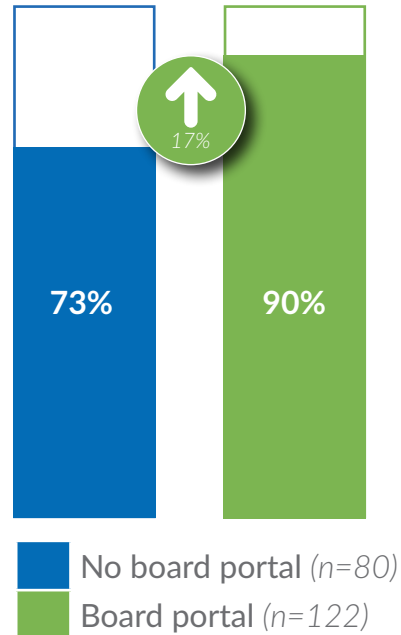
Archived meeting minutes, organizational data and other resources are accessible to board members, logically organized and easy to use.



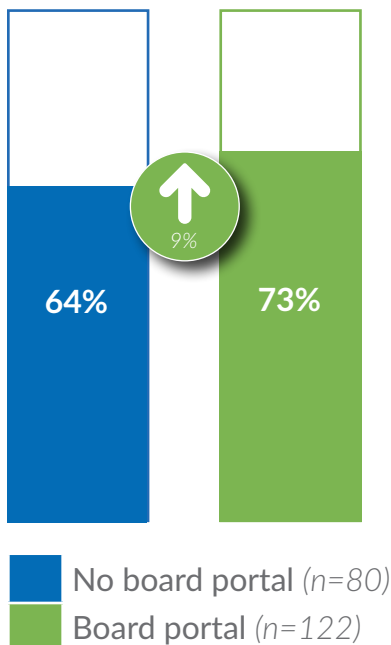
Board expectations and role responsibilities are clearly defined.



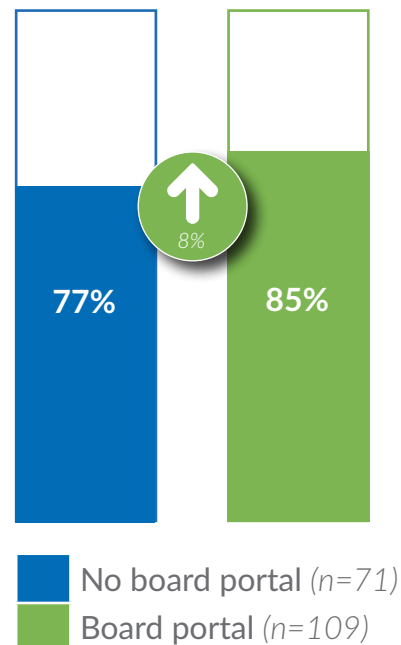
The organization makes it easy for board members to communicate with one another.



Processes exist to collect, evaluate and implement board and committee suggestions.



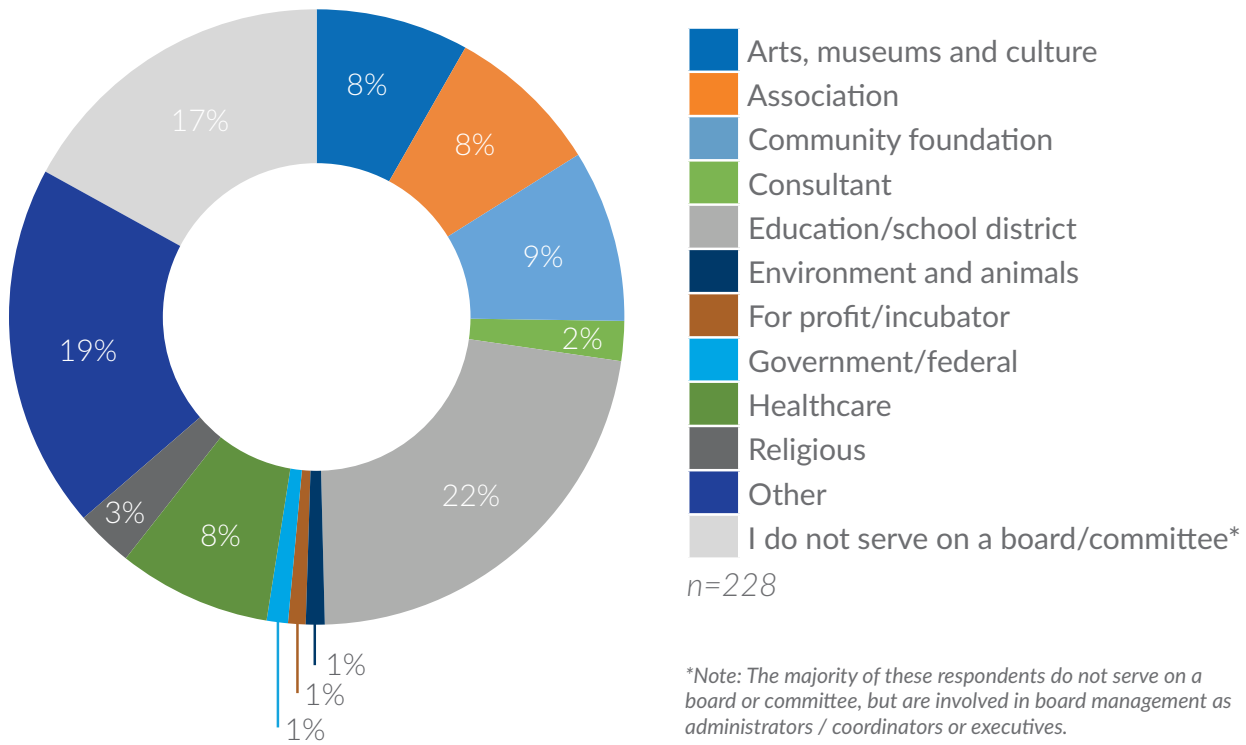
Overall board member satisfaction with contributions.



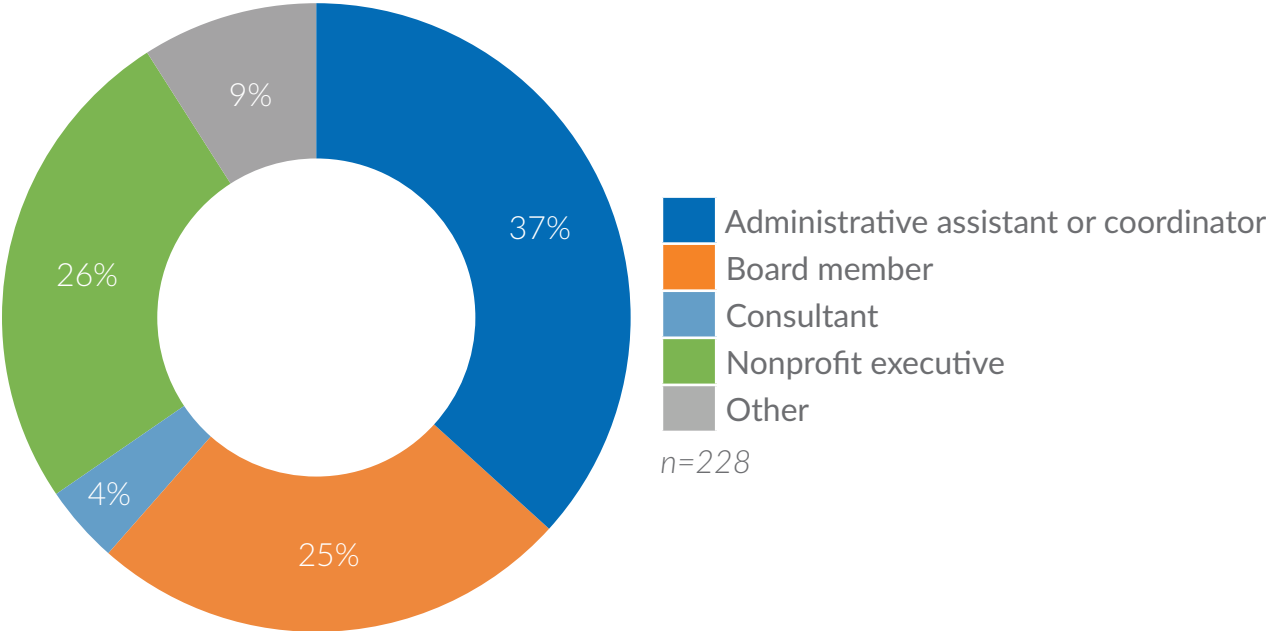
Appendix

Respondent Demographics

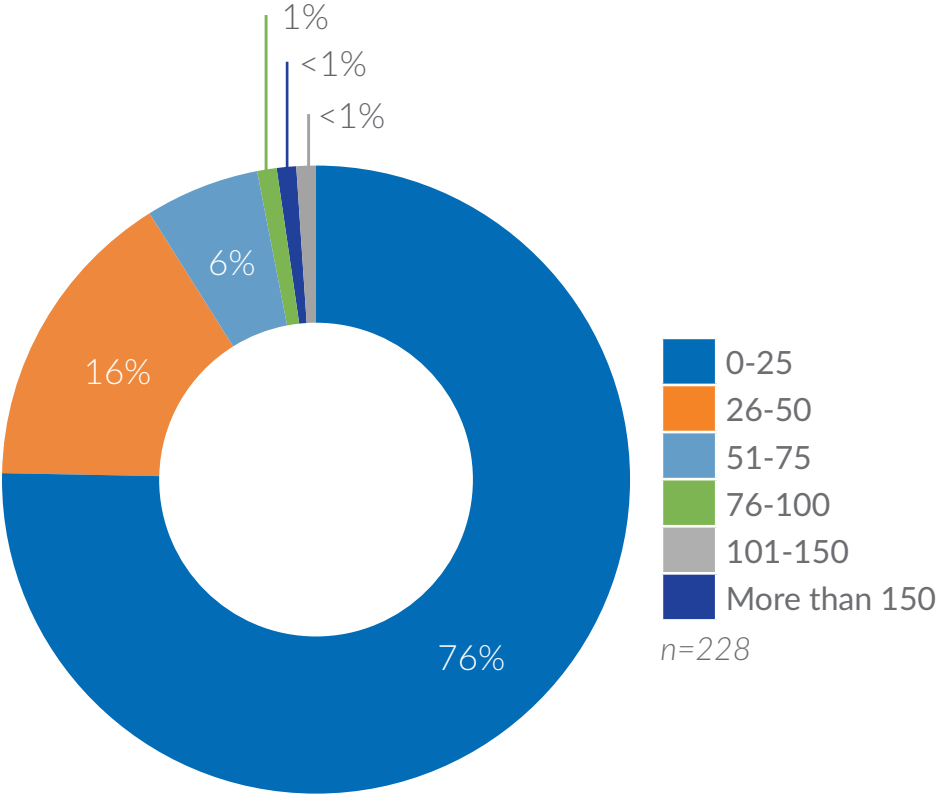
What best describes the organization where you serve as a board/committee member? (If you serve on multiple boards, answer the questions on behalf of one.)



Please select the role that best describes you.



How many people serve on your nonprofit board?



About BoardMax

BoardMax provides a centralized environment for all board-related information. That means meeting materials and information, organizational documentation, task assignments, and member records are logically organized and available 24/7 to board, committee and staff members.

BoardMax has built-in tools that help ensure your organization is compliant with IRS requirements, accreditation bodies, fiscal audits and board expectations.

About StreamLink Software

Founded in 2008, StreamLink Software (StreamLinkSoftware.com) is the leading board and grant management software-as-a-service technology provider for nonprofit and public sector institutions.

The company's flagship grant management solution, [AmpliFund](#), automates hundreds of complex activities throughout the grant lifecycle, thus freeing up valuable resources to pursue additional funding. Its board management portal, [BoardMax](#), helps organizations engage and communicate with board members.

Connect with StreamLink Software on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [YouTube](#) and on our [BoardMax blog](#).