

Accessibility in the F/AIC: Our Membership, Our Strengths, Our Challenges



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Abstract

During 2020 - 2021, the Equity and Inclusion Committee, in conjunction with AIC member Sally G. Kim, undertook an accessibility survey of the field of cultural heritage conservation. The goal of the survey was to better understand the needs of the current conservation and collections care community, prospective conservation students, and other users of programming and materials produced by both AIC and the Foundation for Advancement in Conservation (FAIC). To our knowledge there is currently no data on accessibility in the field of conservation in North America.

Objectives

The goal of the survey was to collect data from AIC members, affiliated professionals, and students pertaining to their perceptions of, and experiences with, accessibility of conservation information. It is our hope that the data collected will better articulate the needs and challenges of our community. The survey results will be used to guide efforts to raise awareness of issues our community is facing, provide pertinent resources, and gather baseline data against which to measure future progress in the field. The areas covered by the survey and report include demographics, disability awareness, personal experiences of those with disabilities, disability rights and accommodations, and experiences accessing conservation information and events.

Methods

The survey was openly available for voluntary participation from January 11 to February 5, 2021 and was promoted via email to multiple groups both within and outside the AIC. At its close, the survey collected what the authors deemed an excellent response rate with **558 complete responses, of which 162 identified as having a disability. Therefore, our data represents** the experiences of both those in our field with disabilities as well as the understanding and accessibility challenges of our larger membership.

Results: overview

Respondents represented a variety of age, workplace, and specialization demographics across AIC and non-AIC members. **Ages of respondents presented a wide range skewing below 45 years of age**, with 27% being under 34 years, 29% being 35-44, 16% 45-54, and 18% being 55 or older (other responses represented less than 5% for each). **The most common workplace for respondents was in museums or historic houses (41%)**, with 17% working in libraries or archives, 9% in private practice, and 5% each working as contractors or in regional labs (other responses represented less than 5% for each). **Sixty-four percent identified as conservators**, 9% as grad students or recent graduates, and 8% identified as collections care professionals (other responses represented less than 5% for each).

For further details on questions included in the survey and a more fulsome summary of responses, please see our full report when it is released (see QR code, below)

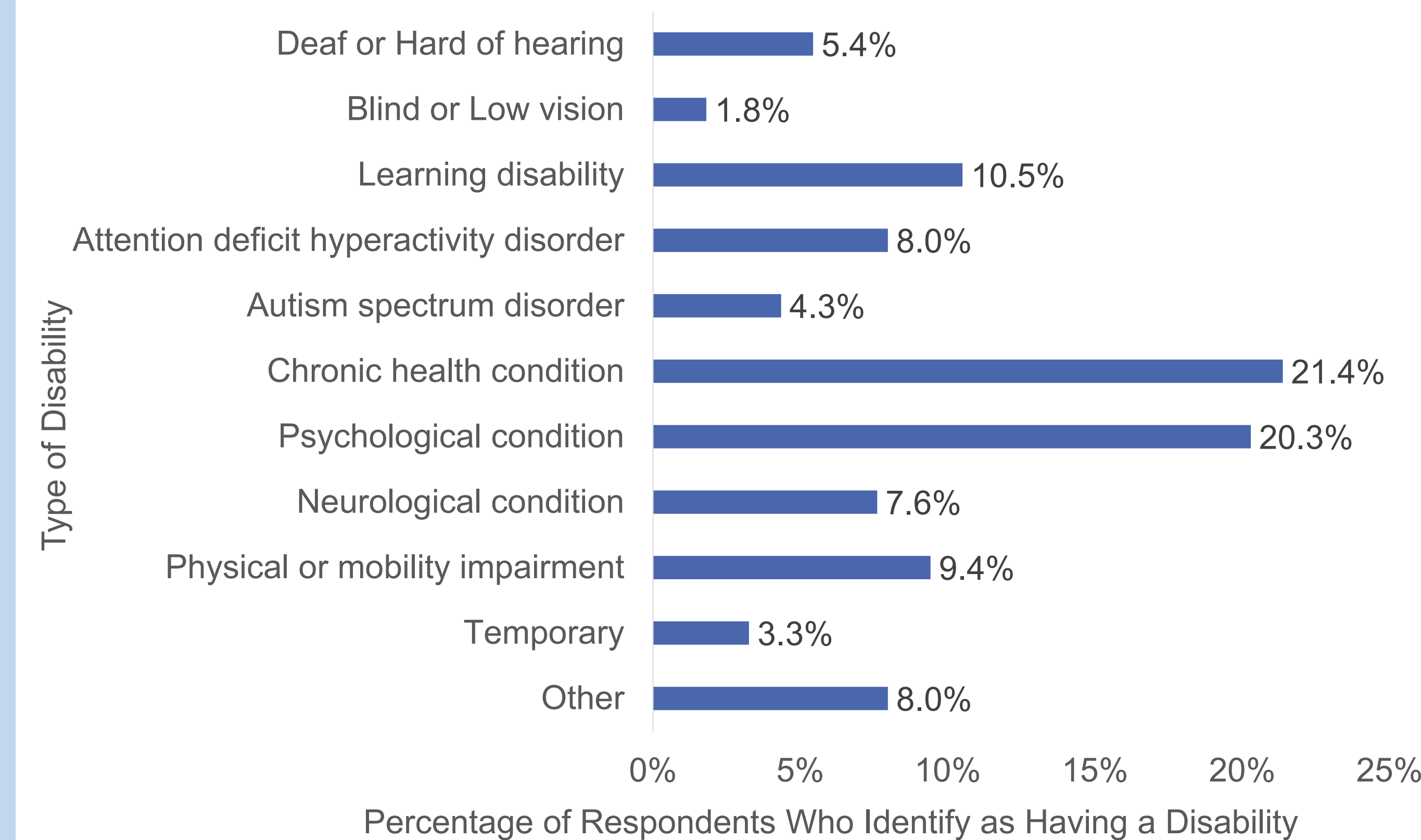
To learn more, please visit our project website:
culturalheritage.org/accessibility-survey
or, scan the QR code to the right



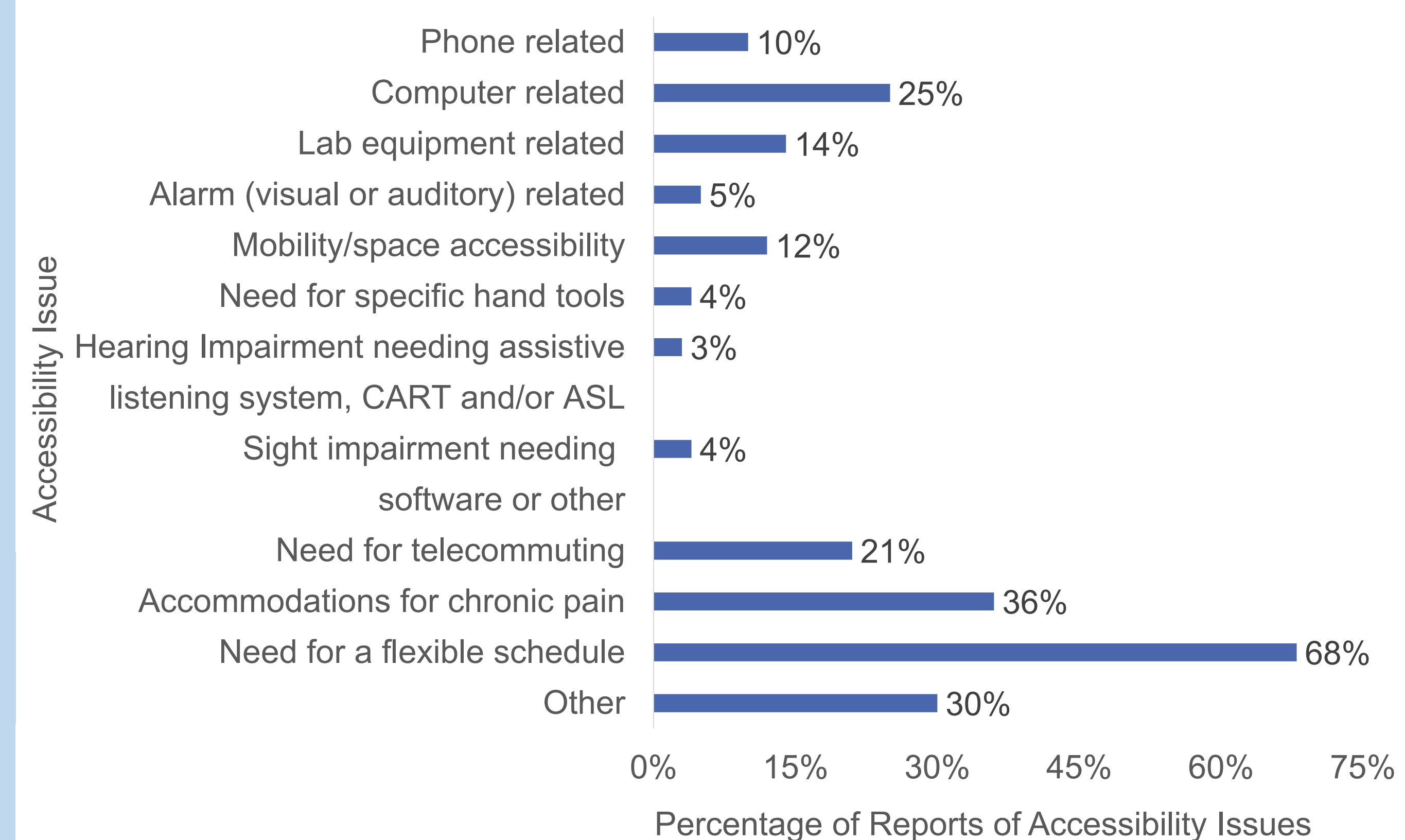
Results: challenges

- Overall, 41% of those who identify as having disabilities felt understood and supported by their colleagues. Notably, those who self-reported as blind/low vision or as having psychological conditions appeared to feel more understood and supported while those identifying as within the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) appear to have felt the least understood.
- Generally, there is a lack of understanding about disability awareness and disability rights by the majority of both respondents who identified as having or not having disabilities.
- However, feedback specific to the accessibility of F/AIC events and resources provide useful data to help guide increased accessibility of future F/AIC efforts.

What type(s) of disability do you identify as having?



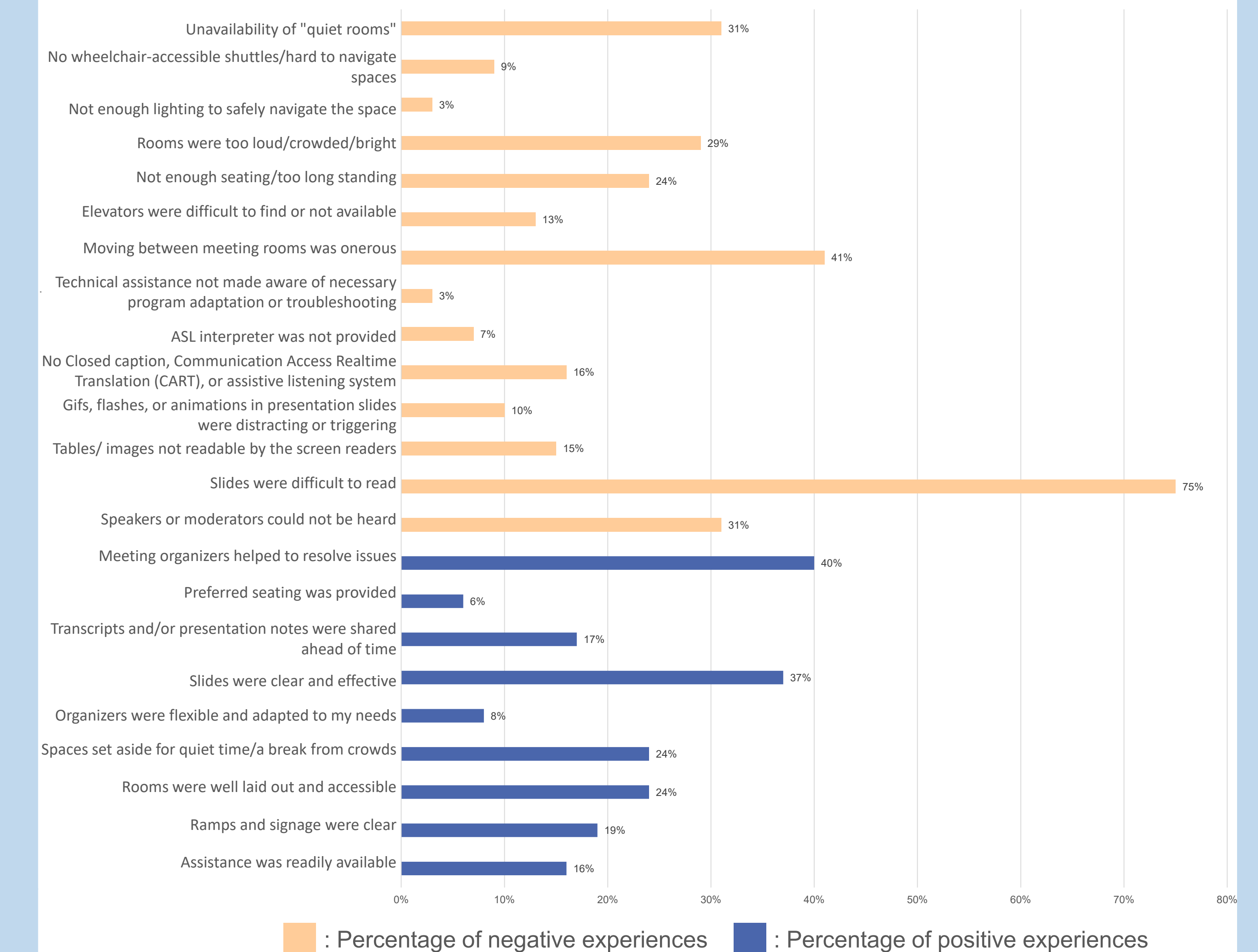
Accessibility Issues in the Classroom or Workplace



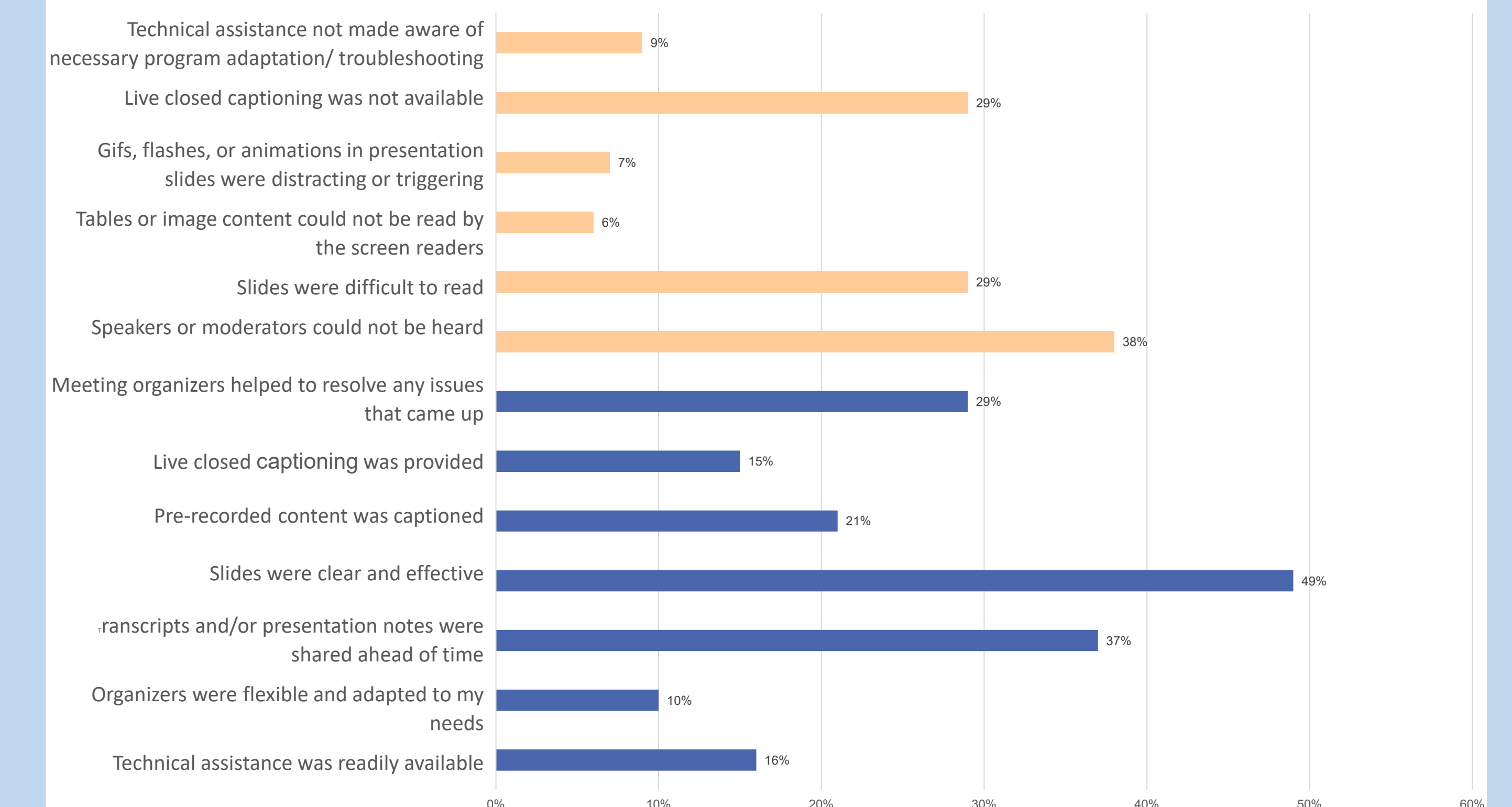
Types of Conservation Resources	Percentage of Reported Issues in Accessing Resources
General information about conservation, preservation, or the profession	6.6%
Webinars	9.0%
Conferences	13.1%
Symposia	7.4%
Lectures	11.5%
Small, hands-on workshops	9.0%
Connecting to Collections Care materials	2.5%
Grant or scholarship materials	9.8%
AIC/FAIC website	4.9%
Archived websites	3.3%
Online courses	6.6%
Online publications	4.9%
Print publications	4.1%
None	0.8%
Other	6.6%

Results

Negative & Positive Experiences at In-Person Events



Negative & Positive Experiences at Virtual Events



Next Steps

The Equity and Inclusion Committee has drafted recommendations based on the survey results. These include recommendations to the boards and staff of AIC and FAIC, networks and specialty groups, as well as for the general AIC membership.

Key takeaways from the survey point to a lack of knowledge and familiarity around accessibility issues, laws, and rights. Because of this, some suggestions are based on individuals increasing their knowledge and are not enforceable for us as an organization.

It must be emphasized that **the work of creating a more accessible organization is not an 'add-on.'** It is an issue that touches on the health, safety, and sustainability of our field and must be incorporated into all aspects of our work. Considering the high number of survey respondents who identified as having psychological and chronic health conditions, both invisible and visible disabilities need to be considered when creating accommodations.

Recommendations have been put forward to the AIC Board of Directors offering areas of improvement in three broad areas where increased awareness, education, and support will help increase broader accessibility:

- F/AIC Boards and Staff
- Networks and Specialty Groups
- Individual Members