

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON CANADA'S DOCUMENTARY COMMUNITY



DOCUMENTARY ORGANIZATION OF CANADA
DOCUMENTARISTES DU CANADA

June 3rd, 2020

In mid-April, the Documentary Organization of Canada (DOC) circulated a survey to its members and others in Canada's documentary production community.

The survey was designed to give a snapshot of the impacts of COVID 19, both quantitative and qualitative, on people working in the documentary community.

The survey had four sections:

- Basic demographic information;
- A section for producers/directors aimed at capturing the impacts on specific projects that respondents identified as being key to their livelihood;
- A section for freelancers aimed at capturing a portrait of lost jobs and lost revenue; and
- A section for everyone to express the different ways their work as documentarians is being impacted, emotional impacts, what kinds of supports they need, what they would like DOC to focus on in terms of support and advocacy.

Section A: Respondents Profile

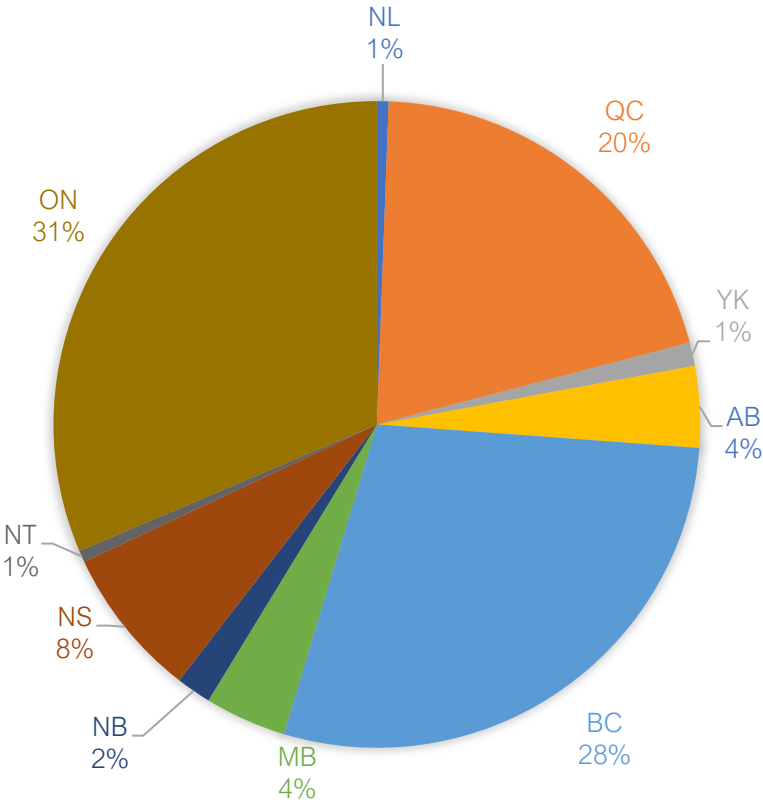
The survey was circulated in both English and French.

A total of 172 people completed the survey: 145 people in English and 27 in French.

Respondents came from 8 of 10 provinces and 2 of the 3 territories. 37% of those who completed the French language survey live outside of Quebec.

Location (province and city) of survey respondents

172 Respondents



Province/Territory	Number of Respondents
NFLD	1
QC	35
YK	2
AB	7
BC	49
MB	7
NB	3
NS	13
NT	1
ON	54

ON	QC	NL	YK	AB	MB	NB	NS	NWT	BC
Toronto (40)	Montreal (31)	Mount Pearl	Dawson City	Edmonton (4)	Winnipeg (7)	Caraquet (2)	Halifax (7)	Yellowknife	Vancouver (38)
The Blue Mountains	Gatineau		Whitehorse	Cochrane		Moncton 1	Dartmouth		Burnaby
Picton	Ogden			Calgary			Terrence Bay		New Westminster
Hamilton	Val-David								Surrey
Niagara	Saint-Alexandre								Sidney (Gulf Islands)
Haldimand									Skidegate
St Catherines									South Hazelton
Thornhill									Victoria
Windsor									
Ajax									
Ottawa									

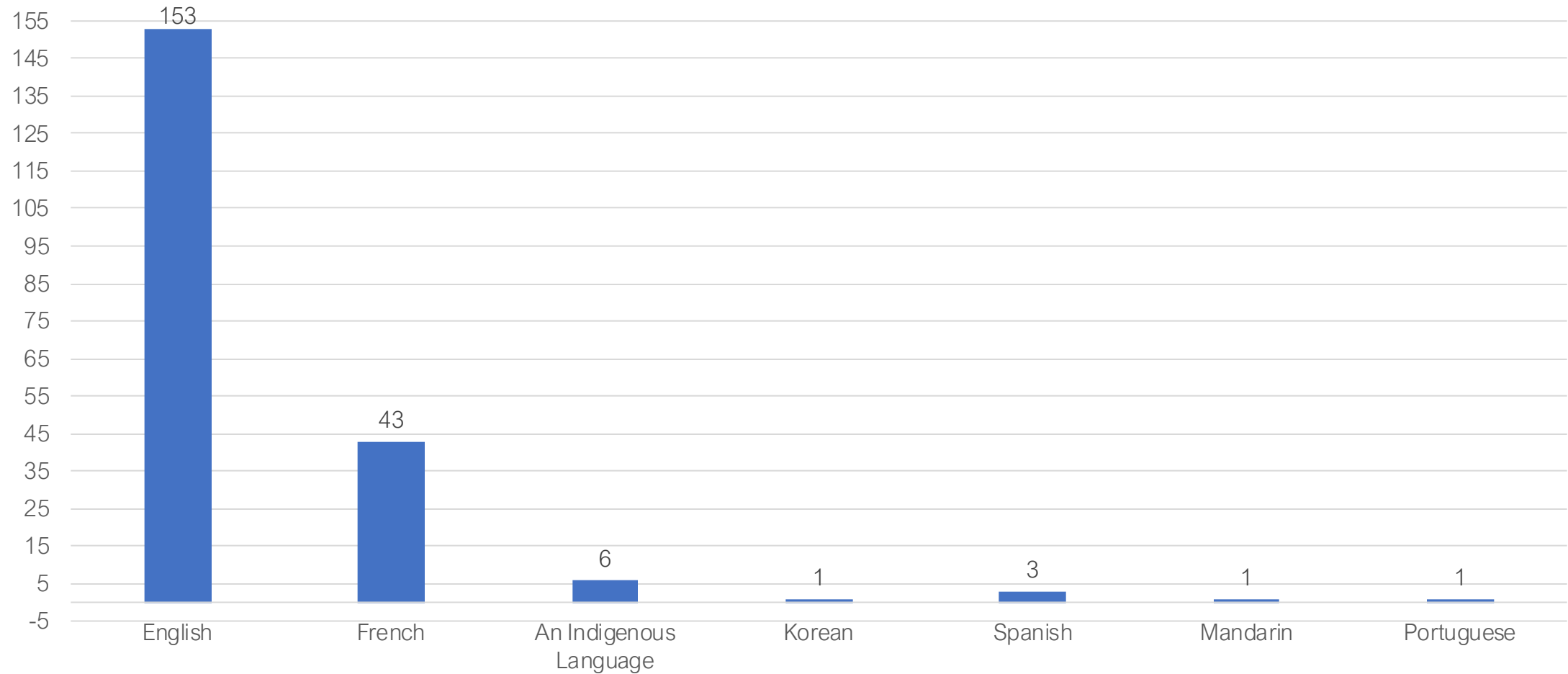
13% of those who completed the English language survey indicated that they work in French. 44% of those who completed the French language survey identified as working in English. 3.5% overall identified as working in an Indigenous language.

Respondents were given the option to identify as working in more than one language.

Which language do you work in?

172 Respondents

*Respondents could choose more than one option.

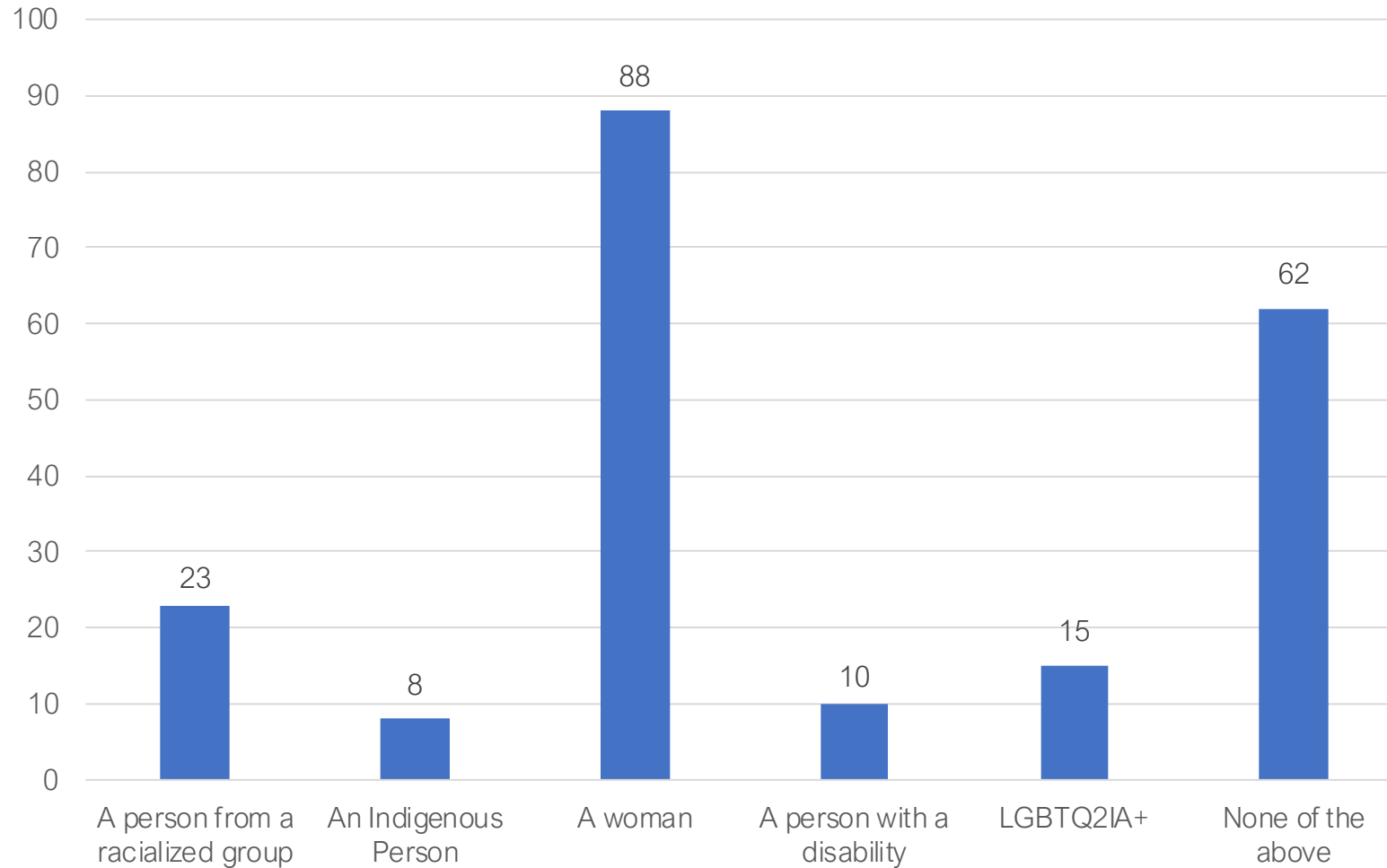


Respondents were broadly representative in terms of gender and cultural diversity.

Gender and cultural diversity

172 Respondents

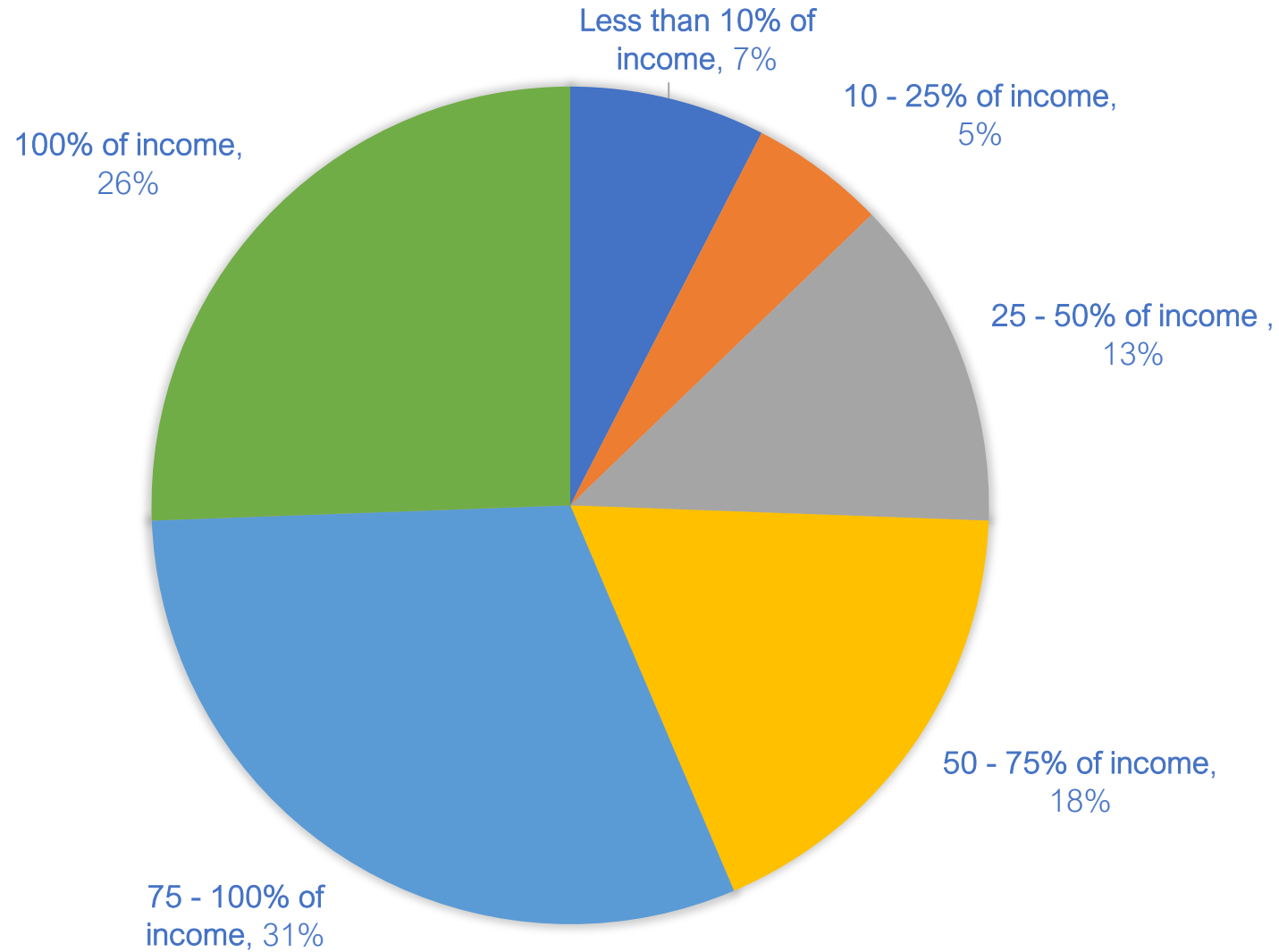
*Respondents could choose more than one option.



A large majority (74%) indicated they derive 50% or more of their income from work in the documentary sector and a majority said they have worked in the sector for more than 15 years. 45.3% indicated they work on both self-initiated projects (as producer and/or director) and on third-party projects as a freelancer for hire.

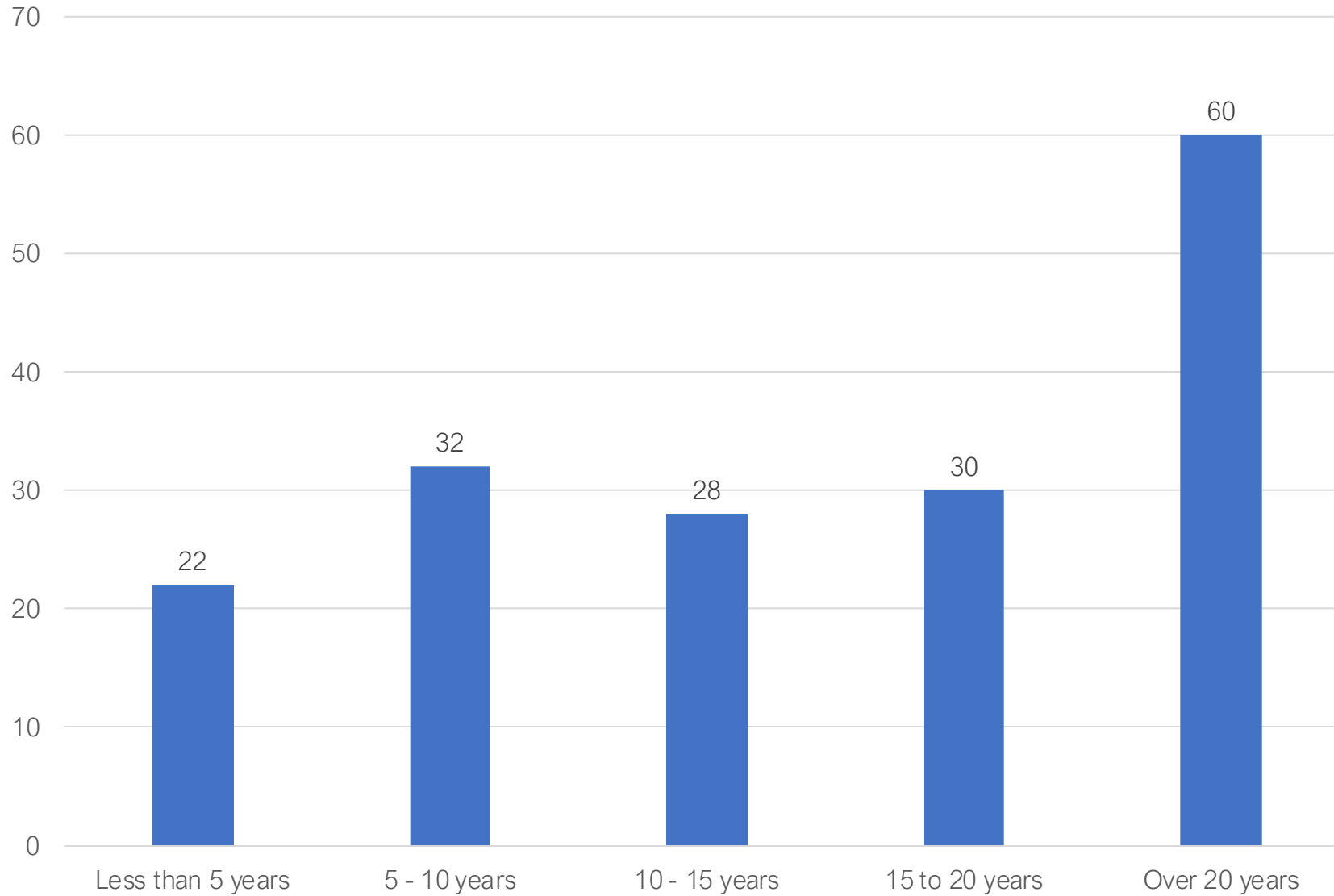
Percentage of income derived from work in the documentary sector:

172 Respondents



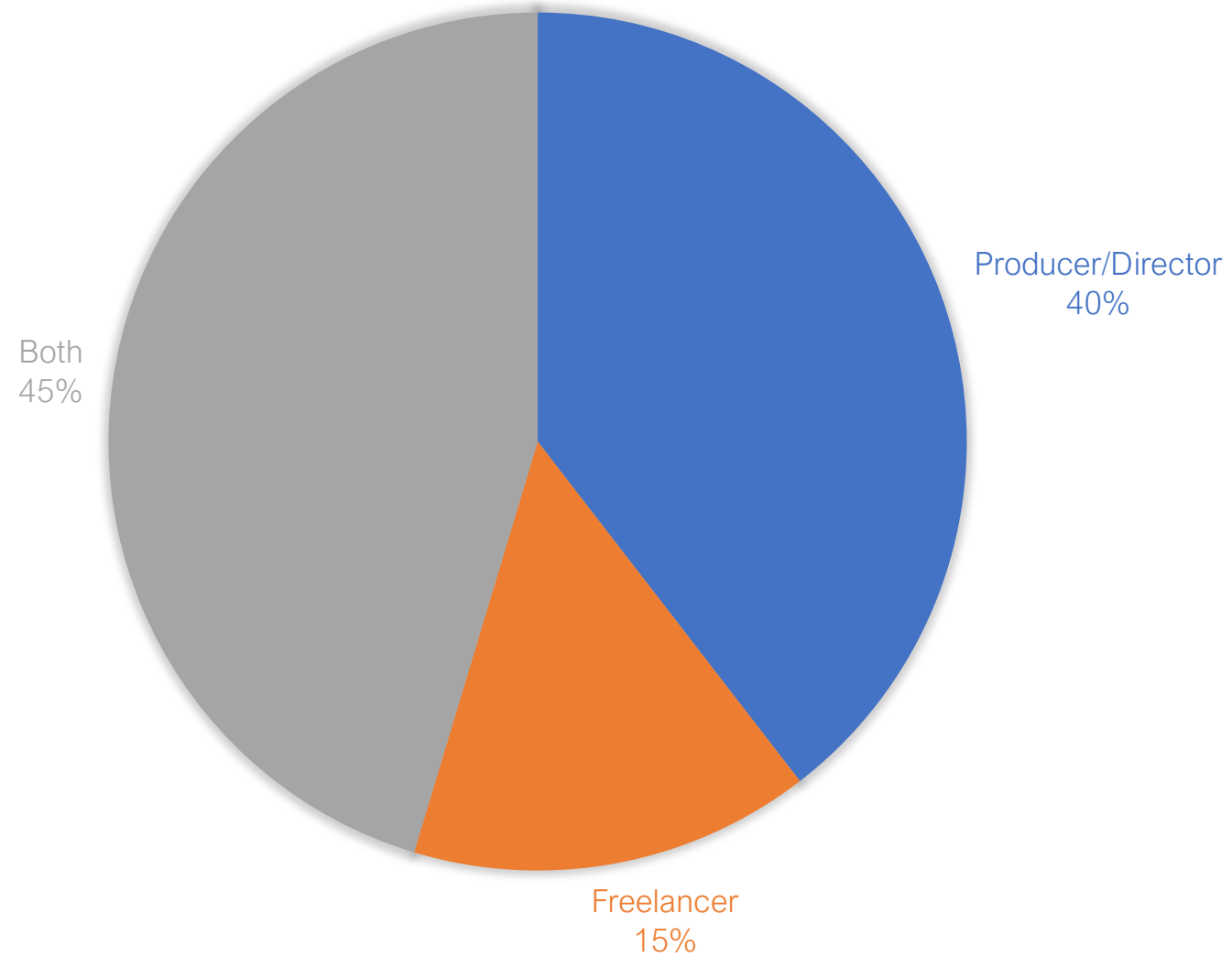
Number of years working in the documentary sector:

172 Respondents



Type of work respondents typically do

172 Respondents



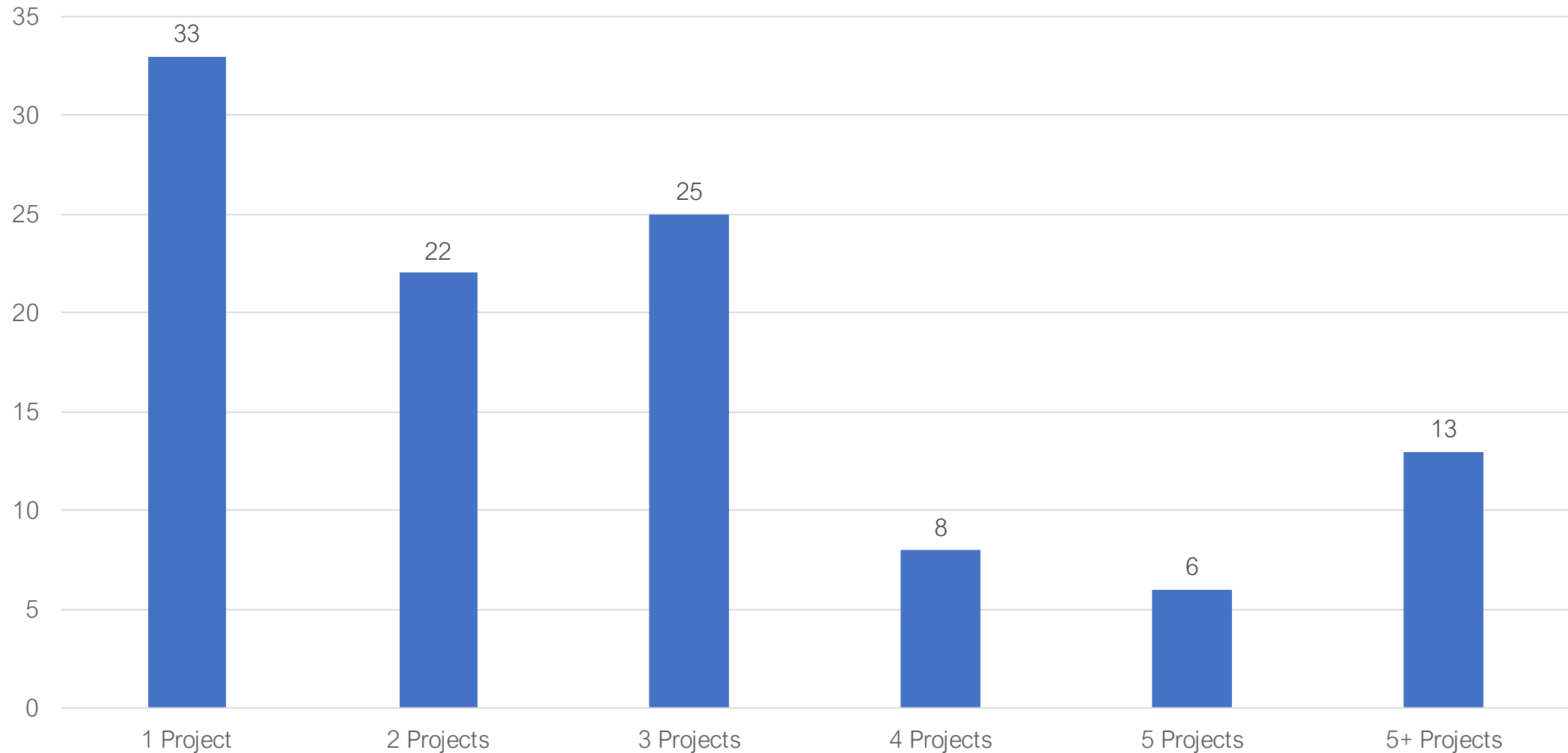
Section B: Producers and Directors

107 people completed all or part of the section for producers/directors aimed at capturing the impacts on specific projects identified by the respondent as being key to their livelihood.

We asked respondents how many projects they had underway just before the pandemic:

Number of projects that respondents had underway prior to March 15th (i.e. pre-pandemic)

107 Respondents



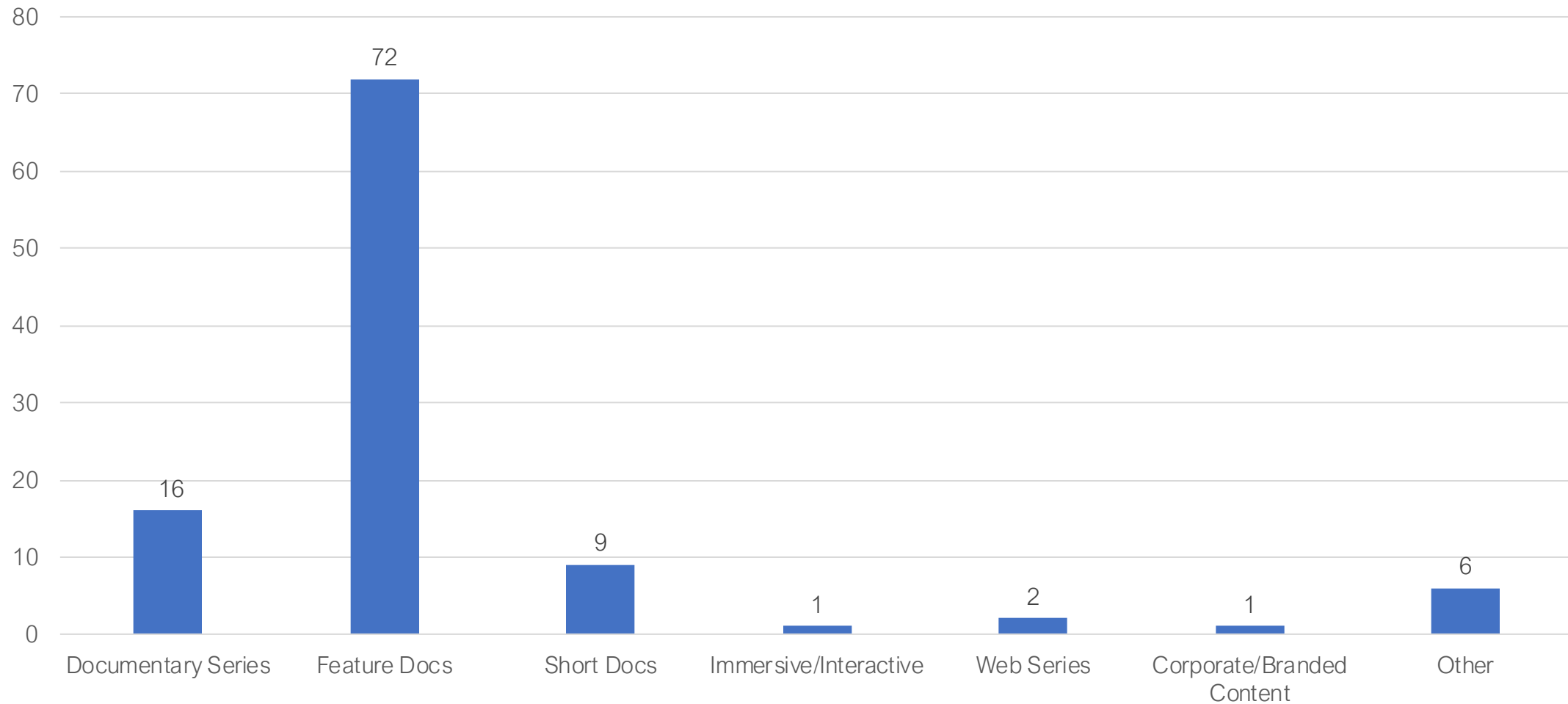
People were invited to respond to a series of questions about the project they considered most important to their livelihood. All 107 respondents completed part or all of this section.

Project 1

Producers and Directors

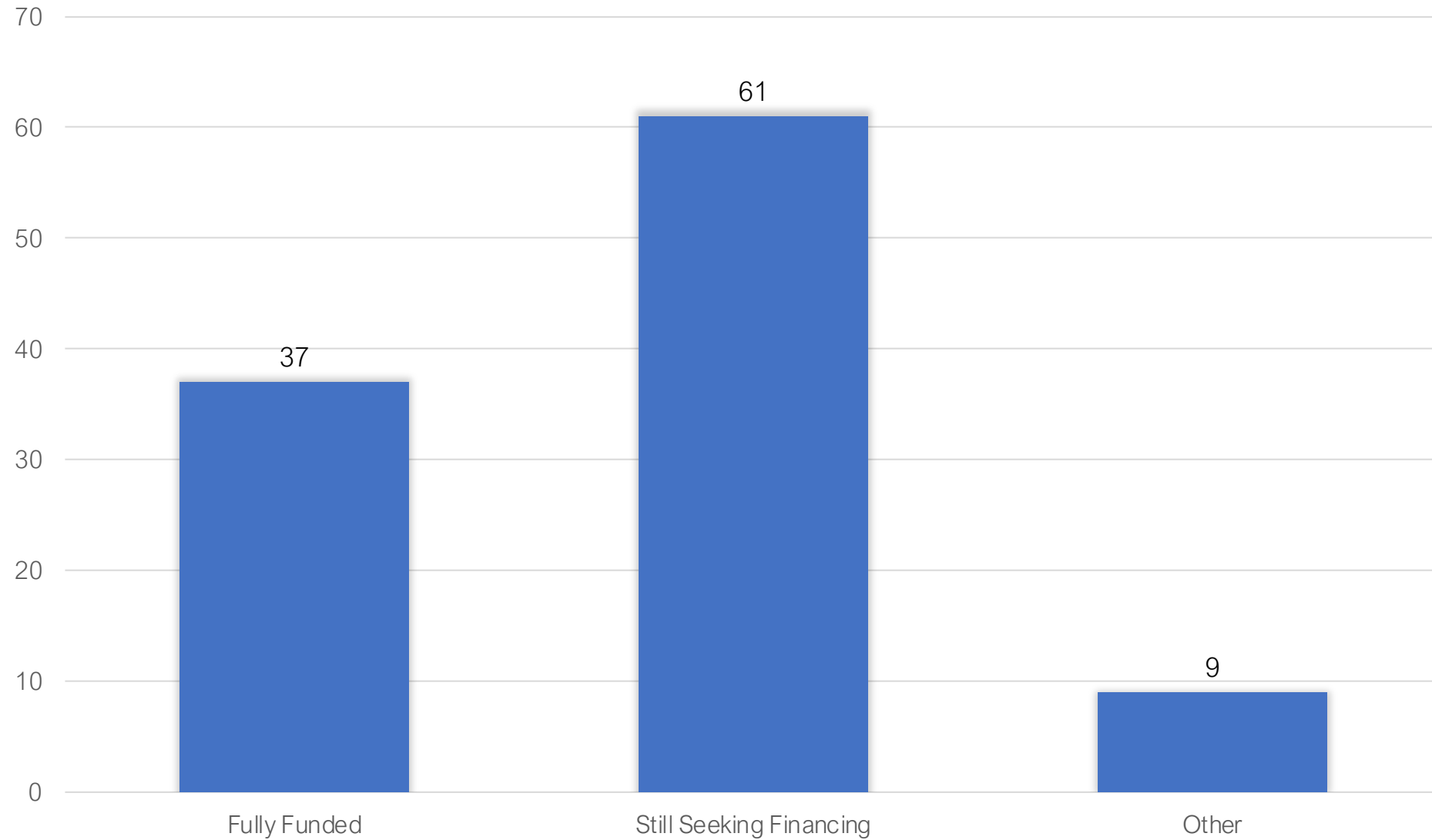
Project 1: Genres

107 Respondents



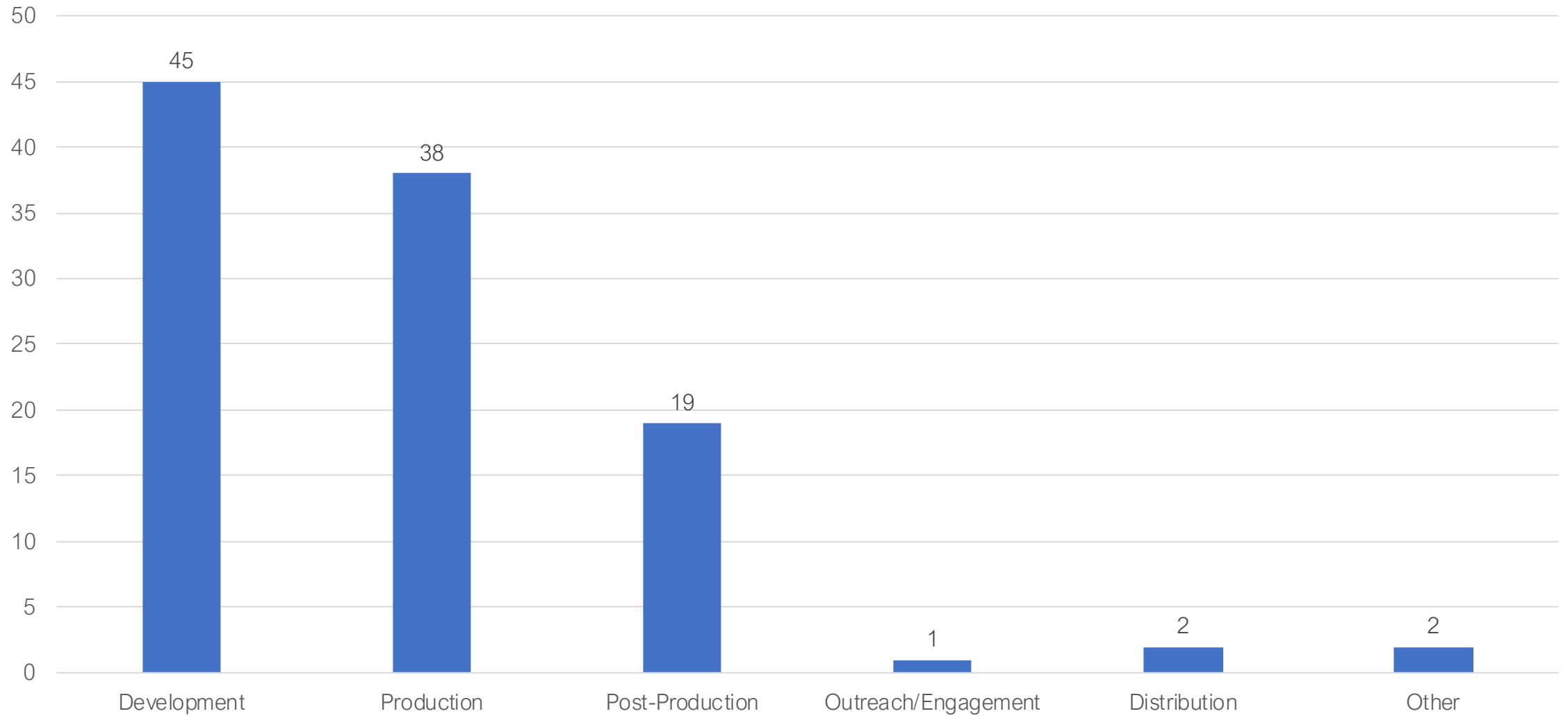
Project 1: State of financing

107 Respondents



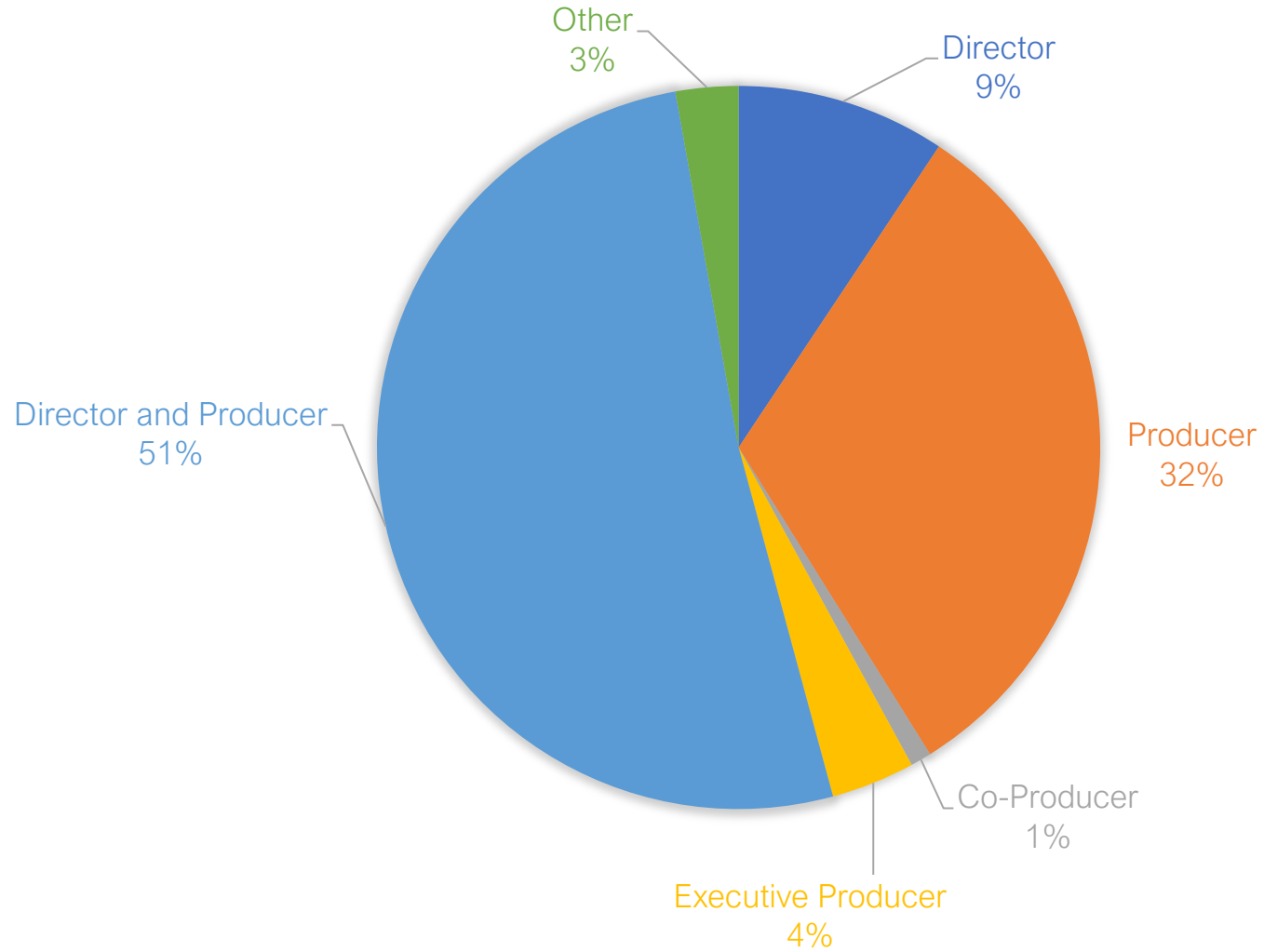
Project 1: Stage of production

107 Respondents



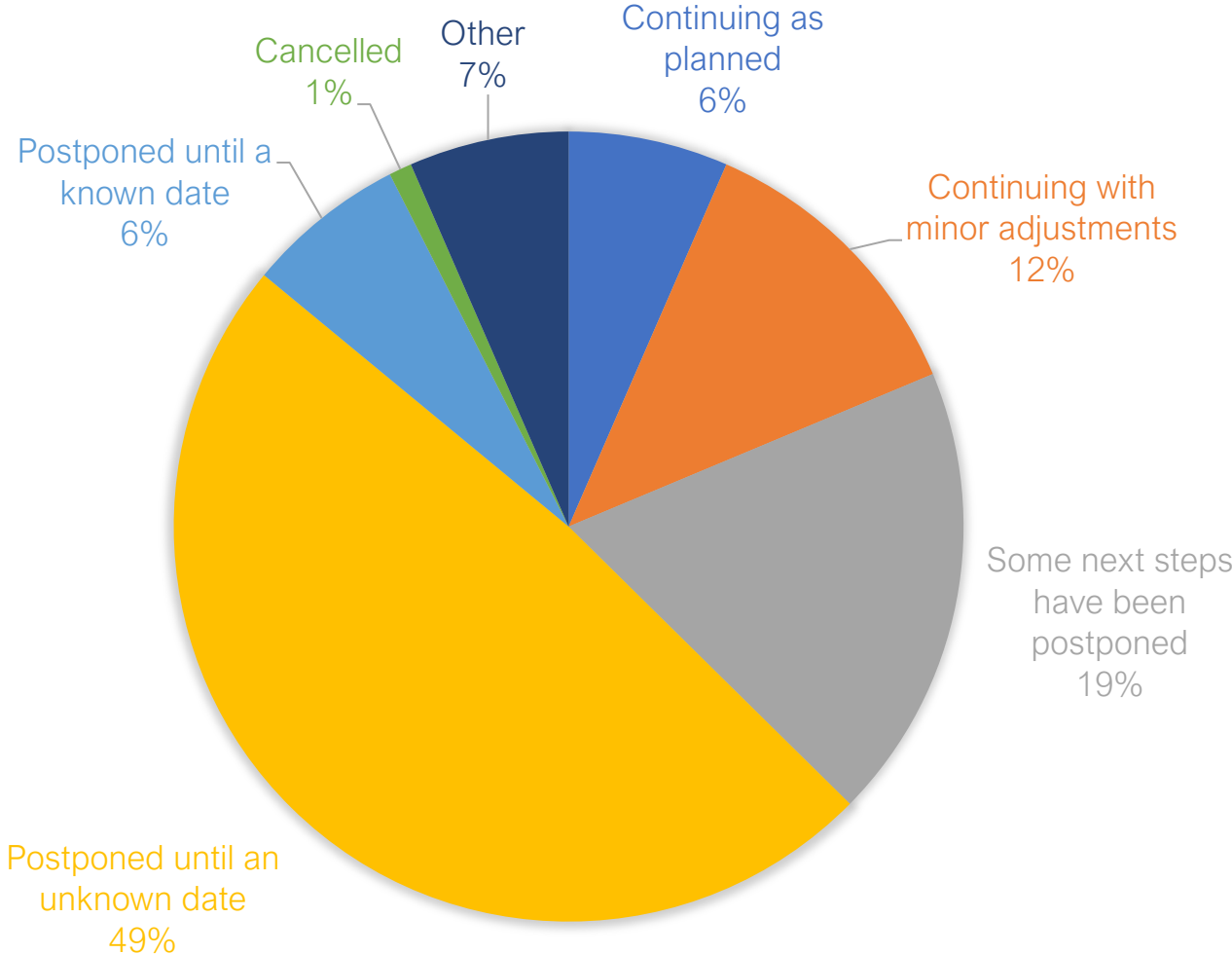
Project 1: Role in project

107 Respondents



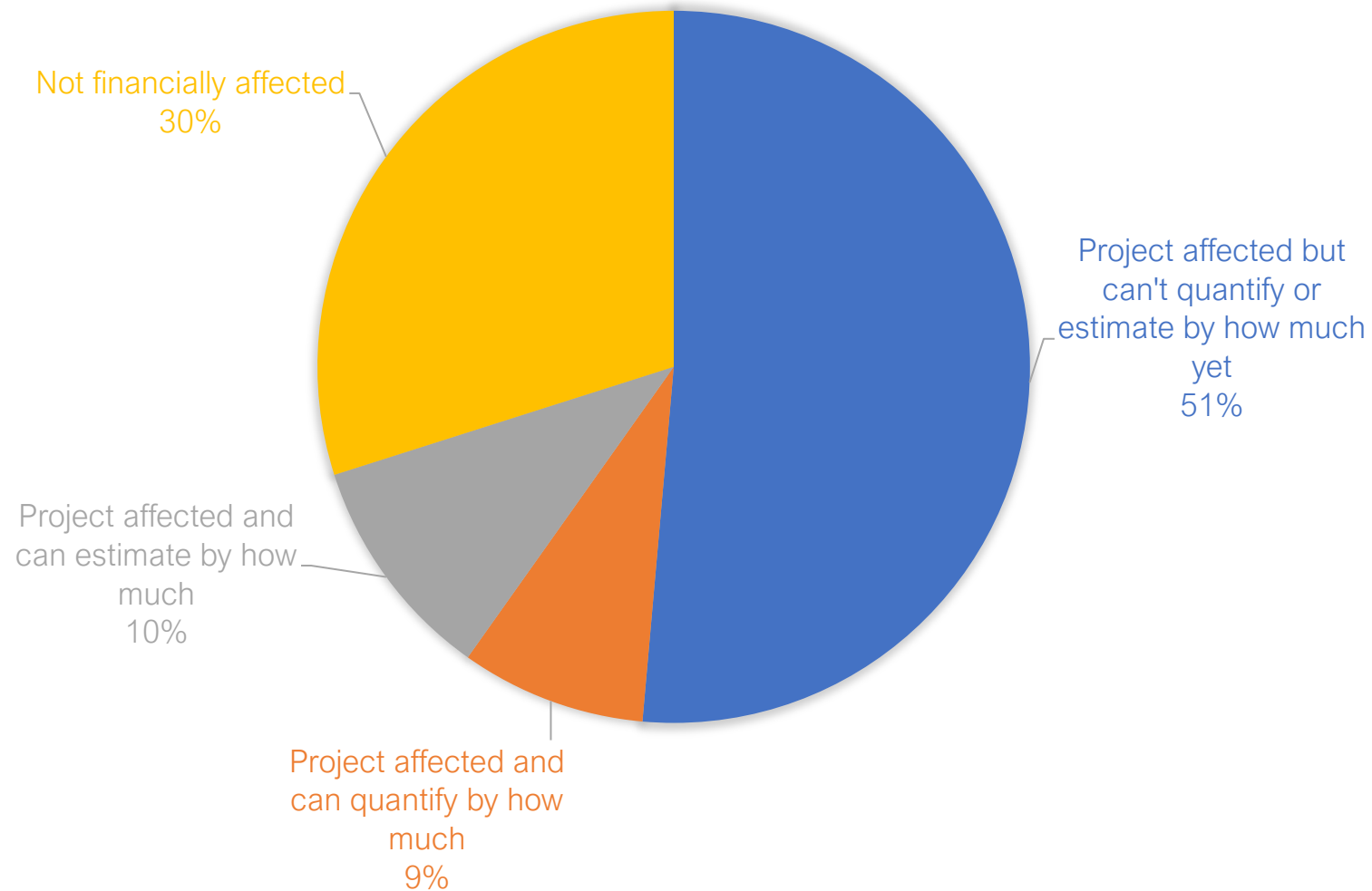
Project 1: Project's current status, due to the impact of COVID-19

107 Respondents



Project 1: Financial impact of COVID-19 on this project

107 Respondents



We asked if people could quantify the actual or estimated financial impact on their project. 23 people provided a financial estimate. Answers varied from \$6,000 to \$1.4 million. Most felt there were too many unknowns to provide an estimate.

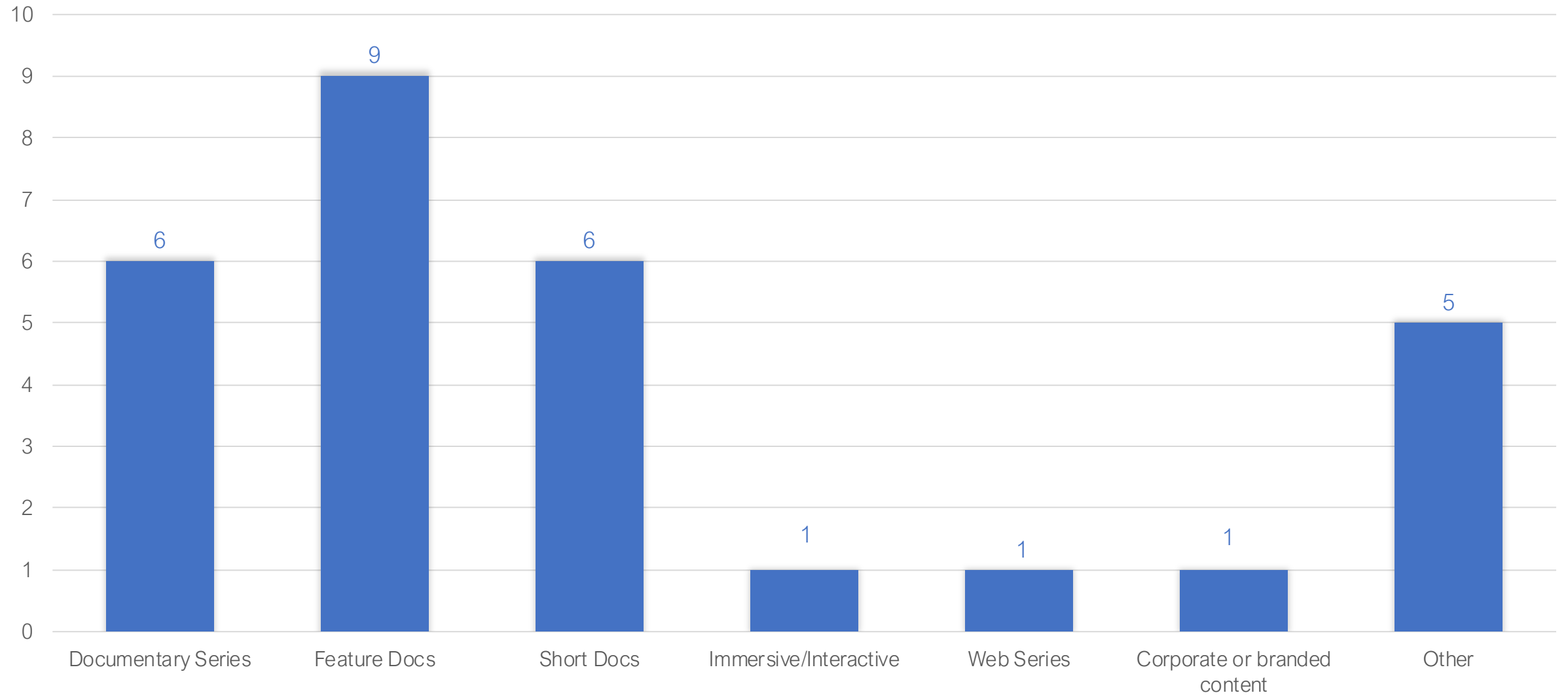
Project 2

Producers and Directors

29 people completed the same set of questions for a second project:

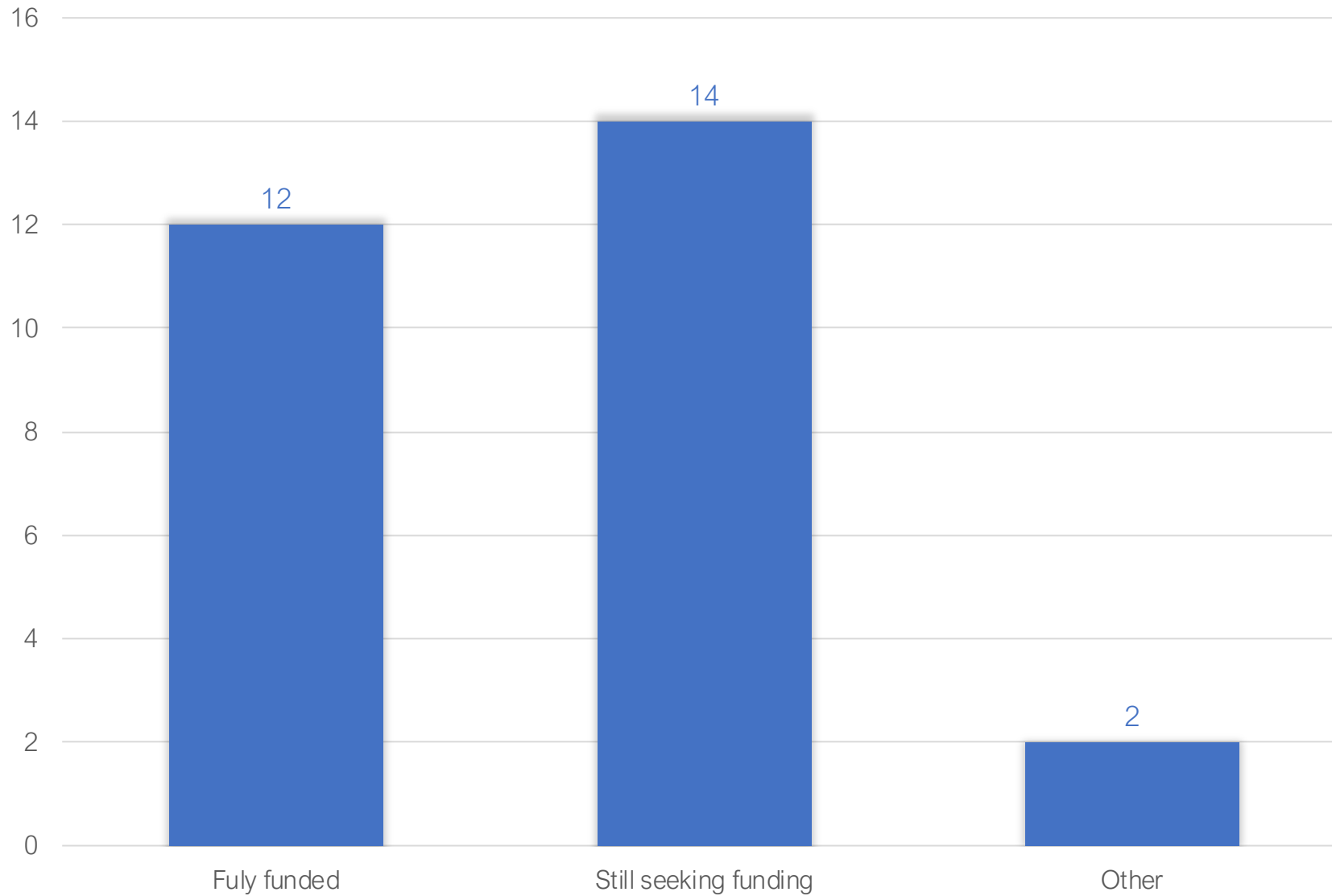
Project 2: Genres

29 Respondents



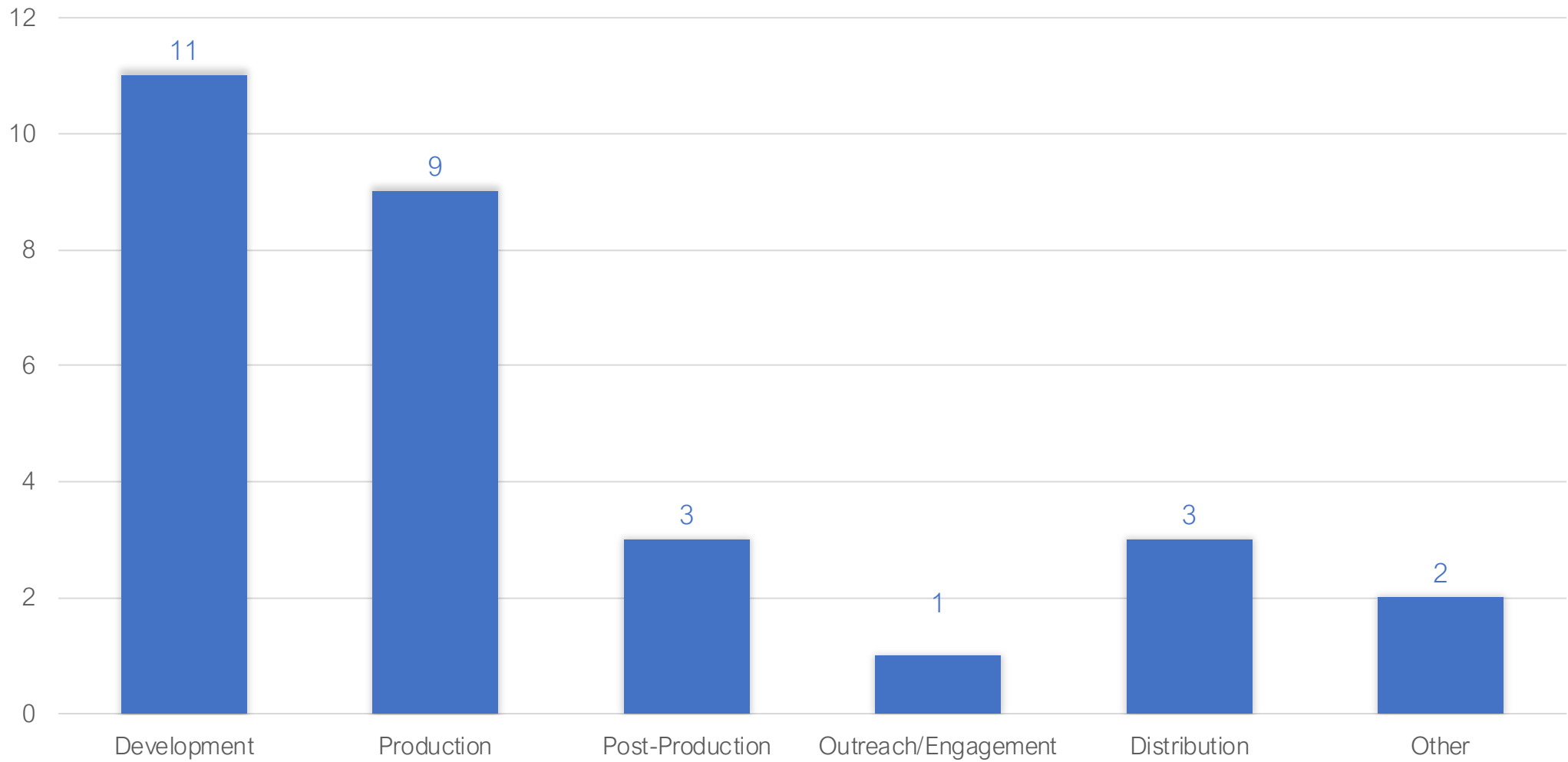
Project 2: State of financing

28 Respondents



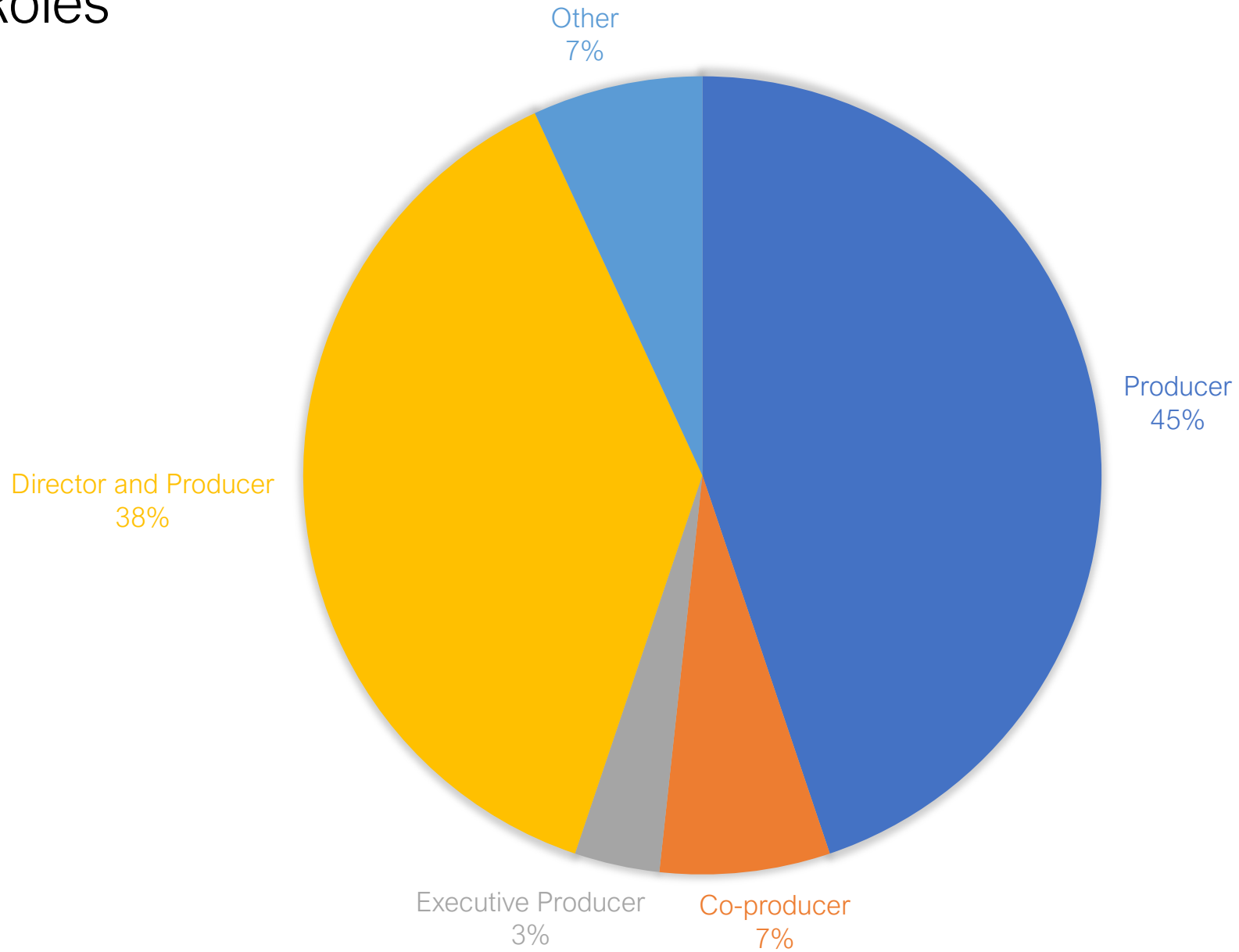
Project 2: Stage of production

29 Respondents



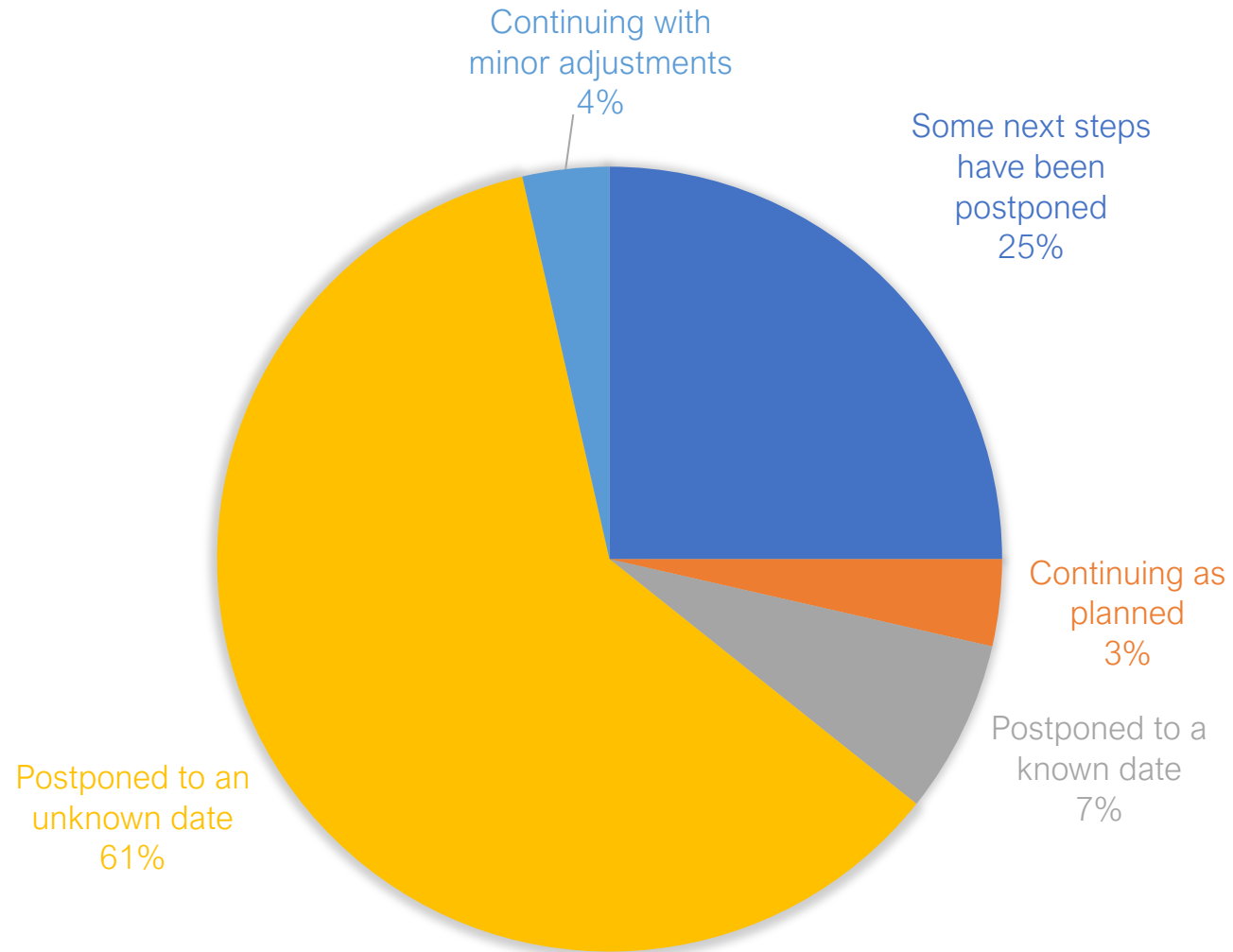
Project 2: Roles

29 Respondents



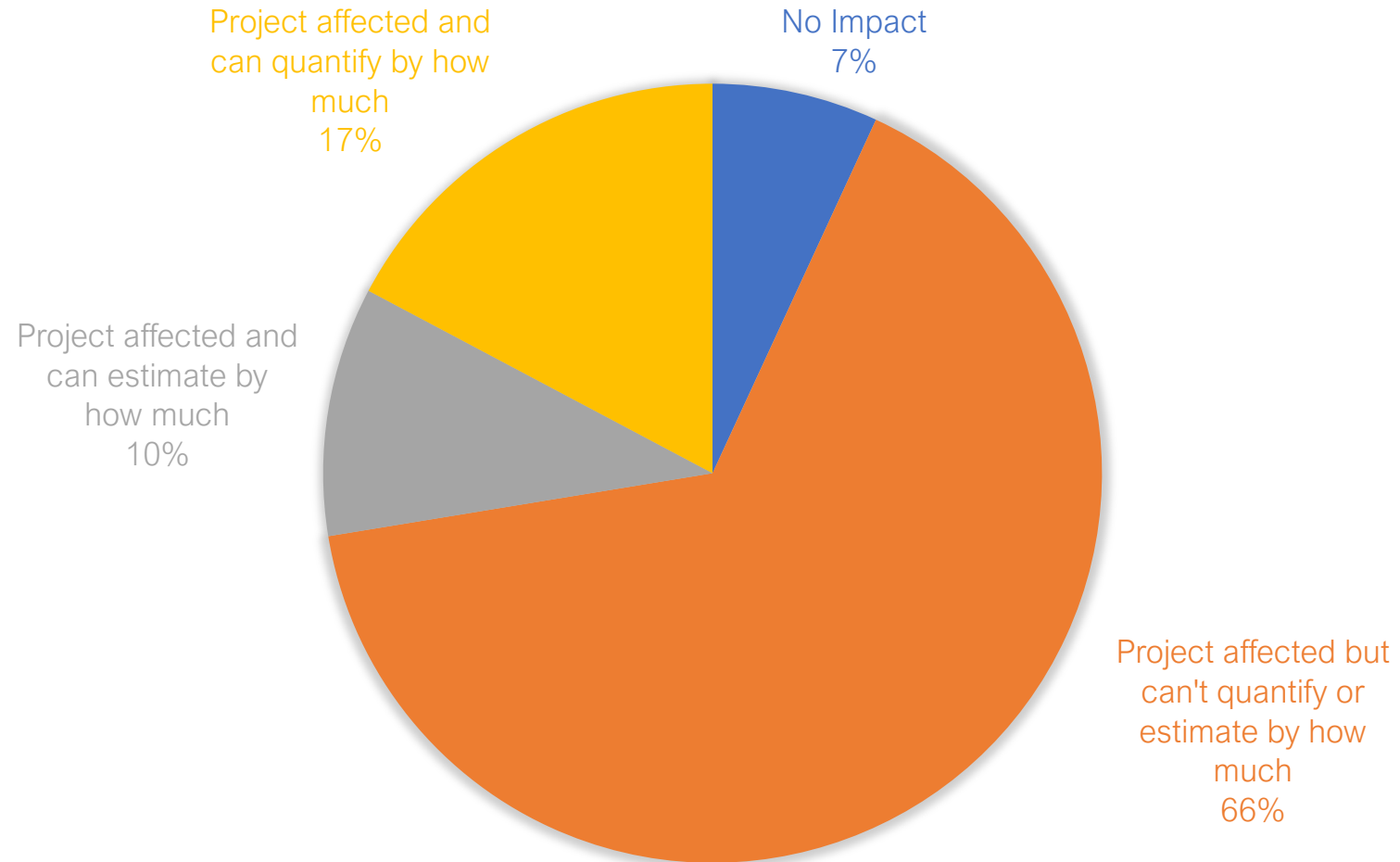
Project 2: Project's current status, due to the impact of COVID-19

29 Respondents



Project 2: Financial impact of COVID-19 on this project

29 Respondents



We asked if people could quantify the actual or estimated financial impact on their project. 10 people provided a financial estimate. Answers varied from \$2,500 to \$599,000. Most felt there were too many unknowns to provide an estimate.

Only a handful of people chose to complete these questions for a third, fourth or fifth project. We have not summarized that data here.

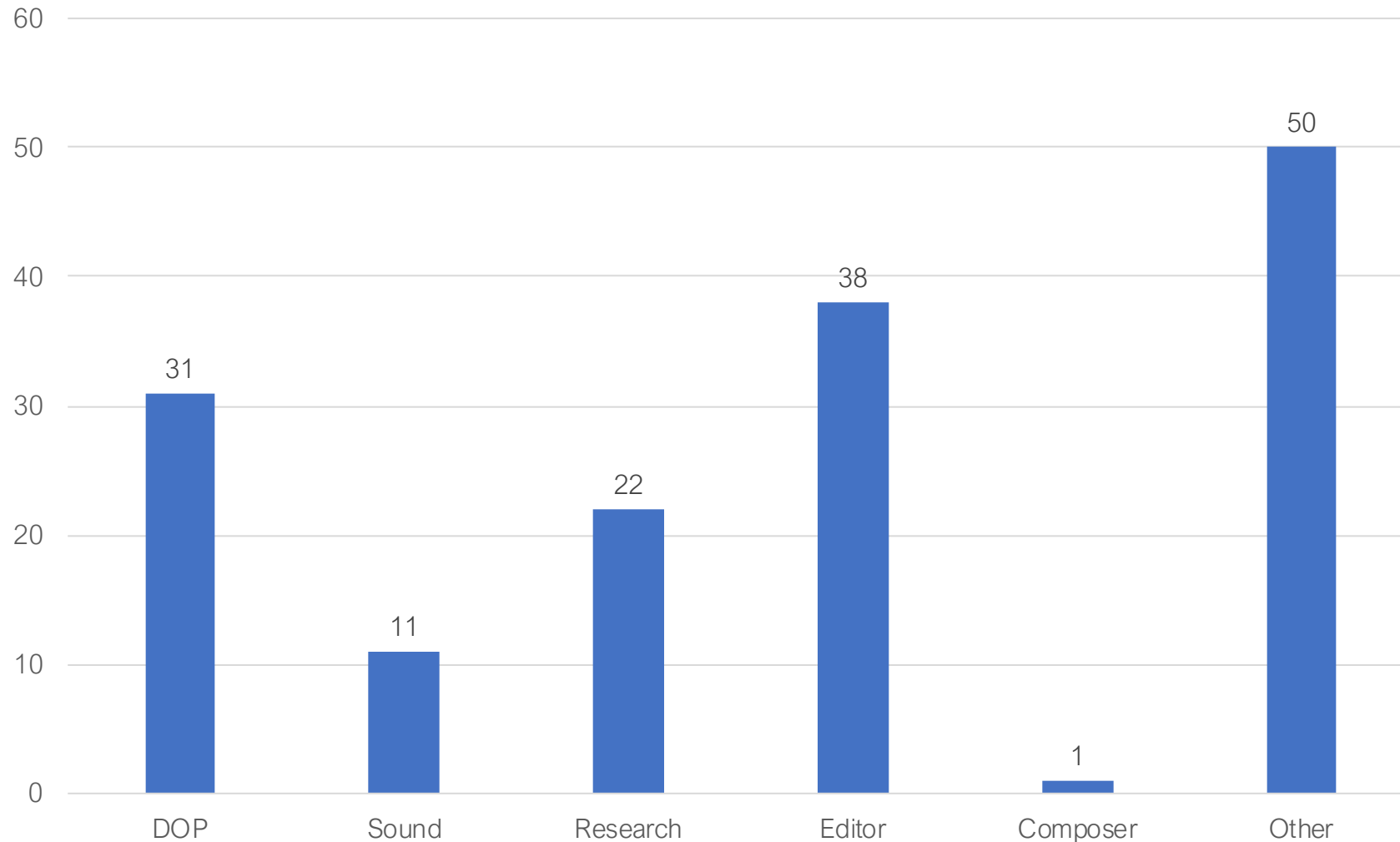
Section C: Freelancers

A total of 96 people completed the section for freelancers. Respondents identified as doing a wide range of freelance jobs in the documentary sector and 66 indicated they had between 1 to 5+ contracts in place prior to the start of the pandemic.

Types of freelance work

96 Respondents

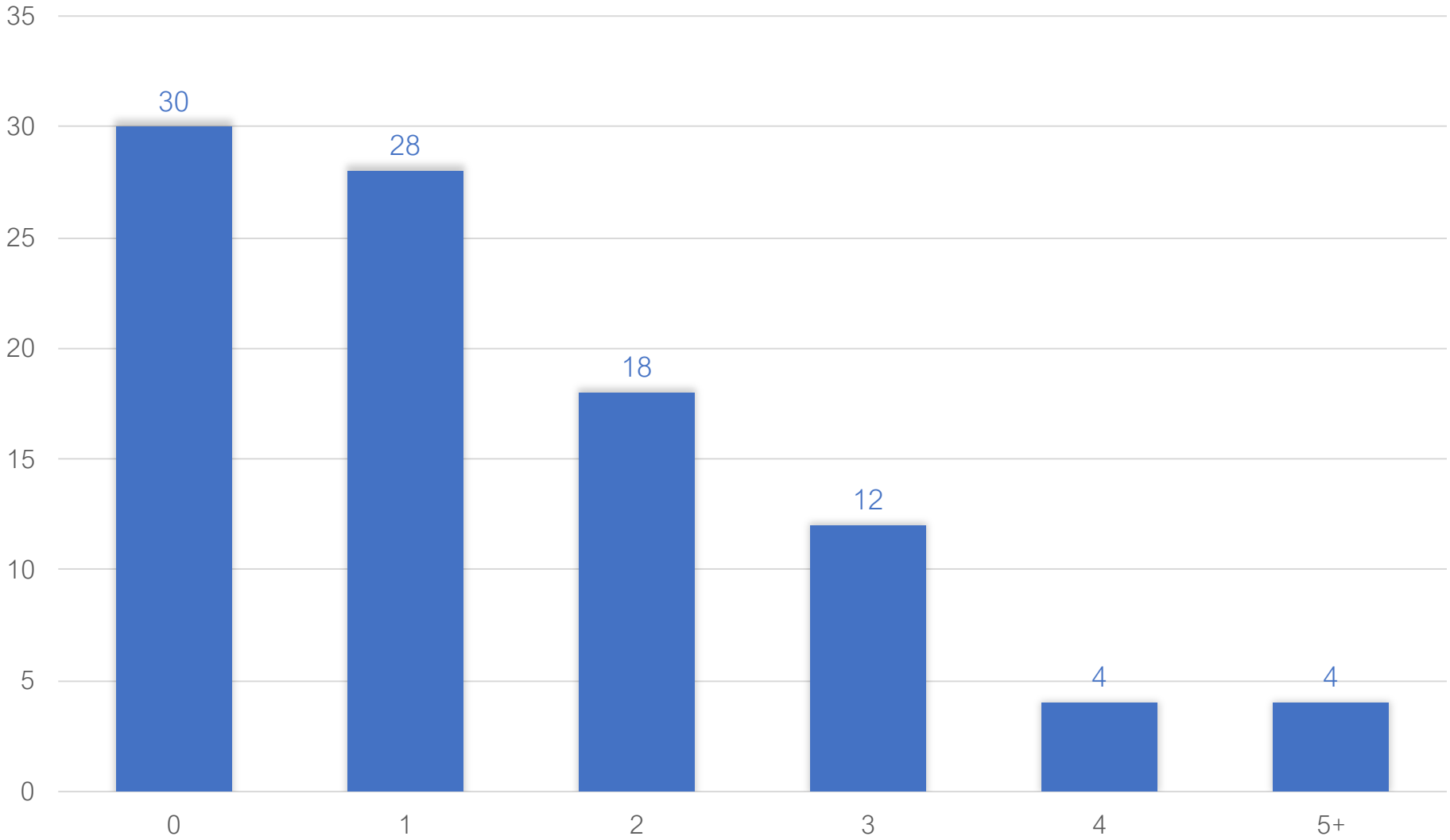
*Respondents could choose more than one option.



Those who responded “other” identified hybrid roles such as producer/director, director/writer and other roles including producer for hire, grant writing; story editor; drone operator, business affairs; production manager; production assistant; colourist; music supervisor and rights clearance.

Number of contracts signed per respondent

96 Respondents



Delayed Contracts

We asked people for information on the value of signed contracts for work scheduled after March 15 that had been delayed.

March 15 – June 15:

54 people provided financial information for delayed contracts for the March 15 – June 15 period. The total value of those contracts is \$806,800.

June 15 – Sept 30:

41 people provided financial information for work on those same contracts scheduled for the June 15 – September 30 period. The total value of those contracts is \$789,800.

Cancelled Contracts

31 people indicated having signed contracts in place for work scheduled between March 15 and June 15 that has now been cancelled.

19 people provided financial information for those contracts with a total value of \$304,200.

Future Contracts

We asked people for information on the value of signed contracts for work scheduled to take place between June 15 – September 30. Only 24 people indicated they had signed contracts in place for that period which is indicative of the general absence of long lead times on contracts in the documentary sector.

As one respondent pointed out: “You are only focusing on signed contracts – but I have had many projects in the negotiation phase outright cancelled.”

Section D: Impacts

In the final section of the survey, we asked people a series of open-ended questions about the impacts of COVID on their work, on their emotional well-being and about the kinds of supports they need, changes they'd like to see and advocacy work they'd like DOC to be focusing on.

Here is a summary of those responses:

How is the specific kind of documentary work you do (eg. domestic, international, theatrical, tv) being impacted by COVID now and what are some of the potential impacts you are concerned about moving forward?

People cited a number of immediate impacts related to projects currently in production including:

- Delays (impact on schedule, budget, cash flow, closing financing, crew availability, delivery deadlines and release plans)
- Travel restrictions (ability to continue shooting)
- Impact of delays on ability to continue following the story
- Impacts of new shooting and crew protocols (financial, creative, schedule)
- How do we shoot? When can we shoot? Where can we shoot?
- Subjects reluctant to be interviewed or continue with project
- Inability to secure location permits
- Health & safety concerns for crew and subjects
- Covid exclusions on insurance
- Lost income and contracts
- Decline in need for post services as production slows down
- Pivoting to use more digital animation and archive

They also described impacts on projects in release:

- Travel restrictions (festivals and distribution)
- Uncertainty about whether or not to submit to online festivals
- Impacts on theatrical distribution deals
- Reduced profile in the absence of real-world festivals, award events, etc.
- Inability to connect directly with audiences in real world settings
- Need to redesign outreach and marketing strategies

Some anticipated negative impacts if everyone restarts at once:

- Festival and distribution bottlenecks when things do open up
- Overdemand on broadcasters/funders when things come back
- Overdemand on crew, post services, etc ,when things come back

Several described impacts affecting work/life balance:

- Increased personal responsibility (child-care and elder care)
- Concern for personal and family health and safety

“As Covid has exposed the harsh, and unfair nature of our society in other sectors (janitors, grocery clerks, bus drivers etc etc) so too has it in our industry. So many of us are constantly underpaid for our work - left in a state of constant hustle that is unsustainable.”

Many people spoke of the uncertainties they are now having to navigate:

- Broadcasters (stability of current commitments)
- Broadcaster (possibilities for new commitments)
- Broadcasters (shifting interests)
- Viability of projects that were developed pre-covid
- Potential cancellation of ongoing series & freelancer job impacts
- Impacts on interim financing
- Cash flow – how do we get drawdowns if we can't deliver?
- Ability to keep company running while production is shut down

How have you been (or how do you anticipate being) impacted emotionally by the coronavirus pandemic?

Some people indicated they were not feeling major emotional impacts, however, many others did and they described a range of feelings:

- Financial stress & anxiety
- Concerned about keeping business afloat
- Concerned for employees who have been laid off
- Concern for film subjects
- Stress about balancing home schooling & work
- Concerned for family in LTC
- Concerned for family abroad
- Concern for family who work in health care
- Depression
- Feelings of isolation
- Anxiety
- Not feeling creative
- Grieving the festival launch & theatrical release that won't happen in the same way after years of hard work
- Concerned about projects
- Worried for the industry
- Stress of no work
- Stress of getting sick or family members getting sick
- Stress of how our industry will change
- Concerned about if there will be enough work on the other side

“There’s been an enormous increase in stress related to all the uncertainty and the increase in production costs caused by the halt in shooting. Laying off crew is also very difficult from an emotional point of view.”

What would help you now, in light of this crisis? What do you need?

People identified a range of concrete financial and funding supports that will help them bridge. **Access to development funds was raised by a significant number of respondents:**

- Access to development funds that have meaning and intent and keep things moving
- Access to early development funding that doesn't require a broadcaster commitment
- Assurances from funders that deadlines are flexible
- Flexibility with funding requirements and deliverables
- Ensuring interim financing partners know that broadcaster and funder commitments will be honoured
- The freedom to pause projects without penalty from funders
- Clear commitment from and active communication from funders to honour commitments
- Commitment from broadcasters to prioritize projects that can be completed in the next year
- New commissions of content that can be produced in current context
- More acquisitions of existing content
- Financial assistance for companies
- Technical help/support (to get us connected better, to help us do more things from home)
- Non-repayable Emergency Grant for lost work based on delayed/cancelled productions
- Rent relief/assistance
- Gap loans while waiting for tax credits
- Interim financing relief
- Extension of CERB, CEWS etc. into the summer
- Subsidy programs to help cover additional project costs caused by COVID-19
- A guaranteed liveable income

People wrote about the need for a plan to move forward and develop protocols for working in ways that respect public health guidelines and keep everybody safe:

- A plan to get the doc sector back to work with small crews
- Best practices and protocols for shooting, remote editing, etc.
- Creative ideas and training on how we can produce interesting and high-quality content while in isolation
- In collaboration with the unions, committees that examine how we can shoot without a cure or a vaccine.
- To come up with strategies together (in collaboration with funders, broadcasters, unions etc.). Strategies that are safe for all involved and address needs from all sides
- Access to latest information from around the world on what other doc organizations are doing
- Legal support in this new climate and what the legal ramifications are
- Clarity about what we should and shouldn't be expected to do for work at this time. Essential and non-essential is interpreted differently by many. Uneven power dynamic (with employer) makes it difficult to question

People also wrote about the need for community, solidarity and connection:

- Feeling connected to community, feeling supported
- More DOC community engagement; virtual chats; connection to other filmmakers
- Mentorship
- Connecting emerging artists with experienced ones virtually
- Space to vent
- Deep reflection and discussion on our role as filmmakers in the post-COVID-19 world

And people wrote about the need for shifts in the distribution landscape:

- Online networking opportunities for finished films
- Virtual theatrical platform opportunities similar to Kino Marquee in Canada (allowing virtual theatrical co-viewing experiences and live streamed interactive Q&A's with a paywall and the ability to partner with independent theatres, film societies, aligned organizations.)
- Adaptability for funding agencies in their marketing and distribution requirements to consider virtual and online screenings
- A release of premiere status and 'no previous online viewing' restrictions for broadcasters, distributors, all exhibitors

What are the lost opportunity impacts you are likely to face (eg. Cancelled markets and festivals and impact on deal opportunities)?

People made it clear that the loss of new opportunities (which is difficult to quantify) is as important a consideration as losses on existing projects that can be documented. They identified a range of lost opportunity impacts:

- Lost networking opportunities at industry events within and outside Canada
- Cancelled markets and access to decision makers (buyers, distributors, etc)
- Lost festivals and screenings
- Cancelled premieres
- Cancelled theatrical releases
- Meaningful conversations/exchange with audiences (co-viewing in person)
- Cancelled work opportunities
- Cancelled awards and gala events and associated prestige
- Changed release strategies
- Profile and prestige of A-list festival launches
- Not able to reach broadcasters who are overwhelmed
- Cancelled jobs and projects
- Having to rethink everything about festivals and distribution
- Story continuity may be lost in the interim
- Cancelled speaking and master class opportunities
- No film festivals for emerging filmmakers mean no distribution opportunities as we are not established in the markets
- Creative ideas will change. What we thought we could film, we no longer can and we will be forced to work within the confines of limited crew and cast and design our creative around those parameters

Is there a specific advocacy focus or resource development work you would like to see from DOC?

Responses in this section focused on the vulnerability of the documentary sector and the need to advocate for sustainability; the need to develop guidelines for moving forward; and the need for information sharing and community building. A need to understand and address the unique challenges and barriers to access faced by members of structurally marginalized groups was also underlined as well as the need for active, two-way dialogue with broadcasters and funders.

- More resources for development including development funding that doesn't require a broadcast trigger
- Continue to maintain a clear dialogue with Broadcasters and Funders so we know what to expect and when
- An action plan to get documentary filmmakers back to work in a safe way
- More webinars for education and information sharing and building community
- Assistance with releasing finished works
- Interest relief on interim financing
- Championing our value to Canadian culture
- Support and community (mental health)
- Emergency relief for those who don't qualify for existing programs
- Health insurance
- Avenues of revenue that are not tied to individual projects (eg using Tax Credits to keep companies working between projects.)
- Better license fees
- Fight for fair pay for all in our industry
- More public funding via NFB, CBC and others
- Ensuring that the funders we have for doc remain strong in their commitment to the independents
- Addressing the unique needs and providing resources specific for racialized groups especially Indigenous and Black filmmakers who are disproportionately going to be affected by this pandemic
- We need to work with the main funders (CMF, Telefilm Canada, the provincial agencies and private funds) to put into place simple and easy-access programs to help production companies cover budget overruns they will incur as a result of COVID-19

“We will need strong advocacy for documentary to ensure we will be able to continue to practice our profession in a sustainable way in a post COVID-19 context. We will have to work with government, institutions and associations to ensure we have the means to apply the new parameters that will be established. Among other things, I’m thinking of crew safety, additional production costs caused by the pandemic, new preventative measures, travel restrictions, insurance exclusions, etc.”

“We can now see the power imbalance and inequality in this industry in stark relief. We need to take systemic measures to right the situation.”

Given the continuing fallout from the coronavirus pandemic, what opportunity or opportunities (if any) do you see for our industry?

While some found it difficult to see opportunity in the current context, others saw opportunities for renewal, for new ways of doing things, for greater connection and to advocate for sustainability:

- More international cooperation with doc makers in other parts of the world which in turn could minimize travel costs in the future
- Improved remote work-flows
- More connections and collaborations with filmmakers and industry leaders throughout all of Canada
- More connections with each other, events that link us and chapters working together across the country
- More collaboration and sharing of resources
- Strengthen community spirit
- Two-way dialogue with funders and broadcasters; deepening those relationships and exploring how we can jointly develop new visions, approaches
- Online pitching with broadcasters – especially for producers based outside of Toronto
- We can tell stories in innovative way but still need budgets to do so
- I am digging into my archive
- More time to write and research
- Virtual theatrical screening opportunities and platforms that will allow secure co-viewing and live Q&A's with transactional paywalls - will allow our stories to reach beyond the usual markets
- Increased online viewing
- Time for innovation and fresh thinking
- Ramping up digital marketing and digital distribution
- Government funding for filmmakers who self-distribute their docs
- A chance to fight for more and better funding opportunities. Think of it as a New Deal for our art form/profession
- Investir dans les diffusions par internet et encourager des plateformes de documentaires nationaux
- Finding new ways to research and shoot remotely if we can't travel
- Reviewing tax credit requirements if moving forward we will have to hire people locally for shoots
- Rejigging broadcast and funder deadlines so we're not all going to the trough at the same times during the year and shooting at the same time as well
- Find ways for our funding system to align more fully with the international marketplace, and the private and philanthropic arts sector in order to step forward in funding documentary so our reliance on government financing becomes less precarious

“There is an opportunity for more virtual meetings, festivals, education, workshops and conferences. This will help connect the world of documentary film better in the long run.”

“I think there is an opportunity for us to develop new forms and formats for our documentaries that rely less on production work involving large crews and high-impact travel. I think there is an opportunity for a more participatory and collaborative model of production to re-emerge.”

“There has been more exploration in what we can actually achieve in the virtual world. It won't replace Face to Face, but some innovations are very positive for the future.”

“Production is paused. Development is shifting. Distribution is shifting. We are trying to recalibrate, but it's hard with the world changing every day. What we were working on yesterday might not seem very important today. What we are working on today might not seem very important tomorrow.”

ELIGIBILITY FOR EMERGENCY RELIEF PROGRAMS

In a separate survey conducted over May 26 and 27 we asked our members to what extent they are eligible for different Federal Government emergency relief fund programs.

167 people completed the survey – 152 in English and 15 in French.

Production Company Owners:

75% of those who answered the survey identified as owning their own production company.

Of those, 33% said they were eligible for the Canadian Heritage emergency support fund being administered by CMF, Telefilm Canada and the Canada Council. 40% said they weren't and 25% said they didn't know.

26% identified as being eligible for The Canadian Emergency Business Loan (CEBA). 47% said they weren't and 28% didn't know.

9% said they were eligible for the Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS). 74% said they weren't and 17% didn't know.

76% indicated they were not eligible for Rent Relief. 17% didn't know. 7% said they were eligible.

Freelancers:

74% of those surveyed also identified as freelance workers.

Of those, 71% indicated they were eligible for the Canada Emergency Relief Benefit (CERB). 22% indicated they were ineligible and 7% said they didn't know.

Understanding the Gaps:

We asked if people felt they or their company was falling through the cracks.

25% indicated they were. 53% said they weren't and 22% said they didn't know.

Most of those who identified as falling through the gaps had their own company. Reasons cited include:

- Being a very small company and not having eligible projects in the period covered by the emergency funding administered by CMF, Telefilm and the Canada Council;
- The fact that they pay themselves in dividends rather than a salary;
- The fact that they have contractors rather than employees; and
- Year of incorporation of their company.

Concerns were expressed that existing measures are better suited to well established companies and so will serve the “old guard” but don't support small companies, especially those owned by BIPOC filmmakers who have historically faced additional structural barriers to accessing CMF/Telefilm.



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