

FAD / **FUNDING AND DISCLOSURE REFORM**

AEC Funding and Disclosure Stakeholder Survey 2025

Final Report v1.0

Prepared for the Australian Electoral Commission
Roy Morgan | February 2026
Confidential - Not for External Distribution

Executive Summary

Purpose and Context

This work was commissioned to provide a baseline assessment ahead of the commencement of the revised federal political funding and disclosure scheme in July 2026. The reforms introduce lower disclosure thresholds, more frequent reporting, and revised reporting periods.

The research establishes a pre-commencement baseline of stakeholder awareness, understanding, confidence and preparedness. It is intended to inform AEC implementation planning and the development of stakeholder-facing guidance.

The evidence is designed to support decisions about how the framework is introduced and supported in practice, with particular relevance to implementation readiness, system design, and areas where guidance can most effectively assist stakeholders. The research does not assess compliance behaviour, system performance, enforcement outcomes or policy impact. Findings reflect stakeholder expectations and self-reported preparedness prior to commencement and should be interpreted as indicators of where clarity, reassurance and design choices may best support early implementation.

Perspectives were gathered from three stakeholder groups with distinct relationships to the scheme:

- political participants with direct reporting responsibilities
- existing donors operating under the current disclosure framework, whose engagement is typically episodic and transaction-driven. The donor sample includes individuals and organisations that have previously made reportable donations under the current framework; it does not include potential new donors who may enter under the revised thresholds
- members of the general public, whose interest is primarily focused on transparency and system integrity rather than operational detail

Major Findings

The findings indicate that, at the point of future implementation of the revised funding and disclosure scheme, particular attention will be most valuable in supporting how stakeholder confidence translates into the practical application of requirements. If the reforms were implemented at the time of this research, stakeholders would be engaging with them from differing baseline levels of awareness and preparedness.

Across stakeholder groups, awareness, understanding, confidence and preparedness do not increase together. While institutional trust in the AEC is consistently high, operational confidence is more context-specific and narrows most noticeably when legislative requirements must be translated into concrete actions, particularly where thresholds, timing, reporting triggers and confirmation processes apply

The evidence suggests that early AEC implementation effort will be most effective when focused on accommodating variable preparedness among smaller entities and individuals, providing timely orientation for donors whose engagement is episodic, and reinforcing guidance at points of action rather than relying on previous familiarity with the framework alone.

Priority Baseline Findings

Based on the evidence, three priority findings warrant attention in planning for early implementation and stakeholder support.

- **Strengthening confidence through practical preparedness**

Many stakeholders report confidence in their ability to comply while indicating lower levels of practical understanding, particularly where reporting responsibilities are infrequent or highly concentrated, making this an important focus for early implementation support. This pattern is most evident where reporting responsibilities sit with individuals or smaller organisations, or where compliance tasks are concentrated in a single role. Confidence appears to reflect organisational familiarity with administrative processes rather than readiness for the new requirements themselves, highlighting where practical, task-level guidance will matter most at commencement. This highlights an opportunity to reinforce confidence with practical, task-level support that bridges this gap.

- **Supporting donors at reporting trigger points**

Reported uncertainty relates to existing donors' understanding at key reporting and submission points. Existing donor awareness of the reforms is episodic and often linked to specific events. A notable share of donors do not anticipate that the changes will apply to them until a reporting or threshold trigger is encountered. This identifies a point where timely orientation and reassurance will be most useful when reporting obligations arise at thresholds or trigger points, particularly during early roll-out, helping donors navigate requirements when they become relevant.

- **Enhancing clarity at points of action**

Trust in the AEC is consistently high across stakeholder groups; however, confidence softens where stakeholders are required to interpret requirements, navigate multi-step processes, or confirm that obligations have been met correctly. The baseline evidence suggests that, at the point of future implementation, system usability and guidance at reporting and submission points will be particularly critical, as these are the moments where clarity and reassurance matter most.

Major Baseline Findings

- **Institutional trust is strong; practical confidence can be reinforced**

Across political participants, donors and the general public, trust in the AEC's independence, integrity and fairness is consistently strong. Differences between groups are largely differences of degree rather than direction.

Confidence is more variable when attention shifts from institutional credibility to practical support, information clarity and day-to-day application. Neutral responses dominate these areas, suggesting uncertainty rather than dissatisfaction. This indicates a solid foundation of trust alongside an opportunity to strengthen confidence through clearer operational guidance and system design.

- **Awareness varies by proximity to obligation**

Political participants report the highest awareness, donors report more episodic awareness, and the general public reports low awareness overall.

Where awareness exists, it is often broad rather than detailed, particularly outside regulated entities. Among donors, awareness tends to focus on high-salience elements such as donation caps and thresholds, with less recognition of ongoing reporting and operational requirements. This creates an opportunity for targeted, timely communication that builds understanding as obligations arise.

Major Baseline Findings

- **Understanding is weakest at points of application**

Across stakeholders, broad awareness of the reforms is more developed than understanding of how requirements operate in practice. Uncertainty concentrates around reporting triggers, thresholds, timing and how obligations interact across a reporting cycle, rather than around the overall intent of the reforms.

This pattern is evident even among regulated stakeholders and is more pronounced for donors. The evidence consistently shows that uncertainty emerges at points where action is required, rather than at the level of general reform intent, indicating where guidance and system design can most effectively support correct application.

- **Anticipated challenges are procedural rather than resourcing-based**

Stakeholder attention centres on record-keeping, reporting processes, interpretation and ongoing administration. Challenges are framed more around process clarity and assurance than staffing levels or technical capacity, with fewer stakeholders identifying resourcing as a primary concern.

This suggests that how clearly requirements are explained and applied in real reporting situations will matter more than stakeholders' general capacity to allocate resources to compliance.

Major Baseline Findings

- **Engagement with guidance is trusted and task-focused**

The AEC is widely regarded as the most trusted information source. Engagement with guidance is largely task-driven and tends to occur when obligations feel immediately relevant.

Non-use of AEC materials reflects timing, relevance and accessibility rather than disengagement. Many stakeholders indicate they expect to seek official guidance once the reforms become directly applicable to them, underscoring the importance of timely, task-focused design of information and support.

- **System usability supports confidence at points of action**

Digital capability is generally seen as adequate for core tasks. Confidence drops where systems require interpretation, multiple steps or confirmation that obligations have been met correctly.

Most points where reassurance and orientation are valued relate to knowing where to start, what steps to follow and how to confirm completion, rather than to technical performance. These issues arise most often at reporting triggers and submission points, presenting a clear opportunity to support confidence through design, sequencing and confirmation cues.

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1. Overview

Reform Context

Australia's federal electoral funding and disclosure scheme is changing. The *Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Reform) Act 2025* introduces lower disclosure thresholds, donation and expenditure caps, more frequent reporting, and revised reporting periods. These changes increase both the volume of information required to be reported and the frequency of reporting.

While the legislative changes are consistent, their practical impact differs by role. Donors and political entities will face new thresholds, limits and reporting requirements. Administrators and intermediaries will carry greater responsibility for accuracy and timing. For the general public, the reforms primarily affect transparency and confidence in the system rather than direct participation.

This research is situated within that reform context. It examines how the changes are understood and anticipated across different groups, and where clarity, guidance and system design are likely to matter most as implementation approaches.

The Role of Stakeholder Experience

How the reforms work in practice will depend not only on the legislation, but on how stakeholders encounter the requirements when they need to act.

Political participants, donors and intermediaries interact with the funding and disclosure framework at different points, with different levels of frequency and responsibility. As a result, their experience of the reforms will vary even where the rules are the same.

These differences affect how quickly obligations are identified, how confidently reports are completed, and when guidance or support is sought. Uncertainty is most likely to arise at reporting and submission points, rather than through general awareness of the reforms.

For the general public, exposure to the reforms is indirect and occurs through published information. Public confidence is shaped less by knowledge of the rules and more by whether donation information is visible, clear and credible.

Understanding these differences helps identify where communication, guidance and system design will have the greatest effect as commencement approaches.

Background and Research Objectives

The research provides an evidence base on awareness, understanding, confidence and anticipated challenges ahead of commencement. Its purpose is to inform communication, education and system design decisions during the lead-in to implementation.

Research Objectives

The research objectives are to:

- **Assess awareness and understanding of the reforms**
Examine the extent to which stakeholders are aware of the legislative changes and understand how the new requirements apply in practice.
- **Understand preparedness and anticipated challenges**
Explore how confident stakeholders feel ahead of commencement and where they anticipate difficulty in meeting the new requirements.
- **Identify communication, education and system support needs**
Identify the types of guidance, information and system features stakeholders consider most useful to support engagement with the scheme.
- **Inform future AEC implementation planning**
Provide insight to support planning for communication, education and online service development ahead of commencement.

Research Participants

The research is structured around three stakeholder groups that interact with the funding and disclosure framework in different ways and at different points in time.

- Group A focuses on political participants who have direct and ongoing responsibility for meeting funding and disclosure obligations, often through complex reporting arrangements and delegated roles.
- Group B focuses on donors, whose interaction with the scheme is typically less frequent and more episodic, but still subject to specific thresholds, triggers and reporting requirements.
- Group C focuses on the general public, whose interaction with the framework is indirect and shaped primarily by the visibility, clarity and accessibility of published information.

Together, the three groups provide a system-level view of how the reforms are understood and anticipated across those who must comply, those who contribute, and those for whom the transparency outcomes are intended.

This structure allows the research to show where stakeholder experiences are similar, and where differences in role or exposure may lead to different experiences at reporting and submission points.

How to Read this Report

Interpretation guidance

This report brings together baseline findings from political participants, donors and the general public as part of the AEC Funding and Disclosure Stakeholder Survey program.

Findings should be read with the following in mind:

- The report provides a baseline assessment ahead of the July 2026 commencement of the reforms and is intended to inform the AEC's implementation planning. It does not assess compliance, system performance or enforcement outcomes.
- Findings reflect self-reported awareness, understanding, confidence and anticipated challenges at the time of research, not observed behaviour under the reformed framework.
- Reported confidence or trust should not be treated as indicators of operational readiness in completing reporting tasks in practice. Across the baseline evidence, understanding narrows when stakeholders consider how requirements would apply in specific reporting situations.
- Differences between stakeholder groups primarily reflect differences in role, responsibility and exposure to the funding and disclosure system, rather than differences in capability or intent.
- Where baseline findings are mixed or uncertain, this is reported directly rather than resolved through interpretation.

The report sets out evidence-based implications and, where supported, identifies considerations for communication, education, system design and stakeholder support ahead of commencement.

Limitations

This research provides a baseline view of stakeholder preparedness and expectations ahead of commencement of the revised funding and disclosure scheme. Findings should be interpreted in light of the following limitations.

- **Donor sample reflects existing donors under the current framework**
The donor sample reflects existing donors under the current framework and does not include individuals or entities that may become subject to disclosure under the revised thresholds. Those who will be required to disclose for the first time under the revised thresholds were not represented, creating an opportunity for targeted follow-up research closer to commencement.
- **Findings capture perceived readiness, not observed behaviour**
Results are based on self-reported awareness, confidence and expectations prior to commencement. They indicate perceived preparedness and potential friction points, rather than actual compliance behaviour or system performance once the reforms are operational.
- **Timing reflects pre-implementation conditions**
Fieldwork was conducted before final system design, guidance materials and transitional arrangements were available. Stakeholder views reflect expectations in the absence of full information and may evolve as reforms become more concrete and guidance is issued.
- **Limited segmentation for some sub-groups**
While analysis differentiates between major stakeholder groups, sample sizes limit deeper segmentation in some areas (for example, individual versus organisational donors). This constrains conclusions about how preparedness and support needs may vary within groups.
- **Focus on federal framework only**
The research examines expectations in relation to the federal funding and disclosure regime. Interactions with state or territory requirements are raised qualitatively but are not assessed in detail.

2. Methodology and Interpretation

Method Overview

The research was designed as a structured survey program to capture stakeholder perspectives before the commencement of the funding and disclosure reforms.

Separate surveys were conducted with political participants, existing donors and members of the general public, reflecting their different roles, responsibilities and points of interaction with the funding and disclosure scheme.

The survey focused on baseline awareness of the reforms, perceived understanding of requirements, confidence in completing reporting tasks, and anticipated challenges as commencement approaches.

Questions were designed to capture stakeholder experience and expectations, not to test knowledge or assess compliance. This allows the evidence to indicate where communication, education and system design are most likely to support stakeholders at the point of use.

The findings provide a pre-commencement baseline against which emerging issues and support needs can be monitored as the reforms are implemented.

Group A: Survey Design and Fieldwork

Group A focuses on political participants with direct responsibility for funding and disclosure obligations, including parties, candidates, associated entities and those acting on their behalf.

- The survey targeted individuals with operational involvement in reporting, administration or oversight of funding and disclosure activities, rather than general members or supporters.
- Fieldwork was conducted using an online survey, with recruitment designed to reach respondents with recent or current exposure to reporting requirements.
- The survey explored awareness of the reforms, understanding of how requirements apply in practice, confidence ahead of commencement, and anticipated challenges in meeting obligations.
- Findings from Group A reflect the perspectives of stakeholders with direct reporting responsibilities and highlight where clarity, guidance and system support will be most important at the point of use.

Group B: Survey Design and Fieldwork

Group B focuses on donors who interact with the funding and disclosure framework through making political donations, but who do not typically have ongoing reporting responsibilities.

- The survey targeted individuals who had previously donated, capturing perspectives from donors with varying levels of familiarity with disclosure requirements and reporting processes.
- Fieldwork was conducted using an online survey, with recruitment designed to reach donors across a range of donation types and frequencies.
- The survey explored awareness of the reforms, understanding of donor obligations and thresholds, confidence in engaging with the framework, and anticipated areas of uncertainty ahead of commencement.
- Findings from Group B provide insight into how donors interpret their obligations, where confusion may arise, and how donor experience may influence compliance and engagement under the new arrangements.

Group C: Survey Design and Fieldwork

Group C focuses on members of the general public, who do not typically have direct reporting obligations but are the intended audience for the transparency outcomes of the reforms.

- The survey targeted Australian adults aged 18 years and over, regardless of whether they had previously donated or engaged directly with funding and disclosure information.
- Fieldwork was conducted using an online survey, with recruitment through a probability-based research panel designed to reflect the Australian adult population.
- Quotas were applied on key demographic characteristics to support population-level representativeness, while remaining sufficiently flexible to minimise exclusion and support efficient fieldwork.
- The survey explored awareness of the reforms, understanding of political donation disclosure, perceptions of transparency and trust, and expectations of how information should be accessed and presented.
- Findings from Group C provide insight into public awareness and confidence, and into how changes to disclosure arrangements may be experienced through visibility, clarity and accessibility of information rather than direct interaction with the system.

Fieldwork Outcomes

Fieldwork was completed across all three stakeholder groups, with participation outcomes reflecting differences in role, salience and engagement with the funding and disclosure scheme.

- Group A (political participants):
1,685 eligible stakeholders were invited. 144 completed the survey, representing an overall response rate of 8.5%, with a 49% completion rate among those who commenced. Median survey length was 20 minutes, consistent with a time-poor, compliance-focused cohort.
- Group B (donors):
1,888 eligible donors were invited. 123 completed the survey, representing an overall response rate of 6.5%, with a 32% completion rate among those who commenced. Median survey length was 18:30 minutes, reflecting lower ongoing engagement outside reporting periods.
- Group C (general public):
6,026 eligible *Roy Morgan Research Community* members were invited. 527 completed the survey, representing an overall response rate of 9.4%, with a 70% completion rate among those who commenced. Median survey length was just over 6 minutes. These outcomes are consistent with a low-salience topic for the general population.
- Across all groups, response rates are consistent with expectations for surveys on complex or low-salience regulatory topics. Data quality checks were applied prior to analysis. Detailed fieldwork and sample information for each group is provided in the group-specific interim reports.

Response rates use the standard AAPOR Response Rate 3 (RR3) approach, which accounts for invited participants whose eligibility could not be confirmed.

Interpreting Findings

- The findings describe stakeholder awareness, understanding and confidence ahead of commencement of the reforms.
- They identify where stakeholders expect clarity or difficulty, and where support may be required during implementation.
- The findings reflect perceptions and expectations, not observed behaviour under the reformed framework. They are not a measure of compliance, reporting accuracy or system performance.
- The findings are most relevant for identifying risks, areas of uncertainty and support needs during the lead-in period.

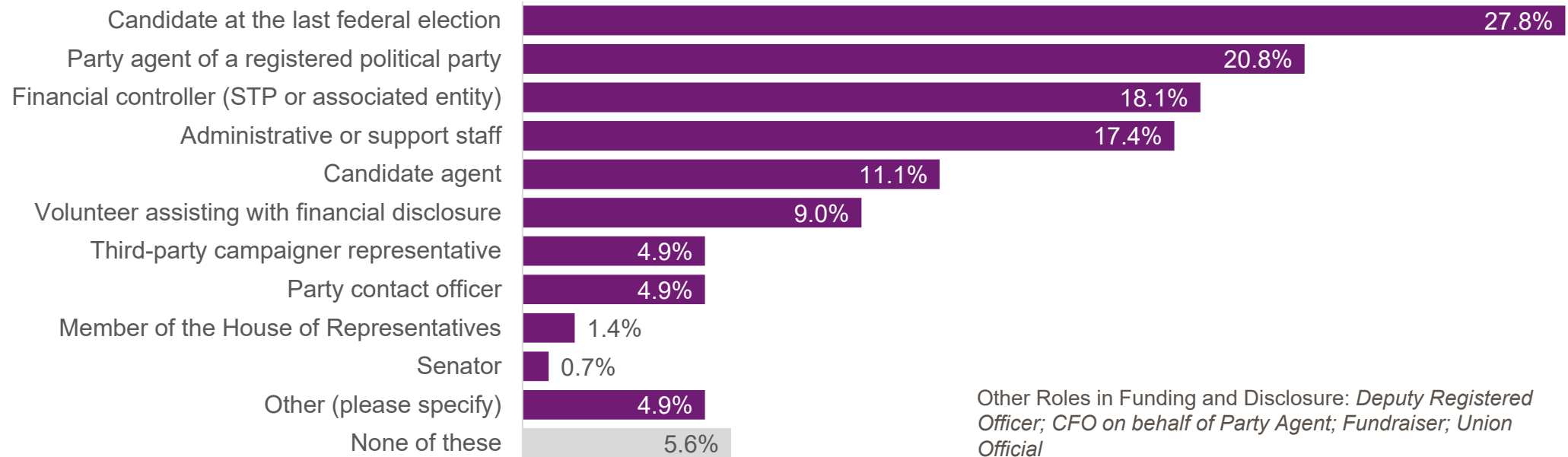
Key Measures:

- **Awareness** indicates whether stakeholders recognise that reforms are occurring, not whether they understand the detail.
- **Understanding** is self-reported and reflects perceived comprehension rather than tested knowledge.
- **Confidence and preparedness** capture how ready stakeholders feel to engage with the reforms, not whether that readiness is well founded.
- Differences across groups primarily reflect role, responsibility and frequency of interaction with the system.
- These measures are most useful when read together, particularly where confidence appears higher than understanding.

3. Sample Profile and Operating Context

Profile of Respondents: Role in Funding and Disclosure

Group A (Political Participants)



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

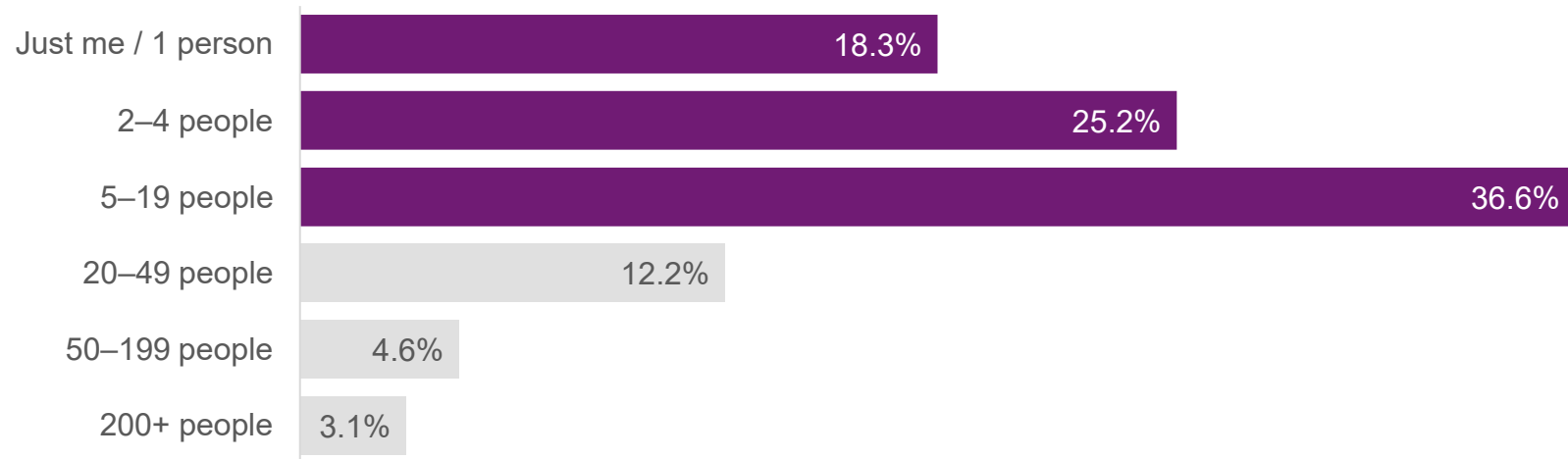
Q.S1b Which of the following best describes your role in relation to funding and disclosure?

- Respondents occupy a range of roles across funding and disclosure activities, with many holding direct or primary responsibility. 27.8% were candidates at the most recent federal election; 20.8% were party agents of registered political parties; 18.1% were financial controllers for significant third parties or associated entities; 17.4% were administrative or support staff involved in disclosure; and 11.1% identified as candidate agents.
- This mix indicates that responses largely reflect perspectives from individuals actively engaged in disclosure decision-making or administration.

Number of paid staff or regular volunteers in the organisation

Group A (Political Participants)

80.2% of stakeholders represent **small organisations** with fewer than 20 paid staff or regular volunteers.



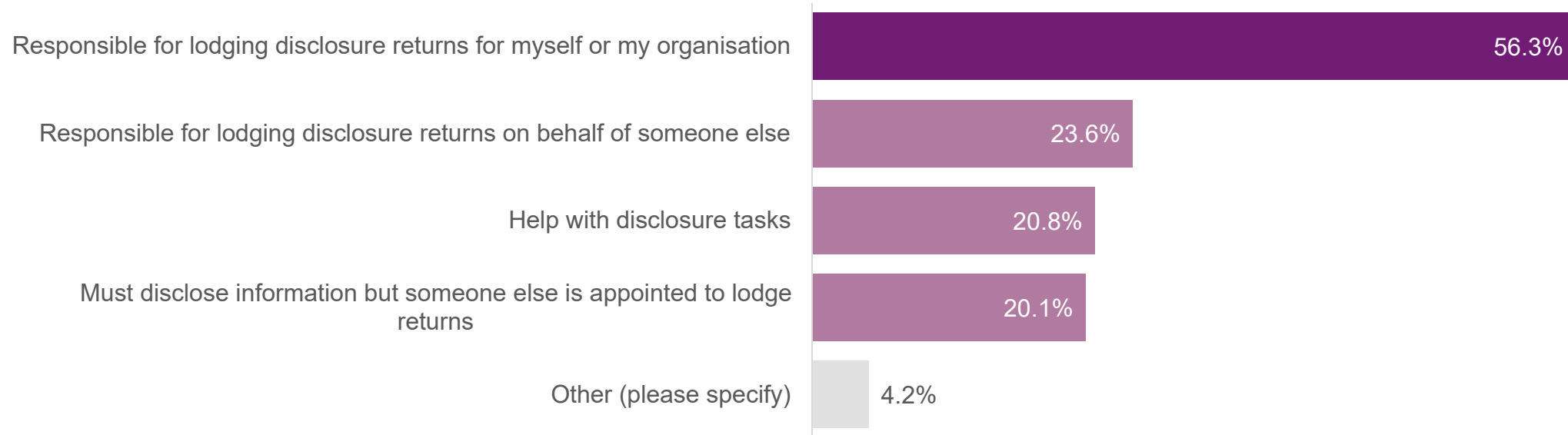
Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q F1. About how many paid staff or regular volunteers does your organisation have (including yourself if applicable)?

- Most respondents represent small organisations with limited staff or volunteer capacity with 80.2% representing organisations with fewer than 20 paid staff or regular volunteers
- This profile highlights the prevalence of resource-constrained operating environments among Group A respondents.

Personal Involvement in Lodging Disclosure Returns

Group A (Political Participants)

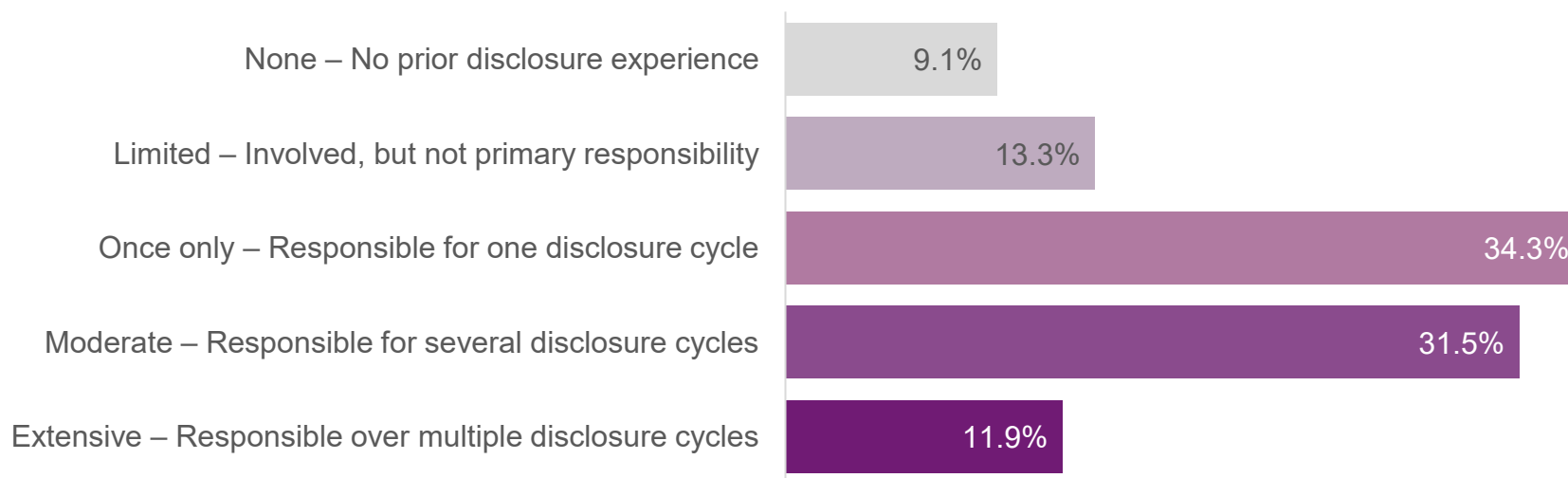


Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q 53 Which of the following best describes your personal involvement in lodging disclosure returns?

Most respondents report direct responsibility for lodging disclosure returns, indicating that the findings largely reflect hands-on experience with funding and disclosure requirements. Others are involved through support or delegated roles, highlighting variation in depth of engagement and exposure to compliance processes.

Experience with Funding and Disclosure Group A (Political Participants)

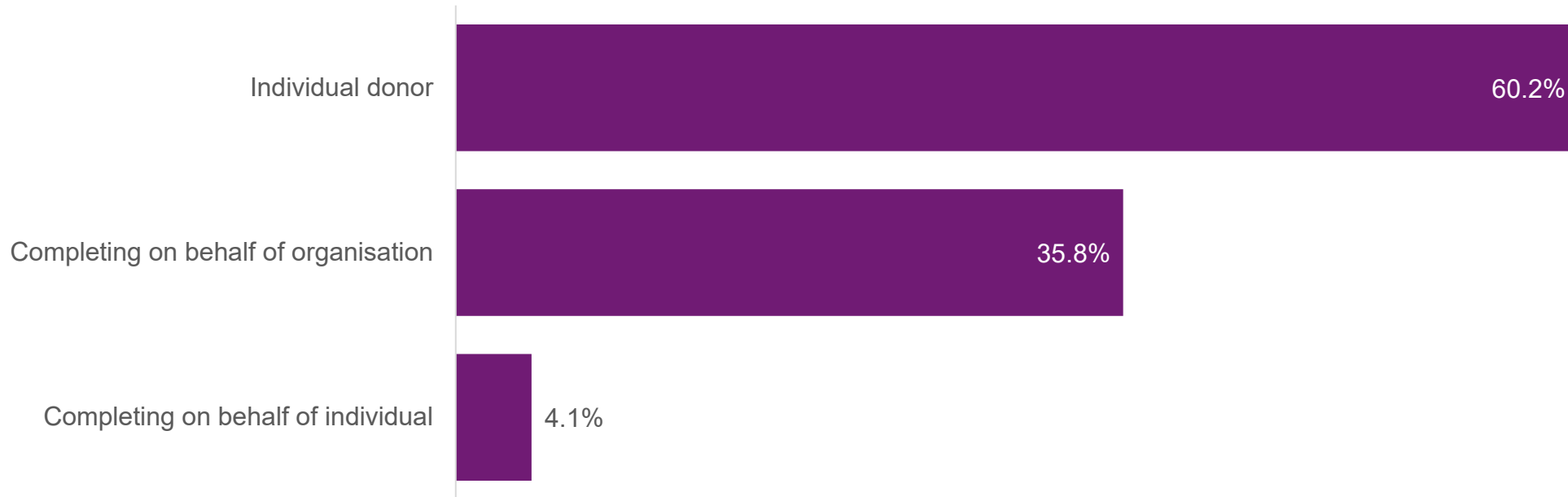


Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q S4 How much experience do you have with political funding and disclosure requirements?

- Respondents reported mixed levels of prior experience with funding and disclosure, with no single experience level dominating the sample. While 43.4% report moderate or extensive experience, a substantial proportion have limited or one-off exposure to disclosure processes.
- This spread suggests that Group A includes both stakeholders with established familiarity and those for whom disclosure has been episodic or peripheral, with implications for how requirements are interpreted and where guidance may need to be more explicit or practical.
- Importantly, despite variation in prior experience, the vast majority of political participants (90.4%) expect to have future funding and disclosure obligations, indicating that the findings are relevant to stakeholders who anticipate ongoing engagement with the framework.

Role in Funding and Disclosure Group B (Donors)



Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

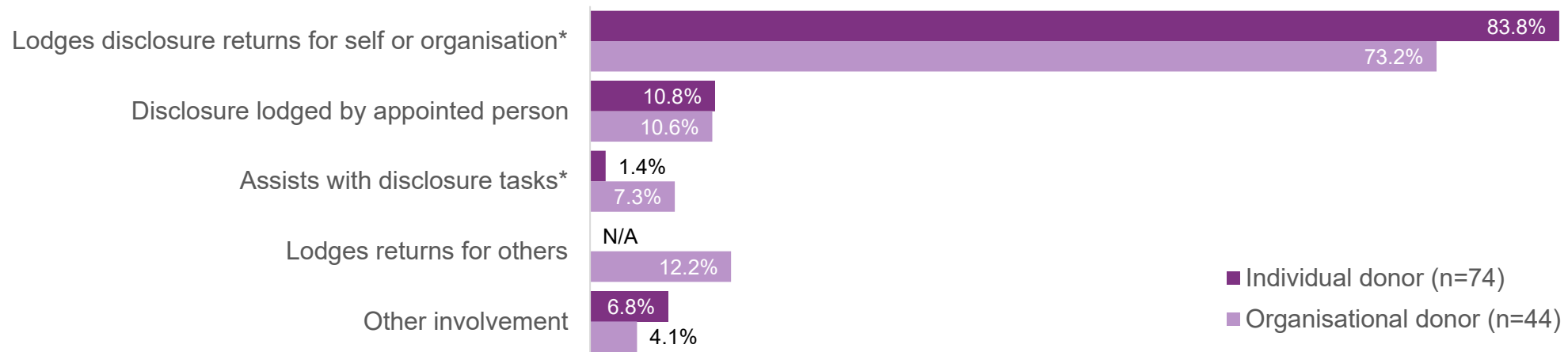
Q xS2 Are you completing this survey as an individual donor or on behalf of an organisation that donates to a party, candidate, or third party?

- Respondents comprise both existing individual donors and those acting on behalf of organisations or individuals, reflecting the practical distribution of donor roles in disclosure activities.
- Most respondents report direct involvement in funding or disclosure processes, providing a relevant perspective on donor roles and responsibilities under the current framework.

Involvement in lodging disclosure returns

Group B (Donors)

Most existing donors lodge disclosures themselves; third-party involvement is uncommon



Base: Individual and Organisational Donors

Q S3. Which of the following best describes your personal involvement in lodging disclosure returns?

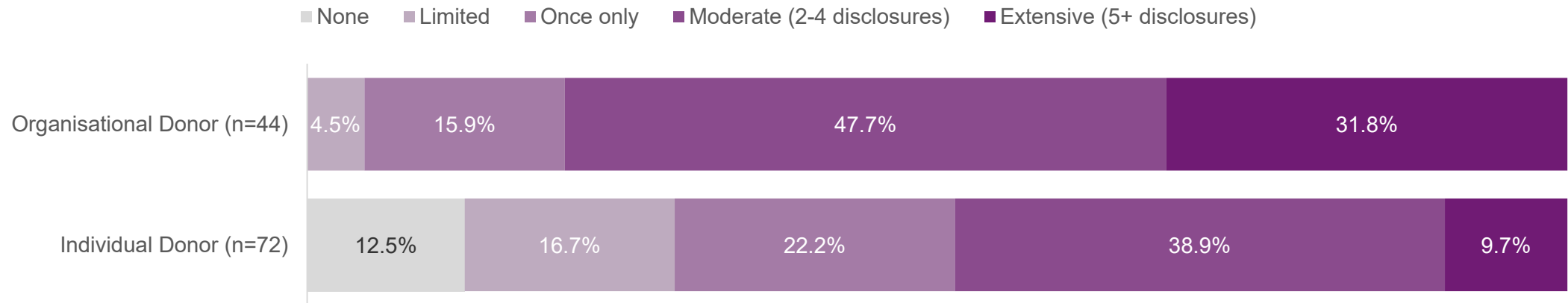
*Differences between individual and organisational donors are statistically significant for disclosure lodged personally and assisted disclosure tasks ($p < 0.05$).

- Around three-quarters or more of existing donors report lodging disclosure returns themselves, with limited reliance on appointed persons or assisted processes.
- Disclosure obligations are typically managed in-house by existing donors, suggesting systems and guidance need to support direct user workflows rather than delegated or third-party use.

Experience in lodging disclosure returns

Group B (Donors)

Organisational donors report higher levels of disclosure experience than individual donors



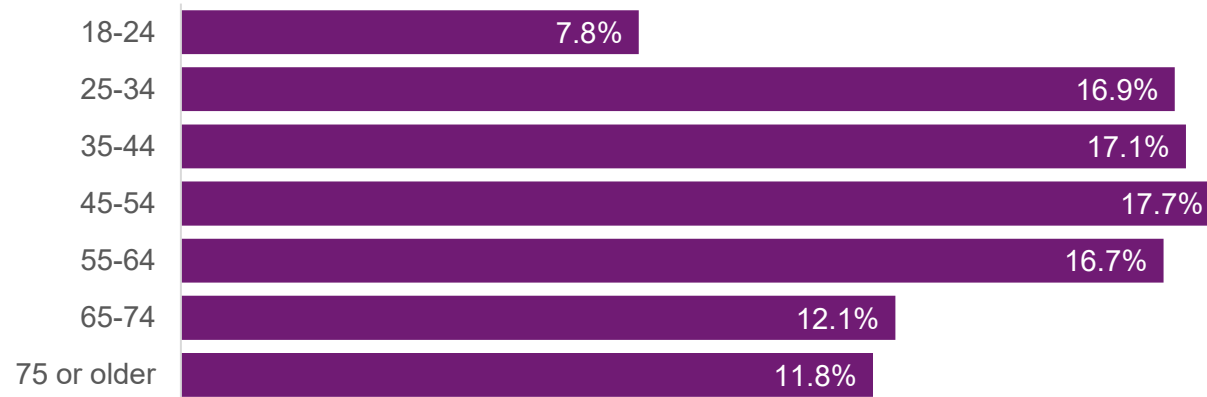
*Base: Individual and Organisational Donors (excludes 2 Individual Donors that were unsure)
Q S4. How much experience do you have with political funding and disclosure requirements?
Differences in experience levels between individual and organisational donors are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).*

- Nearly one-third of organisational donors report extensive disclosure experience, compared with fewer than one in ten individual donors.
- Organisational donors are likely to approach disclosure with greater familiarity and established processes, while individual donors more often report limited or episodic experience.

Demographics

Group C (General Public)

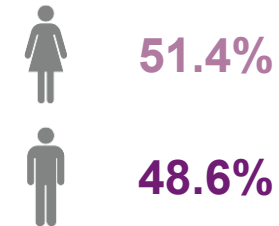
Age distribution



Respondents under the age of 18 excluded from the study.

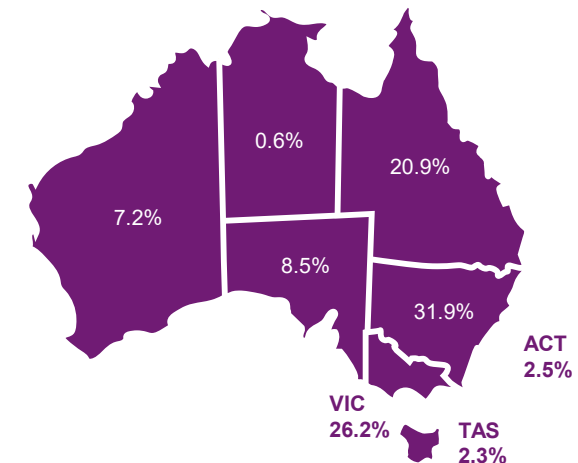
- The Group C sample reflects a broad cross-section of the Australian adult population. Gender representation is balanced, and respondents are distributed across all adult age groups, with representation from younger and older cohorts.
- Participants were drawn from all states and territories, with the largest shares from New South Wales and Victoria, consistent with population distribution. Smaller jurisdictions are represented at proportionate levels.
- This demographic profile provides a sound basis for examining public awareness, understanding and perceptions of funding and disclosure arrangements in later sections of the report.

Gender distribution



Question included options for non-binary identification, but these were not selected by any participant.

Geographic distribution



Australian map by Freeimages.com

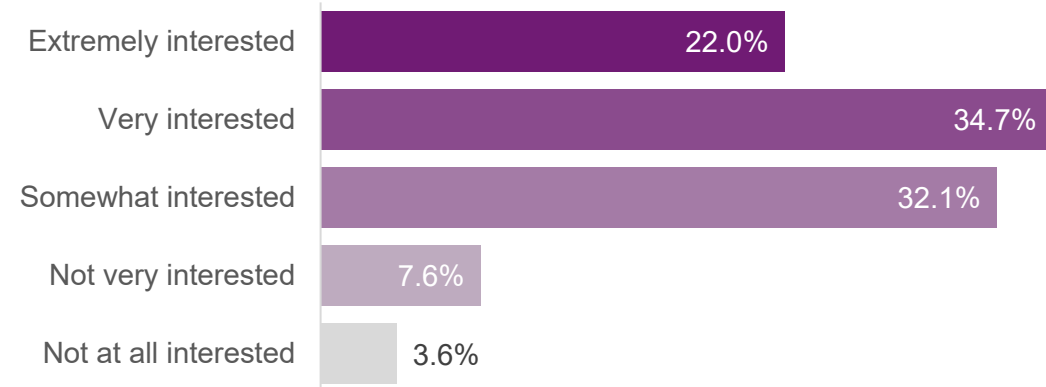
Citizenship, Enrolment and Interest

Group C (General Public)

Citizenship: The majority of respondents were Australian citizens (96%), with a small proportion identifying as non-citizens (4%).

Enrolment: Almost all Australian citizen respondents reported being enrolled to vote (99%).

Interest in politics and government in Australia



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)

Q PF6. "How interested are you in politics and government in Australia, if at all?"

- Most Group C respondents were Australian citizens and enrolled to vote, reflecting the intended population for the transparency outcomes of the reforms.
- Levels of self-reported interest in politics and government were generally high, with most respondents indicating at least some interest. A smaller proportion reported low or no interest. This pattern is not unexpected for a general population survey conducted on a civic topic.
- This profile provides important context for interpreting later findings on awareness and expectations, noting that general political interest does not necessarily imply familiarity with funding and disclosure arrangements or active engagement with disclosure information.

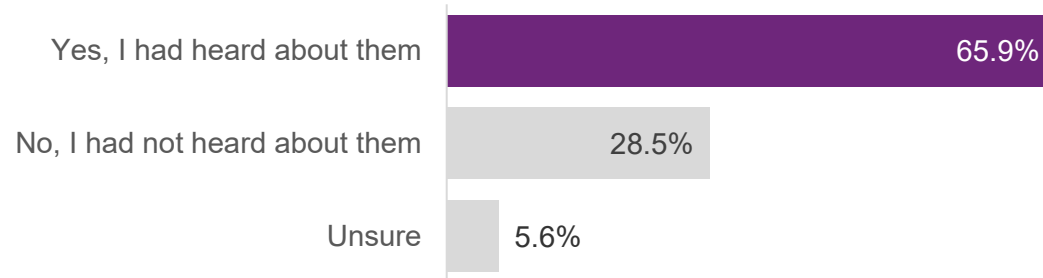
4. Insights

4.1 Awareness of reforms

Awareness of Reforms

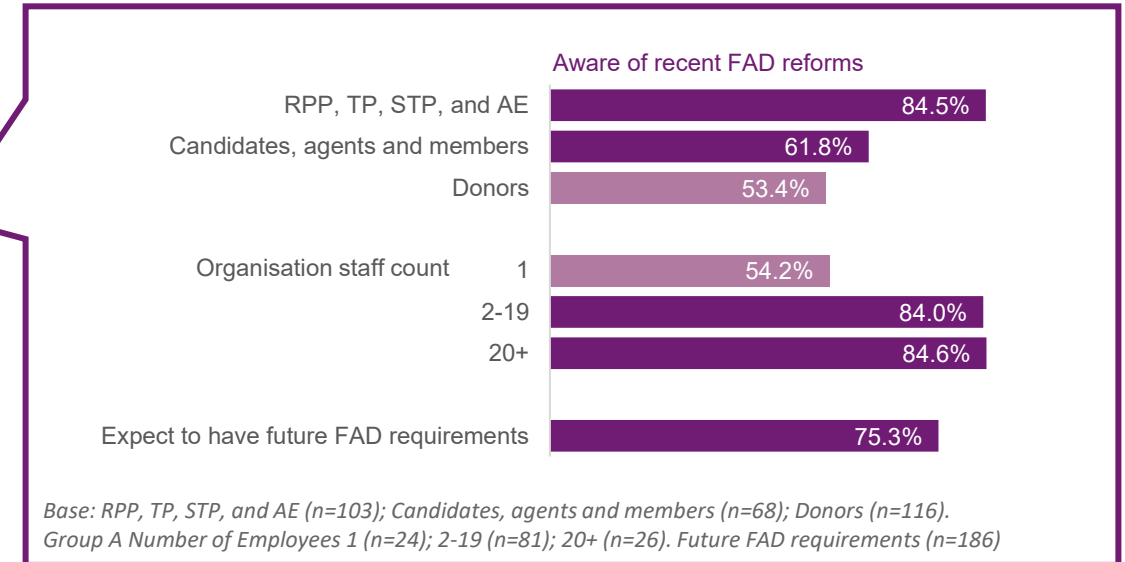
Group A (Political Participants) and Group B (Donors)

Most regulated stakeholders were aware of the reforms at the time of the survey, with awareness lower among donors.



Base: All Group A and B respondents (n=267)

Q B1a. "Before today, had you heard about recent changes to the requirements for federal political funding and disclosure (Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Reform) Act 2025)?"



Base: RPP, TP, STP, and AE (n=103); Candidates, agents and members (n=68); Donors (n=116).

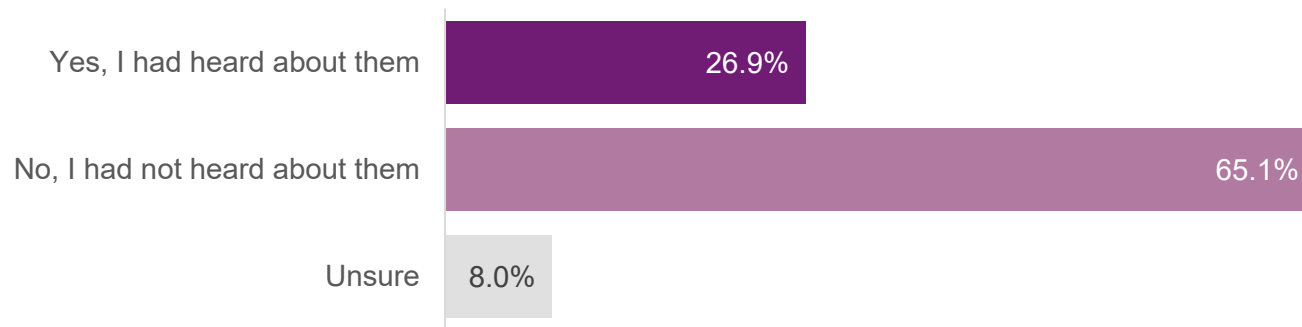
Group A Number of Employees 1 (n=24); 2-19 (n=81); 20+ (n=26). Future FAD requirements (n=186)

- Around two-thirds of Group A and Group B (65.9%) were aware of the reforms prior to the survey. Awareness was higher among regulated political participants and larger organisations than among donors and self-represented individuals.
- Around one-third had not heard of the reforms or were unsure. This indicates that baseline awareness varies across groups and is more closely linked to expected reporting obligations than to general exposure.
- Awareness alone does not indicate readiness. Differences in baseline awareness should be taken into account when interpreting subsequent findings on understanding, confidence and preparedness, particularly for donors and smaller entities.

Awareness of Reforms

Group C (General Public)

Awareness of the reforms is low amongst the Australian public



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)

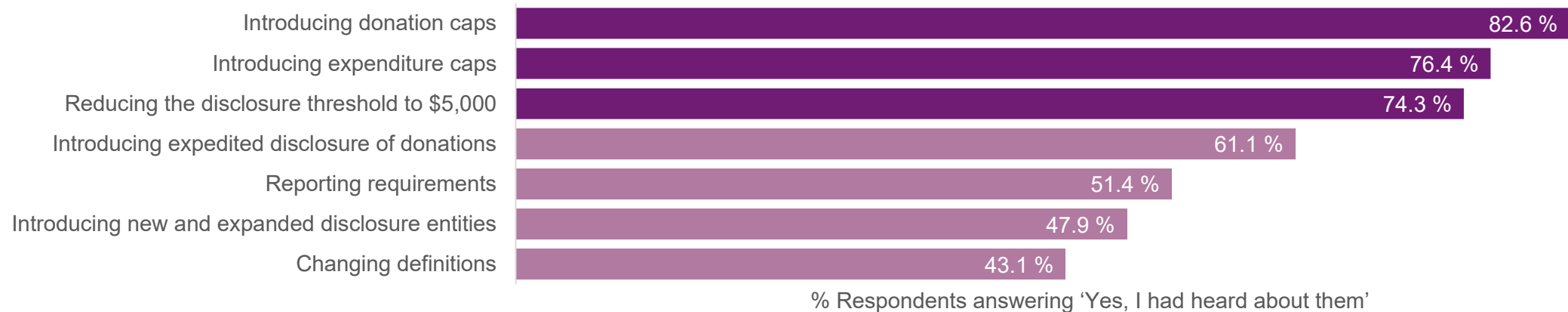
Q PB1. "Before today, had you heard about any changes to the rules about how political donations are reported or made public?"

- Almost two thirds of survey respondents reported having not heard of the incoming changes to the rules about how political donations are reported or made public. A quarter were aware of the changes.
- By contrast, awareness is much higher amongst both donors and political participants. Realistically, it is groups who must interact directly with the legislation that are likely to know about the reforms.

Awareness of Specific Reforms

Group A (Political Participants)

New donation caps are the change stakeholders are most aware of



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q B2. Before today, had you heard about the following changes commencing 1 July 2026

- Awareness is highest for high-salience changes such as donation caps (83%), expenditure caps (76%) and the reduced disclosure threshold (74%). Operational and definitional changes are less well recognised, with lower awareness of reporting requirements (51%), expanded disclosure entities (48%) and changes to definitions (43%).
- This creates a risk gap: stakeholders may feel informed about the headline reforms while being less prepared for the practical reporting and compliance implications that will shape day-to-day implementation.
- RPP, TP, STP, and AE demonstrate much higher awareness for all of the changes coming into effect than donors and candidates. Educational material about the changes should be much more targeted to donors and independent candidates.

Awareness of Specific Reforms

Group B (Donors)

Awareness is highest for headline reforms such as donation caps



Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

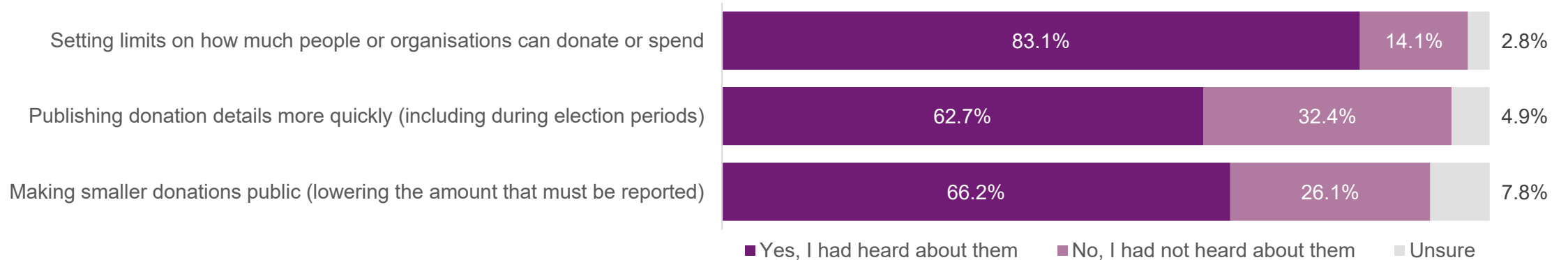
Q B2. Before today, had you heard about the following changes commencing 1 July 2026

- Donors are most aware of reforms that directly affect donation amounts, particularly the introduction of donation caps (57%) and the reduction in the disclosure threshold to \$5,000 (52%).
- Awareness is lower for more technical changes, including reporting requirements (37%) and changes to definitions (25%).
- Awareness of reforms that directly affect donors is partial rather than comprehensive. This suggests that many donors may be exposed to reform messages at a high level without fully absorbing the detail, highlighting the need for clearer, more direct communication of donor-relevant changes and their practical implications.

Awareness of Specific Reforms

Group C (General Public)

Public awareness is highest for donation caps, lower for disclosure mechanics



Base: All Group C respondents aware of upcoming reforms (n=142)

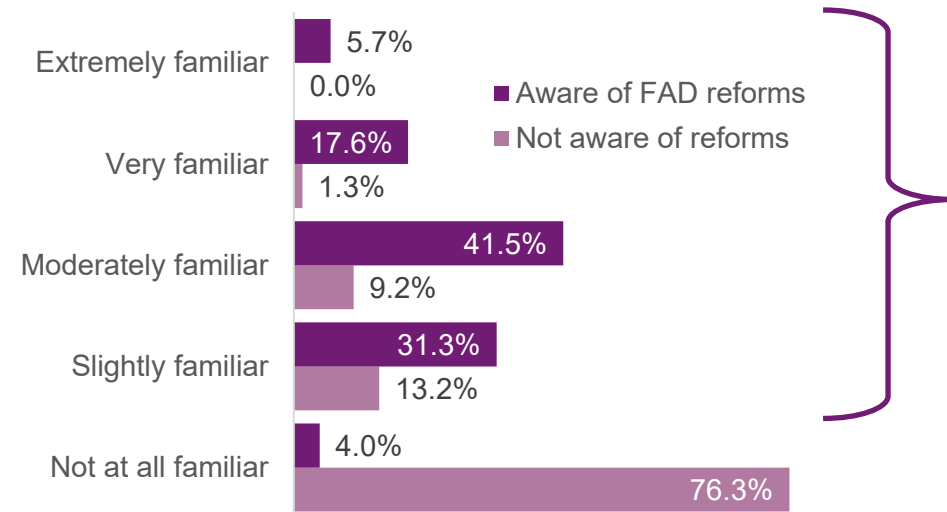
Q PB3a. "Before today, had you heard about the following changes commencing 1 July 2026?"

- Among members of the public who were aware of upcoming reforms, familiarity is highest with donation and spending limits (83%), with lower awareness of faster publication requirements and lower disclosure thresholds (around two-thirds).
- Awareness is strongest for reforms that align with intuitive fairness concepts (caps and limits), and weaker for procedural changes relating to timing and disclosure mechanics.
- Public awareness is selective and principle-based rather than procedural, reinforcing that general public confidence in the reforms rests on perceived integrity outcomes rather than understanding of how the system operates in practice.

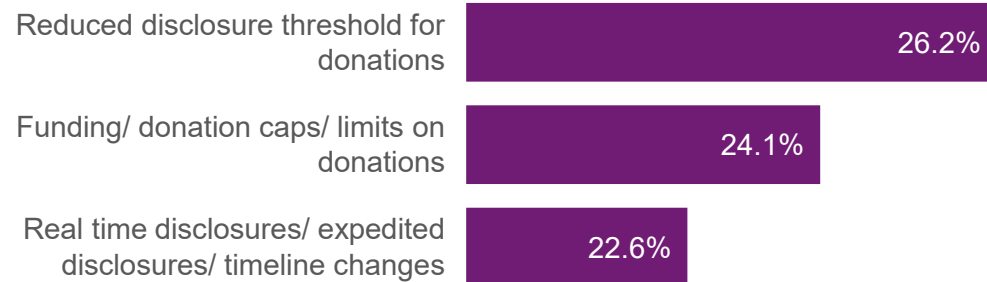
Overall Familiarity

Group A (Political Participants) and Group B (Donors)

Stakeholders aware of the reforms are also much more likely to report higher familiarity with those changes. Reduced disclosure thresholds, donation caps, and real-time disclosure were the requirements of most relevance.



Base: Group A and B respondents aware of FAD changes (n=176), and unaware (n=76)
Q B1b. "Before today, how familiar were you with the changes to the requirements for federal political funding and disclosure (Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Reform) Act 2025)?"



Base: Group A and B respondents at least slightly familiar with the changes to requirements for federal political funding and disclosure (n=116)
Q B1c. "Which of the new requirements is most relevant or important to you or your organisation?" (top 3 coded themes)

- Most Group A and B respondents are not familiar with the incoming FAD reforms. Those aware of the incoming reforms were most likely to report moderate familiarity with the changes.
- Among those aware of the changes, the most relevant/important to them or their organisation were donation caps (24.1%), real-time or expedited disclosure (22.6%), and reduced disclosure thresholds (26.2%).
- Expenditure caps, and changes to reporting requirements were less commonly cited except by RPP, TP, STP and AE. By comparison, these issues were almost never mentioned by donors.

Awareness & Understanding

Stakeholder-identified priorities within the reform package

Donation and spending caps

Stakeholders frequently highlighted changes to donation and spending caps, particularly where requirements differ across participant types and have implications for system configuration and compliance.

“Donation and spending caps that differ for different participants (e.g. independents vs major parties).”

“Both the expedited disclosure requirements and the donation/expenditure caps are, in my view, the most important to the organisation. Both will require significant technological development to allow our systems to comply with the requirements.”

Disclosure thresholds

Updates to disclosure thresholds were identified as a key area of awareness, with respondents noting implications for reporting frequency and compliance effort.

“Update of disclosure threshold for \$5,000 and requirements.”

Q B1c Which of the new requirements is most relevant or important to you or your organisation?

Expedited disclosures and real-time reporting

Expedited disclosure and real-time reporting obligations were consistently cited as significant changes requiring early clarity and practical guidance.

“Expedited disclosure of donations. Federal accounts. Calendar year reporting. Changing annual returns.”

“Reduced disclosure threshold, real-time disclosure obligations, as well as potential for other parties to become third party / have increased disclosure obligations at the next election.”

“New disclosure limits, real-time reporting.”

Other considerations

A range of additional reform elements were raised, particularly relating to administrative funding, account separation, and impacts for candidates and associated entities.

“Political party compliance, donation thresholds and ceilings, application of admin funding.”

“The requirement to have dedicated Federal and Administrative accounts – there is still a lack of clarity around how we will be able to separate administrative and campaign income and expenditure.”

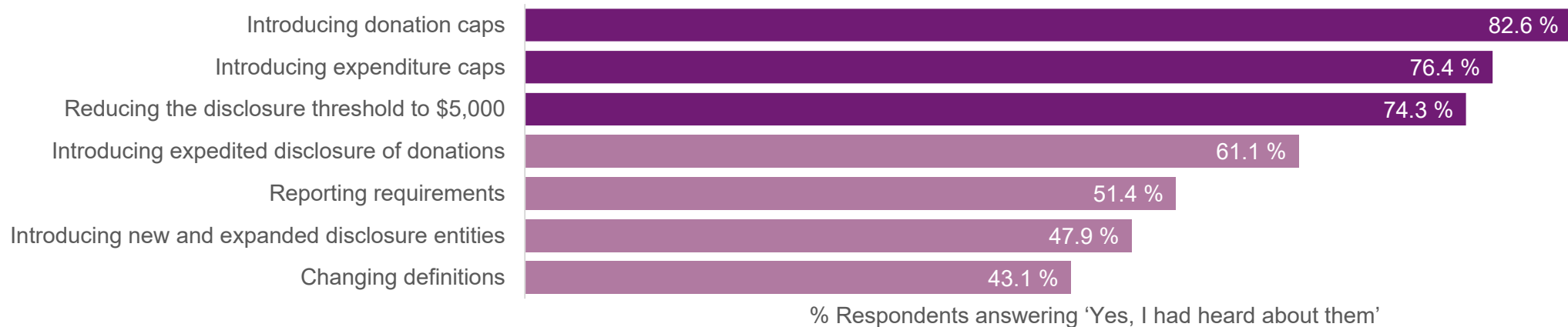
“Reporting requirements and changes in funding arrangements for candidates and associated entities.”

Quotes may be suitable for reuse in implementation or communication materials, subject to context.

Key Reforms

Group A (Political Participants)

New donation caps are the change stakeholders are most aware of



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144). Ranked most relevant/important changes (Q B1c) presented next to labels.

Q B2. Before today, had you heard about the following changes commencing 1 July 2026

- Awareness is highest for high-salience changes such as donation caps (83%), expenditure caps (76%) and the reduced disclosure threshold (74%). Operational and definitional changes are less well recognised, with lower awareness of reporting requirements (51%), expanded disclosure entities (48%) and changes to definitions (43%).
- Although expedited disclosures were in the top 2 most mentioned new requirements relevant to political participants, only 3 in 5 were even aware of the incoming change.
- This creates a risk gap: stakeholders may feel informed about the headline reforms while being less prepared for the practical reporting and compliance implications that will shape day-to-day implementation.

Key Reforms

Group B (Donors)

Awareness is highest for headline reforms such as donation caps



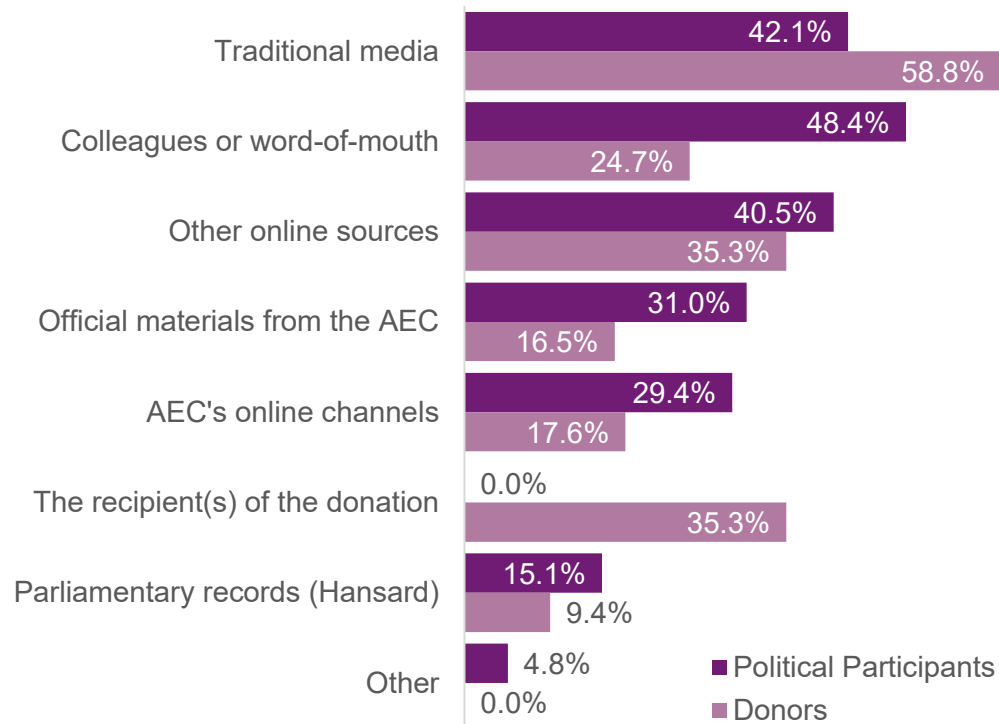
*Base: All Group B respondents (n=123). Ranked most relevant/important changes (Q B1c) presented next to label.
Q B2. Before today, had you heard about the following changes commencing 1 July 2026*

- Donors are most aware of reforms that directly affect donation amounts, particularly the introduction of donation caps (57%) and the reduction in the disclosure threshold to \$5,000 (52%). These are also the reforms donors were most likely to mention unprompted as relevant to themselves.
- Awareness is lower for more technical changes, including reporting requirements (37%) and changes to definitions (25%).
- Awareness of reforms that directly affect donors is partial rather than comprehensive. This suggests that many donors may be exposed to reform messages at a high level without fully absorbing the detail, highlighting the need for clearer, more direct communication of donor-relevant changes and their practical implications.

Information Sources

Group A (Political Participants) and Group B (Donors)

Word-of-mouth was the most common method of learning about the reforms for political participants, but not for donors who were more likely to hear about them through traditional media.



- The profile of sources from which respondents heard about the incoming FAD reforms were quite different for political participants and donors.
- While word-of-mouth is the most common source of awareness for political participants, it is the 4th most common for donors, who instead often cited the recipient of the donation as their source of awareness.
- Candidates and candidate agents had a profile of information sources much more similar to that of donors than RPP, TP, STP and AE, with more than half citing other online sources (54.5%).
- The reach of AEC materials was low for all respondents, but even more so for donors.

Base: Group A respondents aware of upcoming changes (n=126), Group B respondents aware of upcoming changes (n=85)

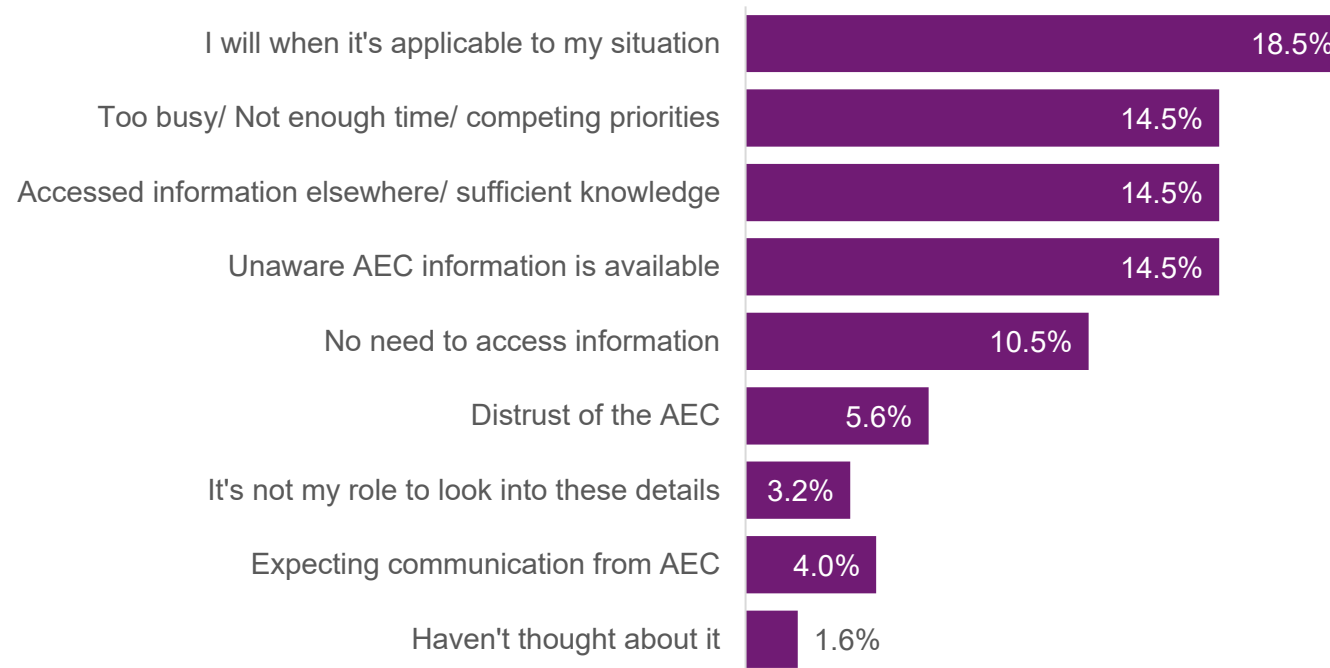
Q B3. "Where have you/your organisation heard about the recent changes to federal political funding and disclosure?" (multiple choice)

Response option 'The recipient(s) of the donation' only presented to Group B.

Reasons for not using AEC Materials

Group A (Political Participants) and Group B (Donors)

The most common reason given for not accessing official AEC communications about the incoming changes was that they weren't yet applicable to the respondent's situation



- Those who did not learn about the reforms from AEC sources were asked why. The most common response was that they would once it became relevant to them.
- It was very rare for a negative perception of the AEC to have prevented someone accessing information about the reforms from them.
- Convenience and relevance are the strongest themes behind someone not using AEC materials. The AEC will need to consider how to keep material readily available and accessible for people as they decide it becomes relevant to them.

Base: Group A and B respondents heard about changes through non-AEC sources (n=124)

Q B3a. "What are the main reasons you or your organisation have not accessed AEC's official materials or online channels about recent changes to funding and disclosure requirements?" (Coded themes)

Reasons for not using AEC Materials

Group A (Political Participants)

Respondents who had not accessed AEC official materials most commonly cited time constraints, reliance on alternative sources of advice, or uncertainty about the availability of guidance following the introduction of new legislation.

“Lack of time and resources – focus fully on other urgent priorities at this time. It would be expected that the AEC sends emails, even mail clearly and succinctly outlining the changes. Perhaps in bite-size portioned communications that educate into this.”

“I reviewed the laws and commentary directly.”

“Sufficient detail provided through internal channels.”

“We took our advice from our external lawyer.”

“Websites become too confusing to navigate. Print media is more succinct.”

“I didn’t realise the resources were available yet. When I checked the website it said advice was pending as the legislation was new.”

- Non-use of AEC materials appears driven less by disengagement and more by practical constraints and channel preferences, with stakeholders relying on established legal or internal advice pathways and deferring engagement with official guidance where it is perceived as pending, difficult to navigate, or time-intensive.

Base: Group A respondents who haven’t accessed AEC official materials or channels (n=65)

Q B3a. “What are the main reasons you or your organisation have not accessed AEC’s official materials or online channels about recent changes to funding and disclosure requirements?”

Quotes may be suitable for reuse in implementation or communication materials, subject to context.

Where political participants need the most guidance

Group A (Political Participants)

Overall scope and compliance planning

“All of it – especially caps, thresholds, declaration / disclosure requirements. Want to ensure that we are fully compliant and have time to plan.”

Timing, definitions and transitional arrangements

“Changes to the definitions. How will it work if changes are implemented from 1 July, but reporting will be calendar year. How will we report on the period from July till December 2026?”

Account structures and election-period reporting

“Methods of disclosure during election periods, and more clarity around the use of Federal vs Administrative accounts and funds, particularly given that Federal revenue surpluses have historically been used to fund the operation of our Party in non-election years by offsetting our administrative budget deficit.”

- Information needs focus on practical application, especially around thresholds, timing, account structures and expedited reporting.
- Stakeholders are seeking clarity on how requirements apply in practice, rather than explanation of the policy intent, particularly in transitional and election-period scenarios.

Expedited disclosure processes and systems

“Expedited disclosure requirements, definition of donors and entities forms and software for submitting returns ensuring suitable record keeping.”

Donations, fundraising and classification

“Donations disclosure including gifts and how to handle fundraising events & receipts for net proceeds.”

“Short time frame reporting of donations. Disclosure of political donations. Information regarding whether the same disclosure rules apply to non-political donations, i.e. donations made to our organisation with the explicit instructions that they are for our advocacy account, not our political account: do the same disclosure, threshold and reporting timeframe rules apply to those non-political donations as they do to political donations?”

Base: Group A respondents who have heard about the recent changes (n=122)

Q B3b. “Which of the new requirements do you feel you will need the most information about?”

Quotes may be suitable for reuse in implementation or communication materials, subject to context.

Awareness and Understanding: Integrated View

Awareness of the reforms is relatively high across stakeholders, but understanding is variable and concentrated on headline changes rather than day-to-day compliance requirements.

- Across Groups A and B, awareness of the reforms is widespread but not universal, and is strongly patterned by stakeholder type, with higher awareness among organisational actors and those expecting to make future disclosures than among donors and individuals.
- Awareness is concentrated on high-salience elements of the reform package, particularly donation caps, expenditure caps and reduced disclosure thresholds, while operational, definitional and reporting changes are less well recognised across all stakeholder groups.
- Among those who are aware, familiarity with the reforms tends to be moderate rather than deep, and stakeholders most readily identify elements that are visible or frequently referenced, rather than those that shape ongoing reporting and system requirements
- Differences between stakeholder groups are pronounced: regulated political participants show broader awareness across reform elements, while donors and candidates demonstrate narrower awareness focused on a limited subset of changes.
- Information pathways vary substantially by group, with political participants more likely to report word-of-mouth or internal channels, and donors and candidates more reliant on media or donation recipients, limiting exposure to comprehensive or authoritative guidance.
- Non-use of AEC materials reflects timing, relevance and accessibility considerations rather than active disengagement, with many stakeholders indicating they expect to seek official guidance once the reforms become directly applicable to them.

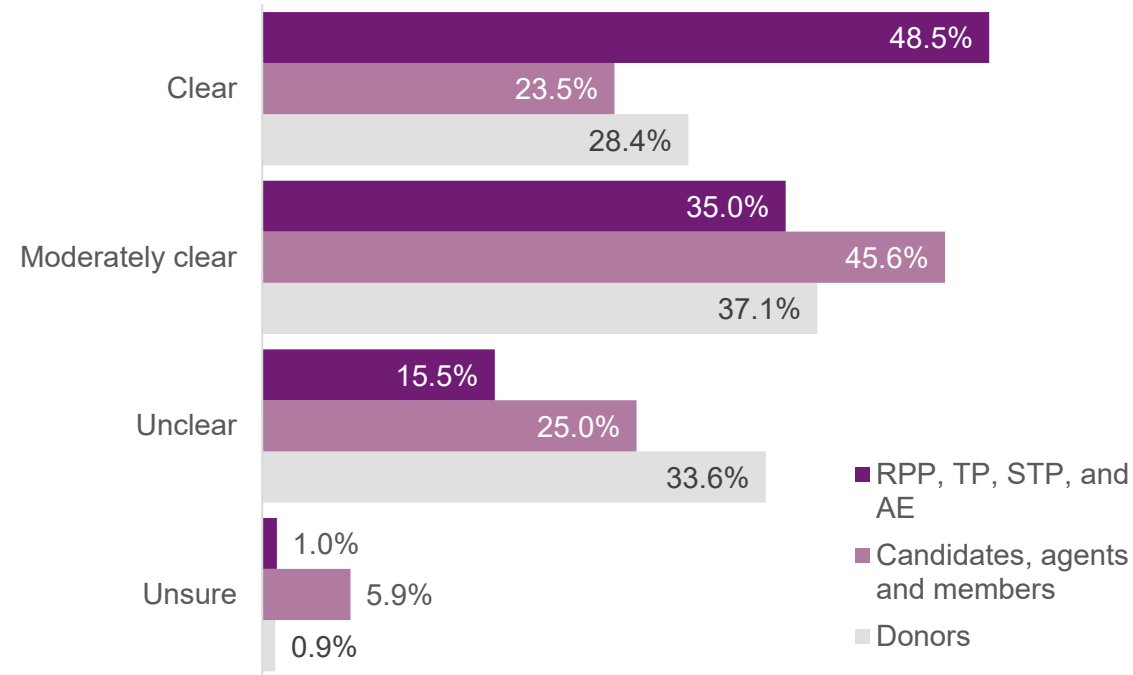
The evidence points to an implementation risk where stakeholders feel informed about the reforms at a headline level but are less prepared for the operational and reporting changes that will determine compliance in practice, particularly among donors and candidates who are less connected to formal information channels.

4.2 Confidence and Preparedness

Clarity of Existing Requirements

Group A (Political Participants) and Group B (Donors)

The existing funding and disclosure requirements are generally considered clear



- Most stakeholders consider the existing funding and disclosure scheme clear, but clarity is variable, with donors and smaller entities significantly more likely to report uncertainty than regulated political participants and larger organisations.
- Perceived clarity increases with organisational capacity, particularly where dedicated staff manage disclosures, suggesting that ease of navigation is closely tied to resources rather than to the intrinsic simplicity of the scheme.
- Reported clarity reflects organisational capability as much as system design, indicating that confidence in navigating the existing scheme should not be assumed for individuals and smaller entities when transitioning to the new requirements.

Base: Group A and B respondents RPP, TP, STP, and AE (n=103); Candidates, candidate agents and members (n=68); Donors (n=116).

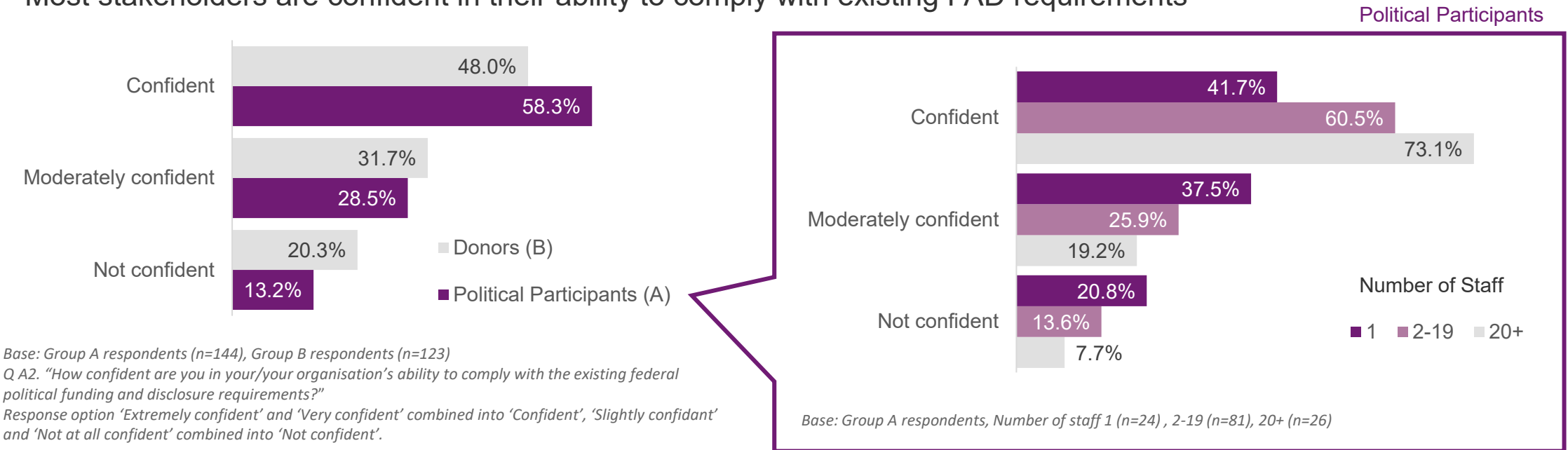
Q A1. "How clear are the requirements relating to the existing federal political funding and disclosure scheme to you?"

Response option 'Extremely clear' and 'Very clear' combined into 'Clear', 'Slightly clear' and 'Not at all clear' combined into 'Unclear'.

Confidence with Existing Requirements

Group A (Political Participants) and Group B (Donors)

Most stakeholders are confident in their ability to comply with existing FAD requirements



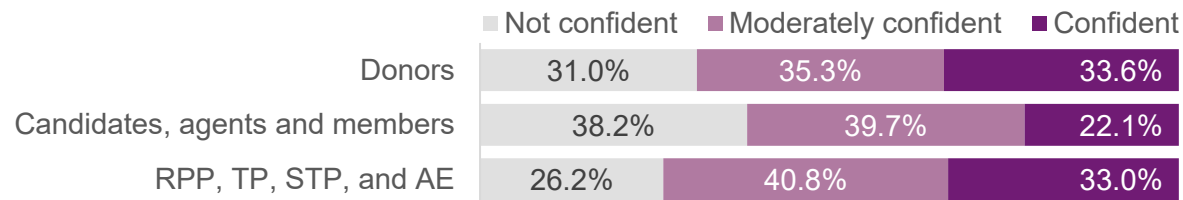
- Most stakeholders report confidence in their ability to comply, but confidence is lower among donors and smaller political organisations than among larger, better-resourced entities.
- Among political participants, confidence increases with organisational size, reflecting differences in access to dedicated compliance resources.
- Confidence largely reflects organisational capacity rather than preparedness in itself, indicating that confidence alone is a weak indicator of readiness for the new requirements, particularly for smaller organisations and individuals.

Confidence Responding to Changes

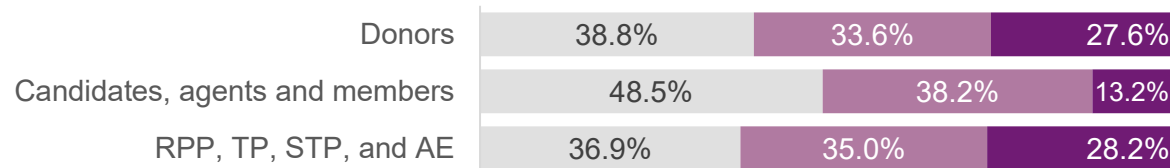
Group A (Political Participants) and Group B (Donors)

Stakeholders are less likely to feel informed about the new requirements, than able to meet their obligations

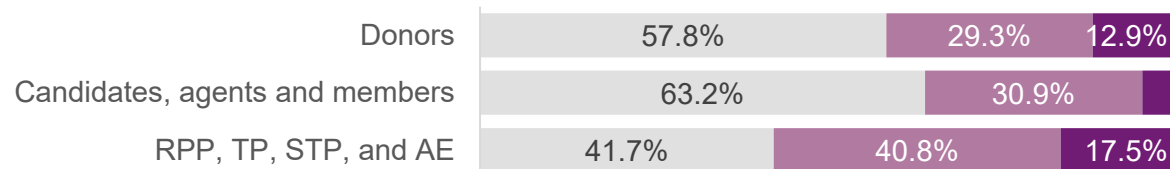
Your ability to meet the obligations under the new requirements



Your preparedness to complete the required disclosure tasks



How well informed you are about the new requirements



Base: Group A and B respondents RPP, TP, STP and AE (n=103); Candidates, agents and members (n=68); donors (n=116).

Q B7. "How confident are you about the following aspects of meeting the new requirements?"

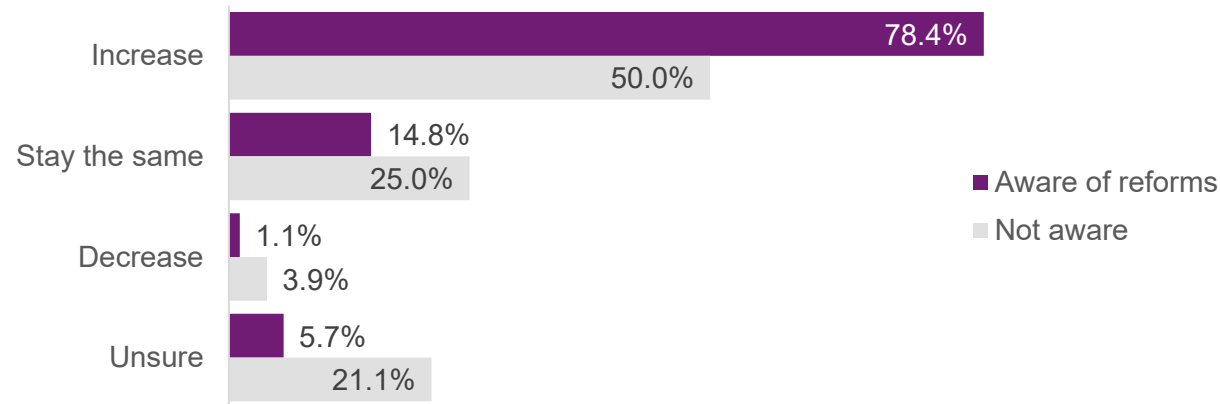
Response option 'Extremely confident' and 'Very confident' combined into 'Confident', 'Slightly confident' and 'Not at all confident' combined into 'Not confident'.

- Stakeholders are more confident in their ability to meet the new requirements than in how well informed they feel about them, with confidence lowest for understanding the changes and highest for meeting obligations.
- Candidates and agents consistently report the lowest confidence across all measures, while donors report confidence levels closer to larger political entities despite lower awareness.
- Confidence responding to the reforms appears to be shaped more by perceived support or backing than by understanding of the requirements, reinforcing the risk that confidence may overstate actual preparedness, particularly for candidates and smaller entities.

Expected Resource Burden

Group A (Political Participants) and Group B (Donors)

Most survey respondents expect the FAD reforms to increase the time and effort required for compliance



Base: Group A and B respondents aware of the reforms (n=176), not aware of reforms (n=76)

Q B4. "Do you expect the amount of time and effort required to comply with the new requirements will increase, stay the same, or decrease?"

- Most stakeholders expect the reforms to increase the time and effort required for compliance, particularly among those who are already aware of the changes.
- Even among stakeholders who were not aware of the reforms, expectations tend toward increased workload rather than stability or reduction.
- Anticipated resource burden is widespread and not limited to informed stakeholders, indicating that expectations of increased effort are driven by the presence of reform itself rather than by detailed understanding of the requirements.

Expected Actions to Meet the New Requirements

Group A (Political Participants)

Providing internal training and upgrading systems are the actions most political participants expect to take to comply



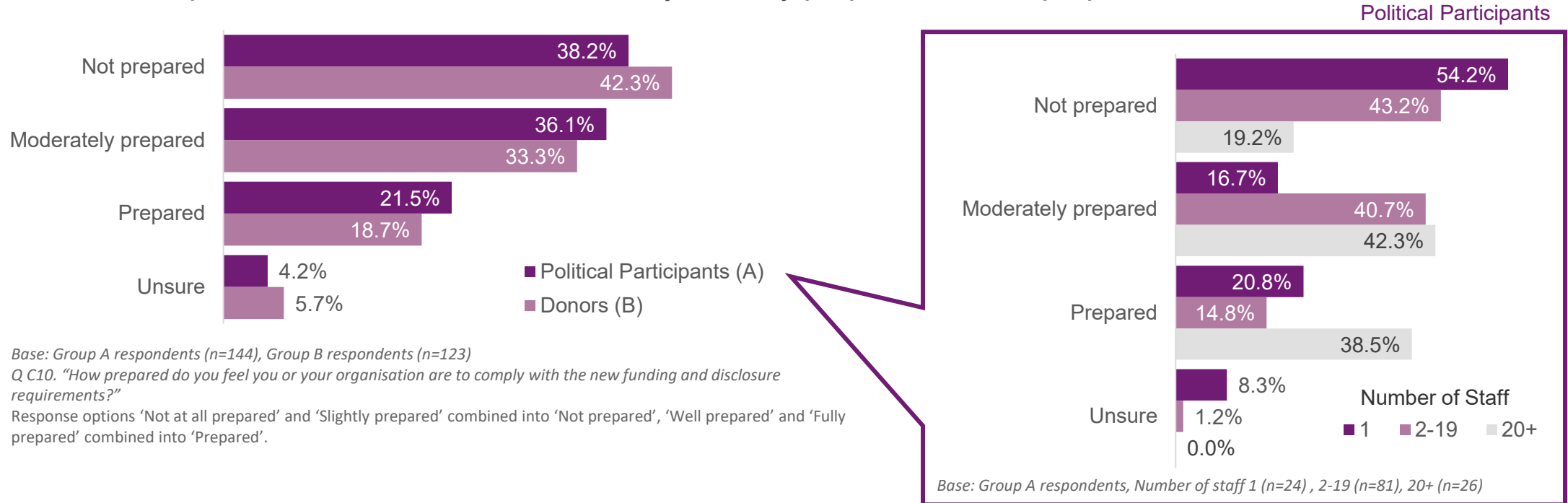
- Political participants who are aware of the reforms most commonly anticipate upgrading systems, providing internal training, and allocating additional compliance budget, indicating preparation focused on operational capability rather than minor process change.
- Those not yet aware of the reforms are far less likely to anticipate taking any action and are much more likely to select “*none of these*”, suggesting limited forward planning.
- Anticipated actions diverge sharply by awareness, indicating a risk of under-preparation among currently unaware stakeholders, particularly in relation to systems, resourcing and recordkeeping, which are likely to become binding once the reforms commence.

Base: Group A respondents aware of the reforms (n=108), unaware of the reforms (n=30)
 Q B5. “What actions might you or your organisation need to take to comply with the new requirements?” (multiple choice)

Overall Preparedness to Comply

Group A (Political Participants) and Group B (Donors)

Less than a quarter of stakeholders feel that they are fully prepared, or well prepared



- Fewer than one in four stakeholders feel prepared to comply with the new requirements, with a majority reporting they are either not prepared or only moderately prepared.
- Preparedness varies by organisational capacity: political participants in larger organisations report substantially higher preparedness than those with one or few staff, while donors and political participants show similarly low overall preparedness.
- Despite relatively high confidence reported elsewhere, operational preparedness is limited, particularly among smaller organisations and individuals, indicating a material readiness gap that is likely to surface at commencement without targeted support.

Confidence and Preparedness: Integrated View

Confidence in complying with the reforms is generally higher than preparedness, with capacity and resourcing differences shaping readiness across stakeholder groups.

- Perceived clarity and confidence under the existing scheme are relatively strong overall, but are variable, with donors and smaller organisations consistently reporting lower clarity and confidence than larger, staffed entities.
- Confidence in responding to the new requirements varies by dimension: stakeholders tend to feel more confident in their ability to meet obligations than in how well informed they are about what the new requirements entail.
- This confidence gap is most evident for candidates, who report lower confidence across measures, while donors report confidence levels closer to political participants despite lower awareness and familiarity with the reforms.
- Expectations of increased time and effort to comply are widespread and are evident even among stakeholders who were previously unaware of the reforms, indicating a general anticipation of higher compliance burden.
- Awareness of the reforms is associated with greater anticipation of concrete preparatory actions, including system upgrades, training, budget allocation and external advice, while those unaware are more likely to anticipate taking no action.
- Overall preparedness to comply with the new requirements is low across groups, with substantially higher preparedness reported by larger organisations than by individuals or small entities, suggesting capacity rather than intent as the primary differentiator.
- Preparedness increases consistently with organisational size, suggesting that transition capacity is closely associated with staffing and administrative structure.

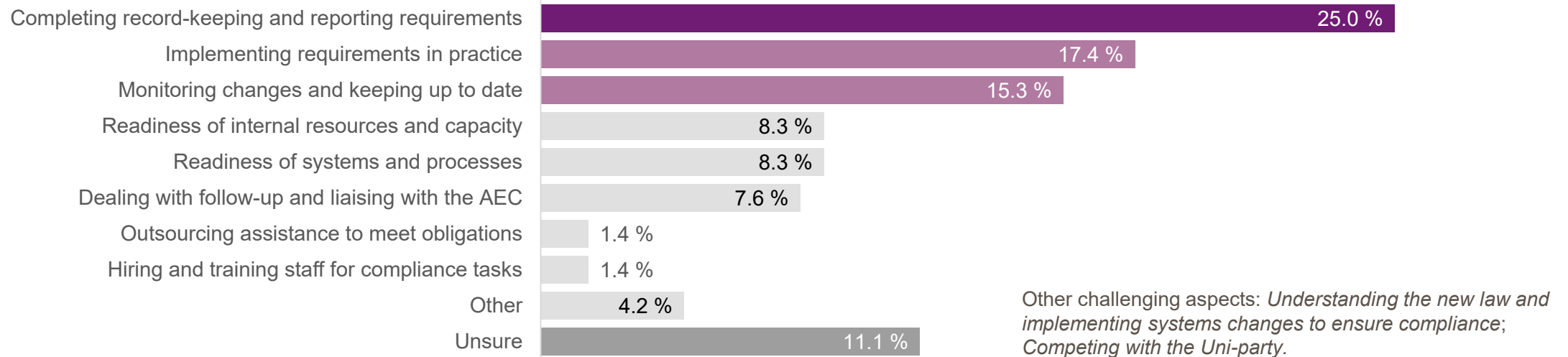
The evidence highlights a difference between confidence to comply and practical preparedness, particularly among candidates, donors and smaller organisations.

4.3 Anticipated Challenges and Support Needs

Expected Challenges

Group A (Political Participants)

Record-keeping and reporting requirements are the aspect of compliance stakeholders most expect to be challenging or time-consuming.



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

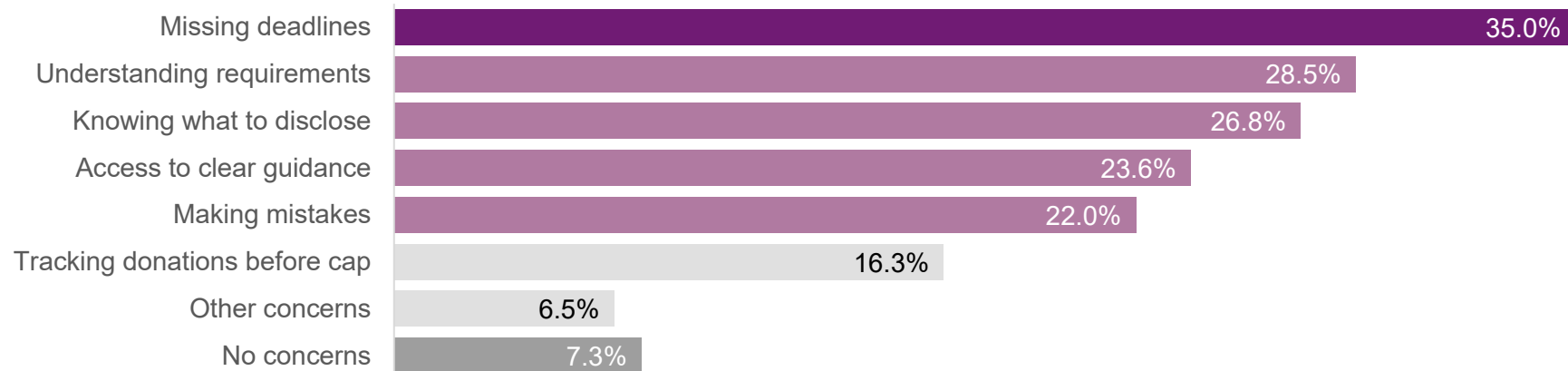
Q B6. "What aspect of complying with the new requirements do you expect will be most challenging or time-consuming?"

- Record-keeping and reporting are the most frequently cited challenges, followed by implementing the requirements in practice and keeping up with ongoing changes. Fewer stakeholders identify staffing, outsourcing, or resourcing as primary challenges.
- The anticipated burden is concentrated in process complexity and ongoing administration, rather than workforce capacity. This points to a need for clear guidance, streamlined reporting processes, and practical tools to reduce time and effort, rather than a reliance on additional staffing or external support.

Expected Challenges

Group B (Donors)

Donor concerns centre on compliance risk and uncertainty about meeting new disclosure obligations



Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

Q B6. What concerns you most about the new requirements?

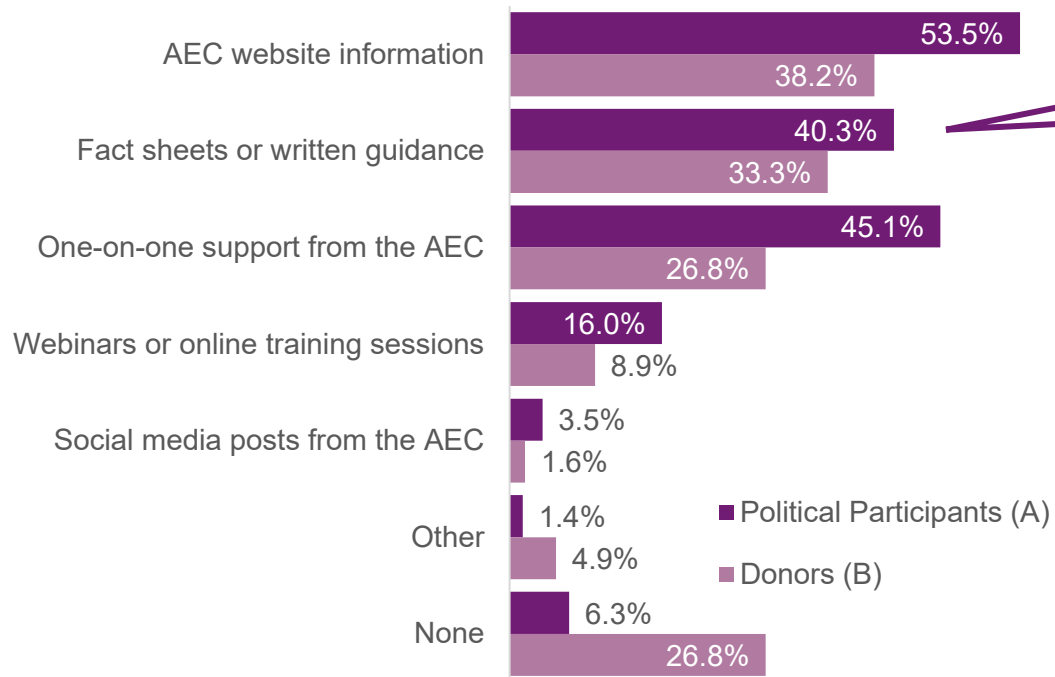
No statistically significant differences by donor type ($p>.05$)

- The most common concerns relate to compliance execution, particularly missing deadlines (35%) and understanding what is required (29%).
- Around one in four donors are concerned about what to disclose (27%), access to clear guidance (24%), and making mistakes (22%), indicating uncertainty around correct application rather than resistance.
- Donor risk is concentrated in procedural clarity and operational confidence, reinforcing the need for clear timelines, plain-language guidance, and practical examples to reduce such concerns.

How Stakeholders access AEC guidance

Group A (Political Participants) and Group B (Donors)

The AEC website is the AEC provided support resource most used by stakeholders in the last 12 months to understand funding and disclosure requirements



Group A respondents from organisations with one or fewer staff were much less likely to report having used fact sheets or written guidance to understand their disclosure obligations (16.7%).

- The AEC website is the most commonly used support channel, cited by almost half of stakeholders, followed by fact sheets or written guidance, then one-on-one support. The exception are stakeholders from small organisations which are much less likely to use fact sheets.
- Webinars and social media are used by comparatively few stakeholders.
- Stakeholders tend to engage with AEC support at the point of need, favouring authoritative, practical channels over broadcast or promotional formats. This reinforces the central role of the website and direct support in enabling compliance, while suggesting social media is best positioned as a signposting tool rather than a primary guidance channel.

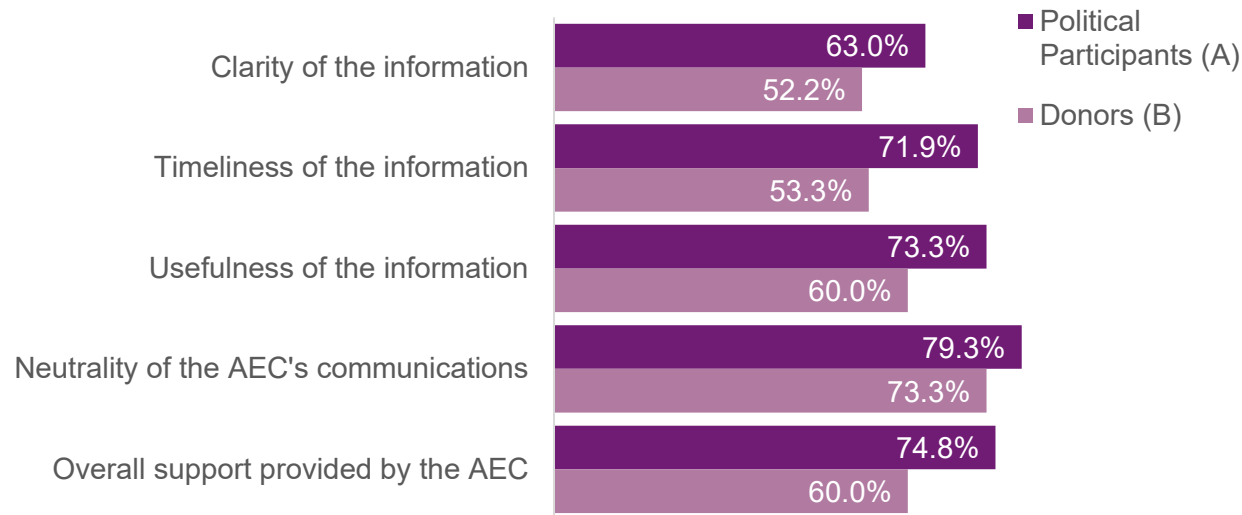
Base: Group A respondents (n=144), Group B respondents (n=123)

Q C1. "In the past 12 months, which types of AEC guidance or support have you or your organisation used to understand or meet your federal funding and disclosure obligations?" (maximum 2 multiple choice)

Evaluation of AEC Provided Support

Group A (Political Participants) and Group B (Donors)

Satisfaction was highest regarding the neutrality of the AEC's communications



Group A respondents from organisations with higher staff headcounts tended to exhibit greater satisfaction with all five of the measures of AEC support.

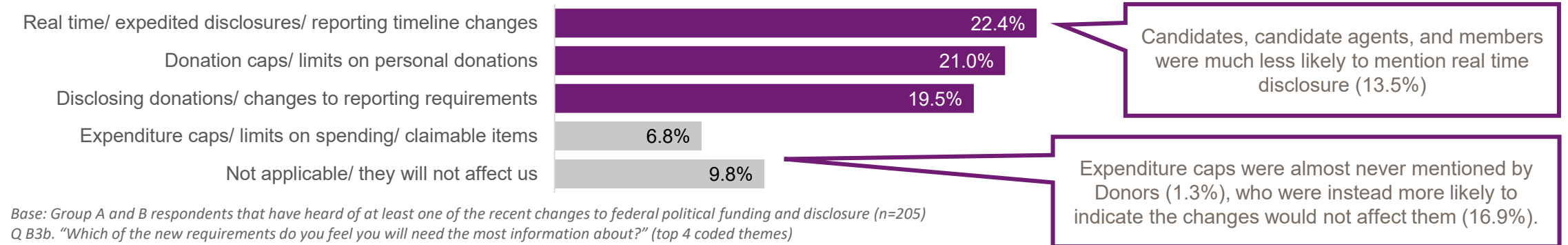
- Satisfaction with AEC-provided support is high across all measures, with the strongest ratings for the neutrality of communications and overall support.
- Political participants from larger organisations report higher satisfaction across all dimensions than donors and, particularly for timeliness and usefulness of information.
- While confidence in the AEC's neutrality and intent is well established, clarity and structure of guidance remain the main opportunity for improvement, particularly for smaller and less-resourced stakeholders, without risking trust in the AEC's role.

*Base: Respondents that have used at least one type of AEC guidance or support to meet federal funding and disclosure obligations in the past 12 months from Group A (n=135), or Group B (n=90)
Q C2. "Thinking about the guidance or support you have used from the AEC, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with each of the following?" Presents those that responded 'Satisfied' or 'Very satisfied'.*

Support Requirements

Group A (Political Participants) and Group B (Donors)

Real time disclosures were the most frequently mentioned requirement stakeholders need more information about



- Information needs most commonly relate to real-time and expedited disclosure requirements, followed by donation caps and changes to reporting thresholds, indicating uncertainty at points where timing and triggers apply.
- Information needs vary by group: candidates and agents are less likely to identify real-time disclosure as a priority, while a notable share of existing donors indicate that the changes will not apply to them, reflecting differing perceptions of how the revised requirements relate to their donation activity.
- Support demand is concentrated at operational trigger points, particularly around timing and applicability. This suggests a need for clear, scenario-based guidance that helps stakeholders determine when obligations apply to them and what action is required, especially to address potential misperceptions among donors about applicability.

Anticipated Challenges & Support Needs: Integrated View

Anticipated challenges are concentrated in practical compliance processes, while support needs focus on translating new requirements into clear, workable actions across reporting steps.

- Across stakeholder groups, anticipated challenges are primarily associated with record-keeping, reporting and implementing the requirements in practice, rather than staffing levels or access to external resources.
- The compliance burden is described in terms of process complexity and ongoing administration, with less emphasis on workforce capacity, suggesting that difficulty arises from how requirements operate rather than whether they can be resourced.
- Engagement with AEC support is largely task-driven, with the website and direct guidance used most frequently, while webinars and social media play a more limited role across groups.
- Satisfaction with AEC guidance and support is consistently high, particularly regarding neutrality and overall support, with donors reporting slightly lower but still strong satisfaction than political participants.
- Despite high satisfaction, clarity remains the main area where stakeholders identify room for improvement, particularly in explaining how new definitions, timelines and obligations apply in practice.
- When asked about future support needs, stakeholders most often identify general training and education, followed by support on disclosure timing and real-time reporting, with notable variation by stakeholder type.

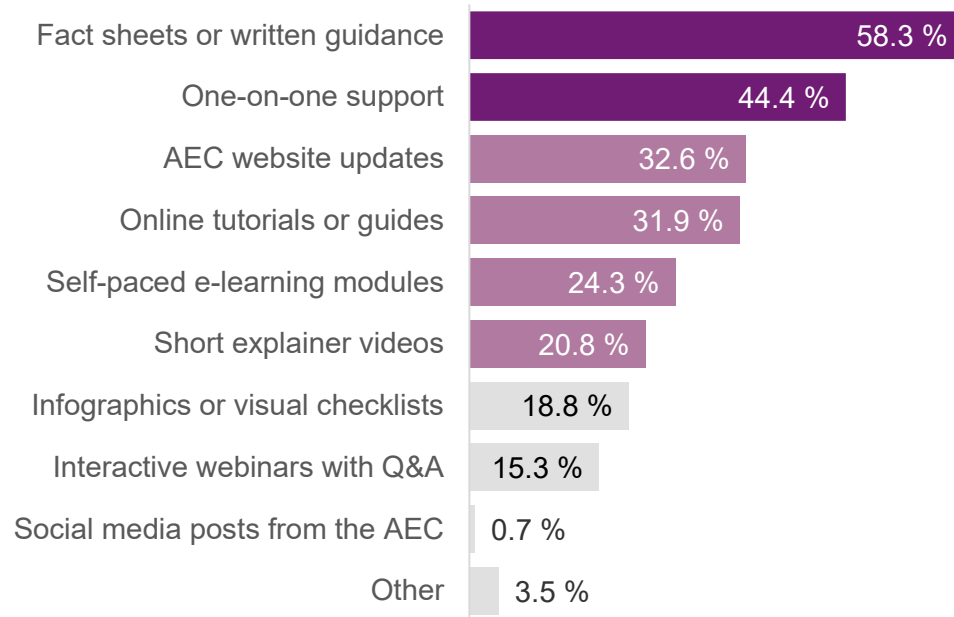
The evidence indicates that risk arises less from access to support or trust in the AEC, and more from stakeholders' ability to apply new requirements consistently in day-to-day reporting, particularly where processes, timelines and definitions intersect.

4.4 Communication and Education Preferences

Preferred Communication Channels and Formats

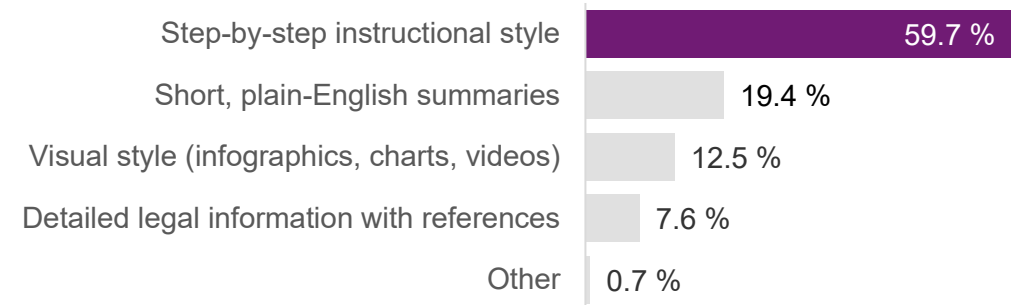
Group A (Political Participants)

Fact sheets are the most popular format for AEC information about funding and disclosure



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)
Q C3. "In future, through which formats or channels would you prefer to receive AEC information or support about funding and disclosure?" (maximum 2 multiple choice)

A step-by-step instructional presentation style is favoured by the majority of stakeholders



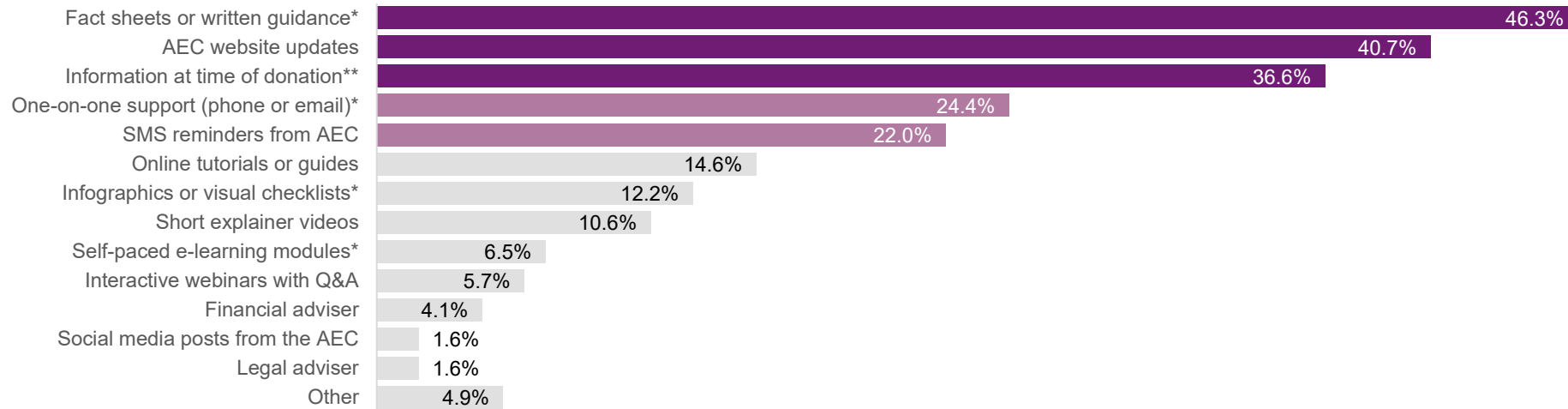
Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)
Q C4. "When receiving information from the AEC, which presentation style is most helpful to you?"

- Stakeholders strongly prefer fact sheets and written guidance, particularly when presented in a clear, step-by-step format.
- Plain-English explanations are valued far more than legal detail or highly visual formats.
- AEC communications will be most effective when they focus on practical, sequential guidance that supports direct compliance action.

Preferred Communication Channels

Group B (Donors)

Written guidance and official AEC channels are preferred over interactive or social formats



Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

Q C3. In future, through which formats or channels would you prefer to receive AEC information or support about funding and disclosure?

*Preference is higher among organisational donors than individual donors ($p < .05$).

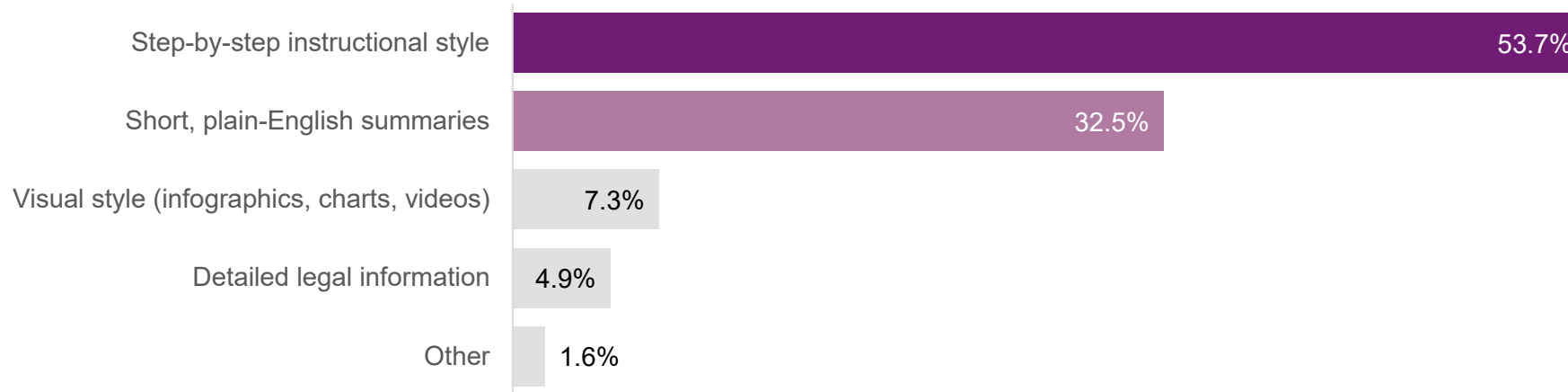
**Preference is higher among individual donors than organisational donors ($p < .05$).

- Written guidance remains central, with fact sheets (46%) and website updates (41%) among the most preferred channels.
- Direct support still plays a role, with around one-quarter preferring one-on-one help via phone or email (24%).
- Low interest for social or broadcast formats, including social media, webinars, and e-learning modules, suggests donors prioritise reliability over engagement.
- Investment in clear, authoritative written guidance, supported by responsive help channels, aligns strongly with donor preferences.

Preferred Presentation Style

Group B (Donors)

Clear, staged instructions are favoured over detailed legal explanations



Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

Q C4. "When receiving information from the AEC, which presentation style is most helpful to you?"

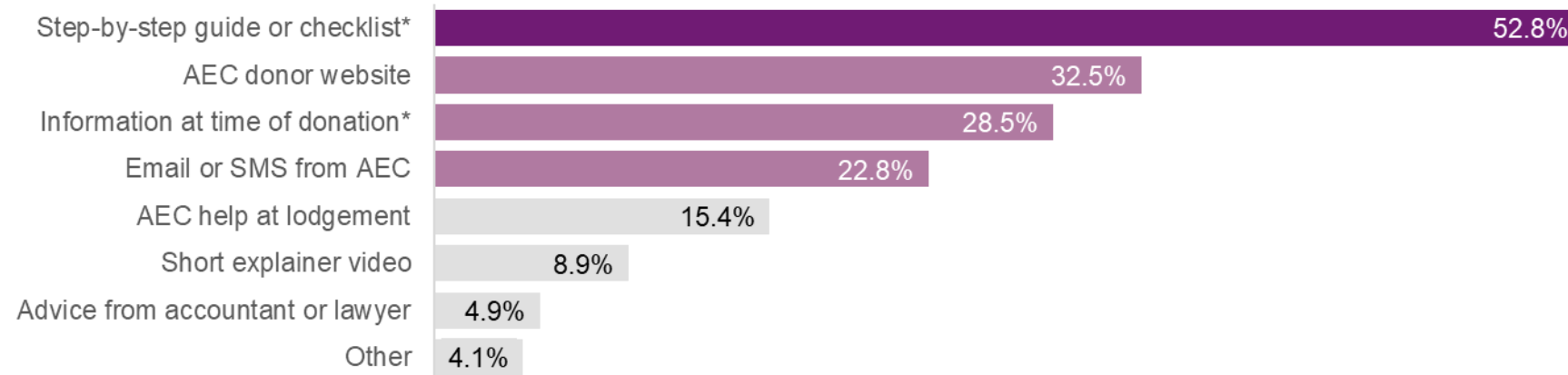
No statistically significant differences by donor type ($p > .05$)

- A step-by-step instructional style is the dominant preference (54%), cutting across donor types.
- Plain-English summaries are valued by around one-third (33%), reinforcing the importance of clarity over formality.
- Detailed legal information appeals to very few (5%), indicating most donors want to understand what to do, not why the law says so.
- Guidance should prioritise clear actions and sequencing, with legal detail available as background rather than the main delivery mode.

Preferred Ways to Learn

Group B (Donors)

Step-by-step guidance and information provided at the point of action are most valued



Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

Q XC1. How would you prefer to learn about the requirements for disclosing donations? No statistically significant differences by donor type ($p > .05$)

Preference for step-by-step guides is higher among organisational donors than individual donors ($p < .05$).

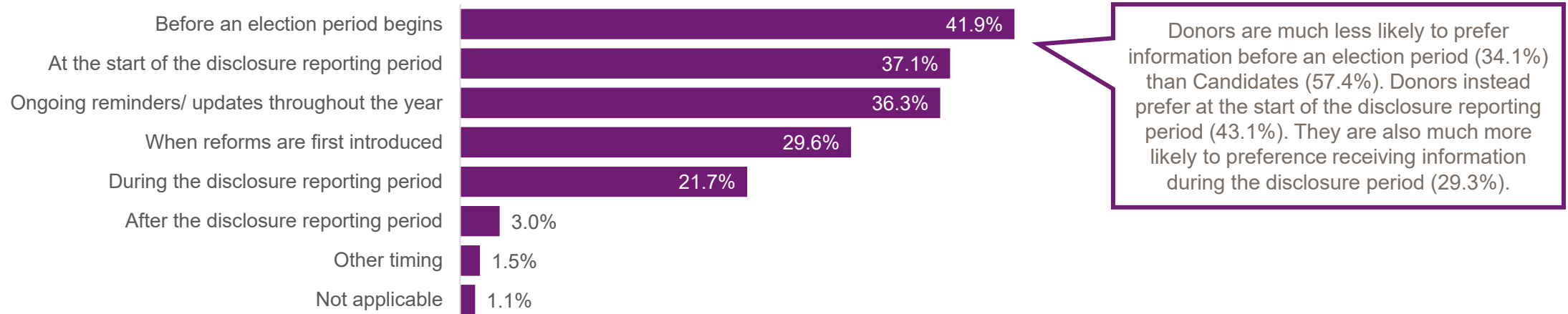
Preference for receiving information at the time of donation is higher among individual donors than organisational donors ($p < .05$).

- Step-by-step guidance clearly stands out, with over half of donors preferring checklists or guides (53%), well ahead of other learning formats.
- Information is most valued when it is delivered at the point of action, such as at the time of donation or via the AEC website, rather than through stand-alone or passive channels.
- For the AEC, this points to the value of embedding clear, practical guidance directly into donation and disclosure tasks, helping donors act with confidence at the moment decisions are required.

Preferred Timing of Communications

Group A (Political Participants) and Group B (Donors)

Stakeholders are most likely to prefer receiving information about FAD obligations before an election period begins.



Base: All Group A and B respondents (n=267)

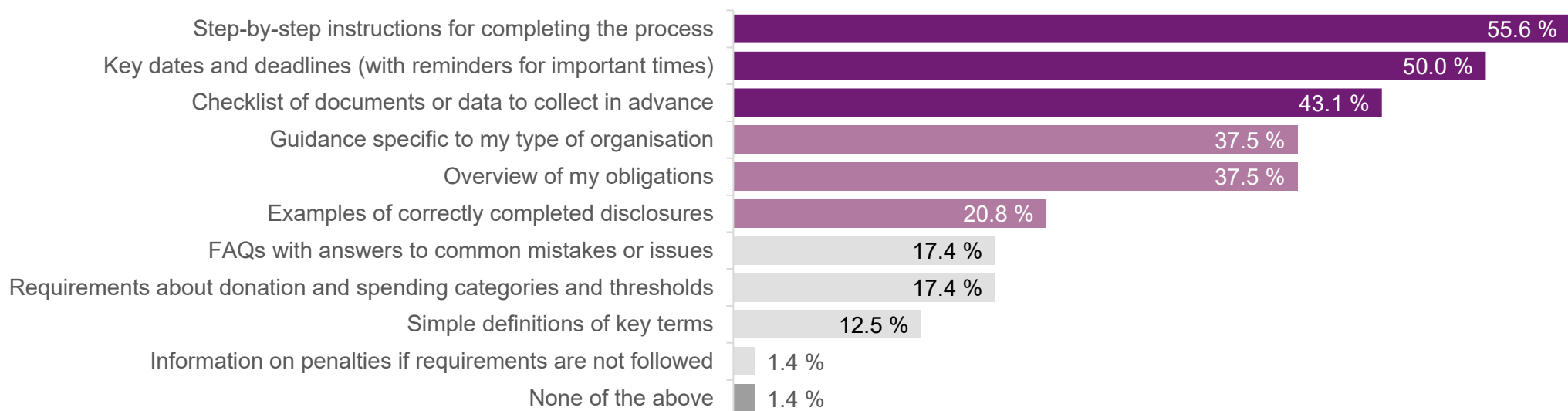
Q C8. "When would it be most useful for you to receive information and guidance about funding and disclosure obligations?" (maximum 2 multiple choice)

- Stakeholders clearly prefer to receive guidance before an election period begins (41.9%), with strong secondary support for ongoing reminders throughout the year (36.3%) and at the start of reporting periods (37.1%). Very few see value in communications after reporting has concluded (3.0%).
- Communications will likely be most effective if they are front-loaded and proactive, with early notice ahead of election periods supported by periodic reminders, rather than relying on post-reporting guidance when compliance pressure has already passed.

Information Preferences

Group A (Political Participants)

The information that stakeholders would find most useful to help prepare and lodge their disclosure return is step-by-step instructions for completing the process



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

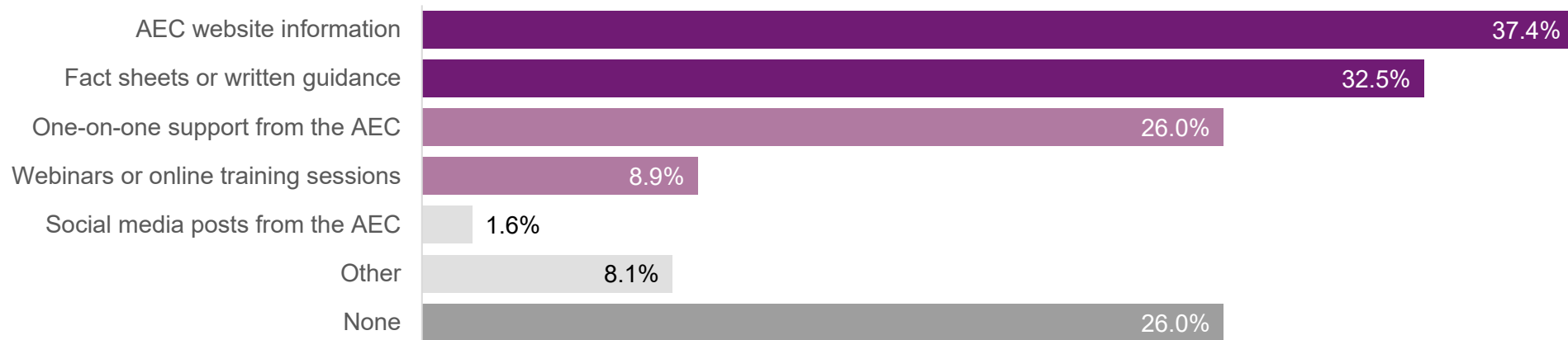
Q C7. "Which three types of information would be most useful to help you prepare and lodge your disclosure return?" (maximum 3 multiple choice)

- Stakeholders prioritise practical, task-oriented guidance, with clear demand for step-by-step instructions (55.6%), key dates and reminders (50.0%), and checklists of required information (43.1%), ahead of explanatory or legal detail.
- Support materials should be designed to reduce cognitive and administrative load, focusing on actionable tools that help stakeholders do the task correctly and on time, rather than expanding conceptual or technical explanations.

Past use of AEC guidance and support

Group B (Donors)

AEC guidance is primarily accessed through self-serve channels, though one in four have not used any support



Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

Q C1. In the past 12 months, which types of AEC guidance or support have you or your organisation used to understand or meet your federal funding and disclosure obligations?

- AEC website (37%) and written guidance (33%) are the most commonly used channels, followed by one-on-one support (26%).
- 26% selected “None”, indicating a sizeable minority have not used any AEC guidance/support in the past 12 months.
- Guidance reach is strongest via self-serve channels, but there’s an opportunity to bring the “None” group into the system (e.g., targeted onboarding prompts and signposting at point-of-need).

Trust in AEC Communications

Group A (Political Participants) and Group B (Donors)

Most stakeholders trust AEC communications about funding and disclosure obligations more than other sources such as their colleagues, media, and political networks.



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144), and Group B respondents (n=123)

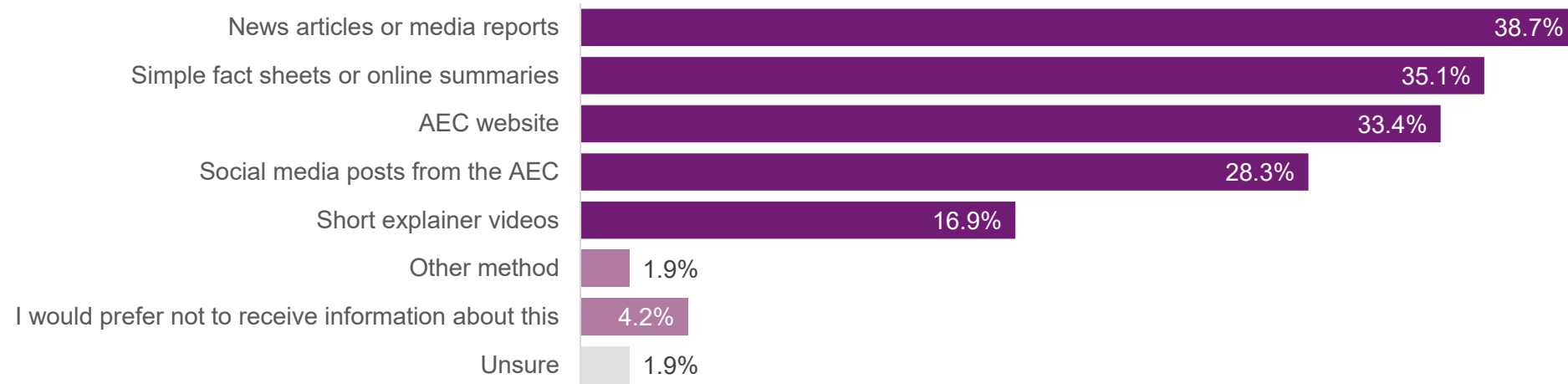
Q C9. "Compared to other sources of information about funding and disclosure obligations (e.g. colleagues, media, political networks), how much do you trust AEC guidance?"

- A clear majority of stakeholders trust AEC communications more than alternative sources, with almost three quarters saying they trust the AEC more than colleagues, media or political networks, and only a very small minority expressing lower trust. Results were very similar for donors and political participants, other than those from very small organisations.
- The AEC holds a strong credibility and authority position on funding and disclosure obligations, creating a clear opportunity to act as the primary, trusted source for definitive guidance and to correct or pre-empt misinformation from informal channels.

Communication Preferences

Group C (General Public)

News articles are the Australian public's preference for learning about how political donations are made



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)

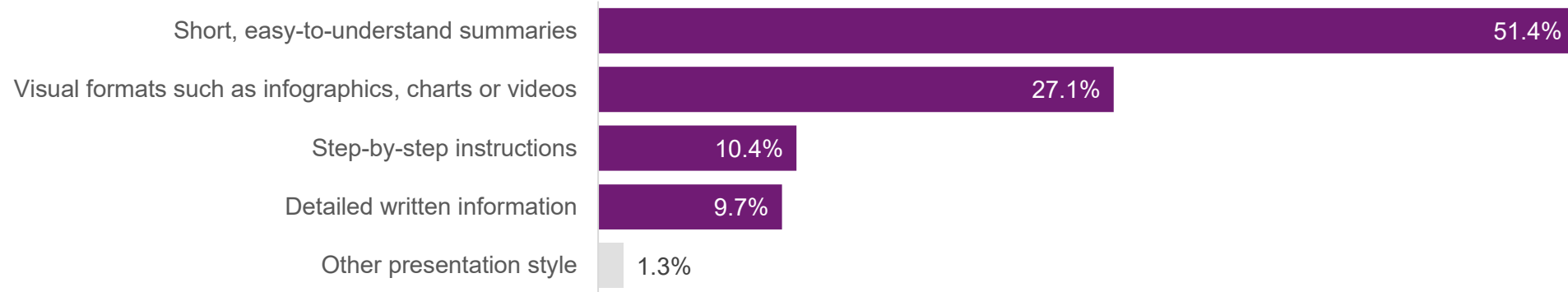
Q PC1. "How would you prefer to learn about how political donations are made public in Australia?" (Multiple response question.)

- The AEC website and simple fact sheets or online summaries were almost as popular among survey respondents as news articles for receiving information about how political donations are made public in Australia.
- Interest in short explainer videos was much lower, selected by only a sixth of respondents. Given these are generally more expensive to produce, it is unlikely this format is required to communicate with the public.

Presentation Style Preferences

Group C (General Public)

More than half of survey respondents would prefer short, easy-to-understand summaries from the AEC



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)

Q PC2. "When receiving information from the AEC, which presentation style is most helpful to you?"

- Short, easy-to-understand summaries were clearly the most popular presentation for the Australian public.
- Although visual formats, which could include videos, were the second most popular presentation style, it's likely infographics and charts would be more popular given the lack of interest in short explainer videos.
- Interestingly, step-by-step instructions are not popular with the Australian public, while being very popular with the other groups studied who are more concerned about completing accurate compliant disclosures.

4.4.1 Channel Analysis by Stakeholder Group

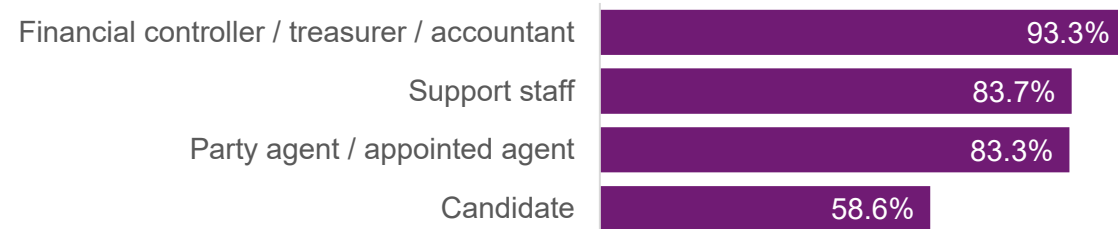
Group A (Political Participants)

Awareness is high amongst political participants, driven by word-of-mouth

75.0%
Aware of FAD reforms

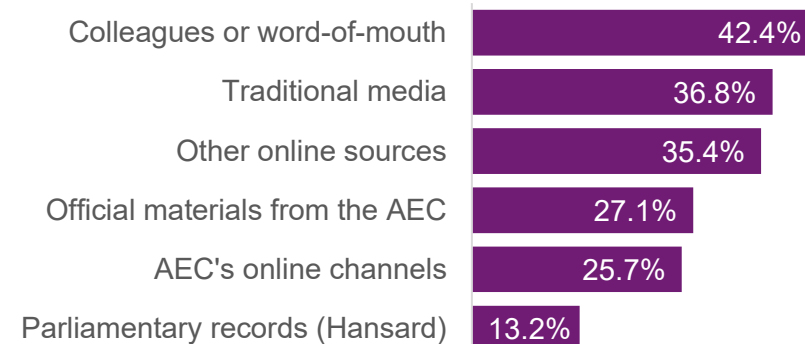
Three quarters of political participants (**75.0%**) are aware of the funding and disclosure reforms. Awareness was most frequently driven by colleagues or word-of-mouth (42.4%), while AEC materials and online channels combined account for awareness amongst a third of political participants (33.0%). When looking at awareness amongst responsible for using eReturns, financial controllers are the most likely to know about the incoming reforms (93.3% aware), and candidates the least likely to know about incoming reforms (58.6% aware).

Awareness amongst eReturns users

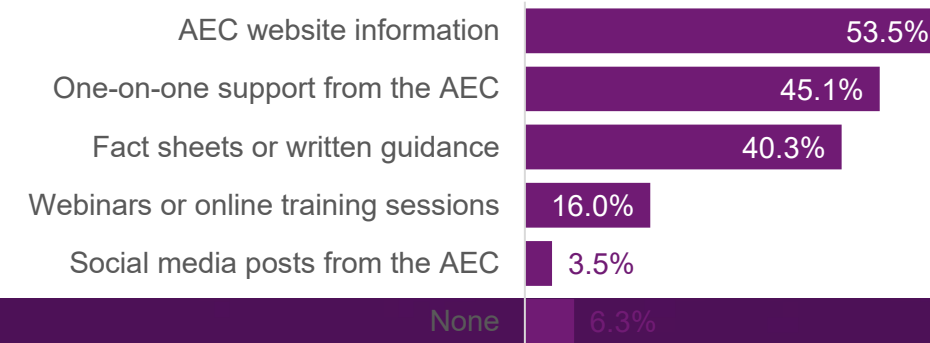


The AEC website is the most commonly used support resource by political participants (53.5%), who also regularly make use of one-on-one support from the AEC (45.1%). Website usage was much more common for financial controllers (62.2%) than it was for candidates (37.9%), whose most common form of support resource used in the last 12 months was one-on-one support from the AEC. Candidates are also notably less likely to have made use of existing fact sheets or written guidance from the AEC (31.0%).

Source of awareness



Support resources actually used (L12M)

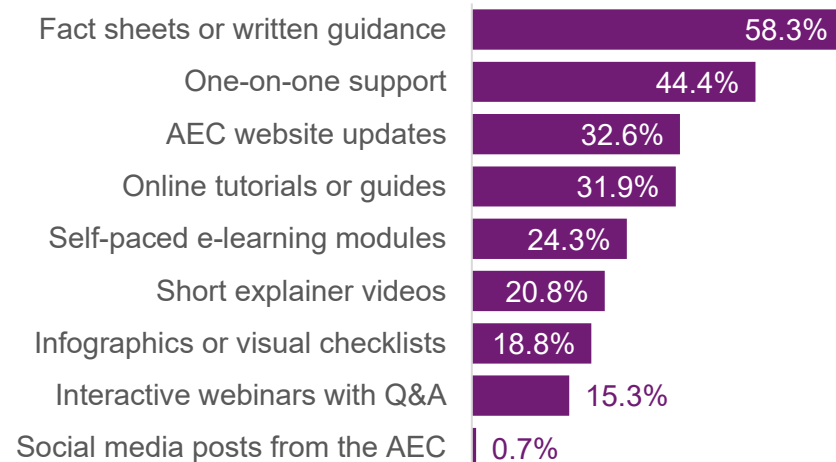


Group A (Political Participants)

Support resources for political participants should predominantly be in a step-by-step instructional style

Despite use of the AEC website being high amongst political participants, it is far from the most preferred support resource. Fact sheets or written guidance (58.3%), followed by one-on-one support (44.4%) are the most desired form of support. The majority of political participants want support delivered in a step-by-step instructional style (59.7%). AEC website updates are much less popular amongst support staff (27.9%) and candidates (13.8%), who instead showed a greater preference for self-paced e-learning modules (39.5% support staff, 31.0% candidates). They are also more likely to seek one-on-one support from the AEC.

Preferred support resources

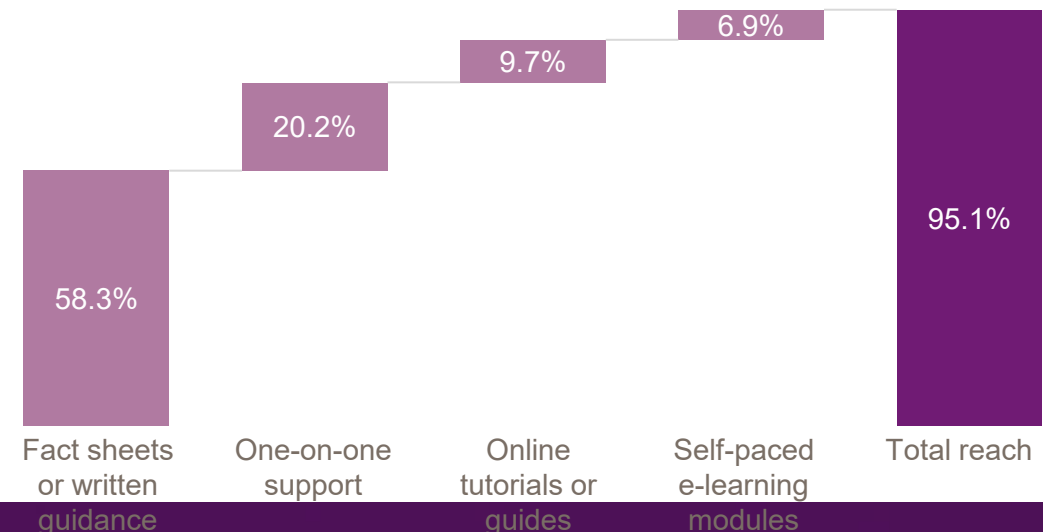


Preferred presentation style



Considering overlapping preferences, the combination of fact sheets, one-on-one support, online tutorials and self-paced e-learning would deliver effective support resources for almost all political participants (95.1%). Although AEC website updates were the third most frequently preferred resource, users with that preference are almost entirely covered by the other resources mentioned.

Additional reach gained by combining support options



Group A (Political Participants)

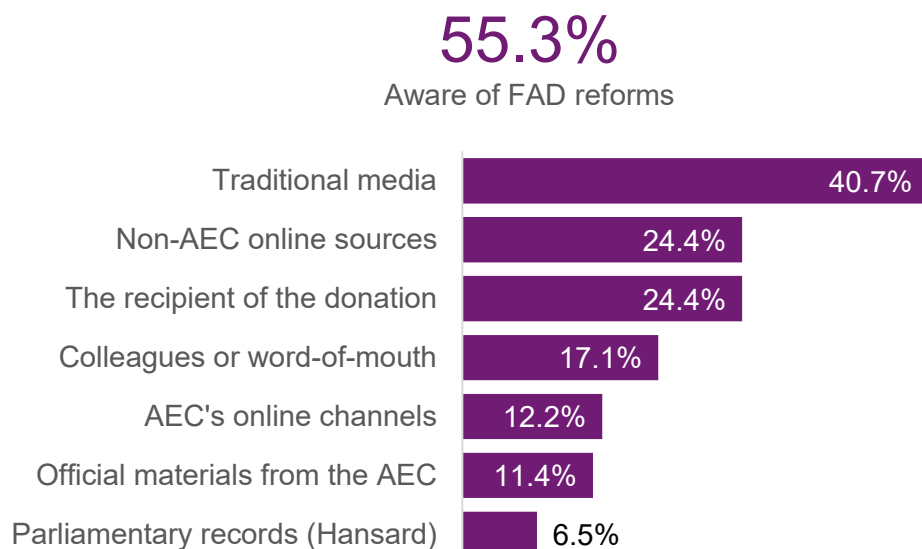
Implications for communication and support targeted to political participants

- **Independent candidates are more challenging to reach than resourced organisations.**
Awareness of upcoming FAD changes is much higher amongst political participants whose role involves administration and compliance tasks than amongst the candidates themselves. Candidates are less likely to have used the resources the AEC has already provided, and more likely to reach out to the AEC for one-on-one support.
- **Word-of-mouth is a powerful tool for reaching political participants.**
Almost half of political participants had learned of the upcoming FAD reforms through word-of-mouth. Designing resources which can be easily shared between political participants will positively influence distribution.
- **A variety of resources should be developed, but most should use a step-by-step instructional style.**
Political participants demonstrated a variety of preferences for different support resources, but the gap in preference for step-by-step instructional and the next most popular style was large. One-on-one support will be in-demand, particularly by candidates, and this will provide a critical opportunity to share information with otherwise hard to reach individuals.
- **Fact sheets are of critical importance, and can be effectively reinforced by other support resources**
A mix of four different support resources provides efficient coverage of the support preferences for 95.1% of political participants, but for the bulk of those stakeholders, fact sheets will be their preference (58.3%). Developing well received fact sheets, e-learning, and online tutorials offers the potential to reduce demand for one-on-one support from the AEC.

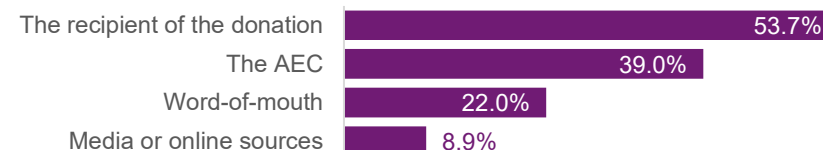
Group B (Donors)

Awareness is moderate and driven primarily by media rather than direct AEC channels

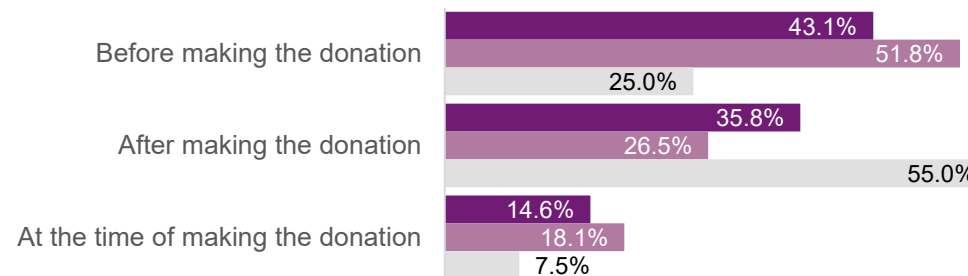
Just over half of donors (**55.3%**) are aware of the funding and disclosure reforms. Awareness is most commonly driven by traditional media (40.7%), while AEC materials and online channels combined account for under one in five donors (19.5%). Information provided by the recipient of the donation plays a secondary role in reform awareness, despite being a primary source of obligation information.



Donors are most likely to learn about their personal disclosure obligations from the recipient of the donation (53.7%), followed by the AEC (39.0%). Word-of-mouth and media sources play a smaller role in explaining obligations, despite media being the dominant driver of reform awareness.



Donors who are aware of the reforms are more likely to learn about their disclosure obligations before making a donation (51.8%), while those unaware of the reforms are more likely to become aware after donating (55.0%). Overall, donors are spread across learning about their obligations before, at the time of, and after donating, indicating that there is no single dominant moment of engagement.



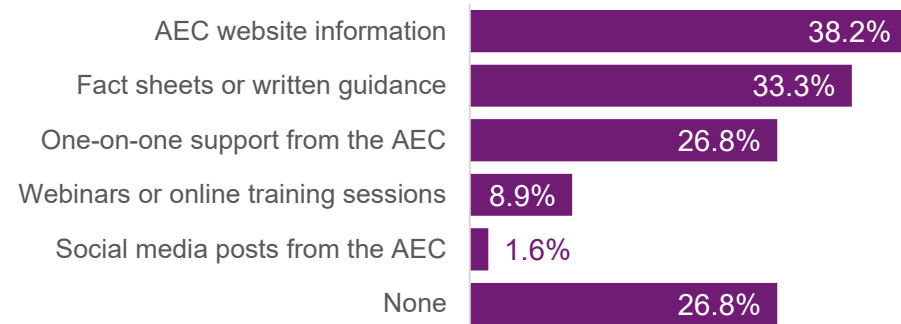
■ All donors ■ Donors aware of reforms ■ Donors unaware of reforms

Group B (Donors)

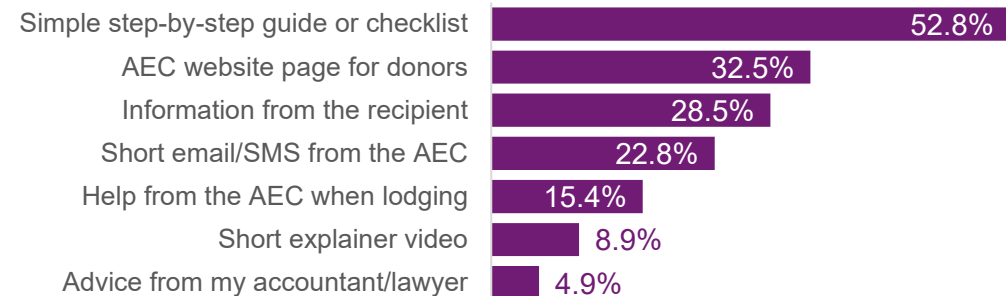
A targeted mix of support channels delivers the greatest donor reach

The AEC website is the most commonly used support resource by donors (38.2%), but it is not their preferred method of support. Donors show a clear preference for simple, step-by-step guides or checklists. Preferences differ depending on how donors first learn about their obligations, with those informed via media or word-of-mouth more likely to rely on one-on-one AEC support, while those informed by recipients tend to prefer support delivered through those channels.

Support resources actually used

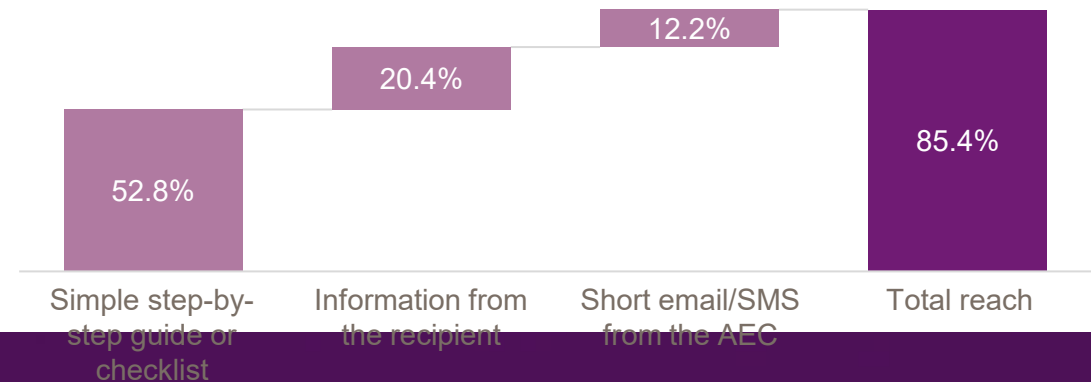


Preferred support resources



Considering overlapping preferences, an efficient combination of three support measures can be identified. A mix of simple guides or checklists, information delivered via donation recipients, and short AEC email or SMS reminders would meet the communication preferences of an estimated 85.4% of donors.

Additional reach gained by combining support options



Group B (Donors)

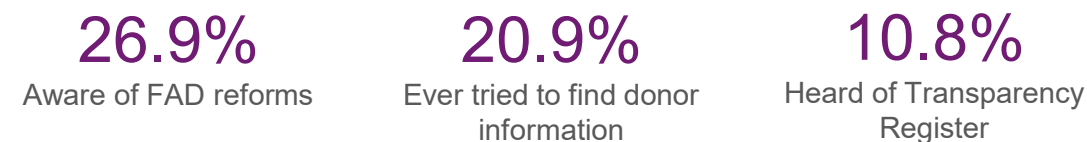
Implications for donor communication and support

- **Relying on AEC-owned channels alone will limit donor reach.**
Awareness and support use are more commonly driven by media, donation recipients, and non-AEC sources than by direct AEC channels, indicating that AEC-only communication pathways do not, on their own, align with how most donors currently receive or prefer information.
- **Donation recipients represent a critical touchpoint for reaching donors with obligation-related information.**
Donors most frequently report learning about their disclosure obligations from recipients of donations, implying that recipient-mediated communication aligns more closely with donor information pathways than stand-alone awareness messaging.
- **No single support channel is sufficient to reach existing donors.**
Both actual usage and stated preferences are distributed across multiple channels, implying that concentrating support in any one format would leave a substantial proportion of donors unreached.
- **Combining a small number of support channels substantially increases potential reach.**
A mix of step-by-step guides or checklists, information provided by donation recipients, and short AEC email or SMS communications aligns with the reported preferences of an estimated 85.4% of donors.

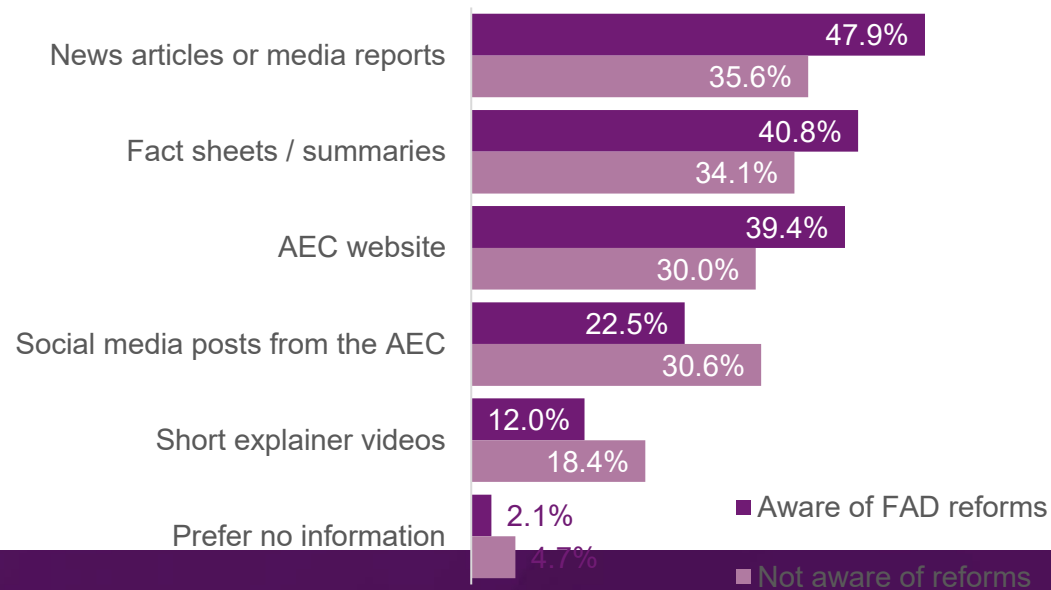
Group C (General Public)

General public awareness of FAD reforms is limited, but reach can be maximised through mainstream channels

Just over a quarter of the general public (26.9%) are aware of the upcoming funding and disclosure reforms. Awareness is lower for donation information (20.9%) and for the Transparency Register (10.8%).



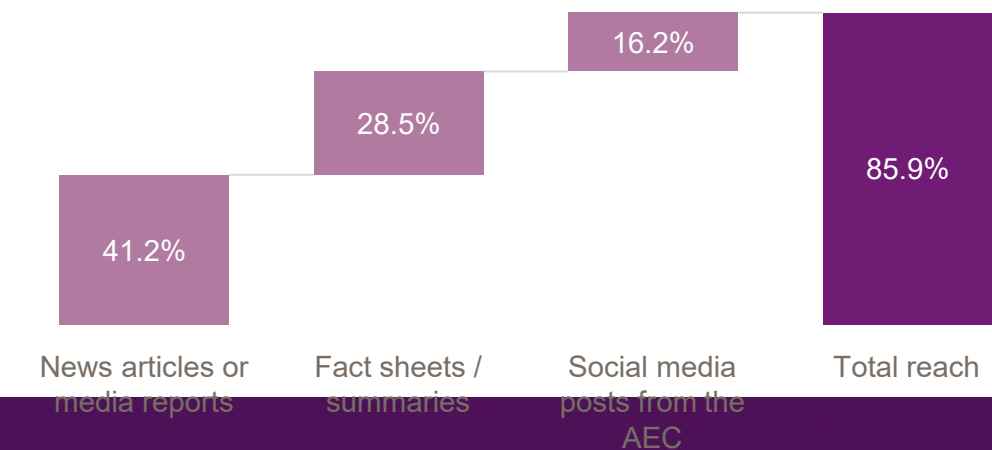
Preferences for learning about donation information



For the general public, news articles or media reports are the most commonly preferred source of donation information (38.7%). Fact sheets (35.3%) and the AEC website (33.4%) are also widely preferred. While social media is selected less often overall, it is relatively more popular among those currently unaware of the reforms (30.6%).

Taking overlapping preferences into account, a combined approach using news articles (press releases), fact sheets, and AEC social media would deliver broad overall reach. Including social media alongside mainstream and written channels increases the likelihood of reaching individuals who are not currently aware of the reforms.

Additional reach gained by combining communication options

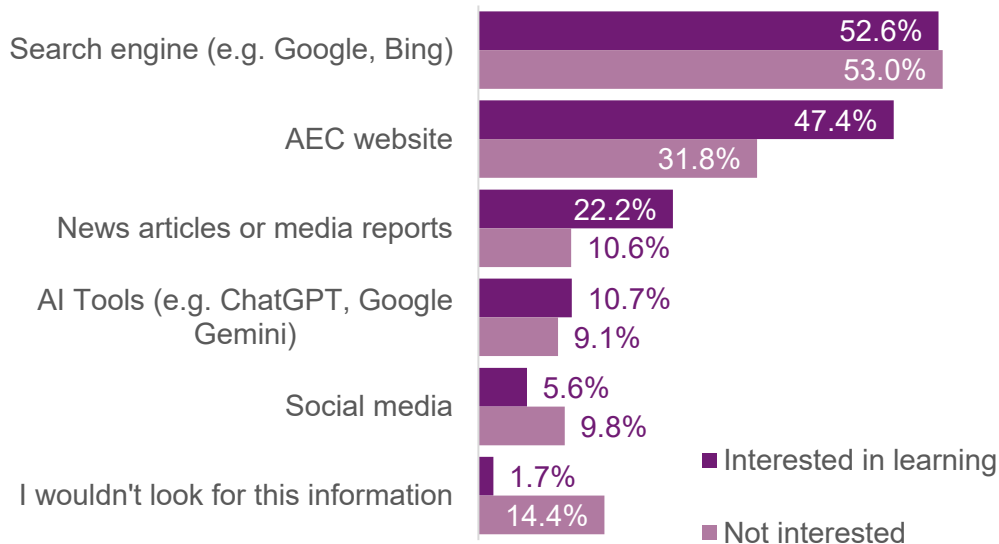


Group C (General Public)

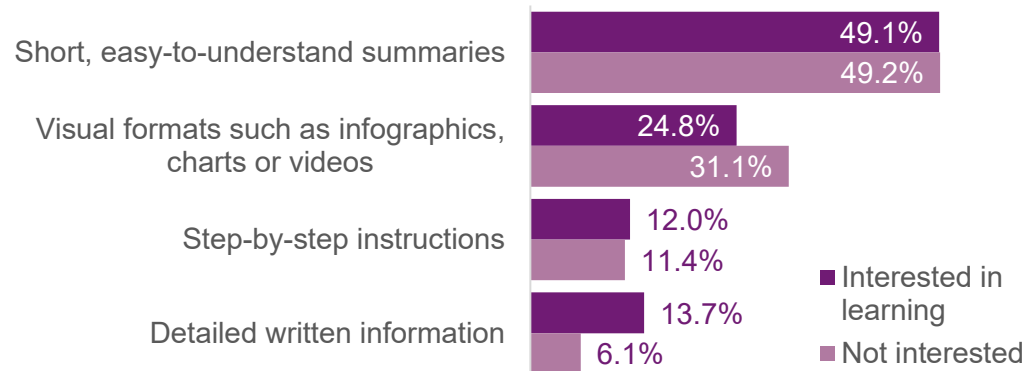
Effective SEO to the AEC website the most effective path for presenting donation information

If members of the general public seek information about political donations, they are most likely to begin with a search engine (54.5%), followed by the AEC website (43.1%). Those who express interest in learning more about political donations and reporting are substantially more likely to indicate they would look to the AEC website or news and media sources than those who are not interested.

Where someone would look for donation information



Preferred presentation style for information



Short, easy-to-understand summaries are the most commonly preferred presentation style (49%), regardless of interest level. Visual formats, such as infographics and videos, also appeal to a sizeable audience.

While detailed written information is less popular overall, a smaller but distinct group of respondents who are interested in learning more about political donations indicate a preference for more detailed material (13.7%).

Group C (General Public)

Implications for communication with the general public

- **Media engagement and reach**

Segments of the general public who do not regularly engage with news media are less likely to encounter information about the reforms. Overall awareness of the upcoming funding and disclosure changes remains limited. Among those who are aware, there is a higher interest in receiving information via news media and the AEC website, indicating these channels are effective for engaged audiences, while complementary channels such as social media may support broader reach.

- **Diversity of communication channels**

The Australian public engages with a wide range of information sources. No single communication channel is widely preferred for receiving information from the AEC about donations and disclosures. A combined approach incorporating news media, fact sheets and social media would be expected to deliver broad overall coverage, with cumulative reach exceeding 85%.

- **Search as the primary entry point**

When seeking information about donations and disclosures, members of the public are most likely to begin with search engines such as Google or Bing (54.5%). While the AEC website is less commonly the initial destination, it remains a key source for those interested in understanding political donations. Supporting this pathway through effective search visibility aligns with how people naturally look for information.

- **Preferred information formats**

Short, easy-to-understand summaries are the most preferred format for AEC information, selected by around half of the general public. Visual formats, including videos and infographics, also appeal to a sizeable audience. Although detailed written information is less popular overall, a smaller group of respondents interested in learning more about political donations prefers more in-depth material.

Communication & Education Preferences: Integrated View

Stakeholders trust the AEC as the authoritative source, but communication effectiveness depends on delivering clear, task-focused guidance at the moments when action is required.

- Across stakeholder groups, trust in AEC communications is high relative to other sources, establishing the AEC as the primary reference point for funding and disclosure information rather than one source among many.
- For political participants and donors, preferences are strongly oriented towards written, step-by-step guidance that supports direct compliance tasks, with low interest for legal detail, visual formats or broadcast-style engagement.
- Timing matters as much as format, with clear preference for guidance provided ahead of election periods and aligned to reporting milestones, supported by reminders, rather than information delivered after reporting has concluded.
- Past use of AEC guidance is concentrated in self-serve channels such as the website and written materials, while a sizeable minority report no recent engagement, indicating variable reach rather than lack of trust.
- Preferences diverge for the general public, who favour short, easy-to-understand summaries and news-style information, while step-by-step instructions are less relevant outside a compliance context.

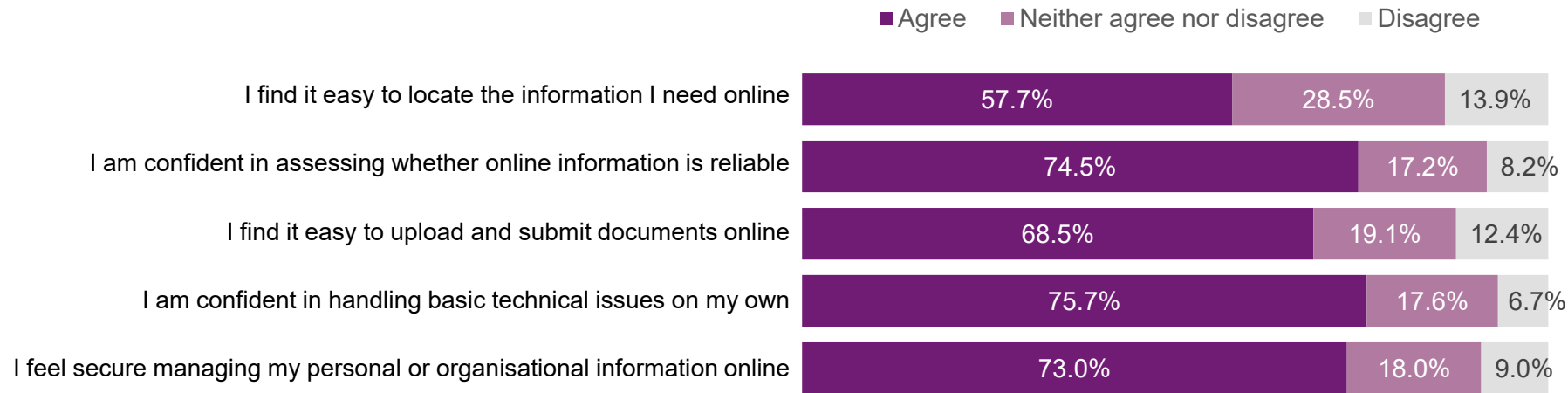
The evidence indicates that communication risk lies not in credibility but in translation, with reform delivery most likely to be supported where guidance is practical, clearly sequenced and timed to decision points for those responsible for compliance, while remaining accessible and concise for the broader public.

4.5 ICT & Systems

Digital Confidence Levels

Group A (Political Participants) and Group B (Donors)

Locating information online is the digital skill stakeholders are least likely to agree they find easy



Political participants from organisations with 1 or fewer staff are much less likely to agree they locate information online easily (29.2%)

Base: All Group A and B respondents (n=267)

Q D1. "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your ability to use digital tools and navigate online environments?"

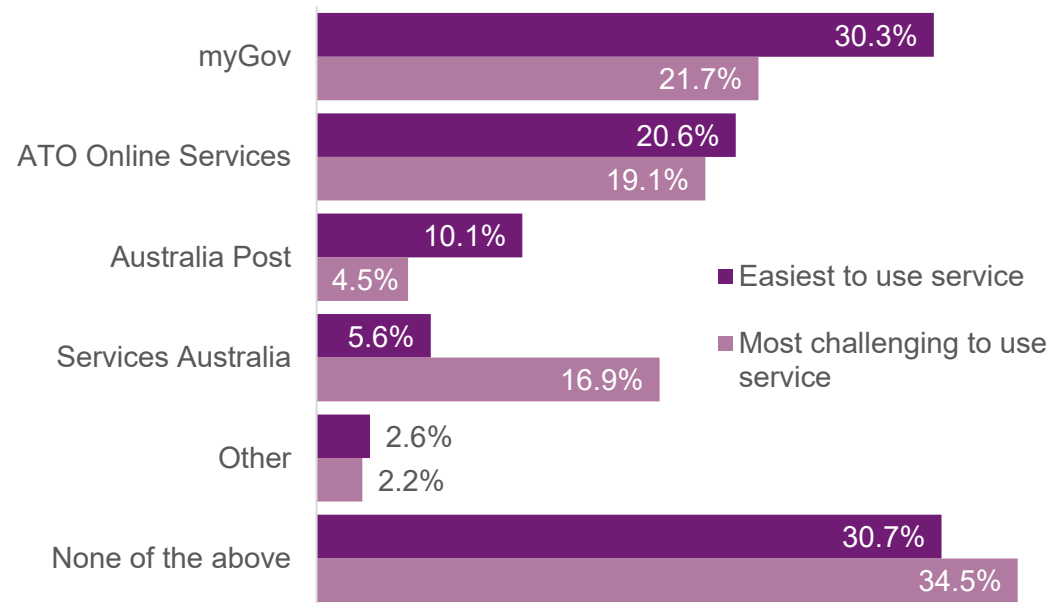
Response options 'Strongly agree' and 'Agree' combined into 'Agree', 'Disagree' and 'Strongly disagree' combined into 'Disagree'.

- Stakeholders report high confidence across most digital tasks, particularly in assessing information reliability, managing information securely, and handling basic technical issues.
- Confidence is consistently lowest for locating information online, with this gap most pronounced among political participants from smaller organisations.
- Reported confidence levels are likely to be overstated due to the online survey mode; even so, relative differences indicate that information findability and navigation, rather than digital capability, remain the primary constraint.

Perceptions of Other Government Services

Group A (Political Participants) and Group B (Donors)

User experience varies sharply across government services, driven by easy access and navigation



Base: All Group A and B respondents (n=267)

Q D2a. "Which of the following online government services do you find the easiest to use?"

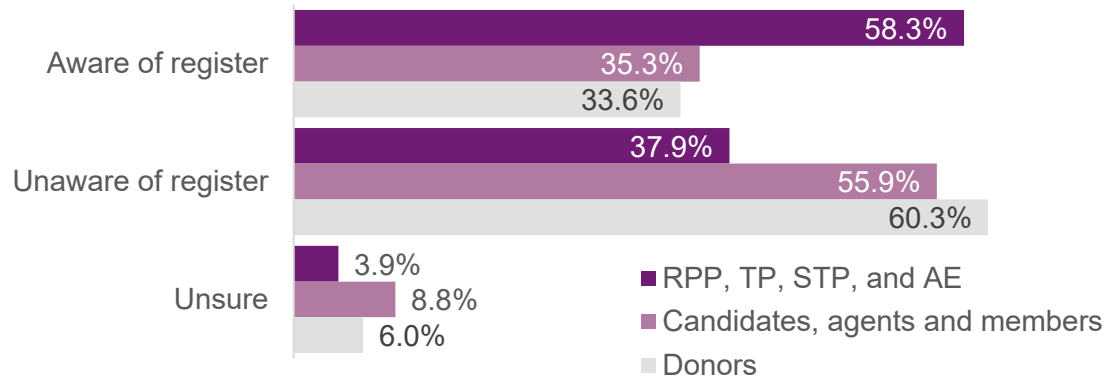
Q D3a. "Which of the following online government services do you find the most challenging to use?"

- myGov is most frequently identified as both the easiest and the most challenging online government service, indicating highly variable user experiences rather than uniformly poor usability.
- Log-in, access and first-step navigation are the primary sources of difficulty, while clear pathways once inside the system are the main reason myGov is also rated as easy to use.
- Differences by organisation size suggest experience and familiarity matter: political participants from larger organisations are less likely to report difficulty with ATO Online Services.
- Perceptions of usability are shaped most strongly at entry points. Improving sign-in, orientation and early reassurance is likely to have a greater impact on confidence and usability than changes deeper within systems.

AEC Transparency Register

Group A (Political Participants) and Group B (Donors)

Awareness of the AEC Transparency Register is concentrated amongst regulated entities, who use the service most

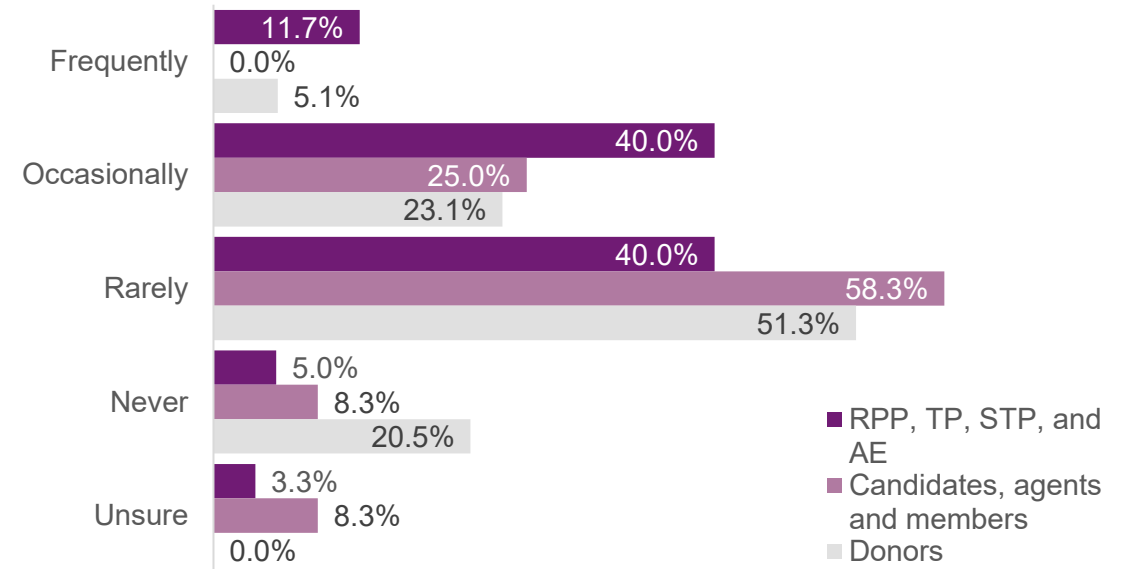


Base Group A and B respondents with stakeholder type: RPP, TP, STP and AE (n=103); Candidates, agents and members (n=68); Donors (n=116)

Q D4a. "Have you heard of the AEC's Transparency Register?"

Base: Group A and B respondents aware of the transparency register: RPP, TP, STP and AE (n=60); Candidates, agents and members (n=24); Donors (n=39)

Q D4c. "How often do you or your organisation use the Transparency Register?"

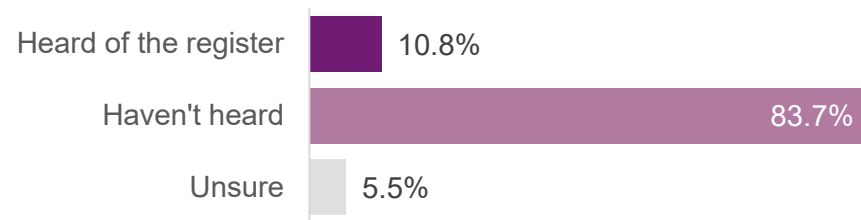


- Awareness of the AEC Transparency Register is concentrated among regulated entities, while candidates, agents and donors are more likely to be unaware of the register.
- Among those who are aware of the register, regulated entities report more frequent use, whereas candidates, agents and donors tend to use it only occasionally or rarely.
- Existing AEC tools to support funding and disclosure are primarily reaching organisational users. There is an opportunity to improve awareness and relevance for individuals with funding and disclosure obligations, particularly donors and smaller actors.

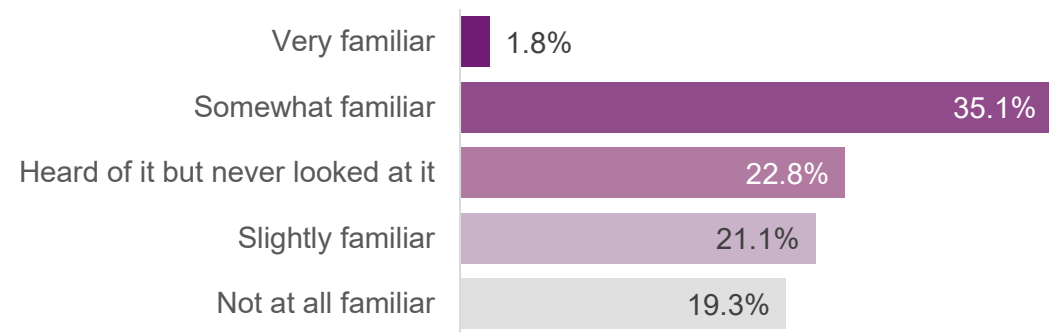
AEC Transparency Register

Group C (General Public)

Low public awareness and familiarity with the Transparency Register



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)
Q PD4a. "Have you heard of the AEC's Transparency Register?"



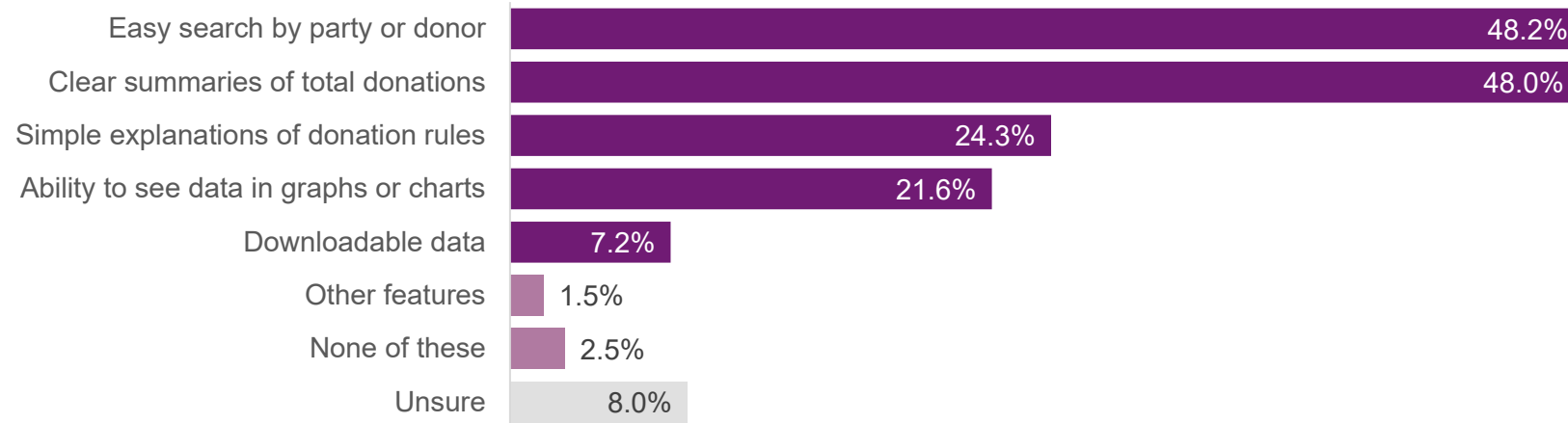
Base: Group C respondents that have heard of the Transparency Register (n=57)
Q PD4b. "How familiar are you with the AEC's Transparency Register?"

- Only a small minority of the general public report having heard of the AEC Transparency Register, indicating very low baseline awareness.
- Among those who are aware of the register, familiarity is generally shallow. Most describe themselves as only *somewhat* or *slightly familiar*, with almost no respondents reporting high familiarity.
- These findings align with broader patterns observed elsewhere in the survey, where interest in political transparency is high but active information-seeking about political funding and disclosures remains limited.

Transparency Register features

Group C (General Public)

The public prioritises simple search and clear donation summaries



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)

Q PD5. "The Transparency Register already lists who donates, how much, and to whom. If it were to include more features, which of the following would you find most useful?" (Multiple response question.)

- Nearly half of respondents identified easy search by party or donor and clear summaries of total donations as the most useful potential features of the Transparency Register.
- Features that support deeper analysis, such as downloadable data or visualisations, were selected by far fewer respondents, indicating more limited interest beyond basic understanding.
- The findings suggest the public primarily values simple, accessible entry points to donation information, rather than technical or data-heavy functionality, particularly given current low awareness of the register.

eReturns Usage

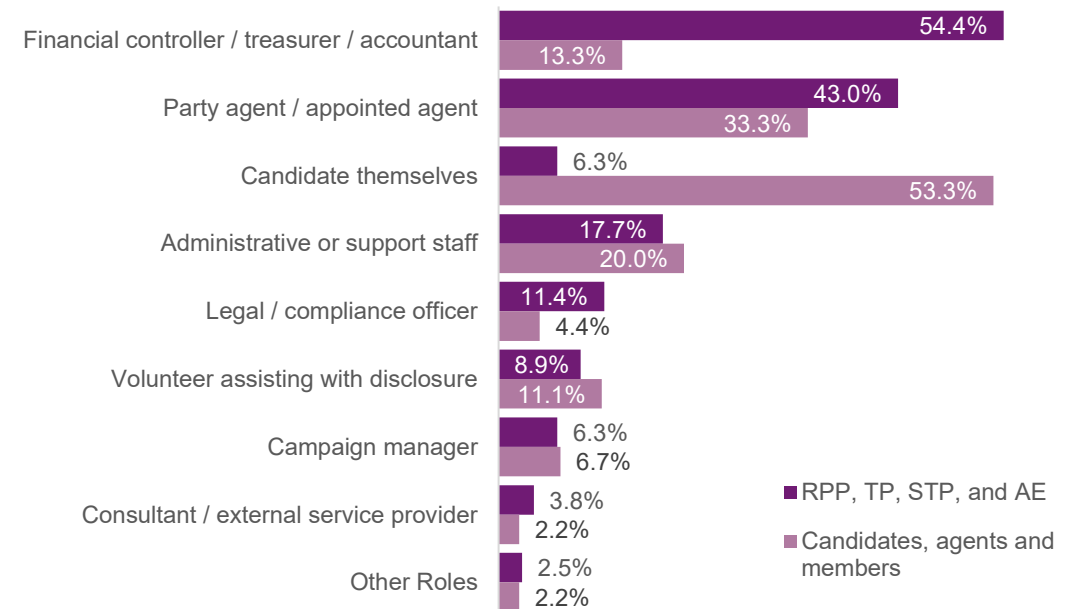
Group A (Political Participants) and Group B (Donors)

Most stakeholder/organisations have one person responsible for all reporting requirements, and that person is most likely to be the financial controller or appointed agent

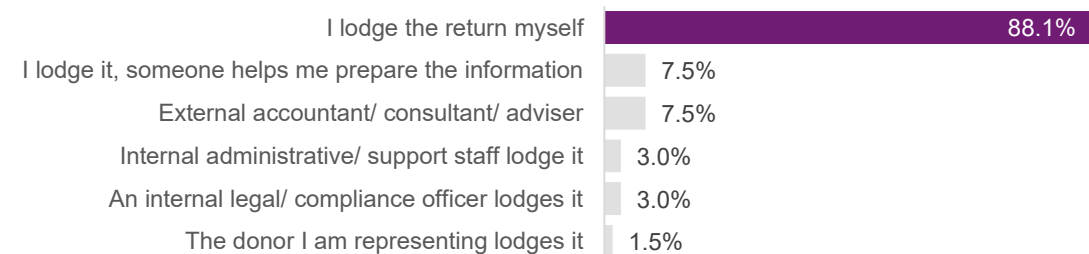
- eReturns usage is highly centralised. Most stakeholders rely on a single individual to manage reporting (59.0%). In the case of donors and candidates they most often complete disclosures themselves (87.1%, 53.3% respectively), while stakeholders from regulated entities are more likely to rely on party agents (43.0%) or financial controllers (54.4%).
- For a large proportion of stakeholders compliance is heavily dependent on individual knowledge, availability and confidence, rather than embedded organisational processes or shared capability.
- This concentration places a premium on clear guidance, error prevention and in-system reassurance, as reporting is often handled by a small number of individuals, with limited opportunity for routine cross-checking or shared oversight.

Base: Group A respondents who have used eReturns, or someone from their organisation (n=114)
Q D6. "Who in your organisation usually uses eReturns?"

Base Group B donors who have used eReturns (n=62)
Q XD6. "Who usually lodges the disclosure return in eReturns?"



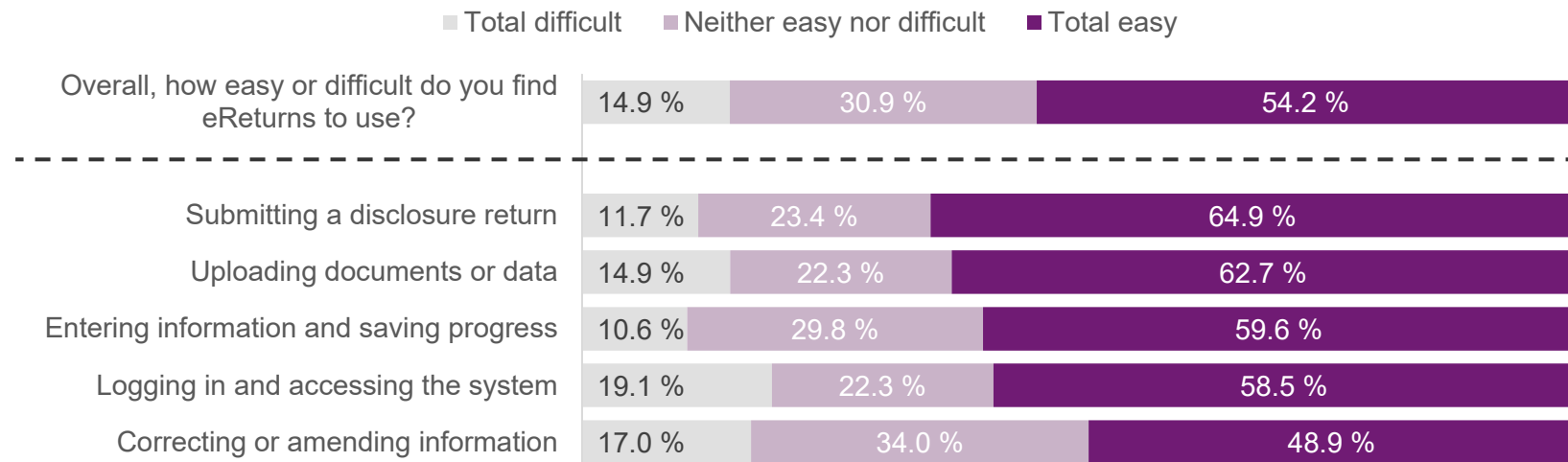
Responsibility for lodging disclosure returns (Donors)



eReturns Ease of Use

Group A (Political Participants)

Most political participants rate eReturns as easy to use, with variation by task



Stakeholders from organisations with one or fewer staff/volunteers are much less likely to find eReturns easy to use (33.3%). This effect was also present for submitting a return (38.9%), uploading data (44.4%), entering/saving information (33.3%), logging into the system (38.9%), and correcting or amending information (33.3%).

Base: Group A respondents who have used eReturns (n=94)

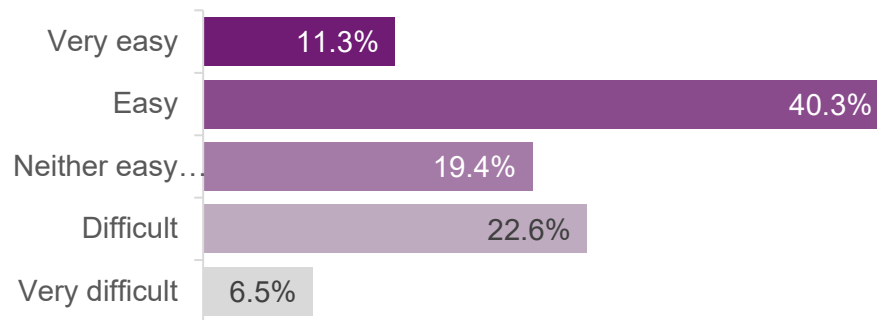
Q D8. "Overall, how easy or difficult do you find eReturns to use?"

Q D9. "Thinking about your most recent use of eReturns, how easy or difficult was it to do each of the following?"

- Most users rate eReturns as easy to use overall (54%), particularly for core tasks such as submitting returns, uploading documents and entering information. Correcting or amending information is the least easy task, though still more often rated easy than difficult.
- Ease of use is lower for stakeholders from very small organisations, indicating that usability challenges are concentrated among users with limited internal support rather than across the user base as a whole.

eReturns Ease of Use Group B (Donors)

eReturns generally supports routine tasks, but ease of use is inconsistent amongst donors



Base: Base: Donors who have used eReturns (n=62)

Q D8. Overall, how easy or difficult do you find eReturns to use?

Organisational donors were more likely to indicate that eReturns was easy to use ($t(p<.05)$)

- Core tasks such as logging in, entering information, and submitting returns are generally rated as **easy (around 55–65%)**, though **neutral or difficult ratings** still account for **25–40%** across most tasks.
- More complex or less frequent actions, such as amending returns or returning to in-progress work, attract higher neutrality (25–35%) and notable “not applicable” responses (**up to 44%**), indicating **limited exposure** rather than failure.
- Around **40%** of users report needing help at least occasionally when using eReturns.

- Core tasks (logging in, entering information, submitting returns) are more often rated as easy (55–65%), though 25–40% still rate these as neutral or difficult.
- Less frequent tasks (amending returns, resuming in-progress work) attract higher neutrality and “not applicable” responses (up to 44%), indicating limited exposure rather than persistent difficulty.
- eReturns works for routine use, but confidence drops for non-routine tasks, highlighting a need for clearer in-system guidance and reassurance.

Challenges Using eReturns

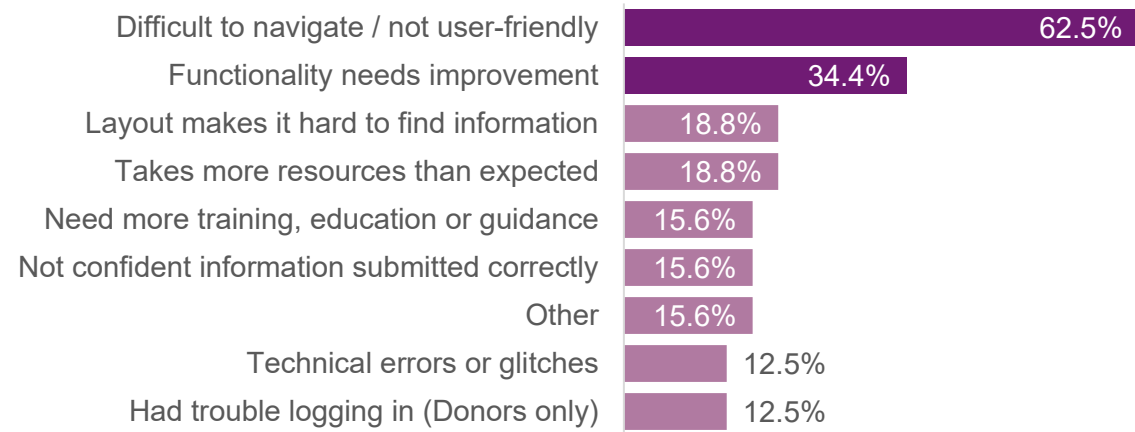
Group A (Political Participants) and Group B (Donors)

Roughly half of stakeholders needed help from someone else to use eReturns. The most likely aspect of eReturns stakeholders found difficult to use was navigating the solution

47.4%

of users needed help
to use eReturns

*Base: Group A and B respondents who have used eReturns (n=156)
Q D10. "Did you need help from someone else (e.g., a colleague, accountant, or AEC staff) to use eReturns?"*



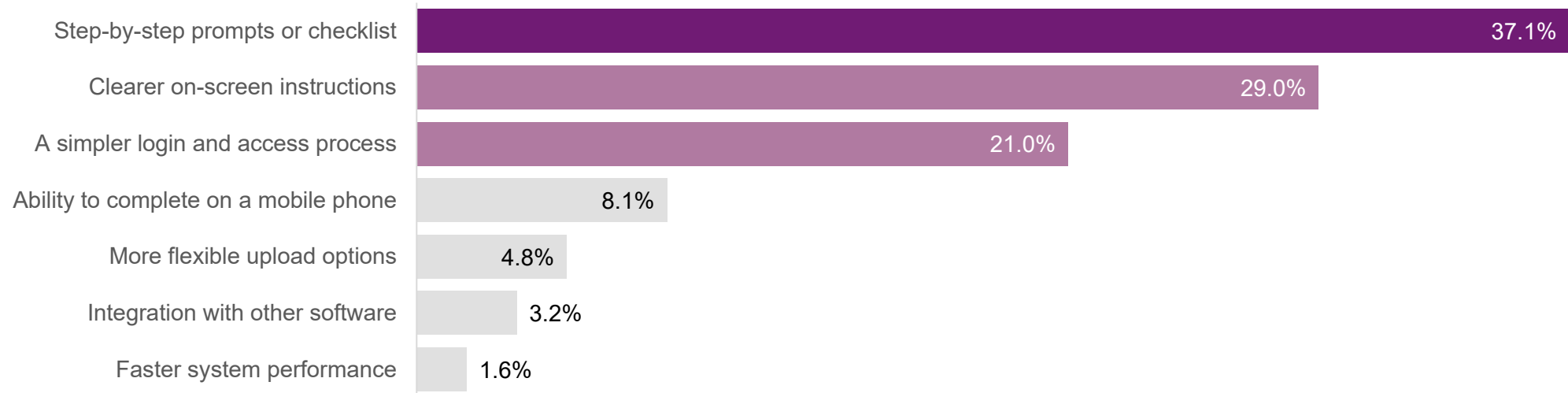
*Base: Group A and B respondents that found eReturns 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to use (n=32)
Q D11. "Which aspects of eReturns created challenges for you?" (maximum 3 multiple choice)*

- Nearly half of users (47.4%) required help to use eReturns, indicating that independent use is not the norm for a substantial minority of stakeholders.
- Navigation and usability are the primary challenges, with difficulty moving through the system cited most often (62.5%), well ahead of technical errors or system reliability issues.
- This suggests the main opportunity lies in clearer pathways and reassurance, rather than major functionality changes, particularly to support infrequent or time-poor users and reduce reliance on external help.

eReturns Improvements

Group B (Donors)

Users want clearer guidance rather than new functionality



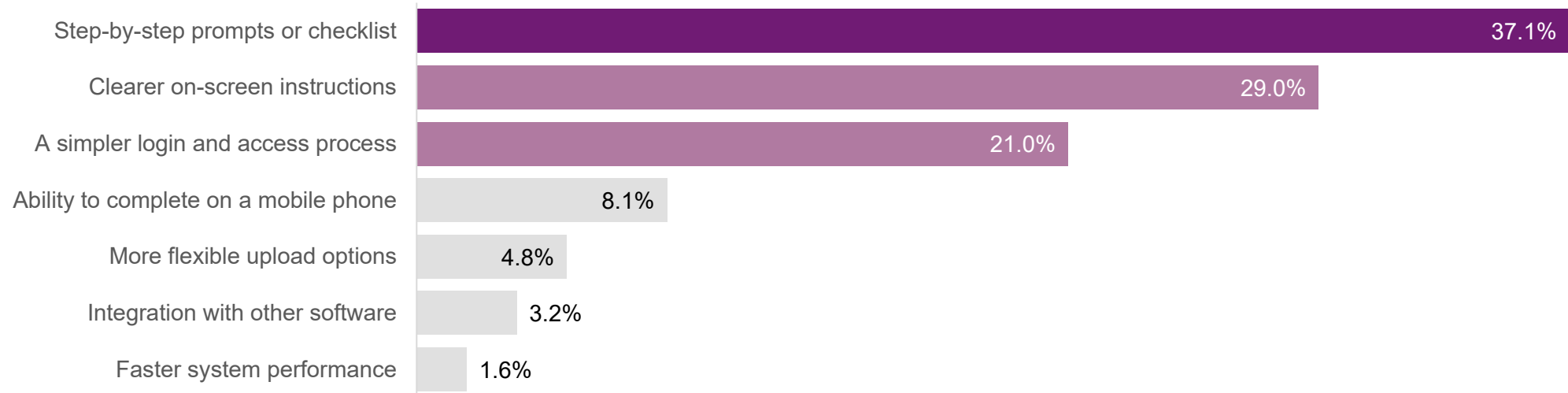
Base: Base: Donors who have used eReturns (n=62)
Q D12. What would make it easier for you to lodge returns?

- The most common requests relate to step-by-step prompts or checklists (37%) and clearer on-screen instructions (29%), indicating a desire for more structured support.
- Fewer users prioritise technical enhancements such as faster performance (2%), software integration (3%), or flexible uploads (5%).
- Improving the clarity and sequencing of the user journey is likely to deliver more value than adding features, particularly for users who lodge infrequently or are unsure about compliance steps.

eReturns Improvements

Group B (Donors)

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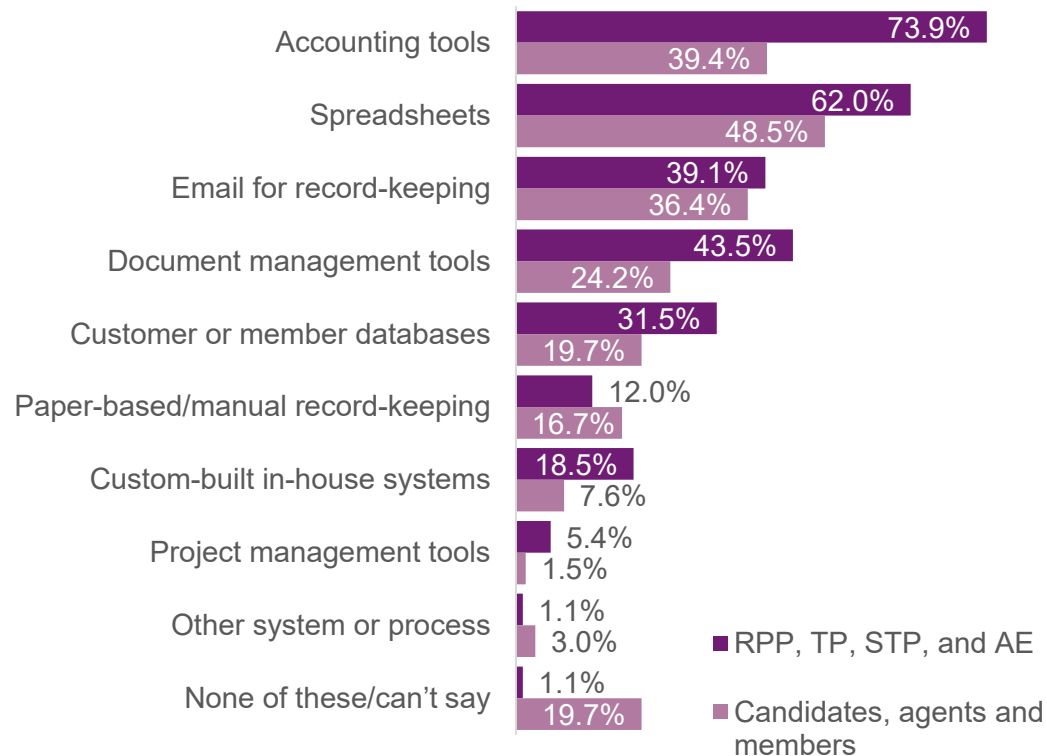
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Existing Reporting Tools

Group A (Political Participants)

Reporting relies on existing tools, with clear differences between organisations and candidates



- Most political participants rely on established tools such as accounting software and spreadsheets to manage reporting, particularly among regulated entities.
- Software-based record-keeping is far more common in organisations than among individual candidates, who are more likely to rely on manual or paper-based methods.
- These differences highlight variable baseline capability, indicating that guidance and support will need to accommodate both well-resourced organisations and individuals with limited or informal reporting systems.

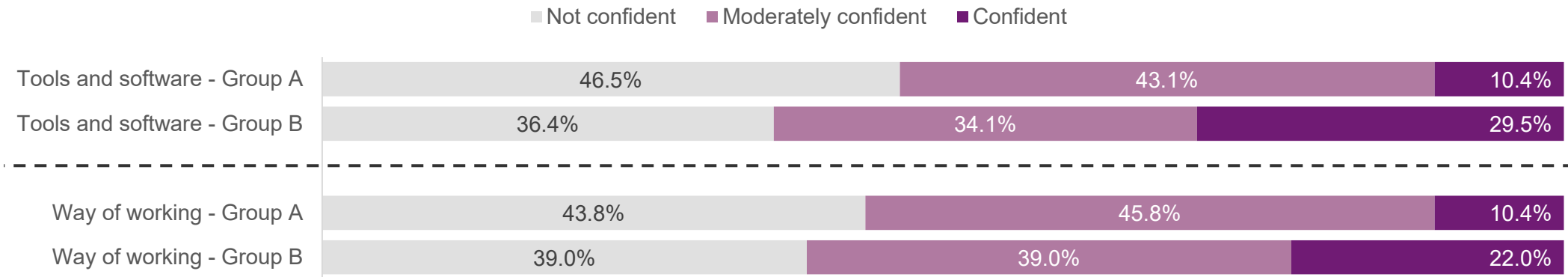
Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q D18. "Which of the following tools do you/your organisation currently use to manage financial or reporting information?" (multiple choice)

Existing Reporting Practices

Group A (Political Participants) and Group B (Donors)

Respondents from Group B are more likely to be confident the new service will fit their tools and way of working



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144), and Group B respondents answering on behalf of an organisation (n=44)

Q D19.1. "How confident are you that the new online service would fit with your current way of working? The new online service will work with the tools and software I/we already use."

Base: All Group A respondents (n=144), and Group B respondents (n=123)

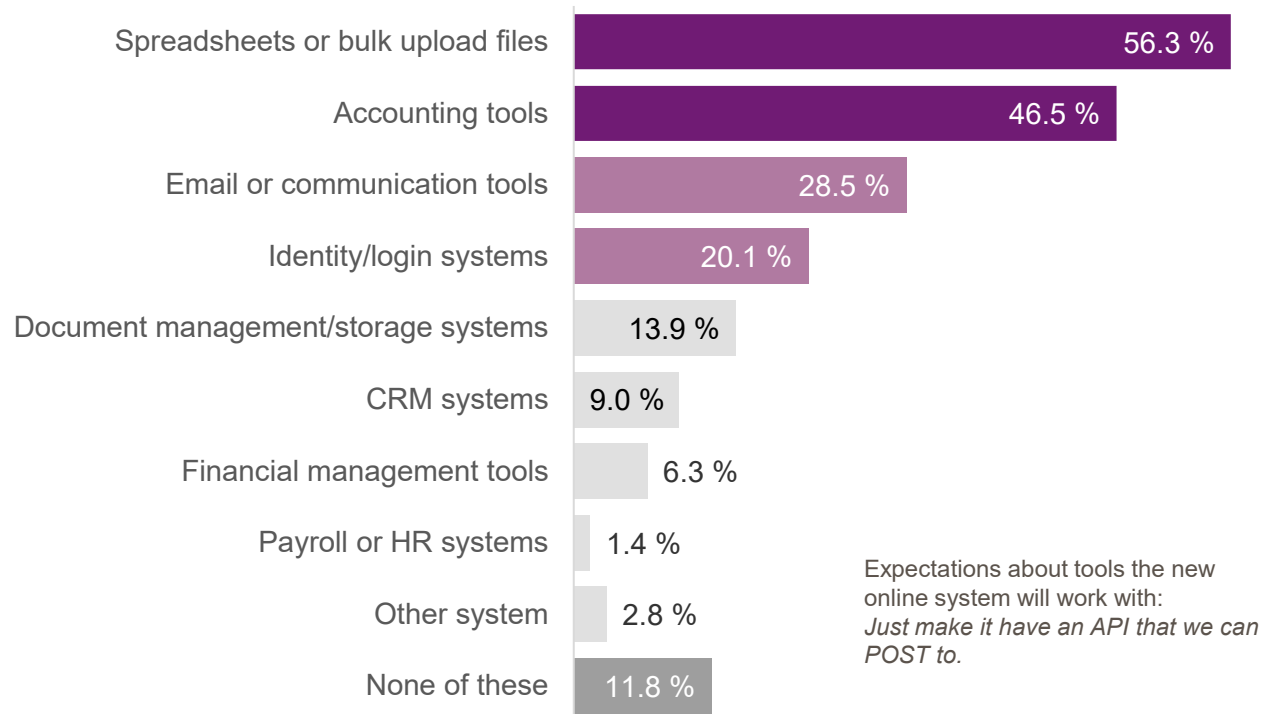
Q D19.2 "How confident are you that the new online service would fit with your current way of working? The new online service will fit into the way I/we normally work."

- Group B (Donors) express higher confidence than Group A that the new service will fit both their existing tools and their way of working, despite generally less reliance on formal reporting software.
- Group A stakeholders show lower confidence overall, reflecting more established systems and processes that may need to integrate with, or adapt to, the new service.
- Higher confidence among donors likely reflects simpler or more individualised reporting arrangements, rather than greater readiness or capability, and should not be read as lower support needs during implementation.

Software Integration

Group A (Political Participants)

Integration expectations focus on spreadsheets rather than specialist systems



- Most Group A stakeholders expect the new service to work with spreadsheets or bulk upload files (56.3%), followed by accounting tools (46.5%). Expectations drop sharply for other systems.
- Expectations for integration are strongest among regulated entities, but spreadsheets remain the most common expectation across all Group A segments, including candidates.
- Overall, expectations point to file-based data preparation and upload rather than automated system-to-system integration.

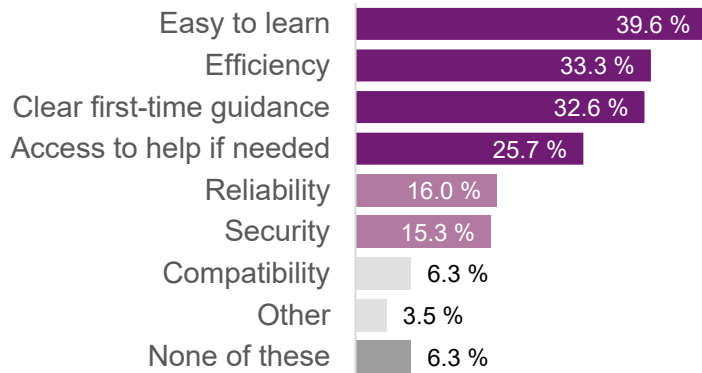
Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q D17. "Which of the following tools would you expect the new online service to work with?" (maximum 3 multiple choice)

Facilitating New Online Service Readiness

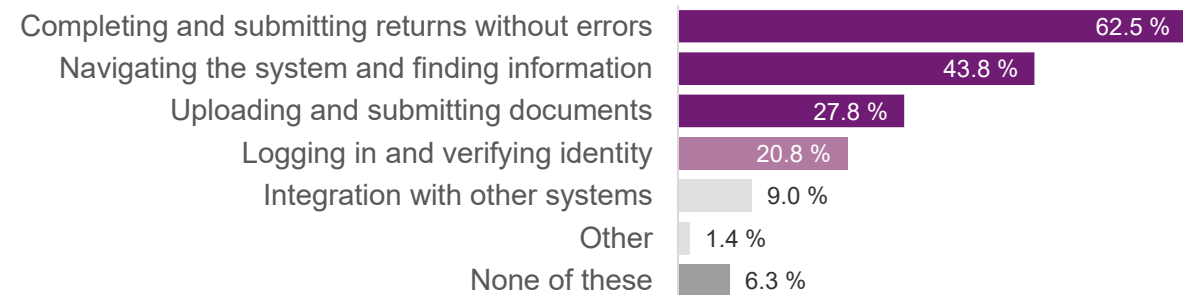
Group A (Political Participants)

Readiness to use is driven by ease of learning and confidence in error-free submission



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q D14. "Which of the following would be most important in helping you or your organisation feel confident and ready to start using the new online service?" (maximum 2 multiple choice)



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q D15. "While all parts of the online service need to function well, which steps are the most critical for you or your organisation?" (maximum 2 multiple choice)

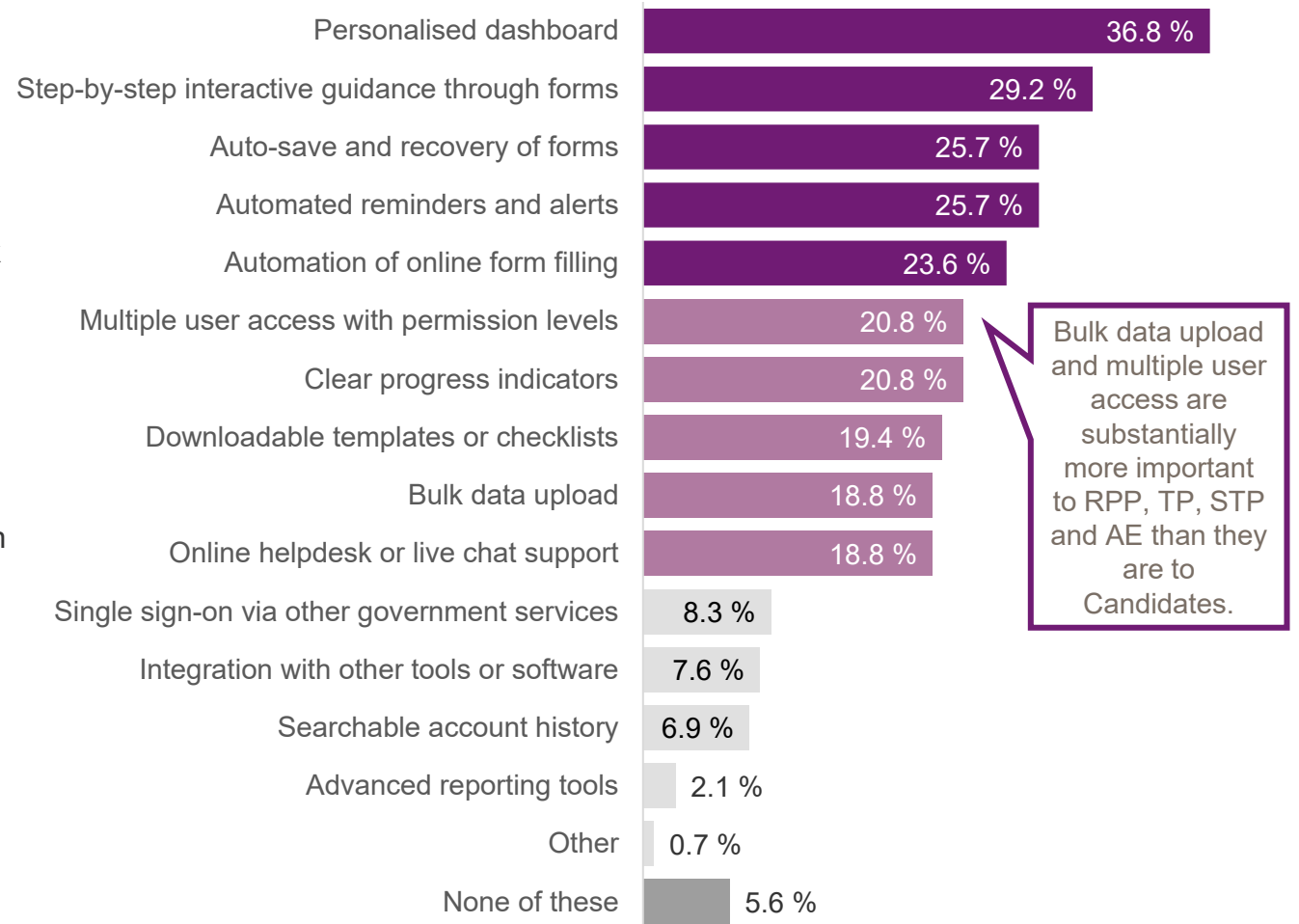
- When preparing to use the new service, stakeholders most often prioritise it being easy to learn (39.6%), efficient to use (33.3%), and supported by clear first-time guidance (32.6%).
- The most critical functional requirement is the ability to complete and submit returns without errors (62.5%), well ahead of navigation and finding information (43.8%) or uploading documents (27.8%).
- Overall, readiness to start using the service is more closely tied to confidence in accuracy and error prevention than to integration or advanced functionality, highlighting the importance of early reassurance and clear guidance.

Desired features in the New Online Service

Group A (Political Participants)

Interest focuses on visibility, guidance and progress tracking rather than advanced functionality

- Interest is highest in features that support orientation and task management, particularly a personalised dashboard (36.8%), step-by-step guidance (29.2%), and auto-save/recovery (25.7%).
- Features that improve clarity and completion confidence (progress indicators, reminders, templates) attract more interest than integrations or advanced reporting tools.
- Demand for advanced functionality such as system integration (7.6%) and advanced reporting (2.1%) is limited, suggesting core visibility and guidance features would meet most needs.



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

Q D16. "Which of the following features would be most useful for you or your organisation when using the new online service?"
(maximum 3 multiple choice)

Desired features in the New Online Service

Group B (Donors)

Donors prioritise automation and ease of completion

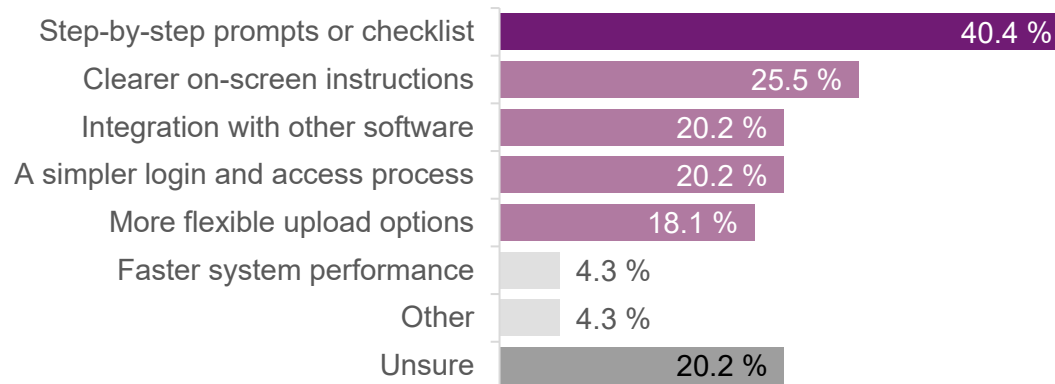
- **Features that reduce effort and friction are most valued**
The strongest preferences centre on single sign-on via government services (31%), automated form filling (29%), and automated reminders and alerts (26%), pointing to demand for smoother, lower-effort interactions.
- **Guidance and reassurance features sit just behind core automation**
Around one in five nominate step-by-step interactive guidance (20%), auto-save and recovery (20%), and clear progress indicators (18%), reinforcing the importance of confidence and visibility during completion.
- **Advanced or specialist tools attract limited interest overall**
Capabilities such as bulk data upload (9%), multiple user permissions (6%), advanced reporting tools (3%), and system integrations (<1%) are low-priority for most respondents.
- **Users want complexity removed, not exposed**
Preferences concentrated on automation, guidance, and error-prevention rather than powerful but complex tools, suggesting that perceived value will be maximised by simplifying the experience rather than expanding feature depth.
- Compared with political participants, donors place relatively greater emphasis on reducing effort through automation (e.g. single sign-on, automated form filling and reminders), while both groups show limited interest in advanced or specialist tools; donors' preferences place less weight on visibility and task management features.

Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

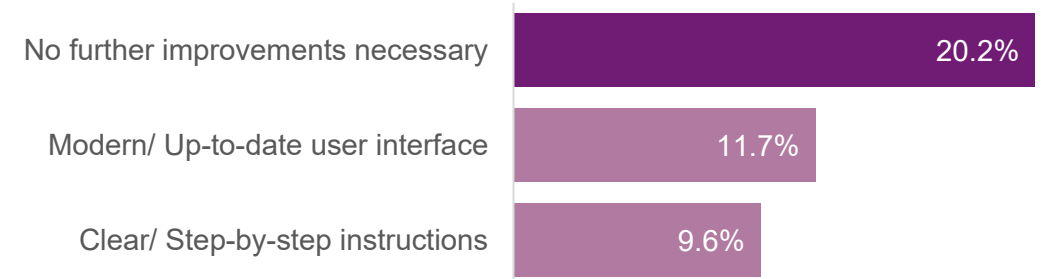
Improving eReturns Usability

Group A (Political Participants)

Clear, in-context guidance is the most common usability improvement identified



Base: Group A respondents who have used eReturns (n=94)
Q D12. "What would make it easier for you to use eReturns?" (maximum 2 multiple choice)



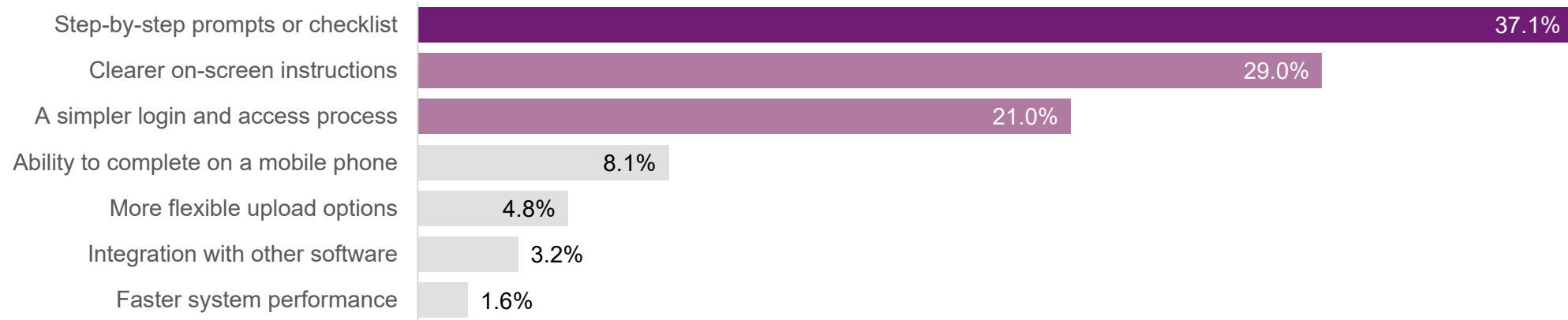
Base: Group A respondents who have used eReturns (n=94)
Q D13. "Based on your experience, if you could change one thing about eReturns to make it easier to use, what would it be?" (top 3 coded responses)

- When prompted, stakeholders most often identify step-by-step prompts or checklists as the change most likely to make eReturns easier to use (40.4%), followed by clearer on-screen instructions (25.5%). Interest in integration with other software is lower (20.2%), particularly among Candidates.
- When asked unprompted to name a single improvement, the most common response is that no further changes are necessary (20.2%), suggesting many users do not actively perceive usability issues without specific prompts.
- Taken together, the results indicate that structured guidance is valued when made visible, even among users who otherwise consider the system adequate. Targeted, in-context prompts are likely to improve ease of use without materially disrupting existing workflows.

Improving eReturns Usability

Group B (Donors)

Clearer guidance is the primary usability need for donors



Base: Base: Donors who have used eReturns (n=62)

Q D11. What would make it easier for you to lodge returns?

No statistically significant differences by donor type ($p > .05$)

- Donor preferences align closely with Political Participants, with both groups prioritising clearer guidance and step-by-step support over additional features.
- Donors most commonly identify step-by-step prompts or checklists (37.1%) and clearer on-screen instructions (29.0%) as changes that would make eReturns easier to use, indicating a preference for clearer structure rather than new functionality.
- A simpler login and access process is also a notable priority (21.0%), while relatively few donors prioritise technical enhancements such as mobile use (8.1%), flexible uploads (4.8%), software integration (3.2%) or system performance (1.6%).
- Overall, the findings suggest that for donors, clarity, sequencing and reassurance through the reporting process are more important than added features, particularly given infrequent use and lower familiarity with reporting requirements.

Improving eReturns usability (quotations)

Group A (Political Participants)

Interface

“One simple area that shows all outstanding reporting obligations. Each title is a hyperlink that takes you straight to the form. That is what the ATO does.”

“Modern interface and being able to enter directly into the system first-time input rather than uploading forms.”

“Make it user friendly and use plain English.”

“More modern interface.”

Instructions

“Better point-to-point explanations and examples of what information is required.”

“Easier upfront explanation on the process and who needs to submit what.”

Other

“Integrate with our accounting firm’s system to allow them to lodge.”

“Simple terminology.”

- Requests cluster around a more modern, simpler interface; clearer, plain-English instructions; and better visibility of outstanding obligations.
- Several stakeholders reference other government systems (e.g. ATO) as benchmarks for clarity, navigation, and task completion.
- Usability improvements are less about new functionality and more about reducing cognitive load through clearer structure, language, and task signposting.
- A single, consolidated view of obligations combined with plain-English, point-by-point guidance would align strongly with user expectations and expectations formed by other government services.

Base: Group A respondents who have used eReturns (n=94)

Q D13. “Based on your experience, if you could change one thing about eReturns to make it easier to use, what would it be?”

Quotes may be suitable for reuse in implementation or communication materials, subject to context.

Improving eReturns usability (quotations)

Group B (Donors)

Interface and portal changes

“Better visual user experience”

“Modern interface. Clearer separation of the categories of donation recipients. Clearer separation of recipient categories in the webpage when entering donations.”

“Better summary upfront of what the sections are to be completed. I added all of the donations into one page and then realised candidate campaign account disclosures were separate to political party disclosures”

“Being able to view multiple donors on one login profile”

“Not having to scroll down and select my party for each and every donation. It's quite annoying, that's all.”

Integration with other systems

“Xero Integration”

“Political party donation returns are automatically loaded into individual donation returns for confirmation or correcting by individual donors. A bit like the ATO tax return system automatically loading share income, bank deposit interest income etc”

“Integration with the VEC so I don't have to do it twice.”

“Just make it more user friendly and linked to myGov account.”

Base: Group B respondents who have used eReturns (n=62)

Q D13. “Based on your experience, if you could change one thing about eReturns to make it easier to use, what would it be?”

Ability to correct errors

“Ability to revisit and change the form to correct errors.”

“The ability to correct errors post lodgement, step by step prompts with examples of a correctly populated/form or screen.”

“Ability to edit the order in which it appears on the final report.”

Other

“Provide simple instructions, ideally with a video and FAQ.”

“Amounts should be recorded excl GST not incl GST for compatibility with business accounting systems.”

“Make it possible and easy to use on mobile.”

“Knowing periods when disclosures are valid and need to be submitted, as states and federal are all different and it's tough to remember when and how to do. Also clarity on whether political memberships need to be included, as the party submits them on the transparency register but we are not required to, which leads to media inquiries on the discrepancy.”

Quotes may be suitable for reuse in implementation or communication materials, subject to context.

ICT & Systems Findings

Expected benefits of the new online service

Expected benefits are cautious, with uncertainty outweighing strong conviction

- **Neutral expectations dominate across all proposed benefits**
For every outcome tested, the most common response is neither likely nor unlikely (37–42%), indicating uncertainty about whether the new service will materially change the disclosure experience.
- **Moderate optimism outweighs pessimism, but strong belief is rare**
Around 25–34% expect improvements (somewhat likely) in saving time, reducing effort, avoiding errors, or improving access to information. However, only 4–7% consider these outcomes very likely.
- **Negative expectations are present but not dominant**
Combined unlikely responses sit at around 25–30% across measures, suggesting scepticism among a minority rather than active resistance.
- **Donors are open to improvement but unconvinced of impact**
The new service is expected to offer incremental gains rather than clear step-change benefits, highlighting the need for visible improvements and confidence-building signals post-launch to shift neutrality into belief.

Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

Q D20. Based on what you know, how likely do you think the new online service will...?

ICT & Systems: Integrated View

Stakeholders' digital capability is generally strong, but confidence and effectiveness are shaped more by clarity, orientation and reassurance than by technical functionality.

- Across groups, digital confidence is high for core tasks such as managing information, security and document handling, while locating information online is consistently less confident, indicating a findability issue rather than a skills gap.
- Use of AEC digital tools is typically infrequent and task-driven, particularly for the Transparency Register, which is used occasionally for verification rather than as a familiar or routinely navigated system.
- Reporting responsibilities are highly centralised, with most organisations relying on a single individual to manage compliance, increasing reliance on clear guidance, error prevention and reassurance within systems.
- eReturns is generally considered usable for routine tasks, but around half of users require assistance, with difficulties concentrated in navigation, understanding steps and confidence that actions have been completed correctly.
- Expectations for the new online service prioritise being easy to learn, supporting error-free completion and providing clear first-time guidance, while demand for advanced features or complex integrations is limited.
- Neutral expectations dominate anticipated benefits of the new service, suggesting openness to improvement alongside uncertainty about whether it will materially reduce effort or errors in practice.

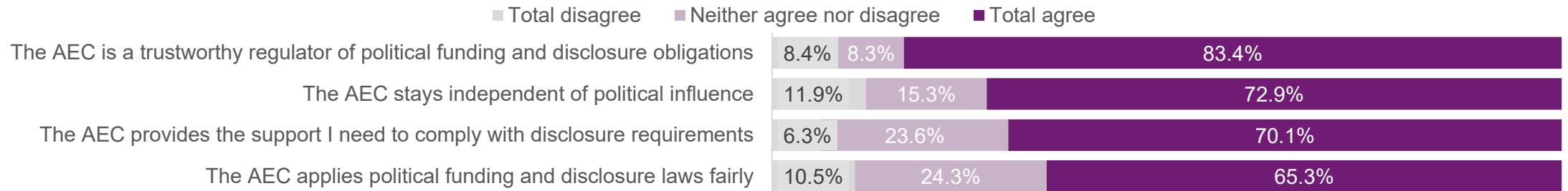
The evidence suggests that outcomes will depend less on expanding system capability and more on designing for infrequent, time-poor users who need clear orientation, visible progress and confirmation that obligations have been met.

4.6 Attitudes towards the AEC

Attitudes Towards the AEC

Group A (Political Participants)

Strong trust in the AEC provides a stable foundation as the reforms take effect.



Base: All Group A respondents (n=144)

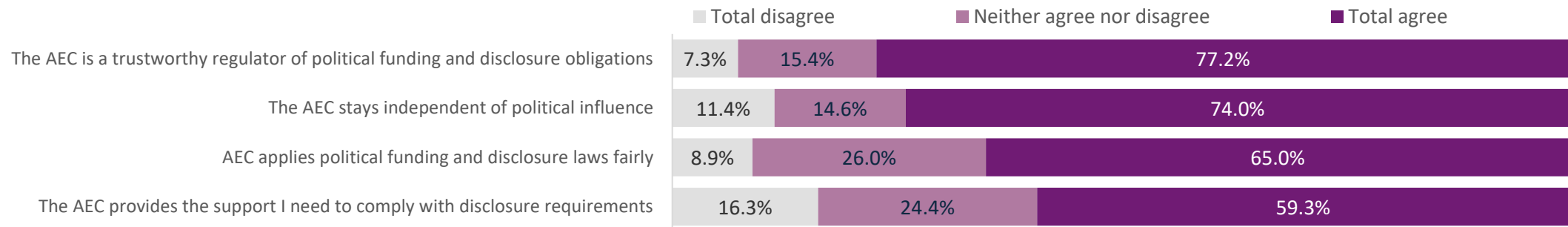
Q A3. "Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)"

- Political participants report high levels of trust in the AEC, particularly as a trustworthy and independent regulator. Agreement is strongest on the AEC's overall integrity and role.
- Perceptions are more mixed on whether funding and disclosure laws are applied fairly, driven mainly by neutrality rather than disagreement.
- The AEC begins reform implementation from a position of strong institutional trust, providing a solid foundation for engagement and compliance.
- However, neutrality around fairness highlights the importance of transparent, consistent application and clear guidance to maintain confidence as new requirements take effect.

Attitudes Towards the AEC

Group B (Donors)

Donors express high trust in the AEC, with comparatively lower confidence in practical support



Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

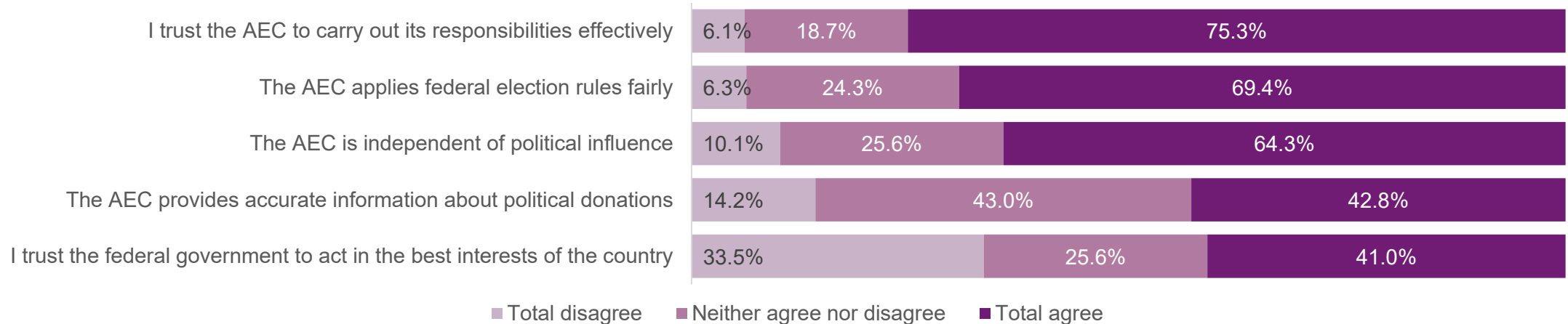
Q A3. "Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)"

- Large majorities agree that the AEC is independent, trustworthy and applies funding and disclosure laws fairly, with agreement levels around two-thirds to three-quarters across these measures.
- Agreement is lower for the statement that the AEC provides the support donors need to comply, with a larger neutral response suggesting some uncertainty about the adequacy or relevance of current support.
- Strong institutional trust provides a solid foundation for reform delivery, but there is an opportunity to strengthen confidence in the AEC's practical, day-to-day support role as reforms move closer to commencement.

Transparency, trust and legitimacy

Group C (General Public)

The Australian public tends to trust the AEC and believes they apply rules fairly, free of political influence



Base: Group C respondents at least slightly familiar with the AEC's role running elections, or regulating political donations and funding (n=493)

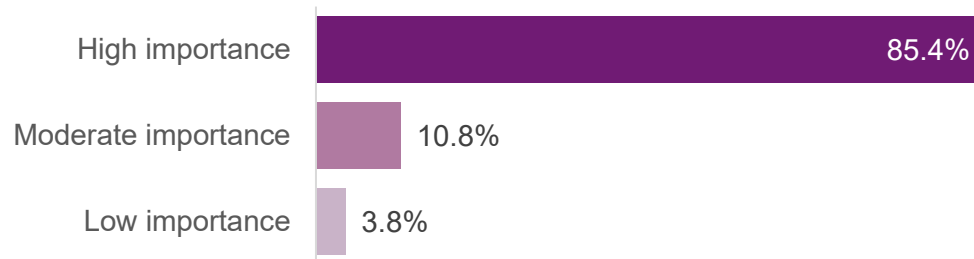
Q PA2. "How much do you agree or disagree with each statement?". Response option 'Strongly disagree' and 'Disagree' combined into 'Total disagree', 'Agree', and 'Strongly agree' combined into 'Total agree'.

- Three quarters of respondents agreed they trust the AEC to carry out its responsibilities effectively. There was a similar level of agreement the AEC applied federal election rules fairly, and that they are independent of political influence. Disagreement with these statements was very low.
- Respondents were much less likely to agree that the AEC provides accurate information about political donations, with a much higher proportion taking a neutral position.
- Perceptions of the AEC tended to be better than for the federal government, with respondents roughly evenly split between agreement and disagreement they trust the federal government to act in the best interest of the country. The disparity suggests it's less likely perceptions of the federal government skew perceptions of the AEC.

Transparency, trust and legitimacy

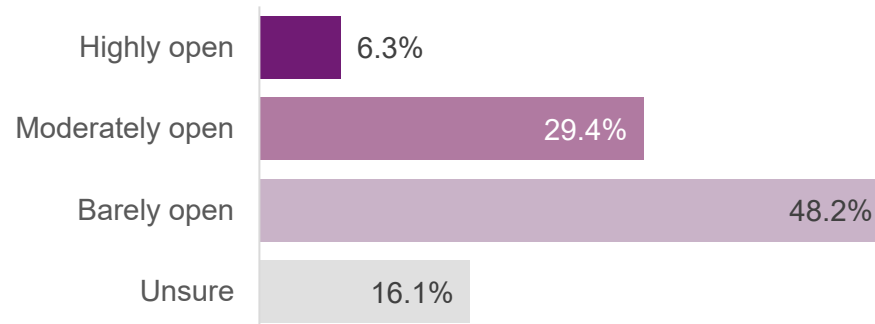
Group C (General Public)

Donation transparency is highly important to the Australian public, but very few consider our system transparent



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)

Q PB4. "How important is it that Australians can see who donates to political parties or candidates?". Response option 'Extremely important' and 'Very important' combined into 'High importance', 'Slightly important', and 'Not at all important' combined into 'Low importance'.



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)

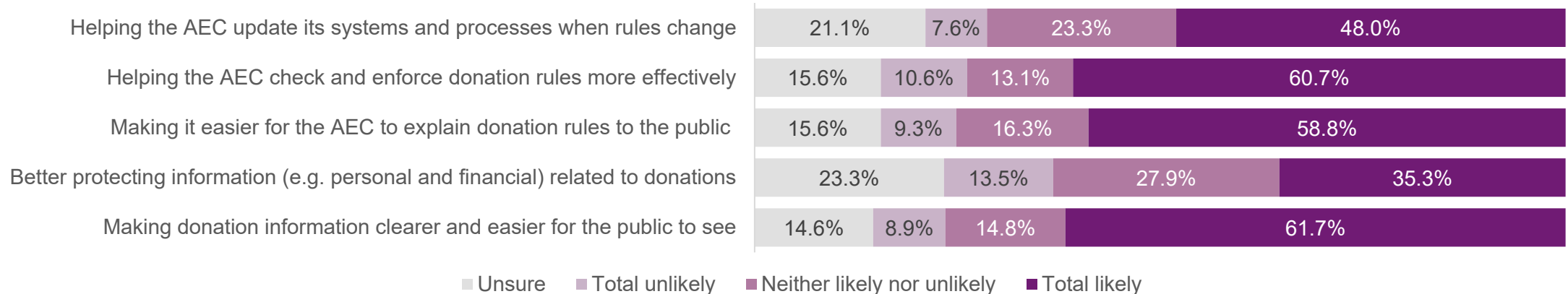
Q PB5a. "In your opinion, how transparent is the political donation system in Australia?". Response option 'Extremely open' and 'Very open' combined into 'Highly open', 'Slightly open', and 'Not at all open' combined into 'Barely open'.

- Survey respondents overwhelmingly consider it extremely important, or very important that Australians can see who donates to political parties or candidates.
- When asked to consider how transparent the political donation system is in Australia, respondents were very pessimistic. Very few considered the Australian system 'highly open', being much more likely to consider our system 'barely open'.
- Roughly one in six respondents were unsure as to how open and transparent the Australian system is.

Transparency, trust and legitimacy

Expected effects of FAD changes

AEC enforcement of donation rules, explaining those rules to the public, and communicating donation information are the improvements survey respondents were most optimistic about



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)

Q PB6. "Based on what you know so far, how likely is it that the upcoming changes to the political donation rules will lead to the following improvements?"

Response option 'Very unlikely' and 'Unlikely' combined into 'Total unlikely', 'Very likely', and 'Likely' combined into 'Total likely'.

- More than half of survey respondents considered it likely that the incoming changes to funding and disclosure laws would lead to improvements in the AEC's ability to check and enforce donation rules more effectively, make it easier for the AEC to explain the rules to the public, and make it easier for the public to see information about the donations being made.
- Respondents were less likely to think the changes would help the AEC update its systems and processes, and protect information related to donations, but in both cases, more responded likely than unlikely.
- Although all respondents were asked to consider the improvements listed above, not all respondents are familiar with the changes coming into effect. It will be important to isolate the expectations of those familiar with the changes coming into effect.

General Public Trust in the AEC and Perceptions of Transparency

High expectations for transparency coexist with scepticism about the current system

- The general public places very high importance on transparency in political donations, yet very few consider the current political donation system to be open or transparent in practice. Perceptions cluster strongly toward “barely open,” with a sizeable minority unsure how the system operates.
- Trust in the AEC is high and clearly differentiated from attitudes toward political institutions more broadly. The AEC is widely seen as independent and fair, with considerably stronger confidence than that expressed toward the federal government.
- Confidence drops when questions shift from institutional integrity to information visibility. Many respondents are neutral or uncertain about whether donation information is accurate, accessible or easy to understand, suggesting limited engagement rather than active distrust.
- Public legitimacy for funding and disclosure reform rests less on confidence in the AEC as a regulator, and more on whether reforms translate into clearer, more visible and more comprehensible information for the public. Trust provides a foundation, but perceived transparency will be the primary test of reform success.
- These results complement existing evidence on public trust and political finance by clarifying that public confidence rests on credible oversight and visible transparency, rather than ongoing engagement with disclosure information or support for changes that increase public funding.

High trust in the AEC does not offset low confidence in political donation transparency; reforms will likely be judged by what the public can see and understand, not by institutional credibility alone.

Attitudes towards the AEC: Integrated View

Across stakeholder groups and the general public, trust in the AEC is high and consistent, with comparatively weaker confidence in the AEC's practical support and information provision.

- Trust in the AEC as an independent, trustworthy and fair regulator is strong across political participants, donors and the general public, and is consistently higher than trust in government more broadly where comparable measures are available.
- Political participants express the highest levels of confidence in the AEC's integrity and independence, with agreement strongest on the AEC's role as a regulator rather than on operational aspects of compliance support.
- Donors also report high trust in the AEC's neutrality and fairness, but show lower agreement that the AEC provides the practical support they need, alongside a higher level of neutral responses on this measure.
- Among the general public, confidence in the AEC's effectiveness and independence is high, while views are more mixed on the accuracy and accessibility of information about political donations.
- Across all groups, neutrality rather than disagreement accounts for most of the variation on measures relating to fairness, support and information accuracy, indicating areas of uncertainty rather than active distrust.
- Differences between groups are largely by degree rather than direction, with institutional trust broadly shared, but expectations and experiences of practical support less uniform.

The evidence suggests a strong foundation of institutional trust on which reforms can be implemented, alongside an implementation risk if uncertainty around practical support and information clarity is not addressed as new requirements take effect.

5. Major Themes

Summary Themes

- **High institutional trust alongside weaker confidence in practical support**

Across political participants, donors and the general public, trust in the AEC as an independent, fair and authoritative regulator is consistently high. This confidence is strongest in relation to the AEC's integrity and neutrality, and weaker where questions relate to the provision of practical, day-to-day support and information clarity. Neutral rather than negative responses account for much of the variation, indicating uncertainty rather than active distrust. Differences between groups are largely by degree, with political participants expressing the highest confidence and donors and the public showing more mixed views on practical support and information accuracy.

- **Awareness varies substantially by proximity to obligations**

Awareness of the funding and disclosure reforms differs markedly across stakeholder groups, closely aligned with role and frequency of interaction with the framework. Political participants demonstrate the highest awareness, donors show more episodic awareness linked to specific triggers, and the general public exhibits low awareness overall. Where awareness exists, it is often general rather than detailed, particularly outside regulated stakeholders. This pattern is consistent across quantitative measures and supported by verbatim insights of variable exposure to reform information.

Summary Themes

- **Practical understanding lags behind awareness across all groups**

Across stakeholder groups, understanding of how the reforms operate in practice is less developed than awareness of their existence. Areas of lower understanding concentrate around thresholds, timing, reporting triggers and how requirements intersect in real-world scenarios. This gap is evident even among regulated stakeholders and is more pronounced for donors and the general public. The evidence consistently shows that uncertainty arises at points of action rather than at the level of general reform intent.

- **Confidence in compliance is shaped more by usability than by capability**

Stakeholders report generally high digital confidence for core tasks such as managing information and security, while expressing lower confidence in locating information and navigating systems. Difficulties with existing tools, including eReturns, are concentrated in orientation, clarity of steps and reassurance that obligations have been met correctly, rather than technical performance. Reporting responsibilities are highly centralised, often resting with a single individual, increasing reliance on clear guidance, visible progress cues and error prevention. This pattern is consistent across political participants and donors.

Summary Themes

- **Practical understanding lags behind awareness across all groups. Anticipated challenges are procedural rather than capacity-based**

Anticipated challenges are primarily associated with record-keeping, reporting processes and the ongoing administration of new requirements. Stakeholders describe the compliance burden in terms of process complexity and interpretation rather than staffing levels or access to resources. Support needs are correspondingly focused on translating requirements into workable actions, particularly around reporting timelines, real-time disclosure and definitions. While satisfaction with existing AEC support is high, clarity remains the most frequently identified area for improvement.

- **Communication effectiveness depends on timing, sequencing and role-specific design**

Stakeholders report generally high digital confidence for core tasks such as managing information and security, while expressing lower confidence in locating information and navigating systems. Difficulties with existing tools, including eReturns, are concentrated in orientation, clarity of steps and reassurance that obligations have been met correctly, rather than technical performance. Reporting responsibilities are highly centralised, often resting with a single individual, increasing reliance on clear guidance, visible progress cues and error prevention. This pattern is consistent across political participants and donors.

Summary Themes

- **Preferences for future ICT systems emphasise clarity, guidance and reassurance**

Stakeholders express clear preferences for future ICT systems that provide structured guidance, clear sequencing of tasks and reassurance at key reporting points. The evidence indicates a desire for systems that support users in understanding what is required, when actions are needed, and how obligations fit together over time. Preferences are shaped by the concentration of reporting responsibilities among a small number of individuals, increasing the value placed on confirmation, error prevention and visibility of progress. These preferences are consistent across regulated stakeholder groups and align with areas where confidence is currently lower.

6. Conclusion

Conclusion

Across stakeholder groups, awareness, understanding, confidence and preparedness do not align in a simple or linear way, particularly when stakeholders consider how requirements would operate in practice. While trust in the AEC as a regulator is consistently high, this does not in itself indicate that stakeholders feel equipped to apply the new requirements accurately in practice.

Awareness of the reforms varies substantially by proximity to reporting obligations, with higher awareness among regulated political participants than among donors and the general public. This awareness is often broad rather than detailed, and practical understanding is less developed across all groups. Understanding declines most noticeably when legislative requirements must be translated into specific actions, particularly in relation to thresholds, timing and reporting triggers. As a result, awareness alone provides limited insight into how requirements would be applied in practice.

Confidence in the system remains high at a general level but narrows when attention shifts from general understanding to the application of requirements in practice. Stakeholders report strong trust in the AEC and generally high digital capability, yet preparedness is shaped more by clarity, sequencing and assurance than by capacity or resourcing. Anticipated challenges are concentrated in interpretation and confirmation that obligations have been met correctly, distinguishing general confidence from confidence at points of action.

Conclusion

Expectations of communication, education and system support reflect these conditions. The AEC is widely regarded as the authoritative source of funding and disclosure information, but engagement depends on whether guidance is delivered at relevant points in the reporting cycle and framed around concrete tasks. Where reporting responsibility is centralised, the importance of clear structure and reassurance becomes more pronounced, with preferences varying by role rather than by overall confidence.

ICT-related findings reinforce this pattern. Stakeholders generally report adequate digital capability for core tasks, but confidence diminishes where system use requires navigation across multiple steps, interpretation of requirements, or confirmation that actions have been completed correctly. Preferences expressed for future ICT arrangements emphasise clarity of sequencing, visibility of progress and reassurance at submission and validation points. These considerations are most pronounced where reporting responsibility is concentrated with a small number of individuals, indicating that system design will materially shape perceived preparedness at points of action rather than baseline capability.

Overall, the findings show that trust, awareness and general confidence do not on their own indicate readiness for commencement. Preparedness depends on how clearly stakeholders are guided to apply the new requirements at key stages in the reporting cycle. Taken together