

FAD / **FUNDING AND DISCLOSURE REFORM**

AEC Funding and Disclosure Stakeholder Survey 2025

Interim Report – Group B (Donors)

Prepared for the Australian Electoral Commission
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Executive Summary

Purpose and Scope

Purpose

This interim report presents early findings from Group B: Donors, following completion of Group B fieldwork for the AEC Funding and Disclosure Stakeholder Survey 2025. It provides an evidence-based snapshot of awareness, understanding, confidence and support needs ahead of the commencement of the Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Reform) Act 2025 on 1 July 2026.

Findings are preliminary and directional, based on interim self-reported data from Group B only. They are intended to inform early planning for communication, education and ICT readiness within the FAD Program, rather than to assess compliance outcomes or implementation effectiveness.

Interim Findings

Awareness, understanding and confidence

Awareness of the reforms among donors is limited and uneven, even for changes that affect them directly, such as disclosure thresholds and reporting requirements. Where awareness exists, understanding is often high level rather than detailed, with many donors uncertain about how specific rules, definitions and timing will apply in practice.

Across the findings, confidence in eventual compliance tends to exceed confidence in detailed understanding or preparedness. This suggests that many donors expect to rely on familiar processes, prior experience and AEC guidance at the point of action, rather than holding a clear, advance understanding of the new framework.

Compliance responsibility and operating context

Responsibility for funding and disclosure reporting is highly concentrated, with most donor organisations relying on a single individual to manage compliance. This increases dependence on individual knowledge and capacity and heightens sensitivity to complexity, ambiguity and error.

As a result, donors favour guidance and systems that reduce interpretation risk and administrative burden, particularly for time-poor users who may engage with reporting obligations infrequently but carry full accountability for accuracy.

Interim Findings

Communication, education and ICT preferences

Donors strongly trust the AEC as the authoritative source of information. Engagement with guidance and support is largely task-driven, intensifying around reporting events rather than occurring as ongoing learning. Preferences consistently favour early, proactive communication; plain-English explanations; and step-by-step guidance.

ICT preferences reflect this context. Donors prioritise systems that minimise cognitive load and error risk over advanced functionality. The most valued characteristics include clear visibility of obligations and due dates, guided workflows, simple navigation, and reassurance that information has been saved and submitted correctly. While integration with common tools such as spreadsheets or bulk uploads is expected, practical usability and certainty are rated more highly than technical sophistication.

Interim Findings

Implications

The interim findings suggest that implementation risk is less about donors' willingness to comply and more about how effectively that intent is supported in practice. While confidence in eventual compliance is relatively high, it is not yet consistently grounded in a clear understanding of how the new requirements will operate, particularly where timelines, definitions and reporting processes intersect.

This risk is amplified by the concentration of compliance responsibility within organisations. With reporting typically managed by a single individual, gaps in clarity or usability are less likely to be absorbed internally, increasing the impact of ambiguity, late awareness, or early-stage system friction.

As with political actors (Group A), donors exhibit high intent to comply but rely heavily on guidance, automation and system reassurance to translate that intent into confident, error-free compliance. In this context, timing, sequencing and usability will be critical. ICT design and communication that reduce cognitive effort, surfaces obligations clearly, and prevent errors at the point of need will be central to supporting an effective transition.

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1. Overview

Reform Context

Overview of the legislative reforms

Australia's federal electoral funding and disclosure framework 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. For donors, these reforms expand both when donations must be disclosed and how quickly disclosure is required, increasing the compliance responsibilities associated with making political donations.

The reforms are scheduled to commence on 1 July 2026, creating a defined period for communication, education and system preparation. How effectively this transition period is used will directly influence donors' awareness of their obligations, confidence in meeting new requirements, and ability to comply in practice.

Group B: Donors, including individual donors and organisations that make political donations above the disclosure threshold, play a critical role in the transparency framework. While donors may interact less frequently with AEC systems than political actors, they are directly responsible for understanding when disclosure obligations arise and ensuring accurate and timely reporting under the new arrangements. Understanding donor awareness, preparedness, likely challenges and support needs is therefore essential to informing the AEC's approach to communication, guidance and system design ahead of commencement.

Background and Research Objectives

This interim report forms part of the AEC Funding and Disclosure Stakeholder Survey program and presents early results from the Group B (Donors) component following completion of fieldwork. Its purpose is to support implementation planning, rather than to assess compliance outcomes or enforcement activity. The report provides an early, evidence-based view of donor awareness, preparedness and anticipated support needs to help the AEC plan communication, education and system development during the lead-in to reform commencement.

Research Objectives

The Group B (Donors) component of the AEC Funding and Disclosure Stakeholder Survey is designed to provide an evidence base to support implementation of the 2025–26 reforms. The research objectives are to:

- **Assess awareness and understanding of the reforms**
Examine the extent to which donors are aware of the legislative changes and understand when disclosure obligations arise and how the new requirements will apply to their donation activity.
- **Explore perceived preparedness and anticipated challenges**
Understand how prepared donors feel ahead of commencement and identify areas where they anticipate difficulty in meeting the new disclosure requirements, including timing, thresholds and reporting processes.
- **Identify communication, education and system support needs**
Identify the types of guidance, information and online system features donors consider most useful to support accurate and timely disclosure under the new framework.
- **Inform future AEC implementation planning**
Provide insight to support the AEC's planning for communication, education and online service development ahead of commencement.

How to Read this Report

Interpretation guidance

This interim report provides the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) with an early, evidence-based view of findings from the Group B (Donors) component of the AEC Funding and Disclosure Stakeholder Survey 2025.

The findings presented in this report should be read with the following in mind:

- Findings are directional and interim in nature, and are reported ahead of integrated analysis across Groups A (Political Actors) and C (General Public).
- The emphasis is on identifying patterns, emerging risks and support needs, rather than drawing final conclusions about donor behaviour or compliance outcomes.
- Measures of confidence and preparedness reflect self-reported perceptions, not observed disclosure behaviour or assessed compliance.
- This report does not make final recommendations or prescribe actions. Its purpose is to inform planning and further analysis.

Further analysis will examine differences within the donor cohort, explore sub-groups with distinct disclosure experiences or support needs, and integrate findings across political actors and the general public. This will strengthen the evidence base for final implementation decisions ahead of the July 2026 commencement.

2. Methodology and Interpretation

Method Overview

Survey approach

The Group B (Donors) component of the AEC Funding and Disclosure Stakeholder Survey was administered as an online self-completion survey (CAWI). This approach allowed donors to complete the survey at a time and pace that suited their availability, and supported the inclusion of detailed questions relating to donation activity, disclosure obligations and anticipated impacts of the reforms.

Fieldwork timing

Fieldwork for Group B was conducted in two stages:

- a pilot conducted from 10–12 December 2025
- main fieldwork conducted from 15 December to 7 January 2026

This timing was designed to maximise participation among donors with varying levels of engagement and differing degrees of familiarity with funding and disclosure requirements.

Recruitment approach

Participants were recruited from AEC-identified individual and organisational donors. Invitations were issued directly to eligible contacts to ensure that the survey reached donors with responsibility for, or direct involvement in, donation decisions and disclosure obligations.

In total, 1,879 eligible donors were invited to participate. 380 respondents commenced the survey and 123 completed it, representing a 6.5% overall response rate and a 32.4% completion rate among those who commenced the survey.

Response rates for Group B (Donors) were lower than for Group A (Political Actors), reflecting differences in engagement levels and interaction with funding and disclosure requirements, as well as the timing of fieldwork. The achieved sample remains suitable for identifying early patterns and informing implementation planning.

Questionnaire Structure

The questionnaire was developed in consultation with the AEC and structured to capture evidence across the following key areas:

- donor awareness and understanding of the legislative reforms, including familiarity with specific reform elements such as disclosure thresholds, expedited reporting and caps
- clarity, confidence and perceived preparedness in relation to existing and future donor disclosure obligations
- anticipated challenges in complying with the new requirements, including understanding obligations, meeting timeframes and avoiding errors
- communication and education preferences, including preferred sources, formats, timing and language support for donor guidance
- experience with AEC online services, including awareness and use of the Transparency Register and eReturns
- expectations and priorities for the new online service, including usability, guidance, automation, reminders and integration with existing workflows

Notes for Interpretation

The findings in this report should be interpreted with the following considerations in mind:

- The results are based on self-reported perceptions, rather than direct observation of behaviour or compliance-readiness.
- Reported preparedness reflects self-assessed readiness ahead of commencement and does not predict how stakeholders will perform once the new requirements are in effect.
- Analysis at this stage focuses on overall patterns, with subgroup analysis limited to high-level differences where appropriate.
- An asterisk (*) indicates that the difference between groups is statistically significant, meaning that the observed difference is unlikely to be due to chance alone.
- The results are intended to inform planning and further analysis, not to evaluate performance or assess compliance outcomes.

3. Fieldwork Snapshot and Data Quality

Fieldwork Snapshot

Fieldwork period	Pilot: 10–12 Dec 2025; Main: 15 Dec 2026–7 Jan 2026
Participation outcomes	1,888 eligible donors invited; 380 started (20%); 144 completed (6.5%); 32% completion among starters
Survey length	Median duration: 18:30 minutes

6.5%

response rate
32% completion among starters

Fieldwork for Group B was completed successfully, with participation outcomes consistent with expectations for a time-poor donor population with lower ongoing engagement with the AEC and disclosure activities outside of reporting periods.

Response rates are calculated using AAPOR Response Rate 3 (RR3), which accounts for estimated eligibility among cases of unknown eligibility.

Participation Context

Device Usage

Survey completion occurred predominantly on desktop devices (83%), with 17% completed on mobile devices.

Browser Usage

Respondents most commonly completed the survey using Chrome (42%) and Microsoft Edge (30%), followed by Safari (22%). Use of other browsers was limited, including Firefox (5%) and Samsung Internet (2%).

Implications for interpreting digital findings

The predominance of desktop completion is consistent with the administrative and transactional nature of donor disclosure activities, which are often undertaken using desktop-based systems and browsers

This participation context suggests that:

- Responses indicate a considered level of engagement with the survey content, noting the predominance of desktop-based completion.
- Findings relating to online systems should be interpreted in the context of predominantly desktop-based workflows.
- Lower levels of mobile completion are likely to reflect the context in which disclosure-related tasks are typically undertaken, rather than indicating barriers to survey participation.

4. Respondent Profile and Context

Profile of Respondents: Role in Funding and Disclosure



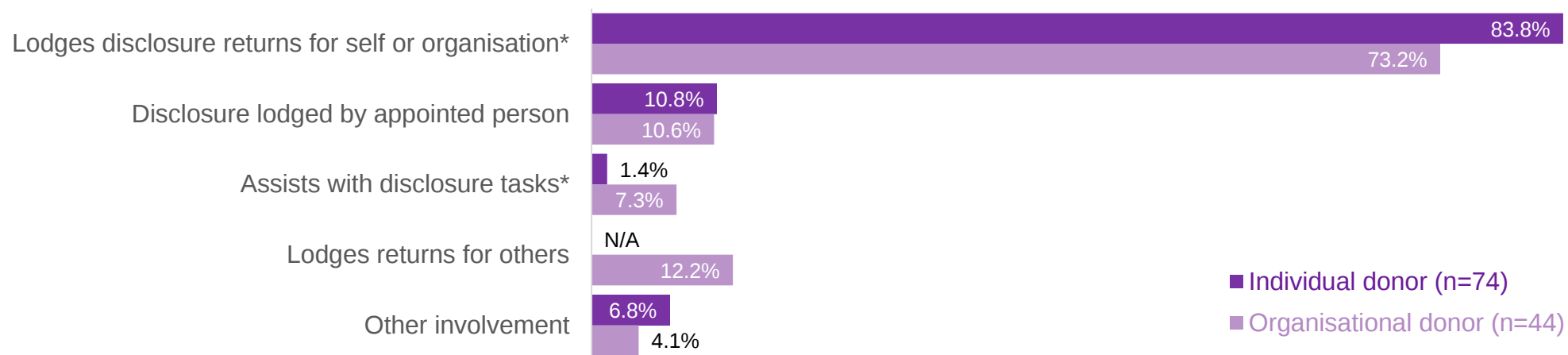
Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

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 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.

Profile of respondents: involvement in lodging disclosure returns

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



Base: Individual and Organisational Donors

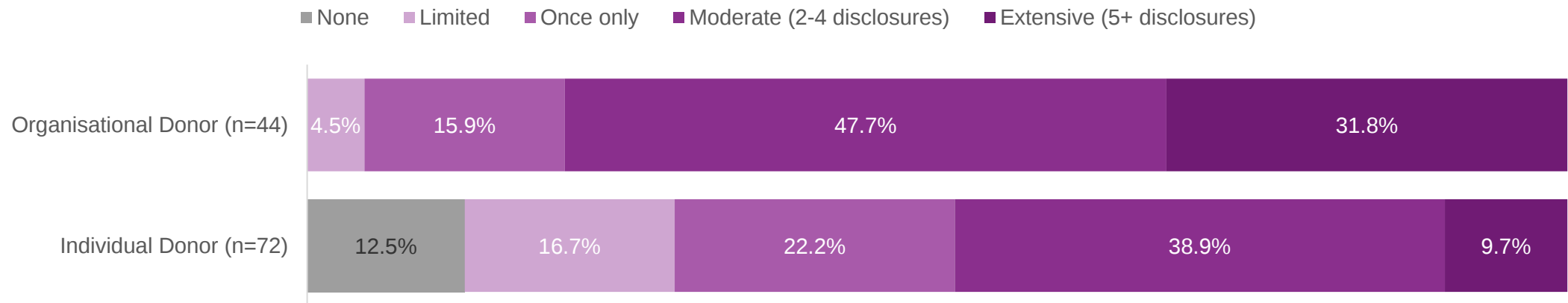
Q S3. Which of the following best describes your personal involvement in lodging disclosure returns?

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

Profile of respondents: experience in lodging disclosure returns

Organisational donors report higher levels of disclosure experience than individual donors



Base: Individual and Organisational Donors (excludes 2 Individual Donors that were unsure)

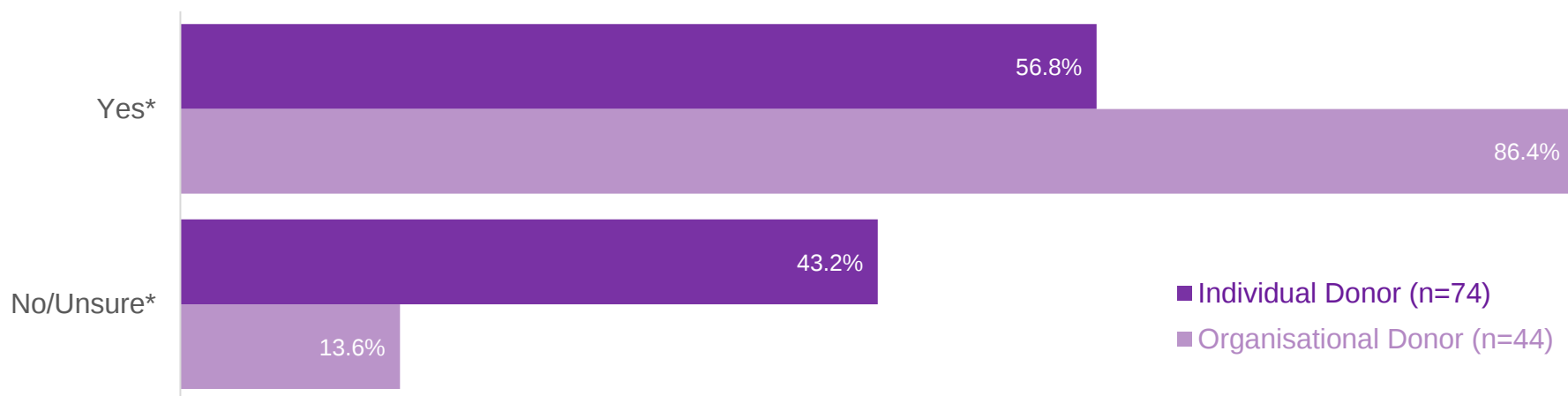
Q S4. How much experience do you have with political funding and disclosure requirements?

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, whereas individual donors may require clearer guidance and support tailored to less frequent or first-time use.

Profile of respondents: expectations of future disclosure requirements

Most organisational donors expect future disclosure requirements; individual donors are less certain



Base: Individual and Organisational Donors

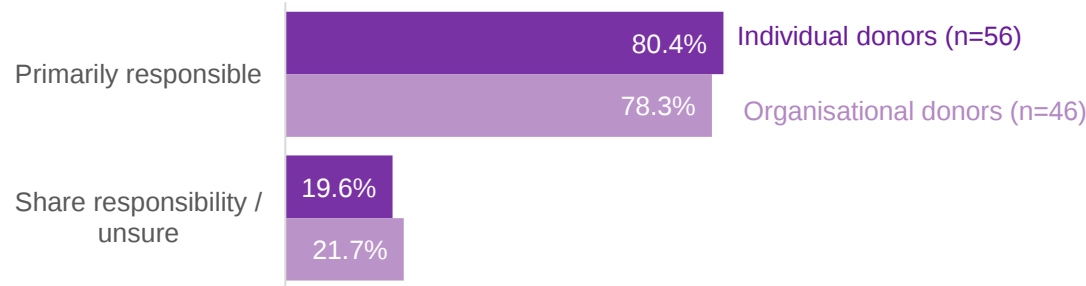
Q 55. Do you expect to have future funding and disclosure requirements?

*Difference between individual and organisational donors is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$)

- Organisational donors are significantly more likely to expect future funding and disclosure requirements, while individual donors are more likely to be unsure or indicate no expectation.
- Individual donors appear less certain about whether future disclosure obligations will apply to them, suggesting a need for clearer, more targeted communication about ongoing requirements.

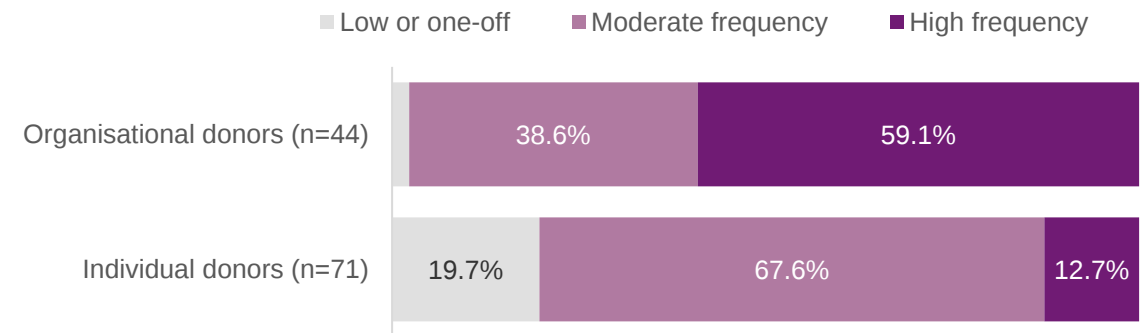
Profile of respondents: involvement in political donations and disclosure

Most donors expect to manage disclosure themselves, but organisational donors anticipate significantly more frequent donation activity than individuals



Base: Individual and Organisational Donors expecting future disclosure requirements
Q xS6. How involved do you expect to be in meeting funding and disclosure requirements in the future?

Nearly 6 in 10 organisational donors expect to donate **frequently** (i.e. **several times a year, outside election periods**), compared with around 1 in 8 individual donors.



Base: Individual and Organisational Donors
Q Ex2. Thinking about federal donations, how often are you likely to donate?
Differences in donation frequency between individual and organisational donors are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

- Across both donor types, most respondents expect to manage disclosure responsibilities themselves.
- Donation frequency differs by donor type. Organisational donors are significantly more likely to expect frequent donation activity, while individuals typically donate infrequently or at moderate levels.
- Disclosure and compliance guidance will need to accommodate very different usage patterns, with organisational donors likely to face a higher and more sustained compliance burden.
- Clear, implementation-focused guidance will be particularly important for higher-frequency organisational donors, even though responsibility for disclosure is expected to sit with donors themselves.

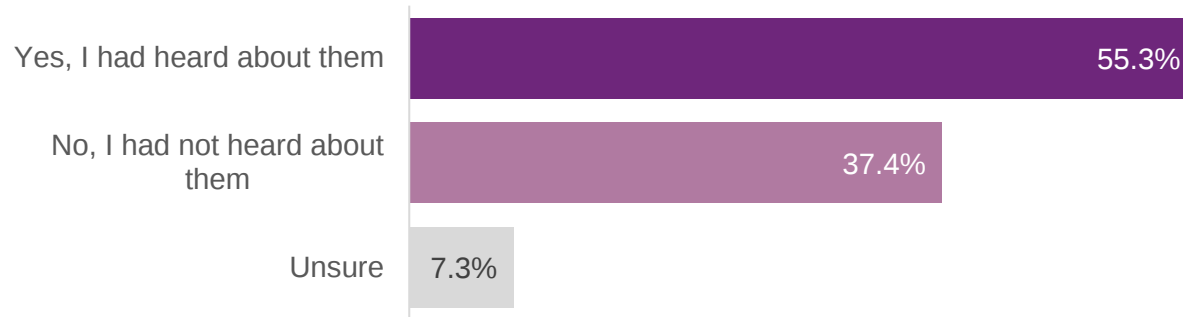
5. Insights

5.1 Awareness of Reforms

Awareness & Understanding

Recent reforms

Most stakeholders are aware of recent reforms



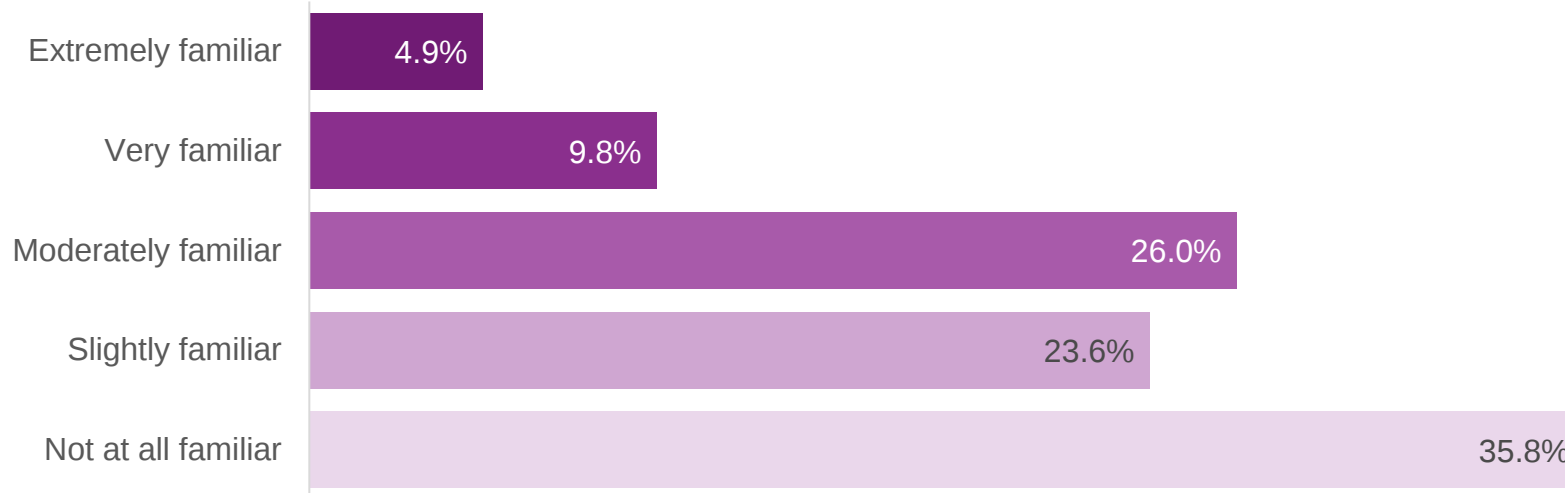
Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

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)?"

- Just over half of donors (55%) reported having heard about the recent reforms prior to participating in the survey, indicating a moderate level of baseline awareness.
- This provides an important baseline for interpreting subsequent findings, particularly in relation to understanding of the reforms, confidence to comply, and the type of information and support donors may require.

Awareness & Understanding

Overall familiarity



Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

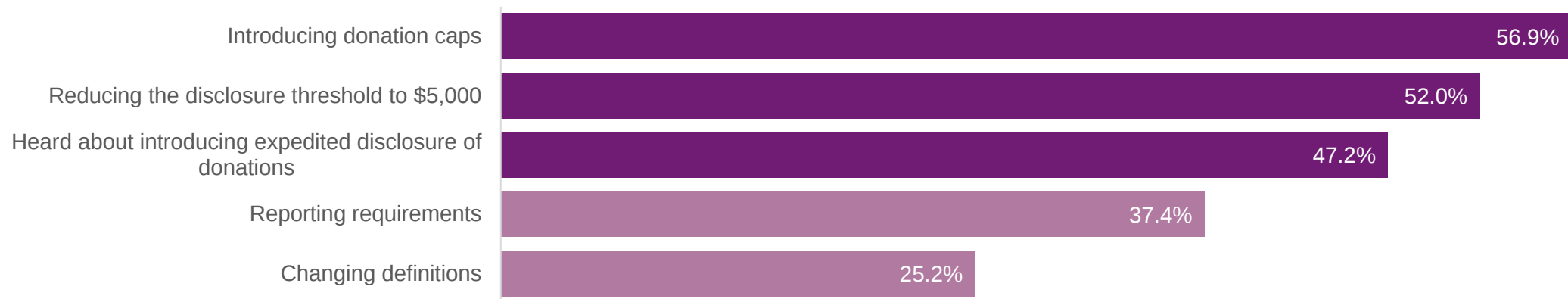
Q B1b Before today, how familiar were you with the changes to the requirements for federal political funding and disclosure (Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Reform) Act 2025)?

- Familiarity with funding and disclosure requirements prior to the reforms is generally low, with around six in ten respondents reporting that they were not at all or only slightly familiar with the framework.
- Many donors are engaging with the reforms from a relatively low baseline of prior familiarity, indicating a need for clear, practical guidance that does not assume detailed prior knowledge of the funding and disclosure system or reforms.

Awareness & Understanding

Key reforms

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 & Understanding

Perceived relevance of new funding and disclosure requirements

Donors showed limited clarity about which reforms are most relevant, with perceived importance driven more by anticipated reporting impact than by detailed understanding.

- Uncertain and deferred relevance: Many donors were unsure which requirements mattered most, often indicating relevance would only become clear if or when they next donate.
- Disclosure changes dominate attention: Where specific reforms were identified, lower disclosure thresholds and faster or more frequent reporting were most salient, reflecting concern about increased personal compliance obligations.
- Fairness concerns surface: A notable minority viewed the reforms as advantaging major parties over independents and grassroots campaigns, particularly in relation to donation and expenditure caps.
- Behavioural disengagement for some: A subset indicated the reforms would discourage future donations altogether, suggesting withdrawal rather than adaptation.
- Limited affirmative framing: Few donors explicitly referenced transparency benefits, with privacy and administrative burdens secondary to concerns about fairness and disclosure mechanics.
- Implication:
Perceived relevance is being shaped by compliance burden and equity considerations rather than a holistic understanding of the reforms, indicating a need for clearer, more practical communication about how changes apply in real-world donation scenarios.

Awareness & Understanding

Stakeholder-identified priorities within the reform package

Reducing the disclosure threshold

"I generally was under the reporting threshold, reducing the threshold to \$5k will now likely require me to report every year."

"For me, the requirement to have a lower threshold for disclosure would be a minor disincentive to donate as much to my political party."

Triggers of disclosure requirements

"The point at which I must disclose and the amount of donation/s that trigger a disclosure"

Donation caps

"The limitations on the amount we can donate and the spending caps by independent candidates."

"Restriction on donations over the whole electoral cycle"

"Donation and expenditure caps and lower disclosure thresholds"

- Donors mention various aspects of the changes as the most relevant to them – reduced disclosure threshold, donation and expenditure caps, and changes to the reporting.
- Several donors question the fairness of the changes suggesting that they favour major parties.

Expedited disclosures and real-time reporting

"Requirements on donor to comply with real time compliance."

"Requirement for real-time disclosure (rather than annual) and lower disclosure threshold."

Other issues – questioning fairness of the new rules

"Independents rules versus Political Party rules"

"Changes strongly benefit major parties (Labor, Lib/Nats) over Independents and allows major parties to obtain much greater funding for each election cycle while restricting funding available to Independents. This effectively discriminates against my preferred political candidates."

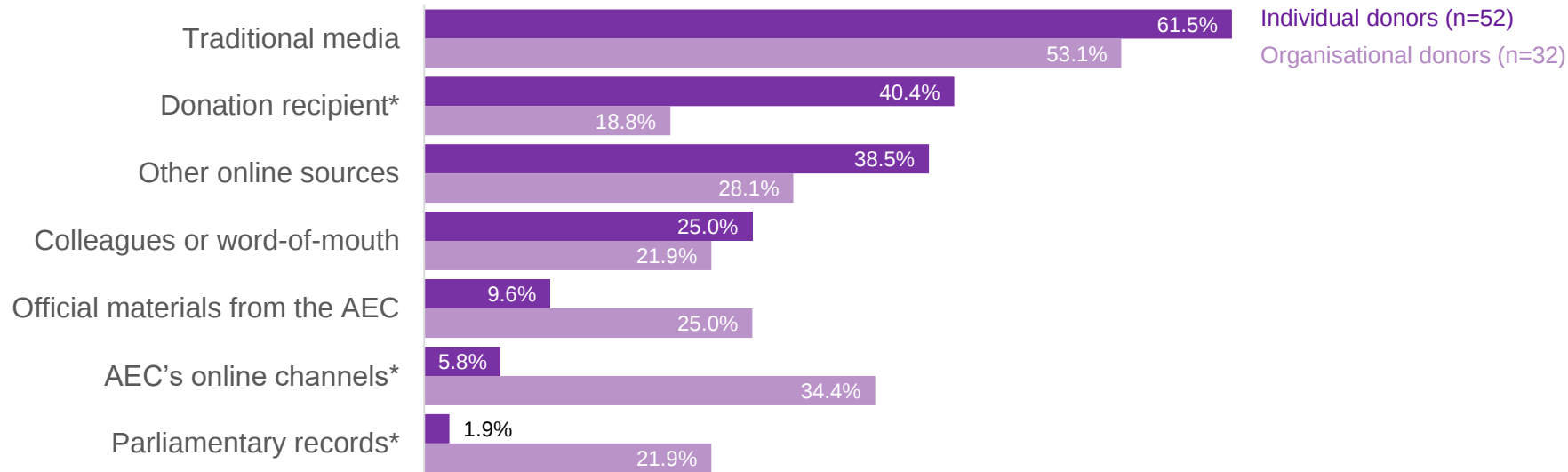
"I donate to community independents, both directly and via climate 200. These new laws are designed to give advantage to established political parties and significant disadvantage to independents"

*Base: Group B respondents who are at least slightly familiar with the changes (n=79)
Q B1c Which of the new requirements is most relevant or important to you or your organisation?*

Awareness & Understanding

Information sources

Donors were most likely to have heard about the changes through external and informal channels



Base: Individual donors and organisation donors aware of upcoming changes (n=126)

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

*Difference between individual and organisational donors is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$)

- Awareness is primarily driven by external channels, particularly traditional media and other online sources, with informal networks (colleagues or word-of-mouth) also playing a substantial role, especially for individual donors.
- Direct AEC channels have lower reach, particularly among individual donors, while organisational donors are more likely to cite AEC online channels and official materials as information sources.
- Information pathways differ by donor type, suggesting that a single communication approach is unlikely to reach all stakeholders effectively.

Awareness & Understanding

Reasons for not accessing AEC official materials

Non-use of AEC materials primarily reflects timing and perceived relevance, rather than resistance to the reforms themselves.

- No immediate need to engage
Most respondents had not accessed AEC materials because the changes were not yet applicable, including those not currently donating, below disclosure thresholds, or waiting until closer to commencement or the next election.
- Deferred and delegated engagement
Many indicated they would consult AEC materials only when required, relying in the interim on accountants, lawyers, political parties, advocacy organisations, or mainstream media.
- Awareness and accessibility gaps
A smaller group were unaware the materials existed or expected more proactive communication from the AEC. Some also cited usability issues or difficulty navigating government documentation.
- Active disengagement among a minority
A subset expressed disengagement, including dismissing the need to access materials or indicating they no longer intend to donate.

Awareness & Understanding

Reasons for not accessing AEC official materials or online channels

Too early to worry about the changes

“Because it doesn't become effective until 1 July 2026 - so accessing AEC material so we are compliant from 1 July will be a task for the first half of this year.”

“I guess I'm waiting for them to come into force”

Lack of awareness about the changes

“We have not been prompted by the AEC - there hasn't been much proactivity.”

“Didn't even realise they existed plus I'm an individual and only look at this basically every federal election.”

No need for it (no impact of changes)

“At this stage, I haven't seen enough need to follow up the recent changes. I expect that relatively little will change for me. The changes that do take place would easily be worked out mainly with my political party, but also with the A.E.C. as needed.”

Prefers receive information from other sources

“Sufficient information for my purposes in mainstream news organisations (eg ABC).”

“Not yet needed, but I have followed the debate closely and am involved with some democracy focussed civil society organisations who have kept me well briefed.”

“I'm just a private donor so rely on the political party I support to guide me.”

“I thought I had heard sufficiently about the changes elsewhere.”

Base: Group B respondents who haven't accessed AEC official materials or channels (n=59)

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?”

Awareness & Understanding

Areas where donors require the most information about the new requirements

Overall process and requirements

“All of the requirements. Why do they have to be so complex? Why am I, as an individual, not allowed to give my money to political parties or candidates who represent my values?”

“Detailed info on requirements for independent candidates.”

“Expedited disclosure will need more clarity on whether the entity donated to will submit, and better clarity within the submission form. How to fill it out. I have not had all the information I’ve needed in the past, and I have been told they would submit for me, but they haven’t always done so promptly.”

“How the reporting obligations interact with state donations. I only had to fill out an AEC disclosure because I had donated to a political party that made both a federal and state disclosure. I had not made a federal donation but I still had to do the paperwork.”

Donation and expenditure caps

“How do associate entities work? If there are multiple entities related to one party? How does the cap by year and electoral cycle work?”

“Donation limits, candidate expenditure limits”

“Caps on amount of donation, i.e. how is it counted if you donate to more than one branch of the national party?”

” Maximising contribution to individual candidates legally”

Expedited disclosure processes

“Expedited disclosure requirements, donation caps”

“How donations will be processed in real time”

“The range of different disclosure - parties, candidates, third parties and timing of disclosure”

“Immediate disclosures, the overlap between state portals and AEC”

Base: Group B respondents who have heard about the recent changes (n=83)

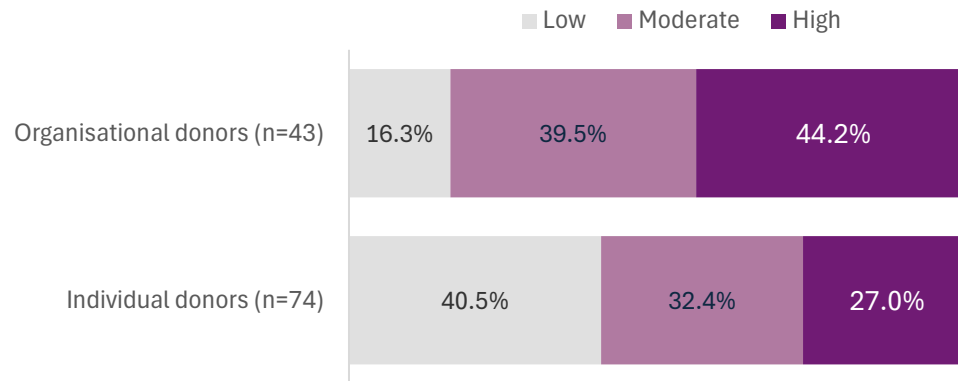
Q B3b. “Which of the new requirements do you feel you will need the most information about?”

5.2 Confidence and Preparedness

Clarity, Confidence & Preparedness

Existing requirements

Most donors report at least moderate clarity, though clarity is higher among organisational donors

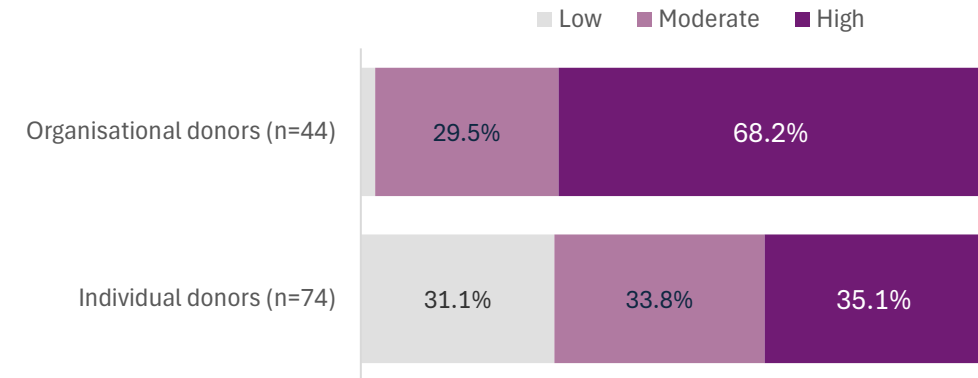


Base: Individual and Organisational Donors

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

*Differences between individual and organisational donors are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Confidence to comply is relatively high overall, particularly among organisational donors



Base: Individual and Organisational Donors

Q A2. How confident are you in your/your organisation's ability to comply with the existing federal political funding and disclosure requirements?

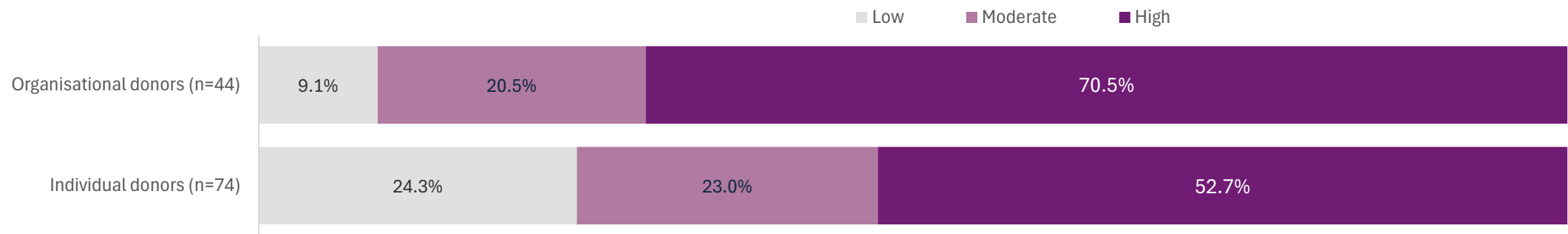
*Differences between individual and organisational donors are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

- Clarity is generally moderate or high but uneven with a substantial minority of individual donors (40.5%) reporting low clarity compared with organisational donors (16.3%).
- Confidence exceeds clarity: a larger proportion of donors reporting being at least moderately confident in their ability to comply than report high clarity about the scheme itself, suggesting familiarity with processes even where understanding is incomplete.
- This pattern suggests compliance has become proceduralised over time: stakeholders appear to have developed practical ways of meeting requirements, particularly within organisations, even where aspects of the scheme remain complex or open to interpretation. The confidence gap between individual and organisational donors indicates that individual donors may benefit most from reassurance and practical guidance, rather than additional technical detail.

Clarity, Confidence & Preparedness

Understanding the purpose of disclosure requirements

Understanding of the purpose of political donation disclosure requirements is stronger among organisational donors than individual donors



Base: Individual and Organisational Donors

Q xA4. How well do you understand the purpose of political donation disclosure requirements?

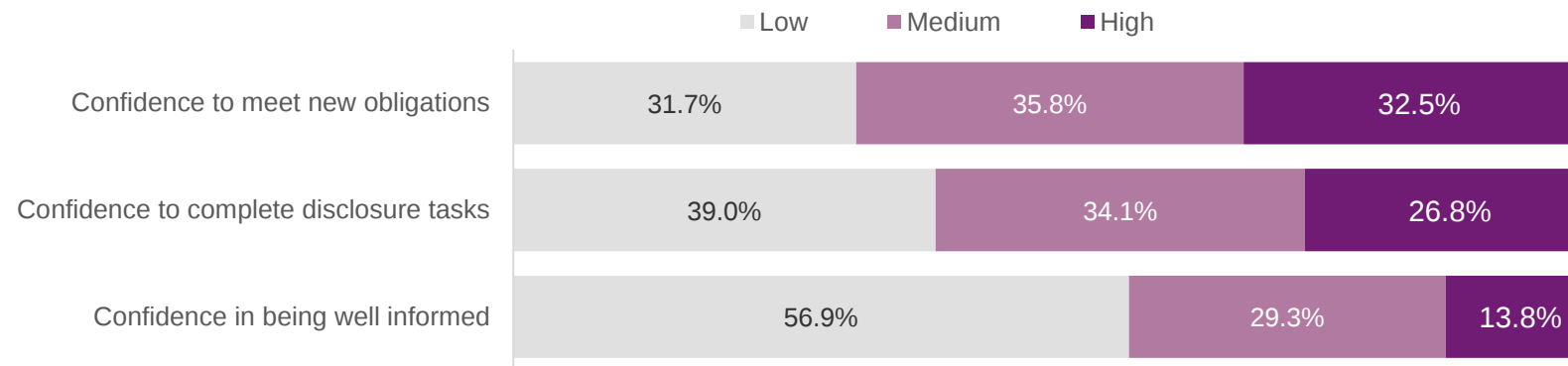
*Differences between individual and organisational donors are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

- Organisational donors report stronger understanding of the purpose of disclosure requirements, with around 71% indicating high understanding, compared with 53% of individual donors.
- Individual donors are more likely to report lower or moderate understanding, with 47% falling into low or moderate understanding overall, compared with 29% of organisational donors.
- This gap suggests that understanding of the intent behind disclosure is more embedded among organisational donors, likely reflecting greater exposure to compliance frameworks, while individual donors may benefit from clearer communication about why disclosure is required and what it seeks to achieve.

Clarity, Confidence & Preparedness

Confidence responding to changes

Stakeholders are more confident in their ability to meet new obligations than they are about being informed of those requirements and their current preparedness to complete disclosure tasks



Base: Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

Q Ex2. How confident are you about the following aspects of meeting the new requirements?

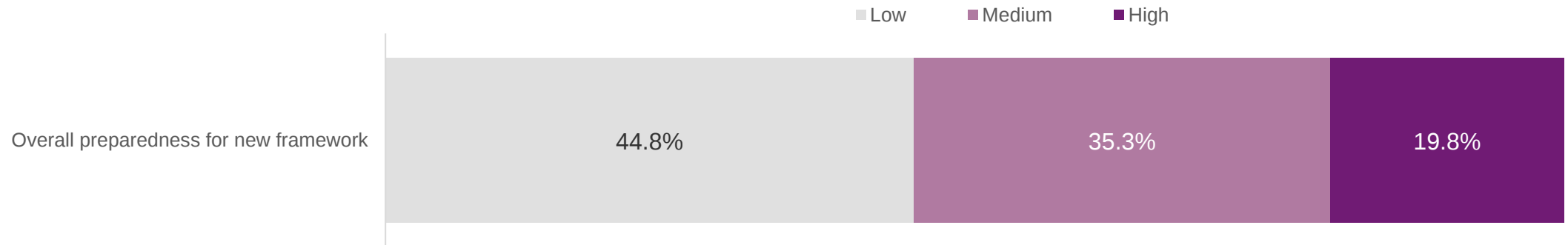
No statistically significant differences by donor type ($p > .05$)

- Confidence is mixed rather than strong, with around one-third reporting moderate confidence across all three measures (29–36%).
- High confidence is limited (27–33%), while a sizeable minority report low confidence, particularly in feeling well informed (57% low).
- Donors are engaging with the new requirements, but many lack assurance and clarity, pointing to a need for confidence-building support rather than basic awareness.

Clarity, Confidence & Preparedness

Confidence to Meet New Requirements

Donors reported mixed preparedness for the new funding and disclosure framework, with confidence concentrated in the middle rather than at high levels



Base: Base: All Group B respondents (n=116; 7 unsure excluded)

Q C10. How prepared do you feel you or your organisation are to comply with the new funding and disclosure requirements?

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

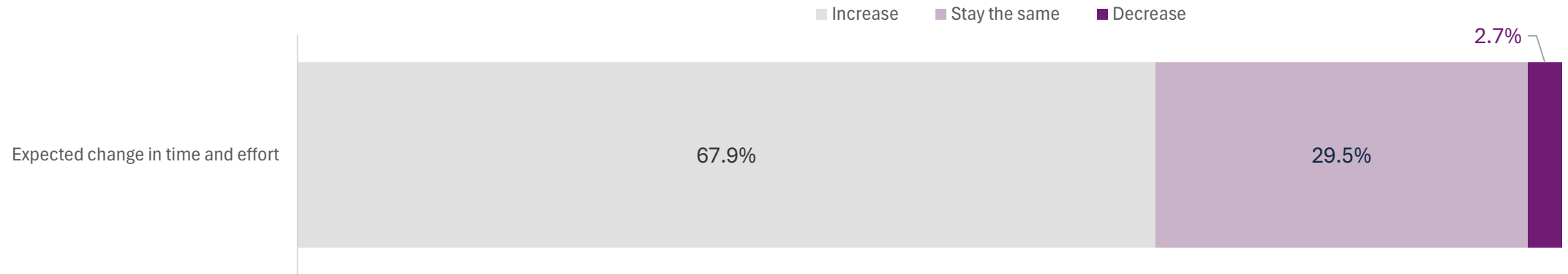
- Fewer than one in five stakeholders (19.8%) feel highly prepared for the new requirements, while nearly half (44.8%) report low preparedness.
- A substantial proportion (35.3%) sit at a moderate level of preparedness, indicating partial readiness rather than full confidence.
- Preparedness is uneven and still developing, suggesting that many donors may require additional guidance and reassurance as the new framework approaches implementation.

5.3 Anticipated Challenges and Risks

Anticipated Challenges and Risks

Expected Impact on Time and Effort

Most donors expect the new funding and disclosure requirements to increase the time and effort required to comply



Base: Base: All Group B respondents (n=116); 7 unsure excluded

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?

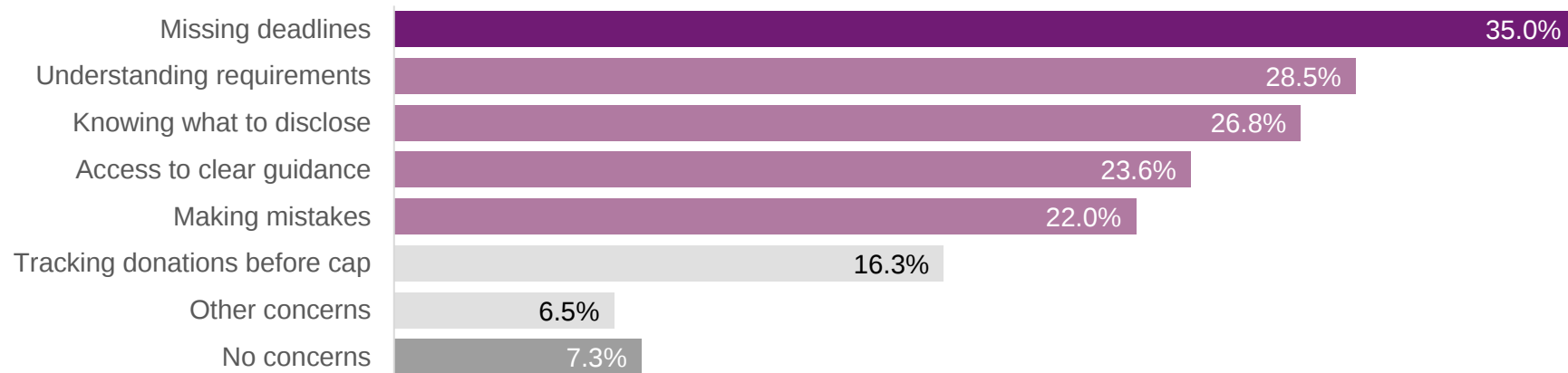
No statistically significant differences by donor type ($p > .05$)

- Around two-thirds of donors (67.9%) expect the time and effort required to comply to increase under the new framework.
- Nearly one-third (29.5%) expect no change, while very few (2.7%) anticipate a decrease in effort.
- Anticipated increases in compliance effort represent a key perceived risk, highlighting the importance of efficient systems, clear processes, and practical guidance to minimise administrative burden.

Anticipated Challenges and Risks

Key Areas of Concern

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.

Anticipated Challenges & Support Needs

Areas requiring the most support from the AEC and preferred forms of support

Interpreting new requirements in practice

“A summary of the new law & its requirements as well as knowing what mistakes can be made & the penalties for making mistakes or not doing the disclosure on time”

“Timing of disclosures and periods in which limits apply (ie electoral term, financial year, etc)”

“Deadlines, thresholds, best practice in terms of tracking, how information flows between parties”

“Knowing when the disclosure periods are and when any deadlines are, and if I can still report online in much the same manner as before - albeit changes to the timing and perhaps to the donation data.”

Clear, simple information

“Clarity around obligations, ensuring we have all the information we need from the candidate and which of us or the candidate will submit.”

“Checklist guidance.”

“Provide information in clear English without too much jargon”

“Clear advice on what we need to disclose and when. Including managing donations to multiple State branches of a political party (federal campaign accounts) and multiple candidates in individual campaign accounts.”

“Key dates, thresholds and caps.”

“The new caps and group definitions”

Preferred forms of support – AEC employees

“When we try to complete the online forms, it is really helpful to us to be able to contact someone knowledgeable at the AEC for advice. Some AEC employees are helpful and informative, others less so.”

“There needs to be access to a person to discuss issues. I have had a very frustrating time trying to find someone with sufficient knowledge to answer questions at AEC. It appeared to me that only a handful of people are knowledgeable, and others have little experience or knowledge.”

“Email support”

Preferred forms of support – AEC website or emails

“A modern website. The online reporting program is antiquated and confusing to use.”

“Clear step by step information (guides) on the website”

“Correct disclosure , timely and accurate with correct examples provided.”

“Reminder emails about obligations and where to access disclosure documents”

Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

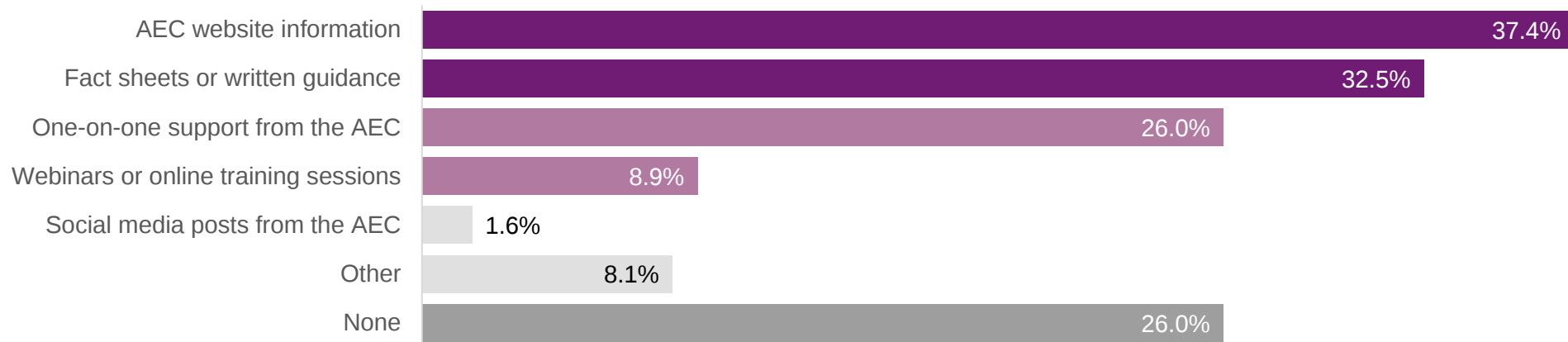
Q C11. “Looking ahead to the new requirements, which areas do you feel you will need the most support from the AEC to understand or comply?”

5.3 Communication and Education Preferences

Communication and Education Preferences

Past use of AEC guidance and support

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)

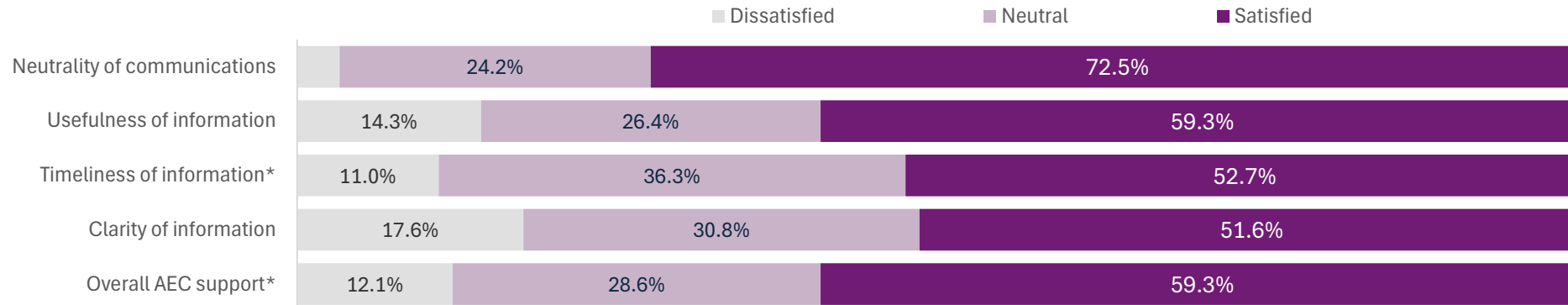
Q C1. In the past 12 months, which types of AEC guidance or support have you or your organisation used to understand or meet your federal funding and disclosure obligations?

- 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).

Communication and Education Preferences

Satisfaction with AEC support among those who used any guidance

Satisfaction is strongest for neutrality and usefulness, while clarity and timeliness are considered weaker



Base: Group B respondents that had used AEC guidance (n=91)

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?

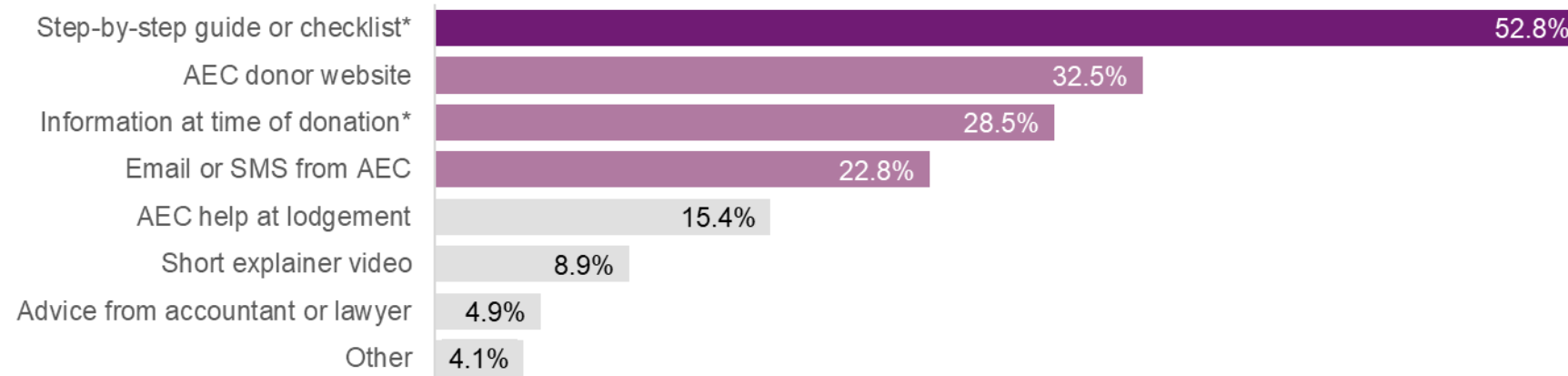
*Satisfaction with timeliness and overall support is higher among organisational respondents than individual donors ($p < 0.05$).

- Trust in AEC communications is strong once guidance is accessed, particularly in relation to neutrality of tone (73% satisfied) and perceived usefulness (59%).
- Clarity and timeliness lag behind, with around one-third of users reporting neutral views, suggesting hesitation rather than dissatisfaction.
- For the AEC, the opportunity lies in reducing uncertainty at the point of use, helping donors move from “generally satisfied” to confident in applying the guidance correctly and on time.

Communication and Education Preferences

Preferred Ways to Learn

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 ($p < .05$).

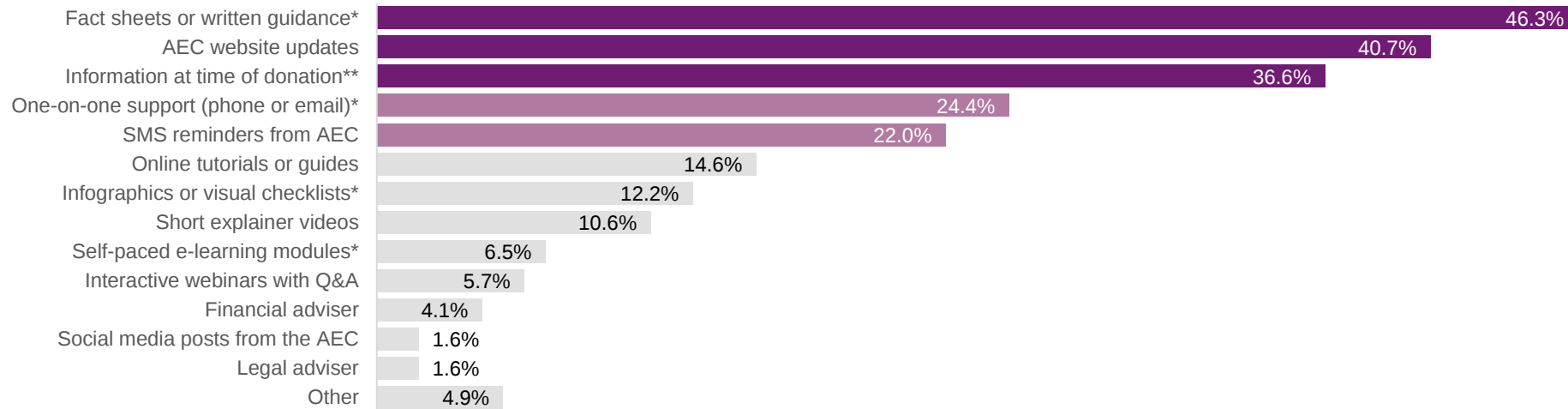
Preference for receiving information at the time of donation is higher among individual donors than organisational donors ($p < .05$).

- 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.

Communication and Education Preferences

Preferred Channels

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 ($p < .05$).

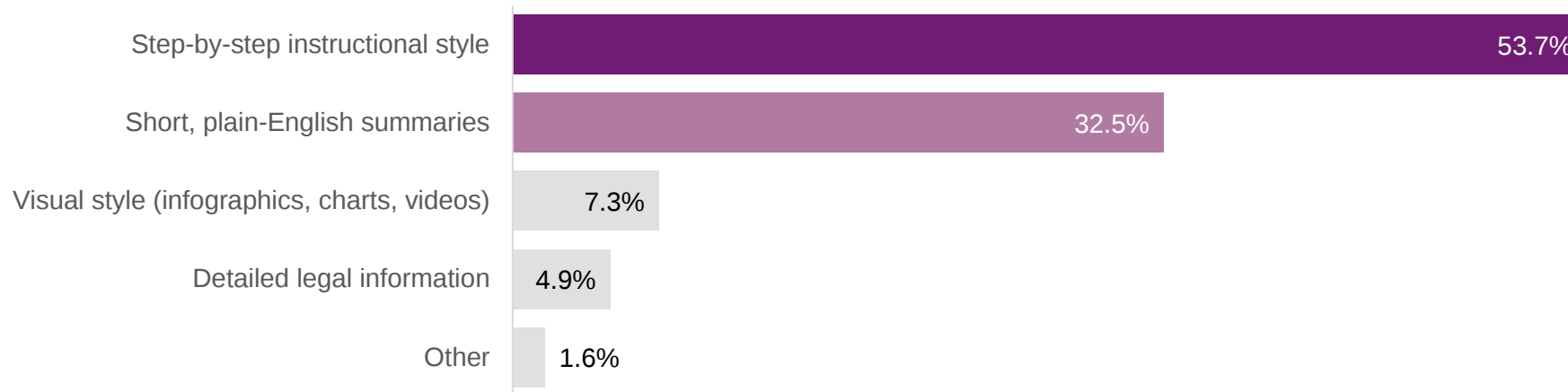
**Preference is higher among individual donors than organisational donors ($p < .05$).

- 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.

Communication and Education Preferences

Preferred Presentation Style

Clear, staged instructions are favoured over detailed legal explanations



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?

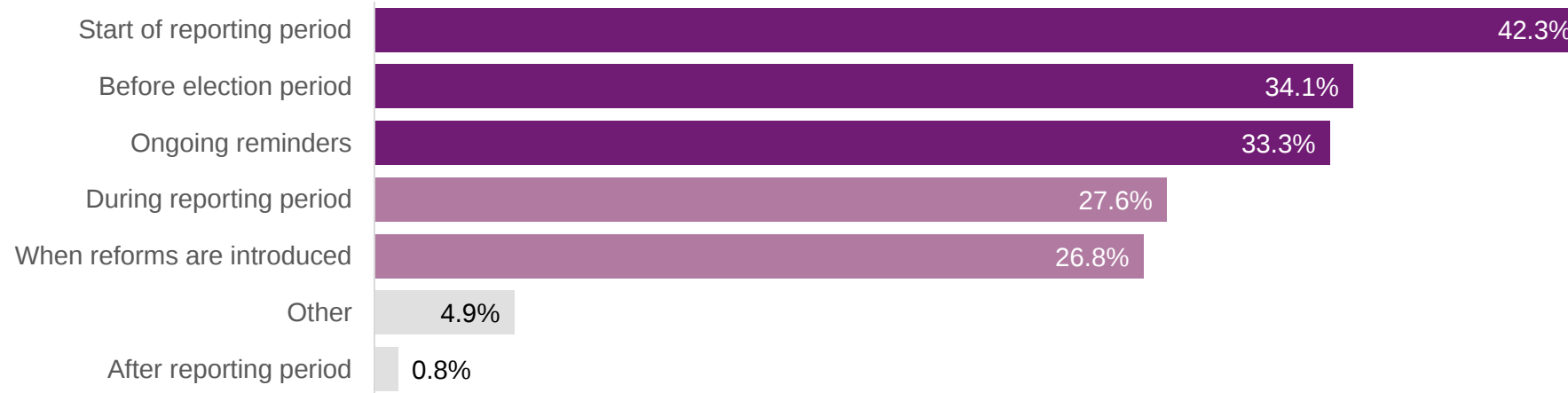
No statistically significant differences by donor type ($p > .05$)

- 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.

Communication and Education Preferences

Timing of Information

Donors want guidance aligned to reporting milestones



Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

Q C8. When would it be most useful for you to receive information and guidance about funding and disclosure obligations?

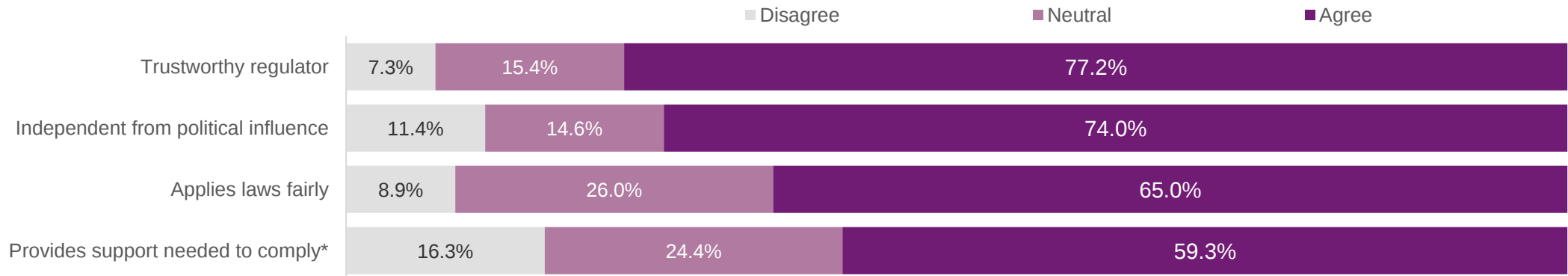
No statistically significant differences by donor type ($p > .05$)

- Information is most valued at key moments in the reporting cycle, particularly at the start of the reporting period (42%) and ahead of election periods (34%), rather than after reporting has concluded.
- Ongoing reminders (33%) also rate highly, indicating donors want reinforcement across the cycle rather than one-off communications tied only to reforms or deadlines.
- For the AEC, this suggests guidance is most effective when it is timed to decision points and key milestones, combining early prompts with light-touch reminders to support correct action throughout the reporting period.

Communication and Education Preferences

Trust in AEC Guidance

High trust in the AEC's independence and fairness, with weaker confidence in practical support.



Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

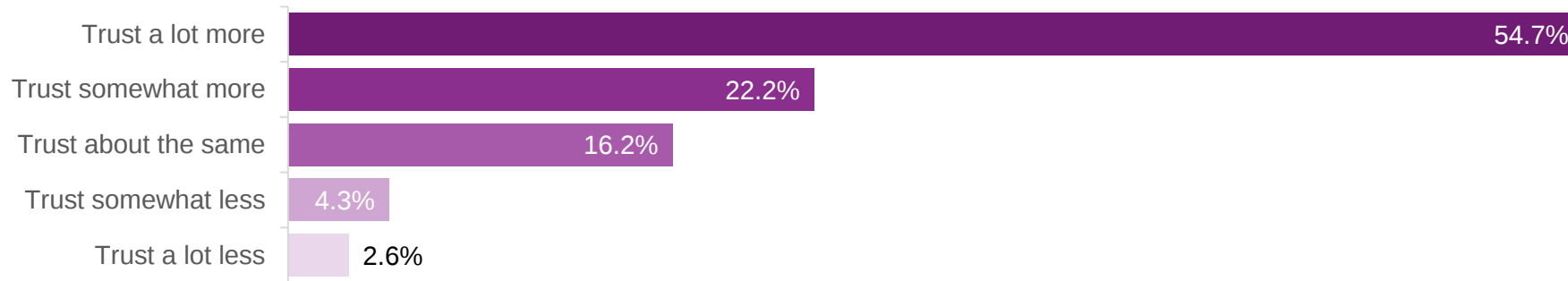
Q A3. Thinking about the AEC, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? *Belief that the AEC provides support needed to comply was higher among organisational respondents than individual donors ($p < .05$)

- Trust in the AEC's independence, fairness and role as a regulator is very strong, with around three-quarters agreeing the AEC is independent (74%) and trustworthy (77%).
- Confidence is less settled around practical support (59%), with one-quarter neutral (24%) and around one-in-six (16%) disagreeing that the AEC provides the support they need to comply. This belief was more prevalent in individual donors than organisational donors.
- The AEC's credibility as an impartial regulator is well established; the opportunity lies in translating that institutional trust into confidence at the point of compliance, by strengthening how support is experienced in practice rather than reinforcing legitimacy or authority.

Communication and Education Preferences

Trust in AEC Guidance

AEC guidance is trusted more than other information sources



*Base: All Group B respondents (n=117); excludes 6 unsure
Q C8. Compared to other sources of information about funding and disclosure obligations (e.g. colleagues, media, political networks), how much do you trust AEC guidance?
No statistically significant differences by donor type (p>.05)*

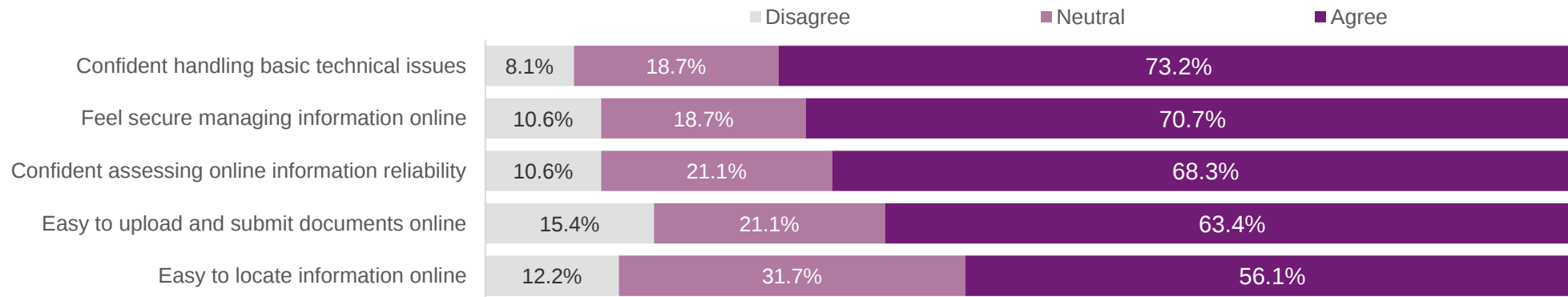
- Trust in AEC guidance is high relative to other sources, with over half saying they trust it a lot more than alternatives (55%).
- Low levels of comparative distrust suggest the AEC remains the primary authority for funding and disclosure guidance.
- The minority who see the AEC as “about the same” as other sources may still cross-check information, pointing to an opportunity to reinforce AEC guidance as the definitive reference.

5.4 ICT & Systems

ICT & Systems Findings

Digital Capability and Confidence

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



Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

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

- Most donors report confidence across core digital tasks, including finding information, assessing reliability, and managing information securely, with agreement typically above 60%.
- Confidence is highest for handling technical issues and uploading/submitting documents, though a meaningful minority remain neutral, indicating uncertainty rather than difficulty.
- The digital experience works for most users, but neutral responses point to opportunities to reduce hesitation, particularly through clearer guidance and reassurance at task-heavy moments, rather than major system changes.

ICT & Systems Findings

Awareness and familiarity with the Transparency Register

Awareness of the Transparency Register is low, and familiarity is limited

- Awareness of the Transparency Register is limited, with only **33%** of donors having heard of it, and **61%** saying they have not.
- Familiarity is **very low overall: 67%** say they are not at all familiar, and fewer than 15% describe themselves as very or extremely familiar.
- Low awareness and familiarity suggest the Transparency Register is not yet front-of-mind for most donors, limiting its role as a proactive information source rather than a reactive or compliance-driven tool.

Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

ICT & Systems Findings

Use of the Transparency Register among those aware

Use of the Transparency Register is infrequent and largely transactional

- Use is **infrequent**: around **71%** use the Register rarely or never, typically only during election periods
- When used, the Register is primarily accessed **to check personal donation details (84%)**, compare donations (47%), or verify accuracy (41%), rather than for broader civic or compliance purposes.
- The Transparency Register is currently used as a verification tool, not a routine reference point, suggesting opportunities to better signal its relevance outside election cycles and beyond individual record-checking.

Base: Donors who have heard of the Transparency Register (n=41)

ICT & Systems Findings

Awareness and uptake of eReturns

eReturns is established, but awareness gaps remain

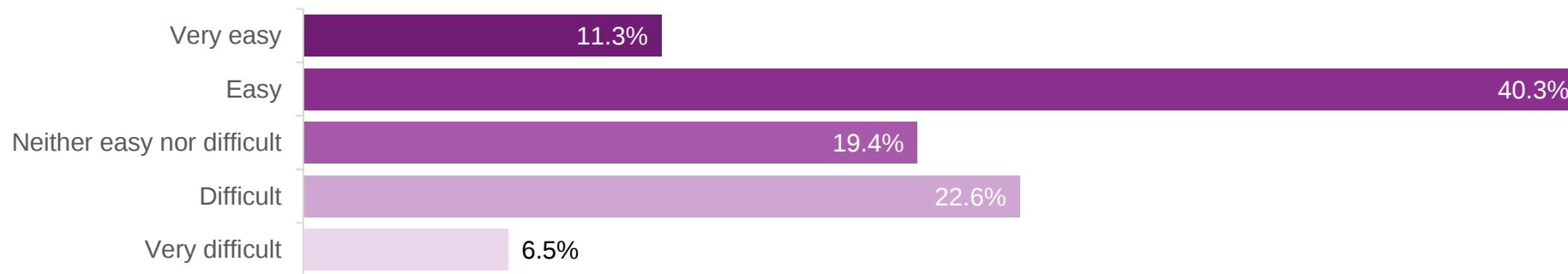
- Around half of donors have used eReturns (50%), while a further quarter have either not heard of it or are unsure (36% combined).
- Lack of awareness remains material, particularly among individual donors, where nearly one-third report not having heard of eReturns.
- eReturns is established among experienced users, but awareness gaps persist, suggesting that some donors may still be operating outside the primary digital pathway.

Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

ICT & Systems Findings

Overall ease of use

eReturns is usable, but not consistently easy



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 ($p < .05$)

- Among users, experience is mixed: around half describe eReturns as very easy/easy (52%), while over a quarter find it very difficult/difficult (29%)
- eReturns broadly works for those familiar with it, but the experience is not consistently smooth, leaving room to reduce friction and uncertainty for less confident users.

ICT & Systems Findings

Task-level experience and need for assistance

Core tasks work, but support is still needed for complexity

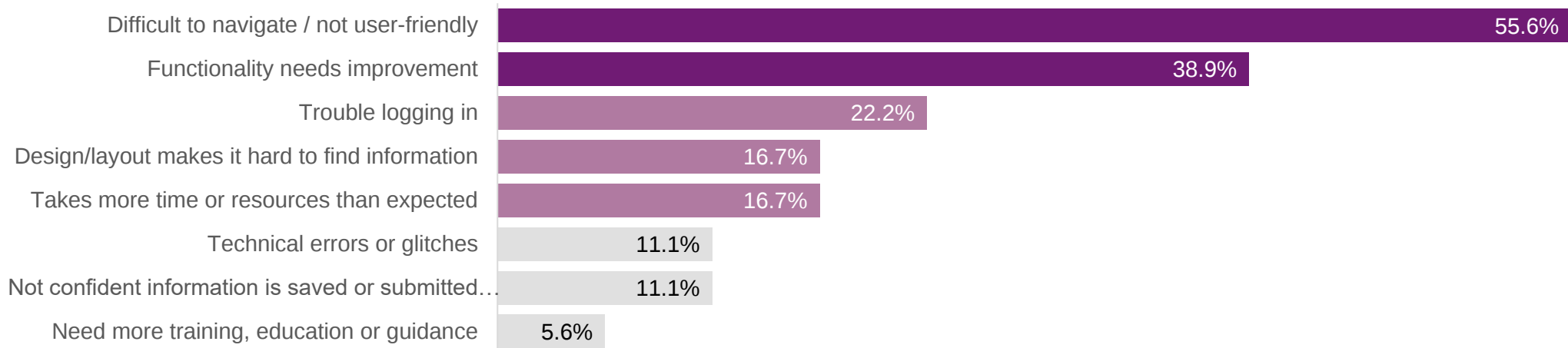
- Core tasks such as logging in, entering information, and submitting returns are generally rated as **easy (around 55–65%)**, though **neutral or difficult ratings** still account for 25–40% across most tasks.
- More complex or less frequent actions, such as amending returns or returning to in-progress 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.
- Routine workflows are working for most users, but confidence drops for more complex tasks; reliance on informal support points to an opportunity to strengthen in-system guidance and reassurance at critical moments.

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

ICT & Systems Findings

Challenges experienced when using eReturns

Usability and navigation issues are the primary sources of friction



Base: Base: Donors who found eReturns difficult (n=18)

Q D11. Which aspects of eReturns created challenges for you?

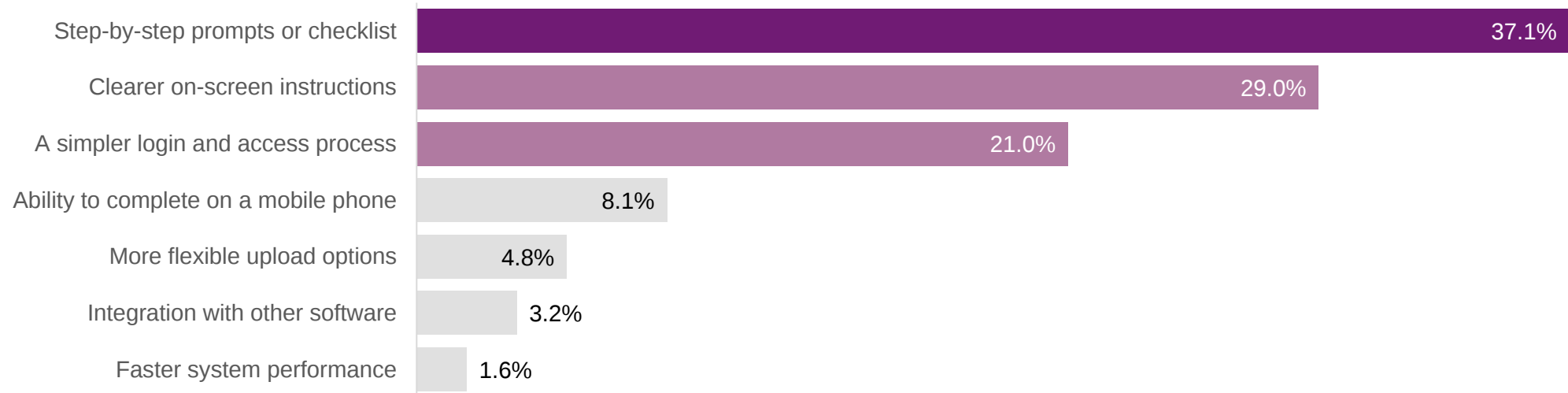
No statistically significant differences by donor type (p>.05)

- Over half of users who experienced difficulties describe eReturns as hard to navigate or not user-friendly (56%), with a further 39% saying core functionality needs improvement.
- Issues relating to confidence and effort are present for a smaller group, including uncertainty about whether information was saved or submitted correctly (11%) and the system taking more time than expected (17%).
- Problems are driven less by system reliability and more by how users move through the system and receive reassurance, pointing to a need for clearer structure, feedback, and guidance during lodgement.

ICT & Systems Findings

eReturns Improvements

Users want clearer guidance rather than new functionality



*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 ($p>.05$)*

- 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.

ICT & Systems Findings

Improving eReturns usability - quotations

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.”

ICT & Systems Findings

Suggestions for Improvement

Users most often suggest usability and guidance improvements to eReturns

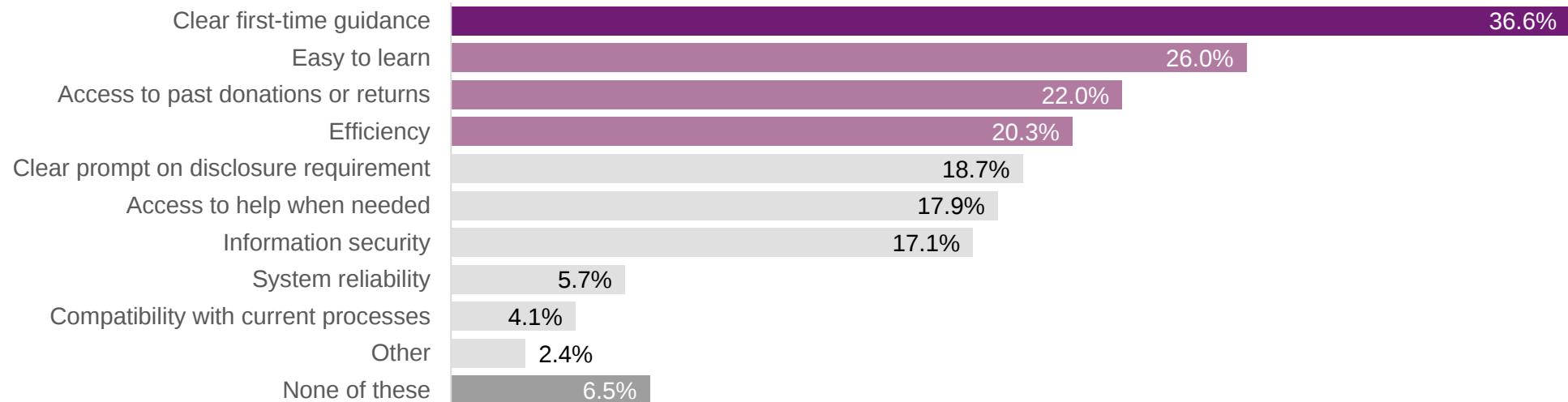
Suggested improvements to eReturns focus on usability, clarity, and reducing administrative effort rather than changes to disclosure rules.

- **Outdated interface and usability:** Many respondents described eReturns as visually outdated and not user-friendly, and called for a more modern interface with clearer layout and navigation.
- **Guidance and structural clarity:** Confusion was commonly reported around categories, definitions, disclosure periods, caps, and GST treatment. Respondents wanted clearer upfront explanations, step-by-step prompts, examples, and integrated help.
- **Process efficiency and error correction:** Friction points included logging in, repeated data entry, and correcting mistakes. Suggested improvements included easier login, editing returns post-lodgement, previewing submissions, bulk uploads, and auto-population of data.
- **Minority views:** Some respondents reported no issues once familiar with the system, while others were unsure or unable to comment due to limited use.
- Improving front-end design, guidance, and automation is likely to reduce user burden and errors, particularly for infrequent or first-time users.

ICT & Systems Findings

Drivers of confidence in the new online service

Confidence is driven by guidance and clarity, not system mechanics



Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

Q D11. 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?

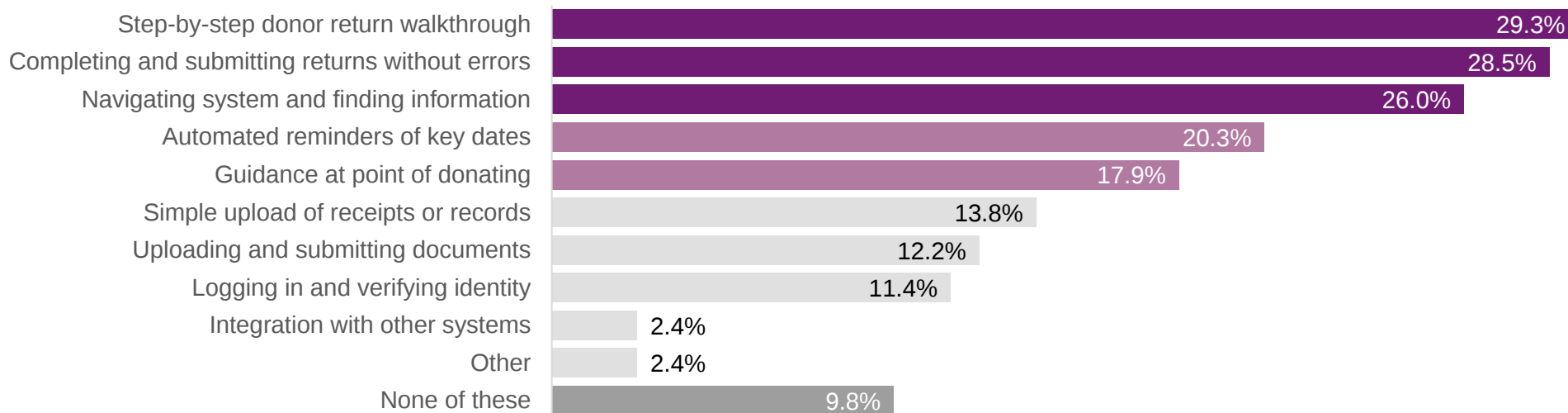
No statistically significant differences by donor type ($p > .05$)

- Clear first-time guidance (37%) is the strongest driver of readiness, ahead of ease of learning (26%) and efficiency (20%).
- Trust fundamentals such as information security (17%) and access to help when needed (18%) matter, but are secondary to knowing what to do and when.
- Users are not seeking a technically impressive system; they want early orientation, clear prompts, and reassurance that they are doing the right thing from the outset.

ICT & Systems Findings

Most critical steps in the online service

Error-free completion and navigation matter more than access points



Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

Q D12. What would make it easier for you to lodge returns?

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

- The most critical steps relate to step-by-step walkthroughs (29%), completing and submitting returns without errors (29%) and finding information within the system (26%).
- Supporting structures such as step-by-step walkthroughs (29%), automated reminders (20%) and guidance at the point of donating (18%) are valued more than login or upload mechanics.
- Success is defined by confidence at submission, not just entry into the system; users want help staying on track all the way through, not just getting started.

ICT & Systems Findings

Desired features in the new online service

Automation and guided progress are preferred over advanced tools

- **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.

Base: All Group B respondents (n=123)

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...?

6. Major Early Themes

Summary of Early Themes

- **Awareness is relatively low and understanding is uneven.**

Donors are most likely to be aware of reforms that directly affect them, such as donation caps and disclosure thresholds, but awareness is not widespread and drops sharply for more detailed or procedural changes. Familiarity is often high level rather than detailed, with many donors yet to understand how the reforms will apply in practice. This suggests that understanding is likely to develop closer to points of action, rather than in advance.

- **Engagement with guidance is episodic and driven by reporting events.**

Interaction with information and support tends to increase around lodgement and deadlines rather than occurring as ongoing preparation. This places greater importance on guidance that is timely, clearly signposted, and available at the point decisions are being made.

- **Routine tasks are functioning, while less frequent actions create uncertainty.**

Most donors find core tasks such as logging in, entering information, and submitting returns straightforward. Confidence drops for less common activities, including amending returns or resuming incomplete work. A substantial minority report needing help at least occasionally, indicating friction around exceptions and reassurance rather than basic use.

- **Confidence is shaped more by clarity than by system performance**

Challenges relate primarily to navigation, orientation, and visibility of progress rather than speed or technical reliability. Donors respond more strongly to knowing what is required, what has been completed, and whether information has been submitted correctly than to advanced system capability.

Summary of Early Themes

- **Donors value features that reduce effort and error over added complexity.**

Interest is highest in automation and guidance that simplify compliance, including single sign-on, reminders, and automated form completion. Expectations of benefit are modest, suggesting that practical improvements that reduce effort and increase certainty will matter more than large-scale change.

7. Next Steps

Next Steps

- **Deepen analysis by donor context and reporting role**
Examine findings by donor type, reporting responsibility, frequency of use, and organisational context to identify where confidence, support needs, and risk differ most across donor cohorts.
- **Refine communication and system priorities for donors**
Use subgroup insights to inform the timing and emphasis of donor communications and guidance, with a focus on early clarity, point-of-action prompts, and reducing uncertainty around reporting obligations.
- **Translate findings into practical system and guidance requirements**
Convert evidence into clear, prioritised requirements for system design and support materials, focusing on usability, automation, and alignment with existing donor workflows to support confident and accurate compliance.