



FIRST LOOK:
2021 AMS/CRM SYSTEM
SELECTION SURVEY RESULTS



2021

www.501works.com
research@501works.com
703-459-9779

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Deirdre Reid, CAE
Freelance Writer

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Villy Savino
VP Technology Transformation

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Kathie Pugaczewski, CAE, CMP, QAS
Vice President Operations

PerByte

Nadine Witchel, FCPA, FCGA
Chief Executive Officer

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Vice President, Client Engagement

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DELIVERING TECHNOLOGY THAT WORKS FOR YOUR ASSOCIATION

501Works is an advanced software engineering, consulting, and solutions company with a deep knowledge of AMS/CMS systems, website delivery, systems integrations, data management and business applications. Our experience and knowledge is built in to our innovative products, including Mojo Middleware and Software Mage.

Why We Did This Survey

Selecting and implementing a new AMS/CRM can be painful and disruptive for associations and their staff. Even projects that end well have their bumps along the way. The decisions that are made set the foundation for functional and financial effect on business operations for years to come especially when you consider the number of staff, members, and systems that rely on the operability of the AMS/CRM. And it's not just organizations that are impacted by this process. Vendors and Consultants play an important part in system selection, from helping potential clients navigate the RFPs and system demos, to negotiating contracts that are favorable to all involved parties.

We realized from many discussions over the years that most organizations experience similar bumps in the road when it comes to identifying and selecting a new AMS/CRM software. Further discussions with Vendors and Consultants raised some interesting perspectives from the other side of the coin. Our goal with this survey was to give these key stakeholders the opportunity to highlight their system selection experiences so that we can bring to light solutions to build better processes and systems for all.

How To Use This Report

This report is our “first look” at the survey responses from our 237 participants. This report will allow readers to gain insight into what your association peers and Vendor and Consultant partners have been experiencing during system selection.



Survey Participant Groups

The survey targeted participants who have been involved in **AMS/CRM system selection** during their careers. Respondents were placed into participant groups based on their response to the first survey question asking them to self-identify as **Association Staff**, **Association Management Company Representatives**, **Vendors/Solution** providers, or **Consultants**. If the survey respondent fell outside of these groups but had experience with system selection, they were given the opportunity to provide their contact information for consideration for future research.

System Selection Timeline

Association Staff were categorized by having selected a system within the past 5 years (even if that system was not yet implemented) or in the process of selecting a system. Association Staff who identified as neither of those groups, specifically who selected a system six or more years ago or who were not preparing to go through system selection, were given the opportunity to provide their contact details for inclusion in future research. Five years was chosen as the boundary timeline for system selection respondents with the hope that the memory would be recent enough to be recalled for the survey but not too distant that significant details were forgotten. Respondents who were AMC Representatives who manage one organization at a time were given the same questionnaire as Association Staff.



Research Questions

The survey was driven by four research questions:

- Are the feelings of AMS/CRM selection participants positive, negative, or neutral towards the AMS selection process?
- What are the key factors driving the AMS/CRM selection participants' feelings towards the selection process?
- How would the creation of a standardized approach to AMS selection benefit selection participants?
- How would the automation/digitization of the selection process benefit selection participants?

Survey Overview

Participants answered between **14** and **35** survey questions depending on their participant group. The questions collected responses across several topics of interest including demographic information such as understanding the type of organization they work for or service, the roles they played or expect to play during system selection, their level of comfort with certain aspects of the system selection process, and their overall impressions of their experiences.

The survey questions also asked participants to share the reasons for their feelings about their experiences, share an overview of the processes they followed or plan to follow during system selection, identify what they would do differently with the process if faced with another system selection, and other insights about dealing with RFPs and system selection.

The survey, which ran from October 2021 to December 2021, received **237** responses representing more than **73** associations, **16** AMS/CRM solution providers, and **13** consulting groups.

SURVEY PARTICIPANT GROUPS



ASSOCIATION STAFF - 67% OF RESPONDENTS

159 Association employees participated in the survey. **45%** of the Association employee participants are in the process of searching for a new system. **38%** of Association respondents selected a system within the past 5 years.



VENDOR - 14% OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

34 Vendor employees representing more than **16** AMS/CRM solutions



CONSULTANT - 9% OF RESPONDENTS

22 Consultants representing **13** consulting organizations



ASSOCIATION MANAGEMENT COMPANY REPRESENTATIVE - 9% OF RESPONDENTS

19 AMC reps. who manage one organization (32%) responded to the same survey questions as the Association Staff. AMC rep. managers of multiple organizations (68%) were redirected into the Other Interested Participants category.



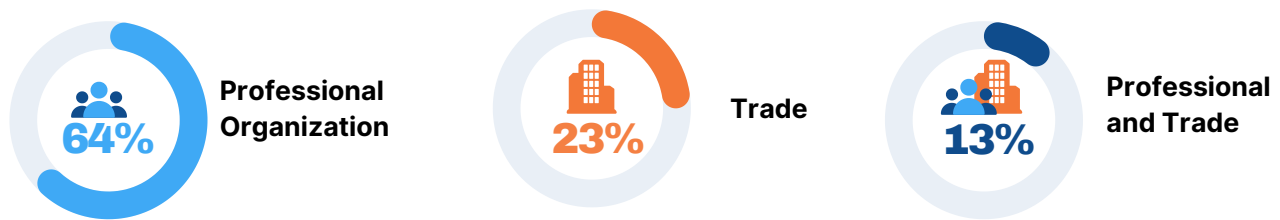
OTHER INTERESTED PARTICIPANTS

Survey respondents with experience in the system selection process who fell outside of the targeted participant groups were given the opportunity to share their contact information for inclusion in a future survey. This included Association Staff who completed selections more than 5 years ago or who are preparing for system selection in the near future (**17%** of Association Staff survey respondents).

ASSOCIATION STAFF DEMOGRAPHICS

Fig.1

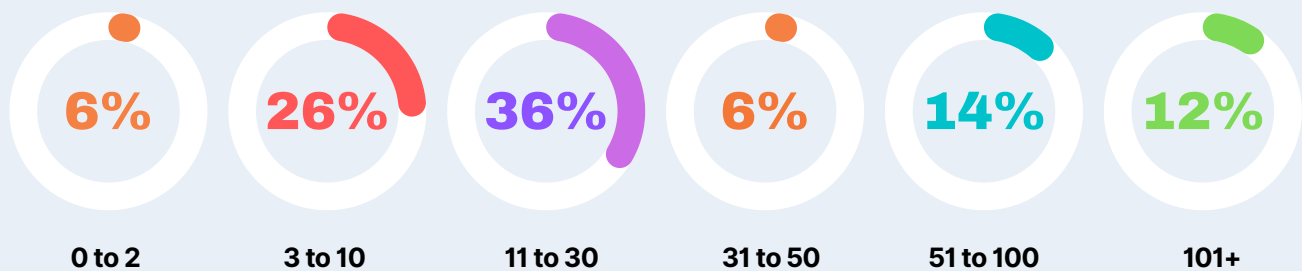
Organization Type



*Fewer than 1% of respondents identified "Other" as their Organization Type.

Fig.2

Number of Employees at Association Staff Organizations



Most Association Staff respondents are based at organizations with 3 to 30 staff.

Fig.3

Length of Time on Legacy AMS/CRM

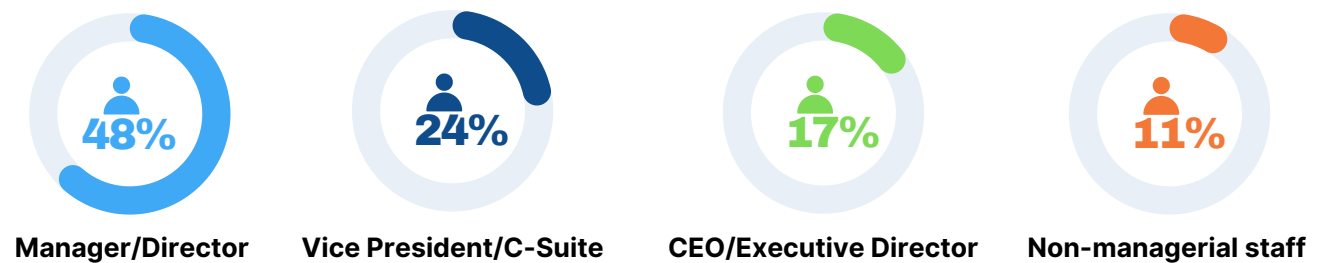


Most respondents reported organizations keeping the legacy system for up to 10 years.

ASSOCIATION STAFF PRIMARY FUNCTIONS AND DEPARTMENTS AT ORGANIZATIONS

Fig.4

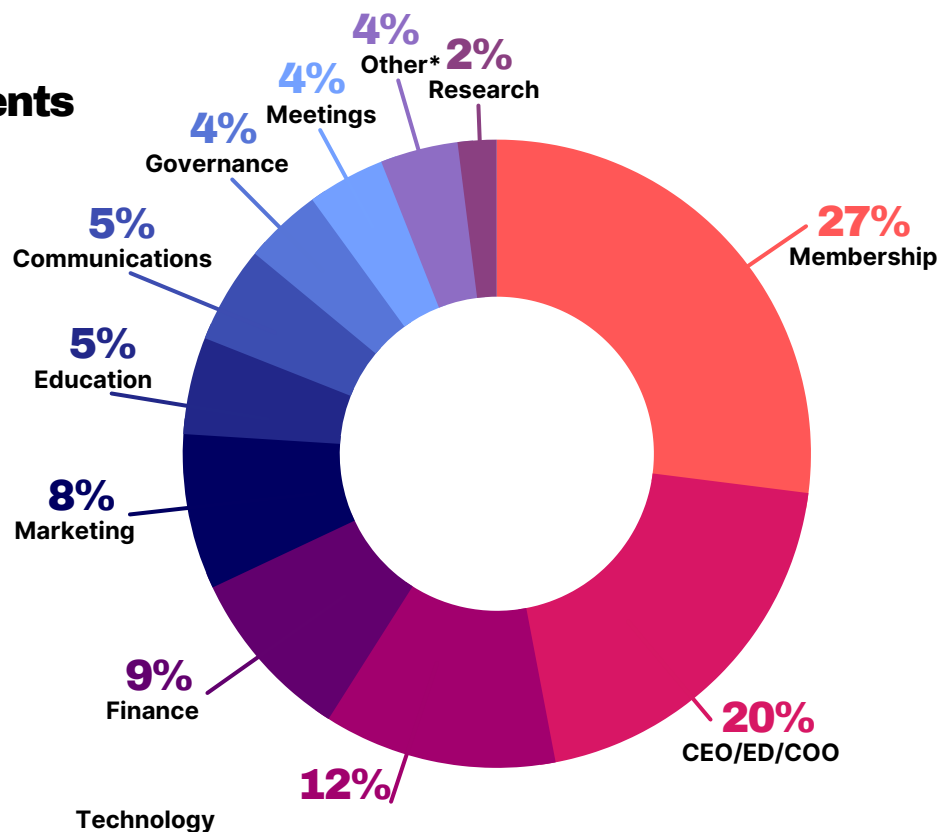
Primary Function at Organization



Nearly half of the Association Staff survey participants were Manager/Director level followed by **41%** of participants at the highest levels of their respective organizations.

Fig.5

Departments



Since system selections and implementations impact the entire organization, it was very beneficial to receive Association Staff survey participants across a variety of departments. **Membership** was the frontrunner at **27%** followed by **20%** of participants who identified as **CEOs/Executive Directors/COOs**. Technology was the third most represented department at **12%** with all other departments coming in at the single digits.

**4% of Association respondents highlighted Operations and Executive-level support in the "Other" category for their departments.*

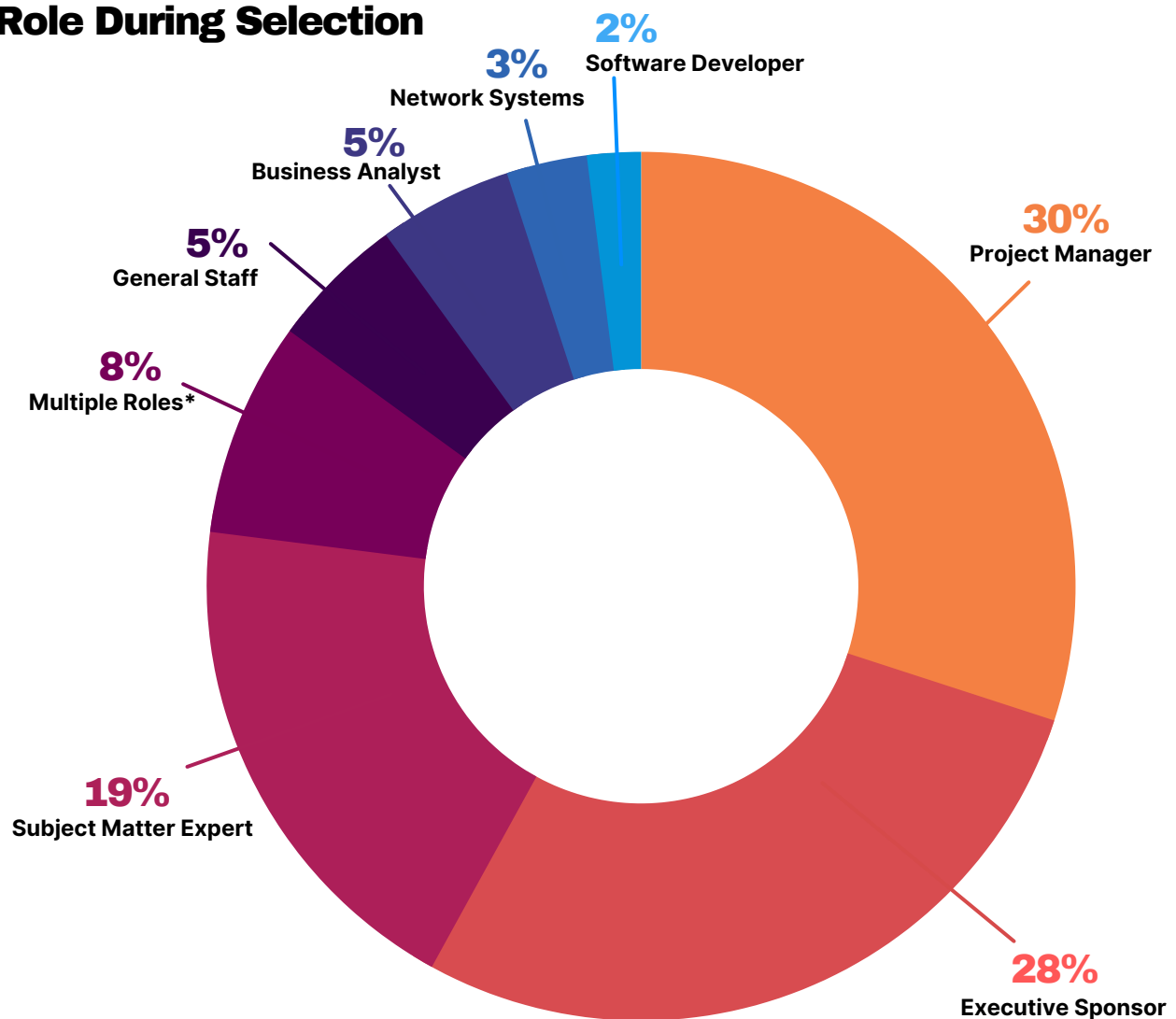
ASSOCIATION STAFF ROLES AT ORGANIZATIONS

Most Association Staff participants identified their roles during system selection as Project Manager. Executive Sponsor (described as an executive-level staff who provided approval and oversight on the selection project), came in a close second place, with Subject Matter Expert rounding out the top three roles participants filled.

*Multiple Roles held by the same person tended to be combinations of Project Manager & Business Analyst, Executive Sponsor & Project Manager, and Project Manager & Subject Matter Expert.

Fig.6

Role During Selection



ASSOCIATION STAFF INVOLVEMENT IN SYSTEM SELECTION



ASSOCIATION STAFF INSIGHTS

What challenges are you facing as you go through AMS/CRM selection? "Fitting in search and implementation between all other day-to-day duties."

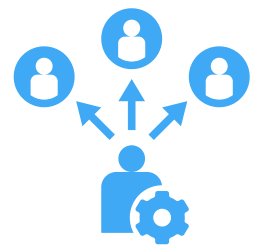
Fig.7

How Staff Became Involved in Selection



Volunteered

"Volunteered" refers to participants who sought out inclusion in the system selection process.



86%

**Assigned
by Management**

"Assigned by Management" includes participants who were hired specifically for the system selection process or whose job descriptions included participation in the system selection process.



CONSULTANT INSIGHTS

65% of Consultant respondents assist up to 20 clients with selection each year. 70% of these respondents create between one and 20 RFPs and 42% review between 20 and 40 Vendor proposals on behalf of clients in a year.

ASSOCIATION STAFF INVOLVEMENT IN TECHNOLOGY IMPLEMENTATION

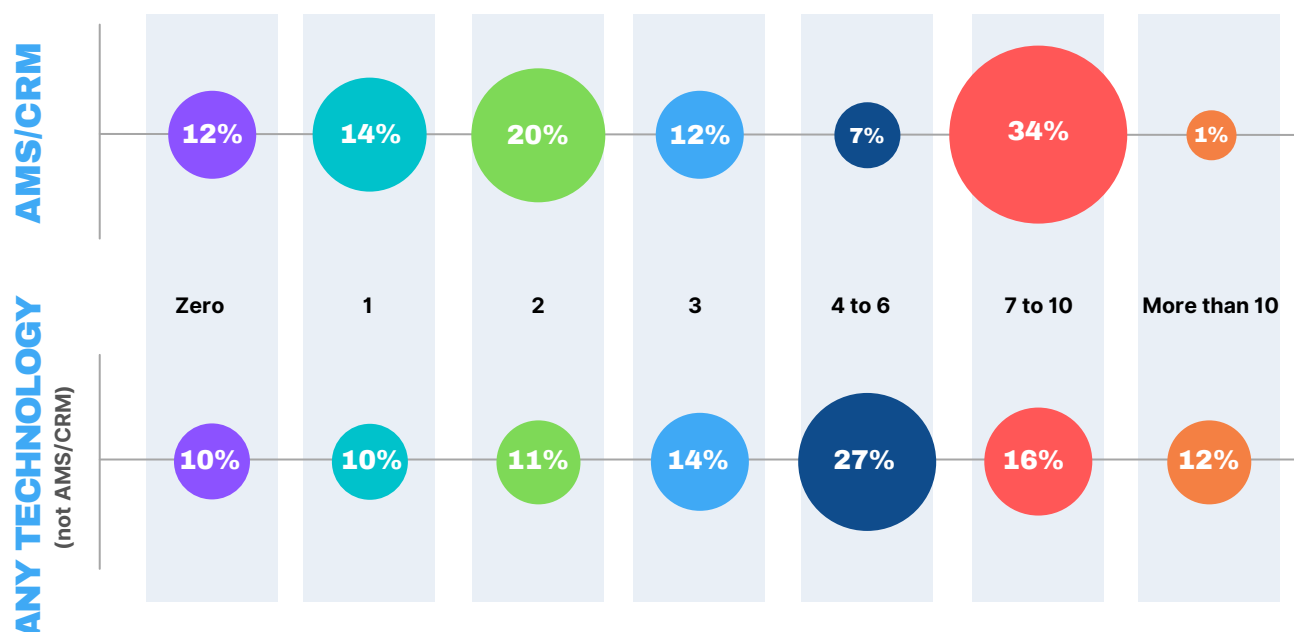


ASSOCIATION STAFF INSIGHTS

"Do we need an AMS? Or do we need excellent integration of several best-in-class systems?"

Fig.8

Number of Times Assn. Staff Selected/Implemented Systems



34% of Association respondents have selected and/or implemented 7 to 10 AMS/CRM in their careers.



CONSULTANT INSIGHTS

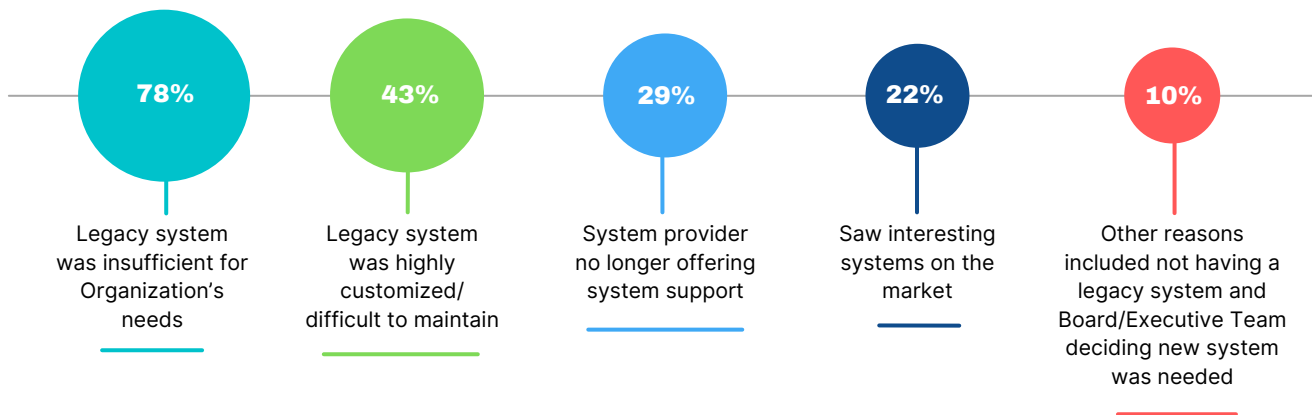
"Challenges sometimes arise when Vendors show features that aren't standard/were highly configured for another client, without disclosing it to the current client...it's not always obvious and can lead to missed expectations."

SYSTEM SELECTION DECISIONS

129 Association Staff respondents selected the reasons their Organizations decided to transition from the legacy system.

Fig.9

Reasons for Associations Changing Legacy System (n=129)



NOTE: Respondents were able to choose as many reasons as were appropriate for their situations as well as provide any reasons under the "Other" category that weren't already listed.



62%

CONSULTANT & VENDOR INSIGHTS

62% of Consultant respondents and 54% of Vendor respondents identified "Legacy AMS/CRM was insufficient for Organization's needs" as the primary reason clients share for seeking a new system.



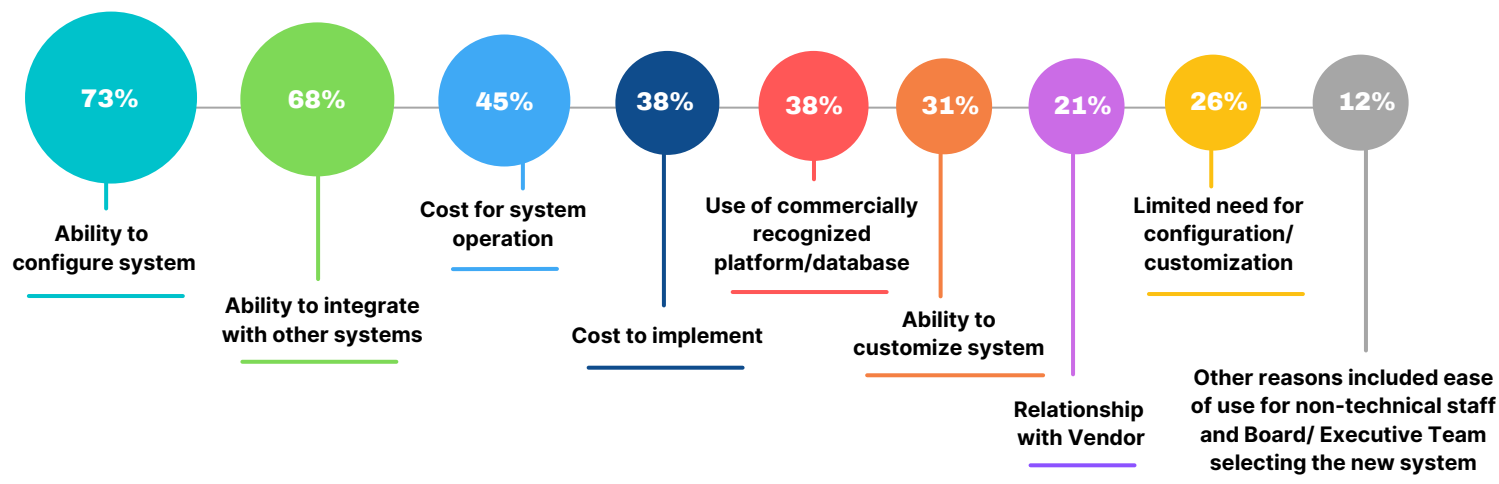
54%

SYSTEM SELECTION DECISIONS

58 respondents who selected a system within the past five years identified the reasons that led to the final system choice.

Fig.10

Reasons for System Choice (n=58)



NOTE: Respondents were able to choose as many reasons as were appropriate for their situations as well as provide any reasons under the "Other" category that weren't already listed.



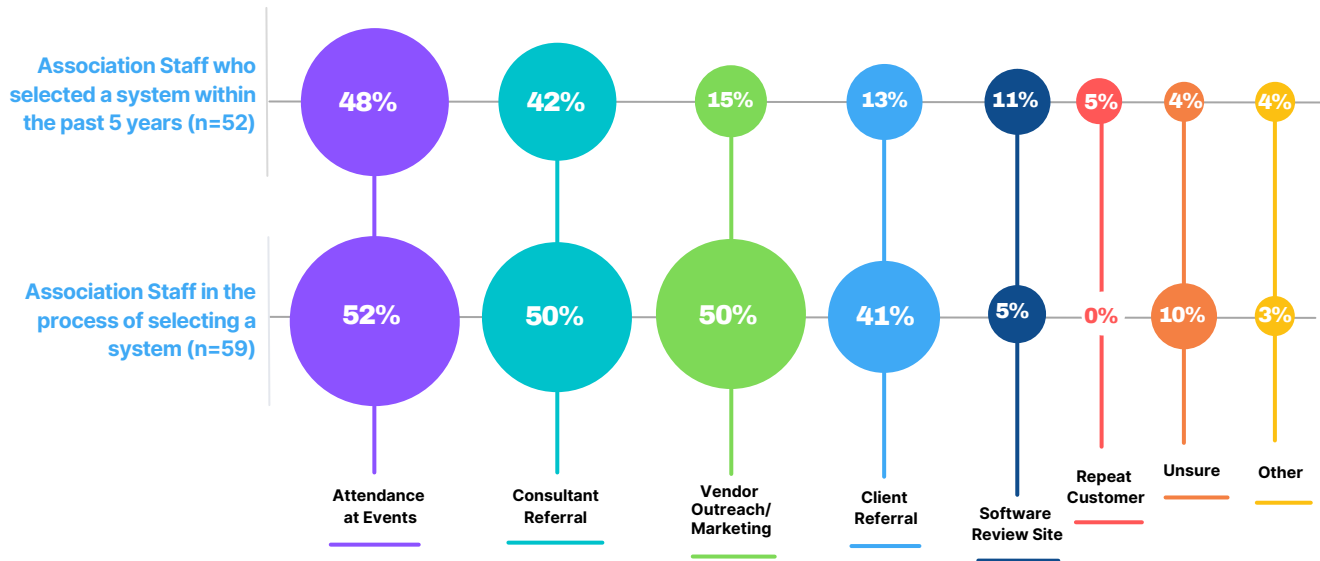
VENDOR INSIGHTS

"Most AMS systems do the core things that associations need. Let's focus on the requirements that are usually unique: membership eligibility, member definition, data migration and accounting."

SYSTEM SELECTION DECISIONS

Fig.11

Identification of Potential Vendors



Association respondents selected all of the ways they identified or expect to identify Vendors/Solution providers. Event attendance, consultant referrals, and vendor outreach comprise the top three ways for locating potential vendors.



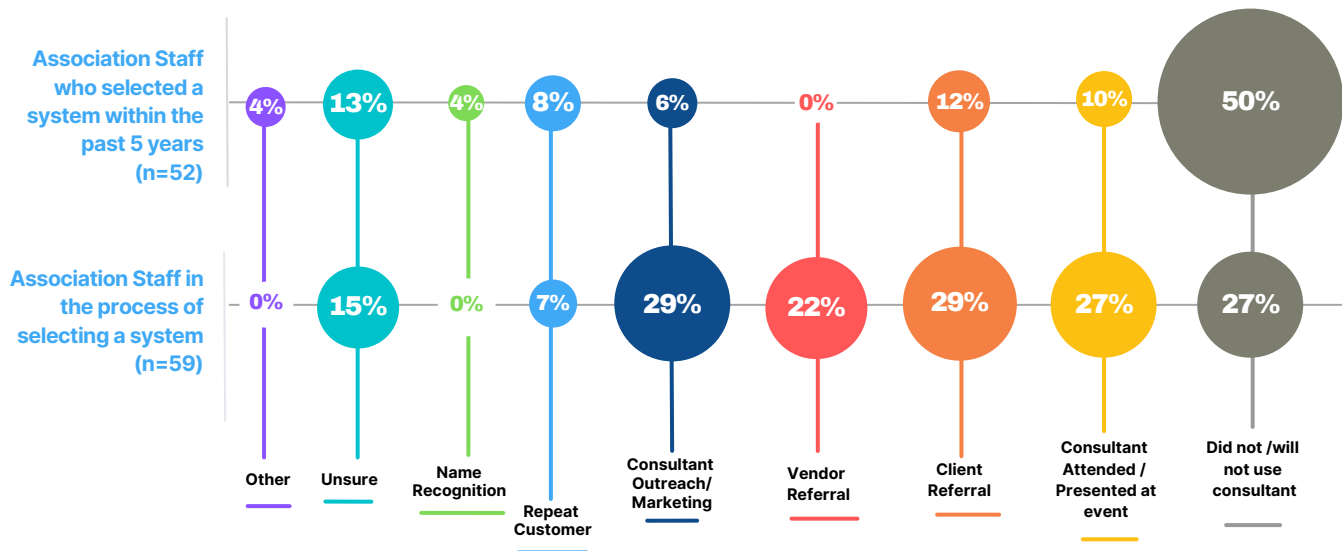
VENDOR INSIGHTS

67% of Vendors identified Company Outreach/Marketing efforts and Client referrals as main sources for new clients.

SYSTEM SELECTION DECISIONS

Fig.12

Identification of Potential Consultants



Association respondents selected all of the ways they identified or expect to identify Consultants. Consultant outreach and client referrals were selected the most by participants currently going through selection followed by attendance at events and absence of plans to use a consultant. Consultants were not used half the time by participants who selected a system within the past 5 years.



CONSULTANT INSIGHTS

56% of Consultants identified Client and Vendor referrals as main sources for new clients.

SYSTEM SELECTION DECISIONS

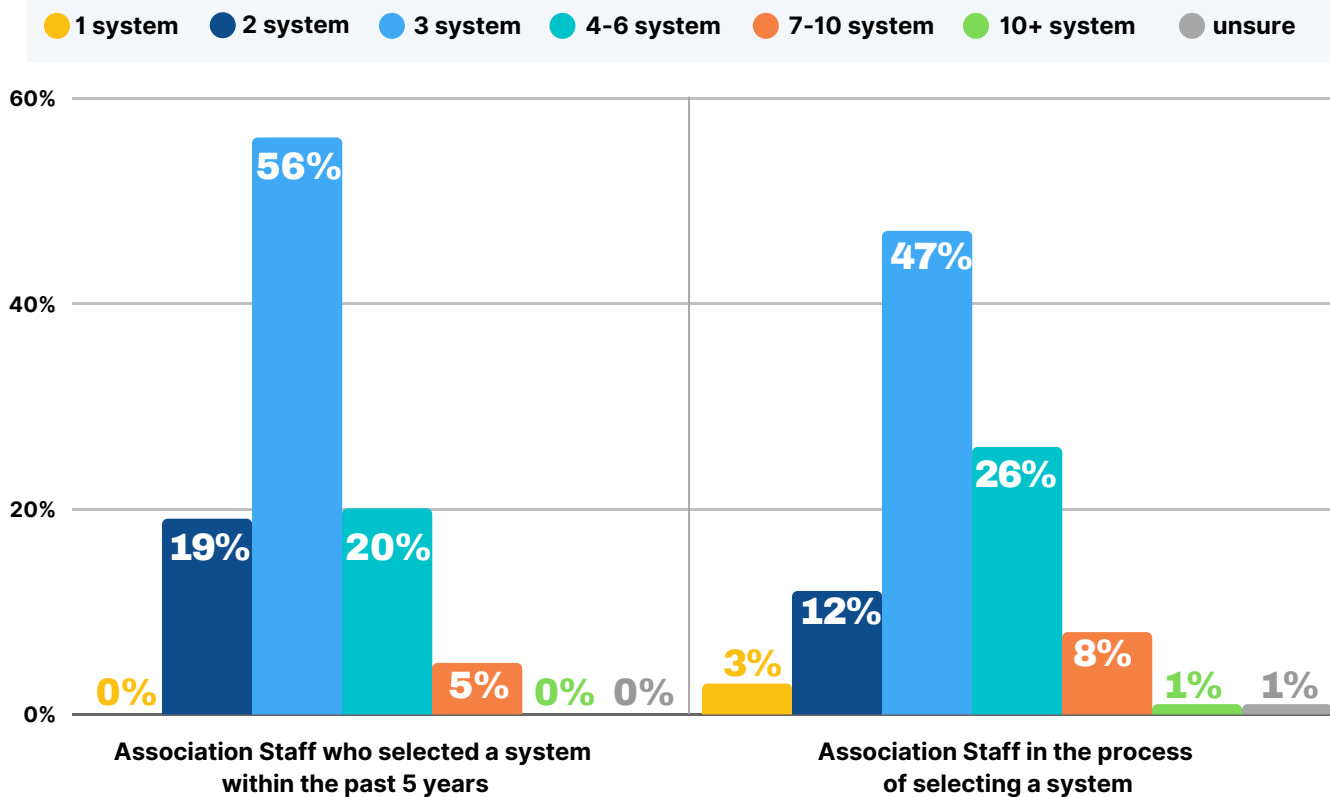


ASSOCIATION STAFF INSIGHTS

"We sent RFPs to 45 companies."

Fig.13

Number of systems "seriously" considered for selection



Most Associations focused on three systems as their top contenders before making a final selection.



VENDOR INSIGHTS

56% of Vendor respondents provide 2-3 targeted demos with content specific to the potential client before a selection decision is made. 36% of Vendor respondents said they rarely learn after the targeted demo that the system does not fit the needs of the potential client. Another 36% said it sometimes does occur.

SYSTEM SELECTION TIMELINE

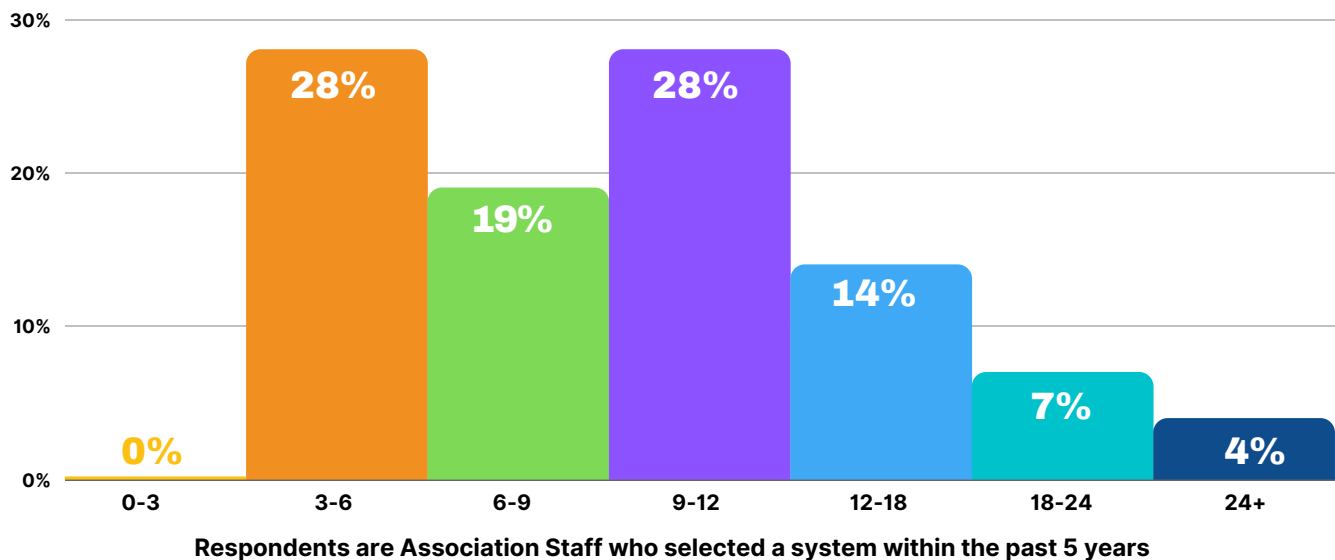


VENDOR INSIGHTS

40% of Vendor respondents say it can take three to four days to respond to a client RFP. 30% say it can take five or more days.

Fig.14

Number of Months b/t deciding system was needed and selecting new system



Most participants who selected a system within the past five years were able to make that selection between three and 12 months. Just over a quarter of those same participants implemented the new system three to six months after selection.



CONSULTANT INSIGHTS

52% of Consultant respondents receive between 1 and 20 requests for system selection support in a year.

SYSTEM SELECTION TIMELINE

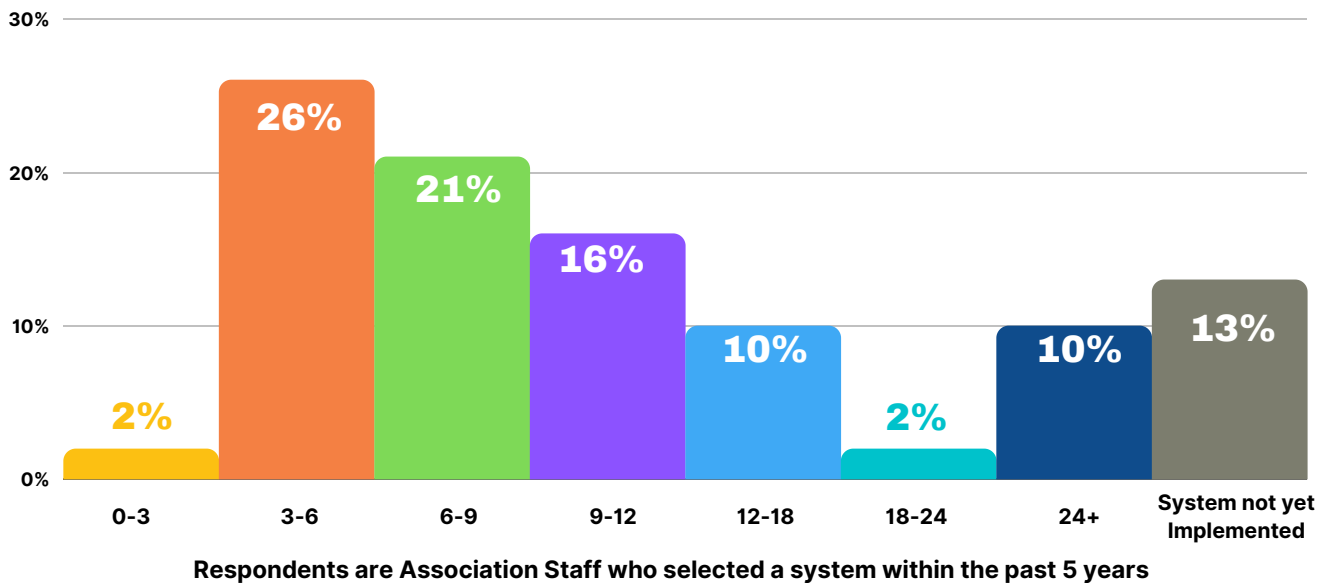


VENDOR INSIGHTS

66% of Vendor respondents receive between 10 and 30 RFPs per year. 75% said they respond to up to 30 RFPs. 46% win the client up to a quarter of the time each year.

Fig.15

Number of Months b/t system selection and system implementation



Almost half of participants who selected a system within the past five years were able to implement the new system three to nine months after selection. Some participants implemented their new systems two or more years after selection.



ASSOCIATION STAFF INSIGHTS

What would you do differently if you went through the selection process again?: "I would conduct a business analysis of what we are doing now and what we think we can do differently in the future. Business analysis is vital."

SYSTEM SELECTION TIMELINE

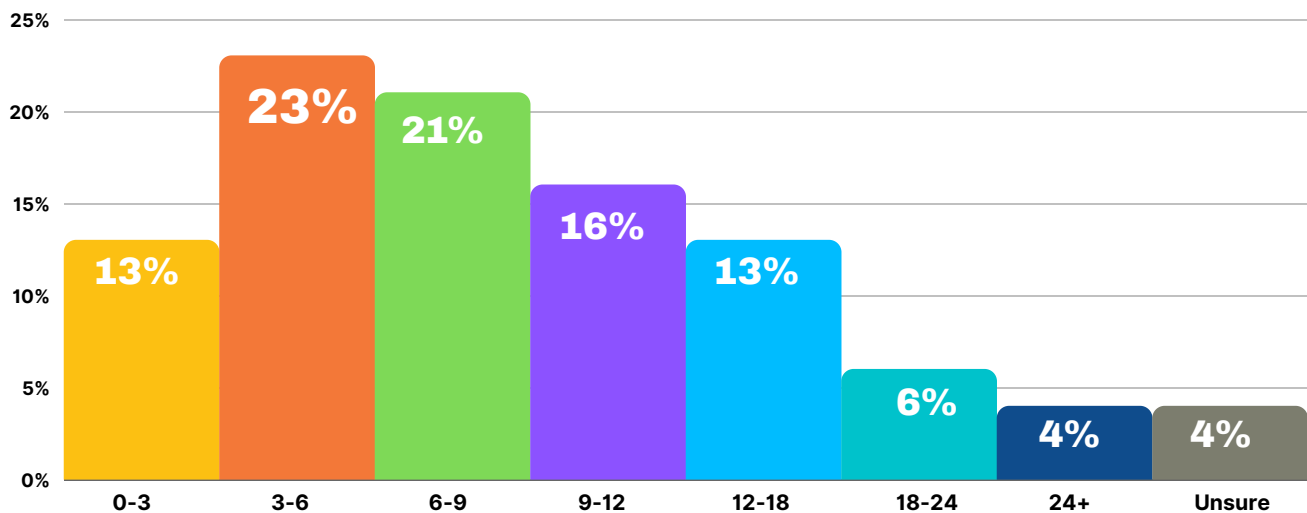


VENDOR INSIGHTS

According to 50% of Vendors, most organizations take four to six months to select their new system.

Fig.16

Expected number of months for system selection



Respondents are Association Staff currently going through system selection

44% of Association Staff currently going through system selection expect to have a decision made three to nine months after starting the search. Very few respondents expect it to take more than 18 months.



CONSULTANT INSIGHTS

33% of Consultants said they rarely assist a client with selecting a new system and then not assist with the implementation of that system. 62% said it sometimes occurs where they are involved with selection but not implementation for that client.

SYSTEM SELECTION TIMELINE

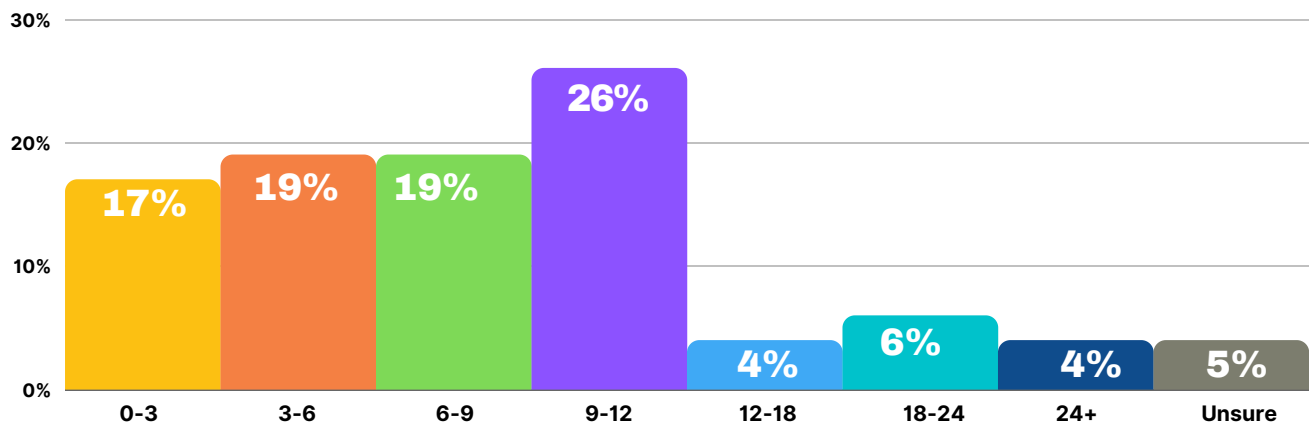


VENDOR INSIGHTS

46% of Vendors said sometimes organizations do not include system/business requirements in the RFP. More than a third (**39%**) said system/business requirements are frequently included that do NOT fit the actual system/business requirements of the organization.

Fig.17

Number of months expected b/t system selection and implementation



Respondents are Association Staff currently going through system selection

A little over a quarter of participants currently going through the process expect to implement the new system six to nine months after making a selection. A small number are unsure of the implementation timeline.

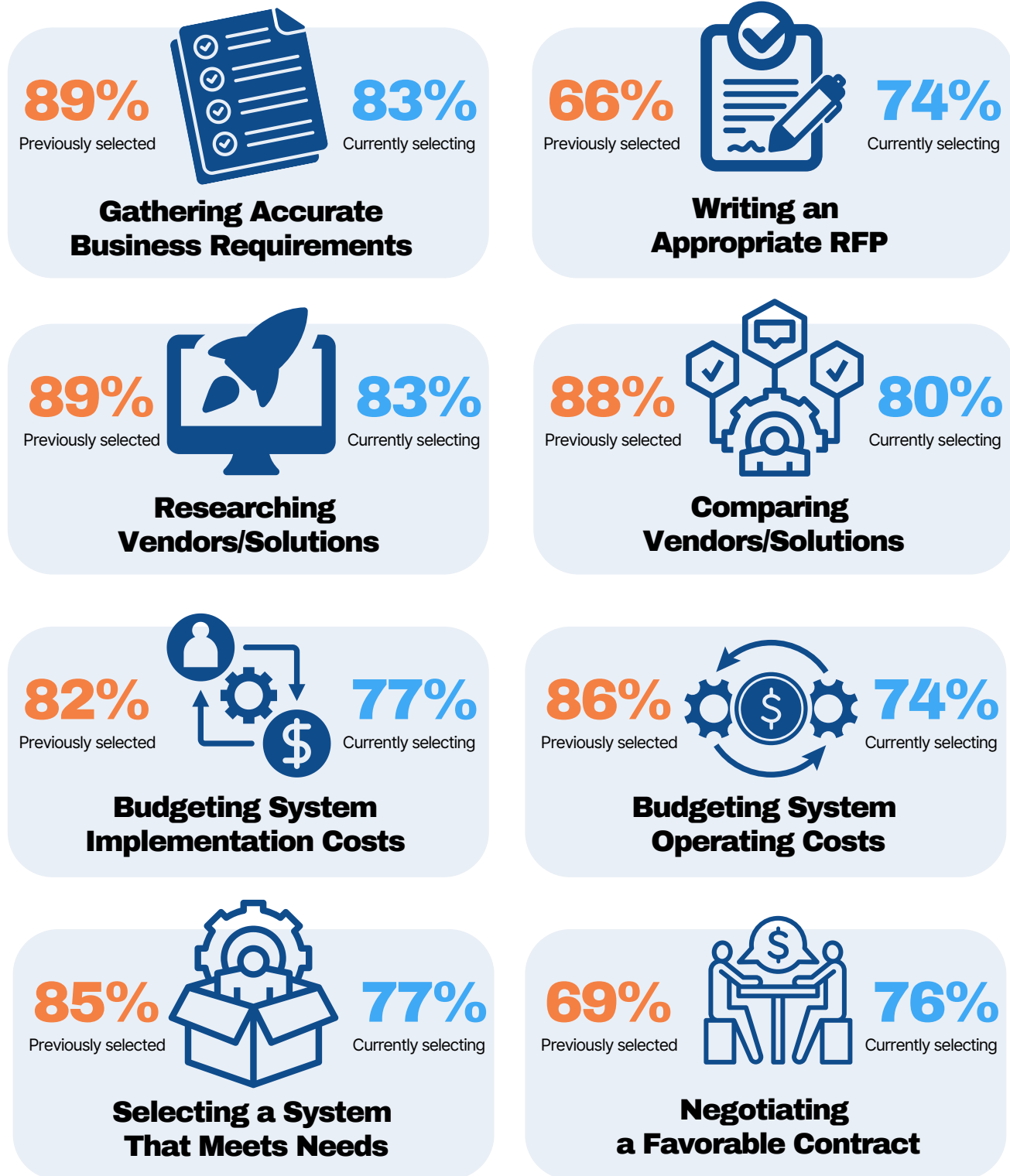


ASSOCIATION STAFF INSIGHTS

What would you do differently if you went through the selection process again? "Ask to meet with a tech person on the AMS team before signing the final contract. Ask the tech person questions about our must have customizables."

Fig.18

Association Staff Confidence with Major Tasks

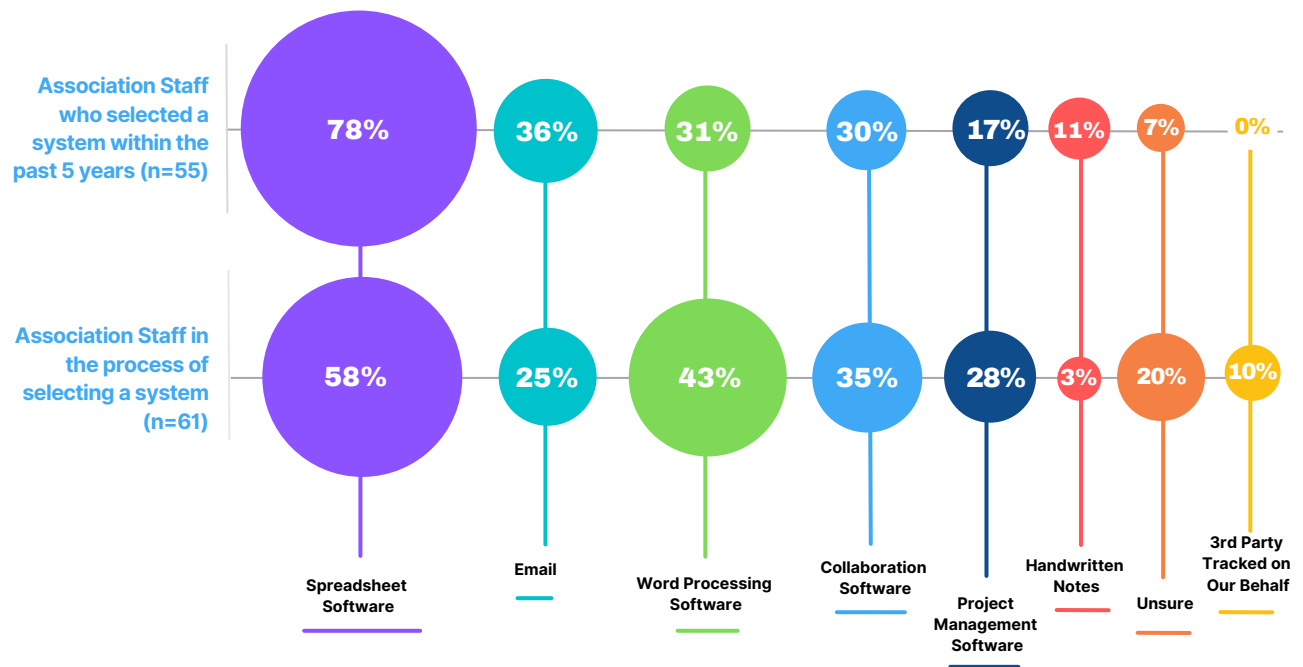


Association Staff respondents were asked to rate their level of confidence with eight specific tasks. Participants rated each task as feeling no confidence, little confidence, unsure, some confidence, and high level of confidence. Percentages displayed show respondents who expressed **some** or **high confidence**.

SYSTEM SELECTION INFORMATION TRACKING

Fig.19

System Selection Information Tracking



Participants selected the various ways they managed/plan to manage information during the system selection process. Spreadsheet software (e.g. Excel, Google Sheets, etc.) is heavily relied upon followed by word processing software (e.g. Word, Google Docs, etc.) and email. The majority of respondents chose how the information would be tracked based on staff already being familiar with the methods and because the options were cost effective or free.



CONSULTANT INSIGHTS

"Too many RFPs ask for the sun, moon and stars but during discovery I hear that many departments are eager to recreate legacy reports, etc. Far too much legacy mindset compromises the system selection process."

SYSTEM SELECTION PROCESS

Participants describe the steps taken to select a new system:

"Used staff w/project managerial skills and time available. Used ASAE AMS conference for vendor scouting (very valuable). System selected based on most important perceived needs (BTW, chosen system abandoned when during implementation stage it was realized it would not work)."



"First step was a very detailed and comprehensive needs assessment broken down into must have, should have, nice to have. Then compared vendor offerings against the needs assessment and conducted interviews and sandbox trial."



"Identified AMS systems; had a demo; looked at pricing; compared features; revisited 3 that met needs to narrow down selection."



"Did research on the top AMS/CRM products to see how they measured up to each other and which companies had more of the features we were interested in. We narrowed the list to the top 5...we then made a recommendation to the Board, which they accepted."



"1.) Undertake a study to determine what our members need an 'ecosystem' to do. 2.) Undertake a study to determine what our staff need an 'ecosystem' to do. 3.) Design the ecosystem. 4.) Research options and begin developing a strategy for implementation. 5.) Select vendors for the ecosystem."



"Gather wants/needs/must haves. Research options. Participate in demos from AMS. Review quotes. Prepare comparisons. Review options. Review with staff. Select."



"We have ongoing documentation of existing operational and programmatic deficits of the current system and we have also already determined not to remain within the traditional 'one system does it all' parameters for a successor solution."



LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY EXPERIENCED OR EXPECTED

Fig.20



Participants identified "Concerns with cost of system" and "Difficulty comparing available systems" as the main reasons for the level of difficulty experienced or expected during system selection.



ASSOCIATION STAFF INSIGHTS

What challenges did you face during AMS/CRM selection? "Difficult staff members looking for a system to do exactly what old system did; not open to change and making decisions based on old practices."

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY EXPLAINED

Participants explain the reasons for the level of difficulty they experienced or expect to experience:



OVERALL IMPRESSION WITH SYSTEM SELECTION PROCESS



ASSOCIATION STAFF INSIGHTS

What challenges did you face during AMS/CRM selection? "Just the sheer magnitude of the project and the learning curve for the new information."

Fig.21

Overall Impression of participants who selected system w/i past 5 years



57%

Overall positive
experience



36%

Neither Positive
nor Negative



7%

Overall Negative
Experience

Overall Impressions of participants currently going through system selection



47%

Overall positive
experience



47%

Neither Positive
nor Negative



6%

Overall Negative
Experience



ASSOCIATION STAFF INSIGHTS

What aspects of AMS/CRM selection have you found to be positive? "How many options we have available and how up-to-date with technology so many of them are."

WHAT COMES NEXT...?

The purpose of this “first look” report is to present an overview of respondents and highlight some of their experiences and expectations. By design, it does not detail the nuances of participants’ experiences as this is something that will be addressed in depth in future reports.

Something that is very clear from the results: all participants who engage in the system selection process face challenges. Some of the challenges are easier to navigate, especially with the support of a knowledgeable guide, such as a consultant or a staff member, who has managed this type of technology project before. Other challenges are expected and mostly unavoidable like budget and resource constraints. And still other challenges may be self-induced such as the push to customize a new system to behave like the legacy system.

Developing a better understanding of the processes and methods that are commonly used by those who engage in system selection will pave the way for the creation of a more standardized approach that reduces common challenges, increases customer satisfaction with the selected system, and improves the relationships between the key stakeholders: association staff, vendors, and consultants.

After reviewing this report, feel free to share your reactions with our team. What did you find to be the most beneficial? What are you eager to learn more about? What do you insist must be in the next report? Our goal is to make sure we provide information that is relevant to you and serves industry needs.



www.501works.com
research@501works.com
703-459-9779



James Marquis
Marquis@501works.com
703-459-9779



Kim grever
grever@501works.com
703-459-9779



www.branchingknowledge.com
info@branchingknowledge.com

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