FestEVAL

CELEBRATING EVALUATION

21–25 September 2020

AUSTRALIAN EVALUATION SOCIETY

OVERVIEW & FINDINGS

Evaluation of FestEVAL 2020

December 2020

Commissioned by: Australian Evaluation Society

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Evaluation of FestEVAL 2020

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Preferred citation: Collins, T. (2020). *Evaluation of FestEVAL 2020.*

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OVERVIEW & METHODOLOGY

Evaluation of FestEVAL 2020

The evaluand: FestEVAL 2020 ~ *"Celebrating Evaluation"*

- **Client and commissioner**: Australian Evaluation Society

- **FestEVAL**: One week of free, online evaluation themed activities (21-25 September 2020).

- **Main FestEVAL ambitions**:
  - AES member engagement
  - Support AES core business

- **Evaluation timeframe:** ~2.5 months (mid September to December 2020)

Key evaluation deliverables

1. Preparation of an initial evaluation plan, including: a logic model and data collection plan;

2. Design, testing and administration of an online mixed-methods survey tool;

3. Design and facilitation of semi-structured Focus Group Discussions and interviews with a sample of key informants;

4. Data analysis and Synthesis of findings in a final report;

5. Preparation of materials for presenting findings to AES Board and other stakeholders.

FestEVAL evaluation methodology

- A rapid, convergent mixed-methods evaluation
  - designed to examine perceptions of FestEVAL value, the effectiveness of FestEVAL as a platform for core AES business.

- Key data collection tools:

1 x online post-event survey (qual + quant)

5 x qual, semi-structured interviews / focus groups

Not in scope:

- Analysis of Zoom data / transcripts.

Key Evaluation Questions (KEQ)

KEQ 1

Overall, did participants perceive there was value in attending the online FestEVAL activities?

KEQ 2

Was the Australian Evaluation Society satisfied with FestEVAL as a platform for conducting its core business?

FestEVAL evaluation plan

Key Evaluation Questions	Sub-questions	Purpose	Data collection method
KEQ1. Overall, did participants perceive there was value in attending the online AES 2020 FestEVAL activities?	Why did participants decide to attend FestEVAL?	To identify participants' motivating factors	Post-event survey; Semi-structured interviews with a convenience/ purposive sample of FestEVAL registrants, AES Board members, and FestEVAL Working Group members.
	Were participants also planning to attend the (deferred) AES 2020 conference in Brisbane?		
	Did the online format allow participants to engage effectively in FestEVAL activities?	To assess appropriateness of Zoom as a platform for AES member engagement	
	Did the online format of FestEVAL support effective delivery of updates?		
	Did the online format of FestEVAL support engagement between AES members?		
	Did 'FestEVAL Club' provide a useful opportunity for informal networking or building new professional partnerships?		
	Which elements of FestEVAL were most valued?	To support design of future online AES events	
	Are there any ways in which future online AES events could be improved?		
KEQ2. Was the AES satisfied with 2020 FestEVAL as a platform for the prosecution of its core business?	Was the AES Board satisfied with the design of FestEVAL as a way to engage with its members?	To assess appropriateness of FestEVAL as a platform for AES member engagement and delivery of core business	Semi-structured interviews with purposive sample of AES Board members.
	Was the AES Board satisfied with the design of FestEVAL in terms of a platform for core business, namely the AGM?		

FestEVAL population and sampling

FestEVAL attracted 780 registrations; 2,000 attendances over 26 sessions; and participants from at least 14 countries.

Qualitative interviews

- Purposive / convenience sampling
  - 6 x FestEVAL participants
  - 3 x AES Board members*
  - 1 x Working Group*
  - 1 x FestEVAL presenter*

** Note that some participants had several roles*

Post-event survey

- Census sampling
- Survey open for 3 weeks
- 181 respondents
- 23% response rate

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Evaluation of FestEVAL 2020

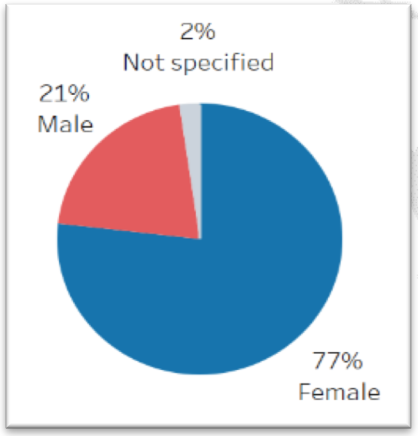
FestEVAL reached participants from across Australia…

Place of residence (n=179)

Australia	Victoria	35%
	New South Wales	22%
	Australian Capital Territory	11%
	Queensland	7%
	Western Australia	6%
	South Australia	3%
	Northern Territory	3%
	Tasmania	1%
Aotearoa New Zealand	International	5%
Other international	International	7%

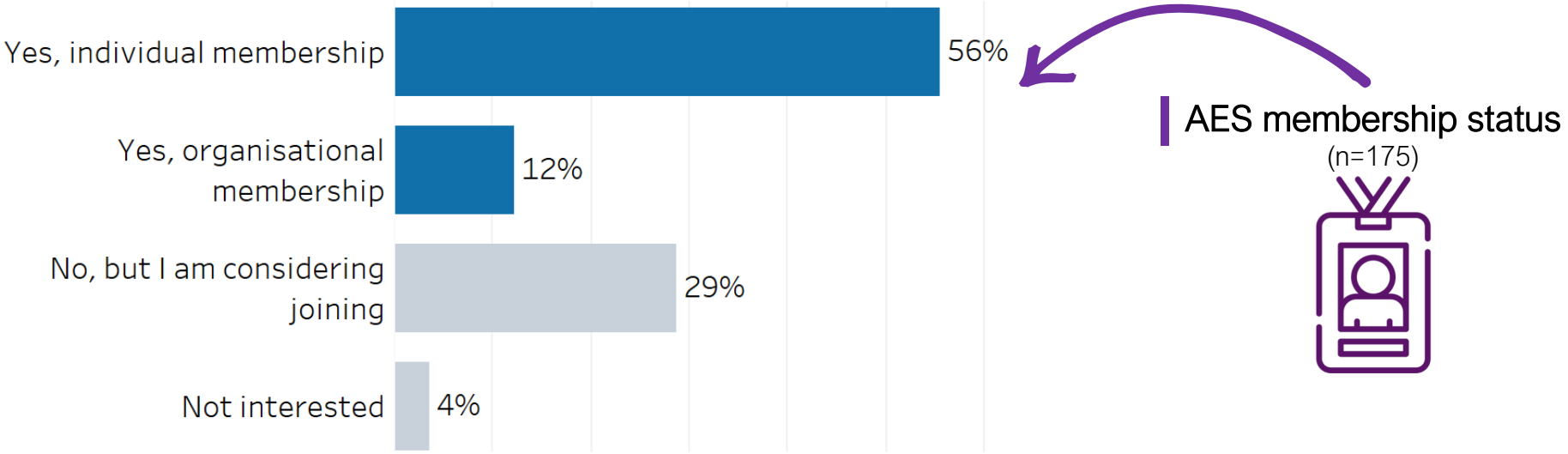
'Other international' (n=12) includes: Nepal, Mozambique, Myanmar, Uganda, Dominican Republic, Canada, Singapore, Indonesia, United States.

Gender (n=179)

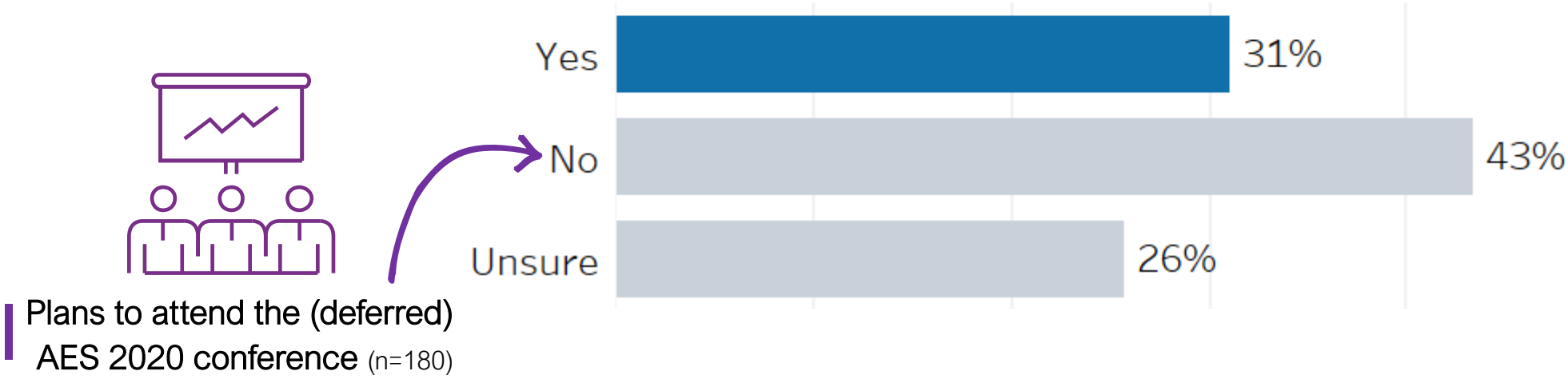


…and some further afield.

FestEVAL attracted strong attendance by AES members…

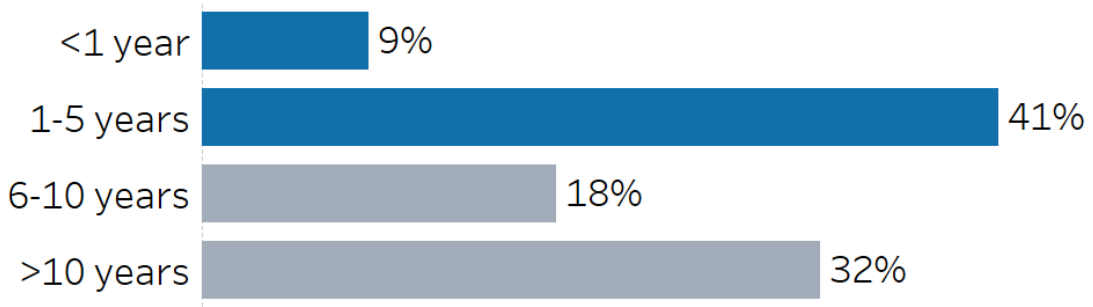


…and reached some who weren't otherwise planning to attend the (in-person) AES conference.



Participants brought a wealth of evaluation expertise…

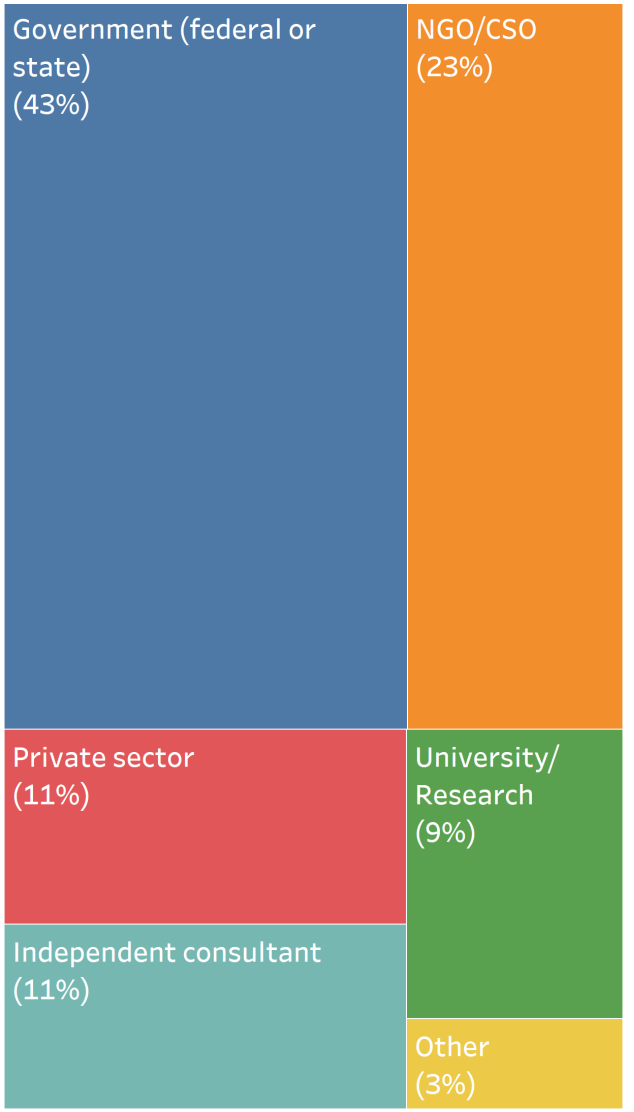
Half of respondents had <5 years' evaluation experience (n=179)



Almost 60% were involved in designing or conducting evaluations (n=178)

Designing or conducting evaluations	58%
Commissioning or contracting out evaluation projects	11%
Studying or learning about evaluation	10%
Running programs or projects that get evaluated by others	4%
Reading / using evaluation reports and findings	4%
Contributing data or information to evaluations	3%
Teaching evaluation	2%
Other (please specify)	6%
None, no current involvement with evaluation	1%

Sector or organisation (n=179)

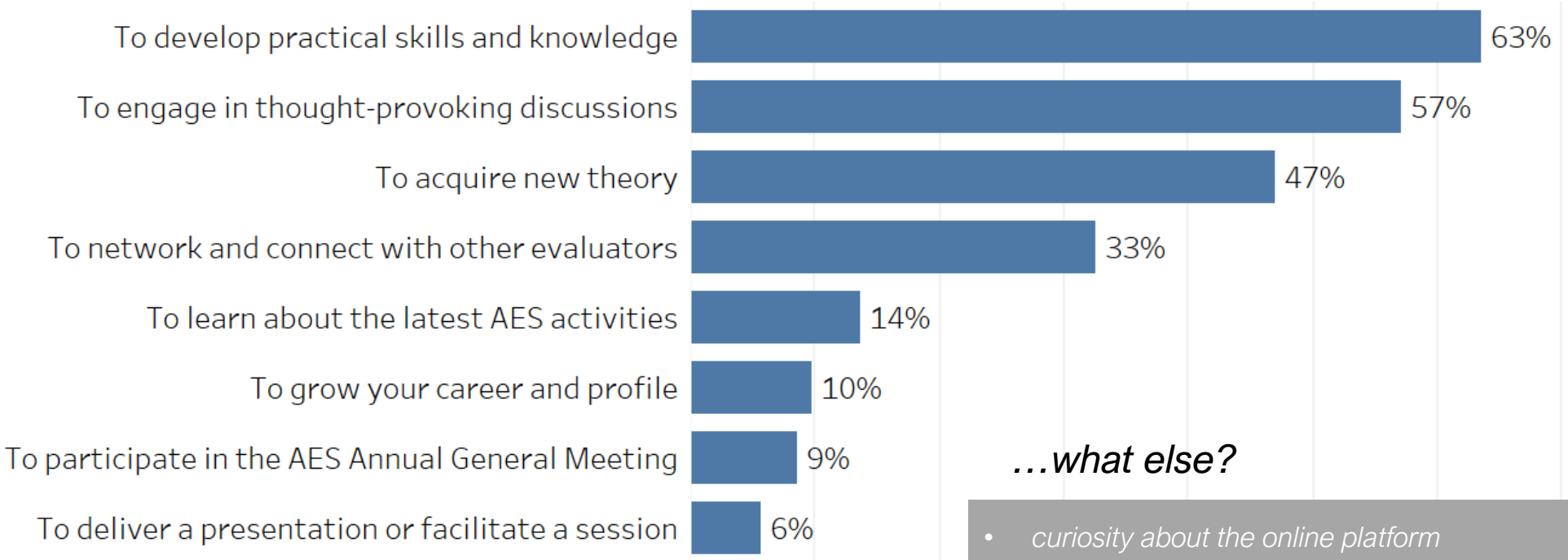


KEY FINDINGS

Evaluation of FestEVAL 2020

What motivated attendance at FestEVAL?

Most respondents (70%) attended between 2 to 5 sessions,
and were motivated by the opportunity to develop practical skills and knowledge (n=179)



> My unpredictable work program meant work had to take precedence over FestEVAL attendance. This was disappointing as I **really, really wanted to listen to Michael Quinn Patton.**
>
> *~ Registered participant who could not attend*

…what else?

- *curiosity about the online platform*
- *provision of support to AES*
- *hearing from thought leaders in the field*
- *keeping up-to-date with current and emerging evaluation issues*

A snapshot of FestEVAL highlights (n=99)

"For us in WA, the chance to connect with people from other parts of Australia and hear what is going on was **invaluable**."

4.1★
average rating

"That it happened at all - what a great idea :)"

"Banter in the chat thread"

The **provocations** presented in the opening session, and that formed a theme for subsequent FestEVAL presentations

The **convenience** and **accessibility**: online, no cost and no travel required

Listening to **expert presenters**, such as Michael Quinn Patton

Conversations and **exchange of ideas**

Hearing from others **outside the "usual suspects"**

Excitement about the **pilot mentoring program**

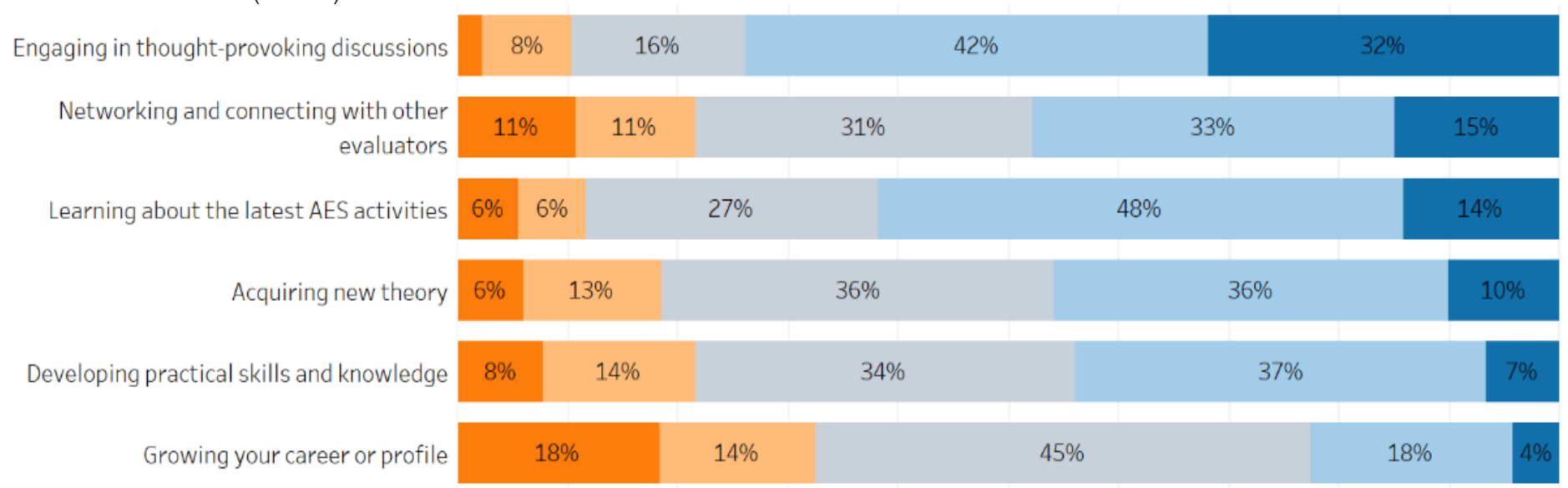
The reminder about "why we do what we do, and to get excited about **new ideas and new ways of thinking**"

"Ah ha" moments in the experiential multicultural workshop

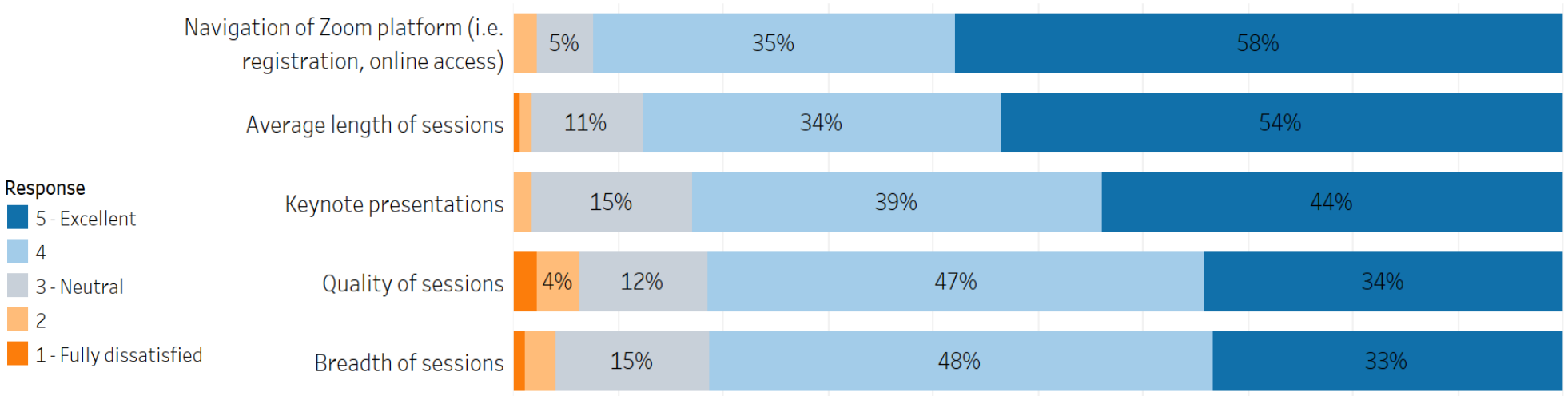
"Being able to observe and better understand the types of people involved in evaluation... **we are definitely a 'breed'**

Views on FestEVAL satisfaction and usefulness

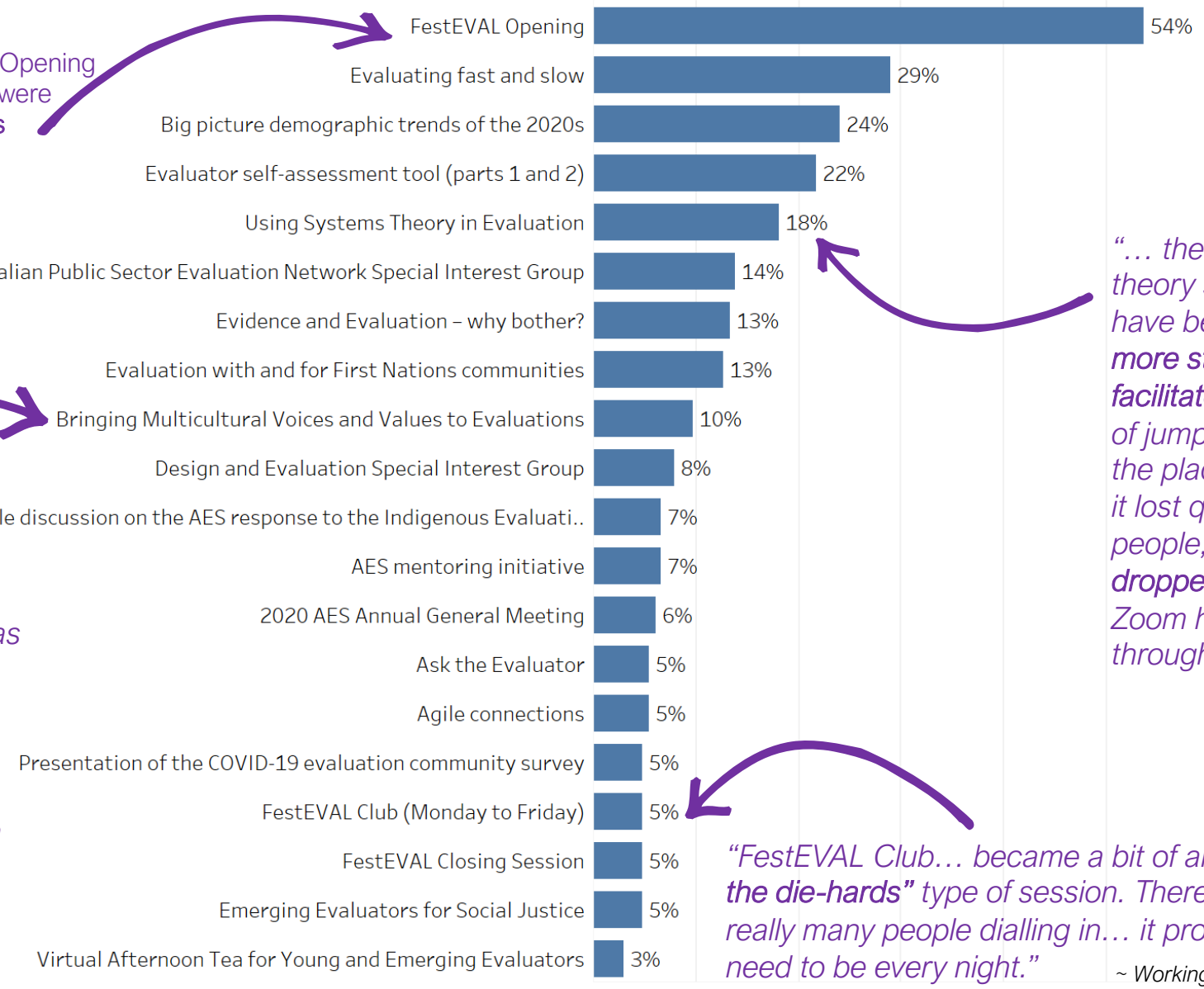
Usefulness for… (n=176)



Satisfaction with… (n=176)



Which sessions were most valuable? (n=166)



The FestEVAL Opening 'provocations' were **clear favourites**

*"… the systems theory session could have been a bit **more structured/ facilitated** as it kind of jumped all over the place and I think it lost quite a few people, who **dropped out** of the Zoom halfway through"*

~ Participant

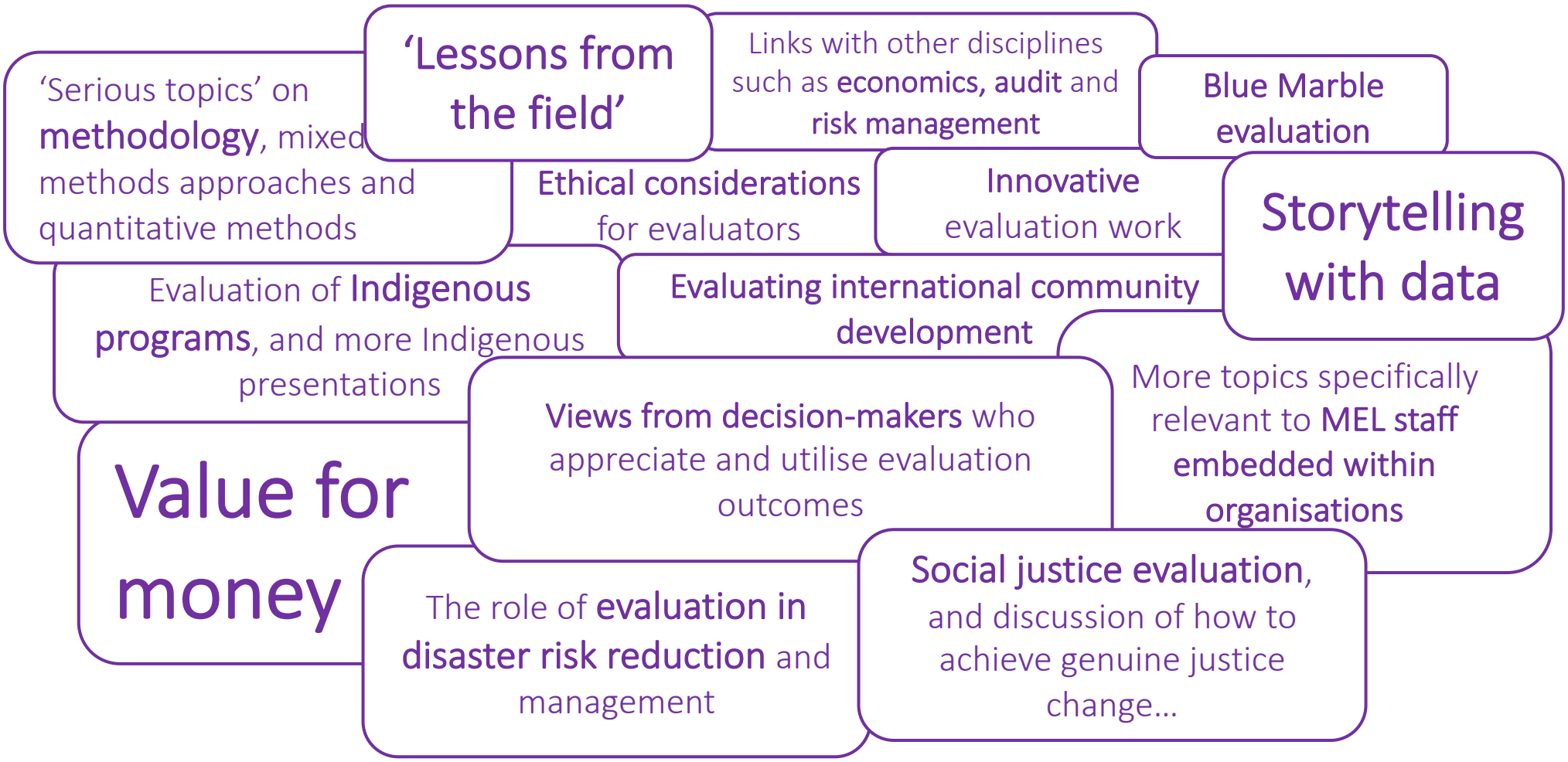
*"The multicultural session I sat in on was good, but it would've been better if it provided **specific strategies** on how to undertake evaluation with multicultural communities."*

~ Participant

*"FestEVAL Club… became a bit of an **"only for the die-hards"** type of session. There weren't really many people dialling in… it probably didn't need to be every night."*

~ Working Group member

Requests for topics or sessions NOT covered (n=40)



> Networking opportunities could be designed differently to feel accessible/not exclusive for people new to the community (I'm not new to evaluation, but new to Australia).
>
> *~ Participant*

Zoom worked well, but there's room for improvement (n=40)

POSSIBLE ZOOM IMPROVEMENTS

- Streamlined **registration process**, including use of **calendar invitations**;
- **Removal of session caps**;
- **Clear instructions** provided in advance *(particularly re: breakout rooms)*;
- **Training for presenters** on use of online tools *(i.e. how to run polls, manage chats, and effectively facilitate breakout rooms)*;
- Clearer guidance on where/if **session recordings** will be available;
- Greater **facilitation of the chat** (to ensure all questions are answered), and an **overall FestEVAL chat function** *(i.e. outside specific sessions).*

*"It was great to be **immersed in evaluative thinking** and connecting with others for a week from the comfort of my house!"*

~ Participant

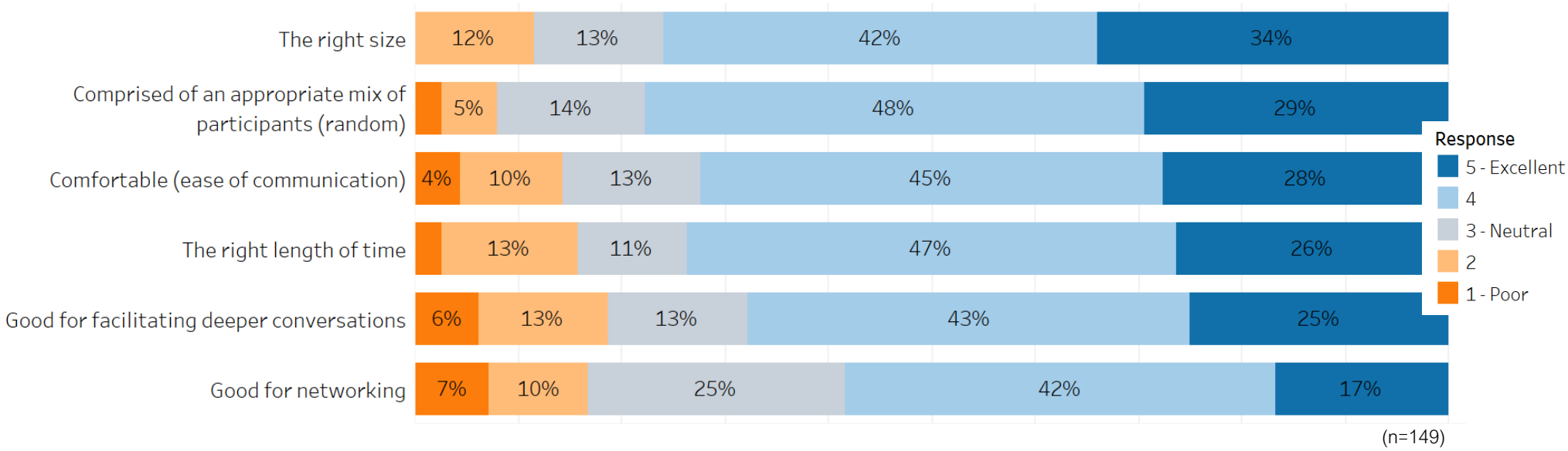
*"Sometimes we capped registrations, thinking we can't fit more than 200 in this one, but then only 90 people dialled in – a waste for others who wanted to attend. **Planning for attrition is a key lesson.**"*

~ Working group member

*"Having to complete registration in advance meant you **couldn't drop in/drop out as easily** as if you were at an in-person conference…"*

~ Participant

Zoom breakout rooms were a rather contentious topic…



KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED:

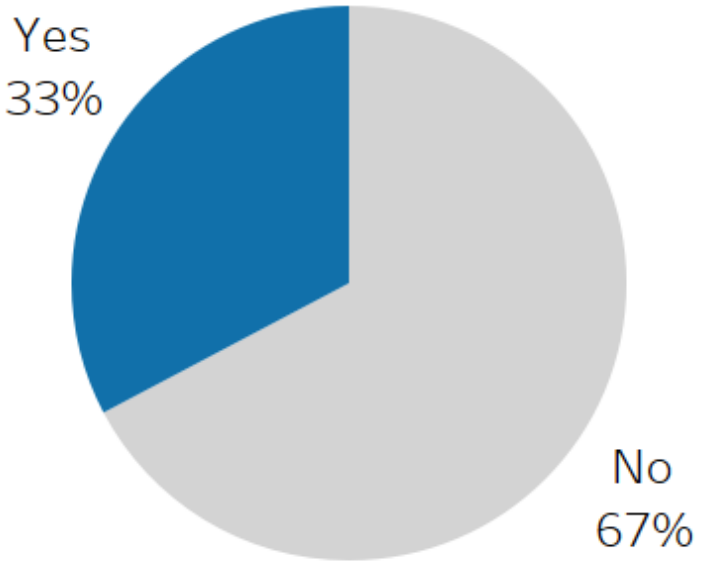
- Lack of guidance, structure or facilitation;
- 'Zoom fatigue', and over-frequency of use;
- Preference to hear from the 'experts' rather than each other;
- Difficulty sustaining conversation in very small groups;
- Breakout rooms announced before any formal presentation;
- Discomfort in engaging with strangers;
- Tech issues.

(Note: criticisms emerged in the qual responses, rather than the quant survey questions)

> I really didn't have a **desire or energy to participate in breakout rooms.** Might be just me, but in Melbourne after 6 months of lockdown, I was struggling to have any extra energy to participate…
>
> *~ Participant*

FestEVAL facilitated some new professional connections

One-third of respondents made new professional connections (n=169)

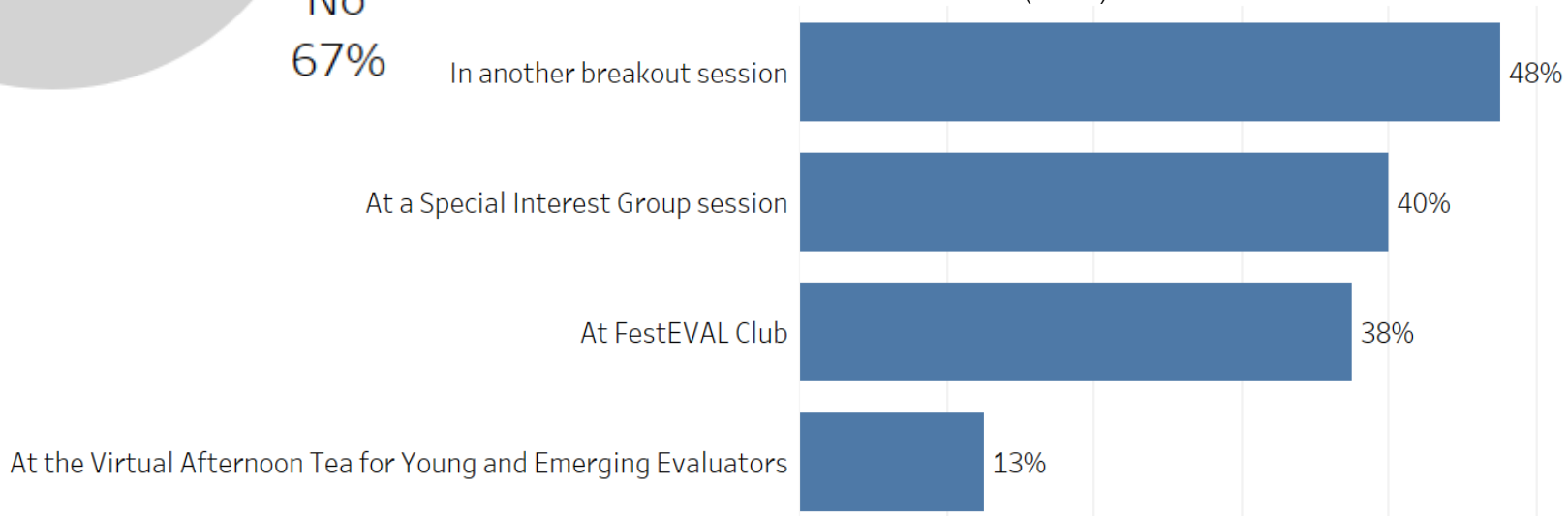


Working together on a presentation; co-facilitating

LinkedIn

Group or private chats

Where or how? (n=55)



42% of respondents willing to pay for future online AES events

n =144

SUMMARY OF QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK:

- It is **reasonable to charge**, but pricing must reflect the fact online events are far cheaper than in-person events.
- Offering FestEVAL **free-of-charge has flow-on benefits for the AES**: a larger database of new contacts, and greater awareness of future (charged) AES events.
- **Recommend against charging a flat fee** for the whole event - most will not be able to attend all sessions on offer.
- If charging, participants need to know **exactly what to expect.**
- Recommend **consideration of a hybrid model** (i.e. opening/closing and other presentations free, interspersed with charged workshops run by expert facilitators).
- People would be willing to pay to **acquire a technical or practice skill** – not for general discussions.
- A wealth of **online content is already available** – so AES must have a **niche offering**.

FestEVAL organisation was **far simpler** than a conference

*"We decided to do FestEVAL a couple of months out – **very unconference-like**! That meant we could leave things a bit later, no need for venue hire etc. And it just clicked, because of the group of people behind the scene…"* ~ AES Board member

*"We didn't let the scope get too big – that was another **success criterion**…"* ~ AES Board member

*"It was pretty **administratively light-on** relative to organising a conference…"* ~ Working group member

*"We now have a **tried-and-tested model** we can fall back on if needed – that's really reassuring to know!"* ~ AES Board member

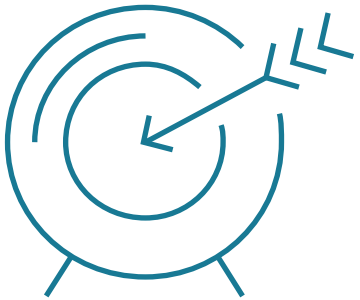
*"It's now important to keep the **momentum** going…"* ~ Working group member

IDEAS FOR A FUTURE MODEL:

- **A hybrid model**: (i.e. an online FestEVAL-style event in the first half of the year, followed by an in-person conference in September).
- Hold **face-to-face events locally**; supplemented with a **national conference online**.
- Or, potentially, a specific state, territory or region could host or be a '**showcase region**' for a future FestEVAL.

(As suggested by select FestEVAL participants and working group members)

FestEVAL effectively facilitated AES core business



> *Our Annual General Meeting was attended by roughly 60-70 people, and coincided with the launch of the new AES website.*
>
> **~ AES BOARD MEMBER**

"Loved doing the AGM online"

"I think members were particularly interested in how the AES had gone throughout the Covid-19 period".

*"I was **pleasantly surprised** to see how many people tuned into a **virtual AGM**. It's generally not a really exciting event, but has to happen."*

*"The **AES business got done** – the online AGM was really clear and simple, run really well, and benefited from a trial run the day before."*

*"The AGM had a good turnout, with **strong member engagement** (and hopefully non-members too)."*

> *What we really wanted was a platform for our members to connect and contribute... and I think we got that.*
>
> **~ AES BOARD MEMBER**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation of FestEVAL 2020

Four key recommendations

1 **Enhance the Zoom experience** through a streamlined registration process, strategic use of breakout rooms, training for facilitators, alignment between session descriptions and content, and removal of attendance caps (where possible).

2 **Design networking opportunities that target specific participant groups**. This approach could also be adopted for 'FestEVAL Club' sessions, with a more structured model catering for specific interests.

3 **Consider adding practical sessions**: 'lessons from the field', case studies, economic evaluations, and storytelling with data (among others).

4 **Adopt a hybrid event model**, alternating between online and in-person events (where possible) - and charge accordingly.

REFERENCES

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