

Diversity in Brookline's Commissions, Committees, and Boards 2020

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Introduction

To ensure the concerns and ideas of all individuals are voiced and meaningfully considered, municipalities have an obligation to uphold diversity in their civic activities. The Brookline, Massachusetts Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Relations released a survey to gauge diversity in the Town's commissions, committees, and boards (CCB) and track progress in diversity since 2018. The survey, administered in January, 2020, included race or ethnicity, gender, age, household income, household size, home ownership, disability status, veteran status, and Town employment status as metrics of diversity within Brookline. The survey also collected data on the frequency of public outreach and the methods, if any, used to ensure outreach to diverse members of the community. 128 survey responses were received from either CCB or town meeting members. Comparative statistics for analysis were drawn from either the United States Census Bureau or the results of the Fall 2018 CCB diversity survey.

Race and Ethnicity

Survey respondents were 82% White, 4.7% Asian, 3.9% mixed race, 3.1% Black or African American, 1.6% Hispanic or Latino, and 0% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; 4.7% of respondents did not answer this question (figure 1). Compared to the 2018 survey results, Brookline's CCBs have experienced a 147.7% increase in Asian participation, 64.5% increase in Black participation, 7.3% decrease in White participation, and 17.8% decrease in Hispanic or Latino participation. 2018 data on mixed race and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander participation is not available.

As of 2019, Brookline's population is 74.1% White, 15.9% Asian, 7.8% Hispanic or Latino, 4.2% mixed race, 3.2% Black or African American, and less than 0.1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (United States Census Bureau, 2019). The racial and ethnic diversity of Brookline's CCBs are not representative of Brookline's general population with notable shortcomings in Asian and Hispanic or Latino representation (figure 1).

Gender

Survey respondents were 60.2% female and 35.9% male; 3.9% of respondents did not answer this question (figure 2). Compared to the 2018 survey results, Brookline's CCBs have experienced a 15.7% increase in women, 10.2% decrease in men, and 100% decrease in transgender individuals.

As of 2019, Brookline's population is 53.2% female and 46.8% male (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Census data on Brookline's transgender population is not available. Brookline's CCBs include a larger proportion of women than exists in the broader Brookline population.

Age

Among survey respondents, 46.9% were over 64 years old, 21.9% were 50-64 years old, 22.7% were 35-49 years old, 7% were 19-34 years old, and 0% were younger than 19; 1.6% of respondents did not answer this question (figure 3). Compared to the 2018 survey results, Brookline's CCBs have experienced a 14.2% increase, 25.8% decrease, 18% increase, and 21.2% increase in participation from individuals older than 64, 50-64, 35-49, and 19-34 respectively.

The age groups older than 64, 50-64, 35-49, and 19-34 comprise 16.6%, 15%, 17.2%, and 31.8% of Brookline's general population respectively (United States Census Bureau, 2017). 2019 data indicates that persons older than 64 now represent only 15.9% (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Brookline's CCBs do not reflect the age diversity of the broader population. There are significant shortcomings in the representation of the 19-34 year old age group and younger individuals overall in CCB participation.

Household Income

Among survey respondents, 0.8% made less than \$13,000 in household income, 1.8% made between \$13,000 and \$26,000 in household income, 13.3% made between \$27,000 and \$75,000 in household income, 27.3% made between \$75,000 and \$150,000 in household income, 28.1% made between \$150,000 and \$300,000 in household income, and 15.6% made more than \$300,000 in household income; 13.3% of respondents did not answer this question (figure 4). 2018 data on CCB member household income was not collected.

The median household income in Brookline between 2014 and 2018 was \$113,515, adjusted to 2018 dollars (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Based on this, the household income diversity of Brookline's CCB is skewed towards more affluent members, leaving less affluent individuals underrepresented.

Number of Household Residents

Among survey respondents, 11.7% lived alone, 42.2% lived in a household of 2, 15.6% lived in a household of 3, 14.8% lived in a household of 4, 7% lived in a household of 5, 1.6% lived in a household of 6, and 0.8% lived in a household of 10 or more individuals; 6.3% of respondents did not answer this question (figure 5). 2018 data on the number of household residents was not collected.

The average number of individuals per household in Brookline between 2014 and 2018 was 2.34 (United States Census Bureau, 2019). The average household size among respondents was 2.7*. While stratified data on the number of household residents in Brookline is not available, Brookline's CCBs appear to be roughly representative of the broader population in this category.

*Average number of residents was calculated under the assumption that “10 or more” equaled exactly 10.

Home Ownership

Among survey respondents, 80.5% owned their home, 16.4% rented their home, and 0.8% had other arrangements; 2.3% of respondents did not answer this question (figure 6). 2018 data on home ownership was not collected.

Of Brookline’s occupied housing, 50.9% is owned and 49.1% is rented as of 2017 (United States Census Bureau, 2017). The diversity of Brookline’s CCBs is strongly misrepresented in this area, with a 65% higher proportion of homeowners in Brookline’s CCBs than exist in Brookline’s general population.

Persons with Disability

Survey respondents were 10.2% self-identified persons with disabilities while 84.4% were not; 5.5% of respondents did not answer this question (figure 7). Compared to the 2018 survey results, Brookline’s CCBs have experienced a 58.4% increase in self-identified persons with disabilities and a 5.3% decrease in self-identified persons without disabilities.

Between 2014 and 2018, persons with disabilities under the age of 65 comprised 3.5% of Brookline’s population (United States Census Bureau, 2019). While this indicates that self-identified persons with disabilities are overrepresented in Brookline’s CCBs, it is critical to note that 46.9% of respondents were 65 and older and not included in Brookline’s census on persons with disabilities (figure 3).

Veterans

Survey respondents were 4.7% self-identified veterans while 89.1% were not; 6.3% of respondents did not answer this question (figure 8). Compared to the 2018 survey results, Brookline’s CCBs have experienced a 4.4% increase in self-identified veterans and a 3.5% decrease in non-self-identified veterans.

Veterans make up 0.02% of Brookline’s population. Self-identified veterans comprise a larger proportion of Brookline’s CCBs than exists in the broader Brookline population.

Civic Role

Among survey respondents, 18% belonged to two or more civic roles (figure 10). Respondents played a singular civic role in Town meetings (8.6%), the Advisory Committee (5.5%), the Brookline Commission for the Arts (4.7%), the Commission for Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Relations (3.9%), the Bicycle Advisory Committee (3.1%), the Public

Transportation Advisory Committee (2.3%), the Council on Aging (2.3%), the Public Health Advisory Board (2.3%), the Historic Preservation Commission (2.3%), the Housing Advisory Board (2.3%), the Zoning Board of Appeals (1.6%), the Zoning Bylaw Committee (1.6%), the Commission on Disability (1.6%). The Pedestrian Advisory Committee (1.6%), the Brookline Commission for Women (1.6%). The Transportation Board (1.6%), the Small Business Development Committee (0.8%), the Fiscal Advisory Committee (0.8%), the Coolidge Corner Study Committee (0.8%), the Tree Planting Committee (0.8%), the Information Technology Advisory Committee (0.8%), the Select Board (0.8%), the Parks and Recreation Commission (0.8%), the Building Commission (0.8%), the Planning Board (0.8%), and the Library Trustees (0.8%); 27.3% of respondents did not answer this question (figure 10).

Frequency of Public Outreach

Survey respondents reported the frequency at which their civic group reached out to the public for concerns or questions. 14.1% reported never reaching out, 6.3% reported reaching out once a year, 19.5% reported reaching out two times a year, 15.6% reported reaching out four times a year, and 44.5% reported reaching out every month (figure 11). 2018 data on the frequency of outreach for concerns and questions from the public was not collected.

Diversity Inclusion Efforts

Quantitative

Survey respondents reported whether their civic group took measures to ensure diverse members of the public are reached. 68% of respondents reported “yes” while 32% reported “no” (figure 12). 2018 data on whether civic groups take measures to ensure they reach diverse members of the public was not collected.

Qualitative

Respondents were asked to elaborate on their or their civic group’s effort to ensure diverse members of the public were reached. The qualitative responses to this question have been organized by themes and will be discussed in order of prevalence.

The most widespread method for reaching diverse members of Brookline involves utilizing mass media. This includes using websites, digital newsletters, social media, surveys, posters, newspapers, and other non-targeted strategies to disseminate information. Facebook pages, email list servers, and the TAB were particularly common resources among this category of outreach.

Following mass-media outreach, many respondents reported leveraging their own personal networks to share information and discuss issues or concerns. Speaking with colleagues, door-to-door conversations in residential communities, and spontaneous interactions with local citizens are all examples of personal-network outreach.

Civic groups with pre-established contact lists or knowledge of interested and pertinent groups often reached out directly to said individuals. This includes, for example, notices to individuals affected by zoning laws or targeted contact with faith-based institutions.

Some civic groups are interested in or actively working to increase their outreach to diverse members of Brookline. This theme was reflected in a handful of responses either seeking advice or expressing barriers to success in this area.

A few respondents noted that their civic group relies entirely on the public to reach out to them. In some cases, this was due to the nature of the civic group, such as receiving complaints from the community. In other cases, outreach has not been integrated into the group's ongoing activities.

Neighborhood associations and local public meetings were used by a small cohort of respondents to reach diverse individuals. This includes using not only one's own neighborhood association, but also the associations of other neighborhoods when beneficial or applicable. Public meetings were most often announced via mass media.

Lastly, a few individuals actively sought out diverse members of the public. Respondents either brought forth the concerns of the individuals they reached or encouraged diverse individuals to become more civically involved themselves. Half of the responses categorized under this theme sought out the elderly for their concerns and input.

Limitations

There are a few limitations to the 2020 CCB diversity study that should be taken into consideration. Firstly, the small sample size (n=128) makes the data less generalizable and more prone to misrepresent the true diversity of Brookline's CCBs. Sample size is a challenging variable to address since the online survey was disseminated via commission board chairs and the Town Moderator. Reliance on this method prevents the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Relations from knowing which civically engaged individuals have and have not been reached by the survey. Secondly, the study is prone to voluntary selection bias since individuals can self-select whether to complete the survey. While census data suggests the proportion of Brookline residents with computer access is very high, the possibility of excluding individuals without internet access from data collection is still possible (United States Census Bureau, 2019).

Discussion

From a holistic perspective, the 2020 CCB survey provides evidence that Brookline has made notable progress in increasing diversity within CCBs over the last year. However, a closer look at the various metrics of diversity indicates these improvements have not been made across the board, with significant shortcomings in some areas and a need for continued improvement in most.

Significant changes were seen in the racial and ethnic diversity of Brookline's CCBs. The Asian population, which was significantly underrepresented in the 2018 survey, experienced a 147.7% increase in CCB participation—the largest change of any subgroup. The proportion of

Black or African American individuals in CCBs is now equal to that of the broader population after a 64.5% increase in participation. However, Hispanic or Latino participation decreased 17.8% and Asian individuals comprise only a third of the proportion of their population density. These gaps indicate a need for continued efforts in racial and ethnic inclusion.

Persons with disabilities and veterans both saw an increase in CCB participation at the rates of 58.4% and 4.4% respectively. Along with females, these three groups are overrepresented in Brookline's CCBs relative to their proportion of the broader population. Unlike the overrepresentation of White individuals, these surpluses should not be viewed negatively since the unique needs and perspectives of these groups may benefit from heightened representation and advocacy.

Brookline's CCBs are evidently lacking in income diversity, with more participation from affluent households and much less participation from households in lower income brackets. Since the average number of residents in a CCB member's home, 2.7, is not much higher than Brookline's average, 2.34, the heightened participation of affluent households is unlikely to be a result of more income-generating residents. CCBs would benefit from a continued effort to balance household income diversity.

The age diversity of Brookline's CCB members has improved, with an 18% and 21.2% increase in the underrepresented age groups of 35-49 and 19-34. These improvements were complimented by a reduction of 25.8% in the overrepresented age group 50-64. Despite the progress in the aforementioned age brackets, the 65 and older cohort grew by 14.2%. One of the surveys new metrics for diversity, home ownership, found CCBs have a 65% higher proportion of homeowners than exist in Brookline's broader population. Home ownership rates may be confounded by both age and income. Concerted efforts to increase the age and household income diversity of CCBs could, by extension, improve other diversity metrics such as home ownership.

The qualitative survey results shed light on a number of themes relating to how civic groups ensure outreach to diverse members of Brookline. While each theme is insightful independently, a larger issue is revealed by viewing the themes collectively. There appears to be an overabundance of passive outreach and a deficit in active outreach to diverse community members. Mass media strategies such as public posters and server lists are convenient and require little infrastructure at the cost of generality. Active approaches, such as seeking out target populations to bring their concerns forward, are more intensive and resource-demanding and thus utilized less often. CCBs looking to improve their outreach to diverse individuals may benefit from an increase in active outreach in lieu of its passive counterpart.

Appendix

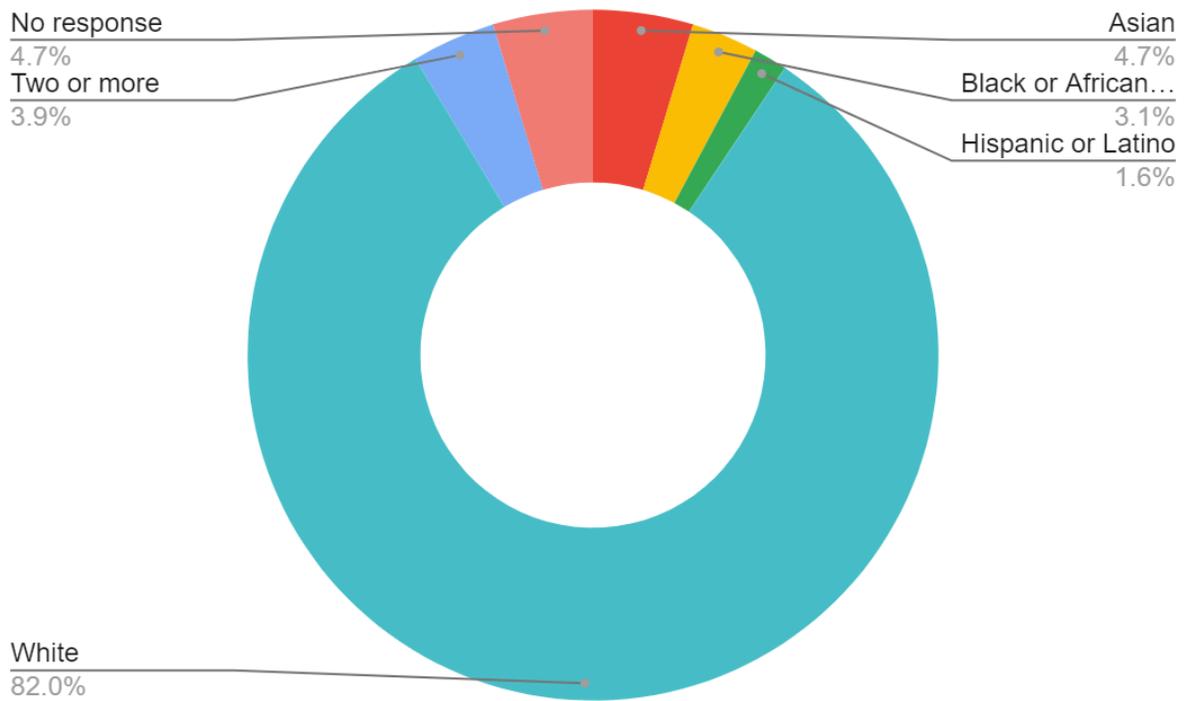


Figure 1. Racial and ethnic diversity of Brookline's CCB in 2020; n=128.

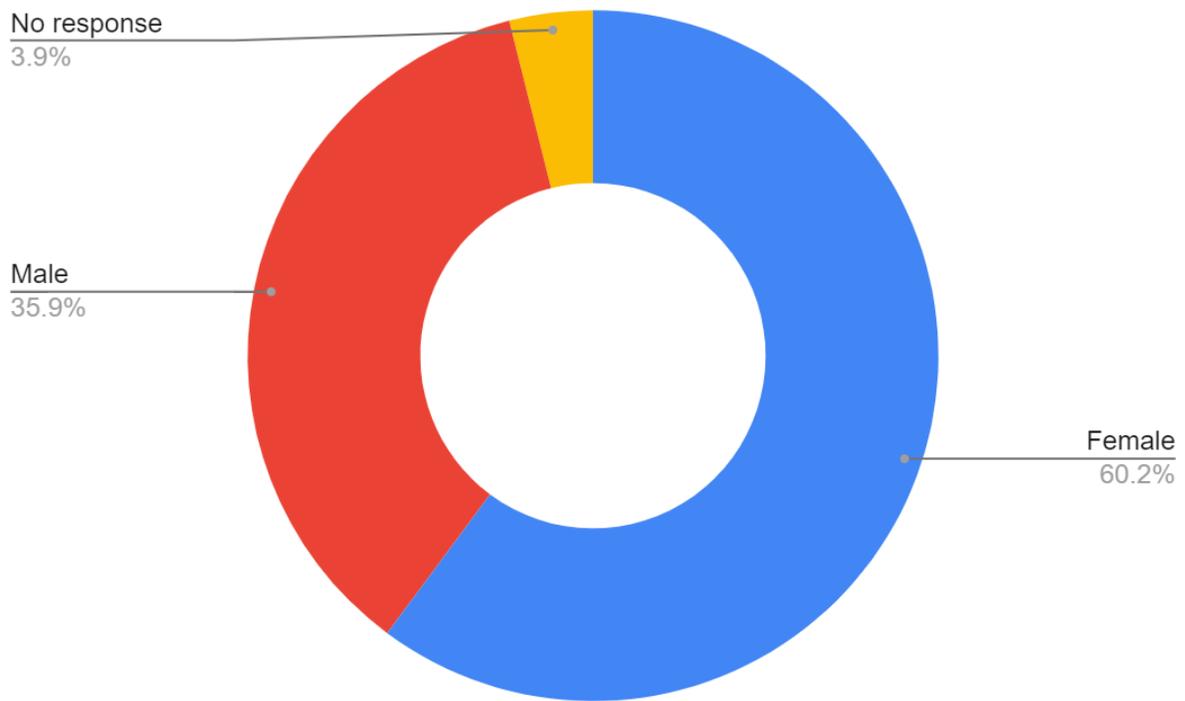


Figure 2. Gender diversity of Brookline's CCB in 2020; n=128.

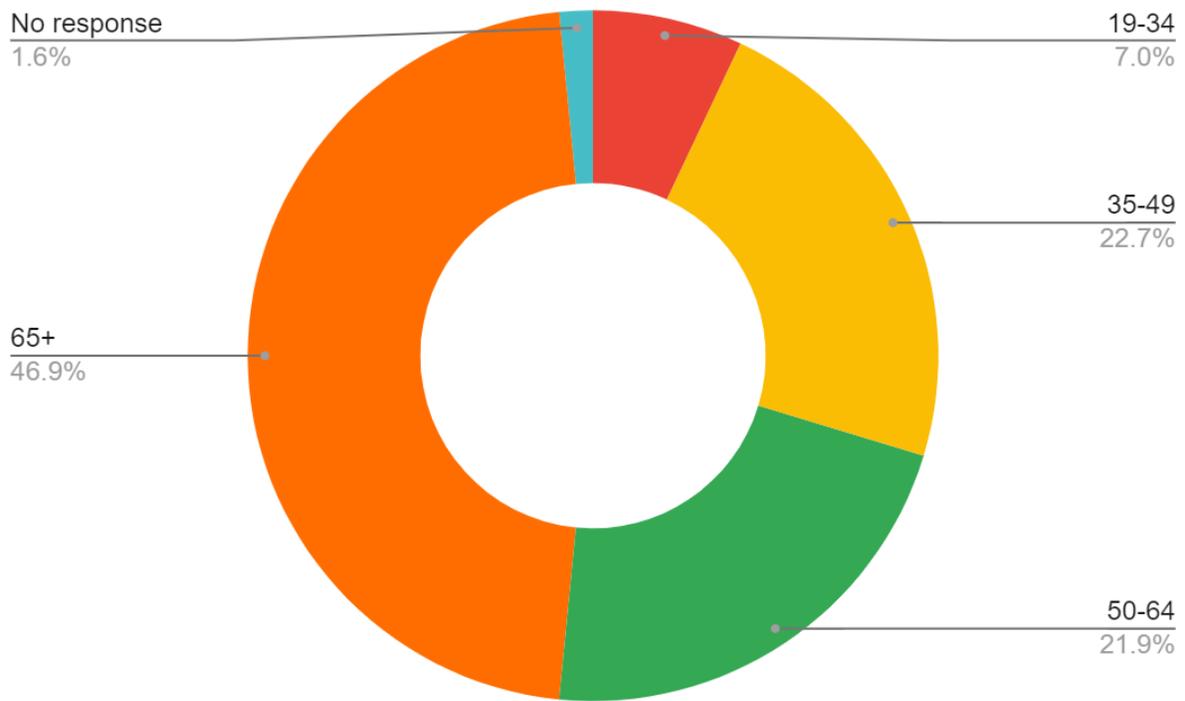


Figure 3. Age diversity of Brookline's CCB in 2020 in years; n=128.

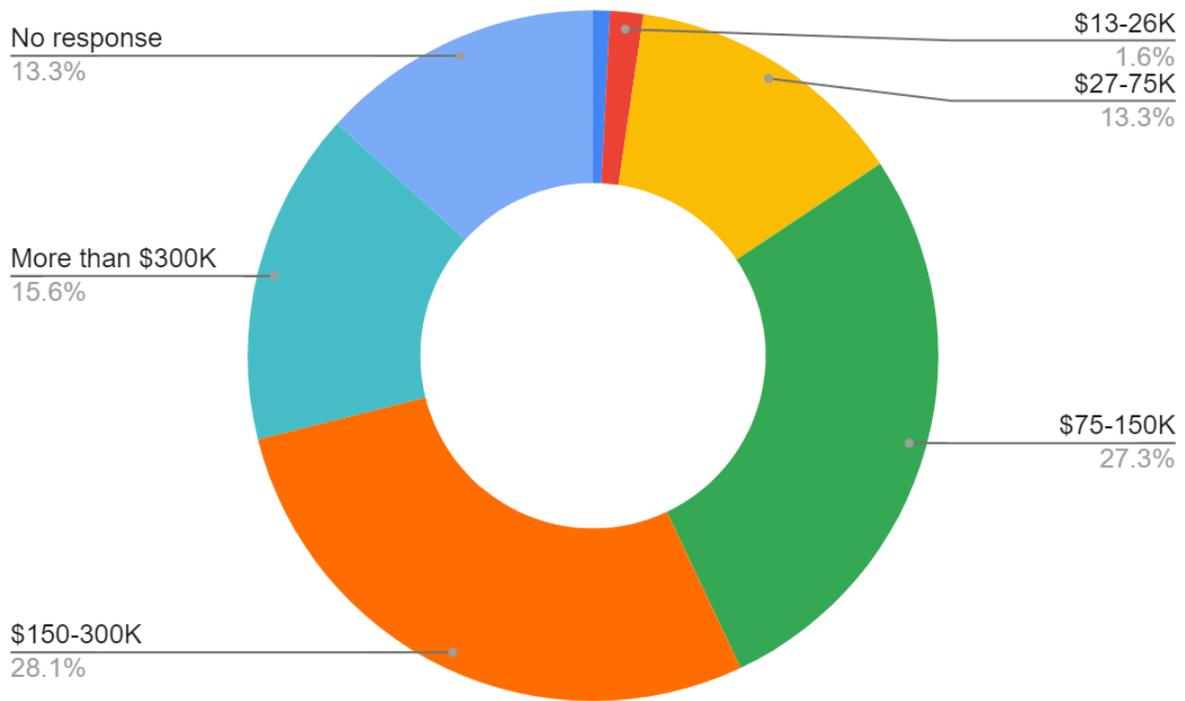


Figure 4. Income diversity of Brookline's CCB in 2020; n=128.

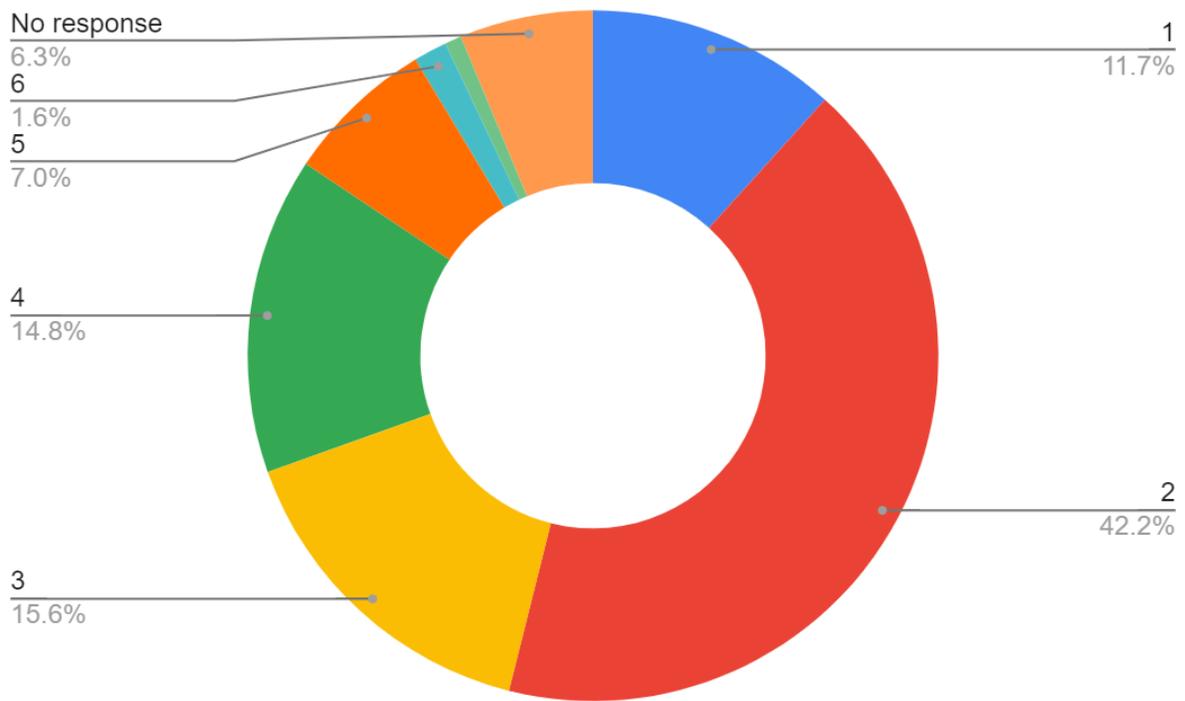


Figure 5. Diversity of household size in Brookline's CCB in 2020 by number of residents per household; n=128.

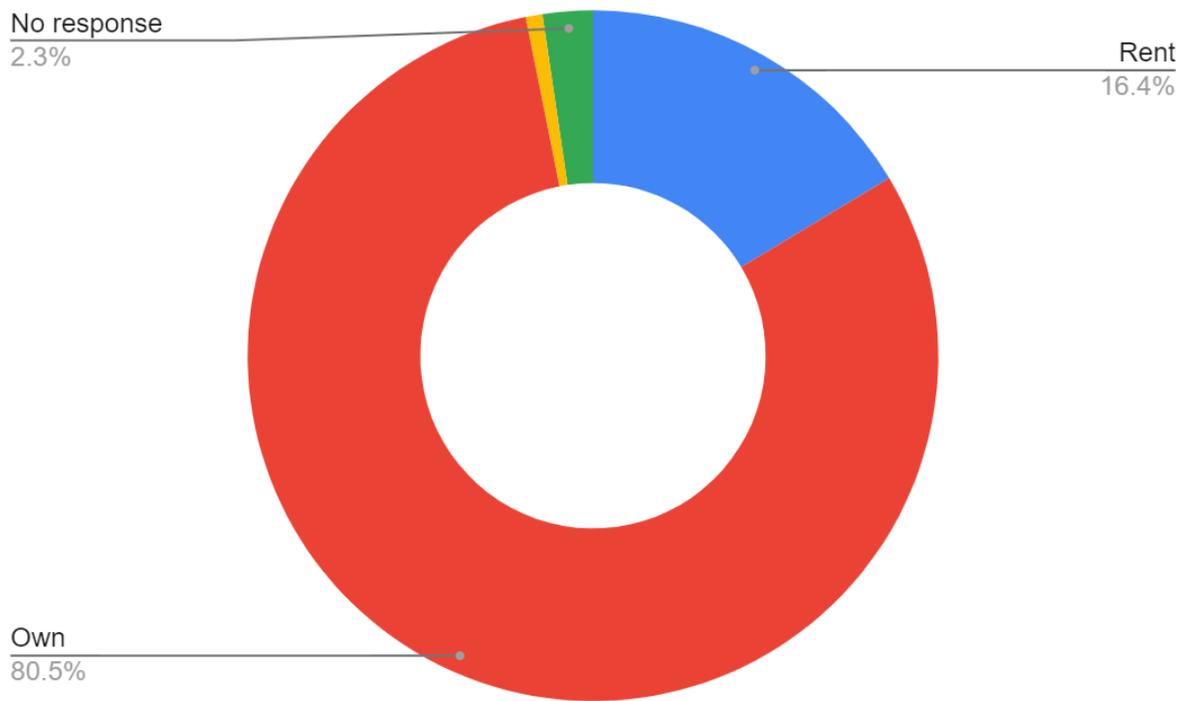


Figure 6. Diversity of home ownership in Brookline's CCB in 2020; n=128.

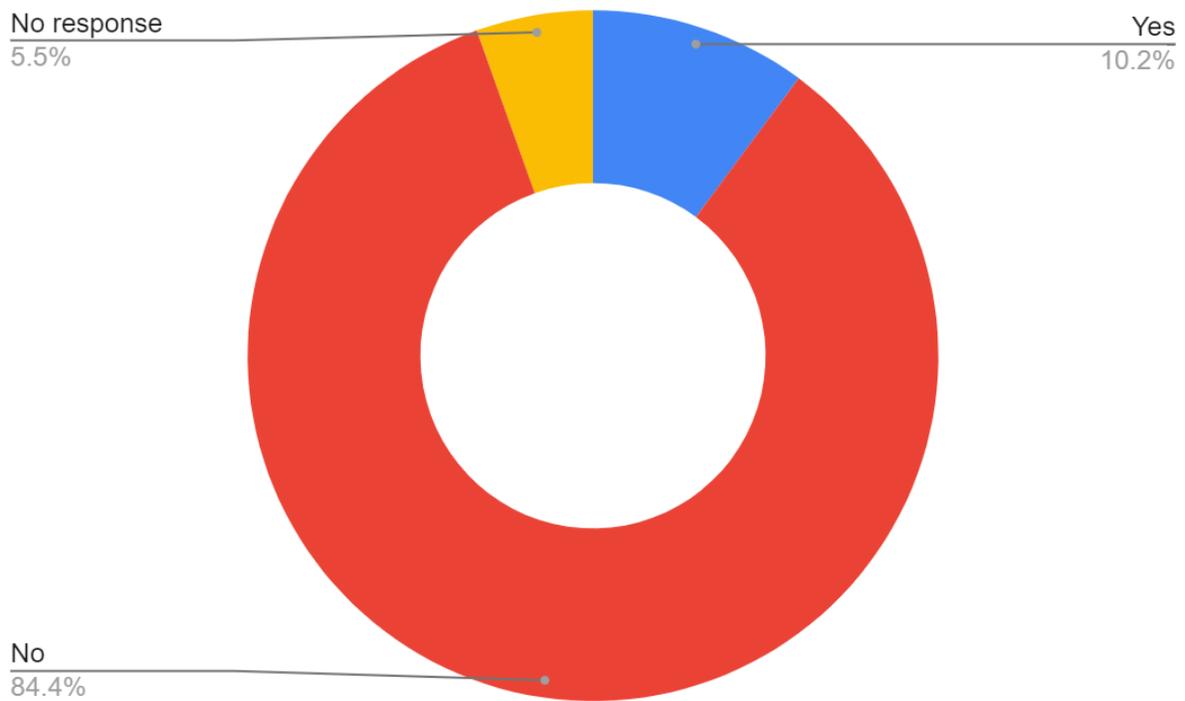


Figure 7. Diversity of self-identified persons with disabilities in Brookline's CCB in 2020. "Yes" signifies the respondent is a self-identified person with disability(ies). "No" signifies the respondent is not a self-identified person with disability(ies); n=128.

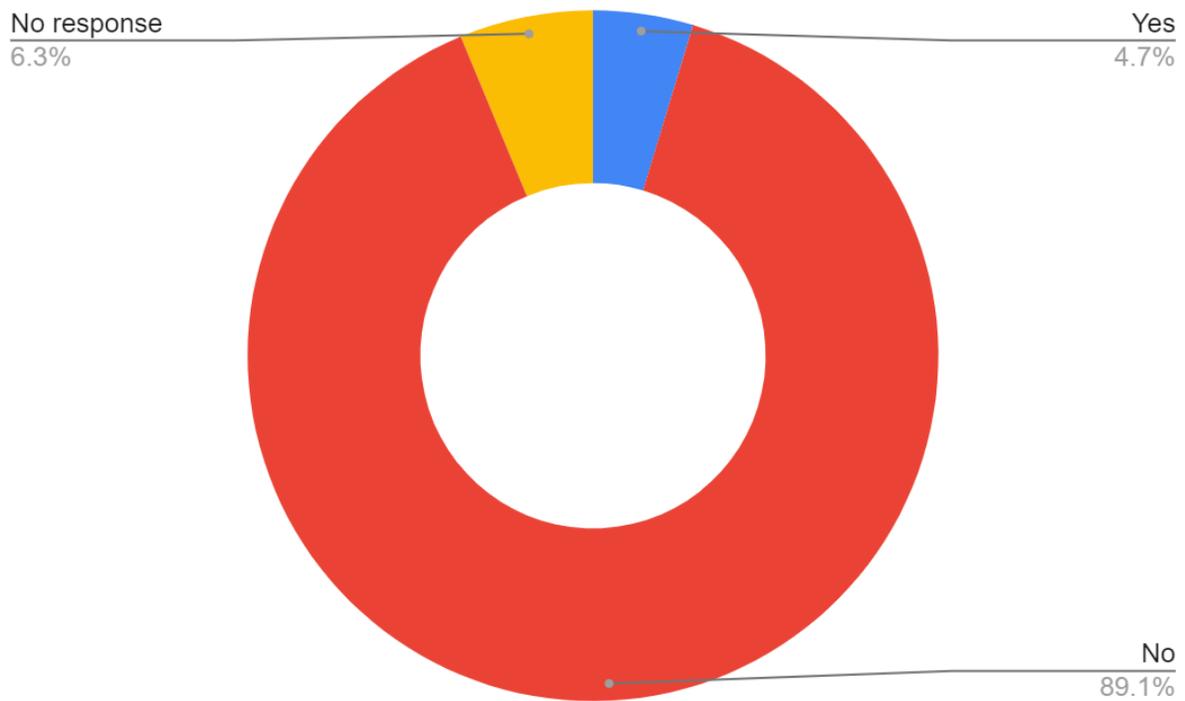


Figure 8. Diversity of self-identified veterans in Brookline's CCB in 2020. "Yes" signifies the respondent is a self-identified veteran. "No" signifies the respondent is not a self-identified veteran; n=128.

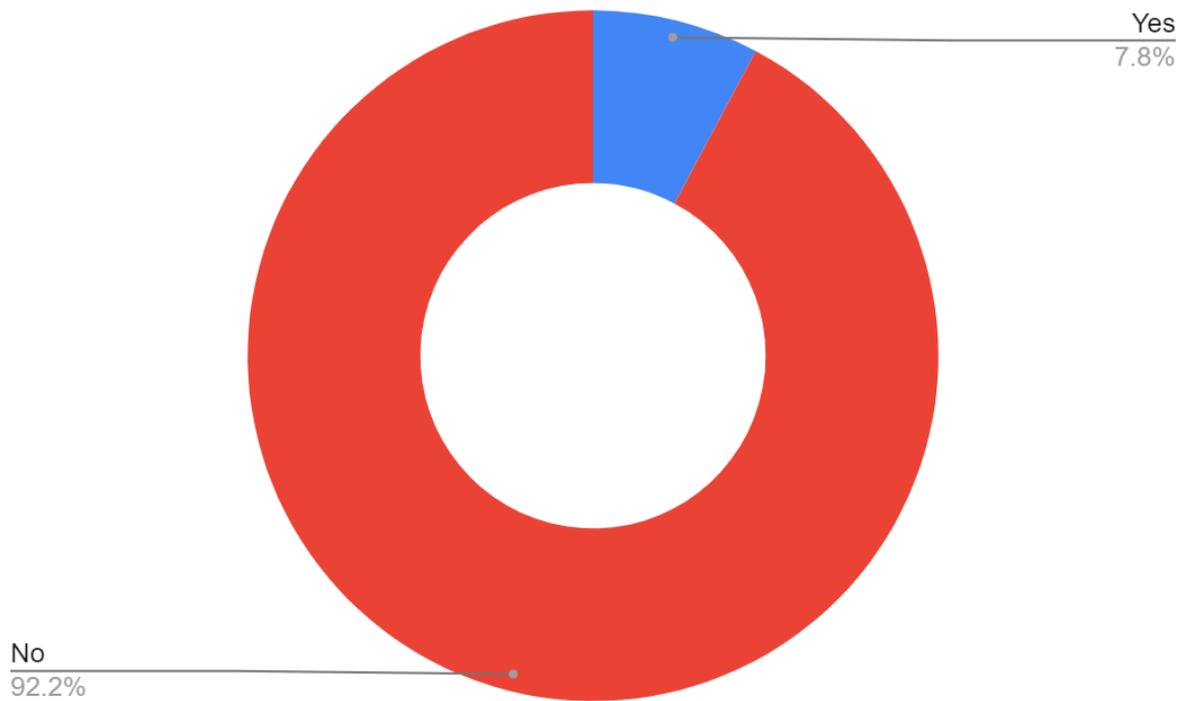


Figure 9. Diversity of Town employees in Brookline's CCB in 2020. "Yes" signifies the respondent is a Town employee. "No" signifies the respondent is not a Town employee; n=128.

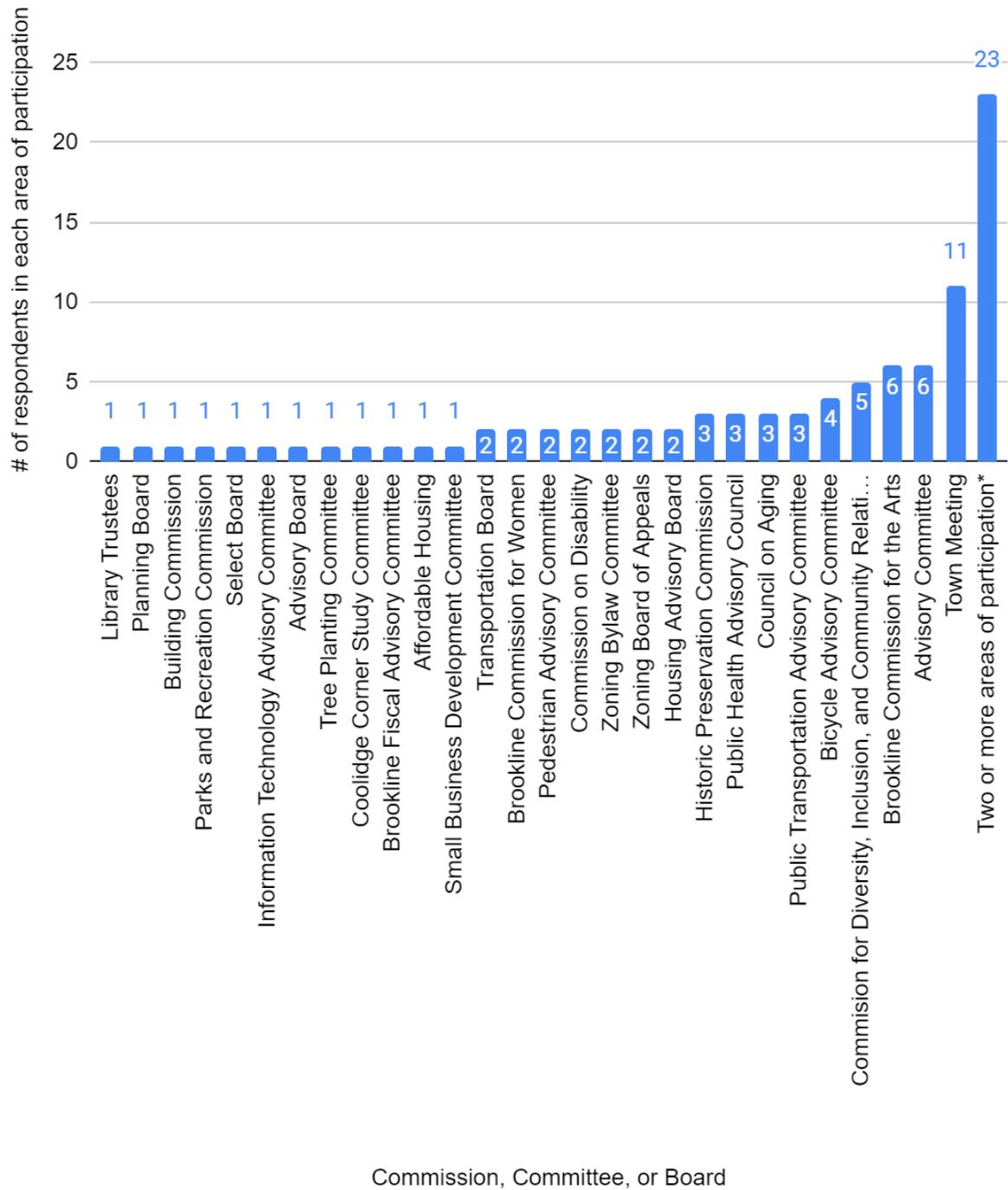


Figure 10. Civic role of survey respondents in Brookline's CCB in 2020. Qualitative responses on civic role have been converted to quantitative data via grouping; n=128.

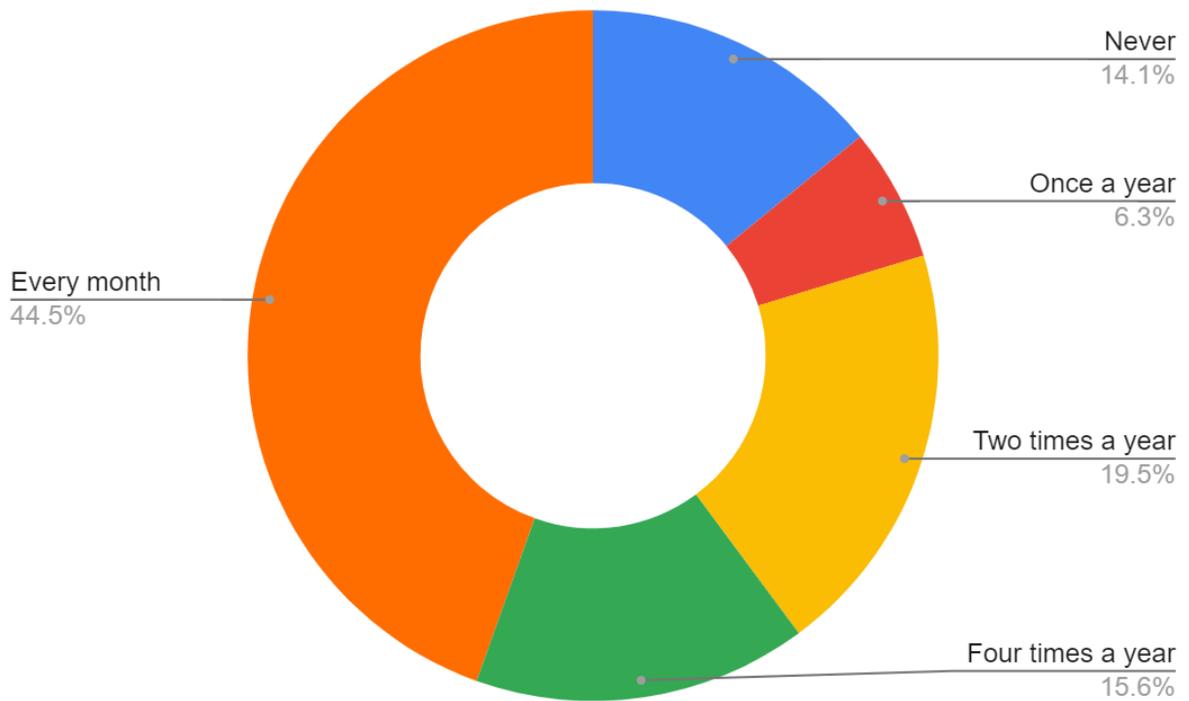


Figure 11. Frequency of public outreach from the respondent's civic group in 2020; n=128.

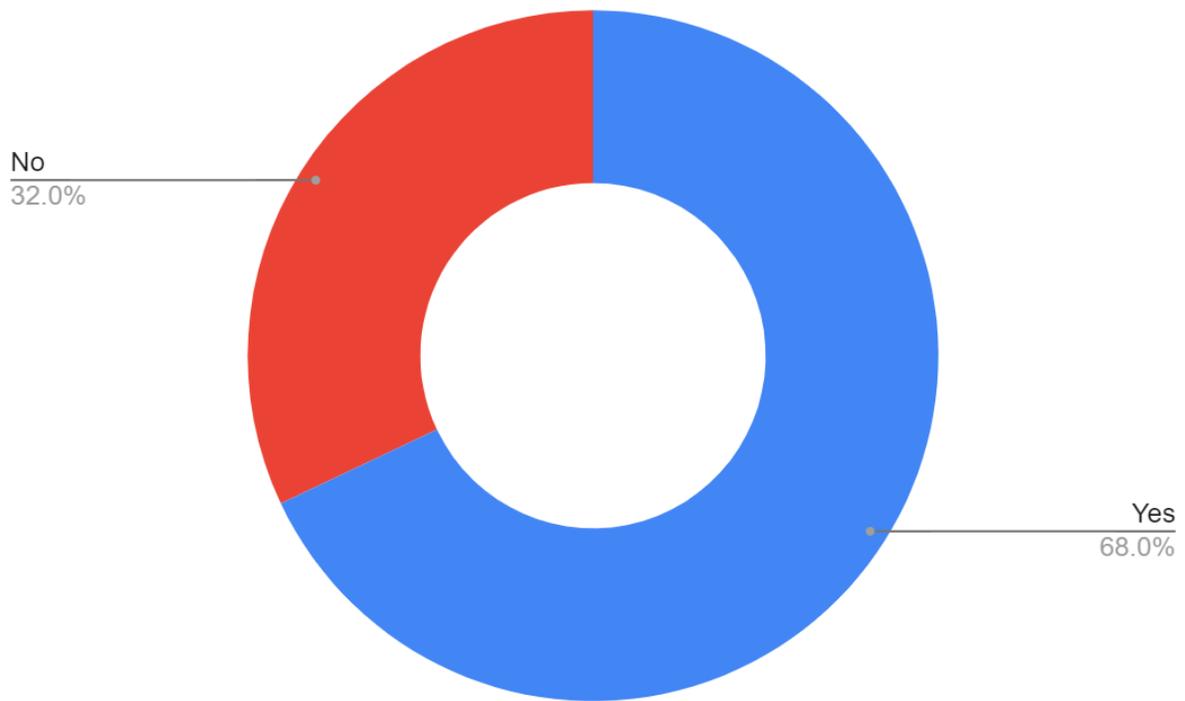


Figure 12. Diversity inclusion efforts from the respondent's civic group in 2020. "Yes" signifies the respondent's civic group ensures they reach diverse members of the public. "No" signifies the respondent's civic group does not ensure they reach diverse members of the public; n=128.

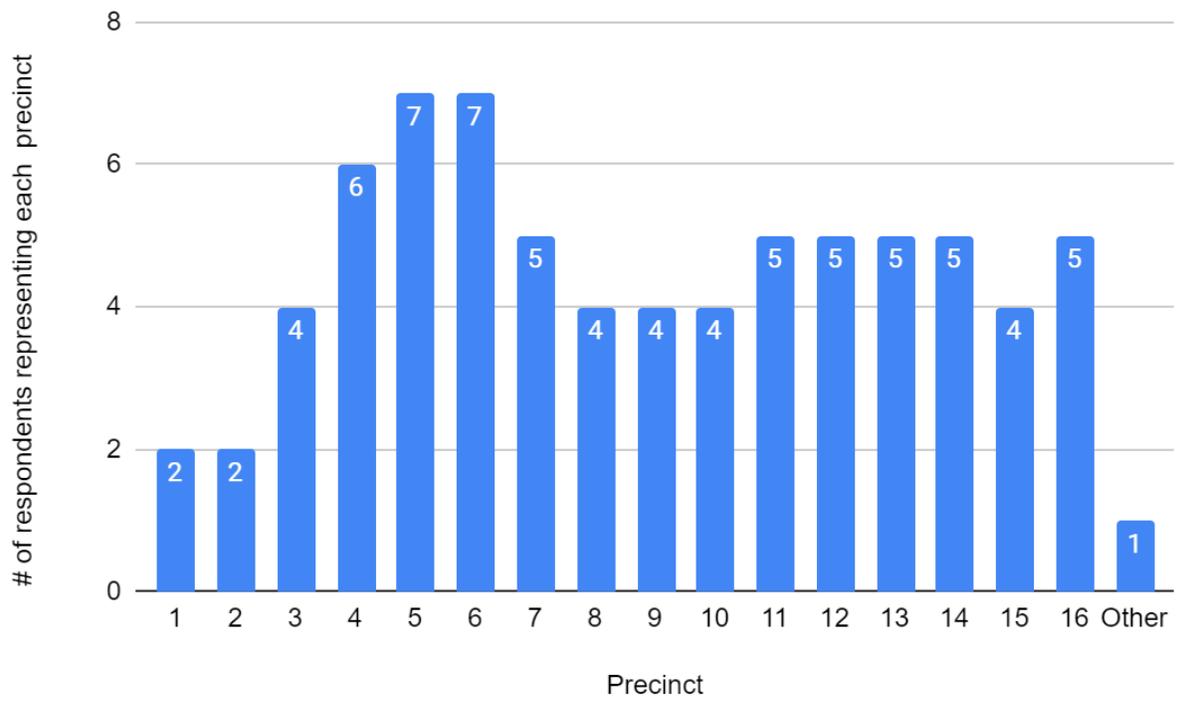


Figure 13. Precinct representation of respondents in 2020; n=128.