

SURVEY 2000

**THE FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL
SOCIETIES**

A REPORT OF THE 2000 SURVEY OF MEMBERS

By

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With the Assistance of Anastasia Blandford

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW OF THE SURVEY

This survey represents the second recent attempt to survey member needs and attitudes by the Federation of Australian Historical Societies, the first, or pilot, survey having been carried out in 1999 (Regional and District Historical Societies). The present survey was meant to complement the 1999 survey, with more detailed information relating to collections. The two-page survey form was sent out to all member societies, of whom 301 responded.

The first section of the questionnaire covered basic information on the society (e.g. name, postal code, number of members, year of founding, relationship with the local council, funding sources and needs), while the second was devoted to the specific problems of the individual society's collection - its size, composition, management and access. Several questions focused on the uses of the new information technologies such as the desk-top computer software and public access via the world wide web. An open-ended final question gave members the chance to comment on any aspect of their society that they chose.

Responses on the whole were informative and extra details were normally generously provided. The problem arose of representing the richness of material so yielded in a form which could be readily available and immediately transparent to all members and, possibly, on the FAHS website. Although there were only twenty-seven main questions, many of these were of the open-ended format, which generated a great complexity of response, given the high variation in size, location and resources of the member societies. The result is necessarily something of a compromise, whereby the flexibility of coding must recognise the need for coherence and comprehensibility, particularly for identifying directions for policy by the Executive. The consultant is grateful, however, for the Executive's recognition of this problem, and of the extension to the previously agreed time for delivery of this report.

REPORTING METHOD

Apart from the odd note and the Summary in a following section, there is very little commentary provided on the individual tables and charts, since they are meant to be self-explanatory. The remaining text of this introduction sets out the technical aspects of the processing and analysis of the data, followed by a brief commentary for the consideration of the executive on the possible implications for decision-making and development of the Federation. Since this report represents only a first take from the data based on individual item, there may well be more complicated and specific questions on which to base a follow up. These are set out in the concluding section.

DATA QUALITY AND CODING STRATEGY

While data were generally usable, there were several questions (e.g. Qs 6, 15b, 16, 17b) where there were so few responses that an analysis by table or graphic was impossible. Because questions were generally so open-ended, the task of coding was extremely time-consuming and at times, tedious. Each question had to be examined several times throughout the entire 301 sample, with an eye to the creating of coding categories. Since there were over 20 questions of this type, many of which could be answered more than once, the coding sheet grew in length to more than four typed pages, embracing 87 variables, to which were added seven constructed variables (e.g. for the multiple response variables where members could tick more than one item, state code identifier and remoteness index). The principal consultant is very grateful to the assistant, Anastasia Blandford, for the meticulous and labour-intensive effort that was necessary to code and classify this complex material.

Missing responses have been included in every tabulation and in most of the graphics, where the number was significant for interpretation purposes. Most of these problems could have been avoided had the questionnaire been more professionally constructed, eliminating the need for such a laborious exercise, while at the same time preserving spaces for "written-in" or unstructured responses. The final question was so disparate that it was very difficult to do anything more than to list the responses that were most informative as to directions of policy

relating to the maintenance and display of collections. The data were first entered into Microsoft Excel, imported for analysis into SPSS Version 9.1 for summary analysis, including treatment of missing data (not possible with Excel). The output was then exported back to Excel for tabulation and graphical display (extensive use was made here of the superior chart-making facilities of Excel 2000) and then copied into this report.

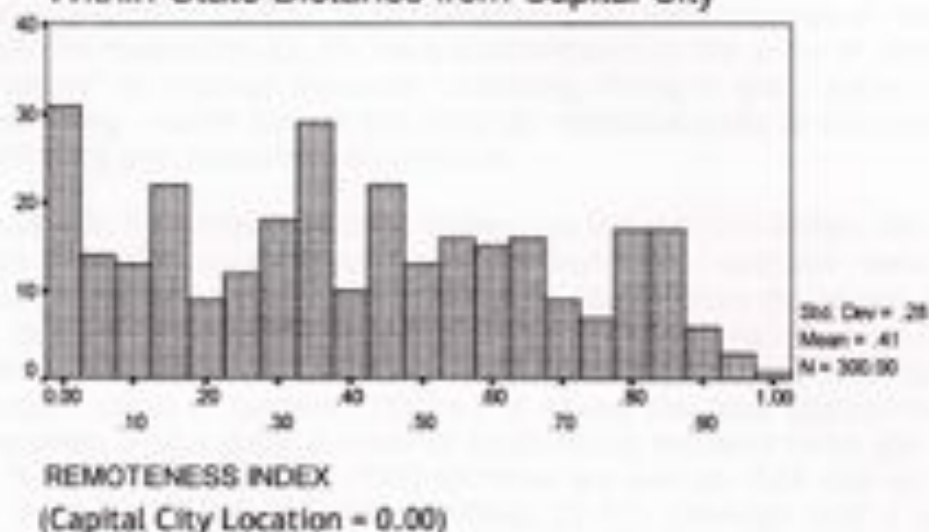
THE FINDINGS: A SUMMARY

Historical societies, within each State and Territory of the Commonwealth, are constituted as voluntary-incorporated, non-profit-making bodies in the public sphere. As such, they attract funding and support from Government bodies, particularly local councils, who see them as repositories of the collective memory of a town or district and, quite recently, as providers of displays and other facilities that may serve as foci of tourist interest.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the respondent societies should represent a wide variety of types of organization of often quite diverse perceptions of their individual charters and objectives, ranging from the maintenance and collection of family and civic photographs and letters to quite large and communally-supported bodies enjoying extensive resources for displays, exhibitions and publication lists. Unfortunately, it is the small, poorly-resourced society, reliant on an ageing volunteer membership which appears to be more typical of this sample, and probably of the whole population of societies. A brief commentary on each section, may, however, provide a number of insights which could prove to be the basis for identifying the directions which the Federation might follow to these smaller, local bodies which constitute the overwhelming majority of the membership.

Section A : At first glance, the geographical distribution by state of the respondent societies would appear to follow the concentration of population (Q. 1). However, such a crude analysis conceals the largely rural and regional character of the bulk of the respondent societies. The following chart gives a crude representation of this property, based on the fact that higher postcodes within each state are the more remote from the capital. This analysis suggests that only about 30, or ten percent of the respondents are based in or near the great metropolitan concentrations of population, with the vast majority being distributed fairly evenly across their respective states.

Distribution of Societies by Remoteness Within-State Distance from Capital City



The relatively small size of the average society is indicated in the analysis for Q2, where it appears that the most frequent size interval is between about twenty-five and forty members. Although there are some very large societies with 1,000 or more members (one has 4,000), these are by no means typical. These larger members tend to distort the arithmetic mean (ninety-seven for the complete sample), while the median value is closer to fifty. The analysis of the date of founding (Q. 2) indicates as well that most societies are unlikely to grow, given the mature profile of the sample (i.e. most over thirty years since foundation). Size and age (both of the societies and their members) has implications, of course, for the kind of resources which may be called upon for any event, since most members will not normally be active.

The vast majority of members here (80%), however, have premises of their own, many (over 30%) with formal terms of occupancy in a building or museum (Q. 4). The great majority as well find their premises to be satisfactory, with 26% indicating that they are 'very satisfactory' (Q. 5). The same level of satisfaction applies to the item indicating the level of support from the local authority, where two-thirds of the responses indicate a positive perception. About 35% of respondents say that their local authority has a heritage committee, with about 30% of the total sample indicating that the society has formal representation (about 45% of those with some kind of committee) (Q. 8).

Sources of income, other than membership dues, are varied, with a heavy reliance on grants publications, admissions and fundraising of various kinds. Donations, including bequests, also figured prominently. This spread among the great bulk of the sample (only 8 failed to answer

this question) indicated a healthy diversity of financial base (Q. 9). Indeed financial anxieties were not as prominent as the lack, or age, of membership (Q. 10), while lack of space for storage and display accounted for about 20% of the responses. Potential avenues of support from the Federation (Q. 11) were concentrated in the areas of 'political economy' of external relations - lobbying, filling in grant application, advertising - rather than in the internal- technical areas of cataloguing, computing and collection maintenance.

Section B: Collections This is indeed the focus of the survey, the one area where analysis could provide important detailed technical information for member support. It would appear from the responses to Q. 12 that the members' holdings are quite varied and often complex, with a spread across the principal types of holdings (photographs, books, records, maps) of between 15% to 25% among the total aggregation of responses, with a mean number of types falling between three and four of these categories. Most (75%) societies are well on their way to fully or partially cataloguing their holdings (Q. 13) although only a small minority have them completely catalogued (15%, Q. 14).

Indeed, it is in this technical area of computer use and access (through the web) that the vast majority of societies appear to be deficient. Most have no, or only one, computer (Q. 15a) and those that do appear to be working with outdated hardware (Q. 15b). Questions (16 through 18) in this area were poorly answered. Only a handful of the societies had a website or URL address. On the other hand, almost 40% indicated that they would like to have their collection available through web-enabled access (Q. 19). The majority (60%) of the sample also indicated that they would like to part of a national linking of historical societies. Given the fact that photographs were considered by far the most important items of the societies' collections out of the aggregated responses, it would appear that some form of electronic preservation might also complement the application of the new technologies to cataloguing and public access. Most societies were apparently able to provide a museum or archives area but only a small proportion (about 13%) are able to attract more than 100 visitors per month (Q. 25)

Conclusions:

To the extent that this sample is representative, the analysis of responses to this survey reveals an important set of agencies with strong and dedicated community membership and support, vitally concerned with the preservation of their local histories and heritage. Three sets of issues would appear, however to be threatening or eroding the base of the societies:

- (1) a national decline in local or community-based voluntarism, well documented for most developed societies since the 1970s;
- (2) the economic and social decline of rural and regional Australia, where, as we have seen, the majority of societies are based;
- (3) the commercialisation and professionalisation of heritage services the growth of tourism and the new information technologies. The age profile of the the societies, indicated by their founding (mean date is 1973), indicates that the historical societies may be borne by a movement which has reached, or is just passing, its maturity.

The specific concerns emerging from the analysis are only partly financial, though this area is particularly acute in the attraction of grants. Of greater importance appear to be non-financial problems such as the recruitment of new, particularly younger members, access to display and exhibition space and the development of public strategies which could lift the individual society's public profile. The popular vogue for heritage and tourism provides at least one source of renewal of an interest in local history, though this would of necessity be driven by commercial rather than voluntary and non-profit motives and would no doubt alter the character and social nature of the membership. Political and financial support would no doubt be forthcoming from local support and would no doubt increase, but the resultant professionalisation of services may be seen to marginalise the volunteer base.

If there is one area, however, where the internal needs of the individual societies and the role of the FAHS may be seen to converge, it is in the support for the modernisation of the preservation, cataloguing and access of collections through the new information technologies. In this area the societies seem to be in need of greatest support and where the effects of reform could be greatest: (1) in involving newer and younger members in the project (2) in expanding and revitalising the societies' public image and thereby, their revenue base (3) in developing closer links and ties between members on a national level. There are many grounds for optimism among the responses that have been analysed and the potential for a renewal of the local heritage movement.

is great, without falling into either the extremes of commercialisation on the one hand or stagnation, senescence and decline on the other. This report has set out the challenges which face the societies. It is imperative that these be met, locally and nationally, within the coming decade.

SOME DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS

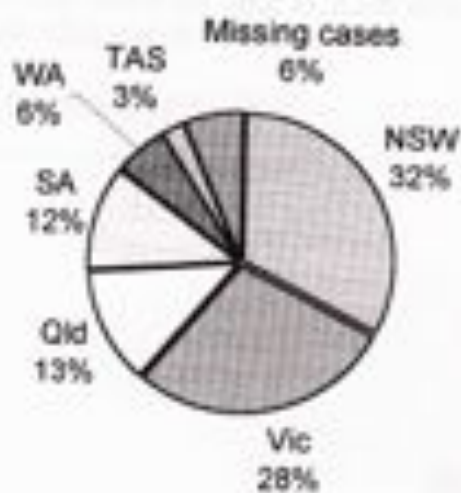
In the refinement of policy along the lines suggested above, the data yielded by this survey could prove to be an invaluable resource. Specifically, with further analysis, by using more sophisticated multivariate techniques such as cluster analysis and data-mining, it should be possible to identify those societies, by state, region, size, date of founding and some other variable, who would benefit most from certain kinds of strategically targeted support. While some may benefit from professional help with the writing of grants, others may need assistance with the development of computing infrastructure, while others (perhaps the majority) could do with some help with recruitment of younger members. The data could then be interrogated systematically for the identification of the profiles of societies which would benefit most by specific kinds of support packages appropriate to regions, size, stage of development, infra-structure and collection mix.

SECTION A: GENERAL INFORMATION

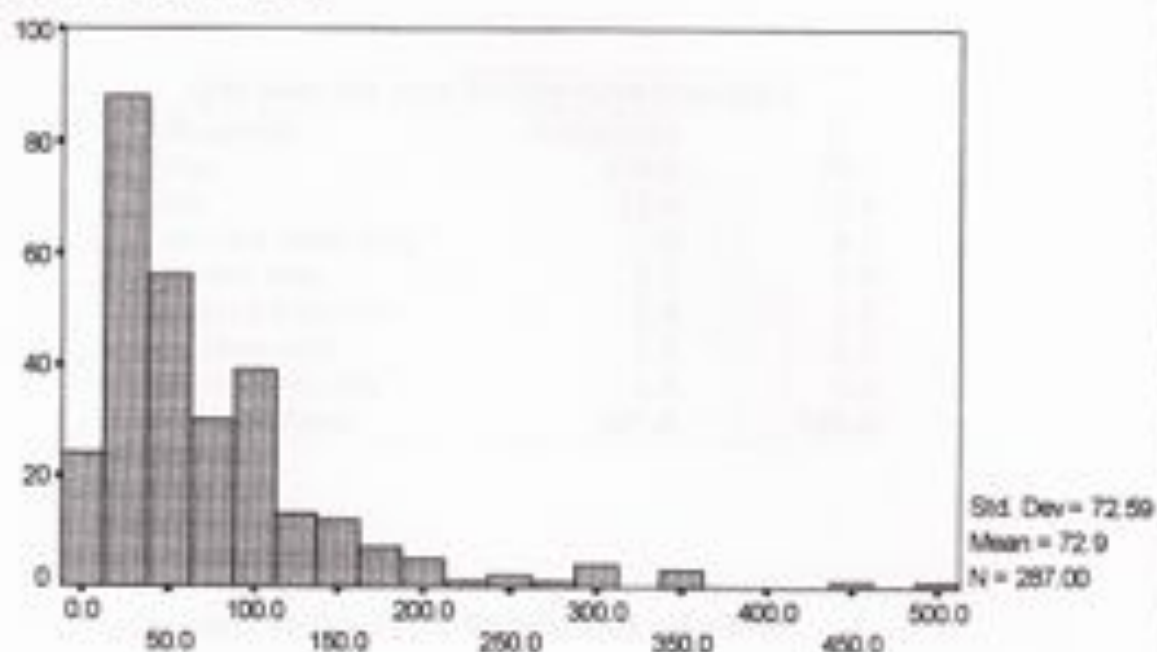
Q 1. Name and Location of Societies by State

State	Frequency	%
NSW	99	32.9
Vic	85	28.2
Qld	38	12.6
SA	35	11.6
WA	17	5.6
TAS	8	2.7
Missing cases	19	6.3
Total	301	100

Distribution of Societies by State



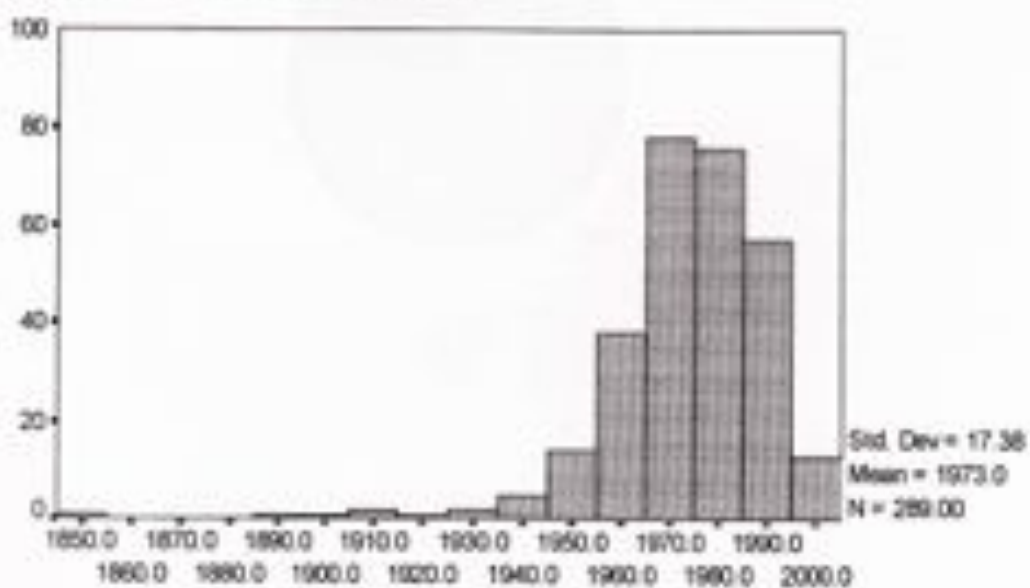
Q 2 Number of Members



Over half the societies have <50 members, while four have 500+

Note: the three largest societies, with each over 1,000 members, have trimmed from this figure for sake of scale effects - their sizes were 1000, 1828 and 4000 respectively.

Q. 3 Date of Founding of Society



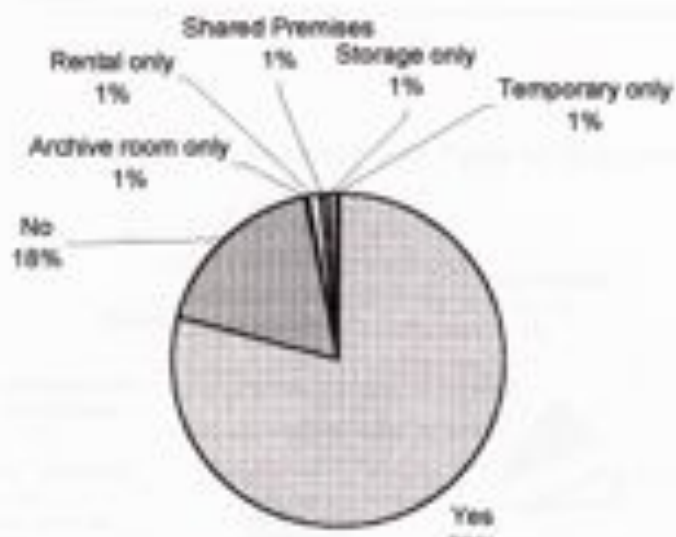
Year Society Was Founded

Society Premises

Q4a Does the your Society have premises?

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	238.0	79.1
No	53.0	17.6
Archive room only	1.0	0.3
Rental only	3.0	1.0
Shared Premises	3.0	1.0
Storage only	2.0	0.7
Temporary only	1.0	0.3
Total	301.0	100.0

Question 4a Does your Society have premises?

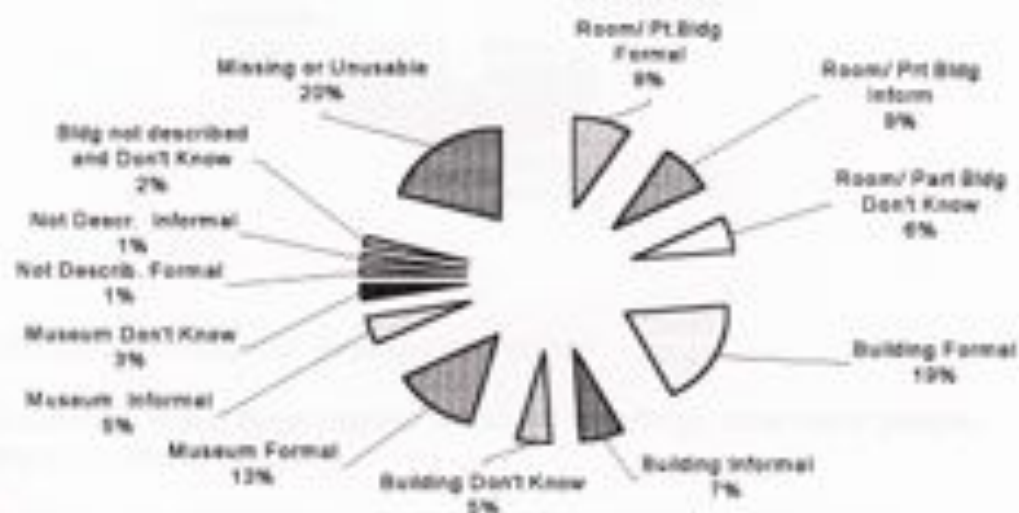


Question 4b Premises - Size, ownership and terms of occupancy

Q4b Premises- Type and Occupancy

Type of Bldg	Frequency	%
Room/ Pt.Bldg Formal	27	9.4
Room/ Prt Bldg Inform	26	9.1
Room/ Part Bldg Don't Know	18	6.3
Building Formal	56	19.5
Building Informal	20	7
Building Don't Know	16	5.6
Museum Formal	40	13.9
Museum Informal	14	4.9
Museum Don't Know	9	3.1
Not Described. Formal	4	1.4
Not Described Informal	4	1.4
Bldg not described and Don't Know	5	1.7
Missing or Unusable	62	16.4
Total	301	100

Q. 4b Physical Aspects and Type of Occupancy

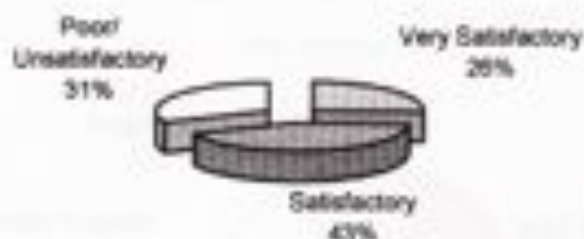


Satisfaction with Premises

Q. 5 How satisfactory for your needs are your premises?

Response	Frequency	%
Very Satisfactory	63	22
Satisfactory	104	36.2
Poor/ Unsatisfactory	76	26.5
Unusable	43	15
Missing	15	0.3
Total	301	100

Q 5. How satisfactory for your needs are your premises?



Attendance at Regular Speaker's Meetings

Question 6. If you have regular speaker's meetings, how many people attend on the average?

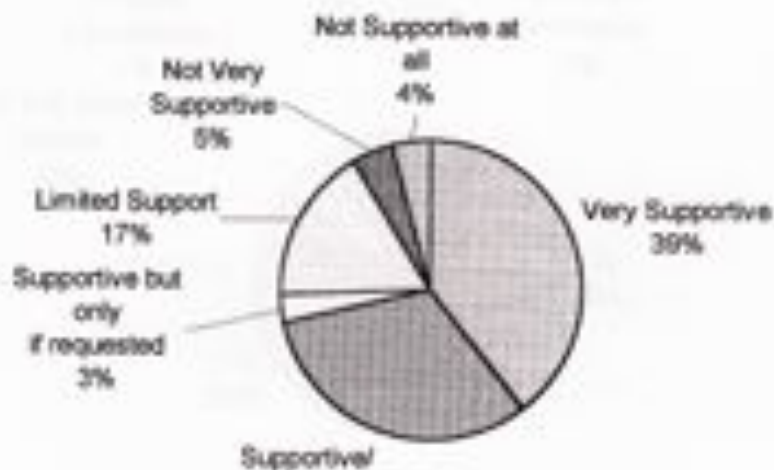
Responses to this question were not analysed, due to the very few usable responses.

Local Authority Support

Q. 7 How supportive is your local council (authority)?

Response	Frequency	%
Very Supportive	113	37.5
Supportive/ Satisfactory	92	30.6
Supportive but only	9	3
Limited Support	48	15.9
Not Very Supportive	13	4.3
Not Supportive at All	12	4
Not usable or missing	14	4.7
Total	301	100

Question 7. How supportive is your local Council?



Council Heritage Advisory Committee

Q8a Does your Council have a Heritage Advisory Committee?

Response	Frequency	%
No	139	46.2
Yes	102	33.9
No but takes advice	16	5.3
Consults sometimes	4	1.3
Don't know	19	6.3
Forming a committee	3	1
N/A	6	2
Missing	12	4
Total	301	100

Q. 8a Does your Council have a Heritage Advisory Committee?

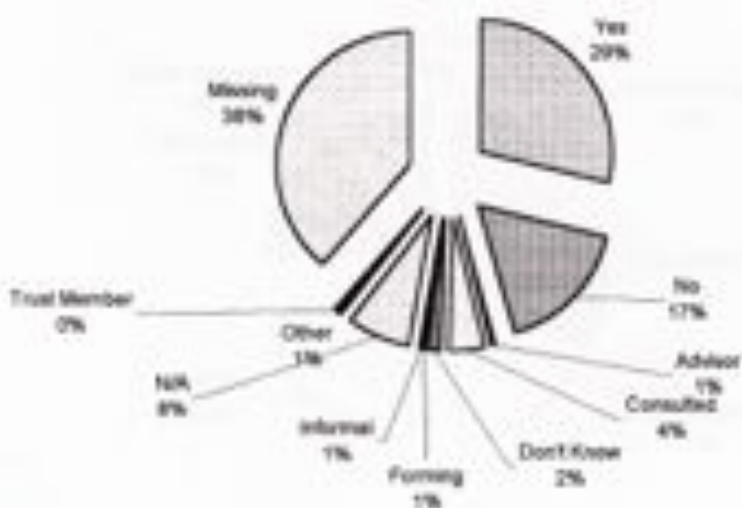


Society Representation on Heritage Advisory Committee

Question 8b Are you and/or other local historical societies represented?

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	86.0	28.6
No	51.0	16.9
Advisor	2.0	0.7
Consulted	13.0	4.3
Don't Know	5.0	1.7
Forming	1.0	0.3
Informal	1.0	0.3
N/A	23.0	7.6
Other	2.0	0.7
Trust Member	1.0	0.3
Missing	116.0	38.5
Total	301.0	100.0

Q 8b Are you and/or other historical societies represented?



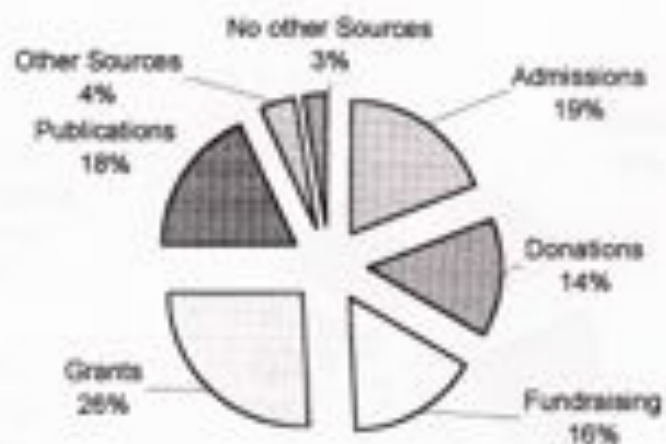
Sources of Income beyond Membership (Dues)

Q 9 What sources of income do you have beyond membership?		
Funding Source	Number of Responses	% Responses
Admissions	117	18.9
Donations	89	14.4
Fundraising	97	15.7
Grants	161	26.1
Publications	111	18
Other Sources	26	4.2
No other Sources	17	2.8
Total responses	618	100

Note on responses: Societies could specify more than one category. Only 8 failed to respond to this item.

Notes on Funding Source Categories: The most popular forms of fundraising were cake-stalls, raffles and bric-a-brac stalls at local markets or functions. Most popular responses in the "Other" category were lunches or organised functions for visiting groups. A few societies mentioned interest earned from bank accounts. "Donations" included bequests.

Q. 9 Sources of Income beyond Membership

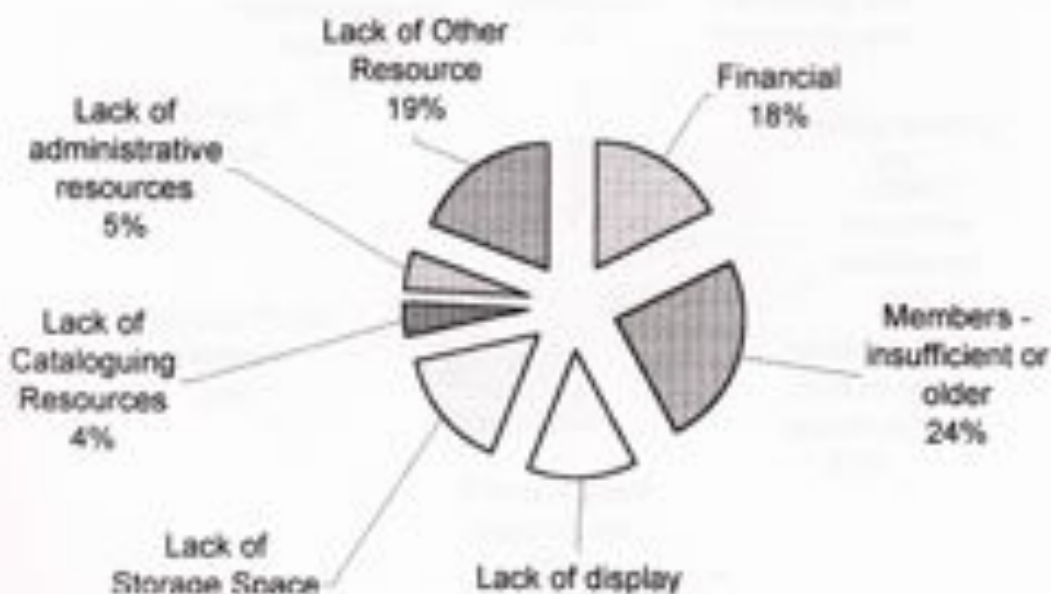


Particular Needs and Problems of Your Society

Q. 10 Does your society have any particular needs or problems?		
Type of Need or Problem	Count	% Responses
Financial	92	17.6
Members - insufficient or older	129	24.6
Lack of display space	73	13.9
Lack of Storage Space	82	15.6
Lack of Cataloguing Resources	22	4.2
Lack of administrative resources	25	4.8
Lack of other resources	101	19.3
Total responses	524	100

39 missing cases

Q. 10 Does your society have any particular needs or problems?

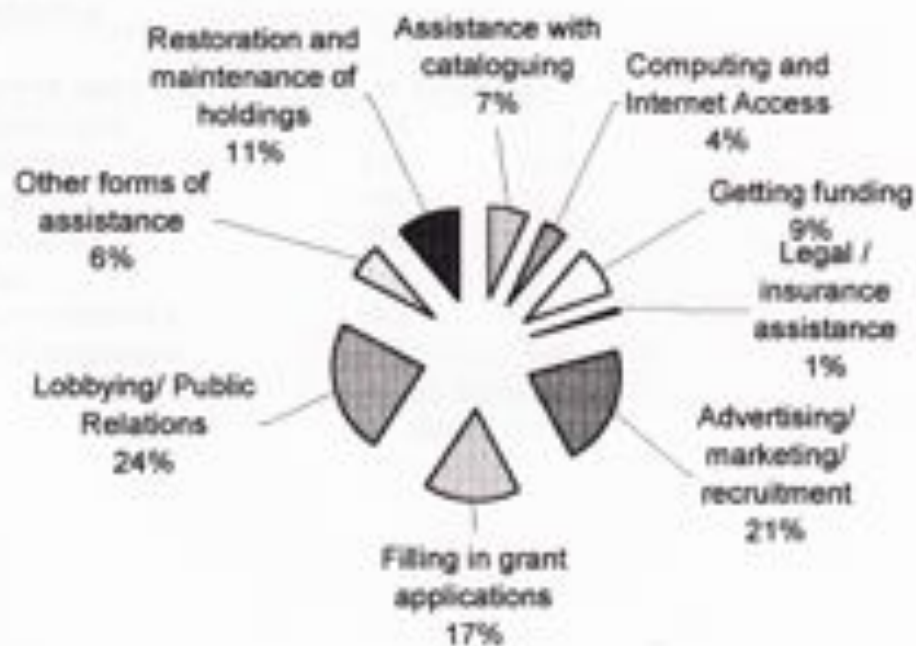


Types of Possible Assistance from the FAHS

Q. 11 How can FAHS assist your society?

Type of Assistance	Count	% Responses
Assistance with cataloguing	15	6.9
Computing and Internet Access	9	4.2
Getting funding	19	8.8
Legal / insurance assistance	2	0.9
Advertising/ marketing/ recruitment	46	21.3
Filing in grant applications	37	17.1
Lobbying/ Public Relations	51	23.6
Other forms of assistance	13	6
Restoration and maintenance of holdings	24	11.1
Total responses	216	100
134 missing cases		

Q. 11 How can the FAHS assist your society?



SECTION B - COLLECTIONS

The Information Collection - Size, Scope and Nature of Materials Held

Question 12. Does your society have an information collection? Please indicate the size and scope of these collections; an archive of manuscripts or other records? A library of historical books? A photographic collection? A map collection? Other?

Q. 12a Size of Information Collection		
Size of Collection	Count	% Responses
No Information Collection	9	3.0
Under 1000 pieces	9	3.0
Over 1000 pieces	61	20.3
Missing	222	73.8
Total responses	301	100

Note No chart was constructed for Table 12a because of large proportion of societies who did not specify the size of their collections.

Q12b Composition of Collection

Type of Materials	%	
	Count	Responses
Manuscripts	104	11.4
Records	135	14.8
Books	199	21.8
Photographs	226	24.7
Maps	149	16.3
Other materials	101	11.1
Total responses	914	100

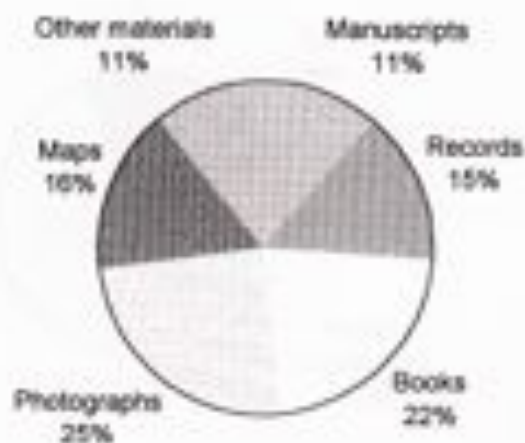
45 missing cases

Note on Collection Diversity An index of the diversity and composition of the average individual collection can be obtained indirectly from this table.

- (1) The diversity (i.e. number of types of materials) can be obtained by dividing the total number of responses by the number of responding societies, i.e. $914 / (301 - 45) = 914 / 256 = 3.6$.
- (2) The composition (i.e. the actual types of materials held) of the average collection can be derived from inspecting the rank order of popularity of each type of material.

By combining these two measures, one could therefore infer that the average collection holds between three and four classes of materials - photographs, books, maps and records, in order of incidence.

Q 12b Diversity of Collection Materials Across Societies

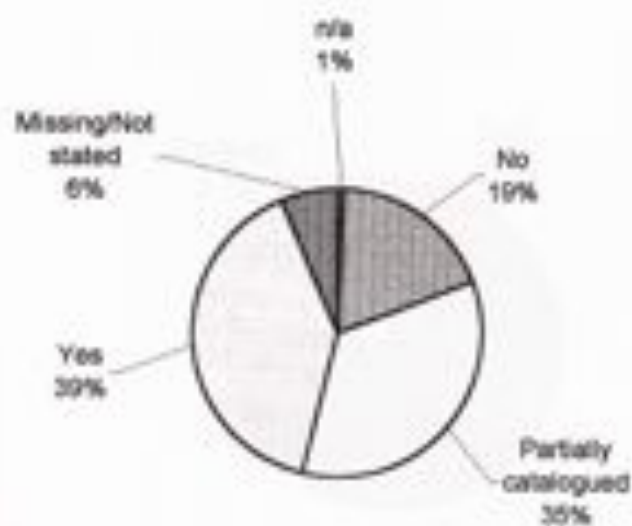


Cataloguing of Collections

Q. 13 Are your collections catalogued?

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	120	39.9
No	56	18.6
Partially catalogued	104	34.6
n/a	2	0.7
Missing/Not stated	19	6.3
Total	301	100

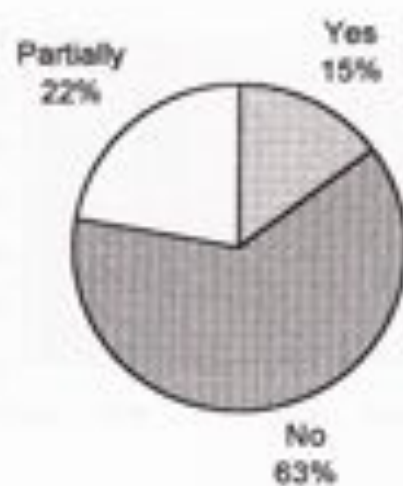
Q. 13 Are your collections catalogued?



Computer Cataloguing of Collections

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	41	13.6
No	176	58.5
Partially	62	20.6
n/a	2	0.7
Missing/ Not Stated	20	6.6
Total	301	100

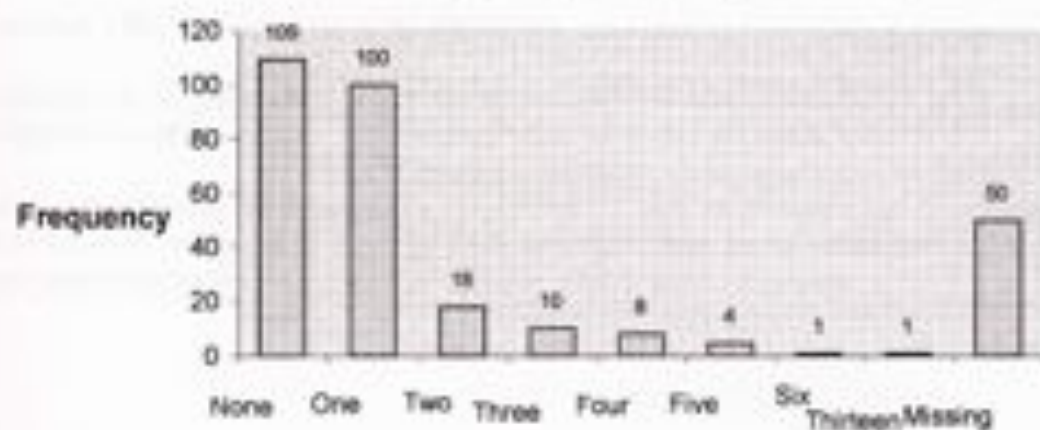
Q. 14 Are your collections computer-catalogued?



Number, age and model of computers owned by Society

Q. 15a How many computers do you have?		
No. of Computers	Frequency	%
None	109	36.2
One	100	33.2
Two	18	6
Three	10	3.3
Four	8	2.7
Five	4	1.3
Six	1	0.3
Thirteen	1	0.3
Missing	50	16.6
Total	301	100

Q 15a How many computers does your society have?



Question 15b What age and model?

There were only a few usable answers here and no figure or table has been derived. However, the modal (most common) description of the few societies that did respond was 'very old'. Responses indicated that several societies are operating with outmoded IBM 486 computers operating with Windows 3.1.

Type of Software Used

Question 16. What software do you use?

No table or graphic was generated to this question, because of insufficient response (about 20% of the sample).

Those societies which did respond indicated that they are using generally available data base packages - Paradox, Microsoft Access and ClarisWorks for cataloguing and Inmagic and Photoshop were for image processing.

Website and URL Address

Question 17a. Do you have website or a shared website?

Question 17b. If so, what is its address?

Question 18. Is your collection electronically linked or associated with another collection or library?

There were so few responses to questions 17 and 18 (fewer than five indicating some form of website or linkage with another collection), that these questions have been excluded from formal tabular and graphic analysis.

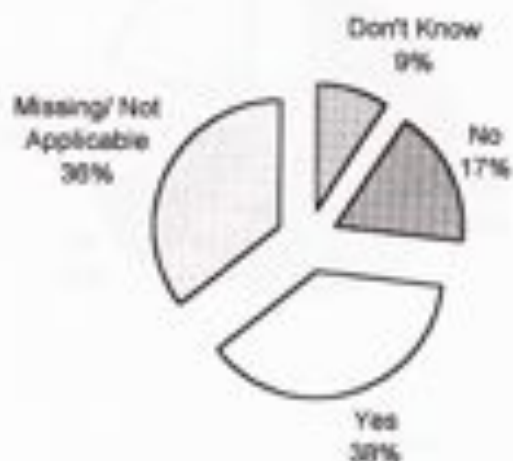
Desirability of Web-enabled Public Access to Your Catalogue

Question 19. If you do not already have computer cataloguing, a Website or computer links, would your society wish to have its collection computer-catalogued and accessible by a website for public access?

Q 19 Would you wish your collection catalogued for public web access?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	114	37.9
No	52	17.3
Don't Know	28	9.3
Missing/ Not Applicable	107	35.5
Total	301	100

Q19. Do you want your collection to be catalogued for public web access?

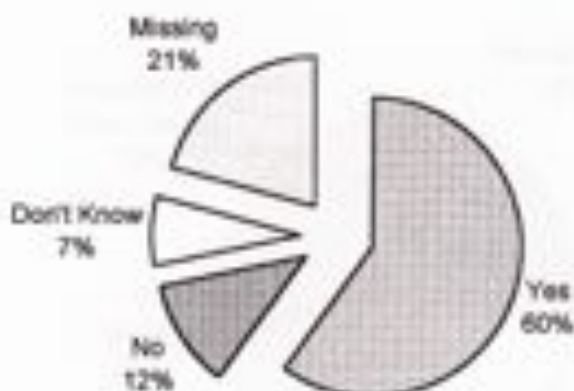


Desirability of National Linking of Historical Societies

Q 20 Would your society wish to be part of a national linking of historical societies?

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	181	60.1
No	35	11.6
Don't Know	22	7.3
Missing	63	20.9
Total	301	100

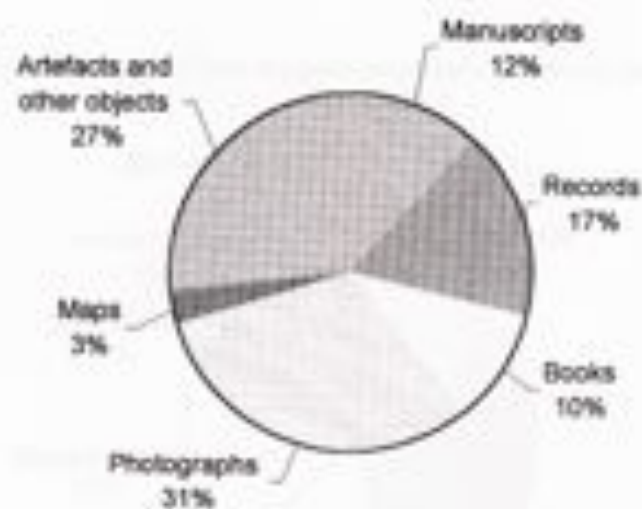
Q. 20 Would your society wish to be part of a national linking of historical societies?



Most Important Items in Your Collection

Q. 21 What do you consider (to be) the most important items in your collection?		
Class of Item	Count	% Responses
Manuscripts	47	11.5
Records	71	17.4
Books	41	10.1
Photographs	126	31
Maps	12	2.9
Artefacts and other objects	110	27
Total responses	407	100
		65 missing cases

Q. 21 What do you consider the most important items in your collection?

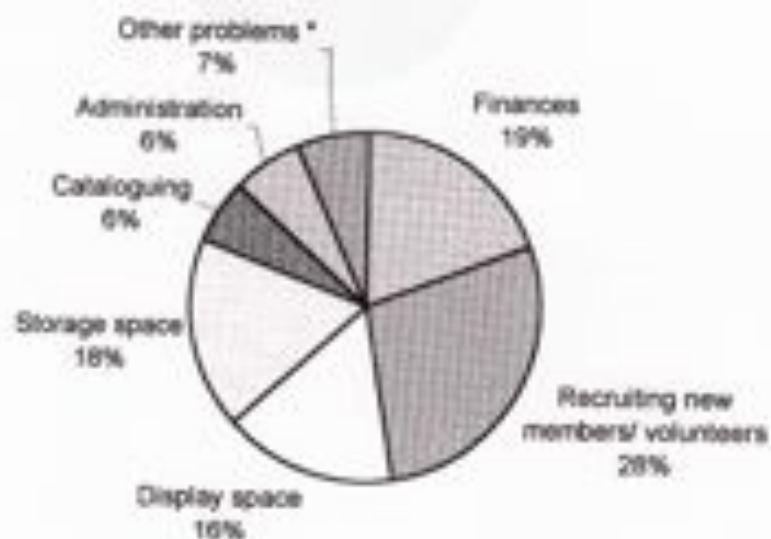


Biggest Problems in Managing Collection

Q. 22 What are the three biggest problems you have managing your collection?		
Problem Area	Count	% Responses
Finances	93	19.3
Recruiting new members/ volunteers	136	28.2
Display space	77	15.9
Storage space	86	17.8
Cataloguing	28	5.8
Administration	31	6.4
Other problems *	32	6.6
Total responses	483	100

30 missing cases

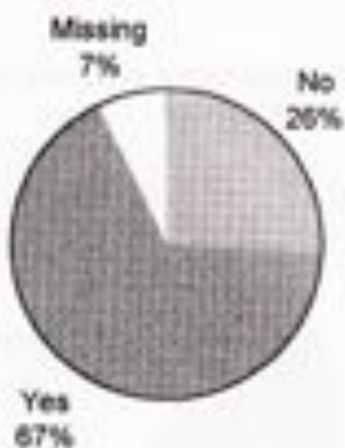
Q. 22. What are the three biggest problems you have managing your collection?



Museum or Archive Area

Q. 23 Do you have a museum or public archive area?		
Response	Frequency	%
Yes	200	66.4
No	79	26.2
Missing	22	7.3
Total	301	100

Q. 23 Do you have a museum or archive area?

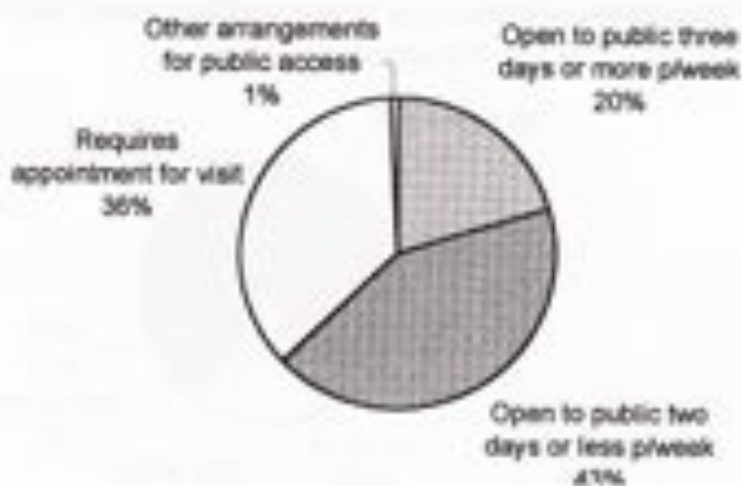


Hours Museum/ Archive Areas Is Open to the Public

Q.24 What hours are your archives open to the public?		
Response	Count	% Responses
Open to public three days or more p/week	64	20.3
Open to public two days or less p/week	134	42.4
Requires appointment for visit	115	36.4
Other arrangements for public access	3	0.9
Total responses	316	100
	64 missing cases	

Note: Several respondents listed more than one arrangement, apparently because of seasonal variations in opening times.

Q. 24 What hours are your archives and/or museum open to the public?

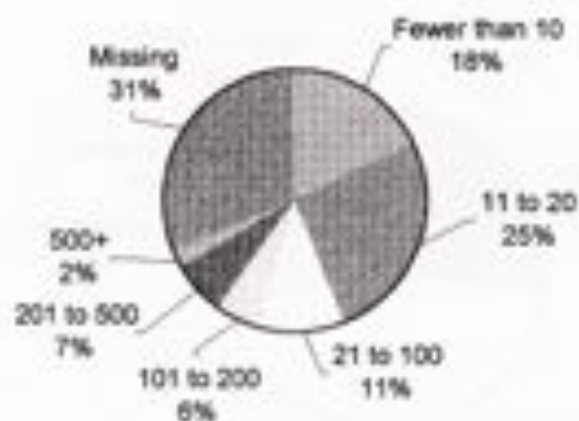


Number of Visitors per Month

Q. 25 How many readers/ visitors would you average per month in your archives/ museum?

Response	Count	% Responses
Fewer than 10	54	26.2
11 to 20	77	37.4
21 to 100	32	15.5
101 to 200	17	8.3
201 to 500	20	9.7
500+	6	2.9
Missing	95	
Total responses	301	100

Q. 25 How many visitors would you average per month to archives/museum?

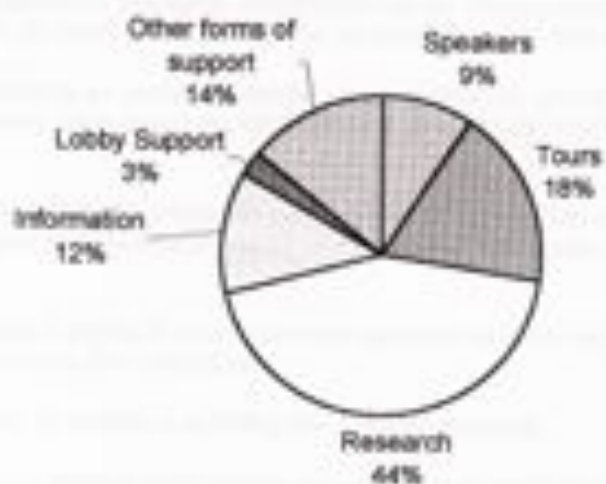


Other Functions and Services Offered by Society

Q.26 What other functions and services do you offer?		
Name	Count	% Responses
Speakers	29	9.1
Tours	58	18.3
Research	138	43.5
Information	39	12.3
Lobby Support	8	2.5
Other forms of support	45	14.2
Total responses	317	100

71 missing cases

Q. 26 What other functions or services do you offer?



Comments on Society's Collection or Community History- Selected Responses

Q. 27 Do you wish to comment further on your society's collection or on any other community history matters?

Out of the 301 forms returned, only 136 gave responses to this question, mostly very short and/or descriptive of Society's activities, achievements and special features. Many were repetitive of information given elsewhere in the questionnaire. Many other were richly informative and would require a more detailed text-based analysis than possible by normal survey methods.

Those that were specially concerned with the funding, management and display of collections are of direct interest to this survey.

Some of the extracts provide a sample only of the range of responses to this question :

This is a very expensive business. Insufficient funds from government to print historical documents. Live (!) money is available to landcare groups. Think History Groups!

In the past 12 months or more the Society has applied for grants with no success. This is after hours of work have been spent on applications. One wonders what has to be done to attract funding!

The collection is under the protection of a group of interested and dedicated volunteers, but with display space at a premium, sadly the historical items cannot be shown to the general public.

Small centres find it difficult to attract the recognition that larger places do, but often have more original settings for collections.

We are desperate to obtain a building for a Police Museum.

We need a grant to enable us to widen our research of early history.

We lack a public display area, and haven't enough members to site displays in other public places.

Lack of volunteers in a professional way to manage our museum etc.

Yes, but it would take too long.

We would love to have the advice and guidance of a shared trained field officer.

The Society survives on the efforts of a few active members.

The Historical Society is dying a natural death, its aims and functions having been taken over by the Library and Museum. Most of the surviving members are over 75 with some well into their 90s.....

Never get grants, always apply for them...

Like many district societies, ours is suffering from the lack of young and enthusiastic members - apparently insoluble.

We have been told that our glass negative collection is historically valuable but have been unable to obtain a grant to have them processed.

Like most voluntary organizations, our volunteers consist of retirees and seniors. No younger people seem available ...

We are happy with our "Idealist" software, but would appreciate the opportunity to liaise with other users.

We would like to have our records recorded on computer and therefore accessible to other historical societies, but not necessarily on the World Wide Web.