Skagit County
Board of Commissioners
Ron Wesen, First District
Peter Browning, Second District
Lisa Janicki, Third District

Summer 2023 All-Staff Budget Survey Results

Executive Summary

As part of the ongoing budget process for the 2024 fiscal year, leadership created a survey for staff to provide feedback on how Skagit County can be more efficient and reduce expenditures. The County budget is estimated to be in a deficit if the current level of services is maintained. The survey asked staff for ideas on how to reduce expenses within their own departments and the organization overall, if there are positions with redundancies or are unnecessary, and if the County were to reduce staff positions, should we do so through layoffs or attrition. 198 employees completed the survey, approximately 23% of the current staff. Highlights of the survey responses include:

- **Allow for more flexible and remote schedules.** Staff suggested management allow for more remote and hybrid schedules with the ability to use flexible hours such as four tens or nine eighties. The reduction of staff in the office could allow for desk sharing and reduce the need for office space. Shrinking the overall footprint of the County would reduce capital costs and building energy needs.
- **Reduce expenditures for supplies and equipment.** Staff overwhelmingly supported reducing supply costs by going paperless, particularly for timecards and checks, and requiring consultants accept direct deposit payments. Respondents also stated there are too many staff taking county vehicles home with them, with some taking vehicles to outside counties. Reducing vehicle usage would extend the life of the vehicle and shrink funding needed for gas and maintenance. The County should also refrain from purchasing new equipment each time a staff member moves offices and try to reduce new technology purchases.
- **Decrease middle manager and coordinator positions.** Staff responded there are a preponderance of middle manager and coordinator positions that create additional red tape for approvals and are unnecessary for small teams. These positions could be reduced, and staff would report to a director or other senior manager.
- **Create new revenue by selling unnecessary vehicles and increasing fees.** The County should consider selling vehicles not in use and increase fees for various services.
- **Combine departments into one location to reduce lobby staff.** There are departments located in multiple office locations. These departments could be relocated to one location to reduce the need for additional lobby staff. There are small departments which could also be combined to share one lobby.
- **Hire a purchasing and grants staff member.** Staff stated the County should increase our grant applications, but many departments feel they do not have the time to look for the appropriate funding sources. Respondents requested the County consider hiring a county-wide purchasing and grants staff member to help look and apply for grants and organize efficient purchasing of equipment and supplies.
- **Increase professionals on staff to reduce the need for consultants.** Consulting fees are a high cost annually to numerous departments. The County should consider hiring professionals or training current staff to reduce the need for expensive consulting contracts.
- **If staff reductions are necessary, reduce through attrition rather than layoffs.** While many respondents supported reducing unnecessary positions or projects, 89% of the staff support reducing positions through attrition rather than layoffs.
- **Provide updates on overall budget process and specific department expenditures.** Staff support transparency in the budget process, opportunities to provide feedback, and explanations of specific department budgets and how they receive and use funding.

Question 1: Strategic Plan Consistency

"All new or enhanced positions, programs, and levels of service must be consistent with the County's Strategic Plan to be considered for allocation of resources."

Respondents were instructed to rate their agreement with the above statement on a scale of one to ten, with ten being the most agreeable. The weighted average response was 7. The three top answers were 8 (22%), 5 (20%), and 10 (19%).

Q1: Answer on Scale of 1-10
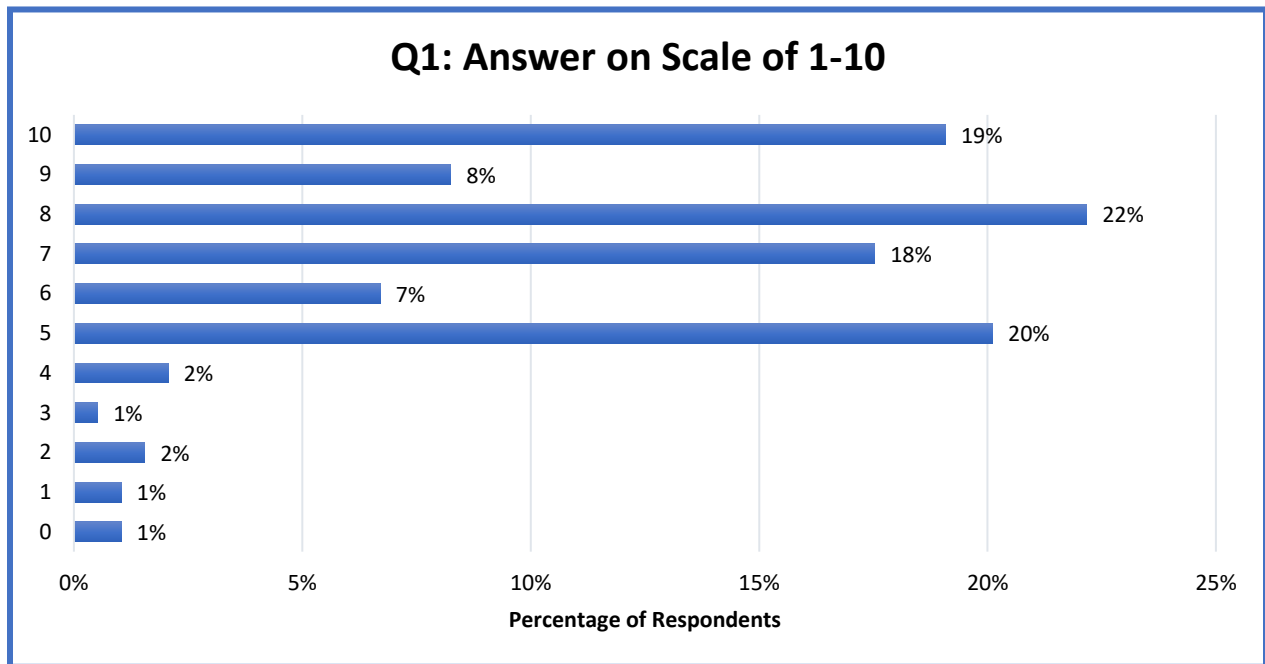
Answer 1-10	Number of Responses	Percentage
0	2	1%
1	2	1%
2	3	2%
3	1	1%
4	4	2%
5	39	20%
6	13	7%
7	34	18%
8	43	22%
9	16	8%
10	37	19%

Q1 Weighted Average = 7.2

Question 2: Training

"Preliminary budgets shall include training that is relevant, local (when feasible), and the best value."

Respondents were instructed to rate their agreement with the above statement on a scale of one to ten, with ten being the most agreeable. The weighted average response was 8.15. The three top answers were 10 (36%), 8 (19%), and 9 (15%).
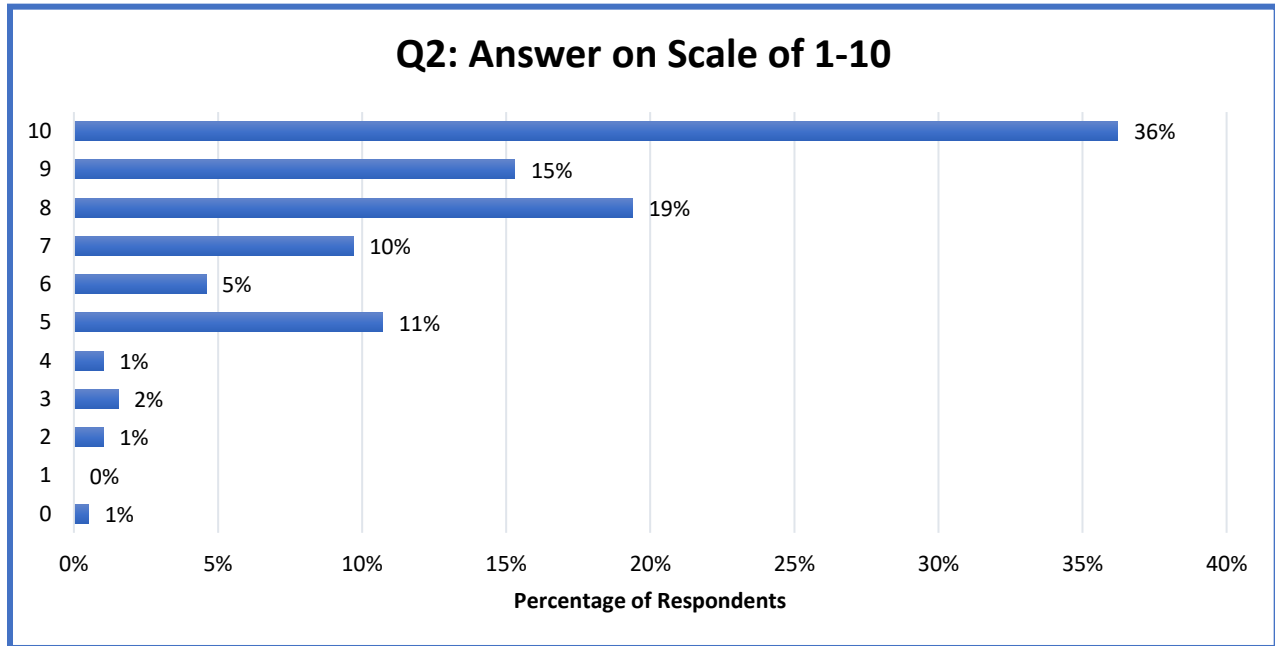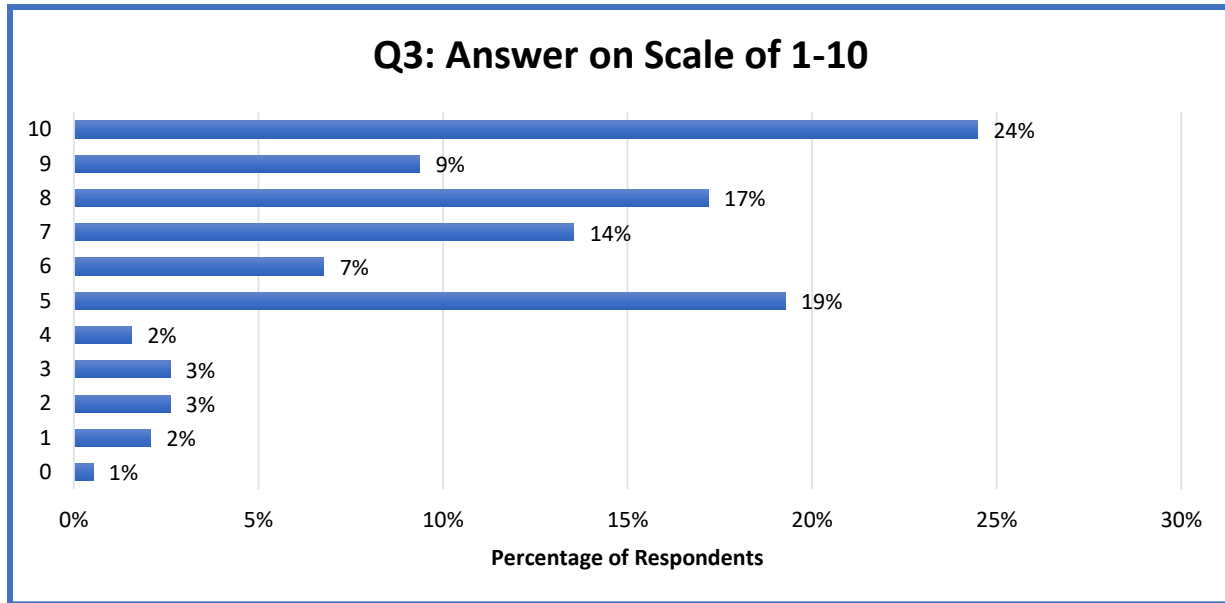
Q2: Answer on Scale of 1-10

Answer	Percentage
10	36%
9	15%
8	19%
7	10%
6	5%
5	11%
4	1%
3	2%
2	1%
1	0%
0	1%

Percentage of Respondents

Answer 1-10	Number of Responses	Percentage
0	1	1%
1	0	0%
2	2	1%
3	3	2%
4	2	1%
5	21	11%
6	9	5%
7	19	10%
8	38	19%
9	30	15%
10	71	36%

Q2: Weighted Average = 8.15

Question 3: Grants

"New grants must be consistent with the County's Strategic Plan and core services to be considered."

Respondents were instructed to rate their agreement with the above statement on a scale of one to ten, with ten being the most agreeable. The averaged weighted answer was 7. The three top responses were 10 (24%), 5 (19%), and 8 (17%).

Q3: Answer on Scale of 1-10

Scale	Percentage
10	24%
9	9%
8	17%
7	14%
6	7%
5	19%
4	2%
3	3%
2	3%
1	2%
0	1%

Percentage of Respondents

Answer 1-10	Number of Responses	Percentage
0	1	1%
1	4	2%
2	5	3%
3	5	3%
4	3	2%
5	37	19%
6	13	7%
7	26	14%
8	33	17%
9	18	9%
10	47	24%

Q3: Weighted Average = 7.2

Question 4: Reducing Expenses

"What recommendations do you have for reducing expenses within your division and/or department? Please provide detail."
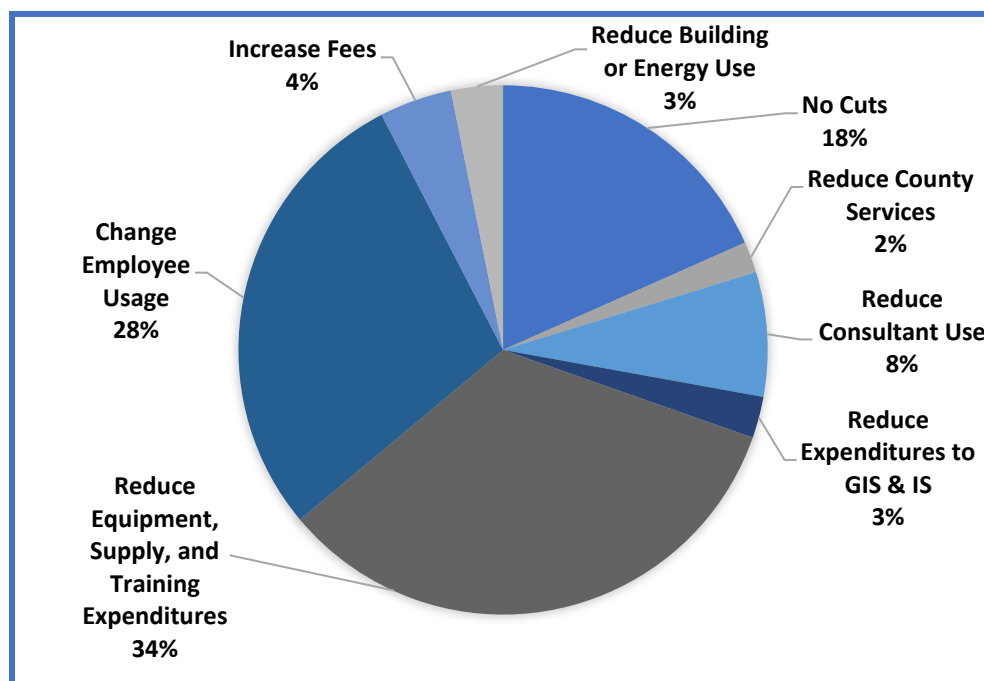
A majority of respondents (62%) support cutting expenses by either changing employee usage or reducing expenditures towards supplies, equipment, and training.

Changing Employee Usage:

- Allow for remote/hybrid/flexible work schedules to reduce office space, allow for shared desks, and reduce building energy usage.
- Reduce overtime hours by ensuring coverage of essential shifts.
- Utilize more part time or on call employees to remove full time employees without a full workload.
- Retain current staff and train them up to reduce the need for outside consultants and new employee orientation costs.
- Use furlough days to reduce salary costs rather than layoffs.

Reduce Expenditures for Supplies, Equipment, and Training:

- Go paperless in each department, use electronic timecards and checks, require consultants to take payment by direct deposit.
- Reduce the number of employees taking home county vehicles. Some employees live in different counties, which requires more gas and milage on the cars. Reducing vehicle usage would prolong the vehicle life and reduce maintenance costs.
- Do not purchase new furniture each time a department or employee moves offices.
- Reduce expensive training, particularly for out of state or repeat courses, and memberships.


Pie chart showing: Increase Fees 4%; Reduce Building or Energy Use 3%; No Cuts 18%; Reduce County Services 2%; Reduce Consultant Use 8%; Reduce Expenditures to GIS & IS 3%; Reduce Equipment, Supply, and Training Expenditures 34%; Change Employee Usage 28%

Question 5: What Can Be Done Differently?

"Within the scope of your division and department, what work can be done differently or not at all? Please Explain."

The most common response (38%) was to reducing staffing inefficiencies within departments.

Staffing Inefficiencies:

- Combine staff responsibilities by reducing unnecessary tasks and projects and evaluate the workloads for each position.
- Reduce new staff training by retaining current staff and increasing training opportunities.
- Reduce office space by using remote work and ensuring departments are not split between multiple locations.
- Reduce middle manager/lead/coordinator positions to increase efficiency.
- Cut consultant work by empowering or training current staff to perform the work.
- Increase oversight of project tracking and records to ensure timelines stay on track.
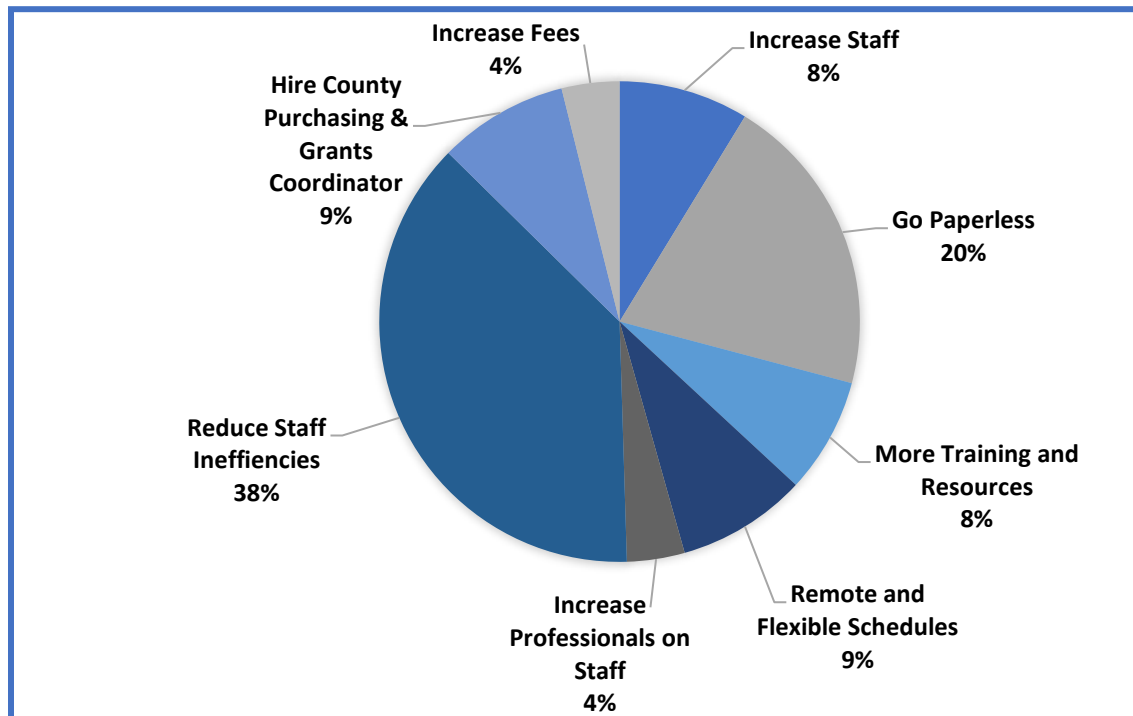
Question 6: Costs Reductions for Organization

"What cost reduction ideas do you have for our organization overall (not just within your department?)"

The majority of respondents (51%) support reducing costs within the organization by either reducing equipment and supply costs and generating new revenue or by reducing staff and county programs and services.

Reducing Equipment and Supply Costs, Generating New Revenue

- Go paperless and electrify the county vehicle fleet.
- Reduce building air conditioning and use green energy.
- Sell off vehicles and equipment that are no longer needed.
- Reduce unnecessary supply costs.
- Increase fees for county services.
- Reduce county vehicle usage for employees outside of work.

Reducing Staff, County Programs and Services

- Use furlough days and early retirement incentives to reduce salary costs.
- Audit and eliminate unnecessary county services.
- Privatize the Guemes Ferry and encourage special taxing districts.
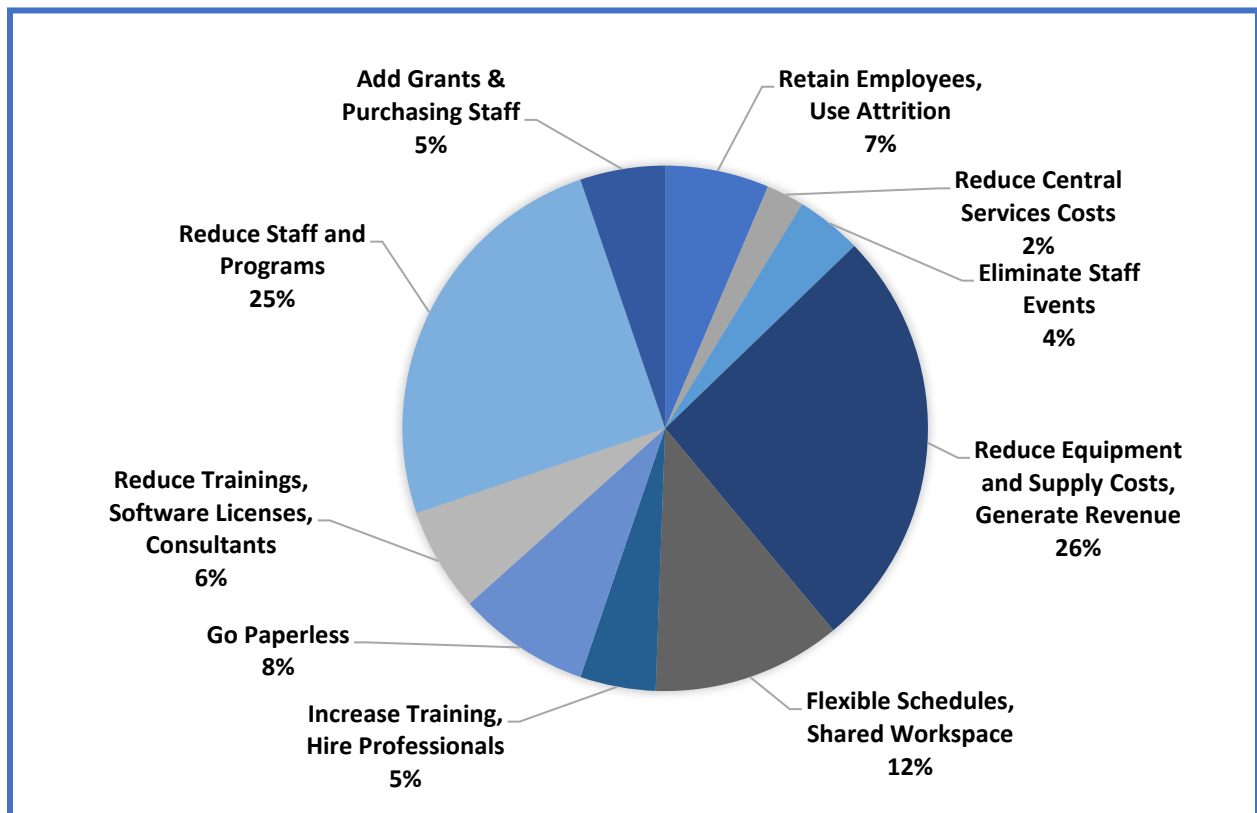
Question 7: Reduce Positions or Projects

"Without consideration to a person, are there positions or certain bodies of work within your division or department that you could see being absorbed by other positions or eliminated? Please explain and provide detail."

69% of respondents answered no while 32% answered yes to this question. The most common responses were to reduce temporary or grant funded positions and seasonal workers, and to reduce middle manager or coordinator positions.

## Question 8: Reducing Redundancy

"Are there positions supporting work that could be considered redundant or not related to an essential role of government? Please provide detail."

82% of respondents answered no while 18% answered yes. The most common responses to this question were to reduce middle managers or coordinators, reduce outsourced or contracted work, and to reduce lobby staff by combining office locations.

Question 9: Layoff or Attrition

"If staff costs need to be reduced, are you supportive of reductions by attrition or lay off? Choose one."

89% of respondents answered attrition while 11% answered layoffs.
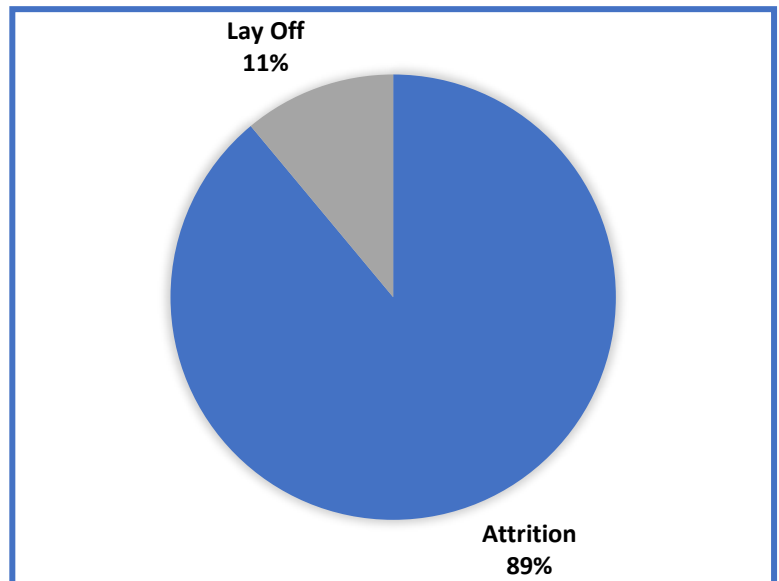
Question 10: Budget Update Feedback

"What communication method do you prefer to receive periodic budget updates from the Commissioner's Office? Choose one."

81% of respondents requested email updates from the Commissioner's office regarding budget updates while 10% would prefer a presentation update. Of the staff who responded 'other,' suggestions are summarized below:

- Monthly updates.
- Both email and presentations.
- Direct interface with departments to allow for dialogue.
- Hybrid presentations with materials available ahead of time.
- In person forum to allow for questions and feedback.
- Provide updates through department directors or division managers.
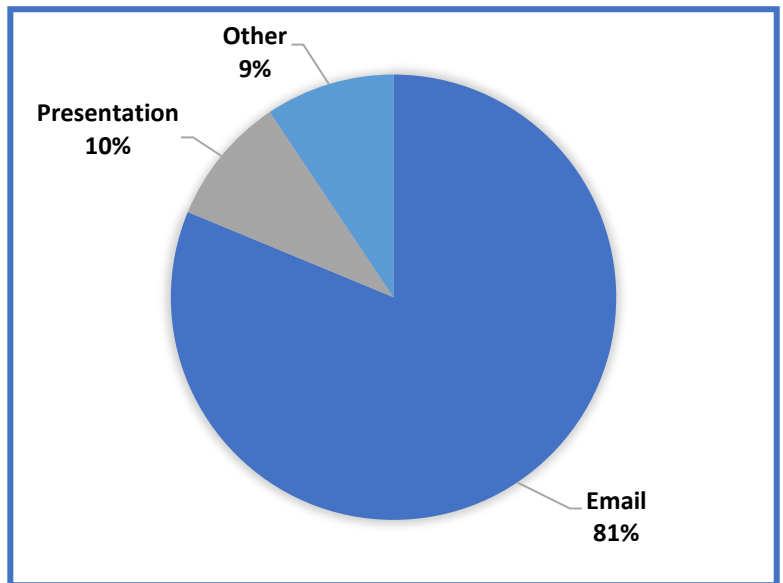
Question 11: Additional Information

"What type of information would you like to receive about the budget? Please describe."

The majority of staff (59%) responded they would either like to see an overall budget process presented or specific department budgets with line-by-line expenses and income displayed.

Budget Process Overall:

- Provide timelines and specific process requirements.
- Explanations of current budget constraints and how these changes are serving the best interest of the public.
- Feedback on changes for incoming funding from state or federal sources.
- Show the before and after of the preliminary budget and new proposed budgets, with explanations of what changes were made and why.
- Include information on fund balances and how decisions are made regarding reserve funds.

Specific Department Budgets:

- Provide infographics and specific line-by-line itemization for department budgets to show revenue vs fixed and variable costs.
- Summarize recommendations by directors and ultimate decision by the Commissioners.
- Specify which expenses are mandated and which are discretionary.
- Discuss how service or position cuts are either best serving the community or ensuring appropriate workload management for current employees.