



Other Community Input: Open Town Meeting

A survey was sent to Other Open Town Meeting (OTM) municipalities via the Massachusetts Moderators Association (MMA). Here is the description of the survey:

The Town of Westford is investigating ways to increase participation at our Town Meetings. We are asking other Open Town Meeting municipalities for background information for learning purposes. This survey should only take 5 minutes of your time. If you have made significant changes due to COVID, please answer these questions pre-COVID.

Survey methodology

The Working Group wanted the survey to be as quick as possible to entice as many of the over 250 Open Town Meeting municipalities to respond as possible. The idea was to get a quick look then follow up with more in depth questions with certain towns we felt we could learn from. The questions asked can be found in Appendix A. After the MMA sent out the survey the first time, we received roughly 20 responses. A few weeks later, we asked the MMA to send out a reminder which gathers about another 20 responses. At this point, the Working group created a list of similar municipalities that we wanted to concentrate on. Some had answered the survey, some not.

Lesson Learned: In evaluating the Towns it became difficult to assess whether a particular aspect of a Town ATM was good or bad. We had no way of quantifying their residents' engagement due to a particular aspect - for example, did town's with a weekday meeting have more or less engagement. During follow up, we asked roughly how many residents attended ATM and if the person felt that the attendees represented the demographics of their municipality.

None of the questions on the survey were required, therefore the responses below may not have the same number.

Results

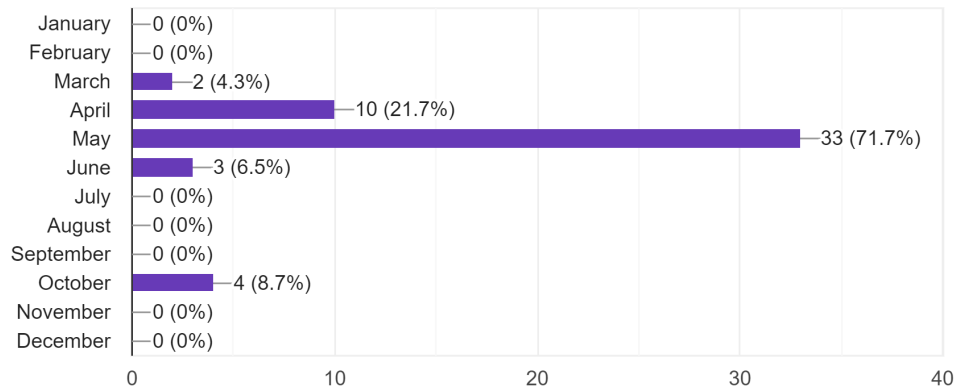
46 Municipalities answered the survey. Not all indicated which town as this was not required information. The MMA wanted to ensure that any respondent could remain completely anonymous. The municipalities who answered the survey: Wayland, Chatham, Hatfield, Abington, North Andover, Wellfleet, Westport, Weston, Hamilton, Ipswich, Shutesbury, Grafton, Freetown, Andover, Hadley, Ashland, Maynard, Boxborough, Charlton, Ayer, Barre, West Newbury, Great Barrington, Westborough, Townsend, Wareham, Wilmington, Ware, Hopedale, Uxbridge, Dover, Yarmouth, Pembroke, Acton, Concord, Stoneham, Sudbury, Sharon, Groton

ATM Date/Time

Question : Which month/day/time is your Annual Town Meeting held? Please check all that apply

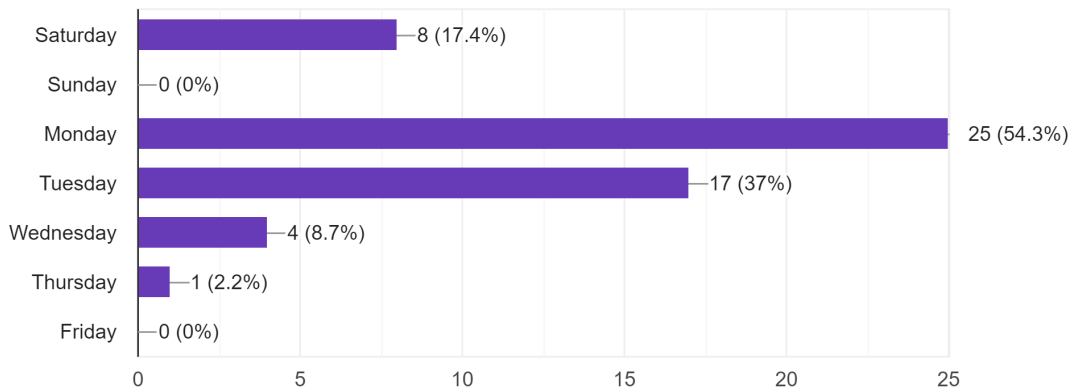
Month. Please check all that apply

46 responses



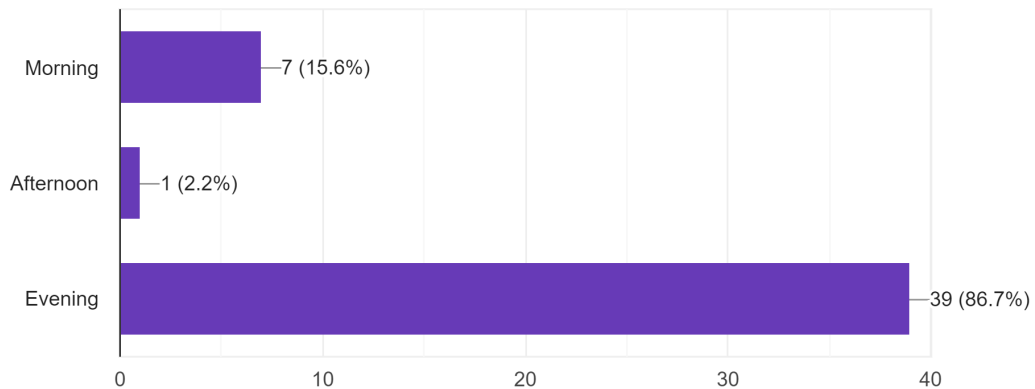
Day. Please check all that apply

46 responses



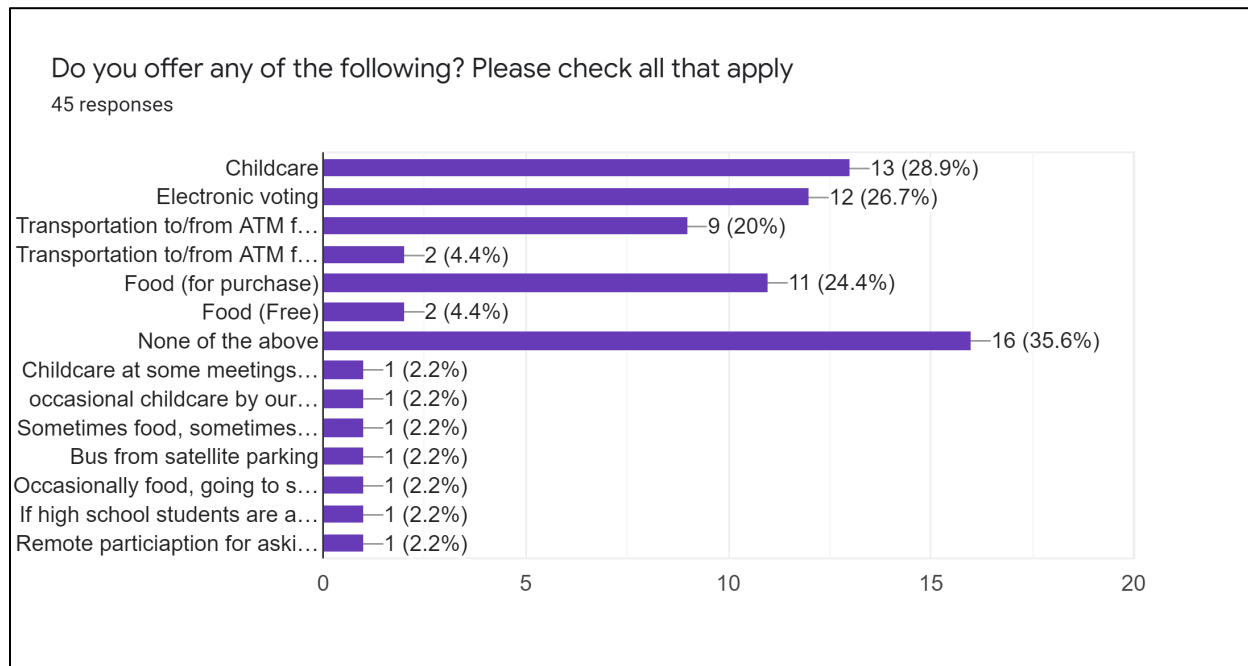
Start Time. Please check all that apply

45 responses



Special Accommodations

Question: Do you offer any of the following? Please check all that apply

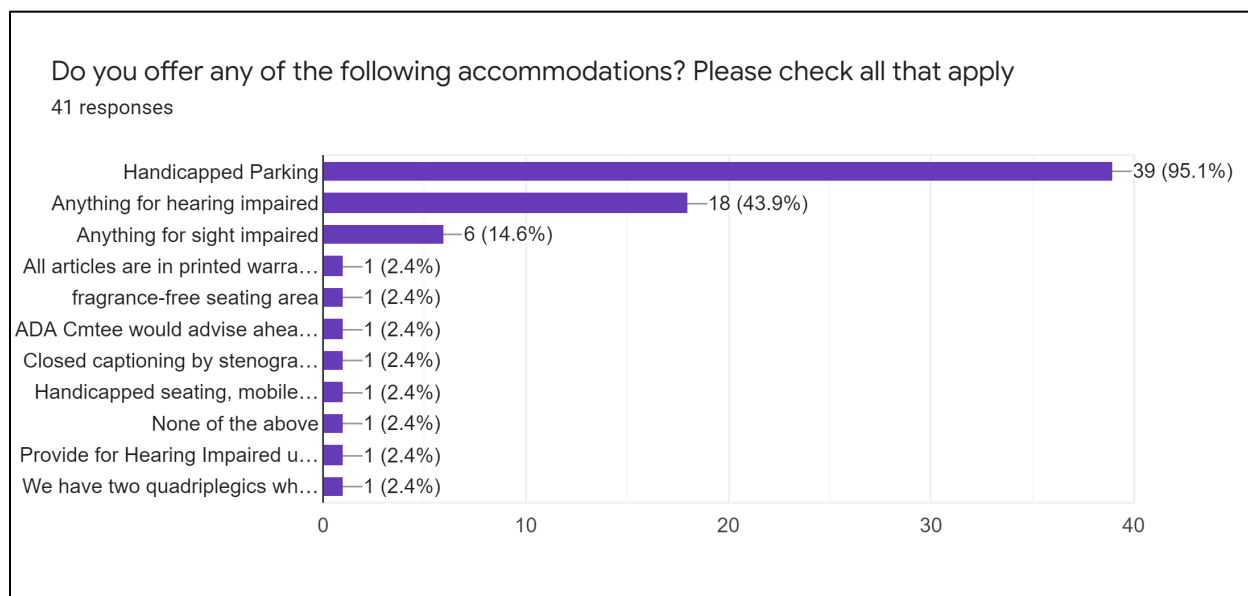


Response options:

Childcare; Electronic Voting; Transportation to/from ATM for specific groups (i.e. elderly or disabled); Transportation to/from ATM for any attendee; Food (for purchase); Food (free); None of the above.

Write -in responses: Childcare at some meetings (5); sometimes food (2) ; Remote participation for asking questions; A survey of opinion for those who cannot attend the meeting; Access to presentations prior to meeting; Bus from satellite parking;

Question: Do you offer any of the following accommodations? Please check all that apply

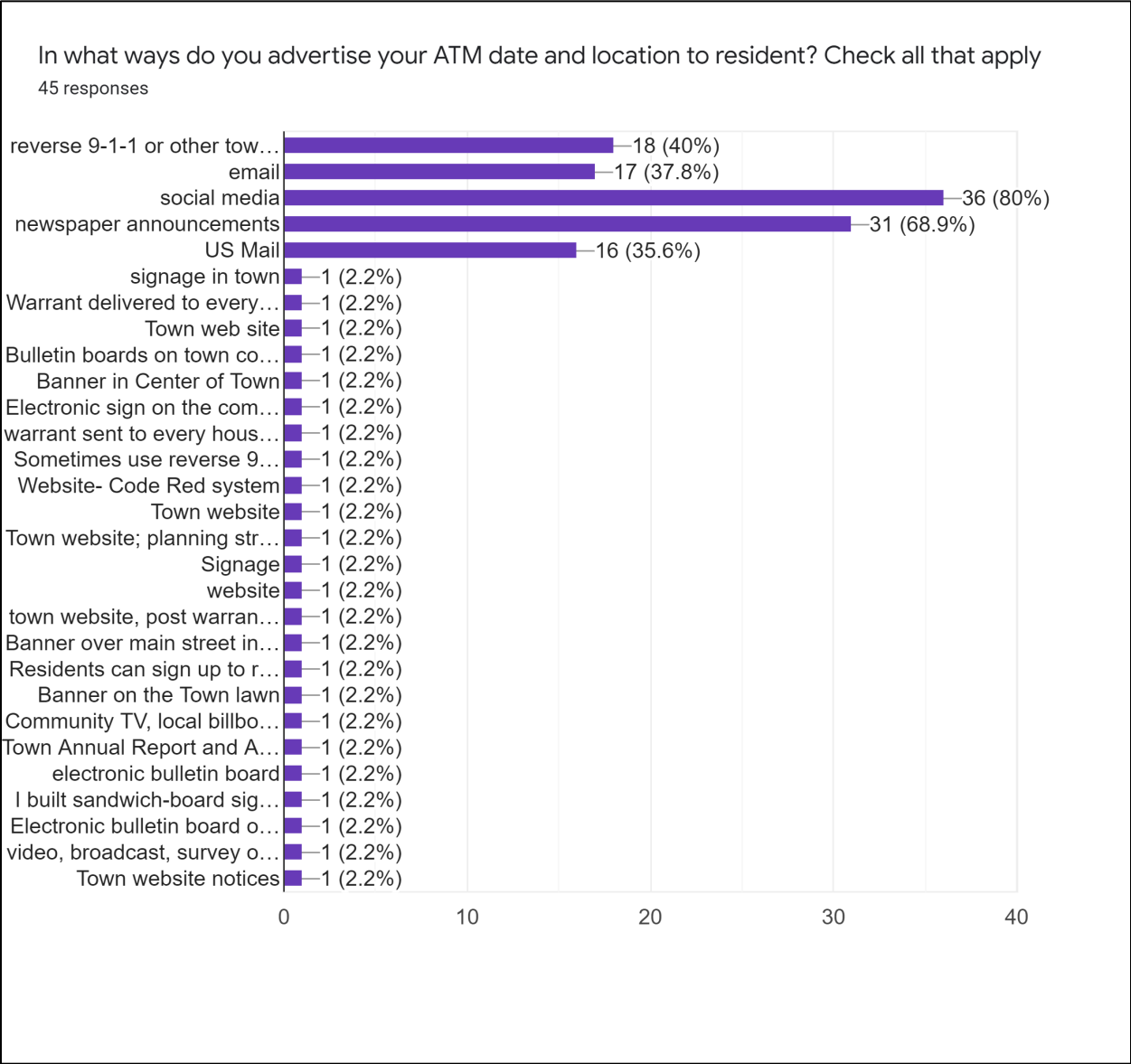


Response Options: Hadicapped parking; Anything for Hearing Impaired; Anything for sight impaired; None of the above

Write-in Responses: ADA Cmtee would advise ahead of time if contacted; All articles are printed and displayed on large projection screen; fragrance-free seating area; Provide for hearing impaired upon request; We have 2 quadriplegics who routinely attend meetings and provide assistance for them; Handicapped seating; mobile microphone; Closed Caption by stenographer

Informing Residents

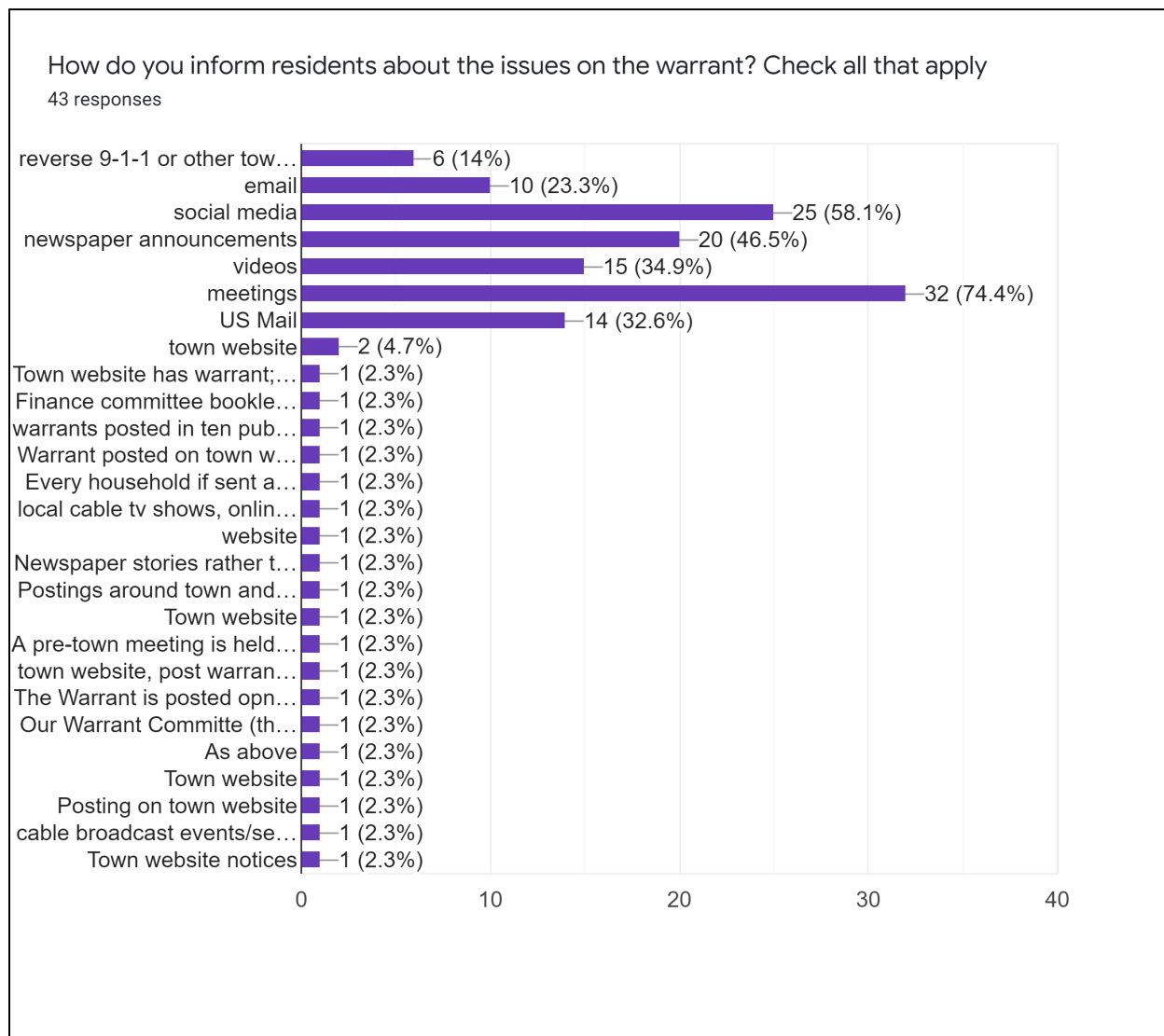
Question: In what ways do you advertise your ATM date and location to residents? Check all that apply



Response Options: reverse 9-1-1 or other town wide phone call reminder; email; social media; newspaper announcements; US mail

Write-in Responses: Website(9); electronic bulletin board(4); Banner over Main St(3); Warrant sent to every household(2); Sometimes use reverse 911; govt access station publicizes; Code Red system; video, broadcast; survey of opinion; I built sandwich-board signs I put around town; post warrant in public places; Warrant delivered to every household via Action unlimited newspaper; Signage in town(3); Residents can sign up to receive notifications of all town wide meetings; Community TV;

Question: How do you inform residents about the issues on the warrant?



Response Options: reverse 9-1-1 or other town wide phone call; email; social media; newspaper announcements; videos; meetings; US mail

Write-in Responses: Website(13); Newspaper stories; Cable broadcast events/seminar(2); online ZOOM meetings; Finance Committee booklet(2); Pre-Town Meeting is held on every article, broadcast live, recorded and posted; Warrant posted in public places(4); Every household is sent a copy of the warrant

Question: How do you inform new residents of the town government process?

Most answered (17) - We don't or not very well

Town website (11)

Welcoming package

Welcome mail and email; social outreach

Explanation at the beginning of the warrant

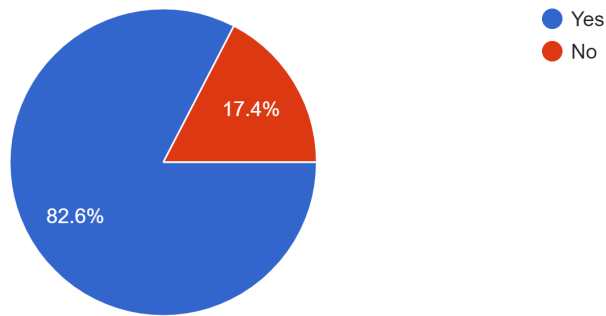
Information given when they register to vote (4)

Meeting Specifics

Question: Do you limit the time (in minutes) of public comments/questions?

Do you limit the time (in minutes) of public comments/questions?

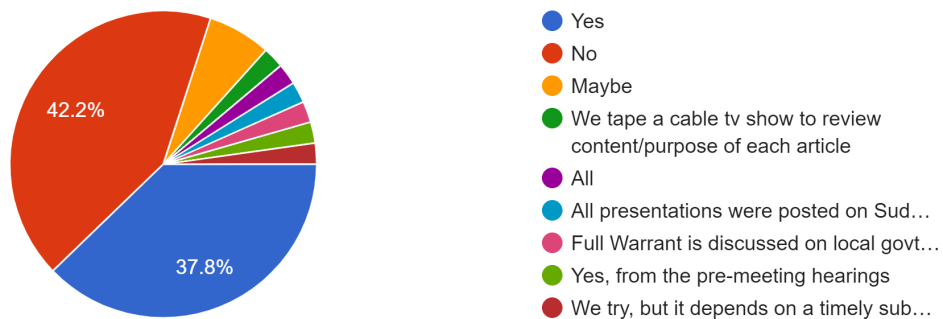
46 responses



Question: Are specific article presentations posted online ahead of ATM?

Are specific article presentations posted online ahead of ATM?

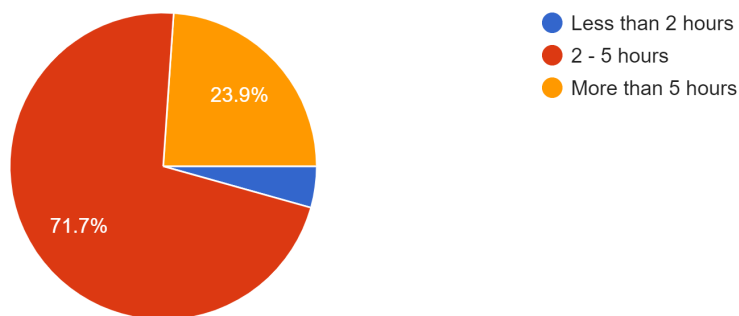
45 responses



Question: On average, how many hours do the meetings last?

On average, how many hours do the meetings last?

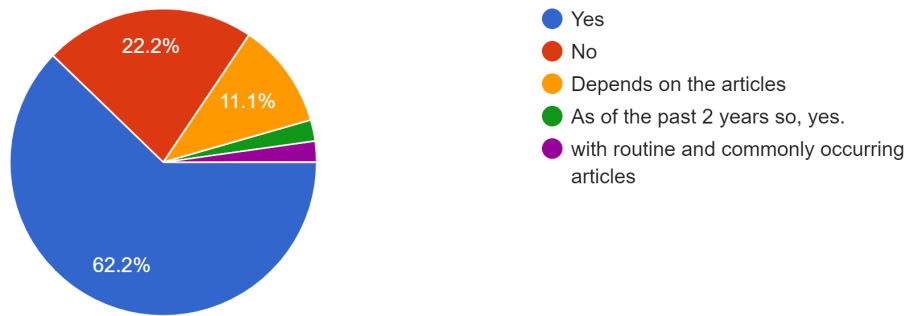
46 responses



Question: Do you routinely use a consent agenda as part of ATM?

Do you routinely use a consent agenda as part of ATM?

45 responses



Question: Do you do anything out of the ordinary to attract people to ATM?

No (9)

We don't have a problem - routinely get 600 people out of 5550 voters (Chatham)

Try to get all Dept. and committees promoting in a positive way. All work to keep it polite yet short. More come because it is short and to the point.

Most recently had a mobile vaccine clinic

I interview the Chair of the Fin Com and Town Manager a month before the meeting on TV

Baby sitting

Article in local paper

Food Trucks

Scouts sell cookies

Have tried several approaches over the years, turnout is dependent on the topics

Follow Up With Specific Towns

The Working Group decided to concentrate on municipalities similar to Westford in size and location. The list of towns include:

Acton, Andover, Bedford, Concord, Dracut, Grafton, Groton, Hingham, Holden, Hudson, Mansfield, Marblehead, Marshfield, Middleborough, North Andover, Norton, Pembroke, Rockland, Sandwich, Scituate, Sharon, Somerset, Stoneham, Sudbury, Tewksbury, Wakefield, Wareham, Westborough, and Wilmington

Follow-up questions aimed at trying to determine roughly how many attendees (as a percentage of registered voters), demographics and attendee engagement. Only a few towns responded with follow-up - Acton, North Andover, Westborough, Groton, and Wilmington.

Attendance - It should be noted that on average, Westford has anywhere from 1-2% of the registered voters in attendance for ATM, with the exception of ATM's with contentious articles - i.e. for the School override vote in 2017, attendance was 6.75%. Among the municipalities that responded with attendance information, most fell within this same range. The exception being Acton. According to the Acton Town Moderator, attendance is usually between 2.5 - 4 %. Others with higher than normal attendance cited a specific article as the reason - i.e. the construction of a new school or allowing marijuana businesses.

Demographics - All towns indicated that demographics did not accurately represent the town. Some cited an increase in certain demographics. Only one town (Wilmington) indicated that the demographics were accurate but also noted that Wilmington's population in general is getting older.

Attendee engagement - every municipality agreed that residents are more engaged depending on the issues.

For further information:

Individual survey responses: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rtqu8Mtso8kBYwyf67xRje_HLPMjbyrG/view?usp=sharing

Individual Survey responses and Westford Stats in excel format:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1nBezPMIBSFNRQ_GqOm9G-goWayMNf5J81ILbBk8HCkM/edit?usp=sharing

Survey Summary by Google: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TdmJ4lkBPG6-Ir75SUJy_JymiTu94GgS/view?usp=sharing

Appendix A: Open Town Meeting Survey questions

Open Town Meeting Survey

The Town of Westford is investigating ways to increase participation at our Town Meetings. We are asking other Open Town Meeting municipalities for background information for learning purposes. This survey should only take 5 minutes of your time. If you have made significant changes due to COVID, please answer these questions pre-COVID.

All of the survey results will be available to MMA members. You may remain completely anonymous, if you wish, or add your contact information at the end for further follow-up by a Westford committee member

*** Required**

1. Town - please enter the Town you are answering for

Which month/day/time is your Annual Town Meeting (ATM) held?

Please select the month of your ATM pre-COVID, if different. If it is variable, please select all that apply, pre-COVID.

2. Month. Please check all that apply

Check all that apply.

January

February

March

April

May

June

July

August

September

October

November

December

3. Day. Please check all that apply

Check all that apply.

Saturday

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

4. Start Time. Please check all that apply

Morning

Afternoon

Evening

5. Is your ATM month/day/time consistent every year?

Mark only one oval.

yes

No

Other:

6. Where is your ATM typically held? Please check all that apply

School

Community Center

Other Town Building

Outside - i.e. sports field

Other

7. Does your town hold Special Town Meetings? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Maybe

Special Town Meeting

8. How often do you hold Special Town Meetings?
9. How does the attendance of STM compare to ATM?

Check all that apply.

More attendees Less attendees
approximately the same number of attendees

Special Accommodations

10. Do you offer any of the following? Please check all that apply
- Childcare
Electronic Voting
Transportation to/from ATM for specific groups - i.e. elderly or disabled
Transportation to/from ATM for any attendee
Food (for purchase)
Food (free)
None of the above
Other
11. Do you offer any of the following accommodations? Please check all that apply
- Handicapped parking
Anything for hearing impaired
Anything for sight impaired
Other

Informing Residents

12. In what ways do you advertise your ATM date and location to residents? Check all that apply
- Reverse 9-1-1 or other town wide phone call reminder
Email
Social media
Newspaper announcements
US mail
Other
13. How do you inform residents about the issues on the warrant? Check all that apply

Reverse 9-1-1 or other town wide phone call reminder

Email

Social media

Newspaper announcements

Videos

meetings

US mail

Other

14. How do you inform new residents of the town government process?

Meeting Specifics

15. Do you limit the time (in minutes) of public comments/questions?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

16. Do you provide any sort of Frequently Asked Questions on the warrant articles?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Other:

17. Are specific article presentations posted online ahead of ATM?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Maybe

Other:

18. On average, how many hours do the meetings last?

Mark only one oval.

Less than 2 hours

2 - 5 hours

More than 5 hours

19. Do you routinely use a consent agenda as part of ATM?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Depends on the articles

Other:

20. Do you do anything out of the ordinary to attract people to ATM? (food trucks, other attractions, etc)

21. Is there anything else you'd like to add or explain?

22. Would you be willing to speak to a member of our committee for more information? If so, please enter your phone number or email address, whichever you prefer.