

A close-up photograph of a person's hands using a Braille keyboard on a laptop. The person is wearing a dark, patterned shirt. To the left, a smartphone is connected to the laptop via a white cable. The background is dark and out of focus.

IT INSIGHTS REPORT

# DELIVERING DIGITAL ACCESS AND EQUITY IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

PRESENTED BY  
**FEDSCOOP | STATESCOOP**

UNDERWRITTEN BY



Building a better  
working world



# Executive Summary

The public sector continues to make strides to make the digital delivery of services and the customer experience more equitable and accessible across the constituents they serve. FedScoop and StateScoop surveyed 178 prequalified federal, state, county and municipal government leaders, customer experience and IT decision-makers to learn about the progress they're making in improving CX and service delivery as well as the roles modern infrastructure and connectivity play in support of those efforts.

## The survey also explored:

- + The maturity of their agency's digital interfaces and capabilities in meeting the needs of populations of all abilities.
- + How they are prioritizing their accessibility design goals/investments.
- + Technical, operational and cultural challenges around equity in providing digital services.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Level of priority to ensure access for all

Nearly half of state and local — and 39% of federal — respondents said it is a top agency/leadership priority to ensure constituents of all abilities can easily obtain the information and services they seek.

## Formal frameworks

Nearly 7 in 10 of all respondents said their agency has a formal accessibility framework or policy in place for physical/mobile disabilities. More federal agency respondents, however, said they have frameworks in place for blindness/low vision (54%) and deafness/hard of hearing (58%). On the contrary, nearly double of state and local agency respondents have formal documents in place for limited English fluency (54%), limited digital literacy (44%) and limited/lack of reliable broadband/digital access (33%).

## Populations surveyed for accessibility needs or CX

Federal respondents have been more active than state and local respondents over the past 12-24 months in surveying various population groups about accessibility needs — particularly the hard-of-hearing. State and local agencies have been more active than federal respondents in surveying those with English fluency, digital literacy and broadband/digital access needs



## Leadership awareness of obstacles

Nine in 10 state and local — and 8 in 10 federal — respondents said their leaders are aware of the potential obstacles “all” or “some” populations “experience accessing agency information and services.”

## Approaches to design

Regarding their digital design approach, roughly half of respondents said their agency focuses primarily on a “universal design” approach for all abilities. Another 28% of state and local — and 22% of federal — respondents focus the design around different disabilities groups. About 3 in 10 federal — and 2 in 10 state and local — respondents said their design approach focused on meeting regulatory requirements.

## Implementing innovation to improve access

Two-thirds of federal — and 59% of state and local — respondents said their agency has an ongoing innovation process for improving access for people who need accommodations. Perceptions varied by title, however, with more IT leaders saying their agency had an innovation process in place than management or communications/CX leaders.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Maturity to meet accessibility needs

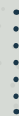
When asked to rate the maturity of their agency’s ability to meet the digital accessibility needs of different populations, federal respondents outpaced state and local respondents in rating their agency for having “fully achieved/optimized” the following:

- + Enabled barrier-free, equal access to digital products, services, and content for all (21% federal vs. 12 % state and local)
- + Established Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standards (31% vs. 20%)
- + Comply with Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) standards for people with disabilities (40% vs. 30%)
- + Promoting awareness of digital accessibility (26% vs. 19%)

## Satisfaction of constituents

Respondents were asked how constituents who do — and do not — identify with having a disability would rate their satisfaction in finding and completing services. Overall, all respondents believe those having disabilities are less satisfied with access to content and services than those without disabilities.

When asked to estimate the satisfaction of those without disabilities, federal respondents scored themselves higher for “online chat engagement” than state and local respondents (64%



vs. 40% — rating a 7 or higher on a 10-point scale). State and local respondents, on the other hand, registered higher scores than their federal counterparts for “in-person engagement” (76% vs. 68%) and “call center/phone engagement” (73% vs. 68%).

When asked to estimate the satisfaction of those having disabilities, state and local respondents tended to outscore their federal counterparts for “call center/phone engagement” (63% vs. 54%) as well as for “in-person engagement” (64% vs. 56%). Federal, state and local gave themselves comparable satisfaction scores for “online chat engagement” and “website resources/forms.”

## Capabilities to improve digital access

Half (52%) of federal respondents cited “general accessibility training” as the capability that would help most to improve constituents’ digital access, while 54% of state and local respondents said “speech-to-text tools” would help their constituents most. Technical accessibility training and text-to-audio tools also ranked high among government respondents.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Challenges in delivering optimal CX

All respondents said "lack of necessary budget resources" is the most significant challenge their agency faces in delivering an optimal level of accessibility. However, the second-most cited challenge for federal respondents is their agency's reliance on legacy technology, while state and local respondents said it was the lack of dedicated staff/skills. When comparing responses from different job titles, C-suite/management, communications/CX and IT personnel, all said the budget was the most significant challenge. Still, C-suite respondents said legacy technology was the second biggest challenge, while communications/CX and IT respondents said it was a lack of dedicated skills/staff.

## Level of support

A higher percentage of federal agency respondents than state and local respondents said they get high levels of relevant support to "close accessibility gaps" from broadband/software/hardware providers, NGOs, federal regulators, advocacy groups and private enterprises. A higher percentage of state and local respondents compared to federal respondents said they receive "low-to-no interest" from federal regulators and private enterprises to help close accessibility gaps.



## Impact of the Jobs Act

When asked how confident respondents were that The infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act would notably expand broadband access to populations not currently well-served, about half of federal – and 6 in 10 state and local – respondents gave it 50% or better chance of making "a notable impact."

# SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

FedScoop and StateScoop conducted an online survey of 178 prequalified public sector government IT decision-makers. The survey was conducted online in November 2022.

**48%** FEDERAL AGENCIES

**52%** STATE & LOCAL AGENCIES

- 13%** C-suite/executive-level decision-maker
- 42%** Business/program leader/manager
- 7%** CIO/CTO/CISO/CDO
- 6%** Digital/communications leader or personnel
- 20%** Customer experience/service manager or personnel
- 12%** IT systems/network administrator/operations manager
- 1%** Other (supervisor)

# IMPORTANCE FOR EVERYONE TO ACCESS INFORMATION

Federal vs. State/Local

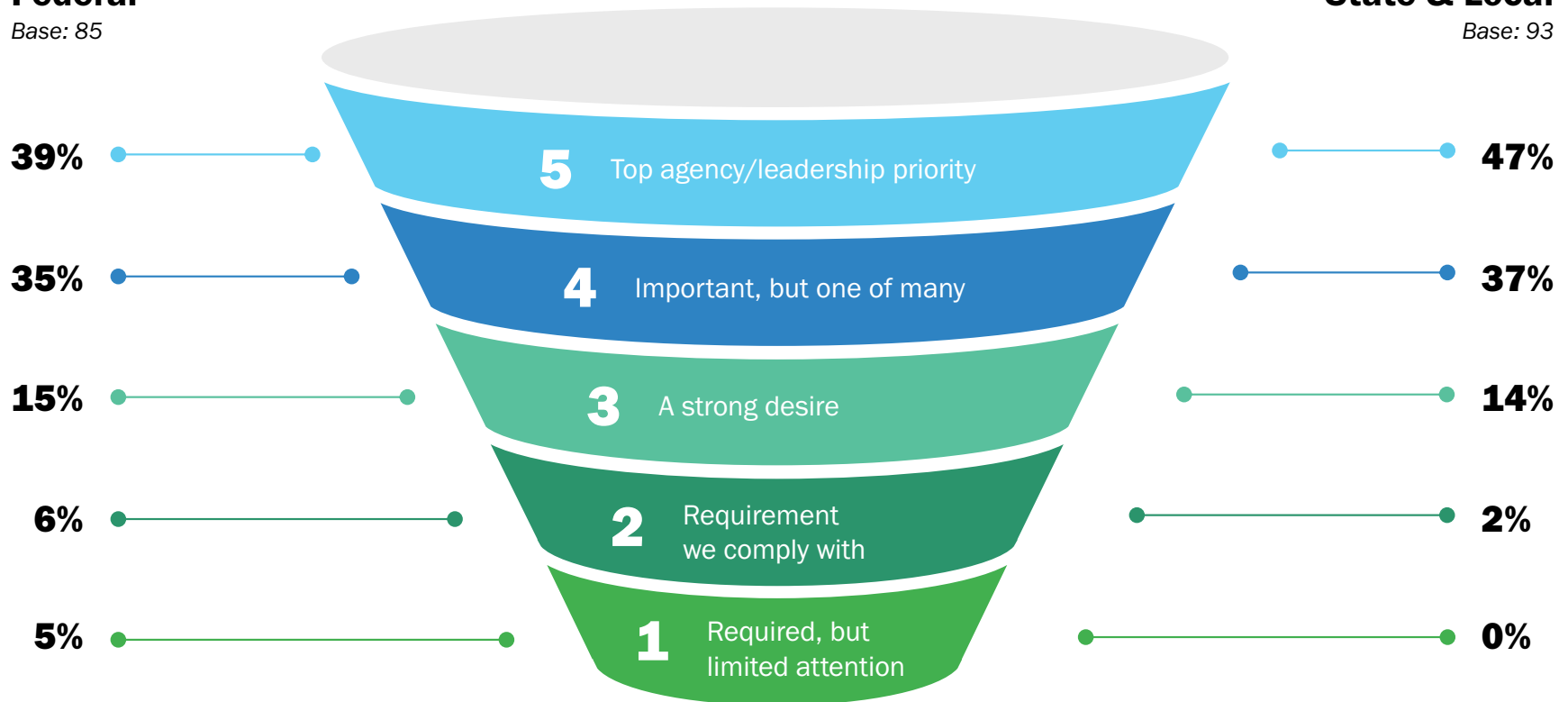
- What is the level of importance/priority for your agency to ensure constituents of all abilities can easily obtain the information and services they seek (5 = most important)?

## Federal

Base: 85

## State & Local

Base: 93



# FORMAL ACCESSIBILITY FRAMEWORK IN PLACE

Federal vs. State/Local

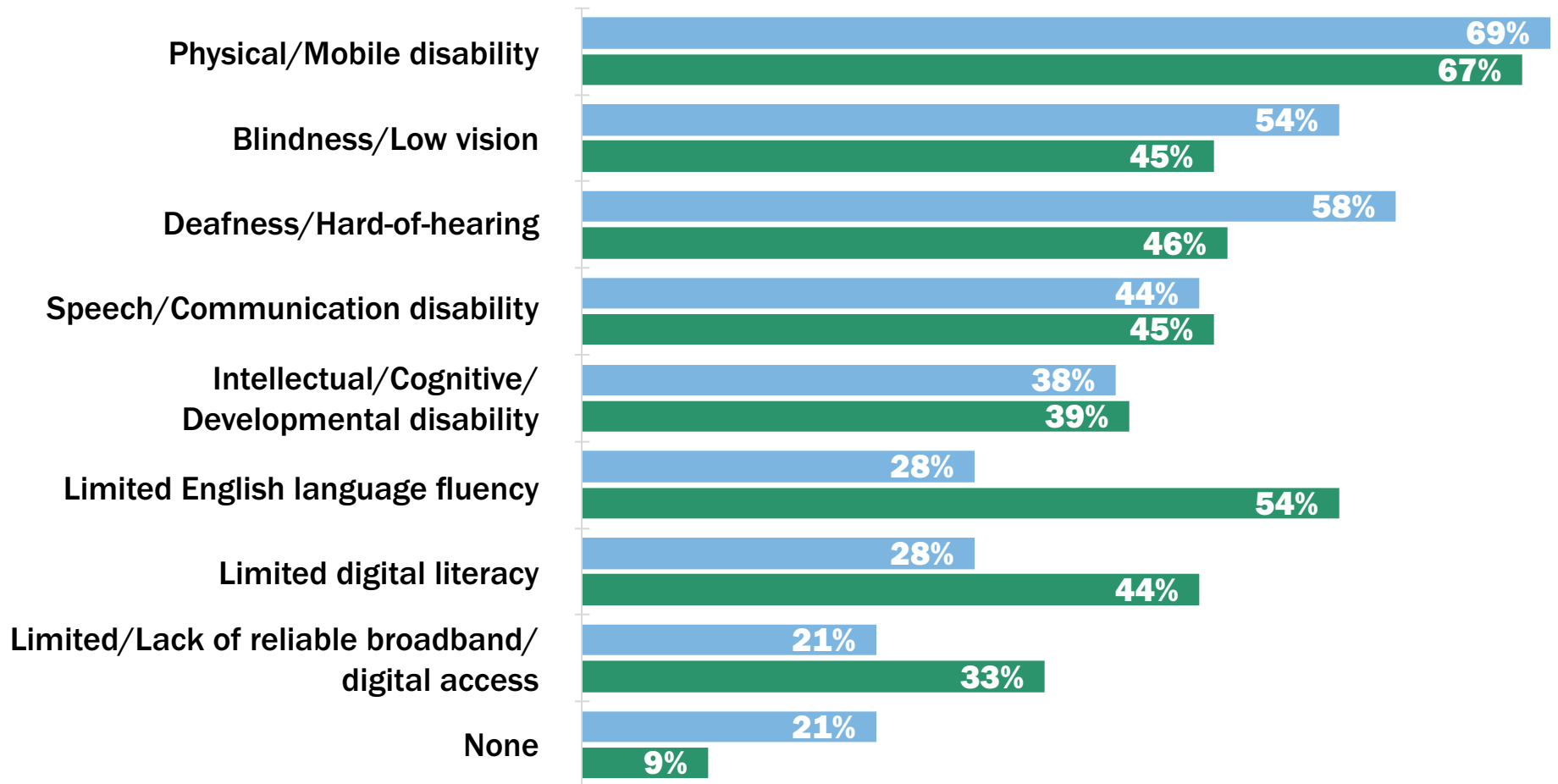
➤ For which of the following populations does your agency have a formal accessibility framework or policy in place?

**Federal**

Base: 85

**State & Local**

Base: 93





# POPULATION SURVEYED FOR ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS OR CX

Federal vs. State/Local

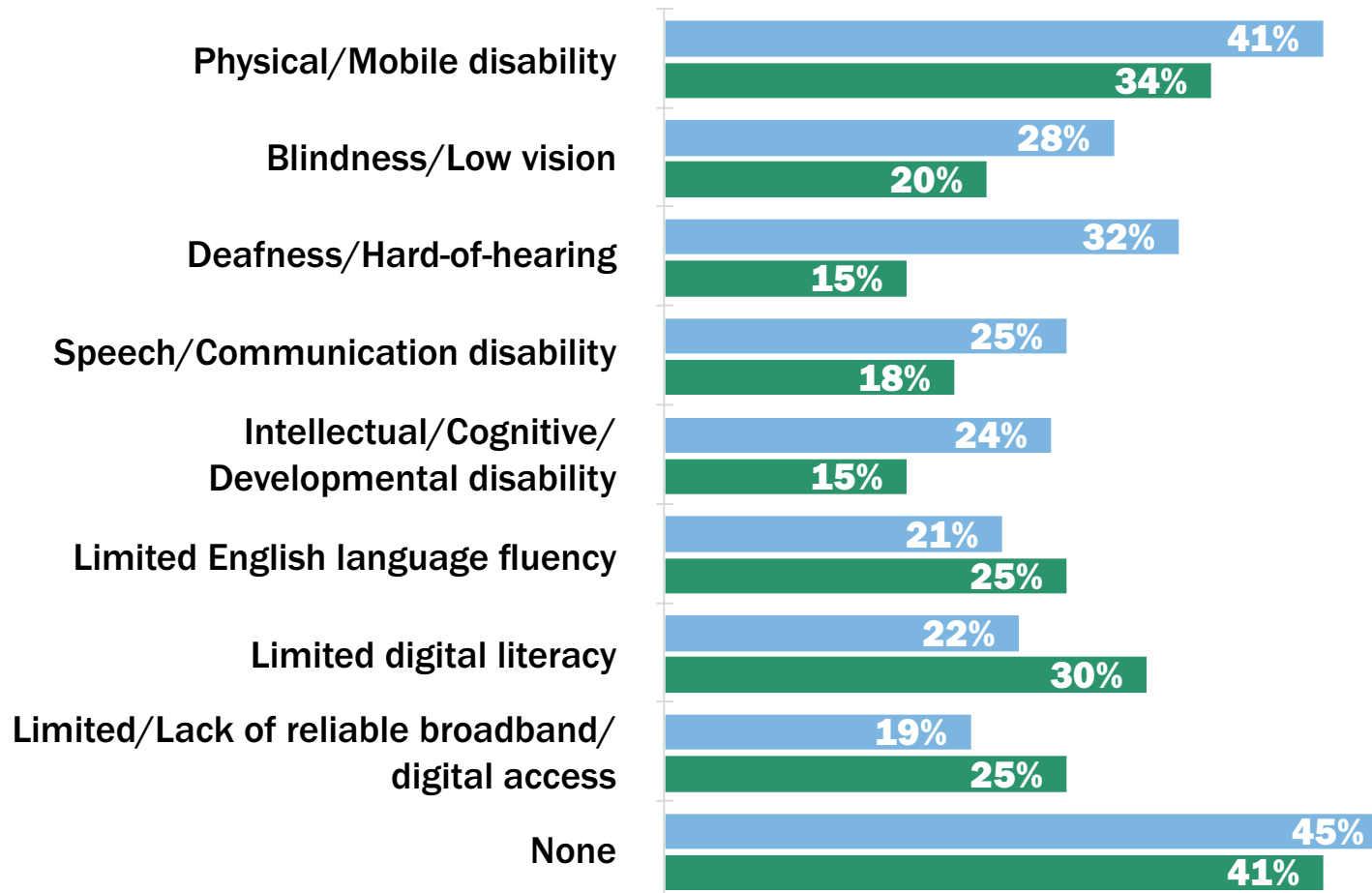
➤ Which of the following populations has your agency surveyed in the past 12-24 months about their digital accessibility needs or user experience?

Federal

Base: 85

State & Local

Base: 93



## Takeaway

Federal respondents have been more active than state and local respondents over the past 12-24 months in surveying various population groups although state and local respondents showed a higher interest in surveying those with limited English fluency, digital literacy and broadband/digital access.



# AWARENESS OF OBSTACLES

Federal vs. State/Local

- Are your agency leaders aware of the potential obstacles that different populations experience accessing your agency's information and services?

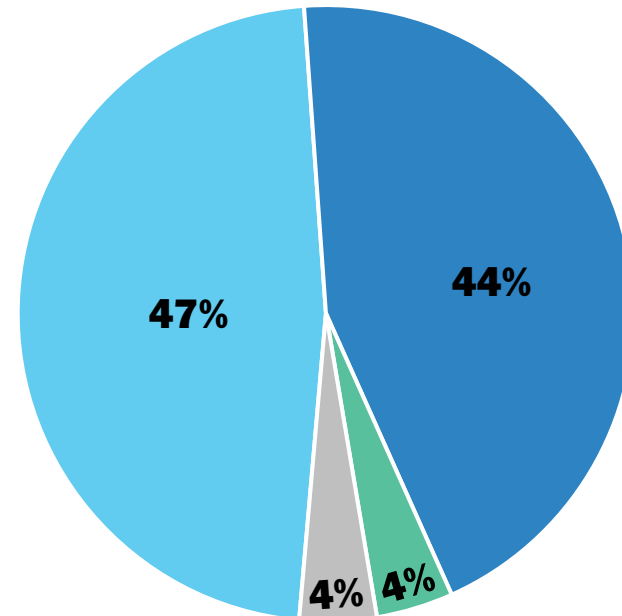
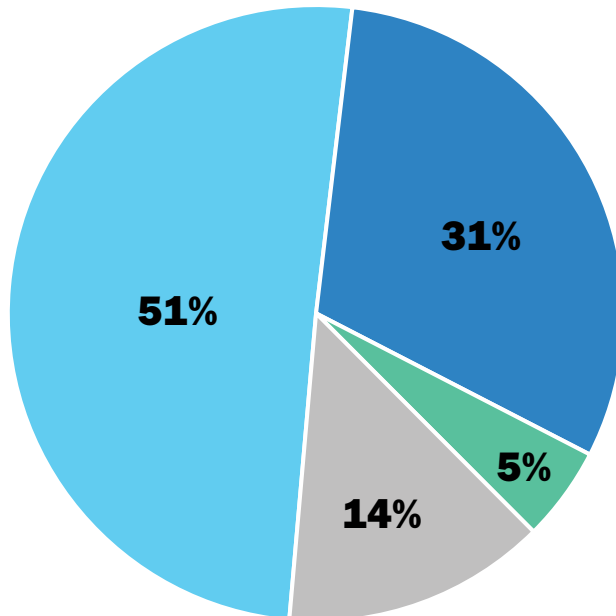
## Federal

Base: 85

## State & Local

Base: 93

Yes, for all populations    For some populations    No    Don't know



# DESIGN APPROACH

Federal vs. State/Local

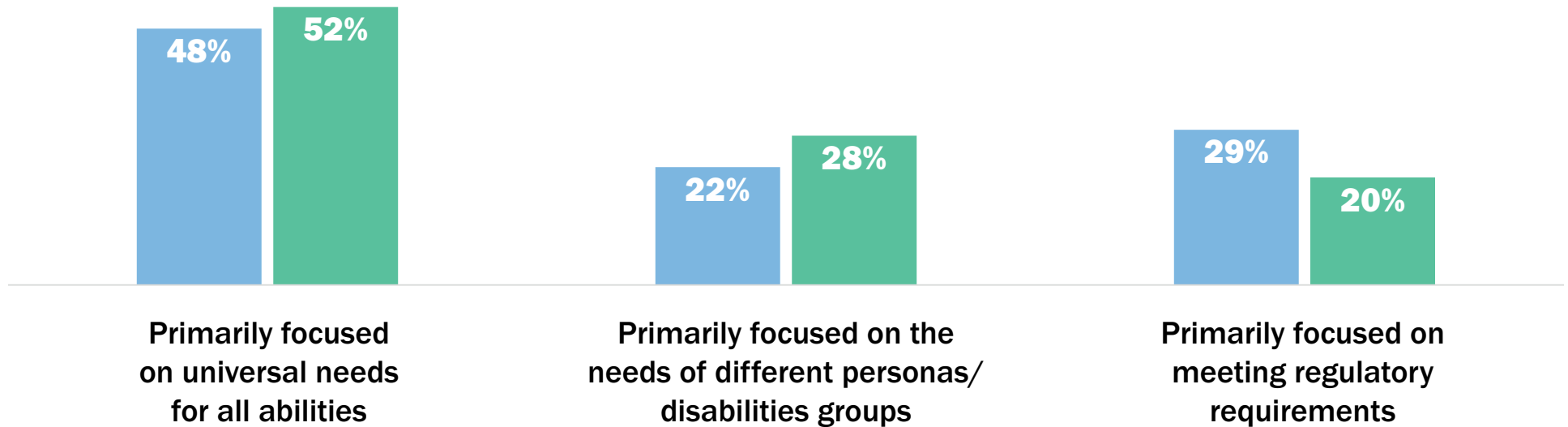
- Which design approach best describes how your agency looks at improving the digital access and experience of users seeking information and services from your agency?

## Federal

Base: 85

## State & Local

Base: 93



# DESIGN APPROACH

Management vs Communications/CX vs IT

➤ Which design approach best describes how your agency looks at improving the digital access and experience of users seeking information and services from your agency?

## Management

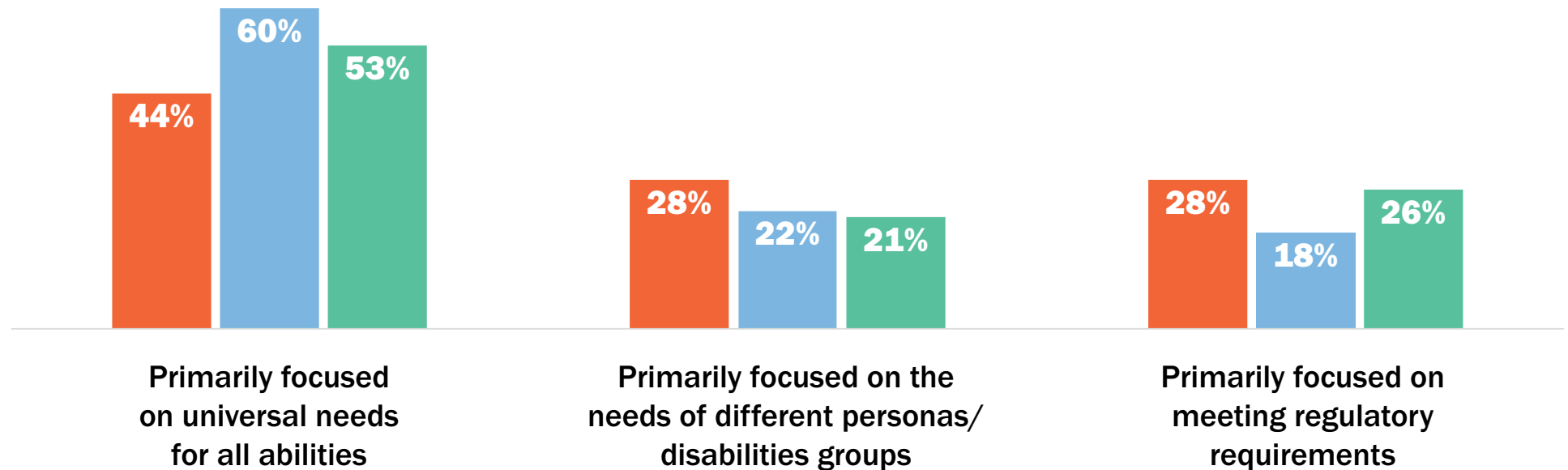
Base: 97

## Comms & CX

Base: 45

## IT

Base: 34



# INNOVATION PROCESS TO IMPROVE ACCESS

Federal vs. State/Local

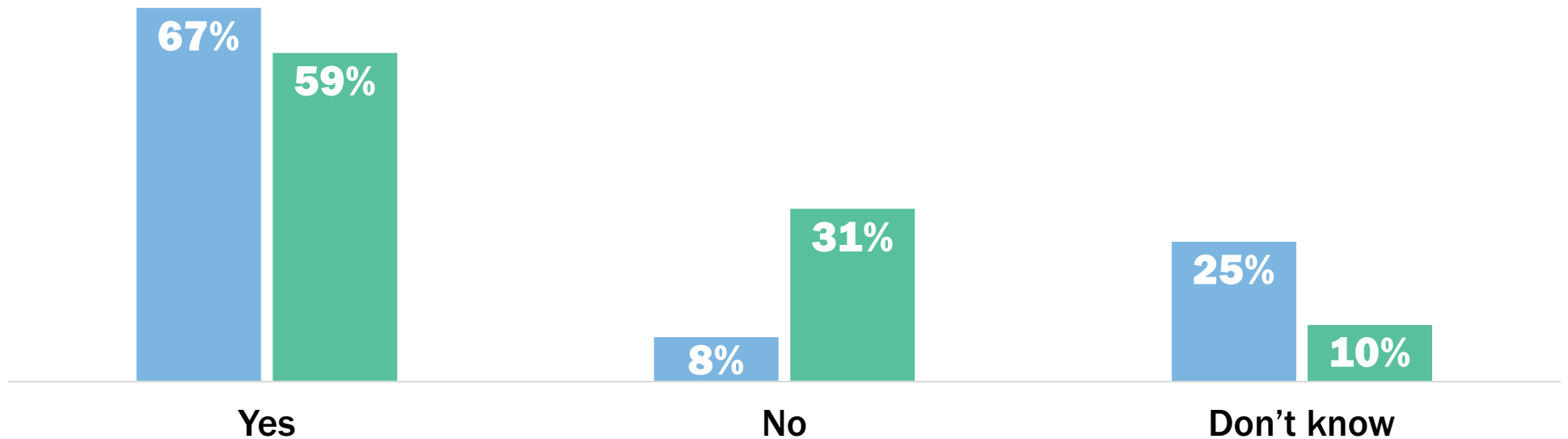
- Does your agency have an ongoing innovation process for improving access for people who need accessibility accommodations (versus meeting the minimum required standards?)

## Federal

Base: 85

## State & Local

Base: 93





# INNOVATION PROCESS TO IMPROVE ACCESS

Management vs Communications/CX vs IT

- Does your agency have an ongoing innovation process for improving access for people who need accessibility accommodations (versus meeting the minimum required standards?)

## Management

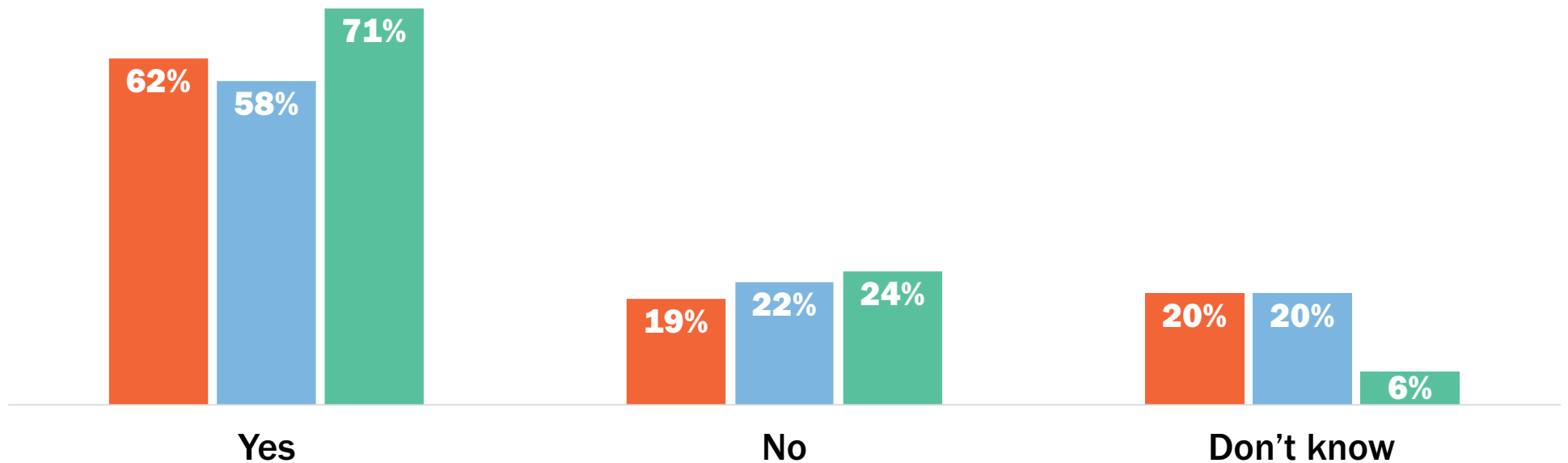
Base: 97

## Comms & CX

Base: 45

## IT

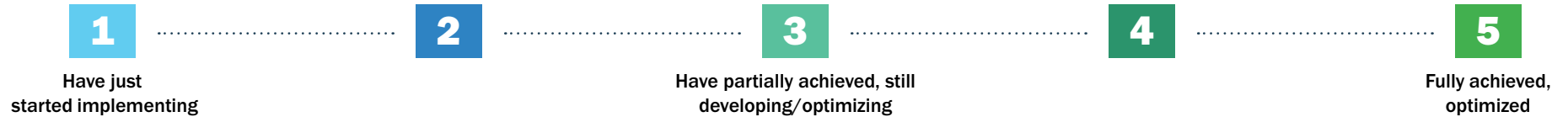
Base: 34



# MATURITY TO MEET ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS

Federal vs. State/Local

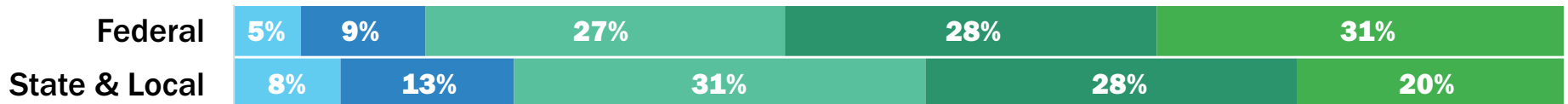
➤ How would you rate the maturity of your agency's ability to meet the accessibility needs of different populations in the following areas (on a scale of 1 to 5)?



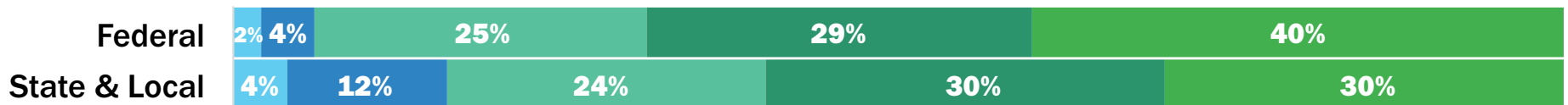
## Enabled barrier-free, equal access to digital products, services, content for all



## Established Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standards



## Comply with Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) standards for people with disabilities



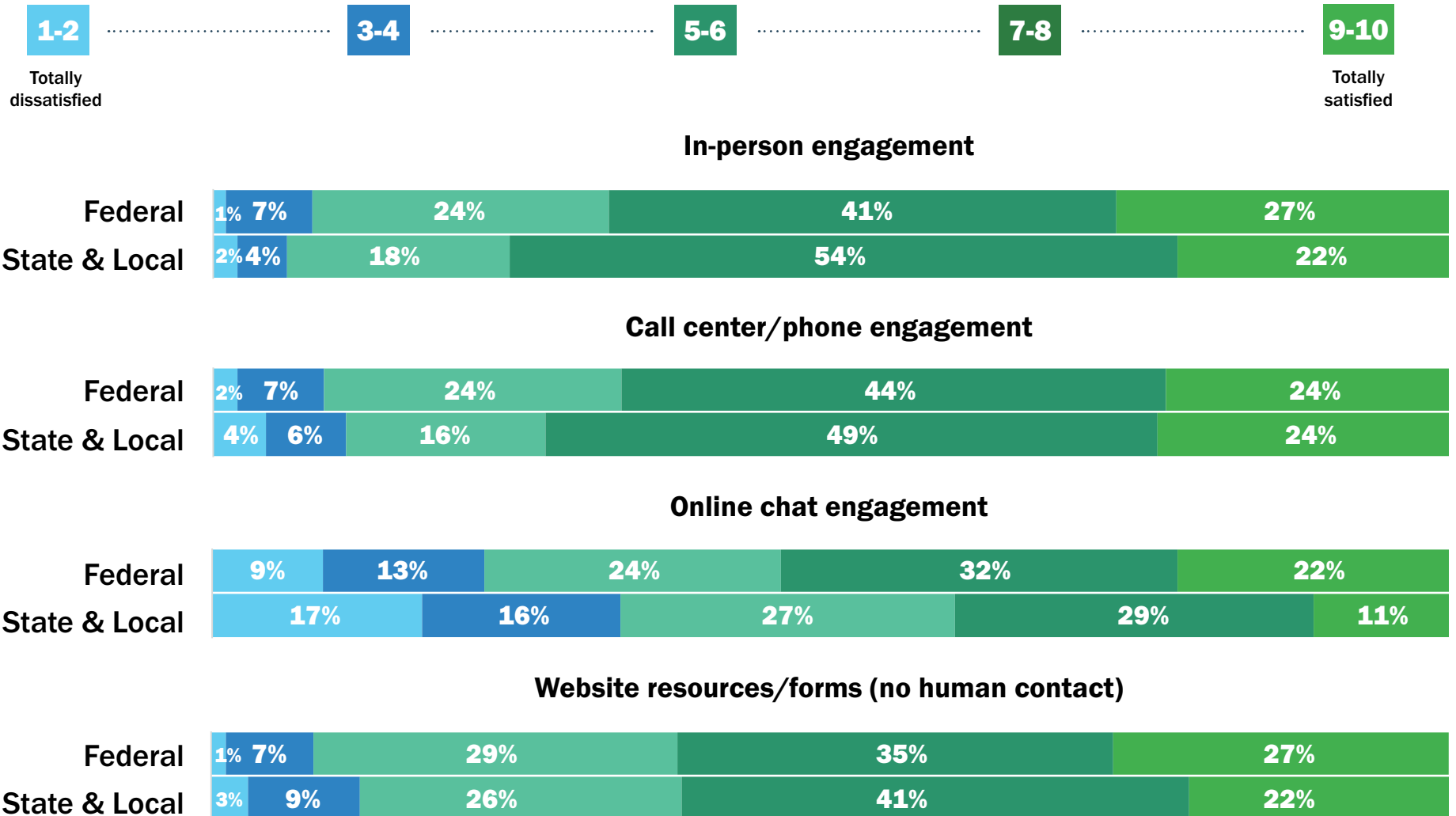
## Promote awareness of digital accessibility; encourage proactive compliance



# SATISFACTION OF THOSE WHO DO NOT IDENTIFY WITH DISABILITY

Federal vs. State/Local

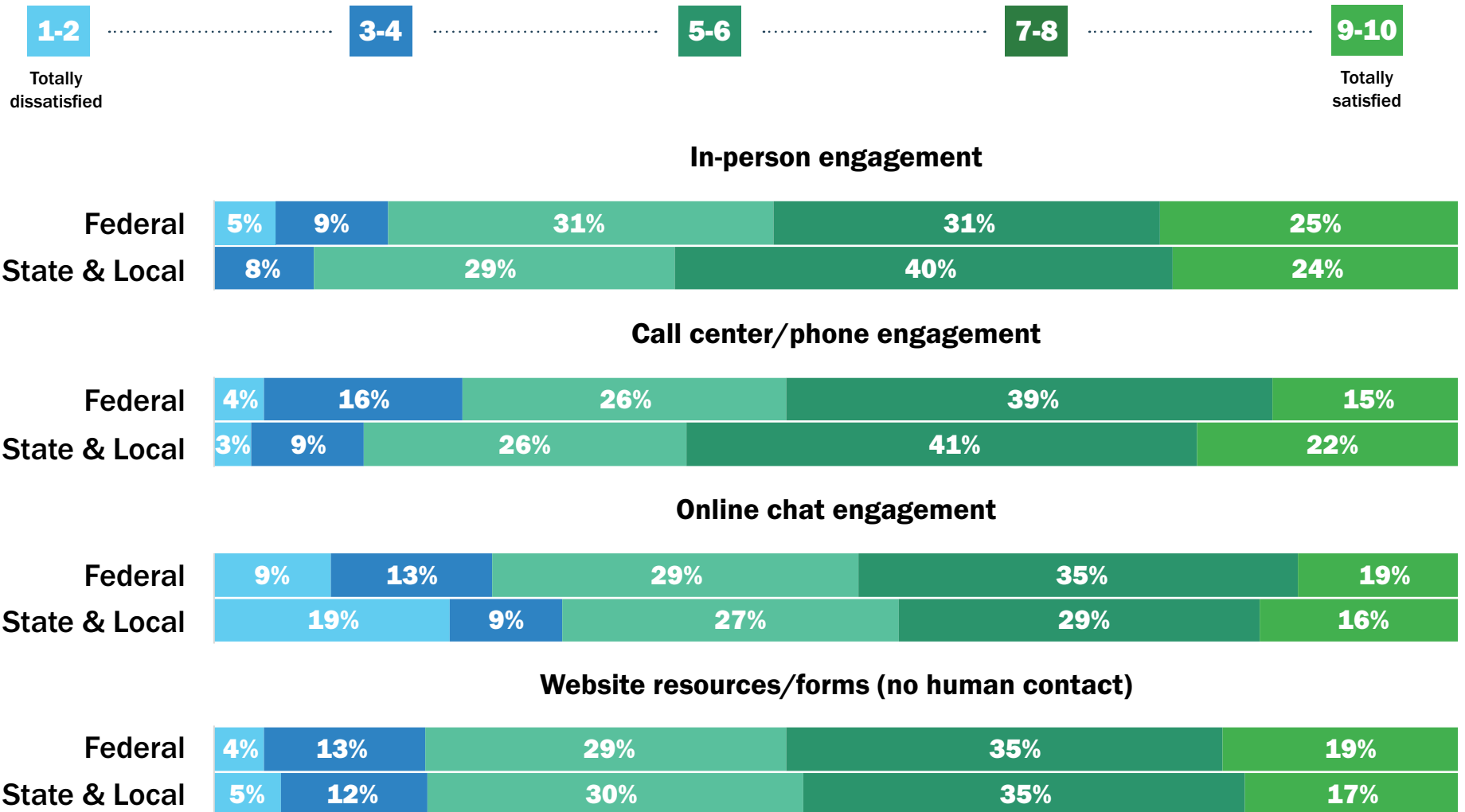
➤ How would the majority of constituents who **do not identify** as a person with a disability rate their level of satisfaction in finding and completing services from your agency via the following methods, on a scale of 1 to 10?



# SATISFACTION OF THOSE WHO DO IDENTIFY WITH DISABILITY

Federal vs. State/Local

➤ How would the majority of constituents **who do identify** as a person with a disability rate their level of satisfaction in finding and completing services from your agency via the following methods, on a scale of 1 to 10?



# DATA SHARING

Federal vs. State/Local

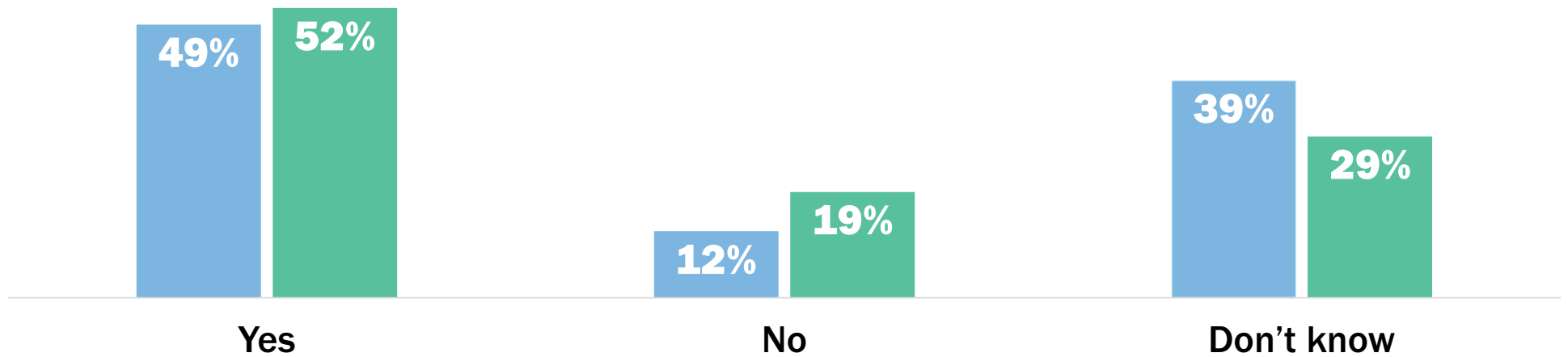
- Does your organization share or federate appropriate intra-agency data to proactively improve the user experience for people of all abilities?

## Federal

Base: 85

## State & Local

Base: 93





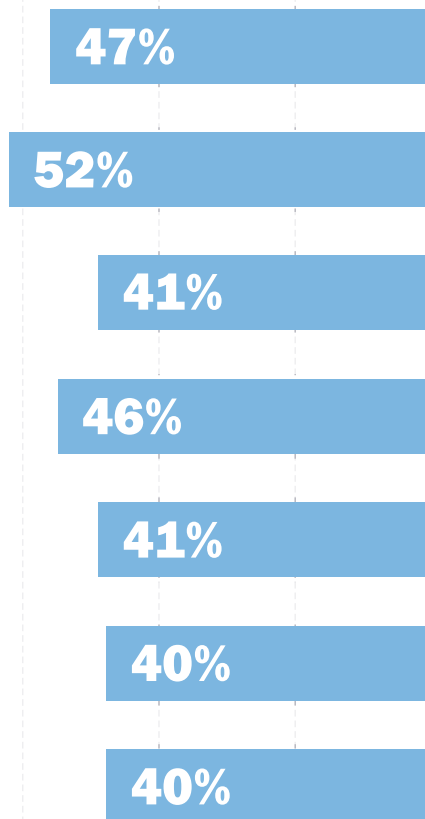
# CAPABILITIES TO IMPROVE DIGITAL ACCESS

Federal vs. State/Local

➤ What capabilities would help most to improve constituents' digital access to your agency's information and services?

## Federal

Base: 85



Speech-to-text tools

General accessibility training

Technical accessibility training

Text-to-audio tools

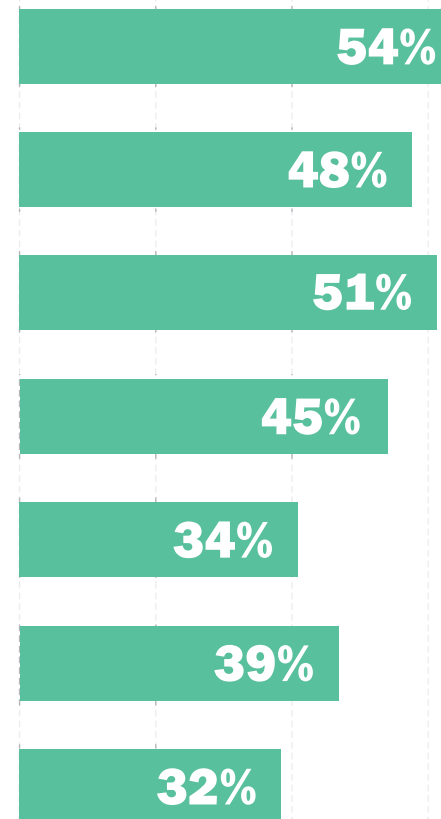
Options for "human in the loop" issue identification

Scanning tools to automatically identify accessibility issues and remediate issues, where possible

Platforms for auditing, monitoring & developing accessibility engineering

## State & Local

Base: 93



54%

48%

51%

45%

34%

39%

32%

# CHALLENGES IN DELIVERING OPTIMAL CX

Federal vs. State/Local

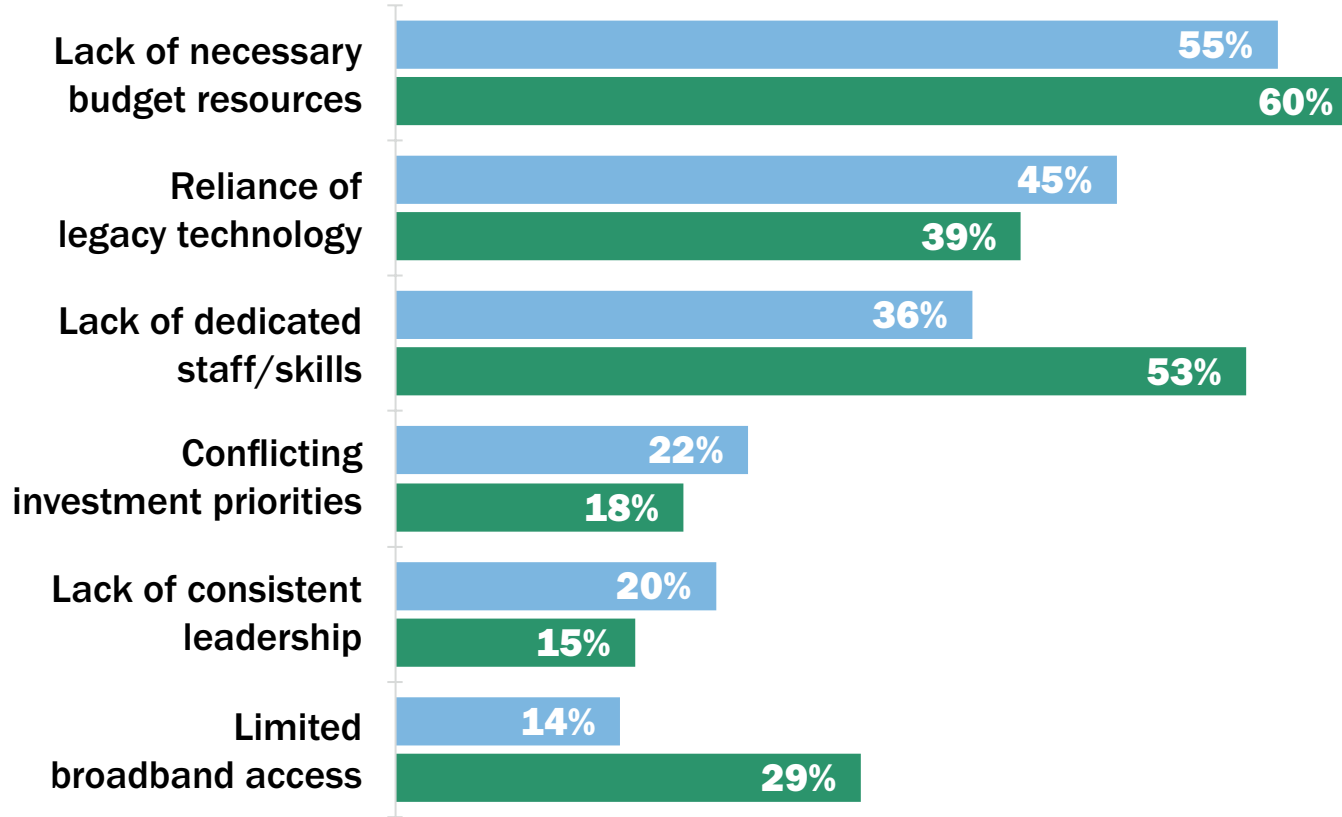
➤ What are the most significant challenges your agency faces in delivering an optimal level of digital accessibility to agency information and services?

## Federal

Base: 85 | Other 4%

## State & Local

Base: 93 | Other 2%



## Other Takeaways

C-suite/management, communications/CX and IT personnel all said the budget was the most significant challenge; but c-suite said legacy technology was the second most while communications/CX and IT said lack of dedicated skills/staff.

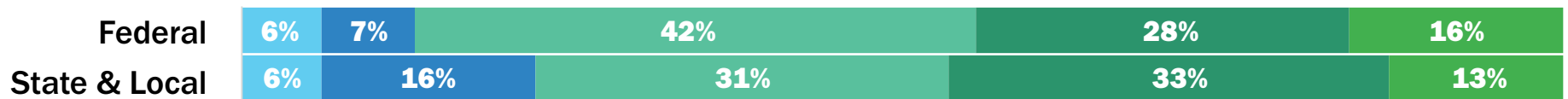
# LEVEL OF SUPPORT

Federal vs. State/Local

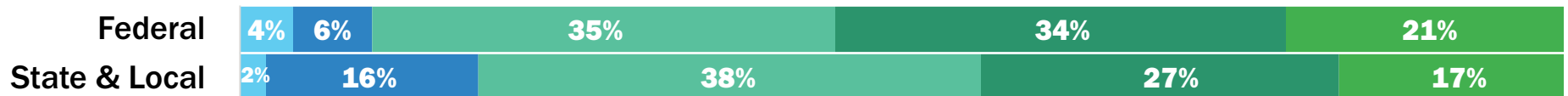
➤ How would you describe the level of support your agency currently receives from the following groups to close accessibility gaps (on a scale of 1 to 5)?



## Broadband providers/partners



## Hardware/infrastructure providers



## Software providers



# LEVEL OF SUPPORT

Federal vs. State/Local

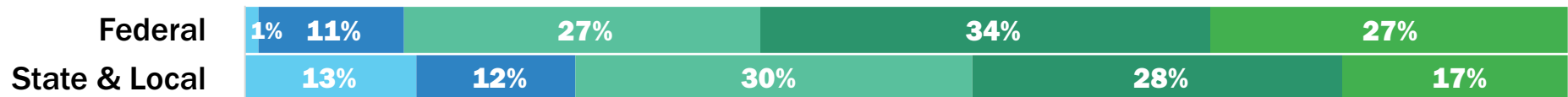
➤ How would you describe the level of support your agency currently receives from the following groups to close accessibility gaps (on a scale of 1 to 5)?



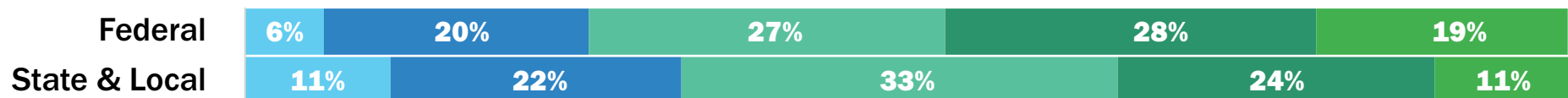
## Non-government organizations



## Federal regulators



## Private enterprises



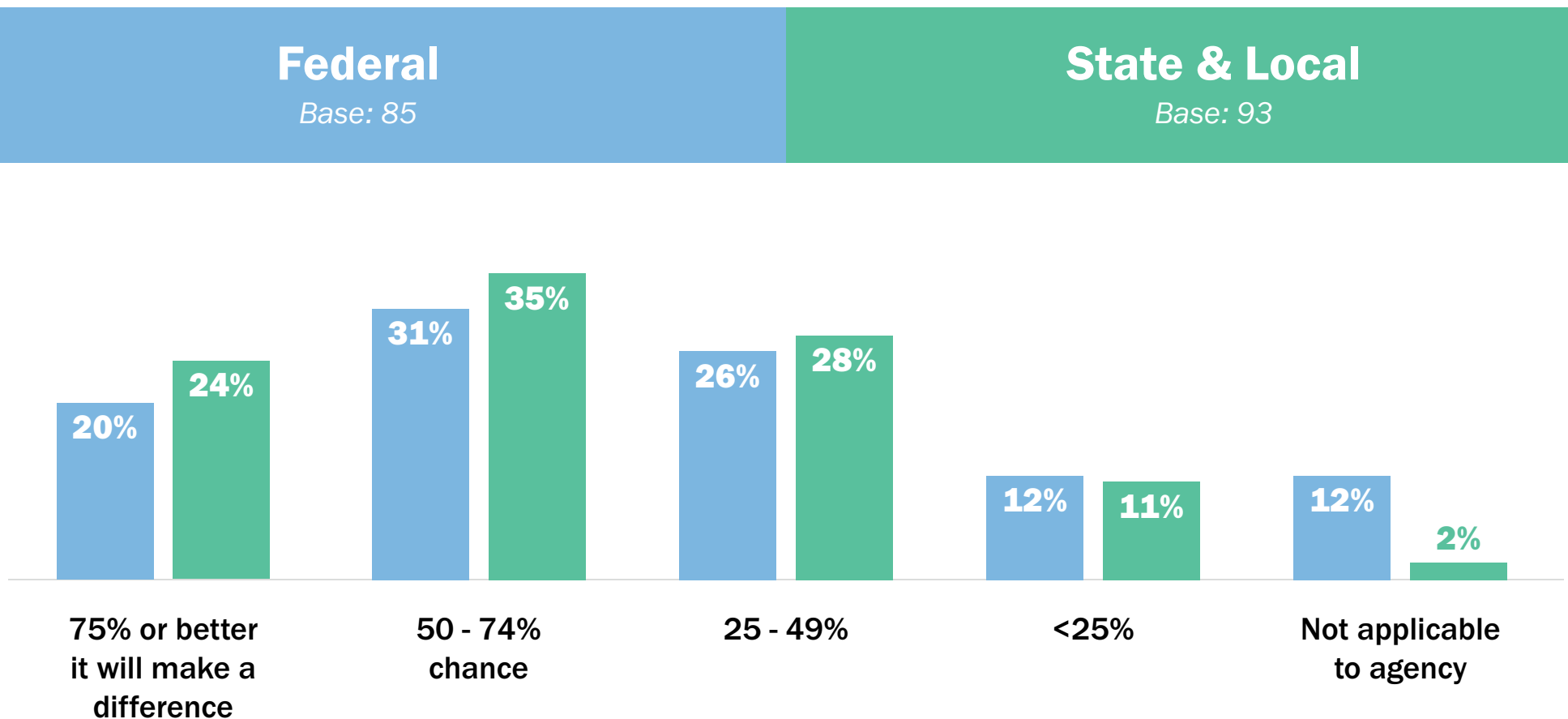
## Advocacy groups for the disabled



# IMPACT OF JOBS ACT

Federal vs. State/Local

➤ How confident are you that the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act will make a notable impact in expanding broadband access to populations not currently well-served?





# TAKEAWAY CONCLUSIONS

## **Ensuring a better experience for all types of disabilities**

Government regulations have paved the way for individuals with physical disabilities to gain equitable access to agency information and services. Supporting access is also high on the radar of agency leaders. However, state and local agencies appear to be more proactive than federal agencies in addressing emerging concerns like digital literacy, English fluency and a lack of reliable broadband/digital access.

## **Potential for inflated self-assessments**

Roughly half to two-thirds of federal respondents — and a slightly higher proportion of state and local respondents — believe the majority of their constituents would give their agencies satisfaction score of 7 to 10 for various forms of customer engagement. Yet around 1 in 4 respondents typically said they surveyed different populations about their accessibility needs in the past 12-24 months — suggesting agency leaders may be well served by surveying users more frequently to have a better sense of how well constituents feel they are meeting their accessibility needs. Without a regular feedback mechanism, agencies may have a false sense of where they stand in meeting these needs.

## **Agencies favor universal design, but many still focus on compliance**

While roughly half of all respondents say they're taking a "universal design" approach to improving digital access to their services, about 3 in 10 federal — and 2 in 10 in state and local — respondents say the need to meet regulatory requirements is the primary driver of their approach to design — suggesting many agencies may still lag in meeting emerging digital access needs. Federal agencies are more likely to have an "ongoing innovation process for improving access for people with disabilities" than state and local agencies. Agencies could leverage industry standards for user-centered design to improve accessibility and innovate with multiple constituencies.

## **Connecting with communities**

Agency respondents gave mixed scores for how much support they receive from various technology providers and from public, private and non-governmental organizations, perhaps due to the size of their agency or how resource-rich they are. Federal, state and local respondents said they continue to face several technical, policy and training challenges that could be better met if different groups worked more collaboratively to help close accessibility gaps.

## **FedScoop**

FedScoop is the leading tech media brand in the federal government market. With more than 4.3 million monthly unique engagements and 202,000 daily newsletter subscribers, FedScoop gathers top leaders from the White House, federal agencies, academia and the tech industry to discuss ways technology can improve government and identify ways to achieve common goals. With our website, newsletter and events, we've become the community's go-to platform for education and collaboration.

## **StateScoop**

StateScoop is the leading media brand in the state and local government market. With more than 2.3 million monthly unique engagements and 187,000 daily newsletter subscribers, StateScoop brings together IT leaders and innovators from across government, academia and industry to exchange best practices and identify ways to improve state and city government. reports on news and events impacting technology decisions in state and local government. With our website, newsletter and events, we've become the community's go-to platform for education and collaboration.

## **CONTACT**

**WYATT KASH**

*SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT CONTENT STRATEGY*

SCOOP NEWS GROUP

WASHINGTON, D.C.

202.887.8001

WYATT.KASH@SCOOPNEWSGROUP.COM