



Public Sector Infrastructure Leadership Survey

– Technical Appendix

New Zealand Infrastructure Commission / Te Waihanga

Te Waihanga seeks to transform infrastructure for all New Zealanders. By doing so our goal is to lift the economic performance of Aotearoa and improve the wellbeing of all New Zealanders.

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Introduction

Public sector infrastructure projects are often complex and high stakes. They require skilled leaders who can manage risks, drive project performance, and ensure successful outcomes. Effective leadership can make the difference between projects that meet their objectives and those that face delays, cost overruns, or fail to deliver value.

The New Zealand Infrastructure Commission, Te Waihanga, works to strengthen infrastructure capability across the public sector. Through its Leadership and Capability work programme, the Commission supports current and future infrastructure leaders by developing practical guidance, facilitating networks and learning opportunities, and supporting the growth of leadership capability across the public sector. This includes initiatives that connect senior leaders and enable them to share experience and insights from across the infrastructure system. One example is the Infrastructure Leaders Network (ILN), which provides opportunities for senior public sector infrastructure leaders to engage through meetups, masterclasses, communities of practice, and an active LinkedIn group.

This report presents insights from a survey of senior public sector infrastructure leaders. The findings will help inform future capability development initiatives, resources, and leadership support across New Zealand's infrastructure system.

Approach

For New Zealand to deliver the infrastructure that it needs, we need highly skilled infrastructure leaders. Currently there isn't a clear view of who's leading infrastructure projects and managing assets across the public service. The better we understand who is working in the sector the better we can increase system-wide capability and develop learning opportunities to support the delivery of the infrastructure services that New Zealanders need.

A short survey was developed for public sector infrastructure leaders: Project Directors (ProjDs), Programme Directors (ProgDs), Senior Responsible Owners (SROs), Asset Managers, or other senior infrastructure leaders. It was designed to gain insights into what roles public sector infrastructure leaders hold, the pathways they've taken into these positions, their experiences, what sectors and agencies they work in, as well as perceptions of development needs and system-level challenges. It is important to note that the questions did not assess individual capability.

The survey tool was developed by the Commission's Leadership and Capability team with input from our specialist social science research and digital engagement staff members. It was tested and refined internally and externally with a small number of leaders. Feedback was used to improve questions focus and clarity.

Participation in the survey was voluntary. It was distributed in October 2025 through the Infrastructure Leaders Network (ILN) mailing list, as well as made available more widely via LinkedIn. It was also shared directly with capital-intensive agencies and councils. The survey was open to all senior leaders involved in infrastructure delivery across the public sector. The survey was anonymous and took around 10 minutes to complete.

Results

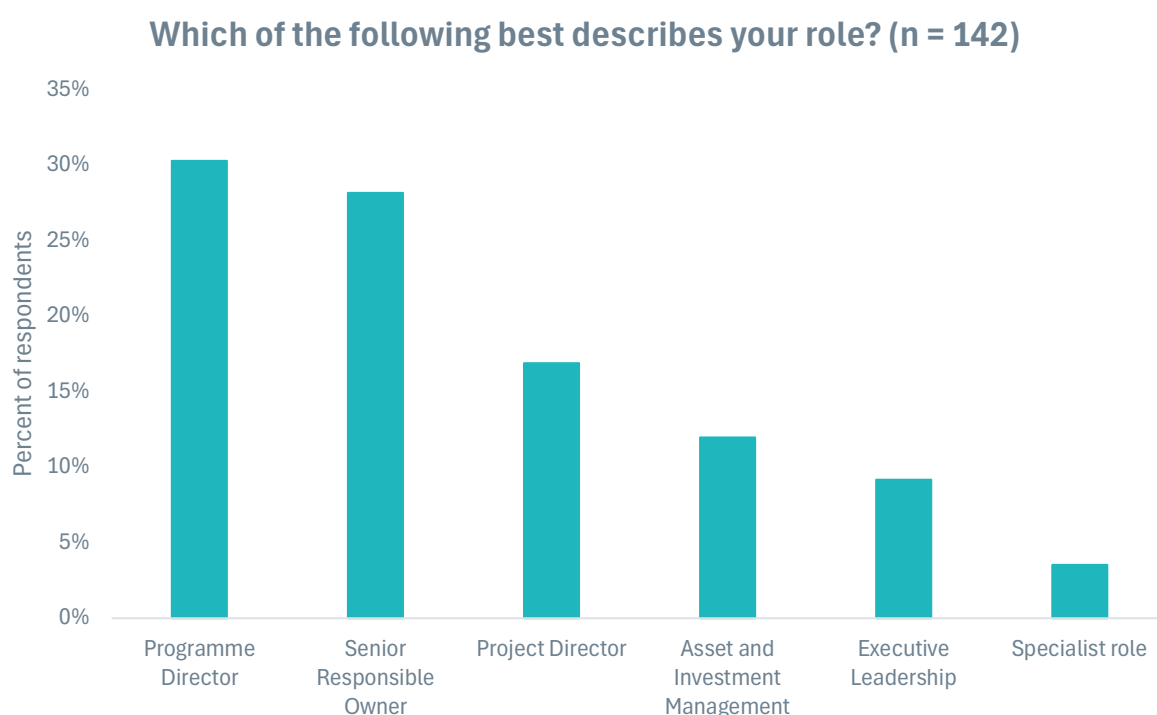
In total, 155 complete survey responses were received. Thirteen of these responses were from individuals who identified as having an employment type that does not fit the category of 'public sector infrastructure leader', and these responses were removed from the sample. This left 142 responses that fit the criteria and were included in the analysis.

The results provide a ‘snapshot’ of insights into leadership roles in New Zealand’s public sector infrastructure system. Given that the total size and nature of the leadership population is unknown, and results should be interpreted as indicative rather than representative. However, the findings of the survey are generally consistent with what we have heard from hundreds of public sector infrastructure leaders over the past several years, through interviews, workshops, and previous Te Waihanganga engagement.

Background and role

Programme Directors (30%), Senior Responsible Owners (28%), and Project Directors (17%) make up (75%) of the survey sample. Smaller proportions are in Asset and Investment Management (12%), Executive leadership (9%) and Specialist positions (4%) – see **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: Leadership roles identified by respondents

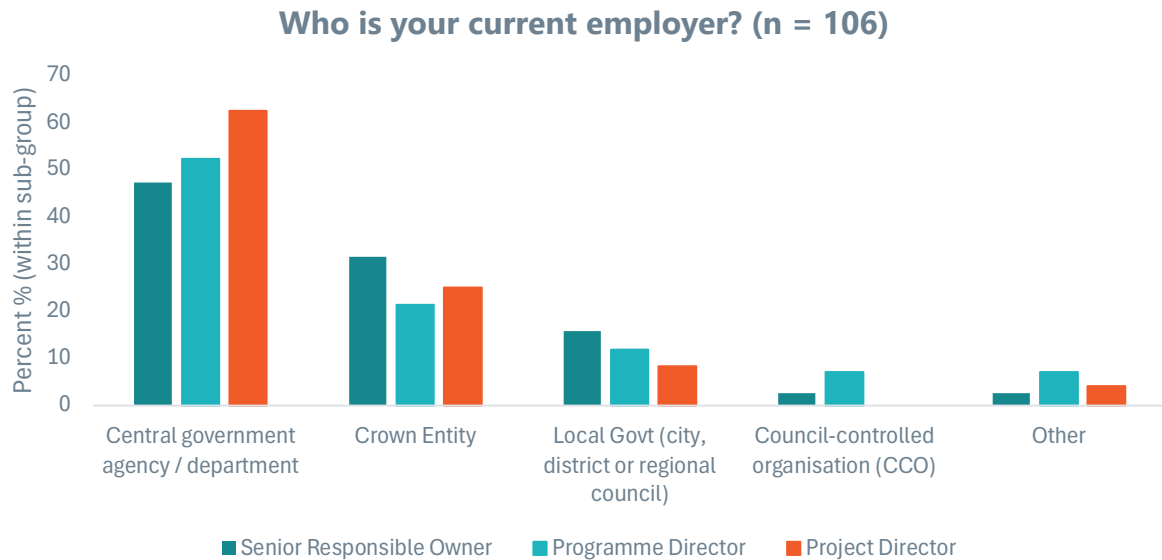


The rest of the analysis in this appendix focuses on the first three cohorts (Programme Directors, Senior Responsible Owners, and Project Directors). This focus reflects the alignment of the analysis with the *People Who Build Projects* report and the Commission’s work over the past three years with this leadership cohort. Responses from other roles are being used separately to inform other Leadership and Capability work programmes.

The majority of respondents are employed by central government

Across all three roles – SROs, ProgDs and ProjDs – the majority of the survey respondents are employed within central government agencies or departments, though the balance between central and other public sector employers in our sample varies somewhat by role – see **Figure 2**.

Figure 2: Survey respondent employers



Land transport projects/sector were most frequently mentioned

For the SROs, ProgDs and ProjDs in our sample, almost a quarter were primarily involved the 'land transport' sector. 'Water and waste' and 'other' were the next most frequently mentioned sectors, with other projects/sectors commonly including defence, buildings (housing, public properties), community facilities and urban development – see **Figure 3**.

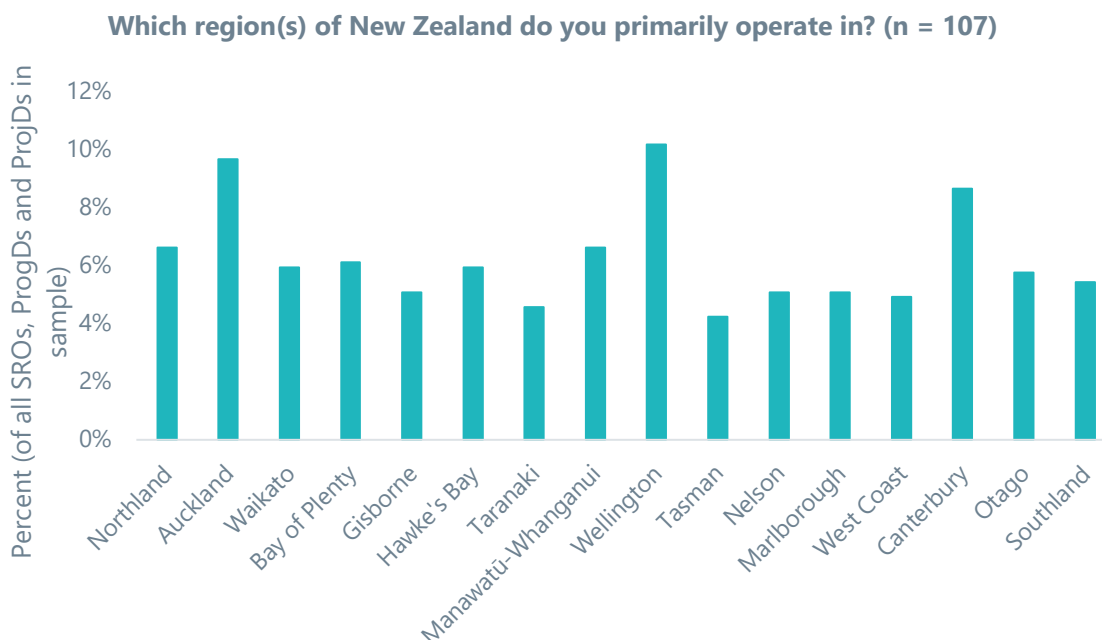
Figure 3: Survey projects/sectors respondents work in



Respondents work on projects around New Zealand

The SROs, ProgDs and ProjDs in our sample operated projects across New Zealand. Please note that most respondents operated in (and selected) more than one region – see **Figure 4**.

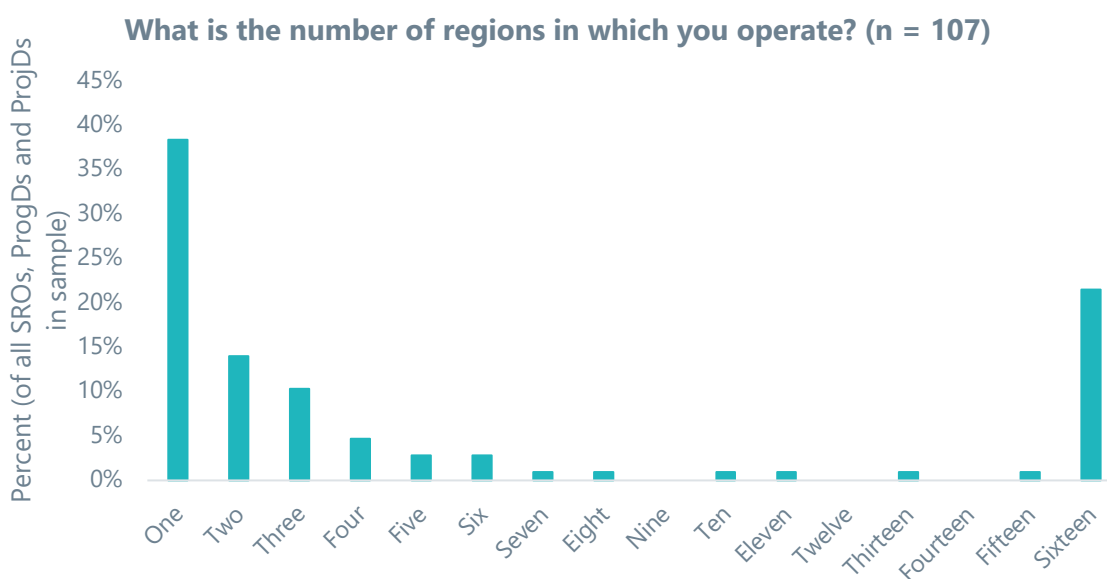
Figure 4: Region’s respondents primarily operate in



Most respondents operate in more than one region

Most of the SROs, ProgDs and ProjDs in our sample operated in more than one region, with just over 20% operating nationwide (across all sixteen regions) – see **Figure 5**.

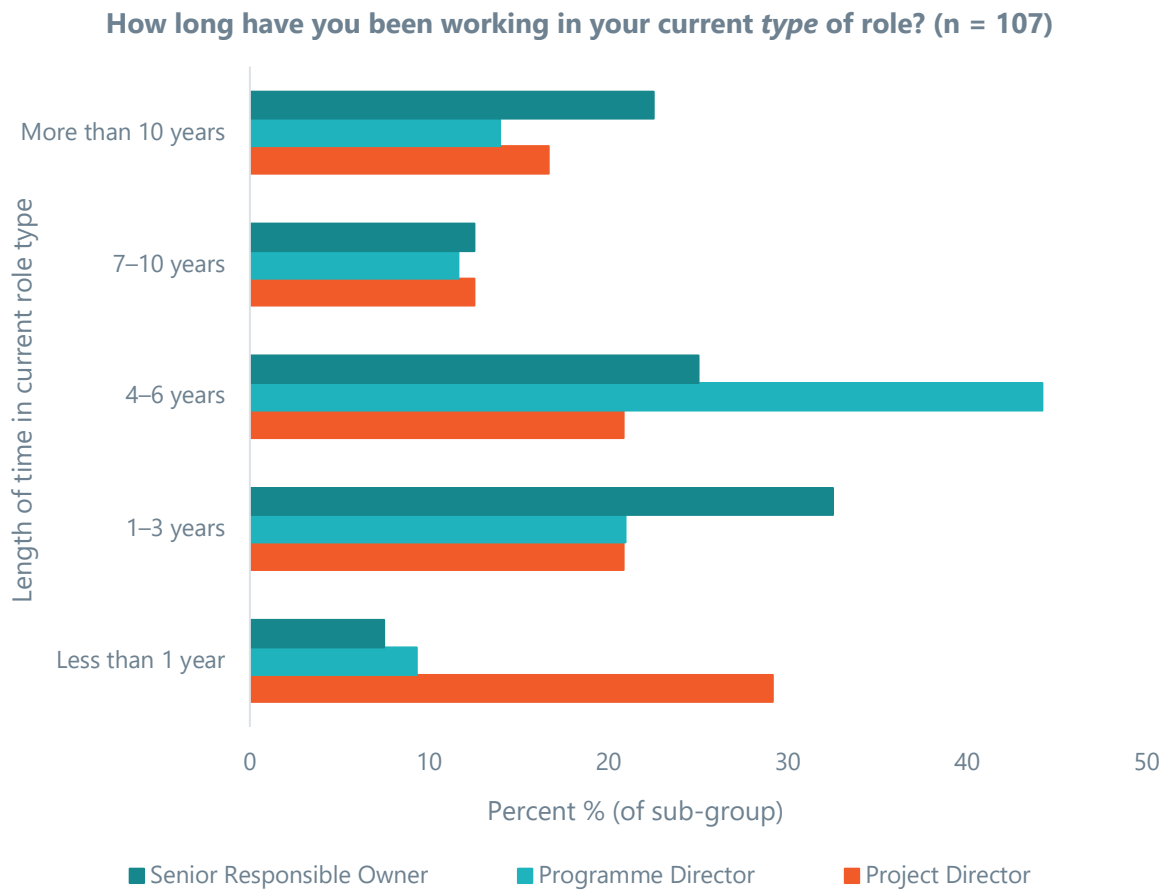
Figure 5: Number of regions respondents operate



Senior public sector infrastructure leaders tend to be experienced in their role

The data suggests that most SRO, ProgD and ProjD respondents have significant experience in their current role type, though the distribution varies between the three roles. Project Directors tended to be more likely to have experience of less than one year – see **Figure 6**.

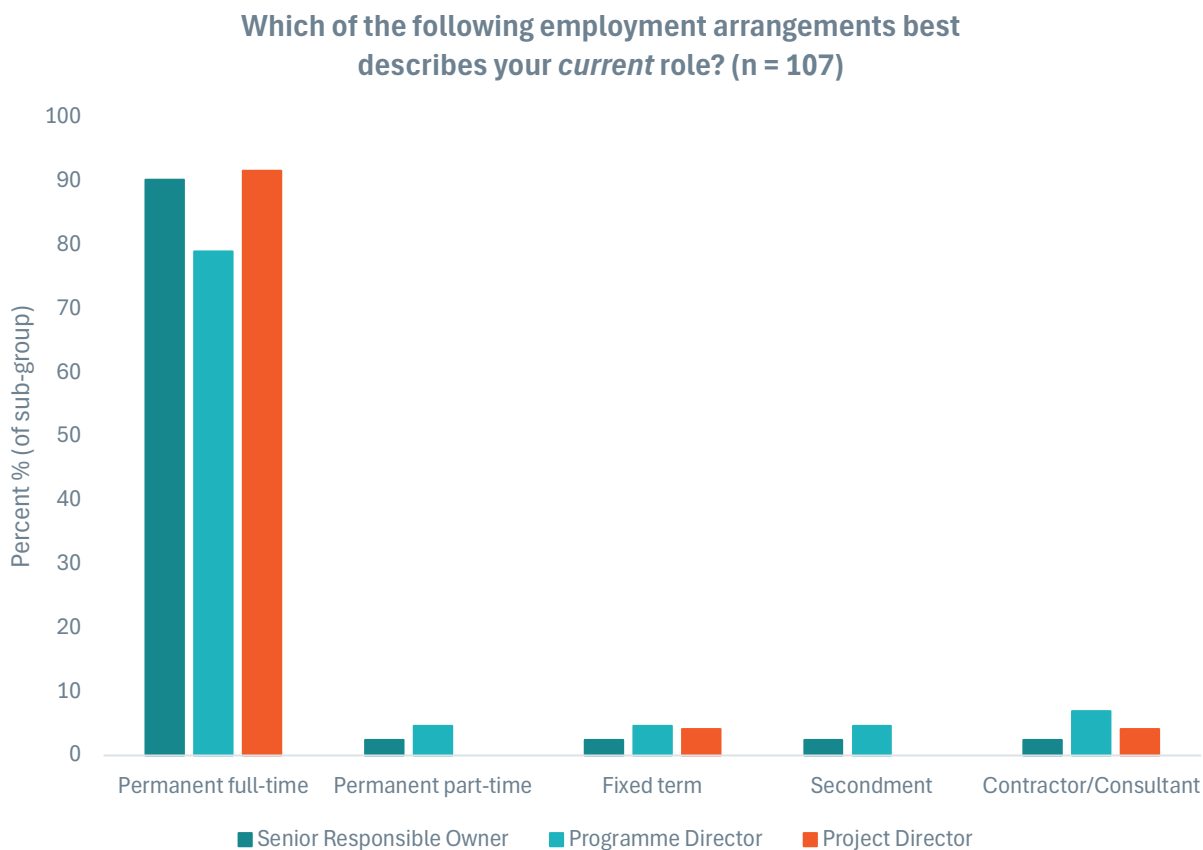
Figure 6: Respondent tenure in current type of role



Permanent, full-time work is typical for the infrastructure leaders in our sample

The survey sample shows a predominantly permanent, full-time workforce across all three roles – see **Figure 7**.

Figure 7: Employment arrangements of respondents



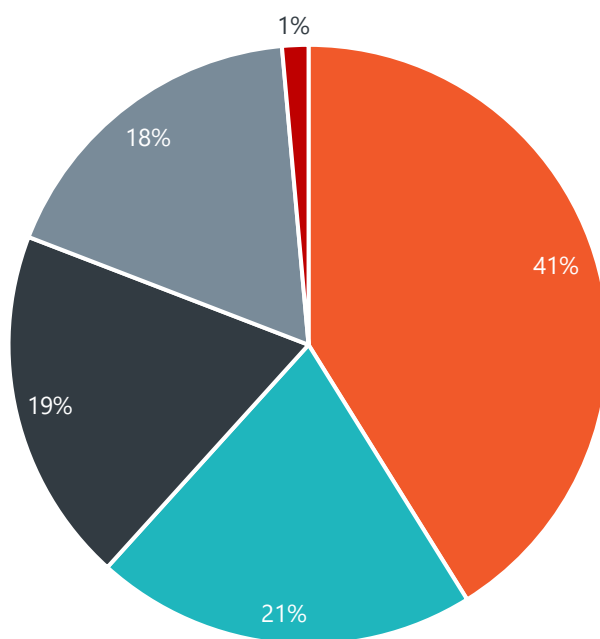
Senior public sector infrastructure leaders gained experience in a range of sectors

The leaders in our sample most frequently gained their experience in the public sector (41%), with some gaining experience primarily in the private sector (21%) and some in both public and private (19%). Just under one in five (18%) gained their experience mostly overseas – see **Figure 8**.

Figure 8: Sectors where respondents gained most experience

In which sectors did you gain most of your experience?

For all SROs, ProgDs and ProjDs in sample (n = 107)

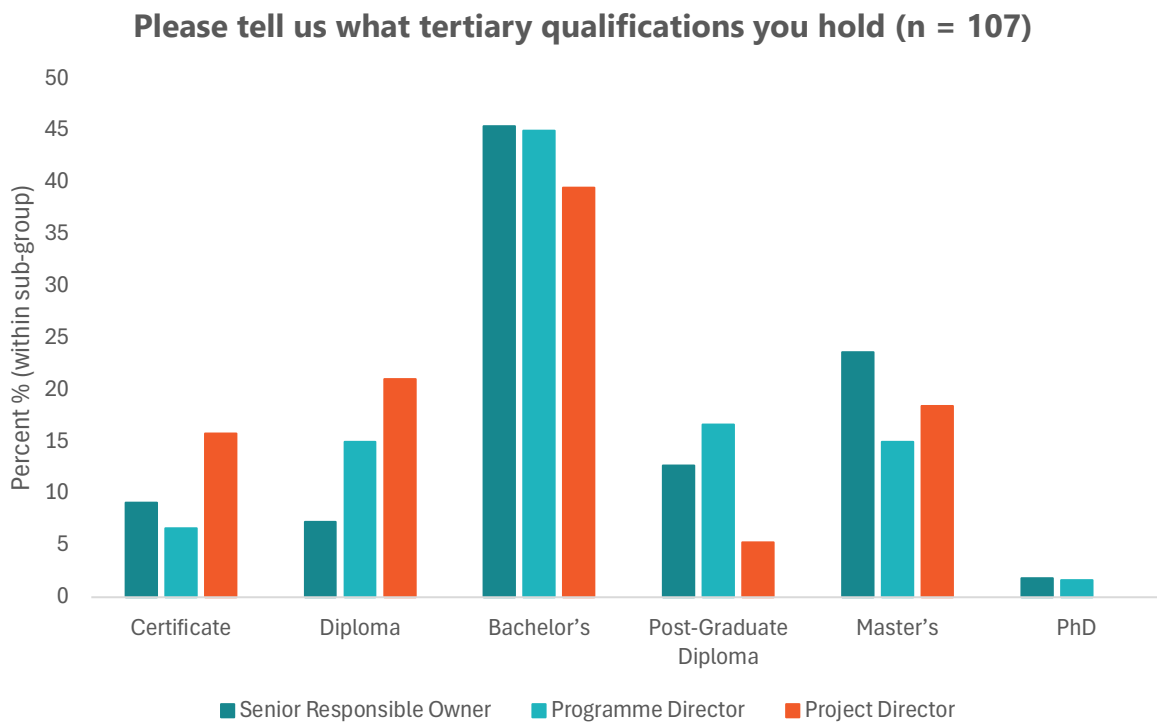


- New Zealand Public sector (central government, local government, Crown entities)
- New Zealand Private sector (consulting, contracting, finance, development, etc.)
- New Zealand Public and Private sectors equally
- Internationally
- Other

Bachelor's degrees are the most frequent qualification for our sample

The leaders in our sample most frequently held Bachelor level degrees (particularly in engineering, planning, and business fields), across all role types. However, a range of levels of tertiary education are present – see **Figure 9**.

Figure 9: Tertiary qualifications held by respondents



Professional development

Figure 10: Professional development undertaken by respondents in the past five (5) years



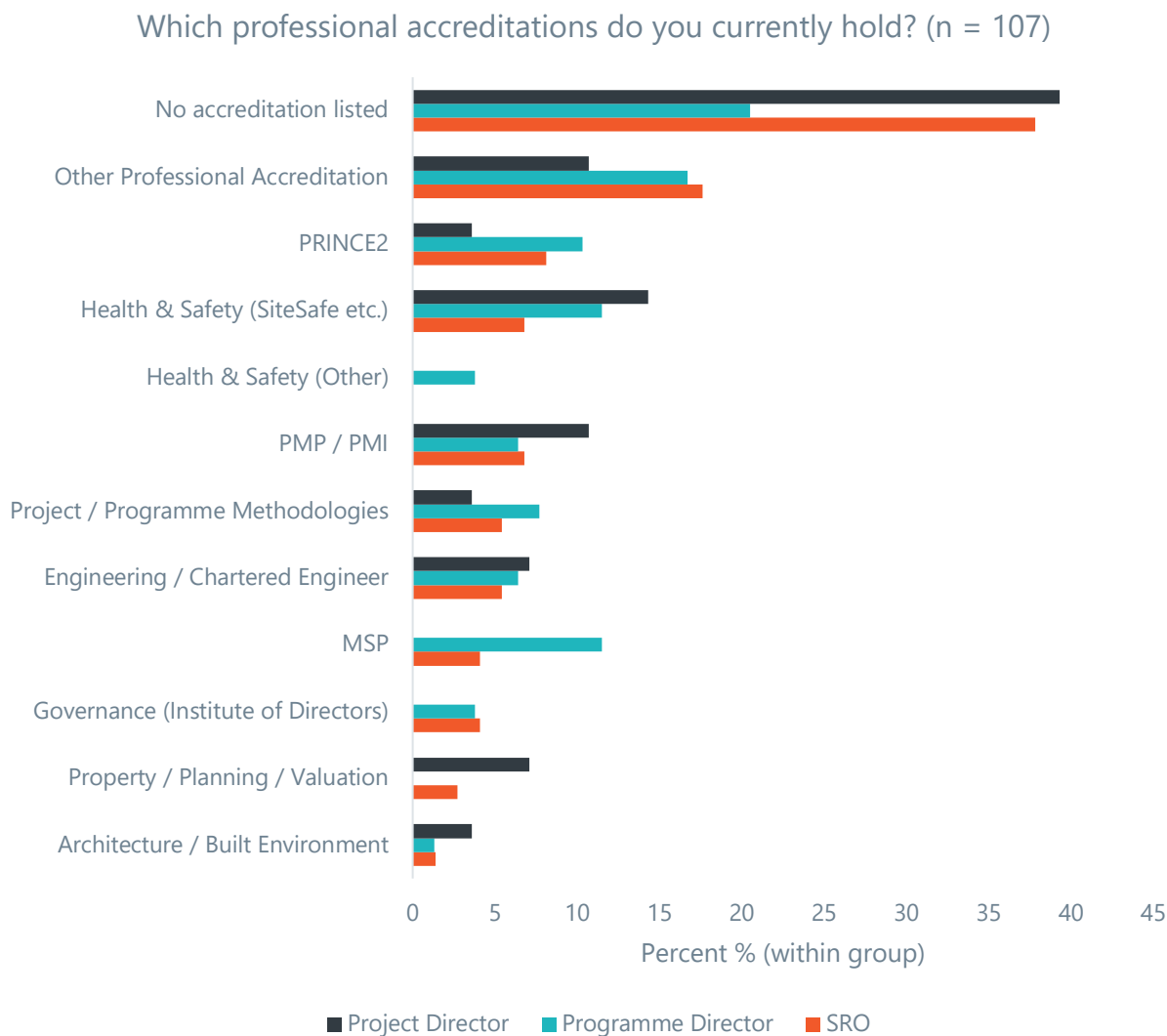
Figure 10 shows professional development undertaken by respondents in the past five years. Some respondents provided specific examples in the 'other' category including:

- Project Directors: technical or sector-specific training, infrastructure courses, delivery tools or systems training, safety or risk training, and specialised project delivery workshops.
- Programme Directors: change management training, stakeholder engagement training, strategy or policy learning, programme leadership workshops, and industry conferences.
- Senior Responsible Owners (SROs): executive education, governance workshops, strategic leadership programmes, sector forums or conferences, and policy or system leadership development.

Professional accreditations

- Formal accreditation is not universal across leadership roles: Several respondents reported no accreditation, particularly among Project Directors (39%) and Senior Responsible Owners (38%), compared with Programme Directors (21%) – see **Figure 11**. Project and programme management certifications (PRINCE2, PMP, MSP) appear across all roles.

Figure 11: Professional accreditations held by respondents



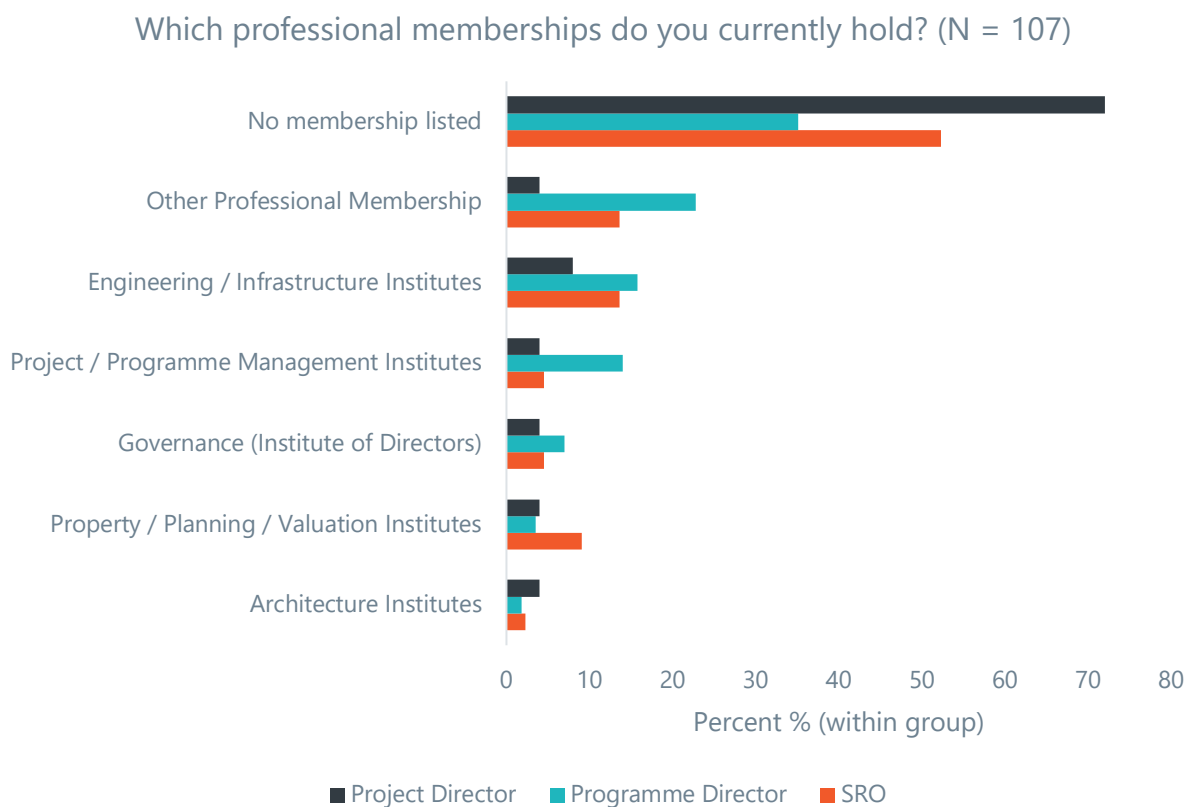
A small number of respondents provided specific examples in the ‘other’ category including:

- Project Directors: sector-specific or technical training, infrastructure or construction courses, delivery tools or systems training, safety or risk workshops, and specialist project delivery training.
- Programme Directors: sector or infrastructure leadership courses, change management training, stakeholder engagement programmes, strategy or policy learning, programme leadership workshops, and industry conferences.
- Senior Responsible Owners (SROs): executive education programmes, governance and board training, strategic leadership courses, public sector leadership development, and infrastructure sector forums or conferences.

Which professional memberships do you currently hold? (n = 107)

- Most respondents reported no professional membership – see **Figure 12**.
- Engineering and infrastructure institutes appear across all three roles, that may suggest these professional bodies remain a common pathway into infrastructure leadership positions.

Figure 12: Professional memberships held by respondents



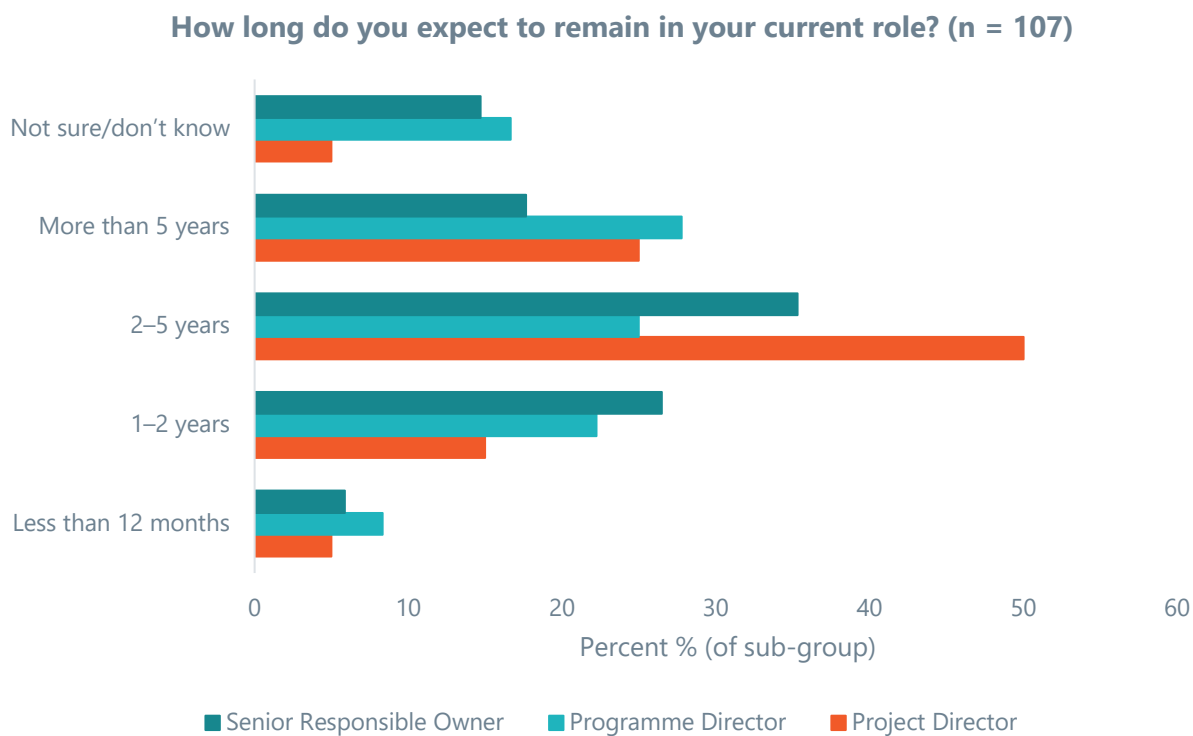
A small number of respondents provided specific examples in the ‘other’ category including:

- Project Directors: smaller professional associations, technical institutes, and niche infrastructure or construction-related memberships.
- Programme Directors: specialised infrastructure, asset management, public works, or sector leadership organisations, or project management bodies.
- Senior Responsible Owners (SROs): senior professional or sector memberships such as leadership networks, specialist professional bodies, and industry associations.

Most respondents expect to remain in their current role for several years or more

Very few respondents in our sample expect to remain in their current role for less than a year. Most respondents expect to be in their role for at least two years, with about a quarter – or one in five – expecting to stay more than 5 years – see **Figure 13**.

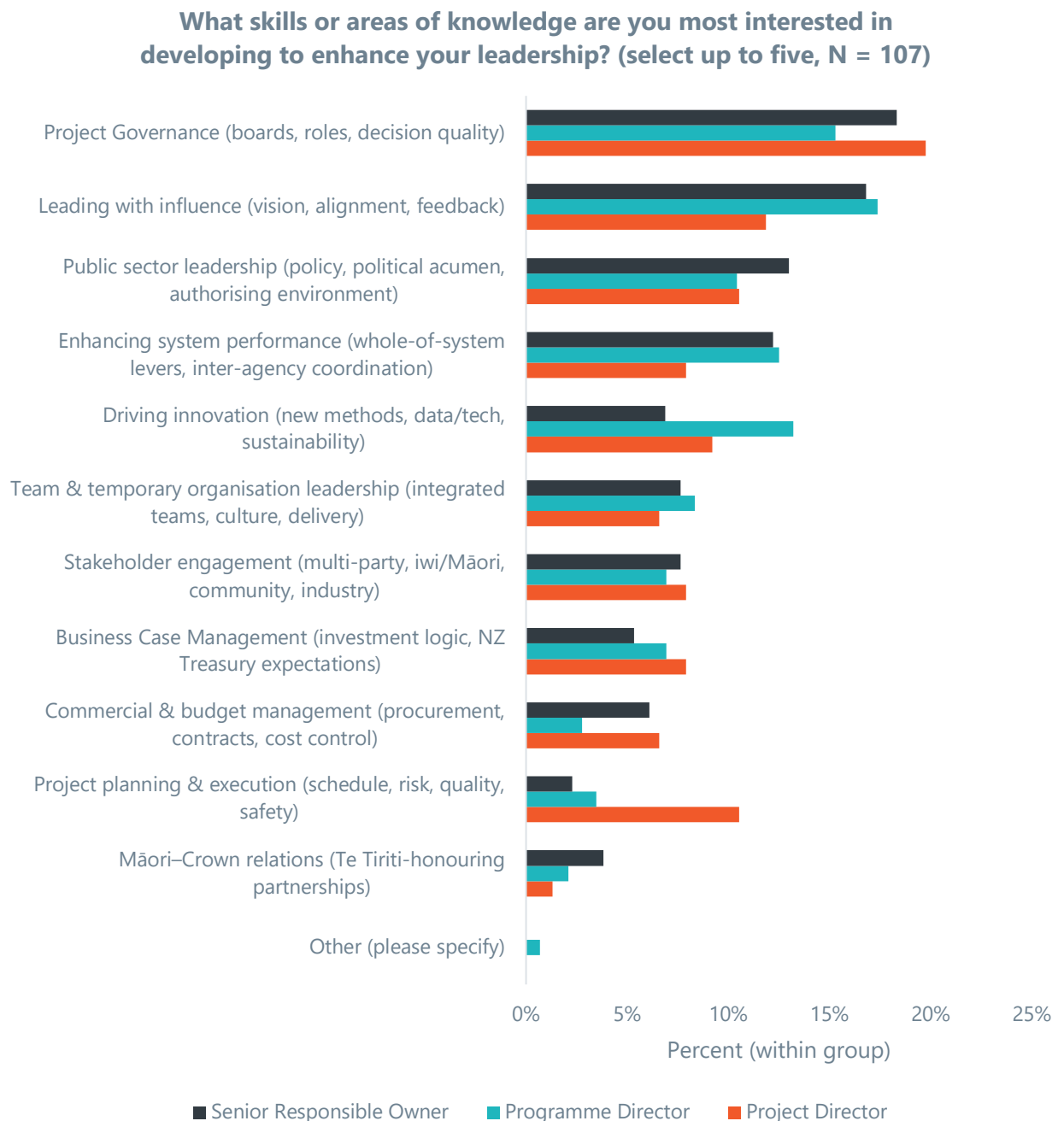
Figure 13: Respondent perception of longevity in current role



Governance and influence top areas selected for development by infrastructure leaders

Infrastructure leaders in our sample selected a wide range of areas they are most interested in to enhance their leadership. The top three overall area project governance, leading with influence, and public sector leadership – see **Figure 14**.

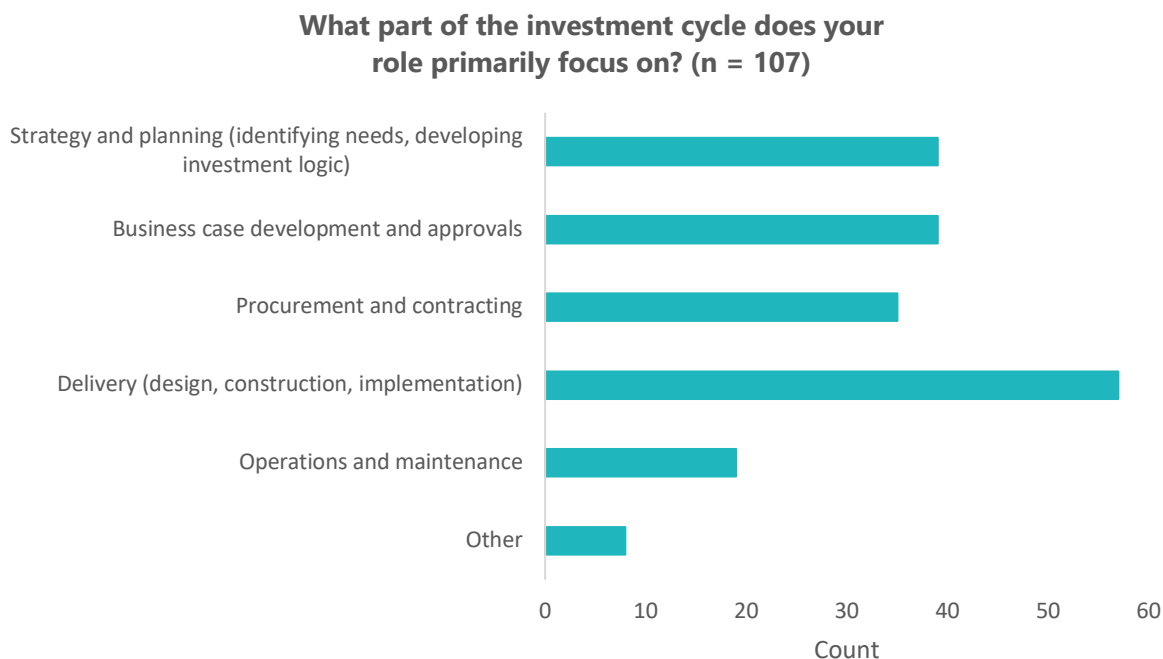
Figure 14: Skills or knowledge identified by respondents to enhance leadership



Infrastructure leaders in our sample most frequently focussed on delivery

Infrastructure leaders in our sample focussed on all stages of the investment cycle, with the most frequently selected stage being delivery. The nine 'other' responses all typically stated being involved in 'all of the above' – see **Figure 15**.

Figure 15: Part of investment cycle respondents primarily focus on



Project characteristics for the leaders in our sample

Figure 16: Volume of projects respondents are currently working on

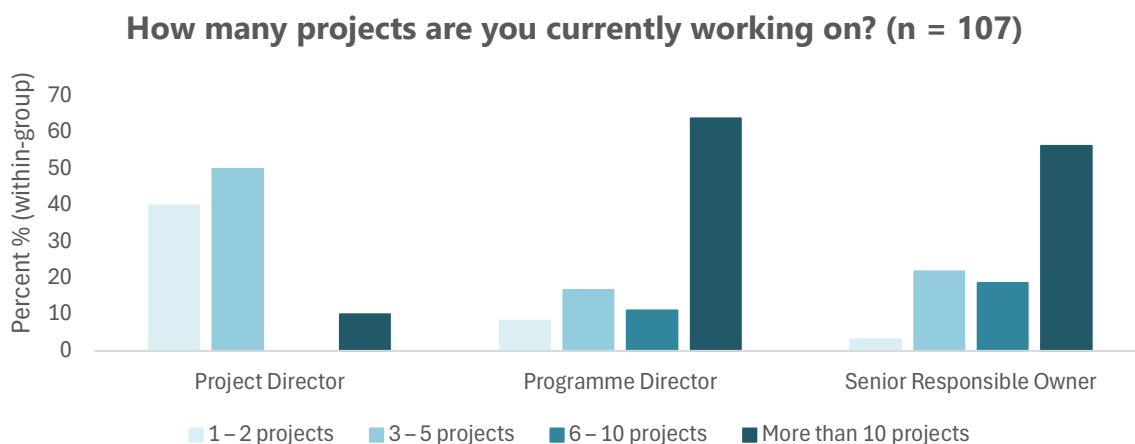


Figure 17: Average duration of projects respondents works on

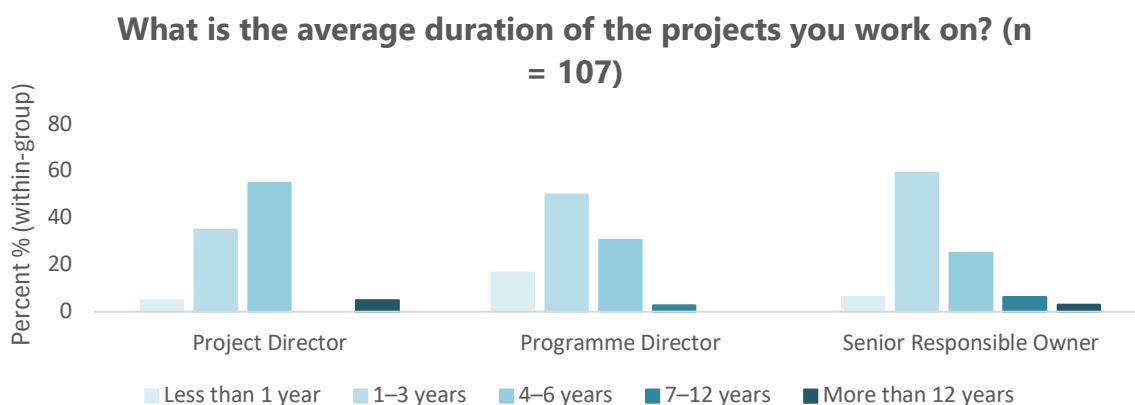
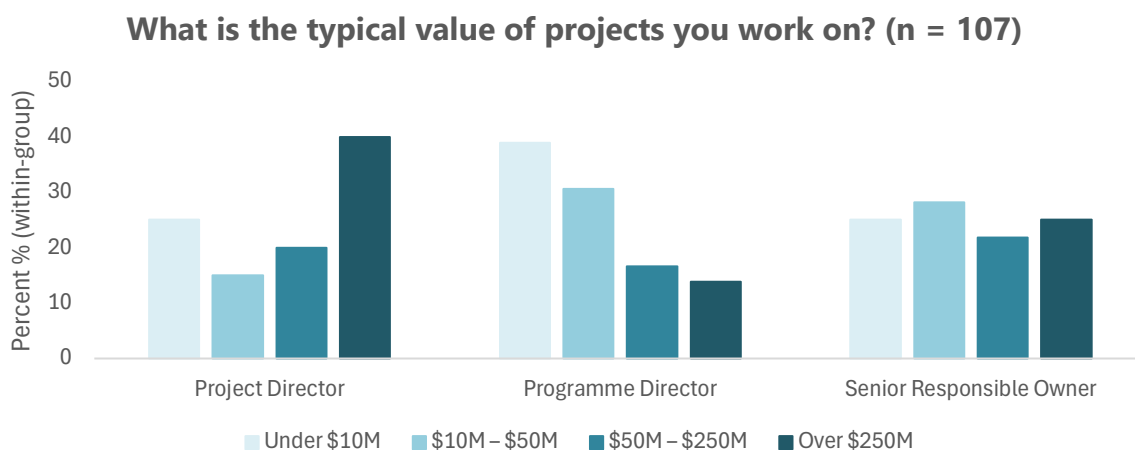


Figure 18: Typical value of projects respondents

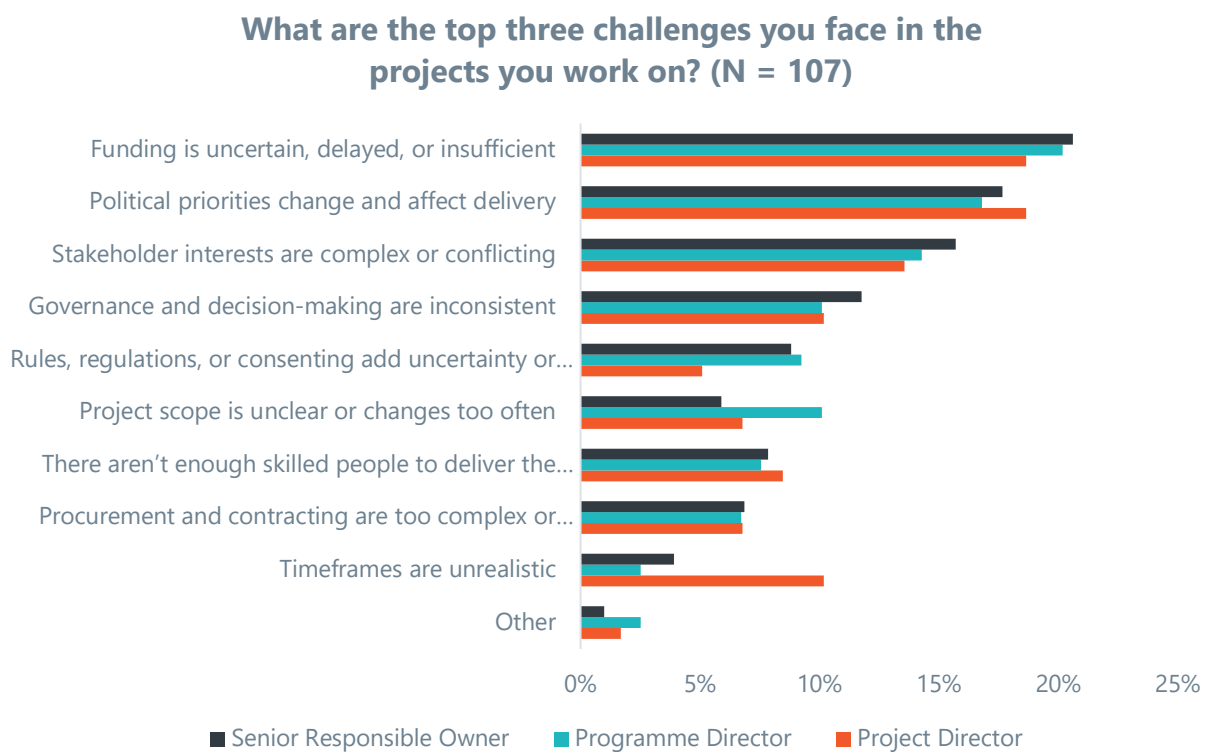


Funding issues and political change are the top challenges faced

The top three challenges faced by leaders in our sample are uncertain funding, changing political priorities, and complex or conflicting stakeholder interests. 'other' included:

- scale of challenge – wellbeing of staff
- business quality assurance and reporting requirements conflicting with delivery best practices
- cost Inflation
- design challenges, level of completion
- expedited delivery during organisational change programme.

Figure 19: Top three challenges faced by respondents in projects



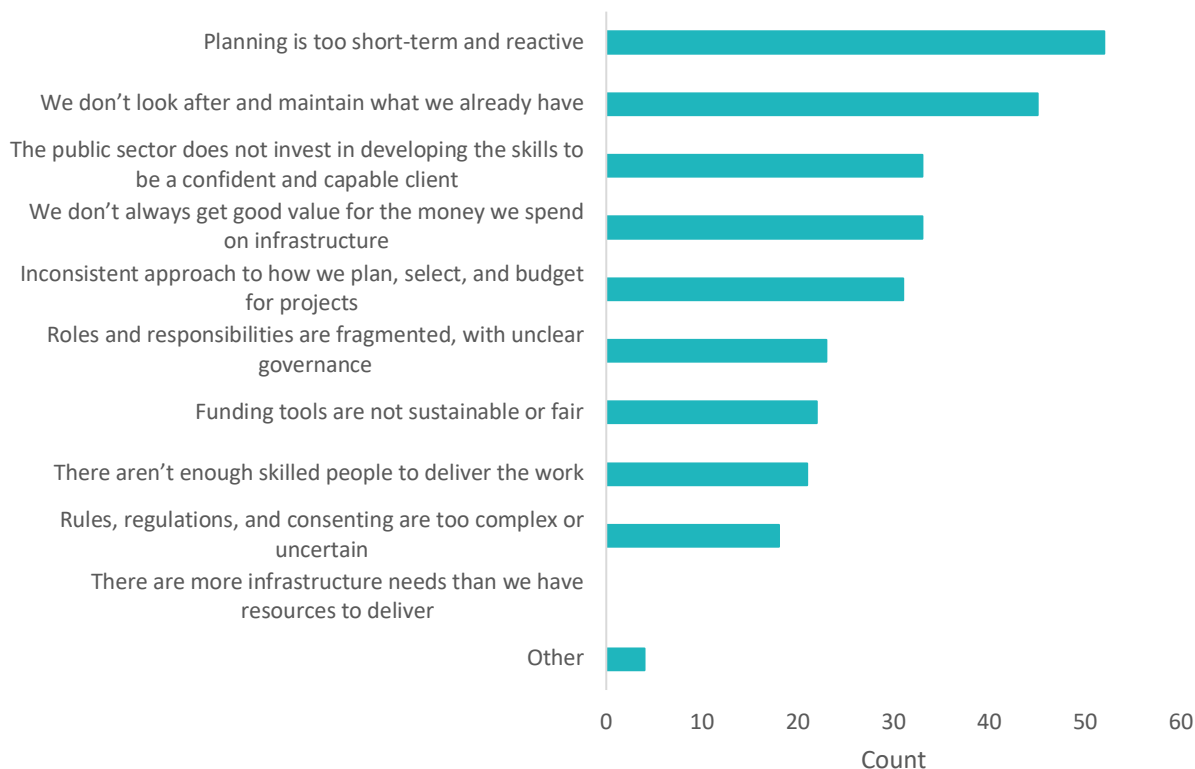
Short term planning is seen as the top challenge to address by infrastructure leaders

Infrastructure leaders in our sample see short term, reactive planning as the most pressing infrastructure challenge to address. The next priority is looking after what we already have (maintenance), followed by being a good client and getting value for money. Other included:

- reducing time and costs to procure, as these can take a sizeable chunk of the capital funding or even Opex
- suspicion of the private sector
- organisations competing to deliver projects
- funding cycle is annual and multi-year appropriations are not supported.

Figure 20: Priority of challenges to be addressed by importance

Looking at the challenges facing New Zealand’s infrastructure system, which three do you think are the most important to address? (N = 107)



Compensation and bonuses

Figure 21: Annual total compensation by respondents per role type

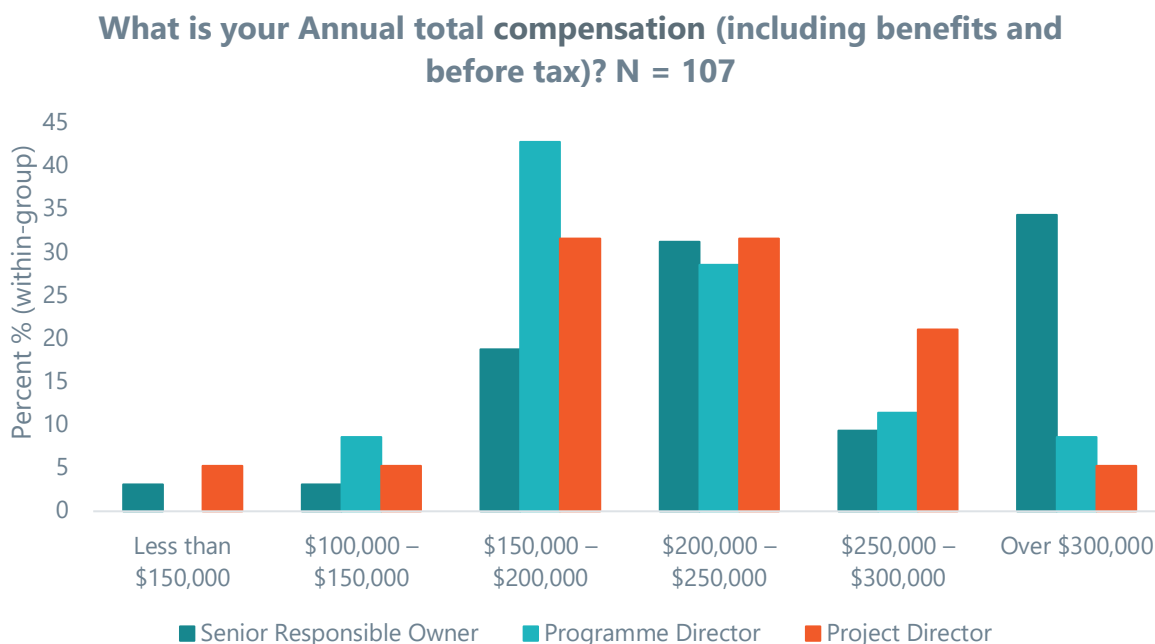
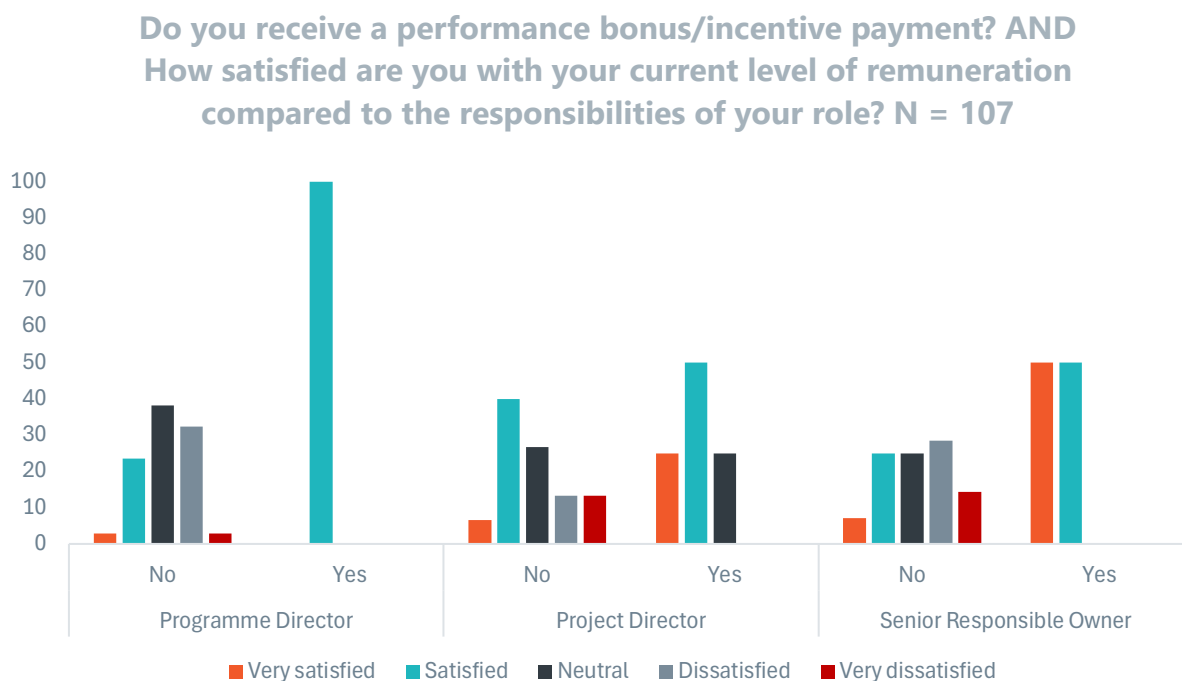


Figure 22: Performance or bonus received by respondents and overall satisfaction with current remuneration compared to responsibilities of role



Demographic characteristics

Figure 23: Age of respondents per role type

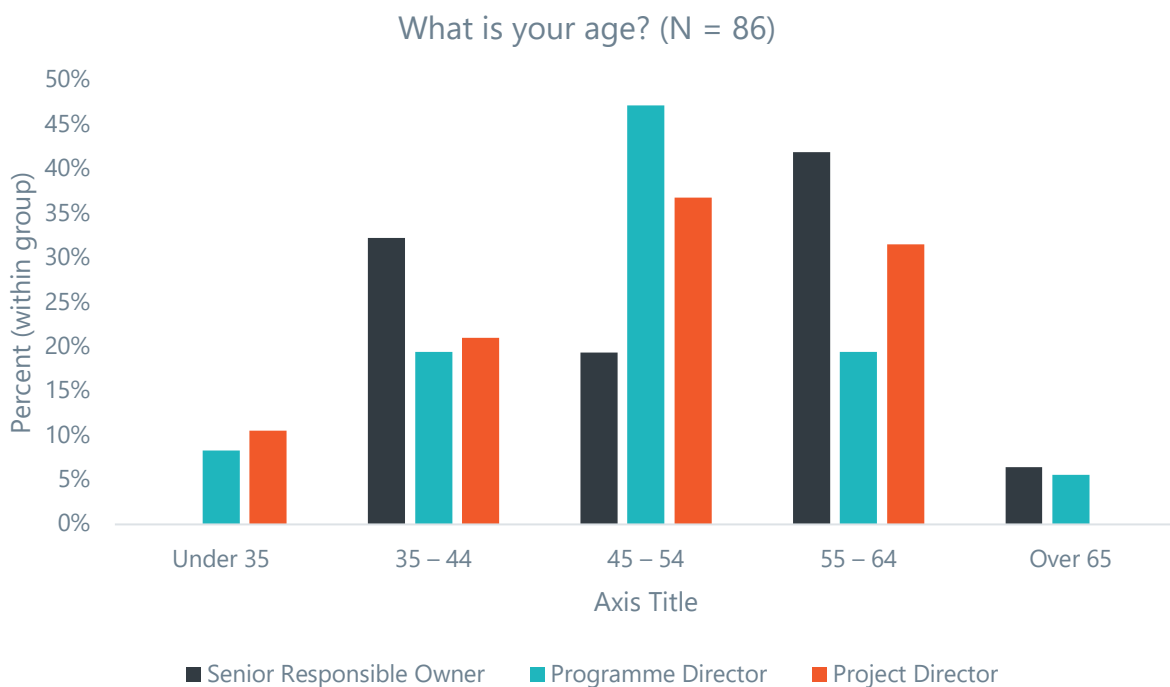


Figure 24: Gender of respondents per role type

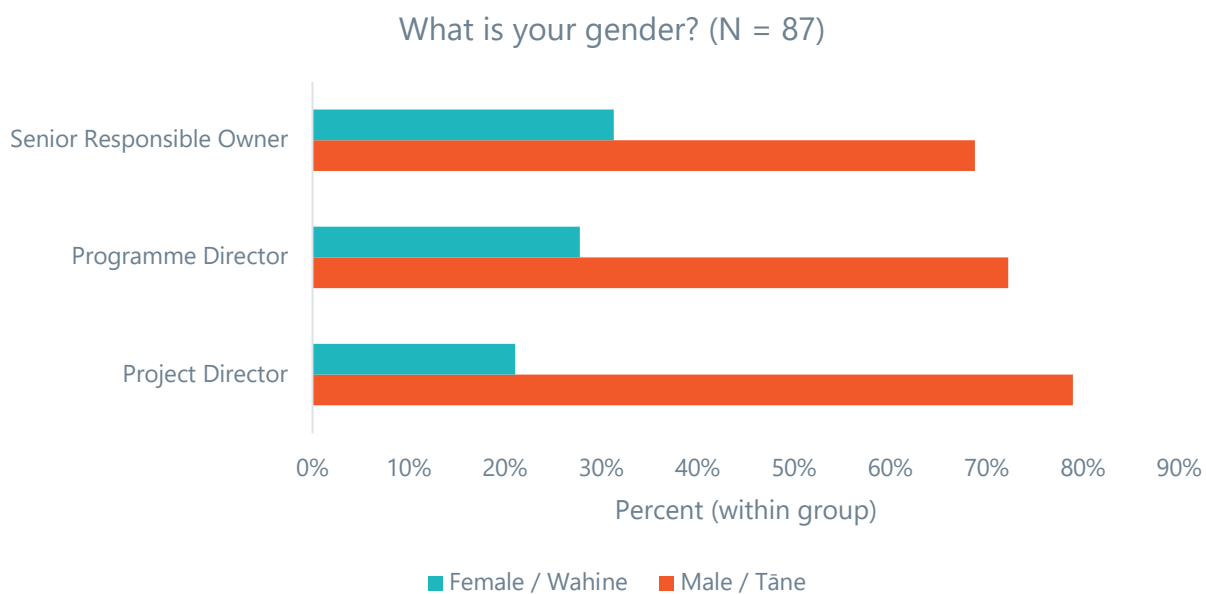
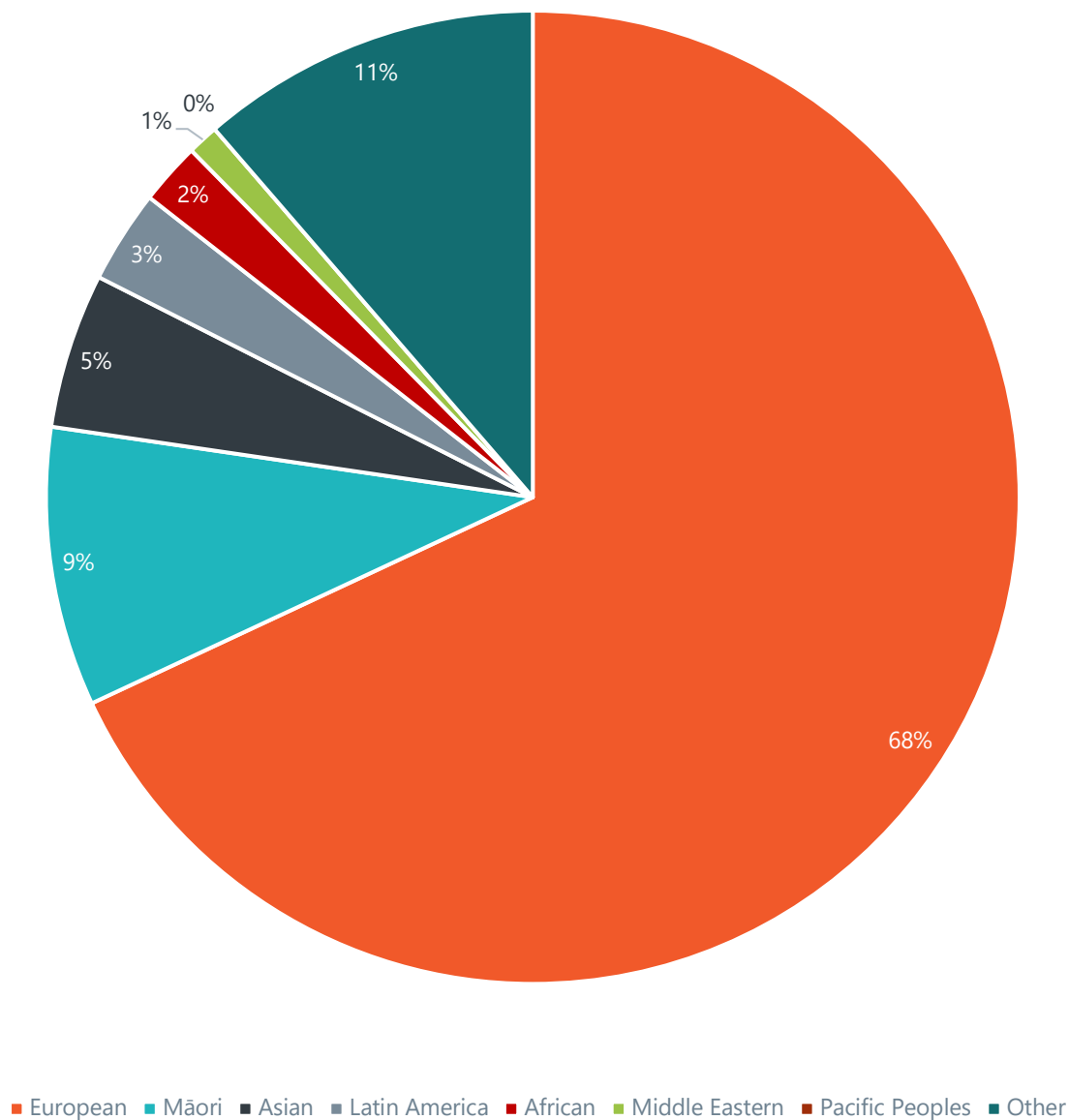


Figure 25: Ethnicity of respondents

Which ethnic group(s) do you belong to? N = 97



Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Thematic summary of open-ended responses:

1. Fragmented systems and short-term political cycles undermine delivery

A consistent concern is that political change and fragmented governance structures cause disruption, inefficiency, and stop-start project delivery. Respondents highlighted the need for bipartisan agreement, long-term certainty, and streamlined decision-making to improve outcomes.

“Appears to be heavily driven by political cycles, with little attempt by either side to understand and work with the opposition to get good results.”

“Getting longer term certainty of funding and less changes in direction following elections would make it better to plan and deliver.”

“As long as we have a three-year election cycle, and continue to swing further left and right, long term infrastructure planning and maintenance is a dead duck.”

“We need a long-term (10 years or more) project pipeline of major capital projects that have bipartisan agreement, so they are not subject to changes in political leadership.”

2. Capability gaps, governance issues, and inconsistent leadership quality

Several comments emphasise a lack of skilled leadership and capability within government agencies. There are frustrations with bureaucratic or politically appointed leaders lacking delivery experience, resulting in poor decision-making and risk management.

“It often feels like a bit of a ‘closed shop’ or a ‘boys club’... leadership roles are often filled by ‘shoulder tapping’ a loyal old friend... rather than open, truly merit-based appointments.”

“Often, SROs don’t actually have relevant experience, which is dangerous for successful project delivery.”

“Poor Governance knowledge. Delayed decisions, Uncertainty over funding.”

“Infrastructure leadership is hugely lacking in Northland. Consultants are filling the many gaps that exist.”

3. Resource and workforce constraints are limiting delivery

There is concern about staffing shortages, low remuneration, and heavy reliance on external consultants. Respondents link these issues to delivery delays, loss of institutional knowledge, and limited ability to act as an ‘intelligent client’.

“Due to current staffing of procurement professionals available in my sector hinders projects to be streamlined / Fast tracked.”

“Remuneration is low for the roles and duties I perform... we have not received salary increases in three years.”

“Building large complex teams to deliver... is very challenging, especially when you have to assemble these teams primarily using external market procurements.”

“Greater ability to use internal resourcing to ensure that we can act as an intelligent client is very important.”

4. System inefficiencies and duplication

Many respondents cited duplication in business case processes, poor coordination between agencies, and rigid procurement practices that add cost and delay rather than improving quality.

"The government investment management system and budget process cause a huge bottleneck... requiring a DBC to support a budget bid and needing it through Cabinet prior to budget decisions being made."

"Having to rewrite the business case for the budget bid template and then again later... is all extra work that is not great value and takes up considerable time and cost."

"Lack of alignment between MBIE and GCDO... we all go solo and do not learn from the knowledge gained by others."

"Too many people and too many departments involved in the decision-making process."

5. Value for money and lifecycle thinking need greater emphasis

Respondents called for a stronger focus on long-term value, lifecycle costs, and resilience rather than a focus on upfront capital spending or political motivations.

"Government obsession with 'announceables' has undermined good asset management practices."

"It is critical to clearly articulate value for money. It is more than the \$ spent to just build... The full cost of anything is over its life in use."

"Keep systems simple and repairable – easily maintained."

"Key success is matching the funding to the expected outcomes."