

# CIVIC ATHLETIC COMPLEX MASTER PLAN & COMMUNITY RECREATION CENTER PUBLIC FEEDBACK SUMMARY



This document provides a summary of both in person and online Engage Bellingham feedback regarding both the Civic Athletic Complex Master Plan and the possibility of constructing a Community Recreation Center within the Civic Athletic Complex.

The in-person meeting was hosted at Bloedel-Donovan Park in December 2025 and showcased interactive visual displays and an in-person presentation of both the draft Civic Athletic Complex Master Plan and a presentation of preliminary findings related to the feasibility and business case for a Community Recreation Center at the site. Over 100 people attended the in-person open house, and 1,173 participants were able to take the Engage Bellingham survey.

# WHAT WE HEARD CIVIC MASTER PLAN

The Civic Master Plan was the first topic for both the in-person and Engage Bellingham survey, since it frames the Community Recreation Center discussion.

When asked what community members found to be their favorite thing about the proposed master plan they responded with the following, which aligns with long-standing feedback that Bellingham staff have heard over the years:

## 1 EXPANSION AND MODERNIZATION OF THE CIVIC CAMPUS

People appreciated that the plan looks at the **entire Civic Athletic Complex as a connected, cohesive campus** rather than isolated facilities. The idea of modernizing aging infrastructure and improving walkability and connections to and across the site was a major positive.

## 2 EXPANDED AQUATICS FACILITIES

One of the most celebrated elements of the Master Plan was improved and expanded aquatics, including the potential for:

- More **lap swim lanes**
- A **larger pool** (often compared favorably to Canadian facilities)
- Warmer water and better acoustics
- Family-friendly features such as **lazy rivers, splash areas, and better family changing rooms**
- Added wellness amenities like **saunas, hot tubs, and diving boards**
- More accessible hours for lap swimmers, families, and seniors

## 3 ICE RINK AND ICE SPORTS POTENTIAL

By far the most frequently praised (and passionately mentioned) aspect was the **potential for additional ice facilities**, including:

- Adding a **second (or more) sheet of ice**
- Supporting **hockey, figure skating, speed skating, and public skating**
- Renovating the existing rink with **better seating, heating, locker rooms, and spectator amenities**
- Keeping ice sports in Bellingham rather than forcing families to travel to Everett or Canada

Many respondents emphasized **how unique and vital the ice rink is to the region** and viewed its expansion as a major community win.

After soliciting feedback on what the Master Plan got right, we also asked what community members hoped the City could continue to refine and be attentive to as the master plan moves forward toward implementation. These ideas included:

## 1 PARKING, ACCESS & SAFETY

This was a major practical concern about how community members could safely access the site given the new demands on the site. Specific suggestions for improvements included:

- **More parking**, especially near the Sportsplex and aquatics
- Better **lighting** in parking lots and along paths
- Clear **drop-off zones for families and people with mobility challenges**
- **Safer pedestrian routes** and overall site security

Many respondents worried that new amenities would increase congestion without enough parking improvements.

## 2 AFFORDABILITY & HOURS OF ACCESS

Residents repeatedly emphasized program access, not just facilities:

- Keep fees **affordable** for families, seniors, and low-income residents
- Sliding-scale pricing or scholarships
- **Earlier morning and later evening hours**, especially for working adults and youth

People were concerned that beloved facilities would be underused if they weren't affordable or open when people could actually use them.

## 3 OTHER REQUESTED IMPROVEMENTS

Additional ideas included:

- Roller skating / roller derby space
- Indoor youth and teen hangout areas
- Café and spectator spaces that are warm and comfortable
- Clearer signage and inclusive design (languages, accessibility)

The community was also invited to share their input on what other facilities and programs could be included in either the Civic Athletic Complex Master Plan or in future thinking about the Community Recreation Center and these included:

## 1 NEW RECREATION & SPORT AMENITIES

Respondents proposed many additions including:

- **A roller skating / roller derby track**
- **Indoor** track & field facilities (throwing areas, pole vault, sprint lanes)
- More **fitness studios** (dance, yoga, group exercise)
- Expanded aquatics: **50-meter pool, lazy river, splash pads, dive tank**
- **Hydrotherapy zones** (hot tubs, cold plunge, steam rooms, saunas)

## 2 COMMUNITY & SOCIAL SPACES

People wanted the Civic Athletic Complex and new Community Recreation Center to feel welcoming and social, suggesting ideas like:

- A café or restaurant **inside or overlooking the Sportsplex**
- Warm spectator viewing areas
- Party rooms and flexible community spaces
- Library branch or book drop
- Indoor play areas for kids and teens

## 3 ACCESSIBILITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

Community members also centered ideas around accessibility, equity and inclusion in many of their comments advocating for facilities and programs like:

- Family and **gender-neutral changing rooms**
- Adaptive recreation programs and equipment
- Multilingual signage
- Affordable pricing, scholarships, sliding-scale access

## 4 TRANSPORTATION, SAFETY & CONNECTIVITY

Suggestions included:

- Covered **bike parking** and safer bike routes
- Better **transit access** with stops near entrances
- Improved lighting, emergency call boxes, safer **pathways**

## 5 ENVIRONMENTAL & SUSTAINABILITY IDEAS

Community-driven sustainability concepts:

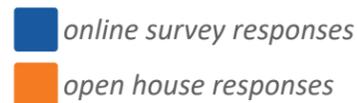
- Solar canopies over parking
- Rain gardens and stormwater treatment
- Preservation of mature trees
- Energy sharing between ice and aquatics (common in Canadian centers)

# WHAT WE HEARD

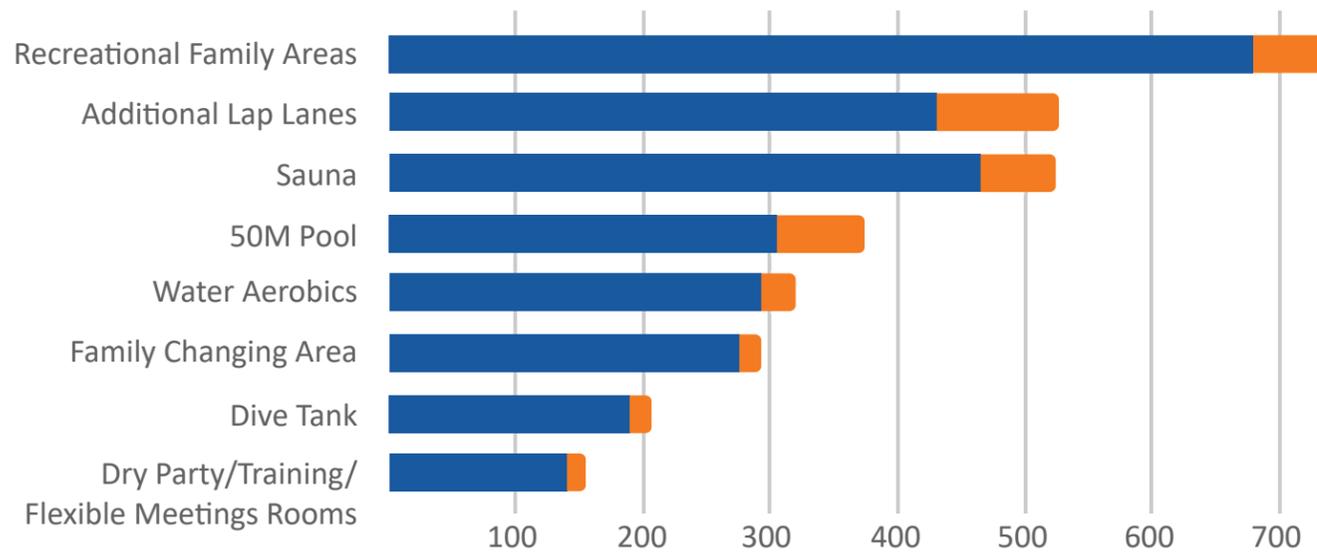
## COMMUNITY RECREATION CENTER

Following the questions about the Civic Athletic Complex's Master Plan, the survey then shifted to a series of questions about what the community would like to see prioritized within a future Community Recreation Center building.

We've broken down the findings from the survey results into three categories: Aquatics, Indoor Athletics, and Other Recreation Uses.

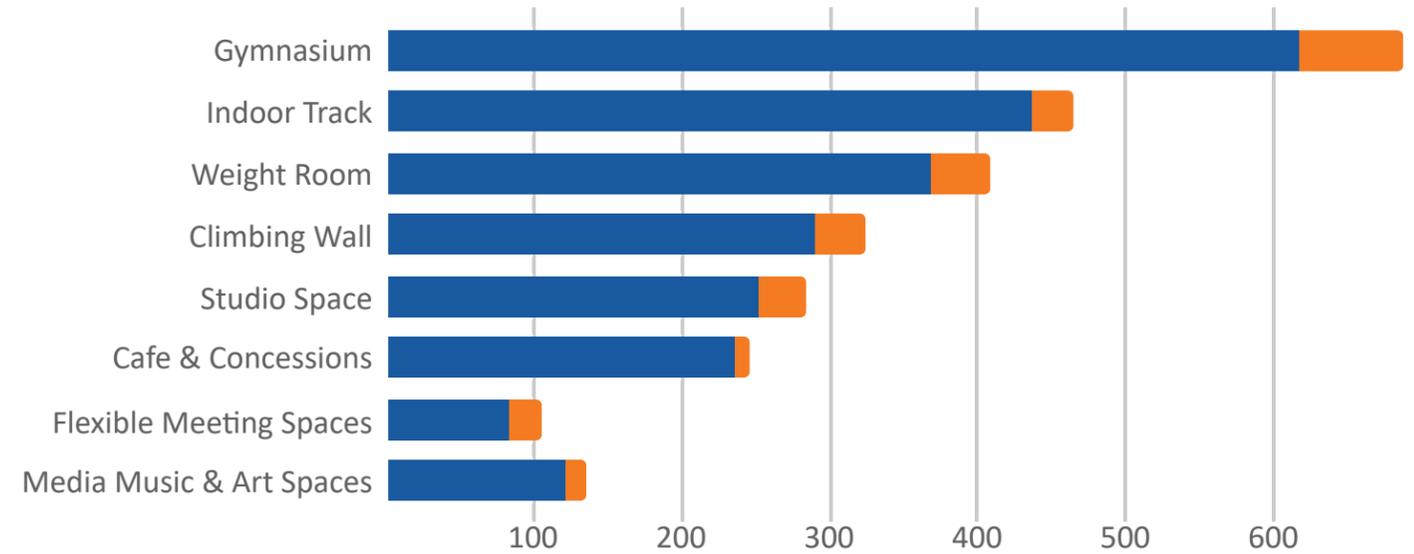


### AQUATICS



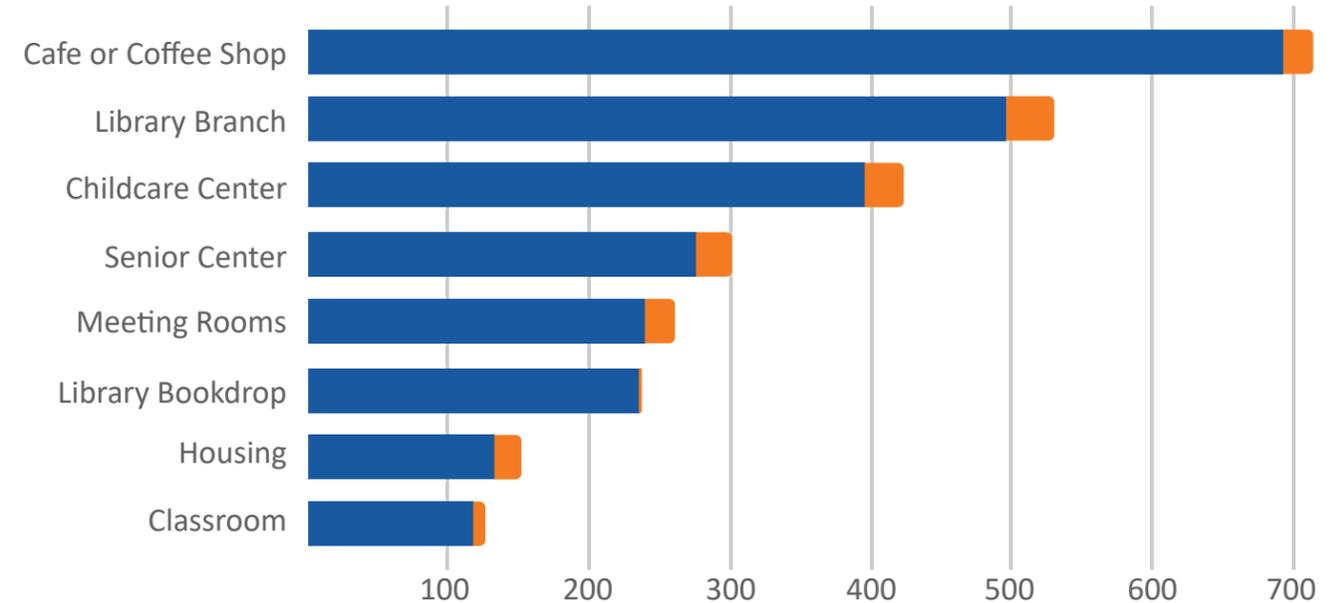
For the aquatics programs, the public responded most positively to family recreation areas including water slides and a lazy river. There was also strong community desire for additional lap lanes. Other community members identified a 50 meter pool, water aerobics, and a family changing area as important investments, while lower down in the community responses were things like a dive tank and a dry, party or meeting room associated with the aquatics area of the building.

### INDOOR ATHLETICS



Indoor athletics has long been a known investment priority for the community so it is not surprising that the highest priority for indoor recreation was a gymnasium, followed by an indoor track and a weight room. Lower down on the priority list were specialty spaces with perhaps more limited constituencies like a climbing wall, studio spaces, or a cafe or concessions. The lowest priorities on this list were flexible meeting spaces and a music or art space.

### OTHER RECREATION USES



The survey asked about other recreation uses that might be located within a Community Recreation Center. Respondents did prioritize seeing a cafe or a coffee shop included in the building, and were also interested in a library branch or child care center as part of the space. Less resonant for respondents, but still important, was the idea of a senior center, meeting rooms, and a library book drop. Community members who took the survey did not respond strongly to having housing or classroom space within the Community Recreation Center.

Finally when asked what would make it easier for community members and their neighbors to regularly use the Community Recreation Center the community offered the following ideas:

## 1 LONGER & MORE FLEXIBLE HOURS

This was one of the most common requests from survey respondents:

- Open **earlier in the morning** (often 5:00–6:00 am)
- Stay open **later in the evening** (9:00–11:00 pm)
- Be open on **weekends and holidays**

People emphasized that current open hour schedules don't work well for working adults, families, or students.

## 2 BETTER ACCESS, PARKING & TRANSPORTATION

Ease of getting there mattered a lot:

- **More parking**, closer to high-use facilities (e.g. pool, Sportsplex)
- Well-lit parking lots and pathways
- Easy drop-off areas for kids, seniors, and people with mobility challenges
- **Safe bike access** and covered bike parking
- Public transit routes and bus stops that align with operating hours

## 3 AFFORDABILITY & FLEXIBLE PRICING

To encourage frequent use, respondents asked for:

- **Affordable memberships** and day passes
- Family pricing that doesn't penalize larger households
- Sliding-scale fees, scholarships, or subsidized access
- Reduced barriers for seniors, students, and low-income residents

## 4 CLEAN, SAFE, AND WELL-MAINTAINED FACILITIES

People said they'd come more often if the center felt consistently welcoming with elements like:

- Clean locker rooms, bathrooms, and common areas
- Regular maintenance of equipment and buildings
- Good lighting and visible safety measures
- A general feeling of safety for kids, teens, and families

## 5 SCHEDULING THAT LEAVES ROOM FOR THE PUBLIC

Respondents stressed the importance of **access**, not just programming:

- More **open swim, lap swim, public skate, and open gym**
- Less competition between organized teams and general users
- Programs spread across the day, evenings, and weekends
- Simple, easy-to-understand schedules and booking systems

## 6 FAMILY-FRIENDLY & INCLUSIVE AMENITIES

Ideas that would support regular use included:

- **Childcare options** so parents can exercise or swim
- Family and gender-neutral changing rooms
- Comfortable seating and warm viewing areas
- Cafés, coffee, or snack options for longer visits
- Indoor play or hang-out spaces for kids and teens

## 7 CLEAR COMMUNICATION & WAYFINDING

To reduce friction for everyday use:

- Clear signage inside and outside the facility
- Easy navigation between buildings
- Friendly, visible staff to help new or occasional users
- Clear communication when schedules or hours change

## 8 DESIGN THAT WORKS YEAR-ROUND

People emphasized Bellingham's climate:

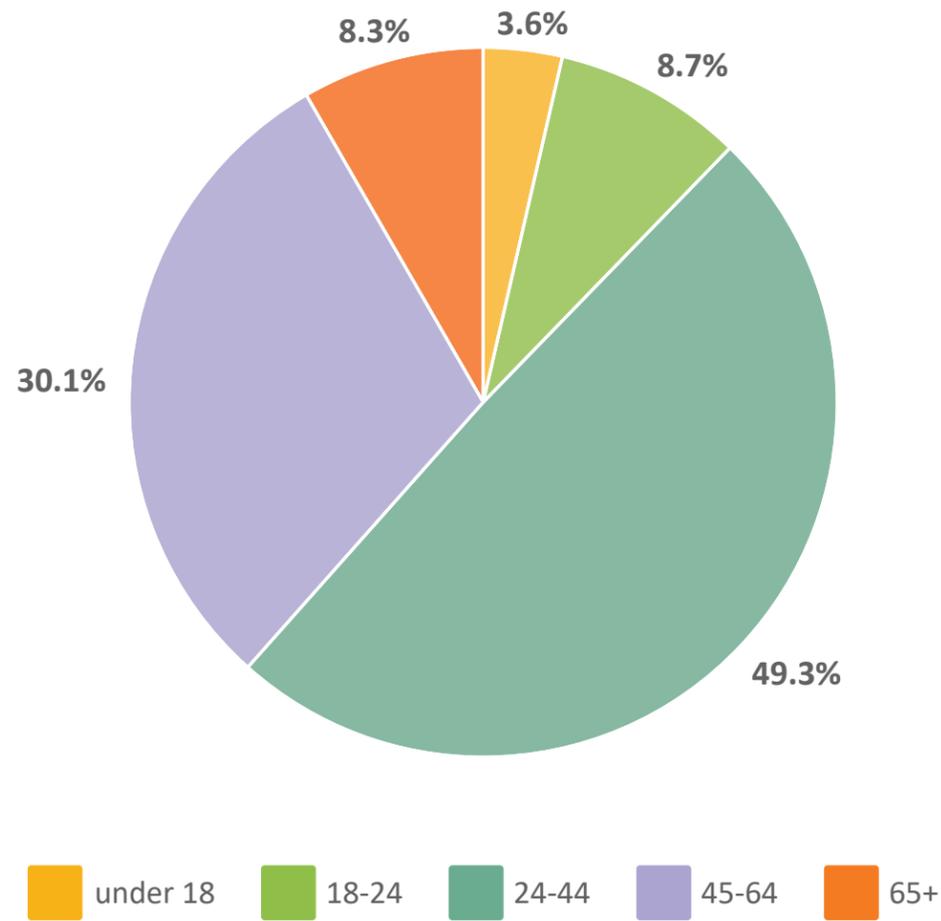
- Warm, well-lit indoor spaces in winter
- Covered walkways and entrances for rain
- Spaces that feel inviting even on dark, cold days



# APPENDIX

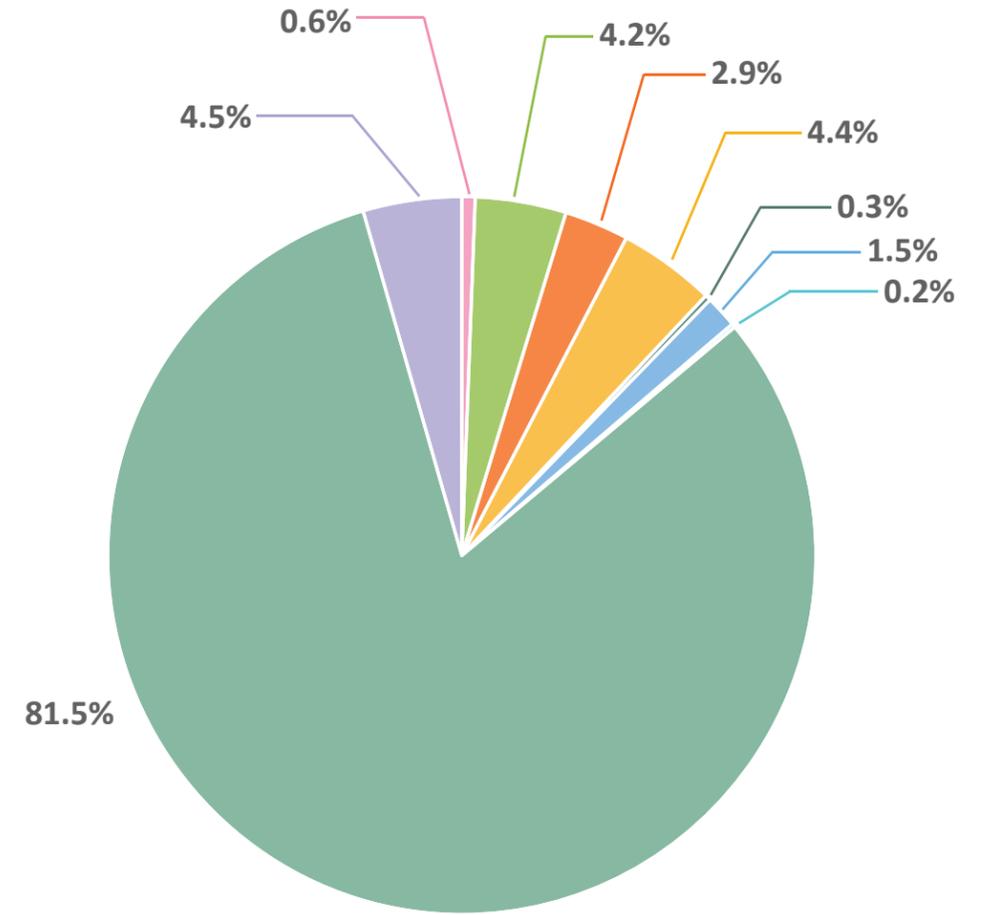
The following three charts include information about those community members who responded to the survey. *Demographic information was not collected at the open house.*

## AGE OF PARTICIPANTS



\*1140 responses, 46 skipped

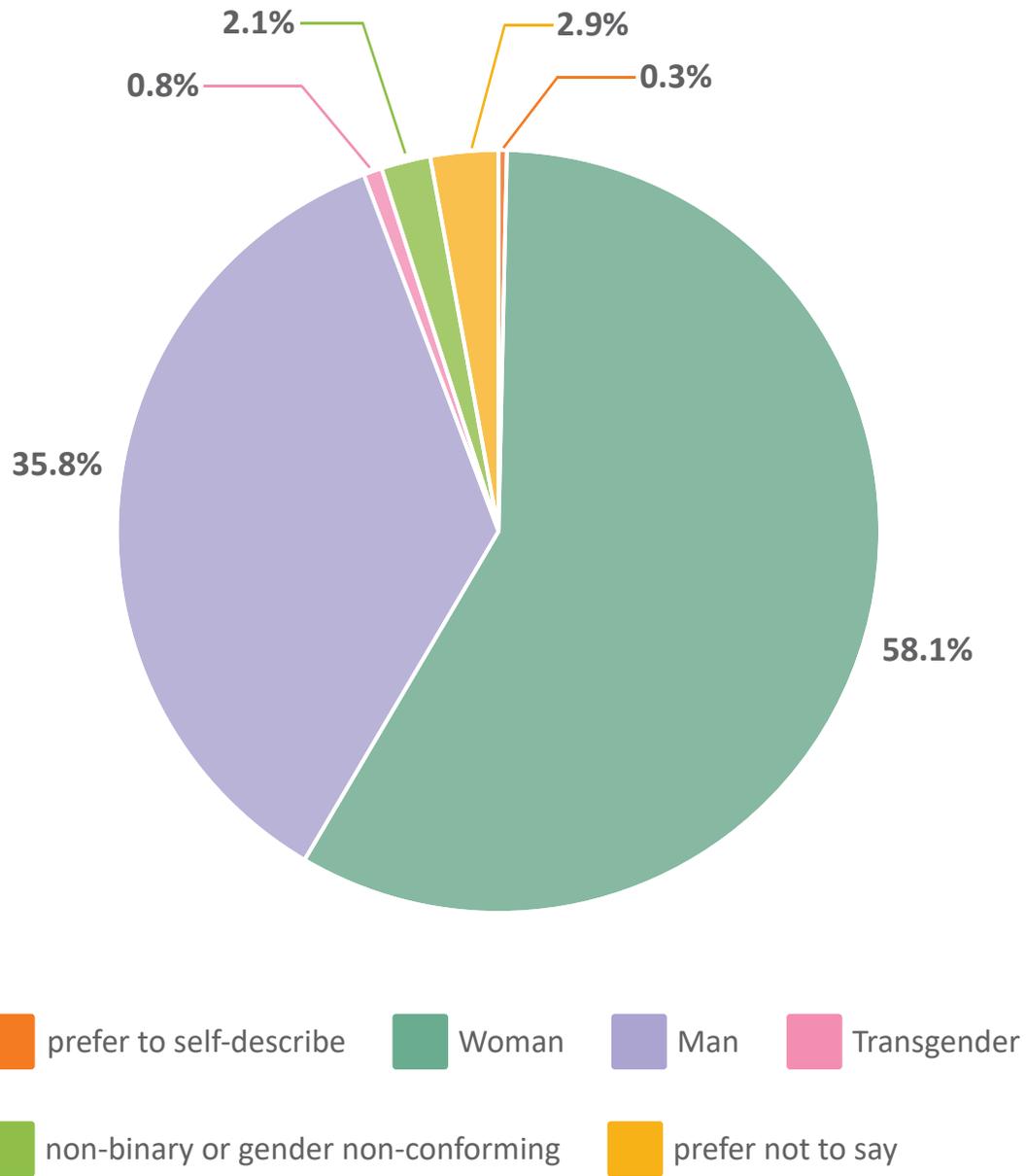
## RACE OR ETHNICITY OF PARTICIPANTS



- a race or ethnicity not listed above
- Asian or Asian American
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Native American or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Multiracial or Biracial
- White or European American

\*1080 responses, 106 skipped

## GENDER OF PARTICIPANTS



*\*1135 responses, 51 skipped*