

**Creating a Dynamic Advisory Board Public at the Savannah River Site
Citizen Advisory Board Meetings-17054
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ABSTRACT

Ascertaining the desired skills and abilities needed for a successful board member appointed to the Savannah River Site Citizens Advisory Board from current members is this paper's objective. By learning the skills that current members feel are valuable for a healthy and dynamic board, future selection criteria may be adapted from their views.

Research for this report includes a literature review of board creation, along with analysis of surveys conducted with board members in November 2016.

INTRODUCTION

The United States Department of Energy (DOE) utilizes various approaches in an effort to offer community residents affected by site work a means of voicing their opinions. This activities includes speaking at local organizations and clubs, hosting public hearings, providing free site tours, and offering the Citizens Advisory Board (CAB or SRS CAB).

The Savannah River Site Citizens Advisory Board is one of eight site-specific Environmental Management Advisory Boards (EMSSABs) funded by DOE and located in Aiken, South Carolina. These volunteer boards provide advice and recommendations to DOE on environmental remediation, waste management, legacy planning and related site issues. Liaisons from the DOE, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency-Region IV and the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control actively participate during meetings by presenting pertinent agency updates and answering community questions.

The SRS CAB meets bi-monthly in a combined committees' session, with meetings of the full board beginning at 8:30 a.m. on the following day. These meetings are open and direct public participation is encouraged during Monday's committee-style meetings. On Tuesdays, Public Comment Periods are offered at various times throughout the day.

Providing advice and recommendations to the DOE regarding clean-up activities and legacy management is a vital part of the CAB's mission. CAB members join the

board with their own pre-conceived insight regarding site activities. CAB members are community volunteers who are not required to have any previous scientific experience, or history with the site. Over the years, the SRS CAB has drawn membership from those focused on community growth, environmental protection, and scientific development. Keeping these different backgrounds in mind, EMSSABs need to cohesively work together to craft constructive recommendations. A board composed of productive members takes opinion differences into account and synthesizes them into recommendations reflecting the beliefs of the entire represented community.

This research is structured in three components: literature review of board membership, methodology, and a discussion of the survey findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Boards serve their organization by providing outside guidance and counsel, while simultaneously acting as a catalyst for innovation, sustainability and development. The informal nature of advisory boards allows for flexibility in structure and management style compared to a governing body housed within the organization. Franklin A. Gevurtz of the University of the Pacific's McGeorge School of Law identified the roots of modern advisory boards in medieval town councils; these councils were initially charged with settling disputes among merchants and investors. By the early 1900s, the role of advisory boards grew in the corporate world as a way for shareholders to watch over companies they trusted with investments. The shift of power between advisory boards and in-house managers continued to ebb and flow over the years and the degree of control varies from organization to organization⁽ⁱ⁾. Other advisory boards are found in educational institutes, non-profit agencies and the government sector to allow for citizen input in organizations that affect the community at-large. Many of these boards draw members from the community who are lay-persons in the field of work that the board covers, and simply provide their input to organizations from a community perspective.

Congress recognized the value in utilizing advisory boards to ascertain citizen viewpoints when it passed the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) in 1972⁽ⁱⁱ⁾. A partial driver of FACA's establishment was recognizing that government's role is to represent public interest, and a direct channel of public input could be invaluable. FACA requires committee membership to be balanced in representation of points of view represented, and advice provided by committees be objective and accessible to the public. FACA requires that

meetings, with limited exception, remain open and a public record be maintained. The SRS CAB is a federal advisory board.

The accomplishment produced by these FACA boards resides with the individual members. Board members enjoy a unique opportunity to share insight and recommendations that can create a lasting community impact. However, the work produced is only as strong as the individual members who participate and contribute to the board. Each individual member has the chance to create meaningful work for their organization. Strong board performance can move an organization towards growth, weak performance, conversely, can significantly diminish the impact of the board's purpose.

Research by Jonker and Meehan discovered that boards are most effective when three principles of membership are the focus (iii). First, members must be engaged in the board's mission. For SRS CAB members, engagement may translate into attending meetings to learn firsthand about Savannah River Site programs and receive pertinent updates to develop effective recommendations.

Second, established term limits are critical for maintaining healthy boards. Without limits boards may stagnate, while new membership offers an opportunity to garner fresh ideas. The SRS CAB bylaws limit each member to three terms of two-years in hopes of engaging new community members and gaining different perspectives. Third, according to Jonker and Meehan, cultivating the right composition of members is fundamental. Attracting members who bring valuable assets to an organization opens the door to a successful board. Finding a path that diversifies membership, engages participation and limits terms provides boards a chance to thrive.

In 2013, nearly 1.5 million non-profit organizations registered with the Internal Revenue Service, an increase of 2.8 percent from 2003 (iv). Non-profit organizations often require a board of directors, and these hundreds of thousands of organizations vie each other for vibrant and productive members to join their organizations.

Research from the Nonprofit Governance Index found that on average, an organization met seven times yearly at 3-4 hours each meeting (v). Asking potential members if they can adequately devote enough time to positively impact a board can be a difficult, but necessary question to be posed before committing to membership. Organizations must freely communicate the anticipated time commitment, and potential members must be self-aware enough to determine if their own schedules permit joining. Shared one non-profit board member, "to be a

good board member, it takes a total commitment, and it's hard to devote both the time and money necessary to more than one (vi)."

Once time commitments are fleshed out, research from the Bridgespan (vii) Group finds diversity as essential for a successful board. A homogeneous board may result in near-sighted decision making and groupthink. By contrast, a heterogeneous board — one composed of individuals possessing a variety of skills, perspectives, backgrounds, and resources — promotes creativity and innovation. This heterogeneous board offers contrary voices that work together in accomplishing the organization's mission, while representing community views. Along the lines of diversity, creating a culture of inclusiveness is essential; members with diverse backgrounds and experiences offer unique qualities that contribute to a thriving board.

With diversity in mind, a 2002 Harvard Business Review article offered a list of top qualities vital for healthy board membership, including: regular attendance; range of member skills and age; independence and autonomy (viii). While these qualities are significant, Sonnefield argues the challenge is determining the factors that "make one group of people an effective team and another, equally talented group of people a dysfunctional one; well-functioning, successful teams usually have chemistry that can't be quantified."

In terms of defined qualities, scores of business journals and articles freely offer lists of personal characteristics valued for successful board membership. One such list encourages the following traits (ix):

1. Pre-existing passion for the cause
2. Eagerness to participate at every meeting
3. Willing to prepare ahead for meetings
4. Anxious to serve on committees
5. Strong desire for stewardship to others
6. Supportive, but willing to express their own opinion
7. Strives to learn as much as possible

While desired individual characteristics vary depending upon the board's function, some universal qualities exist to create a healthy, dynamic and productive collective of individuals. Honesty, participation, regular attendance and judgment regularly appear in journals and publications focused on desired board qualities. Research on board characteristics is evolving, and much of the current work is focused on business and non-profit boards. In those realms, financial donations, personal connections and educational background are highlighted as keys to success. In boards, like the SRS CAB, where the work is focused on representing community

view points, the desired qualities are more sharply focused on interest in the board's work and time commitment.

METHODOLOGY

To gauge the board's feelings about the desired qualities of a productive board member, qualitative and quantitative paper surveys were fielded during the full board SRS CAB meeting in Aiken, SC in November 2016. The study was comprised of 6 main questions, each having multiple sub-parts.

The approach to this study was focused on process evaluation, rather than outcome evaluation. Process evaluations study what happens while a program is in process, such as the ongoing program of the Citizen Advisory Board (Abelson & Gauvin, 2006). Their counterpart, outcome evaluations work to assess whether the program achieved the intended results. This would be a challenge for the SRS CAB, an active board, but may be a better fit for an advisory board whose work successfully ended.

Population and Sampling

The survey population consisted of all board members who attended the full-board meeting in November 2016. In this public participation study, a control group does not exist. The board may fill 25 member spots; currently, the board holds 23 members. Nine surveys were completed and collected.

Participant Recruitment

Respondents were invited to complete paper surveys via several announcements during the board meeting. The meetings for the Savannah River Site Citizen Advisory Board are advertised in various ways, including social media sites, e-mails blasts, and newspaper advertisements. The meeting announcement is also published in the federal register.

Instrument Development

The survey was developed using a variety questions, including: open-ended questions and scaling questions to assess viewpoints of board membership qualities. In questions that required respondents to indicate a degree to which they agreed with a given statement, the statements were anchored with a 6-point Likert-type scale with anchors of "Greatest Importance" and "Least Importance." The order of the questions was determined by intermittently using ranking questions, rating questions and degree questions to avoid having question-type redundancy.

Several questions fell into the category of "Perceived Usefulness," which according to F.D. Davis, is the "degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free effort" (x). The second question type fell into "Behavioral Intention," or how much effort people will use in order to perform a behavior (xi). The remaining questions fell into the category of demographic collection.

Data Collection

The survey was presented in a two-page, back-and-front format. Surveys were distributed during the board meeting, and collected after an hour time frame. Given that this survey was not being used to gauge people's responses over a period of extended time, user identification was not created. Data was exported into Microsoft Excel for analysis.

Conclusion

Reliability is "the degree to which an assessment tool produces stable and consistent results" (xii). For this survey, internal consistency reliability was utilized to understand the degree to which different test items that review the same construct will produce similar results. Several questions focusing on individual board qualities compared to assess reliability, and the survey was found reliable.

Validity refers to how well a test measures what is purported to measure. The survey underwent construct validity, whereas the SRS CAB Support Team, who administers the program, reviewed the survey before distribution.

The board members are the essential main-working component of the CAB. The CAB relies on volunteer members who donate their time and talent to provide recommendations to the DOE. The research reviews various qualities that may make up a productive board member. This broad question was posed to current SRS CAB board members to ascertain their own views as to the qualities and characteristics that are indicative of a dynamic and productive board member. As survey respondents currently serve on the board, their views on board qualities needed in fulfilling the SRS CAB's work come from a first-hand perspective.

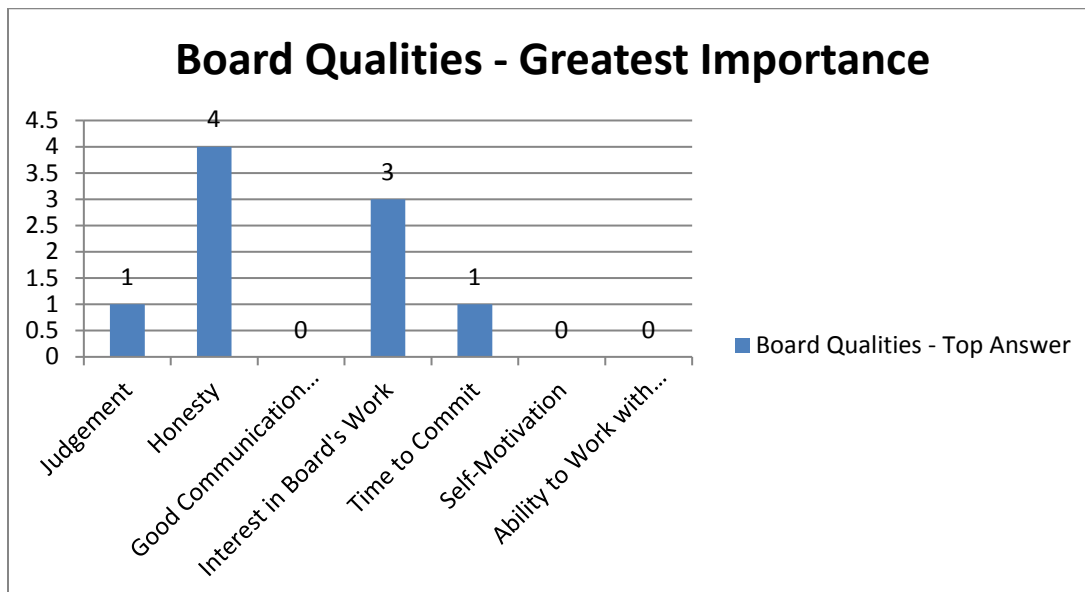
Graph 1: Board Qualities Ranked in Order of Greatest to Least Importance – Top Answer

The first of six questions on the survey asked respondents to rank the qualities in order of greatest to least importance, with 1 correlating to the greatest importance and 7 as the least. The seven qualities include: judgment, honesty, communication skills, interest in board’s work, time to fully commit to the board, self-motivation, and, ability to work well with others.

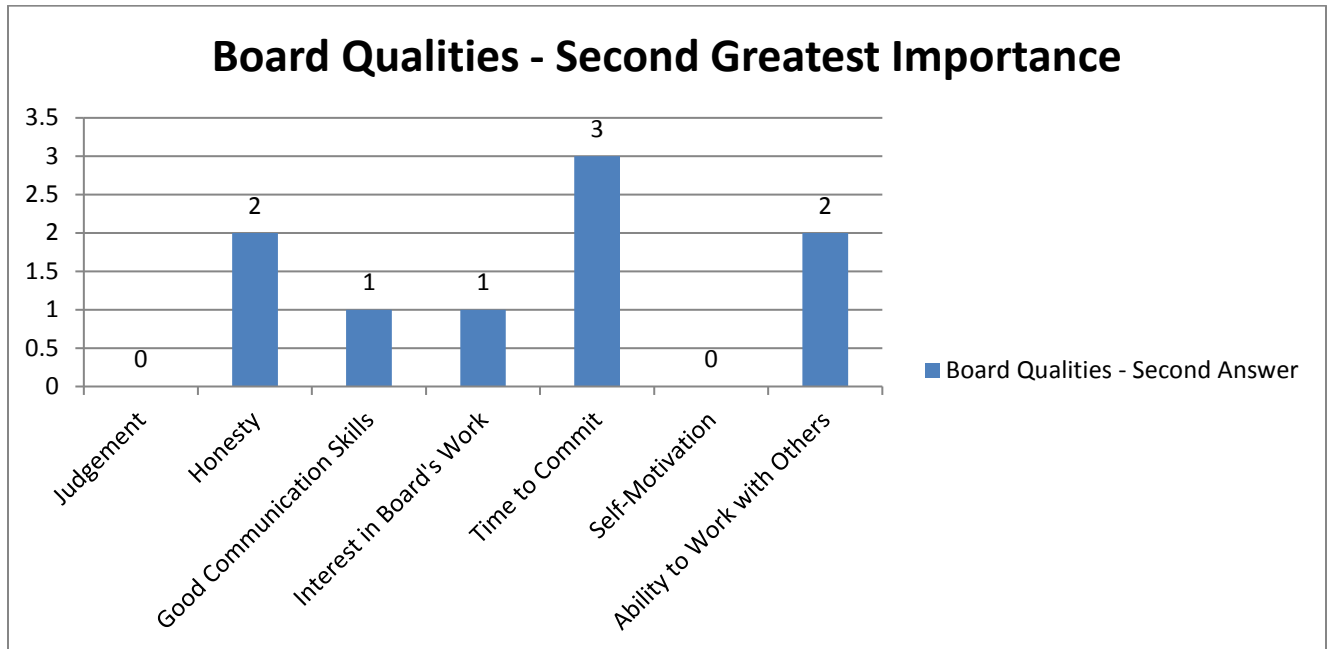
Of the 9 survey respondents, all 9 answered the question providing a 100% response rate.

The findings show that:

- **1** respondent ranked ‘Judgment’ as the most important quality (11%)
- **4** respondents ranked ‘Honesty’ as the most important quality (44%)
- **0** respondents ranked ‘Communication Skills’ as the most important quality (0%)
- **3** respondents ranked ‘Interest in Board’s Work’ as the important quality (33%)
- **1** respondent ranked ‘Time to Commit’ as the most important quality (11%)
- **0** respondents ranked ‘Self-Motivation’ as the most important quality
- **0** respondents ranked ‘Ability to Work well with Others’ as the most important quality



Graph 2: Board Qualities Ranked in Order of Greatest to Least Importance – Second Answer



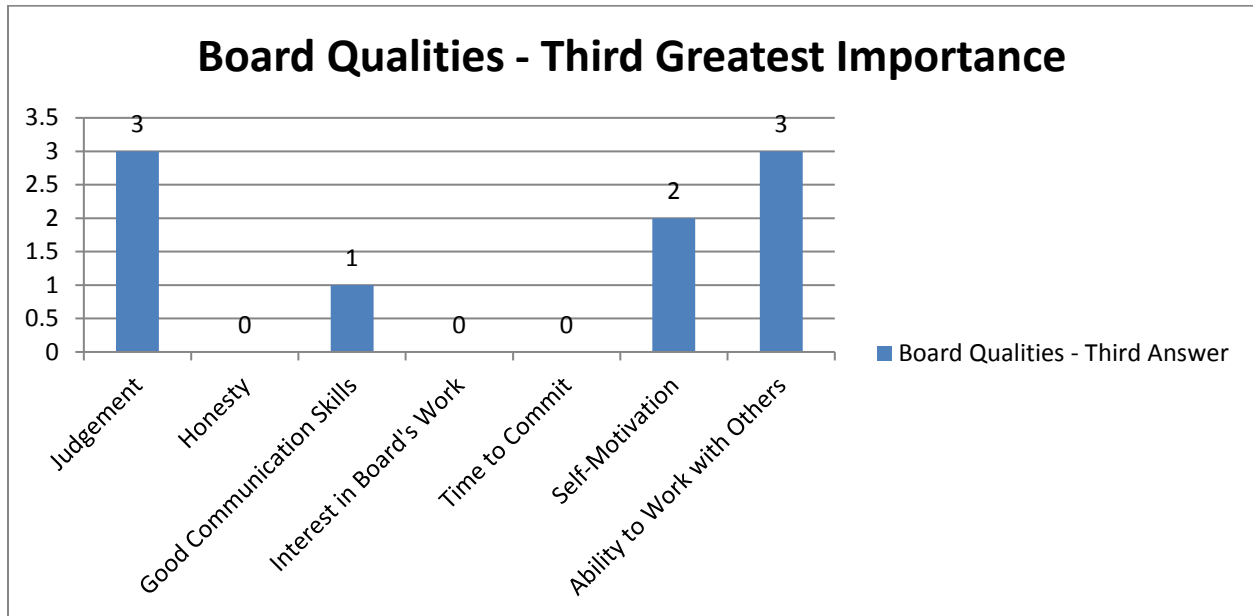
Respondents were asked to rank the following qualities in order of greatest to least importance, with 1 correlating to the greatest importance and 7 as the least.

Of the 9 survey respondents, all 9 answered the question providing a 100% response rate.

The findings show that:

- **0** respondents ranked 'Judgment' as the second greatest quality (0%)
- **2** respondents ranked 'Honesty' as the second greatest quality (22%)
- **1** respondent ranked 'Communication Skills' as the second greatest quality (11%)
- **1** respondent ranked 'Interest in Board's Work' as the second greatest quality (11%)
- **3** respondents ranked 'Time to Commit' as the second greatest quality (33%)
- **0** respondents ranked 'Self-Motivation' as the second greatest quality (0%)
- **2** respondents ranked 'Ability to Work well with Others' as second the greatest quality (22%)

Graph 3: Board Qualities Ranked in Order of Greatest to Least Importance – Third Greatest Answer

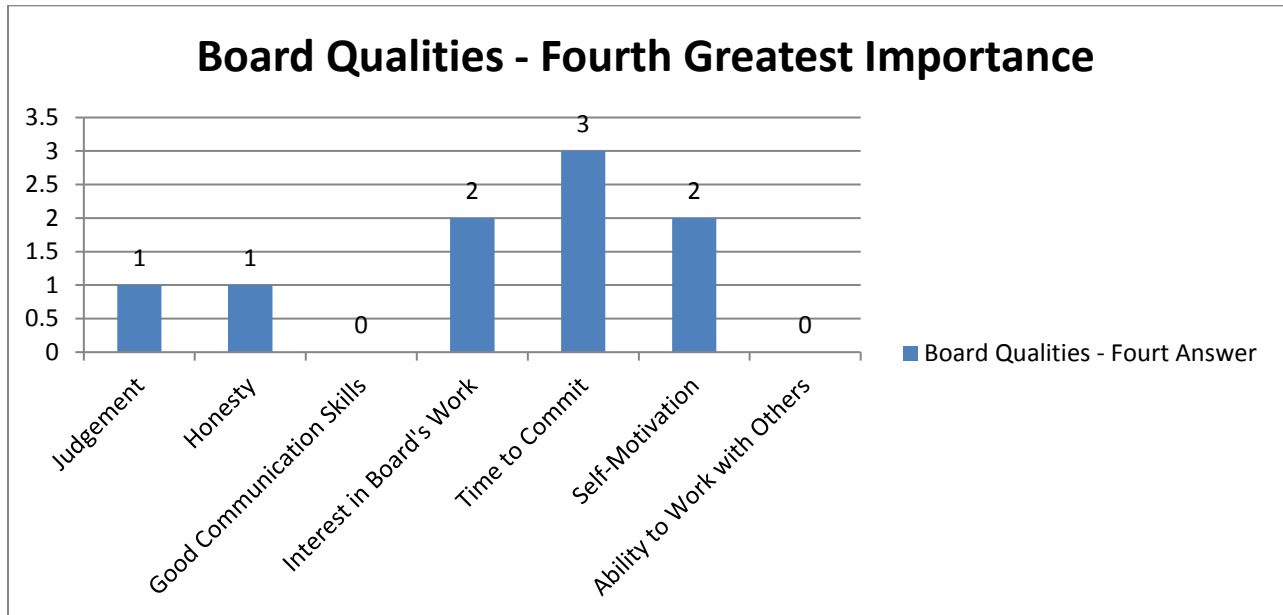


Respondents were asked to rank the following qualities in order of greatest to least importance, with 1 correlating to the greatest importance and 7 as the least.

Of the 9 survey respondents, all 9 answered the question providing a 100% response rate.

- **3** respondents ranked 'Judgment' as the third greatest quality (33%)
- **0** respondents ranked 'Honesty' as the third greatest quality (0%)
- **1** respondent ranked 'Communication Skills' as the third greatest quality (11%)
- **0** respondents ranked 'Interest in Board's Work' as the third greatest quality (0%)
- **0** respondents ranked 'Time to Commit' as the third greatest quality (0%)
- **2** respondents ranked 'Self-Motivation' as the third greatest quality (22%)
- **3** respondents ranked 'Ability to Work well with Others' as the third greatest quality (33%)

Graph 4: Board Qualities Ranked in Order of Greatest to Least Importance – Fourth Greatest Answer

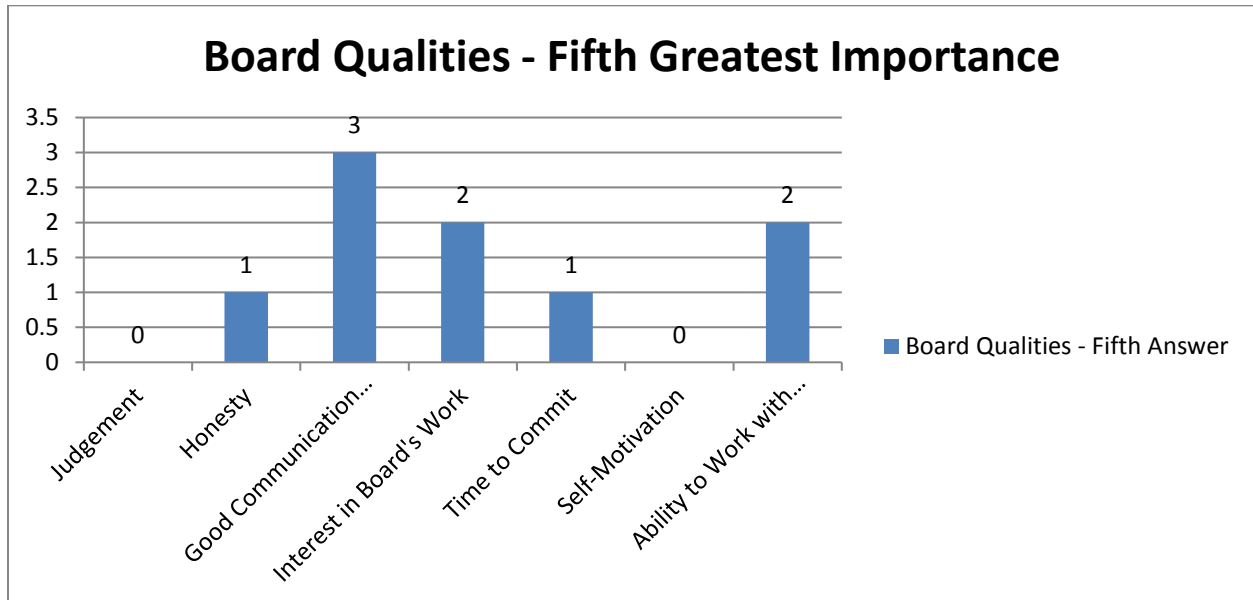


Respondents were asked to rank the following qualities in order of greatest to least importance, with 1 correlating to the greatest importance and 7 as the least.

Of the 9 survey respondents, all 9 answered the question providing a 100% response rate.

- **1** respondent ranked 'Judgment' as the fourth greatest quality (11%)
- **1** respondent ranked 'Honesty' as the fourth greatest quality (1%)
- **0** respondents ranked 'Good Communication Skills' as the fourth greatest quality (0%)
- **2** respondents ranked 'Interest in Board's Work' as the fourth greatest quality (22%)
- **3** respondents ranked 'Time to Commit' as the fourth greatest quality (33%)
- **2** respondents ranked 'Self-Motivation' as the fourth greatest quality (22%)
- **0** respondents ranked 'Ability to Work well with Others' as the fourth greatest important quality (0%)

Graph 5: Board Qualities Ranked in Order of Greatest to Least Importance – Fifth Greatest Answer

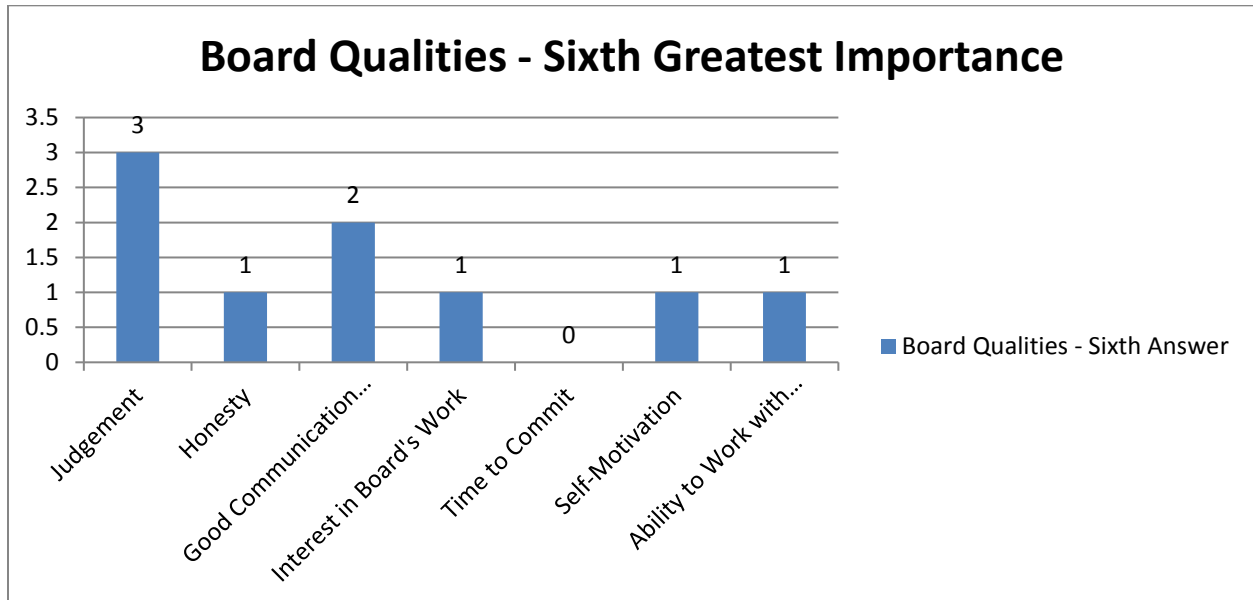


Respondents were asked to rank the following qualities in order of greatest to least importance, with 1 correlating to the greatest importance and 7 as the least.

Of the 9 survey respondents, all 9 answered the question providing a 100% response rate.

- **0** respondents ranked 'Judgment' as the fifth greatest quality (0%)
- **1** respondent ranked 'Honesty' as the fifth greatest quality (11%)
- **3** respondents ranked 'Communication Skills' as the fifth greatest quality (33%)
- **2** respondents ranked 'Interest in Board's Work' as the fifth greatest quality (22%)
- **1** respondent ranked 'Time to Commit' as the fifth greatest quality (11%)
- **0** respondents ranked 'Self-Motivation' as the fifth greatest quality (0%)
- **2** respondents ranked 'Ability to Work well with Others' as the fifth greatest quality (22%)

Graph 6: Board Qualities Ranked in Order of Greatest to Least Importance – Sixth Greatest Answer

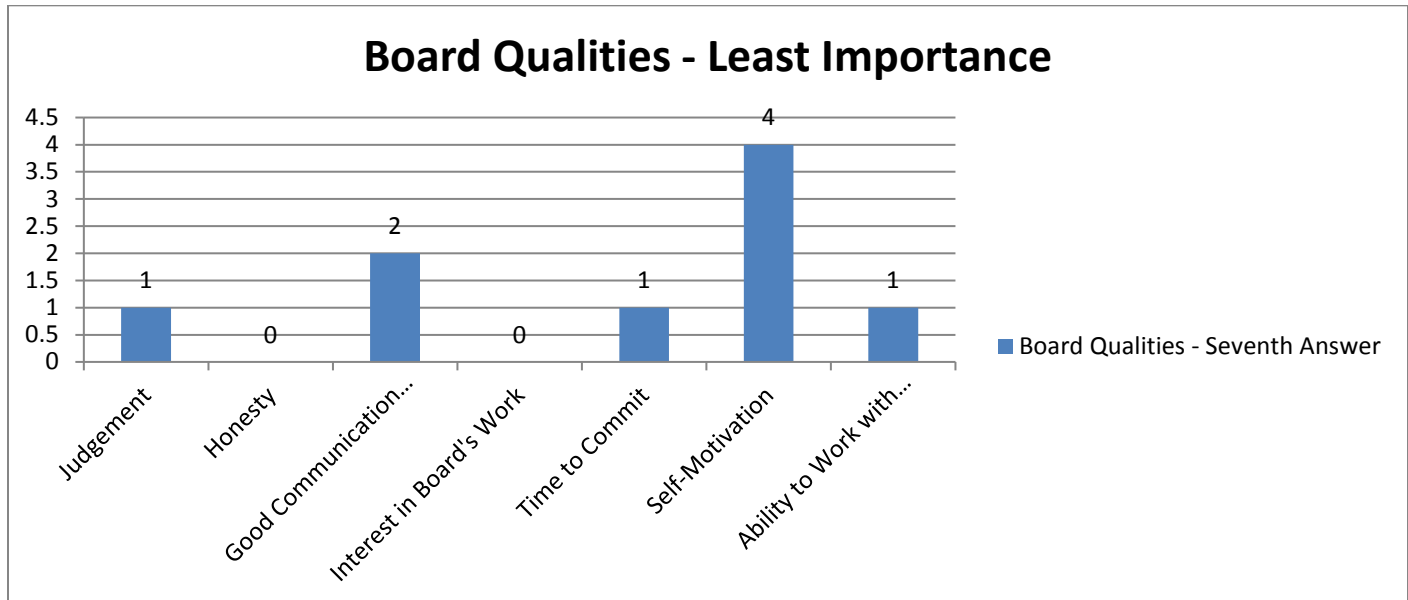


Respondents were asked to rank the following qualities in order of greatest to least importance, with 1 correlating to the greatest importance and 7 as the least.

Of the 9 survey respondents, all 9 answered the question providing a 100% response rate.

- **3** respondents ranked 'Judgment' as the sixth greatest quality (33%)
- **1** respondent ranked 'Honesty' as the sixth greatest quality (11%)
- **2** respondents ranked 'Communication Skills' as the sixth greatest quality (22%)
- **1** respondent ranked 'Interest in Board's Work' as the sixth greatest quality (11%)
- **0** respondents ranked 'Time to Commit' as the sixth greatest quality (0%)
- **1** respondent ranked 'Self-Motivation' as the sixth greatest quality (11%)
- **1** respondent ranked 'Ability to Work well with Others' as the sixth greatest quality (11%)

Graph 7: Board Qualities Ranked in Order of Greatest to Least Importance – Least Important Quality

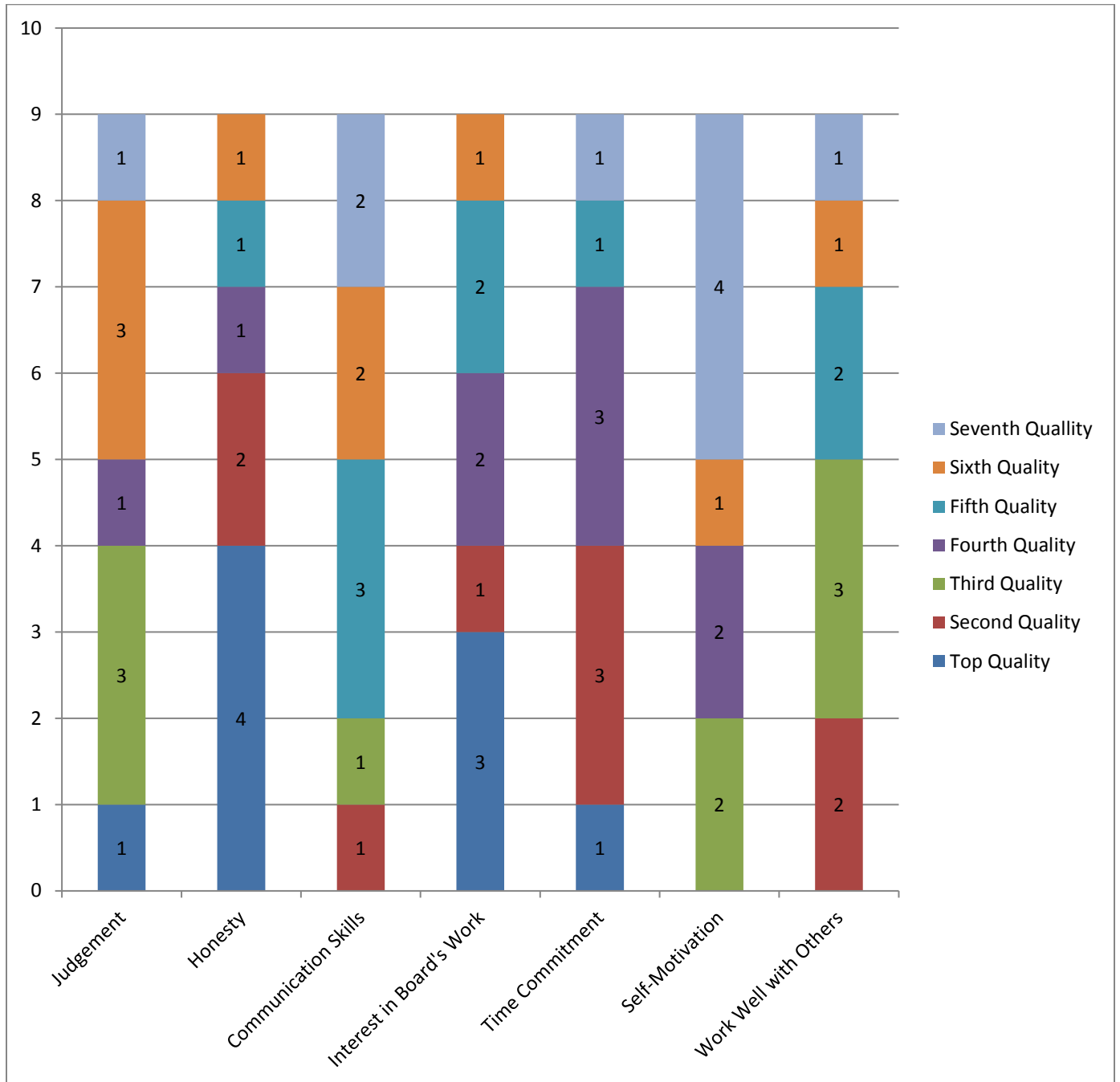


Respondents were asked to rank the following qualities in order of greatest to least importance, with 1 correlating to the greatest importance and 7 as the least.

Of the 9 survey respondents, all 9 answered the question providing a 100% response rate.

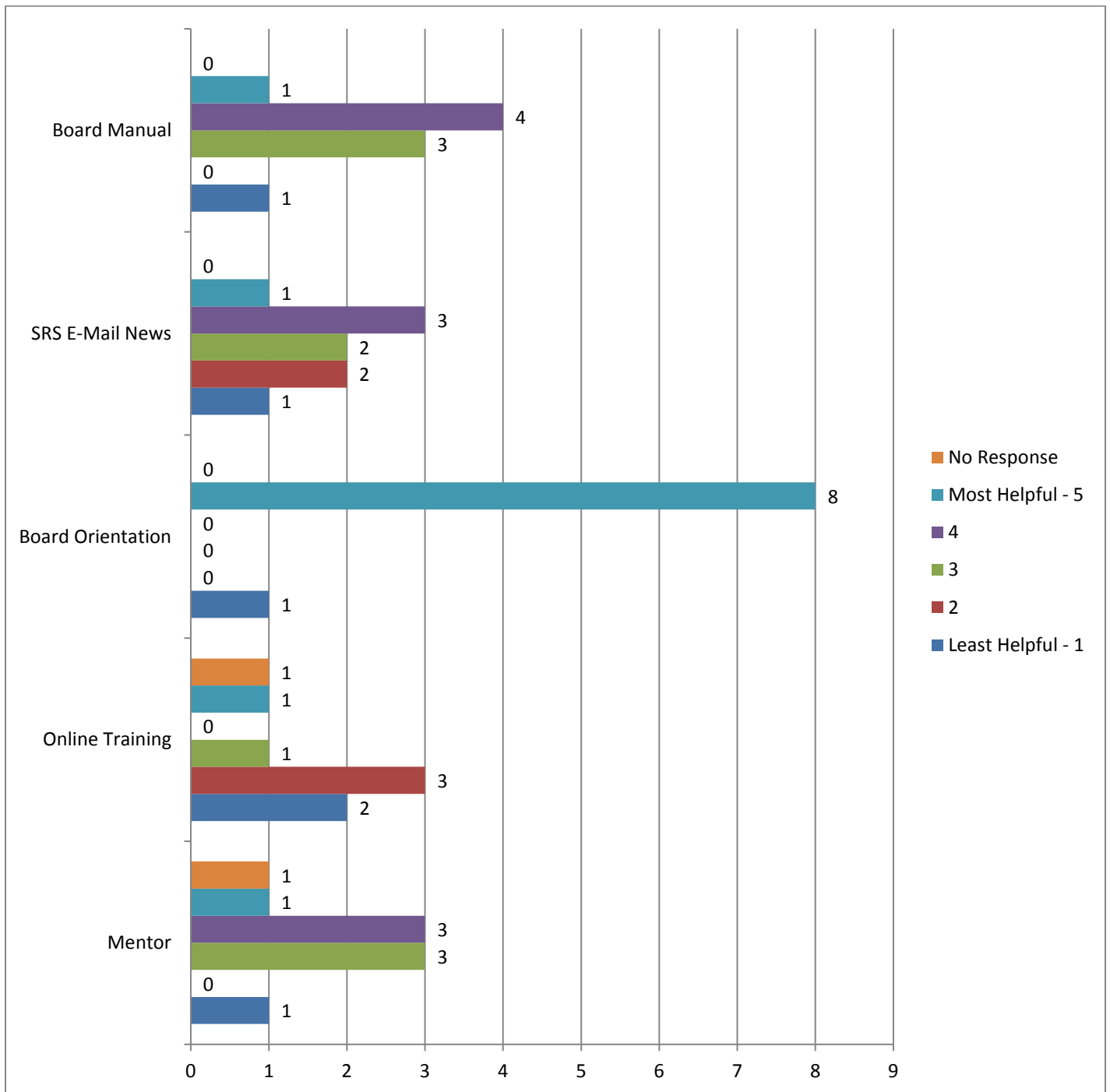
- **1** respondent ranked 'Judgment' as the least important quality (1%)
- **0** respondents ranked 'Honesty' as the least important quality (0%)
- **2** respondents ranked 'Communication Skills' as the least important quality (33%)
- **0** respondents ranked 'Interest in Board's Work' as the least important quality (0%)
- **1** respondent ranked 'Time to Commit' as the least important quality (0%)
- **4** respondents ranked 'Self-Motivation' as the least most important quality (44%)
- **1** respondent ranked 'Ability to Work well with Others' as the least important quality (11%)

Graph 8: Rank Qualities in Order of Greatest to Least Importance – All Nine Respondent Answers



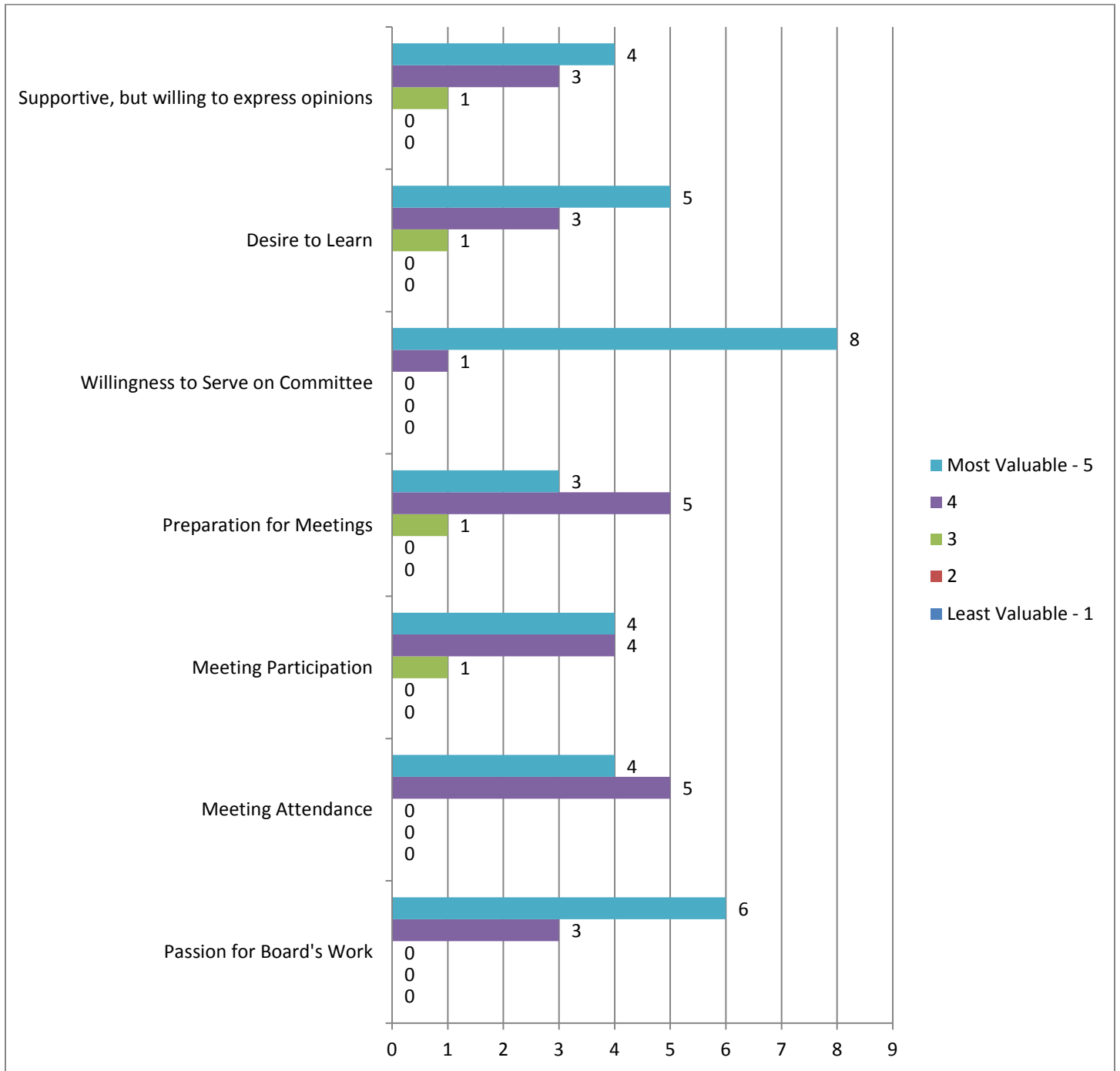
Graph 9: Rate Qualities in Order of Greatest to Least Importance – All Nine Respondent Answers

The next subset of questions asked board members to rate, on a scale of 1 to 5, the following tools in their usefulness as it related to helping them acclimate to the board. For this question, 1 is designated as least helpful and 5 as most helpful.



Graph 10: Rate Desired Board Traits

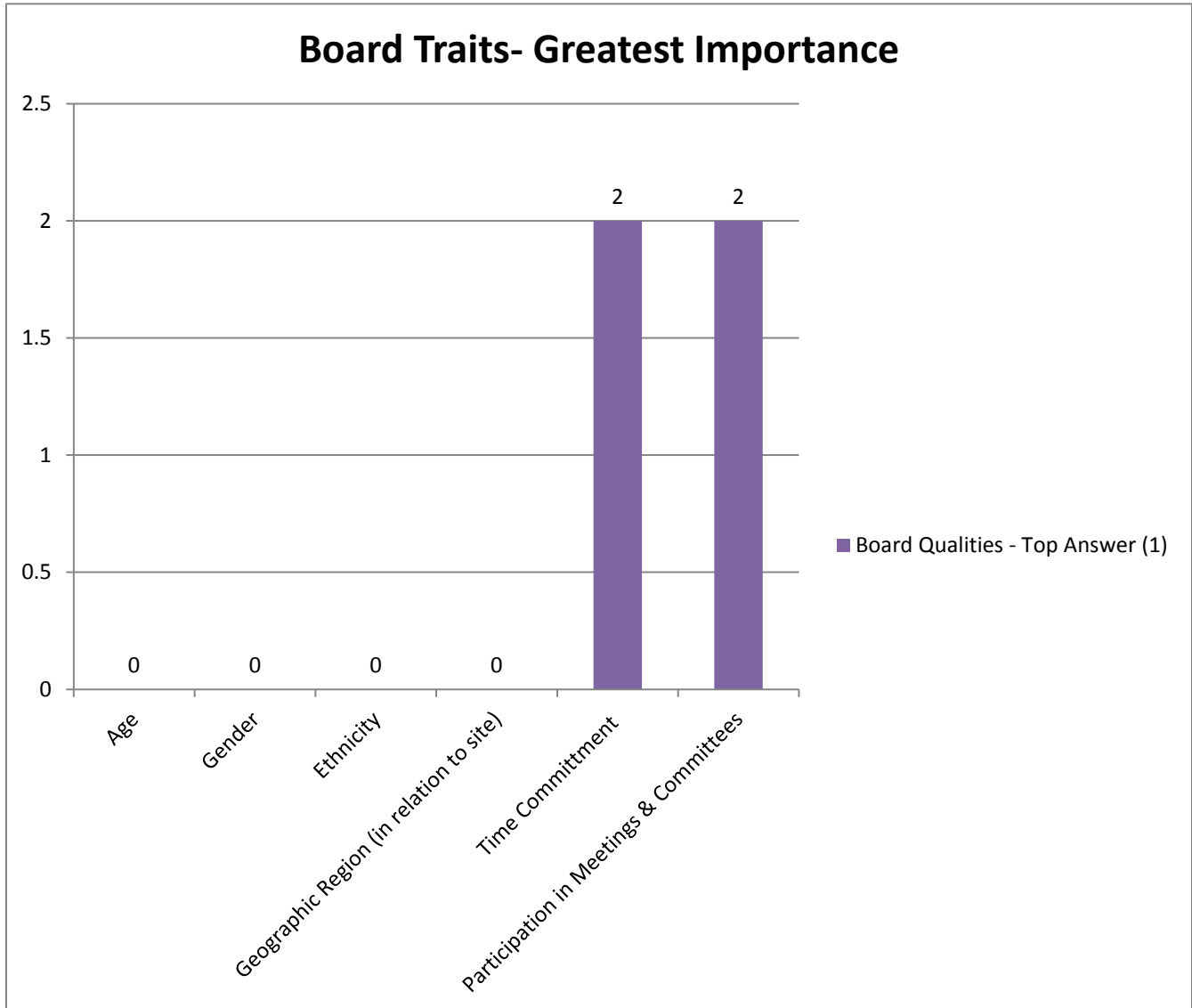
The next subset of questions invited board members to rate, on a scale of 1 to 5, personal qualities as it related to being a productive board member. In this question, 1 is designated as least important and 5 as most important. Of the 9 survey respondents, all 9 answered the question providing a 100% response rate.



Graph 11: Rate Desired Board Traits – Top Quality

In the second to final question, respondents were asked to rank six given qualities in greatest to least importance as they believed these qualities impacted creating a healthy, working and diverse board. For this question, 1 acted as the greatest importance and 7 designated as least greatest importance.

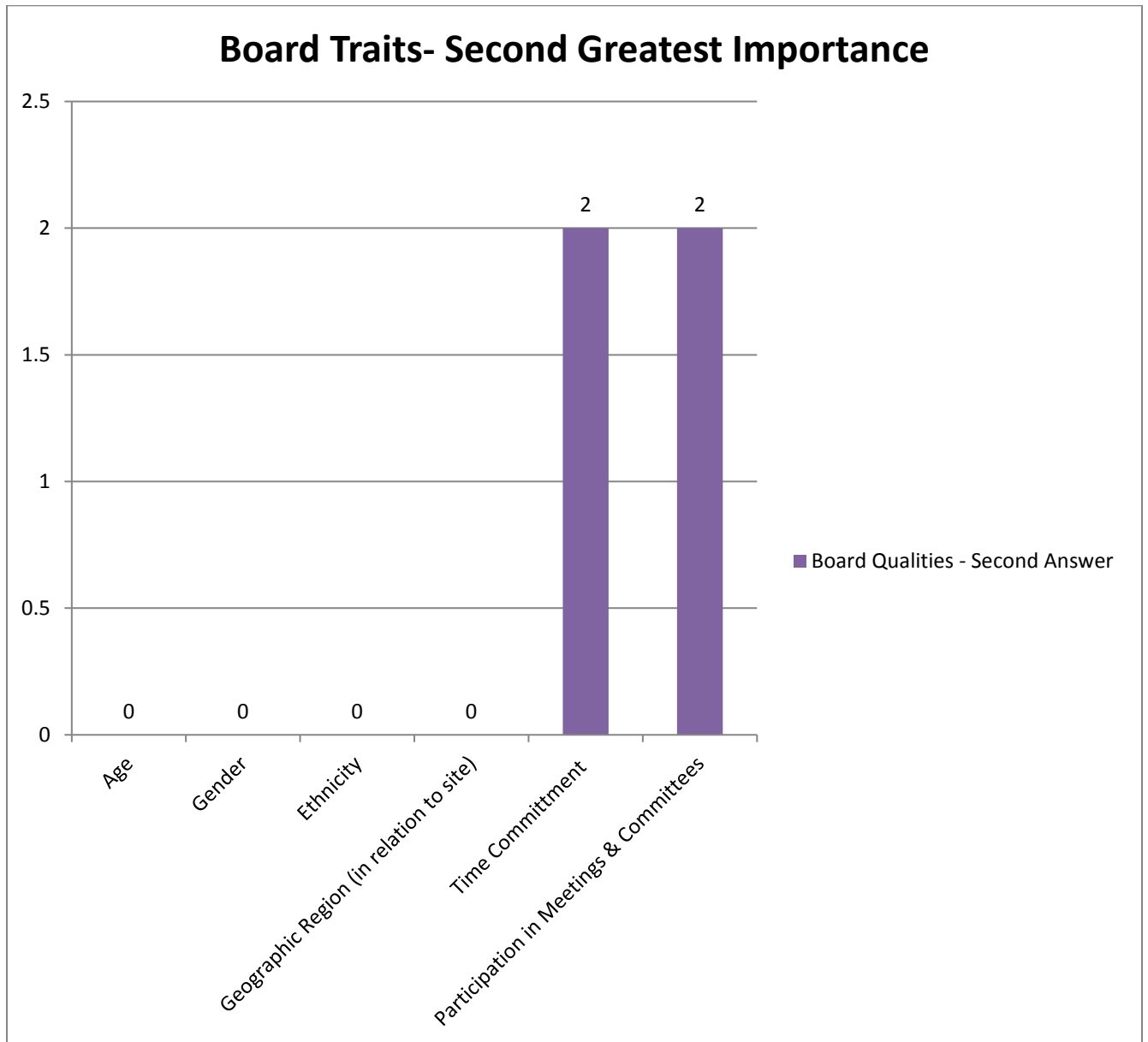
Of the 9 survey respondents, 4 answered the question providing a 44% response rate.



Graph 12: Rate Desired Board Traits – Second Greatest Quality

In the second to final question, respondents were asked to rank six given qualities in greatest to least importance as they believed these qualities impacted creating a healthy, working and diverse board. For this question, 1 acted as the greatest importance and 7 designated as least greatest importance.

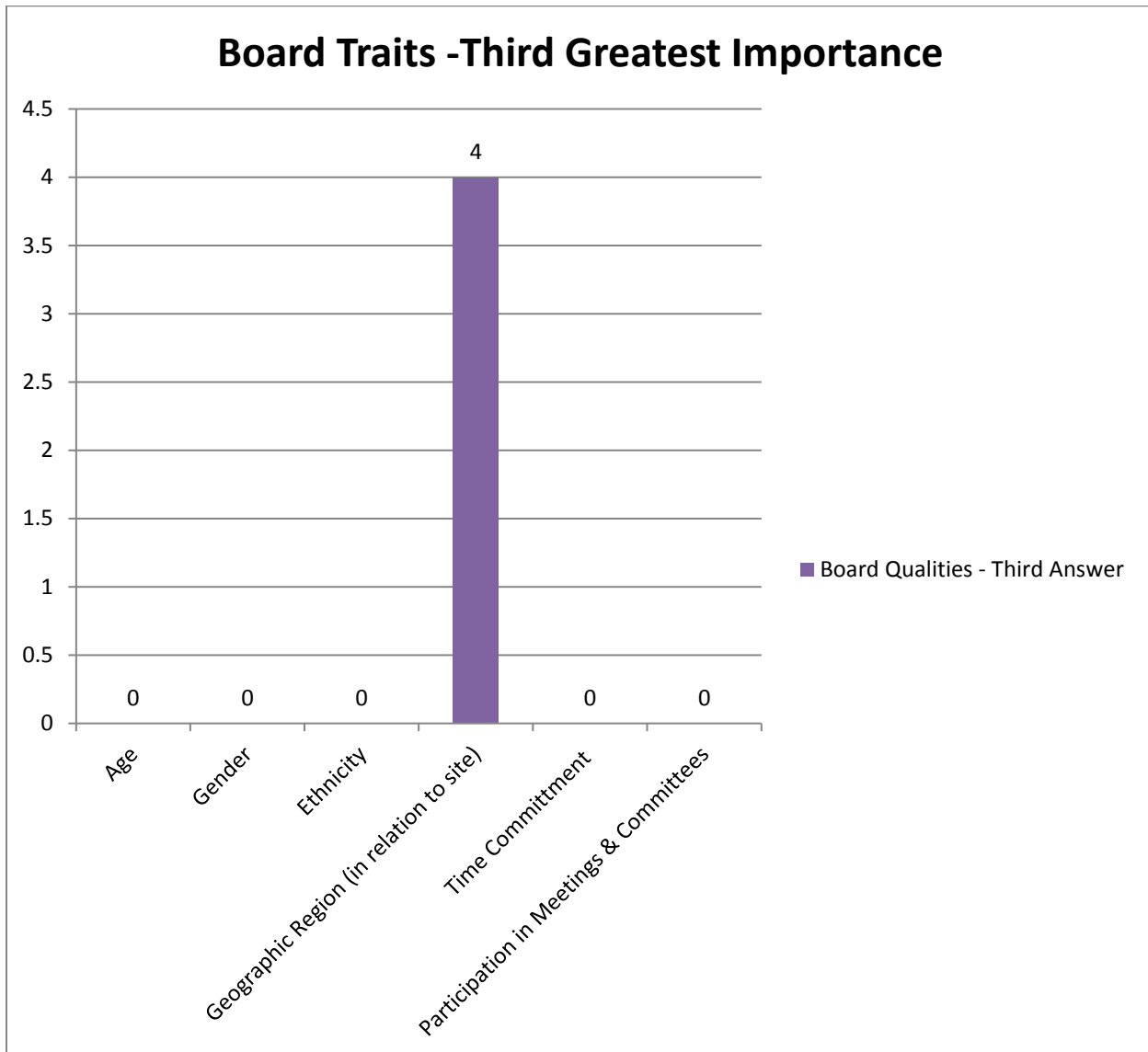
Of the 9 survey respondents, 4 answered the question providing a 44% response rate.



Graph 13: Rate Desired Board Traits – Third Greatest Quality

In the second to final question, respondents were asked to rank six given qualities in greatest to least importance as they believed these qualities impacted creating a healthy, working and diverse board. For this question, 1 acted as the greatest importance and 7 designated as least greatest importance.

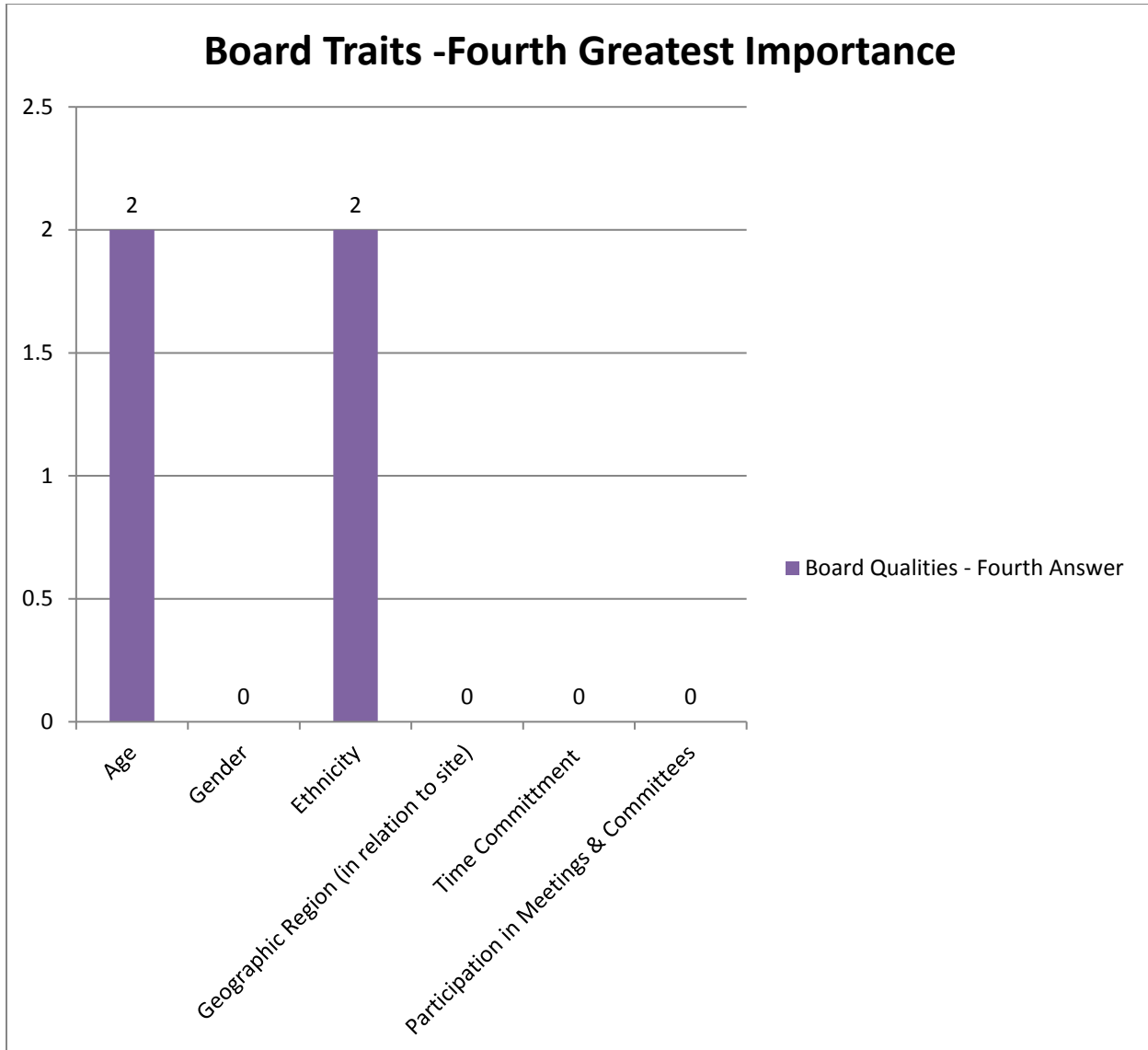
Of the 9 survey respondents, 4 answered the question providing a 44% response rate.



Graph 14: Rate Desired Board Traits – Fourth Greatest Quality

In the second to final question, respondents were asked to rank six given qualities in greatest to least importance as they believed these qualities impacted creating a healthy, working and diverse board. For this question, 1 acted as the greatest importance and 7 designated as least greatest importance.

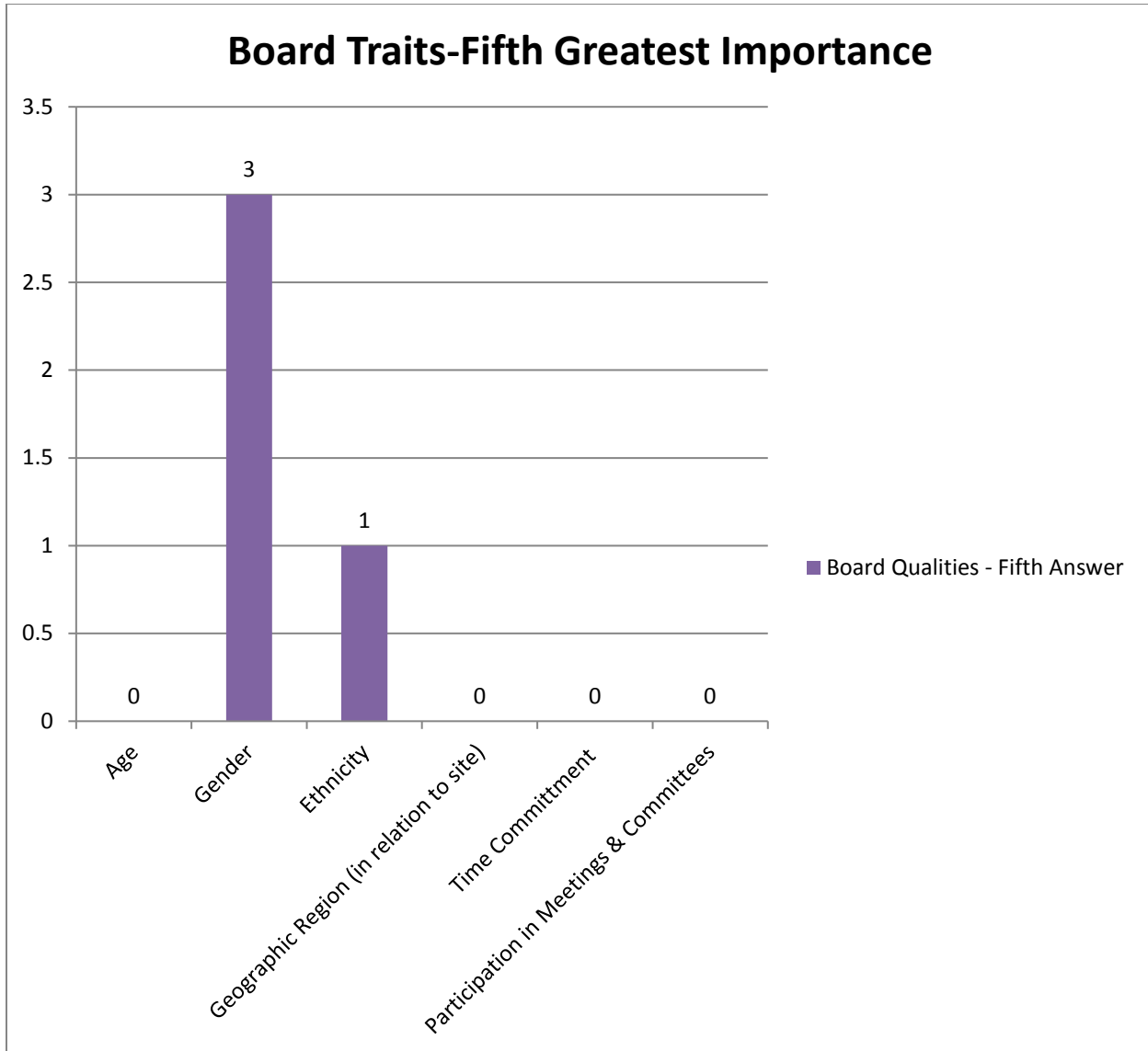
Of the 9 survey respondents, 4 answered the question providing a 44% response rate.



Graph 15: Rate Desired Board Traits – Fifth Greatest Quality

In the second to final question, respondents were asked to rank six given qualities in greatest to least importance as they believed these qualities impacted creating a healthy, working and diverse board. For this question, 1 acted as the greatest importance and 7 designated as least greatest importance.

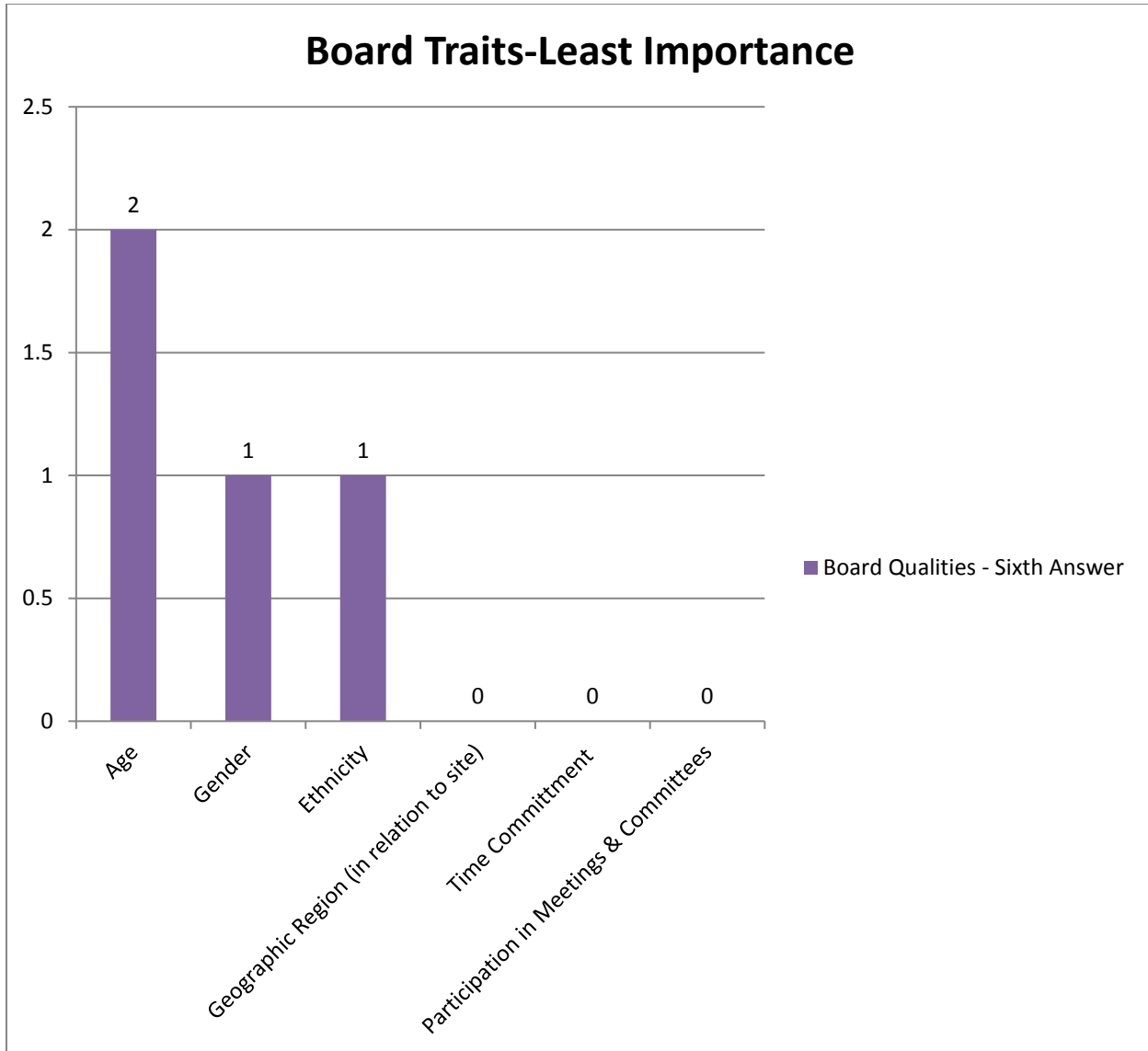
Of the 9 survey respondents, 4 answered the question providing a 44% response rate.



Graph 16: Rate Desired Board Traits – Least Greatest Quality

In the second to final question, respondents were asked to rank six given qualities in greatest to least importance as they believed these qualities impacted creating a healthy, working and diverse board. For this question, 1 acted as the greatest importance and 7 designated as least greatest importance.

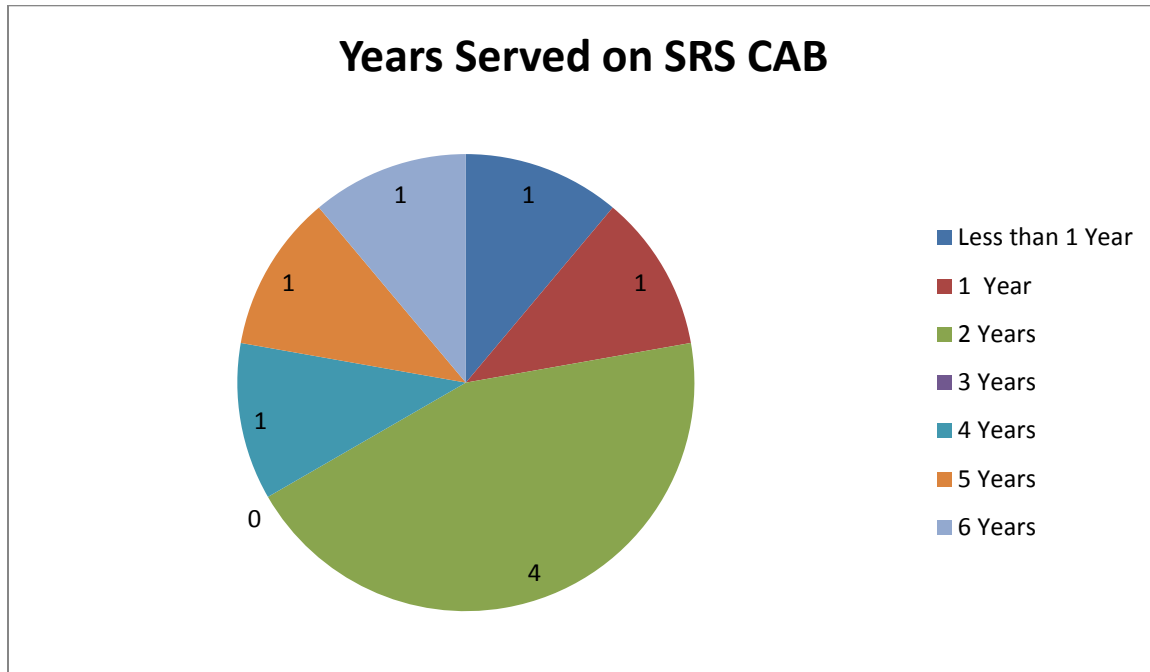
Of the 9 survey respondents, 4 answered the question providing a 44% response rate.



Graph 17: Years on SRS CAB

The final question sought to learn the number of years each respondent had served on the board. Again, the SRS CAB limits members to three terms of two years for a combined potential total of six years.

Of the nine respondents, all nine answered the question providing a 100% response rate.



CONCLUSION

In terms of the first question, one respondent wrote on the survey that all given characteristics were vital for a productive board member and could not be fairly ranked. Honesty and interest in the board's work ranked highest in overall qualities, perhaps demonstrating that despite the goal of the organization, the universal skill of honesty can prove most valuable.

In reviewing answers provided for question two, eight respondents shared that board orientation stood out as the most helpful tool as they acclimated to the board. Board orientation provides a chance for new board members to meet one another, and the support team, prior to their meeting. At this meeting, the work of the SRS CAB is reviewed as well as the process for how meetings are run.

Extrapolating conclusions from the third question rating board traits proves harder due to only four of the nine respondents fully completing this question. Making an overarching conclusion on board traits seems unfair given only four respondents answered; however, their answers are valuable in demonstrating that time commitment and participation rank as most important for responding board members. This answer closely parallels the first question, where three board members ranked time commitment as the second of the seven possible responses on valuable board traits.

Multiple challenges surfaced in constructing this board member evaluation survey. For one, in order to feasibly conduct the survey, a stringent scientific approach was not taken. Survey participants were not randomly sampled, and instead, all board members who attended the Citizen Advisory Board meeting during the November 2016 were offered a survey. That said, another issue lies with the surveys being voluntary, which may have prevented some people from completing surveys for fear that their survey may have been identified and that they could be construed as having negative feedback. Another challenge came with the cost, as this survey was conducted without a budget. Another factor is the time frame, as this survey was conducted during a closed period but could easily have spanned a year or longer to gain further results.

This evaluation provided a snapshot in time of board membership qualities at the Savannah River Site Citizens Advisory Board meeting. Continued surveys are vital to understanding what is working well and what can be improved. General snapshots of the study can shed light on desired board qualities and may be useful as a preliminary foundation to further explore the subject. Though board membership has been studied for decades, much of the research and practice remains in the early-stages. Working on educating the public for the need of research, securing funding to provide and assess evaluation, and developing frameworks that provide consistent and reliable data remains a challenge.

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