NASFAA
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT FINANCIAL AID ADMINISTRATORS

2025 ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN SURVEY REPORT

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

For 25 years, NASFAA has surveyed financial aid professionals to understand the environment in which they administer student aid. These surveys identify resource shortages that may hinder the delivery of financial aid services, explore the causes of these shortages, and assess the potential impacts on both students and office operations. In fall 2024, we conducted our most recent survey, designed to evaluate the current capabilities of financial aid offices at NASFAA member institutions.

Much has changed in the five years since our previous administrative burden survey (2019). Significant factors influencing the financial aid landscape include:

- **The COVID-19 Global Pandemic:** Financial aid offices adapted to the challenges of continuing operations during the pandemic, which also led to the creation of the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF). HEERF grants helped institutions address student emergency needs and supported colleges and universities during significant disruptions to their normal operations.

  While institutions greatly needed those funds, the eligibility criteria and permitted uses changed frequently, and the funds came with onerous reporting requirements. NASFAA member institutions also cited intensifying staffing challenges during this period.[1]

- **FAFSA Simplification Act Passage and Implementation:** The 2024-25 academic year marked the final year of implementation of the FAFSA Simplification Act, which included significant changes to federal student aid policy, including a new Federal Methodology, a simplified Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and reinstatement of Federal Pell Grant eligibility to incarcerated students. Implementation issues plagued the rollout of the overhauled 2024-25 FAFSA, and these challenges have continued even into the 2025-26 FAFSA cycle.

- **New Gainful Employment and Financial Value Transparency Regulations:** The Department of Education (ED) resurrected the Gainful Employment (GE) regulations that it had previously introduced and rescinded twice over the past decade. ED also added a new accountability framework, Financial Value Transparency (FVT), which collects institutional data and calculates GE metrics for non-GE programs. This significantly broadened GE reporting compared to previous iterations, extending it to nearly every postsecondary education program. The regulations add a significant reporting requirement in the first year of implementation and an annual institutional reporting requirement. They also now require institutions with failing programs to issue new warnings and acknowledgements to students.

Despite these and other changes, financial aid offices and their staff have remained committed to ensuring that all qualified students can access postsecondary education regardless of their socioeconomic background.

Below is a summary of key findings from our survey and recommendations for ways to alleviate the administrative burden on financial aid offices so they can focus on supporting the needs of their students.

Key Findings

- The percentage of institutions participating in emergency aid programs rose significantly, from 35% in 2020 to 52% in 2025.

- A strong majority (91%) of respondents reported feeling the time and resources their office devotes to processing each aid application has "greatly increased" or "somewhat increased" in the past five years.

- Fifty-two percent of respondents believed their financial aid office faced moderate (38%) or severe (14%) resource shortages over the past five years that affected their level of service during peak processing periods. Of those who felt they faced a shortage, 68% felt it was permanent.

- In discussing their financial aid office (FAO) budgets, most respondents cited the "FAO operating budget being insufficient to meet financial aid office needs" (56%) and the "student financial aid budget being insufficient to meet student needs" (53%) as their most common long-term challenge areas.

- Twenty-eight percent of respondents reported that resource constraints have had a "significant impact" on their office's ability to meet its obligations and capacity to support students. This is up from 17% in our 2020 report—a 64% increase.

---

[1] *NASFAA. (2022). Financial aid offices face intensifying staffing challenges amid the pandemic.*

- The student services activities most often reported as "greatly affected" by resource constraints included financial literacy (35%), outreach efforts (33%), maintaining the financial aid office website (27%), and focusing on target populations (27%).

- The most common resources financial aid offices felt they needed to maintain quality financial aid services were training for processes and procedures (86%), automation (83%), training for technology (82%), and technical support staff (82%). This is a shift from our 2020 report, where respondents felt their biggest resource needs were operating budget (86%), technology training (85%), and counseling staff (84%).

- When asked to limit their additional resource needs to five, most respondents indicated they needed more automation (55%) and compliance staff (48%).

Considerations for Congress and the Department of Education

In this report, NASFAA outlines considerations to address the causes associated with resource constraints and presents Congress and ED with options for reasonable steps to reduce administrative burden.

Faced with ongoing resource shortages, institutions appear to prioritize compliance over student services, which is rational, but unfortunate. Schools should be able to meet their compliance obligations while providing students with high-quality service. If pursued, the following initiatives would allow financial aid administrators to focus on counseling students and families while remaining in compliance with their administrative capability mandate:

- **Ensure new and amended regulations do not impose undue burden on financial aid offices.** For instance, use administrative data instead of imposing new, onerous reporting requirements for initiatives like GE/FVT, and avoid duplicative requirements. Financial aid administrators consistently list regulatory and compliance workload as a significant factor contributing to resource shortages and challenges.

- **Thoroughly test the FAFSA every year before launch and include a comprehensive testing plan in all new technological efforts.** Financial aid administrators faced unprecedented challenges with the flawed 2024-25 FAFSA rollout, and students suffered as a result. ED should develop a thorough testing plan for all new technology initiatives to ensure all avoidable rollout issues are addressed before systems go live.

- **Explore creating a federal emergency aid program.** More than half of institutions surveyed reported they offer an emergency aid program, reflecting growing awareness of students' financial challenges beyond the standard cost of attendance. However, resource shortages can lead to wide variation among institutions in the availability of emergency aid offerings. A federal emergency funding source could help create a level playing field by ensuring all institutions can provide aid to students facing short-term financial crises, preventing minor setbacks from disrupting their success.

- **Double the Maximum Pell Grant.** More than half of survey respondents reported their student financial aid budget was insufficient to meet students' needs. While institutions have struggled to meet those needs, the Pell Grant has failed to keep pace with rising college costs. When adjusted for inflation, today's maximum Pell Grant is worth about the same as it was in 1978, even though college costs have more than doubled in that time. In 2024-25, the maximum Pell Grant covered only 32% of the average cost of tuition, fees, room, and board at a public four-year institution[2] compared to more than three-quarters of those costs in 1975. The time has come for Congress to make a substantial investment in the program by doubling the maximum Pell Grant.

[2] National College Attainment Network. (n.d.). *Double Pell.*

Methodology

Survey Instrument

NASFAA made several key changes to the survey instrument this year:

- We updated the survey to better reflect the current challenges financial aid professionals face in administering aid and managing their office environments. Some questions remained unchanged and are displayed with responses over time; however, NASFAA added many new questions and updated others.

- In response to the ongoing staffing shortages[3] cited by NASFAA member institutions, this year's survey grouped individual questions into sections and randomly assigned three of those sections to each respondent. This resulted in a shorter survey completion time overall but still allowed for a representative sample for questions in each section.

The 2024 Administrative Burden Survey consisted of four sections:

- **Resources** — perceptions about the financial aid office's current capacity to maintain quality services, including constraints and the causes of perceived shortages.

- **Impact on students** — perceived effects of resource constraints on student support, in six subsections: Student Services, Student/Family Consumer Information, Application Processing, Other Aid Processing, Professional Judgment, and Return of Title IV Funds.

- **Resource need** — perceptions about additional resources needed to maintain quality services, with two subsections: Compliance and Professional Development.

- **FAFSA Simplification Post-Implementation Survey** — perceptions about implementing changes resulting from the FAFSA Simplification Act (results published separately).[4]

NASFAA designed the survey questions to examine the existing capabilities of our members' FAOs. In particular, we aimed to identify specific resource shortages institutions may be experiencing and views financial aid administrators may have about the impact such shortages may have on their offices and the students they serve. The survey informed participants that their responses would be confidential and any reported findings would not allow for third-party identification of individual institutions.

Although NASFAA conducted this survey in fall 2024, this report will be published in spring 2025, and all findings are referenced as "2025" throughout.

Data Collection

In October 2024, NASFAA emailed the electronic survey to at least one contact at all NASFAA member institutions — a total of 2,906 potential respondents. In addition, the email contacts had the option to forward the survey link to other staff members. Member schools received four additional follow-up reminders over the course of the survey's open period. Where possible, we randomized answer choices to prevent bias. A copy of the survey instrument is available from NASFAA's Research Department upon request.

Profile of Institutional Respondents

Of the 2,906 survey invitations sent, NASFAA received 982 replies that included a response to at least one question (34% of the surveys sent). Unless otherwise stated, the survey asked respondents to provide information for the 2023-24 award year.

As shown in Table 1, most survey respondents (38%) came from private nonprofit institutions. Respondents also tended to come from relatively small institutions. Almost half (45%) came from institutions with a full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment of between 1,000 and 4,999, and 22% came from institutions that enrolled fewer than 1,000 FTE students. Eighty-nine percent used a semester format (Table 2).

---

[3] NASFAA. (n.d.). *Benchmarking surveys.*

[4] NASFAA. (2024). *FAFSA simplification pre-implementation survey findings.*

Looking across all institutional types, it is clear that students have access to a wide range of financial aid programs. For many federal student aid programs — such as Federal Direct Loans, Federal Pell Grants, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, and Federal Work-Study — 90% or more of respondents who answered the relevant question reported that their institution participates in the program.

Participation rates for state aid programs and institutional gift aid also exceeded 90%. Institutional loans and TEACH Grants had the lowest participation rates. In a very distinct shift from our previous report, the number of institutions that reported offering emergency aid programs rose from 35% (2020) to 52% (2025).

The number of responding institutions that hold a Minority Serving Institution designation for FY 2024, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education Federal Eligibility Matrix, is not listed in the tables below but calculated by NASFAA.[5] Across survey respondents, 22% (n = 213) were Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). Overall, MSIs account for 27% of NASFAA's membership.

NASFAA considers the demographics of survey respondents to be representative of our overall membership.

Table 1. Survey Respondents' Institutional Characteristics Compared to the NASFAA Membership

Full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment*	Survey respondents	NASFAA membership
Under 1,000	22%	29%
1,000-4,999	45%	47%
5,000-9,999	13%	12%
10,000-19,999	18%	7%
20,000 and above	1%	5%
n	982	2,759

Sector	Survey respondents	NASFAA membership
Private nonprofit	38%	38%
Community college	31%	31%
Public 4-year	24%	19%
Proprietary	4%	8%
Graduate/professional only	2%	4%
n	982	2,759

Financial aid association region**	Survey respondents	NASFAA membership
MASFAA	25%	23%
EASFAA	22%	23%
SASFAA	18%	19%
WASFAA	16%	16%
SWASFAA	10%	11%
RMASFAA	8%	7%
n	982	2,759

*As defined by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System 12-month enrollment (E12) variable.

**A breakout of states within each region may be found on NASFAA's website: https://www.nasfaa.org/Directory_of_Associations.

[5] U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.) *Eligibility designations for higher education programs.*

Table 2. Profile of Survey Respondents by Self-Reported Institutional Characteristics

Program format(s)*	2025	2020
Semester	89%	79%
Trimester	4%	2%
Quarter	8%	2%
Non-term	4%	1%
Non-standard term	8%	2%
Multiple (only an option in 2020)	N/A	15%
n	980	

Self-Reported Student Assistance Programs Offered at the Institution	2025	2020
Federal Direct Loan	93%	95%
Federal Pell Grant	97%	95%
Federal Work-Study	91%	91%
Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant	92%	91%
Federal Parent PLUS Loan	85%	83%
Federal Grad PLUS Loan	53%	54%
Federal Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education Grant	32%	32%
Institutional loan	18%	27%
State aid (e.g., grants, loans, scholarships)	93%	92%
Institutional gift aid (e.g., scholarships, grants, fellowships, tuition waivers)	94%	96%
Aid from external/non-government sources (e.g., grants, scholarships, fellowships)**	83%	-
Private (alternative) loan	84%	88%
Emergency aid	52%	35%
Other (please specify)	4%	7%

*These data are self-reported, and institutions were able to select all formats that applied to their institution.

**This answer choice was new for the 2024 survey instrument.

NASFAA did not collect staffing and salary information in our 2024 Administrative Burden survey. These data are collected separately as part of NASFAA's Benchmarking work and in partnership with the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR). Staffing and salary information appears on the Benchmarking section of our website.

Survey Findings

Changes in Applicants, Aid Disbursed, and Office Resources

The National College Attainment Network (NCAN) closely monitors FAFSA filing rates using data from the Federal Student Aid Data Center, which is part of Federal Student Aid (FSA, an office of the U.S. Department of Education), and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE). Their calculations[6] show 46% of 12th-grade students and 50.1% of high school graduates completed a 2024-25 FAFSA as of June 30, 2024. These percentages are down for each population over the past five years, with 52% of 12th grade students and 56.4% of high school graduates filing in 2020-21. While this number shows an overall picture of FAFSA filing, there are additional meaningful data points to consider when discussing the change in applicants and the implications for financial aid offices.

[6] National College Attainment Network. (n.d.). *National FAFSA completion rates for high school seniors and graduates.*

[7] U.S. Department of Education Federal Student Aid. (n.d.). *FAFSA volume reports.*

Changes in Applicants

Using FAFSA Volume Reports from the Federal Student Aid Data Center,[7] NASFAA found changes in the number of schools listed on students' FAFSA applications. As seen in Table 3, a comparison of the 2018-19 FAFSA filing year to the 2022-23 FAFSA filing year (the most recent available) reveals a significant increase (28%) across both application types in the number of students listing 10 schools on their FAFSA. This data point is particularly interesting to financial aid offices, as it helps to illustrate that while admissions applications (and, subsequently, enrollments) are declining on the whole, the work for individual schools may not be. We analyze this further in our "Change in Aid Disbursed" section, below.

Table 3. Percentage Change in the Number of Schools Listed on the FAFSA, by Application Filing Status (2018–19 to 2022–23).[8]

Number of schools listed	Freshmen, original application			Non-freshmen, original application			Combined freshmen and non-freshmen, original application		
	2018-19	2022-23	% change	2018-19	2022-23	% change	2018-19	2022-23	% change
1	3,689,065	3,842,392	4%	10,176,523	9,259,258	-10%	13,865,588	13,101,650	-6%
2	656,428	585,445	-12%	1,229,005	962,396	-28%	1,885,433	1,547,841	-22%
3	389,691	309,173	-26%	437,731	316,757	-38%	827,422	625,930	-32%
4	288,945	229,032	-26%	225,538	165,713	-36%	514,483	394,745	-30%
5	230,333	188,714	-22%	132,772	100,016	-33%	363,105	288,730	-26%
6	185,682	156,551	-19%	83,320	64,673	-29%	269,002	221,224	-22%
7	148,282	129,446	-15%	55,752	44,652	-25%	204,034	174,098	-17%
8	126,518	116,445	-9%	40,358	33,127	-22%	166,876	149,572	-12%
9	115,825	107,864	-7%	31,477	26,092	-21%	147,302	133,956	-10%
10	243,672	344,743	29%	48,815	62,272	22%	292,487	407,015	28%

Source: Federal Student Aid Data Center, FAFSA Data by Demographic Characteristics, Annual Application Cycle Data.

In addition to these data, recent reports from the National Student Loan Clearinghouse Research Center found "Preliminary data for fall 2024 shows undergraduate enrollment increasing 3%. All sectors are seeing growth in the number of undergraduates this fall."[9]

The majority (91%) of survey respondents also reported feeling the effort in time and resources their office devotes to an aid applicant has "greatly increased" or "somewhat increased" in the past five years as well (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Reported Changes in Average Time and Resources Spent on Aid Applicants, 2019–20 to 2023–24

- Greatly increased — 61%
- Somewhat increased — 30%
- Remained constant — 6%
- Somewhat decreased — 2%
- Greatly decreased — 1%
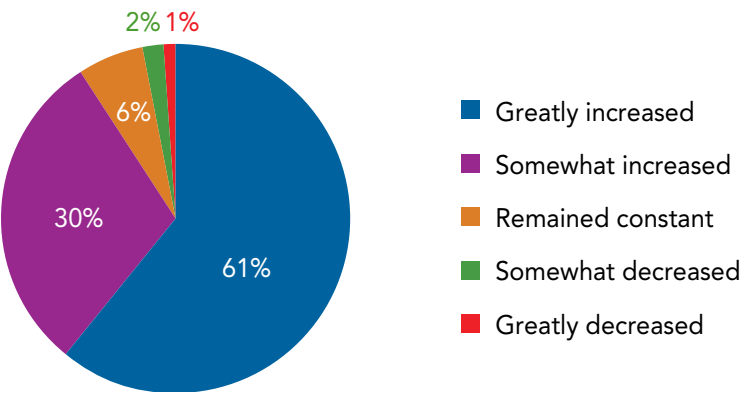
[8] These data represent the last six years available at the time of publication.

[9] National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (n.d.). *Stay informed with the latest enrollment information.*

Changes in Aid Disbursed

The College Board's *Trends in College Pricing and Student Aid*[10] reports the dollar amount of federal, state, institutional, and other aid as down 18% in real dollars over the past decade (2014-15 to 2023-24, the most recent available data). In addition, when looking at the past five years (2019-20 to 2023-24), aid fell from $290.5 billion to $256.7 billion — a decrease of $33.7 billion, or 12%, in real dollars.

Downward national trends in dollars disbursed don't necessarily result in less work for schools. As shown earlier in Figure 1, 91% of institutions reported feeling the time and resources their office devotes to each aid application has "greatly increased" or "somewhat increased" in the past five years.

Financial aid administrators may be spending more time on each student this year for a variety of reasons. The rollout of FAFSA simplification for the 2024-25 academic year faced significant implementation issues. Administrators had to learn how to process an entirely new application — with unfamiliar data fields, revised comment codes, and other technical changes — while also communicating those ongoing updates to students and families. ED repeatedly delayed application releases, and many applicants faced numerous challenges once they gained access.

NASFAA's *FAFSA Key Dates* of the 2024-25 FAFSA rollout details nearly 50 late announcements or releases and 33 ED errors. Solutions to these delays and errors typically involved time-consuming manual workarounds, including processing FAFSA corrections individually instead of by batch and manually looking up students' National Student Loan Data System histories. Additionally, in a *survey* conducted by NASFAA last fall, 73% of respondents indicated the issues surrounding the 2024-25 FAFSA rollout contributed greatly to resource shortages in their offices. Ninety percent of NASFAA member respondents also indicated the issues associated with the 2024-25 FAFSA rollout impacted their ability to send financial aid offers to applicants on time.

Another study, conducted by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, found 70% of total calls to ED's call center during the first five months of the 2024-25 FAFSA Application Cycle (January to May 2024) went unanswered — a total of 40 million unanswered calls.[11] While our survey did not explicitly ask respondents about financial aid office call volumes, it is reasonable to assume that a significant portion of students who couldn't get through to ED's call center called their financial aid offices for help instead, and the increase in time spent by financial aid administrators per aid application likely reflects this.

Beyond the 2024-25 FAFSA simplification rollout, NASFAA has *long reported* on financial aid staffing shortages. We also acknowledge the potential for recency bias and the likelihood of skewed responses to this survey question. The survey asked respondents to reflect on the past five years and estimate the time and resources their office dedicates to processing an aid application. However, because NASFAA administered this survey in fall 2024, many respondents likely focused on the 2024-25 FAFSA cycle, which was their most recent experience.

Changes in Office Resources

In a 2022 NASFAA *survey* of 500 institutions, 80% of respondents indicated they were concerned about their financial aid office's future ability to adhere to ED's administrative capability requirements. What's more, 56% of respondents reported feeling concerned about their ability to meet the needs of students given their current staffing levels. That same survey report found that half of survey respondents had been operating at only a 75% staffing capacity for two consecutive aid years.

A more recent report (2024), from NASFAA and CUPA-HR,[12] found that over half (56%) of financial aid professionals were at least somewhat likely to seek other employment, with one in three (33%) likely or very likely to do so within the next 12 months. Among those considering a job change, most planned to remain in higher education (79%), and a majority cited a pay/salary increase as their primary motivation (79%).

NASFAA released the findings from its most recent study (2024), as part of our *Career Awareness Thought Force Final Report*, which examined the experience of "new" financial aid professionals.[13] These results, which represented the opinions of more than 1,800 current financial aid administrators and nearly 700 new professionals, revealed nearly one-third felt unsure about how long they would stay in the financial aid profession overall (31%), with 39% of new professionals citing even higher levels of uncertainty.

---

[10] The College Board. (2024). *Trends in student aid.*

[11] Government Accountability Office. (2024, August). *FAFSA: Education needs to improve communications and support around the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (GAO-24-107407).*

[12] Fuesting, M., & Etier, C. (2024). *Higher education financial aid workforce: Pay, representation, pay equity, and retention,* College and University Professional Association for Human Resources.

[13] Defined in this work as individuals who self-reported working full-time in a financial laid office for less than 3 years.

Employee retention is critical across all sectors, including postsecondary education. In financial aid offices — where responsibilities are highly technical and require rigorous training — it is imperative for institutions to maintain adequate staffing levels. Doing so not only ensures compliance but also supports staff morale and reduces turnover.

Financial Aid Office Responsibilities for Compliance

Another section of the administrative burden survey examined whether the financial aid office was the primary administrative unit responsible for Title IV regulatory compliance outside of student financial aid processing and, if so, what specific responsibilities it handled. Of the 983 respondents, more than 900 reported overseeing at least one listed compliance area, even if it was unrelated to aid processing.

As shown in Table 4, the most cited areas for reports directly related to Title IV regulatory compliance were GE and FVT reporting (76%) and institutional reporting requirements/consumer information disclosures (54%). The most cited areas for reporting not directly related to Title IV regulatory compliance were technical and software support training for all staff involved in application, award, and administration of financial aid (74%) and state reporting/disclosures (63%).

Table 4. FAO Compliance Responsibilities Directly and Not Directly Related to Aid Processing

Responsibility	Percentage
Directly Related	
Gainful Employment/Financial Value Transparency reporting	76%
Institutional reporting requirements/consumer information disclosures	54%
Enrollment reporting	20%
Management of written arrangements/study abroad	18%
Other	15%
Foreign gifts and contracts reporting/disclosures (Section 117)	13%
FAO not responsible for any Title IV regulatory compliance outside of financial aid processing	13%
Not Directly Related	
Technical and software support training for all staff involved in application, awarding, and administration of financial aid	74%
State reporting/disclosures	63%
Financial literacy program management	52%
Veterans Administration/GI Bill/military tuition assistance administration/processing	46%
Emergency aid program administration/management	42%
Completing non-mandatory surveys (e.g., *US News*, NPSAS)	37%
Vocational rehabilitation administration/processing	32%
Other	11%
NPSAS reporting	9%
Title IX compliance	5%
FAO not responsible for any administrative responsibilities outside of financial aid processing and Title IV regulatory compliance	4%
Food bank management	1%

Note. The subsample sizes for directly and not directly related are 963 and 961, respectively.

Perceptions About Resource Shortages

Federal regulations require that institutions provide an "adequate number of qualified persons to administer" the Title IV programs in which the institution participates [§668.16(b)(2)] and provide "adequate financial aid counseling to eligible students who apply for Title IV, HEA assistance" [§668.16(h)]. ED considers a number of factors in terms of meeting these regulations.

The survey asked participants whether they believed their office currently faced any resource shortages that affected their capacity to maintain quality financial aid services and comply with all requirements. More specifically, it asked about the timing, duration, and specific types of any shortages encountered.

When asked about resource shortages, findings indicate that 52% of respondents believed their financial aid office had faced moderate (38%) or severe (14%) resource shortages over the past five years that affected the level of service during peak processing periods. An additional 43% indicated they had some shortages that did not affect the level of service. Only 6% of respondents felt they faced no shortage. Of those who felt they faced a shortage, 68% felt it was permanent.

When asked about long-term challenges faced by their office where resolution was anticipated to take more than one year (Table 5), a majority indicated their FAO operating budget was insufficient to meet their office needs (56%), and their student financial aid budget (grants/scholarships) was insufficient to meet student needs (53%). The most common temporary challenges, where resolution was anticipated in less than one year, were long processing times for aid applications, verification, professional judgment, etc. (42%); financial aid staff unable to answer all questions posed to them (41%); and inability to properly prepare for upcoming regulatory changes (41%). The areas offices most often cited as not a challenge were long wait times for students to get help from financial aid staff (54%) and inability to consistently meet compliance deadlines (52%).
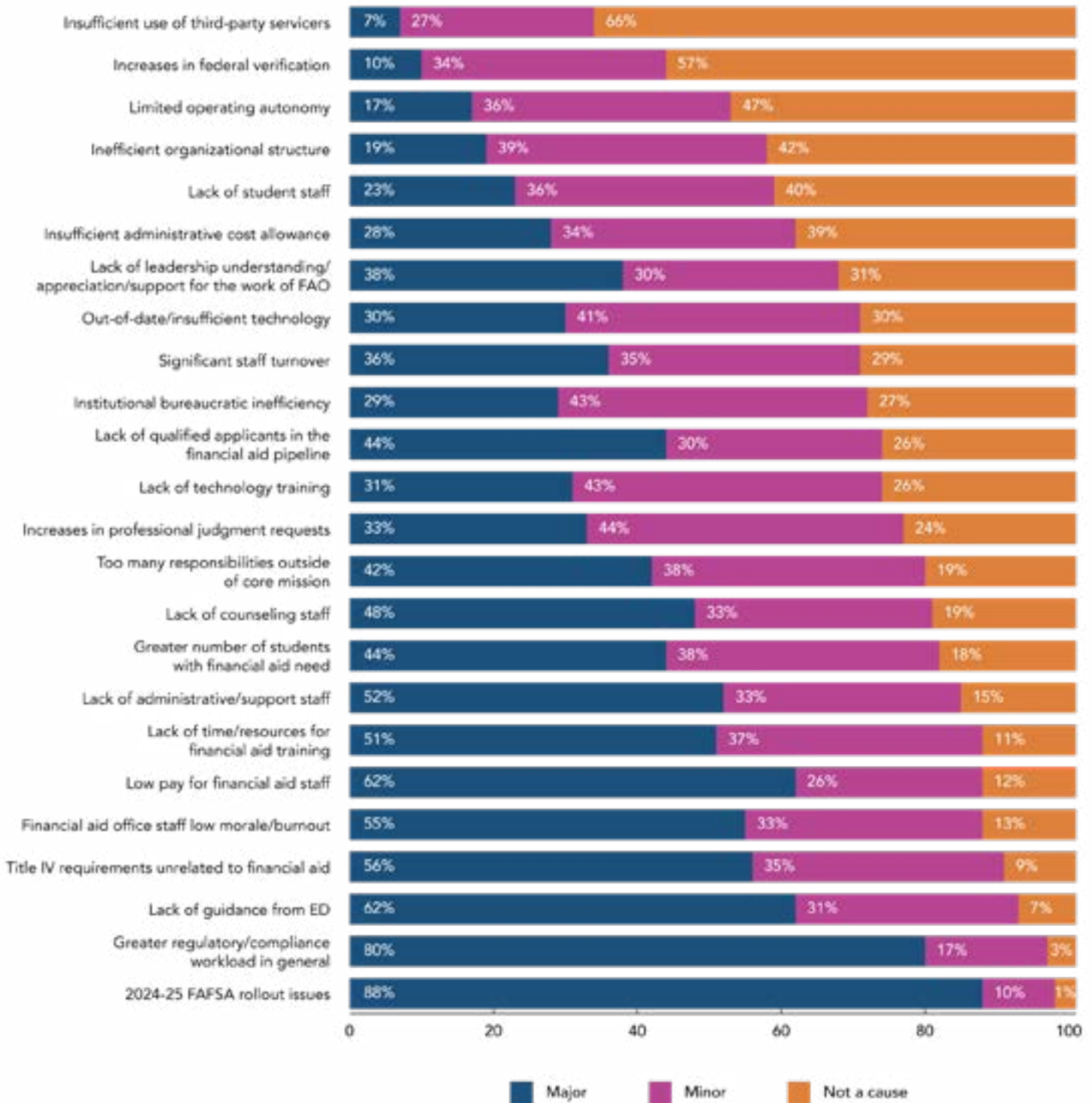
Table 5. Challenges Faced by Financial Aid Offices, by Anticipated Resolution Time

	Temporary (resolution anticipated in < 1 year)	Long-term (resolution anticipated to take > 1 year)	Not a challenge	n
FAO operating budget insufficient to meet financial aid office needs	15%	56%	29%	835
Student financial aid budget (grants/scholarships) insufficient to meet student needs	11%	53%	36%	837
Long wait times for students to get help from financial aid staff	28%	17%	54%	839
Long processing times for aid applications, verification, professional judgement, etc.	42%	23%	35%	839
Inability to consistently meet compliance deadlines	32%	16%	52%	837
Financial aid staff unable to answer all questions posed to them	41%	18%	40%	841
Inability to properly prepare for upcoming regulatory changes	41%	44%	15%	839
Inability to be innovative	22%	51%	27%	833

Respondents were also asked to identify the factors that contributed to their challenges. Figure 2 outlines the most common major and minor factors as well as factors respondents considered as not contributing to their challenges. The most commonly cited contributing factors (major or minor) were 2024-25 FAFSA rollout issues (98%), greater regulatory compliance workload in general (97%), lack of guidance from ED (93%), and Title IV requirements unrelated to financial aid (91%). The areas institutions most often cited as not contributing to their challenges included insufficient use of third-party servicers (66%) and increases in federal verification (57%).

Direct comparison with our 2020 report is difficult due to updated and expanded answer choices in the most recent survey. However, some notable similarities emerged. In 2020, 82% of respondents cited compliance workload as a major contributing factor, compared to 80% in 2025 who identified increased regulatory/compliance workload as a major factor. Verification appeared as a minor cause in both 2020 (36%) and 2025 (34%).

Figure 2. Factors Contributing to Resource Challenges Faced by Financial Aid Offices

Factor	Major	Minor	Not a cause
Insufficient use of third-party servicers	7%	27%	66%
Increases in federal verification	10%	34%	57%
Limited operating autonomy	17%	36%	47%
Inefficient organizational structure	19%	39%	42%
Lack of student staff	23%	36%	40%
Insufficient administrative cost allowance	28%	34%	39%
Lack of leadership understanding/appreciation/support for the work of FAO	38%	30%	31%
Out-of-date/insufficient technology	30%	41%	30%
Significant staff turnover	36%	35%	29%
Institutional bureaucratic inefficiency	29%	43%	27%
Lack of qualified applicants in the financial aid pipeline	44%	30%	26%
Lack of technology training	31%	43%	26%
Increases in professional judgment requests	33%	44%	24%
Too many responsibilities outside of core mission	42%	38%	19%
Lack of counseling staff	48%	33%	19%
Greater number of students with financial aid need	44%	38%	18%
Lack of administrative/support staff	52%	33%	15%
Lack of time/resources for financial aid training	51%	37%	11%
Low pay for financial aid staff	62%	26%	12%
Financial aid office staff low morale/burnout	55%	33%	13%
Title IV requirements unrelated to financial aid	56%	35%	9%
Lack of guidance from ED	62%	31%	7%
Greater regulatory/compliance workload in general	80%	17%	3%
2024-25 FAFSA rollout issues	88%	10%	1%

Legend: Major, Minor, Not a cause

Impact of Resource Shortages on Meeting Obligations to Students

Describing their perceptions about the extent to which resource constraints have affected the FAO's ability to meet their obligations and capacity to support students, 28% of respondents reported a significant impact, and an additional 48% reported some impact on this capacity. This is a change from our 2020 report, where only 17% of respondents reported a significant impact and 66% some impact. While total percentages indicating impact are relatively stable, more respondents reported significant impact in the most recent survey. This is important given the mission of FAOs to serve students.

When asked about the extent to which the office is capable of engaging in the types of activities that best serve the needs of students, 67% of respondents reported somewhat limited capability, and 12% reported very limited capability. Thus, it seems clear that respondents continue to be concerned about whether they are able to meet their mission.

We also asked respondents who reported some form of staffing or resource shortage and identified at least one impact to specify how these constraints may have affected the quality of financial aid services their office provided.[14] Reported effects ranged from diminished direct services to students to internal operations within the financial aid office, such as aid processing, verification, compliance, and providing consumer information.

The student services activities most often reported as greatly affected included financial literacy (35%), outreach efforts (33%), maintaining the financial aid office website (27%), and focusing on target populations (27%). Regular office hours and walk-in hours showed the least impact (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Perceptions of the Extent of Impact of Resource Constraints on Specific Student Services
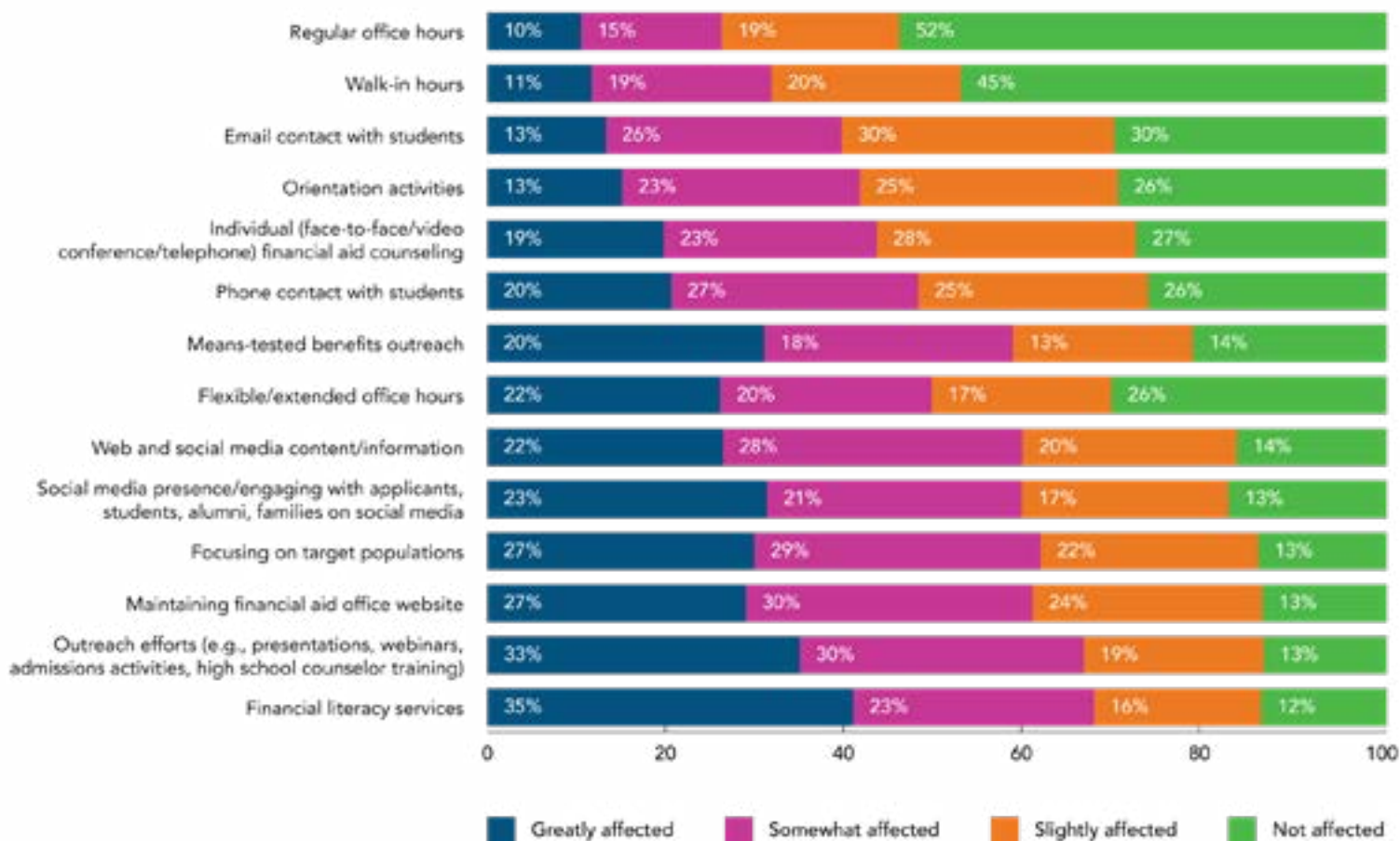
The survey also asked participants about the impact of resource shortages on processing financial aid (Tables 6 to 12).[19] In terms of standard aid processing, our findings suggest the areas most greatly affected were:

- Gainful Employment/Financial Value Transparency institutional reporting (61%)
- Staff training — external or in-person (travel required) (43%)
- Analyzing and responding to notices of proposed rulemaking (41%)
- Proactive identification of possible special/unusual circumstances (39%)
- Incorporating new Title IV regulatory requirements (36%)
- Engaging with state, regional, or national professional organizations (34%)
- Helping students complete the FAFSA (33%)

[14] In an effort to alleviate the survey burden for respondents, all respondents saw questions related to students. For all other areas listed, we randomly displayed the questions. While these sample sizes are smaller, NASFAA still considers them to be representative of our membership.

Table 6. Perceived Impacts of Resource Shortages on Student/Family Consumer Information

	Greatly affected	Somewhat affected	Slightly affected	Not affected	n
Updating cost of attendance	10%	25%	26%	38%	808
Updating and producing annual aid application information (e.g., catalog, webpage)	20%	29%	28%	19%	807
Compliance with consumer disclosure requirements	17%	25%	25%	27%	805
Loan counseling	14%	22%	24%	32%	803
Other activities related to student/family consumer information not listed above	16%	25%	25%	23%	805

Table 7. Perceived Impacts of Resource Shortages on Application Processing

	Greatly affected	Somewhat affected	Slightly affected	Not affected	n
Helping students complete the FAFSA	33%	30%	24%	13%	399
Timely resolution of C-codes	24%	31%	29%	16%	399
Timely awarding of aid	27%	28%	29%	16%	399
Verification: Discretionary verification of additional data elements	20%	23%	29%	26%	399
Verification: Accuracy of verification results	11%	19%	32%	37%	398
Resolution of conflicting information outside of verification process	29%	28%	28%	14%	399
Private loan and Parent PLUS processing	10%	20%	31%	31%	399

Table 8. Perceptions of the Impacts of Resource Shortages on Other Aid Processing

	Greatly affected	Somewhat affected	Slightly affected	Not affected	n
Award revisions	25%	36%	23%	16%	399
Data transfer to and from ED	26%	28%	24%	21%	400
Identification and resolution of overawards	14%	25%	30%	30%	400
Issuing aid offers	27%	27%	29%	16%	399
Satisfactory academic progress monitoring/appeals processing	12%	24%	28%	34%	399
Timely disbursement	12%	21%	21%	45%	399
Timely restoration of overpayments due to overawards to program accounts	8%	15%	20%	48%	398

Table 9. Perceptions of the Impacts of Resource Shortages on Professional Judgment

	Greatly affected	Somewhat affected	Slightly affected	Not affected	n
Proactive identification of possible special/unusual circumstances	39%	26%	22%	13%	400
Processing requests	28%	28%	28%	15%	400
Making adjustments	25%	30%	28%	16%	399
Documenting professional judgment decisions	18%	27%	24%	31%	399
Setting professional judgment flag/sending updated record to FAFSA Processing System	28%	24%	24%	23%	400

Table 10. Perceptions of the Impacts of Resource Shortages on Return of Title IV Funds

	Greatly affected	Somewhat affected	Slightly affected	Not affected	n
Identification of withdrawn students/dropouts	12%	19%	24%	44%	400
Determination of withdrawal date	11%	17%	23%	46%	401
Accuracy of return of Title IV funds calculations	9%	15%	18%	56%	400
Timeliness of return of Title IV funds calculations	12%	15%	25%	46%	401
Timeliness of restoring program funds to Title IV accounts and making post-withdrawal disbursements	12%	12%	22%	50%	401

Table 11. Perceptions of the Impacts of Resource Shortages on Compliance

	Greatly affected	Somewhat affected	Slightly affected	Not affected	n
Meeting existing federal rules and regulations directly related to the Title IV aid programs	25%	26%	29%	20%	391
Meeting existing federal rules and regulations indirectly related to the Title IV aid programs	14%	15%	19%	32%	390
Incorporating new Title IV regulatory requirements	36%	35%	20%	8%	391
Complying with non-Title IV federal regulatory requirements	12%	15%	26%	39%	391
Complying with state aid rules	17%	21%	29%	29%	391
Complying with private aid rules	7%	12%	26%	47%	388
Complying with institutional policies and procedures with regard to financial aid	15%	25%	29%	31%	390
Analyzing and responding to notices of proposed rulemaking	41%	19%	17%	13%	389
Gainful Employment/Financial Value Transparency institutional reporting	61%	21%	10%	4%	390
Default prevention and resolution activities	29%	19%	19%	23%	390
Engaging in annual audit activities	21%	27%	26%	24%	391

Table 12. Respondents' Perceptions of the Impacts of Resource Shortages on Professional Development

	Greatly affected	Somewhat affected	Slightly affected	Not affected	n
Staff training - internal or online (no travel)	26%	29%	24%	21%	394
Staff training - external or in-person (travel required)	43%	30%	17%	10%	393
Engagement with state/regional/national professional organizations	34%	29%	21%	15%	394
Involvement with campus-wide committees/initiatives	23%	29%	28%	19%	394
Providing/updating office equipment	22%	27%	20%	26%	391
Orientation/onboarding for new staff	24%	26%	24%	18%	394

Resource Needs

Given the resource shortages often faced by financial aid offices, the survey asked participants who reported some sort of shortage to provide their perceptions about the types of financial, staffing, and other resources they believed their office needed to maintain quality financial aid services. Respondents could choose more than one type of resource (Table 13).

Overall, the most common responses were training for process and procedures (86%), automation (83%), technical support staff (82%), and training for technology (82%). This is a shift from our 2020 report, where respondents felt their biggest resource needs were operating budget (86%), technology training (85%), and counseling staff (84%).

Table 13. Perceived Resource Needs*

Additional Resource Needed?	Yes	No	*n*
Training (process and procedures)	86%	14%	782
Automation	83%	17%	784
Technical support staff	82%	18%	784
Training (technological)	82%	18%	783
Operating budget	76%	24%	783
Technological upgrades	75%	25%	781
Aid available for students	73%	27%	781
Counseling staff	70%	30%	784
Support staff	70%	30%	783
Management staff	36%	64%	779
Student staff	34%	66%	782
Third-party servicers	19%	81%	772

* Respondents could choose more than one.

To identify priority resource needs, the survey asked participants what additional resources they would choose if limited to just five (Figure 4). The most common responses were automation (55%), IT support staff (51%), and compliance staff (48%). Although the answer choices for this question have been updated since our 2020 report, making direct comparisons impossible, there appears to be a shift in priorities — in 2020, the most common responses were counseling staff (23%) and IT support staff (22%).

Figure 4. Primary Resource Needs Across Institutions
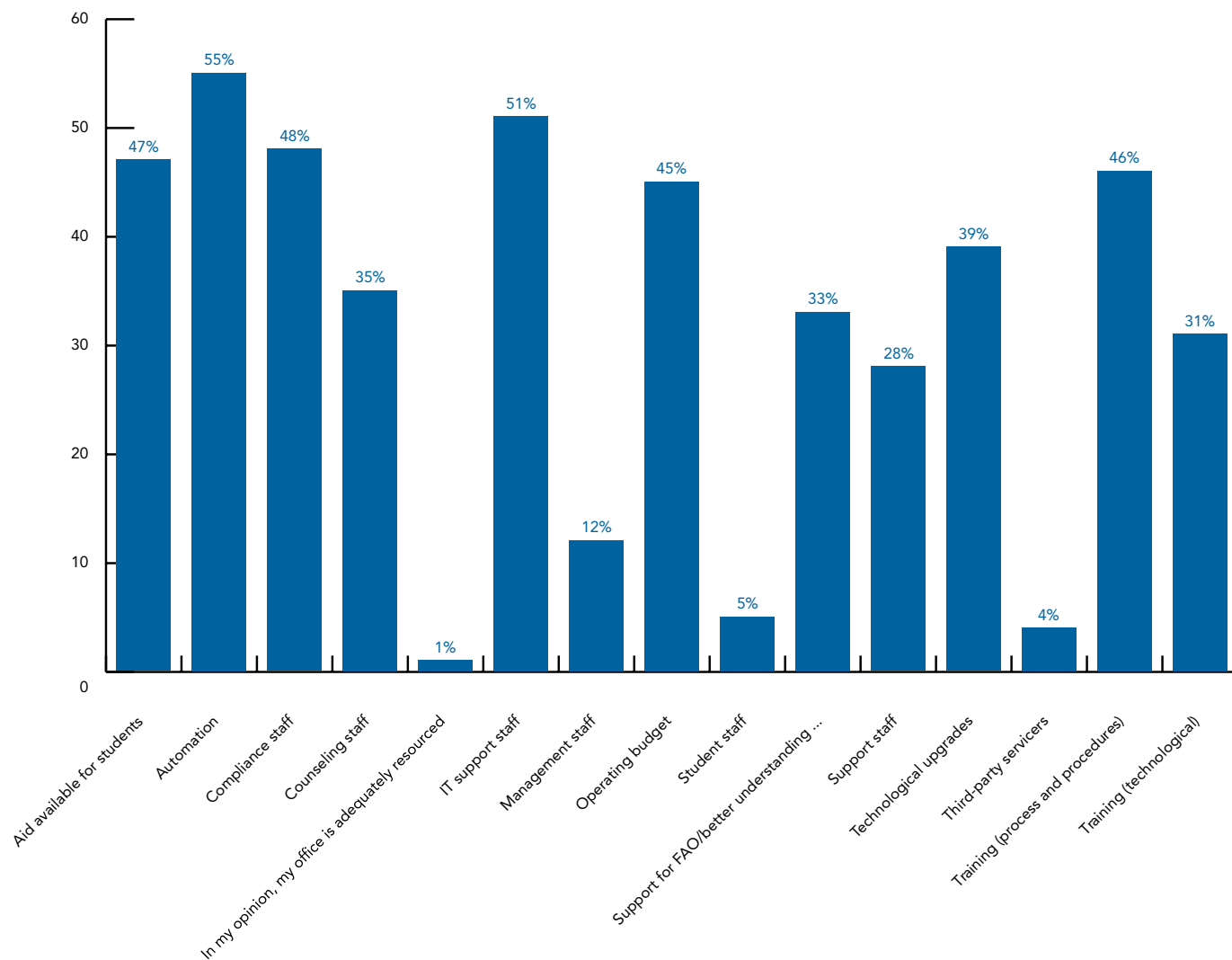
Conclusion

As the financial aid landscape continues to evolve, financial aid offices face mounting challenges that threaten their ability to provide timely, student-centered support. The findings from NASFAA's fall 2024 survey underscore the growing pressures these offices face — whether from shifting federal regulations, complex implementation of new policies, or long-standing resource shortages. Despite these hurdles, financial aid professionals remain steadfast in their commitment to ensuring equitable access to higher education.

However, commitment alone cannot overcome structural constraints. Without meaningful action to reduce administrative burden and bolster institutional capacity, offices will be forced to continue prioritizing compliance over critical student services. To preserve the integrity and accessibility of the student aid system, policymakers must act. By streamlining regulatory requirements, investing in technology and staffing support, and expanding federal aid programs, Congress and ED can empower institutions to meet both compliance demands and the needs of students.

Financial aid offices stand ready to serve — but they need the tools and resources to do so effectively.

The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) provides professional development for financial aid administrators; advocates for public policies that increase student access and success; serves as a forum on student financial aid issues; and is committed to diversity throughout all activities.

NASFAA

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT FINANCIAL AID ADMINISTRATORS