

# COVID-19's Effects on Board Professionals

## *A Snapshot Survey*

**AGB** ASSOCIATION OF  
GOVERNING BOARDS  
OF UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES

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## A Snapshot Survey

How are board professionals at colleges, universities, and institutionally related foundations responding to the professional and personal demands of the COVID-19 pandemic? How had their work environments changed as they prepared for the 2020-2021 academic year? AGB conducted a short survey from August 6-August 21, 2020, (approximately 20 percent response rate, N = 199) to gauge the pandemic's effects on this portion of its membership.\*

**“Working mothers have been called upon to do the impossible.”**

**“I am overwhelmed”**

\* Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding.

## Selected Respondent Demographics



**89%** female

**80%** white non-Hispanic

**61%** over age 50

## Respondents' Employer Demographics



**53%** private nonprofit institution (two- or four-year)

**32%** public institution (two- or four-year)

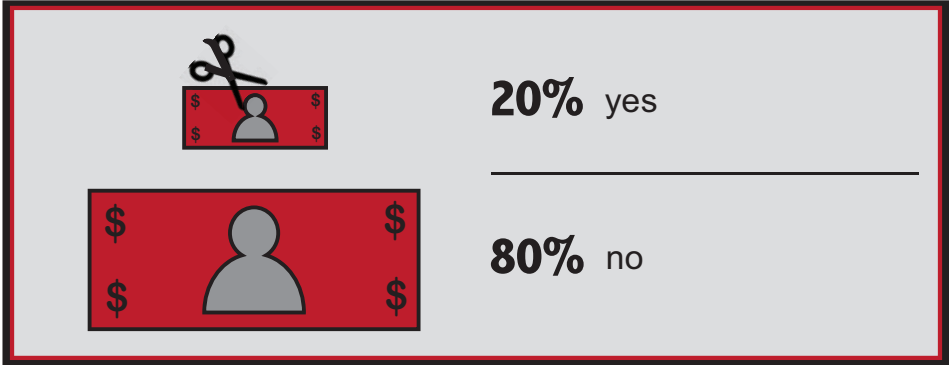
**7%** public system (two- or four-year)

**6%** institutionally related foundation

**2%** other

**1%** for-profit

## Temporary Pay Cuts (Non-furlough)



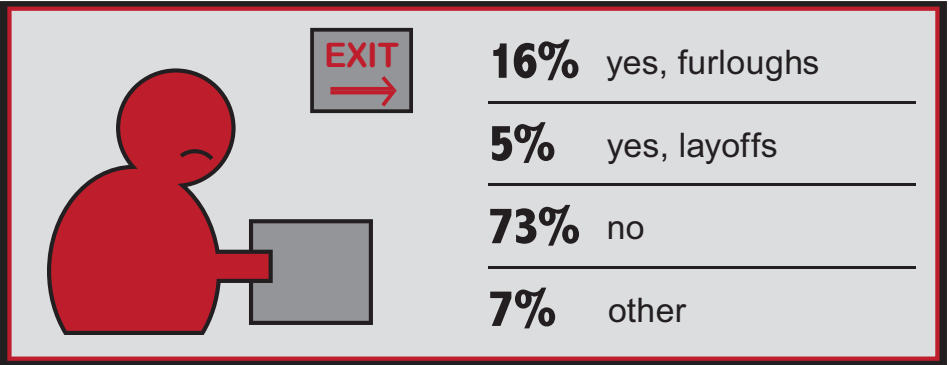
## Benefits Cuts (e.g., suspended retirement plan matches)



The majority (68 percent) of respondents indicated the pandemic had had some effect on their duties and responsibilities; 26 percent indicated the pandemic had considerably changed them. One respondent commented, “Much of my job is beyond ‘considerable change’ and more akin to ‘unrecognizable as I knew it.’” Only 4 percent responded the pandemic had had no appreciable effect on their duties and responsibilities.

The survey first asked board professionals about personnel changes, benefits cuts, and changes to their duties and responsibilities. Similar percentages of public four-year institutions and private four-year institutions reported furloughs had already taken place in their offices/departments (15 percent public four-year institutions; 17 percent private nonprofit four-year institutions). Another 38 percent of respondents from private nonprofit four-year institutions reported benefits cuts; 15 percent of respondents from public four-year institutions and 8 percent of respondents from public systems indicated benefits cuts would be determined at a later date. (See benefits/pay infographics on this page for summary data on all respondents.)

## Layoffs or Furloughs within Office/Department

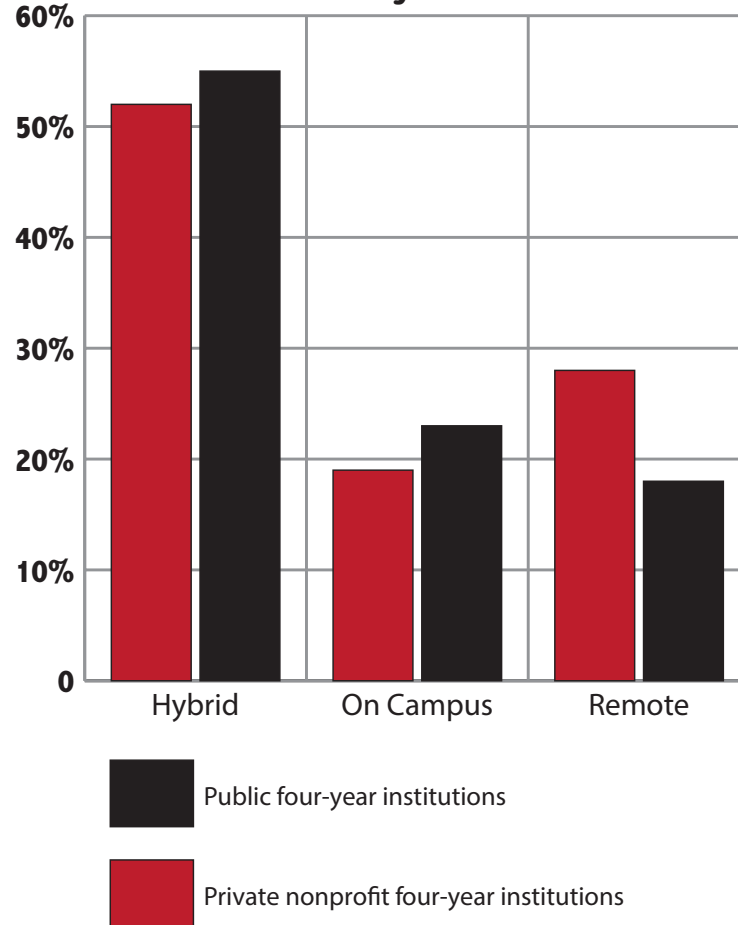


Most board professionals anticipated fulfilling their duties in fall 2020 in a hybrid mode—53 percent—versus 25 percent working remotely and 20 percent working on campus. Only 2 percent responded that their plans were not firm as of the date they completed the survey.

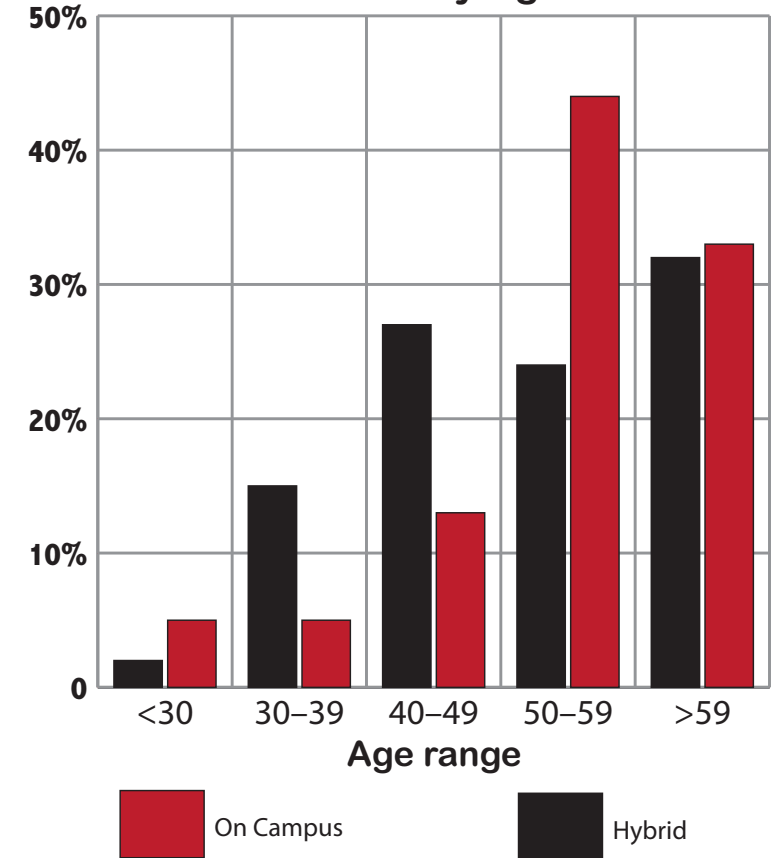
**“[The pandemic] made me more resilient and adaptive to change”**

**“Working from home does not always provide the best environment for productivity. I believe it is, however, here to stay, in some format or other.”**

**Selected Fall 2020 Work Environment Plans by Sector**



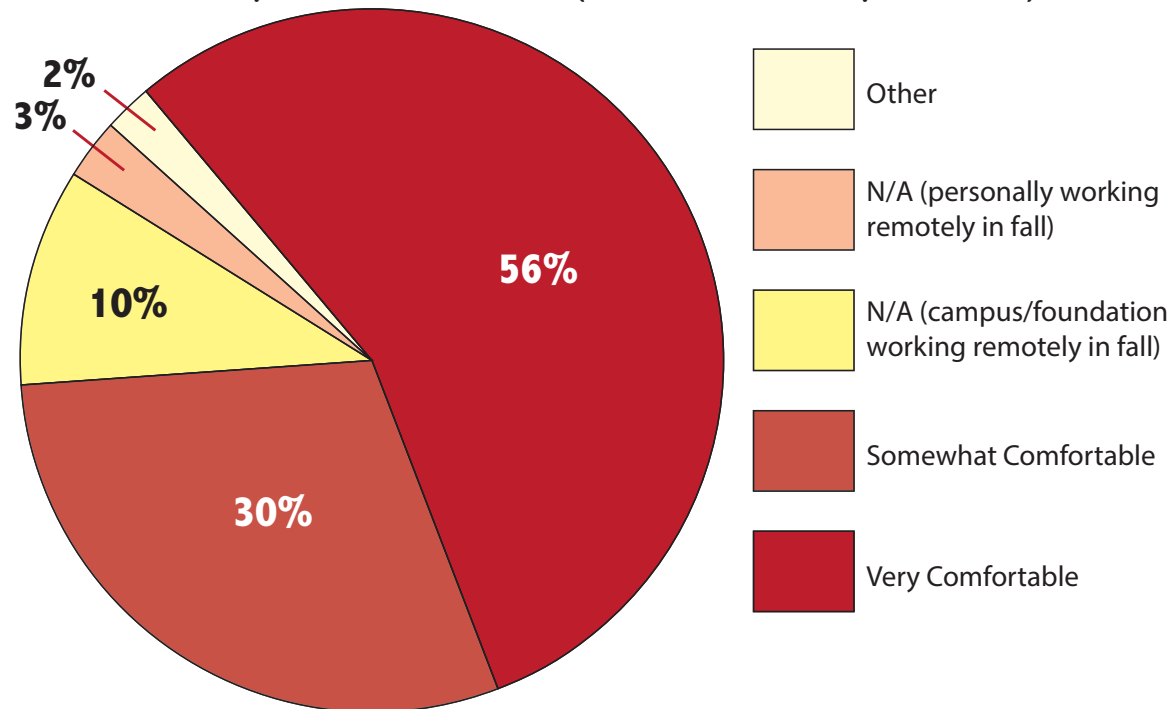
**Selected Fall 2020 Work Environment Plans by Age**



Forty-nine percent of respondents were very comfortable with their campus/foundation’s current health and safety plans for reopening in fall 2020 in relation to their own work plans; 26 percent were somewhat comfortable. Only 8 percent were either somewhat or very uncomfortable in relation to their own work plans.

Respondents were also asked to describe the pandemic's effects on board operations as well as their relationships with institutional (or foundation) leadership and board leadership. The importance of good communication was repeatedly emphasized in free responses such as "Without daily face-to-face [interaction], it is imperative to maintain constant clear communication" and the "increased importance of constant communication and dialogue to ensure the chair and trustees are up to date and effectively engaged in reopening plans."

**Comfort Level with Campus/Foundation Fall 2020 Health and Safety Plans, Respondents Over 59 (31% of total respondents)**



**"A good week is just  
72 hours"**

In addition to referencing pandemic-related isolation, stress, and work overload (one participant commented about "[exhaustion] from constant planning and crisis management since March"), they mentioned the inability to clearly read body language in online meetings, have "water cooler" chats, or advance their work informally by getting coffee together or walking down the hall to a colleague's office to talk over an issue. This was considered a drawback of remote work and in some cases led to strained relationships.

**". . . It feels like we are in a constant state of playing catch-up. I have never experienced anything like this in my career."**

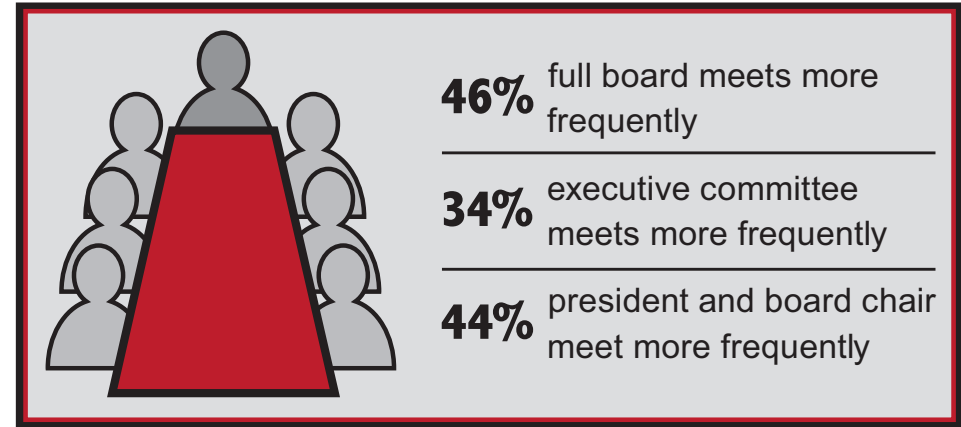
Almost all respondents (97 percent) indicated that the pandemic led to more reliance on video technology for board communication. “The public comment section of our regular board meetings has grown more robust and our board is adjusting to this,” one respondent noted. Twenty-one percent indicated there was more reliance on their board virtual portal for communication; 17 percent, however, indicated reliance on their board virtual portal was about the same.

Board professionals were also asked how the pandemic had changed their personal responsibilities. Fifty-six percent said there had been no change; 20 percent had become solely or partly responsible for supervision of children/learning at home due to closures of day care facilities, schools, or camps. Another 15 percent had taken in additional household members (e.g., college-age relatives returning home temporarily), 8 percent had become the sole economic support of their household, and 5 percent had become solely or partly responsible for elder or other dependent care at home.

**“Being very sedentary has been hard physically.”**

**“Working remotely can at times be lonely.”**

## Pandemic Effect on Institutional/Board Operations



Finally, respondents were offered the opportunity to express how the pandemic and its effect on their job duties and responsibilities had affected their personal well-being. Unsurprisingly, the words “anxious,” “exhausted,” “isolation,” “lonely,” and “stress” occurred repeatedly. The pandemic creating vastly increased workloads and longer work hours was a common theme. But board professionals also expressed gratitude for having jobs and for the support of family and loved ones, even as they expressed sorrow for not being able to see them in person. Others mentioned spiritual/religious support, using remote work to reset work-life balance to manageable levels, exercising as a way of burning off stress and/or trying to avoid pandemic-related weight gain, and similar coping mechanisms.

As one respondent summed up, “[I’m] coping as best I can just like everyone else in the country.”