



# THE NUMBERS BEHIND THE WORDS

*A study of compensation and job satisfaction in professional speechwriting*

**The first-ever quantitative assessment  
of compensation for speechwriters.**

# INTRODUCTION

The advent and growth of the [Professional Speechwriters Association](#) over the past few years has established a center of the long-nebulous speechwriting universe—and an easy place for speechwriters to find one another and to be found.

But not until this moment has anyone undertaken to quantify the economics of this tiny trade so that speechwriters and their bosses and clients can know what's fair—for a freelance speech or a full-time speechwriter's salary. Without any comparative information about speechwriting peers, every negotiation has been a game of liar's poker in which the speechwriter doesn't stand a chance.

Enter “The Numbers Behind the Words.”

The Professional Speechwriters Association is proud to finally present this game-changing study, and all speechwriters have [SKDKnickerbocker](#) to thank. For the D.C.-based national and global public affairs firm was uniquely eager and able to conduct this study for the PSA. Eager because former White House speechwriter Stephen Krupin leads SKDK's standard-setting [executive communication practice](#), which not only offers speechwriting and other valuable services, but roots hard for the greater industry to make the most of its talent. And able because SKDK's research arm, led by managing director Alex Braun, has the vast public polling skills required to create a quantitative study of an industry this numerically small.

The result of SKDK's study, conducted for the PSA, represents a major step forward in the professionalization of speechwriting and leadership communication. It proves many long-held hunches, it contains surprises that challenge our assumptions and it quantifies some of the contradictions and tensions that speechwriters, their employers and their clients will always wrestle with.

In short, it reveals a lot of reality.

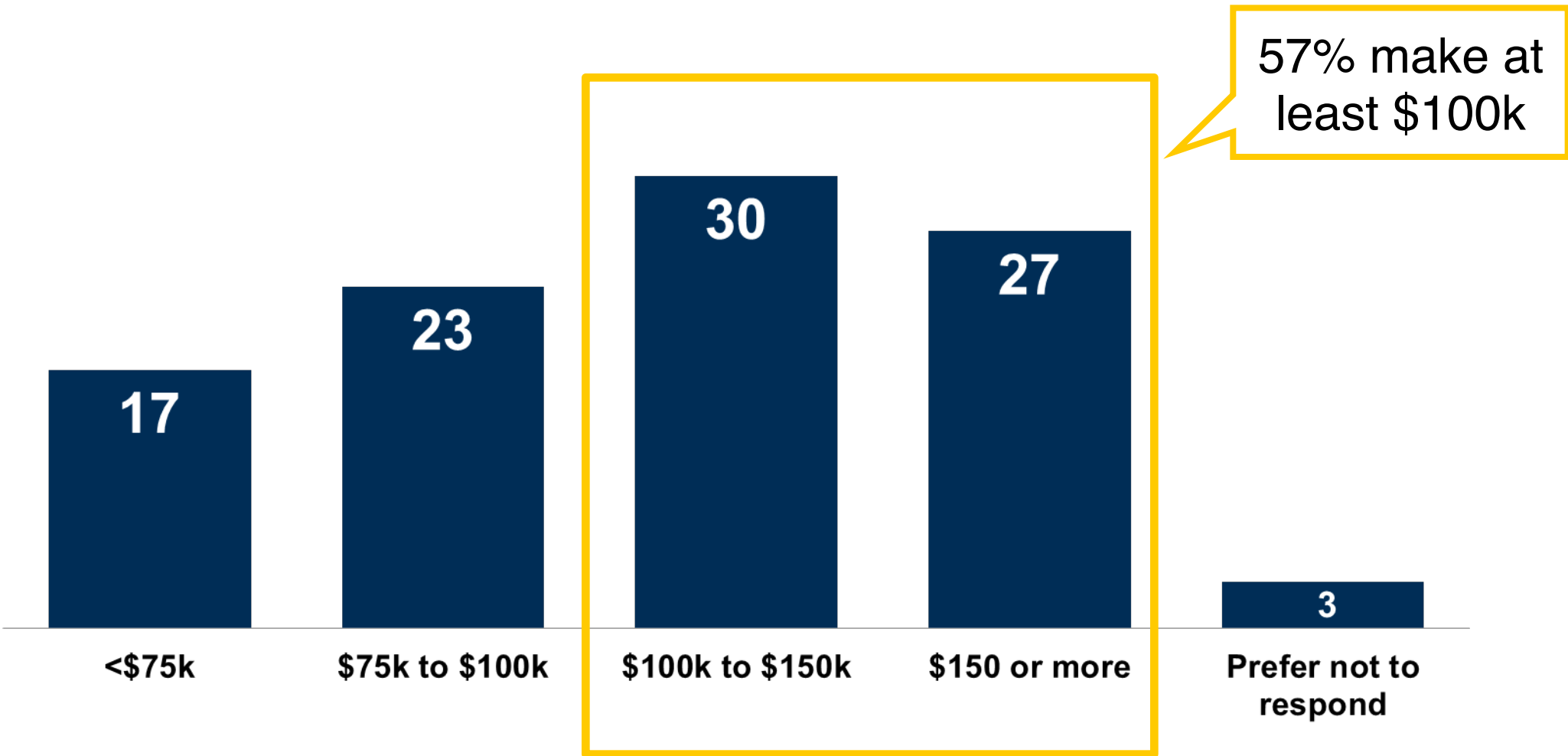
Enjoy “The Numbers Behind the Words.”

And, more importantly, put it to fruitful use—for all of us.

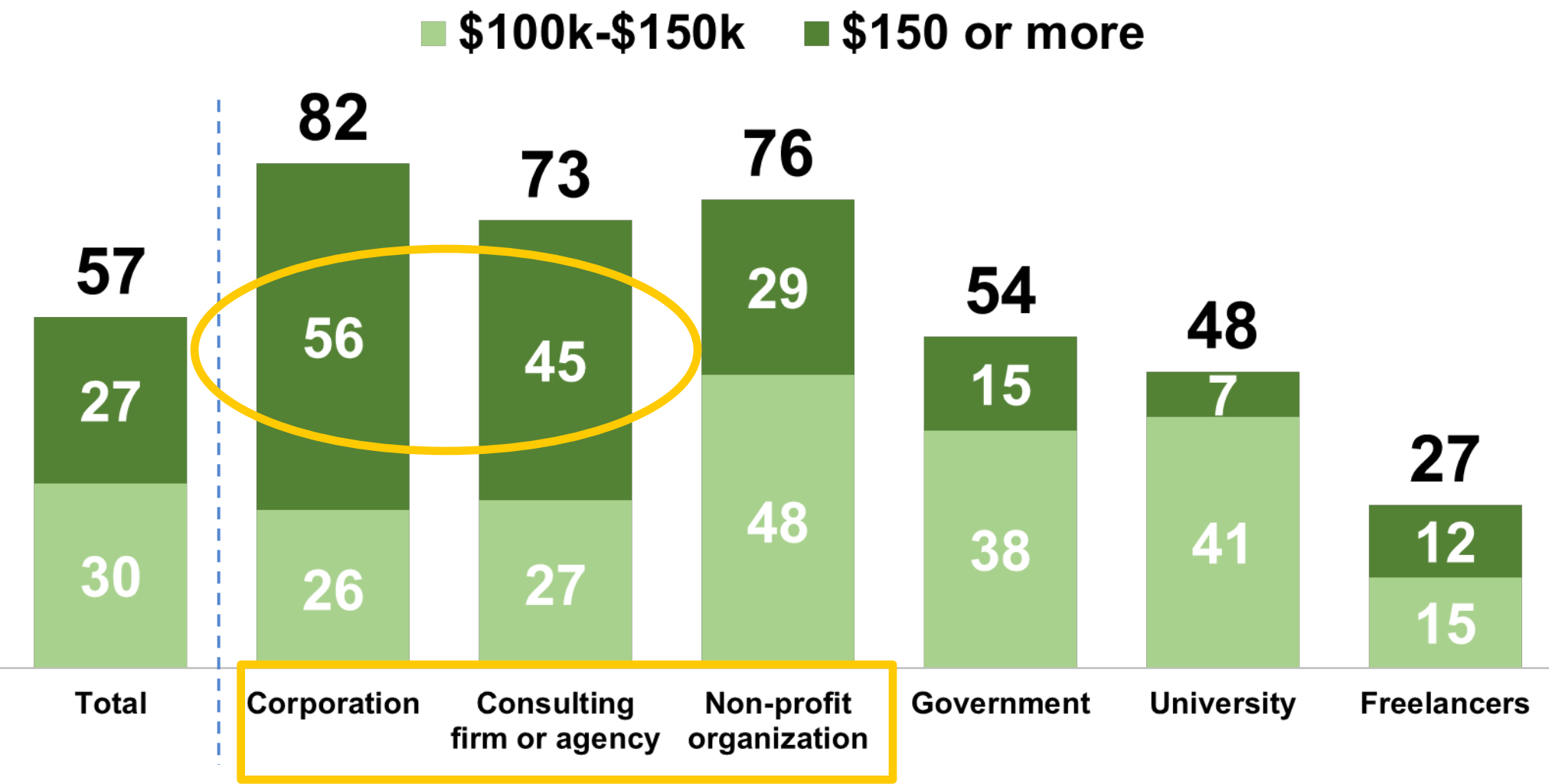
David Murray, Executive Director  
Professional Speechwriters Association

**WHAT THE SURVEY CONFIRMED**

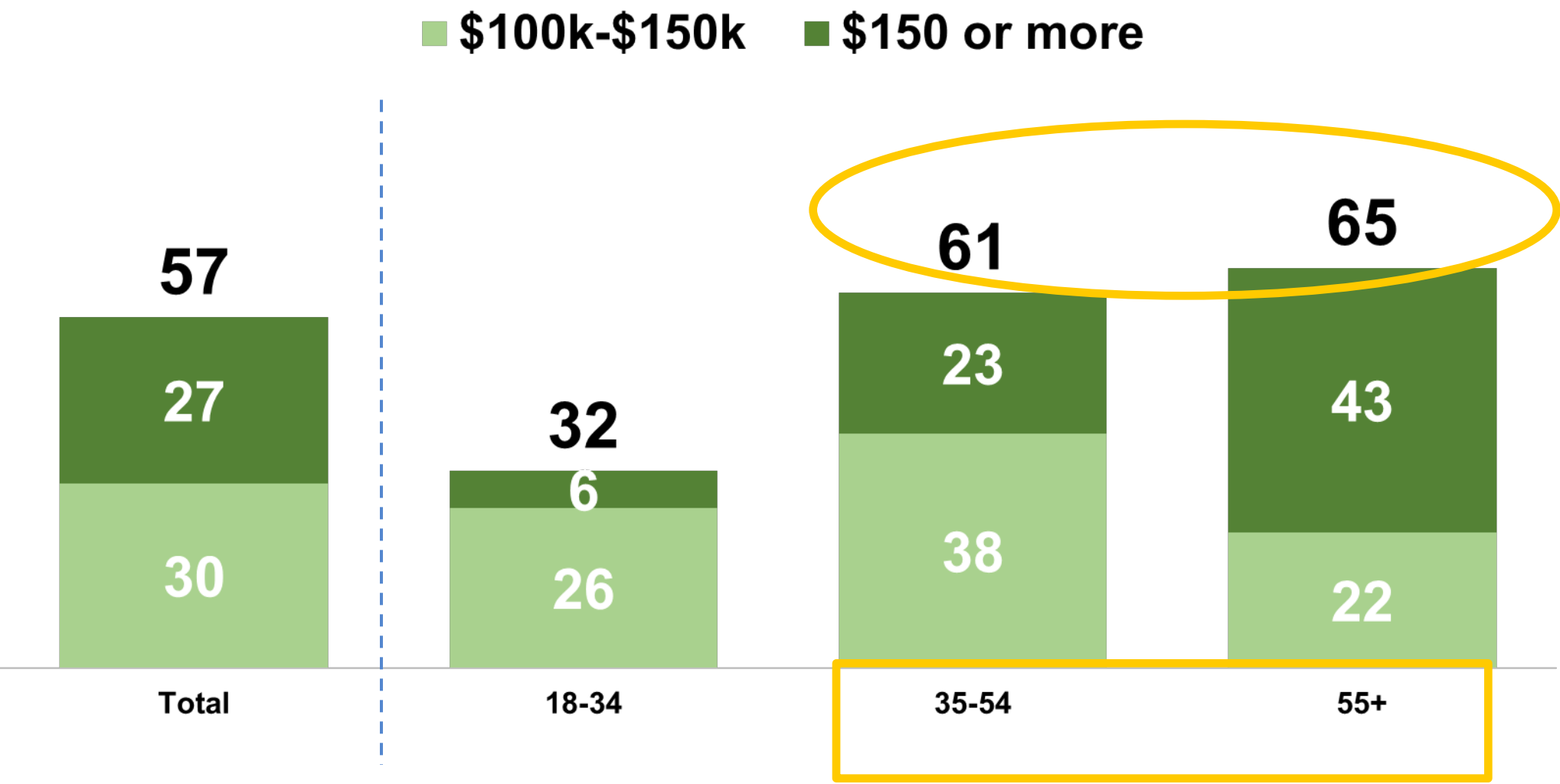
# MOST SPEECHWRITERS EARN MORE THAN \$100K



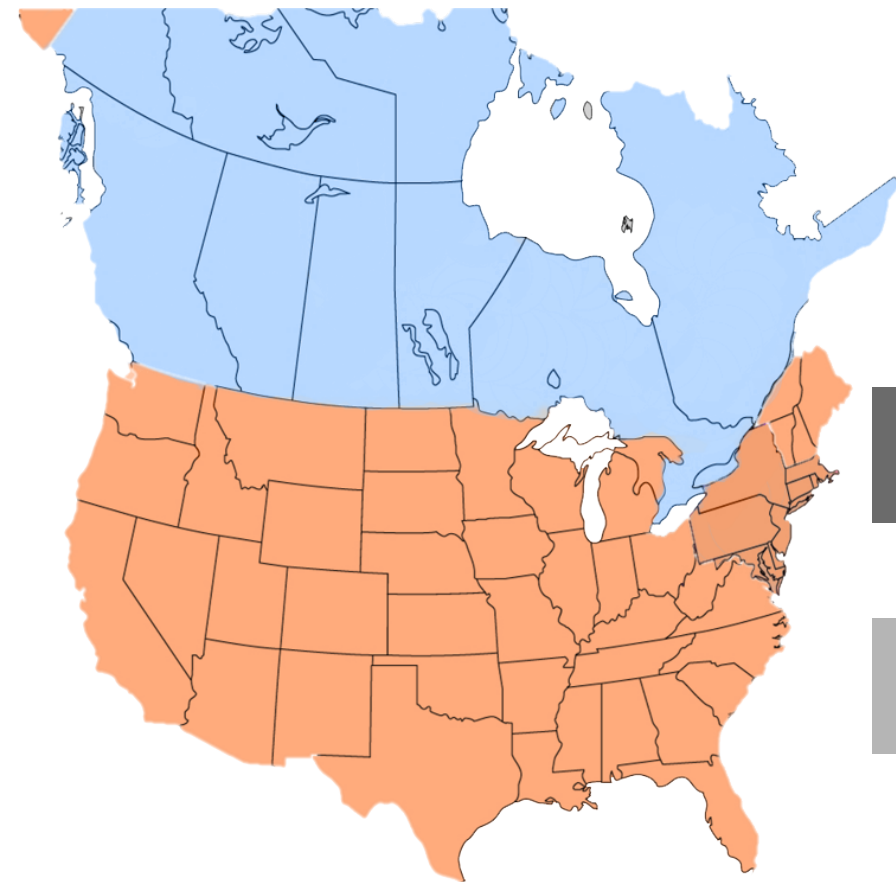
# SPEECHWRITERS AT CORPS OR AGENCIES EARN MORE



# MID-CAREER IS WHEN MOST START MAKING \$100K+

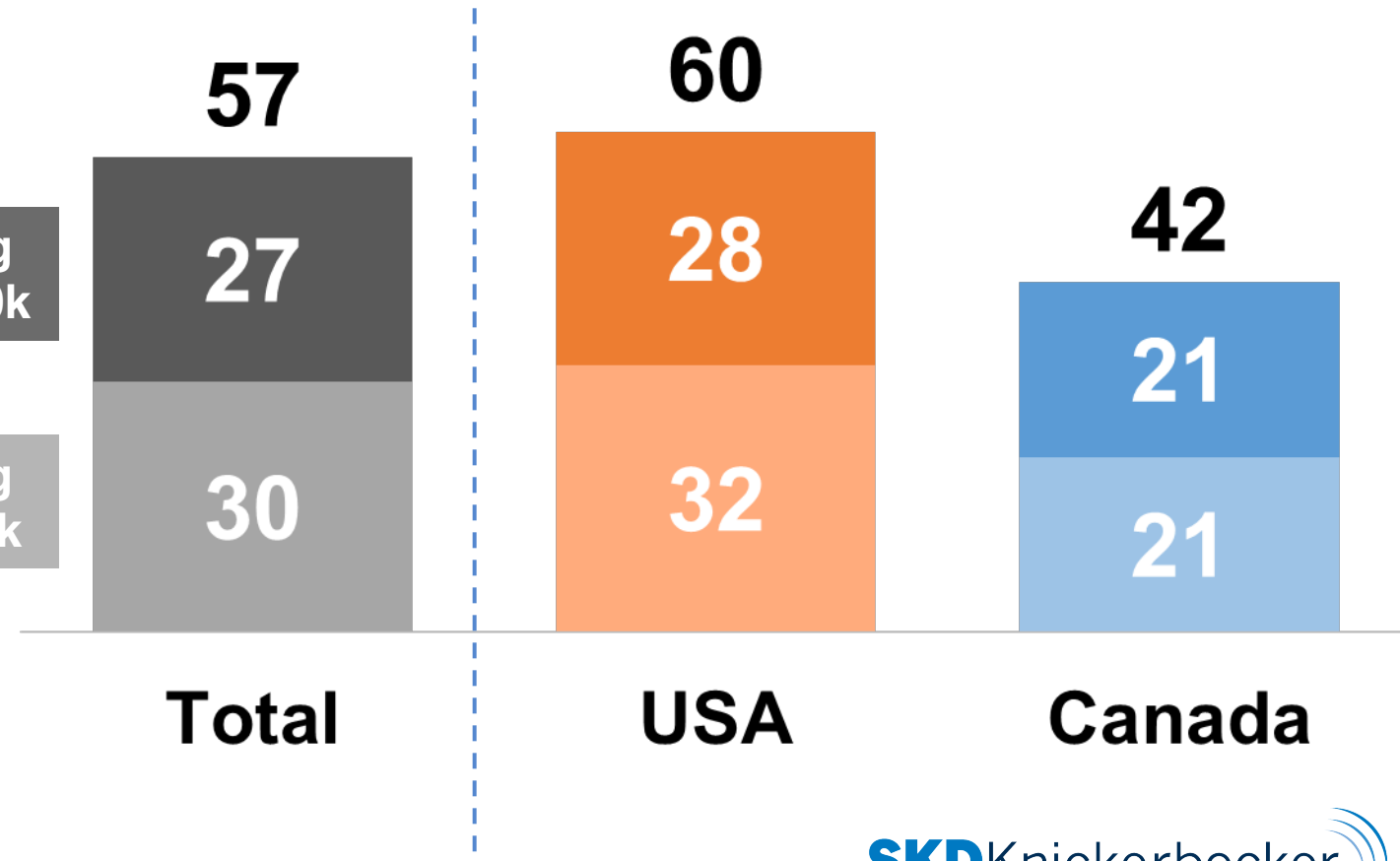


# AMERICANS EARN MORE THAN CANADIANS



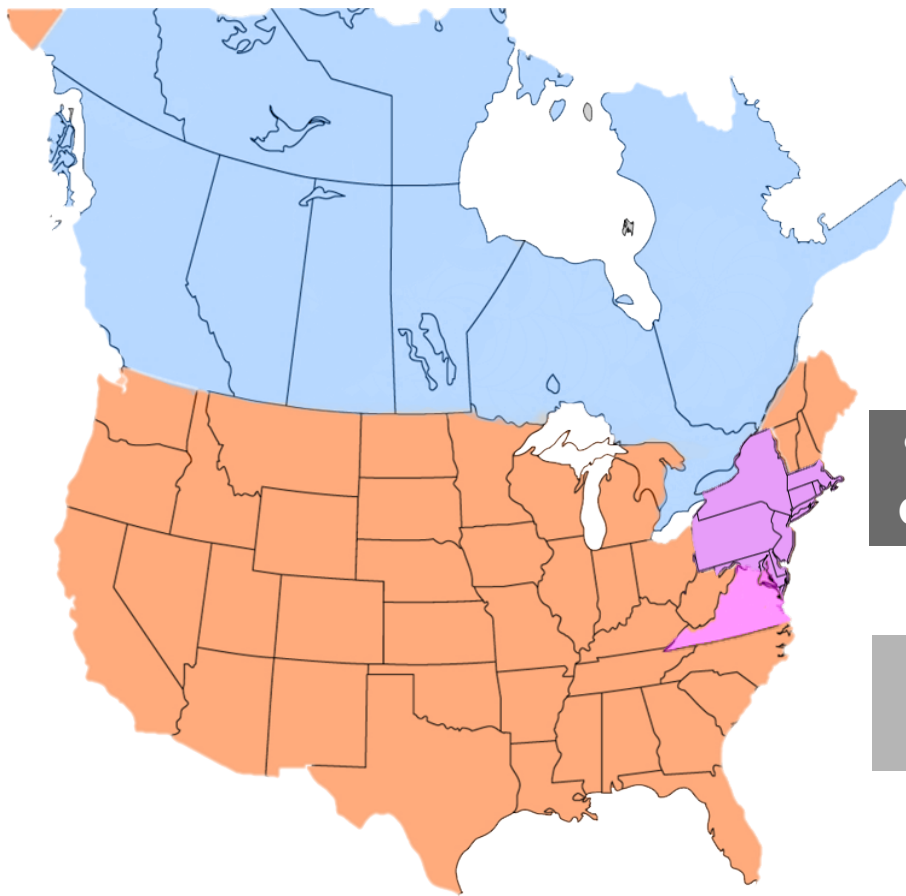
% making  
over \$150k

% making  
\$100-150k



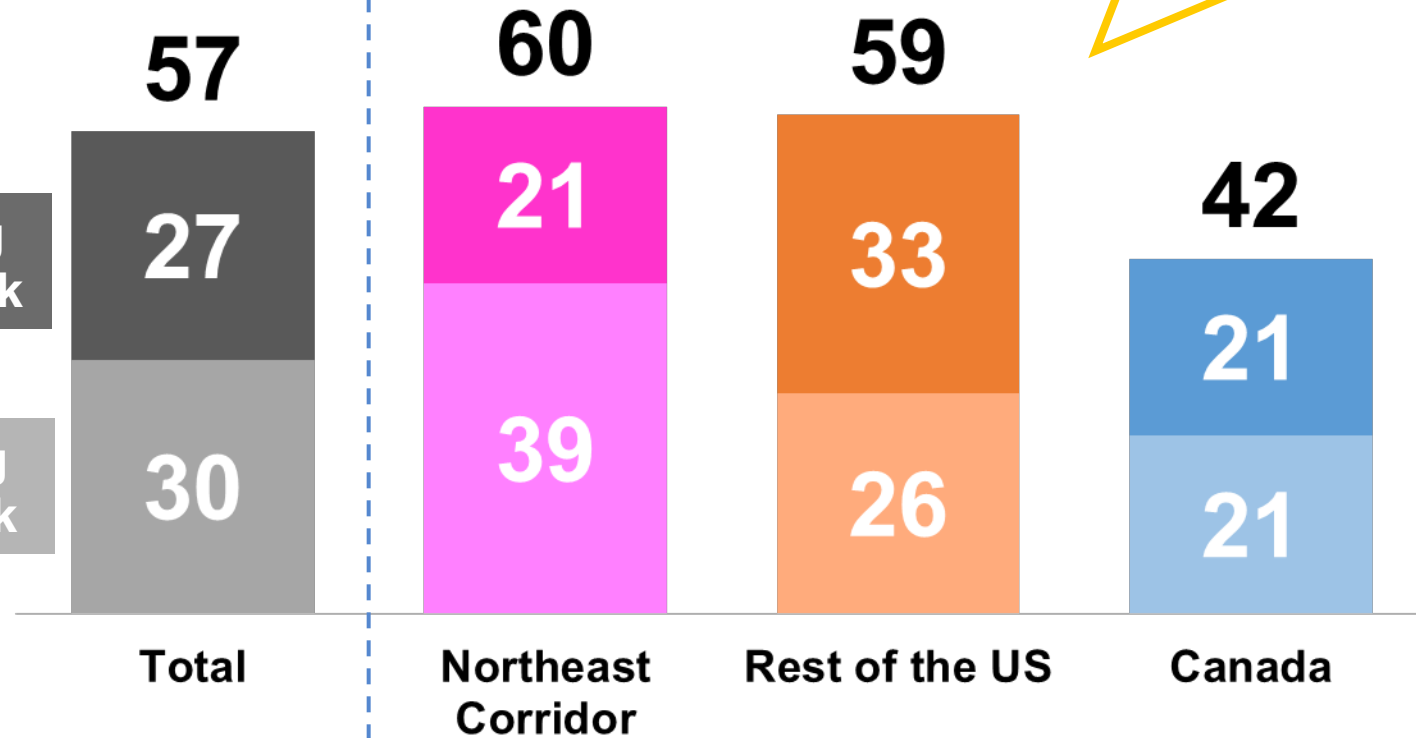


# PAY BREAKDOWN BY REGION



% making  
over \$150k

% making  
\$100-150k



40% of speechwriters outside the Northeast Corridor in the US work in the private sector, compared to 18% inside.



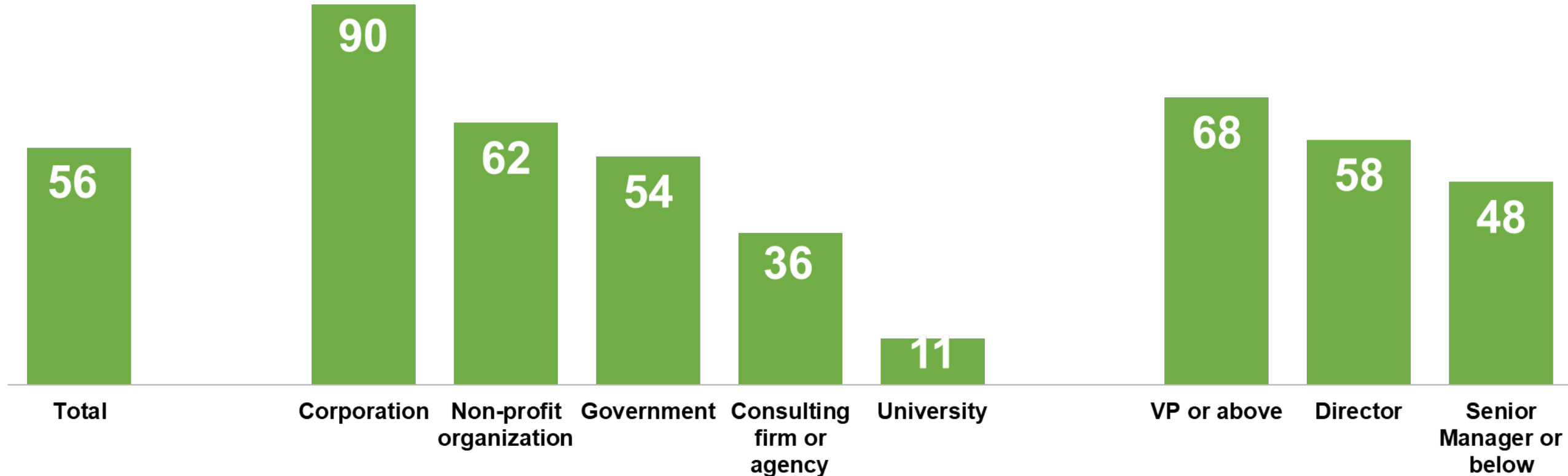
# INCREASED SENIORITY MEANS OTHER TYPES OF WORK

	TOTAL	VP or above	Directors	Snr. Mgnr or below
Speechwriting	96	93	95	97
Executive communications	83	96	97	74
External communications	50	82	45	41
Internal communications	44	68	45	46
PR	22	43	16	15
HR communications	12	36	18	5



# JUST OVER HALF OF SPEECHWRITERS GET BONUSES OR OVERTIME

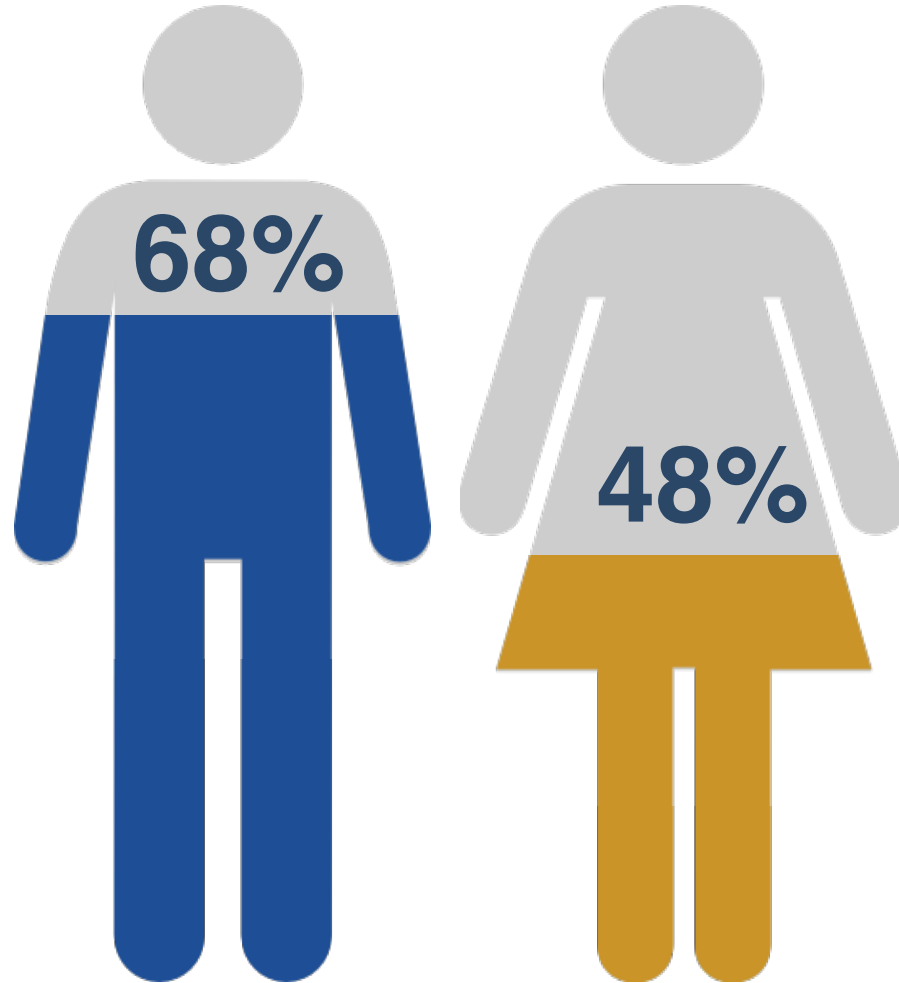
Which speechwriters get performance bonuses or overtime  
(among non-freelancers)



# WHAT THE SURVEY REVEALED

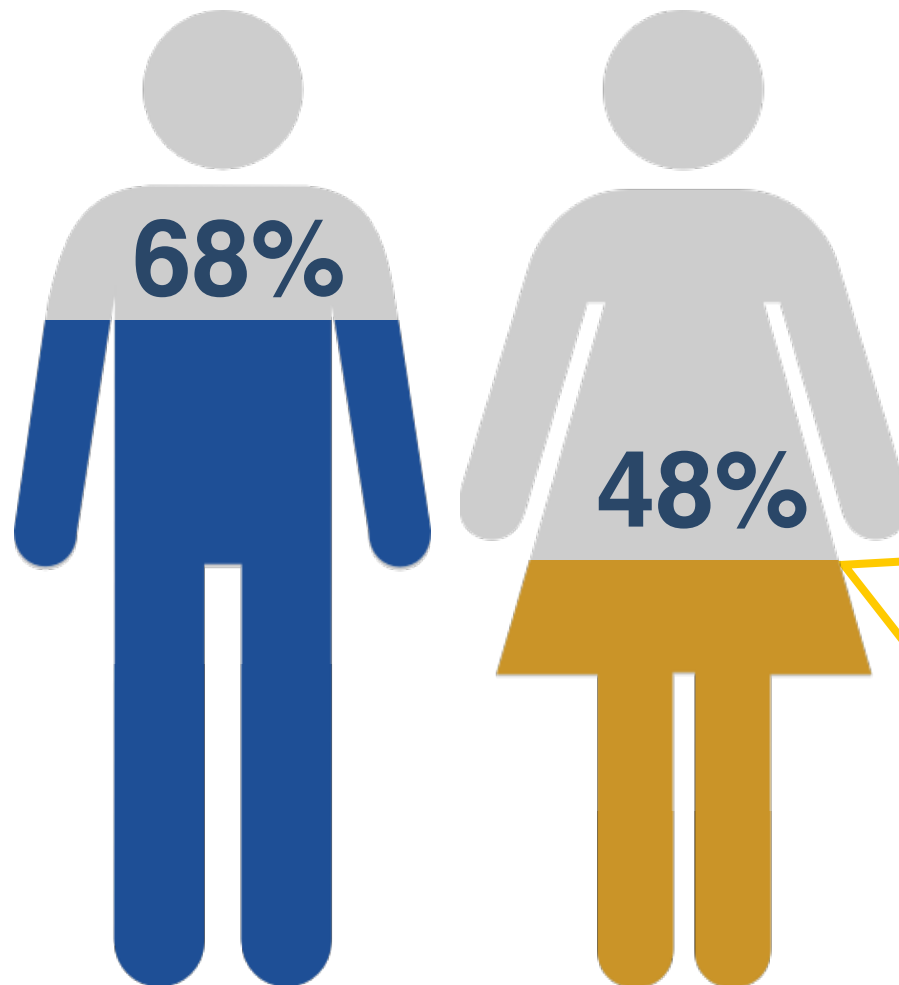
# MORE MEN MAKE OVER \$100k

**\$100k+**



# % OF EACH GENDER MAKING OVER \$100K

**\$100k+**



Part of this gender gap comes from the age gap.

60% of speechwriters under the age of 35 are women. Above the age of 35, women are only 40%.

# FEWER WOMEN ARE “VERY SATISFIED” WITH THEIR PAY

% very or somewhat  
satisfied with pay

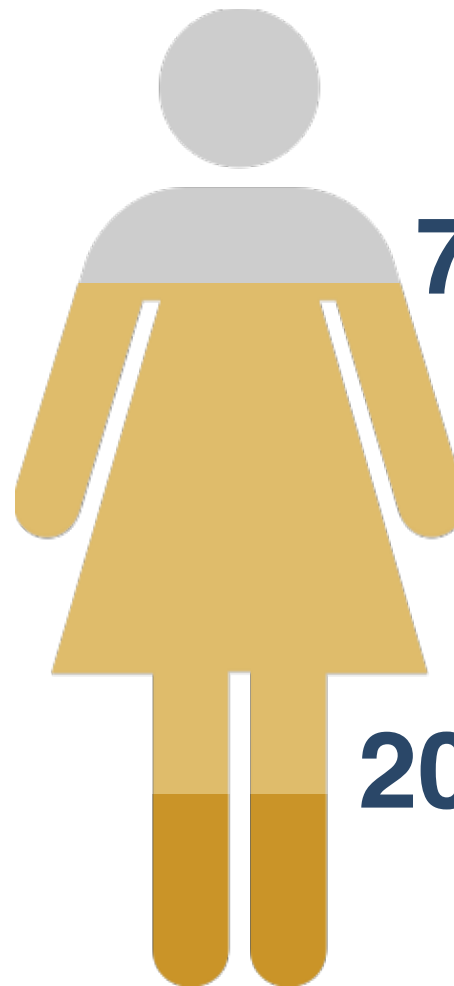
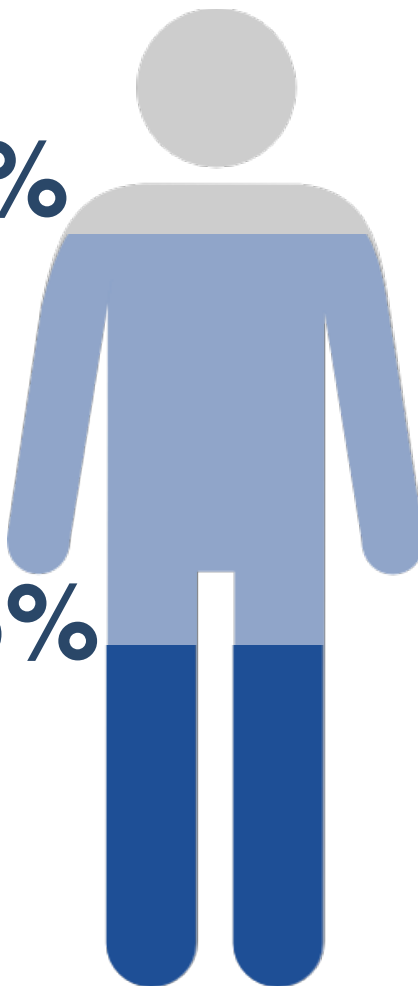
79%

% very satisfied  
with pay

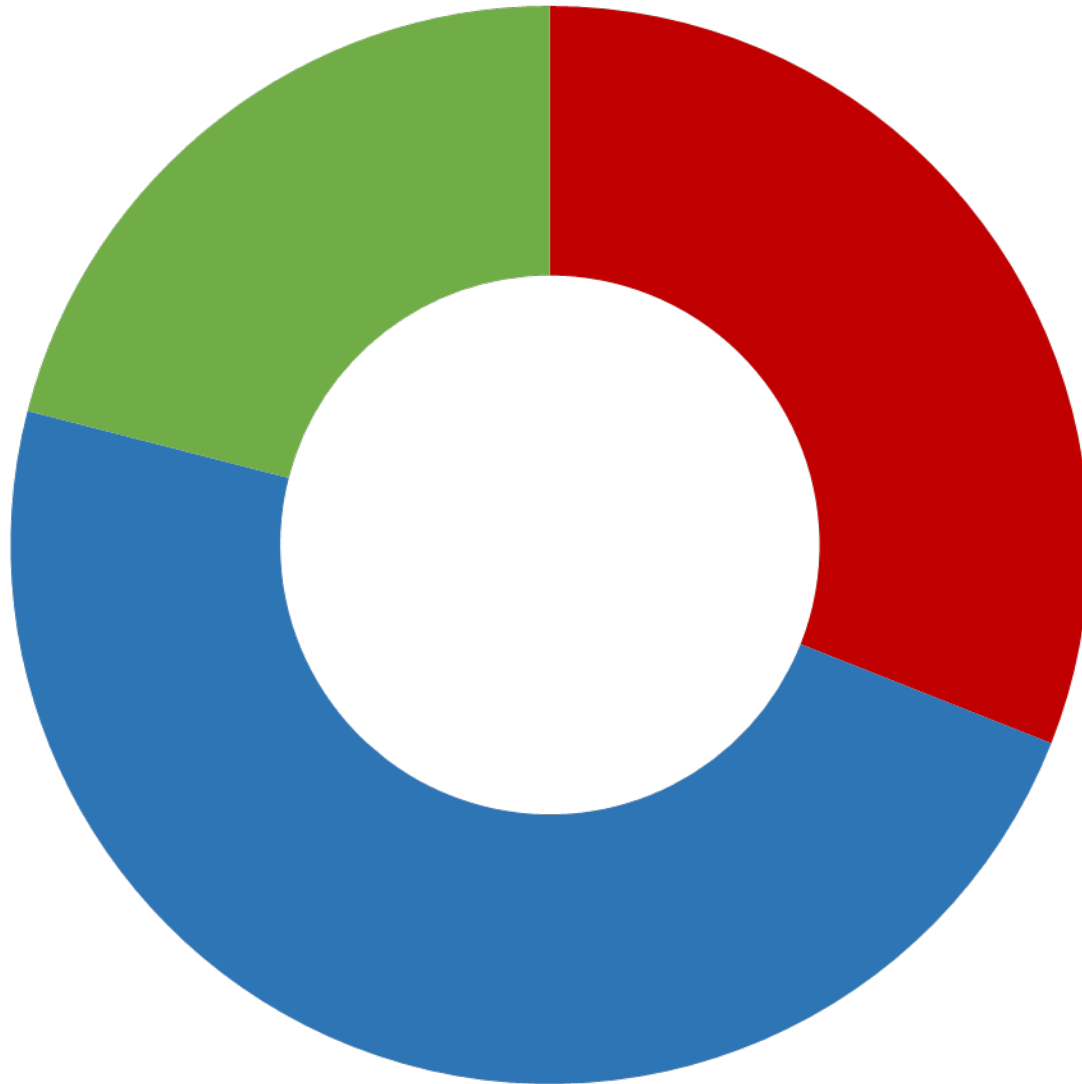
36%

73%

20%



# WHERE SPEECHWRITERS WORK



**48% Public Sector**

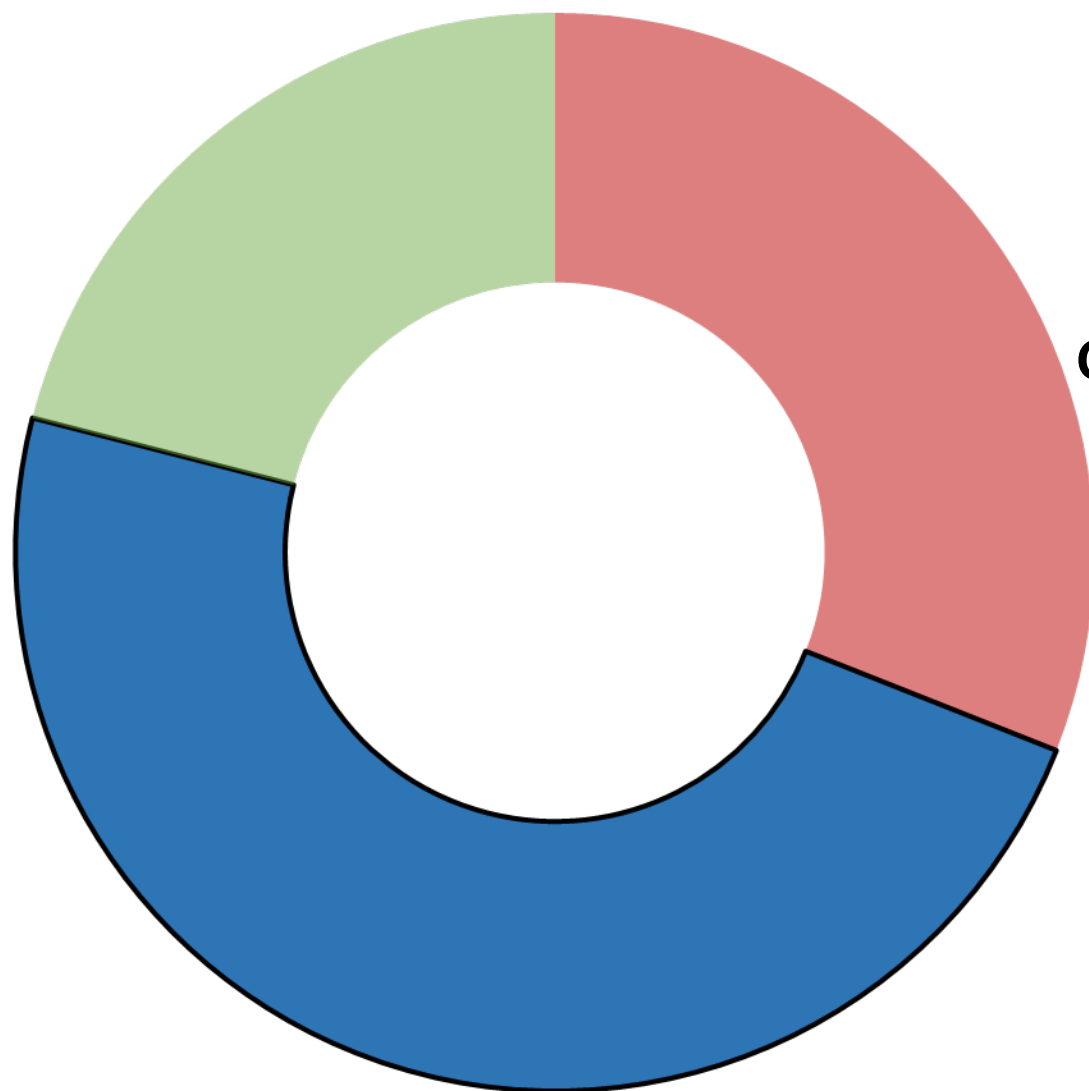
**31% Private Sector**

**21% Freelance**





# BREAKDOWN OF PUBLIC SECTOR

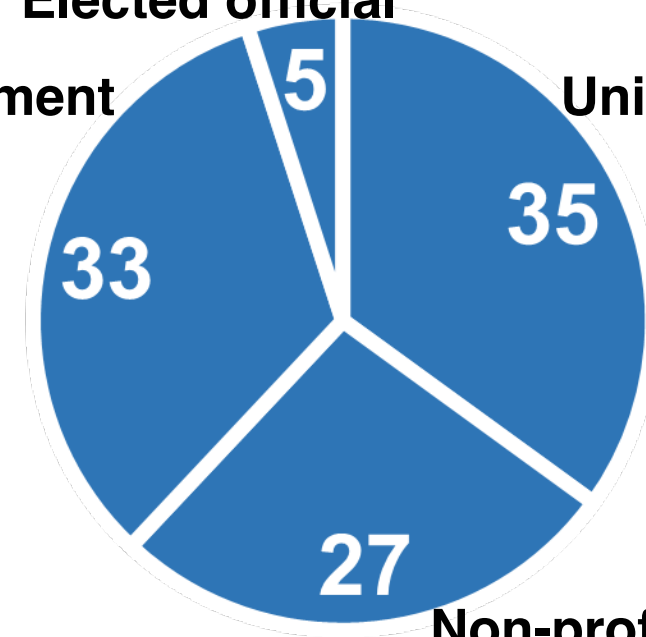


**48% Public Sector**

**Elected official**

**Government**

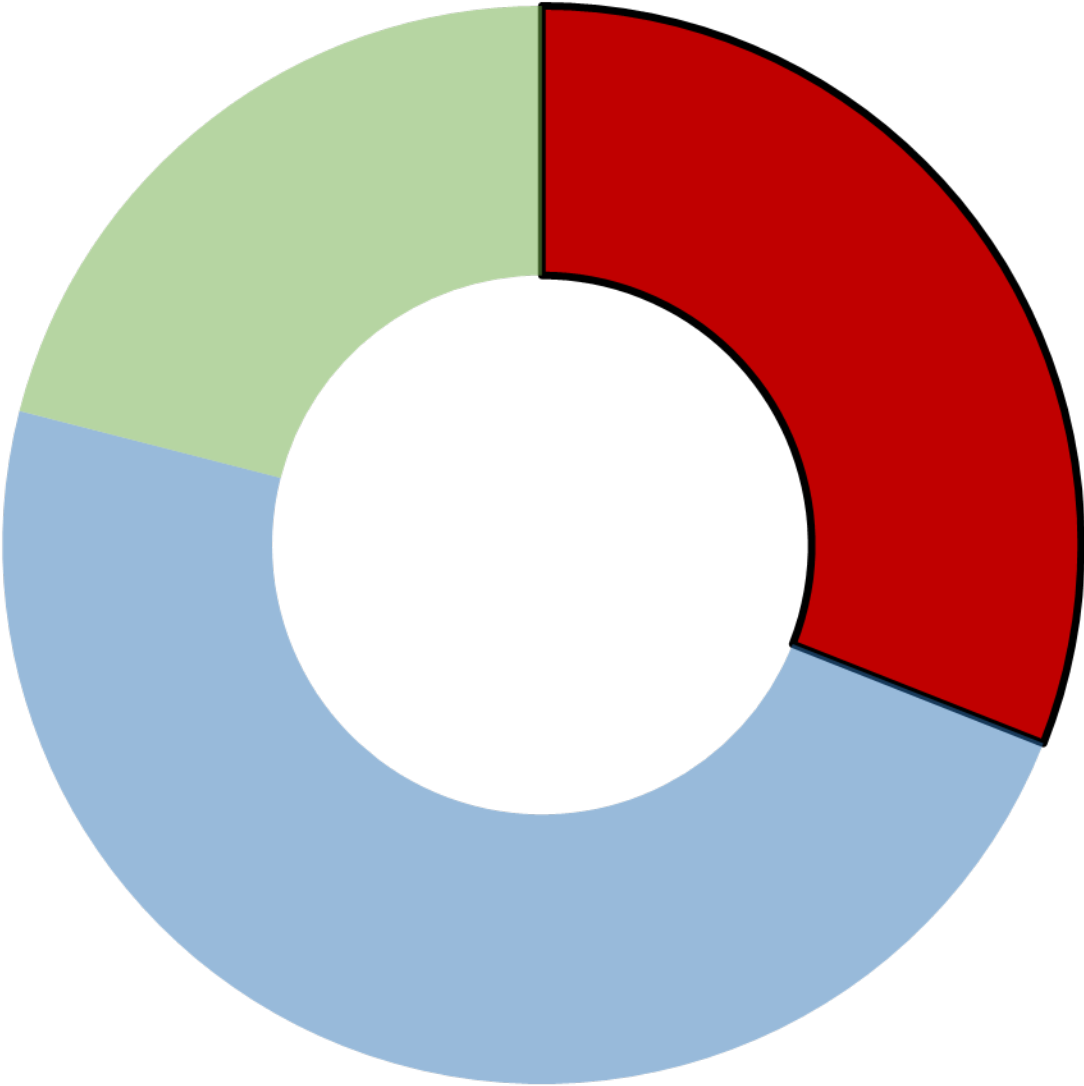
**University**



**Non-profit**

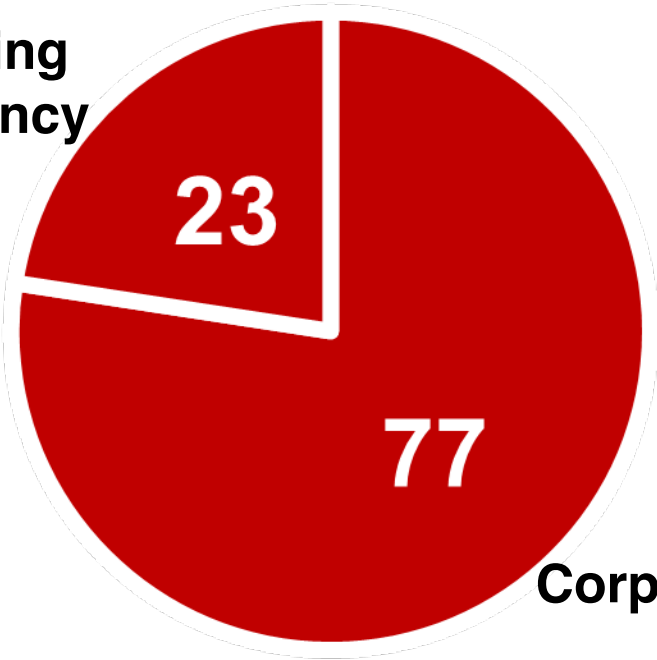


# BREAKDOWN OF PRIVATE SECTOR



31% Private Sector

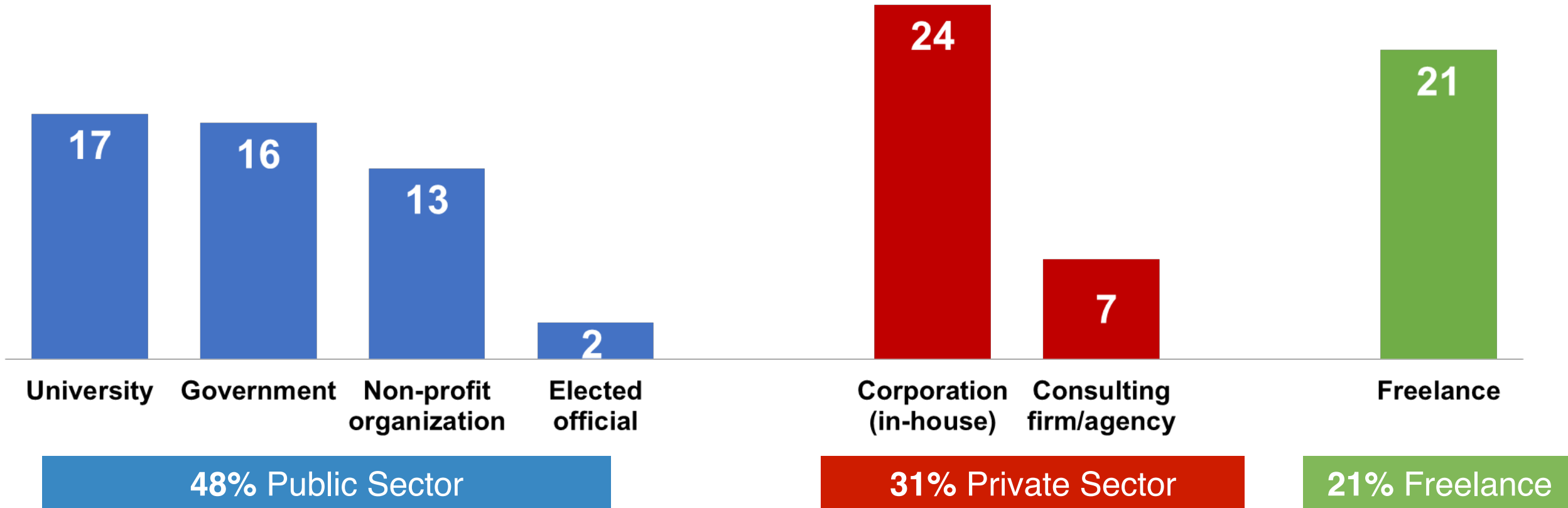
Consulting  
firm/agency



Corporation



# WHERE SPEECHWRITERS WORK



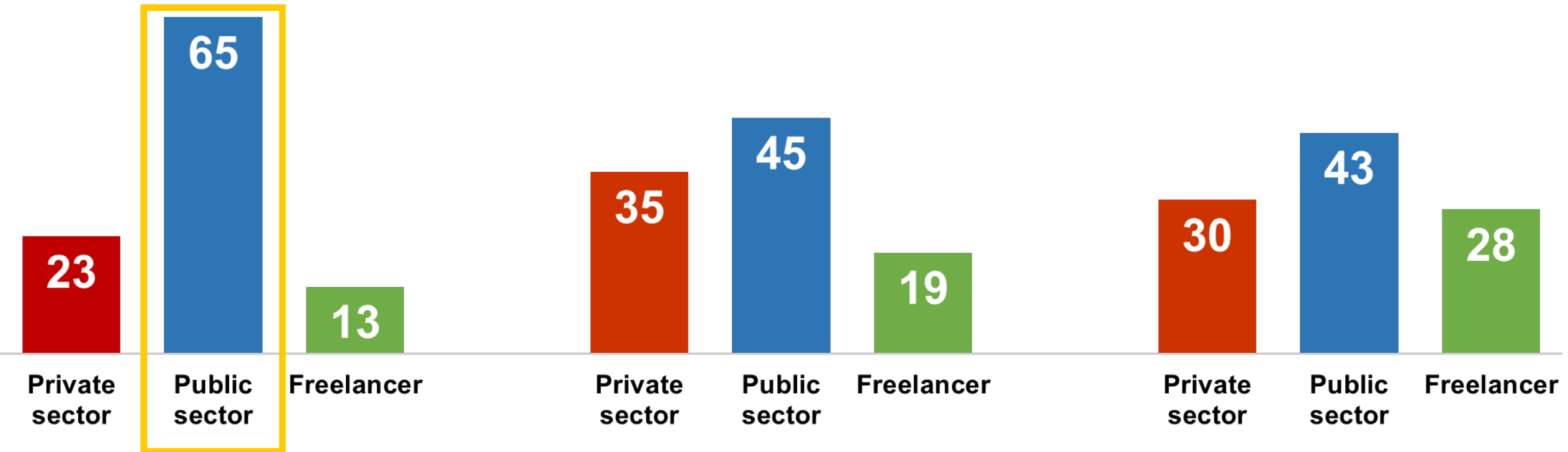
# YOUNG SPEECHWRITERS ARE MOST LIKELY TO WORK IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

## Where speechwriters work by age

### UNDER 35

### 35-54

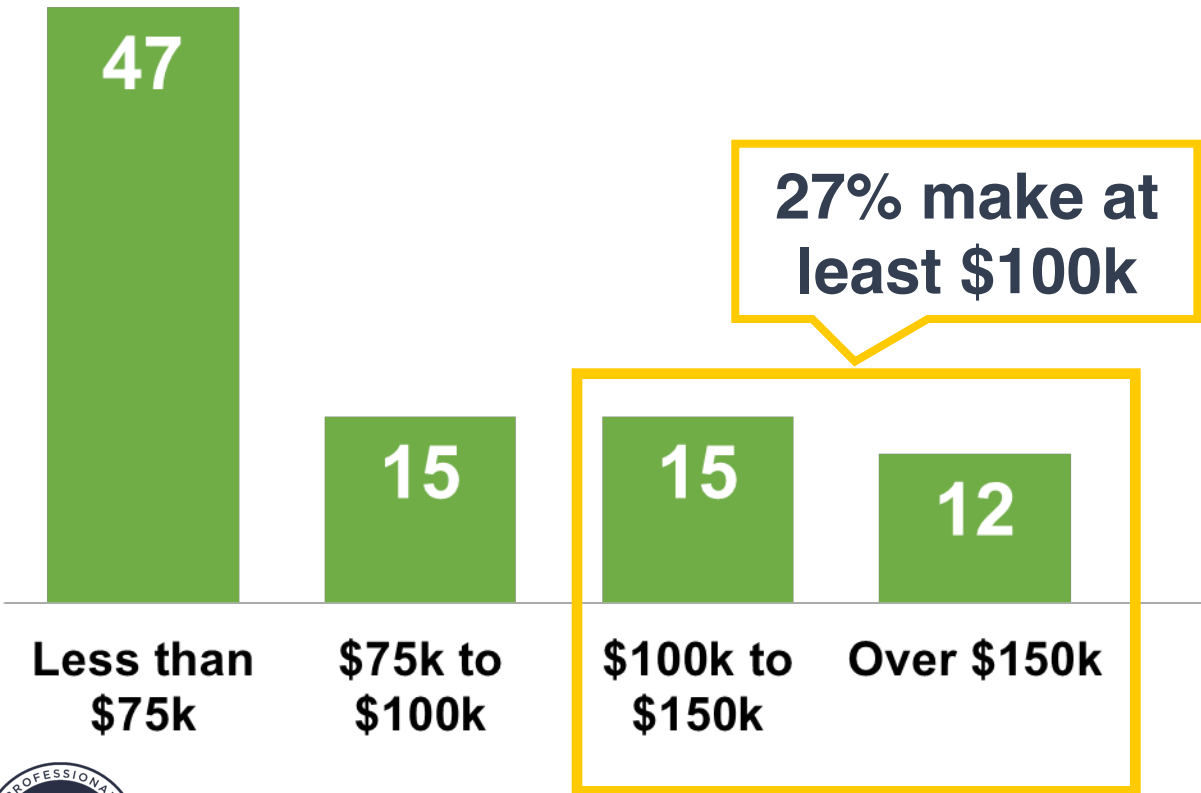
### OVER 55



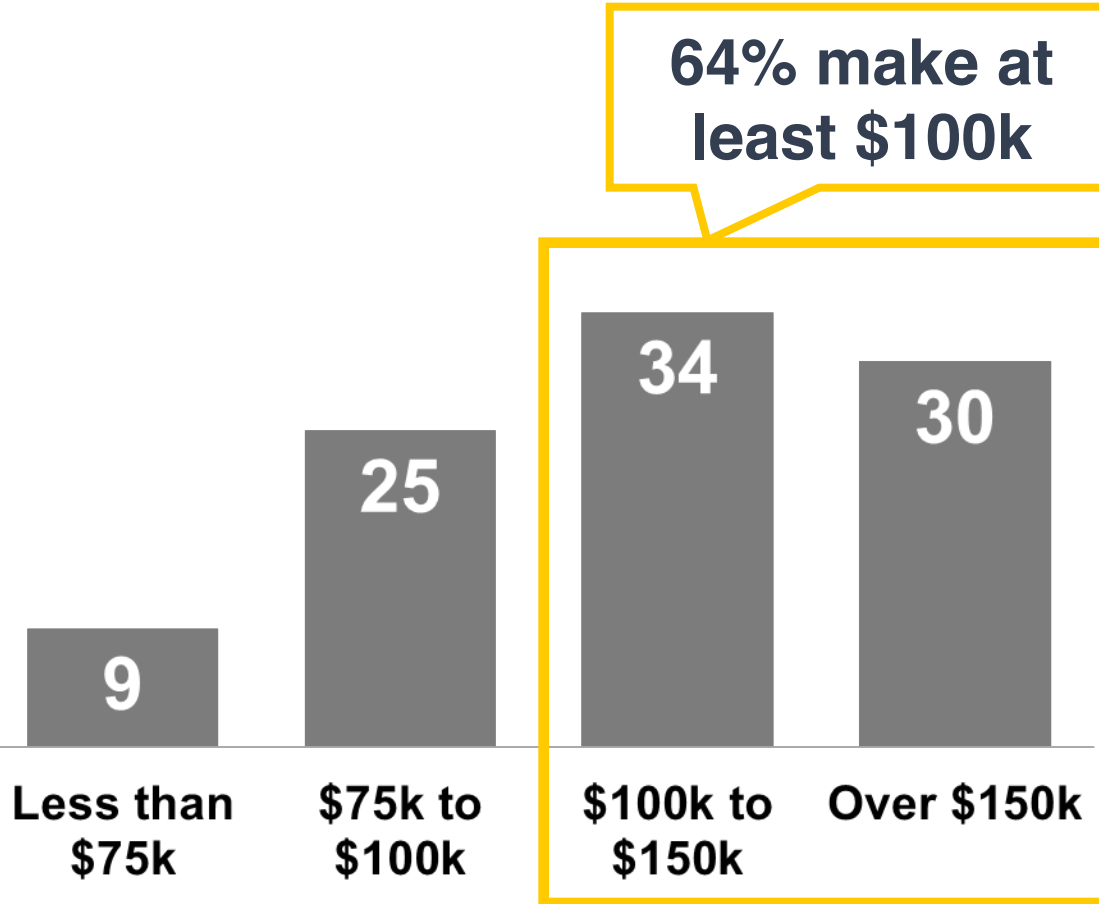
# DEEP DIVE ON FREELANCERS

# FREELANCERS MAKE LESS THAN NON-FREELANCERS

## FREELANCERS

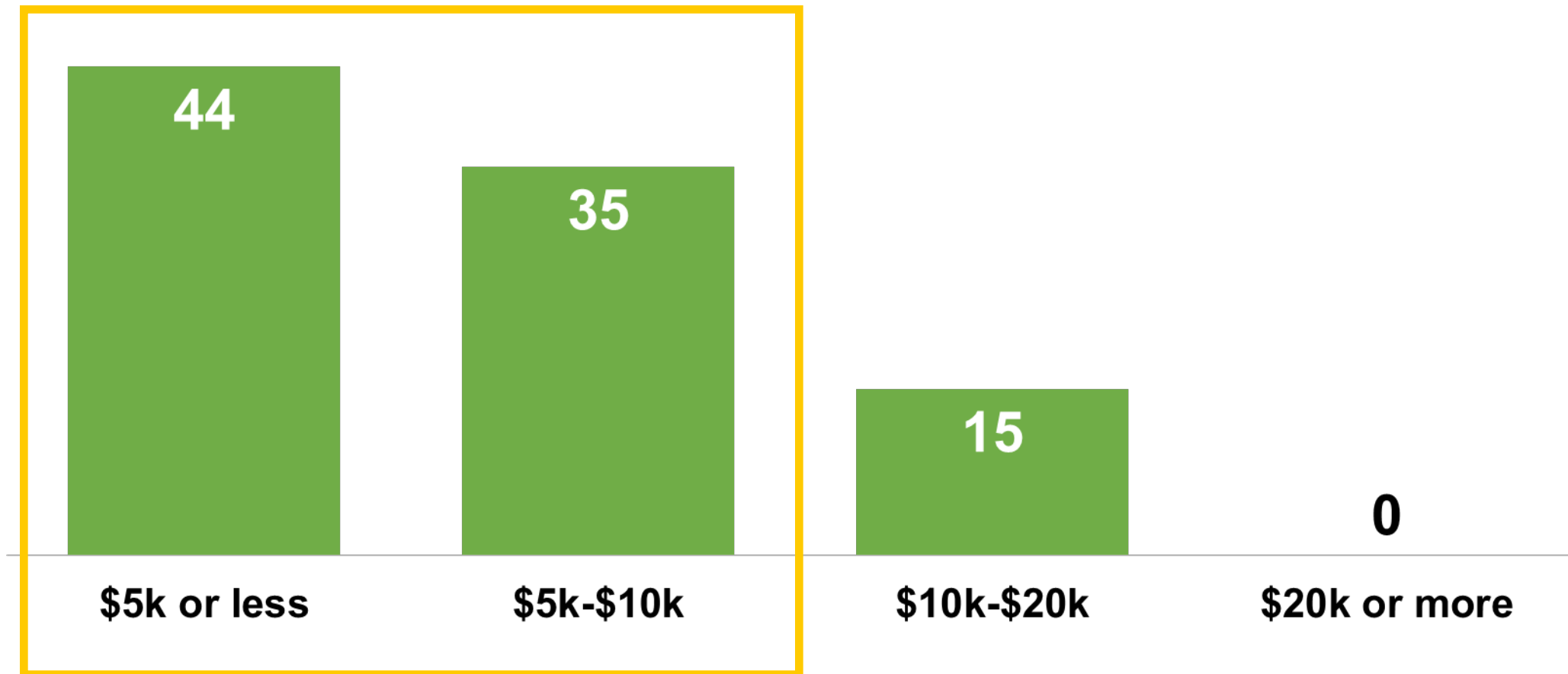


## NON-FREELANCERS



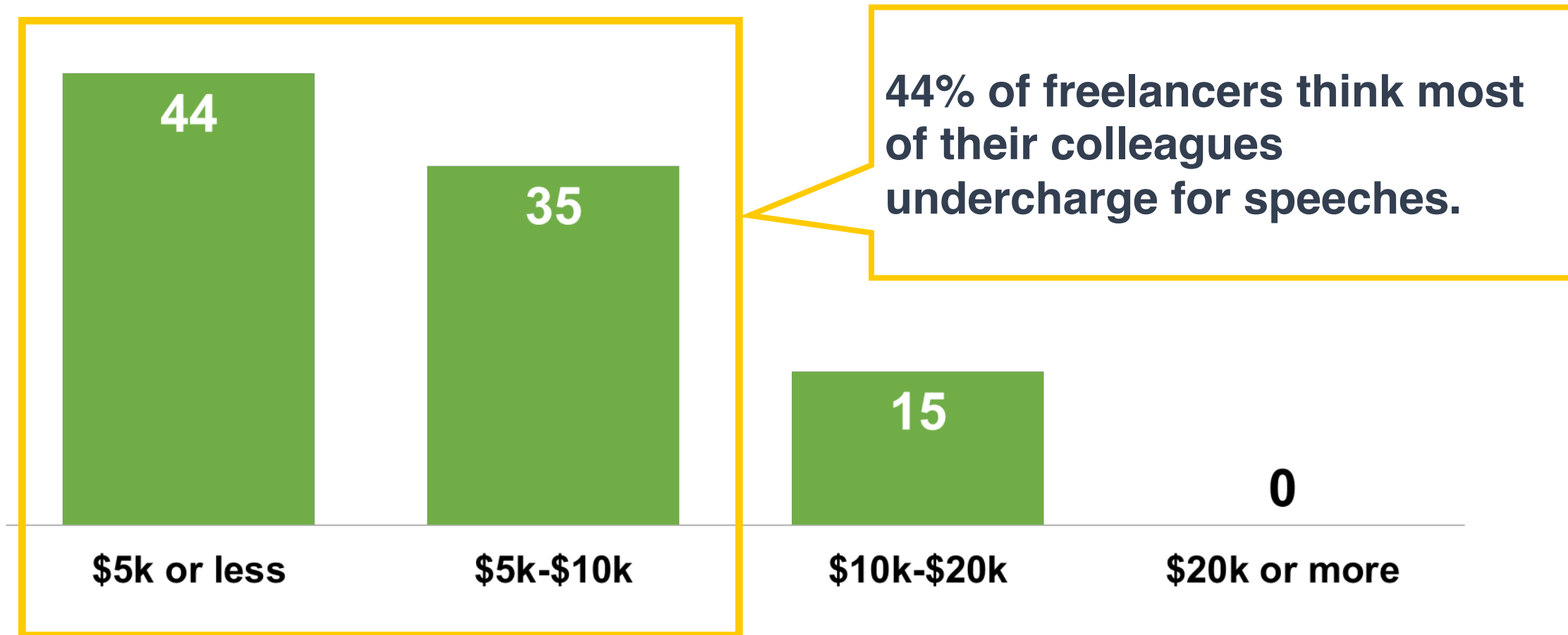
# THE AVERAGE SPEECH COSTS UNDER \$10K

Typical charge for speech



# FREELANCERS THINK COLLEAGUES UNDERCHARGE

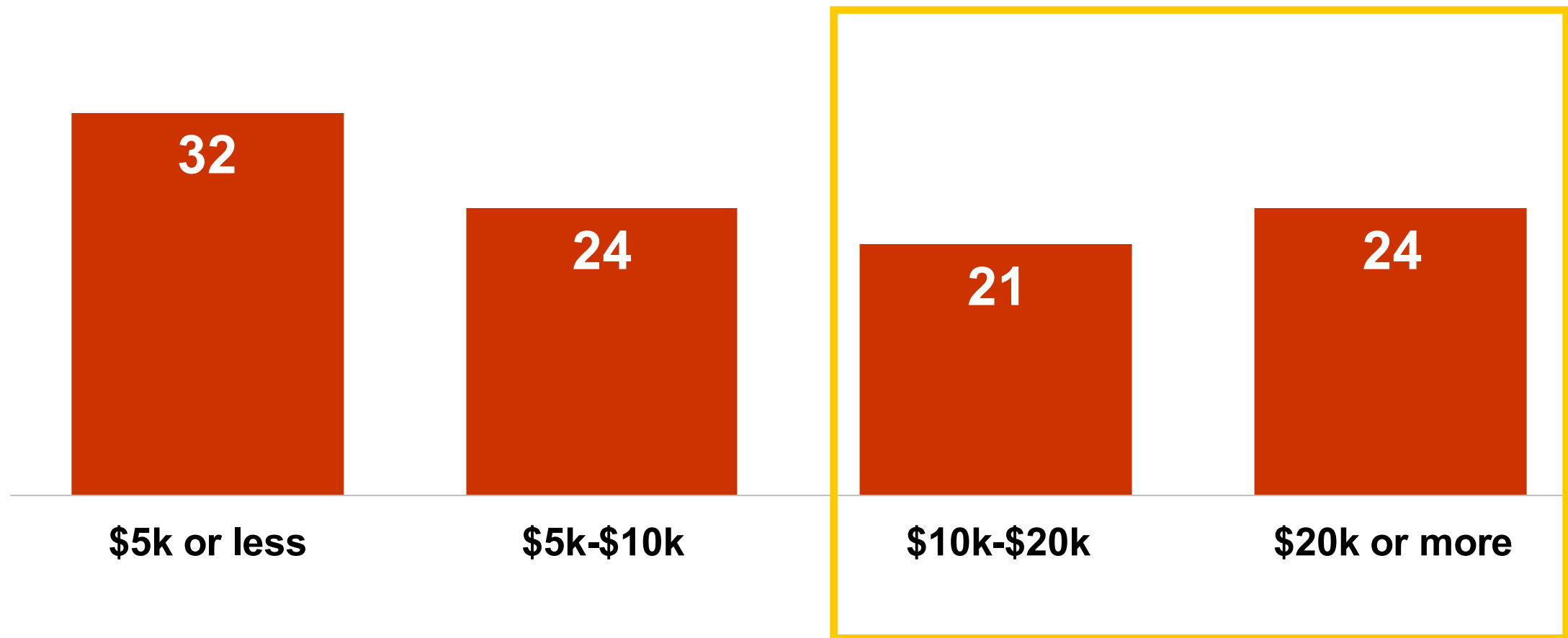
## Typical charge for speech





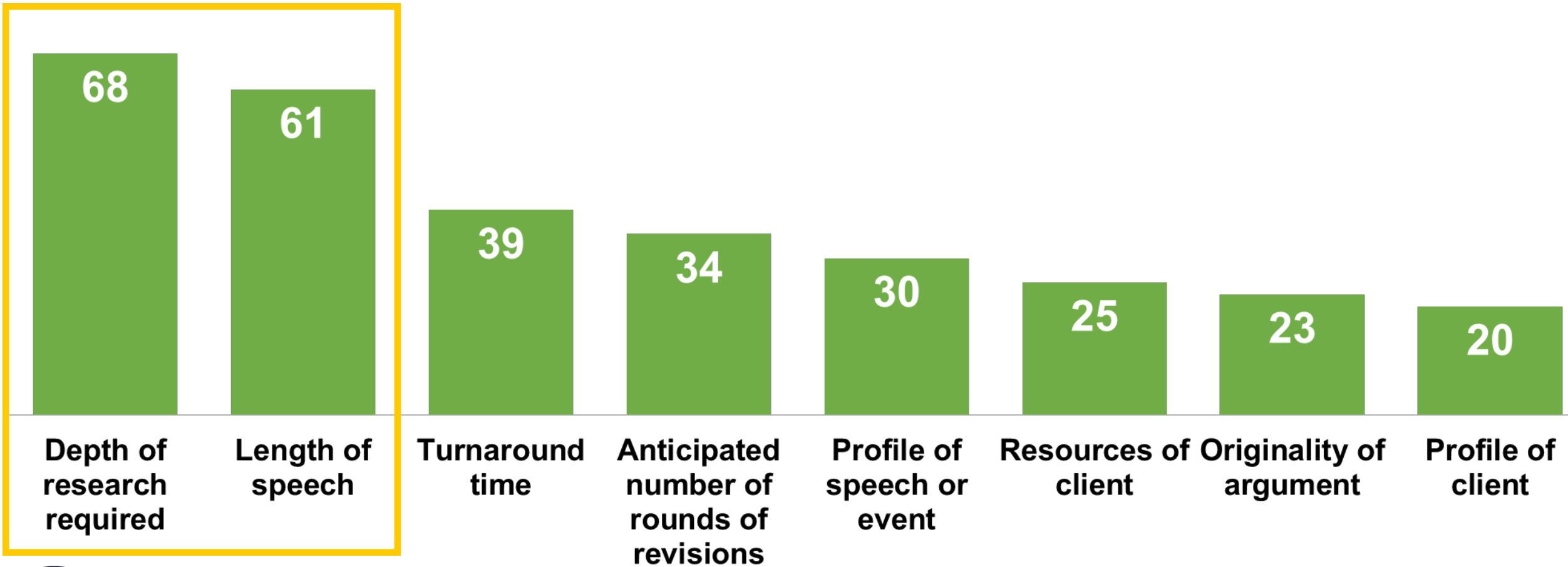
# NEARLY HALF HAVE CHARGED OVER \$10K

## Highest charge for speech

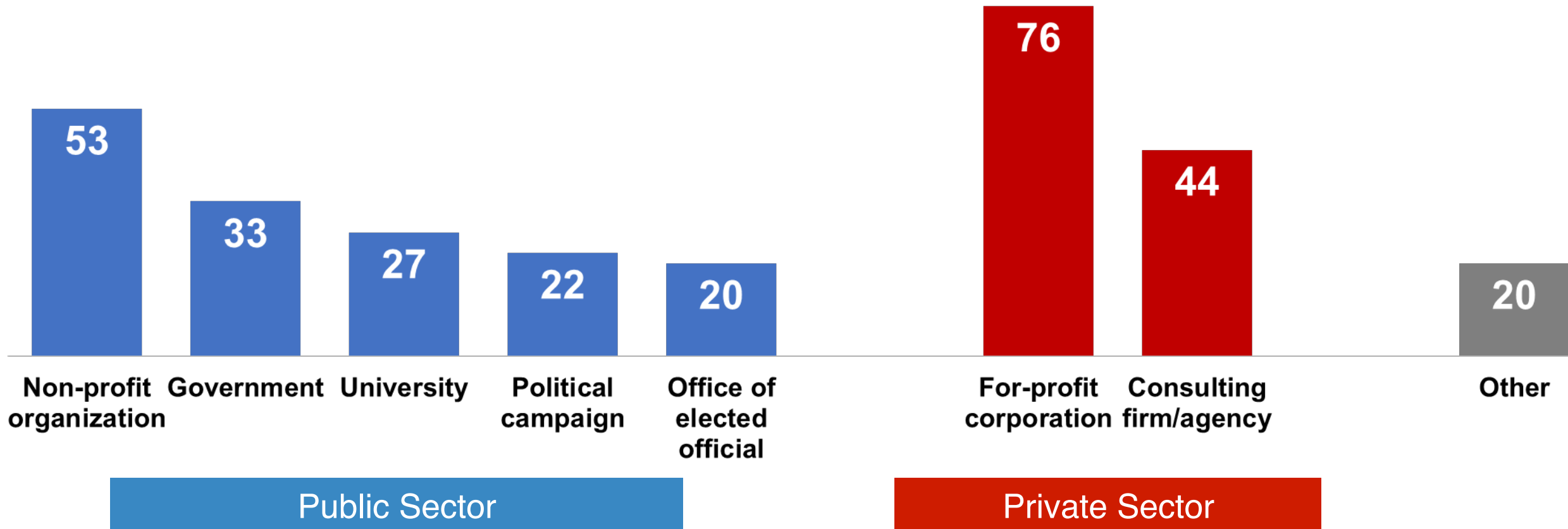


# RESEARCH DEPTH AND LENGTH ARE BIGGEST DETERMINANTS OF RATES FOR FREELANCERS

## Determinants of rates

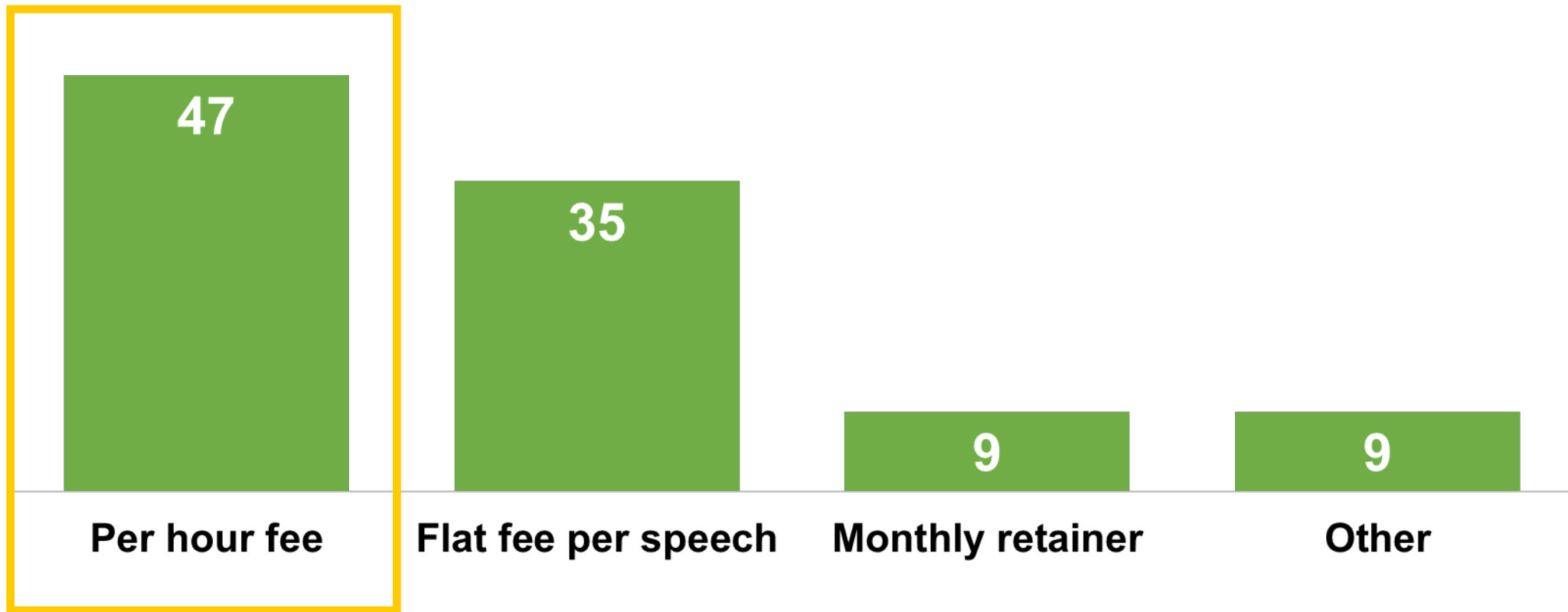


# CLIENTS OF FREELANCERS

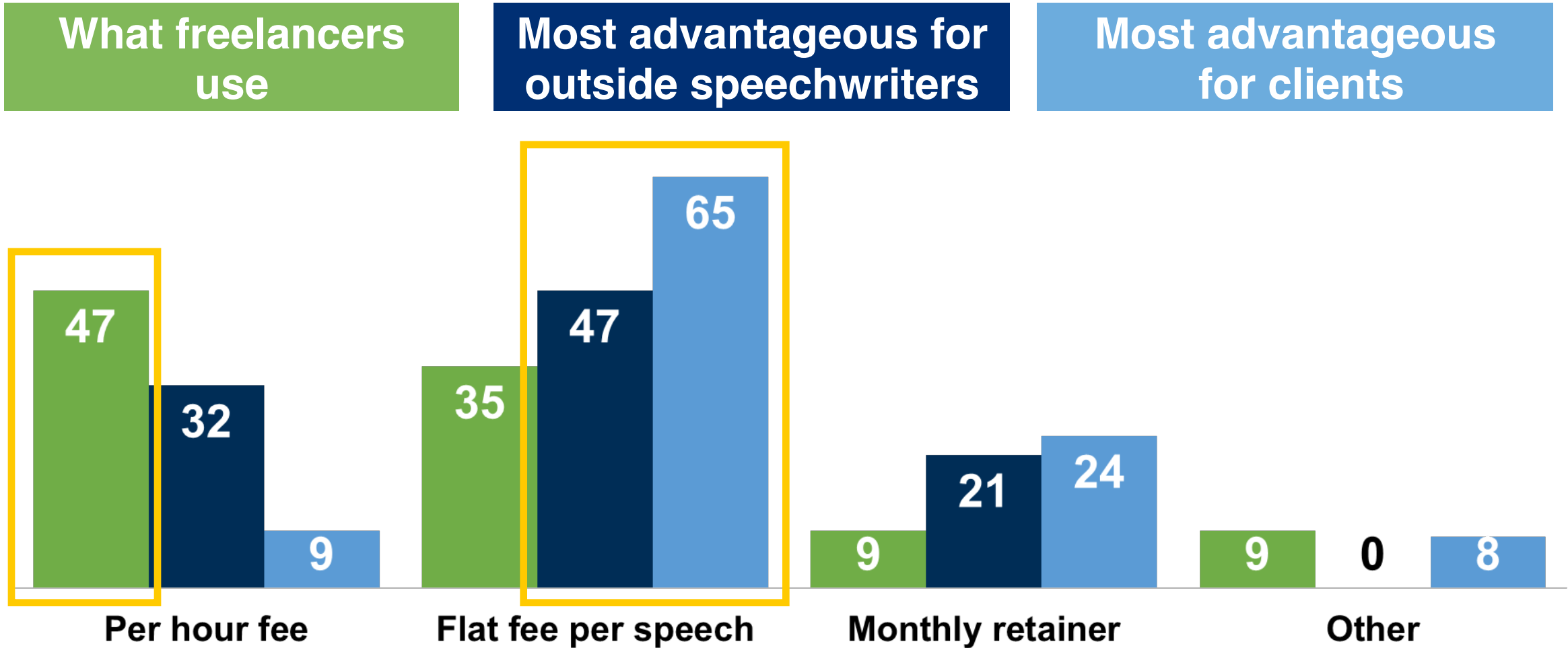


# MOST FREELANCERS CHARGE BY THE HOUR

## What freelancers use



# BUT THINK FLAT FEES ARE MOST ADVANTAGEOUS



**HOW SPEECHWRITERS FEEL**

# BEST PART OF SPEECHWRITING

## Room for **creativity**

“ Room for **creativity** and the opportunity to learn from a **broad range of interesting people**.

“ To write, to be **creative** and to **help our executives convey the values of our organization**.

## Working with **leaders**

“ Nudging the principal to **embrace his/her rhetorical influence, and then collaborating to find the signature voice**.

“ Creating the words and **coaching the leader to move hearts and minds for our time**.

## **Influencing** the public

“ I love taking simple words to explain complex arguments **so they are accessible to the greatest number of people**.

“ Being able to shape messaging and **help people understand complex ideas**.

# BIGGEST FRUSTRATION WITH SPEECHWRITING

- “ **Too little prep time** with principal to discuss thrust, mission of speeches, due to principal's busy schedule.
- “ **Getting the leader to focus** on the speaking occasion message. No time for real feedback.
- “ **Leaders going rogue** or not buying into the process.
- “ **Not having information** about initiatives until too late.



# CONCLUSION

Thanks for reading “The Numbers Behind the Words.” Now: How will you use it?

While its insights might be interesting, the true test of the value of this study is its *usefulness*.

Does it help a freelancer decide what to charge for a speech? Does it help convince a boss that a speechwriter deserves a raise? Does it help an employer set a competitive salary for a speechwriting position?

Time will tell—and your experience. We hope you will tell us how this study works, and how it might be made to work better.

This is only the first quantitative study of speechwriters’ compensation and job satisfaction, and while we expect it to have lasting value, we also expect to expand it and further refine its data for maximum usefulness.

Please email suggestions or feedback on this study to me directly, at [psaexecdirector@vsotd.com](mailto:psaexecdirector@vsotd.com). I will acknowledge your email and compile every suggestion I receive into a file for future mini-surveys and for an eventual second edition of this study.

Speechwriter: If you want to know it, we want to know it—and we’ll figure out a way to find it out.

Sincerely,

David Murray, Executive Director  
Professional Speechwriters Association