



Mercer Rowing Survey 2016

Participant Report
February 2017

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1. Executive Summary

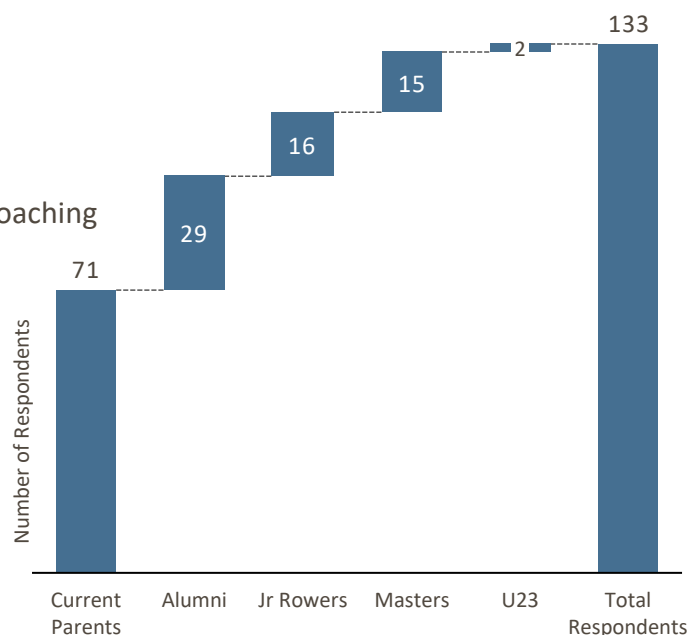
Executive Summary

- ▶ Strong response rates from Parents, Rowers and Masters provides a strong foundation for assessing results

- ▶ Respondents acknowledge Mercer:

- Delivers considerable value,
- Creates a high-impact program with strong coaching
- Engenders a love of the sport,
- Builds character in its participants
- Creates a strong culture

- ▶ Creating value for participants and stakeholders trumps winning as a priority, but winning is still valued by many



- ▶ Most feel they receive high value for the fee and say they would consider paying more for coaching, equipment and training, however, there is little interest in a fundraising requirement...but potential willingness to fundraise for better facilities, equipment and coaching

- ▶ Many acknowledge that things are improving, but a significant amount of feedback is blunt and critical

- ▶ Emails and 1:1 communication are the most-used forms of communication... ..but there are opportunities to improve emails and the website

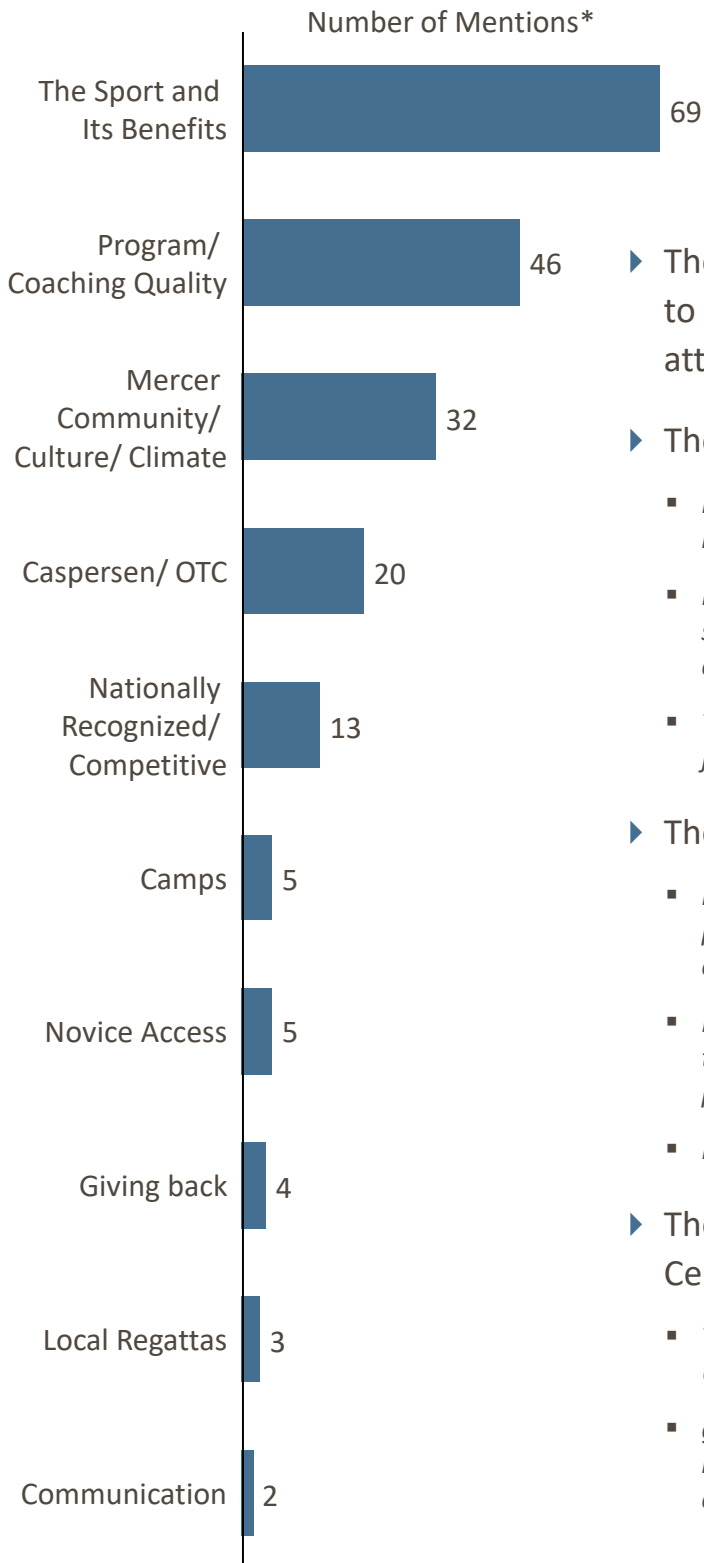
- ▶ Issues and opportunities focus on:

- Communication with participants, within the club and among external stakeholders
- Addressing sometimes conflicting feelings about divisiveness, prioritizing winning over inclusion, and advocacy within the culture
- Governance, transparency and leadership that fosters a better sense of involvement



2. Positives/Aspirations/Foundation

What do you love about Mercer? Access to the sport and its benefits are the predominant drivers, the program and environment are drivers as well



- ▶ The majority value Mercer for providing access to the sport itself, with all its positive attributes. The differential attributes are:
 - ▶ The program itself, and its coaches
 - *How much the coaches care about the rower first as an individual, and then how they can contribute as a whole.*
 - *I like the way the instructors made every effort to make sure we were using proper rowing techniques. It was obvious they were not just going through the motions.*
 - *That the coaches are very determined and doing a great job of training our kids.*
 - ▶ The Mercer culture and climate
 - *I love the community among both the rowers and parents. Being a competitive club, yet not win at any expense.*
 - *I love the people at mercer. That's what drew me into the sport and that's why I look forward to being at practice everyday.*
 - *I love the sense of community*
 - ▶ The opportunity to row out of the Caspersen Center/Olympic Training Site
 - *The opportunity to train out of the same facility as the US National Team.*
 - *great to have national team around as mentors/role models great coaching--when we have ...national competitiveness national regattas*



What Do We Do Well? Coaching, Operational Effectiveness and Culture Stand Out

▶ Coaches and coaching

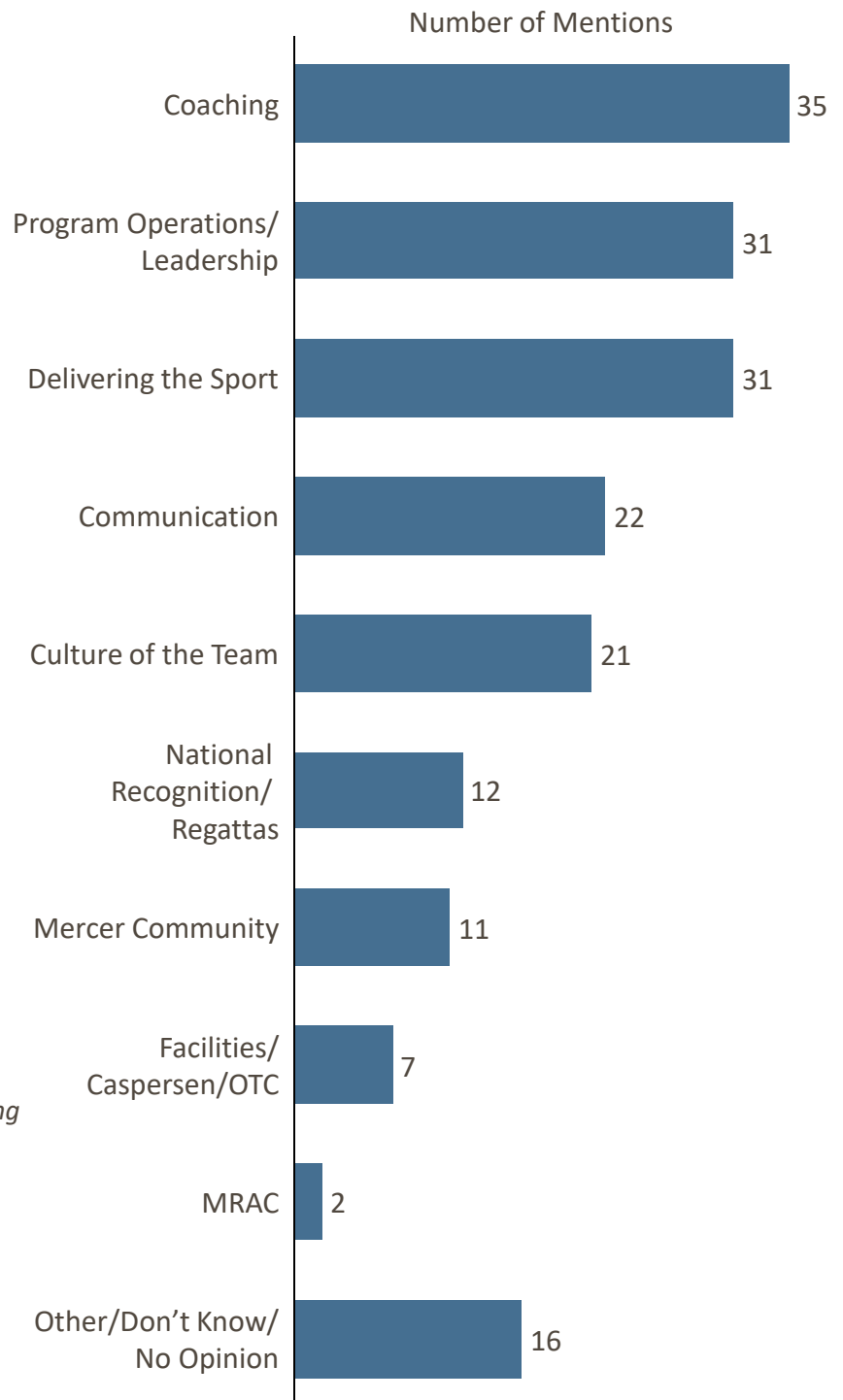
- *Coaches seem on time and organized. They hold rowers accountable.*
- *great coaches, including national team rowers as coaches*
- *teaching is top notch*
- *The coaches and their passion for the sport is terrific.*

▶ Operations and Leadership

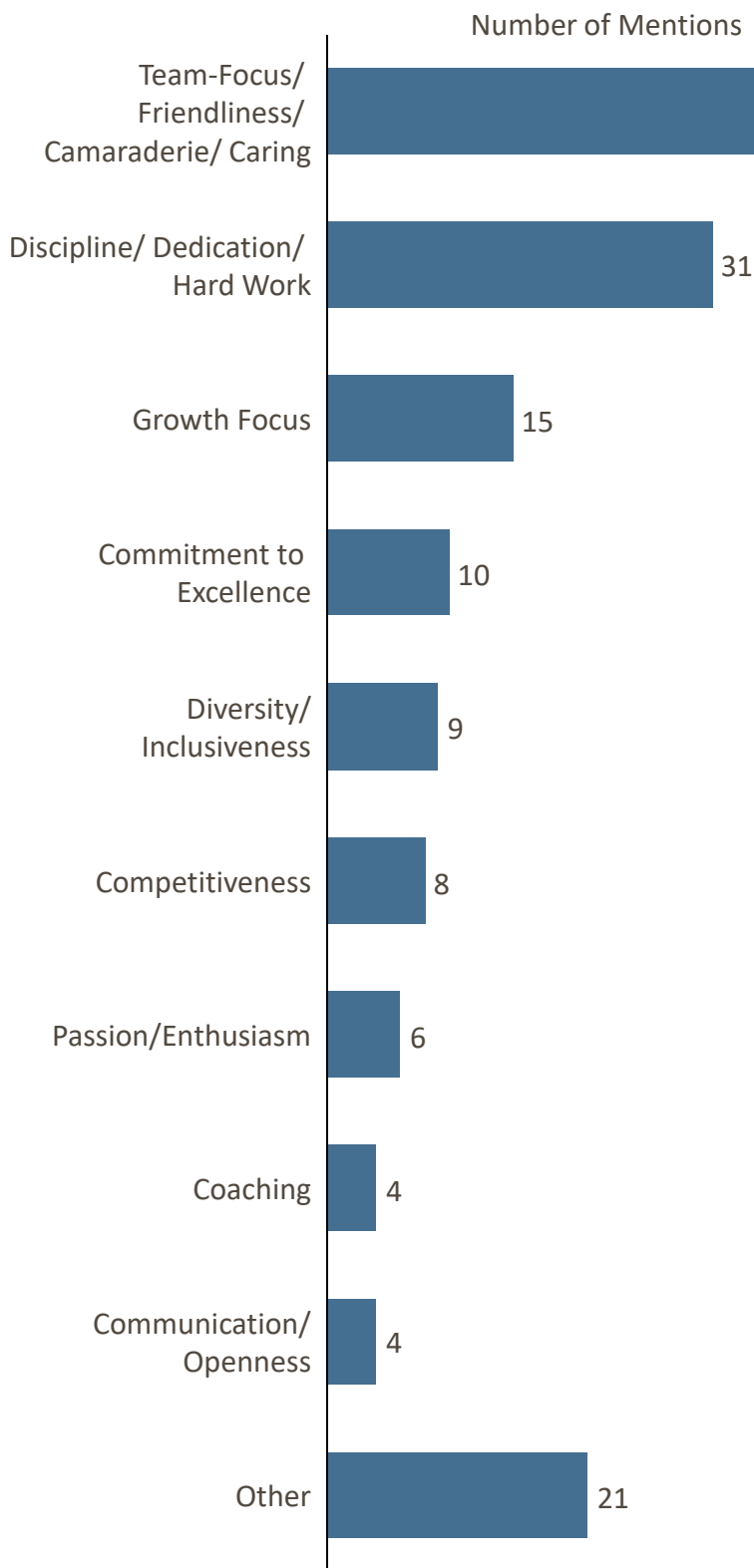
- *Good organization and planning; sign up on team snap for practice and regattas.*
- *it's a tough job. just organizing hundreds of kids for the sport is a great achievement. volunteer organization is excellent too.*
- *The club operates well in the way it utilizes the facilities and in relationship with US Rowing.*

▶ Culture of the Team

- *Great attitude, love for rowing, welcoming to all abilities.*
- *Mercer rowing seems to have found a way to appeal to a lot of kids to build up the sport and to manage the influx and to keep everybody moving forward to a really fine well rounded athlete*
- *You make the kids responsible; not their parents.*
- *We are enthusiastic about developing athletes and the sport at all levels*



What Do You Value about Club Culture: An open, welcoming, team-oriented culture that values dedication and hard work



▶ Open, welcoming, group-focused

- *Camaraderie, opportunity to participate, inclusiveness*
- *I value that most of the parents are very caring and put all the kids best interest first.*
- *Most families are very friendly and encouraging. The coaching staff is very approachable.*
- *The kids help each other out, encourage each other. It is a good team.*
- *The sense of community is tremendous! I met some incredible people through Mercer that will remain friends for a life time.*
- *When I first joined, I loved the camaraderie of the members. I have tons of great memories of regattas and breakfasts after Saturday practices.*

▶ Dedication and Hard work

- *A great sports team with the discipline required to maximize race results.*
- *Dedication and hard work are reinforced*
- *Reputation of being a hard / competitive environment*
- *The competition and the drive by the kids to succeed.*
- *Everyone showed up, everyone delivered, and everyone put in the extra mile.*

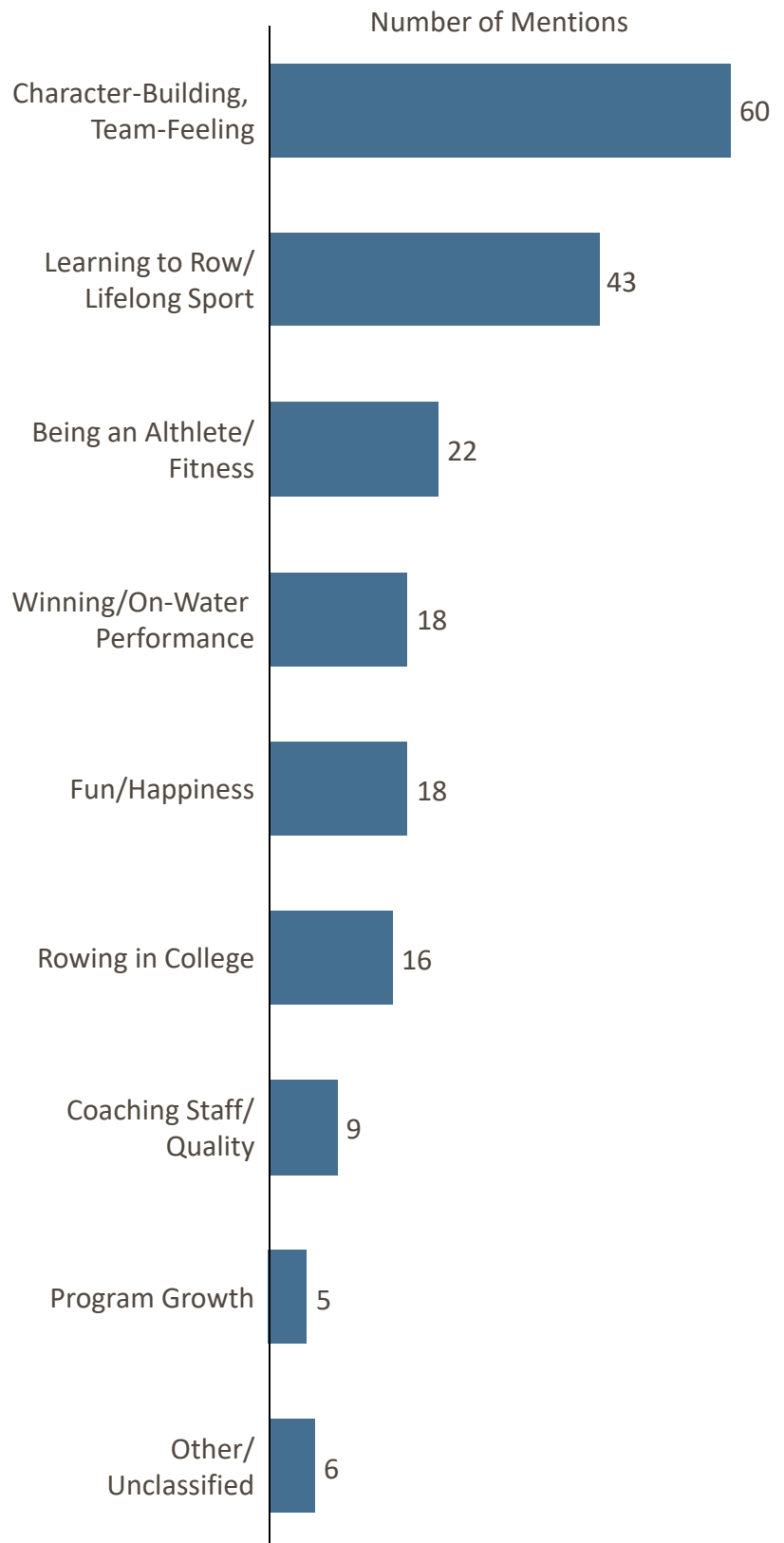
Definition of Success: Delivering the intrinsic values of the sport but winning/college opportunities are important to some

▶ Intrinsic values of the sport (character, team, lifelong sport) are key

- *A balanced approach to training for a lifelong sport*
- *Love of the sport. Positive attitude from everyone.*
- *Enjoying the sport and striving to reach potential in it. No injuries.*
- *My child looks forward to going to her rowing practice everyday - that to me is success because it demonstrates her love for the sport and her tenacity and her willingness to take on any challenges .*
- *My son continues develop as a leader and his love of rowing grows.*
- *A positive, team driven experience where the kids realize that they are all both the strongest and weakest link and need to work together to strengthen the boat.*

▶ Exogenous outcomes (winning, college) are less, but still important

- *Adequate and stable coaching staff with far less turnover; continued development of winning performing crews, lessons learned from [Name Redacted] and other successful community-based HS and Masters clubs.*
- *Competing in races and winning. Having a program that promotes fitness.*
- *Results at regatta and the kids getting into great colleges.*
- *More children rowing at competitive levels, more boats in regattas, more children advancing to college to row, more medals at nationals*



3yr Goal: While individual value remains high, winning is also a key long-term priority



▶ Value for Participants means achieving varied individual goals

- Fun, competitive, high level of fitness, team oriented while rowing and outside of rowing. The team building/ leadership is especially important with kids coming from different schools
- It would be great if the vast majority (98% or more) of rowers felt happy with their experience at the club, and especially with their interactions with the coaching staff, and lead varsity rowers, such as captains.
- just tell the kid honest opinion...even if they suck at it...tell them like giving grades in school.. progress report or have a meeting with a parent before you fail them by not picking for a race...

▶ Winning and National Recognition are prominent long-term goals

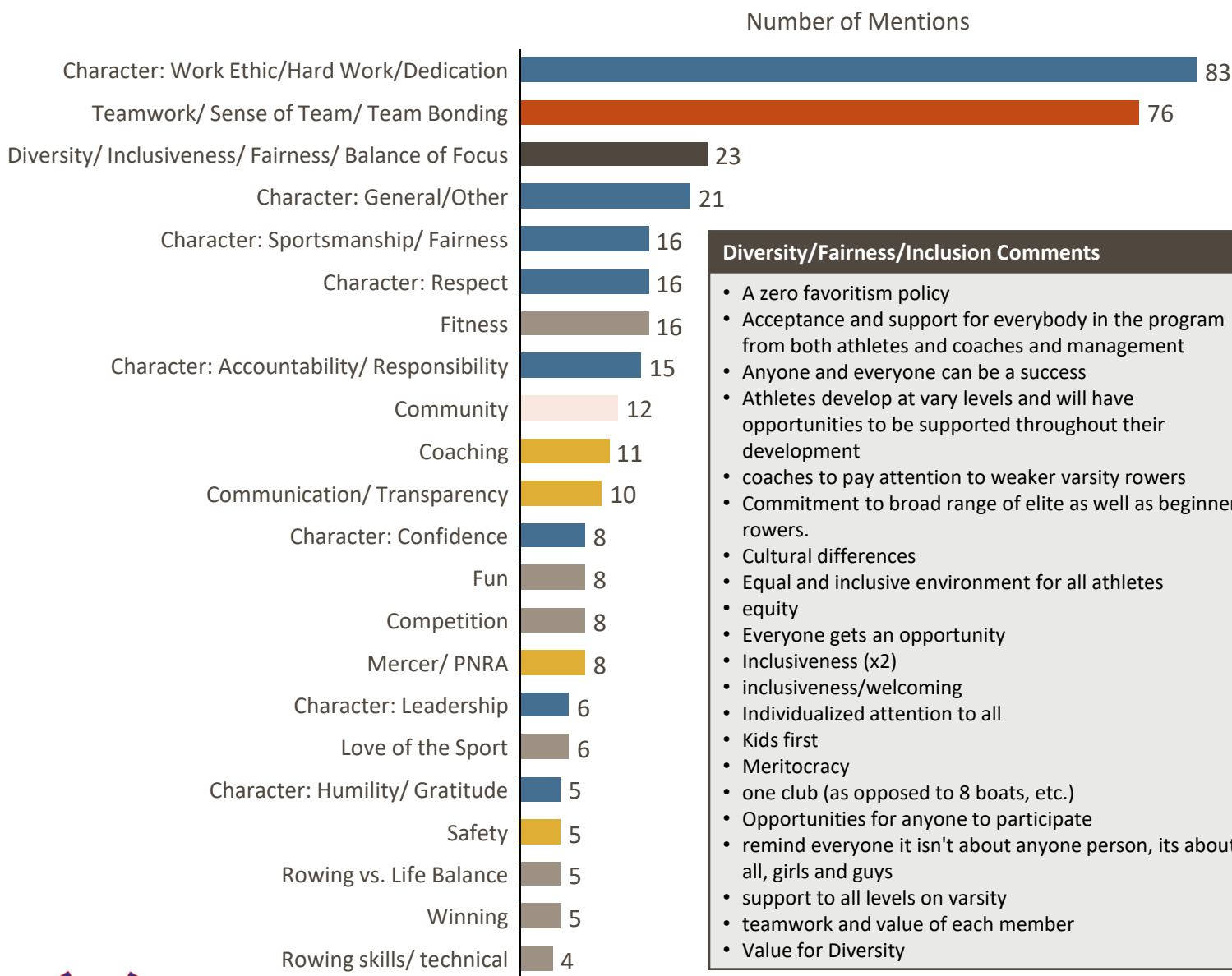
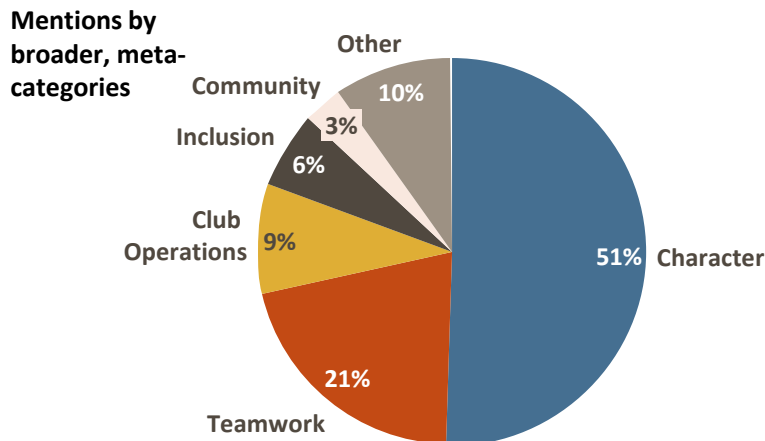
- for juniors: girls in top 3 in youth nationals; boys in top 5 in youth nationals.
- Get a boat to A final at Youth Nationals every year-- boys and girls
- Sustained national success--that is hard to do and people will recognize it around the country It will help those who want to row in college and thereafter
- The club needs a winning record to be seen as great. You want people to name Saugatuck, Marin, Oakland, Gonzaga, PNRA as the teams to beat. The only thing people know is the record. What goes on to create that is a culture of working hard, great coaching and attracting talent. Create the first two and you will gain the third.



3. Values

Values: What values would you like to see instilled?

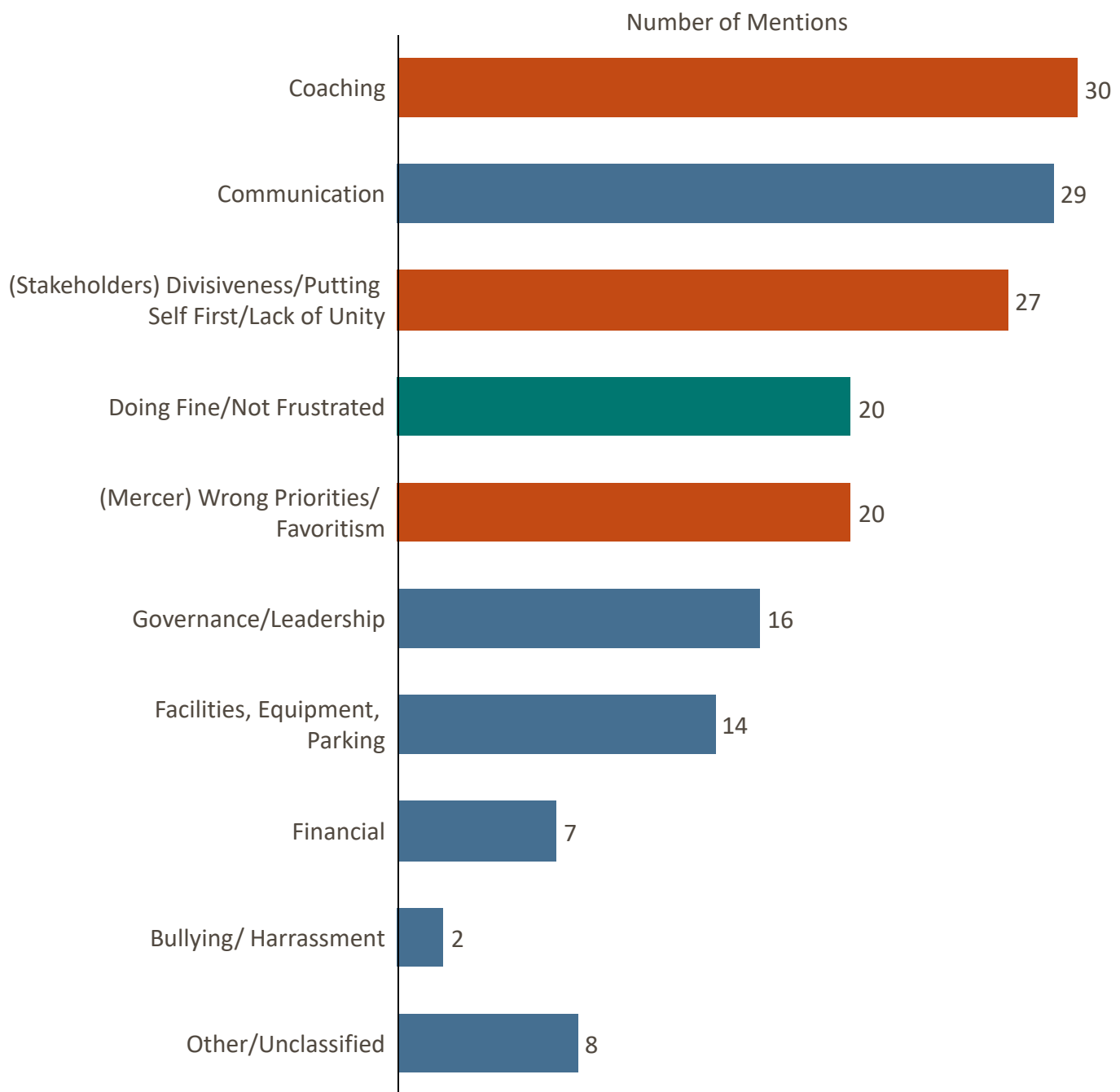
- ▶ Character (multiple dimensions) is the dominant value, followed by a strong sense of teamwork
- ▶ A sense of fairness and inclusion within the club is a major area of mention



4. Frustrations and Opportunities

Frustrations: There is a cluster of frustrations reflecting a deterioration in the cohesive character of Mercer's culture

1. Turbulent feelings around recent history reflect a combination of Coaching, Divisiveness (of Parents & Kids) and concerns about Mercer's Priorities, linking to Leadership/Governance/Communication concerns.
2. Communication issues covered in depth in a separate section



Frustrations—Coaching: Coaching ethos, turnover, instructional time and realistic comminution about progress seem dominant concerns

Illustrative Quotes

- A little loose in boat assignments and prepping for a session
- Coaches losing control of their crews on the water and/or violating the traffic pattern.
- Elimination of Saturday practices. For those that cannot come everyday during the week, the ability to row on Saturdays is important .
- my child is frustrated when he is not in the water for several days
- My son enjoyed the summer program because he actually got to get into a boat to row. However in the fall program in 6 weeks he only got to row for one hour. Every practice was nothing but running and calisthenics. My son became frustrated with not actually getting to row. You should have more time in the fall programs for rowing, not running. Your called Princeton National Rowing Association, not Princeton National Running Association.
- (1)From my child: When coaches leave immediately after practice and are therefore unable to answer questions or provide feedback. (2)From me: I understand the need to develop fast boats, but there are 'new varsity' athletes that don't have the skill set yet and are left out of race lineups.
- The turnover of coaching staff
- Too many rowers with not enough instructional time with a coach.
- I think the Juniors are hampered by1) a (necessarily?) young and perhaps inexperienced coaching staff and 2) by an intrusion of parents into coaching/decision making...the latter is perhaps more typical for youth sports today than in the past.
- Limited capacity. Rowers should be on the water from Sept to Nov/ March-Sept. Erging for all rowers during the winter.
- Not clear how boating decisions made
- Not enough coaches for the amount of Novice rowers. \$700 is a lot of money for my child to only go out once a week because there wasn't enough coaches for the boats. I understand running and conditioning is part of program, but as of now, hasn't seen much boat time.
- Request to be honest if kid need improvement. Tell them right away and when they ask for feedback from time to time. Dont surprise them when they are not selected for race
- That change came from the bottom up. Coaches need to be held accountable for their performance on and off the water.

Frustrations—Divisiveness: A sense that individuals are putting themselves (or their children) first, favoring some over others or being cliquish

Illustrative Quotes

- Cliques and social media gossip.
 - Kids who don't have the right attitudes
 - Parental interference.
 - Parents who only care about own kids at expense of others, lack of transparency on income and expenditures, poor decision making around early expenses on expansion, poor overall communication
 - Seems to be a lot of pettiness among some members
 - Some of the parents don't get to know the program and start to criticize it. Some parents push or try to drive the program to make their kids stars, but don't really stop and look at the program and how it is set up and it is the Kids that set their place in the program.
 - Some parents feel the need to be over controlling, very clickish, not very open to other parents
 - Some parents have unrealistic expectations for their children
 - The cliquey-ness of the teams and how there is a lot of unnecessary gossip about a rower on the team.
 - The number of people not pulling their share in the volunteer work of the club.
 - The parents who think they have the power to control the program and overstep their boundaries. I think coaches should be allowed to just coach
- The unfortunate lack of team unity or any type of support from teammates.
 - there is no team bonding time. I dont even know everybody on my teams name, let alone anything about them
 - too much parent involvement
 - How bitchy it could get - sometimes it felt like middle school when people started excluding each other and started drama.
 - It was very cliquey, the longer term members excluded most of the new recruits. I knew the boats, boathouse and location were extremely valuable but did not need to be reminded of this every five minutes. It was an honour to use the facilities but if felt like we were not meant to be there which made the whole experience uncomfortable.
 - When people betray the sense of community for personal or familial gain. Our growing obsession with winning over competition. The pettiness that festers when people become obsessed with 'collegiate exposure'
 - Cliquishness and bullying wasn't checked, didn't train enough.
 - Unfriendliness, discord within teams and amongst staff, lack of communication and clarity from the top--whether that be from coaches to athletes or from execs to coaches
 - Certain teams members think that it is OK to treat others members poorly and without respect...

Frustrations—MJRC's Priorities/Favoritism: Concerns over a focus on winning vs. supporting the broader group of rowers

Illustrative Quotes

- At times focus on reputation impedes recognizing athletes developmental needs.
 - Coxing becomes very subjective and hard work does not always pay off.
 - Favoritism
 - Mercer seems like it is becoming more and more elitist with every year that passes. The juniors always have the newest, coolest gear, and the pressure to buy into that kind of culture, on top of the club fees, closes the club to people that can't afford all the "extras". The kids are extremely privileged, and act as such.
- In the last several years, although there was talented instruction, there also seemed to be a differentiation of instruction for those members that presented more talent. I don't mean that the v1 boats shouldn't receive the instruction. Just that all levels of members should receive comparable instruction to bring their rowing talent to their next respective levels. It appeared that there was sometimes more effort put into the rowers / individuals with obviously greater talent. I get it that you want to have winning teams but you also want a deep team that is developing a new crop year after year. Rowing is one of those sports that you can develop given the right ingredients. If the coach has a short horizon, or parents for that matter, then it doesn't serve the program.

Opportunities to Improve: Coaching and communications are the most significant opportunities



▶ Coaches, Coaching Quality and Coaching Approach are the dominant opportunity identified

- Continue to hire high quality and responsible coaches.
- Foster a better team dynamic and environment for teammates.
- Have a talk with the teams in the beginning of the season and remind them that this is a team, and to include everyone involved.
- I suspect you can create a development program for your coaching staff that supports their career growth as they support our athletes.

▶ Communications are a recurring issue

- Be more organized in sending out information
- I think there needs to be a more open communication with parents, almost an education so parents understand what is going on and can find a place to belong and be supportive, but not disruptive of the program
- Operational issues dominate concerns about Program Logistics

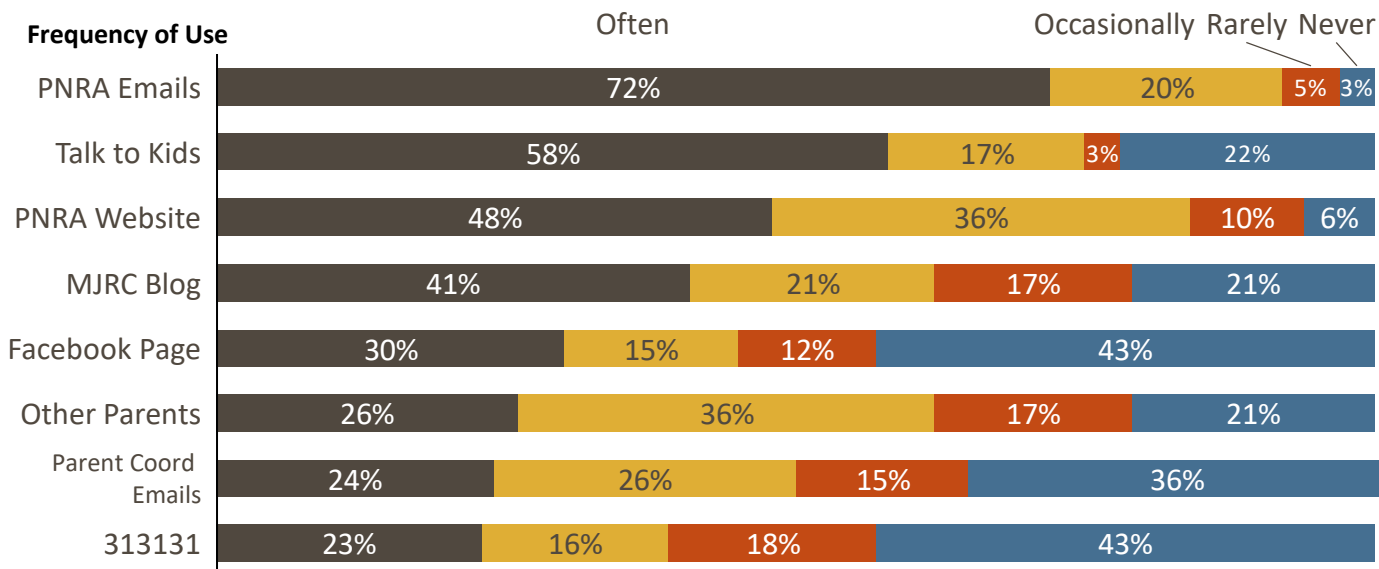
▶ Governance and Leadership

- Make sure the Mercer Rowing Advisory Committee has some REAL influence on how the club is being run.
- The club needs more transparency in its operations. We had come from another club where business meetings were open to all members, the Board is serving the club members not faceless entity. Similar to a commercial entity, the club members parents and rowers are the stockholders who the Board is responsible too. Today its not clear who the Board is responsible to, other than itself.



5. Communication

Communication: Moderate quality but improving

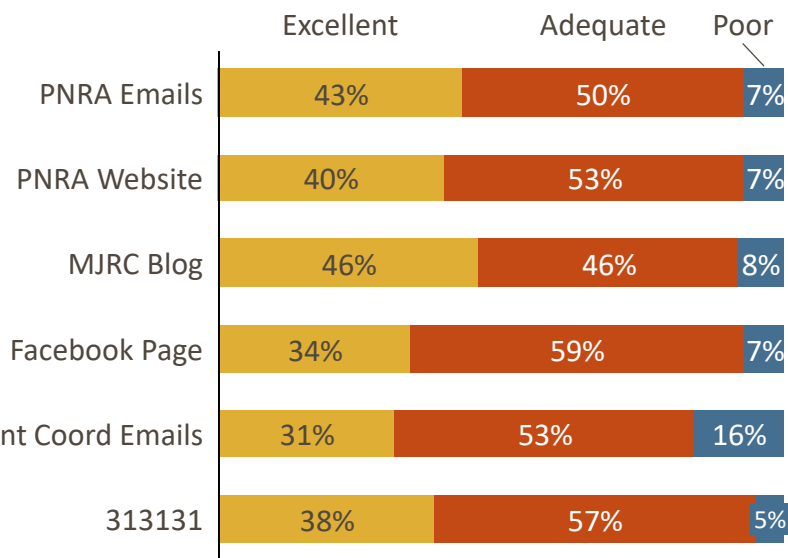


► Many commented that communications were improving. Most of those suggesting improvements focused on:

► **Timeliness: more information farther in advance**

- Needs to be more frequent and timely, medium and long term planning needs to be better.
- Post consistently what is happening—weekend practices, boat selection, changes in plans. We can schedule but when things change, we need to know or when decisions are taking that impact our family schedules, we need to know.

Quality of Communication Methods



► **Completeness or content:**

- I've noticed that information you might think of as "business as usual" could be completely unknown many. While I don't fancy hearing the wheel reinvented every year, know that many parents might still be clueless.
- Greater substance to posts, sometimes it feels like I'm getting the minimum amount of information.

► **Emphasizing one channel over another:**

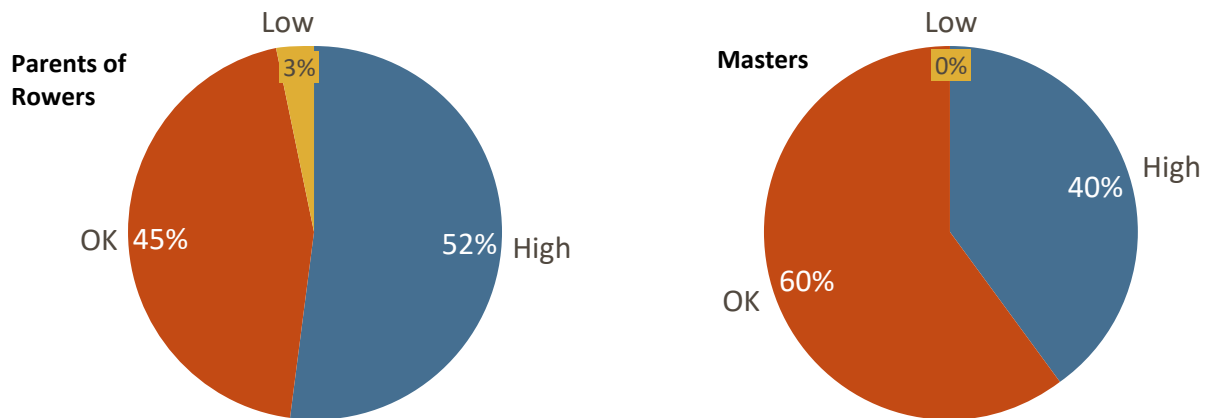
- continue to improve and keep website up to date; provide timely emails when needed and helpful
- Do not depend on Facebook for major communication. I personally do not like using it. I would prefer to be informed of relevant team information through email. There is a perceived assumption that everyone is checking Facebook for info, including athletes for practice times, etc. Just put the info on the blog and email the info.



6. Financing/Fundraising

Value for Fee: Most feel the program is well worth it...is there a willingness to pay more based on a compelling argument?

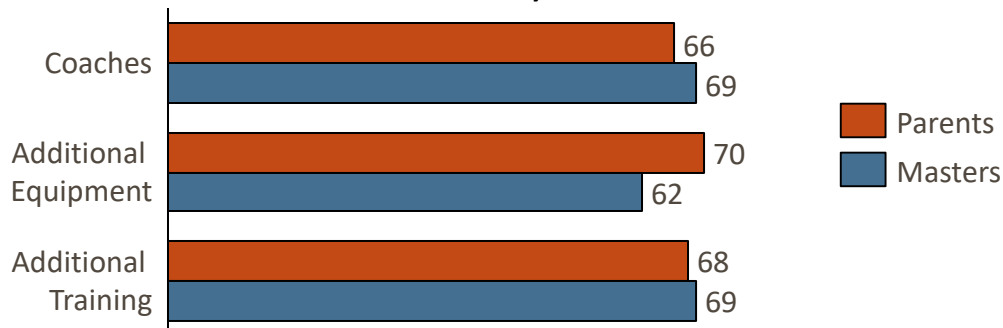
How do you feel about the value you receive for the fee you pay?



Illustrative Open-Ended Comments

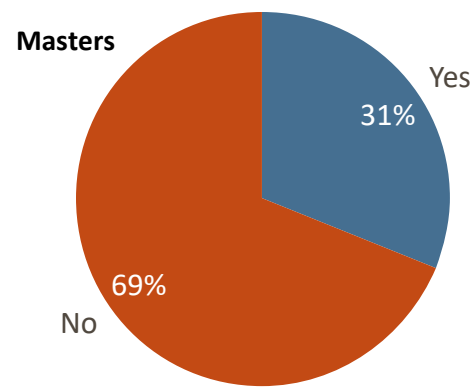
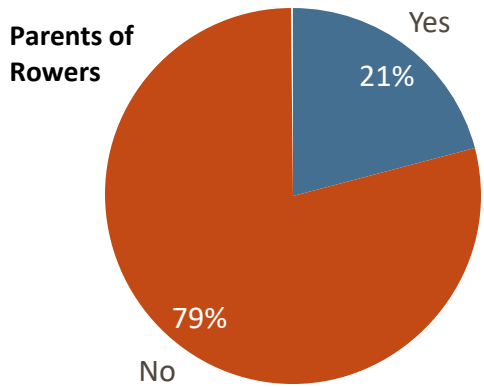
- I want to see clear and complete financials before answering; and a go forward budget and DISCUSSION
- Winter training between the fall season and spring season
- Regatta trips
- At the moment we are getting what we need; it might be different for more advanced rowers
- not at this time, I am paying \$1400 for two months of training already
- Interested in coxswain specific coaching/workshops
- # of coaches is fine as is
- team bonding sessions, athletic wear, another dock??
- We should have the appropriate amount of coaches and equipment and then support the program through fees
- the kids should be able to row more, not just do running and calisthenics
- I would first need to understand if my athlete would have a direct and immediate benefit
- the challenge with additional training is how it impacts those who cannot afford it; that does not mean it shouldn't take place, but maybe something sent home with all participants on what they can do at home or at the boathouse with a trainer.
- more coaching please. absolutely willing to pay for the best available coaches
- I would need to see the "business case ", or benefits for the extra cost first.
- Before paying more I would need to know clearly who is in charge of the money and how it is going to be spent. I don't trust that funds were spent appropriately in the past.
- Get more kids in the races
- Erg & land training facilities

Percent Who Would Pay More For...



Fundraising: Few would support an obligation to do so, but there is an appetite to fundraise—primarily for new equipment

Should there be a fundraising obligation?



Would fundraise for...

