



**TEXAS** Board of  
**Architectural Examiners**  
Architects ▪ Interior Designers ▪ Landscape Architects

**Report on Customer Service**

June 2, 2008

# Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
I. Inventory of Customers	3
II. Information-Gathering and Survey Instrument	3
III. Analysis of the Findings	3
IV. Performance Measures	6
V. Customer Responses to Multiple-Selection Questions	6

# Report on Customer Service

The Texas Board of Architectural Examiners has continued to improve online services that allow our customers to do business and pay fees by logging in to their personal accounts. We have also continued to encourage staff to make excellent customer service an important part of everyday activities. The following report and survey results indicate that our efforts have been productive.

## I. Inventory of Customers

Our customers are identified as registered architects, interior designers, and landscape architects; students and exam candidates of these professions; building and other regulatory officials; clients of design professionals and the general public; as well as non-registered persons working in related industries. Our customer list includes 17,681 email addresses. Our actual registrant base is 18,308 as of May 29, 2008 (but changes hour by hour with online account management).

## II. Information-Gathering and Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was offered electronically on the Web and promoted via with the agency's online database of email addresses. The request for survey participation was emailed to each email address in our database, along with a follow-up reminder, also via email. The survey was in the field from January through March, 2008.

The survey utilized a secure data collection Web site. The third-party vendor collected surveys anonymously. The numerical data were collected electronically and are presented in this report. Responses to open-ended questions were reviewed on an individual basis and include suggestions for areas of improvement and change for the agency, as well as other comments on agency performance. Those responses contributed significantly to this report, and will inform agency staff greatly throughout the strategic planning process.

The questions in the survey were patterned after the questions from a previous TBAE survey, using available guidelines from the strategic plan instructions. Additional questions were added, which the agency will use in strategic planning, including several inquiries about the Web site, online business capabilities via the Internet, and our new communications outreach program.

## III. Analysis of the Findings

The data can be broken down into six distinct areas for analysis: communication and interaction with TBAE staff, online services, complaint handling, materials received from TBAE, rules, and overall satisfaction.

## 1. **Communication and interaction with TBAE staff**

Since the last survey taken in 2006, this year's survey reflects continued improvement in ratings for communication and interaction with TBAE staff. For example, the "disapproval" rating for communication with our office staff has dropped to 4%; a 3% improvement over the 2006 disapproval rating of 7%. The *overall* satisfaction approval rating is between 72% and 79%, excluding response time to email and voice mail messages which received 60% and 57% approval ratings, respectively. The open-ended questions provide insight for staff improvement in customer communication and interaction.

Satisfaction with TBAE's facility. The high level of "N/A" responses (88%) to questions about the agency's facility indicates that very few people have visited the office in person. Of the remaining 12% who answered questions about the facility, 11% gave it a high rating. The facilities are currently undergoing a much-needed renovation which is expected to make them more reflective of the professions regulated by the agency and ensure compliance with Texas Accessibility Standards, as well as improve staff productivity and morale.

TBAE Web site. The respondents gave Web site "content" a high approval rating of 85%. Satisfaction with the organization and clarity of the site have increased from the 2006 survey approval rating of 83% to a current rating of 86%. The open-ended questions reveal that users are not always able to easily navigate or find the information they seek; they report that some navigation improvements and a search feature would resolve the problem.

Communications outreach. Throughout 2007, TBAE developed and executed an ongoing communications outreach program called the TBAE Communications Corps. While the project's first year was a clear success, including unprecedented efforts like informational "trade-show" booths and large-scale continuing education presentations to new audiences, this Customer Service Survey offered communications staff an excellent change both to benchmark Communications Corps visibility and to learn more about our key audiences and their interest level in agency outreach. This data set is reflected in questions 4 through 6 in the Customer Responses section of this report (Section V).

## 2. **Online services**

TBAE launched its online business services in December of 2005. Survey results indicate that 95% of our customers have or will conduct some business online. Of those who will pay for services online, 86% will use credit cards instead of electronic checks. The fear of identity theft and unfamiliarity with electronic checks were reported as the main reasons for not using electronic checks. Of those who have used the agency's online services, more than half said they wouldn't change a thing except to lower registration fees. The most reported complaint involved the inability to remember passwords and User IDs.

## 3. **Complaint Handling**

Only 27% (193 of the respondents) rated the complaint process. Of this 27%, several mistakenly thought the question involved complaints about the agency or staff members. Only 4% of those rating the complaint process were dissatisfied with it, essentially because the time it takes to resolve a complaint seems too lengthy.

## 4. **Materials received from TBAE**

According to the survey results, the number of respondents who reported they have either not received or not read the various publications provided by TBAE has dropped to 19% compared to the 2006 level of 25%. All of the respondents who rated the publications rated them as somewhat or very useful. The overall response to outgoing communication materials indicates that we are successfully reaching our customers.

List-serve. TBAE's list-serve is a communications tool allowing instant and cost-free communication with TBAE registrants, candidates, and subscribers via email. The list-serve's *somewhat satisfied* to *very satisfied* approval rating of only 54% is offset by the fact that 45% of the responses were "N/A" indicating that some customers are unfamiliar with the term or are ambivalent about the list-serve messages. Fewer than 12% indicated that they were less than satisfied. Suggestions for improving list-serve messages included rating them for importance and more tightly focusing them to the proper recipients.

Newsletter and Web Site. TBAE's newsletter, *Licensing News*, was rated as *somewhat useful* to *very useful* by 80%, and the Web site's offering rated as *somewhat useful* to *very useful* by 67% of the respondents. An 85% majority of the respondents would prefer to receive communications from this agency by email, instead of traditional mail. *Licensing News* is mailed to all customers biannually and historically has been the agency's primary method of communicating with customers.

## 5. Rules

There was a 3-way tie for the most frequently-mentioned rules that concern the respondents:

- the high cost of renewal fees
- mandatory continuing education, and
- rules pertaining to the professional seals

There was a 2-way tie for the second most frequently mentioned rules:

- use or misuse of the title "interior designer"
- qualifications for taking the licensing exam

## 6. Overall satisfaction

As in the 2006 survey responses, our overall approval rating continues to be strong. An 89% approval rating from our respondents indicates that customer service efforts are noticed and appreciated.

## Summary of Analysis

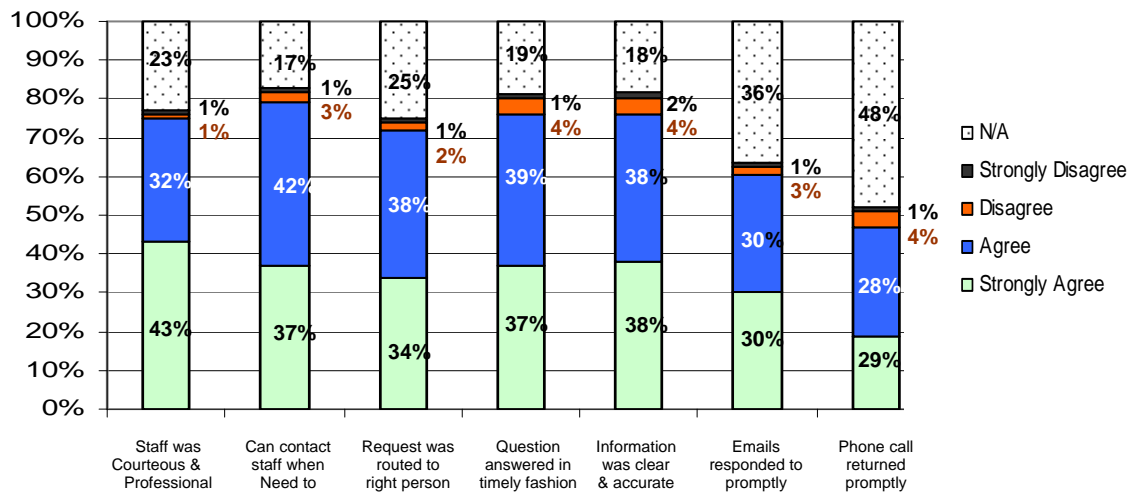
While TBAE has a high approval rating overall from the respondents, it is clear that there is much that we can do to improve our relationship with our customers. Considering today's economy, it is no surprise that the cost of doing business is a concern to more and more registrants. The agency is looking for ways to decrease costs in an effort to pass savings on to the registrants and candidates we regulate. The agency will continue to explore ways to further improve customer relations and reduce costs.

#### IV. Performance Measures

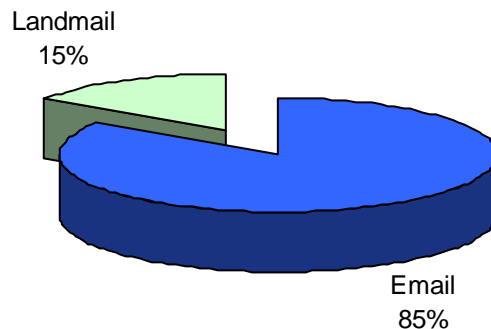
- a. Percentage of surveyed customer respondents expressing overall satisfaction with services received: **89%**
- b. Percentage of surveyed customer respondents identifying ways to improve service delivery: **10%**
- c. Number of customers solicited for survey **18,308**
- d. Number of customers surveyed (responsive) **720**
- e. Cost per customer surveyed **\$0.28/respondent**
- f. Number of customer groups **10**

#### V. Customer Satisfaction Multiple Choice Survey Questions (On charts, \* indicates less than 1%)

1. When communicating with TBAE please describe your experiences: As shown in the following chart, approximately 75% indicated overall satisfaction with the agency's communications. Others reported that TBAE's response time to email and voice mail messages could be improved.



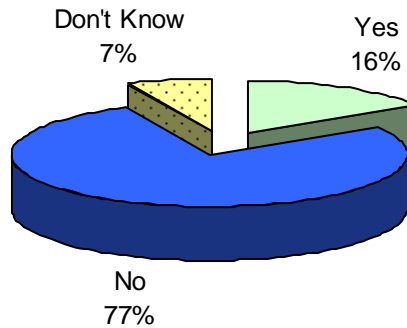
2. Do you prefer that TBAE communicate reminders and announcement to you via email or land mail? An overwhelming 85% of the responses indicate that email is the preferred method of receiving communications from TBAE.



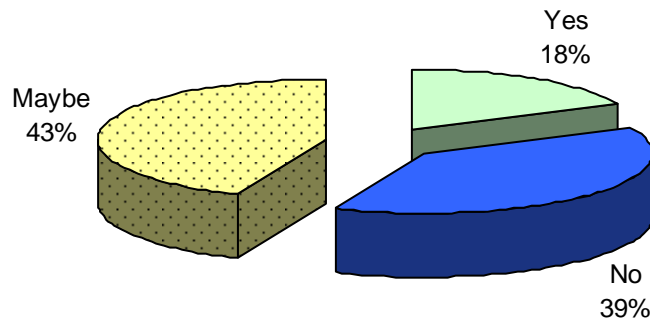
### 3. How can we improve our communication?

More than half of the responses to this question indicate that the agency is doing a good job and no improvements are necessary. Suggestions include a faster response time to email and voice mail messages. This is particularly true of exam candidates who are anxious to learn their test scores. Others noted that TBAE has not clearly communicated that registration renewals can be mailed in, and that forms are available online and can be obtained by calling the agency.

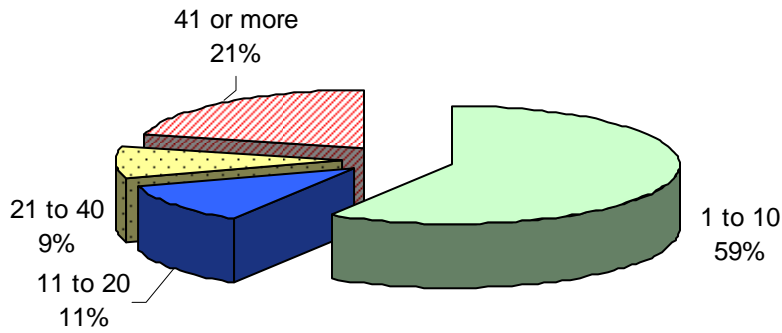
### 4. Have you ever attended a live presentation by a TBAE staff member?



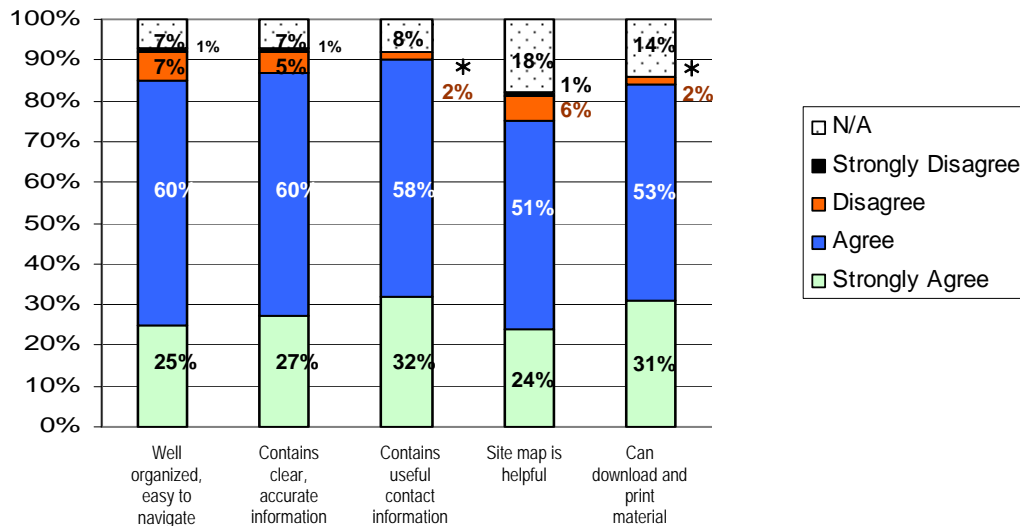
### 5. Would your firm (or local group, etc.) like to attend an in-person presentation by a TBAE representative?



6. How many design professionals work for your firm?

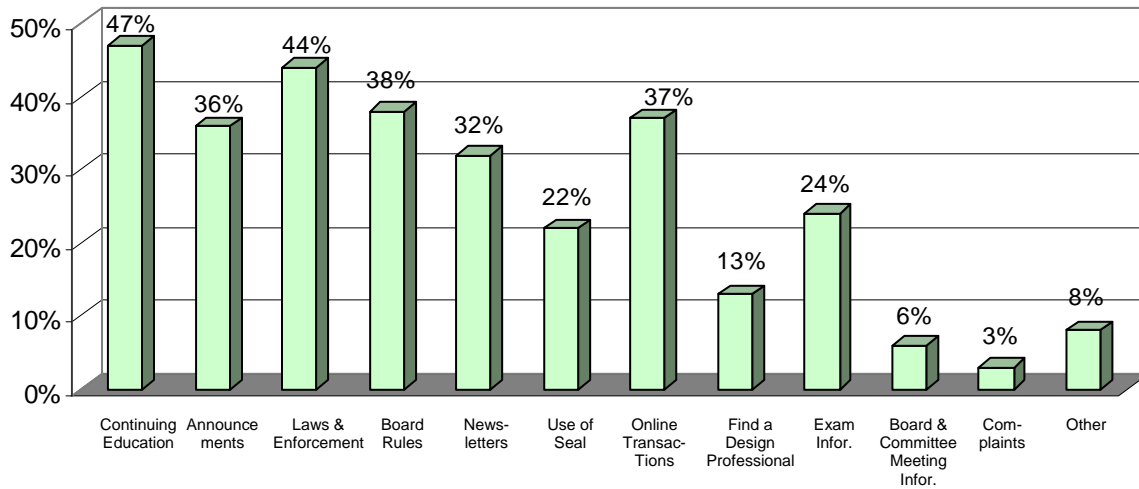


7. Please rate TBAE's Web site, [www.tbae.state.tx.us](http://www.tbae.state.tx.us): As shown in this graph, 75% - 90% agree or strongly agree with the statements about the Web site's attributes. The site map received the lowest rating of the five listed.



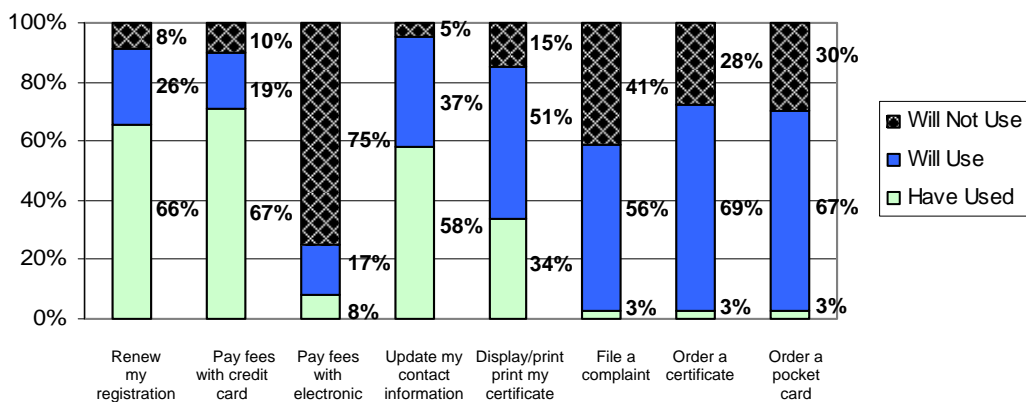
8. How do you use the TBAE web site? More than half of the individuals responded that they use the Web site to access their online accounts to pay fees, update their contact information, or find exam scores. This is reflected in the chart for question 9 below. The other responses include using TBAE's Web site to review current laws and rules regulating their profession as well as updates to the rules, looking for information about continuing education requirements, looking for design professionals, and printing information or forms.

### 9. What information from the Web site do you use the most?

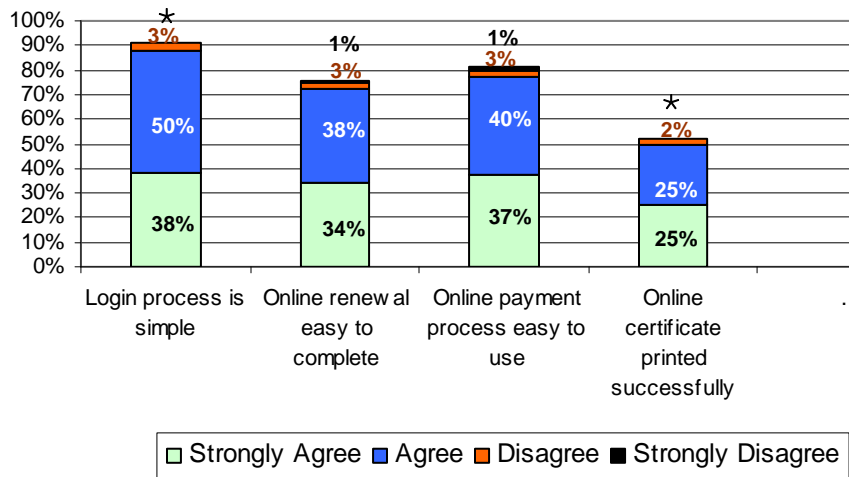


10. How could we improve our Web site? More than half of the responses described satisfaction with or no suggestions for improving the Web site. The suggestions included providing assistance with continuing education, such as providing an online CEPH log and offering courses and/or links to specific continuing education courses. There were several suggestions for improving the online log-in and registration renewal process. Most of the suggestions for improving the Web site had to do with overall design and navigation.

11. Have you used or do you plan to use the following new online services? With the exception of paying fees with an electronic check and filing a complaint, the great majority of responses indicated that our customers have embraced online services for routine business transactions. Few registrants find it necessary to order a new certificate or pocket card, which explains the higher 28% to 30% “will not use” response for those two services.



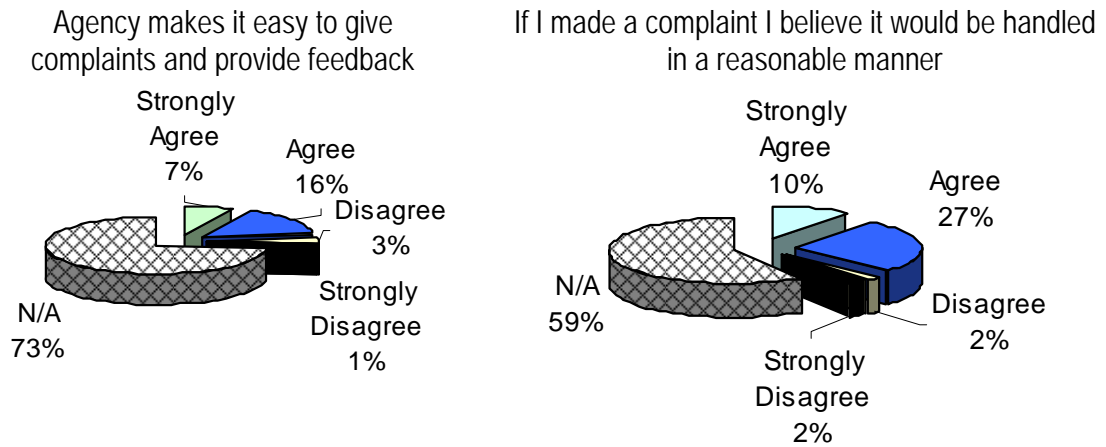
12. Please rate your experience with TBAE's online services: Between 96% and 98% of the responses agree or strongly agree with the attributes described in the following chart.



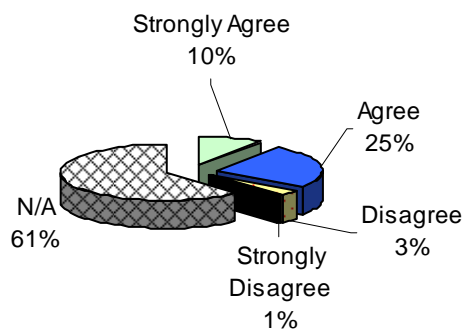
13. What would you change about the online payment system? Suggestions included simplifying the log in process, making sure it successfully takes the payment or notifies that the payment process failed, improving navigation to avoid dead ends, and annual automatic credit card billing or adding the ability to retain credit card information.

14. If you do NOT plan to use the online services, what factors contribute to this decision? Most respondents intend to use the online services, so there were few responses to this question. The three primary reasons provided were 1) security concerns, 2) an employer who pays the fee, and 3) a personal preference for land mail.

15. Please rank your experience with TBAE's complaint handling process (about the agency, not about professionals):



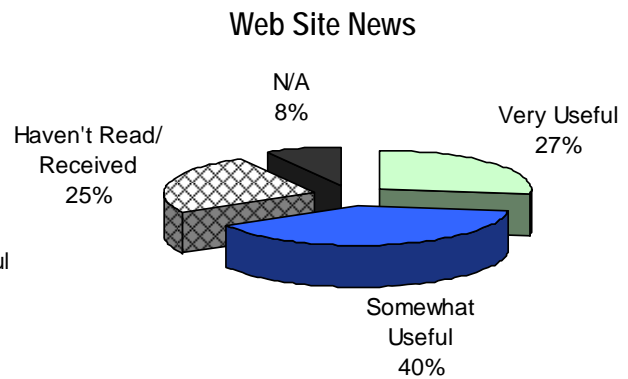
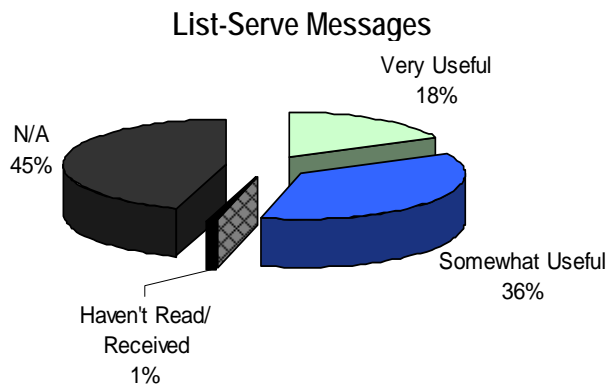
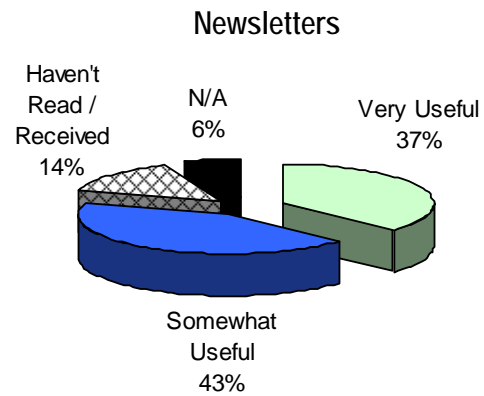
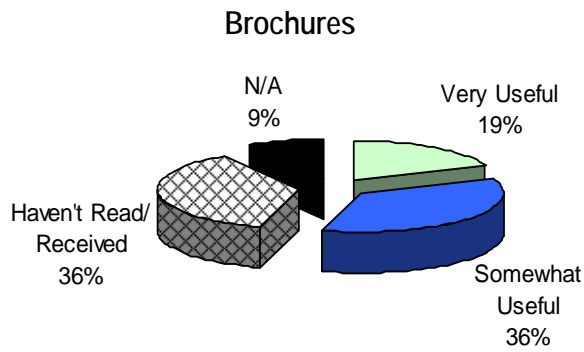
TBAE seeks feedback and is responsive



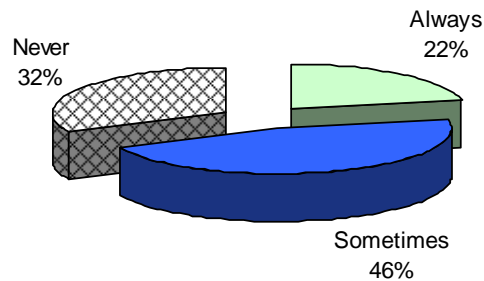
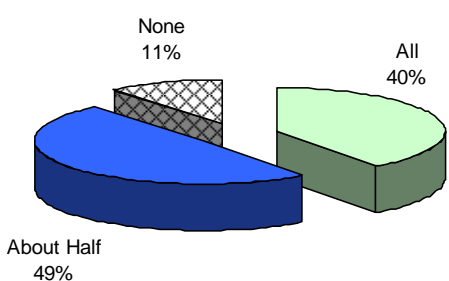
16. What suggestions do you have for improving the complaint process?

Most respondents have not made a complaint and are not willing to offer suggestions for improving something they have not used. The suggestions that were offered for improvement included allowing anonymous complaints and reducing the time it takes to resolve the complaint.

17. Please rank the following publications, communications, and Web site material:



18. How much of the newsletter do you read? 19. Do you read the list serve messages?



20. How can the various publications or Web site material be improved? Suggestions included keeping material simple and to-the-point, separating the information that is directed to registrants from information directed to candidates, providing more continuing education choices, and adding graphics.

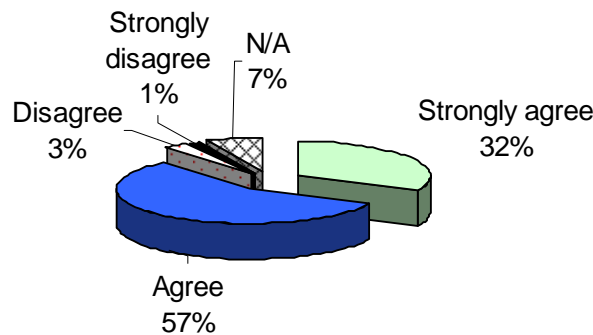
21. What changes would you like to see to the board rules? By a wide margin, the top most frequently mentioned areas of concern are 1) the new continuing education requirement for sustainable design, 2) lower the fees, 3) simplify/clarify the sealing rules, 4) pros and cons concerning the title act for interior

designers, 5) clarify eligibility requirements for taking the exam, 6) make the rules easier to understand, and 7) eliminate the 5 year rolling clock for taking the exam as well as the rule that requires a six month wait prior to retaking a specific exam.

**22. What new or additional services can TBAE Provide?**

Suggestions included that the agency provide more suggestions for continuing education courses, a better tracking system for CEUs, add online classes, and faster exam scores.

**23. Overall, I am satisfied with the service I have received from this agency:**



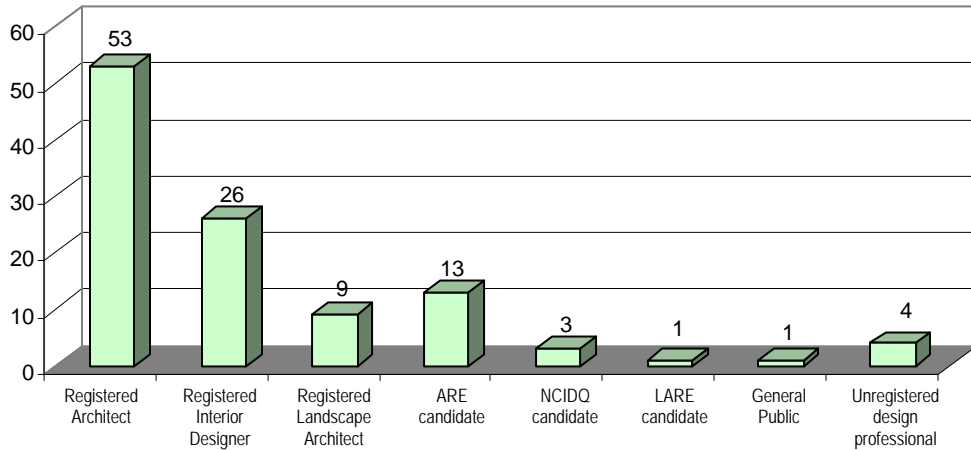
**24. What are we doing well?** Customer service: words like *responsive, accessible, accurate., friendly, professional, and helpful* were used repeatedly; they mentioned: communicating the right information at the right time; a user-friendly Web site that provides up-to-date information; policies for taking the exam that are "the most progressive in the country;" and relating legislative information as soon as it is available.

**25. What constructive feedback can you provide TBAE?** The most repeated suggestions concerned the cost of renewal fees, the time it takes to receive exam scores, expeditiously notifying registrants about legislation or rules pertaining to their practice, and offering seminars to review rules and legislation. The respondents would also like to see the agency more aggressively identify and sanction unlicensed individuals who offer interior design, architectural, or landscape architectural services.

**26. If you have visited the TBAE office, please rate the facility:**

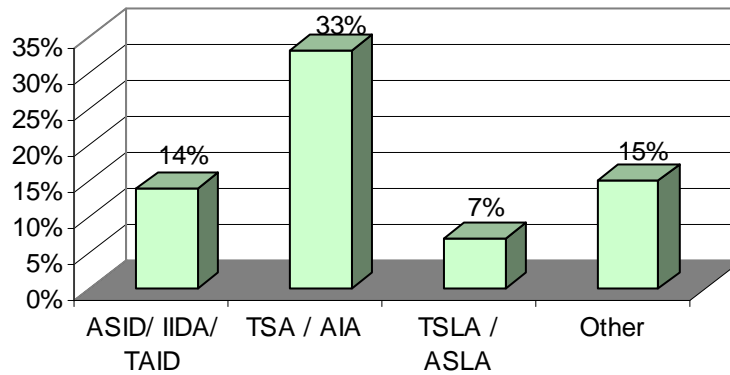
Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
The facility was easy to find	4%	7%			88%
The facility was clean and orderly	4%	7%			88%
The facility was accessible	4%	6%	1%		89%
The facility was open when I needed access	4%	7%	1%		88%

27. I am a:



Note: Values expressed are percentages, and some respondents self-identified as more than one category (i.e. they hold multiple professional licenses, such as Architect and Interior Designer).

28. Are you a member of any of the following organizations?



29. What means do you use to stay informed about your profession? The most frequently mentioned method is through the agency's Web site, newsletter, and/or list serve messages, followed very closely by offerings from the American Institute of Architects. Professional organization chapter meetings and other professional group meetings as well as continuing education classes are also preferred methods of keeping informed about their professions.