

Toolik Steering Committee RA Update and Feedback

January 2026

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Who are Research Assistants at Toolik?

- Many stay at TFS for full summer, or make several trips
- Usually not students, but often working closely with graduate students or mentoring undergrads
- Often seasonal technicians
- Responsible for research objectives and making project decisions when PIs are not in camp
- Also included those identifying as “Staff Scientists”



2025 Survey

a time for reflection..



- Anonymous, no required questions
- Feedback sought regarding all aspects of life and work at Toolik. Including:
 - Critical issues that prevented research goals from being accomplished
 - Travel to/from Toolik
 - Helicopter vendor and coordinators
 - Housing accommodations and Washateria
 - Prepared meals and food items
 - Shipping to/from Toolik
 - TFS-SEDC, TFS-GIS, and TFS logistics office
 - Equipment requests
 - TFS website, MyToolik, SRS system
 - Community recognition
 - *ANY* other comments or concerns about *any* topic

Critical Issues or Barriers to Completing Research Goals

- For several research groups, the 25 year old driver age requirement presented very significant barrier for completing *any* fieldwork outside of walking distance from TFS – also already presenting many issues for 2026
 - Several groups only had only 1 person allowed to drive (or 0!) – incredibly inefficient to waste someone's time just to have to drop-off or pick-up
 - Multiple instances of only one person being able to drive entire trip to/from Fairbanks – driver fatigue
 - What are the repercussions for not following the rule?
 - Do we have no choice but to hire employees over 25yo? Other options?

Traveling through Fairbanks

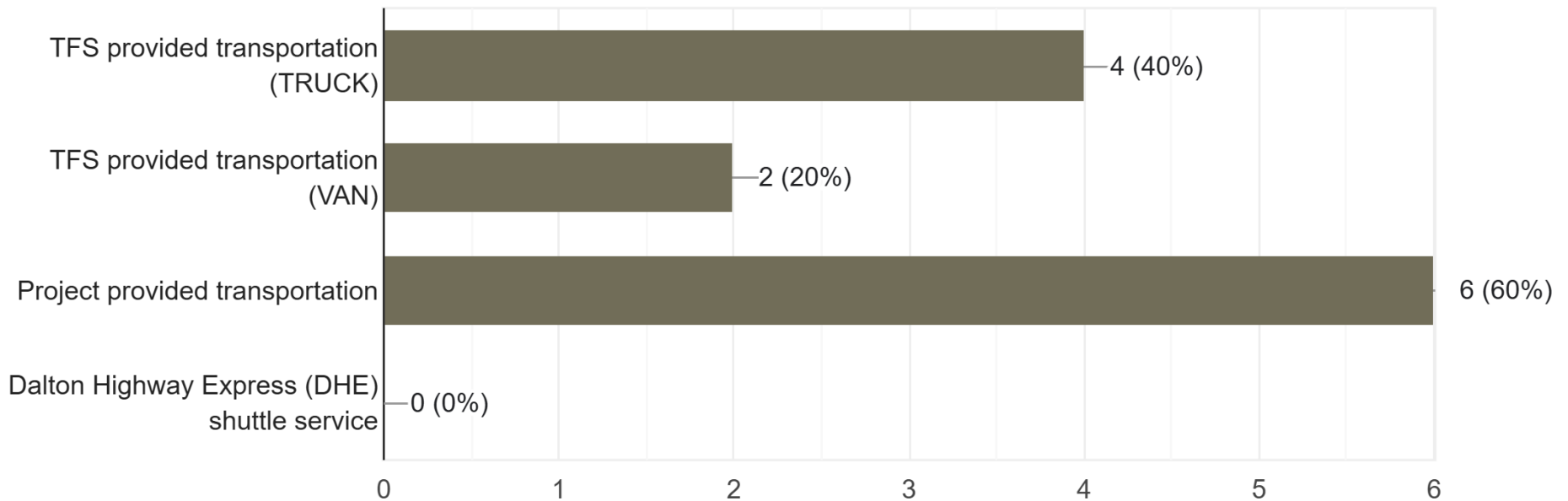
- No issues reported

Comments:

- “We flew in to Fairbanks, stayed over night at an Air bnb, uberred to the logistics office, and then off to Toolik we went!”

How did you travel between Fairbanks (or Prudhoe) and Toolik?

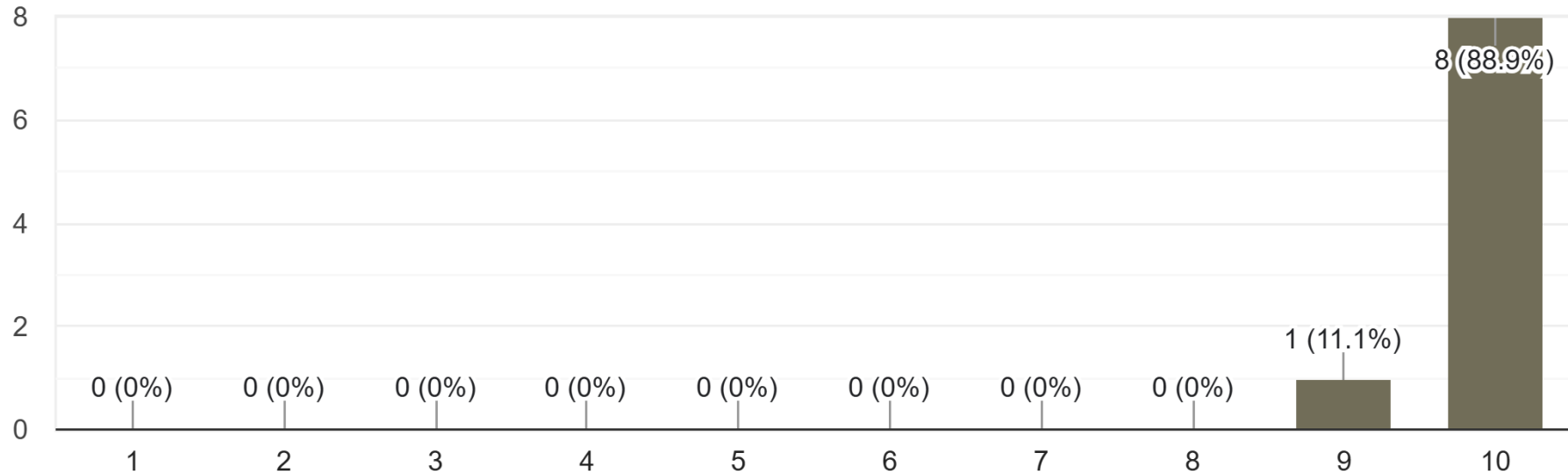
10 responses



Toolik Logistics Support in Fairbanks

How would you rate any assistance you received from the Toolik logistics office in Fairbanks?

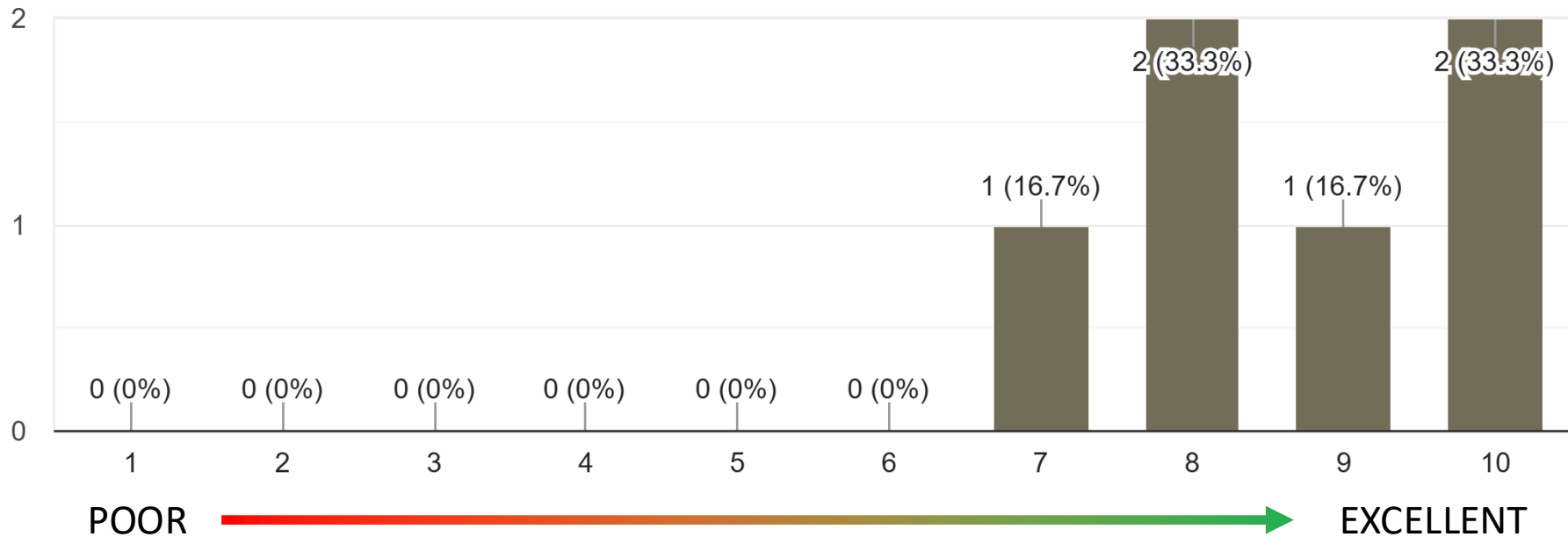
9 responses



Toolik Science Trucks

While at Toolik, did you use TFS owned vehicles? How would you rate access to TFS science trucks?

6 responses



TFS Trucks

- Overall, truck availability was limited at times

Comments:

- “Particularly at the beginning of the season, when many vehicles needed maintenance simultaneously, it was difficult to access a vehicle”
- “There was some confusion surrounding filling the TFS trucks with gas and which account to charge it to, where protocols were differently enforced than in the past, but we eventually got the truck we needed for our day trips!”
- “Also, it snowed while we were there and not all the TFS trucks had snow brushes in them”
- “I think it was unclear whether TFS trucks were available for projects that had their own PFS rental vehicles, or only available to projects that had no other vehicle option

Driver Restrictions

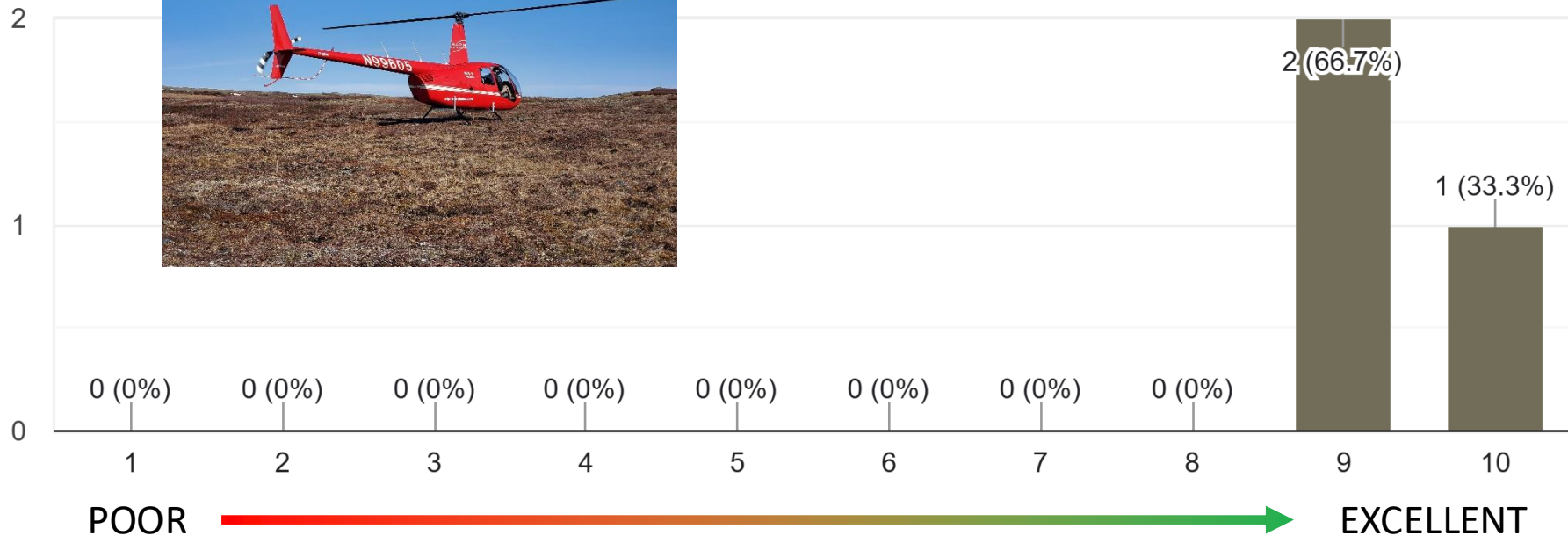
Comments:

- “Our core staff had only one member over 25 and three members under 25, which meant a lot of lost time as one member needed to chauffeur others to their field sites every time.”
- “I was not able to drive because I am under 25”
- “I did not have trouble getting field research done on account of license restrictions. However, there were times when I was the only legal driver in a truck, and it would have been nice to have the option for a coworker under 25 to drive.”

Helicopter Vendor

Did you use the helicopter in 2025? If so, how would you rate the helicopter vendor (Alpine Air Alaska)?

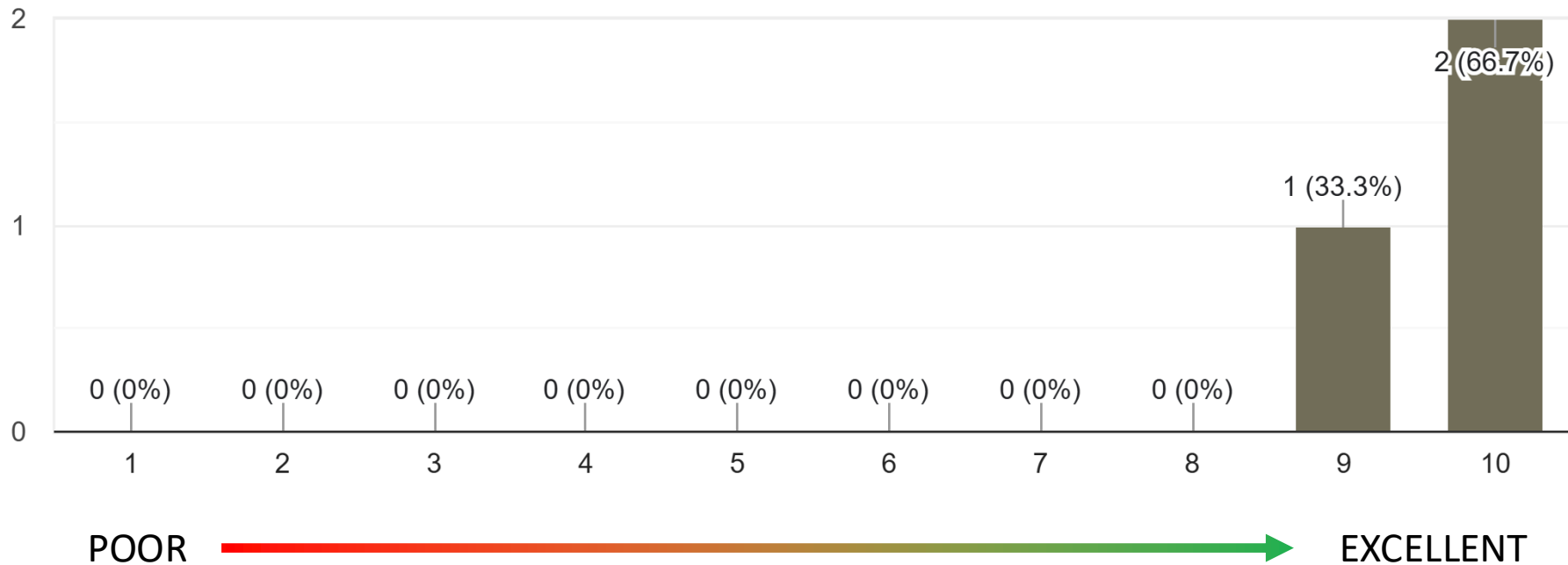
3 responses



Helicopter Coordinators

Did you use the helicopter in 2025? If so, how would you rate the helicopter coordinator (Bodie)?

3 responses



Helicopters at Toolik 2025

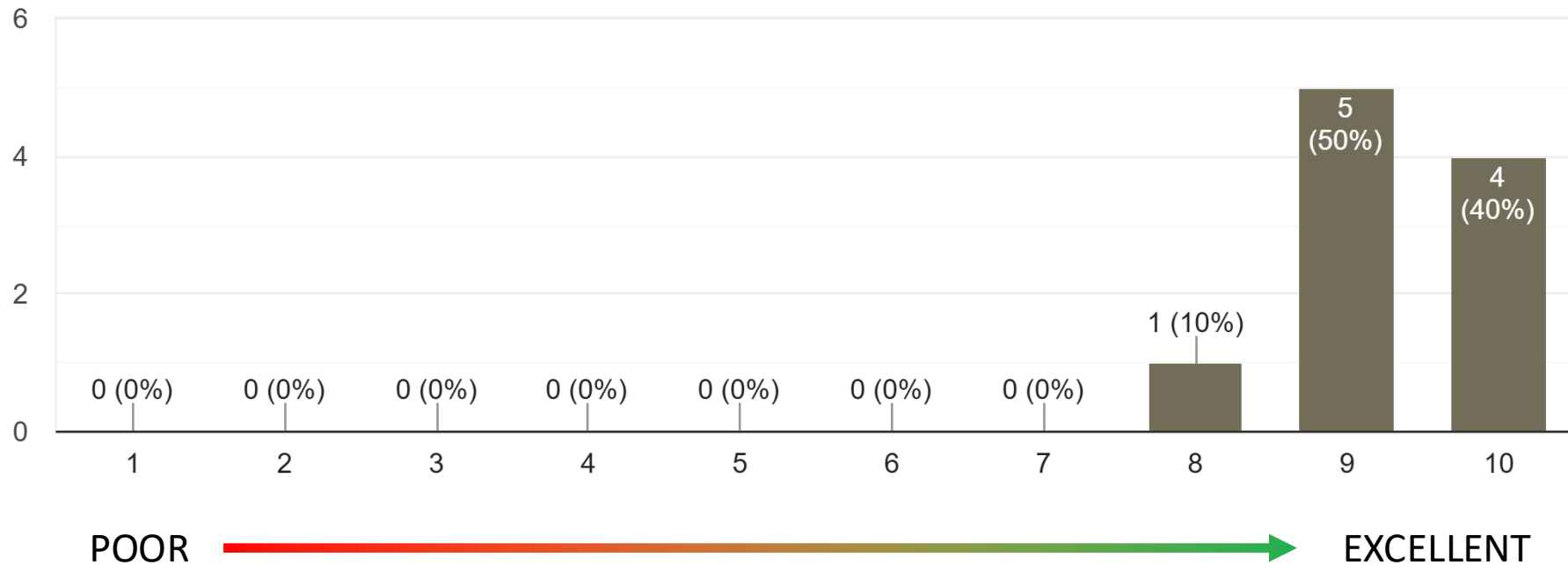
Comments:

- “Excellent job rescheduling our flight due to weather, were able to quickly reschedule us, and did their best to get us out when possible while prioritizing safety.”
- “Bodie was a terrific helicopter coordinator and routinely went above and beyond to help whenever and wherever he could!”



How would you rate your housing accommodations at Toolik?

10 responses



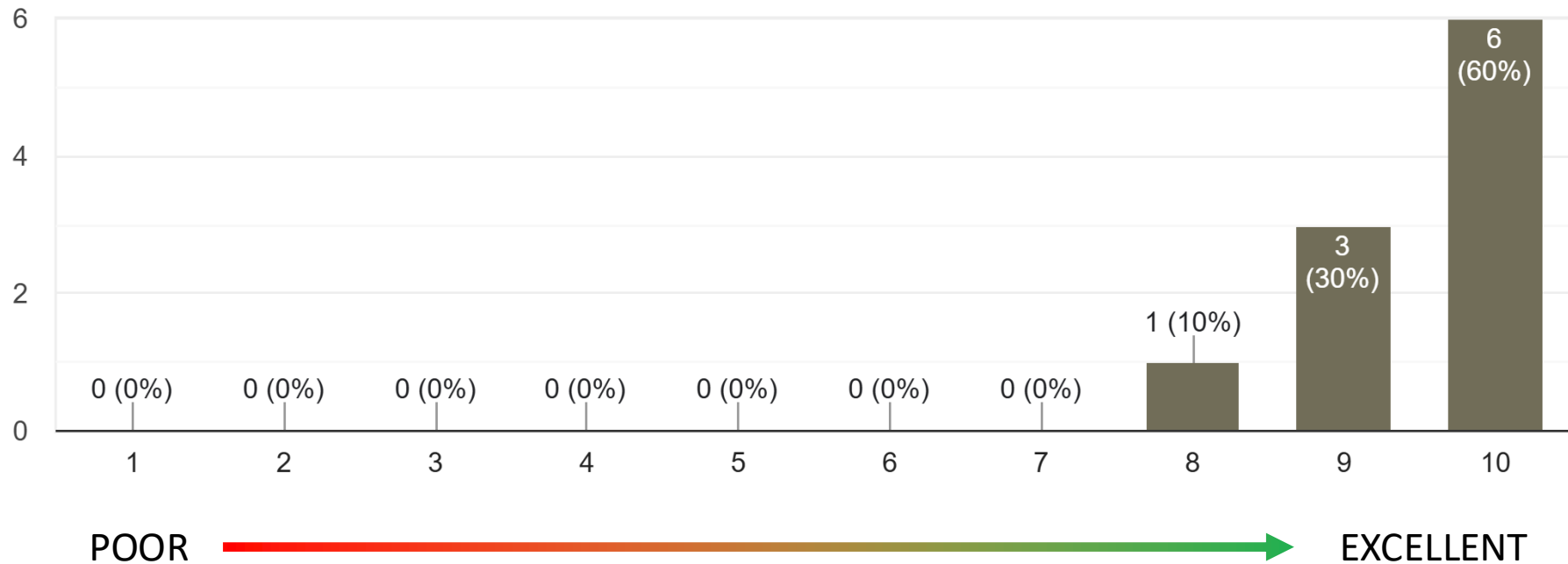
TFS Housing comments

- “Lack of sound proofing in the dorms is very noticeable, addition of blankets or some kind of muffling on the walls would be really nice!”
- “No issues! Everything was great.”
- “I love solo life in the weather port. And really appreciate everyone's assistance and checking in to make sure I had everything I needed to be comfy (I did!).”

Meals at TFS

Overall, how would you rate the prepared meals at Toolik?

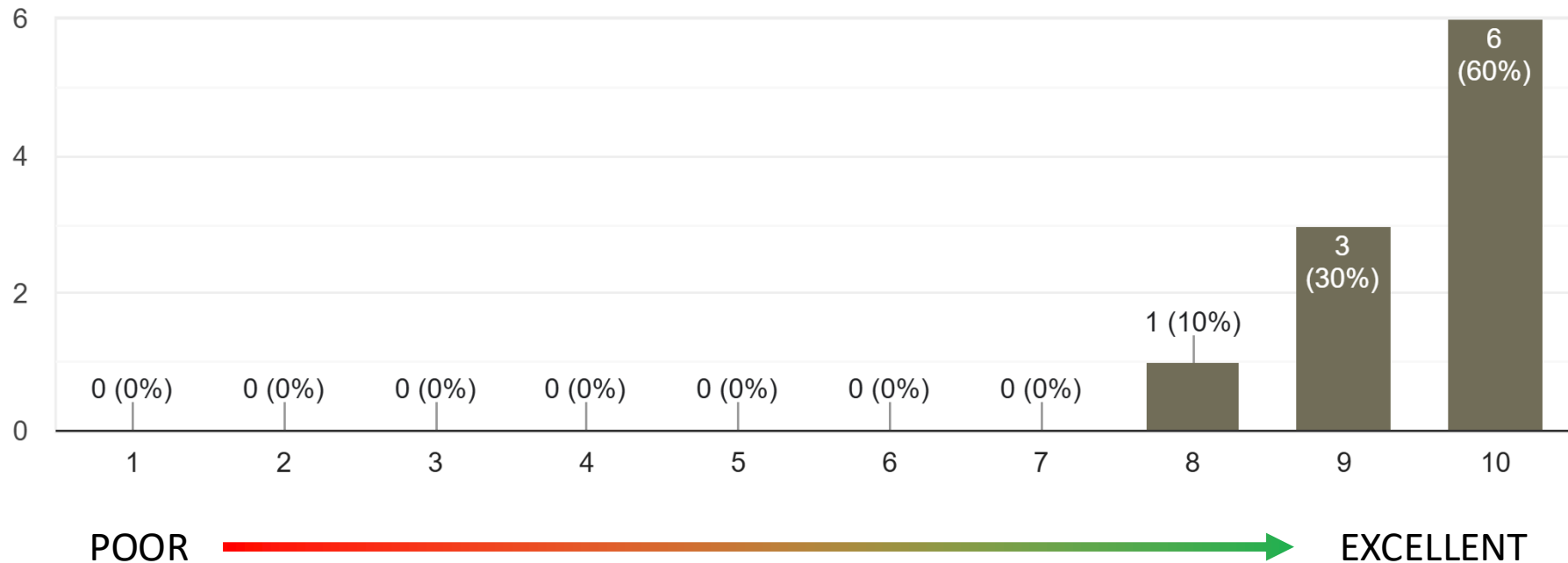
10 responses



Sandwiches, Salad, Snacks at TFS

How would you rate the variety of sandwich, salad, and snack items available at Toolik?

10 responses



Food at TFS (comments or things you'd like to see)



- “jelly beans”
- “More “healthy” snack options, protein bars are very appreciated! Also more protein options in the vegetarian meals.”
- “plenty to choose from!”
- “More pizza nights please!”
- “I thought the food variety and diversity was great, and I’m saying that as a veggie!”
- “Thank you for being thoughtful about prep for vegetarians – it’s nice to know you think we’d like to eat more than just noodles, and warm blobs of tofu”

Food at TFS continued..

- “The food staff is professional and courteous.”
- “thanks for the great work on providing food!”
- “...It felt like myself and others in my group were getting in trouble for things we didn't know were rules but were maybe "unwritten" rules that you learned after being up there for a bit. For the future seasons, additional signage would be good about some of these unwritten rules (i.e., only bread is allowed to touch the panini press, don't approach the back side of the buffet line during the shoulder seasons).”
- “The food is beyond excellent. I can't see how anyone could in good faith complain about it.”
- “The food was excellent!”

TFS Washeteria

- “I thought that it was kept fairly clean.”
- “I am gobsmacked by the washeteria! I can't believe we get such great private showers AND get to do laundry in such great machines!”
- “It's fine, but a colossal waste of money. There really should be some hooks or shelves in the shower rooms.”
- “The washeteria was very clean and served its purpose. I don't think any changes are needed.”



Watercraft

- No major issues with boats for research purposes
- Recreational vessels were appreciated
- Bailing boats after rain was sometimes an issue

Comments:

- “no problems were encountered”
- “I used the kayaks, and really appreciated folks taking time to get me oriented to rules and regs. I had no issues checking the kayaks in/out or finding paddles, pfds for them”
- “The only problem was that there were not enough kayak paddles by the end of the summer – one or two must have been broken or lost throughout the summer.”

Camp Life and Recreation Requests

- More short bikes and some kind of climbing wall! Labeling cubbies in the gym with your leave date (like the washateria) so things can be cleaned out
- a banjo!

Lab Space at TFS

- “No issues, all good.”
- “DI water in Lab 2 needed fixing several times.”
- “Lab space was great and we could complete the work we needed to do in it, or have easy access to other instruments that we needed in nearby labs.”

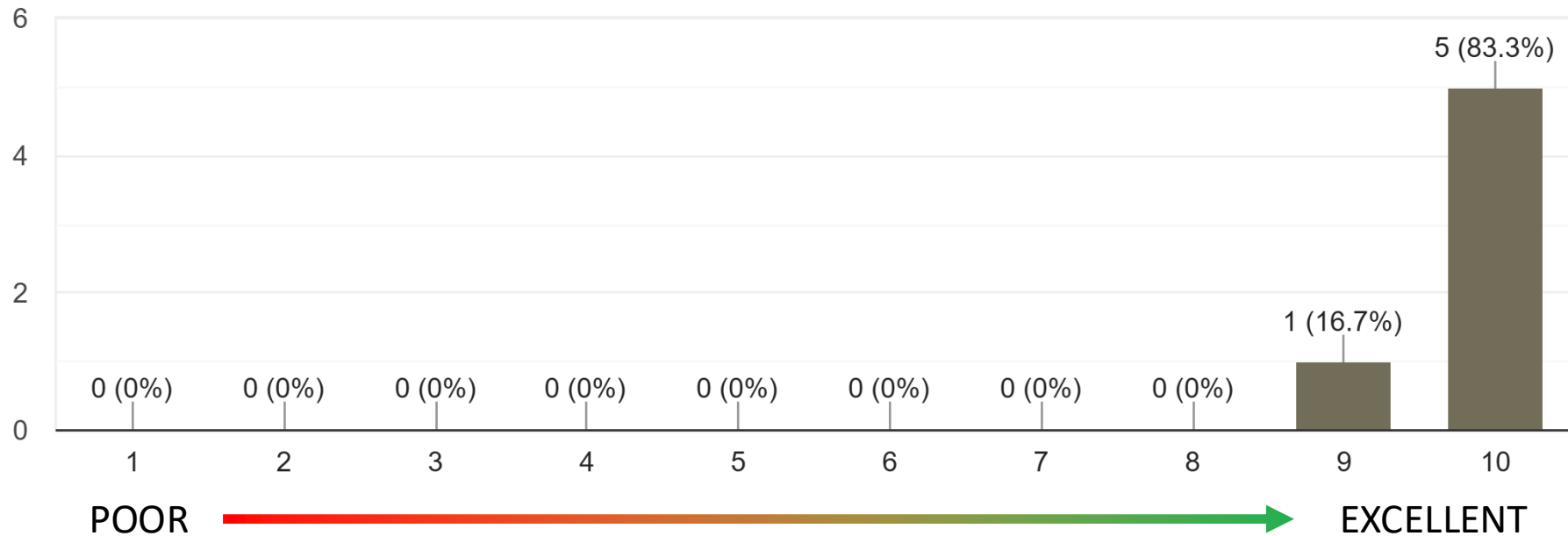
Shipping to/from TFS

- “Logistics was on their game – high fives all round!”
- “shipping worked great”



How would you rate any field assistance or remote access assistance you received from TFS-ENVIRONMENTAL DATA CENTER?

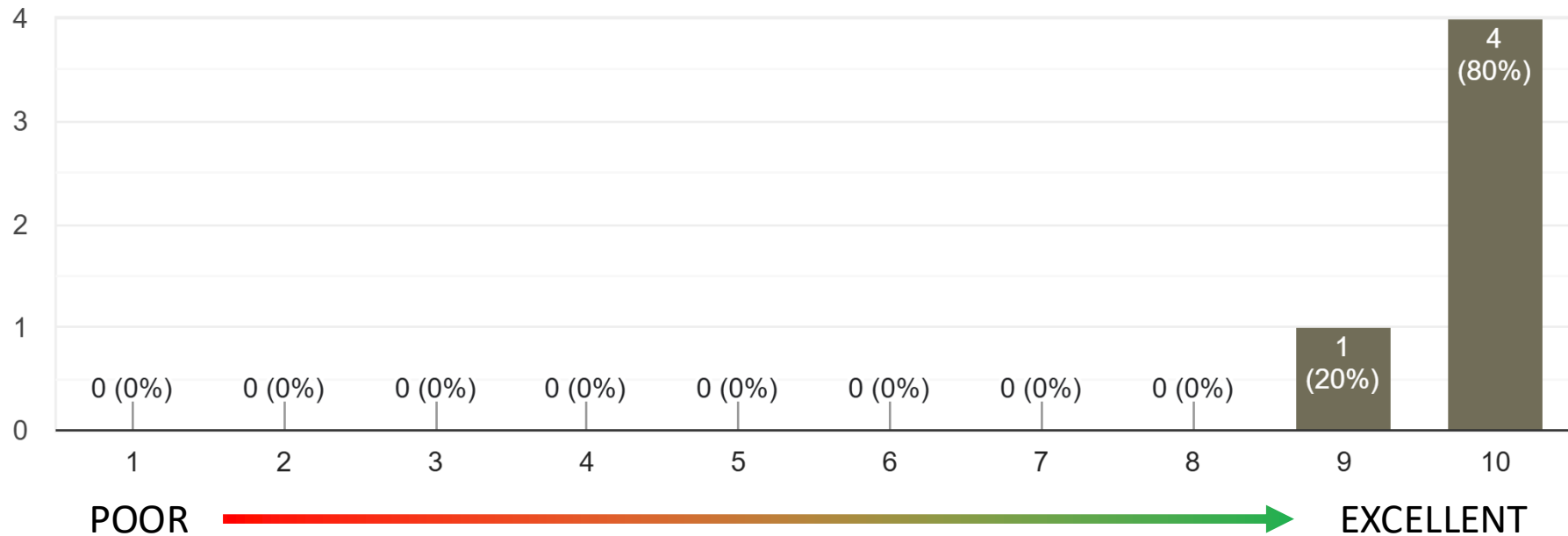
6 responses



TFS-GIS and Remote Sensing

How would you rate any field assistance or remote access assistance you received from TFS-GIS and REMOTE SENSING?

5 responses



SEDC and GIS Support

- “so helpful and proactive.”
- “Very helpful and flexible!”
- “Thank you for doing stellar jobs – it is so much appreciated”
- “You should be paid more. Remote access is invaluable to our research.”

TFS Shared Equipment Requests

- “...recommend to get multiband handheld gps (better precision).”
- “It would be nice to have another set or two of larger (more size inclusive) waders / boots / gear available to borrow from the SQUA”
- “It would be really nice to have land surveying equipment available, i.e. transit level and rod.”
- “A dry suit might also be a nice addition to the gear closet, although I realize they're quite expensive.”

TFS Website, SRS System

- “Difficulties when a reservation uses a project truck, and then wants a back up of the toolik shuttle.”
- “Making and changing reservations was a bit trying at times, which led to some frustration and consternation, for all parties, I'm sure.”
- “I think the myToolik reservation page is a little clunky to use. One small change that would make it a lot more user-friendly is a calendar view of reservations. Now, all the reservations for a given project are tabular, which makes them a little tricky to keep straight. A visual representation of arrivals/departures would be useful (something along the lines of a gantt chart).”

Other Comments and Future Directions

- Honestly, it's such a treat to have all the amenities Toolik provides while doing research. You all make it so that arctic research can happen, and I'm really grateful for all that you do! Thank you for everything!"
- "I get the sense the staff at the station feel misunderstood and undervalued a bit. It is concerning to me and other researchers I've spoken with that there has been so many staff leaving, albeit for a variety of reasons. But, it's tough times for science I realize."



Community recognition

- “Joe Franich is an incredible asset at TFS. Each year, Joe gets better and seems to anticipate our every need and equipment issues. By the time our crew arrived at TFS, Joe had our snowmobiles, sleds, and all requested items waiting inside the lab and at our doorstep, ready to go. Joe gave us personalized and efficient service. Joe is so chill.”
- “Abby Jackson with the EDC was wonderful to work with! Abby made sure all the data were collected for our project, even when we weren't here!”
- “I'd like to give a shout out to everyone in the Toolik community – for their patience, their knowledge, their professionalism, their kindness and overall good-people-ness. Thank you.”
- “Amanda, Joe and Justin in particular. The entire staff has been fantastic this year. Thank you all!”



Questions? Discussion?