

SURVEY

Rating Core Labs

In a survey of *Genome Technology* readers, core lab scientists and researchers shared their thoughts on how well core labs are doing.

BY CIARA CURTIN

Core labs might be the overlooked, underappreciated sidekick in the research world, but this survey of 841 *Genome Technology* readers says that users are happy overall with their cores.

For this survey, our third on the topic, we asked about your experiences with core labs. About 23 percent of the respondents worked at a core lab themselves, and they were directed to a separate set of questions asking about their facilities, while the rest of the respondents gave their feedback on using core labs — 66 percent of those respondents send work to cores.

CORE LAB
RESPONDENTS

182

SCIENTISTS NOT
AT CORE LABS

604

Most commonly, researchers take advantage of core labs for DNA sequencing, microarray, mass spectrometry, and 2D gel projects — a similar breakdown as in our previous two surveys — while sending out oligo building to outside service providers. They do, however, prefer to do PCR and cloning in their own labs. Accordingly, the top services offered at cores are DNA sequencing and microarrays, while

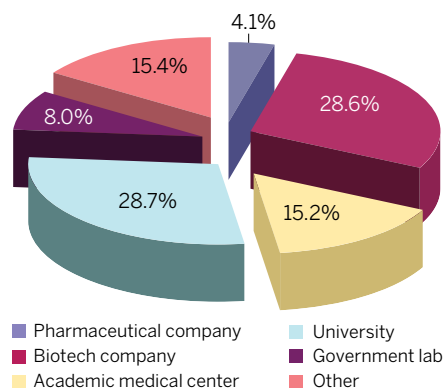
many facilities also offer PCR and genotyping services.

And the users are pretty happy with those services. Most users rated their cores as “excellent” or “good” overall and were particularly pleased with the accuracy of their results, the core staff, and the reliability of the service at the core. Indeed, when asked if they would switch from using their core lab to an outside service provider, respondents overwhelmingly — 64 percent — said that they’d stick with the service they are using now. The users do, however, see some room for improvement in speed of service, cost, and the range of services offered; cores were more likely to be rated as “good” on those points.

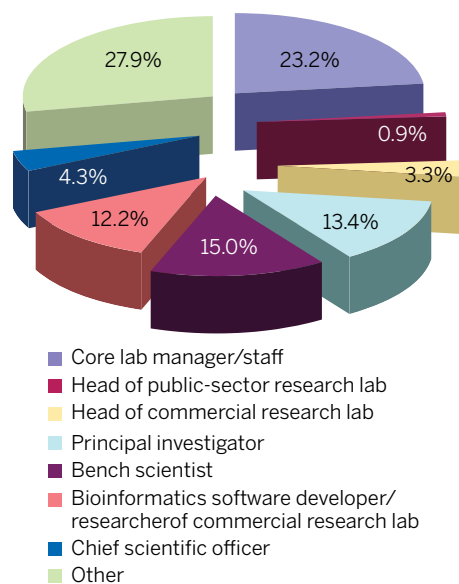
For their part, managers and staff at core labs say that accuracy and reliability of results are among their top priorities, followed by the quality of their support staff and the ease and efficiency of their work flow. Core lab workers also report that their prices are often tiered. For example, in-department researchers might receive a better rate than those from other institutions, followed by flat rates (though some cores do offer subsidized or even free services).

A little more than two-thirds of core lab staff also say that they are seeing more work this past year than before — which they also noted in the 2008 and the 2006 surveys.

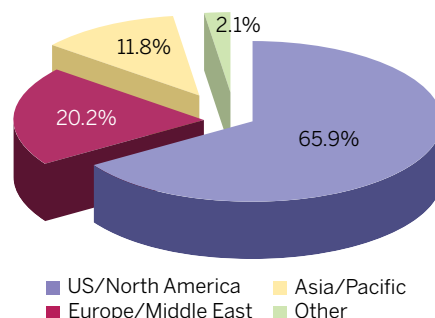
RESPONDENTS BY ORGANIZATION TYPE



RESPONDENTS BY JOB TITLE



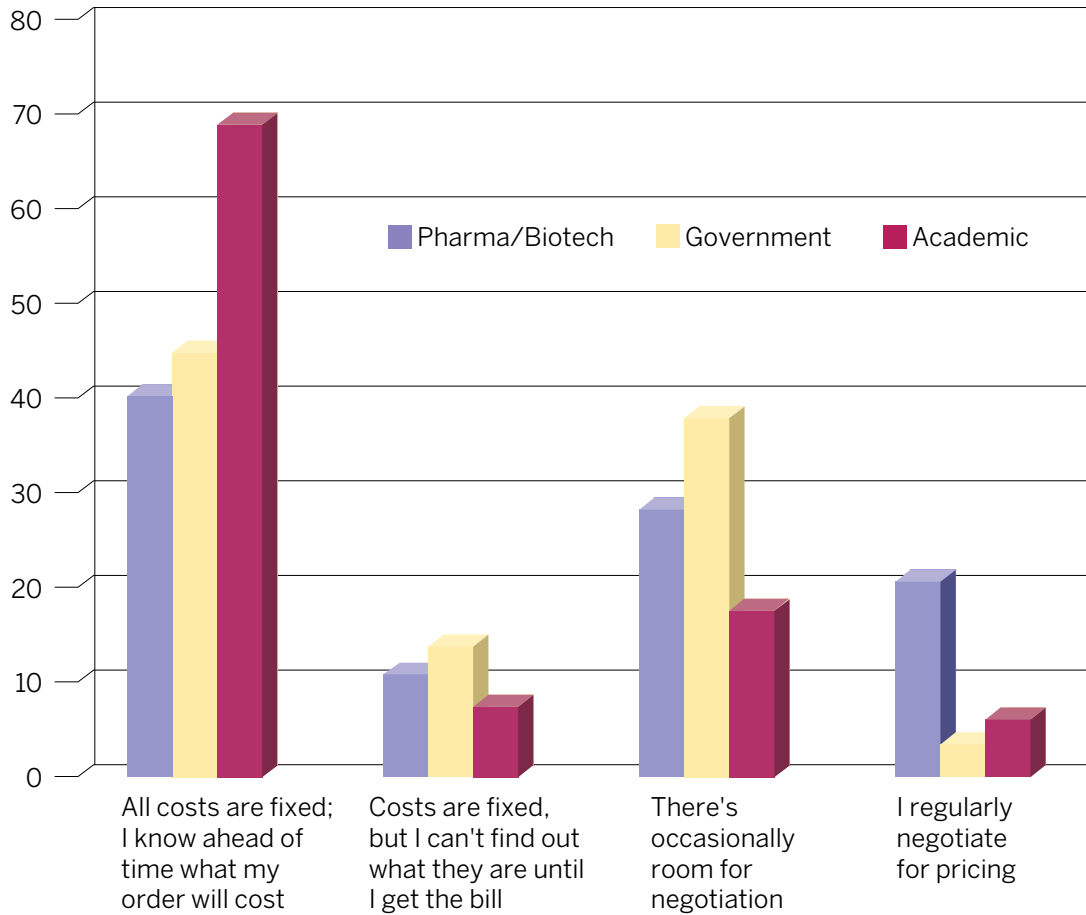
RESPONDENTS BY LOCATION



Scientists (Non-Core Lab) Respondents

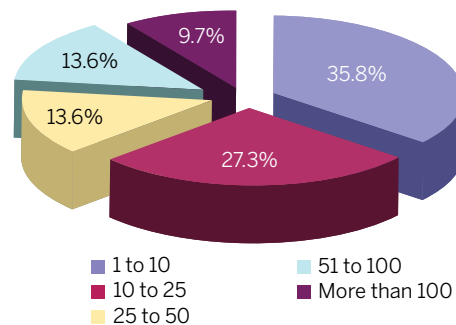
ARE COSTS UNIFORM, OR DO YOU NEGOTIATE FOR PRICING?

Percentage of respondents by organization type

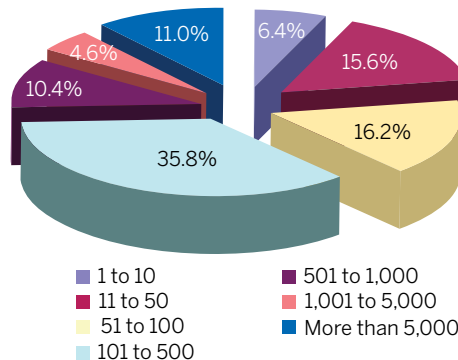


Core Lab Respondents

HOW MANY SCIENTISTS SEND WORK TO YOUR LAB EACH MONTH?



HOW MANY SCIENTISTS HAVE THE OPTION OF USING YOUR CORE LAB?



NEW TRENDS

67%

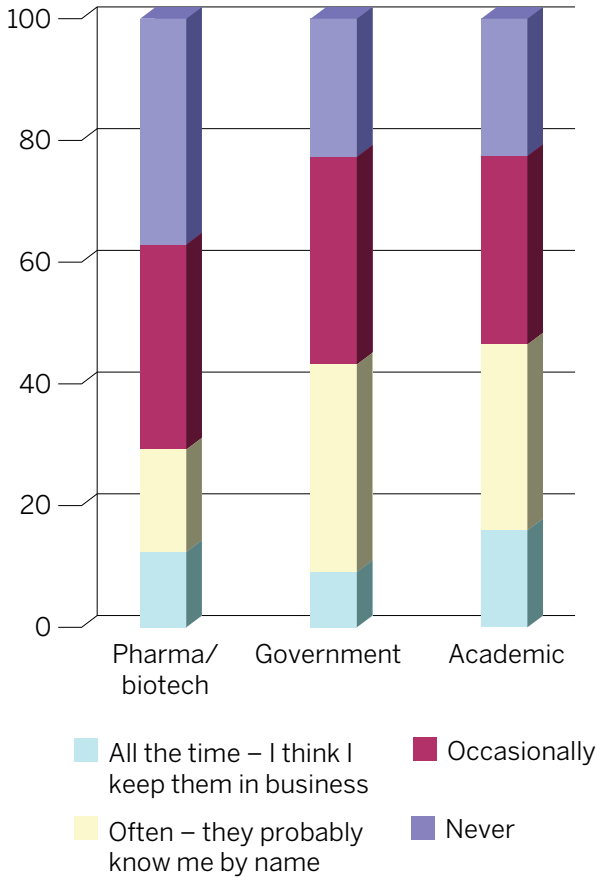
of core lab respondents say they've seen a spike in work this year.

WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT TO CORE LABS

Accuracy
Reliability

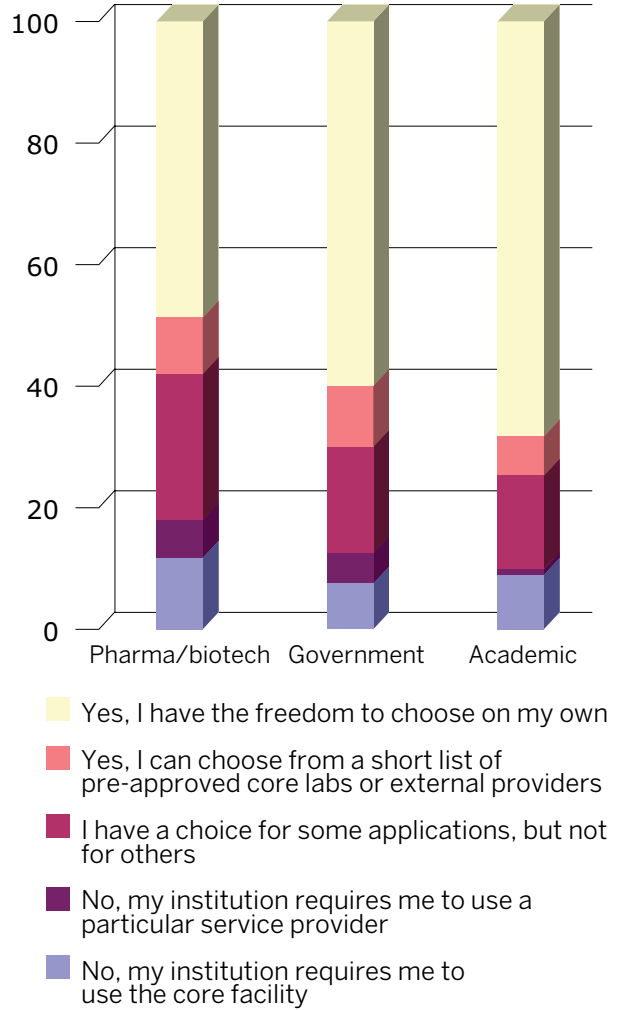
HOW FREQUENTLY DO YOU SEND WORK TO A CORE LAB?

Percentage of respondents by organization type

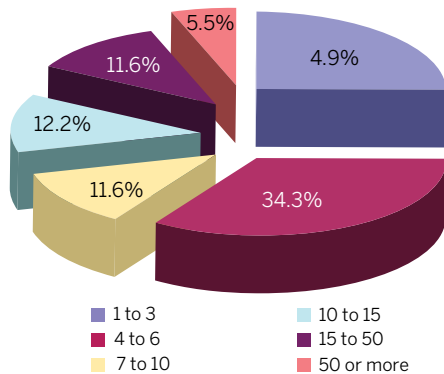


DO YOU HAVE A CHOICE ABOUT USING AN OUTSIDE SERVICE PROVIDER INSTEAD OF YOUR CORE LAB?

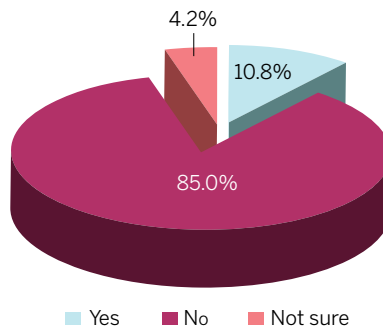
Percentage of respondents by organization type



CORE LAB STAFF SIZE, IN PERCENT



IS YOUR CORE FACILITY CLIA CERTIFIED?



WHAT'S ON YOUR WISH LIST?

These were the most important to improving their facilities:

Having newer tools/technologies

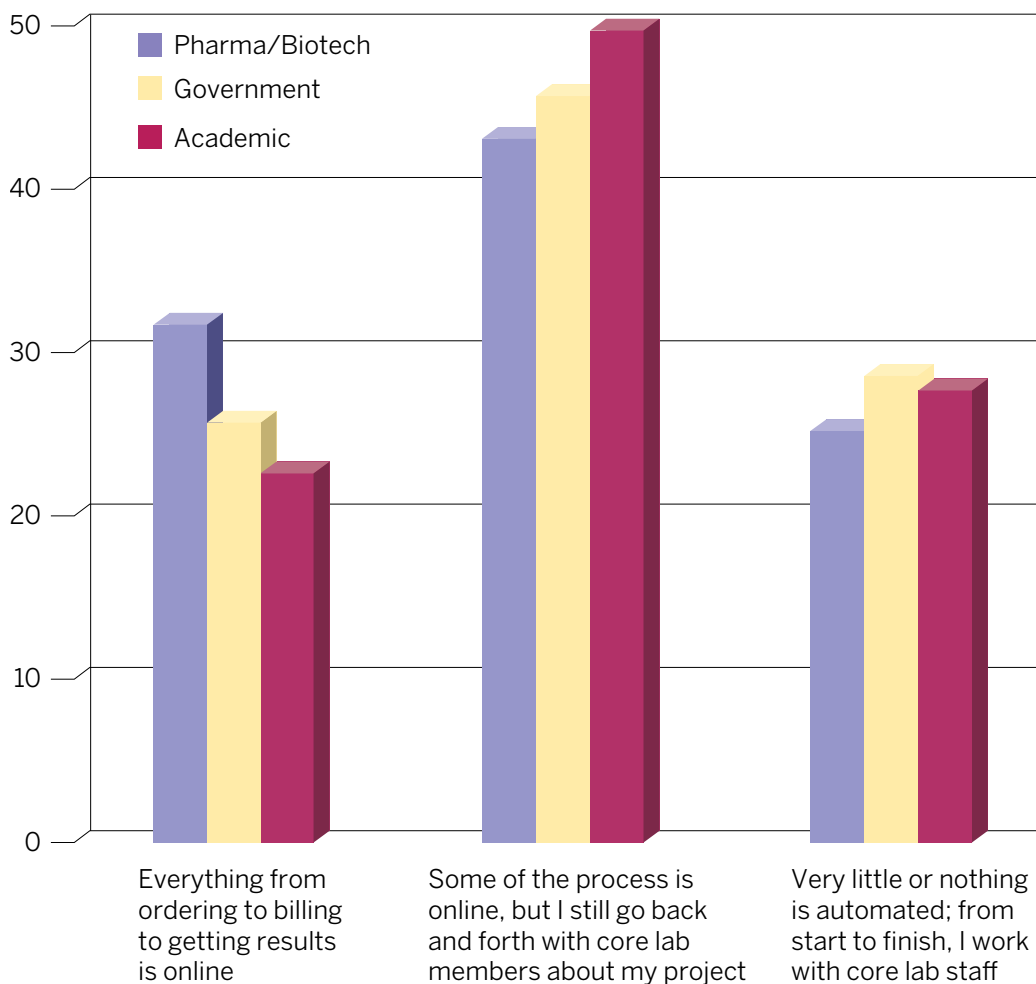
Better software options

Having higher-throughput tools/technologies

Scientists (Non-Core Lab) Respondents

WHEN PLACING A WORK ORDER, WHAT INTERACTION DO YOU HAVE WITH YOUR CORE LAB?

Percentage of respondents by organization type



PARSING TECHNOLOGIES

Non-core lab scientists indicated that they would be most likely to run these technologies in their own lab:

PCR
Cloning

While they were most likely to run these at a core facility:

DNA sequencing
Microarrays
Mass spectrometry
Genotyping

Meanwhile, core lab members were most likely to offer these technologies:

DNA sequencing **Microarrays**
PCR **Genotyping**

PRICING

44.8% of core labs are fee-for-service with tiered pricing

32.5% are fee-for-service with flat pricing

16.0% are free

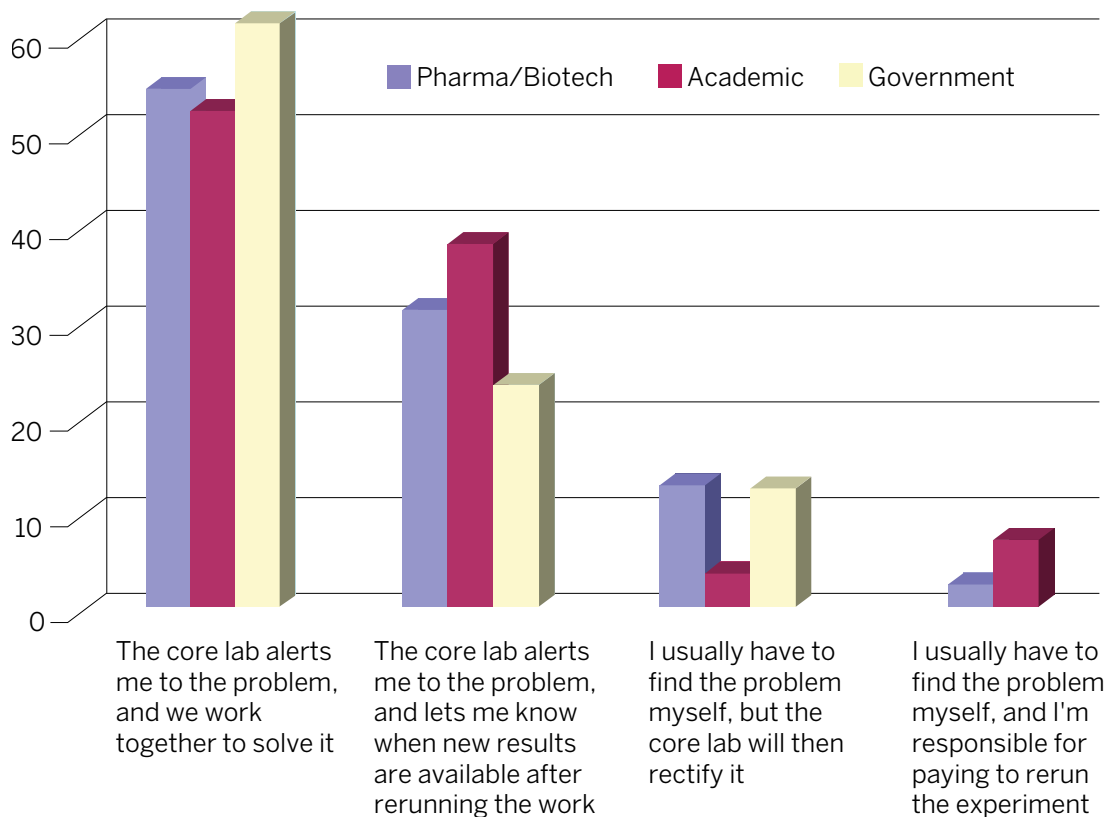
FLEXIBILITY OF RESULTS

Pharma/biotech and academic respondents report having the most flexibility in choosing data formats and analysis programs at their core labs.

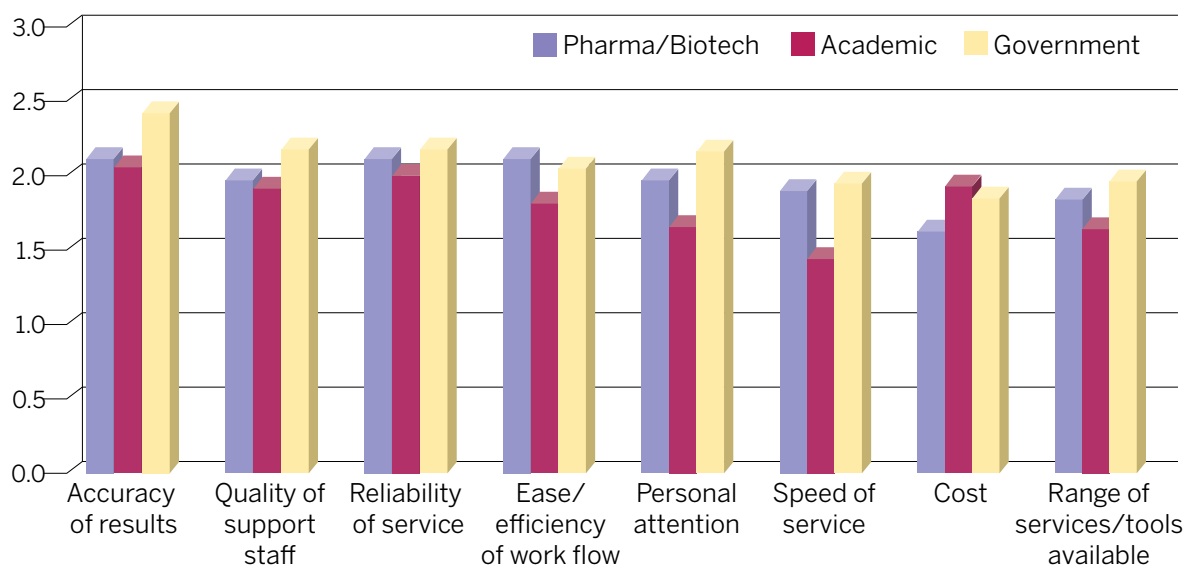
33.0% of pharma/biotech respondents and **32.9%** of academic respondents indicated having a selection of tools available, compared to **26.9%** of government lab respondents

IF THERE IS A PROBLEM WITH YOUR ORDER, HOW IS IT HANDLED?

Percentage of respondents by organization type



USERS RATE THE CORE LABS



To establish ratings, *GT* assigned 3 points for each "excellent" response, 2 for each "good," and 1 for each "fair." "Poor" responses yielded zero points. The totals were then divided by the number of respondents to make the ratings comparable. The highest possible rating, therefore, is a 3.0.