



Workshop
on
Transparency & Proactive Disclosure
of Information on Websites
November 12 – 13, 2015

Program Management Unit
Punjab Resource Management Program
Planning & Development Department
Government of the Punjab

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List of Acronyms

DLI	Disbursement Linked Indicator
P&D	Planning & Development Department
PITB	Punjab Information Technology Board
PPRMP	Punjab Public Management Reform Program
PRMP	Punjab Resource Management Program
RTI	Punjab Transparency & Right to Information Act 2013

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A. Background

The Punjab Public Management Reform Program (PPMRP) was launched in 2013 as a five-year partnership, scheduled to conclude in 2018, between the Government of the Punjab and the World Bank to improve transparency and resource management across the Punjab. PPMRP, worth US\$50 million, is a PforR instrument designed to support the government's program that focuses on addressing critical constraints to service delivery. The program aims to: i) improve transparency and access to information about specific services; ii) strengthen performance monitoring systems and feedback loops; and iii) strengthen resource management systems.

Under PPMRP, the first Disbursement Linked Indicator (DLI), i.e. the Intermediary Results Indicator 1.1, focuses on *“proactive disclosure by targeted organisations through the publication of institutional information on their websites for access and availability of the public.”* This indicator is particularly significant vis-à-vis the proactive disclosure requirements stipulated in the Punjab Transparency & Right to Information Act 2013 (RTI).

The Punjab Transparency & Right to Information Act was passed by the Punjab Assembly in December 2013 and has been deemed an effective law based on its contents and provisions. The primary objective of the Transparency & Right to Information Act is **“to enforce the fundamental right of access to information in all manners of public importance ...”** Accordingly, the principles of the act, which also support the ambit of the PPMR program, are:

- a. maximum disclosure;
- b. proactive disclosure (providing information without a request);
- c. defined and limited exceptions;
- d. defined procedures;
- e. appeals mechanism (for enforcement of law and to handle citizens' complaints); and
- f. promotional measures.

To amplify the importance of the RTI, the preamble thereof stipulates its principle and premise as “to provide for transparency and freedom of information to ensure that citizens have improved access to public information; to make the Government more accountable to citizens; to enforce the fundamental right of access to information in all matters of public importance.” The context is particularly significant in cognizance of the objectives of DLI-1 and PPMRP.

B. Introduction & Overview

A workshop was arranged by Punjab Resource Management Program (PRMP) on Proactive Disclosure of Information on Websites under DLI-1 of Punjab Public Management Reform Program (PPMRP) in the Auditorium of Planning & Development Department (P&D) on November 12 & 13, 2015. The workshop aimed to discuss, review, and identify issues pertaining to both the revamping and the development of websites of the targeted departments.

The purpose of this two-day workshop was to provide an opportunity to the representatives of the targeted departments to share their views and highlight issues encountered in the development and maintenance of their respective websites. Moreover, the objective of the workshop was to understand and highlight the significance of this program with respect to the broader Transparency & Right to Information Act 2013 to successfully implement the requirements and criteria of proactive disclosure of information to benefit the citizens of the province. Another key objective of this workshop was to highlight to the higher/senior authorities the impediments being faced within their respective departments to achieve the goals set by Planning & Development Department, as well as the RTI, so that serious corrective measures can be taken. The workshop was well-attended by over a hundred representatives (Annex–A) from the targeted departments and organisations under the PPMRP.

In the pursuit of an all-encompassing agenda, the workshop provided participants with the opportunity to learn extensively of the background, nature, operational effectiveness, and overall importance of PPMRP, in general, and DLI-1, in particular. The participants received this information in the context of the Government of the Punjab's Reform Agenda which places overwhelming emphasis on accountability, openness, and transparency in governance.

The presentation, training, and discussions on the RTI entailed the historical importance of proactive disclosure and transparency, coupled with the significance of the information regime stipulated by global governance best practices. In doing justice to the legal efficacy of the RTI enacted by the Provincial Assembly of the Punjab, the workshop proved to be instrumental in communicating not only the premise and principles of the law, but in specifying the statutory obligations imposed by it on public sector officials and organisations. The workshop additionally served as an appropriate platform to encourage organisations to appoint Public Information Officers within their respective organisations (who may also act as designated focal persons for PPMRP), and apprised the attendees of the legal ramifications of failing to perform the statutory duty imposed by RTI.

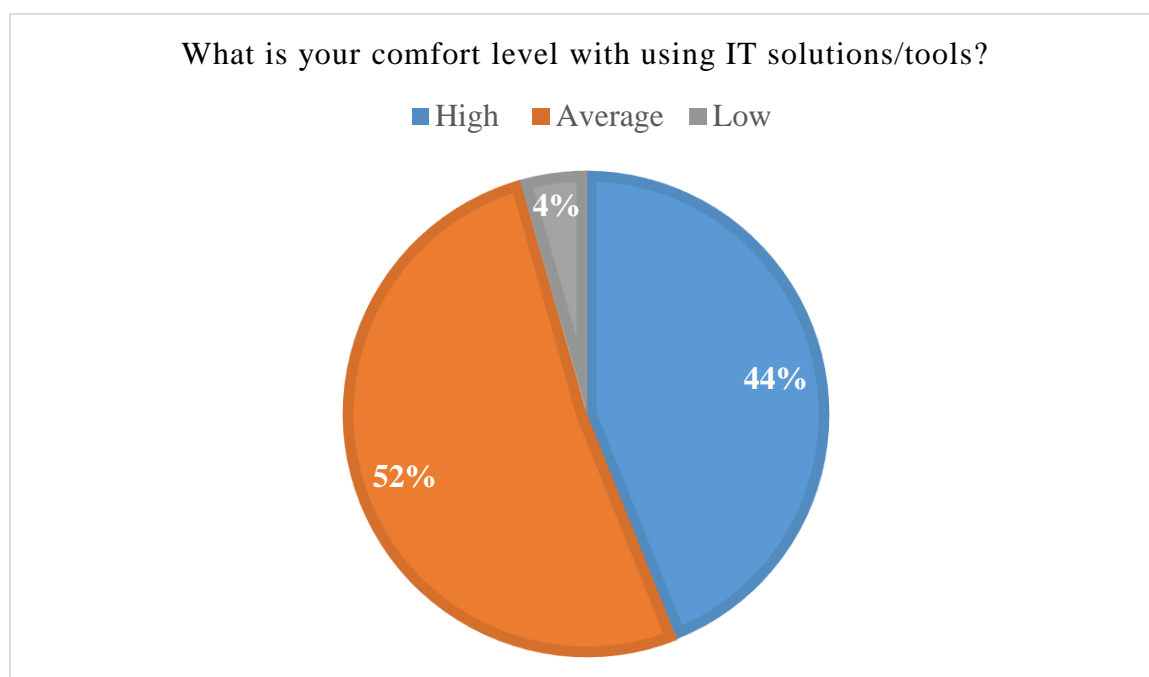
C. Findings

Through the two-day interactive sessions, detailed discussions with representatives of targeted organisations were held on RTI and PPMRP and their valuable feedback was collected to help in better implementation of the program. This feedback may be deemed critical in devising the way forward vis-à-vis implementation of PPMRP in the next two and a half years.

A feedback form (Annex-B) was circulated amongst the representatives to gain insight into the hurdles being faced by the targeted organisations to help streamline the process on behalf of implementing agencies. A summary of the feedback form has been tabulated below.

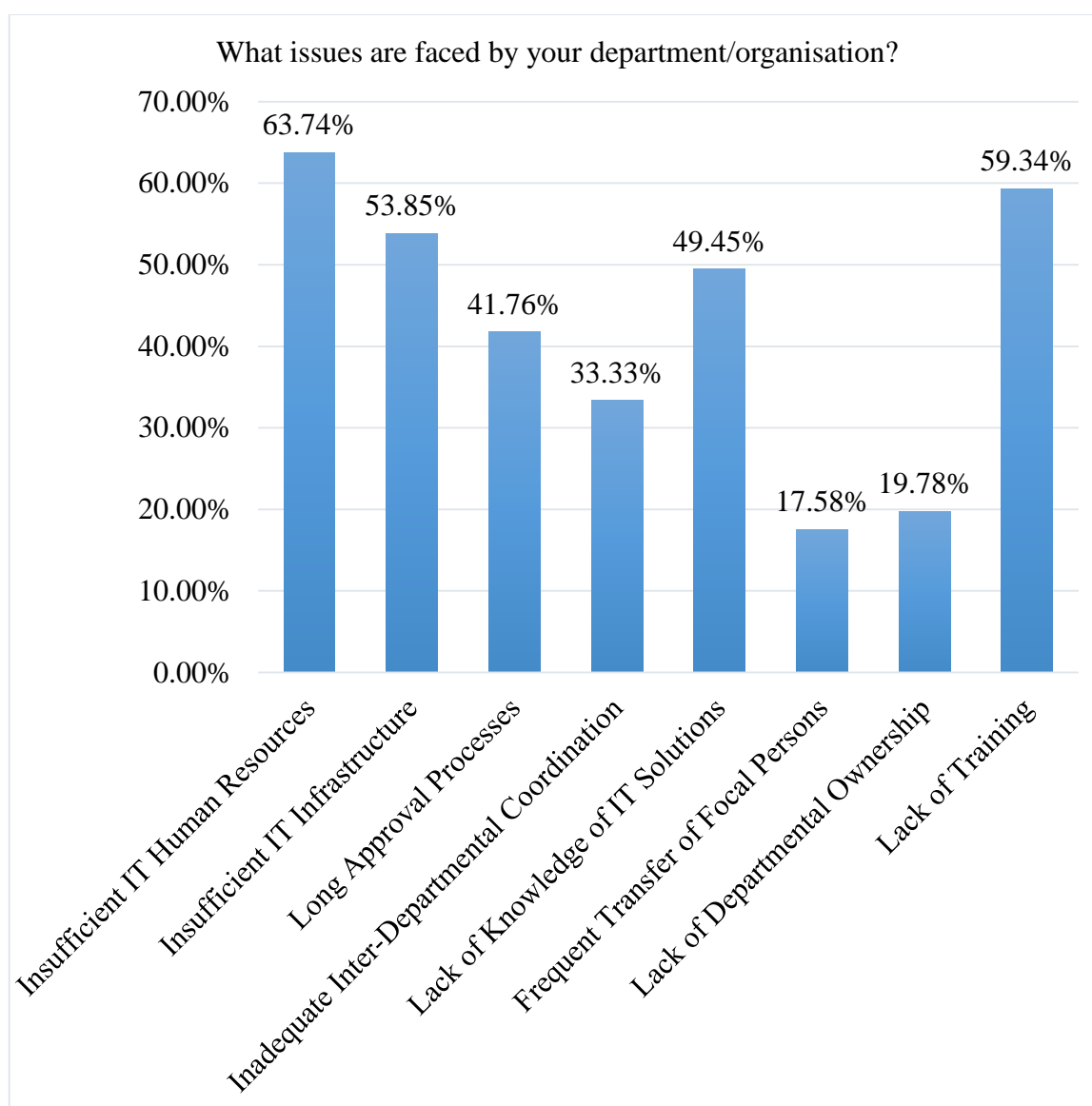
Feedback Form Questions

1. What is your comfort level with using IT solutions/tools?



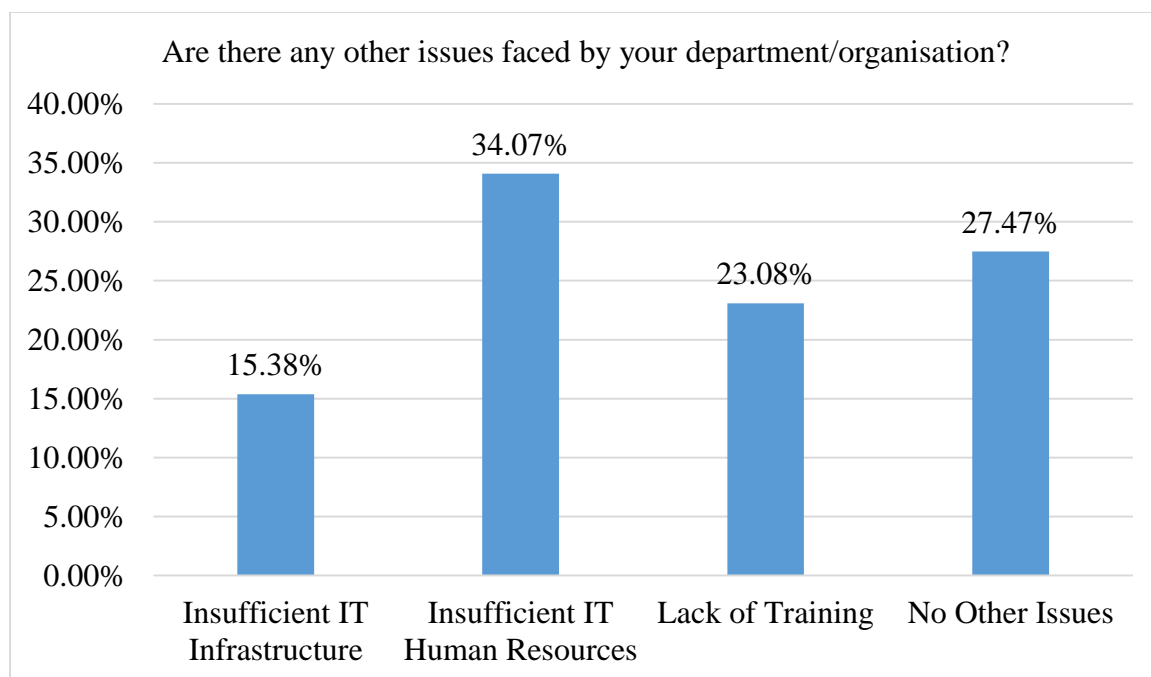
The question sought to ask representatives their respective degrees of comfort with the use of IT tools such as emails, dashboards, management information systems, and websites etc. A little over 44 percent claimed a high level, whereas over 52 percent considered it to be average. Reassuringly, less than 4 percent of the participants considered their comfort level to be low.

2. What issues are faced by your department/organisation?



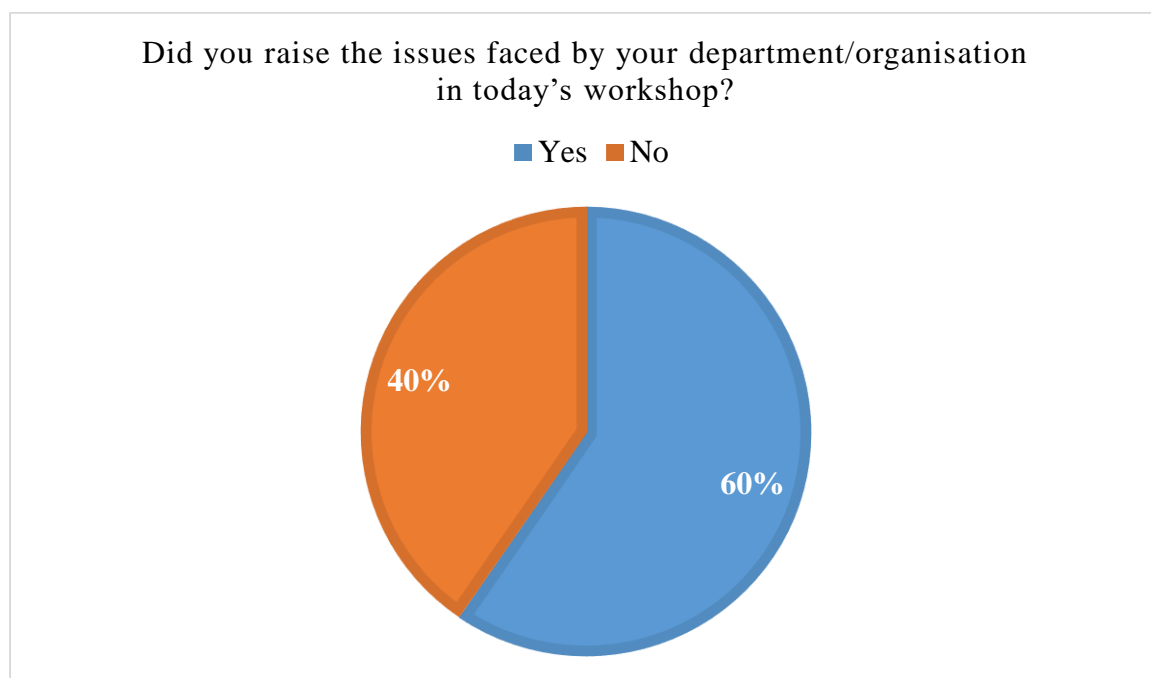
The question sought to inquire as to which, from amongst an exhaustive list of options, were the issues faced by targeted organisations vis-à-vis the development and deployment of websites. While less than 20 percent of the participants indicated frequent transfer of focal persons and lack of departmental ownership, a significant number of participants agreed with and indicated existence of all the remaining issues that were identified by PRMP during the last two and a half years.

3. Are there any other issues faced by your department/organisation?



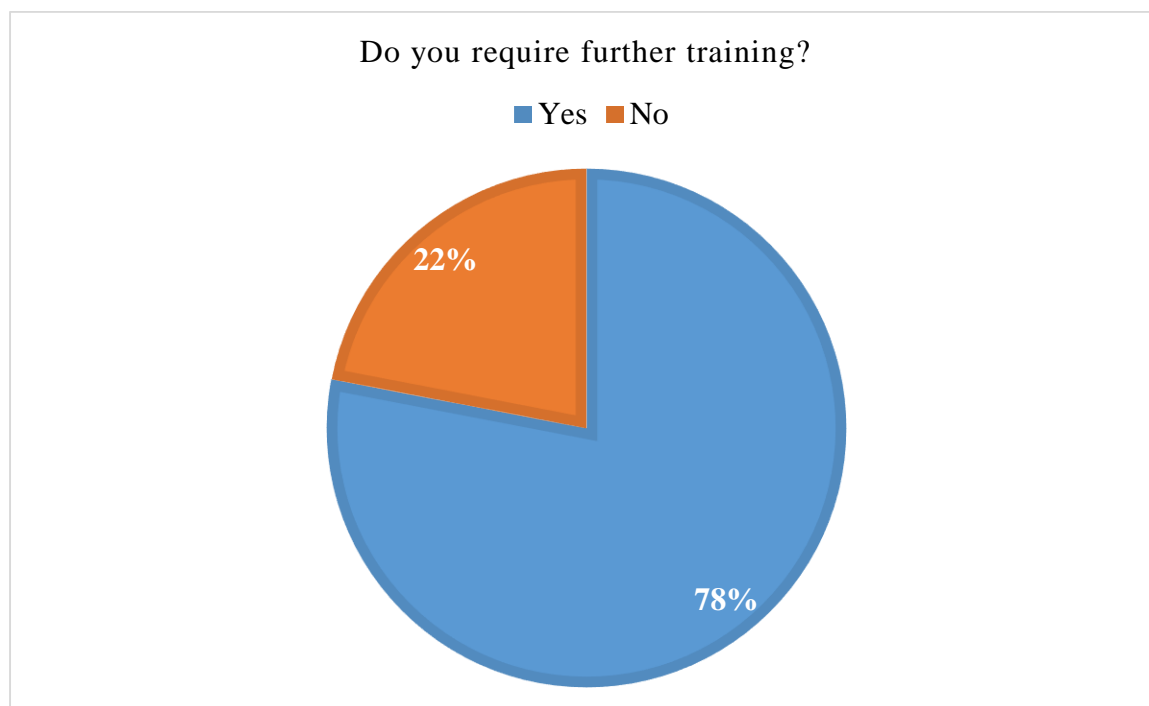
The participants were provided with an opportunity to highlight any additional issues, which may have remained unobserved by PRMP, which their target organisation may be facing. While over 27 percent of participants clearly stated there to be no additional issues, the remaining participants reiterated the existence of issues identified in the previous question.

4. Did you raise the issues faced by your department/organisation in today's workshop?



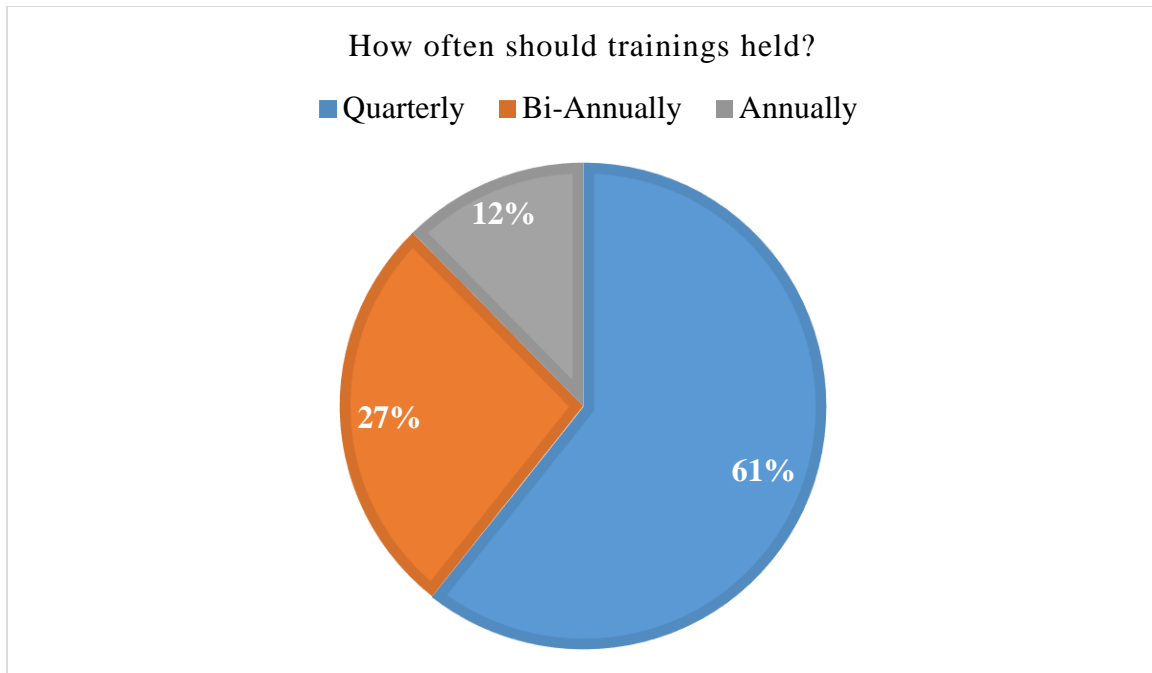
A significant proportion of the participants indicated that they had raised the issues, faced by their respective organisation, for discussion during the workshop. While 40 percent of the participants indicated that they had not, two factors may be taken into consideration: i) some organisations did not face any issues that were not previously identified; and ii) organisations did not raise issues, for fear of repetition, which had already been discussed at the forum.

5. Do you require further training?



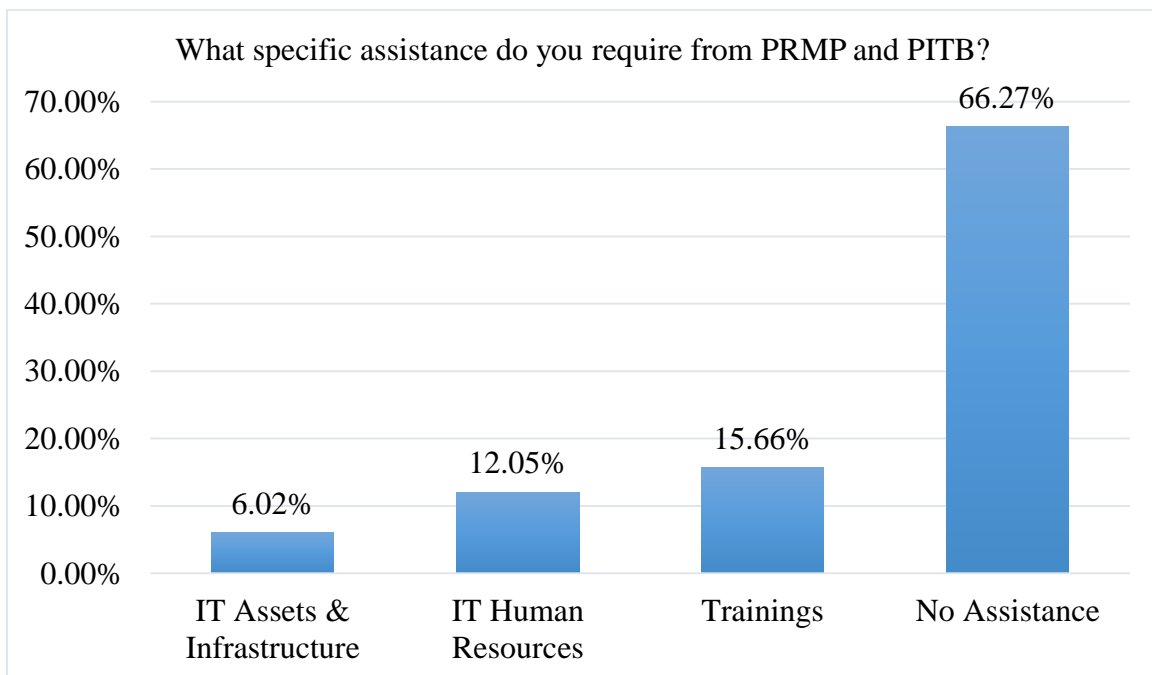
A significant proportion of the participants, particularly those who felt and identified lack of training to have been an impediment in the implementation of the program, stated a need for additional trainings/workshops for capacity-building and efficient execution of the program. The training needs in particular focused on tailor-made trainings for the organisations, on regular basis, pertaining to content and data uploading on Drupal, graphic designing on applications and softwares such as Adobe Photoshop and Corel Draw, interface development, systems networking, and website development.

6. How often should trainings be held?



While the question pertaining primarily to those participants who had stated a need for additional training in the previous question, the responses from all participants were sought. Accordingly, across all participants, over 61 percent encouraged the notion of quarterly trainings and workshops, whereas 27 percent indicated their assent for bi-annual workshops.

7. What specific assistance do you require from PRMP and PITB?



In light of the importance of all organisations engaging in proactive disclosure, under the remit of the Punjab Transparency & Right to Information Act 2013, and vis-à-vis the ambit of PPMRP, most target organisations stated that they did not require any specific assistance from PRMP and PITB. However, they did identify the need for technical assistance from time to time from both PITB as well as PRMP, and urged both the organisations to assist in raising their issues to the higher authorities in terms of lack of IT knowledge resources at their disposal. They deeply felt a disconnect between their issues and the existing policy framework. It was witnessed that the target organisations were keen to implement a sustainable system for proactive disclosure of information and acknowledged that incentivizing the process will only add value and expedite the process. For those representatives who did seek specific assistance from PITB and PRMP, more frequent trainings topped their list of priorities.

D. Suggestions & Way Forward

PRMP, as the implementing agency for PPMRP and an organisation committed to the promotion of transparency and good governance, has methodically collected and tabulated feedback to identify specific assistance that may be provided to target organisations. In this regard, PRMP is working closely with the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB), to organise and conduct trainings and workshops with immediate effect. These are expected to build the IT Human Resource capacities of targeted organisations not only for the development and maintenance of websites during the remainder of the two and a half years of the program, but to ensure sustainable capacity and expertise in these organisation to carry the torch after PPMRP concludes.

More specifically, PRMP shall be engaging in the following exercises as the way forward:

- a. Building of human resource capacity and expertise through regular trainings;
- b. Seeking requests from target departments/organisations for additional financing;
- c. Coordination with PITB to make available all possible IT assets and infrastructure;
- d. Continued liaison with target organisations to provide assistance and gain feedback.

Under PPRMP, an additional financing of USD 100 million is expected for fiscal years 2016 to 2018 which will provide further strengthening of this program initiative. Departments have been urged by PRMP to identify their needs and to make transparency and proactive disclosure of information on websites a sustainable initiative for good governance.