

DATA

Making a connection with consumers is key to sustainability for funeral directors, but getting inside the consumer's head is more challenging every year for those looking to stay ahead of the curve when it comes to trends and preferences for memorialization. And there's really only one way to find out what someone wants – ask them. Since 2012, NFDA has done exactly that, asking consumers what they want in a funeral service for a loved one or, eventually, for themselves.

This is the 12th NFDA Consumer Awareness and Preferences Survey, and the numbers are fairly consistent, which reflects a statistical significance and high level of reliability. In addition, new questions are incorporated each year to keep the content fresh and make the survey as comprehensive as possible.

Several new questions were added in 2023, the answers to which were certainly not expected and present more color to the current funeral service landscape. We'll have more on those new questions when we go inside the numbers a little later.

As always, the survey's main objective is to measure consumer awareness of and preferences for funerals and funeral services in an effort to help directors improve their service quality by learning more about consumer attitudes and trends in funeral service.

As in past surveys, NFDA asked consumers about a variety of topics, including shopping for a funeral home, funeral planning, why a funeral home is chosen, social media, religion, clergy, celebrants, green funerals, body donation, preneed, cremation and memorialization. The most noticeable observations in this survey wave:

- More than 85% of consumers agree that funerals are for the living and that they help mourners begin their grief journey and healing process.
- More than two-thirds (71%) of respondents feel it is either very important or important to have a funeral or memorial service to commemorate the life of a loved one.
- Regardless of their disposition preference, 57.3% of respondents prefer to have a funeral service with a viewing and visitation prior to burial or cremation.
- Compared to those who attended a cremation service, respondents who attended a funeral/memorial service with burial are significantly more likely to state that the service was very helpful in paying tribute to or commemorating the life of their loved one and an important part of helping them begin the healing process.

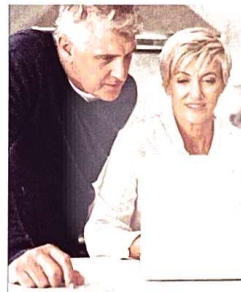
Moving Online

The practice of making funeral arrangements online (with or without the help of a funeral director) has been gaining momentum. This year, 65.6% of respondents said they have personally been involved in planning a funeral for a loved one.

Continuing the move toward online activities, more than half of respondents who have planned a funeral (54.8%) said they visited a funeral home website when they planned a funeral or memorial service. Of note, 26.1% of those made all arrangements online and 41.3% started the arrangement process online but followed up with a funeral director.

This year, 47.2% of respondents felt the online planning process was a good experience but still needed the assistance of a funeral director, while 41.1% were satisfied with the experience and were able to accomplish everything online. The survey found that 13.6% of respondents said their first interaction with the funeral home was online. And here's one stat to keep an eye on – 19.6% of respondents would prefer to make funeral prearrangements online versus speaking directly to a funeral director.

In the past, word of mouth was the most powerful endorsement for a product or business; these days, it's online reviews. When selecting a funeral home, more than one-third of respondents said an online review either solidified their decision and/or steered them toward a particular funeral home.



WORDS OF WISDOM

“The goal is to turn data into information and information into insight.”

– CARLY FIORINA, FORMER PRESIDENT AND CHAIR, HEWLETT-PACKARD CO.

Websites and Facebook Pages

Similar to past surveys, 66.7% of consumers said they have visited a funeral home's website primarily to look for an obituary, price information or information about planning a funeral, and/or to write an online condolence.

Facebook continues to be the social platform of choice as 86.2% of respondents use Facebook, with 65.4% stating they use it daily or several times per week. The survey also found that 42.9% of respondents who use Facebook have visited a funeral home's Facebook page, primarily to look for an obituary, and 21.3% said they have used the services of a funeral home they found on Facebook.

Religion

As we will find when we look at the religious component of funerals in more detail, the fluctuation in these numbers over the years has been perplexing. In 2023, 41.1% of respondents said they felt that having a religious component as part of a funeral was very important (down from 47.3% in 2021). Nearly 60% of respondents identify as Christian and 18.9% had no religious preference.

One-third of respondents (33%) felt that it was very important to have the body/cremated remains present at a funeral, down from 40.9% in 2021.

Looking at venues at which consumers are having memorials for loved ones, 53.1% have attended a funeral at a location other than a funeral home or place of worship. Correspondingly, 47% have attended a funeral or memorial service where someone other than a member of the clergy has presided over the service.

The pandemic gave livestreaming some permanence among funeral service offerings, and one-third of respondents have participated in a funeral or memorial service via a streaming service. Of those who have not participated in a livestreamed service, 50.5% would consider doing so.

Shopping

When it comes to funeral home shopping, more than one-third of consumers (38.6%) said they called/visited more than one funeral home when they planned a funeral. Of those, 52.9% did so to compare prices and 43.2% did so to check availability.

Of those who visited or called more than one funeral home to compare prices, 53.3% obtained pricing information in person, 24.2% obtained pricing information over the phone, 13.9% via email and 8.8% via a web search. The majority of respondents (70.9%) felt it was easy/very easy to obtain pricing information.

Of those who contacted more than one funeral home, the main reasons they chose a particular firm was because they had an existing relationship with a funeral director (18.7%), it offered affordable pricing (16.4%) and/or they had previously used the funeral home (13%).

Cremation

Approximately 40% of respondents said they would prefer cremation for their own funeral. Of those, 25.2% would prefer a funeral service with viewing and visitation prior to the cremation; 21.4% would prefer a memorial service.

When asked why they would choose cremation for themselves, 54.4% said it was more cost effective and 42.5% said it was easier/simpler/convenient. Of those who prefer cremation, 37.7% would prefer scattering their cremated remains in a sentimental place, 17.3% are undecided and 17% would bury or inter them at a cemetery.

If provided the opportunity, 26.2% of respondents

would be either very interested or interested in witnessing the start of the cremation process, while 33.2% were not interested at all.

Prearranging

When making prearrangements, 80.4% of those surveyed said they would prefer to make them by speaking directly to a funeral director. Just 10.1% have actually made prearrangements in writing with a funeral director.

Furthermore, 17.3% have prearranged and prepaid for their funerals. The main reasons include to guarantee prices of products and services and so survivors won't have to pay for arrangements and or worry about making them.



WORDS OF WISDOM

“Data are just summaries of thousands of stories. Tell a few of those stories to help make data meaningful.”

— AUTHOR DAN HEATH

Methodology

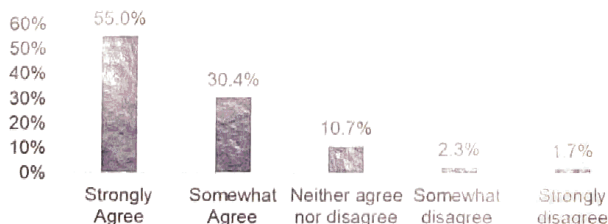
The survey was conducted March 7-15, 2023. Survey invitations were emailed to an online consumer panel consisting of Americans age 40 and older. A total of 1,009 participants completed surveys. Results for all respondents are projectable within a range of $\pm 3.2\%$ (with 95% confidence).

Please note that consumers who participate in online panels are typically higher-than-average internet users with higher incomes and education levels.

The sampling method is designed to generate a good representation of different racial/ethnic groups:

- 606 surveys obtained from the general population (primarily white)
- 134 from the Black/African-American population
- 132 from the Asian population
- 151 from the Hispanic population.

A funeral is for the living to help them begin their grief journey and healing process.



We began the survey asking consumers how much they value the funeral by seeking their level of agreement with the following statement: “A funeral is for the living to help them begin their grief journey and healing process.” Consumers agreed, with 55% saying they strongly agreed with the statement and another 30.4% saying they somewhat agreed. Almost 11% (10.7%) neither agreed nor disagreed, and 4% somewhat or strongly disagreed.