

Salaries & Status of Sustainability Professionals in Higher Education 2026



Results of AASHE's Higher Education Sustainability Staffing Survey

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On the cover: Sustainability professionals at the October AASHE 2025 Conference & Expo in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Clockwise from top-left (left to right below): Yasmin Mansour - Director of Sustainability, American University in Cairo; Stephania Fregosi - Sustainability Analyst, Portland Community College; Stephen Ellis - Associate Director of Asset Strategy & Resilience, Boston University; Clement Loo - Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies, University of Minnesota, Morris; Krista Bailey - Associate Director for Campus Sustainability, Penn State University; Ayodeji Oluwalana - Waste Reduction and Recycling Program Manager, Penn State University; Dedee DeLongpre Johnston - Chief Sustainability Officer, Wake Forest University; Meghna Tare - Chief Sustainability Officer, University of Texas at Arlington; Fiona Wilson - Chief Sustainability Officer, University of New Hampshire; Shane Stennes - Chief Sustainability Officer, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.



Introduction



The sustainability team at Flinders University worked to become the first institution in the world to earn a STARS Version 3.0 rating in summer 2024. Pictured left to right: Jikke Adema, William Van Ausdal, and Julie Huynh.

Every three years, the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) conducts a survey of sustainability professionals employed in higher education. These surveys aggregate information from sustainability staff and specialized positions such as academic staff and recycling & waste staff working in sustainability.

This report presents the results of the 2026 Higher Education Sustainability Staffing Survey. It examines the nature of sustainability positions at colleges and universities in the United States, Canada and other countries, providing insights into salaries, funding, supervision, job satisfaction, challenges, and more. Historically, and in alignment with AASHE membership patterns, representation has been heavily skewed toward U.S., and to a lesser extent, Canadian respondents.

This report serves as an update to AASHE's 2023 [staffing survey report](#) and captures how sustainability work is affected by changing political climates in the U.S. and elsewhere.

Key Findings



Left to right: Chief Climate Officer Angela Oberg (Rutgers University), Director of Sustainability Rob Andrejewski (University of Richmond) and Community Compost & Garden Coordinator Nat Schwark (University of Arizona) engage with attendees at the AASHE 2025 Conference & Expo.

Higher education sustainability programs are resilient. The field¹ continues to grow and evolve despite significant funding and political challenges.

Sustainability staff are facing new challenges.

- The proportion of respondents rating their job security as “very secure” dropped from 35% in 2023 to 20% in 2026, the lowest level we’ve seen.
- The proportion of respondents selecting “Federal and/or regional political climate is not supportive of sustainability” as one of their biggest challenges grew dramatically, from 10% of respondents in 2023 to 26% of respondents in 2026. Similarly, the number of respondents identifying “lack of financial resources or financial security” as a major challenge increased from 36% in 2023 to 45% in 2026.
- Roughly a quarter of respondents (26%) indicated that their budgets had decreased in the last three years, an increase from 19% who reported this in 2023.
- Compared in 2023, the proportion of respondents that reported high engagement in strategic planning efforts dropped from 13% to 6.6% for top-level plans and from 50.4% to 46.3% for mid-level plans.
- The slightly lower number of respondents compared to 2023, especially among public institutions, may reflect a reduction in the total number of higher education sustainability staff. In addition, a 7% decline in respondents from public institutions may be a sign of staffing challenges that disproportionately impact U.S. publicly-funded institutions.

¹ Although the survey was open to paid higher education sustainability professionals anywhere in the world, respondents were based primarily in the U.S., and to a lesser extent, Canada and Australia. As a result, our findings are largely focused on sustainability trends in these regions.

Key Findings

Despite serious threats, the field of higher education sustainability is resilient and shows signs of continued development.

- The number of respondents in Chief Sustainability Officer (CSO) or similar leadership roles doubled compared to 2023, suggesting continued growth in the strategic importance of sustainability. This is further supported by growth in the proportion of respondents whose positions are housed in their institution's highest administrative office (i.e., the President or Chancellor).
- Thirty-seven percent of respondents reported that the number of paid sustainability staff positions at their institution had increased since 2023 compared to only 16% that reported a decrease. The 26 respondents who reported being the first person to hold their position and started their positions in 2025 provide additional evidence that new sustainability positions continue to be created.
- The average number of paid staff supervised by respondents increased to 5.6 FTE compared to 4.8 FTE in 2023.
- The median sustainability budget controlled by respondents increased overall (from \$220,000 in 2023 to \$250,000 in 2026).
- There has been an incremental increase in median salaries overall and across virtually all position types. Consistent with this, 85% of respondents indicated that their salary had increased slightly or significantly over the last three years.
- Eight percent of respondents reported that their position had moved up in the organizational chart over the last three years and the vast majority of respondents indicated that their position remained in the same place organizationally or had moved laterally. Only 5% said their position had moved down organizationally.
- Approximately 81% of respondents were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" in their positions in 2026, which is slightly higher than in 2023.

The nature of sustainability work is evolving.

- The "opportunity to reduce risk and/or operational expenses" became a top-five driver, with the proportion of respondents citing it jumping from 20% in 2023 to 26% in 2026.
- Sustainability professionals are engaging more with offices of Civic & Community Engagement, Finance/Administration, and Career Services; and engaging less with capital projects and planning offices, DEI offices, faculty and staff governance offices; and the Office of the President/Chancellor.
- Sustainability staff participation in most diversity, equity and social justice (ESJ) efforts has decreased since 2023, but participation in efforts to expand basic needs programs and form ESJ-focused community partnerships saw growth.
- The proportion of respondents who said their organizations generate revenue through sustainability-related activities increased from 30% in 2023 to 34% in 2026.
- Remote work arrangements (often adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic) are becoming less common, with the proportion of respondents working remotely multiple times per week or more decreasing from 38% in 2023 to 30% in 2026.

Key Findings



Sustainability Education Co-Director Beth Mercer-Taylor (University of Minnesota) emcees a Q&A session with Dr. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson during the AASHE 2025 Opening Keynote.

The role is becoming older, increasingly female, and is diversifying slowly.

- Responses from those under age 30 decreased 4%, while responses from respondents above age 40 increased.
- Respondents identifying as female continued to trend upward, increasing from 64% in 2023 to 67% in 2026. For the first time, respondents identifying as female made up the majority of responses across all position types.
- The proportion of respondents that identify as “White” with no other race or ethnicity identification declined from 83% in 2023 to 82% in 2026. Proportions for Asian and Hispanic respondents increased slightly, while growth among Black respondents was flat.

Inequities in compensation and funding remain stubbornly persistent.

Respondents identifying as female are earning 82 cents to the dollar compared to male counterparts, representing a decline from 83 cents in 2023.

- Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) and multi-racial respondents earned less overall across all positions than White respondents (\$75,000 versus \$85,000).

We look forward to exploring these findings in greater depth, and revisiting them in future surveys and analyses. In the meantime, we encourage sustainability professionals and scholars everywhere to utilize this report and its corresponding resources to conduct research, help make a business case for sustainability, and establish or grow sustainability positions and offices at AASHE member institutions and beyond. For convenience, contact information and a preferred citation are provided at the end of this document.

Let's Continue the Conversation...



October 4-6, 2026

Hilton Inner Harbor hotel in Baltimore, Maryland

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**Because higher education sustainability
takes all of us.**

[#AASHE26](#)

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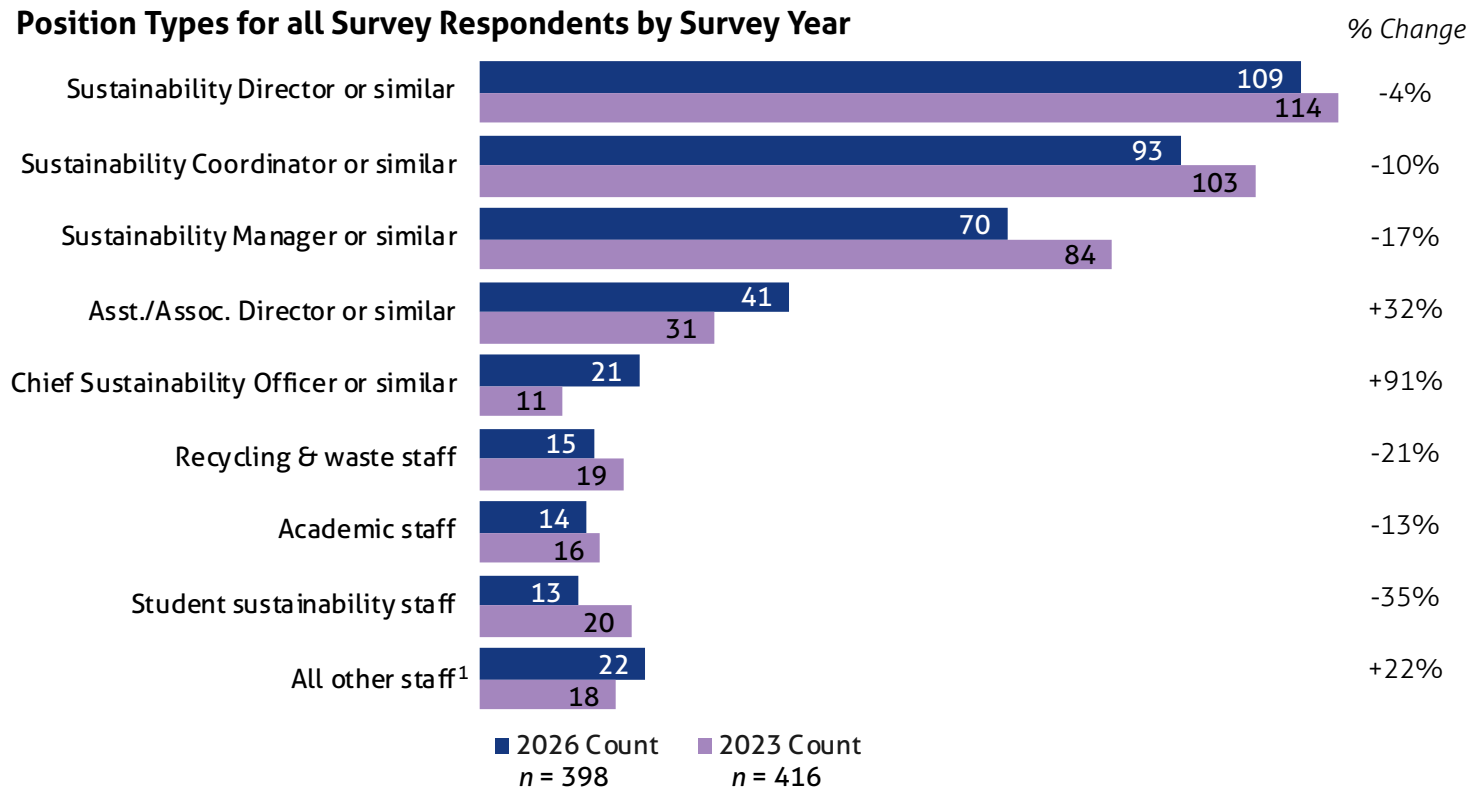
Respondent Position Types

Survey respondents were grouped into position types based on similarities in their titles and other data provided in the survey. Eight position types had sufficient respondents to track and analyze as cohorts. While several respondents had roles focused on marketing & communications and student services, there were not enough responses to include as distinct comparison groups. As a result, these respondents were instead classified as Coordinators, Managers, or Directors as appropriate. Encompassing nearly 95% of all survey respondents, these position types are used throughout this report as filters for data views where relevant.

Despite similar timing, marketing and promotion efforts, total responses were down slightly in 2026 compared to past years, with 398 valid respondents in 2026 versus to 416 in 2023. This 4% decrease may be indicative of changes in the total number of sustainability positions in higher education, but may also reflect changing cultural norms, such as decreasing responsiveness to email marketing campaigns especially among younger professionals, or greater distraction or disengagement as a result of needing to prioritize reaction to a changing political climate.

In a potential sign of the continued growth in the strategic importance of sustainability, responses from Chief Sustainability Officers (CSOs) and similar senior and executive-level positions nearly doubled compared with 2023. Responses from Assistant/Associate Directors also increased significantly.

Position Types for all Survey Respondents by Survey Year



¹ The "All other staff" category includes 22 respondents whose roles and responsibilities did not allow them to be grouped with enough respondents to be analyzed as a distinct cohort. These respondents had positions focused on administrative support (5), equity and social justice (1), energy management (3), environmental health (1), facilities (2), gardens and grounds (3), green labs (1), institutional effectiveness (1), quality assurance (1), and transportation (4).

Respondent Demographics

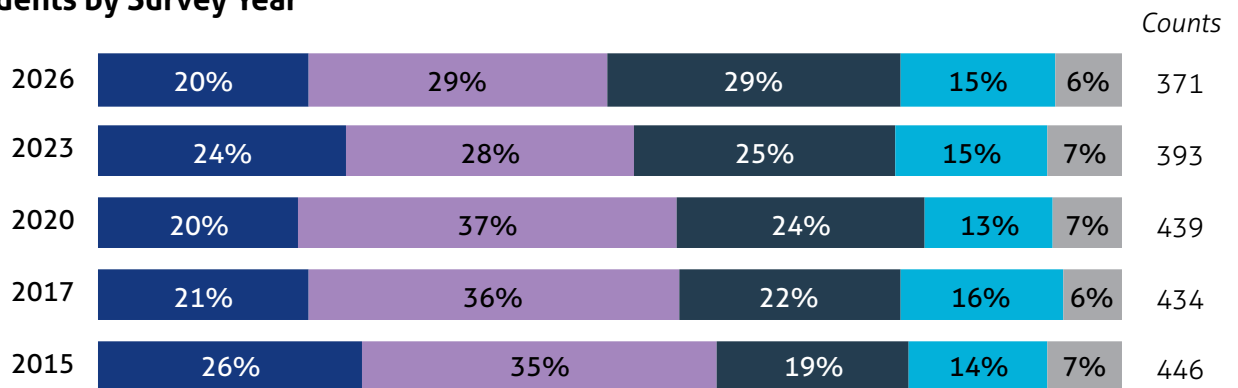


University of Minnesota sustainability staff shared locally-harvested apples with conference attendees while hosting the AASHE 2025 Conference & Expo in Minneapolis, MN.

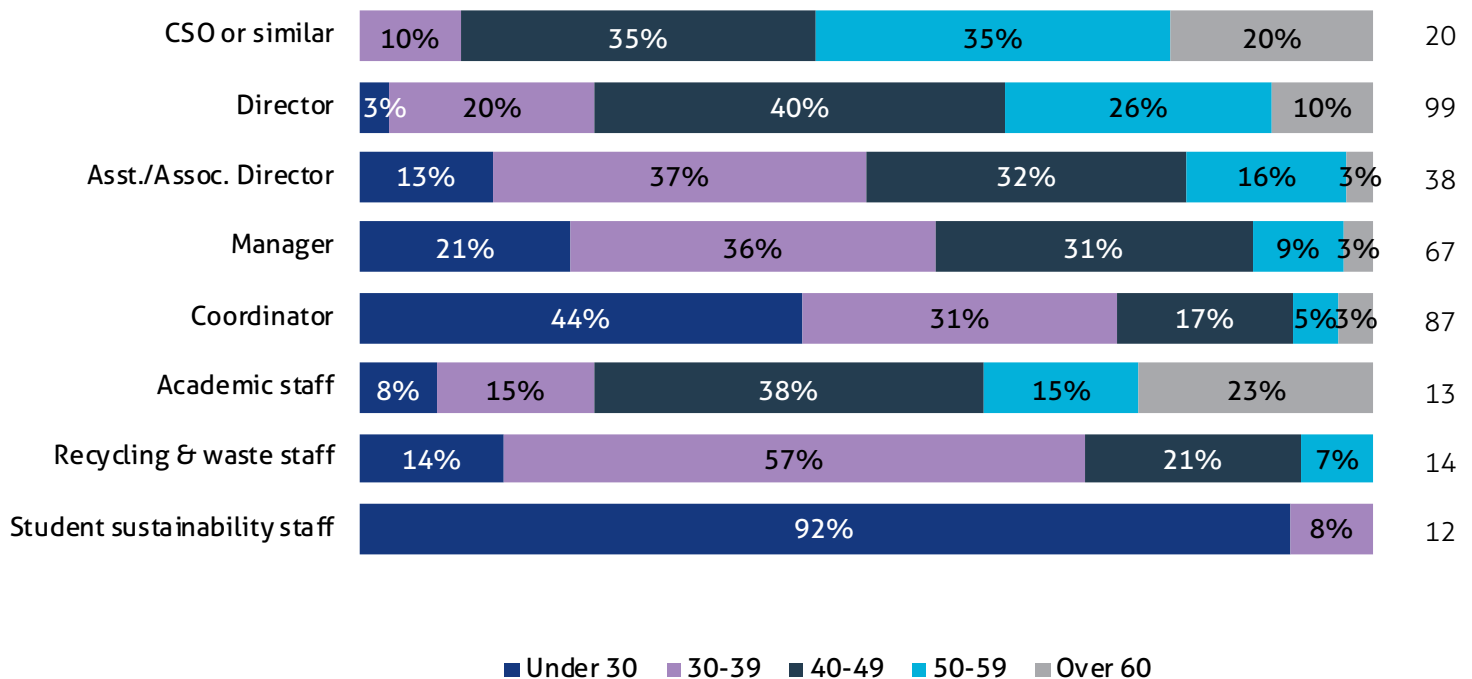
Age

The proportion of respondents under 30 years of age decreased by 4% after reaching a high of 24% in 2023. Correspondingly, respondents above 40 increased to above 50% once again after dropping to below 50% for the first time in 2023. Other age categories saw little change in comparison to prior years. These results indicate a continued maturation of the field, with perhaps a narrowing (or cutting) of positions at entry levels. Results by position type, as expected, showed lower level positions (e.g., student sustainability staff, coordinators) tend to be occupied by younger respondents, while higher-level positions (e.g., CSOs, Directors, academic staff) tend to be occupied by older respondents.

Age of Respondents by Survey Year



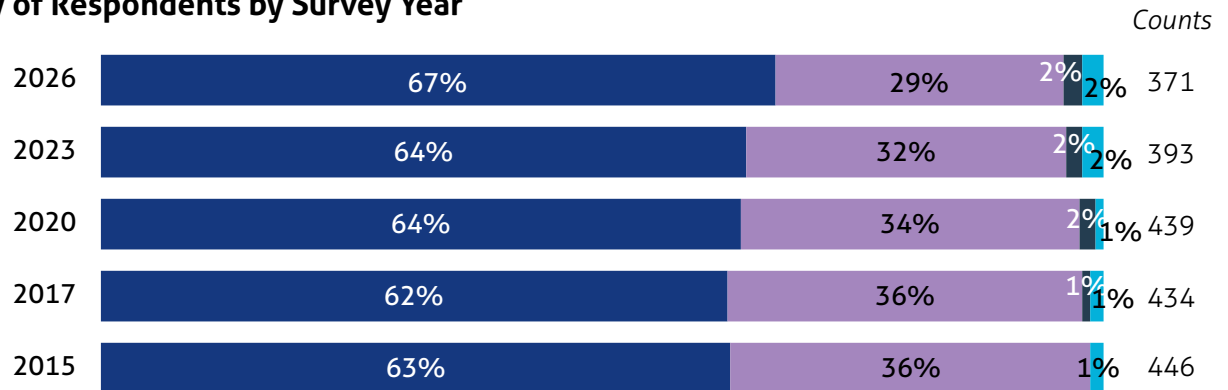
Age of Respondents by Position Type, 2026



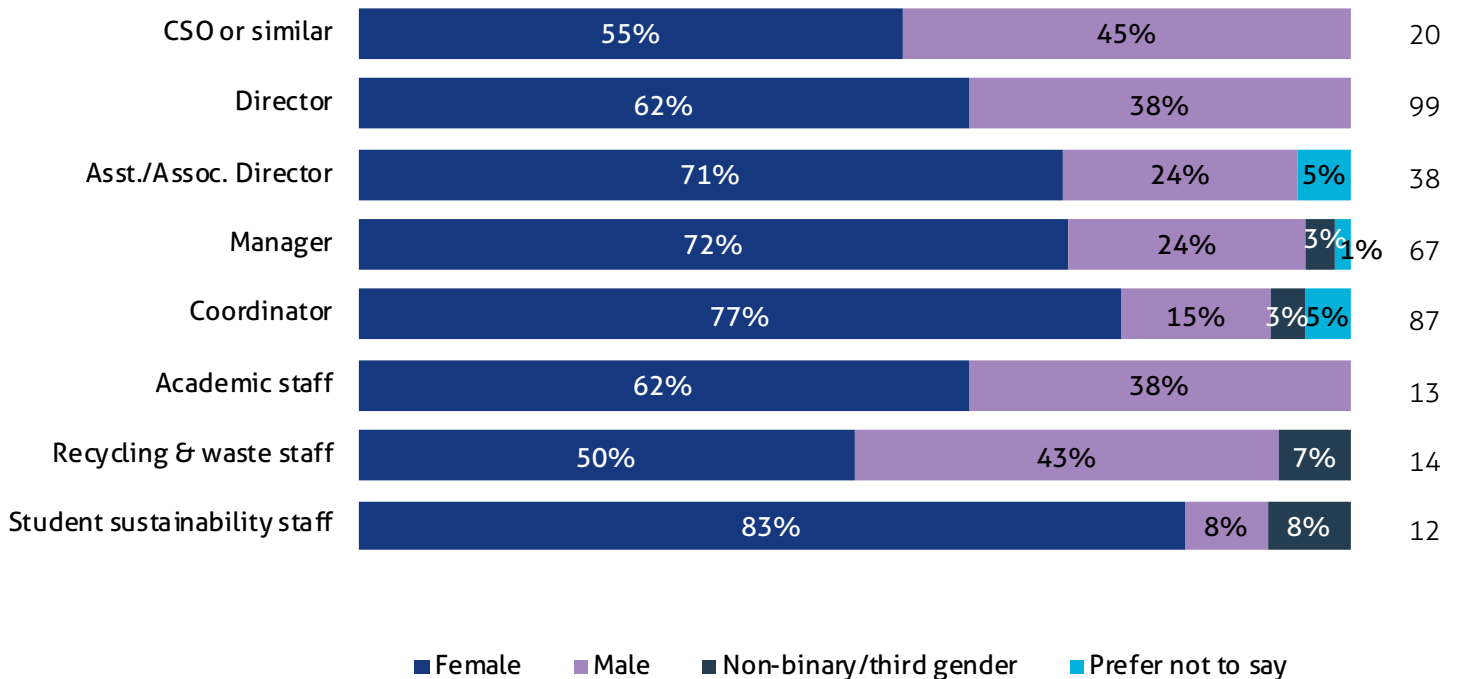
Gender Identity

The higher education sustainability profession appears to be increasingly female. The proportion of respondents identifying as female increased by 3% since 2023 (to 67%), with a corresponding decrease among male respondents. For the first time, respondents identifying as female made up the majority of responses across all position types, with particularly high proportions for student staff and Coordinator positions. The proportion of male respondents was highest for CSO positions (45%) and recycling & waste positions (43%).

Gender Identity of Respondents by Survey Year



Gender Identity of Respondents by Position Type, 2026



Race & Ethnicity

Response options to a question on race and ethnicity of respondents changed in 2026 to better align with the categories used elsewhere by AASHE. Results are largely comparable with 2023. The proportion of respondents that identify as “White” with no other race or ethnicity identification dropped by 1%, while proportions for Asian and Hispanic respondents increased by similar amounts. This indicates that higher education sustainability positions are predominantly White but continue to slowly diversify.

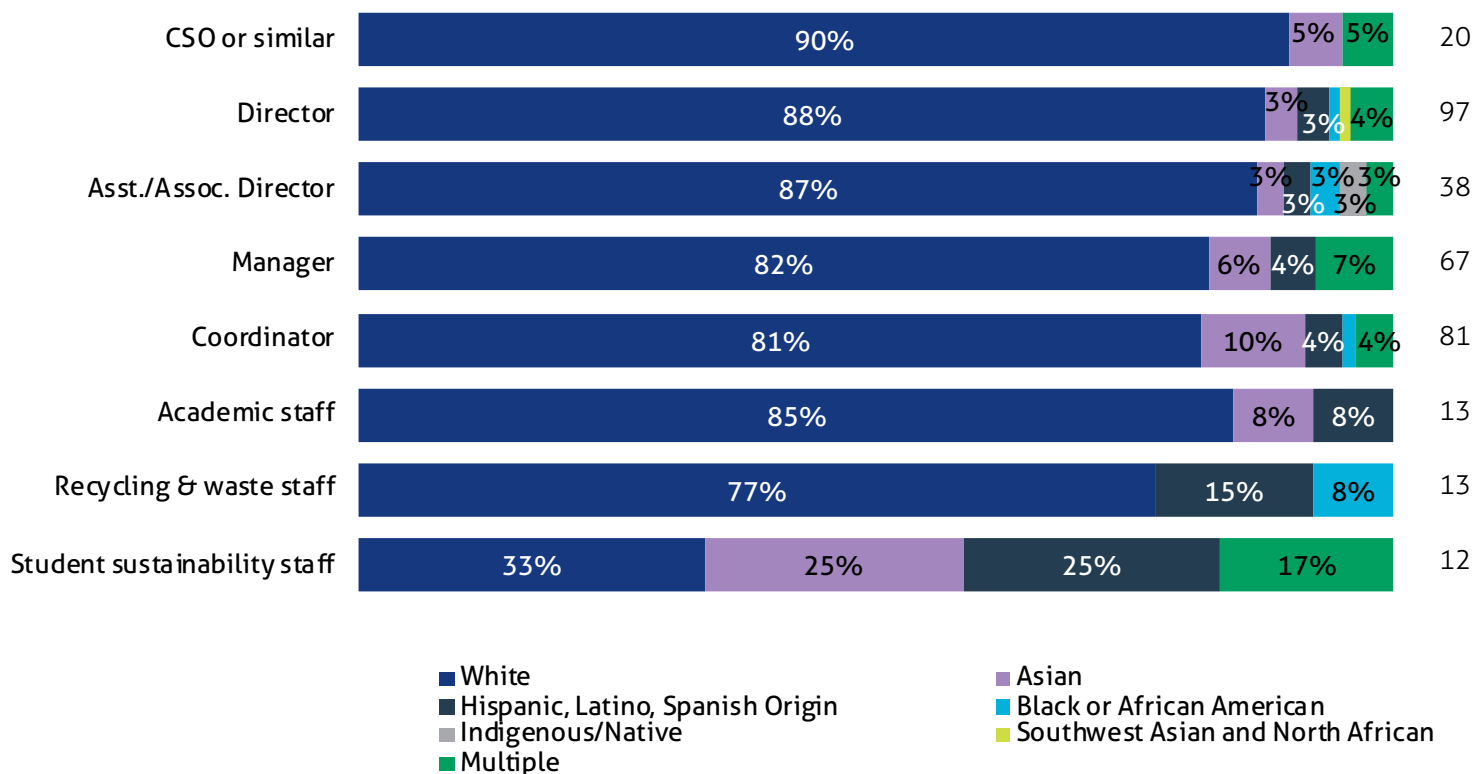
By position type, CSOs, Sustainability Directors, Assistant/Associate Directors, and academic staff had higher proportions of respondents that identified as White with no other ethnicities or races. The student sustainability staff position was found to be most diverse, with about two-thirds of respondents identifying as other than White (similar trends were found in 2023).

Race & Ethnicity of Respondents by Survey Year

Counts



Race & Ethnicity of Respondents by Position Type, 2026



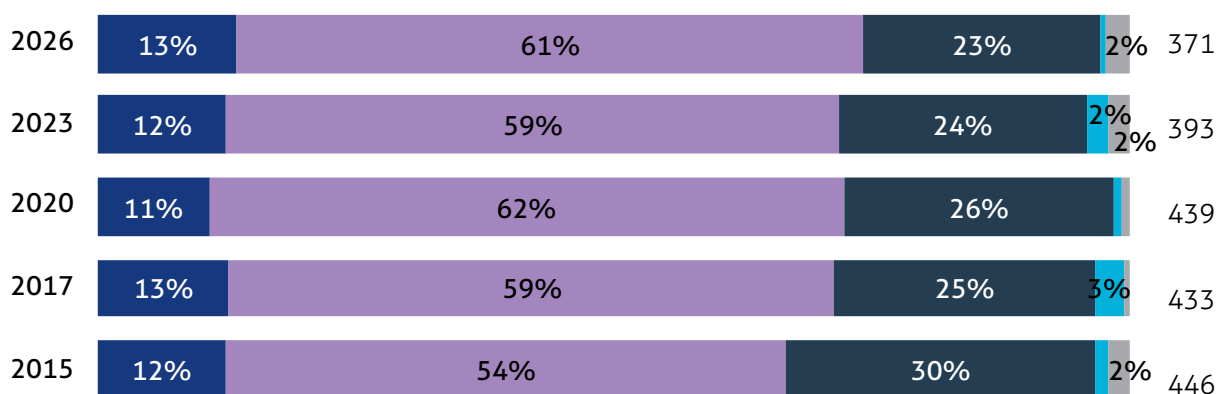
■ White
 ■ Asian
 ■ Hispanic, Latino, Spanish Origin
 ■ Black or African American
 ■ Indigenous/Native
 ■ Southwest Asian and North African
 ■ Multiple

Education Level

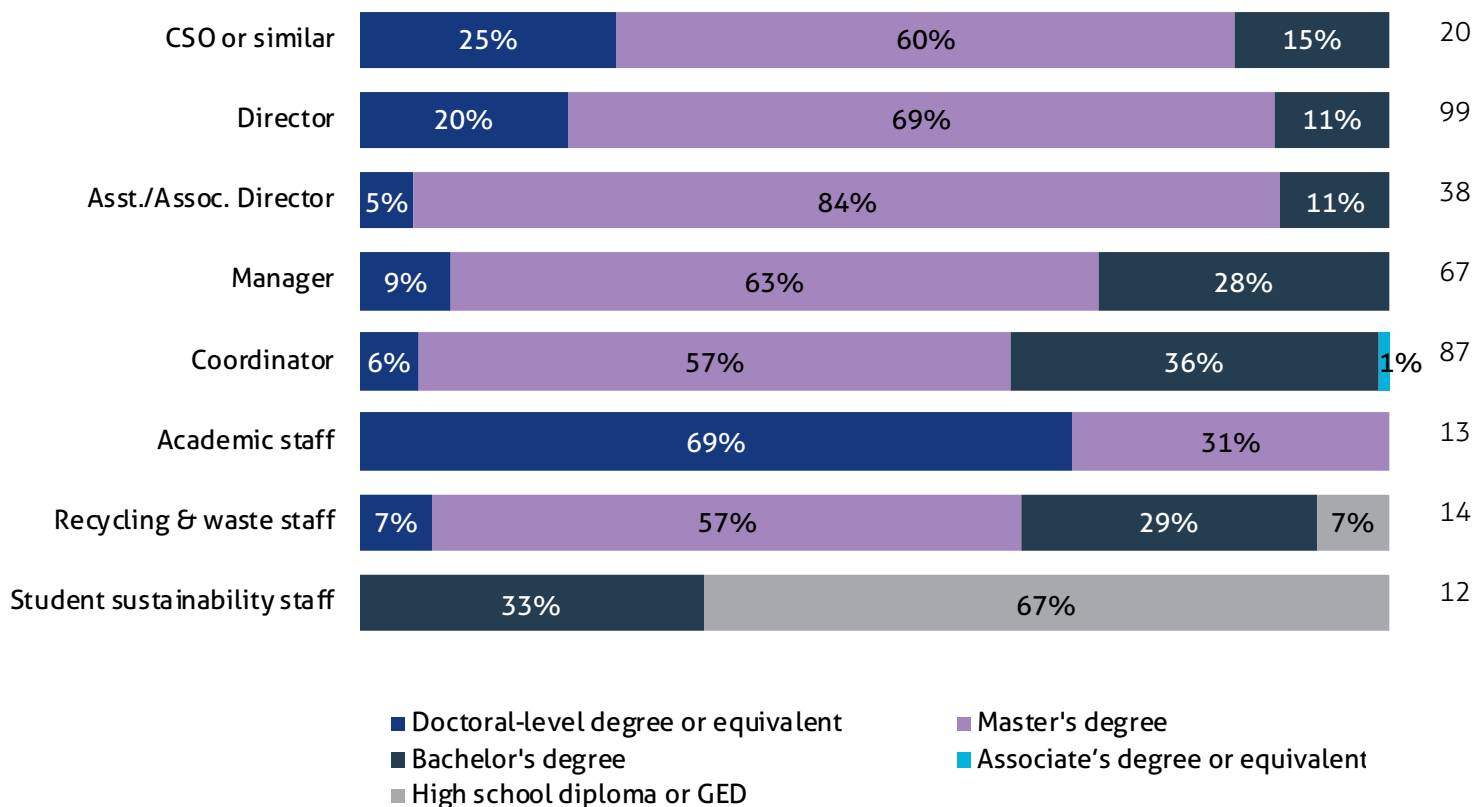
A master's degree continues to be important for many higher education sustainability positions, with 61% of respondents holding a master's degree as their highest level of education (up from 59% in 2023). Ninety-seven percent of respondents held at least a bachelor's degree (up from 96% in 2023). The proportion of doctoral degree holders is increasing incrementally. By position type, academic staff had the highest percentage of respondents with doctoral degrees (69%). Respondents with doctoral degrees were increasingly more common in higher-level positions. Student staff, Coordinators and recycling & waste staff had the lowest percentages of respondents with master's degrees or higher.

Highest Level of Education Completed by Survey Year

Counts



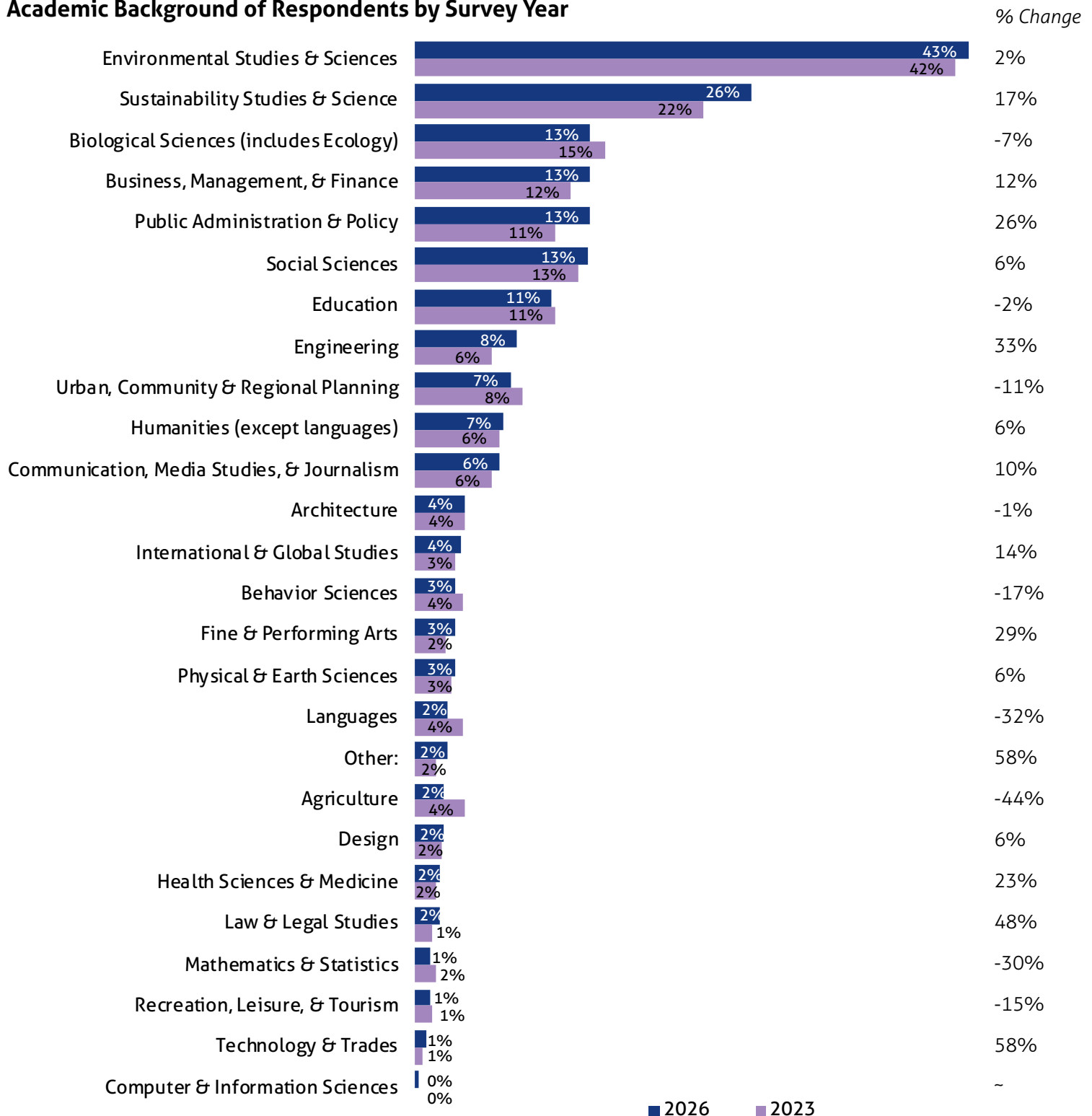
Highest Level of Education Completed by Position Type, 2026



Academic Background

The most common discipline for sustainability officers continues to be Environmental Studies & Sciences. There was a 3% increase in respondents referencing Sustainability Studies and Sciences.

Academic Background of Respondents by Survey Year



Institution Information



Sustainability professionals attended a sustainability tour at Carleton College at the AASHE 2025 Conference & Expo in Minneapolis, MN.

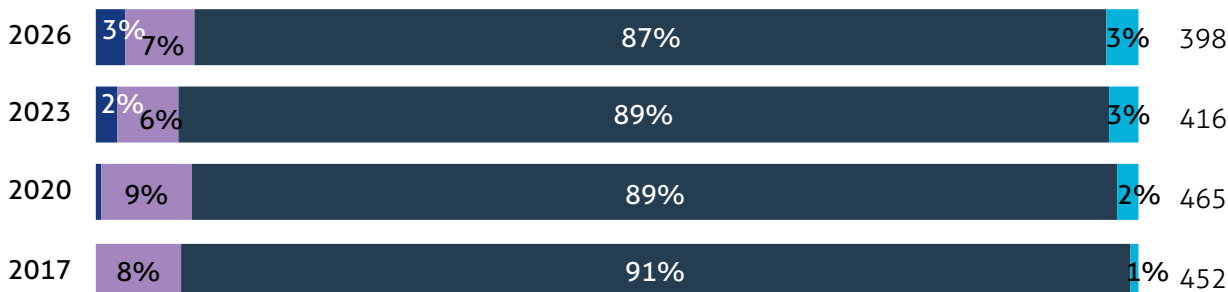
Country

The staffing survey was developed for sustainability professionals in the U.S. and Canada, and became accessible to qualifying professionals anywhere in the world in 2017. Since then, responses from other countries have grown incrementally. 2026 results were nonetheless heavily skewed toward U.S. respondents, and to a lesser extent, Canadian and Australian respondents.

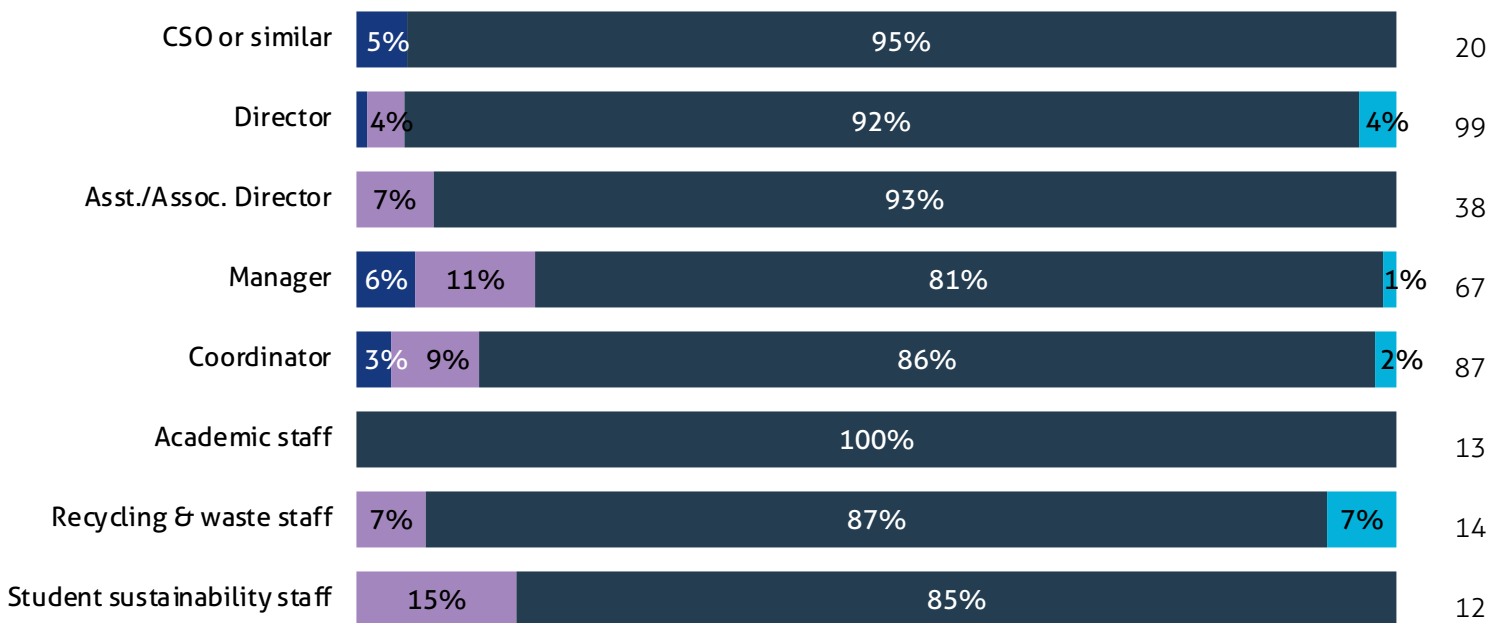
The 2026 survey saw a continued slight increase in respondents from outside of the U.S. (13% in 2026 versus 11% in 2023). The proportion of Canadian respondents remained similar to past years' responses. There was an increase in respondents from Australia, which can be attributed to an ongoing partnership between AASHE and the Australasian Campuses Towards Sustainability (ACTS). Responses from countries outside of Australia, Canada, and the U.S. were too few to enable meaningful analysis as separate cohorts.

Country of Respondents by Survey Year

Counts



Country of Respondents by Position Type, 2026



■ Australia ■ Canada ■ United States ■ Respondents from other countries

Country of Respondents, 2026

Country	2026 Count	2026 %	2023 Count	2023 %	2020 Count	2020 %
Australia	11	2.8%	8	1.9%	2	0.4%
Azerbaijan	0	0.0%	1	0.2%	0	0.0%
Bangladesh	1	0.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Brazil	0	0.0%	2	0.5%	0	0.0%
Bulgaria	0	0.0%	1	0.2%	0	0.0%
Canada	27	6.8%	25	6.0%	41	8.6%
China/Hong Kong	0	0.0%	1	0.2%	2	0.4%
Colombia	0	0.0%	1	0.2%	1	0.2%
Ecuador	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.2%
Egypt	1	0.3%	0	0.0%	1	0.2%
Greece	0	0.0%	1	0.2%	0	0.0%
Hungary	0	0.0%	1	0.2%	0	0.0%
Iraq	1	0.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Ireland	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	0.4%
Lebanon	1	0.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Malaysia	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.2%
Mexico	2	0.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
New Zealand	1	0.3%	0	0.0%	1	0.2%
Philippines	2	0.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Saudi Arabia	1	0.3%	0	0.0%	1	0.2%
South Africa	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Spain	1	0.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Sweden	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.2%
Switzerland	1	0.3%	1	0.2%	1	0.2%
Taiwan	0	0.0%	1	0.2%	0	0.0%
Uganda	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.2%
United Arab Emirates	0	0.0%	2	0.5%	2	0.4%
United Kingdom	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4	0.8%
United States	348	87.4%	371	89.2%	413	86.9%
Total	398	100%	416	100%	475	100%

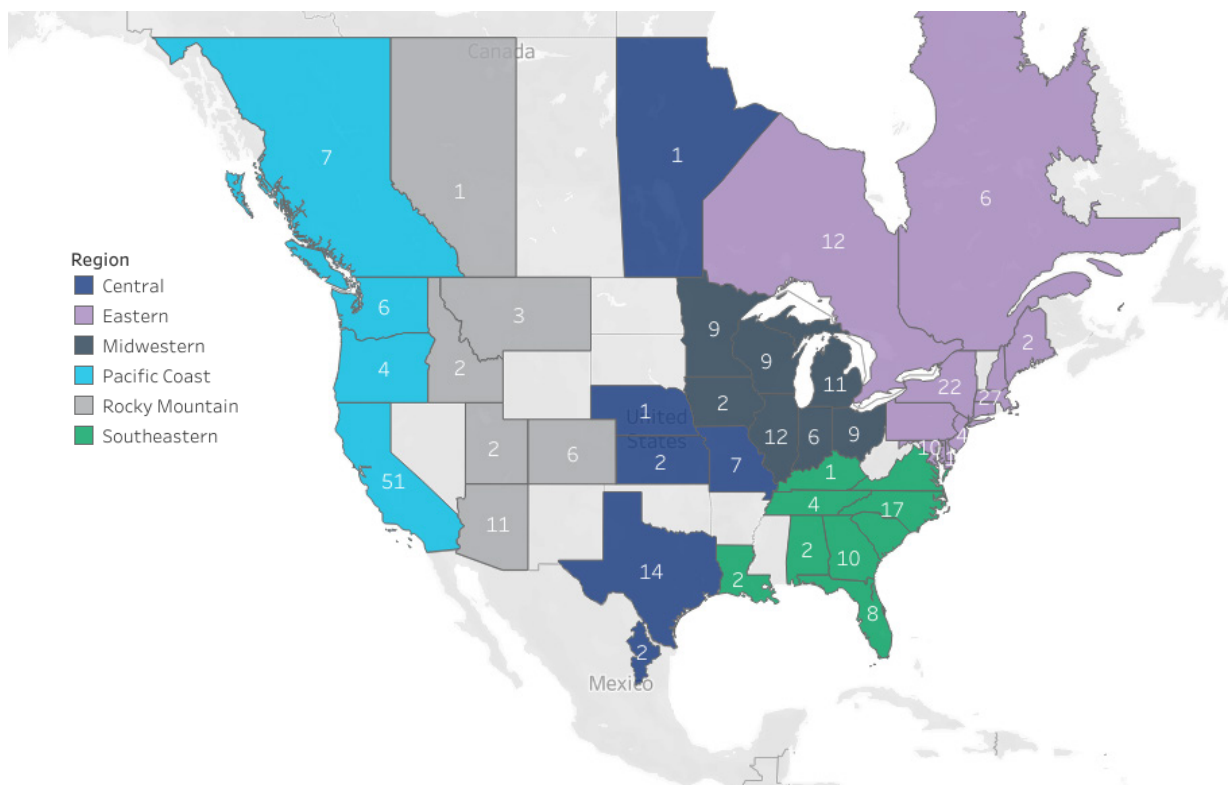
Region



Exhibitors from various regions across North America convened at the AASHE 2025 Conference Expo to engage with sustainability professionals.

Respondents from the U.S. and Canada were asked in which province, territory or state the institution or system office is located. This report references geographical regions defined by APPA, Leadership in Educational Facilities.

Map of Respondents in North American Regions, 2026

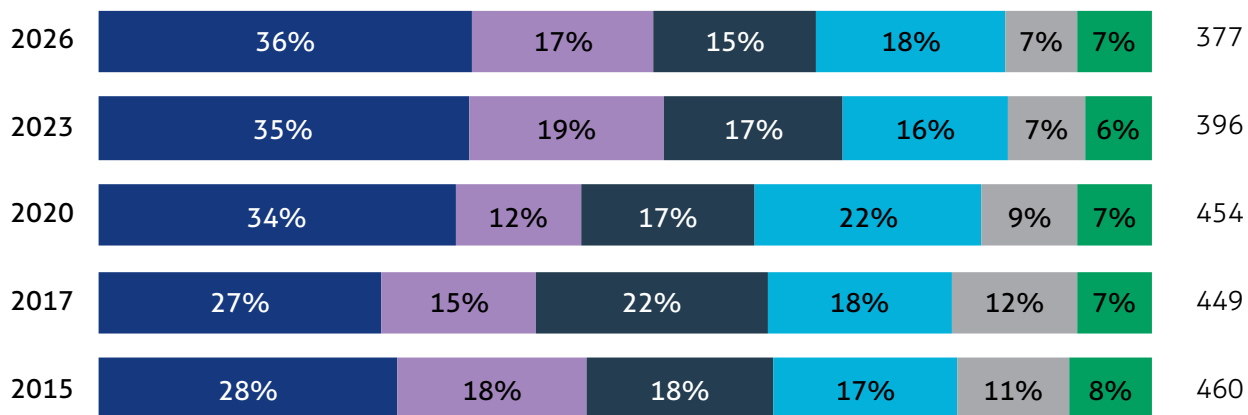


Region

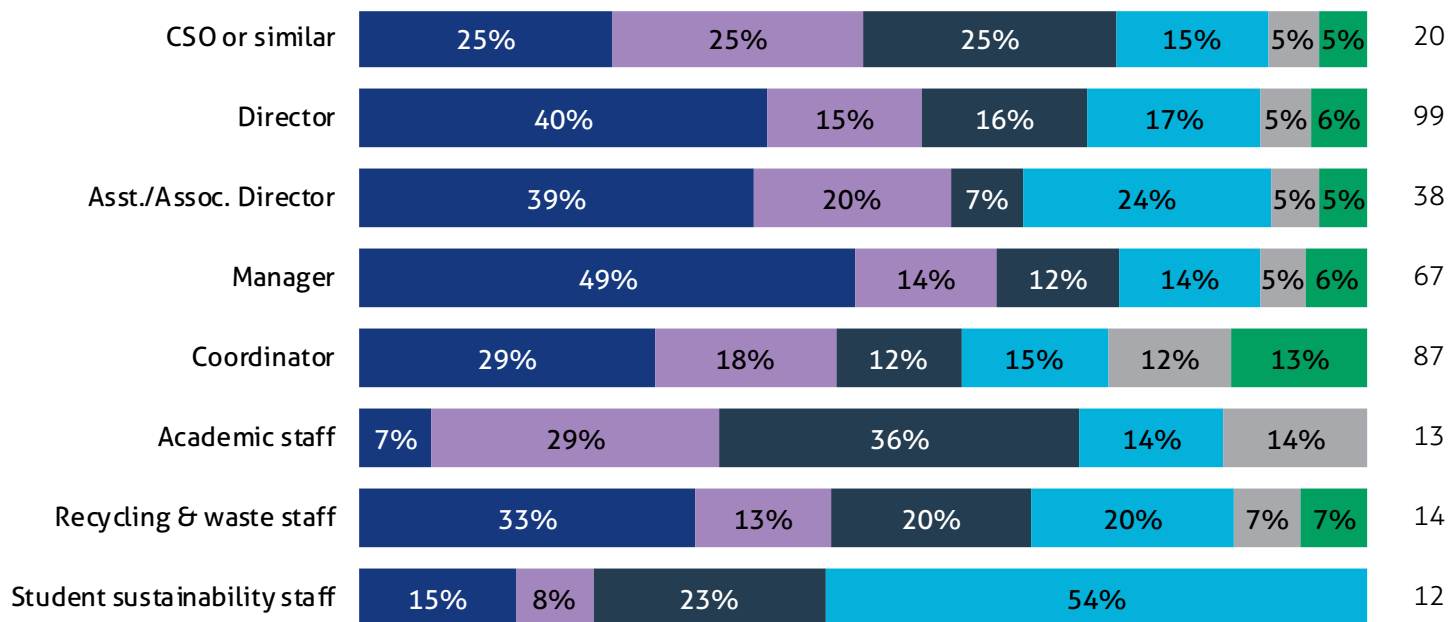
Among U.S. and Canadian respondents, the largest proportion (36%) came from institutions in the Eastern region of the U.S. and Canada – with the lowest proportion (7%) coming from the Rocky Mountain region. Proportions were similar to past years' responses. Responses varied by position type, with a relatively high proportion of Managers from the Eastern region, and a high proportion of student sustainability staff from the Pacific Coast region.

Region Where Respondent Institution is Located by Survey Year

Counts



Region Where Respondent Institution is Located by Position Type, 2026

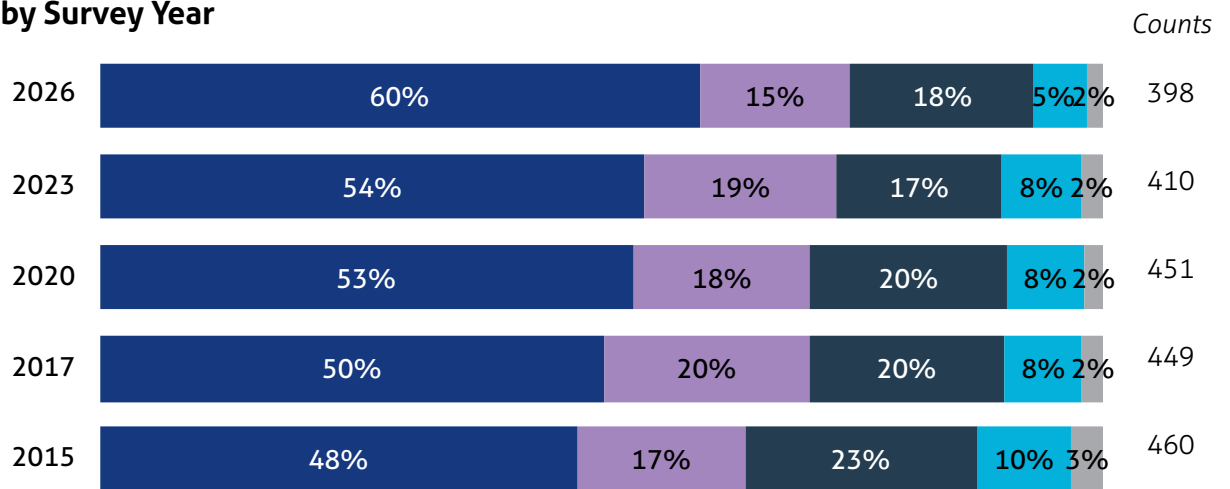


■ Eastern
 ■ Southeastern
 ■ Midwestern
■ Pacific Coast
 ■ Rocky Mountain
 ■ Central

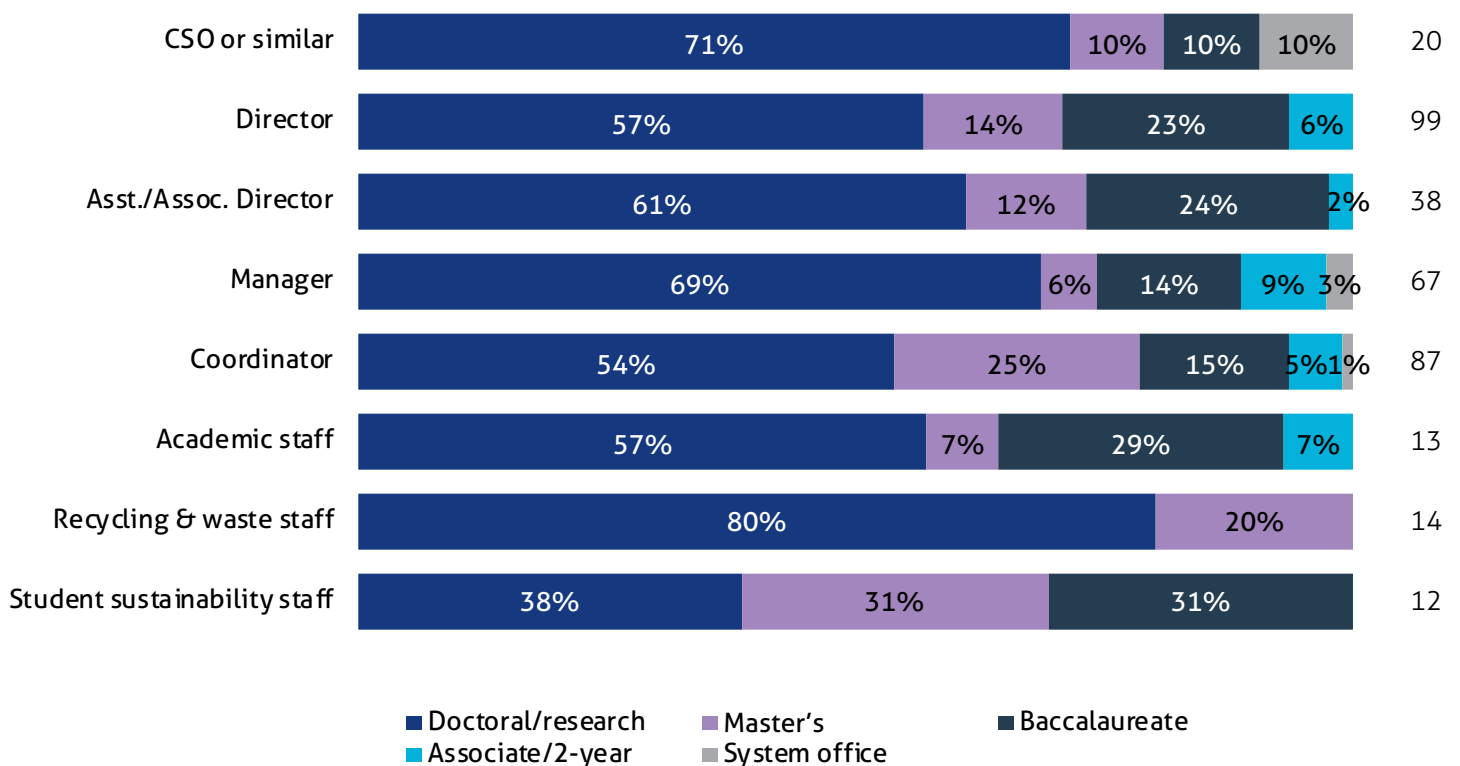
Institution Type

The institution type question is adapted from the Carnegie Basic Type Classification used in the U.S.. Over half of all respondents were from doctoral/research institutions, and the proportion of respondents from such institutions has continued to increase since 2015. The percentage of respondents from master's and associate/2-year institutions decreased in comparison to prior surveys. By position type, high proportions of recycling staff (80%) and CSOs and similar (71%) were found among doctoral institutions.

Institution Type by Survey Year



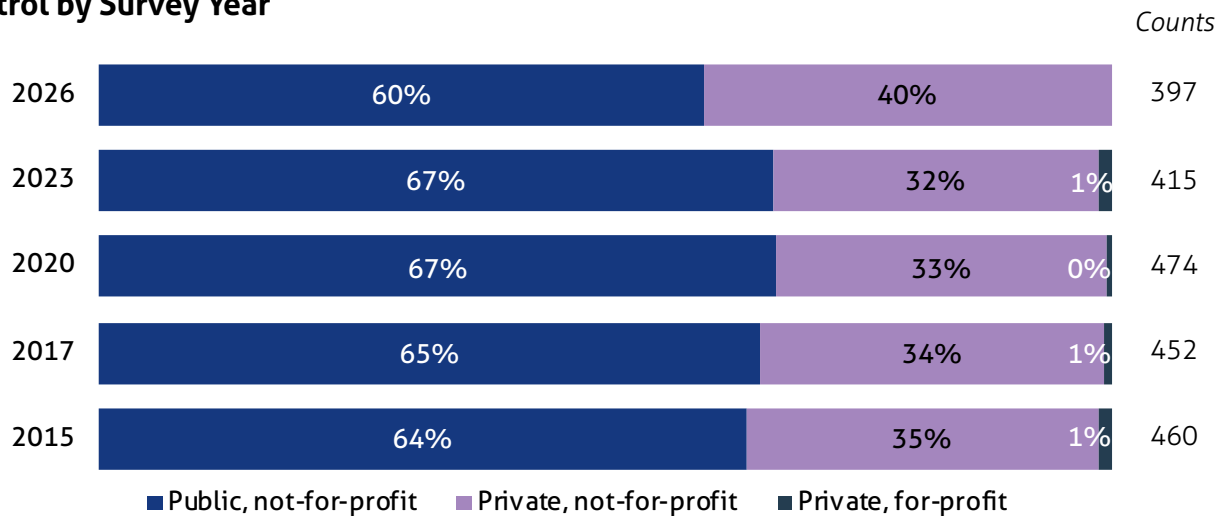
Institution Type by Position Type, 2026



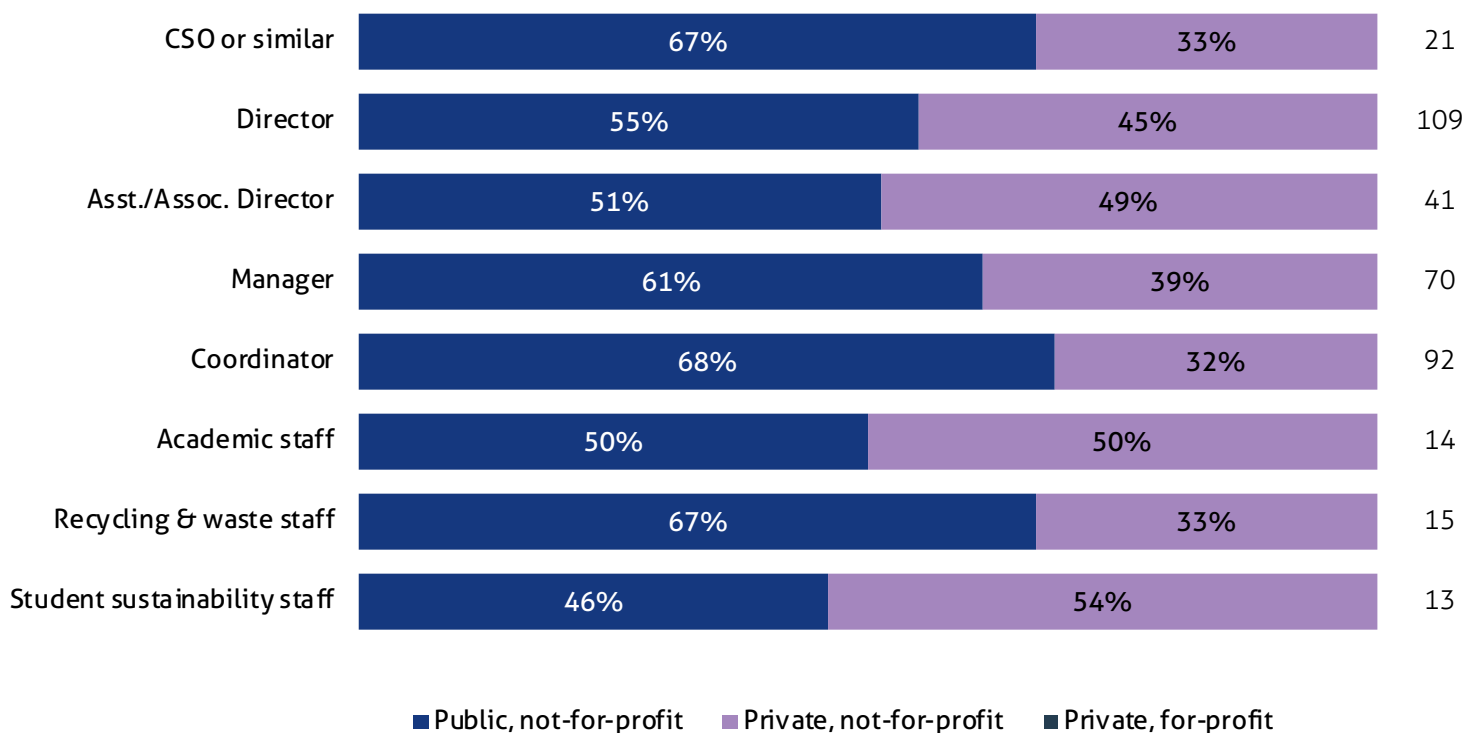
Institution Control

About 60% of respondents were affiliated with public institutions while the remainder were with private institutions. The percentage of respondents from private, not-for-profit institutions increased by 8% between 2023 and 2026. Such a significant change may indicate staffing and/or funding challenges among public institutions, though more comprehensive research would be needed to confirm this. By position type, the proportion of respondents from private institutions was highest among academic staff (50/50 split).

Institution Control by Survey Year



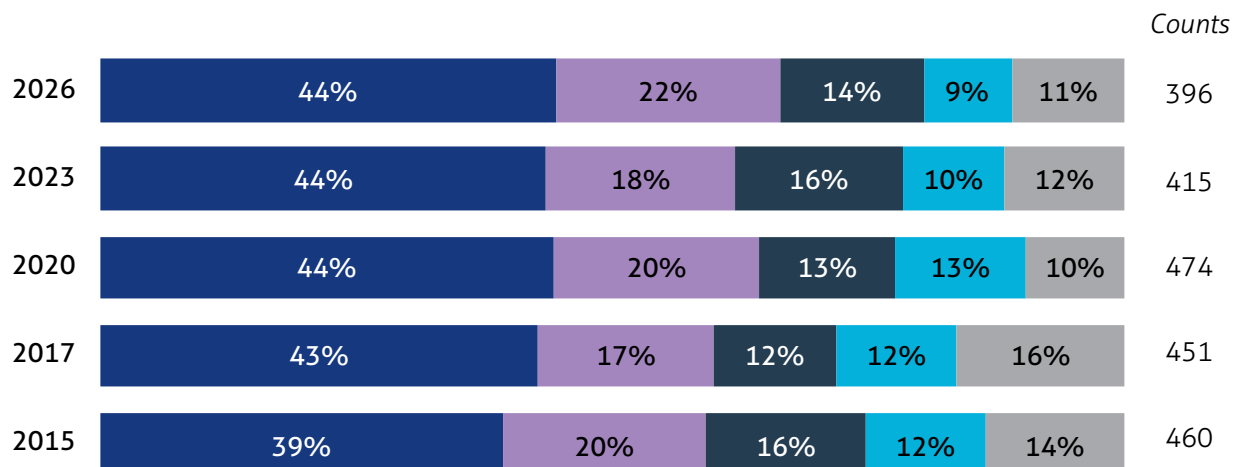
Institution Control by Position Type, 2026



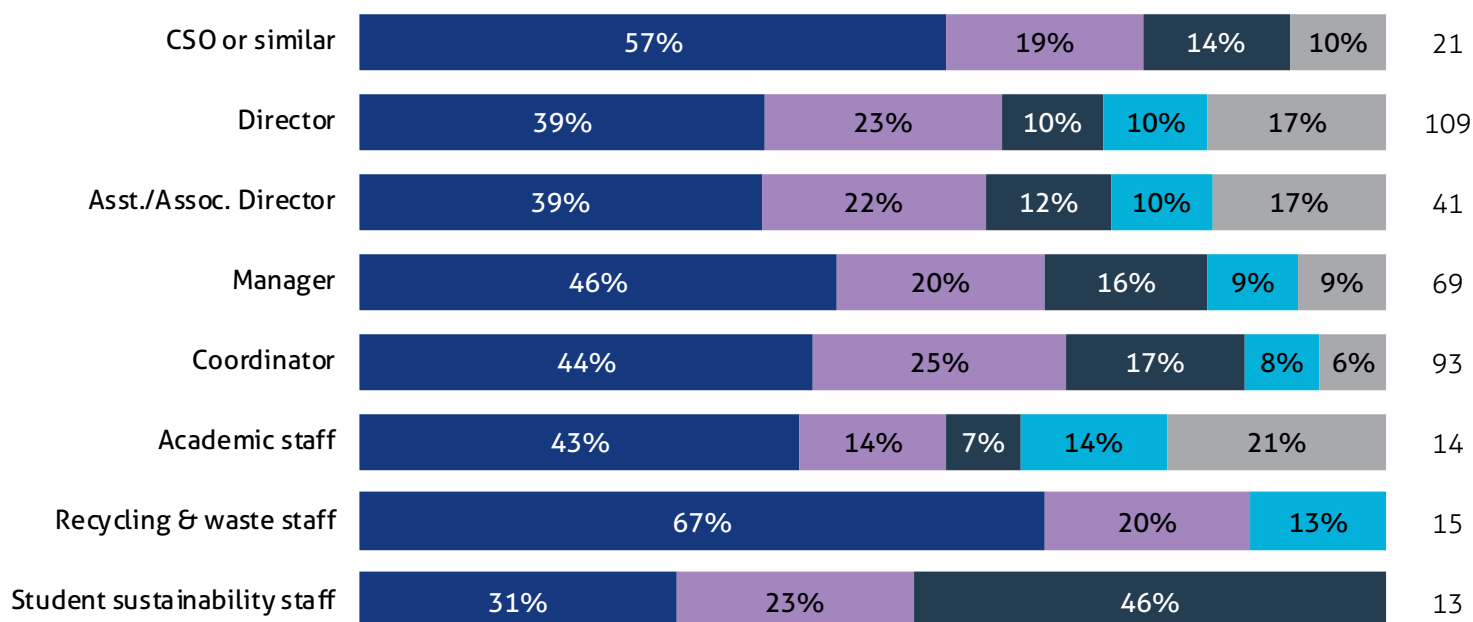
Student Enrollment

The plurality of respondents (44%) were from institutions that enrolled 20,000 or more students, with little fluctuation over survey years. By position type, a high proportion of recycling & waste positions (67%) were found at institutions with 20,000+ students, while a high proportion of student sustainability staff positions (48%) were found among institutions with 5,000-9,999 students.

Student Enrollment by Survey Year



Student Enrollment by Position Type, 2026



■ 20,000 students or higher
 ■ 10,000-19,999 students
■ 5,000-9,999 students
 ■ 2,500-4,999 students
■ Under 2,500 students

Nature of Position

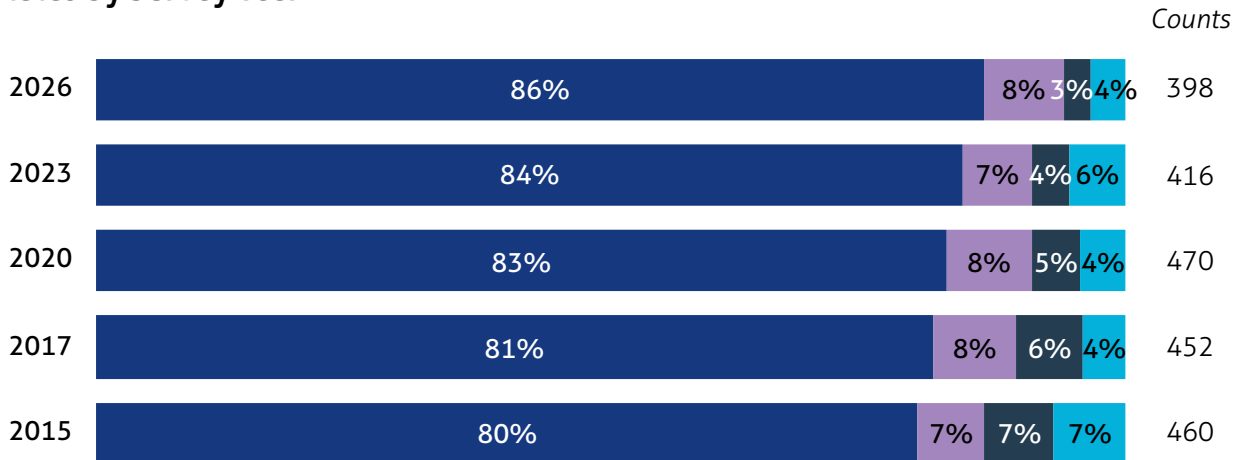


Chief Sustainability Officers Meghna Tare and Fiona Wilson share insights on the value of sustainability in higher education during a panel discussion at the AASHE 2025 Conference & Expo.

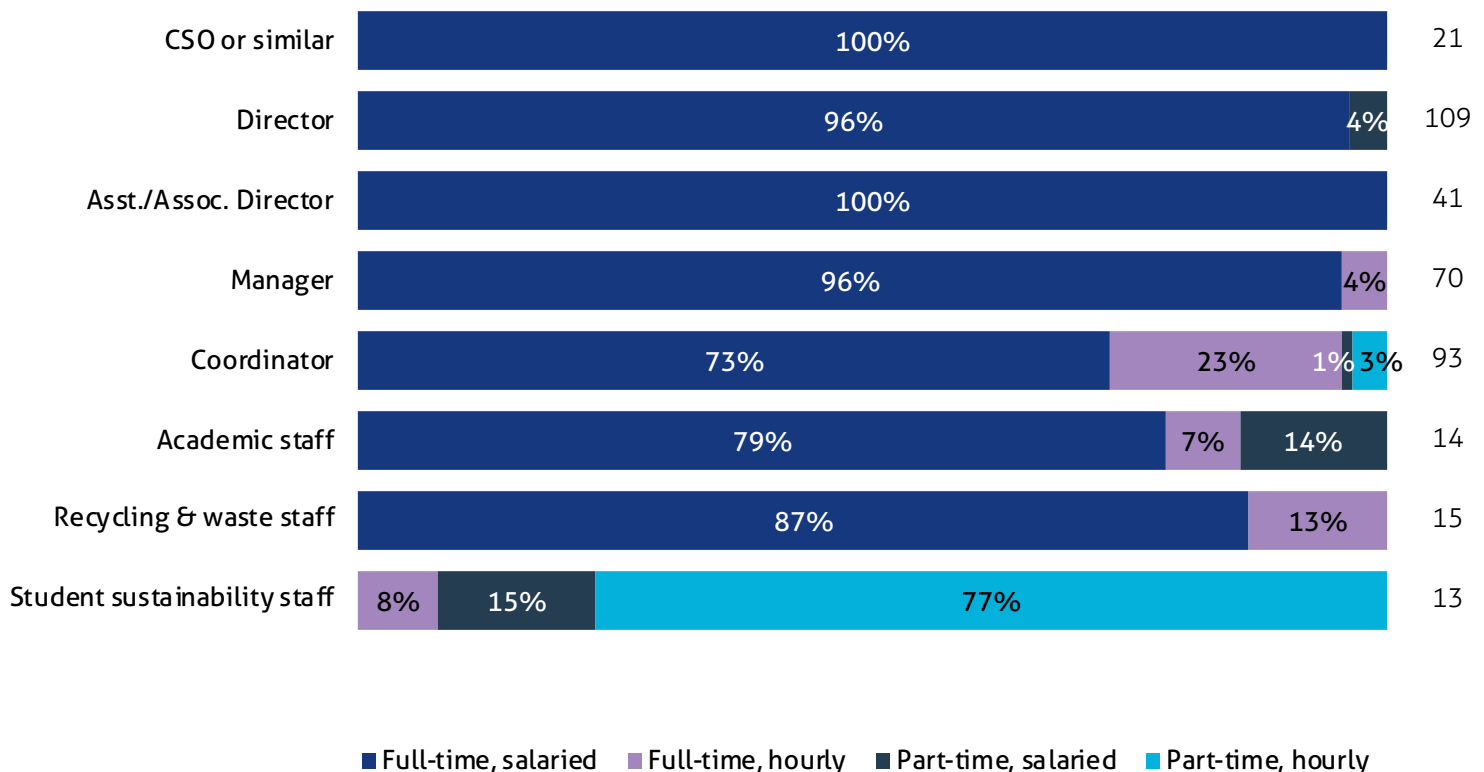
Employment Status

The vast majority of respondents (94%) had full-time positions, a 3% increase from 2023. Most were in salaried positions (86%), a 2% increase since 2023. Nearly all positions at higher levels were full-time and salaried. Ninety-two percent of student sustainability staff positions were part-time.

Employment Status by Survey Year



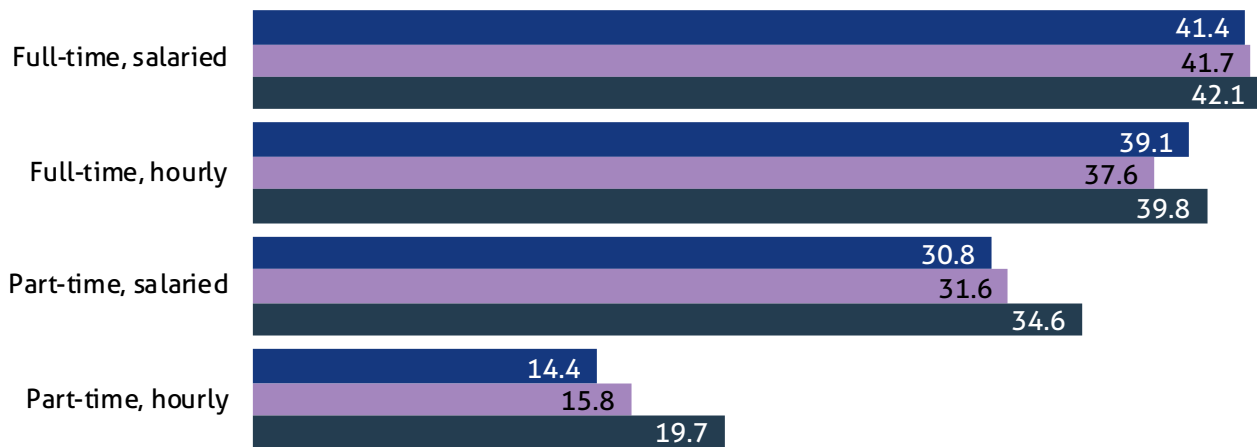
Employment Status by Position Type, 2026



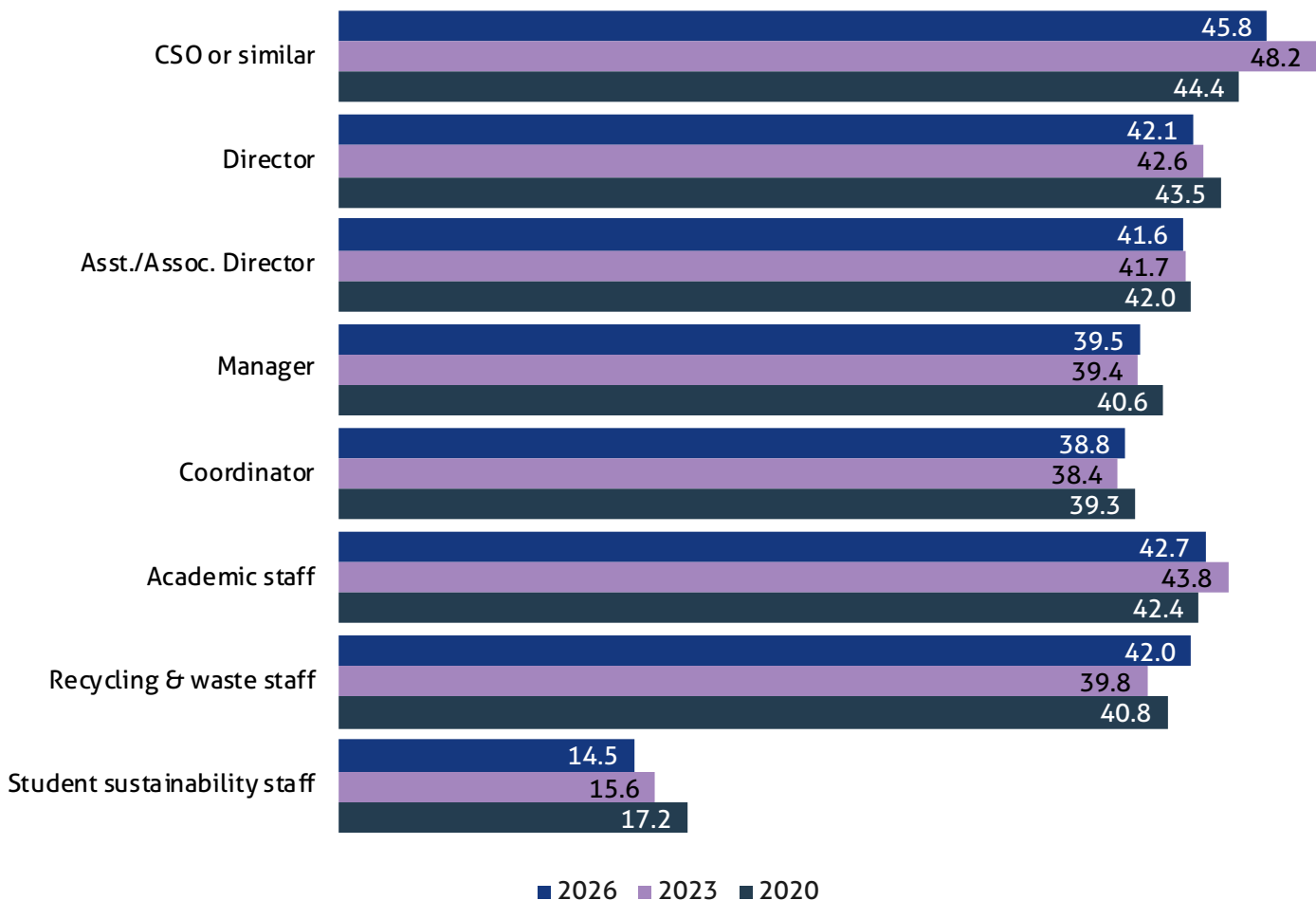
Hours Worked

Average hours worked in a typical week decreased slightly in all categories except full-time hourly positions, where average hours worked increased. CSO and similar positions as well as academic staff positions reported working the greatest number of average hours in a typical week.

Average Hours Worked in a Typical Week by Survey Year



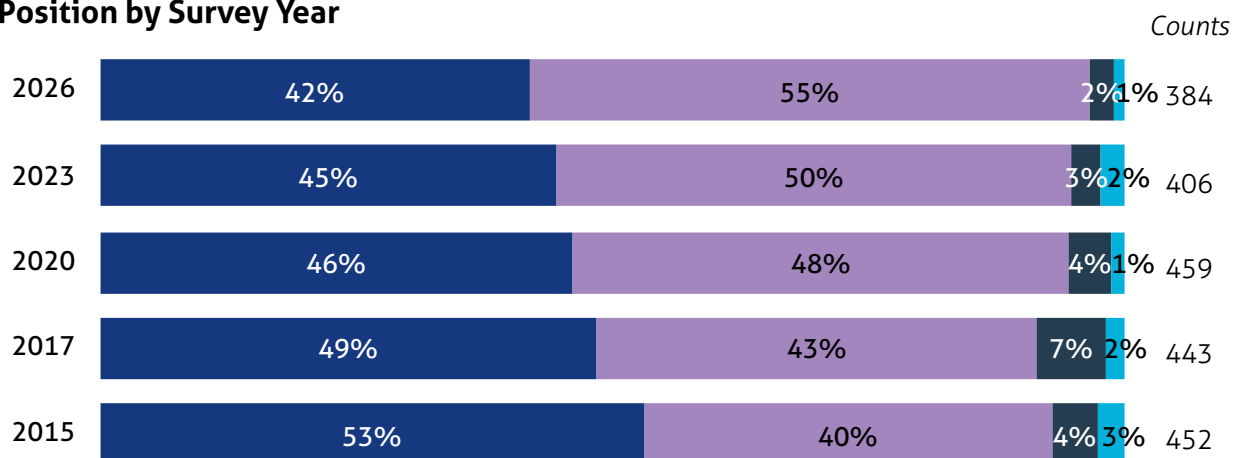
Average Hours Worked by Position Type and Survey Year



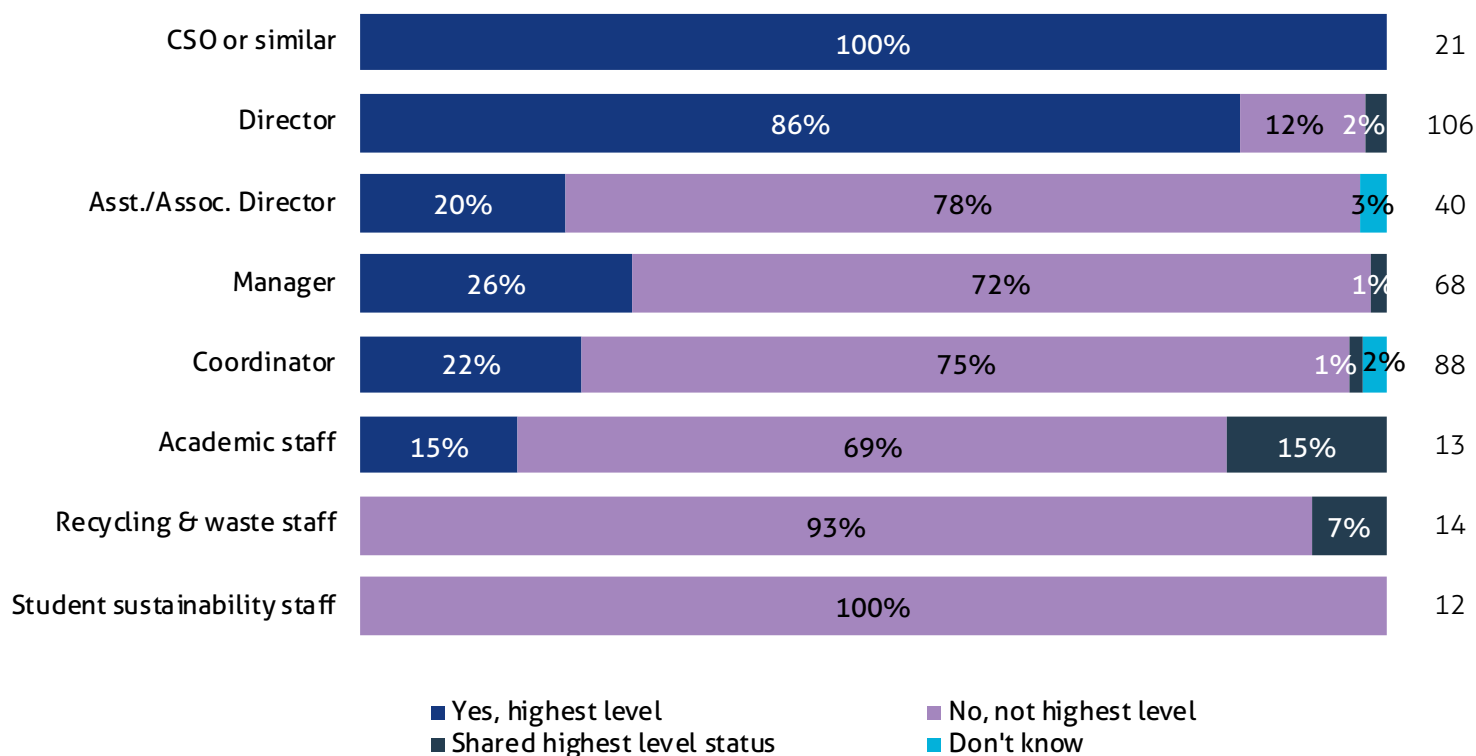
Highest Level Positions

Respondents were asked, "Is your position the highest-level sustainability position at your institution or organization?" There has been a steady decrease in the proportion of respondents who hold their institution's highest level sustainability position since 2015, suggesting consistent growth in new and lower level positions. Responses varied by position type. CSO and Sustainability Director positions were the most likely to be the highest-level sustainability positions at the institution (100% and 86% respectively). Recycling & waste staff and student sustainability staff were least likely to be the highest-level positions at the institution.

Highest Level Position by Survey Year



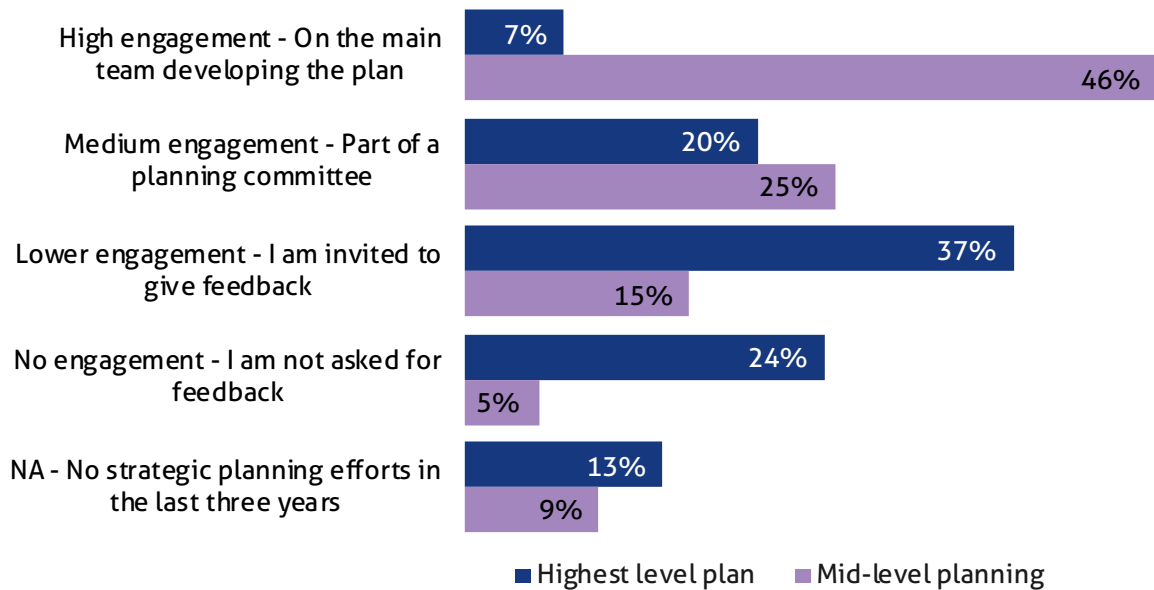
Highest-level Position by Position Type, 2026



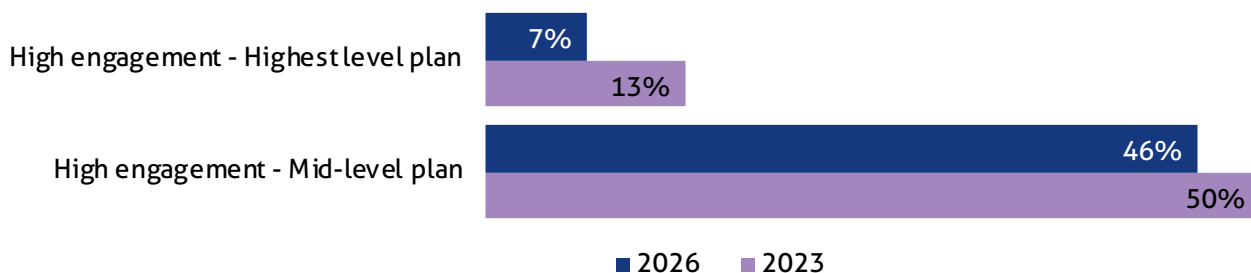
Involvement in Strategic Planning

In 2026 and 2023, respondents were asked about involvement in highest level plans as well as mid-level plans (e.g., divisional or departmental plans). Fewer than half of respondents (46%) are on the main planning teams for one or more mid-level plans, while a much lower proportion (7%) are on the main planning teams for the highest level plans. High engagement in strategic planning for top and mid-level plans was more common in 2023 than in 2026.

Involvement in Strategic Planning, 2026



High-level Engagement in Strategic Planning by Survey Year

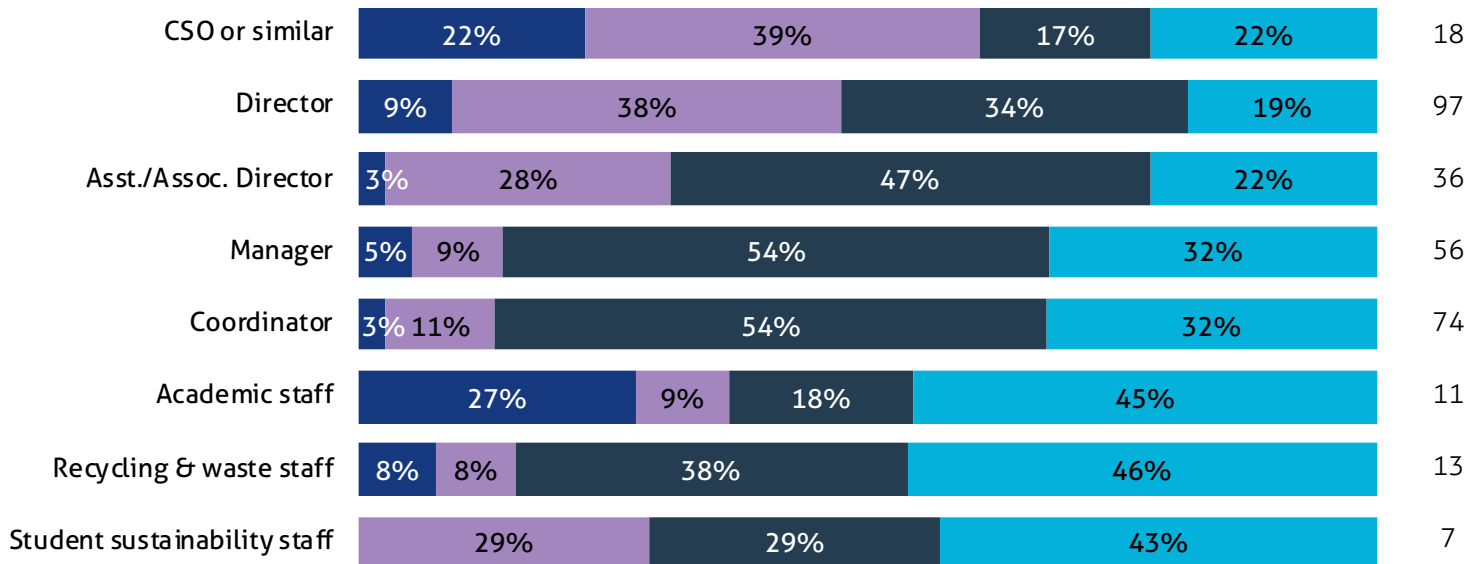


Involvement in Strategic Planning

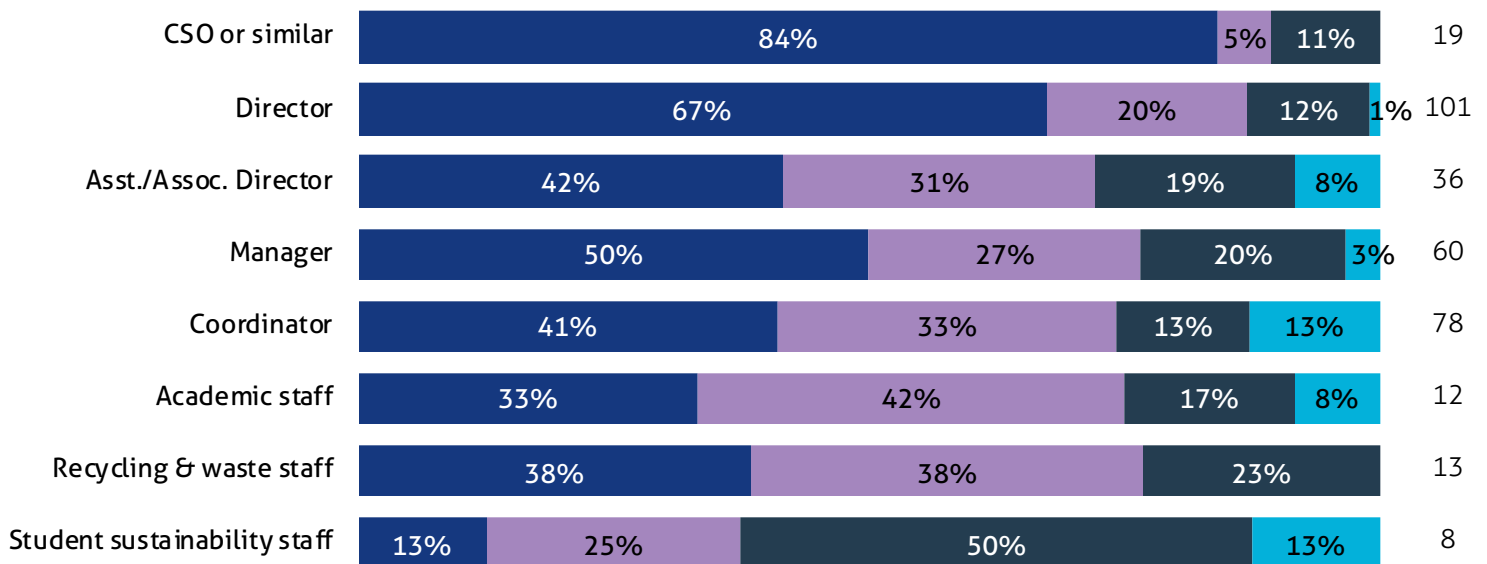
By position type, CSOs and Directors were more highly involved in both levels of strategic planning. Academic staff were most likely to be involved in the development of highest level strategic plans.

Involvement in Highest-level Strategic Planning by Position Type, 2026

Counts



Involvement in Mid-level Strategic Planning by Position Type, 2026

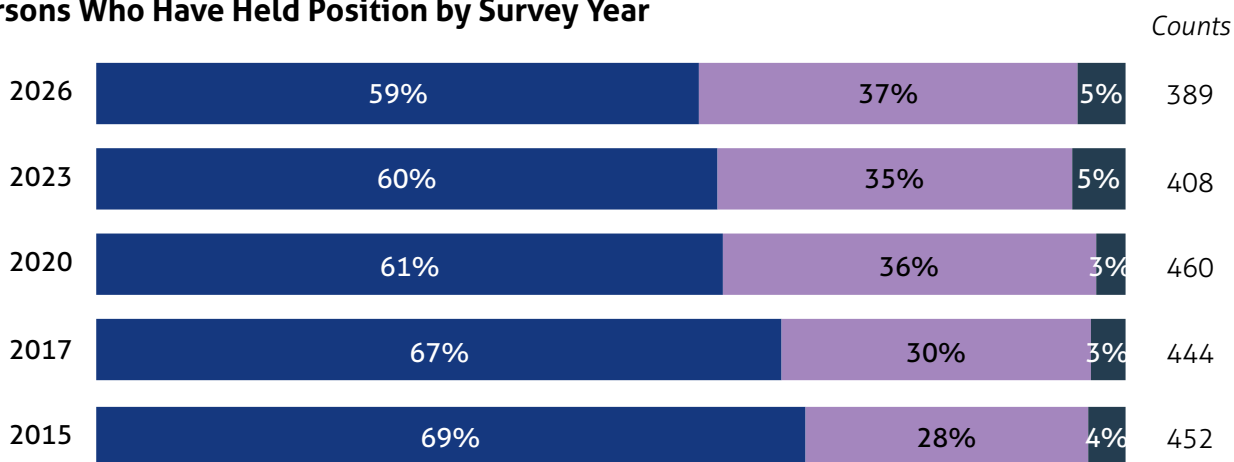


- High engagement - On the main team developing the plan
- Medium engagement - Part of a planning committee
- Lower engagement - I am invited to give feedback
- No engagement - I am not asked for feedback

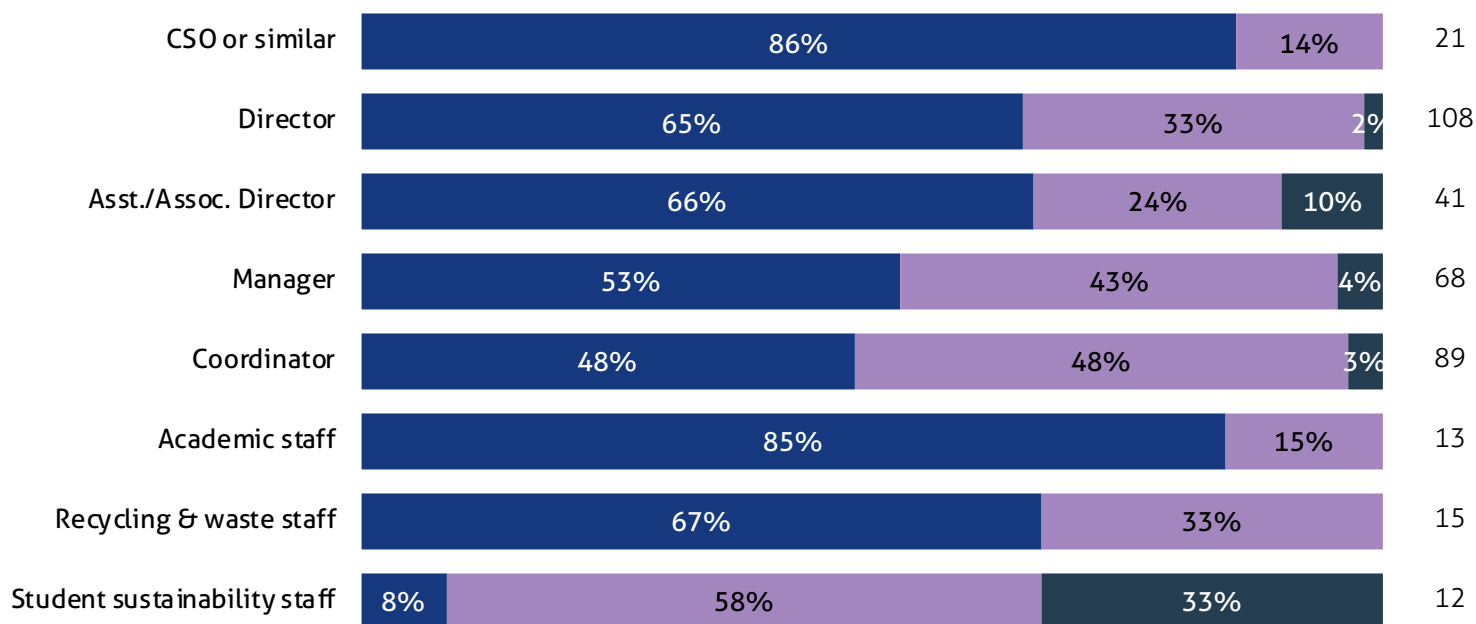
Number Who Have Held Position

To help identify trends in new sustainability positions, respondents were asked to indicate if they were the first person to hold their position at its current rank or level. While the majority of respondents (59%) were the first person to hold their current position, the proportion of respondents that are the first to hold their position has declined steadily since 2015. This pattern is consistent with a field that is maturing. By position type, CSOs and Directors were most likely to be the first to hold their positions, potentially highlighting the newness of this position. Student sustainability staff were more likely to not know, or be the second or more in a position.

Number of Persons Who Have Held Position by Survey Year



Number of Persons Who Have Held Position by Position Type, 2026

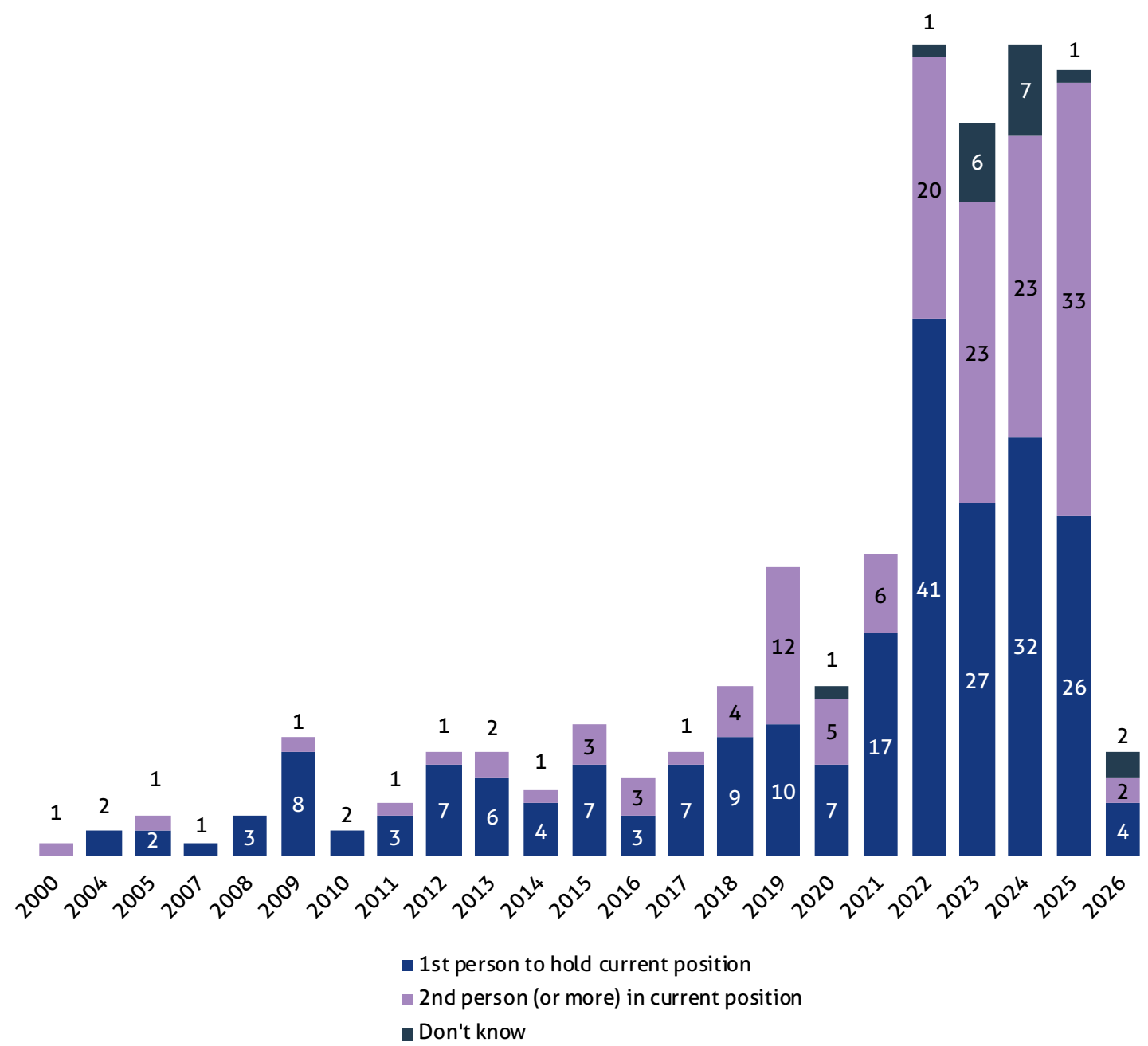


■ First person in current position ■ 2nd person (or more) in current position ■ Don't know

Year Work Began

Respondents were asked, "In what year did you begin working in higher education sustainability overall?" By filtering results of this question with respondents who indicated that they were the first person to hold their position at its current rank/level (see preceding section), the number of new annual positions in campus sustainability each year can be estimated. The 2026 survey shows that new positions peaked in 2022 (this is consistent with 2023 report findings), and new positions continued to be added. These findings suggest that there is consistent growth in new sustainability positions in recent years.

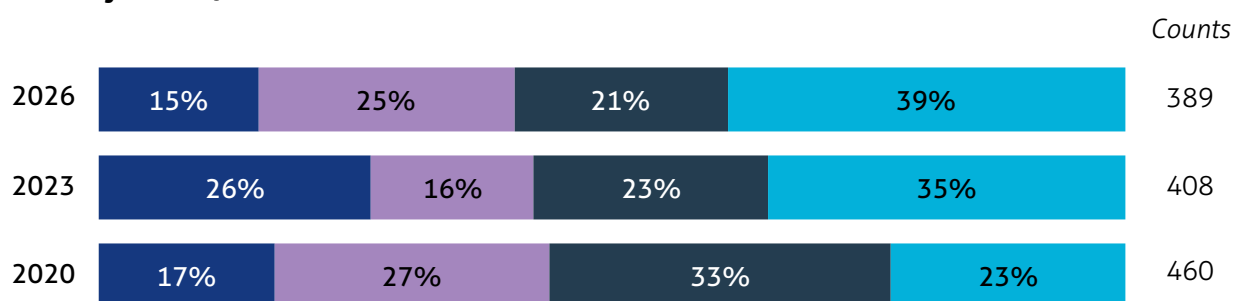
Year when Higher Education Sustainability Work Began



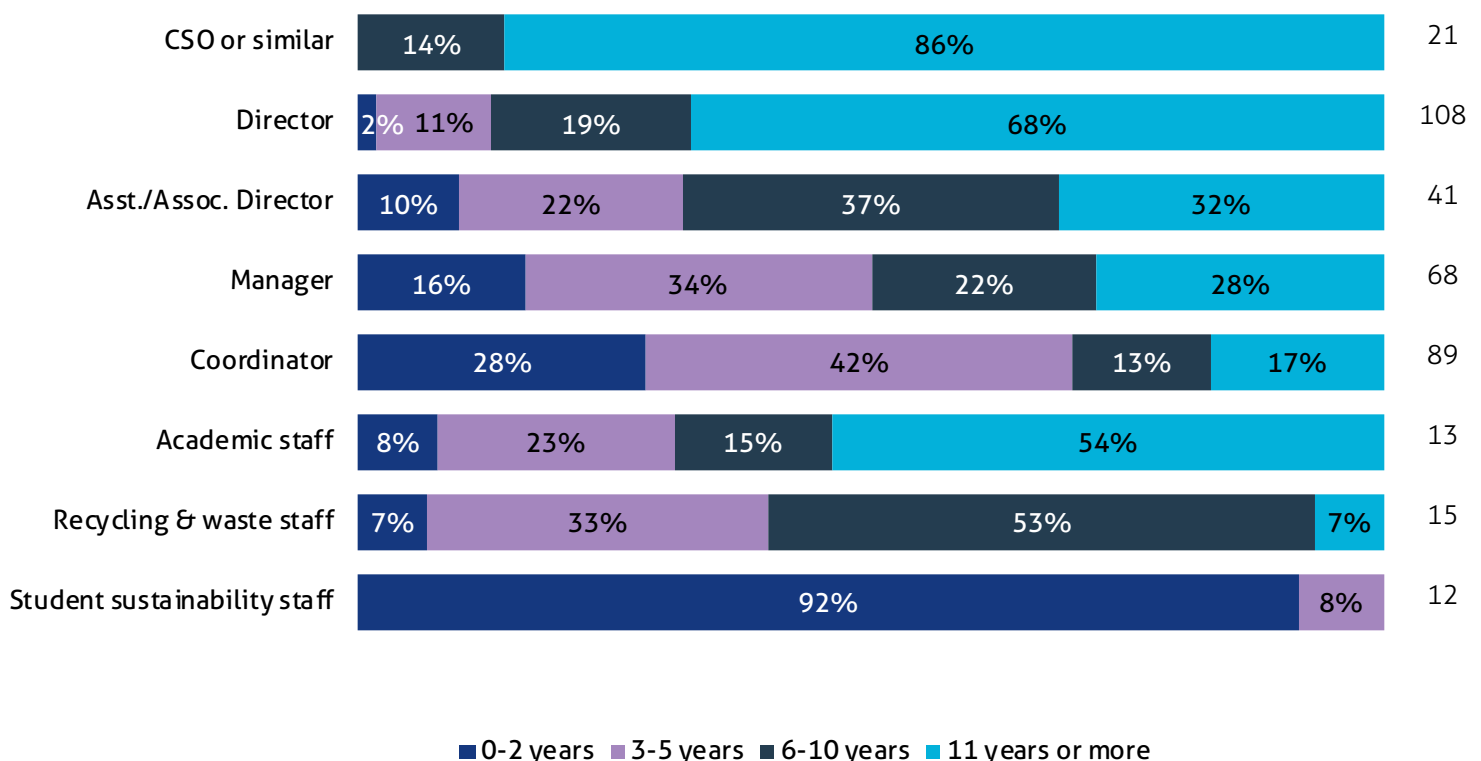
Years of Sustainability Work

Respondents were asked how many years they have worked in higher education sustainability. In comparison to prior years, a smaller proportion of 2026 respondents were new to higher education sustainability (0-2 years). In addition, there was an increase in the proportion of highly seasoned employees (those who have worked on sustainability for 11 years or more). These findings indicate that new positions in sustainability may be back to typical levels after a spike in 2022 that may have been related to pandemic-related job transitions. By position type, CSOs had the greatest number of years of sustainability experience, as expected, followed by Directors and academic staff. Students and Coordinators, predictably, had the fewest years of experience.

Years of Sustainability Work | N=389



Years of Sustainability Work by Position Type, 2026 | N=367 Count



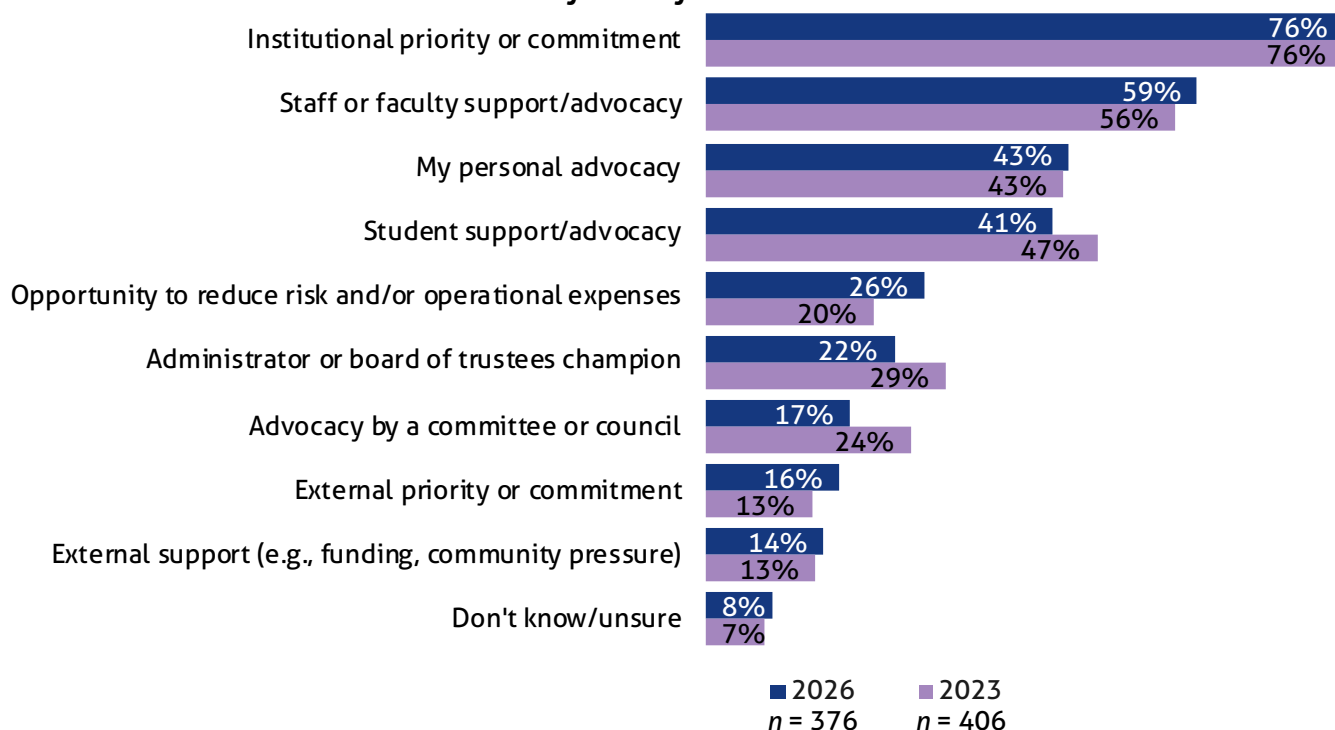
Main Driver for Position Continuation



Natalie Hayes, Sustainability Director at Bentley University, joins Tufts University CSO Dano Weisbord in sharing perspectives on innovations in campus dining waste minimization at AASHE 2025.

A question about the main driver for the continuation of one's current position asked respondents to select up to five most significant drivers. "Institutional priority" continues to be the main driver, with little fluctuation across most categories in comparison to 2023. Notably, there was a significant increase in "Opportunity to reduce risk and/or operational expenses" as a driver in 2026.

Main Driver for Position Continuation by Survey Year

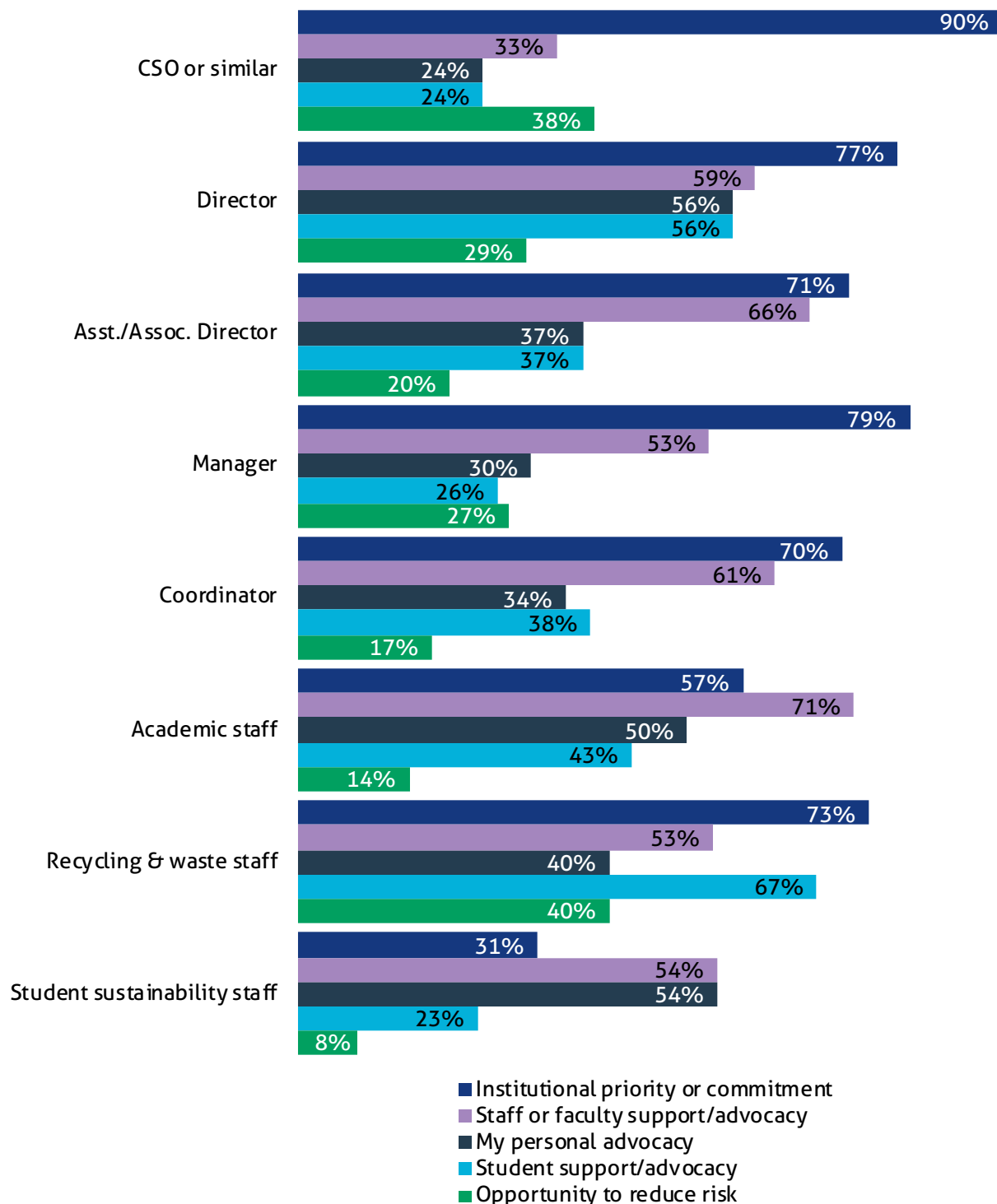


Main Driver for Position Continuation

For the five most common drivers, responses were analyzed by position type. "Institutional priority or commitment" was most frequently cited as a main driver for CSOs and similar (90%).

Main Driver for Position Continuation by Position Type, 2026

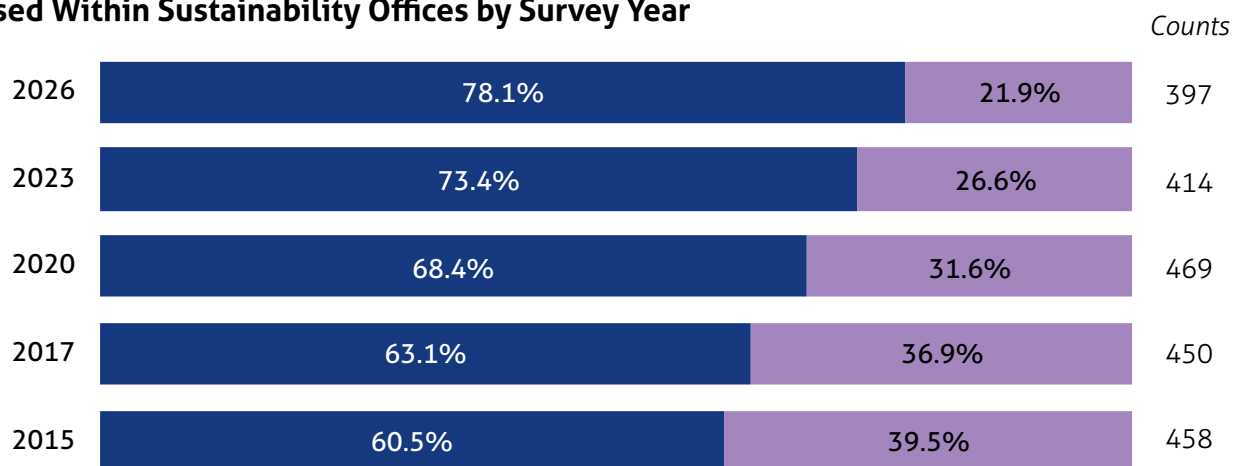
n=376



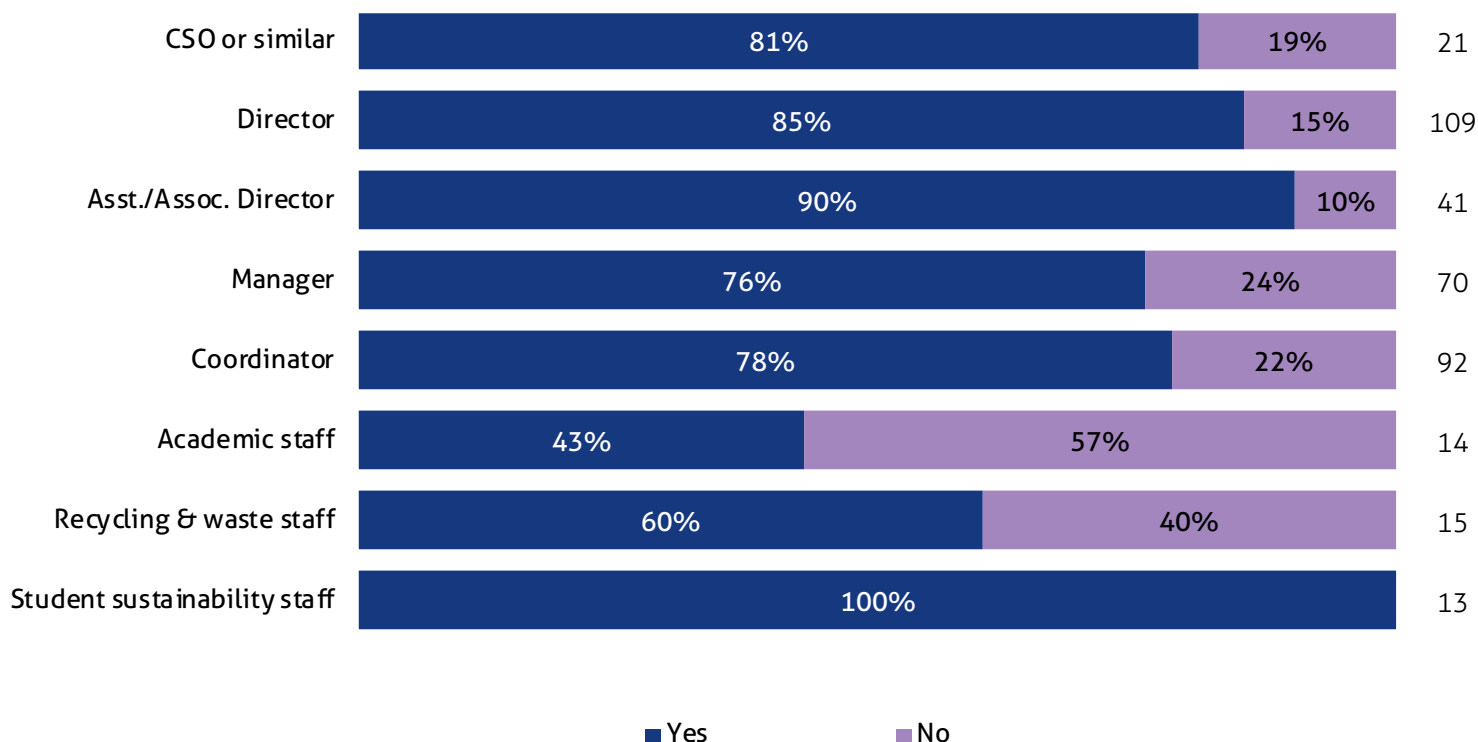
Positions Housed in Sustainability Offices

We continue to see a trend toward more sustainability offices over time, with 78% of respondents indicating that their position was housed in an office or unit with “sustainability” in its name, compared to 73% in 2023. By position type, student sustainability staff, Assistant or Associate Directors, Directors and CSOs were most likely to be housed in sustainability offices, while academic staff and recycling & waste staff positions were much less likely to be housed in sustainability offices.

Positions Housed Within Sustainability Offices by Survey Year



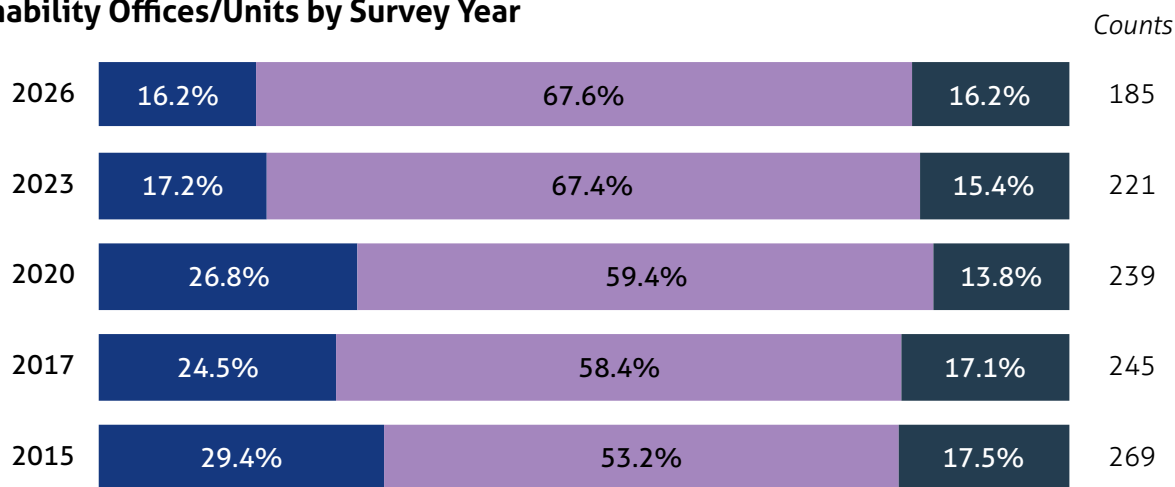
Positions Within Sustainability Offices by Position Type, 2026



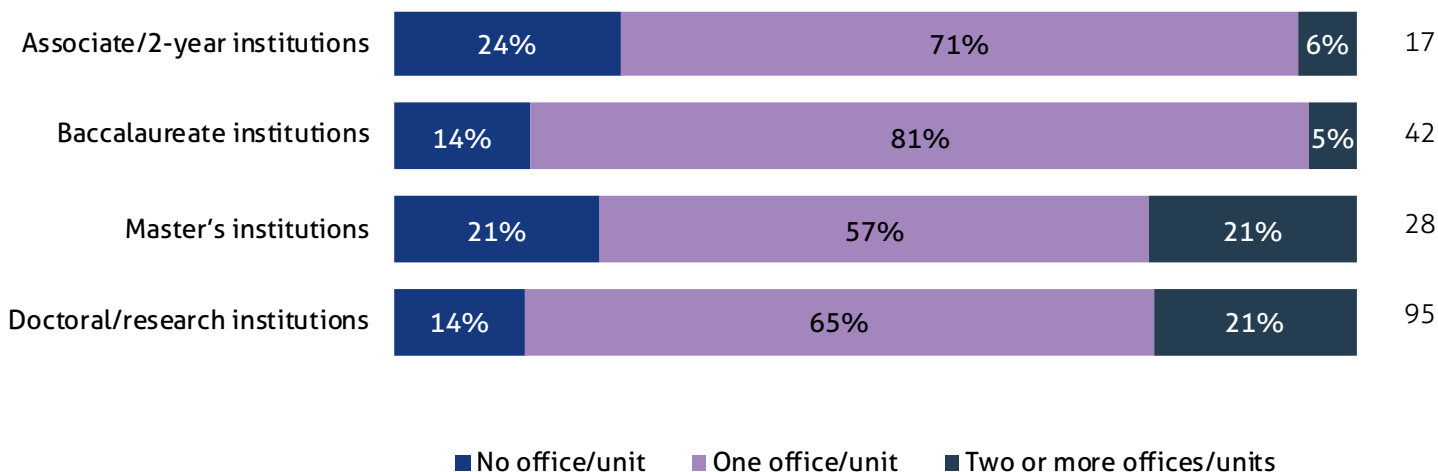
Number of Sustainability Offices

Self-identified sustainability points of contact (one per institution) were asked whether sustainability efforts at their institution/system office were centralized in an office, unit, center, or institute with “sustainability” in its name. Overall, nearly 84% of institutions reported having at least one office, center, or institute with “sustainability” in the name, a slight increase from 2023. Responses were also analyzed based on institution type. Associate/2-year and master’s institutions were least likely to have an office, unit, or center with “sustainability” in its name. Master’s and doctoral/research institutions were most likely to have two or more offices, units, or centers.

Number of Sustainability Offices/Units by Survey Year



Number of Sustainability Offices/Units by Institution Type, 2026



Number of Sustainability Staff

Self-identified sustainability points of contact (one per institution) were asked to indicate the number of paid sustainability staff - both non-student and student - employed by their institution. To begin tracking centralized versus decentralized change in the number of sustainability staff, this question was revised in 2026 to also indicate the number of positions that are centralized in a sustainability office versus outside of a sustainability office. Due to this change, results are not comparable with past years' results. Overall, student sustainability staff comprise a majority of sustainability staff at respondent institutions (64%), and most positions were in sustainability offices (71%) rather than outside of sustainability offices.

Student vs. Non-student Sustainability Staff Positions, 2026 n=174

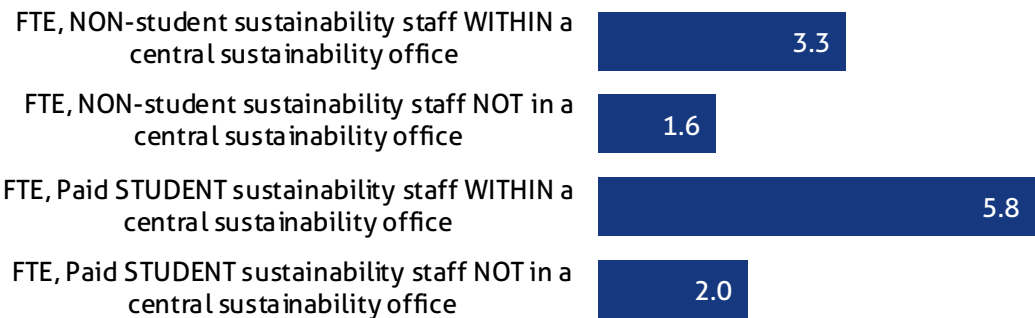


Sustainability Office vs. Non-sustainability Office Staff Positions, 2026



The chart below includes averages of total reported student and non-student sustainability staff counts overall. Median amounts were analyzed also, but showed little variation and are not displayed. On average, institutions with sustainability offices had three non-student sustainability positions and five student sustainability positions, with positions outside of sustainability offices being lower on average.

Average FTE of Sustainability Staff, 2026

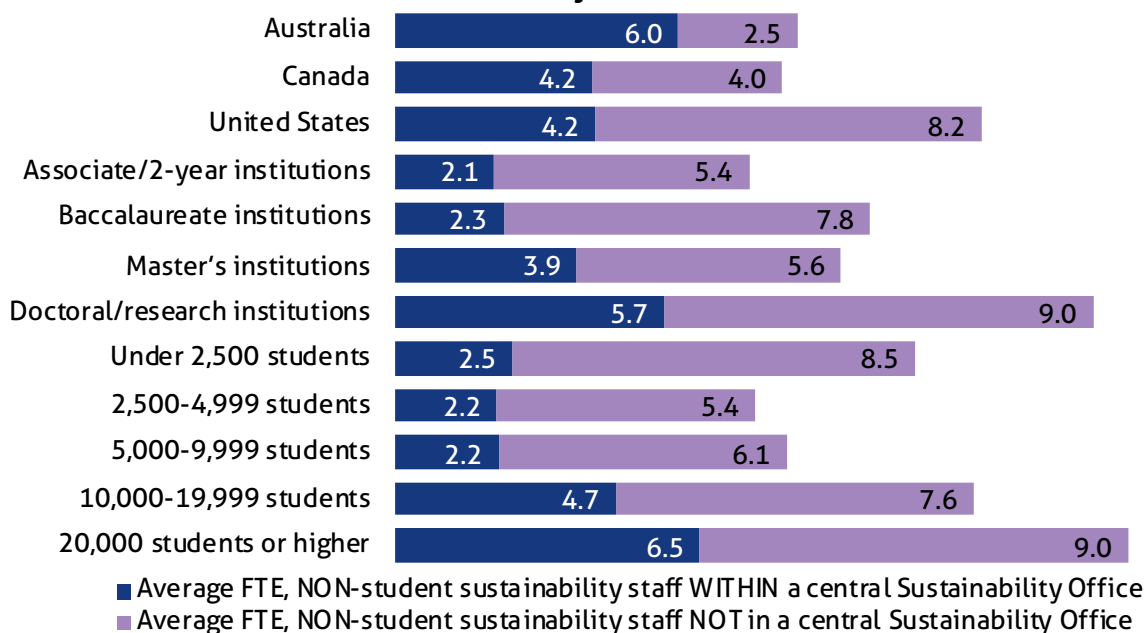


Number of Sustainability Staff

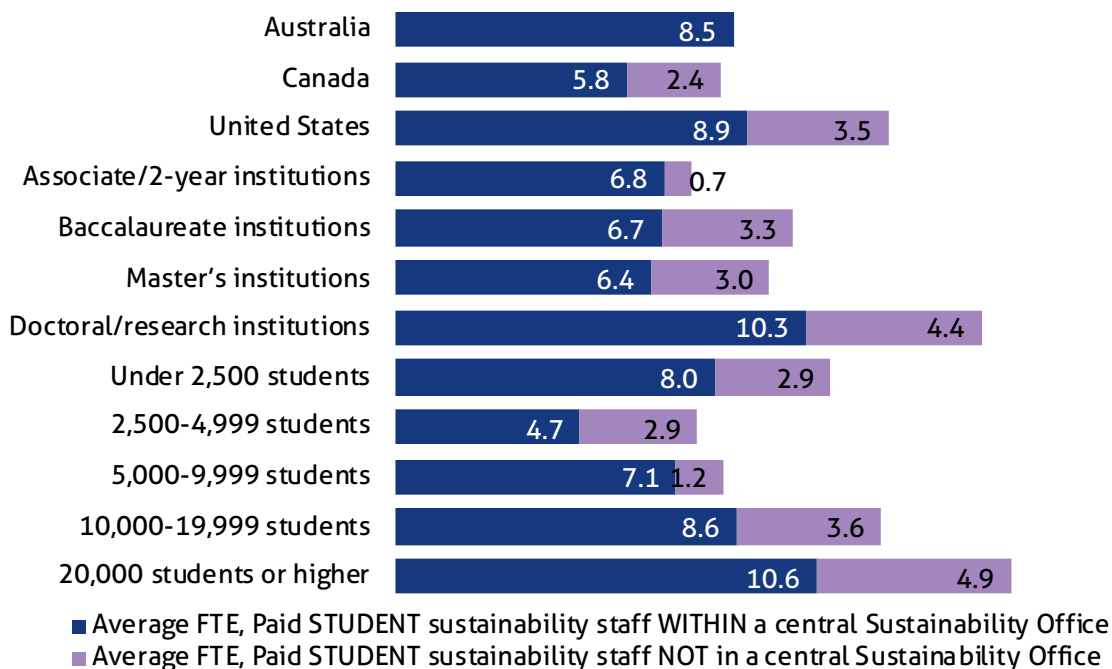
Averages of total reported student and non-student sustainability staff counts based on country, institution type, and student enrollment are presented below. Among non-student staff, institutions with 20,000 FTE or higher, doctoral institutions, and U.S. institutions had the greatest overall staff counts. Non-student positions within sustainability offices were most common among Australian institutions. Among student staff, we see a similar trend, where institutions with 20,000 FTE or higher, doctoral institutions, and U.S. institutions had the greatest staff counts. Student positions within sustainability offices were prevalent across multiple institution categories.

Average Number of NON-STUDENT Sustainability Staff, 2026

n=152



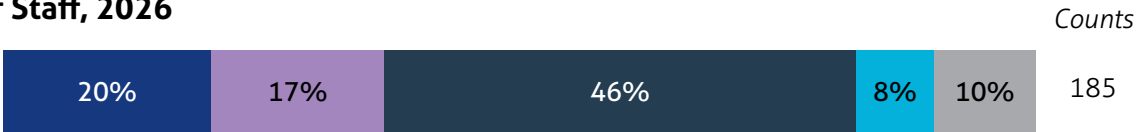
Average Number of STUDENT Sustainability Staff, 2026



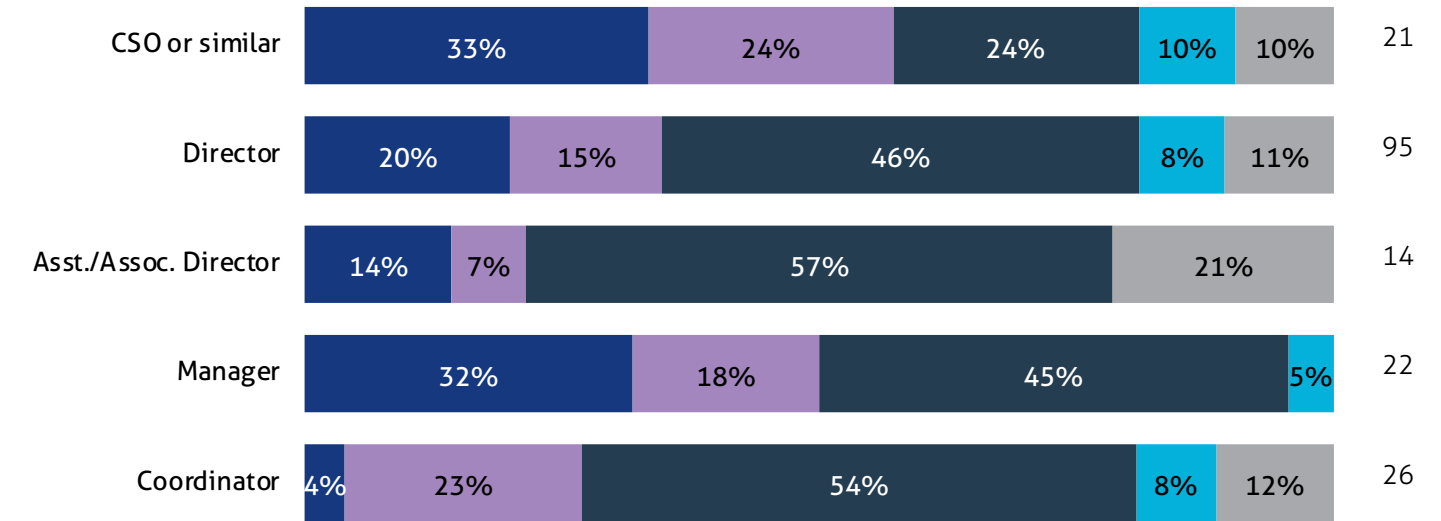
Change in Number of Staff

A new question in 2026 asked self-identified sustainability points of contact (one per institution): “Over the last three years (since the February 2023 staffing survey), how has the number of paid sustainability staff positions at your organization changed?” The bulk of respondents (45%) indicated no change, 37% indicated an increase, and 16% indicated a decrease. By regional and institutional characteristics, significant staff increases occurred among respondents in the Southeastern and Central regions of North America, and among master’s institutions. Decreases in the number of sustainability positions were most common among Pacific Coast respondents in North America, and among doctoral institutions.

Change in Number of Staff, 2026



Change in Number of Staff by Regional & Institutional Characteristics, 2026

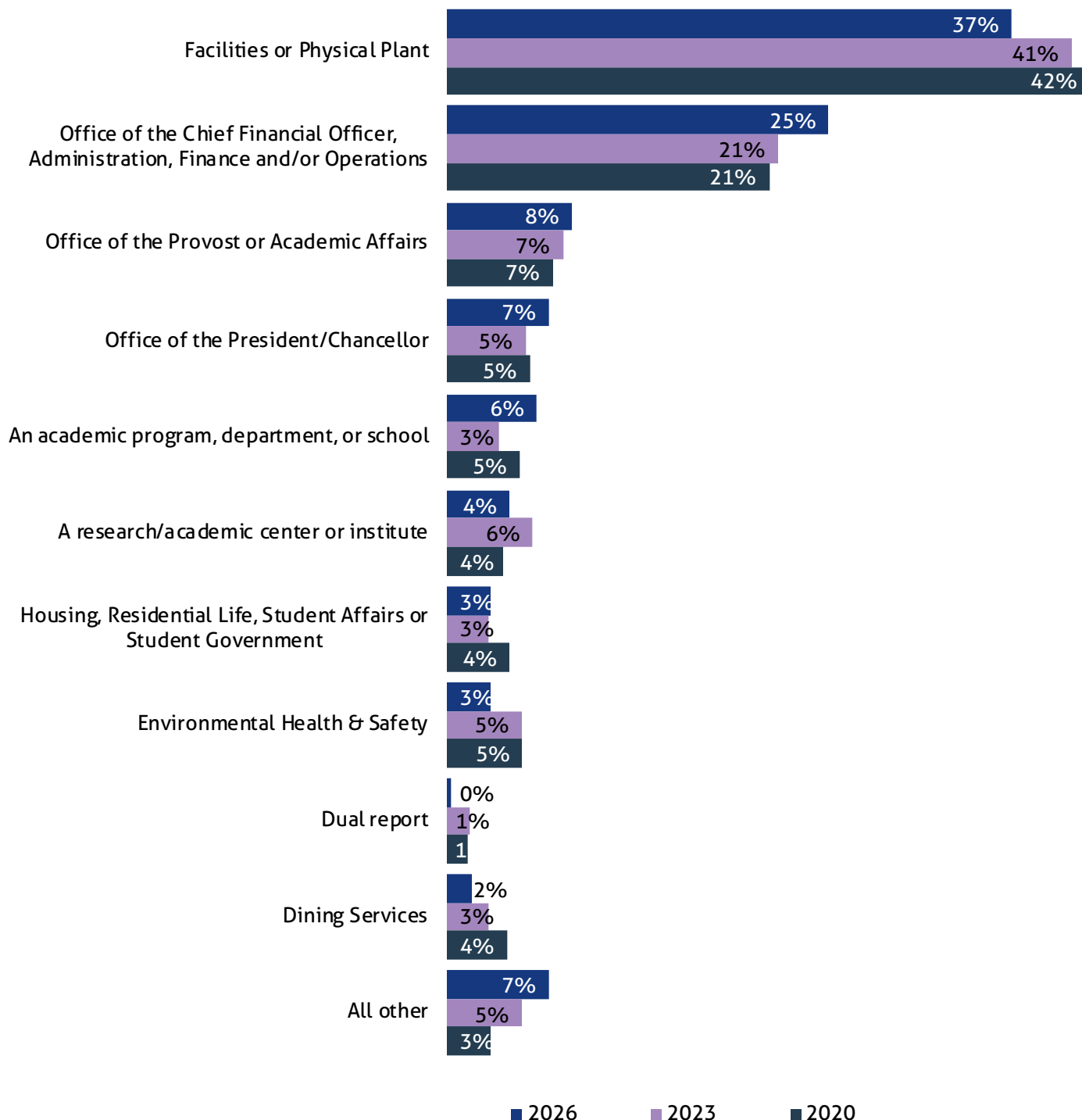


- Increased significantly (10% or more)
- Increased slightly (1-9%)
- Stayed about the same (+/- 1%)
- Decreased slightly (1-9%)
- Decreased significantly (10% or more)

Where Position or Office is Housed

Respondents were asked to provide an indication of where their sustainability position, office, and/or unit is housed organizationally. Responses showed a continued increase in positions housed within Finance & Administration, along with a corresponding decline in respondents based in Facilities or Physical Plant. Respondents with positions housed in the Office of the President or Chancellor increased by 2% since 2023.

Where Sustainability Positions are Housed by Survey Year



Change in Where Positions are Housed

A new question introduced in 2026 asked respondents, “Over the last three years (since the February 2023 staffing survey), has the organizational home for your sustainability position, office, and/or unit changed?” Most respondents (75%) indicated no change. Those that indicated “Yes” were asked a follow-up question: “How would you characterize the direction of the move?” with response options of “moved down in the organizational chart”, “moved laterally in the organization chart”, and “moved up in the organizational chart”. Among those respondents that did see changes, lateral changes were most common, impacting nearly 12% of all respondents. Eight percent of respondents moved up in the organization chart, whereas 5% moved down. By position type, the positions that were most likely to have recently seen upward moves included student sustainability staff and CSO and similar positions.

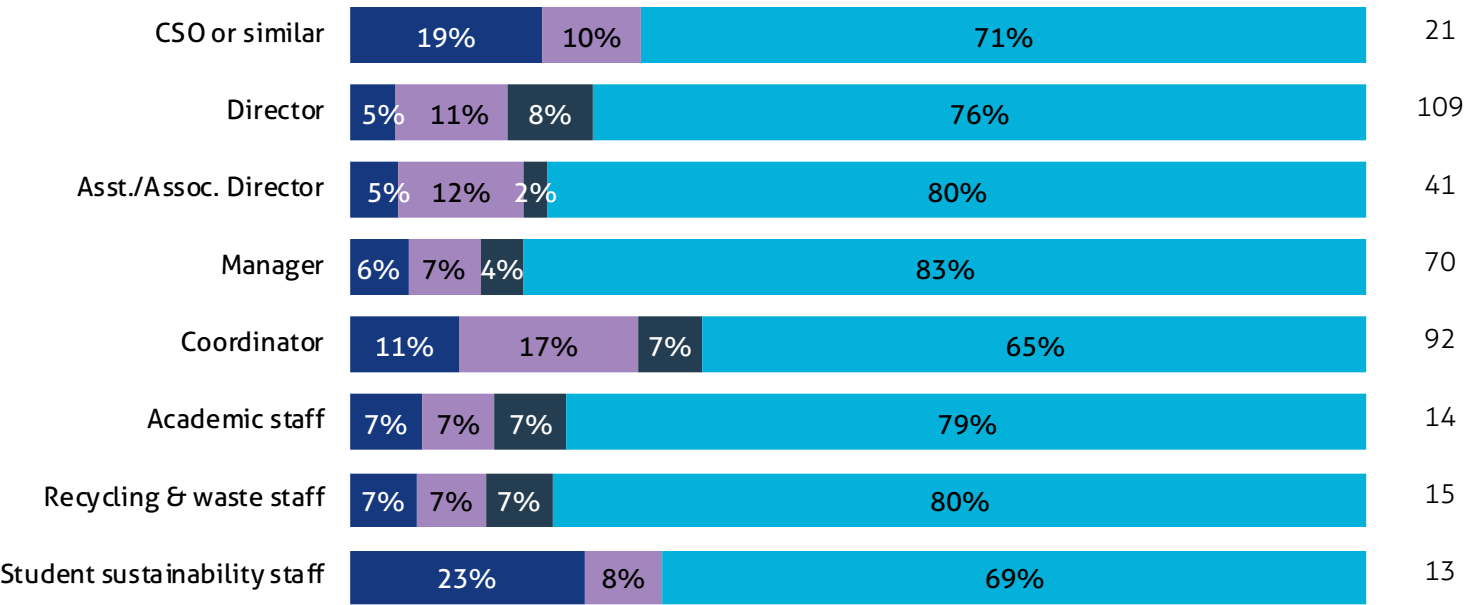
Change in Where Sustainability Positions are Housed, 2026

Counts



397

Change in Where Sustainability Positions are Housed by Position Type, 2026



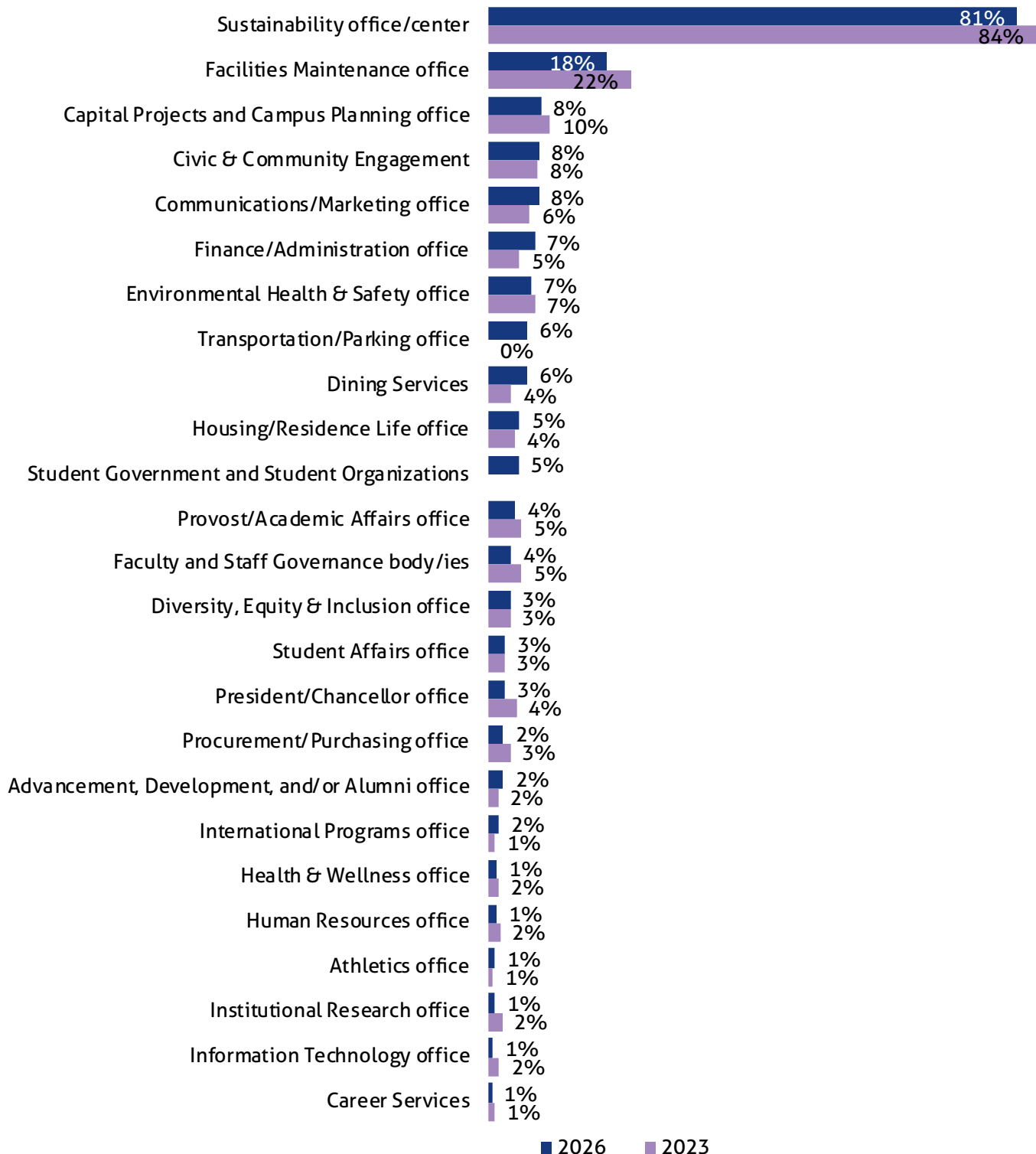
- Moved up in the organizational chart
- Moved laterally in the organization chart
- Moved down in the organizational chart
- No change

Areas & Levels of Responsibility

Respondents were asked about their personal level of responsibility over offices, divisions, and departments across the institution. As in past surveys, direct responsibility for a sustainability office and/or center was cited most frequently by a significant margin. The next highest responses were Facilities and capital projects offices.

Level of Responsibility by Survey Year

n=391

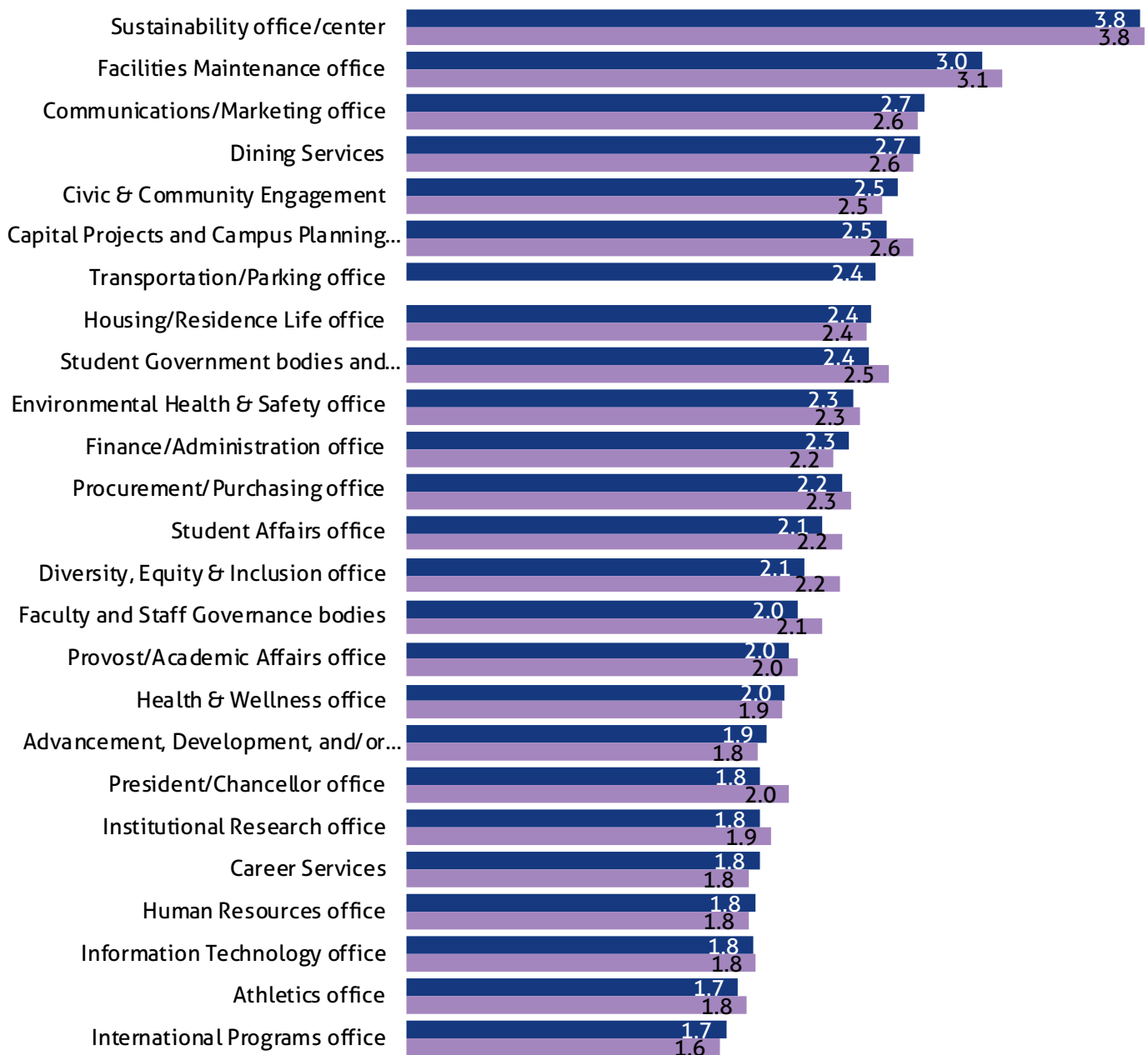


Areas & Levels of Campus Engagement

Level of engagement is analyzed based on weighted averages for a question on engagement with other offices or divisions. Predictably, regular engagement with sustainability and Facilities offices was cited most frequently, though engagement with Facilities was somewhat lower than in 2023. Higher engagement in comparison to 2023 was noted with offices of Civic & Community Engagement, Finance/Administration, and Career Services. Lower engagement in comparison to 2023 was noted with capital projects and planning offices, DEI offices, faculty and staff governance offices, and the Office of the President/Chancellor. Some of these changes may be the result of external factors (e.g., reduced government funding for renewable energy within the U.S. may have resulted in less engagement with capital projects and planning offices).

Level of Engagement across Campus, Weighted Average

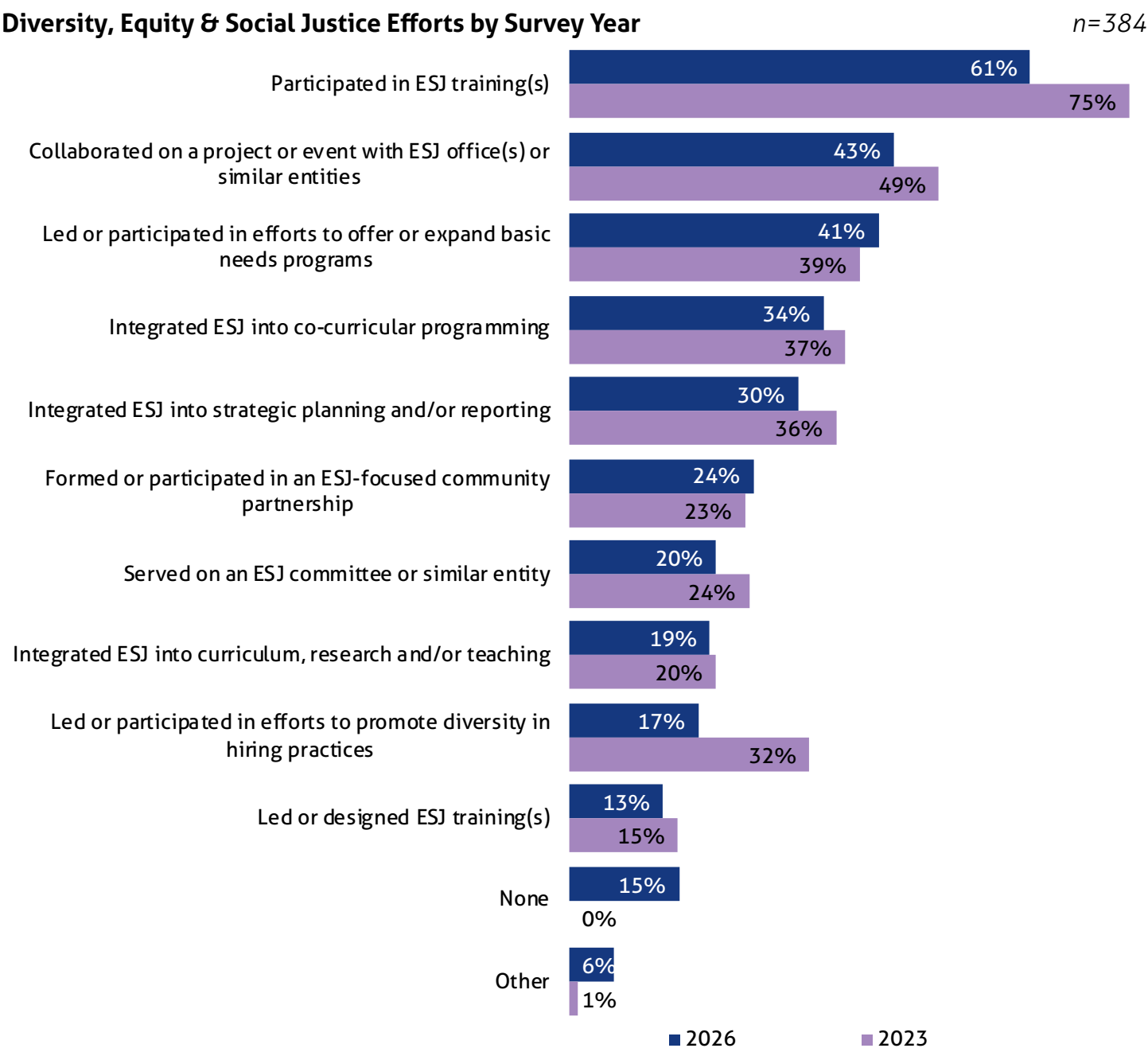
n=391



■ 2026 ■ 2023

Advancing Equity & Social Justice

A question first introduced in 2023 asked respondents whether they had participated in various diversity, equity, and social justice (ESJ) efforts in the last three years. Nearly all efforts saw decreased participation in comparison to 2023 results. Participation in ESJ training was the most common effort identified by respondents, though there was a significant drop from 75% in 2023 to 62% of all respondents in 2026. A significant drop was also noted for respondents that “Led or participated in efforts to promote diversity in hiring practices” between 2023 and 2026. Two areas saw moderate growth since 2023: Efforts to offer or expand basic needs programs and participation in ESJ focused community partnerships. Given that most respondents are based in the U.S., these results indicate that anti-DEI policies within the U.S. may be reducing participation in certain types of DEI events and activities, while also spurring interest in community engagement and basic needs programs.

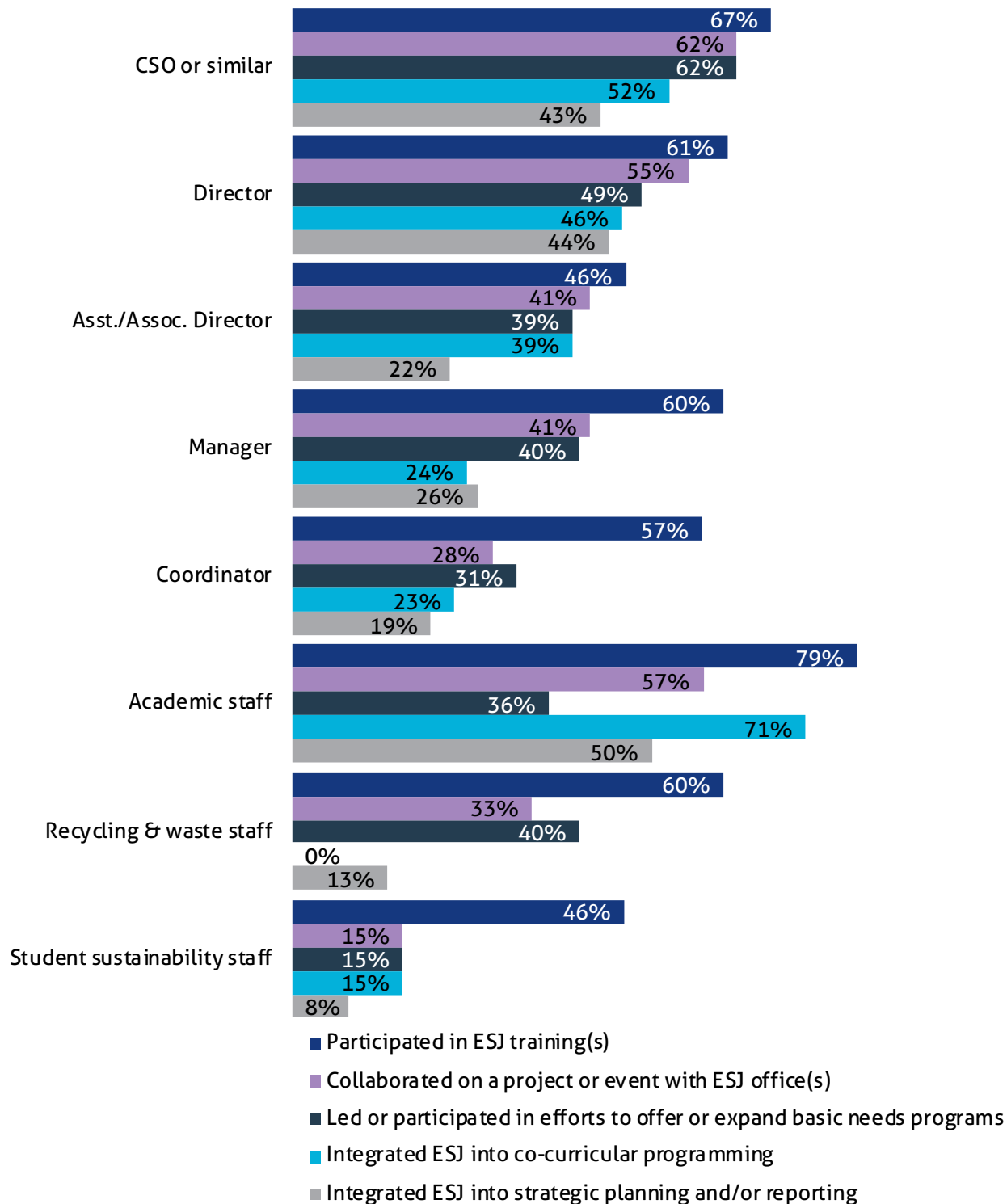


Advancing Equity & Social Justice

For the five most common ESJ efforts, responses were analyzed by position type. Generally, ESJ training was higher for CSOs, Directors and academic staff positions. On the other hand, it was notably lower for student sustainability staff and Coordinators.

Diversity, Equity & Social Justice Efforts by Position Type

n=376

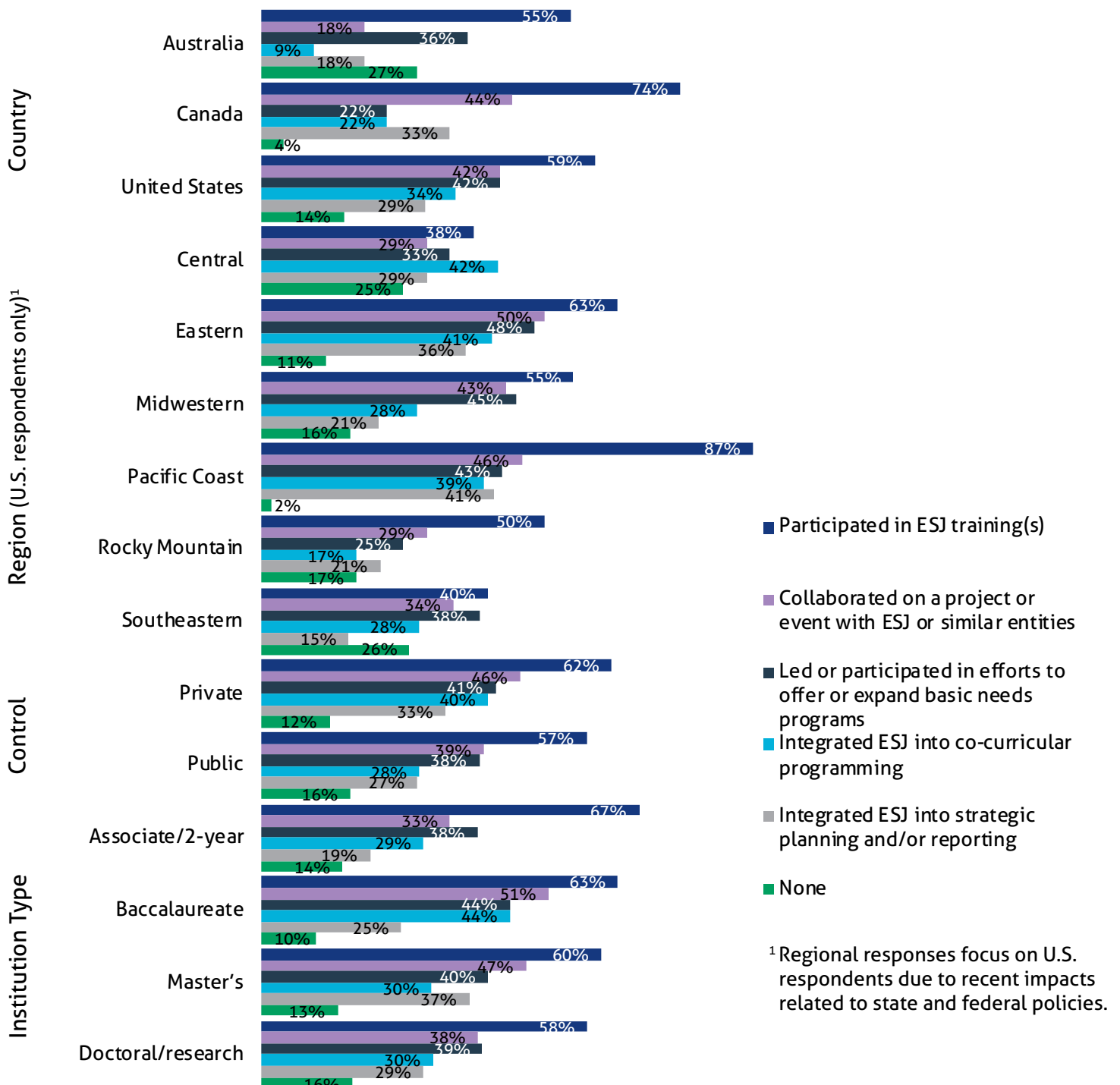


Advancing Equity & Social Justice

Participation in ESJ training was most prevalent among Canadian respondents, U.S. Pacific Coast respondents, and associate institutions. Participation in ESJ training was highest among U.S. Pacific Coast respondents and Canadian respondents. The proportion of respondents that indicated “none” was highest among Australian respondents and U.S. respondents in the Southeastern and Central regions. It was lowest among U.S. Pacific Coast respondents and Canadian respondents.

Diversity, Equity & Social Justice Efforts by Institutional & Regional Characteristics

n=376



Professional Certifications

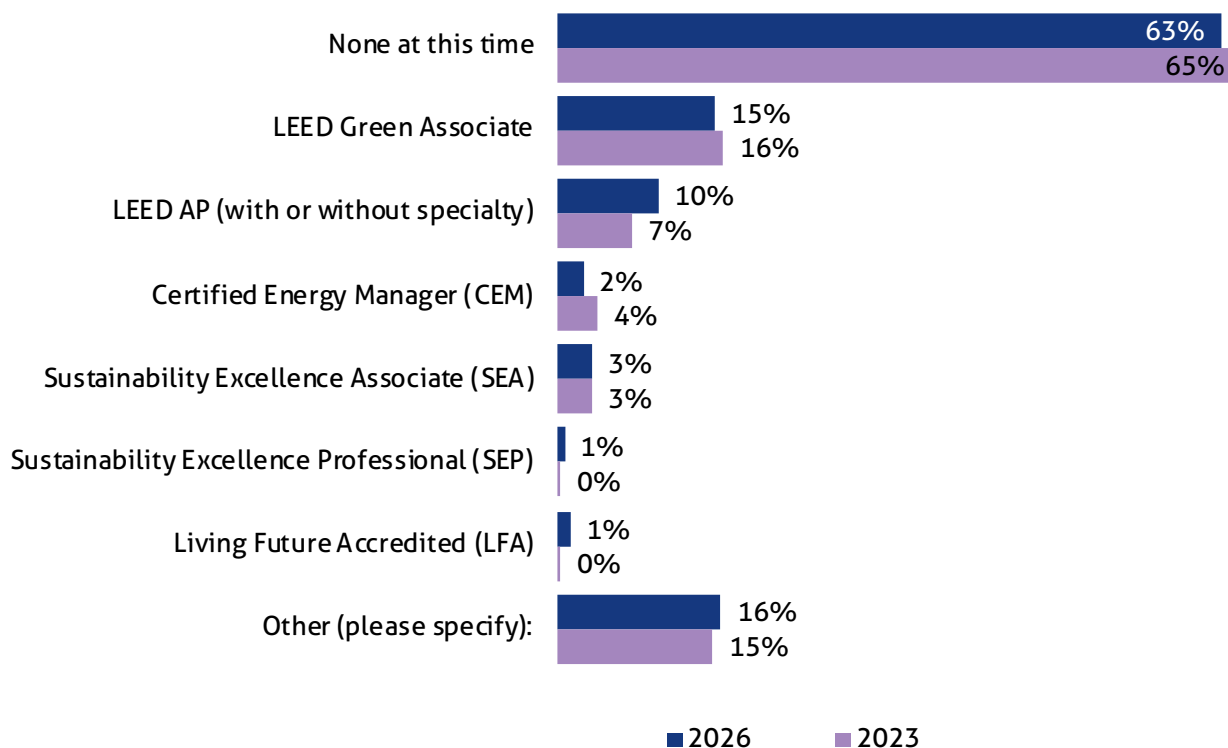


Sustainability professionals at the AASHE 2025 Conference interact during a networking session.

Respondents were asked which accreditations or certifications they held, and could select from a list of more common certifications or identify others. The majority of respondents (63%) did not have any certifications, in comparison to 65% in 2023.

Professional Certifications by Survey Year

n=334

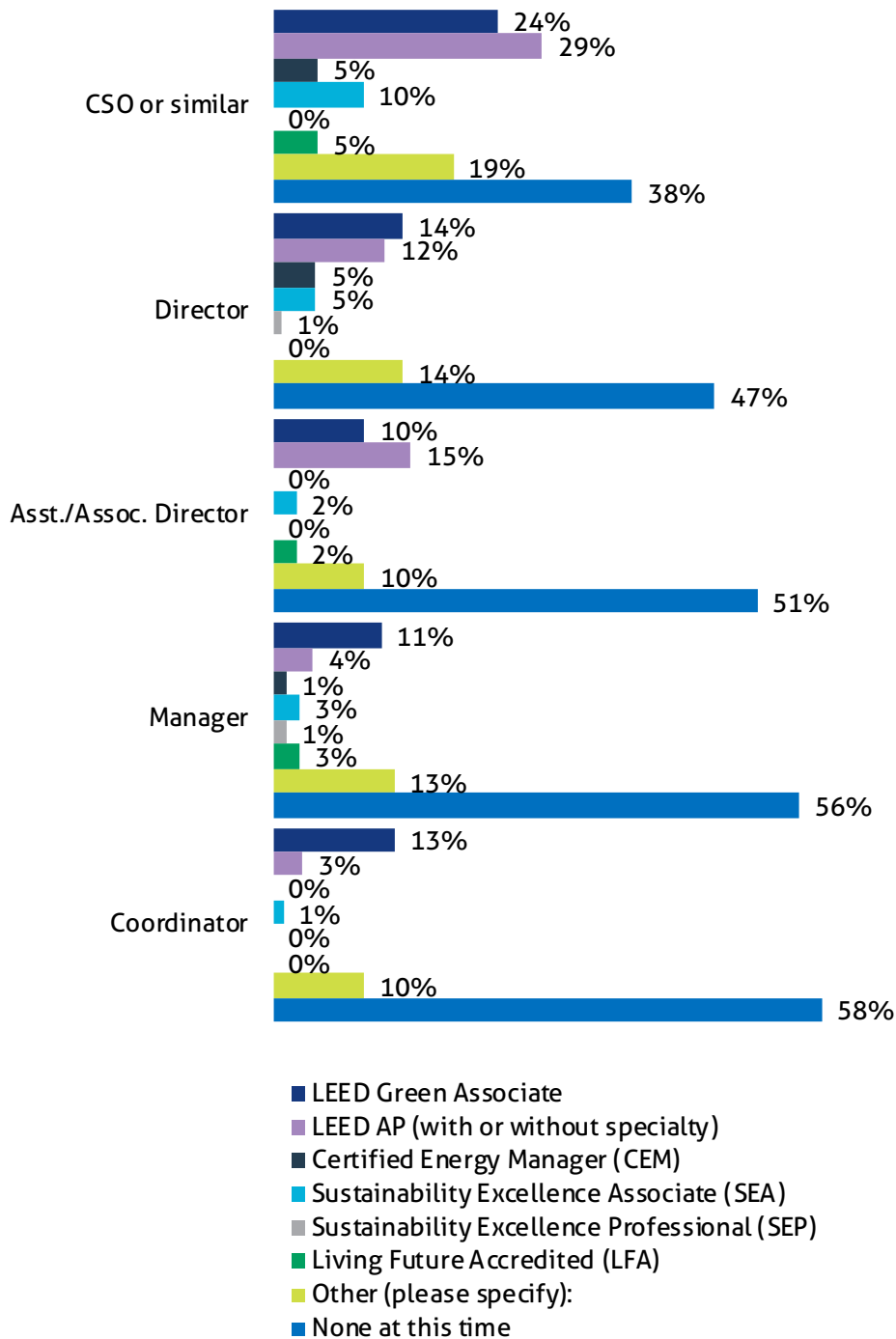


Professional Certifications

Results were reviewed for the most common position types. CSOs and Directors were most likely to hold a certification. Common responses for "other certifications" included TRUE Zero Waste certification and Professional Engineer (PE).

Professional Certifications by Position Type, 2026

n=378

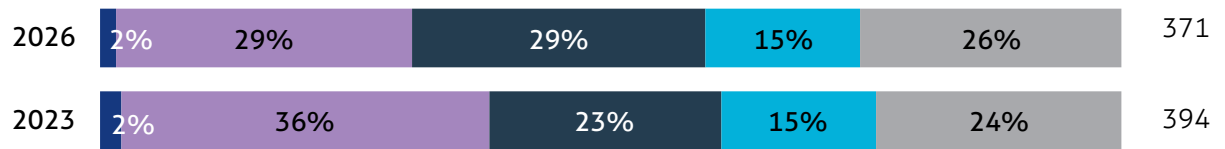


Remote Work

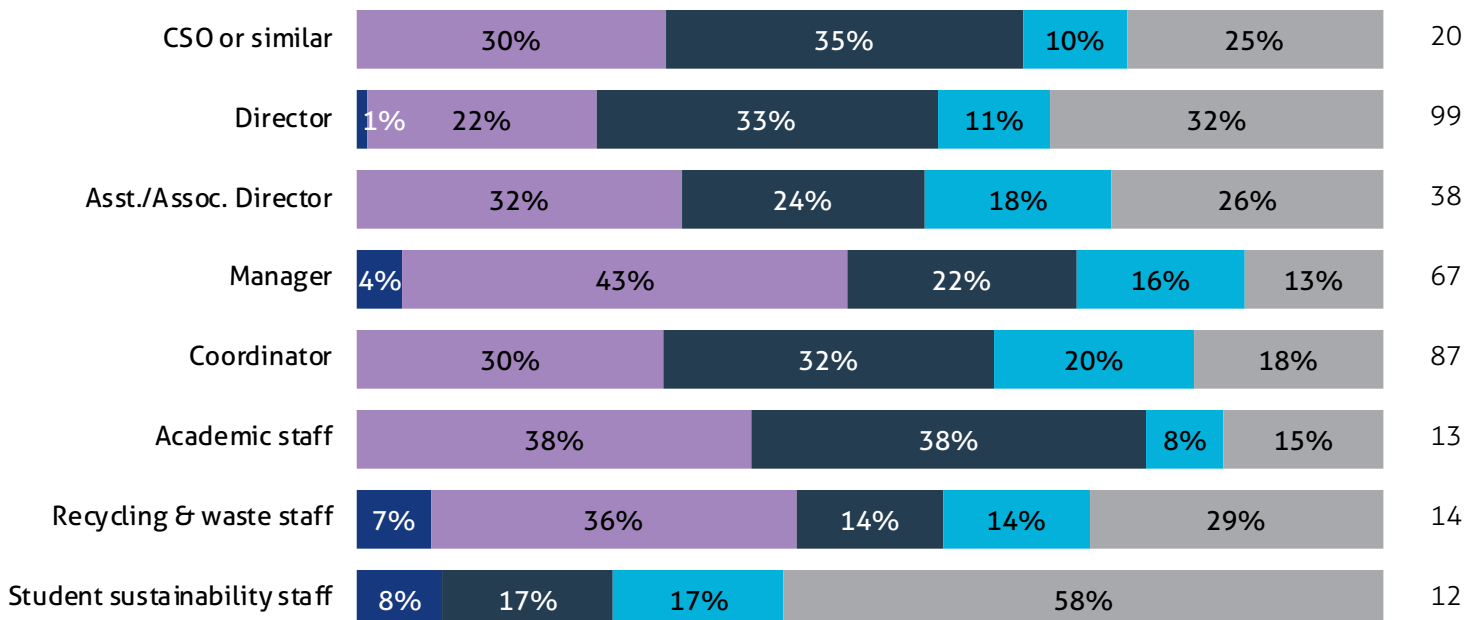
A question introduced in 2023 asked: "How frequently do you work remotely (e.g., from a home office)?" Overall, remote work has declined since 2023. Respondents working remotely multiple times per week or more decreased from 38% in 2023 to 30% in 2026. Over a quarter of respondents indicated that they work remotely "a few times a year or less". By position type, academic staff seemed to have the most flexibility to work remotely, with 77% working remotely once per week or more. CSOs and Coordinators worked almost exclusively on-site.

Remote Work Frequency by Survey Year

Counts



Remote Work Frequency by Position Type, 2026



■ Always (with exceptions)
 ■ Multiple times a week
 ■ About once a week
■ About once a month
 ■ A few times a year or less

Work Priorities

A new free-response question was introduced in 2026 asking, "What is/are the topic(s) that your sustainability position or office is currently prioritizing?" Respondents report a wide range of sustainability priorities, with most focusing on campus infrastructure, waste reduction, emissions reporting, energy efficiency, and composting. Many also emphasize student engagement, STARS certification, curriculum integration, and sustainable transportation. A few highlight biodiversity, cost savings, and climate action planning.

Sample of free responses, 2026

"Circular economy, reporting, regulatory compliance, sustainability action planning, student employment/applied learning. Future: *major focus on green procurement and facilities/capital sustainability (embodied carbon)*"

- Senior officer, New York

"Institutionalizing *offset purchasing for air travel*; green space planning and development in support of our biodiversity plan"

- Sustainability Officer, Montréal

"Finding *cost saving measures*, expanding EV charging, developing a Climate Action Plan, commissioning an Integrated Energy Master Plan, and submetering building for electricity, gas and water"

- Sustainability Officer, California

"*Deepening partnerships* with our research focused center, as well as campus-as-lab partnerships with faculty/students to prioritize teaching and research mission alignment. A newer executive leader has challenged our team with achieving AASHE STARS Platinum"

- Sustainability Officer, Missouri

"Moving away from being buried within Facilities, to a broader *dual reporting structure* that matches our campus-wide responsibilities"

- Sustainability Officer, Illinois

"*Integrating sustainability into curriculum and procurement.* We recognize the impacts of AI and climate risk are of critical importance but do not have the capacity to fully prioritize these areas. "

- Sustainability Officer, British Columbia

Salary & Benefits

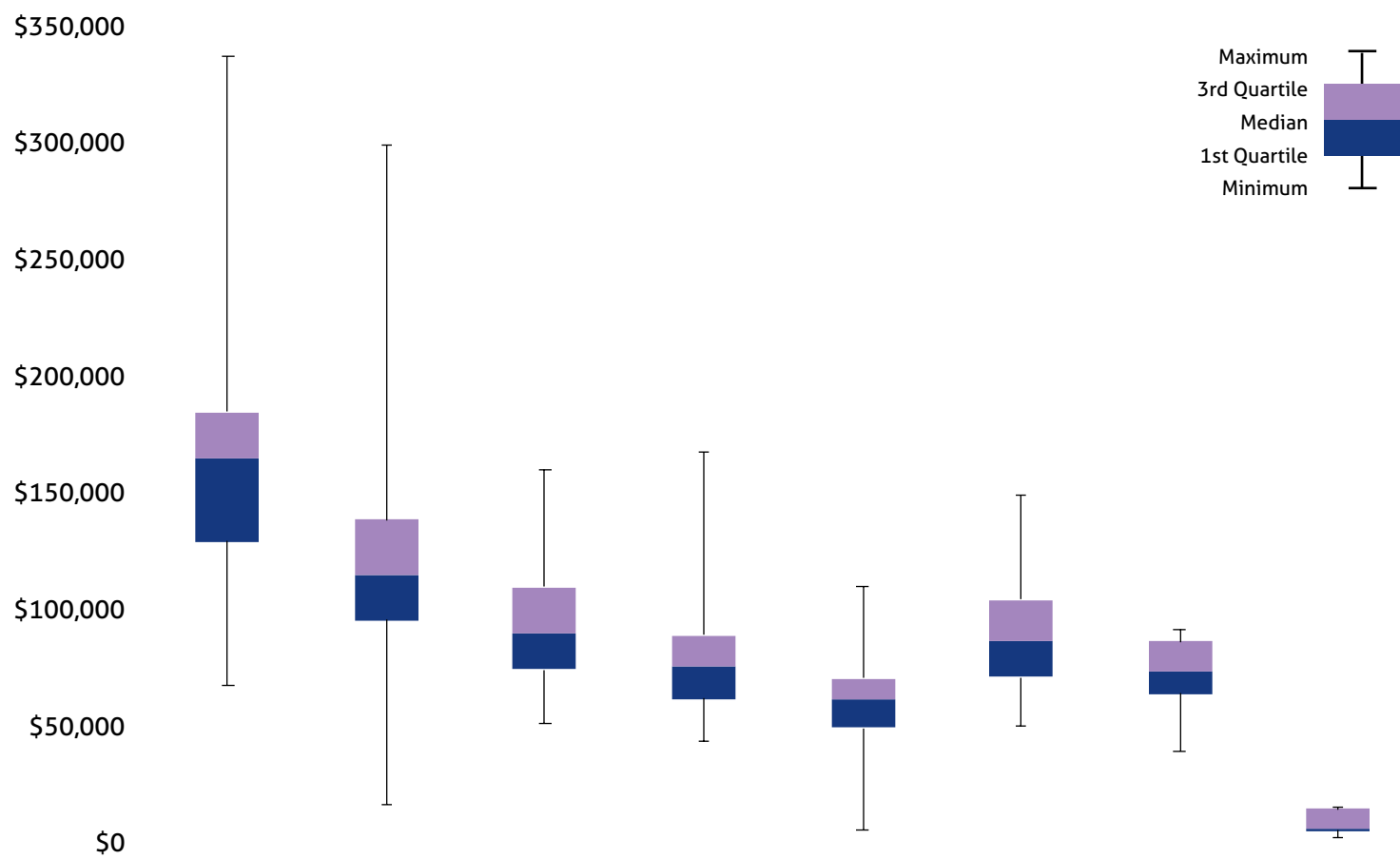


Léonie Lado, a student sustainability staff member at McGill University and first student member of the AASHE Board, attends the annual Member Meeting at the AASHE 2025 Conference & Expo.

Salary Data

The box and whisker plot below summarizes the salary range and salary quartiles for each position type, while the table below provides additional detail. As expected, CSO positions had the highest median salary (\$165,000) while student sustainability staff, which are typically employed part-time, had the lowest median salary (\$6,800). Low outliers represent part-time salaries, as part-time and hourly workers were asked to enter the amount they would earn annually based on the number of hours they were working.

Salary Range & Percentiles by Position Type, 2026



	CSO or similar	Director	Asst./Assoc. Director	Manager	Coordinator	Academic staff	Recycling & waste staff	Student sustainability staff
Count	21	109	41	70	93	14	15	13
Minimum	\$67,779	\$17,500	\$52,000	\$44,021	\$6,081	\$50,316	\$40,000	\$3,000
1st Quarter	\$130,000	\$96,000	\$75,000	\$62,606	\$50,549	\$71,875	\$64,750	\$5,890
Median	\$165,000	\$115,000	\$90,000	\$76,275	\$62,401	\$87,000	\$74,000	\$6,808
3rd Quarter	\$185,000	\$139,000	\$110,000	\$89,750	\$71,199	\$104,750	\$86,750	\$15,000
Maximum	\$338,000	\$300,000	\$160,000	\$167,982	\$110,000	\$150,000	\$92,000	\$16,000

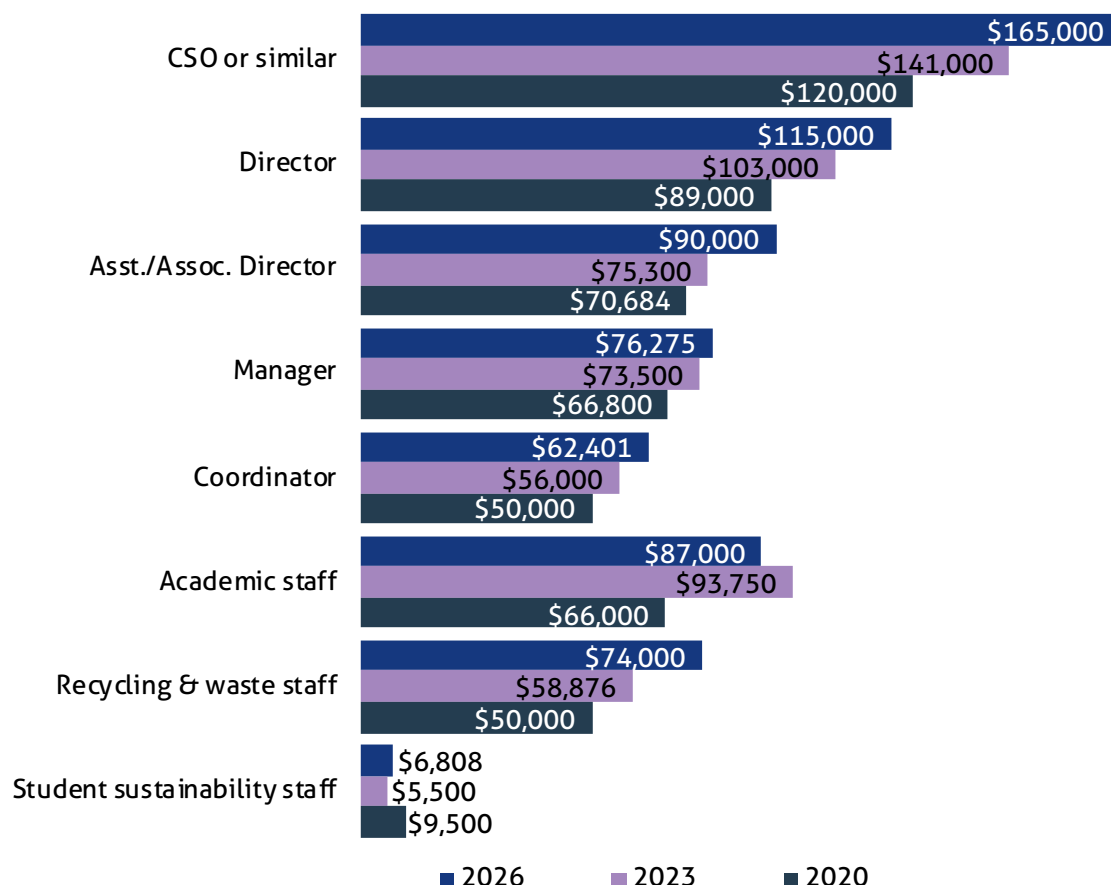
Salaries Across Multiple Surveys



Sustainability professionals Noah Swistak (left), Sylvia Sandhurst (middle), and Dr. Krista Hiser interact with AASHE 2025 attendees in Minneapolis, MN.

Comparison of 2026 salary data with past years' salary data shows an incremental increase in median salaries overall and across virtually all position types. On average across all positions, salaries increased by 13.9% since 2023 and by 30.4% since 2020. This increase is likely partly due to rising inflation and cost of living. Because this is not a longitudinal survey, comparisons over time for certain positions should be interpreted cautiously.

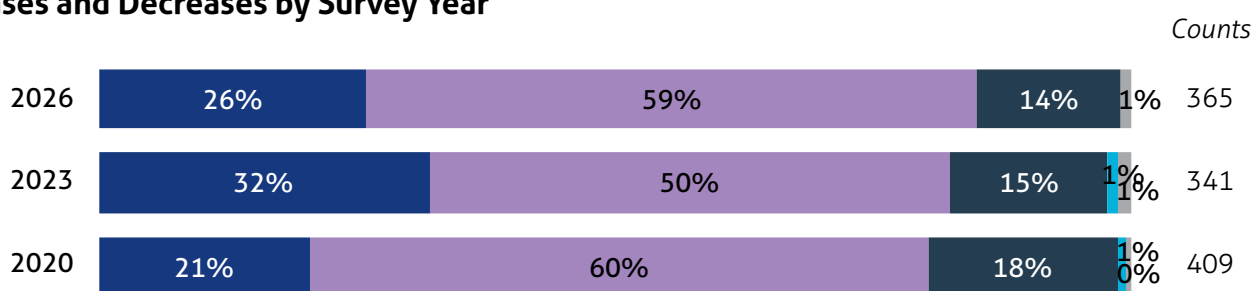
Median Salaries by Survey Year



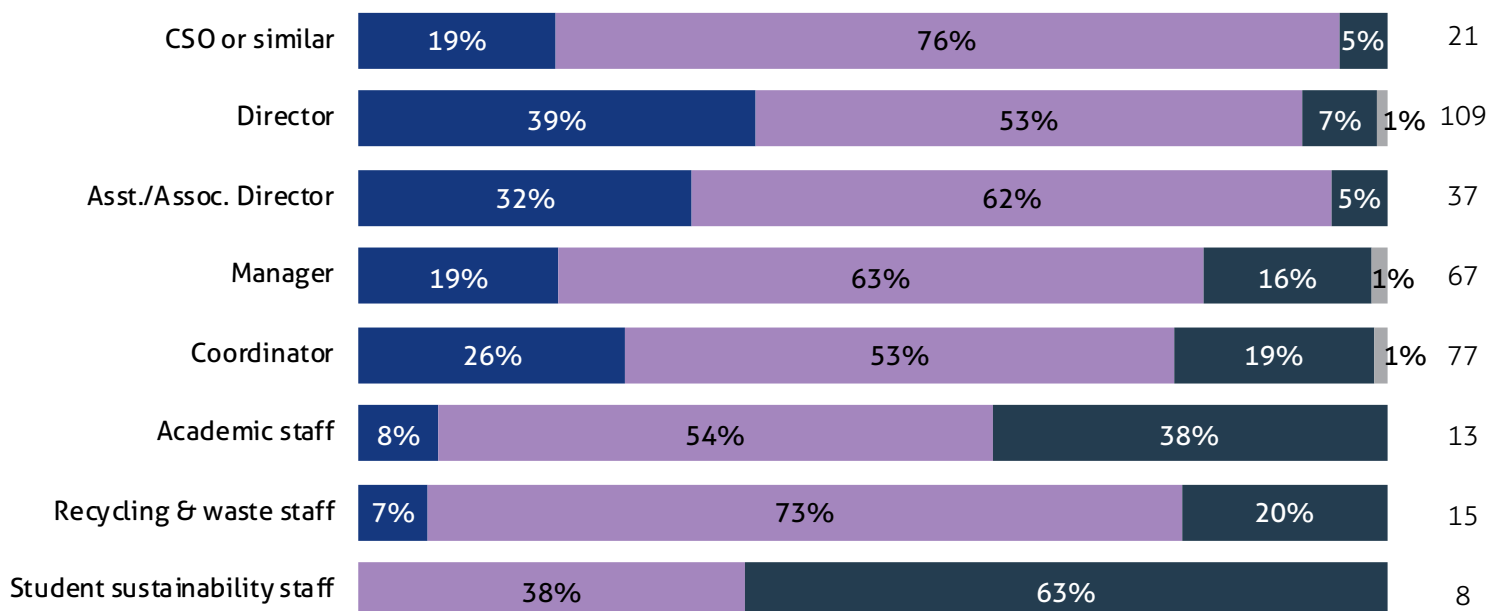
Salary Change in Last Three Years

Respondents were asked to indicate whether their salaries increased, decreased, or stayed the same since the previous staffing survey three years prior. Eighty-five percent of respondents indicated that their salary increased slightly or significantly over the last three years, while 14% indicated that there was minimal change. In comparison to 2023 results, “significant” increases were slightly less prevalent (26% versus 32%). For about 1% of respondents, salaries decreased slightly or significantly. Reasons for salary decreases included switching to different positions or changing from full-time to part-time. Reasons for salary increases included merit increases, cost of living increases, and promotions. Changes in salary over time varied by position type. Positions where salary increases were more prevalent included those of Director and Assistant or Associate Director.

Salary Increases and Decreases by Survey Year



Salary Increases and Decreases by Position Type, 2026



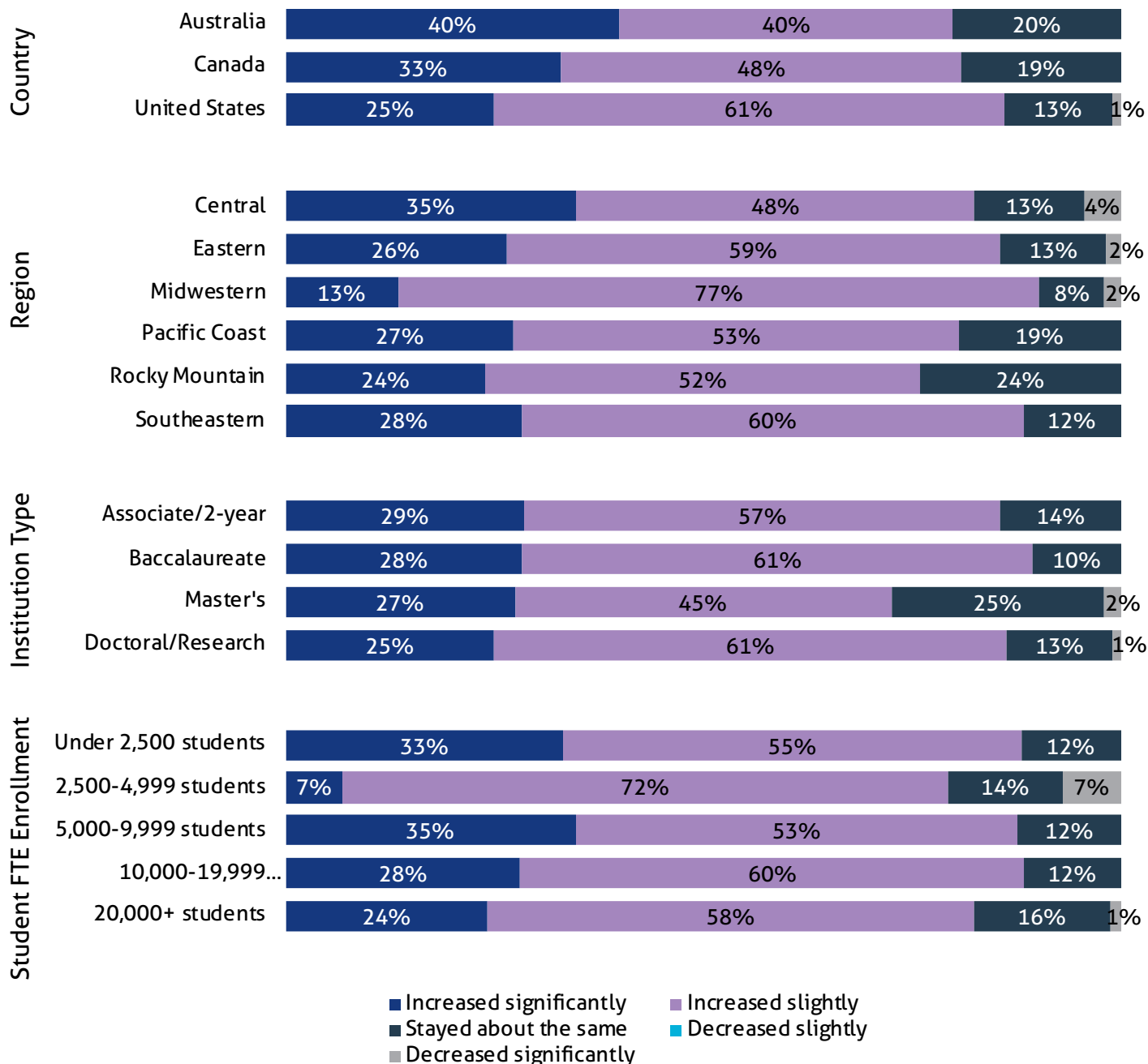
- Increased significantly (10% or more)
- Increased slightly (1-9%)
- Stayed about the same (+/- 1%)
- Decreased slightly (1-9%)
- Decreased significantly (10% or more)

Salary by Institutional Characteristics

Salary changes based on characteristics such as region, institution type, and enrollment size were also analyzed. Significant increases in salary were more common for respondents in the Central region (35%), among institutions with 5,000 to 10,000 students (35%), and among institutions with fewer than 2,500 students (33%).

Salary Increases and Decreases by Region & Institutional Characteristics, 2026

n=347

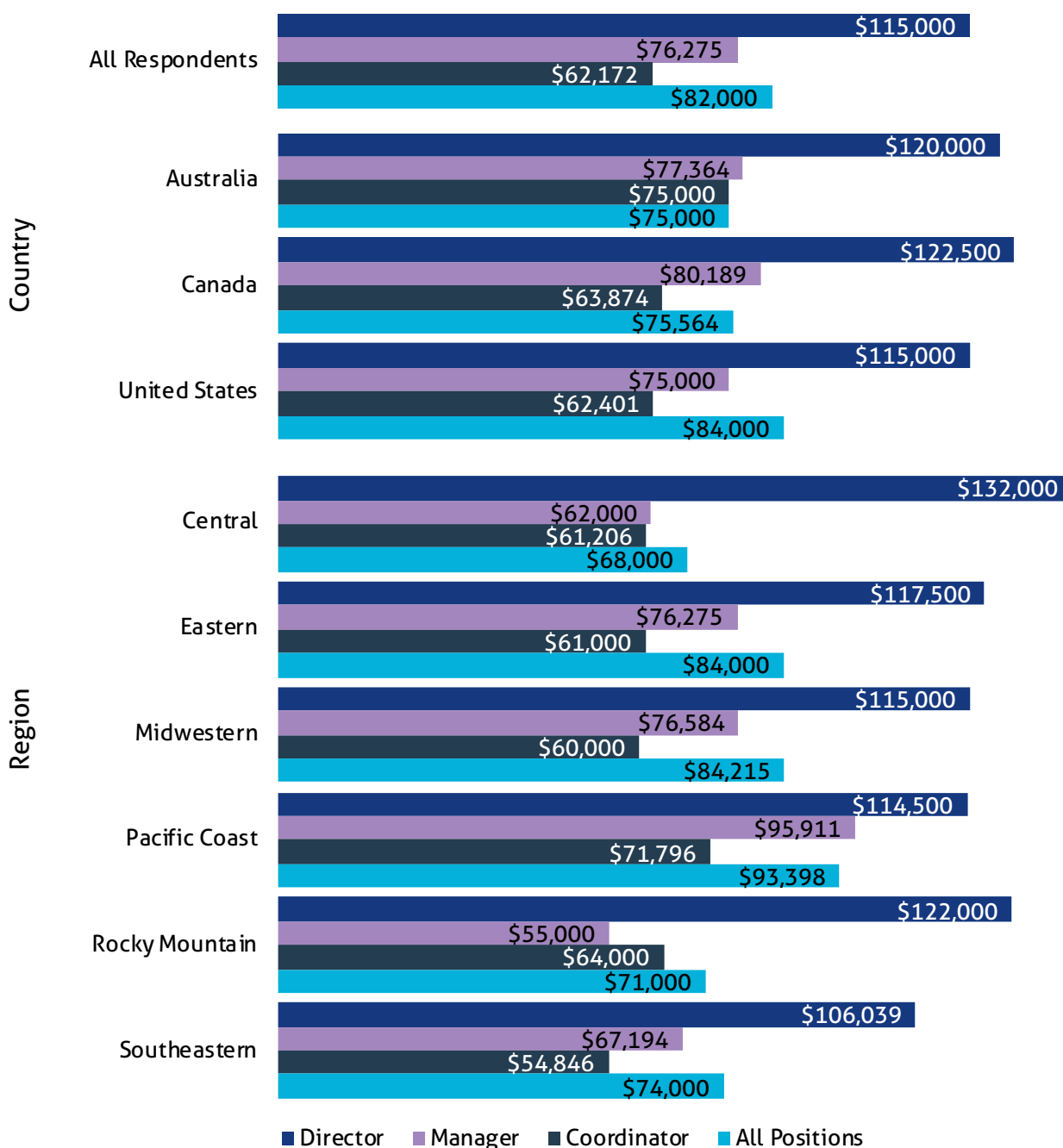


Salary by Institutional Characteristics

Median salaries were analyzed based on institutional characteristics, including country where institution is located, North American region, institution type, and institution size. The table below includes salaries for the more common position types as well as for all positions. Due to low response rates, results are not included for respondents outside of Australia, Canada, and the U.S., and those working at institutional system offices. Salaries were slightly higher among Australian and Canadian respondents in comparison to U.S. respondents, and were slightly higher among respondents in the Pacific Coast region. Median salaries for Director positions were relatively high among respondents in the Central Region, however, overall median salaries were low in this region for other positions.

Median Salaries by Regional Characteristics, 2026

n=412

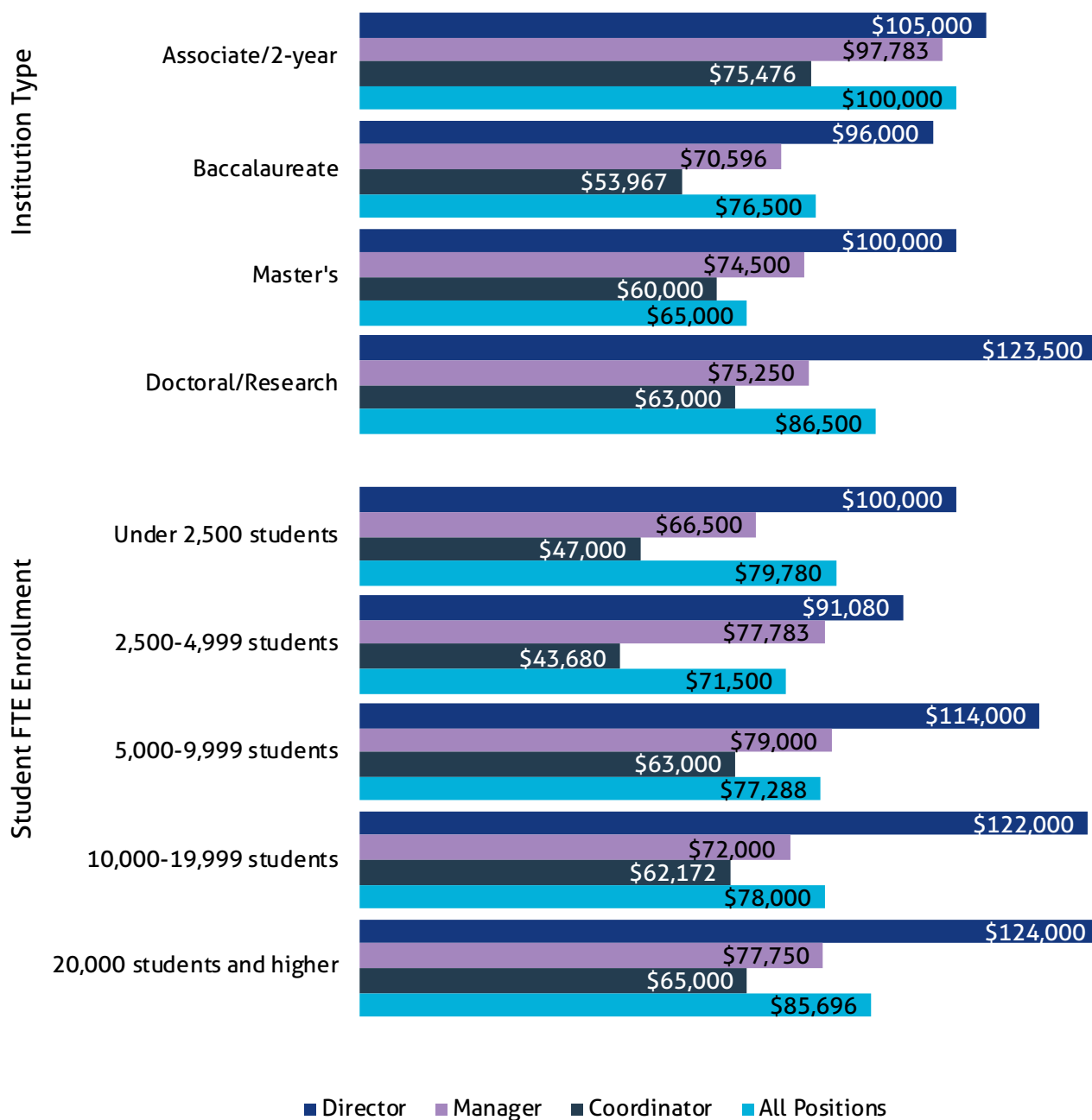


Salary by Institutional Characteristics

Salaries were higher for positions at associate and doctoral institutions, and somewhat lower at baccalaureate and master's institutions (similar trends were found in past years' analyses). Salaries were higher for small institutions with 2,500 or fewer students and institutions with 10,000 or more students.

Median Salaries by Institutional Characteristics, 2026

n=412



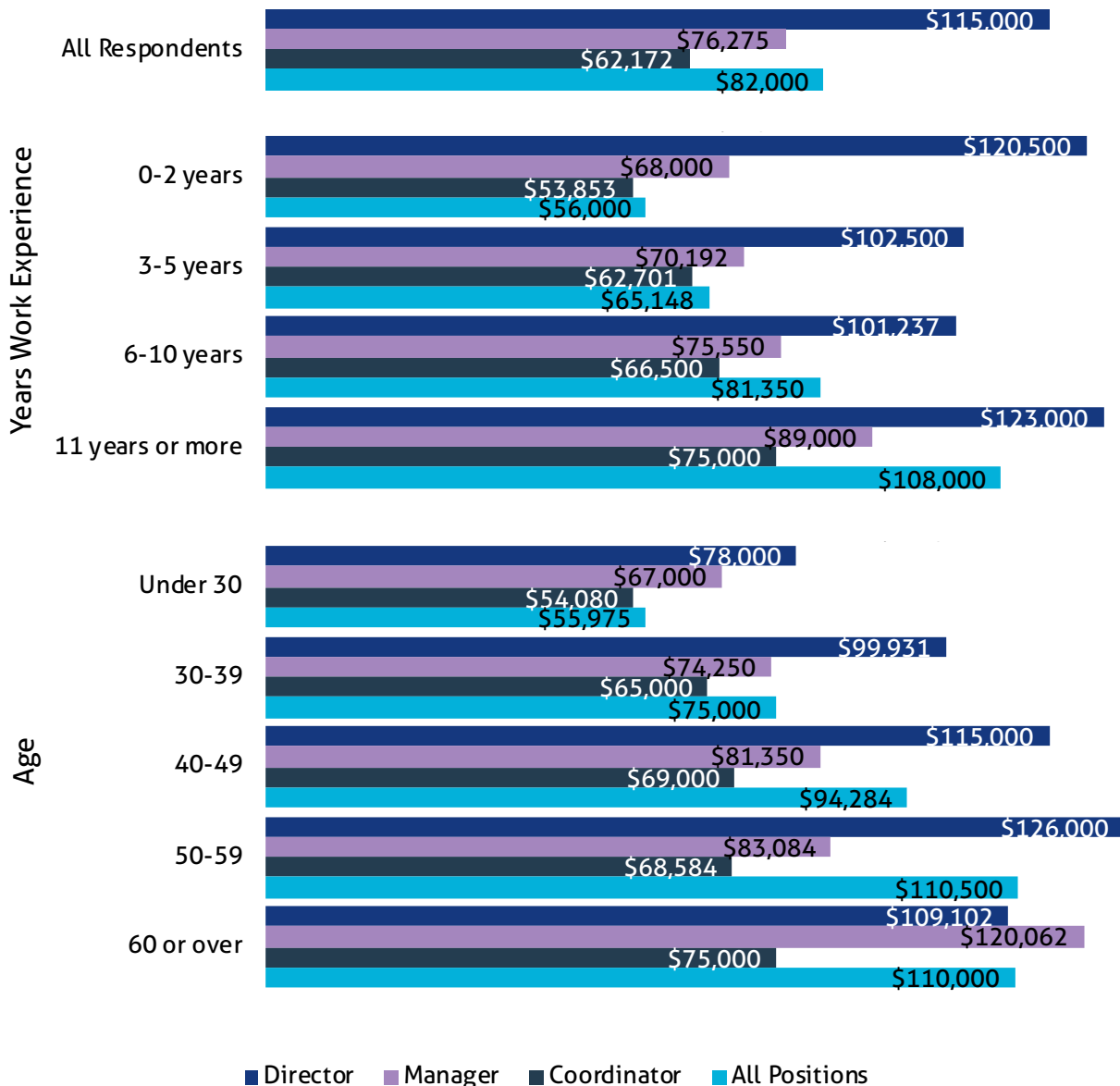
Salary by Individual Characteristics

Median salaries were analyzed based on individual characteristics, including years worked in higher education sustainability, age category, gender identity, racial/ethnic identity, and education level. The charts below include salaries for the more common position types (Director, Manager, Coordinator) as well as for all positions. Responses for gender identities other than male/female, and for most racial/ethnic categories were too low for independent analysis. Other gender identities were excluded, and races/ethnicities other than White were reported in aggregate. The sample of responses indicating associate degree or lower for “What is the highest level of education you’ve completed?” was also too small to include.

Median salaries tend to increase with years worked. As in 2023, there was a surprisingly high median salary for Directors with less than two years of higher education sustainability experience. Median salaries by age also tended to trend upward and, as in 2023 salaries peaked at the 50-59 age category.

Median Salaries by Individual Characteristics, 2026

n=398

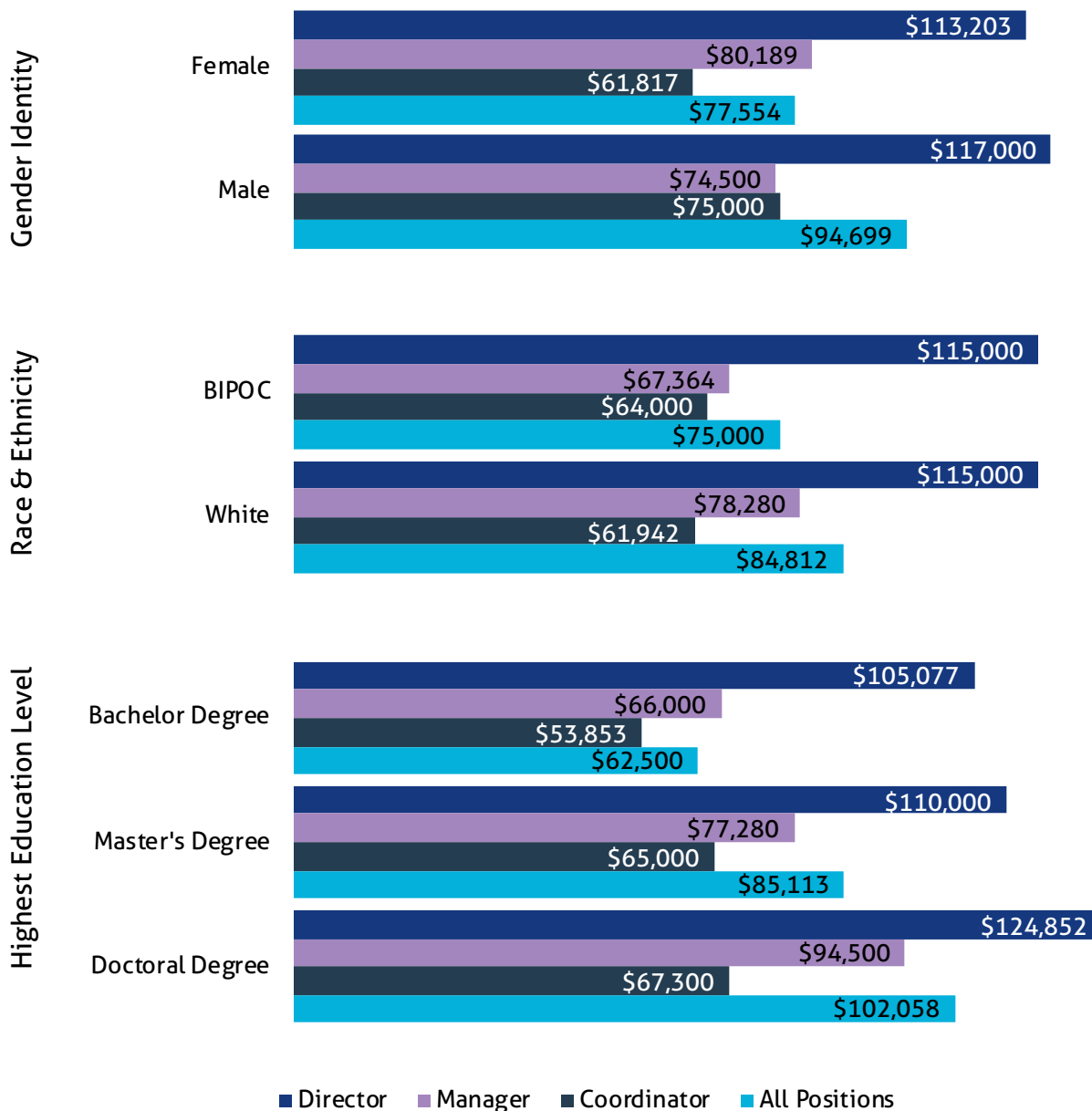


Salary by Individual Characteristics

By gender identity, salaries across all positions were higher for those identifying as male, with females earning 82 cents to the dollar compared to male counterparts (a slight drop from 83 cents to the dollar in 2023). However, in Manager roles, respondents identifying as female earned more than their male counterparts. In terms of race and ethnicity, White respondents earned higher salaries overall, though results varied by position type. In terms of education level, salaries increased with higher education level across all positions.

Median Salaries by Individual Characteristics, 2026

n=398

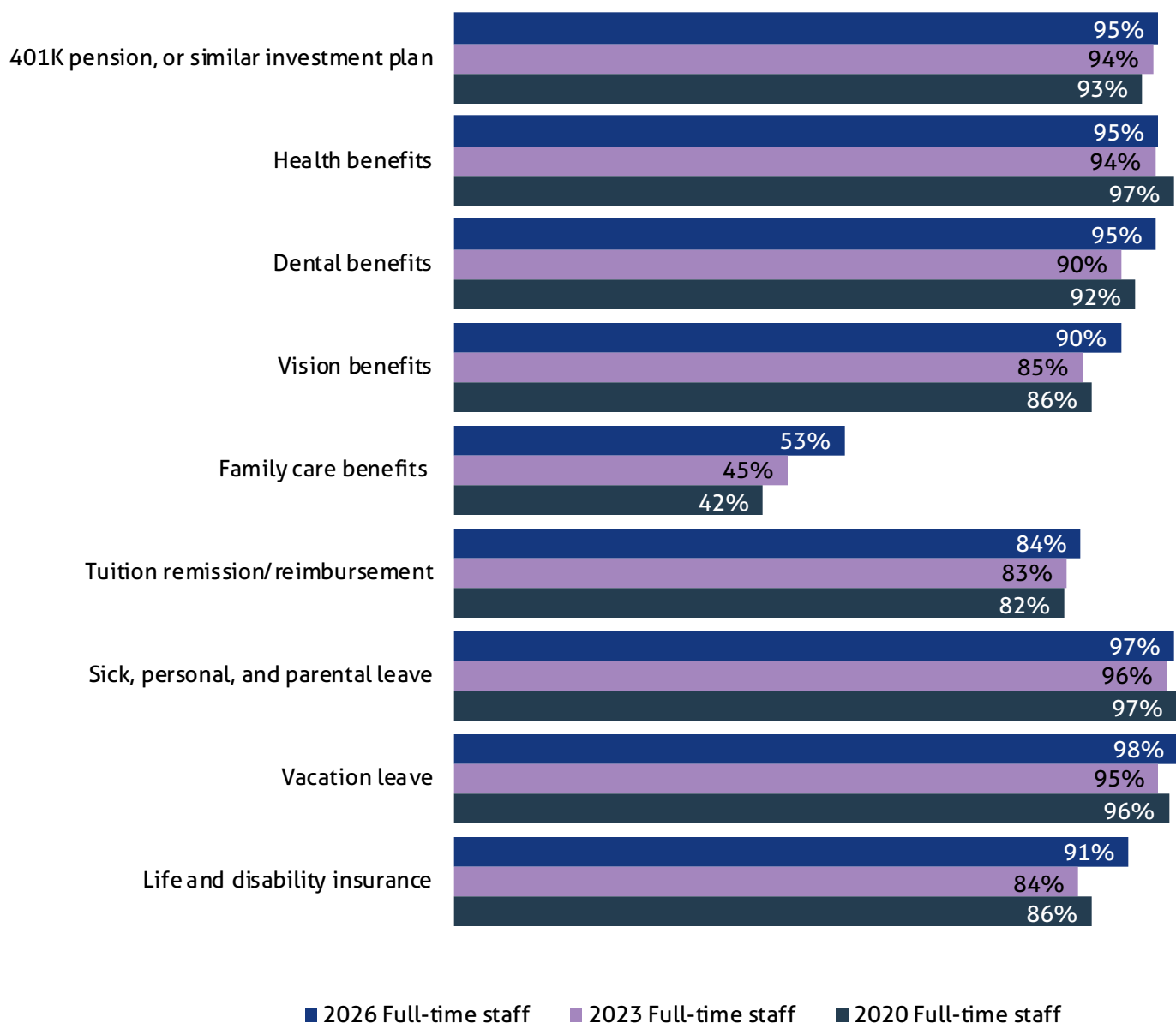


Employee Benefits

The 2026 staffing survey asked about the types of employee benefits that respondents receive through their sustainability positions. Responses varied significantly based on full-time versus part-time status and are presented separately. The vast majority of full-time respondents (over 90%) receive retirement, health insurance, dental insurance, sick leave, and vacation benefits, with the rate of those receiving benefits increasing over time. Fifty-three percent of full-time respondents received family care benefits (an 8% increase from 2020).

Full-time Employee Benefits by Survey Year

n=378

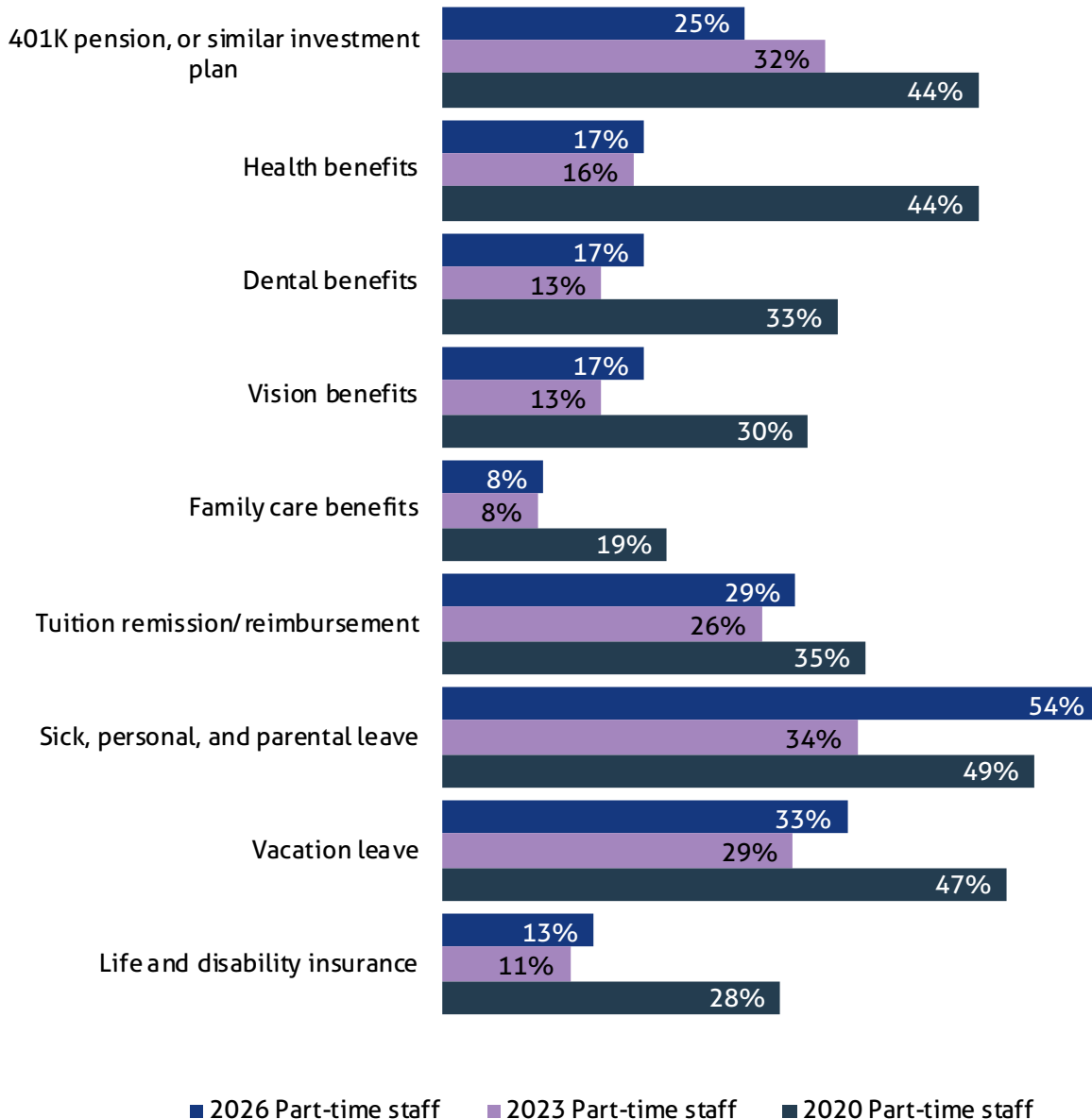


Employee Benefits

For part-time respondents, benefits were offered to fewer than half of respondents across all categories. While the relatively small sample size for part-time respondents should be noted, the apparent significant drop in overall benefits between 2026 and 2020 is concerning, especially considering healthcare impacts due to COVID-19 since 2020.

Part-time Employee Benefits by Survey Year

n=24



Budgets & Funding

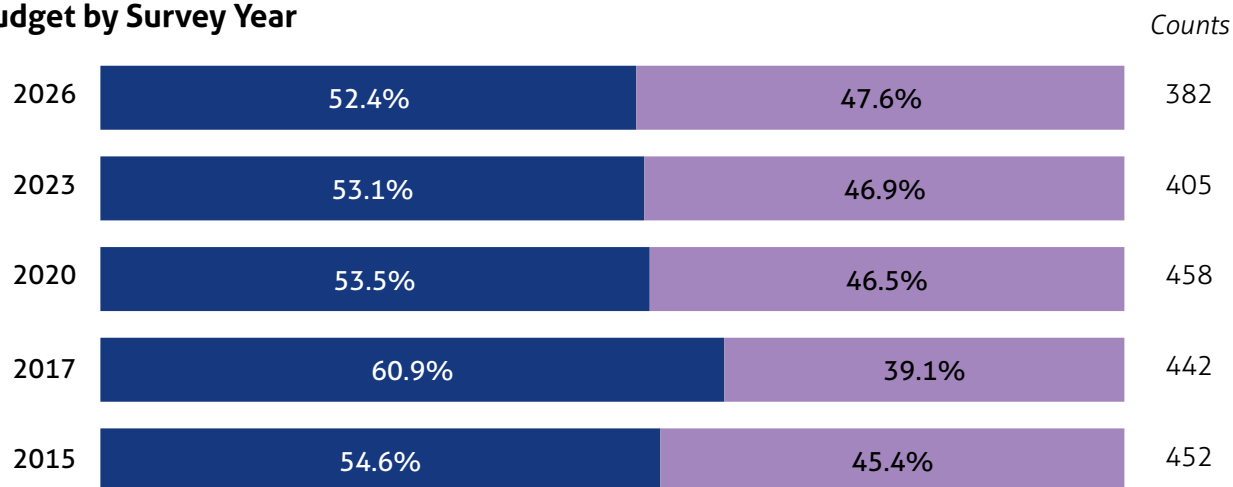


Jim Walker, Director of Sustainability at University of Texas at Austin, provides insights on STARS reporting during a session at the AASHE 2025 Conference & Expo.

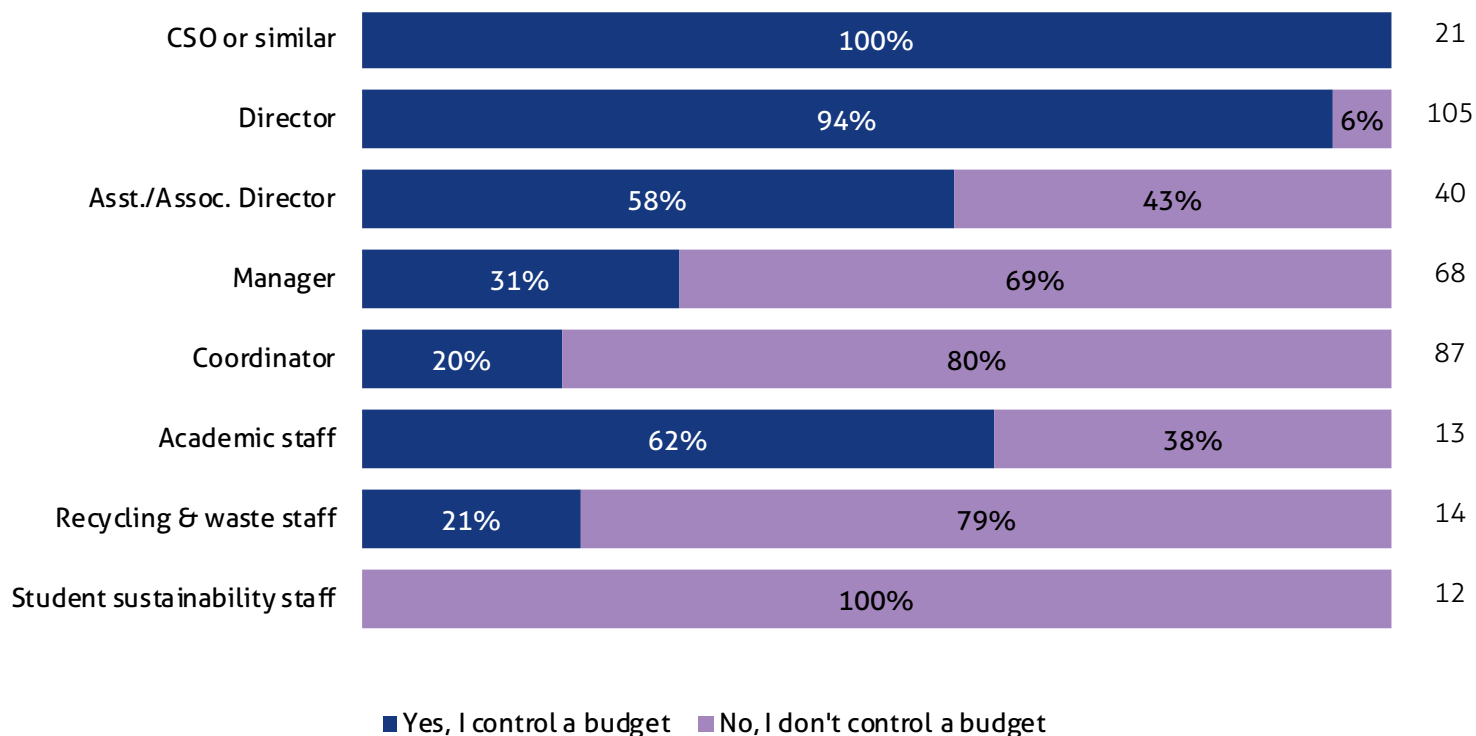
Control of a Budget

Similar to responses in prior surveys, a slight majority (52%) of respondents indicated that they personally control a budget in their sustainability positions. CSOs were most likely to control a budget (100%), followed by Directors (88%), and academic staff (80%).

Control of a Budget by Survey Year



Control of a Budget by Position Type, 2026



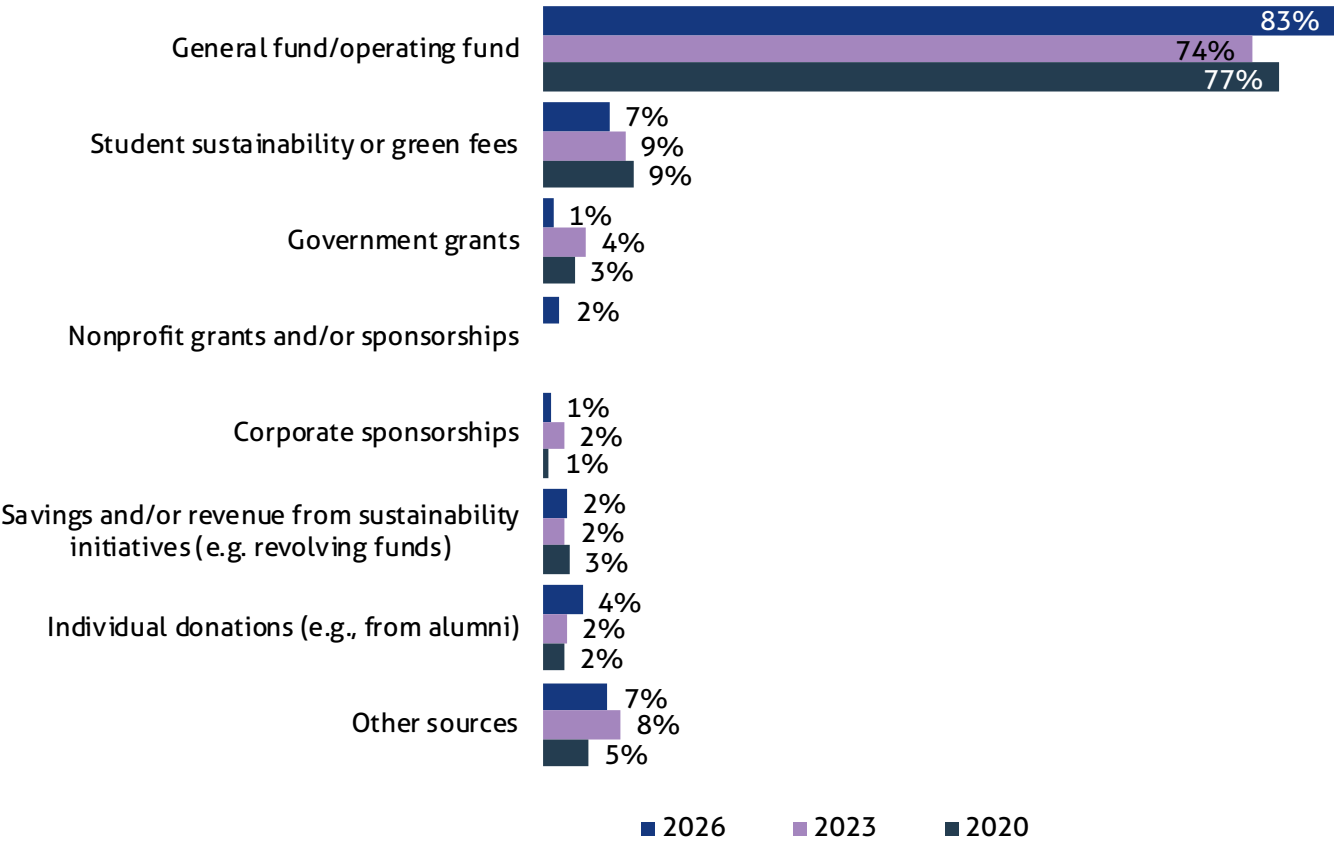
Sources of Funding



Sustainability professionals joined the Green Sports Alliance on a presentation about integrating sustainability into college game days during the AASHE 2025 Conference & Expo.

Respondents indicating “Yes” to personally controlling a budget were asked a series of follow-up questions related to their budgets. One of these questions asked about the percentage of total annual operating budget from various sources, and listed seven potential fund source categories. This question was revised in 2026 to split “Foundation and/or government grants” to “non-profit grants” and “government grants”, so responses were not comparable for those options. The majority of funding came from institutions’ general/operating funds. Funding from government grants has decreased from 4% in 2023 to 1% in 2026.

Sources of Funding by Average Percentage by Survey Year n=172

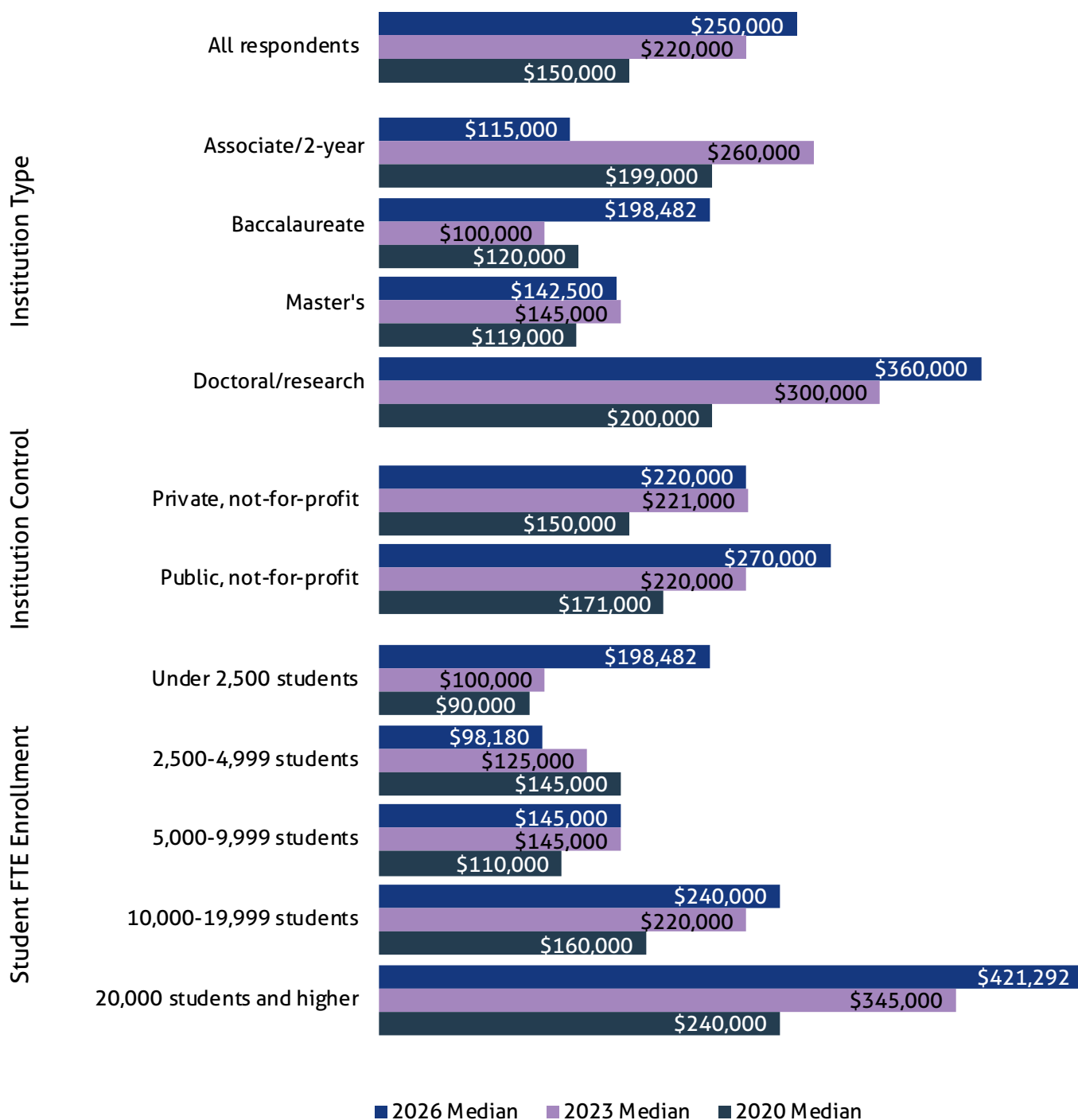


Sustainability Budgets

Respondents indicating that they controlled a budget were asked questions related to sustainability budget size and allocation. Findings were filtered by institution type, control, and student enrollment size. For total annual budgets, median responses are presented below. Overall, median sustainability budgets increased across most categories as compared to prior years. Sustainability budgets were highest among doctoral/research institutions and those with 20,000+ students. Median sustainability budgets dropped significantly for associate/two-year institutions between 2023 and 2026.

Median Total Annual Budget by Institution Type, 2026

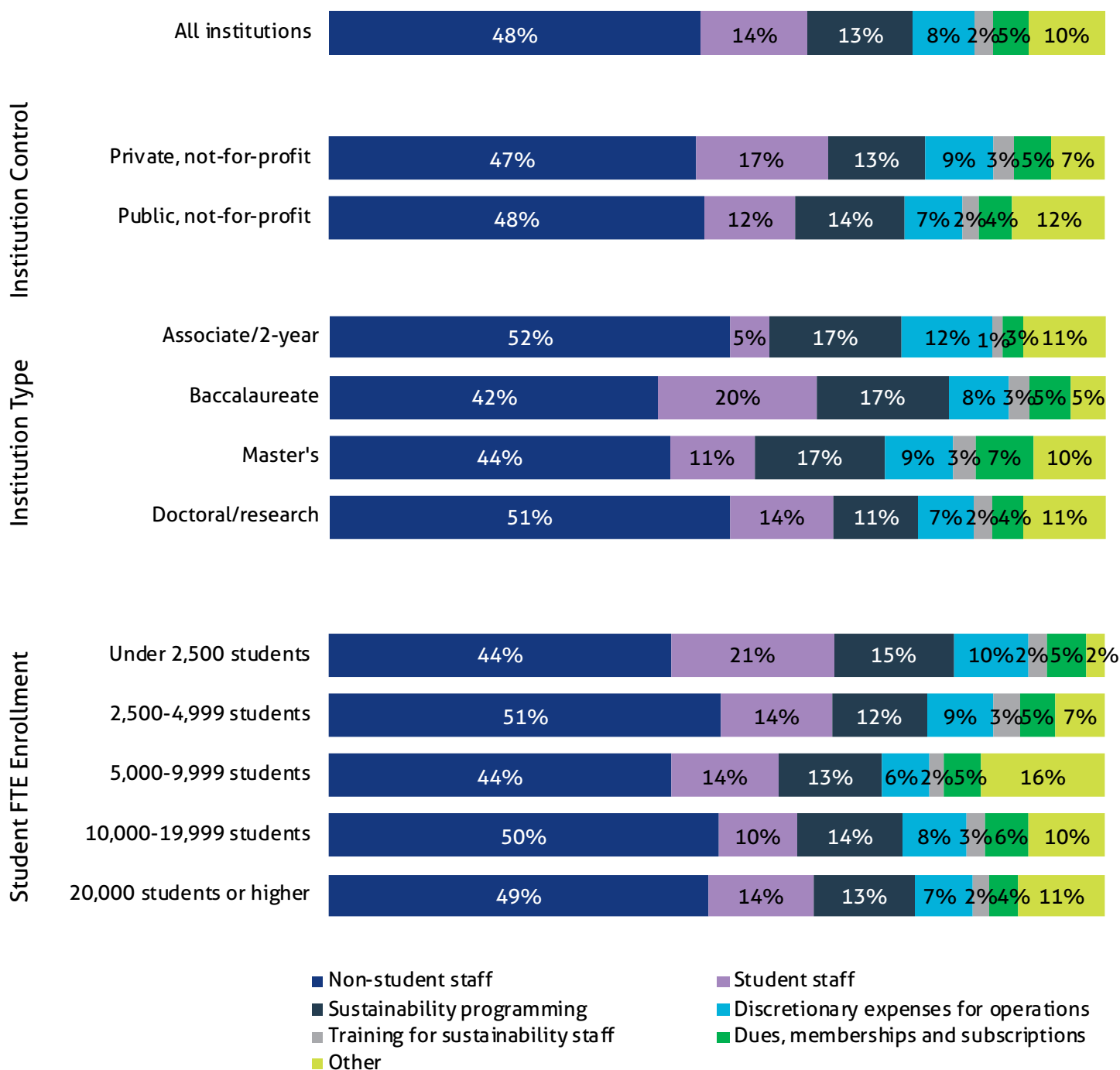
n=191



Sustainability Budgets

The question on operating budget allocation percentages is presented based on averages, as it was not subject to significant data outliers. Budget allocation varied based on institution type and enrollment size. Proportion of budgets allocated for non-student staff was highest among associate/2-year institutions, while proportion of budgets allocated for student staff was highest among very small institutions with 2,500 FTE or smaller, and baccalaureate institutions.

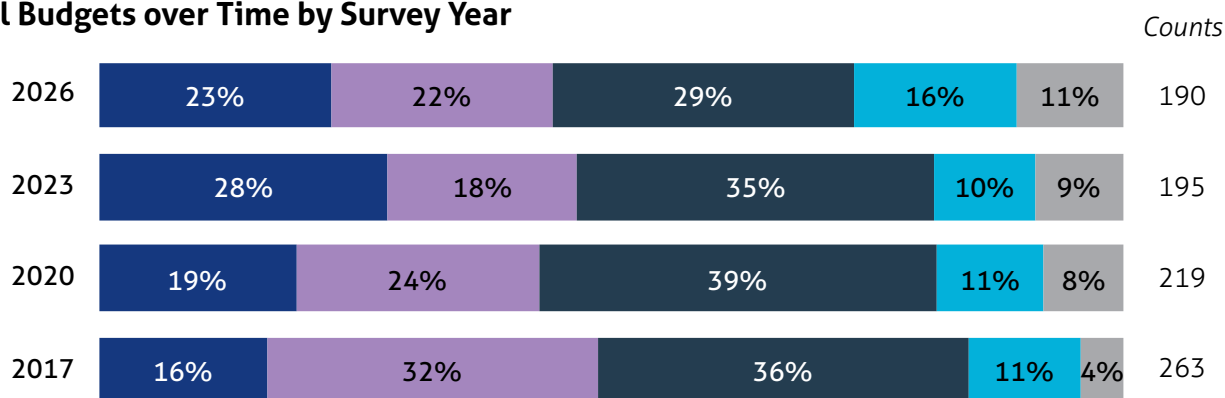
Average Budget Allocation by Institution Control, Type and Student Enrollment, 2026 *n=200*



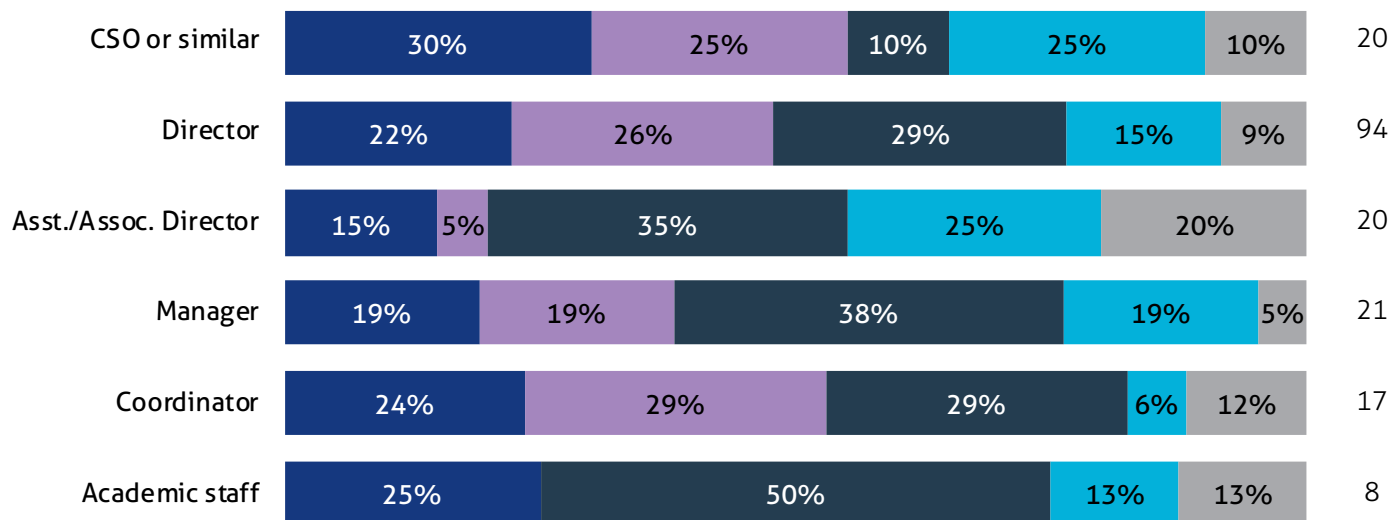
Changes in Budget Over Time

Fund managers were asked how their total annual budget had changed over the last three years. Choices included "Increased significantly (10% or more)", "Increased slightly (1-9%)", "Stayed the same (+/- 1%)", "Decreased slightly (1-9%)" and "Decreased significantly (10% or more)". Responses indicate that while sustainability budgets are still growing or stable at most institutions, they have decreased at least slightly for a quarter of respondents. Forty-four percent of respondents indicated that total annual budgets increased (down from 47% in 2023). The amount of respondents experiencing a budget decrease rose to 26% in 2026 (was 19% in 2023). The positions with the greatest likelihood for budget decreases were Assistant or Associate Directors (45%) and CSOs (35%).

Change in Total Budgets over Time by Survey Year



Change in Total Budgets over Time by Position Type, 2026



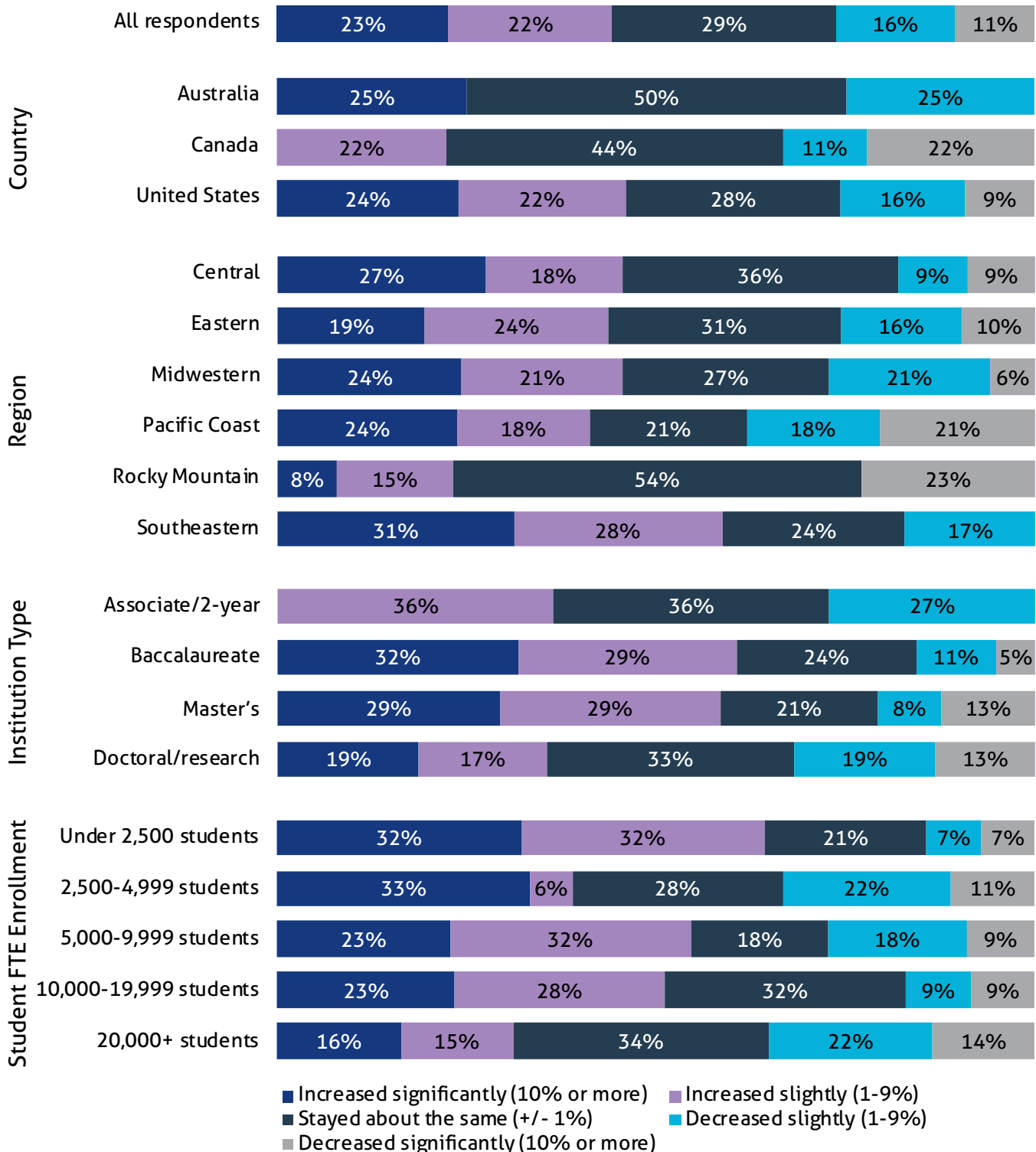
■ Increased significantly (10% or more)
 ■ Increased slightly (1-9%)
■ Stayed about the same (+/- 1%)
 ■ Decreased slightly (1-9%)
■ Decreased significantly (10% or more)

Changes in Budget Over Time

By country, region, institution type, and enrollment size, the most significant increases were found for respondents at institutions under 5,000 FTE and baccalaureate institutions. Budget decreases were most common among Canadian respondents and those in the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Coast regions.

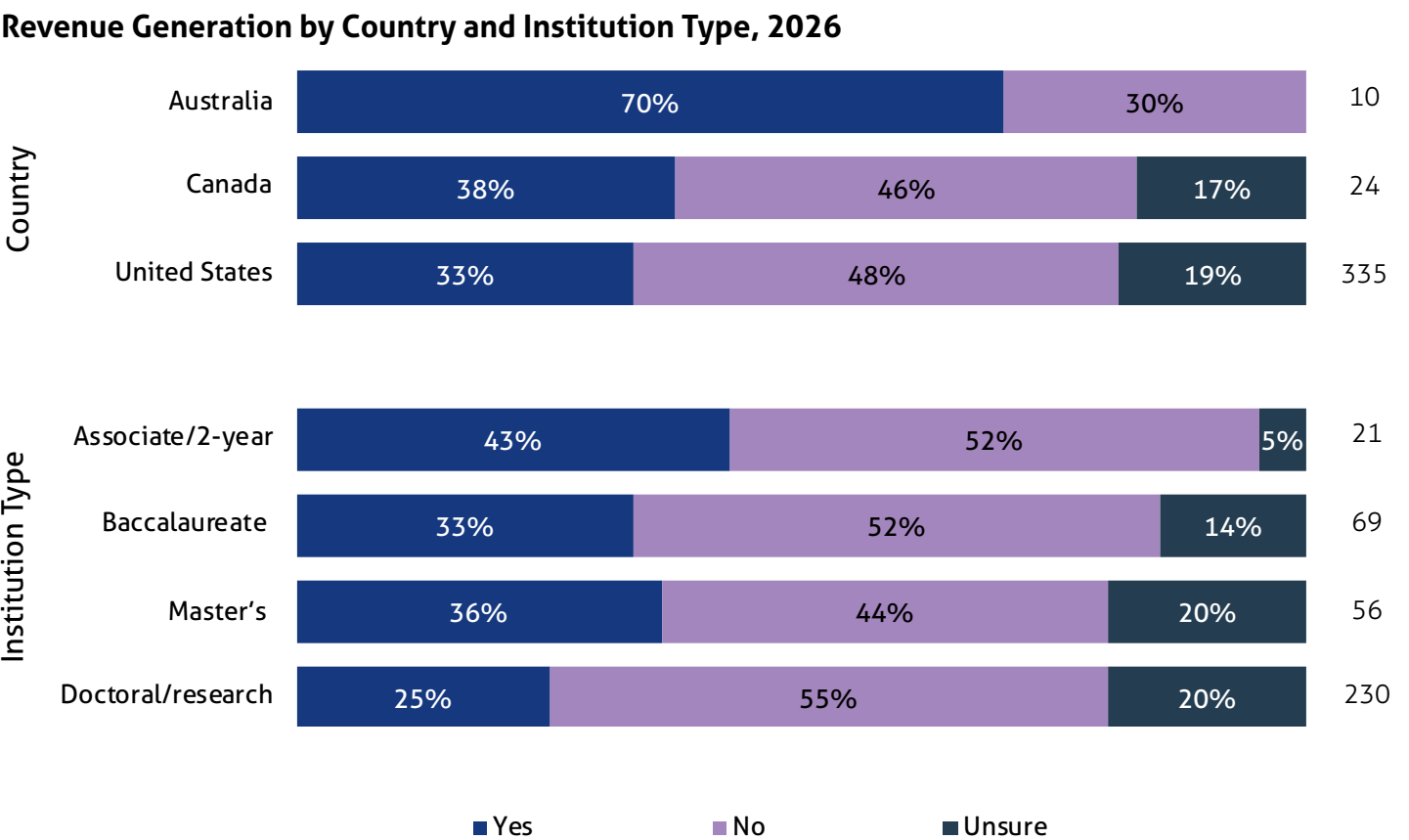
Change in Total Budgets over Time by Regional & Institutional Characteristics, 2026

n=205



Sustainability Revenue

A question introduced in 2023 asked: “Does your organization generate revenue through sustainability-related activities?” Respondents could answer Yes, No, or Unsure, and optional comments were encouraged to describe the types of sustainability-related activities that generate revenue. Respondents indicating that their institution generates sustainability revenue increased by 4% since 2023. By country, revenue generation was highest among Australian respondents and (70%), followed by associate/2-year institutions (43%).



Sustainability Revenue



Vendors at the AASHE 2025 Expo offered a variety of products and services to sustainability professionals in attendance.

Top sustainability revenue themes identified in the free response question included revenue from recycling, move-out and re-use, agricultural product sales, compost revenue, electric vehicle charging, fees for educational offerings, renewable agreements and arbitrage, carbon offsets and charges, renewable energy agreements and arbitrage, bike shop sales and repairs, and fees for services. Some responses (e.g., student fees, grants) could be considered independent revenue sources rather than revenue from sustainability operations.

Revenue Generation Free Response Themes, 2026

Recycling, moveout, other re-use collections	42
Agricultural and garden products	16
Grants	12
EV station charging	9
Educational offerings	7
Renewable energy agreements	5
Carbon charge	5
Bike shop sales and repairs	4
Service to community	4
Composting	3
Event hosting	3
Revolving funds	3
Renewable energy arbitrage	2

Supervision



Chief Climate Officer at Rutgers, Angela Oberg shares information during a Northeast Campus Sustainability Consortium (NECSC) Networking Session at the AASHE 2025 Conference & Expo.

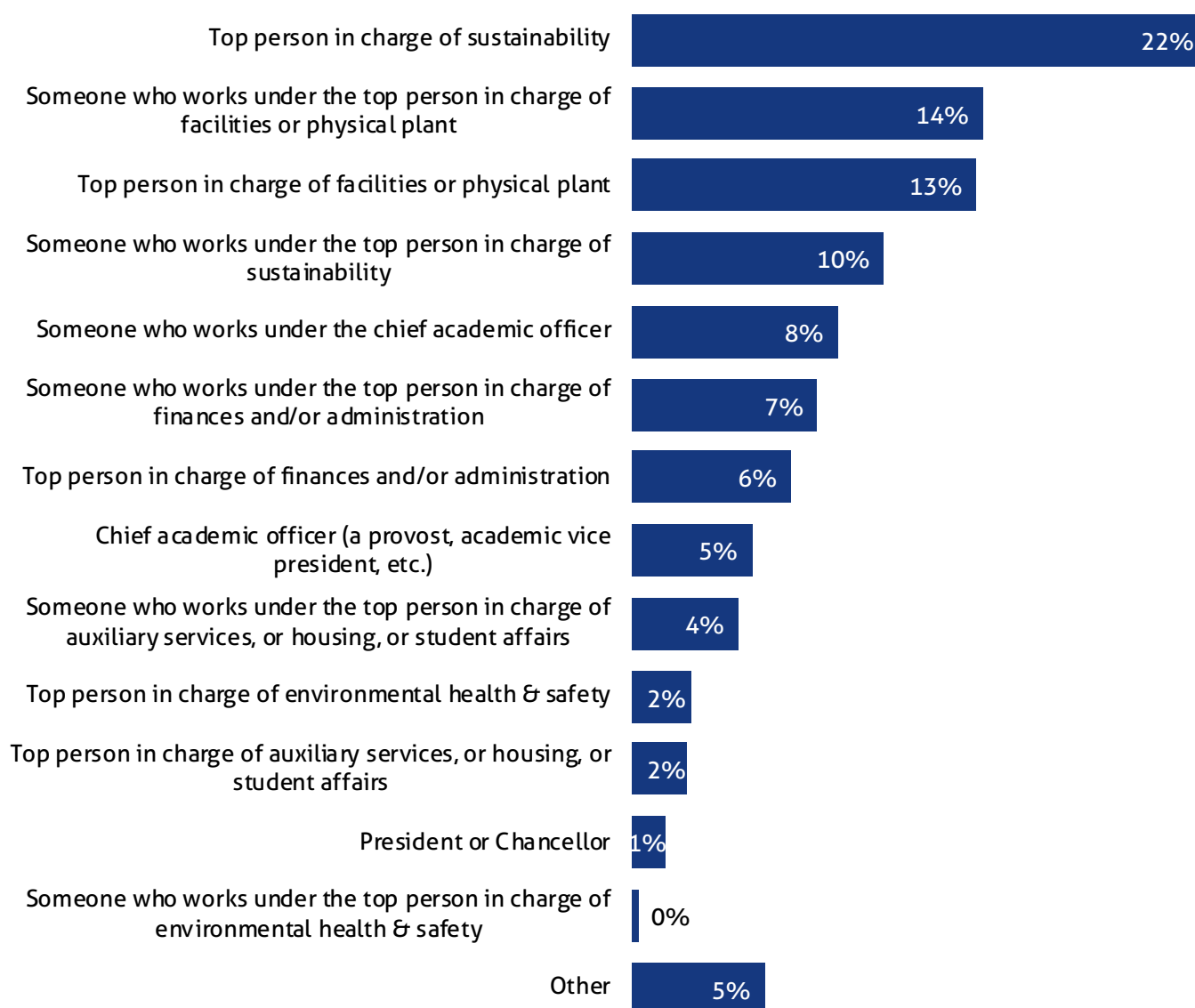
Direct & Indirect Supervision

Questions related to respondent supervisors were reformatted in 2026 to streamline the survey and focus on direct supervision. Respondents were asked, “To whom do you report directly?” and “Beyond your primary supervisor, do you report to others, directly or indirectly?” About one-third of respondents (33%) have a direct or indirect supervisor in addition to their primary supervisor, likely reflecting the broad scope of responsibilities assigned to sustainability staff.

The areas most commonly referenced for direct supervision include reporting to the top sustainability officer, reporting to other sustainability office staff, and reporting to the top person in Facilities. For respondents reporting to a President or Chancellor, a greater proportion report indirectly rather than directly. Because this question was reformatted this year, comparisons to past surveys are not possible.

Area(s) of Direct Supervision, 2026

n=406

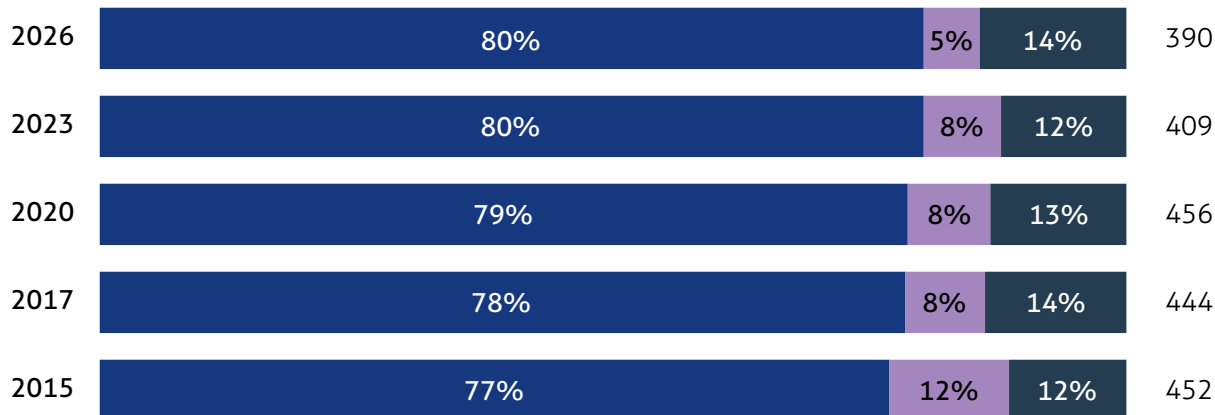


Staff Supervision

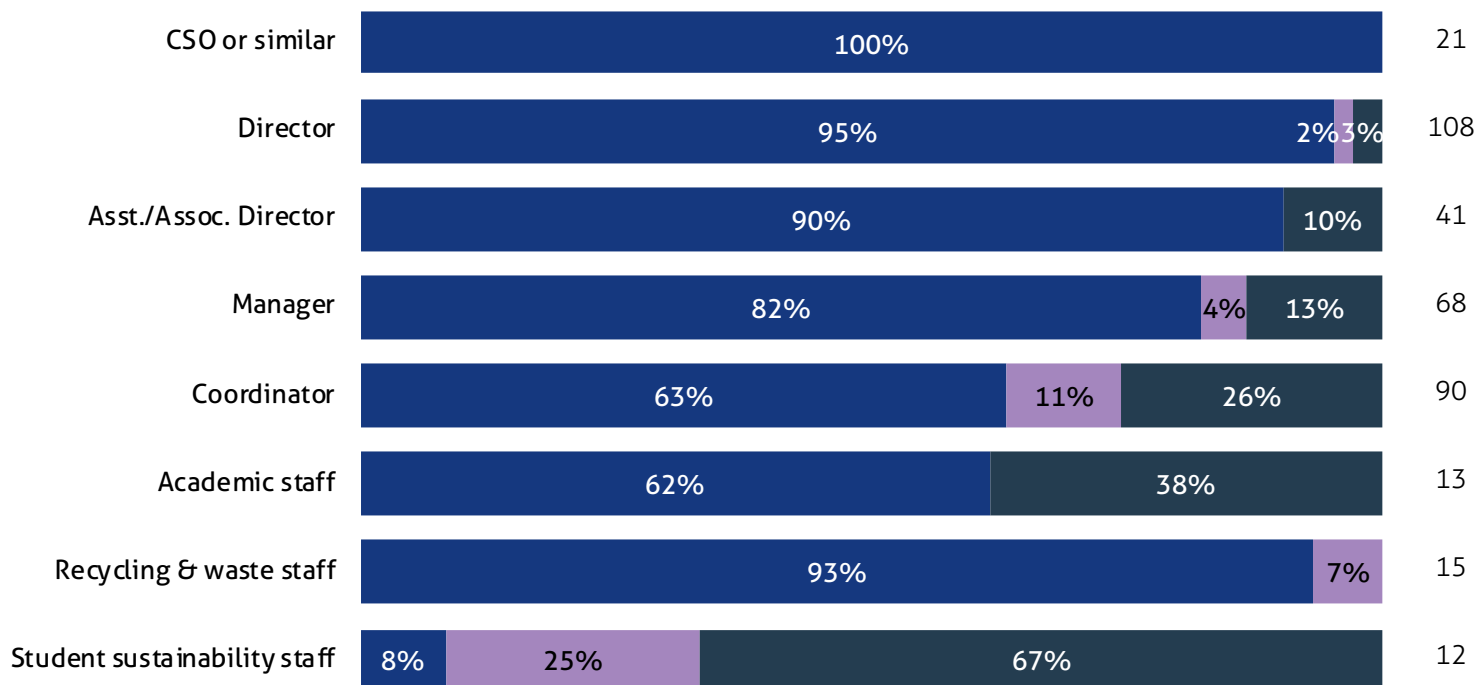
Survey respondents were asked to indicate whether they supervise paid or unpaid workers. Eighty percent of respondents indicated that they supervise at least one paid non-student or student worker, with little change in comparison to 2023 results. However, supervision of unpaid employees dropped by 2% in comparison to 2023 results. By position type, supervision of paid staff was incrementally greater for higher-level positions.

Supervisory Level by Survey Year

Counts



Supervisory Level by Position Type, 2026



- I supervise one or more paid workers.
- I supervise only unpaid workers.
- I don't supervise anyone.

Number of Paid Staff Supervised

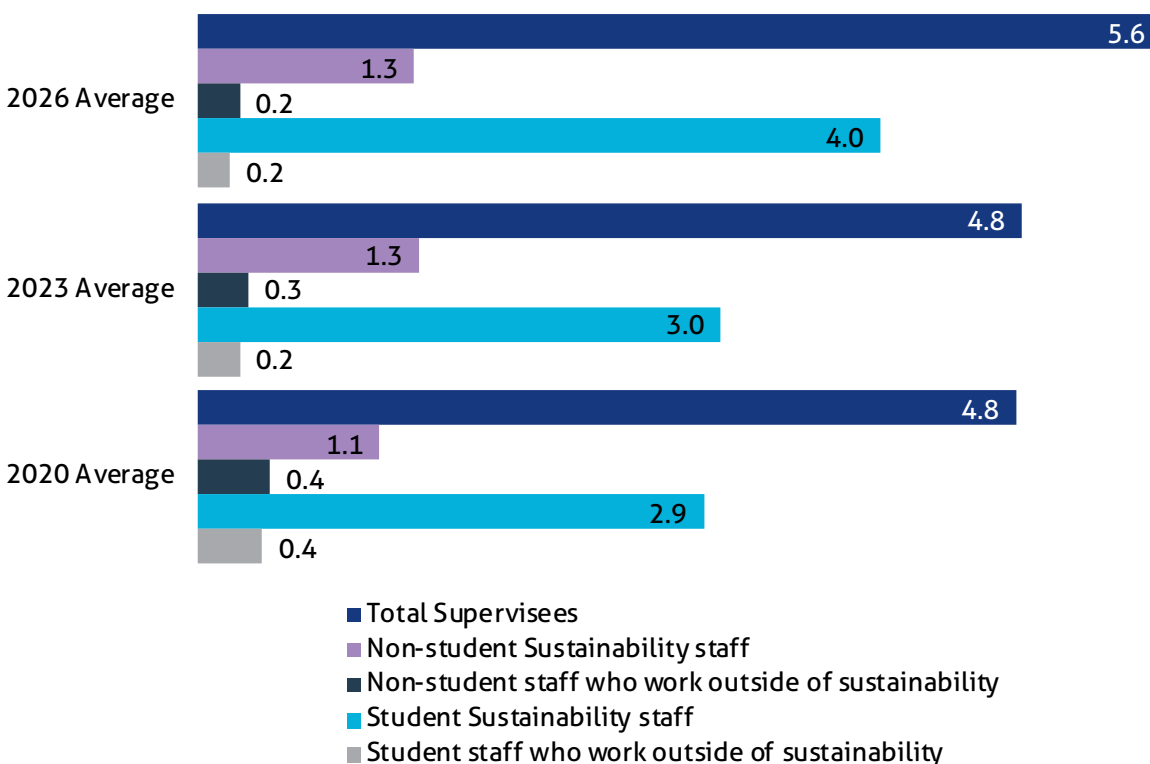


Students interact with Dr. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson following the Opening Keynote at AASHE 2025.

Respondents indicating that they supervise paid workers were asked to indicate the number of staff that they supervise. Results are presented as average responses overall and by position type (there was little variation when analyzed by median responses and many median responses were zero). There was a significant increase in the average number of total staff supervised, which was driven largely by an increase in student sustainability staff. Supervision of non-student staff dropped slightly overall.

Average Number of Staff Supervised by Survey Year

n=313

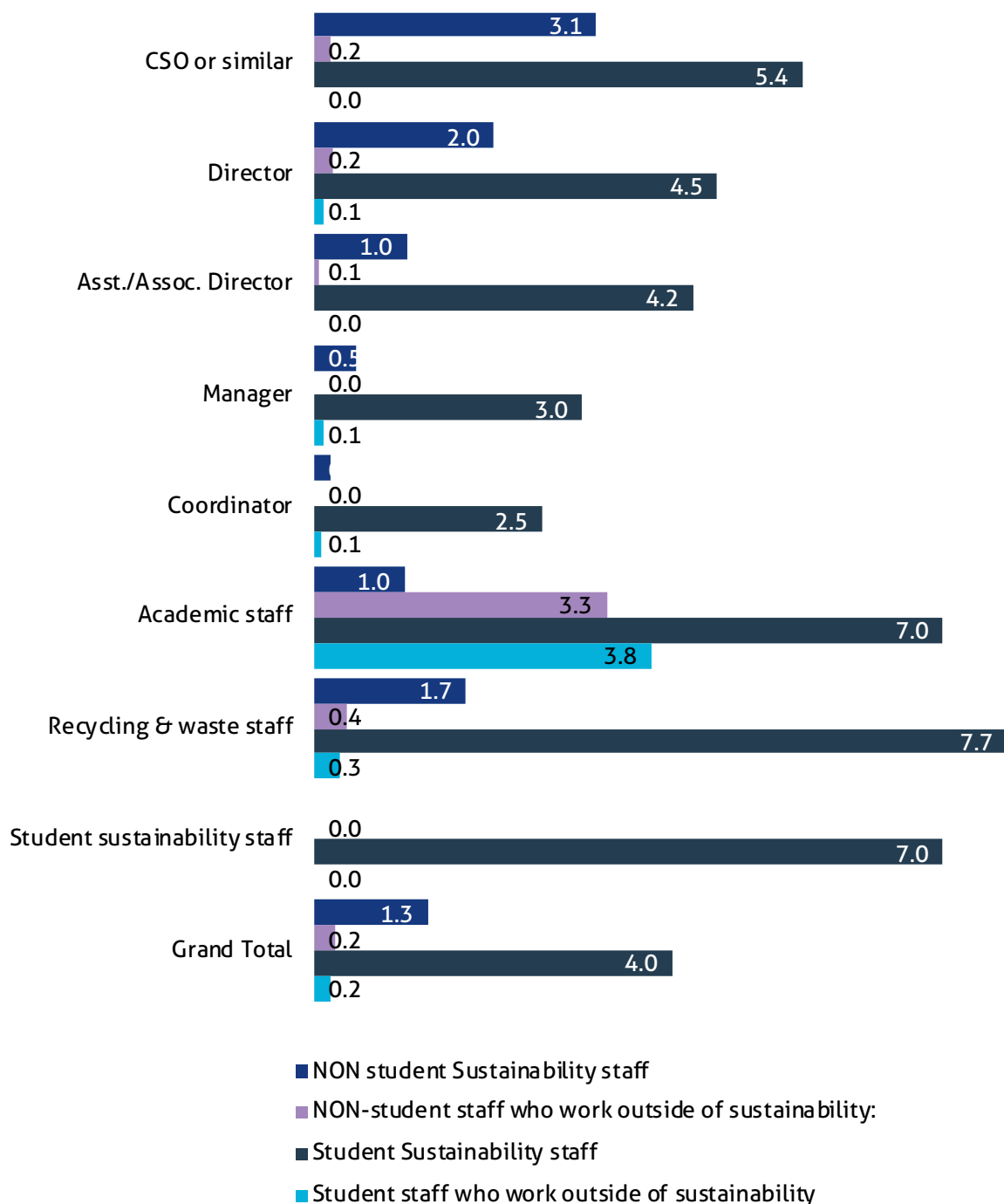


Number of Paid Staff Supervised

By position type, academic staff supervised the greatest number of staff, however, many of these positions were outside of sustainability. CSOs and Directors were most likely to supervise staff working in sustainability.

Average Number of Staff Supervised by Position Type, 2026

n=313



Employee Perspectives



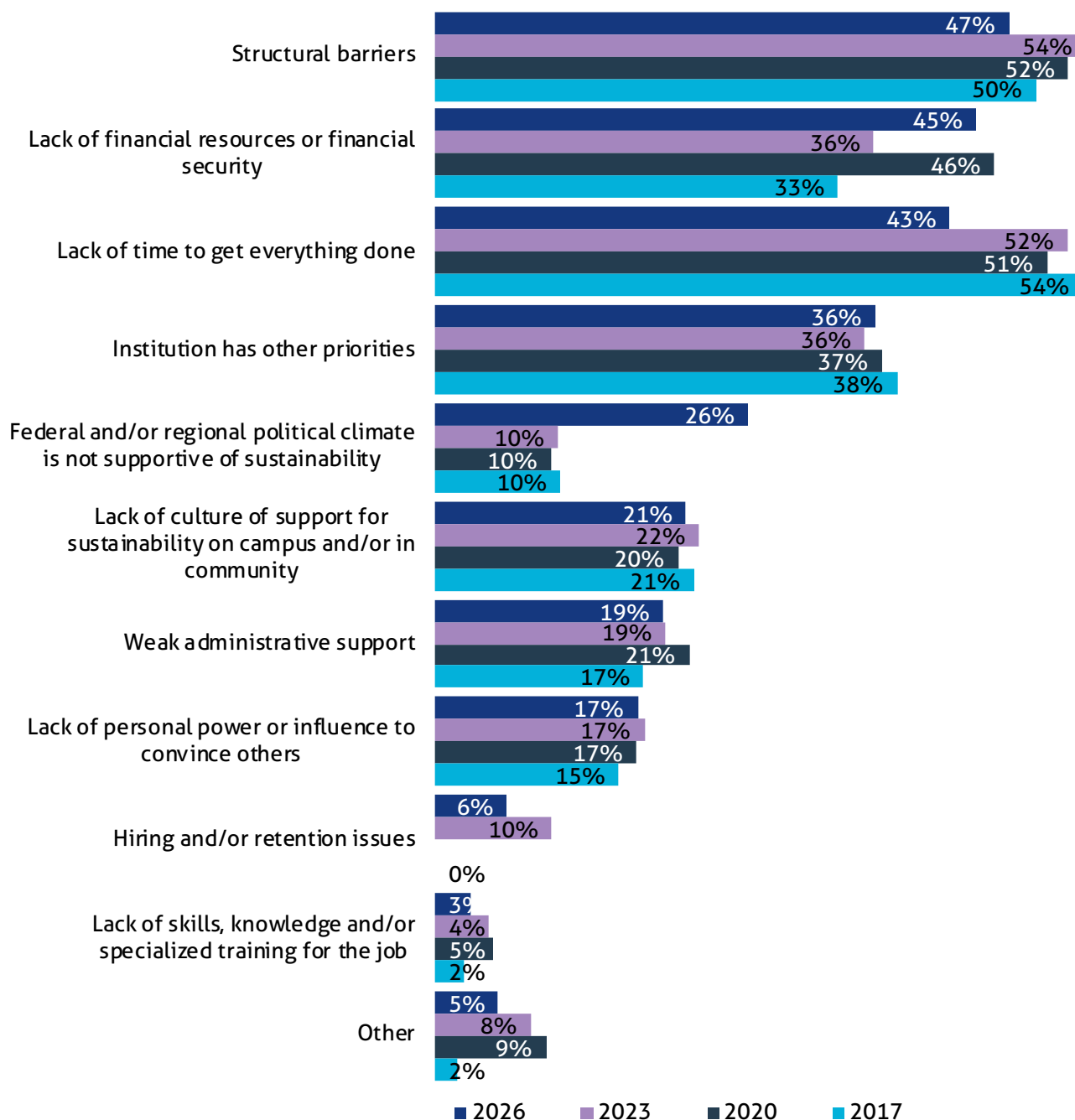
Associate Director of Asset Strategy & Resilience Stephen Ellis (Boston University) joins Sustainability Analyst Stephania Fregosi (Portland Community College) to present findings from completing recent STARS 3.0 reports.

Biggest Challenges

Respondents were asked to indicate the biggest challenges they face in their positions, and could select up to three options. "Structural barriers (administrative silos, policies, obstructionist individuals/offices, etc.)" was again cited as the top issue in 2026, and "lack of financial resources or financial security" was the second-greatest challenge. Challenges related to "Federal and/or regional political climate is not supportive of sustainability" increased significantly, from 10% of respondents in 2023 to 26% of respondents in 2026. "Lack of time to get everything done" was a reduced challenge in 2026.

Biggest Challenges by Survey Year

n=371

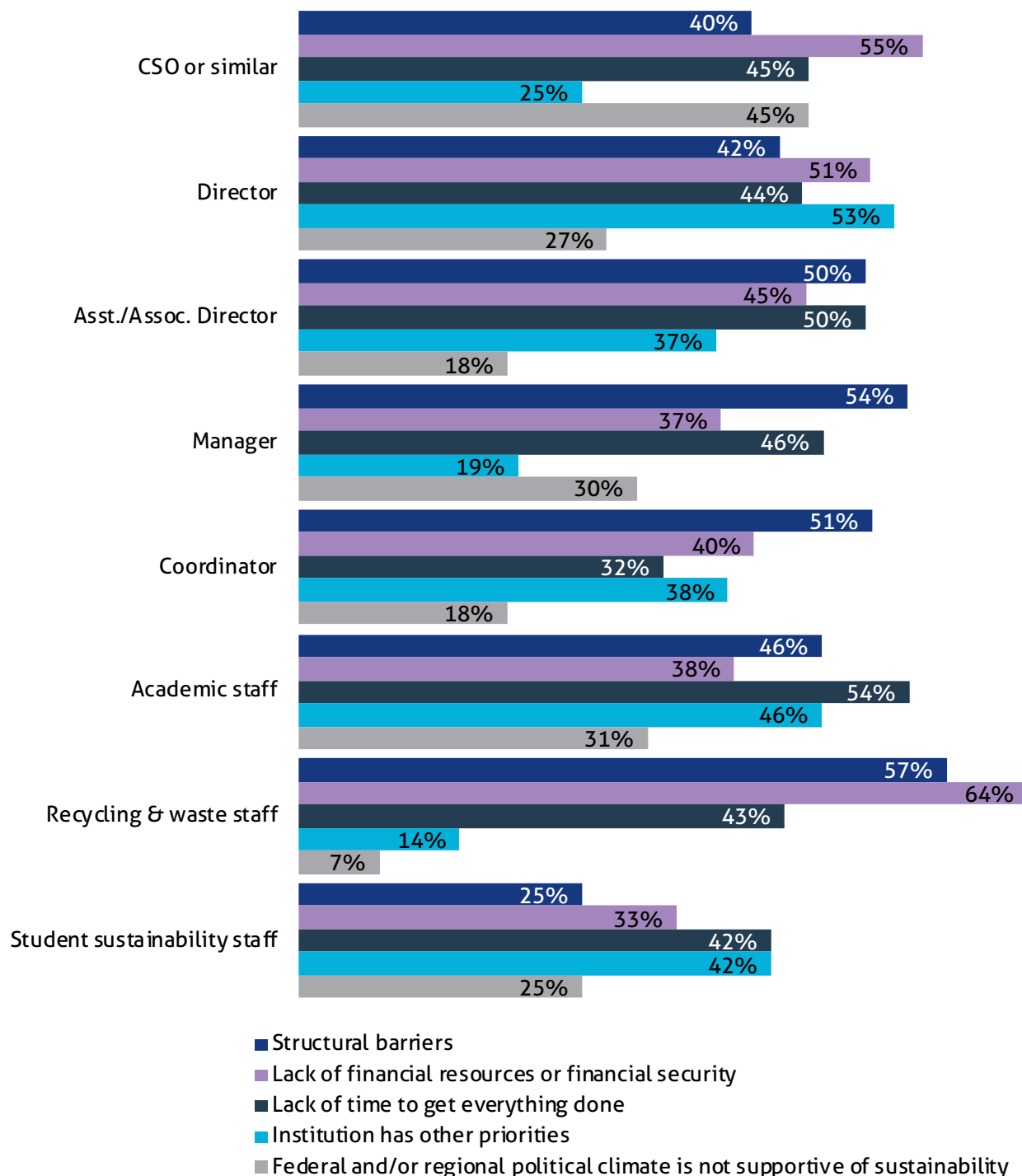


Biggest Challenges

Results by position type are presented for the top five challenges only. Recycling & waste staff experienced significant challenges related to lack of financial resources and structural barriers and in particular. CSO respondents indicated that “Federal and/or regional political climate is not supportive of sustainability” was a particularly significant challenge.

Biggest Challenges by Position Type, 2026

n=350

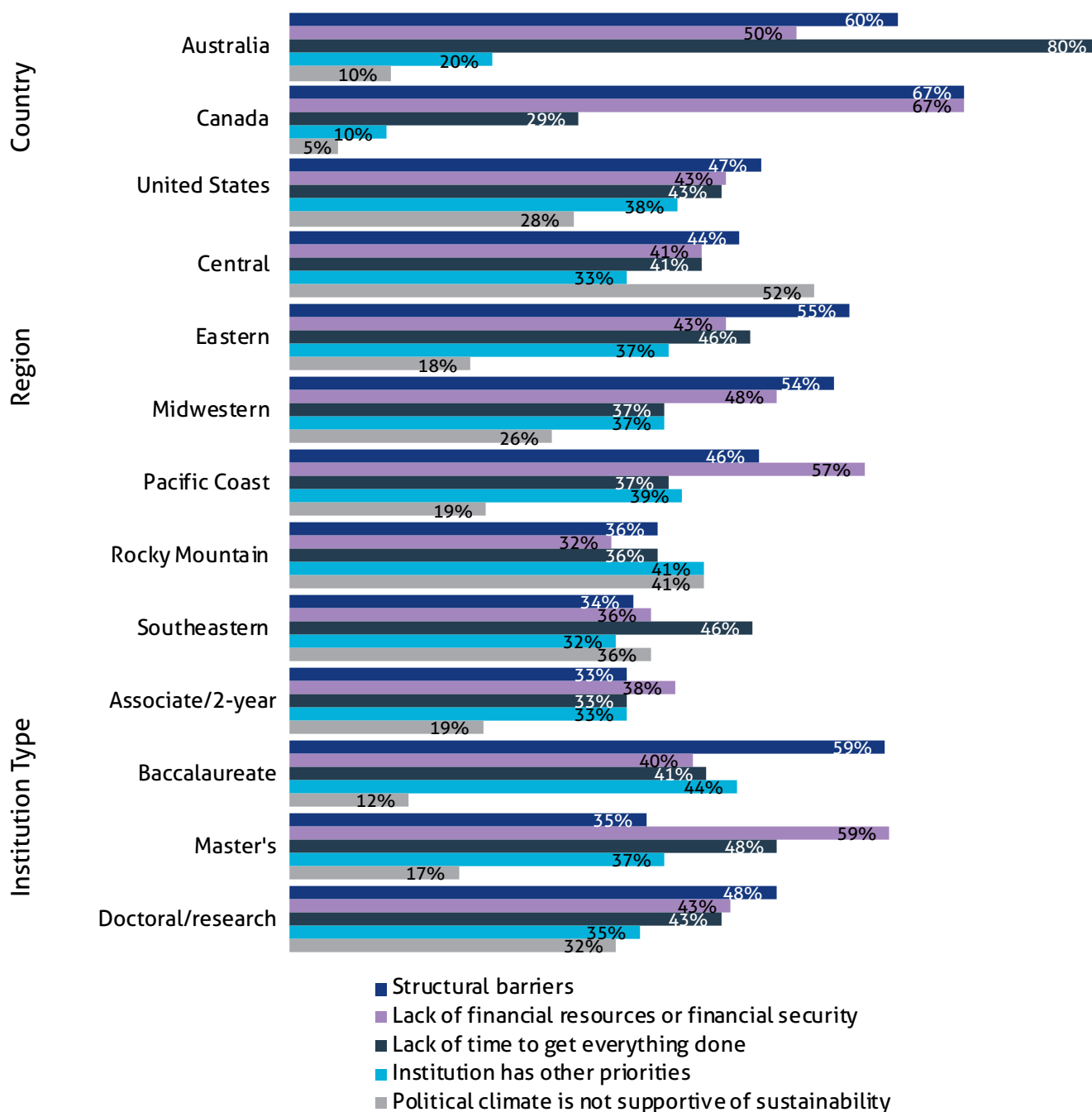


Biggest Challenges

Results by regional and institutional characteristics are presented for the top five challenges below. "Lack of time to get everything done" was particularly significant for Australian respondents (80%) while "lack of financial resources" was particularly significant among Canadian respondents (67%). "Structural barriers" were particularly relevant to respondents from Canadian and baccalaureate institutions. "Federal and/or regional political climate is not supportive of sustainability" was most often mentioned by North American respondents in the Central and Rocky Mountain regions.

Biggest Challenges by Regional and Institutional Characteristics, 2026

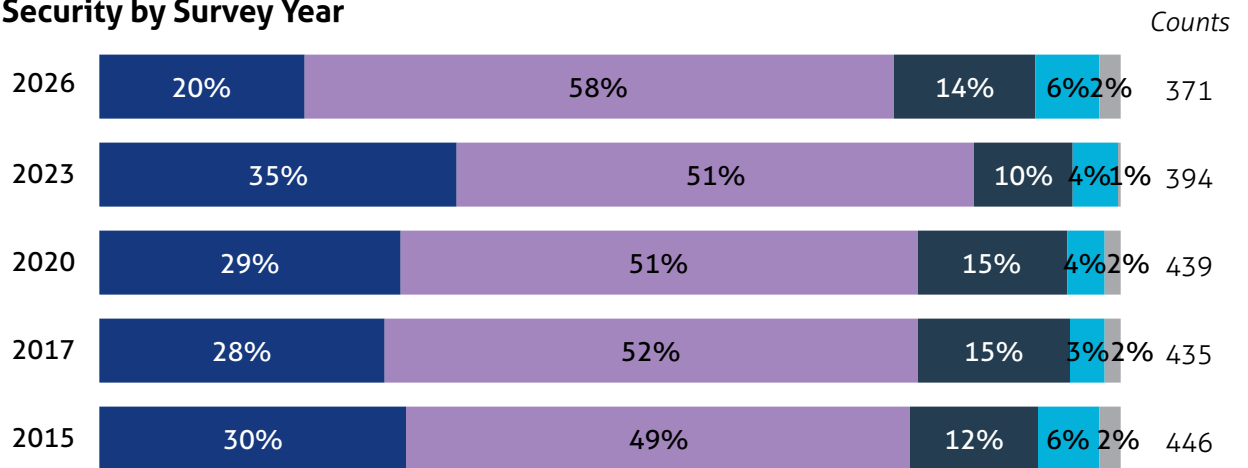
n=371



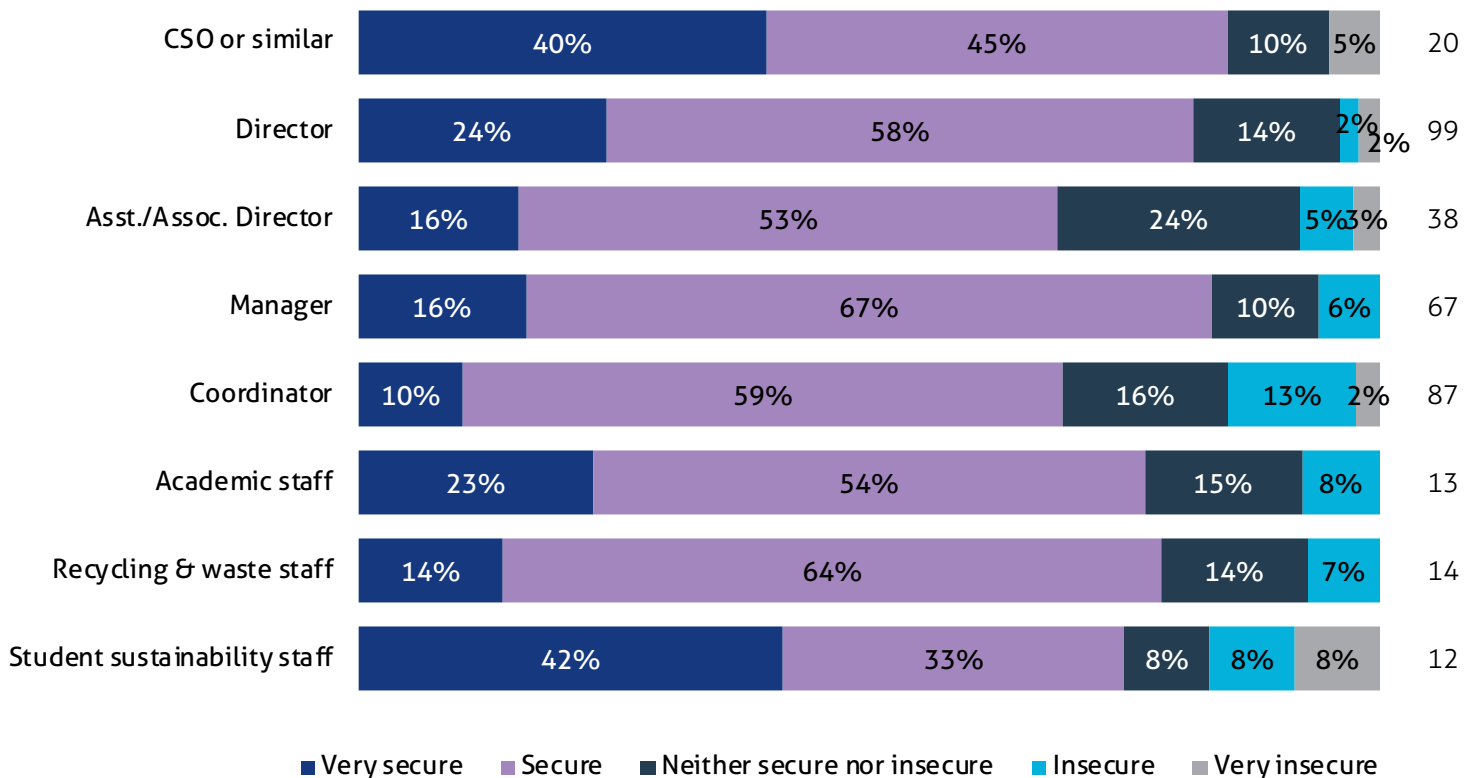
Job Security

Job security has declined since it peaked in 2023. When 2026 respondents were asked “How would you rate your degree of job security?”, responses of “very secure” or “secure” (77.6%) dropped to their lowest levels since before 2015. By position type, job insecurity was highest among Coordinators and student sustainability staff, indicating that age and work experience may be key job security indicators.

Degree of Job Security by Survey Year



Degree of Job Security by Position Type, 2026

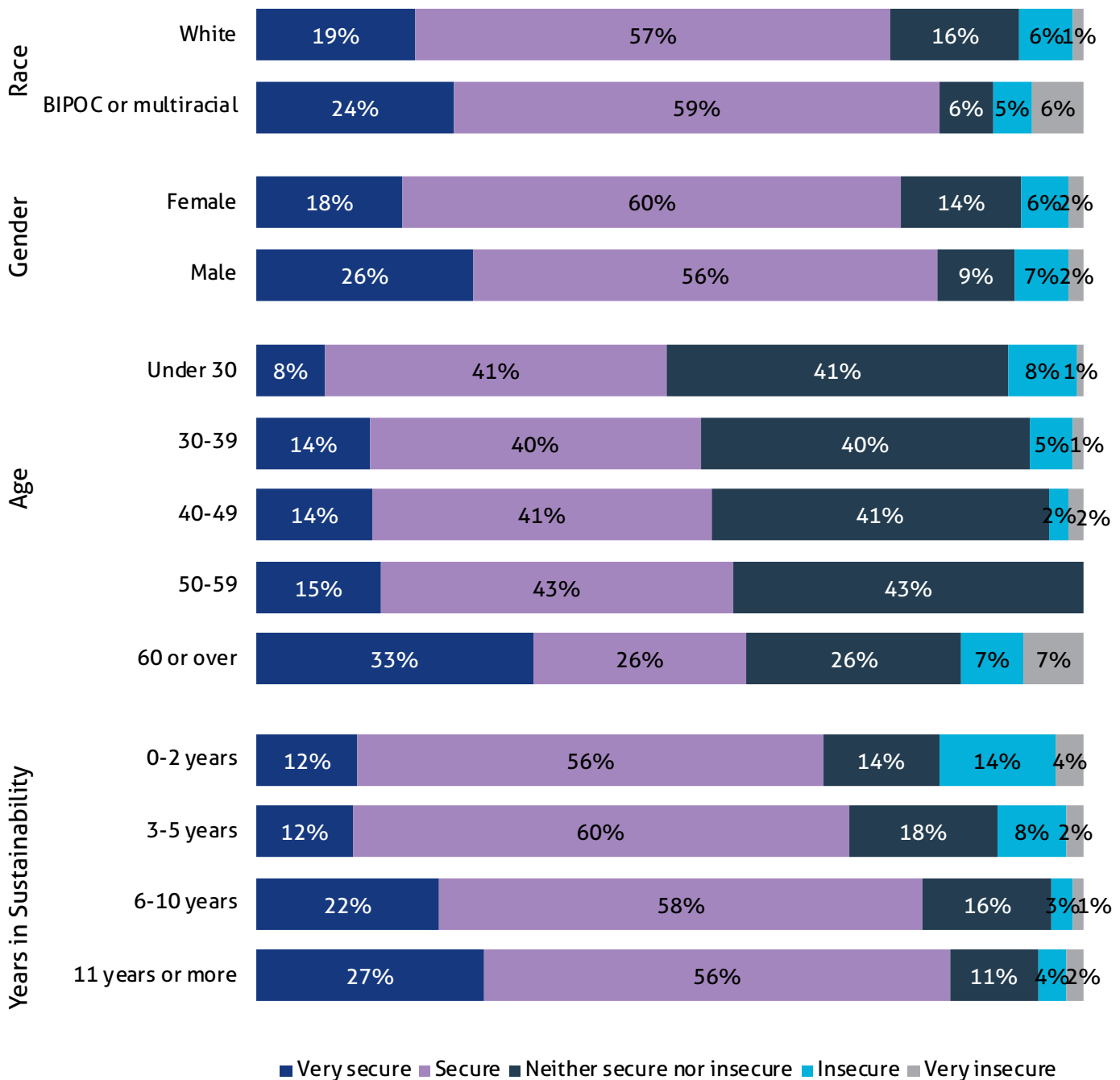


Job Security

The results were further analyzed by individual characteristics to see if any of these characteristics played a role in impacting job security. White and male respondents were more likely than BIPOC/ multi-racial and female respondents to report “secure” or “very secure” job security. Sentiments of high insecurity were greatest for the highest and lowest age categories (under 30 and 60 and up), and for staff with less (0-2) years of sustainability work experience.

Degree of Job Security by Individual Characteristics, 2026

n=371

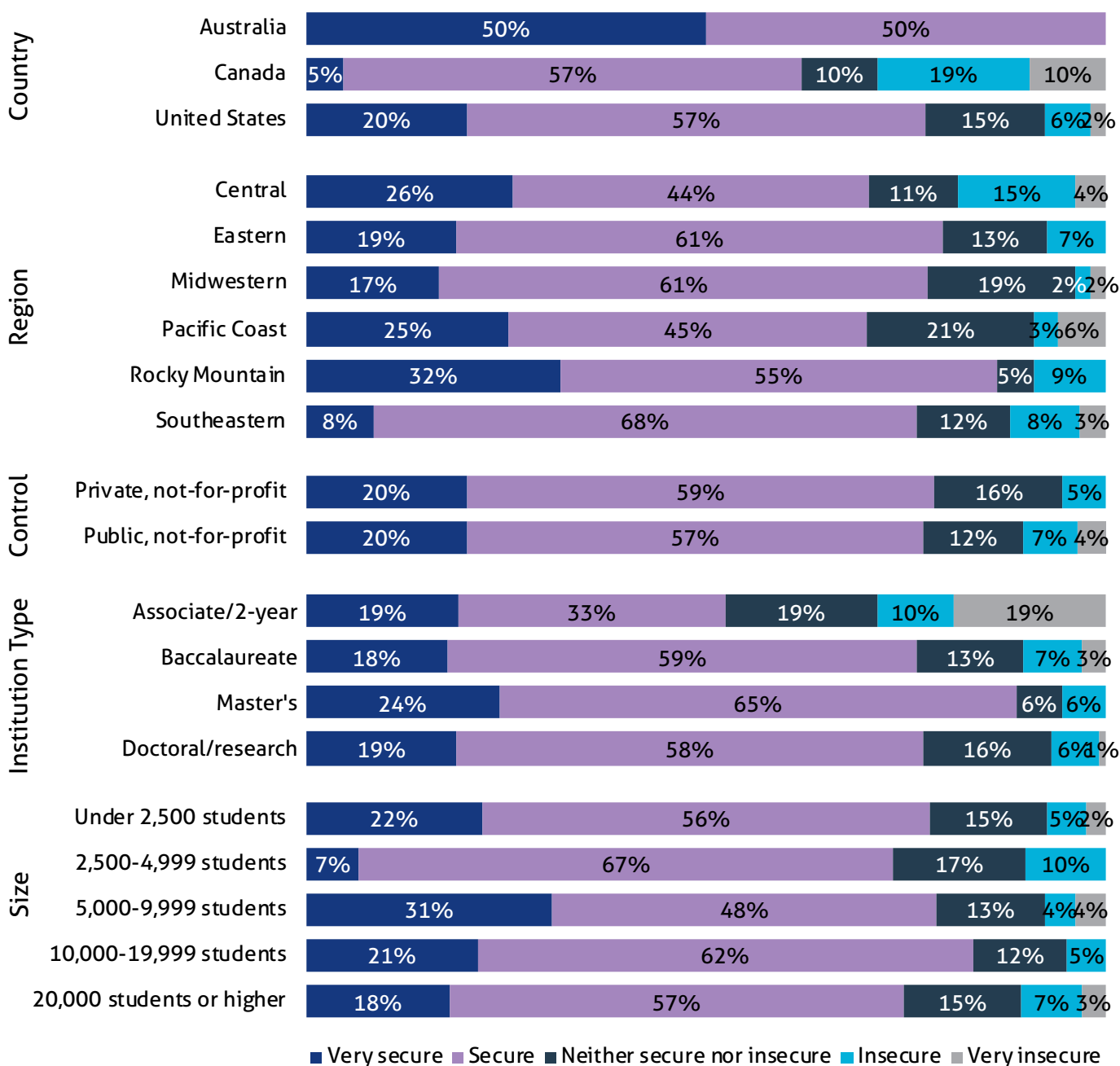


Job Security

The results were also analyzed by regional and institutional characteristics. By country, Australian respondents indicated the highest rates of job security (100%) from any other group, while Canadian respondents experienced high insecurity (29%). Respondents in the Rocky Mountain region indicated high rates of job security (87%). Job insecurity was higher among respondents at public institutions (11%) than those at private institutions (5%). By institution type, job insecurity was highest among respondents from associate/2-year institutions (29%). Respondents from institutions with 2,500-5,000 students saw relatively low security and high insecurity compared to other size categories.

Degree of Job Security by Regional and Institutional Characteristics, 2026

n=371

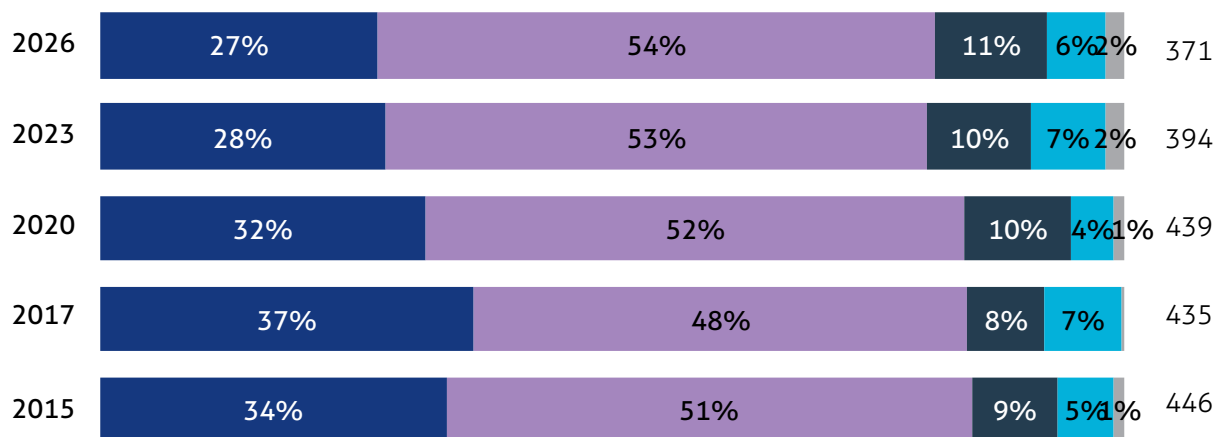


Job Satisfaction

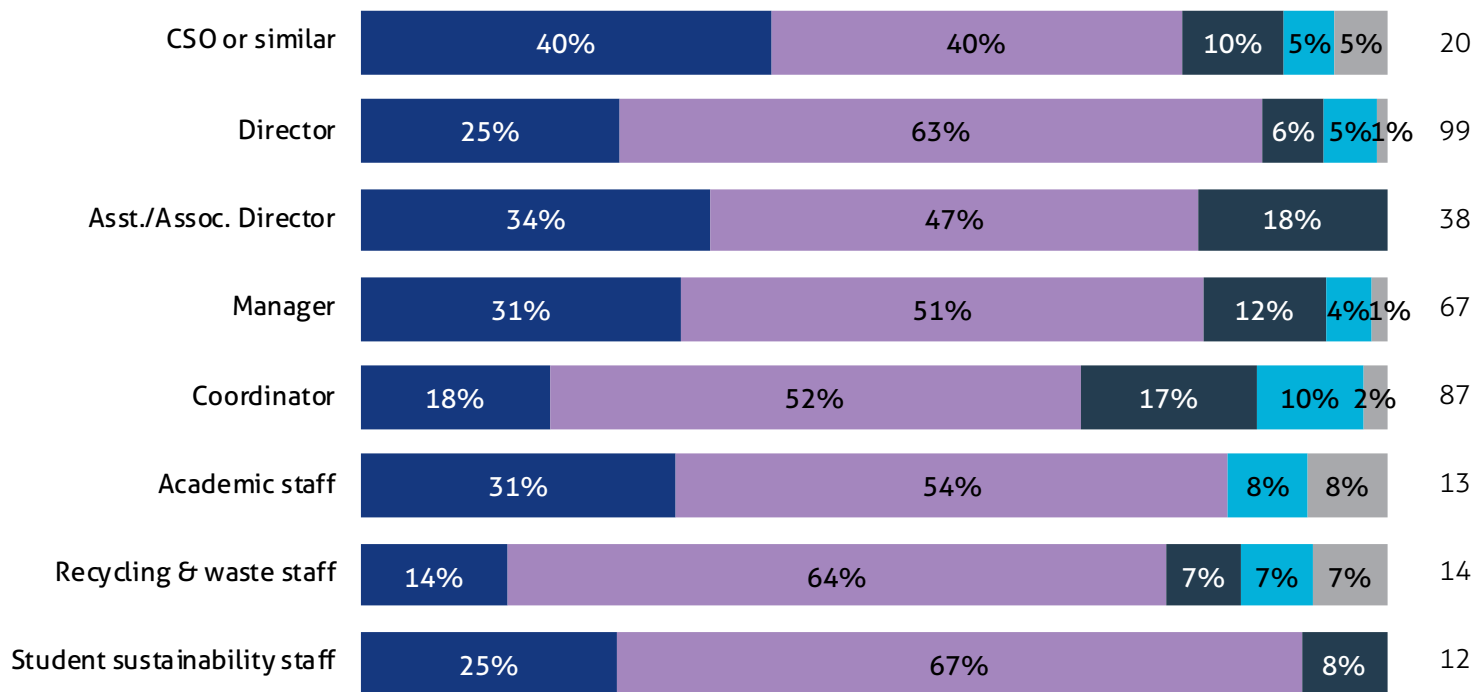
Job satisfaction for sustainability staff is similar to what it was in 2023. Approximately 81% of respondents were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” in their positions in 2026, which is slightly higher than in 2023. Results varied by position type, with student sustainability staff and Directors having the greatest levels of satisfaction. Dissatisfaction was highest among academic staff (16%) and recycling & waste staff (14%).

Degree of Job Satisfaction by Survey Year

Counts



Degree of Job Satisfaction by Position Type, 2026



■ Very satisfied
 ■ Satisfied
 ■ Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied
 ■ Unsatisfied
 ■ Very unsatisfied

Adjusting to the Current Political Climate

A new free-response question was asked in 2026: "How has your sustainability work changed as a result of the current political climate in your country and/or region?"

Responses reflect a predominantly neutral or negative sentiment about the impact of the current political climate on sustainability work in higher education. Many noted increased legislative and political restrictions, reduced funding for sustainability and climate research, and the scaling back or removal of DEI-related programs. Some reported needing to adjust communication strategies, shift priorities, or seek alternative funding sources. A few described increased advocacy or resilience in response to challenges, while others experienced little change due to strong state or institutional support. Overall, most respondents highlighted heightened constraints and uncertainty, with a few expressing positive adaptation or continued progress despite the political environment. Although results largely reflect the sentiments of a primarily North American sample, the survey findings indicate that in some parts of the world (e.g., Australia), the political environment for advancing sustainability is more favorable.

"It has increased our urgency!"

- Senior sustainability administrator, North Carolina

*"At the provincial level, we have been facing some pretty **serious budgetary pressures** which has been difficult."*

- Sustainability Officer, Ontario

*"Concerns about visibility and potential impacts have contributed to **more conservative communication practices**."*

- Sustainability Officer, Massachusetts

*"We are placing greater **emphasis on the cost savings and cost avoidance** we deliver... We are doing less explicit environmental justice work; however, our work continues to consider disproportionate environmental burdens and benefits."*

- Senior sustainability administrator, Missouri

*"I am even more intentional, truth-telling, and forward-looking. While many seem to think it is a time to freeze, I have been building my own and my team's momentum to **be present, courageous, and consistent**."*

- Academic Officer, Pennsylvania



Sustainability summer interns at University of Wisconsin-Whitewater conduct peer-to-peer education at the Campus Garden through volunteer activities.

AASHE disseminated and publicized a survey with approximately 58 questions for a four-week period in February and March 2026. Responses from 454 individuals were collected, and 398 were included for analysis in this report. As in previous years, partially completed surveys and respondents working in sustainability less than 25% of the time were excluded from the analysis. The number of overall survey respondents was slightly lower in 2026 than in prior years.

Most 2026 survey questions were also asked in previous surveys, and year-by-year comparisons have been included when possible. For readability, graph data labels were rounded to the nearest percent throughout this report, and data labels of 1% or less were sometimes excluded.

The information found in this report is based on a sampling of higher education sustainability professionals. These results provide a reasonably comprehensive view of higher education sustainability for U.S. audiences, to a lesser extent, Canadian and Australian audiences, and even less so for professionals outside of these regions. Though efforts were made to disseminate the survey widely, due to the voluntary nature of the survey, we cannot definitively claim to have captured representative samples for any position type. The staffing survey is not longitudinal in nature, so differences between survey years should be interpreted with caution. We've provided sample sizes and counts throughout this report to provide context around potential trends.

About AASHE



Attendees from the University of Minnesota system share the stage after the AASHE 2025 Closing Keynote.

AASHE empowers higher education administrators, faculty, staff, and students to be effective change agents and drivers of sustainability innovation. AASHE enables members to translate information into action by offering essential resources and professional development to a diverse, engaged community of sustainability leaders. We work with and for higher education to ensure that our world's future leaders are motivated and equipped to solve sustainability challenges. For more information, visit www.aashe.org.

Thank You!

Images in this publication feature higher education sustainability professionals at the AASHE 2025 Conference & Expo, or were provided courtesy of AASHE member and partner institutions.

Salaries & Status of Sustainability Professionals in Higher Education
Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE)
Released August 3, 2026

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