

# Bridging the Gap: Aligning Association Professionals and Members for Success

This report reveals critical misalignments between association professionals and members that impact recruitment, retention, and revenue growth.



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INTRODUCTION

# Loyalty is growing, but misalignment continues.

While both association professionals and members agree on the importance of advocacy and industry growth, a massive disconnect exists around career development—a driving force of member loyalty.

For a decade, we’ve been tracking the pulse of professional associations and their members through partnership with Edge Research, aiming to understand what drives membership recruitment, retention, and association revenue.

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**THE GOOD NEWS:** Loyalty is up. Members are turning to their organizations for guidance during economic and political challenges, which contributes to both groups strongly aligning on the importance of advocacy, representation, and community building.

**THE BAD NEWS:** Ten years later, association professionals (Pros) are still missing what their members want most—career advancement support. While nearly half of Members say job opportunities and career development are “very important,” fewer than 1 in 4 association Pros recognize this priority.

This disconnect comes at a critical time. The data reveals shifting patterns in who pays membership dues, while cost remains the #1 reason for membership lapse.

The research reveals both challenges and opportunities that can benefit every association professional. While 88% of Pros say putting on successful events is their top priority, younger members may not agree on event formats. Three-quarters of Members need continuing education, yet associations may be missing digital delivery preferences. And despite Members using AI weekly at work, association Professionals are still catching up on adoption.

What we discovered about member retention trends can help reshape how you approach membership strategy as you prepare for 2026. The association industry is resilient, so it’s important to show up for your members when they need it most.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Association professionals must close critical gaps with their members to recruit, retain, and boost revenue

This research reveals substantial misalignments across four main areas: career advancement, professional development delivery, technology adoption, and event strategy.

While encouraging progress exists in community building and advocacy alignment, the gaps in individual member priorities pose immediate threats to retention and long-term revenue sustainability. Organizations that ignore these misalignments risk losing members in the next year, particularly as more than half of Members (62%, up from 55% in 2024) now pay their own dues and assess value more judiciously.

## Career advancement—still disconnected

The most significant disconnect centers on career-focused services, where members consistently place much higher importance on job opportunities and career advancement than professionals recognize, despite being a recurring theme year after year. This gap has direct financial implications as self-paying members become increasingly selective about organizational value and cost remains the primary reason for membership lapse.

These career development expectations vary significantly by career stage, with early career Members prioritizing job opportunities, mid-career Members focusing on advancement pathways, and late-career Members valuing networking and referral opportunities. Organizations that fail to address these stage-specific needs risk losing members across their entire professional lifecycle.

## Professional development transformation opportunity

Professional development requirements have increased substantially, creating opportunities for associations to provide core value through learning programs. However, significant gaps exist between member preferences for flexible, digital delivery methods and current organizational offerings. Members demonstrate strong desire for on-demand courses, short-form video content, and recommended learning pathways that most organizations currently under-provide.

This represents both a retention risk and a revenue opportunity, as Members increasingly source professional education from multiple providers and consistently rate self-service digital formats higher than traditional employer- or association-provided training.

## Technology as a loyalty driver

Members who perceive their organizations as early technology adopters show dramatically higher loyalty metrics (85% satisfaction, 72% NPS, 53% connection rates). Yet Members consistently rate their organizations higher on technology capabilities than Professionals rate themselves—suggesting significant untapped potential for digital transformation initiatives.

The reported acceleration of AI adoption across both professionals and members of organizations since last year creates opportunities for associations to lead their industries in AI-enabled services, training, and policy development.

## Events strategy under pressure

Association event planners face multiple pressure points, from travel concerns affecting both international and domestic attendance to evolving member preferences for educational and networking experiences. While events remain the second-largest revenue source after membership dues, organizations must balance financial dependencies with changing member needs and external constraints, like supplementing annual conferences with regional events to match certain member preferences. Understanding best practices for conference planning, particularly event registration, is vital to event strategy.

## The path forward

Success requires strategic realignment across four major channels: expanding career development to match member priorities, modernizing professional development delivery, leveraging technology, and adapting event strategies to address travel and engagement challenges. Organizations that take a comprehensive approach to closing these gaps will strengthen member loyalty while building sustainable revenue growth.

# Key Findings

## **A few notes about this study:**

Parallel surveys were conducted with members of professional membership organizations in the United States and professionals who work at those organizations (referred to in this report as “Members” and “Pros,” respectively).

In this report, “small organizations” refers to organizations with annual revenue of less than \$5 million. “Large organizations” refers to organizations with annual revenue of \$5 million or greater. Note that due to rounding, not all percentage totals in this report equal 100 percent.

KEY FINDINGS

# Shifting Trends Among Pros and Members

## Career Development Disconnect

Job opportunities:

46%

of Members say this is **very important** vs just 23% of Pros (23-point difference)



Helping with career advancement:

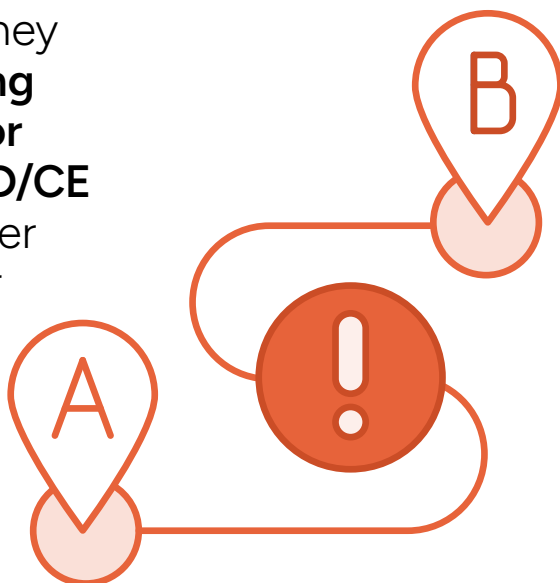
45%

of Members say this is **very important** vs just 27% of Pros (18-point difference)

## Opportunities for Alignment

74%

of Pros say they are **prioritizing developing or improving PD/CE programs** over the next year



46%

of Members have used their organization's online career center/job board

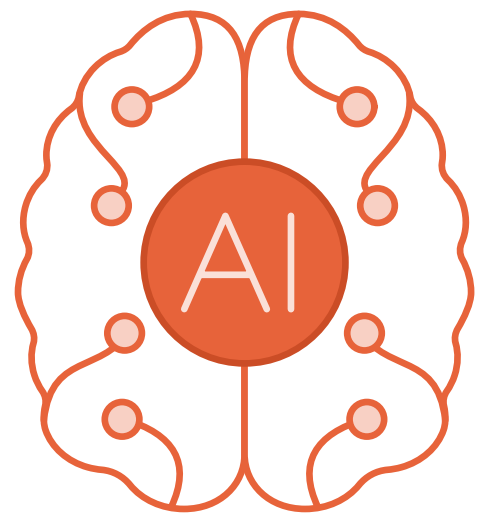
→ 73% would be interested in using a career platform from their org if it was offered

## Conflicting Outlooks About AI and Tech

62%

of Members use AI **every day** to a few times a month

→ Just 39% of Pros say their organization uses AI



Only

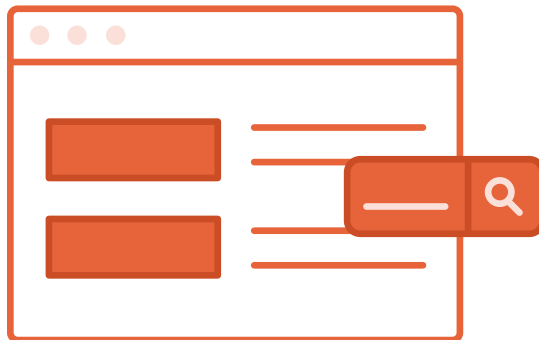
49%

of Pros feel **technologically prepared** for the future

## Event Strategy Remains a Priority

88%

of Pros say successful events, conferences and/or tradeshows are their **#1 priority**



77%

of Pros report **stable or growing attendance** despite economic or political concerns

72%

of current Members prefer **in-person events** over virtual

## The Alignment Sweet Spot

Top 3 areas where Pros and Members completely agree on importance:

1. **Advocating** for interests with federal/state policymakers
2. **Fueling growth** of the profession/industry
3. **Raising awareness** about the profession/industry

*This alignment matters more than ever as shifting dues payment patterns emerge and membership growth tells a complex story that every association professional needs to understand.*

RESEARCH FINDINGS PART I

# Priority Gaps and Alignment Between Members and Pros



# 01

## The Career Development Crisis: The Pro-Member Disconnect

The most critical misalignment between association professionals and members centers on career-focused development and support. Members place dramatically higher importance on job opportunities and career advancement than professionals recognize—gaps that have persisted year after year despite being recurring themes in member feedback.

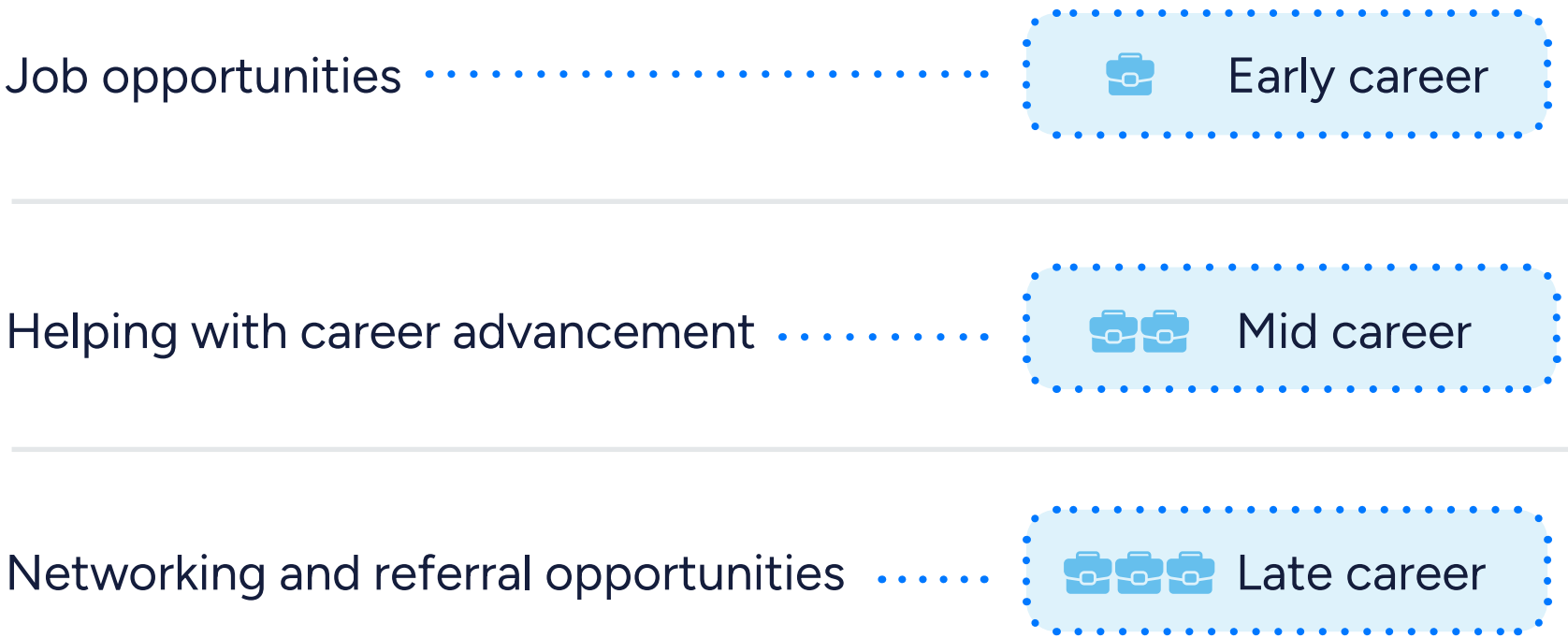
### Largest Career Advancement Priority Misalignments

	MEMBERS	PROS	
Job opportunities	46%	23%	+23% gap
Career advancement	45%	27%	+18% gap
Training	48%	34%	+14% gap

➔ This disconnect becomes even more critical when considering career stages, as different member segments have distinct career development needs.

### Career Services Priorities by Stage

(of members ranking their top renewal benefit)







## 02

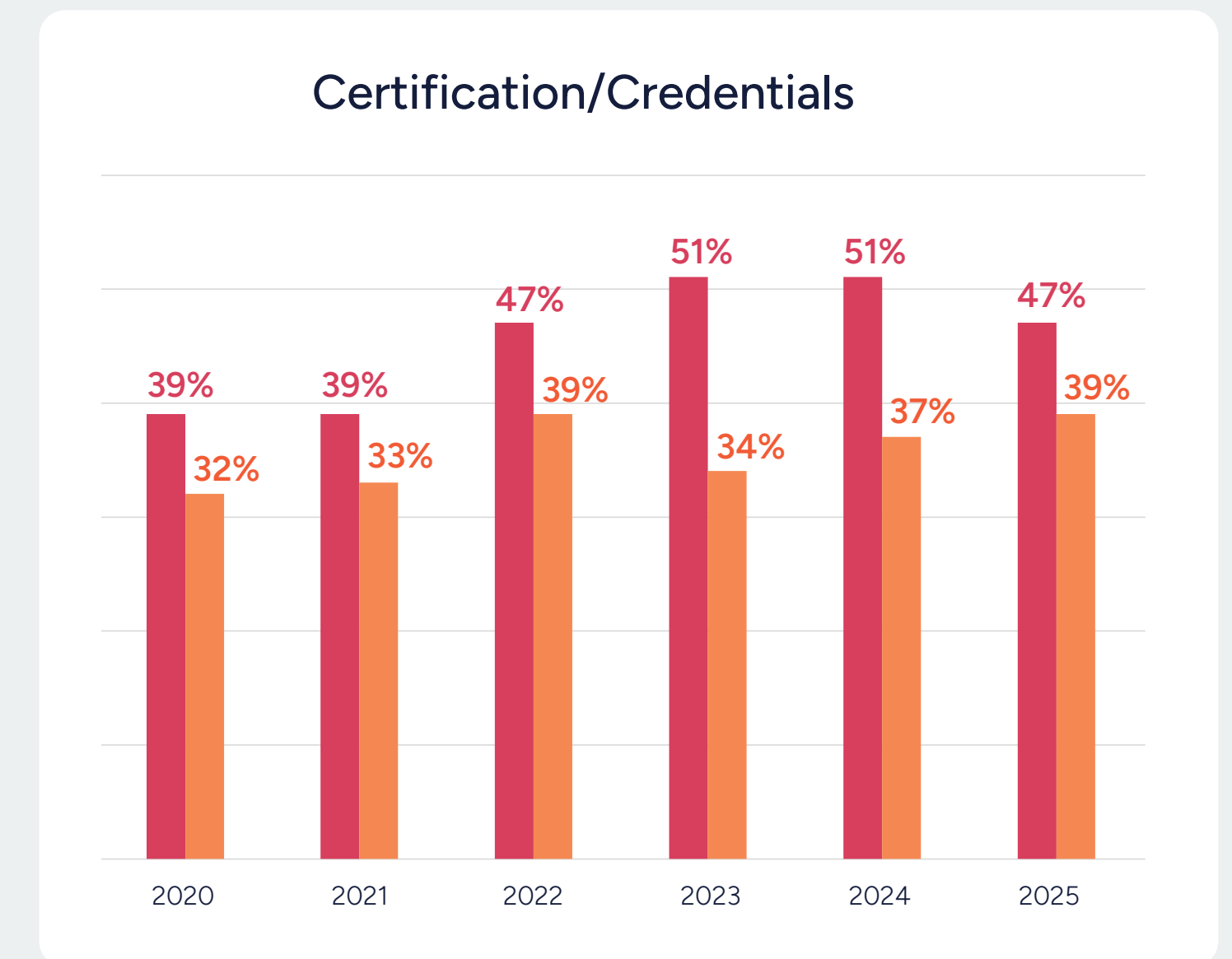
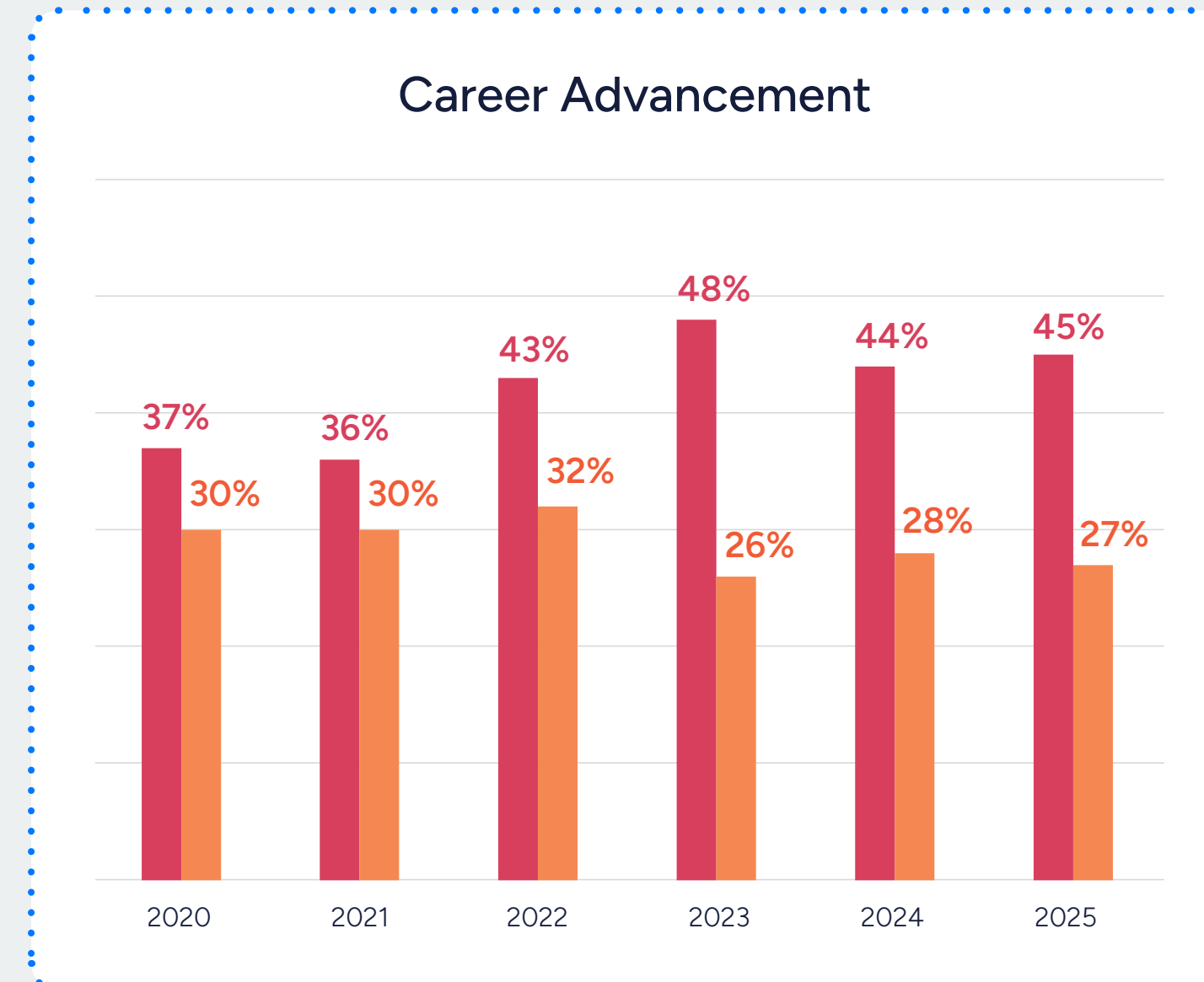
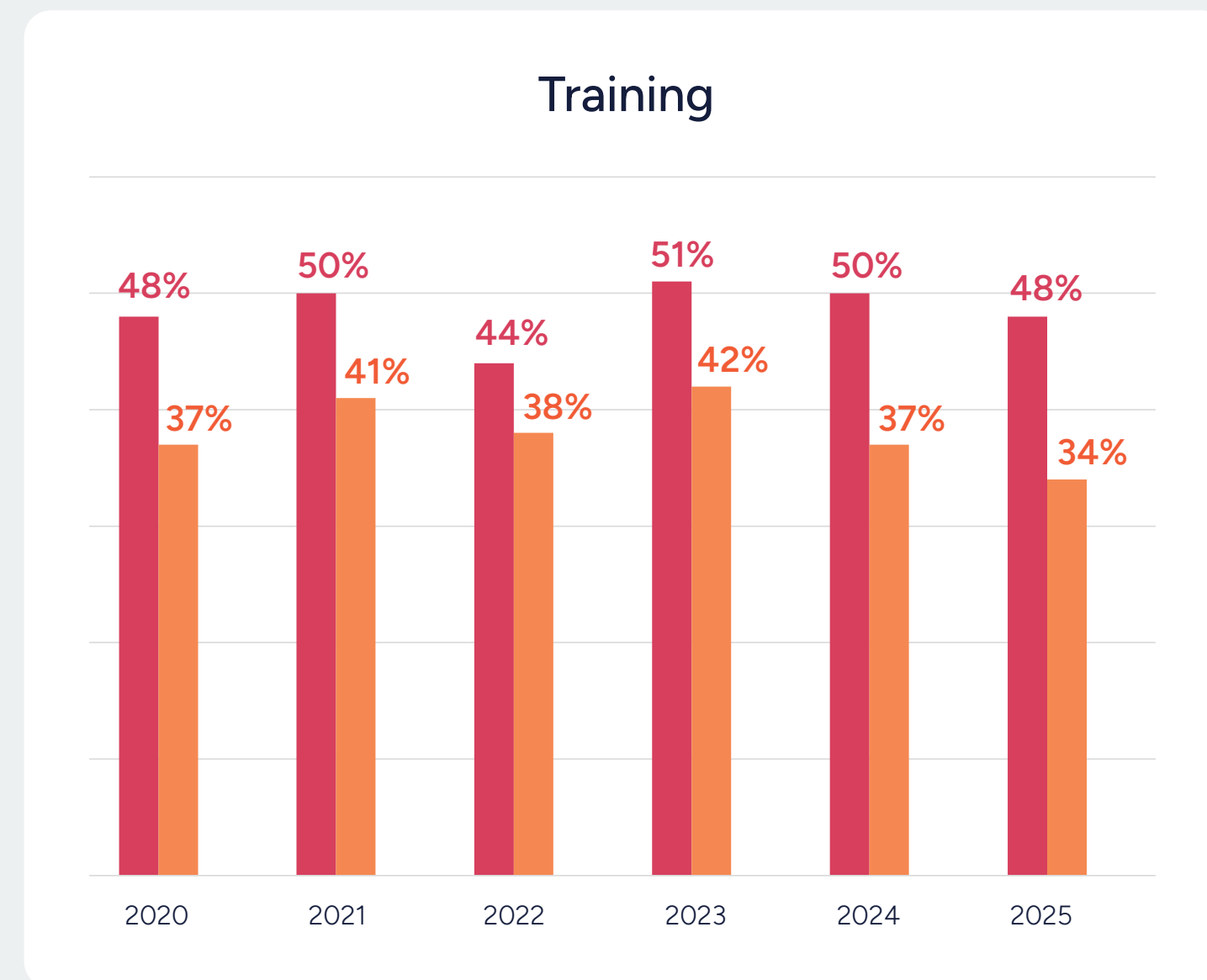
## Spotlight on Career Advancement Misalignment

- Six years of data reveal a pattern of association professionals consistently failing to recognize how much members value career-focused services.

What makes this particularly concerning is the timing: as workplace dynamics shifted post-pandemic and members increasingly pay their own dues, the very services they most need for professional success remain the most undervalued by the organizations meant to serve them.

### Top Benefits for Members vs. Pros (% Very Important)

Members Pros





# 03

## Lapsed Members Reveal What Organizations Are Missing: Career Benefits (Even Over Advocacy)

➔ Lapsed Members consistently prioritize career advancement benefits at higher rates than current Members.

While current Members value collective benefits like advocacy and industry representation, Professionals are risking attrition by not adding more focus to the career development benefits they can offer. Not only do lapsed Members prioritize individual career benefits more highly—they’re also significantly harder to please across the board. Even their top-rated benefit scores 10 points lower than current Members’ top priorities, suggesting that once Members become dissatisfied, winning them back requires addressing fundamental value propositions.

### Top 6 Benefits for Current Members (% Very Important)

1.	CODE OF ETHICS	55%
2.	LATEST NEWS AND INFO	54%
3.	REPRESENTING INTERESTS	54%
4.	ADVOCACY	52%
5.	FUELING GROWTH	50%
6.	RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT THE INDUSTRY	48%

### Top 6 Benefits for Lapsers (% Very Important)

1.	TRAINING	45%
2.	INFORMATION ABOUT LATEST NEWS	42%
3.	PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OR CODE OF ETHICS	42%
4.	CAREER ADVANCEMENT HELP	41%
5.	REPRESENTING INTERESTS	40%
6.	JOB OPPORTUNITIES	39%



# 04

## Alignment Over Advocacy, but Misalignment Over Professional Development

➔ While Members and Pros continue to be misaligned in several key areas, they do agree on the increased importance of advocacy.

Unifying over advocacy efforts is crucial for the association industry at large, especially during the current economic and political climate. However, associations are at risk of losing members if they don't focus on the importance of career development and support that their members want. The gap has decreased in some areas—Pros previously overestimated conference importance, but this misalignment has narrowed significantly since 2019.

Since 2019, this decreased from a gap of **-25%** to now only a gap of **-16%** in 2025.

### Top Areas of Agreement Between Members and Pros

(% Very Important)

	MEMBERS	PROS	
Advocating for interests with federal and state policy makers	52%	50%	2% gap
Fueling the growth of the profession/industry	50%	52%	-2% gap
Raising awareness about the profession/industry	48%	44%	4% gap

### Conference Gap Improvement

	MEMBERS	PROS	
Recognizing the importance of meetings and conferences	38%	54%	-16% gap
	33% in 2024	65% in 2024	



05

# Technology and AI Remain Lower Organizational Priorities Despite Increasing in Importance

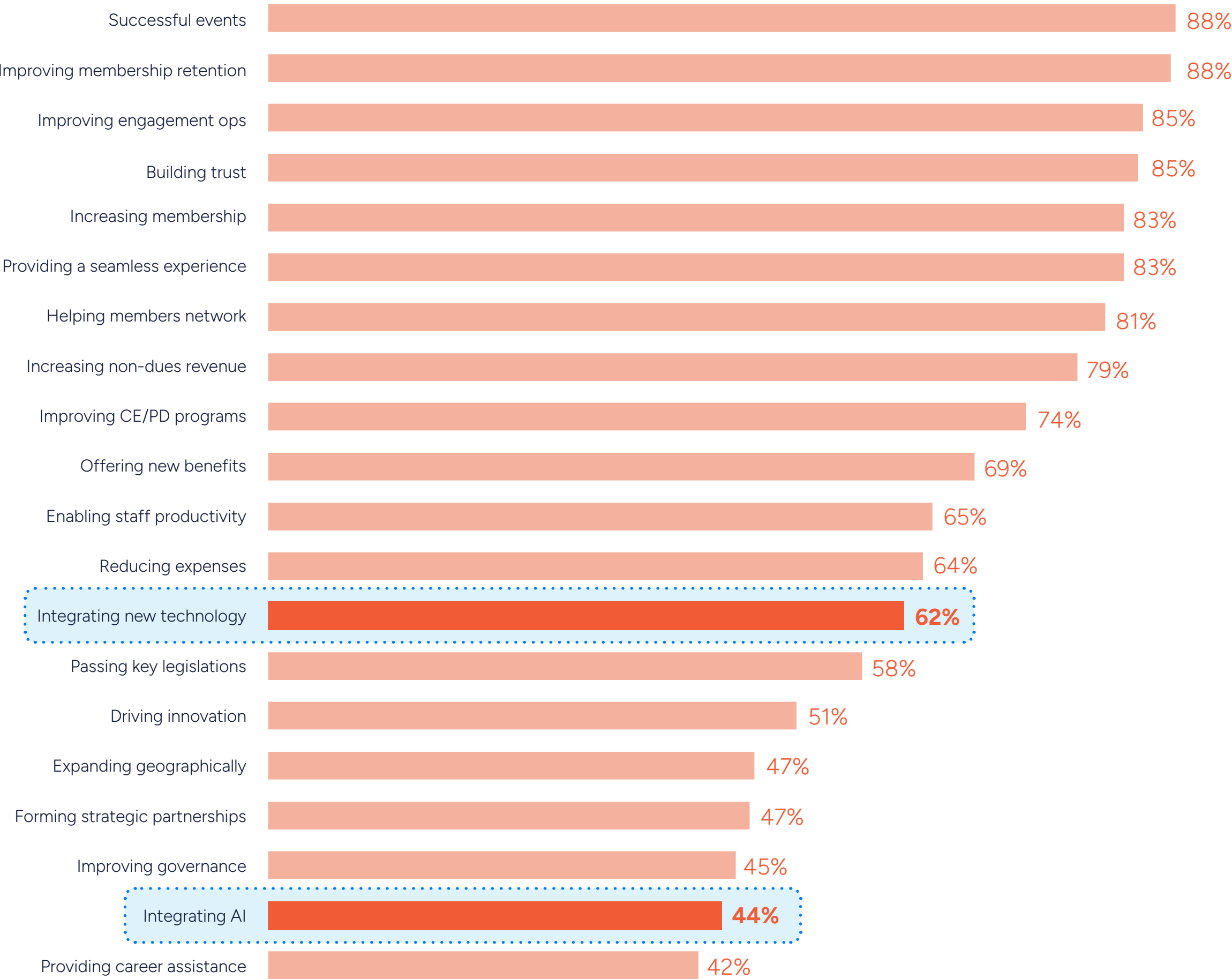
➔ Even with significant increase in importance for upgrading technology and integrating AI...

... these initiatives remain lower priorities compared to traditional activities like events, retention, and engagement, which is consistent with previous findings over the past ten years. As Pros report feeling ill prepared for future technological challenges, there should be a better balance between priorities and investing in upgrading the right technology.

“What are your biggest fears next year?  
Falling behind industry innovations.”

ASSOCIATION PROFESSIONAL

Pros’ Top/Important Priorities Over the Next Year







# 06

## The Cost of Misalignment

➔ With membership dues as the primary revenue source for Pros, the dual pressures of self-paying Members and cost sensitivity create significant financial vulnerability for associations that don't address these value alignment gaps.

Increasing numbers of Members are paying their own dues and **cite cost as the primary barrier to membership**. In fact, cost and low perceived value emerge as the top reasons for membership lapse, with a key theme from lapsed Members including organizations being “out of touch with what’s important to members.”

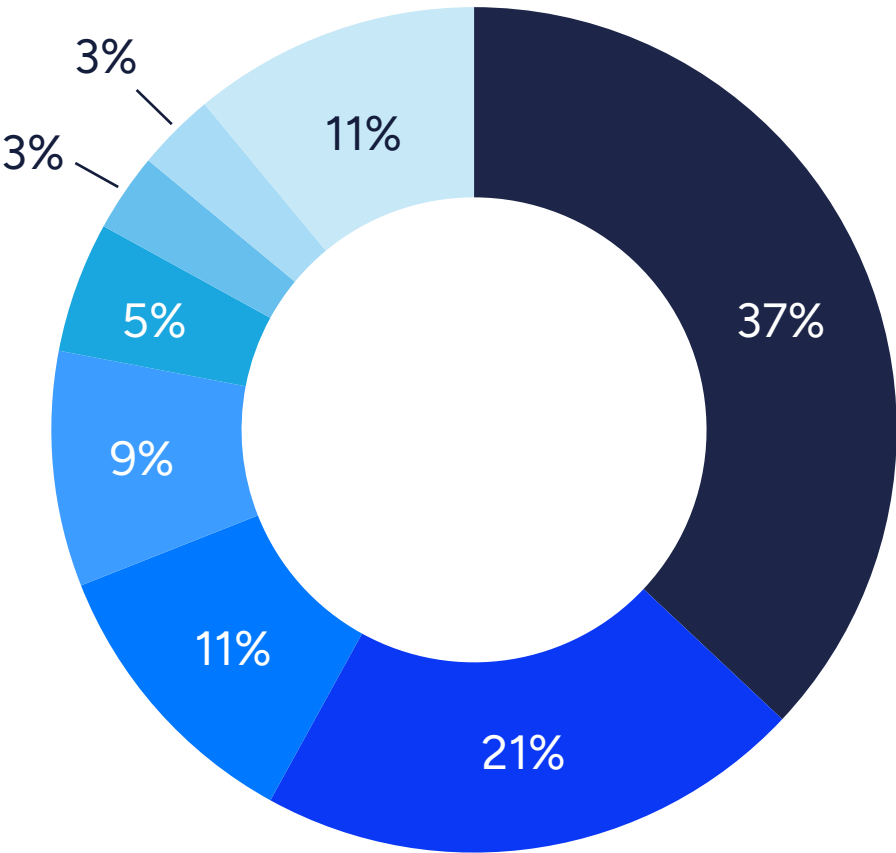
94%

of Members engage in at least one organizational activity...

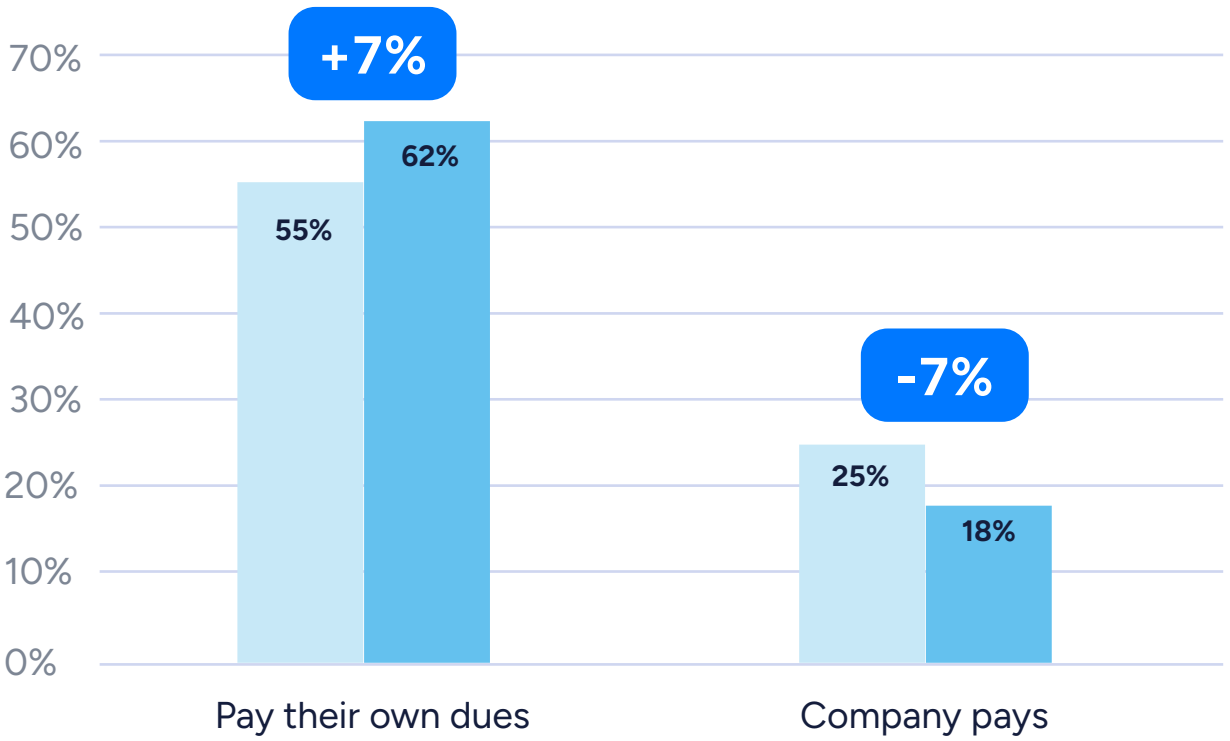
... placing particularly high value ratings for leadership opportunities, mentorship, and certifications.

### Current Pros' Revenue Sources Breakdown

Member dues	37%
Meetings/trade shows	21%
Sponsorships/partnerships	11%
PD courses	9%
Grants (foundation, gov't)	5%
Job board	3%
Fundraising	3%
Other/Other non-dues revenue	11%



### Self-Paying Members Trends



52%











would reassess their organization's value/stop membership if they were forced to pay their own dues



# 06

## The Cost of Misalignment *Continued*

### ➔ Most Important Benefits for Current Members for Renewal

1		Providing ways that members can collaborate, share, and create community
2		Advocating for your interests with federal and state policy makers
3		Helping with career advancement
4		Representing your interests
5		Information about the latest news, regulations, trends, and other issues affecting your profession or industry
6		Job opportunities
7		Networking and referral opportunities
8		Being your professional community
9		Fueling the growth of your profession/industry
10		Certifications or credentials

### Top Reasons for Lapsing

1.	IT BECAME TOO COSTLY	28%
2.	HAVE OTHER PRIORITIES RIGHT NOW	23%
3.	ORGANIZATION WAS PROVIDING LITTLE VALUE	20%
4.	CHANGED INDUSTRY/ EMPLOYMENT	17%
5.	ORGANIZATION WAS OUT OF TOUCH WITH WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO MEMBERS	10%

### Highest Value Activities from Members' Organizations

1.	LEADERSHIP POSITION	80%
2.	MENTORSHIP	79%
3.	CERTIFICATIONS	77%
4.	ANNUAL MEETING/ TRADE SHOW	70%
5.	TRAINING PROGRAMS	70%



07

## Current Event Strategy Focuses on Attendance, Revenue, and Experiences

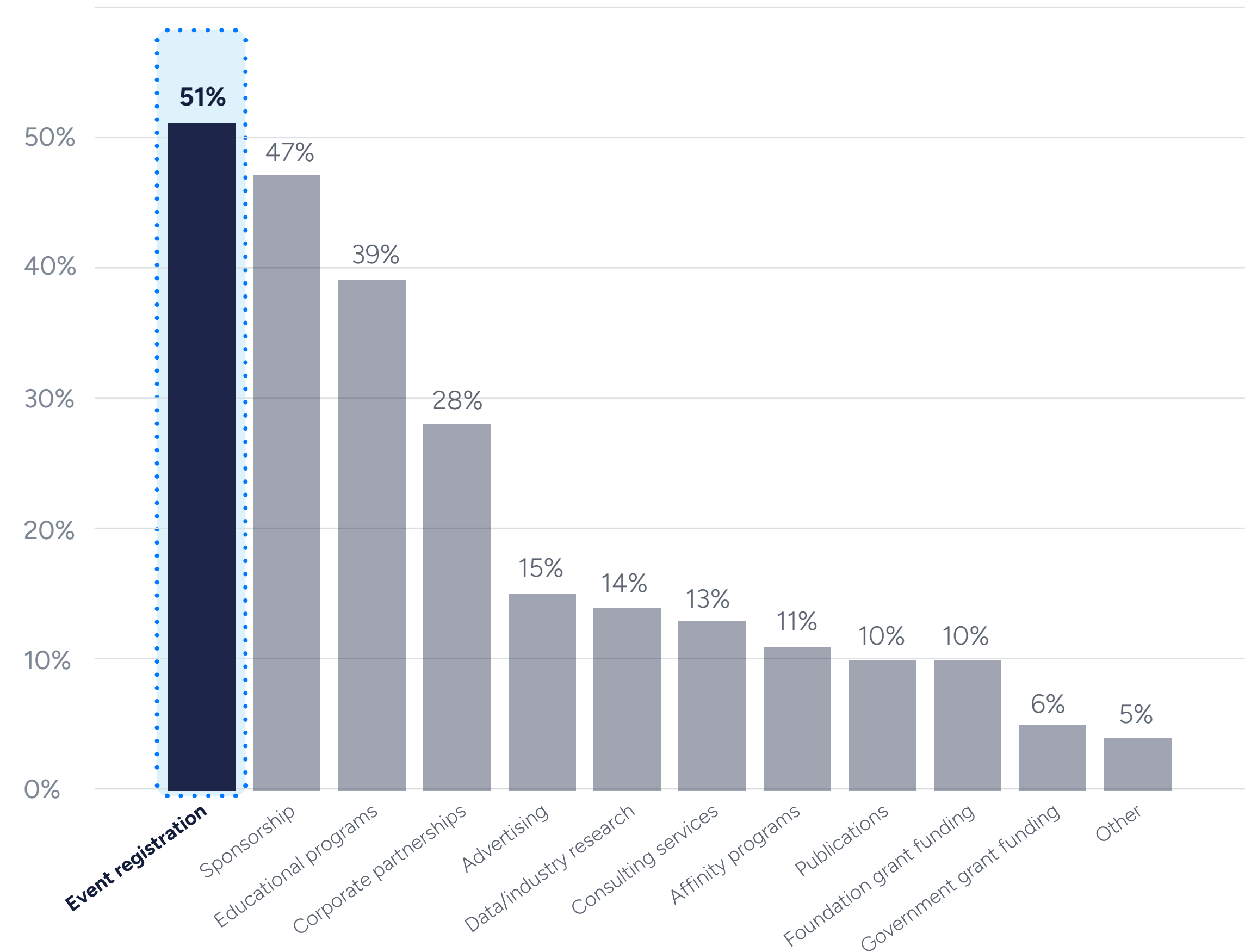
- Events represent the #1 priority for 88% of Pros, reflecting their critical importance as the second-largest revenue source.

Professional event priorities emphasize increasing attendance, revenue, engagement, and seamless experiences. Pros say the biggest challenges to their event goals over the next year will be their attendees/members' organizations having tighter budgets. For Pros' budgetary constraints, their cost pressures concentrate in food & beverage, audio/visual technology, and venue rental.

*I get to attend national and regional conferences on a yearly basis, and present research while representing my employer. I find these experiences to be valuable.*

ASSOCIATION MEMBER ON RENEWING HIS MEMBERSHIP EACH YEAR

### Non-Dues Revenue Development Focus for Pros Over the Next Year





# 07

## Current Event Strategy Focuses on Attendance, Revenue, and Experiences

Continued

*I fear that we'll continue to struggle with registrations at our events, and won't bring in enough revenue to support our continued operations.*

ASSOCIATION PROFESSIONAL ON FEARS ABOUT THE UPCOMING YEAR

### Top Event Priorities for Pros

- |  |     |
|--|-----|
| 1. INCREASING ATTENDANCE                   | 63% |
| 2. INCREASING REVENUE                      | 62% |
| 3. IMPROVING ATTENDEE ENGAGEMENT           | 57% |
| 4. PROVIDING SEAMLESS ATTENDEE EXPERIENCE  | 56% |
| 5. BUILDING TRUST WITH ATTENDEES/COMMUNITY | 49% |

### Biggest Cost Pressures for Pros

- |                                |     |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| 1. FOOD & BEVERAGE             | 53% |
| 2. AUDIO/VISUAL AND TECHNOLOGY | 49% |
| 3. VENUE RENTAL                | 48% |
| 4. STAFF TIME/RESOURCES        | 32% |
| 5. SPEAKER FEES/TRAVEL         | 23% |

### Biggest Challenges to Achieving Event Goals for Pros

- |   |     |
|---|-----|
| 1. ATTENDEES/MEMBERS' ORGS HAVE TIGHTER BUDGETS | 46% |
| 2. INFLATION/RISING COSTS                       | 39% |
| 3. ECONOMIC/POLITICAL FORCES                    | 30% |
| 4. TRAVEL LIMITATIONS FOR ATTENDEES/MEMBERS     | 27% |
| 5. LIMITED TIME AND RESOURCES                   | 25% |



RESEARCH FINDINGS PART II

# Professional Development Disconnect and Member Retention Patterns

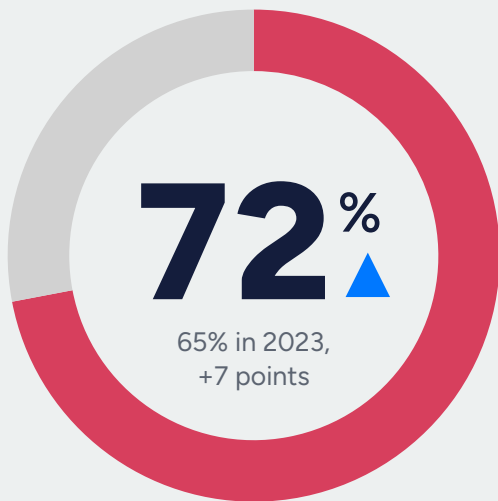


01

# Growing Professional Development Requirements Create Opportunities for Enhanced Member Value

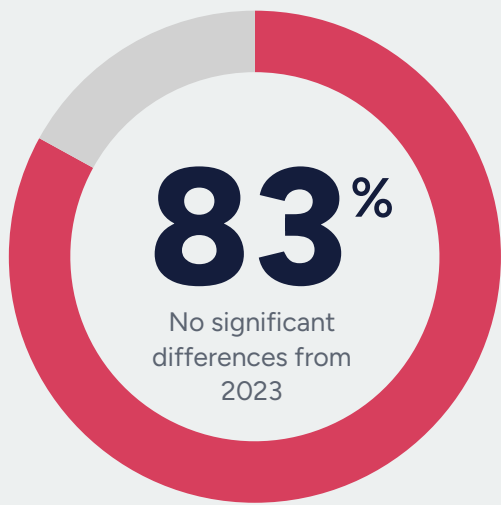
Professional development (PD) requirements have increased substantially, with 72% of Members now required to take professional education and training (up seven points from 65% in 2023), and 83% completing at least one PD activity within the last year. Higher requirements are concentrated among industries like education, healthcare, and technology/IT sectors. In-person courses jumped six spots to become the most popular PD format, which explains Member preferences for in-person conferences focused on education.

## Professional Development Growth Trends for Members



are required to take professional education and training

Higher among: Gen Z/Millennials, Education, Healthcare (Medical), Technology/IT



did at least one PD activity within the last year

## Professional Development Formats Most Likely to be Utilized in the Next Year by Members (% Very/Somewhat Likely)

1.	IN-PERSON COURSE, SESSION, OR SEMINAR	69%
2.	SHORT VIDEOS, RECORDED WEBCASTS	68%
3.	ON DEMAND, SELF-PACED ONLINE COURSE	68%
4.	WEBCAST STREAMING OF A LIVE EVENT	66%
5.	ONLINE COURSE VIA LIVE WEBINAR	66%
6.	RECOMMENDED COURSES	65%
7.	HANDS-ON/EXPERIENTIAL TRAINING	65%
8.	VIRTUAL CONFERENCE	65%
9.	SOCIAL LEARNING	62%
10.	RECOMMENDED LEARNING PATHS	62%
11.	MOBILE LEARNING	60%
12.	MULTI-DAY CONFERENCE	59%
13.	JUST-IN TIME LEARNING	58%
14.	REBROADCAST	56%



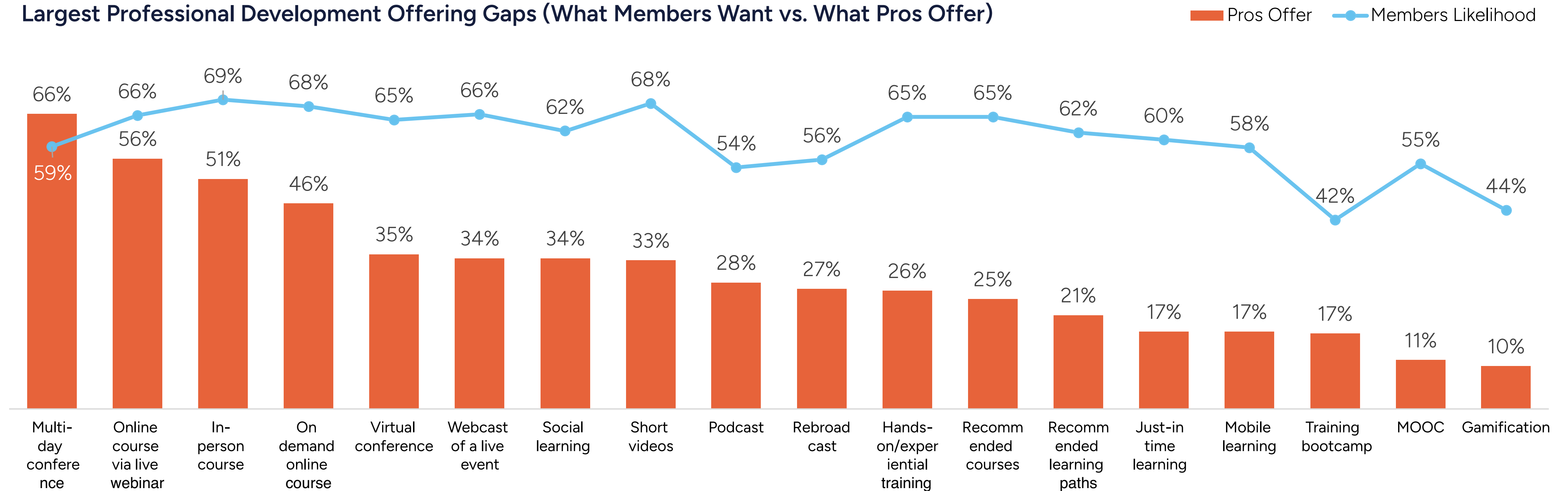
02

## Significant Gaps Between Member Demand and Professional Offerings

→ While Members show strong demand for flexible, digital professional development options, organizations currently under-provide many of these formats.

The largest gaps exist in short videos (35-point gap), recommended courses (40-point gap), and recommended learning paths (41-point gap), representing immediate opportunities to better serve member needs.

Largest Professional Development Offering Gaps (What Members Want vs. What Pros Offer)





# 03 Associations Compete Effectively Against Employers for PD Market Share

Members source professional education equally from employers (38%) and professional organizations (36%), but online self-service formats receive the highest satisfaction ratings. With Members equally prioritizing professional development opportunities from their organizations and employers, pros can stand out by enhancing the learning experience through self-service formats, on-demand environments, and virtual events.

## → Professional Education Organizations/Venues Used Within the Last Two Years

## → Perceived Quality Rating Received by Members

		Excellent 2025	Excellent 2023	Excellent 2021
Your employer	38%	35%	38%	32%
Professional membership organization(s) you belong to	36%	48%	50%	44%
A training institute	17%	45%	46%	44%
LinkedIn	16%	46%	42%	60%
A college or university	15%	48%	49%	52%
YouTube	14%	51%	55%	70%
Google	14%	57%	47%	50%
A networking group	13%	45%	50%	53%
Professional membership org(s) you do not belong to	10%	44%	52%	52%
Masterclass	9%	61%	47%	41%
Skill Share	7%	37%	31%	36%
A corp. that is not your employer	7%	35%	45%	45%
Udacity	3%	31% (small n size)	58%	47%





# 04 Career Services Show High Demand Among Younger Demographics

➔ Almost half (46%) of current Members have used their organization’s online career center/job board, with strong interest across generations, but particularly among Gen Z and Millennials.

The technology/IT and accounting sectors show the highest interest levels in receiving peer data from their organizations.

Industry Interest in Peer Data from Their Organizations  
(% of Members very interested)

63%

Technology/IT

58%

Finance

44%

Arts

39%

Healthcare

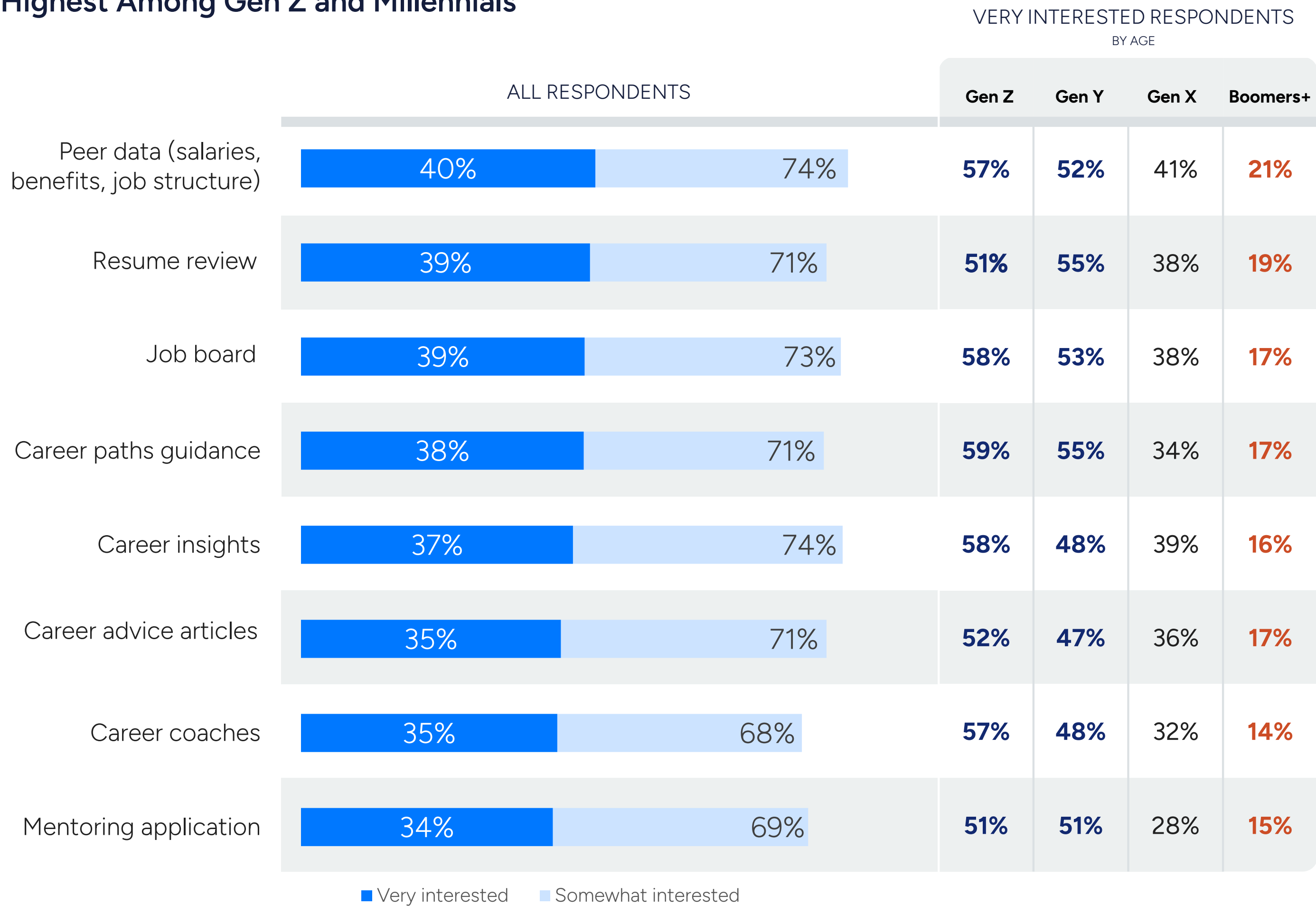
36%

Nonprofit

29%

Education

## Interest in Career Support Continues to be Highest Among Gen Z and Millennials



RESEARCH FINDINGS PART III

# Digital Transformation and Member Loyalty Connection



# 01 Technology Perception Drives Member Loyalty

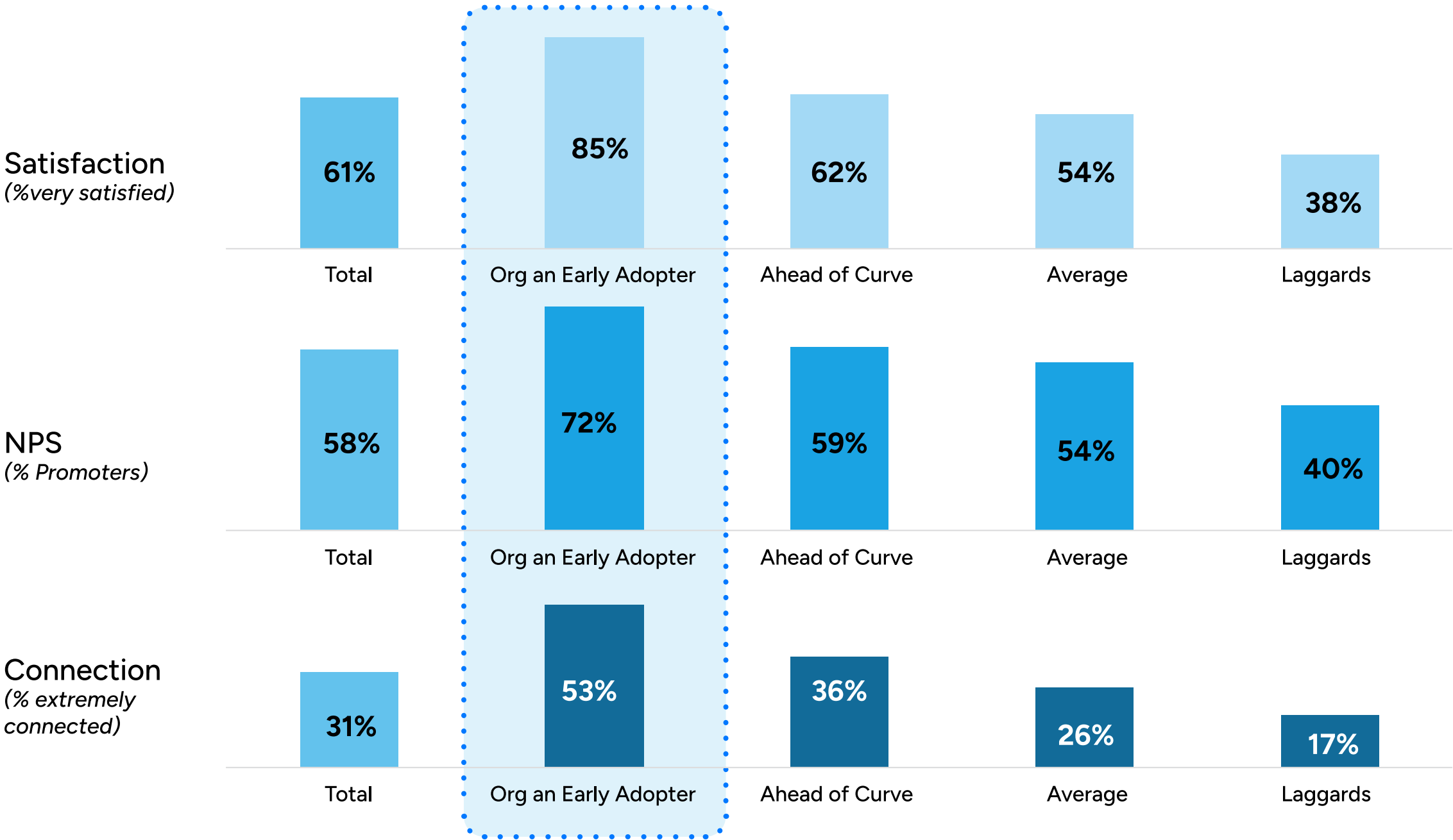
➔ Members who perceive their organizations as early technology adopters show significantly higher loyalty across all key metrics.

This data reinforces the loyalty improvements seen across the membership base since 2016. Member loyalty indicators have strengthened across satisfaction, Net Promoter Score (NPS), connection, and renewal metrics—and technology perception appears to be a significant driver of these improvements.

“I would like to see more use of technology for virtual networking opportunities, such as online discussion forums or member-only social platforms.”

ASSOCIATION MEMBER

Technology Perception Impact on Loyalty





## 02

## The Technology Confidence Gap Creates Opportunity

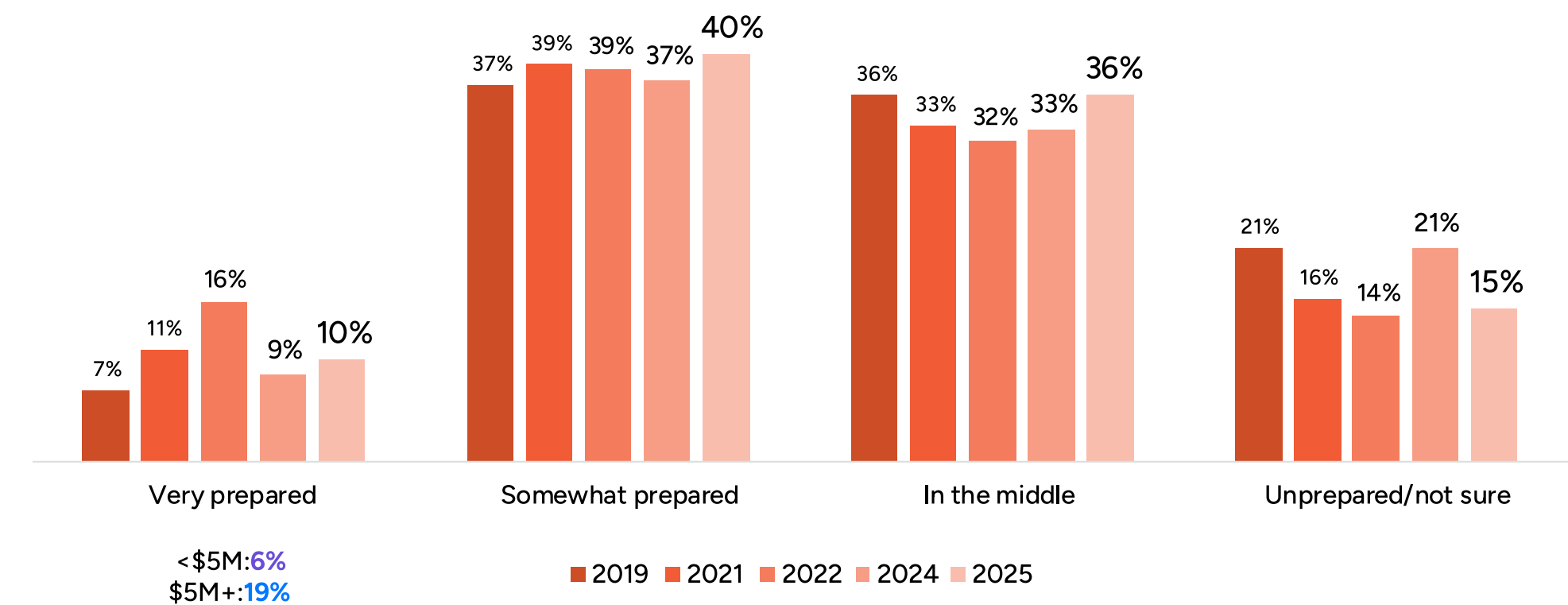
- ➔ Despite Members rating organizations higher on technology adoption than Pros rate themselves (58% of Members vs. 41% of Pros see their organizations as early adopters), significant opportunities exist to capitalize on this positive perception.

Only half of Pros feel technologically prepared for the future, while 67% of Members believe their organizations help them stay prepared—suggesting untapped potential for technology initiatives within the organizations themselves.

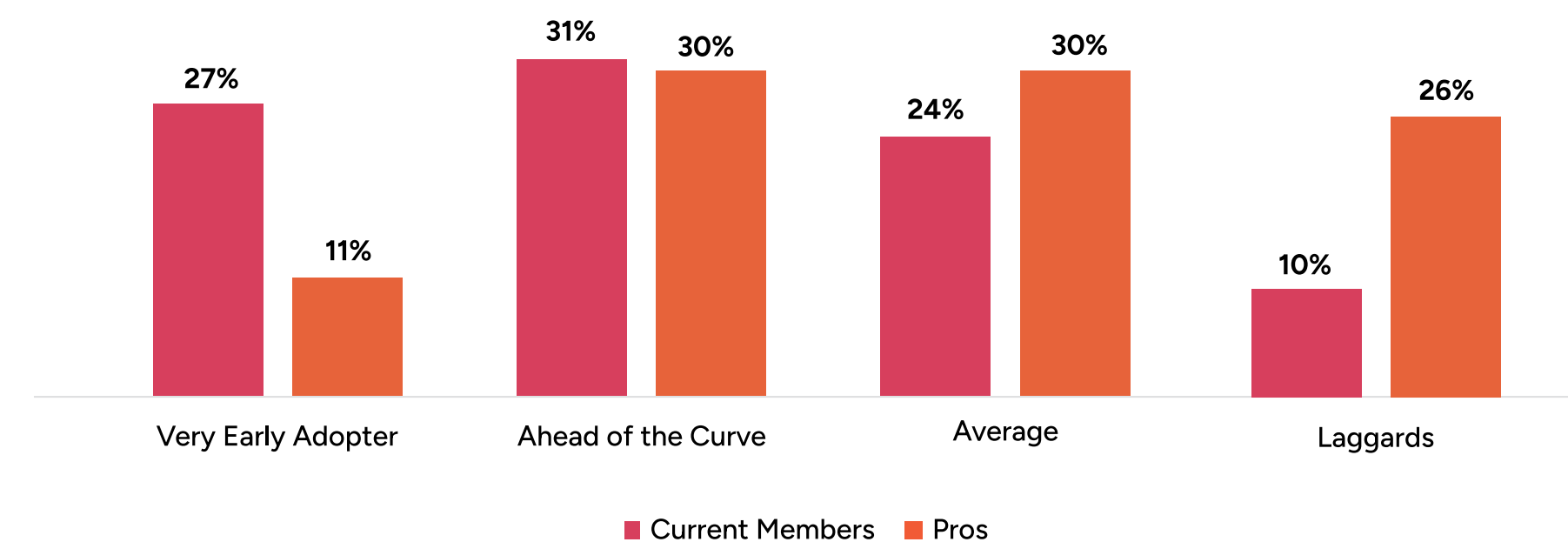
### Technology Helpfulness Agreement Rates

	MEMBERS	PROS
"My organization helps me stay up-to-date with the latest technological innovations"	70%	59%
"Technology is transforming my organization for the better"	69%	70%
"My organization helps me be technologically prepared for the future"	67%	52%

### Pros' Sentiment About Tech Preparedness Over Time



### Organizational Tech Adoption Perception Between Members and Pros







# 03

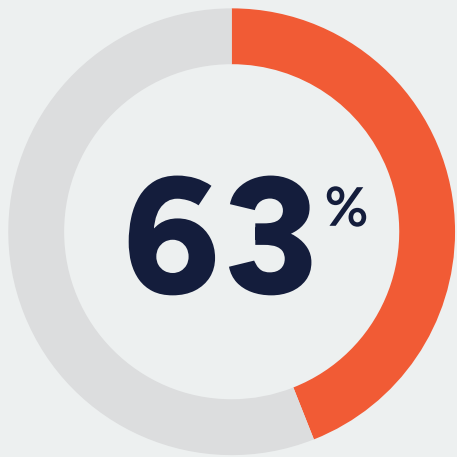
## IT Budget Increases Enable Technology Investment Opportunities

➔ Despite Pros not feeling technologically prepared for the future, there’s promise that in the next year they’ll be better equipped to keep up.

The majority of Pros report increasing IT budgets, with a significant jump in both budget increase and flexibility in tech purchasing decisions over 2024, with growth concentrated in larger organizations. Investment priorities focus on member-facing systems, with AI leading planned spending increases and LMS software being the largest expansion over 2024 spending increases.

However, based on their overall priorities, it’s likely Pros are underutilizing the tech tools that could enable their organizations to thrive.

IT Budget Growth



of Pros say IT budget will increase

+19 points since 2024

IT budget growth is concentrated in larger organizations:  
77% of large-staff orgs (21+ staff)  
86% of enterprise orgs (\$5M+ Revenue)

### Technology Solutions Used by Pros

AMS or CRM	80%	Artificial intelligence (AI)	39%
Events related tools	62%	Mobile applications	36%
Accounting/fund accounting system	62%	Marketing automation tool	35%
Webcast/webinar tool	60%	Analytics/business intel	31%
CMS	56%	Advocacy system	19%
Job boards	47%	Fundraising related tools	19%
Online Communities	45%	Volunteer management platform	18%
LMS	45%	RMS	10%
E-commerce platform	44%	Predictive intelligence	6%

### Technology Investment Priorities (of those already using and planning to spend more)

AI	38%	E-commerce	22%
CMS	34%	Online communications	21%
LMS	33% (+16 points since 2024)	Events tools	21%
AMS or CRM	32%	Accounting systems	12%
Advocacy system	29%	Job boards	7%



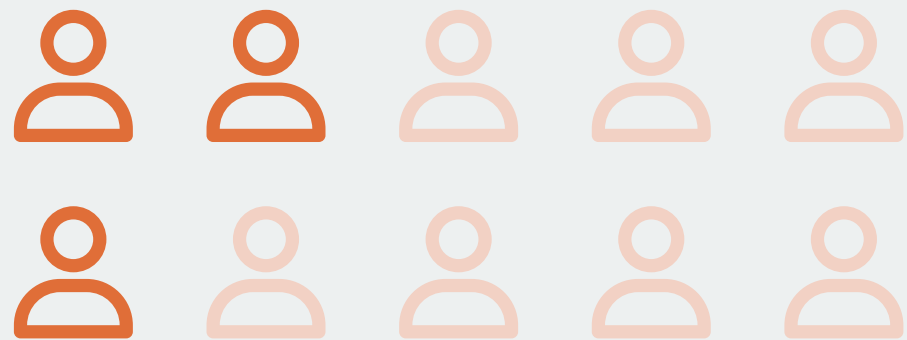
# 04

## AI Adoption Accelerates Among Both Pros and Members

➔ Member AI usage has increased significantly, with 45% using AI at least a few times a week, and 22% now using AI every day at work (+9 points since 2024).

The majority agree AI is changing how their companies operate. Professional AI adoption also jumped substantially, with 39% of organizations now using AI and most having established AI policies or in the process of creating them. Board support for AI initiatives reached 61% (up from 23% in 2024), indicating organizational readiness for AI integration.

### AI Adoption and Governance Among Pros

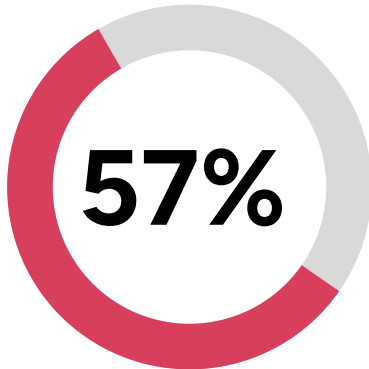


**39%** of professional organizations use AI (significant increase)

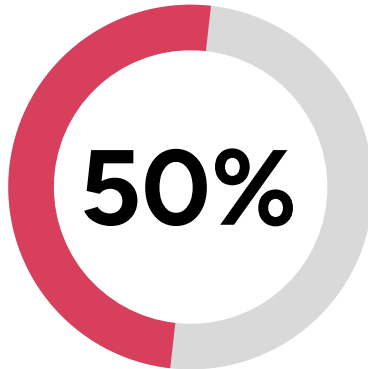
**40%**  
have established AI policies

**20%**  
are in the process of creating AI policies

### Members Agree:



“AI is changing the way my company operates”



“AI is helping me be smarter and more efficient”

### AI Usage Frequency Among Current Members

Everyday	22%
A few times a week	23%
Weekly	8%
A few times a month	9%
Monthly	3%
A few times a year	3%
Rarely	16%
I’ve never used AI	17%

**+9 points**  
since 2024



05

# AI Implementation Focuses on Content Creation and Marketing

➔ Pros primarily use AI for content generation and marketing materials, though a third also use it for analyzing event and member data to personalize member experiences, or to develop continuing education content.

“Right now marketplace expectations, the need for greater efficiency, and board pressures are driving our march towards introducing new innovations.”

ASSOCIATION PROFESSIONAL

## How Pros Use AI



OF PROS USING AI:

76%

use it at least a few times a week

38%

plan to spend more on AI next year



05

# AI Implementation Focuses on Content Creation and Marketing Continued

➔ Fortunately, Members show they are most comfortable with their organizations using AI for content creation and marketing materials. While they are least comfortable with their organizations using AI for behavior tracking and analysis, they are okay with its outcomes of predicting behavior.

Gen Z and Millennials show significantly higher comfort across most AI applications.

AI Comfort by Generation (% very)

	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers+
Content recommendations	43%	42%	30%	18%
Marketing materials	41%	43%	31%	16%
Behavior prediction	46%	33%	16%	5%

Member Comfort Levels with Organizational AI Use

(% very/somewhat)







06

# Assuring Members About Data Privacy and Security Is Imperative for Pros

➔ Data privacy is a hot topic with consumers today, and this study confirms that members of associations are no exception.

On the bright side, members indicate they’re willing to provide information to their organization if they think it’s secure and they’ll benefit from sharing the data.

## Member Agreement About Technology Usage

Using technology makes me <b>concerned about privacy and data security</b>	<div>69%</div> <div>agree</div>
I am okay with technology <b>collecting my data as long as it’s secure</b>	<div>59%</div> <div>agree</div>
I am okay with technology <b>collecting data on me if it is for my benefit</b>	<div>56%</div> <div>agree</div>
<b>I don’t like technology to collect data</b> about me in anyway	<div>48%</div> <div>agree</div>
I usually <b>don’t take the time to read privacy policies</b> or how my data will be used and stored	<div>44%</div> <div>agree</div>

RESEARCH FINDINGS PART IV

# Events & Conferences



01

## Despite Generational Differences Among Members, Event Attendance Continues to Drive Success

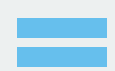
- ➔ As events are the utmost priority for 88% of Pros, with 51% seeking to focus their 2026 non-dues strategy around event registration, it's important to understand how members are thinking about events.

While most members continue to value comprehensive large-scale conferences, some member segments, particularly Gen Z and certain sectors like technology/IT, express interest in more frequent, smaller-scale regional events as complements to major conferences. The good news: most Pros (77%) report stable or even increased attendance for 2025, indicating strong continued demand for traditional conference formats that provide comprehensive networking and educational opportunities. Half report still maintaining their current annual large conference model, reflecting the successful attendance trends.

### 2025 Conference Attendance/Registration Performance

**34%**

Increased

**42%**

Remained stable

**13%**

Decreased

**5%**

Hasn't started yet

**5%**

Not sure

### Professional Event Strategy Focus for Pros

Are you considering replacing your single annual conference with multiple smaller regional events?

**Actively planning** to replace single annual conference with multiple smaller regional events for 2025-2026

**10%**

**Considering** multiple smaller regional events for 2026 or later

**16%**

**Maintaining** current annual conference model

**51%**

**Already implemented** multiple regional events

**14%****25%**

are planning or have already implemented changes



02

## Attendance Remains Stable Despite Travel Concerns

- While 77% of Pros report stable or increased conference attendance for 2025, there's still a critical need to address that significant travel concerns persist.

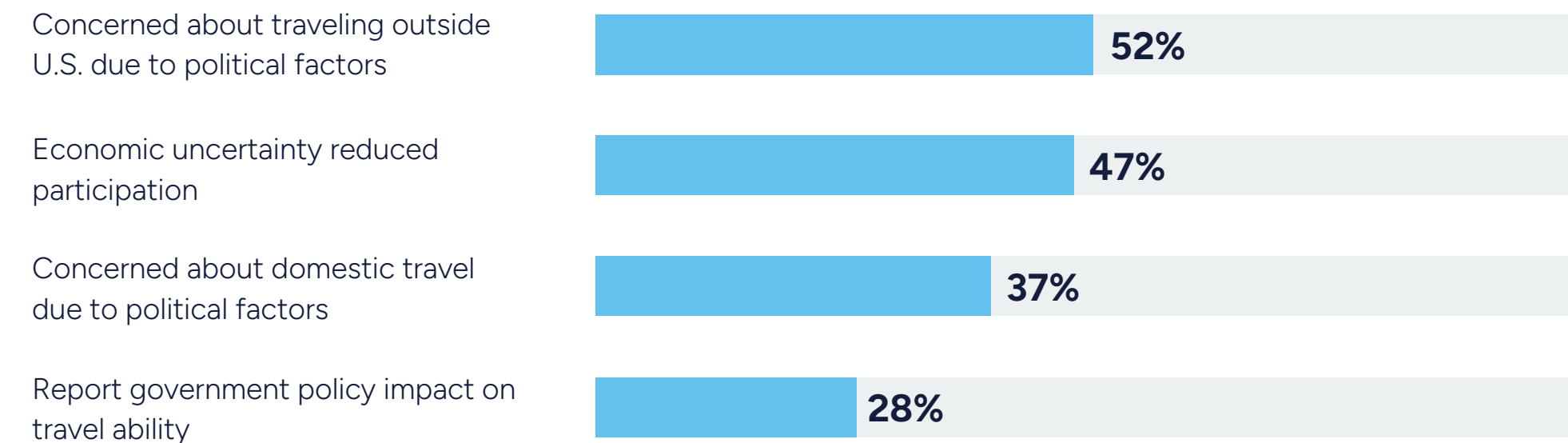
Most Pros report international attendees have expressed U.S. travel trepidations, with half of domestic Members also reporting concern about traveling outside the U.S. due to economic and political factors. Many organizations are adapting through various strategies to address these travel and attendance concerns, which include virtual options, regional satellite events, improving year-round digital engagement, or supporting members with their travel or visas.

### International Attendee Impact (Reported by Pros)

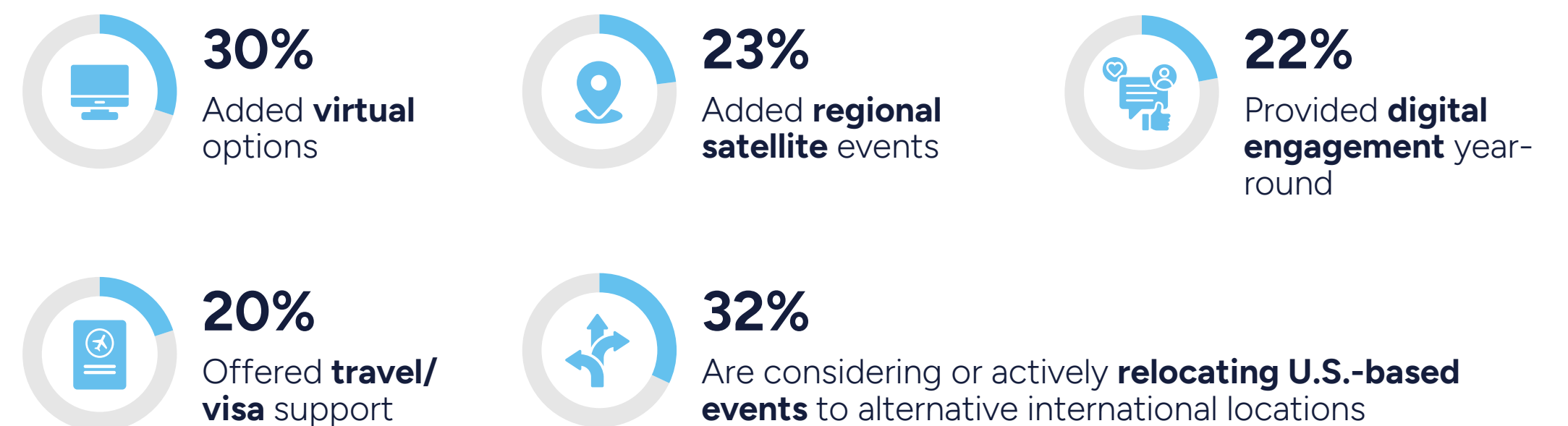
**67%**

of Pros say international attendees expressed at least some concern about traveling to the U.S.

### Domestic Member Travel Concerns



### How Pros Addressed Travel Concerns in 2025





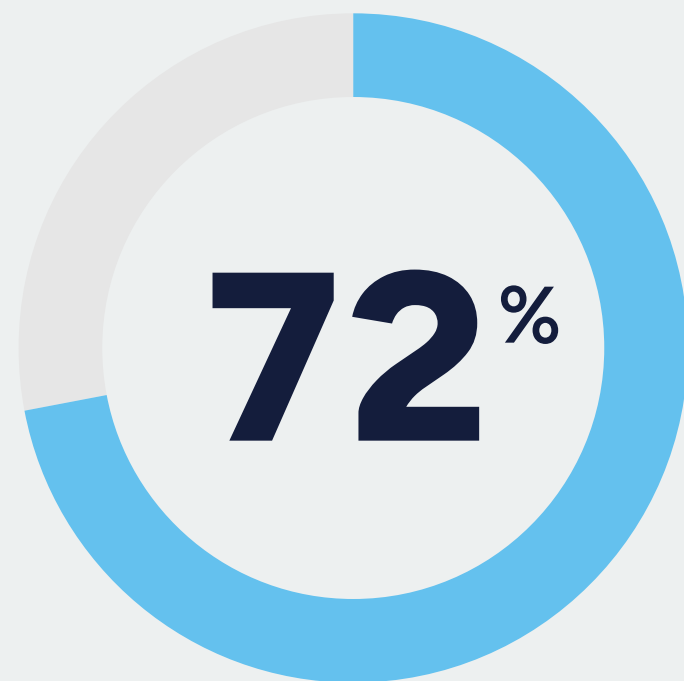


03

## In-Person Events Are Still Preferred Overall, But Pros Should Prioritize Education Sessions to Gain ROI

→ Even amid economic and political impacts, most Members still strongly prefer in-person events over virtual options.

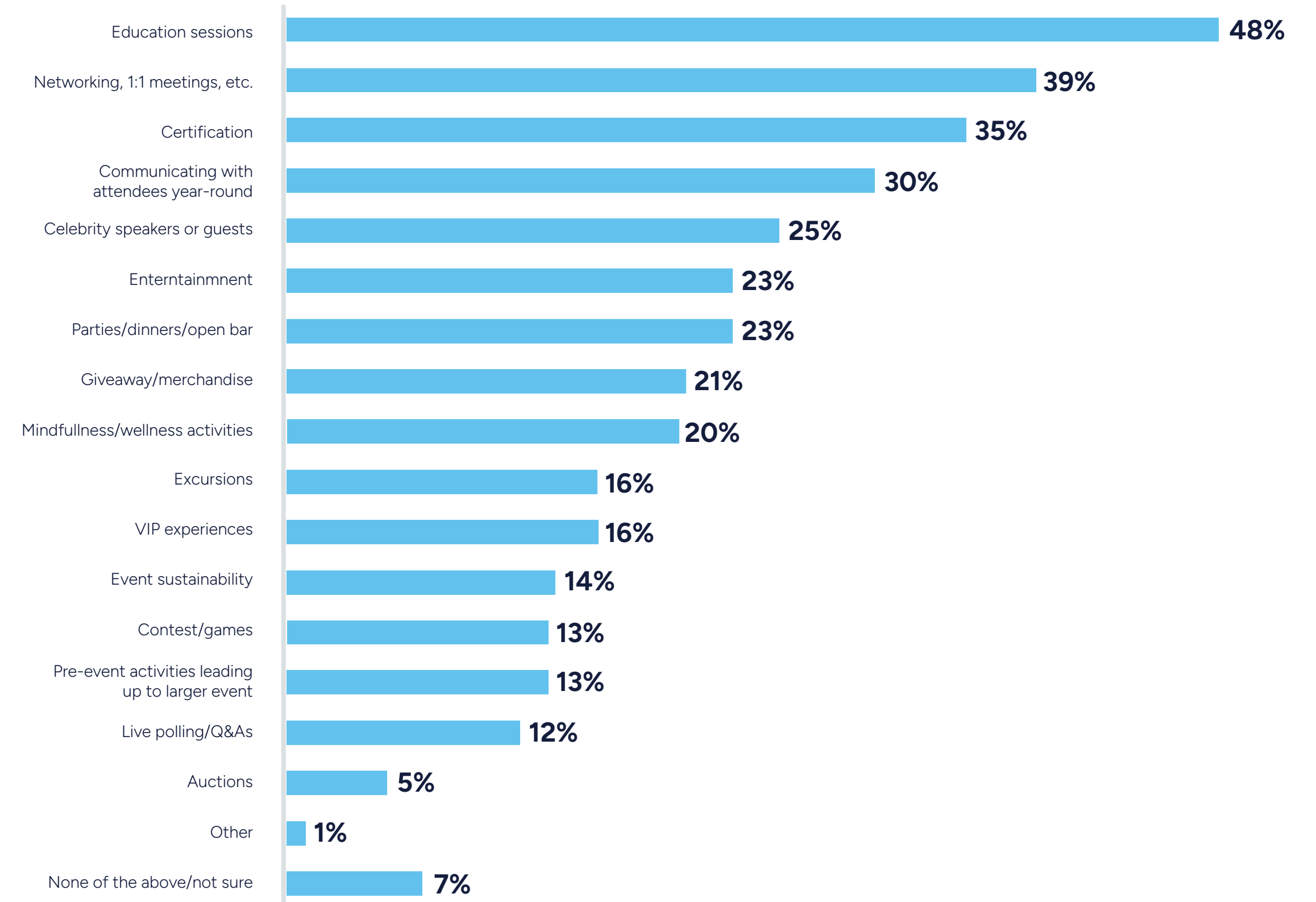
They also mostly value education sessions, networking, and certification from their events (in any format). While Pros are prioritizing increased attendance, revenue, and attendee experiences, they should build professional development and career path support into their event strategies to increase attendance and retention.



of Members **prefer in-person events** over virtual

Members who are satisfied, connected, likely to renew, and promoters of their org are more likely to prefer in-person.

### Most Valuable Aspects of Events for Members



# Conclusion

CONCLUSION

The 2025 research reveals a widening gap between what association professionals prioritize and what members actually value. With more members paying their own dues and evaluating ROI more critically, it’s time for associations to realign their strategies.

The following **six recommendations** offer actionable ways to recruit, retain, and grow—by focusing on career advancement, flexible learning, technology adoption, and member-centric innovation.

1. Career Advancement is a Core Member Value, Not Just a Perk

Members consistently rank career advancement benefits, like job boards, resume reviews, and networking, as top priorities, especially younger and self-paying Members. Yet Pros continue to undervalue these offerings, creating a persistent gap that threatens retention.

➔ ACTIONABLE STRATEGIES

- Elevate career advancement programs from “nice to have” to “need to have.” Promote them as core membership value, not just non-dues revenue.
- Segment offerings by career stage: job opportunities for early careerists, advancement pathways for mid-career, and referrals/networking for late-career members.
- Use AI to personalize career centers, making resources more intuitive and increasing repeat engagement.



2. Fuel Growth Through Multi-Modal Learning

With 72% of Members now required to take professional education, associations have a prime opportunity to become their go-to learning provider. But members want flexibility, relevance, and accessibility.

➔ ACTIONABLE STRATEGIES

- Offer stackable micro-credentials tied to events and workshops.
- Launch peer-to-peer learning pods around trending topics like AI or new regulations.
- Push bite-sized learning into member workflows (e.g., 5-minute videos on member portal homepages).
- Ensure high-quality, on-demand content that rivals commercial platforms.

CONCLUSION

3. Transform Technology into a Winning Advantage

Technology isn't just infrastructure, it's a companion to doing more with less, a driver of member loyalty, and a catalyst for innovation. Members who perceive their organizations as tech-forward report significantly higher satisfaction, connection, and renewal intent. Yet many Pros still underestimate their own tech capabilities and underutilize the tools they already have.



ACTIONABLE STRATEGIES

- Invest in scalable, member-facing systems like LMS, AMS, and AI-powered platforms.
- Treat your tech stack as a strategic asset, not a cost center—especially as budgets tighten.
- Use technology to personalize experiences, automate engagement, and deliver value at scale.
- Ensure your team is trained and empowered to use tech tools to their fullest potential.
- Remember: the possibilities for your organization's use of technology are vast. Make sure you're using them to stay relevant and deliver maximum value to your members.

4. Keep Advancing With AI

AI adoption is accelerating among Members (53% use it at least weekly), and they're comfortable with organizations using it for content creation, marketing, and personalized learning. Yet only 39% of Pros report using AI, and many feel technologically unprepared.



ACTIONABLE STRATEGIES

- Use AI for personalized content delivery, member segmentation, and predictive analytics.
- Integrate AI into career centers, CE programs, and event planning.
- Ensure board support and staff training to drive responsible, strategic AI adoption.
- Communicate clearly about data privacy and member comfort with AI use.



CONCLUSION

5. Rethink Events: Education + Accessibility = ROI

Events remain the #2 revenue source, but Member preferences are shifting. While in-person is still preferred, Members want educational value, regional accessibility, and career relevance.

➔ ACTIONABLE STRATEGIES

- Supplement annual conferences with regional events to address travel concerns.
- Tie micro-credentials to event workshops to boost perceived value.
- Prioritize education sessions and networking over flashy experiences.
- Use event data to personalize follow-up learning paths.



6. Close the Cost-Value Gap Before It Costs You

With 62% of Members now paying their own dues (up from 55%), cost is the top reason for lapsing. Lapsed Members value career benefits even more than current ones and are harder to win back.

➔ ACTIONABLE STRATEGIES

- Offer tiered pricing, renewal incentives, and trial memberships.
- Focus messaging on career advancement, learning, and community—not just advocacy.
- Use data to identify at-risk members and intervene early.
- Ensure tech investments align with member priorities, especially in LMS, AMS, events and career tools.



# How Momentive Can Help

## HOW MOMENTIVE CAN HELP

# Close the Gap Between What You Think Members Want and What They Actually Need

This is where Momentive can support you.

The research reveals that association professionals are working with assumptions that don't match member priorities. You're prioritizing advocacy (which matters) while missing career development opportunities (which drive retention). You're planning annual membership increases while members are losing employer-paid dues. You're cautious about AI while members are already using it weekly at work.

Momentive's ecosystem of association tools helps you:

- ✓ **Connect more** with members through integrated solutions that deliver the career development and flexible programming they actually want.
- ✓ **See what's really happening** with live dashboards and predictive analytics that identify member priorities before they become retention risks.
- ✓ **Deliver career value** through AI-powered job boards and career centers that address the gap in understanding what members need most.
- ✓ **Adapt quickly** with flexible platforms that let you test regional events, launch digital programming, and evolve offerings as member preferences shift.

**Momentive Software amplifies the impact of over 20,000 purpose-driven organizations in more than 30 countries, with over \$11 billion raised and 55 million members served to date.**

Mission-driven nonprofits and associations rely on Momentive's cloud-based software and services to address their most pressing challenges—from engaging their communities to simplifying operations and growing revenue. Designed to help organizations connect more, manage more, and ultimately expect more, Momentive's solutions are built with reliability at the core and strategically focus on fundraising, learning, events, careers, volunteering, accounting, and association management. Momentive partners with organizations that believe "good enough" is never enough—so they can bring on better outcomes for everyone they serve.

Learn more at [momentivesoftware.com](https://momentivesoftware.com)

# Methodology & Appendix



METHODOLOGY

Parallel surveys were administered to Members of “professional membership organizations” and to Professionals (Pros) who work at these organizations. The studies examined attitudes, values, and drivers of member loyalty; how these differ by audience; and where they align and diverge. This year included some tracking and some new questions about professional development and events.



An online survey of 1,032 U.S. members of professional organizations (831 current and 201 lapsed within the last two years) and 220 professionals working in these organizations. Quotas were set for key demographics.



PARTICIPANTS

U.S. members of professional membership organizations and professionals working in these organizations



SAMPLE SIZE

1,032 members (831 current, 201 lapsed) and 220 professionals



FIELDWORK

Conducted online between July 1 and August 5, 2025



RESPONDENTS

Non-probability sample with quotas for demographics; “Members” and “Professionals/Pros” refer only to surveyed participants



APPENDIX

Page 8

Figures 1 & 2. Questions asked: Below is a list of benefits that being a member of a professional membership organization might provide. For each, please indicate how important that benefit is to you. | Earlier you rated the following benefits as important to you. Which benefit is MOST IMPORTANT when you think about renewing your membership? Please select one.

Page 9

Figure 3. Questions asked: Below is a list of benefits that being a member of a professional membership organization might provide. For each, please indicate how important that benefit is to you. | Below is a list of benefits that a professional membership/trade organization might provide to its members. For each, please indicate how important you feel that benefit is to your organization’s members. Would you say it is...

Page 10:

Figure 4 & 5. Question asked: Below is a list of benefits that being a member of a professional membership organization might provide. For each, please indicate how important that benefit is to you.

Page 11:

Figure 6 & 7. Questions asked: Below is a list of benefits that being a member of a professional membership organization might provide. For each, please indicate how important that benefit is to you. | Below is a list of benefits that a professional membership/trade organization might provide to its members. For each, please indicate how important you feel that benefit is to your organization’s members. Would you say it is...

Page 12:

Figure 8. Question asked: How important are each of the following for your organization over the next year?

Pages 13/14:

Figure 9, 10, 11, 12 & 13. Questions asked: In a typical year, what percentage of your organization’s revenue is from each of the following? | How are/were your membership dues paid? | If your organization no longer paid your membership dues and you had to pay the dues on your own, would you ... | Which of the following describes why you are no longer a member of your professional membership organization? Please select all that apply.

Earlier you rated the following benefits as important to you. Which benefit is MOST IMPORTANT when you think about renewing your membership? Please select one. | In the last 12 months, in which of the following ways have you been involved with your professional membership organization? Please select all that apply. | And how valuable are each of the following types of involvement with your professional membership organization?

Pages 15/16:

Figure 14, 15, 16, & 17. Questions asked: Which of the following non-dues revenue streams are you most focused on developing in the next year? Thinking about the events/meetings/conferences/tradeshows your organization is planning in the next 12 months, how much of a priority is each of the following? | Which of the following costs are pressuring your organization’s event budget the most? | Which of the following, if any, are the biggest challenges to achieving your organization’s priorities/goals for your events over the next year?

Page 18:

Figure 18 & 19. Questions asked: In the industry in which you work, are you required to take professional education and training in order to comply with industry standards (i.e., licensure and certification)? | How likely are you to utilize the following professional education and training opportunities in the next 12 months?

Page 19:

Figure 20. Questions asked: How likely are you to utilize the following professional education and training opportunities in the next 12 months? Which of the following professional education and training opportunities do you offer members?

Page 20:

Figure 21. Question asked: Within the last two years, through which of the following organizations or venues have you received professional education and training? Select all that apply. Overall, how would you rate the professional education and training you received from each of the following?

Page 21:

Figure 22, 23, & 24. Questions asked: Have you ever used your professional membership organization’s ONLINE CAREER CENTER/JOB BOARD? How interested are you in receiving the following job/career assistance from your professional membership organization?

APPENDIX

Page 23:

Figure 25. Questions asked: Overall, how satisfied are you with your membership in this professional membership organization? | How likely are you to recommend this professional membership organization? Use a 10-point scale where 10 means you are extremely likely to recommend and 0 means you are not at all likely to recommend the organization. | On a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 means extremely connected and 1 means not connected at all, how connected do you feel to this professional membership organization and the work that it does?

Page 24:

Figure 26, 27 & 28. Questions asked: Now thinking about YOUR PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATION, how would you describe its adoption of new technologies? | How would you rate your professional membership organization’s overall use of technology as it relates to the member experience? | Thinking about the professional membership/trade organization where you work, how would you describe its adoption of new technologies? | How would you rate your professional membership/trade organization’s overall use of technology? | How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? | When it comes to technology, how prepared do you feel your organization is for the future?

Page 25:

Figure 29, 30, & 31. Questions asked: Over the next year, do you expect your IT budget to... | In the next 12 months, will your organization spend more, less, or the same on each of the technologies/solutions it uses? | Which of the following technologies/solutions does your organization use? Select all that apply.

Page 26:

Figure 31, 32, & 33. Questions asked: How often, if at all, are you using artificial intelligence (AI) at work? | Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. | Which of the following technologies/solutions does your organization use? Select all that apply. | Which of the following best describes your board’s position on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) by your organization? | Does your professional membership organization have an artificial intelligence (AI) policy?

Pages 27/28:

Figure 34, 35, & 36. Questions asked: In which of the following ways is your organization using artificial intelligence? Select all that apply. | There are many different ways that organizations can use artificial

intelligence (AI). How comfortable do you feel with your professional membership organization using AI in the following ways?

Page 29:

Figure 37. Question asked: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Page 31:

Figure 38 & 39: Questions Asked. How would you describe your 2025 annual conference’s registration/attendance? | Are you considering replacing your single annual conference with multiple smaller regional events?

Page 32:

Figure 40, 41, 42, & 43. Questions asked: Has your organization experienced any shifts in international member/attendee registration for US-based events since January 2025? | What percentage of your expected international attendees have expressed concerns about traveling to the US? | Are you considering relocating US-based events to alternative international locations? | Which of the following steps have you taken to address international member travel concerns? | Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements about events, courses, and conferences offered by professional membership organizations. Please answer to the best of your knowledge, whether you have attended these kinds of events before or not. | Is your ability to travel to your professional organization’s events impacted by changes to governmental policy that affect your job, employer, and/or industry?

Page 33:

Figure 44 & 45. Questions asked: Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements about events, courses, and conferences offered by professional membership organizations. Please answer to the best of your knowledge, whether you have attended these kinds of events before or not. | Which of the following, if any, do you find the most valuable during annual conferences/tradeshows from your professional membership organization? Select all that apply.