

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FutureMakers Coalition conducts the Workforce Employer Survey annually and uses the data to inform its Southwest Florida (SWFL) network, specifically our education partners, about employer needs and opportunities to better work together to ensure the desired qualified workforce is available to the region's employers. The Survey was broadly distributed to a variety of SWFL businesses and organizations via direct email and social media, as well as via a link on the FutureMakers Coalition homepage, between late-July and early-September 2024. FutureMakers Coalition had two important goals for the 2024 Workforce Employer Survey: 1.) to reach as many SWFL organizations and businesses as possible; and 2.) to represent the important SWFL industry segments so the results accurately reflect the diverse SWFL workforce/employer environment. We are pleased that both of those goals were achieved.

Ninety-five organizations responded to the 2024 Workforce Employer Survey, which is slightly below last year's (2023) total of 101 businesses and organization.¹ Among the 93 organizations that provided information about their employees, approximately 59% were small employers (defined for the purposes of this report as having 100 full-time employees or less) and 41% were large employers (more than 100 employees). The SWFL organizations that responded to the 2024 Survey represent a broad mix of industry segments, including representation from the Healthcare or Social Services/Assistance (24%), Education (20%), Other Technical and Professional Services (14%), Manufacturing (9%), Government (8%), Real Estate, Rental and Leasing (6%), Transportation/Logistics (6%) segments. Organizations in the Construction, including the trades (2%), Accommodation/Hospitality/Food Services (2%), and Retail Trade (1%) segments, which are among the largest employers in SWFL, were underrepresented in the 2024 Survey.

A combined 87% of the surveyed organizations reported that it is "very likely" or "likely" that recruiting and hiring new, qualified employees will be a priority in 2024. Similarly, as organizations grow their staffs, a combined 89% of all responding SWFL employers replied that it is "very likely" or "likely" that improving the training of new or existing employees will be a priority in the next six months. More importantly and speaking to FutureMakers Coalition's mission, 41% of the organizations indicated that "yes" they would pay a **higher** starting salary to potential employees who have a post-high school credential (degree), certificate, or industry-recognized certification. Thirty-nine percent stated that the starting salary would depend on the specific job requirements and candidate, while 20% of the organizations stated that "no", they would not pay a higher starting salary to potential employees who have a post-high school credential (degree), certificate, or industry-recognized certification.

¹The 2024 Survey results may not be completely comparable to the 2023 Survey results since a different mix of organizations responded to the Surveys between the two years.

When asked why employees left their organization, the responding organizations reported “new position offered more money” (63%), “moved out of the region” (59%) and the “cost of housing too high” (50%) as the top three reasons. The impact of Hurricane Ian (16%) continues to play a role (although decreasing from past surveys) in why employees left the responding organizations.

Conversely, in an effort to attract and retain qualified employees, 93% percent of the organizations reported that, in addition to an employee’s salary, the organization offers additional employee benefits. Among all organizations that offer employee benefits in addition to a salary, the most offered benefits included health benefits (91%), personal time off (84%), and paid vacation (83%). It is interesting to note that compared to last year’s Survey results, the proportion of organizations offering housing cost assistance increased from 5% in 2023 to 16% in 2024. However, over half of the organizations (56%) indicated that financial assistance for housing would be “very helpful” toward assisting their organizations in recruiting, hiring, or retaining qualified employees. The findings related to housing above reflect the evolving needs of the SWFL workforce and one of the biggest challenges businesses are having in recruiting (and retaining) qualified employees to the region.

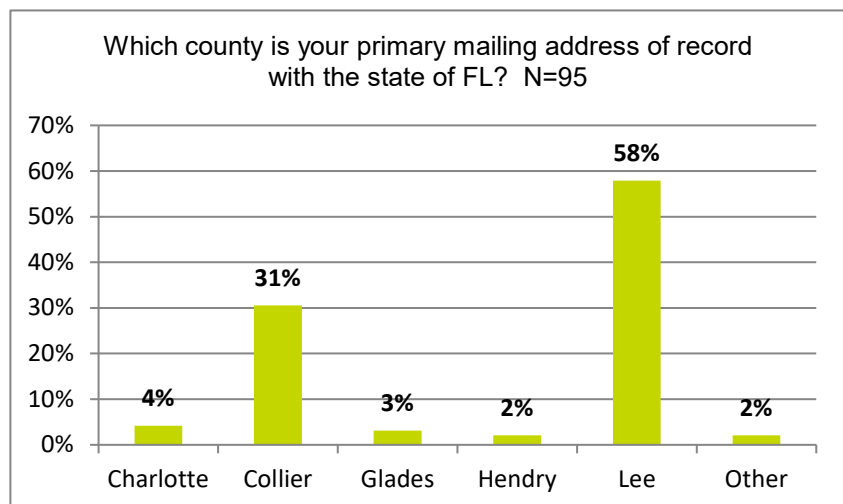
Sixty-six percent of the organizations reported that they partner or collaborate with one or more of SWFL’s post-secondary educational institutions to assist in finding, recruiting, and/or training qualified employees. Offering student internships/preceptorships/co-ops (74%) and participating in recruiting activities (69%) were the most often reported partnerships or collaborations.

INTRODUCTION

FutureMakers Coalition conducts the Workforce Employer Survey annually and uses the data to inform its Southwest Florida (SWFL) network, specifically our education partners, about employer needs and opportunities to better work together to ensure the desired qualified workforce is available to the region’s employers. The last few years have brought many challenges to Southwest Florida’s employers (the 2020-21 COVID-19 pandemic and Hurricane Ian). As the region’s recovery continues, many challenges remain. Despite historic low unemployment rates in Florida and across the USA, many workers still have not returned to the workforce and employers are having problems finding and hiring qualified employees. Inflation, including the costs to rent or own housing, has nearly wiped out any of the gains in average hourly wages. This 2024 Workforce Employer Survey attempts to better understand the recruiting, hiring, and training approaches and challenges your organization must overcome to find qualified employees. The Survey was broadly distributed to a variety of SWFL businesses and organizations via direct email and social media, as well as via a link on the FutureMakers Coalition homepage, between late-July and early-September 2024.

RESULTS

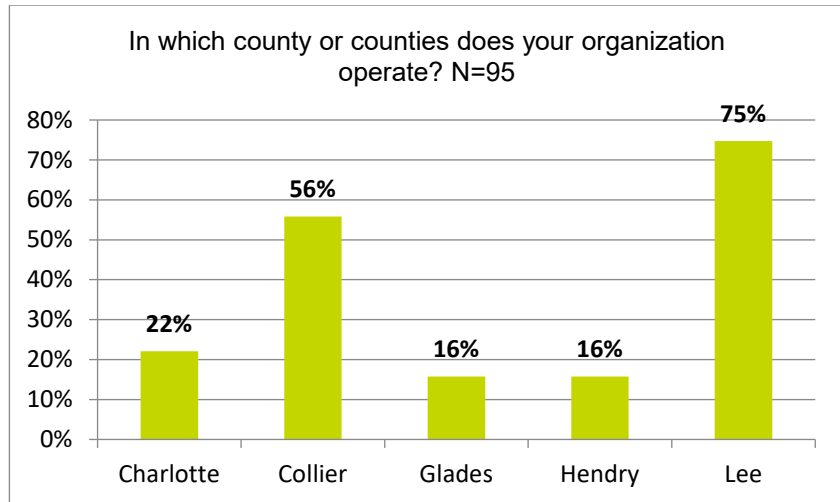
Ninety-five organizations and businesses responded to the 2024 Workforce Employer Survey, which is slightly fewer than last year’s (2023) total of 101 organizations and businesses.² Not every organization answered every question, therefore the charts provide the “N” = the number of organizations that responded to the specific question.

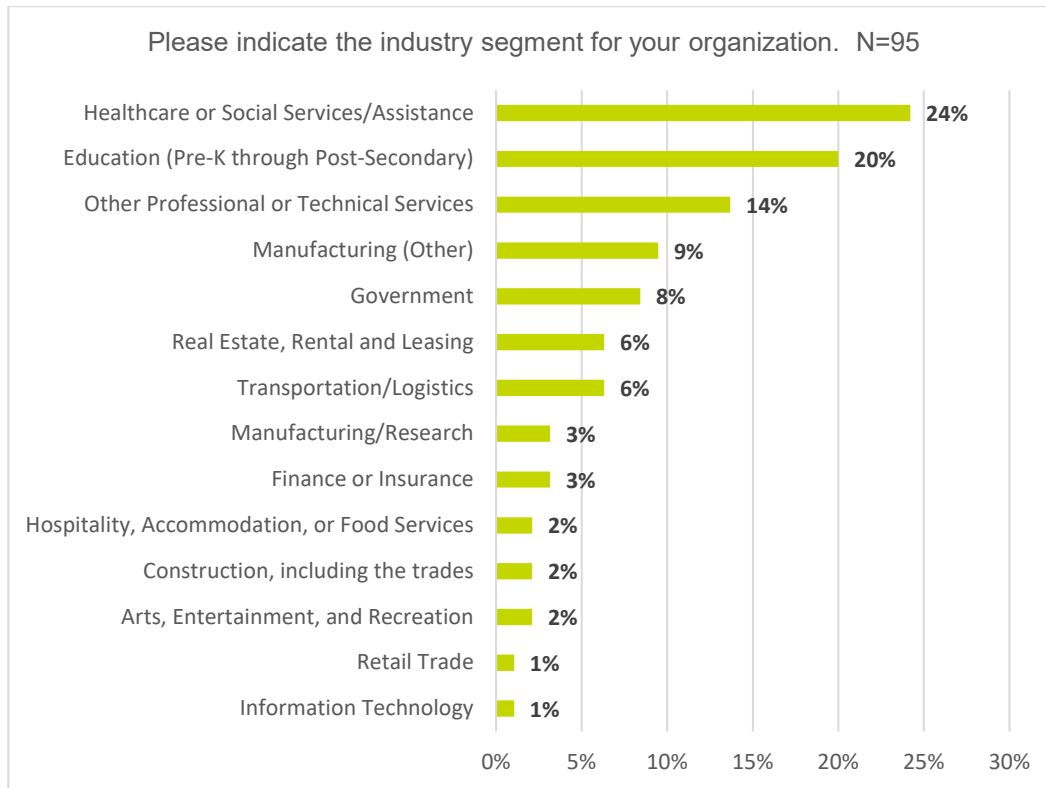


² The 2023 Survey results may not be completely comparable to the 2024 Survey results since a different mix of organizations responded to the Surveys between the two years.

The participating organizations reported that Lee and Collier Counties had the highest concentrations of home (main) offices (58% and 31%, respectively) while Hendry and Glades Counties had the lowest concentrations of home offices (3% and 2% respectively). One organization reported having main offices in more than one SWFL county; one organization reported having the main office in Broward County.

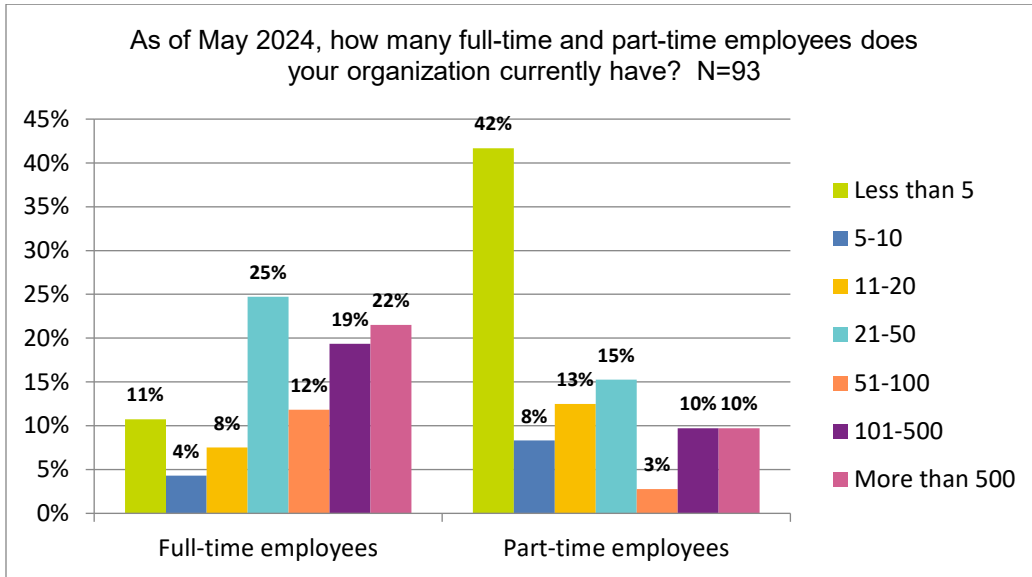
Almost all of the organizations reported having operations in or serving more than one SWFL county.



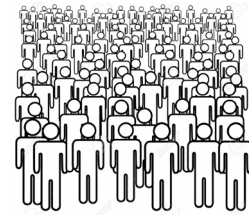
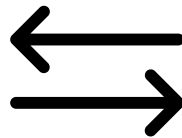
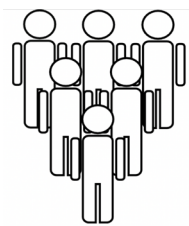


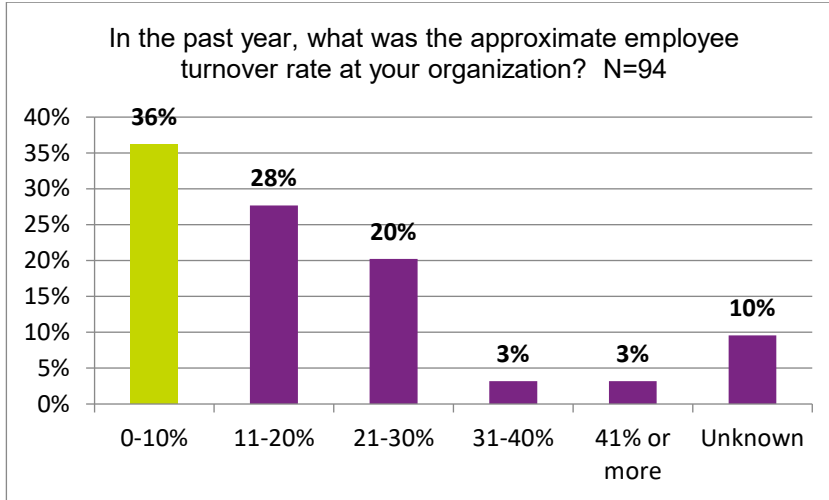
The SWFL organizations that responded to the 2024 Survey represent a similar mix of industry segments compared to the 2023 Survey. Healthcare or Social Services/Assistance (24%) remains as the largest proportion of responding organizations, followed by Education (20%), and Other Professional or Technical Services (14%). Responding organizations in the Accommodation/Hospitality/Food Services (2%) and Retail Trade (1%) segments, which are among the largest employers in SWFL³, were underrepresented in the 2024 Survey since distributing surveys to the many individual businesses in these segments is challenging.

³ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages*

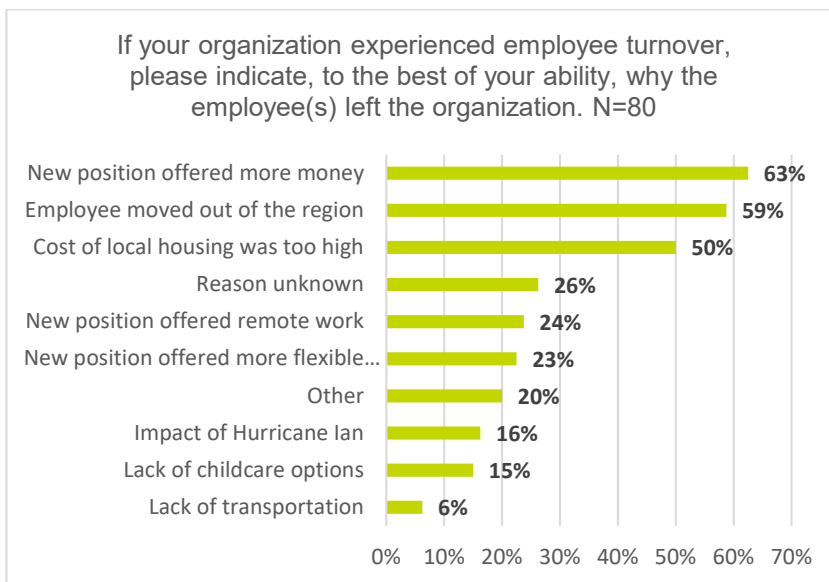


Ninety-three organizations in total responded to this question with all (93/93) reported having full-time employees and 72/93 (77%) reported having part-time employees. Interestingly, 10% of the responding organizations with part-time employees reported having more than 500 part-time employees. The largest proportion of the responding organizations with full-time employees (25%) reported having 21-50 full-time employees. Forty-two percent of responding organizations with part-time employees reported having less than 5 part-time employees.





Just of one-third (36%) of responding SWFL organizations reported employee turnover rates between 0% and 10%. According to most experts, a turnover rate of 10% or less is considered ideal.⁴



When the SWFL organizations could suggest the reasons why employees left their organizations, the highest reported reasons for leaving were the new position offered more money (63%), moved out of the region (59%) and the cost of housing (to rent or to own) was too high (50%).



These top three reasons in 2024 were the same as in the 2023 report. Reasons in the Other (20%) category included retirement, going back to school, and new opportunity/change of career.

⁴<https://www.creditdonkey.com/average-turnover-rate.html#turnover-rate>



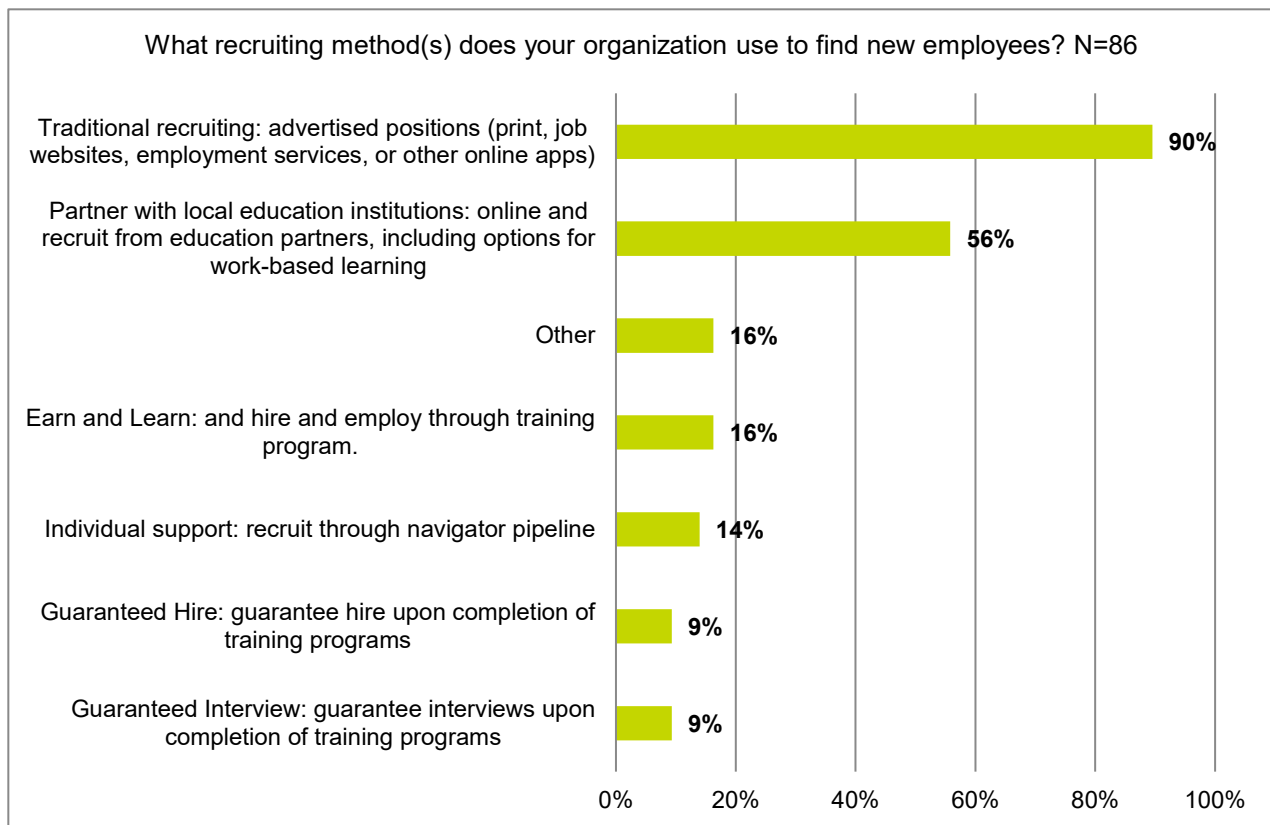
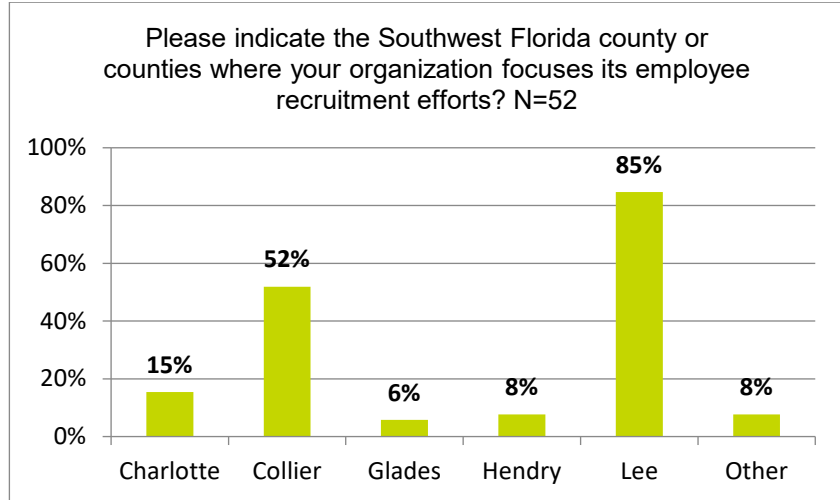
In the next 6 months, as SWFL continues its long recovery from Hurricane Ian, a combined 87% of the surveyed organizations (86% in 2023) reported that it is “very likely” or “likely” that recruiting and hiring new, qualified employees will be a priority in 2024. Only a combined 6% of organizations reported that it is “unlikely” or “very unlikely” that recruiting and hiring new, qualified employees will be a priority in the next six months of 2024.



Similarly, as organizations grow their staffs, a combined 89% (90% in 2023) of the SWFL employers replied that it is “very likely” or “likely” that improving the training of new or existing employees will be a priority in the next six months.

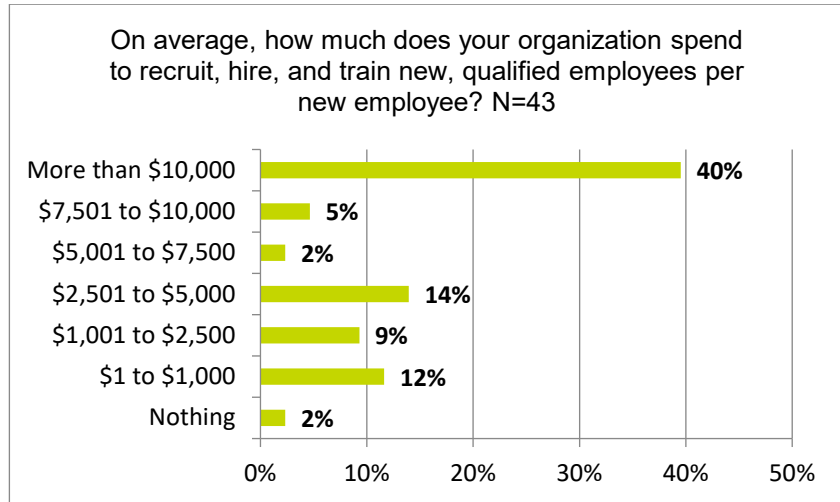


Over half (58%) of the SWFL organizations reported that they focus their employee recruitment efforts across the 5-county region. Recruitment efforts, however, tend to be focused most in Lee County (85%) with the lowest recruitment focus in Glades County (6%). Responding organizations also reported recruitment efforts in Sarasota, Manatee, and Palm Beach counties.

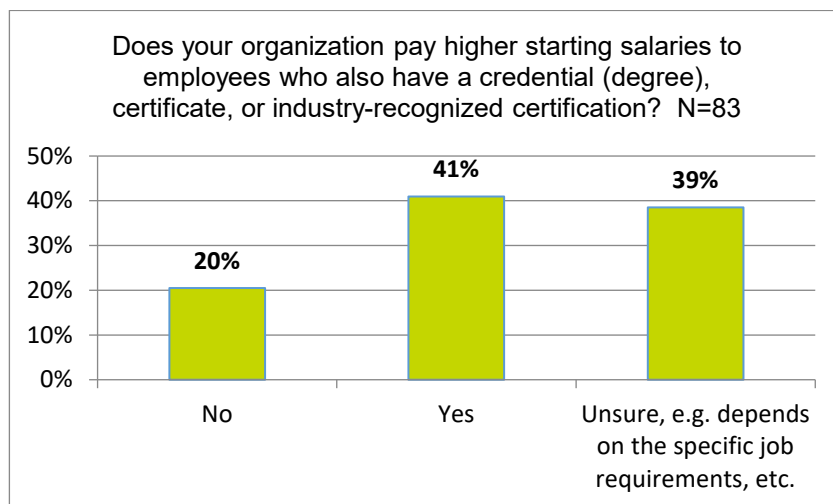
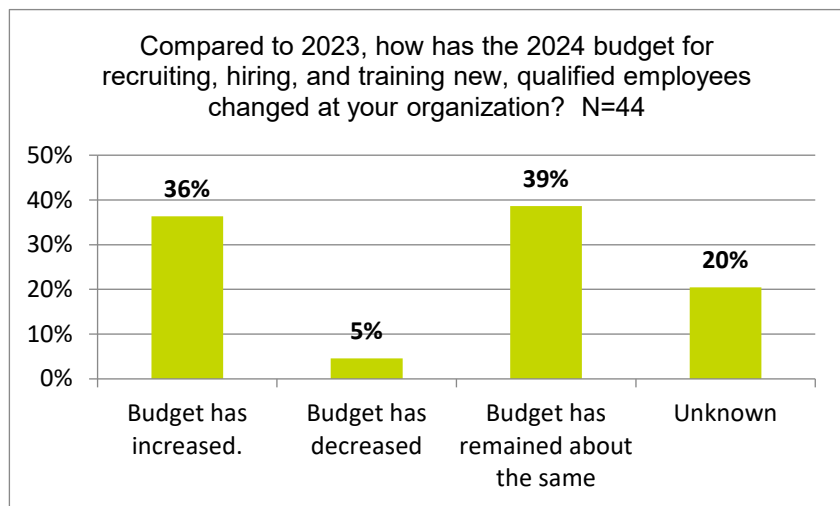


A large majority (90%) of the responding SWFL organizations reported using traditional recruiting services, followed by partnering with local educational institutions (56%). Other responses included word of mouth, employee referrals, social media, and networking (including LinkedIn). Most employers noted using more than one method.

Among the SWFL organizations that responded to the question, 54% indicated that “yes” they have an annual budget for recruiting, hiring, and training new, qualified employees. Among those employers reporting a budget, 40% indicate that they spend more than \$10,000 per new employee (up from 28% in 2023). Only 2% of reporting organizations reported spending nothing.



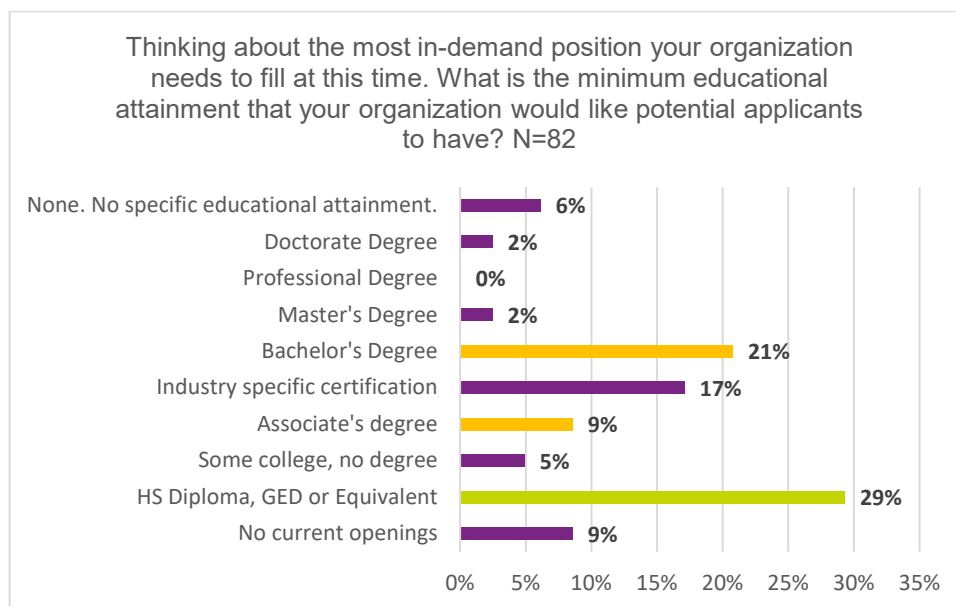
Furthermore, 36% of the organizations reported that their annual budgets for recruiting, hiring, and training new, qualified employees have increased since 2023 (down from 56%).



When asked about starting salaries, 41% of the responding organizations indicated that “yes” they would pay a higher starting salary to potential employees who have a credential (degree), certificate, or industry-recognized certification.

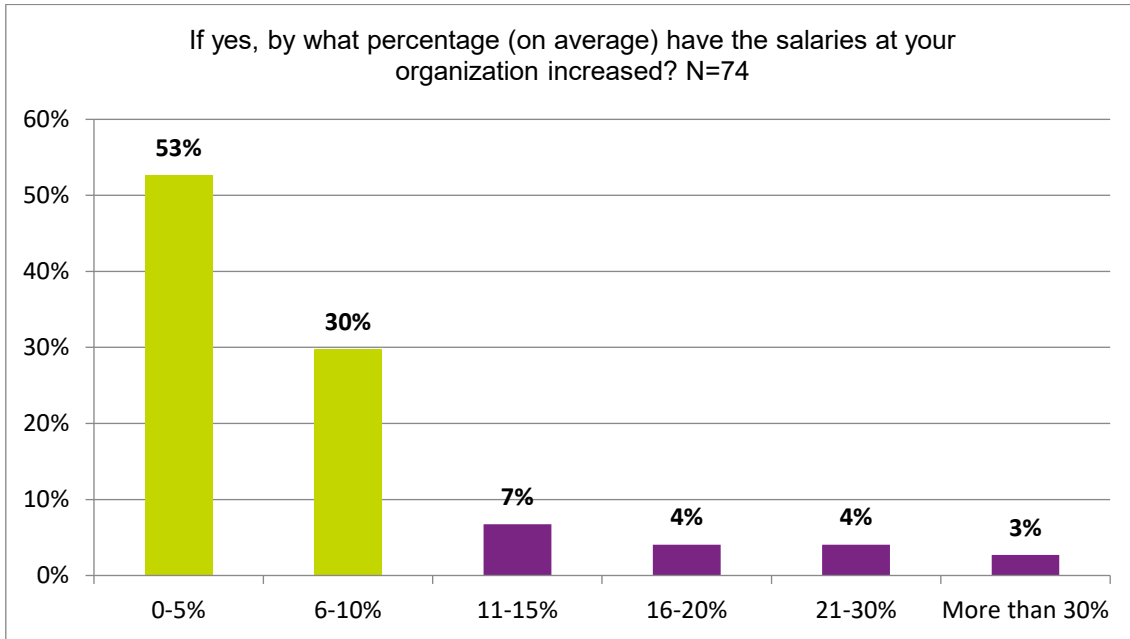


SWFL organizations are hiring for positions across the entire spectrum of levels, with 76% reporting entry level/forward facing positions. Twelve percent of the responding organizations indicated that they are not currently hiring.



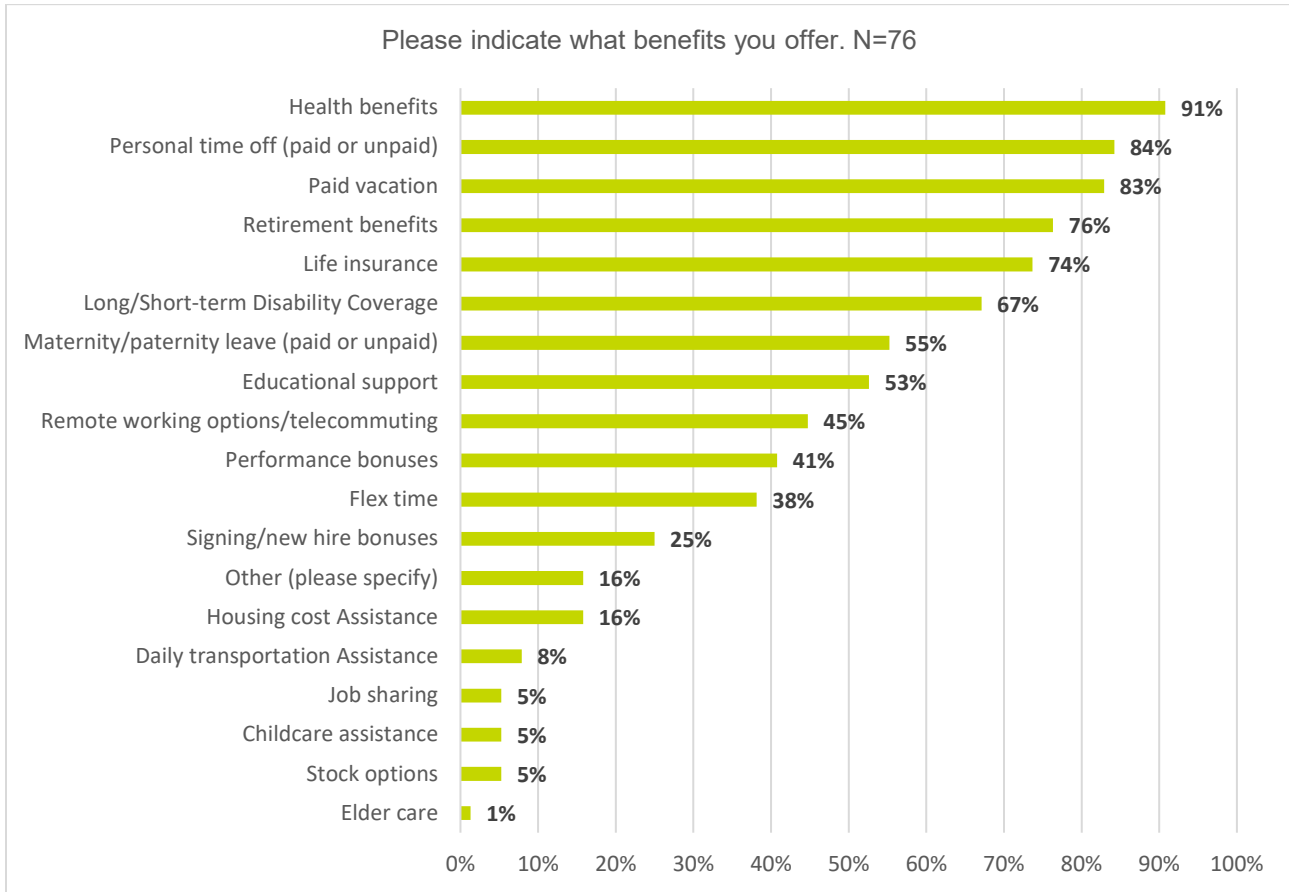
When the organizations considered their most in-demand position, 29% reported that a HS diploma, GED, or equivalent is the minimal educational attainment that is required. A combined 30% of the responding organizations reported requiring some degree (Associate’s or Bachelor’s) or an industry-

specific certification. Only 6% of responding organizations reported no specific educational attainment is required.




Almost all responding organizations (93%) reported increasing their employees' wages in the past year. Among those organizations that reported increasing their employees' wages, a combined 83% reported increasing wages between 0-10%.

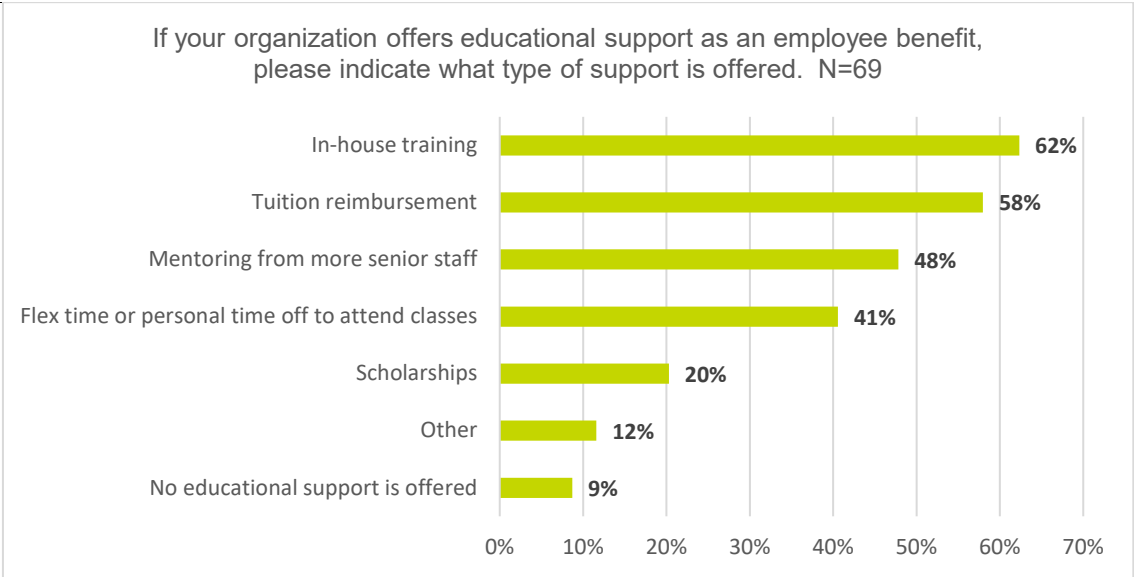




Ninety-three percent of the responding organizations reported that, in addition to an employee’s salary, the organization offers additional employee benefits. Among all organizations that offer employee benefits in addition to a salary, the most offered benefits included health benefits (91%), personal time off (84%), and paid vacation (83%). In the other category, employee benefits include profit sharing, mileage, gym membership, and professional organization memberships.

The percent of employers offering education opportunities is one of the outcomes tracked by the Persistence and Completion Team. At the time of publication of the Annual Educational and Workforce Outcomes Report, the data was not available. Data for this outcome is presented below.

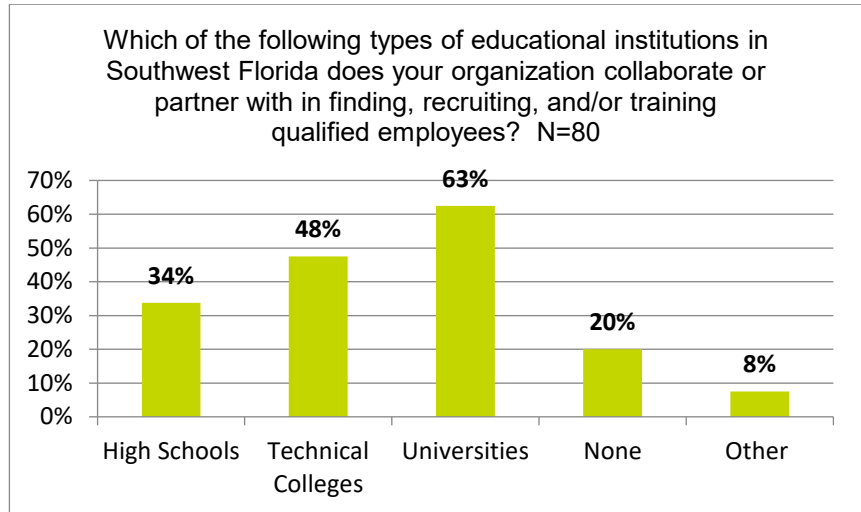
	Indicator		Measure	Trending
	Returning Adults Percent employers offering education opportunities	SWFL	89.9%	↓



Among all responding organizations that offer educational support to their employees, the most offered support included in-house training (62%), tuition reimbursement (58%), and mentoring from more senior staff (48%). Other educational support included professional continuing education, preceptorships and internships, company paid conference/seminar fees, and industry continuing education.



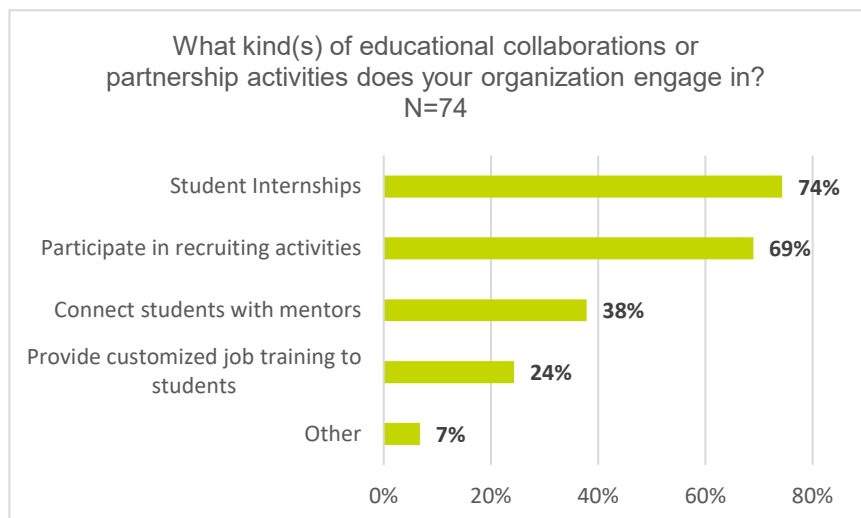
Sixty-three percent of the organizations reported that they partner or collaborate with one or more of SWFL’s universities to assist in finding, recruiting, and/or training qualified employees. Twenty percent of responding organizations indicated that they partner with none of the regional educational institutions. The “Other” category includes community colleges, adult education centers, the Heights Center, and the Fire Academy.



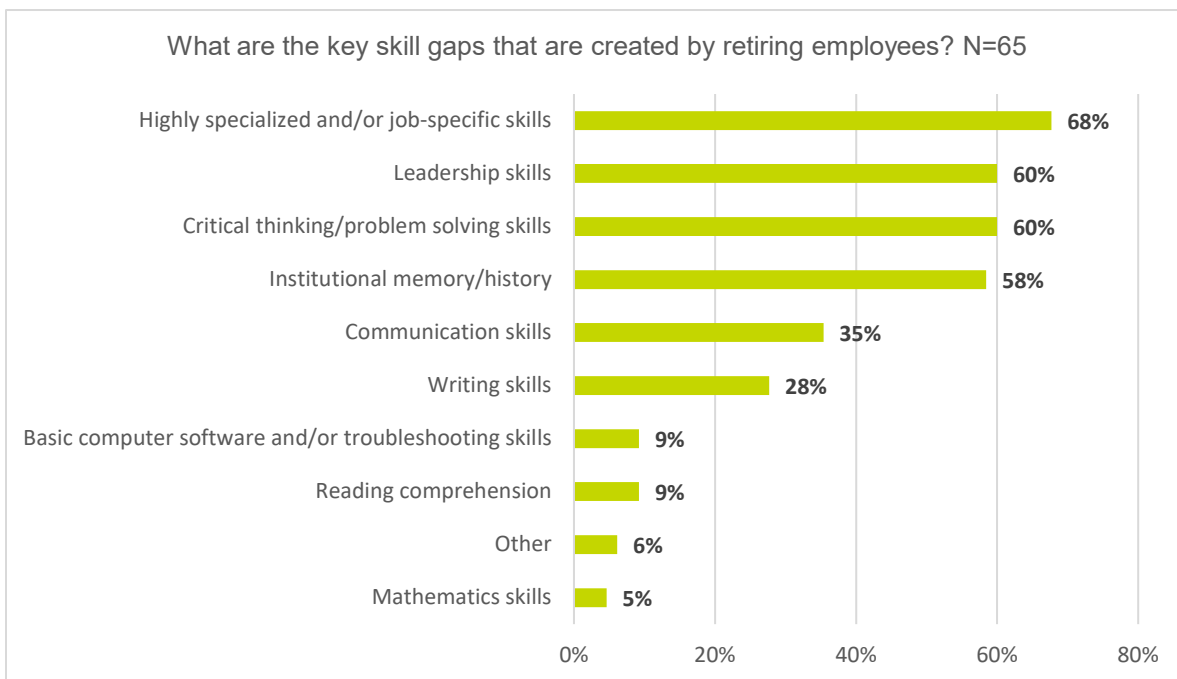
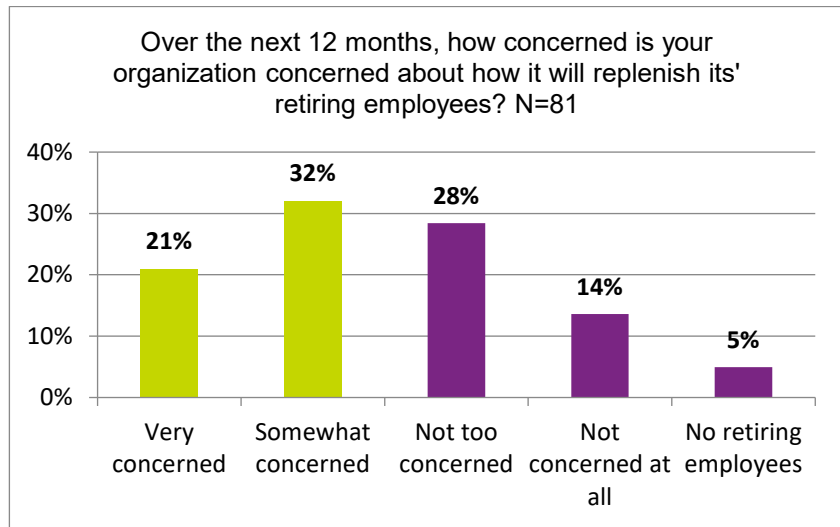
The percent of employers working with post-secondary institutions is one of the outcomes tracked by the Persistence and Completion Team. At the time of publication of the Annual Educational and Workforce Outcomes Report, the data was not available. Data for this outcome is presented below.

	Indicator		Measure	Trending
	Business Partnerships Percent employers working with postsecondary institutions	SWFL	65.6%	

Among responding organizations, offering student internships / preceptorships / co-ops (74%) and participating in recruiting activities (69%) were the most often reported partnerships or collaborations with regional educational institutions. Other collaborations included job coaching and posting jobs on school job boards.

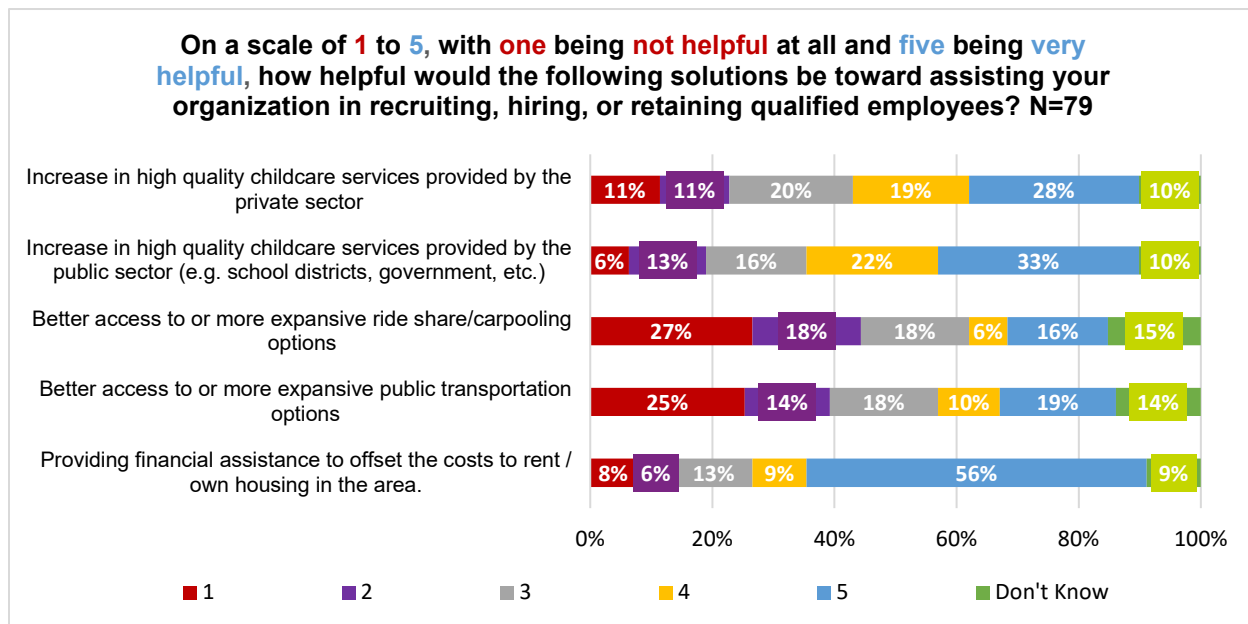
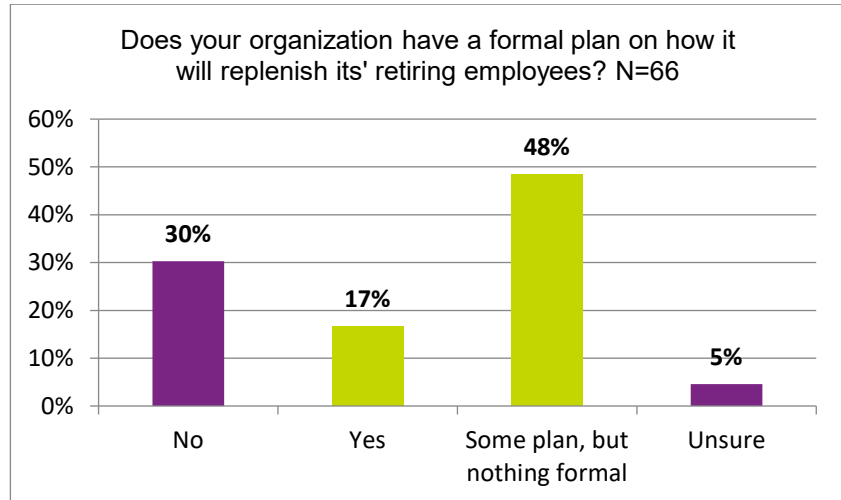


A combined 53% of responding organizations indicated that they are “very concerned” or “somewhat concerned” about replenishing their retiring employees.



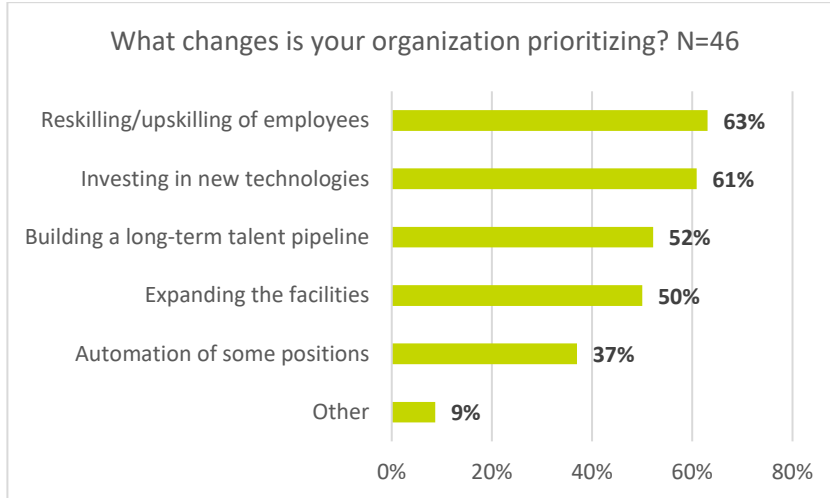
Across all responding organizations, highly specialized or job-specific skills (68%), leadership skills (60%), critical thinking/problem solving skills (60%), and loss of institutional memory/history (58%) were identified most often by the organization as the skill gaps created by retiring employees. Other skill gaps identified by the organizations included teaching skills and professionalism/accountability.

A combined 65% of responding organizations stated that “yes” they have a formal plan to replenish their retiring employees or “some plan, but nothing formal”. Thirty percent of the organizations reported “no” as to whether they have a formal plan to replenish their retiring employees.



Over half of the organizations (56%) indicated that financial assistance for housing would be “very helpful” toward assisting their organizations in recruiting, hiring, or retaining qualified employees. Childcare services, both from the public sector (33%) and the private sector (28%), were also ranked “very helpful” by about one-third of the organizations. Both more public transportation and ride share/car pooling options were viewed as “not helpful” among 25% and 27% of the organizations, respectively.





Fifty-nine percent of the responding organizations reported prioritizing changes to their structure or processes. Reskilling/upskilling employees (63%) and investing in new technologies (61%) were the most reported changes that organizations are prioritizing. Other priorities include succession planning for a retiring CEO/President and to flatten the organization.

Finally, the surveyed organizations were given the opportunity to provide their thoughts on any issues not covered in the Survey. The specific responses were received from 30 of the organizations can be categorized in three main categories:

- Cost of living/affordable housing
 - ✓ Huge issues are housing availability and affordability.
 - ✓ It was already touched upon, but the cost of living has grown faster than salaries. More affordable housing options are needed as well as more affordable day care options.
 - ✓ Lack of affordable housing and the local costs for groceries and restaurants is higher than other areas of the state and country.
 - ✓ Lack of affordable workforce housing is THE number one issue and will make the most difference, if finally addressed in SWFL.
 - ✓ Cost of living is the biggest boundary. Also health care. Hard for smaller business to afford to offer health care support to employees - publicly financed health care can't come soon enough.
 - ✓ The county and city continue to tax and find fees that are causing financial issues.
- English as a second language
 - ✓ We find many qualified candidates with limited English - we are fortunate to have many Spanish speaking employees who can assist with translation, but English classes would be a great option.
 - ✓ English as second language challenges. esl courses more readily available, available online, easier to find.
 - ✓ Having an ESL course that is specific to 2 of our divisions: landscape and HOA Janitorial.
- Creative solutions to find qualified employees
 - ✓ We would like to learn how to create our own pipeline of employees.

- ✓ Additional funding to hire more staff.
- ✓ We need better community collaboration. Perhaps active round tables?
- ✓ Centralized resource of organizations that offer employee and leadership development opportunities.

Several other comments were received that include work ethic (We need people who are willing to work full time (40) hours per week and come to work on time, when scheduled, and stay the entire shift; globally address the challenges of impact on morals with excessive wealth), the shortage of teachers (The largest challenge is a nation-wide shortage of teachers. Universities are experiencing a decreased number of education graduates which has presented a slower pipeline of candidates.), and Artificial Intelligence (AI).