

Competitive Wages and Benefits Survey of North Country Libraries, Archives, and Museums: Analysis

A NNYLN Collaborative Inquiry

Why? Who? How?

- To address the challenges of working in libraries, archives, and museums in the North Country
- Collaborative Inquiry Group composition
- 7-County Survey
 - Quantitative data (*salaries, benefits, education, etc.*) and
 - Qualitative (*affordability, burnout, fostering morale*) data that puts the numbers into context.

The caveats

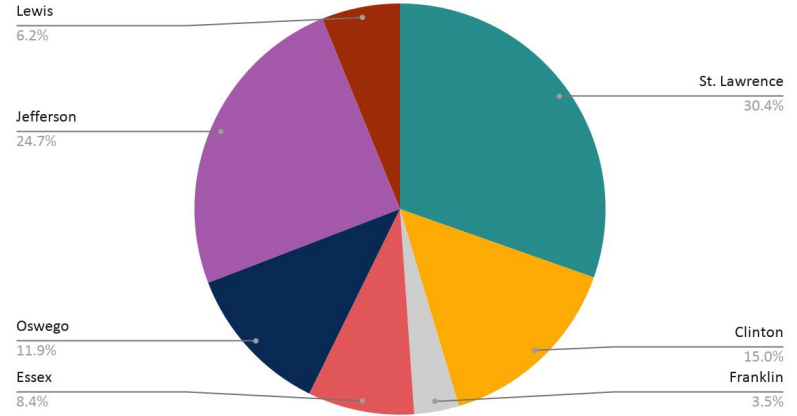
- Balancing transparency and anonymity in the presentation of the data (no public data set)
- We're not experts
- Improve future iterations
- Limitations of the data and the team (sample size, self-report, free-response)
- Interpretations, not hard and fast conclusions

Portrait of respondents

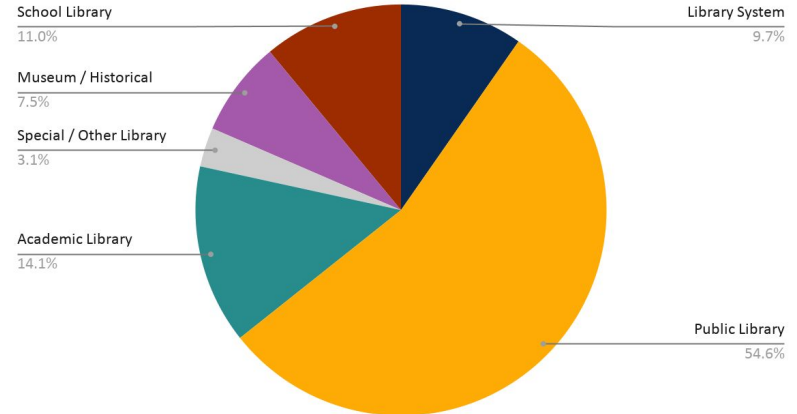
Who responded

- 233 total responses (5 invalidated) → 227 respondents in data set
- Institution types surveyed:
 - 99 public libraries
 - 10 academic libraries
 - 5 school library systems, and their member school libraries
 - Special/other libraries (including hospital libraries)
 - Museums, historical associations, and archives

What county are you employed in?



Institution Type



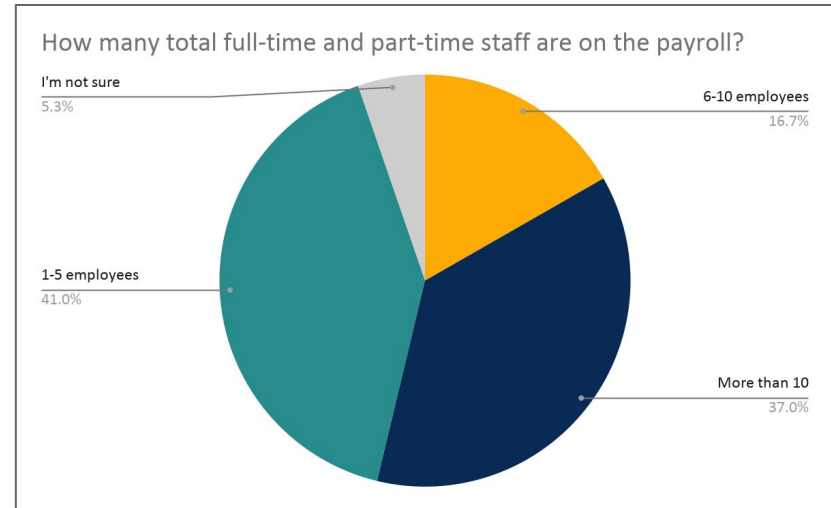
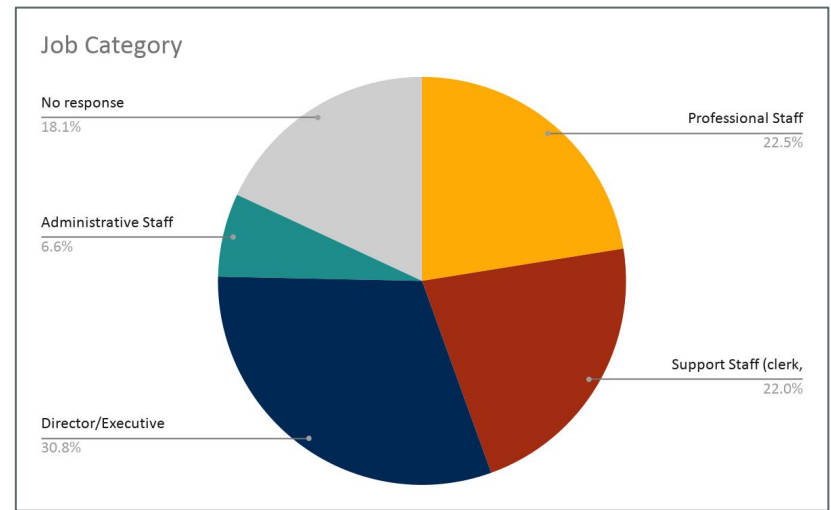
Who responded

Job Category

- Support: clerk, assistant, aide, page, technician
- Administrative: bookkeeping, finance, IT, business/office manager, administrative assistant, facilities, member management
- Professional: librarian, archivist, consultant, library media specialist, educator
- Director/Executive Director/Library Manager

Staffing

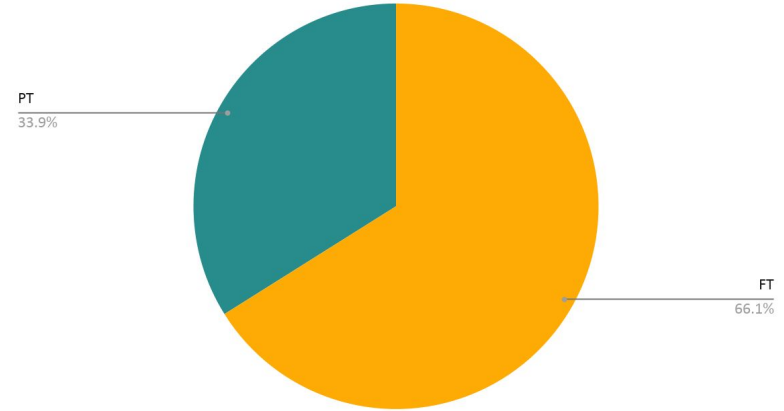
- Big clusters on either end of spectrum in our region, seem to be either very small or “big”



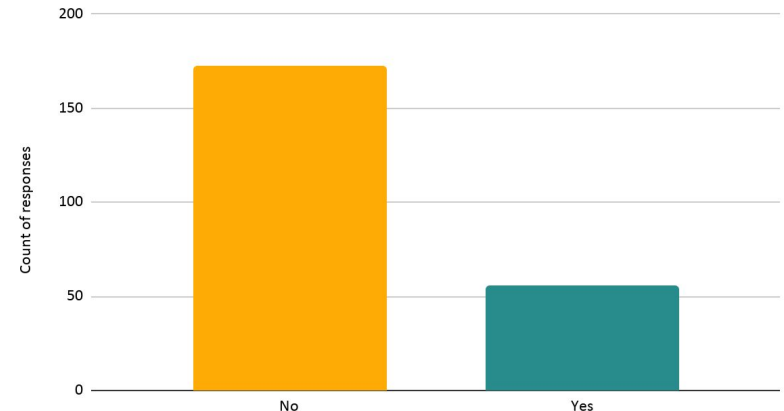
Who responded

- Employed IRS definition to classify part-time vs. full-time
 - “a full-time employee is, for a calendar month, an employee employed on average at least 30 hours of service per week”
(<https://www.irs.gov/affordable-care-act/employers/identifying-full-time-employees>)
- Civil service
- Union membership
 - 32% were union members, with over 75% indicating satisfaction with union

Part-time v Full-time



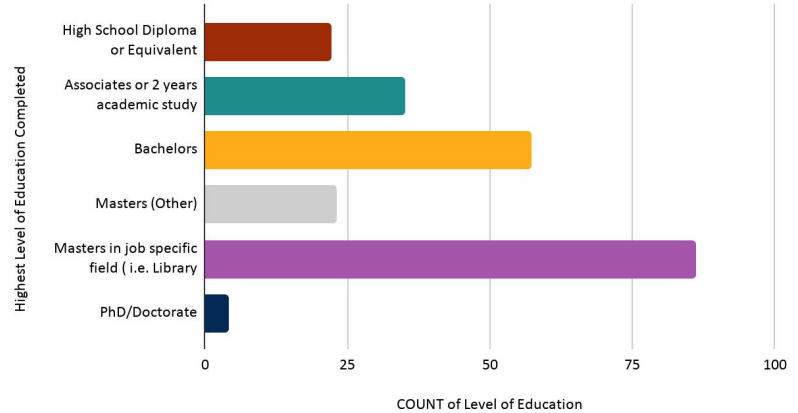
Is this a civil service position?



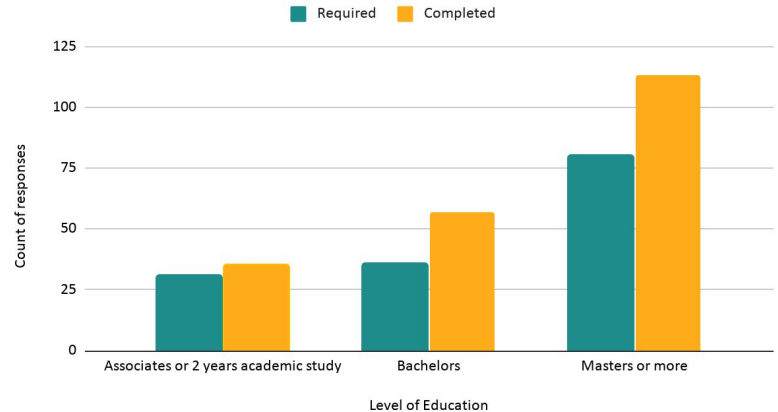
Who responded

- Strong representation of people in MLIS-level positions in full dataset
- Some workers may be overqualified for the positions they're filling

Highest Level of Education Completed (227 responses)



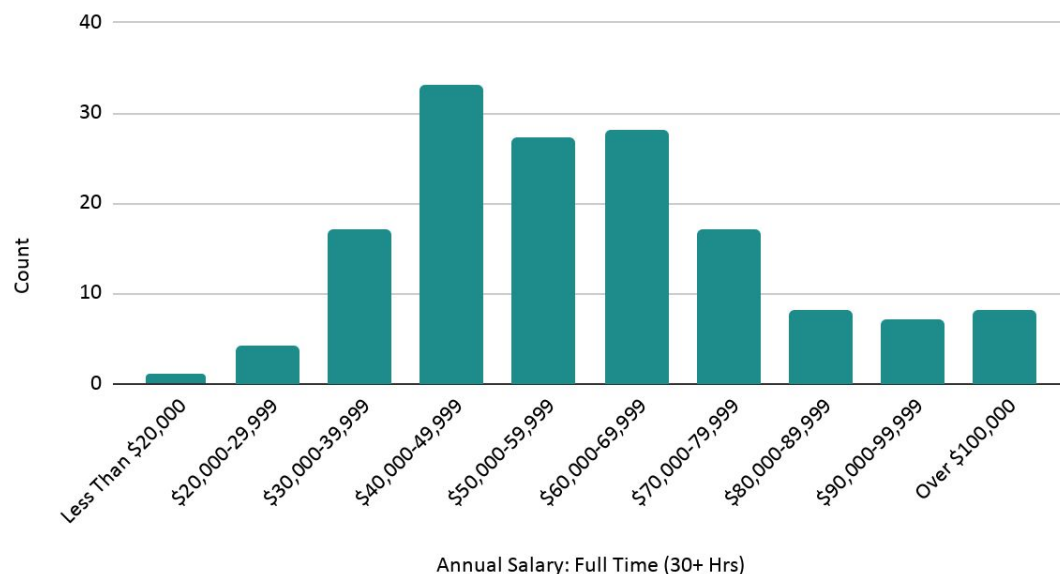
Level of Education Required for Position vs Highest Level Completed



Compensation

Salary distribution (*Full-Time*)

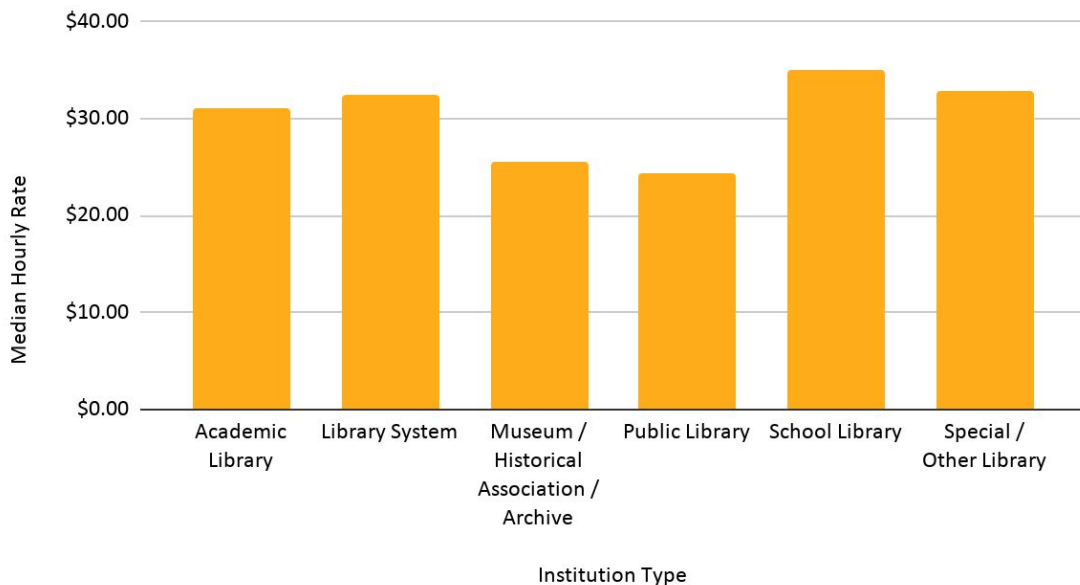
Annual Full-Time Salary Distribution (150 responses)



- This is a broad look at our field in the region and will be useful for a comparison in subsequent years of the survey.
 - National/State Data, May 2025:
 - US Median Annual Wage: \$68,270
 - NY Median Annual Wage: \$78,590
- *from [BLS May 2025 OEWS Profile for "Librarians and Media Collections Specialists"](#)*
- Note: The "less than \$20,000" response corresponded to a respondent who likely is not employed on a 12-month contract (school?).
 - We will change wording in coming years for greater accuracy in calculating salaries and hourly wages

Full-time median hourly rate by institution type

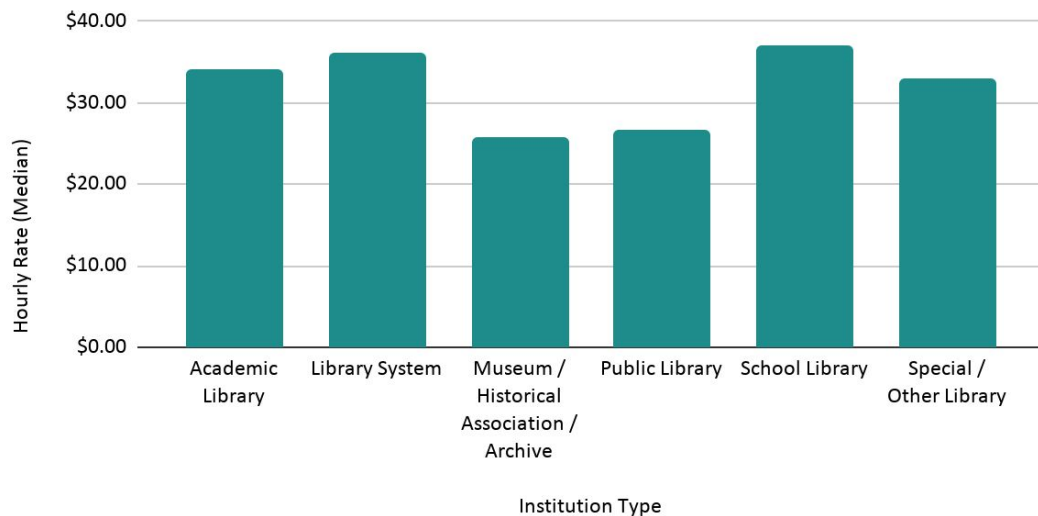
Median Hourly Rate vs. Institution Type (Full-Time)



- It's hard to draw strong conclusions when we're not comparing similar positions, though this does indicate some trends
 - Full-time position comparison, doesn't factor in education
 - Of respondents, there may have been more support staff responses from certain types.

Full-time median hourly rate by institution type, for positions requiring Bachelors or Masters

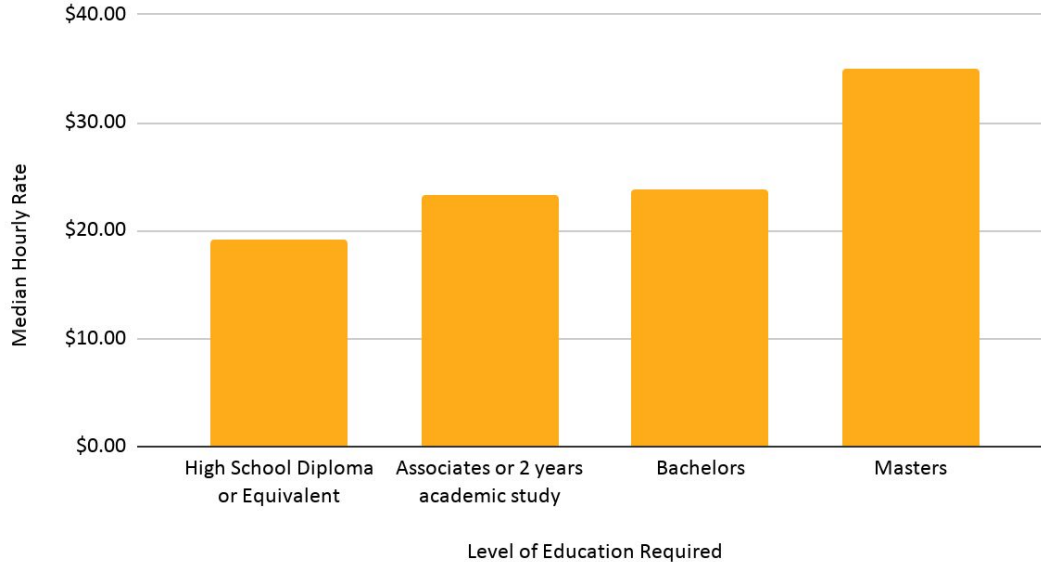
Median Hourly Rate v Institution Type (Full-Time Position Requiring Bachelors or Masters)



- Factors in required education, though we see a similar trend.
- We can only draw so many conclusions because of the small sample sizes in some institutional categories but this does point toward some trends
- Likewise, all positions consolidated here to maintain sufficient sample (e.g., directors alongside other positions), which exerts an effect

Full-time median hourly rate by required level of education

Median Hourly Rate vs. Level of Education Required (Full-Time)

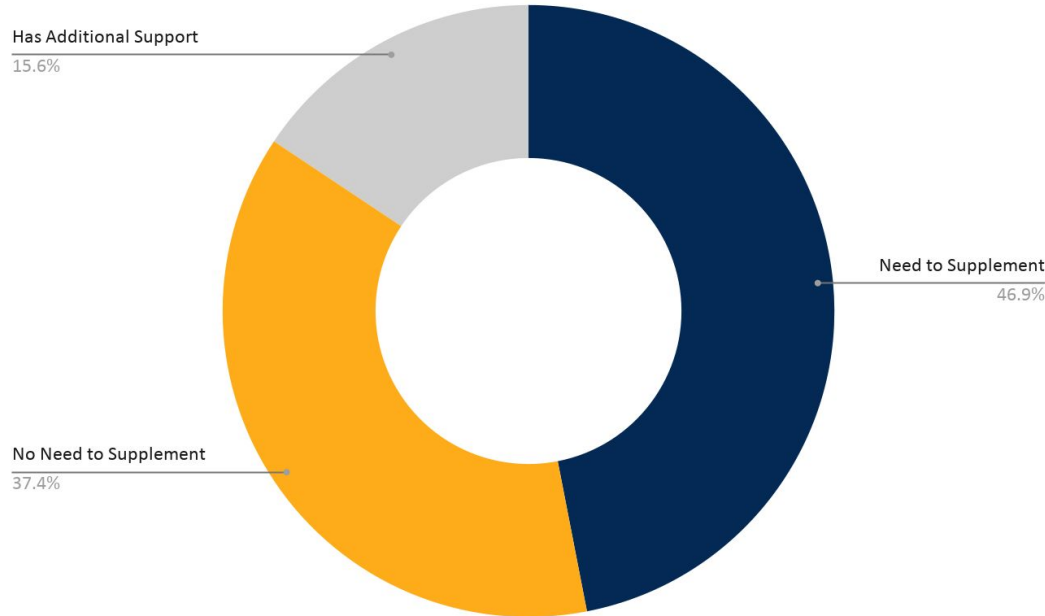


- Demonstrates a jump in wages for Masters degrees
 - Public libraries have Minimum Standards that require certain hours open and education levels, including Masters for over 7,500 populations
- **Overtime? Exempt?**
There are federal and state labor laws that govern which employees are **exempt and non-exempt** (i.e., do or do not receive overtime), including certain pay levels for exemption, dependent on job duties

Relevant Ask the Lawyer Questions:

- <https://wnylrc.org/raq/changing-salaried-employees-hourly-exempt-professional-employees>
- <https://wnylrc.org/raq/minimum-wage-public-library-employees>
- <https://wnylrc.org/raq/compensation-strategy-public-libraries>

Do you need to supplement your salary with other work? (147 responses)

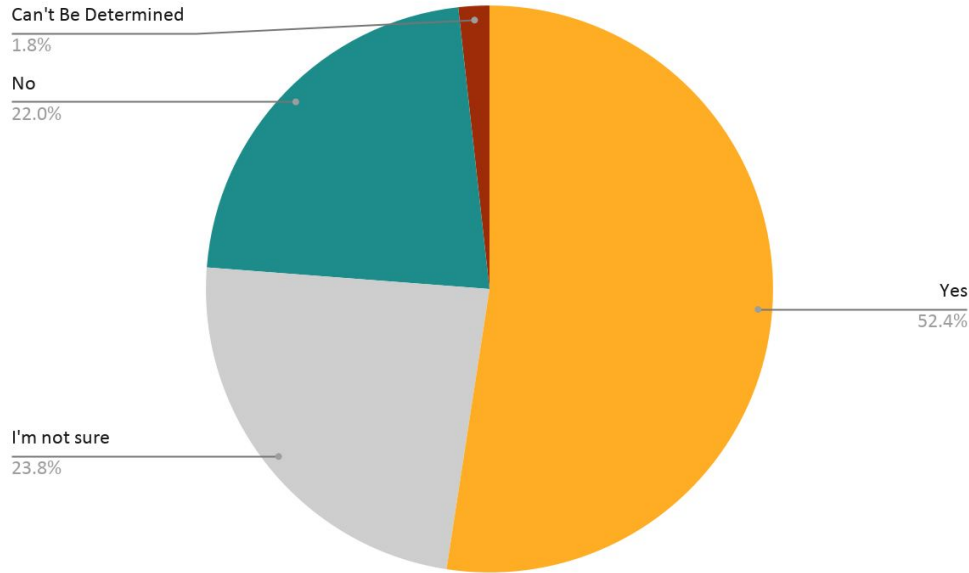


- Free response question
- We categorized based on response
- Vast majority noted either that they had some form of additional support (*retirement, second income in household, disability*), which allowed them to work only this job OR that they supplemented with additional work

Do you need to supplement your salary with other work?

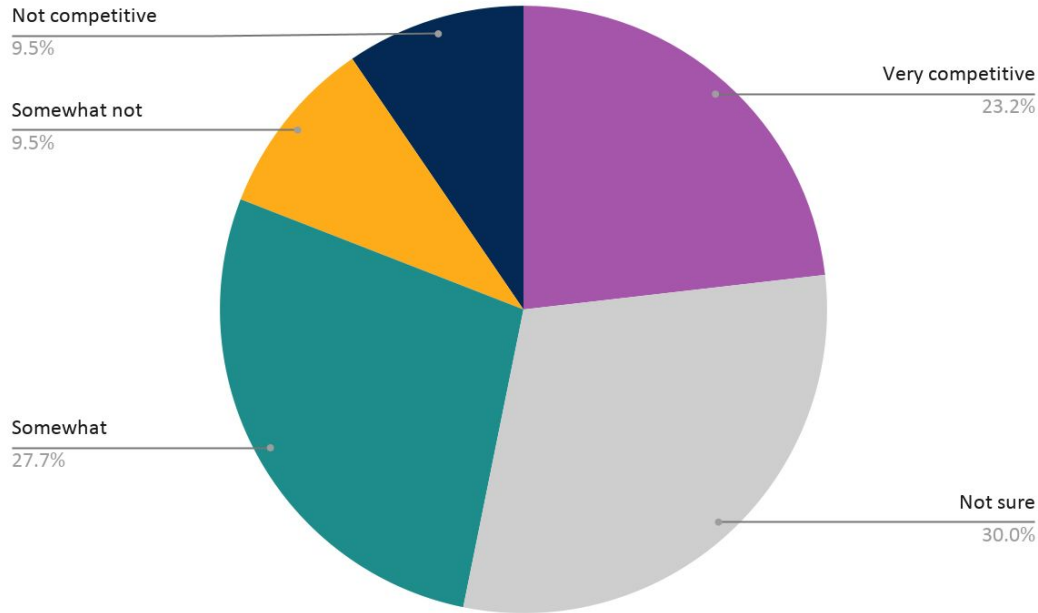
- “I could not work at this job if I didn't have the income of my husband to rely on. “
- “I have Army retirement ... and my husband works full time. This is the only reason I can afford to work here “
- “2 income household, otherwise I would not be able to afford this job”
- “I have picked up part time seasonal work but it's typically 7 days a week total and takes too much of a toll.”
- “Retired”, “I have my ____ retirement that I use to help cover day-to-day expenses “
- “Yes definitely. And many of my coworkers also have to work another part or full-time job to make ends meet and are still struggling.”
- *And many more*

Is there an annual process for determining raises? (227 responses)



- We may word this question differently next year.
 - In the open-ended responses we received: many people are uncertain if their “process” is “official”, others are affected by Minimum Wage increases each year, and many responses are, “it’s up to the board”/no guarantee.
 - Points to potential need for clarity and transparency
 - Does org have a process and do staff understand it? An assurance towards cost-of-living raises can be great for morale.

Do you feel your compensation is competitive with similar positions in the region? (216 responses)

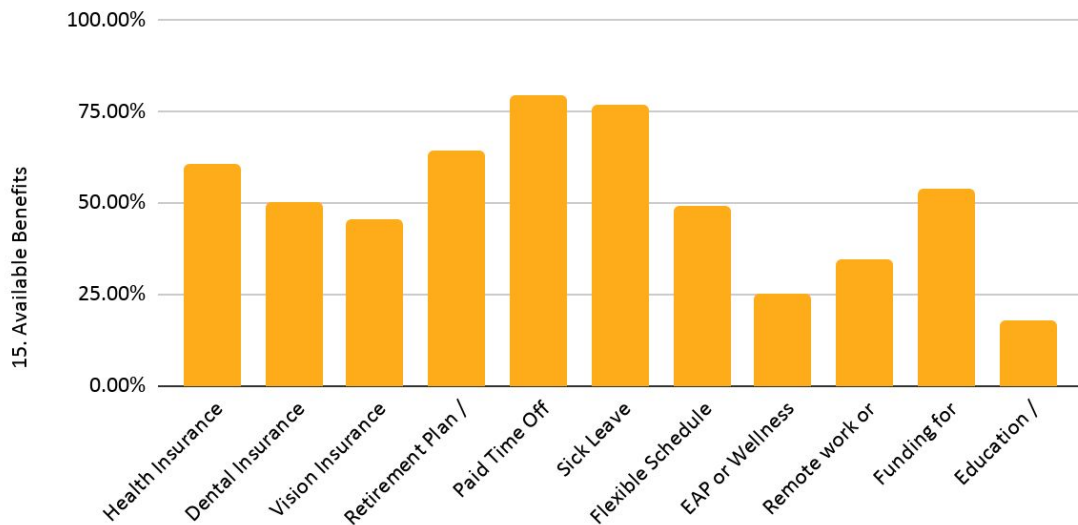


- 30% of respondents were not sure, and 19% said compensation was “not competitive” or “somewhat not competitive.”
- Some professional jobs not compensating enough for the degrees they require.
- Affordability may inform this perspective
 - [Living Wage Calculator](#)
 - [Average Student Loan Payments](#)
 - [NYS Health Insurance Marketplace](#)

Access to benefits

What benefits are available to you? (227 responses)

What benefits are available to you? Check all that apply.



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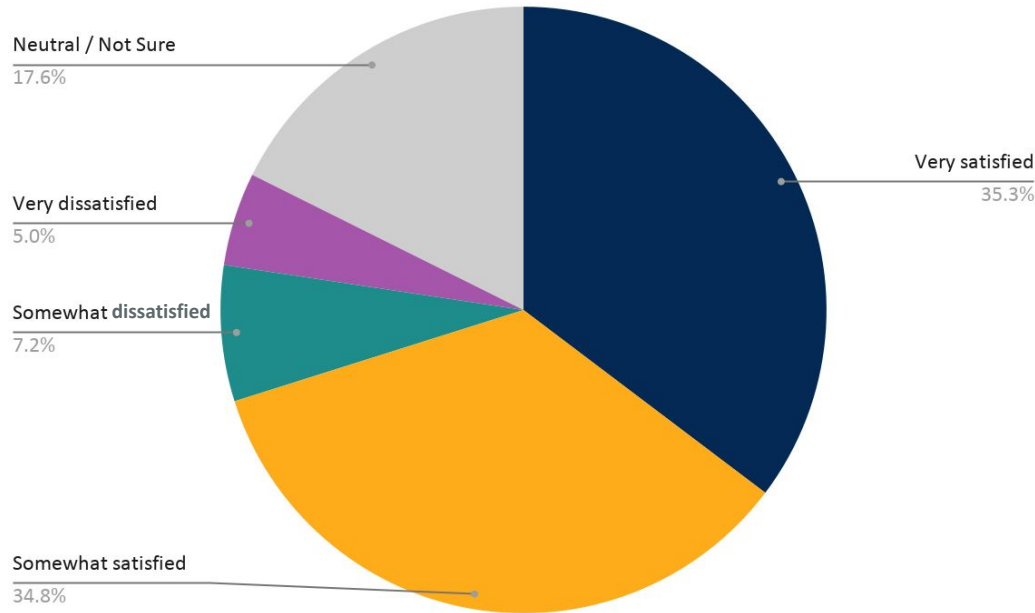
Notable findings:

- PTO most common benefit (180 respondents or 79.3% have access)
- Education / Tuition Repayment least common (only 40 respondents or 17.62% have access)
 - NNYLN offers PD grants for those pursuing MLIS and working in region's libraries or special collections
- Just over half of respondents have access to funding for professional development

Additional or unique benefits

- 4-day work week (“It has improved employee morale and mental health,” “This combined with the flexible schedule has been a transformative benefit for staff who are caregivers allowing them to continue to work in their profession and earn an income”)
- Gym memberships, paid lunch, gift shop discounts
- Annual staff retreat
- “I've been able to bring my child to work regularly”
- Access to CanaRx which provides prescriptions for maintenance meds for free
- Up to two pairs of shoes from Shoes for Crews annually
- Free copies and faxes
- Low interest credit card, scholarship opportunities, some discounts
- Phone stipend
- *Mileage reimbursement*

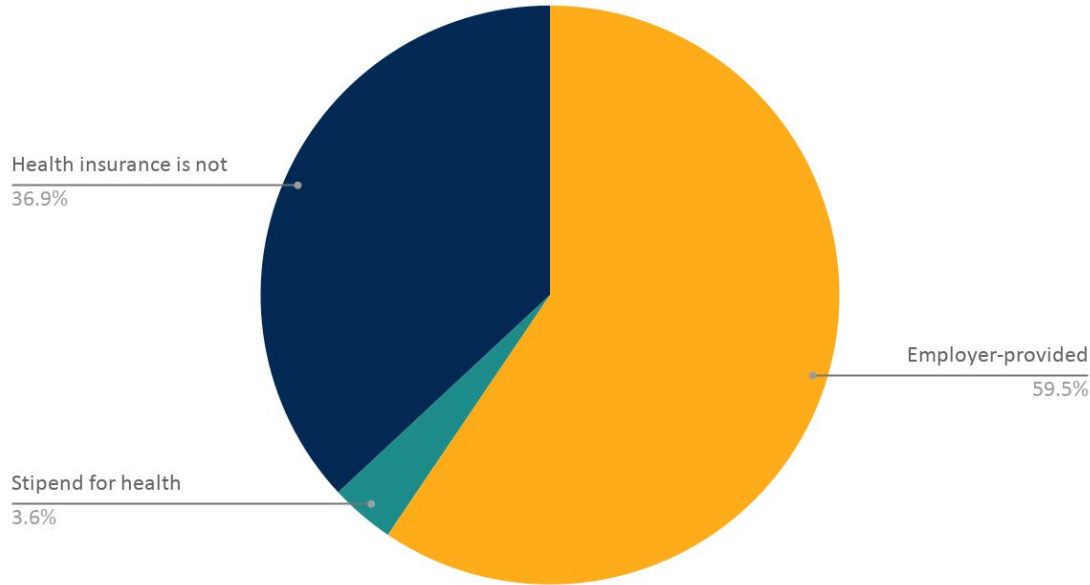
Are you satisfied with your benefits package overall? (217 responses)



- Comments expressing dissatisfaction tended to reference health insurance, a benefit that came across as extremely important in responses
- Importance of prioritizing major benefits; if you can move the needle on one thing, health insurance may be most important
- Value of experimenting with unique benefits (e.g., flexible scheduling, 4-day work weeks)

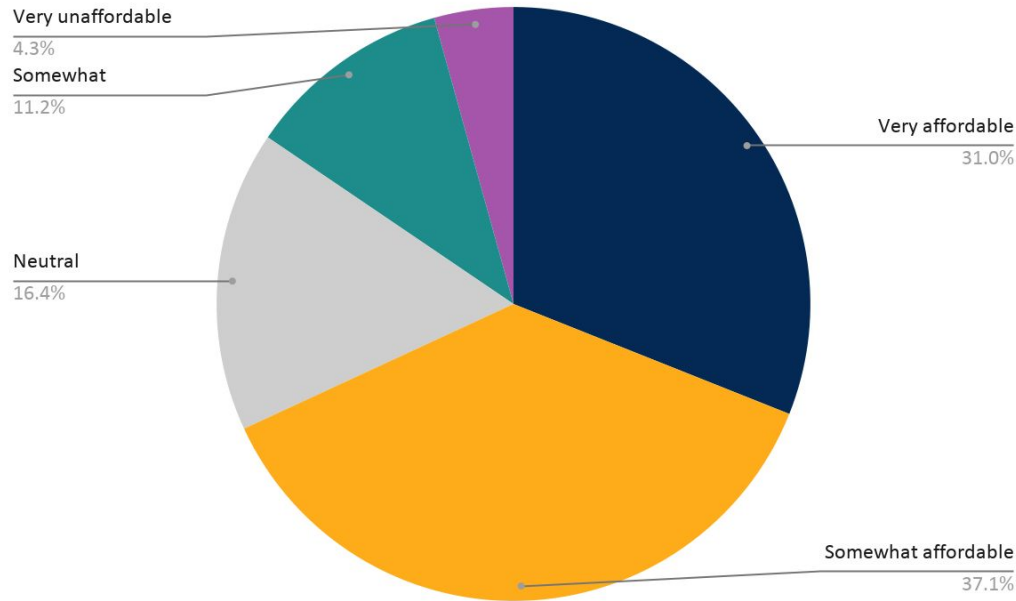
Describe the type of insurance available to you as an employee.

Count of Health Insurance (222 respondents)



- About 63% receive some type of employer-provided health insurance.
- **37% of respondents are not provided any type of health insurance by their employer**
- Healthcare options available on the [NYS marketplace](#) for a sole household resident of St. Lawrence County making \$50,000/year range from \$400/month to \$1000/month

How affordable is your share of health insurance costs? (227 responses)

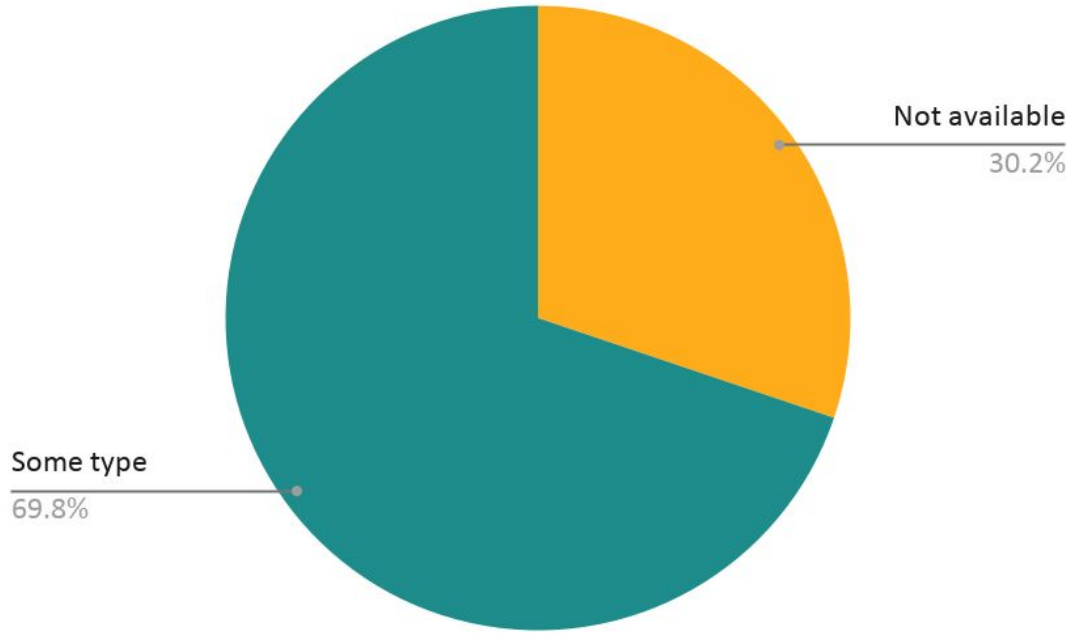


- Less than a third called health insurance “very affordable”
- The high costs of health care repeatedly came up as a source of stress for respondents

Comments on access to health insurance

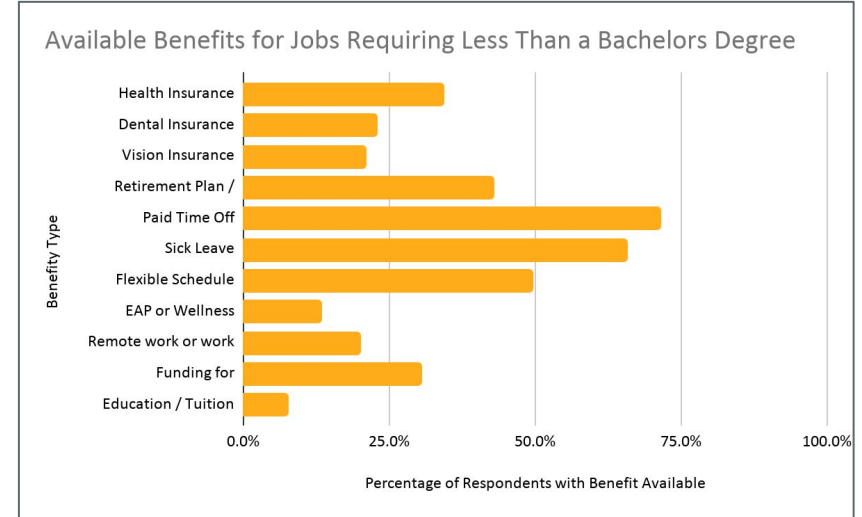
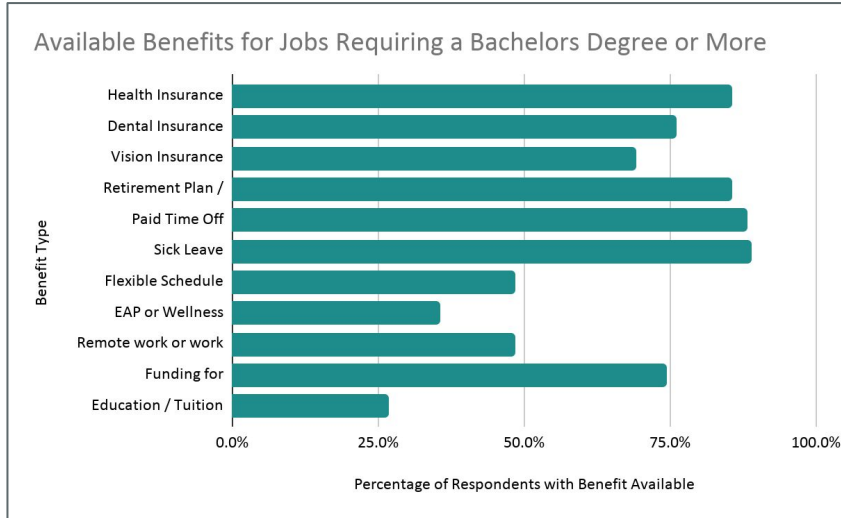
- I was told 'insurance may be available but it will undoubtedly be more expensive than going through the marketplace;' this has continued to be true.
- A coworker recently had an opportunity to move to full time employment but unfortunately felt they had to decline due to a lack of quality health insurance offered.
- We receive pay increases, at the same time we receive benefit cost increases, so it's always a wash financially.
- Options are two high deductible plans which are very poorly explained each year by external company. Always frustrating to understand. We should just all have Medicare For All.
- No spouses or dependents are included except at tremendous cost
- Unaffordable at the wages the organization is willing to pay
- Health insurance premiums have increased by 55% since 2021 but I think our situation is still better than most.
- Health insurance has gotten less generous and more costly as costs have risen over the years but is still an essential benefit

Access to retirement benefits (222 responses)



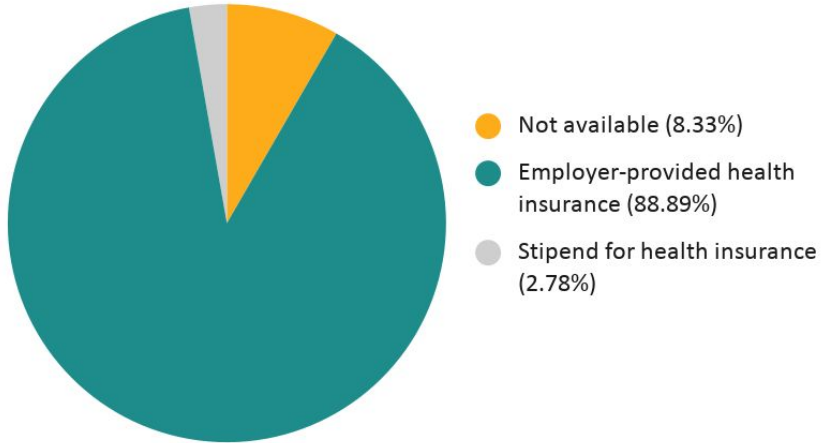
- Just over 30% of those who responded do not have access to retirement benefits
- Of those who do have access, included:
 - Employer-sponsored retirement plan (for example, 401(k), 403 (b) or a contribution/match towards your retirement plan)
 - NYS Retirement
 - Individual retirement plan with no employer contribution (for example, a 457 Deferred Compensation Plan, IRAs)

Access to benefits by education requirement of position



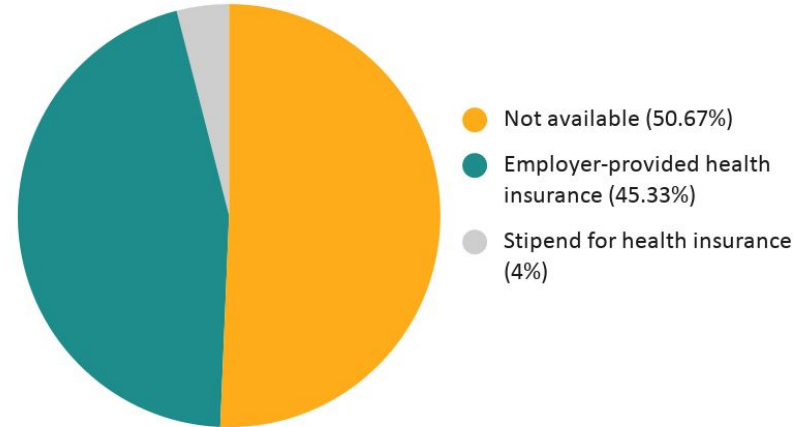
Union vs. non-union: Access to health insurance

Union members vs. Access to Health Insurance



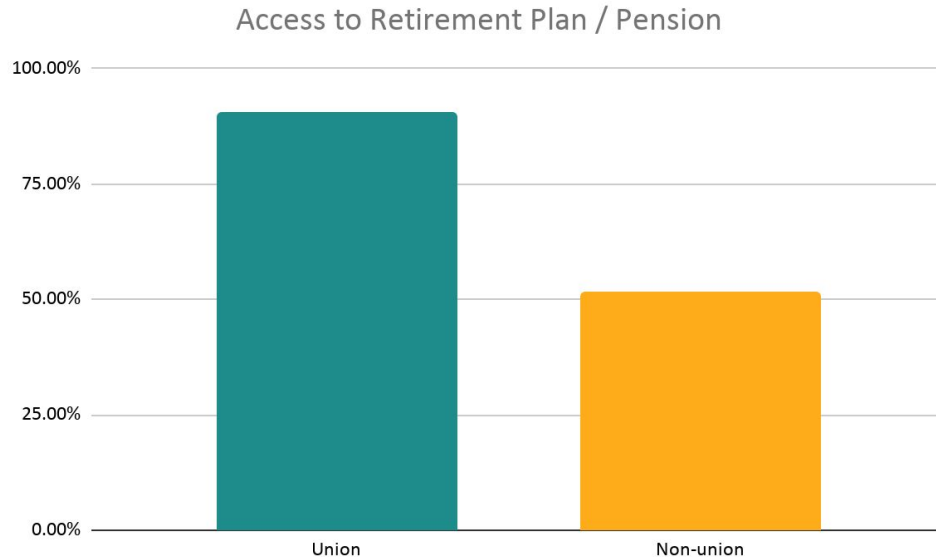
Of respondents who identified as **union members**, only **8.33%** stated that “health insurance is not available.”

Non-union vs. Access to Health Insurance



Of respondents who identified as **non-union**, **50.67%** stated that “health insurance is not available.”

Union vs. non-union: Access to retirement

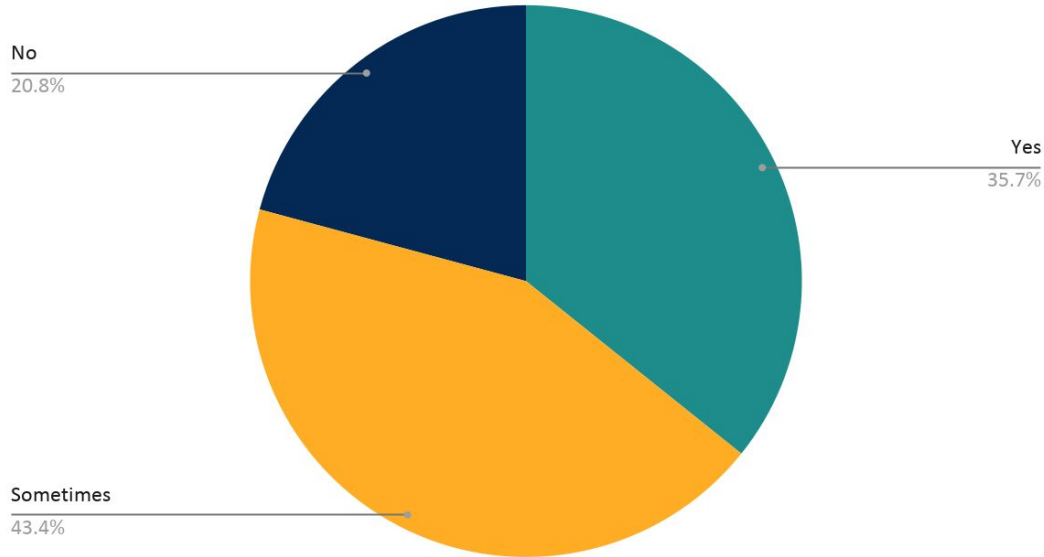


- Of respondents who identified as **union members** **90.41%** selected that a “Retirement Plan / Pension” was available to them.
- Of respondents who identified as **non-union**, only **51.30%** stated that a “Retirement Plan / Pension” was available to them
- Total respondents:
 - 153 self-identified non-union members
 - 73 self-identified as union members

Perceptions

Are staffing levels adequate to meet the organization's needs?

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- We want to be mindful of a healthy work environment that promotes a healthy amount of work. The opposite hurts morale and increases burnout.
- 64% didn't answer YES, so there's room for improvement.
- For "Sometimes," some of our organizations referenced coverage issues when someone calls out and more.

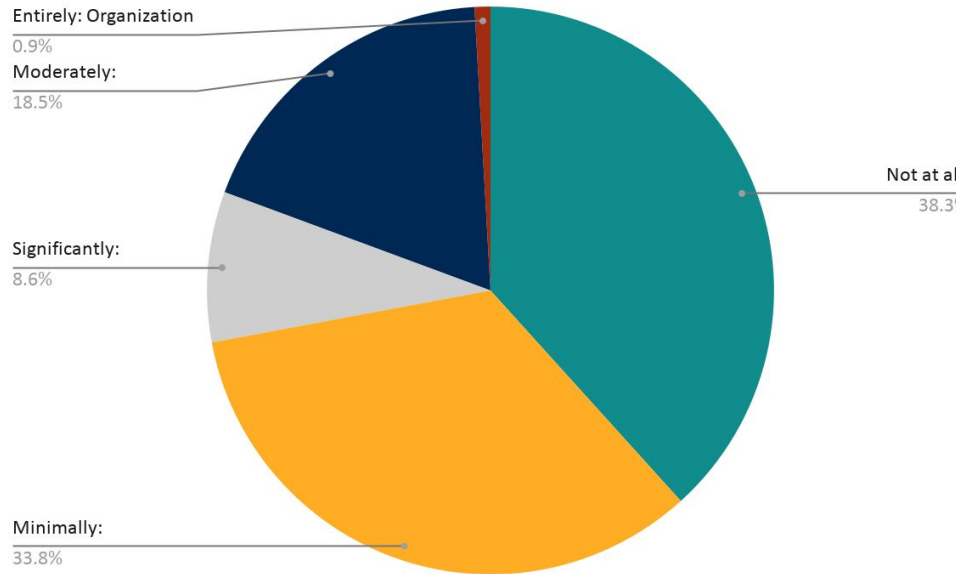
Meeting organizations needs versus thriving - what does thriving look like, and what does that take?

Are staffing levels adequate to meet the organization's needs?

Talk to your staff about whether they feel staffing levels are adequate, and whether the staff and schedule can handle surprises. Consider:

- **Hiring more staff**, including substitutes to keep on the payroll
- **More hours** for part-time staff. Positions with more hours are often more attractive. Create full-time positions if possible.
- **Update job descriptions** and consider changing duties for more efficiency, more flexibility.
 - The goal is more redundancy for time off and emergencies.
- Consider giving staff **uninterrupted “door shut” hours** or work from home or that gives designated time for emails, planning, scheduling staff, and more.

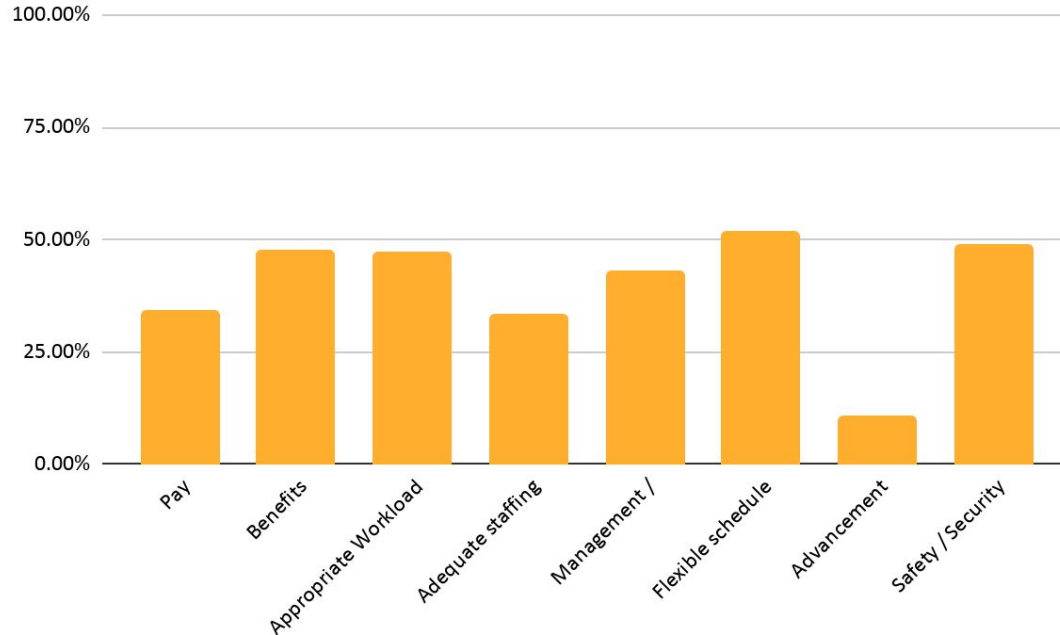
How much does your organization depend on volunteers for regular operational or necessary duties (excluding Board members/trustees)?



Volunteers are awesome. However, there's potential issues when relying on volunteers for operational duties.

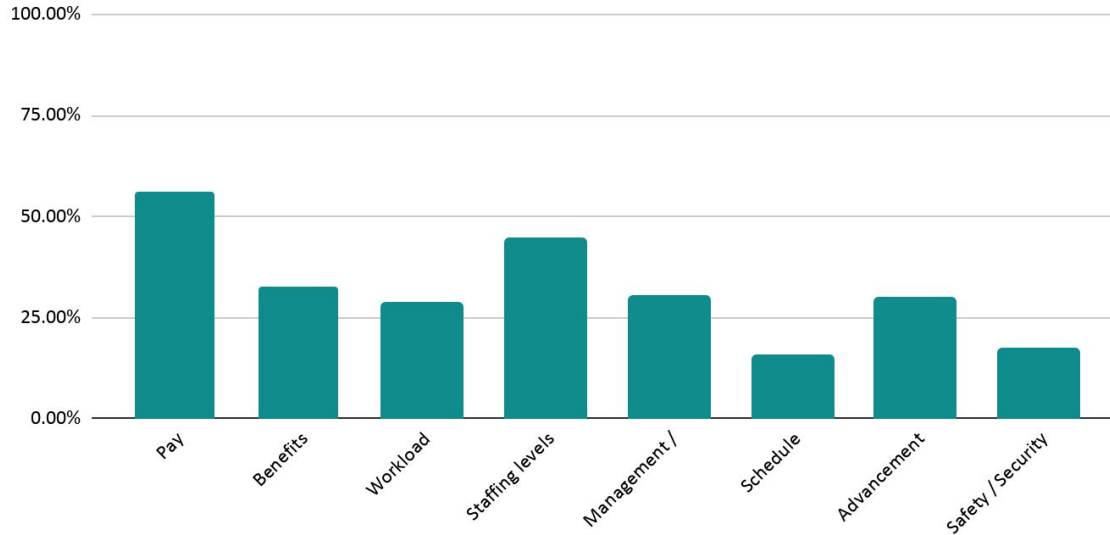
- Legal issues, [NYS DOL](#) rules
 - [Best Practices from Society of American Archives](#)
- May devalue paid work (bad for morale)
- May create risks if those volunteers are interfacing with the public but aren't fully trained or versed in policies
- May be less reliable than a paid staff person

Which areas of your work environment do you feel are working well?



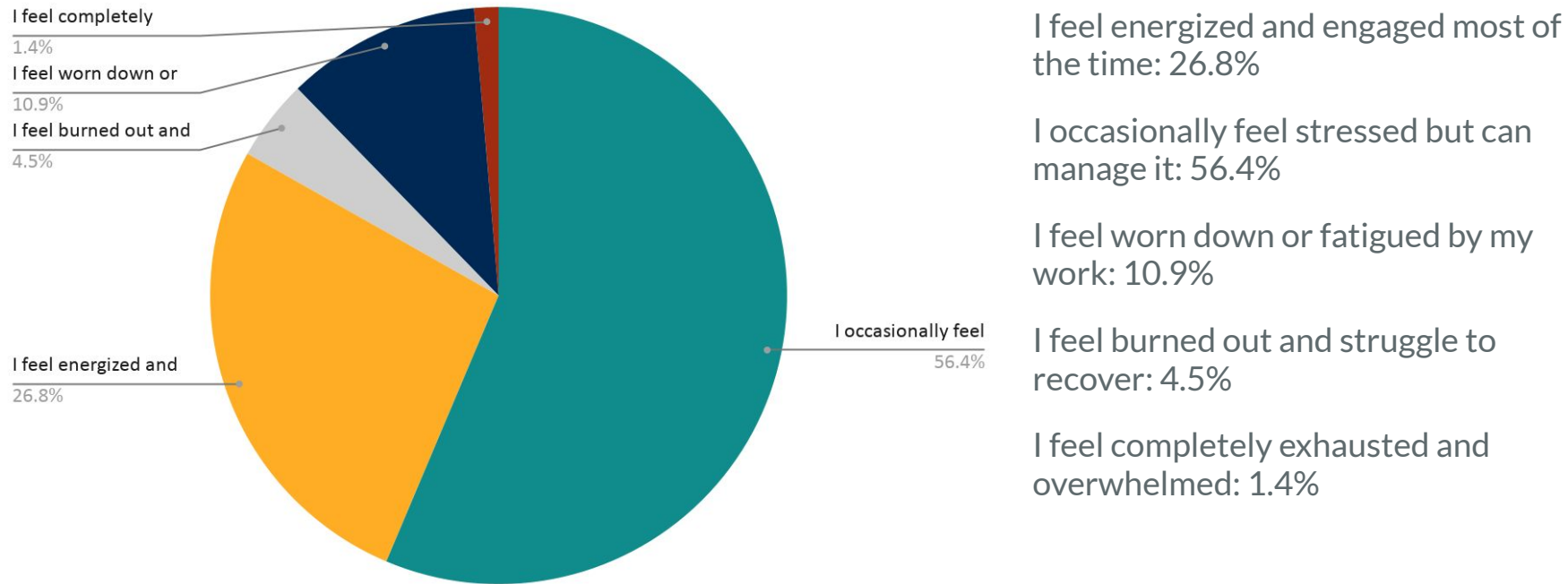
- Only flexible schedule is over 50%. Employees like flexible scheduling!
 - Think creatively about benefits like a 4-day work week
- Only 10.57% responded “advancement opportunities.” What could “advancement opportunities” look like in small institutions?

Which areas of your work environment could be improved?

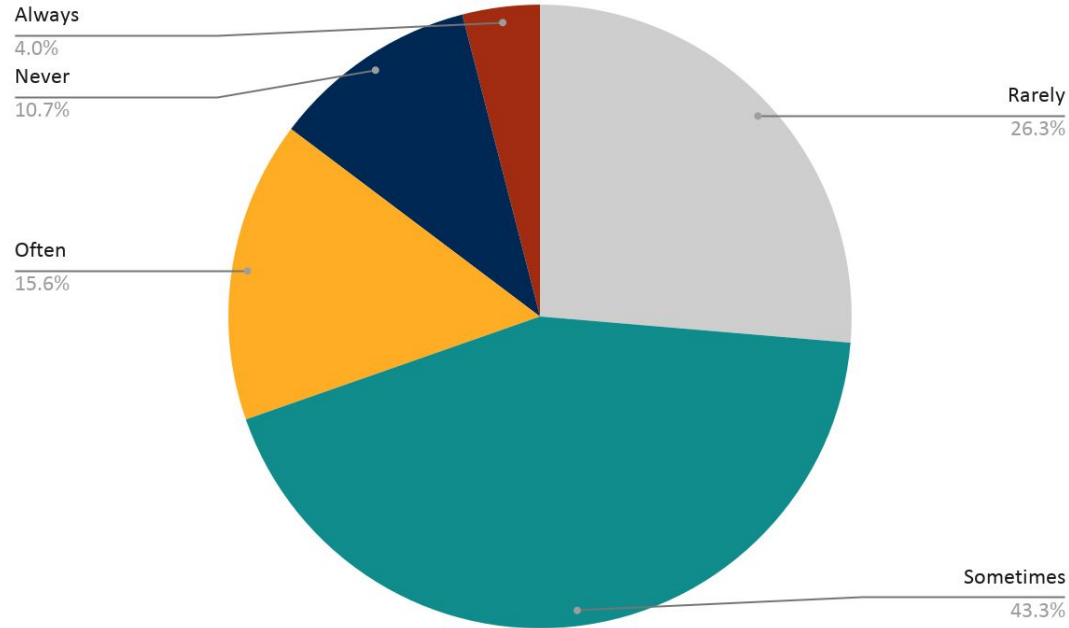


- Perception is reality and we should be empathetic to others' views
- Look closely at hours and scheduling, if you're a manager
- Staff Evaluations, consider Stay Interviews
- Consider alternate forms of "advancement" if you're a small organization
- Compensation strategy
- Seek additional funding to improve work environment

Which statement best describes how your work currently affects your well-being? (221 responses)

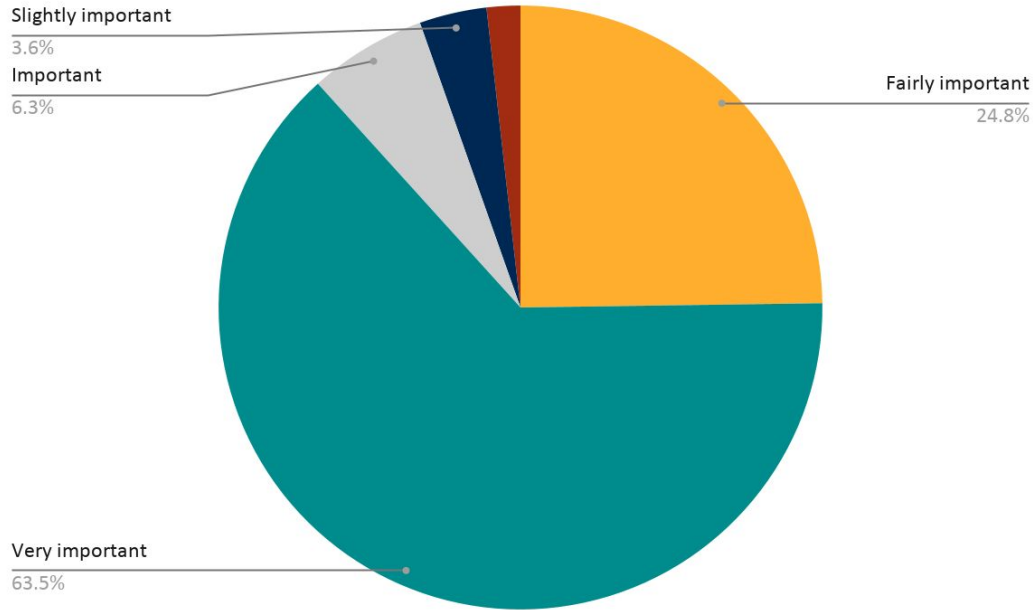


How often do you feel emotionally exhausted or burned out from your work? (225 responses)



- Almost two-thirds responded “Always,” “Often,” or “Sometimes”
- What are the root causes of these feelings? And then, what changes might be made to address those?
 - [Library Worker Support Network](#)
 - Regular check-ins
 - Scheduling changes/flexible scheduling

How important is workplace morale to your satisfaction at work? (224 responses)



94.6% of respondents said workplace morale is Important, Fairly Important, or Very Important.

While many might expect this, we don't often find ourselves being objective about fostering workplace morale.

- What can your organization do to foster morale?
- If you are a director or manager, are you checking in with your employees?
- If you are a staff member, what would elevate morale, and do you feel comfortable proposing it to your manager or director?

What are some examples of how your workplace fosters morale?

- “Free food”, “Potluck luncheons”, “
- “Themed days”, “Celebrating holidays” and “monthly birthday acknowledgments”
- “Open communication”, “Taking staff feedback seriously”, “team huddles/building”
- “Open opportunities for autonomy on creative projects”
- Holiday/themed team building events, collaborative team efforts (i.e. pollinator gardens and volunteer initiatives)
- “I am always thanked and praised for a job well done. Regular pay raises.”
- “Attending professional development opportunities” -
 - Organizations should budget for this (*staff coverage, travel expenses, etc.*)
 - All Network trainings, and all virtual trainings through other councils, are free

Free local in-person library events:

- Northern New York Library Network (NNYLN) - two member meetings a year, Special Collections Tour & Talks
 - NCLS - Cookout, Fall Annual Meeting
- CEFLS - reinitiating regular member meetings

Key takeaways

- Health benefits are extremely important, and the lack of benefits or their high expense is a significant source of stress to staff and employers.
- The cost of turnover is high, so making changes to increase employee satisfaction is fiscally smart.
- Small significant changes can often be made at little expense (attention to morale, flexible scheduling, attention to professional development).
- Rural areas have unique issues: high cost of transportation, limited health and dental care, competition for employees is often with outside fields or a few large institutions.
- Many people love the work and their coworkers, and this is valued as a unique benefit.

Next Steps

- Intention to repeat process, implementing changes to better the process and data gathered
- Interested in feedback from those who completed the survey or who have ideas for data that could be useful
- Open to work directly with organizations who want to use this data or analysis to craft components of an organizational plan
- More collaborative inquiries will be convened through Network
 - Opportunities to further use this data through these collaborative inquiries
 - Opportunities to propose new groups or projects as offshoots of this data (or on other topics)
- What would make you more likely to use this analysis in your workplace? What additional resources might be useful for you?

Any questions?