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The Youth Fields Workforce

Findings from the National Power of Us Workforce Survey

Career Pathways | Professional Learning | Professional Well-Being | Compensation

April 2025

Preface

The Power of Us Workforce Survey is a national, cross-sector survey aimed at building a baseline understanding of the youth fields workforce—who they are, where they work, what they do, and what they experience on the job and in their careers. Adults in the youth fields work with children and youth in a range of sectors outside the school day, including out-of-school time, before- and afterschool care, summer learning, summer camps, sports, arts-based programming, experiential learning, mentoring, juvenile justice, housing and homelessness services, libraries, museums, and many more. We have learned a lot from the more than 10,000 members of this essential workforce who completed this survey.

First, there is so much that the youth fields can be proud of. Survey findings indicate that respondents are committed to their work in the youth fields. They also feel valued at work, like they belong in their organization, and that they are a part of a larger youth fields community. The youth fields offer pathways for career advancement and professional growth as well as opportunities for professional learning, healthy pay, and core benefits.

We also learned that there are many opportunities to better understand and support this workforce, especially for those who are not in leadership positions and are in part-time positions. In our survey, many of these respondents shared the same commitment to the youth fields as those in leadership positions and full-time positions. They also reported that they feel valued, a sense of belonging at their organization, and part of a larger youth fields community. But in contrast to those in leadership positions, fewer of them come to work with postsecondary degrees and they experience less access to professional learning. They also reported lower pay and access to fewer benefits.

Our survey findings suggest we can do more as a field to support this workforce by providing equitable pay and benefits at all levels, offering opportunities for career advancement and professional learning, and fostering a sense of belonging on the job and in the field. We also believe that these findings can launch conversations in the field, especially with those who do not share the same positive experiences as those who completed our survey. Let's continue to learn from our colleagues in the field so that we can progress in practice, policy, and research and make the positive experiences and opportunities true for all.

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A ground-breaking study of a broad field, the **Power of Us Workforce Survey** provides insights into the youth fields workforce, highlighting their dedication to supporting youth to thrive through various settings and programming, varied career paths, and their current experiences and needs in professional learning, well-being, and compensation.

The Power of Us Workforce Survey is a first-of-its-kind national, cross-sector survey of the workforce designed to serve as a baseline to inform practice, policy, and future research. The findings from the report reflect the responses of current paid staff in the youth fields workforce who responded to the survey.

10k+
youth-serving professionals and volunteers participated

Who Is In the Youth Fields Workforce?
Adults who work with young people in strengths-based interest development and enrichment opportunities through community organizations, institutions, and agencies.

This report represents the characteristics (e.g., leadership position or not, race/ethnicity) of those who participated in the survey and does not make claims to represent the characteristics of the full youth fields workforce.

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Why Explore the Youth Fields Workforce

Adults in the youth fields work with children and youth in a range of sectors outside the school day, including out-of-school time (OST), before- and afterschool care, summer learning, summer camps, sports, arts-based programming, experiential learning, mentoring, juvenile justice, housing and homelessness services, libraries, museums, and many more. Whether they go by "mentor," "counselor," or "afterschool practitioner," **the adults in the youth fields workforce are essential contributors to children's learning and development beyond formal schooling** (Akiva et al., 2023; Baldridge, 2018; Fusco, 2012; Pozzoboni & Kirshner, 2016). They bring a diversity of skills and experiences to their work (e.g., Fusco, 2012; Intrator & Siegel, 2014; Larson et al., 2015; Ross, 2013) and can play an essential role in creating conditions for positive developmental outcomes for youth (e.g., Baldridge, 2018; Ginwright, 2015; Kataoka & Vandell, 2013; McLaughlin, 2000, 2018; National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2002; Search Institute, 2020). Indeed, the relationships between youth fields staff and young people are often cited as the "active ingredient" in cultivating positive outcomes for youth (e.g., Pekel et al., 2018; Rhodes, 2004).

Understanding who makes up this workforce is crucial in recruiting and retaining dedicated individuals and improving their experiences at work. Until now, we lacked current, collective information about the workforce. **The Power of Us Workforce Survey responds to the long-standing need to update, broaden, and deepen our understanding of who works with our nation's young people** (National Afterschool Association [NAA], 2006, 2017; Yohalem et al., 2006). Thousands of youth fields staff responded to the survey to make the findings useful for the greater good. With many thanks to them—and all who support youth in the youth fields—we share with you a snapshot of the youth fields workforce through the Power of Us Workforce Survey.

THE YOUTH FIELDS STUDY

The Power of Us Workforce Survey was part of the Youth Fields Study. Through the study, the Power of Us survey team, led by the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®), endeavored to provide current, relevant, and reliable information about the national youth fields workforce: who they are, what they do, where they work and have worked, their professional identities, pathways to and within their career, experiences on the job, and professional supports. The study also included a set of qualitative perspectives, led by the National Institute on Out of School Time with the aim to learn more about the experiences of the workforce through focus groups in the field. To find the results of the qualitative investigation, access this special issue of the After School Matters *journal here. The Youth Fields Study was funded by The Wallace Foundation.*

Who Completed the Power of Us Workforce Survey

The Power of Us Workforce Survey is a national survey of the youth fields workforce, defined as paid staff and volunteers who work with youth beyond school hours, beyond the school year, and outside of classroom settings. Current and former youth fields staff and volunteers accessed the survey through the study website, www.powerofussurvey.org. Data collection began on February 22, 2022, and ended on March 31, 2023. Over 10,000 current and former youth fields staff and volunteers participated in the survey.

The data in this report come from 7,733 current paid staff in the youth fields workforce. The findings represent the characteristics and experiences of the staff who completed the Power of Us Workforce Survey. The results are from a national, cross-sector dataset and serve as a baseline to inform practice, policy, and future research.

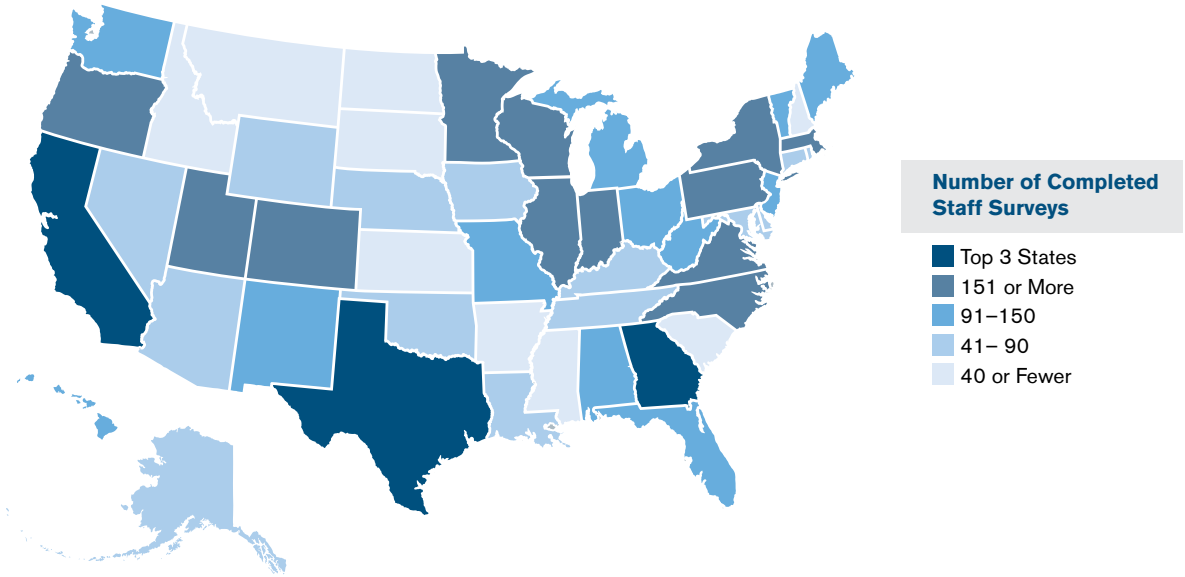
Location of Respondents[1]

- **State.** Members of the youth fields workforce from every state (Figure 1), as well as the District of Columbia and the territory of Guam, responded to the survey. One in five respondents (19%) work in California. Other top states include Texas and Georgia.
- **Region.** Approximately one third (33%) of respondents are in the West, one quarter (24%) in the South, one fifth (18%) in the Midwest, and one seventh (15%) in the Northeast.

REACHING THE WORKFORCE

We used a collective, targeted, and comprehensive recruitment plan to get the most robust survey participation and data possible. A communication campaign, led by Collaborative Communications, helped potential respondents to identify as part of this unique profession and motivate them to complete a detailed survey. The 18-month campaign included a dedicated website, a social media campaign, conference presentations, and peer-to-peer encouragement (see Appendix A). The Power of Us recruitment effort also included hundreds of organizations and dozens of committed champions who promoted the survey in their organizations and networks. In addition, AIR conducted additional outreach in a representative sample of 190 counties in the United States (for more details, see Appendix B).

Figure 1: Survey Responses by State



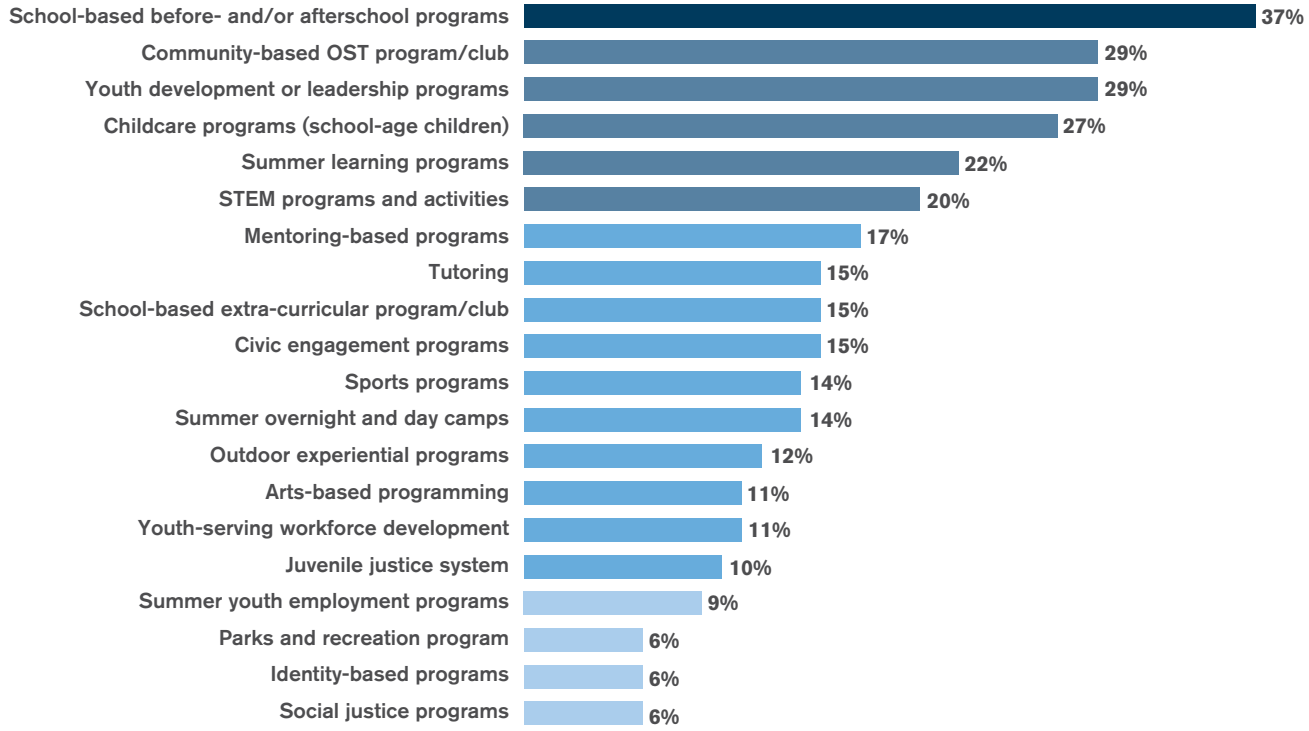
[1] Percentages may not sum to 100% due to respondents skipping survey items or selecting less common responses.

Who Completed the Power of Us Workforce Survey

Employing Organization and Sector(s) of Respondents[2]

- **Organization type.** Three out of five respondents (60%) work at a nonprofit or community-based organization. One in four (24%) work at a public agency (e.g., housing and homelessness services) or institution (e.g., museum, library), and one in 10 (8%) work at a private organization (e.g., faith-based organization, fee-based program).
- **Organization level.** One in four (28%) work at a city-level or local organization/entity, one in five (18%) at a national organization/entity, and one in six at a state-level (17%) or county-level (16%) organization/entity. Six percent work at a regional-level organization/entity.
- **Sector(s) of the youth fields.** Survey respondents work in a range of sectors (Figure 2). Two out of three respondents (67%) indicated that their work is cross-sector, selecting an average of four sectors.

Figure 2: Youth Fields Sectors in Which Respondents Work*



*Sectors with 5% or less of total respondents include children and youth library services (5%), faith-based programs (4%), postsecondary prep programs (4%), housing and homelessness programs (3%), museum education (2%), and place-based initiatives (2%).

[2] Percentages may not sum to 100% due to respondents skipping survey items or selecting less common responses.

Who Completed the Power of Us Workforce Survey

Respondent Characteristics. Table 1 presents the characteristics of Power of Us Workforce Survey respondents and the U.S. adult labor force. Compared to the U.S. adult labor force, higher proportions of survey respondents were under the age of 40, female, or Black, Indigenous, and people of color (not White). In addition, higher percentages of survey respondents have a sustained career and lower percentages have a full-time position or work in a metro area compared to the U.S. adult labor force.[3,4]

Table 1: Characteristics of Power of Us Workforce Survey Respondents (Current Staff) and the U.S. Adult Labor Force[5]

Characteristics	Survey Respondents	U.S. Adult Labor Force	Characteristics	Survey Respondents	U.S. Adult Labor Force
Age			**Sex[5]**		
18–25 Years Old	19%	11%	Female	74%	47%
26–39 Years Old	37%	34%	Male	21%	53%
40–54 Years Old	28%	31%	**Position Type**		
55 Years Old and Up	14%	24%	Full Time	71%	85%
Race/Ethnicity[6]			Part Time	20%	15%
American Indian	1%	1%	Other	9%	*
Asian	3%	7%	**Tenure in the Field**		
Black or African American	14%	13%	Earlier Career (<15 Years)	53%	83%
Hispanic or Latino/a	17%	18%	Sustained Career (≥15 Years)	45%	13%
Middle Eastern	<1%	*	**Work Location[7]**		
Native Hawaiian	<1%	<1%	Metro Area	80%	87%
White	56%	77%	Nonmetro Area	20%	13%
Two or More Races/Ethnicities	7%	2%	**Leadership Position[8]**		
Unsure	1%	*	Yes	73%	*
Not White[9]			No	27%	*
Not White	43%	*			

* Not available for U.S. adult labor force.

† U.S. Adult Labor Force data include 16- and 17-year-old workers. Power of Us Workforce Survey respondents were 18 years and older.

[3] The comparison is for illustrative purposes only because it is likely the questions, response types, and analysis the AIR team used for the Power of Us survey are not the same as those used to understand the broader U.S. adult labor force.

[4] Percentages may not sum to 100% due to respondents skipping survey items or selecting less common responses.

[5] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS).

[6] Respondents could select more than one race/ethnicity, so percentages will not sum to 100%.

[7] Metro area and nonmetro area are defined based on the rural–urban continuum from the USDA: https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/rural-urban-continuum-codes/documentation/.

[8] Respondents self-identified as serving in one or more of the following position types listed in the survey item: Organizational Leader: I lead the organization or lead a major team at the organization (e.g., Executive Director, Officer, President); Program Leader: I oversee the development, design, and implementation of one or more programs, supports, and services to youth at the organization (e.g., Program Manager, Program Director, Program Coordinator, Youth Development Manager); Site Leader: I oversee the implementation and supervise the delivery staff at a site (e.g., Site Director, Camp Director, Club Manager, Youth Minister, Youth Librarian, Head Coach); Frontline Staff: I work directly with youth and deliver programs, supports, and services at the organization (e.g., Instructor, Youth Development Professional, Activity Specialist, Camp Counselor, Coach, Museum Educator, Childcare Provider).

[9] The not White figure is the percentage of staff who indicated a race/ethnicity other than White.

Who Completed the Power of Us Workforce Survey

Considerations About the Sample and Survey Findings

The survey sample comprises individuals who heard about and chose to complete the survey due to widespread outreach (see Reaching the Workforce sidebar on page 5). There is no existing population information about the youth fields workforce as a whole; therefore, it is not possible to assess the extent to which this sample represents the workforce (i.e., the extent to which the survey results would be the same if every youth fields professional responded). Rather, this survey and its findings provide a valid national baseline of staff and their experiences across the country, which can inform policy, practice, and future research.

"Effects" of respondent characteristics on findings. The AIR team examined characteristics of the sample and identified relationships between groups of respondents based on respondent characteristics. We elevate **three considerations** for the reader to keep in mind when reviewing the survey findings:

- **The "Leadership Effect."** There is high representation of respondents in leadership positions in the survey data of current staff. Therefore, findings for the overall sample will be more influenced by the experiences of those in a leadership role compared to experiences of those not in a leadership role.
- **The "Generation Z Effect."** Compared with older respondents, respondents ages 18–25 are more likely to be (a) not White (particularly Latino/a), (b) part-time staff, and (c) not in a leadership position. Therefore, it is possible that differences between respondents in leadership positions compared to respondents not in leadership positions may be driven by the demographic characteristics of age, race, and/or part-time status.
- **The "California Effect."** Latino/a respondents and respondents ages 18–25 were more likely to work in California, which may influence the findings for younger and Latino/a respondents overall.[10]

As described later, we examined and report statistically significant differences (of 5 percentage points or more) between groups of respondents (including those listed above) to understand differences in experiences in the field, even though the differences may be driven by other related characteristics.

We also examined responses for respondents not in leadership positions and respondents in part-time positions. Overall, the findings for these groups are similar to the findings for all staff (see the Power of Us Snapshots for part-time staff and frontline staff, as well as the Power of Us Workforce Survey Supplemental Tables and Findings package, available at https://www.air.org/project/power-us-workforce-survey).

[10] The AIR team explored the confounding relationships of race, age, sustained career status, and leadership role statuses with California worker status via logistic regression modeling.

Who Completed the Power of Us Workforce Survey

LEADERSHIP REPRESENTATION

Survey participants responded to the following item to define their role:

Think about your MAIN job in the youth fields (the job in the youth fields for which you work the most hours). What is your role? Please select all that apply.

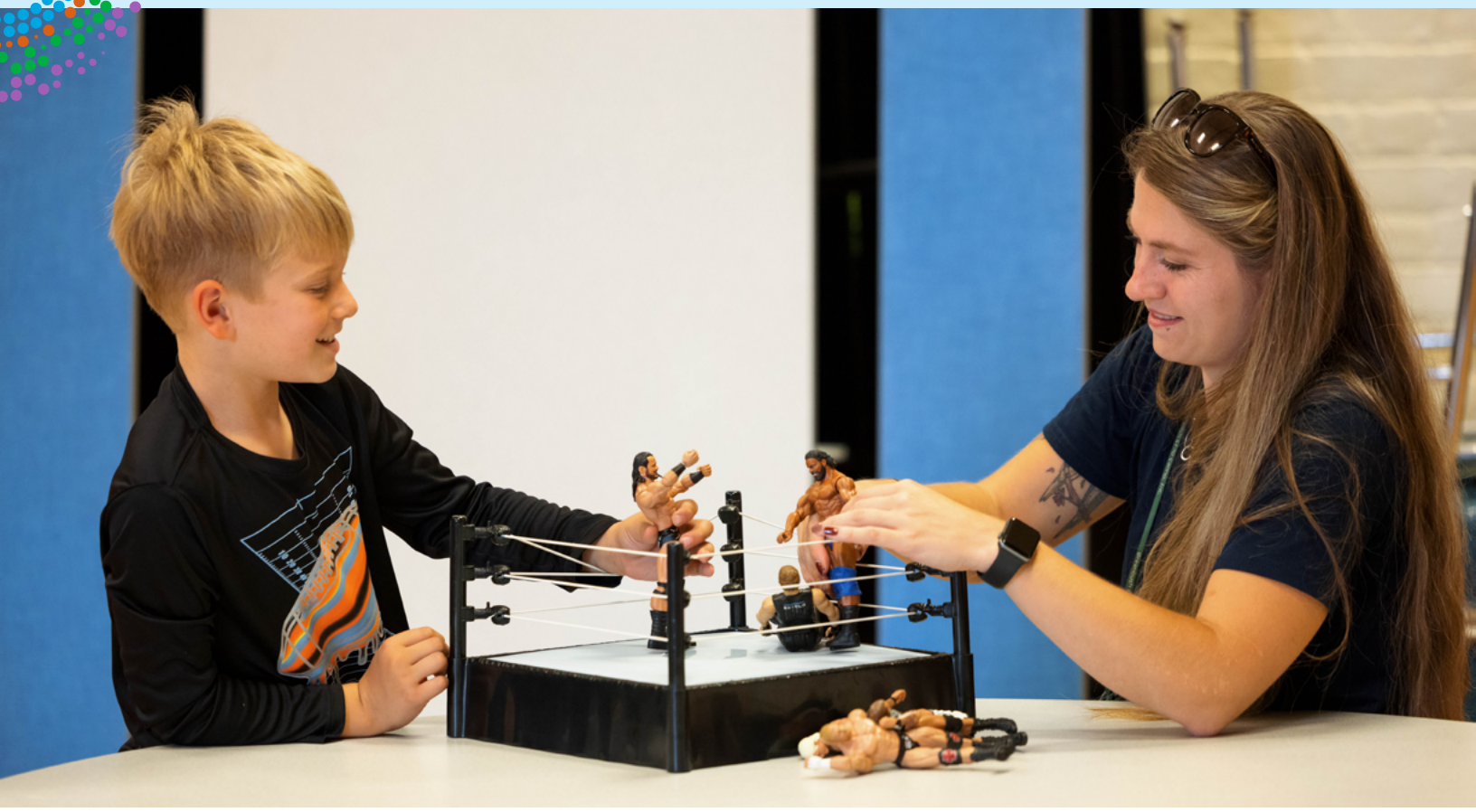
- ❑ **Organizational Leader:** I lead the organization or lead a major team at the organization (e.g., Executive Director, Officer, President).
- ❑ **Program Leader:** I oversee the development, design, and implementation of one or more programs, supports, and services to youth at the organization (e.g., Program Manager, Program Director, Program Coordinator, Youth Development Manager).
- ❑ **Site Leader:** I oversee the implementation and supervise the delivery staff at a site (e.g., Site Director, Camp Director, Club Manager, Youth Minister, Youth Librarian, Head Coach).
- ❑ **Frontline Staff:** I work directly with youth and deliver programs, supports, and services at the organization (e.g., Instructor, Youth Development Professional, Activity Specialist, Camp Counselor, Coach, Museum Educator, Childcare Provider).
- ❑ Other (please specify).

The Power of Us Workforce Survey dataset included a high proportion of respondents in leadership positions. The middle management role of program leader (rather than organizational leader) was the most common position that respondents serve in, and the frontline staff position was the second most common position. Regardless of position—including leadership—the majority of respondents indicated in a separate survey item that they work directly with youth in their role (see page 15 for more information).

As in every national survey, we took every attempt to hear from varied staff in the workforce regardless of position and other factors, including full- or part-time status, sector, and geography. We recognize there are longstanding challenges in national data collection and unique circumstances, including but not limited to individual circumstances (e.g., lack of Internet access) that make survey participation a challenge for some in the workforce and recovery efforts from COVID-19 (Afterschool Alliance, 2022). Further, it may understandably be difficult for some staff (e.g., frontline staff, part-time staff) to find time to complete the 20-minute survey during the work day, which also may have contributed to the higher response of those in leadership positions and full-time positions.

As we did for other personal and professional characteristics, we examined differences in responses based on respondent role: leadership positions (organizational leader, program leader, or site leader) compared to nonleadership positions (frontline staff or other nonleadership role specified in "other" response). We include throughout the report statistically significant differences (of 5 percentage points or more) between respondents in leadership and nonleadership roles. If no differences based on leadership position are stated in this report, there were no significant differences at all or small differences that did not meet our reporting threshold of 5 percentage points or more. As previously noted, we also include findings for respondents in nonleadership positions in the Power of Us Workforce Survey Snapshot: Frontline Staff and the Power of Us Workforce Survey Supplemental Tables and Findings package, available at **https://www.air.org/project/power-us-workforce-survey**.

How to Interpret Survey Findings



This report presents descriptive information as well as statistically significant findings from the survey. To produce these findings, the AIR team examined the distribution of responses for each survey item for all responding current staff and explored differences in survey responses by respondent age, sex, race/ethnicity[11] (i.e., White or not,[12] Black or not, Latino/a or not), full- or part-time status, role (i.e., leadership position or not), urbanicity (i.e., metro area or not), and tenure in the field (i.e., earlier career of less than 15 years or sustained career of 15 years and up).

To identify **statistically significant differences** in survey responses, we used pairwise statistical testing, which determines if there is enough evidence to suggest a statistically significant difference between two groups (e.g., female respondents compared to male respondents). Statistical significance tells us if a difference in responses between groups is most likely due to actual differences in the population or experiences of the population and not likely due to chance. The team used R statistical software to perform tests of statistical significance at the alpha level of 0.01, which means there is a 99% likelihood that we would see the same differences if we conducted the survey again. Differences between groups included in the body of this report are statistically significant (at the 0.01 level) and differences of 5 percentage points or more. Not all statistically significant findings are in the body of the report; the findings in the report include those with large differences between groups and multiple data points that elevate a trend. o All significant findings are included in the Power of Us Workforce Survey Supplemental Tables, available at **https://www.air.org/project/power-us-workforce-survey**.

[11] The AIR team did not test for significant differences for other races/ethnicities due to low response.

[12] Not White is defined as staff who identified as a race/ethnicity other than White.

How the Report Is Organized

This report features key survey findings from the paid workforce (i.e., current staff), with attention to notable commonalities and differences among respondents. The report is organized in four sections that address the following topics:

I. Career Pathways:
Entry into the Youth Fields, Youth Fields Career Progression, Future in the Youth Fields

II. Professional Learning:
Career Preparation, Professional Learning Supports

III. Professional Well-Being:
Working Conditions, Inclusion, Stress and Burnout

IV. Compensation:
Pay, Benefits

Each section includes subsections for each topic with two levels of key findings, based on the characteristics of:

- **Key findings for all current staff respondents.** These findings provide an overview of the experiences and characteristics of the full group of respondents who completed the survey: a national, cross-sector, cross-organizational sample. They represent the experiences of thousands in the youth fields workforce, with a diversity of respondents as far as personal and professional characteristics (e.g., age, race/ethnicity, role, tenure) and where they work (i.e., geography, organization, sector).
- **Key findings for differences across groups.** These findings provide insight into the extent of variation of experiences of current staff respondents based on characteristics: race/ethnicity, sex, age, tenure in the fields, working in a metro area, leadership position, and full- or part-time status. Any differences in groups presented in this report are statistically significant at the 0.01 level and differences of 5 percentage points or more.[13]

Each chapter concludes with a brief reflection that provides some high-level context for the findings within prior research and field commentary.

There is much more to learn from the Power of Us Workforce Survey respondents, and we also encourage further exploration using the public dataset, available at https://www.air.org/project/power-us-workforce-survey.

[13] Not all statistically significant findings are in the body of the report; all significant findings are included in tables in the Power of Us Workforce Survey Supplemental Tables and Findings package, available at https://www.air.org/project/power-us-workforce-survey.

I Career Pathways

Survey: Share about your career pathways including entry, progression, leadership, and future in the youth fields.

Entry Into the Youth Fields

Respondents first join the youth fields in their teens or early 20s. Although most respondents were under age 40, this trend holds true regardless of respondent age when they took the survey (e.g., the majority of respondents age 55 or older started in the field in their teens or early 20s).

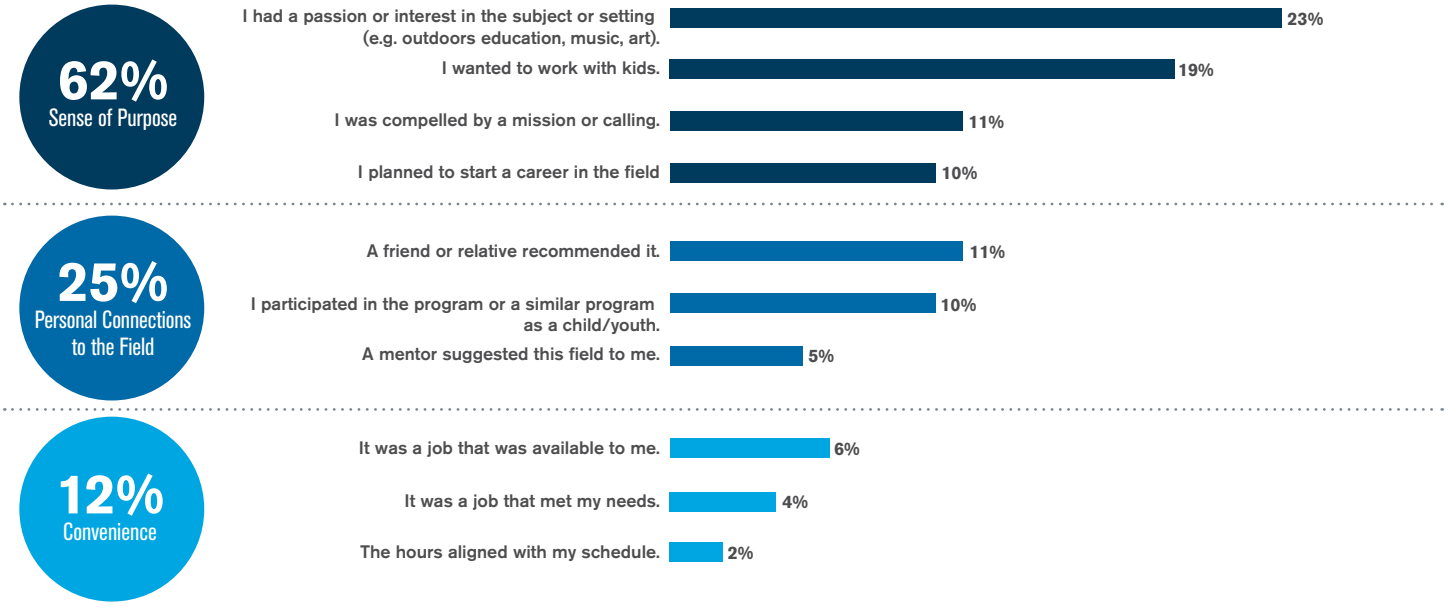
- Three out of four respondents (76%) started their career in the youth fields when they were 25 years old or younger: one out of three (35%) started when they were 18 years old or younger and four out of 10 (41%) started when they were 19–25 years old.
- At least half of the respondents within each age group (at the time of survey participation) started in the fields at age 25 or younger.
- Respondents in leadership positions were slightly more likely to have started in the youth fields when they were 18 years old or younger (37% compared to 32% of respondents not in leadership positions).
- Latino/a respondents were more likely to have started in the youth fields at age 25 or younger (47% compared to 39% of respondents who are not Latino/a) and lower percentages started at ages 26–39 (13% compared to 18%).

I Career Pathways

Respondents first joined the youth fields due to purpose or personal connections to the field. Respondents also indicated "purpose" (as well as altruism) and personal connections (i.e., colleagues) as characteristics they value for their jobs today (see callout box page 14).

- Three out of five respondents (62%) indicated the primary reason for choosing their first job in the youth fields was based on a sense of purpose (e.g., passion/interest, wanting to work with young people, plan to join the field; see Figure 3).
- One in four (25%) indicated a motivation based on their personal connections to the field (e.g., friend/relative, mentor, prior participation in program).
- One in 10 (11%) indicated reasons of convenience (e.g., available job, met needs).

Figure 3: Primary Reason for Joining the Field



Note: Percentages in call outs to the left of the chart above reflect the sum of the percentage of respondents (to the tenth of a percentage point) selecting each primary reason for joining the field in that category. Percentages in the bar chart are rounded to the nearest percentage point.

I Career Pathways

Respondents reported some differences in motivations related to purpose or personal connections. Although motivations related to a sense of purpose were most common for most groups of respondents, some of these motivations were slightly more likely for some respondents than others. Similarly, personal connections to the field were more important for some younger respondents and Latino/a respondents.

18%
of respondents older than 25 joined the field due to mission or calling compared to 4% of respondents ages 18–25

- Respondents older than 25, especially respondents 55 and older, were more likely to indicate mission or calling as the reason they joined the field (18% compared to 4% of respondents ages 18–25).
- Respondents with sustained careers (22% compared to 16% of respondents with earlier careers) and female respondents (21% compared to 12% of male respondents) were more likely to choose their first job because they wanted to work with young people.
- Younger respondents (ages 18–25) and Latino/a respondents were more likely to have started in the field because of a recommendation from a friend or relative (15% compared to 8%–10% for all other age bands and for respondents who are not Latino/a).
- Younger respondents (ages 18–25) were more likely to have joined the field because they had participated in the program or a similar program as a child/youth (14% compared to 8% of respondents ages 40–54) and because they planned to start a career in the field (13% compared to 8% of respondents ages 55 and up).

TOP 10 JOB CHARACTERISTICS RESPONDENTS VALUE

1. **Colleagues**
   Working with people I like (**34%**)
2. **Altruism**
   Helping others (**34%**)
3. **Pay**
   Earning a good living to pay for the things I need (**33%**)
4. **Purpose**
   Connecting with the organization's mission (**29%**)
5. **Creativity**
   Developing new ideas, creating new things (**27%**)
6. **Achievement**
   That feeling of accomplishment from doing a job well (**26%**)
7. **Leadership**
   Having the opportunity to guide and influence the work of others (**24%**)
8. **Environment**
   Working in pleasant surroundings (**18%**)
9. **Intellectual stimulation**
   Learning new things (**16%**)
10. **Challenge**
    The opportunity to master new skills (**13%**)

1 Career Pathways

Youth Fields Career Progression

Over their youth fields career, respondents changed jobs but stayed in the youth fields. This is especially true for those in leadership positions and with sustained careers.

38%
of respondents have moved in or out of the youth fields over their career

- Two out of three respondents (65%) have had two to five jobs in the youth fields over their career. One in five (18%) have had only one job, and one in seven (14%) have had six to 10 different jobs.
- Three out of five respondents (60%) have remained in the youth fields since their first job in the youth fields, either in the same organization or multiple youth fields organizations. Two out of five (38%) have moved into the youth fields (after starting elsewhere) and/or out of the youth fields to return later during their career.
- Respondents with sustained careers and respondents in leadership positions are more likely to have held six or more jobs in the field (27% and 19%, respectively) and to have worked in multiple organizations in the youth fields (48% and 43%, respectively).

Respondents have worked in industries outside of the youth fields, most often in service or adjacent fields. Most have had a job outside of the youth fields at some point in their lives, such as prior to starting in the youth fields.

85%
of respondents have had a job outside of the youth fields in their career, most commonly in service-related industries

- Nearly nine out of 10 respondents (85%) have had a job outside of the youth fields in their career, most commonly in service-related industries, such as retail (25%) and hospitality/food service (22%).
- Respondents have also worked in industries that are adjacent to the youth fields, such as K–12 education (20%), college or university (18%), and community/social services (16%).

Many respondents serve in a youth-serving leadership position, most often at the program level. A leadership position (at the organization, program, or site level) was common for respondents. Notably, the majority of respondents in all roles, including leadership, indicated that they work directly with youth.

68%
of respondents who lead their organization or a major team work directly with youth

- Three out of four respondents (73%) serve in at least one of three types of leadership positions (see Figure 4), and some respondents serve in multiple positions.[14]
- The most common position for respondents is program leader, and the second most common role that respondents serve in is the frontline role.
- Most respondents—regardless of role—work directly with youth. This finding also was true of those in leadership positions, including at the organization level (68%), the program level (85%), and the site level (96%).

[14] Not all statistically significant findings are in the body of the report; all significant findings are included in tables in the Power of Us Workforce Survey Supplemental Tables and Findings package, available at https://www.air.org/project/power-us-workforce-survey.

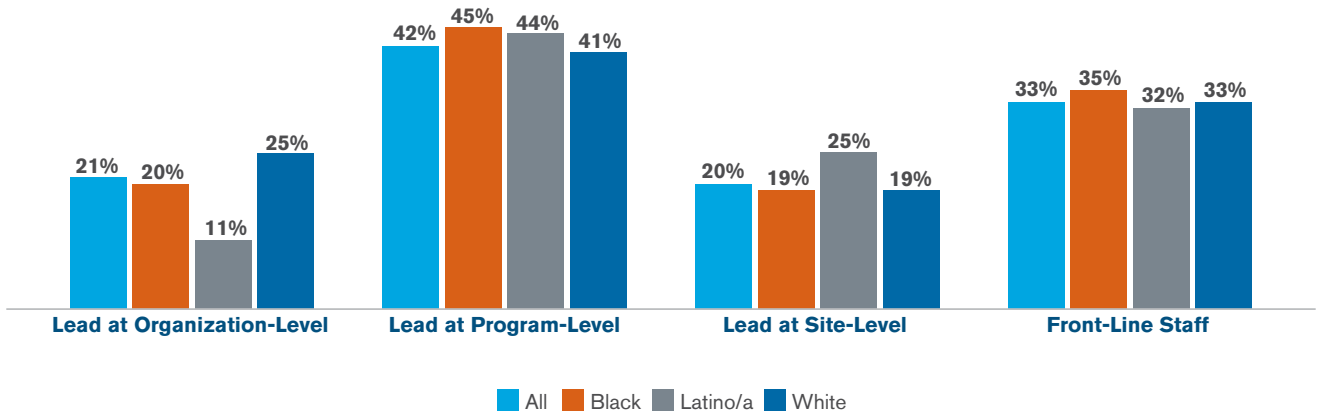
I Career Pathways

Black, Latino/a, and White respondents serve in leadership positions, with slight variations in the level of leadership. Regardless of race/ethnicity, most respondents[15] serve in leadership positions (Figure 4).

33%
of respondents serve in frontline roles

- The most common position for Black, Latino/a, and White respondents is program leader. The second most common position is a frontline role.
- A somewhat higher percentage of White respondents lead their youth-serving organization or a major team within the organization compared to Black and Latino/a respondents.
- A higher percentage of Latino/a respondents serve as a site leader. However, this may be a result of the younger age of the Latino/a respondents (and high representation of California) in the sample.

Figure 4: Percentage of Respondents by Position Overall and by Race/Ethnicity*



* The team conducted statistical testing only for Black, Latino/a, and White respondents because of low response for other races/ethnicities. Only differences listed in bullets preceding charts are statistically significant.

[15] As a reminder, this report represents the characteristics (e.g., role) of those who participated in the survey and does not make claims to represent the characteristics of the full youth fields workforce.

I Career Pathways

Respondents who work in nonmetro areas and younger respondents are more likely to serve as frontline staff. Older respondents and male respondents are more likely to serve in higher level leadership positions. Although program leader and frontline positions remain the most common for most groups, there are other differences by location, age, and sex.

53%
of respondents ages 18–25 have frontline positions

- Two out of five respondents in nonmetro areas (40%) have frontline positions compared to one in three who work in metro areas (32%).
- One out of two respondents ages 18–25 (53%) have frontline positions. In comparison, one out of three respondents (33%) ages 26–39 and one out of four ages 40–54 (25%) or age 55 and older (26%) have frontline positions.
- Nearly two out of five respondents age 55 and older (37%) lead their organization or a major team at the organization compared to 4% of respondents ages 18–25 and 15% of respondents ages 26–39.
- One in five female respondents (20%) lead their organization or a major team at the organization compared to one in four male respondents (25%).

Future in the Youth Fields

Respondents were overwhelmingly positive about their career pathways. Most indicated that they have opportunities to advance and grow within their organizations.

86%
of respondents are satisfied with their opportunities for professional growth

- Nine out of 10 respondents (86%) *agreed or strongly agreed* that they are satisfied with their opportunities for professional growth.
- Four out of five respondents (80%) *agreed or strongly agreed* that they have the same opportunities for advancement as other employees at their organization.

Respondents in their mid-20s and older seek more opportunities for advancement. Although the majority of respondents, regardless of age, were positive about career advancement, respondents between the ages of 26 and 54 were slightly less positive than younger respondents.

31%
of respondents ages 26–39 indicated a desire for more advancement opportunities

- One out of five respondents ages 26–39 (17%) and 40–54 (18%) *disagreed* that they have the same opportunities for advancement as other employees, compared to one out of ten of respondents ages 18–25 (13%).
- One out of three respondents ages 26–39 (31%) indicated a desire for more advancement opportunities as a change to their job, compared to one out of four respondents ages 18–25 (26%).
- Career advancement remains important to some younger respondents; a higher percentage of respondents ages 18–25 (26%) indicated they want more opportunity for career advancement compared to respondents age 55 and up (16%).

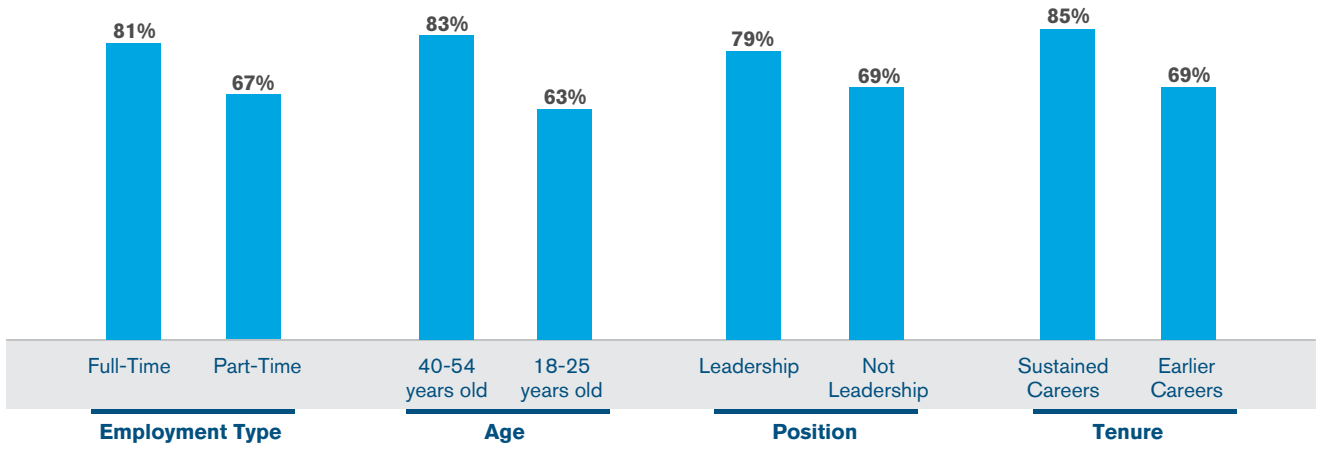
I Career Pathways

Respondents are committed to continuing their career paths within the youth fields.
Many see the youth fields as their line of profession moving forward.

77%
of respondents are *very committed* to the youth fields

- Three out of four respondents (77%) are *very committed* to the youth fields. One in five (19%) indicated they are *somewhat committed*, and 4% are *a little committed*. Only 1% indicated they are *not at all committed*.
- *Very committed* to the youth fields was the most common response for survey participants, regardless of personal (i.e., age, race/ethnicity, sex) or professional (i.e., role, tenure in the field, job location, full- or part-time status) characteristics.
- Respondents who are full-time, are older, are in leadership positions, or have sustained careers indicated higher commitment to the youth fields (Figure 5). Similar patterns were seen for female respondents and Black respondents, although to a lesser extent.

Figure 5: Percentage of Respondents *Very Committed* to the Youth Fields, by Respondent Characteristics



Reflections on Survey Findings and Prior Research

The Power of Us Workforce Survey findings on career pathways largely align with previous research and policy conversations among state and local leaders, practitioners, and advocates. Multiple prior studies noted that most staff who are drawn to and stay in the youth fields do so because they enjoy working with youth, find purpose in it, and have a personal connection to the communities, places, and experiences with the young people they support (Hall et al., 2020; Starr et al., 2023; Vasudevan, 2019). Studies also note that, in some cases, youth fields staff entry into the fields may be "accidental," by way of a first job or other interest (e.g., playing music, sports), but those who stay in the field eventually come to understand their work as a calling—a way "to make a difference, give back, or create a change"—and remain committed to working in the youth fields (Starr et al., 2023; Vasudevan, 2019). Relatedly, Blattner and Franklin (2017) found that youth fields staff stay in the field because they love the work and care about children and youth; further, career youth-serving professionals believe that they have chosen this work and had agency in this choice.

Despite these strengths of the field, a continuing challenge remains in retaining some staff due to high turnover for some positions in the field. Indeed, Wilkens (2020) found that turnover is frequent in 37% of staff roles, and some of those roles may remain unfilled until a replacement is hired. There are noteworthy concerns for organization leaders, children, and families when a workforce frequently changes jobs; however, prior research suggests that youth-serving professionals who are unhappy with an organizational environment, but committed to working with youth, find a way to persist in the career by changing organizations (Vasudevan, 2019).

II Professional Learning

Survey: Share about your postsecondary studies and your experiences with on-the-job training and development.

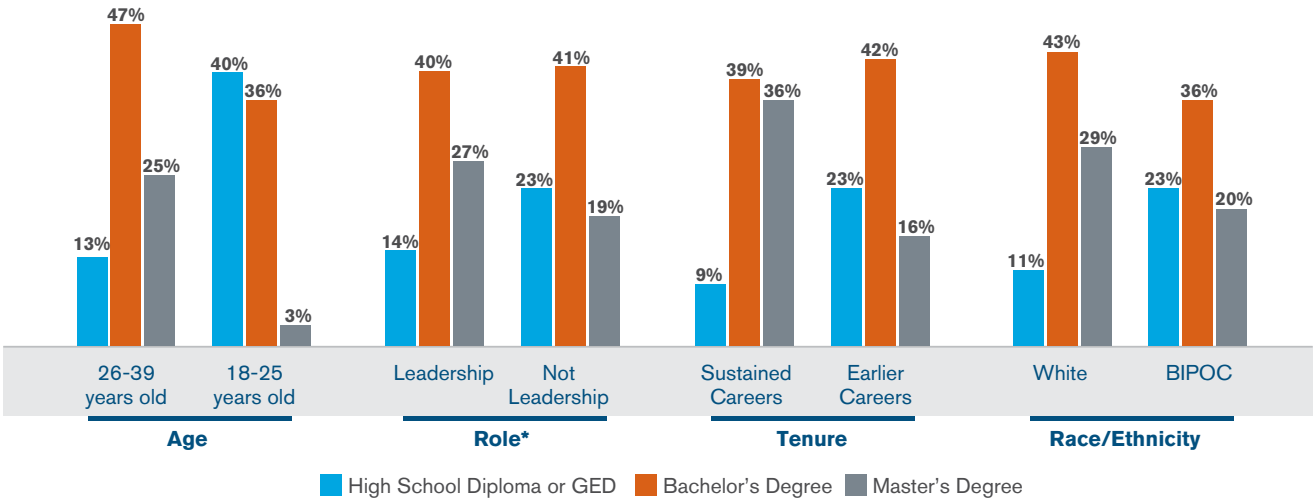
Career Preparation

Many respondents have earned postsecondary degrees. Regardless of respondent characteristic, the most common highest earned degree is a bachelor's degree, except for the youngest respondents. In addition, there are variations in the percentages with a high school diploma or master's degree based on respondent characteristics.

40%
of respondents hold a bachelor's degree

- Two out of three respondents earned a bachelor's degree or higher as their highest degree earned. Specifically, 40% have a bachelor's degree as their highest degree earned, 25% have a master's degree, and 3% have a professional degree or doctorate. Seventeen percent have a high school diploma or GED as their highest degree earned, and 11% have an associate's degree.
- A bachelor's degree is the most common highest degree earned regardless of current position, tenure, or race/ethnicity except for respondents ages 18–25 who most often have earned a high school diploma as the highest degree earned (see Figure 6).
- High school diploma as the highest degree earned is more common for respondents who are younger, not White, not in leadership positions, or earlier career (less than 15 years in the field; see Figure 6).
- A master's degree as the highest degree earned is more common for respondents who are older, are White, serve in leadership positions, or have a sustained career (15 years or more in the field; see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Highest Degree Earned (Percentage of Respondents), by Respondent Characteristics



*Differences in percentages earning a bachelor's degree are not significant based on position. All other differences between groups are statistically significant.

II Professional Learning

Respondents with postsecondary degrees pursued diverse programs of study. There is no common educational pathway to the youth fields for survey respondents.

23%
of respondents studied education for postsecondary degrees

- One in four respondents (23%) studied education and one in five (19%) studied liberal arts. One in 10 studied health and medical sciences (11%), business (9%), or social work (9%). Less common programs of study include STEM (8%), legal studies (7%), fine arts (5%), and youth development (5%).
- Respondents in leadership positions (compared to respondents not in leadership) are more likely to have studied education (25% compared to 19%) or business (11% compared to 6%). Similarly, respondents with sustained careers are more likely to have studied education compared to respondents with earlier careers of less than 15 years (29% compared to 17%).

Most respondents see at least some alignment between their postsecondary studies and their current job. Respondents were mostly split between *somewhat, fairly*, or *very aligned.*

53%
of respondents indicated their work was *very aligned* or *fairly aligned* with their postsecondary program of study

- One in two respondents (53%) indicated their work was *very aligned* or *fairly aligned* with their postsecondary program of study: 26% indicated it was *fairly aligned*, and 27% indicated it was *very aligned*.
- For respondents who indicated *very aligned*, the most common programs of study were education, social work, liberal arts, health and medical sciences (e.g., registered nursing, psychology), and legal or policy studies (e.g., juvenile justice and restorative practices, public policy management).
- One in three respondents (34%) indicated their program of study was *somewhat aligned* to their work, and 13% indicated it was *not at all aligned*.
- For respondents who indicated *not at all aligned*, STEM, fine arts, and business were the most common programs of study.

II Professional Learning

Some respondents, especially younger respondents, reported more variation in the alignment between their work and their degree program of study compared to others. Younger respondents also come to their youth fields work with different programs of study than older respondents.

21%
of respondents 18–25 see their work as *very aligned* to their postsecondary program of study

- Compared to respondents age 40 and up, respondents ages 18–25 are more likely to have studied liberal arts, health and medical sciences, or STEM and less likely to have studied education.
- One in five (21%) respondents ages 18–25 see their work as *very aligned* with their post-secondary program of study compared to one in three (32%–33%) age 40 and up.
- Relatedly, a higher percentage of respondents with sustained careers (33%) reported their work is *very aligned* to their postsecondary program of study compared to respondents with earlier careers of less than 15 years (22%).

II Professional Learning

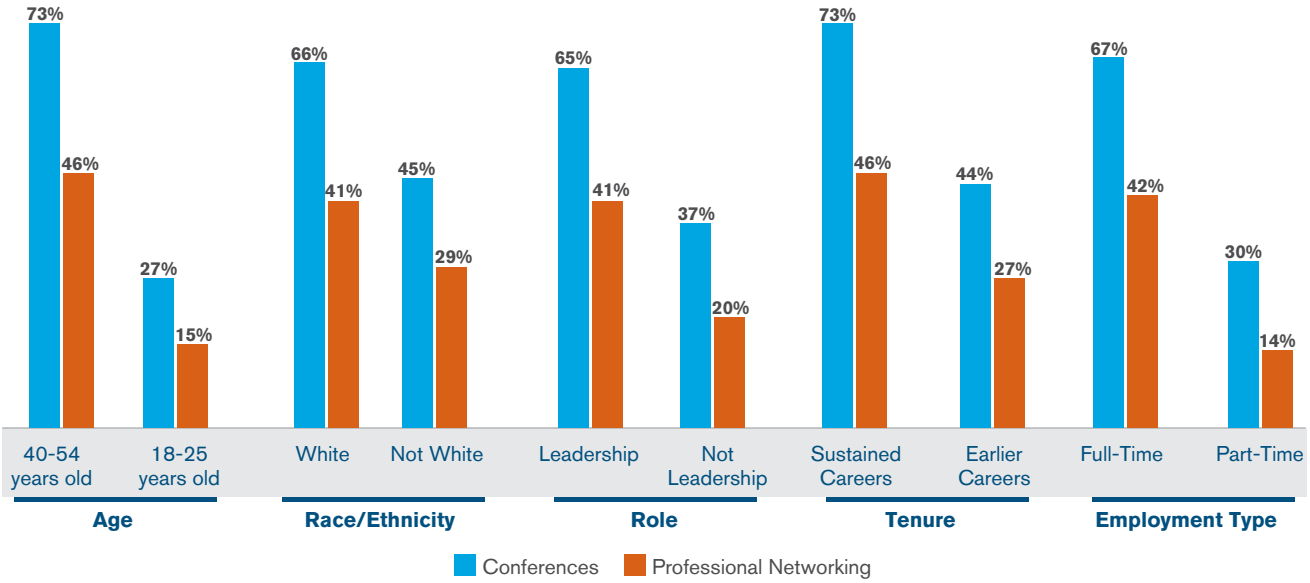
Professional Learning Supports

Most respondents participate in trainings, webinars, and conferences for professional learning. However, there are participation gaps based on respondent age, race/ethnicity, position type, role, and tenure.

25%
of respondents participate in professional learning communities

- Four out of five respondents participate in trainings and workshops that are in person (78%) or virtual (81%). Three out of five participate in webinars (59%) or conferences (57%). One in two participate in courses (46%) or use books, tools, or other resources (44%).
- Less common is participation in collaborative professional learning with colleagues or experts, such as professional networking (36%), professional learning communities (25%), coaching (22%), or shadowing (12%).
- There are gaps in participation in most types of professional learning for respondents who are ages 18–25, Latino/a, not White, or earlier career and respondents who have part-time or nonleadership positions (see Figure 7 for two types and the Power of Us Workforce Survey Technical Documentation[16] for more detail). There are also participation gaps for some types of professional development for male respondents (although fewer types than for the aforementioned groups).
- Slightly higher percentages of Latino/a respondents, non-White respondents, and male respondents reported participating in job coaching (and Latino/a and not White in job shadowing) compared to respondents who are not Latino/a, are White, or are female (respectively). In contrast, lower percentages of Latino/a respondents and non-White (and in some cases, male) respondents participate in other types of professional learning.

Figure 7: Participation in Conferences and Professional Networking (Percentage of Respondents), by Respondent Characteristics



[16] Technical Documentation is available at https://www.air.org/project/power-us-workforce-survey.

II Professional Learning

Most respondents have access to professional learning through their employer, but many experience a lack of access from other sources. In particular, there are differences in access by age, race/ethnicity, employment type, and position. These same groups also reported gaps in participation in types of professional development (see previous bullets).

37%
of respondents
have access to professional
learning through the internet

- Four out of five respondents (84%) have access to professional learning through their organization.
- One out of three have access through the internet (37%) or other organizations (34%).
- There are notable gaps in access to professional learning outside of employer-provided training for younger respondents, non-White respondents, part-time respondents, and respondents who are not in leadership (see Figures 8 and 9).

Figure 8: Percentage of Respondents With Access to Professional Learning Through Organizations Outside Employer, by Respondent Characteristics

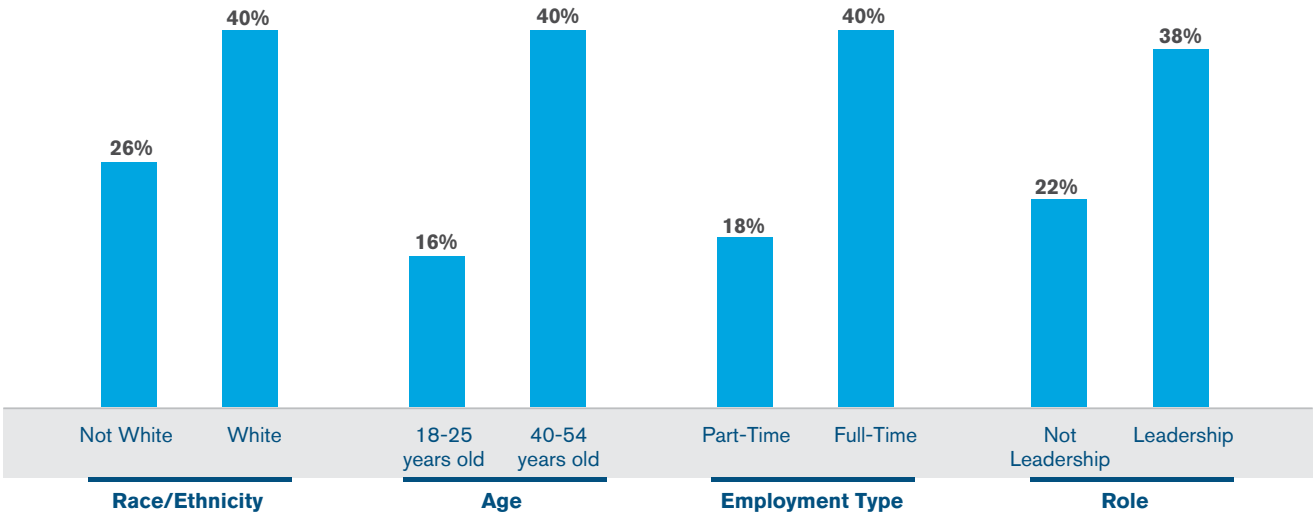
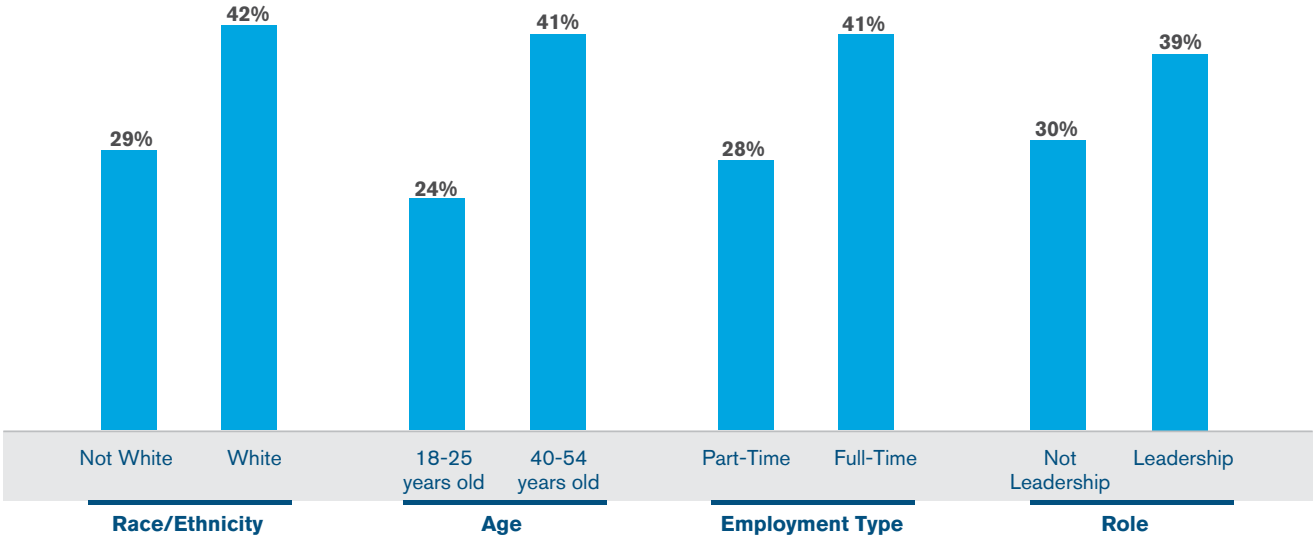


Figure 9: Percentage of Respondents With Access to Professional Learning Through the Internet, by Respondent Characteristics



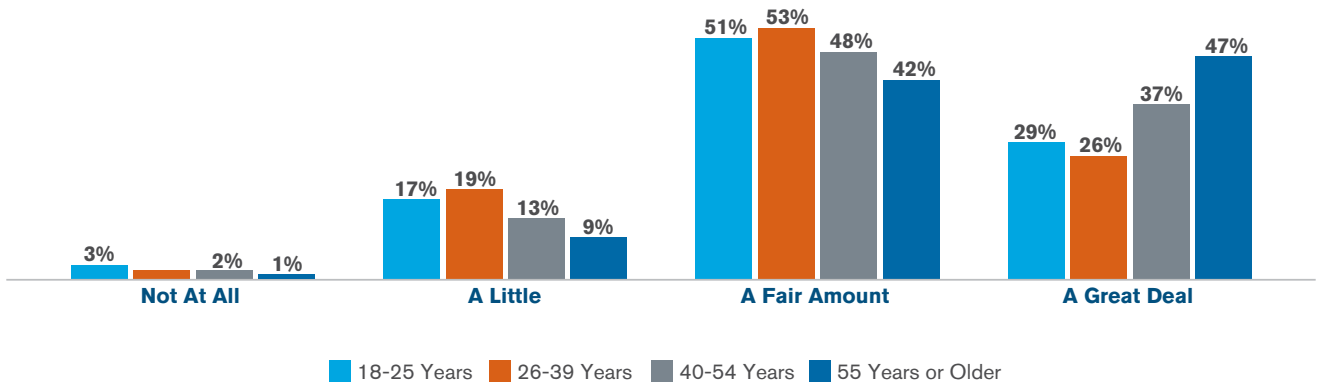
II Professional Learning

Professional learning opportunities are meeting respondents' needs—to an extent. Respondents indicated there are opportunities for improvement, in particular for respondents under age 40 and earlier career respondents with less than 15 years in the field.

29%
of earlier career respondents shared that their professional learning meets their needs *a great deal*

- Four out of five respondents (82%) shared that their professional learning meets their needs *a fair amount* or *a great deal*, which was a trend regardless of personal or professional characteristics.
- Three out of 10 earlier career respondents (29%) selected *a great deal*, compared to four out of 10 respondents with a sustained career (37%). Similarly, respondents under age 40 were less likely to select *a great deal* compared to older respondents (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Percentage of Respondents Reporting How Much Professional Learning Meets Their Needs, by Age



Respondents want more professional learning. Respondents indicated they want more professional learning when asked about improvements to their professional learning opportunities specifically and changes to their job in general.

40%
of respondents want resources to participate in professional learning

- When asked about improvements to the professional learning opportunities available to them, one in three respondents (34%) noted they want more offered through their organization. This was particularly true for respondents with earlier careers (37%), ages 18–25 (39%), who are not White (40%), or who are male (40%).[17] Relatedly, when asked about how they would change their jobs, one in five respondents noted "more or better professional learning support" (18%).
- One in five respondents (22%) noted more frequent professional learning would improve the professional learning opportunities available to them.
- Two out of five respondents (40%) indicated having "resources (e.g., funding, materials) to participate in or use" professional learning would improve their professional learning opportunities (the most common improvement selected by respondents). Relatedly, only one in four respondents (26%) indicated that their organization offers funding for individuals to participate in professional development (e.g., activities external to the organization).

[17] Similar percentages of Black staff (39%) and Latino/a staff (41%) indicated a need for more professional learning offered through their organization.

II Professional Learning

Respondents want more convenient professional learning opportunities. Convenient times and locations for professional learning are important to respondents, as is time off to participate in professional learning. The latter is particularly salient for full-time respondents and respondents ages 26–39. Respondents in leadership positions and respondents with sustained careers also indicated a need for more convenience.

29%
of respondents identified professional learning at convenient times as an improvement to their professional learning opportunities

- Respondents would like to see improvements to professional learning focused on convenience: professional learning offered at more convenient times (29%) and locations (24%). Respondents would also like time off to participate in or use professional learning (26%).
- Three in 10 full-time respondents (29%) identified time off to participate as an improvement to their professional learning opportunities (compared to 19% of part-time respondents). Similarly, one in three respondents ages 26–39 (32%) identified time off to participate as an improvement to their professional learning opportunities (compared to 23% of respondents ages 18–25).
- Respondents in leadership positions were more likely to indicate professional learning offerings at more convenient times (30% compared to 25% of those not in leadership) or convenient locations (25% compared to 20%). Similarly, a higher percentage of respondents with a sustained career (27%) reported that they would like professional learning at more convenient locations compared to earlier career respondents (21%).

Reflections on Survey Findings and Prior Research

Taken together, the Power of Us Workforce Survey findings and previous research on professional learning highlight the importance of organizations providing the time, space, and guidance for on-the-job training of youth fields staff, given that their educational backgrounds and career pathways vary greatly. Consistent with previous research, many of the Power of Us Workforce Survey respondents have earned a postsecondary degree and have mixed opinions about the alignment of their postsecondary studies with their work (NAA, 2006; Yohalem et al., 2006). The Power of Us Workforce Survey data also indicate that some respondents, such as younger staff who tend to serve in part-time and frontline roles, are more likely to have earned a high school diploma or associate's degree as their highest degree earned. Results from our survey also reinforced what we have heard anecdotally and through other research: There is no common credential or unified pathway into the youth fields (Fusco, 2012; Starr et al., 2023). Although there have been critical conversations about creating a nationally recognized youth work credential, the workforce is often valued for its diversity in degrees, lived experiences, and disciplinary approaches (Fusco, 2012; Gannett & Starr, 2016).

Many scholars have noted the importance of professional learning to build skills and encourage career persistence, thus contributing to high-quality programs that can help young people achieve positive outcomes (Blattner & Franklin, 2017; Borden et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2020; Hartje et al., 2008; Wiedow, 2018; Young & Goldberg, 2024). Prior research has found that youth fields staff themselves also highlight learning opportunities as an important feature of their professional growth (Hall et al., 2020). However, the Power of Us Workforce Survey findings align with previous research that, although staff have access to professional learning through their organization, some barriers prevent them from fully taking advantage of those and other opportunities available to them (Akiva et al., 2016; Bradshaw, 2015; Wiedow, 2018). Some of the specific challenges include limited staff hours to participate, lack of funding to participate, and lack of follow-up training or opportunities to reflect on or put their learning into practice (Akiva et al., 2016; Wiedow, 2018). The organizational approach to professional learning can exacerbate these challenges. For example, if staff are expected to participate in professional learning during the workday, limited time can present a challenge; if staff are expected to participate outside of the workday or organization, a lack of funding may present participation barriers.

III Professional Well-being

Survey: Share about your professional well-being, including working conditions, inclusion, and stress and burnout.

Working Conditions

Respondents have the resources to do their jobs. This was true regardless of most respondent characteristics. However, younger respondents were more positive about having the resources they need to do their job.

84%
of respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they have the resources they need to do their job

- Four out of five respondents (84%) *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they have the resources they need to do their job.
- A higher percentage of respondents ages 18–25 *strongly agreed* that they have the resources they need to do their job compared to respondents ages 26–39 (30% and 25%, respectively).

Some respondents indicated the work environment and job flexibility can be improved. Respondents under age 40 were more likely to want to change their work environment and job flexibility compared to older respondents.

21%
of respondents want more opportunities for remote work

- One in five respondents indicated needed changes to their job include improving the work environment (22%) and having more opportunities for remote work (21%). One in five respondents ages 18–25 indicated the need for these improvements (23% and 22%, respectively) compared to one in six respondents age 55 and up (18% and 15%, respectively).
- Non-White respondents (24% compared to 19% of White respondents) and respondents in full-time positions (23% compared to 17% of respondents in part-time positions) were more likely to indicate wanting more opportunities for remote work.
- One in six respondents (16%) selected more flexibility in work hours as a desired change to their job. Respondents ages 18–25 were more likely to identify this aspect as a desired change compared to respondents age 55 and up (18% and 12%, respectively).

III Professional Well-being

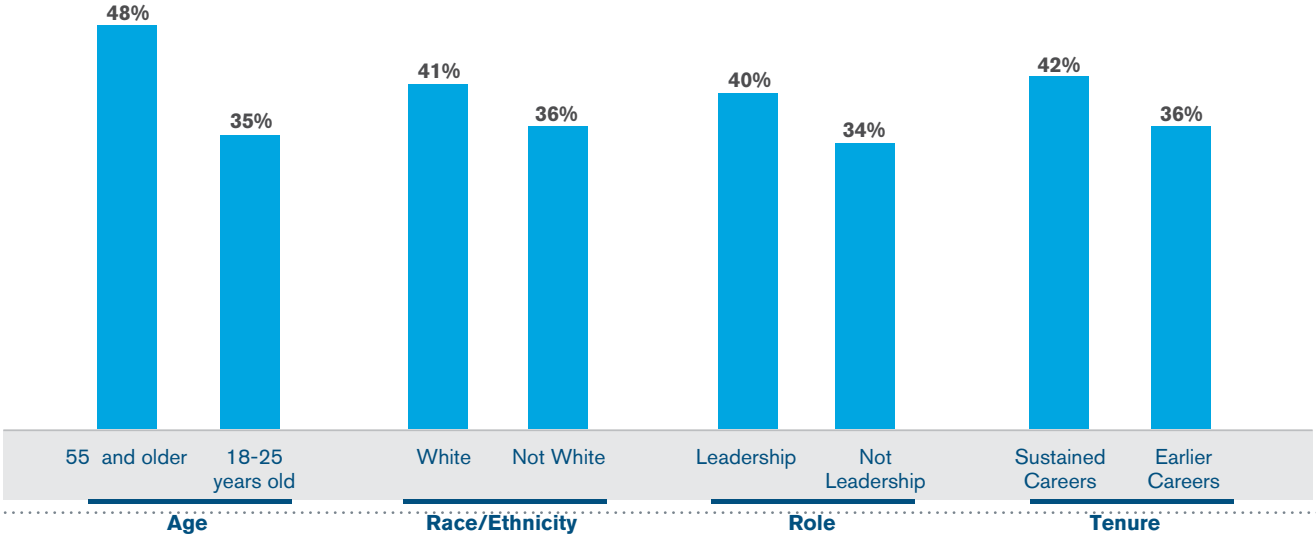
Inclusion

Respondents feel valued and that they belong at their organization; however, there were slight variations based on role, tenure in the field, age, and race/ethnicity. Respondents who are in leadership positions and respondents who have sustained careers feel slightly more positively about belonging; younger, Latino/a, and non-White respondents feel slightly less positively.

18%
of respondents ages 18–25 want more recognition at work

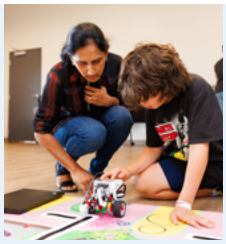
- Nine out of 10 respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they feel valued at work (87%) and that they belong at their organization (89%).
- Nearly one out of two (45%) respondents age 55 and up *strongly agreed* that they feel valued at work compared to two out of five (39%) respondents ages 18–25. Relatedly, a higher percentage of respondents ages 18–25 (18%) indicated that an aspect of their job that they would change is to have more recognition compared to respondents age 55 and up (12%).
- Higher percentages of respondents in leadership positions, respondents with sustained careers, and respondents age 55 and up *strongly agreed* that they feel like they belong at their organization (see Figure 11). Slightly lower percentages of respondents ages 18–25,

Figure 11: Belonging at the Organization: Percentage of Respondents Who Strongly Agreed, by Respondent Characteristics



III Professional Well-being

Respondents see themselves as part of a larger youth fields community; those who are younger and who are not in leadership positions are slightly less positive. Black respondents feel slightly more positive about being a part of the youth fields community.



87%
of respondents *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that they see themselves as part of a larger youth fields community

- Nine out of 10 respondents (87%) *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they see themselves as part of a larger youth fields community.
- Two out of five in leadership positions (40%) *strongly agreed* that they see themselves as part of a youth fields community (compared to 31% of respondents not in leadership). Relatedly, respondents who are not in leadership positions (14%) were more likely to *disagree* than those in leadership (9%).
- Two out of five respondents age 55 and up (42%) *strongly agreed* that they see themselves as part of a larger youth fields community (compared to 36% of those ages 18–25).
- Two out of five Black respondents (42%) *strongly agreed* that they see themselves as part of a larger youth fields community (compared to 37% of respondents who are not Black).

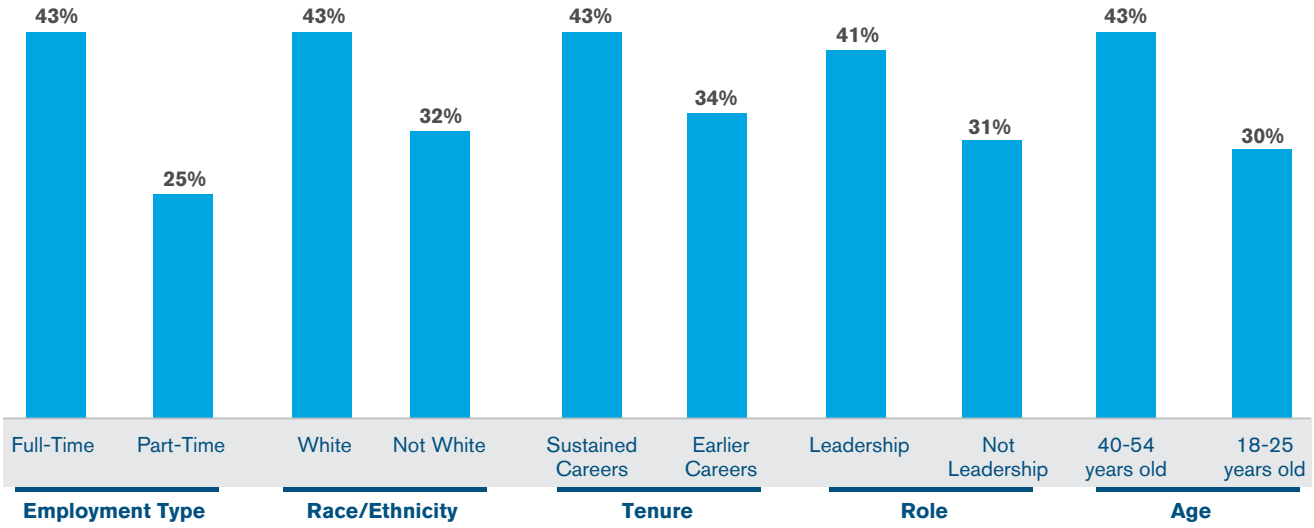
Stress and Burnout

Many respondents experience stress and burnout on the job. The need for less stress was particularly true for those who are older, are White, are full-time, have leadership positions, or have sustained careers.

47%
of respondents feel burned out at work

- One in two respondents (47%) *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that they feel burned out at work.
- Two out of five (38%) indicated "less stress" was a needed change to their job. Out of a list of 20 improvements, only better pay and/or benefits was higher (69% of respondents selected it as a change to their job).
- Higher percentages of respondents who are full-time, are White, have sustained careers, are in leadership positions, and are older chose "less stress" as an aspect of their job they would change (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Change to Their Job: Percentage of Respondents Who Selected "Less Stress," by Respondent Characteristics



III Professional Well-being

Reflections on Survey Findings and Prior Research

The Power of Us Workforce Survey findings regarding working conditions align with recent efforts that note the work environment is a core, foundational element for creating a thriving out-of-school time workforce (NAA, 2022; Office of the U.S. Surgeon General, 2022). Similarly, the survey findings about work flexibility echo recent findings from Hall and colleagues (2020), in which youth-serving staff expressed a desire for work-life balance and work flexibility that was less common in youth fields jobs with fixed hours and times of day. Other prior research indicates work flexibility can be critical for working parents, caregivers, and those who are juggling multiple jobs alongside their youth fields position (Vasudevan, 2019; Yohalem et al., 2006).

In the Power of Us Workforce Survey, most respondents reported that they feel valued at work, belong at their organization, and are a part of a larger youth fields community. This finding is reflective of the commitment staff report they feel toward their career in other research (e.g., Blattner & Franklin, 2017; Starr et al., 2023). However, the slightly less positive response to questions about sense of belonging for younger, Latino/a, and non-White survey respondents points to an ongoing need for more inclusive environments, elevated in other research. For example, Baldridge and colleagues (2024) note that youth fields staff and leaders of color have shared the stress related to being tokenized and/or devalued on the job.

Although it may seem paradoxical that respondents feel both valued and stressed, this is a known tension for those in the youth fields workforce. Our findings align with other research that found that stress and burnout are common challenges experienced by youth fields staff (e.g., Barford & Whelton, 2010; NAA, 2022; Vasudevan, 2019; Yohalem & Pittman, 2006). In a recent study, researchers found that stress can stem from ambiguous role identities (i.e., job responsibilities) in which direct-service professionals are “trying to be everything else” for young people (Bloomer et al., 2021). Specifically, staff who are unclear about their roles take on duties beyond what might be expected by their organization, including experiencing a sense that they need to resolve challenges in youth lives that are outside the focus of the program. It also may stem from unpreparedness or emotional exhaustion from responding to youth experiences and behaviors related to adversity and trauma (Bloomer et al., 2021).

IV Compensation

Survey: Share about pay and benefits. Responses are compared to other professions in the U.S. workforce.

Pay

Most respondents report hourly wages of at least $15 per hour and salaries of at least $40,000 per year. Respondents in leadership positions, with sustained careers, or in full-time positions are more likely to be paid via annual salary. Pay is generally higher than pay for childcare workers.

53%
of respondents earn an hourly wage of at least $20 per hour

- One in two respondents paid hourly (53%) earn at least $20 per hour (Figure 13). One in two paid via an annual salary (48%) earn $60,000 or more per year (Figure 14).
- Two out of three respondents not in leadership positions (68%) are paid via hourly wage and 26% receive an annual salary.
- Three out of five respondents in leadership positions (62%) are paid via annual salary and one in three (35%) are paid hourly. Respondents with sustained careers and full-time positions are also more likely to be paid via annual salary.
- Nine out of 10 respondents paid hourly (89%) earn $15 or more per hour (see Figure 13). In comparison, approximately half of childcare workers paid hourly earn $14 or more per hour.[18]

Respondents' pay is lower than the education field (based on role). Respondents in leadership positions report lower salaries than those of school principals (similar trends were observed for respondents with sustained careers and full-time positions). Respondents not in leadership positions report salaries that are lower than those of classroom teachers. Respondents' hourly pay—regardless of position—is lower than hourly pay for the education workforce.

88%
of respondents in leadership positions earn less than school principals

- Four out of five respondents paid hourly (79%) earn less than teachers (approximately $30 per hour).[19] This trend was similar regardless of having a leadership position (Figure 13) as well as career tenure or full- or part-time position.
- One in two respondents paid via salary (49%) and nearly three out of four respondents who are not in leadership positions (71%) earn a lower annual salary than teachers (approximately $62,000; Figure 14).[20] This trend was similar for staff with earlier careers and part-time positions.
- Nine out of ten respondents in leadership positions paid via annual salary (88%) earn a lower annual salary than principals (approximately $101,000; Figure 14).[21] This trend was similar for respondents with sustained careers and respondents with full-time positions.

[18] Median pay for childcare workers is a $13.71 hourly wage or $28,520 annual salary, meaning half of childcare workers earn more than $28,520.

[19] Median annual salaries for elementary and secondary school teachers are $61,690 and $62,360, respectively. A salary of $62,000 corresponds to a full-time hourly wage of about $30 per hour.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Median annual salary for school principals is $101,320.

IV Compensation

Figure 13: Hourly Wages (Percentage of Respondents), by Position

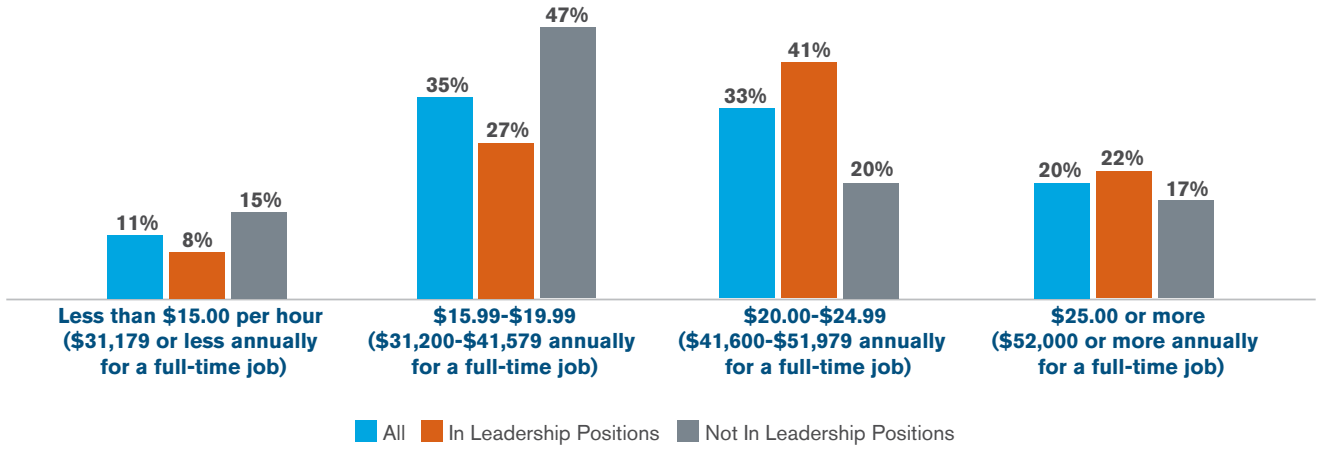
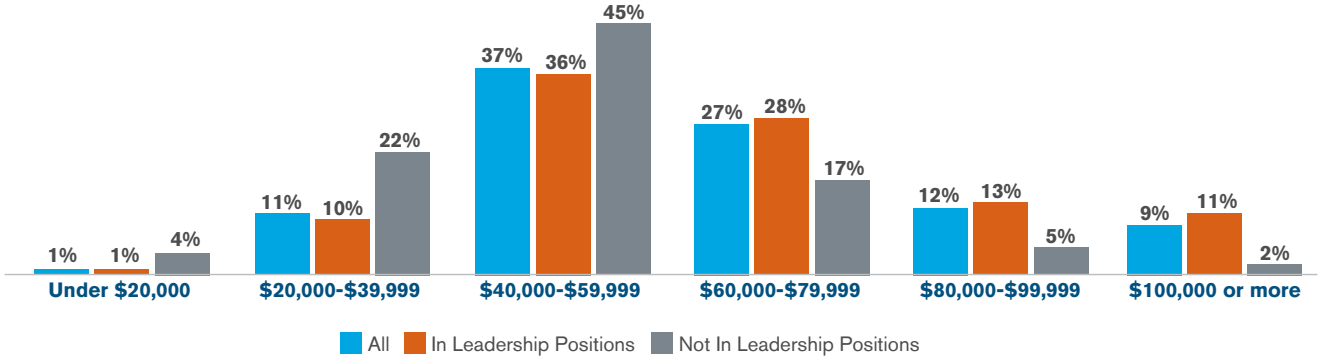


Figure 14: Annual Salaries (Percentage of Respondents), by Position



IV Compensation

There are gaps in hourly pay by race/ethnicity and age. Latino/a respondents report lower hourly pay compared to Black respondents and White respondents.

- Three out of four respondents ages 18–25 (77%) were paid by hourly wage, and two out of three of those respondents (64%) reported being paid less than $20 per hour.
- Four out of 10 Latino/a respondents (44%) receive an hourly wage of $20.00–$24.99 compared to three out of 10 White respondents (29%) and Black respondents (27%). Although some of these differences may be related to respondent age, differences remain after adjusting for age.

Respondents expressed the need for improved pay and/or benefits. This was particularly true for younger respondents and earlier career respondents.

37%
of respondents *strongly disagreed* or *disagreed* that they are paid a fair amount for the work they do

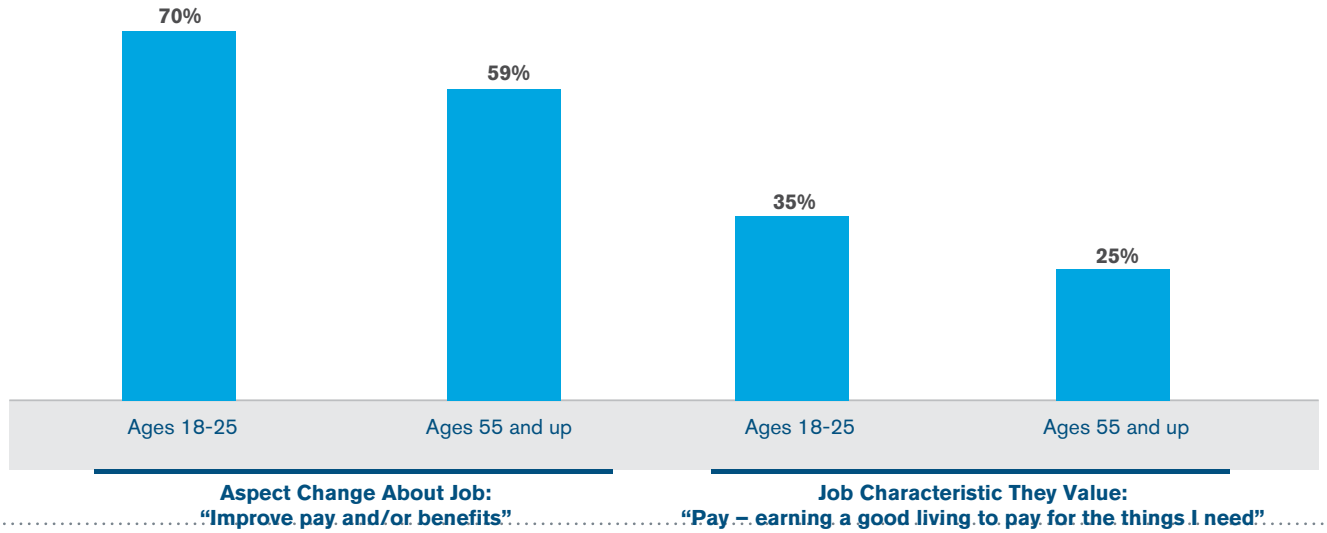
- Nearly two out of five respondents (37%) *strongly disagreed* or *disagreed* that they are paid a fair amount for the work they do.
- Two out of three respondents (69%) indicated that better pay and/or benefits is a needed job improvement. This was the most common desired change to their job selected by respondents.
- Two out of three respondents ages 18–25 indicated a need for improved pay or benefits compared to three out of five respondents age 55 and up (Figure 15).
- One out of three respondents ages 18–25 indicated one of the top three job characteristics they value is pay (i.e., “earning a good living to pay for the things I need”) compared to one out of four respondents age 55 and up (Figure 15). Similar trends were observed for earlier career respondents compared to sustained career respondents.

IV Compensation

THE YOUTH FIELDS: TOP 10 ASPECTS WE WOULD CHANGE ABOUT OUR JOBS

1. **Better pay and/or benefits** (69%)
2. **Less stress** (38%)
3. **More support from leadership** (26%)
4. **More opportunities for advancement** (26%)
5. **More opportunities for collaboration** (22%)
6. **Improved work environment** (22%)
7. **More opportunities for remote work** (21%)
8. **More or better professional learning support** (18%)
9. **More recognition** (18%)
10. **More opportunities to be creative** (18%)

Figure 15: Respondents Wants and Values Regarding Compensation, by Age



Benefits

Most respondents have access to benefits through their employer. Compared to U.S. private industry nonunion workers, lower percentages of respondents have access to retirement benefits and higher percentages have access to paid family leave.

- Respondents commonly have access to personal leave and medical insurance, whereas few have access to professional development funds, transportation benefits, or tuition assistance (Figure 16). Only one in 10 respondents (10%) has no access to benefits.
- Three out of four (75%) have access to paid leave and two out of three (68%) have access to medical insurance, similar to private industry nonunion workers (77%–79% and 69%, respectively).
- One out of two respondents (56%) has access to retirement benefits, compared to 68% of private industry nonunion workers. Two out of five respondents (43%) have access to paid family leave, compared to 27% of private industry nonunion workers.

IV Compensation

Figure 16: Respondents' Access to Benefits Through Employers

More than half have access to:	Less than half have access to:
Paid leave (75%)	Paid family leave (43%)
Medical insurance (68%)	Retirement savings contributions (39%)
Dental insurance (62%)	Professional development funds (26%)
Vision insurance (57%)	Transportation benefits (23%)
Retirement benefits (56%)	Tuition assistance (18%)

Respondents in full-time or leadership positions and respondents with sustained careers are more likely to have access to benefits. There are substantial gaps in access to benefits between full-time and part-time respondents (Figure 17). There are smaller but similar gaps exist for respondents based on leadership position (Figure 18) and career tenure. However, differences in access to benefits, including between those in leadership positions and those not in leadership positions, are smaller after taking into consideration full- and part-time status.

Figure 17: Respondents With Access to Benefits, by Full-Time and Part-Time Status (Percentage of Respondents)

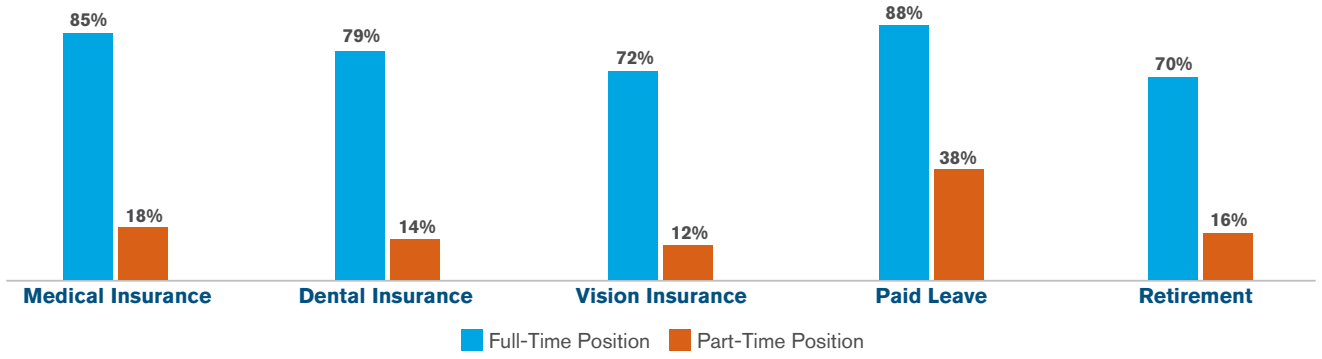
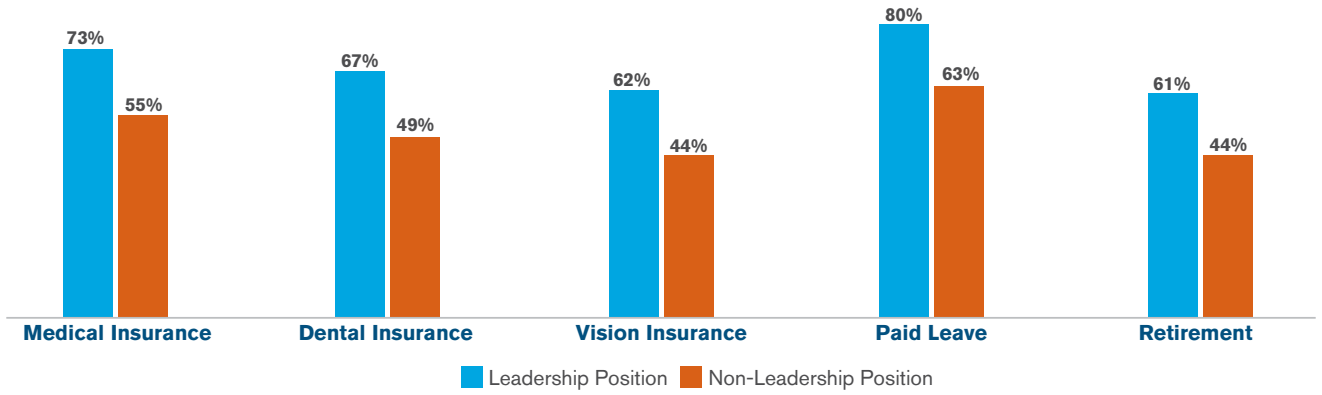


Figure 18: Respondents With Access to Benefits, by Role (Percentage of Respondents)



IV Compensation

Younger, non-White, and Latino/a respondents have access to fewer benefits. Even after taking into consideration full- or part-time status, differences in access to medical insurance, paid leave, and retirement benefits remained for respondents ages 18–25, non-White respondents, and Latino/a respondents (Figures 19–21).[21]

Figure 19: Access to Medical Insurance Benefits Through Employers, by Respondent Characteristics

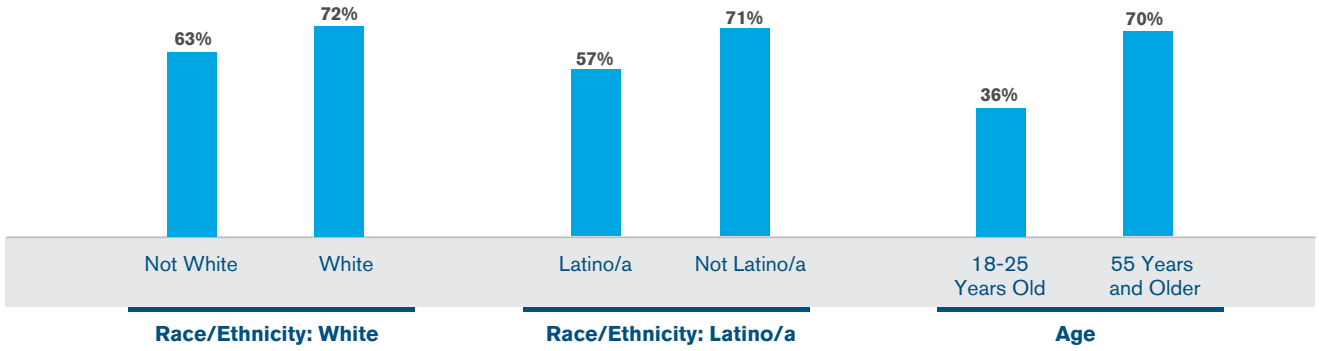


Figure 20: Access to Paid Leave Benefits Through Employers, by Respondent Characteristics

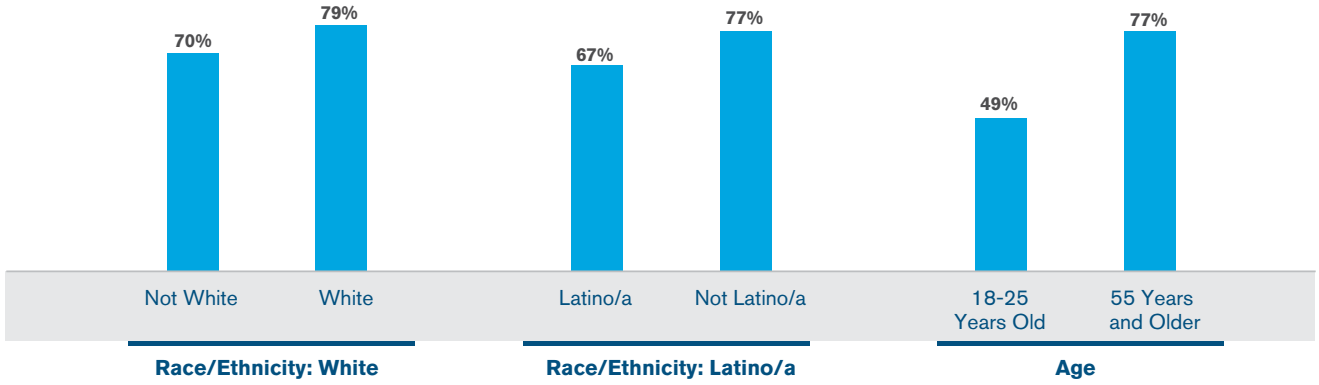
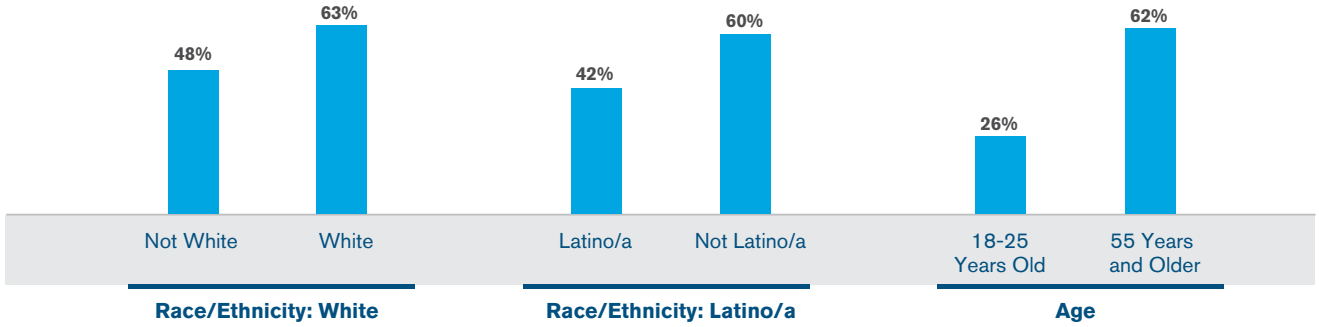


Figure 21: Access to Retirement Benefits Through Employers, by Respondent Characteristics



[21] These differences by age and ethnicity could be a result of the Generation Z Effect and the California Effect mentioned on page 8 of this report.

IV Compensation

Reflections on Survey Findings and Prior Research

The Power of Us Workforce Survey findings elevate the importance of compensation and benefits to the workforce and for the recruitment and retention of qualified staff in the youth fields. Although pay reported by respondents overall is influenced by the high representation of staff in leadership positions, with sustained careers, and in California, the significant differences in pay for some respondent groups point to pay inequities in the field. Prior research indicates that compensation and benefits are important elements of job quality and that transparency in the recruitment process about salary ranges and available benefits can help eliminate pay gaps (Conway et al., 2021; NAA, 2023). Indeed, in the Power of Us Workforce Survey, respondents indicated that the most common aspect of their jobs that they would change is to improve pay and/or benefits, which aligns with recent research on the economic uncertainty experienced by youth fields staff in areas experiencing gentrification and rising housing costs (Baldridge, 2020; Vasudevan, 2019). The importance of compensation and benefits is not unique to the youth fields; pay, benefits, and working conditions are the most common elements of job quality in frameworks across various fields (Conway et al., 2021). Recent policy and advocacy efforts, both within and adjacent to the youth fields, have named providing equitable compensation and access to benefits as essential for a stable workforce (e.g., NAA, 2022; National Association for the Education of Young Children; 2021, National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment, 2022).

Summary

The Power of Us Workforce Survey findings can translate to actionable practice and policy change to support the workforce in meaningful and effective ways. Toward these ends, the Power of Us Workforce Survey contributes the following high-level takeaways:

- Many staff are drawn to and stay in the youth fields because they enjoy working with youth, find purpose in it, and have a personal connection to the communities, places, and experiences of the young people they support.
- There is no common educational pathway into the youth fields. There is a critical need for organizations to provide the time, space, and guidance for on-the-job training, because educational backgrounds and access to professional learning vary greatly.
- Strengths in the field include working conditions and inclusion, with opportunities to improve these experiences for some respondents and—for many—to reduce stress and burnout.
- Compensation and benefits are important, and there are indicators in the Power of Us Workforce Survey data of differences in respondents' pay by age and race/ethnicity. The issue warrants attention by researchers for further exploration and by policy and practice leaders to improve the recruitment and retention of qualified staff in the youth fields.

Of course, this is just the beginning. There is more work to do to harness the Power of Us and strengthen our understanding and support of the youth fields workforce. Specifically, we pose the following actions for consideration:

- **Explore additional findings from the Power of Us.** Our team conducted further explorations of the workforce experience for respondents who are not in leadership positions and staff in part-time positions (see the Power of Us Workforce Survey Supplemental Tables & Findings). Visit https://www.air.org/project/power-us-workforce-survey to see these and any other future findings.
- **Answer your own questions about the field using the Power of Us public dataset.** There are more data and analyses for the field to explore using the Power of Us Workforce Survey public dataset (available at https://www.air.org/project/power-us-workforce-survey). For example, we can learn more about the experiences of the workforce in different regions of the country and sectors of the field. As a field we can explore the relationships between staff experiences, such as the level of commitment to the field and pay or benefits. And although the report highlights some significant differences for groups of respondents, there is more to learn about the experiences of staff within subgroups (e.g., variations in responses for younger staff [ages 18–25] by sex or race/ethnicity). These are just a few examples, and we know there are many more questions to ask and answer.
- **Launch other data collection and research efforts.** The Power of Us Workforce Survey—as a cross-organizational, cross-sector, and national survey—is a starting point for the field. The field will continue to benefit from the survey data as others—policymakers, researchers, associations, and collaborating organizations—build upon it through ongoing data collection. Policymakers and analysts can consider the youth fields in existing and future data collection, such as in national surveys of the workforce, by adding a "youth fields" job sector to capture more information on the field. Finally, regular national administrations of the Power of Us Workforce Survey can create a longitudinal dataset, tracking the field over time and continuing to develop our understanding of the experiences and needs of the field.

Summary

- **Share and make meaning of findings with the field.** We encourage using this report, the Power of Us Workforce Survey resources (available at https://www.air.org/project/power-us-workforce-survey), your own survey data, and other field resources to launch discussions with colleagues, policymakers, and researchers. Through these discussions, groups can discuss how their experiences mirror those of the Power of Us Workforce Survey respondents, ways that experiences differ, and how the field can use policy, practice, and research to increase the positive experiences and trajectories for the workforce.

We remain committed thought partners in your work and look forward to hearing more about what you are learning and how you are using it in the field. Please reach out to us at powerofussurvey@air.org to share your updates and questions and to continue this collaborative effort.

Speaking of collaboration, we are thankful to our many partners in this work, listed below. We invite you to look to them for the good work they do and thank them for their contributions to this effort, because the Power of Us Workforce Survey, the dataset, and this report would not be possible without their support.

Power of Us Champions and Partners

Partners

- Collaborative Communications
- National Institute on Out-of-School Time

Expert Advisory Group

Co-chairs:

- Dale Blyth, Journal of Youth Development, University of Minnesota (emeritus)
- Aleah Rosario, Partnership for Children & Youth

With representatives from:

- Afterschool Alliance
- American Camp Association
- Arts Education Partnership
- The Aspen Institute
- Association for Child & Youth Care Practice, Inc.
- The Council of Large Public Housing Authorities
- Education Development Center, Inc.
- Every Hour Counts
- The Forum for Youth Investment
- The Center for Juvenile Justice Reform at Georgetown University
- Institute for Educational Leadership
- MENTOR
- Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs
- National Afterschool Association
- National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials
- National League of Cities
- National Recreation and Parks Association
- National Summer Learning Association
- National Urban League
- Search Institute
- Sperling Center for Research and Innovation
- StriveTogether

Summary

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- Laura Coleman, Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research
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- Priscilla Little, Research and Strategy Consultant
- Corliss Outley, Clemson University
- Nikki Yamashiro, Afterschool Alliance

Field Champions

Field Engagement Lead:

- Rebecca Goldberg, Rebecca Goldberg Consulting

With support from:

- 50 State Afterschool Network
- American Probation and Parole Association
- American Youth Policy Forum
- ARC
- AYS Inc.
- BOOST Collaborative
- Boys & Girls Clubs of America
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Southern Nevada
- California Teaching Fellows Foundation
- Camp Fire
- Change Inc.
- Children's Creativity Museum
- CHOICE
- Communities In Schools of Hampton Roads
- Edna Martin Christian Center
- Girls Inc.
- Girls Inc. of Fort Smith
- Girls Inc. of Metro Denver
- Greater Rochester Afterschool & Summer Alliance (GRASA)
- Heart Haven Outreach
- Heart of Los Angeles (HOLA)
- Historic Paradise Foundation
- Horizons National
- How Kids Learn Foundation
- Junior Achievement of Greater Kansas City
- Kingdom Learning Center
- Knowledge to Power Catalysts
- LA After School All Stars
- Learn All the Time (Andy Roddick Foundation)
- The Learning Agenda
- Los Angeles County of Education
- National 4-H Council
- National Partnership for Juvenile Services
- Next Up
- Office of Children's Affairs, Denver Afterschool Alliance
- The Opportunity Project
- Outward Bound USA

Field Champions (cont.)

- Parkway Rockwood Community Education Adventure Club
- Partnership for After School Education (PASE)
- Positive Coaching Alliance
- Praxis Institute
- Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation
- Rock Hill Schools
- Search Institute
- Starfish Initiative
- Temescal Associates
- Todd Martin Youth Leadership
- Woodcraft Rangers
- YMCA of the USA
- YMCA of Greater Fort Wayne (Child Care Services)

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Appendix A. Communications Campaign

Collaborative Communications group spearheaded the Power of Us Workforce Survey Communications Campaign. Spanning across various events, platforms, and engagements, this campaign unfolded as a strategic endeavor to foster dialogue, empower champions, and increase the reach of the Power of Us Workforce Survey.

Spring 2022: Laying the Foundation

In spring 2022, meticulous planning and material development set the stage for engagement. The creation of compelling campaign materials, including postcards, banners, and digital assets, underscored the commitment to impactful storytelling. The campaign's presence at the Beyond School Hours and NAA Convention through strategic sponsorships and engagements marked the initial foray into the wider out-of-school-time community. These events provided crucial opportunities to disseminate the survey's message, and collect authentic content for garnering attention and enthusiasm among participants.

- Campaign Materials Development: Designed postcards, pop-up banners, digital advertising banners, and half-page inserts for Afterschool Matters.
- Beyond School Hours Sponsorship (Orlando, FL): Promoted survey at booth, included postcards in swag bags, and highlighted during plenary.
- NAA Convention Sponsorship (Las Vegas, NV): Featured speaker, promotion on website/app, and on-site promotion.
- Delaware Afterschool Network Coffee Chat: Guest speaking opportunity.
- BOOST Conference Sponsorship (Palm Springs, CA): Planned promotion.

Summer 2022: Cultivating Champions

With the arrival of summer 2022, the campaign transitioned into a phase of champion cultivation and outreach. Leveraging guest speaking opportunities, sponsorship at prominent conferences, and the launch of a dedicated champions strategy, the focus shifted toward nurturing advocates within the field. Through targeted emails, office hours, and social media promotions, the campaign galvanized stakeholders to champion the cause, amplifying the survey's reach and impact.

- National Community Schools and Family Engagement Conference: Promoted survey and campaign.
- Champions Strategy Launched: Hosted office hours, targeted emails, and promotions in newsletters and on social media.
- Paid Social Ads: Soft launch on Twitter and Facebook.

Appendix A. Communications Campaign

Fall 2022: Amplifying Impact

In fall 2022, the campaign intensified its efforts, amplifying its impact through a strategic blend of digital outreach and in-person engagements. Ramping up paid social ads across multiple platforms and hosting a Power of Us Tweetstorm unleashed a wave of digital advocacy, driving awareness and engagement. Simultaneously, continued support to statewide networks, conferences, and meetings ensured sustained momentum, fostering a culture of collaboration and action. The campaign also kicked off the Power Pledge initiative, which provided incentives for organizations to recruit respondents from their networks.

- NPSS Office Hours: Support sessions held.
- Ramped Paid Social Ads: Increased presence on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.
- Power of Us Tweetstorm: Launched, promoting the survey.
- Power Pledge Promotion: Continued outreach, support, and promotions.
- Support at Conferences: Provided materials at various conferences and meetings.

Winter 2022–23: Sustaining Momentum

Through iterative updates to communication toolkits, websites, and targeted promotions, the campaign persisted in its mission to amplify voices and drive participation. Continued support to statewide networks, coupled with strategic placements in prominent publications, fortified the campaign's foothold and expanded its reach.

- Continuation of Activities: Updates to toolkits, website, and continued promotion through newsletters, blogs, and social media.
- Paid Social Ads Continued: Across multiple platforms.
- Support to Statewide Networks: Assistance with conferences and meetings.
- Promotion of *The 74* Article: Highlighted article authored by key figures.

Spring 2023: Final Push for Responses

As the campaign journeyed into spring 2023, the hosting of a Power of Us Tweetstorm, coupled with ongoing support and promotion efforts, underscored the campaign's unwavering commitment to driving survey responses. Through sustained engagement, the campaign laid the groundwork for a robust survey sample.

- Power of Us Tweetstorm: Held session for social media action.
- Continued Support: Aid to networks and champions, including stipends.
- Paid Social Ads Continued: Maintained presence on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn.

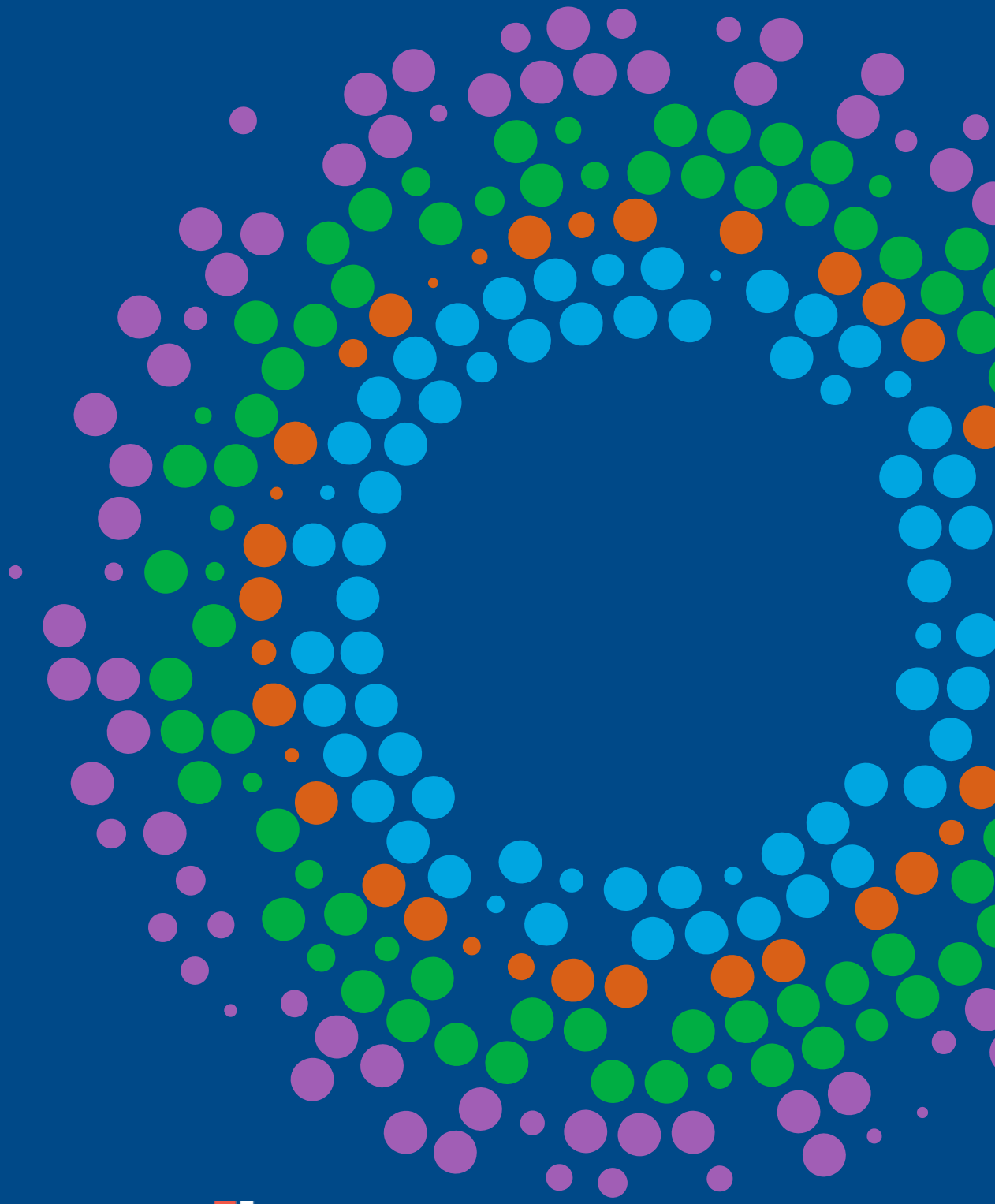
Appendix B. Additional Methodology

County Sample

To ensure the survey reached members of the workforce who are not otherwise connected to this professional community (such as through larger organizations, professional associations, or national conferences), the team sampled 190 counties in the United States that together represent the population of the country based on state, urbanicity, and adult population size. The final set of counties included three to four counties in each U.S. state. The team performed Google searches to identify the youth-serving organizations in each of those counties and conducted email, telephone, and mail outreach to request that the organizations' employees and volunteers complete the survey.

Survey Development

The AIR team worked closely with a technical working group (TWG) of experts (listed on page 38) in the youth fields to develop the survey content. First, the team and the TWG generated a list of topics related to the youth fields workforce that the field may wish to learn more about. The team prioritized the list of topics to narrow it down, keeping survey length and respondent burden in mind. The AIR team then identified and selected existing items from other industry surveys that were pertinent and wrote new items as needed. The project team conducted cognitive interviews and piloted the survey to thoroughly test the instrument. The final survey contained four response pathways for each respondent type (current staff, current volunteers, former staff, former volunteers). The survey started with a screener to ensure that respondents were current employees or volunteers in the youth fields or had worked or volunteered in the youth fields within the last 5 years. There were 31 items for former staff and volunteers, 52 items for current staff, and 32 items for current volunteers. For the survey items for current staff, see the Technical Documentation, available at https://www.air.org/project/power-us-workforce-survey.



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