



 Report

2024 workforce education motivations

What kind of learning do workers want from their company, and why?



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○ Overview

○ What kind of learning do workers want from their company, and why?

This was the question we set out to answer in our 2024 Workforce Education Motivations Survey, which included continuing comparisons to our [2019 InStride/Bain & Co. survey](#). The survey, which polled **over 1,000 working American adults**, explored their likelihood of pursuing further education through their employer, their reasons for doing so and their specific learning goals.

The findings reveal a workforce that values education and is eager to learn, but with unique needs, motivations and aspirations.



Key findings

1 Workers crave academic credentials without student debt

As more companies offer upfront tuition benefits, we wanted to know if workers prefer online education over the traditional in-person and on-campus model. The answer was a resounding **yes!** With tuition rising twice as fast as inflation over the past 40 years, Americans are seeking ways to further their careers without being burdened by a lifetime of student debt.

Given two choices, **72%** of employees would prefer “to pursue an online degree while working, with tuition fully paid for by my employer” versus opting “to pursue an in-person degree program, paying for tuition with my own funds and/or student loans.” Even the youngest cohorts of workers preferred to learn online while working for an employer that sponsored their education, contrasting with the prevailing narrative that Gen Z only wants in-person learning. When it comes to the kinds of education workers are excited to pursue, college degrees remain in high demand, particularly from nationally recognized public universities.



American workers are turning to employers for access to education, with over **80%** of workers between ages 18-44 citing interest in going back to school



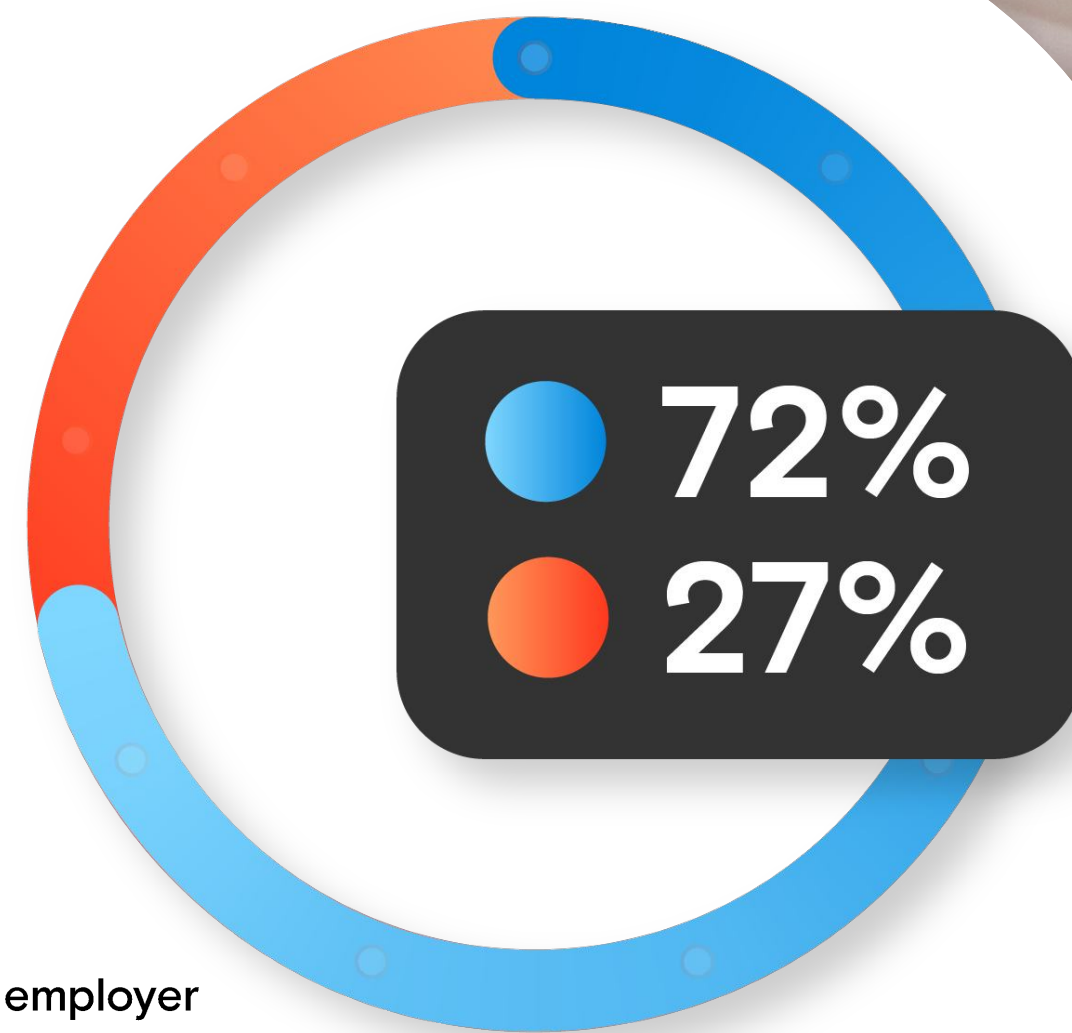
62% of respondents were interested in going back to school for a degree (associate, bachelor's, master's) while continuing to work. Additionally, **81%** of respondents were even more motivated by opportunities to get that education from a nationally recognized public university, highlighting the value placed on degrees from esteemed institutions.

This was most pronounced for Gen Z, with **93%** responding that they would be more interested in utilizing a workforce education benefit if it came from a nationally recognized public university. **This contradicts the prevailing narrative that Gen Z isn't interested in a traditional four-year degree and may instead reflect that they fear they can't afford it.**

If you had two paths available for you to pursue a college degree, which of the following two paths would you choose?

72% of respondents would prefer to pursue an online degree while working, with tuition fully paid for by their employer.

27% would prefer to pursue an in-person degree program, paying for tuition with their own funds and/or student loans.

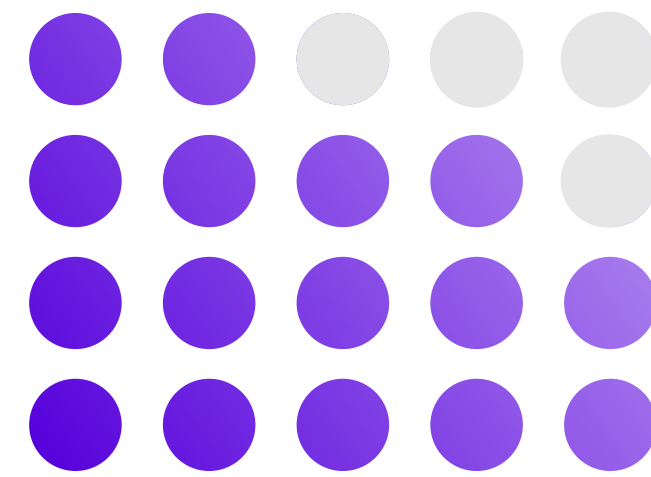


- Paid by employer
- Self-funded

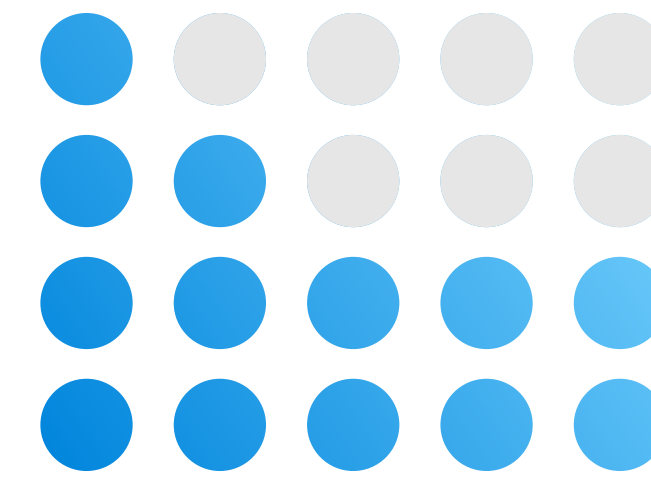


Gender differences:

An overwhelming **81%** of women preferred the employer-paid online option, with **66%** of men also preferring that option.



81%

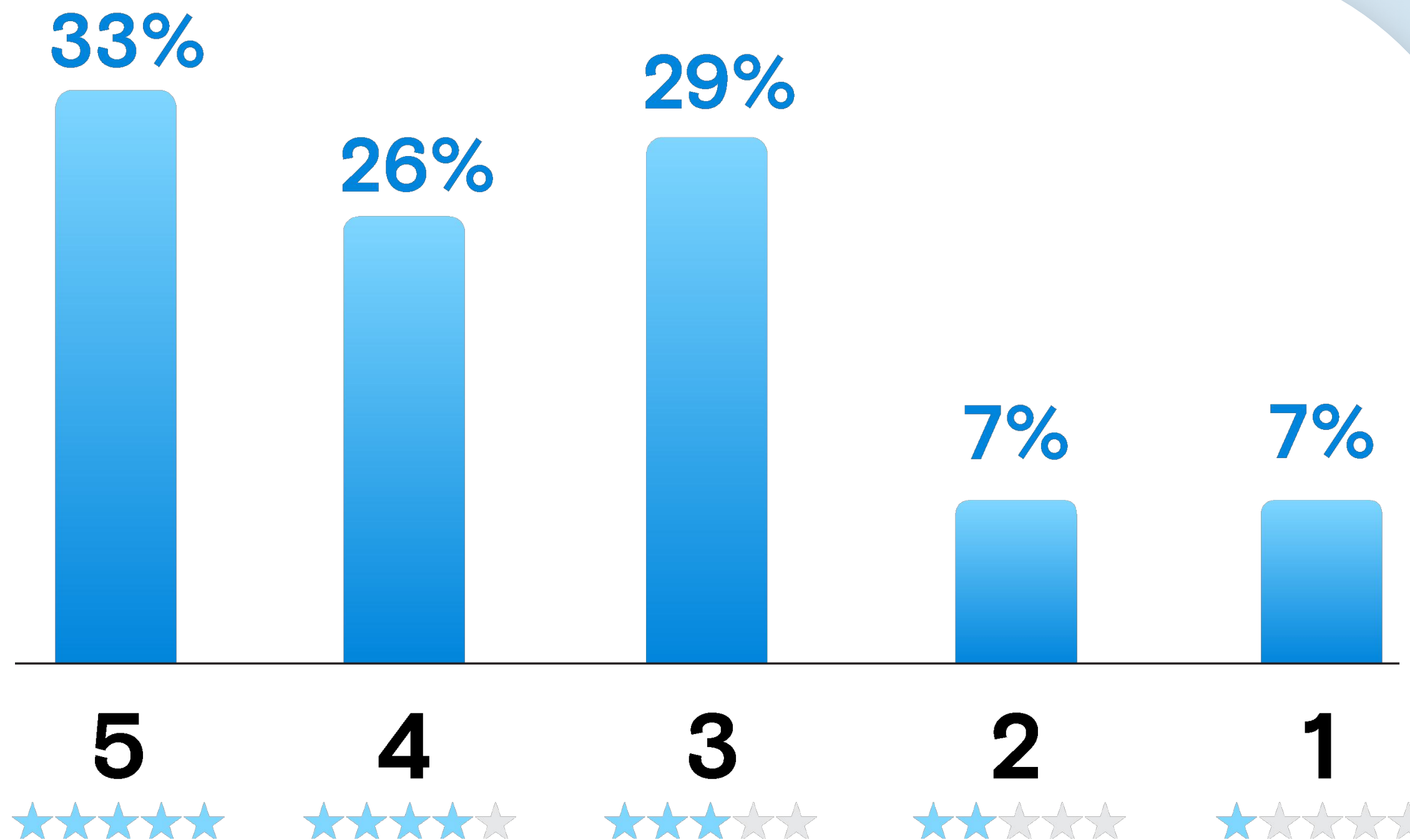


66%

● Women
● Men

On a scale of 1-5, please rank the value of a bachelor's degree from a nationally recognized public university:

5 - I believe a bachelor's degree earned online from a high quality public university is very valuable



1 - I do not believe a bachelor's degree earned online from a high quality public university is valuable

2

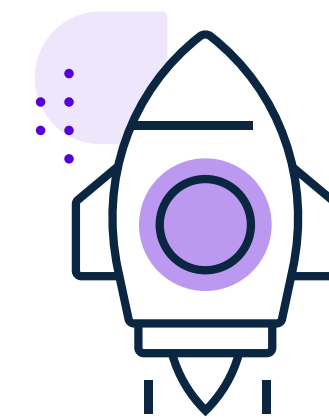
Younger generations seek education to earn a promotion

There is a narrative that Gen Z and Millennials aren't interested in promotions or management roles. In contrast to this narrative, our survey reveals that interest in going back to school is highest among those under 45. Notably, **84% of these workers expressed interest or strong interest in going back to school** through an employer-sponsored education benefit.

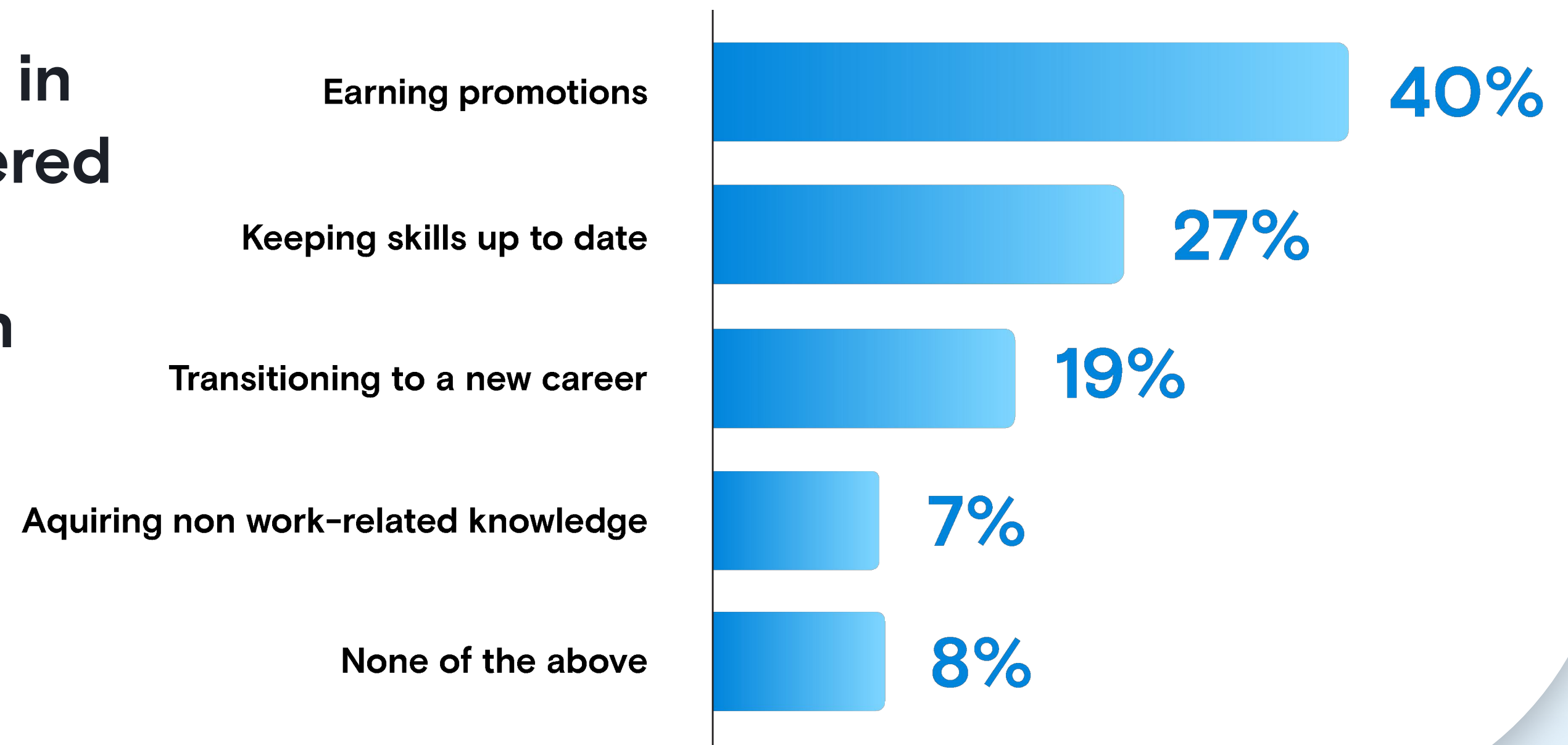
Their top reason for wanting to add skills and education to their resume? **To earn a promotion.**

Forty percent of all respondents (and 44% of those under 45) listed this as their **top reason, 13 points higher than keeping their skills up to date**, which was the second most common response.

Workers crave help from their employers for their education with over **85%** motivated by the ability to enhance their performance and career prospects through education



When deciding to enroll in a course or degree covered by this benefit, which of these would be the main motivating factor?



36%



26%



24%



6%



8%



5 - Extremely important

4

3

2

1 - Not at all important

On a scale of 1-5, how important is it to you to move up in your job?



3

Since 2019, tuition assistance has become even more sought after as a workplace benefit

Since our 2019 InStride/Bain & Co. survey, interest in joining companies that offer tuition assistance and staying at those companies because of that benefit has dramatically increased.

From 2019 to 2024, the proportion of employees who said they were “significantly influenced” by this benefit grew from **25% to 38%**, a **13 percentage-point increase**. A similar trend was observed with retention: the number of employees stating they were significantly more likely to stay with their employer due to tuition assistance rose from 16% to 23%.

In our 2024 survey, employers that offered tuition assistance programs were rewarded with positive opinions from 65% of their workforce for offering this benefit, and 67% would have a more favorable view of their employer if an education program were added. **64%** said they were more likely to apply to a company that offered tuition assistance.



Offering tuition assistance is having a growing effect on driving retention and talent attraction, increasing **13 percentage points** since 2019

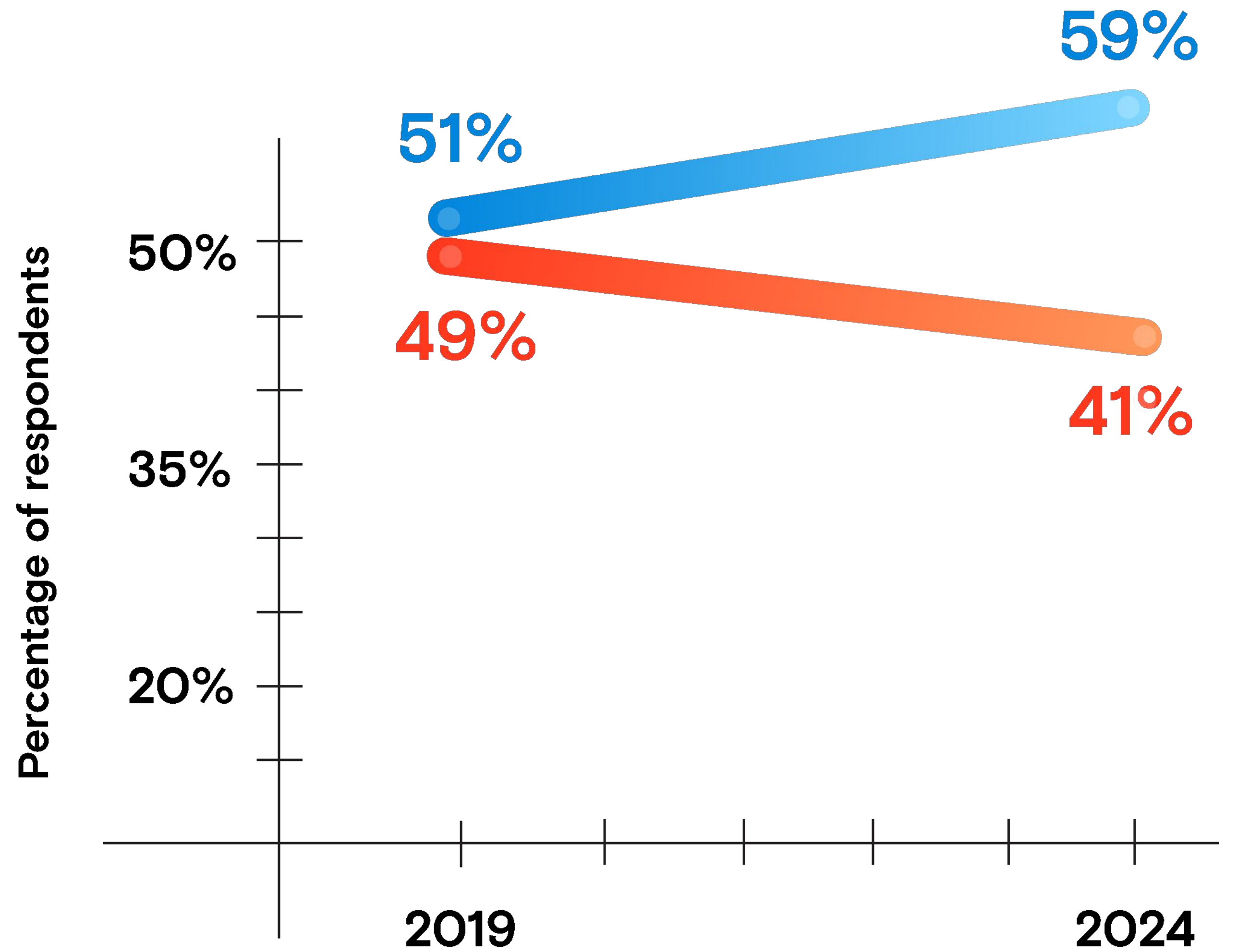




Did knowing that your employer had a tuition assistance program influence your decision to work there?



- Significant or some influence
- No Influence

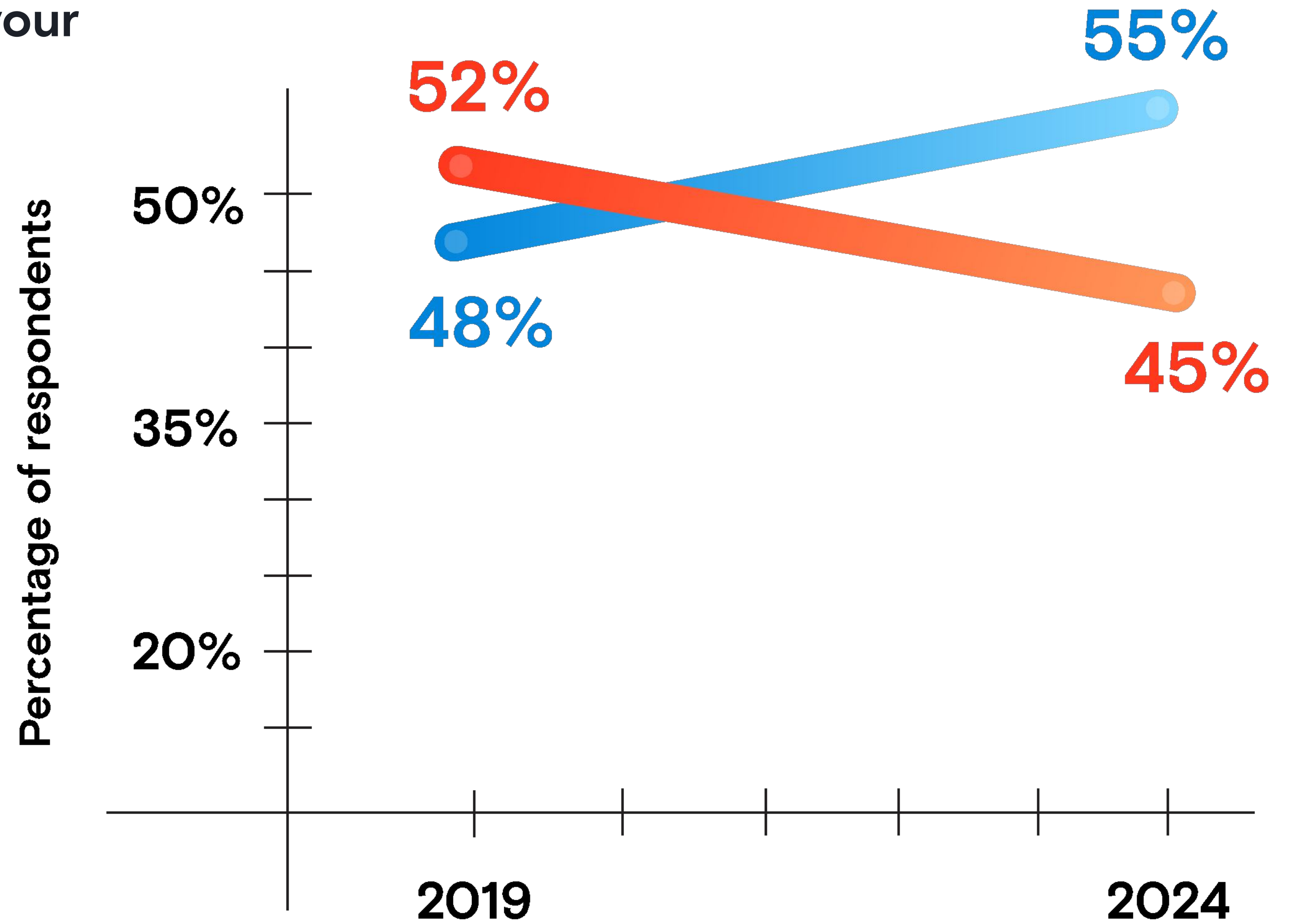




Does your employer's tuition assistance program affect your decision to stay employed by your current employer?



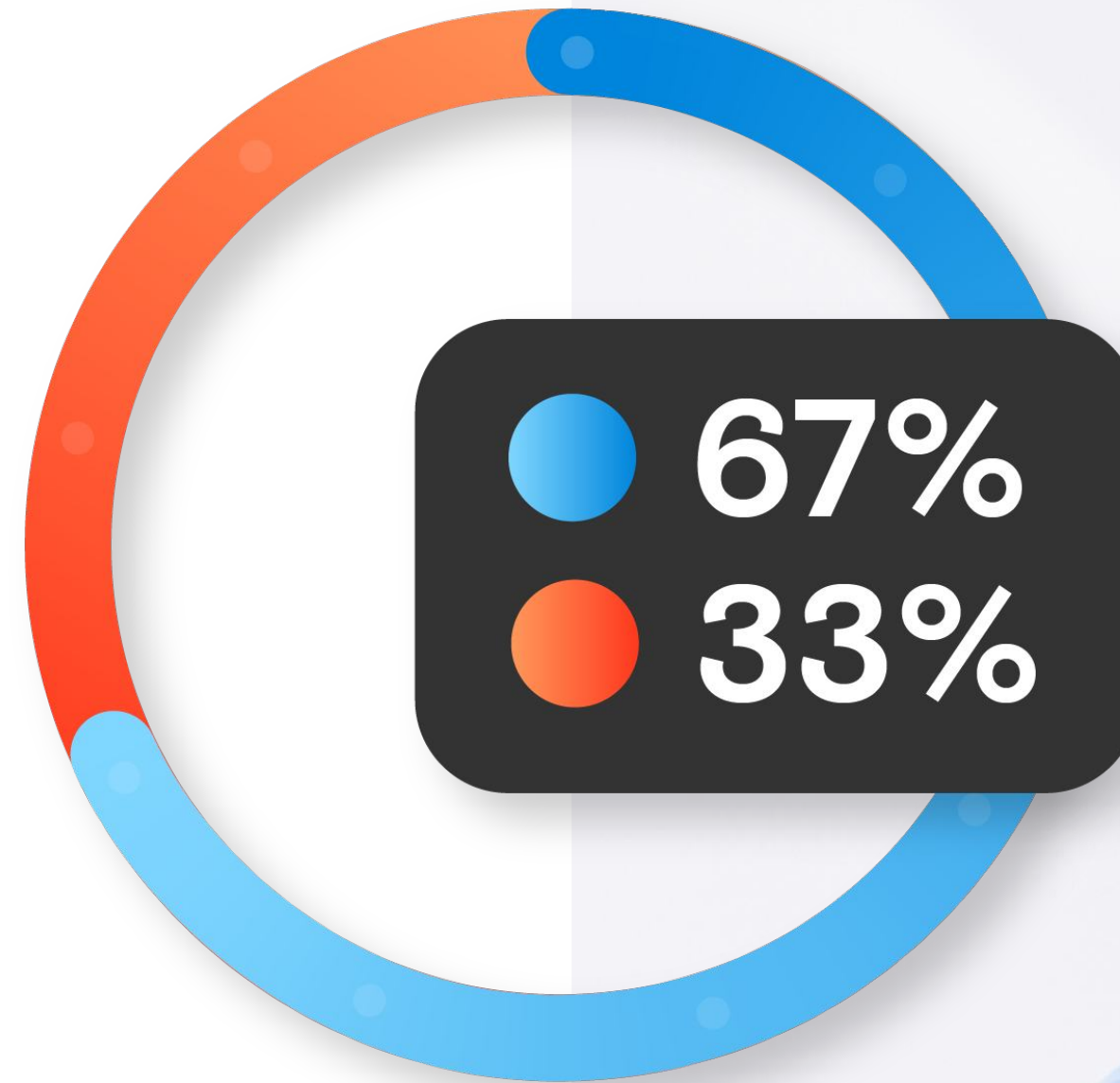
● Significant or some influence
● No Influence



○ If your current employer or a future employer were to have a tuition assistance program, how would it affect your perception of that employer?

67% would like their employer more if they added an education program.

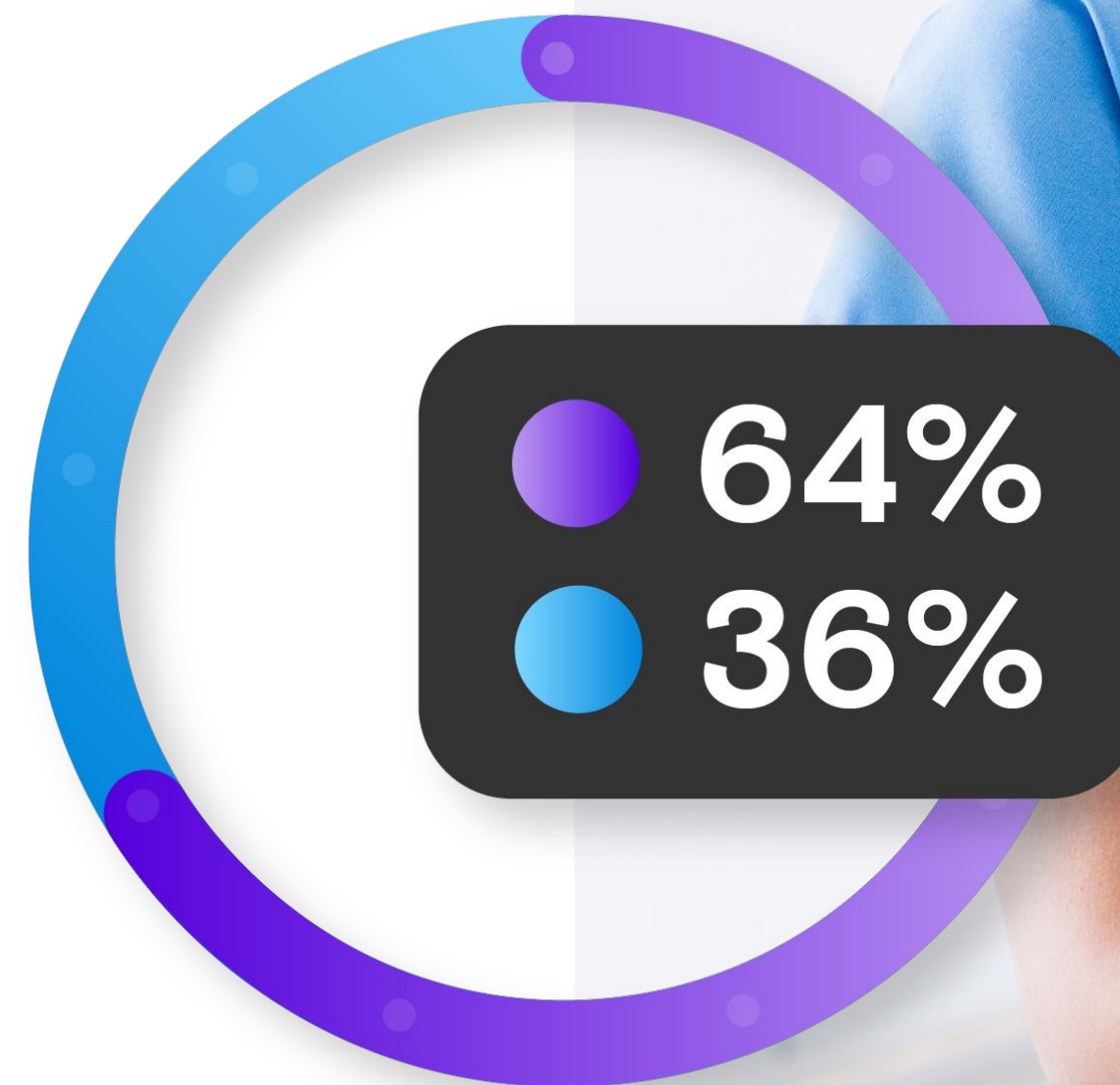
● Like employer more
● No effect



○ How much would the existence of a tuition assistance program at an employer increase the likelihood of you pursuing a job there?

64% would be more likely to apply if their employer offered tuition assistance.

● More likely to apply
● No effect



4

Interest in education programs is highest for underrepresented groups, the young and managers

The youngest cohort of workers, early in their careers, expressed the most interest in taking advantage of workforce education benefits. These generations are greatly affected by the rising unaffordability of tuition, which has outpaced wage growth for decades.

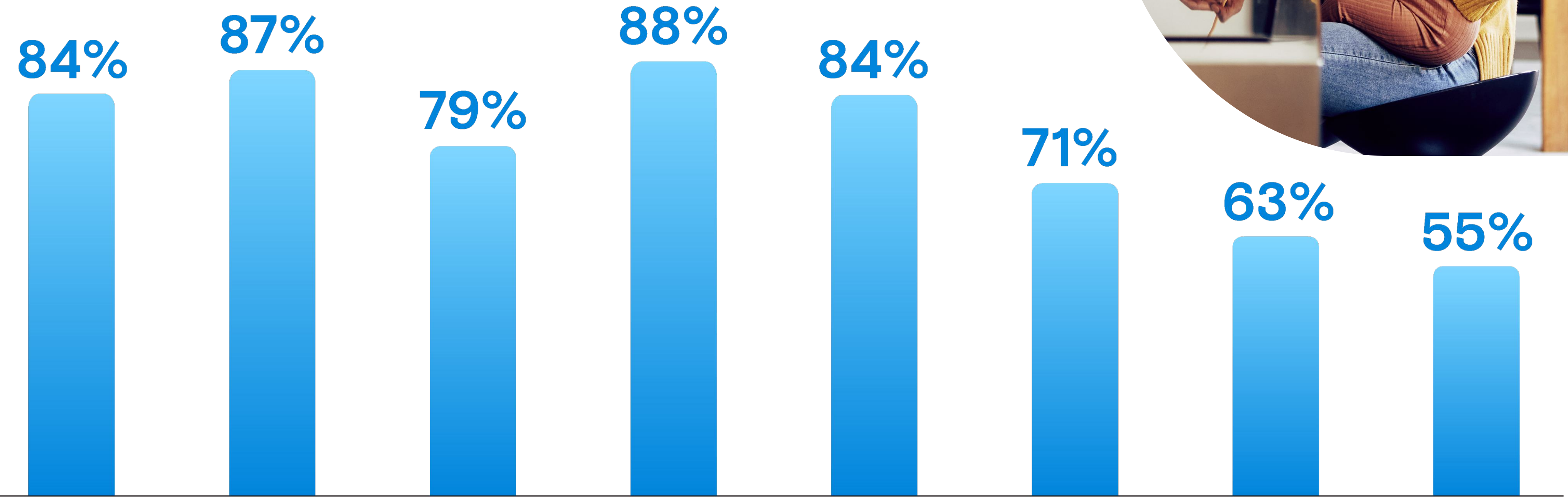
Black and Brown communities, who have traditionally had less equitable access to educational attainment, showed more interest in these benefits compared to their White and Asian colleagues. As companies consider ways to level the playing field for their employees, providing access to education for all employees is [an effective way to promote educational equity](#).

Finally, though entry-level employees showed interest in using education benefits, **managers were even more excited by the opportunity, aiming to keep their skills relevant in a fast-changing world where management continues to face new challenges.**



Gen Z, Millennials, managers and underrepresented groups have extremely high interest in taking advantage of workforce education programs, **10+ pts** higher than other employees

How interested would you be in going back to school if your employer covered 100% of your tuition upfront?

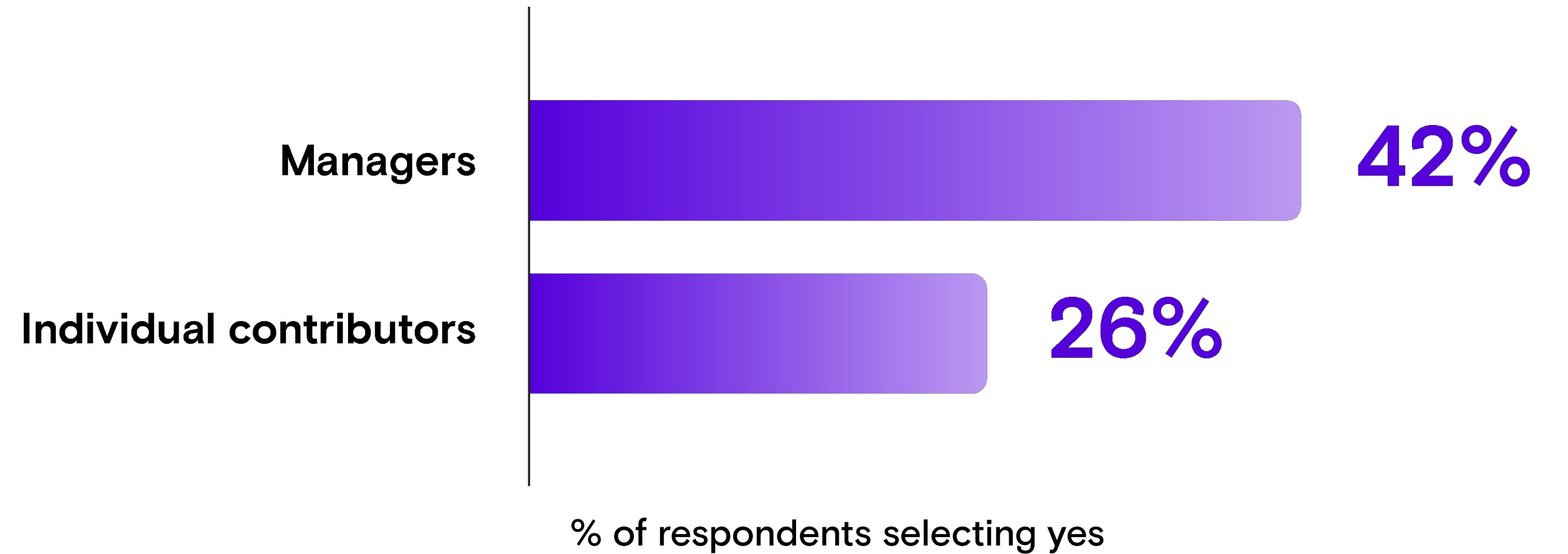


Age range

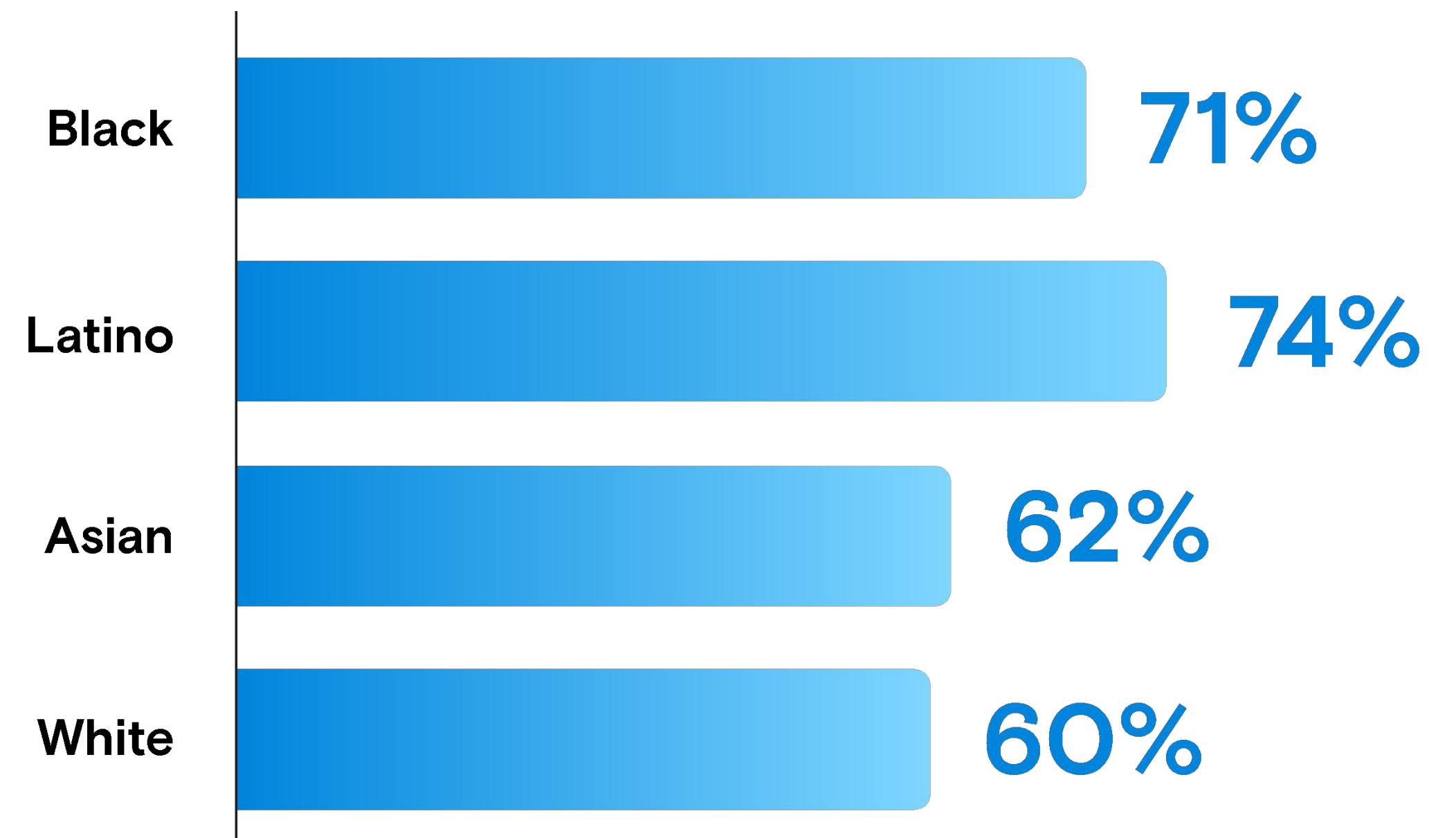
18-24 25-29 30-34 35-39 40-44 45-49 50-59 60-69

% of respondents selecting interested or very interested on a 5 option scale

In the last 5 years, have you chosen not to pursue a promotion because you believed you did not have enough education or skills for the higher role?

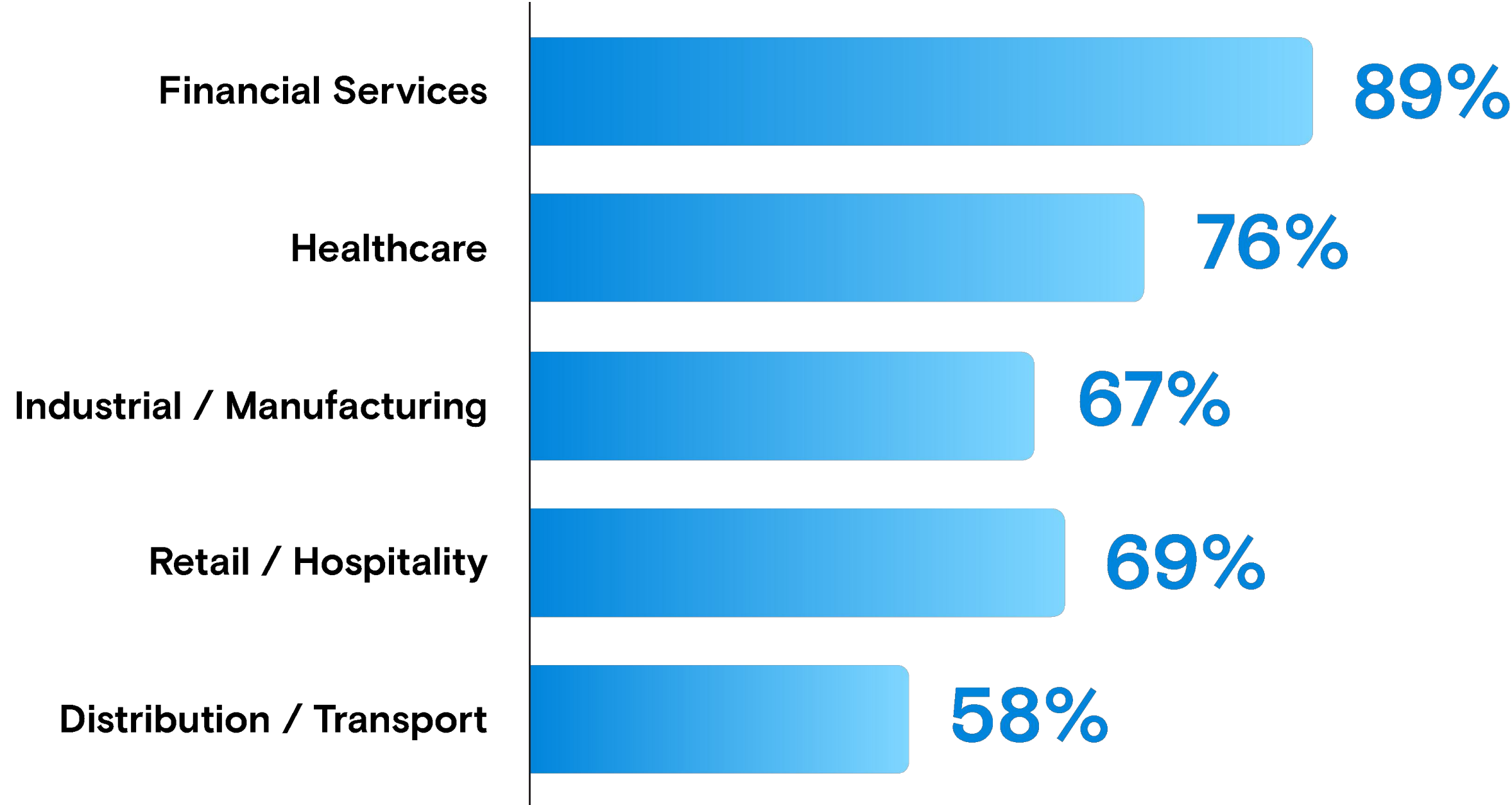


How interested would you be in a tuition assistance program that enables you to earn degrees and certifications with your employer covering all of the costs upfront?



% of respondents selecting interested or very interested on a 5 option scale

How likely do you think it is that you will need to go back to school or enroll in upskilling programs before you retire to keep your skills relevant in the job market?



% of respondents ranking their likelihood at a 3 or greater on a 1-5 scale



● Key takeaways

1

Fully funded education programs drive participation



Investing in fully funded education programs can significantly increase employee interest and participation. The survey finds that when employers cover full tuition costs, nearly **three-quarters (73%) of employees are likely to pursue further education**. This drops to just over half (54%) when only partial funding is available. Companies should advocate for policies that support fully funded education benefits to maximize engagement and retention.



2

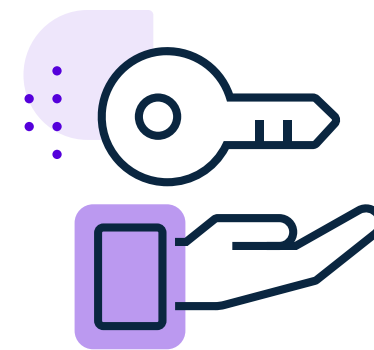
Leverage education benefits for recruitment and retention



Education benefits positively influence employee perception and can be a powerful tool for recruitment and retention, with **64% of respondents more likely to apply to a company offering tuition assistance**. By offering robust education programs, companies can improve their attractiveness to prospective employees and enhance loyalty among current employees.

3

Address educational gaps with on-ramps and support services



For employees who have not completed high school or lack certain foundational skills, providing on-ramps and support services are crucial. The survey found that **50% of adults who did not complete high school have chosen not to pursue a promotion due to a belief that they did not have enough education or skills for the higher role**. Workforce education programs should offer high school diploma completion, language learning and foundational courses to help these employees advance in their careers.



Methodology

In March and April 2024, InStride conducted an online survey of working adults in the U.S. aged 18-69 to benchmark overall sentiments about corporate education benefits. The **1,042** respondents represent a range of ages, educational levels, employment statuses, industries, gender identities, and racial or ethnic backgrounds.

To uncover how these sentiments have changed since the pandemic, select survey questions mirrored those included in the 2019 InStride/Bain & Co survey.



About InStride

InStride, in partnership with top academic institutions, enables companies to provide career-aligned, debt-free education through a personalized digital platform and consultative service model. InStride empowers forward-thinking, talent-focused corporate partners such as Labcorp, Adidas and Intermountain Health to drive meaningful social and business outcomes by unlocking access to life-changing education. Visit [InStride.com](https://www.instride.com) or follow InStride on [LinkedIn](#) for more information and up-to-date news.

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