

Kentucky Water Workforce Survey Results

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Outline

- Survey Overview
- Demographics
- Retention
- Recruitment
- Conclusion
- Recommendations
- Next Steps

Survey Overview



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Kentucky Utility Regulatory Information

- Kentucky Division of Water: 1,164 utilities
 - 436 drinking water systems
 - 728 KPDES permitted systems
- Kentucky Public Service Commission: (about 17%)
 - 136 drinking water systems
 - 58 sewer systems

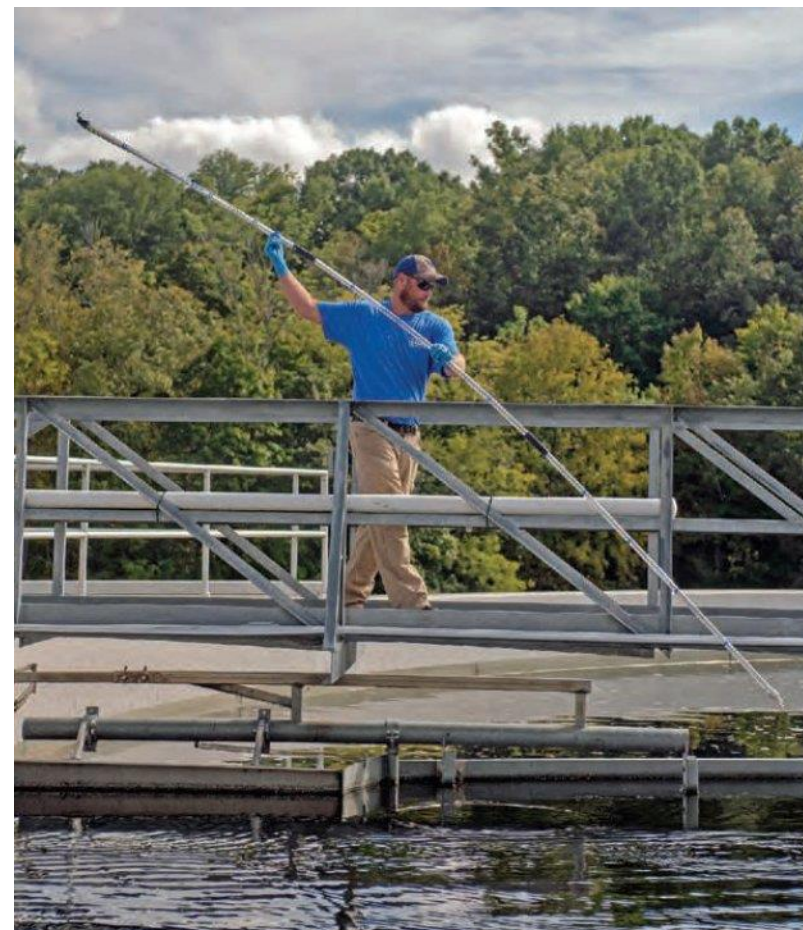
Operator Recruitment and Development (ORD) Committee

Committee members represent 10 different stakeholder entities:

- Energy and Environment Cabinet
- Clean Water Professionals
- KY-TN American Water Works Association
- UK-Kentucky Water Resources Research Institute
- Kentucky Rural Community Assistance Program
- Kentucky Rural Water Association
- Kentucky Wastewater Operators Certification Board
- Kentucky Water and Wastewater Operators Association
- Bowling Green Municipal Utilities
- Northern Kentucky Water District

ORD's Goals and Objectives


- Bring operator recruitment and development issues to the forefront.
- Gain a better understanding of recruitment and retention in the water workforce.
- Help decision makers better understand operator challenges.



Kentucky Water Workforce Survey

- Two Surveys:
 - Operator Survey (36 questions)
 - Manager Survey (31 questions)
- Open from May 3, 2022 – June 7, 2022
- Recruitment methods:
 - Email
 - Social media
 - Newsletters
 - Promotion at events

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY RESEARCH




Do You Have Experience as a Manager or Operator at a Water Utility in Kentucky?

Researchers at the University of Kentucky invite you to take part in a survey about your experience as a manager or operator in the water workforce. The purpose of this research study is to learn more about operator recruitment and retention. The goal is to gather information about Kentucky's water workforce and gain a better understanding of the challenges, barriers, and opportunities in hiring and retaining operators. Interested participants will be asked to take a brief 10 - 15 minute online survey. Survey participants will be given a chance to win a gift card after completing the study.

You may be eligible to participate if you:

- Are over the age of 18
- Have experience as a manager or operator at a water utility

Scan the QR code or visit the link below to learn more:



<https://bit.ly/KYWaterWorkforceSurvey>

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University of Kentucky Research
An Equal Opportunity University

Kentucky Water Resources Research Institute

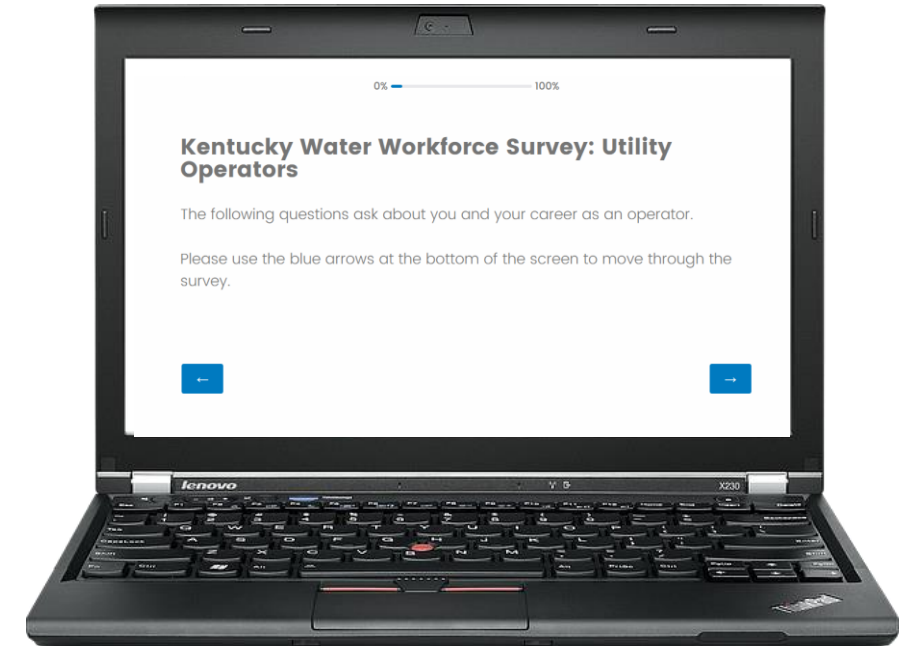
www.UKclinicalresearch.com

water management study

KWRR1-002_flyer #

Survey Response

- Total respondents: 635
 - Operator Survey: 415
 - Manager Survey: 220

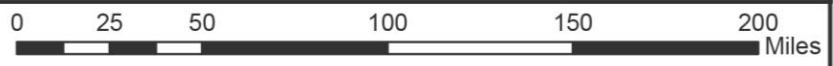
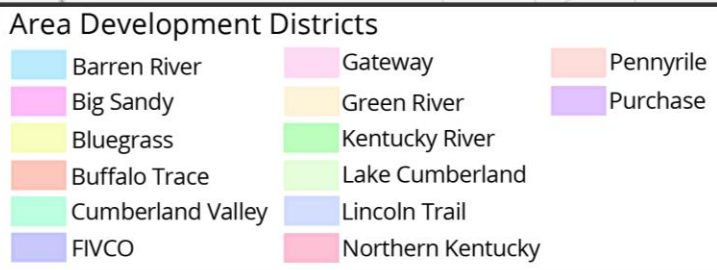
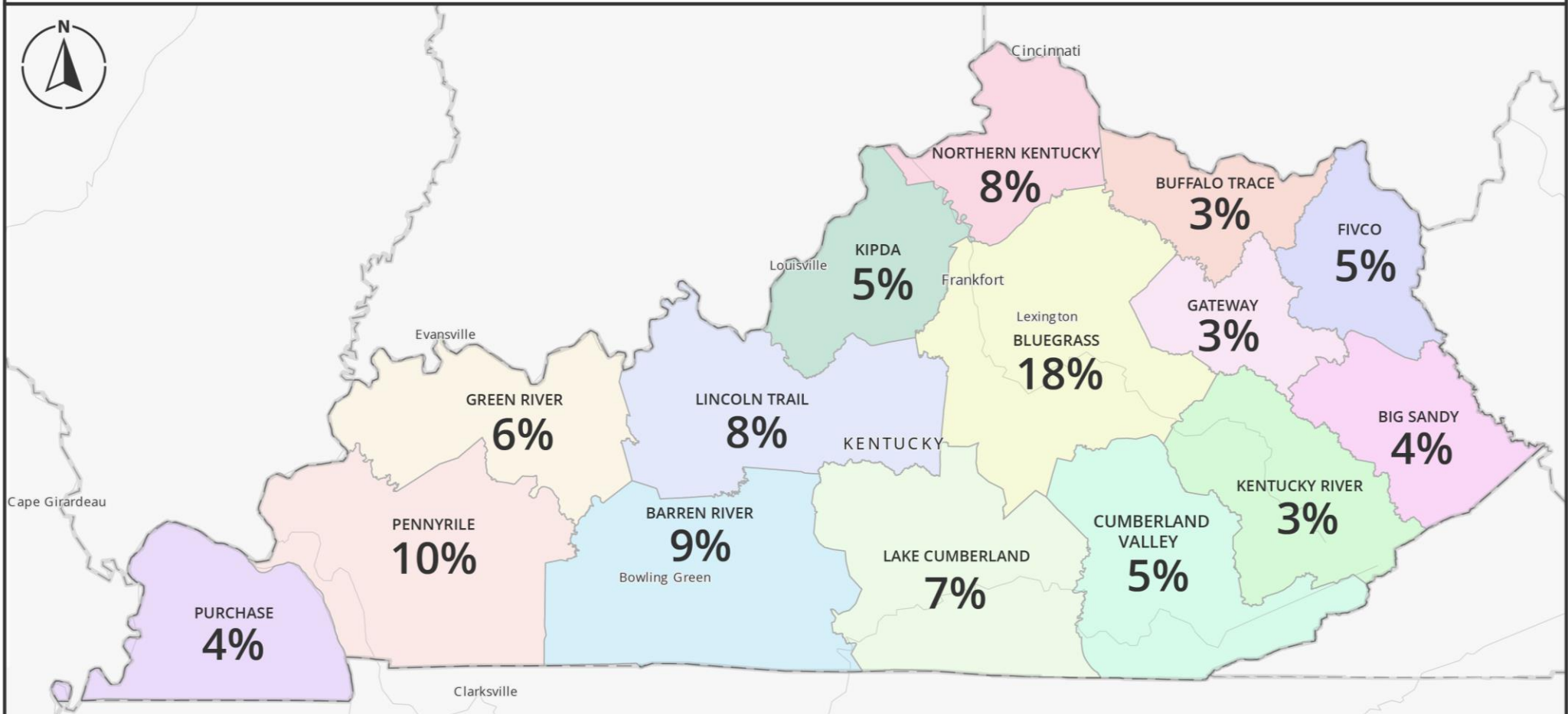


Demographics



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Spatial Distribution of Survey Respondents - Area Development Districts



Map Produced By: The Kentucky Water Resources Research Institute.

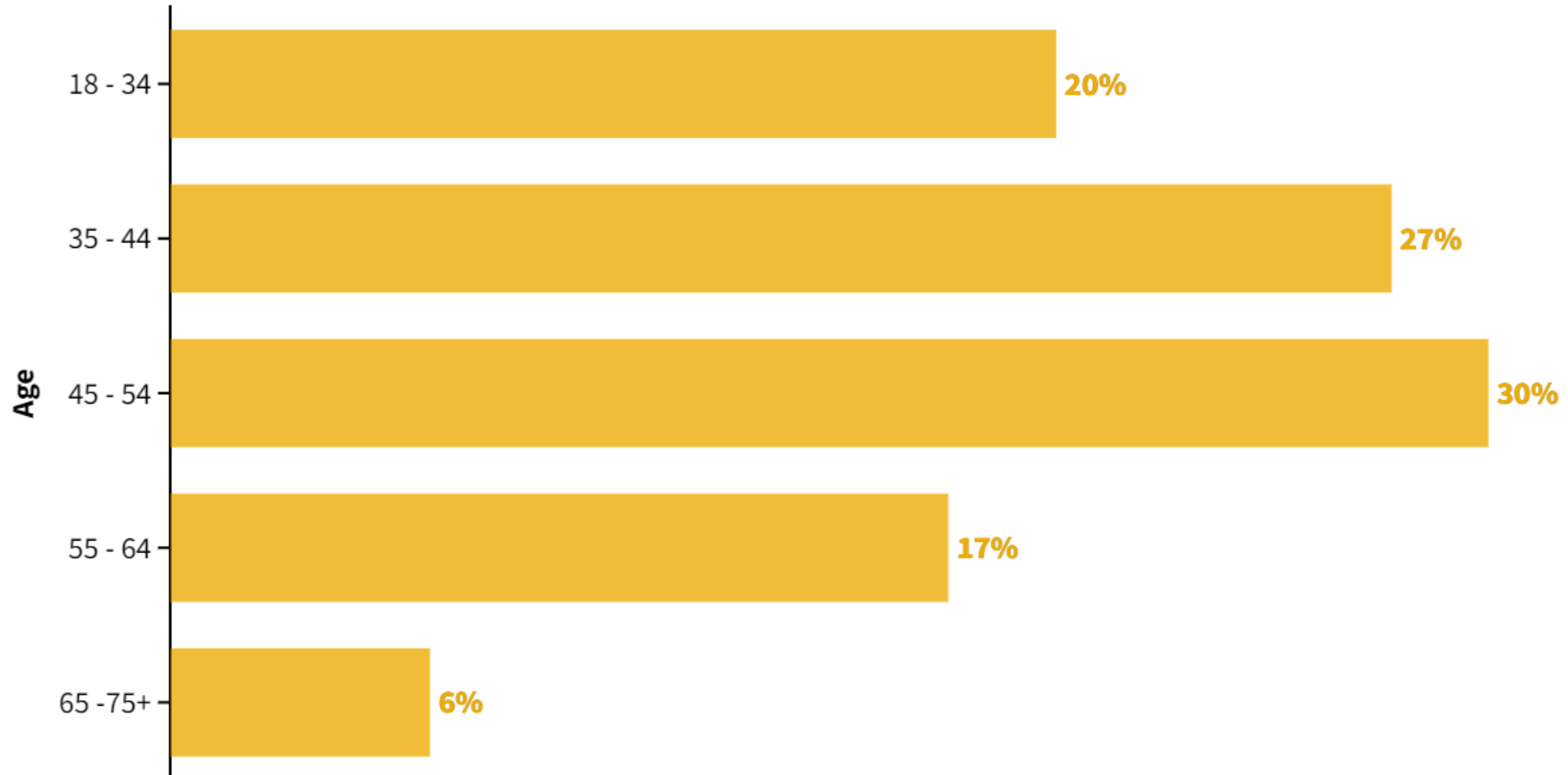
Demographics

- 86% male, 13% female, 1% other
- Race or Ethnicity of responders:
 - 91% white
 - 4% black or African-American
 - 2% American Indian or Alaskan Native
 - 2% Latino or Hispanic or Spanish origin
 - 1% other
 - 2% prefer not to say

Age of Respondents

KWWS Operator Survey

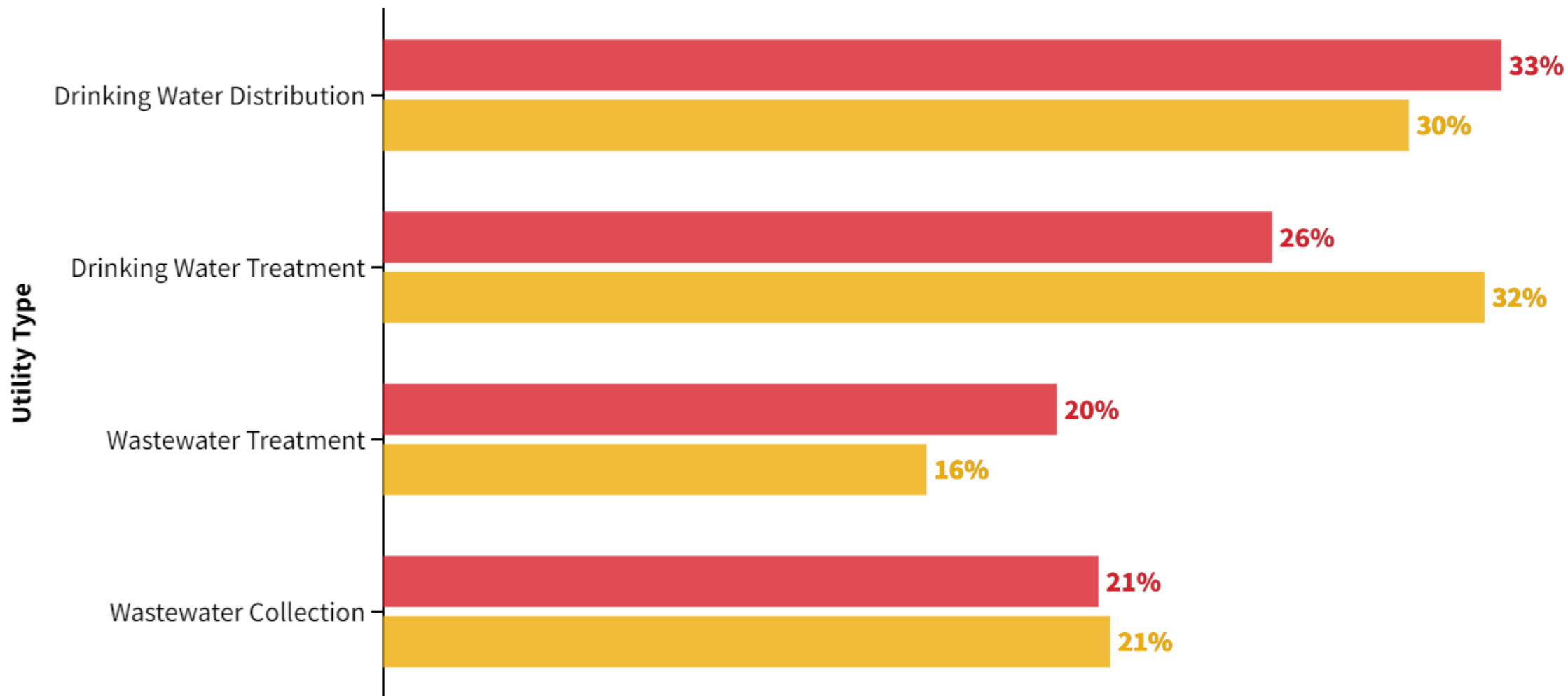
Operators



Which Of The Following Describe Your Utility?

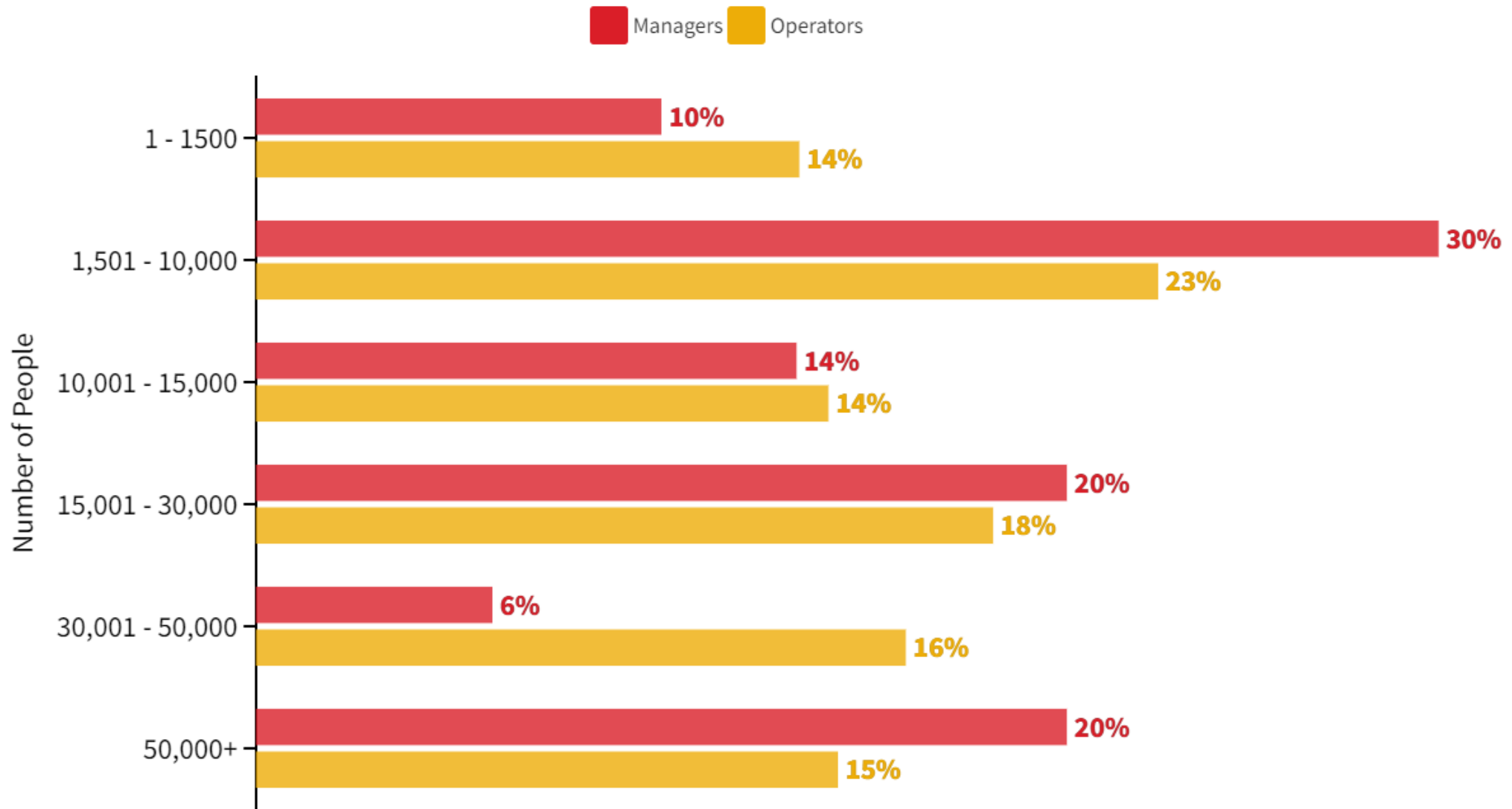
KWWS Operator/Manager Survey

Managers Operators



How Many People Does your Utility Directly Serve?

KWWS Operator/Manager Survey



Retention

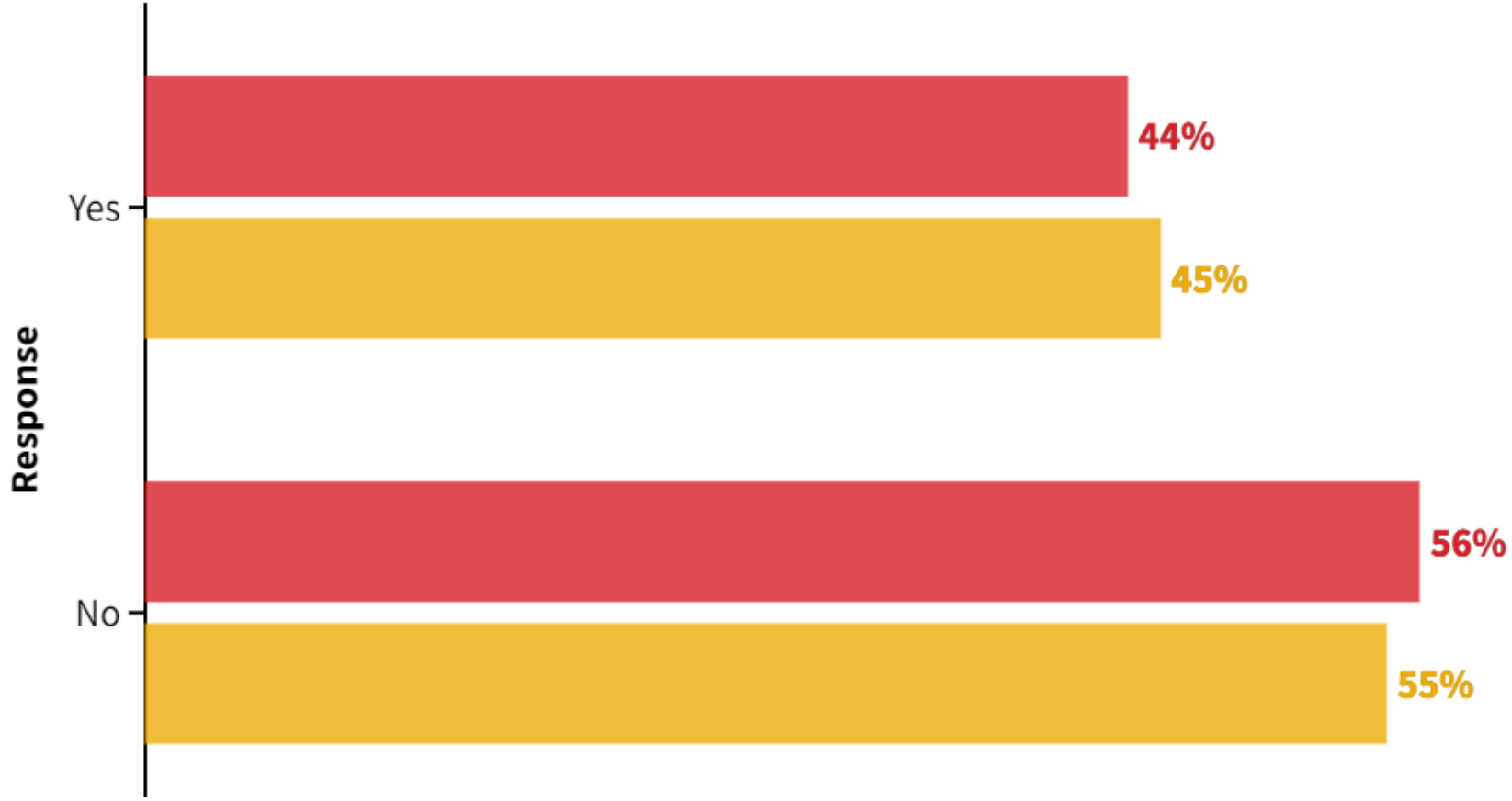


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In Your Opinion, Does Your Utility Have Enough Operators?

KWWS Operator/Manager Survey

Managers Operators



Median Hourly Wage | Pay Expectations

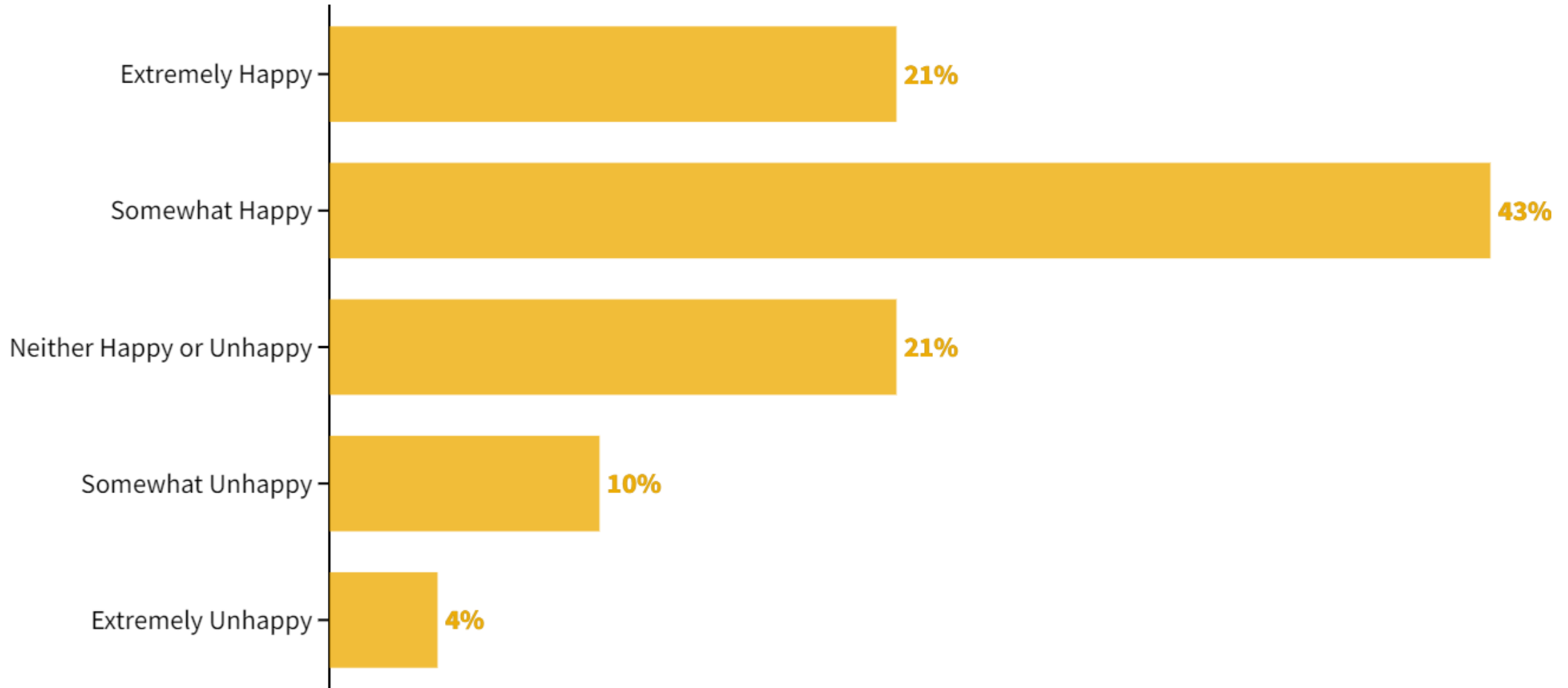
KWWS Operator Survey



How Happy Are You At Work?

KWWS Operator Survey

Operators



Retention: Key Points to Consider

76% like doing the tasks they do at work.

70% are given the equipment and tools needed to do my job effectively.

68% are satisfied with the benefits they receive.

39% are considering leaving the utility.

37% believe that they are not being paid a fair amount for the work.

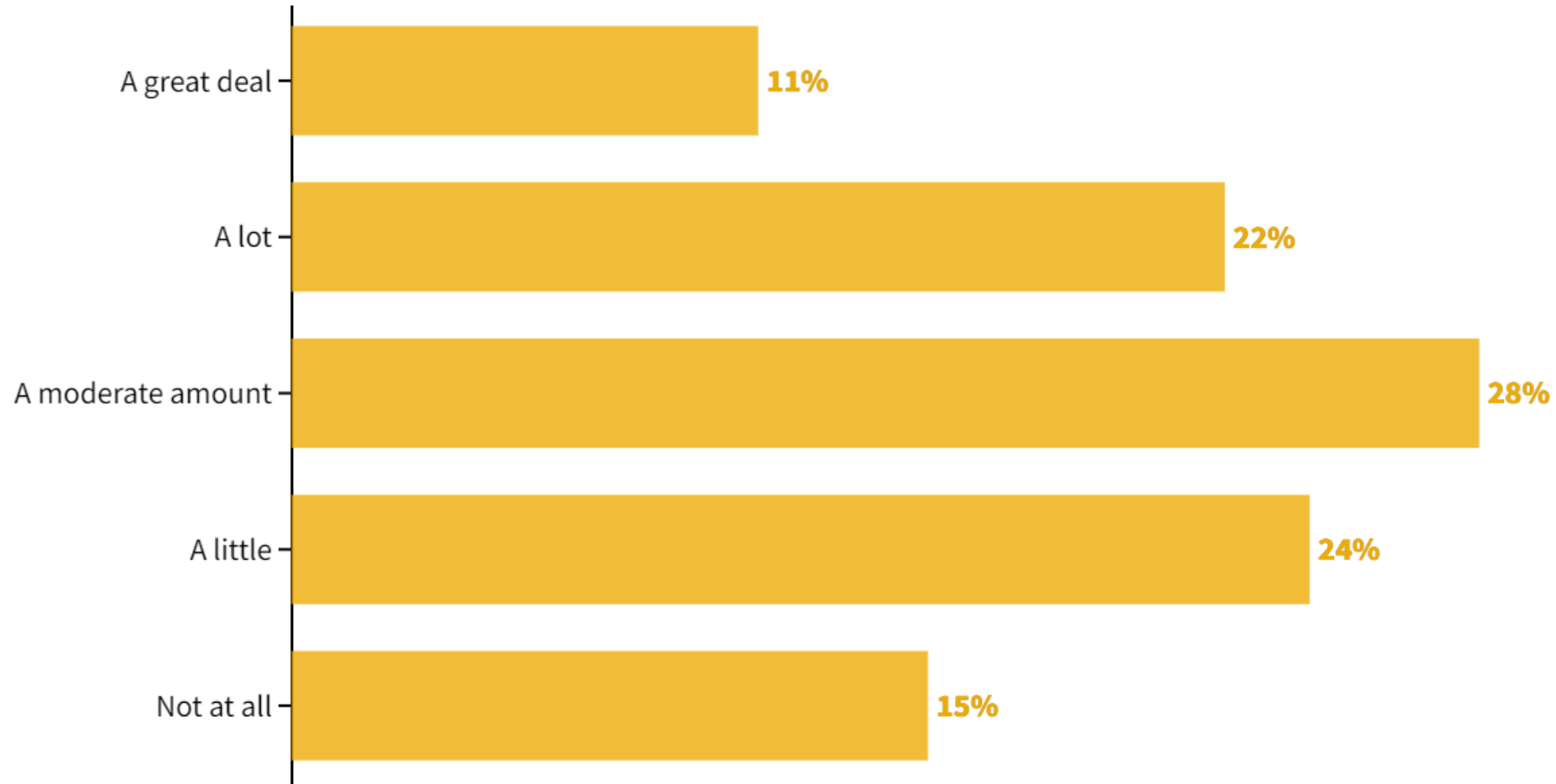
32% believe that work is not distributed evenly at their utility.

28% are considering leaving the water industry.

Do You Feel Appreciated By Your Utility?

KWWS Operator Survey

Operators



Relationship with Decision Makers

How well do your utility's decision makers understand what you do in your job?

- **51% responded slightly well or not well at all.**

How often do your utility's decision makers communicate with the operators?

- **55% responded rarely or never.**

What reasons do operators give for leaving the job?

- Better pay in another job opportunity – 72%
- Retiring – 62%
- Undesirable working hours (on-call, etc.) – 38%
- Career advancement – 36%
- Better benefits – 35%
- Too much responsibility – 22%
- No longer want to work in the water sector – 17%
- Certification exam and process is too difficult – 16%

Succession Planning

Are you currently eligible to retire?

- **23% of operator survey respondents are eligible.**

Does your utility have a succession plan in place if a manager leaves or retires?

- **45% do not**

Does your utility have a succession plan in place if an operator leaves or retires?

- **46% do not.**

Retention Issues

- A lack of adequate pay
- A lack of consistent benefits
- Better pay elsewhere (poaching by other utilities)
- A lack of appreciation of employees by utility decision-makers
- A lack of succession planning
- A lack of appreciation of the retention problem by management
- Impacts from COVID

Recruitment



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What advertising resources are used?

Job Resources	Resource Used by Utility	Resource Used by Operator
Newspapers	61%	18%
Online job posts	61%	32%
Social media	49%	15%
Industry-specific website	41%	18%
Local government site	29%	14%
Job fair	14%	8%
Unemployment office	12%	4%

What benefits does your utility provide?

Benefit	Percent of Respondents
Paid sick and vacation	90%
Paid holidays	89%
Health insurance	86%
Retirement benefits	82%
Paid time and travel to attend trainings	77%
Paid or reimbursed certification fees	73%
Overtime	69%
Life and disability insurance	64%
Annual raises	64%
Paid or reimbursed tuition or training expenses	63%

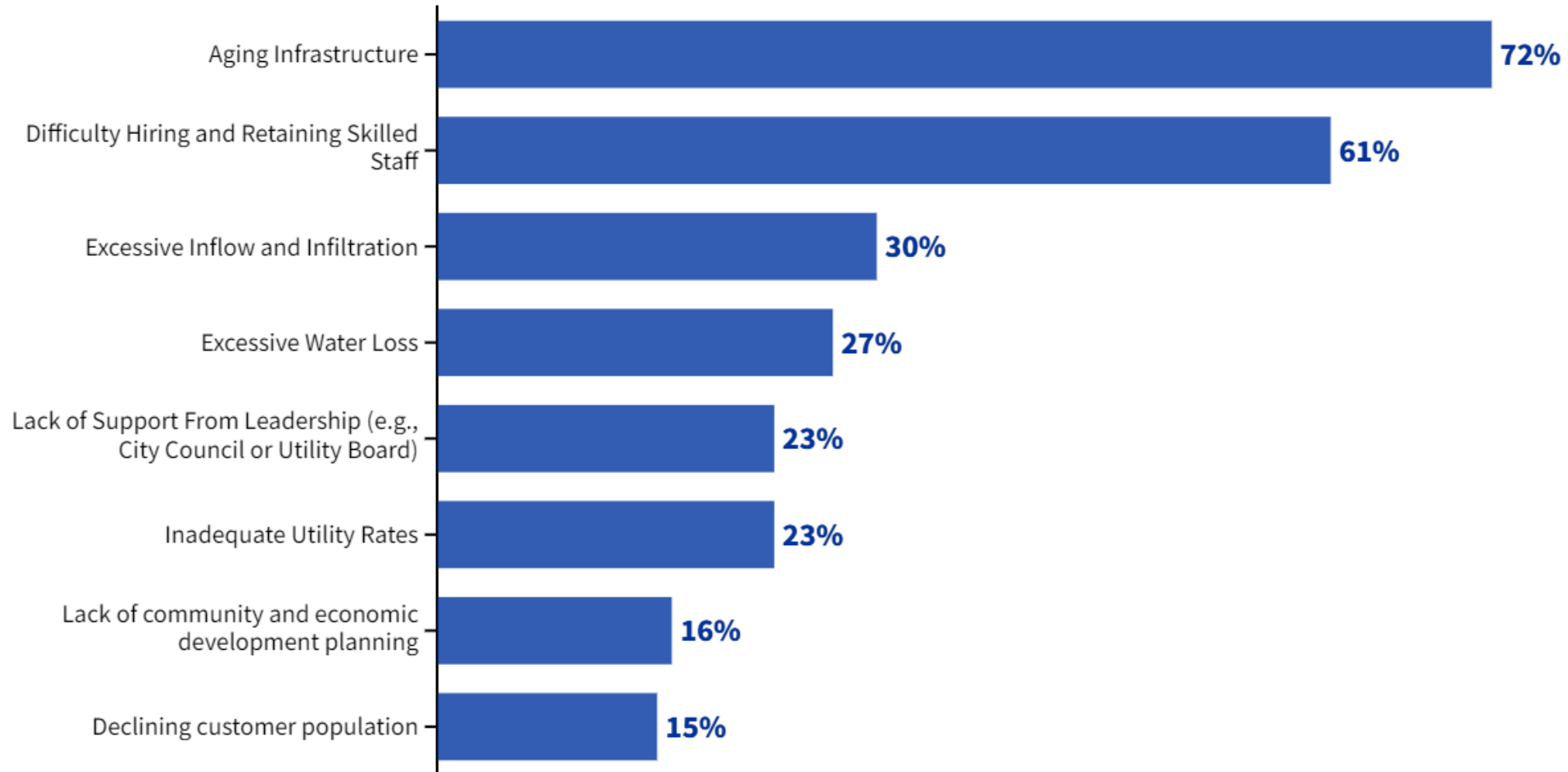
Barriers to Hiring Operators

- Rate of pay – 74%
- Lack of qualified applicants – 68%
- Available shifts are not desirable – 34%
- Type of work – 32%
- Financial limitations at the utility – 30%
- Certification process – 28%
- Certification requirements – 25%
- Applicants unwilling to become certified – 22%
- City Council or Utility Board – 16%
- Lack of benefits – 15%

What Type Of Operations Challenges Does Your Utility Face?

KWWS Operator/Manager Survey

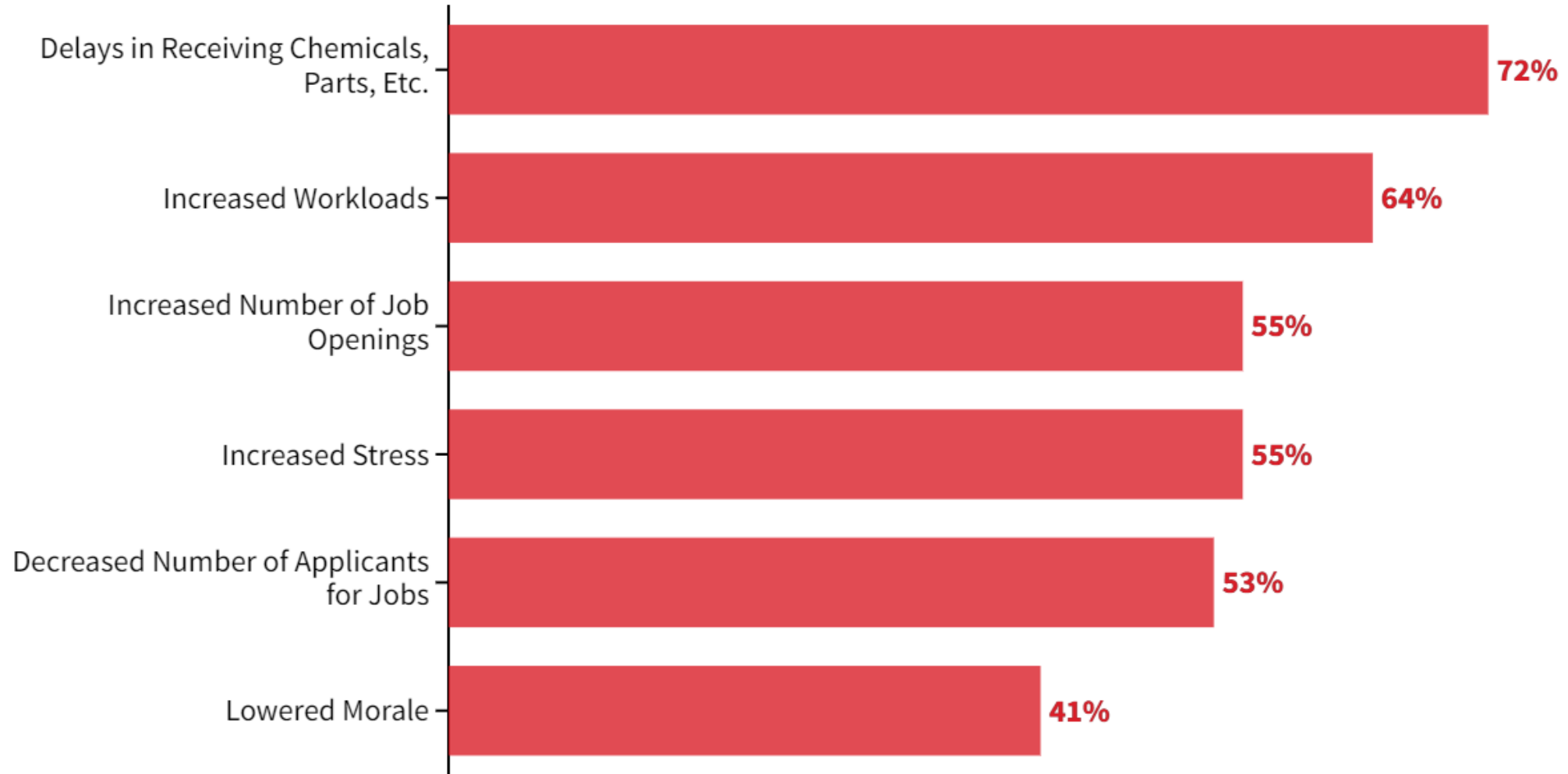
All Respondents



Over the last two years, which of the following has your utility experienced?

KWWS Manager Survey

Managers



Recruitment Issues

- A lack of qualified applicants
- A lack of adequate pay
- A lack of consistent benefits
- A lack of a trainee or apprentice program
- A lack of effective recruitment strategies including advertisement
- A lack of appreciation of the recruitment problem by management

Conclusion:

There is an ongoing problem in recruiting and retaining qualified operators in Kentucky's water sector.



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Recommendations



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Retention Strategies

- Educate utility decision makers about the magnitude and nature of the problem.
- Increase pay.
- Increase benefits.
- Demonstrate a greater appreciation of employees.
- Develop succession plans for both operators and managers.
- Provide tools and support to management to help address recruitment issues.

Recruitment Strategies

- Evaluate utility financials and explore avenues to increase operator salary scales.
- Develop and implement an effective trainee internship and/or apprentice program.
- Develop more effective marketing strategies and techniques to advertise vacant positions.
- Evaluate utility benefit packages to ensure they are competitive with other industries or utilities.
- Improve communication and interaction with staff.

Additional Strategies

- Develop a template for an effective utility communication plan to improve employee, stakeholder, and public interaction during normal operating and emergency situations.
- Consider development of a decision-maker training program for all utilities. The KPSC requires training for *newly* appointed water commissioners during their first year (116 of the 194 systems).

Future Steps



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Next Steps

- Additional data analysis
- Final report
- Present findings to water sector
- Present findings to public officials
- Start a conversation – plant seeds of thought
- Follow-up studies/surveys

Discussion / Questions



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