# South Carolina Workforce Pulse: Perceptions, Priorities, and Policy Implications

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## Executive Summary

To support strategic workforce development across South Carolina, the Coordinating Council for Workforce Development (CCWD) commissioned a statewide survey to better understand public perceptions, priorities, and barriers related to employment. The study aimed to identify actionable insights that can guide outreach, training, and engagement strategies for high-demand sectors.

The survey reached 672 residents across all 12 workforce regions. Respondents were asked about their familiarity with eight industry sectors, employment preferences, perceived challenges, and job-seeking behaviors. Data were also disaggregated by demographics, region, and employment status to support targeted analysis.

Key findings reveal that:

- Awareness of high-growth sectors like Advanced Energy/Utilities remains low, especially among younger and less-educated residents; Manufacturing awareness varies regionally and demographically.

- Perceived workforce challenges are deeply tied to specific industries—ranging from credential barriers in Health Care and Public Administration to physical demands in Manufacturing and Transportation.

- South Carolinians prioritize compensation, stability, and flexibility—but only select sectors such as Healthcare, Government, and Energy/Utilities are seen as delivering well on these expectations.

- Nearly half of respondents view the state's job market positively, but optimism is uneven, with women, lower-income individuals, and younger adults expressing more concern.

- Job seekers face persistent barriers—particularly low wages, transit limitations, incompatible schedules, skills mismatch, and housing affordability—while also prioritizing long-term stability and autonomy.

- Veterans face challenges converting military skills into civilian credentials and underutilize education benefits, pointing to gaps in support and outreach.

The report offers ten strategic recommendations, including launching sector-specific awareness campaigns, improving access to training pathways, and strengthening employer alignment and digital engagement. Together, these efforts can help build a more responsive and future-ready workforce system for South Carolina.

## Project Background and Objectives

### Background

To support strategic workforce development efforts in South Carolina, the Coordinating Council for Workforce Development (CCWD) commissioned a statewide research initiative to better understand how residents perceive and engage with employment opportunities across key industries. The goal was to identify gaps in awareness, interest, and preparedness related to high-demand sectors and generate actionable insights to inform CCWD's outreach, engagement, and workforce planning strategies.

The study was conducted through a large-scale, population-based survey of South Carolina residents. The survey ensured representation across all twelve workforce regions to support geographically targeted insights. The data were weighted by age to match the population distribution of South Carolina residents. Final results reflect a weighted distribution of 11.63% for ages 18–24 and 88.37% for ages 25 and older.

### Objectives

The overarching goals of the survey project were to:

- **Measure Baseline Awareness and Preferences**. Assess South Carolinians' familiarity with, interest in, and attitudes toward employment opportunities across eight major industry sectors:
    1. **Accommodation & Food Services**: Covers businesses providing customer services in hotels, motels, resorts, restaurants, cafes, theme parks, and tour companies. (Example jobs: chefs, waiters, tour guides)
    2. **Advanced Energy/Utilities**: Includes technologies and processes that make energy production, distribution, and storage cleaner, more efficient, affordable, and reliable. (Example jobs: electrical installers, plant operators)
    3. **Educational Services**: Includes pre-schools, universities, training centers, and other institutions that impact learning. (Example jobs: teachers, teaching assistants, secretaries)
    4. **Health Care & Social Assistance**: Ranges from small employers to large hospital systems, including physician's offices, hospitals, medical laboratories, nursing homes, and social service centers. (Example jobs: physicians, health aides, medical assistants)
    5. **Manufacturing**: Encompasses small businesses to global organizations in sectors such as aerospace, automotive, textile, chemical, pulp and paper, steel, and advanced materials. (Example jobs: assemblers, mechanics, industrial engineers)
    6. **Public Administration/Government**: covers the management of public resources and services such as local services, law enforcement, military, and industry oversight. (Example jobs: police officers, firefighters, office clerks)
    7. **Retail Sales/Trade**: Involves selling goods like clothing, food, and electronics to consumers, along with after-sales services such as repair and installation. (Example jobs: salespersons, cashiers, technicians)
    8. **Transportation & Warehousing**: Includes businesses that transport passengers and cargo, store goods, and provide transportation-related services such as couriers and postal services. (Example jobs: movers, truck drivers, order fillers)

- **Explore Perceived Barriers and Motivators.** Examine perceptions of:
    1. Necessary training and educational pathways
    2. Workplace environments and reputations by sector
    3. Career priorities such as salary, benefits, flexibility, and job stability

- **Capture Social and Demographic Context.** Collect data on key social factors including:
    1. Age, race, gender, and marital status
    2. Educational attainment
    3. Presence and age of children in the household
    4. Employment status and job satisfaction
    5. Job-seeking behavior

- **Support CCWD's Public Engagement and Messaging.** Generate insights that can inform targeted communication and outreach strategies tailored by regions and demographics

- **Deliver Actionable Recommendations**
    1. Provide marketing and engagement recommendations grounded in survey findings
    2. Identify opportunities to increase visibility, trust, and alignment between South Carolinians and the state's workforce development goals

## Methods

A custom survey was designed to gather data on a range of topics, including workforce awareness, employment preferences, sector-specific perceptions, training access, and challenges in the current labor market. The survey also captured detailed demographic and social background information, including education level, employment status, household income, military affiliation, and regional location.

Respondents were recruited through an online panel using Centiment, a third-party data collection partner. Data collection took place from February 27 to March 21, 2025, via the Qualtrics platform. A total of 882 surveys were initially collected. After applying a rigorous data cleaning process—including quality checks for completion time, response patterns, and logical consistency—a final valid sample of 672 respondents was retained for analysis.

To allow for robust subgroup analysis, the sample was initially designed to oversample young adults aged 18 to 24, who ultimately comprised 52% of the unweighted dataset. This approach helped ensure adequate statistical power for this priority group. However, to accurately reflect the broader South Carolina population, the final data were weighted by age to match state-level distributions—11.63% for individuals aged 18–24 and 88.37% for those aged 25 and older. We also ensured that our sampling numbers for each region closely matched actual population ratios, providing a reliable and accurate representation of regional demographics across the state.

| Regions | Sample Ratio | Target Ratio | Differences |
|---|---|---|---|
| Trident | 15.5% | 15.8% | 0.3% |
| Greenville | 11.5% | 10.4% | -1.1% |
| Lowcounty | 4.8% | 5.4% | 0.6% |
| Catawba | 7.4% | 8.2% | 0.8% |
| Midlands | 14.0% | 14.1% | 0.1% |
| Upstate | 8.3% | 8.2% | -0.1% |
| Worklink | 7.7% | 8.0% | 0.3% |
| Waccamaw | 8.0% | 9.2% | 1.2% |
| Santee-Lynches | 4.0% | 4.1% | 0.1% |
| Upper Savannah | 5.4% | 4.8% | -0.6% |
| Lower Savannah | 6.4% | 5.9% | -0.5% |
| Pee Dee | 7.0% | 5.9% | -1.1% |
| **Total** | **100.0%** | **100.0%** | |

Findings in this report are presented in total and, where appropriate, include significant subgroup differences by age, gender, race/ethnicity, income, region, and employment status. Differences are reported only where statistically significant and meaningful. Individual sector-specific results for some sections, including full response distributions can be found in the Appendix.

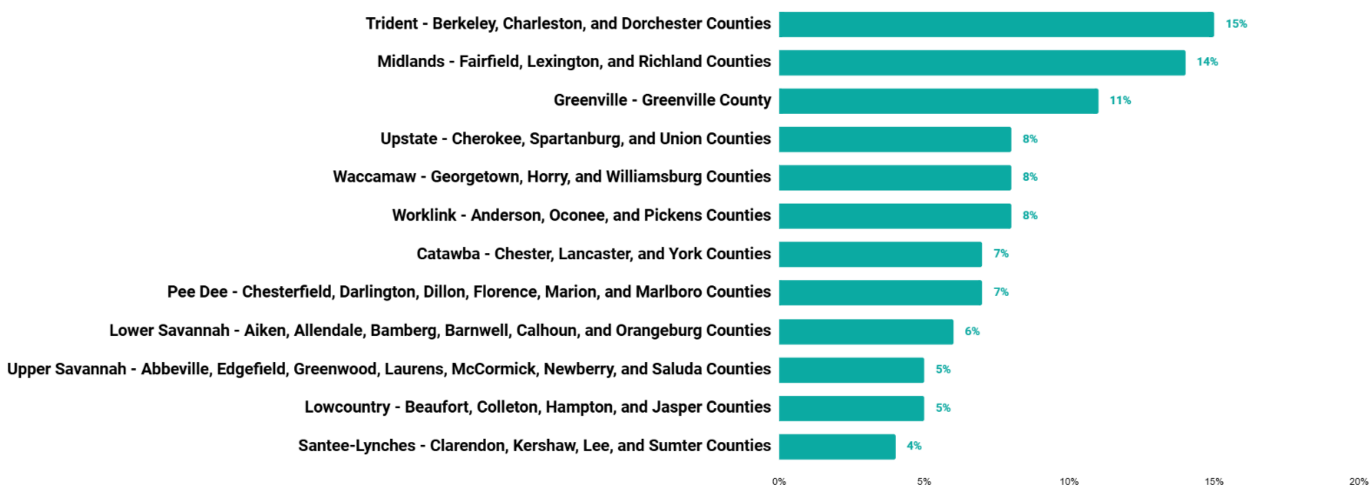
To help readers interpret the data, this report uses p-values to indicate whether observed differences are likely due to chance or represent real patterns in the population. A p-value less than 0.05 ($p < .05$) means there is less than a 5% chance the result occurred randomly, which is typically considered statistically significant. A p-value less than 0.01 ($p < .01$) reflects an even higher level of confidence in the finding. In general, the lower the p-value, the more likely the difference is meaningful rather than due to chance.

## Respondent Demographics

This section provides an overview of the individuals who participated in the survey. Unlike other sections of the report, which present weighted findings to reflect the broader South Carolina population, the data in this section are unweighted and reflect the actual characteristics of the 672 individuals who completed the survey. This snapshot offers helpful context for interpreting the results that follow.

Survey responses were collected from all regions of South Carolina, with particularly strong representation from the Trident, Midlands, and Greenville areas. No weighting was applied to regional data; all regional findings reflect raw response totals.

**Figure 1. Regions**




There is a fairly even split between males (47%) and females (53%). The majority of survey respondents (89%) identified as Not Hispanic or Latino. In terms of race, 61% of respondents identified as White, followed by 33% who identified as Black or African American.

Most respondents had either a high school diploma (33%), some college experience without a degree (20%), or a bachelor's degree (16%). Nearly one-quarter (22%) had a bachelor's degree or higher. Most respondents were either employed full-time (29%) or actively seeking or considering new job opportunities (21%), with others identifying as retired (15%) or working part-time (14%). Respondents represented a wide range of industries, with the largest shares working in Retail Trade (14%), Health Care and Social Assistance (13%), and Accommodation and Food Services (12%).

Most respondents reported annual household incomes under $75,000, with the largest group (26%) earning between $25,000 and $49,999. About one in five (21%) earned less than $25,000, and another 20% earned between $50,000 and $74,999. Higher-income brackets were less common. In terms of household size, the most common household size was two people (29%), followed by one-person (21%) and three-person households (20%). Larger households of five or more people were less frequently reported.

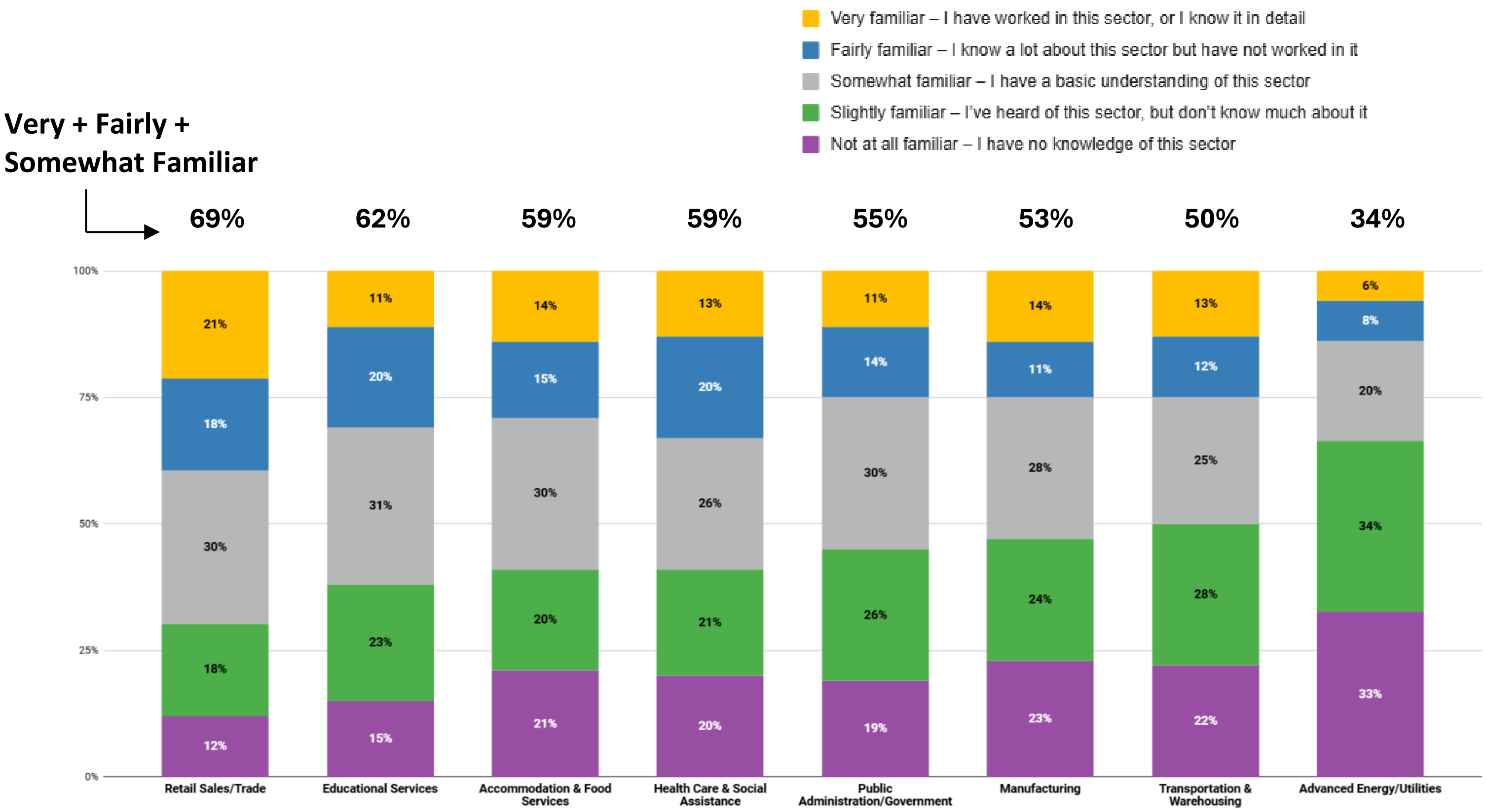
Full demographic breakdowns are included in the Appendix (see Figures A1 to A9).

## Awareness and Perceptions of Industries

### Familiarity With Workforce Sectors

To better understand how the public views different areas of employment, respondents were asked how familiar they are with eight major workforce sectors in South Carolina. For each sector, respondents were asked to rate their familiarity on a five-point scale ranging from "Not at all familiar" to "Very familiar." The findings are shown below in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Level of Familiarity With the Workforce Sectors**




Respondents are most familiar with the Retail Sales/Trade sector (69% Very Familiar, Fairly Familiar, or Somewhat Familiar), followed by Educational Services (62%), Accommodation & Food Services (59%), and Health Care & Social Assistance (59%). Respondents are least knowledgeable about the Advanced Energy/Utilities sector (34%).

Several notable differences emerged when familiarity was examined by demographic subgroups:

- White respondents reported higher levels of familiarity with the **Retail Sales/Trade** sector than Black/African American respondents (75% vs. 61%; $p < .05$). Familiarity with this sector also tracked with education level—those with a Bachelor's degree or an Associate degree were the most familiar (77%), followed by those with a Master's or higher (75%) and those with some college or technical training (74%).
- Familiarity with the **Educational Services** sector also showed a clear relationship with education level. Respondents with a Master's degree or higher (78%), an Associate degree (75%), or a Bachelor's degree (68%) all reported higher levels of familiarity than those with less formal education.

- Younger respondents (ages 18–44) reported higher familiarity with the **Accommodation & Food Services** sector than did older respondents (ages 45 and up).
- Familiarity with the **Health Care & Social Assistance** sector increased with education. Respondents with a Master's degree or higher reported 72% familiarity, followed by 68% of those with an Associate degree, and 63% of those with a Bachelor's degree.
- In the **Public Administration/Government** sector, familiarity was highest among those with a Master's or higher (76%). Other groups reported familiarity levels from 32% to 61%.
- Men were significantly more familiar than women with the **Manufacturing** sector (67% vs. 39%; $p < .01$). Familiarity with this sector was especially high among respondents living in the Lowcountry region (75%) and among hiring managers (67%).
- Familiarity with the **Transportation & Warehousing** sector was also higher among men than women (58% vs. 41%; $p < .01$).

**Implications**

These findings highlight both broad and uneven patterns of familiarity with key workforce sectors in South Carolina. Sectors such as Retail, Education, Food Services, and Health Care—where the public has more direct or visible contact—were associated with higher familiarity, especially among those with higher education levels. In contrast, familiarity was lowest with the Advanced Energy/Utilities sector, suggesting limited public exposure to or understanding of emerging or specialized industries. This lack of familiarity could pose challenges for workforce development in sectors poised for growth but remain under-recognized by the general public. South Carolina's 2024 Unified State Plan reinforces the importance of improving awareness of workforce opportunities by streamlining access to information and simplifying participation for both job seekers and employers—goals that align closely with this survey's findings about limited public familiarity with many sectors (Coordinating Council for Workforce Development, 2024).

Differences in familiarity across demographic and regional groups point to opportunities for more targeted outreach and engagement. Men reported higher levels of familiarity than women in sectors such as Manufacturing and Transportation & Warehousing, suggesting potential gender-based gaps in exposure or access. Education also played a strong role—respondents with higher levels of formal education were significantly more familiar with sectors like Educational Services, Health Care & Social Assistance, and Public Administration. Regional differences were evident as well; for example, familiarity with Manufacturing was especially high in the Lowcountry, reflecting the economic footprint of the sector in that area. These patterns underscore the importance of tailoring communication strategies to reach populations with lower levels of sector awareness and ensuring that workforce development efforts are accessible and responsive to the varied experiences of South Carolinians. These insights can help inform how industries and policymakers promote sector opportunities, especially in regions or groups with limited awareness.

## Perceived Challenges Across Workforce Sectors

Survey respondents were asked to identify what they perceive to be the top three challenges facing each of the eight key workforce sectors assessed in the survey. While certain themes surfaced across multiple industries—such as low wages, high stress, and difficult working conditions—there were also notable differences that reflect public perceptions about the unique realities of each field. A summary of the top three challenges for each sector is shown below in Table 1. Individual sector-specific results, including full response distributions, are provided in the Appendix (see Figures A10a to A10h).

**Table 1. Top Three Perceived Challenges by Sector**

| SECTOR | #1 Challenge | #2 Challenge | #3 Challenge |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Retail Sales/Trade** | Low starting wages or salaries (55%) | Not a prestigious or respected career path (29%) | Long, inflexible, or unpredictable work hours (27%)<br><br>Difficulty attracting and retaining skilled workers (27%) |
| **Educational Services** | Low starting wages or salaries (50%) | High-stress environment (38%) | Difficulty attracting and retaining skilled workers (34%) |
| **Accommodation & Food Services** | Low starting wages or salaries (47%) | Long, inflexible, or unpredictable work hours (34%) | High-stress environment (31%) |
| **Health Care & Social Assistance** | High-stress environment (51%) | Only for people with specific degrees or certifications (37%) | Long, inflexible, or unpredictable work hours (31%) |
| **Public Administration/Government** | High-stress environment (47%) | Low starting wages or salaries (25%)<br><br>Work environment concerns (e.g., safety risks) (25%)<br><br>Long, inflexible, or unpredictable work hours (25%) | Only for people with specific degrees or certifications (23%) |
| **Manufacturing** | Physical demands of the job (33%) | Supply chain disruptions and material shortages (30%) | Job instability or concerns about automation replacing jobs (29%) |

| SECTOR | #1 Challenge | #2 Challenge | #3 Challenge |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Transportation & Warehousing** | Physical demands of the job (42%) | Long, inflexible, or unpredictable work hours (32%) | Low starting wages or salaries (25%) |
| **Advanced Energy/Utilities** | Work environment concerns (e.g., safety risks) (31%) | Difficulty attracting and retaining skilled workers (30%) | High-stress environment (28%) |

Key Findings

Across nearly all sectors, three major themes consistently emerged:

- **Low Starting Wages or Salaries.** Low starting wages or salaries was the most frequently selected challenge for the Retail, Education, and Accommodation & Food Services sectors. This reflects a widespread perception that compensation in these industries is not commensurate with the effort or demands of the job.

- **High-Stress Work Environments.** Stress was a prominent concern in five of the eight sectors, particularly in Health Care & Social Assistance and Public Administration/Government. This indicates a broad public awareness that many jobs—especially those involving public service or care for others—are emotionally and mentally taxing.

- **Demanding Working Conditions.** Respondents frequently cited challenges related to physical demands, unpredictable or inflexible schedules, and unsafe or high-risk environments. These concerns were most pronounced in sectors such as Transportation & Warehousing and Manufacturing, where physical demands and difficult schedules were top challenges. Work environment concerns, including safety risks, were also reported in Advanced Energy/Utilities and Public Administration/Government.

Key Differences Across Sectors

While some workforce challenges like low pay, high stress, and demanding schedules were common across multiple industries, there are also meaningful variations by sector and subgroup. These patterns offer insight into how different populations perceive the realities of working in various fields. The examples below highlight where certain concerns were especially concentrated:

- **Health Care and Public Administration/Government Are Viewed as Credential-Heavy.** Respondents were more likely to cite “Only for people with specific degrees or certifications” as a challenge in these two sectors. This suggests that educational requirements may be viewed as a barrier to entry—especially in roles that are also perceived as high-stress. This perception was especially common among military respondents (42%) and respondents aged 65 and older (52% and 50%) in the Educational Services sector. In Health Care, White respondents were more likely than Black or Other race respondents to cite credentialing as a challenge, though the differences were not significant (42% vs. 27% and 25%).

- **Perceptions of Prestige Vary Widely.** Retail stood out as the only sector where "Not a prestigious or respected career path" ranked among the top three perceived challenges. In the Accommodation & Food Services sector, males were significantly more likely than females to select this option (34% vs. 21%; $p < .05$). White respondents were also more likely than Black or Other race respondents to select this option, though the differences were not significant (32% vs. 19% and 25%). In Transportation & Warehousing, men were also more likely than women to view the sector as lacking prestige (18% vs. 5%; $p < .01$).

- **Manufacturing and Advanced Energy/Utilities Are Viewed as Risk-Prone or Physically Demanding.** These two sectors received the highest rates of concern related to physical demands (Manufacturing) and workplace safety risks (Advanced Energy/Utilities). In Manufacturing, concerns about attracting and retaining skilled workers were particularly common among respondents aged 75+ (60%), White respondents (33% vs. 18% Black and 0% Other; not significant), and military-affiliated individuals (42% vs. 25% non-military; $p < .05$). Perceptions of long, inflexible hours were more common among larger households (with 5+ people, 43%) and non-military respondents (21% vs. 3%; $p < .01$). In the Advanced Energy/Utilities sector, concerns about safety were especially common among men, compared to women (39% vs. 21%; $p < .05$), and White respondents were more likely to report high stress and credentialing barriers compared to Black and Other respondents.

- **Transportation & Warehousing Is Seen as Tough on the Body and Schedule.** "Physical demands" and "long, inflexible hours" dominated concerns in this sector, suggesting that the work is viewed as both exhausting and disruptive to personal life. While these were broadly shared concerns, women were more likely than men to cite credential requirements as a challenge for this sector (12% vs. 3%; $p < .01$).

- **Skilled Worker Shortages Are a Cross-Sector Concern.** Across Advanced Energy/Utilities, Educational Services, and Retail Sales/Trade, "Difficulty attracting and retaining skilled workers" ranked among the top three challenges. These findings suggest a widespread strain on the talent pipeline—possibly driven by factors such as evolving technical skill requirements, lower perceived job prestige, and competition from other industries.

- **Age and Race Play a Role in Views of Wages and Workload.** Across sectors, White respondents were consistently more likely than Black or Other race respondents to cite low wages as a top concern. This was especially true in Accommodation & Food Services (56% vs. 31% and 22%; $p < .01$). High stress was also more frequently cited by White respondents across multiple sectors, including Health Care (58% vs. 38% and 26%; $p < .01$) and Public Administration/Government (54% vs. 32% and 35%; $p < .05$ and NS).

**Implications**

These sector-specific perceptions provide valuable insights for workforce development planning. Addressing concerns around physical demands, safety, credential barriers, and sector reputation will require different strategies depending on the industry. For example, sectors perceived as physically demanding or high-risk—like Manufacturing, Transportation & Warehousing, and Advanced Energy/Utilities—may benefit from messaging that highlights improved safety protocols, technological advancements, and job supports that reduce physical strain. In contrast, sectors like Educational Services, Health Care & Social Assistance, and Public Administration may need to focus on reducing stress, clarifying credentialing pathways, and improving compensation in order to attract and retain talent. Recent research underscores the impact of career barriers on stress and job satisfaction in education, highlighting the importance of addressing these issues as part of broader recruitment and workforce sustainability strategies (Woods et al., 2023).

## Public Awareness of Job Types Within Sectors

To assess how well the public understands the range of roles available in the Accommodation & Food Services, Health Care & Social Assistance, and Manufacturing sectors, respondents were asked to select all jobs they believe exist within each industry. The list they chose from included a mix of core roles for each sector, cross-functional support positions, and unrelated occupations used to test baseline awareness. A summary of the top three associated types of jobs for each sector is shown below in Table 2, followed by Figures 3a through 3c, which present individual sector-specific results with full response distributions.

**Table 2. Top Three Associated Types of Jobs**

| | #1 Type of Job | #2 Type of Job | #3 Type of Job |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Accommodation & Food Services** | Cook (78%) | Restaurant Manager (77%) | Bartender (69%) |
| **Health Care & Social Assistance** | Nurse (83%) | Human Resources Staff (64%) | Receptionist (60%) |
| **Manufacturing** | Quality Control Inspector (69%) | Maintenance Staff (67%) | Human Resources Staff (53%) |

**Figure 3a. Public Awareness of Job Types in the Accommodation & Food Services Sector**

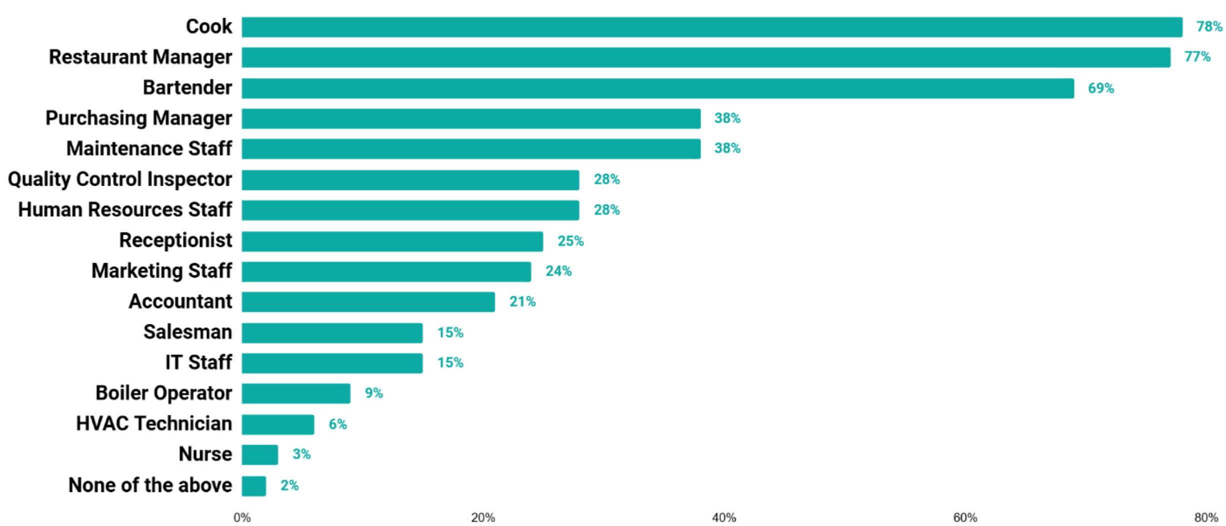


**Figure 3b. Public Awareness of Job Types in the Health Care & Social Assistance Sector**

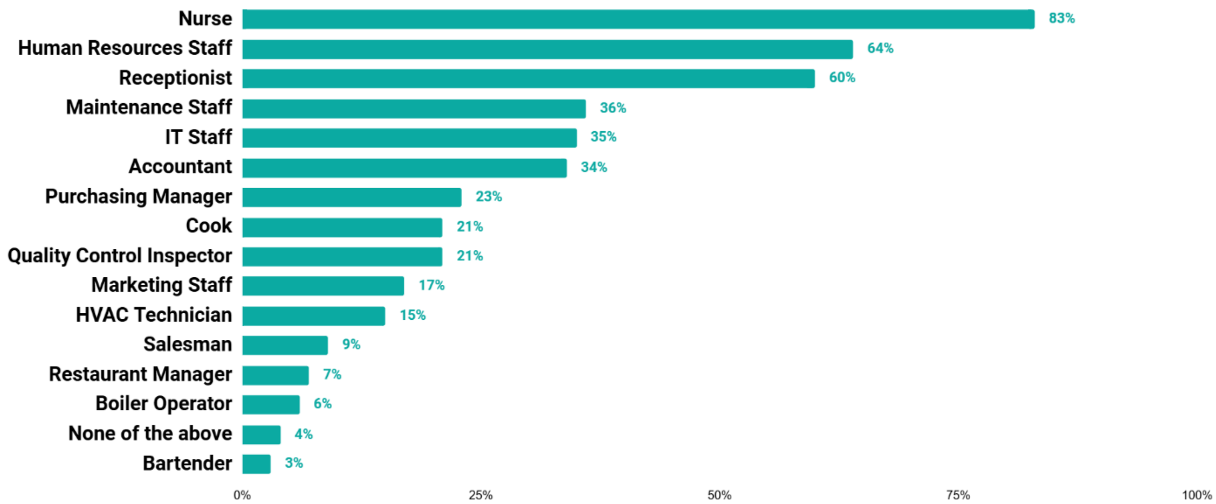
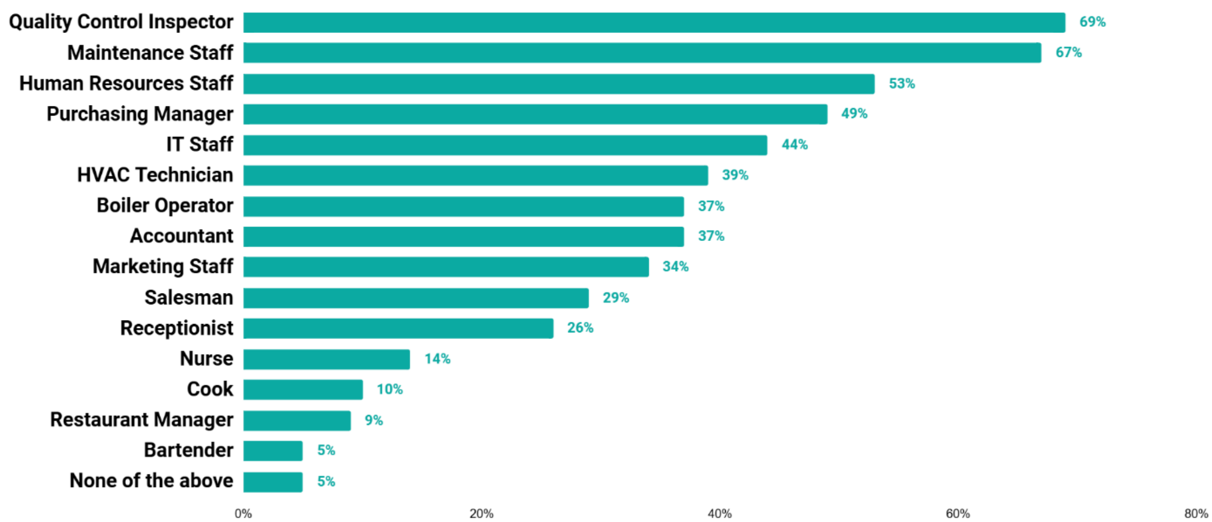



**Figure 3c. Public Awareness of Job Types in the Manufacturing Sector**




Key Findings

- **Respondents tend to associate each sector with its most visible, front-line roles.** In Accommodation & Food Services, selections were heavily concentrated on hospitality-specific positions like Cook (78%), Restaurant Manager (77%), and Bartender (69%). Similarly, in Health Care, the most frequently selected jobs were Nurse (83%), Human Resources Staff (64%), and Receptionist (60%). In Manufacturing, responses were anchored in operational roles, with Quality Control Inspector (69%) and Maintenance Staff (67%) leading the way.
- **Cross-sector functions like HR and accounting were recognized inconsistently.** While Human Resources Staff appeared in the top three for both Manufacturing and Health Care, it ranked much lower for Accommodation & Food Services (28%). Other shared roles—such as Accountant, Marketing Staff, and IT Staff—were acknowledged by a smaller share of respondents across all three sectors, suggesting a limited understanding of the behind-the-scenes roles that support every industry.

Sector-Specific Role Perceptions

- **Accommodation & Food Services** was strongly linked to hospitality and food prep roles, with little recognition of administrative or support positions. This narrow perception could limit how people view long-term career paths in the industry.

- **Health Care & Social Assistance** was associated most clearly with caregiving and frontline support (nurse was selected by 83% of respondents), but also showed broader recognition of HR (64%) and administrative jobs (60%).

- **Manufacturing** was perceived as highly technical and operational, with roles like Quality Control Inspector and Maintenance Staff topping the list. However, it was the only sector where Boiler Operators, HVAC Technicians, and other facility-based roles were more strongly recognized.

**Implications**

These findings suggest that public awareness of sector-specific job opportunities is often shaped by the most visible or traditional roles, while many essential supporting positions remain under the radar. Expanding awareness of the full range of careers in each sector—particularly in areas like HR, IT, marketing, and finance—could help broaden the talent pipeline and reshape perceptions of long-term opportunities. Career exploration initiatives and workforce messaging should consider incorporating real-world examples of diverse roles within each sector to help people imagine futures beyond the front line. Research shows that employers who actively engage youth in career exploration can effectively showcase the breadth of opportunities within their industries, particularly in fields like manufacturing, construction trades, and information technology, where young people often lack exposure to the variety of available roles (Youth Career Launchpad, 2024).

## Key Considerations When Choosing a Job

To better understand what drives workforce preferences across sectors, respondents were asked to identify the most important factors they consider when choosing a job. The findings are presented in Figure 4.

**Figure 4. Key Considerations When Choosing a Job**

Key Findings

Four considerations stood out as the most important to South Carolinians when thinking about employment:

- **Salary and earning potential (46%)**
  A good salary and strong earning potential was the most frequently cited factor influencing job desirability. Nearly half of respondents identified it as their top priority, reinforcing the importance of competitive compensation in today's labor market.

- **Health benefits (36%)**
  Access to medical, dental, and vision coverage was the second most commonly selected factor. This underscores the central role of comprehensive healthcare in shaping job desirability, particularly in a post-pandemic workforce landscape.

- **Job stability and security (32%)**
  Long-term confidence in employment was another top-tier concern. In an environment where layoffs, automation, and industry disruptions are at the top of mind, security remains a powerful motivator.

- **Work-life balance (29%)**
  Respondents also placed high value on achieving a sustainable balance between professional demands and personal well-being. This signals a widespread desire for jobs that respect boundaries and support quality of life.

Other frequently mentioned priorities included a positive workplace culture and environment (23%), retirement benefits such as 401(k) or pension plans (22%), and work schedule flexibility (20%). These responses reflect growing expectations for supportive, stable, and adaptable work environments. While compensation and health coverage remain foundational, factors like workplace culture and flexibility are increasingly shaping how people assess job quality. This trend mirrors national findings, which highlight the importance of job stability, benefits, and growth opportunities in employment decision-making (Deloitte Development LLC & The Manufacturing Institute, 2014).

Differences by Demographic Group

While many job considerations were broadly valued across the population, several key differences emerged when looking at responses by age, race, and military affiliation:

- **Older** respondents were particularly likely to value health-related and long-term financial benefits. Among those aged 65 to 74, over half (52%) identified health benefits as a top consideration. Retirement benefits were also most frequently cited by respondents aged 55 and older, reflecting a natural shift toward financial planning and security later in one's career. Respondents aged 75 and older were also the most likely to prioritize job opportunities located close to where they live (38%), which may reflect mobility limitations, caregiving responsibilities, or a preference to remain embedded in their communities.
- **Job seekers** placed a high premium on salary (62%) and schedule flexibility (27%), reflecting both immediate financial concerns and a desire for roles that can accommodate their current needs and responsibilities.
- **White** respondents were significantly more likely than Black or Other race respondents to cite salary as a top priority (52% vs. 33% and 37%; $p < .01$).

Differences by Employment Status

Notable differences also emerged when examining responses by employment status (see Table 3). These variations reflect how job-related needs shift depending on one's current role or stage in the employment journey.

**Table 3. Top Three Considerations by Employment Status**

| EMPLOYMENT STATUS | #1 Factor | #2 Factor | #3 Factor |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Job Seekers** | A good salary and strong earning potential (62%) | Job stability and security (39%) | A positive workplace culture and environment (31%) |
| **Employed** | A good salary and strong earning potential (43%) | A good work-life balance (36%) | Job stability and security (34%) |
| **Hiring Managers / Employers** | Opportunities for career advancement (61%) | Job stability and security (33%) | A positive workplace culture and environment (29%) |

*NOTE*: The sample contained only 32 Hiring Managers / Employers, so findings should be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size.

- **Job seekers** were most focused on financial and practical concerns. Over half (62%) identified a good salary and strong earning potential as their top priority—the highest of any group. They also prioritized job stability and security (39%) and a positive workplace culture and environment (31%), suggesting that both predictability and the quality of the work environment are especially valued by those actively searching for employment.

- **Employed** respondents also ranked salary as their top consideration (43%), but placed slightly greater emphasis on work-life balance (36%) and job stability and security (34%). This suggests that once basic employment needs are met, factors related to well-being, balance, and long-term security begin to take on greater importance.

- **Hiring managers** presented a distinct perspective. Opportunities for career advancement topped their list (61%), followed by job stability and security (33%) and a positive workplace culture and environment (29%).

Differences by Region

Finally, interesting themes and differences were seen when examining responses by region (see Table 4). These regional variations reflect how local contexts—such as access to healthcare, economic stability, or industry mix—may shape what people value most when considering employment opportunities.

**Table 4. Top Three Considerations by Region**

| REGION | #1 Factor | #2 Factor | #3 Factor |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Trident** | A good salary and strong earning potential (61%) | A good work-life balance (36%) | Health benefits (e.g., medical, dental, vision) (31%) |
| **Midlands** | A good salary and strong earning potential (55%) | Health benefits (e.g., medical, dental, vision) (37%) | Work schedule flexibility (34%) |
| **Greenville** | A good salary and strong earning potential (47%) | Job stability and security (36%) | Health benefits (e.g., medical, dental, vision) (35%) |
| **Upstate** | A good salary and strong earning potential (45%) | Health benefits (e.g., medical, dental, vision) (42%) | Job stability and security (37%) |
| **Waccamaw** | Health benefits (e.g., medical, dental, vision) (36%) | Job stability and security (35%) | A good salary and strong earning potential (34%) |
| **Worklink** | A good salary and strong earning potential (53%) | Health benefits (e.g., medical, dental, vision) (42%) | A good work-life balance (33%) |
| **Catawba** | A good salary and strong earning potential (45%) | Job stability and security (43%) | Health benefits (e.g., medical, dental, vision) (36%) |
| **Pee Dee** | Health benefits (e.g., medical, dental, vision) (35%) | Job stability and security (33%) | Retirement benefits (e.g., 401(k), pension) (30%) |
| **Lower Savannah** | Health benefits (e.g., medical, dental, vision) (45%) | A good salary and strong earning potential (38%) | A good work-life balance (33%) |
| **Upper Savannah** | A good salary and strong earning potential (46%) | Work schedule flexibility (34%) | Job stability and security (33%) |
| **Lowcountry** | A positive workplace culture and environment (38%) | A good salary and strong earning potential (35%) | Health benefits (e.g., medical, dental, vision) (32%)<br><br>Opportunities for career advancement (32%) |
| **Santee-Lynches** | Job stability and security (47%) | A good salary and strong earning potential (36%) | Opportunities that align with your personal interests (32%) |

Across nearly all regions in South Carolina, a good salary and strong earning potential emerged as the most important factor when considering a job. It ranked as a top priority in 11 out of 12 regions, making it the most consistent and universal driver of employment decisions across the state. Regardless of geography, workers overwhelmingly place a premium on fair and competitive compensation.

Health benefits also stood out as a key motivator. Health benefits were among the top three considerations in 10 regions and ranked first in Pee Dee, Lower Savannah, and Waccamaw. This suggests that in some areas, access to affordable healthcare may be as important—or even more important—than earnings. Job stability and security was another frequent priority, ranking among the top three in seven regions. This likely reflects an ongoing concern with economic uncertainty, as well as a desire for long-term employment prospects.

A good work-life balance appeared in the top three responses in three regions (Trident, Worklink, and Lower Savannah), pointing to a growing emphasis on maintaining time for family, rest, and personal well-being. These findings highlight how workers are increasingly valuing holistic job packages that support both financial and personal health. In Midlands and Upper Savannah, work schedule flexibility also made the top three, possibly driven by caregiving responsibilities or a desire for more control over daily routines.

Some regions revealed unique priorities that highlight local values. For example, a positive workplace culture and environment was especially important in the Lowcountry, where it ranked first. In Santee-Lynches, alignment with personal interests made the top three—the only region where this occurred—indicating that personal fulfillment may be a stronger motivator there. Likewise, opportunities for career advancement was cited more in the Lowcountry than in other regions.

**Implications**

These findings reinforce that competitive compensation alone is not enough to attract and retain talent in today's workforce. South Carolinians are also prioritizing benefits, job stability, flexibility, and workplace culture when evaluating employment opportunities. Employers who respond to this broader range of needs through policy, communication, and supportive practices will be better positioned to compete in a tight labor market.

The variation across demographic groups, employment status, and regions further highlights the importance of tailored workforce strategies. For instance, flexibility and work-life balance may resonate more with job seekers and younger workers, while health and retirement benefits are especially valued by older adults. In regions like Pee Dee and Lower Savannah, emphasizing healthcare access may be particularly effective, while areas like Santee-Lynches may benefit from promoting opportunities that align with personal interests and values. These insights can help shape more targeted talent attraction strategies across the state.

## Perceptions of How Well Sectors Deliver on Job Priorities

After identifying their top considerations when choosing a job, respondents were asked to evaluate how well each of the eight sectors fulfills those specific priorities. This provides insight into how different industries are perceived in terms of delivering what workers value most. A summary of the top sectors for each job-related factor is shown below in Table 5. Individual sector-specific results, including full response distributions, are provided in the Appendix (see Figures A11a – A11l).

**Table 5. Sectors Perceived to Best Deliver on Job Priorities**

| FACTOR | #1 Sector | #2 Sector | #3 Sector |
|---|---|---|---|
| **A strong industry reputation and prestige** | Health Care & Social Assistance (78%) | Public Administration/Govt (72%) | Accommodation & Food Services (72%) |
| **Retirement benefits (e.g., 401(k), pension)** | Public Administration/Govt (72%) | Health Care & Social Assistance (64%) | Advanced Energy/Utilities (59%) |
| **Health benefits (e.g., medical, dental, vision)** | Retail Sales/Trade (69%)<br><br>Health Care & Social Assistance (69%) | Public Administration/Govt (68%) | Advanced Energy/Utilities (59%) |
| **A good salary and strong earning potential** | Health Care & Social Assistance (61%) | Advanced Energy/Utilities (62%) | Public Administration/Govt (56%) |
| **Opportunities for career advancement** | Health Care & Social Assistance (64%) | Advanced Energy/Utilities (56%) | Public Administration/Govt (54%) |
| **Job stability and security** | Health Care & Social Assistance (66%) | Advanced Energy/Utilities (63%) | Public Administration/Govt (57%) |
| **Job opportunities located close to where you live** | Accommodation & Food Services (58%) | Retail Sales/Trade (57%) | Health Care & Social Assistance (56%) |
| **A sense of belonging in the workplace** | Educational Services (62%) | Accommodation & Food Services (61%) | Advanced Energy/Utilities (59%) |
| **Opportunities that align with your personal interests** | Public Administration/Govt (49%) | Educational Services (45%) | Health Care & Social Assistance (44%) |
| **A good work-life balance** | Educational Services (54%) | Retail Sales/Trade (41%) | Advanced Energy/Utilities (42%) |

| FACTOR | #1 Sector | #2 Sector | #3 Sector |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Work schedule flexibility** | Public Administration/Govt (47%) | Advanced Energy/Utilities (46%)<br><br>Educational Services (46%) | Accommodation & Food Services (41%) |
| **A positive workplace culture and environment** | Advanced Energy/Utilities (44%) | Accommodation & Food Services (43%) | Educational Services (42%)<br><br>Health Care & Social Assistance (42%) |

Key Findings

Three sectors stood out across a broad range of factors:

- **Health Care & Social Assistance.** This sector ranked in the top three for nine of the twelve evaluated job priorities—including #1 rankings for industry reputation, salary and earning potential, career advancement, and job stability. It was also rated highly for retirement and health benefits, proximity to job opportunities, and alignment with personal interests. Despite often being associated with high stress, Health Care & Social Assistance is widely seen as a sector offering strong compensation, long-term security, and meaningful career growth.
- **Public Administration / Government**. Government work was also well-regarded across the board. It was the top-rated sector for retirement benefits, work schedule flexibility, and alignment with personal interests, and it performed strongly in health benefits, career advancement, and job stability. These results reinforce the perception that government roles provide stability, structure, and long-term value—though most responses were collected prior to recent budget cuts, which could influence future views.
- **Advanced Energy / Utilities**. This sector ranked in the top three for eight of the evaluated factors, including a positive workplace culture, salary, job stability, career advancement, and work schedule flexibility. It was also recognized for offering good retirement benefits, a sense of belonging, and good work-life balance. While the sector may be less familiar to some respondents, those who did have an opinion viewed it favorably—particularly when it comes to compensation, stability, and overall job quality.

Sector Strengths by Job Factor

- **Health Care and Social Assistance**. This sector was viewed most favorably for industry reputation and prestige (78%) and also ranked in the top three for salary, career advancement, job stability, retirement benefits, and health benefits. It also performed well in terms of proximity of job opportunities and alignment with personal interests. These perceptions likely reflect the sector's essential role in communities, strong institutional presence, and the values-driven nature of many health care professions.
- **Accommodation & Food Services**. This sector was viewed favorably for job proximity, a sense of belonging, and a positive workplace culture. It also ranked in the top three for work schedule flexibility and reputation. However, it did not appear among the top sectors for salary, benefits, or career advancement, suggesting that while it may offer flexibility and community, it may be seen as lacking in long-term economic value.

- **Retail Sales / Trade**. This sector was recognized for providing health benefits, which may reflect broader eligibility in larger retail chains, jobs close to home, and work-life balance. However, it did not rank highly on long-term career factors like prestige, retirement benefits, or advancement—reinforcing earlier concerns about low starting wages and limited job stability in the retail sector.

How Sectors Are Perceived on Key Priorities

Perceptions of how well sectors deliver on specific job attributes help explain their appeal—or lack thereof—in the eyes of potential workers (see the individual sector-specific results, including full response distributions, in the Appendix - Figures A11a to A11l).

- **Health Benefits.** Health Care & Social Assistance (69%), Public Administration/Government (68%), and Advanced Energy/Utilities (59%) were viewed as the top sectors for providing reliable medical, dental, and vision coverage. Retail Sales/Trade (69%) also received unexpectedly high marks in this area—possibly reflecting benefit offerings from large national employers. In contrast, Accommodation & Food Services were rated much lower (23%), suggesting persistent perceptions of inconsistent or limited health benefit access in these sectors.

- **Work-Life Balance.** Educational Services received the highest ratings (54%) for work-life balance, followed by Retail Sales/Trade (41%) and Advanced Energy/Utilities (42%). These sectors may be perceived as offering more predictable or adaptable schedules. In contrast, sectors like Manufacturing and Transportation & Warehousing were rated less favorably—likely reflecting the demanding, shift-based, or inflexible nature of work in those industries.

- **Job Stability and Security.** Health Care & Social Assistance (66%) received the highest ratings for job stability, followed by Advanced Energy/Utilities (63%) and Public Administration/Government (57%). These sectors are widely seen as offering consistent, long-term employment opportunities. In contrast, sectors like Retail Sales/Trade and Accommodation & Food Services ranked much lower(37% and 36%, respectively)—reflecting continued perceptions of instability, high turnover, and vulnerability to economic fluctuations.

**Implications**

The results show that certain sectors—particularly Health Care & Social Assistance, Public Administration/Government, and Advanced Energy/Utilities—stand out for delivering on a wide range of job priorities. These sectors are perceived as offering not only competitive salaries and benefits but also opportunities for advancement, long-term security, and supportive work environments. For many South Carolinians, they represent reliable, stable career paths that align well with what workers say they value most.

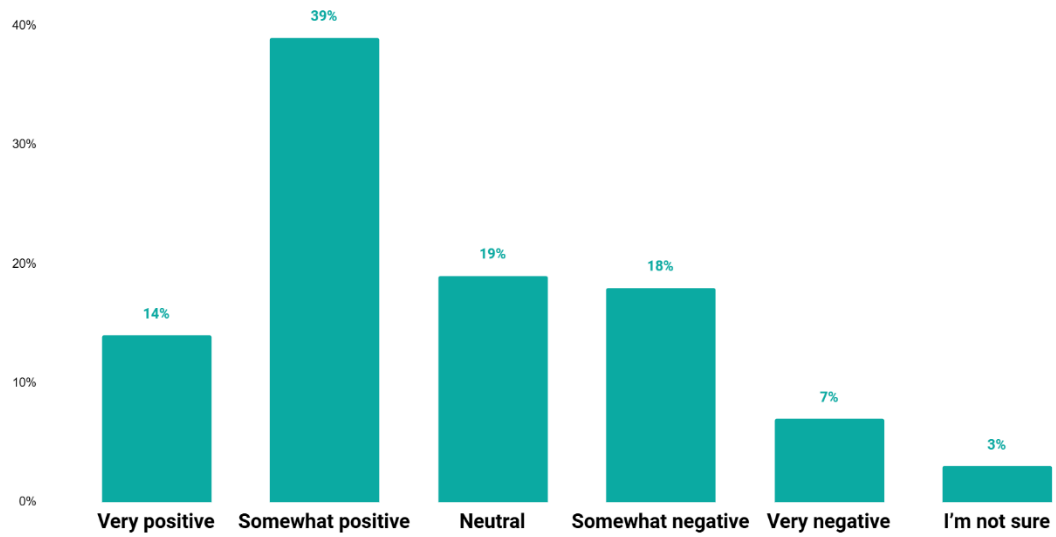
At the same time, no single sector excelled across all areas. Lifestyle-related factors such as schedule flexibility, a sense of belonging, and alignment with personal interests were less consistently rated highly—even among the top-performing sectors. Some industries not traditionally associated with long-term careers, such as Retail Sales/Trade and Accommodation & Food Services, still earned positive ratings for attributes like job proximity, flexibility, and workplace culture. Similarly, Educational Services stood out for its reputation on work-life balance and belonging. These findings suggest that while workers gravitate toward stability and compensation, they also value supportive and flexible environments—and often must compromise on at least some of their top priorities when considering employment options.

This dynamic reflects broader national trends. A 2024 Pew Research Center study found that while most workers are satisfied with their jobs overall, fewer express satisfaction with benefits like opportunities for promotion (44%) or how their contributions are recognized (38%)—indicating that even in stable roles, key motivators often go unmet (Pew Research Center, 2024).

## Workforce Issues in South Carolina

### Perceptions of the Overall Job Market in South Carolina

**Figure 5. Perceptions of the Overall Job Market in South Carolina**




When asked how they feel about the overall job market in South Carolina, just over half (53%) of respondents had a positive view, including 14% who described their outlook as very positive and 39% who said it was somewhat positive. One-quarter (25%) expressed negative views, split between somewhat negative (18%) and very negative (7%). These results suggest that while nearly half of South Carolinians feel generally positive about the state's job market, a notable portion remain either uncertain or pessimistic. The 25% who feel negatively—especially when combined with the 19% who are neutral—may reflect concerns about job quality, industry fit, wage levels, or personal employment experiences.

Perceptions of the job market were generally consistent across regions, but clear differences emerged across demographic and socioeconomic lines. Positive impressions increased steadily with age: 68% of respondents aged 65 to 74 and 60% of those 75 and older rated the job market positively. Men were more likely than women to report a favorable outlook (60% vs. 45%; $p < .01$), and hiring managers/employers were among the most optimistic, with 72% expressing a positive view. Education and income were also strong predictors of outlook. Respondents with a Master's degree or higher were the most positive (78%), as were those in households earning $150,000 or more per year (74%).

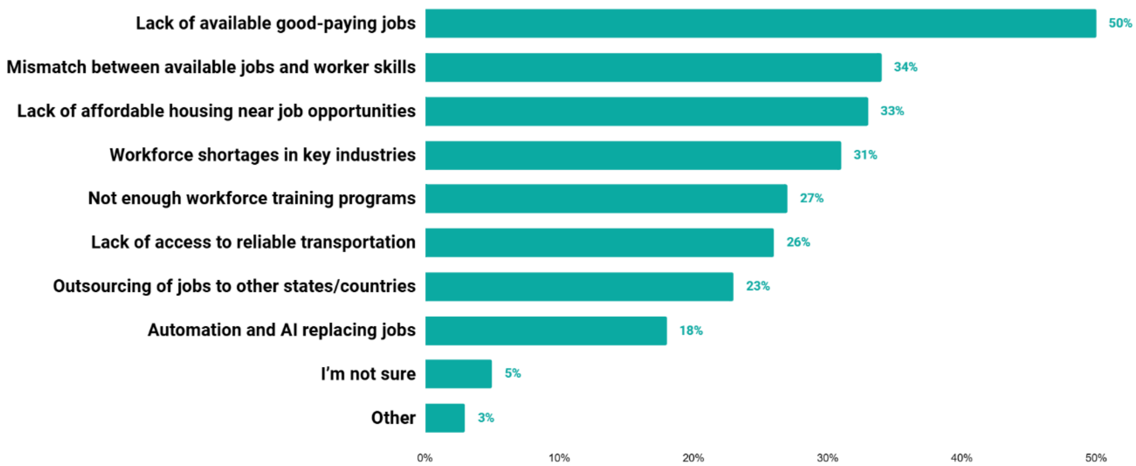
**Implications**

While just over half of South Carolinians view the job market positively, a substantial share remain neutral or pessimistic, highlighting a divide in perceived access to quality employment. This divide is closely linked to demographic and socioeconomic factors, with optimism concentrated among older adults, men, higher earners, and those with advanced degrees. These patterns suggest that confidence in the job market is not evenly distributed and that many residents—particularly women and lower-income individuals—may feel disconnected from current economic opportunities.

These perceptions have real implications for workforce participation and engagement. If large segments of the population are unconvinced about the availability or quality of jobs, they may be less inclined to pursue new roles, invest in skill-building, or engage with workforce development initiatives. Closing this perception gap will require targeted communication, more effective hiring and advancement practices, and clear investments in job quality—especially in communities and populations that feel overlooked.

## Challenges in the Overall Job Market in South Carolina

**Figure 6. Challenges in the Overall Job Market in South Carolina**




When asked to identify the biggest challenges facing the workforce in South Carolina, respondents most commonly pointed to economic and structural barriers—with a clear emphasis on compensation, housing, and alignment between worker skills and job availability. Half (50%) cited a lack of available good-paying jobs as the most pressing concern. This finding underscores a widespread perception that while jobs may exist, many do not meet workers' financial needs or expectations for sustainable income.

A mismatch between available jobs and worker skills was the second most frequently cited challenge (34%), highlighting the need for better alignment between workforce training and evolving industry demands. The lack of affordable housing near job opportunities was identified by one-third of respondents (33%), particularly for workers who may be commuting long distances or struggling to secure stable housing near their jobs. Related to this, workforce shortages in key industries (31%) were also flagged as critical barriers—suggesting that even when jobs exist, employers may not have enough qualified candidates to fill them.

Consistent with these findings, previous research across South Carolina has identified a similar set of employment barriers—most notably, the shortage of good-paying jobs. Additional challenges such as employment gaps, inflexible work hours, and lack of transportation were found to impact nearly every demographic group (Millan Chicago LLC, 2022), reinforcing the structural and logistical issues cited by respondents in this survey.

Differences by Demographic Group

Demographic differences in the current study further illustrate the complexity of perceived challenges. Respondents aged 55 to 64 were most likely to report a lack of good-paying jobs (69%). Job seekers were particularly concerned about pay (67%) and housing (39%). Meanwhile, workforce training gaps were flagged more often by men (32% vs. 22%; $p < .05$) and by Black respondents compared to White respondents (36% vs. 24%; $p < .05$). Access to transportation was a particularly acute challenge for respondents with household incomes under $25,000 (41%). Respondents with Bachelor's or advanced degrees were more likely to identify workforce shortages in key industries as a top issue—suggesting a view of the labor market shaped by their proximity to high-demand, high-skill sectors.

Differences by Region

**Table 6. Top 3 Perceived Challenges by Region**

| REGION | #1 Challenge | #2 Challenge | #3 Challenge |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Trident** | Lack of available good-paying jobs (52%) | Mismatch between available jobs and worker skills (41%) | Lack of affordable housing near job opportunities (39%) |
| **Midlands** | Lack of available good-paying jobs (50%) | Mismatch between available jobs and worker skills (38%) | Workforce shortages in key industries (36%) |
| **Greenville** | Lack of available good-paying jobs (53%) | Lack of affordable housing near job opportunities (31%)<br><br>Lack of access to reliable transportation (31%) | Not enough workforce training programs (28%) |
| **Upstate** | Mismatch between available jobs and worker skills (48%) | Lack of available good-paying jobs (44%) | Lack of affordable housing near job opportunities (38%) |
| **Waccamaw** | Lack of available good-paying jobs (67%) | Lack of affordable housing near job opportunities (42%) | Workforce shortages in key industries (41%) |
| **Worklink** | Mismatch between available jobs and worker skills (52%) | Lack of available good-paying jobs (49%) | Lack of access to reliable transportation (32%) |
| **Catawba** | Lack of available good-paying jobs (46%) | Lack of affordable housing near job opportunities (35%) | Not enough workforce training programs (32%) |

| REGION | #1 Challenge | #2 Challenge | #3 Challenge |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Pee Dee** | Lack of available good-paying jobs (48%)<br><br>Lack of affordable housing near job opportunities (48%) | Workforce shortages in key industries (35%) | Lack of access to reliable transportation (33%) |
| **Lower Savannah** | Lack of available good-paying jobs (43%) | Lack of access to reliable transportation (41%) | Mismatch between available jobs and worker skills (36%) |
| **Upper Savannah** | Lack of available good-paying jobs (44%) | Lack of access to reliable transportation (40%)<br><br>Workforce shortages in key industries (40%) | Not enough workforce training programs (39%) |
| **Lowcountry** | Lack of available good-paying jobs (60%) | Lack of affordable housing near job opportunities (47%) | Workforce shortages in key industries (46%) |
| **Santee-Lynches** | Lack of available good-paying jobs (36%) | Lack of access to reliable transportation (34%) | Not enough workforce training programs (33%) |

Across all 12 regions in South Carolina, the lack of available good-paying jobs was a most frequently cited challenge. It ranked as the #1 concern in ten regions, and appeared in the top three in all others—reflecting a strong, statewide perception that while jobs may exist, many do not offer wages sufficient to meet the cost of living or provide long-term financial security. The lack of affordable housing near job opportunities was also a dominant concern, appearing among the top three in seven of the regions. This underscores a growing disconnect between where jobs are located and where workers can afford to live.

A mismatch between available jobs and worker skills emerged as a top-three challenge in five regions, with the highest concern reported in Worklink (52%), Upstate (48%), and Trident (41%). These figures suggest persistent gaps between employer needs and the current skill base of the workforce.

Additionally, limited access to reliable transportation continued to be a significant barrier in Lower Savannah, Pee Dee, Worklink, Greenville, Santee-Lynches, and Upper Savannah. According to additional research conducted for the South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce, transportation access challenges were most severe in Tier IV counties, where it was identified as the number one barrier to employment—reinforcing this report's finding that geographic and infrastructural limitations disproportionately affect job seekers in rural areas (Millan Chicago LLC, 2022).

A number of regions also surfaced more specific concerns. Workforce shortages in key industries ranked among the top three in Waccamaw, Lowcountry, Upper Savannah, Midlands, and Pee Dee, indicating strain in high-skill or high-demand sectors. Meanwhile, a lack of workforce training programs appeared in the top three for Greenville, Catawba, Upper Savannah, and Santee-Lynches—signaling ongoing gaps in upskilling pathways and career mobility.

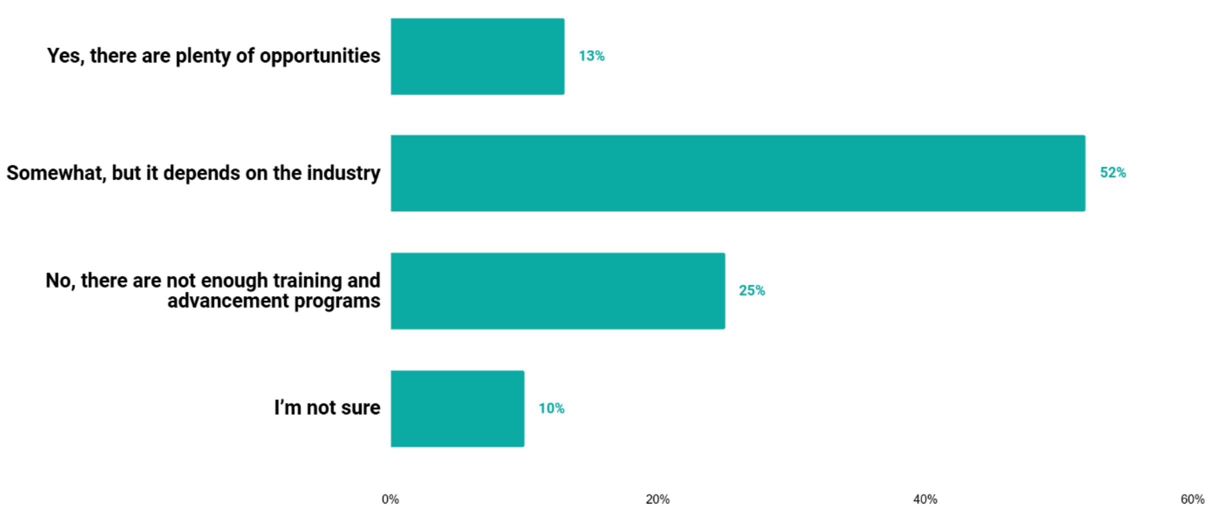
### Implications

The challenges identified by South Carolinians point to a labor market shaped as much by accessibility and alignment as by job availability. While job creation remains important, many residents perceive existing opportunities as falling short—either financially, geographically, or in terms of fit with their skills. Concerns about low wages, housing affordability, and transportation access suggest that workforce participation is often limited by practical constraints that extend beyond simple employment counts. This perception aligns with external findings showing that many South Carolinians not participating in the workforce cite barriers such as caregiving responsibilities, transportation issues, or a lack of suitable opportunities (Millan Chicago LLC, 2022).

The widespread concern about low-paying jobs across nearly every region points to a foundational challenge that may be dampening motivation and engagement across the labor force. At the same time, variation by region, race, gender, and income level highlights the need for targeted solutions. Transportation access remains a critical barrier for rural and lower-income communities, while gaps in training and alignment between job requirements and worker skills were more frequently noted by men and Black respondents. These findings reinforce that workforce development strategies must go beyond generic messaging or broad-based investments—they must be responsive to the specific needs and constraints experienced by different populations and communities across the state.

## Opportunities for Job Training and Career Advancement in South Carolina

**Figure 7. Opportunities for Job Training and Career Advancement in South Carolina**



When asked whether South Carolina offers enough opportunities for job training and career advancement, most respondents expressed conditional or critical views—highlighting the need for more targeted and industry-specific efforts. The majority (52%) said that opportunities exist but depend heavily on the industry, suggesting uneven access across different sectors. This indicates that while some industries may be doing well in providing pathways for upskilling and advancement, others may be lagging behind or failing to make opportunities visible to job seekers.

Just 13% of respondents felt there are plenty of opportunities available, pointing to a relatively small segment of the population with strong confidence in the state's training and advancement infrastructure. In contrast, 25% reported that South Carolina does not offer enough programs, reflecting concern over gaps in workforce development and career mobility.

These findings reinforce earlier concerns about mismatches between jobs and worker skills and insufficient workforce training programs. They suggest that public confidence in the state's ability to prepare workers for the future remains limited and dependent on industry context. This lack of confidence is not isolated to South Carolina: national research also shows that only 40% of Americans believe today's students are adequately prepared for modern manufacturing jobs, highlighting a broader challenge in aligning educational systems with high-demand careers (Deloitte Development LLC & The Manufacturing Institute, 2014).

**Implications**

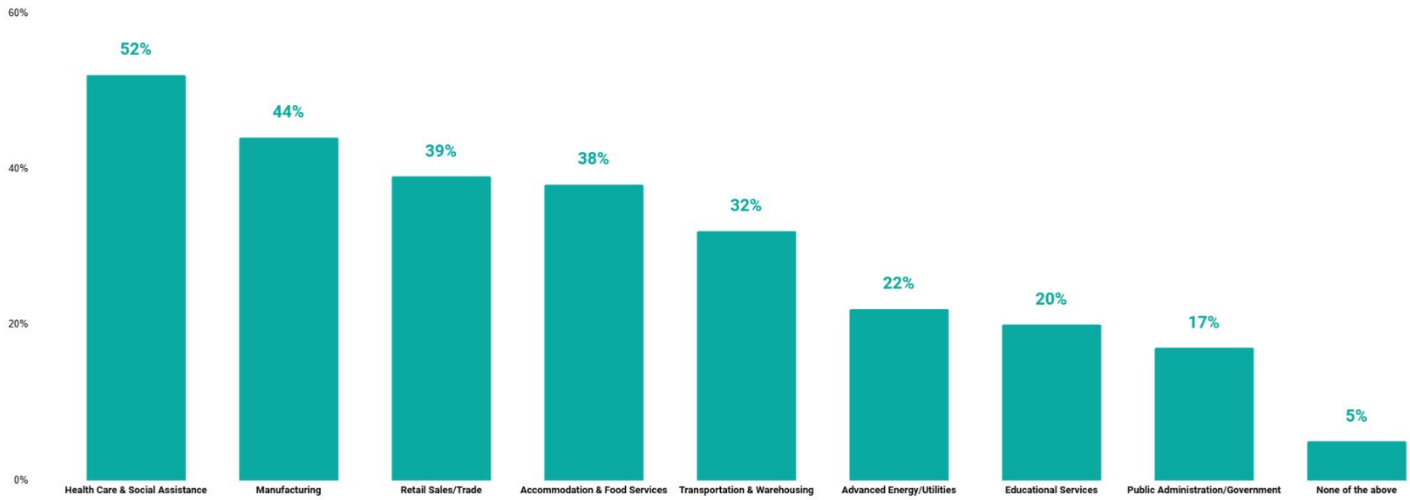
These findings underscore the importance of expanding and better communicating job training and career advancement opportunities across the state—especially in sectors where public confidence is low or access appears limited. While some industries may offer robust pathways for growth, the fact that most respondents see opportunity as industry-dependent—and only a small minority view the state's offerings as sufficient—suggests a need for more equitable and visible workforce development infrastructure.

External research further supports this finding. CCWD's strategic goals underscore the importance of expanding real-world experiences such as internships, co-ops, and youth apprenticeships—mirroring this study's emphasis on work-based learning as a bridge to meaningful career pathways (Coordinating Council for Workforce Development, 2024). These opportunities are explicitly designated as "career-ready qualifier" experiences in CCWD planning materials and represent a tangible way to strengthen workforce pipelines, particularly for young adults and job seekers seeking clearer entry points into high-demand industries.

Without accessible and clearly communicated training programs, many South Carolinians may struggle to prepare for high-demand roles or to transition into careers that offer upward mobility. Strengthening industry partnerships, aligning programs with local economic needs, and increasing regional visibility of existing resources will be key to building public trust and ensuring that workers across all sectors can see—and pursue—meaningful pathways to advancement. The importance of work-based learning was also a focus of the state's Unified Plan, which sets specific targets for increasing real-world experiences—such as internships, apprenticeships, and service learning—among high school and college students (Coordinating Council for Workforce Development, 2024).

## Perceptions of Top Job-Creating Industries in South Carolina

**Figure 8. Perceptions of Top Job-Creating Industries in South Carolina**




When asked which industries they believe are the top job creators in South Carolina, respondents selected a mix of service-oriented and traditionally strong economic sectors. Health Care & Social Assistance was the most frequently selected industry, cited by 52% of respondents. This aligns with broader perceptions of the sector as both a consistent employer and a critical service provider across the state.

Health Care & Social Assistance was the most frequently cited job-creating sector, selected by 52% of respondents, underscoring its central role in South Carolina's economy and growing workforce demand. Manufacturing followed at 44%, reinforcing its continued importance to the state's economic identity. Other frequently selected sectors included Retail Sales/Trade (39%), Accommodation & Food Services (38%), and Transportation & Warehousing (32%)—all of which reflect industries with wide geographic reach and consistent demand for frontline labor.
By contrast, Public Administration/Government was selected by just 17% of respondents, suggesting a relatively modest public perception of job creation within the government sector.

The public appears to associate job creation most strongly with sectors that are highly visible, growing, or tied to essential services. While some of these perceptions may reflect actual labor market trends, others may be shaped by personal experience, media coverage, or community presence of specific industries.

Differences by Demographic Group

While there was general agreement on which industries are driving job creation in South Carolina, notable differences emerged across demographic and regional groups—suggesting that personal experience, occupation, and geographic context play a strong role in shaping public perception. Educational Services was more likely to be seen as a top job creator by females (26% vs. 14% of males; $p < .01$), which may relate to higher representation of women in educational roles, while males were more likely to report Manufacturing (52% vs. 36% of females; $p < .01$) and Public Administration/Government (23% vs. 12% of females; $p < .01$).

Manufacturing was especially recognized in manufacturing-heavy regions such as Upstate (72%), Worklink (64%), and Greenville (58%). Perception of manufacturing as a job driver also increased with income, with 58% of respondents earning $150,000 or more identifying it as a top job-creating industry.

Accommodation & Food Services was more frequently selected by White respondents than Black or Other race respondents (42% vs. 30% and 15%; $p < .05$ and $p < .01$), and was particularly emphasized in Waccamaw and Lowcountry, where over half (59% and 57%, respectively) cited it as a key employment sector.

Retail Sales/Trade was especially recognized by job seekers (48%), suggesting that its perceived accessibility or abundance of entry-level positions may make it more top-of-mind for those currently seeking work.

Differences by Region

**Table 7. Top Perceived Job-Creating Industries by Region**

| REGION | #1 Sector | #2 Sector | #3 Sector |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Trident** | Health Care & Social Assistance (68%) | Retail Sales/Trade (44%) | Manufacturing (35%) |
| **Midlands** | Manufacturing (44%) | Health Care & Social Assistance (42%) | Accommodation & Food Services (35%) |
| **Greenville** | Health Care & Social Assistance (60%) | Manufacturing (58%) | Accommodation & Food Services (42%) |
| **Upstate** | Manufacturing (72%) | Transportation & Warehousing (49%) | Retail Sales/Trade (43%) |
| **Waccamaw** | Accommodation & Food Services (59%) | Retail Sales/Trade (53%) | Health Care & Social Assistance (47%) |
| **Worklink** | Manufacturing (64%) | Accommodation & Food Services (46%) | Retail Sales/Trade (33%) |
| **Catawba** | Health Care & Social Assistance (51%) | Transportation & Warehousing (38%) | Accommodation & Food Services (37%) |
| **Pee Dee** | Health Care & Social Assistance (73%) | Retail Sales/Trade (40%) | Manufacturing (37%) |
| **Lower Savannah** | Manufacturing (44%) | Health Care & Social Assistance (41%) | Transportation & Warehousing (39%) |
| **Upper Savannah** | Manufacturing (50%) | Retail Sales/Trade (46%) | Health Care & Social Assistance (42%) |
| **Lowcountry** | Health Care & Social Assistance (69%) | Accommodation & Food Services (57%) | Retail Sales/Trade (47%) |
| **Santee-Lynches** | Health Care & Social Assistance (39%)<br><br>Educational Services (39%) | Accommodation & Food Services (34%)<br><br>Retail Sales/Trade (34%)<br><br>Transportation & Warehousing (34%) | Manufacturing (30%) |

Some variations emerged by region:

- Health Care & Social Assistance was the most frequently cited sector in Trident, Greenville, Catawba, Pee Dee, Lowcountry, and Santee-Lynches, and appeared among the top three in nearly every other region. This underscores the sector's broad visibility and perceived stability as a consistent source of jobs statewide.

- Manufacturing was seen as the top industry in Upstate (72%), Worklink (64%), Upper Savannah (50%), Midlands (44%), and Lower Savannah (44%)—regions with strong manufacturing footprints. In these areas, nearly half or more of respondents cited manufacturing as a leading job creator, reinforcing its ongoing role in regional economic identity.

- Retail Sales/Trade appeared in the top three for eight of the 12 regions, reflecting its ubiquity and accessibility across both urban and rural communities. It ranked especially high in Waccamaw (53%), Upper Savannah (46%), and Trident (44%).

- Accommodation & Food Services was also frequently selected, ranking in the top three in seven of the regions. Its strong presence in tourism-heavy and service-oriented regions likely contributes to its visibility as a key employer.

- Transportation & Warehousing emerged as a top-tier job creator in Upstate, Catawba, Lower Savannah, and Santee-Lynches, indicating the importance of logistics and distribution in these areas.

- Educational Services appeared as a top-three sector only in Santee-Lynches, highlighting regional variation in how education is viewed as a source of employment.

**Implications**

Understanding which industries the public perceives as leading job creators offers important guidance for shaping workforce development, outreach, and career awareness efforts. The consistent prominence of Health Care & Social Assistance, Manufacturing, Retail, and Accommodation & Food Services across demographic groups and regions suggests that these sectors are not only economically vital but also highly visible to South Carolinians. These perceptions can strongly influence where individuals choose to seek employment or pursue training—reinforcing the importance of aligning career pathways with the industries people recognize and trust. Nationally, Americans continue to rank manufacturing among the most important sectors for maintaining a strong economy, underscoring its central role in both economic identity and workforce strategy (Deloitte Development LLC & The Manufacturing Institute, 2014).

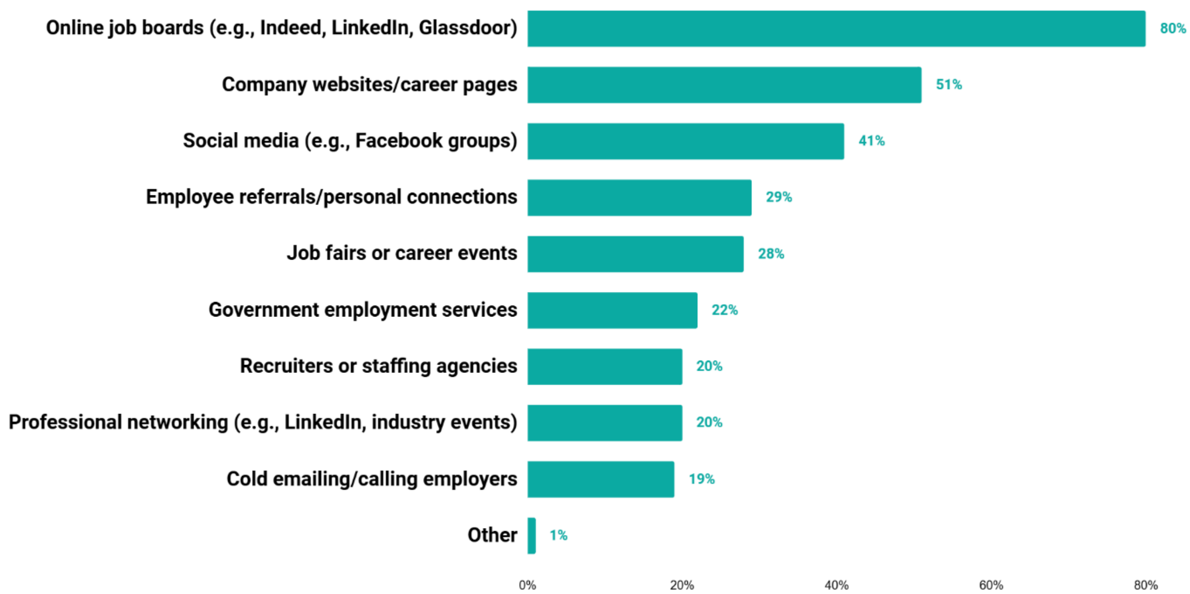
At the same time, demographic and regional differences reveal that perceptions of opportunity are shaped by factors such as gender, income, occupation, and geography. Manufacturing, for example, was more frequently selected by men and higher-income respondents, while Health Care and Educational Services were more commonly identified by women. In regions like Upstate and Catawba, Transportation & Warehousing stood out as a key job-creating sector, while in Waccamaw and Lowcountry, the visibility of Accommodation & Food Services reflected strong tourism economies. These patterns reinforce the need to tailor workforce development messaging to reflect the economic landscape and cultural context of each community—ensuring that public awareness efforts are both accurate and resonant.

## Job Seekers

Only 13% identified as current job seekers—those actively looking for a new job or considering a career change. Insights from this group highlight both the strategies they are using and the challenges they face.

When asked how they're searching for jobs, a strong majority (80%) of job seekers reported using online job boards such as Indeed, LinkedIn, and Glassdoor. Just over half of job seekers also rely on company career pages (51%), and 41% utilize social media platforms like Facebook groups, underscoring the importance of a strong digital presence for employers. More traditional methods like employee referrals (29%) and job fairs or career events (28%) also remain relevant, suggesting that both online and offline strategies play a role in reaching job seekers.

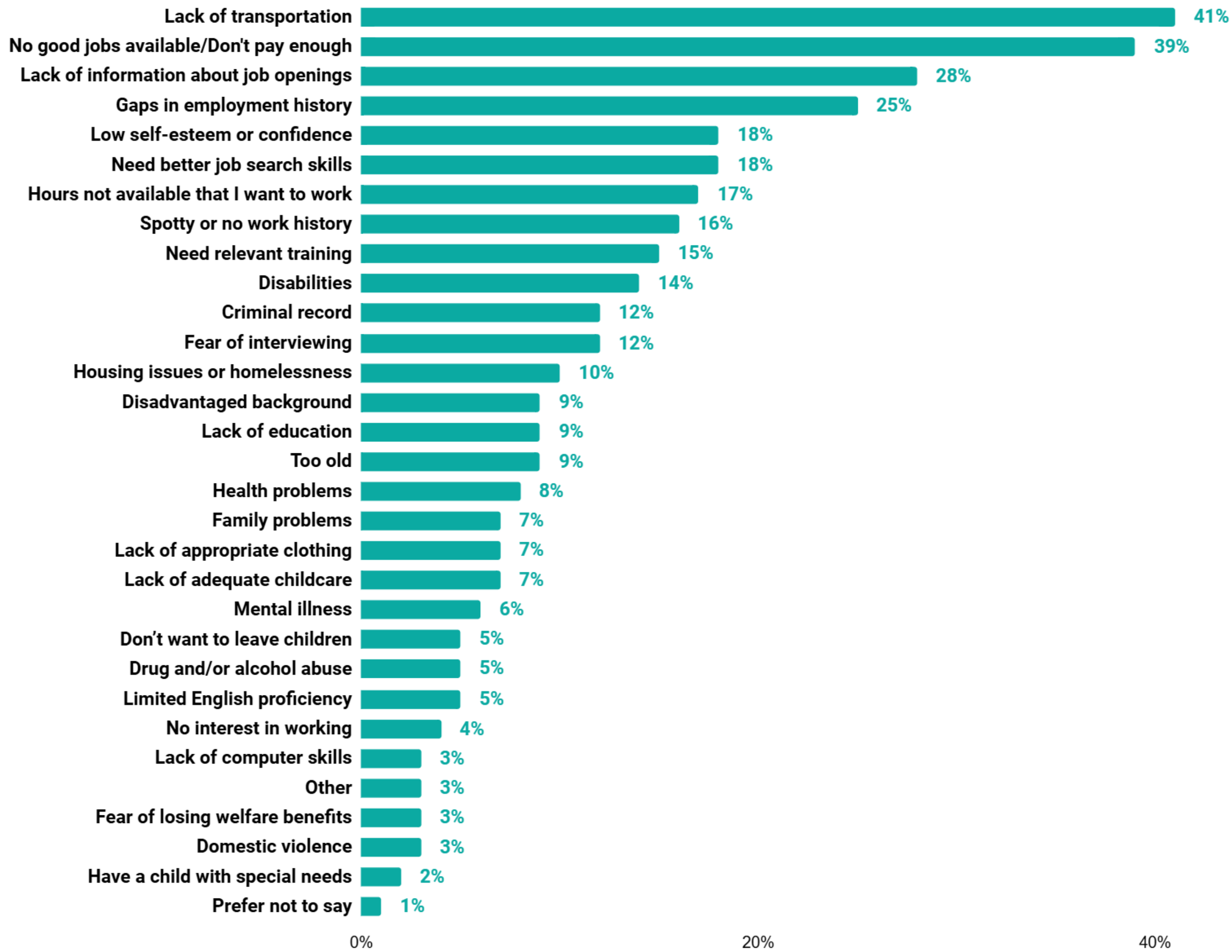
**Figure 9. Job Search Methods (among job seekers)**




Despite their efforts, job seekers face considerable barriers. Lack of transportation was the most frequently cited challenge, selected by 41% of respondents, likely reflecting the difficulty of reaching jobs in rural or underserved areas without reliable transit options. Close behind, 39% of respondents said there were no good jobs available or that the jobs available didn't pay enough, underscoring persistent concerns about wage adequacy and job quality. Lack of information about job openings (28%) and gaps in employment history (25%) also emerged as major hurdles.

These findings highlight the complex, multi-layered nature of job search challenges ranging from logistical and informational gaps to structural issues like skill mismatch and limited access to opportunity. Addressing these barriers will require coordinated efforts across transportation, workforce development, and employer outreach.

**Figure 10. Barriers to Employment (among job seekers)**




When asked what they value most in a future role, job seekers placed a premium on compensation, flexibility, and growth. The top priority was a competitive salary, selected by 49% of respondents. This was followed by flexible work hours (38%), opportunities for career growth and advancement (33%), and job stability/security (32%). These preferences align with broader statewide trends emphasizing worker autonomy, long-term sustainability, and quality of life. Findings from a companion labor force study similarly revealed that residents across the state—particularly those currently not in the workforce—consistently prioritized better pay, shorter commutes, and more flexible job conditions as the key factors that would encourage them to return to work, echoing the same themes identified by job seekers in this survey (Millan Chicago LLC, 2022).

**Figure 11. Most Valued Job Attributes (among job seekers)**


### Implications

Findings from job seekers reveal a workforce that is engaged and motivated, but often held back by structural barriers and unmet expectations. The widespread use of online platforms—such as job boards, social media, and company websites—highlights the importance of a strong and visible digital presence. Employers aiming to attract talent, particularly in competitive or hard-to-staff labor markets, should ensure their listings are accessible across platforms and clearly communicate key details like salary ranges, work schedules, and opportunities for growth.

However, visibility alone is not enough. The most frequently cited challenge—the lack of good-paying jobs—echoes broader concerns seen throughout this study and reinforces the disconnect between job availability and job quality. Transportation challenges, especially in rural areas, further limit access and opportunity. Addressing these barriers will require cross-sector collaboration to improve transit infrastructure, expand remote or hybrid work options, and promote equitable wages.

Job seekers' stated priorities—compensation, flexibility, career advancement, and stability—reflect shifting workforce values. To attract and retain talent, employers and workforce development programs must adapt to these preferences by offering more flexible schedules, clear advancement pathways, and supportive, sustainable work environments. These findings highlight an opportunity for South Carolina's workforce system to become more responsive and future-focused in how it supports job seekers.

## Veterans

Sixteen percent reported being a veteran, with an additional 2% identifying as active-duty transitioning service members. Military spouses represented a smaller portion of the sample, with just 4% currently married to a service member and 7% reporting past military spouse status.

**Figure 12. Military Service**

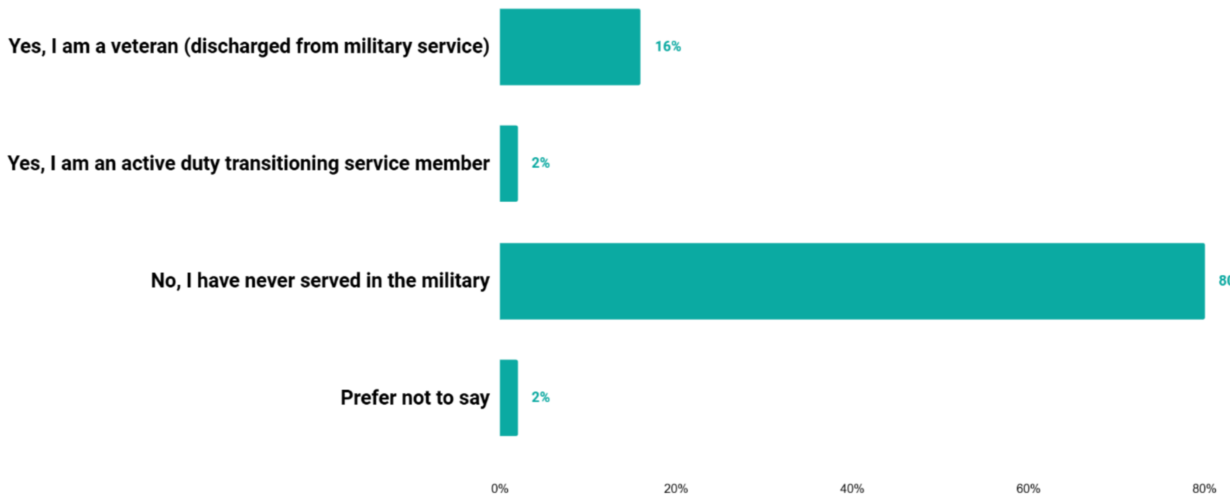



**Figure 13. Military Spouse**

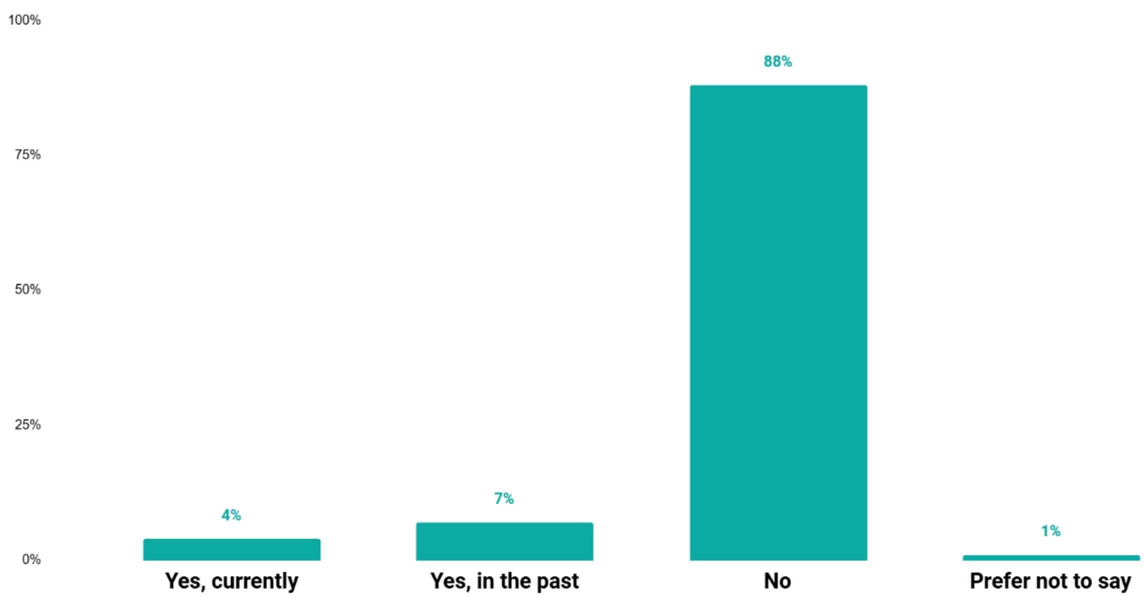
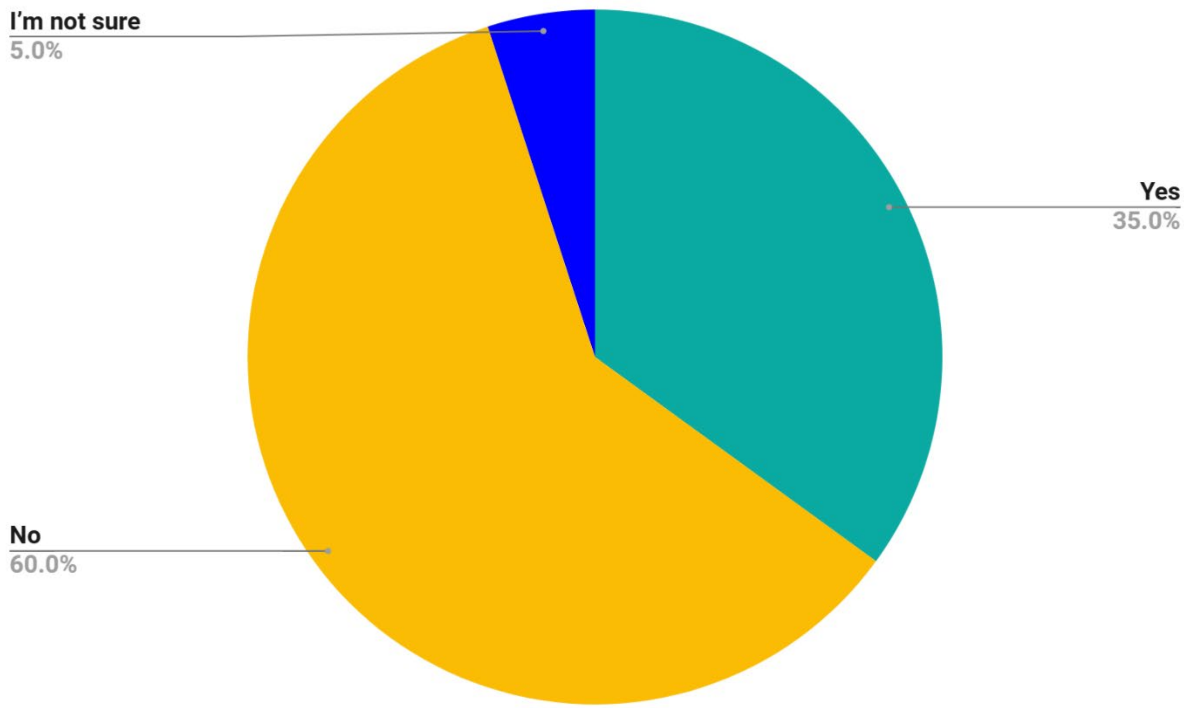
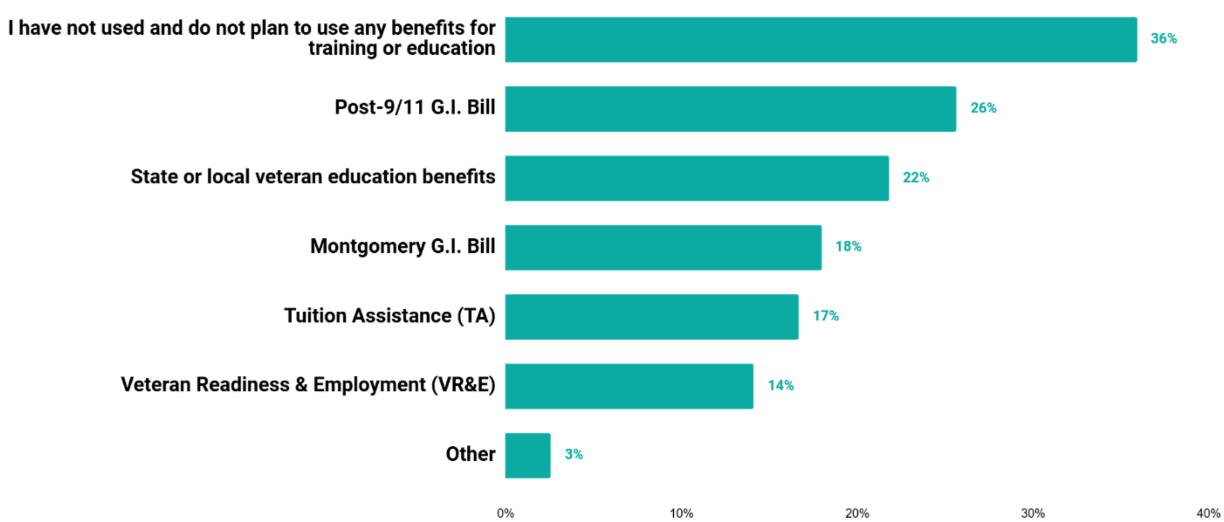


**Figure 14. Military-to-Civilian Credentialing (among veterans)**




Among those with military experience, 35% said their skills training has been successfully converted into civilian licenses or certifications, while a majority (60%) said it has not. This gap suggests a continued disconnect between military-acquired competencies and civilian workforce recognition—a missed opportunity for smoother transitions and faster re-employment.

**Figure 15. Utilization of Military Education Benefits (among veterans)**



When asked about education and training benefits, just over one-third (36%) of veteran respondents said they have not used, nor do they plan to use, any military education benefits. Still, a sizable share did report utilizing key resources, including the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill (26%), state or local veteran education benefits (22%), the Montgomery G.I. Bill (18%), and Tuition Assistance (17%). These numbers point to the underutilization of existing support systems and highlight the need for increased awareness and streamlined access to these resources.

**Implications**

The findings highlight persistent barriers that veterans and military-affiliated individuals face when transitioning into the civilian workforce—despite the valuable skills and training many bring with them. The fact that only 35% of veteran respondents reported having their military skills successfully converted into civilian certifications underscores a missed opportunity to better leverage an experienced and disciplined labor pool. Improving credential recognition and creating clear pathways for translating military experience into civilian roles would not only support smoother transitions but also help fill workforce gaps in high-need industries.

Additionally, the underutilization of military education benefits suggests that many veterans are either unaware of available supports or face challenges in navigating them. With over one-third of veterans reporting they have not used—and do not plan to use—any education benefits, there is a clear need for more proactive outreach, individualized guidance, and simplified processes for accessing programs like the G.I. Bill or state-level education resources.

## Key Takeaways

1. **Widespread Awareness Gaps Across High-Growth Sectors.** While familiarity with service-heavy industries like Retail, Education, and Health Care is strong, awareness of sectors such as Advanced Energy, Transportation, and Information Technology remains low—particularly among non-veterans, lower-income individuals, and those with less formal education. This lack of familiarity may hinder pipeline development in critical growth areas. Strategic efforts outlined by the CCWD (2024) emphasize increasing visibility and understanding of South Carolina's priority sectors, supporting this report's call to close sector awareness gaps—especially in high-demand fields like Manufacturing and Advanced Energy.

2. **Perceived Workforce Challenges Are Structural and Sector-Specific.** Concerns about job quality—particularly pay, stress, and physical demands—dominate public perceptions. Education and Health Care are seen as high-stress and credential-heavy; Manufacturing and Transportation are viewed as physically taxing. Although Manufacturing ranks high as a job-creating sector, it continues to face public hesitancy. A national study found that only 37% of Americans would encourage their child to pursue a career in Manufacturing (Deloitte Development LLC & The Manufacturing Institute, 2014), suggesting that sector reputation may still be shaped by outdated views of job conditions.

3. **Public Awareness of Job Types Remains Narrow.** Respondents tend to associate industries with highly visible, front-line roles—such as nurses in Health Care or cooks in Accommodation & Food Services—while essential support roles in IT, accounting, or project management remain underrecognized. This narrow view of occupational diversity may limit career exploration and long-term planning. The Youth Career Launchpad report recommends showcasing diverse, real-world job examples across industries to expand the perceived range of viable and desirable careers (American Student Assistance & Burning Glass Institute, 2024).

4. **Mismatch Between Job Priorities and Perceived Sector Delivery.** Although flexibility, benefits, and job enjoyment are among the top priorities for workers, most sectors are not widely perceived as meeting these expectations. Even sectors like Health Care and Public Administration, which are viewed as stable and offering strong compensation, receive lower ratings for factors such as work-life balance and schedule flexibility. This gap aligns with broader national trends: a 2024 Pew Research Center study found that while most U.S. workers highly value benefits and flexibility, only about half report having these in their current jobs (Pew Research Center, 2024).

5. **Long-Term Value Perceptions Favor Public and Health Sectors.** Health Care & Social Assistance and Public Administration are viewed as offering the best combinations of salary, benefits, and job stability. These perceptions are consistent with national data showing higher satisfaction and job pride in government and healthcare roles (Pew Research Center, 2024). However, this value perception may be vulnerable. Policy changes—including hiring freezes, return-to-office mandates, and shifts in civil service protections—have introduced uncertainty. According to a 2025 Washington Post–Ipsos poll, many federal workers worry these changes could impact morale and long-term appeal, potentially shifting public sentiment about government jobs.

6. **Job Market Sentiment Is Divided by Demographics.** While nearly half of respondents expressed a positive view of the job market, optimism was highest among older, higher-income, and college-educated individuals. Women, lower-income groups, and those without post-secondary education were more likely to report neutral or negative views. These disparities reflect broader national trends: the 2024 Pew Research Center study showed that lower-income workers and women are significantly less likely to report satisfaction with their jobs or see clear paths to advancement (Pew Research Center, 2024).

7. **Access, Not Availability, Is the Bigger Barrier.** While jobs may be available, many South Carolinians face barriers that limit their access—most notably low wages, a lack of affordable housing near job centers, and poor transportation infrastructure. These challenges were especially acute in rural and lower-income communities. Nationally, dissatisfaction with wages and cost-of-living adjustments is common, with only 30% of workers saying they're highly satisfied with their pay and 80% of dissatisfied workers citing falling behind on living expenses (Pew Research Center, 2024). These concerns echo strongly in this study's regional and demographic findings.

8. **Training and Career Advancement Opportunities Are Seen as Uneven.** While some industries and regions offer pathways to growth, most respondents feel that opportunities for upskilling and advancement are inconsistent and often difficult to access. Only 15% believe that South Carolina offers plentiful training and career development options. This aligns with the 2024 Work in America survey from the American Psychological Association, which found that nearly one-quarter of U.S. workers are dissatisfied with advancement opportunities and 91% rate them as critical to retention and job satisfaction.

9. **Job Seekers Face Structural Barriers and Prioritize Flexibility.** One in five respondents identified as active job seekers. Many rely on online tools and social media but continue to face barriers such as low wages, limited transportation, and incompatible hours. Flexibility, competitive pay, and work-life balance emerged as top priorities—particularly among job seekers, young adults, and women—highlighting a shift in expectations toward stability, agency, and quality of life in employment.

10. **Veterans Face Persistent Credentialing and Navigation Gaps.** Although many veterans bring valuable skills and training, the majority have not successfully converted their military experience into civilian licenses or certifications. Additionally, over one-third of veteran respondents reported not using—and not planning to use—available military education benefits, indicating challenges in awareness and access. These findings underscore the need for improved outreach, streamlined credentialing pathways, and tailored support to facilitate veterans' transitions into the civilian workforce. This aligns with national research from RAND (2021), which documents inconsistent credential recognition across states and industries and highlights the difficulties veterans face navigating complex career transition systems.

## Next Steps

1. **Launch Targeted Sector Awareness Campaigns.** Public familiarity is highest with service-oriented industries such as Retail Sales/Trade, Educational Services, and Health Care & Social Assistance. By contrast, awareness of Advanced Energy/Utilities remains especially low, and Transportation & Warehousing also lags behind as well. Familiarity with these sectors is especially limited among respondents with less formal education, women, and Black/African American respondents. In contrast, familiarity with Manufacturing and Transportation & Warehousing is notably higher among men, and knowledge of Public Administration/Government and Health Care rises with educational attainment.

   This uneven familiarity suggests a need to improve the visibility of high-opportunity industries that are less understood by the general public—particularly among underrepresented groups. National research reinforces this recommendation. For instance, Thomasnet (2021) points to a widespread perception gap in supply chain careers, where advanced technologies like AI and robotics remain invisible to younger generations, further exacerbating labor shortages.

   Potential Actions:

   - Develop tailored outreach initiatives to spotlight careers in under-recognized but high-demand fields.
   - Use storytelling and real employee case studies to showcase diverse roles beyond the front line (e.g., HR, IT, logistics).
   - Partner with schools, colleges, veteran transition centers, and job centers to improve sector visibility in rural and underserved regions.
   - Streamline how employers access state workforce resources by supporting centralized communication and navigation tools. This recommendation echoes broader statewide goals to reduce fragmentation and make it easier for South Carolina employers—especially small businesses—to connect with education and workforce partners (Coordinating Council for Workforce Development, 2024).

2. **Address Perception Gaps to Attract Next-Generation Talent**. Public perceptions of the logistics, transportation, and manufacturing sectors are out of step with what younger job seekers value most—namely, flexibility, benefits, and visible career growth. This study's findings suggest that reshaping these narratives will be essential to strengthening the workforce pipeline in these industries. National data echo these concerns. Although logistics and transportation careers are widely recognized for offering job stability and opportunities for personal growth, they continue to be perceived as lagging behind other industries in flexibility, benefits, and clearly defined career paths—attributes that are especially important to next-generation talent (Supply Chain Management Review, 2024).

   Further emphasizing this point, the *Launchpad Jobs* report identifies that many young workers are unaware of high-quality, non-degree career opportunities in logistics and transportation. The report highlights that these sectors offer roles with strong wage growth, benefits, and advancement potential, yet they remain underrepresented in career guidance resources. This lack of visibility contributes to the misalignment between young workers' career aspirations and their perceptions of available opportunities (American Student Assistance & Burning Glass Institute, 2024).

Potential Actions:

- Partner with schools, counselors, and career platforms to include logistics and transportation in career exploration tools and high school guidance materials.
- Create youth-targeted messaging that reframes these sectors as innovation-driven, upwardly mobile, and accessible without a four-year degree.
- Highlight entry points, career ladders, and growth trajectories using real employee stories—particularly in marketing, operations, and logistics tech roles.

3. **Promote Healthcare Careers Through Trust-Based Messaging.** Health Care & Social Assistance was one of the top-rated industries in this study for delivering on priorities like health benefits, job stability, and career advancement. These strengths, combined with nursing's consistent ranking as the most trusted profession in the U.S. (American Nurses Association, 2024), present a clear opportunity to build sector momentum.

   Potential Actions:

   - Launch targeted campaigns that highlight the community-serving aspects of nursing and other healthcare roles—especially to younger job seekers.
   - Leverage public trust and strong sector performance to attract talent from underrepresented regions and demographics.
   - Feature real nurses and care workers in promotional materials to humanize career pathways and emphasize belonging and impact.

4. **Design Region-Specific Workforce Strategies.** Perceptions of job opportunities, challenges, and priorities varied significantly across South Carolina's 12 regions. A one-size-fits-all approach risks missing critical local needs.

   Potential Actions:

   - Use regional data to guide tailored strategies—for example:
     - Lower Savannah & Pee Dee: Focus on solving transportation barriers and increasing visible access to nearby jobs. CCWD's strategy to increase the number of workers living within a short drive, bus ride, or bike ride from major job hubs reinforces the importance of proximity-based solutions, validating this study's findings on transportation as a critical barrier (Coordinating Council for Workforce Development, 2024).
     - Upstate & Midlands: Invest in addressing skills mismatches and promoting reskilling programs.
     - Waccamaw & Lowcountry: Leverage hospitality-sector strengths while creating more diverse pipelines beyond seasonal work.
   - Empower regional workforce boards to co-develop campaigns and local initiatives that align with lived experience.

5. **Streamline Employer Engagement Across Agencies.** This survey found that even in regions with strong local industries, many respondents perceive a lack of access to training and career pathways. At the same time, hiring managers who responded to the survey prioritized career advancement and work-life balance—indicating a need for more intentional alignment between employer needs and workforce development efforts. One systemic barrier may be the complexity employers face when trying to engage with state workforce resources. The 2024–2025 Unified State Plan reinforces this concern, calling for efforts to “decrease the number of points of contact an employer must engage within state government to address education and workforce issues” (Coordinating Council for Workforce Development, 2024, p. 17).

   Potential Actions:

   - Simplify and centralize employer-facing services to reduce administrative burden and improve responsiveness.
   - Create a unified digital entry point or single point-of-contact system for employers seeking assistance with hiring, upskilling, or compliance.
   - Align local workforce board efforts with statewide coordination goals to ensure that employer needs are consistently addressed—especially in regions facing skills mismatches or talent shortages.

6. **Expand Access to Training and Credentialing Pathways.** Only 13% of respondents believe South Carolina offers *plenty* of opportunities for training and advancement. Like this study’s respondents, Americans surveyed in national research prefer hands-on programs—such as internships, apprenticeships, and certifications—as the most effective ways to prepare for careers in manufacturing (Deloitte Development LLC & The Manufacturing Institute, 2017).

   Potential Actions:

   - Increase funding and visibility for training programs, apprenticeships, and education—especially in rural areas.
   - Partner with employers to co-design programs that lead directly to job placement or promotion.
   - Streamline processes for translating military skills into civilian credentials and licenses, and strengthen onboarding for veterans into high-demand fields.

7. **Enhance Employer Support for Flexibility, Stability, and Advancement.** Workers increasingly prioritize work-life balance, flexibility, and a sense of purpose—especially younger adults, job seekers, and military-affiliated respondents.

   Potential Actions:

   - Provide technical assistance and support to employers who offer flexible scheduling, mental health support, or alternative work arrangements.
   - Develop model policies for promoting support and flexibility in the workplace—particularly in sectors perceived as high-stress or underpaid.
   - Encourage employers to clearly define career advancement pathways and make internal promotions more transparent.

8. **Prioritize Wage Transparency and Job Quality Messaging.** Across all demographics, a lack of "good-paying jobs" was the most frequently cited workforce concern. Job seekers also prioritized salary, work-life balance, and flexibility.

   Potential Actions:

   - Encourage employers to post salary ranges and benefits clearly on job boards and social media listings.
   - Highlight industries that outperform on compensation, stability, and advancement—especially Health Care and Public Administration.
   - Promote case studies that illustrate long-term career growth and quality-of-life improvements through specific job paths.

9. **Shift the Narrative: From Job Quantity to Job Quality and Access.** The gap between available jobs and *livable* jobs is a persistent concern across all demographics. Solving this is not just about creating more roles—but improving access and transparency.

   Potential Actions:

   - Reframe state-level workforce campaigns to emphasize quality of opportunity: stability, flexibility, belonging, and progression.
   - Use findings from this report to advocate for comprehensive hiring practices and investment in wraparound services like childcare and transportation.
   - Develop dashboards or infographics that regularly share data on workforce gaps, training access, and job seeker satisfaction to hold systems accountable and build public trust.

10. **Strengthen Workforce Messaging Across Digital and In-Person Channels.** Job seekers rely heavily on online job boards and social platforms, but also use traditional methods like job fairs and referrals. A multi-channel approach ensures broader reach.

    Potential Actions:

    - Audit job listings across platforms (Indeed, LinkedIn, company sites) to ensure listings are accessible, informative, and up-to-date.
    - Partner with influencers, career coaches, and local leaders to amplify job opportunities on social media.
    - Support local job fairs, resume workshops, and interview prep programs—especially in under-resourced areas where internet access may be limited.

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## Appendix

The demographic data (Figures A1-A9) are unweighted and reflect the actual characteristics of the 672 individuals who completed the survey. To allow for robust subgroup analysis, the sample was initially designed to oversample young adults aged 18 to 24, who ultimately comprised 52% of the unweighted dataset. This approach helped ensure adequate statistical power for this priority group.

**Figure A1. Respondents' Age**

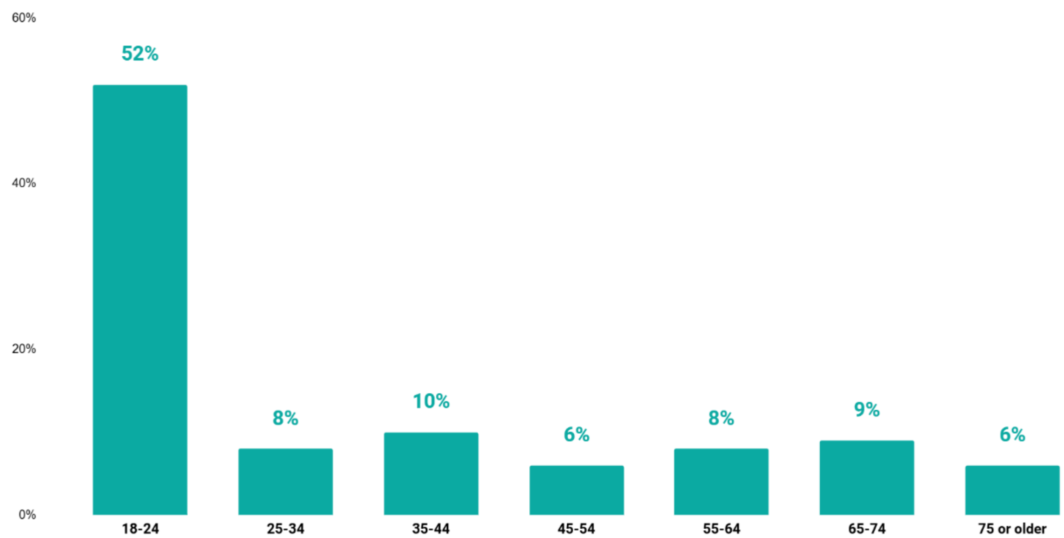


**Figure A2. Respondents' Gender**

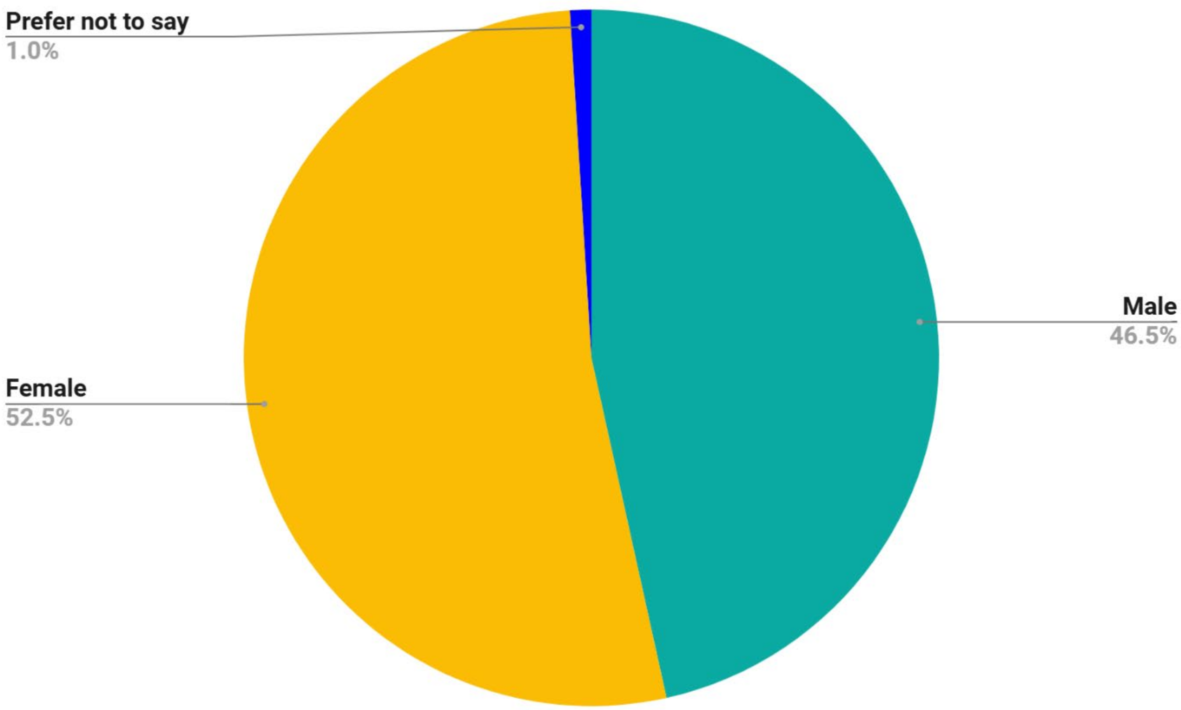
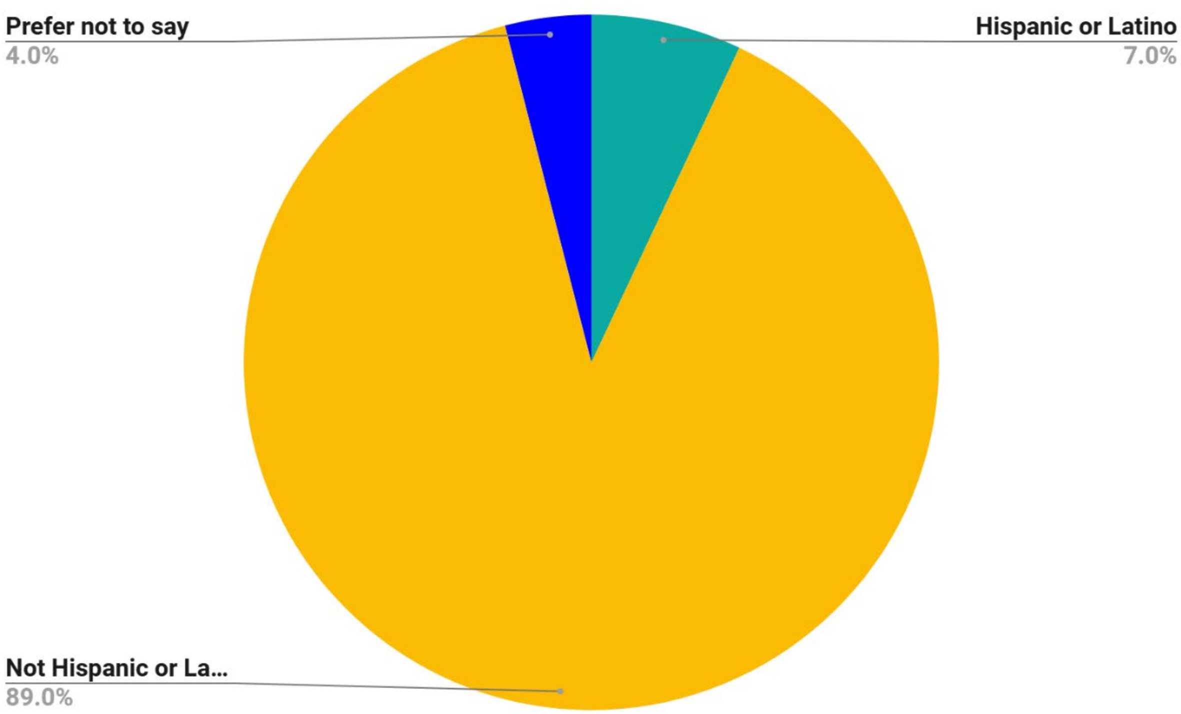
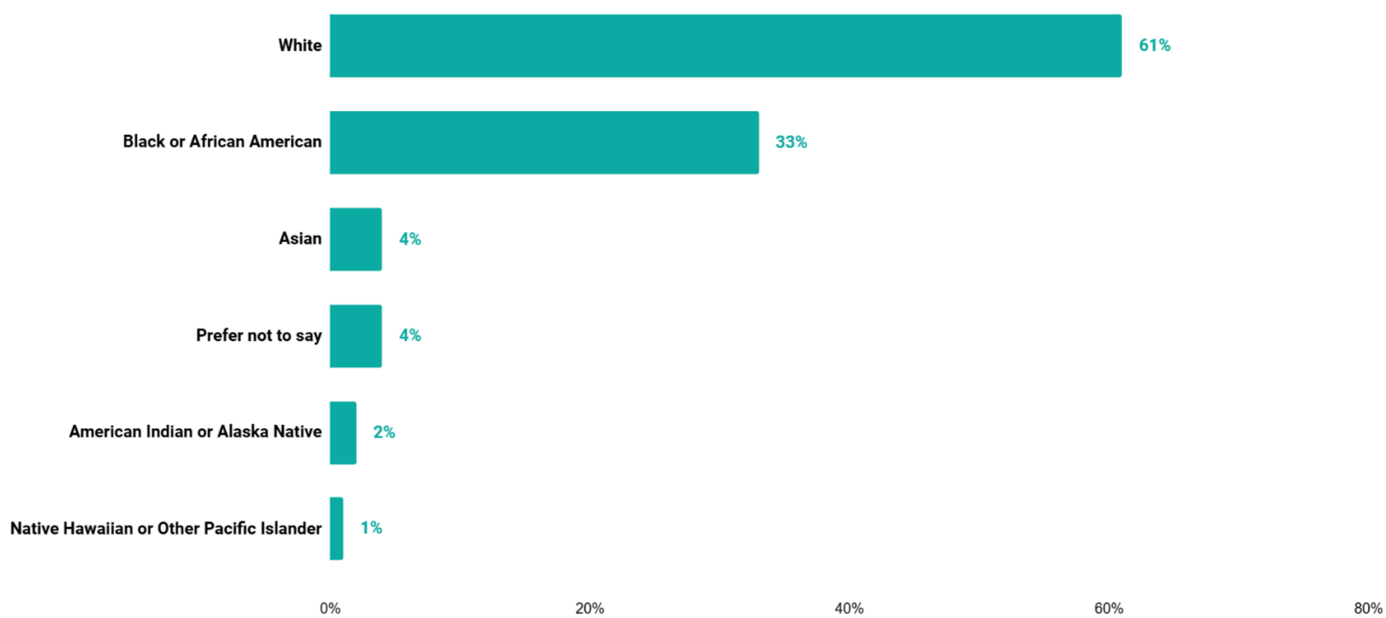


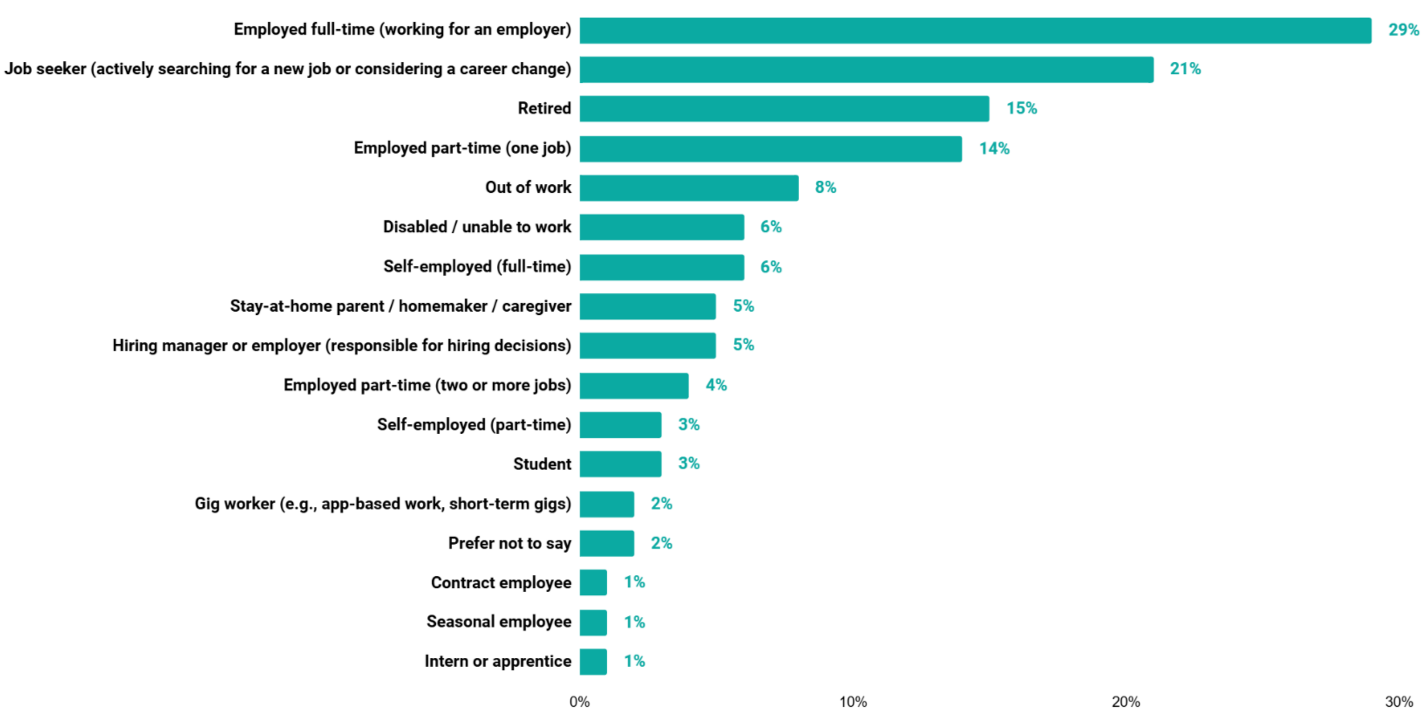

**Figure A3. Respondents' Ethnicity**



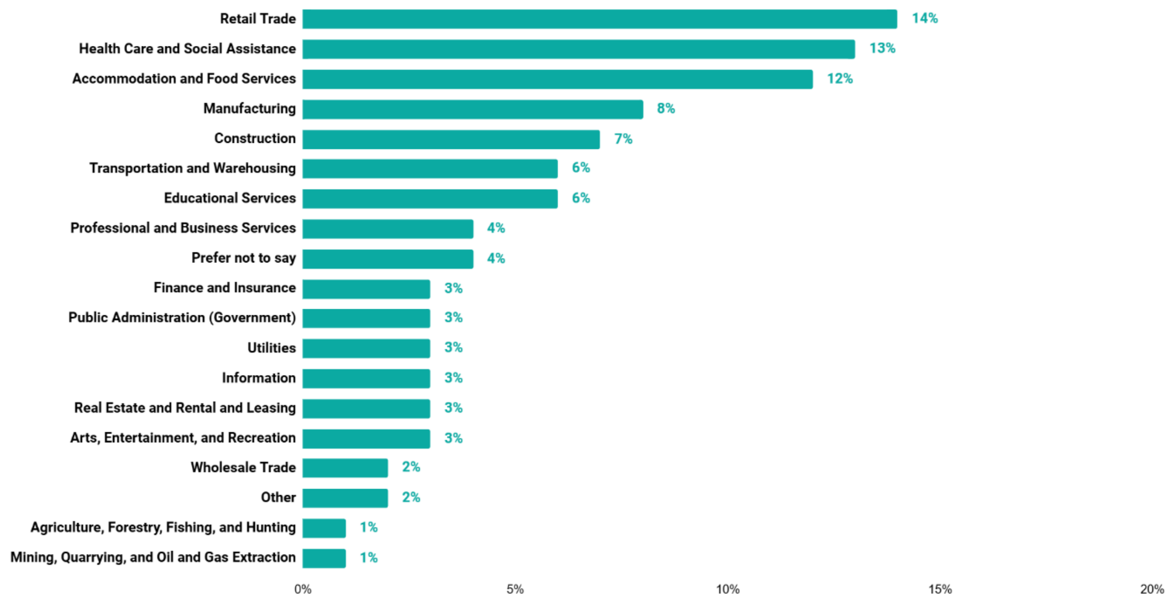
## Figure A4. Respondents' Race



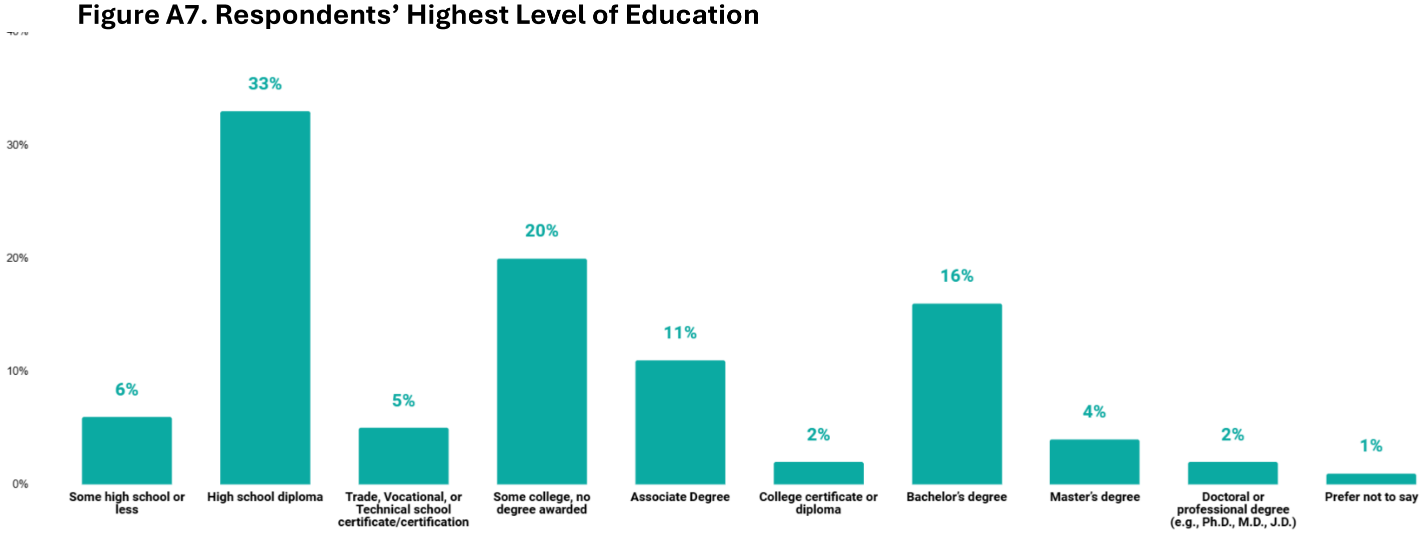

## Figure A5. Respondents' Employment Status



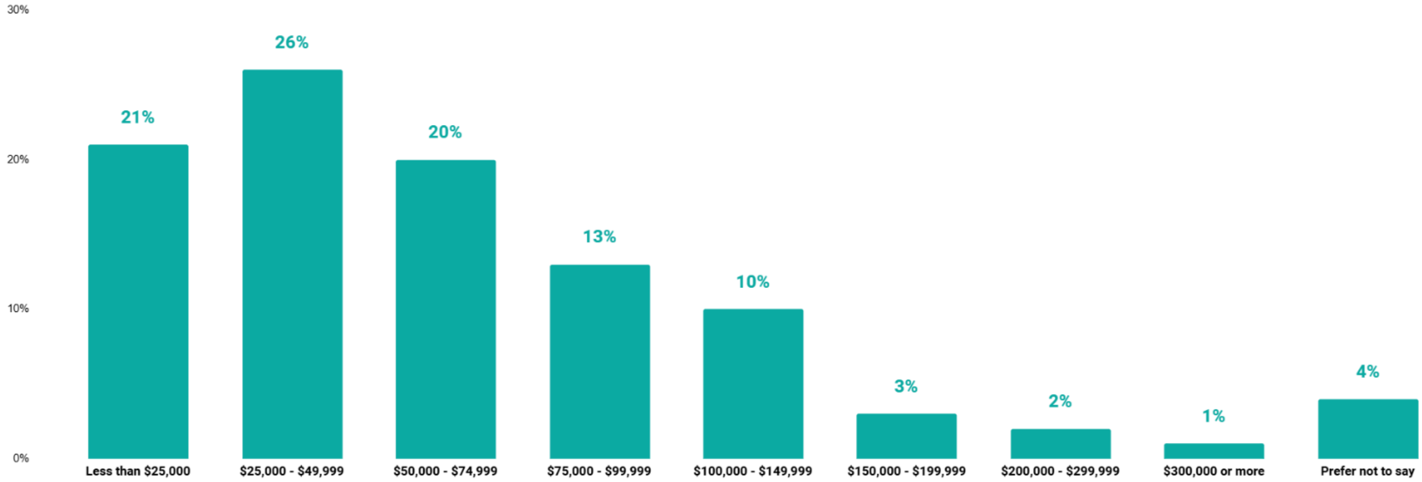
## Figure A6. Respondents' Industry Sector (among those who are employed; n = 371)



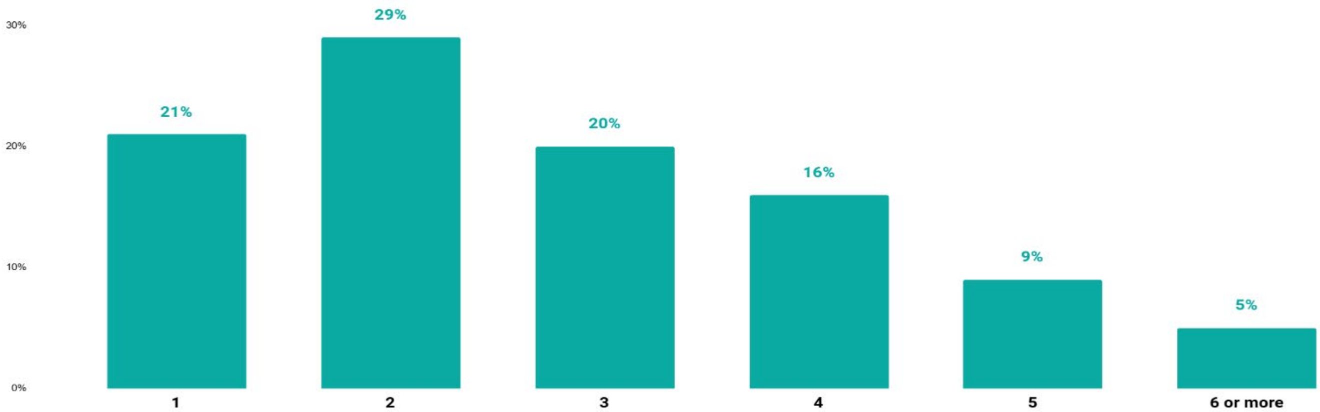

## Figure A7. Respondents' Highest Level of Education



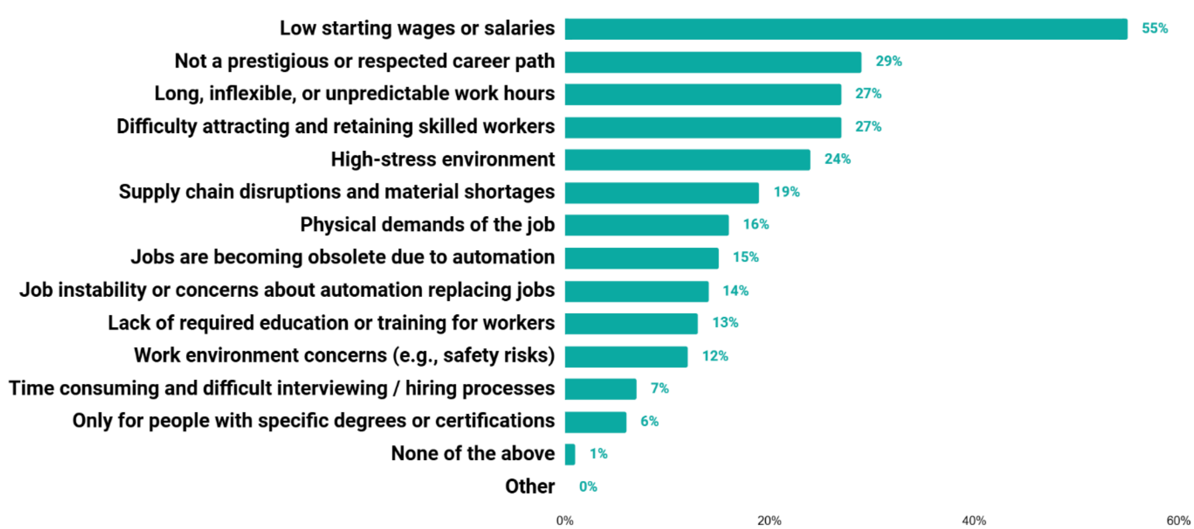
### Figure A8. Respondents' Annual Household Income



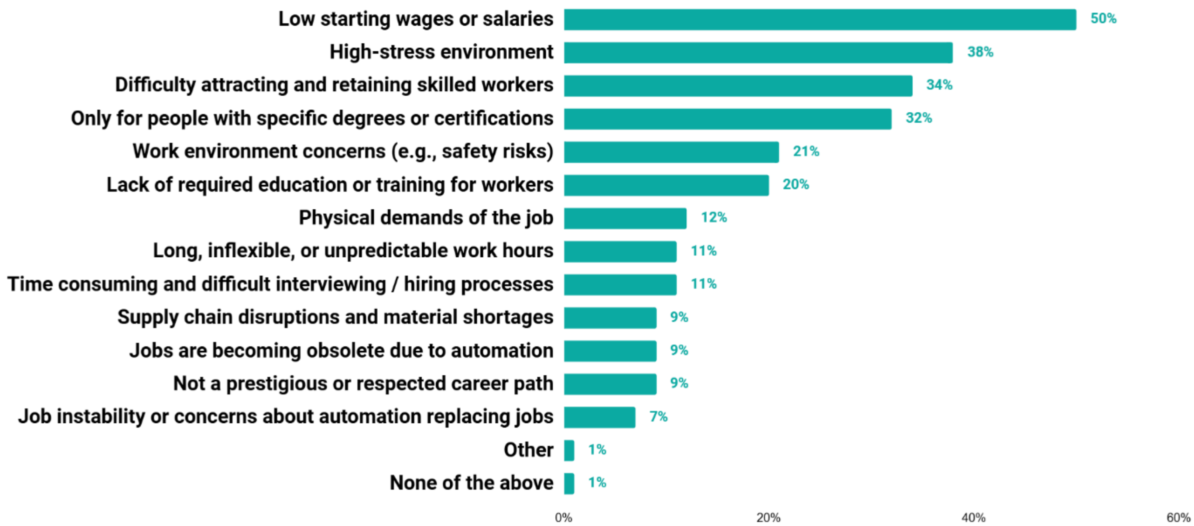

### Figure A9. Respondents' Household Size




### Figure A10a. Retail Sales/Trade - Challenges



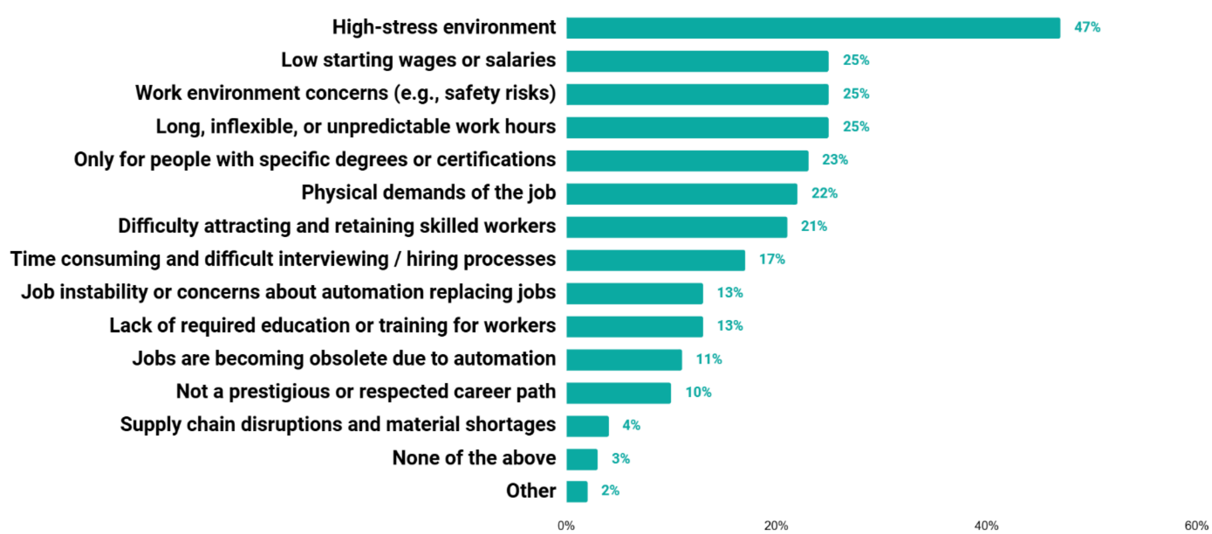
## Figure A10b. Educational Services - Challenges



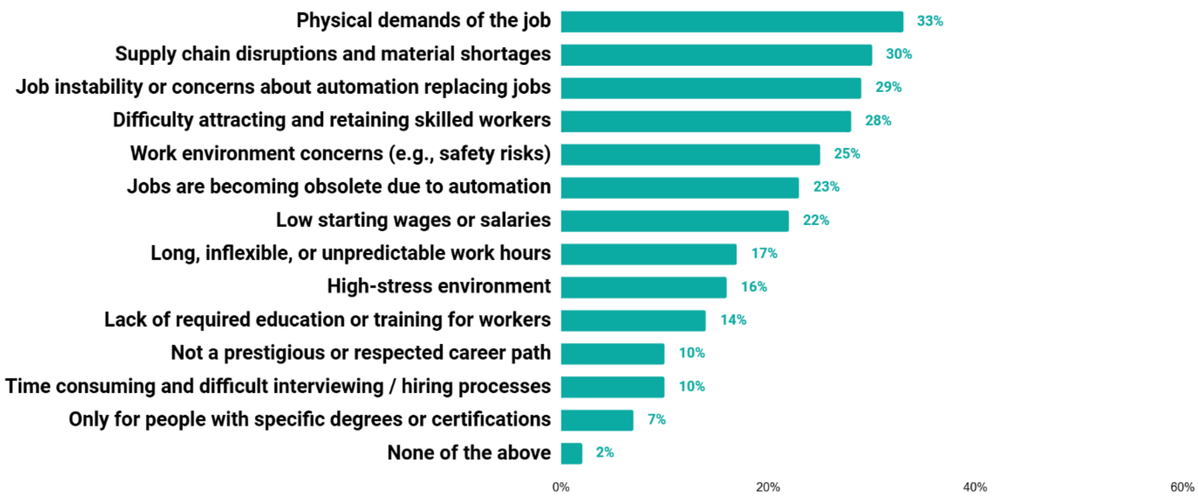

## Figure A10c. Accommodation & Food Services - Challenges

### Figure A10d. Health Care & Social Assistance - Challenges

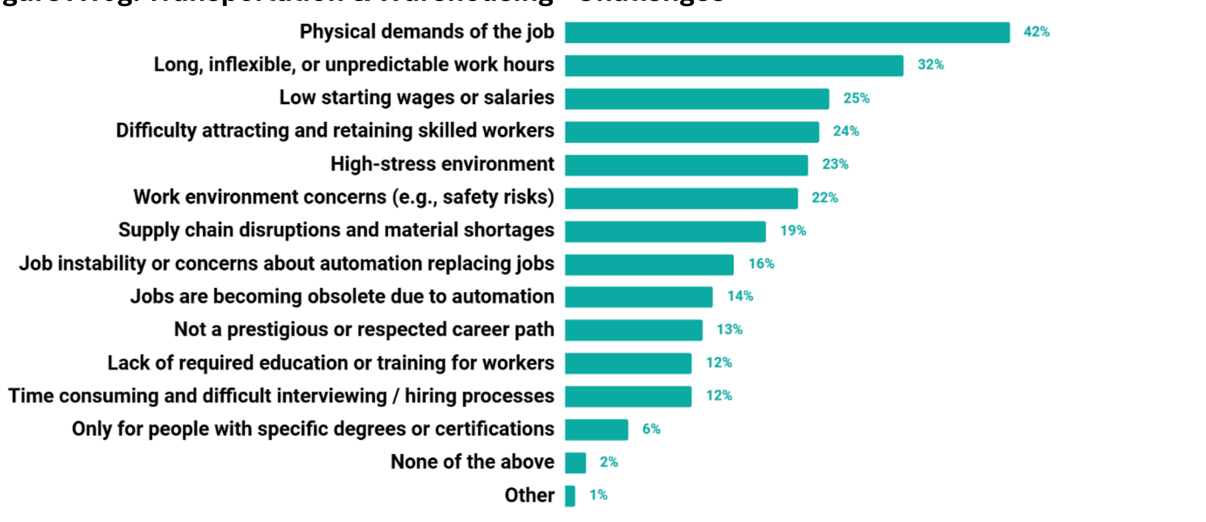

### Figure A10e. Public Administration/Government - Challenges



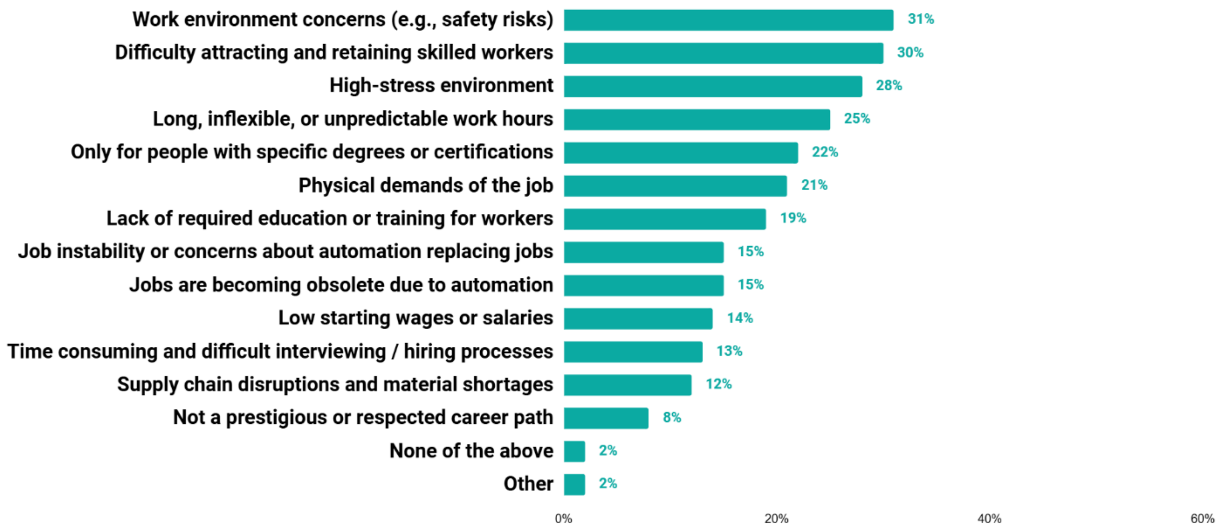
## Figure A10f. Manufacturing - Challenges



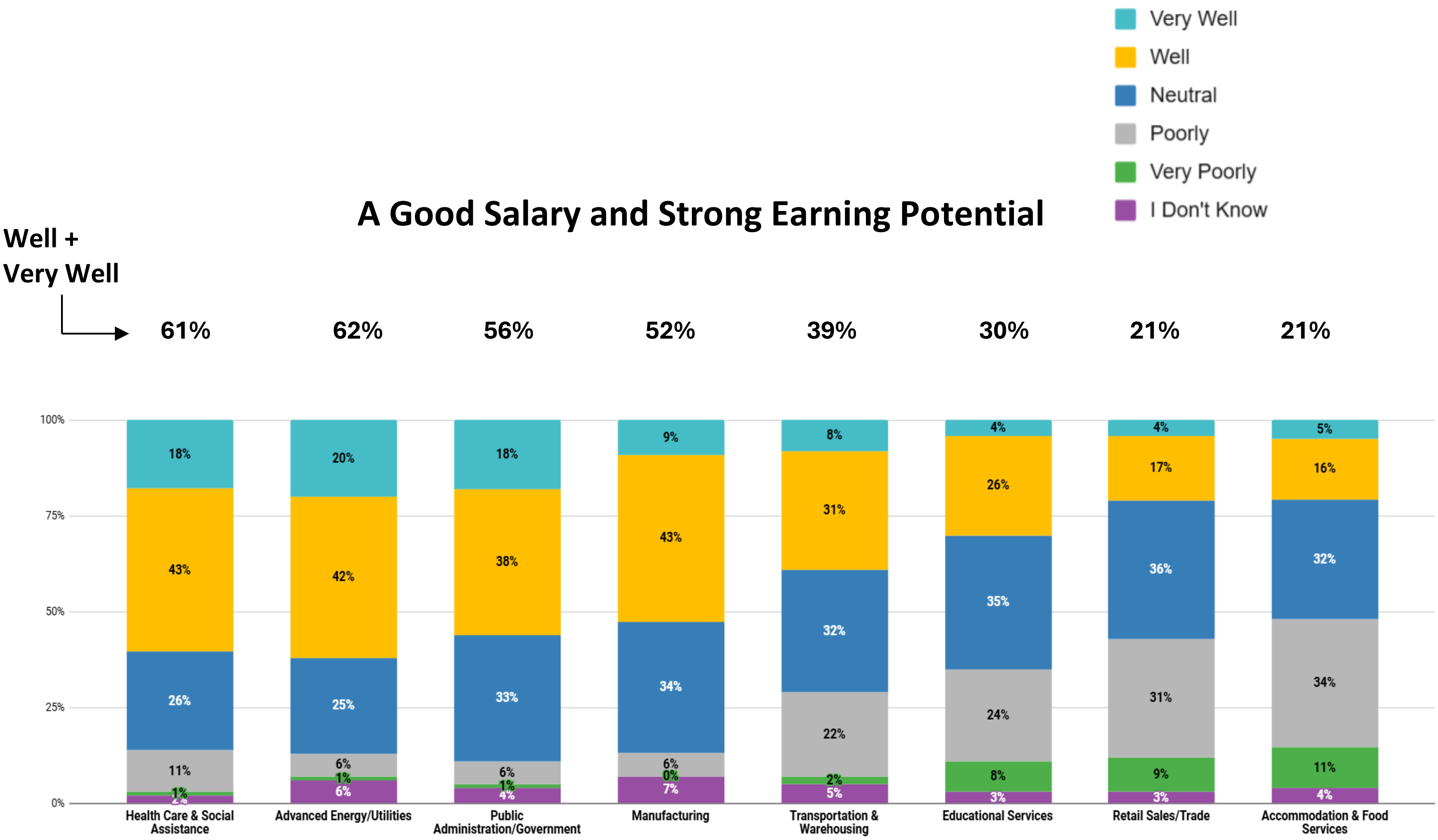

## Figure A10g. Transportation & Warehousing - Challenges

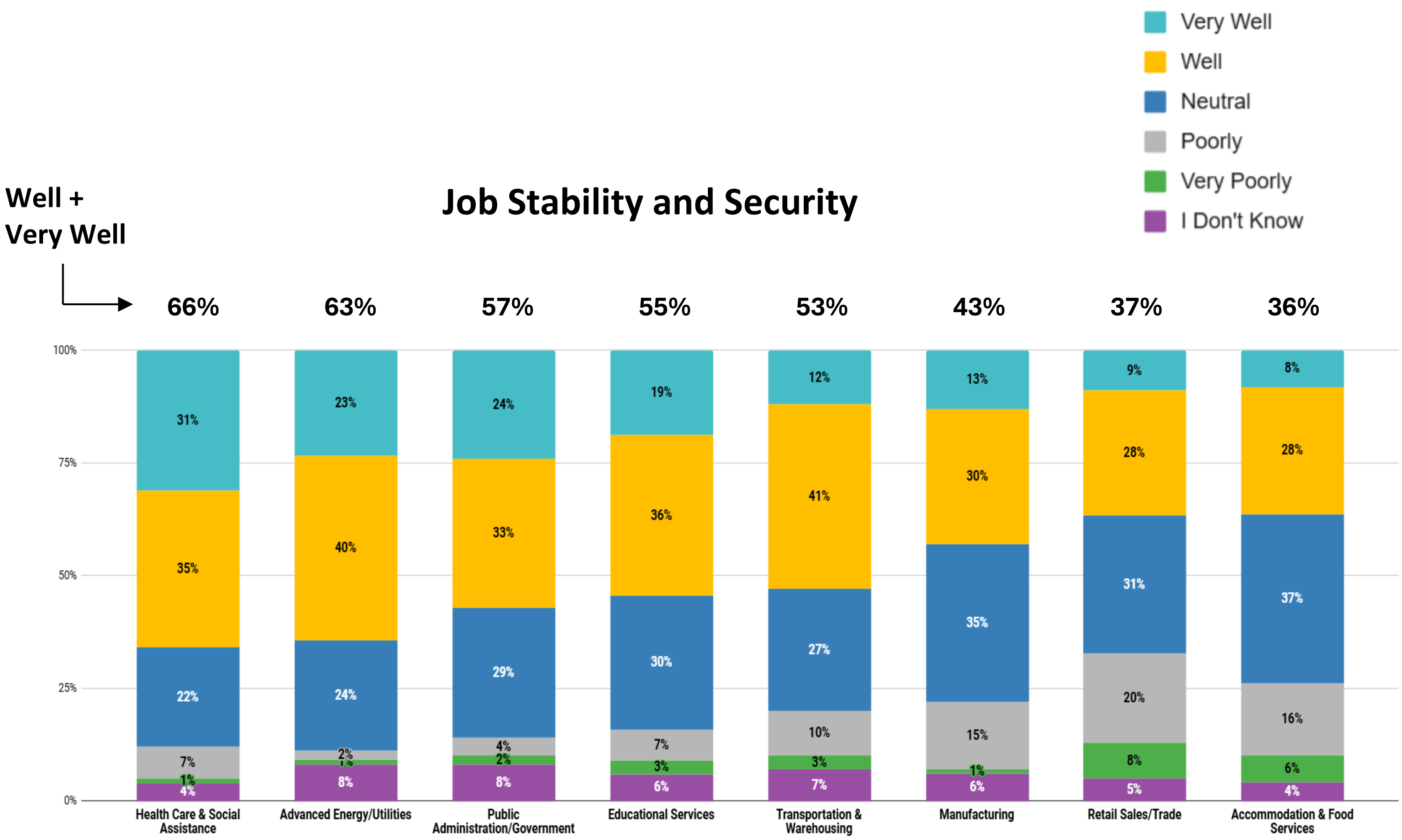


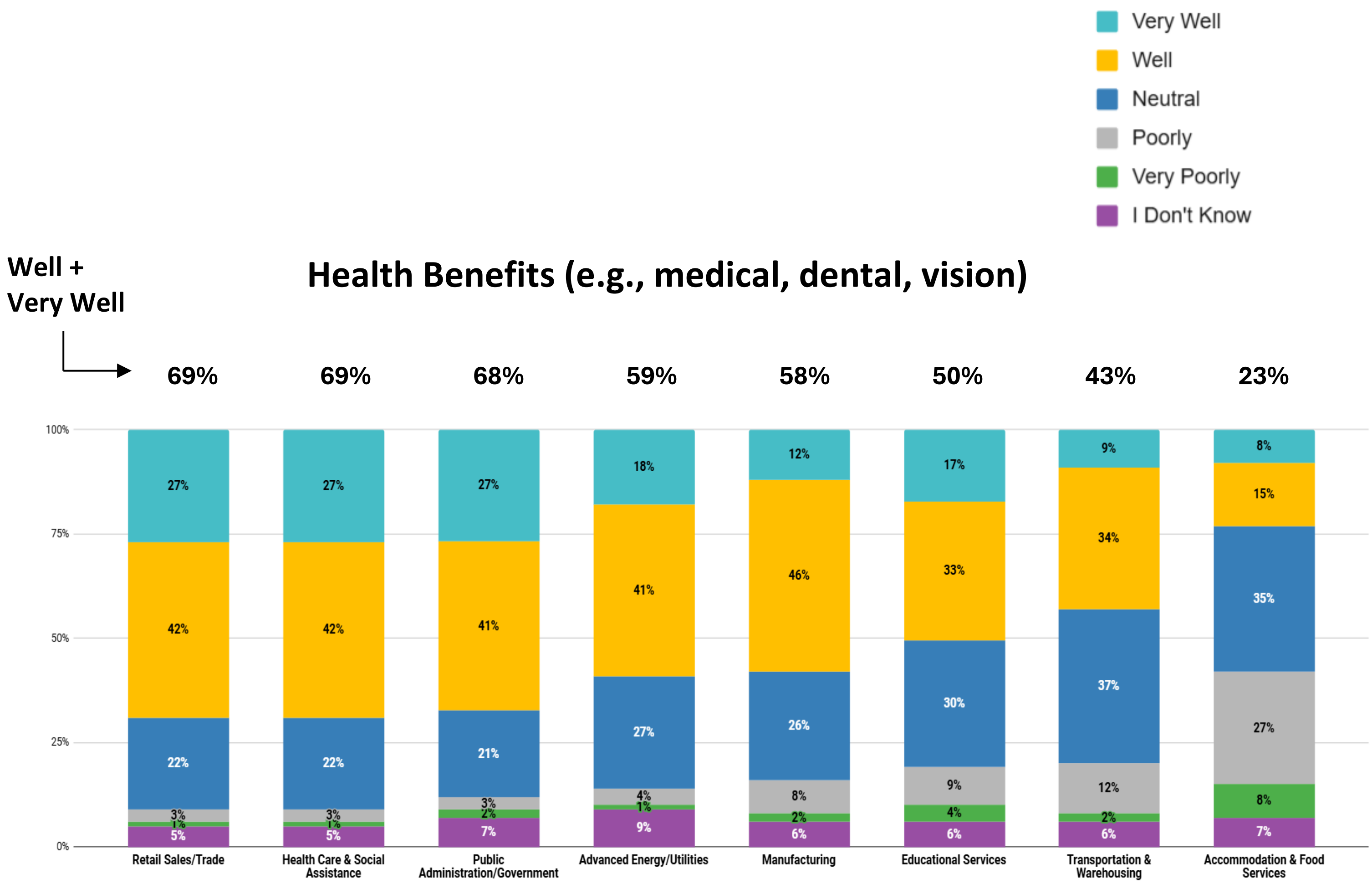
## Figure A10h. Advanced Energy/Utilities - Challenges

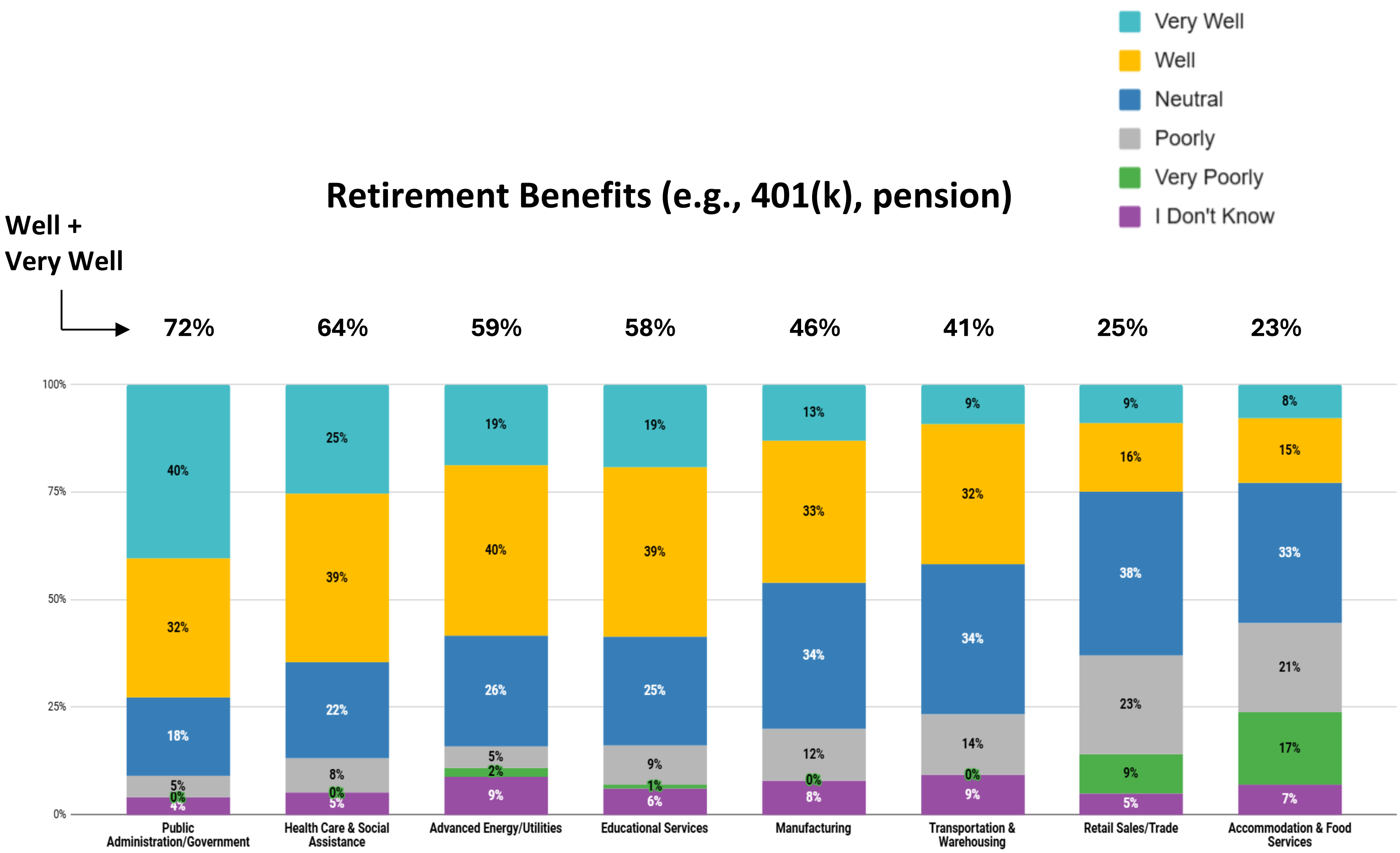


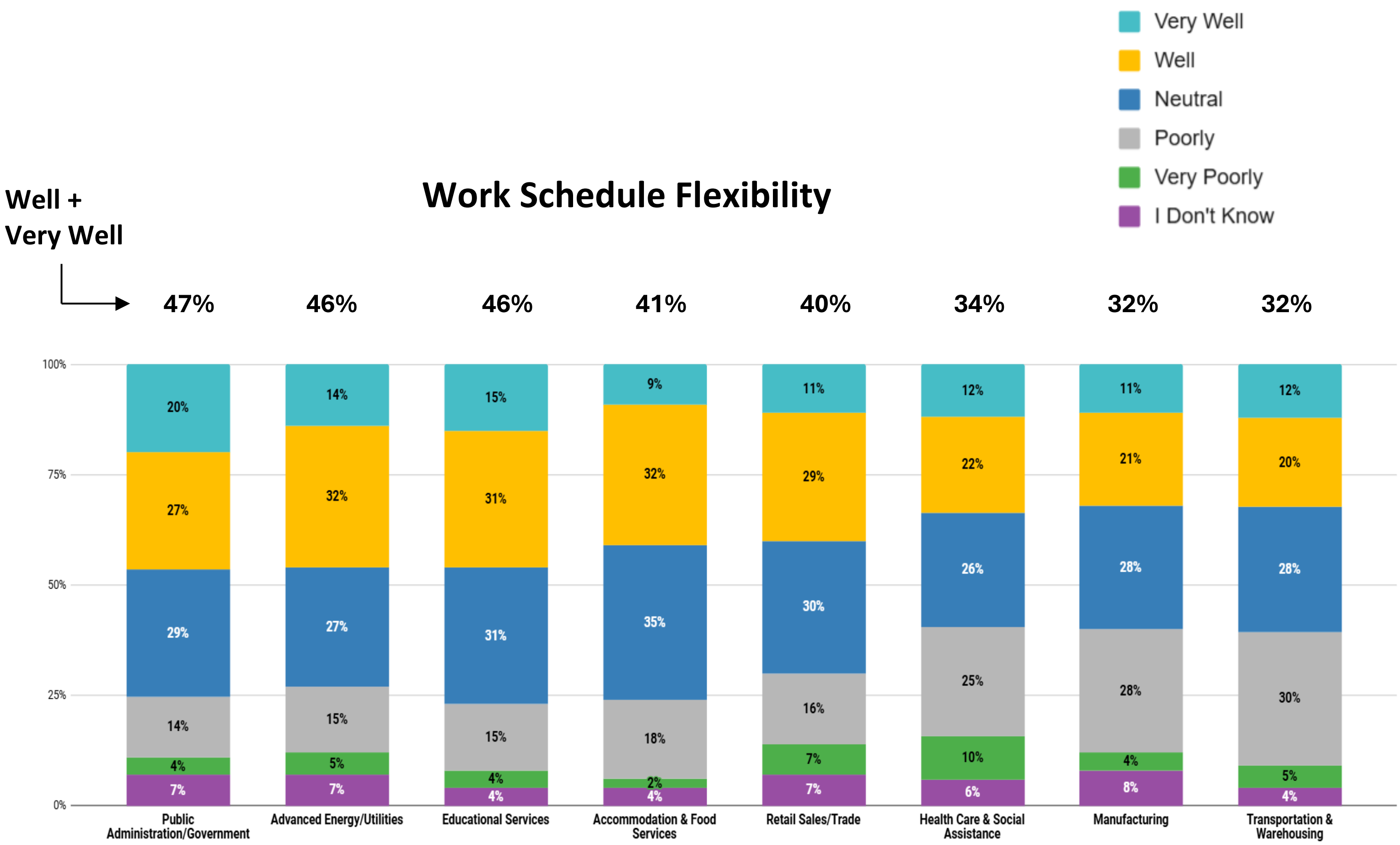
**Figures A11a – A11l. Perceptions of How Well Sectors Deliver on Job Priorities**

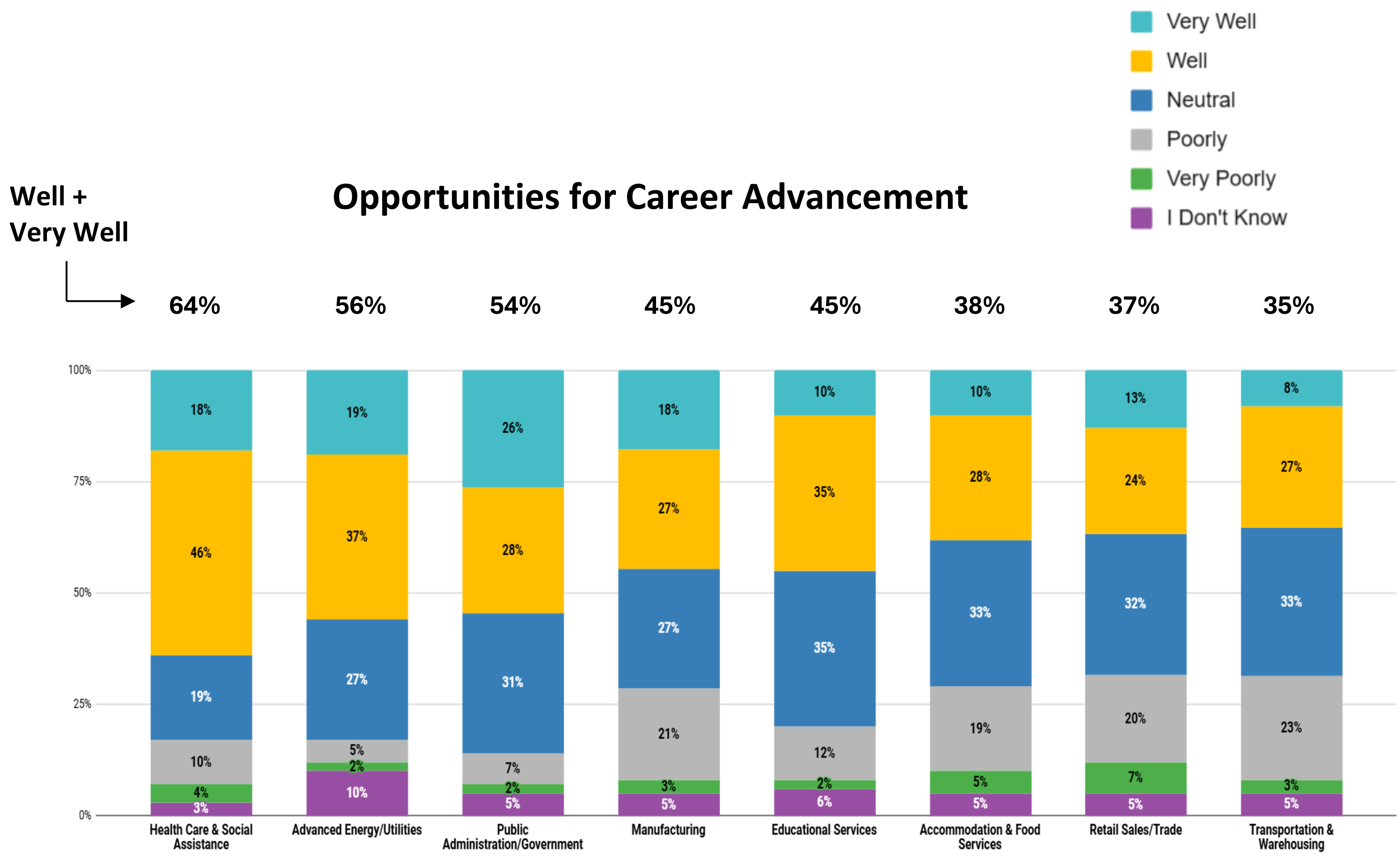


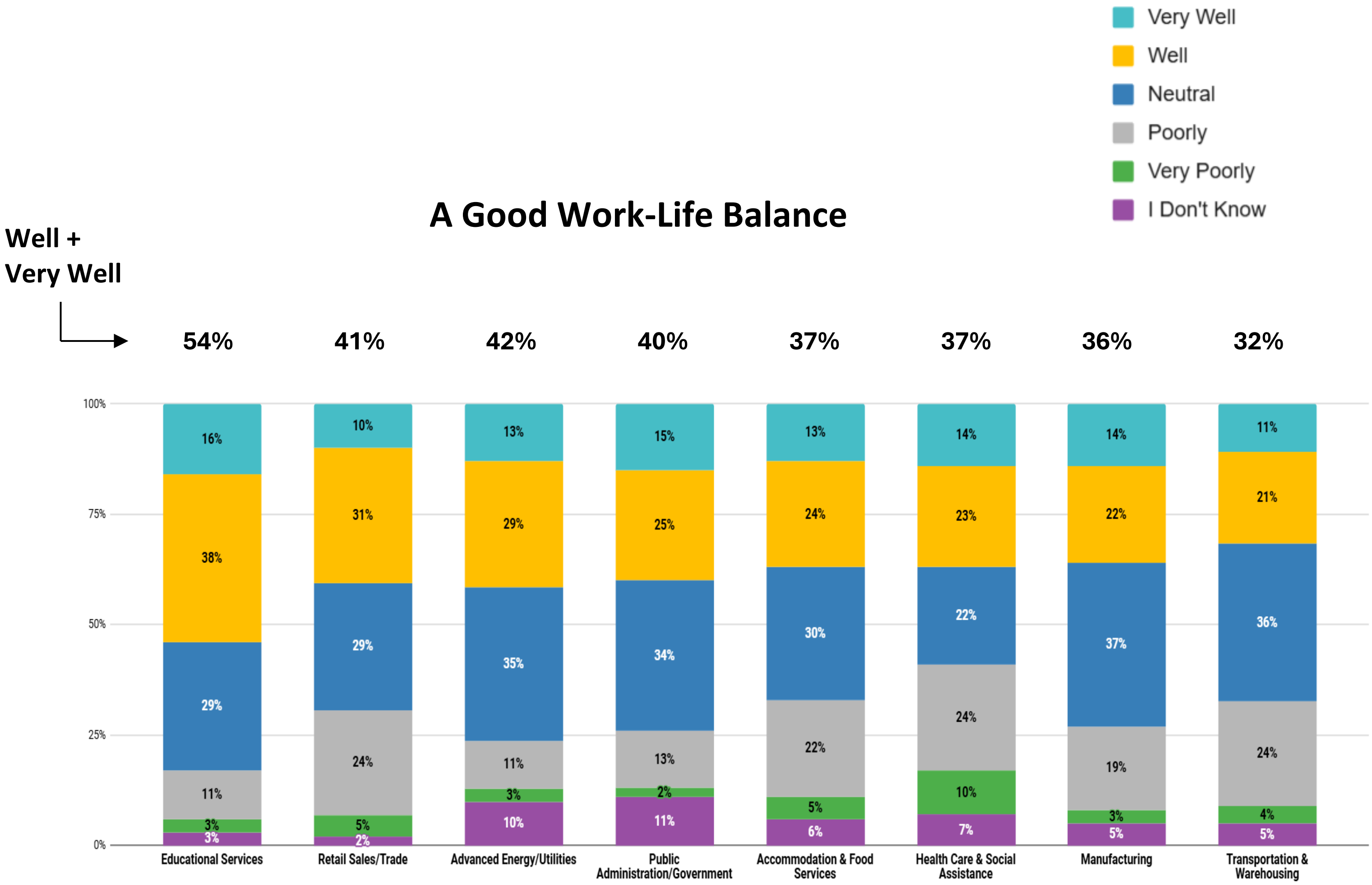

Job Stability and Security
Very Well
Well
Neutral
Poorly
Very Poorly
I Don't Know
Well +
Very Well
66%
63%
57%
55%
53%
43%
37%
36%
100%
75%
50%
25%
0%
Health Care & Social Assistance
Advanced Energy/Utilities
Public Administration/Government
Educational Services
Transportation & Warehousing
Manufacturing
Retail Sales/Trade
Accommodation & Food Services


Very Well
Well
Neutral
Poorly
Very Poorly
I Don't Know
Health Benefits (e.g., medical, dental, vision)
Well + Very Well
69%
69%
68%
59%
58%
50%
43%
23%
100%
75%
50%
25%
0%
Retail Sales/Trade
Health Care & Social Assistance
Public Administration/Government
Advanced Energy/Utilities
Manufacturing
Educational Services
Transportation & Warehousing
Accommodation & Food Services
27%
42%
22%
3%
1%
5%
27%
42%
22%
3%
1%
5%
27%
41%
21%
3%
2%
7%
18%
41%
27%
4%
1%
9%
12%
46%
26%
8%
2%
6%
17%
33%
30%
9%
4%
6%
9%
34%
37%
12%
2%
6%
8%
15%
35%
27%
8%
7%

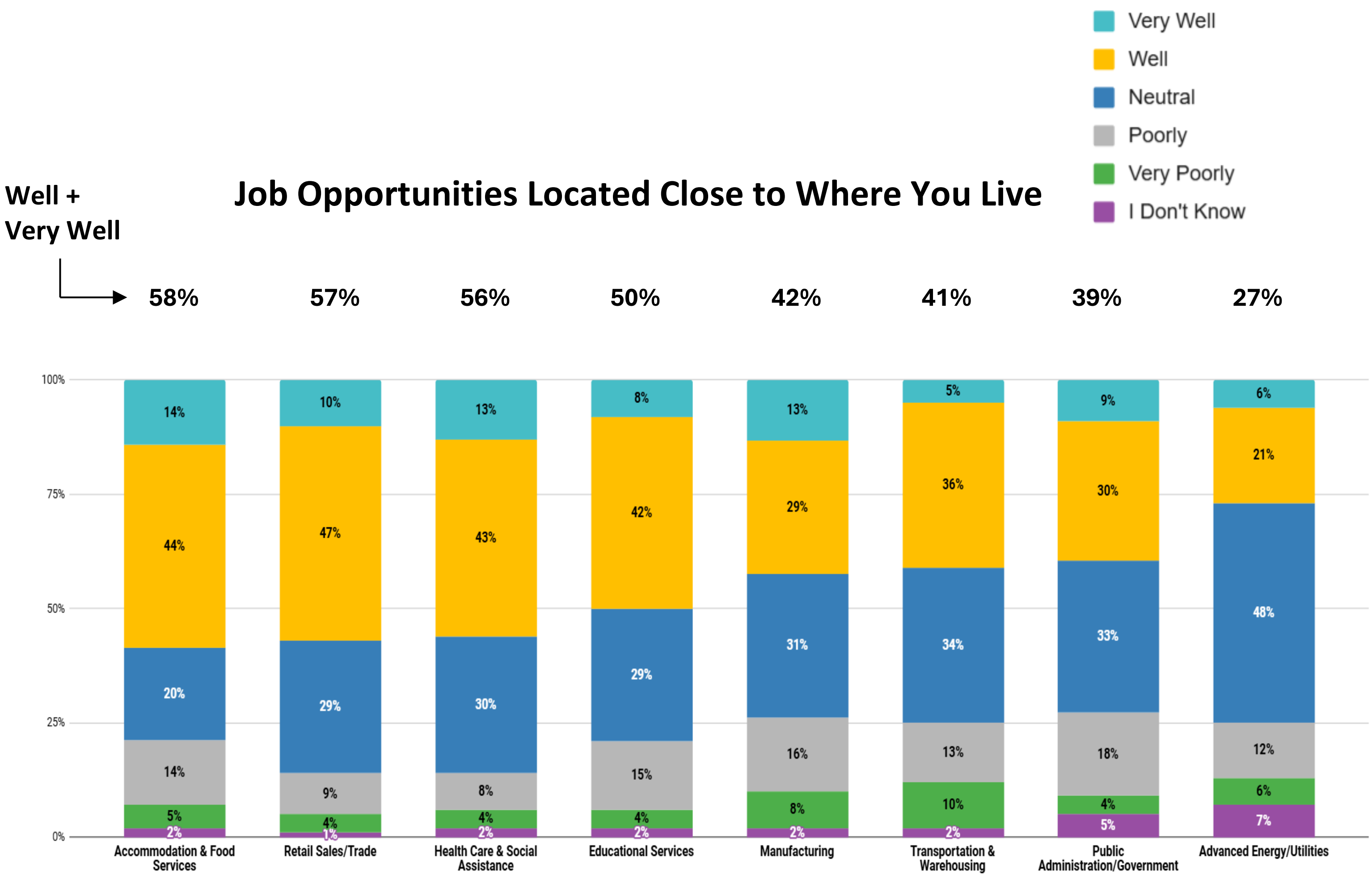

Very Well
Well
Neutral
Poorly
Very Poorly
I Don't Know
Retirement Benefits (e.g., 401(k), pension)
Well +
Very Well
72%
64%
59%
58%
46%
41%
25%
23%
100%
75%
50%
25%
0%
40%
32%
18%
5%
0%
4%
25%
39%
22%
8%
0%
5%
19%
40%
26%
5%
2%
9%
19%
39%
25%
9%
1%
6%
13%
33%
34%
12%
0%
8%
9%
32%
34%
14%
0%
9%
9%
16%
38%
23%
9%
5%
8%
15%
33%
21%
17%
7%
Public Administration/Government
Health Care & Social Assistance
Advanced Energy/Utilities
Educational Services
Manufacturing
Transportation & Warehousing
Retail Sales/Trade
Accommodation & Food Services

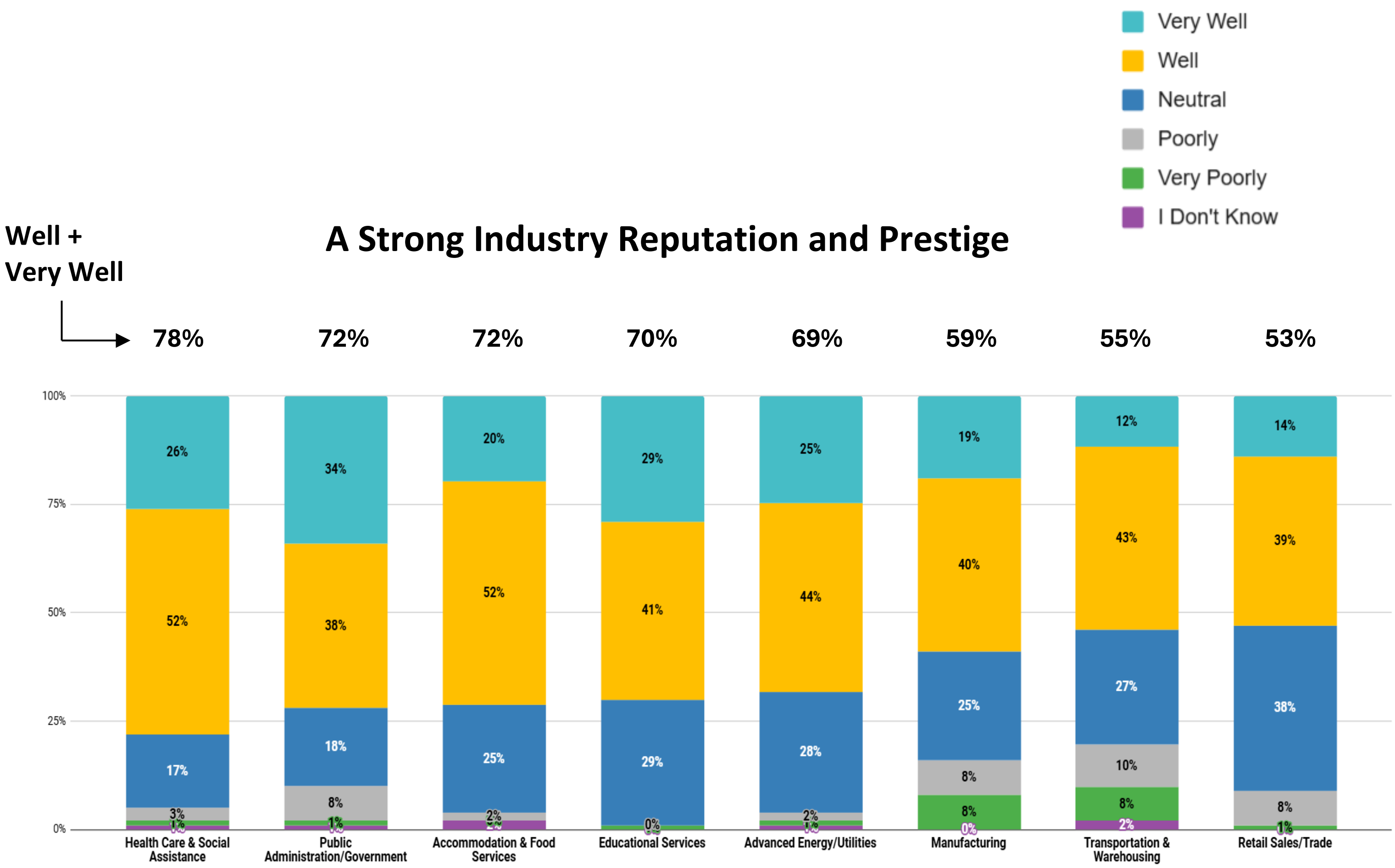

Work Schedule Flexibility
Very Well
Well
Neutral
Poorly
Very Poorly
I Don't Know
Well +
Very Well
47%
46%
46%
41%
40%
34%
32%
32%
100%
75%
50%
25%
0%
20%
27%
29%
14%
4%
7%
14%
32%
27%
15%
5%
7%
15%
31%
31%
15%
4%
4%
9%
32%
35%
18%
2%
4%
11%
29%
30%
16%
7%
7%
12%
22%
26%
25%
10%
6%
11%
21%
28%
28%
4%
8%
12%
20%
28%
30%
5%
4%
Public Administration/Government
Advanced Energy/Utilities
Educational Services
Accommodation & Food Services
Retail Sales/Trade
Health Care & Social Assistance
Manufacturing
Transportation & Warehousing

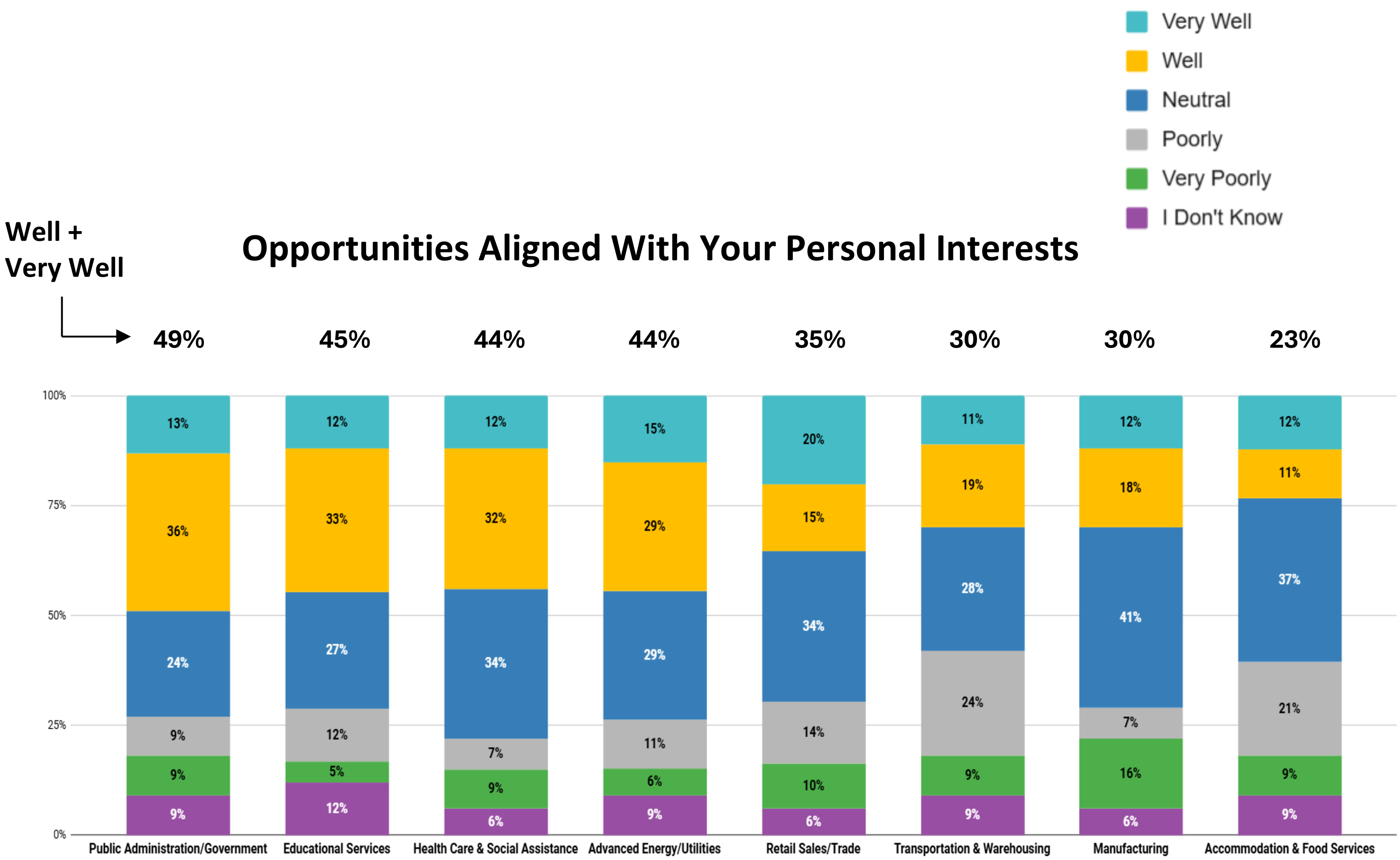

Very Well
Well
Neutral
Poorly
Very Poorly
I Don't Know
Well + Very Well
Opportunities for Career Advancement
64%
56%
54%
45%
45%
38%
37%
35%
100%
75%
50%
25%
0%
18%
46%
19%
10%
4%
3%
19%
37%
27%
5%
2%
10%
26%
28%
31%
7%
2%
5%
18%
27%
27%
21%
3%
5%
10%
35%
35%
12%
2%
6%
10%
28%
33%
19%
5%
5%
13%
24%
32%
20%
7%
5%
8%
27%
33%
23%
3%
5%
Health Care & Social Assistance
Advanced Energy/Utilities
Public Administration/Government
Manufacturing
Educational Services
Accommodation & Food Services
Retail Sales/Trade
Transportation & Warehousing

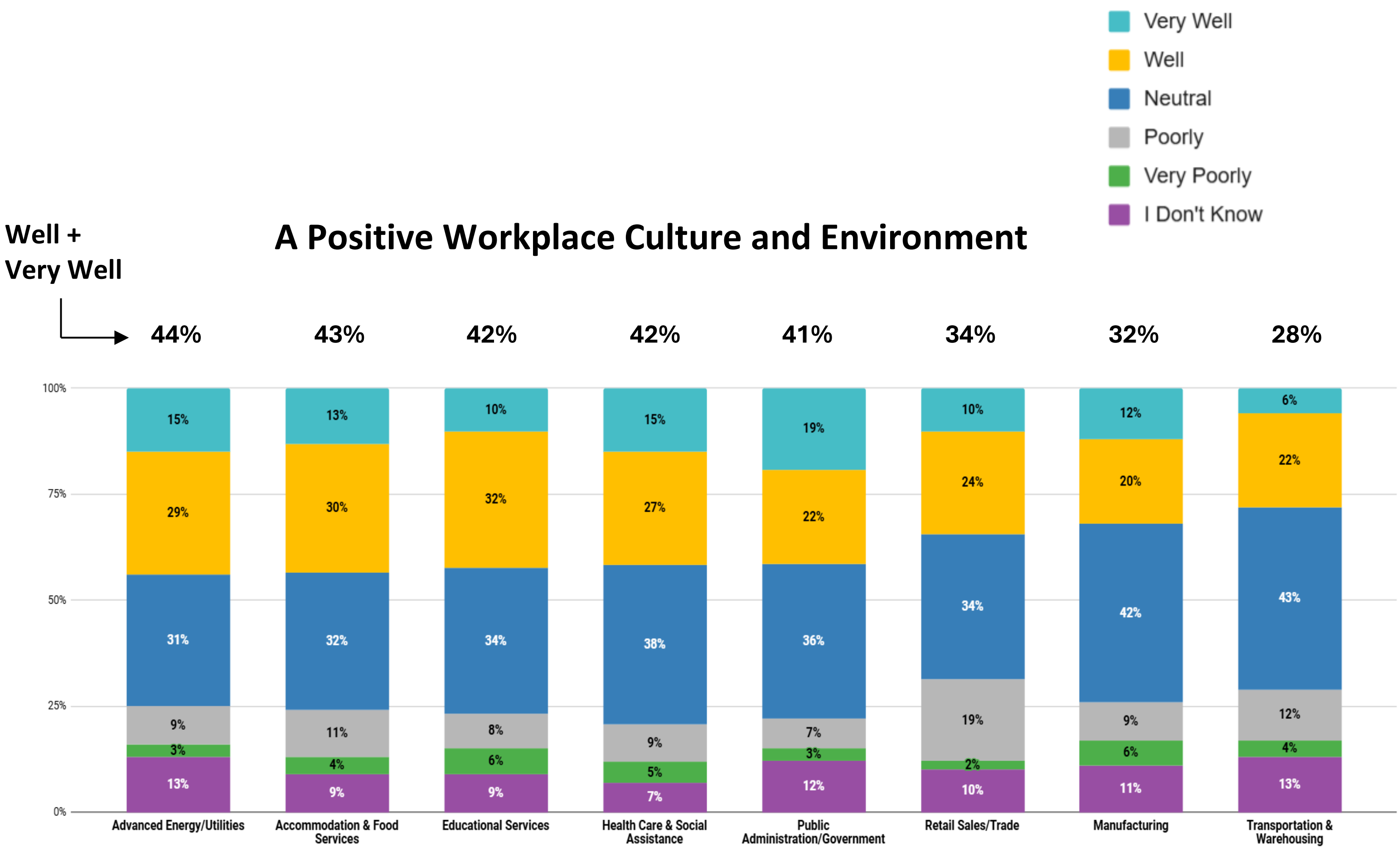

Very Well
Well
Neutral
Poorly
Very Poorly
I Don't Know
A Good Work-Life Balance
Well +
Very Well
54%
41%
42%
40%
37%
37%
36%
32%
100%
75%
50%
25%
0%
16%
38%
29%
11%
3%
3%
10%
31%
29%
24%
5%
2%
13%
29%
35%
11%
3%
10%
15%
25%
34%
13%
2%
11%
13%
24%
30%
22%
5%
6%
14%
23%
22%
24%
10%
7%
14%
22%
37%
19%
3%
5%
11%
21%
36%
24%
4%
5%
Educational Services
Retail Sales/Trade
Advanced Energy/Utilities
Public Administration/Government
Accommodation & Food Services
Health Care & Social Assistance
Manufacturing
Transportation & Warehousing

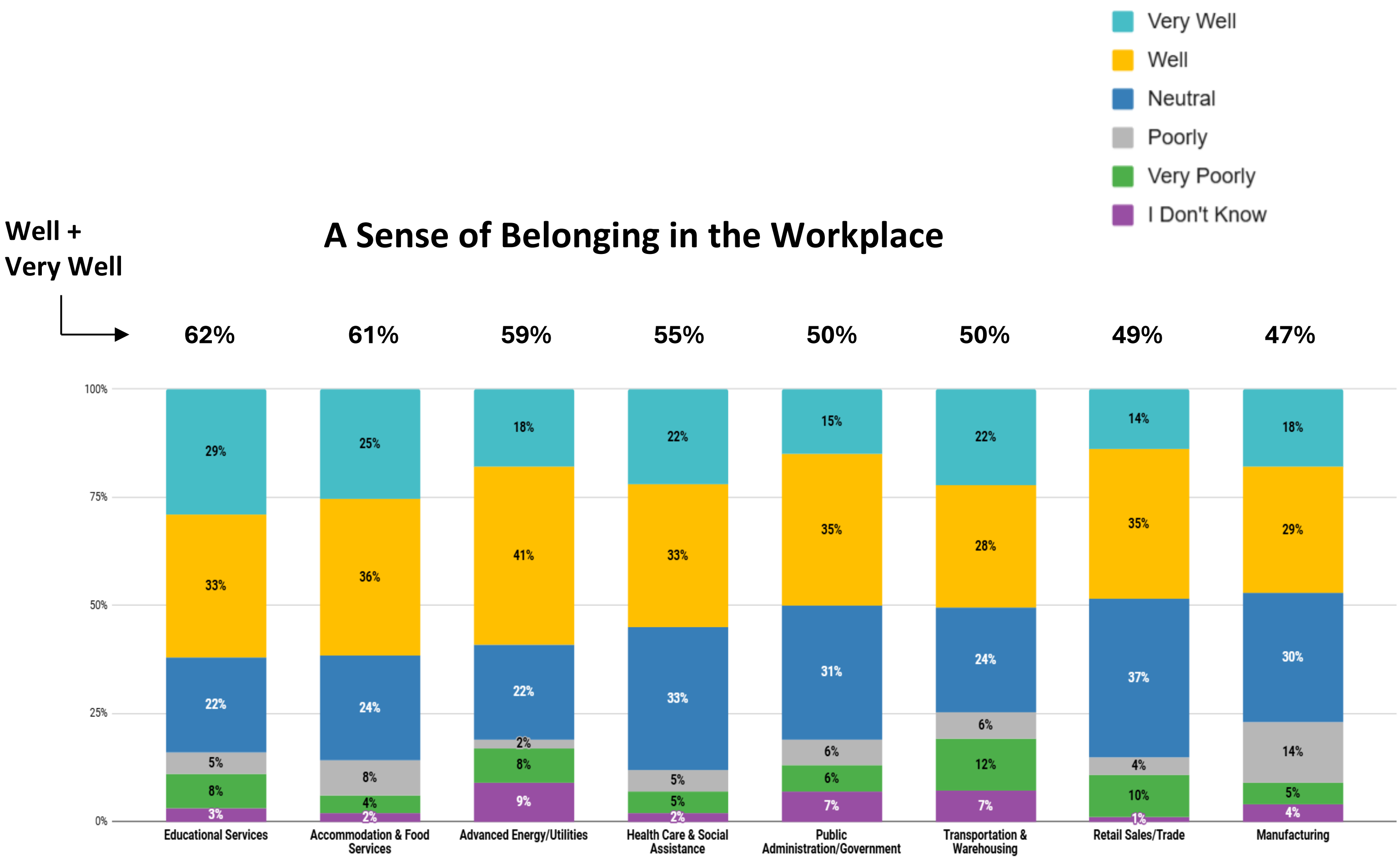
## Job Opportunities Located Close to Where You Live




Very Well
Well
Neutral
Poorly
Very Poorly
I Don't Know
Well +
Very Well
A Strong Industry Reputation and Prestige
78%
72%
72%
70%
69%
59%
55%
53%
100%
75%
50%
25%
0%
26%
52%
17%
3%
1%
34%
38%
18%
8%
1%
20%
52%
25%
2%
29%
41%
29%
0%
25%
44%
28%
2%
19%
40%
25%
8%
8%
0%
12%
43%
27%
10%
8%
2%
14%
39%
38%
8%
1%
Health Care & Social Assistance
Public Administration/Government
Accommodation & Food Services
Educational Services
Advanced Energy/Utilities
Manufacturing
Transportation & Warehousing
Retail Sales/Trade


Very Well
Well
Neutral
Poorly
Very Poorly
I Don't Know
Well + Very Well
Opportunities Aligned With Your Personal Interests
49%
45%
44%
44%
35%
30%
30%
23%
100%
75%
50%
25%
0%
13%
36%
24%
9%
9%
9%
12%
33%
27%
12%
5%
12%
12%
32%
34%
7%
9%
6%
15%
29%
29%
11%
6%
9%
20%
15%
34%
14%
10%
6%
11%
19%
28%
24%
9%
9%
12%
18%
41%
7%
16%
6%
12%
11%
37%
21%
9%
9%
Public Administration/Government
Educational Services
Health Care & Social Assistance
Advanced Energy/Utilities
Retail Sales/Trade
Transportation & Warehousing
Manufacturing
Accommodation & Food Services


A Positive Workplace Culture and Environment
Very Well
Well
Neutral
Poorly
Very Poorly
I Don't Know
Well +
Very Well
44%
43%
42%
42%
41%
34%
32%
28%
100%
75%
50%
25%
0%
15%
29%
31%
9%
3%
13%
13%
30%
32%
11%
4%
9%
10%
32%
34%
8%
6%
9%
15%
27%
38%
9%
5%
7%
19%
22%
36%
7%
3%
12%
10%
24%
34%
19%
2%
10%
12%
20%
42%
9%
6%
11%
6%
22%
43%
12%
4%
13%
Advanced Energy/Utilities
Accommodation & Food Services
Educational Services
Health Care & Social Assistance
Public Administration/Government
Retail Sales/Trade
Manufacturing
Transportation & Warehousing


Very Well
Well
Neutral
Poorly
Very Poorly
I Don't Know
Well + Very Well
A Sense of Belonging in the Workplace
62%
61%
59%
55%
50%
50%
49%
47%
100%
75%
50%
25%
0%
Educational Services
Accommodation & Food Services
Advanced Energy/Utilities
Health Care & Social Assistance
Public Administration/Government
Transportation & Warehousing
Retail Sales/Trade
Manufacturing