

# Kentucky Water Workforce Survey Results

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Resources Research Institute

# Operator Recruitment and Development (ORD) Committee

Committee members:

- Valerie Lucas, Clean Water Professionals
- Jessica Wilhoite and Veronica Roland, Kentucky Operator Certification Program
- Donna McNeil, KWWRI
- Kay Sanborn, KY-TN American Water Works Association
- Doug Kimbler, Bowling Green Municipal Utilities
- Kim Padgett and Maggie Mahan, Kentucky Rural Community Assistance Program
- Heather Stevenson and Jason Pennell, Kentucky Rural Water Association
- Robin Strader, Kentucky Wastewater Operators Certification Board Vice Chair
- Mary Carol Wagner, Northern Kentucky Water District
- Adam Scott, Kentucky Water and Wastewater Operators Association
- Alicia Jacobs, Amanda Lefevre, Joseph Uliasz, Energy and Environment Cabinet Representatives

# ORD's Goals and Objectives


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



# Kentucky Water Workforce Survey

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

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY RESEARCH




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

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

**You may be eligible to participate if you:**

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

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



<https://bit.ly/KYWaterWorkforceSurvey>

**For more information:**

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University of Kentucky Research  
An Equal Opportunity University

Kentucky Water Resources Research Institute

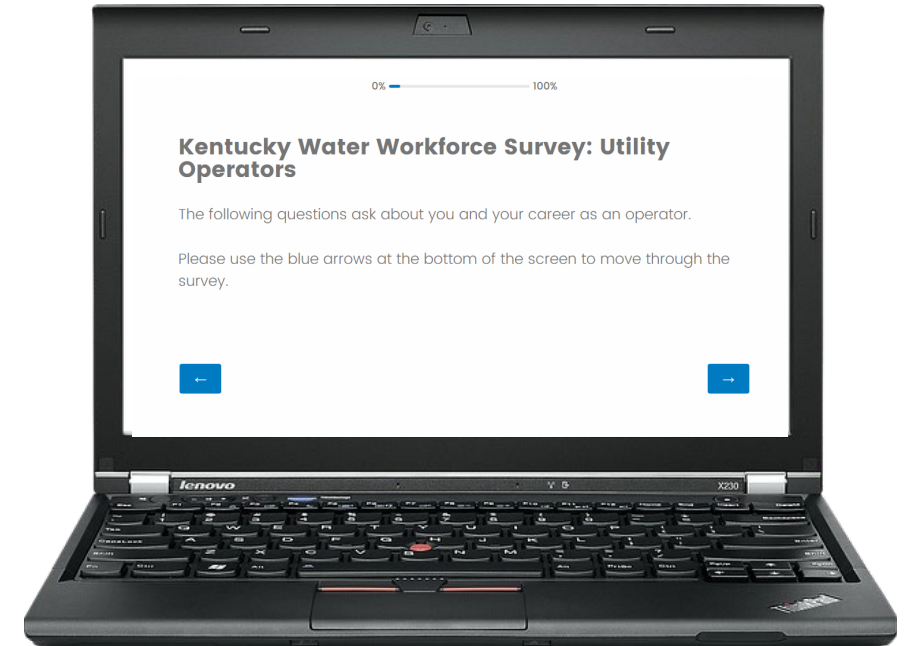
www.UKclinicalresearch.com

water management study

KWRR1-002\_flyer #

# Survey Response

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



# Operator Demographics



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# Gender of Respondents

KWWS Operator Survey

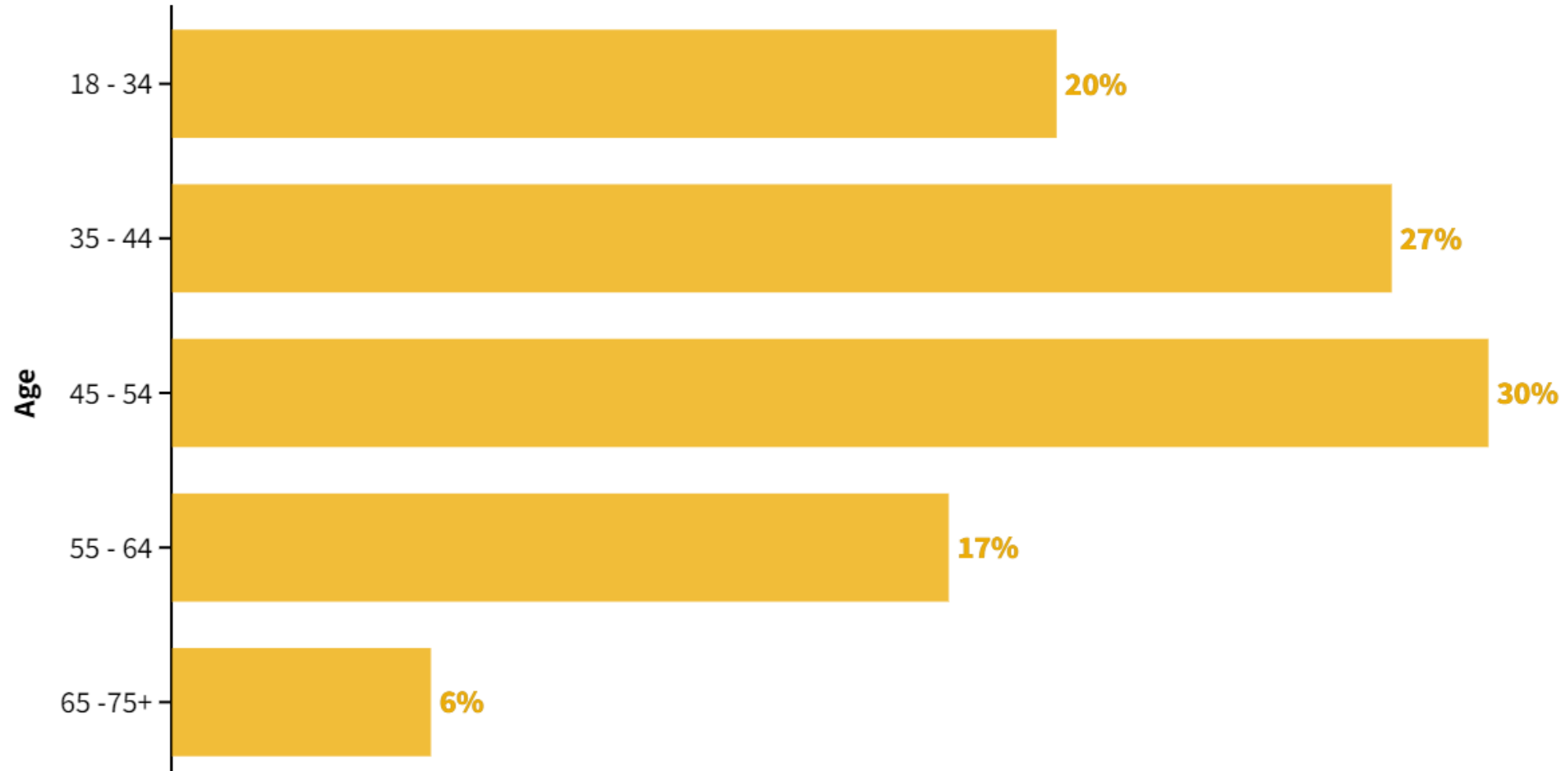
Male Female Other



# Age of Respondents

## KWWS Operator Survey

Operators

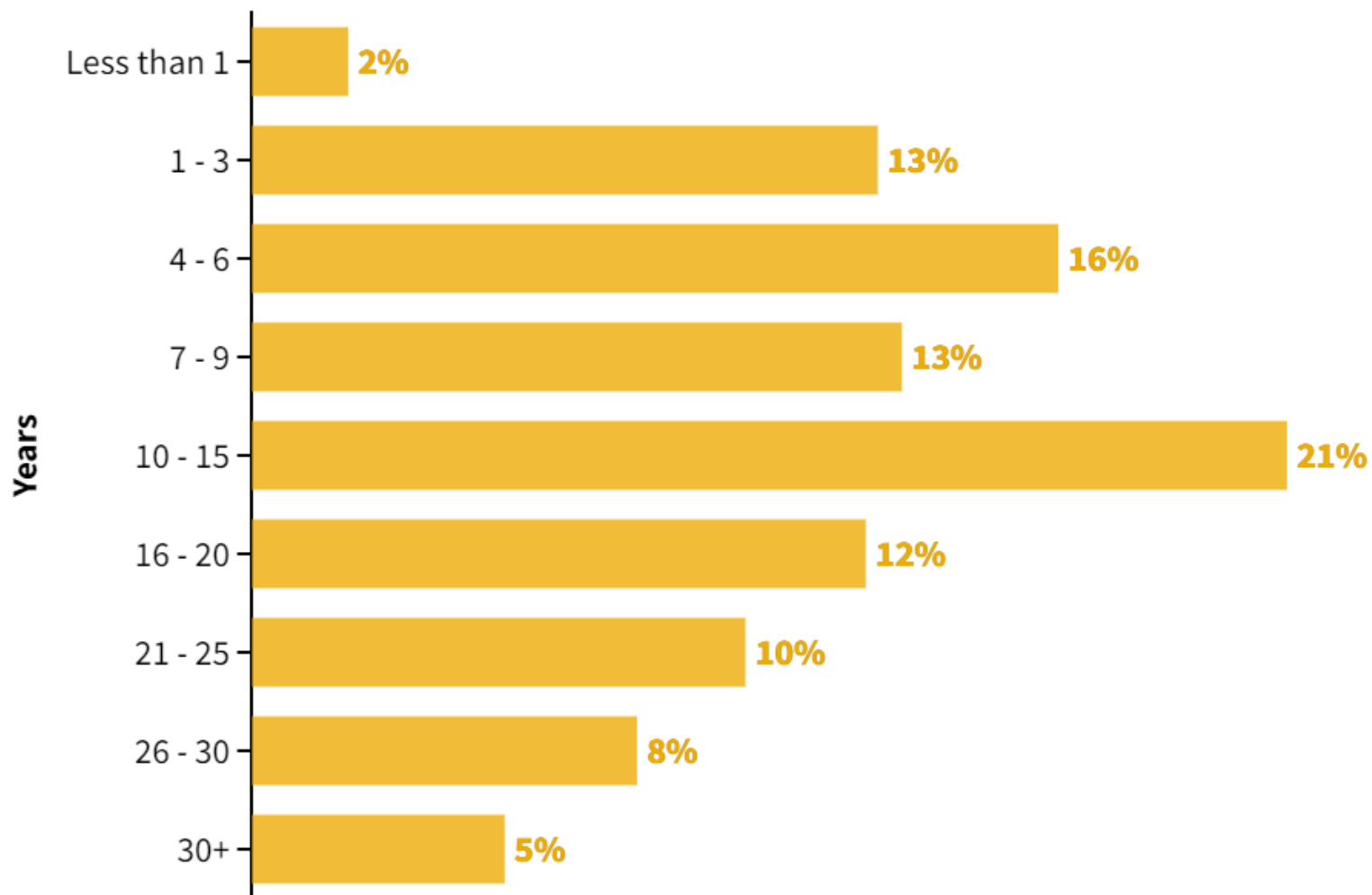




# How Many Years Have You Worked At The Utility?

KWWS Operator Survey

Operators



# Utility Demographics

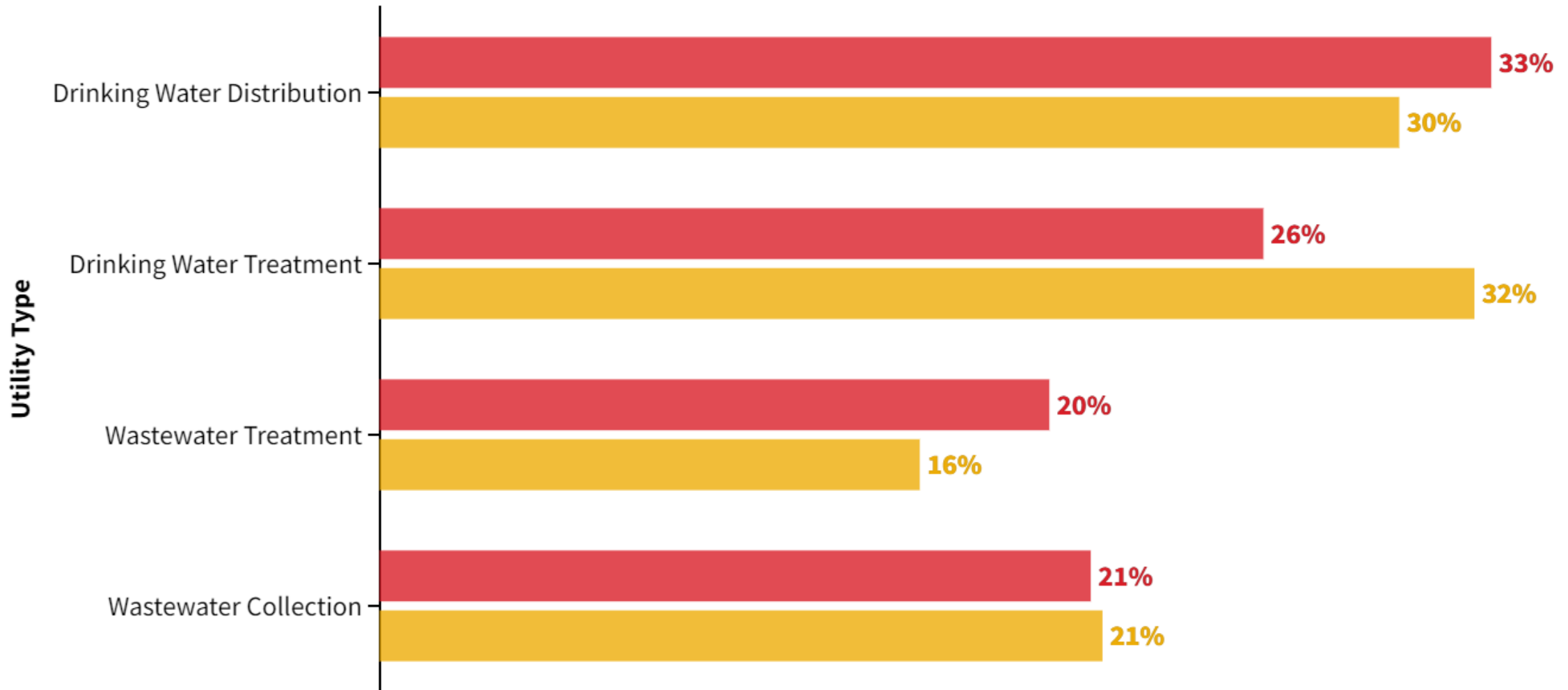


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# Which Of The Following Describe Your Utility?

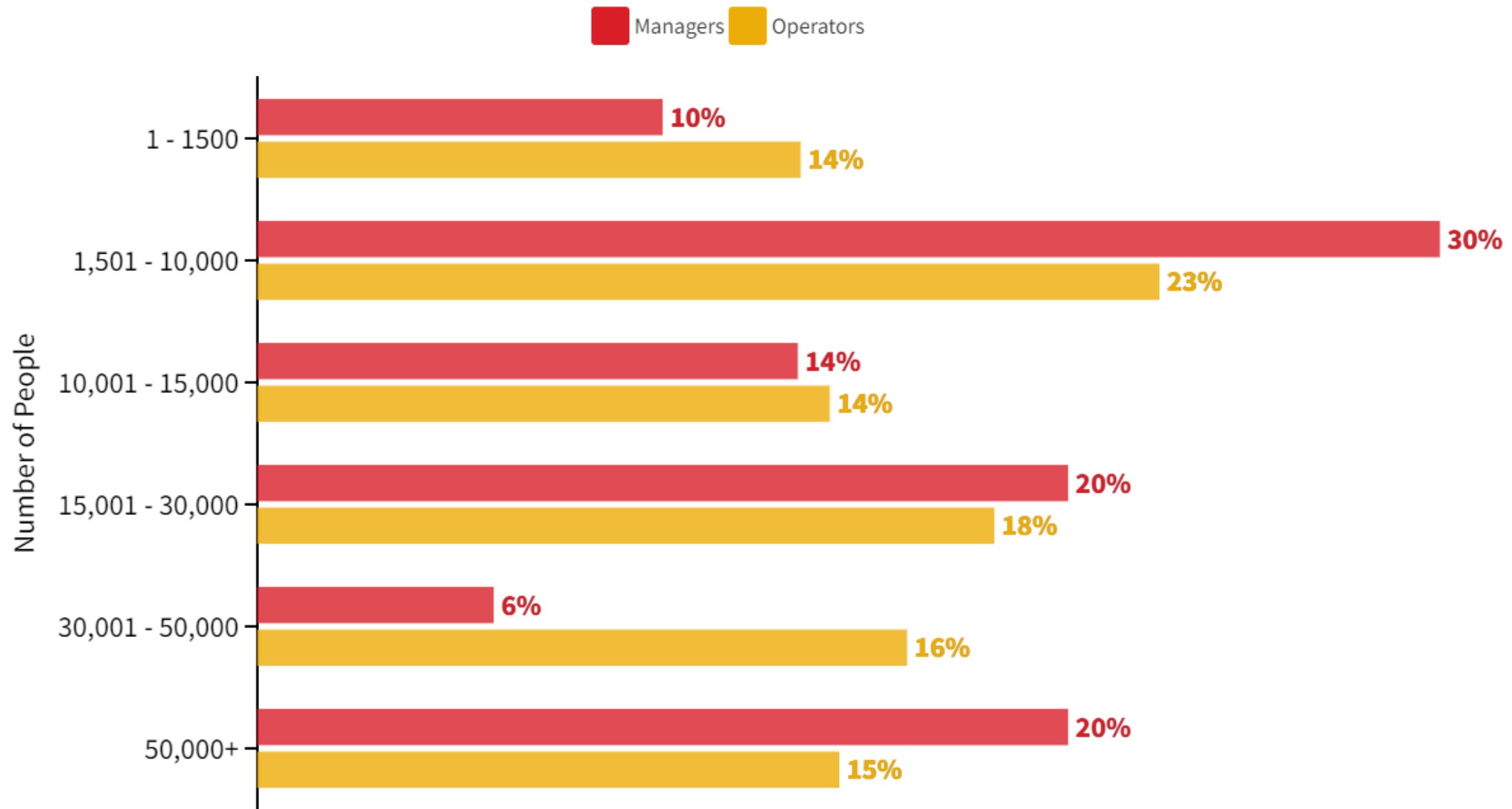
KWWS Operator/Manager Survey

Managers Operators

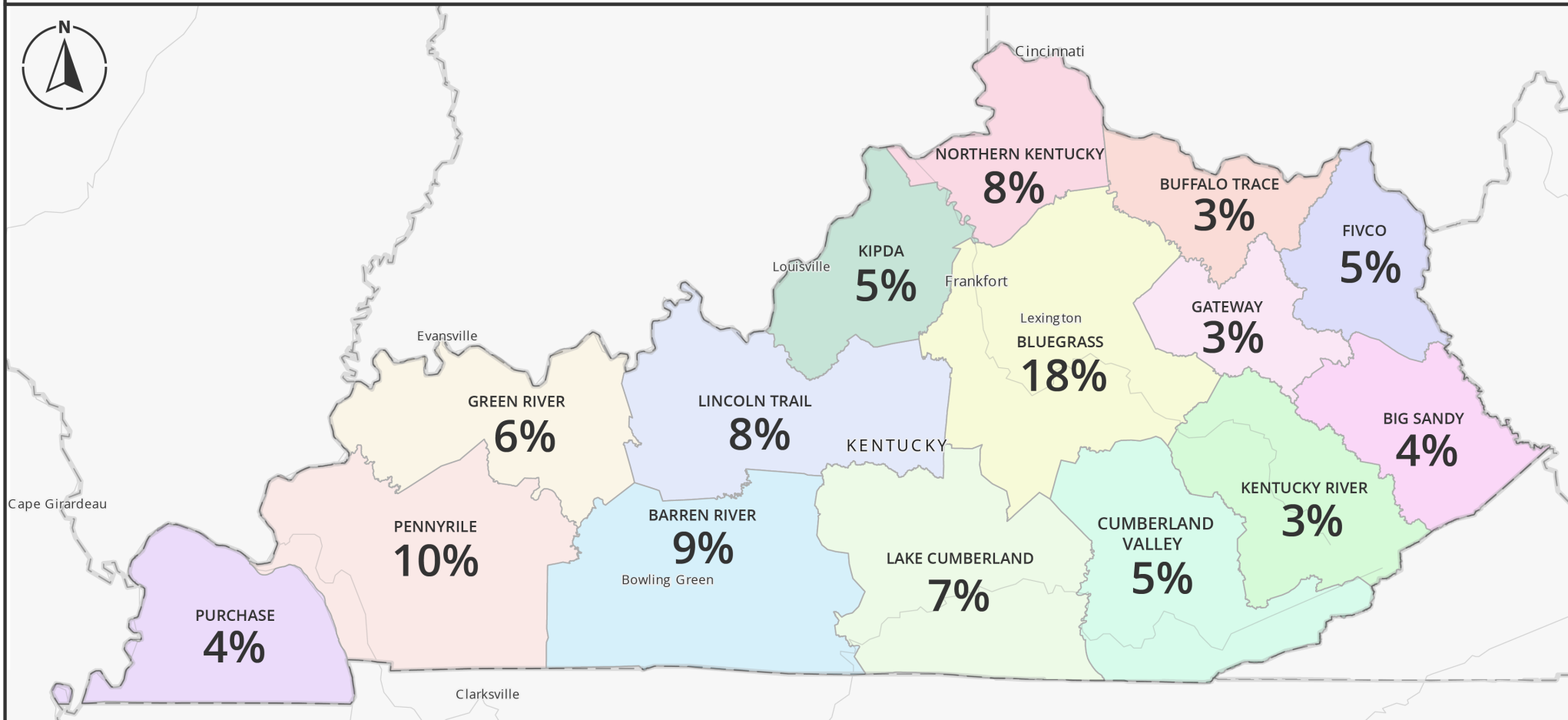


# How Many People Does your Utility Directly Serve?

KWWS Operator/Manager Survey



# Spatial Distribution of Survey Respondents - Area Development Districts



- Area Development Districts**
- Barren River
  - Gateway
  - Pennyrile
  - Big Sandy
  - Green River
  - Purchase
  - Bluegrass
  - Kentucky River
  - Buffalo Trace
  - Lake Cumberland
  - Cumberland Valley
  - Lincoln Trail
  - FIVCO
  - Northern Kentucky



Map Produced By: The Kentucky Water Resources Research Institute.

# Utility Challenges

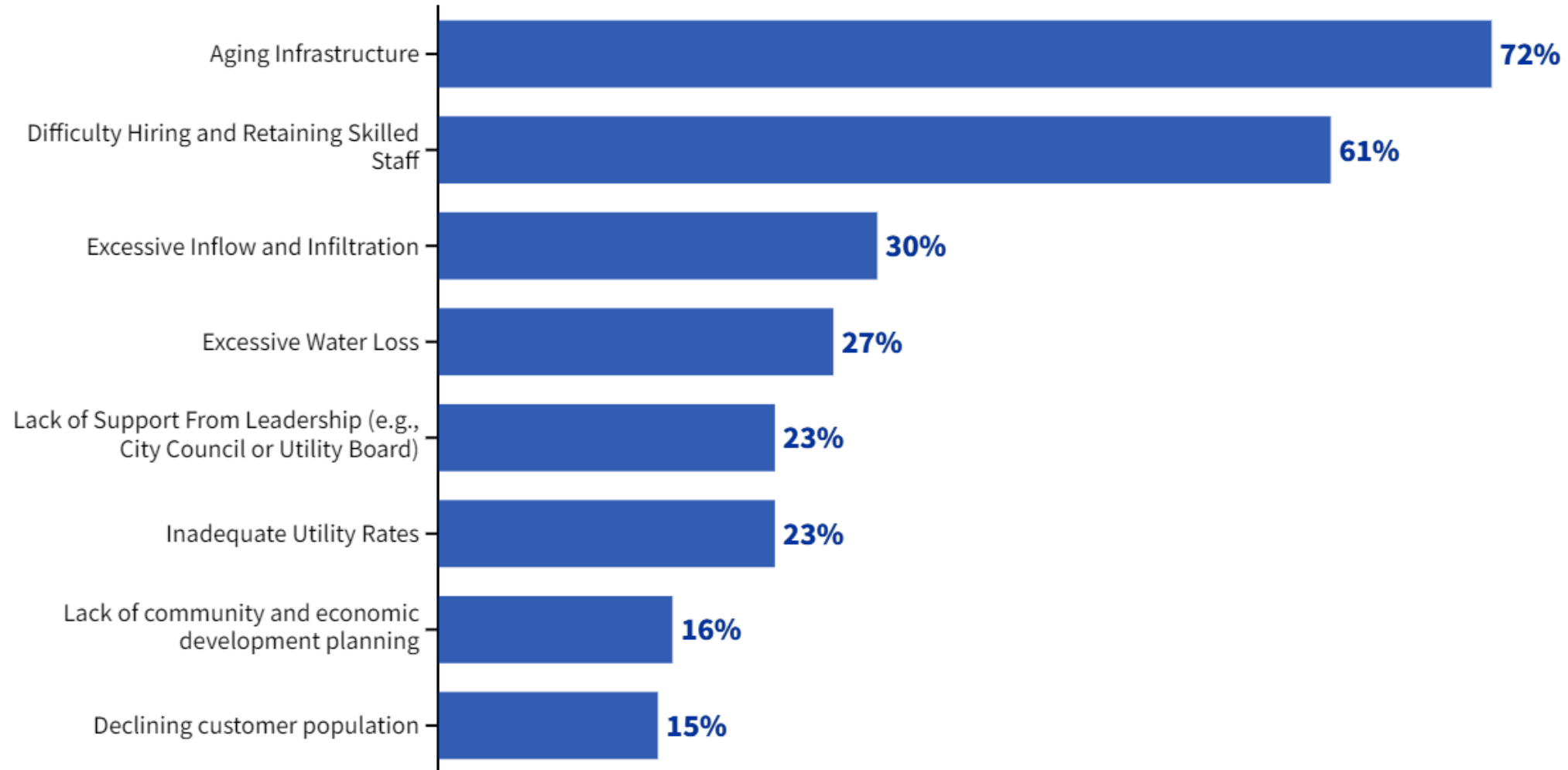


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# What Type Of Operations Challenges Does Your Utility Face?

KWWS Operator/Manager Survey

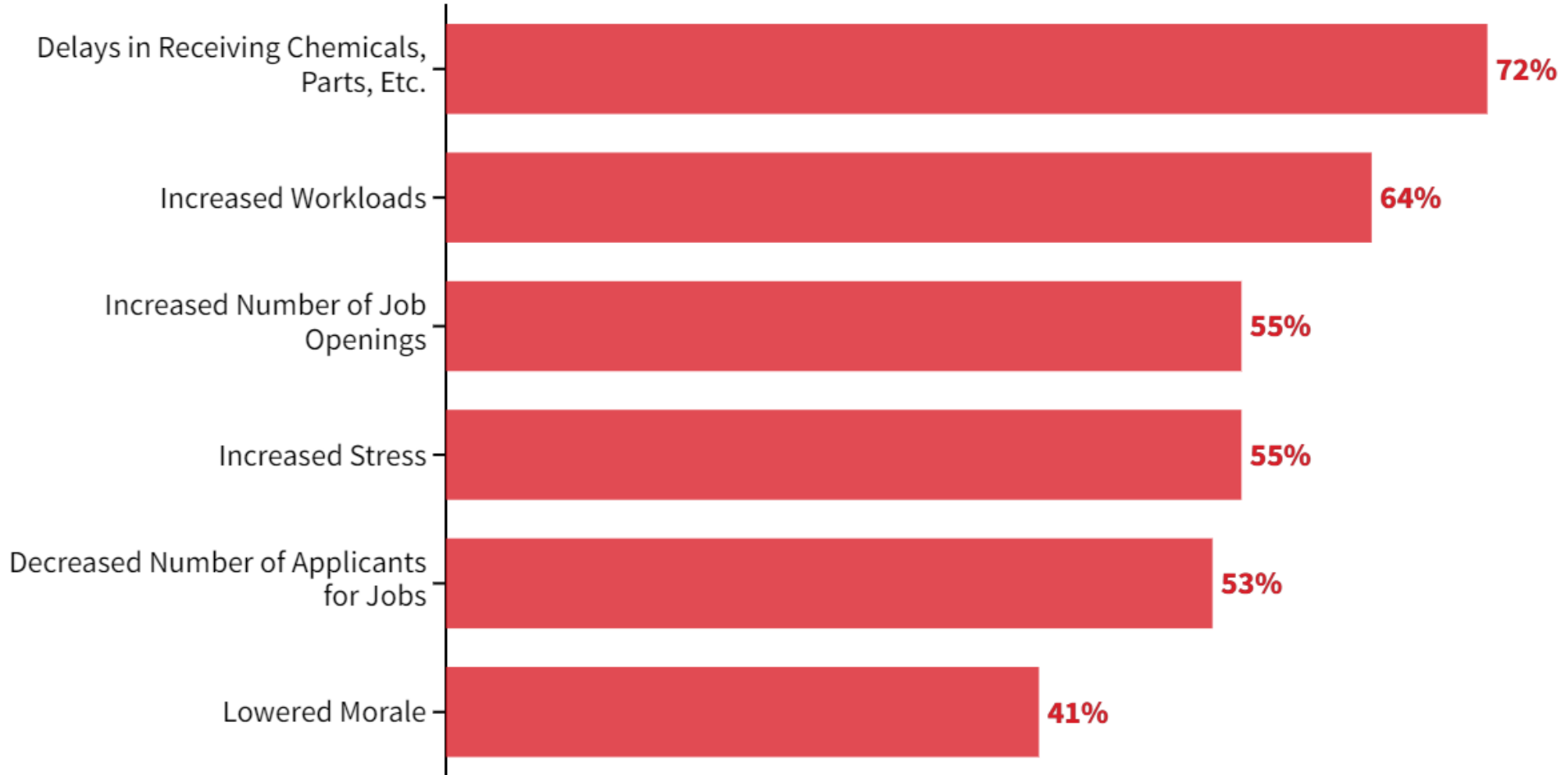
All Respondents



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

KWWS Manager Survey

Managers





# Job Satisfaction

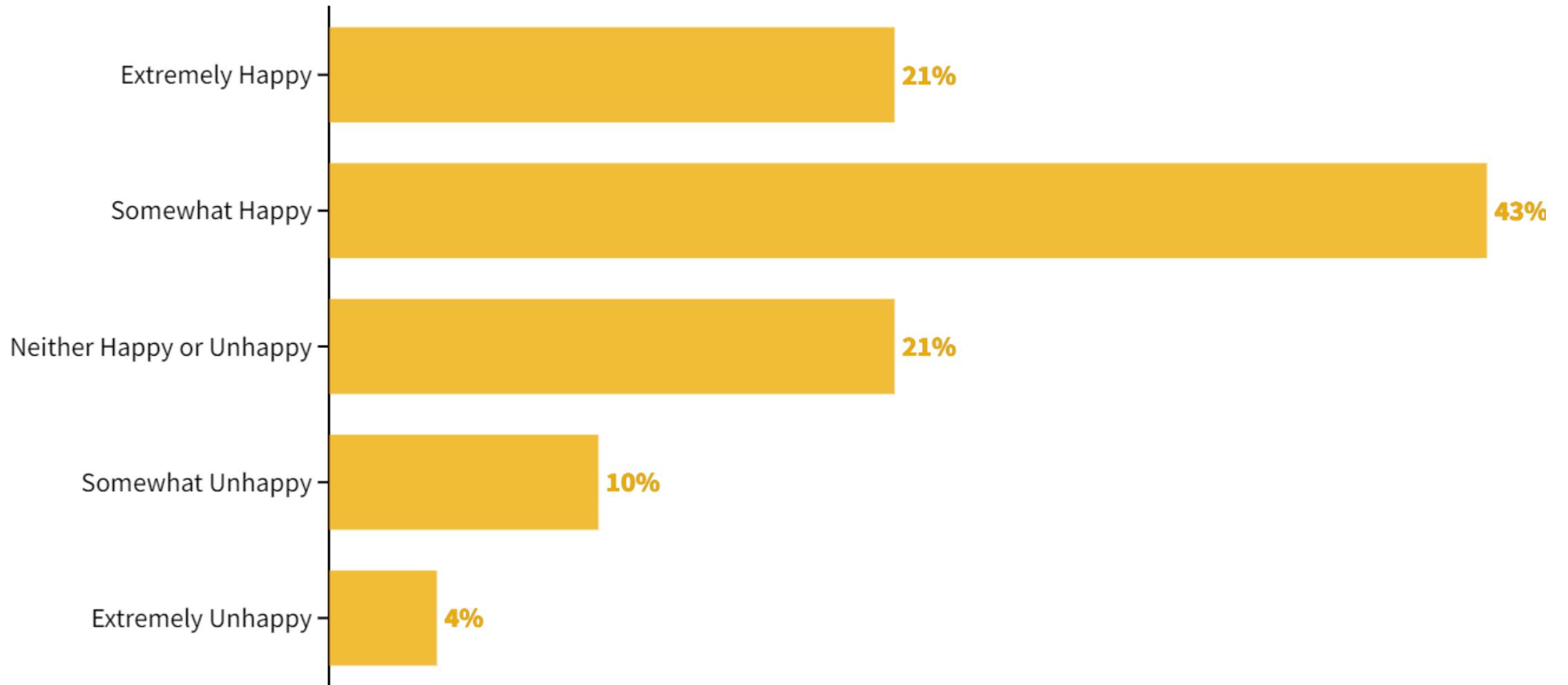


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# How Happy Are You At Work?

## KWWS Operator Survey

Operators



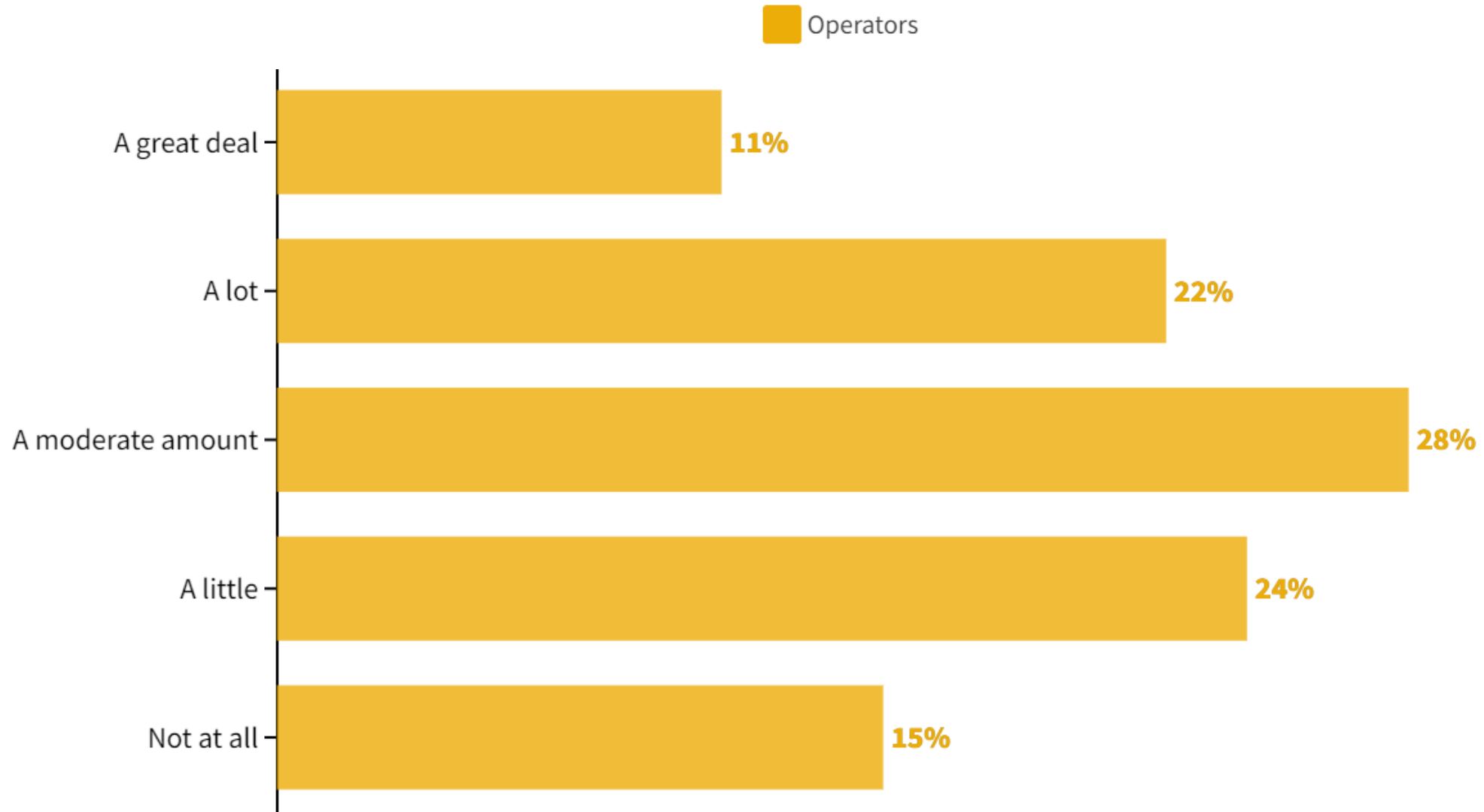
# Median Hourly Wage | Pay Expectations

## KWWS Operator Survey



# Do You Feel Appreciated By Your Utility?

## KWWS Operator Survey



# Over the last two years, which of the following have you experienced?

- Increased workload: 66%
- Increased stress: 60%
- Lower morale: 46%
- Increased work hours: 37%
- Financial hardships: 31%

# Relationship with Decision Makers

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

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

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

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

# Recruitment

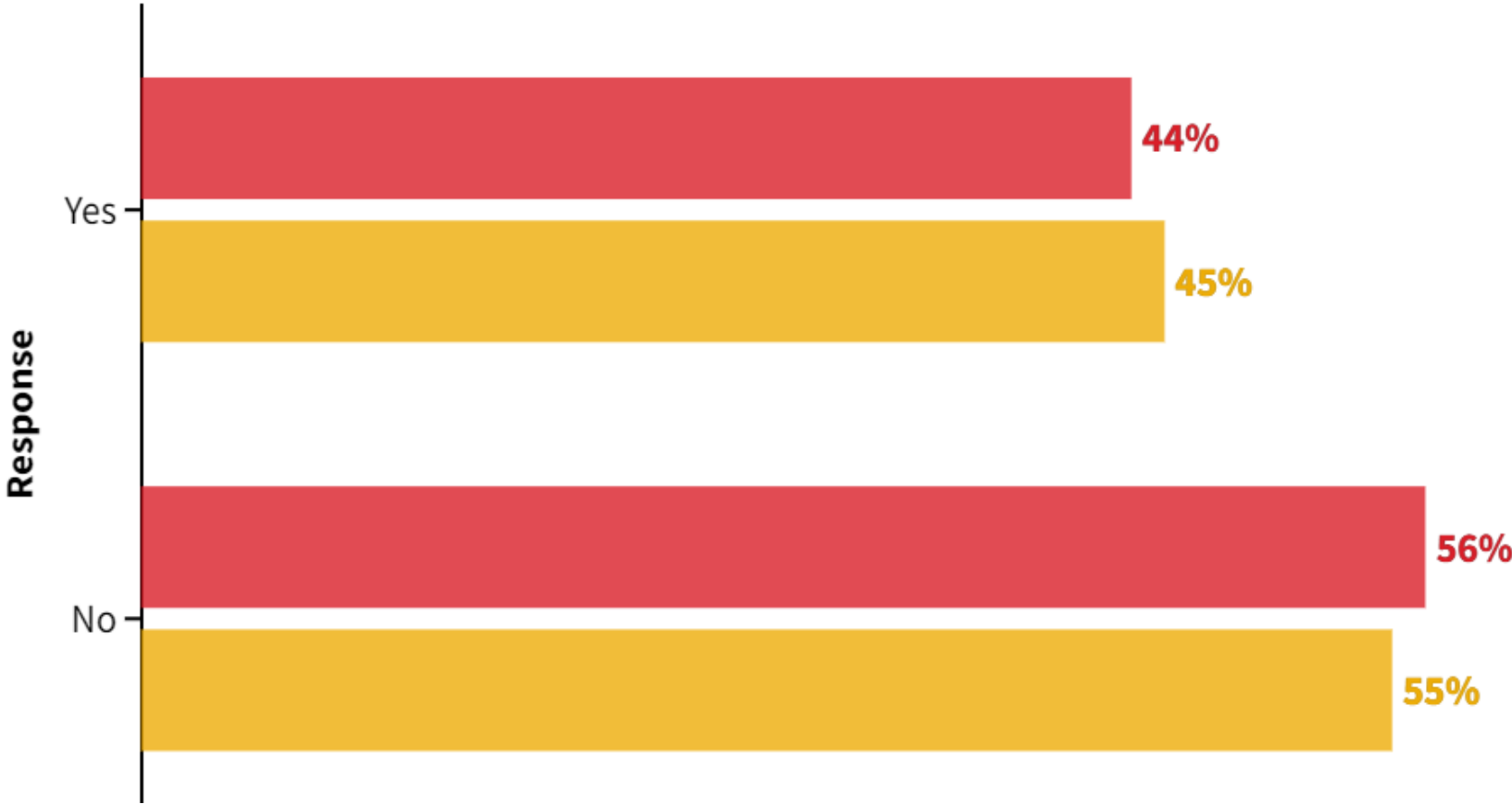


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# In Your Opinion, Does Your Utility Have Enough Operators?

KWWS Operator/Manager Survey

Managers Operators





# Barriers to Hiring Operators

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

# What benefits does your utility provide?

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

# Retention



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# What reasons do operators give for leaving the job?

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

# Aspects of the Job: Somewhat Satisfied or Extremely Satisfied

## Operator Responses:

- Hours – 70%
- Type of Work– 69%
- Certification Renewal Process – 62%
- Preferred Shifts– 60%

## Manager Responses:

- Hours – 67%
- Type of Work – 67%
- Certification Renewal Process – 54%
- Preferred Shifts– 53%

# Aspects of the Job: Somewhat Dissatisfied or Extremely Dissatisfied

## Operator Responses:

- Pay – 39%
- Certification Exam Process – 22%
- Workload – 21%
- Preferred Shifts– 17%

## Manager Responses:

- Pay – 38%
- Certification Exam Process – 29%
- Preferred Shifts– 20%
- Workload – 20%

# Retention: Key Points to Consider

- 39% are considering leaving the utility.
- 28% are considering leaving the water industry.
- 37% believe that they are not being paid a fair amount for the work.
- 32% believe that work is not distributed evenly at their utility.
- 68% are satisfied with the benefits they receive.
- 76% like doing the tasks they do at work.
- 70% are given the equipment and tools I need to do my job effectively.

# Succession Planning

Are you currently eligible to retire?

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

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

- **45% do not**

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

- **46% do not.**



# Future Steps



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# Next Steps

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

# Questions?



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