



ITHAKA S+R

Under Pressure: Values, Constraint, and the Strategy Gap in the Ithaka S+R 2025 US Library Survey.

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Through research, collaboration, and innovation, Ithaka S+R informs policy, guides strategies, and builds evidence-based tools to broaden access to postsecondary education, improve student and workforce outcomes, and advance scholarship.

Ithaka S+R is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit with a mission to improve access to knowledge and education for people around the world. We believe education is key to the wellbeing of individuals and society, and we work to make it more effective and affordable.

Background

- Ithaka S+R conducts the **US Library Survey** on a triennial basis to track leaders' perspectives, priorities, and strategies over time
- The 2025 survey cycle explored key questions around both longstanding and emerging challenges, organized around core areas of inquiry, including:
 - Role of the library
 - Library strategy and priorities
 - Library collections and budget
- The report examines these topics and more in detail; today focuses on a selection of key findings

Methodology

- Fielded to library deans and directors at all four-year, not-for-profit colleges and universities in the US
- Included a mix of legacy questions for cross-sample comparison as well as new items on emerging issues
- Final sample of **483 respondents** (36% response rate):

38%

Doctoral institutions

53%

Private not-for-profit
institutions

57%

In current role for five years
or fewer

62%

Women

87%

White individuals

41%

Between 55–64 years old



Key Findings

1 Financial and staffing constraints continue to strain libraries.

3 Many leaders feel libraries are undervalued in campus decision-making.

5 Prioritization of open access initiatives has declined since the previous survey cycle.

7 Hiring growth is expected in AI and machine learning roles, instruction, and assessment.

2 AI is reshaping priorities, but adoption is uneven.

4 Student learning is a top priority, but confidence in impact is lower.

6 Concerns about third-party access to data have reached their highest level since 2019.

Learn more about these findings and many others in the report!

Role of the Library

While most leaders feel confident in their **ability to articulate** the library's value proposition, fewer believe this value is **recognized** by senior administrators.

Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement below.

Percentage of respondents answering agree – strongly agree

I am confident in my ability to articulate the library's value proposition in a way that aligns with the strategic goals of the college/university administration.

75%

Faculty and researchers recognize the value the library adds to the college/university.

63%

My direct supervisor and I share the same vision for the library.

57%

I am confident that academic deans and other senior administrators believe the library's value proposition aligns with the strategic goals of the college/university.

51%

Students recognize the value the library adds to the college/university.

51%

I am involved in key institutional decision-making processes at the campus level.

31%

Academic deans and other senior administrators consider our roles to be of equivalent standing.

24%

Role of the Library

Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement below.

Percentage of respondents answering _____

Slightly – strongly agree **Neutral** **Slightly – strongly disagree**

I am committed to upholding my library's core values, even when they are challenged.



Even as sociopolitical circumstances change, my library's mission remains consistent.



I am confident in my ability to effectively advocate for my library to college/university administration.



My library's core values are the same as they were 3 years ago.



My role as a library leader is apolitical with respect to state and/or national politics.



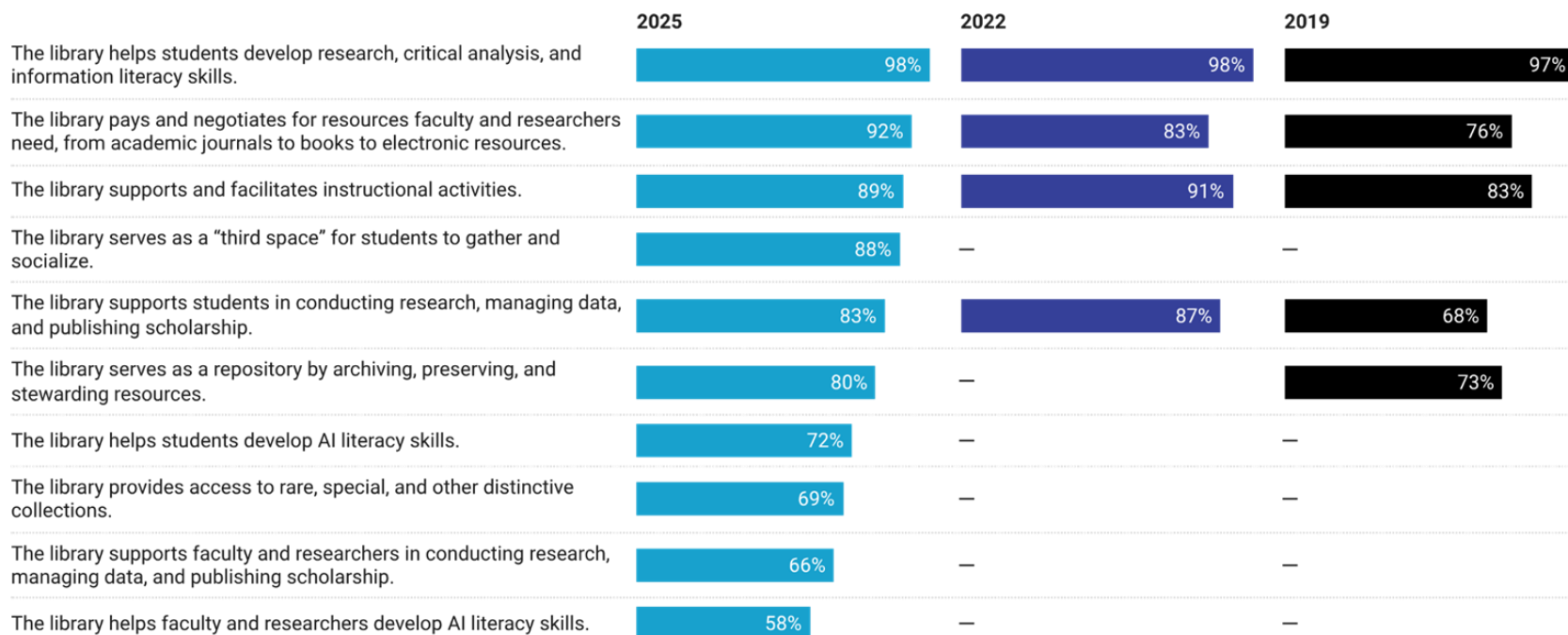
My library's strategies are the same as they were 3 years ago.



Role of the Library

How important is it to you that your library provides the following functions or serves in the capacities listed below?

Percentage of respondents answering **very – extremely important**, by cycle

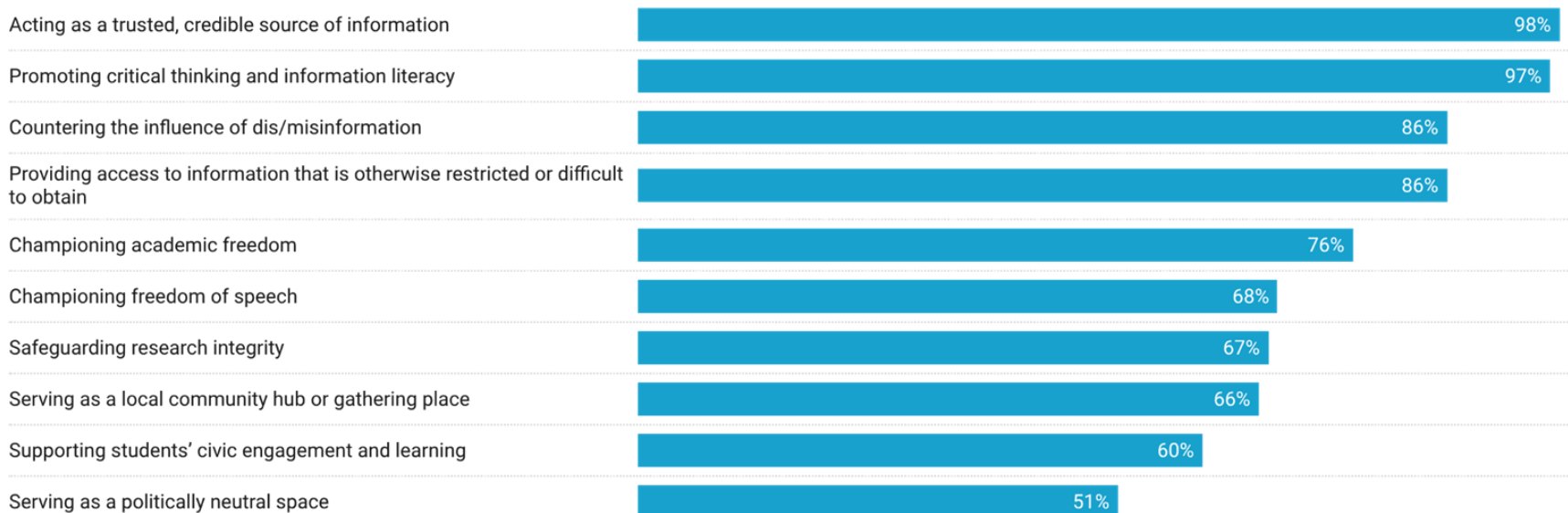


Role of the Library

Nearly all respondents believe the library's role as a **trusted and credible source of information** is highly important.

How important is it to you that your library fulfills each of the following roles?

Percentage of respondents answering very – extremely important



Library Strategy

However, areas identified as highly important **do not** yet appear to be **supported** by the same level of strategy.

Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement below.

*Percentage of respondents answering **agree** – **strongly agree***

My library has a clear collections strategy that drives our decision-making about format, delivery, and access mechanisms.

59%

My library has a clear vision that is broadly accepted on campus for the use of our space footprint.

43%

My library has a clear strategy for ensuring accessibility and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance across digital collections.

35%

My library has a clear vision for redressing the influence of dis/misinformation among our community members.

18%

My institution has a clear policy around students' use of generative AI.

17%

My library has a clear strategy for incorporating emerging technologies beyond artificial intelligence (e.g., immersive media such as virtual or augmented reality, advanced data visualization tools).

13%

My library has a clear vision for futureproofing that takes into account emerging sociopolitical trends.

10%

Library Strategy

Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement below.

*Percentage of respondents answering **agree – strongly agree***

Academic libraries have a responsibility to strengthen public trust in reliable information sources.

78%

Academic libraries should prepare for how emerging technologies beyond artificial intelligence (e.g., immersive media, advanced data visualization tools) will reshape information literacy needs.

72%

I am confident that staff at my library have the skills needed to teach information literacy effectively.

70%

My library is recognized as a leader in information literacy on campus.

65%

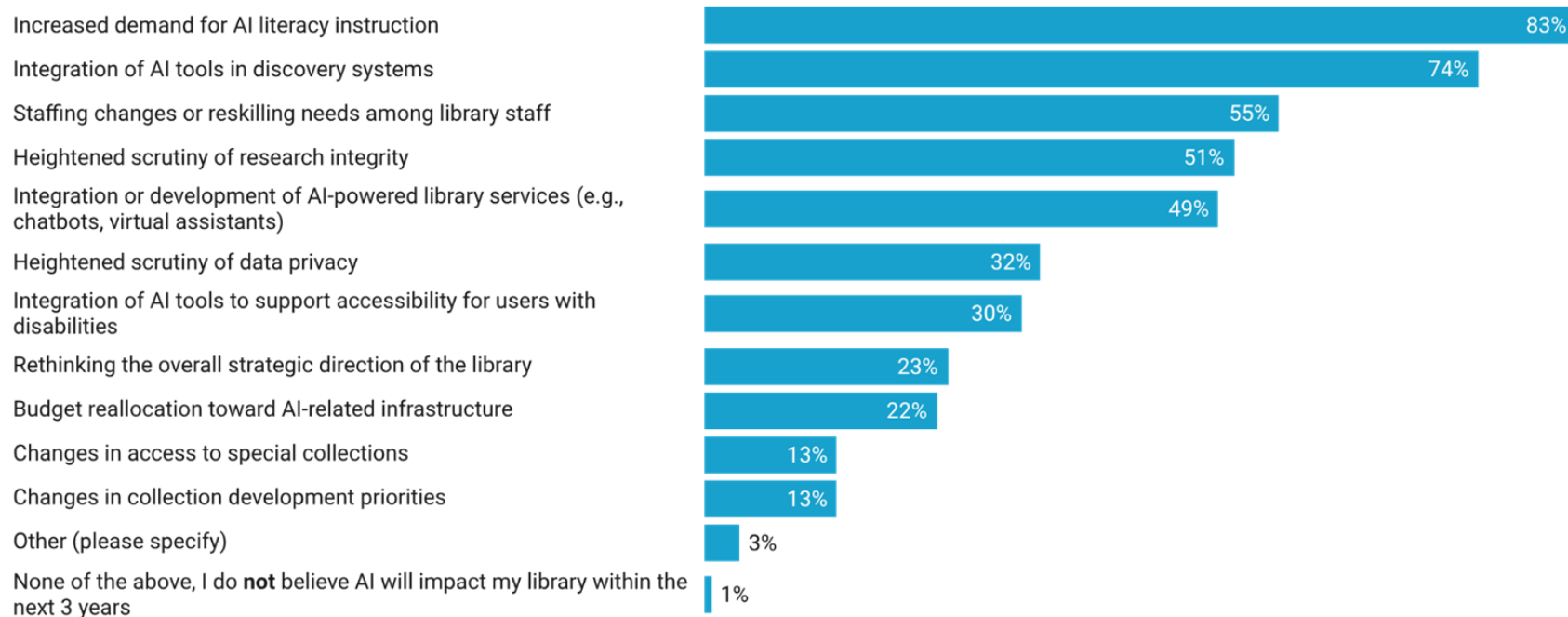
Information literacy instruction will become increasingly central to higher education's mission within the next 3 years.

64%

AI in the Library

What, if any, do you anticipate will be the most significant impacts AI will have on your library within the next 3 years? [Select all that apply]

Percentage of respondents selecting the given impact

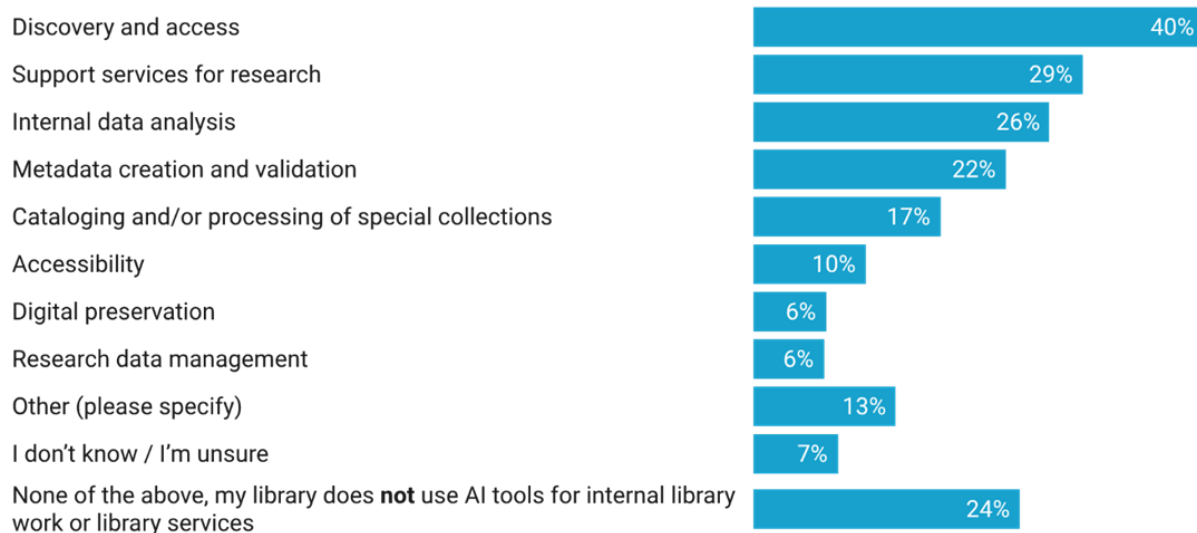


AI in the Library

Libraries are integrating AI tools at **different rates** and **in different ways**.

In which of the following areas, if any, does your library currently employ AI tools to support internal library work or library services? [Select all that apply]

Percentage of respondents selecting the given functional area

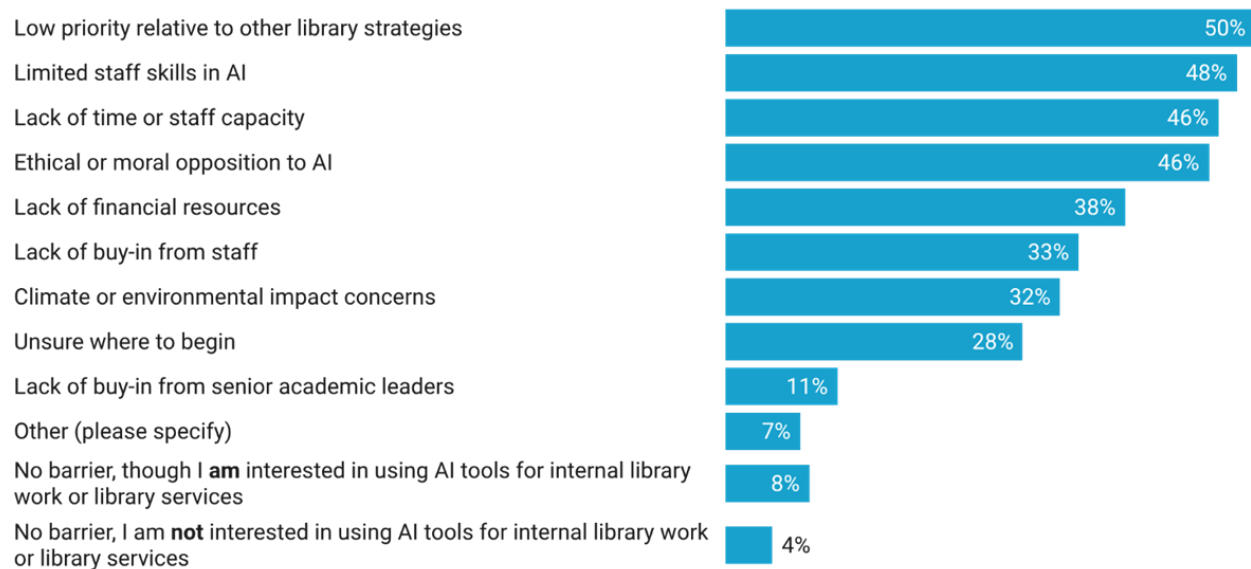


AI in the Library

Among libraries not currently using AI tools internally, the **most common barriers relate to staffing capacity and strategic uncertainty**.

What are the primary barriers, if any, to employing AI tools in your library? [Select all that apply]

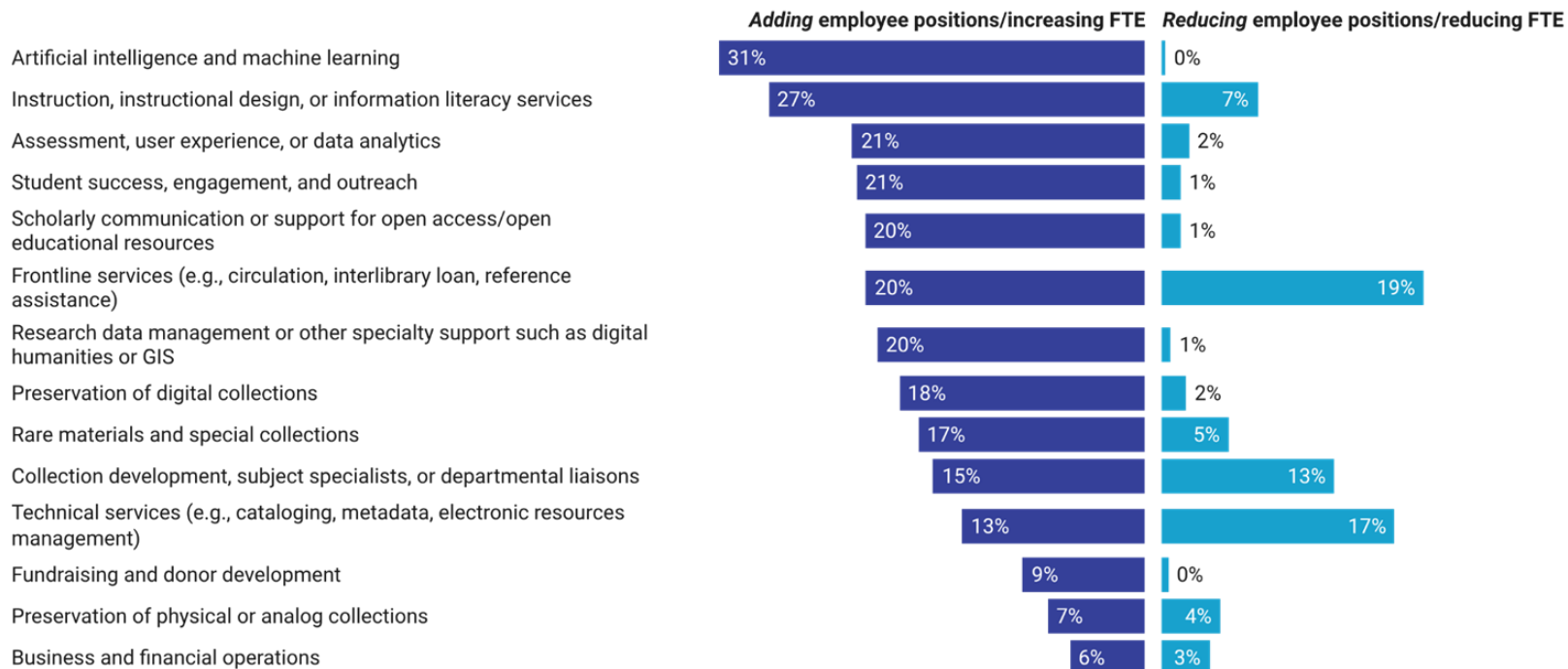
Percentage of respondents selecting the given barrier (shown only to respondents whose libraries do not use AI tools)



Hiring Priorities

To the best of your knowledge, will your library add or reduce employee positions in any of the following areas within the next five years?

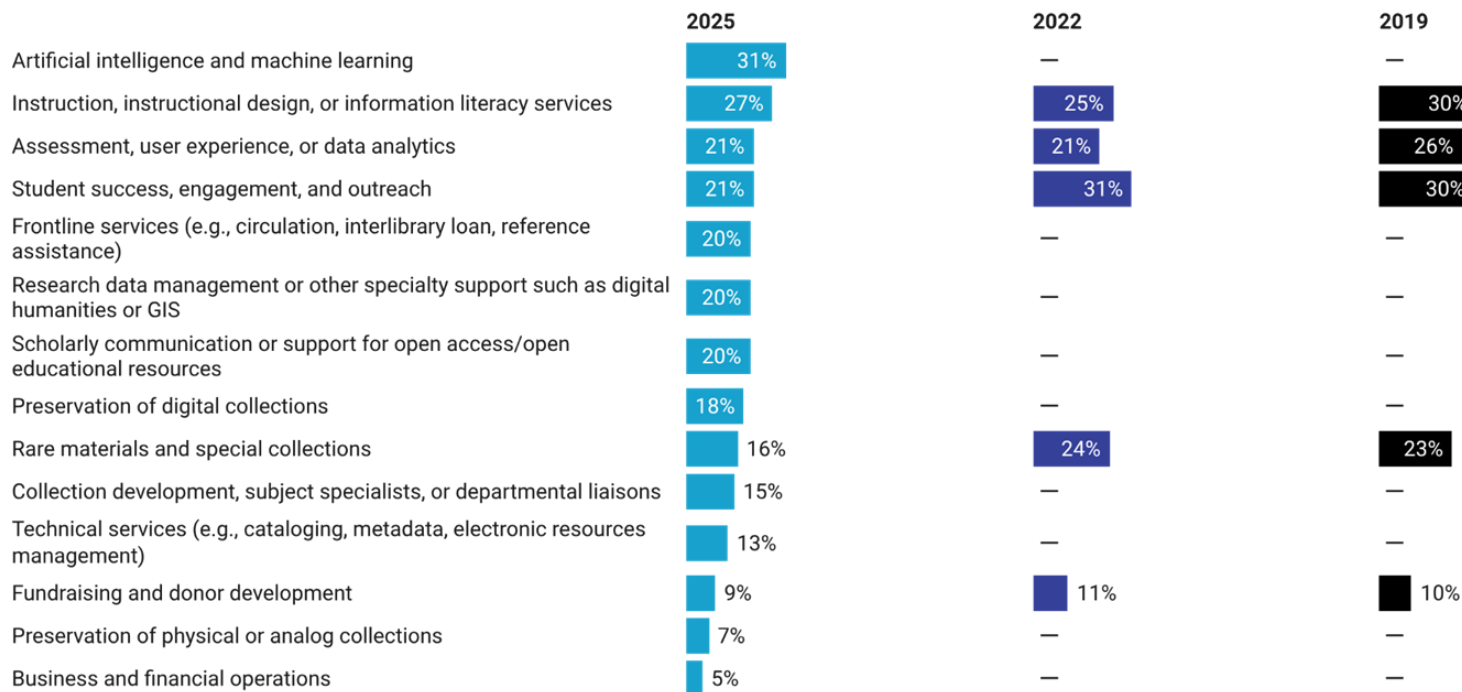
Percentage of respondents selecting the given area



Hiring Priorities

To the best of your knowledge, will your library **add** or reduce employee positions in any of the following areas within the next five years?

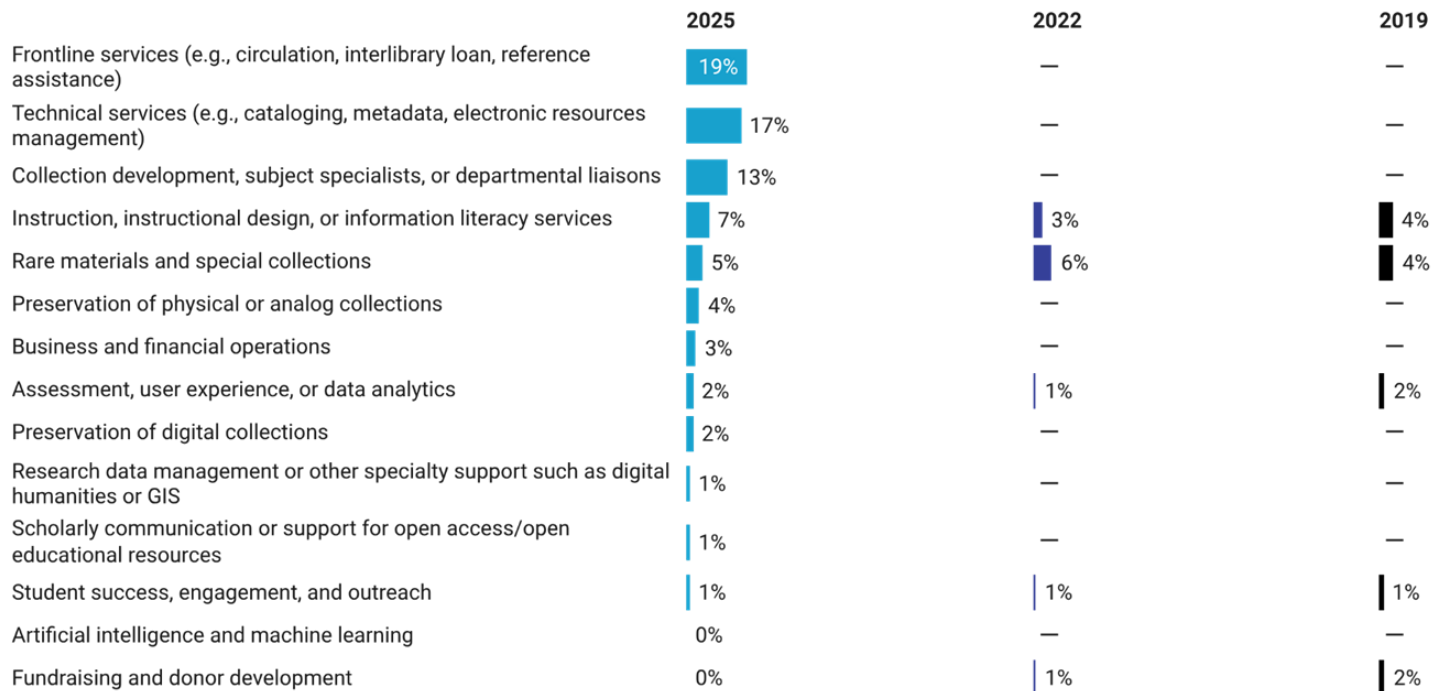
*Percentage of respondents planning to **add employee positions/increase FTE**, by cycle*



Hiring Priorities

To the best of your knowledge, will your library add or **reduce** employee positions in any of the following areas within the next five years?

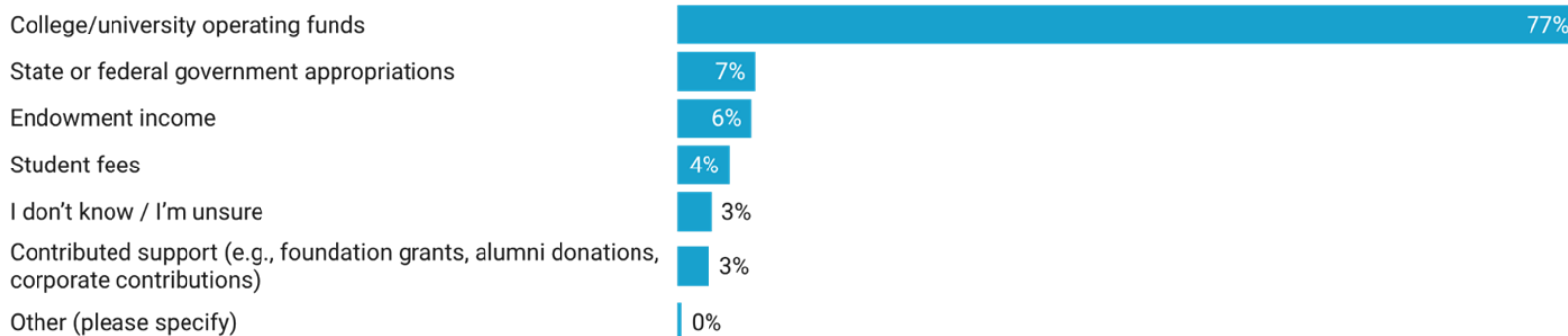
Percentage of respondents planning to **reduce employee positions/reduce FTE**, by cycle



Budgets

What percentage of your library's current operating budget is derived from the following sources?

Average amount of operating budget derived per source



↑ 32%

Expect their operating budget to **increase**

↓ 32%

Expect their operating budget to **decrease**

= 36%

Expect their operating budget to remain **stable**

Budgets

In response to anticipated budget decreases, has your library considered or implemented any of the following changes?

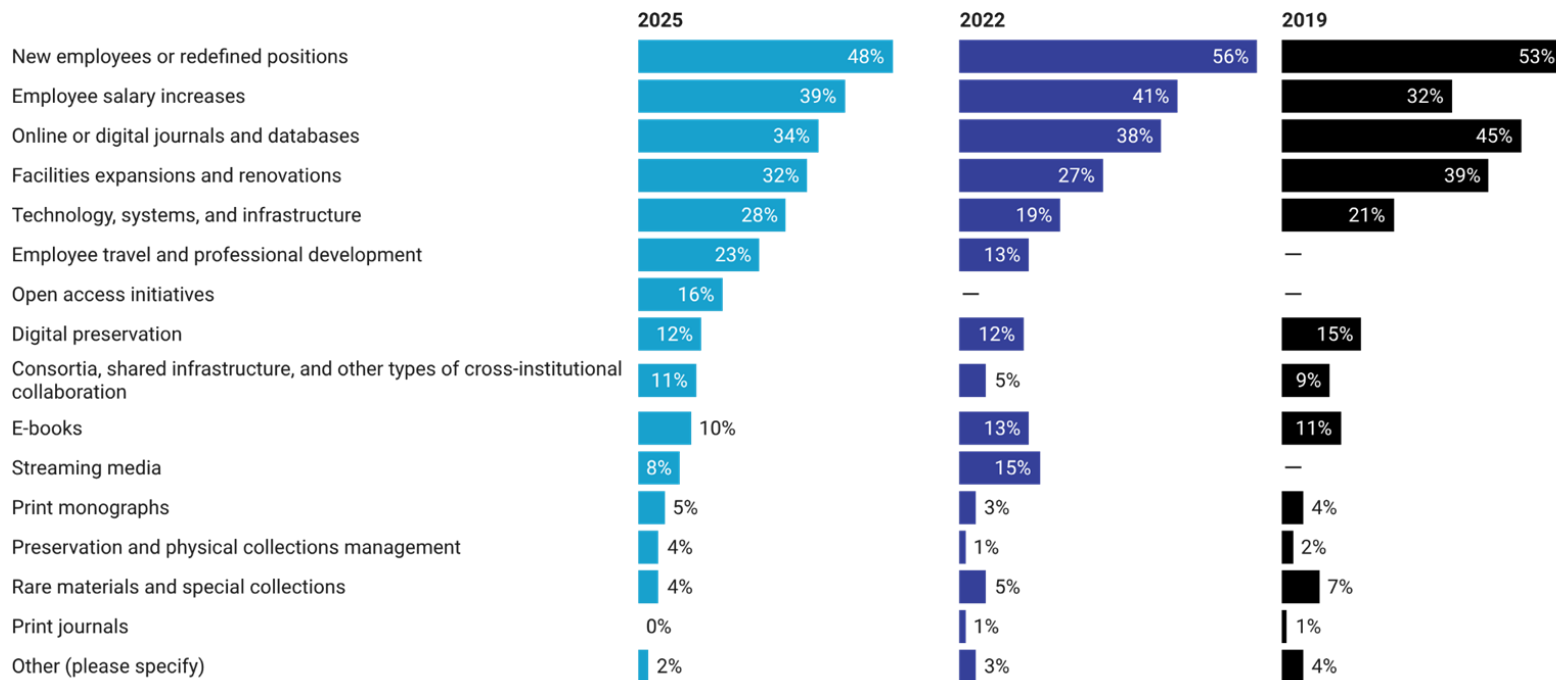
Percentage of respondents selecting the given change (shown only to respondents who anticipate a budget decrease within the five years)



Budgets

If you received a 10% **increase** in your library's budget next year, in which of the following areas would you **invest**? [Select up to three areas]

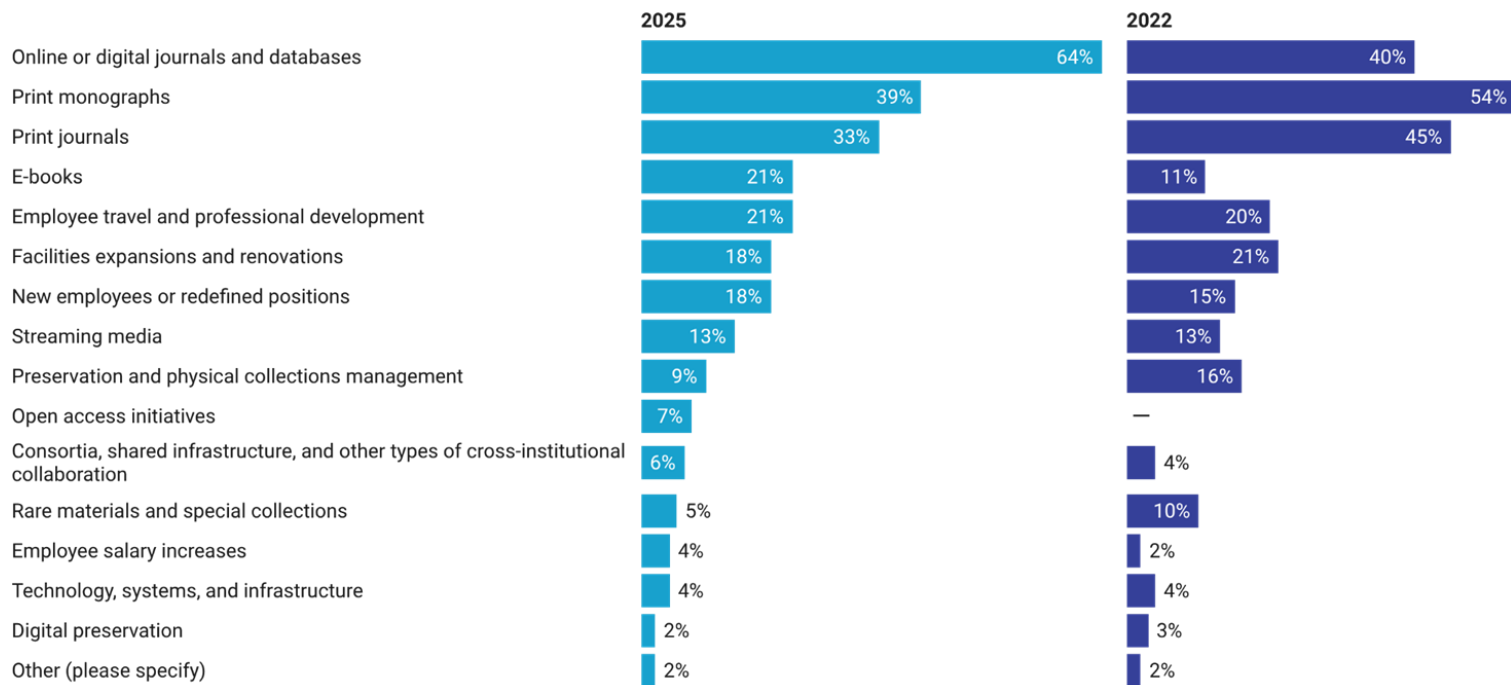
Percentage of respondents selecting the given area of investment, by cycle



Budgets

If you received a 10% **reduction** in your library's budget next year, in which of the following areas would you **make reductions**? [Select up to three areas]

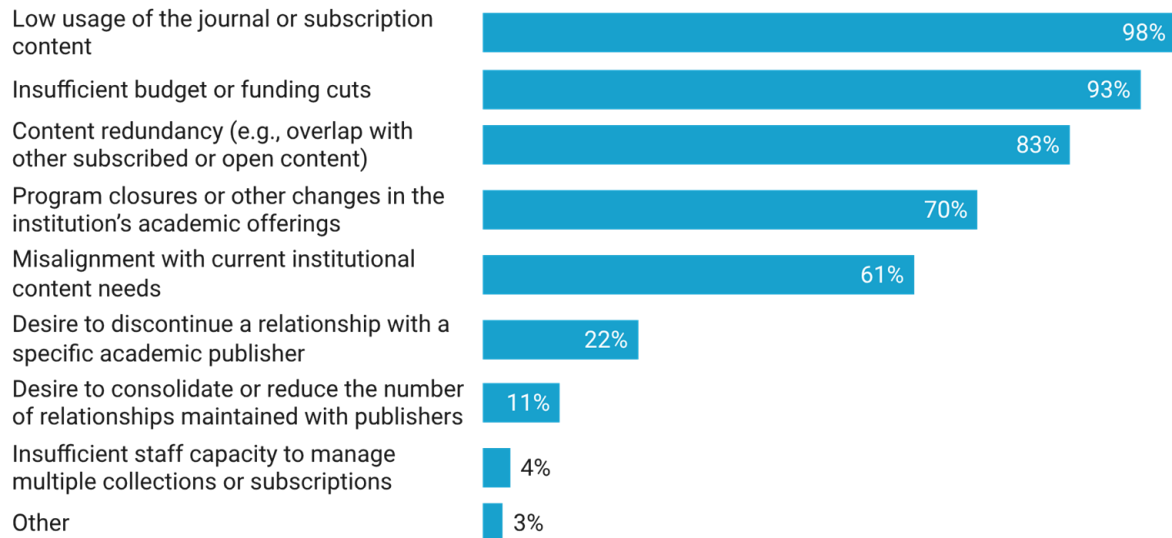
Percentage of respondents selecting the given area of reduction, by cycle



Budgetary Impact on Collections: Findings From *Perspectives on Academic Publishers*

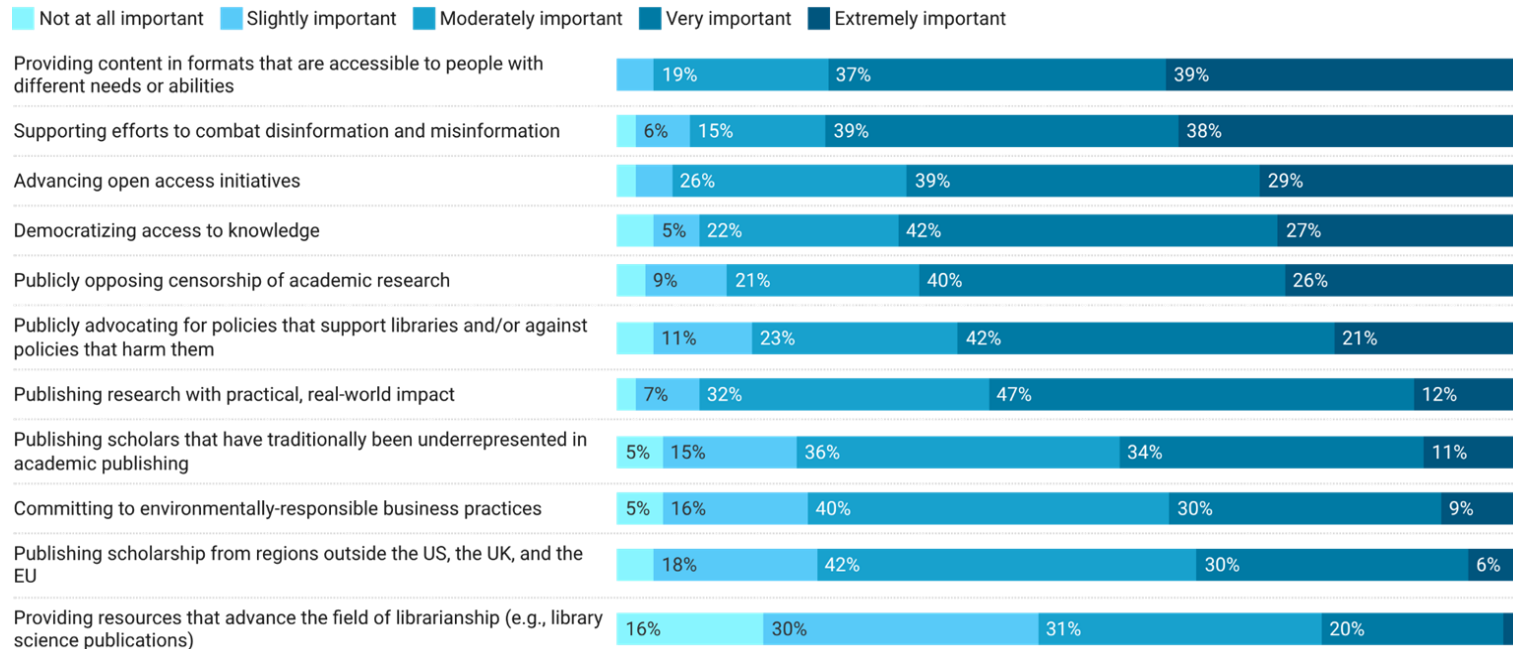
A complementary study conducted by Ithaka S+R in 2025 found that **budget constraints** were a major driver of discontinuation decisions.

Which of the following reasons, if any, influence your library's decision to discontinue journal or subscription content? [Select all that apply]



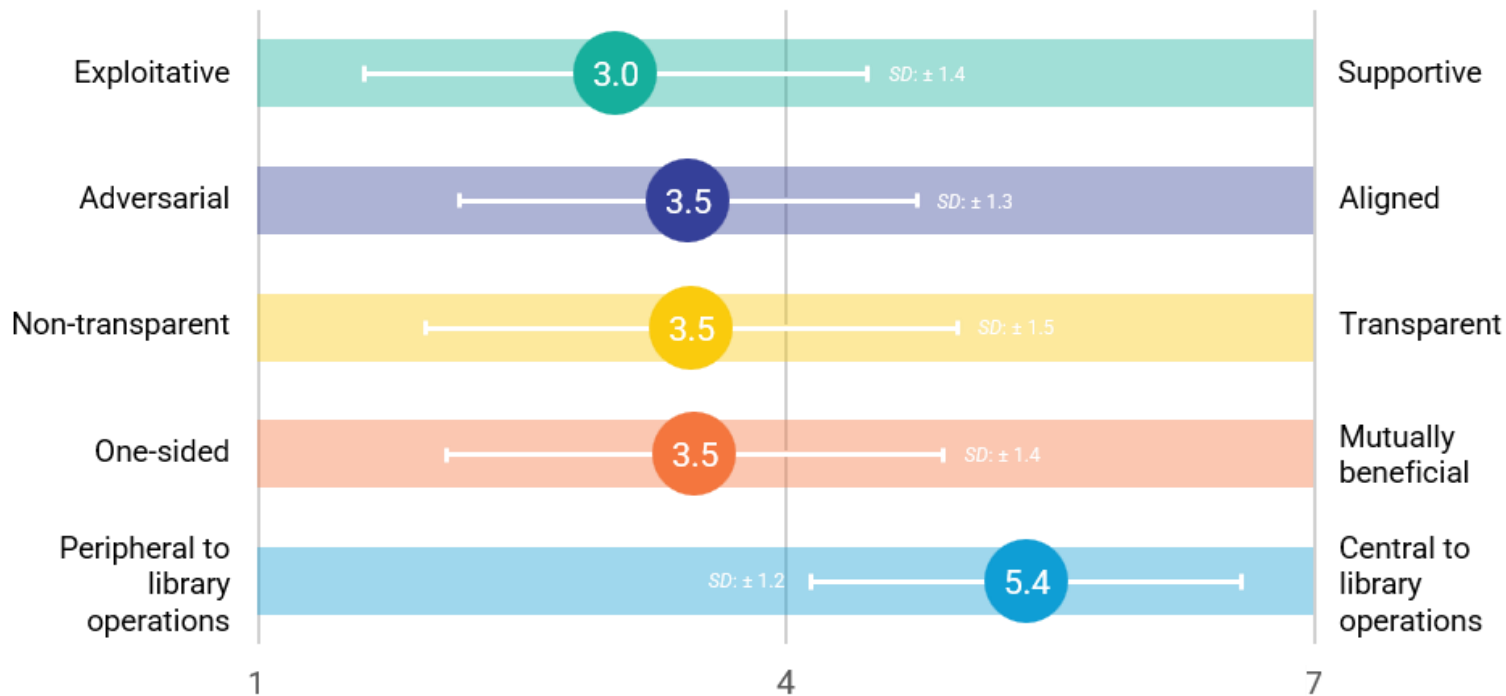
Values Impact on Collections: Findings From *Perspectives on Academic Publishers*

When evaluating whether to begin or renew a contract with an academic publisher, how important is it to you that the publisher demonstrates each value listed below?



Perceptions of Publishers: Findings From *Perspectives on Academic Publishers*

Please rate your perception of academic publishers overall for each pair of descriptions below.

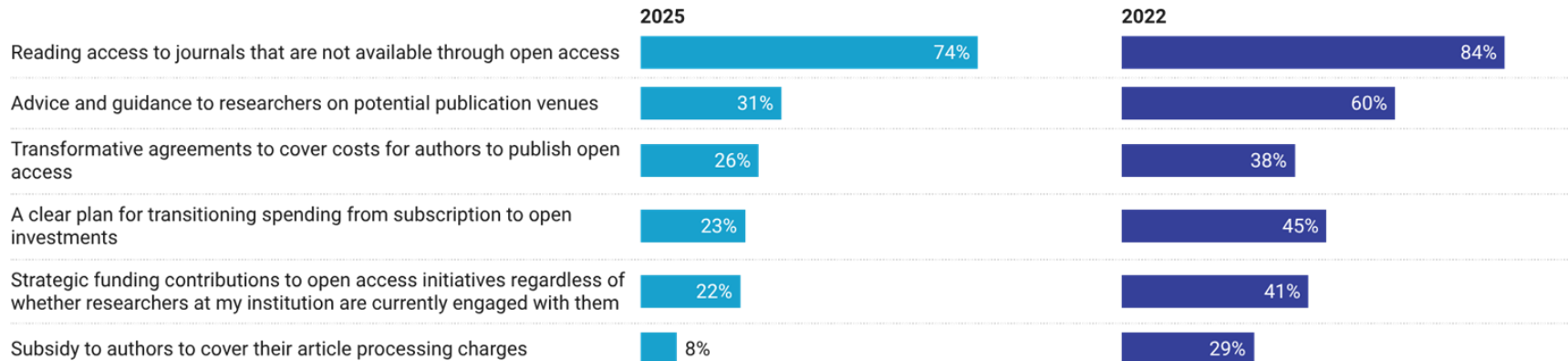


Collections

Investment in open access initiatives has **declined**.

How important is it to you that your library provides each of the following?

*Percentage of respondents answering **very – extremely important**, by cycle*

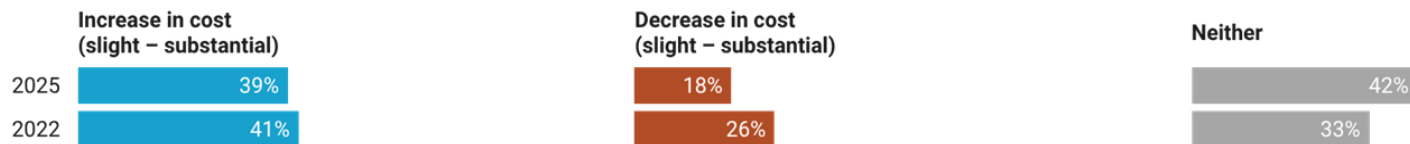


Collections

Compared to the previous survey cycle, **fewer leaders believe that open access will reduce institutional spending** on scholarly communication.

When thinking about forecasting the long-term impact of open access on what your institution pays for scholarly communication, how do you expect that an increasingly open access future will impact your institution?

Percentage of respondents answering ____

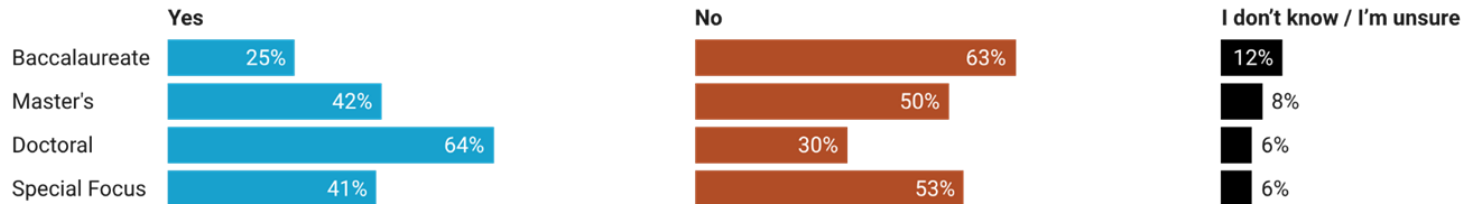


Collections

E-preferred acquisition models are most common at **doctoral institutions**.

Has your library adopted/implemented an e-preferred acquisitions model?

Percentage of respondents answering ____, by Carnegie Classification



Collections

E-book acquisition is nearly universal, with 96% of libraries reporting that they currently acquire e-books. Among these libraries, **traditional item-by-item selection** remains the dominant acquisition method.

How important is it to you that your library engages in each of the following methods for acquiring e-books?

*Percentage of respondents answering **very – extremely important** (shown only to respondents whose libraries currently acquire e-books)*

Traditional item-level selection, in which a library selects books at the title level or uses tools that recommend titles. 42%

Demand-driven acquisition (DDA), in which users browse a catalog of titles and user activities trigger the purchase of individual titles. 36%

Evidence-based acquisition (EBA), in which a library pre-commits funds for purchase and develops business intelligence to determine how best to allocate the resources for permanent purchases. 31%

Emerging “flip to open” initiatives, which fund the transition of titles from a paid access to open access model. 17%

Complete collections, in which a library purchases the complete output of a publisher or a bundled cross-publisher collection by subject area. 12%

Key Takeaways

- While leaders feel confident in their ability to articulate the library's value, they are less certain that their institutions recognize this impact
- Most say their library's core values are unchanged from three years ago, though many report changes in the strategies used to advance them
- Growing expectations around AI support are adding pressure to library staff and services, though the scale and nature of these demands vary
 - Many have not yet translated anticipated AI impact into coordinated action
- Constrained budgets are already affecting library services and collections

Future Work as Suggested by Findings

- Ithaka S+R is expanding work to support libraries in AI literacy and effective, ethical AI use, including cohort projects to address:
 - *AI in Action: Advancing Library Operations*
 - *AI Literacy: Community Colleges and Small Institutions*
 - *AI Ready Assessment Assignments*
 - *Developing a Portrait of an AI-Ready Library School Graduate*
- We are also continuing work on affordability and access, for example:
 - *Academic Libraries as Leaders in Open Education and Textbook Affordability*