

Initial 2026 Employee Assembly Priority Poll Report

June 12, 2026

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Introduction

The Employee Assembly Priority Poll Committee was established initially as an ad-hoc committee responsible for the design and administration of a survey intended to inform and strengthen the work of the Employee Assembly by ensuring that survey questions are meaningfully aligned with the priorities of the Assembly's standing committees. This report reflects the committee's ongoing effort to identify trends, concerns, and recurring themes across Cornell's staff community, translate survey findings into clear and actionable areas of focus, and maintain accountability in how the Employee Assembly responds to the results. While the committee's role is not to resolve every issue identified, it is committed to reporting the information gathered, the actions pursued, and the outcomes achieved.

The 2026 Employee Assembly Priority Poll Committee was chaired by Carl Cornell and included Employee Assembly representatives Rose Howard, Kyle Karnuta, Deborah Surine, and Victoria Bell. The committee also included representatives from Cornell's Human Resources Office, Ruth Katz and Maria Wolff; the Department of Inclusion and Belonging, Erin Sember-Chase; and general staff representative Alison McCauley.

There have been Employee Assembly led polls in years past. Long term, the Employee Assembly is interested in codifying a repeating process, in partnership with Cornell Leadership, to enable the Poll to continue from year to year. This will allow more robust data collection and reporting, and allow the Employee Assembly to assess if their efforts are supporting their Charter, to 'ensure a direct focus for the continued involvement of exempt and non-exempt staff members in the governance of non-academic affairs and in the life of the University.'¹

The 2026 Employee Assembly Priority Poll was open to Cornell staff from April 2 through April 16, 2026. Due to an error in the Qualtrics close date, the poll's availability did not close when the system was slated to close. Since these entries were made by Cornell Staff interested in having their voices heard, the Chair of the Committee, Carl Cornell, decided to include these findings in our final report, with the last result entered on April 27, 2026.

When closed, the survey received a total of 727 responses. All survey questions were optional, and therefore, response totals may vary by question. This 'question optional' approach was adopted to encourage participation and ensure respondents felt comfortable engaging with the survey.

To maintain transparency, generative AI tools were used in this report. These tools were used to help process data, summarize findings, and provide brainstorming and editing help. After using these tools, the AI output data was thoroughly reviewed by humans before its inclusion in this report.

¹ Charter Cornell University Employee Assembly, as amended on September 21, 2020

A full listing of the questions (including the header and prompts in the Qualtrics) used in this year's report are available in [Appendix A](#), available at the end of this document. A full listing of graphical data can be found in [Appendix B](#) of this document.

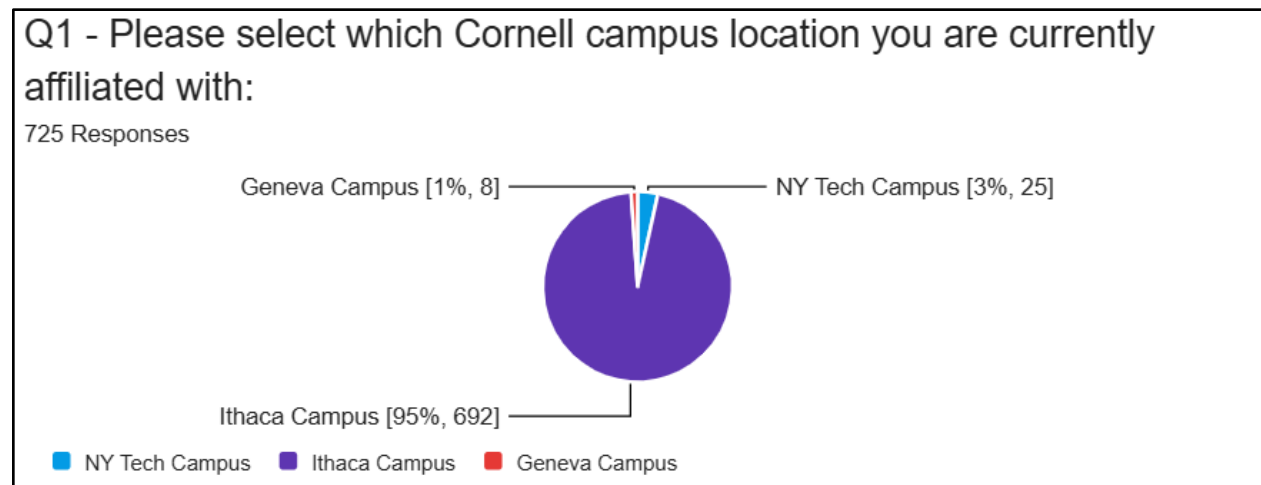
Lastly, all images included in this report are accompanied by alternative text to support accessibility and ensure a more inclusive experience for readers of all abilities.

Demographic Data

This year, the committee developed and included several demographic and workplace related questions to better understand the campus affiliations of respondents and current work arrangements, such as in-office or remote work modalities. The intent of these questions was to see if there were patterns of issues that were more prevalent in certain demographic groups.

Campus Location

Of the 725 respondents who answered the question, “Please select which Cornell campus location you are currently affiliated with” 95.45%, or 692 respondents, identified as affiliated with the Ithaca campus. Additional representation included respondents affiliated with Cornell’s New York Tech campus 3.45%, or 25 respondents and the Geneva campus 1.1%, or 8 respondents.



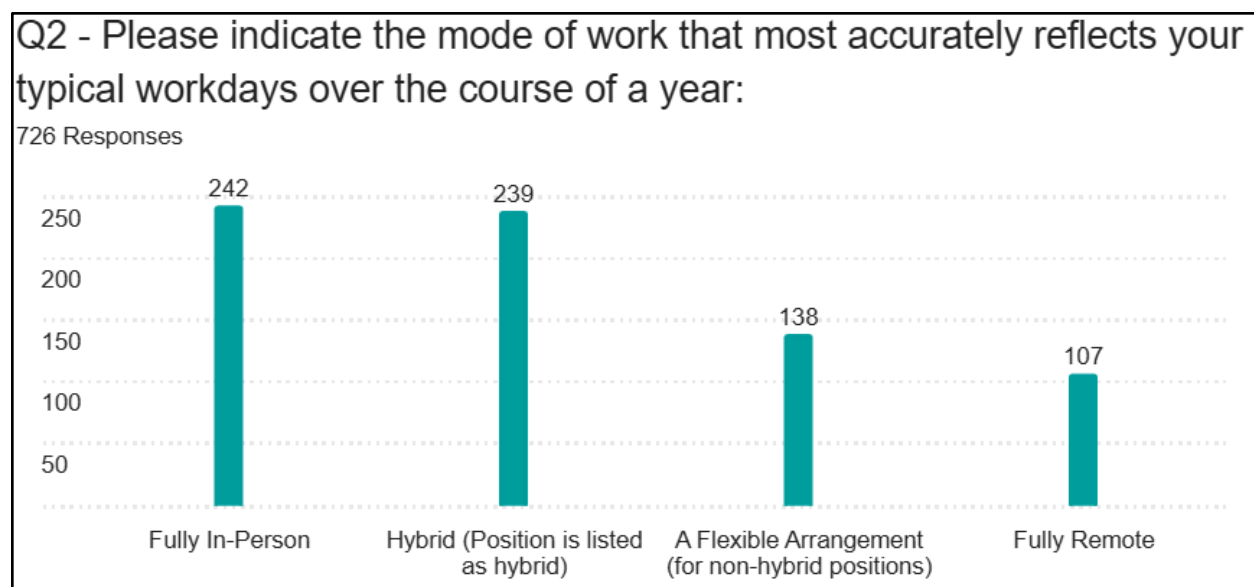
The committee notes that the “NY Tech Campus” response option may not have fully captured the broader population of Cornell employees working in New York City outside of the Cornell Tech campus. As a result, some New York City–based staff may have selected alternative affiliation categories, including Ithaca or NY Tech Campus, which may affect the precision of these results. It is our intent to change this category’s title in future priority polls.

Responses to the question regarding typical work arrangements over the course of a year reflected a broad distribution across in-person, hybrid, flexible, and fully remote work models. The results suggest that Cornell staff experience a wide range of workplace arrangements, with

a substantial portion of respondents participating in some form of hybrid or flexible work structure.

Working Arrangements

In regards to working modality, the two largest individual response groups were employees working fully in-person (242 respondents) and staff working in hybrid designated positions (239 respondents) representing nearly equal portions of the respondent pool. An additional 138 respondents reported working under a flexible arrangement in positions not formally classified as hybrid, while 107 respondents indicated that they work fully remotely.



For the purposes of this report, the committee grouped hybrid positions, flexible work arrangements, and fully remote work arrangements into a broader category representing staff who have some form of remote arrangement. Using this framework, 484 respondents, or 66.6% of the respondents identified as working in a remote capacity, compared to 242 respondents (33.3%) who identified as working fully in-person.

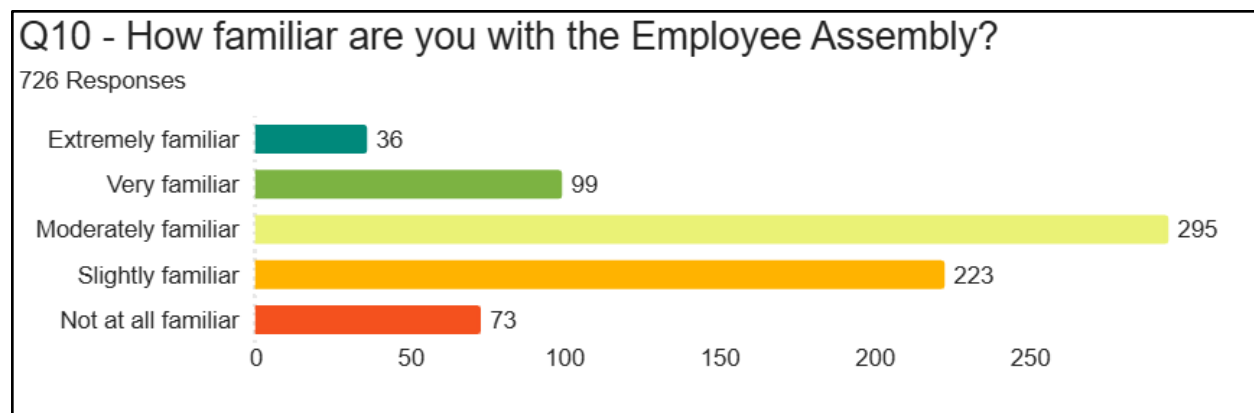
Overall, the results suggest that a significant majority of staff engage in some form of hybrid, flexible, or remote work arrangement, highlighting the importance of considering a wide range of workplace experiences and operational needs across Cornell's staff community.

Staff & EA Relations

The committee approved the addition of several supplemental survey questions intended to better understand the relationship between Cornell staff and the Employee Assembly. These questions were designed to assess respondents' familiarity with the Employee Assembly, as well as their level of comfort engaging with or reaching out to their elected representatives.

Staff Familiarity with the Employee Assembly

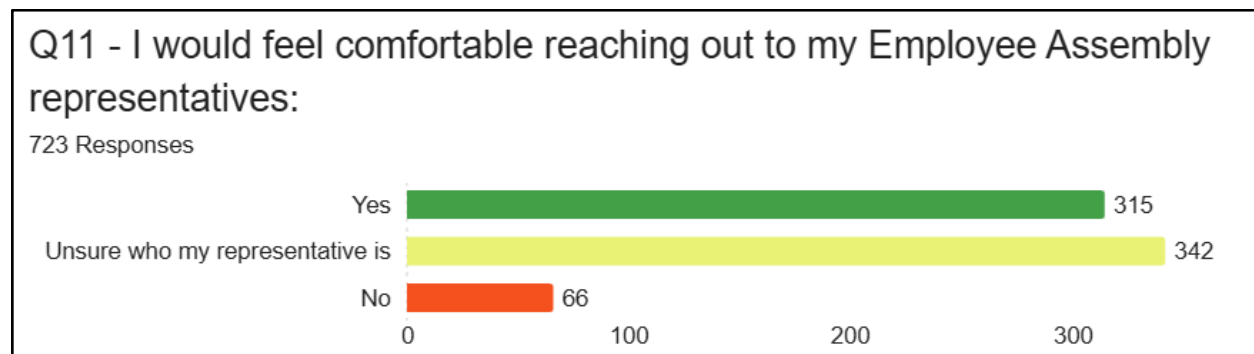
Of the 726 staff who answered the question, “How familiar are you with the Employee Assembly?”, 430 responses (59%) reported being extremely, very, or moderately familiar with the Employee Assembly. The remaining 295 respondents (41%) indicated that they were slightly familiar or not familiar at all.



These results indicate a moderate level of awareness regarding the Employee Assembly, with a slight majority of respondents demonstrating at least a working familiarity. However, a substantial portion of respondents (41%) report low to no familiarity. This is a good indicator that the Employee Assembly has opportunities to strengthen communication, increase engagement with the broader employee population, and strengthen its role within the staff population.

Comfort Engaging with Employee Assembly Representatives

Out of the 723 respondents who answered the question, “Do you feel comfortable reaching out to your Employee Assembly representative?” 315 respondents (43.5%) indicated that they would feel comfortable reaching out to their representatives, but 408 respondents (56.5%) indicated that they would not feel comfortable doing so or that they were unsure who their representative was.



This data points to a potential gap in visibility, accessibility, and approachability of Employee Assembly representatives. There is opportunity here for the Employee Assembly to

communicate representative assignments and improve avenues for connection and communications in an effort to ensure constituents know who to contact for input and support.

Communication Preferences

Aligning with previous year's surveys, we asked questions regarding staff preferred contact methods, and professional social media use.

The respondents were able to select multiple methods through which they would prefer the Employee assembly to communicate to them. An overwhelming 695 respondents chose the "E-mail/Newsletter".

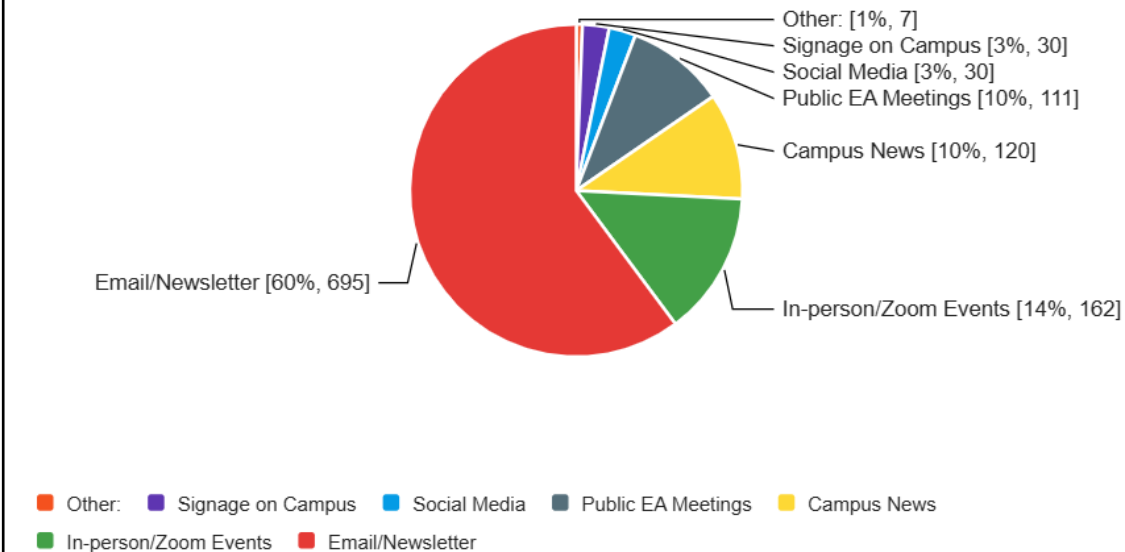
An overwhelming majority of respondents (84%) indicated a preference for receiving updates through communication channels that the Employee Assembly already utilizes, including email/newsletters, Employee Assembly meetings, and in-person or Zoom events.

Responses from staff who selected "Other" Include: Updates in e-mail directly from Employee Assembly Representatives, posting in public MS Teams Channels, representatives communicating with CNG, unit meetings, or PD Training, and in meetings hosted by each unit's representatives.

Employees who selected the category "social media" as a preferred communication method were presented with a follow-up question asking which platforms they use in a professional capacity. Staff were able to select more than one option for this question as well. Among the 29 employees who responded to this inquiry, LinkedIn was the most frequently selected platform with 19 responses, followed by Instagram with 16 responses and Facebook with 13 responses.

Q4 - How would you prefer to receive updates from the Employee Assembly? Select All:

716 Responses



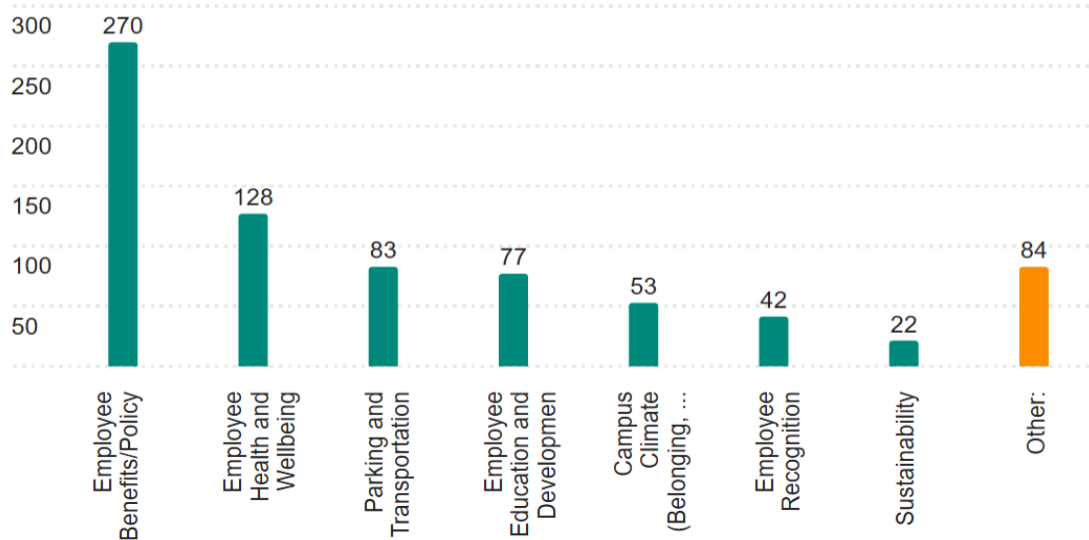
Ultimately, respondents expressed interest in receiving more information through campus news outlets, and respondents also identified social media and campus signage as strong potential avenues for increasing visibility and disseminating information more widely. It would be wise for the Employee Assembly's Communications Committee to explore these methods to further expand its communication outreach.

Staff Selection for Employee Assembly Top Priorities

Employees were asked to select the single category they believed should serve as the Employee Assembly's top priority over the next year. A full breakdown of these results by work modality and campus location can be found in [Appendix B](#): "Numerical Results."

Q3 - What do you think should be the Employee Assembly's top priority this upcoming year? - Selected Choice

759 Responses



Across all employee groups, regardless of campus location or work modality, “Benefits and Policy” was overwhelmingly identified as the highest priority area. This category received twice as many selections as the next highest-ranked category across most groups*, demonstrating a strong and consistent interest in issues related to employee benefits and institutional policy.

**NYTech respondents rated Benefits and Policy only 1.5 times as important as the second category.*

Across most demographic groups, the next highest priority areas included a combination of Health and Wellbeing, Parking and Transportation, and Employee Education and Development, excluding responses categorized as “Other.” The Geneva campus was a notable exception; although the sample size was limited to eight responses, there was a tie for the second-highest priority area between Employee Education and Campus Climate.

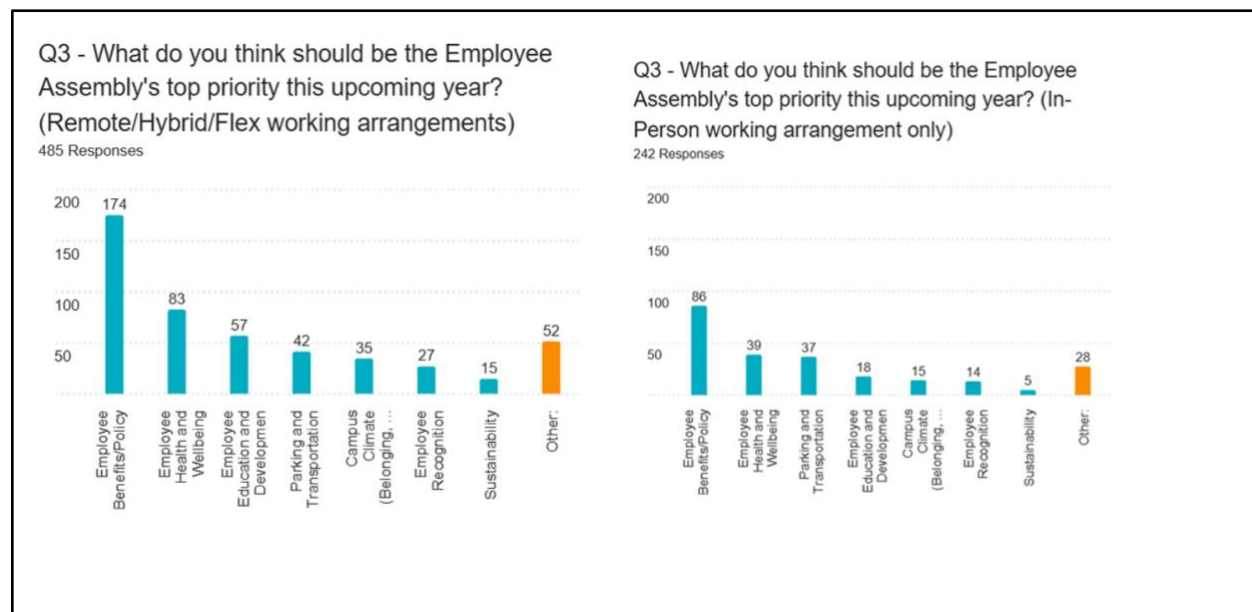
Responses recorded under the “Other” category are contained within the “Staff Short Answer Findings” heading included in this report.

Insights about Parking

Employees located on the Ithaca campus represented the majority of respondents who identified Parking and Transportation as a priority area, accounting for 82 of the 83 responses.

Employees working in-person identified Parking and Transportation as a significantly higher priority concern (ranked 3rd overall, representing 15% of responses) when compared with

employees working in remote arrangements (ranked 4th overall, representing 8.6% of responses).



For in-person employees, factors such as parking availability, parking costs, transit accessibility, commute times, and the overall reliability of campus transportation systems can have a direct impact on daily workplace experience. This contrast between modalities suggests that transportation related concerns are closely tied to on-site work and may warrant continued attention as part of broader employee support and workplace accessibility efforts.

Staff Short Answer Findings

The top priority question was sufficient for getting a quick overview of what employees found important, but the substance of this survey was found in the follow up short answer section that asked for staff to “share your perspective on why you chose the topic you did.”

Analysis of 486 staff short answer responses revealed a workforce experiencing significant stress, financial pressure, and declining institutional trust. The responses indicate this is not a typical adjustment period, rather it paints the institution in the midst of a moral crisis requiring substantive action.

Individual responses could have been categorized under multiple themes; therefore, percentages represent the proportion of the total responses associated with each theme, rather than mutually exclusive counts:

Theme	Responses	Percent of respondents
Morale Crisis	203	41.77%
Financial Stress	177	36.42%
Resilient Cornell Impacts	154	31.69%
Workplace Flexibilities and Inequalities	130	26.75%
Workplace Culture and Retention	92	18.93%

Below is a list of the key themes from above, and the criteria that our committee used to place a comment into each of these subjects.

Morale Crisis (203 Responses)

- Employees reporting lowest morale they have ever seen
- Staff feel viewed as expendable "headcount" and/or treated as "less than" rather than as valued contributors
- Reports of burnout and stress-related and mental health impacts
- Lack of recognition of workload, or increased workload
- Staff are seeking advocacy in a variety of areas (many responses were asking EA to advocate in some specific way)

Financial Stress (177 Responses)

- Salary increases not keeping pace with inflation
- Healthcare premium increases causing net pay reductions
- Parking costs are viewed as an employment tax
- Many staff are struggling to afford to live in Ithaca area

Resilient Cornell Impacts (154 Responses)

- Pervasive job insecurity and layoff anxiety
- Increased workloads despite leadership claims of "not doing more with less"
- Poor communication and lack of transparency about changes
- Concerns about AI in the Workplace
- Staff want structural workload solutions, not just wellness programs

Workplace Flexibilities and Inequalities (130 Responses)

- Faculty-Administration-Staff perceived disparity in treatment and benefits
- Limited personal development and advancement opportunities
- Inconsistent policies across units

- Long-term employees earning less than new employees or paused at minimum within their pay bands
- Lack of connection and solutions due to Ticketing systems and Chatbots

Workplace Culture and Retention (92 Responses)

- There is concern around retention of staff due to: impact of Resilient Cornell, perceived inequities, poor management, no opportunities for growth or higher compensation, etc
- Lack of appreciation, respect and acknowledgement of employees' wellbeing, value, and efforts
- Staff are craving meaningful connection and networking opportunities:
- Concerns regarding Campus Climate and Inclusive Culture

Dissemination of Report

In addition to making this report broadly available to all staff, efforts will also be made to share its findings with targeted campus teams and stakeholder communities, including: The President and the Vice President & Chief Human Resources Officer, Human Resources teams including both Wellness and Policy teammates, and Cornell's Department of Inclusion and Belonging. The aforementioned list is not exhaustive of all offices that might receive a copy of this report, but rather is a starting point leading to cross-campus collaboration.

Further work planned for the Report

In our initial findings, the committee did not have the time to fully process the extensive 'other' short answer questions outside of the numerical data above. We are working on processing that data, and plan to share it with the incoming Employee Assembly Executive board and other campus teams summer 2026.

Acknowledgements

The Chair of the Committee would like to recognize and express sincere appreciation for the extensive time, effort, and collaboration contributed by committee members throughout this process. Efforts include brainstorming and developing ideas, reviewing the survey prior to distribution, assisting with data processing following the survey's closure, and carefully reviewing both the report and accompanying data at each stage of development. Most importantly, the committee remained consistently focused on ensuring that staff constituents were treated with respect throughout the process by designing the survey to be as comfortable, thoughtful, and anonymous as possible.

Appendix A: Priority Poll Questionnaire

Below is a copy of the Qualtrics sent out, including the splash header, and all questions, including those that only appeared under certain circumstances, such as selecting 'other':

The Employee Assembly (EA) is a group of 35 staff members representing the Ithaca, Geneva, and Cornell Tech campuses. The EA works with university leadership to advocate for staff interests, strengthen the staff experience, and ensure staff perspectives are included in university discussions and decision-making.

This anonymous survey is intended to help the EA better understand staff concerns and priorities. It should take 5–15 minutes to complete, and your feedback will directly inform the Assembly's work. EA committees will review the results to identify key themes, elevate issues through appropriate university channels, and translate findings into actionable priorities. Progress, challenges, and outcomes will be shared in a report at the end of the business year to ensure transparency and accountability.

More information on each of the EA committees and the scope of their work can be found at: <https://assembly.cornell.edu/shared-governance/employee-assembly/committees>

Thank you for sharing your perspective and helping shape the staff experience at Cornell.

Q1

Please select which Cornell campus location you are currently affiliated with:

- ☐ Geneva Campus
- ☐ Ithaca Campus
- ☐ NY Tech Campus

Q2

Please indicate the mode of work that most accurately reflects your typical workdays over the course of a year:

- ☐ Fully In-Person
- ☐ A Flexible Arrangement (for non-hybrid positions)
- ☐ Hybrid (Position is listed as hybrid)
- ☐ Fully Remote

Q3

What do you think should be the Employee Assembly's top priority this upcoming year?

- ☐ Parking and Transportation
- ☐ Employee Health and Wellbeing
- ☐ Employee Benefits/Policy
- ☐ Employee Education and Professional Development
- ☐ Campus Climate (Belonging, Inclusion, Respect)
- ☐ Employee Recognition
- ☐ Sustainability
- ☐ Other:

Q3a

Please share your perspective on why you chose the topic you did (optional).

Disclosing an incident on this survey does not constitute formally reporting the incident to Cornell and will not result in any action, disciplinary or otherwise. Should you have issues, concerns, or complaints that you would like to report to the University (and for which you would like the University to take action) please refer to <https://compliance.cornell.edu/concern-reporting-cornell>

Q10

How familiar are you with the Employee Assembly?

- ☐ Extremely familiar
- ☐ Very familiar
- ☐ Moderately familiar
- ☐ Slightly familiar
- ☐ Not at all familiar

Q11

I would feel comfortable reaching out to my Employee Assembly representatives:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure who my representative is

Q12

 Display this question

If I would feel comfortable reaching out to my Employee Assembly representatives: Unsure who my representative is Is Selected

You can find more information on your EA representatives are at: <https://assembly.cornell.edu/shared-governance/employee-assembly/members>

Please feel free to click the link above, as it will open in a new window. When you are ready, please continue the survey.

Q4

How would you prefer to receive updates from the Employee Assembly? Please check all that apply:

- ☐ Email/Newsletter
- ☐ Signage on Campus
- ☐ Social Media
- ☐ In-person/Zoom Events
- ☐ Campus News
- ☐ Public EA Meetings
- ☐ Other:

Q4a



Display this question

If How would you prefer to receive updates from the Employee Assembly? Please check all that apply: Social Media Is Selected

Which social media applications do you use for work or professional purposes? Please check all that apply:

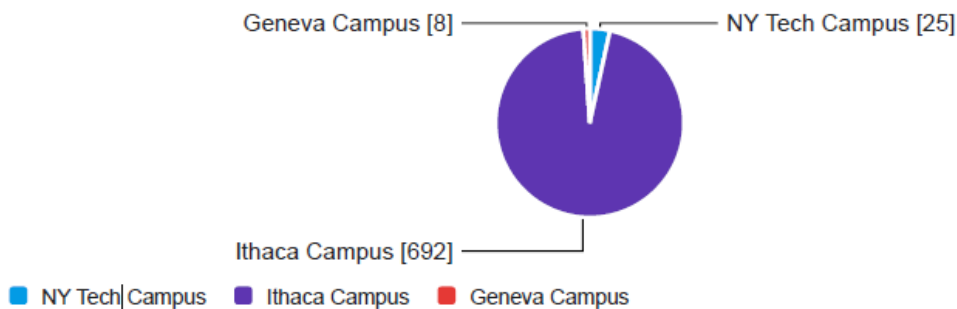
- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ LinkedIn
- ☐ X (formerly known as Twitter)
- ☐ Yammer
- ☐ Other:

Appendix B: Numerical Data

Below is a copy of the results from each question in the form of a chart.
Notes before reading these responses:
All questions were optional, as a result each question might not have the full number of responders. This was a purposeful decision to make sure that people were comfortable taking the survey.
Additionally, "NY Tech Campus" does not sufficiently encapsulate other NYC located Cornell Professionals - These other professionals might be mixed into the Ithaca campus results.

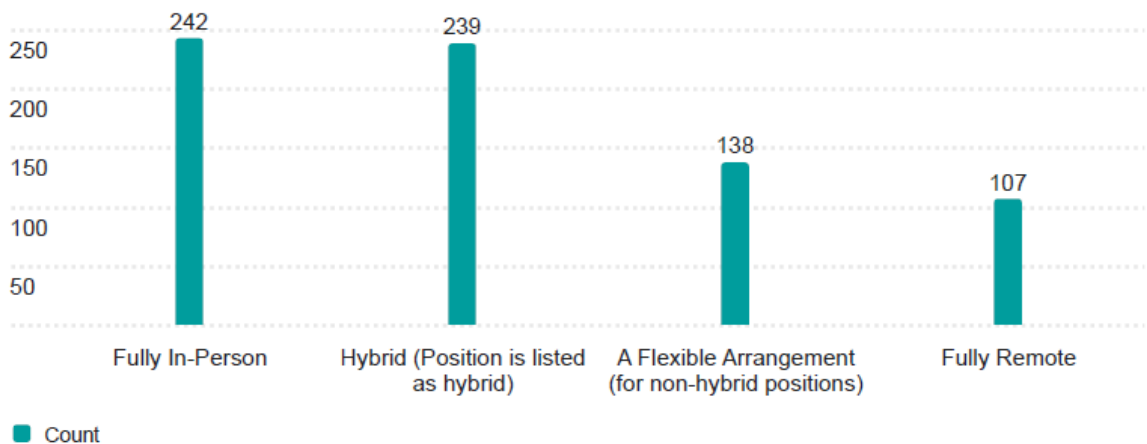
Q1 - Please select which Cornell campus location you are currently affiliated with:

725 Responses



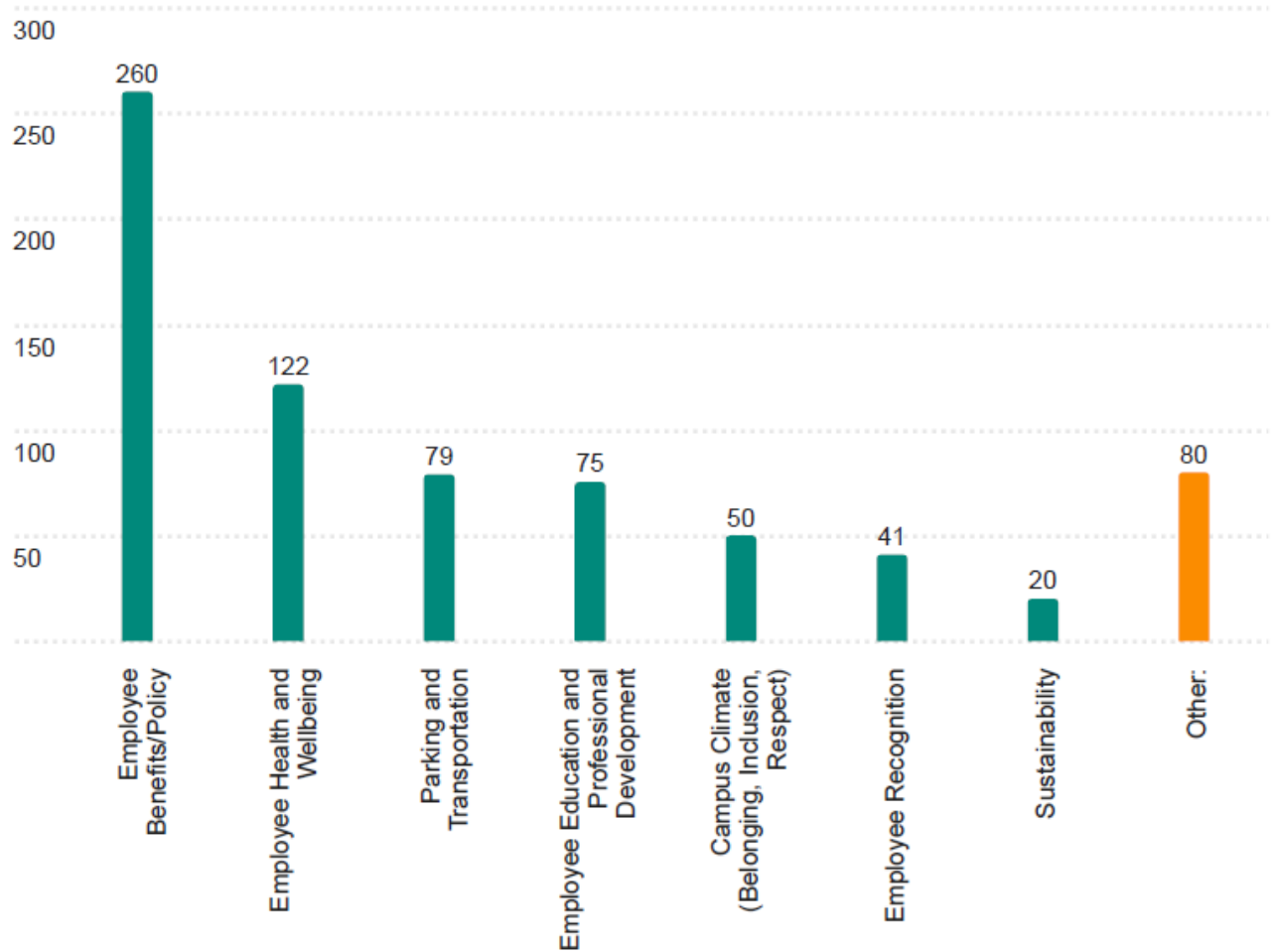
Q2 - Please indicate the mode of work that most accurately reflects your typical workdays over the course of a year:

726 Responses



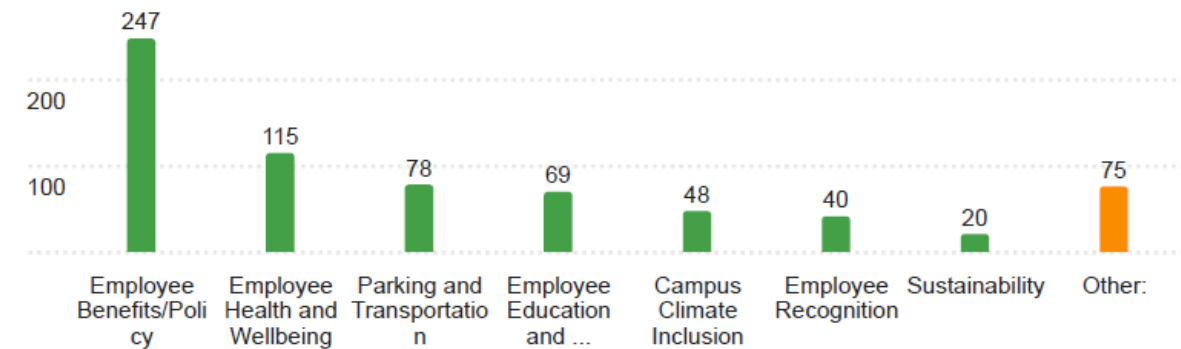
Q3 - What do you think should be the Employee Assembly's top priority this upcoming year? - Selected Choice

727 Responses



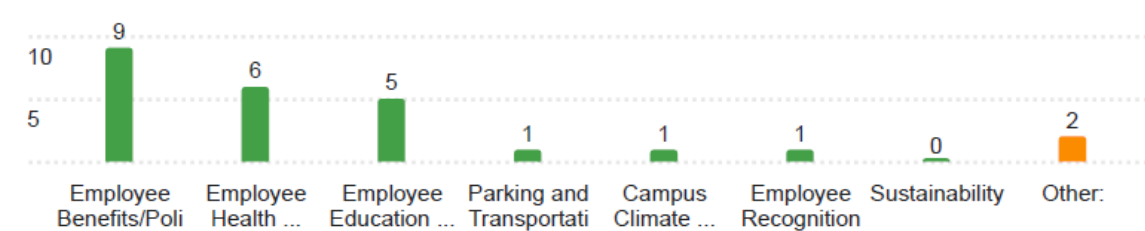
Q3 - What do you think should be the Employee Assembly's top priority this upcoming year? (Ithaca Campus)

692 Responses



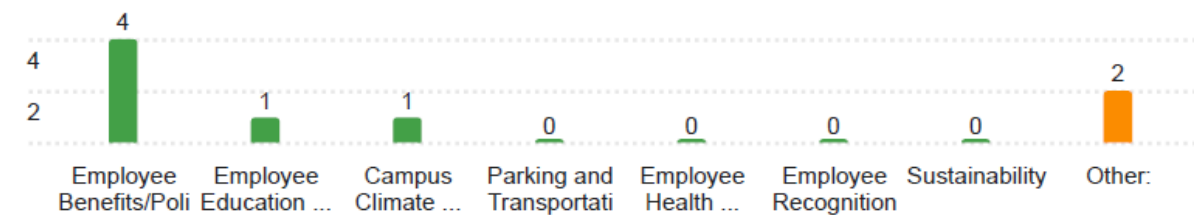
Q3 - What do you think should be the Employee Assembly's top priority this upcoming year? (NYC Campus)

25 Responses



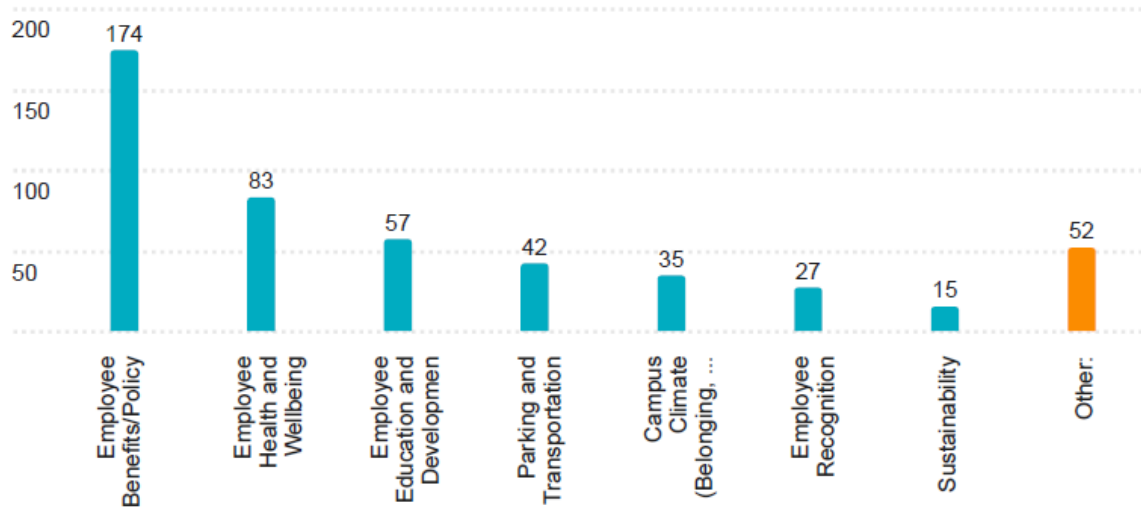
Q3 - What do you think should be the Employee Assembly's top priority this upcoming year? (Geneva Campus)

8 Responses



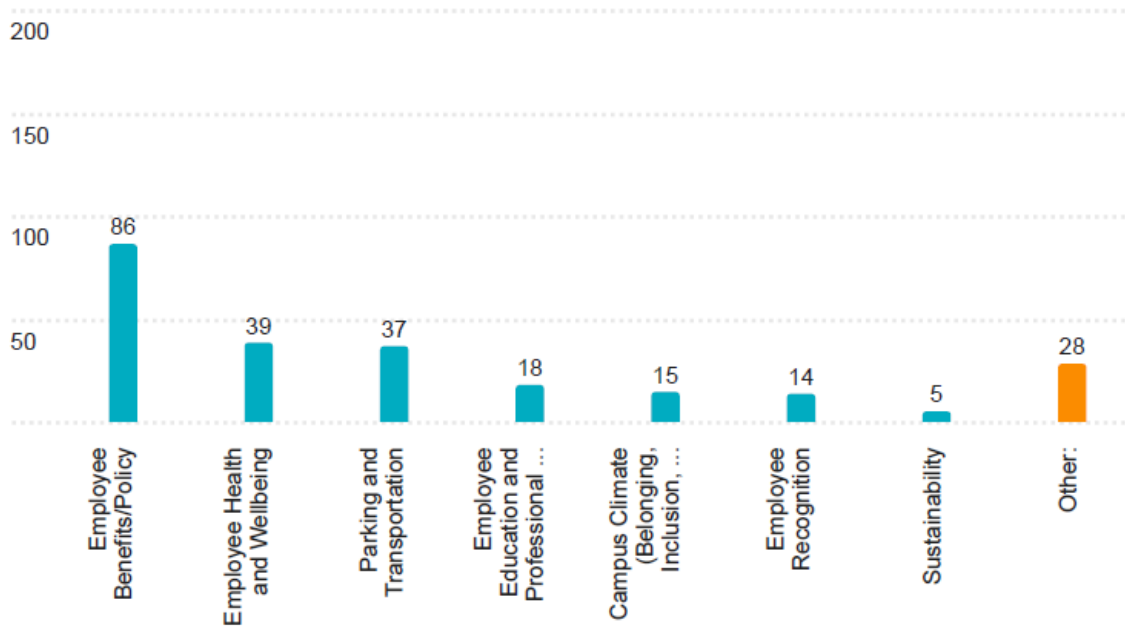
Q3 - What do you think should be the Employee Assembly's top priority this upcoming year? (Remote/Hybrid/Flex working arrangements)

485 Responses



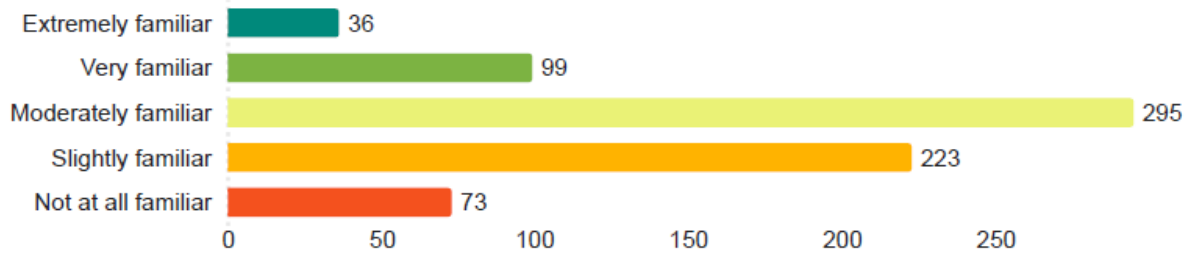
Q3 - What do you think should be the Employee Assembly's top priority this upcoming year? (In-Person working arrangement only)

242 Responses



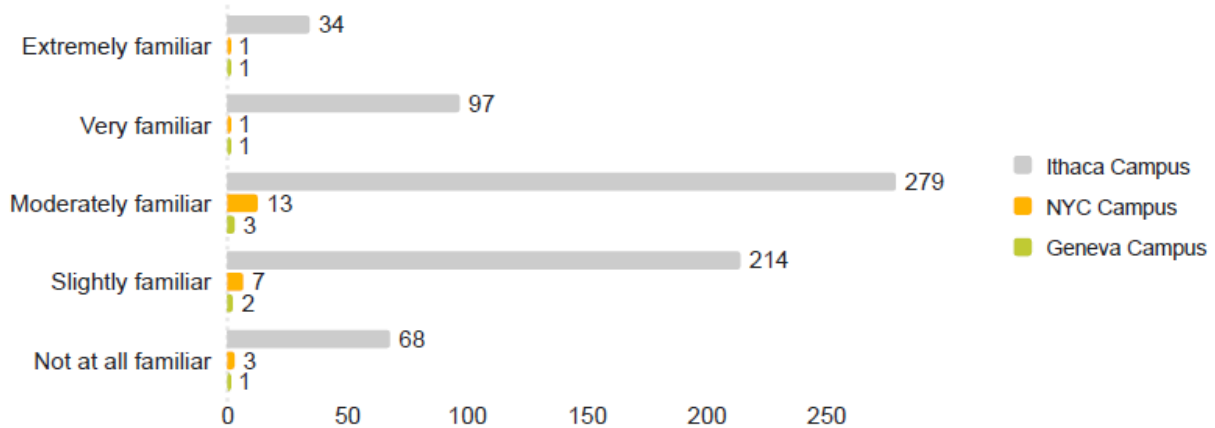
Q10 - How familiar are you with the Employee Assembly?

726 Responses



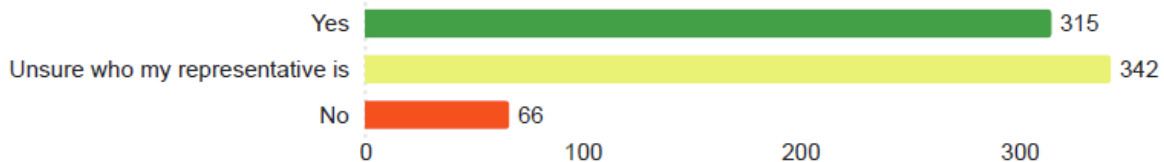
Q10 - How familiar are you with the Employee Assembly? - Breakdown by campus:

726 Responses



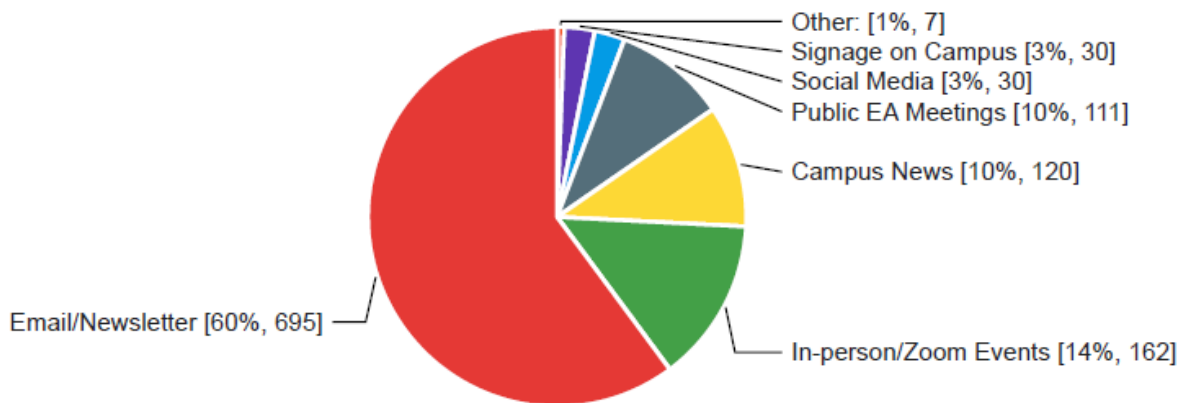
Q11 - I would feel comfortable reaching out to my Employee Assembly representatives:

723 Responses



Q4 - How would you prefer to receive updates from the Employee Assembly? Select All:

716 Responses



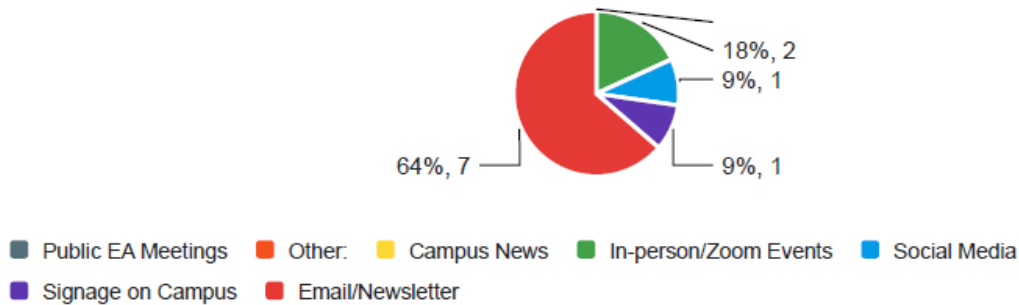
Other: Signage on Campus Social Media Public EA Meetings Campus News
In-person/Zoom Events Email/Newsletter

Q4_ "How would you prefer to receive updates from the Employee Assembly?"

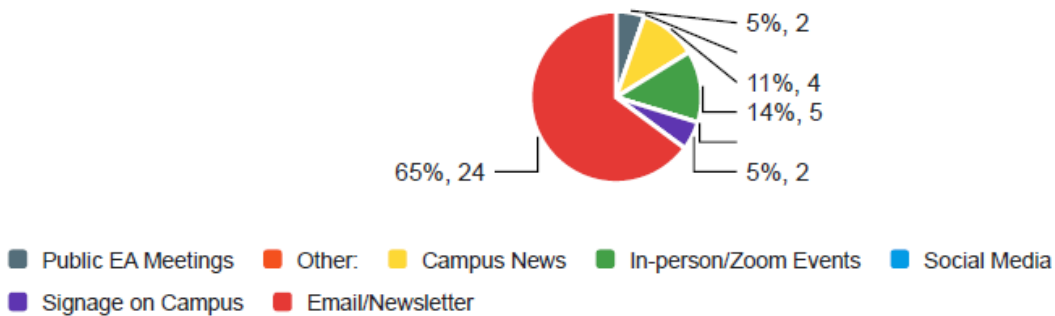
Other Text Responses:

- Updates from my EA representative - my rep has never reached out
- The Tech Rep should post announcements in the Cornell TSP MS teams team, in a specific channel.
- EA Reps providing information in related meetings (CNG, Unit Meetings, PD Trainings, etc.)
- Zoom events
- Public Teams Channel to get updates and post questions
- Meetings hosted by each units representatives

Q4 - How would you prefer to receive updates from the Employee Assembly? Please check all that apply: - Geneva Campus

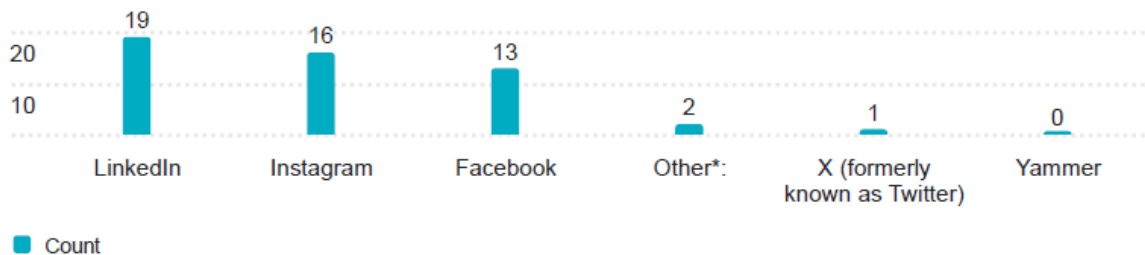


Q4 - How would you prefer to receive updates from the Employee Assembly? Please check all that apply: - NY Tech Campus



Q4a - Which social media applications do you use for work or professional purposes? Select all

29 Responses



*Both of the "Other" responses listed MS Teams as their answer.