UNITE LA
Education Innovation Through Collaboration

Research & Evaluation Unit

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Employment of Systems-Involved Angelenos:

Challenges, Aspirations and Tech Sector Potential

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Survey Context

In early 2022, UNITE-LA led an informational survey, Employment Issues for Angelenos, for those who have a previous record of arrest or conviction. This data collection effort discerns employment histories, challenges and aspirations of this population—particularly for tech careers—and includes data on individual demographics.

The survey was developed by UNITE-LA in partnership with the L.A. County Justice Care and Opportunities Department (JCOD), formerly the Office of Diversion and Reentry, the Los Angeles Regional Reentry Partnership (LAARP) and SECTOR. All partners disseminated the survey via email and digital flyer to L.A. community-based organizations (CBOs), and CBOs disseminated it to their consituents. UNITE-LA also distributed it to individuals associated with our workforce programming.
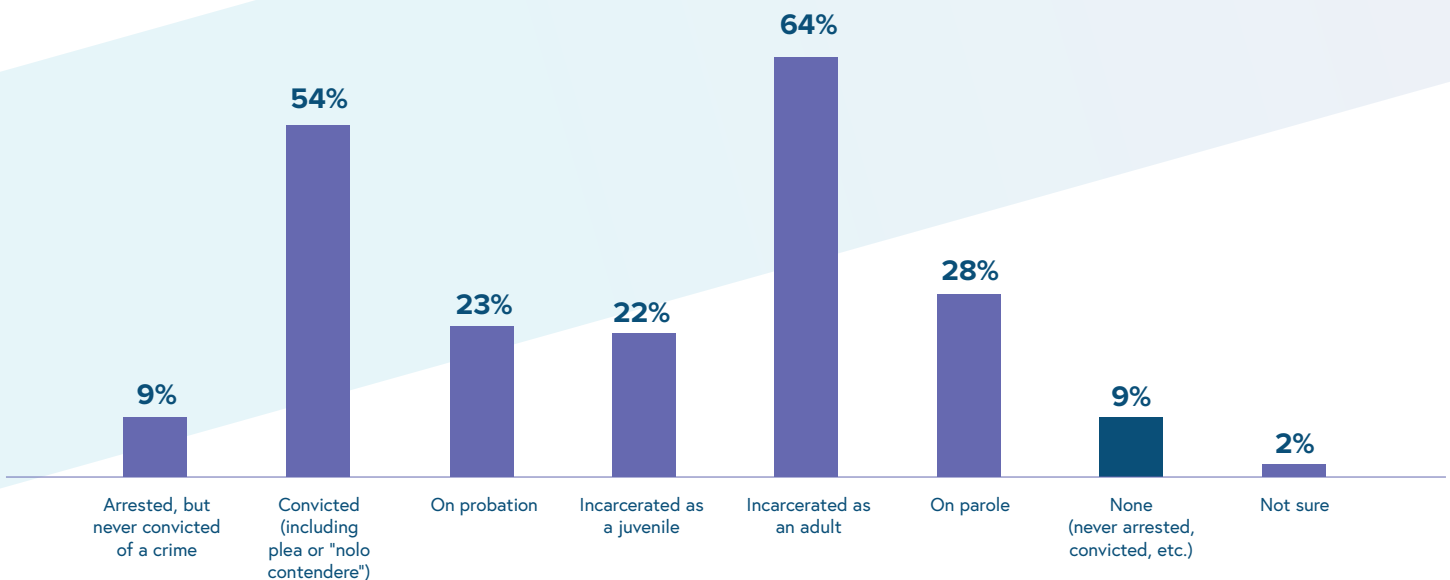
The resulting sample of 397 participants is a convenience sample. (The response rate is unknown, as we do not have information on how many CBOs shared out announcements or how many individuals received invitations to complete the survey.) The invitation flyer announced a survey incentive: the opportunity to win a $50 Amazon gift card.

The vast majority of survey participants had previous involvement with the criminal legal system, with only 9 percent reporting no involvement (Figure 1). Those who responded that they had prior involvement (or were unsure) were eligible to continue the survey, and 283 did so, with some drop-off in responses on later survey questions.

Results are presented below, with brief narrative summaries of select, key results in the following areas: demographics; education, life circumstances; job search and challenges getting/keeping jobs; wages; job duration and recency; issues affecting previous employment; availability for employment; tech sector interest; and perceived barriers and supports for tech careers.

Figure 1: Experience with Criminal Legal System

Category	Percent
Arrested, but never convicted of a crime	9%
Convicted (including plea or "nolo contendere")	54%
On probation	23%
Incarcerated as a juvenile	22%
Incarcerated as an adult	64%
On parole	28%
None (never arrested, convicted, etc.)	9%
Not sure	2%

Demographic Information

Figure 2: Age

15%
41-45
Years Old

13%
46-50
Years Old

12%
36-40
Years Old

12%
51-55
Years Old

10%
56+
Years Old

18%
31-35
Years Old

3%
21-25
Years Old

17%
26-30
Years Old

Figure 3: Gender

0.4%
Non-Binary/
Non-Conforming

1%
Decline to
Disclose

36%
Female

63%
Male
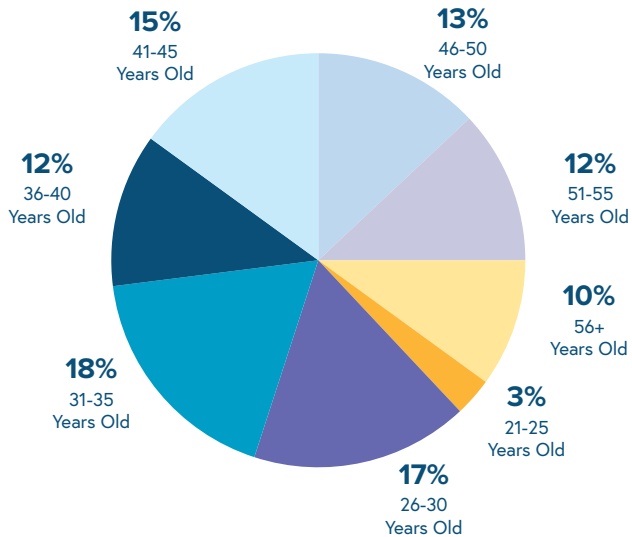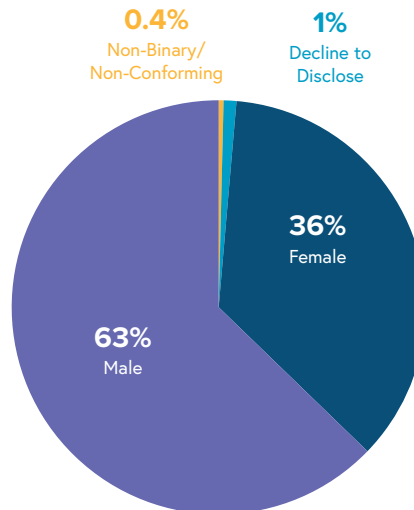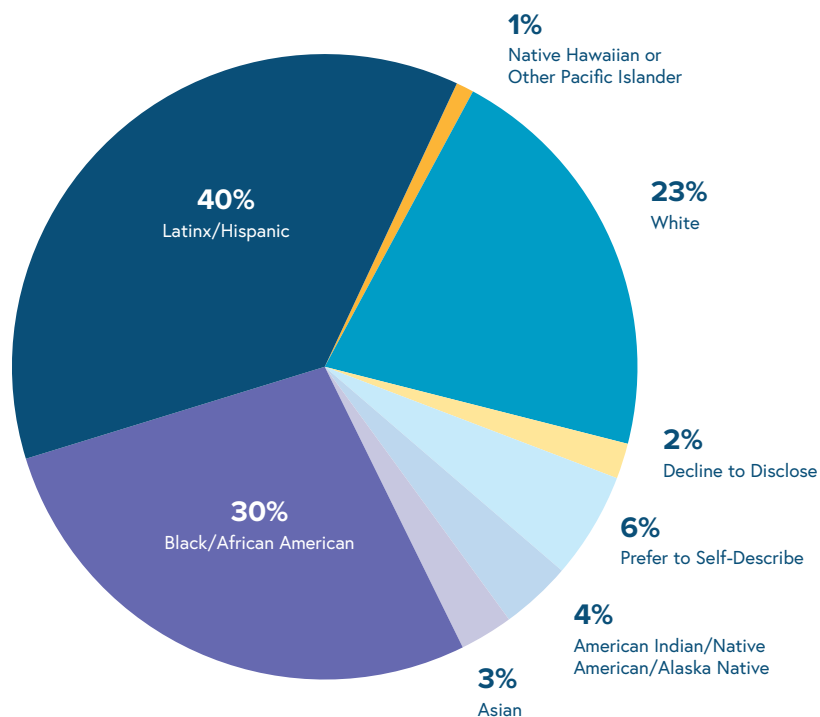
General demographics of respondents demonstrate an older, predominantly male and BIPOC sample: half are above 40 years old, with only 20 percent in the 21-30 year old range (Figure 2); about 6 in 10 are men (Figure 3); almost three-quarters are adults of color (primarily Latinx [40 percent] and Black [30 percent]—Figure 4).

Figure 4: Race/Ethnicity

1%
Native Hawaiian or
Other Pacific Islander

40%
Latinx/Hispanic

23%
White

2%
Decline to Disclose

6%
Prefer to Self-Describe

30%
Black/African American

4%
American Indian/Native
American/Alaska Native

3%
Asian

Educational Attainment & Enrollment

The sample exhibits fairly low education attainment in comparison to the overall adult population of L.A. Figure 5 shows that 12 percent of respondents did not complete high school, and only 12 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher. By contrast, 33 percent of Angelenos have a bachelor's degree or higher.[1] The modal attainment level in our sample is high school diploma or GED (45 percent combined). The next most common is trade/technical certificate or associate degree (31 percent combined). However, 3 in 10 are furthering their education, currently enrolled in school (Figure 6), despite being an older population—with 95 percent over 25, and 80 percent more than 30 years old (per Figure 2, above).

Figure 5: Educational Attainment

21%
GED or High School
Diploma Equivalent

13%
Trade or Technical
Certificate

18%
Associate Degree

24%
High School Diploma

9%
Bachelor's Degree

2%
Master's Degree

1%
Doctoral Degree

11%
Some High School

1%
Middle School/
Junior High School

0.4%
Elementary School
or Less
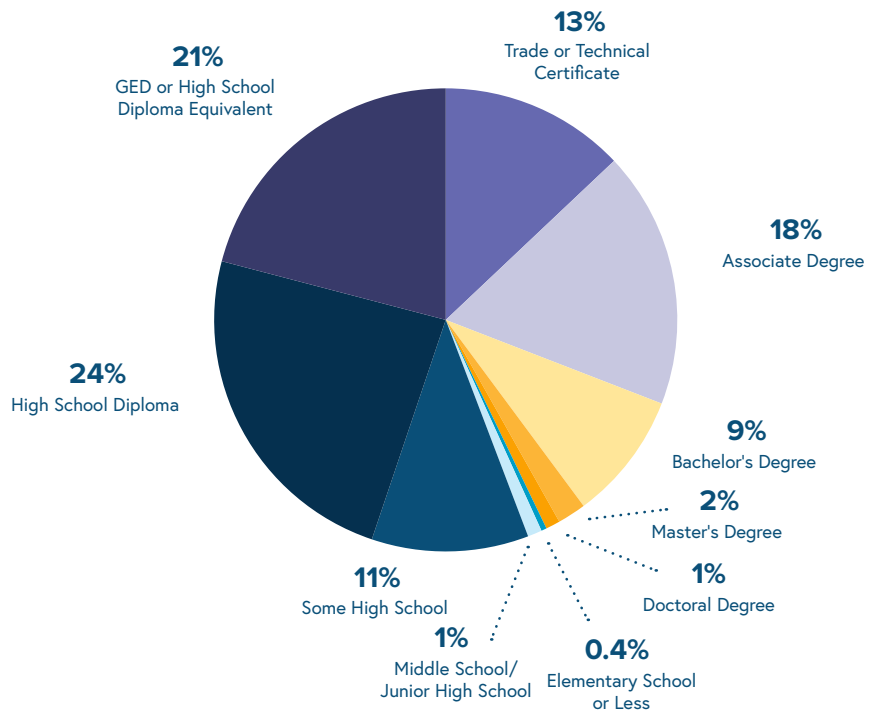
Figure 6: Currently Enrolled in School

29%
Yes

71%
No
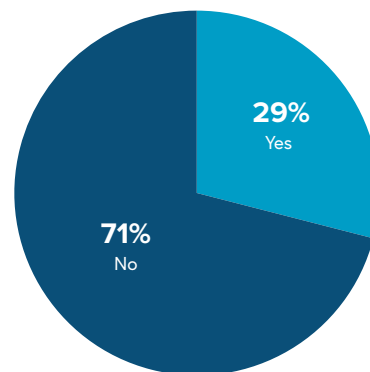
Life Circumstances

Figure 7 provides information on a range of life circumstances. Notable among these is that 11 percent are persons with disabilities, 6 percent are former foster youth, approximately one-fifth are without stable housing, and 6 percent are full-time parents with young or high-need children.

Twenty-eight percent are not currently employed, meaning 72 percent are working. Most have aspirations beyond their current jobs: 55 percent are currently working and open to new opportunities.

Figure 7: Subpopulations, Living Arrangements, Current Work Situation

Veteran	2%
LGBTQIA	8%
Person with a Disability	11%
Immigrant	3%
Currently Without Stable Housing (Home Insecure or Homeless)	21%
Currently/Formerly a Foster Youth	6%
Parenting Full-Time or Planning to Parent Full-Time (with Full Responsibility for Caring for Young or High-Need Children	6%
Parenting or Planning to Parent Children who are in Daycare, in School or Cared for by Family/Others	7%
Currently Working, but Open to Other Opportunities	55%
Not Currently Working	28%
None of the Above	4%

Job Search & Challenges Getting/Keeping Jobs

Figure 8 provides information on commonly used job search engines. Three-quarters of survey participants utilized Indeed Job Search, and LinkedIn and ZipRecruiter were also popular (38 percent and 31 percent, respectively), with smaller shares using other engines.

Figure 8: Job Search Engines Utilized

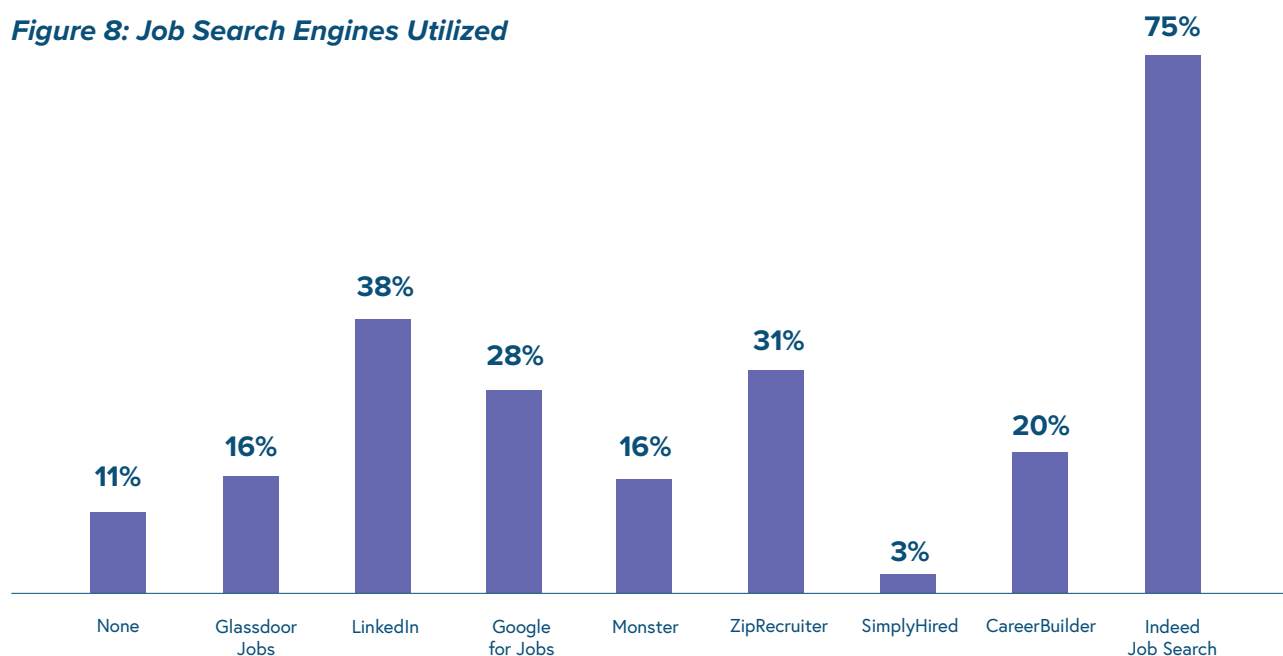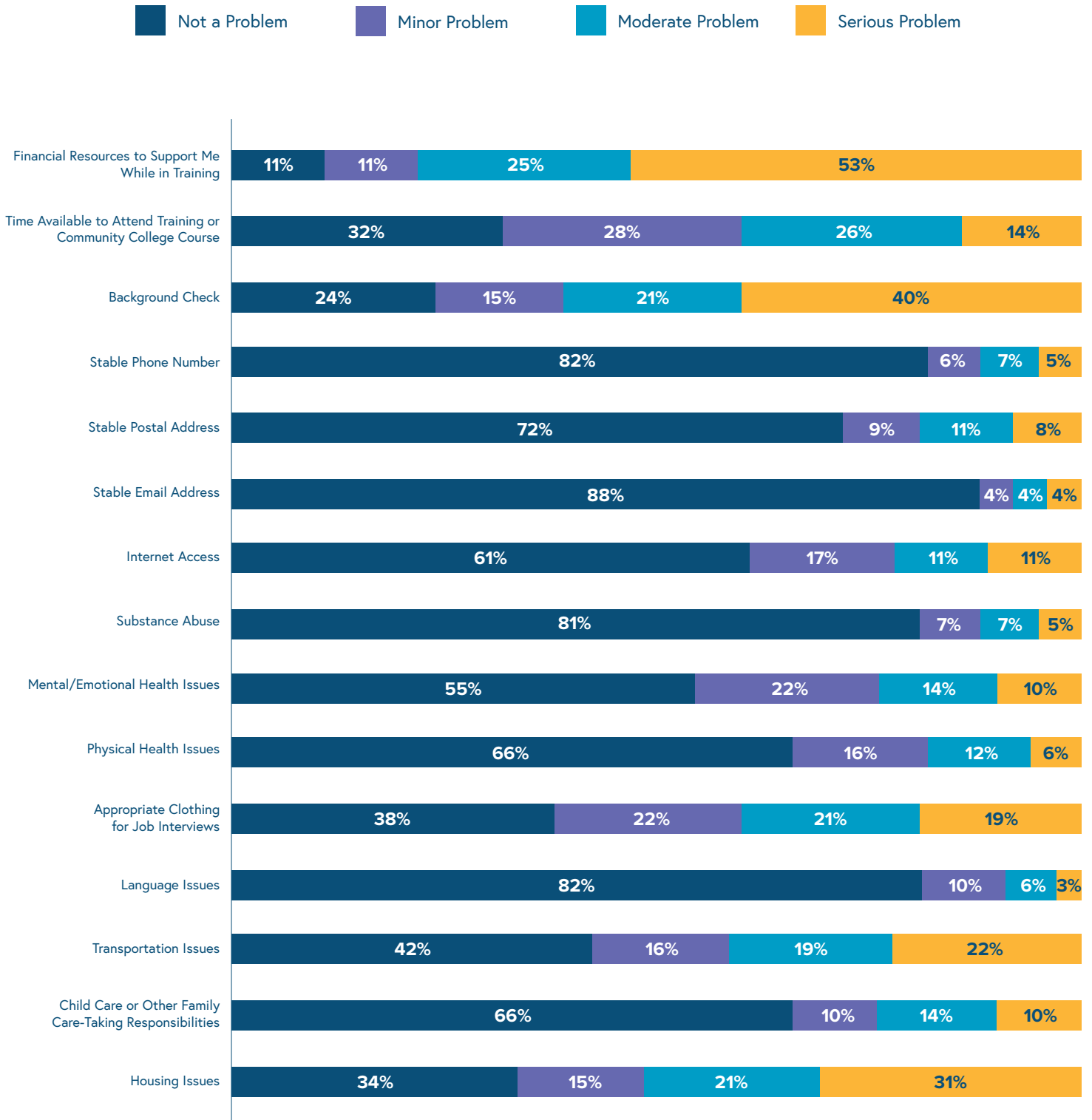| Category	Percentage
None	11%
Glassdoor Jobs	16%
LinkedIn	38%
Google for Jobs	28%
Monster	16%
ZipRecruiter	31%
SimplyHired	3%
CareerBuilder	20%
Indeed Job Search	75%

Figure 9 shows that the biggest challenge for getting or keeping a job was a lack of financial resources to support respondents while training (78 percent total—53 percent reporting a serious problem and 25 percent reporting a moderate problem—Figure 9). Background checks were cited as problematic by 61 percent of respondents (40 percent serious problem, 21 percent moderate problem). Respondents also cited housing, transportation, time to attend training/classes, and appropriate clothing for job interviews as seriously or moderately problematic (52 percent, 41 percent, 40 percent and 40 percent, respectively), with other issues (e.g., internet, health issues, child/family care) posing a problem for smaller—but still substantial—shares of respondents.

Figure 9: Challenges in Getting or Keeping a Job

Legend: ■ Not a Problem ■ Minor Problem ■ Moderate Problem ■ Serious Problem

Challenge	Not a Problem	Minor Problem	Moderate Problem	Serious Problem
Financial Resources to Support Me While in Training	11%	11%	25%	53%
Time Available to Attend Training or Community College Course	32%	28%	26%	14%
Background Check	24%	15%	21%	40%
Stable Phone Number	82%	6%	7%	5%
Stable Postal Address	72%	9%	11%	8%
Stable Email Address	88%	4%	4%	4%
Internet Access	61%	17%	11%	11%
Substance Abuse	81%	7%	7%	5%
Mental/Emotional Health Issues	55%	22%	14%	10%
Physical Health Issues	66%	16%	12%	6%
Appropriate Clothing for Job Interviews	38%	22%	21%	19%
Language Issues	82%	10%	6%	3%
Transportation Issues	42%	16%	19%	22%
Child Care or Other Family Care-Taking Responsibilities	66%	10%	14%	10%
Housing Issues	34%	15%	21%	31%

Wages

Seven in 10 respondents earned more than $15 per hour (Figure 10), 15 percent had hourly wages between $13.01 and $15, and 14 percent earned $13 or less. Figure 11 provides responses to an additional question regarding highest consistent wage (earned over a period of at least three months), asked of a subset of respondents: the modal wage was $18.01 - $21 per hour (30 percent of respondents), and another 23 percent earned more than $21 per hour on a consistent basis.
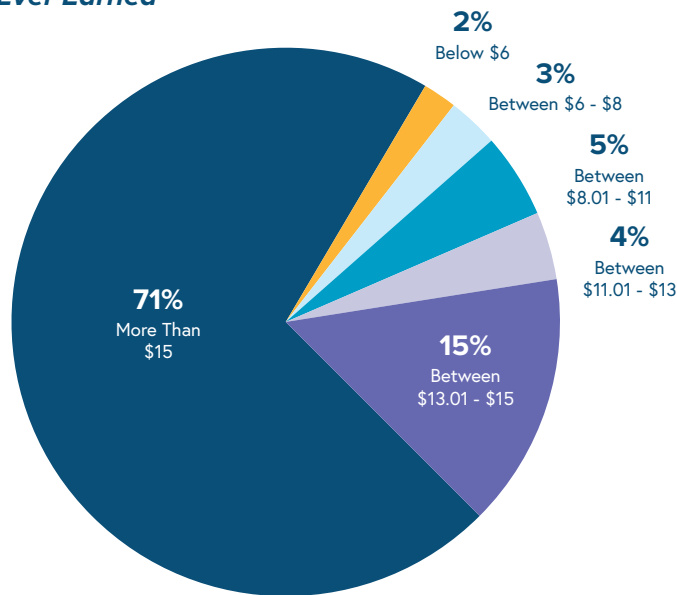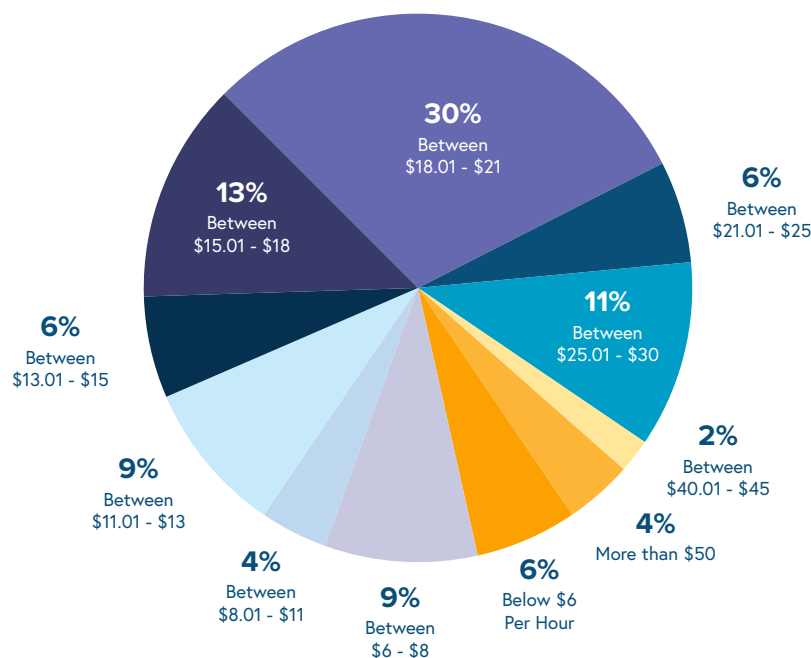
Figure 10: Highest Wage Ever Earned

- **2%** Below $6
- **3%** Between $6 - $8
- **5%** Between $8.01 - $11
- **4%** Between $11.01 - $13
- **15%** Between $13.01 - $15
- **71%** More Than $15

Figure 11: Highest Consistent Wage

- **30%** Between $18.01 - $21
- **6%** Between $21.01 - $25
- **11%** Between $25.01 - $30
- **2%** Between $40.01 - $45
- **4%** More than $50
- **6%** Below $6 Per Hour
- **9%** Between $6 - $8
- **4%** Between $8.01 - $11
- **9%** Between $11.01 - $13
- **6%** Between $13.01 - $15
- **13%** Between $15.01 - $18

Job Duration & Recency

For approximately three-quarters of respondents, the longest job duration was more than a year (Figure 12). With respect to job recency, more than half were employed within the past three months (Figure 13).
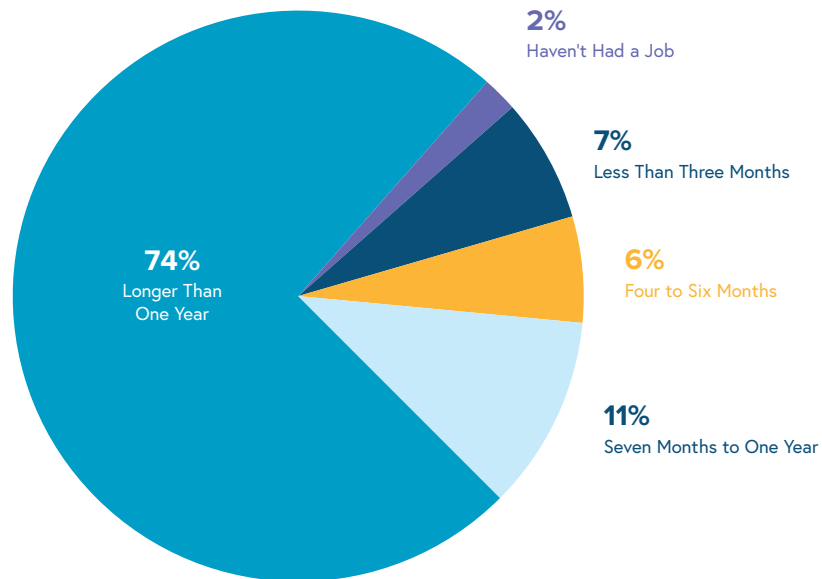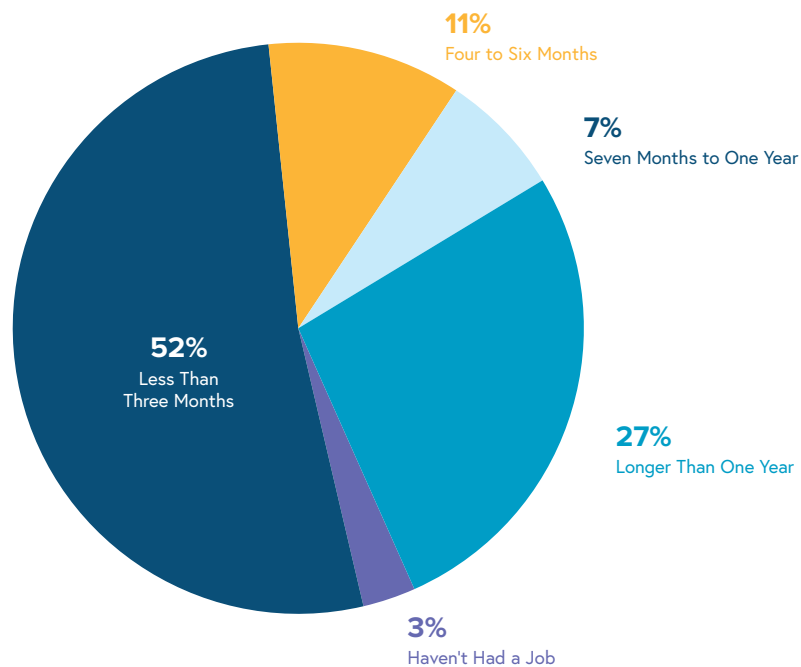
Figure 12: Longest Job Duration

2%
Haven't Had a Job

7%
Less Than Three Months

6%
Four to Six Months

74%
Longer Than
One Year

11%
Seven Months to One Year

Figure 13: Recency of Last Job

11%
Four to Six Months

7%
Seven Months to One Year

52%
Less Than
Three Months

27%
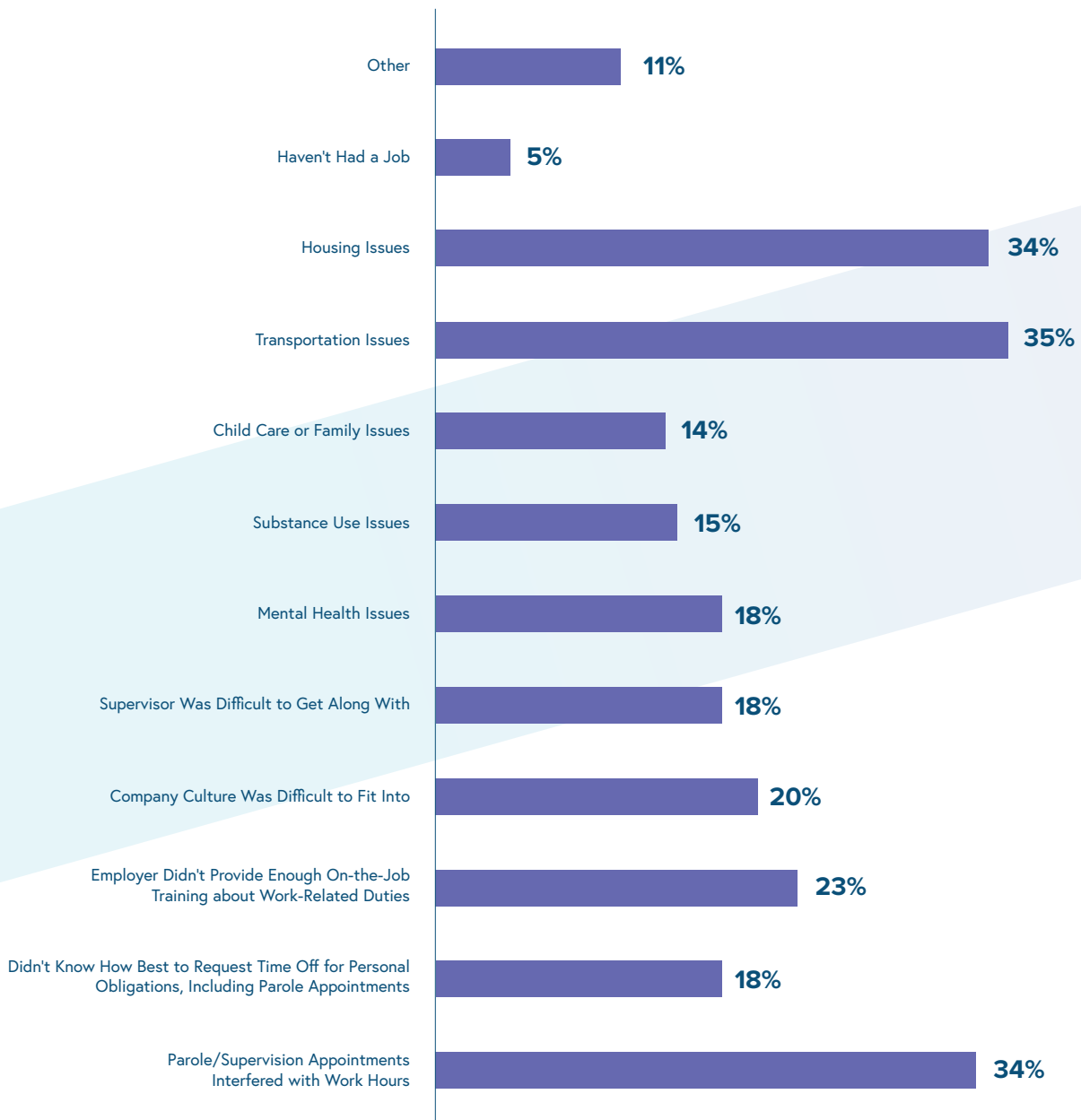Longer Than One Year

3%
Haven't Had a Job

Challenges Affecting Previous Employment

The most significant issues affecting past jobs were housing, transportation and parole/supervision, with a little more than 1 in 3 respondents reporting these types of challenges (Figure 14). Other problematic areas for approximately 1 in 5 respondents were: insufficient on-the-job training, company culture, and supervisor relationship, mental health issues, and uncertainty regarding how to request personal time off (including for parole appointments). Small shares reported substance use (15 percent) or child care/family (14 percent) issues.

Figure 14: Employment Challenges

Challenge	Percent
Other	11%
Haven't Had a Job	5%
Housing Issues	34%
Transportation Issues	35%
Child Care or Family Issues	14%
Substance Use Issues	15%
Mental Health Issues	18%
Supervisor Was Difficult to Get Along With	18%
Company Culture Was Difficult to Fit Into	20%
Employer Didn't Provide Enough On-the-Job Training about Work-Related Duties	23%
Didn't Know How Best to Request Time Off for Personal Obligations, Including Parole Appointments	18%
Parole/Supervision Appointments Interfered with Work Hours	34%

Availability for Employment

Currently, more than half of respondents are available for full-time employment, and more than a third are looking for part-time jobs (Figure 15). Almost all (98 percent) are authorized to work in the United States (Figure 16).

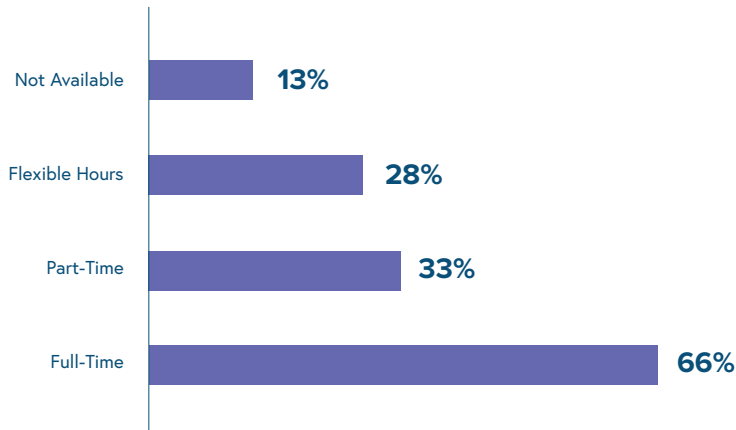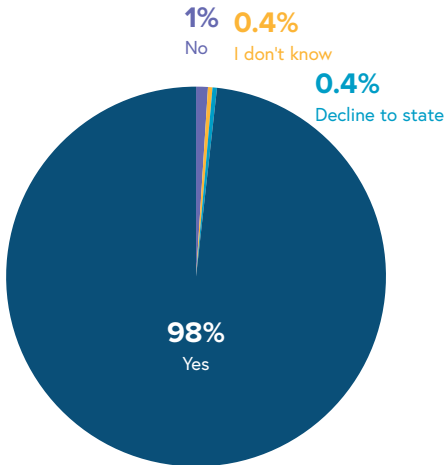*Figure 15: Availability for Work*

- Not Available: 13%
- Flexible Hours: 28%
- Part-Time: 33%
- Full-Time: 66%

Figure 16: Authorization to Work in U.S.

- 1% No
- 0.4% I don't know
- 0.4% Decline to state
- 98% Yes

Tech Sector Interest

More than 4 in 5 survey respondents are interested in a living-wage career in tech or at tech companies (49 percent very interested + 33 percent somewhat interested, Figure 17). Respondents are most interested in Business Operations and Development (45 percent), Information Technology (37 percent), and Graphic Design and Digital Media Arts (29 percent—Figure 18).
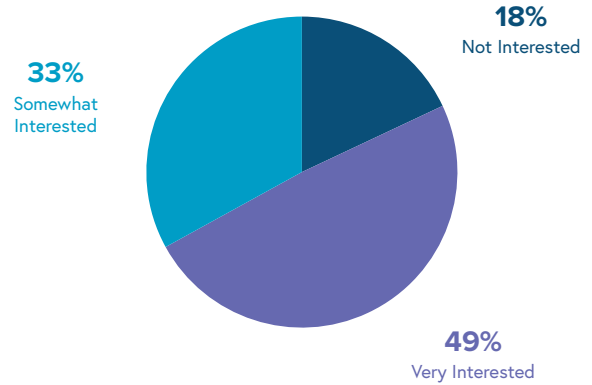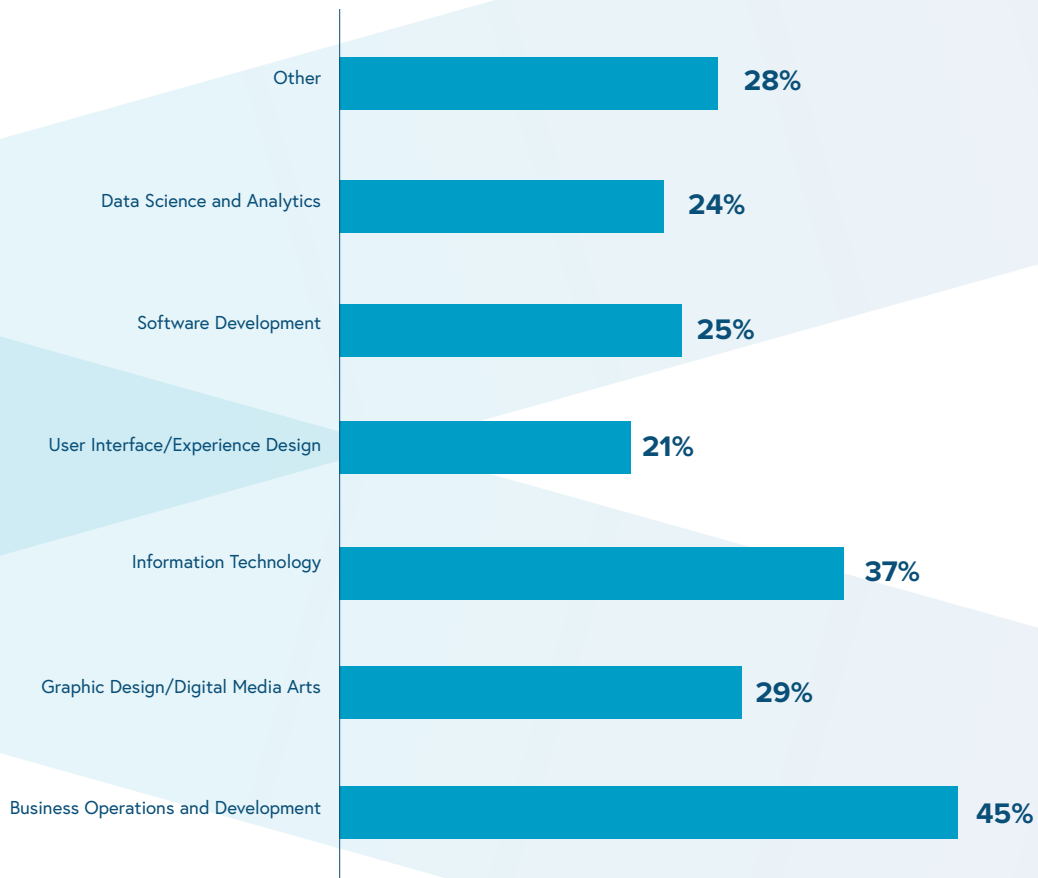
Figure 17: Interest in Tech Careers

18% Not Interested

33% Somewhat Interested

49% Very Interested

Figure 18: Interest in Specific Fields within Tech

Other	28%
Data Science and Analytics	24%
Software Development	25%
User Interface/Experience Design	21%
Information Technology	37%
Graphic Design/Digital Media Arts	29%
Business Operations and Development	45%

Perceived Barriers & Supports for Tech Careers

The most significant perceived barriers to getting and keeping a job in the tech sector are: limited or no experience in the tech industry (60 percent), limited education (41 percent), and uncertainty about available jobs (32 percent—Figure 19). Perceptions regarding helpful supports and resources for pursuing a living-wage career in tech include: information about available jobs and careers (57 percent), training around technology (53 percent), and workshops that explain specific jobs and careers, along with their requirements (52 percent—Figure 20).

Figure 19: Perceived Barriers to Tech Employment
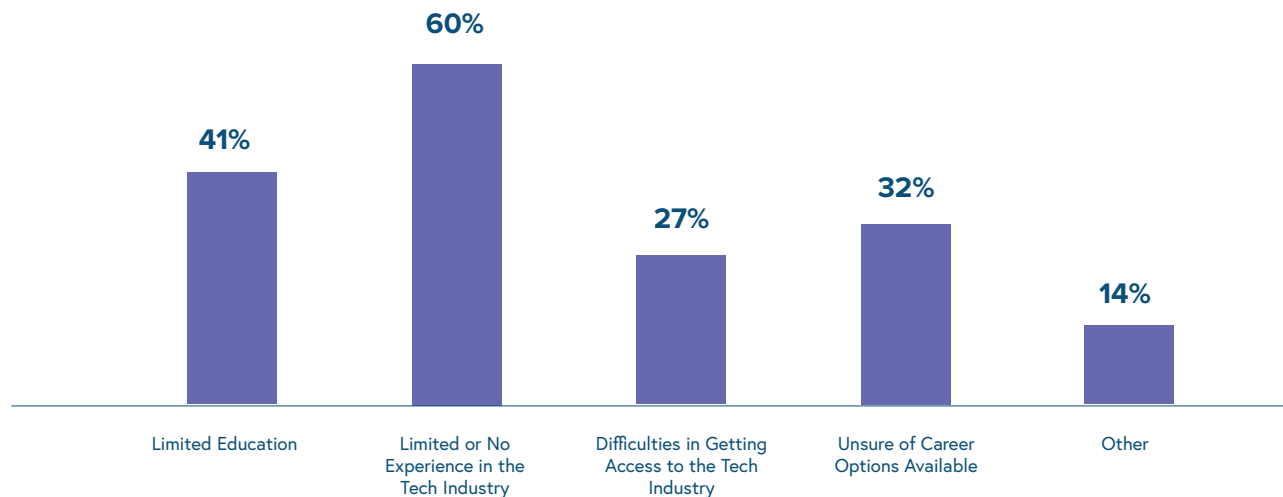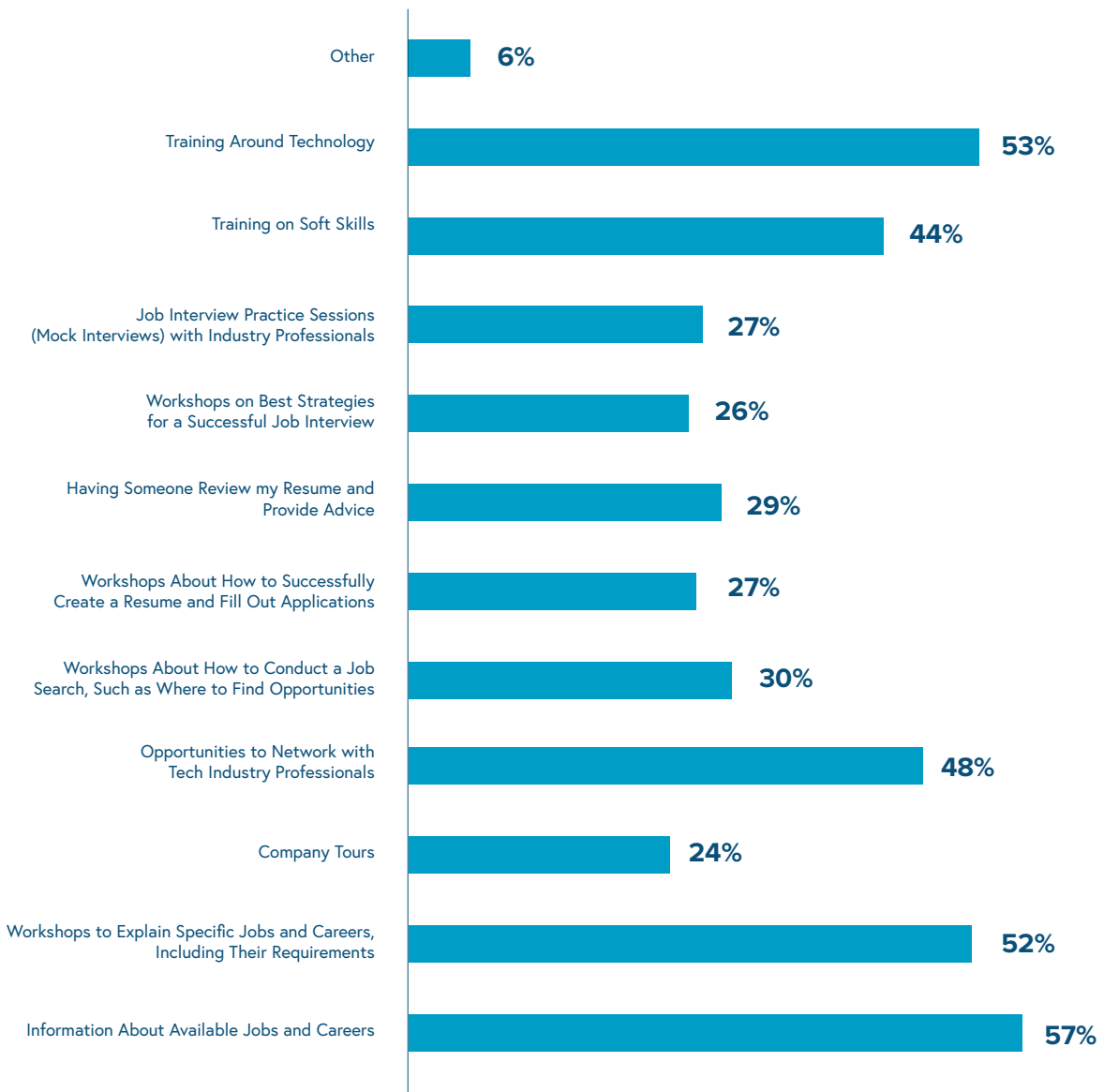

Limited Education	Limited or No Experience in the Tech Industry	Difficulties in Getting Access to the Tech Industry	Unsure of Career Options Available	Other
41%	60%	27%	32%	14%

Figure 20: Perceptions of Helpful Supports in Tech Careers

Category	Percentage
Other	6%
Training Around Technology	53%
Training on Soft Skills	44%
Job Interview Practice Sessions (Mock Interviews) with Industry Professionals	27%
Workshops on Best Strategies for a Successful Job Interview	26%
Having Someone Review my Resume and Provide Advice	29%
Workshops About How to Successfully Create a Resume and Fill Out Applications	27%
Workshops About How to Conduct a Job Search, Such as Where to Find Opportunities	30%
Opportunities to Network with Tech Industry Professionals	48%
Company Tours	24%
Workshops to Explain Specific Jobs and Careers, Including Their Requirements	52%
Information About Available Jobs and Careers	57%

Summary

The Employment Survey of Angelenos with prior records of arrest or conviction provides critical insights on this population. These individuals are overwhelmingly workers who are contributing to L.A.'s labor market and regional economy, while also holding aspirations for better career pathways. Most respondents in our sample are currently working, but are open to new opportunities, and almost 1 in 3 of these adults—despite being beyond typical school age—are furthering their education. This group also faces significant challenges, the most notable—in addition to background checks—being financial supports for training, time to attend training, housing, transportation and appropriate interview attire. A small share also faces health or family-related challenges.

We focused specifically on interests in tech-sector employment and found that more than four-fifths of respondents are interested in careers in tech, with nearly half very interested. Individuals reported limited tech experience and limited education as the greatest perceived barriers to tech employment, followed by limited information on available careers and limited access to the tech sector. Respondents identified critical supports that they would find helpful in making the transition to tech employment, including information about available jobs/careers, workshops to explain specific careers, opportunities to network with tech employers, and technology and soft skills training.

UNITE-LA utilized the results of this data collection effort to craft and launch our new, 2022 Step Into Tech program, tailored for systems-involved individuals and delivering on a number of these critical supports. In the current tight labor market, systems-involved adults constitute an important potential labor pool for the growing tech sector in Los Angeles. We are pleased to be working with JCOD, LARRP and employer partners in building employment opportunities that are inclusive of systems-involved individuals as key contributors to our region's development as a tech hub.

In Partnership With: