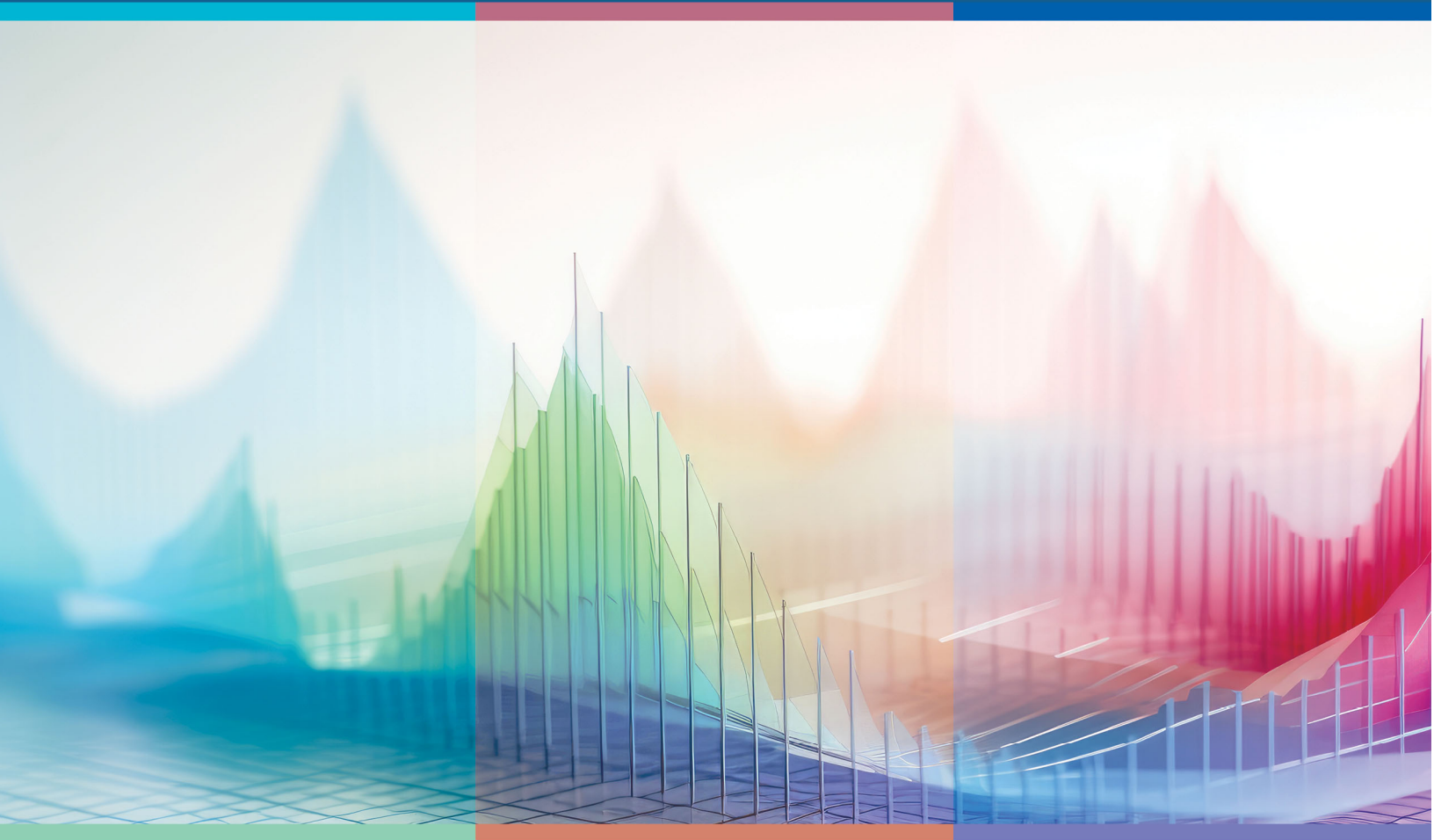


2026

National Business Trends Survey



Cascade Employers Association
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2026 National Business Trends

An Employer Associations of America (EAA) Sponsored Survey, coordinated by Cascade Employers Association in cooperation with employer associations nationwide.

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This survey is provided with the understanding that the information will:

- remain strictly confidential
- be restricted to authorized personnel only
- not be used in collective bargaining or grievance proceedings
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National surveys produced by the EAA include:

- National Business Trends Survey
- National Executive Compensation Survey
- National IT & Engineering Compensation Survey
- National Policies & Practices Survey
- National Benefits Survey
- National Sales Compensation Survey
- National Wage & Salary Survey

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2026 National Business Trends

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This survey was made possible by the collaborative efforts of Employer Associations throughout the nation. We want to graciously thank all of these associations for their efforts in attracting participants and helping to make the 2026 National Business Trends Survey a great success.



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2026 National Business Trends

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2026 National Business Trends

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2026 National Business Trends

Introduction

Report Overview

Each day employers are faced with the challenge of how to move their business forward. The 2026 National Business Trends Survey provides detailed information regarding how executives have responded in 2025 and how they are planning to respond in 2026 to the changing business climate. The reports include:

- Business Outlook
- Business Investment Plans
- Staffing Plans
- Recruitment/Retention Challenges
- Job Creation Challenges
- Business Improvement Measures
- Pay Strategies
- Business Challenges

Report Formats

The 2026 National Business Trends Survey report is divided into seven sections; National Report, Regional Reports (Midwest, Northeast, Southern, & Western), individual State Reports, and individual Industry Reports. The National and Regional sections contain a Significant Trends Summary, a response Detail Report and Participant Demographics. The State and Industry Reports contain a response Detail Report and Participant Demographics only.

Response Levels

The 2026 National Business Trends Survey includes **916** distinct participating organizations spread out over all 50 states, and Washington D.C. Many survey participants indicated they have business operations in multiple states.

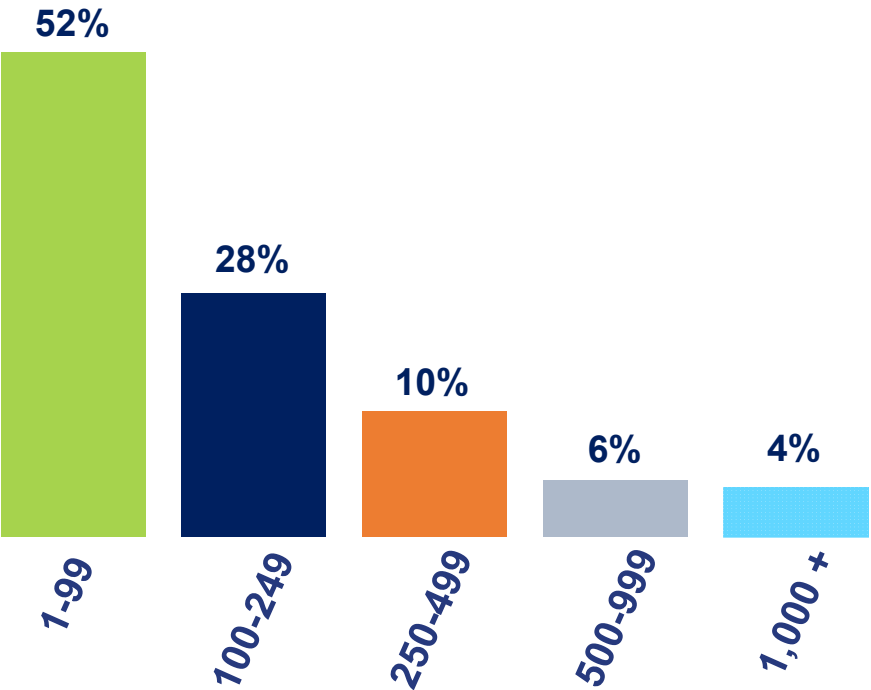
Notes:

Participant responses may not total 100% in some instances due to rounding, the ability to select multiple responses and/or due to participant omissions.

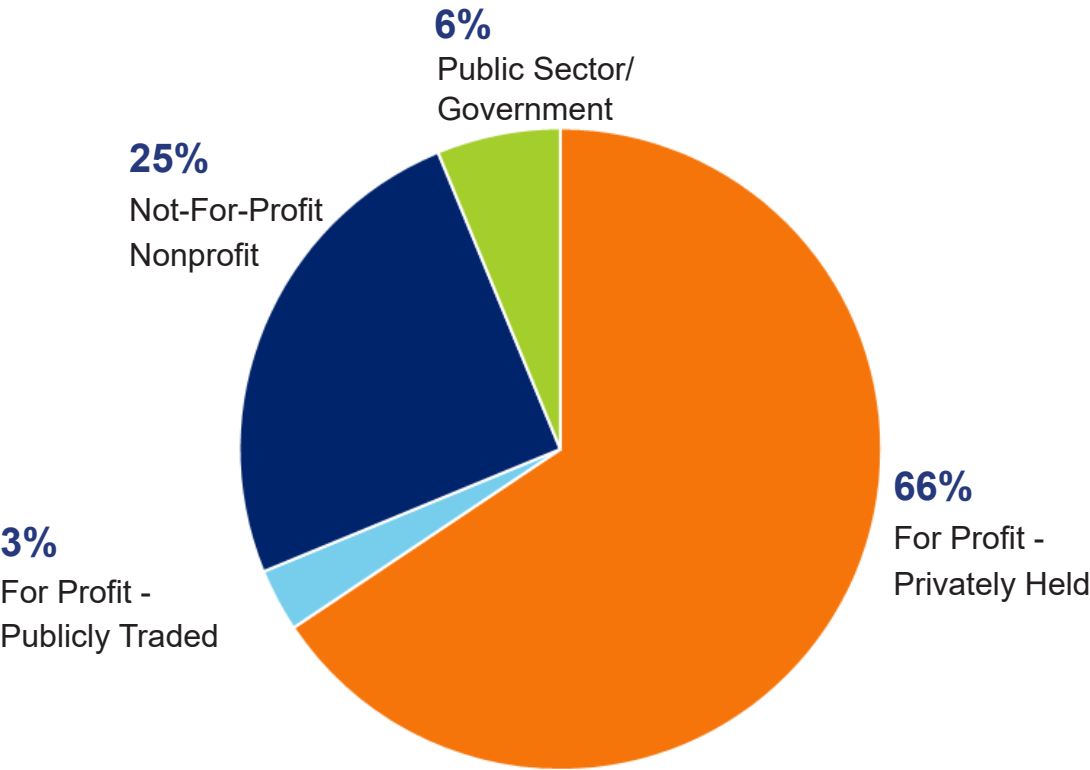
For states and industries where there were less than 10 survey responses, State and Industry Reports have not been included because the number of responses is not sufficient to assure reasonably valid statistics. In addition, despite minimum response rates, the data in some instances is limited. Users should therefore view such responses with discretion. The data may not be representative of overall market trends.

2026 National Business Trends

Participant Distribution by Company Size/Employment



Participant Distribution by Profit Status



2026 National Business Trends

Participant Distribution by Industry



25%

**Manufacturing
Durable Goods**
(useful life = 3+ yrs.)



11%

**Health Care and
Social Assistance**



9%

**Professional,
Scientific, &
Technical Services**



9%

**Manufacturing
Non Durable Goods**
(consumed in less
than life 3+ yrs.)



7%

**Services (Except
Public Administration)**



6%

**Financial &
Insurance**



5%

Construction



4%

**Education
Services**



3%

**Transportation
& Warehousing**



3%

Wholesale Trade



3%

**Arts,
Entertainment, &
Recreation**



3%

**Public
Administration**



3%

Retail Trade



2%

**Real Estate
Rental & Leasing**



2%

Utilities



2%

**Agriculture,
Forestry, Fishing &
Hunting**



1%

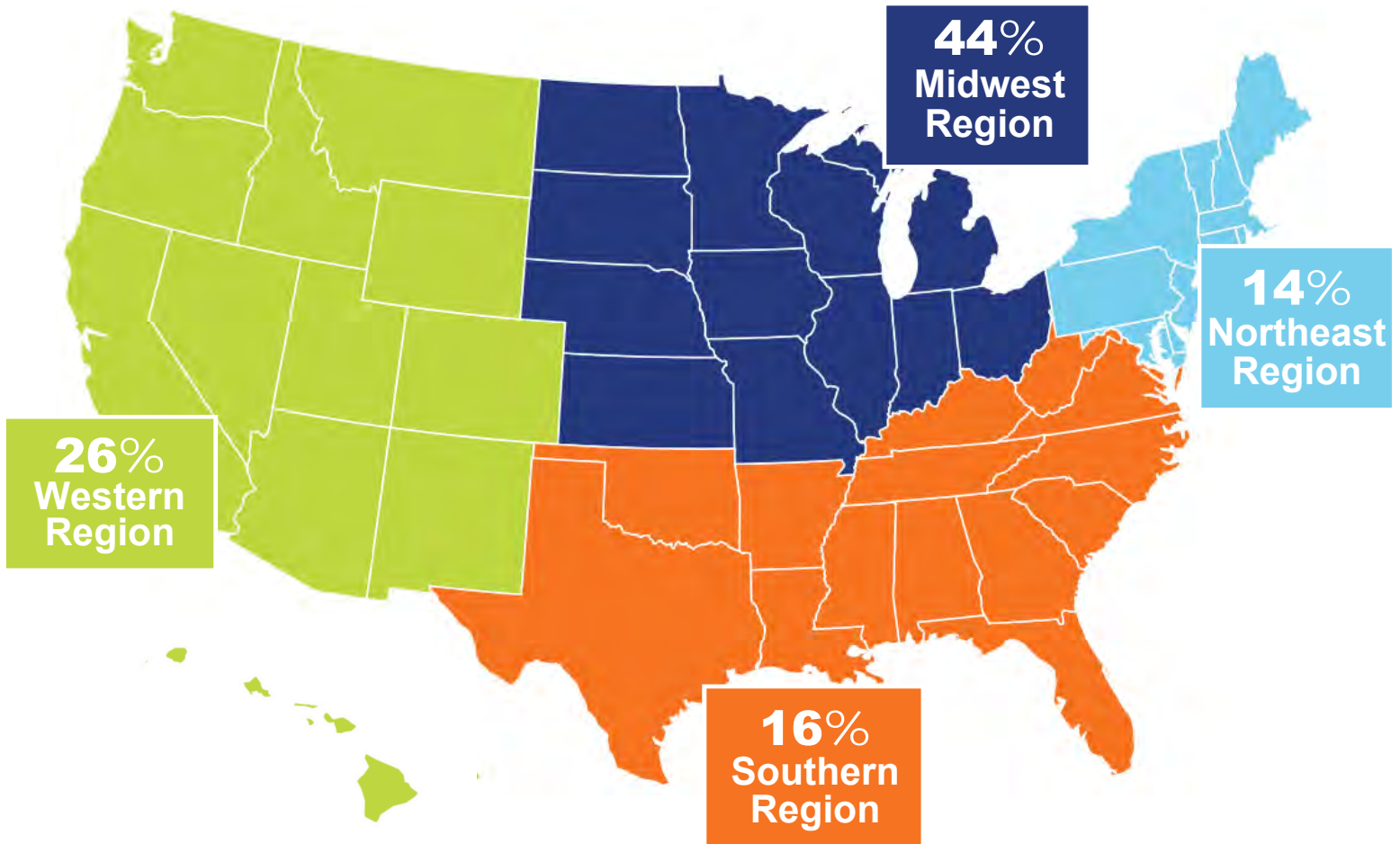
Information

Industries

"Accommodation and Food Services,"
"Administrative and Support and Waste Management and
Remediation Services,"
"Mining," and
"Management of Companies and Enterprises," have less than
1% of participants.

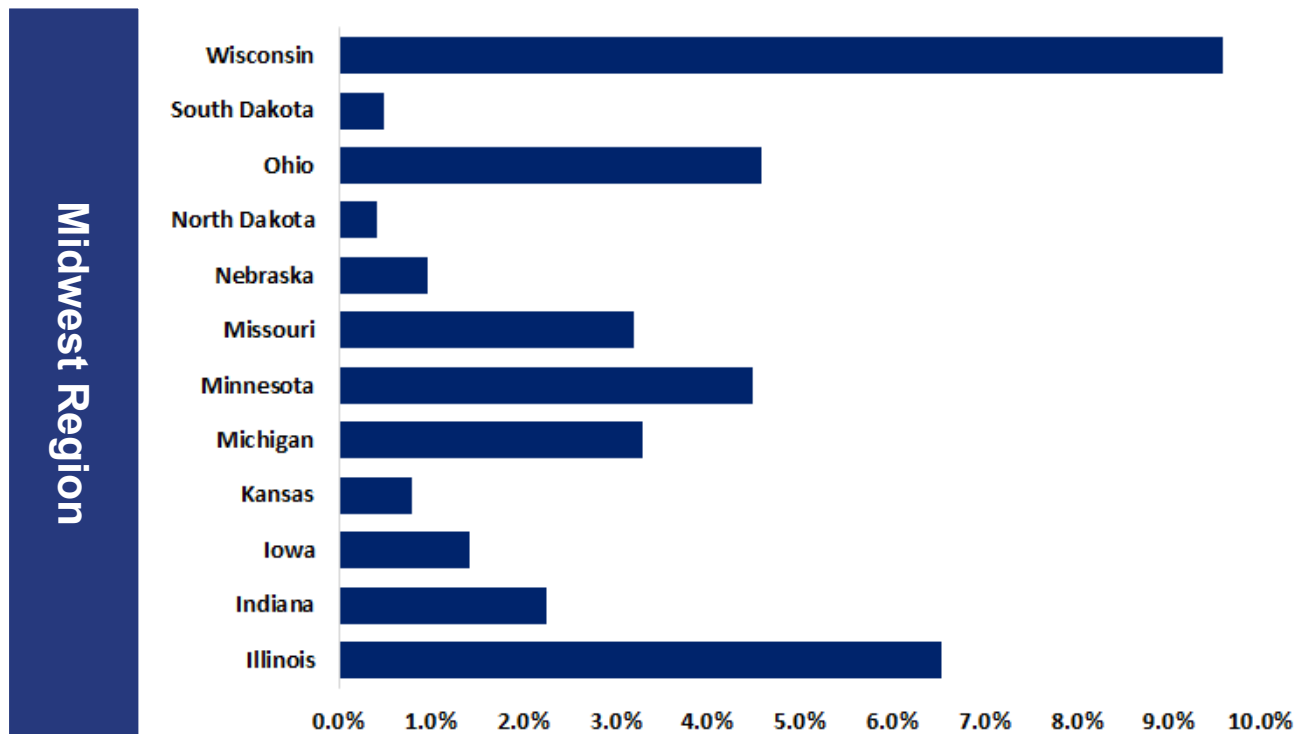
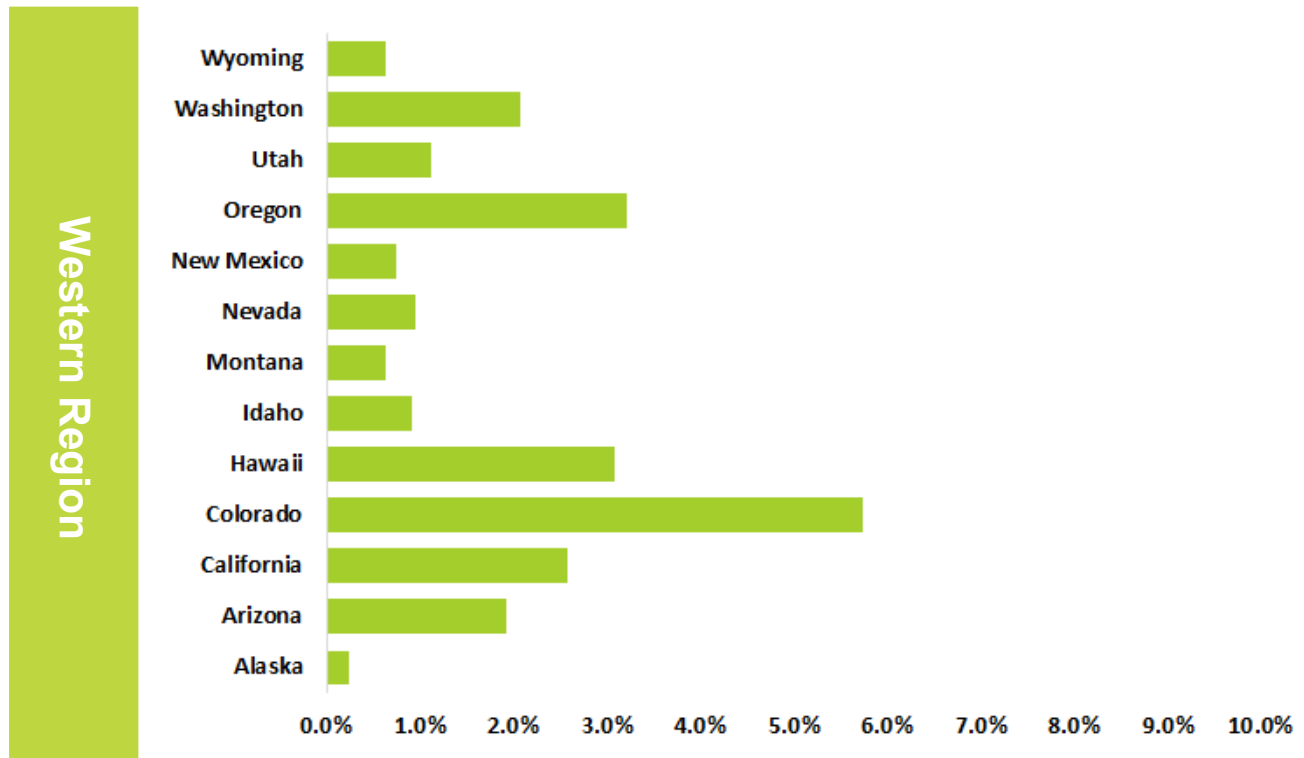
2026 National Business Trends

Participant Distribution by Geographic Region



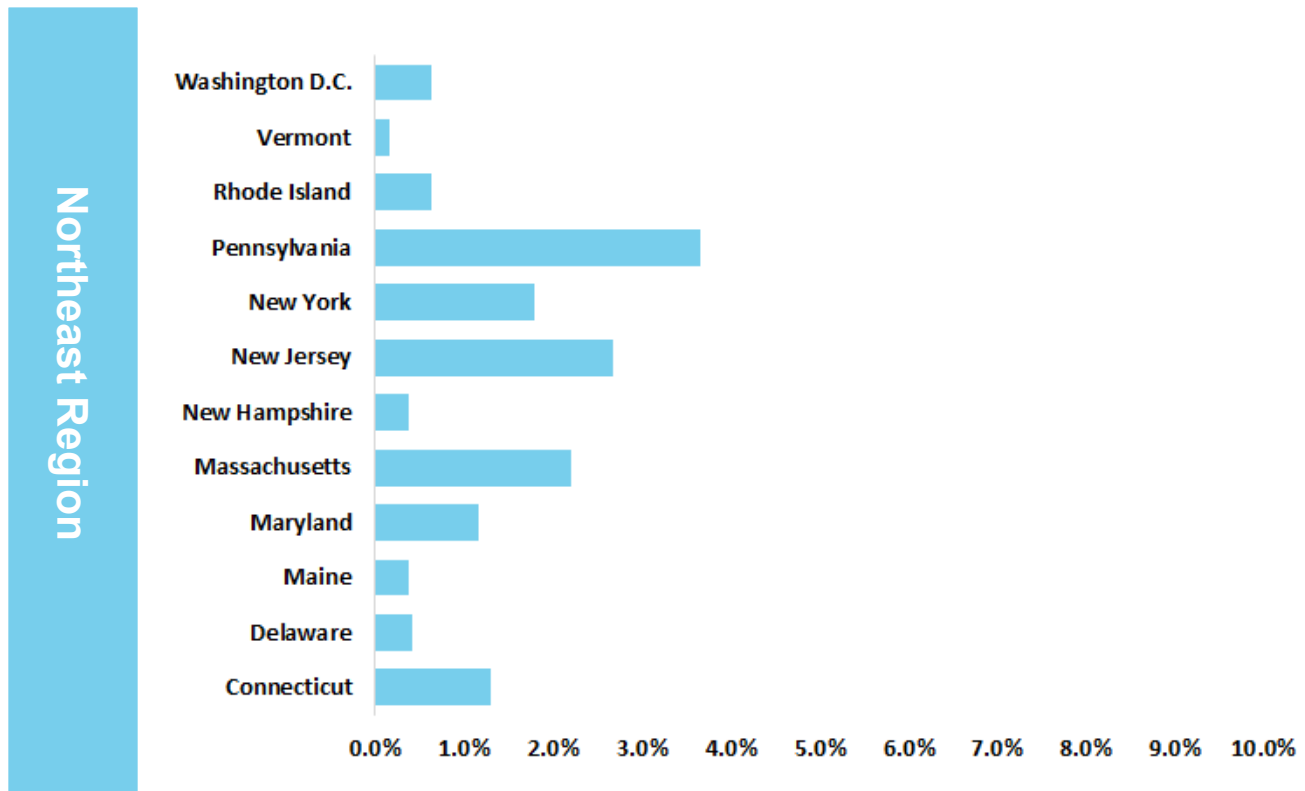
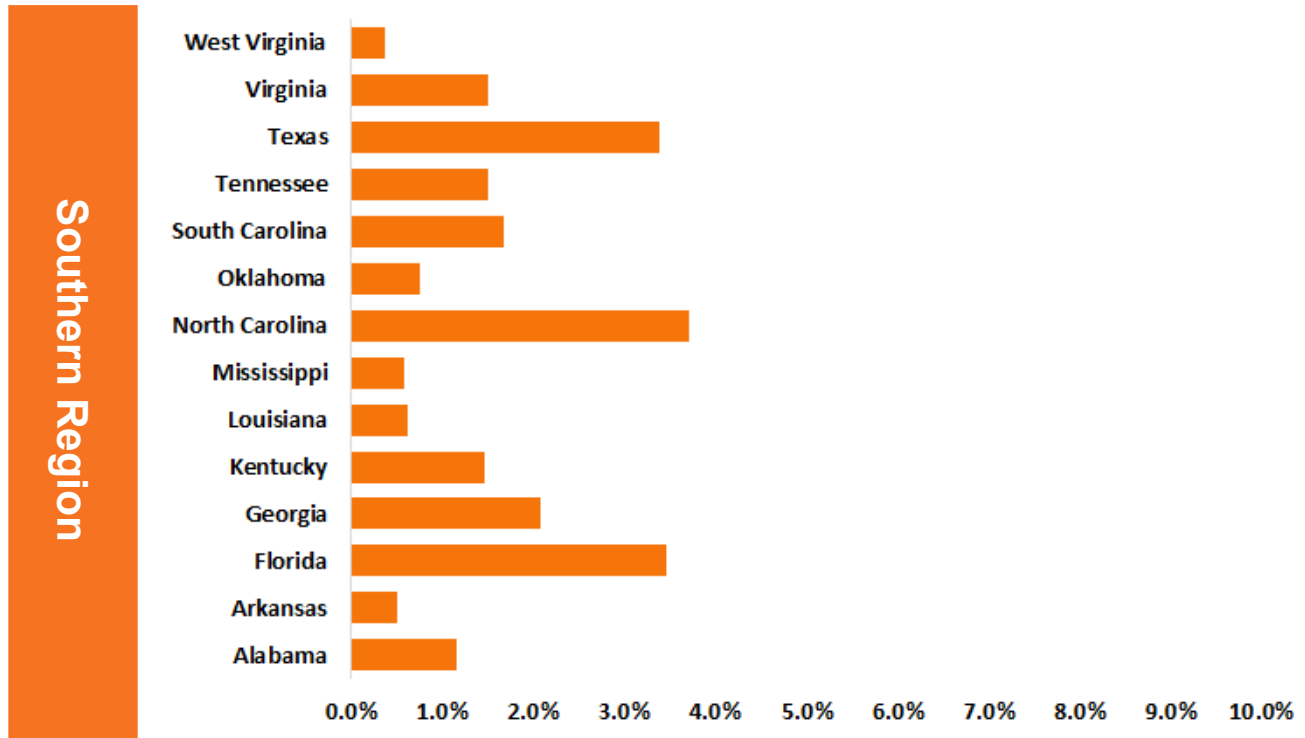
2026 National Business Trends

Participant Distribution by State



2026 National Business Trends

Participant Distribution by State

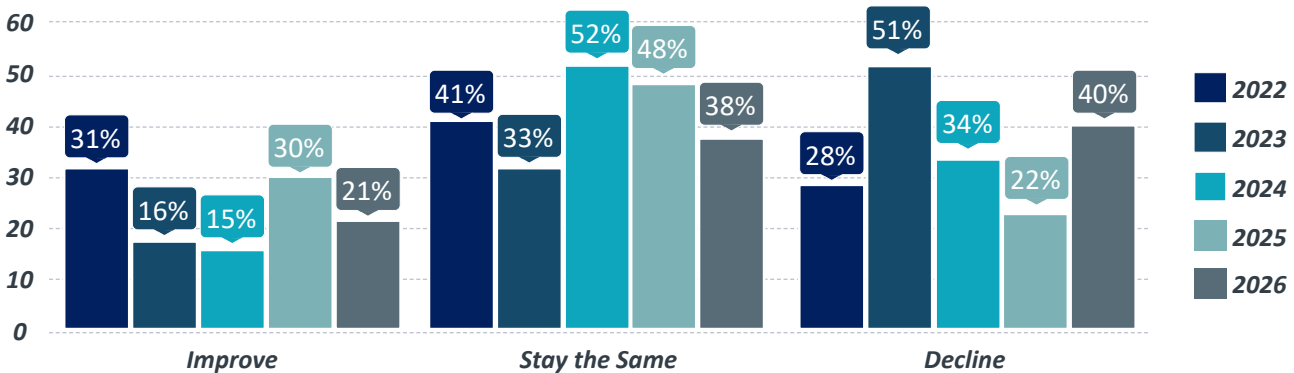


Year-to-Year Comparisons

U.S. Economy Outlook

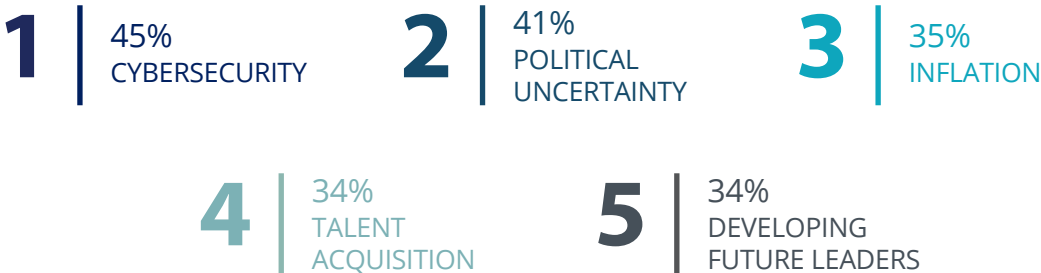
Perceptions of the U.S. economy have fluctuated significantly over the past five years. The data shows that in 2022, optimism was relatively strong, with 31% expecting improvement and 41% anticipating it would stay the same. However, sentiment changed in 2023, with a 51% predicted decline. By 2024, a majority (52%) expected conditions to stay the same. While the outlook on the economy rebounded in 2025, optimism among organizations declined in 2026, with 40% predicting a decline and 38% expecting it to remain the same.

Overall U.S. economy in the next 12 months



Top Short-Term Business Challenges

Over the past three years, the top five short-term challenges have consistently centered on cybersecurity, talent issues, and economic pressures, though their importance has shifted. This year, political uncertainty (41%) has entered the top five for the first time, alongside inflation (35%) and developing future leaders (34%). The top five short-term business challenges are:



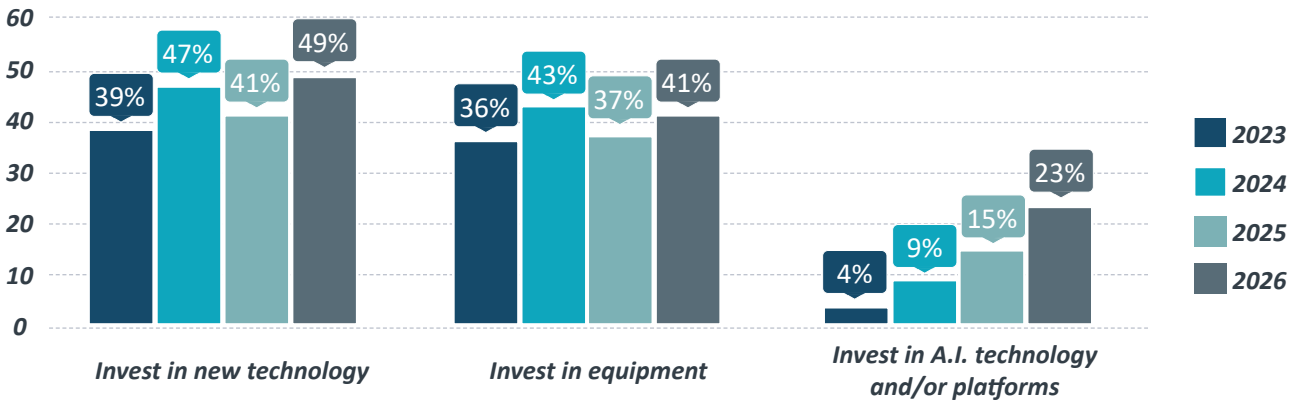
2026 National Business Trends

Year-to-Year Comparisons

Organizational Investment Priorities

Over the course of four years, organizations have consistently prioritized investments in technology and equipment. In 2026, investing in new technology increased to 49%, while equipment investment remained strong at 41%. Notably, investment in A.I. technology and platforms jumped to 23%, entering the top three for the first time.

Top Investment Priorities Trends



AI Adoption in the Workplace

Interest in leveraging AI tools has grown significantly year over year. In 2025, the top areas under consideration were marketing content production (19%), website content production (16%), and recruitment and talent sourcing (15%). This year, priorities have shifted and expanded. Marketing content production increased to 30%, while website content production rose to 27%. Additionally, idea generation emerged as a new focus at 27%, pushing recruitment and talent sourcing off the top three for the coming year.

	2025	2026
 Marketing content production	19%	30%
 Website content production	16%	27%
 Idea generation	14%	27%