



US Library Survey 2025

Under Pressure

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May 14, 2026



ITHAKA S+R

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We would like to thank the following sponsors for their support of this research:



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Executive summary

In November 2025, Ithaka S+R fielded the most recent version of the US Library Survey. Since 2010, this survey has been administered every three years to library deans and directors at four-year, not-for-profit postsecondary institutions in the US to examine how they conceptualize their work—what they prioritize, how they navigate decision-making, and how they align the library with the goals of their parent institutions. The 2025 cycle examines leaders' perspectives on the library's core role, governance, and key dimensions of strategy and operations. It continues to explore established areas of library work within these domains while expanding the scope of inquiry to include emerging areas of influence, including generative artificial intelligence (AI), developments in the scholarly communication ecosystem, and change management.

Key findings

- **Leaders are operating under sustained financial and staffing constraints.** Mirroring previous cycles, the majority of respondents cite a lack of financial resources as the primary constraint on their ability to make changes in their libraries. Anticipated cancellations of journal packages alongside reductions in staff mean that libraries are also limited in their ability to sustain core functions.
- **AI is reshaping priorities, but adoption remains uneven.** Leaders anticipate increased demand for AI literacy instruction, staff reskilling, and research integrity safeguards. However, many libraries have not yet integrated AI into their internal operations, citing limited staff capacity or expertise, ethical concerns, and competing priorities.
- **While most leaders feel confident in their ability to articulate the library's value proposition, fewer believe this value is recognized by senior administrators.** Additionally, only 31 percent agree that they are involved in key decision-making processes at the campus level.
- **Student learning and information literacy are near-universal priorities, but confidence in impact lags.** Nearly all leaders identify fostering student learning, promoting critical thinking, and supporting information literacy as core priorities. Smaller shares,

however, express confidence in the library's effectiveness or in its recognition as a campus leader in these areas.

- **Investments in open access initiatives have waned.** Since the survey was last administered, the share of leaders prioritizing transformative agreements declined from 38 percent to 26 percent. The share prioritizing transitioning their spending from subscriptions to open investments also declined steeply from 45 percent to 23 percent.
- **Concerns about user data privacy are increasing.** Half of leaders are concerned about third-party access to individual-level data, reaching the highest point since we first asked this question in 2019.
- **Roughly one-third of respondents plan to hire staff for AI and machine learning roles.** Additional areas of expected growth include instruction and information literacy, assessment, student success, scholarly communication, and research data management.

Introduction

Since 2010, Ithaka S+R has conducted the US Library Survey triennially to track the perspectives, priorities, and leadership strategies of library deans and directors at four-year, not-for-profit academic institutions. The survey provides library leaders and higher education stakeholders with a high-level view of issues at the forefront of academic library leadership, including how leaders conceptualize the library's role, strategic alignment, and value proposition within the campus context. This research initiative is part of a broader portfolio of work administered by Ithaka S+R that includes the Art Museum Director Survey, the US Instructor Survey, the A*CENSUS survey of archivists, and the forthcoming US Researcher Survey. Collectively, these survey-based projects surface differences in perspectives across professional communities, as well as shared priorities and challenges that bridge them.

Now in its seventh iteration, the 2025 US Library Survey includes topics that have been tracked across multiple cycles as well as new areas of inquiry intended to capture the current higher education landscape.

Consistent with previous cycles, the current survey focuses on the core role and functions of the library, the relationship of library leaders to other senior administrators, and key dimensions of strategy and operations related to budgets, staffing, collections, and student success. It retains legacy items to allow for cross-sample comparison across prior cycles while also incorporating new questions on emerging priorities and issues. Prominent new areas of inquiry in this cycle include generative AI, developments in the scholarly communication ecosystem, and organizational change management.

The survey was fielded from November 3 through December 19, 2025. We received 483 complete, valid survey submissions, yielding a response rate of 36 percent. The sample varied by Carnegie Classification and sector, with a higher share of respondents from doctoral institutions (38 percent) and private institutions (53 percent). See Table 1 for the complete breakdown of the sample's institutional demographics. Note that reporting for the 2025 cycle reflects the newest updates to the Carnegie Classification framework, including the addition of a distinct special focus institution type. Additional details on how we aggregated Carnegie Classification types and their representation within the sample are provided in Appendix A.

Table 1. Demographics of Sample Institutions

Demographic	Count	Proportion of Total (%)
<i>Carnegie Classification</i>		
Baccalaureate	75	15.5
Master's	119	24.6
Doctoral	183	37.9
Special Focus	94	19.5
N/A	12	2.5
<i>Sector</i>		
Public, four-year or above	216	44.7
Private not-for-profit, four-year or above	255	52.8
N/A	12	2.5

Respondents themselves were primarily White (84 percent), women (61 percent), and 55 years or older (44 percent). The majority (57 percent) had been in their current role for five years or fewer. See Appendix B, Table

B.1 for the complete distribution of the sample across all measured demographic variables.

To analyze the data presented in this report, we used a range of techniques to examine responses overall and stratified by key institutional characteristics, particularly Carnegie Classification and sector. For descriptive statistics, we generally report the cumulative share of respondents selecting the highest response options on a given scale—for example, those who strongly agreed with a statement or rated an activity as highly important. For select Likert scale questions introduced in 2025, figures present the full distribution across response options to provide a more complete baseline view. Where comparable data from prior cycles are available, we report changes over time to identify cross-sample shifts in library leaders' views and priorities. Figures showing results by cycle focus on data from 2019 onward in order to foreground the most recent cross-cycle comparisons.

For more detailed information on our methodological approach, please see Appendix C. Consistent with previous cycles, a deidentified version of the dataset and the full survey instrument will be deposited with the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research for long-term preservation and free public access.

Library leader role, governance, and relationship to the institution

What does it mean to lead a library today? Each cycle, we return to this question by asking library leaders to reflect on how they allocate their time, the constraints they encounter, the competencies they identify as most valuable, and their relationship to other senior administrators on campus.

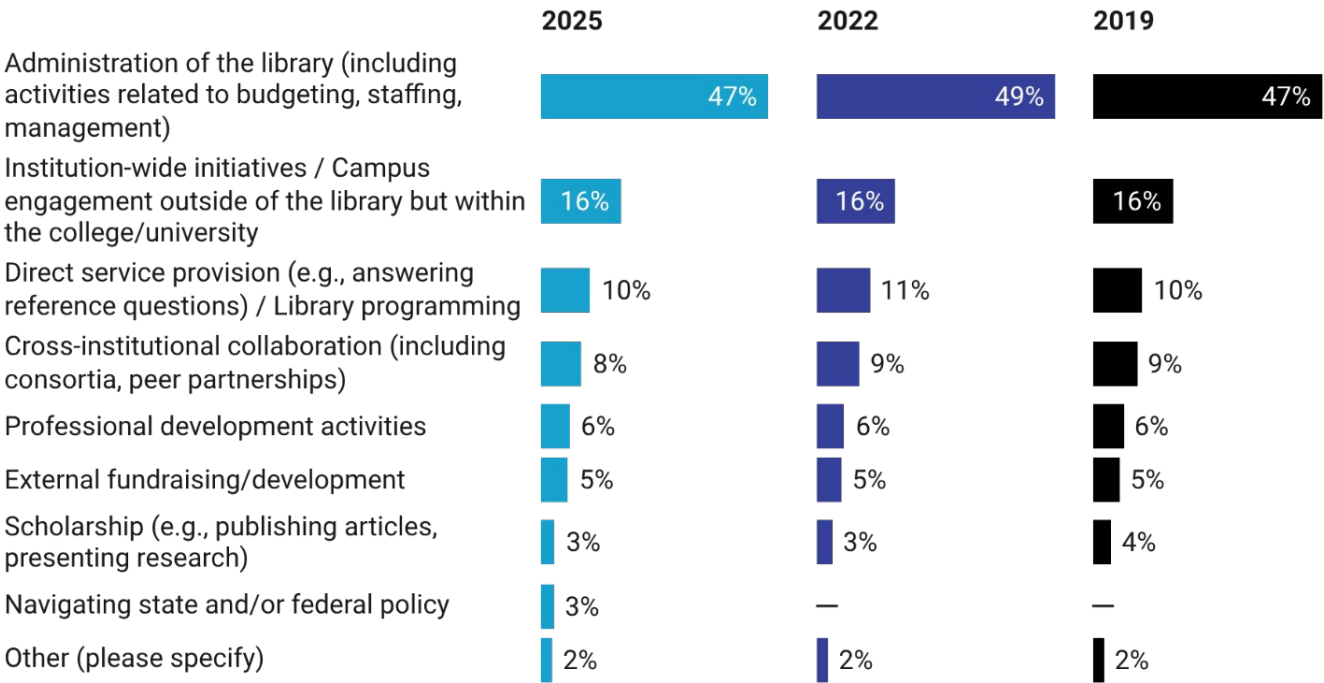
Consistently since 2019, the data have told a remarkably stable story: nearly half of leaders spend their time on administrative tasks (47 percent), followed in a distant second by institution-wide initiatives or campus engagement (16 percent), and then direct service provision (10 percent). New this cycle, we introduced an item on navigating state and/or federal policy, and this takes up the least amount of leaders' time (3 percent; see Figure 1).

When we stratified the analysis, we found meaningful differences by Carnegie Classification and sector on four items. Leaders at doctoral institutions were more likely to spend their time on external fundraising or development (9 percent) compared to leaders at the other three institution types (2–5 percent). Leaders at special focus (9 percent) and doctoral institutions (6 percent) were less likely to spend time on direct service provision when compared to their counterparts at baccalaureate (15 percent) and master's institutions (13 percent).

Meanwhile, leaders at public institutions were more likely than their counterparts at private institutions to spend their time on administrative tasks (49 percent versus 45 percent, respectively), external fundraising (8 percent versus 3 percent), and navigating state and/or federal policy (4 percent versus 1 percent), but less time on direct service provision (5 percent at public versus 14 percent at private institutions).

Figure 1. In your current role, what percentage of your time do you spend on the following activities? Percentages must add to 100%.

Average amount of time spent per activity, by cycle

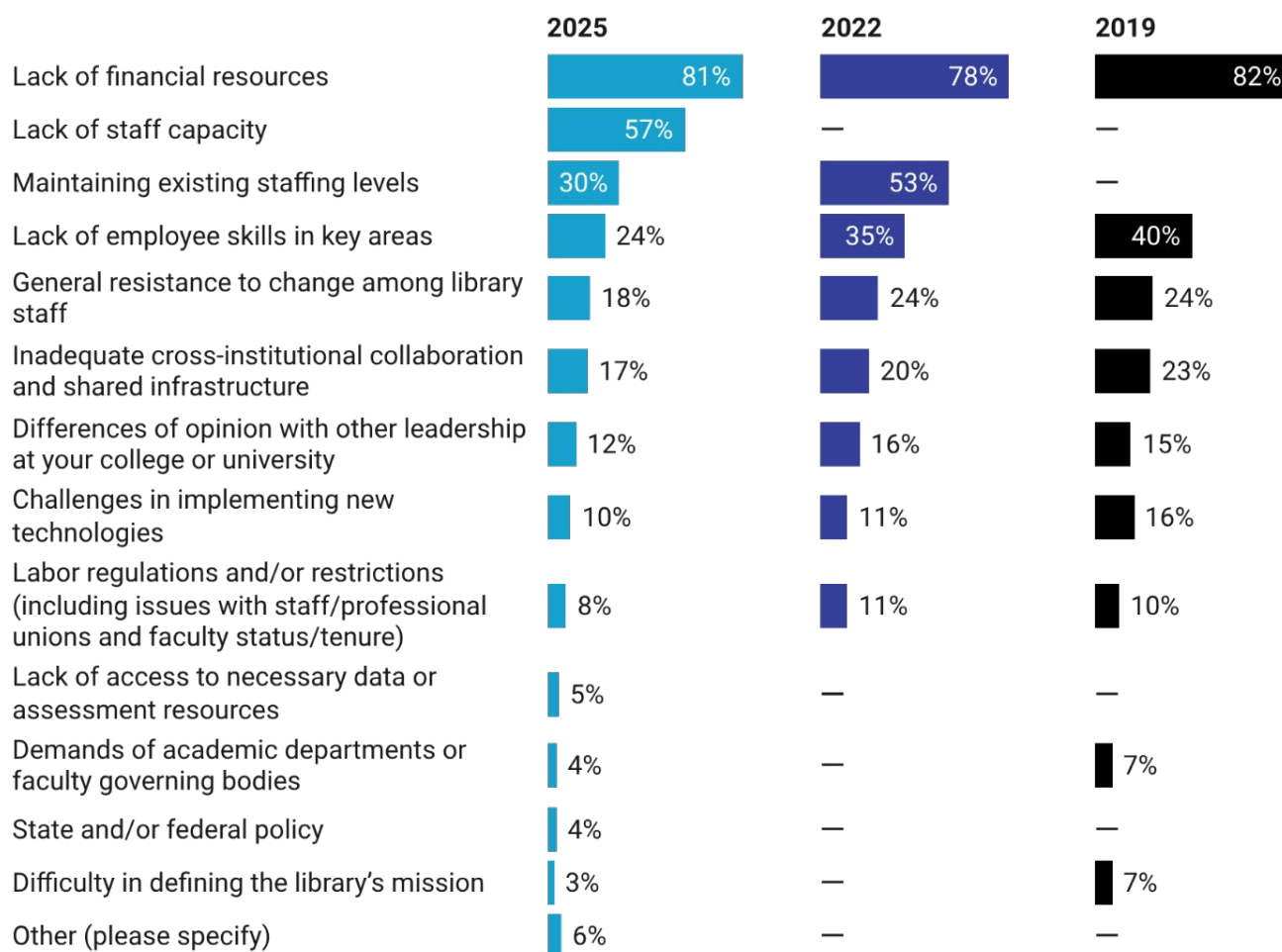


Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

As in prior cycles, financial constraints remained the top barrier for leaders: 81 percent identified a lack of financial resources as a primary constraint on their ability to make desired changes in their library (see Figure 2), far exceeding any other factor. Lack of staff capacity was the second most frequently cited constraint (57 percent), followed by the ability to maintain existing staffing levels (30 percent). Smaller shares identified a lack of employee skills in key areas (24 percent), resistance to change among library staff (18 percent), and inadequate cross-institutional collaboration and shared infrastructure (17 percent) as constraints.

Leaders at doctoral institutions were more likely to struggle with a lack of employee skills in key areas (32 percent) and navigating state or federal policy (8 percent) compared to their peers. Constraints differed along sector lines as well: leaders at public institutions, relative to their peers at private institutions, were more likely to encounter constraints related to labor regulations and/or restrictions (14 percent) and state and/or federal policy (8 percent).

Figure 2. What are the primary constraints on your ability to make desired changes in your library?
Please select up to three items that have the greatest impact at your institution.
Percentage of respondents selecting the given constraint, by cycle



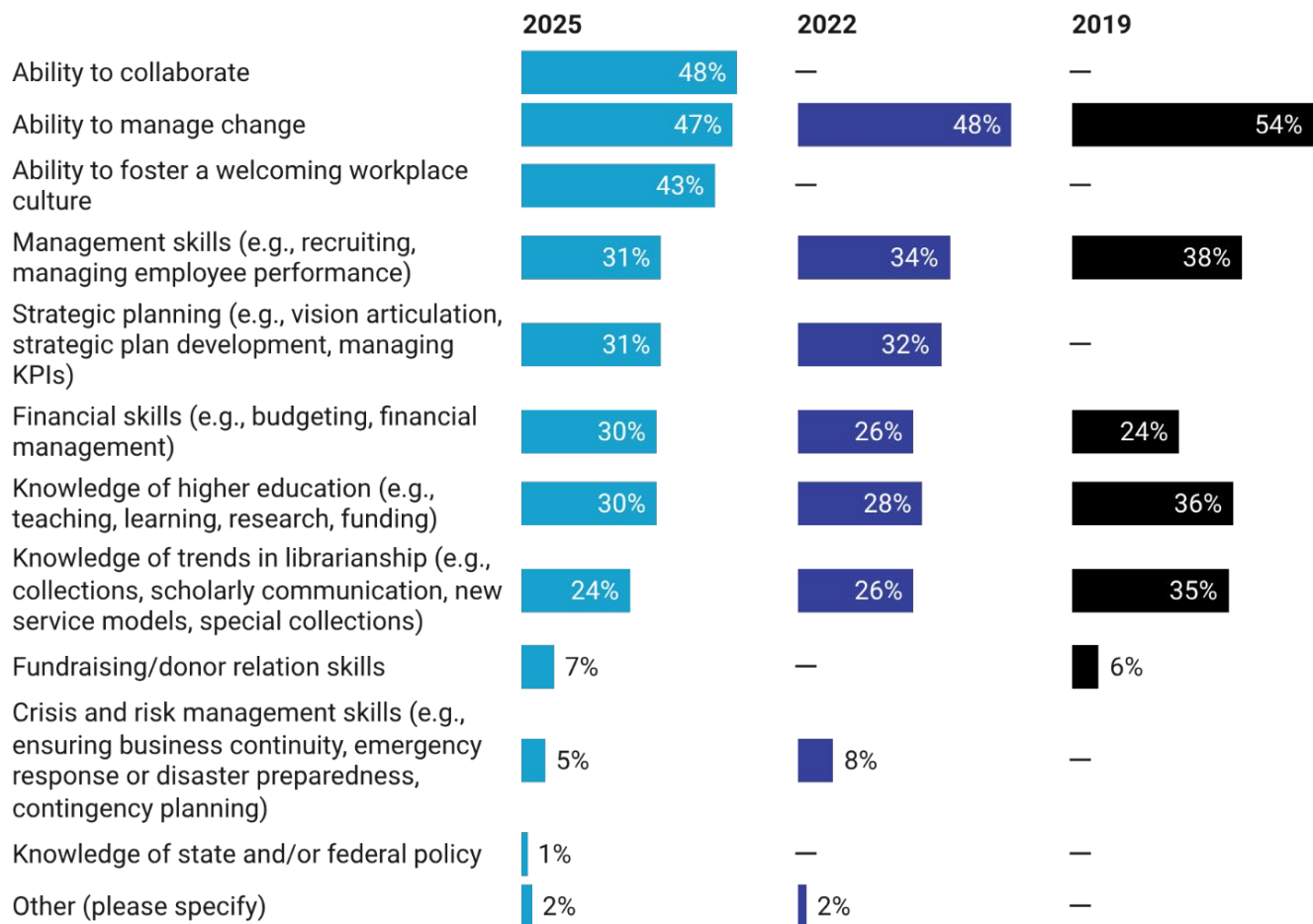
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Leaders were also asked to identify the three skills, abilities, or competencies most valuable in their current role (see Figure 3). Nearly half selected the ability to collaborate (48 percent) and the ability to manage change (47 percent), followed by the ability to foster a welcoming culture (43 percent). Approximately one-third indicated management skills, strategic planning, knowledge of higher education, and financial skills as valuable to their leadership as well. Again, leaders' selections are generally consistent across cycles.

Fundraising/donor relation skills were more salient for some groups than others. Leaders at doctoral institutions were more likely to identify fundraising or donor relation skills as valuable (14 percent), as were leaders at public institutions (11 percent). Conversely, leaders at baccalaureate institutions were less likely to identify fundraising or donor relation skills as valuable (< 1 percent).

Figure 3. Which of the following knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies have been most valuable for you in your current position? Please select up to three items.

Percentage of respondents selecting the given proficiency, by cycle



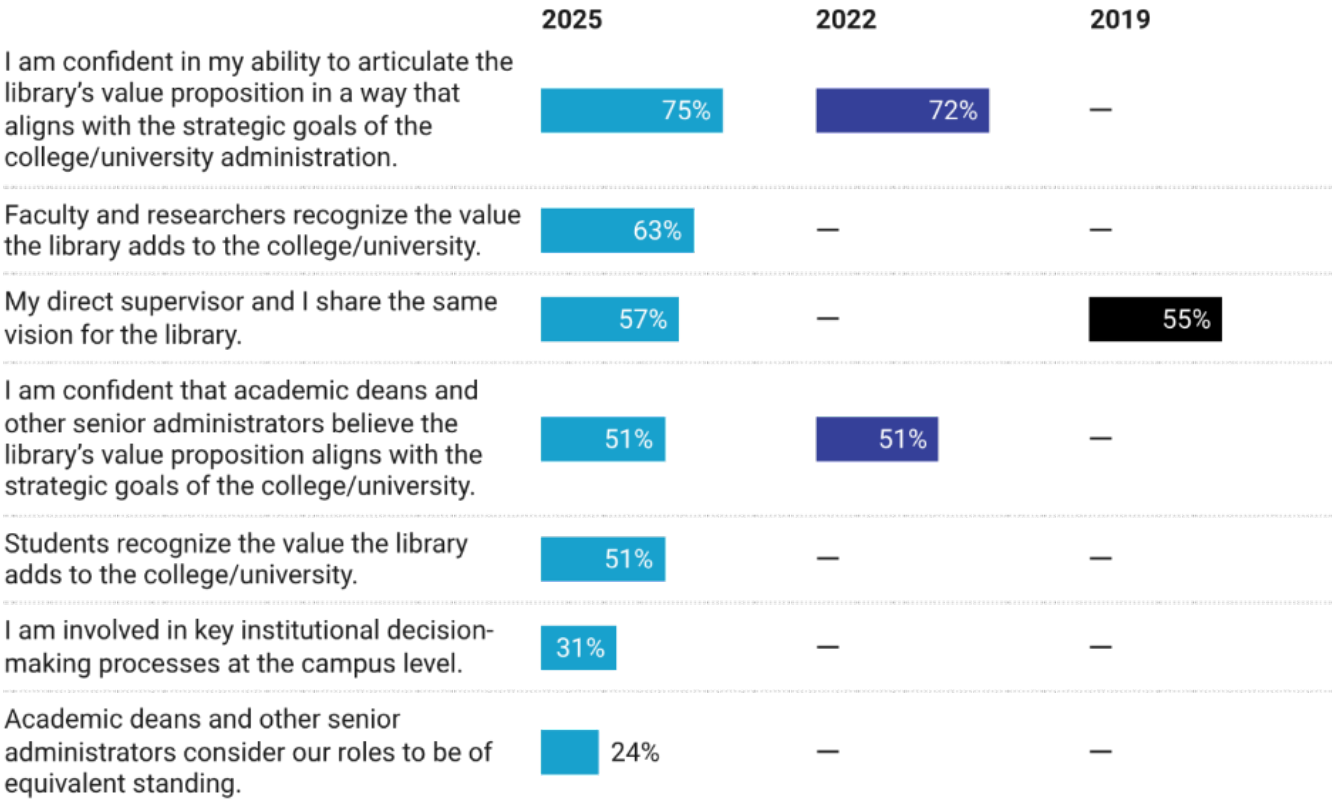
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In 2022, we introduced two questions related to the value proposition of the library. We took the opportunity to expand this topic in the 2025 cycle to better track the library's alignment and perceptions of its value within the institution (see Figure 4). Three-quarters of leaders expressed that they are confident in their ability to articulate the library's value proposition in a way that aligns with the strategic goals of their administration. However, only a little over half were confident that other senior administrators believe the library's value proposition aligns with institutional goals, mirroring the gap observed between these two items in 2022.

Sixty-three percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that faculty and researchers recognize the value the library adds to their institution, while 57 percent agreed that they share the same vision for the library as their supervisor. At the institution-wide level, agreement was lower. Only 31 percent agreed that they are involved in key decision-making processes at the campus level, and just 24 percent agreed that their role is perceived to be of equivalent standing by academic deans and other senior administrators.

These perceptions differed by Carnegie Classification and sector. Leaders at doctoral institutions (32 percent) were more likely than those at master's (22 percent) and special focus institutions (17 percent) to agree that academic deans and other senior administrators see their roles as being of equivalent standing. They were also more likely than leaders at all other institution types to report involvement in key decision-making processes at the campus level (42 percent at doctoral institutions versus 19–27 percent at other institution types). Leaders at doctoral institutions (72 percent) were more likely than those at baccalaureate (52 percent) and master's institutions (54 percent) to agree that faculty and researchers recognize the value the library adds to the institution, and more likely than leaders at master's institutions to agree that students recognize the value of the library (56 percent at doctoral versus 43 percent at master's institutions). Meanwhile, leaders at public institutions were more likely than those at private institutions to agree that they are involved in key decision-making at the campus level (41 percent versus 23 percent) and that they are viewed as being of equivalent standing among academic deans and other senior administrators (33 percent versus 16 percent).

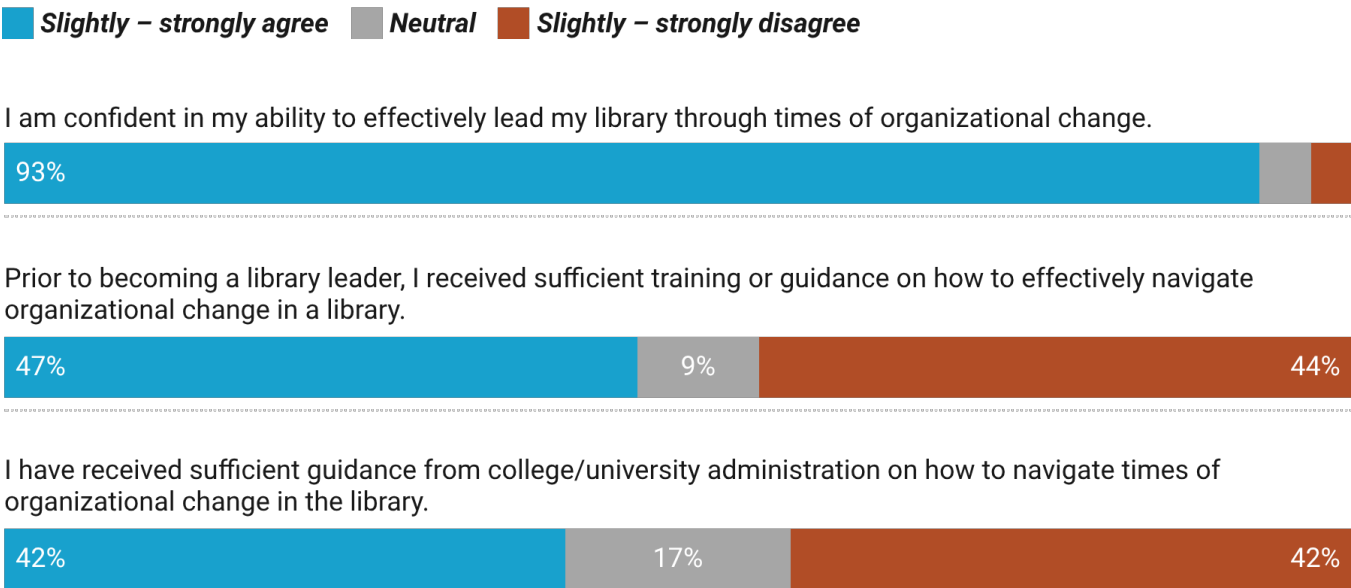
Figure 4. Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement below.
Percentage of respondents answering agree – strongly agree, by cycle



Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

To further investigate leaders’ experiences navigating their role within the library, we introduced new questions in the 2025 cycle to assess their confidence in managing organizational change (see Figure 5). Leaders expressed high levels of confidence in their ability to manage organizational change, but reported less preparation and institutional guidance for doing so. While 93 percent agreed that they can effectively lead their library through times of organizational change, only 47 percent agreed that they had received sufficient training for this challenge prior to becoming a library leader. Even fewer (42 percent) agreed that they have received sufficient guidance from their institution’s administration on managing change. By institution type, leaders at doctoral institutions were more likely than those at master’s institutions to agree that they had received sufficient guidance from their administration on how to navigate organizational change (52 percent versus 34 percent).

Figure 5. Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement below.
Percentage of respondents answering ____



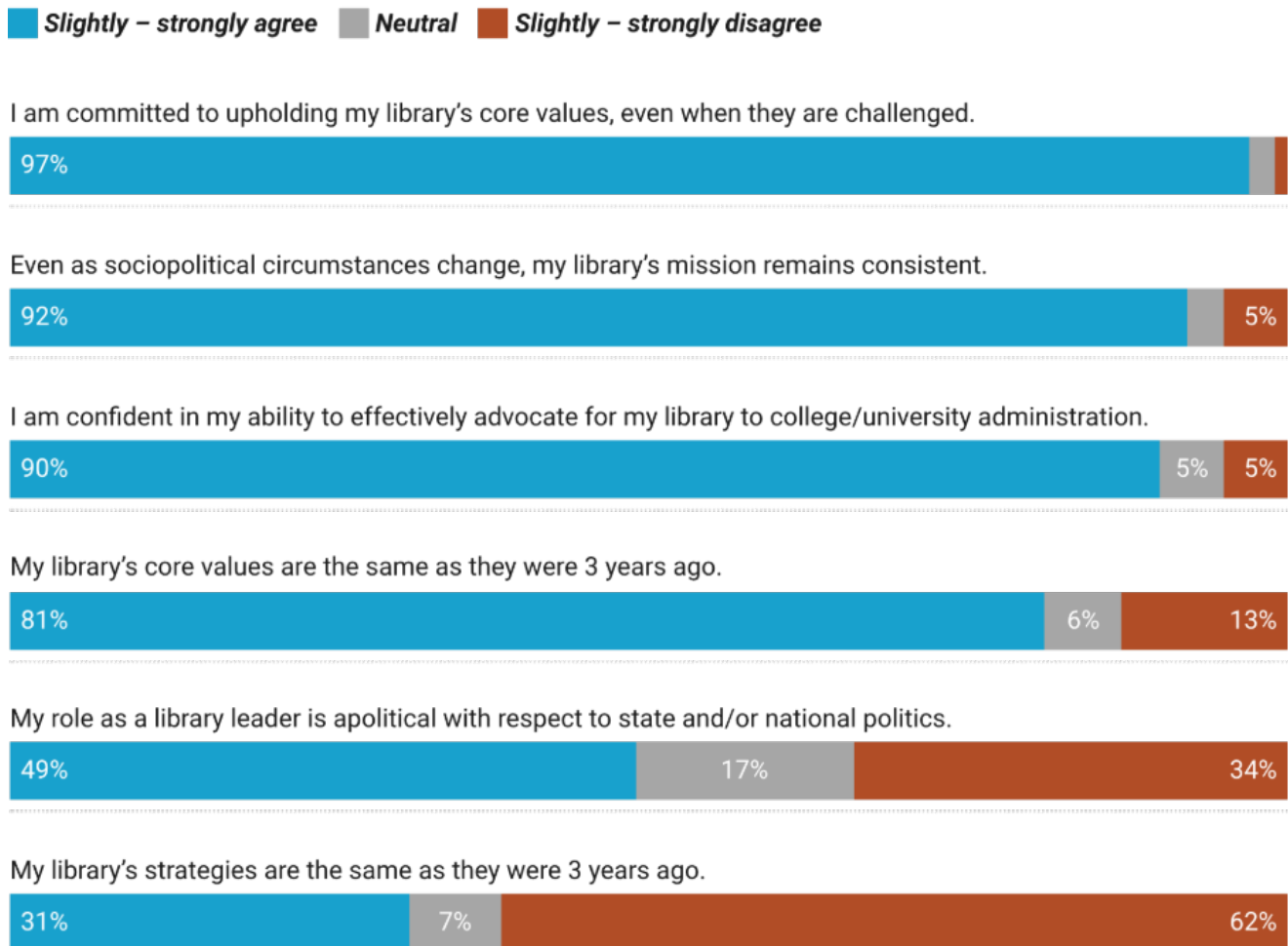
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New items in the 2025 survey provided additional insight into how leaders understand the relationship between values, strategy, and sociopolitical context (see Figure 6). Respondents expressed strong commitment to core library values, with 97 percent agreeing that they uphold these values when challenged. A similarly large share (92 percent) agreed that the library’s mission remains consistent as sociopolitical circumstances change. At the same time, fewer respondents reported stability in strategy: while 81 percent indicated that their library’s core values had remained consistent over the past three years, fewer than one-third indicated that the library’s strategies have remained the same in that time period. Views were more mixed regarding the political dimensions of the role, as 49 percent agreed that their role as a library leader is apolitical with respect to state or national politics.

While 81 percent indicated that their library’s core values had remained consistent over the past three years, fewer than one-third indicated that the library’s strategies have remained the same in that time period.

Leaders at private institutions were more likely than those at public institutions to report that their values had remained the same (85 percent versus 75 percent), that they upheld those values when challenged (99 percent versus 95 percent), and that their role is apolitical (52 percent versus 45 percent).

Figure 6. Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement below.
Percentage of respondents answering ____



Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

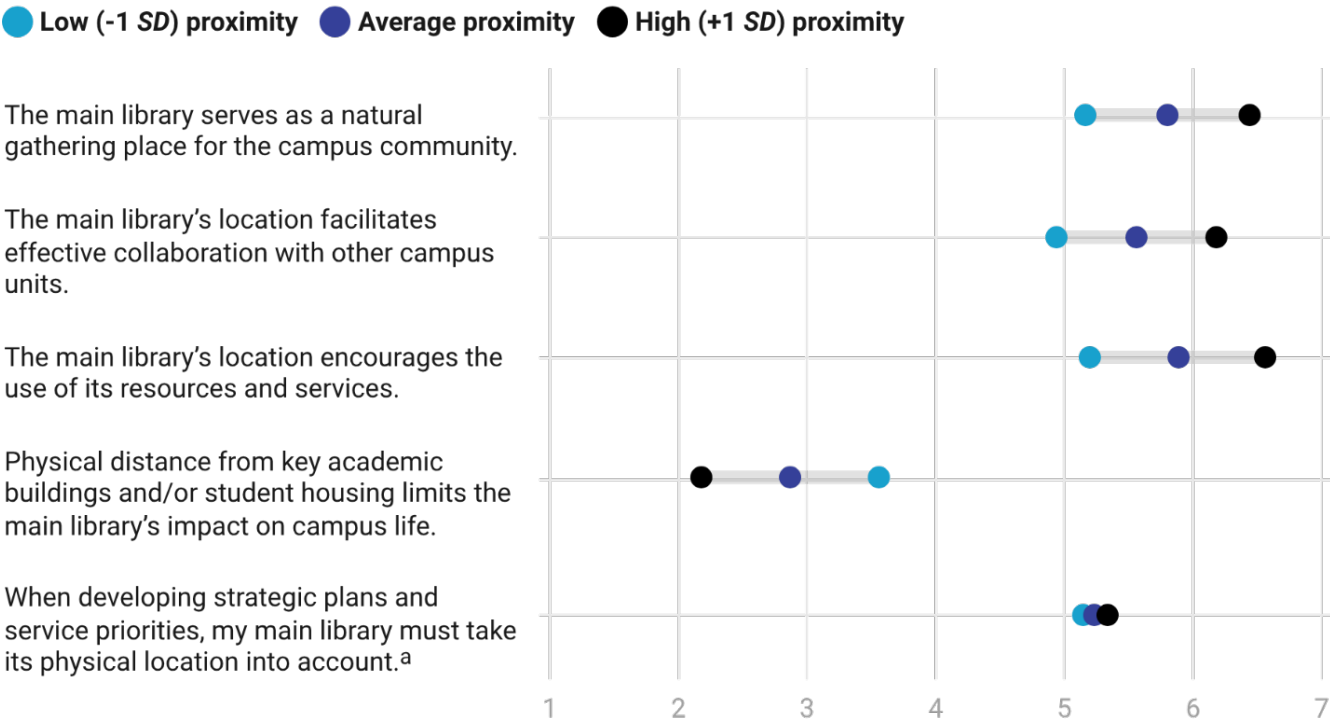
This cycle, the survey also explored how the library's physical location relates to its perceived impact on campus life. Respondents were asked to indicate how close their main library is to the campus center using a visual scale ranging from 0 (very distant) to 100 (fully central). Most reported relatively high levels of centrality, with a median score of 85, suggesting that most main libraries are located near the core of campus. To better

understand how location relates to perceptions of the library's role, we examined whether proximity to the campus center predicted indicators of campus engagement.¹ Leaders of more centrally located libraries were more likely to report that the library serves as a natural gathering place for the campus community, that its location facilitates collaboration with other campus units, and that its location encourages use of library resources and services. Moreover, these leaders of central libraries were more likely to disagree that physical distance from key academic buildings or student housing limits the library's impact on campus life.

This relationship did not extend to strategic planning, in that the proximity to the campus center was not associated with whether leaders reported considering location when developing strategic plans and service priorities. In practice, most respondents, regardless of how centrally their library is located, indicated that they consider location when developing these plans. Given the differences in perceived campus engagement described above, this consistency may indicate that existing planning approaches do not fully account for the constraints associated with more peripheral locations. Figure 7 shows how libraries measured on these facets of campus engagement by level of centrality. For comparative purposes, libraries are grouped into three categories: those relatively far from the campus center ("low" proximity or one standard deviation below the mean), those at a typical distance ("average" or mean proximity), and those especially close to the center of campus ("high" proximity or one standard deviation above the mean).

¹ Some indicators of campus engagement varied by Carnegie Classification and sector. Leaders at doctoral institutions were more likely than those at master's institutions to agree that the main library serves as a natural gathering place for the campus community (77 percent versus 65 percent) and that its location encourages use of library resources and services (84 percent versus 71 percent). Leaders at public institutions were more likely than those at private institutions to agree that the main library serves as a natural gathering place for the campus community (73 percent versus 69 percent), that its location facilitates effective collaboration with other campus units (69 percent versus 60 percent), and that its location encourages use of library resources and services (80 percent versus 73 percent).

Figure 7. Predicted campus engagement indicators across levels of proximity to the campus center
Campus engagement indicators were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree)



^a Item was not statistically significantly associated with the library's proximity to the campus center.
 Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Role of the library

Academic libraries have increasingly repositioned their role within the institution, balancing traditional collection responsibilities with expanding service-oriented functions. Indeed, prior survey cycles have demonstrated a shift in how leaders perceive the library's primary role, away from collections and toward service provision. To better understand how they currently situate their organizations along this continuum, respondents were asked to describe their library using a sliding scale, where one end represented a library that primarily functions as a repository of collections (0) and the other a principally service-oriented organization (100). On average, respondents placed their libraries closer to the service-oriented end of the continuum with a mean rating of 67, indicating that most viewed their organizations as more service- than collections-focused, while still fulfilling elements of both roles.

This orientation toward services was further reflected in how leaders assessed the importance of specific library functions. Figure 8 presents ratings across a range of functional areas, with data from the 2022 and 2019 cycles shown for comparison where available. Ratings were broadly consistent over time, with only minor variation across cycles. Nearly all respondents rated helping students develop research, critical analysis, and information literacy skills as highly important (98 percent), an area that has consistently ranked as near universal in importance across survey cycles. A similarly large share rated paying for and negotiating access to resources needed by faculty and researchers as highly important (92 percent), representing a slight increase from prior cycles. Respondents also rated supporting and facilitating instructional activities (89 percent) and serving as a “third space” for students to gather and socialize (88 percent) as highly important.

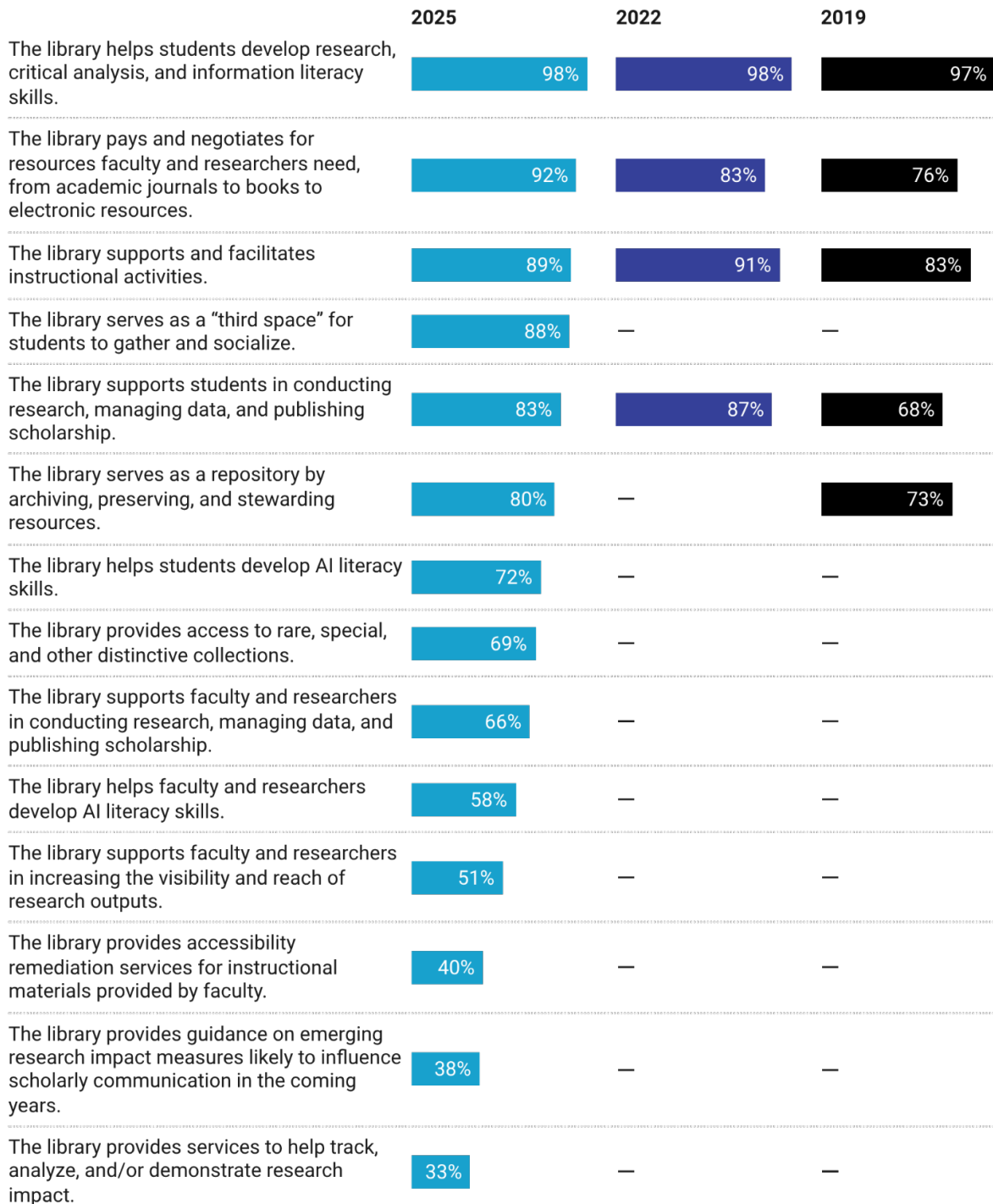
Supporting students' development of AI literacy skills was also widely prioritized, with 72 percent rating this as highly important. By comparison, fewer respondents rated supporting faculty and researchers' development of AI literacy skills as highly important (58 percent).

While respondents broadly prioritized student learning and campus life, most viewed supporting research impact as lower in priority. Thirty-eight percent rated providing guidance on emerging research impact measures

as highly important, and 33 percent rated providing services to support the demonstration of research impact as highly important.

Figure 8. 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*



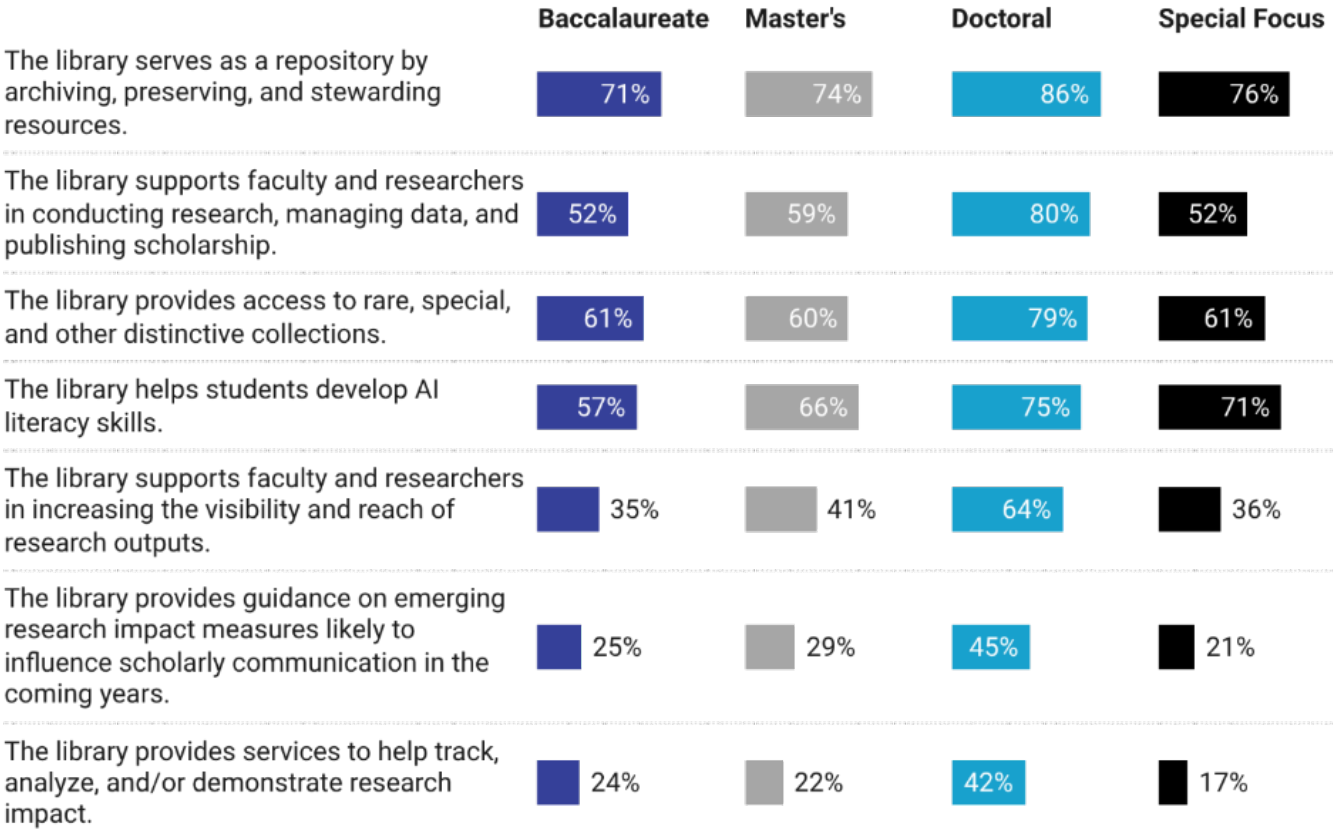
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Responses to several of these items varied by Carnegie Classification (see Figure 9), with the largest differences observed for research-related functions. Leaders at doctoral institutions were more likely than those at all other institution types to rate the library's role in supporting faculty and researchers in conducting research, managing data, and publishing scholarship as highly important. They also placed greater importance than those at other institution types on providing access to rare, special, and other distinctive collections, as well as on increasing the visibility and reach of research outputs. In addition, leaders at doctoral institutions more frequently rated providing services to track, analyze, and demonstrate research impact, as well as offering guidance on emerging research impact measures, as highly important than those at other institution types. Finally, leaders at doctoral institutions placed greater importance on the library's role as a repository compared to leaders at baccalaureate and master's institutions, and were more likely than leaders at baccalaureate institutions to rate supporting students' development of AI literacy skills as highly important.

Several items also differed by sector. Leaders at public institutions were more likely than those at private institutions to rate as highly important the library's role as a "third space" for students (92 percent versus 86 percent), support for faculty and researchers in conducting research, managing data, and publishing scholarship (76 percent versus 57 percent), increasing the visibility and reach of research outputs (62 percent versus 40 percent), providing services to track, analyze, and demonstrate research impact (43 percent versus 24 percent), offering guidance on emerging research impact measures (46 percent versus 30 percent), and providing access to rare, special, and other distinctive collections (76 percent versus 63 percent).

Figure 9. 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 Carnegie Classification*



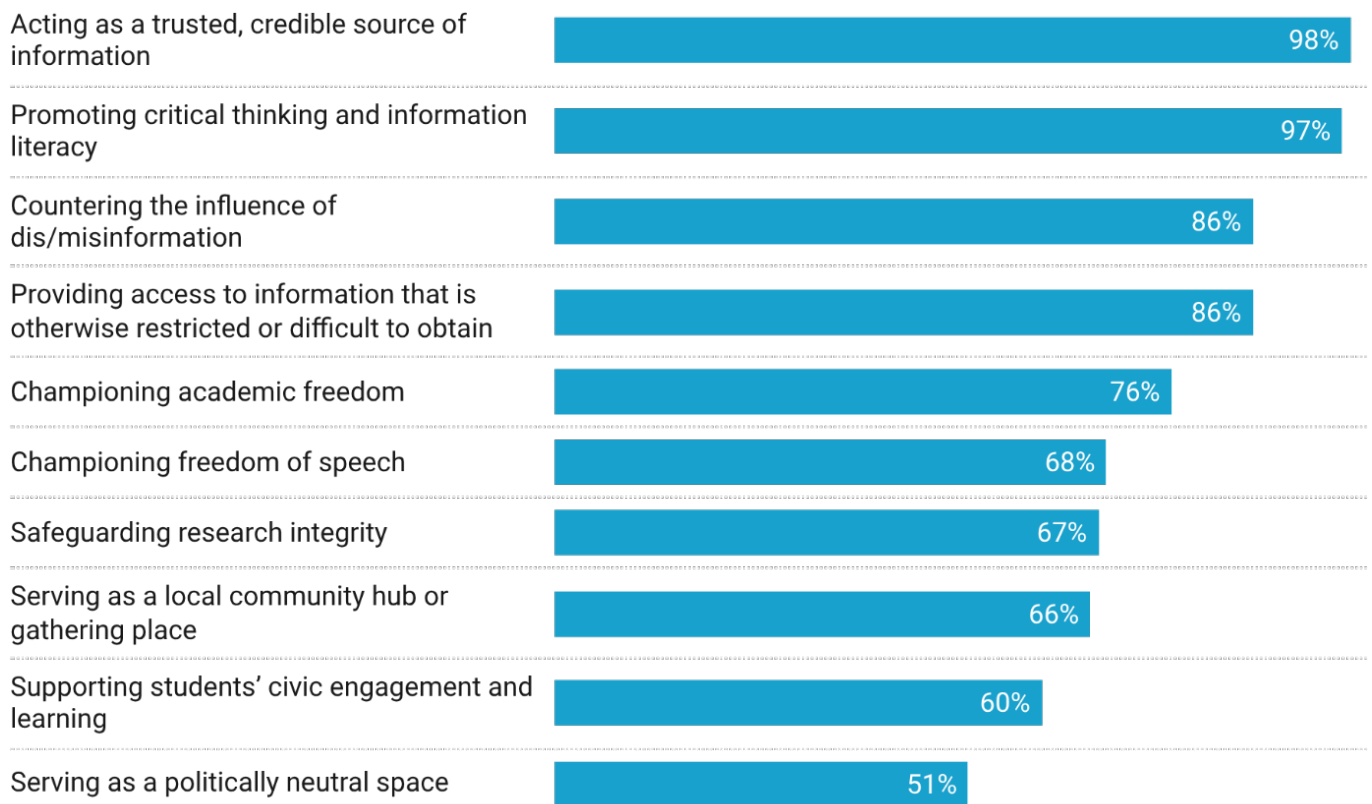
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To further examine leaders’ perspectives on the broad role of the library, respondents were asked to assess the importance of several new potential functions in 2025 (see Figure 10). Nearly all rated it as highly important for the library to serve as a trusted, credible source of information (98 percent) and to promote critical thinking and information literacy (97 percent). Eighty-six percent rated countering the influence of dis/misinformation as highly important, and an equal share rated providing access to restricted or otherwise difficult-to-obtain information as highly important.

Views of these roles varied by Carnegie Classification, primarily reflecting differences between doctoral and master’s institutions. Leaders at doctoral institutions were less likely than those at master’s institutions to rate as highly important the library’s role in championing academic freedom (65 percent versus 83 percent), promoting critical thinking and

information literacy (96 percent versus 99 percent), and countering the influence of dis/misinformation (80 percent versus 93 percent). They also rated the importance of championing freedom of speech lower (57 percent at doctoral institutions) than leaders at baccalaureate, master's, and special focus institutions (70–76 percent). Leaders at public institutions (89 percent) were more likely than those at private institutions (84 percent) to rate providing access to restricted or otherwise difficult-to-obtain information as highly important.

Figure 10. How important is it to you that your library fulfills each of the following roles?
Percentage of respondents answering very – extremely important



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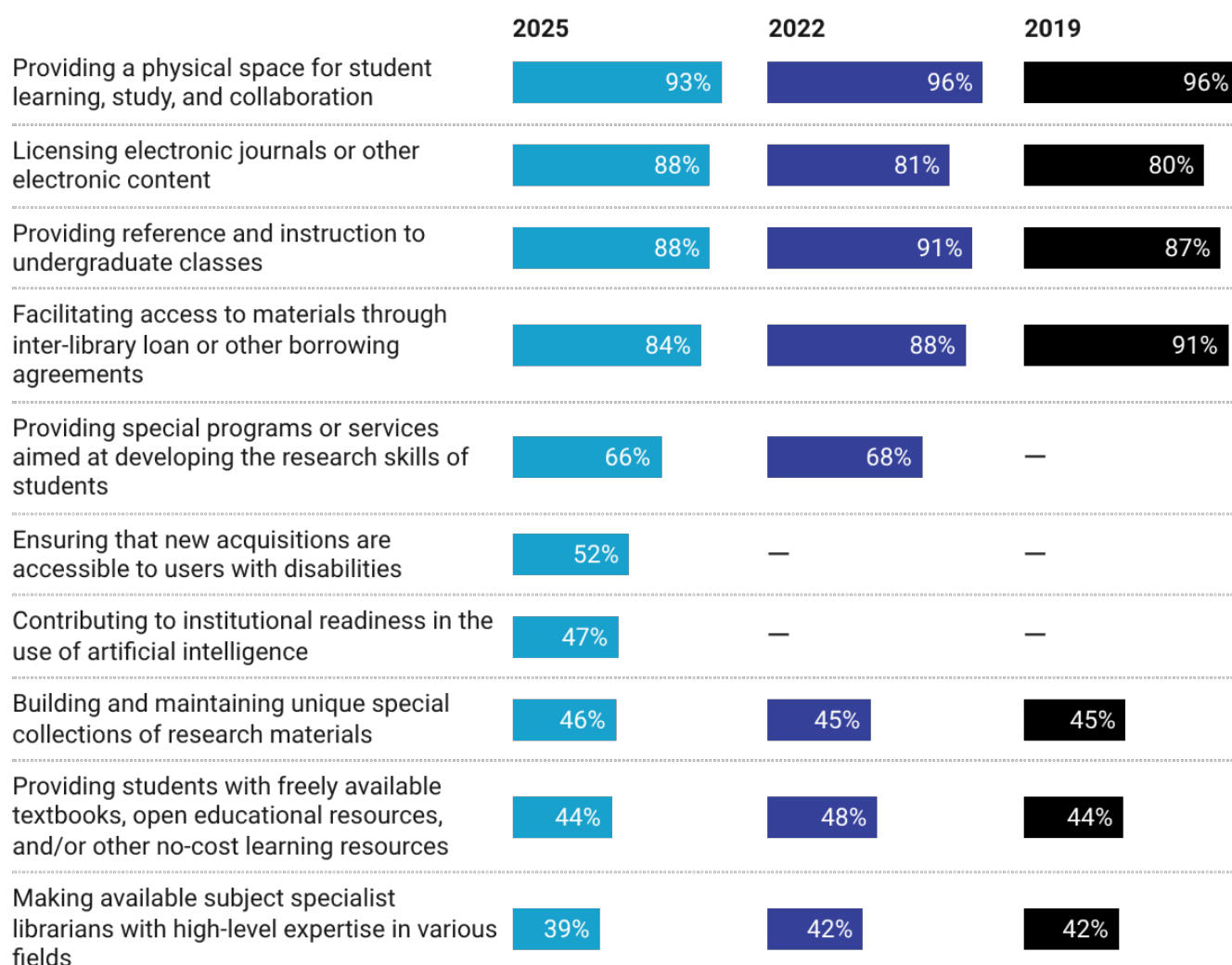
Library strategy and priorities

Library leaders reported on a wide range of strategic priorities, reflecting both enduring core functions and emerging areas. In this cycle, the section also examined the use of AI tools, climate-related disaster preparedness, and library collaborations through consortia and other partnerships.

Leaders first rated 17 library functions in terms of priority. The top 10 functions rated as highest priority in 2025 are shown in Figure 11; results across the full set of rated functions are available in Appendix D, Figure D.1.

As in prior cycles, providing a physical space for student learning, licensing electronic journals or other content, providing reference and instruction to undergraduate classes, and facilitating access to materials via interlibrary loan or other borrowing agreements were each rated as high priority by more than 80 percent of respondents. Some slight shifts in prioritization were observed across cycles; for example, licensing electronic journals or other electronic content saw the largest increase, with 88 percent of leaders rating this as high priority in 2025, compared to 81 percent in 2022 and 80 percent in 2019.

Figure 11. How much of a priority is each of the following functions in your library?
Percentage of respondents answering high – very high priority, by cycle; top 10 prioritized functions shown



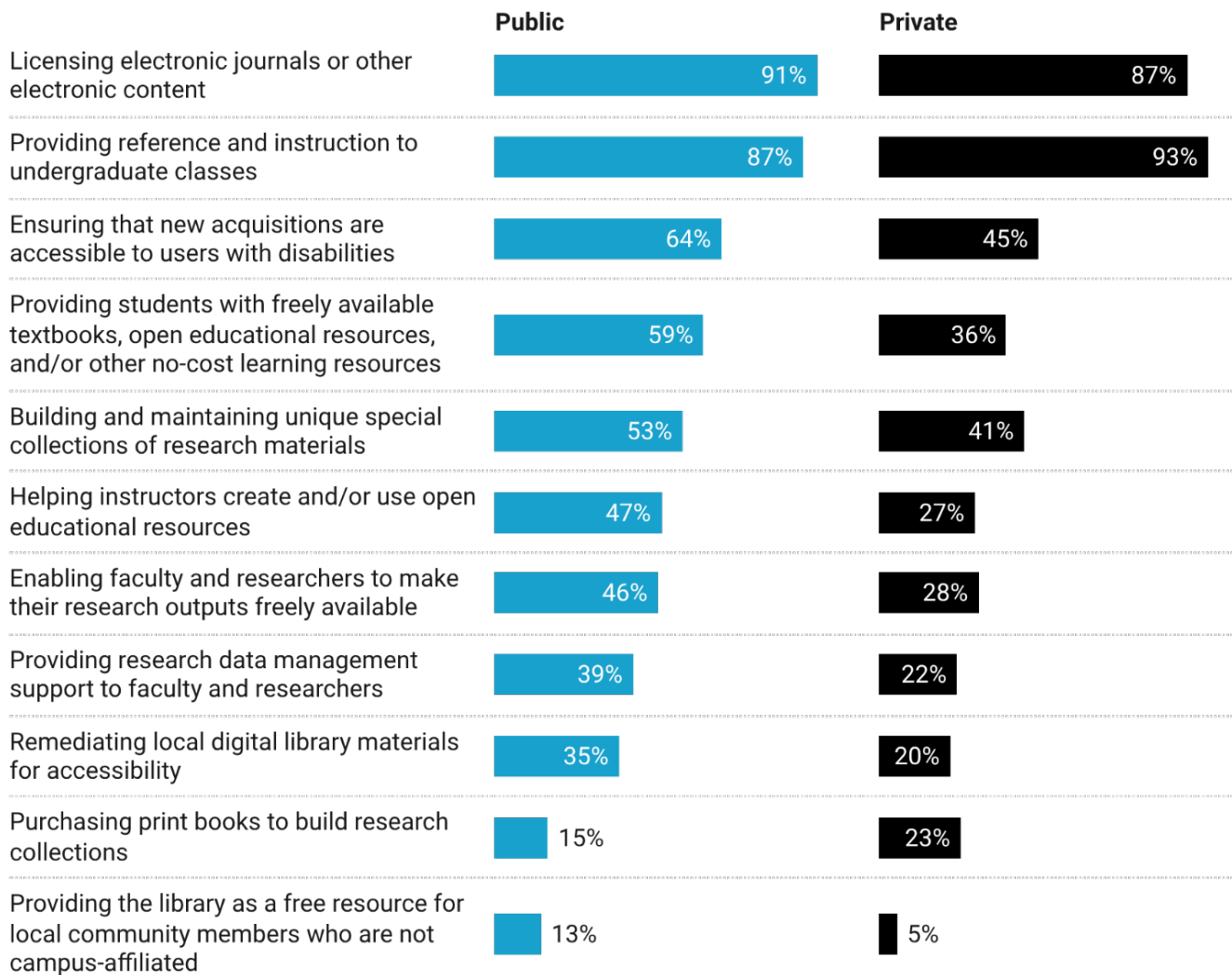
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Responses to several of these items differed by sector, with leaders at public institutions generally placing higher priority on the functions shown in Figure 12. The primary exceptions were providing reference and instruction to undergraduate classes and purchasing print books to build research collections, both of which were rated as higher priorities by leaders at private institutions.

Priorities also differed by Carnegie Classification. Leaders at doctoral institutions placed greater priority on providing research data management support (41 percent) than leaders at other institution types

(13–16 percent), as well as on enabling faculty and researchers to make their research outputs freely available (47 percent at doctoral institutions versus 19–29 percent at other institution types). Doctoral leaders also placed greater priority on building and maintaining unique special collections of research materials (61 percent) than leaders at baccalaureate (31 percent) and master’s institutions (34 percent). By contrast, leaders at baccalaureate institutions placed greater priority on purchasing print books to build research collections (28 percent) than leaders at doctoral institutions (13 percent), but placed less priority on contributing to institutional readiness in the use of AI (32 percent) than leaders at doctoral and special focus institutions (53 percent each).

Figure 12. How much of a priority is each of the following functions in your library?
*Percentage of respondents answering **high – very high priority**, by sector*



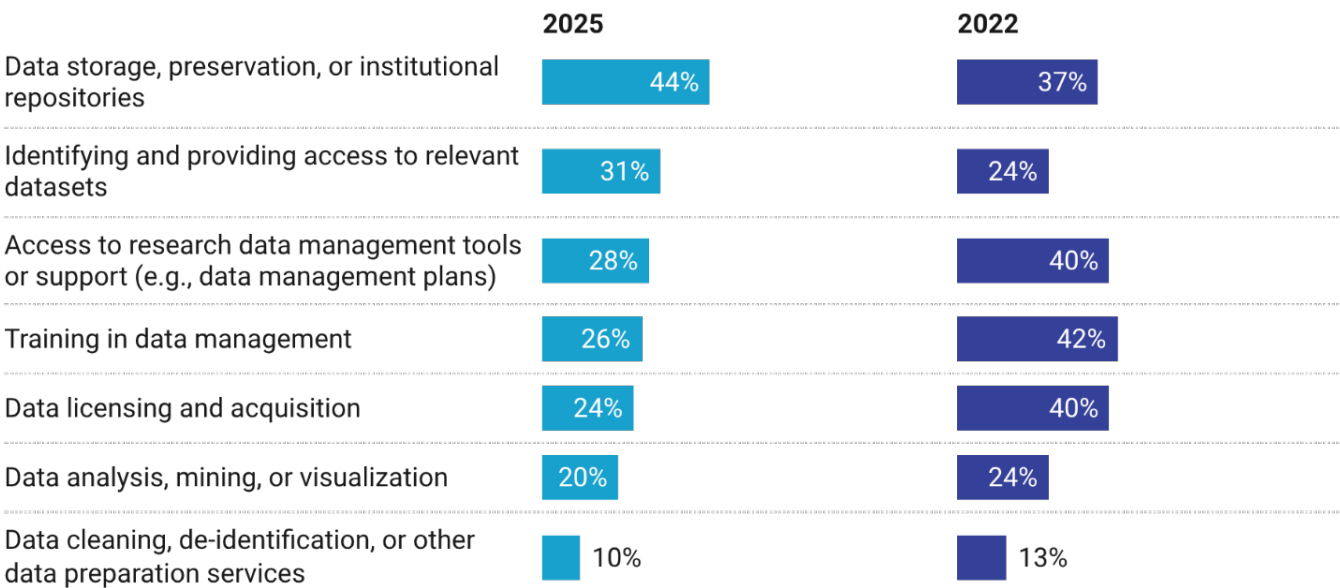
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The survey also continued to track priorities related to research data services to better understand growth and change in this area. As shown in Figure 13, leaders' ratings of these services shifted between 2022 (when this question was first introduced) and 2025. Providing data storage, preservation, or institutional repositories increased in importance, from 37 percent in 2022 to 44 percent in 2025. Identifying and providing access to relevant datasets also increased, from 24 percent in 2022 to 31 percent in 2025. Other data-oriented services, including support for data management planning and broader data support services for library users, declined in perceived importance compared to three years ago.

As in 2022, doctoral institutions in 2025 continued to place the greatest emphasis on services related to supporting and preserving research data. Across Carnegie Classifications, providing data storage, preservation, or institutional repositories was the most highly prioritized data service, but leaders at doctoral institutions were twice as likely as those at baccalaureate institutions to rate it as highly important (60 percent versus 30 percent). Public institutions also placed higher importance than private institutions on a range of research data services, including analysis, mining, or visualization (41 percent versus 19 percent), licensing and acquisition (40 percent versus 29 percent), storage, preservation, or institutional repositories (65 percent versus 43 percent), access to research data management tools or support (52 percent versus 28 percent), cleaning, de-identification, or other data preparation services (20 percent versus 13 percent), training in data management (51 percent versus 26 percent), and identifying and providing access to relevant datasets (45 percent versus 35 percent).

Figure 13. How important is it to you that your library provides each of the following research data services?

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



Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Compared to the last two survey cycles, more leaders reported having clear strategies in a number of areas (see Figure 14). Fifty-nine percent of leaders in 2025 indicated that their library has a clear collections strategy that drives decision-making about format, delivery, and access mechanisms, up from 33 percent in 2022 and 34 percent in 2019. Similarly, in 2025 the number of leaders who agreed that their library has a clear vision related to their space footprint rose to 43 percent, in contrast to 23 percent in 2022 and 24 percent in 2019.

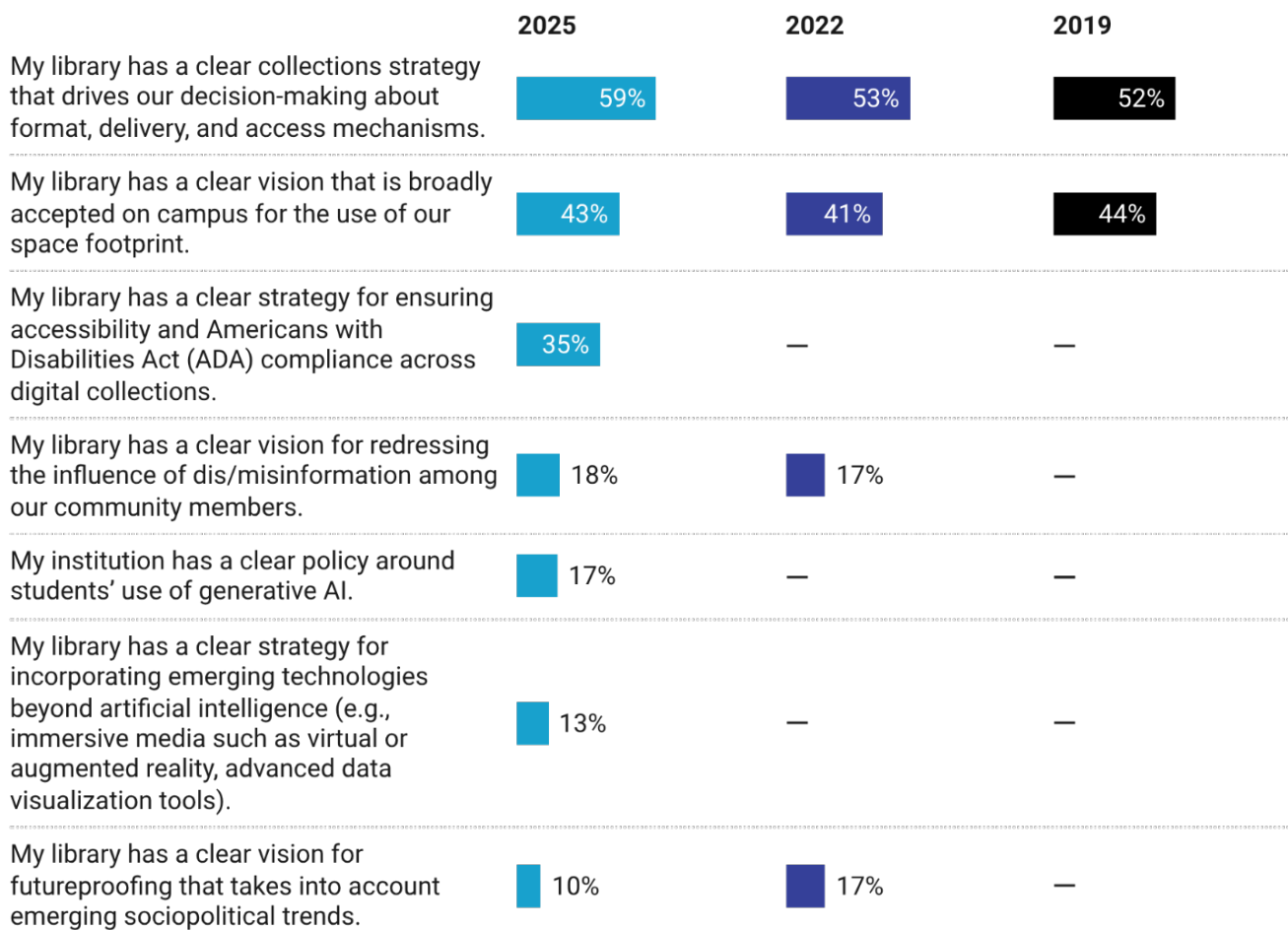
The percentage of leaders that believe the library has a clear vision for redressing the influence of dis/misinformation among community members grew markedly. When this question was introduced in 2022, only 6 percent of leaders agreed that their library had a clear vision in this area; by 2025, this share had increased to 22 percent. Combined with other findings on combatting dis/misinformation, the data indicate that while leaders feel more confident in their library’s vision on this topic, work remains to support students in developing related skills (see Figure 10 above).

Responses did not vary substantially by Carnegie Classification for most of these strategy items, though some differences emerged. Leaders at

doctoral institutions were more likely to agree that their library has a clear strategy for incorporating emerging technologies beyond AI (18 percent) than leaders at baccalaureate (11 percent) and master's institutions (8 percent). By sector, leaders at public institutions were also more likely than those at private institutions to agree that their library has a clear strategy in this area (16 percent versus 10 percent). Leaders at public institutions were also more likely to agree that their library has a clear strategy for ensuring accessibility and ADA compliance across digital collections (45 percent versus 27 percent). Conversely, leaders at private institutions were more likely than those at public institutions to agree that their library has a clear vision for addressing the influence of dis/misinformation among community members (20 percent versus 15 percent).

Figure 14. Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement below.

*Percentage of respondents answering **agree – strongly agree**, by cycle*



Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

AI in the library

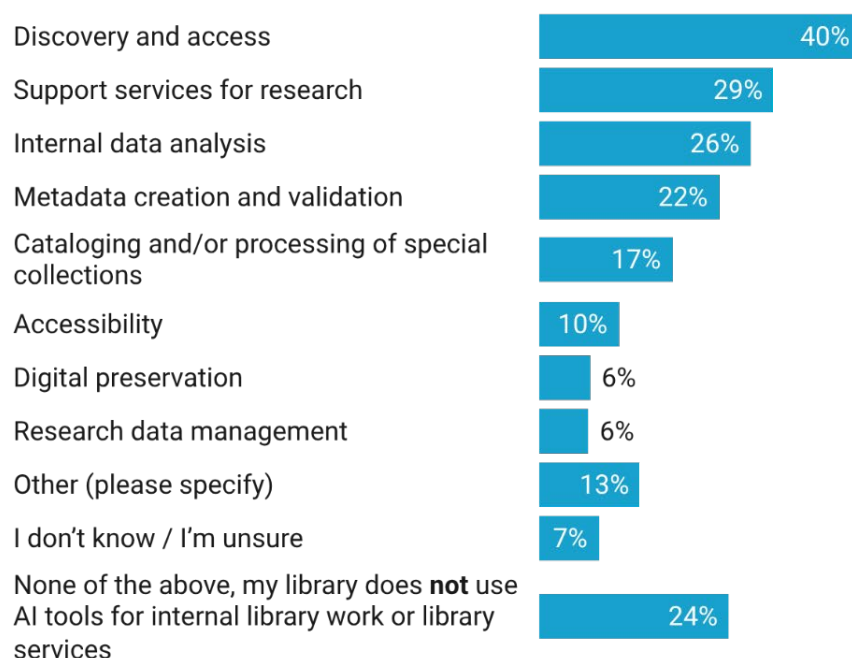
Myriad new influences have shaped higher education since 2022, perhaps none more so than AI. To better understand how AI tools are—or are not—being applied, this cycle included a set of questions examining the current and anticipated uses of AI in academic libraries.

Library leaders most frequently reported using AI tools in discovery and access (40 percent), followed by research support services (29 percent) and internal data analysis (26 percent), shown in Figure 15. By contrast, nearly one quarter indicated that their library does not use AI tools for internal work or services (24 percent). Among the 13 percent of respondents who selected “other” uses of AI, free-text responses specified using AI for purposes that included generating policies or strategic planning documents, updating research guides, transcribing oral histories, fiscal modeling, and general administrative support.

Library leaders most frequently reported using AI tools in discovery and access (40 percent), followed by research support services (29 percent) and internal data analysis (26 percent). By contrast, nearly one quarter indicated that their library does not use AI tools for internal work or services (24 percent).

Use of AI across functional areas varied by Carnegie Classification. Leaders at baccalaureate institutions were less likely to report using AI in discovery and access (25 percent), internal data analysis (12 percent), and metadata creation and validation (11 percent). Conversely, leaders at doctoral institutions were more likely to report using AI in internal data analysis (34 percent), metadata creation and validation (32 percent), and cataloging or processing special collections (23 percent). Overall, leaders at baccalaureate institutions were more likely to report non-use of AI for internal work or services (40 percent), while leaders at doctoral institutions were less likely to indicate non-use (14 percent). Differences also emerged by sector, such that leaders at private institutions (30 percent) were more likely than those at public institutions (16 percent) to report that their library does not use AI tools internally.

Figure 15. In which of the following areas, if any, does your library currently employ artificial intelligence (AI) tools to support internal library work or library services? Please select all that apply.
Percentage of respondents selecting the given functional area

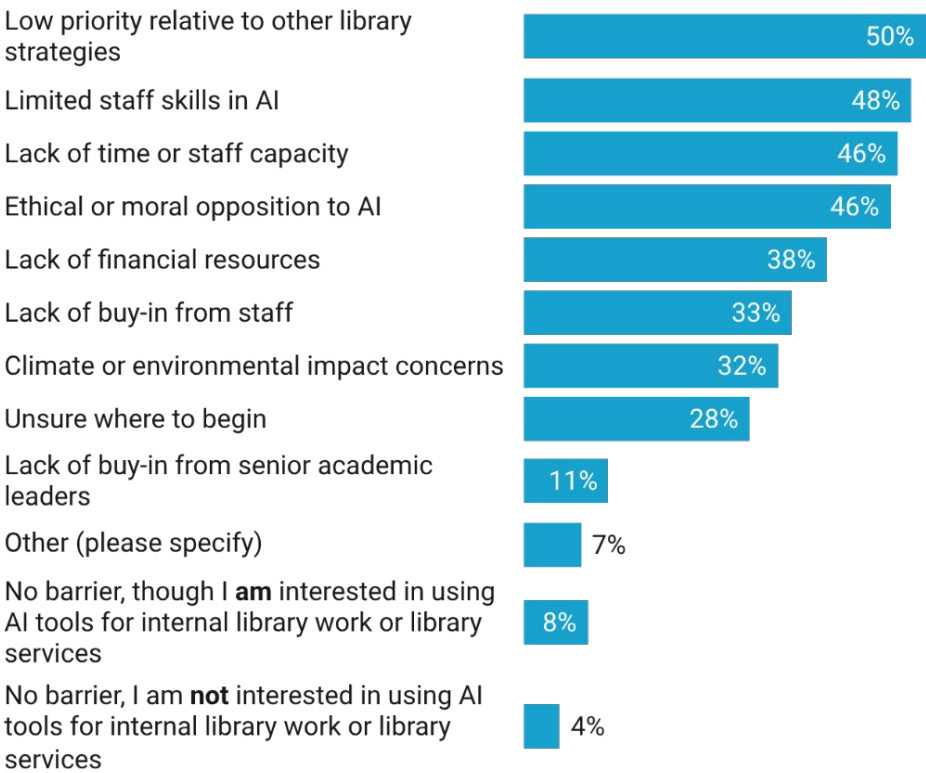


Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Respondents whose libraries do not use AI tools were asked to identify the primary barriers to adoption (see Figure 16). The most frequently cited barriers included low prioritization relative to other library strategies (50 percent), limited staff skills in AI (48 percent), lack of time or staff capacity (46 percent), and ethical or moral opposition to AI (46 percent).

Figure 16. What are the primary barriers, if any, to employing artificial intelligence (AI) tools in your library? Please select all that apply.

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

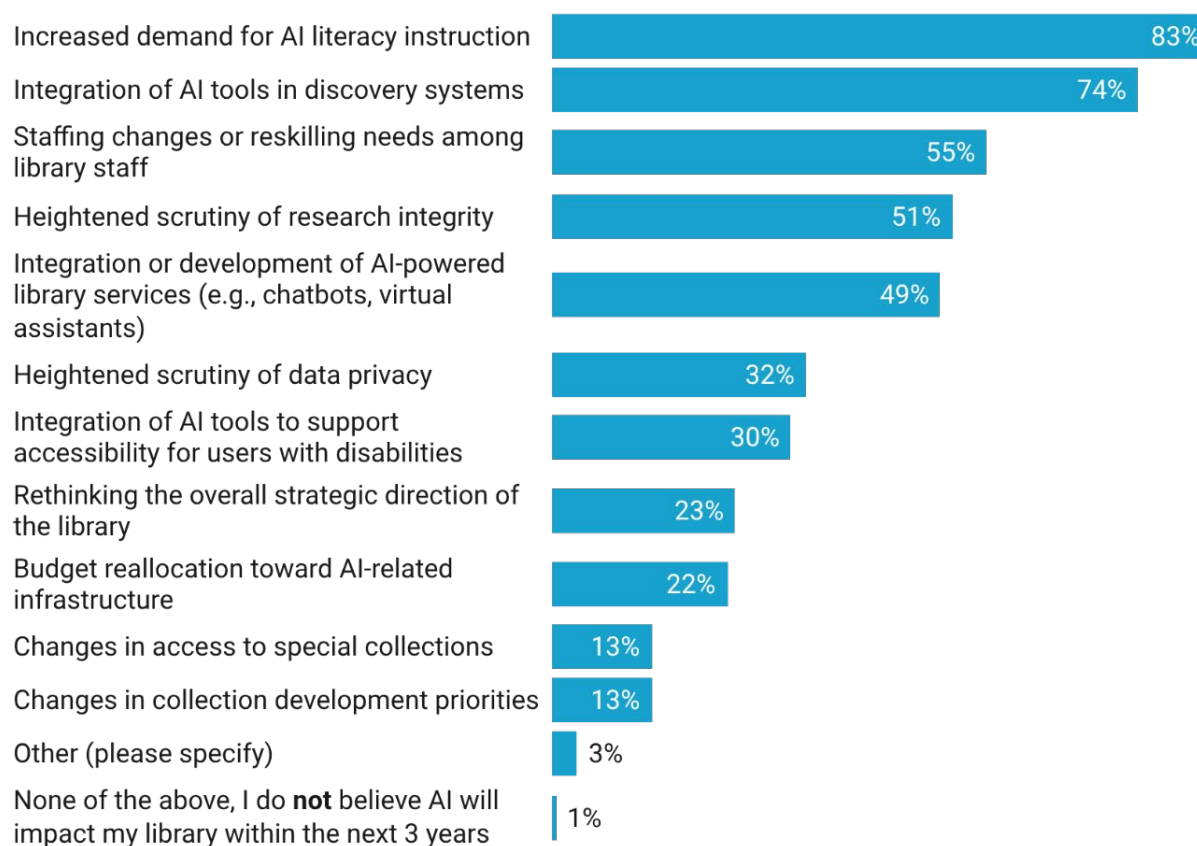


Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

All respondents were asked to indicate the ways in which they anticipated AI would most significantly impact their library within the next three years (see Figure 17). Eighty-three percent anticipated an increased demand for AI literacy instruction. Other commonly identified impacts included integrating AI tools into discovery systems (74 percent), staffing changes or reskilling needs (55 percent), and heightened scrutiny of research integrity (51 percent).

Figure 17. What, if any, do you anticipate will be the most significant impacts artificial intelligence (AI) will have on your library within the next three years? Please select all that apply.

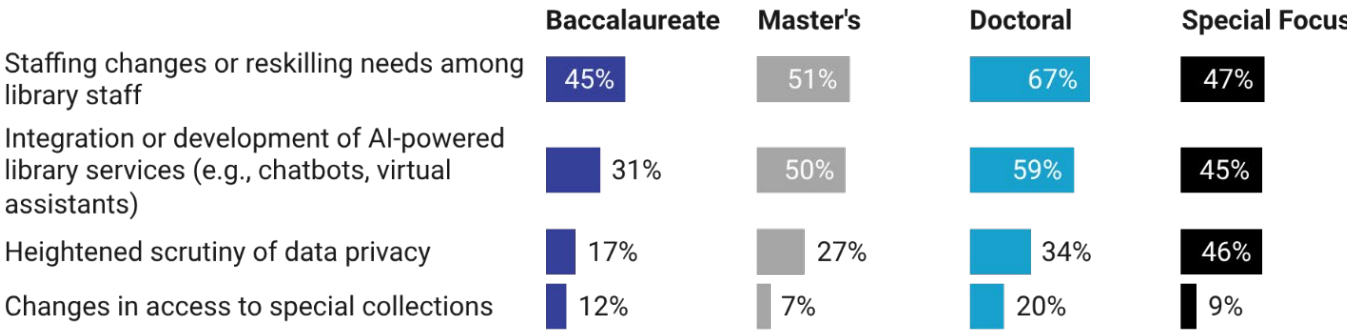
Percentage of respondents selecting the given impact



Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Anticipated impacts varied by Carnegie Classification (see Figure 18). Leaders at doctoral institutions were more likely to report staffing or reskilling needs and changes in access to special collections as significant impacts. Leaders at special focus institutions were more likely to identify heightened scrutiny of data privacy as a significant impact, while those at baccalaureate institutions were less likely to do so. Baccalaureate institution leaders were also less likely to indicate the integration or development of AI-powered library services as a future impact.

Figure 18. What, if any, do you anticipate will be the most significant impacts artificial intelligence (AI) will have on your library within the next three years? Please select all that apply.
Percentage of respondents selecting the given impact, by Carnegie Classification



Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Climate preparedness

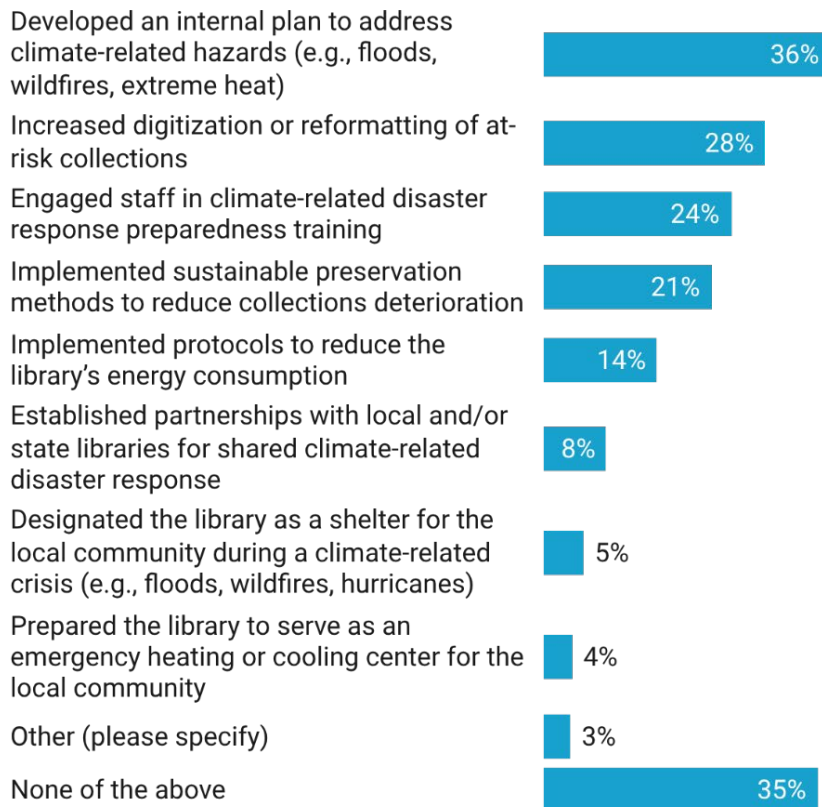
This cycle introduced a set of questions examining the extent to which academic libraries are preparing for climate-related disasters, with the goal of establishing a baseline for tracking these efforts over time. Most respondents reported that their library did not have an up-to-date preparedness plan for climate-related disaster response (51 percent), while 39 percent indicated that they did. Leaders at doctoral institutions were more likely than those at other institution types to report having such a plan (49 percent). Having an up-to-date preparedness plan did not vary by region, despite the reality that academic libraries in certain parts of the country face different risks of exposure to climate-related disasters than others. Additionally, 11 percent of library leaders reported that they do not know whether their library has an up-to-date plan.

To further investigate climate preparedness, leaders were asked to indicate which actions, if any, their libraries have taken to prepare for climate-related disasters (see Figure 19). Developing an internal plan to address climate-related hazards was the most commonly reported activity (36 percent), followed by increasing the digitization or reformatting of at-risk collections (28 percent), engaging staff in climate-related disaster preparedness training (24 percent), and implementing sustainable preservation methods to reduce collections deterioration (21 percent). At the same time, 35 percent indicated that their library has not engaged in any of the listed preparedness activities. Among those that had, most reported undertaking just one (22 percent) or two (18 percent) actions,

suggesting that even where climate preparedness efforts were underway, they remained limited in scope.

Figure 19. Which of the following actions, if any, has your library taken to prepare for climate-related disaster response? Please select all that apply.

Percentage of respondents selecting the given action



Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Cross-institution partnerships

This cycle included new questions examining the use and role of formal partnerships or consortial agreements with other libraries (academic or public) and institutions. Such partnerships were nearly universal across institution types and regions, with 96 percent of library leaders reporting that their library maintained these arrangements.

Respondents whose libraries maintained cross-institutional partnerships were then asked to indicate the benefits their library gained from these collaborations. Leaders identified a wide range of benefits, with more than

half reporting that their library has realized at least six such gains (58 percent), and some identifying as many as thirteen.

Benefits related to collections and cost efficiency were most frequently cited (see Figure 20). These included cost savings through shared purchasing, licensing, or consortial agreements (88 percent), increased negotiating power with vendors and publishers (85 percent), and expanded access to collections and resources through interlibrary loan and reciprocal borrowing (83 percent). A similarly large share (82 percent) also identified access to professional development, networking, or training opportunities as a benefit of these partnerships. Leaders at public institutions (51 percent) were more likely than those at private institutions (33 percent) to report benefits related to collaborative digitization, repositories, or shared print programs.

Figure 20. What benefits, if any, has your library gained through collaboration with other libraries or institutions? Please select all that apply.

Percentage of respondents selecting the given benefit (shown only to respondents whose libraries currently maintain formal partnerships or consortial agreements)



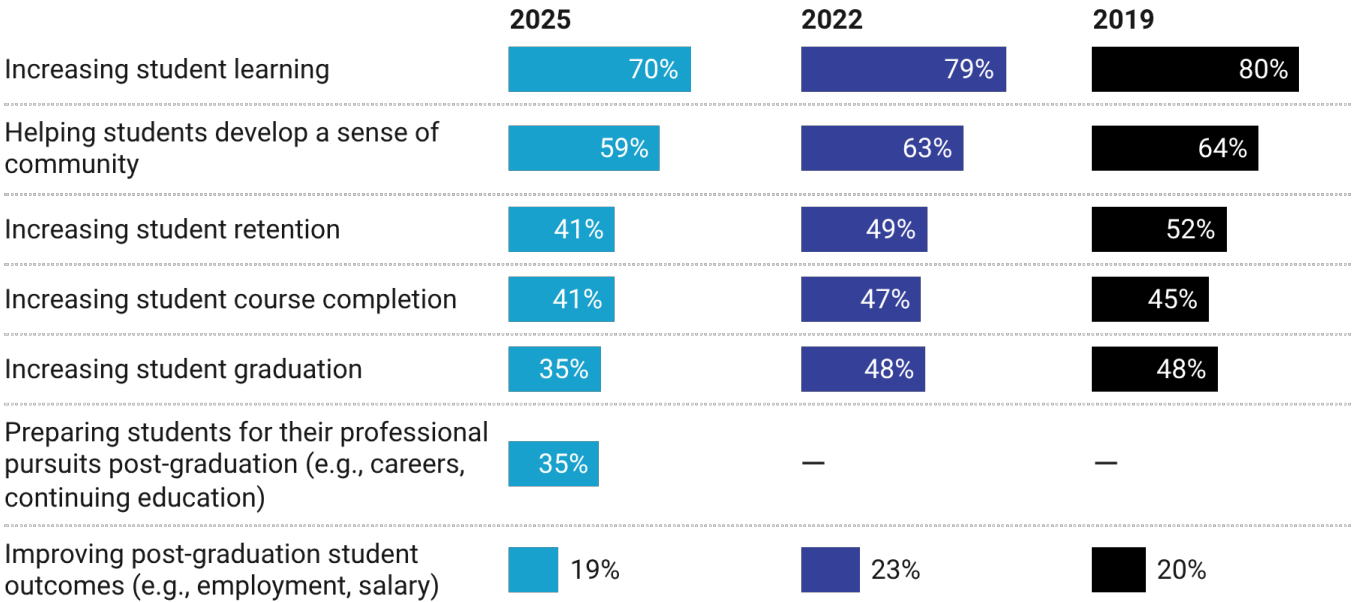
Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Teaching, learning, and student success

We have long examined how library leaders perceive the library's role in supporting a range of student success outcomes, as well as the strategies used to attain them, thus offering insight into how library leaders situate these efforts within the broader institutional context.

As shown in Figure 21, library leaders reported that their library made its strongest contributions to student success via increasing student learning (70 percent) and helping students develop a sense of community (59 percent), followed by increasing student retention and course completion (both at 41 percent). Yet, the share of respondents indicating that the library makes strong contributions to these outcomes has declined compared to prior survey cycles. For instance, 70 percent of library leaders reported that the library majorly contributes to student learning in 2025, down from 79 percent in 2022 and 80 percent in 2019. The largest decline was observed for increasing graduation rates: while 48 percent of leaders reported that the library strongly contributes to increasing student graduation in both 2022 and 2019, just 35 percent did so in 2025.

Figure 21. In your opinion and/or based on evidence gathered, to what extent does your library contribute to each of the following possible student success objectives?
Percentage of respondents answering a lot – a great deal, by cycle



Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

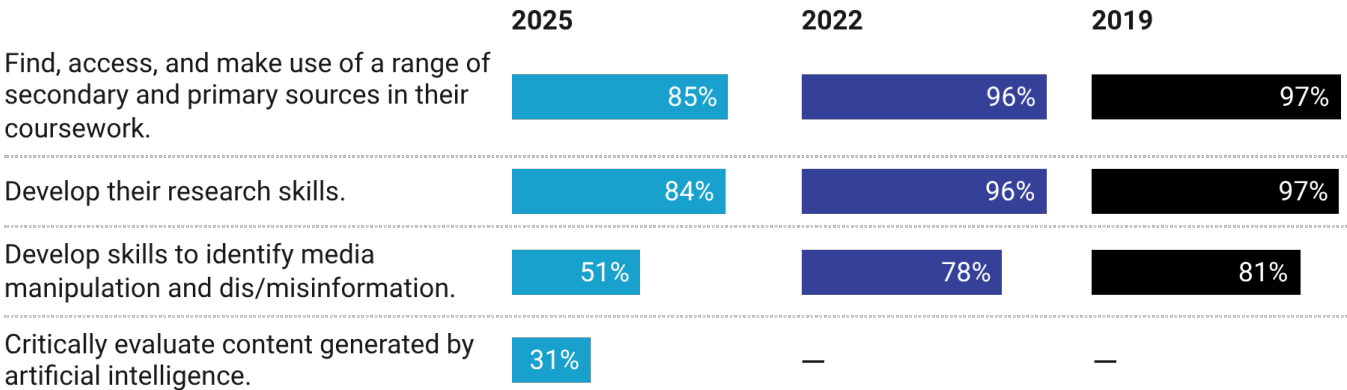
Respondents were also asked to assess how well their library supports student learning across a range of information-related activities (see Figure 22). Reported performance declined across these areas compared to prior cycles. In 2025, 85 percent of leaders reported strong performance in helping students find, access, and use a range of primary and secondary sources, compared to 96 percent in 2022 and 97 percent in 2019. Similarly, 84 percent reported strong support for developing research skills, down from 96 percent in 2022 and 97 percent in 2019. Just over half indicated that the library does very or extremely well in helping students identify media manipulation and dis/misinformation (51 percent), a substantial decrease from 78 percent in 2022 and 81 percent in 2019. This cycle also included a new statement about the library’s role in supporting students’ evaluation of AI-generated content, where a smaller share (31 percent) reported that their staff helps students critically evaluate such content very or extremely well.

Only one area of student learning differed by institutional characteristics: leaders at master’s institutions (77 percent) were less likely than those at special focus and doctoral institutions (both at 87 percent) to report strong contributions to helping students leverage a range of primary and secondary sources in their coursework.

Figure 22. Please indicate how well each statement below describes your point of view.

Librarians at my college/university contribute significantly to student learning by helping students...

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



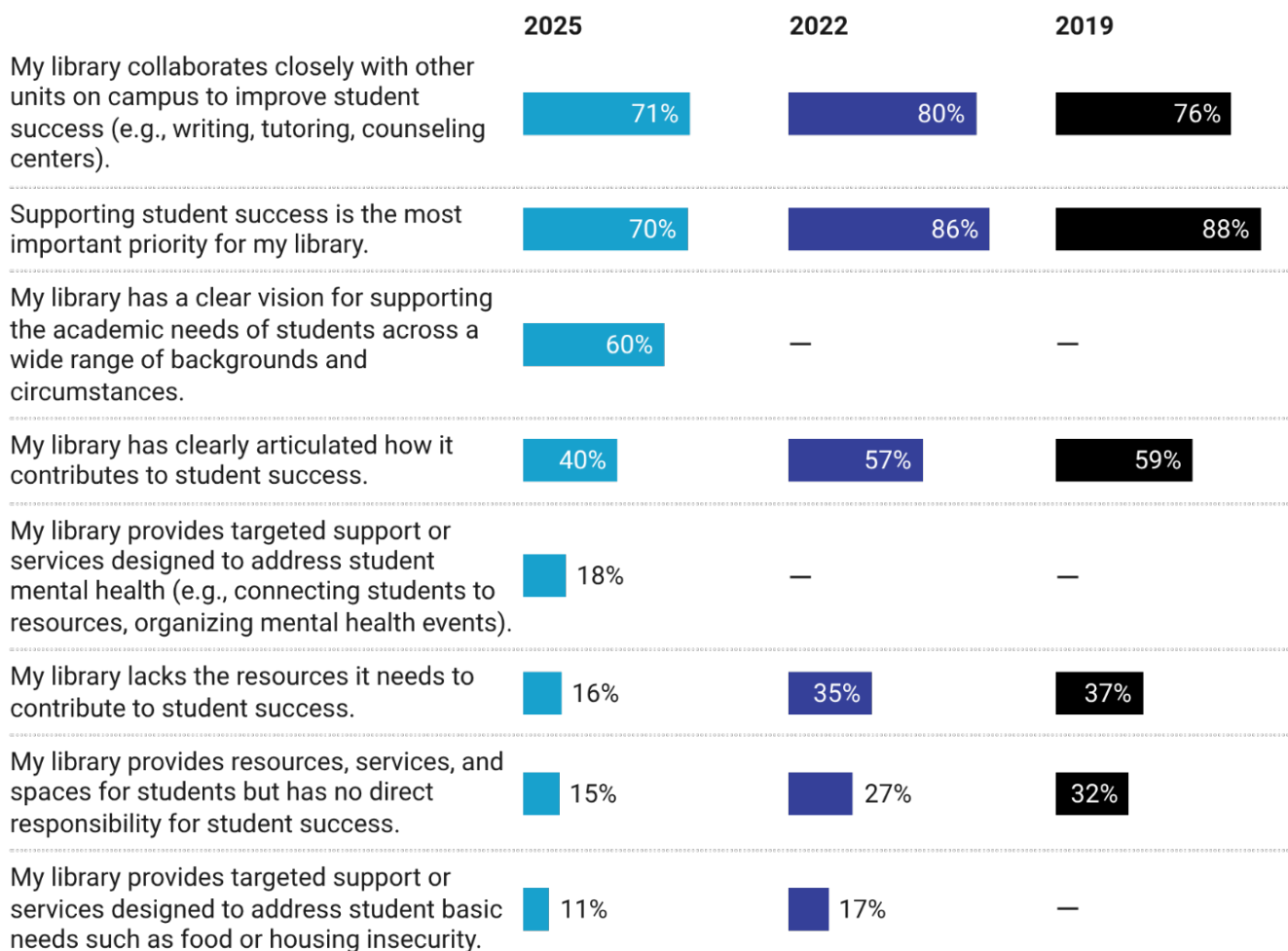
Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Library leaders also reported on their strategies around fostering student success. Overall, responses showed modest declines compared to prior cycles (see Figure 23). For example, 71 percent of respondents agreed that their library collaborates closely with other campus units to improve student success, down from 80 percent in 2022 and 76 percent in 2019. A more pronounced decline was observed in the share who agreed that supporting student success is the library’s most important priority (70 percent, compared to 86 percent in 2022 and 88 percent in 2019). Moreover, there was less consensus on how clearly libraries articulate their contributions to student success: 40 percent of respondents agreed that their library has clearly defined its role in this area, a decline of more than 15 percentage points compared to prior cycles.

Some trends moved in the opposite direction. Sixty percent of respondents agreed that their library has a clear vision for supporting the academic needs of students across a range of backgrounds and circumstances. In addition, fewer respondents believed that their library lacks the resources needed to contribute to student success (16 percent, down from 35 percent in 2022 and 37 percent in 2019). Similarly, fewer respondents (15 percent) agreed with the statement that “[the] library provides resources, services, and spaces for students but has no direct responsibility for student success,” compared to 27 percent in 2022 and 32 percent in 2019.

Responses differed by Carnegie Classification. Leaders at special focus institutions (16 percent) were less likely than those at baccalaureate institutions (23 percent) to report that their library lacks the resources needed to contribute to student success, while leaders at doctoral institutions (60 percent) were less likely than those at baccalaureate and master's institutions (77 percent and 79 percent, respectively) to agree that supporting student success is the library's most important priority. Differences also emerged by sector. Leaders at public institutions (15 percent) were more likely than those at private institutions (7 percent) to report that their library provides targeted support addressing student basic needs. A similar pattern was observed for services related to student mental health, with public institutions more likely to provide such support (22 percent versus 15 percent of private institutions).

Figure 23. Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement below
Percentage of respondents answering agree – strongly agree, by cycle



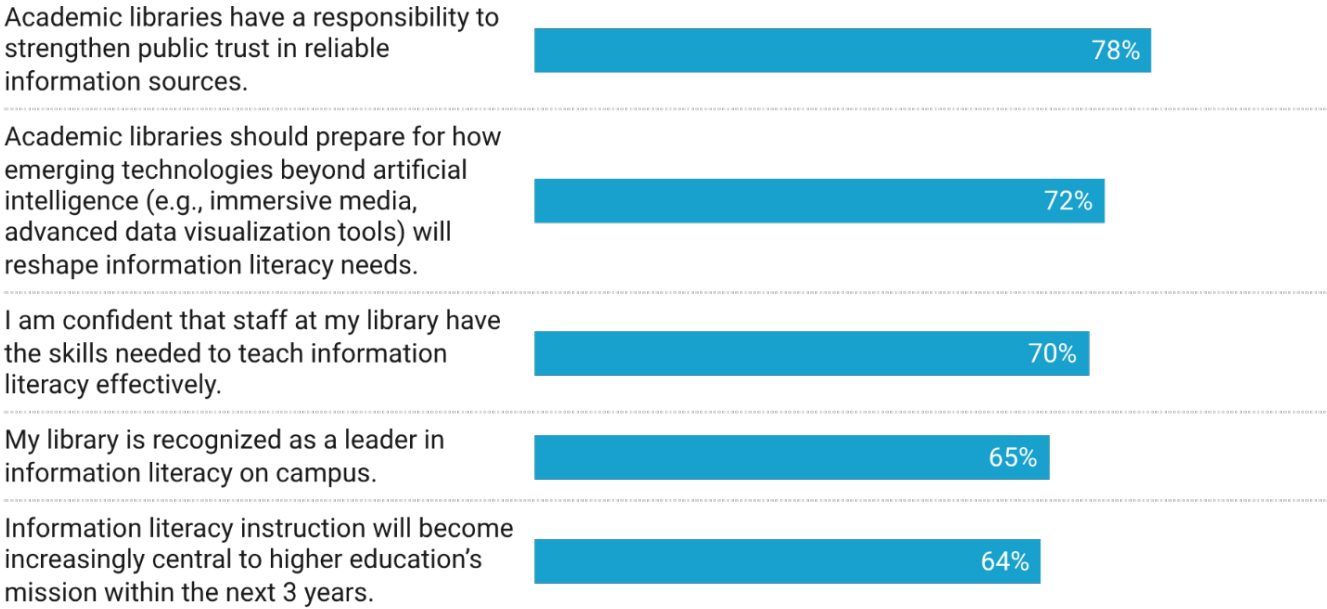
Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

The 2025 survey introduced a set of questions examining the library's perceived role in supporting information literacy and addressing challenges related to the consumption of information (see Figure 24). Seventy-eight percent of respondents highly agreed that academic libraries have a responsibility to strengthen public trust in reliable information sources. A similar share highly agreed that libraries should prepare for how emerging technologies beyond AI will reshape information literacy needs (72 percent). Most respondents also expressed confidence in their staff's ability to teach information literacy effectively (70 percent). However, fewer respondents felt that their library was recognized as a leader in these efforts on campus (65 percent).

Seventy-eight percent of respondents highly agreed that academic libraries have a responsibility to strengthen public trust in reliable information sources. A similar share highly agreed that libraries should prepare for how emerging technologies beyond AI will reshape information literacy needs (72 percent). Most respondents also expressed confidence in their staff's ability to teach information literacy effectively (70 percent).

Levels of agreement on these statements were largely consistent across Carnegie Classification and sector, with one exception: leaders at private institutions (69 percent) were more likely than those at public institutions (59 percent) to agree that information literacy instruction will become increasingly central to higher education's mission within the next three years.

Figure 24. Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement below.
Percentage of respondents answering agree – strongly agree



Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

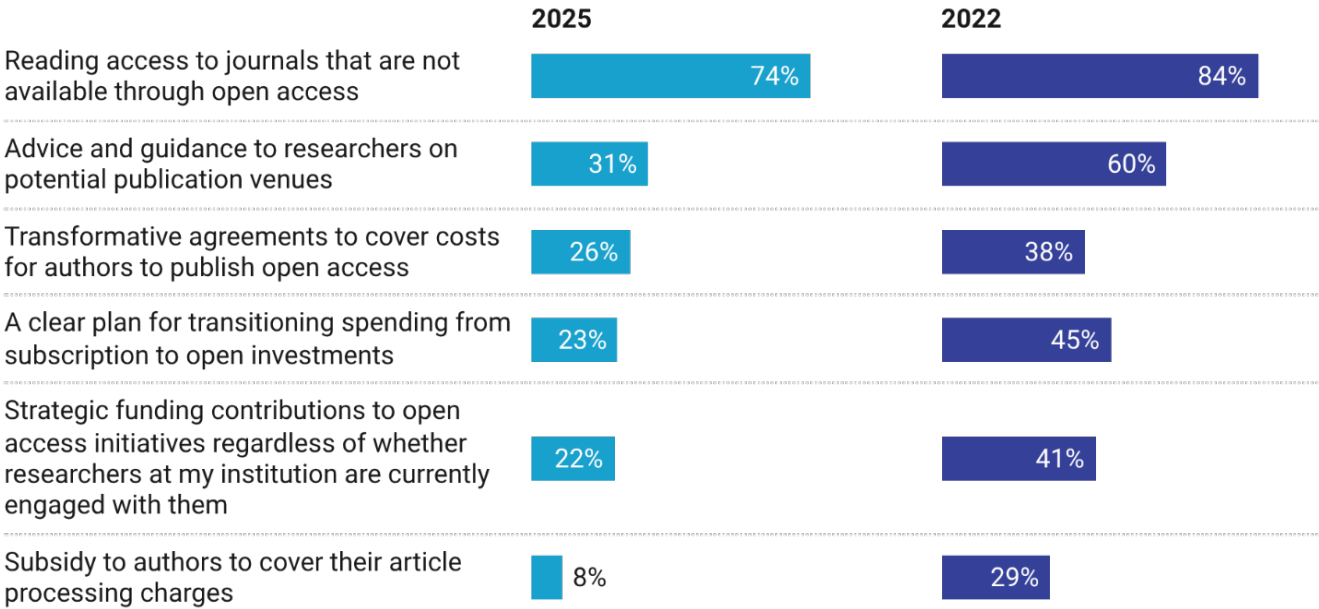
Library collections

This section examined how library leaders are adapting collection strategies in response to evolving scholarly communication models. Respondents were first asked to rate the importance of various collections-related activities on the part of the library (see Figure 25). Leaders most frequently rated providing access to journals not available through open access as highly important (74 percent), while activities related to open access were perceived as less important.

In general, support for open access activities has declined since the survey was last administered in 2022. For example, the share of respondents who rated having a clear plan to transition spending from subscription to open investments as highly important declined from 45 percent to 23 percent. Similarly, the share prioritizing strategic funding contributions to open access initiatives decreased from 41 percent to 22 percent, and the share prioritizing subsidies for article processing charges declined from 29 percent to 8 percent. More broadly, the perceived importance of each activity examined in this survey section declined in 2025.

Differences also emerged by Carnegie Classification and sector. Leaders at doctoral institutions (47 percent) were more likely than those at baccalaureate (16 percent), master's (24 percent), and special focus institutions (23 percent) to rate providing advice and guidance to researchers on publication venues as highly important. Doctoral leaders were also more likely (37 percent) than leaders at baccalaureate (16 percent) and master's institutions (14 percent) to prioritize transformative agreements to offset publishing costs. Leaders at public institutions (45 percent) were more likely than those at private institutions (27 percent) to rate providing guidance on publication venues as highly important, as well as maintaining a clear plan for transitioning spending to open investments (33 percent at public versus 22 percent at private) and pursuing transformative agreements to support open access publishing (38 percent at public versus 26 percent at private).

Figure 25. How important is it to you that your library provides each of the following?
*Percentage of respondents answering **very – extremely important**, by cycle*



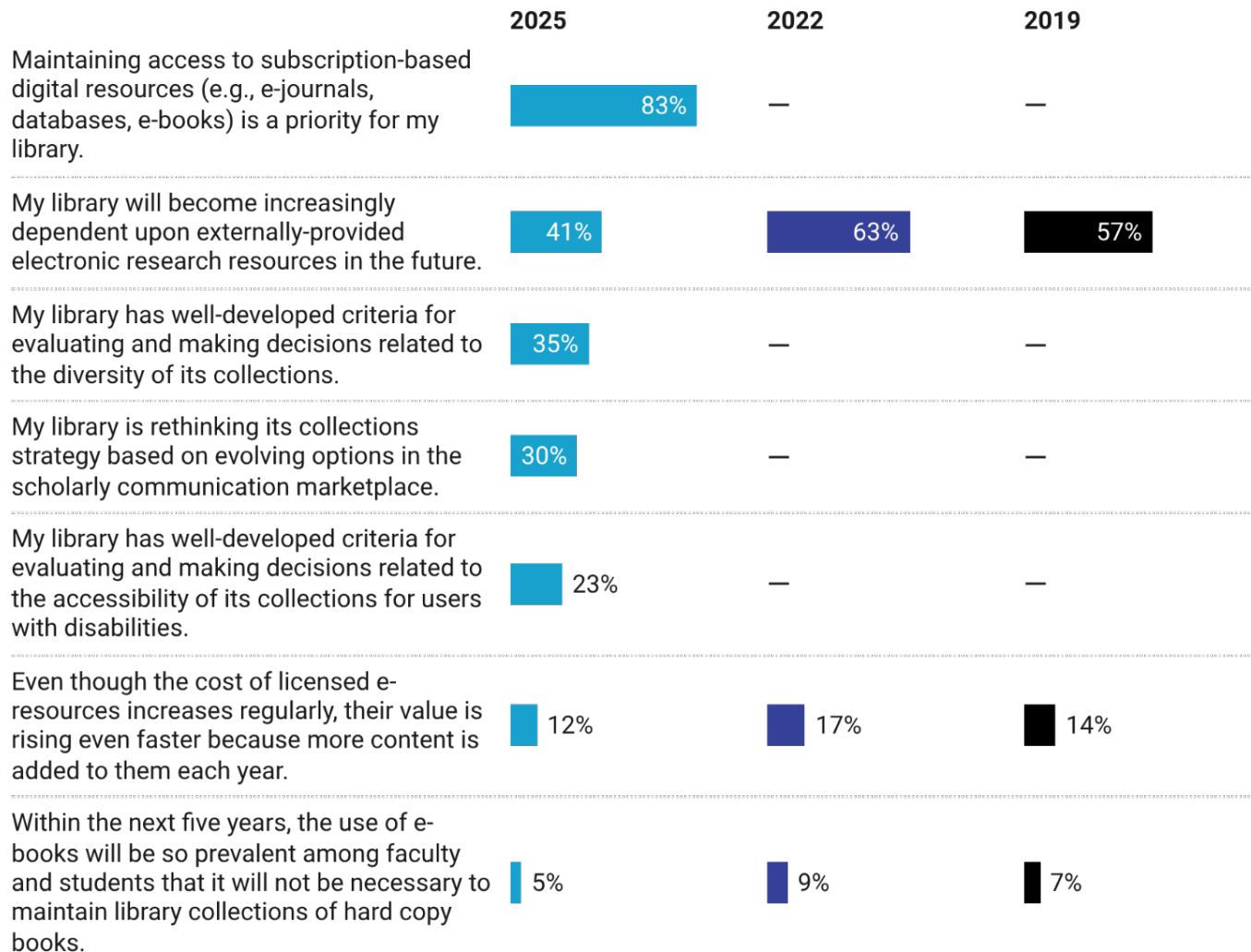
Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

A parallel question asked library leaders to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements related to collection strategies, including several new items reflecting more recent trends in the scholarly communications marketplace (see Figure 26). Most indicated that maintaining access to subscription-based digital resources is a priority in their library (83 percent). Consistent with patterns reported above, agreement across legacy items has declined in the most recent cycle. Most notably, 41 percent of respondents agreed that their library will become increasingly dependent upon externally-provided electronic research resources in the future, down from 63 percent in 2022 and 57 percent in 2019, though this decline may reflect that libraries have reached a point of stability in their reliance on such resources.

When stratified by institutional characteristics, leaders at doctoral institutions (44 percent) were more likely than those at other institution types (19–23 percent) to agree that their library is rethinking its collection strategy in response to changes in the scholarly communication marketplace. Leaders at public institutions were also more likely than those at private institutions to agree that their library is rethinking its collection strategy (37 percent versus 24 percent) and that their library

has well-developed criteria for evaluating the accessibility of collections (29 percent versus 17 percent), but less likely to agree that the value of licensed e-resources is outpacing their cost (10 percent versus 13 percent).

Figure 26. Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement below.
*Percentage of respondents answering **agree – strongly agree**, by cycle*



Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

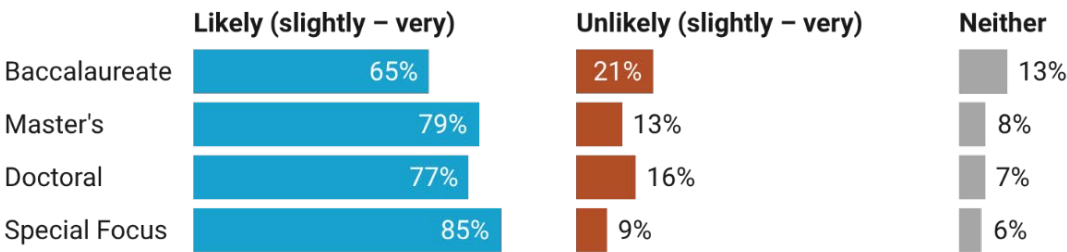
A new question in 2025 asked library leaders to assess the importance of advancing key priorities within acquisitions, particularly in relation to publisher and vendor relationships. Similar shares of respondents rated each of the three areas as highly important: working with publishers and vendors to safeguard research integrity (38 percent), participating in acquisition methods that foreground an equitable publishing ecosystem (37 percent), and working with publishers and vendors to advance open access (36 percent). Leaders at doctoral institutions were more likely than their baccalaureate peers to rate equitable acquisition approaches (48 percent versus 25 percent) and safeguarding research integrity alongside publishers and vendors (40 percent versus 24 percent) as highly important, and were also more likely to prioritize advancing open access when compared to leaders at the other institution types (44 percent at doctoral institutions versus 25–35 percent). Finally, leaders at public institutions were more likely than those at private institutions to rate equitable acquisition approaches (41 percent versus 33 percent) and advancing open access with publishers and vendors (45 percent versus 27 percent) as highly important.

Reflecting continued budget uncertainty, most library leaders noted that they are likely to cancel one or more journal packages in the next licensing cycle (78 percent).

Reflecting continued budget uncertainty, most library leaders noted that they are likely to cancel one or more journal packages in the next licensing cycle (78 percent). This anticipated reduction in collections spending has increased over time. Fifty-five percent of respondents reported a high expectation of cancellations in 2025, compared to 45 percent in 2022 and 47 percent in 2019. Leaders at special focus institutions were more likely than those at baccalaureate institutions to anticipate cancellations (see Figure 27), as were leaders at public institutions (57 percent) compared to those at private institutions (54 percent).

Figure 27. How likely is it that your library will cancel one or more journal packages in the next licensing cycle?

Percentage of respondents answering _____, by Carnegie Classification



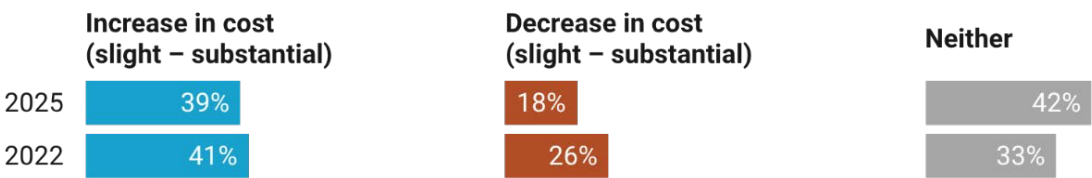
Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Expectations about the long-term impact of open access on institutional costs have remained largely unchanged since 2022, with similar shares of respondents anticipating cost increases (see Figure 28). However, fewer respondents expected costs to decrease (18 percent in 2025, compared to 26 percent in 2022).

Expectations varied by institution type. Leaders at doctoral (48 percent) and special focus institutions (47 percent) were more likely than those at baccalaureate institutions (20 percent) to anticipate that a more open access future would increase costs for their library. Similarly, public institution leaders were more likely than those at private institutions to expect cost increases (30 percent versus 18 percent).

Figure 28. 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 _____



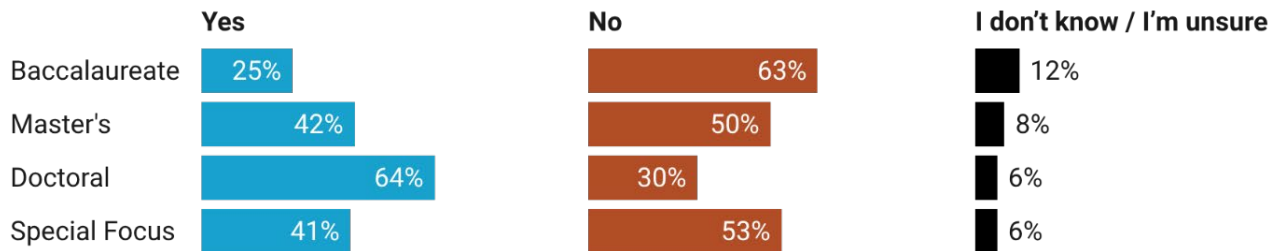
Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Library leaders reported varying levels of e-preferred acquisitions model adoption (see Figure 29). Overall, 47 percent of libraries reported having adopted such a model, with substantial variation by Carnegie Classification. Adoption was highest among doctoral institutions, where 65 percent of library leaders reported implementation of an e-preferred

acquisitions model, compared to 42 percent at master's institutions, 41 percent at special focus institutions, and 25 percent at baccalaureate institutions.

Figure 29. Has your library adopted/implemented an e-preferred acquisitions model?

Percentage of respondents answering _____, by Carnegie Classification

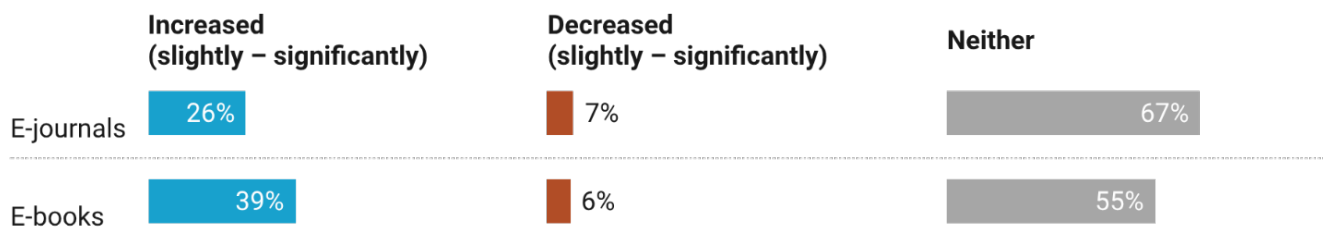


Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Library leaders indicated that their prioritization of securing perpetual access to electronic materials has neither increased nor decreased over the past 12 months (see Figure 30). This was the case for both e-journals (67 percent) and e-books (55 percent). At the same time, a larger share reported increasing prioritization for e-books (39 percent) than for e-journals (26 percent).

Figure 30. In the past 12 months, how has the priority of securing perpetual access provisions for _____ changed at your library?

Percentage of respondents answering _____



Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Nearly all respondents (96 percent) are acquiring e-books. These respondents were also asked to rate the importance of various acquisition methods (see Figure 31). Forty-two percent rated traditional item-level selection as very or extremely important, followed by demand-driven acquisition (36 percent) and evidence-based acquisition (31 percent).

Library leaders at doctoral institutions (29 percent) were less likely than those at baccalaureate (54 percent) and master's institutions (50 percent) to prioritize traditional item-level selection, but more likely (37 percent) to prioritize evidence-based acquisition compared to baccalaureate and master's institutions (both at 27 percent). Examined by sector, leaders at public institutions were more likely than those at private institutions to prioritize demand-driven acquisition (43 percent versus 31 percent) and "flip to open" initiatives (21 percent versus 12 percent). Leaders at private institutions, in contrast, were more likely to prioritize traditional item-level selection than their public peers (50 percent versus 31 percent).

Figure 31. 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%

Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Library assessment, data sharing, and privacy

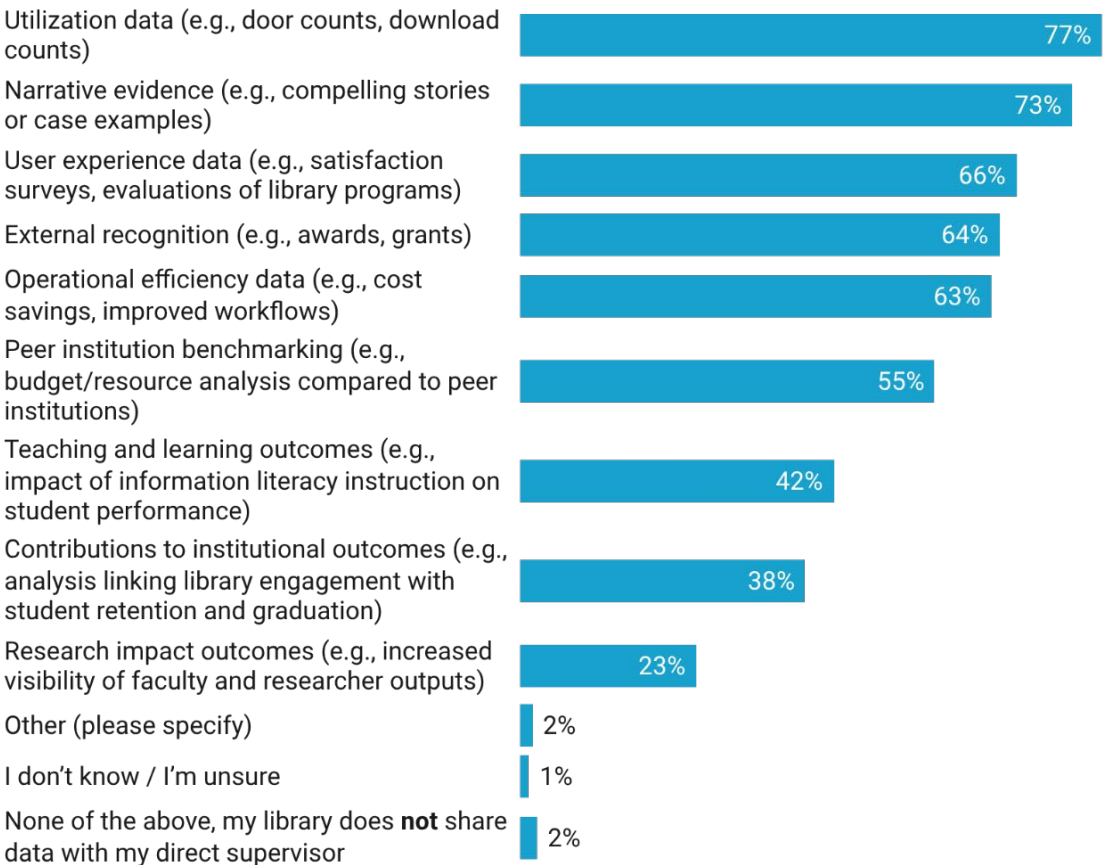
Library leaders were asked a series of questions related to data privacy, the types of internal data collected to demonstrate impact, and how frequently these data were shared with their direct supervisors.

One legacy item asked respondents to indicate their level of concern about the extent to which third-party vendors or partners have access to individual-level data from library users. These concerns have shifted over time, reaching their highest point in 2025. When first measured in 2019, 40 percent of respondents indicated concern about such access. In 2022, this share declined to 30 percent, likely reflecting the prominence of other priorities during the pandemic period. In 2025, however, the proportion of library leaders expressing concern rose to 50 percent. This increase is indicative of heightened attention to data privacy issues, perhaps including those associated with AI use as discussed above (see Figure 17 under *Library Strategy and Priorities*).

This cycle, we introduced two questions examining internal library assessment and how these data are shared within the broader campus environment. The first asked library leaders which types of library data they routinely share with their direct supervisor. The majority reported sharing multiple forms of information about library activities, as shown in Figure 32. Respondents most often share utilization data (77 percent), followed by narrative evidence (73 percent). They also commonly share user experience data (66 percent) and indicators of external recognition, such as awards and grants (64 percent). While responses were largely consistent across Carnegie Classification and sector, leaders at baccalaureate institutions (56 percent) were more likely than those at all other institution types (33–45 percent) to share data on teaching and learning outcomes.

Figure 32. What types of data does your library routinely share with your direct supervisor? Please select all that apply.

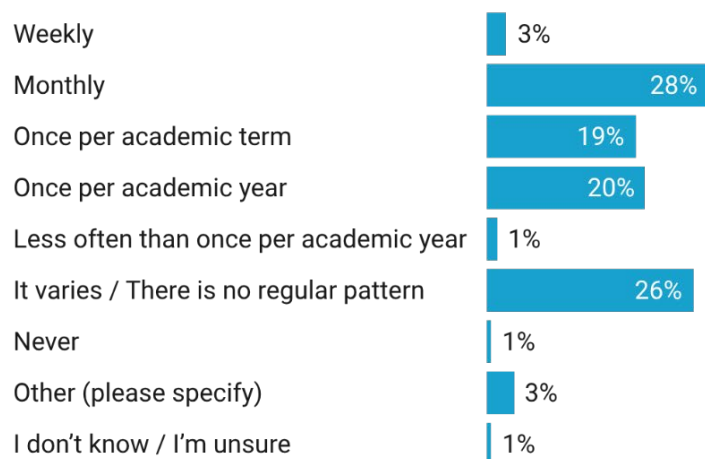
Percentage of respondents selecting the given data type



Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

As a companion question, respondents were also asked how frequently their library shared those data with their direct supervisor (Figure 33). Twenty-eight percent indicated that they share data monthly, followed closely by another 26 percent who reported that they have no regular reporting pattern. Notably, the frequency of data sharing was positively correlated with the number of data types routinely shared: as the number of data types shared with one's direct supervisor increased, data reporting also tended to occur more regularly (and vice versa).

Figure 33. On average, how often does your library share data with your direct supervisor?
Percentage of respondents selecting the given frequency



Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Staffing and talent management

Across recent survey cycles, library leaders have been asked to identify challenges related to staff skills, recruitment, and retention. In 2025, additional questions examined staff morale, hiring conditions, and changes to staffing and benefits.

Leaders were first asked to assess overall staff morale at their library. On a scale from 1 (very low morale) to 100 (very high morale), the average rating was 61, with no meaningful differences by sector or institution type. Thus, morale was generally neutral to moderately high. However, morale varied based on whether a library had experienced staff eliminations and/or furloughs within the past three years, with leaders at these libraries reporting lower average morale compared to those whose libraries had not undergone such staff reductions.

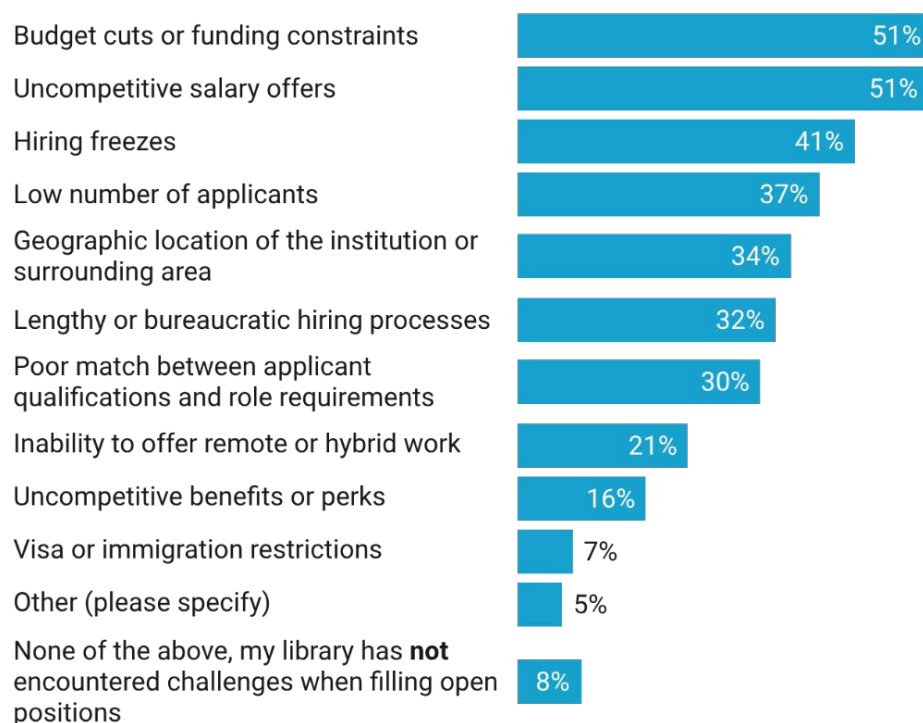
Leaders were also asked whether hiring to fill open positions has become easier or more difficult in the past 12 months. Forty-two percent indicated that it had become more difficult, 41 percent reported no change, and 18 percent indicated that it had become easier.

These perceptions are reflected in the challenges leaders reported when attempting to fill open positions (Figure 34). More than half cited budget constraints and uncompetitive salaries as challenges (51 percent each), followed by hiring freezes (41 percent) and having a limited pool of applicants (37 percent). Roughly one-third reported challenges related to mismatches between applicant skills and job requirements, suggesting potential opportunities for better alignment between workforce preparation and employer needs.

These hiring challenges varied by institution type and sector. Leaders at doctoral institutions were more likely to report challenges related to visa or immigration restrictions (11 percent) and were less likely to report that they face no hiring challenges (3 percent). Leaders at public institutions were more likely to report challenges related to lengthy or bureaucratic hiring processes (42 percent), while leaders at private institutions were more likely to not encounter any challenges in hiring (12 percent).

Figure 34. Which of the following challenges, if any, has your library encountered when attempting to fill open positions within the past 12 months? Please select all that apply.

Percentage of respondents selecting the given hiring challenge



Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Despite these challenges, most leaders did not report widespread difficulties in recruiting or retaining staff across the 14 job roles examined. As shown in Figure 35, 14 percent reported difficulty retaining staff in frontline services, followed by technical services (12 percent), instruction (10 percent), and collection development (10 percent). In terms of recruitment, 17 percent reported difficulty hiring technical services staff, followed by collection development (14 percent), assessment (14 percent), and frontline services (13 percent).

Figure 35. Please indicate in which of the following skills or experiences your library is struggling to retain and/or recruit talent, if at all. Please select all that apply.

Percentage of respondents selecting the given area

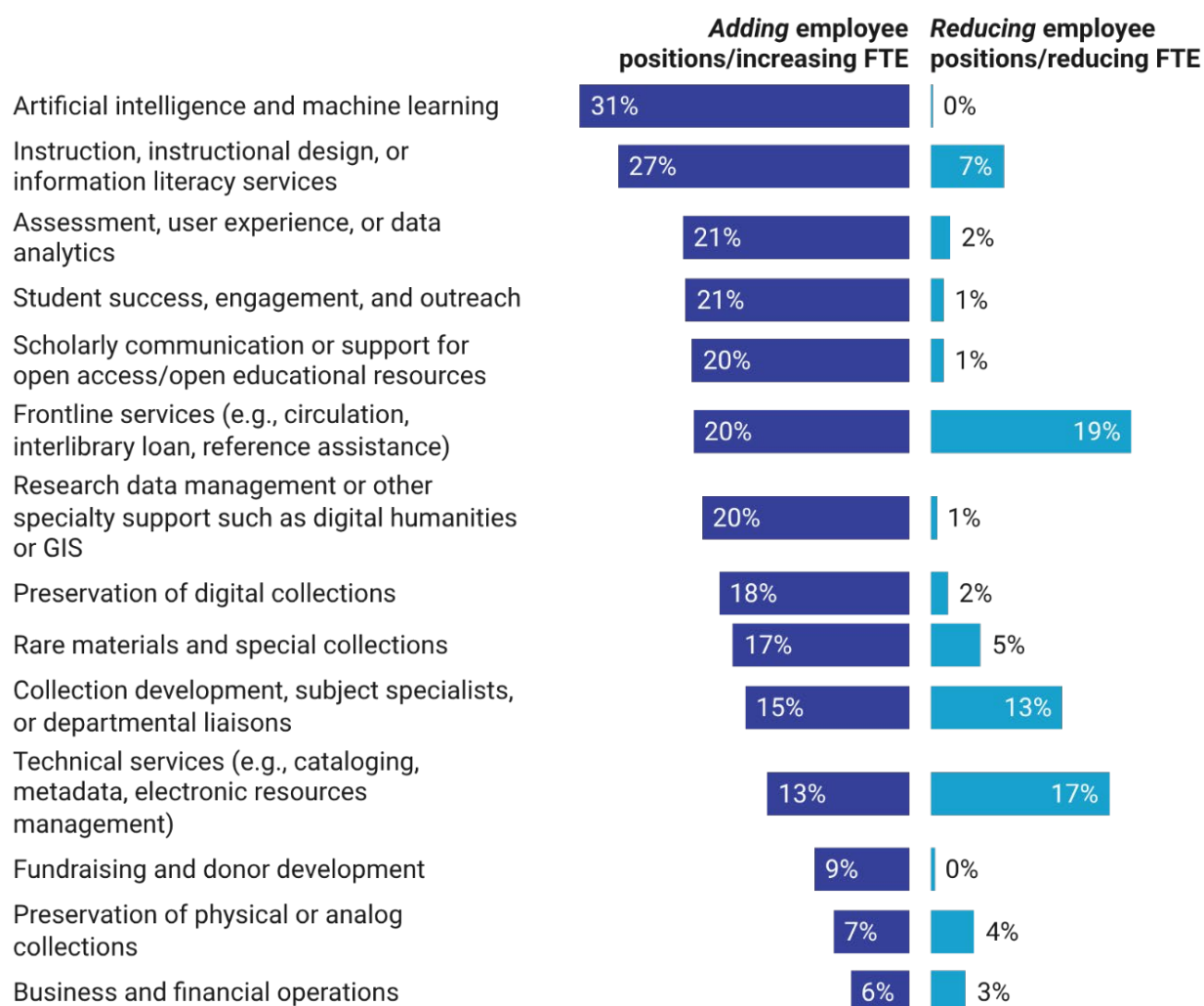


Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Looking ahead, leaders were asked whether their libraries plan to add or reduce employee positions across these same areas within the next five years (see Figure 36). Nearly one-third of respondents plan to add positions in AI and machine learning (31 percent), followed by instruction, instructional design, or information literacy (27 percent). Roughly one-fifth anticipate adding positions in assessment and student success (21 percent each). At the same time, 20 percent plan to add frontline services positions, while 19 percent anticipate reductions in these same roles. Seventeen percent anticipate reductions in technical services positions, and 13 percent in collections development.

Figure 36. 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

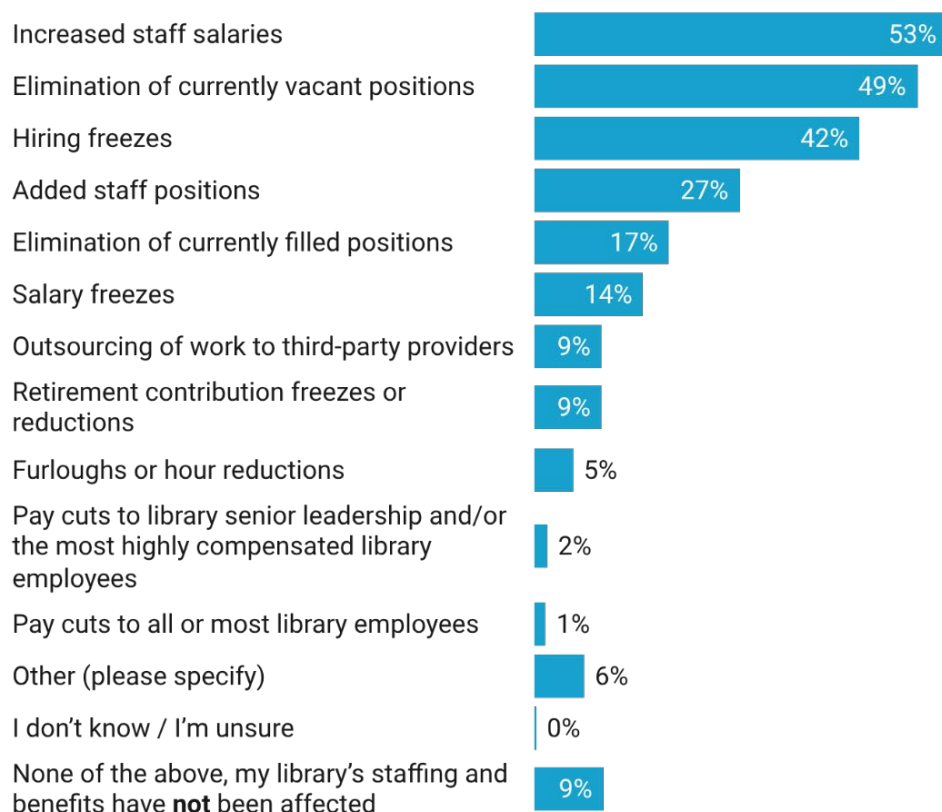


Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Leaders also reported on changes to staffing and benefits over the past three years (see Figure 37). Fifty-three percent noted that staff salaries had increased, and 27 percent reported having added staff positions. At the same time, 49 percent reported having eliminated vacant positions, and 42 percent reported hiring freezes.

Figure 37. What changes, if any, have been made to staffing and benefits at your library within the past three years, not including student workers or volunteers? Please select all that apply.

Percentage of respondents selecting the given change

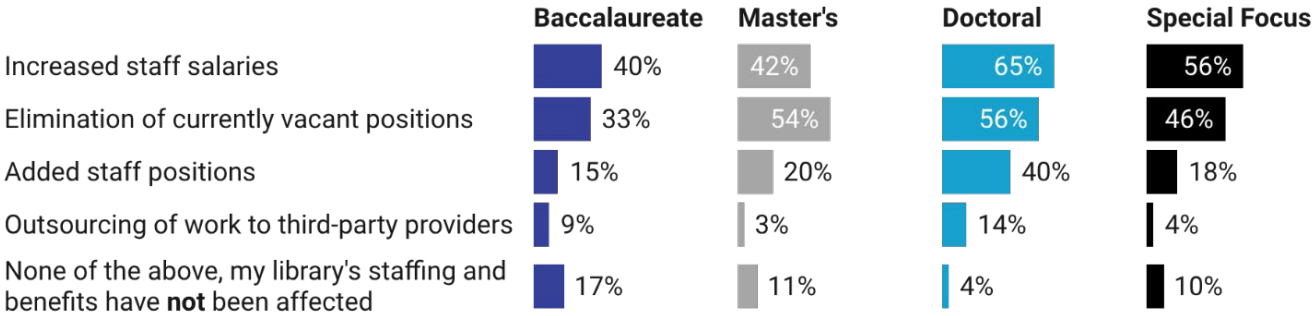


Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Patterns in staffing changes also differed by institution type and sector. Leaders at doctoral institutions were more likely to report having added staff positions, outsourced work to third-party providers, and increased salaries. Meanwhile, leaders at baccalaureate institutions were more likely to report no changes to staffing and benefits and were less likely to report having eliminated vacant positions (see Figure 38).

Leaders at public institutions were more likely to report having added staff positions (35 percent) but were less likely to have eliminated filled positions (12 percent) or instituted retirement contribution freezes or reductions (1 percent). Leaders at private institutions were more likely to report having instituted salary freezes (19 percent).

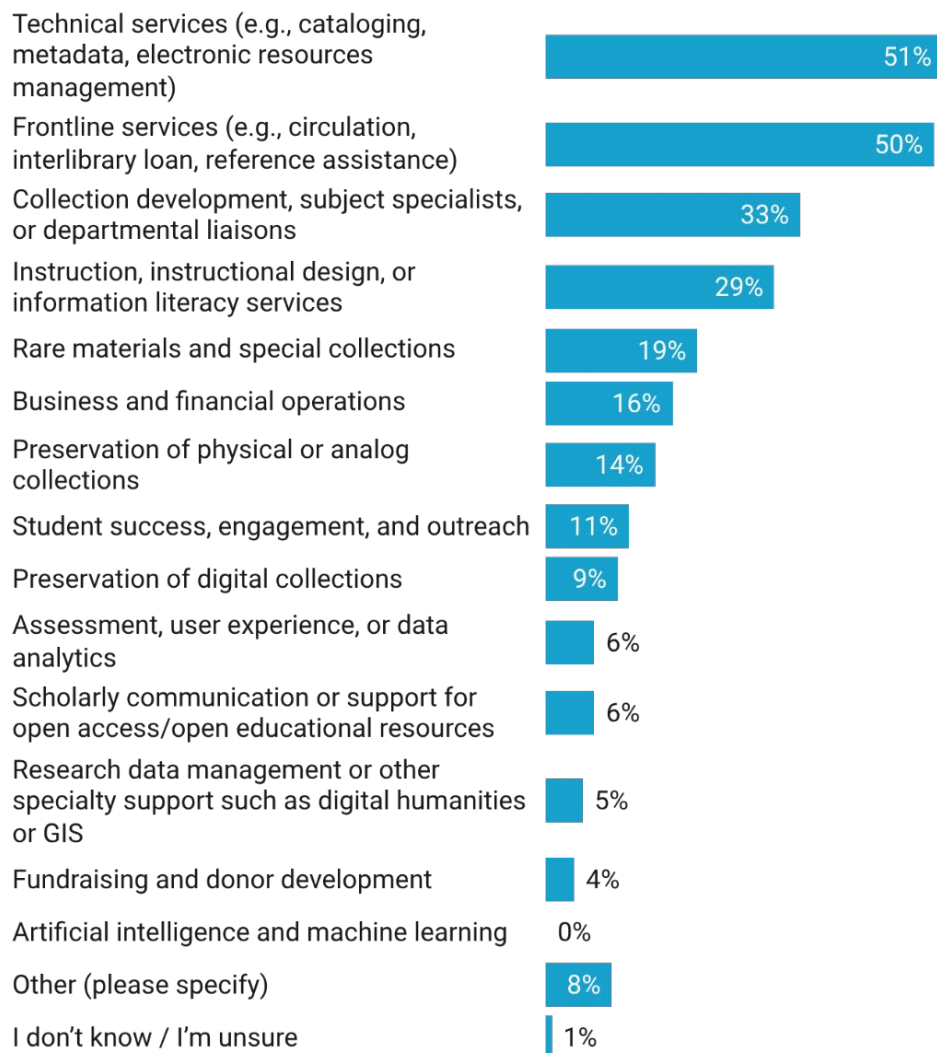
Figure 38. What changes, if any, have been made to staffing and benefits at your library within the past 3 years, not including student workers or volunteers? Please select all that apply.
Percentage of respondents selecting the given change, by Carnegie Classification



Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Among leaders who reported eliminating filled or vacant positions, or instituting furloughs or reduced hours, most indicated that these cuts occurred in technical and frontline services (51 percent and 50 percent, respectively), and one-third reported reductions in collection development, subject specialists, or departmental liaisons (see Figure 39).

Figure 39. In which of the following areas has your library reduced or eliminated employee positions within the past three years, not including student workers or volunteers? Please select all that apply. Percentage of respondents selecting the given area (shown only to respondents whose libraries have eliminated positions and/or instituted furloughs or reduced hours within the past three years)



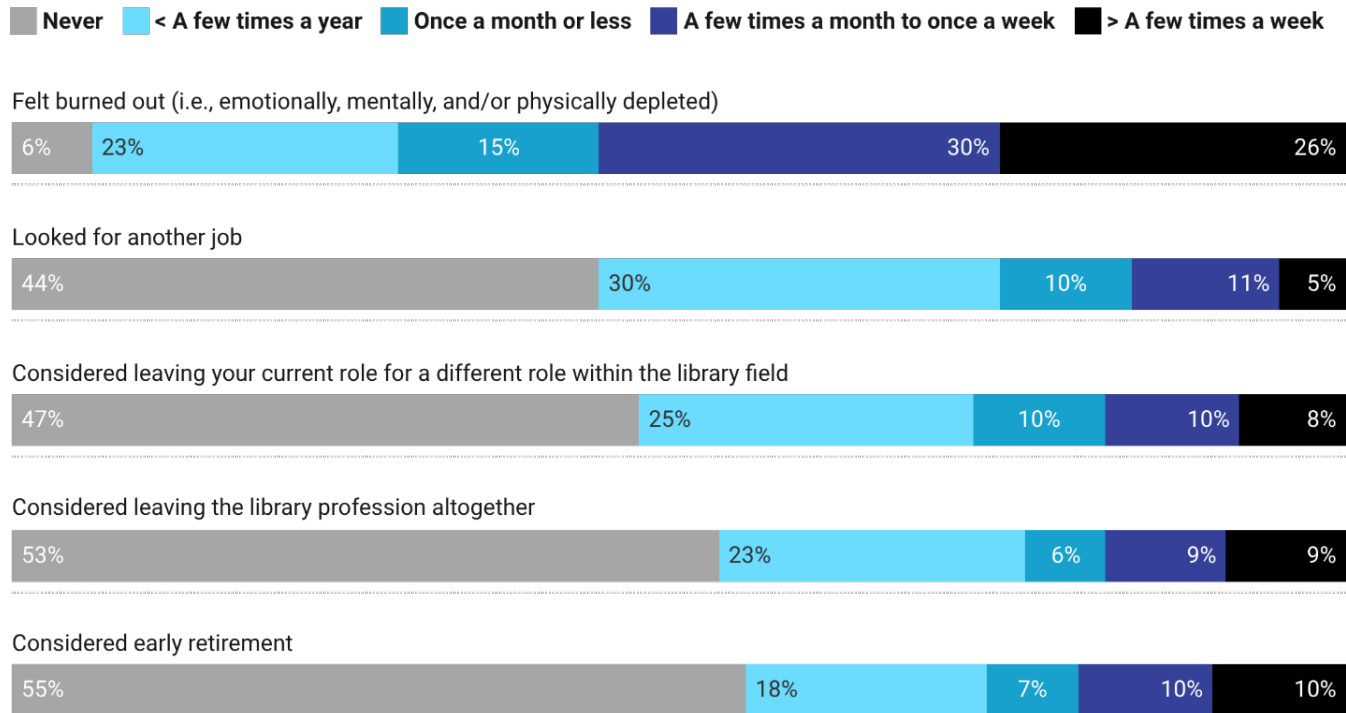
Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Finally, leaders were asked about burnout and their intentions to remain in their roles (see Figure 40). Nearly one-third reported feeling burned out a few times a month to once a week (30 percent), and an additional 26 percent reported feeling burned out a few times a week or more. Despite these levels of burnout, most plan to remain in their current roles and in the profession. For instance, 44 percent of library leaders reported never looking for another job within the past year, 47 percent never considered leaving their current role for another library position, and 53 percent never

considered leaving the profession. Leaders at baccalaureate institutions were more likely than those at doctoral institutions to report having looked for another job (15 percent versus 2 percent) and to have considered leaving their current role for another within the library field (16 percent versus 6 percent).

Figure 40. In the past 12 months, how often have you personally experienced each of the following in relation to your role as a library leader?

Percentage of respondents answering ____



Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Budget

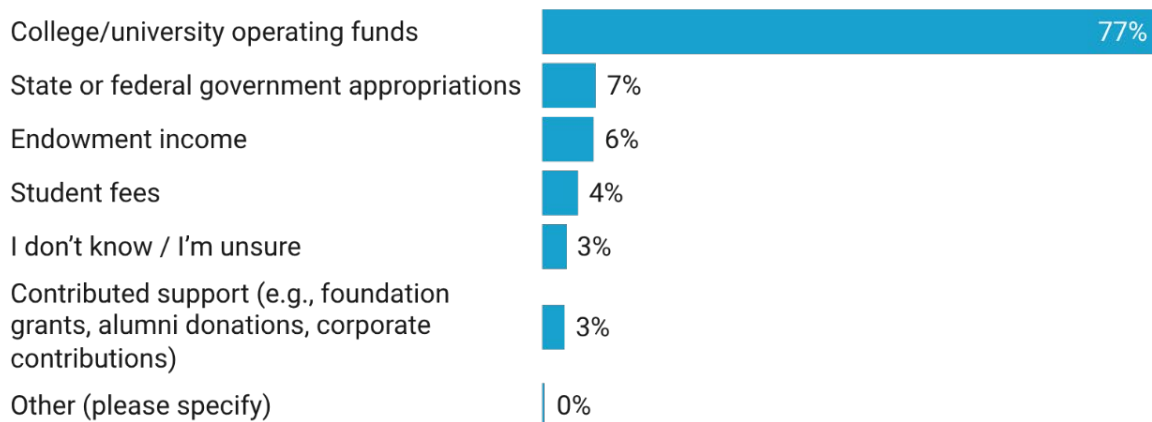
The final section of the survey examined the critical function of budgetary oversight by library leaders. Since 2010, we have asked leaders to estimate how they allocate financial resources within the library. In 2025, we expanded this section to include new questions on funding sources and the strategies leaders are using to respond to financial uncertainty.

Library budgets are overwhelmingly supported by institutional operating funds: on average, respondents estimated that more than three-quarters of their operating budgets came from college or university operating funds (see Figure 41). State or federal funds (7 percent) and endowment income (6 percent) account for much smaller shares.

Reliance on specific funding sources varied by institution type and sector. Leaders at doctoral (8 percent) and special focus institutions (11 percent) were more likely to rely on endowment income than their counterparts at baccalaureate (4 percent) and master's institutions (3 percent). Leaders at public institutions were more likely than those at private institutions to rely on student fees (8 percent versus 1 percent) and state or federal appropriations (14 percent versus 1 percent), but less likely to rely on endowment income (4 percent versus 9 percent) or institutional operating funds (69 percent versus 83 percent).

Figure 41. What percentage of your library's current operating budget is derived from the following sources? Percentages must add to 100%.

Average amount of operating budget derived per source



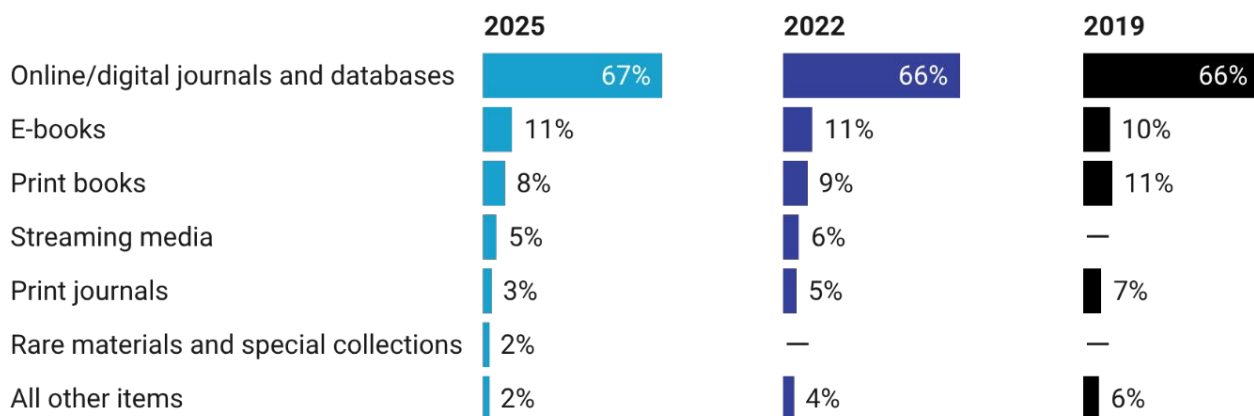
Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

As in previous cycles, library materials budgets remain concentrated in digital resources (Figure 42). Approximately two-thirds of materials budgets were spent on digital journals or databases. E-books accounted for about 10 percent of materials spending, followed by print books at 8 percent. This cycle we also asked about expenditures on rare materials and special collections; respondents indicated that just 2 percent of materials budgets supported these acquisitions.

Leaders at public institutions, compared to their private counterparts, allocated fewer funds to e-books (10 percent versus 12 percent) and print books (7 percent versus 9 percent). However, they allocated greater funds toward digital journals and databases (70 percent at public versus 65 percent at private institutions).

Figure 42. What percentage of your library's current materials budget is spent on the following items? Percentages must add to 100%.

Average amount of materials budget spent per item, by cycle



Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

In parallel, we asked leaders to estimate how their materials budgets would be allocated across these same categories in five years (see Figure 43). Respondents generally anticipated stability in spending on digital journals and databases, with some indicating slight increases. E-book spending was expected to increase modestly, rising from 11 percent of materials budgets in 2025 to 14 percent in 2030. Respondents also anticipated slight increases in spending on print books and print journals, perhaps reflecting a need for retrospective collecting.

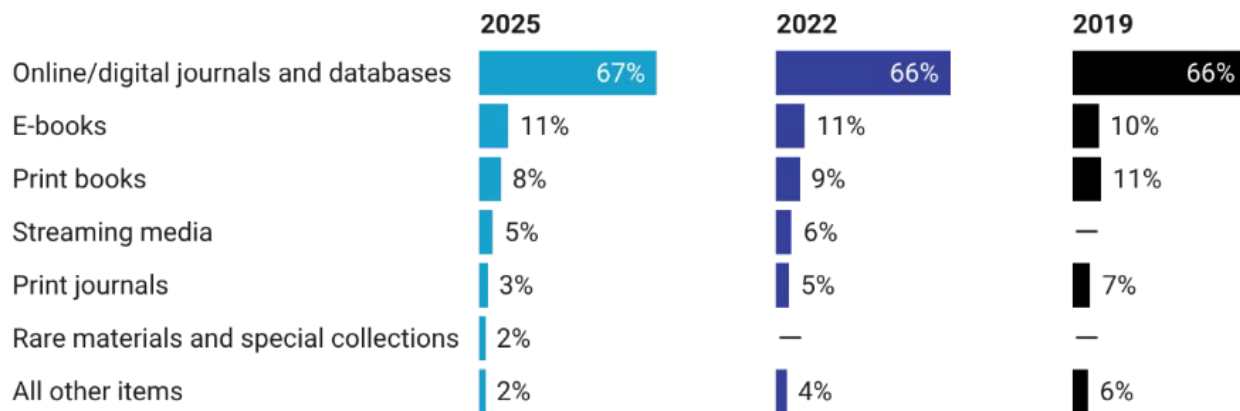
By Carnegie Classification, leaders at baccalaureate institutions forecast allocating more of their budgets toward print books in 2030 (8 percent)

compared to doctoral institutions (4 percent), as well as higher spending on print journals (2 percent at baccalaureate versus 1 percent at doctoral). Leaders at doctoral institutions anticipated allocating a larger share of their budgets to rare books and special collections (4 percent) compared to leaders at master's institutions (2 percent).

Patterns by sector mirrored current spending among these institution types. Leaders at public institutions were less likely than those at private institutions to anticipate allocating funds to print books (4 percent versus 7 percent) and print journals (1 percent versus 2 percent), but more likely to anticipate continued investment in digital journals and databases (69 percent versus 65 percent).

Figure 43. In five years, what percentage of your library's materials budget do you estimate will be spent on the following items? Percentages must add to 100%.

Average amount of materials budget spent per item, by cycle



Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

We also asked leaders whether they expected their library's operating budget to increase, remain the same, or decrease over the next five years. Responses were split: equal shares anticipated increases or decreases (32 percent each), while 36 percent expected their operating budget to remain stable.

To better understand how libraries are responding to financial uncertainty, we introduced a question asking leaders whether they had implemented or were considering changes in response to anticipated budget decreases. This question was asked only of those who expected their budgets to decline. Among these respondents, 84 percent reported that they had already reduced spending on subscriptions, 71 percent had reduced

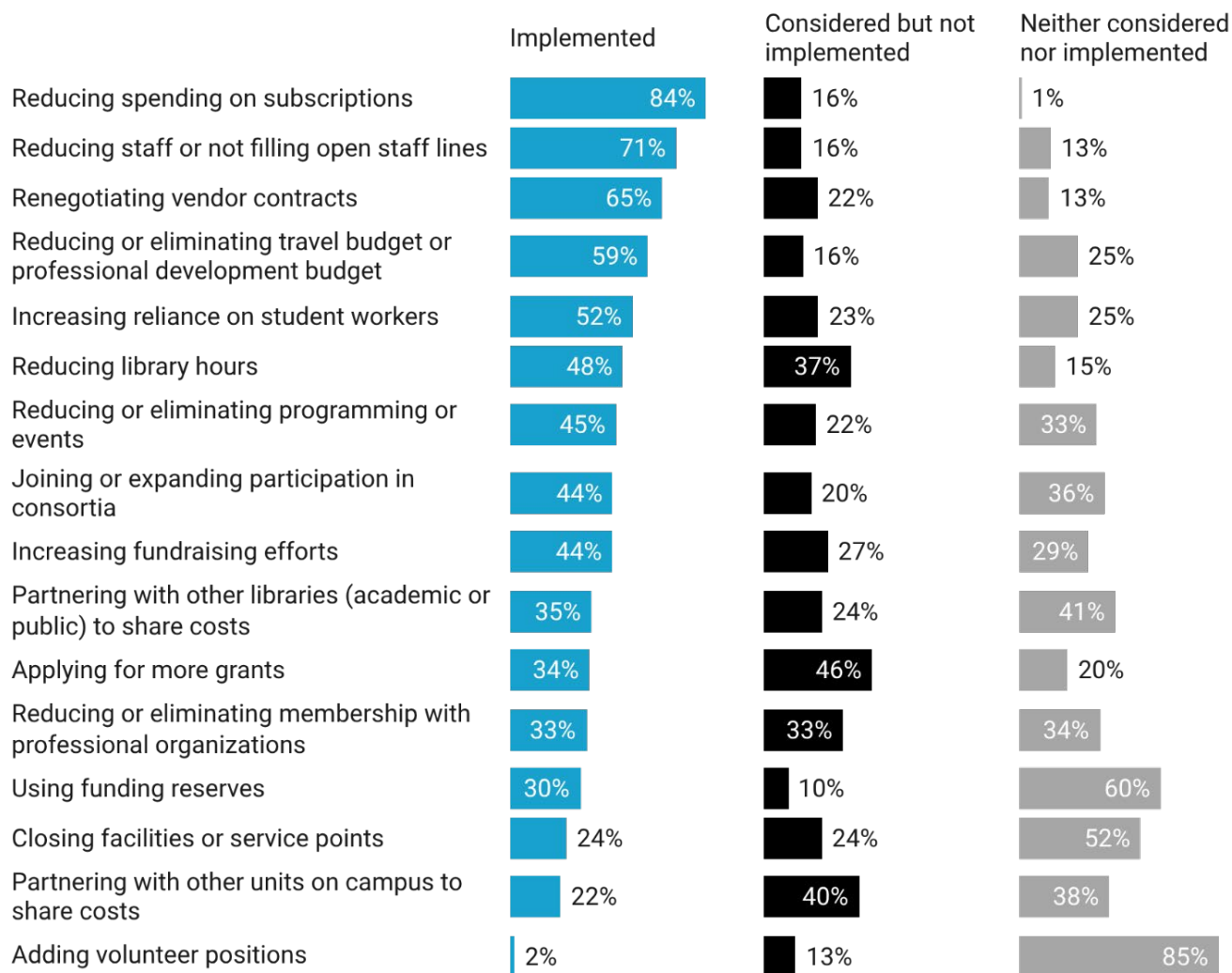
staffing expenditures or left positions unfilled, and 59 percent had reduced or eliminated travel and professional development budgets (see Figure 44).

84 percent reported that they had already reduced spending on subscriptions, 71 percent had reduced staffing expenditures or left positions unfilled, and 59 percent had reduced or eliminated travel and professional development budgets.

Leaders also identified additional strategies they were considering (see Figure 44), including pursuing external grant funding (46 percent), partnering with other campus units to share costs (40 percent), and reducing library hours (37 percent). Although leaders see great value in external library partnerships (see Figure 20 under *Library Strategy and Priorities*), 33 percent reported that they were weighing reductions in memberships with professional organizations.

Figure 44. In response to anticipated budget decreases, has your library considered or implemented any of the following changes?

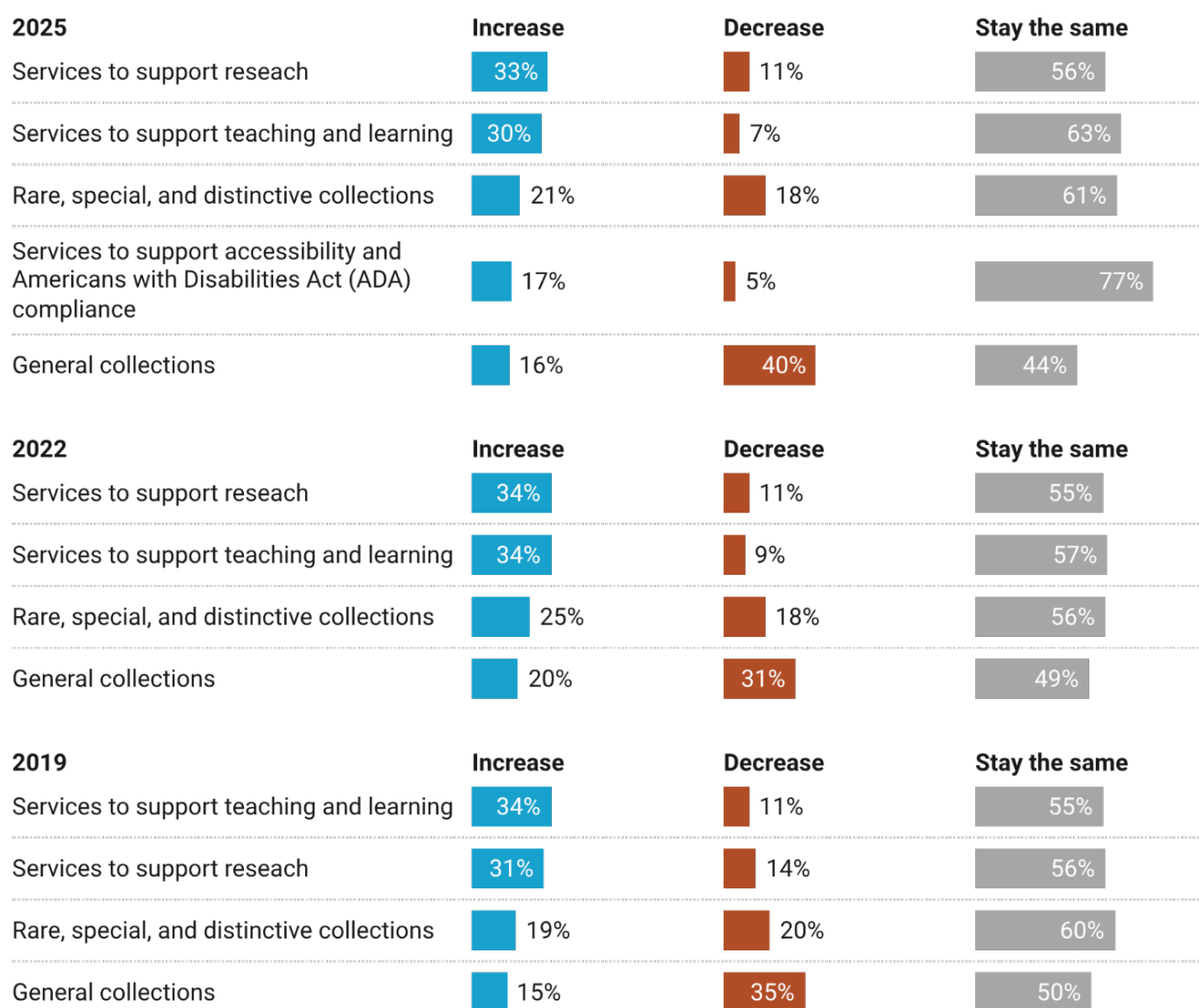
Percentage of respondents selecting the given change (shown only to respondents who anticipate a budget decrease within the five years)



Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Patterns in anticipated changes to resource allocation were broadly consistent with prior cycles (see Figure 45). As in 2019 and 2022, leaders most frequently anticipated increasing expenditures on services that support research (33 percent) and teaching and learning (30 percent). Also mirroring prior cycles, most anticipated decreases in spending on general collections (40 percent).

Figure 45. In the next five years, do you anticipate the share of overall resource expenditure (including direct expenditures and staffing) to decrease, remain the same, or increase for each of the following?
Percentage of respondents selecting each option, by cycle

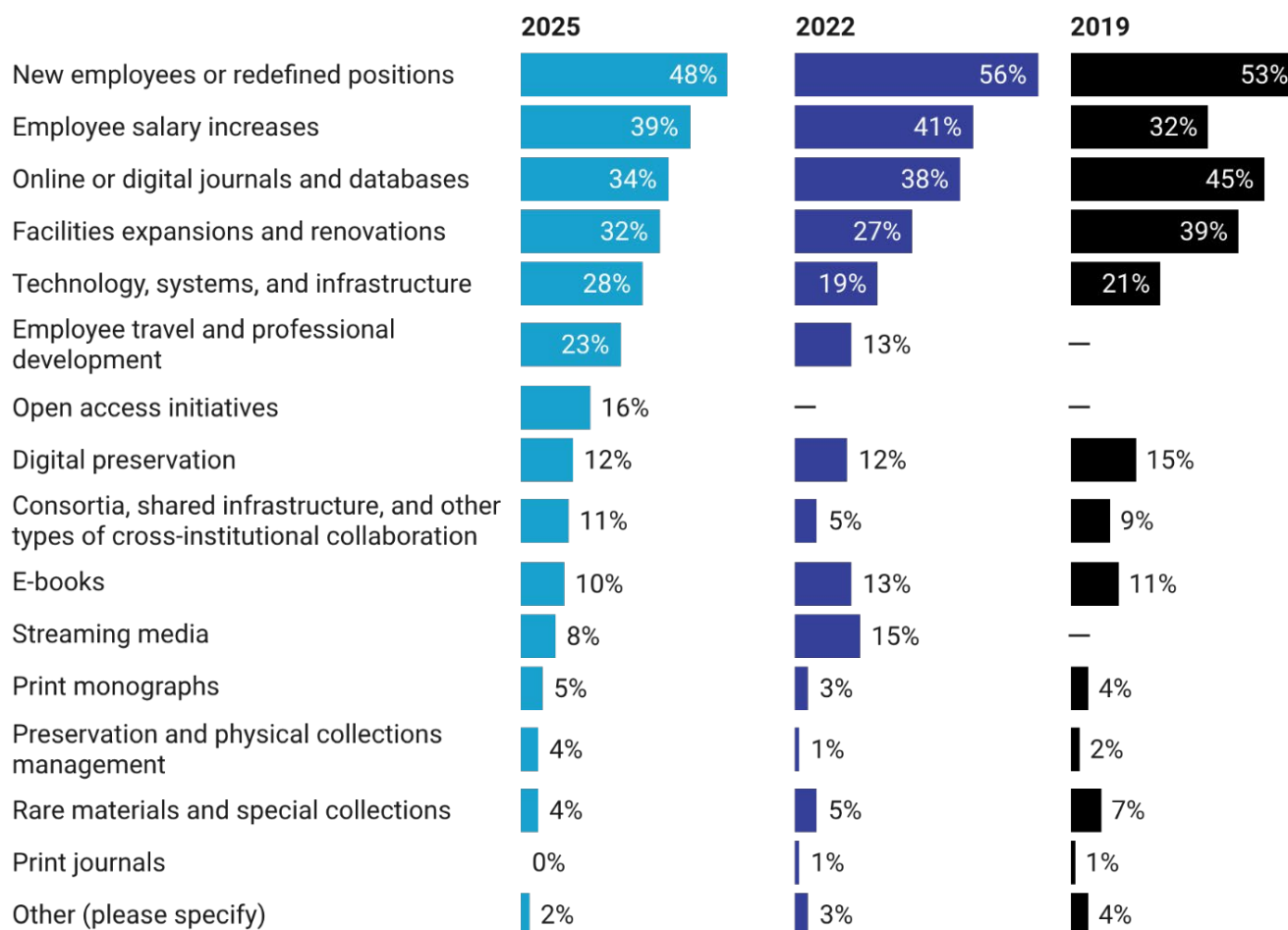


Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Leaders indicated three areas in which they would allocate a hypothetical 10 percent increase in their library's budget, shown in Figure 46. Most would allocate such an increase toward staff investment, either through new or redefined positions (48 percent) or salary increases (39 percent). Thirty-four percent would invest in digital journals and databases. These priorities were broadly consistent with those reported in prior cycles, particularly in 2022. Responses were generally aligned across institution types, though leaders at doctoral institutions were less likely (5 percent) to prioritize additional investment in e-books.

Figure 46. If you received a 10% increase in your library's budget next year in addition to the funds you already expect to receive, in which of the following areas would you allocate the money? Please check up to three areas that you would invest in.

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



Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

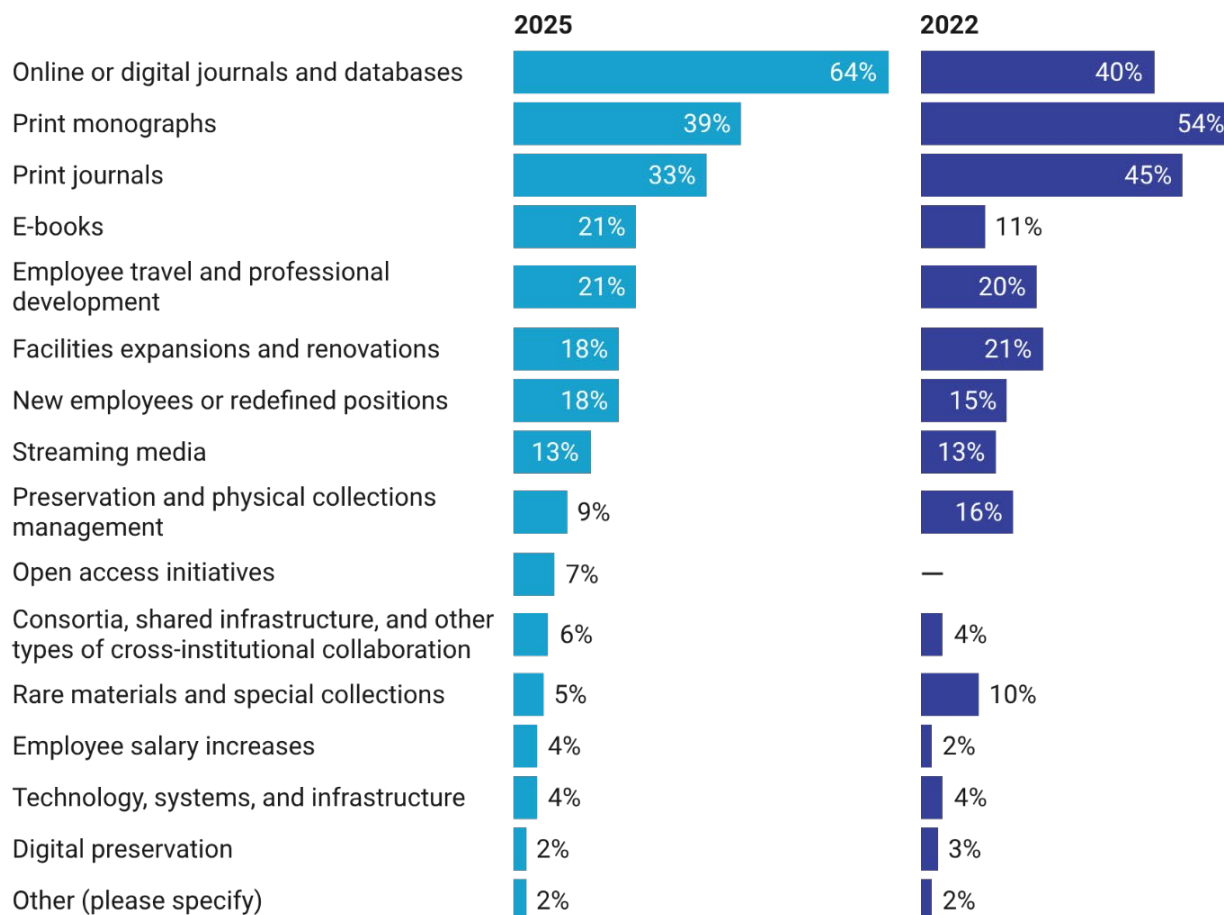
A parallel question, first introduced in 2022, asked leaders to identify three areas in which they would make reductions under a hypothetical 10 percent budget decrease. Compared to the previous cycle, responses in 2025 showed greater convergence around areas targeted for reduction (see Figure 47). The largest share indicated that they would reduce spending on digital journals and databases (64 percent), though this category was also among those most frequently selected for *increased* investment (see Figure 46 above). Thirty-nine percent indicated that they would reduce spending on print monographs, and 33 percent on print journals. However, these shares declined compared to 2022 (54 percent

and 45 percent, respectively), suggesting a modest shift relative to prior expectations for reductions in print spending.

Compared to their peers, leaders at doctoral institutions were more likely to indicate that they would reduce spending on facilities expansions and renovations (24 percent), as well as on new or redefined staff positions (27 percent). Leaders at master's institutions were more likely to report potential reductions in rare materials and special collections (10 percent), while leaders at special focus institutions were more likely to identify reductions in open access initiatives (14 percent). By contrast, no leaders at baccalaureate institutions identified open access as an area for reduction. Leaders at public institutions (23 percent) were also more likely than those at private institutions to identify facilities-related expenditures as an area for reduction.

Figure 47. If you received a 10% reduction in your library's budget next year in which of the following areas would you make reductions? Please check up to three areas you would reduce.

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



Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper

Conclusion

The landscape for academic libraries continues to shift as institutions face financial pressure, rapid technological change, and evolving expectations for teaching, research, and public trust in information. Against this backdrop, the 2025 US Library Survey captures how library strategy, vision, and priorities are evolving in turn. Libraries continue to move toward service provision, with leaders placing strong emphasis on student learning, information literacy, research support, and the library's role as a trusted source of credible information. AI has also quickly become a major area of anticipated impact, particularly in relation to AI literacy instruction, staff reskilling, discovery systems, and research integrity.

In carrying out these strategic priorities, leaders face several compounding challenges. Financial constraints remain the most widely cited barrier to change, and many leaders anticipate canceling journal packages in the next licensing cycle. Leaders are navigating staffing pressures—through burnout, staff reductions, and hiring constraints—even as they anticipate the need for additional expertise in AI, instruction, assessment, and student success. Leaders also continue to be concerned about the library's position within their parent institution: while most feel confident in their ability to articulate the library's value proposition, fewer believe this value is recognized by senior administrators or that their voices are included in campus decision-making. Their confidence in the library's contributions to student success and information literacy also appears more limited than the high priority they place on these areas.

At the same time, the results highlight several important areas of continuity and strength. Leaders remain confident that their libraries contribute to student learning, help students develop a sense of community, and play a central role in strengthening public trust in reliable information sources. Many libraries have also seen increases in staff compensation and were able to add positions in recent years, even within a constrained financial environment. Critically, leaders express strong commitment to upholding the library's core values, underscoring the continued centrality of this work despite a challenging operating environment.

These findings illustrate a field that is under pressure, but also one that continues to adapt. Each cycle of the US Library Survey captures a different set of conditions shaping academic library leadership; in 2025, those conditions are marked by both expanding expectations and often familiar constraints. In the next survey cycle, we look forward to continuing to track these trends, as well as new priorities that will emerge as academic libraries continue to redefine their role within a changing higher education landscape.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the following individuals for their time and generosity in helping update the survey instrument for this cycle, as well as for their feedback at critical points throughout the research design, analysis, and reporting stages. Members of this cycle's advisory board were:

- Karim Boughida, Dean of University Libraries, Stony Brook University
- Kimberley Bugg, Chief Executive Officer and Library Director, Atlanta University Center Woodruff Library
- Valeda Dent, Vice Provost of Libraries, Michael C. Carlos Museum, and Center for Digital Scholarship, Emory University
- Salwa Ismail, Associate University Librarian for Discovery and Access, Harvard University
- Clément Pieyre, Director, Bibliothèque Diderot de Lyon, École normale supérieure de Lyon
- Maurini Strub, Assistant Dean of Strategy and Planning, University of Rochester Libraries
- Erich van Rijn, Executive Director, University of California Press
- Charles Watkinson, Associate University Librarian for Publishing and Director of University of Michigan Press, University of Michigan
- Doug Way, Dean of Libraries, University of Kentucky

The instrument benefited from pretesting with the following library leaders:

- Lindsay Cronk, Dean of Libraries and Academic Information Resources, Tulane University
- Carrie Forbes, Dean of Milner Library, Illinois State University
- Carmelita Pickett, Associate University Librarian for Scholarly Resources and Content Strategy, University of Virginia
- Amanda Wilson, Associate University Librarian and Director of Woodruff Health Sciences Center Library, Emory University

We are also grateful to our colleagues at Ithaka S+R who contributed to the project at key stages, including Mark McBride, Roger Schonfeld, Kimberly Lutz, Juni Ahari, and Sage Love. Finally, we extend our gratitude to the library leaders who took the time to share their perspectives and experiences through the survey. This report would not be possible without their contributions.

Appendix A: Carnegie Classification groupings

Institutions were grouped into four primary categories—baccalaureate, master’s, doctoral, and special focus—based on the 2025 Carnegie Classification framework.² These groupings aggregated multiple detailed Carnegie Classification types into broader analytic categories used throughout the report, detailed below.

Baccalaureate (*n* = 76)

- Mixed Associate/Baccalaureate
- Mixed Baccalaureate
- Professions-focused Associate/Baccalaureate
- Professions-focused Baccalaureate Medium
- Professions-focused Baccalaureate Small

Master’s (*n* = 120)

- Mixed Undergraduate/Graduate-Master’s Large/Medium
- Mixed Undergraduate/Graduate-Master’s Small
- Professions-focused Undergraduate/Graduate-Master’s Large/Medium
- Professions-focused Undergraduate/Graduate-Master’s Small

Doctoral (*n* = 184 institutions)

- Mixed Undergraduate/Graduate-Doctorate Large
- Mixed Undergraduate/Graduate-Doctorate Medium
- Mixed Undergraduate/Graduate-Doctorate Small
- Professions-focused Undergraduate/Graduate-Doctorate Large
- Professions-focused Undergraduate/Graduate-Doctorate Medium
- Professions-focused Undergraduate/Graduate-Doctorate Small

² American Council on Education and Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2025 Carnegie Classifications Fact Sheet (Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 2025), <https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2025-Carnegie-Classifications-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

Special Focus ($n = 95$ institutions)

- Arts and Sciences
- Arts, Music, and Design
- Business
- Graduate Studies
- Law
- Medical Schools and Centers
- Nursing
- Other Health Professions
- Technology, Engineering, and Sciences
- Theological Studies

Other ($n = 8$ institutions); excluded from analysis

- Mixed Associate Large
- Mixed Associate Medium
- Professions-focused Associate Large/Medium

Appendix B: Full sample demographics

Distributions across all measured demographic variables are presented in Table B.1. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. To protect respondent confidentiality, Ithaka S+R aggregates demographic categories with 30 or fewer respondents into broader groupings; nonspecific response options such as “I prefer not to answer” and “I don’t know” are left unaggregated regardless of size. The categories containing these broader groupings are denoted with * in the table. The full set of unaggregated demographic response options shown to respondents can be found in the survey instrument deposited with the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research.

Table B.1. Sample Demographics

Demographic	Count	Proportion of Total (%)
<i>Years in Current Position</i>		
Less than 2 years	110	22.8
2–5 years	165	34.2
6–10 years	115	23.8
11–15 years	44	9.1
More than 15 years	46	9.5
I prefer not to answer	3	0.6
<i>Prior Position</i>		
Associate college/university librarian	130	26.9
Department head	78	16.1
Dean at another institution	52	10.8
Director at another institution	58	12.0
Interim director	47	9.7
Another position not listed here (please specify)*	115	23.8
I prefer not to answer	3	0.6
<i>Direct Supervisor</i>		
Provost, Chief Academic Officer, or Vice President of Academic Affairs	376	77.8

Deputy/Assistant/Associate Provost, Deputy/Assistant/Associate Chief Academic Officer, or Deputy/Assistant/Associate Dean of Academic Affairs	67	13.9
Other (please specify)*	37	7.7
I prefer not to answer	3	0.6
<i>Number of Full-time Staff</i>		
1-3	60	12.4
4-10	133	27.5
11-25	125	25.9
26-50	65	13.5
51-100*	43	8.9
101+	54	11.2
I prefer not to answer	3	0.6
<i>Number of Part-time Staff</i>		
0	166	34.4
1-3	199	41.2
4-10	71	14.7
11-101+*	32	6.6
I don't know / I'm unsure	4	0.8
I prefer not to answer	11	2.3
<i>Do Librarians at Your Library Have Faculty Status?</i>		
Yes	283	58.6
No	158	32.7
Other (please specify)	40	8.3
I prefer not to answer	2	0.4
<i>Are Librarians at Your Library Eligible for Tenure?</i>		
Yes	156	32.3
No	302	62.5
Other (please specify)	23	4.8
I prefer not to answer	2	0.4
<i>Institution Region^a</i>		
Midwest	129	26.7
Northeast	125	25.9
South	157	32.5
West	72	14.9
<i>Highest Level of Education^b</i>		
Master's degree not including MLS/MLIS (MA, MS, MFA)	154	31.9
MLS/MLIS	379	78.5
Doctoral degree (PhD)	105	21.7

Another not listed here (please specify)*	41	8.5	
Age			
22 to 44 years*	52	10.8	
45 to 54 years	148	30.6	
55 to 64 years	171	35.4	
65 years and over	41	8.5	
I prefer not to answer	71	14.7	
Gender Identity			
Man	167	34.6	
Woman	296	61.3	
I prefer to self-identify*	4	0.8	
I prefer not to answer	16	3.3	
Racial/Ethnic Identity			
White	406	84.1	
Person of color*	53	11.0	
I prefer not to answer	24	5.0	
	Mean	Median	Range
Percentage of Unionized Staff	21.4	0.0	0-100

^a States in which respondents' institutions are located were grouped according to the US Census Bureau's regional classifications.

^b If a respondent held multiple degrees that they consider to be of equivalent standing, they were instructed to select all that apply.

Appendix C: Methodology

Ithaka S+R maintains a contact list of library deans and directors at four-year, not-for-profit postsecondary institutions in the US using the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education database. In previous cycles, survey eligibility was limited to institutions with baccalaureate, master's, or doctoral classifications and their respective subcategories. Following the 2025 update to Carnegie Classification framework, this cycle's sampling frame was expanded to include special focus institutions as a distinct category, as well as the new mixed and professions-focused subcategories. The final contact list included 1,520 unique institutions that met these criteria. Of the individuals attempted to contact via email in the backend of Qualtrics, 171 invitations failed or were undeliverable, resulting in a final contact list of 1,349 library leaders. Consistent with prior cycles, a small number of institutions had co-directors; in these cases, respondents were asked to collaborate and submit a single survey response per institution.

To analyze the data, we leveraged a range of descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. For descriptive tests, we report cumulative frequencies at the high end of the response scales used, which we interpret as strong agreement with a statement or identification of an item as a high priority/importance, depending on the given question. Where legacy data are available, we report the frequencies of responses over time. However, because these surveys employ a repeated cross-sectional research design, specific institutions and individuals are not tracked longitudinally across survey waves. As a result, differences observed over time should be interpreted as changes in the views and priorities of the responding sample, rather than within-institution or within-individual change. For inferential tests, we conducted analyses stratified by key institutional or demographic variables, particularly Carnegie Classification and sector (i.e., public academic versus private academic institution control). The inferential tests used included independent-samples t-tests, one-way ANOVAs with Tukey's HSD post-hoc comparisons, chi-squared tests, correlation analyses, as well as OLS regression analyses, where appropriate. Inferential tests that used Carnegie Classification as the stratifying variable included sector as a control, and vice versa. Throughout the report, we share inferential findings that met the threshold

for statistical significance at $\alpha < .05$. We implemented listwise deletion when analyzing the data, such that responses with missing data were excluded only from analyses requiring those variables; as a result, sample sizes exhibited slight variation across analyses.

Appendix D: All library functions rated on priority

Figure D.1. How much of a priority is each of the following functions in your library?

Percentage of respondents answering *high – very high* priority, by cycle



Source: Ithaka S+R • Created with Datawrapper