LIPPMAN CONNECTS · LARGE SHOW ROUNDTABLE · NOVEMBER 2026

Fewer Resources. Higher Costs. Smarter Agents.

What attendees, exhibitors and your own teams are telling us about 2027



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CEO & Chief Strategist, EVOLIO Marketing

EVOLIO marketing

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FOUNDED IN 2015

JOE: 25+ YEARS MEASURING EXHIBITS & EVENTS GLOBALLY

2,000+ EVENTS AND EXHIBITS MEASURED

1,000,000+ ATTENDEE AND EXHIBITOR SURVEYS COMPLETED

50+ ATTENDEE, EXHIBITOR, SPONSOR & SESSION BENCHMARKS

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WHERE THE DATA COMES FROM

Six recent studies. One story.

106
organizers
Attendee Acquisition Reality Gap · Mar–Apr 2026

128
organizers
Beyond the Booth: Exhibit & Sponsorship Sales · May–Jun 2026

101
exhibitors
Exhibitor Advocate Event Sentiment & Outlook Study with EVOLIO · 2026

224
events, 23 cities
TEA 2025 Annual Survey of Exhibition Rates · audited by EVOLIO

51
event leaders
2026 Event Workforce Study · preliminary · fielding now

60
healthcare brands
HCEA GST26 Future of Healthcare Events. Aug 2026

Research conducted by
EVOLIO marketing · Lippman Connects · Trade Show Executive

Feelings Aren't Facts®

Organizer studies: EVOLIO with Lippman Connects and Trade Show Executive. Survey findings are directional; bases vary by question. Workforce Study is preliminary and still collecting responses.

The big picture.

ATTENDEES

38%

of organizers see companies sending fewer attendees

44% at large shows (125K+ sq ft)

EXHIBITORS

55%

of exhibitors are limiting onsite staff because of cost

YOU

76%

of organizers say their own team is understaffed

We each need to do more to prove positive outcomes.

Sources: Attendee Acquisition Reality Gap, EVOLIO · Lippman Connects · Trade Show Executive, Mar–Apr 2026, n=106 (large-show subgroup directional). Exhibitor Advocate Event Sentiment & Outlook Study with EVOLIO, n=101. 2026 Event Workforce Study, EVOLIO · Lippman Connects · TSE, preliminary, n=51.

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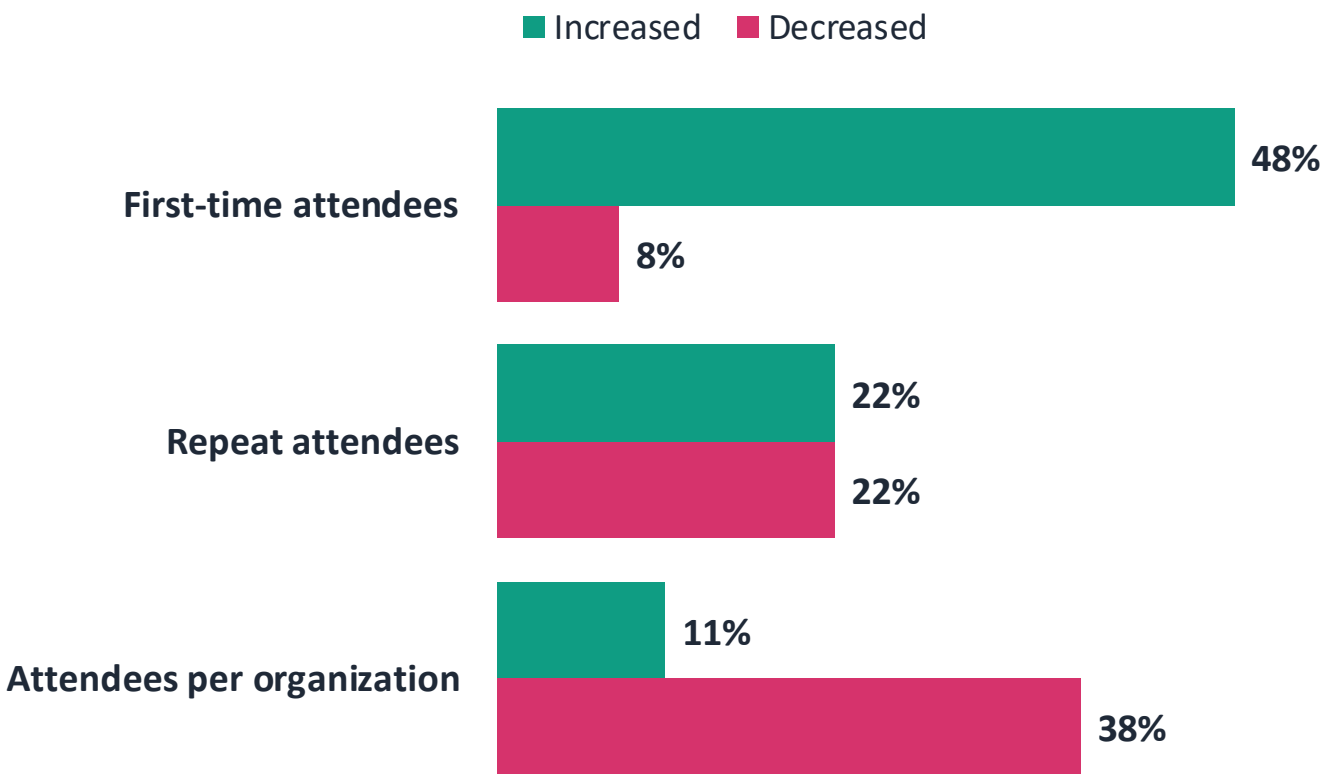
What’s happening at your event?

Attendees. Exhibitors. And the bill they’re paying.

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More shows are growing first-timers than repeat attendees.

CHANGE IN THE PAST 2 YEARS, % OF ORGANIZERS



48% vs 22%

grew first-timers vs. grew repeat attendees

Ask who left

Add a non-returning attendee survey to your post-show survey

Source: Attendee Acquisition Reality Gap, EVOLIO · Lippman Connects · Trade Show Executive, Mar–Apr 2026, n=106 senior organizers. Share of organizers reporting each change, not attendee growth rates.

Exhibitors value events. Their bills are getting difficult to defend.

75%

of exhibitors rate their event program value good or excellent



55%

say rising costs now outweigh the value



20%

of sponsors say sponsorships consistently deliver value



High value. Low ROI proof.

Sources: Exhibitor Advocate Event Sentiment & Outlook Study with EVOLIO, 2026, n=100–101. HCEA GST26 Future of Healthcare Events Study, EVOLIO, preliminary Aug 2026, brands & agencies n=60 (one industry, directional).

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Your rates went up. Most exhibitors' budgets didn't.

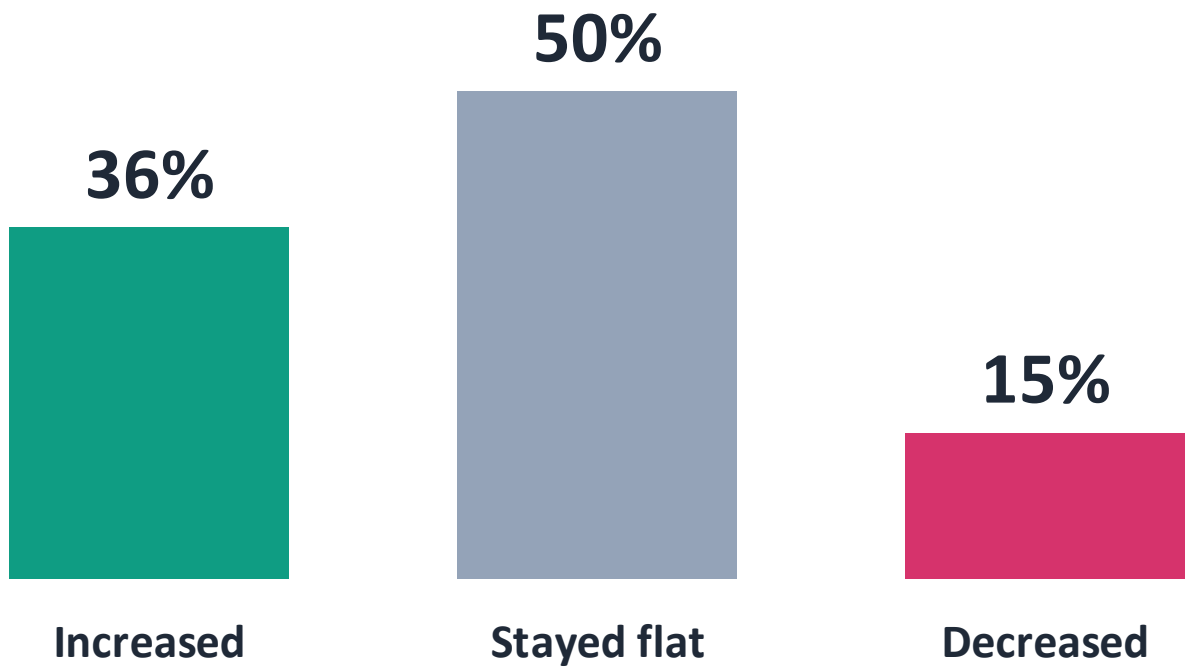
ORGANIZERS

64%

raised cost per square foot

Only 50% sold more net square feet

EXHIBITOR BUDGET, 2026 VS 2025

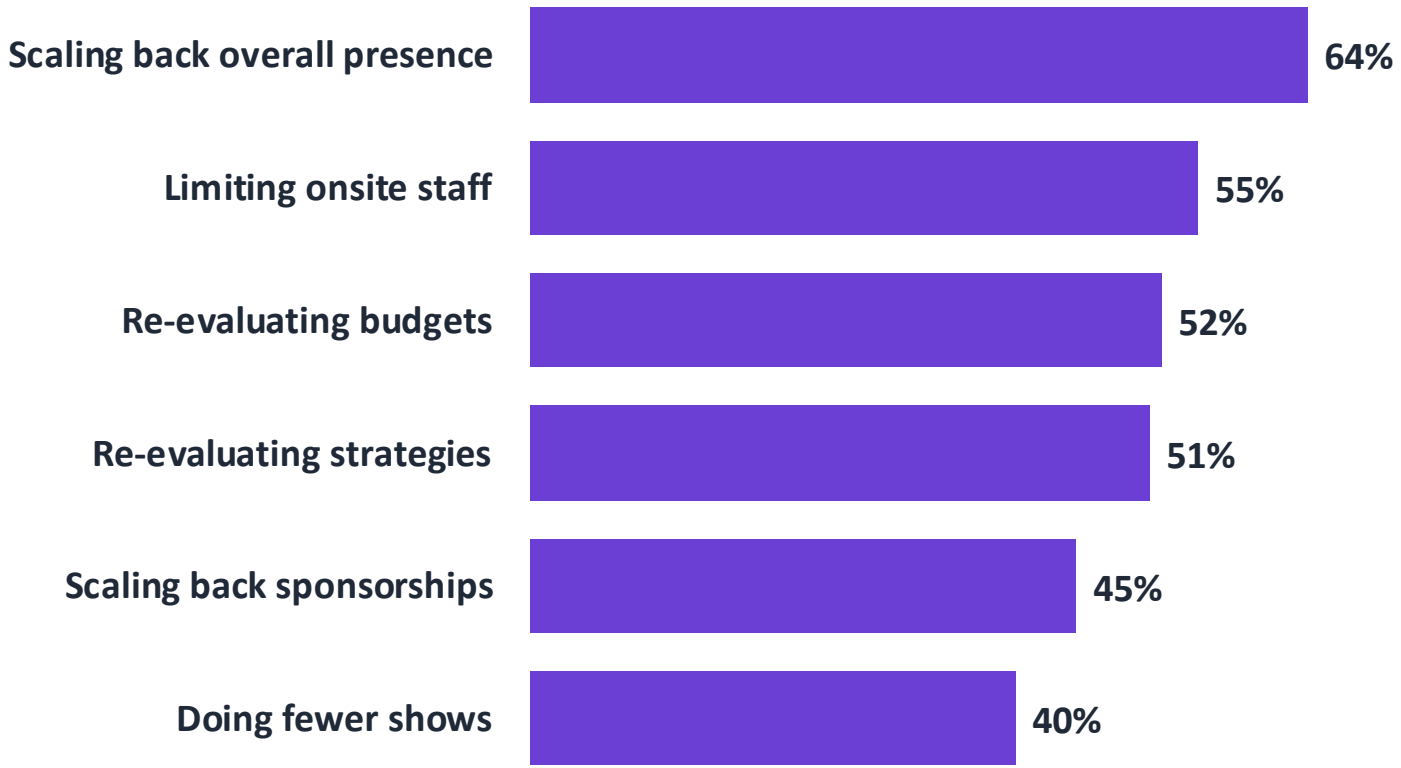


Sources: Beyond the Booth, EVOLIO · Lippman Connects · Trade Show Executive, May–Jun 2026, n=128 organizers. Exhibitor Advocate Event Sentiment & Outlook Study with EVOLIO, 2026, n=101 exhibitors (sums to 101% due to rounding).

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When budgets stay flat, exhibitors' presence shrinks.

BECAUSE OF INCREASING COSTS, EXHIBITORS ARE...



ORGANIZERS SEE IT

85%

see exhibitor dollars shifting

43% standard presence → custom
31% space → sponsorship
31% your event → their own events

Sources: Exhibitor Advocate Event Sentiment & Outlook Study with EVOLIO, n=101 (as reported in TEA 2025 Annual Survey of Exhibition Rates). Beyond the Booth, EVOLIO · Lippman Connects · TSE, May–Jun 2026, n=128 organizers. Select all that apply.

"The first thing to be cut is the sponsorship, because the cost of merely showing up is not optional."

"So many sponsorship options feel like a money grab."

Exhibit program leader, Rising Costs focus group, July 2026

Source: Rising Costs for Exhibitors focus group, The Exhibitor Advocate & EVOLIO, July 2026 (qualitative). Your highest-margin line is their most discretionary one.

More than half the budget is gone before exhibitors promote anything.

62%

space, services and shipping

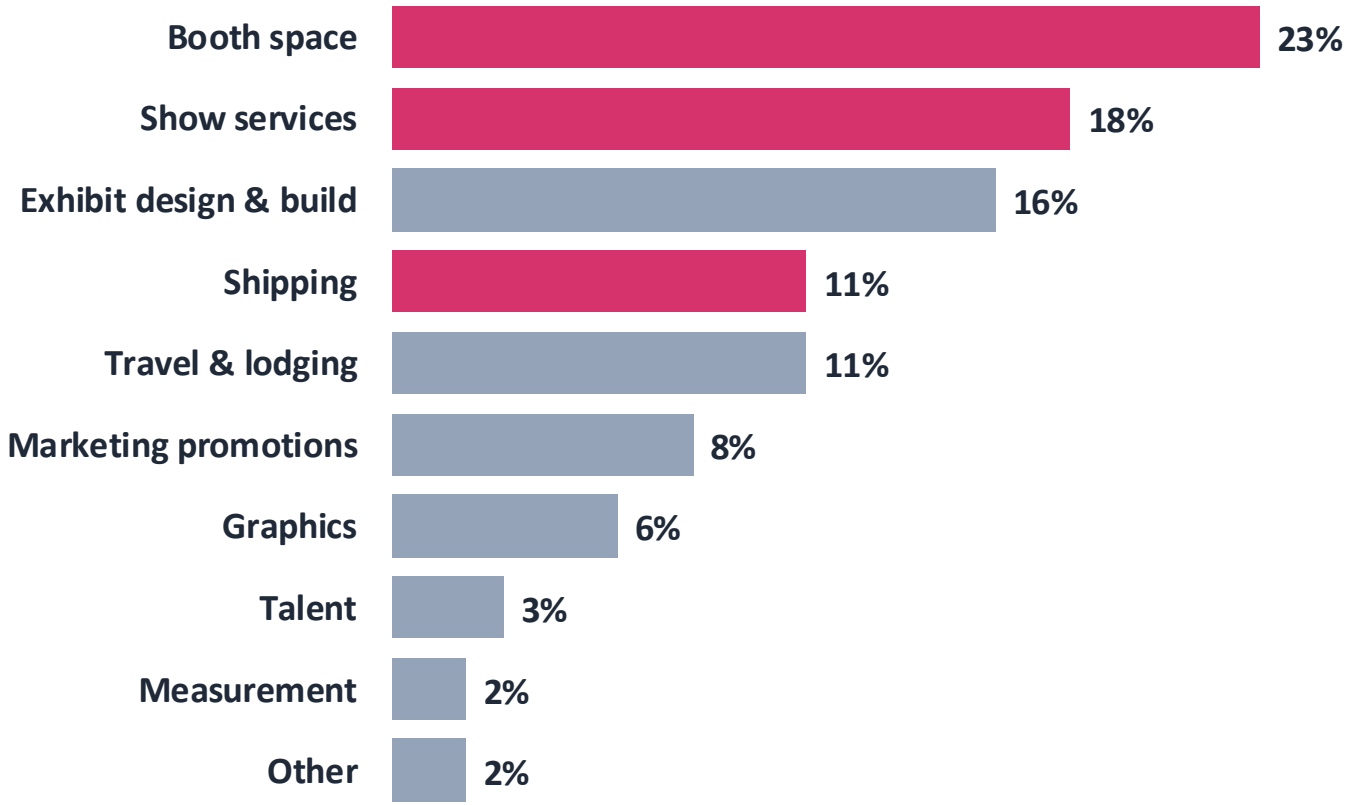
EVOLIO + Exhibitor Advocate

52%

the same three lines

EXHIBITOR Magazine

EXHIBITOR MAGAZINE BUDGET BREAKDOWN, % OF EXHIBIT BUDGET



Sources: Exhibitor Advocate Event Sentiment & Outlook Study with EVOLIO, 2026, n=101 (Q23). EXHIBITOR Magazine, "Budget Breakdown: How the Exhibiting Dollar Is Spent," Aug/Sep 2025, nearly 200 event marketers. Different samples and category definitions.

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Key show services have risen 3x+ faster than inflation.



Get the full report
exhibitoradvocacy.com

+9.5%

Material handling

Now $2.28/lb. Inflation was 2.7%. Up 21% since 2022.

+18.4%

Electrical

In one year. Electrical OT labor is up 41% since 2022.

+21%

Booth padding

Visqueen +22%. Carpet +12.7%.

+75%

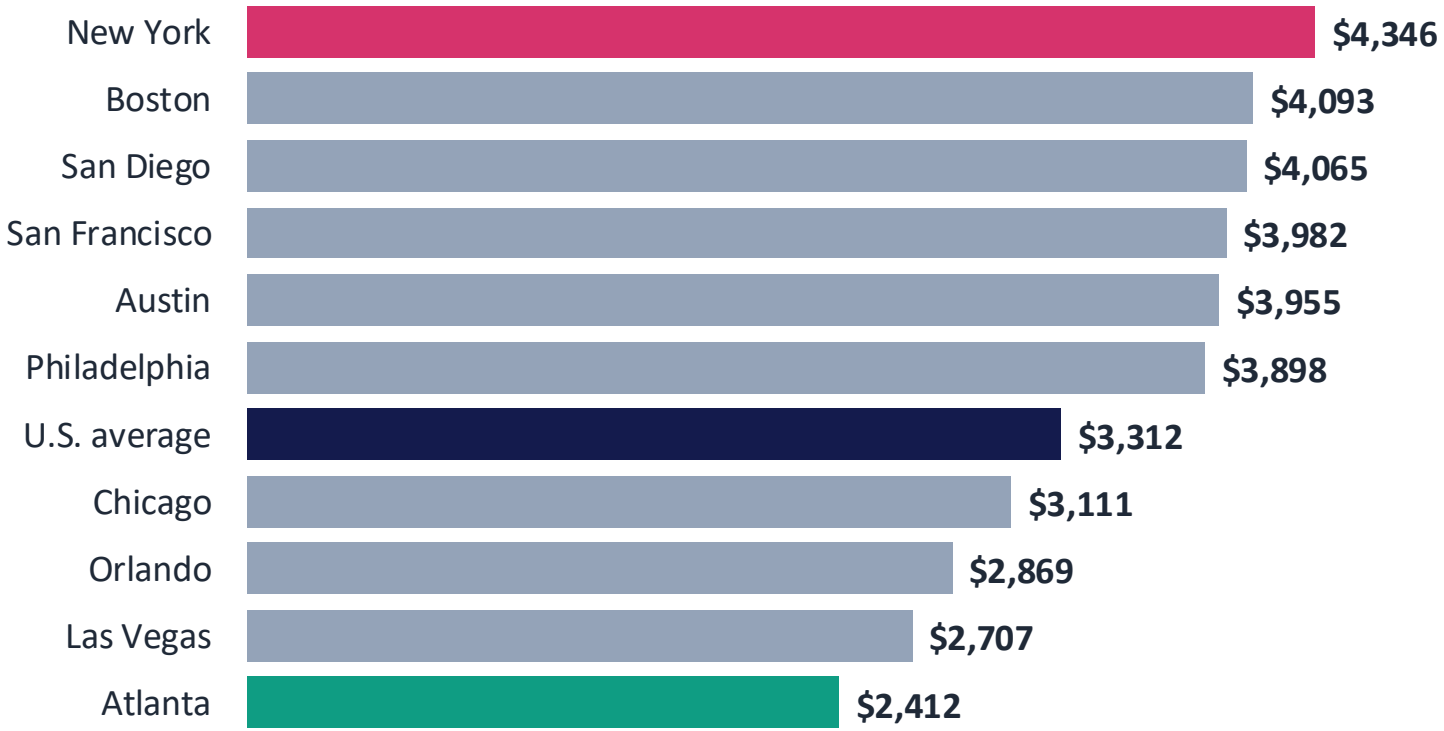
New York vs. Atlanta

Same services basket: $3,531 vs. $2,012.

Source: The Exhibitor Advocate, 2025 Annual Survey of Exhibition Rates, with Tradeshow Logic; independently audited by EVOLIO Marketing. 224 events, 23 U.S. cities, Jan–Dec 2025, advance (discount) rates. Inflation: BLS CPI, Dec 2025.

Change your show location, and you change exhibitors’ bills.

SHOW-SERVICES BILL FOR ONE 10'x10' BOOTH, SELECTED CITIES



Order: 4 hrs display labor, 300 lbs material handling, one 5-amp outlet, 10'x10' carpet + pad + visqueen, 3 vacuums, 6' draped table, 2 chairs, wastebasket. Excludes space, exhibit, freight and travel.

Does your show rotate?

Put the city cost difference in the conversation and the prospectus.

Now, not at move-in.

EVOLIO illustrative calculation using TEA 2025 average city rates (advance/discount rates; actual show rates vary). TEA official basket of goods: New York $3,531, Atlanta $2,012 (+75%).

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The 2026 Event Workforce Study

First look. Preliminary data. You're seeing it before the whitepaper.

ANSWER THE SURVEY

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51 event leaders. Half run large shows.

78%

Director level or above

67%

associations

53%

largest show is 125K+ net sq ft

57%

have 20+ years in events

Research conducted by

EVOLIO marketing · Lippman Connects · Trade Show Executive

Source: 2026 Event Workforce Study, EVOLIO · Lippman Connects · Trade Show Executive. Preliminary data, still fielding, n=51 (segments from a later pull, n=53). Large = largest event 125,000+ net sq ft of exhibit space sold.

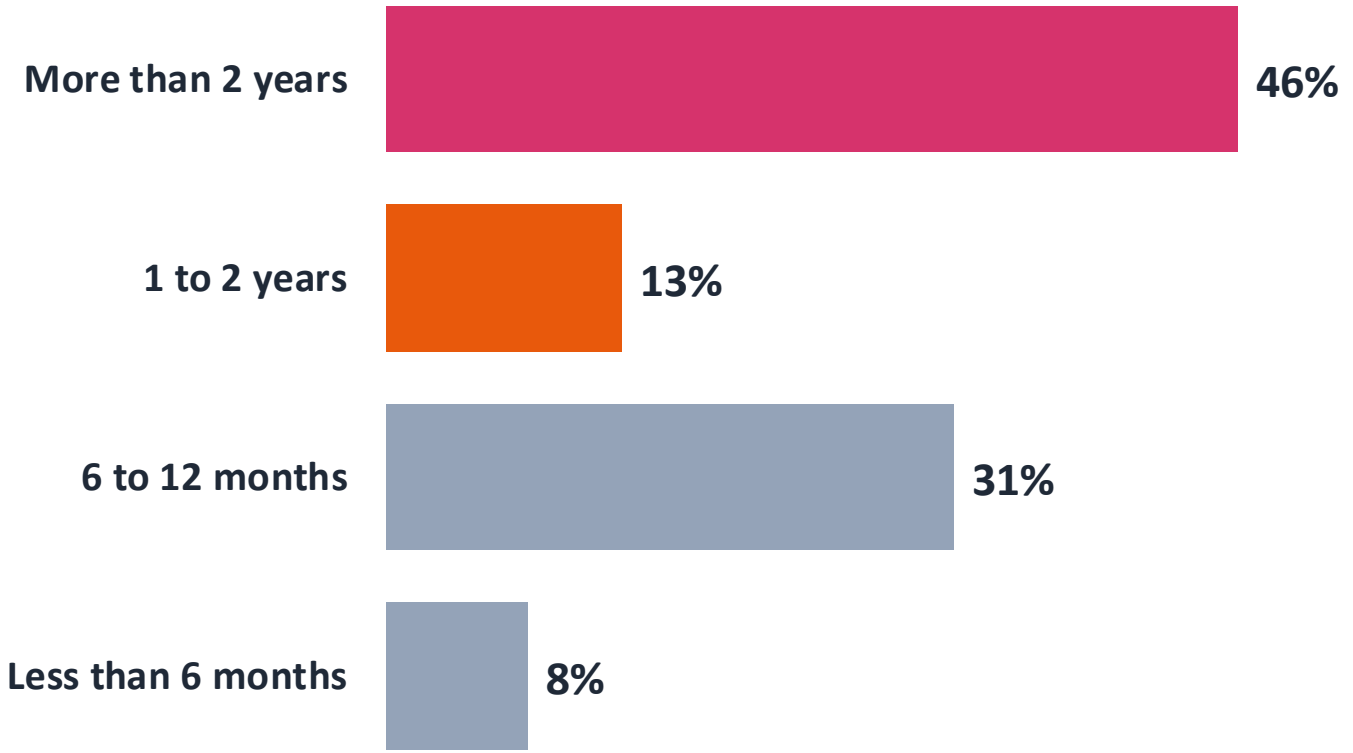
Understaffed isn’t a phase. It’s the operating model.

76%

say their organization is understaffed

61% somewhat · 16% significantly.
Same story at large and non-large shows.

HOW LONG HAS YOUR TEAM BEEN UNDERSTAFFED? (n=39)



Source: 2026 Event Workforce Study, EVOLIO · Lippman Connects · Trade Show Executive. Preliminary data, still fielding, n=51; duration asked of understaffed respondents, n=39 (2.6% not sure). Large vs. non-large means: 1.8 vs. 2.0 (no meaningful difference).

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AI is everywhere. Headcount hasn’t moved.

65%

are piloting or running AI in operations

35% piloting · 29% operational (rounded) · 2% not using

40%

already use AI agents

24% aren't sure, or don't know what an agent is

84%

report no headcount change from AI

86% don't think their own job is at risk

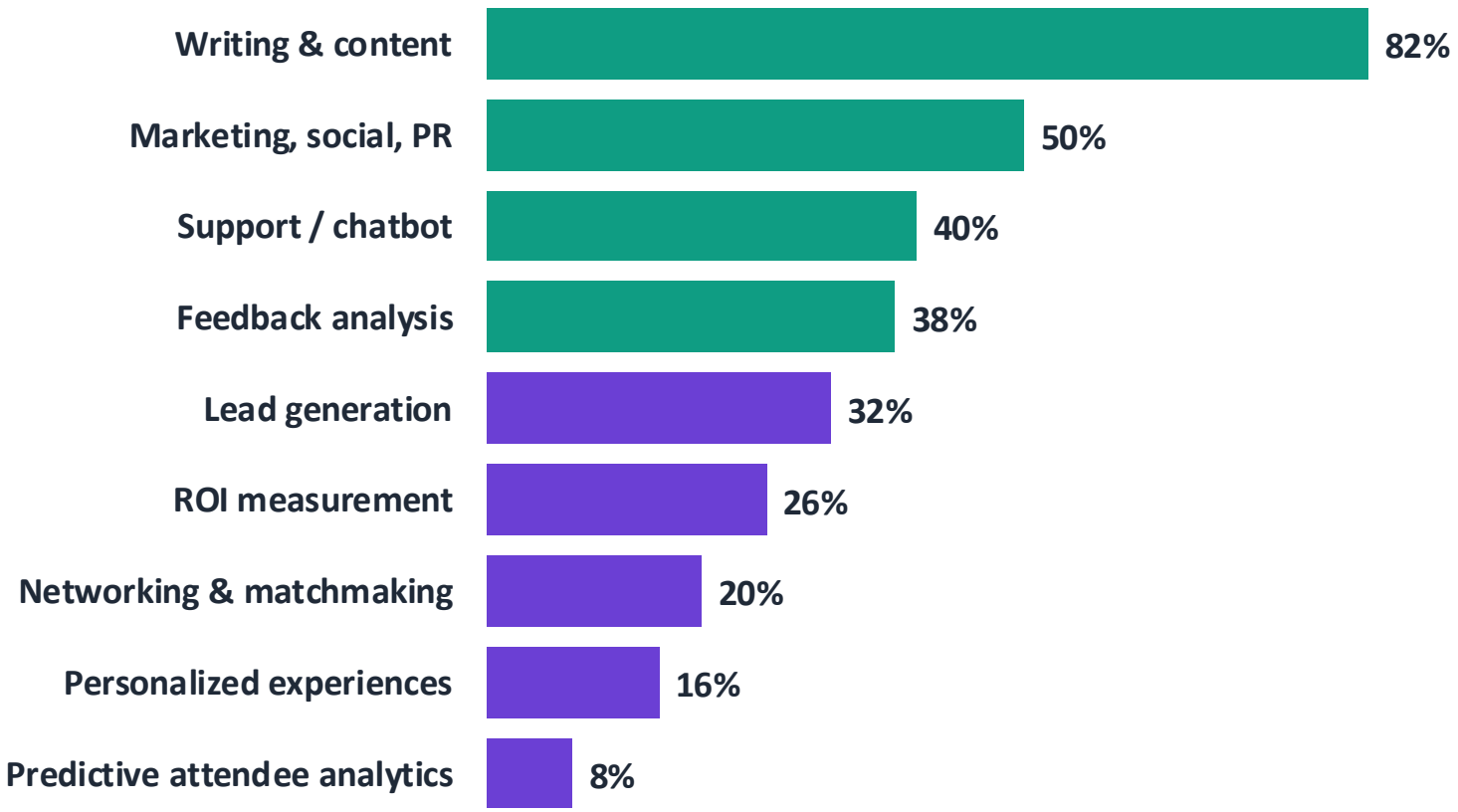
AI isn't replacing your people yet. It’s barely covering for the ones you don't have.

Source: 2026 Event Workforce Study, EVOLIO · Lippman Connects · Trade Show Executive. Preliminary data, still fielding. AI usage n=51; agents, headcount and job risk n=50. AI usage level is the same at large and non-large shows (means 2.9 vs. 2.9).

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AI is writing your emails, not finding your revenue.

AI IS BEING USED FOR… (n=50)



32%

use AI for lead generation. 26% for improving ROI.

50% vs 27%

large vs. non-large shows using AI chatbots for support

Source: 2026 Event Workforce Study, EVOLIO · Lippman Connects · Trade Show Executive. Preliminary data, still fielding, n=50. Purple = revenue and attendee-value uses. Not shown: design 38%, budgeting 24%, translation 18%, speakers 14%, registration 8%. Large vs. non-large n=26 each; chatbot gap is directional (not significant at 95%).

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Your veterans are the knowledge system. There's little backup.

Remember we said…

57%

of respondents have 20+ years in events

1 in 4 are Boomers or older

73%

have no formal process to transfer what veterans know

49% informal or ad hoc · 24% nothing at all

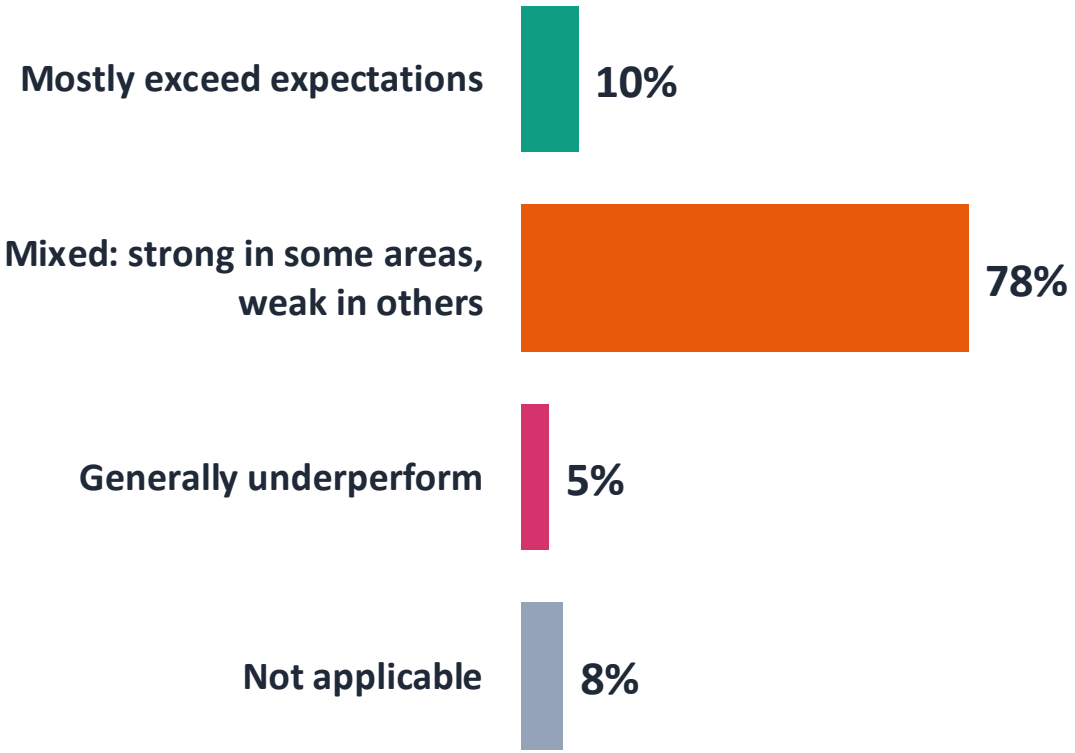
What newer staff lack most lives in the heads of your longest-tenured people.

Source: 2026 Event Workforce Study, EVOLIO · Lippman Connects · Trade Show Executive. Preliminary data, still fielding, n=51; skills lacking asked of those with less-experienced staff, n=33. Boomers: 15% of large-show vs. 35% of non-large respondents (directional).

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Only 1 in 7 can show someone how to get promoted.

HOW DO LESS-EXPERIENCED EMPLOYEES PERFORM? (n=40)



WHAT LESS EXPERIENCED EMPLOYEES ARE LACKING (n=33)

67%

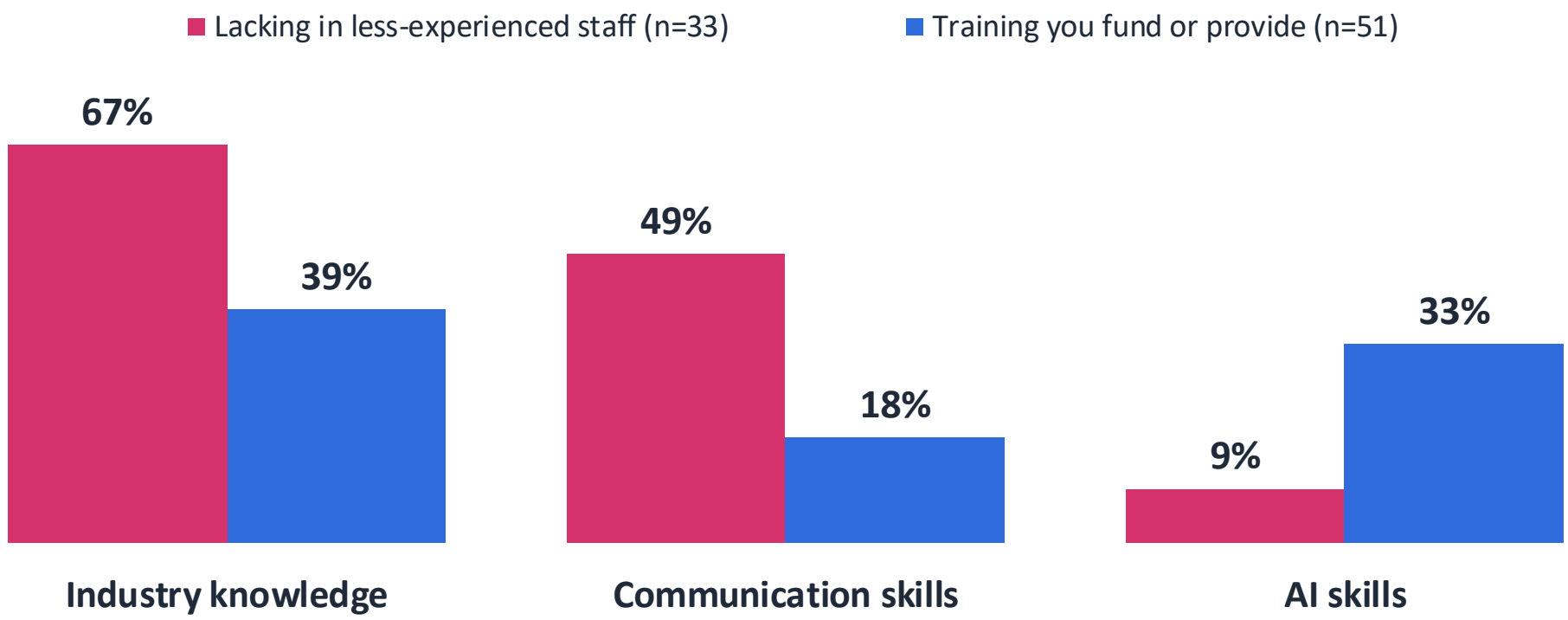
lack industry-specific knowledge, the #1 gap

- **58%** attention to detail
- **52%** work ethic / dedication
- **49%** communication and writing skills
- **42%** presentation skills
- **9%** IT or AI skills

Source: 2026 Event Workforce Study, EVOLIO · Lippman Connects · Trade Show Executive. Preliminary data, still fielding, n=51; perception of less-experienced employees n=40. 15.7% fund no training at all.

You’re training for the wrong gaps.

WHAT NEWER STAFF LACK vs. WHAT YOU FUND



Source: 2026 Event Workforce Study, EVOLIO · Lippman Connects · Trade Show Executive. Preliminary data, still fielding. Pairs: industry knowledge vs. general event industry training; communication skills vs. communication training; AI skills vs. technical/AI training. Also lacking: attention to detail 58%, work ethic 52%.

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Freelancers work. Half of large shows don’t use them.

65%

outsource at least one function to individual freelancers

52% large shows
81% non-large shows

Top: registration, creative and PR (20% each), exhibit ops (16%)

88%

say freelancers have been effective

36% very · 52% somewhat · 0% not effective (n=33)

Source: 2026 Event Workforce Study, EVOLIO · Lippman Connects · Trade Show Executive. Preliminary data, still fielding, n=51; effectiveness n=33. Fractional executive use: 13.7% currently using, 5.9% actively considering, 66.7% neither, 13.7% not sure (n=51); effectiveness n=7 (anecdotal). Large vs. non-large gap on "none": z≈2.2, p<0.05.

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Chronic work overload. Some even feel held back.

Remember we said…

78%

of respondents are Director level or above

46%

of understaffed teams have been short for 2+ years

41%

don't fully feel their organization lets them reach their potential

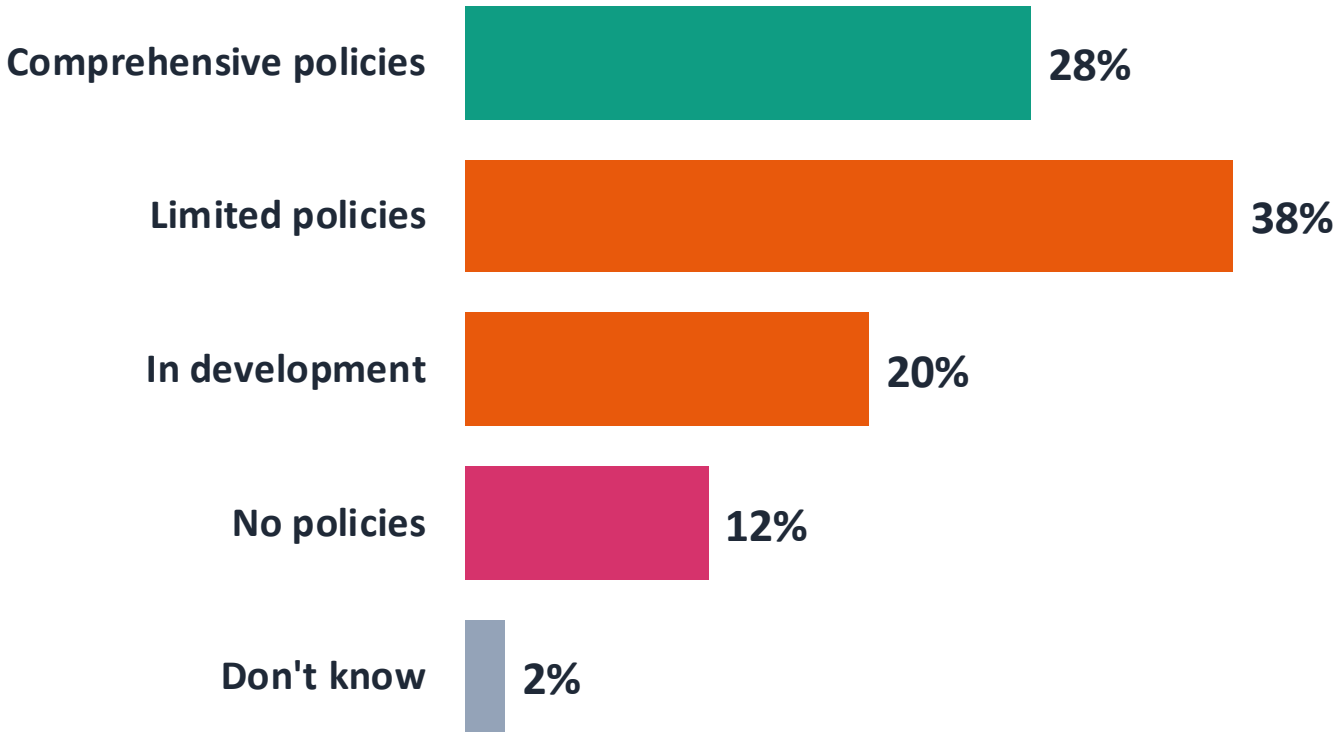
25% somewhat · 16% no

Source: 2026 Event Workforce Study, EVOLIO · Lippman Connects · Trade Show Executive. Preliminary data, still fielding, n=51; understaffed duration n=39. Career potential: large-show respondents less likely to say "yes" than non-large (means 1.8 vs. 1.4, directional).

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40% run AI agents. Only 28% have comprehensive AI policies.

FORMAL AI GOVERNANCE: ACCEPTABLE USE, DATA SECURITY, OVERSIGHT (n=50)



72%

don't have comprehensive AI policies

Your attendee and exhibitor data is in those tools. Large shows trend better governed.

Source: 2026 Event Workforce Study, EVOLIO · Lippman Connects · Trade Show Executive. Preliminary data, still fielding. Governance n=50; AI agent use n=50. Large vs. non-large governance means 1.9 vs. 2.5 (lower = more formal), borderline significance.

92% aren't in the office full time. Culture scores below our risk line.

92%

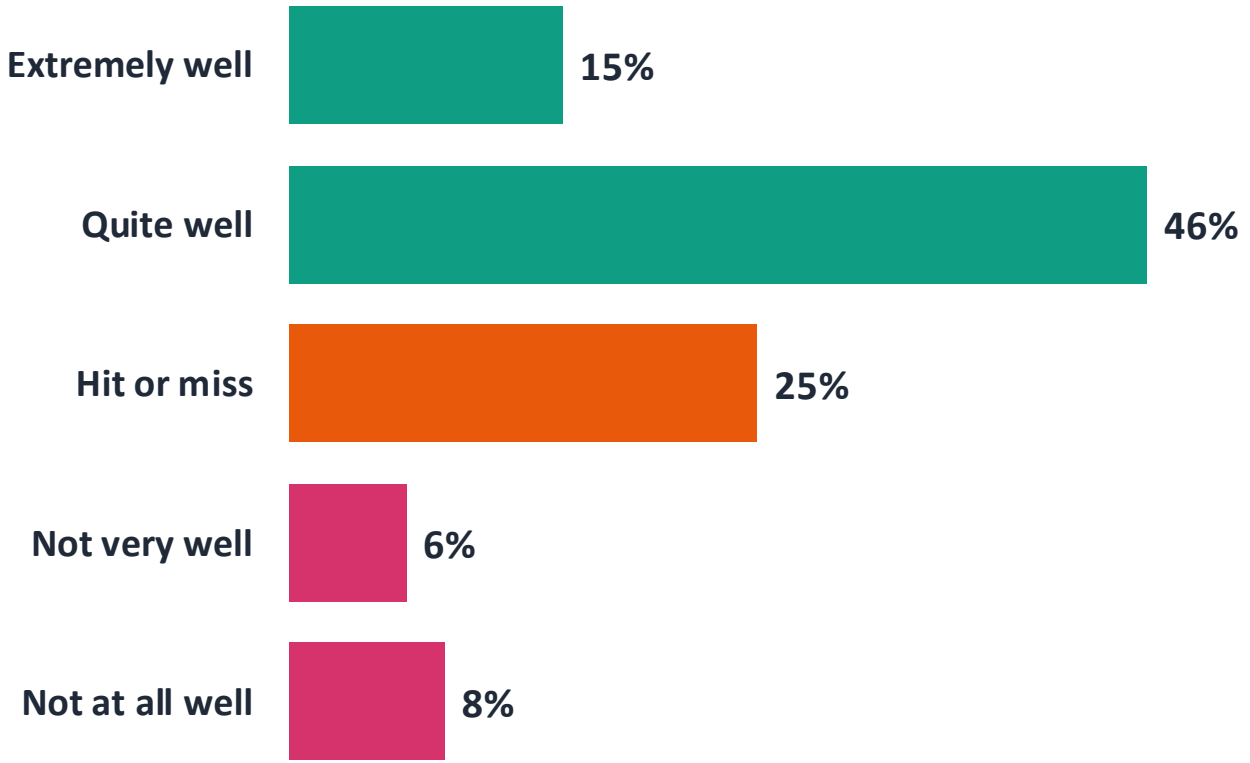
Are not in the office full time

53%

hybrid

25% fully remote · 12% location-based · 2% other · 8% full-time in office

CULTURE FOR REMOTE, HYBRID AND NEW HIRES (n=48)



Source: 2026 Event Workforce Study, EVOLIO · Lippman Connects · Trade Show Executive. Preliminary data, still fielding, n=51; culture question excludes 3 N/A responses (n=48). Large vs. non-large: about 3.6 for both once N/A is excluded (the export codes N/A as 0). EVOLIO Level 2 Strategic Risk: mean <3.9 or top-2-box <76%.

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One team sells it all. Sales training is thin.

76%

use the same staff to sell booths and sponsorships

60%

fund sales training

31% use internal leaders
29% fund outside experts

Only

12%

of sponsors call organizers consultative

45% say transactional

Understaffed, thinly coached, and selling everything means selling inventory, not outcomes.

Source: 2026 Event Workforce Study, EVOLIO · Lippman Connects · Trade Show Executive. Preliminary data, still fielding, n=51. Exhibitor view: HCEA GST26 Future of Healthcare Events Study, EVOLIO, preliminary Aug 2026, brands & agencies n=60 (one industry, directional).

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Workforce moves for 2027.

IMMEDIATE · NEXT 30 DAYS

Pair every 20+ year veteran with a successor. Write the playbook down.

Publish a one-page AI policy and an approved-tools list.

STRATEGIC · 2027 PLAN

Build a vetted freelancer bench: registration, exhibit ops, social.

Fund the gaps you named: industry knowledge and communication.

TRANSFORMATIONAL

Give major roles an agent: prospect research, exhibitor FAQs, post-show reports.

Governed, measured and owned like a hire.

Recommendations are EVOLIO's, based on the preliminary Workforce Study findings. They are not survey results.

Last chance!

ANSWER THE SURVEY BY EOD FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 6

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3

Event managers, beware

The agents are already shopping for shows. Including yours.

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Two AIs are looking at your show right now.

YOUR AI

- Who's missing from my floor?
- What are competing shows charging and adding?
- Where are my warm prospects exhibiting?

EXHIBITORS' AI

- Which shows should we be in, and at what level?
- Where do our buyers actually go?
- Which show can prove its audience?

78% of organizers use AI. 2% call AI prospecting their most effective channel.

Source: Beyond the Booth, EVOLIO · Lippman Connects · Trade Show Executive, May–Jun 2026, n=128 organizers.

Know your competing events better than your exhibitors do.

Competitive show scan · Northline Industrial Expo

SAMPLE DATA

Fictional show and competitors · refreshed weekly by the agent

Show	Next edition	Net sq ft	$/sq ft	Exhibitors	Ed tracks	New this year
Northline Industrial Expo (you)	Sep 2027 · Detroit	310K	$42	1,150	6	—
Lakeshore Fab Week	Jun 2027 · Chicago	265K	$38	980	9	**Hosted-buyer program**
Ridgeview Automation Summit	Apr 2027 · Columbus	140K	$45	520	12	**AI + robotics pavilion**
Southport Precision Show	Mar 2027 · Atlanta	190K	$35	760	5	Free extra booth-staff passes

2 of 3
competitors price below you per sq ft

31
of your exhibitors also exhibit at Lakeshore

2x
Ridgeview runs twice your education tracks

Illustrative agent output. Show names, prices and counts are fictional sample data, not real events.

Where is my warm prospect exhibiting and sponsoring?

THE PROMPT

"Act as a senior exhibit and sponsorship sales strategist for [our show]. For [company], find every trade show, conference, and private event [company] exhibited at, sponsored, or hosted in the last 24 months: booth size, sponsorship level, speakership, messaging, products/solutions displayed, offsite or hosted activity, with a source link for each. Compare that to what we offer and flag what they buy elsewhere that we don't sell. Score fit 1 to 10, recommend a package and price range, and give me three opening questions for the call. Don't guess. Leave blanks and flag them. Put results in a table“

Then make it an agent: it watches the news for launches, new executives and new events, and refreshes the cheat sheet every week.

Prompt adapted from EVOLIO's exhibit-sales prospecting work (Beyond the Booth, 2026). Verify every output against the source links before you use it.

EXAMPLE 1 · WHAT THE AGENT HANDS YOUR REP

A cheat sheet before the call, not a floor plan.

Corvane Robotics · Tier A · Fit 9/10

SAMPLE DATA

Fictional company · event footprint, last 24 months

Event	Their presence	Signal
Lakeshore Fab Week 2026	20x40 booth (was 20x20) + lanyards	Growing spend
Ridgeview Automation Summit	Hosted suite, 40 buyer meetings	Wants meetings
Southport Precision 2025	10x20 booth	Did not return
Corvane Live 2026 (own event)	300 customers, Detroit	Building owned events
Northline Expo (you)	Not since 2024	Lapsed: win back

TRIGGERS

New VP Marketing (Mar 2026). Cobot line launches Q1 2027.

RECOMMEND

20x30 island + hosted-buyer meetings package, $55K–$70K

OPEN WITH

"You ran 40 meetings at Ridgeview. What if you could do that and exhibit in one place?"

Illustrative agent output. Company, events, people and prices are fictional sample data.

Your next attendee is asking an AI, not Google.

SAMPLE BUYER PROMPT

"I am a plant manager evaluating automation and robotics trade shows to attend. Which U.S. events in 2027 would help me learn cutting-edge information, shop and compare suppliers, shop around or purchase solutions, and find partnerships for our advancing robotics AI solutions? I'm also interested in networking and recruiting staff. Include dates, location, fees, relevant exhibitors, networking opportunities, education sessions, and evidence links. Explain the fit and flag unknowns. Score results. Present them in a table"

~2/3

of B2B buyers use AI as much as or more than search for vendor research

Try it tonight

Is your show in the answer? Are the dates, fees and audience right?

Prompt: EVOLIO AAR 2026 AI discovery exercise (illustrative persona). Stat: Responsive, "Inside the Buyer's Mind," Oct 2025, n=350 B2B buyers (vendor-sponsored; vendor research, not event selection).

Exhibitors' agents are scoring your shows. Can they find your audience?

Event portfolio review · Global technology brand

SAMPLE DATA

Fictional brand and events · 2027 planning · agent-scored

Event	2026 cost	Qualified visitors	Cost per qualified	Verdict
Flagship tech show A	$2.4M	3,900	$615	Hold: shift to meetings
Industry show B	$850K	2,100	$405	Grow
Partner summit E	$400K	1,300	$308	Grow
Regional show C	$310K	420	$738	Shrink booth
Vertical show D	$520K	No data	—	Cut: can't verify audience

5%

decide on the organizer's recommendation

Portfolio table: illustrative, fictional sample data. 62% / 5%: HCEA GST26 Future of Healthcare Events Study, EVOLIO, preliminary Aug 2026, brands & agencies n=60 (select up to 3; directional).

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Five steps to building a complex agent. 20 hours. Then it never sleeps.

01

Define

Purpose, accounts, what a great cheat sheet looks like

4 hrs

02

Choose

And test a platform your IT team will approve

2 hrs

03

Build & train

Your data, prospectus, ICP rules and tone

8 hrs

04

Connect

Signals in, data out, cheat sheets, and alerts

4 hrs

05

Operate

Track, refine, repeat, maintain

Ongoing

Govern it from day one. Only 28% of you have comprehensive AI policies today.

Hours: EVOLIO's own sales-agent build (2026 Beyond the Booth case study); yours will vary with platform and data readiness. Governance: 2026 Event Workforce Study, preliminary, n=50.

THREE MOVES FOR MONDAY

Your next moves.

1. Tell exhibitors what your next city costs them (when applicable). Now. And survey the first-timers who didn't come back.

2. Get your veterans' knowledge out of their heads, and train for the gaps you identified.

3. Build one agent this quarter: A consultative sales agent that will research your prospects for your sales team. Govern it.

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THANK YOU

Feelings Aren’t Facts®

Everyone in this room wants the same thing: a buyer-dense floor at a defensible price, run by a team that isn't burning out. The data shows you where to start.

QUESTIONS?

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Sources

- 2026 Event Workforce Study. EVOLIO Marketing, Lippman Connects, Trade Show Executive. Preliminary, fielding Sep–Nov 2026. n=51 (segments n=53).
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- EXHIBITOR Magazine, "Budget Breakdown: How the Exhibiting Dollar Is Spent," Aug/Sep 2025. exhibitoronline.com/topics/article.asp?ID=3680
- Responsive, "Inside the Buyer's Mind," Oct 2025, n=350 B2B buyers (vendor-sponsored).
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, CPI, 12 months ending Dec 2025 (2.7%), as cited in TEA report.

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