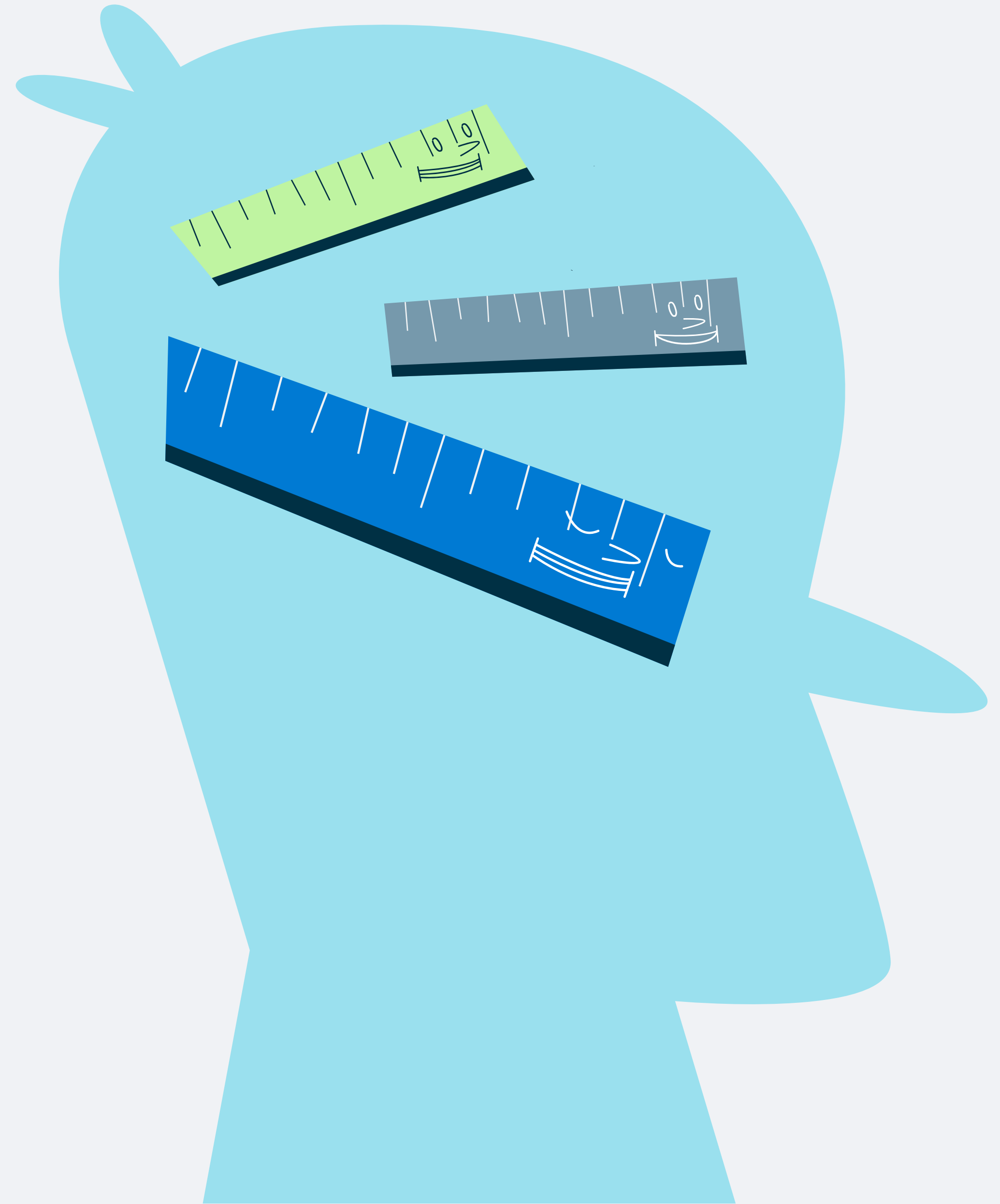


**Simpson
Scarborough**

The Higher Ed CMO Study 2025-26

Chapter 3: Measurement





February 26

Chapter 1: Budgets & Staffing

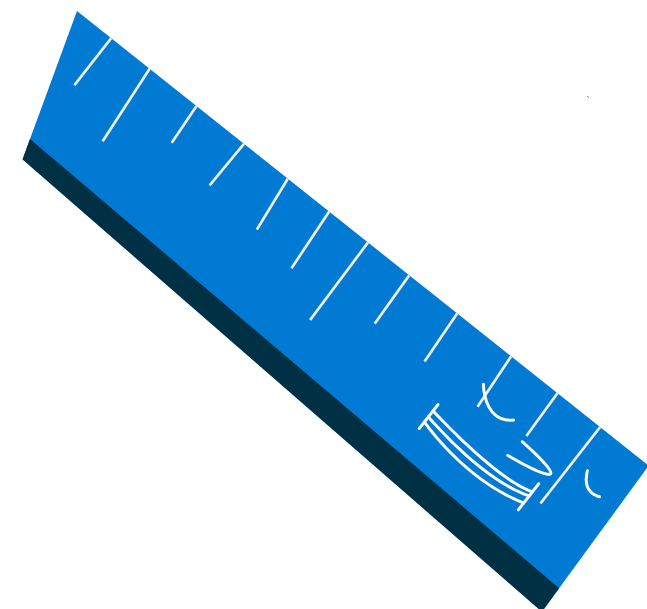
The Fragmented Foundation of the Alignment Gap



March 26

Chapter 2: Growth Ambitions

A Misaligned Agenda



April 23

Chapter 3: Measurement

Where the Alignment Gap Becomes Visible

The Team



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AVP, Accounts
SimpsonScarborough



Reya Calistes
VP, Research, Analytics and Insights
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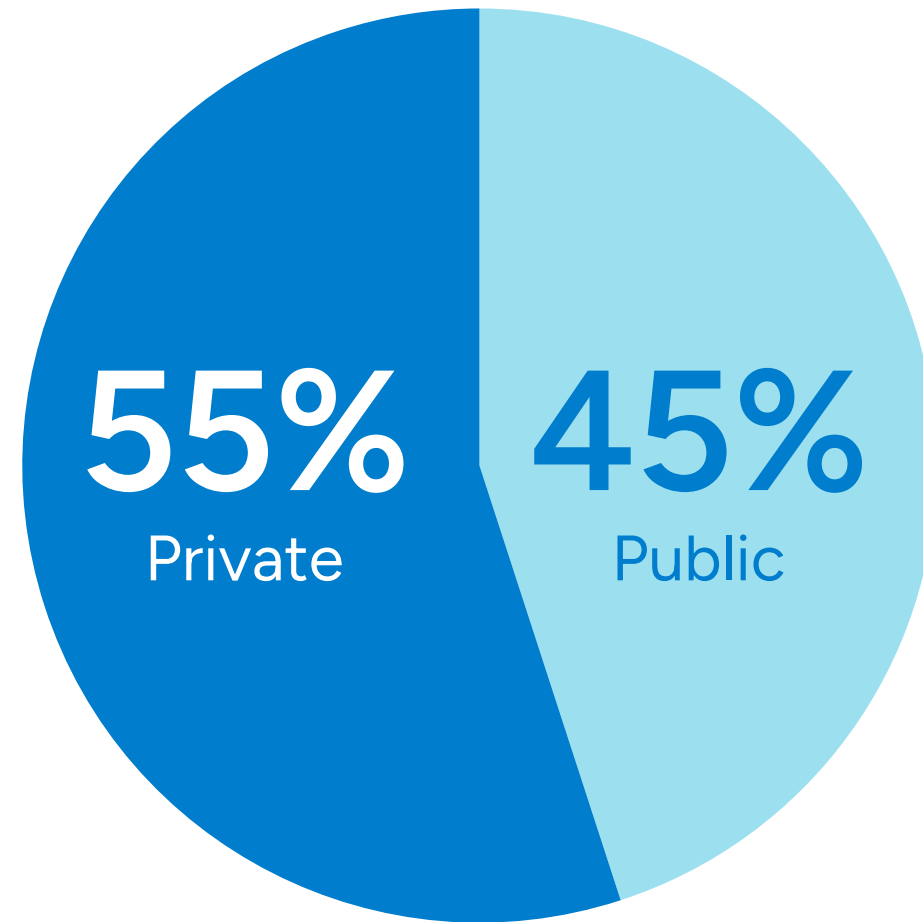


Stephen Jendraszak
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Emory University

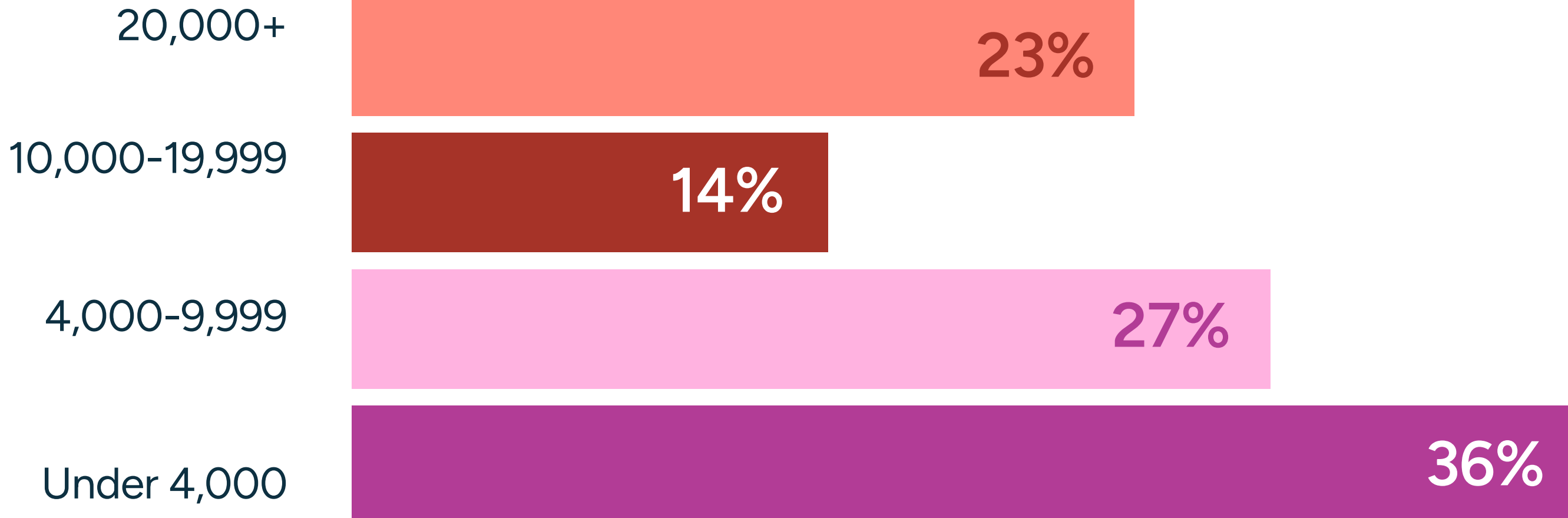
Sector

100%

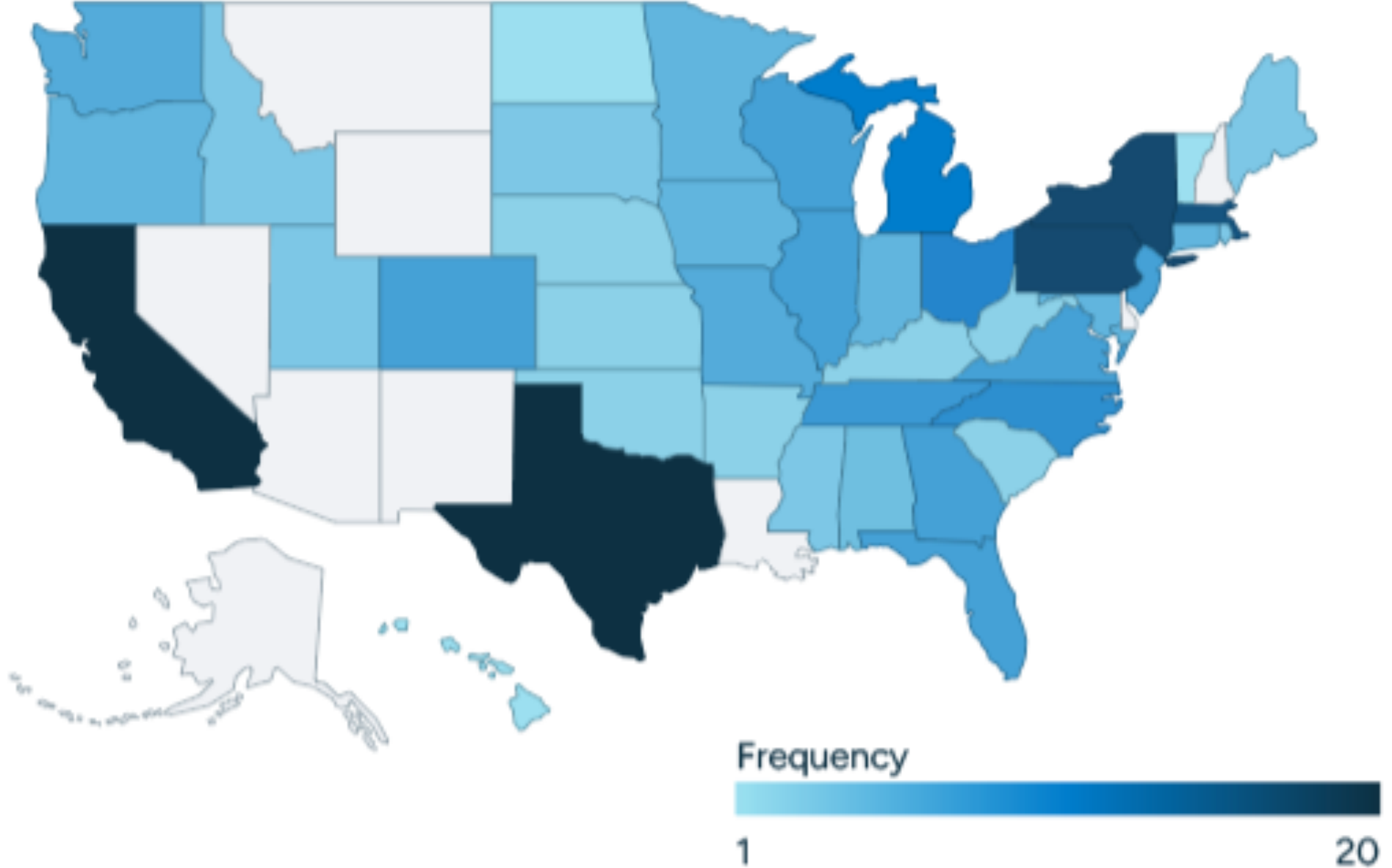
are 4+ year & not-for-profit institutions



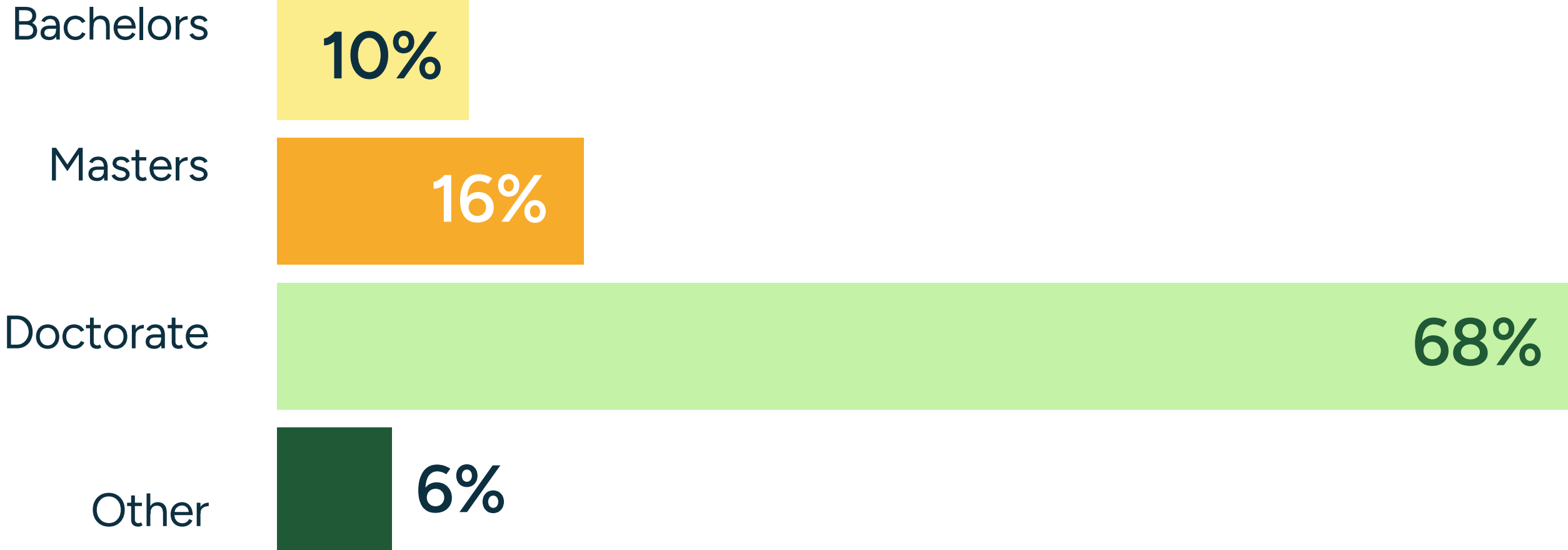
Total Enrollment



Geographic Distribution

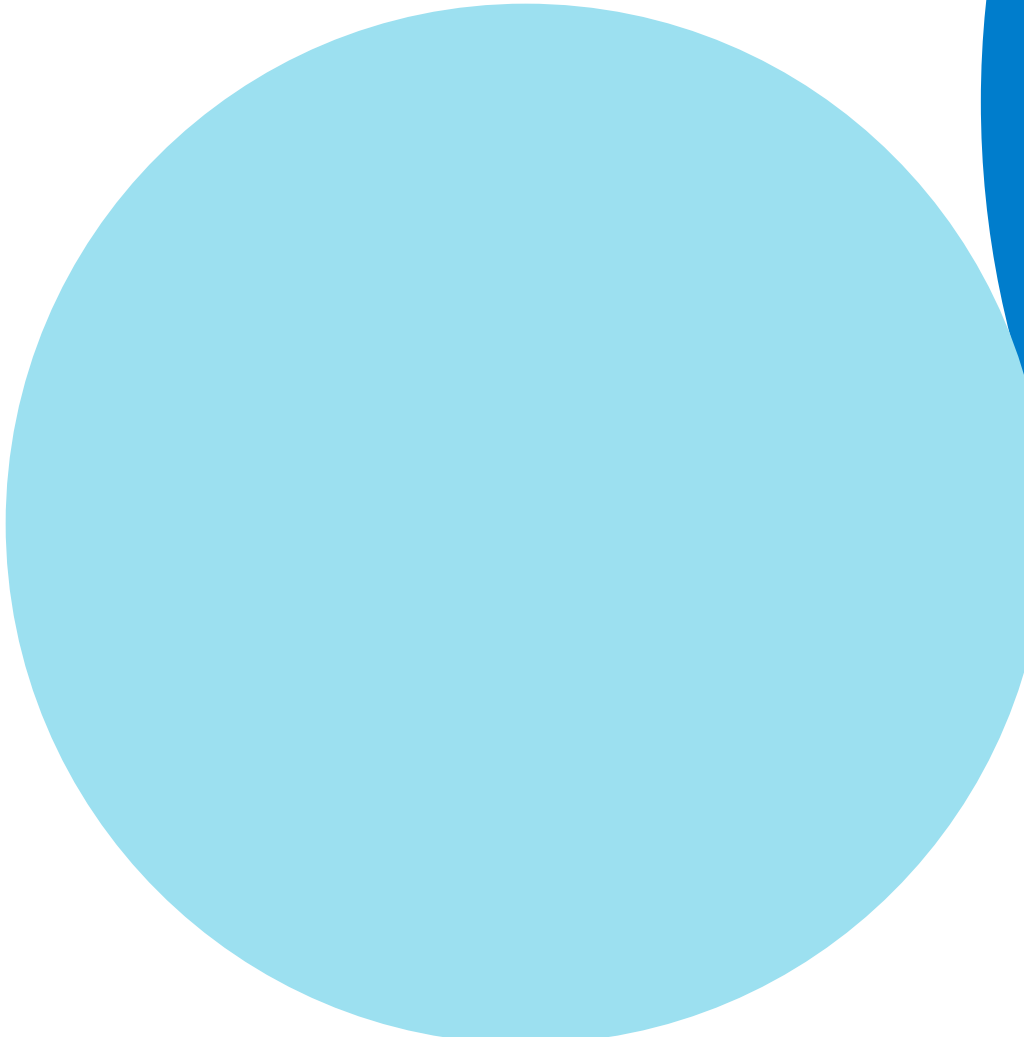


Highest Level of Offering

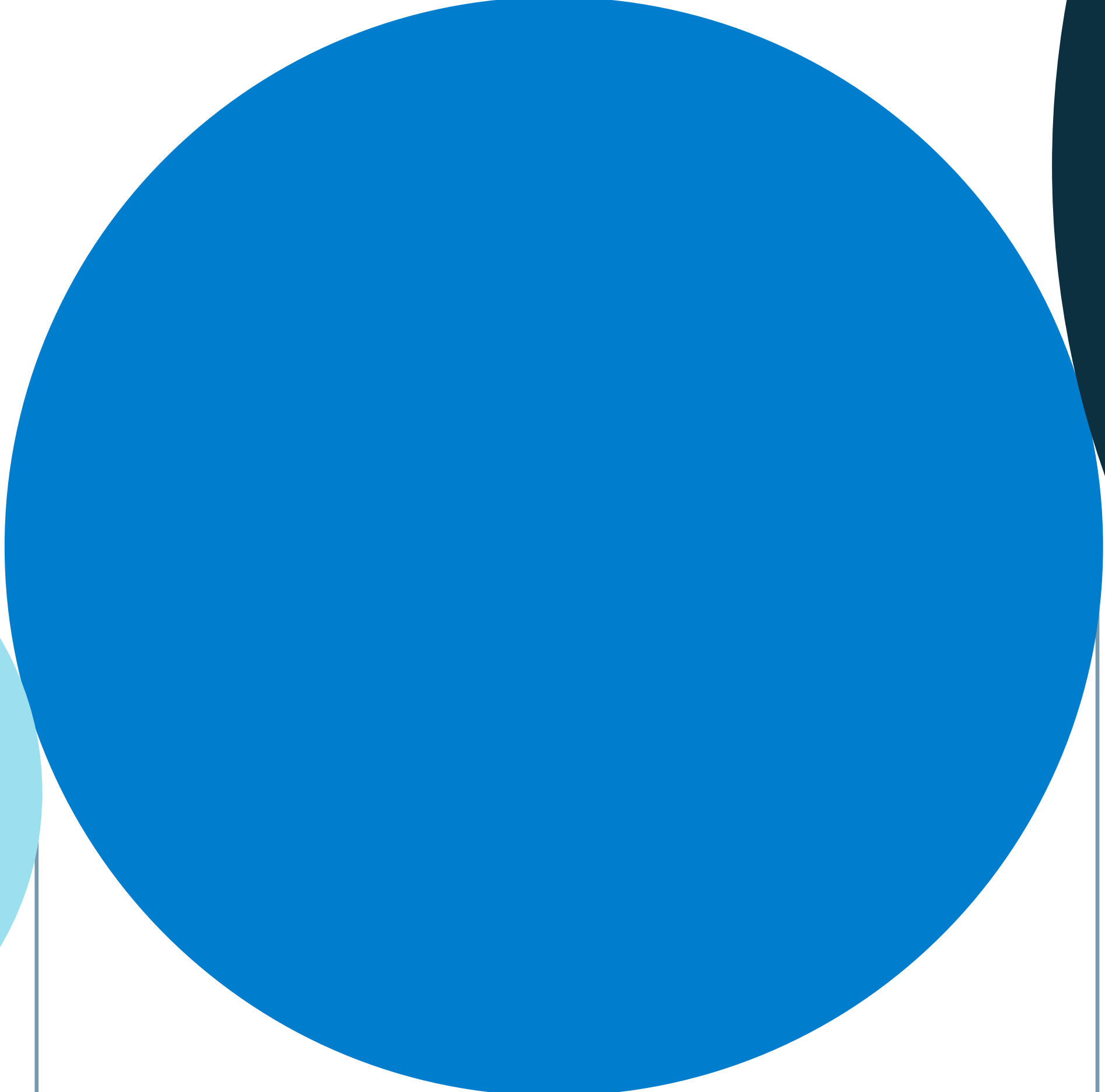


Size Definitions

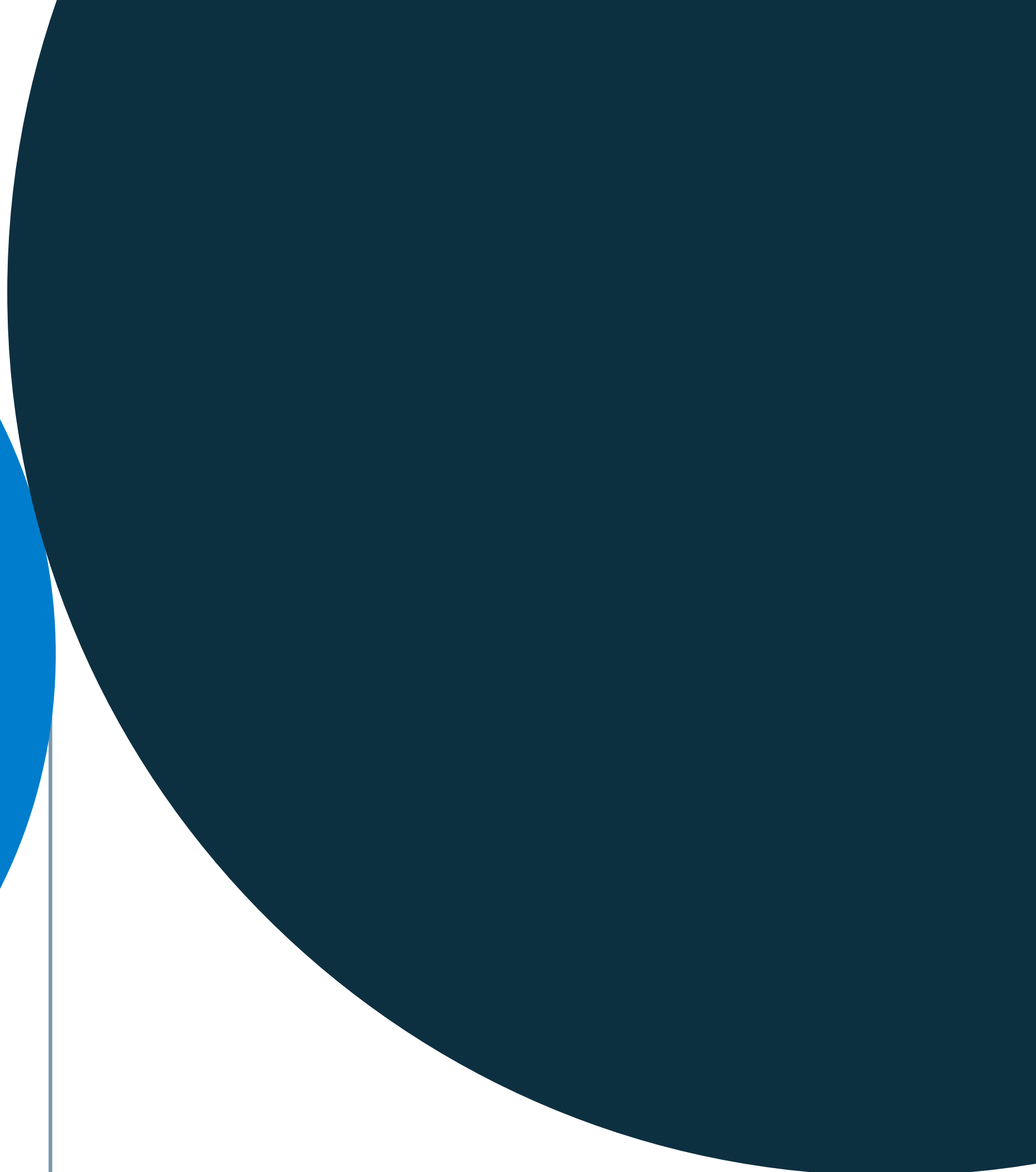
Full time equivalent enrolled.



Small Schools
< 4,000
FTE Students



Medium Schools
4,000-19,999
FTE Students



Large Schools
20,000+
FTE Students

Let's hear from you...

Webinar Registrant Responses

47%

Data lives in separate systems with no centralization efforts

1/3

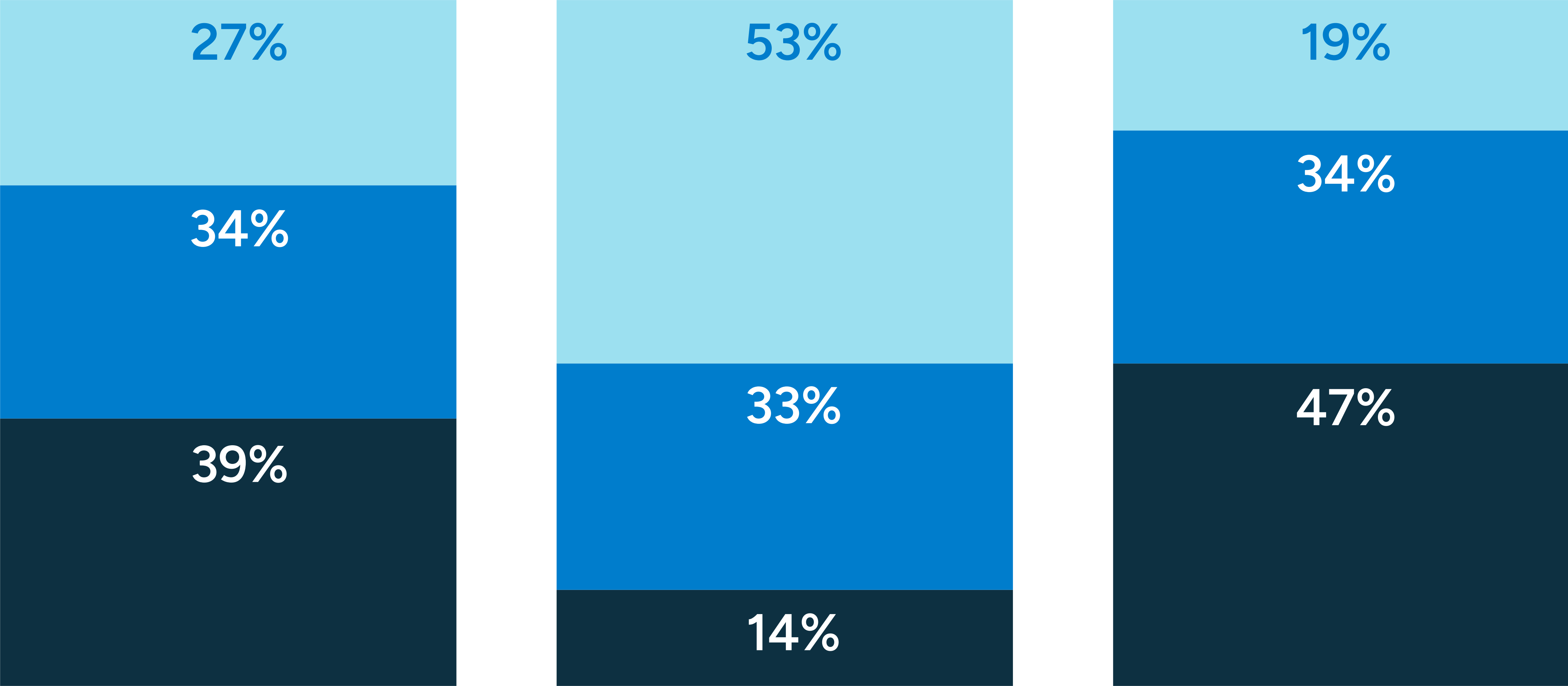
Measure campaign activity but struggle to answer leadership questions

6%

Have unified systems

The question is never just about enrollment.

Rank 1 Rank 2 Rank 3



Awareness

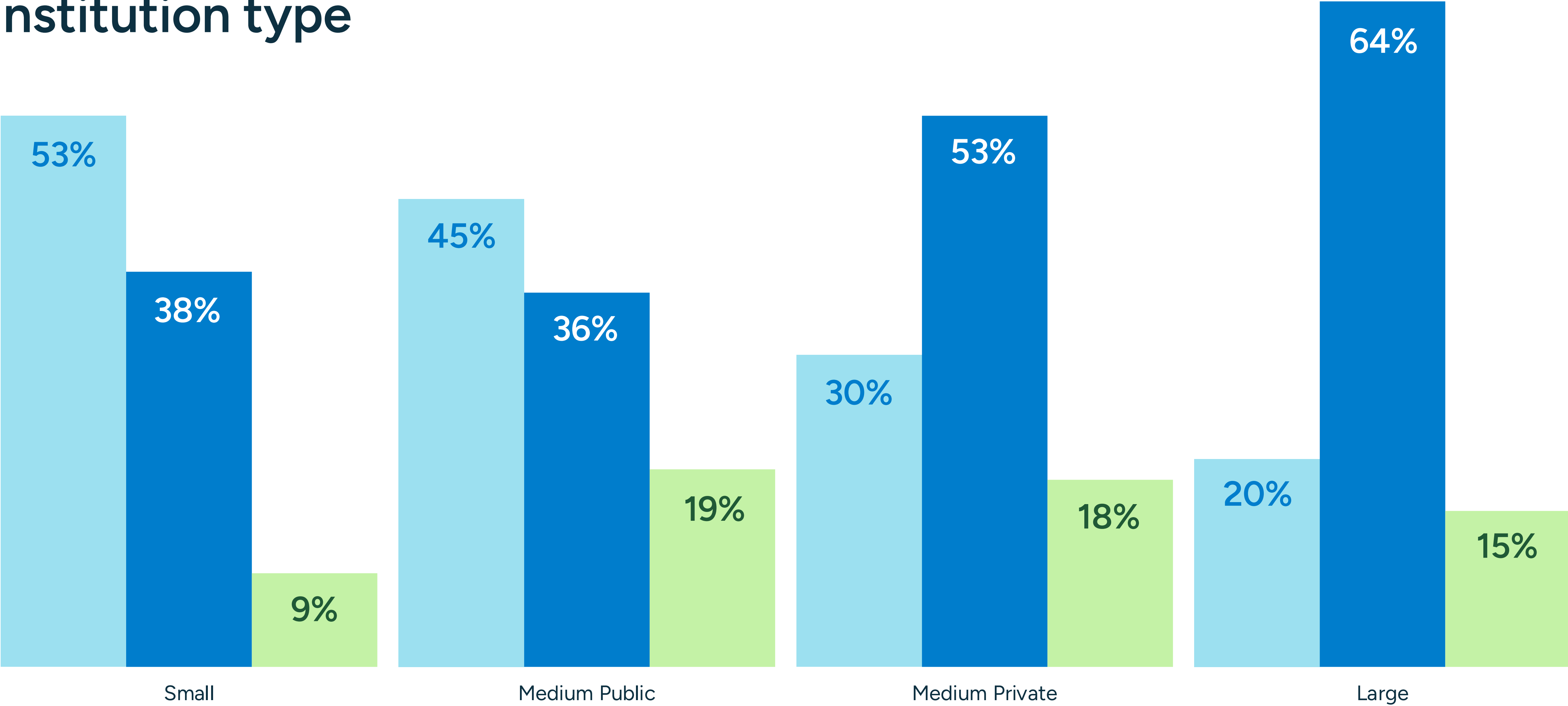
Perception

Reputation

Aside from enrollment, what key areas does your leadership inquire about regarding your brand? 1 = Most important and 3 = Least important

Leadership's top asks by institution type

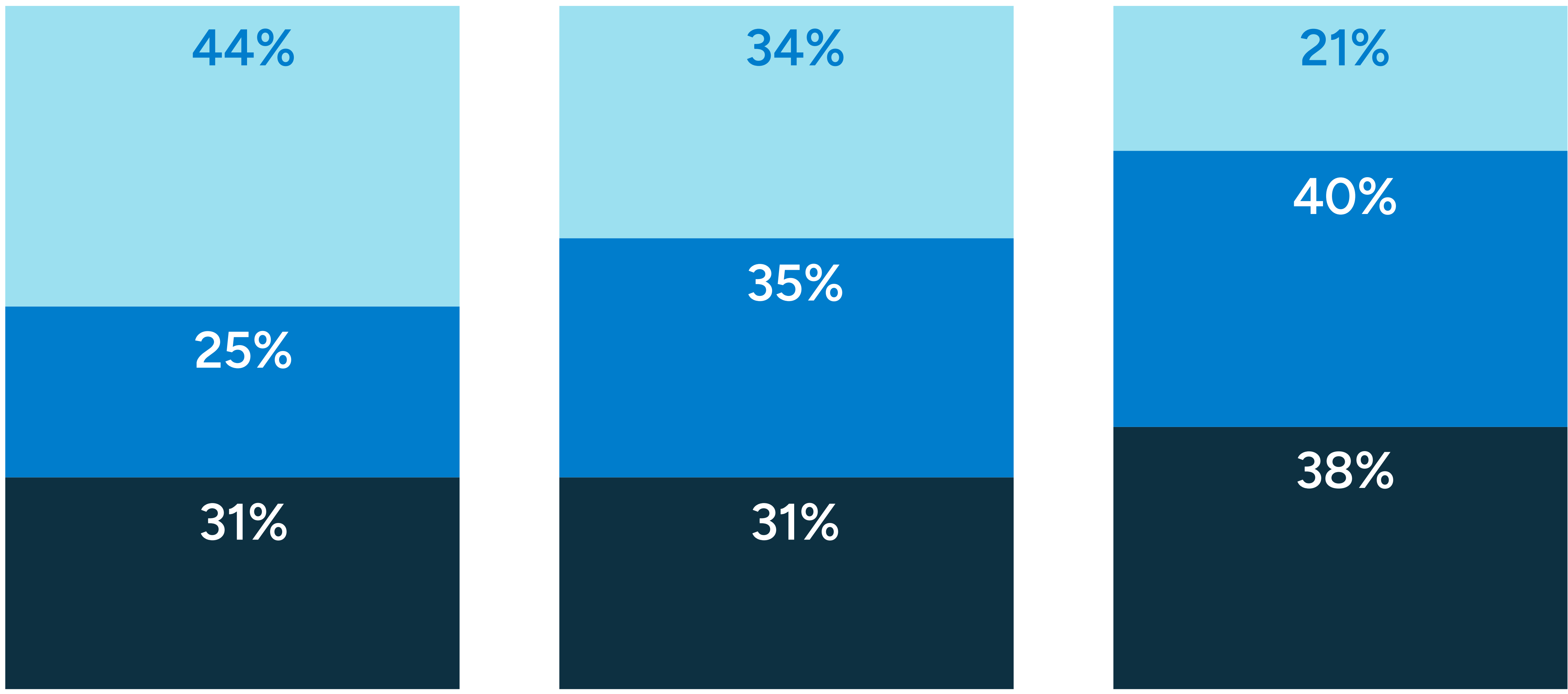
Awareness Reputation Perception



Top priorities of institutions when asked "Aside from enrollment, what key areas does your leadership inquire about regarding your brand?"

CMOs and leadership are in alignment.

Rank 1 Rank 2 Rank 3



Awareness

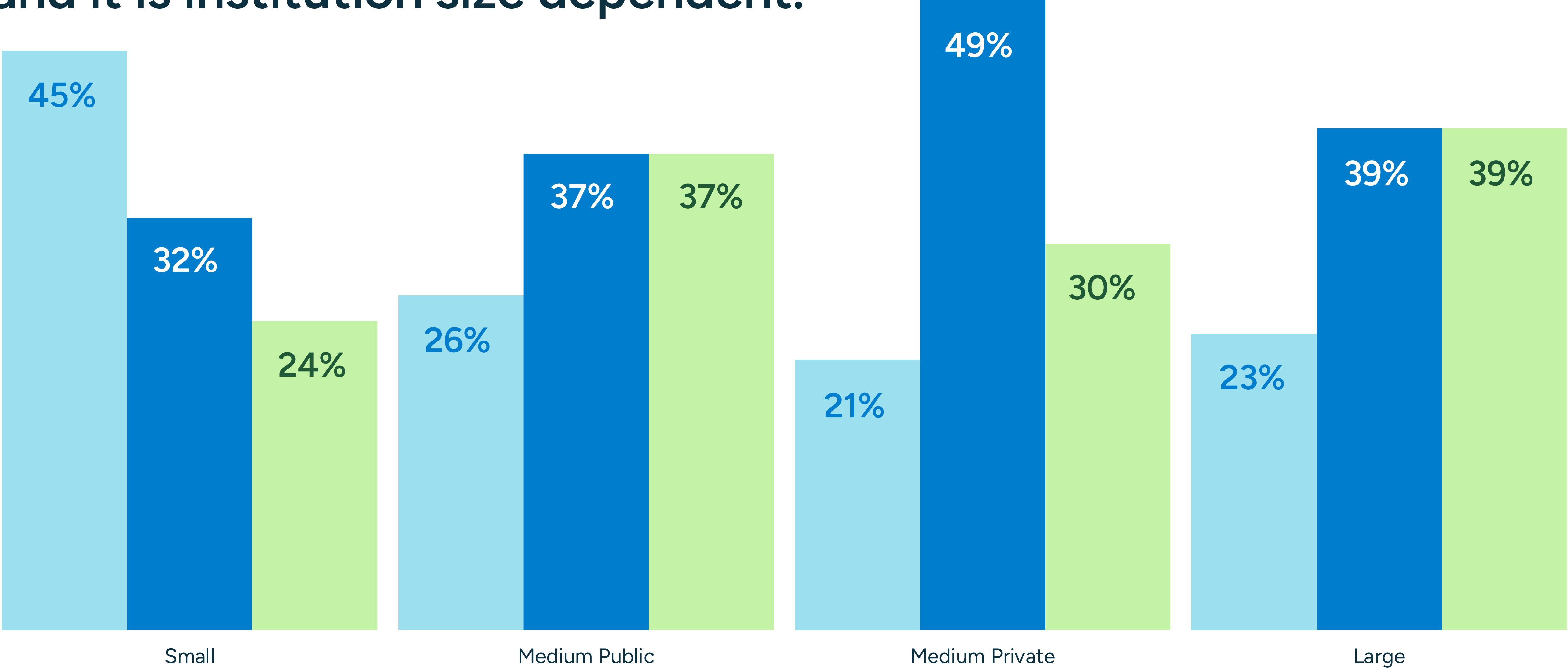
Perception

Reputation

What do you wish you could measure more effectively or directly?
1 = Most important and 3 = Least important

The maturity curve is real—and it is institution size dependent.

Awareness Reputation Perception



Top priorities of institutions when asked "What do you wish you could measure more effectively or directly?"

Awareness is
where you start.
Reputation is
where you **stay**.



You already know what
you should be measuring.
So why can't you?

CMOs know what to measure. The infrastructure doesn't exist to do it.

01

Budget & resources

Can't afford sustained brand research

02

No baseline or historical data

Impossible to show movement

03

Insufficient tools & systems

Dashboards built for channels, not brand

04

Staff capacity

Measurement treated as "extra work"

05

Can't connect brand to outcomes

Enrollment, fundraising, ROI remain disconnected



Let's hear from you...

Webinar Registrant Responses

"Separate systems, separate audiences, goals, and measurements — leading to widely varied perceptions of brand strength."

Vice President for Communications and Marketing

"Who owns the data, shares the data, compares and integrates it, reports out what it means, and makes strategic changes."

Chief Communications Officer

"We are data rich but analysis poor."

Chief Marketing Officer

Theme	Responses	Representative language
Systems fragmentation	~99	"disconnected systems," "too many platforms," "shadow systems"
Silos and decentralization	~69	"siloed teams," "fragmented units," "everyone runs their own data"
Staff, bandwidth, capacity	~56	"no dedicated FTE," "data rich but analysis poor"
Connecting to strategic outcomes	~37	"can't answer bigger questions," "hard to tie to reputation"
KPI alignment	~35	"no shared definition," "competing ideas of what matters"
Budget and resources	~25	"cost of tools," "investment in infrastructure"
Leadership and culture	~18	"not a priority," "leadership doesn't understand modern marketing"

Enterprise expectations. Legacy infrastructure.

What Leadership Expects

- Reputation stewardship
- Enrollment contribution
- Brand differentiation
- Long-term institutional trust

How Marketing Is Supported

- Campaign-based metrics
- Siloed data systems
- No shared baselines
- Episodic research

Alignment Gap *noun*

uh-LINE-mint gap

The space between what leadership intends, what central teams design, and what actually happens day to day across decentralized units.

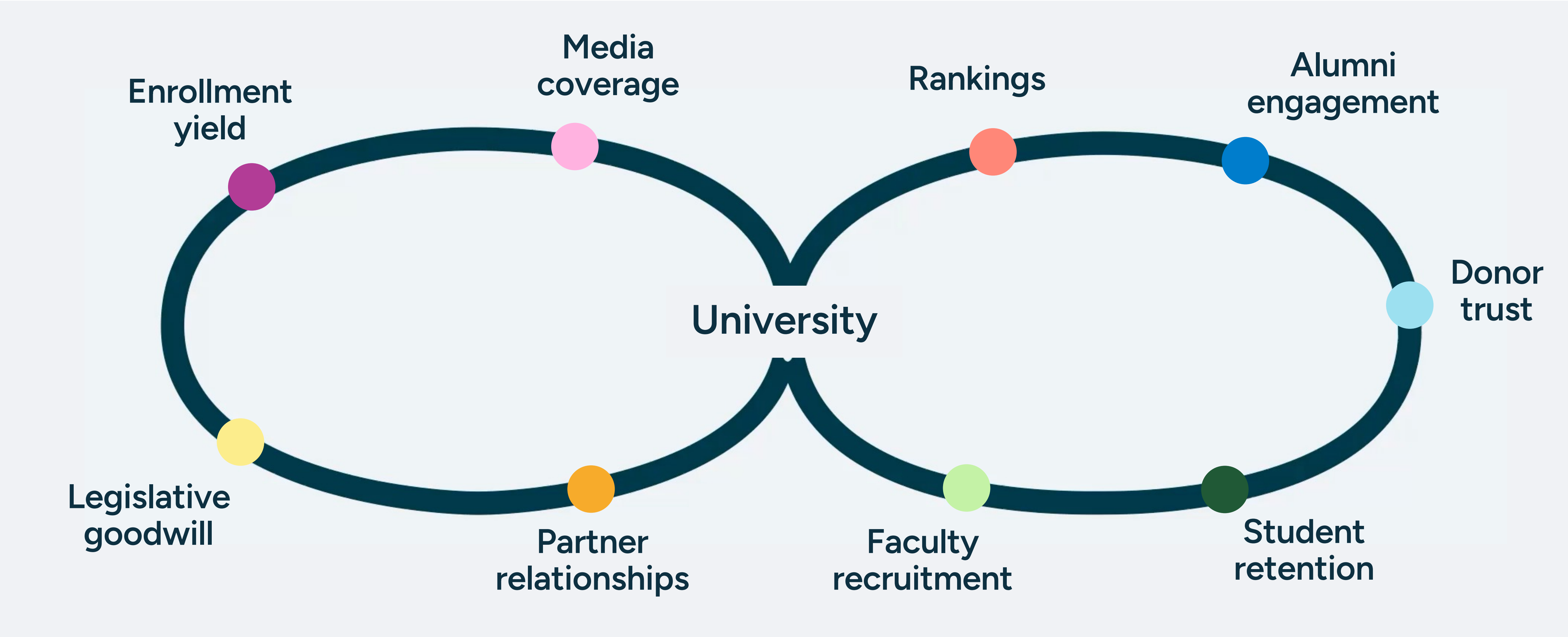


**Reputation
is not a soft
ask. It's a
strategic
mandate.**

~50%

**of CMOs say reputation is
leadership's #1 non-enrollment
brand concern**

Reputation doesn't live in a single metric.
It shows up everywhere.



Use measurement plan as the lever to bridge the gap

Speak from the same dictionary:

What does “reputation” mean to your institution?

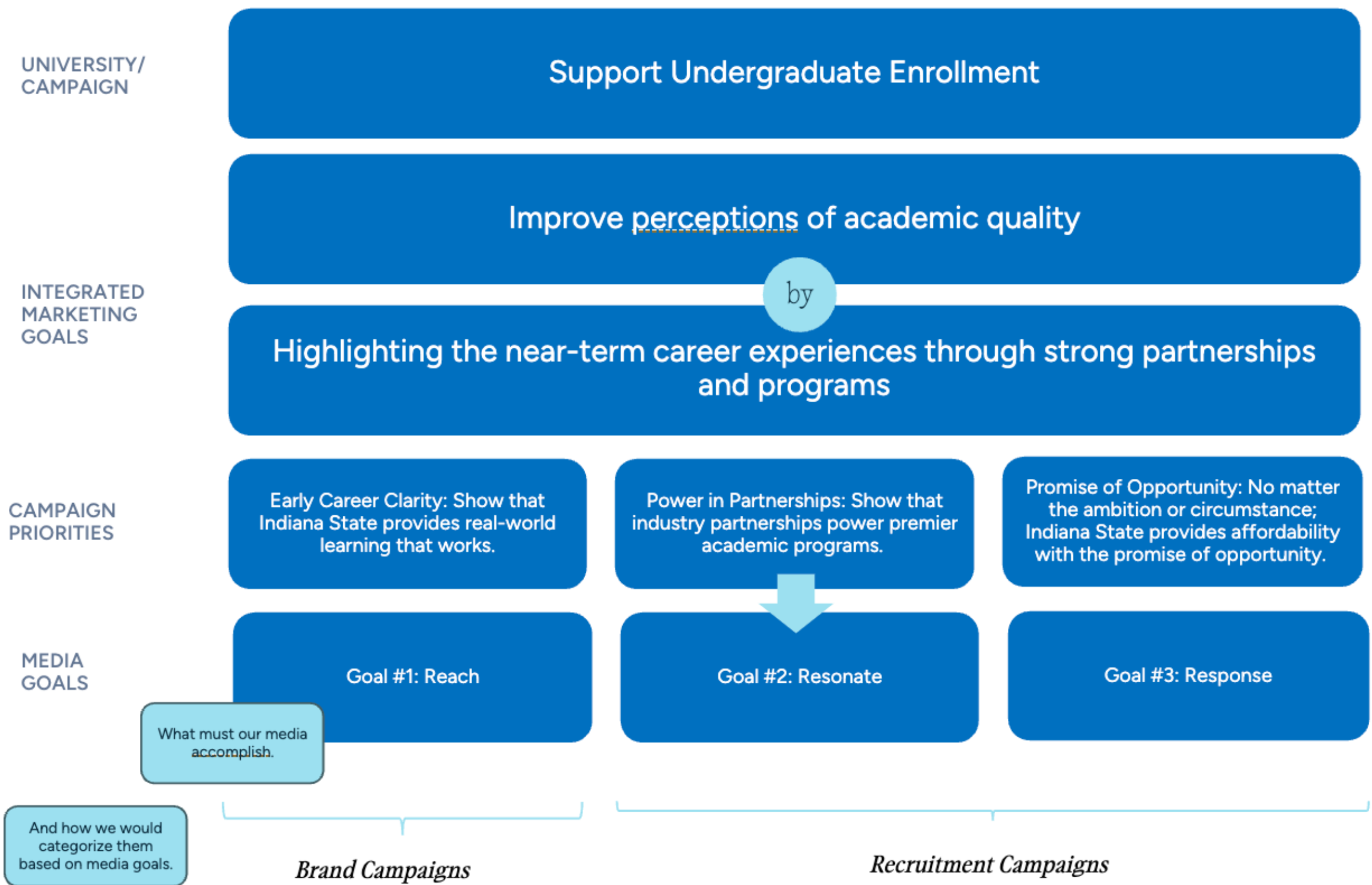
- Create alignment in the use of the word
- Align on metrics that align to your definition

Illustrative example of a measurement plan or framework.

Campaign Approach

Campaign Strategy

How media and messaging align to support marketing goals.





Stephen Jendraszak
AVP for Marketing
Emory University



It's not about having more tools. It's about having the *right architecture*.

Stage 1

Campaign Reporting

Answers "what happened?"

Stage 2

Audience Research

Answers "what do they think?"

Stage 3

An Ecosystem to Measure Reputation

Answers "are we building or eroding trust — and what does that mean for enrollment, giving, and public standing?"

Stage 1

You look aligned. But do you operate aligned?

80% rate visual brand consistency as good or excellent

61% rate verbal identity consistency as good or excellent

46% rate reporting quality as good or excellent

What Stage 1 done well *actually* looks like

Campaign Performance Reporting:

- Includes channel metrics, impressions, clicks, spend, ad lift metrics, etc.
- Answers "what happened?"





Stephen Jendraszak
AVP for Marketing
Emory University



More research. Less insight.

Audience Research

- Mixed method approaches
- Perception studies
- Stakeholder surveys
- Brand tracking
- Answers "what do they think?"

54%

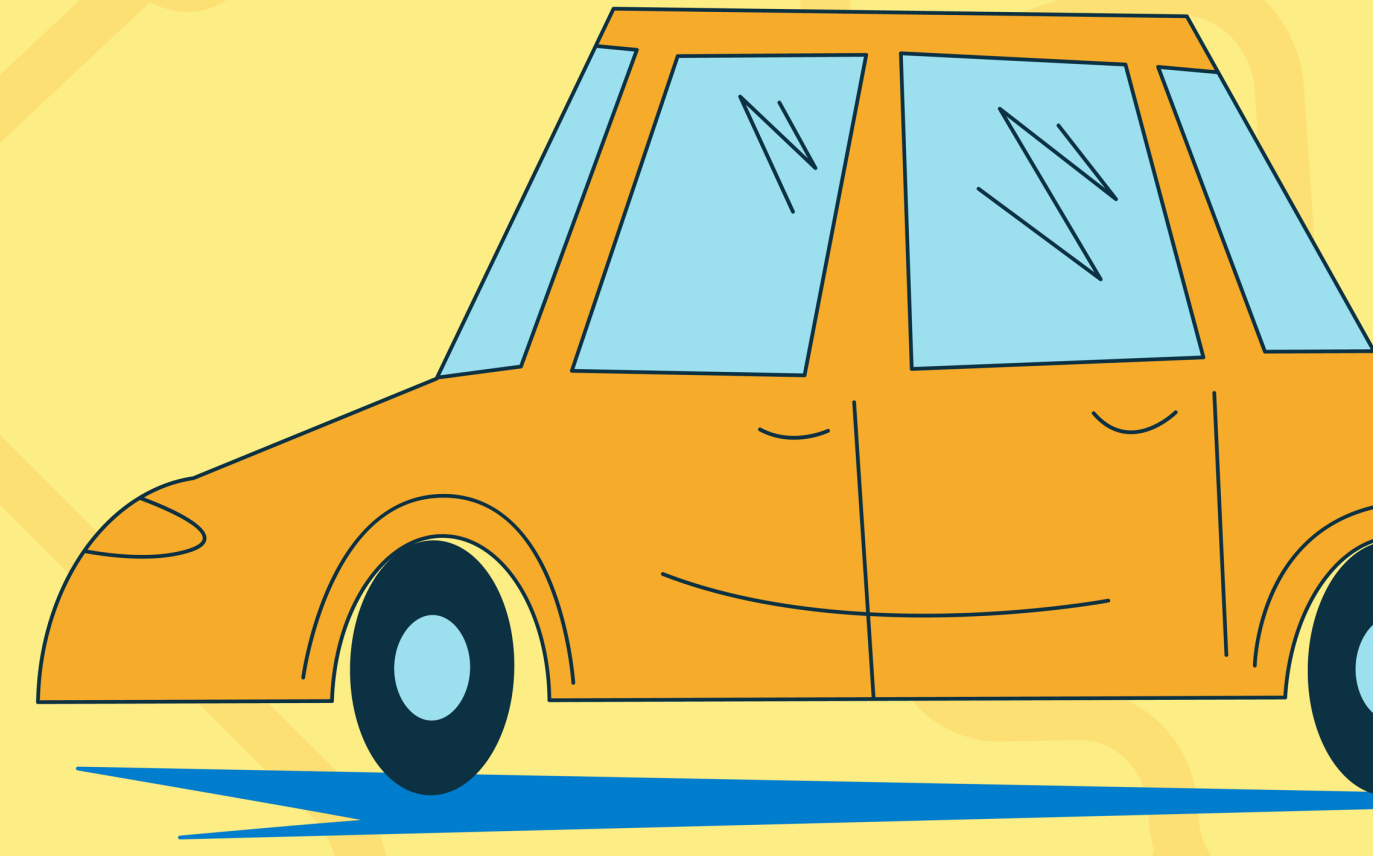
of institutions conducted research with parents of prospective students.
(up from 39% in 2023)

45%

of institutions conducted research with parents of current students.
(up from 36% in 2023)

If your last major research effort was pre-pandemic, your map is outdated.

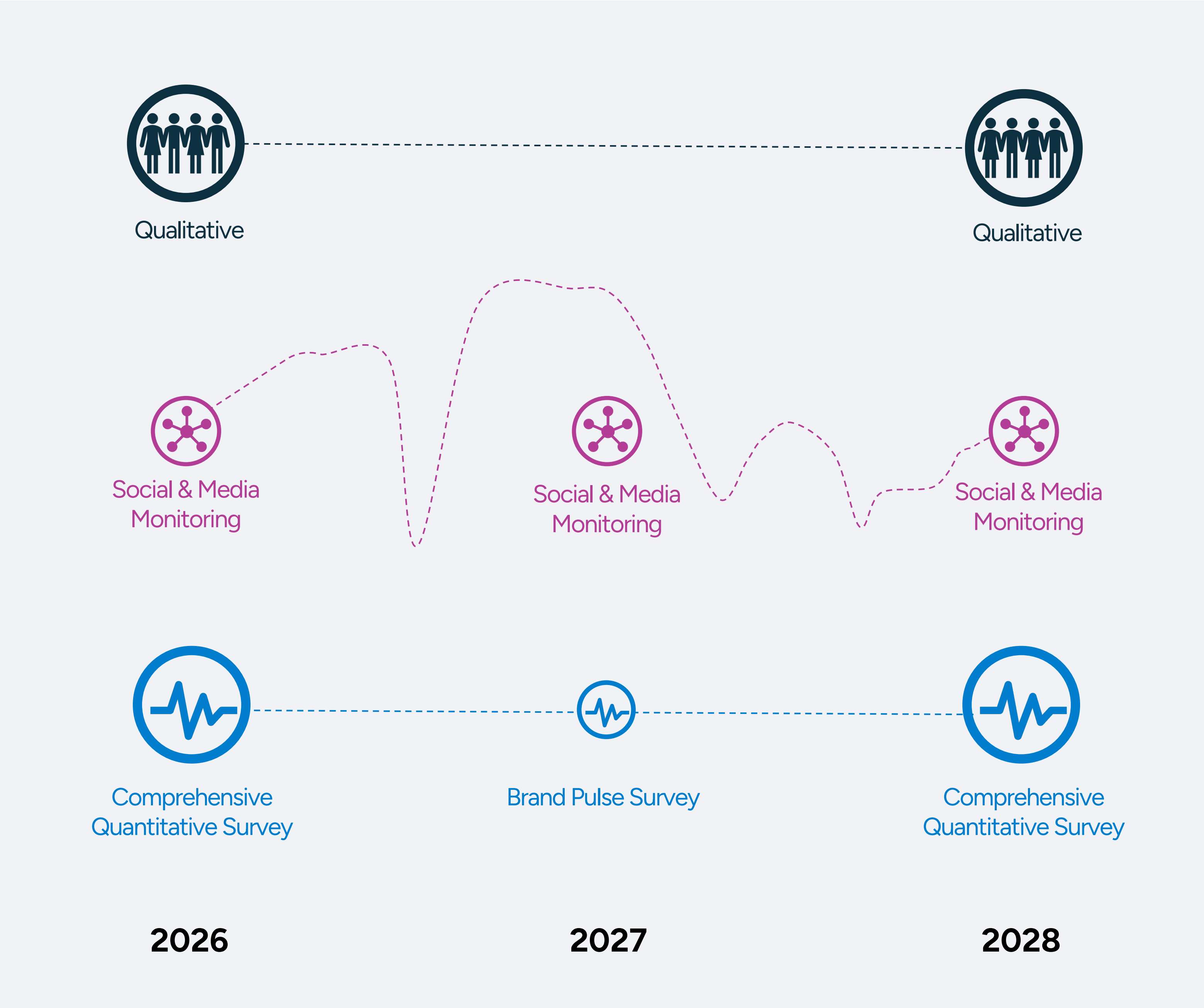
Why Proactive Research Sets the Route for *Smarter Strategy*



Mental health was declared a public health crisis, fundamentally altering what students expect from campus support

Stage 2: A Multi-year Proactive Recommended Approach Sets the Route for *Smarter Strategy*

Answers "what do they think?"



What Stage 2 done well can *actually* look like

Quant

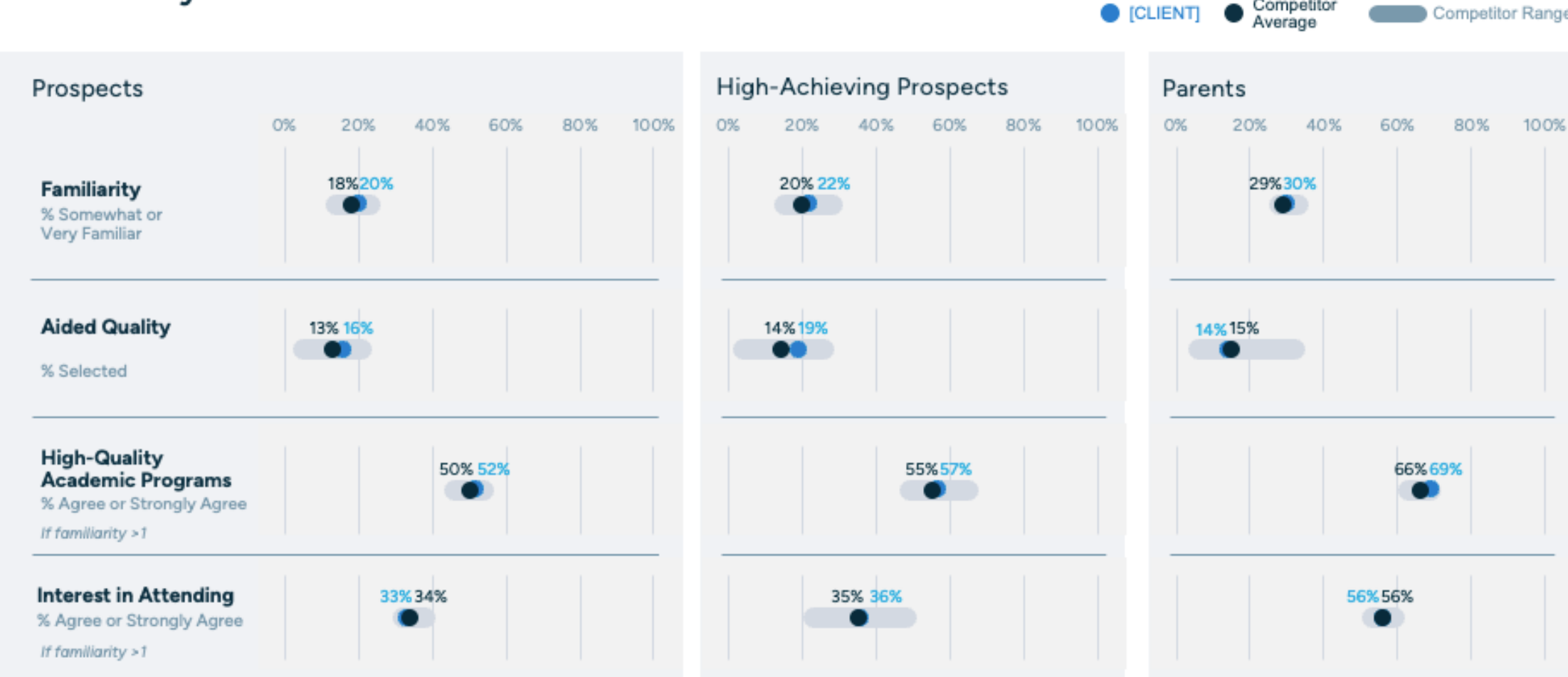
Audiences:
Internal audiences + key external audiences to provide a holistic picture to drive strategy forward

- Some **key metrics** to monitor:
- Awareness
 - Name recognition
 - Fit
 - Academic quality
 - Differentiation
 - Value
 - Trust
 - Impact
 - Pride
 - Interest in attending / consideration
 - NPS / advocacy

Awareness, Perceptions, Consideration

Across both prospects and parents, [CLIENT] tends to perform similarly to its competitors across key brand metrics.

Respondents were asked to identify institutions from a list of 17 for academic quality, and were asked to rate 4 institutions for familiarity, high-quality programs, and interest.



Qual

- Audiences:**
- Internal audiences
 - External audiences:
 - Higher ed peers
 - Guidance counselors
 - Community/business leaders
 - Employers/hiring managers
 - Parents
 - Prospects
 - Admitted non-enrolled vs enrolled students

Higher Ed Peers

What do Peers see as the *strengths* of [CLIENT]?



Primary Themes

- Evolution & Momentum**
[CLIENT] is perceived as improving, modernizing, and becoming more competitive over time. Peers see its reputation as on-the-rise, with significant improvements in recent years.
- Rigor & Faculty Quality**
[CLIENT] is seen as providing serious preparation and quality training to its students. Faculty are viewed as active professionals with credible careers, [REDACTED], and mentoring depth.
- Accessibility & Financial Aid**
Philanthropic investments have improved access and shifted value-for-cost perceptions. [CLIENT] is now seen as more competitive for top students and competing with institutions that previously had more advantages over [CLIENT].
- [REDACTED] affiliation as a Value Multiplier**
In Peers' eyes the [REDACTED] name adds academic rigor and name recognition to students' degrees. The connection strengthens the value proposition significantly.

Secondary Themes

- Specific Program Strengths**
[REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED], are most often cited as strong programs. [CLIENT] is also seen as offering culturally grounded programs that feel like an authentic extension of its location, for example, [REDACTED].
- [REDACTED] Curriculum**
The [REDACTED] is noted as a structured, intentional approach to career readiness that is required of all students rather than optional. While not unique, peers note that [CLIENT] does a better job of communicating and marketing its curriculum and embedding career skills like grant writing and professional development as core requirements compared to other institutions.
- Supportive Community**
[CLIENT] is viewed as a collaborative and supportive learning environment rather than cutthroat, with a strong sense of community that benefits students during a key developmental period of their lives.

In their own words...

“There's a sense that [CLIENT] is moving forward and on-the-rise, not standing still.

It's not a cutthroat place; students seem to support each other, and it seems like a genuine sense of community there.

I consider them to be well-funded and ambitious. They have a sense of entrepreneurship that permeates what they do.

The strides in accessibility are what have helped catapult their reputation. They've always had a strong foundation, but by being more affordable, they've become a real contender for students who would've otherwise immediately chosen another school.

They've made some *really great* hires recently. The faculty have gotten stronger over time.

[CLIENT] does a better job marketing the [REDACTED] program than other schools do with their career preparation programs.

The value of education is changing now that [CLIENT] can give more aid to students; that is getting a lot of notice in our field.

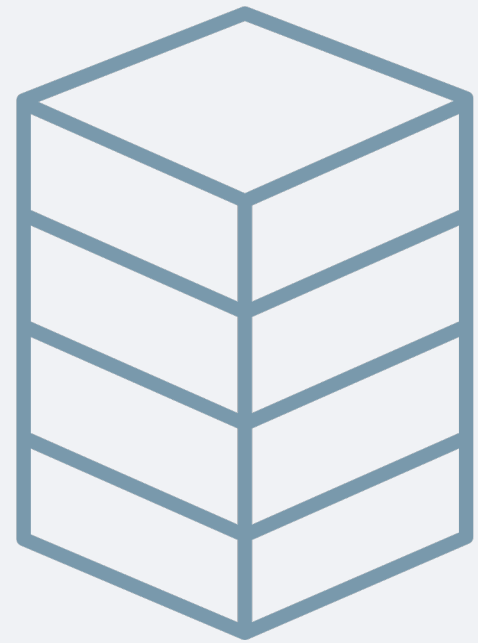
The [REDACTED] association gives students more standing when they leave and strengthens the value of their degree.”



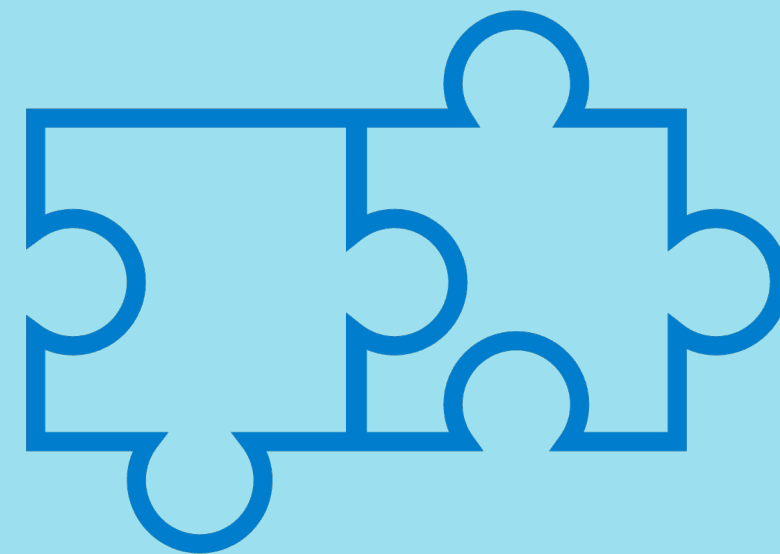
Stephen Jendraszak
AVP for Marketing
Emory University



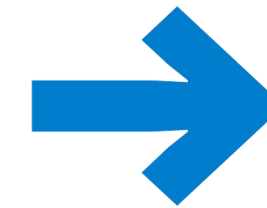
Stage 3: Measurement is the connective tissue — not just a scorecard.



Siloed Data

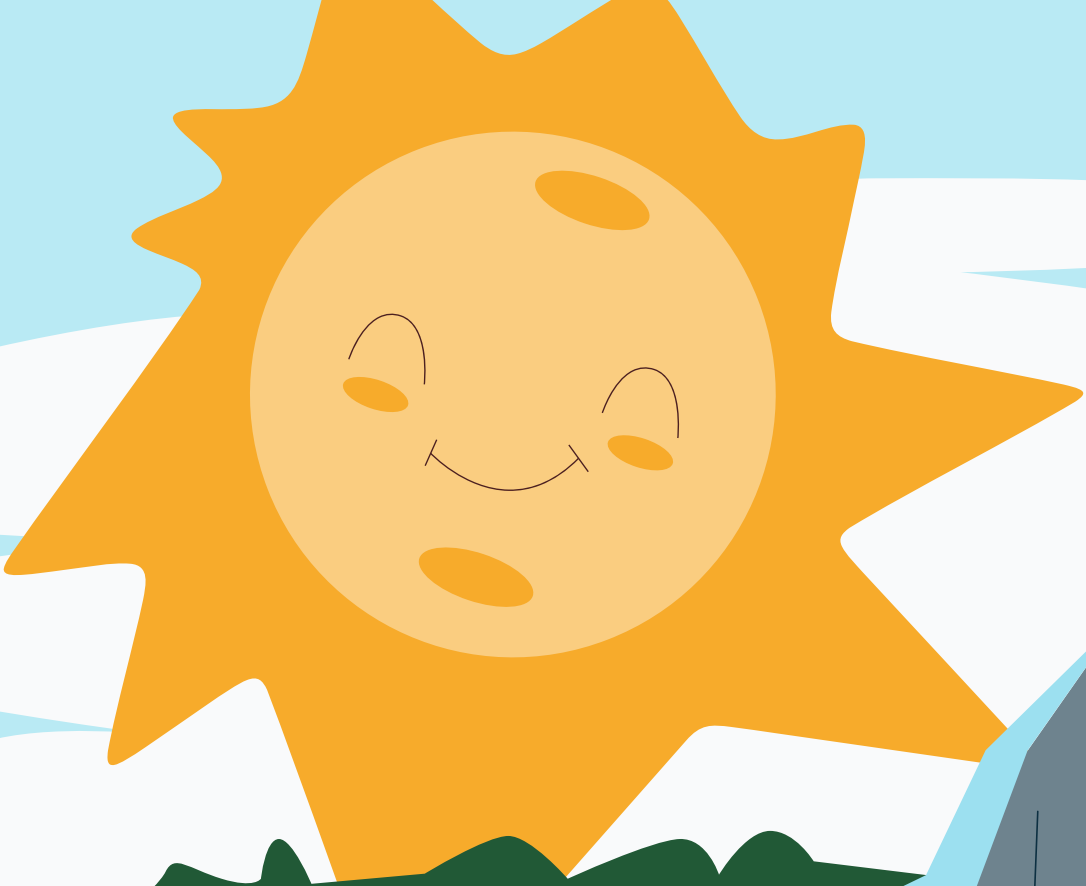


Shared Frameworks



Institutional Intelligence

Stage 3 requires *four things* working together as an ecosystem.

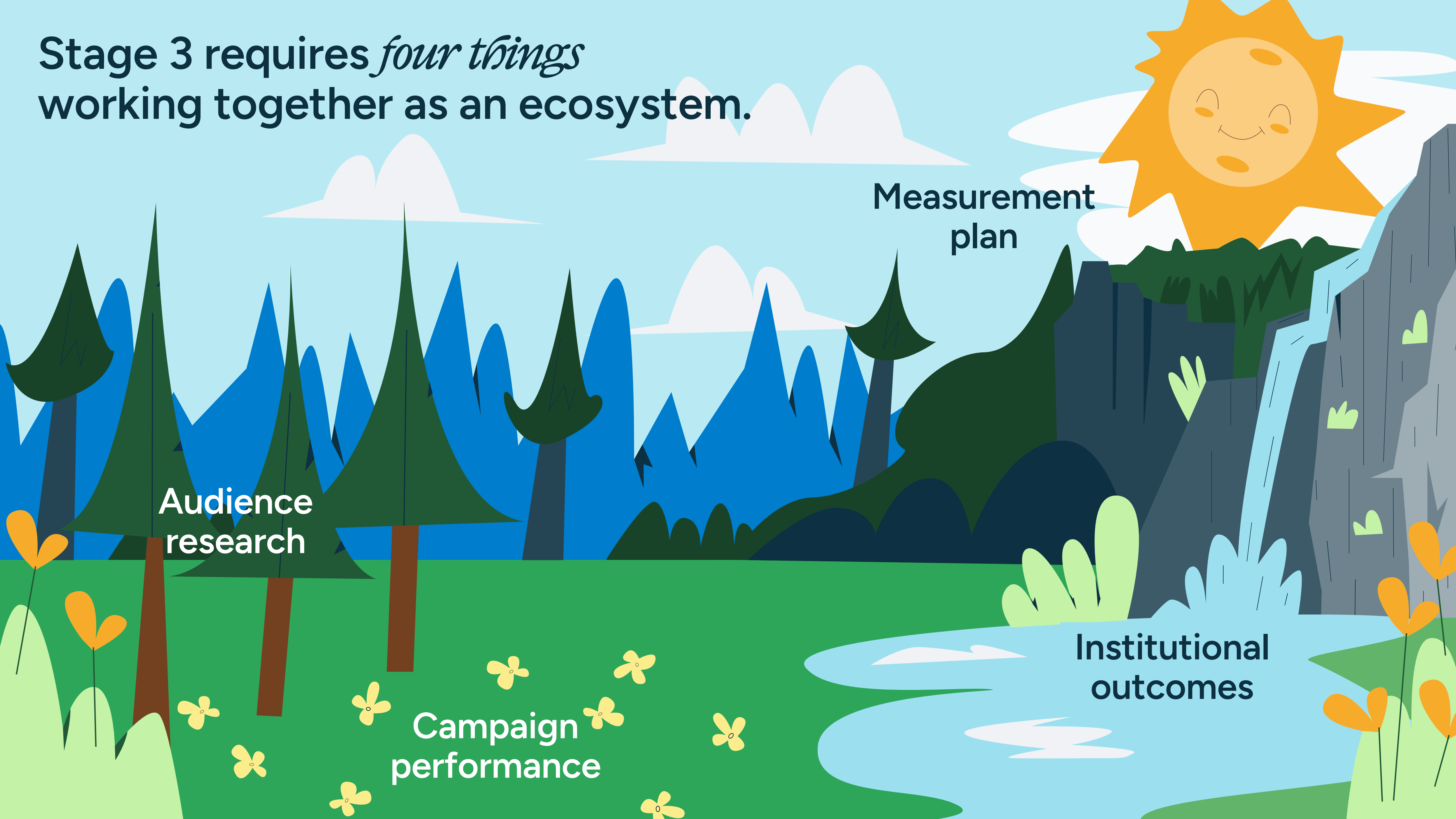


Measurement plan

Audience research

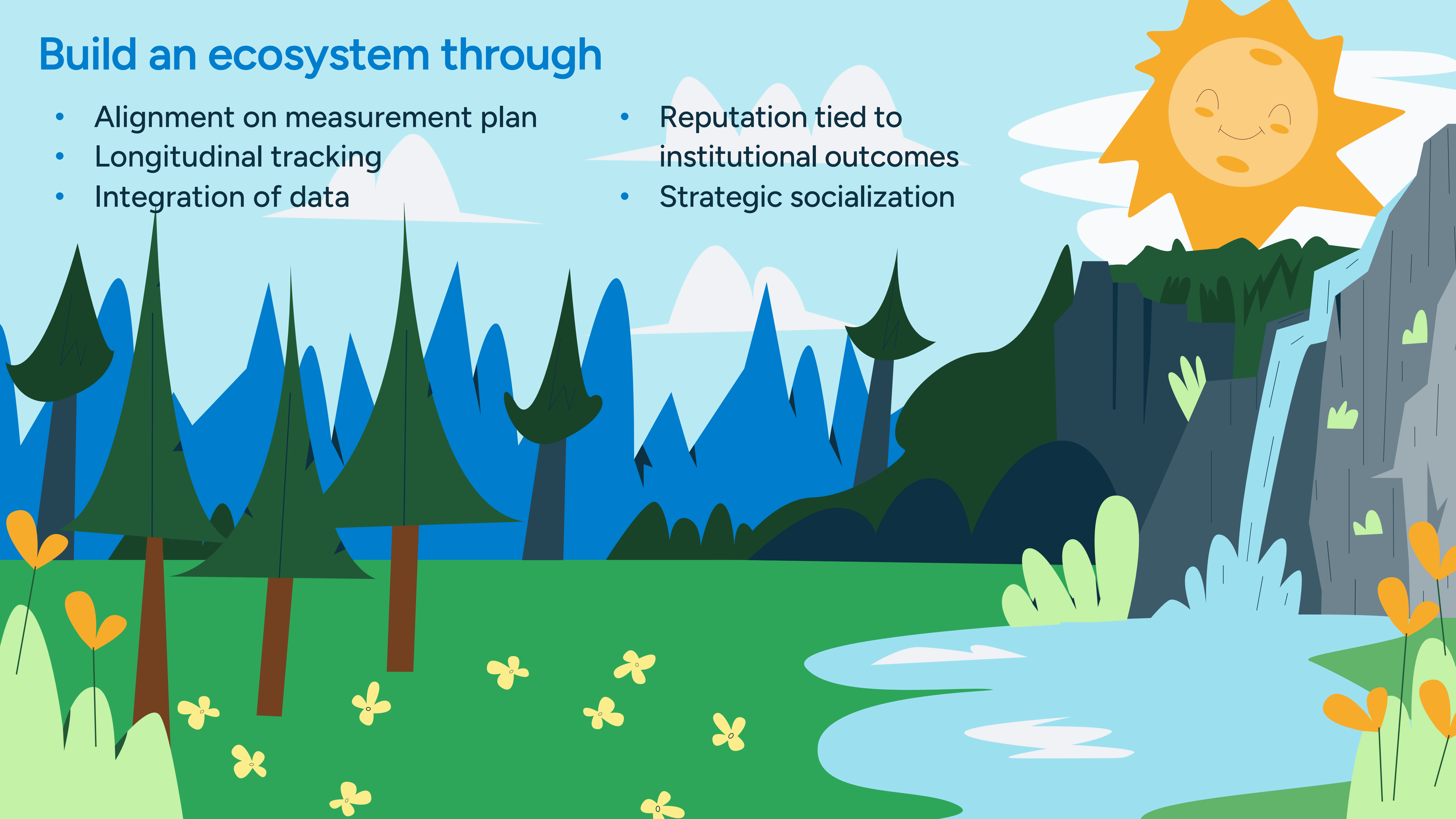
Institutional outcomes

Campaign performance



Build an ecosystem through

- Alignment on measurement plan
- Longitudinal tracking
- Integration of data
- Reputation tied to institutional outcomes
- Strategic socialization



Where are you—and where do you need to be?

Stage 1

Campaign Reporting

Answers "what happened?"

Stage 2

Audience Research

Answers "what do they think?"

Stage 3

An Ecosystem to Measure Reputation

Answers "are we building or eroding trust — and what does that mean for enrollment, giving, and public standing?"



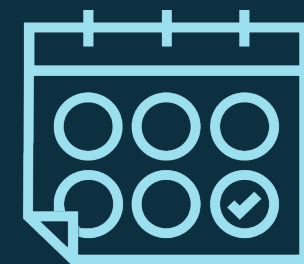
Closing the measurement side of the Alignment Gap

5 moves that matter



Align with leadership's questions first

Build a baseline now



Invest in continuity

Make data travel



Educate leadership on what different metrics reveal



Stephen Jendraszak
AVP for Marketing
Emory University



Measurement
doesn't just describe the
institution. It *exposes* it.

Measurement
is the strategic lever to
close the Alignment Gap.

Are you and your leadership actually on the same page?



This assessment benchmarks your institution's maturity on measurement based on:

- Shared Definition
- Measurement Maturity
- Alignment Across Divisions



*
The Measurement Maturity Diagnostic is only 8 questions and takes less than 3 minutes. It's designed to help you see exactly where your institution stands and where the gaps may be quietly costing you.

Simpson
Scarborough

GMOLAB

June 2-4, 2026
The Limelight
Boulder, CO



Read the entire
CMO Study today:



Ask us anything!



Vanessa Theoharis
AVP, Accounts
SimpsonScarborough



Reya Calistes
VP, Research, Analytics and Insights
SimpsonScarborough



Stephen Jendraszak
AVP for Marketing
Emory University

Thank *you.*

SimpsonScarborough