

Hunter Education in a Post-COVID-19 World

Final Report



Photo credit: Derek Stoner, Pennsylvania Game Commission

**International Hunter Education Association (IHEA-USA)
Responsive Management**

2022

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Although IHEA-USA partnered with Responsive Management for this report, any errors in the report are the sole responsibility of Responsive Management.

The views expressed in this report may not be those of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; rather, they are the responsibility of Responsive Management based on the research.

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EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Hunter education in the United States is changing from both a supply and demand perspective. First, as the COVID-19 pandemic encouraged many Americans to get outside, a number of states saw an increase in hunting license sales in 2020.¹ This bump in hunting participation may have been accompanied by increased demand for hunter education in certain areas, just as social distancing guidelines were forcing many states to scale back the number of live courses being offered.²

Additionally, several trends predating the pandemic may be subtly changing the profile of the average person seeking hunter safety certification. To begin with, firearms sales nationwide have been increasing for at least a decade, with gun sales particularly booming during the pandemic years.³ Moreover, recent research by Responsive Management and the National Shooting Sports Foundation has determined that sport shooting participation has increased alongside gun sales in recent decades. New sport shooters are also demographically different than established sport shooters, with new shooters more likely to be female, more likely to be non-white, and more likely to live in urban and suburban areas.⁴

Surging gun sales and increased sport shooting participation among nontraditional audiences suggest that demand for hunter education may be driven in part by non-hunting firearms owners—in other words, individuals who may be seeking certification from a basic hunter safety course in order to obtain a concealed carry permit or even to purchase a new firearm for the first time.

Amid all this, options for completing hunter education remain inconsistent across the country. For instance, while a number of states offer options to complete a course online, many still do not, even though online courses have been championed as a way to ensure consistency in safety instruction as well as meet demand for hunter education.⁵ Even with more opportunities to complete hunter education online in some areas, live-fire exercises and field days have been eliminated from many hunter education courses in recent years out of necessity.

¹ Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports. “COVID-19 and License Sales.” Accessed from <https://cahss.org/our-research/COVID-19-and-hunting-license-sales/>.

² Lundquist, Laura. (April 20, 2021). “FWP no longer requires in-person hunter ed classes; volunteer instructors concerned.” Missoula Current. Accessed from <https://missoulacurrent.com/outdoors/2021/04/hunter-ed-classes/>.

California Department of Fish and Wildlife. (April 15, 2022). “California’s In-Person Hunter Education Instruction Returns; Online Courses Remain a Permanent Option.” Accessed from <https://wildlife.ca.gov/News/californias-in-person-hunter-education-instruction-returns-online-courses-remain-a-permanent-option>.

³ See recent trend data from the widely used industry proxy for firearms sales: Federal Bureau of Investigation. “NICS Firearm Checks: Month/Year.” Accessed from https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/nics_firearm_checks_-_month_year.pdf/view.

⁴ Responsive Management and the National Shooting Sports Foundation. (2021). Sport Shooting Participation in the United States in 2020. Harrisonburg, Virginia. See also the overview of the study from the Outdoor Hub at: <https://www.outdoorhub.com/news/2020/01/06/nssf-report-shows-growth-shooting-sports/>.

⁵ Wisniewski, Jenifer. (August 30, 2021). “Voice of Leadership: Hunter Education and New Methods We Should Embrace.” Accessed from <https://www.nrahl.org/articles/2021/8/voice-of-leadership-hunter-education-and-new-methods-we-should-embrace/>.

Demand for hunter education is also being shaped, even if subtly, by America's changing demographics. The Census Bureau reports⁶ that the U.S. population will grow by about 80 million people in the next 40 years, with the 65-and-older population essentially doubling by 2060. Additionally, those who are two or more races will be the fastest growing race or ethnic group in the coming years. Just as the United States will continue to undergo slow and steady demographic change over the coming decades, so too may the average hunter education student.

This study was conducted by the International Hunter Education Association (IHEA-USA) and Responsive Management to provide the hunter education community with reliable data to guide decision-making now and into the post-COVID-19 years. Specifically, the project was conducted to investigate the impact of the pandemic on the business of hunter education and the ability of states to understand their current and emerging customers—in this way, the project is intended to help the hunting and sport shooting communities develop more effective and relevant programs, outreach campaigns, and educational opportunities. The study was funded under Multistate Conservation Grant No. F21AP00623-00 from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

For this project, new qualitative and quantitative data were collected from agency hunter education professionals, including program administrators and coordinators. Key objectives of the research were to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected demand for hunter education; explore current hunter education course options and formats, including any changes made by states and territories in the wake of COVID-19; look at how the average hunter education student may be changing; and determine the extent to which states and territories are using hunter education to learn more about their customers.

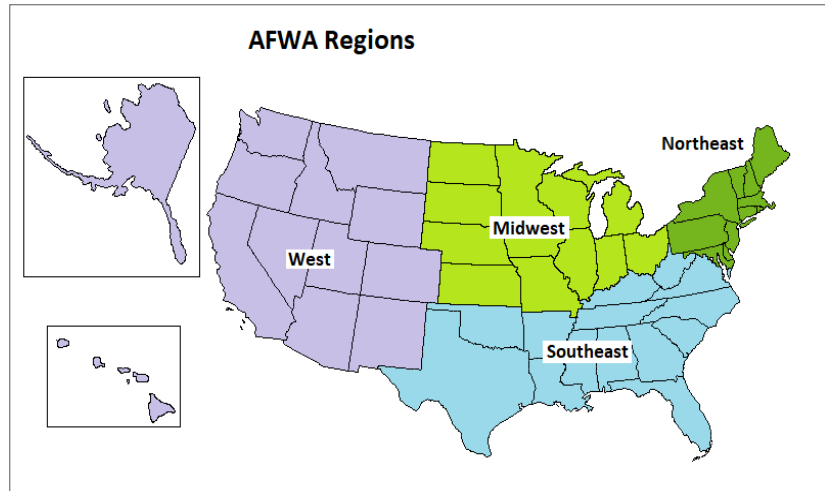
Two other objectives of the grant project include the modernization and updating of IHEA-USA's National Hunter Incident Database and the creation of a new IHEA Student Demographic Database. Aspects of the research with hunter education professionals discussed in this report will inform each of these initiatives (because the database improvements were handled by IHEA-USA separately, these outcomes are covered in a separate document).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

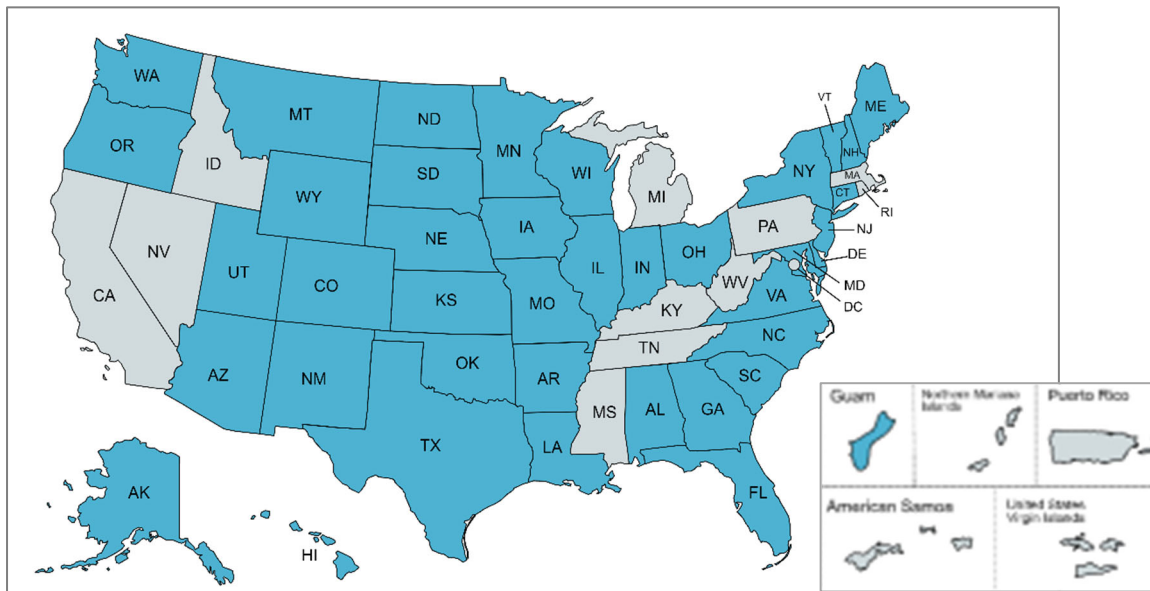
The data collection with hunter education personnel comprised two major components: a series of focus groups with hunter education professionals to explore issues, concerns, and needs related to hunter education in an open-ended manner; and a survey of hunter education professionals to quantify the issues and items identified in the focus groups. The focus group discussion guide and survey instrument were developed cooperatively by the study team of IHEA-USA and Responsive Management; all qualitative and quantitative data collection was conducted by Responsive Management.

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau. "Demographic Turning Points for the United States: Population Projections for 2020 to 2060." Accessed from <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/p25-1144.pdf>.

One focus group with hunter education professionals was conducted for each major region of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, as shown in the map at right. Each focus group was made up of a small number of hunter education professionals from agencies in that region.



The survey was coded as an online questionnaire and distributed to hunter education professionals by Responsive Management, following an extensive phase of identifying the relevant personnel in each agency. Responsive Management obtained a total of 82 completed questionnaires from hunter education professionals in 42 agencies representing all four of the major regions of the country (this includes surveys obtained from professionals at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Texas Wildlife Association, as well as the U.S. territory of Guam). State/territory representation in the survey is depicted in the map below:



The survey data were weighted so that each agency had an equal influence on the data, regardless of the size of the agency or the number of surveys obtained from it (at least one survey was obtained from each participating agency, while some agencies had multiple staff members complete surveys).

MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RESOURCES USED TO DEVELOP THE HUNTER EDUCATION COURSE CURRICULUM

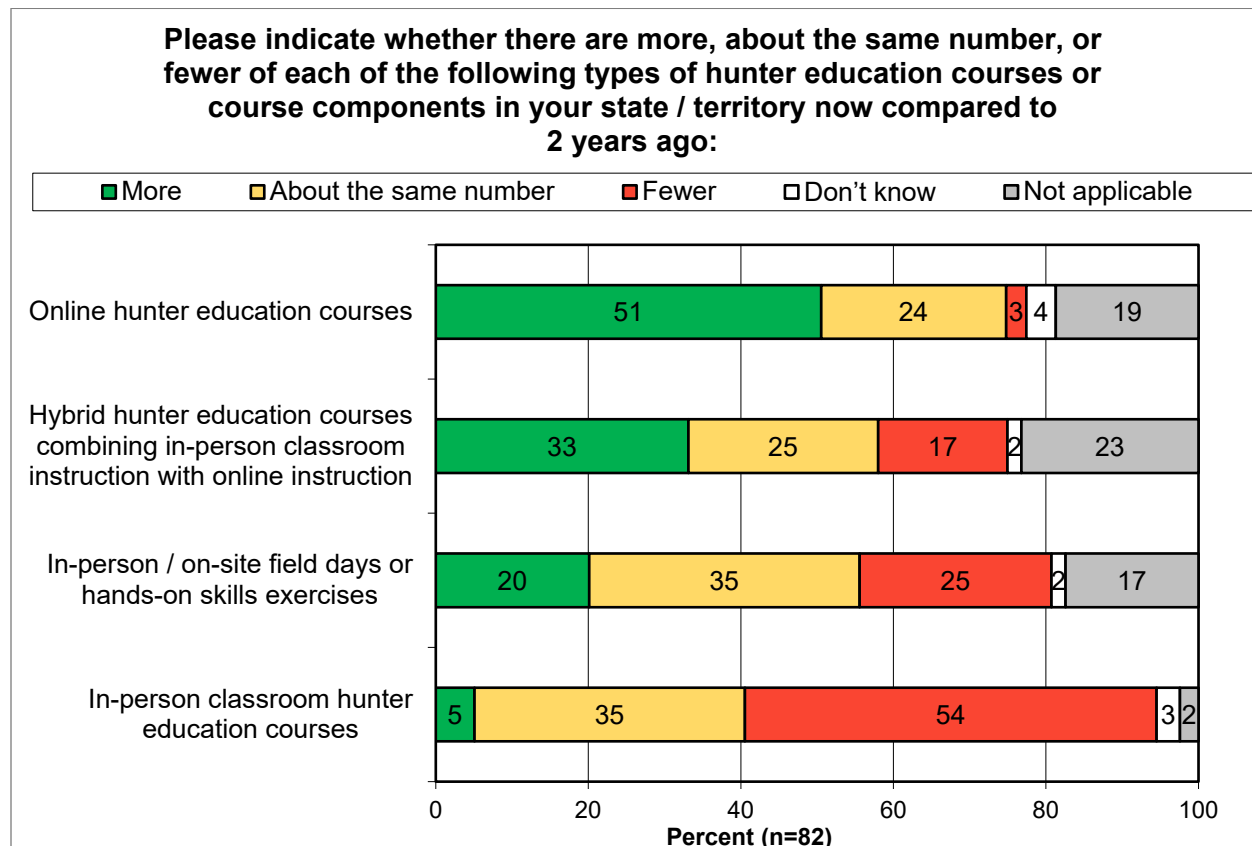
Three resources stand out as being the most important to hunter education coordinators when developing the hunter education course curriculum: the IHEA-USA Education Standards, hunting regulations in the coordinator's state or territory, and feedback or information from hunter education coordinators and/or administrators in the state or territory.

IMPORTANCE OF POTENTIAL HUNTER EDUCATION PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

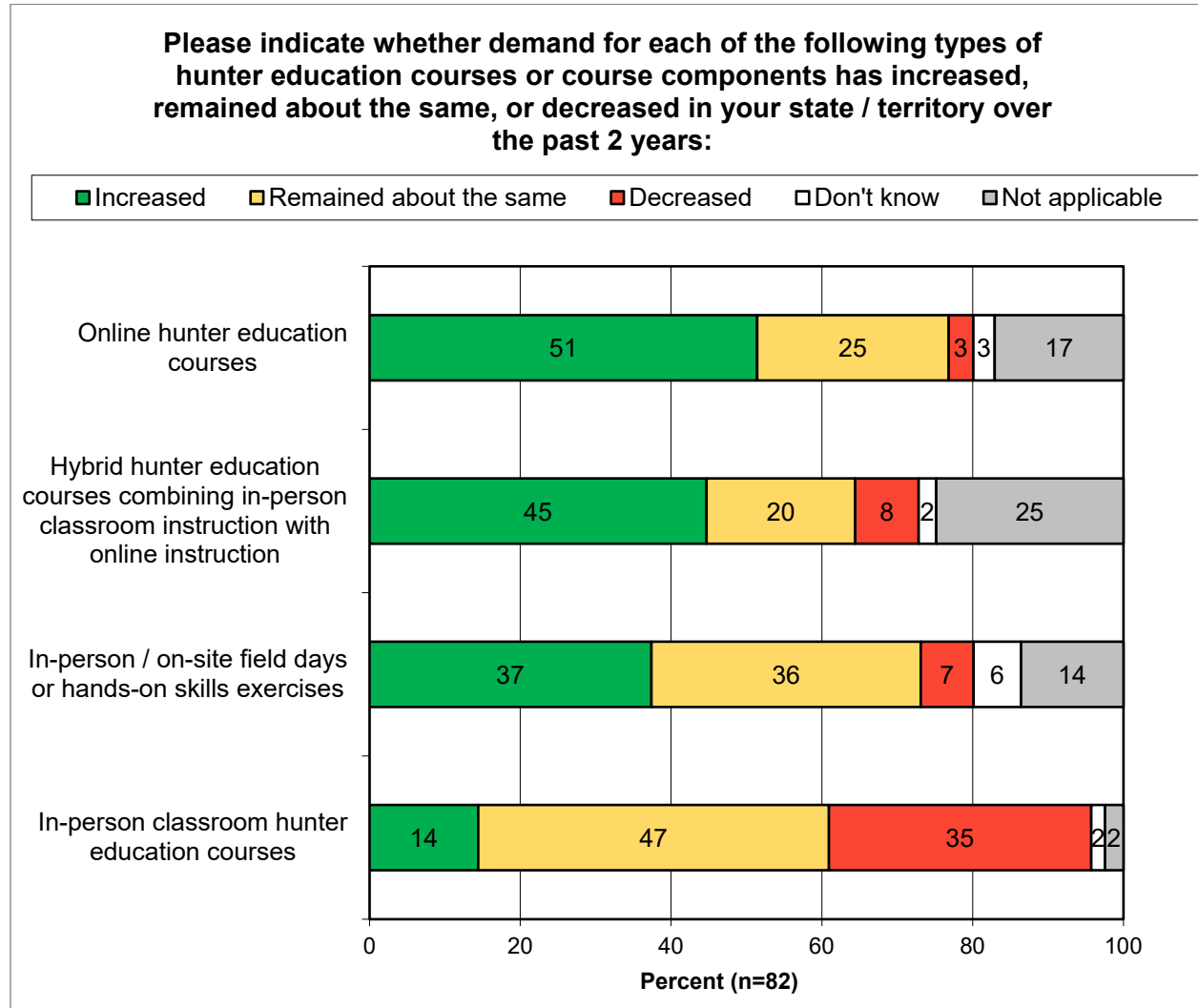
The most important objectives of hunter education programs are increasing awareness of safe hunting practices in the field and decreasing hunting accidents and incidents—two core overarching objectives relating to safety.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND FOR VARIOUS TYPES OF HUNTER EDUCATION COURSES

In more than half of the states/territories surveyed (54%), there are *fewer* options to complete hunter education in a traditional classroom course now compared to 2 years ago. Meanwhile, also in about half of the states/territories (51%), there are *more* opportunities to complete hunter education online now compared to 2 years ago.

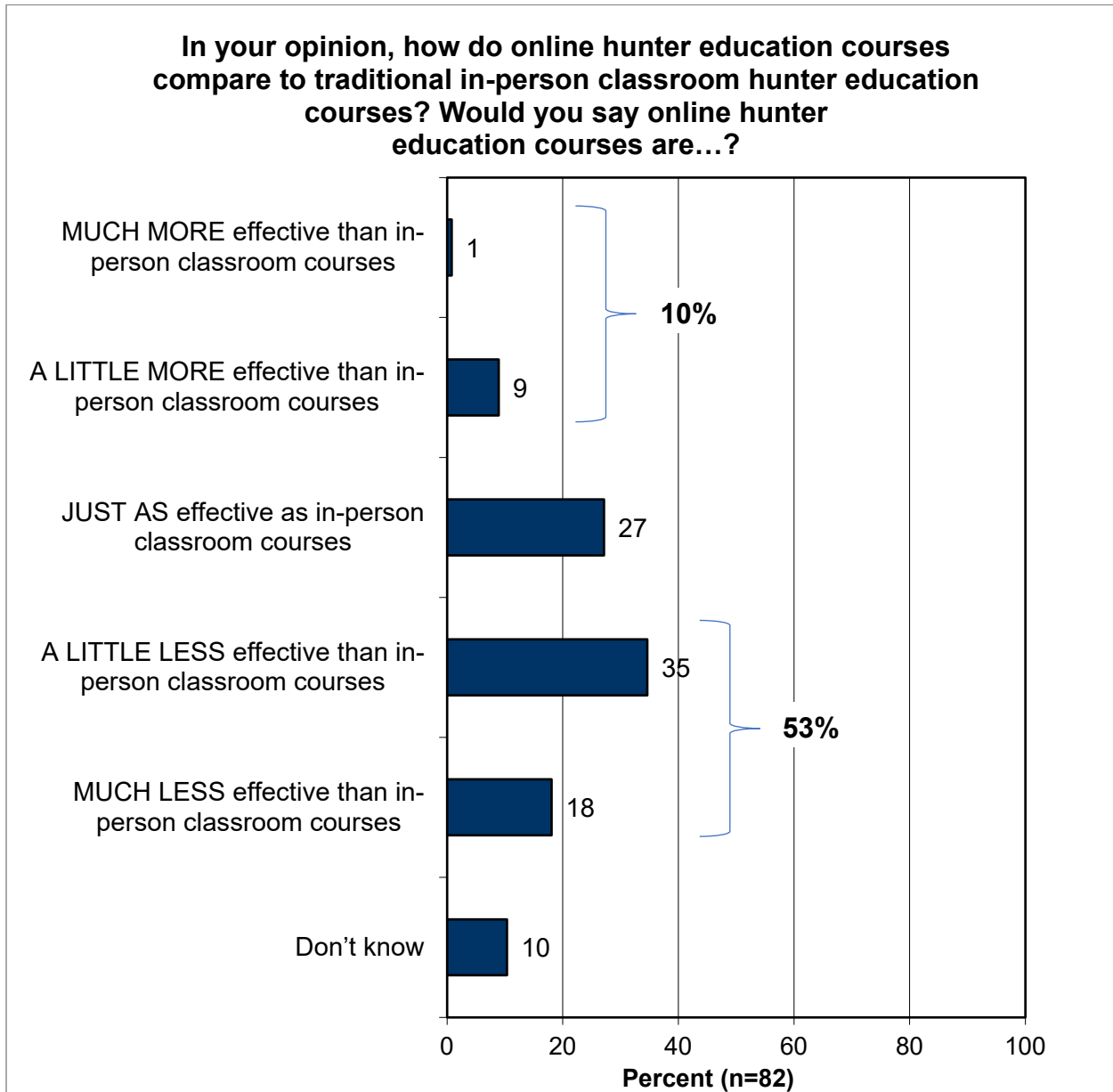


In just over half of the states/territories surveyed (51%), demand for online hunter education courses has increased over the past 2 years. On the other hand, demand for traditional classroom hunter education courses has decreased over the past 2 years in about a third of the states/territories (35%); demand for classroom courses has remained the same in almost half of the states/territories (47%).



The most common changes made to hunter education programs as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic include cancelling in-person courses and/or moving to online-only courses (41% of states/territories made this change) and adding an online-only course option (36%). Other common changes made as a result of the pandemic include limiting class sizes to practice social distancing (18%), lowering the minimum age for online hunter education courses (14%), and adding a virtual field day (12%). Just 15% of the states/territories surveyed indicated not making any changes as a direct result of the pandemic.

Despite the increase in the supply of and demand for online hunter education courses during the pandemic, a slight majority of hunter education coordinators (53%) feel that online courses are less effective than traditional classroom courses.

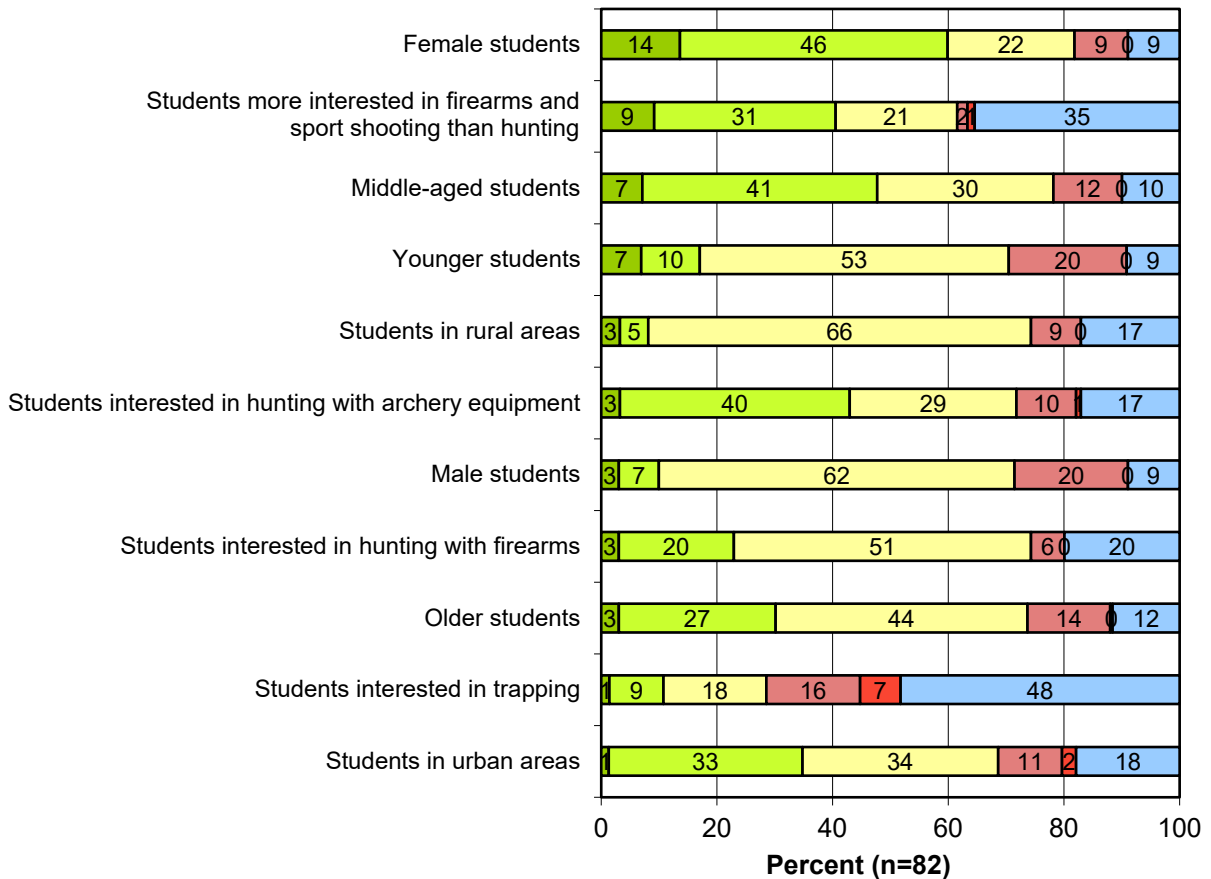


TRENDS IN HUNTER EDUCATION STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Many hunter education courses are seeing increased enrollment from females, middle-aged students, students interested in hunting with archery equipment, students more interested in firearms and sport shooting than hunting, and students in urban areas. The survey looked at trends in the categories of hunter education students who are enrolling now compared to 5 years ago. There are several categories that appear to be on the rise: female students (60% of coordinators indicated there are *a lot more* or *somewhat more* of them enrolling today compared to 5 years ago), middle-aged students (48%), students interested in hunting with archery equipment (43%), students more interested in firearms and sport shooting than hunting (41%), and students in urban areas (35%).

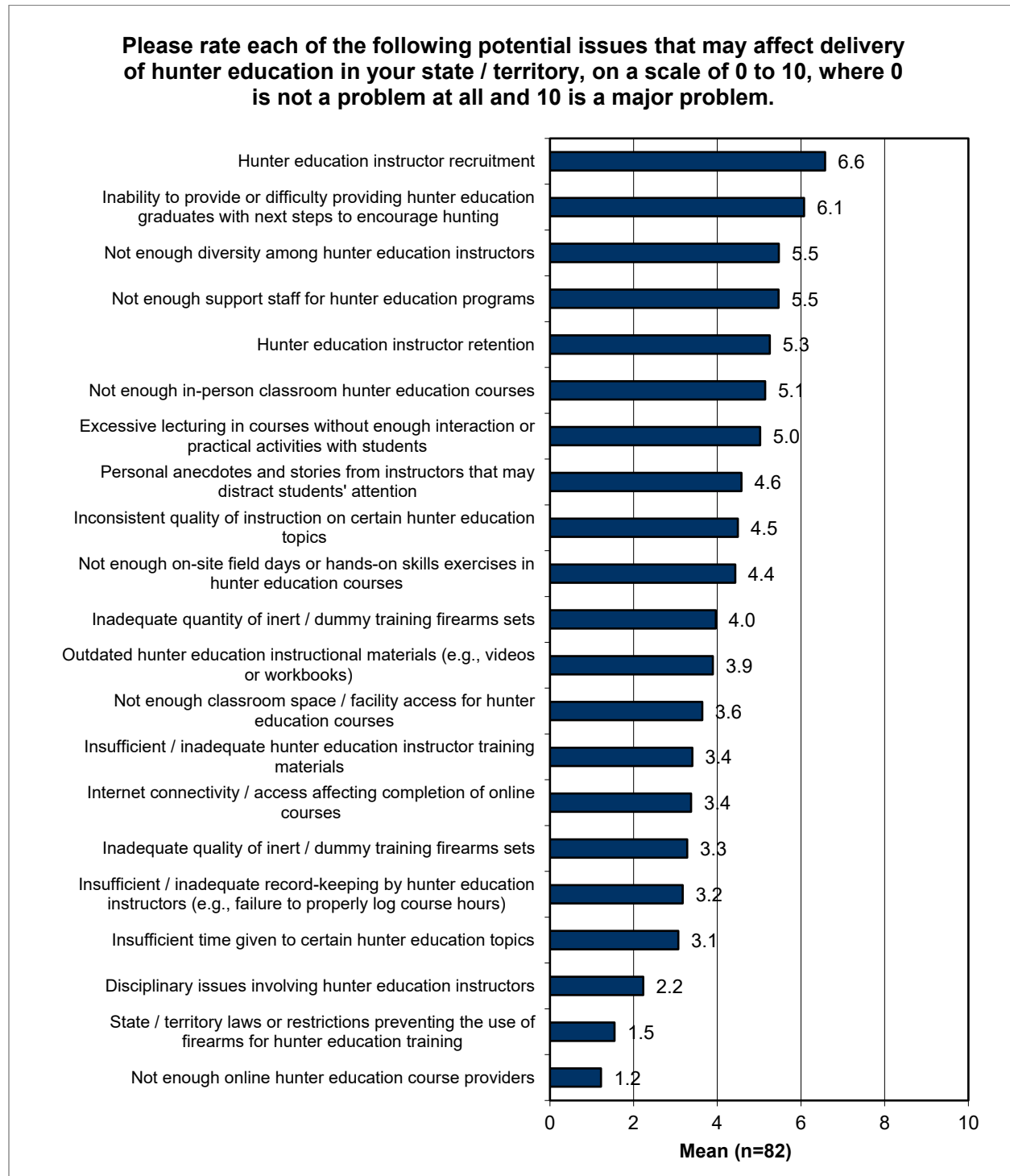
Regarding the types of individuals enrolling in hunter education courses, please indicate whether there are more, about the same number, or fewer of each of the following categories in hunter education courses in your state / territory now compared to 5 years ago:

■ A lot more ■ Somewhat more ■ About the same number ■ Somewhat fewer ■ A lot fewer ■ Don't know



CHALLENGES AND ISSUES THAT AFFECT DELIVERY OF HUNTER EDUCATION

The most pressing issues currently affecting delivery of hunter education are instructor recruitment and the inability of program coordinators to provide hunter education graduates with the next steps to encourage hunting. However, these appear to be issues of moderate, but not major, concern.



Other notable limitations in planning and delivering hunter education relate to personnel: they include a lack of staff and a lack of volunteers. Another fairly common limitation is site/venue availability for courses, or lack thereof.

IHEA-USA should continue to provide information to states and territories that may assist with hunter education instructor recruitment. While only moderately important in the survey ratings, instructor recruitment was discussed at length in the focus groups. Despite the increasing importance of online hunter education programs, the research results make clear that there is still considerable demand for traditional in-person courses led by volunteer instructors. Some hunter education program coordinators suggested that instructor recruitment has become a more pressing issue as many longtime instructors in their programs have begun to “age out” of the position.

IHEA-USA should continue to examine ways to help ensure or increase diversity among hunter education instructors. Recall that many hunter education courses are seeing increased enrollment from females and students in urban areas, among other groups. These trends highlight the need for instructors who represent a range of backgrounds and experiences (right now, the overwhelming majority of hunter education coordinators and instructors are male). A number of comments in the survey and focus groups suggest that hunter education coordinators are aware of the need to maintain or increase diversity among course instructors. IHEA-USA may wish to provide guidance or other information on how agencies may be able to recruit instructors from diverse backgrounds.

Instructor retention is a separate issue from instructor recruitment—for some hunter education programs, retention of instructors is the more pressing issue. It was noted that some volunteer instructors who had health-related concerns about teaching in-person courses during the pandemic had dropped out of teaching hunter education altogether; others had lapsed in their participation due to inactivity as classroom courses were canceled or put on hold. Some coordinators noted that, if demand for in-person courses were to return to pre-pandemic levels, they would likely not have enough volunteer instructors to meet the need. A related issue associated with instructor churn is that some returning volunteer instructors have a hard time adapting to the changes that agencies implemented during COVID-19, particularly changes that impacted the curriculum content (e.g., more videos or reliance on new forms of technology). It was observed that some long-time instructors have had difficulty adjusting to major changes in course format or approach.

IHEA-USA should consider providing more information on how agencies can obtain inert firearms training kits for instructional purposes. With the increasing prominence of online hunter education courses and the decrease in live field days and other in-person instructional opportunities, inert training firearms may not be used in hunter education programs as often today as they were in previous years. Strictly in terms of the numerical ratings in the survey, inert firearm quality and quantity did not rate highly in terms of issues that affect delivery of hunter education. However, some of the open-ended survey comments and remarks during the focus groups suggest that inert training firearms are an issue for *some* hunter education

programs (though perhaps not for the majority of hunter education programs). Several coordinators appeared to learn for the first time in the focus groups that Mossberg (a prominent firearms manufacturer) is no longer producing inert firearms training kits. It may be possible for IHEA-USA to leverage its existing relationships with firearms manufacturers to encourage them to produce inert firearms training kits for the hunter education community. Another possibility may be for IHEA-USA to provide specific guidance on where hunter education professionals can obtain inert firearms kits for use in their programs.

HUNTER INCIDENT REPORTING

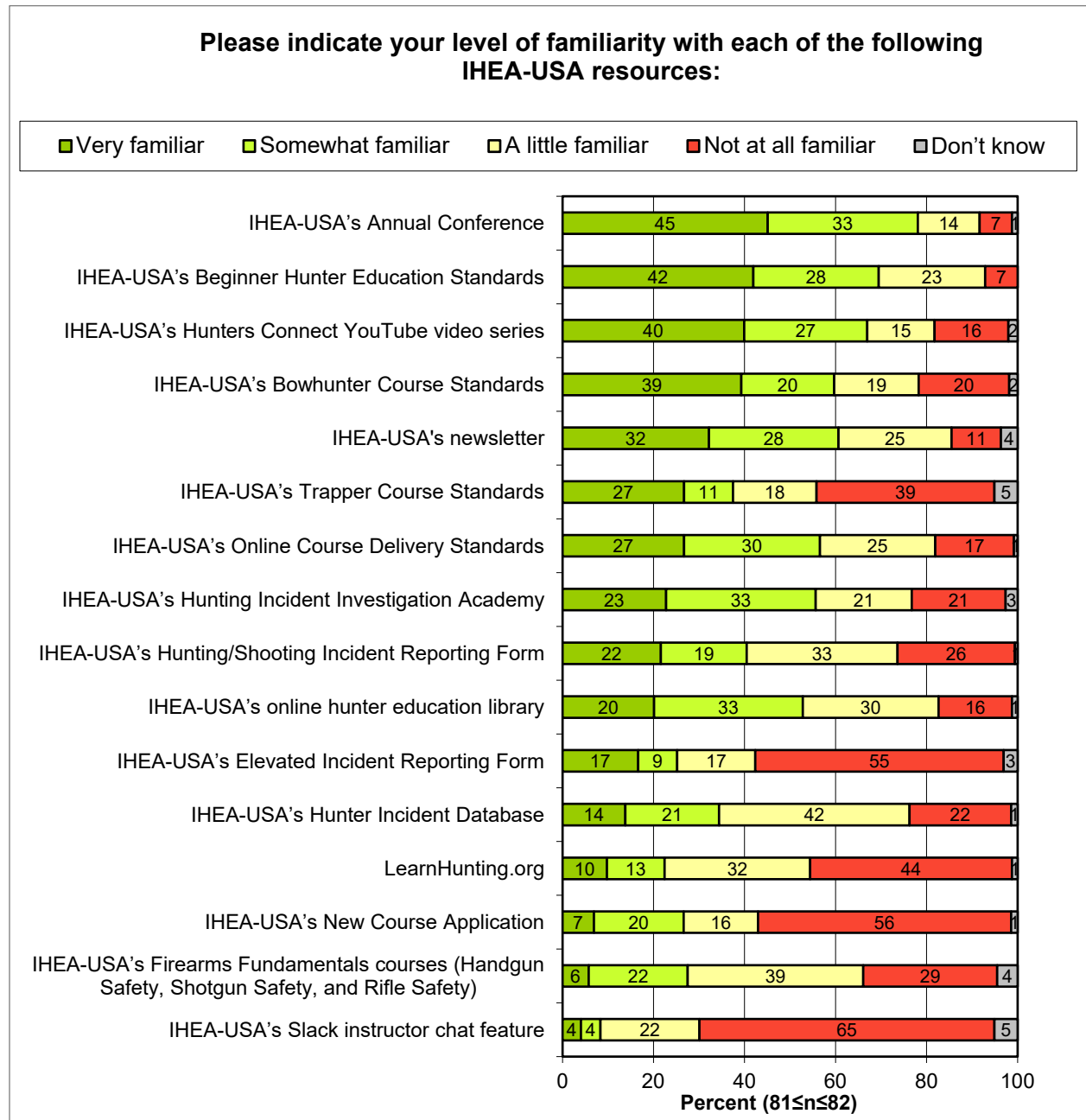
Some hunter education professionals feel that the Hunter Incident Database is limited by inconsistency in reporting from the states and territories. In some cases, this perception may be discouraging use of the Incident Database. A common topic in the focus groups was the fact that not all states and territories report incidents involving tree stands; therefore, many assume the Incident Database will be limited by this inconsistency (the survey found that at least a third of states and territories do not report incidents involving tree stands or elevated stands as part of their hunter incident reports). Similarly, some focus group participants discussed the potential differences in how hunter safety incidents may be defined and reported depending on location. Finally, only about half of the states/territories surveyed indicated that they send their hunter incident data to IHEA-USA (more than a quarter were unsure whether their hunter incident data are sent to IHEA-USA).

There may be a need for IHEA-USA to increase awareness of the national standard definition for a hunting incident. The focus groups, in particular, suggested that some coordinators who are new to their position may not be aware of the nationally established definition for a hunting incident. Because reporting of hunting incidents often falls to different entities and agencies depending on the state or territory (for example, police or sheriff's departments), IHEA-USA may wish to target communications beyond just the fish and wildlife agencies that manage hunting. It may also be helpful for IHEA-USA to explain why certain events qualify as hunting incidents—this may help to increase overall rates of reporting (and consistency in reporting) to the Hunter Incident Database. At least a few professionals in the focus groups said that generally only a few people from their agency are able to attend the IHEA-USA Hunting Incident Investigation Academy.

IHEA-USA may wish to update its template form for hunter incident reporting based on fields commonly used by the individual agencies. It appears that some hunter education professionals are not aware that IHEA-USA provides a fillable PDF form for submitting incident reports; some agencies may not have the most recent version of this form (there were a few comments indicating that IHEA-USA form fields do not always correspond to the online fields). Conversely, there may be a need for IHEA-USA to take a fresh look at which forms states are using to determine whether new fields need to be mapped to the IHEA form. An improved template for uploading data may encourage more states to regularly submit data.

FAMILIARITY WITH AND USE OF VARIOUS IHEA-USA RESOURCES

Regarding various IHEA-USA resources, hunter education coordinators are *most* familiar with IHEA-USA’s Annual Conference, the Beginner Hunter Education Standards, the Hunters Connect YouTube video series, the Bowhunter Course Standards, and IHEA-USA’s newsletter. Meanwhile, the IHEA-USA resources with which hunter education coordinators are *least* familiar include the Slack instructor chat feature, the New Course Application, the Elevated Incident Reporting Form, LearnHunting.org, and the Trapper Course Standards.



IHEA-USA should provide more information to the hunter education community about the advantages and potential uses of its Slack instructor chat feature. The survey found that 79% of hunter education coordinators *never* use the Slack chat feature on the IHEA-USA website. While this feature may be more intended for hunter education *instructors* rather than hunter education program *coordinators*, the low awareness and use of it may still affect instructors' use (in other words, instructors may not hear about it in the first place simply because so few coordinators appear to be aware of it). One note regarding the Slack chat feature is that IHEA-USA may wish to add a disclaimer reminding instructors who use Slack to treat the platform as informational, not prescriptive—any course ideas or concepts obtained through discussions on Slack would still need to be approved by the appropriate agency personnel before being incorporated into a course.

About half of hunter education coordinators (52%) use IHEA-USA's Hunter Incident Database no more than a few times a year: this includes 23% who use it a few times a year, 15% who use it about once a year, and 14% who use it less than once a year. A fairly sizable percentage of coordinators—41%—say they never use the Hunter Incident Database. Among those hunter education coordinators who use IHEA-USA's Hunter Incident Database, about a third (36%) describe it as *extremely* or *very* useful, while almost half (47%) say it is *somewhat* useful.

IHEA-USA should provide a simple visual resource that identifies the acceptable proof of hunter safety certification on a state-by-state basis. If this information is already available, IHEA-USA should consider an email to the hunter education community explaining exactly where the information can be found on its website. Some coordinators noted that IHEA-USA has provided this information previously but apparently no longer updates the information. Keeping the information updated is essential, as there appears to be notable demand for a quick reference guide along these lines.

There is room to grow membership in IHEA-USA: in the survey, 16% of hunter education coordinators indicated not being members, while another 7% were unsure whether they are members. Providing more information on member benefits (e.g., product discounts) will likely be useful, but IHEA-USA should be aware that some agency personnel may be prohibited from accepting discounts due to ethics laws or other policies. IHEA-USA should therefore communicate the other benefits of becoming a member of the organization, such as having access to the hunter education library and receiving updates on news and other information relevant to the hunter education community.

While there is almost universal awareness among hunter education coordinators that IHEA-USA offers instructors and administrators discounts on various products, IHEA-USA may wish to provide more information on how to access and apply these discounts. Comments from coordinators in the survey and focus group suggest that some people simply do not know where to find discount information on the IHEA-USA website, or how to apply discounts for instructors.

USE OF THE IHEA-USA WEBSITE

Virtually all hunter education coordinators have some degree of familiarity with the IHEA-USA website. Four out of five (80%) coordinators are *very* or *somewhat* familiar with the site (note, however, that they are far more likely to be *somewhat* familiar—only 15% say they are *very* familiar).

OPINIONS ON THE PLANNED STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC DATABASE

IHEA-USA should provide more information about its planned Student Demographic Database, including the ways in which states and territories can benefit from the information provided in it. Most hunter education coordinators have not heard anything about IHEA-USA's planned Student Demographic Database, and a relatively small percentage (34%) say they are *extremely* or *very* likely to use the Student Demographic Database when it becomes available. About another half (46%) say they are only *somewhat* likely to use it, while 11% say they are *not at all* likely to use the Student Demographic Database.

As with the Hunter Incident Database, the utility and usefulness of a Student Demographic Database will depend on consistency in the collection of student demographic information. To the extent possible, the collection of demographic information from students may need to be formalized in each state and territory so that it is done more comprehensively. The survey results indicate that student demographic information is commonly collected from in-person classroom courses, but less often from hybrid and fully online courses. However, the focus group discussions suggest that this survey question may have been interpreted in a more informal sense: the “information collection” done in classroom courses may amount to instructors simply assessing student demographic characteristics visually or otherwise anecdotally. While it may be easier for student demographic characteristics to be collected in online courses through specific registration questions, third-party course vendors may not release such demographic information to state/territory fish and wildlife agencies. IHEA-USA may be able to help encourage third-party providers to make this information available to the agencies (though obviously this depends largely on any existing privacy/confidentiality laws).

A FINAL RECOMMENDATION

The final recommendation from this research is that the data in this report be used as an ongoing resource, especially in the rollout of new IHEA-USA products such as the Student Demographic Database. It is likely that IHEA-USA staff and other hunter education professionals will see things in the data beyond the recommendations made here, particularly because they are close to the issues. Future decisions about hunter education resources and products should be made with these data in mind, even if not specifically covered in the recommendations presented here.

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INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF METHODOLOGY

BACKGROUND

This study was conducted by the International Hunter Education Association (IHEA-USA) and Responsive Management to plan for future needs and priorities related to state and territory hunter education programs in the post-COVID-19 world. The study entailed new data collection with hunter education program professionals throughout the United States. The research was funded through Multistate Conservation Grant No. F21AP00623-00 from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

As recruitment, retention, and reactivation (R3) efforts continue to yield results across the country, many states have seen increased demand for hunter education courses. Most recently, demand for hunter education may have increased as a result of the uptick in license sales and hunting participation that occurred during the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic (hunting being one of many outdoor activities that saw a bump in participation during the pandemic).⁷

An analysis of hunting license sales in more than 40 states by Southwick Associates and the Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports found that overall license sales in 2020 increased by roughly 5% over 2019 (both resident and nonresident license sales were up during the period of analysis).⁸ Some people may have also been motivated to hunt as a way to source their own meat amid reports of COVID infections at meat packaging plants.⁹

There may also be emerging demand for hunter education courses from individuals seeking an introduction to firearms or certification to purchase a firearm, with no intention of hunting. In fact, the latest research¹⁰ by Responsive Management and the National Shooting Sports Foundation indicates that newer sport shooters and firearms owners are more likely than sport shooters/firearm owners overall to reside in urban areas, more likely to be female, more likely to be non-white, and less likely to hunt—these characteristics mostly run counter to the profile of the typical hunter education student.

Today's new shooters and gun owners also name self-defense as one of their top reasons for going target shooting, as opposed to shooting to practice for hunting (target shooting with a handgun in 2020 increased about 14% over 2018). This is particularly notable in light of recent

⁷ Wagner, Aaron. (January 24, 2022). "How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected outdoor recreation in America?" Accessed from <https://www.psu.edu/news/health-and-human-development/story/how-has-COVID-19-pandemic-affected-outdoor-recreation-america/>.

Brown, Alex. (December 14, 2020). "The Pandemic Created New Hunters. States Need to Keep Them." Pew Charitable Trusts. Accessed from <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2020/12/14/the-pandemic-created-new-hunters-states-need-to-keep-them>.

⁸ Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports. "COVID-19 and License Sales." Accessed from <https://cahss.org/our-research/COVID-19-and-hunting-license-sales/>.

⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (July 7, 2020). "Update: COVID-19 Among Workers in Meat and Poultry Processing Facilities — United States, April–May 2020." Accessed from <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6927e2.htm>.

¹⁰ Responsive Management and the National Shooting Sports Foundation. (2021). Sport Shooting Participation in the United States in 2020. Harrisonburg, Virginia. See also the overview of the study from the Outdoor Hub at: <https://www.outdoorhub.com/news/2020/01/06/nssf-report-shows-growth-shooting-sports/>.

reports of increased firearms purchases among African-Americans¹¹ and increased hunter education enrollment among females.¹²

Fluctuating hunting participation and increasing firearms sales and sport shooting participation among nontraditional audiences together relate to the shifting base of funding for state fish and wildlife agencies, which are the primary sponsors of hunter education programs in the United States. The Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, or Pittman-Robertson Act, was approved by Congress in 1937 to redirect an existing excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition to state wildlife programs—this meant that anyone purchasing a firearm or ammunition was helping to pay for the work of the state agencies, namely wildlife conservation.

When Pittman-Robertson was enacted, many or most of the people purchasing firearms and ammunition were hunters—therefore, it was hunters driving the funding base for state fish and wildlife agencies. As firearms and ammunition are increasingly purchased by non-hunters for purposes like target shooting and home protection, there may be a growing disconnect between the wildlife agencies that sponsor hunter education and the segment of students who are completing hunter education for non-hunting reasons (e.g., to obtain a firearm or a concealed carry permit).¹³

Another trend that will affect hunter education in the future is broader: the changing demographic makeup of the United States itself. Not only is the overall population of the United States increasing, but so are the populations of urban residents, older residents, minority residents, and immigrant residents. These trends will impact the makeup of both hunter education students and the professional staff, instructors, and other individuals who manage and provide hunter education services.

In addition to the changing demographics of students, hunter education opportunities, requirements, and course options remain inconsistent across the country. Course delivery in many parts of the country is increasingly moving to an exclusively online curriculum, meaning traditional on-site hunter education classroom courses have declined in some states. Similarly, some courses may no longer incorporate opportunities for live-fire exercises or practical skills building in an on-site group setting. (In many cases, these shifts predated but were hastened along by the COVID-19 pandemic.) Changes in format requirements may also impact state reciprocity agreements for acceptable hunter safety certification.

¹¹ National Shooting Sports Foundation. (September 9, 2021). "NSSF retail surveys show 3.2 million estimated first-time gun buyers in first half of 2021." Accessed from <https://www.nssf.org/articles/nssf-retail-surveys-show-3-2-million-estimated-first-time-gun-buyers-in-first-half-of-2021/>.

¹² Dorsey, Chris. (July 9, 2020). "Why Women Are the Fastest Growing Segment of The Population Who Hunt." *Forbes*. Accessed from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/chrisdorsey/2020/07/09/why-women-are-the-fastest-growing-segment-of-the-population-who-hunt/?sh=4ea9e2052158>.

¹³ Two sources provide data on the changing composition of the wildlife conservation funding base: Duda, Mark D.; Beppler, Tom; Austen, Douglas J.; and Organ, John F. (2022). The precarious position of wildlife conservation funding in the United States, *Human Dimensions of Wildlife*, 27:2, 164-172, DOI: 10.1080/10871209.2021.1904307 Southwick Associates. (2017). "Proportions of Excise Taxes Generated by Hunting Versus Non-Hunting Activities." Fernandina Beach, FL.

As supply and demand for hunter education continues to change across the country, hunter education program administrators and coordinators must have reliable data to guide decision-making both within states and territories and throughout the hunter education community. This project was conducted to address this need.

PROJECT METHODS

The research for this project consisted of the following components:

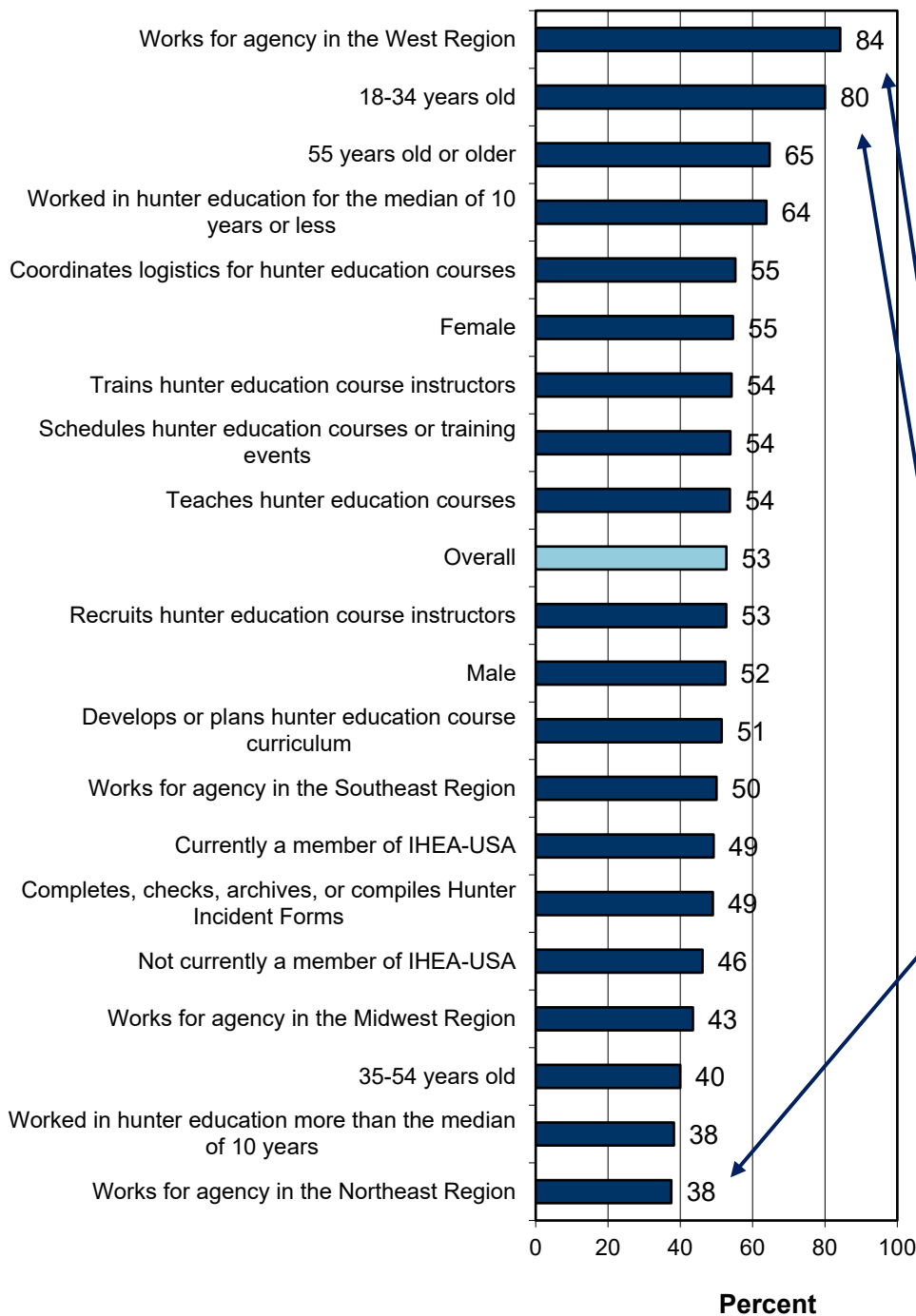
- **Sample development:** This initial phase of the project entailed an extensive sample development process by Responsive Management to identify current hunter education administrators, coordinators, and other relevant program staff to include in the data collection. The sample development process built on existing information provided by IHEA-USA; the updated and supplemental new contact information obtained by Responsive Management will be available to IHEA-USA moving forward.
- **Qualitative research with hunter education professionals:** To explore issues, concerns, and needs related to hunter education in an open-ended manner, Responsive Management conducted four online focus groups with hunter education professionals (including program administrators and coordinators). One focus group with hunter education professionals was conducted in each major region of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (each focus group had representation from multiple agencies within the region—a map of the regions is included in the report section, “Full Discussion of Methodology”). The focus groups entailed in-depth, structured discussions with small groups of professionals about issues and needs related to hunter education.
- **Quantitative research with hunter education professionals:** Using the insights gained from the focus groups, the study partners designed and administered a survey of hunter education professionals throughout the country. The survey was coded as an online questionnaire and distributed by Responsive Management. Distribution of the survey link to an internal sample of confirmed agency professionals ensured that the questionnaire remained a closed survey, meaning it was by invitation only—only those specifically selected for the survey could take it. The study team disseminated reminders and coordinated with the agencies individually to provide additional information, as necessary. Responsive Management obtained 82 completed questionnaires from hunter education coordinators and administrators in 42 agencies (this includes surveys obtained from professionals with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Texas Wildlife Association, as well as the U.S. territory of Guam).

The survey data were weighted so that each agency had an equal influence on the data, regardless of the size of the agency or the number of surveys obtained from it (at least one survey was obtained from each participating agency, while some agencies had multiple staff members complete surveys).

As part of the survey data analysis, several graphs were produced that show how various groups within the overall sample of hunter education professionals (including groups defined by demographic and professional characteristics) respond to certain questions. An example is shown on the next page. Note that the characteristics are not meant to describe a single person

or a person that has all the traits. Rather, the analysis looks at groups defined by the individual characteristics, which sometimes are mutually exclusive.

Percent of each of the following groups who think online hunter education courses are much less or a little less effective than traditional in-person classroom courses:



The light blue bar shows the percentage overall who think online hunter education courses are much less or a little less effective than traditional in-person courses (53%).

Those groups above the light blue bar are more likely than hunter ed. professionals overall to think online courses are less effective. For instance, 84% of those working for an agency in the West Region think this, well above the percentage overall.

Likewise, 80% of hunter education professionals in the younger age group think this. Both of these groups (those in the West Region and those 18-34 years old) are well above the percentage overall.

On the other hand, only 38% of those working for an agency in Northeast Region think online courses are less effective, well below the total of 53%.

The research results are covered in the main body of the report. Because the focus group findings informed the development of the survey, they are presented alongside the survey results in the main section of the report but generally follow the survey data (even though the focus groups were conducted before the survey). The report concludes with a full explanation of the study methodology.

Note that summed results throughout the report are conducted on unrounded numbers, while the graphs generally show integer values. For this reason, there may be apparent discrepancies in sums. For instance, the graph showing interest in becoming a member of IHEA-USA indicates that 4% of non-members are *extremely* interested and 13% are *very* interested; the sum is shown as 18% because it is summed on unrounded numbers. In reality, the percentages are 4.4% extremely interested and 13.2% very interested, a sum of 17.6%, which rounds to 18%.

Finally, two items funded under this grant were handled by IHEA-USA without involvement from Responsive Management: they include the modernization and updating of IHEA-USA's National Hunter Incident Database and the creation of a new IHEA Student Demographic Database. While the technical aspects of these items are covered in a separate document, the survey and focus groups looked at opinions on these resources, and those data are included in this report.

RESEARCH RESULTS

This section presents the full findings from each of the two major phases of research. Findings and quotations from the focus groups are organized thematically and follow the survey results. Throughout the report, survey respondents and focus group participants are generally referred to as “hunter education coordinators,” even though the samples included some program administrators as well as coordinators.

Focus group quotations are indented and shown in italics throughout each section; to maintain confidentiality, quotations are presented anonymously without attribution to any specific individuals.

IMPORTANCE OF VARIOUS RESOURCES IN DEVELOPING THE HUNTER EDUCATION COURSE CURRICULUM

The most important resources used to develop hunter education course curriculum are the IHEA-USA Education Standards, hunting regulations in the coordinator’s state or territory, and feedback or information from hunter education coordinators and/or administrators in the coordinator’s state or territory.

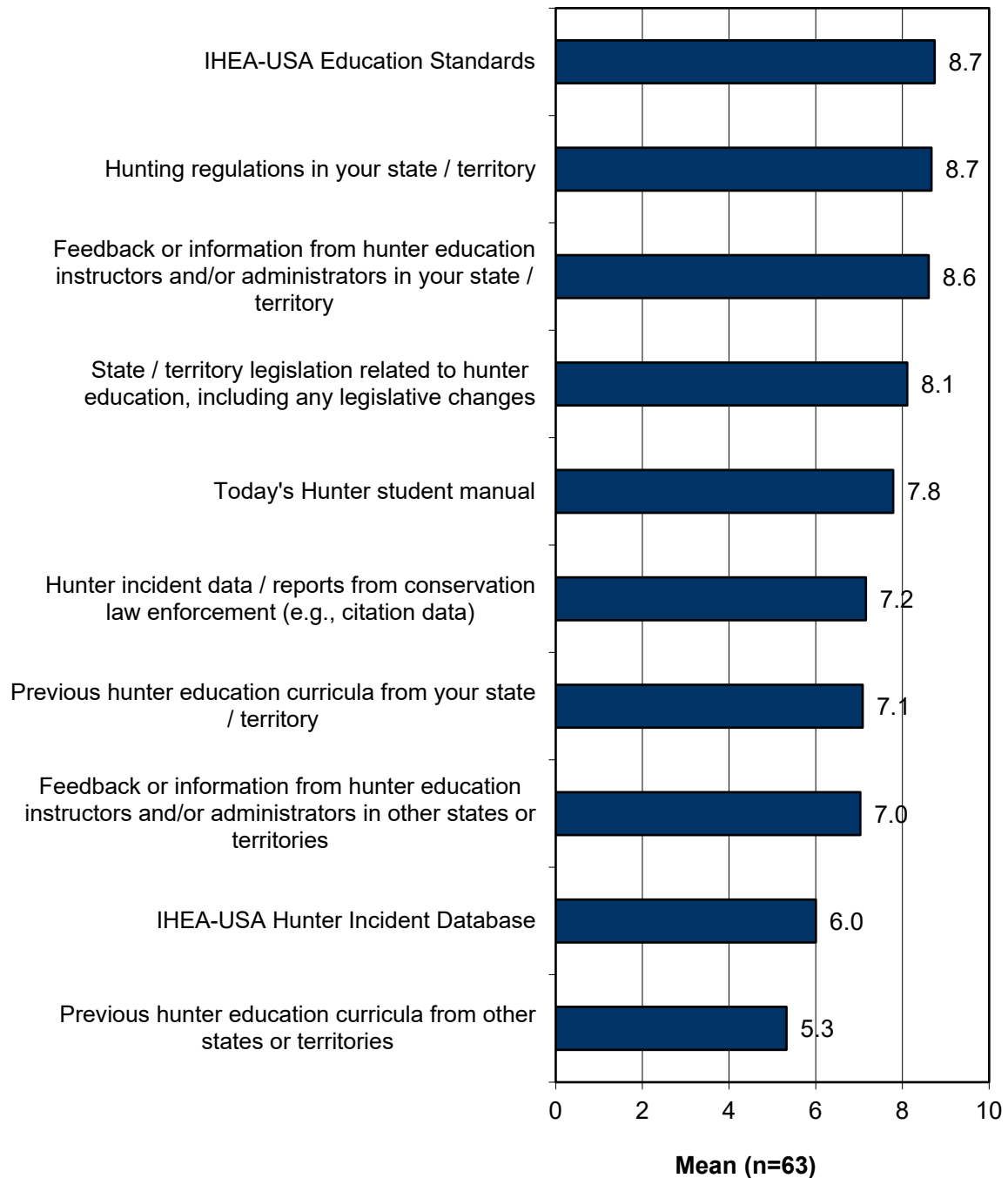
In the survey, coordinators who developed or planned hunter education course curriculum as part of their job were asked to rate the importance of ten different resources that may be used to develop the hunter education course curriculum (ratings were done on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 means not at all important and 10 means extremely important).

Based on the mean ratings, three resources stand out as being the most important: the IHEA-USA Education Standards (mean rating of 8.7), hunting regulations in the coordinator’s state or territory (mean rating of 8.7), and feedback or information from hunter education coordinators and/or administrators in the coordinator’s state or territory (mean rating of 8.6).

A second tier of resources based on the importance ratings consists of state/territory legislation related to hunter education (8.1) and the “Today’s Hunter” student manual (7.8). Below this, but still important, are hunter incident data and reports from conservation law enforcement, such as citation data (mean rating of 7.2), previous hunter education curricula from the coordinator’s state or territory (7.1), and feedback or information from hunter education instructors and/or administrators in other states or territories (7.0).

Finally, two resources had notably lower importance ratings: the IHEA-USA Hunter Incident Database (6.0) and previous hunter education curricula from states and territories other than the coordinator’s own state or territory (5.3).

Please rate the importance of each of the following potential resources that you may use to develop your hunter education course curriculum. Please rate each item on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all important and 10 is extremely important. (Asked of those who develop or plan hunter education course curriculum.)



In the focus groups, coordinators with experience developing the hunter education course curriculum often mentioned the importance of reviewing hunting incidents in their state, along with information from enforcement officers regarding violations in the field. Consistent with the survey results, they also highlighted the importance of the IHEA-USA Education Standards in developing the curriculum, along with state hunting regulations and any relevant legislative or statute changes (all of these items rated highly in the survey as being important for curriculum development).

A few focus group participants mentioned that they found it helpful to review what other states are doing, such as how an agency produced a particular component of the curriculum from a technical writing perspective. Others commented that they periodically had their hunter education instructors review their courses for feedback, including comparing curriculum learning objectives to course lesson plans.

We decided to look at the specific content for these standards, and then we grouped them as we thought would be most beneficial. And then [we] literally created a lesson plan around those specific student learning objectives.

[We] use nationally recognized material, whether it's online or printed material. The bulk of our learning that needs to happen is based on those nationally recognized criteria.... Our lesson plans come from a couple things that we utilize. One is what our law enforcement officers are seeing out in the field,...the violations happening out in the field.... The other one that we look at specifically is our hunting accidents.

If you look back at the history of the hunter ed program across the nation, you can see how it started out with just firearm safety. And that was just general. Then we started moving, started adding on more time to hunter ed classes. A lot of it is accidents that we look at. Instead of just doing firearm safety, we've added in hunter responsibility. We've added in tree stands.... [We are also] looking at violations, complaints that we've had out in the field, whether it's private landowners or just the general public...trying to address different issues that we can try to cover, or looking at our hunting accidents and what types of hunting accidents that we've had in the state.

We went through the IHEA Standards and looked at each of those and then [compared them to] our curriculum.... We do look at the hunting incident trends.

Just when we start seeing trends [in certain types of incidents, we realize] maybe we need to change things in our curriculum...or [our] instructor approaches. Make them more aware that these incidents do take place. They are not just something that could happen; they do happen.

Several focus group participants also mentioned that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, a key consideration in hunter education curriculum development was determining which lessons could or should be offered virtually and which lessons needed to remain part of in-person exercises (assuming the latter option was offered by the state). Several coordinators discussed the balance in using online or home study courses to cover the knowledge portion of hunter education while maximizing any in-person on-site time for hands-on skills activities (especially as a way to test students' knowledge).

Where we had to learn more was how are we going to now change our tactics depending on what type of format we're teaching? So when we develop those lesson plans, it was traditionally for a classroom course.... When we had to switch over, when COVID hit, to a virtual [approach], we looked at the lessons in terms of which lessons in particular are most important to be done in-person, which ones they could learn on their own, and then how we were going to use our field day to give them exercises so they could apply that knowledge acquired on their own, so that it cements it in their brain.

For us it was taking a hard look at what are we noticing for accidents; where are we having issues where the public really needs to have a better understanding with the skills-based piece. Even though our learning objectives really are all knowledge-based, allowing them to do it hands-on gives them an opportunity to apply that knowledge they acquired on their own by doing that online course. That's where we had a lot of changes.

In our statute, we actually have some topic requirements that have to be given. Luckily, they are all covered in our current IHEA standards curriculum for basic hunter ed. So that is helpful.

We customize our [manuals]. It was really super specific to [state] and we recently pulled back on that. I guess I would describe it as a little bit more of a hybrid between "Today's Hunter" and "Our [state] Hunter," which is the manual that we had before. But it's a lot closer to "Today's Hunter" than what we've had in the past. Just kind of saves money and also when our regs change and things change significantly, we don't have a backlog of manuals sitting in a warehouse that aren't accurate anymore.

With the field day, one of the challenges I've always had, with both my instructors and staff, is getting them to understand that they don't need to read the entire book to these students again. That's not what they're there for. They're supposed to have gotten that knowledge, that information, from the online course, and we need to focus on the skills and practicing tree stand safety, firearms safety, all that good stuff. Of course, there is some new material, some stuff that's so important it never hurts to repeat.

We recently took a peek at our curriculum, and we worked to update it a little bit like every other state's been doing—less lecture and a lot more hands-on [exercises].

Additional discussions in the focus groups highlighted the importance of inert firearm training kits, especially for field exercises and demonstrations (several participants expressed concern that Mossberg is no longer supplying inert firearms kits). Other resources and materials commonly cited by focus group participants to develop the hunter education course curriculum (or to plan and offer hunter education in general) included Kalkomey's "Today's Hunter" student manual, Kalkomey's AMS Events volunteer management system, the Eventbrite platform, software developed or customized by the state, National Archery in the Schools Program kits, safety cards, training videos, and the Outdoors Tomorrow Foundation (the latter being cited as a resource for instructor training).

The other thing that has thrown a giant wrench in the wheel is Mossberg not making the hunter ed kits anymore, the inert firearms kits.

We do have training aids and resources. The biggest training aid we find value in is the inert firearms and dummy ammunition.

The inert firearms are probably the biggest and most important thing that we use in our courses and are always sought after. We're always running out of them. I did not know that Mossberg was discontinuing making them.

We've used the Hunter Connect video links during COVID. We started teaching virtual hunter education [courses], which were limited. But we would send out social media blasts—"Hey, here's a link on how to field dress an elk"—and so we would really try to use those resources to keep people [participating] during COVID. People felt really disconnected because we weren't offering in-person courses.

Like many of you, [we] have stuck with the Kalkomey platform just because it is so comprehensive. And we utilized that "Today's Hunter" workbook. We want our in-person forces to be equitable to our online presentation. The challenge with the NRA [course] is there is definitely a feeling of some baggage being associated with NRA for certain reasons and contexts.

Unless something has changed in the last year or so with NRA since the last time I really looked into it, it didn't have the capability of being state-specific.

I think most of us use Kalkomey's student manual.

We use Kalkomey for our printed material fully. We use the same manual for our traditional courses and our field day...; our field day courses are a little different in that some use an online component and then students come to an in-person [session]. But we use the same hunter ed manual for our traditional [course] and our field days. Those students complete that very similar manual, provided by Kalkomey, that we pass out to the students.

We use Kalkomey, as well, for our printed material and for the online course.

We did start an online course with Kalkomey for hunter ed and Becoming an Outdoors Woman when COVID hit in 2020 and had an unbelievable response to it. We put almost 70,000 people through the online hunter ed course that first year in 2020, and it continues to be popular. ... The course is entirely online. We do have entirely in-person courses, but they've been few and far between since COVID. We have a lot of instructors who aren't teaching at the moment.

The Kalkomey videos are great because they give you a 3- to 5-minute little clip of, "This is hunter orange and this is why it's so great," and now you've started a conversation that you can have with your students.

And of course, we use that volunteer management system through Kalkomey.

Brandt took over our licensing side of things, and then I believe within this next year they're going to take on event manager and volunteer stuff. So I'm crossing my fingers that I can just dump all of my stuff into them, and we'll be good to go.

Outdoors Tomorrow Foundation trains new instructors for outdoor education curriculum in the schools.... I tell you what, the school component is huge. And that Outdoors Tomorrow Foundation curriculum is available to every state, and it's in 36 states right now. And I swear, if you can get outdoor education in schools, that's the way to do it.

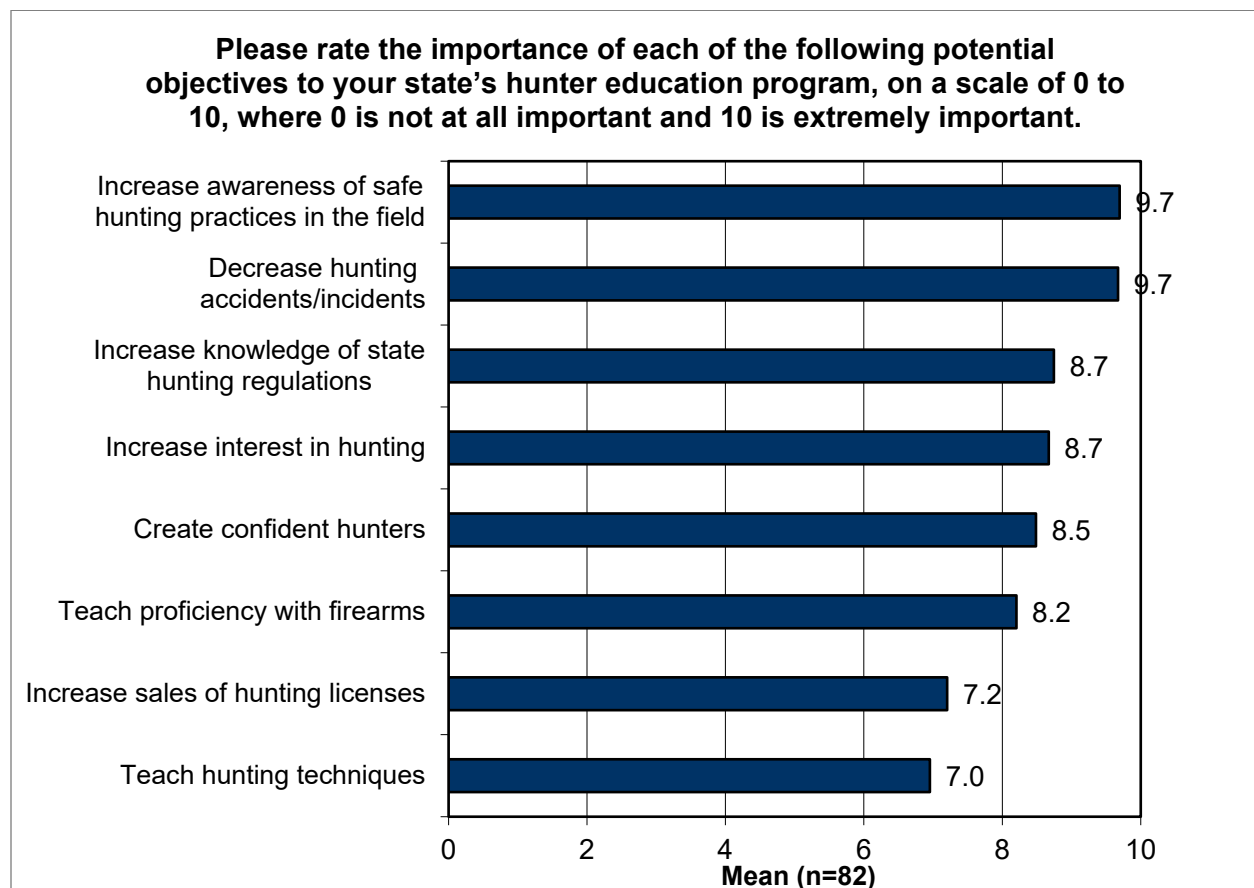
IMPORTANCE OF POTENTIAL HUNTER EDUCATION PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The most important objectives of hunter education programs are increasing awareness of safe hunting practices in the field and decreasing hunting accidents and incidents—two core overarching objectives relating to safety.

In the survey, hunter education coordinators were asked to rate the importance of eight different potential objectives of hunter education programs. In general, none of the objectives were seen as unimportant (the lowest rated objective had a mean rating of 7.0 on a 0 to 10 importance scale). Two objectives, however, stand out as being notably more important than the others: decreasing hunting accidents and increasing awareness of safe hunting practices in the field (both with mean ratings of 9.7).

Four other objectives have mean importance ratings of at least 8.2: increasing knowledge of state hunting regulations (8.7), increasing interest in hunting (8.7), creating confident hunters (8.5), and teaching proficiency with firearms (8.2).

Finally, of lesser importance (though still with fairly high mean importance ratings) are increasing sales of hunting licenses (7.2) and teaching hunting techniques (7.0).

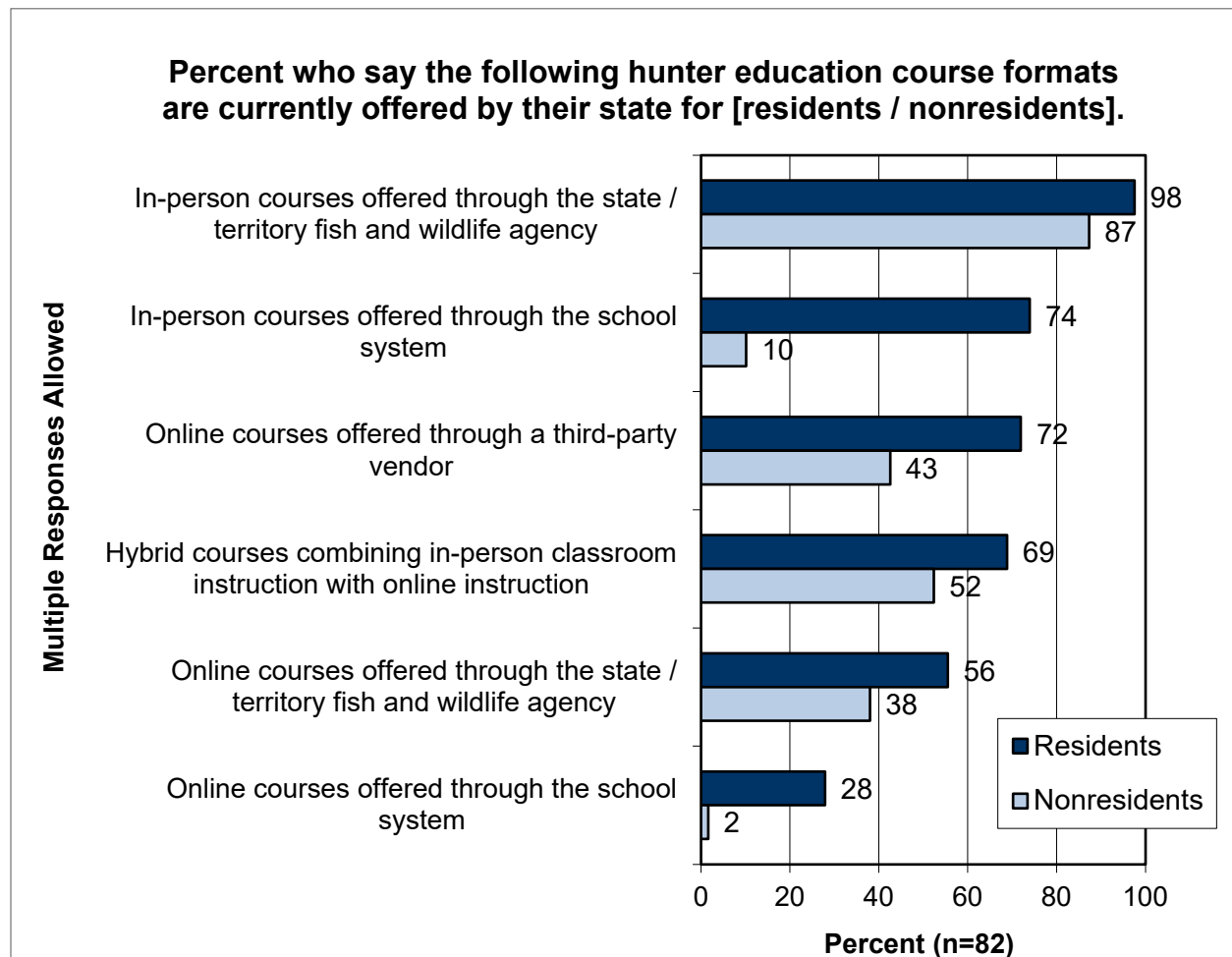


SUPPLY AND DEMAND FOR VARIOUS TYPES OF HUNTER EDUCATION COURSES

The vast majority of states/territories offer in-person hunter education courses through the fish and wildlife agency to both residents and nonresidents. In-person hunter education courses through the school system are available to residents in about three quarters of the states/territories.

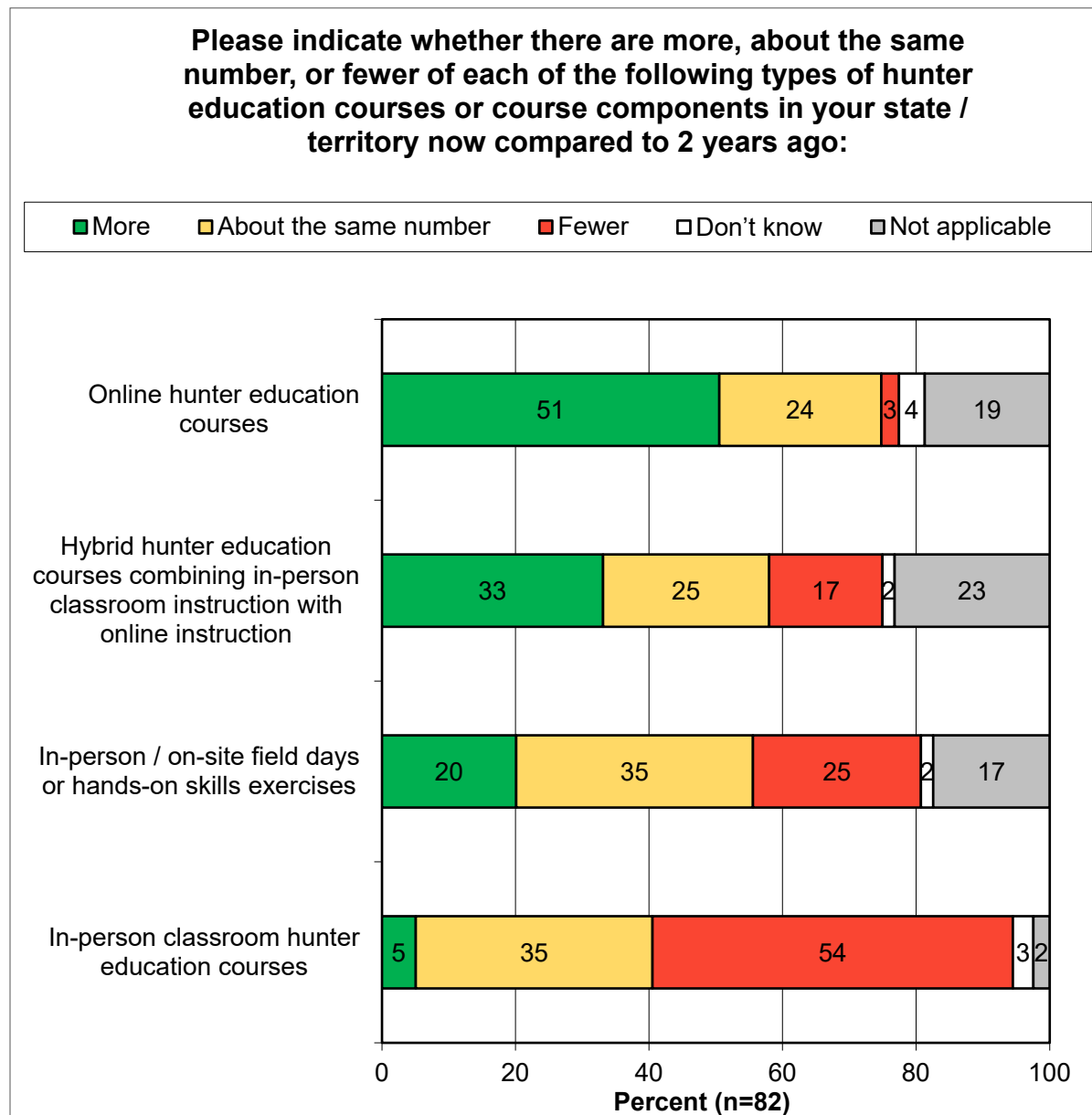
Online hunter education courses are most commonly offered through a third-party vendor (about three quarters of states/territories provide this option for residents, while less than half make these courses available to nonresidents). Online hunter education courses directly through the fish and wildlife agency are offered to residents in just over half of the states/territories; meanwhile, a little more than a third make this option available to nonresidents.

Finally, hybrid hunter education courses combining in-person classroom instruction with online instruction are available to residents in about two thirds of the states/territories and to nonresidents in about half of the states/territories.



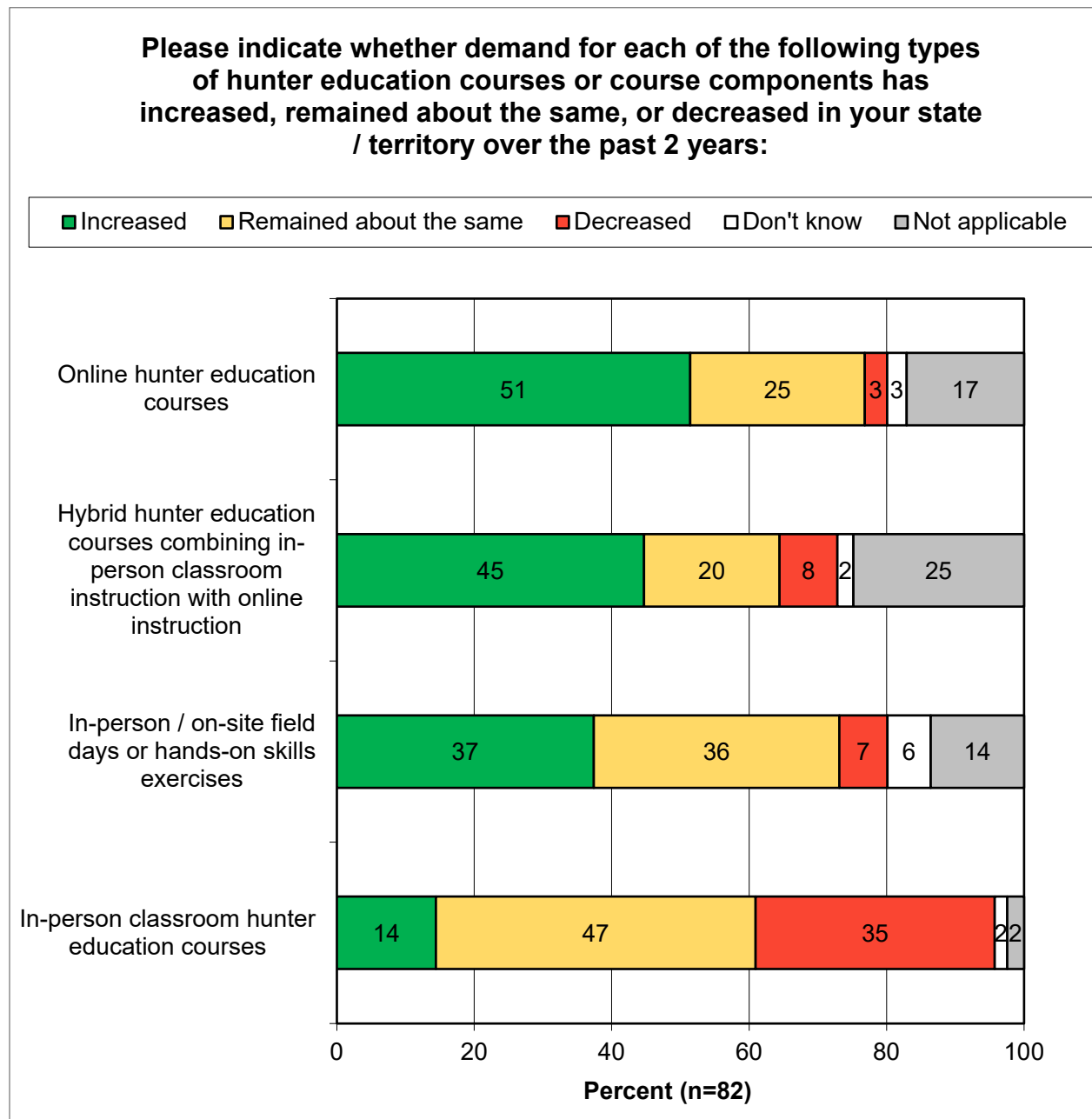
In more than half of the states/territories surveyed (54%), there are fewer options to complete hunter education in a traditional classroom course now compared to 2 years ago. Meanwhile, also in about half of the states/territories (51%), there are more opportunities to complete hunter education online now compared to 2 years ago.

Hybrid hunter education courses combining in-person classroom instruction with online instruction have increased in about a third of states/territories (33%). Finally, the option to complete an in-person/on-site field day or hands-on skills exercise varies greatly by location: in 20% of the states/territories, there are more of these options, while 25% of the states/territories have reduced these options.



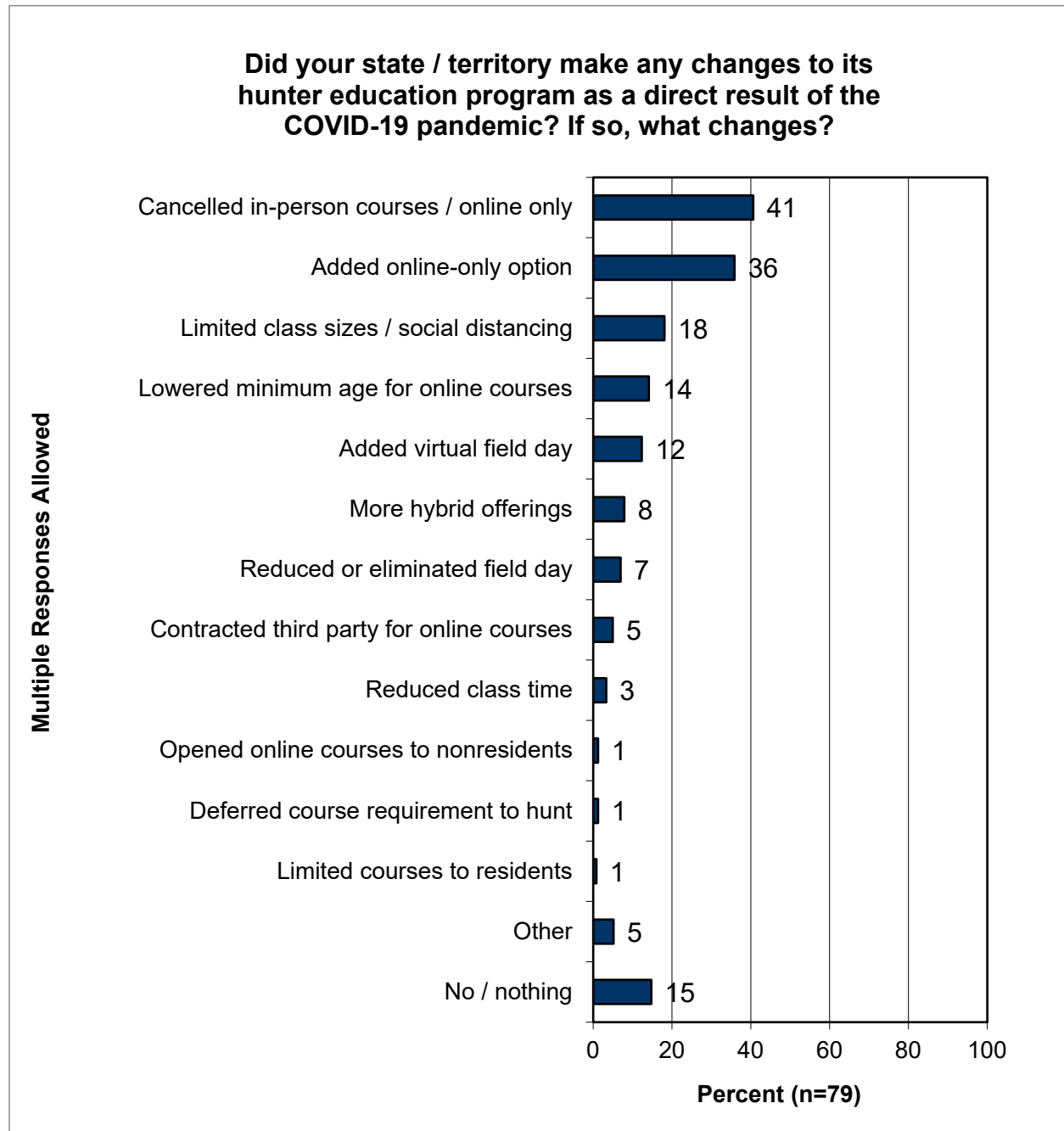
In just over half of the states/territories surveyed (51%), demand for online hunter education courses has *increased* over the past 2 years. On the other hand, demand for traditional classroom hunter education courses has *decreased* over the past 2 years in about a third of the states/territories (35%); demand for classroom courses has remained the same in almost half of the states/territories (47%).

Regarding hybrid courses, demand has increased in 45% of the states/territories over the past 2 years. Regarding in-person/on-site field days or hands-on skills exercises, demand has increased in about a third of states/territories (37%) and remained the same in about another third (36%) over the past 2 years.



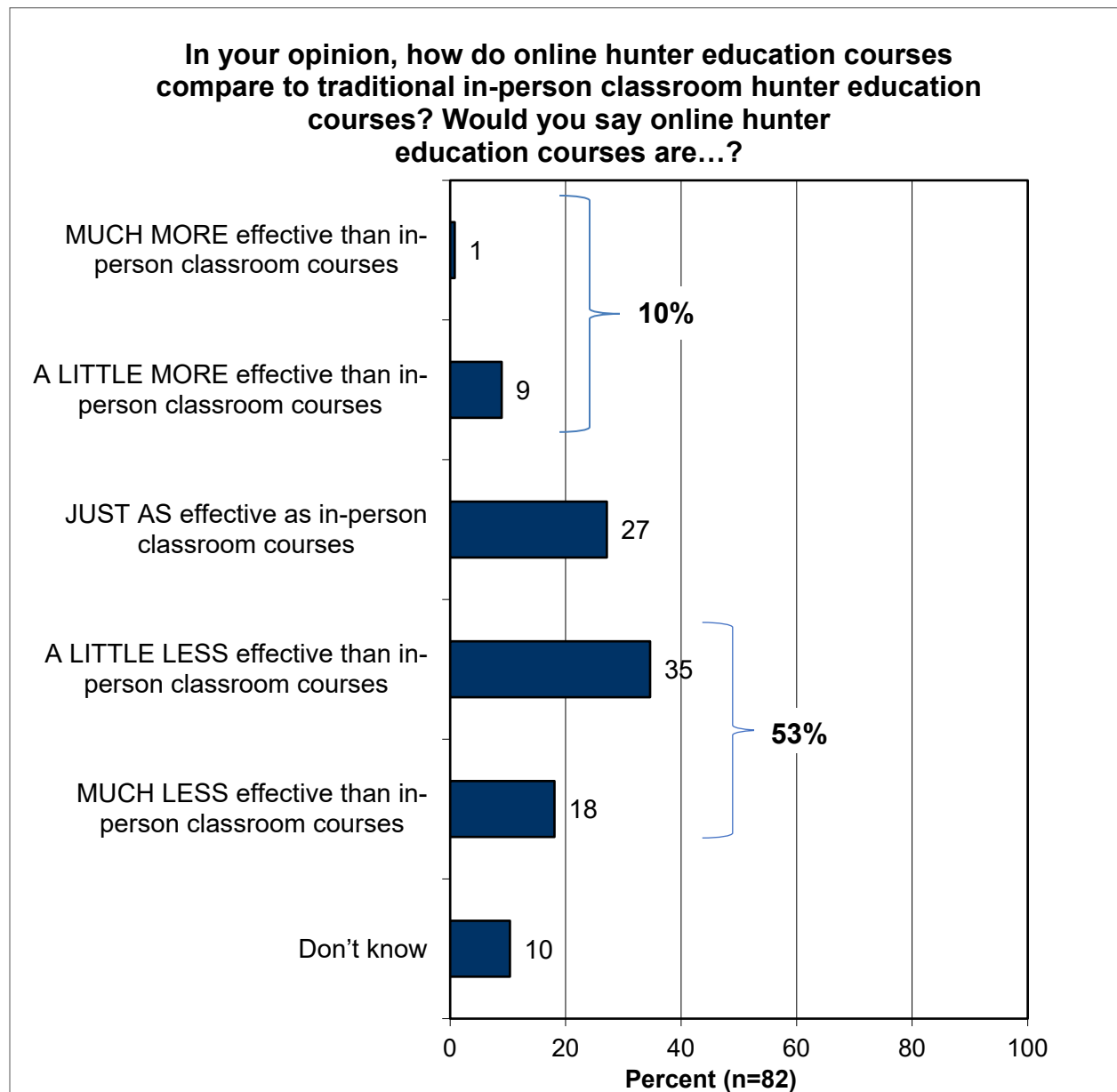
The most common changes made to hunter education programs as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic include cancelling in-person courses and/or moving to online-only courses (41% of states/territories made this change) and adding an online-only course option (36%).

Other common changes made include limiting class sizes to practice social distancing (18%), lowering the minimum age for online hunter education courses (14%), and adding a virtual field day (12%). Just 15% of the states/territories surveyed indicated not making any changes as a direct result of the pandemic.

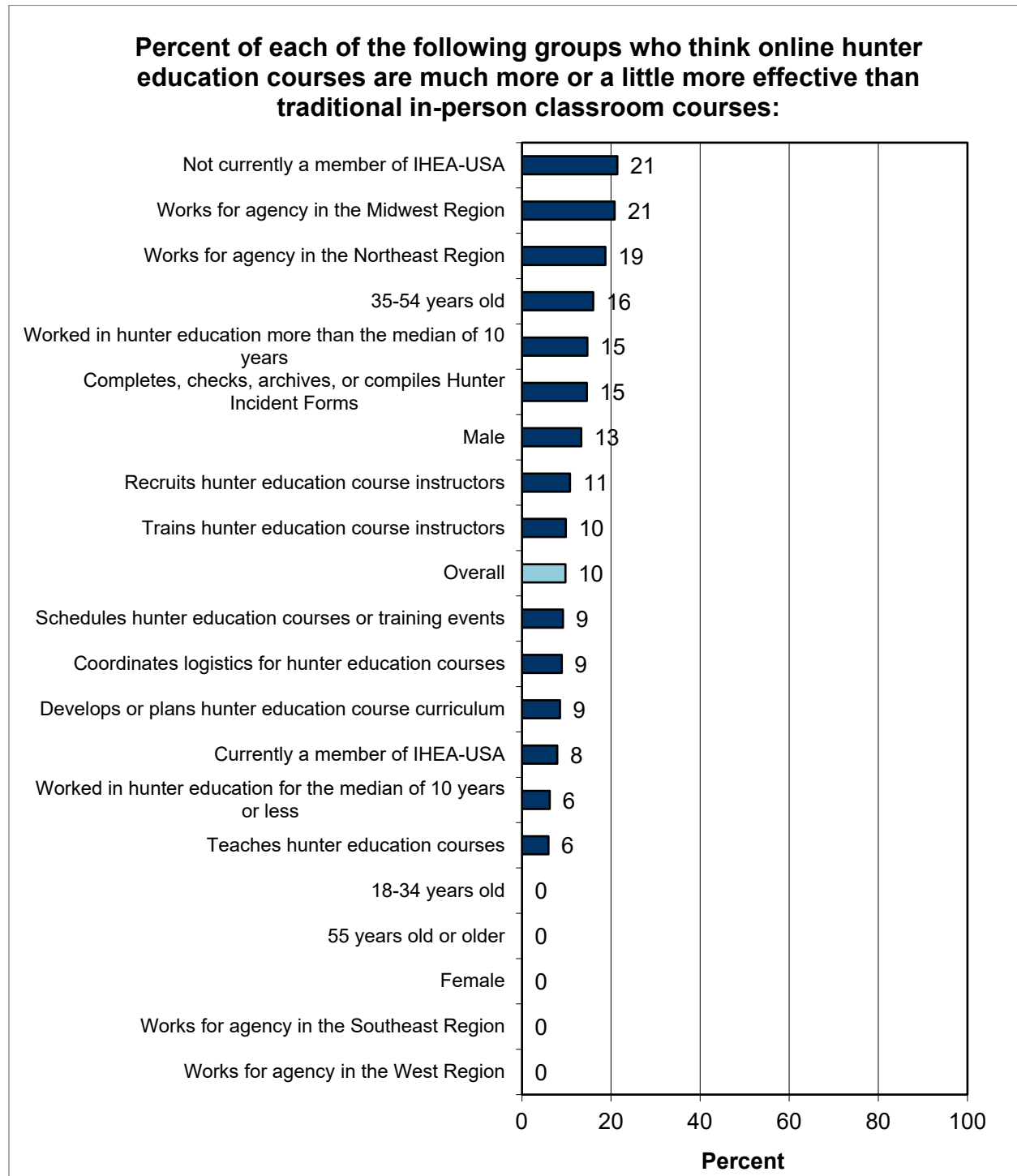


Despite the increase in the supply of and demand for online hunter education courses during the pandemic, a slight majority of hunter education coordinators (53%) feel that online courses are *less* effective than traditional classroom courses.

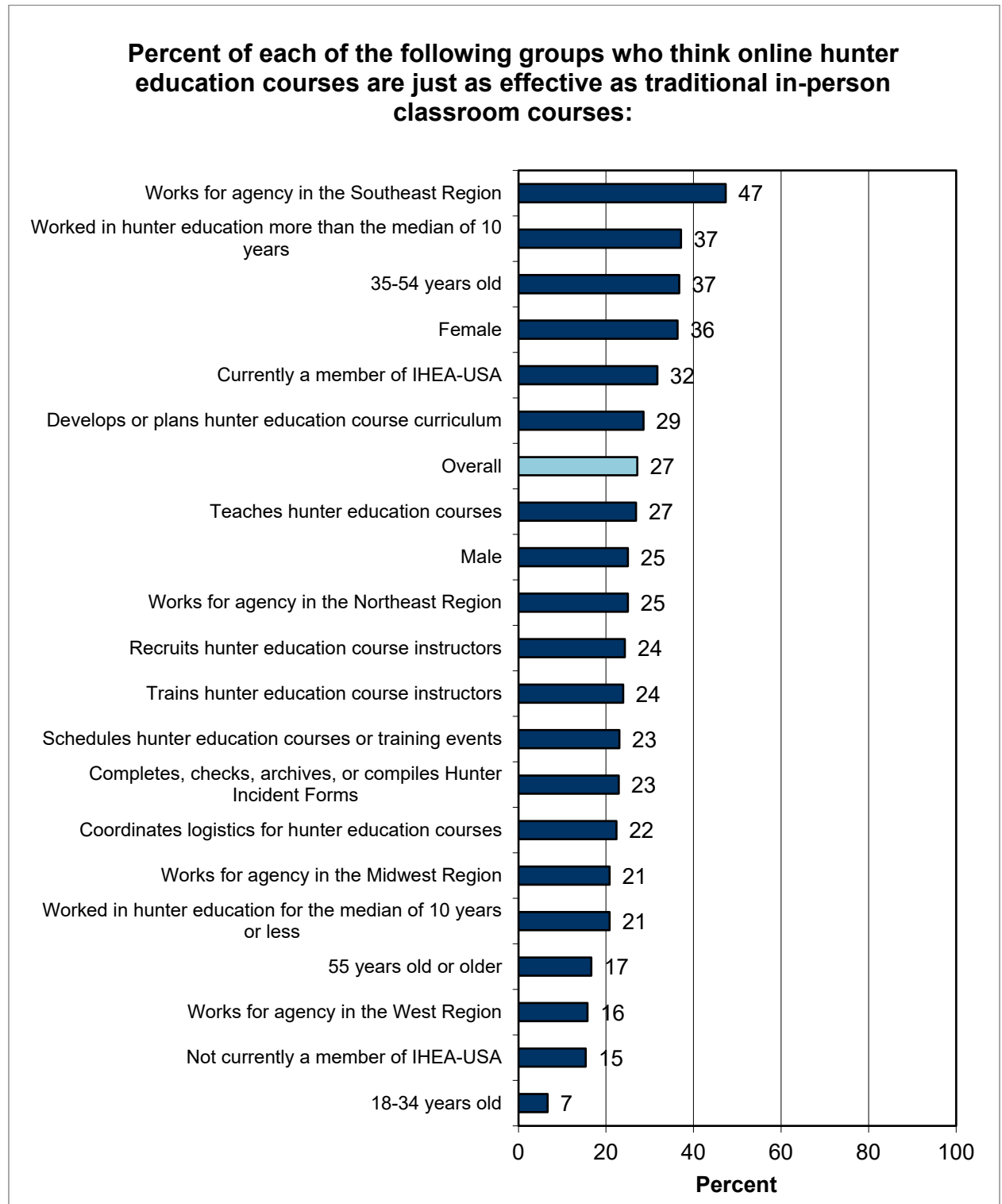
The survey found that 18% of hunter education coordinators think that online courses are *much less* effective, while 35% think they are *a little less* effective than in-person classroom courses. Meanwhile, just 10% of hunter education coordinators think that online courses are *more* effective than in-person classroom courses (including 1% saying *much more* effective and 9% saying *a little more* effective). In the middle are about a quarter of respondents (27%) saying that online courses are *just as* effective as traditional in-person classroom courses.



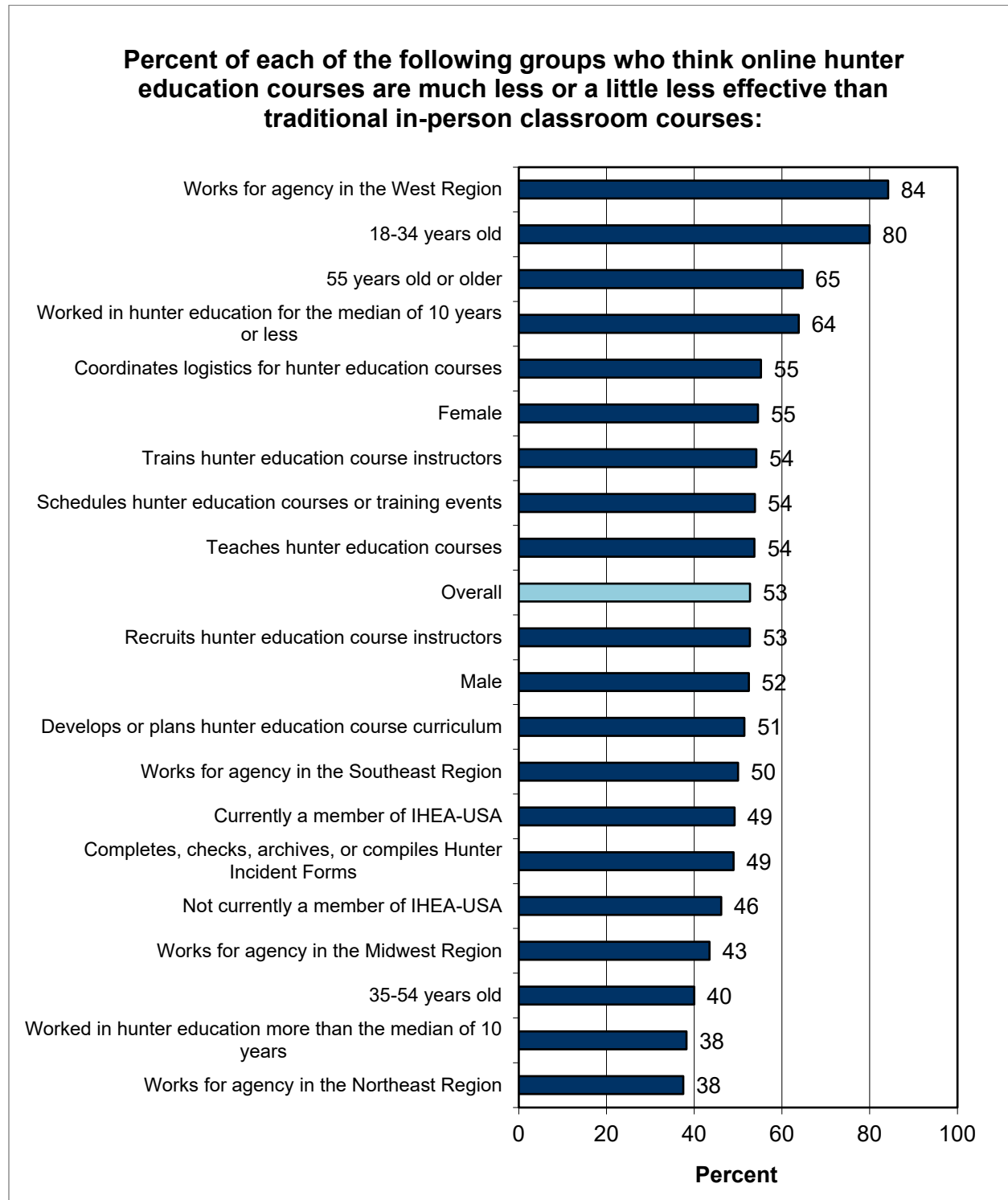
The analysis below shows each of the individual respondent groups (defined by various demographic and professional characteristics) who think that online hunter education courses are *more effective* (either *much more effective* or *a little more effective*) than in-person classroom courses. The groups most likely to hold this opinion include coordinators who are not currently members of IHEA-USA, those working for an agency in the Midwest Region, and those working for an agency in the Northeast Region.



The analysis below shows each of the individual respondent groups who think that online hunter education courses are *just as effective* as in-person classroom courses. The groups most likely to say that online courses are just as effective as classroom courses include coordinators working for an agency in the Southeast Region, those who have worked in hunter education for more than the median of 10 years, those in the middle-age category of 35 to 54 years old, and females.



A final graph in this section breaks down the groups who think that online hunter education courses are *less effective* (either *much less effective* or *a little less effective*) than in-person classroom courses. The groups most likely to hold this opinion include those working for an agency in the West Region, those in the younger age category of 18 to 34 years old, those in the older age category of 55 years old and older, and those who have worked in hunter education for the median of 10 years or less.



Somewhat in contrast to the survey findings, the focus group discussions suggested generally strong support for online courses as a way of providing basic hunter education. Proponents of online hunter education often cited consistency in the curriculum content and delivery, convenience in scheduling, and flexibility for students in terms of being able to complete a course at their preferred pace.

I was not a big advocate to be online; but [it is] consistent and comprehensive, and everybody has the exact same experience, the exact same content.

Online-only really does make sure it's consistent. We have a lesson plan we all follow across the state, but it doesn't always get delivered the way we would like it to [with classroom courses].

The biggest advantage is that [online hunter education] seems to be what the public wants.

Yeah, there's a lot of families out here that are pretty remote. And so you combine how busy kids are with long drive times between sporting events and stuff like that. Being able to give them an online class: it helps break that barrier down of them actually being able to get their hunter safety [certification] to go out hunting. We require that anybody under the age of 16 have a field day...; that's something that we find important here. But the online classroom portion still alleviates a lot of that drive time and makes them only have to commit to 1 day versus a couple nights a week.

The good thing about online is that you don't have to sit and do it all at once. You can do it an hour and come back to it, at your own pace. Let's be honest: people get bored at in-person classes too, depending on your instructor. Some instructors are more dynamic than others. I think that can go either way. And Kalkomey is coming out with a more gamified one.... Like he was saying, it's more expensive; but I think, if you can offer options...if they really want more interaction and are willing to pay for it, or if they don't really like that, they can pay a little less and have more of the click-through-type experience.

At the same time, the focus group discussions also covered some of the perceived drawbacks of online hunter education courses, including the potential for students to become bored or disengaged from the material (especially with “click-through” courses). Also of concern is the possibility that students in online courses may not read material carefully or thoroughly enough. Finally, it was observed that there is often no way to truly verify that the person who completes the online course is the same person who obtains the license and goes hunting. However, most participants suggested that, ideally, both online and in-person hunter education courses can be offered to students as options.

At some point, they have to pass at least a basic safety test, and that's what we're doing with online-only, in my opinion. Here [with this course] is a basic safety awareness. Laws, legal, the shot placement—all the different things that go into it. But, the basic kind of hunter ed, I guess to summarize, is that from a convenience standpoint, the online-only [option] works for most people.

[Online] is very much kind of a click-through.... We don't think students get as much out of it as they would a traditional, in-person class.

We haven't [conducted a demonstration of] the virtual field day yet, but that's definitely coming.

And you know, we've gotten complaints, and we've gotten rid of instructors because of things they've done, and shown, and said in class. The online courses can be consistent...; you know every single person is getting all the information and the same information. Ours is a minimum 7-hour hunter ed course.

We had an issue where a kid took the online course and thought he had completed it. But he did not complete it. And then he went out and purchased a hunting license and shot himself in the foot...; illegally purchased a hunting license and then ended up shooting himself in the foot. I mean, he just didn't read..., [and] you cannot guarantee that someone is not just clicking through.

If you asked our instructors, [they would say that] you have no idea that the person who actually is doing the course is the one who is getting certified. Is mom sitting there doing the course for the 13-year-old?

I like to be able to offer our customers choices. I know I learn better in person.

We have timers right now [to make sure students are not clicking through the course too quickly]. Unfortunately, we have a state law that requires the course be 10 hours.... It's creating problems for students because they get bored, they get lost, they're done with that particular unit [despite the timer keeping them on the page].

TRENDS IN HUNTER EDUCATION STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

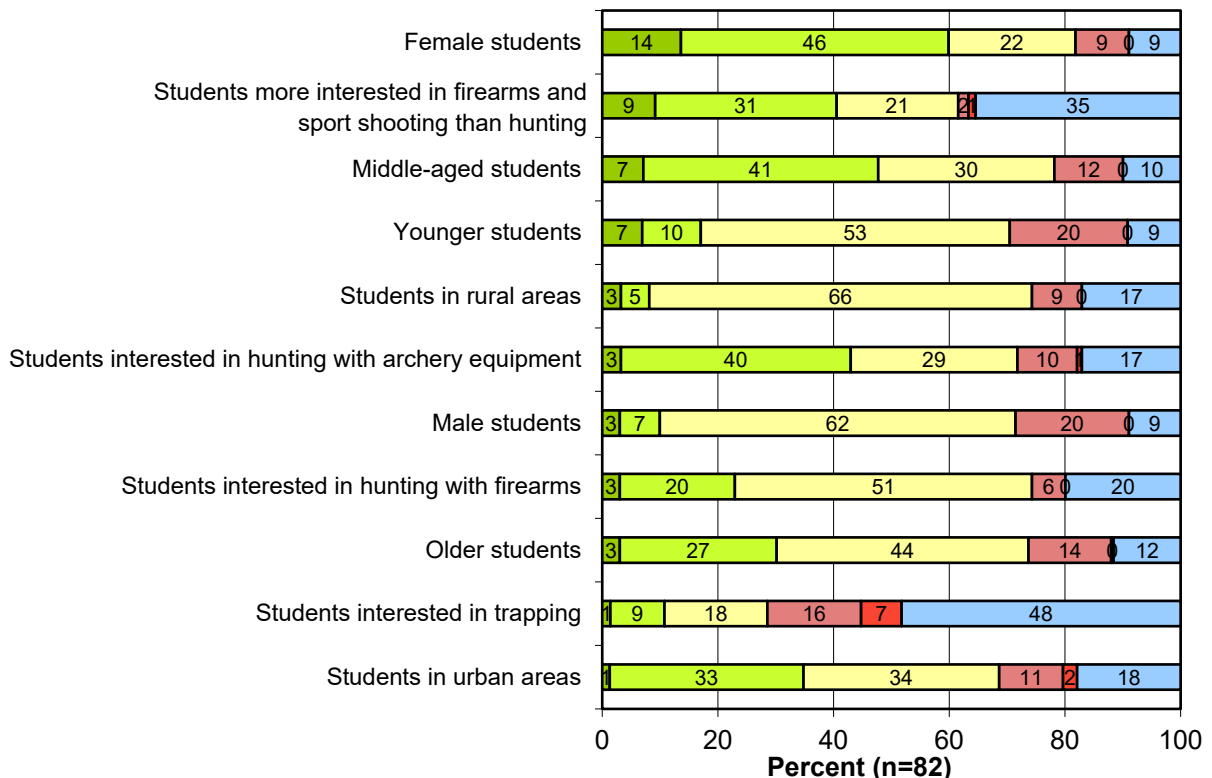
Many hunter education courses are seeing increased enrollment from females, middle-aged students, students interested in hunting with archery equipment, students more interested in firearms and sport shooting than hunting, and students in urban areas.

The survey looked at trends in the categories of hunter education students who are enrolling now compared to 5 years ago. There are several categories that appear to be on the rise: female students (60% of coordinators indicated there are *a lot more* or *somewhat more* of them enrolling today compared to 5 years ago), middle-aged students (48%), students interested in hunting with archery equipment (43%), students more interested in firearms and sport shooting than hunting (41%), and students in urban areas (35%). Note, however, that another 35% of coordinators are unsure whether the number of students more interested in firearms and sport shooting than in hunting has increased, decreased, or stayed the same.

Meanwhile, over the same time period, there appears to have been little change in the numbers of students in rural areas, male students, younger students, students interested in hunting with firearms, and older students enrolling in hunter education courses.

Regarding the types of individuals enrolling in hunter education courses, please indicate whether there are more, about the same number, or fewer of each of the following categories in hunter education courses in your state / territory now compared to 5 years ago:

■ A lot more ■ Somewhat more ■ About the same number ■ Somewhat fewer ■ A lot fewer ■ Don't know



A number of hunter education coordinators who participated in the focus groups had observed an increase in female hunter education students in recent years; others mentioned having observed an increase in adults enrolling specifically in online hunter education over the past few years. However, at least a few people commented that the average makeup of in-person classroom courses in their state today is beginning to resemble the makeup of courses before the pandemic (i.e., mostly younger white males and fewer adult students). As a side note, one person commented that increased enrollment among female students correlated with a change in course venue from gun clubs to libraries and state outdoor education centers.

Despite evident increases in course enrollment by females and adults, some focus group participants acknowledged that it is still impossible to tell whether course graduates are going on to purchase licenses and hunt after completing hunter education—this was commonly blamed on limitations in software and database systems. One state solved this problem by requiring every person who begins an online hunter education course to first register through a system that assigns the student a unique customer number.

A few coordinators in the focus groups suggested that there has been an increase in hunter education students who are completing a course solely or mostly to obtain a concealed carry permit; however, they noted that any exposure to instruction on conservation, hunter ethics, and firearms safety is a good thing (regardless of the student's motivations), as it is likely to increase awareness of and support for wildlife management and the overall work of the agencies.

I've been doing this for 20 years, and we've seen no change [in student demographics]. Our average student is now and always has been male, white, and thirty.

When I started, it was 17% female. And through the course of time, we're seeing pretty close to 30% now in female demographics. We're also seeing some diversity coming into our programs.... But one demographic that we're just not seeing a huge climb in [is] the African-American community.

We're up with females. We're also up with the older demographics.

We did see, with COVID, a significant spike in adult participation in hunter education. What we have likened that to is that everything was shut down. Nobody did anything. So, concealed carry, we believe, has taken the bulk of our adult population coming into hunter education; hence...37% of our graduates don't go on to buy a hunting license or do anything.

I do think it helps students who are coming through [hunter education] who don't want to hunt for them to understand what our agency is, what we do, to learn what conservation is about. I consider that a win for our hunter ed program.

We find that there is a percentage of people sometimes here in hunter ed that are just here to get the firearms chapter and take the test at the end. But if you can spread the good word about conservation and what we do, sometimes you get people who show up in these other programs and they're like, "Well, I wasn't really thinking about going in this direction, but now that I'm here, [I will consider getting into hunting]."

Since COVID, the numbers of online students are going up. We're looking at 60% to 70% adults weekly taking hunter ed. So, that's been a change.

It's not just a small percentage, a high percentage of our new hunters are 25 to 36 [years old]. We're definitely seeing a movement with a lot more female participation statewide.

I want to say 10 or 15 years ago roughly 80-90% of our students were male. And here in the last 8 to 10 years, probably not even 5 to 10 years, we are up to almost 50/50 now with female students.

In [state] we have seen an uptick in females taking our courses.

We've seen an uptick in women, adults, and children. Prior to October 2020, you had to be 18 to take our online-only course. In October 2020 we opened it up to any age, so that obviously changed numbers. But what we have also noticed is that a decent percentage of our completions do not go on to purchase a license.

Here in [state] our numbers [are] pretty similar. The number of women has been going up, [those] that are taking it for the first time, and the age demographic has definitely been inching up.... It's been rising over the last 20 years. I wouldn't be able to give you an exact number or ratio, but it's definitely not one or two per class anymore. It's a lot closer to the 50/50 than it ever has been. We've also seen more women start to take it over the last 2 years since COVID happened; and less men are taking it.

I don't have the statistics right here in front of me, but [we saw an increase in] women getting online and taking one of our online course options. I think the [course] from Kalkomey was the more favored course by women and adults. Here in [state], you don't have to have hunter ed after you turn 18, unless you're going to hunt on one of our military installations or you're going to go hunt somewhere else. But we saw a huge increase in adult hunters taking online hunter ed here. Normally, it would be that 12 to 16 years of age [category] that would really gravitate to online once it became available. But we saw a pretty good jump in adults taking our online courses.

CHALLENGES AND ISSUES THAT AFFECT DELIVERY OF HUNTER EDUCATION

The most pressing issues currently affecting delivery of hunter education are instructor recruitment and the inability of program coordinators to provide hunter education graduates with the next steps to encourage hunting. However, these appear to be issues of moderate, but not major, concern.

The survey explored the importance of 21 different potential issues that may affect delivery of hunter education. Fortunately, none of the potential issues appear to be *major* problems, as none of them rated higher than a mean of 6.6 on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 means not a problem at all and 10 means a major problem. Otherwise, the top ranked issues based on mean rating include hunter education instructor recruitment (mean rating of 6.6) and inability or difficulty providing hunter education graduates with the next steps to encourage hunting (mean rating of 6.1).

Of moderate importance are five issues with mean ratings around the midpoint: not enough diversity among hunter education instructors (5.5), not enough support staff for hunter education programs (5.5), hunter education instructor retention (5.3), not enough in-person classroom hunter education courses (5.1), and excessive lecturing in courses without enough interaction or practical activities with students (5.0).

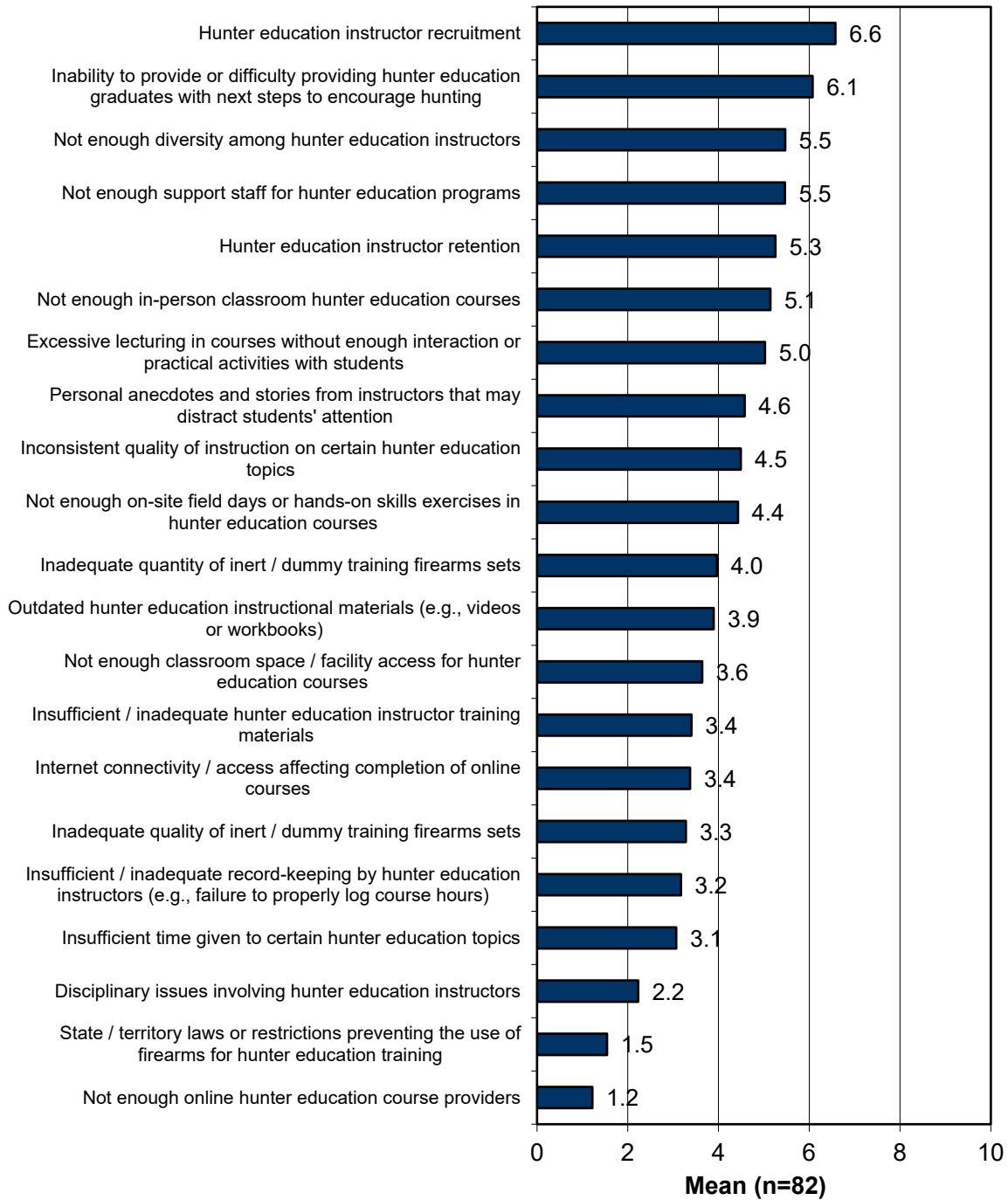
Three other items with mean ratings below 5.0 but above 4.0 include issues specific to course instruction: personal anecdotes and stories from instructors that may distract students' attention (4.6), inconsistent quality of instruction on certain hunter education topics (4.5), and not enough on-site field days or hands-on skills exercises in hunter education courses (4.4).

Least problematic of all are three issues with mean ratings of 2.2 or less: disciplinary issues involving hunter education instructors (2.2), laws or restrictions preventing the use of firearms for hunter education training (1.5), and not enough online hunter education course providers (1.2).

An open-ended follow-up question (in which coordinators could respond with anything that came to mind) identified a handful of further issues, some of which were related to items asked about in the survey:

- The need for more diversity among hunter education instructors was mentioned by several respondents as an issue related to instructor recruitment.
- Issues related to agency support (such as knowledge of hunter education and allocation of adequate staff for hunter education efforts) were mentioned by several respondents.
- A few people discussed the need for updated course resources, such as training videos or inert demonstration firearms.
- Some respondents cited time-related issues, such as last-minute enrollment cancellations by individuals who end up committing to other activities instead of hunter education.

Please rate each of the following potential issues that may affect delivery of hunter education in your state / territory, on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not a problem at all and 10 is a major problem.



Are there any other issues that affect delivery of hunter education in your state/territory? If so, what are they?
Lack of instructor training.
Gaining interest of younger / more diverse volunteer instructor pool. Many feel they don't have enough experience to teach basic hunter education or especially the advanced courses offered.
We have state-issued computers that aren't equipped to work with DVDs, projectors, etc., so we have to bring personal equipment, borrow equipment, or not be able to use videos, power points, etc.
Interested employees to teach them.
Perceived apathy / indifference / lack of knowledge from agency personnel outside of educators.
Distances to get to meet in person with instructors in some areas. Need new examination / evaluation processes and products that are electronic and not manual.
The biggest issue I see is time. People tend to plan activity more and more these days and time is limited. Many times, students schedule to attend a class then cancel or just don't show up because of other interests or other activities that outweigh attending the class.
Public fails to use the spring and summer for HE, and when they get serious in the fall they cannot find a course. [Some areas] need instructors.
We are currently going through an agency change in volunteer policy, which is dramatically impacting our hunter education program. But we anticipate this being a temporary (couple of years) impact that we will rebound from. We rely almost exclusively on volunteers conducting our courses. There are only two agency dedicated staff members in the Hunter Education Program.
We use the "Last Shot" video at the beginning of every hunter ed class due to its messaging. We would love to have an updated version to show students. We use the non-functional Remington and Mossberg sets in every class. Our Remington sets are at the end of their lives and the Mossberg sets don't hold up as well as the Remington sets. We will need to begin purchasing more in the next few years to replace our current sets.
We are finally seeing a shift with instructors accepting the online and hybrid models of teaching hunter education and firearm safety. However, there are still roadblocks with some that don't believe students can learn from an online format at all.
Recruitment of younger, more diverse volunteers.
Instructor availability.
Competition with other extracurricular activities like athletics.
Hard to find a location that allows a course. Can only use inerts; no live fire allowed.
Competing with states that have online-only courses open to all nonresidents.
Lack of instructors and diversity of instructors.
Hunter education in schools just became law, so delivery for that will be difficult.
The greatest challenge I face is the "buy in" of the online courses from our long-standing instructors. This has been challenging, as many think that their way is the best way.
Need more field staff, funding, and admin staff for program.
For in-person classes, some rural areas don't have enough instructors. This causes people to have to travel to get courses.
Instructor cliques that prevent new instructors from coming in and learning. Yet, people will express a need for more instructors.
Administration reassigns staff to competing event on the same day.
Just interest and knowledge.
None, we had over 1,000 instructors pre-COVID, now we're just under 1,000.
Once again, standards and next steps.
The lack of demo firearms will quickly become an issue, if they are not available then we will not be able to hold in-person skills sessions. IHEA could speak on behalf of all states.
The need to diversify and recruit younger instructors / mentors is our greatest need.

In the focus groups, a substantial amount of discussion was devoted to the topic of volunteer instructors “aging out” and the resulting need for the agencies to recruit new instructors—the need to diversify the instructor corps was often mentioned as a related issue, with a few people discussing examples of older instructors failing to engage younger students (it was noted that some older instructors can be “lecture-heavy” in their approach and may not adapt quickly to newer interactive course activities). Related issues cited in the focus groups included older instructors not always ending classes on time or not always adhering to state guidelines in curriculum content. One focus group participant suggested the creation of an online clearinghouse with templates for volunteer training, especially training to help older instructors become comfortable with newer resources and technologies.

Instructor *retention* was often discussed separately from instructor *recruitment*, with some focus group participants suggesting that retention has become a more pressing issue than recruitment. It was noted that some volunteer instructors who had health-related concerns during the pandemic about teaching in-person courses had dropped out of teaching hunter education altogether; others had lapsed in their participation due to the inactivity as classroom courses were canceled or put on hold. Some coordinators noted that, if demand for in-person courses were to return to pre-pandemic levels, they would likely not have enough volunteer instructors to meet the need.

Also mentioned was the issue of returning volunteer instructors having a hard time adapting to the changes that agencies had implemented during COVID-19, particularly changes that impacted the curriculum content. It was observed that long-time instructors sometimes had difficulty adjusting to major changes in course format or approach.

I got some instructors that, if I knew somebody was going to their class, I'd probably recommend them to go to the online-only class [instead].

Our volunteer base is aging out. We're seeing it happen here pretty quick.

I think one of our concerns in [state] is we don't have a very diverse instructor corps.... [We have] a lot of older individuals...and mostly males.... It's concerning because it doesn't really reflect our population.

They're old.... They're getting really old.

The other issue we've had is...our volunteer base is definitely on the older generation, and [we are] trying to [get them to] incorporate new things...and appeal to the new learner.... It's been really, really challenging. You know folks that need pieces, small pieces of information, versus large chunks. It's been more challenging trying to get a new type of mentor instructor.

We've really been pushing more towards [an instructional approach in which] it's not war stories and hunting stories. You're following the lesson plans, and this is what you need to do, and this gets the students out on time. And we've lost some of our longtime instructors because they just have different habits; and some of that we've just come to terms with. And as we bring new instructors in, they get on board with this is what we're doing...and not that we want to lose all of those memories and the longtime instructors, but we've been able to pull some of them into helping out with our shooting sports or different classes where they don't have to hit on X, Y, Z necessarily to get that consistency.... We work really hard on our lesson plans and just trying to get [volunteer instructors] to follow those.

Another thing we're struggling with is some of those volunteers that are just hanging on a little too long, and it's actually creating a culture problem within their communities. So, I see it as a three-pronged approach: getting the new ones, maintaining the ones that we want to maintain, and then slowly phasing out some of the problem children. All three of them have to be handled equally.

We've been trying to push some of those folks into volunteering in other ways.

We're slowly starting to think about volunteer turnover with [instructors] aging out—how do we get new, younger instructors in? We're going to be thinking and really digging into how do we bring new instructors on board in the future.

We need to recruit but [also], how do we retain them after they've been off with online [courses] only, and get them back into the play of things?

Maybe in a diversity sense—our instructors apply by going online to our website and that just starts the process, and it goes from there. It seems to work pretty well. But if IHEA could help us with getting the information to the right groups in a way that they trust, and so that they then go to our website, that might be helpful. We've not been very successful with that at our state level.

A new [program] that we created is essentially very similar to BOW, but it's for anybody, so male, female, any gender..., and what we heard was through the BOW program a lot of females wanted to come with a male counterpart or, you know, just males wanting to get these same skills as well. But we're utilizing those as feeder programs to become an instructor, and we've seen a lot of success with that when they come in and they gain comfort, but then they realize a passion they didn't realize they had [for] shooting or archery or things like that—and that's our strongest increase for female participation for instructors.

Volunteer compliance was another issue noted by several focus group participants: aspects of this issue included consistency in curriculum delivery (including getting instructors to adhere to state standards), getting instructors to properly log hours (i.e., to ensure accurate federal matching funds for the program), and dealing with federal audits requiring a hand signature on every volunteer timecard (the latter issue was singled out as a major logistical challenge, and one focus group participant shared an example of challenging federal authorities on this requirement by referring to the Code of Federal Regulations).

It should be noted that several focus group participants across the groups mentioned the issue of volunteer instructor compliance with logging hours to obtain matching funds. It was mentioned that some volunteer instructors may not properly document their hours because they do not fully understand the state electronic system used to enter hours, or because they do not understand the importance of obtaining matching funds.

We pretty much fund our program from federal funds based on the match for their hours, the value of their hours. So we have to find something for [volunteer instructors] to do—that's part of the reason we're moving into more of the advanced-type courses.

My biggest challenge is volunteer compliance. A couple of years ago we started claiming volunteer hours as in-kind match and convincing [instructors] that it's important to log in and claim your hours.... But trying to convince them that it's important to go in and claim those hours, because we're bringing federal dollars back to [state] by claiming them as income, that's been really difficult for us. That part of my job is probably the most difficult.

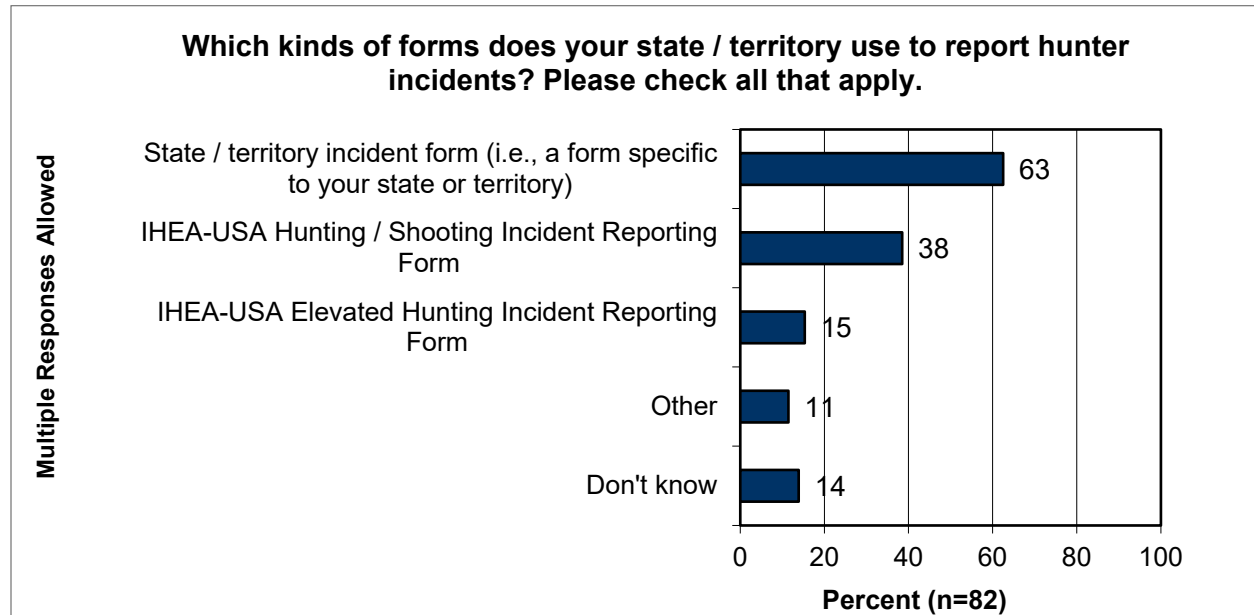
But the feds want each instructor to literally sign a timecard. And with everyone going more electronic, the lead instructor enters everyone's time into Event Manager.

We did go through an audit 3 years or so ago. Our agency auditor scoured the federal laws and basically pushed back on the feds and said, "I don't see where it is.... I know you want us to do this, but it's not in law. So, I'm sorry, but this is how we do it, and until it's federal law, you can't make us do it." That finding never made it into our final audit report. So, we haven't changed yet.

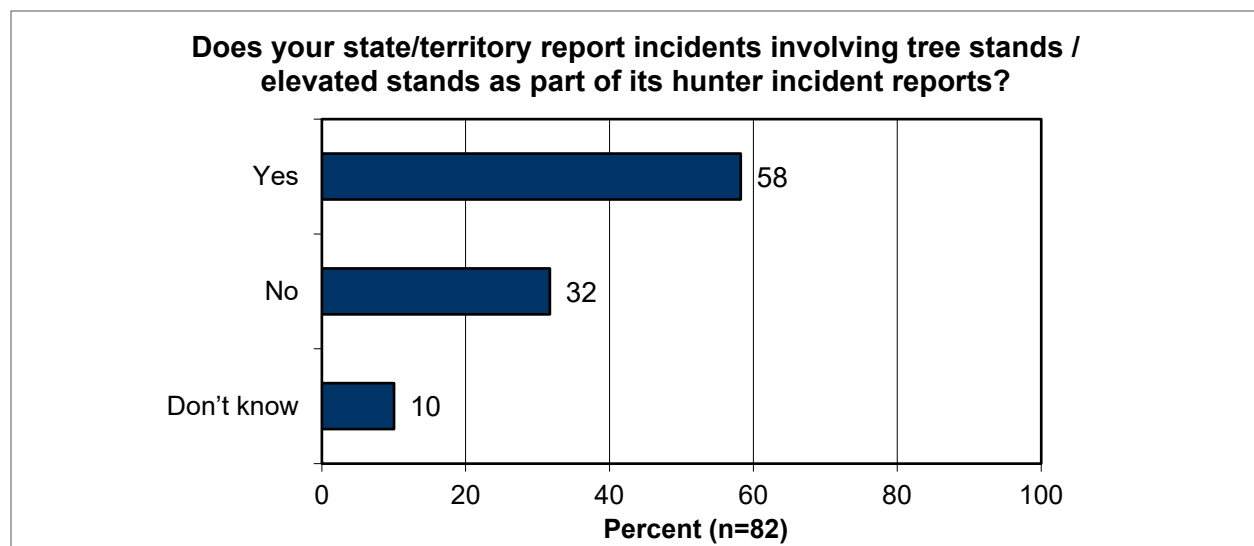
HUNTER INCIDENT REPORTING

The survey looked at aspects of hunter incident reporting, including the forms used to report incidents, the types of incidents reported, and whether incident data are sent to IHEA-USA.

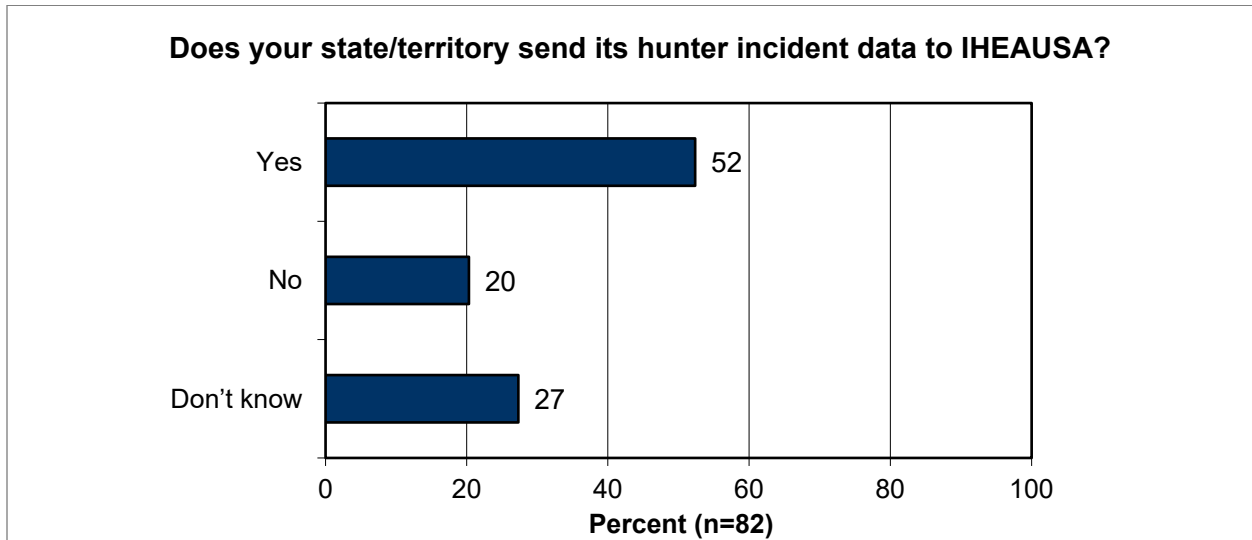
To report hunter incidents, states/territories most commonly use a form specific to their state or territory (63% do this). Only about a third (38%) use the IHEA-USA Hunting/Shooting Incident Reporting Form. The IHEA-USA Elevated Hunting Incident Reporting Form is much less commonly used (just 15% of states/territories use this form).



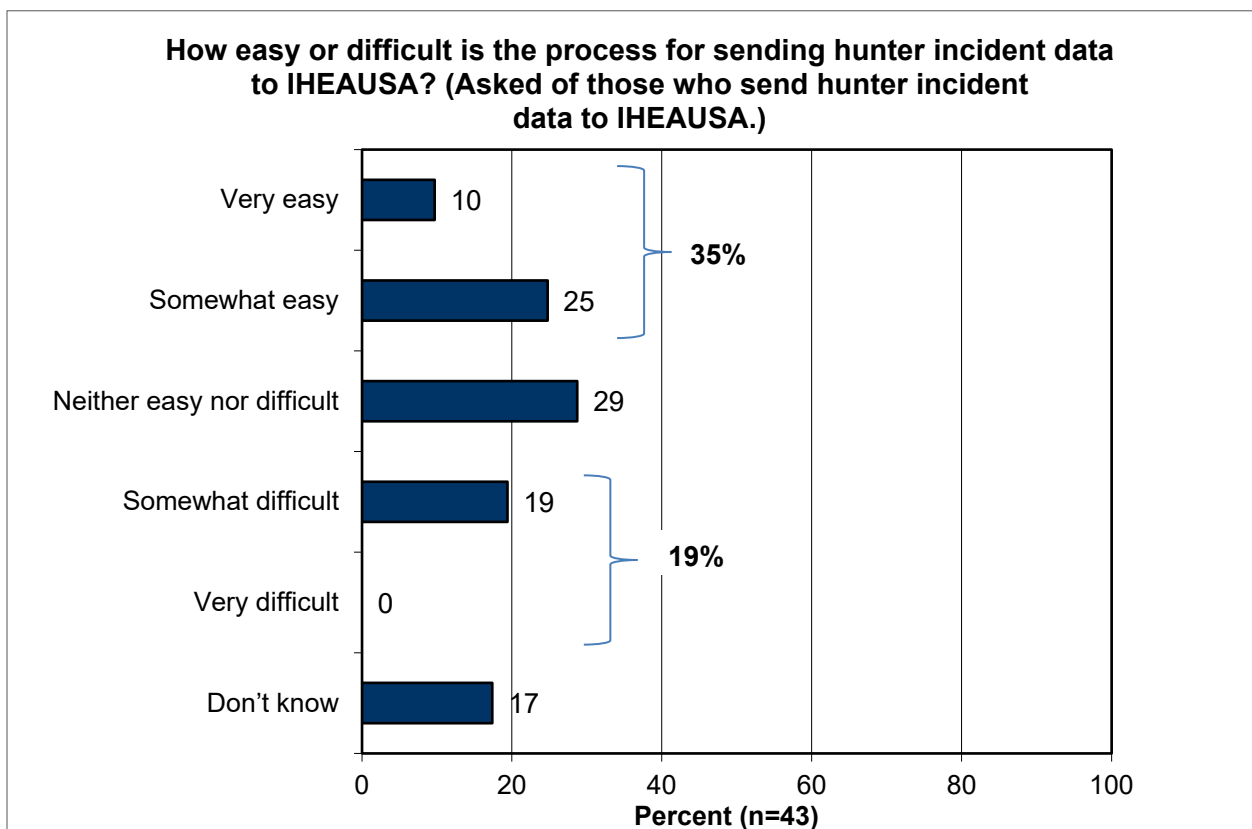
Just over half of the states/territories (58%) report incidents involving tree stands or elevated stands as part of their hunter incident reports. (Note that 10% of those surveyed were unsure whether their agency reports tree stand/elevated stand incidents.)



Only about half of the states/territories (52%) send their hunter incident data to IHEA-USA. (Again, a sizable percentage of those surveyed—27% in this case—were unsure whether their hunter incident data are sent to IHEA-USA.)

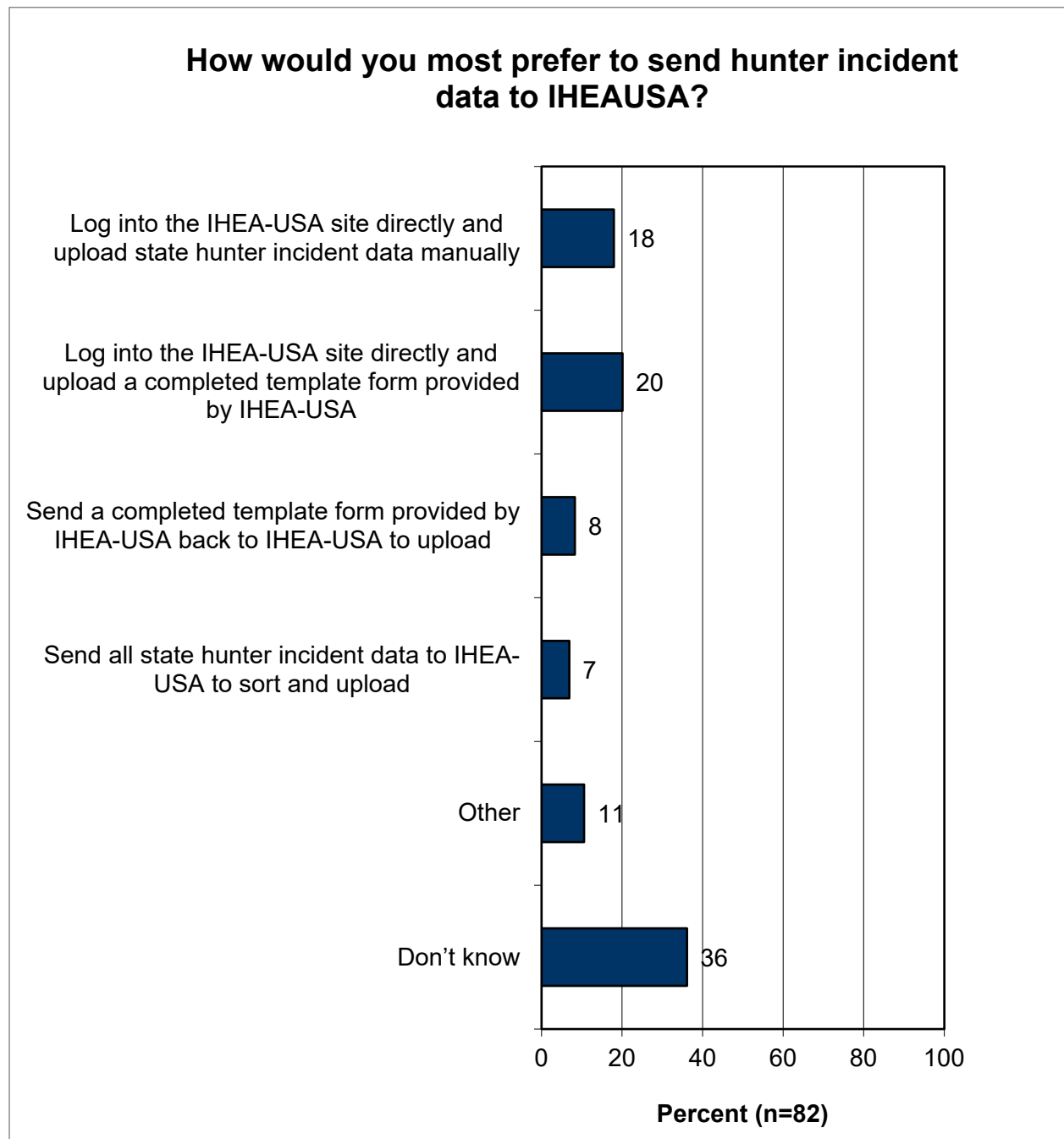


Among those who send hunter incident data to IHEA-USA, about a third (35%) say it is easy to do so (although it is more often described as *somewhat* easy rather than *very* easy). Another 29% say it is neither easy nor difficult to send the data, while 19% describe the process as *somewhat* difficult (fortunately, no one rated the process as *very* difficult).



In terms of the method of sending hunter incident data to IHEA-USA, hunter education coordinators most commonly prefer an option that would allow them to log into the IHEA-USA site directly.

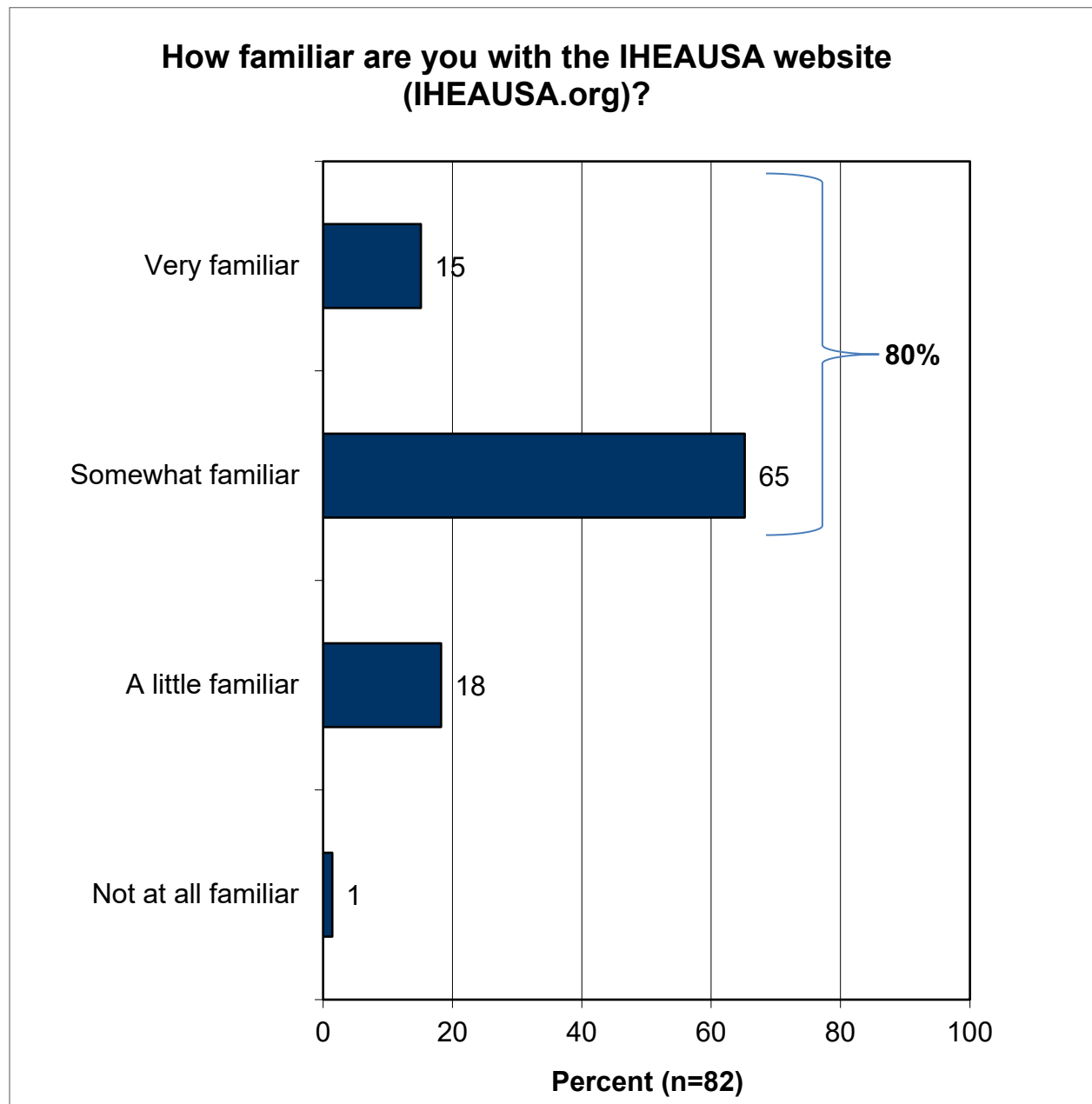
Preferences along these lines are either to log into the site and upload hunter incident data manually (18% of coordinators would prefer this method) or log in and upload a completed template form provided by IHEA-USA (20%). Smaller percentages would prefer to either send a completed template form provided by IHEA-USA back to IHEA-USA to upload (8%) or simply send all hunter incident data to IHEA-USA to sort and upload (7%). Note that more than a third (36%) are unsure or have no preference.



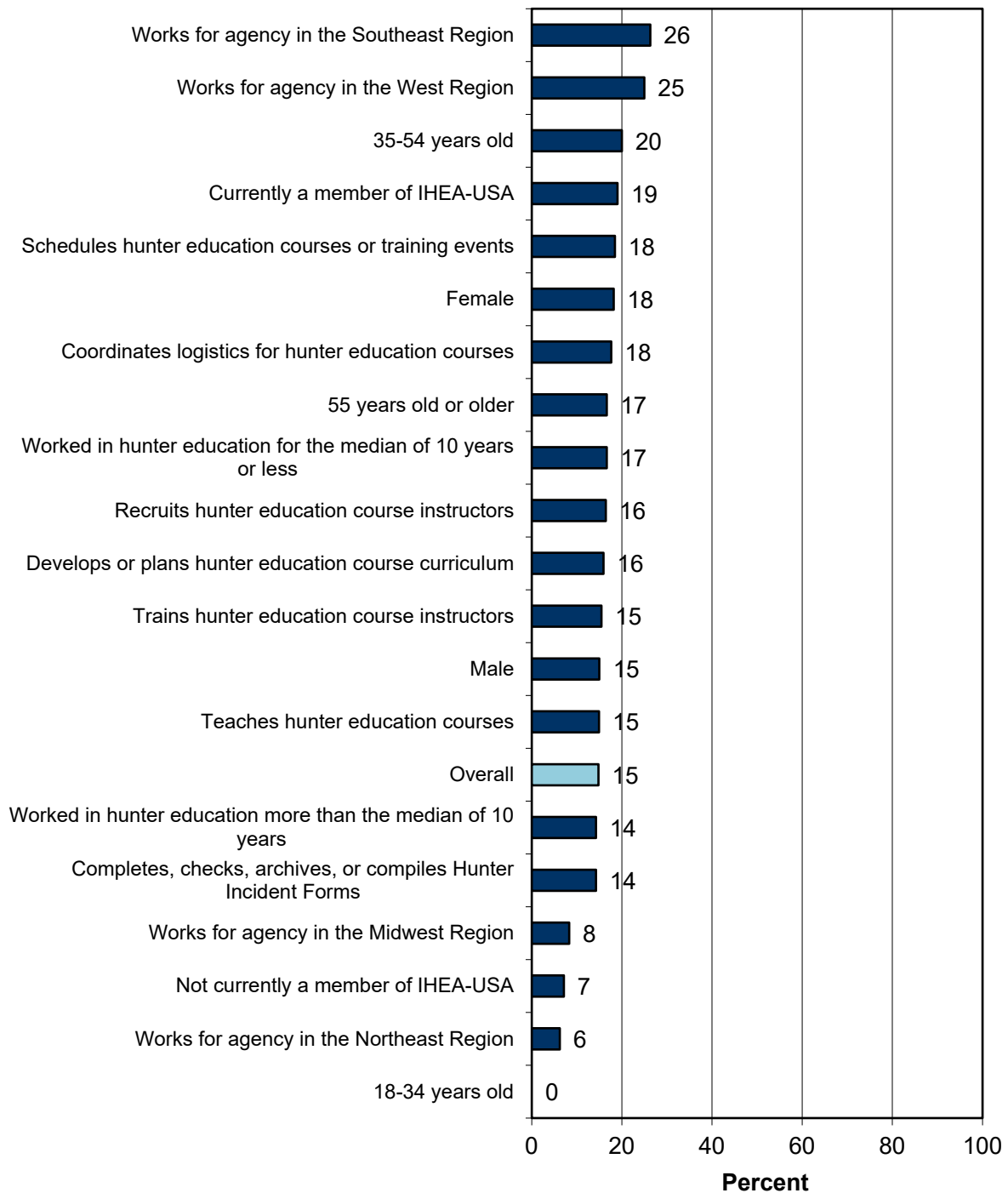
USE OF THE IHEA-USA WEBSITE

Virtually all hunter education coordinators have some degree of familiarity with the IHEA-USA website, with four out of five (80%) being *very* or *somewhat* familiar with the site (15% are *very* familiar).

The graph on the next page shows the percentage of each of the individual groups who are *very* familiar with the IHEA-USA website. As shown in the graph, the groups most likely to be *very* familiar with the website include coordinators in the Southeast Region and the West Region and those in the middle-age category of 35 to 54 years old. (Younger coordinators and those in the Northeast Region are the *least* likely to be very familiar with the IHEA-USA website.)



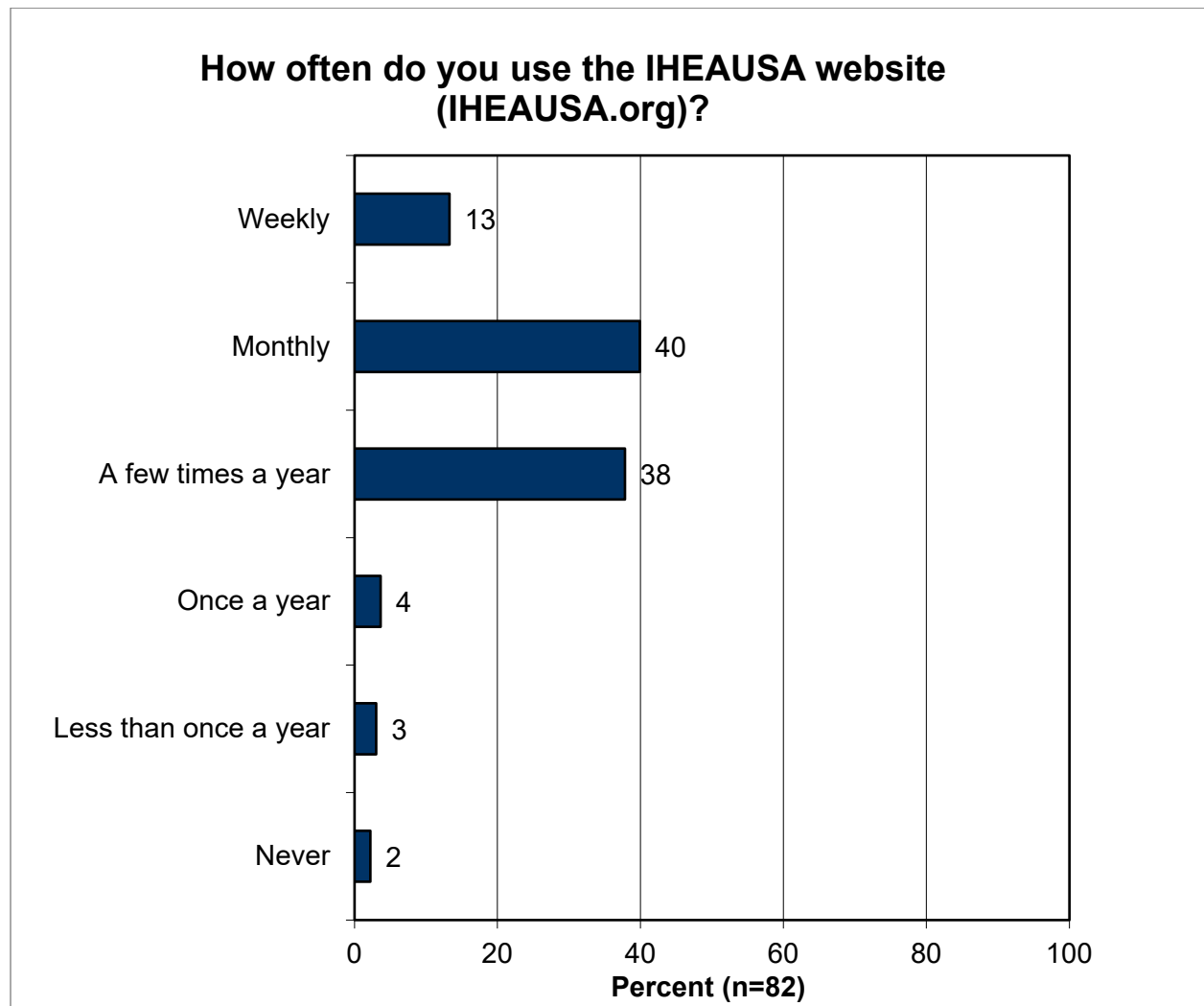
Percent of each of the following groups who are very familiar with the IHEAUSA website:



The vast majority of hunter education coordinators (91%) use the IHEA-USA website at least a few times a year. This includes those who use the site *weekly* (13%), *monthly* (40%) or *a few times a year* (38%).

A table in this section shows the verbatim open-ended comments from coordinators regarding the things on the IHEA-USA website that are the most important or helpful to them. Many of the comments concern resources for instructors, such as instructor incentives and discounts. State-specific contact information for coordinators and instructors was also mentioned several times, as was instructional standards for various types of hunter education courses (firearms, bowhunting, etc.). Other commonly named items include the Hunters Connect video series, the Hunter Incident Database, general news and events for the hunter education community, and training resources for instructors and coordinators.

Some coordinators also offered comments regarding things they need to plan and provide hunter education that they cannot find on the IHEA-USA website: items include a reciprocity document, updated training videos, instructor training and development materials provided in the “Resources” section of the site, an improved instructor discount link, and copies of state-approved hunter education cards.



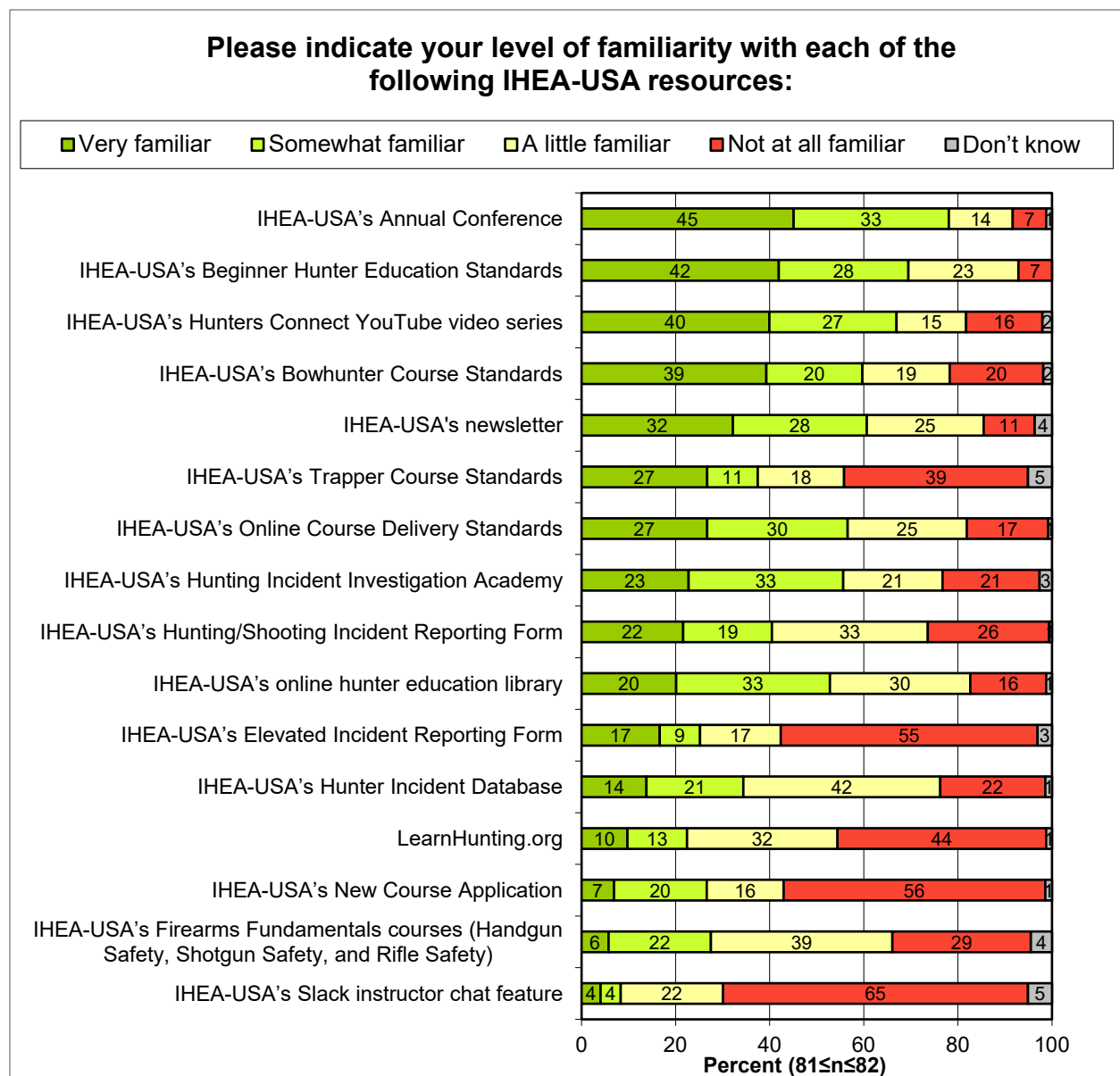
What things on the IHEA-USA website are the most important or helpful to you?
User friendly.
The single most important part of the website was the instructor incentives. Once that disappeared, the instructors were offended and just quit paying any attention to IHEA-USA and went about their business. The instructors feel like they are nicked and dined at every turn, so when they were required to join IHEA-USA and pay their dues in order to be a 'part of the community' that they already volunteer and give so much of their free time and lives to, they felt disenfranchised and most said to heck with it. They enjoyed the perks of being an instructor, but paying extra for them was not that important. Just feedback from the instructor base of [more than 1,000] volunteer instructors.
Programs and assistance.
Discounts for volunteers.
I don't do much with websites, don't have much time. This one wasn't even on my radar.
Resources, knowing how to find discounts since I'm regularly asked about that from instructors.
IHEA-USA events, instructor discounts.
State contacts. Used to visit more often with discounts.
Hunting incident reports. Instructor discounts. Instructor resources (although I admittedly don't utilize them enough). Hunter Connect videos.
List of administrators, resources for instructors.
Reference materials.
Administrator list and contact information. List of state/province hunter education cards from old system.
The online Hunter Ed Library and Hunters Connect.
News release and training aids.
Instructor discounts.
Conference information, contact information of other administrators.
Other states' program point-of-contact information / IHEA standards.
Members content and videos.
Instructors, Hunters Connect, and events.
Hunting incident database.
All of it.
Varies...depending on the month. Contact info of other hunter ed admins, and eventually, when available, having the general database for incidents, number of staff, min. age requirements, state laws.
Hunting incident statistics. Hunter education information by state.
Having open access to instructor discounts for active instructors and not as a membership ploy.
Events, discounts, videos.
The new library showing all the video collections on anything you want.
Events page.
Not sure - gotta get more involved in website.
The ability to look up other state's HE requirements. Pass along the Hunters Connect Videos to students/instructors.
Leopold Discount.
Hunter ed library. Discounts.
Currently, the incident database.
General articles.
Instructor resources and discounts. Conference and networking dates and information. Access to standards and IHEA/AFWA information - content requirements.
Course standards.
Instructor discounts. Hunting incidents. New Information, standards, etc. Contact information by state.
Admin contacts and standards.
Updated training.
Conference information, access to standards for HE, TE and bowhunting.
Info on resources, conferences, training aids, hunting incident database, discounts.
Hunters Connect training videos.
Event information (conference), discounts to instructors, incident database.
Tool kit.
Info on the conference, teaching resources, pro-deal info, and other.
I am too unfamiliar with the site at the moment.
Instructor resources (library); purchasing program; incentives/discounts program.
Instructor resources.
Contact Info of other state agencies and knowing instructor deals.

Are there things that you need to plan and provide hunter education that are not on the IHEA-USA website, or that you cannot find? If so, what are they?
Reciprocity document.
State profiles / data collected by IHEA-USA every year.
Is there a place with / for updated videos?
Yes, field practical tips, suggestions, pictures, layout.
As I mentioned, it would be nice to have instructor training / development available under the Resources tab.
No - anything I need I have or can find. There are additional resources that would be nice to have easier and cleaner access to such as reports, program data, trends, research projects, FAQs that states face (those cyclical things like hunters pink / orange, age minimum, etc.).
Videos that supplement hunter ed material.
Practice firearms.
Have a central place for updated hunter ed videos would be great.
Instructor discount link is horrible.
Copies of state-approved hunter ed cards, as these have been available on the website in the past.
IHEA-USA needs to update and keep updated the accepted hunter education documentation from each state so states can verify hunter education when an out-of-state hunter comes to that state. This is a reciprocity role of IHEA-USA and states' biggest challenge at this time.

FAMILIARITY WITH AND USE OF VARIOUS IHEA-USA RESOURCES

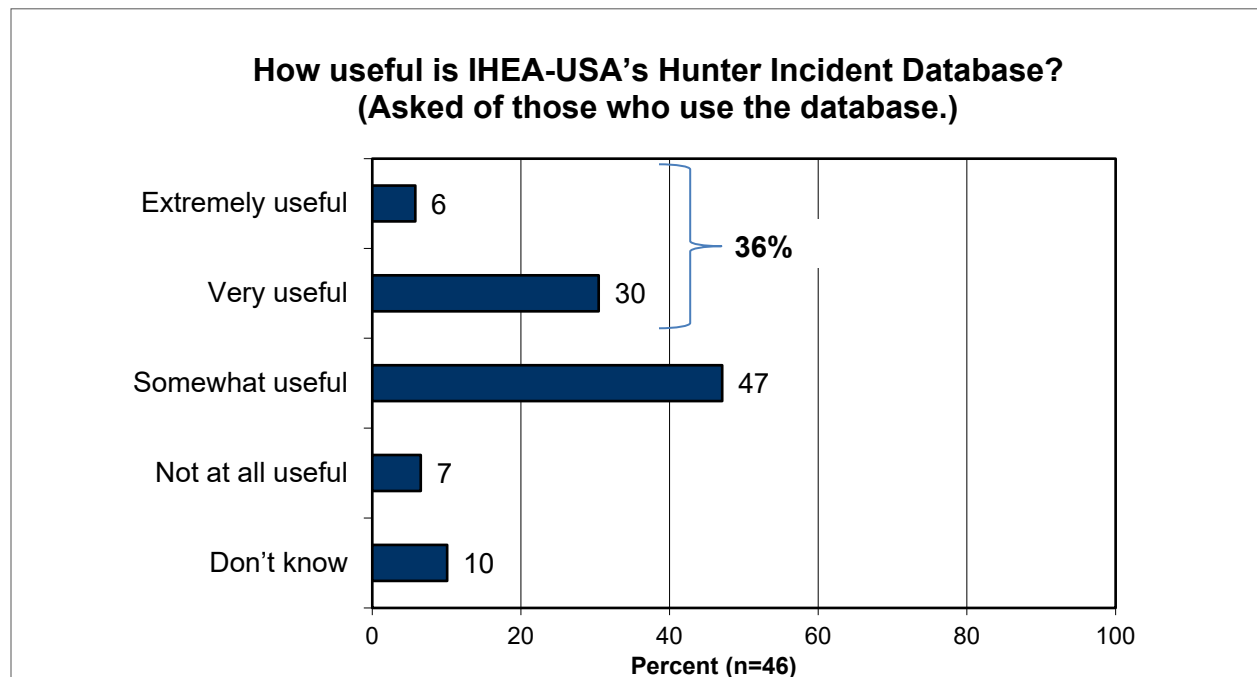
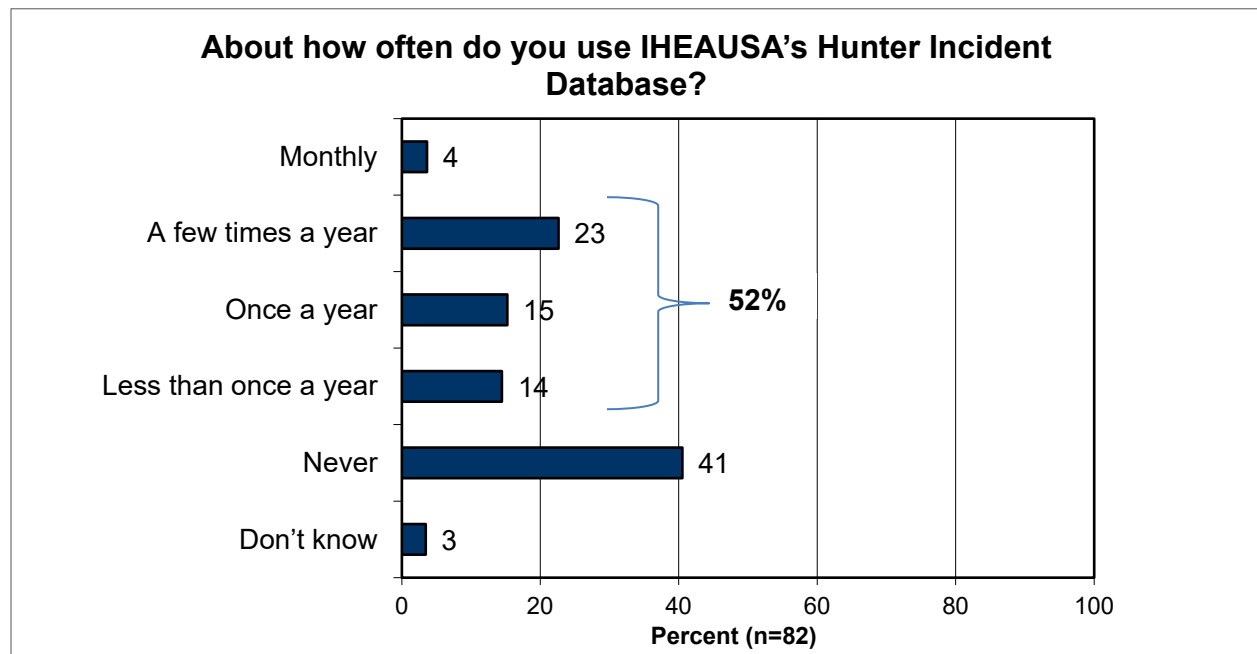
Regarding various IHEA-USA resources, hunter education coordinators are *most* familiar with IHEA-USA's Annual Conference (78% are *very* or *somewhat* familiar, including 45% who are *very* familiar), the Beginner Hunter Education Standards (69% *very* or *somewhat* familiar; 42% *very* familiar), the Hunters Connect YouTube video series (67% *very* or *somewhat* familiar; 40% *very* familiar), the Bowhunter Course Standards (60% *very* or *somewhat* familiar; 39% *very* familiar), and IHEA-USA's newsletter (61% *very* or *somewhat* familiar; 32% *very* familiar).

The IHEA-USA resources with which hunter education coordinators are *least* familiar include the Slack instructor chat feature (65% are *not at all* familiar with this), the New Course Application (56% *not at all* familiar), the Elevated Incident Reporting Form (55% *not at all* familiar), LearnHunting.org (44% *not at all* familiar), and the Trapper Course Standards (39% *not at all* familiar).

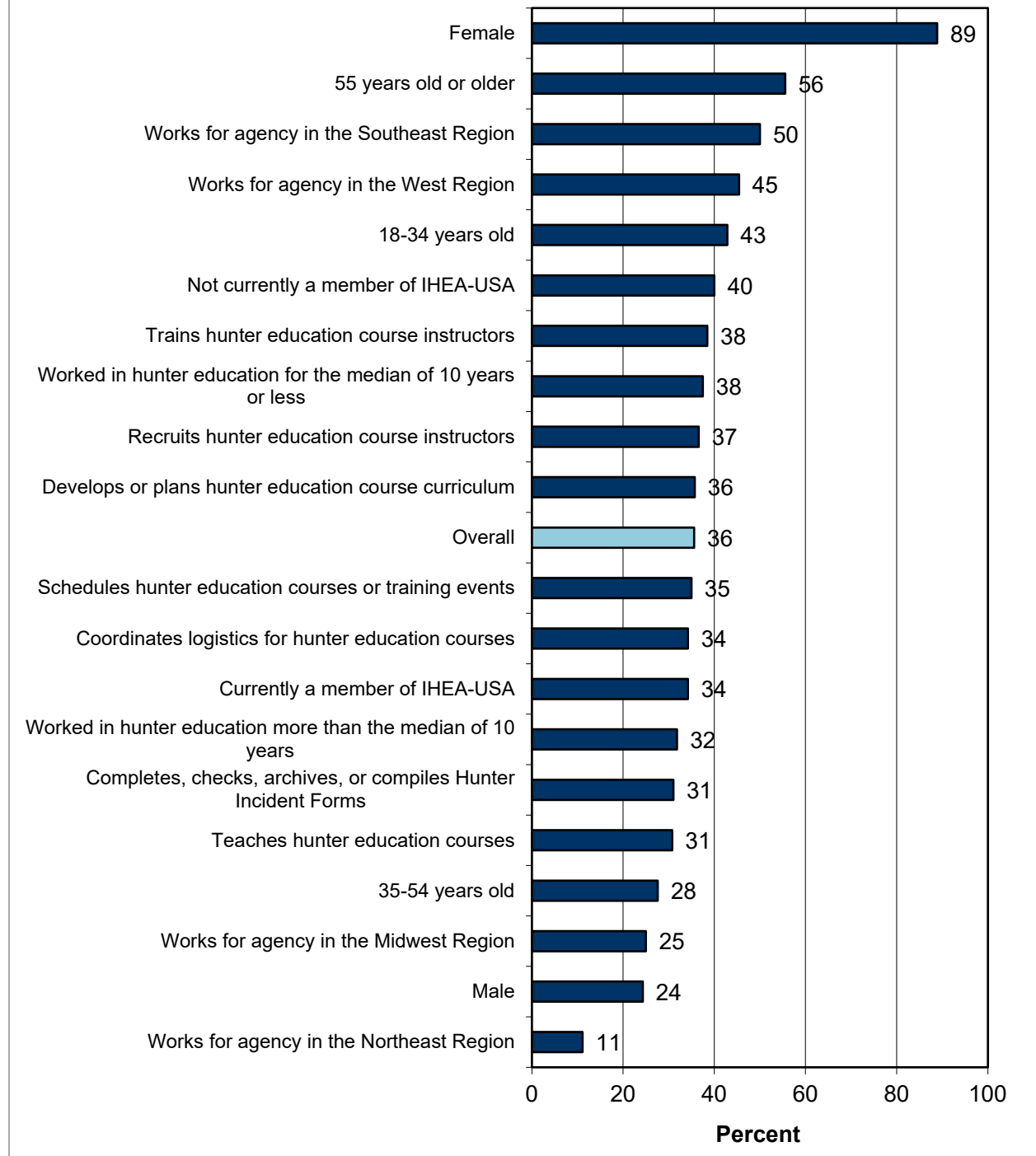


About half of hunter education coordinators (52%) use IHEA-USA’s Hunter Incident Database no more than a few times a year: this includes 23% who use it *a few times a year*, 15% who use it about *once a year*, and 14% who use it *less than once a year*. Another 41% of coordinators say they *never* use the Hunter Incident Database.

Among those hunter education coordinators who use IHEA-USA’s Hunter Incident Database, about a third (36%) describe it as *extremely* or *very* useful, while almost half (47%) say it is *somewhat* useful. As shown in the graph on the next page, those most likely to describe the Hunter Incident Database as *extremely* or *very* useful include female coordinators, those 55 years old or older, and coordinators in the Southeast and West Regions.

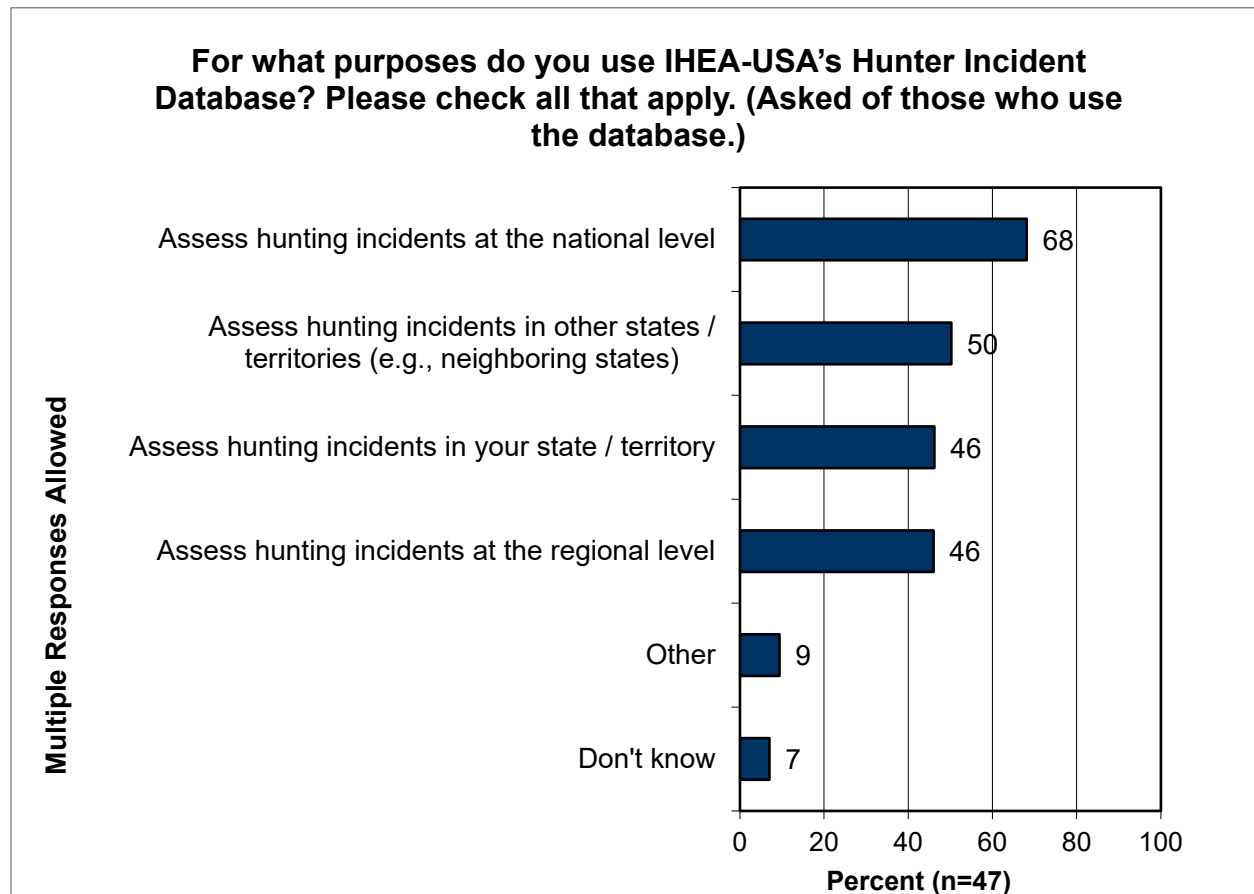


Percent of each of the following groups who think IHEAUSA's Hunter Incident Database is extremely or very useful: (Among those who use the database.)



Hunter education coordinators who use IHEA-USA’s Hunter Incident Database most often do so to assess hunting incidents at the *national* level (68% of those who use the database do so for this purpose).

Less commonly, the database is used to look at incidents in other states and territories (50%), incidents in the coordinator’s own state/territory (46%), and incidents at the *regional level* (46%). Additional uses of the database include fielding media inquiries, general instruction, comparisons of incidents for curriculum/evaluation purposes, and simply having the data in a central location for reference purposes. Suggested improvements typically addressed the user experience, such as making the database more user-friendly; others recommended ensuring that the data are updated and consistent, and providing better forms and reporting options.



For what purposes do you use IHEA-USA’s Hunter Incident Database? Other (please enter specifics)
Media queries.
Entering state-specific hunting incident data.
Research projects: is it going to be a problem for proposed law changes?
Sole digital repository of state hunting incident reports.
I have had others look up information and share it.
For classroom instruction.
Comparing & evaluation for curriculum purposes.
Only to upload my state’s data.

How could IHEA-USA's Hunter Incident Database be improved?
Dashboards showing trends.
It's hard to read the black text on the dark blue banner. The incident date should appear as month, day, year; not day, month, year. The Fatal / Non-Fatal should be one of the first columns to appear, not the last. When the data appears, it doesn't seem to be in any particular order / organization if you just select the state. The online HE library is not explained well. A user is not really able to find it easily. It could be a link under the Resources tab, then when selected you are directed to log-in since it's for members only.
More up-to-date.
All states must enter the data.
Entry to match the forms. Updated forms. Better report formats (more easily printable/distributable). Better filters to tease out certain information maybe?
It could be more user friendly.
Searching is kind of difficult, and sorting through all of the information is kind of difficult.
Data reporting and pull downs - more user friendly.
More complete.
Streamline data input.
Format & layout – can get data as a CSV file, and unless I organize it my way, it's just a pile of data.
By getting all states to have a standard definition of a hunting incident and have all states report incidents.
It's great as is.

Discussions in the focus groups suggest that some coordinators may not see the value in the Hunter Incident Database because of perceived inconsistencies in how accident/incident data are reported; participants also discussed potential differences in how various states and territories define a hunting incident. One example of inconsistent reporting mentioned by several people is when a separate department or agency (such as a police department) fails to report a hunting accident to the hunter education coordinator (this was sometimes attributed to a lack of time, training, or when such reporting is not required by state law).

Focus group participants who had experience using IHEA-USA's Hunter Incident Database often said they did so to review their own state's data (recall that about half of those surveyed said they used the database for this purpose). The focus groups also suggest that the use of the Hunter Incident Database may be most common among those who personally report their incident data to IHEA-USA. At the other end of the spectrum, there appear to be hunter education coordinators who do not see the need to track incident trends over time at the regional and national levels (some suggested that time and staff limitations prevent them from gathering and reporting the necessary incident data).

However, regardless of whether they report their incident data to IHEA-USA, most coordinators in the focus groups suggested that it is standard practice to examine statewide accident trends to determine whether changes or additions are needed to the course curriculum (i.e., to address a certain type of accident that may be becoming more common).

Regarding the process for submitting incident reports to IHEA-USA, it appears that some coordinators are not aware that IHEA-USA provides a fillable PDF form to do this; some agencies may not have the most recent version of this form (there were a few comments indicating that IHEA-USA form fields do not always correspond to the online fields). There may be a need for IHEA-USA to review the forms states are using and map the fields as necessary to the IHEA-USA form—this may help to create the best possible template for uploading data. An updated standardized template may help to avoid a patchwork of forms used by various states.

The focus groups also suggest that some hunter education coordinators are not aware that there is a national standard for how a hunting incident is defined. There was occasional confusion over what exactly constitutes a hunting incident (e.g., accidents involving tree stands or accidents with firearms while *not* hunting).

I was looking to see if IHEA had a standard definition since they run the Incident Academy. Is there a standard, nationwide definition of what HSRI [Hunting-Related Shooting Incident] is going to be?

I think the tool [the Hunter Incident Database] is only as strong as the reporting.

Most of the folks that we send to the Hunting Incident Investigation Academy are kind of second-level: they're district supervisors and stuff like that. So, you might have one person in a district with over four, five, or six agents, and that person is the one that has been to the [Hunting Incident Investigation Academy]. Not all of our agents go to the Academy. So yeah, consistency is an issue.

We don't know how many tree stand issues there are per year. But we do know that it's an issue. We don't need that data updated every year. We don't need to know that this year 25 people fell out of tree stands or last year it was 67 people. We know it's a problem, and so it's part of our education program.... We haven't had a hunting accident with someone crossing a fence in my 20 years, but we're still teaching it. I don't have to have quantified data in some cases to teach about it.... We don't use the IHEA [form] because we have statutory requirements that a form be created and filled out and submitted for evidentiary reasons.

If you know that this state doesn't track or monitor tree stand incidents, then instead of counting that as a zero, you mark it not applicable. Even if the state doesn't do that, just the knowledge for the database of which states do and which states don't is valuable information.

The more detail, the better information we can get. But also, the devil's in the details. We have to take the time to enter all those details so they will have that information, because the information we can get out of there and IHEA can provide is only as good as the information we give them.

[The database] is usable. It's just the way it shows up doesn't make a whole lot of sense in that it's not in chronological order.

Yeah, and it's been a little while since I looked at it but this new one just doesn't seem as logical as the other one...; [there are] way too many dropdowns to get what you need.

We use the IHEA form. Our biggest issue is our agency being notified of incidents, and subsequently my office being notified of incidents.... And it turns out the sheriff's department didn't notify us.

And then the big [question], perhaps because I am so new to it, is how to get the forms we collect over to IHEA—do I send those over to Alex? Or do I input those myself?

There is a state law that requires all of our health providers to notify us of hunting related incidents. So, that helps.

When we sent ours in, of course, the database was down. Our enforcement secretary filled out an Excel sheet with everything and sent it back. So, for us it was really easy the way they collected the data.

[It's] a fine line as to what data all the states would be able to give and have it be consistent data. Because you're going to have those certain state laws and statutes that will keep some states from giving all the information that might be wanted.

We use modified IHEA forms. We have both a tree stand and a shooting incident [form]... We put that form into an Access database and then, what we did last year, is we just downloaded it and sent it in to Alex that way.... It works, especially if you're using his form as a template.

I think it's just a matter of figuring out which fields can align. If you're getting zero compliance from some states now, just being able to get any data at all—something is probably better than nothing.

For us, our law enforcement is a different department..., so we're pretty anecdotal up here in [state] in regards to hunting incidents. When something does happen, we keep track of it in an internal spreadsheet.... Obviously, every year I fill out the form to the best of my knowledge for IHEA when they ask about that.

But the only context that I could see where it would be useful to me is if every state reported the same way.

This year the big change we've made is to split out the elevated hunting stand incidents from our regular non-elevated incidents.

So it goes back to that inconsistency in how that stuff is reported, which, to my mind, would limit the value of [the database].

Officers go through that IHEA Incident Academy Training, and it's super valuable. But that's the only time they have any sort of exposure to it. So, there's no follow up.

There's a preliminary event form where they send it to us when they just start the investigation. There's also a media release statement form, and then there's the follow-up form, and a final form. ... So, that whole process is a little just sticky...; it could work a lot better.

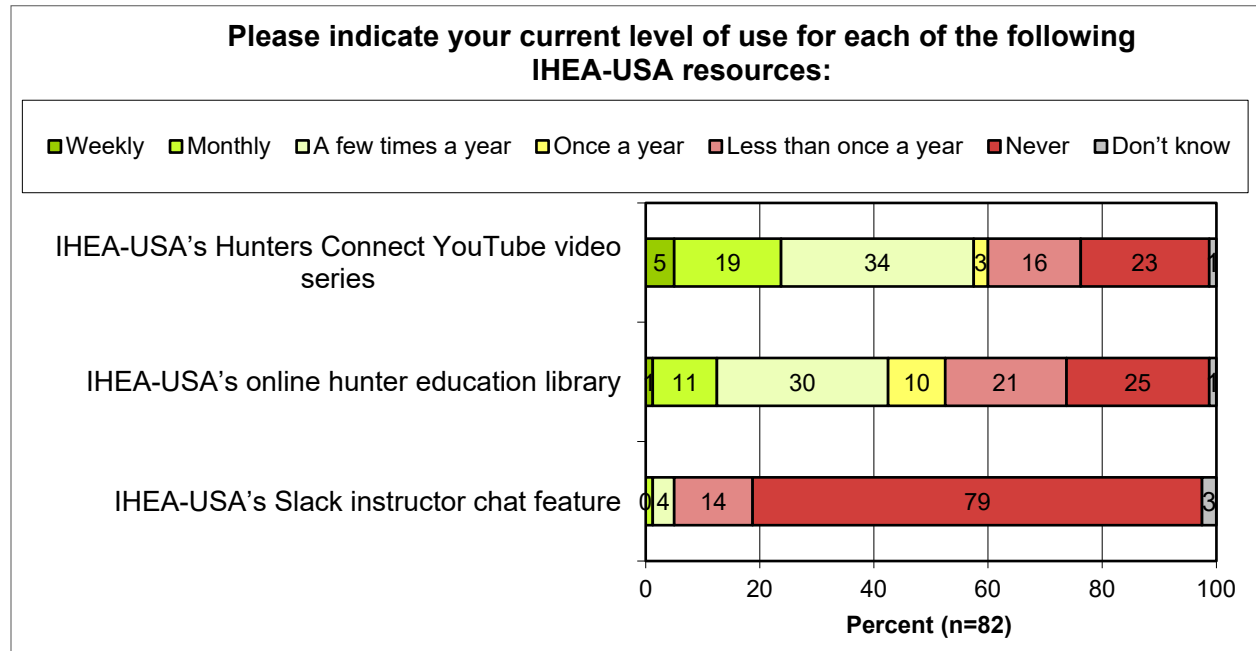
I think it just comes from poor communication from our law enforcement. I think they just don't know what to use. And I think that our lieutenants don't emphasize the importance of using one standardized form and why it's important for us to use.

I think it's important that we have a national database that we can compare across the nation as far as hunting incidents go.... These are national standards, and the standards can't change, so we've got to look at these reports on a national basis to see what needs to be changed. So I'd encourage all states to try to enter in their reports.

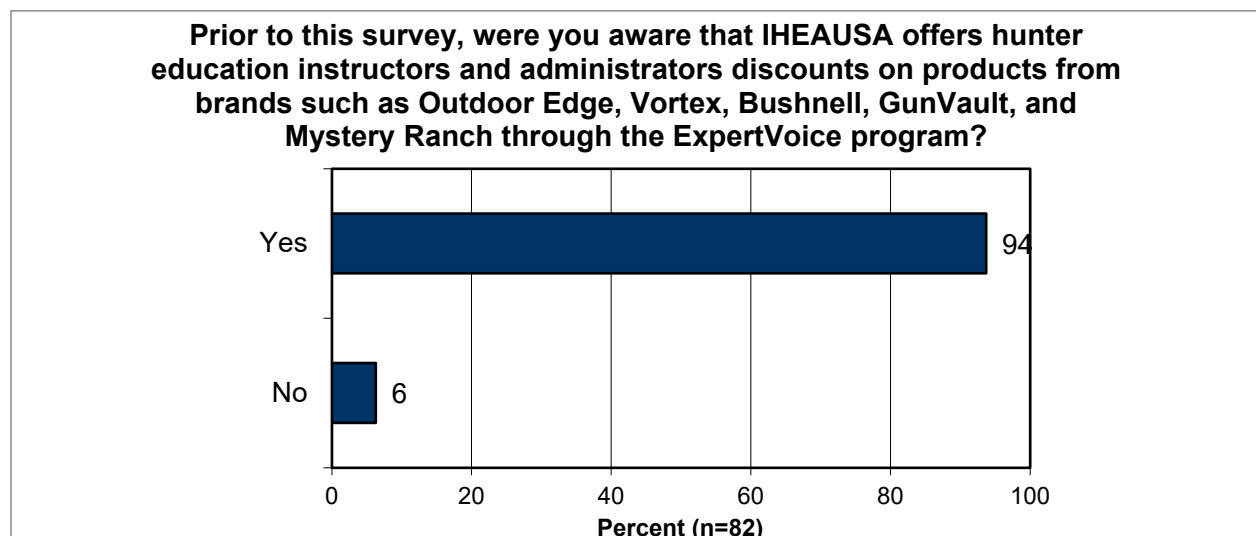
It's good to get everybody to provide that information to IHEA and to have that nationwide data in one database. That way research can be done on regional and nationwide trends. That would be a tremendous asset.

Hunter education coordinators typically use the Hunters Connect YouTube video series and IHEA-USA’s online hunter education library at least a few times a year. By contrast, the overwhelming majority of coordinators (79%) *never* use the Slack instructor chat feature.

In total, 58% of coordinators use the Hunters Connect video series *at least* a few times a year, including 5% who use it weekly, 19% who use it monthly, and 34% who use it a few times a year (23% *never* use Hunters Connect). Meanwhile, 43% use the online hunter education library *at least* a few times a year, including 1% who use it weekly, 11% who use it monthly, and 30% who use it a few times a year (25% *never* use the online hunter education library).



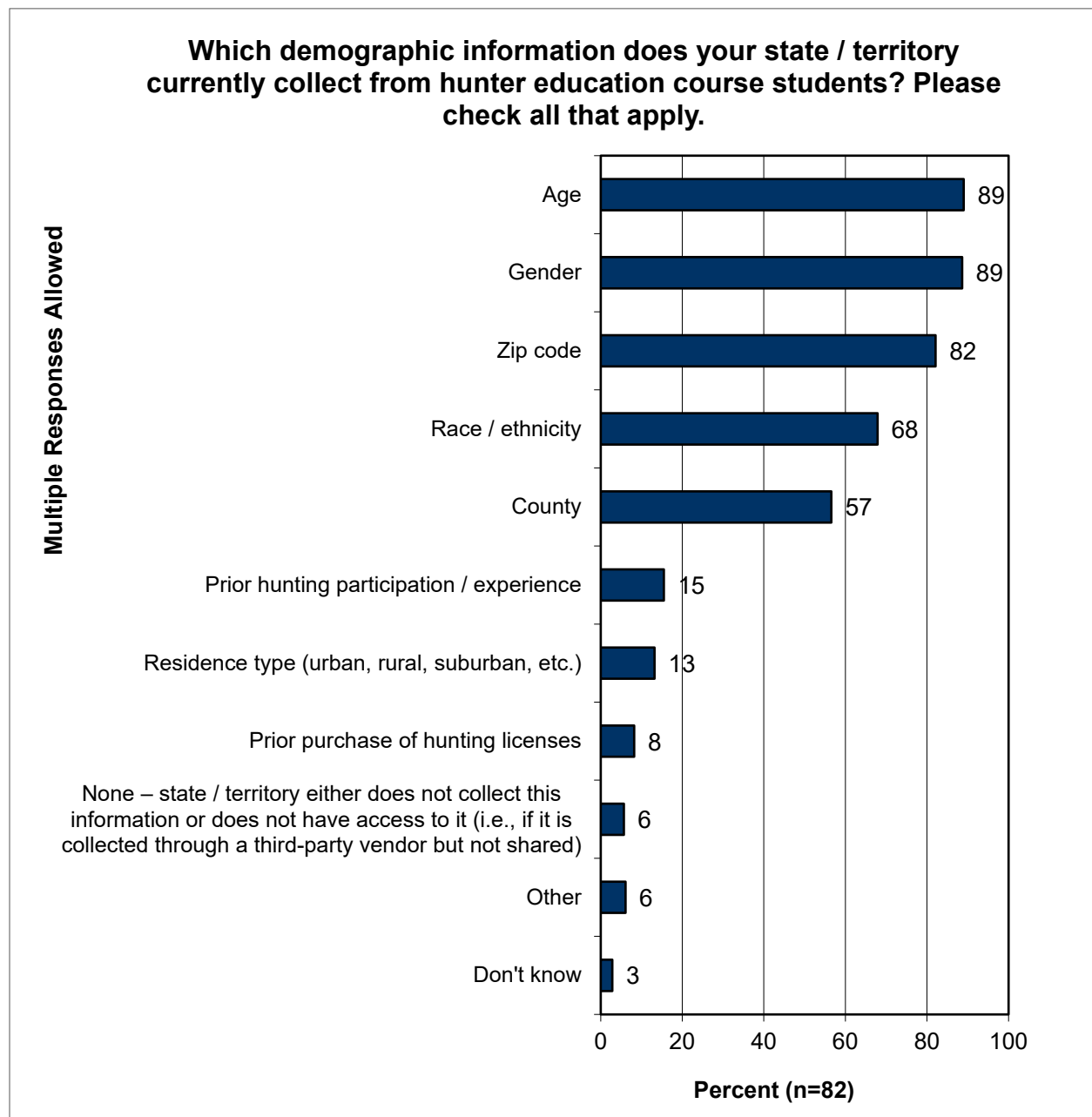
There is almost universal awareness among hunter education coordinators that IHEA-USA offers instructors and administrators discounts on various products (94% were aware of this prior to the survey).



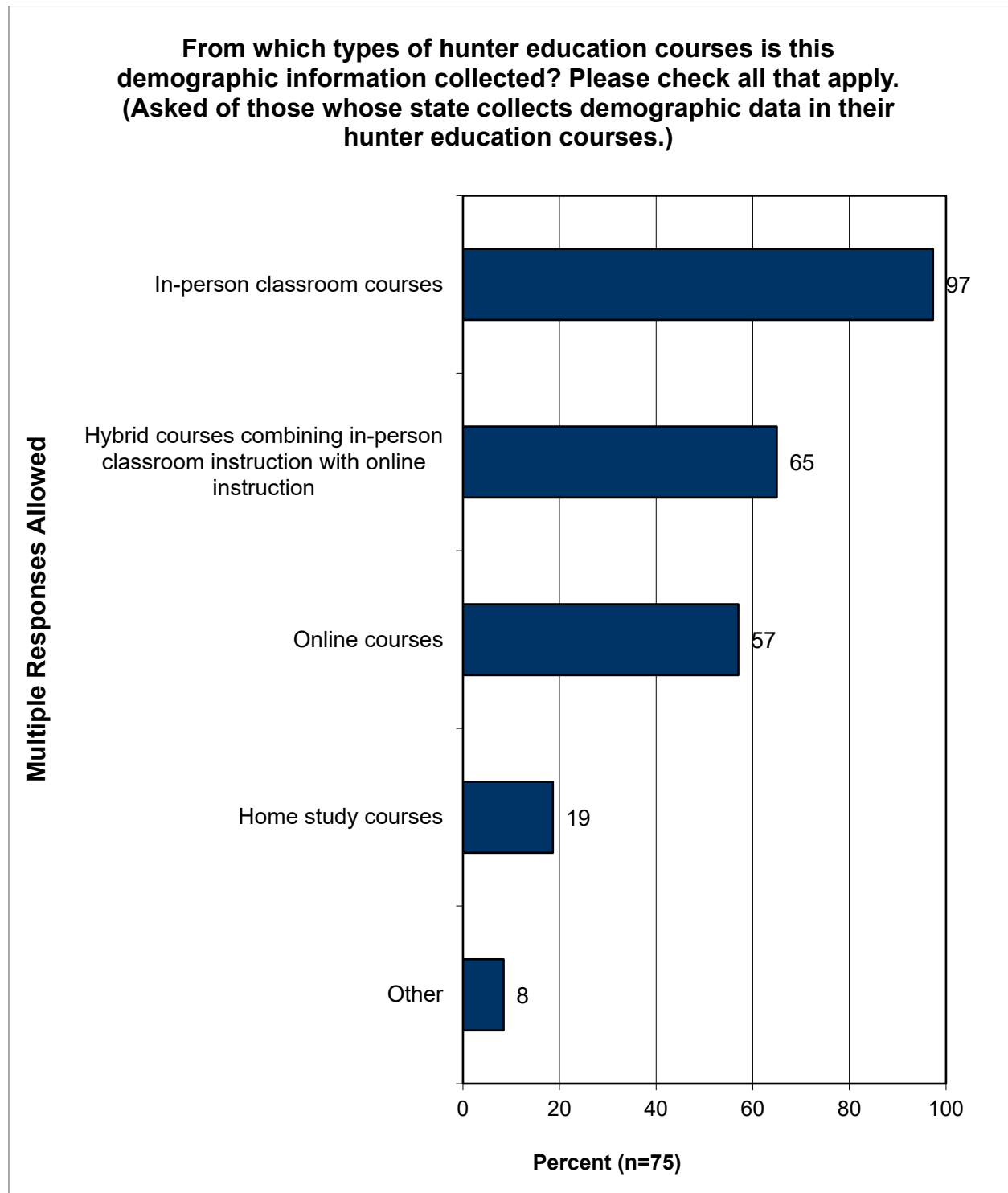
STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC DATA AND OPINIONS ON THE STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC DATABASE

Most states/territories collect some form of demographic data from their hunter education students; the most common types of demographic data collected include age (collected by 89% of the states/territories surveyed), gender (89%), zip code (82%), race/ethnicity (68%), and county of residence (57%).

Smaller percentages collect information regarding prior hunting participation/experience (15%) and residence type, such as whether the student lives in an urban or rural area (13%). Just 6% of the hunter education coordinators surveyed said their state/territory either does not collect any demographic information from course students or does not have access to such data.

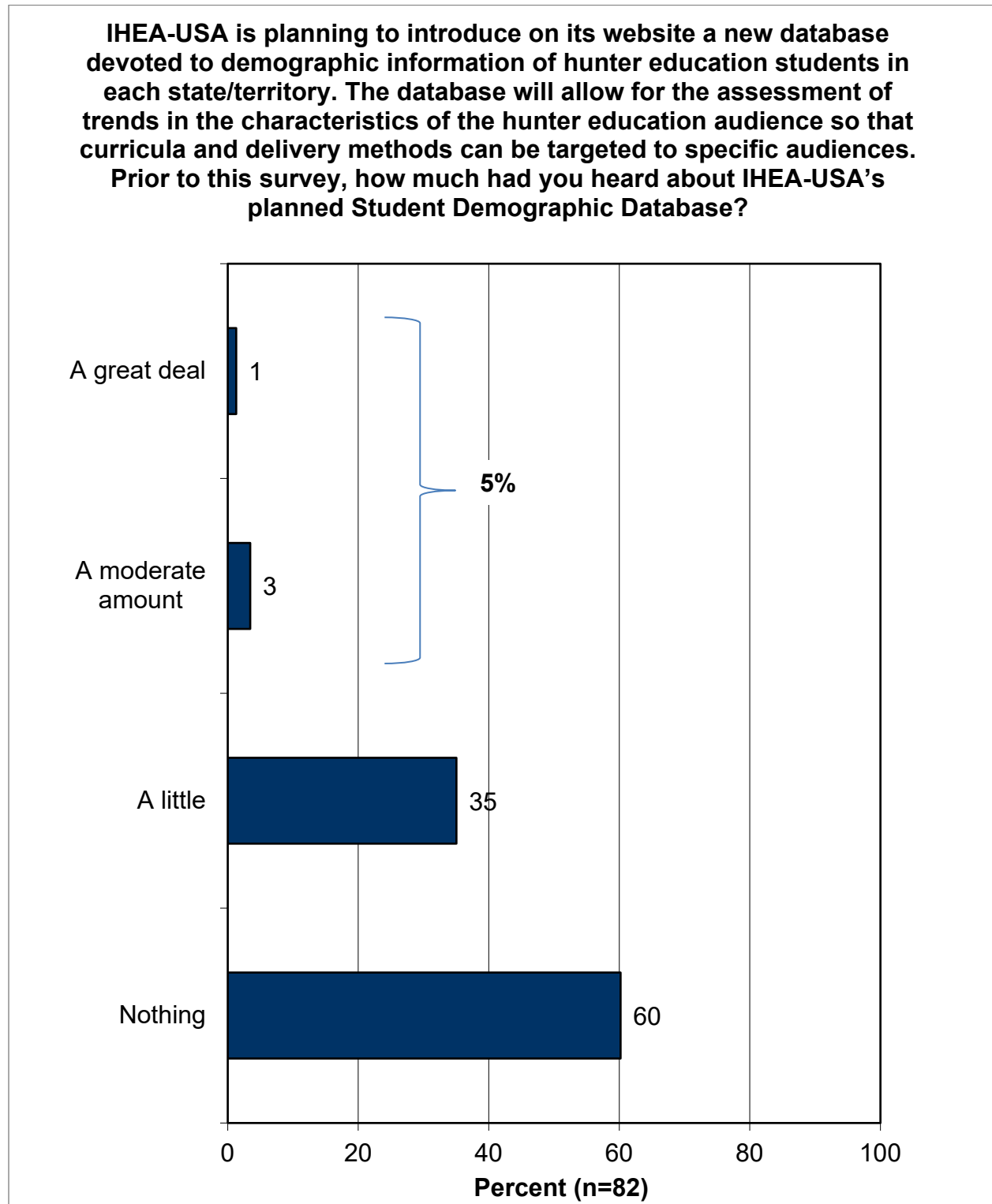


Among states/territories that collect demographic data from hunter education students, almost all (97%) collect such data from those enrolling in in-person classroom courses. About two thirds (65%) collect demographic data from students of hybrid courses that combine in-person instruction and online instruction, while 57% collect it from students in online courses.



Most hunter education coordinators (60%) have not heard anything about IHEA-USA’s planned Student Demographic Database.

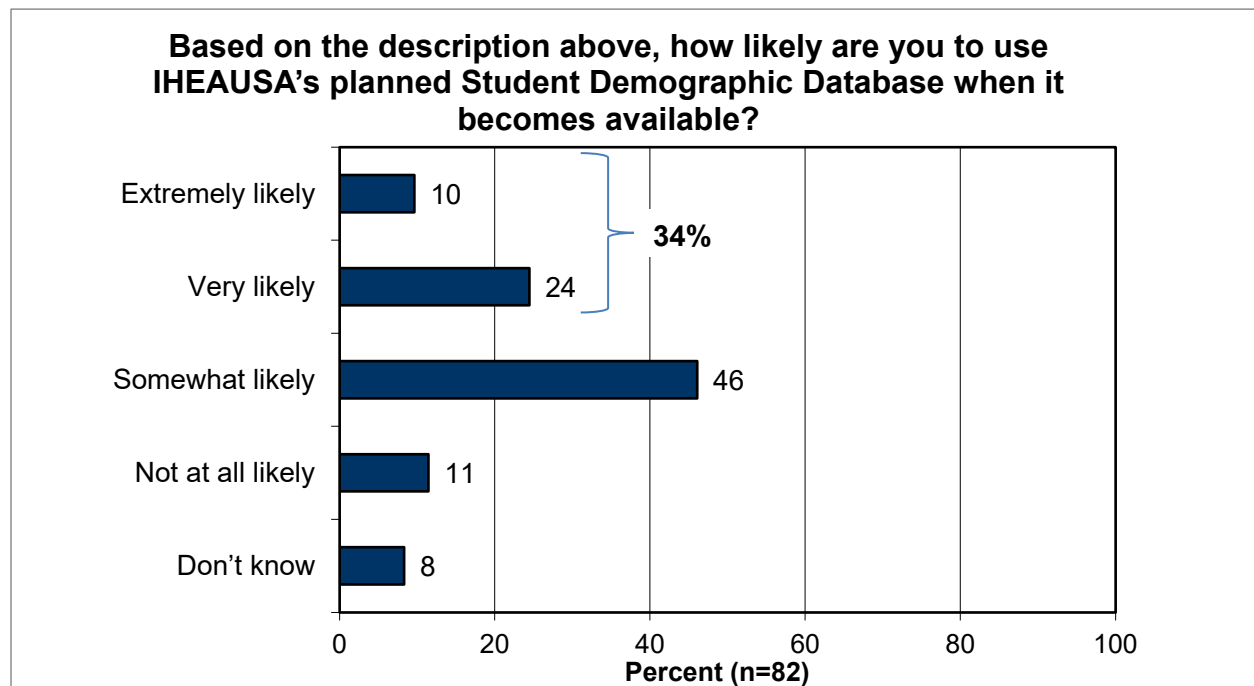
Meanwhile, about a third (35%) have heard *a little* about the Student Demographic Database, while just 5% (summed on unrounded numbers) have heard *a great deal* or *a moderate amount* about it.



A third of hunter education coordinators (34%) are *extremely* or *very* likely to use IHEA-USA’s planned Student Demographic Database when it becomes available. Just less than half (46%) are *somewhat* likely to use it, while another 11% say they are *not at all* likely to use the Student Demographic Database.

A follow-up question asked those who said they were *not at all* likely to use the Student Demographic Database for their reasons. Common answers included simply not having a need to monitor or know about trends in hunter education student demographics (a few people suggested they would provide the same instruction regardless of student demographic characteristics), already having state-specific data on student demographic characteristics, and not having time and/or interest in reviewing student demographic information.

The graph on the following page breaks down the groups who are *extremely* or *very* likely to use IHEA-USA’s planned Student Demographic Database when it becomes available. The groups most likely to use the Student Demographic Database include those in the Southeast Region, female coordinators, and those in the Northeast Region.



Why are you not at all likely to use IHEA-USA’s planned Student Demographic Database?

Continue to offer the class where we can and when we can.

I'm not concerned with other states' performance. Only my own.

I can see how this info could be useful for marketing to certain demographics. But overall, I believe people should be treated and considered equal instead of splitting them into different categories.

Don't know if it would provide value to me.

I will teach anywhere no matter what the demographics are.

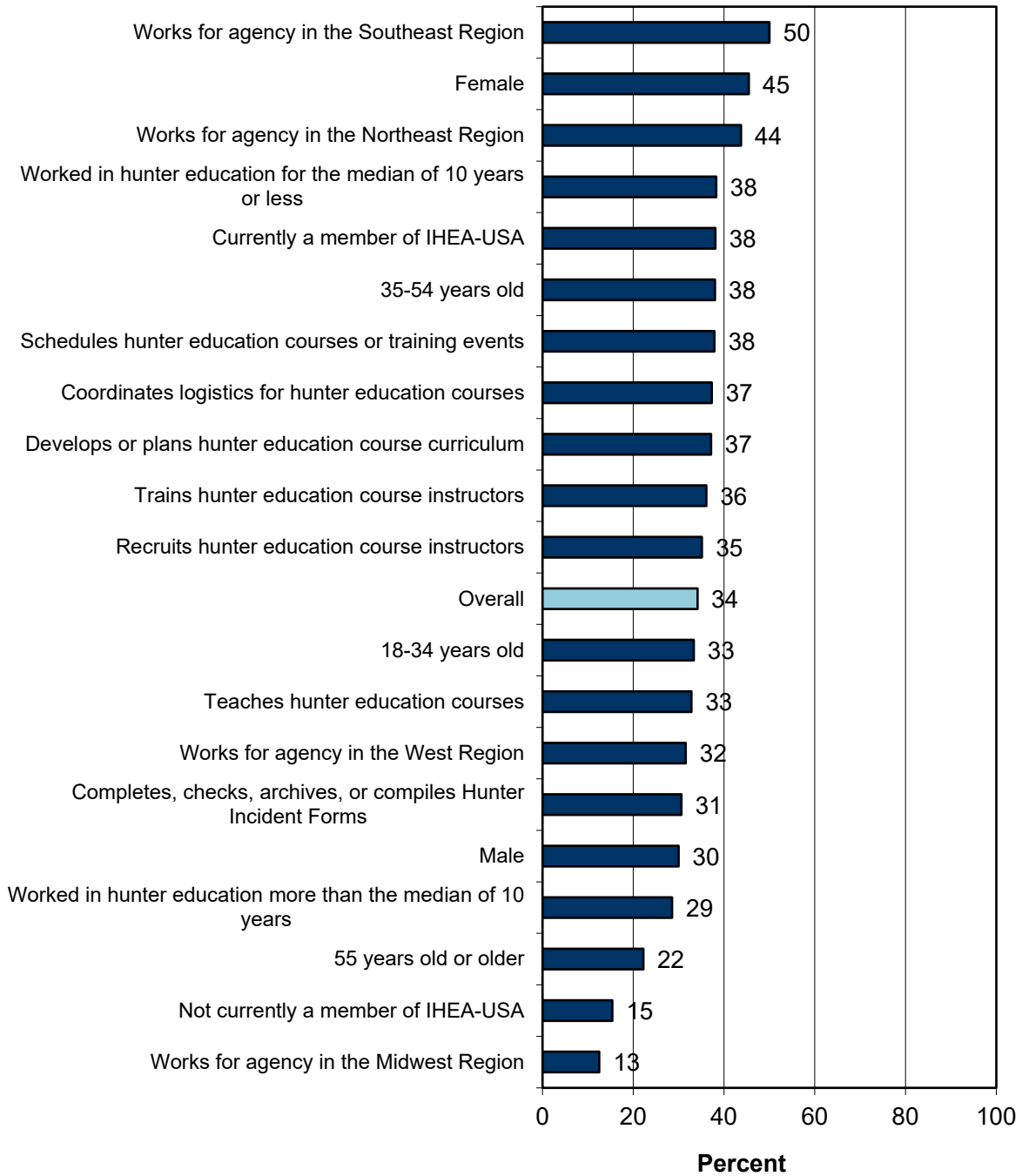
I do not see that demographics are important to me as an instructor. I will teach whoever comes.

This isn't going to make a difference in being able to conduct my courses. Everybody and their brother wants me to spend a lot of time on their website, and I don't have the time.

The message should not be tailored to 'groups' safety, and hunter education should be the same message for everyone.

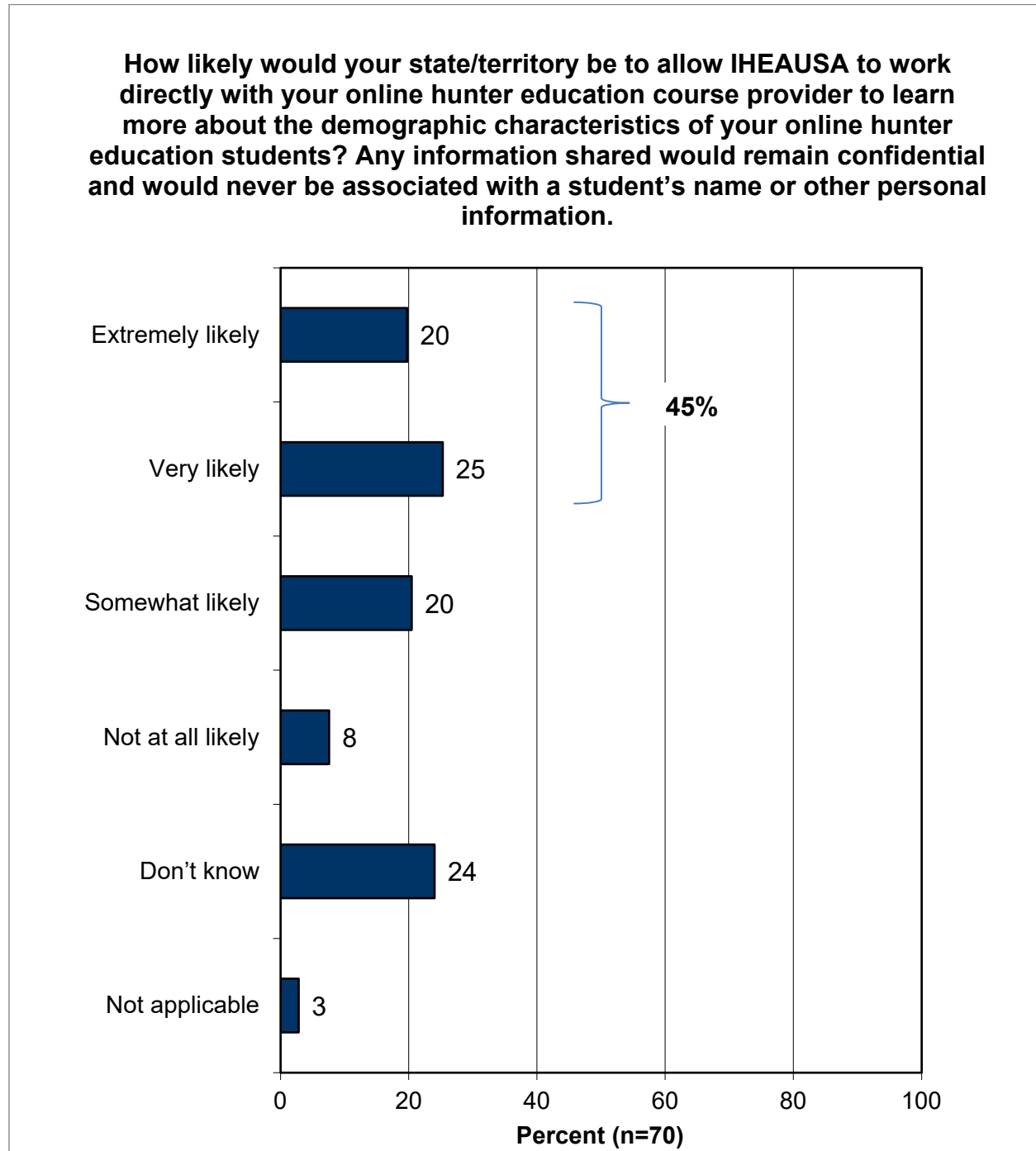
It's not state-specific and we can use our own data internally since we already collect it.

Percent of each of the following groups who would be extremely or very likely to use IHEAUSA’s planned Student Demographic Database when it becomes available:



Slightly less than half of the states/territories surveyed (45%) would be extremely or very likely to allow IHEA-USA to work directly with their online hunter education course provider to learn more about the demographic characteristics of online hunter education students: this includes 20% who would be *extremely* likely and 25% who would be *very* likely.

On the other hand, a fifth (20%) would only be *somewhat* likely, while 8% would be *not at all* likely. Note that almost a quarter (24%) are unsure.



In the focus groups, some hunter education coordinators expressed support for a database that would provide student demographic information at the state level, especially insofar as such data could assist with R3 efforts and the development of specialty courses and programs (many hunter education coordinators viewed their programs as being part of broader agency R3 efforts). However, some participants appeared less enthusiastic about the utility of a *national-level* student demographic database (even so, while some people said they would be unlikely to use a national database, they allowed that such data could still have value).

Once again, the perception of inconsistency in state data collection (because of state laws, multiple course vendors, or other factors) was a major reason for doubting the potential utility of a national-level student demographic database. In other cases, focus group participants mentioned legal issues with data privacy and confidentiality, especially concerning hunter education students who are not adults. One coordinator mentioned that their state would not be allowed to share student demographic data with course instructors, simply because volunteer instructors are not state employees and do not have the same access.

Another potential barrier to collecting comprehensive student demographic information is the sheer variety of hunter education courses offered in the states; a participant suggested that it would be a significant undertaking to collect and compile student demographic information from multiple course types and formats (note that the survey data referenced above indicate that, while student demographic information is often collected from in-person classroom courses, it is collected far less often from online and home study courses). It was also mentioned in the focus groups that collecting student demographic information from hunter education courses offered in public schools would likely be challenging.

Another consideration regarding the planned Student Demographic Database concerns the comparison of demographic characteristics across states: because states often have different minimum age requirements for hunter education class registration, it is likely that such differences would influence the number and average age of students participating in online classes on a state-by-state basis.

Regarding the assessment of student demographic characteristics in classroom course settings, it was noted that hunter education instructors are likely only able to do a quick “visual survey” of their students and record the observations—it was also suggested that hunter education instructors rarely if ever explicitly ask in-person course participants for demographic information. Regarding online courses that may collect such information, it appears that many online providers do not make such demographic data available to hunter education coordinators (in some cases, the data may be available upon request).

Unless we're doing [a course for] specialized youth or specialized women, or a specified Hispanic course, we teach the course exactly the same across the board—in an in-person course, you could have an 80-year-old and an 8-year-old. [Student demographic information is] great data to have, in my opinion, for these specialty-type courses, but if [it's a course] to the general public, you don't really know who you're going to have until you get in the room.

[Student demographic data] would be very useful to someone on the national level, maybe not to your average administrator. We're more concerned about our region and our state in particular.

It gets back to the incidents issues of apples and oranges in terms of what's being collected and, therefore, what's available in the overall database.

[If] IHEA [had] its own online course, we could maybe get some demographic data from whomever was using that free online course.

I know a lot of states that offer three or four different [course] options. So that data, when they register for that particular online class, it's gonna go to that particular provider.

Demographics won't make that much difference unless we're going to do marketing or sell advertising.

We have a real difficult time being able to release any kind of data on youth. And I tend to think that if we can't get all the data, the data we have isn't nearly as useful. Certainly that demographic data would be useful. I just don't know how easy it'll be to obtain it.

Certainly, I have access to my own data. But being able to then share that with other organizations is where things get kind of sticky.

It gets sticky for us as well because, in order for you to take the online course with Kalkomey, you need to have all [state-]specific DNR, customer ID number, and that customer account has all of your information in it. So, we can pull that data at any time and look at it. But we also, especially with youth, unless they subscribe, we can't share that.

From year to year it probably wouldn't make a whole lot of difference. Whatever time span would have to be over, like, 10 years or 20 years or 50 years to actually have it mean something. I don't see a whole lot of value in it other than that. Knowing what other states are doing as far as their program, their instructors, that sort thing...I find more value in that than I would the demographic information.

I think it would be beneficial, especially from a R3 perspective.... But that's going to take time. It's going to take trends. It's not going to take, you know, single points in time. It's going to take a long period of time to develop that trend. And I think IHEA should be the entity that collects that data and houses that data. But you know, like everybody else said, who's collecting it? Those are going to be barriers that are very state- and region-specific.

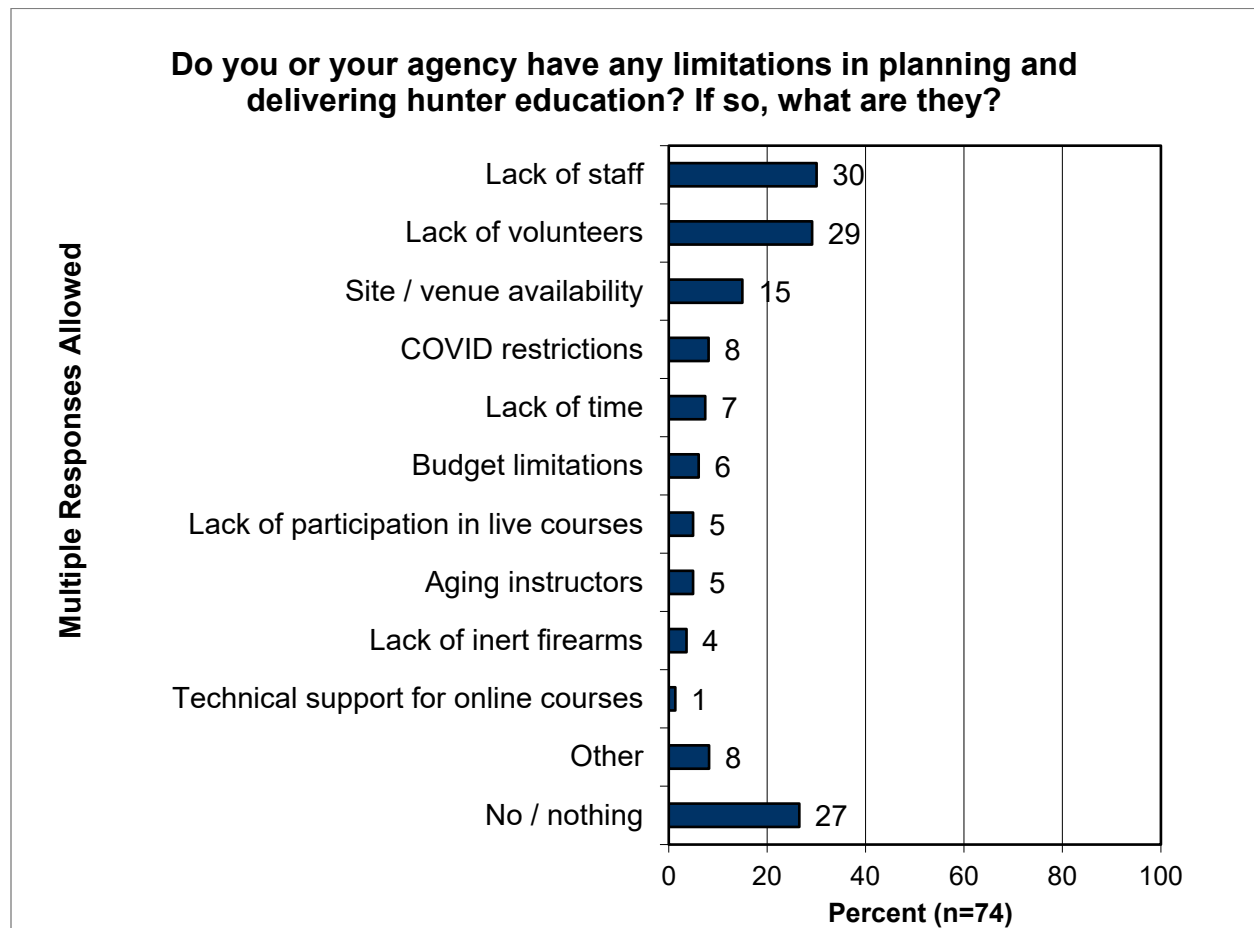
I think it would be very beneficial for us to help us see who we are reaching. We've got a bunch of native communities around the state, so it would be interesting to see [if] we are reaching those communities.

LIMITATIONS IN PLANNING AND DELIVERING HUNTER EDUCATION

The two most common limitations in planning and delivering hunter education relate to personnel: a lack of staff (30%) and a lack of volunteers (29%). Another fairly common limitation is site/venue availability for courses, or lack thereof (15%).

Other notable limitations include COVID-19 restrictions (8%), general lack of time (7%), and budget limitations (6%). Meanwhile, about a quarter of those surveyed (27%) said they have no limitations in planning and delivering hunter education.

A separate open-ended survey question (in which coordinators could respond with anything that came to mind) explored other potential needs of the agencies in planning and delivering hunter education. In general, many of the comments were consistent with the previous findings: for example, issues related to instructor recruitment were frequently named, with many people discussing the need to diversify the instructor corps and/or simply recruit more volunteer instructors (especially in the wake of the pandemic). Others cited the need for additional full-time program staff, as well as the need to secure new or additional classroom space for hunter education courses. Another commonly named issue was the need for updated instructional resources, such as inert firearms and training videos. Flexibility in course scheduling and the ability to better accommodate students (particularly busier younger students) were mentioned as issues as well.



What are the most pressing needs of you or your agency in planning and delivering hunter education?
Recruiting younger volunteer instructors.
Volunteer instructors who are willing to teach under Governor's mandates.
Getting students to show up.
Personnel (typically volunteers, occasionally staff) to hold events followed by access to facilities.
Due to the increase of online virtual skills evaluations, filling seats in in-person classes is challenging.
Facilities and ranges.
Again, in relation to planning and staff capacity: Our agency only has a limited number of FTE positions available; we are unlimited in terms of LTEs, but the turnover in that area is high.
Classroom space in certain portions of the state and instructors in those areas.
Figuring out how to market to and engage non-traditional audiences.
Instructors.
Securing venues for classes, filling classes.
Digital training aids, mainly videos. The old Alan Madison videos are very outdated, and I have yet to see anything new that is comparable in content.
More volunteers.
Active volunteers.
Recruiting more volunteer instructors. Moving to an online platform for the basic class and spend more time on advanced topics.
We continue to work towards reaching all corners of our very diverse state with many rural, distant communities.
Recruit, train volunteers. Recruit, train students.
A diverse instructor corps, access to supplies, firearms and ranges including inert firearms.
Obtaining volunteer instructors.
Successful blueprints for advanced HE classes. Field staff positions to recruit mentors and execute programs.
Recruiting in-person attendance. Offering sufficient numbers of in-person classes.
Staff availability
More active instructors and facilities to host events.
Getting instructors to teach. Recruiting new instructors.
Limited number of volunteer instructors makes the delivering of classes more challenging.
Competition with online hunter ed courses.
A lack of volunteer instructors and the availability of on-line courses.
Manpower: 2 of our 5 districts are without hunter education staff.
We have a backlog of citizens that need the field day.
Coming out of COVID restrictions, we are experiencing a smaller group of volunteers that are willing and motivated to teach. Support staff vacancies need to be filled to assist with major event planning, purchasing and reconciliation.
People. It's one of many tasks for field staff, and teaching commonly is put as a lower priority.
Budget and the lack of volunteer instructors or the decrease in volunteer numbers.
We lost many volunteers during the pandemic, and we need to replace them.
Getting people to show up after they have signed up.
Recruiting and engaging volunteer instructors if virtual methods become primary delivery methods.
Instructor qualification background checks. We have an aging demographic in HE instructors.
Sites and volunteers.
Finding updated teaching materials. The available DVDs and other materials are outdated and don't work on many of the newer computers.
The need to recruit new volunteer instructors and generating enough match as the number of instructors decreases. We also need integrated databases so we can evaluate participation of people who take hunter education.
Better communication with instructors to provide more up-to-the-minute information and help with conducting classes. Better response to student needs by providing timely course options that fit the changing patterns for students. Students today demand more flexible options to fit their lifestyle choices.
Staffing limitations: only two full time staff members. Highest population areas lack locations that are conducive to live fire requirement.
I believe the system we have in place is solid and I can't come up with anything that is a pressing need.
Lack of enough staff, especially full-time staff.
Working to recruit and retain volunteers to set up and teach in-person classes. We run into limited availability of facilities in some areas.
More volunteer instructors willing to teach.
Scheduling.
Updated videos.
Being able to schedule the classes around other responsibilities, instructor's schedules, and other community events.
Catching up from lost time during the pandemic. Number of students declined.
instructors/staff, resources and facilities.

What are the most pressing needs of you or your agency in planning and delivering hunter education?
Motivating volunteer instructors to not only teach HE classes to meet public demand but to also make themselves available to help with additional Dept. outreach events/activities. Additionally, we are in dire need of updated video resources to use in our HE classes.
More volunteers to teach, more recruitment.
Need more staff and volunteers.
Non-firing hunter ed firearms.
None at this time. Allowing an online-only option took care of those pressing needs in the past.
Recruiting volunteer instructors.
Quality volunteers are harder and harder to come by with the pace of busy life these days.
Volunteer motivation and training.
Meeting demand in the ever-changing pressures of todays society.
More personnel.
Storage space for our gear. Good tools for hands-on delivery of materials. A more diverse community of instructors that reflects the diversity of the state. The issues brought up by the online course.
Enhanced customer tracking (multiple programs, licenses, certifications, volunteer involvement, state park visits, purchases, etc.) Enhanced use of social media. Enhanced capabilities with registration and data tracking abilities.
Access in underserved communities. Volunteers in underserved communities. Facilities accessible in these same communities. Technical support for online classes.
Instructor recruitment.
Acquiring hunter education equipment that require FFL or shipping is sometimes not available for products. It is challenging to bring out archery instructors or other specialty instructors.
Instructors who are willing to be involved regularly and are self-motivated to run a team and classes; adequate supplies for teams to teach students.
Creating more instructors, and keeping them active.
Time. There is always a need for more volunteer instructors.
Changing directions, adapting with technology, recruiting new and retaining hunters.
Decreasing volunteer base and rising demand for hunter education.
More instructors.
Finding facilities allowing large groups, mostly because of COVID.
Availability of demonstration firearms.
Timely communication with customers (those seeking/taking courses) and volunteers / partners with our online course registration system.

In the focus groups, many hunter education coordinators discussed their program's role in hunter R3 (a broader agency goal). In detailing current challenges related to planning and delivering hunter education, there was some discussion about the importance of integrating hunter education graduates into the hunting community—it was sometimes observed that such immersion and integration is only possible through in-person course components, which allow students to meet local conservation law enforcement officers, connect with other hunters and potential mentors, and similar interpersonal activities.

Other challenges discussed in the focus groups included the need to update existing videos (such as the Alan Madison DVDs); the need to identify ways to encourage students to show up for in-person classes for which they are registered; maintaining or improving the quality of instructor training; and identifying reliable ways to compare certification requirements across states. Other challenges discussed in the focus groups included maintaining reliable facility access for courses, having internet access for online courses (or online course components) in rural areas, addressing agency staffing shortages, and improving coordination and communication between course enrollment databases and hunting license databases (i.e., to track which hunter education graduates go on to purchase hunting licenses).

Ongoing instructor recruitment and retention issues were also discussed at length in the focus groups. Coordinators talked about the importance of keeping volunteer instructors involved in hunter education programs and as engaged as possible (especially through in-person events), as well as the need to encourage tracking of volunteer hours to account for Federal Aid matching funds.

With basic hunter education, we have staff and volunteers that are really good at delivering it, really good at providing those resources. So, the only challenge is changing [and] trying to shift focus when necessary.... But there are lots of things that we do as a program, recruitment programs and things like that, where we could probably use more tools in our toolbox.

I wish I had more resources so I could have that mandatory field day for hunter education, especially, of course, for the online students. We just don't have the staff or the ability to do that at this time.

Hunter ed gives you the basics, but it's really that mentor, out in the field that reinforces that.... That's something I would really love to get going here: a mentor program.

The problem is scalability—programs that are scalable to where you can reach more than just a few people at a time. [The students are] really wanting to get hands-on experience with somebody that knows what they're doing. And there's only so many resources available to give them that.

We use Madison DVDs a lot, and the content is great. The lessons haven't changed. It's all good stuff, but when you put it on and it's all people in their short joggers and tall tube socks, the students immediately start laughing and aren't paying attention to the messaging because of the messenger, so an update [is needed].

The challenge is getting people to sign up for the course, complete it, and show up for the field day.

[The challenge is] to get people to come to them, even after they've signed up for them. ... We'd think the classes are filled up, and we'd go to teach the class, and you'd have two thirds of the people or less that would show up. That's a challenge. That sort of gets frustrating for our instructors and our volunteers that put in the time. They think they have a full class.

We are a state where people hunt a lot so that's a problem when you have room for 40 kids and only 30 of them show up for a course. That's not good for the instructor. It's not good for a seat that could have been filled by somebody else. So, we threw around the idea of charging 10 bucks or 20 bucks and we really decided against that. We didn't want to charge for it. So, what we had our IT staff do, is in our registration system, if somebody was marked absent from a class, they weren't allowed to re-enroll in another class for a year.

We had around 28,000 hunter education graduates in 2021, and roughly 70% of those were through the online-only course. Only 30% of those students were taking one of our in-person options. So that's a huge change. It cut down on our volunteer hours, which we use as match for our federal grant.

In 2020 into 2021, it was mostly online-only. Now that we're back to in-person, we're having an issue with getting instructors reactivated.

I want to know what every other state considers an acceptable proof of certification. We used to have it, and we don't anymore. So, I feel like that is something that...IHEA could restart: contact all the states and get samples of their acceptable certifications and then have that live on the website where my staff can go and pull up that document, and keep it updated.

I know our hunter ed card has changed over the last 20 years. But our format for our numbers hasn't changed..., so at least updating our system to recognize what format each state uses would be beneficial.

I've been working with our IT staff, and he had a suggestion on how it could be run through IHEA where there's just an automatic live database of the state's hunter ed certifications. You'd have to figure it all out based on the states with what information can be shared. But he said there's probably a way to have enough information there to meet minimum state laws for information through an MOU where there could be an active database connected.

You can just go to Walmart and say "Yep, I've got [a hunter safety certification]," and they'll just write your license a lot of the times. So we have a lot of issues trying to make sure people are complying. But there's really no way for us to verify that those people are complying other than they have a run-in with an officer.

Our databases do not speak to each other. Again, going back to Access: law enforcement is on one side, licensing on the other side.

On my end it would be more interesting to see other states' actual curriculums and have access to be able to go in there and be like, "Oh look, here's everybody's current policy manuals."

We need video resources for use in classes. I use "Today's Hunter" and I love that; our instructors love that because the snippets are less than 5 minutes. The content of Alan Madison is very good, but the delivery is way too long, and it's very dated.

I think something that would help make our jobs easier too is sharable content for socials.... So, if there was some kind of national template that had some national branding that then we could put our logo onto and put [state] specific pictures...like infographics or other nice, sharable content with consistent messaging.

Instructor training resources are something that we desperately need here in [state]. Since it is only a staff of two of us, we have actually tried to hire a staff of contractors to help train volunteers. But it would be really nice if there was like a general, "This is how to be an instructor, and this is what we're looking for as an instructor," and have that content available. And then each state could then spin off that template to do their state-specific stuff. We do use Kalkomey's instructor course as part of our onboarding process for our volunteers, which has been fantastic. That's the hardest thing we have right now too is how to show somebody how to be an effective educator. Because all of our volunteers, they're not educators, they are just, "Hey, I'm passionate about this. I want to help. I want to teach. I love kids. This is my passion." But then, they don't really know how to really do that effectively.

We've been trying to push some of those folks into volunteering in other ways. Because [our hunter education program] is more in schools and a larger percentage [of students] are going all online after they turn 16. And our need for this giant group of volunteers has really just shrunk. We don't need them near as much as we used to. So, that causes a bunch of bitterness and, you know, they think we are trying to push them out. And we're just trying to reassure them, "Look, we can still use you as volunteers for all these other programs and all this other stuff that we do." So, we're pretty picky nowadays about who we bring on as a volunteer just because of those very reasons.

Another challenge that several focus group participants mentioned concerns how to keep students engaged throughout a course while meeting statutory requirements for the number of hours a course must be. One solution, according to some coordinators, is to incorporate more videos into online courses to make the curriculum more interactive; another approach is to shorten some of the videos that are currently used. Several focus group participants mentioned the challenges of maintaining student attention throughout hours of non-interactive “click-through” material in online courses, or hours of lecturing during in-person courses.

Right now in our statute, we're required to provide 12 hours of instruction. That's one of the issues we have with all online self-study. The other is the validity of the final exam, which I think can be addressed. Technology is moving leaps and bounds, especially with COVID now...perhaps there is a way to ensure that the final exam is truly taken by the individual who's passing the course. We've all heard the anecdotes of the 3-year-old who now has a license for life in some states.

[It's important that we look at] how to be an engaging instructor and all those really important teaching techniques to engage the students...just to bring [a specific volunteer's] awareness up to date, because he certainly didn't do anything intentional.

It's not just kids—anybody under 40 doesn't want to sit for 8 hours and listen to somebody talk. And that's what we were battling.... But we yearly check our online courses, and we have instructors check our courses for us as well. So, we have a lot of eyes on them by multiple people every year to try to help catch any changes or anything that's not accurate.

An open-ended survey question explored things IHEA-USA may do or provide the agencies in order to help them plan and deliver hunter education courses. The most commonly named issues include assistance obtaining or developing updated training videos, continuing with improvements to online instructor training resources, and assisting states and territories obtain new or updated inert training firearms. There were several calls for IHEA-USA to produce short training videos for use in hunter education courses (especially training videos that can be used in any course, not just courses from certain providers). Some people named items related to instructor recognition, such as expanded product discounts for instructors or other financial incentives.

Other items dealt specifically with instructor recruitment and training, such as the potential for IHEA-USA to help agencies recruit more instructors, including instructors from national NGOs and nonprofit conservation organizations. Some comments addressed the need for IHEA-USA to continue developing and potentially refining hunter education standards. Finally, it should be noted that many comments praised IHEA-USA for its current efforts in helping to facilitate hunter education and provide resources for states and territories.

Are there any things IHEA-USA could do or provide to assist you and your agency plan and deliver hunter education courses? If so, what are they?
IHEA is on the ball with what they're doing. New admin and leadership--instructor tool box and some of the new curriculum and revamp; they are addressing the needs.
Develop updated videos and digital instructional content.
Online student registration.
Training aids that are affordable. Dummy ammunition for use in classes is difficult to come by. Other training aids could be dummy guns used for fence crossing demonstrations and firearm cares. These would be more expectable in the school situation. Updated videos on flash drives that are affordable would be very helpful.
Fund the production of video content directly related to Hunter Education and provide a system for disseminating these tools to instructors (ideally digitally, on flash drives, etc.).
IHEA does a good job of supporting these courses.
Updated videos.
The instructors we have are amazing and really do a great job. I think small tokens of appreciation go a long way. We provide years of volunteering pins to the instructors. Maybe a years of service reward through IHEA?
I was recently involved with a student manual update for our state. In the process we learned that there are IHEA standards for learning that we didn't know about. Would be great to have more information on that. Discount program for bulk orders of classroom training aids and/or classroom giveaways (orange vests, survival whistles, compasses, etc.).
Rebuild the instructor discount program. The number of manufacturers participating has declined dramatically; those discounts were a great incentive for recruiting and maintaining volunteer instructors.
Assist with development of a database to help track volunteer training modules completed as well as cumulative hours volunteered/students taught.
I think we should take a look at course length and relevancy.
We try to take advantage of any courses offered for instructors by the IHEA.
Secure orange non-firing firearms.
Task conditions and standards for ranges
One of the main issues brought to me from our instructor groups is equipment needs, specifically the need for non-firing firearm for teaching. Now that Mossberg discontinued their 5-gun set there isn't an option available.
Consider some research into ways to effectively recruit volunteers for hunter education and identify ways to generate match for program delivery that is not instructor time or mileage. Find ways to have states share what they are doing for online registration and evaluation using integrated databases with licensing and other agency data bases like deer, moose, and turkey registration. Evaluate available CRM programs offered in the country specific to fish and wildlife communications and outreach and provide that information to states along with examples of how it can be used as an outreach and communications tool for hunter education.
I currently think IHEA is doing a great job, but I still think that the majority of our state instructors are not IHEA members yet.
Online instructor / volunteer training works great for isolated places.
Continue the maintenance of an online instructor training course.

Are there any things IHEA-USA could do or provide to assist you and your agency plan and deliver hunter education courses? If so, what are they?
Yes. Provide current and relevant digital resources. Work with course vendors to develop / refine / add to more interactive (gamified) online courses. Continue to keep volunteer incentive offerings (discounts) current and available. Expand "how to hunt" videos to other regions / habitats.
I feel like we get great support from IHEA.
Possibly be a recruiting tool on the national level.
Yes, work with manufacturers to secure inert firearms.
Financial incentive for instructors.
We are always in search of quality alternatives to live fire. I am also in touch with someone who has an existing permanent tree stand safety structure.
Persuade national organizations like NWTF, RMEF, DU, etc. to encourage their members to become state volunteer HE instructors.
Produce and provide updated, shortened HE training videos that can be used to emphasize curriculum in the HE classroom by instructors. Provide state support in instructor training and development. We currently pay \$30/use for the Kalkomey HE OL Instructor Course. This is a bit pricey for what it is/provides. It would be nice to offer additional how-to's, resources to aid state administrators with improving instructor presentation delivery, how to incorporate hands-on, and dynamic delivery methods as many instructors just read from the student manual / instructor guide or lesson plans and don't end up building on what a student learned from the student manual.
Pull states together to be on the same page as it relates to course delivery. I strongly feel we have lost the standardized course that allowed for reciprocity among all states.
Maybe revise the standards to the most important things to learn in a hunter ed course. It is impossible to teach map and compass or survival in a hunter ed course. At our Becoming an Outdoors-Woman workshops we teach a 3 hour map and compass course and the women still feel they need to practice more before they feel confident using a map and compass. So, 10 minutes of instruction in a hunter ed class might be doing more damage than not having it. Same for survival. You can't teach survival in 10 minutes (if you even have that much time). Take them out of the course. Wildlife identification also is not something you can teach in 10 minutes. The in-person courses need to be shorter and should focus on the hands-on lessons or they cannot compete with the online courses.
Recommend sites for: 1) Hunter education course evaluation templates / tools; 2) Online courses for Sexual Harassment Awareness and Disability Awareness for instructors; 3) Directory of agency course offerings.
Help with our volunteer awareness of what IHEA is.
I actually don't think there's much that IHEA could do in our area, in terms of needs, other than be a supportive partner and a source of resources (which they already are).
Provide safety firearms for demonstrations in class on handling, transfer, different actions, and safety locations, etc.
You all do a great job; can't think of anything.
Educational resources for instructors, providing educational videos instructors can play during hunter ed classes. Spoke w/Alex: Teach in the schools, and we need a source for inert firearms for hunter education in schools. Mossberg is no longer manufacturing the tool we need. Understand there is effort toward this but it's not necessarily a priority in every state.
National Hunter Education (IHEA-USA) certification card, data tracking and registration via a unified, AFWA/IHEA-USA hunter education state-of-the-art database (developed and paid for by sponsors thru IHEA-USA, multi-state or R3 Funding Source). Enhanced / continued training aids, product discounts, and research and information.
Outreach towards recruiting new hunters.
Find vendors willing to create demo firearms for in-person courses. Create a document with all state-accepted hunter education cards so when states have out-of-state hunters or state residents hunt in another state those selling permits can have a document to verify whether the proof of hunter ed is accepted by that state. The lack of this type of document creates huge customer service issues and is time-consuming on agency staff, plus delays the purchase of permits.
Possible nationwide recruiting effort coupled with a consistent online training tool or course for new instructors.

Do you have any other comments or concerns related to hunter education and/or the role of IHEA-USA in assisting states and territories with hunter education efforts? If so, please include them here
Hunting incidents need to be consistent across the county or the database is useless. If every state uses different criteria for the definition of a hunting incident, you cannot compare anything (if that is a planned use of the database). Will the press see that one state has more hunting incidents than another state and assume one state is less safe than the other? Also, without knowing the incidents per number of hunters, there is not much you can do with the data.
Please don't neglect the immediate needs of administrators while the agency (commendably) attempts to change itself to remain relevant. I see NGOs stray from their lane and/or neglect their base, and I don't want to see IHEA do the same. There is time to focus on 'extracurricular' things when the state administrators are fully supported. Increase the frequency and quality of communication, keep an up-to-date reciprocity document with samples of certs from each agency, fight for an industry answer to losing Mossberg kits and keep states in the loop, etc. Those are the things that can help NOW.
I think we should focus more on next steps for HE students and less on general public firearm safety courses.
Continue to intervene on behalf of states by taking calls from potential online vendors interested in developing hunter education coursework - via hunter ed Standards (content & delivery and accreditation / fees).
Keep up the good work. I am thankful to know hunters receive education on firearms safety and ethical harvest of wild animals.
Market and promote introduction to hunter education and learn to hunt programs for new hunters.
It is tempting to teach from the manual instead of using more hands-on training. A take-home pocket guide fitting in a backpack seems more helpful: firearm safety, state specific, wildlife ID, state regs, first aid. [State] was one of the first states to offer online courses through the pandemic, and that seemed the impetus for picking up 300 ag instructors. Face-to-face and any other means possible is needed to keep new information and ideas circulating from one agency to another. [State] has written a new manual that gets students out of their seats. Ag teachers have trouble getting hunting dummy sets, but not the state instructors.
Main concern is to continue to emphasize the importance of hunter education to our states' Directors.
Put the discount page back to open access.
Keep on looking for ways to improve.
I believe that IHEA-USA should be the gold standard and that it should be up to the states if they wish to lower their own standards (as long as the education/content standards are still met). I do not think IHEA-USA should give the same accreditation to services that only just 'check the boxes' to meet requirements of meeting standards, but that those who truly engage and expound on educating our students should be held above others. I believe that the focus of Hunter Education should be on Education, and that our ancillary programs should be where we focus our efforts on specific R3 goals and objectives.
IHEA should be creating a nationwide online program that all states can use for basic hunter education training.
Help promote agencies and non profits by highlighting their R3 efforts.
Is there a IHEA standard or nationwide survey template for hunter education courses?
Try to keep it simple. I am in this through my job and I consider it to be very important; that said if I spent the time that the 'experts' say I should on each part of my job, I would be working about a 300 hour week, not possible. Try to provide help, but make access simple, requirements easy to fulfill, and still keep the quality up. Thanks for asking for our input.
IHEA-USA has significantly improved its role and mission providing support to state agencies.
There are many resources that the IHEA has to offer that I intend to use in the future.
It was great to have the online IHEA conference last year. Our resources are limited, so we're not able to send our entire HE staff team in person (our team is 7 people). Was disappointed to learn that this year staff are not able to attend virtually. Instructors are able to with their membership but staff either need to be in person or not participate. Seems like it would be beneficial to have a virtual rate for those who can't attend--more than free but less than the in-person rate. You would be able to get more information out and offer options to the agencies that can't afford to send all their team members. I had really wanted to engage in some of this year's content, but we only have budget for our division manager to attend.
I feel there is still a disconnect between IHEA and instructors. It's getting better, but with increased communications via IHEA to state admins, and then admins disseminate info to instructors, it will improve. Instructors still feel (at least in [State]) as what is IHEA doing for me? Once resources become more available to them, their interest and trust in IHEA will improve.
Standardized digital content for classes.
With the advancement of human dimension studies and R3, we understand that our primary role is hunter ed. Would appreciate that remaining the primary focus--not R3 becoming the primary focus.
I would like to see a national level sharing site of potential new courses other than basic hunter education, for ideas and research into developing and planning new or updating current courses. Also, I know it will likely not be feasible, but perhaps having a list of different state standards for hunter education requirements for who is required to have completed basic hunter education.
It seems IHEA-USA is getting away from the foundation and role of the organization to support the states with simple tasks such as updating state hunter education certifications. It is also difficult to communicate with IHEA-USA, the response time is long.

In the focus groups, many participants said they appreciated the discounts provided through the IHEA-USA membership (a few people appeared to learn about the discounts for the first time in one of the focus group discussions). It should be noted that a few people expressed confusion over how to gain access to the discounts for their instructors.

Several focus group participants praised IHEA-USA for its virtual conference and for allowing volunteers to attend. As volunteer training remains a pressing issue in general, it appears the virtual conference was highly appreciated as an instructional resource from IHEA-USA.

A few of hunter education coordinators in the focus groups were familiar with the “Hunters Connect” feature on the IHEA-USA website; those who were familiar with it generally appeared to find it useful. By contrast, relatively few coordinators had experience with the Slack chat feature for hunter education instructors—one potential drawback of the Slack chat feature that was mentioned was the risk of instructors instituting ideas or teaching about topics they learned about on Slack and, in doing so, failing to adhere to (or straying from) state standards and protocols.

Regarding the IHEA-USA website, a few focus group participants recommended that IHEA-USA introduce a resource to help coordinators more easily see which courses are accepted in other states—it was suggested that IHEA-USA either post a list of courses by state or a list of certification number formats to compare against the information license applicants enter on applications. It is notable that a number of focus group participants appeared to be unfamiliar with the “Administrator Resources” section of the IHEA-USA website.

Updated visual aids and videos were mentioned as potential resources IHEA-USA could offer to help states and territories deliver better content in hunter education courses. One individual recommended that IHEA-USA develop and offer its own free online hunter education course.

Regarding instructor recruitment, a number of focus group participants suggested that recruiting an adequate number of female instructors can be challenging—there were calls for IHEA-USA to potentially assist in this area.

Other resources that IHEA-USA may be able to provide include shareable content for social media with core messages that can be tailored to each state and territory, reliable inert firearm kits, ongoing review of state and territory hunter education courses to ensure they are meeting standards, and templates for volunteer training.

The “Hunters Connect” videos are great.

I think IHEA took great strides with the virtual conference and opening that up to our volunteers. If there’s sponsorship available where it’s not as much of a fee-based thing, I think that’d be a good thing.

I've been an instructor for 15 years, and [until recently] I hardly even knew what IHEA was. If you talked about it, it was never really promoted. Coming in in October, it really spun my head around [in terms of] the amazing resources, the online content, the library, the videos, and other teaching aids and stuff available. Not to mention, the discounts available to instructors. And so, my big mission right now is to really promote all the great content by becoming an IHEA member.... But [previously], IHEA was always in the background. I'd get the workbooks and stuff like that, but it was never emphasized within our state.

The Slack, I think, is an area where [instructors] can communicate with each other.... We have our standard SOPs as to how this stuff is supposed to be taught..., and we may not want our instructors to vary from that too much. So, on the one hand it can be a valuable resource and a great new way to teach something or a particular lesson. But again, we want our volunteers to do things our way, so there is some balance there.

I think I have experienced that problem. I have had an instructor say to me, "Yeah, we started doing this [because] we were talking to some other instructors." Then I looked at it and said, "That's not even meeting our student learning objectives anymore."

One of the problems with the [IHEA-USA] website is it got so clunky and filled with stuff that it began to be hard to navigate and be useful.

When you go to the "find a course" [section], you can't even find the hunter ed course. You only find the firearms fundamentals course. I'd like to see that go back to where they could type in their state, and if someone in [state] is looking for a course, that would direct them to [the specific state's] website to find a course.

If we could just have some updated videos. They could have the exact same content, but if they could just refresh them a little. That way you won't get people picking apart that [the video appears to be set in] the 1970s or whatever.

[It's important to have] a visual aid also that isn't so outdated that people are laughing and that more are paying attention.

The lens of what IHEA can do for the states and instructors would potentially be to conduct that type of review [of courses] themselves.... I could see a role where IHEA does that and then coordinates with the standards committee to say, "I saw this, and what do y'all think of this?" ... Kind of get the expert opinion from the administrators on what the right course of action might be to address that.

There's a lack of competition in that market [for online hunter education courses]. Kalkomey has a good business model for them, but does that meet the needs of the states?

The biggest thing [IHEA-USA] could contribute to us [is] an education course online that we could all use and then potentially have that as free to our students.

If somebody was going to give me something, if they asked me what I needed, it would be a free online course. I know the NRA built one, and it's out there and available, but when we reviewed that, it was not the quality that we wanted or needed for [our state].

But all the things you guys have talked about, volunteer hours, accepting change, all of those things, it's not something IHEA can give us.

I think it's probably easier to find things [on the IHEA-USA website], just from the dropdowns and stuff. I go there probably once a week, whether it's to check on dates or something for my instructors. I always refer my instructors to the website for resources there as well. I think the website's better than it was.

Field staff can't even look to see what the discounts are unless they're a member.

We're trying to really show our volunteers that we really need them, we value them, and that there's benefits to being a volunteer. That there's some pro deals [through IHEA-USA], there's training, and you're an extension of our department. Because, by and large, they are doing the work. They're doing the heavy lifting, and we are getting that federal match. Without them none of this exists. So it's really trying to re-identify the value of, "Why volunteer?" Why spend your time and follow all these policies and guidelines and spend your Saturdays teaching courses? [The] benefit for equipment, that is just one opportunity that we are trying to highlight.

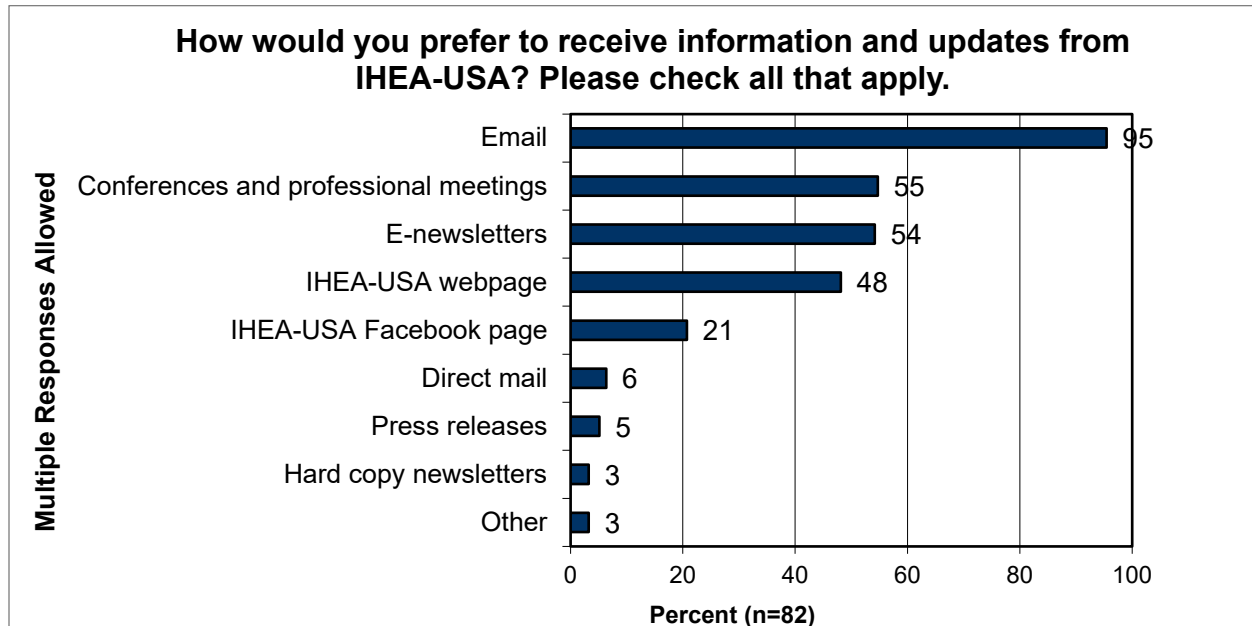
As long as it's updated regularly by the states, it would be handy to know whether hunter ed is required or not, if it's just optional, or whether trapper ed is required. Right now, if I want to find who has a hunter ed course that's actually required, I have to pretty much go to every state and see.... So, a run-down of what online courses they accept—that kind of information might be helpful, as long as the states keep it updated.

I was looking for a non-lead ammunition lesson plan.... IHEA might want to explore doing some national standards for non-lead.

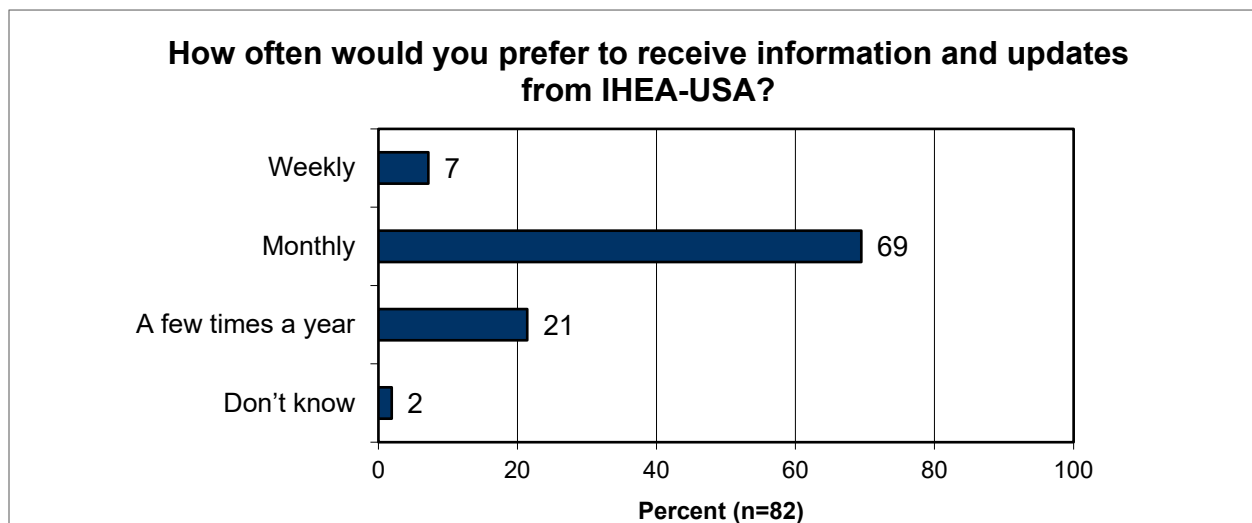
INFORMATION PREFERENCES AND IHEA-USA MEMBERSHIP

Email is by far the most preferred method of receiving information and updates from IHEA-USA (95% of the coordinators surveyed indicated preferring this method).

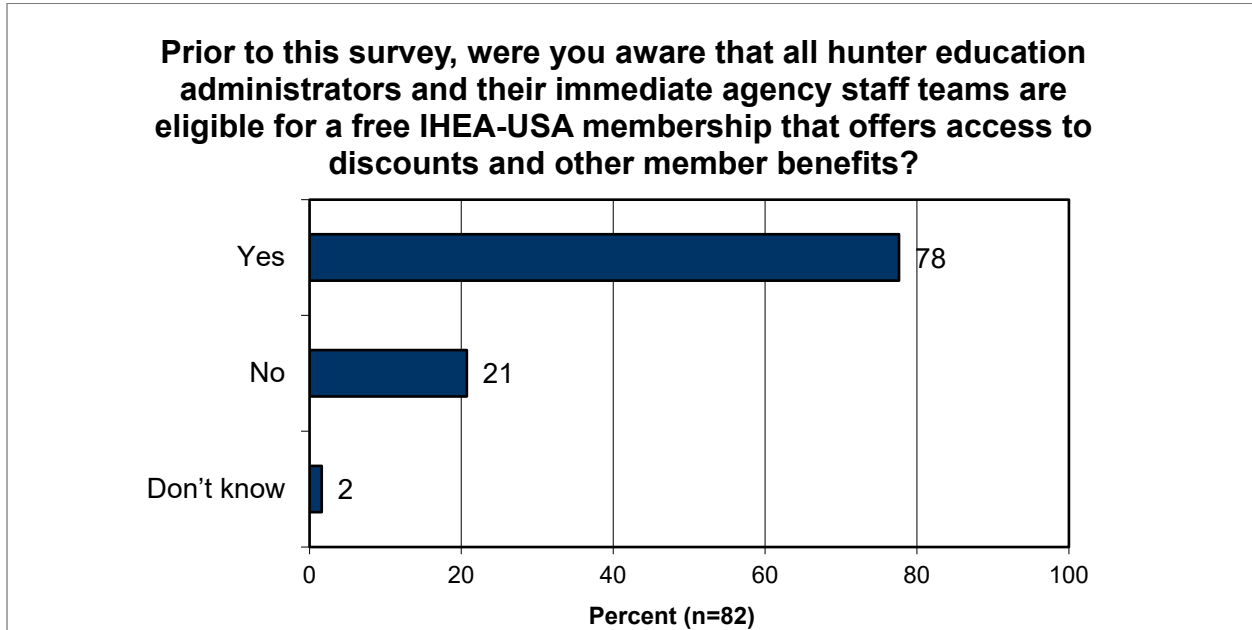
Regarding other ways, about half of hunter education coordinators would prefer to receive updates from IHEA-USA at conferences and professional meetings (55%), e-newsletters (54%), and through the IHEA-USA webpage (48%). About a fifth (21%) would prefer updates and other information through IHEA-USA's Facebook page, while much smaller percentages prefer updates through direct mail (6%), press releases (5%), or hard copy newsletters (3%).



Regarding frequency of information and updates from IHEA-USA, the overwhelming preference is for monthly updates (69% prefer this). Otherwise, about a fifth of coordinators (21%) would prefer updates a few times a year, versus just 7% who would like updates and information on a weekly basis.

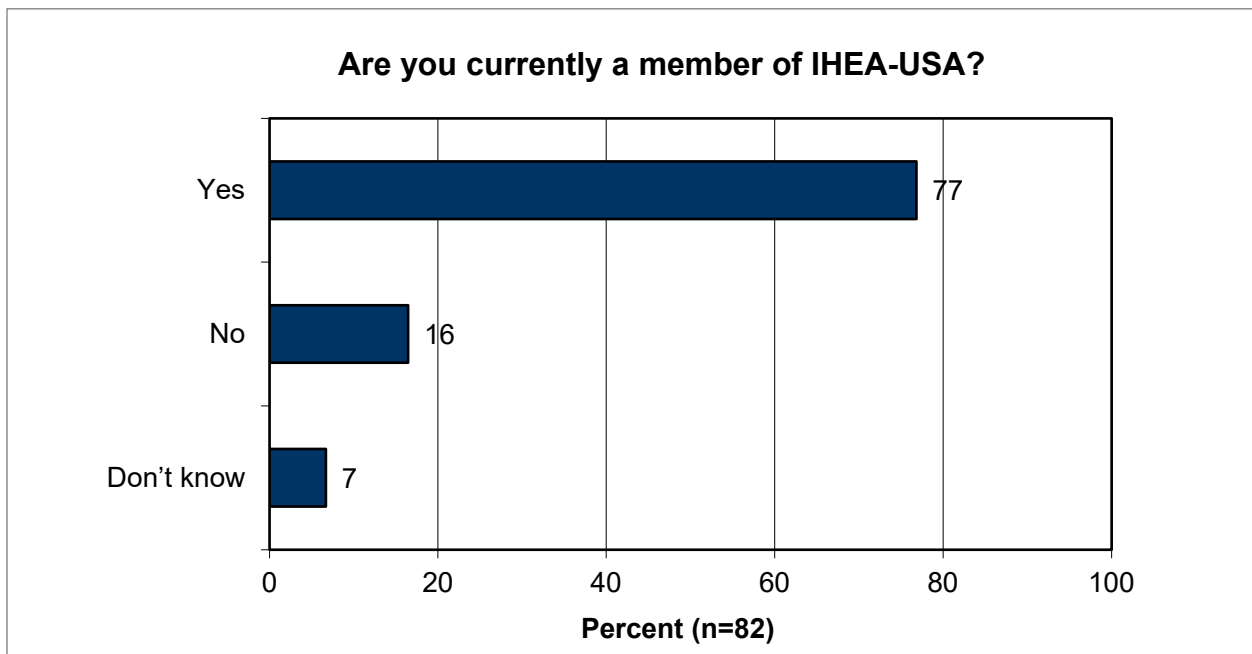


About three quarters of hunter education coordinators (78%) were aware, prior to the survey, that all hunter education administrators and their immediate agency staff teams are eligible for a free IHEA-USA membership with all member benefits. About a fifth (21%) were not aware of this.

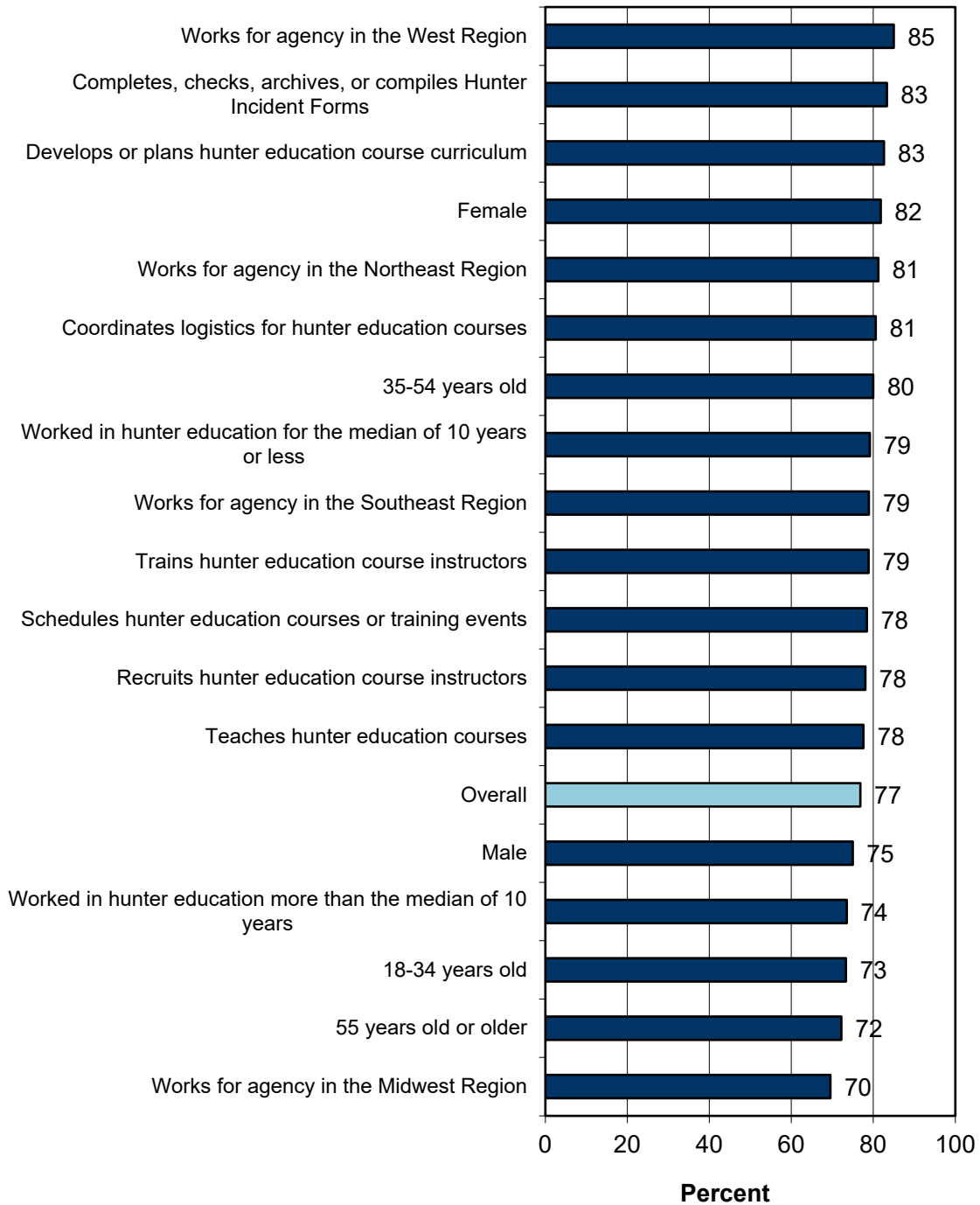


Similarly, about three quarters of the hunter education coordinators surveyed were members of IHEA-USA. Notably, 7% of respondents were unsure whether they were members.

As shown in the graph on the next page, hunter education coordinators in the West Region are the most likely to be members of IHEA-USA, while coordinators in the Midwest Region are the least likely.

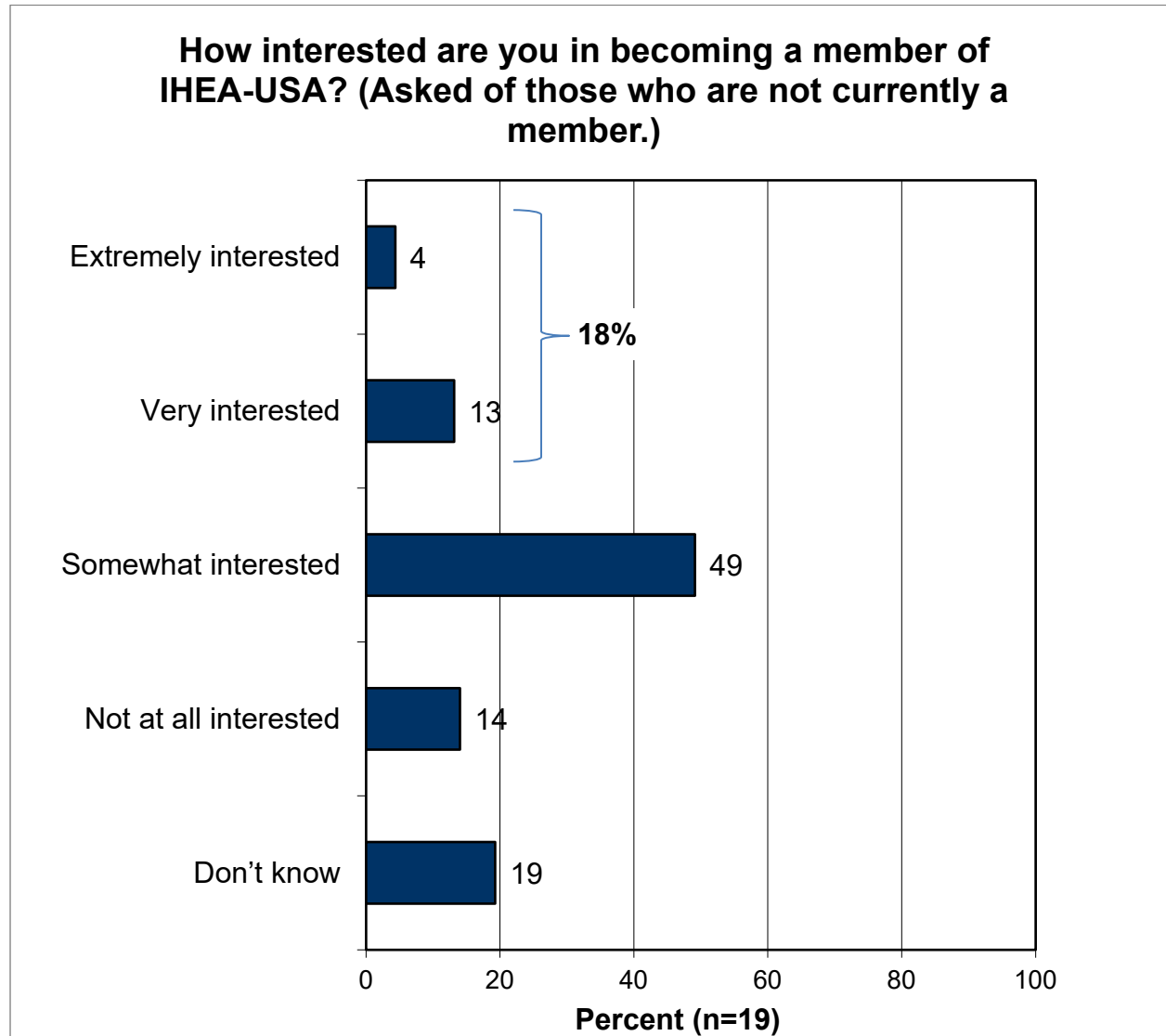


Percent of each of the following groups who are currently a member of IHEA-USA:



Hunter education coordinators who are not currently members of IHEA-USA most often say they are *somewhat* interested in becoming members (as opposed to *extremely, very, or not at all* interested).

To encourage membership, IHEA-USA should provide more information about member benefits and discounts, as well as the ways in which IHEA-USA provides hunter education program support and other assistance to states and territories.

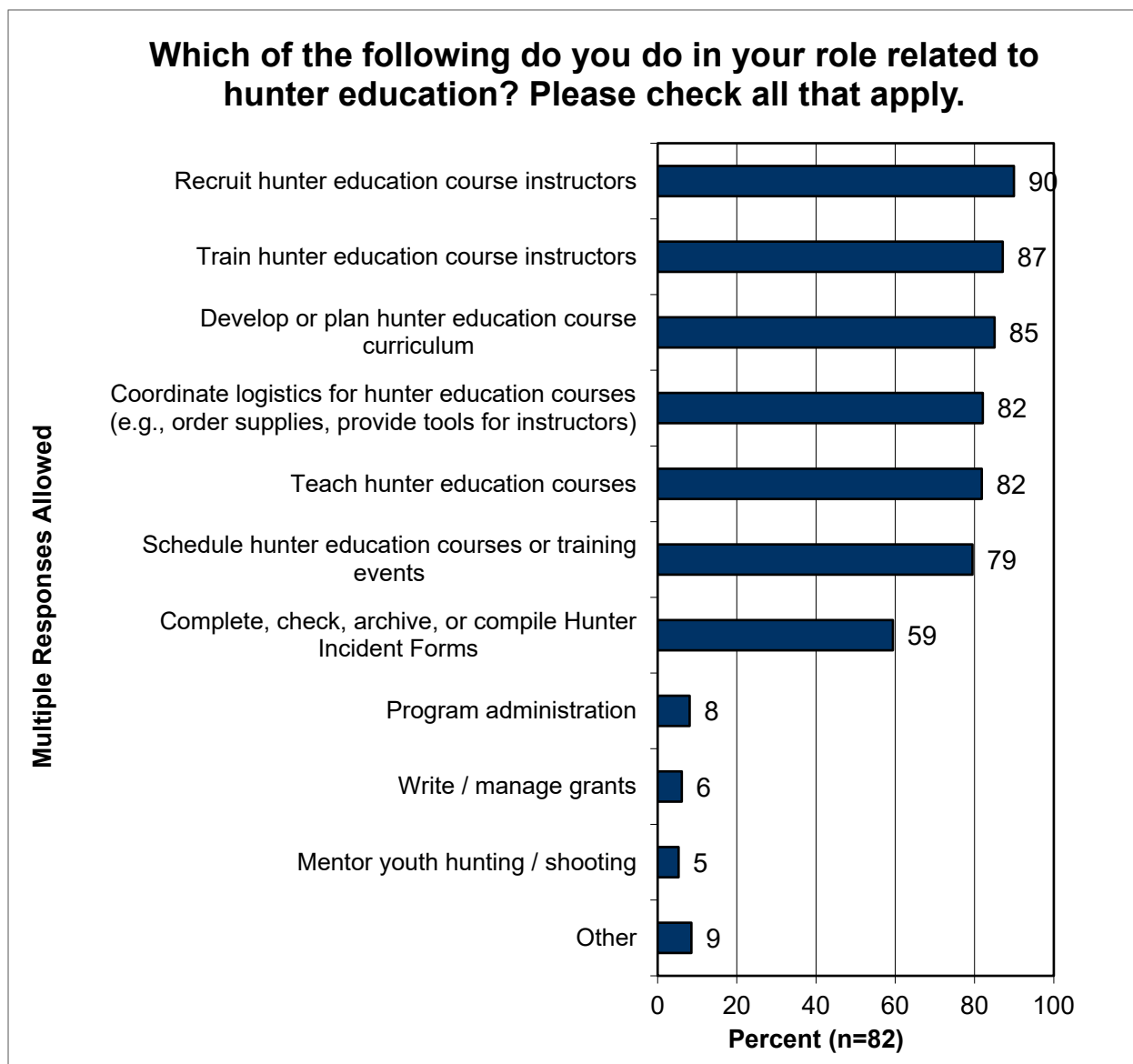


Is there anything IHEA-USA could do or provide to make you more interested in becoming a member?
What are the benefits of being a member?
More information on membership for paid HE Coordinators.
I think my state agency is already a member? We pay a membership fee anyway.
Instructor ideas on delivering the best hands-on class.
Discounts and perks do not apply to me as I am a state employee and cannot accept these offers due to ethics laws. Newsletters and information comparing [my state] with other states and the past participation demographics are interesting.
Make it simple for HE staff to utilize their free memberships.

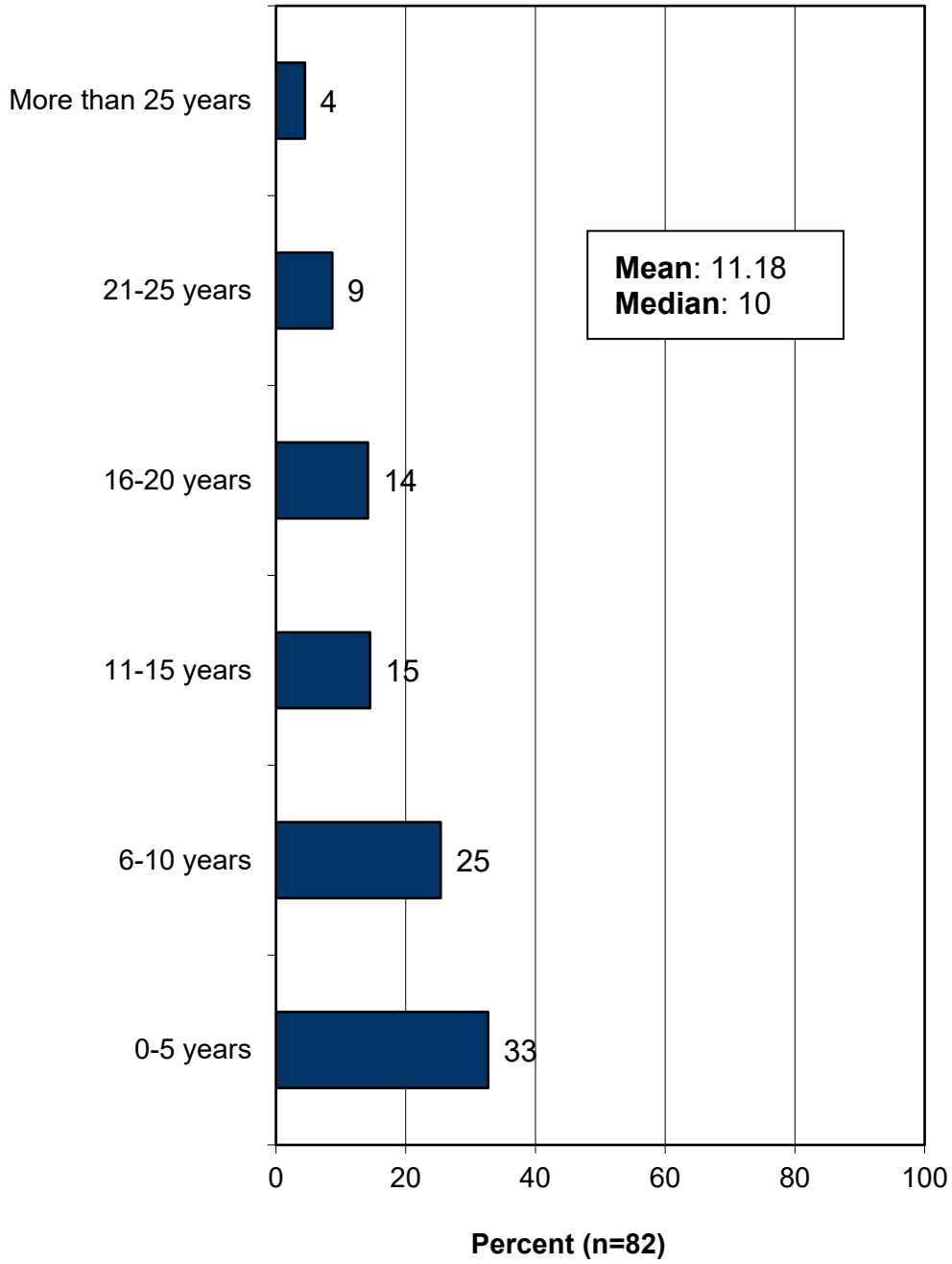
CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

The survey asked hunter education coordinators about the duties and activities they typically do in their role as a hunter education coordinator. The most common duties and activities include recruiting hunter education course instructors (90% of those surveyed do this as part of their job), training hunter education course instructors (87%), developing or planning the hunter education course curriculum (85%), coordinating logistics for hunter education courses (82%), teaching hunter education courses (82%), and scheduling hunter education courses or training events (79%). Additionally, more than half of the hunter education coordinators surveyed (59%) complete, check, archive, or compile Hunter Incident Forms.

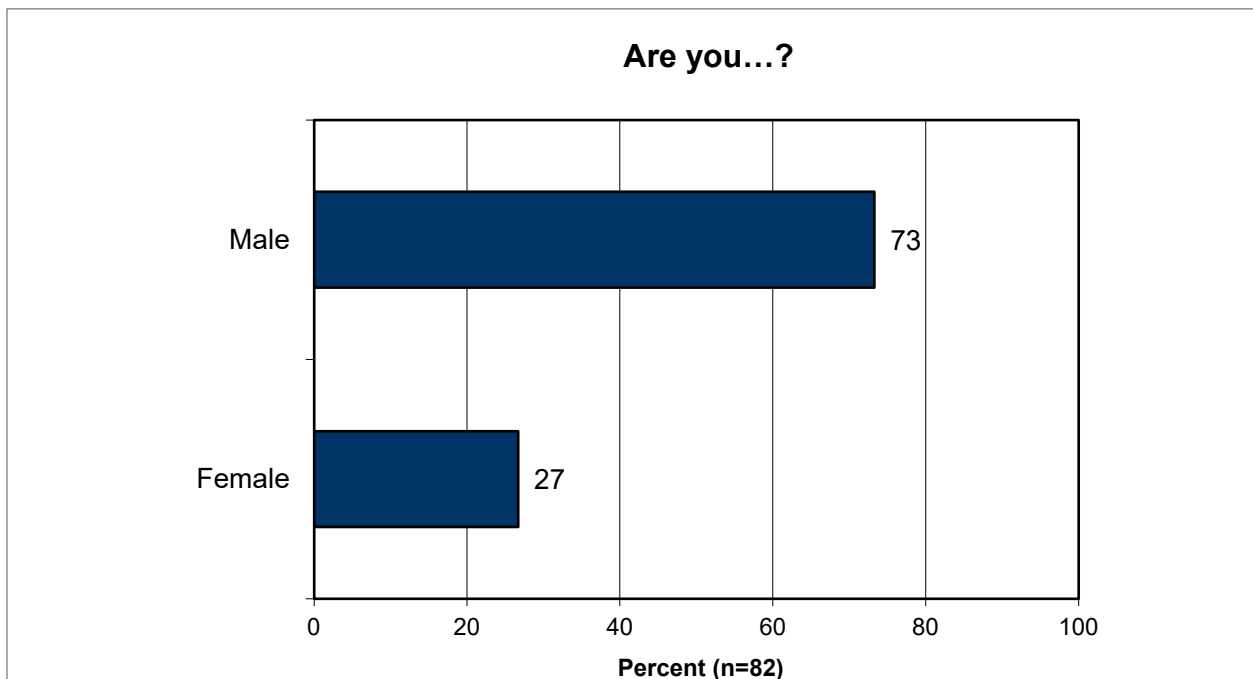
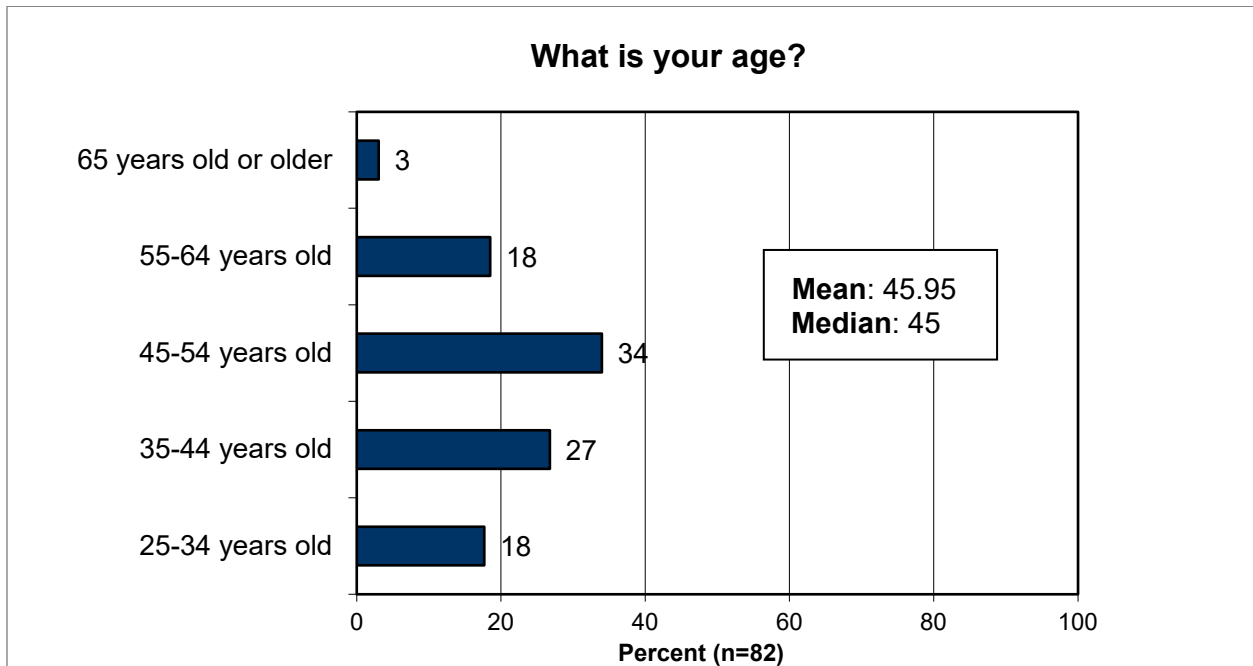
Another survey question looked at the number of years coordinators have been involved with hunter education in a professional capacity: among all survey respondents, the median number is 10 years.



How many years have you been involved with hunter education in a professional capacity?



The median hunter education coordinator age is 45 years old, and approximately three out of four hunter education coordinators are male.



FULL DISCUSSION OF METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study consisted of a series of focus groups with hunter education coordinators and administrators in each of the four major regions of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) and a nationwide survey of hunter education coordinators and administrators. Note that all data collection for the project was conducted with hunter education program professional agency staff; volunteer hunter education course instructors were not included in the research. This section provides an overview of the focus group methodology followed by the survey methodology.

FOCUS GROUP METHODOLOGY

Focus groups were conducted for the initial data collection component. Responsive Management conducted a series of four online focus groups with agency hunter education professionals (including program coordinators and administrators) in January and February 2022. Each group consisted of 7 to 8 hunter education professionals representing a variety of states within each major AFWA region. The groups were conducted via Zoom video conferencing to allow for maximum convenience and participation.

OVERVIEW OF FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH

Focus groups entail in-depth, structured discussions with small groups of individuals about their opinions and attitudes on various issues. The use of focus groups is an accepted research technique for the qualitative exploration of attitudes, opinions, perceptions, motivations, constraints, participation, and behaviors. Focus groups provide researchers with understanding and insights through the process of group discussion and interaction.

The focus groups for this project explored the various challenges affecting the planning and delivery of hunter education, especially in light of restrictions and limitations associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The discussions also explored awareness of and opinions on specific IHEA-USA products and resources, including its Hunter Incident Database and its planned Student Demographic Database. In addition to producing new qualitative data, the focus groups provided the research team with a better understanding of the topics and information that needed to be quantified in the subsequent survey of hunter education personnel.

Focus groups allow for extensive open-ended responses to questions, probing, follow-up questions, group discussion, and observation of emotional responses to topics—aspects that cannot be measured in a quantitative survey. Qualitative research sacrifices reliability for increased validity. This means that focus group findings cannot be replicated statistically as a survey can be (i.e., focus groups have low reliability), but focus groups provide a more nuanced understanding of the issues being discussed (i.e., they have high validity). All focus group discussions were recorded for further analysis.

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT RECRUITING

To compile a list of individuals for focus group recruiting, Responsive Management obtained an existing list of hunter education coordinators and administrators from IHEA-USA and contacted each individual—the purpose of this initial communication was to identify any additional staff

members to potentially invite to participate in the focus groups and survey. This process took several weeks to complete. Responsive Management's initial email introduced the study and its purpose and requested the names and contact information for any other relevant professionals who were qualified to take part in the research. The initial list of hunter education coordinators and administrators from IHEA-USA consisted of 69 records; after the identification of additional hunter education professionals, the list grew to 183 records. The expanded list was subsequently provided to IHEA-USA so that the organization could update its internal records regarding state and territory hunter education contacts. Below is the email that was initially sent to hunter education personnel, which was drafted in cooperation with IHEA-USA:

Responsive Management and the International Hunter Education Association (IHEA-USA) are collaborating on a Multistate Conservation Grant needs assessment of hunter education in the post-COVID-19 world, including a much-needed modernization of IHEA's Hunter Incident Database and the launch of a Student Demographic Database.

The study will address the following challenges:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated demand for hunter education certification in many areas of the country, including demand from sport shooters and firearms owners.
- Hunter education opportunities, requirements, and course options differ across the United States.
- America's changing demographics may also impact supply and demand for hunter education.

Responsive Management and IHEA-USA will be conducting surveys and focus groups with members of the hunter education community to determine their views on these and other important issues.

I am contacting you to request your help in identifying the appropriate individuals to take part in the research. Specifically, we are looking for hunter education administrators, coordinators, agency personnel and others with the following responsibilities or experience:

- Planning and delivery of hunter education courses
- Familiarity with hunter education course content and implementation
- Hunter education instructor recruitment and training
- Reporting or managing hunter incident data
- Managing hunter education course registration

This study involves a series of focus groups with hunter education administrators, coordinators, leadership, and others to explore how COVID-19 has affected hunter education format and delivery. Although only some will be asked to participate in a focus group, everyone will get invited to give feedback via a survey. Focus group findings will assist in a survey instrument that will be designed to quantify the scope and scale of issues affecting hunter education delivery and provide a report on what states learned about changes in course structure, implementation, and policies.

IHEA-USA will use the project results to develop products, services, and resources to better assist the hunter education community.

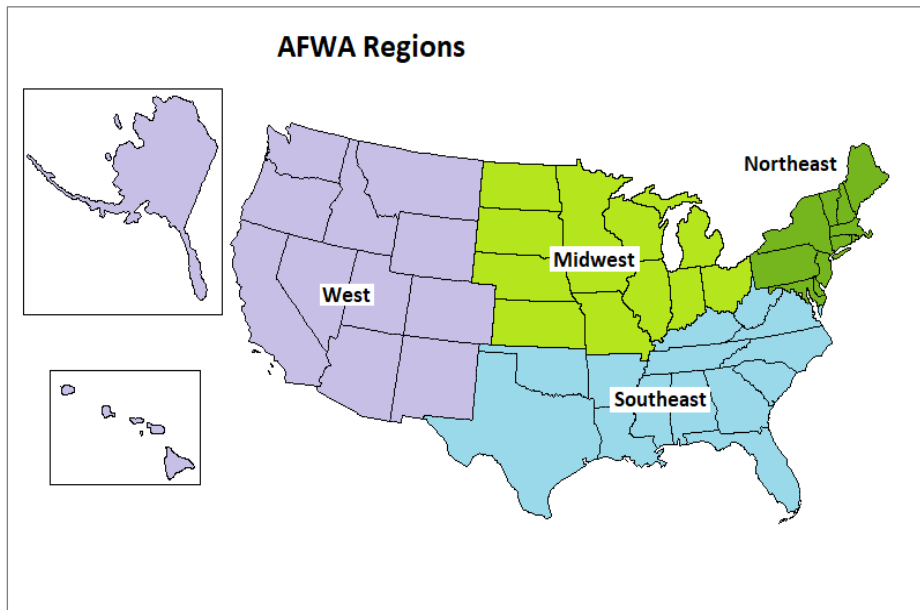
I greatly appreciate your time and help putting us in touch with the individuals who can contribute to this research. I am happy to follow up with the individuals you recommend. I am also available to answer any questions you may have about this study; you may also reach out to Alex Baer, Executive Director of IHEA-USA.

Thank you so much in advance for your time and assistance. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Alison Lanier, Responsive Management Research Staff
Alex Baer, Executive Director, IHEA

Following compilation of the overall list of relevant hunter education professionals, Responsive Management began recruiting individuals for the focus groups. The focus group recruiting procedure included emails to professionals explaining the study (if it was the first time the person was being contacted about the project), follow-up emails, and telephone calls.

Hunter education professionals were recruited from agencies in each of the major AFWA regions, as shown in the map below:



Potential participants were contacted and screened, as necessary, using a standardized set of questions developed in cooperation with IHEA-USA that determined whether the potential participant met the established guidelines set for the group. Professionals who answered “yes” to three or more of the following screener questions pertaining to hunter education job duties qualified to be a focus group participant:

1. Do you set or have a voice in setting your state’s hunter education requirements?
2. Do you plan hunter education course content?
3. Do you conduct hunter education classes?
4. Are you involved with recruiting and/or training volunteer instructors?
5. Are you involved with reporting hunting incidents?
6. Do you collect hunter education student demographic information?

Qualified individuals who expressed interest in participating in a focus group were then contacted again to determine their preferences regarding potential dates for the group (the groups were subsequently scheduled based on the majority preferences in each region). Focus group participants were sent a confirmation email and calendar invitation for the virtual focus group. Responsive Management ensured that there was adequate follow-up contact with those who were recruited to participate in the groups, including a reminder email to participants the day before each scheduled group. Additionally, to allow every professional who qualified a

chance to participate in the qualitative research, Responsive Management offered the option of completing a personal interview with a researcher instead of participating in a focus group.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE AND MODERATION

As previously mentioned, the focus groups were conducted online through Zoom video conferencing to ensure the widest possible range of participants and perspectives. Each focus group was conducted using a discussion guide and was moderated by one of Responsive Management's trained moderators. The discussion guide was developed cooperatively by Responsive Management and IHEA-USA based on the key topics of interest to the study. The guide included general questions regarding challenges, limitations, and other concerns related to hunter education course content and delivery, as well as more specific questions about various IHEA-USA products, services, and resources. The use of a discussion guide ensured consistency in the qualitative data collection.

Using the discussion guide, the moderator kept the discussions within design parameters without exerting a strong influence on the discussion content. In this sense, the focus groups were non-directive group discussions that exposed the spontaneous attitudes, insights, and perceptions of hunter education professionals regarding the discussion guide topics.

While each focus group discussion was allowed to flow organically and did not need to adhere precisely to the guide, the guide was used when it was necessary for the moderator to steer the discussion back to specific focus group topics. Analyses of the qualitative data were performed in three iterations: 1) the actual focus group observation, 2) review of the group recordings by other researchers, and 3) the development of key qualitative findings.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

For the survey of hunter education program coordinators and administrators, a closed online survey was administered. A *closed* survey means that the survey was by invitation only—just those specifically selected for the survey could take it—and could not be accessed in a general internet search. Online questionnaires are an appropriate method of data collection for surveys of agency personnel because they can be taken at any time, at the convenience of the respondent.

SURVEY SAMPLE

The survey was administered using the list of confirmed hunter education professionals included on the initial list provided by IHEA-USA and subsequently expanded by Responsive Management. The overall list comprised hunter education professionals in the 50 states, the United States territories of Guam and Puerto Rico, hunter education associations, and additional hunter education personnel employed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. (As previously noted, only hunter education program professionals employed by the agencies were invited to participate in the survey; volunteer hunter education course instructors were not surveyed for this project.) The final sample database developed in the previous phase of the study resulted in a total of 183 hunter education contacts as potential survey respondents.

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

The survey instrument was developed by Responsive Management and IHEA-USA, based on both the focus group findings and the general topics of interest to the project. The survey was coded in Responsive Management's online platform. The questionnaire was programmed to branch, code, and substitute phrases in the survey based on previous responses so that each survey was tailored to the respondent. Responsive Management conducted pre-tests of the online questionnaire to ensure proper wording, flow, and logic in the survey.

SURVEY CONTACT PROCEDURES AND DATA COLLECTION

The initial email invitation for the survey was prepared by Responsive Management and distributed to hunter education professionals in each state and territory. A generic survey link was provided to a few states that requested to distribute the survey to their staff directly. The initial email invitation for the survey was sent on May 2, 2022; it included a link to the survey as well as contact information for a Responsive Management researcher who was available to answer questions about the study or assist with technical issues. The text of the initial email invitation is shown below:

Dear Hunter Education Professional,

As you may know, Responsive Management and the International Hunter Education Association (IHEA-USA) are collaborating on a Multistate Conservation Grant needs assessment regarding hunter education in the post-COVID-19 world. The purpose of the study is to help states and territories better plan for hunter education in the future, and to help IHEA-USA identify the programs, resources, and other tools that would be most beneficial to the hunter education community.

Following a series of focus groups with hunter education administrators, Responsive Management and IHEA-USA are now implementing a survey to quantify the issues identified in the focus groups and to obtain additional data regarding key hunter education topics.

As a hunter education administrator or professional staff member, your participation in the survey would be greatly appreciated. The research results will help IHEA-USA develop services and resources to better assist the hunter education community.

Please use the link below to access the survey:

[Click Here to Start the Survey](#)

Please note that this survey is intended only for hunter education administrators, coordinators, and other professional program staff – we are not surveying volunteer hunter education instructors at this time.

For questions about the study, please contact Alex Baer, IHEA-USA Executive Director, at abaer@IHEA-USA.org; for assistance with the survey, please contact Alison Lanier with Responsive Management at alison@responsivemanagement.com.

Thank you very much in advance for your time and assistance with this important study. We anticipate sharing the initial study findings at the IHEA-USA Annual Conference next month.

Sincerely,

Alison Lanier, Responsive Management Research Staff
Alex Baer, Executive Director, IHEA-USA

Reminder emails were sent, as needed, to those who did not respond to the first survey invitation; the reminders used the same text with the addition of “Reminder” in the email subject line. The survey link was sent using two different platforms to ensure that messages were not being blocked by spam filters. Those who did not respond to multiple email reminders were contacted by telephone by Responsive Management interviewers. Responsive Management staff left voicemail messages for respondents who could not be reached.

The online data were collected as respondents completed their surveys. Responsive Management monitored the number of completed surveys and downloaded the survey data into its in-house data management facilities. The surveys were checked so that those who took the survey were not sent a reminder email.

After the online surveys were obtained, the survey center managers and/or statisticians checked each completed survey to ensure clarity and completeness. The survey was administered from May through June 2022. Responsive Management obtained 82 completed questionnaires from hunter education professionals in the following states and territory:

- Alabama
- Alaska
- Arizona
- Arkansas
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Guam
- Hawaii
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Minnesota
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- New York
- North Carolina
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- Oregon
- South Carolina
- South Dakota
- Texas
- Utah
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming

In addition to the states and territory above, surveys were obtained from professionals at the Texas Wildlife Association and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

SURVEY DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of data was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics as well as proprietary software developed by Responsive Management. The survey data were weighted so that each agency had an equal influence on the data, regardless of the size of the agency or the number of surveys obtained from it (at least one survey was obtained from each participating agency, while some agencies had multiple staff members complete surveys).

Some of the questions were open-ended, meaning that no answer set was presented, and respondents could respond with anything that came to mind. For the analysis of these questions, each verbatim open-ended response was put into one or more categories. In other cases, responses from open-ended survey questions are shown verbatim in tables.

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL HUNTER EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (IHEA-USA)

The International Hunter Education Association (IHEA-USA) is the professional hunter education association affiliated with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the 50 state fish and wildlife agency hunter education programs. The programs employ 55,000 instructors, many of whom are volunteers, that teach hunting and shooting safety and responsibilities throughout the United States.

Hunter education courses train and certify more than 600,000 students annually. Since 1949, almost 40 million students have completed hunter education courses that cover firearm safety, bowhunting, wildlife management, field care of game, responsible hunting, landowner relations, wildlife identification, and much more.

Hunting is a safe activity, and, because of hunter education, it is even safer! Over the last 50 years, hunting-related injury rates have decreased dramatically, even as populations of deer, wild turkey, elk, geese, and other species of game have risen to record numbers.

Hunters have raised billions of dollars for wildlife conservation in North America and championed the cause of wildlife restoration programs for many generations. Today, hunters continue to be the most effective political voice supporting legislation to protect wild things and wild places for future generations.

IHEA-USA.org

ABOUT RESPONSIVE MANAGEMENT

Responsive Management is an internationally recognized survey research firm specializing in natural resource and outdoor recreation issues. Our mission is to help natural resource and outdoor recreation agencies, businesses, and organizations better understand and work with their constituents, customers, and the public.

Focusing only on natural resource and outdoor recreation issues, Responsive Management has conducted telephone, mail, and online surveys, as well as multi-modal surveys, on-site intercepts, focus groups, public meetings, personal interviews, needs assessments, program evaluations, marketing and communication plans, and other forms of human dimensions research measuring how people relate to the natural world for more than 30 years. Utilizing our in-house, full-service survey facilities with 75 professional interviewers, we have conducted studies in all 50 states and 15 countries worldwide, totaling more than 1,000 human dimensions projects *only* on natural resource and outdoor recreation issues.

Responsive Management has conducted research for every state fish and wildlife agency and every federal natural resource agency, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Coast Guard, and the National Marine Fisheries Service. Additionally, we have provided research for all the major conservation NGOs, including the Archery Trade Association, the American Sportfishing Association, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Dallas Safari Club, Ducks Unlimited, Environmental Defense Fund, the Izaak Walton League of America, the National Shooting Sports Foundation, the National Wildlife Federation, the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Safari Club International, the Sierra Club, Trout Unlimited, and the Wildlife Management Institute.

Other nonprofit and NGO clients include the American Museum of Natural History, the BoatUS Foundation, the National Association of Conservation Law Enforcement Chiefs, the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators, and the Ocean Conservancy. As well, Responsive Management conducts market research and product testing for numerous outdoor recreation manufacturers and industry leaders, such as Winchester Ammunition, Vista Outdoor (whose brands include Federal Premium, CamelBak, Bushnell, Primos, and more), Trijicon, Yamaha, and others.

Responsive Management also provides data collection for the nation's top universities, including Auburn University, Clemson University, Colorado State University, Duke University, George Mason University, Michigan State University, Mississippi State University, North Carolina State University, Oregon State University, Penn State University, Rutgers University, Stanford University, Texas Tech, University of California-Davis, University of Florida, University of Montana, University of New Hampshire, University of Southern California, Virginia Tech, West Virginia University, Yale University, and many more.

Our research has been upheld in U.S. Courts, used in peer-reviewed journals, and presented at major wildlife and natural resource conferences around the world. Responsive Management's research has also been featured in many of the nation's top media, including *Newsweek*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, CNN, National Public Radio, and on the front pages of *The Washington Post* and *USA Today*.

responsivemanagement.com