

Freeman Trends Report

Unpacking XLNC: The future of adult learning at conferences and tradeshow

Part One

Within this report

Total number of
respondents: **4,914**

Total number of attendee respondents: **4,729**

- Attendee margin of error: **+/- 1.4%**
- **65%** of respondents from Conferences
- **35%** of respondents from Tradeshows

Total number of event organizer respondents: **185**

Organizer margin of error: **+/- 7.0%**



PART ONE



**Learning is a big topic.
So, we've chosen to
explore it in two parts.**

**This report
is Part One.**

Key Findings

1. In-person events still dominate professional learning, but only if done right
2. Attendees are frustrated with quality of content & overwhelmed by the volume
3. General/keynote sessions are significantly underperforming
4. Change is known... but blocked

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The in-person learning advantage

Human energy possesses something screens can't replicate, and bringing people together is only the starting point.

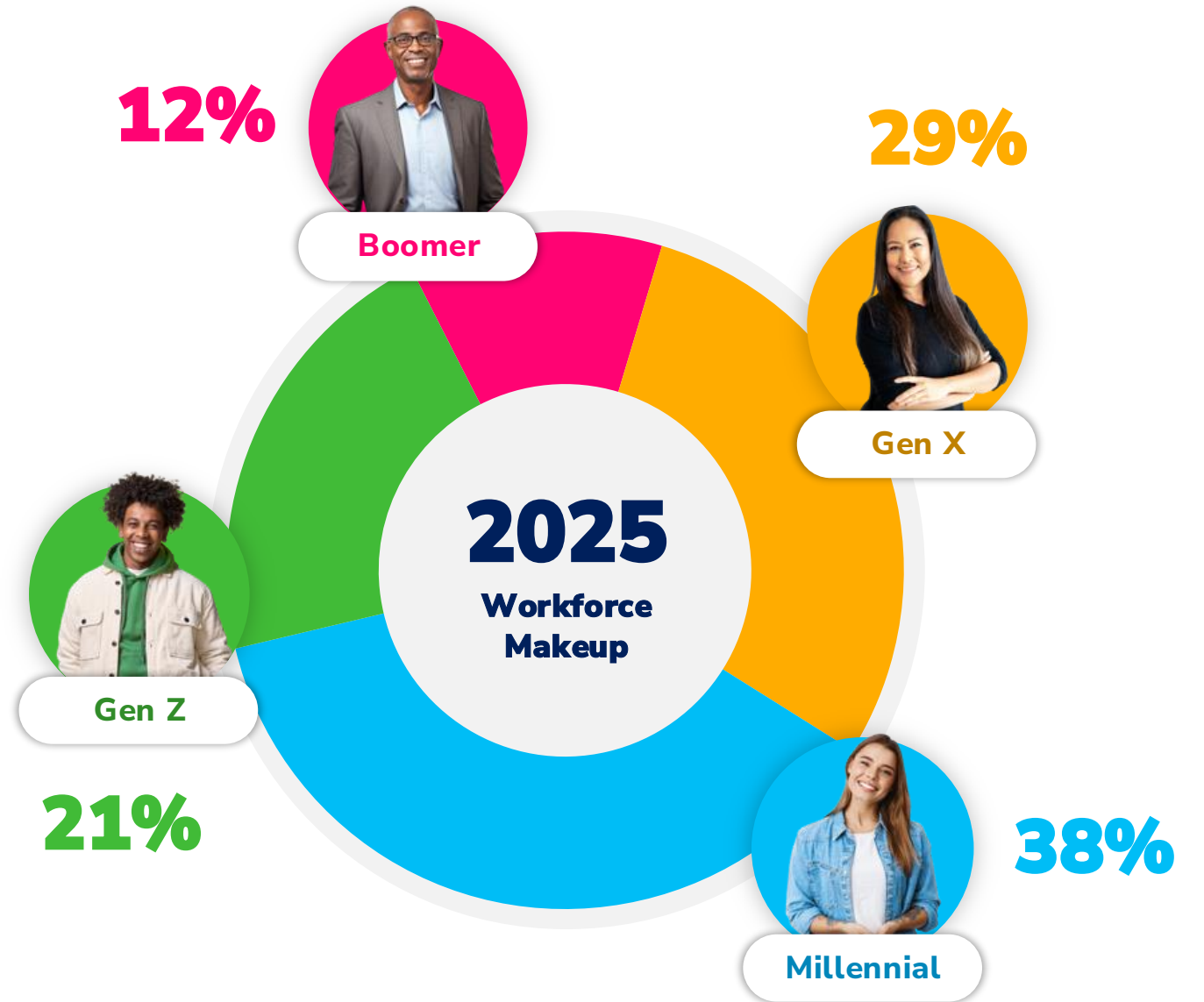
Attendees best learn inside traditional event learning sessions, where current methods are falling short. We need to focus on the fundamentals.



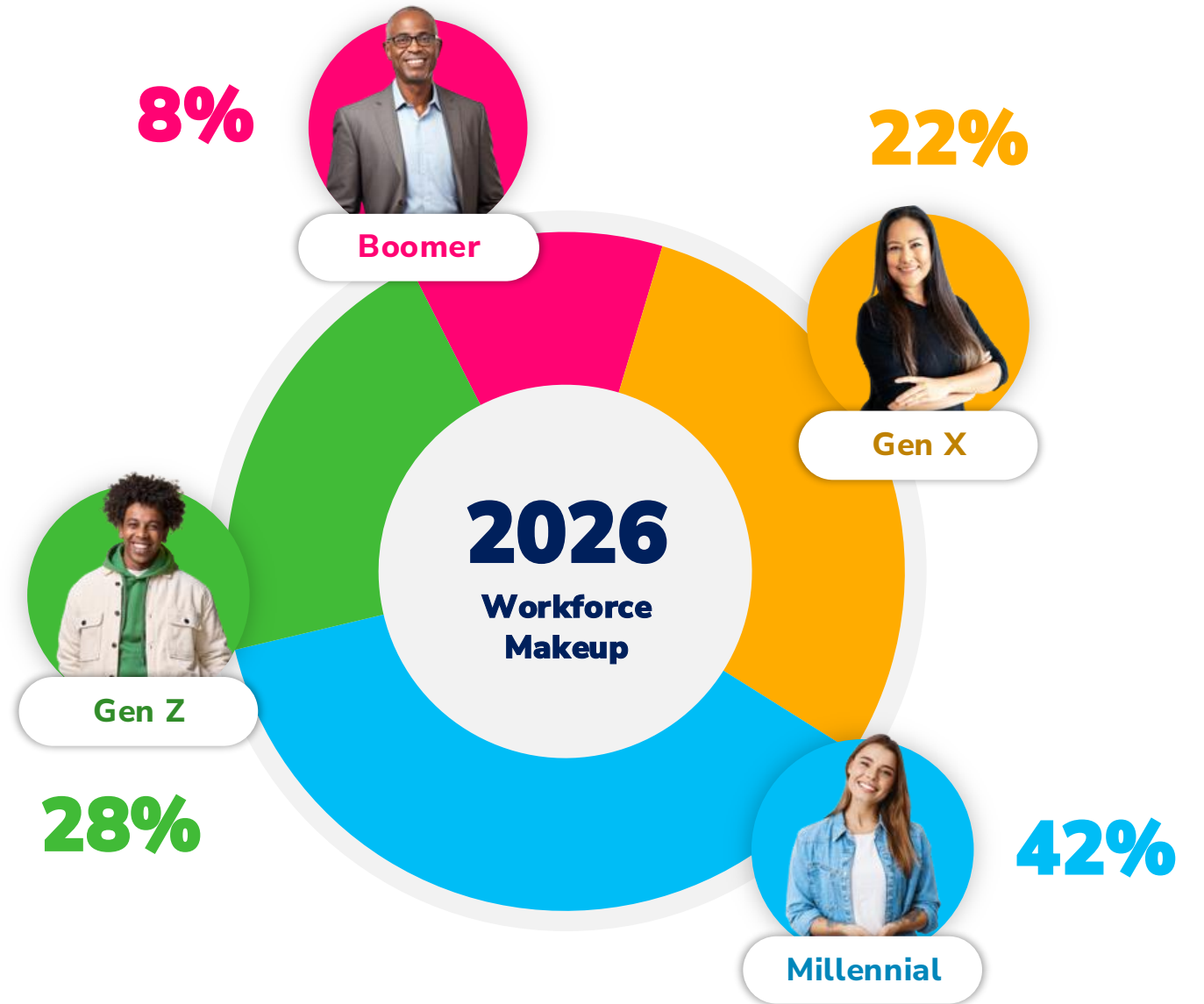
The Workforce Has Shifted



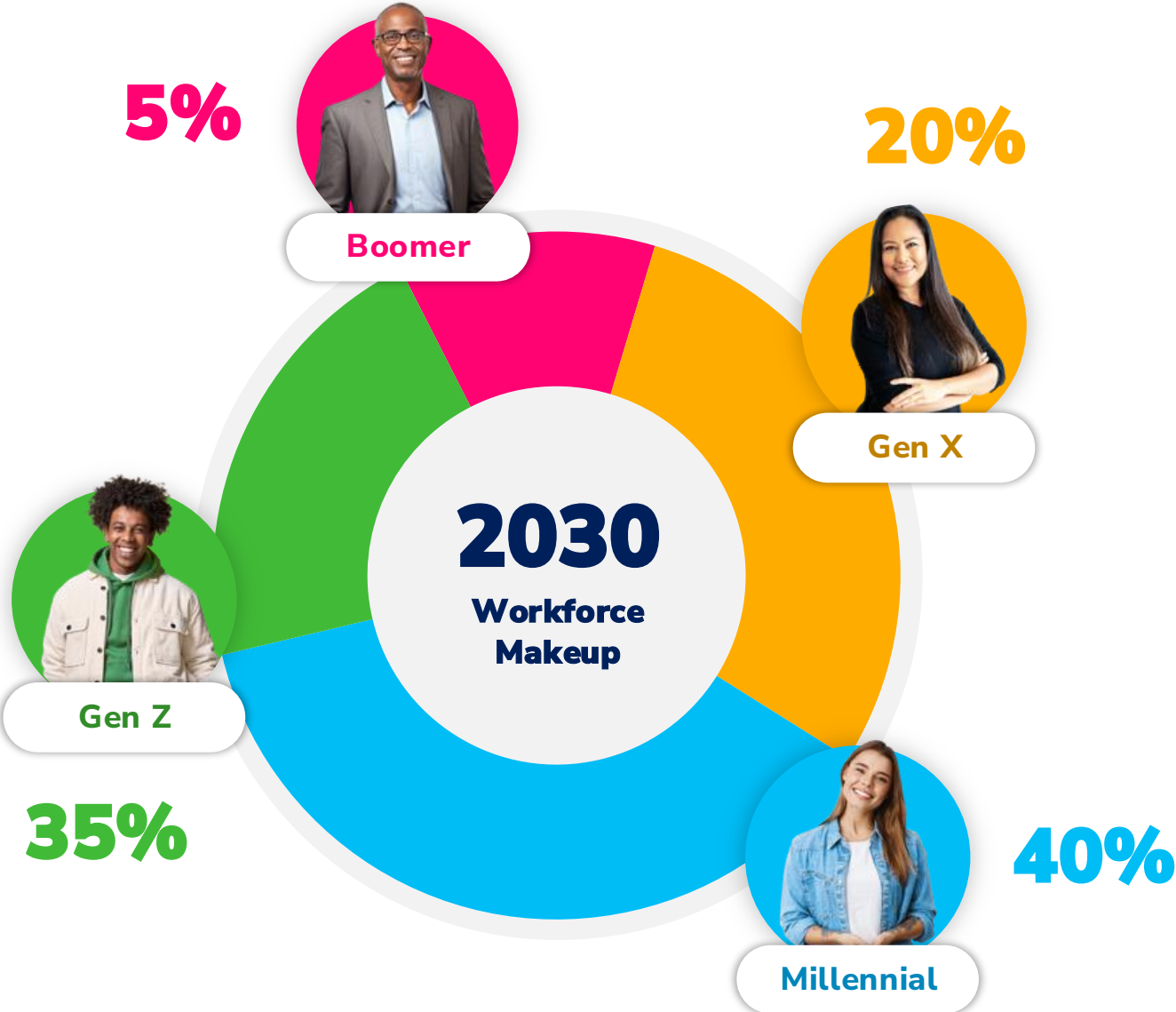
2025



2026



By **2030** we have a whole new landscape.



NowGen is reshaping in-person events and commercial expectations

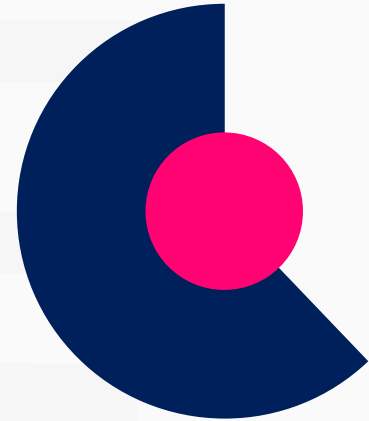






Desire Paths

1. Navigating events/exhibits is painful and confusing
2. Connecting with colleagues, new contacts, and vendor partnerships is overwhelming and frustrating
3. The content/ session volume is ridiculous
4. Why can't you connect me to the content based on what you recommend?





EXPERIENCE

To have fun, feel emotionally fulfilled, explore, hands-on



LEARNING

To be inspired, informed, discover something new



NETWORKING

Connect with peers, build relationships with attendees and event partners



COMMERCE

Discover products/services, buy, build vendor relationships

Where Learning Happens

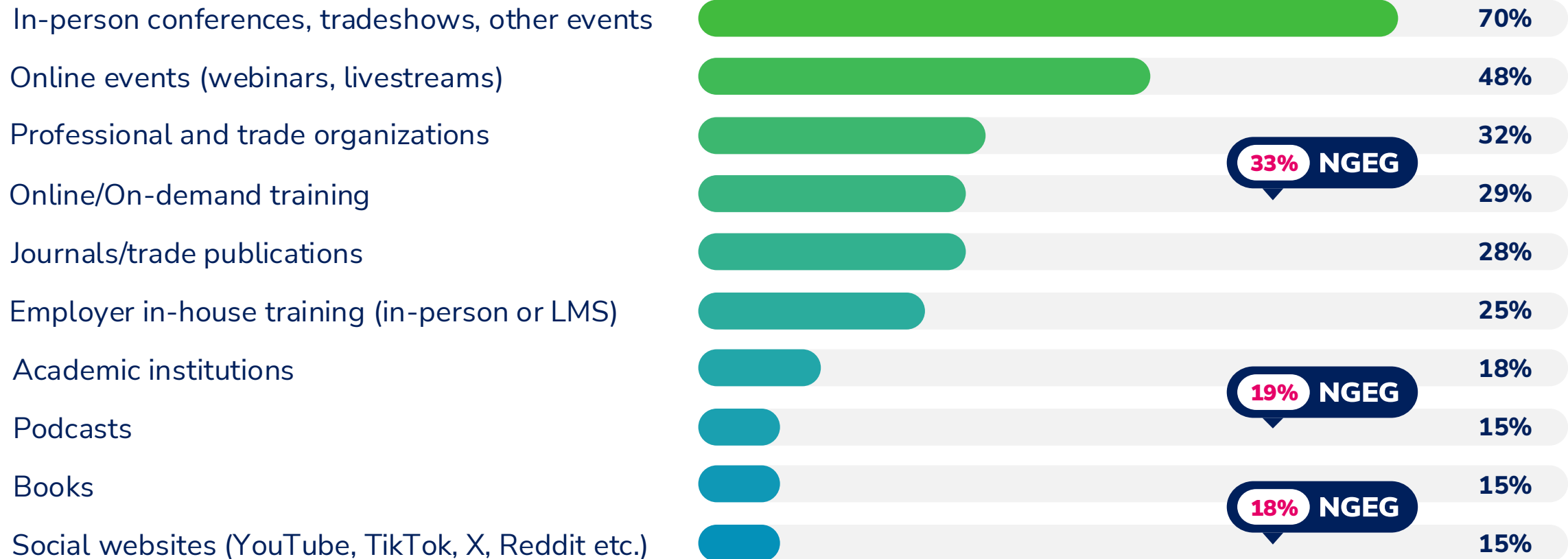


ATTENDEE QUESTION

Select the top 3 sources where you go for professional education, training, or to learn something new?

In-person events remain the primary destination for professional learning

Sources for learning



ATTENDEE QUESTION

What is one thing that makes in-person professional event learning/education sessions unique compared with online learning/education?

Top 4 comment categories

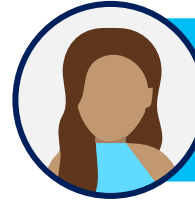
65% Better interaction

36% Forming connections

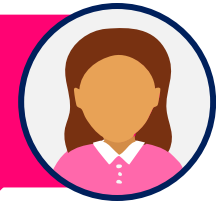
24% Impact and enhanced engagement

19% Format preference

What attendees are saying about face-to-face differentiators



“There tends to be more engagement, which leads to more questions, solutions, and authentic connection.”



“Conversation, the ability to ask questions and ask for clarification.”



“Harder to stay focused/interested looking at a screen versus the interpersonal interaction. Learning from peers, asking questions, discussions are better in person.”



“It's a more personal connection. The relationship building adds to the experience and the openness of the participants.”

Why Learning Lands Differently In-Person



Association for Psychological Science

“The power of face-to-face interactions cannot be replicated through a screen.”

Screen-based socializing simply cannot match face-to-face interaction:

- **Tone of voice**
- **Body language**
- **Facial expressions**

On-Line is for consumption – In-Person is for retention, collaboration, & transformation



How Attendees Define the Value of Learning



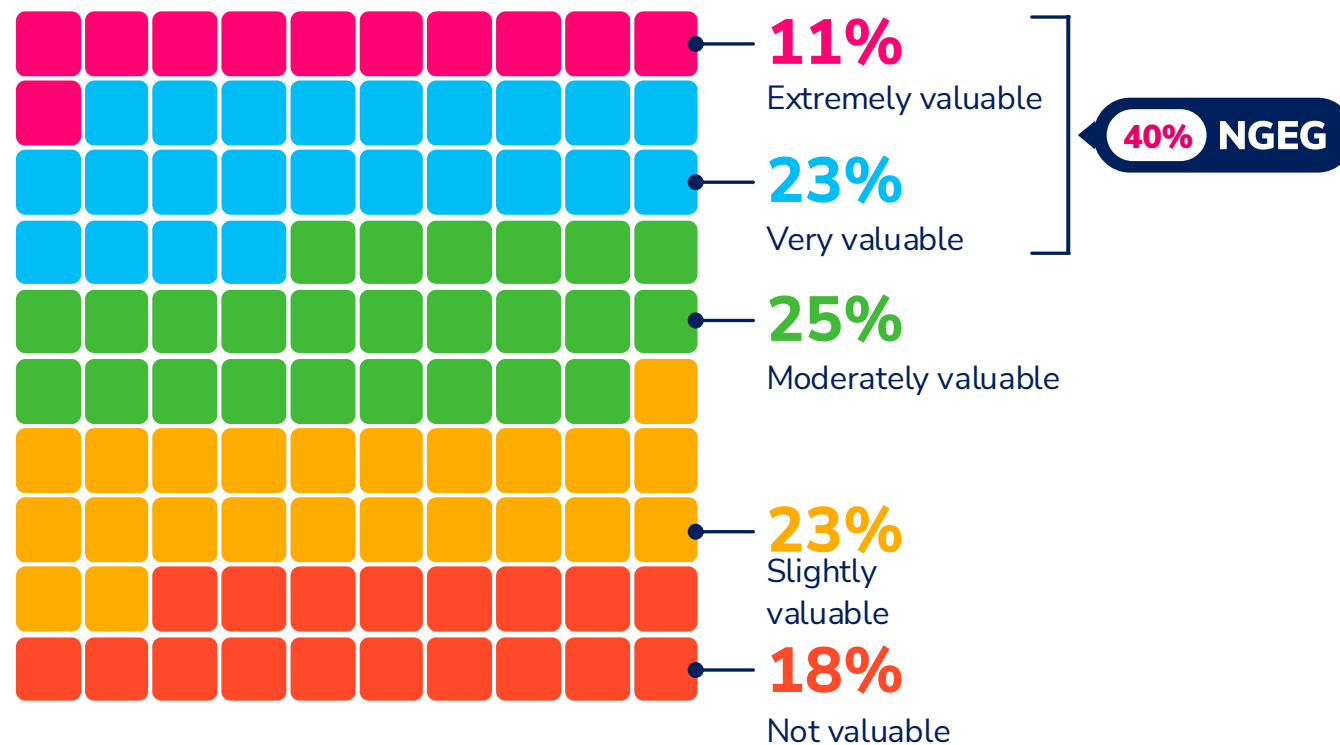
ATTENDEE QUESTION

How valuable is it for you if a professional event offered certifications based on training or session attendance to validate skills relevant for your role, career ambitions, or professional growth?

Many attendees don't consider event certification opportunities to be very valuable

Value of certifications

Certification Value for Role/Career

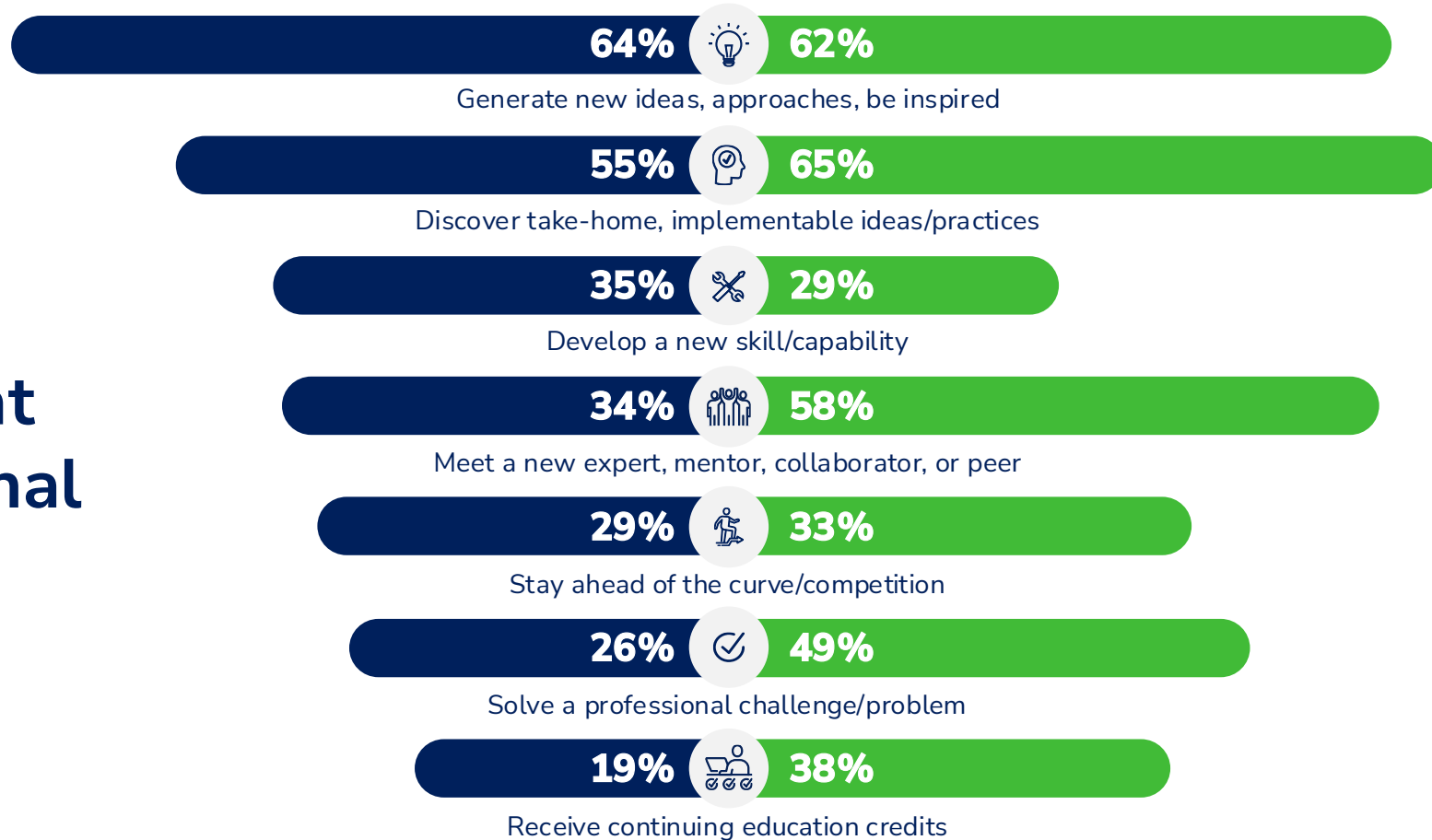


ATTENDEE / ORGANIZER QUESTION

Think about all aspects of the event where you/attendees learn. Which of the following best describes what you/attendees hope to gain from how you/they learn at the event?

Attendees prioritize ideas they can apply over credentials they can collect

Goals for learning at professional events

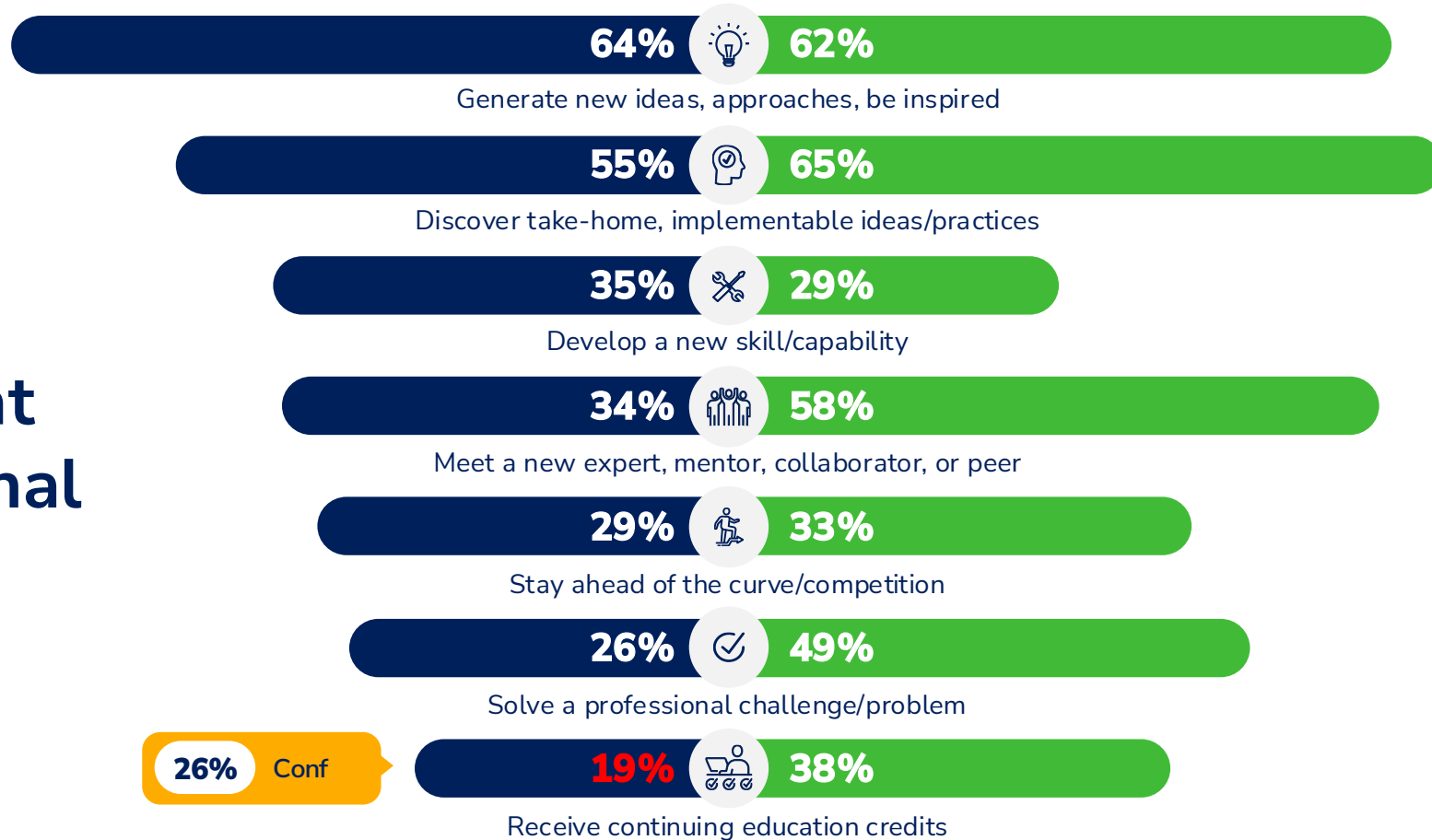


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Goals for learning at professional events



26% Conf

ATTENDEE QUESTION

At the most important in-person professional event you attend, what are the key indicators that you received value from the education sessions you attended? Select all that apply.

ORGANIZER QUESTION

At your organization's most important in-person event, what are the key indicators that your audience received value from education sessions? Select all that apply.

Organizers overestimate the impact education sessions have on retention

Measuring value from education session attendance

42%

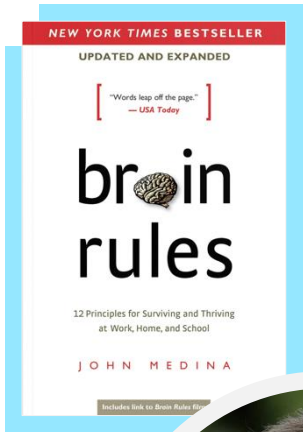
Made me want to return to the event

83%



Attendees

Organizers



JOHN
MEDINA,
BRAIN RULES

“The brain doesn’t pay attention to boring things.”

- The brain isn’t built for long stretches of passive listening.
- Attention naturally drops after about 10 minutes (“the ten-minute rule”) without a change in stimulus.
- The brain is evolutionarily hardwired to remember **relevant, practical, & emotionally engaging information.**
- **People learn best when they are engaged, involved, and able to apply what they’re hearing.**

How Event Learning Falls Short



ORGANIZER QUESTION

Relative to the total professional attendee count at your event, approximately what percentage attend your primary keynote/general/plenary session?

General sessions attract only half of event attendees, on average

General session attendance compared to total event attendance



*of total event attendance

ATTENDEE QUESTION

What type of keynote speakers do you prefer the most for a general session/plenary address?

Attendees would rather hear keynotes from industry experts than celebrities





Action Item

Take advantage of A/V partners in new ways

AV professionals understand how people see, hear, and interact with content in a live environment. Organizers can work with them earlier in the planning process to design sessions that support learning, incorporate live demonstrations, interactive event technologies, visual storytelling, and dynamic transitions that help make messages stick.

Organizers can create sessions that feel more engaging, memorable, and aligned with how attendees learn best.

What Effective Event Learning Looks Like



ATTENDEE QUESTION

Consider the session types in a conference room setting at the most important in-person event you attend. Allocate 100 points across the following session types for how you prefer to learn at the event.

Attendees demand a mix of learning formats

Learning session type preference



24%

Lecture/presentation

22%

Hands-on or participatory interaction

19%

Facilitated workshops/roundtables

18%

Demonstration delivered by speaker(s)

17%

Panel with a moderator

ATTENDEE QUESTION

What are the most useful ways to direct you to the sessions you should attend? Select all that apply.

ORGANIZER QUESTION

What ways do you direct attendees to the sessions they should attend? Select all that apply.

Attendees crave more personalized, real-time guidance when curating their event learning journey

Guiding attendees on sessions to attend



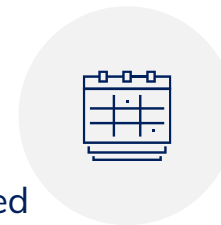
68% **81%**

Allow me to build my personal schedule in the event app



42% **14%**

Suggested "next session to attend" notifications based on sessions I already attended



44% NGEN

38% **30%**

Provide itineraries for common types of attendees (first timer, industry veteran, etc.)



62% **76%**

Grouping of sessions by category, topic, or track



38% **15%**

Ask about my challenges or topics of interest during registration



37% **29%**

Email me suggested sessions to attend based on my needs leading to the event

● Attendees ● Organizers

ATTENDEE QUESTION

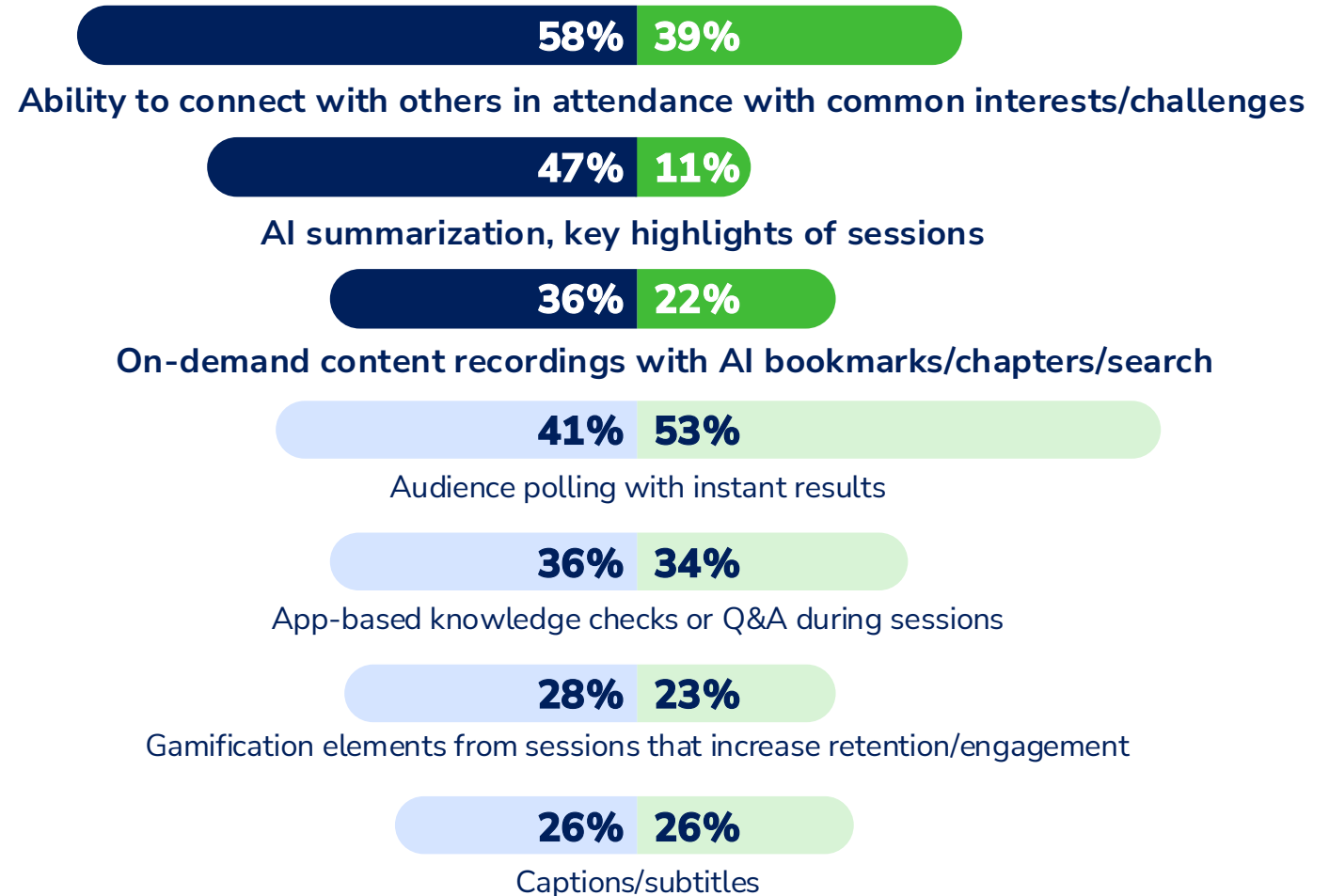
What technologies could be used in keynote/general/plenary sessions or other education sessions to improve your learning experience? Select all that apply.

ORGANIZER QUESTION

What technologies do you use in keynotes/general sessions or other education sessions to improve attendees learning experience? Select all that apply.

Attendees expect AI to enhance how they learn at events

Technological improvements for education sessions



● Attendees ● Organizers

So, What Now?



ORGANIZER QUESTION

To what extent do each of the below areas prevent your organization from changing how keynotes/general/plenary sessions are conducted?
1 to 5 scale: 1= Not at all, 5 = To a great extent.

Tradition and governance structures are slowing change

Factors preventing changes to general sessions

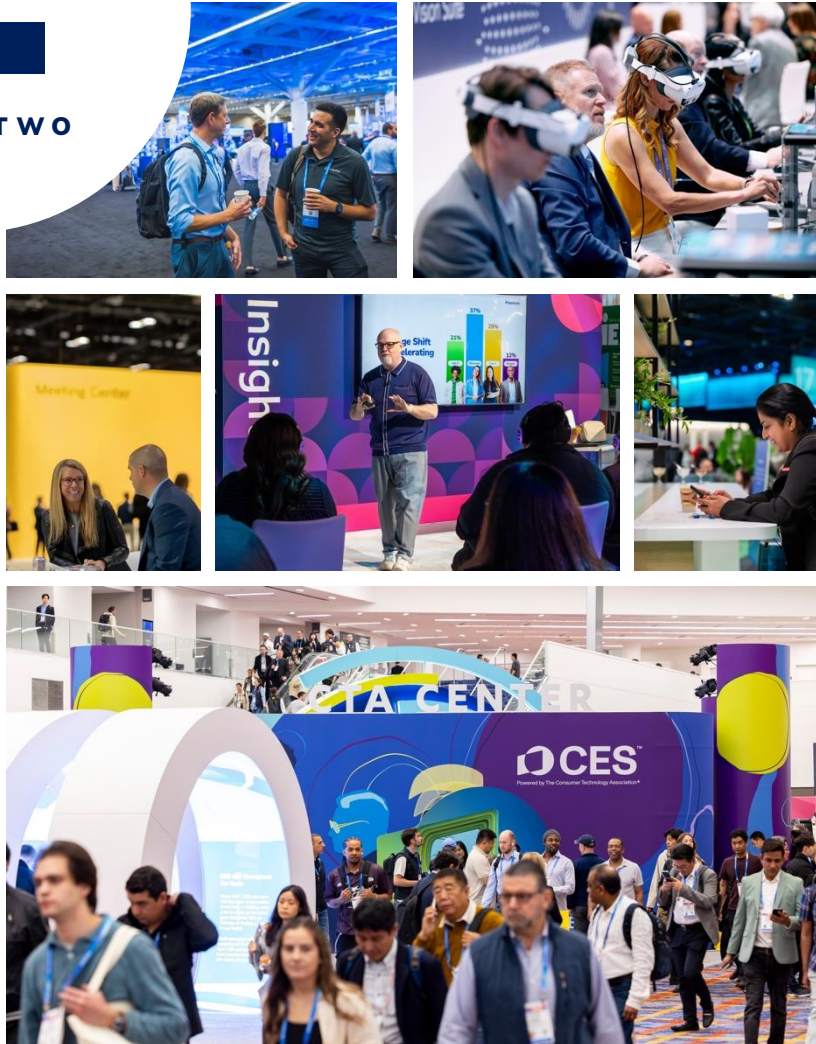


Learning Beyond the “Classroom”





PART TWO



Learning is not confined to conference rooms and general sessions

In **Part Two** of this research, we'll explore how organizers can turn the entire event into a platform for learning.