

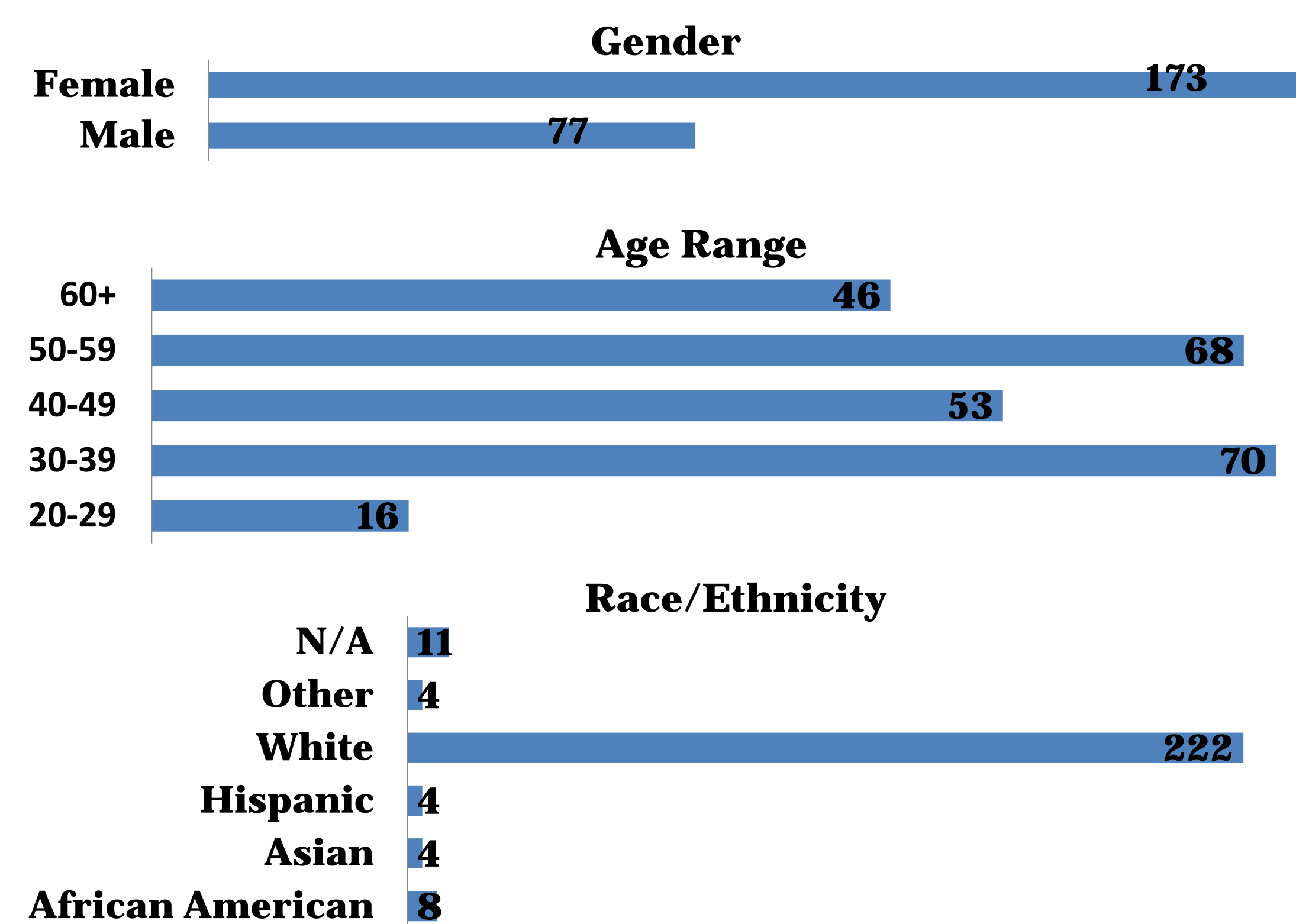
Abstract and Methodology

Leadership shapes our professional culture and can influence the strength of organizational outreach and advocacy programs now and in the future. How do archivists view the role of leaders and leadership within SAA and the profession as a whole?

This poster presents data obtained through a July 2012 survey focused on perceptions of how SAA leadership roles are attained, supported, and developed. Surveys were distributed through the Archives & Archivists listserv as well as the listservs of many regional and state archival organizations.

Survey Response Demographics

The survey yielded 252 unique responses. The demographics of respondents to this survey are in line with the 2004 A*CENSUS survey demographics.



Survey Implications and Next Steps

Overall, the survey results indicate that archivists view leadership in professional organizations as personally important, yet lack of employer support and not knowing the “right” people are seen as major impediments to actually becoming involved with SAA. Volunteering for leadership opportunities with regional or state organizations, however, is seen as a comfortable alternative to the perceived clique of SAA.

Research on this topic will continue with an examination of similar professional organizations’ methods of cultivating leadership, interviews with SAA leaders and administrators to clarify what they look for in or expect from organizational leaders, and recommendations for expanding the leadership base within SAA to tap into the individual interest.

An Old Boys Club?: The Society of American Archivists and the Culture of Professional Leadership

Survey Findings

Perceptions Gaps by Age

Younger archivists expressed confusion at how one gains a leadership role. With age and experience came a realization that self-nomination, willingness to volunteer, and involvement in sections and roundtables provide a launching pad for organizational leadership. One thread uniting all age groups, however, was a recognition of the importance of networking or “knowing the right people.”

“It’s an enormous mystery, but I think it has something to do with knowing someone on the nominations committee.”

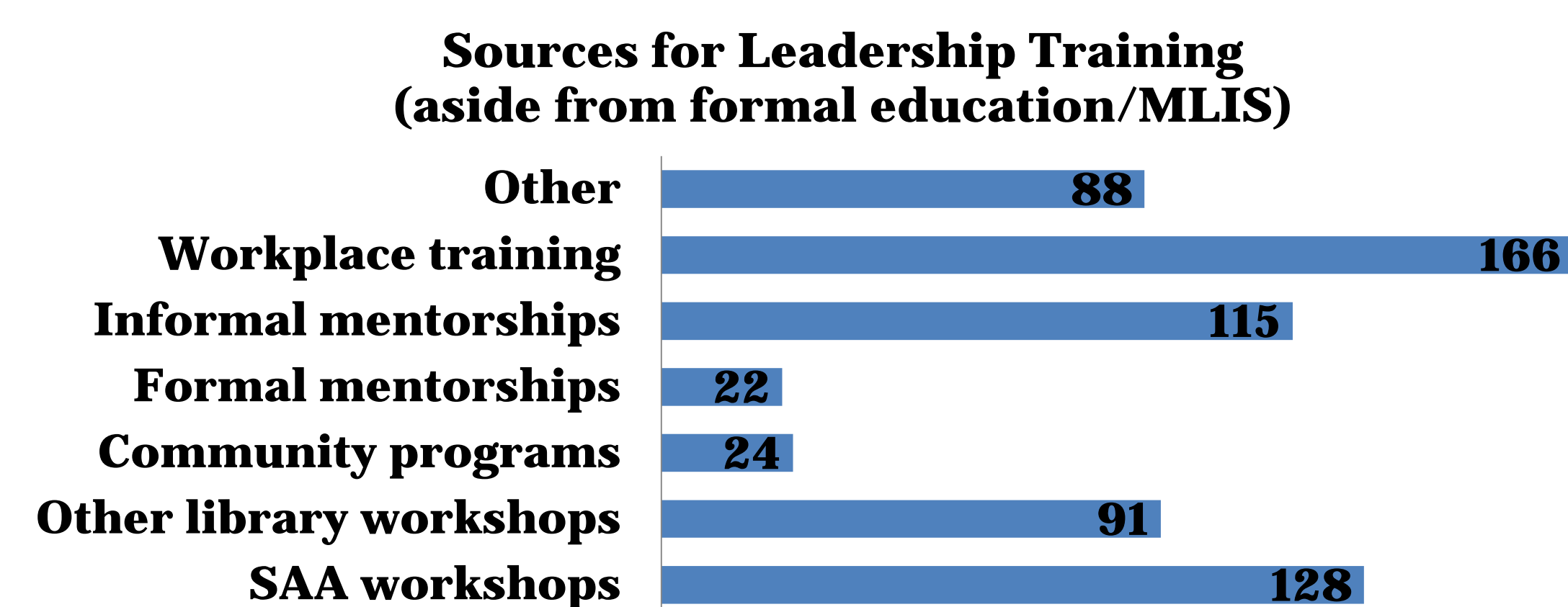
20-29 year old respondent

“Generally, you are proposed or suggested by your peers. As in most other searches for leadership positions, the self-nominated are rarely as successful.”

60+ respondent

Leadership Training Avenues

The majority of respondents cited workplace training as their primary venue for leadership training.



Perceptions Regarding Employer

Perhaps related to the importance of “knowing the right people,” many respondents expressed a belief that leadership positions within SAA typically were filled by archivists from archival institutions they perceive to be larger or more prestigious.

The large [SAA] sections are hard to break into if you are from a small institution or one that isn’t generally a leader itself.”

Perceptions Regarding SAA Itself

Many respondents noted that it is “easier” to become involved in professional leadership through state or regional organizations due to travel limitations, smaller organizational sizes, lower membership costs, and a greater sense of relevance to their work. Some felt SAA to be too cold, too expensive, or too monolithic to conquer.

“I chose to be a leader in my state’s organization because it’s small and actually does have a positive effect on membership through affordable workshops and legislative lobbying for funding.”

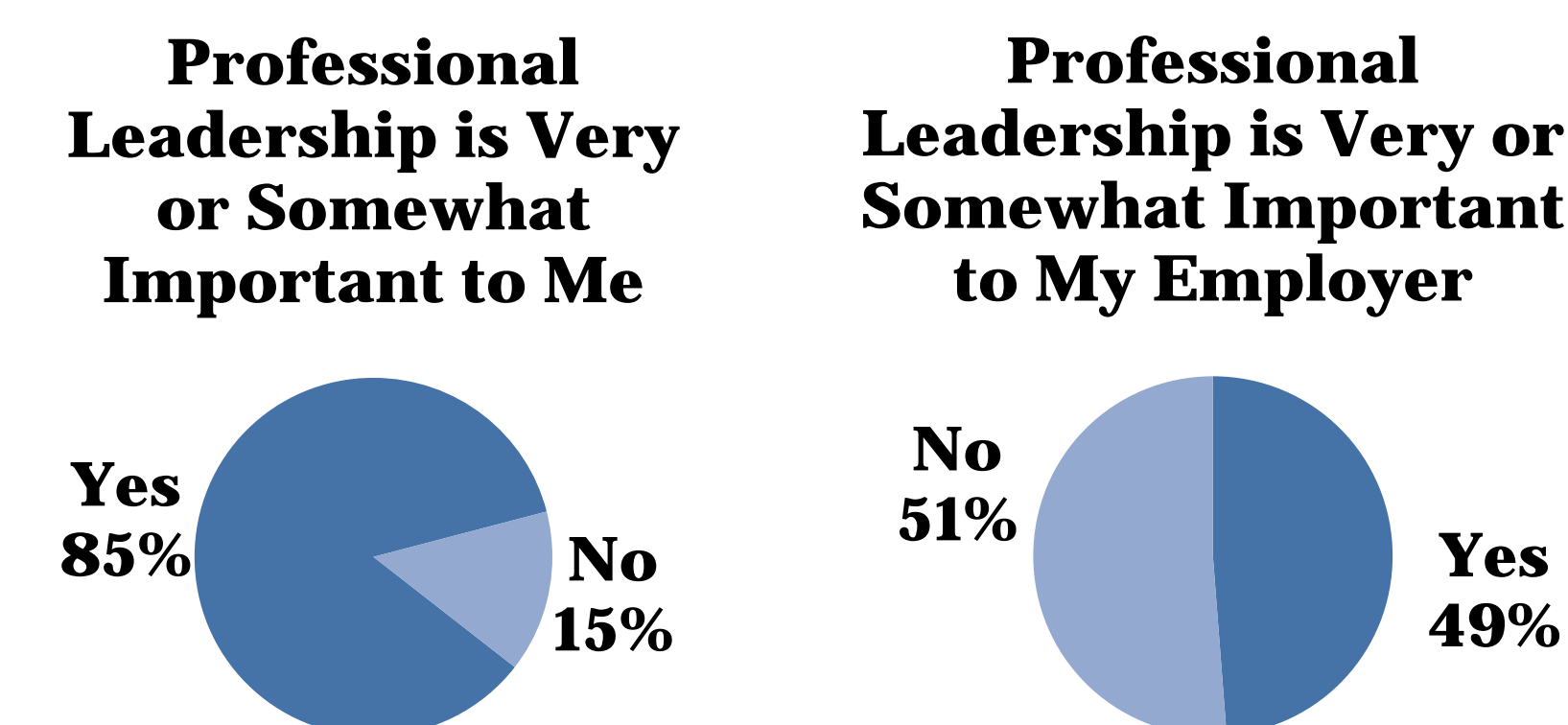
Perceptions about Institutional Support

Overall, 87.2% of respondents say that professional leadership is either very important or somewhat important to them personally. Yet only 62.8% note that their employers value professional leadership to the same degree.

The gap is particularly apparent in two demographic categories: among government archivists and among younger archivists.

Government Archivists

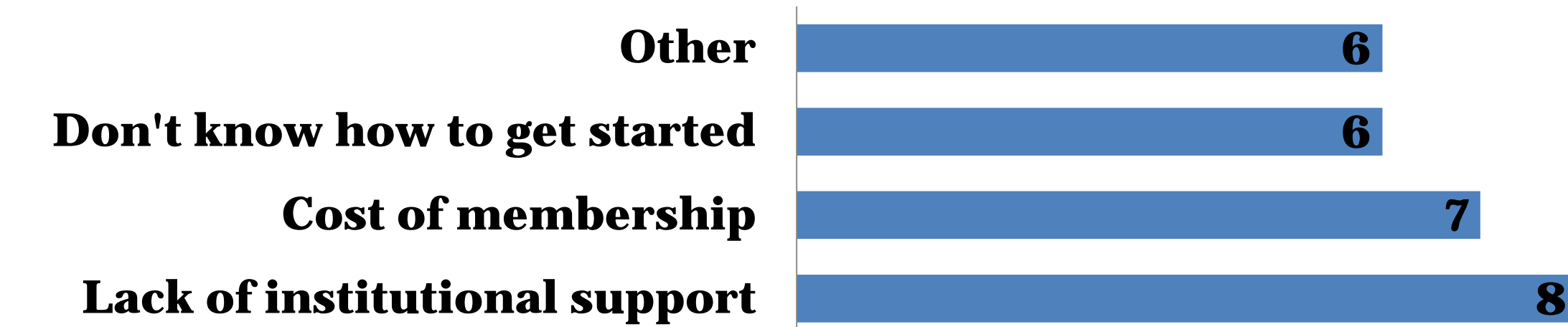
While 85% of government archivists value professional leadership personally, they report that only 49% of employers share this feeling. One government archivist noted, “I feel discouraged from participating.”



20-29 Year Old Archivists

All 15 of the respondents who were 20-29 years old consider leadership in a professional organization to be very or somewhat important to them personally. But only seven feel their employers consider it somewhat important (none who consider it very important).

Primary Impediment to Becoming Involved with SAA



Note: respondents could select more than one response.

“There is more that can be achieved at the regional level. The bureaucracy of SAA is sometimes stifling.”

“SAA is cliquish and many of the processes are dependent upon being part of the group. It isn’t very welcoming. Ultimately, I find my time spent with the regional is immensely more productive and satisfying. I really feel like I make a difference.”

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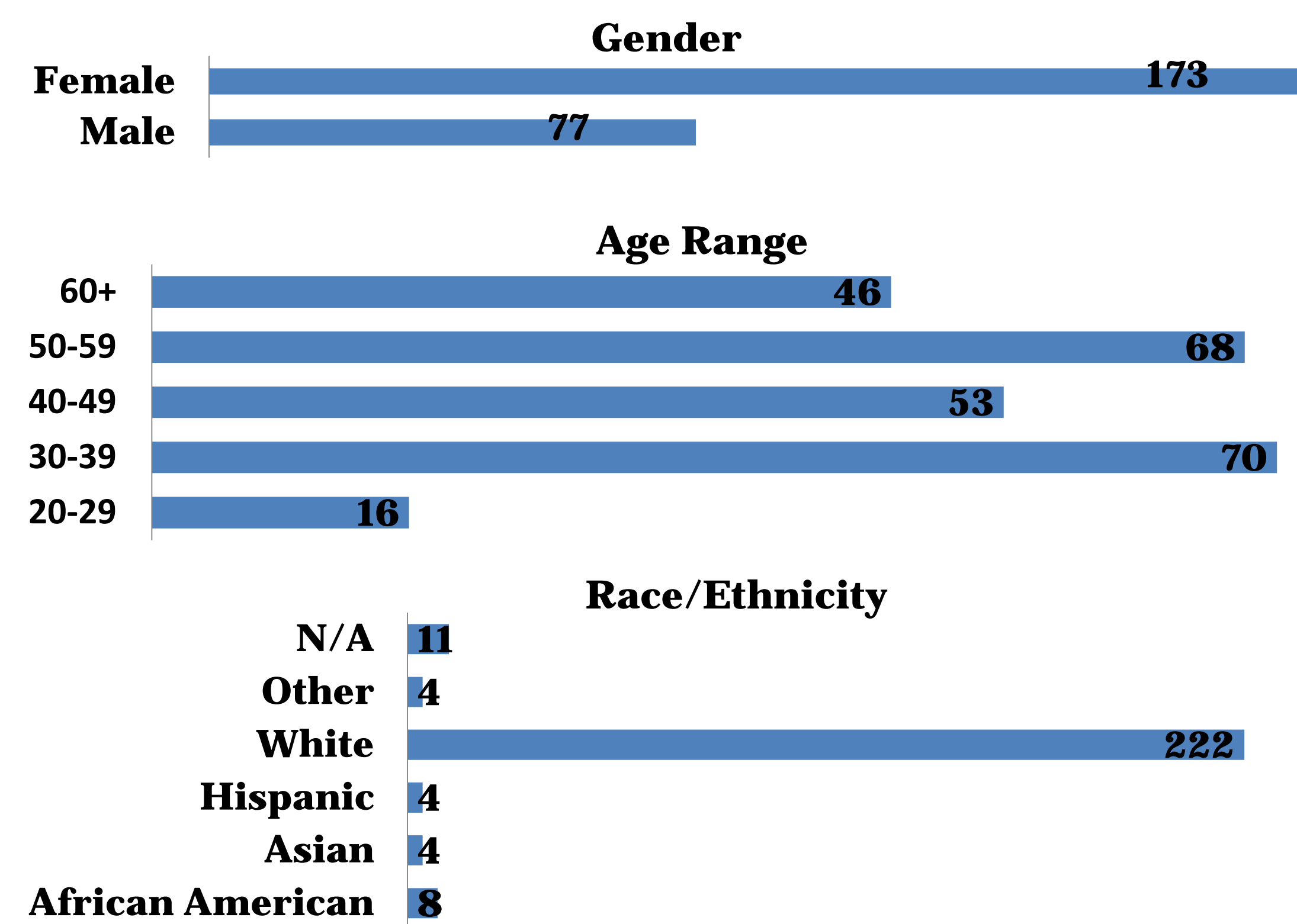
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Additional Qualitative Survey Results

Networking

Networking was a major theme for survey respondents. No matter the age or institutional affiliation of the respondent, networking was consistently identified as a highly important activity on the path to leadership.

“It’s a matter of making connections. You have to get known.”
 50+ respondent

“Sad to say, and perhaps I’m wrong, but it seems that who you know is a big factor in landing a leadership position in SAA.”
 40+ respondent

“By networking with the ‘movers and shakers’ of SAA.”
 20+ respondent

“Knowing someone who knows someone.”
 30+ respondent

Regional and State Organizations

Archivists overwhelmingly describe regional and state organizations as important to the profession. When asked why they chose to get involved at the state/regional level, the most common reason given was a desire to “give back” to the profession. These groups were cited as necessary to respond to immediate and local needs. Respondents also described these smaller groups as “easier” to be involved in, from not only a financial perspective, but also because it’s easier to move forward in leadership roles. Frustration with SAA was also a reason for getting involved on a more local level.

“I felt that my regional organization provides me with more ‘immediate’ opportunities to engage in leadership activities.”
 20+ respondent

“To serve the community.”
 30+ respondent

“I believe in the need/role of the regional organizations. I wanted to serve...in a leadership position to demonstrate my commitment [to the organization], and to express my gratitude for its significant place in my professional life.”
 40+ respondent

Volunteering

Survey respondents frequently identified volunteerism as an essential quality for successful leaders. Volunteering is also seen as an important stepping stone in organizations; a way to create a “track record” of good work.

“[Being] active in roundtables and sections and expressing interest and volunteering to participate on committees and other SAA activities.”
 50+ respondent

“Appointment and election as a ‘punishment’ for having produced on a prior assignment. The positions are progressive in building your knowledge, providing recognition, and generating an impression that the organizational work matters.”
 60+ respondent

Although the importance of volunteering was a major theme in the survey responses, many identified it as an unsuccessful path for getting a position, while still being a good way to “get noticed.”

“Generally, you are proposed or suggested by peers. As in most other searches for leadership positions, the self-nominated are rarely as successful.”
 60+ respondent

“Self-nomination is frequently the only way to announce that you are interested. Then others notice and doors open up.”
 60+ respondent

“Self-nomination is the most common process for most constituent groups....Various positions-elected or not—are attained generally because the candidate has specific knowledge or experience. For elected office, there is no doubt some other factors such as popularity, geography, archives type, etc.”
 60+ respondent

“Volunteer associations can only survive if they have volunteers., so I agreed when asked to serve.”
 50+ respondent