

Littler 2025 Labor Survey Report

SEPTEMBER 2025

Littler®

Executive Summary

As employers navigate a new labor relations landscape, Littler's 2025 Labor Survey gauges how in-house lawyers, human resources (HR) professionals, and business executives are responding.

The findings from nearly 800 respondents—42% of whom hold C-suite positions—reveal that companies may not be as prepared as they could be to respond to and/or mitigate the potentially costly business disruptions and reputational damage that union organizing and other labor disputes can cause.

Case in point: While 1 in 4 employers—and over 60% of those with over 10,000 employees—say they have experienced organizing activity over the past two years, only 9% of those without unionized workforces feel “very prepared” to effectively respond.

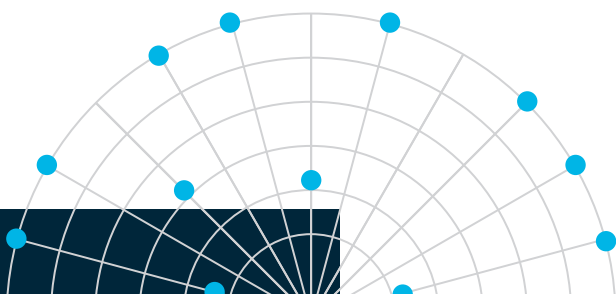
This report provides businesses with an in-depth look at where other organizations stand and steps they are (or are not) taking to adjust to modern labor relations trends.

A NEW LABOR LANDSCAPE

The labor relations landscape has shifted in recent years amid changing workforce demographics and values. Employees are more focused on [work-life balance](#) and [job mobility](#)—though such moves are getting [harder to make](#)—and they're increasingly interested in being heard when it comes to issues that affect their day-to-day work lives.

While the union membership rate hasn't grown over the past decade and the pace of union organizing [slowed](#) in the first six months of this year, unions have become more active overall at the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). For instance, [union election petitions were up 27%](#) in the NLRB's 2024 fiscal year and unfair labor practice charges have also been on the rise in recent years. This comes as the likelihood of a petition resulting in the union winning an election is higher than it was even a few years ago, [according to NLRB data](#).

Advance preparation is important. In the current environment, organizing attempts still arise quickly, often without warning, and are impacting industries that have not historically been unionized. Whether or not activity results in union representation, the consequences of organizing efforts can be significant, from stock price declines and proxy fights to brand impact and detrimental effects on a company's culture and operations. Even companies with traditionally stable union relationships find themselves fielding a broader range of demands during bargaining, along with an increased number of work stoppages or other workplace disruptions. Nearly half (42%) of respondents with unionized employees say that union leaders have become more confrontational and aggressive in the past year.



PREPAREDNESS GAPS AROUND

Our survey reveals that many employers are underprepared for the modern labor relations landscape.

Of respondents at organizations that do not have any unionized employees:

- Nearly 40% say they are not prepared at all to respond effectively to organizing activity.
- A third say they have done nothing to prevent or mitigate the risk of organizing activity.
- Less than a quarter have conducted training for frontline managers (24%) and only 2% have conducted mock organizing drills.

Of respondents at organizations with some unionized employees:

- Just 18% feel very prepared to handle more aggressive collective bargaining tactics, such as strikes, walkouts, or coordinated corporate campaigns.
- Only about a third of all employers—and 39% of respondents from large organizations—have prepared strategic and economic analyses to assist with bargaining, which are critical to effective negotiations.

For their part, large employers (i.e., those with over 10,000 employees) tend to be significantly more prepared than their smaller counterparts, no matter their workforce's current union makeup. For instance, 61% of such organizations—compared with 38% overall—have updated or revised their labor relations strategies over in the past two years to reflect shifts including changing workforce demographics and expectations, technological developments, and social media activism.

61%

of large employers have recently updated their labor relations strategy

38%

of all respondents said the same

Manufacturing, healthcare, and retail/hospitality organizations—more frequent targets of organizing activity—also tended to demonstrate higher preparedness levels than the overall respondent base.

ORGANIZING DRIVERS AND PRESSURES

In addition to the trends noted above, our survey reveals the leading factors behind headline-making organizing activity.

Aside from pay and benefits, the leading drivers for employee support of such efforts include work/life balance (38%), desire for input into business decisions (31%), and job security (29%), according to employers that have experienced union organizing over the past two years. While respondents who haven't experienced such activity of late ranked work/life balance and job security among the top three contributing factors (outside of pay and benefits), only 15% cited a desire for input into business decisions—suggesting those employers may not be prepared for emerging demands on that front.

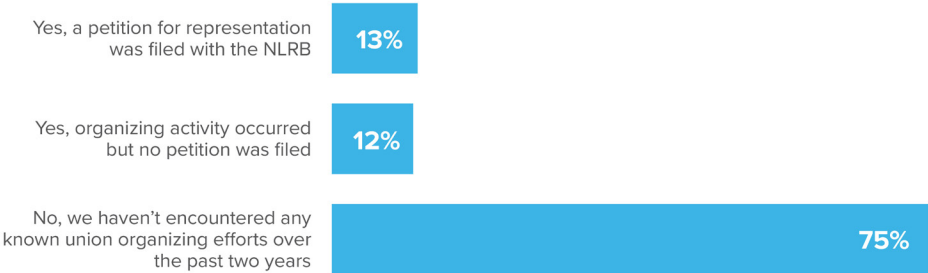
Meanwhile, trends like AI integration, mental health and wellbeing, and inclusion, equity and diversity (IE&D) were all cited by fewer than 10% of employers that have experienced recent organizing activity. This may be a blind spot for business leaders, especially considering that a growing number of employees may be highly motivated by these issues in years to come.

The majority of respondents (93%) are based in the U.S., with the remainder located elsewhere but with organizations that have U.S. operations. For a complete breakdown of respondent demographics, see the [methodology and demographics section](#).

CURRENT ORGANIZING ACTIVITY AND INTEREST

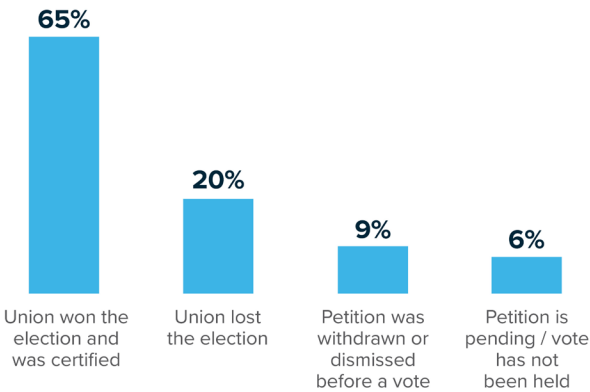
Has your company experienced union organizing activity within any part of your workforce over the past two years?

This question was only asked to those whose workplaces are not fully unionized.



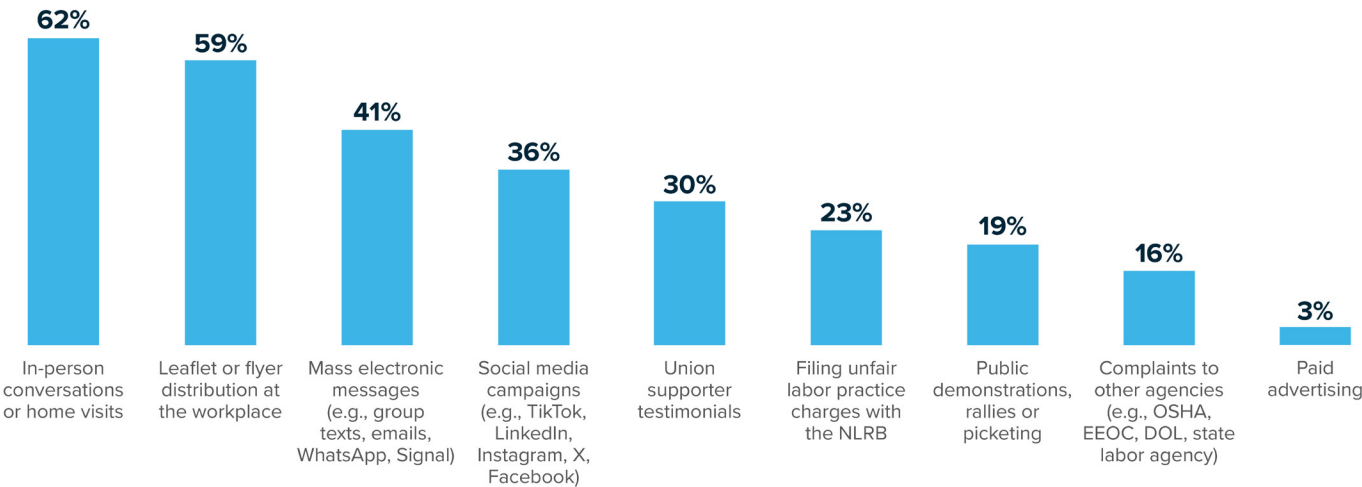
What was the outcome of the petition filed to the NLRB following union organizing efforts?

This question was only asked to those who indicated that a petition for representation was filed to the NLRB in the previous question.



During the organizing campaign your organization experienced, which of the following tactics were used by union organizers? (Select all that apply)

This question was only asked to employers that have experienced union organizing over the past two years.



In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and amid changing workforce demographics, nationwide approval of labor unions is [historically high](#), even as the share of U.S. workers represented by unions continues to inch down—with unions currently [only representing about 6%](#) of private-sector wage earners.

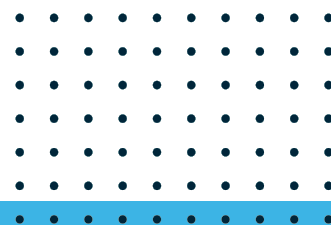
Against this backdrop, one quarter of the employers we surveyed that don't have fully unionized workplaces reported experiencing organizing activity over the past two years; the share was much higher among large companies (64%). Those figures are significant given the costs and business disruption that can come with organizing activity, even if such efforts are ultimately not successful.

Over the past two years, 13% of these respondents saw a petition for representation filed with the NLRB as a result of union organizing efforts, a figure that rises to 41% for large employers. Twelve percent (and 23% from large organizations) say organizing activity occurred during that period, but no petition was filed. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of those whose organizations had a petition for representation filed to the NLRB indicated that the union won the election, with 6% still pending.

The union win rate in elections conducted by the NLRB in 2024 was 78.3% (1,518 union wins of the 1,938 total elections held), according to *Bloomberg Law's* [latest annual report](#) on NLRB election data, a roughly 10-percentage point increase from the 2014 union win rate of 68.6%. That shift—driven by factors that include more aggressive organizing tactics, unions targeting new industries, and pandemic-driven changes in the workplace—raises the stakes for employers to prepare effectively.

The survey data also shows that union leaders are increasingly using technology and digital platforms in the organizing process. A considerable percentage of employers that experienced organizing activity in the past two years saw organizers utilize mass electronic messages (41%) and social media campaigns (36%). The actual use of these tactics may even be higher, given that the survey results only reflect what respondents actually witnessed.

Nearly a quarter of this group (23%) said union organizers filed unfair labor practice charges with the NLRB and 19% experienced public demonstrations, rallies, or picketing—both of which were less common just a handful of years ago.



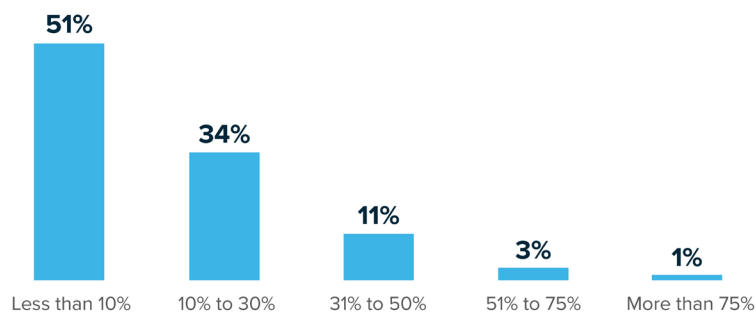
“Unions are devoting more resources to turning employee curiosity into actual support, targeting employees in industries that have not historically been receptive to their message, and using high-profile corporate campaigns and strikes to gain attention. This won't change with a more management-friendly NLRB, but can be effectively addressed by employers who recognize that most employees still prefer a direct relationship with an employer that makes engagement a top priority as opposed to a talking point.”

[Jonathan Levine](#),
co-chair of Littler's Labor Management
Relations Practice Group



If a union organizing drive were held today, what share of your employees do you believe would be curious enough to indicate their potential interest by signing a union authorization card?

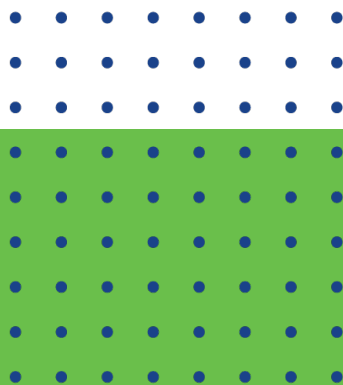
This question was only asked to organizations that do not have any unionized employees.



The majority of employers surveyed that do not have any unionized employees (85%) believe that if a union organizing drive were held today, less than 30% of their employee base would sign a union authorization card.

Yet data from other surveys suggest these respondents may be underestimating the willingness of their employees to at least consider joining a union. Overall approval of labor unions is at its highest levels since the 1960s, according to the latest [Gallup poll](#), and an [analysis](#) of multiple surveys over nearly 50 years reported a rise in low-wage industries of the “union-curious” worker. Additionally, in the digital era—when employees have ready access to organizing information and seamless ways to connect quickly with one another—just because leadership doesn’t hear about organizing efforts doesn’t mean those efforts aren’t brewing.

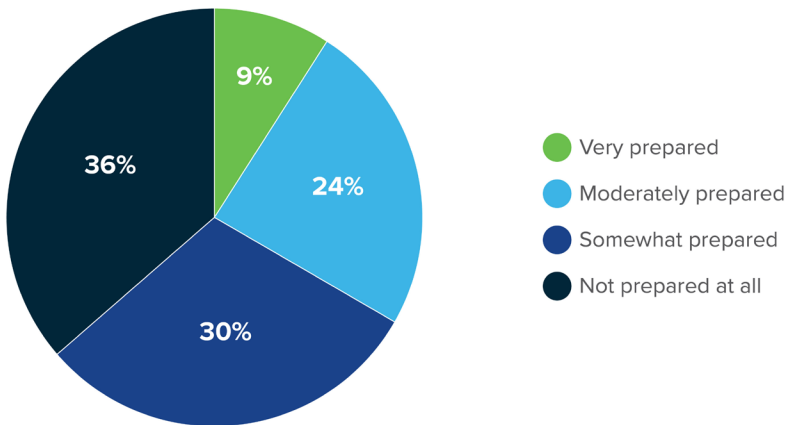
Against this backdrop, it is increasingly important for executives to build trust with their workforces and engage with employees who want to feel valued and understand how their work fits into the organization’s overall vision and purpose. Otherwise mistrust and a lack of employee engagement can be a catalyst for union curiosity.



PREPAREDNESS LEVELS AND RISK MITIGATION STRATEGIES

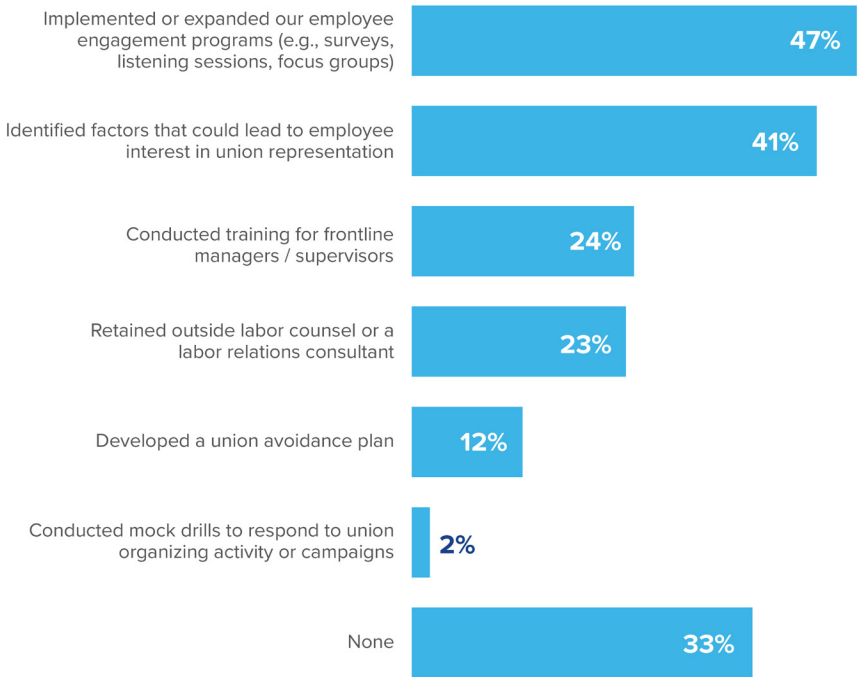
How prepared do you believe your organization is to respond effectively to union organizing activity?

This question was only asked to organizations that do not have any unionized employees.



Which of the following steps has your organization taken to prevent or mitigate the risk of union activity? (Select all that apply)

This question was only asked to organizations that do not have any unionized employees.

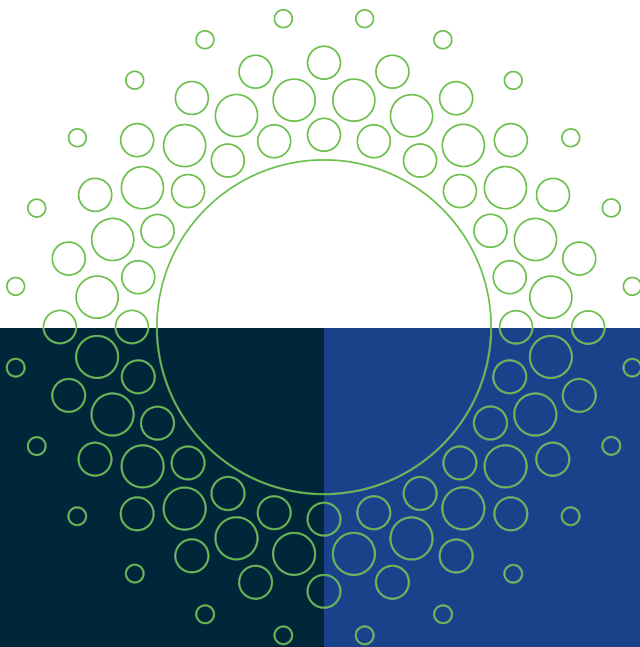


Only 9% of employers with non-unionized workforces feel very prepared to respond to organizing activity; 54% say they are somewhat or moderately prepared, while over a third (36%) say they are not prepared at all. However, the percentage of those feeling not at all prepared dropped for large employers (11%) and those in industries with more union experience, such as manufacturing (16%) and retail/hospitality (19%).

As for the steps being taken by this group to prevent or mitigate labor relations risk, the top two answer choices—implementing/expanding employee engagement programs (47%) and identifying factors that could lead to employee interest in unions (41%)—show a focus on understanding and connecting with their workforces.

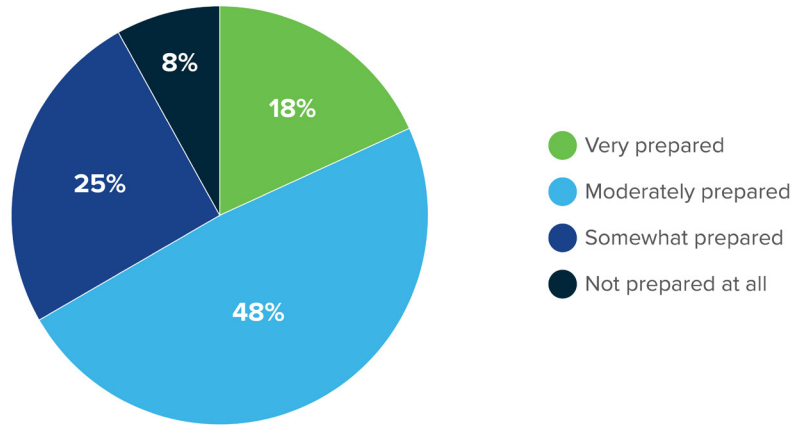
Additional steps toward preparedness, including training frontline managers and supervisors (24%) and conducting mock organizing drills (2%), were selected by fewer respondents, with another third saying they have done nothing at all to prepare.

Again, large employers have taken more action. Over half say their organizations have conducted training and developed a plan to mitigate the risk of future organizing in their workplaces. Employers in healthcare, manufacturing, and retail/hospitality were also more likely to take these and other steps.



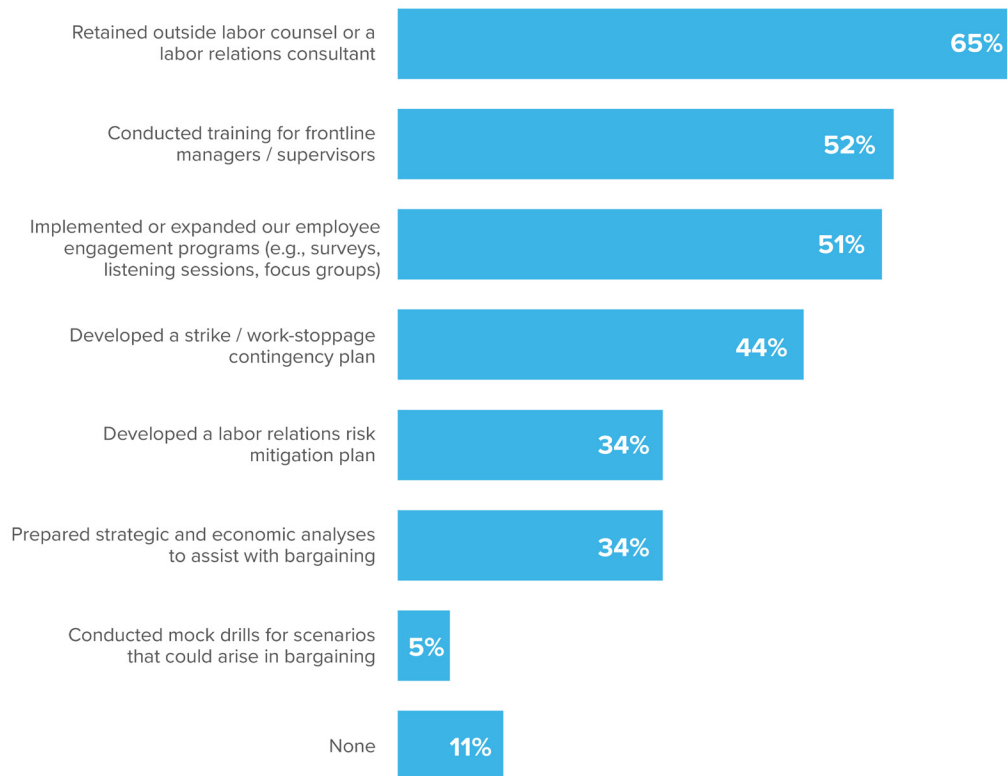
How prepared do you believe your organization is to respond effectively to escalated collective bargaining tactics, such as strikes, walkouts, or coordinated corporate campaigns?

This question was only asked to organizations whose workforces include unionized employees.



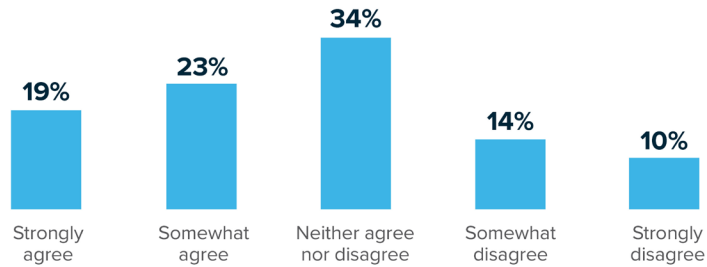
Which of the following steps has your organization taken to prepare for escalated collective bargaining tactics? (Select all that apply)

This question was only asked to organizations whose workforces include unionized employees.



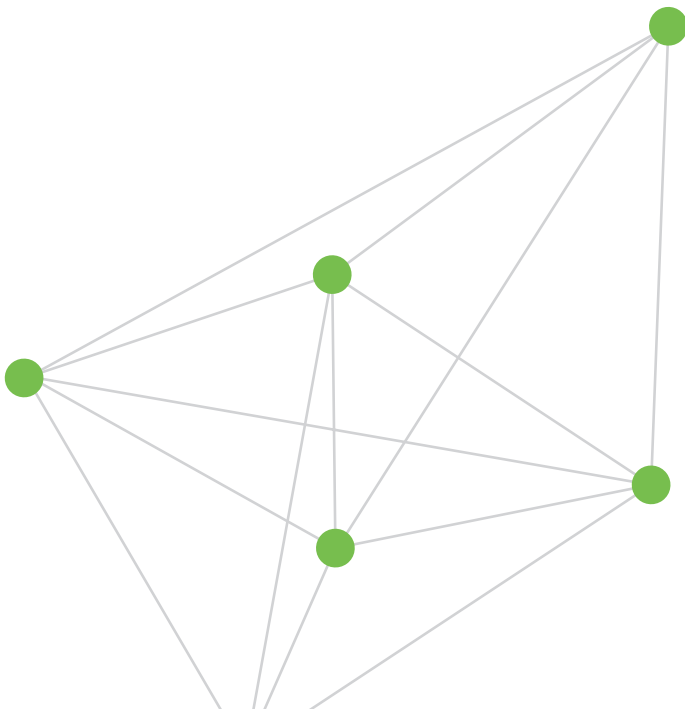
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement:
“Over the past 12 months, union leaders have become more aggressive and confrontational in their interactions with our organization.”

This question was only asked to employers with unionized employees.



Unions are increasingly willing to disrupt both unionized and non-unionized workplaces. For companies with unionized workers, that can often come in the form of a strike during collective bargaining or a walk-out over terms and conditions of employment. After all, nearly half of this group (42%) says that union leaders have become more confrontational and aggressive in the past year. At the same time, coordinated, organization-wide corporate campaigns and the use of public pressure and social media activism are on the rise.

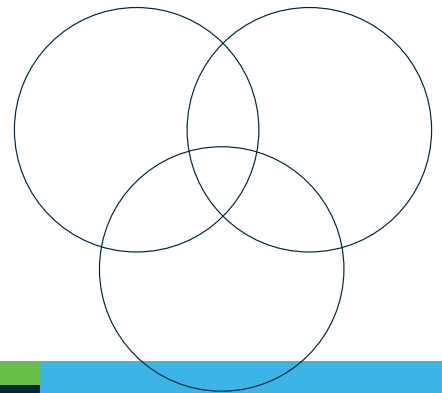
Despite these trends, only 18% of respondents whose workforces include unionized employees (and 22% of large employers) say they are very prepared to respond to these escalated pressure tactics—while 8% are not prepared at all. Healthcare respondents are among the most prepared of the sectors we queried, with 19% saying they are very prepared and none saying they are not prepared at all.



As for the steps these companies are taking to respond, most have retained outside labor counsel (65%), the top answer choice. Yet just over half have conducted training for frontline managers/supervisors (52%) or implemented/expanded employee engagement programs (51%). Perhaps most surprising, only 44% have developed a strike or business disruption contingency plan and just 34% have prepared strategic and economic analyses to assist with bargaining.

Large employers are significantly more prepared on all fronts, though only 39% had prepared strategic/economic analyses—a key factor in successful negotiations. Similarly, healthcare, retail/hospitality, and manufacturing respondents tended to be more prepared in most areas than the overall respondent base. Even so, prominent blind spots persist: Only 27% of retail/hospitality employers have developed a strike or business disruption contingency plan, while just 25% and 21% of healthcare and retail/hospitality employers, respectively, have prepared strategic and economic analyses to assist with bargaining. By contrast, nearly half of manufacturers—who are more likely to have experienced these negotiations—have prepared such analyses.

The findings also reveal a potentially problematic lack of alignment between HR and in-house counsel respondents. For instance, legal professionals were much more likely than their HR counterparts to say their organizations had developed a contingency plan (51% versus 38%), a labor relations risk mitigation plan (42% versus 27%), and prepared analyses to assist with bargaining (39% versus 28%). Even if the legal department is leading these analyses, it is important for HR and labor relations teams to be familiar with the plans and aligned with the company's overall approach.

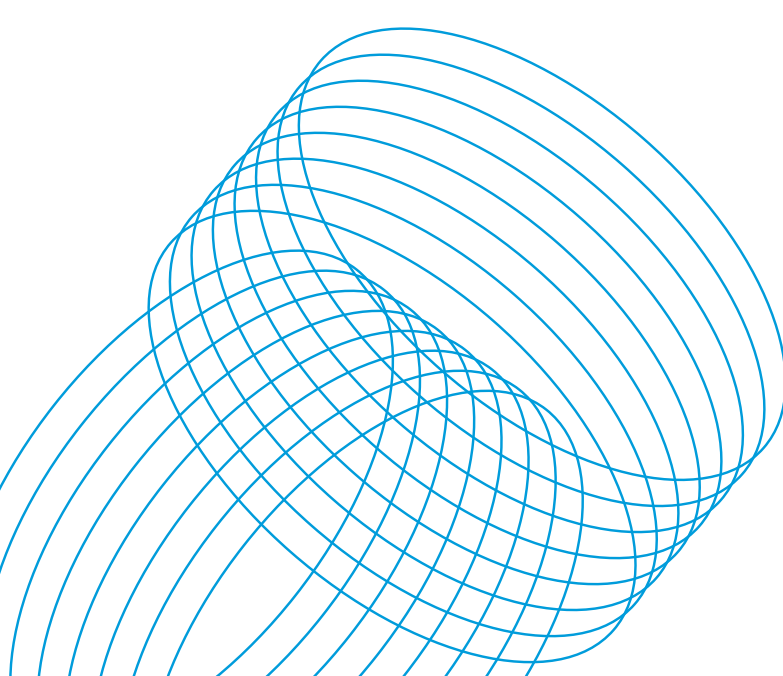
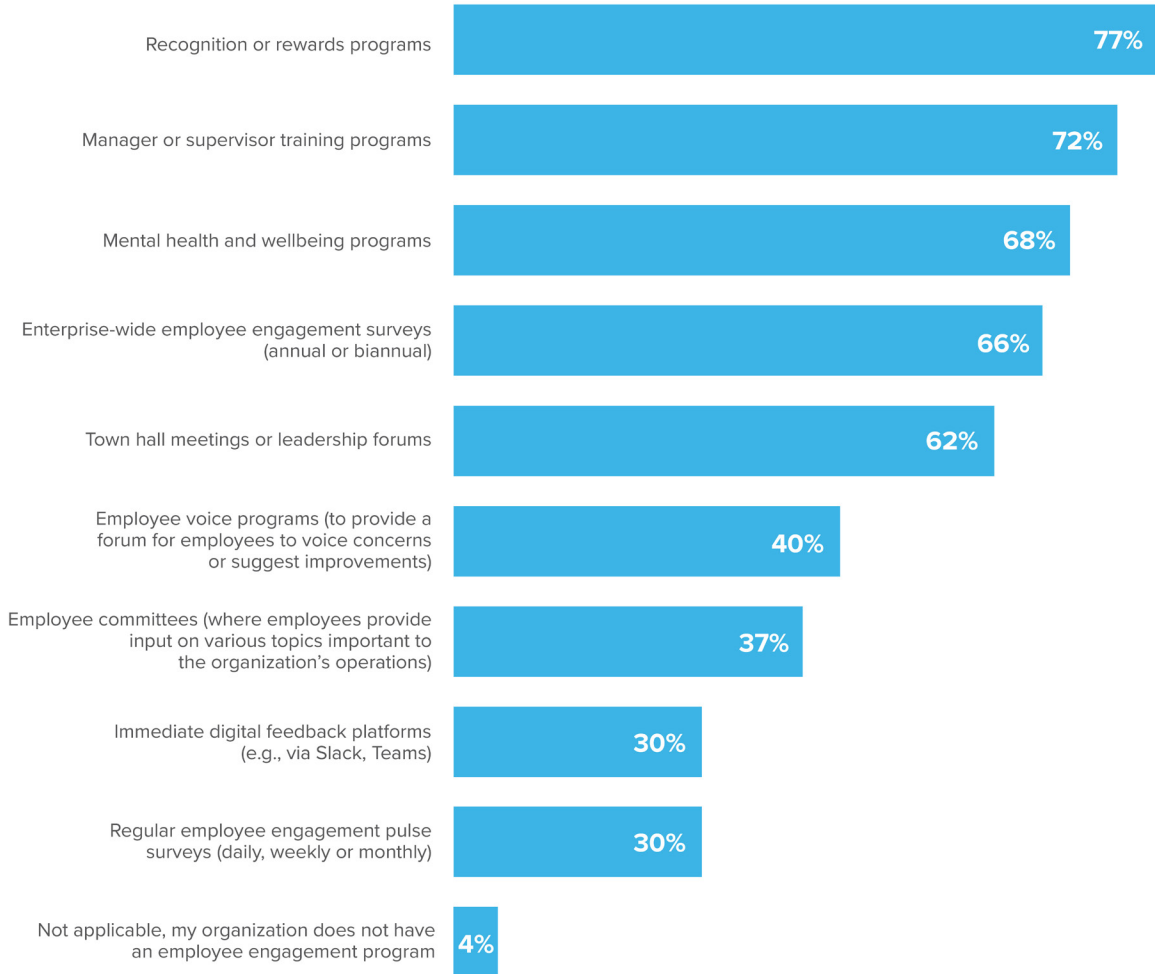


“Organizations may have preliminary plans in place when it comes to running their businesses amid a strike or preparing strategic and economic analyses for bargaining. But these plans may not have the teeth to stand up to an actual work stoppage or complicated negotiations, particularly given the potential lack of alignment between different parts of the business. Adequate preparedness helps create strategies that are lawful, effective, and actionable.”

Tanja Thompson,
co-chair of Littler’s Labor Management
Relations Practice Group



**Which of the following are included in your organization's employee engagement program?
(Select all that apply)**

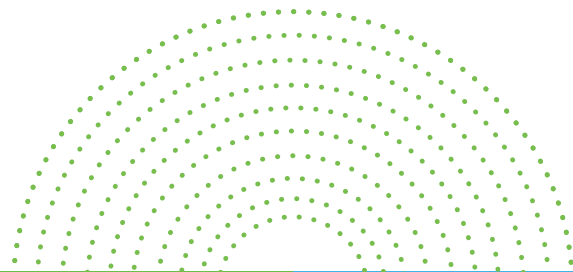


Employee engagement programs can reduce the likelihood of unionization by creating workplaces where employees feel valued and heard.

It's promising, then, that only 4% of respondents say their organizations do not have an employee engagement program. More than 6 in 10 say their organizations have recognition or rewards programs (77%), manager or supervisor training programs (72%), mental health and wellbeing programs (68%), employee engagement surveys (66%), and town hall meetings or leadership forums (62%). The growth of formalized mental health and wellbeing programs is particularly notable given that 70% of employers in Littler's [2025 Employer Survey](#) said they are seeing a rise in leave or accommodations requests related to mental health conditions.

That only 40% of organizations have employee voice programs suggests a missed opportunity, as these forums—which are designed to enable employees to share their opinions, ideas, and concerns—are a critical factor in union curiosity becoming union activity or an NLRB petition. While large organizations are far more likely to have employee engagement surveys (80%), town hall meetings or leadership forums (78%), and mental health and wellbeing programs (84%) in place, just over half (53%) of those respondents say they have implemented employee voice programs.

When examining sector-specific results, healthcare respondents tend to have implemented employee engagement programs at a higher rate—be it employee surveys (76%), employee committees (41%), mental health and wellbeing programs (70%), or recognition and rewards programs (86%). While manufacturers aligned fairly closely to the overall respondent base, retail/hospitality respondents lagged in key areas, such as town hall meetings or leadership forums (51%), mental health and wellbeing programs (60%), and employee committees (23%).



“Nearly every big union campaign today promises to give employees more of a voice in the workplace. But most employees prefer not to pay union dues or face other drawbacks associated with the reality of being represented by a union. Establishing employee voice programs can therefore be an effective way for employers to improve their operations and give employees the engagement they want. However, these programs are often implemented poorly or create new risks should employers fail to tangibly address employee concerns. The best programs involve multiple forums for employees to have a voice and encourage follow-through from leadership.”

Brooke Niedecken,
co-chair of Littler's Labor Management
Relations Practice Group



ORGANIZING DRIVERS, PRESSURES, AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

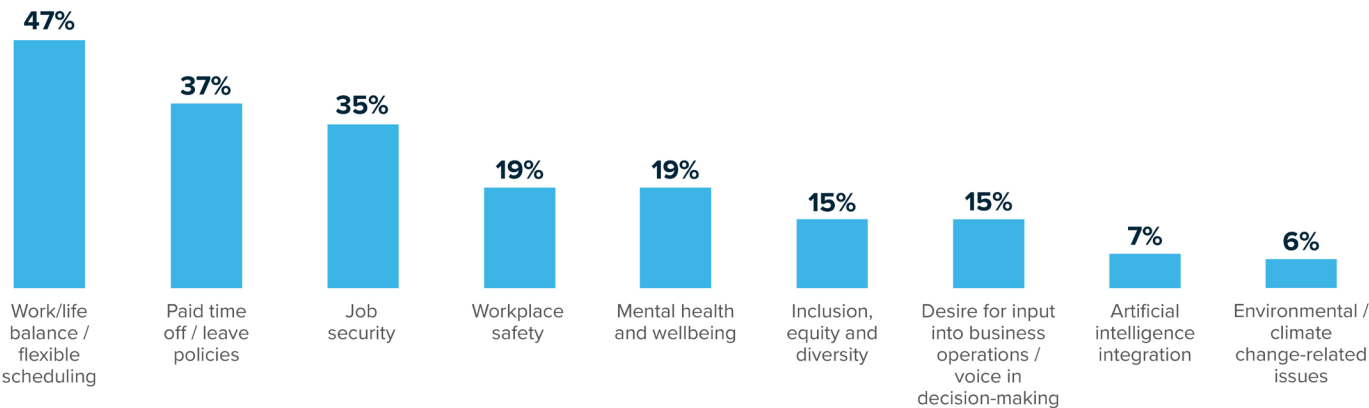
Which of the following factors were cited by employees as reasons for supporting union organizing efforts? (Select all that apply)

This chart reflects responses from employers that have experienced union organizing activity over the past two years and includes factors that were a focus outside of compensation and benefits.



Which of the following factors do you believe are most likely to prompt employees to consider supporting union organizing efforts? (Select all that apply)

This chart reflects responses from employers that have NOT experienced union organizing activity over the past two years and includes factors that were a focus outside of compensation and benefits.



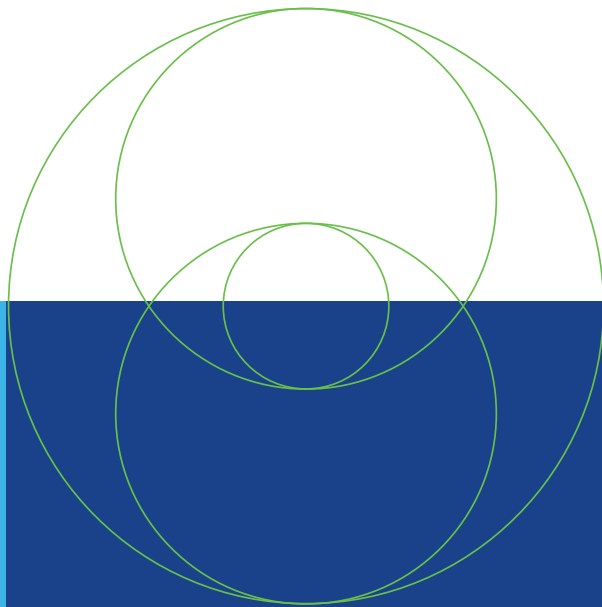
What factors are motivating union organizing activity today?

Pay and benefits are perennial drivers, of course—but a range of other issues are rising to the fore that employers should watch.

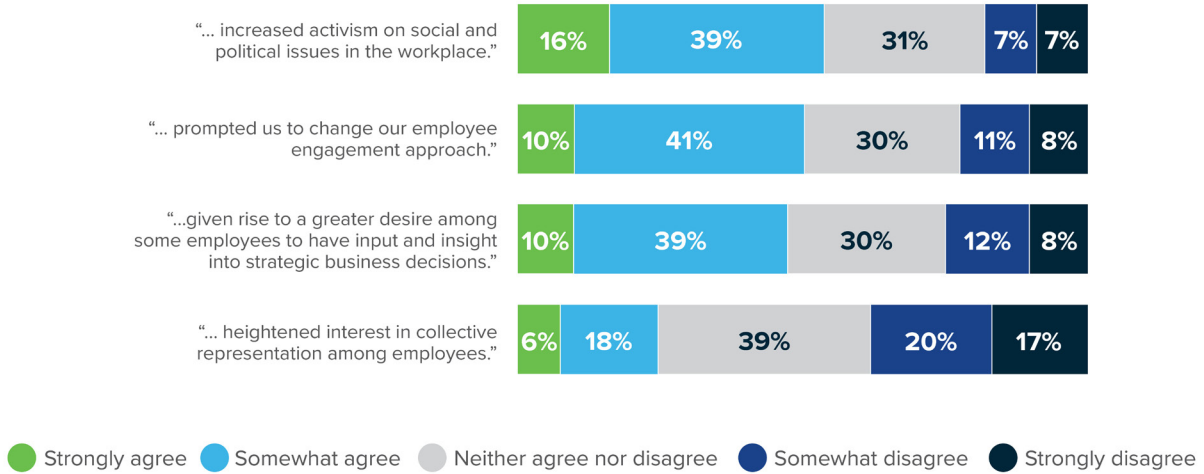
Among organizations that have encountered union organizing activity in the past two years, work/life balance ranked as the top factor that employees cited as a reason for supporting such efforts. This was followed by a desire for input into business operations (31%), job security (29%), and paid time off/leave policies (27%).

Tellingly, when asked what factors might prompt employees to consider supporting union organizing efforts, respondents who have not experienced union activity in the past two years identified three of these four reasons. However, that only 15% of this group expect employees' desire to have input into business operations to be a factor suggests that non-unionized employers may want to focus more on that motivation moving forward.

On the other hand, those who have not experienced recent union activity also ranked hot-button issues like mental health and wellbeing (19%), inclusion, equity and diversity (IE&D) (15%), and artificial intelligence (AI) integration (7%) at higher rates than their counterparts. This could indicate a growing concern of these factors, which may eventually ladder up to demands surrounding work/life balance (*e.g.*, mental health and wellbeing), job security (*e.g.*, AI), and desire for input into business operations (*e.g.*, IE&D).



**Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:
“The growing number of Gen Z employees in the workforce has...”**



Please indicate the extent to which you feel your organization’s corporate culture is currently being influenced by the following external forces.



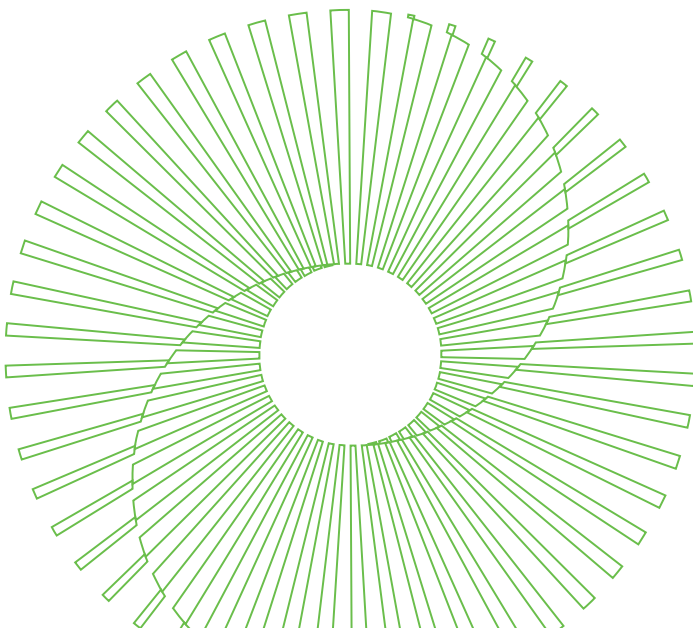
Different experiences and demographics mean today's workers often have different values. Whereas previous generations tended to be more singularly focused on economic outcomes at work, the modern workforce often includes a subset of employees with vocal opinions about noneconomic issues such as work/life balance, good corporate citizenship, IE&D, and environmental impacts.

Our findings underscore this new state of play: 55% of respondents agree that the growing number of Gen Z employees in the workforce has increased activism on social and political issues; nearly half (49%) say the same about a greater desire to have input into strategic business decisions. "Younger generations tend to be more open and receptive to unions," one respondent told us. However, that has yet to translate to actual increases in unionization rates, and just 24% of respondents agree that the influx of Gen Z employees has resulted in heightened interest in union representation.

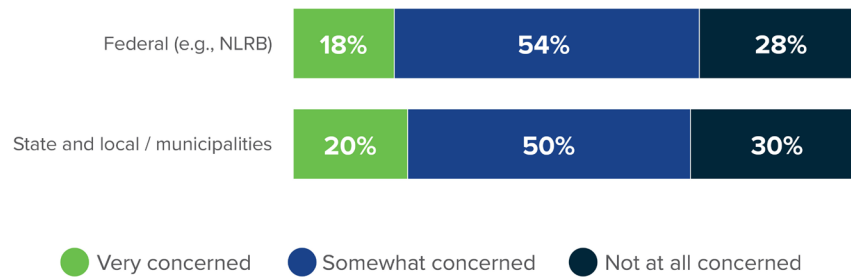
External forces are at play here, too. Forty-three percent of respondents believe that political polarization and divisiveness are having a strong or moderate influence on their organization's corporate culture. Nearly a third of respondents also say media coverage of employee dissatisfaction and/or union influence (30%) and social media activity covering such topics (24%) are having an impact on their organization's culture.

Employers' verbatim responses revealed additional trendlines impacting corporate culture and employee engagement. The most frequently mentioned theme was government and politics, with respondents citing issues like geopolitical uncertainty, ongoing trade wars, and immigration laws. "A large percentage of our staff are immigrants," one respondent wrote. "There is concern for ICE raid[s]." That tracks with Littler's [2025 Employer Survey](#), which found that 75% of employers believe changes to immigration policy will impact their businesses during the first year of the new Trump administration.

Economic pressures—such as the "increasing divide between the have and have nots"—were also frequently mentioned, as were return-to-office and remote work policies and leadership skills. "Many mid-level managers were promoted too early and lack the professionalism needed to deal with current employee concerns," said one respondent.



How concerned is your organization about labor law changes that have occurred at the following levels of government?



The Trump administration's shakeups at the NLRB have thus far led to a few management-friendly changes. In the first few months of 2025, the NLRB's acting general counsel rolled back numerous memoranda issued by his predecessor, including those dealing with mandatory workplace meetings regarding labor issues, non-compete agreements, and rights of student athletes.

As a result, respondents' level of concern about NLRB enforcement fell considerably in our latest [Employer Survey](#), with 56% now anticipating an impact from such enforcement on their businesses over the next year—down from 73% in 2024.

Yet uncertainty remains. After all, it will take some time for a new board majority to reverse course from its pro-union direction under President Biden. At the same time, increased populism is driving more support from Republicans for pro-union bills, such as legislation that would create the equivalent of a rocket docket for the negotiation of first contracts with new unions.

This mixed sentiment is captured in our survey results, which find that 18% of employers are very concerned about federal labor law changes and 54% are somewhat concerned. Respondents feel similarly about state and local changes, with employers based in California expressing more concern than the overall pool (26% are very concerned, versus 20% of all respondents). This makes sense given active pro-union laws currently in place and the [new laws](#) coming into effect in the [Golden State](#) in 2025, from a new minimum wage and independent contractor protections to regulations addressing discrimination and employer intimidation tactics.

Business leaders should also monitor a [recently passed New York state labor law](#), that, if signed by Gov. Kathy Hochul, would significantly expand the state's authority in labor matters traditionally handled by the NLRB.

"Today's employers are facing a significant amount of uncertainty relating to labor laws and the NLRB. Precedents thought to be well-established were overruled by the Biden-era board and are currently making their way through the courts of appeal. And now there are more voices—Democrat and Republican—calling for labor law reform. There is a growing recognition that the unpredictability of policy changes from administration to administration underscores the importance of advance preparation and proactively identifying prime risks."

**[Brendan Fitzgerald](#),
Shareholder in Littler's Labor Management
Relations Practice Group**





Methodology and Demographics

In June and July of 2025, 772 professionals completed Littler’s survey via an online survey tool.

Most respondents (93%) were based in the U.S., with the remaining 7% based outside of the U.S. but with organizations that have U.S. operations. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (63%) are with organizations that do not have any unionized employees, while 37% have a mix of union and non-union employees and 1% have workforces that are fully unionized.

Respondents were from a variety of industries, with the top three represented industries being healthcare (15%), manufacturing (12%), and retail/hospitality (11%).

Respondent titles included:

- Chief Human Resources Officer / Chief People Officer (25%)
- HR Professionals (33%)
- Chief Legal Officer / General Counsel / Deputy General Counsel (13%)
- In-House Lawyers (19%)
- Other C-suite title (5%)
- Other business professional (5%)

Companies represented were of a variety of sizes, with the following number of employees worldwide:

- More than 10,000 employees (17%)
- 5,001 to 10,000 employees (9%)
- 1,001 to 5,000 employees (22%)
- 501 to 1,000 employees (12%)
- 101 to 500 employees (24%)
- 1 to 100 employees (16%)

Responses to some questions in the survey do not add up to 100% due to rounding, and some exceed 100% because respondents were invited to select more than one answer.

