



INSTITUTIONAL  
MEMBERSHIP  
PROGRAM

RESPOND  
NOT REACT:

Bridging institutions  
into spaces of safe activism

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[info@icca.art](mailto:info@icca.art)



# Section 2. Hiring vs. Investing

# What is the issue ?

Diversifying hiring strategies seems to have become the institutional band-aid solution and a shield against criticism serving many in the sector, which may very well be the result of the rise in governmental short-term funding aimed at supporting Indigenous communities in the arts.

This, as we know, came as an overdue solution to the usual exclusionary practices of funding bodies but due to its temporary format it has brought yet another range of issues within arts employment. Short-term employment opportunities have become commonplace in enabling predatory behaviours from organizations that are heavily reliant on funding, even if this meant hiring a token Indigenous worker without any true commitment or willingness to transform.

This makes apparent the little engagement put into long term investing of Indigenous and art workers of colour at large and feeds into the current transactional culture now common in the art sector, belittling the personal needs of said workers. Investment should always be present when bringing any BIPOC employee on board. Temporary hiring and 'letting in' Black and Indigenous art workers is not going to be enough anymore.

# How does it create harm?

- Short-term government funded youth contracts (ie. summer jobs/internships) can easily become exploitative when emerging staff are not offered the mentorship or care they need. We often hear about BIPOC staff being asked to take on work outside their contracts, but for emerging staff they often do not have the tools, experience, or language to advocate for themselves or even recognize when they are being overworked. It is through connecting these youths with leaders of their communities and allowing them to creatively leave their mark in the organization that investment into their future as arts workers can ensue .
- Short term/temporary BIPOC positions promote out of touch hiring practices and move BIPOC arts workers around while keeping them away from leadership roles or positions of power. This can be seen in how calls for application are circulated in close professional circles, have tighter and tighter deadline limits, uphold meritocracy over lived experience and do nothing to accommodate their applicants needs in the hiring process. Racialized workers have to meet many conditions before ever stepping into these employment spaces. It is time for institutions to recognize that they have their own set of conditions to meet as well.

- Cluster BIPOC hiring only works if an institution can create space for workers to interact and collaborate with each other. A reclusive and urgent work culture doesn't allow for supportive kin relationships to be nurtured and grow beyond the walls of an institution.
- There is often labour sitting outside of the job descriptions of many organizations. The intense emotional and non-consensual labour placed upon those new hires is important to be acknowledged at the door and financially recognized if staff are asked to take on labour beyond their stated work.

# Case study

Recently ICCA Board Co-Chair John G. Hampton was appointed as the executive director and CEO of the Mackenzie Art Gallery in Regina, SK. In doing so, Hampton became the first Indigenous leader of a public art gallery in so-called Canada. Indigenous leadership within the arts in major spaces is a testament to our time.

Indigenous leadership brings needed structural shifts for institutional culture as we know it. For example, such leadership brought to life *Conceptions of white: A research Toolkit on the origins and meaning of white identity*, one of the many initiatives by the Mackenzie Art Gallery following Hampton's arrival. This is a living document using human and physical resources to examine the origins and the reality of whiteness as a concept invented to classify degrees of humanity. It is important to take a hard look at whiteness, white supremacy and its structures. When thinking of these realities, we often see arts spaces trying to contend with the 'other,' forcing counter narratives into their own stories without any self-reflection. Successful leadership doesn't hide behind a glass wall, it examines its past and works actively to dismantle its more harmful traditional practices to move in tandem with its team and the times.

For those that have long understood the striking equity and diversity issues we face in this country, as detailed in the feature 'Crisis of Whiteness', a data project including some of Canada's biggest arts institutions collected by Sean O'Neill for *Canadian Art* (2020). We have observed how much this erasure and governance model continues to impact all BIPOC cultural workers and has started to slowly wear them to the bone.

*“But the most dangerous outcome of this all-white leadership is not irrelevance; it’s the reflexive perpetuation of violence and harm toward the people they marginalize—Black people, Indigenous people, people of colour, people with disabilities, 2SLGBTQIA+ people—which has impacted the health and creative capacity of countless artists, staff and future leaders whose bodies don’t reflect whiteness back to itself.”  
(O’neil, 2020)*

**SEAN O'NEIL**



Now let's talk about investing ! Institutional investment into the futures of Indigenous youth and emerging arts workers can be approached through a myriad of ways, but we value that mentorship and education need to be present from the start. Education and investment goes hand in hand. We often warn younger generations of arts professionals to be wary of institutions, what we need instead are structures to support emerging BIPOC arts workers who want to work with institutions on how to survive them and sustain themselves within these spaces. Logan MacDonald, Mi'kmaq artist and member of the ICCA board, examines this concept with The Longhouse Labs Project based out of the University of Waterloo. Longhouse Labs explores perspectives to support decolonization within academic curriculum in a higher education framework, imagining new ways to manifest space for Indigenous artists to thrive. The project comprises initiatives and resources including a studio-gallery space, a garden for land-based learning, annual visiting artist fellowships, and an archive.

MacDonald reflects on the importance of Indigenous leaders to help shape tomorrow's generation:

*“I'm looking to highlight how Indigenous leaders bring valuable knowledge and practices that we can benefit from in ways that support meaningful reciprocity. And I see this as a way to validate non-Eurocentric positions within the university, while also helping to empower the next generation of Indigenous artists.” (Philpott, 2021)*

It is important for cultural institutions to nurture professional development and provide tailored resources for their newly hired staff. When the needs of arts professionals are valued and recognized at the door, the possibilities for how an institution can grow alongside and in harmony with its employees becomes endless.

# What needs to be done to address it (tools)?

- Succession planning: Plan for the success of your employees by having in place strategies and a timeline to help them adequately take on new responsibilities and roles. Any worker deserves the chance to be given the proper training and orientation that fits their needs and offers professional development towards a future of leadership.
- Allow for a Peer Internal Mentorship Program to be developed. Mentorship can take shape in many different ways and should be at the centre of your efforts in uplifting your Indigenous and BIPOC staff. Adequately compensate senior BIPOC staff or whomever is taking on the role of mentor for this labour as well.
- Invest in the mental wellbeing of your BIPOC staff. Mental health is rarely mentioned in the arts but institutions constantly require extensive emotional labour from its racialized staff. It is clear that those tasked with the weight of dismantling colonial structures are the same ones facing it in their daily life. Be flexible with paid leave, investing in ceremonial time off, and understand the boundaries of your staff.
- Invest time in their ideas and projects for the future. Work with them to make their vision come to life at their pace.

- Hire Indigenous workers in full-time leadership positions, not on a short time contract or only in roles specifically branded with the term 'Indigenous.' As important as it is to have an Indigenous curator in an Indigenous curator position, considering Indigenous workers for other positions in your organizations is a must.
- Lastly, even with incredible Indigenous or Black leadership at the top of powerful institutions, there are many odds playing against them. One being the flow in which monetary and funding investments have been directed in the past hundreds of years. We have seen how dysfunctional some of the very top funding institutions in our system have become. As Michael Maranda highlights in his 2020 *Canadian Art Data Project*, with this one key finding: **The less money a gallery receives, the more likely the Director or Curator is Indigenous**

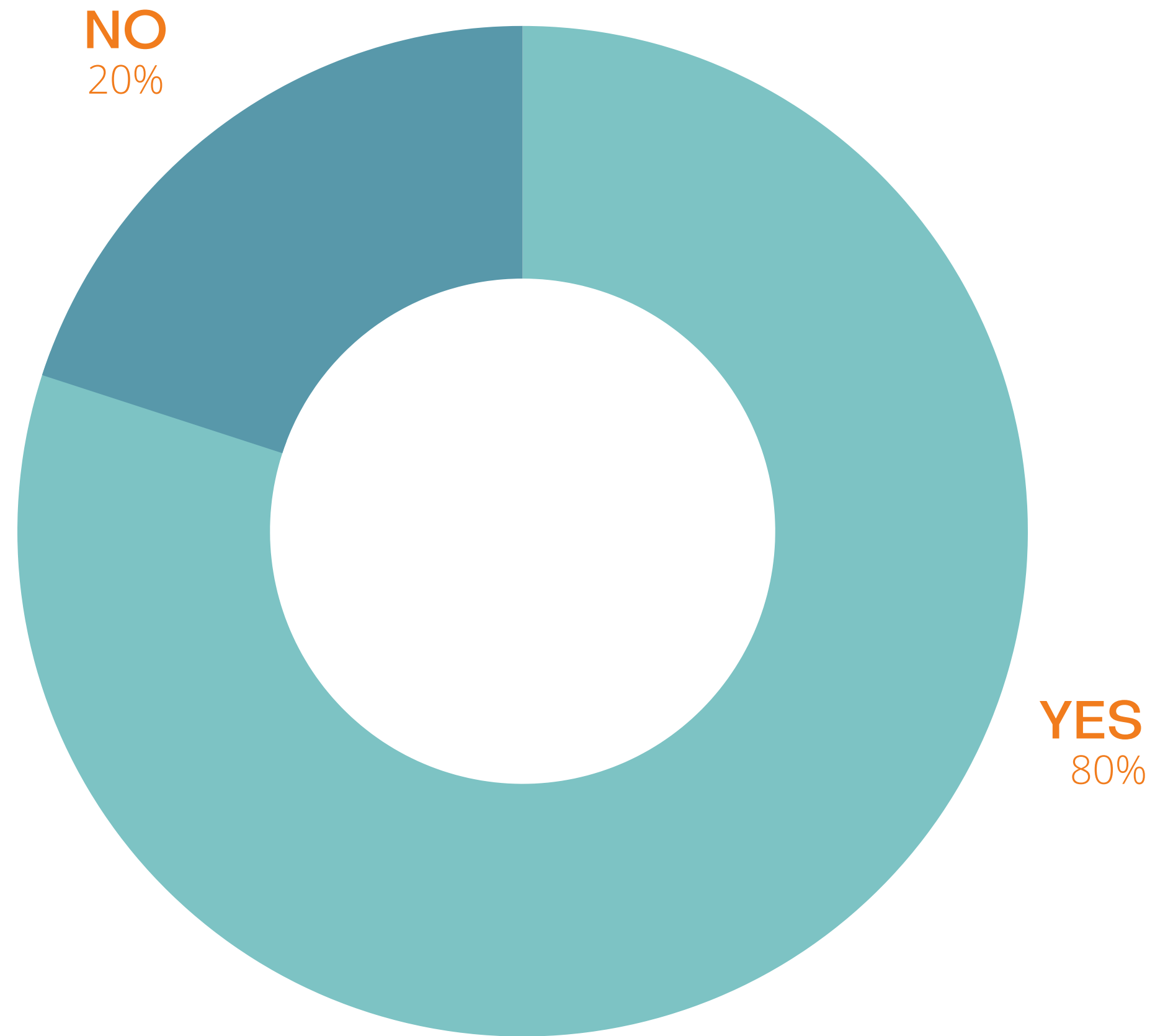
*“As a proxy for a more fine-tuned indication of correlation: the average grant received for Caucasian staff is \$127,000. For Indigenous curators and directors, that amount is \$67,000. For visible-minority staff, that amount is \$141,000. Obviously, there are underlying questions that a mere dataset cannot answer, but the low grant levels for Indigenous staff are particularly distressing.” (Maranda, 2020)*

This is why if you have the power and capacity, there should also be a focus towards community investment. In the spirit of reparations, if you can then you should.

# Data

AS OF JUNE 2022

At this time, does your institution/organization have any Indigenous and/or Black staff?

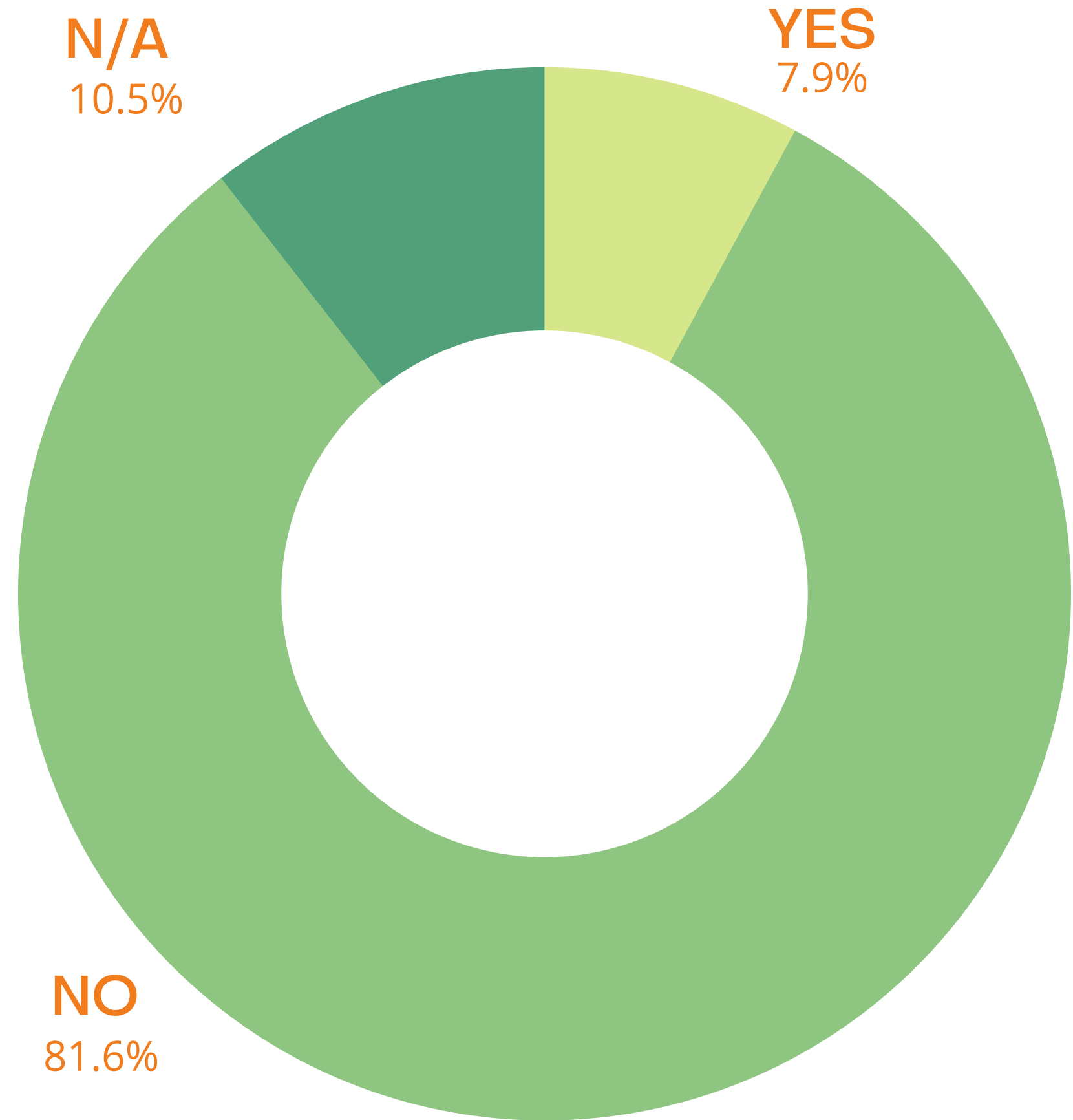


\*Data collected from the Institutional Membership Program

# Data

AS OF JUNE 2022

If 'Yes', how many are permanent staff members?

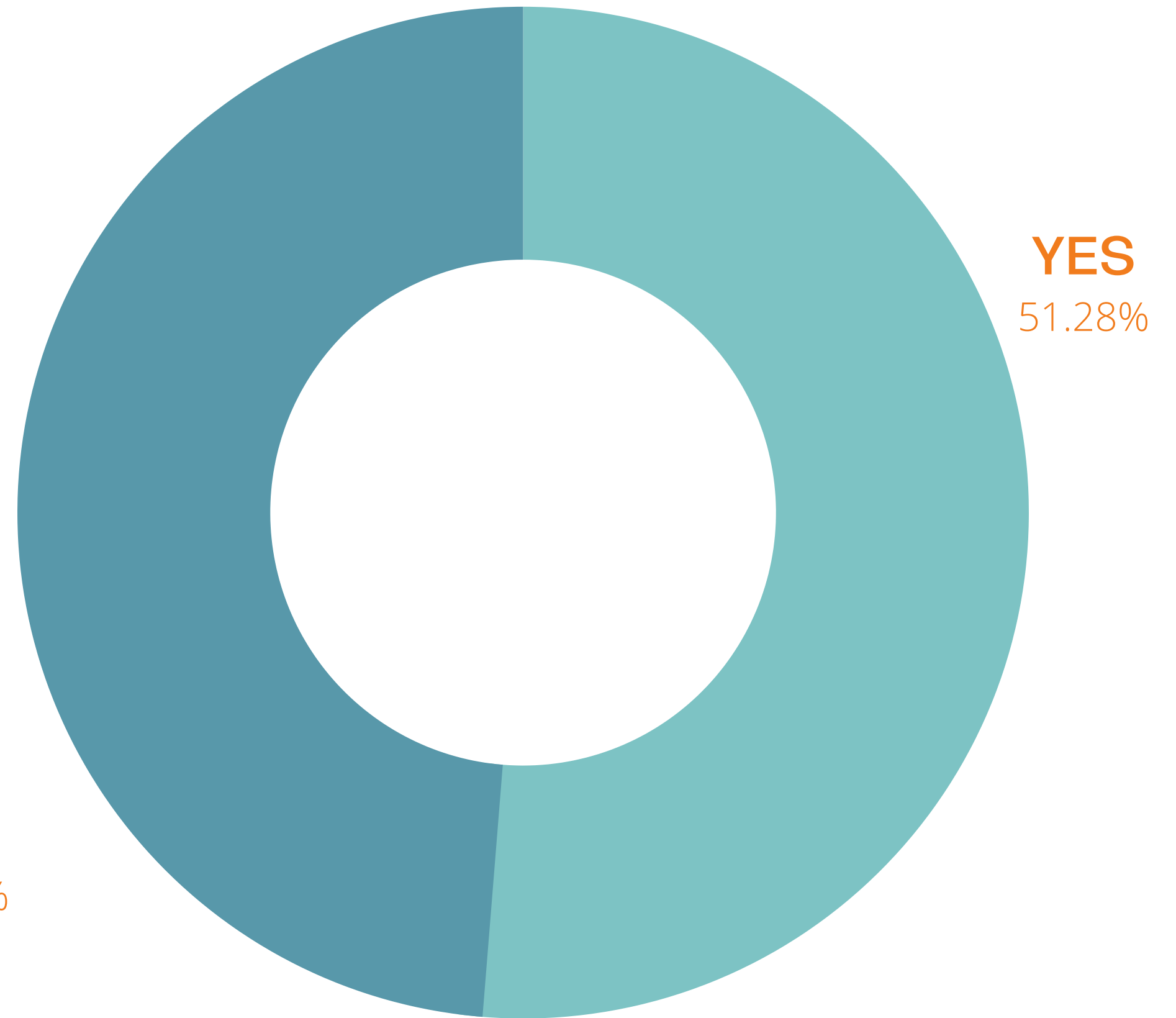


\*Data collected from the Institutional Membership Program

# Data

AS OF JUNE 2022

At this time, does your institution/organization have any Indigenous and/or Black staff in leadership or managerial roles?

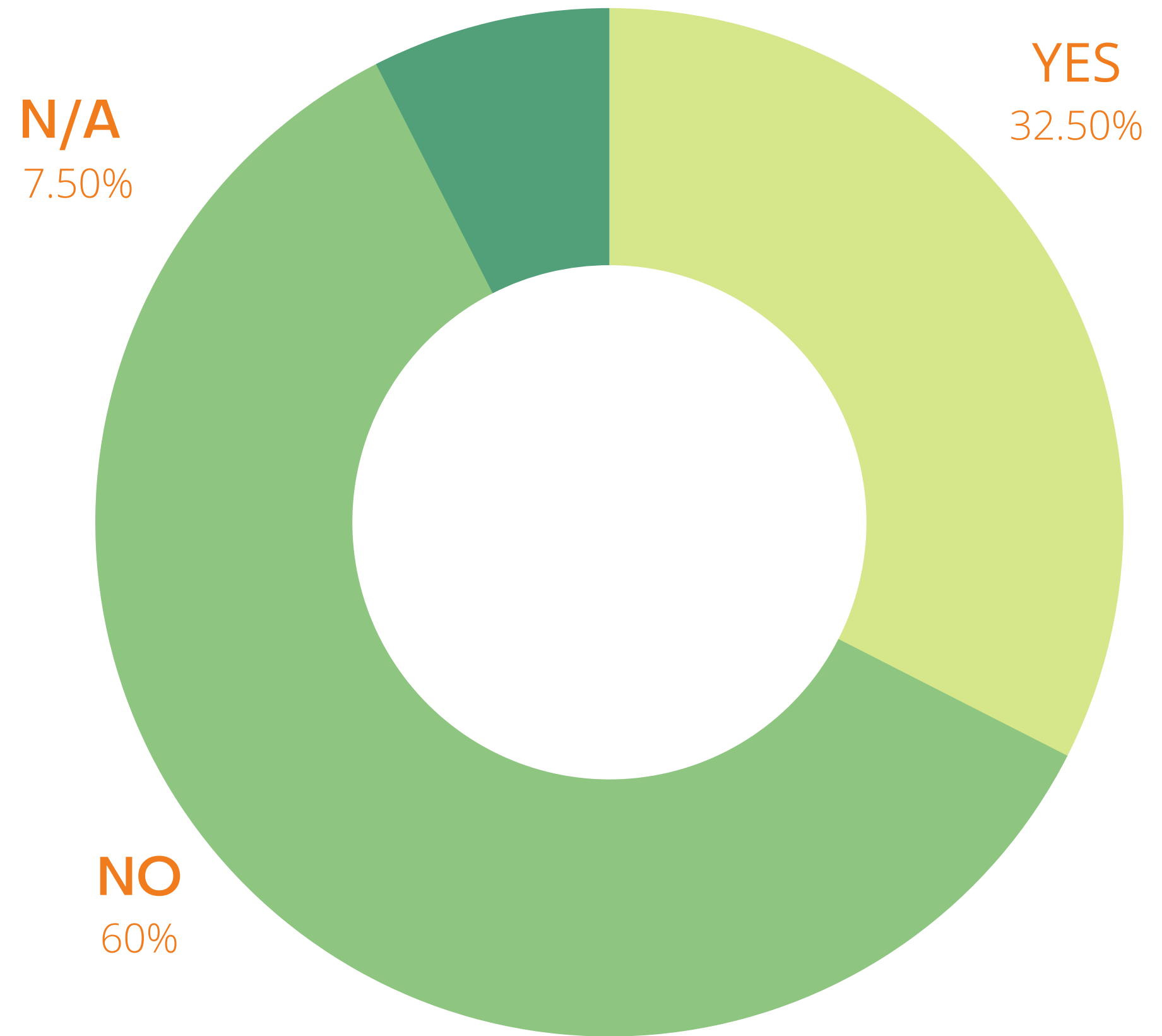


\*Data collected from the Institutional Membership Program

# Data

AS OF JUNE 2022

Has your institution/organization discussed, planned, or actualized a succession plan to bring BIPOC staff intentionally into leadership roles?



\*Data collected from the Institutional Membership Program



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**Contact email**  
info@icca.art