



# 2023 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Barometer

The Value of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Initiatives: Boom or Bust?

Bridge  
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Executive Search

# State of DEI

## Company leaders stand behind DEI programs in wake of SCOTUS affirmative action decision

In the wake of the Supreme Court's decision to overturn affirmative action in higher education, professionals across many sectors who have invested in building diverse talent pipelines and inclusive cultures, held their collective breath and wondered both how their own leadership would react to the news and how it would impact DEI initiatives.

The data tells a clear story: corporate America sees the value of DEI programs and feels confident in the direction of their own DEI initiatives.

As we move into an election year and “the war on woke” gains media prominence, large employers reveal that the reported backlash against DEI initiatives is largely overstated. The vast majority of employers report no negative effects from their DEI initiatives, and in fact, continue to see improvements in culture, hiring, retention, and the bottom line. In fact, employers surveyed are planning on increasing investment on DEI initiatives.

But DEI initiatives still have a long way to go. 85% of hiring leaders at large U.S. employers are white, and while they report plans to increase spending on DEI initiatives, 80% of them believe their leadership is already diverse.

As we have become used to in 2023, there are contradictory narratives around the current state and future health of DEI initiatives, so the data deserves more attention.



# Methodology

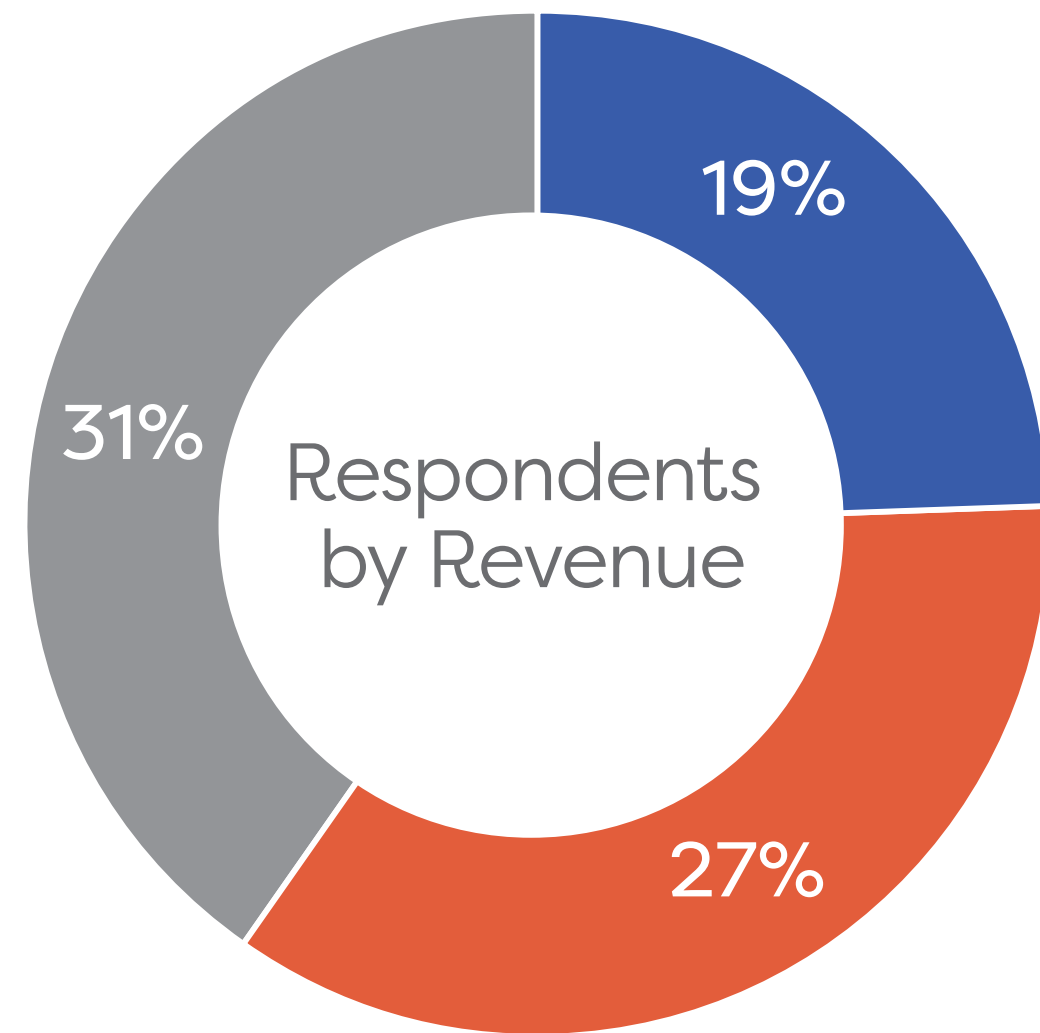
For the first annual **2023 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Barometer**, we surveyed 400 leaders in the C-Suite and human resources departments at companies with at least 250 employees or at least \$25 million in revenue.

This survey entered the field two weeks after the Supreme Court's decision to strike down affirmative action in university admissions, in July 2023. To our knowledge, it is the first survey measuring DEI attitudes in the wake of that decision.

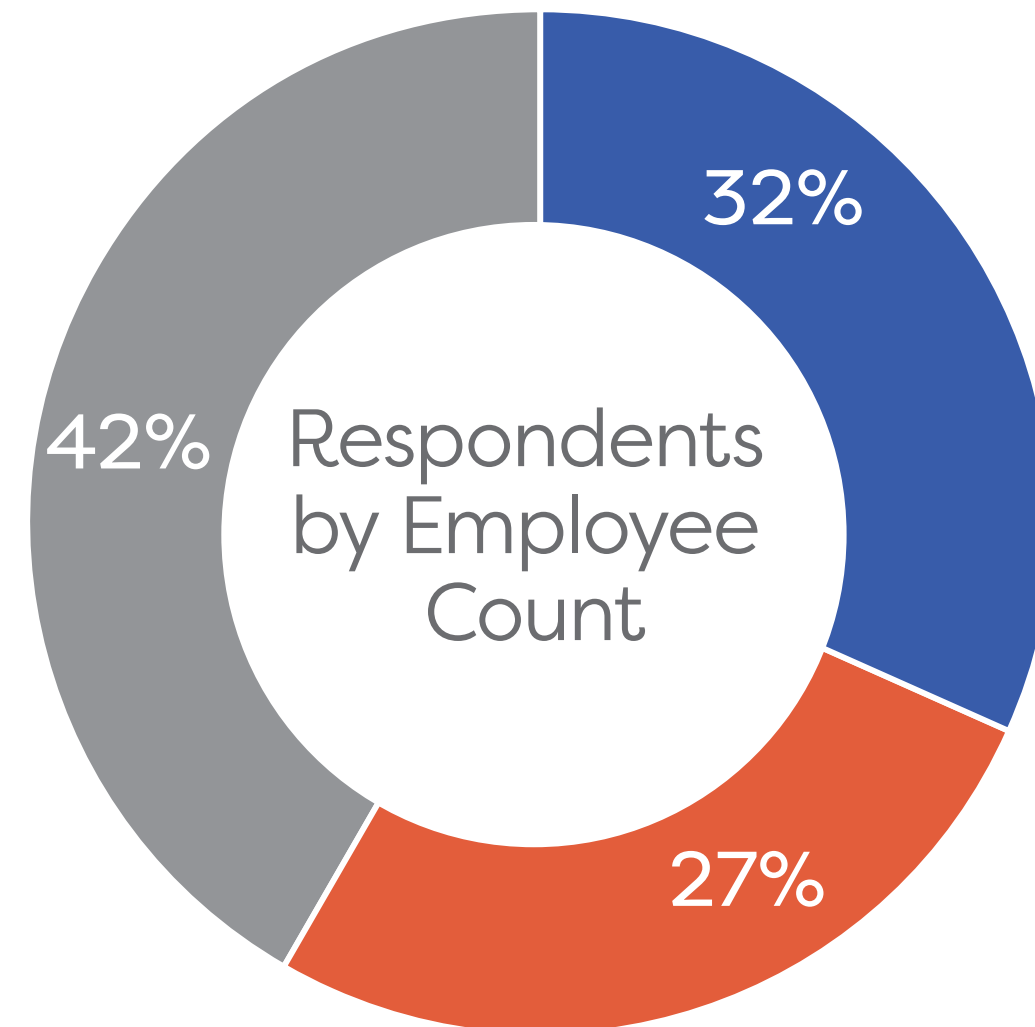
Bridge Partners commissioned Lab42 to conduct this survey, which was in the field from Jul 25-Aug 10. Numbers are rounded up or down to the next one-tenth percentage. The confidence level is 95% unless noted.

# Respondent make up

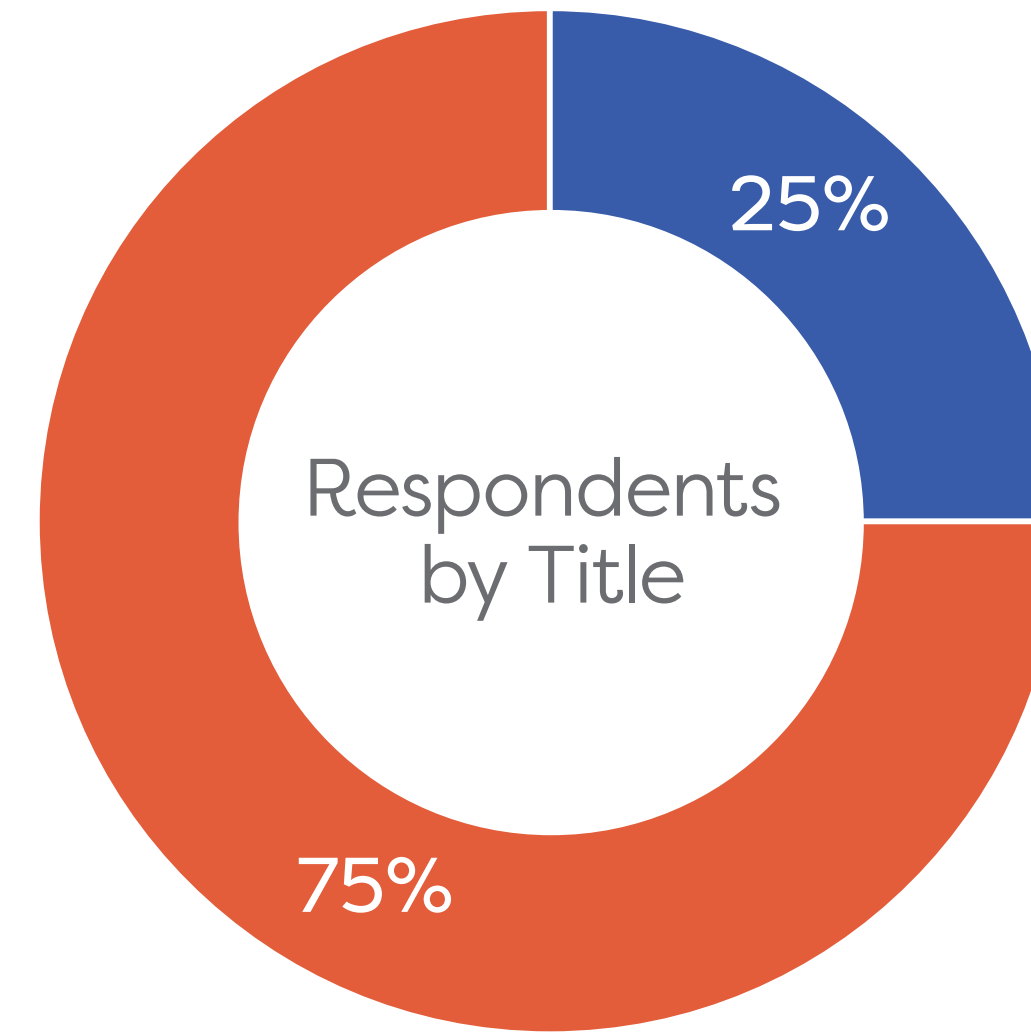
85% of the leaders in this survey identified as white



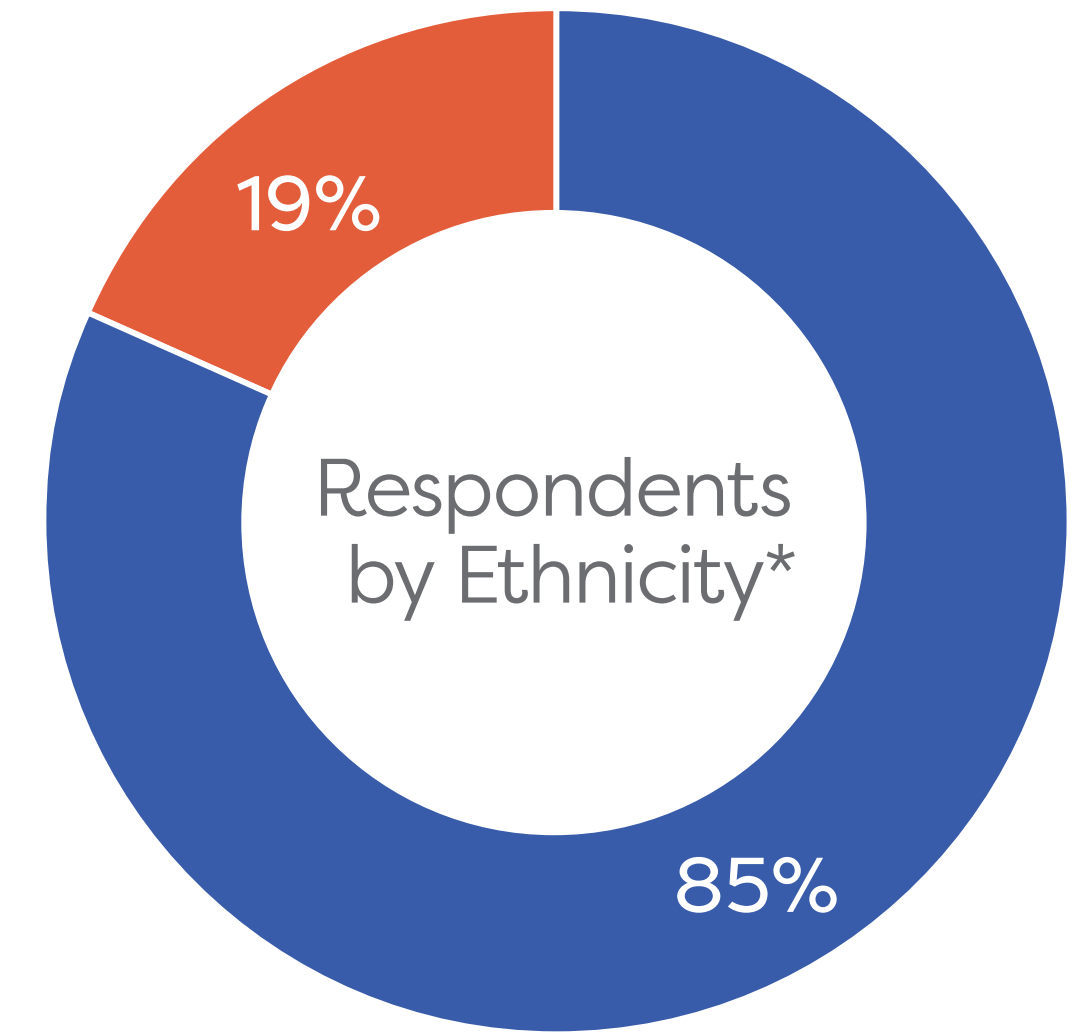
● <\$25M ● \$25-\$100M ● \$100-\$500M



● <500 ● 500-1000 ● >1000



● C-Suite ● HR



● White ● Non-White Ethnicity

\*respondents could choose multiple ethnicities

# Overall sentiment towards DEI programs

80%

of large employers see DEI programs as **positive**

73%

of those with DEI programs plan to further **build and enhance it**

88%

of large employers see DEI programs as **necessary**

82%

of large employers say DEI is **more important** to their organization **now** than 5 years ago

96%

of large employers with DEI programs believe it is the **most impactful social impact initiative**

Across hiring leaders, DEI programs enjoy massive support



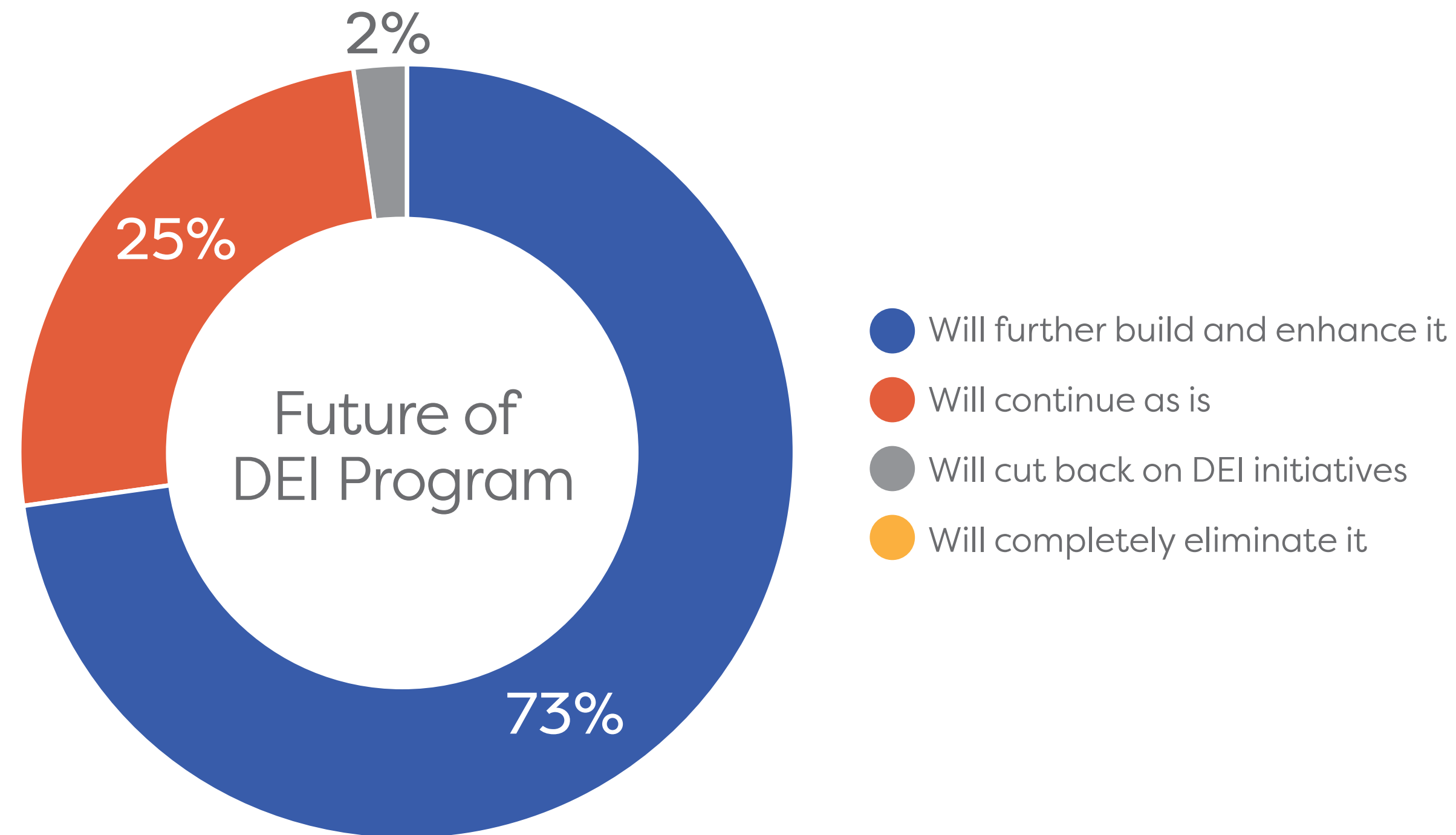
**73%**

of C-Suite report plans to expand DEI initiatives; only 2% report plans to cut back.

**70%**

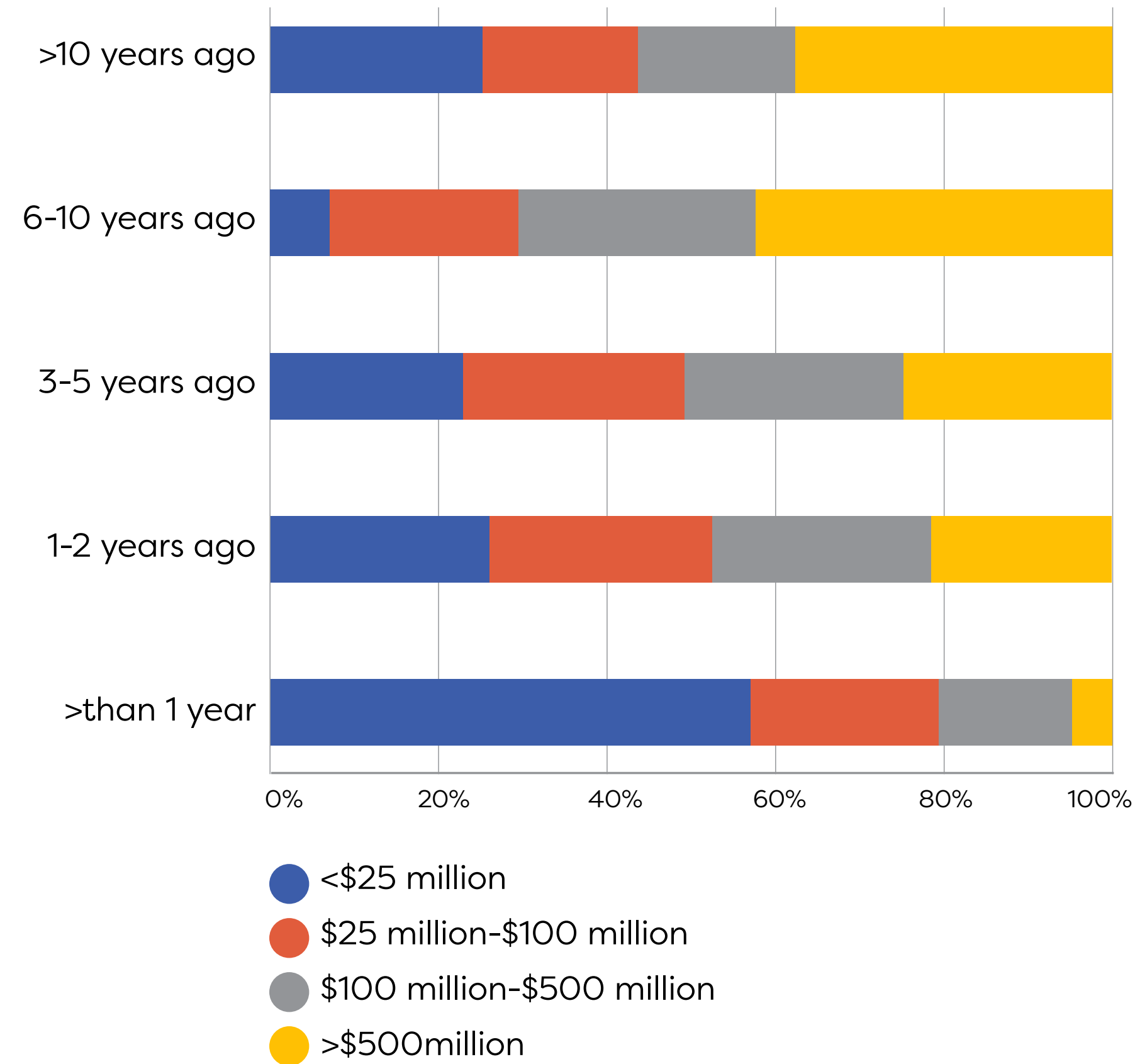
of companies with revenues over \$25 million plan to further build and enhance their DEI program

# What is the future of the DEI program in your company in the next 2-3 years?



# 80% of large employers have started a DEI program in the past 5 years.

When did your DEI program start?  
(BROKEN DOWN BY REVENUE)

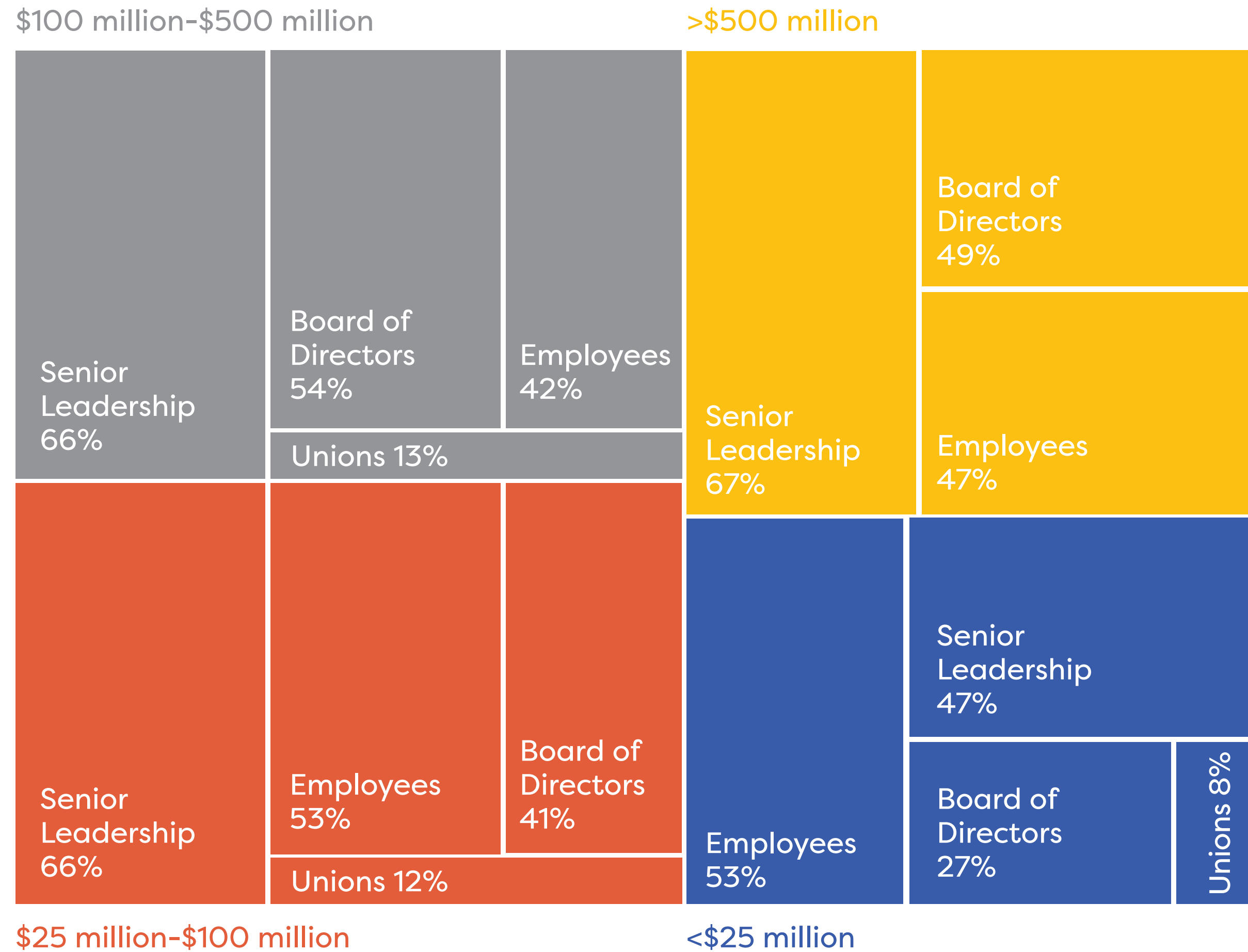


31%

of companies over \$500 million in revenue started their DEI programs 6 or more years ago.

# Who champions DEI programs outside HR?

## Top Stakeholder DEI Champions



DEI initiatives enjoy broad support even from non-HR stakeholders within the company

Board of Directors are 3 times more likely to champion DEI programs than unions



# HR leaders see impact on hiring and culture, while C-Suites see impact on bottom line

C-Suites are **37%**

more likely than HR leaders to cite increase in revenue/market as a success metric

C-Suites are **35%**

more likely than HR leaders to cite stronger leadership as a success metric

**49%** of C-Suite

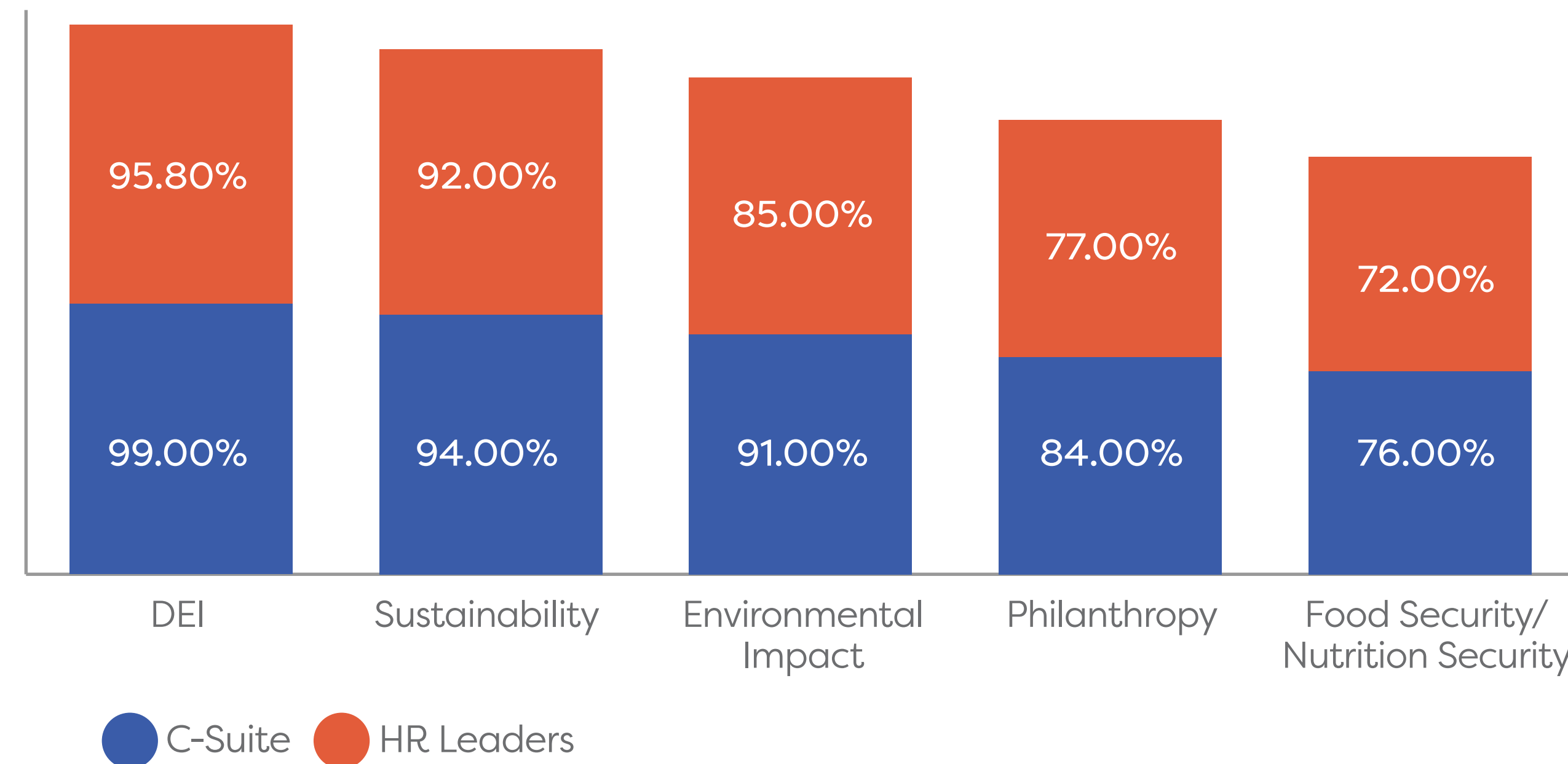
believe DEI programs improve topline or bottomline growth

Only **23%** of C-Suites

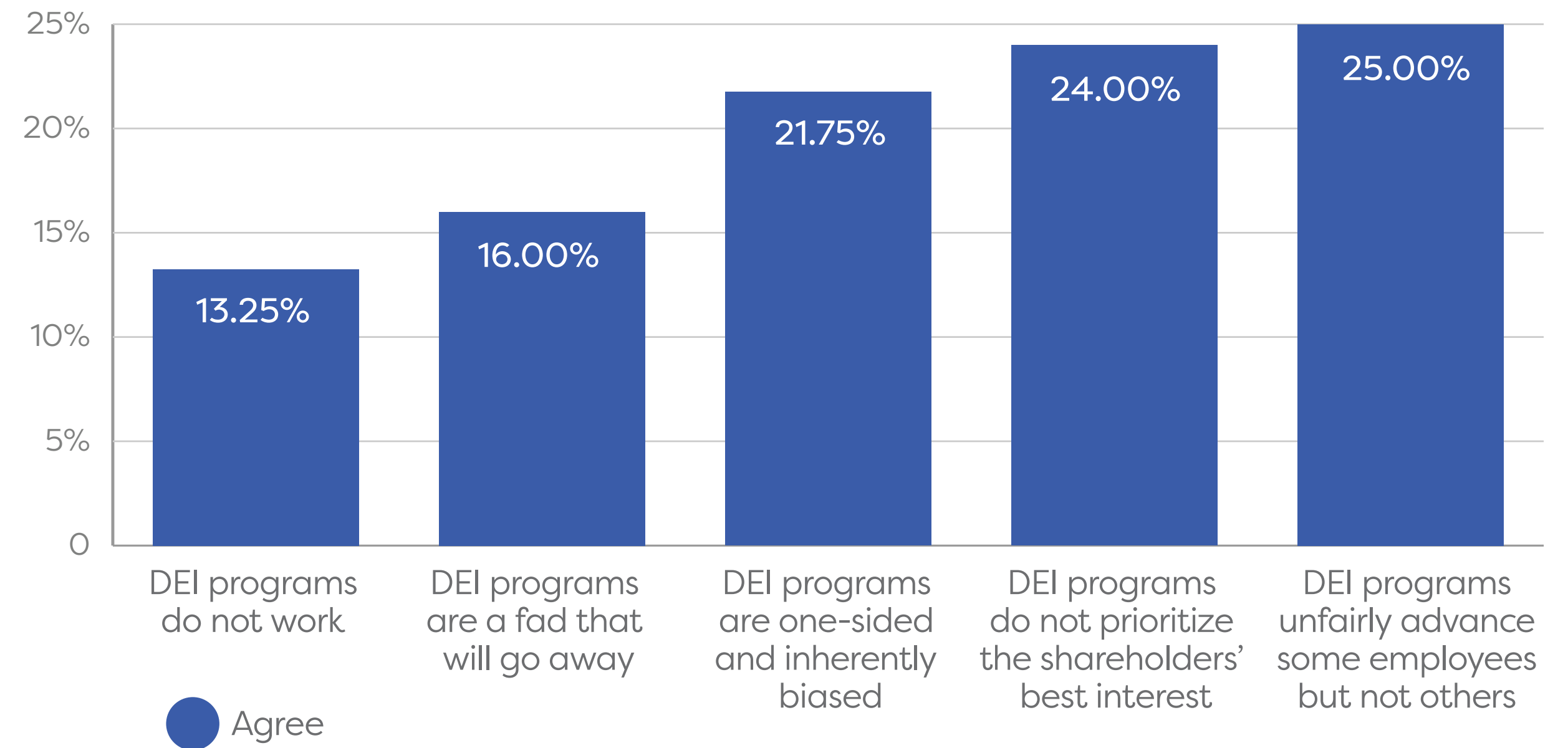
agree that DEI programs do not benefit the shareholder

When it comes to recruiting, hiring, and retention, how important are the following social initiatives to your organization?

96% of large employers believe DEI is the most impactful social impact initiative. DEI impacts recruiting, hiring, and retention more than sustainability, and environmental impact initiatives



Some hiring leaders do believe in the most reported criticisms of DEI initiatives – but they are in the minority



Companies with 500-1000 employees are least enthusiastic about DEI programs

- 18% believe DEI programs do not work
- 14% believe DEI programs are a fad
- 29% think DEI programs are one-sided



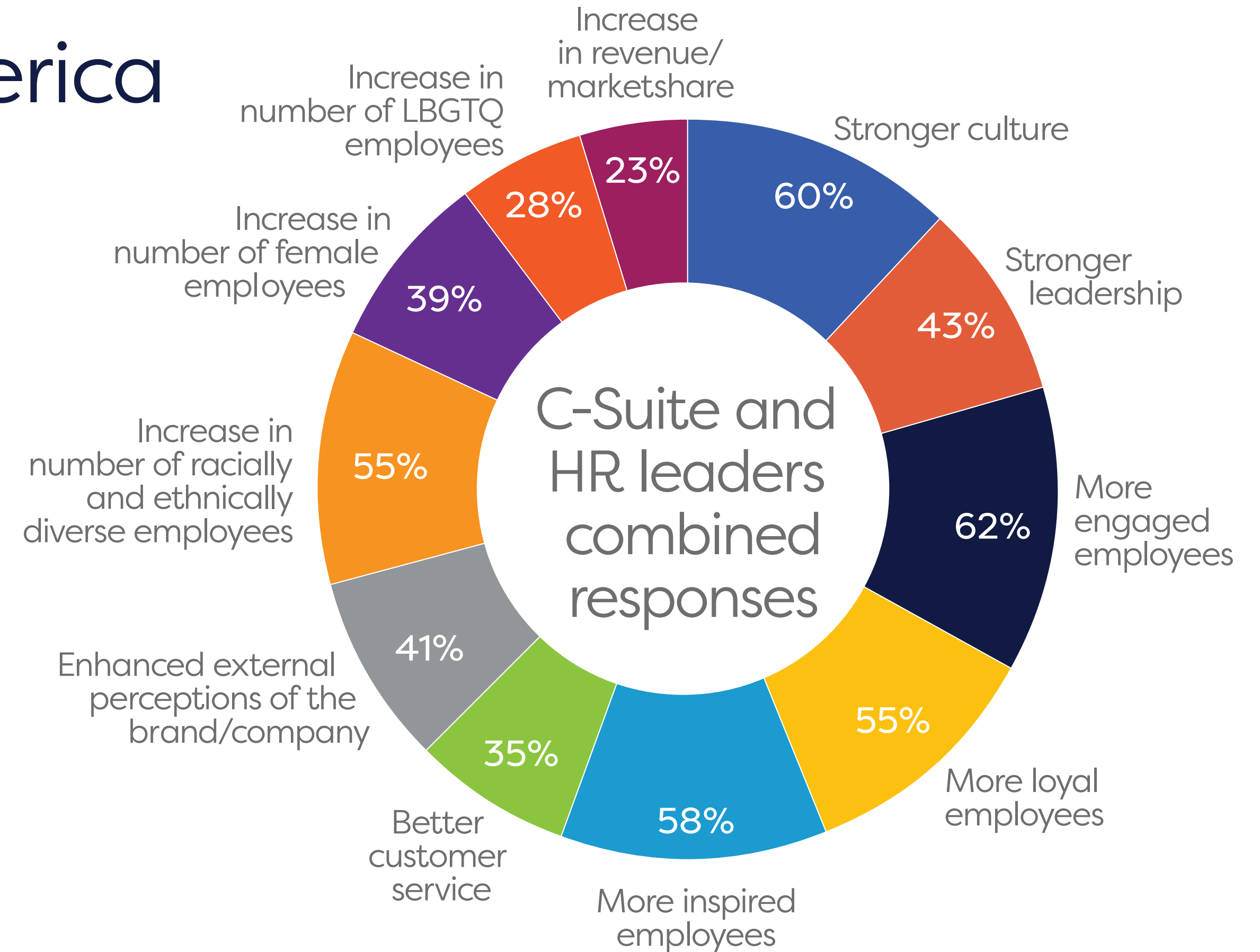
# Impact of DEI in corporate America

**80%** of employers

believe their boardroom and senior leadership is diverse, and they report a wide range of benefits attached to their DEI initiatives

**Only 30%**

of C-Suite executives cite increased revenue and market share as a tangible impact of DEI programs



C-Suite and HR leaders agree: The number one impact measure of DEI programs is more engaged employees.

# How do you measure the success of your DEI program?

## Women and LGBTQ hires

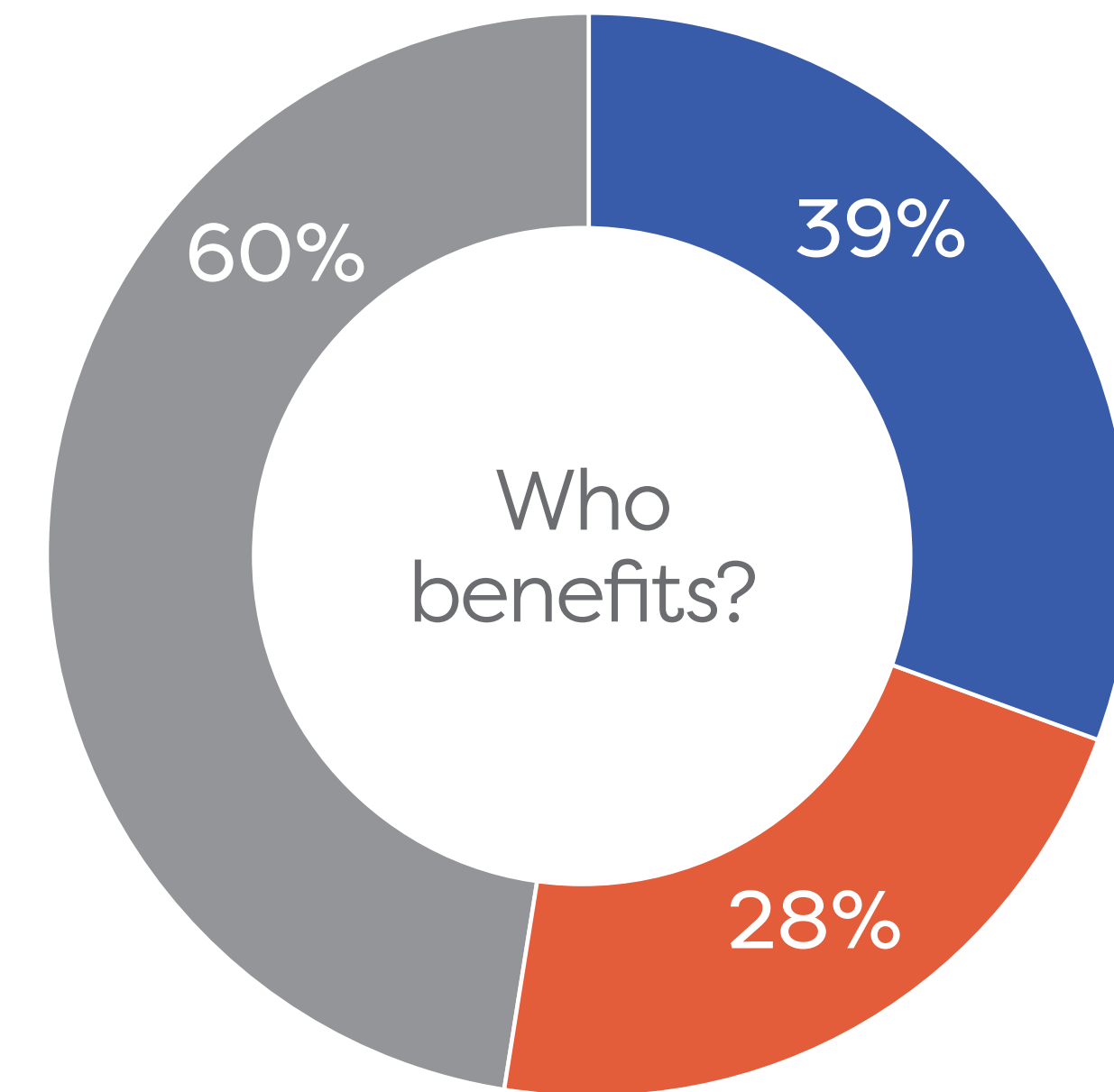
lag behind in DEI push as hiring leaders measure increases in representation of ethnic and racial minorities over women and LGBTQ

## Companies under \$25 million

are most likely to cite increase in female employees as a success metric

## Companies between

\$100 million-\$500 million are least likely to cite increased female employees as a success metric



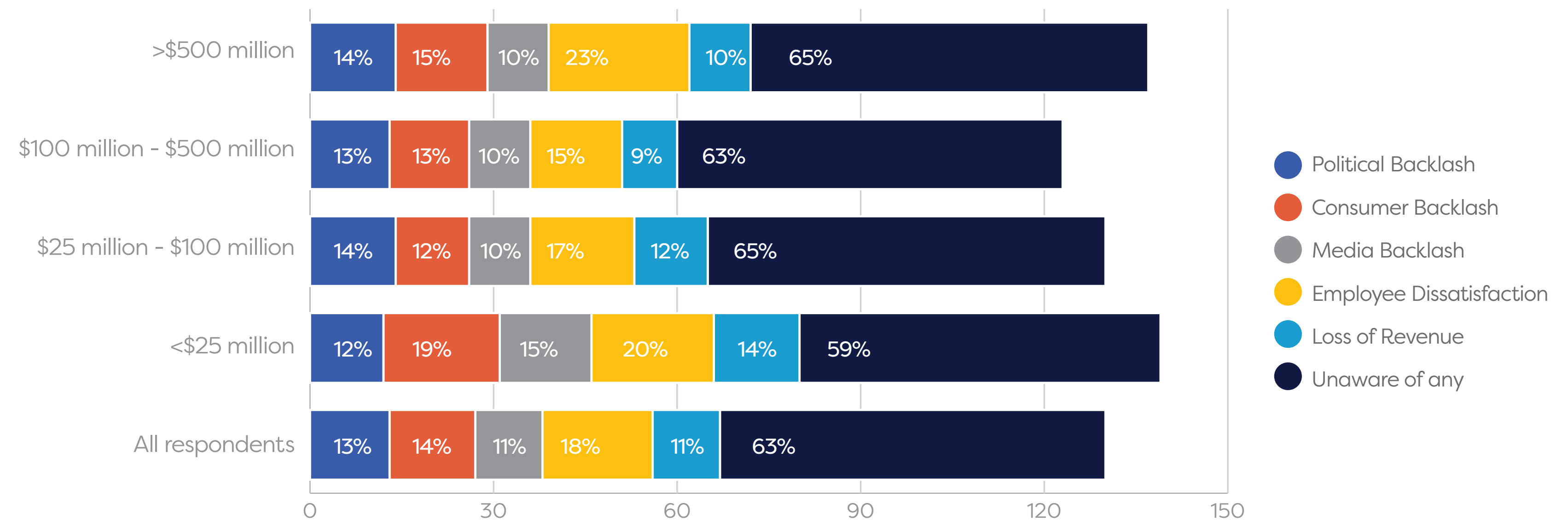
- Increase in number of female employees
  - Increase in number of LGBTQ+ employees
  - Increase in number of racially and ethnically diverse employees
- \*respondents could choose multiple answers

Racial and ethnic diversity is the predominant focus of DEI programs in corporate America

# Threat of consumer, media or political backlash is overstated

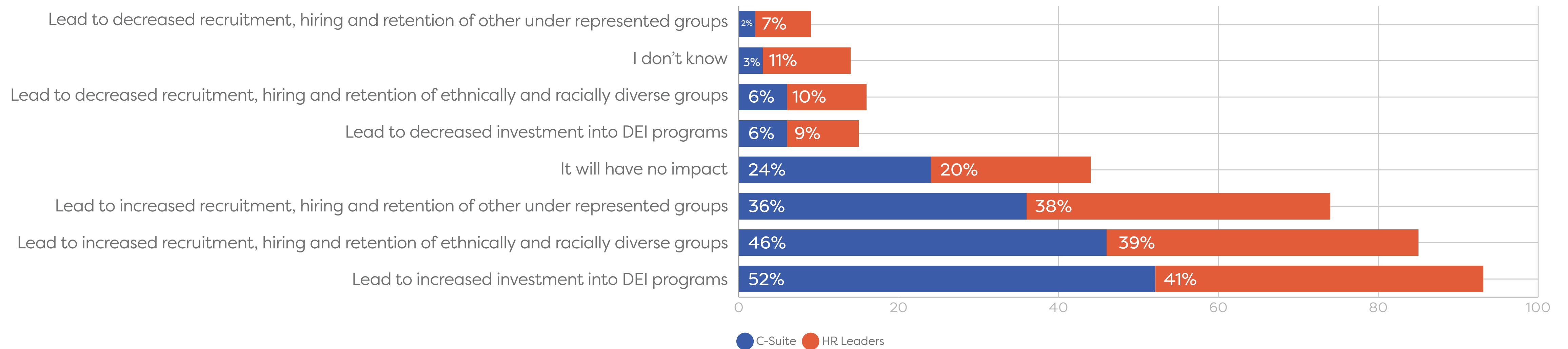
The **majority** of employers with DEI programs

report they are unaware of any backlash due to DEI initiatives





# How will the Supreme Court's decision on affirmative action in college admissions impact your DEI programs?



The C-Suite was 24% more likely than HR leaders to say the SCOTUS decision would increase DEI investment

About Bridge Partners LLC

# Celebrating 20 years of inclusive executive search

Founded in 2003 and led by a diverse team of women and leaders of color, Bridge Partners is a retained executive search firm with an unrivaled track record of guiding and implementing an inclusive search process, centering both our work and our own culture in equity.

Today, with offices in New York City, Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia and Washington DC, our clients include major corporations, nonprofits, public sector and social impact organizations across the United States and around the world. What they have in common is a desire to harness the proven market, talent and performance advantages of a diverse leadership group that reflects the world we live in and the constituents they serve.

When asked what differentiates us, the answer is simple: For 20 years, we have approached executive search with the knowledge that diverse leadership talent is out there, and intentionality is the key. Our transparent and inclusive process successfully uncovers the best talent, period. The proof is in our results.

Our reputation for, and commitment to, equity and inclusion comes from years of hard work; we are a minority-owned business with a team and network that reflect that commitment.

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