2024

InnerSource Commons

State of InnerSource Report

Foreword

I'm thrilled to present the State of InnerSource 2024 report. The InnerSource Commons community regularly runs the State of InnerSource survey to get feedback on the status of InnerSource within our community member organizations. As we continue to see InnerSource practices evolve and mature across industries, this survey provides invaluable insights into the current landscape of InnerSource adoption and implementation.

A few key observations stood out to me this year.

- The growing emphasis on reusable software as a primary motivation for InnerSource adoption. This shift highlights how organizations are recognizing the long-term value and efficiency gains of InnerSource.
- The emergence of documentation-as-code as a common early InnerSource project type. This trend suggests that organizations are finding practical, low-barrier entry points to begin their InnerSource journey.
- The persistent challenge of time constraints as a major blocker to InnerSource contribution. This underscores the need for continued advocacy and support at all levels of an organization to prioritize InnerSource initiatives.

I'm particularly encouraged to see the increase in organizations starting to introduce formal InnerSource programs. This indicates a growing recognition of InnerSource as a strategic priority worthy of dedicated resources and structure. This growth has been coupled with the formation of the ISPO Working Group in the InnerSource Commons Foundation.

My heartfelt thanks go out to Clare Dillon and all the volunteers who contributed their time and expertise to design, conduct, and analyze this survey. Your efforts provide an essential service to the InnerSource community, helping practitioners and leaders alike to benchmark their progress and identify areas for growth.

As we look to the future, I'm excited by the potential for InnerSource to continue driving innovation, collaboration, and efficiency across the software development landscape. Let's use the insights from this report to further our collective mission of spreading InnerSource best practices and fostering a more open, collaborative approach to software development within organizations.

Russ Rutledge
Executive Director InnerSource Commons

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Contents

Foreword **2**
Contents **3**
Key Takeaways **4**
InnerSource Concepts & Perceptions **5**
InnerSource Concepts 5
Individual InnerSource Experience 6
Perceived InnerSource Benefits - Individuals 7
Perceived InnerSource Blockers 8
InnerSource Projects & Practices **9**
InnerSource Projects 9
InnerSource Practices & Culture 11
InnerSource in Organizations **13**
InnerSource Trends 13
Organization Motivation, Progress & Measurement 16
InnerSource Organizational Practices 18
Resourcing InnerSource 19
InnerSource Commons **21**
About the Survey **23**
Methodology 23
Demographics 24
Gender 24
Role 25
Work Experience 26
Firmographics 27
Sector 27
Org & Dev Org Size 28
Geographic Location 29
Acknowledgments **30**
About InnerSource Commons **30**
Contact Information 30
Learn More 30

Key Takeaways

1. **InnerSource Concepts**: InnerSource is most commonly associated with the concept of code reuse, with “adopting open source practices” coming closely behind.
2. **Individual Benefits**: The top individual benefits are sharing knowledge, networking, and improving software quality.
3. **Organization Benefits**: The top organization motivations and areas of perceived progress are creating reusable software, removing silos and bottlenecks, and knowledge sharing.
4. **InnerSource Blockers**: The top InnerSource blockers are time to contribute, lack of middle management buy-in, and a lack of familiarity with InnerSource principles.
5. **Inner Source Projects**: Libraries and internal tools, DevOps projects and Platform projects were the most common descriptions of InnerSource projects, with documentation-as-code featuring as the next most popular project type.
6. **InnerSource Practices:** The most common practice is making InnerSource projects visible and discoverable through a portal.
7. **InnerSource Trends:** Most organizations have a small or medium number of InnerSource projects in their organizations, and are scaling up their InnerSource practices.
8. **InnerSource Support**: The majority of respondents to this survey agree that InnerSource is both an important strategy in their organization and executive management explicitly supports InnerSource.
9. **InnerSource Programs**: The majority of organizations have an InnerSource Program, the majority of which are informal, part-time, or virtual.

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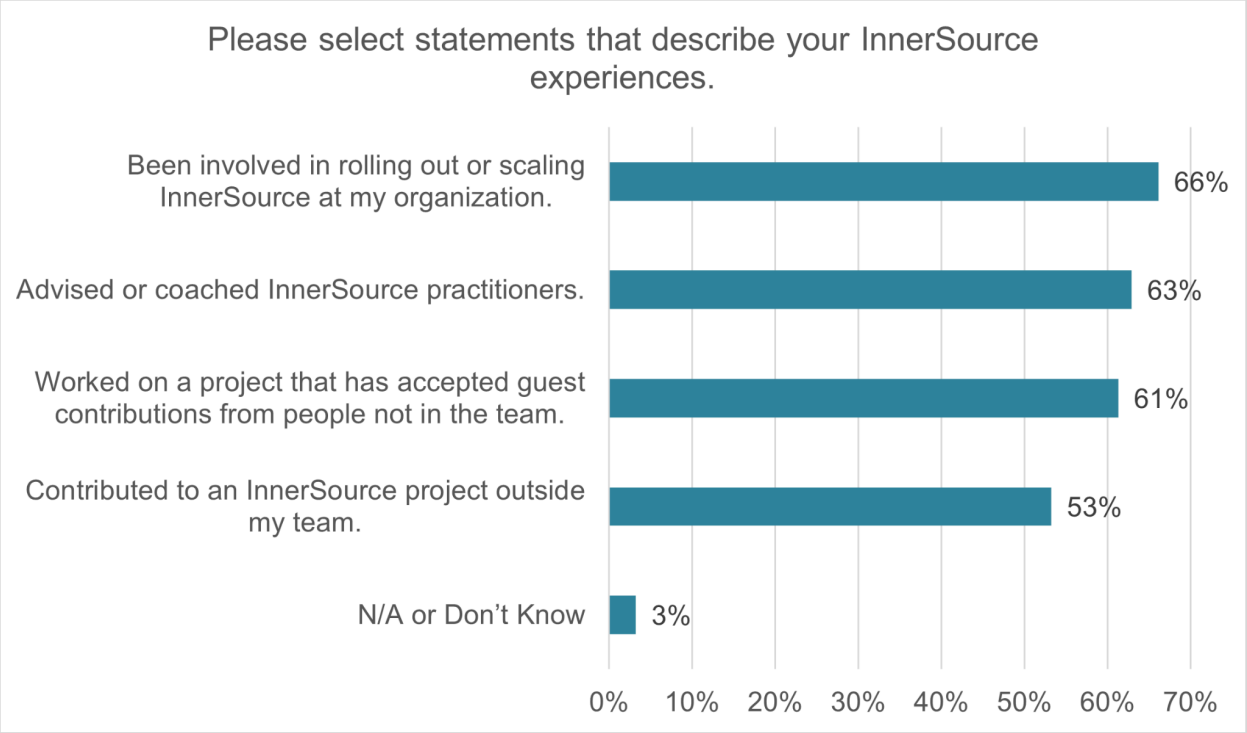
InnerSource Concepts & Perceptions

InnerSource Concepts

To start with we asked what respondents think of when they think of InnerSource. The number one concept associated with InnerSource is “Reusing software/source code” which replaces “Adopting open source practices within the organization” from last year's survey, though that concept comes as a close second. Themes related to collaboration and learning across the organization come next. Apart from the answers below, additional answers in the “Other” free text field related to software development best practices for collaboration, and learning and development.

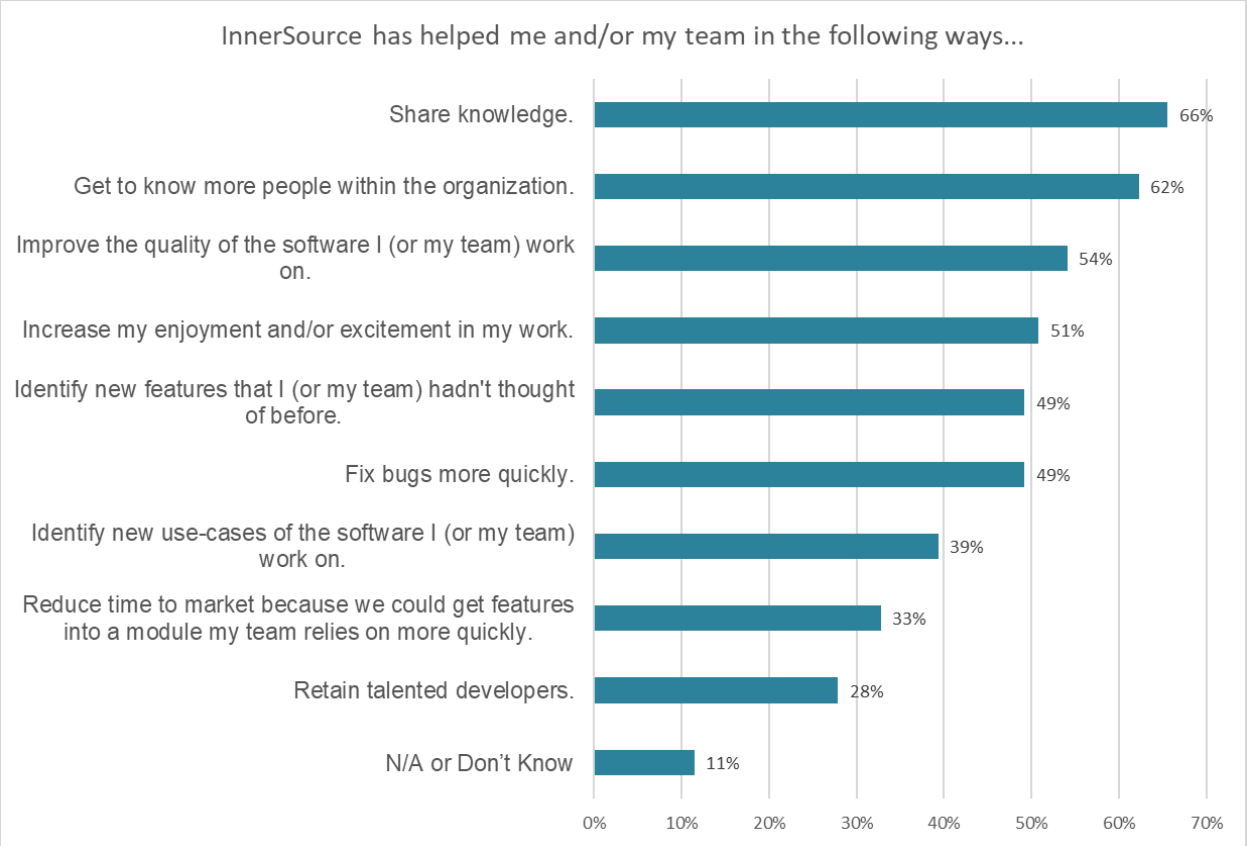
Individual InnerSource Experience

Given that this survey is promoted to InnerSource Commons community members, it is perhaps not a surprise that the majority of respondents are experienced in InnerSource. Most are involved in rolling out or scaling InnerSource in their organizations and have advised or coached other InnerSource practitioners.



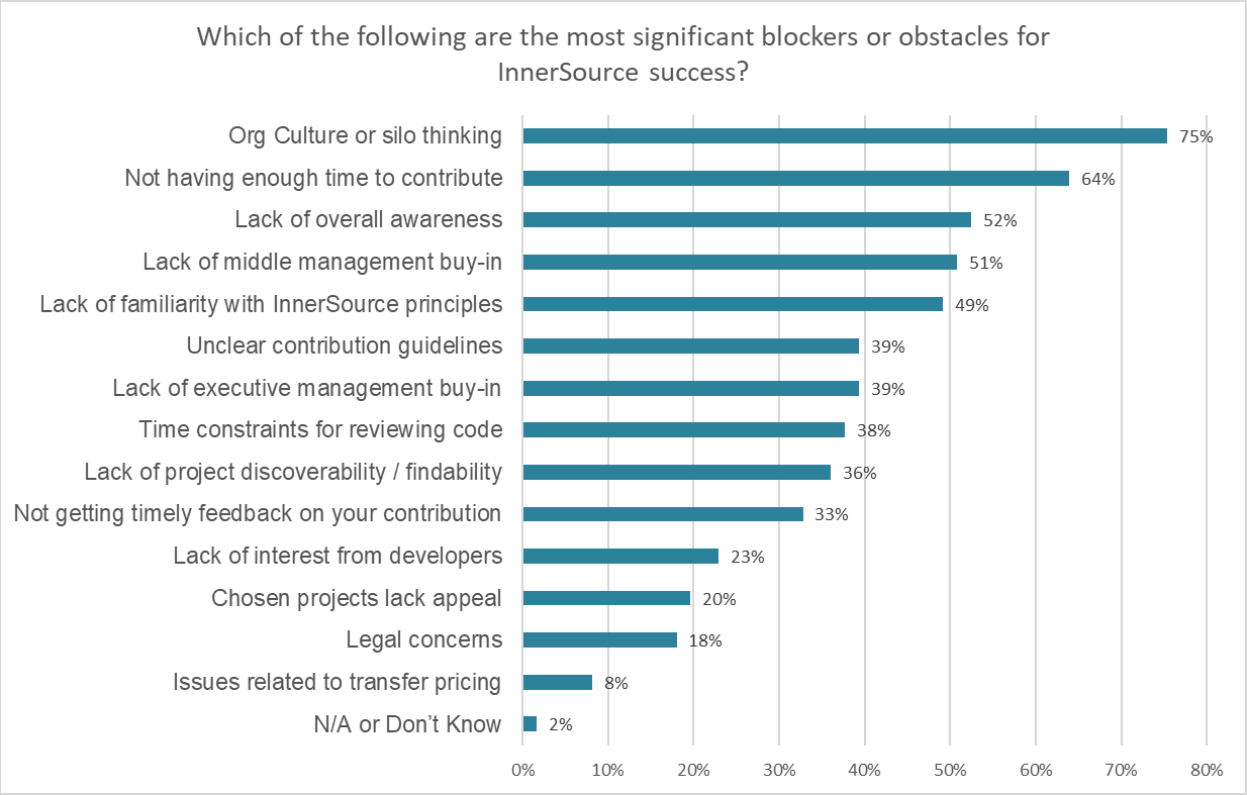
Perceived InnerSource Benefits - Individuals

The top three perceived benefits the individual respondents noted were sharing knowledge, networking, and improving software quality (replacing increasing enjoyment from 2023 survey). Responses from the free text “Other” field focused on increased developer productivity (e.g. “accelerated time to market”, “improved communication and documentation quality”), culture improvements (e.g. “It has created a culture of people looking for or creating solutions to problems instead of defaulting to asking others to do it for them”), improved developer practices (e.g. “leading us to quickly uncover new use cases”), and learning and development (e.g. “share knowledge”). As noted in last year’s survey, it is interesting that the personal benefits reported differ from the organizational motivations and measures included below, with knowledge sharing emerging as the top personal motivation while organization motivation is more focused on efficiency.



Perceived InnerSource Blockers

The top blockers associated with InnerSource were organizational culture (silo thinking), not having enough time to contribute, lack of overall awareness, and middle management buy-in. Free text feedback in this question elaborated on these issues. Respondents commented that there was often insufficient time and resources available for InnerSource (e.g. “Lack of time for proper documentation has been the biggest blocker for our teams. They are not willing to spend time and don’t see the prize in external contributions.”). There was additional feedback relating to a lack of good InnerSource practices that can inhibit adoption within the organization (e.g. “For some projects, it's really hard to get a grasp of the code base and how to contribute. The documentation is lacking and sometimes, there is no one willing to take the time to onboard me.”). Some feedback pointed to more general cultural or interpersonal issues such as “Difficulty with specific humans who own areas of code - [it is] easier for me to just fork and build my own than deal with their personality”.



InnerSource Projects & Practices

InnerSource Projects

For the first time in this year's survey, we asked respondents to describe InnerSource projects in their organization. The options for this question were sourced from the InnerSource Commons community. Libraries and internal tools, DevOps projects and Platform projects were the most common project descriptions. This highlights how InnerSource is often being leveraged for projects that are intended for broad use within an organization.

"Documents as code" was the next most common project type, with 46% of respondents saying that could describe their InnerSource projects. This fits with anecdotal feedback we have heard in InnerSource Commons community calls, suggesting that documentation-as-code is emerging as a common early project type for some organizations that may be just beginning their InnerSource journey.

Other options included projects where collaboration was pre-planned between development teams (e.g. inter-divisional projects, community projects, cross-regional projects) or even organizations (e.g. inter-organization projects or those that span legal boundaries). 32% of respondents declared that InnerSource projects in their organization were on a path to open source in the future. Only 15% of respondents suggested that InnerSource was practiced by default on all projects in their organization.

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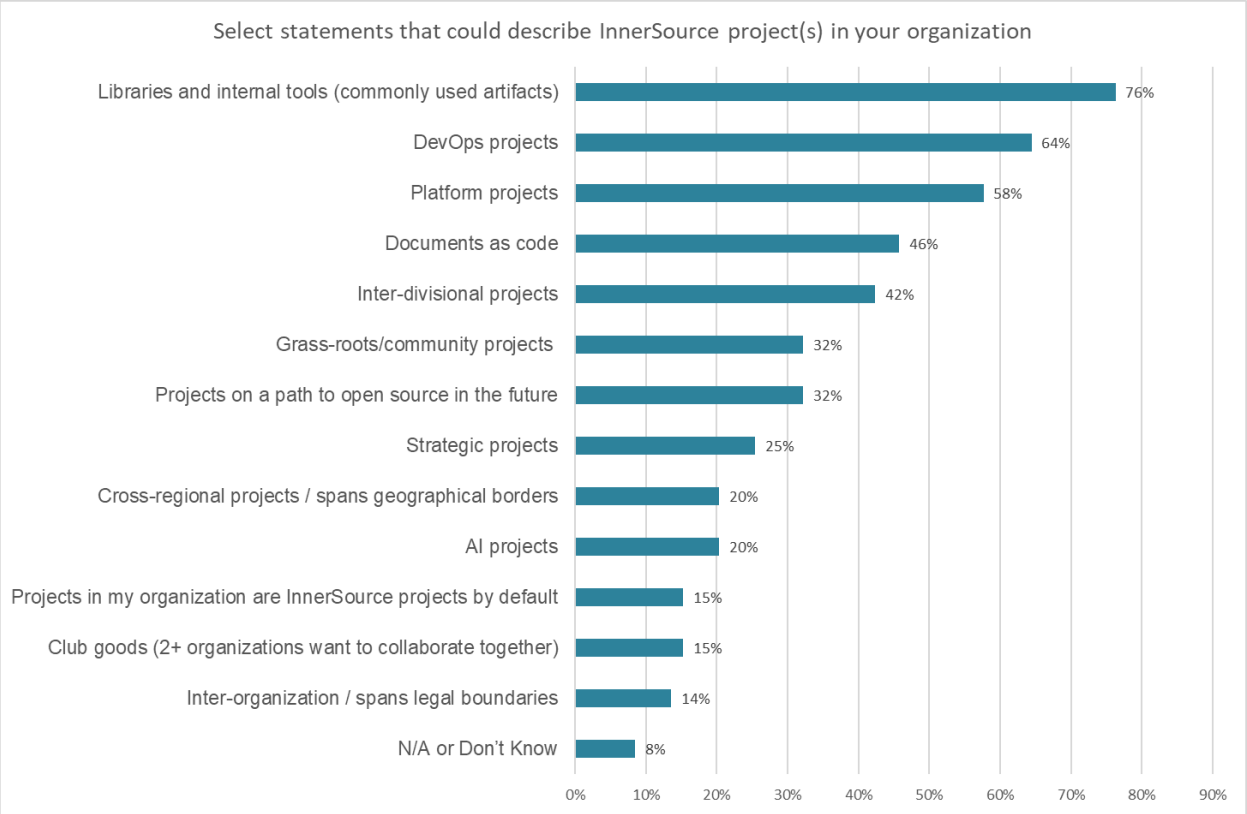
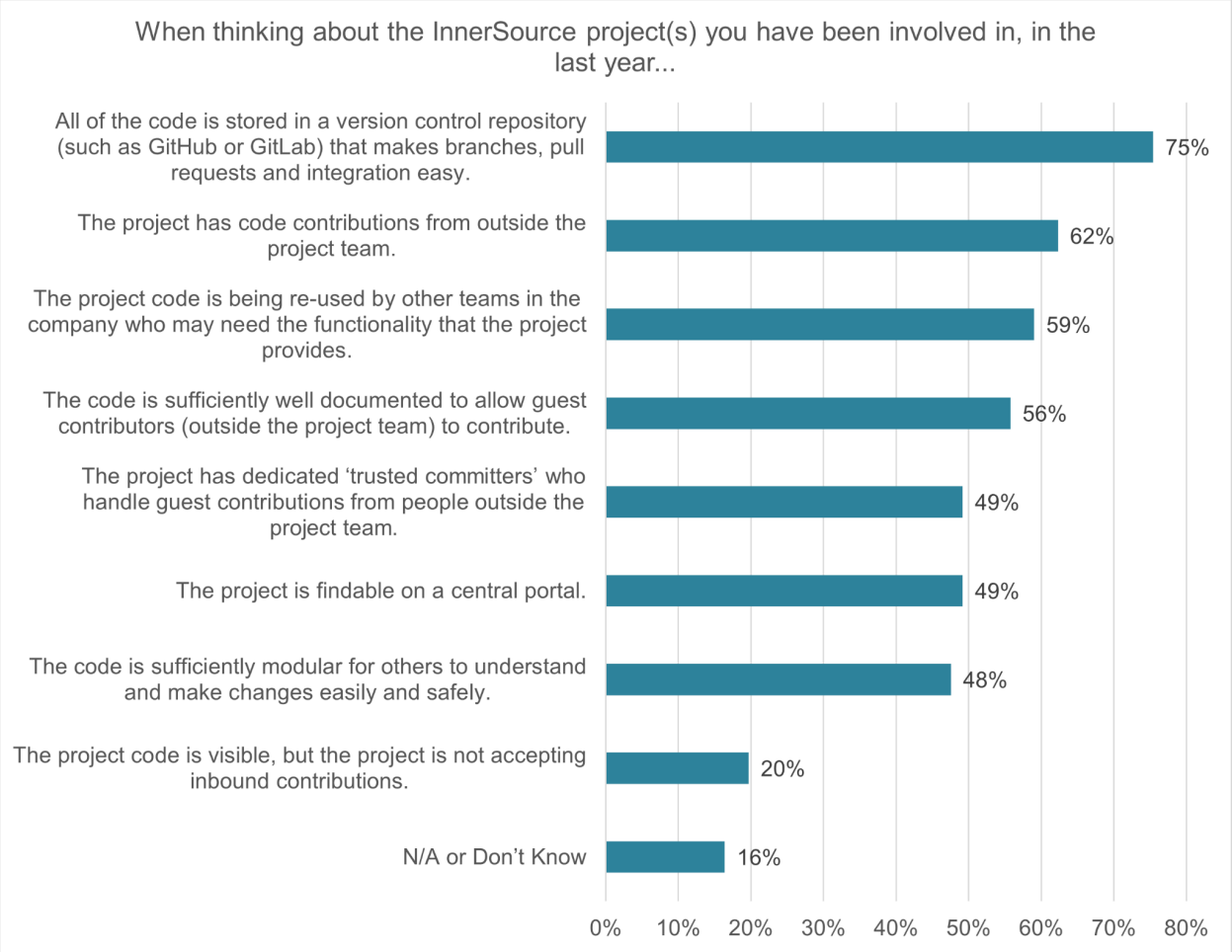
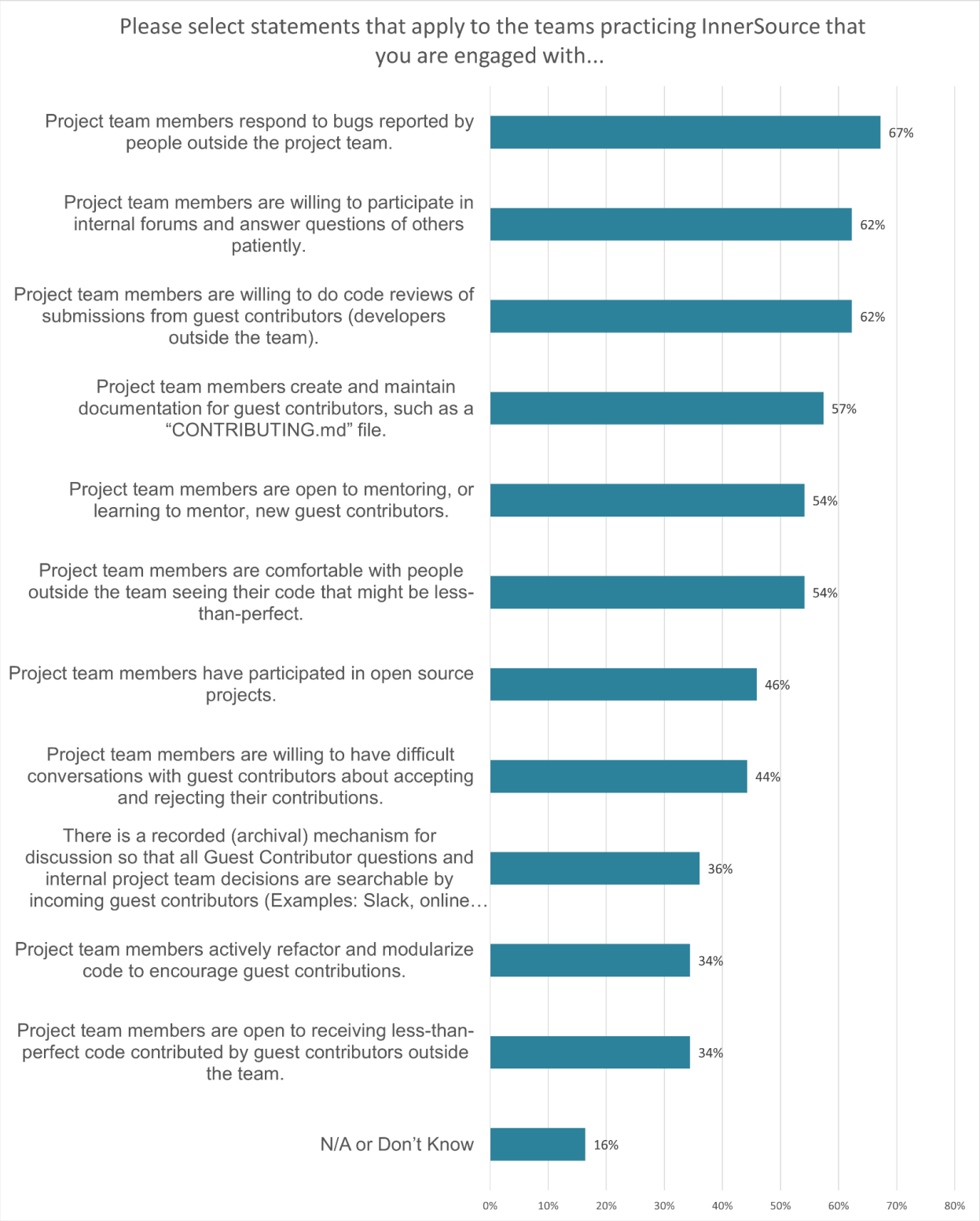

Select statements that could describe InnerSource project(s) in your organization
Libraries and internal tools (commonly used artifacts)
76%
DevOps projects
64%
Platform projects
58%
Documents as code
46%
Inter-divisional projects
42%
Grass-roots/community projects
32%
Projects on a path to open source in the future
32%
Strategic projects
25%
Cross-regional projects / spans geographical borders
20%
AI projects
20%
Projects in my organization are InnerSource projects by default
15%
Club goods (2+ organizations want to collaborate together)
15%
Inter-organization / spans legal boundaries
14%
N/A or Don't Know
8%
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%

InnerSource Practices & Culture

Throughout the year in InnerSource Commons, we have discussed many InnerSource behaviors and practices. This section looked at which of these practices and behaviors were most in use at a project and team level. Many of the practices listed below will be familiar to those in the InnerSource Commons community, with documentation, findability, and modularity still areas where there may be room for improvement. It is also interesting to note that 20% of respondents do not accept inbound contributions to their InnerSource projects.



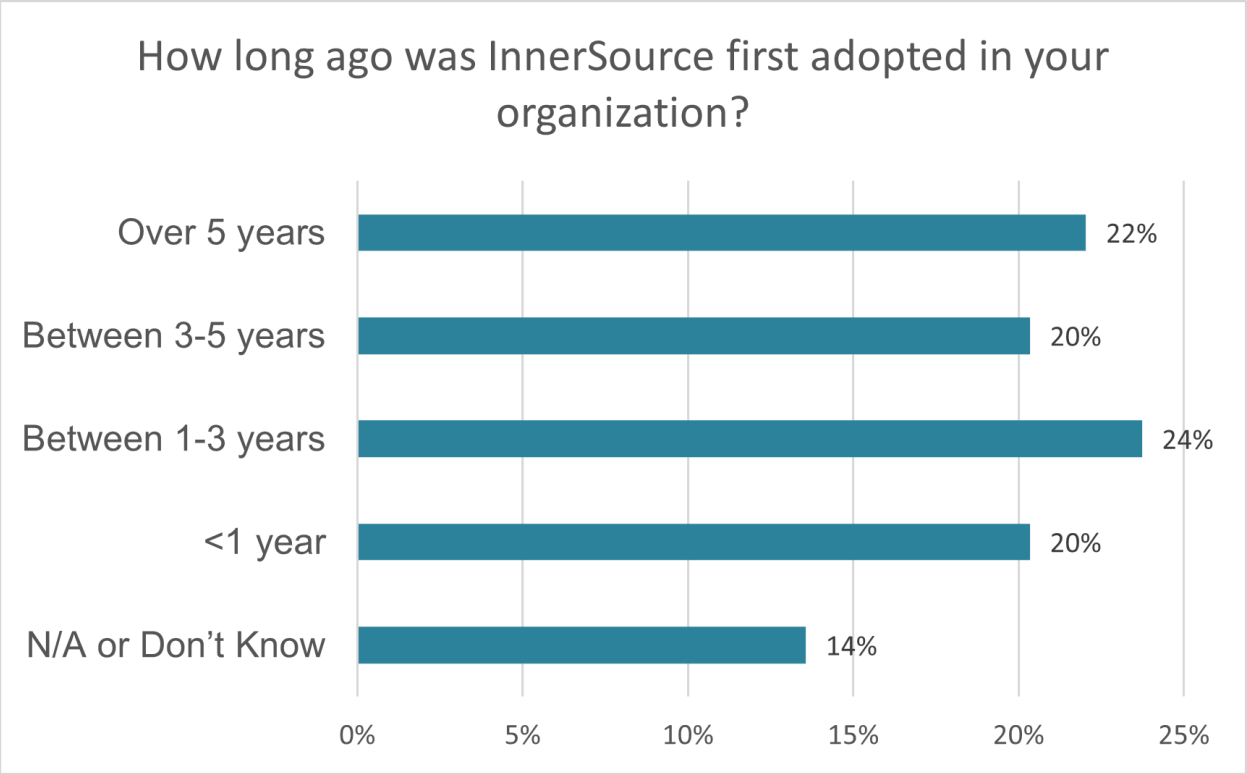
When considering team practices, it seems that teams are most often active when responding to external triggers, such as bugs, questions, or reviewing quality contributions. However, practices that are less common relate to proactive archiving of discussions and refactoring code. It also appears that teams may not always be open to receiving code contributions that are less than perfect, perhaps a reflection of the time constraints identified as a key blocker of InnerSource.

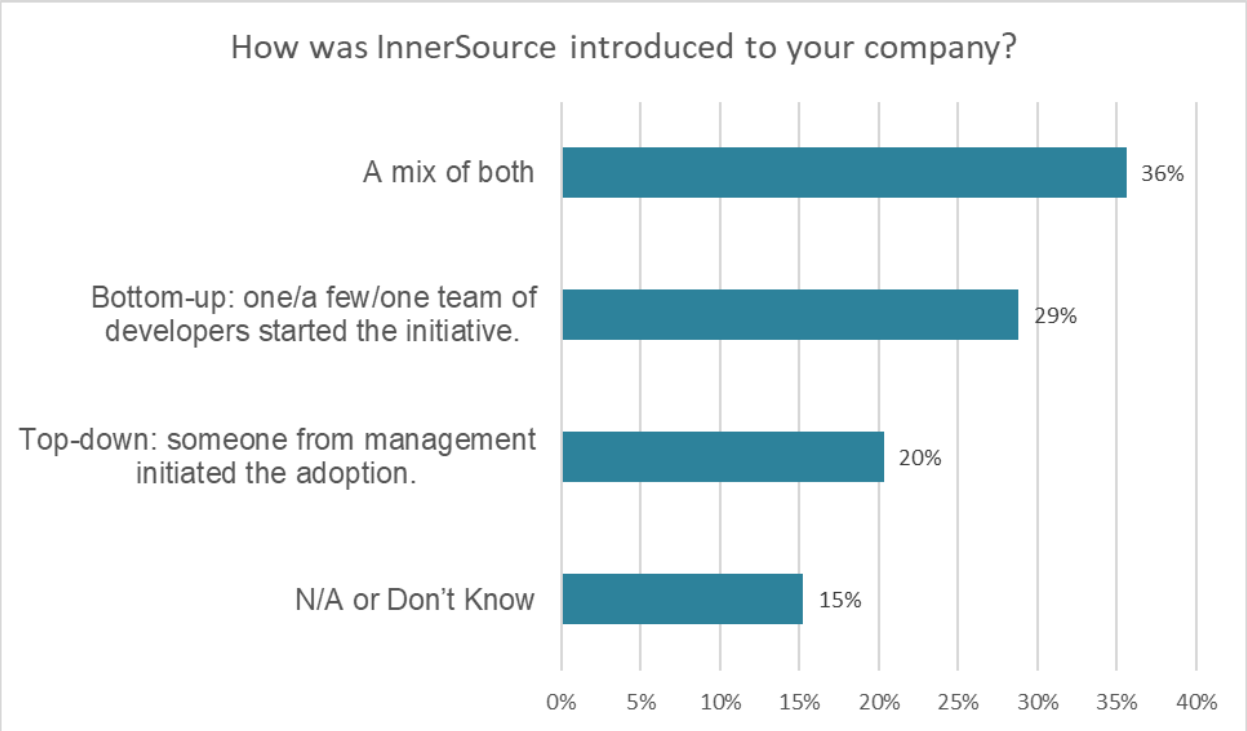

Please select statements that apply to the teams practicing InnerSource that you are engaged with...
Project team members respond to bugs reported by people outside the project team.
67%
Project team members are willing to participate in internal forums and answer questions of others patiently.
62%
Project team members are willing to do code reviews of submissions from guest contributors (developers outside the team).
62%
Project team members create and maintain documentation for guest contributors, such as a “CONTRIBUTING.md” file.
57%
Project team members are open to mentoring, or learning to mentor, new guest contributors.
54%
Project team members are comfortable with people outside the team seeing their code that might be less-than-perfect.
54%
Project team members have participated in open source projects.
46%
Project team members are willing to have difficult conversations with guest contributors about accepting and rejecting their contributions.
44%
There is a recorded (archival) mechanism for discussion so that all Guest Contributor questions and internal project team decisions are searchable by incoming guest contributors (Examples: Slack, online…
36%
Project team members actively refactor and modularize code to encourage guest contributions.
34%
Project team members are open to receiving less-than-perfect code contributed by guest contributors outside the team.
34%
N/A or Don’t Know
16%
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%

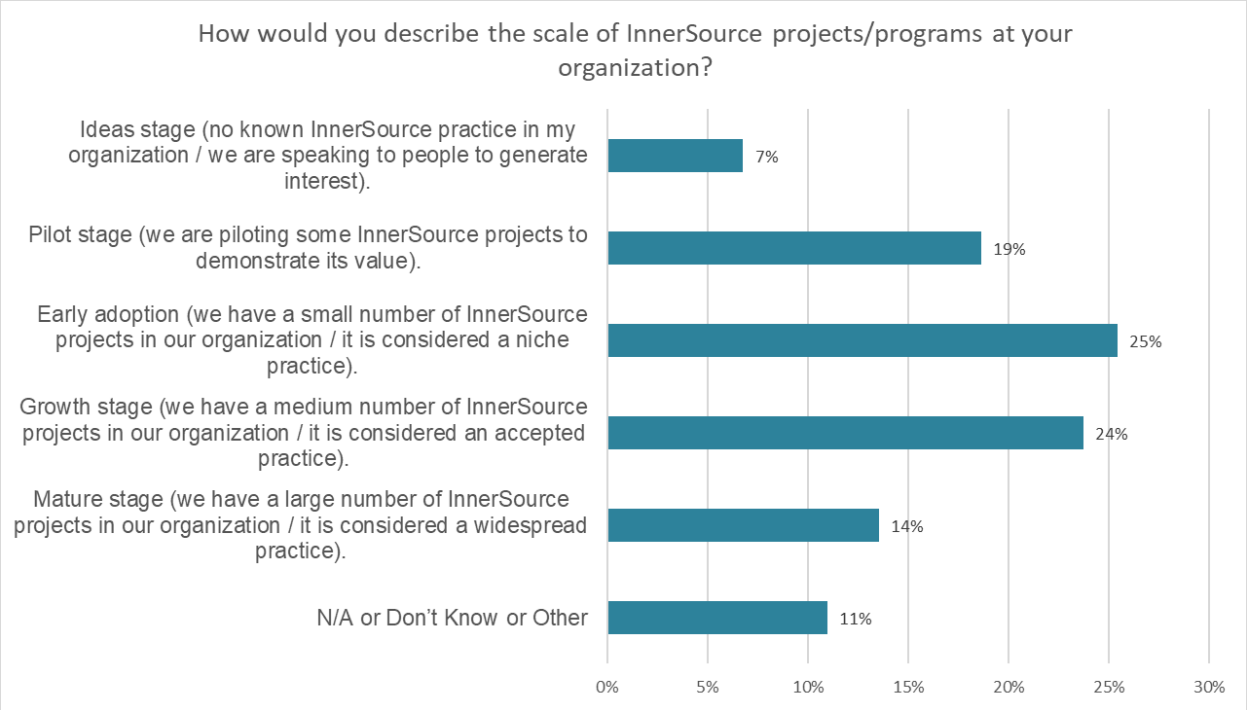
InnerSource in Organizations

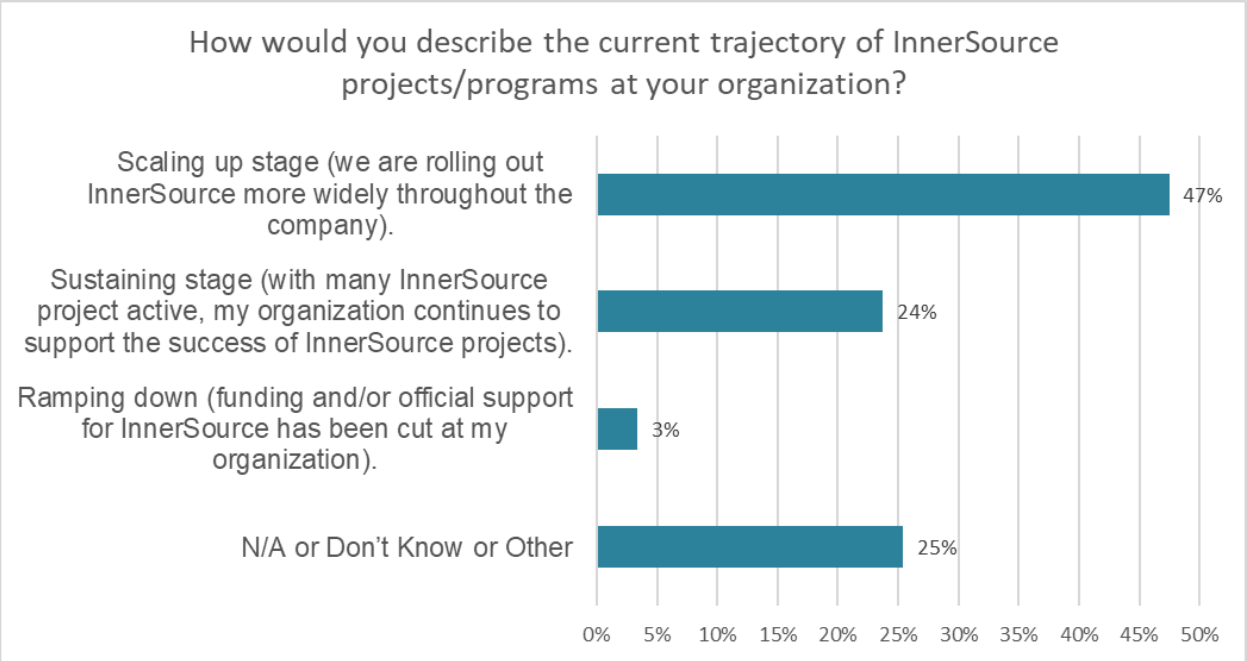
InnerSource Trends

There was a wide range of InnerSource experience among the respondents. InnerSource may be initiated as a top-down or bottom-up initiative or, most often, a mix of both. One-quarter of the respondents are in the early adoption phase of their InnerSource adoption journey, 24% consider it an accepted practice and 14% consider InnerSource a mature practice within their organization. Most organizations (47%) are currently scaling up their InnerSource practice.




How was InnerSource introduced to your company?
A mix of both
36%
Bottom-up: one/a few/one team of developers started the initiative.
29%
Top-down: someone from management initiated the adoption.
20%
N/A or Don't Know
15%
0%
5%
10%
15%
20%
25%
30%
35%
40%


How would you describe the scale of InnerSource projects/programs at your organization?
Ideas stage (no known InnerSource practice in my organization / we are speaking to people to generate interest).
7%
Pilot stage (we are piloting some InnerSource projects to demonstrate its value).
19%
Early adoption (we have a small number of InnerSource projects in our organization / it is considered a niche practice).
25%
Growth stage (we have a medium number of InnerSource projects in our organization / it is considered an accepted practice).
24%
Mature stage (we have a large number of InnerSource projects in our organization / it is considered a widespread practice).
14%
N/A or Don't Know or Other
11%
0%
5%
10%
15%
20%
25%
30%



Executive Support

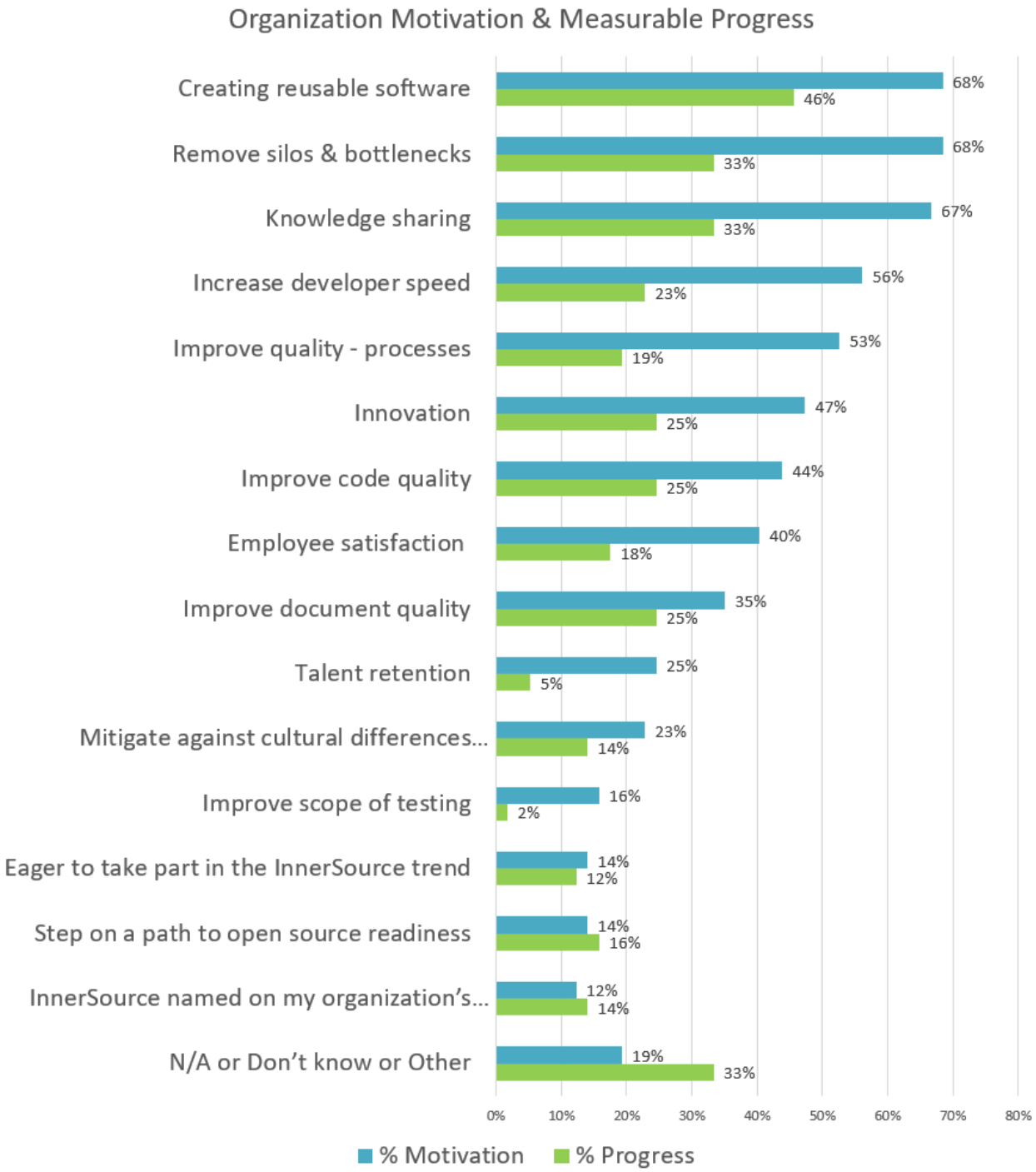
Over 50% of respondents agree or strongly agree that executives explicitly support their InnerSource initiative.

Organization Motivation, Progress & Measurement

We asked respondents to consider what motivated their organization to participate in InnerSource. We then asked which of those areas had seen measurable progress since adopting InnerSource. Creating reusable software came and removing silos and bottlenecks came out as top motivation, with knowledge sharing (which scored most highly last year) coming a close third. The reported measurable progress for creating reusable software is similar to last year (46% as opposed to 50% in 2023). However, reported progress in knowledge sharing dropped most significantly from 68% in 2023 to only 33% in 2024.

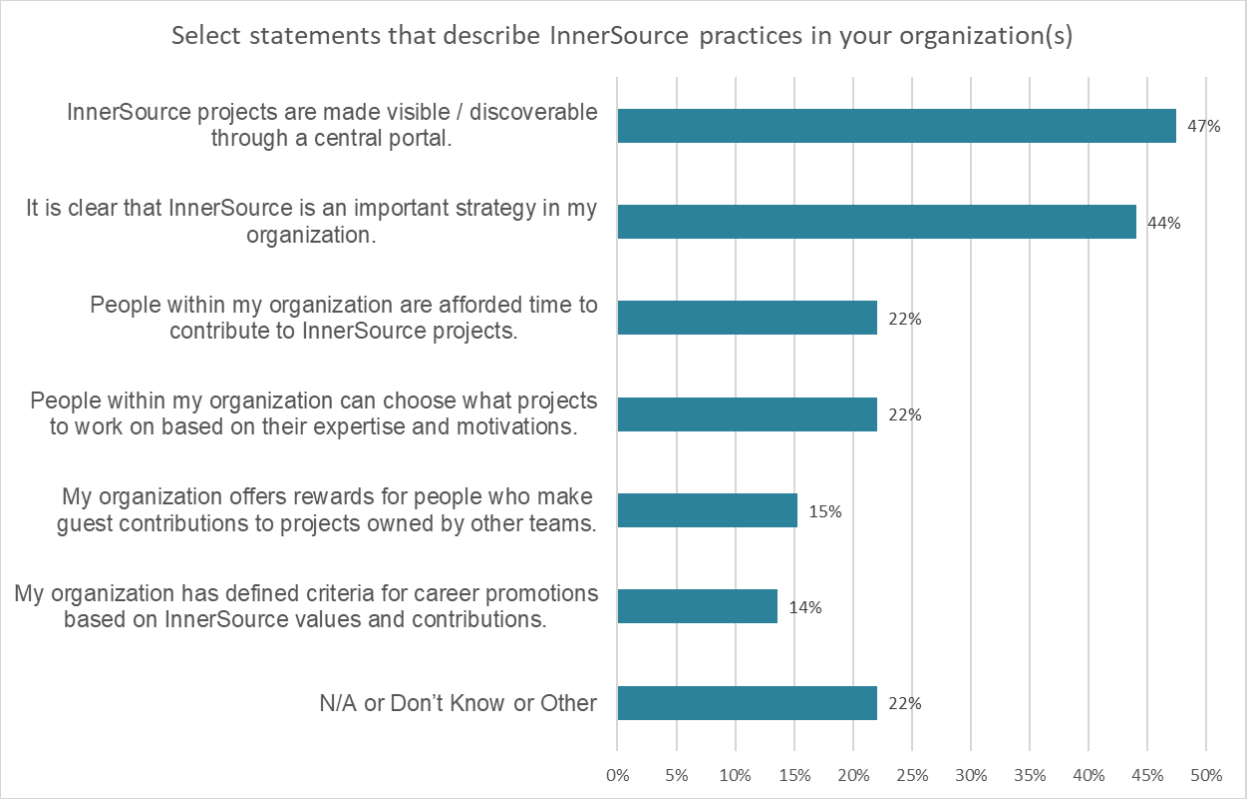
When asked how the progress or success of InnerSource was measured, less than half of the respondents chose to give details. Here are some of the ways that were mentioned:

- Using dashboards and reports from tools such as GitHub / GitLab to track InnerSource projects and contributions.
- Using automated tooling to track the presence and quality of related InnerSource documentation.
- Running surveys to assess adoption and satisfaction of InnerSource practitioners.
- Some organizations also rely on manual reporting and observation to assess progress.


Organization Motivation & Measurable Progress
Creating reusable software
68%
46%
Remove silos & bottlenecks
68%
33%
Knowledge sharing
67%
33%
Increase developer speed
56%
23%
Improve quality - processes
53%
19%
Innovation
47%
25%
Improve code quality
44%
25%
Employee satisfaction
40%
18%
Improve document quality
35%
25%
Talent retention
25%
5%
Mitigate against cultural differences...
23%
14%
Improve scope of testing
16%
2%
Eager to take part in the InnerSource trend
14%
12%
Step on a path to open source readiness
14%
16%
InnerSource named on my organization's...
12%
14%
N/A or Don't know or Other
19%
33%
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
% Motivation
% Progress

InnerSource Organizational Practices

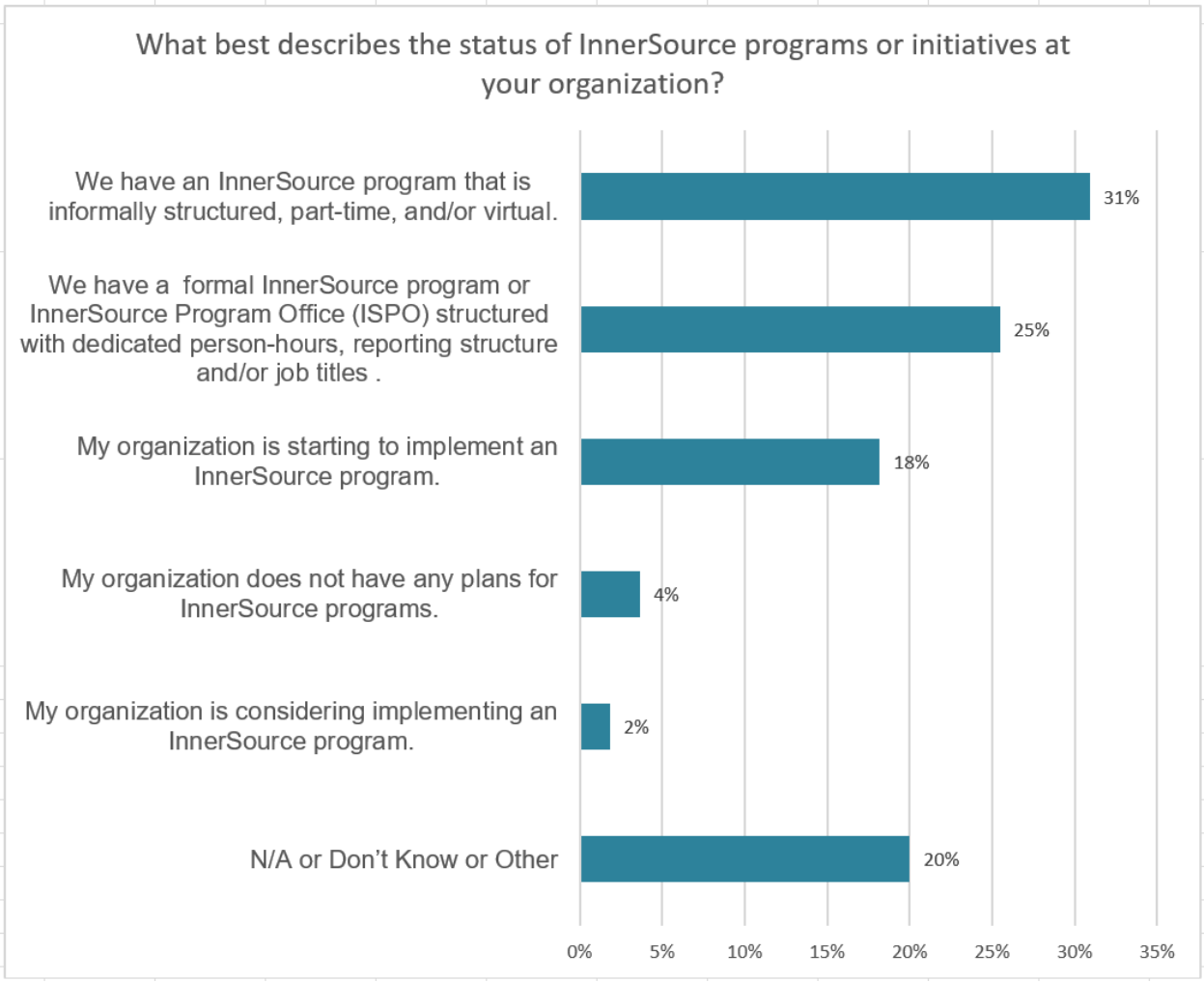
In this section, we explored which patterns and practices may be in place in the respondents' organizations. As with previous years, visibility and discoverability come top of the list in terms of InnerSource practices reported. Only 22% of respondents reported that their organization affords time to contribute to InnerSource projects, perhaps reflecting the top reported blockers (culture and time). 15% of organizations reward InnerSource contributions, and 14% have incorporated InnerSource in their criteria for career promotions.



Resourcing InnerSource

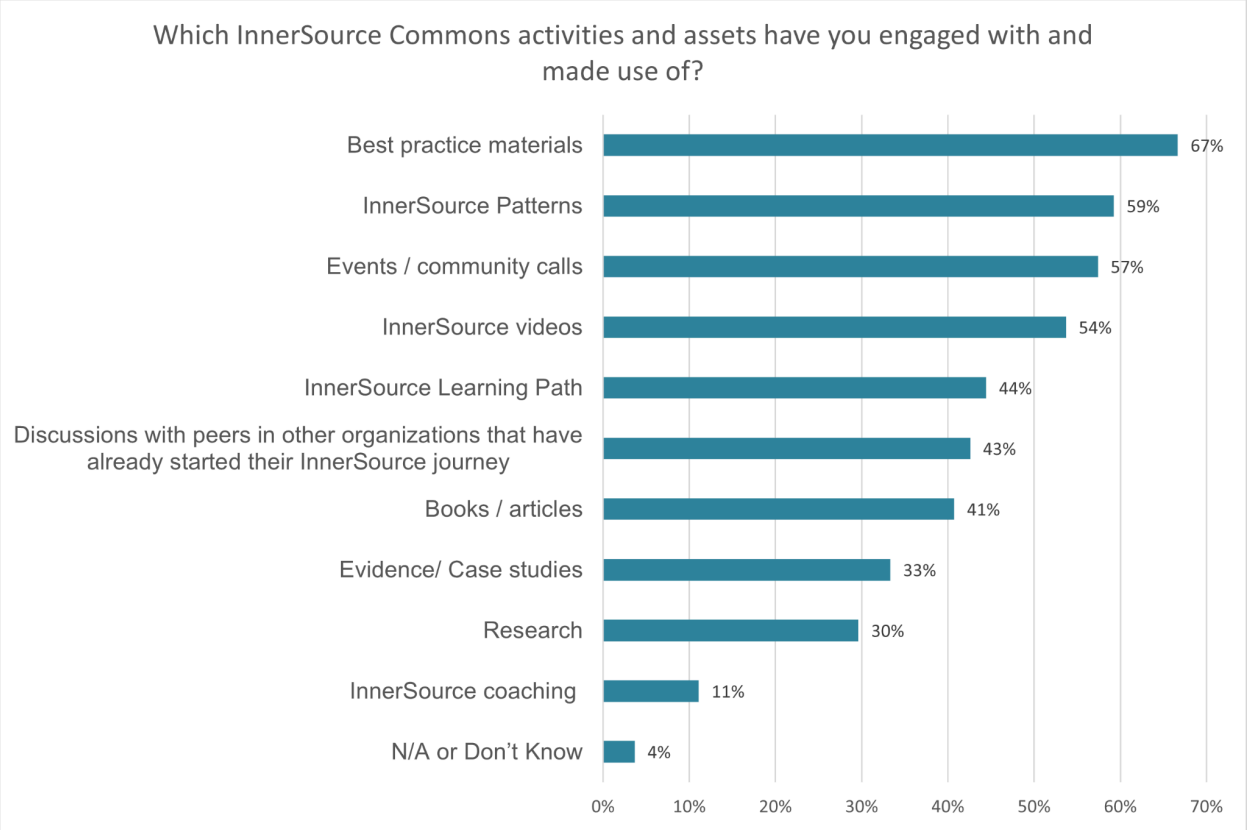
We have seen a decrease in 2024 of respondents who report that InnerSource is not explicitly resourced within their organization. In 2023, 38% of respondents said no resources were funded, in 2024, that was down to 11%. 34% of respondents reported that at least one full-time dedicated role is funded, similar to last year. Most organizations rely on informal support of staff for their InnerSource practices.

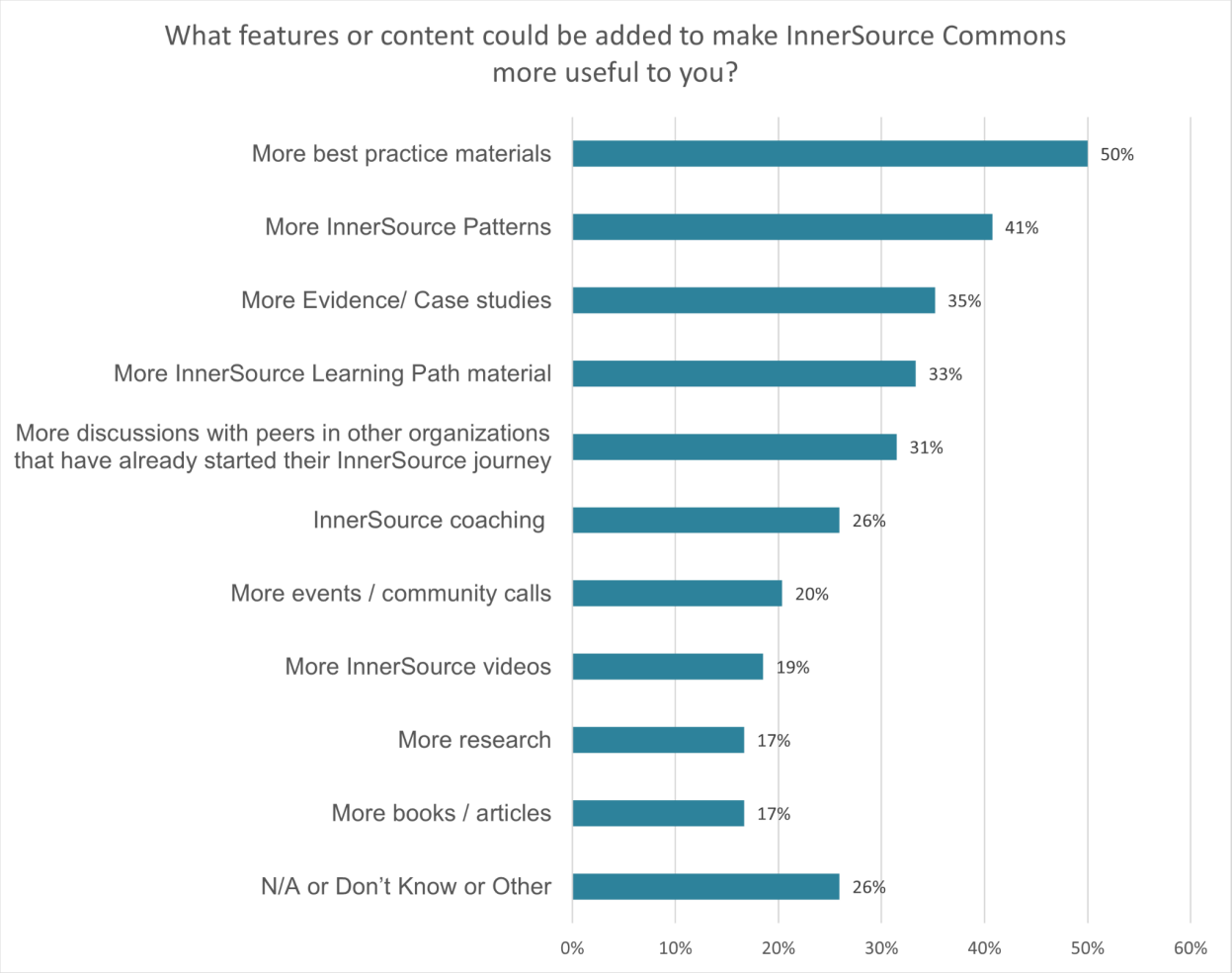
There has been a reduction in the number of respondents who have both formal (22% down from 31% in 2023) and informal (18% down from 36% in 2023) InnerSource Programs. However, there was an increase in those whose organizations were starting to introduce InnerSource Programs (18% up from 8% in 2023).


What best describes the status of InnerSource programs or initiatives at your organization?
We have an InnerSource program that is informally structured, part-time, and/or virtual.
31%
We have a formal InnerSource program or InnerSource Program Office (ISPO) structured with dedicated person-hours, reporting structure and/or job titles .
25%
My organization is starting to implement an InnerSource program.
18%
My organization does not have any plans for InnerSource programs.
4%
My organization is considering implementing an InnerSource program.
2%
N/A or Don't Know or Other
20%
0%
5%
10%
15%
20%
25%
30%
35%

InnerSource Commons

This section of the survey aimed to find out how InnerSource Commons can better help respondents on their InnerSource journey. The most popular InnerSource Commons activities and resources were reported to be best practice materials (67%), InnerSource Patterns (59%), and the ISC events and community calls (57%). When asked what features or content could make InnerSource Commons more useful, perhaps unsurprisingly, top of the wish list were more best practice materials and patterns.




What features or content could be added to make InnerSource Commons more useful to you?
More best practice materials
50%
More InnerSource Patterns
41%
More Evidence/ Case studies
35%
More InnerSource Learning Path material
33%
More discussions with peers in other organizations that have already started their InnerSource journey
31%
InnerSource coaching
26%
More events / community calls
20%
More InnerSource videos
19%
More research
17%
More books / articles
17%
N/A or Don't Know or Other
26%
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%

About the Survey

Methodology

The State of InnerSource Survey 2024 was designed collaboratively by the InnerSource Commons community. Questions were reviewed and revised at the InnerSource Commons Community Call that took place in October 2023, and thereafter in the ISC #survey Slack channel.

The questionnaire was administered using Qualitrics, thanks to the support of the University of Galway, and was open for approximately 12 weeks in November-January 2024. The survey was promoted within the InnerSource Commons community (on Slack and on our Newsletter) and also across our social media channels. We had 118 respondents to the survey. Not every respondent answered every question. We removed respondents who only filled in their contact details but didn't answer any questions.

If you have any feedback on the survey or would like to get involved in future surveys, please reach out to info@innersourcecommons.org.

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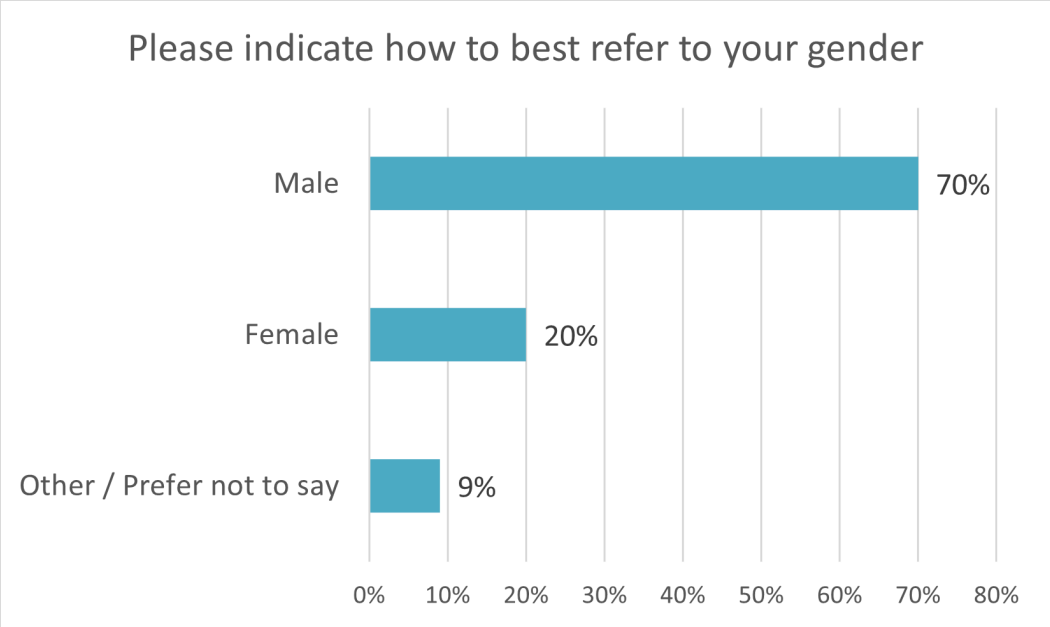
Demographics

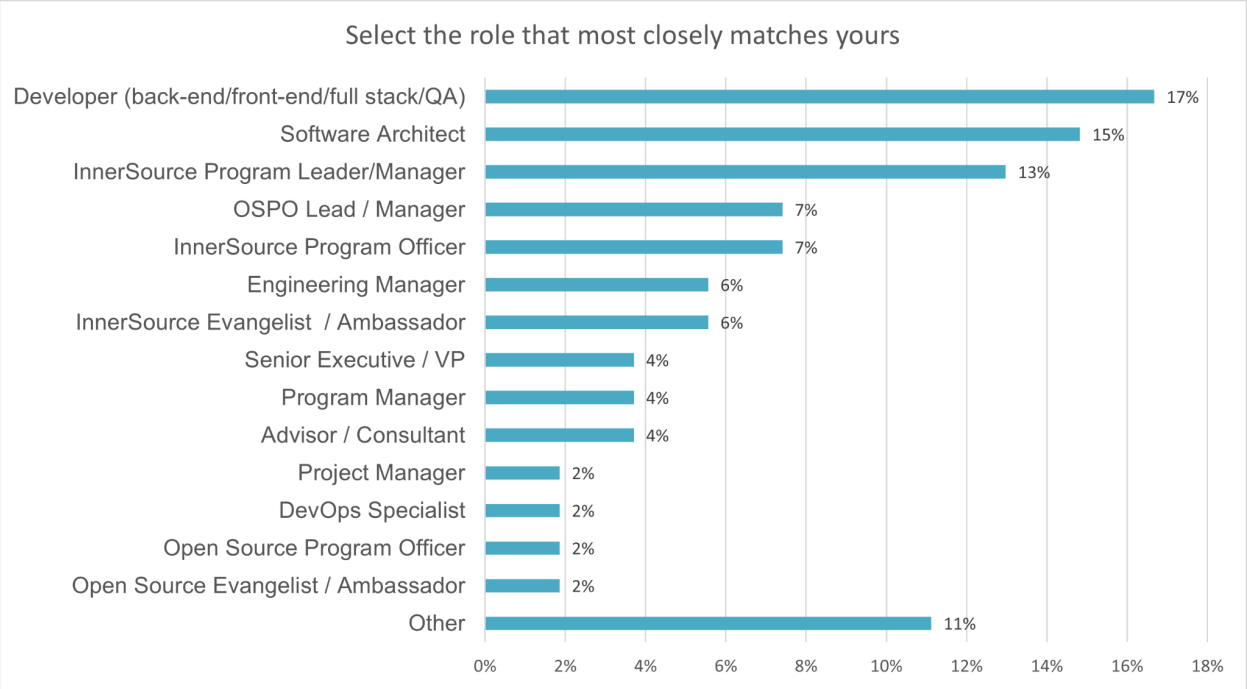
Gender

From our demographics, we can see an expected gender split with a majority of male respondents (70%). However, it is worth noting that the 20% female representation is more than [many estimates] of female contributors in the open source ecosystem.



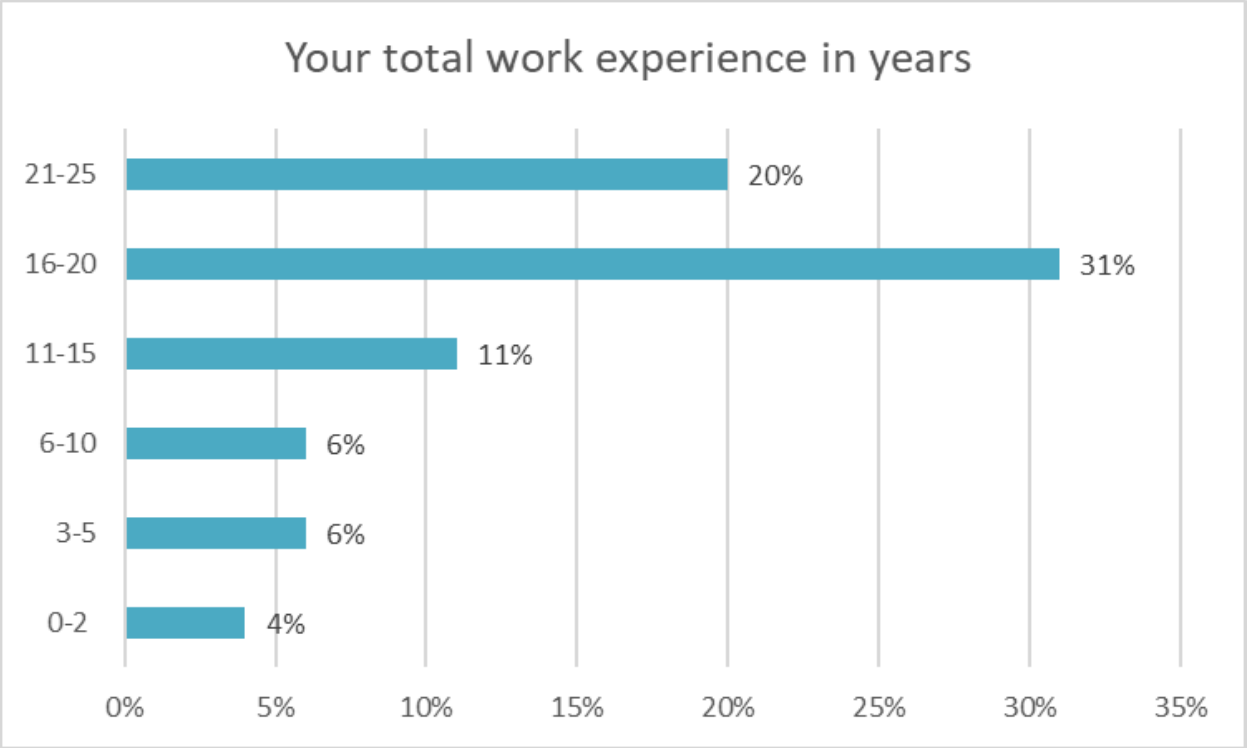
Role

Respondents had a range of roles. 32% of respondents who specified their role identified as developers or software architects. 26% indicated they had a specialized InnerSource role, such as InnerSource Program Leader / Manager, Officer, or Evangelist. Other roles included OSPO Manager (7%) engineering manager (6%), and senior executive (4%).



Work Experience

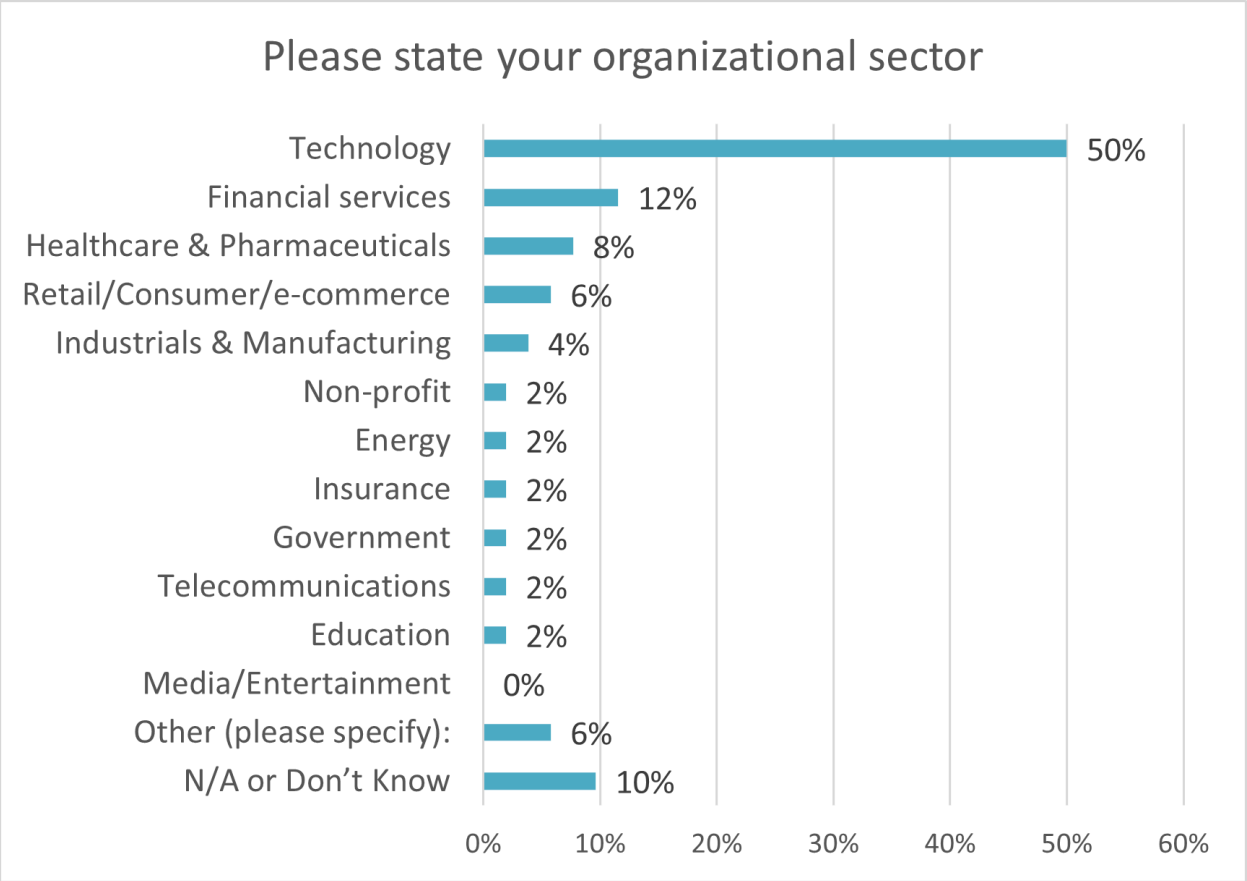
Most respondents had 10+ years of experience.



Firmographics

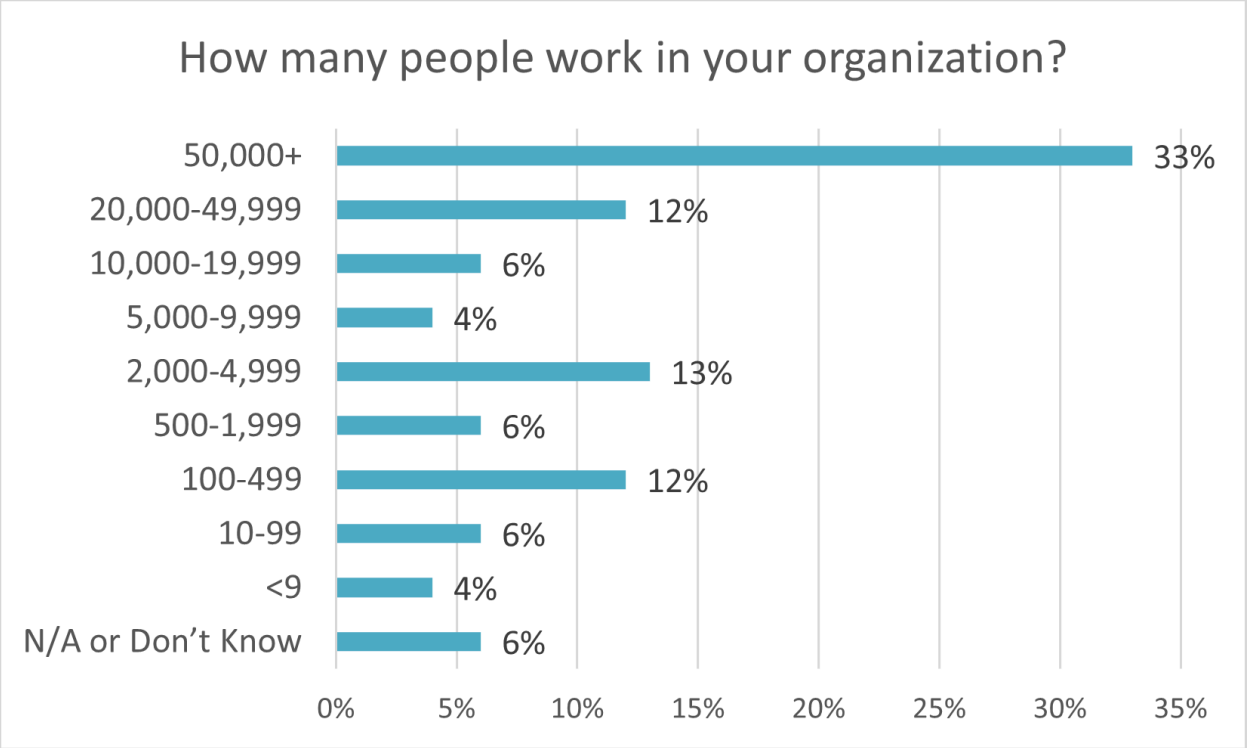
Sector

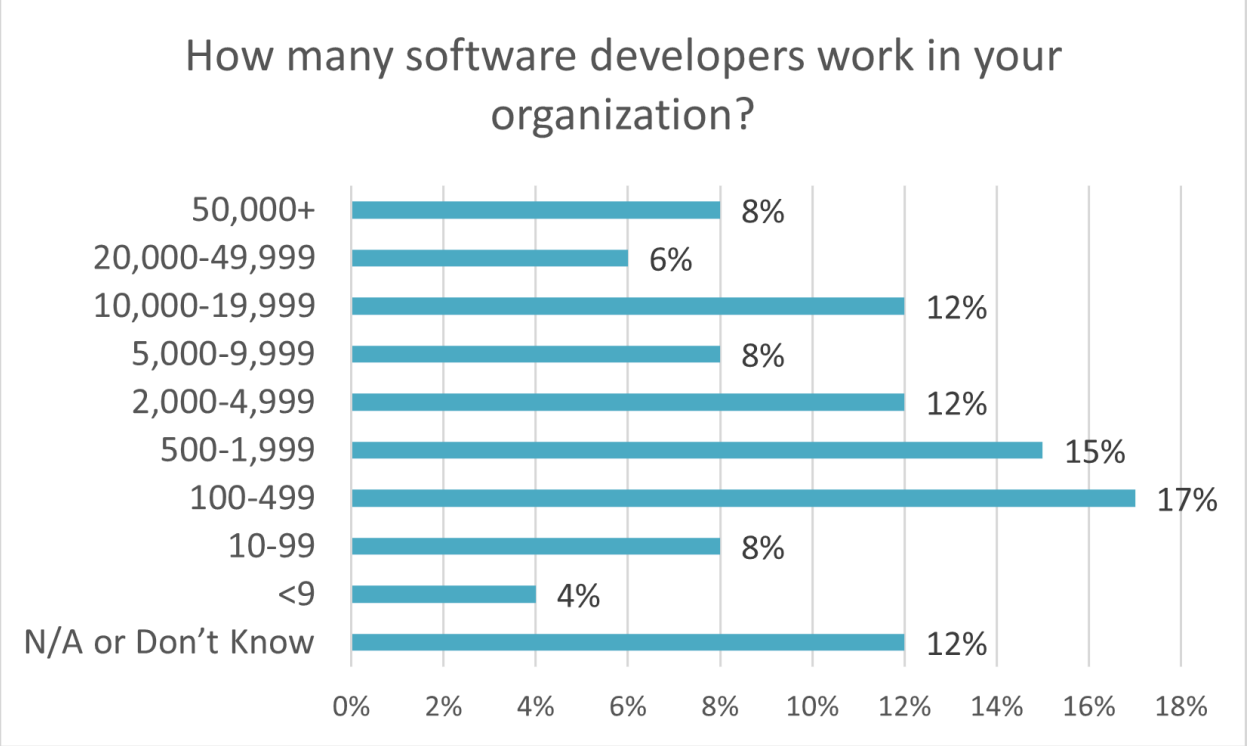
As in previous years, respondents are working in a wide range of domains, with technology being the largest. The category technology obviously comprises a wide range of companies offering many different types of services and products. As in previous surveys, several respondents work in the financial services domain, healthcare & pharmaceuticals, retail, and manufacturing.



Org & Dev Org Size

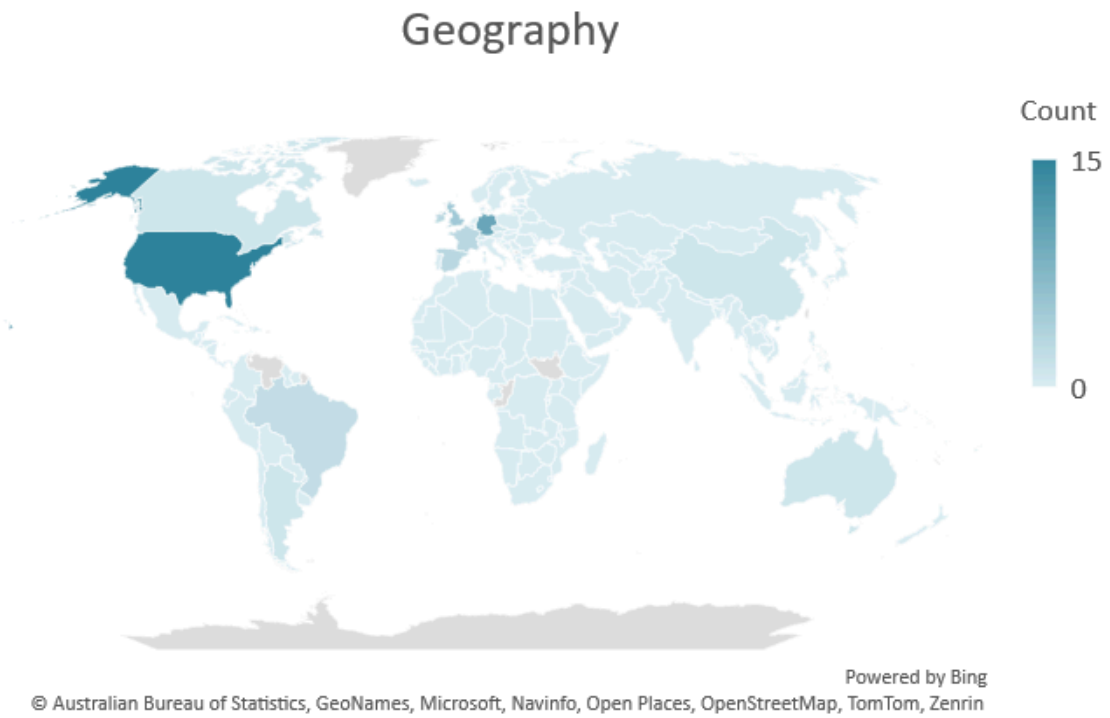
45% of our respondents came from very large organizations (20,000+), and there was a wide spread of size of developer organizations.





Geographic Location

Respondents came from over 13 different countries. 55% came from Europe and 40% came from the Americas. Top countries were the United States and Germany.



Acknowledgments

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Special thanks to our primary author:
Clare Dillon, Lero, University of Galway, and InnerSource Commons Foundation Member
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0008-6205-0296

About InnerSource Commons

InnerSource Commons is the world's largest community of InnerSource practitioners. It is dedicated to creating and sharing knowledge about InnerSource, the use of open source best practices for software development within the confines of an organization. InnerSource helps organizations experience the benefits of using open source methods: reducing bottlenecks, increasing efficiencies, and creating happier developers.

Founded in 2015, the InnerSource Commons is now supporting and connecting over 3,000 individuals from over 750 companies, academic institutions, and government agencies. The InnerSource Commons Foundation was incorporated on February 19th, 2020 and is a 501(c)(3) public charity.

Contact Information

You can reach us at info@innersourcecommons.org or visit the InnerSource Commons Slack.

Learn More

Check out the InnerSource Commons website at www.innersourcecommons.org to find more resources such as our Learning Path, Patterns, Events, Research and more.