

## **Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group Meeting**

### **McCormick Foundation and CAEL**

**April 29, 2013**

Meeting Summary

#### **Introduction**

The eighth meeting of the Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group was held on April 29, 2013 at Roosevelt University. There were 22 attendees, including representatives from 19 colleges and programs serving the Chicago area. A full list of attendees is provided at the end of this summary.

#### **Updates**

##### **ACE meetings**

Illinois Joining Forces sponsored a workshop on the Joint Services Transcript and ACE credit recommendations called “Delving into the Details: The American Council on Education (ACE) Review Process and Military Transcripts.” The workshop, which was facilitated by Michelle Spire, Director of Military Programs at ACE, was held on April 23 at Lincoln Land College in Springfield and on April 24 at the College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn. Cynthia Rathunde coordinated the workshops and provided the group with handouts from the workshop. She reported to the group that the JST system is now up and running for all participating branches except the Coast Guard; Coast Guard transcripts should be available through the JST system by October 2013. A JST account is needed to access the system electronically, and there is no limit on the number of accounts per institution.

##### **CCME**

The Annual Symposium of the Council of College and Military Educators took place February 25-28 in San Diego. Amy Sherman and Charlotte Cahill presented at a session on career and education advising for student veterans and found that there was a lot of interest in the topic among attendees at the conference. Ivan Hernandez, who attended the conference, noted that one of the primary purposes of the event is to bring together people who are working with student veterans. He said that he finds the conference useful because it, like the affinity group, provides an opportunity to share ideas about best practices and to learn more about supports available to student veterans at other institutions.

##### **IJF**

Members of the affinity group are encouraged to join the Education Working Group, which is co-chaired by Amy Sherman and Jennifer Timmons of the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), of Illinois Joining Forces (IJF). IJF is intended to be a centralized network and clearinghouse for veterans in Illinois, but this model means that IJF is only as strong as its membership. As the Education Working Group moves forward, more input from colleges and universities would be especially valuable. In order to join, each institution must sign an MOU, which is available on the IJF website. Once you have joined IJF, it's important to make sure that the information about your institution that is displayed on the IJF website is complete; this helps to maintain the IJF site as a useful resource for referrals. The next meeting of the Education Working Group will be held in July.

### **Presentation on Veterans Programs at the City Colleges**

Members of the group from the City Colleges of Chicago gave a presentation on the services that the City Colleges provide to student veterans. The Veterans Services Specialists who presented were: Sharron Irvin-Williams from Olive-Harvey College, Ed Davis from Wright College, Meosha Thomas from Kennedy-King College, and Tim Davis from Truman College.

All four are Veterans Services Specialists at their institutions; their role is to serve as a one-stop shop and first point of contact for student veterans. The Veterans Services Specialist positions, which are categorized as student services positions, were created under a grant in January 2011 and the positions were phased into the City Colleges system beginning in the fall of 2012. The primary goal of the specialists is to help veterans succeed both in college and in the community, and advocacy is a major part of what Veterans Services Specialists do. They also work with work-study students and serve a total of about 1500 student veterans in the City Colleges system.

The Veterans Services Specialist role within the City Colleges includes:

- Working with other offices and departments, including the Disability Access Center and Wellness Center
- Retention efforts, including providing good customer service and helping student veterans earn credentials with economic value
- Providing direct services such as assistance with transfer applications
- Coordinating with the district office and meeting monthly with the Veterans Services Specialists from all of the City Colleges

Some notable successes in improving programs and policies for student veterans at the City Colleges include:

- The creation of full-time Veterans Services Specialist positions on all campuses
- Improvements in policies related to military credit evaluation – including automatically granting four hours of physical education credit and 3 hours of health credit
- Scholarship program for student veterans
- Faculty and staff development day
- New website explaining the services available to student veterans on all City Colleges campuses

- Veterans Resource Centers, which include the offices of the Veterans Services Specialists, are in place on all campuses

However, some challenges remain. These include:

- Addressing all of the needs – including hunger and homelessness – of student veterans
- Tracking student veterans (though it is possible to do some tracking through financial aid usage)
- Budgeting and fundraising
- Changing requirements and policies for the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP), which offers 12 months of training assistance to unemployed veterans between the ages of 35 and 60

The presentation also included information on what is happening at individual institutions within the City Colleges system. At Olive-Harvey College, Sharron Irvin-Williams was working with the American Legion to plan a Memorial Day event. Olive-Harvey has also partnered with Metropolitan Family Services and ChildServ to create a program focused on mental health services that will launch in the fall. At Wilbur Wright College, Ed Davis is working to create a separate Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) policy that takes into account the obligations of military-connected students and requirements associated with veterans benefits for student veterans.

Meosha Thomas shared information about her work with the large VRAP population at Kennedy-King College. She has implemented a variety of supportive services and planned events designed to address the needs of this population, including a health fair, food pantry services, a laptop giveaway, one-on-one tutoring, a veteran museum, freed food and coffee in the vet center, a Boots to Books program that helps veterans pay for books, and a veteran relief network that works to pay off delinquent accounts. Meosha also does outreach at shelters and food pantries every two weeks in order to inform veterans about the benefits available to them. Representatives from different veterans services organizations come to campus every two weeks to educate veterans about the resources available to them. Kennedy-King College has also taken the Got Your 6 pledge. Meosha has started work on faculty and staff training and has made 5- to 10-minute presentations at professional development events.

Tim Davis noted that the veteran population at Truman College is very different from that at Kennedy-King College, so there are significant differences in the services offered by the two institutions. Most of the student veterans at Truman College served in the post-9/11 era, and many are skeptical about the role of the Veterans Services Specialist and of programs focused on student veterans. Tim has worked to create a culture change by making a point of advocating for student veterans and has found that veterans on campus are increasingly seeking his assistance. Truman College is also the site for a pilot of the VA's Veterans Integration To Academic Leadership (VITAL) program, which seeks to connect student veterans to their local VA medical centers and to provide the supports that student veterans need to succeed academically. The VITAL program may be pushed out to other City Colleges in the future.

## Best Practices Survey Results and Next Steps

Becky Klein-Collins presented information about a survey of members of the group that was conducted by CAEL. The idea for the survey came out of the group's debriefing on the Valuing Veterans event, when the group agreed that having a clearer picture of what was happening at other institutions would be useful in building support for programs and policies for student veterans. The survey also provides an opportunity to consider what the role of the affinity group should be in the future.

Becky shared the results of the survey with the group; that data is included at the end of this summary. The results include, where possible, comparisons with the findings of a 2011 national survey of campus programs for veterans and service members conducted by the American Council on Education (ACE), American Association of State Colleges and Universities, NASP: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, and National Association of Veteran's Program Administrators. It should be noted that both the affinity group survey and ACE's national survey suffer from response bias. In the case of the affinity group survey, respondents have already demonstrated a relatively strong institutional commitment to providing services to student veterans through their membership in the group. The national survey may have similar bias in that colleges who are focused on serving veterans may have been more likely to respond to the survey.

The results of the survey suggest that one of the biggest challenges facing the group is how to create change on campuses, and the group suggested several ideas for using the survey to help create change. One possibility would be to use the data to create action-planning guides for use on campuses; these could also include information on why the programs and policies identified in the survey are considered best practices. The guides might also offer data on how the affinity group has influenced the provision of services to student veterans and information on what specific institutions are doing. Another suggestion was to provide leaders at each institution with more information about what other institutions, especially similar institutions, are doing, though it would first be necessary to get permission from affinity group members to share information about specific schools.

The group also discussed activities that the group could plan that would help build engagement among college leaders. One possibility would be to hold a second event for college leaders, at which data from the survey could be shared. If a second event were held, it might be helpful to target leaders at the level of dean, rather than president or provost, in order to build support for student veterans at all levels. Another idea is for the group to work with institutions that haven't yet leveraged the Valuing Veterans event, perhaps by identifying subject matter experts within the group and using peer matching to improve services. The group could also expand its impact by reaching out to new members and linking those new members to subject matter experts within the group.

## Advising Workshop Overview

Charlotte Cahill provided information about a workshop on career and education advising that CAEL has developed for college and university staff members who are working with student veterans. The two primary goals of the workshop are to:

1. Provide an overview of common issues and concerns among student veterans
2. Equip advisors with practical information and tools they can use to help student veterans overcome challenges, succeed academically, and make good career choices

The workshop includes modules on topics that include career pathways, education benefits, military credit transfer and prior learning assessment, mental and behavioral health, and creating supportive campus environments. CAEL piloted the workshop at Northeastern Illinois University in March. It was an interesting session and attendees provided much helpful feedback.

CAEL would like to schedule another workshop which would be open to advisors from all institutions represented in the affinity group. Attendance would most likely be limited to one advisor per institution so that the workshop does not become too large. Members of the group said that this would be helpful and suggested scheduling the workshop for late September or early October. There was also some interest in the possibility of offering the workshop via webinar in order to make it available to more people. Several institutions would also be interested in offering the workshop to all of the advisors on their campuses.

## Open Mic

The group discussed some of the issues around creating faculty and staff training and encouraging attendance at training. American InterContinental University has mandatory training, which has support from the institution's training staff and the provost, available online. At Robert Morris University, a faculty in-service day incorporated a brief (10-15 minute) training that included presentations by Holly Passi from Jesse Brown VA hospital and by a student veteran. It can also be helpful to identify veterans on the faculty who can champion training. At UIC, getting buy-in from the faculty senate was an important step in implementing training. The group agreed that faculty training is a significant ongoing need and suggested setting aside more time for discussion at the next affinity group meeting.

Members of the group also had several follow-up questions related to the presentation about the City Colleges. Group members from the City Colleges explained that:

- A list of certifications available at each college is available through the "Career Finder" feature on the main City Colleges website
- The City Colleges do accept out-of-district students, but eligibility for in-district rates begins only 30 days after a prospective student establishes residency in Chicago

Several group members also made announcements about upcoming events, which led to a brief discussion of the usefulness of the LinkedIn group for the affinity group. Anna Laubach asked whether the group would find it more convenient to use a Facebook page or affinity group website, and several members of the group agreed that it would be.

## Next Steps

- Cindy Rathunde will supply copies of the handouts from the ACE workshops in April to anyone who was unable to attend
- CAEL will work to finalize the results of the survey so that group members can share them with others at their institutions
- CAEL will begin planning an advising workshop for staff members from institutions that are part of the affinity group
- Next meeting:
  - July 22, 11 am to 2 pm, at Benedictine University
  - Pete LaHaie, Meosha Thomas, Charles Goodrum, and Cindy Rathunde volunteered to help plan the next meeting – Becky will follow up

## Meeting Attendance

Name	Institution
Ivan Hernandez	American Intercontinental University
Linda Owens	Benedictine University
Charlotte Cahill	CAEL
Becky Klein-Collins	CAEL
Charles Goodrum	Chicago State University
Meosha Thomas	City Colleges of Chicago - Kennedy-King College
Sharron Irvin-Williams	City Colleges of Chicago - Olive-Harvey College
Tim Davis	City Colleges of Chicago - Truman College
Edward Davis	City Colleges of Chicago-Wilbur Wright College
Donna Clayborn	Complete the Degree
Scott Stratton	DeVry University
Paige Vanderhyden	Joliet Junior College
Janelle Wade	Loyola University
Anna Laubach	McCormick Foundation
General McArthur	Morraine Valley Community College
Emily Drake	National Louis University
Cynthia Rathunde	Northeastern Illinois University
Natalie Furlett	Northwestern University
James Flagg	Robert Morris
Peter LaHaie	Roosevelt University
Sheri Gross	Saint Xavier University
Annette Wright	UIC

# How do we compare?

Current practices survey  
results – draft for discussion



# What you needed:

Information about what other schools are doing

- To make the argument for doing something new
- To show college presidents what the landscape looks like
- To understand where your institution's resources might be put to use



# The Basics

- A survey in Feb-March: 20 respondents from Affinity Group
- Compare to each other
- Compare to result from 2011 national survey
  - From Soldier to Student II: Assessing Campus Programs for Veterans and Service Members. ACE, AASCU (SOC), NASP, NAVPA. Retrieved from <http://www.acenet.edu/links/pdfs/cpa/SoldiertostudentII-2012.html>

# How many student vets?

## Undergraduate Student Veterans (n=17)

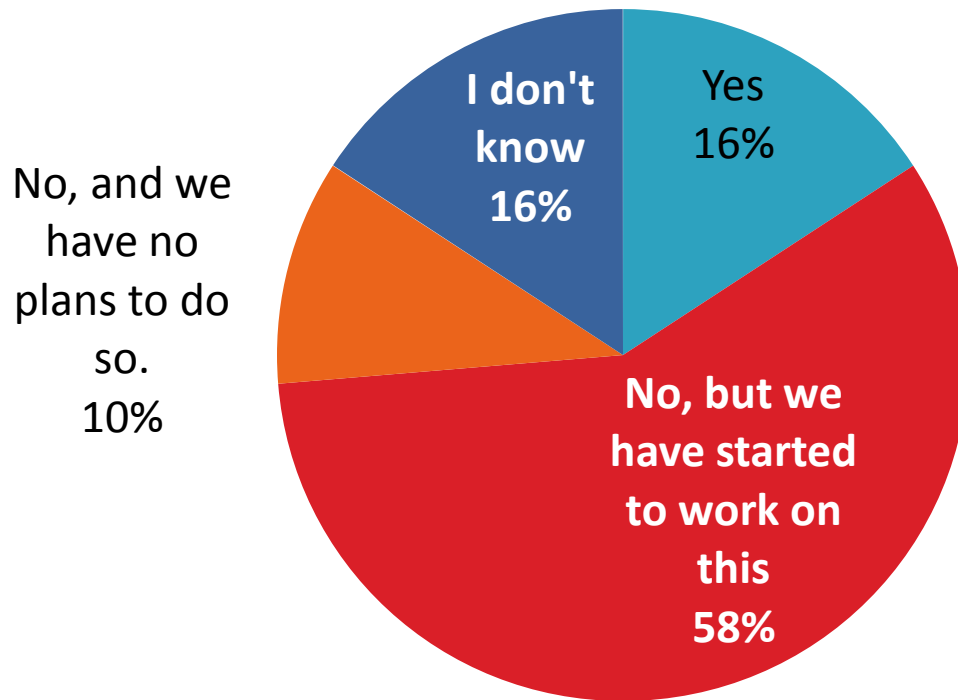
Min	Max	Average
40	400	210

## Graduate Student Veterans (n=10)

Min	Max	Average
20	175	88

# Tracking Veterans

**Do you track veteran outcomes?**



# Single Point of Contact

**79%**

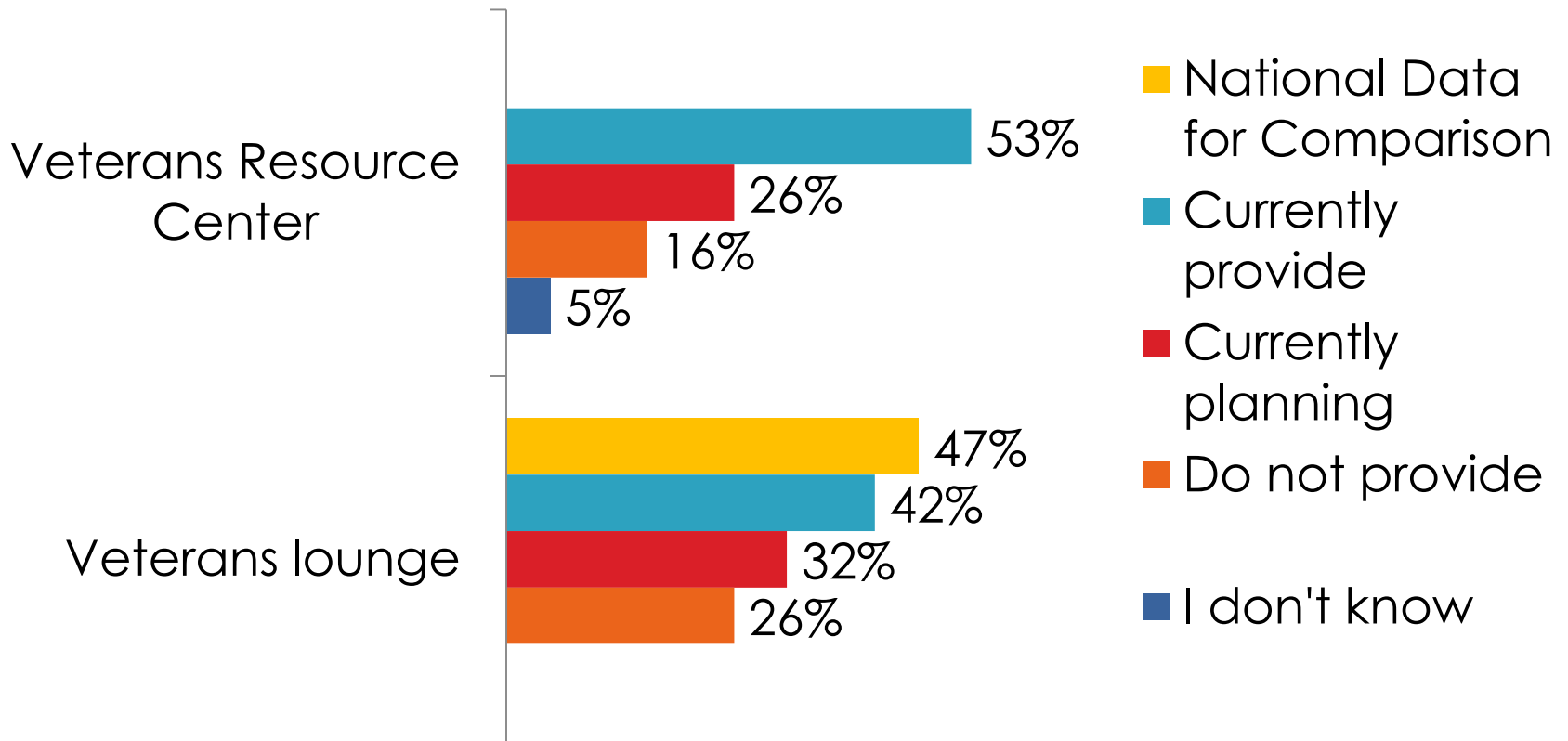
of Affinity Group institutions have a single point of contact for veterans

**71%**

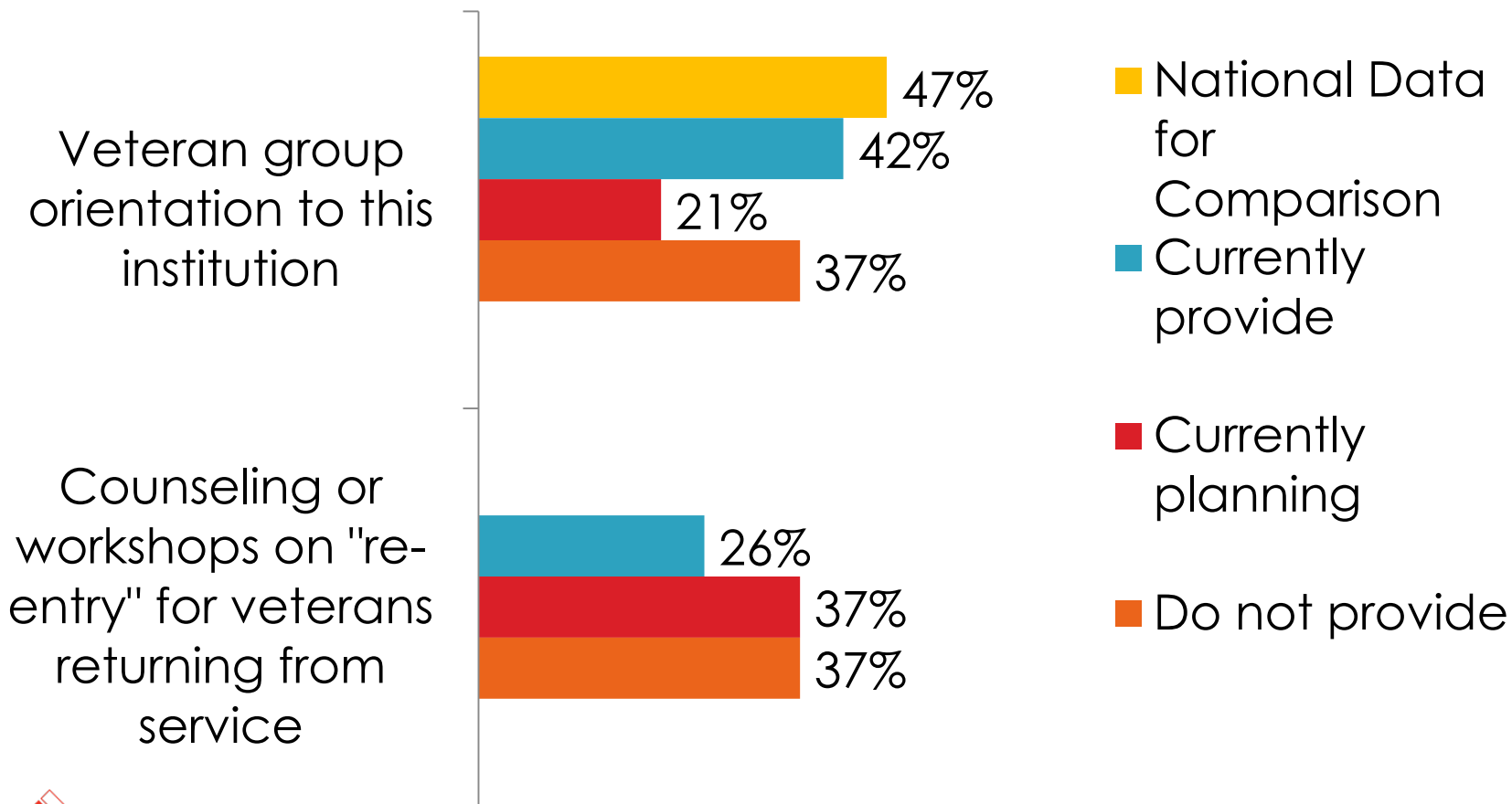
of institutions nationally have an office or department dedicated to serving veterans

# Programs and Services

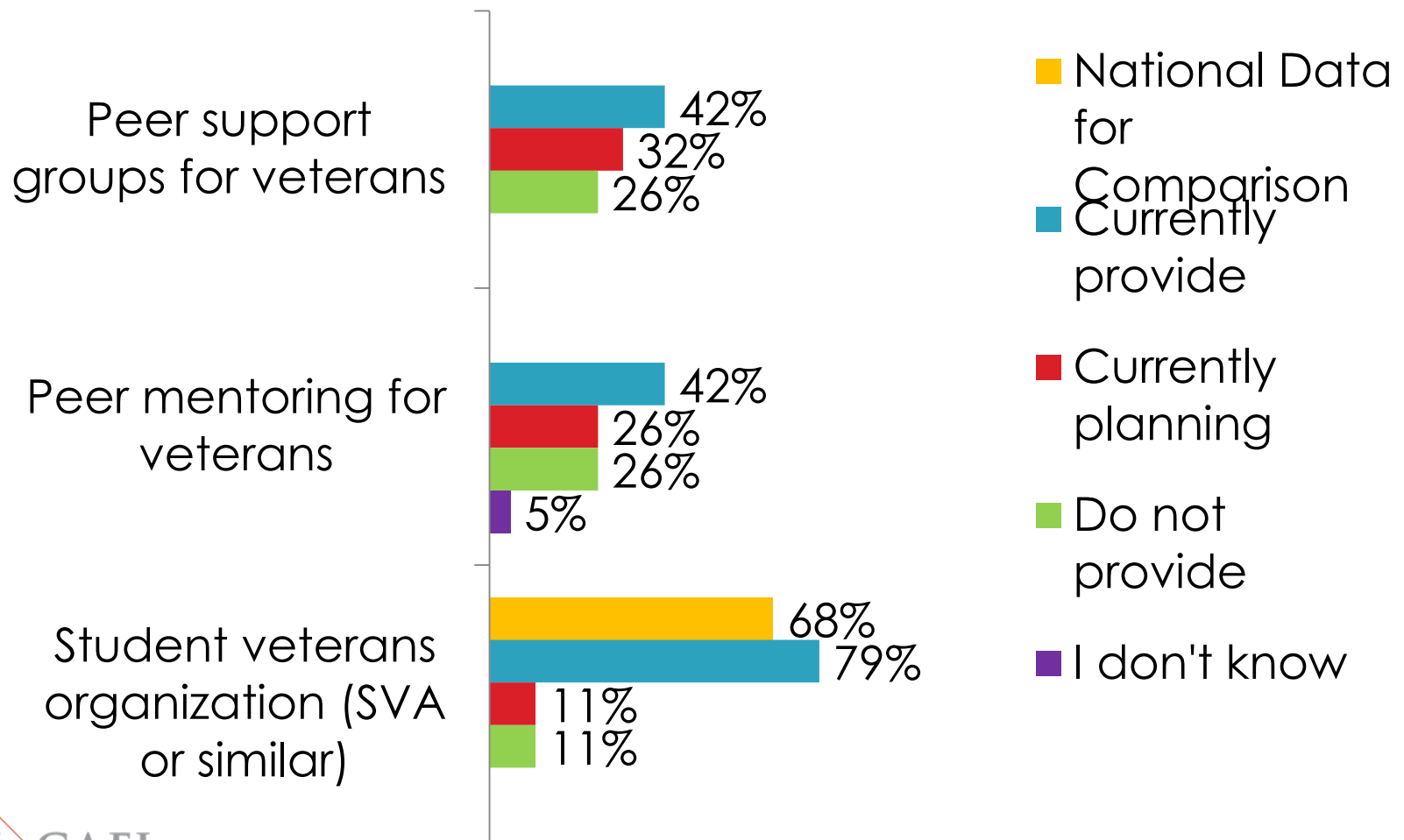
# Resource Centers/Lounges



# Orientation/Workshops

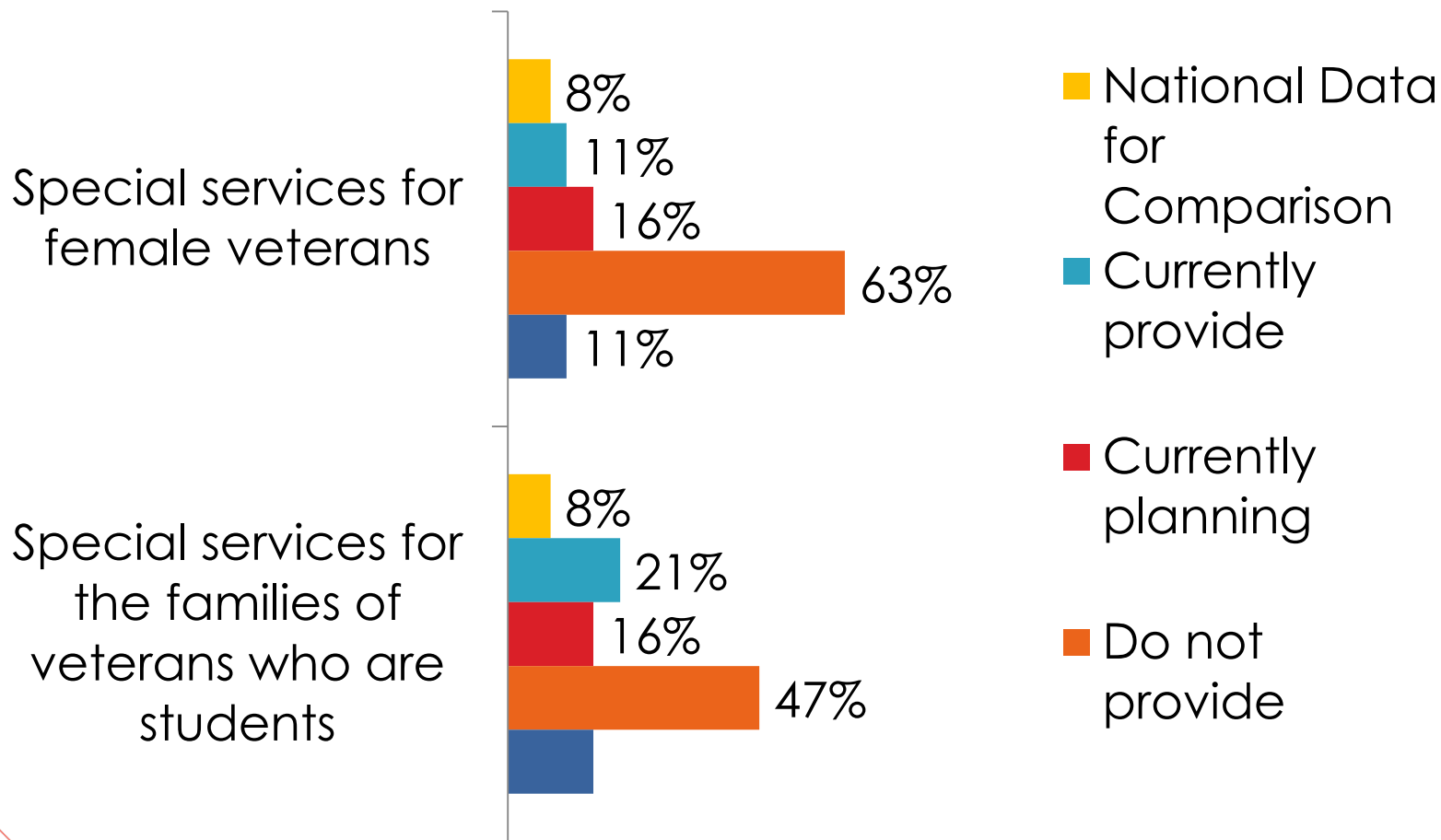


# Peer Services/Support Groups

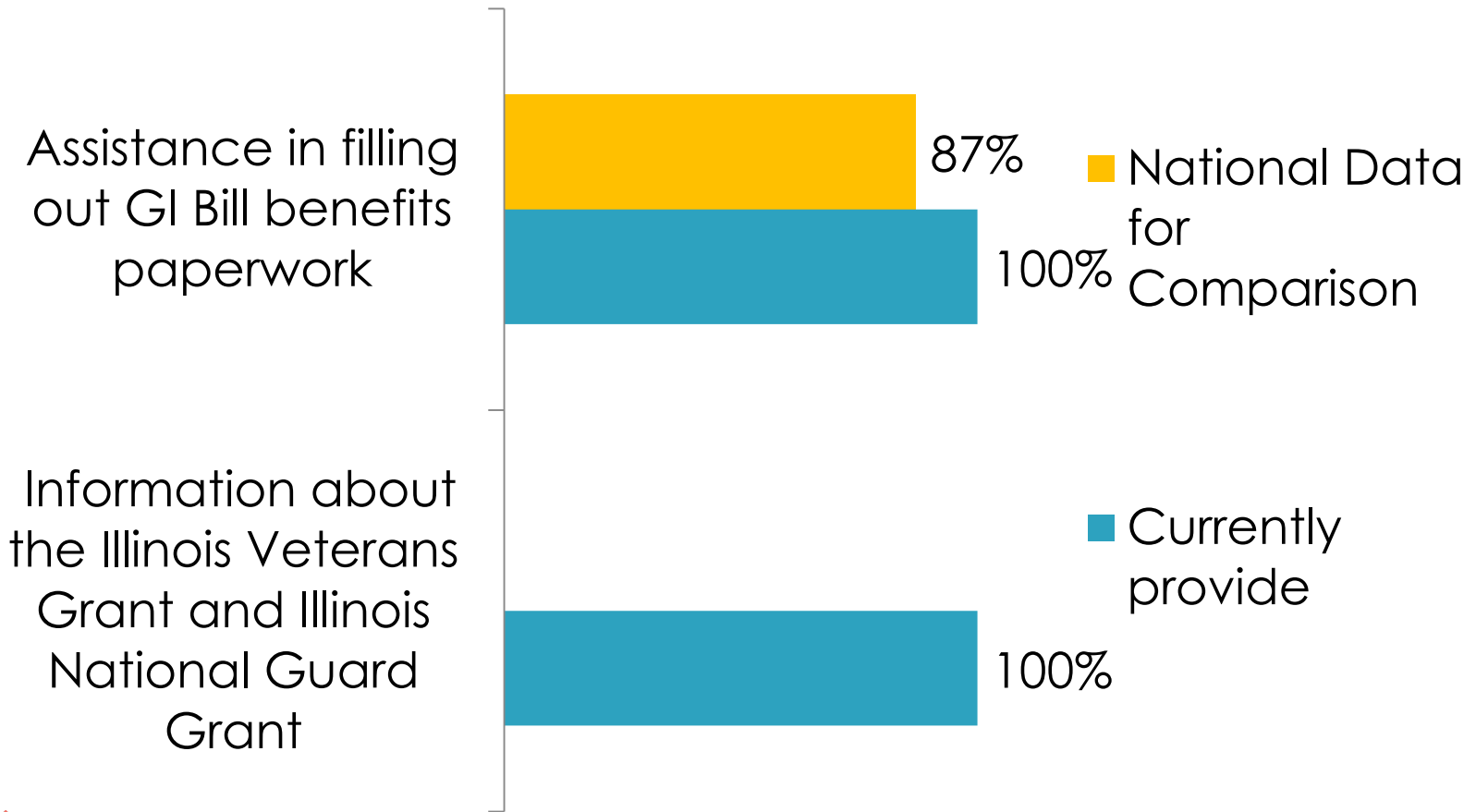




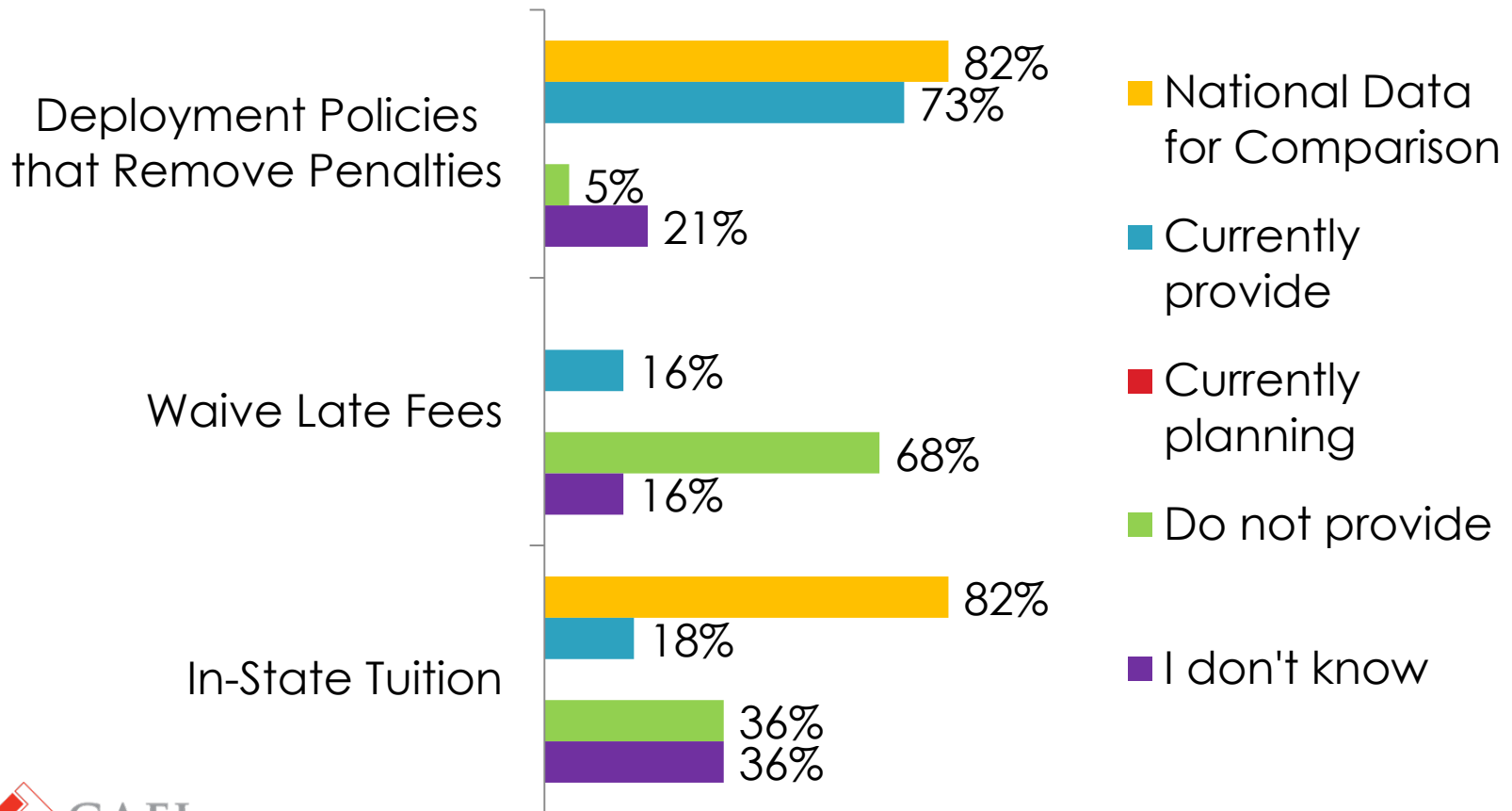
# Female Veterans and Families



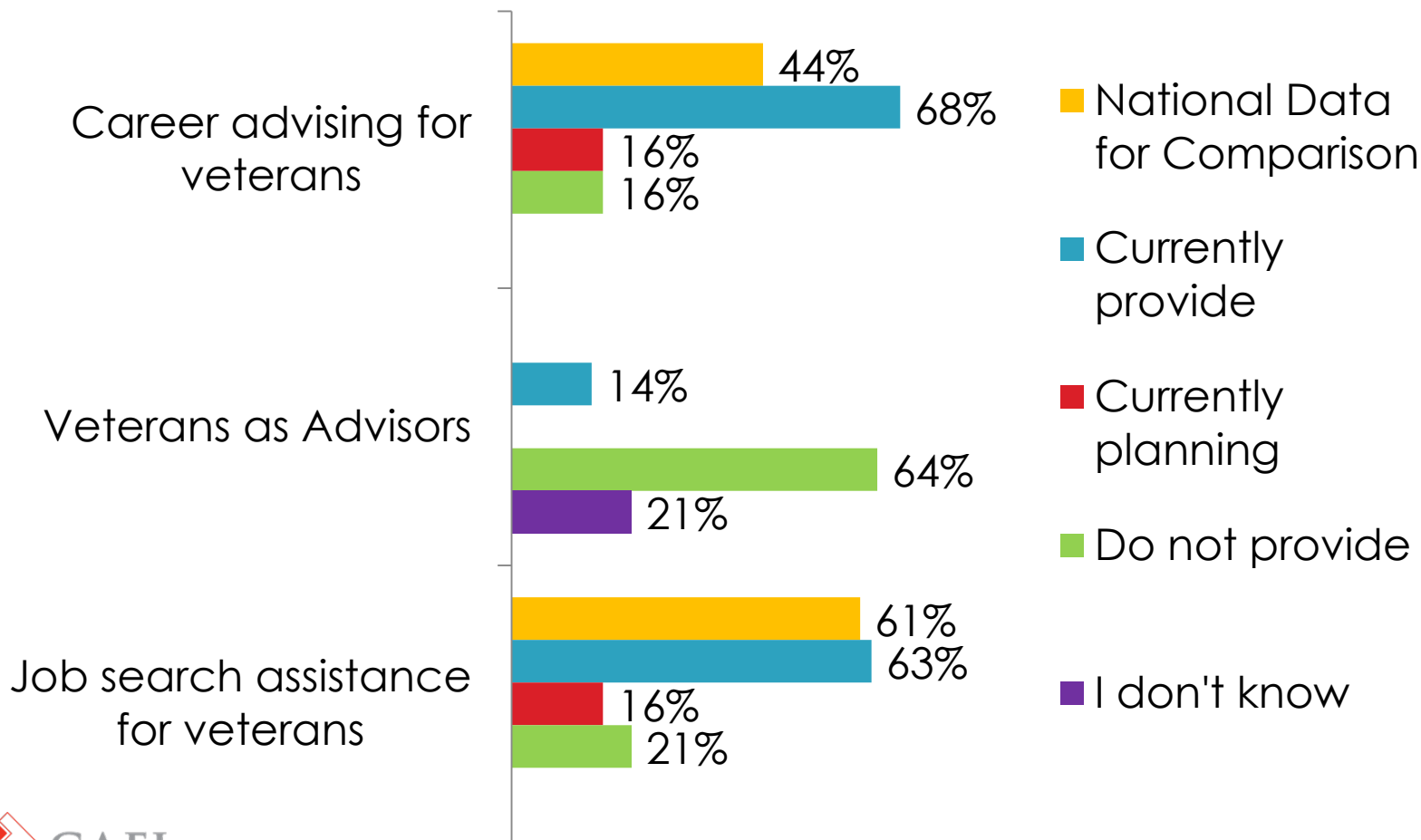
# Assistance with Benefits



# Deployment Policies, Late Fees & Tuition Rates



# Career and Education Advising



# Faculty Training

## Does your institution provide training to faculty?

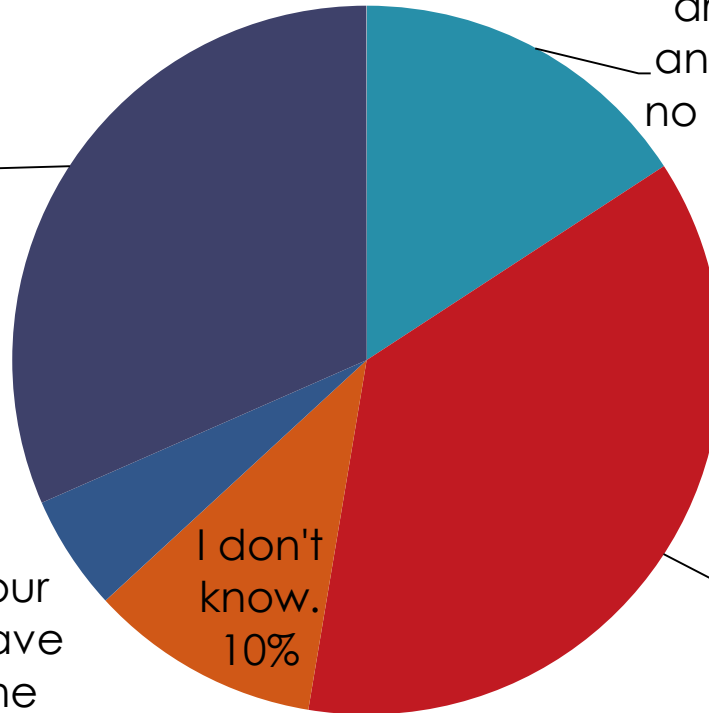
This is a work in progress; some of our faculty have had some training, but we need to do more.  
32%

Few, if any, are trained, and we have no plans to do this.  
16%

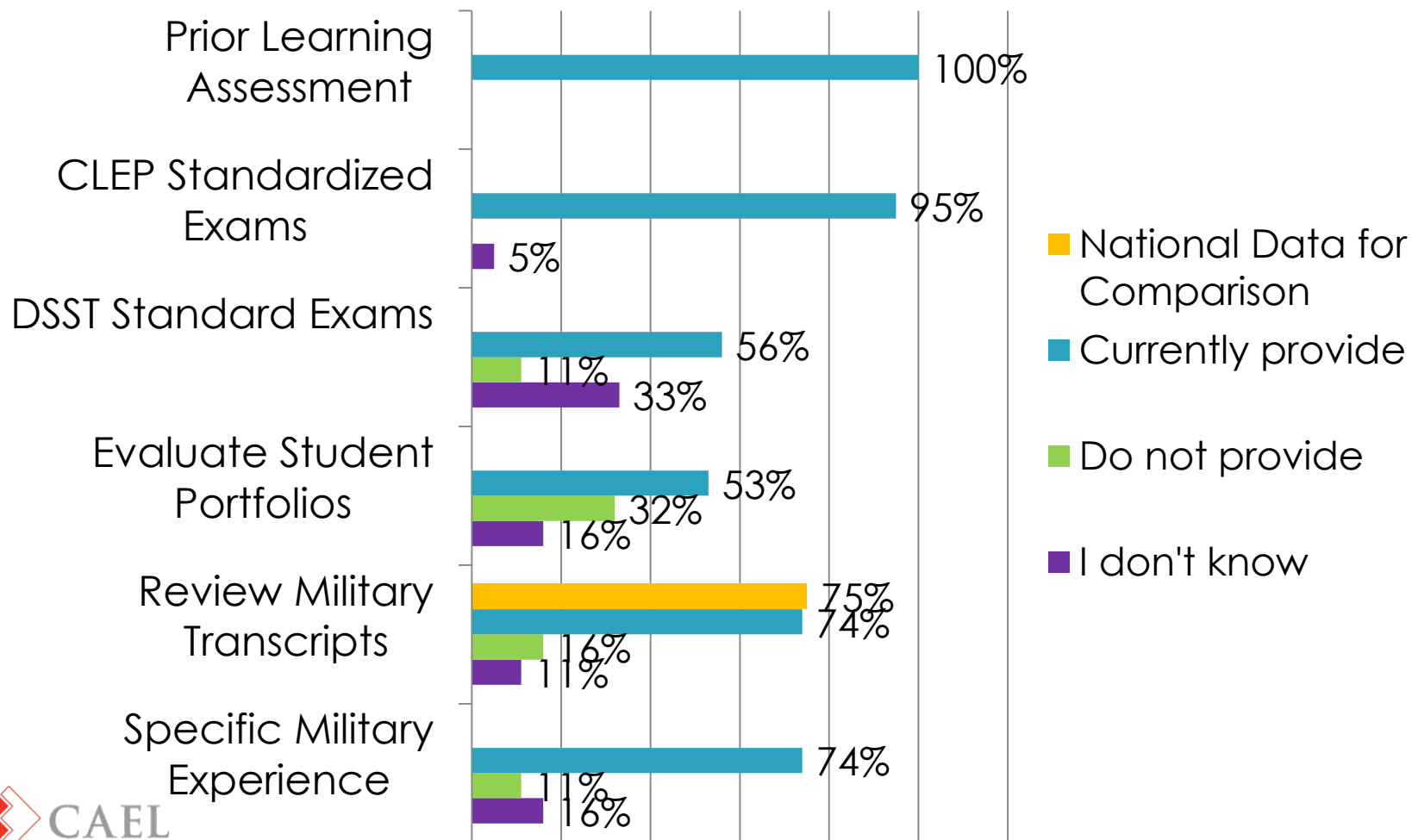
Few, if any, are trained, but we are planning to do this.  
37%

Most of our faculty have had some training.  
5%

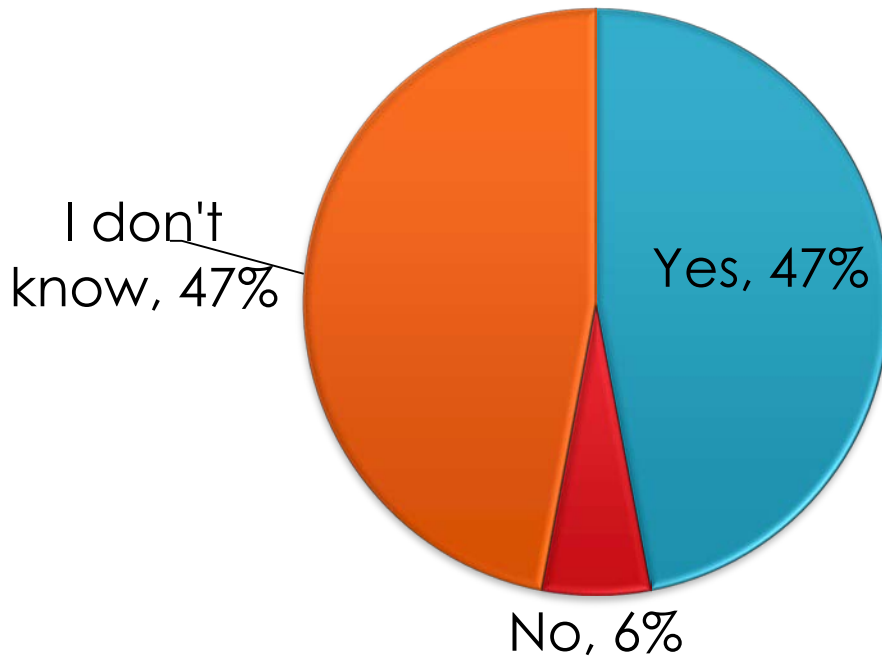
I don't know.  
10%



# Prior Learning Assessment



# Do your students take advantage of the PLA opportunities?

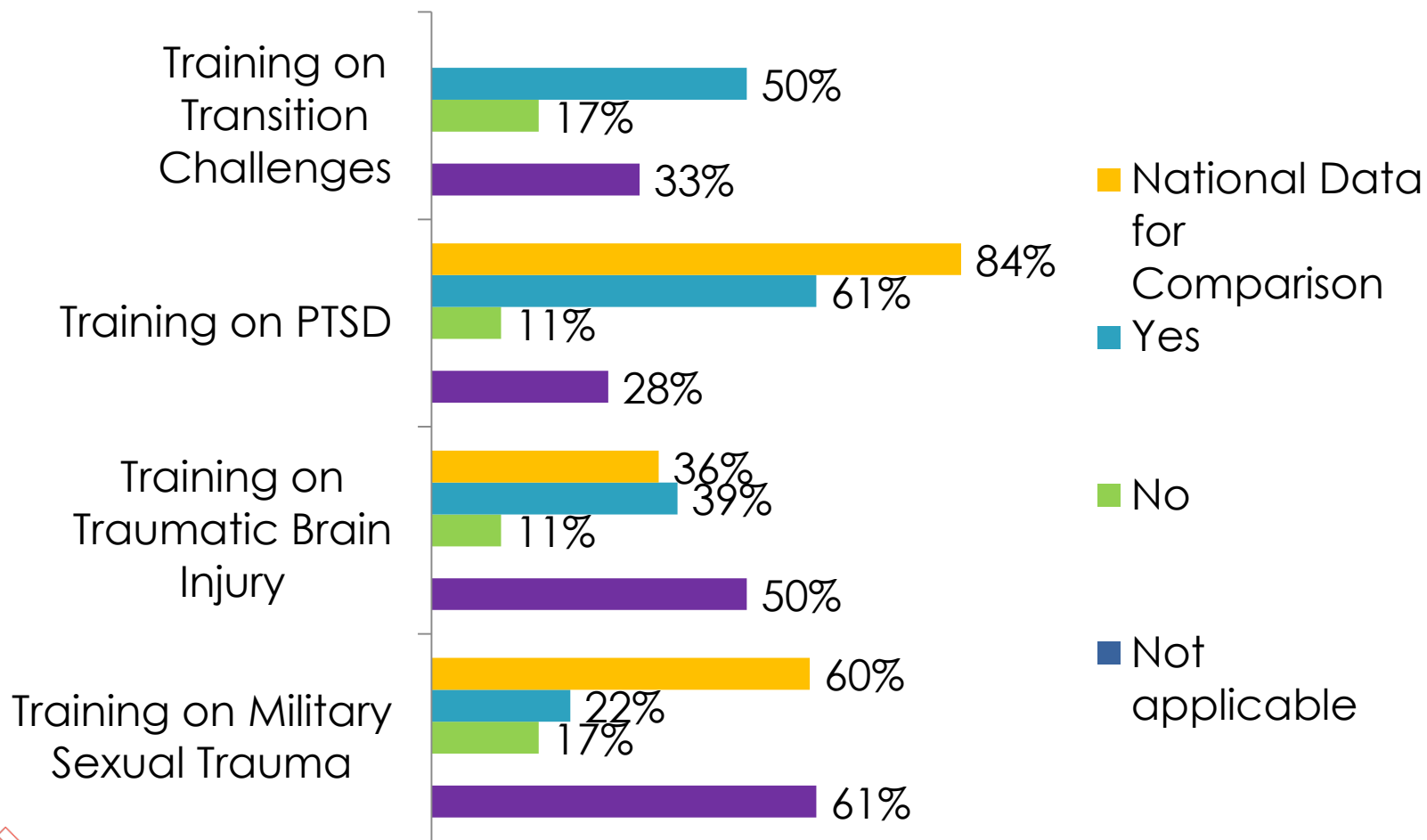


# Mental and Emotional Health Services

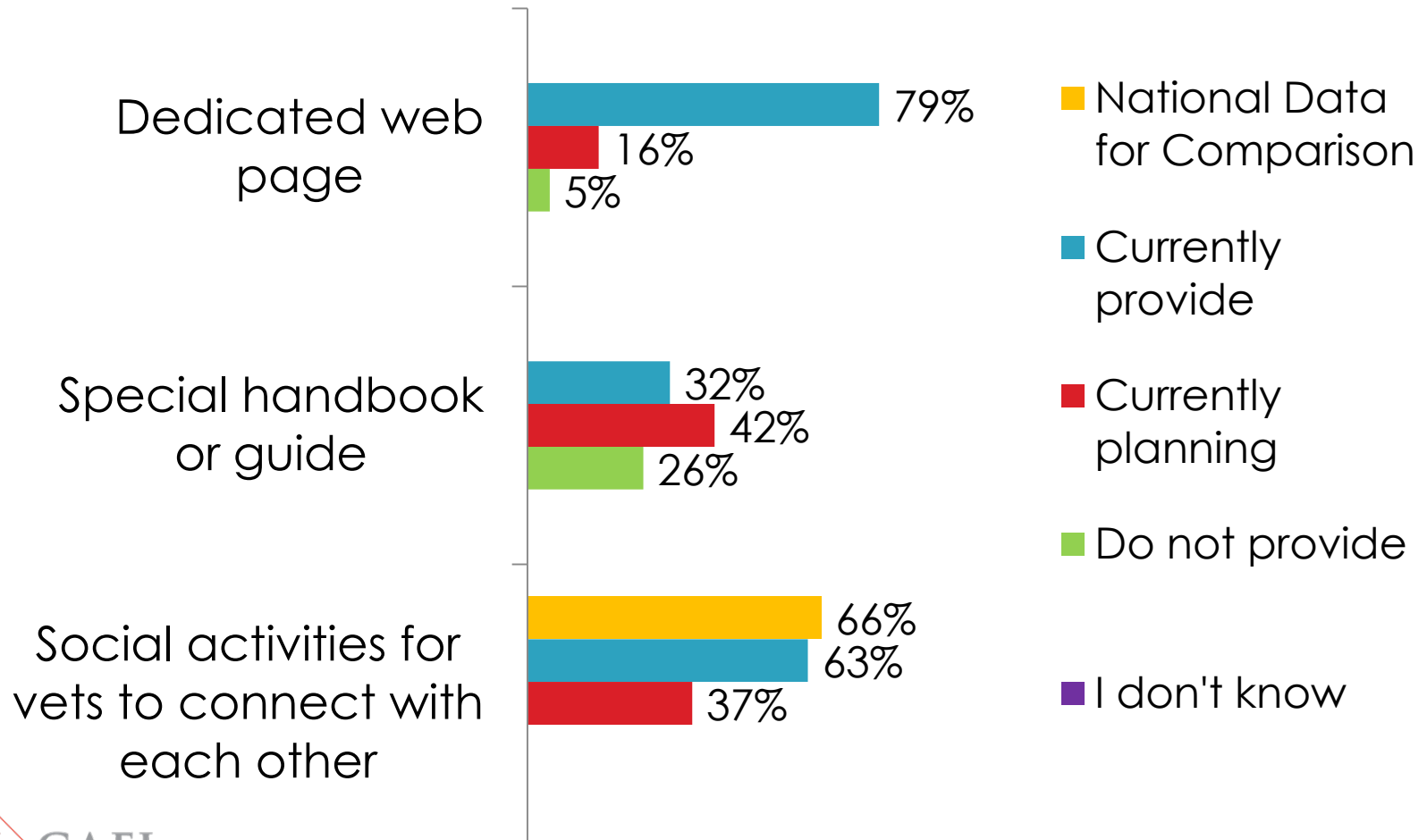
- 14 (78%) of Affinity Group member institutions provide mental health services
  - All but one Affinity Group member had met with the mental health counselors
- National comparison: 84%



# Training of Mental Health Staff

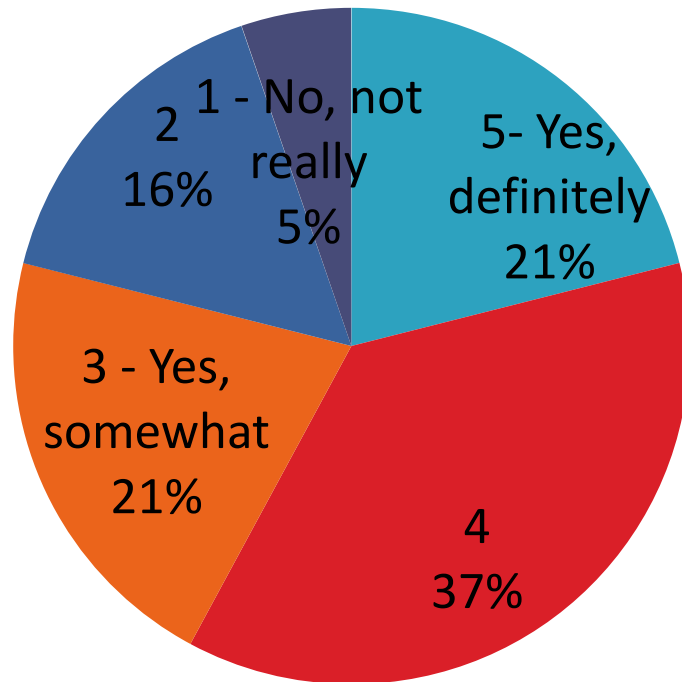


# Other Services



# Institutional Commitment

# Does My Institution Have a Strong Focus on Serving Veterans?



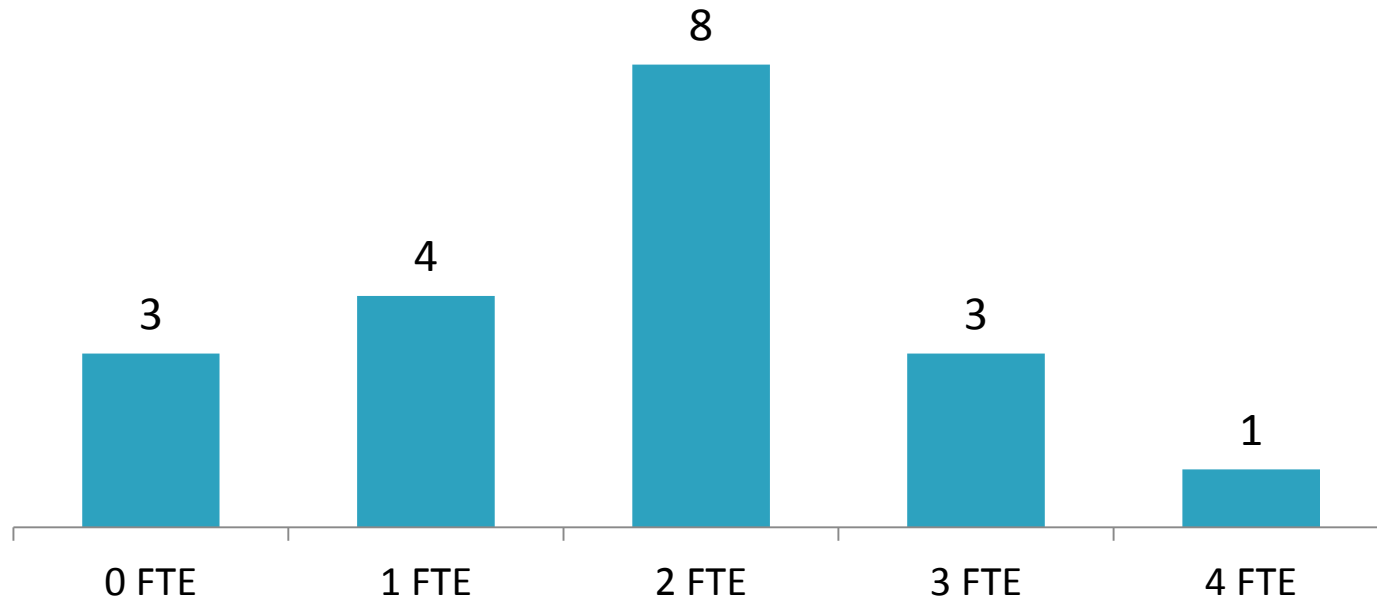
# Have you seen an impact since the September event?

- 25% - significant improvement 😊
- 50% - some positive improvement 😊
- 25% - no change 😞

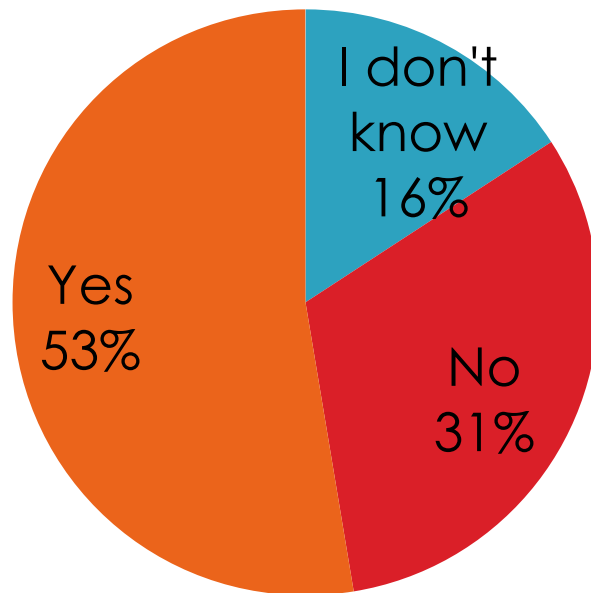
# Staffing

# Staffing

**How many full-time equivalent staff are dedicated to serving student veterans at your institution?**

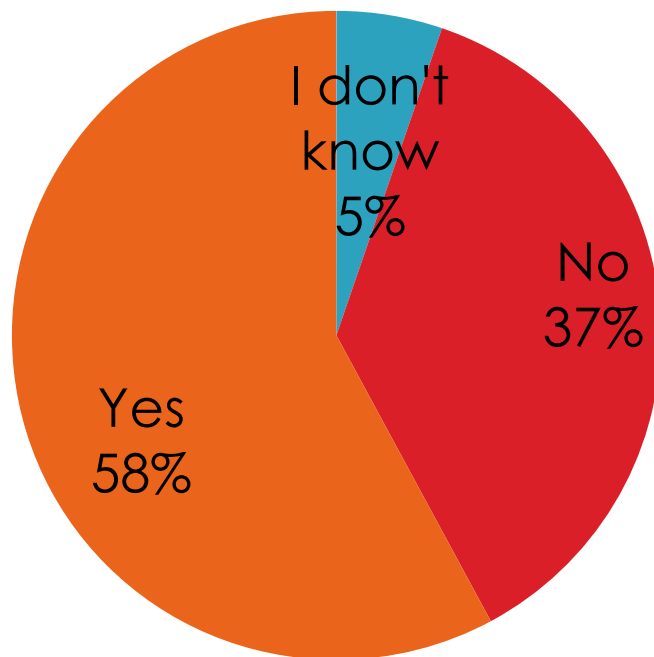


# Are student services staff or advisors veterans?





# Do you employ VA work study veterans?



# Next Steps

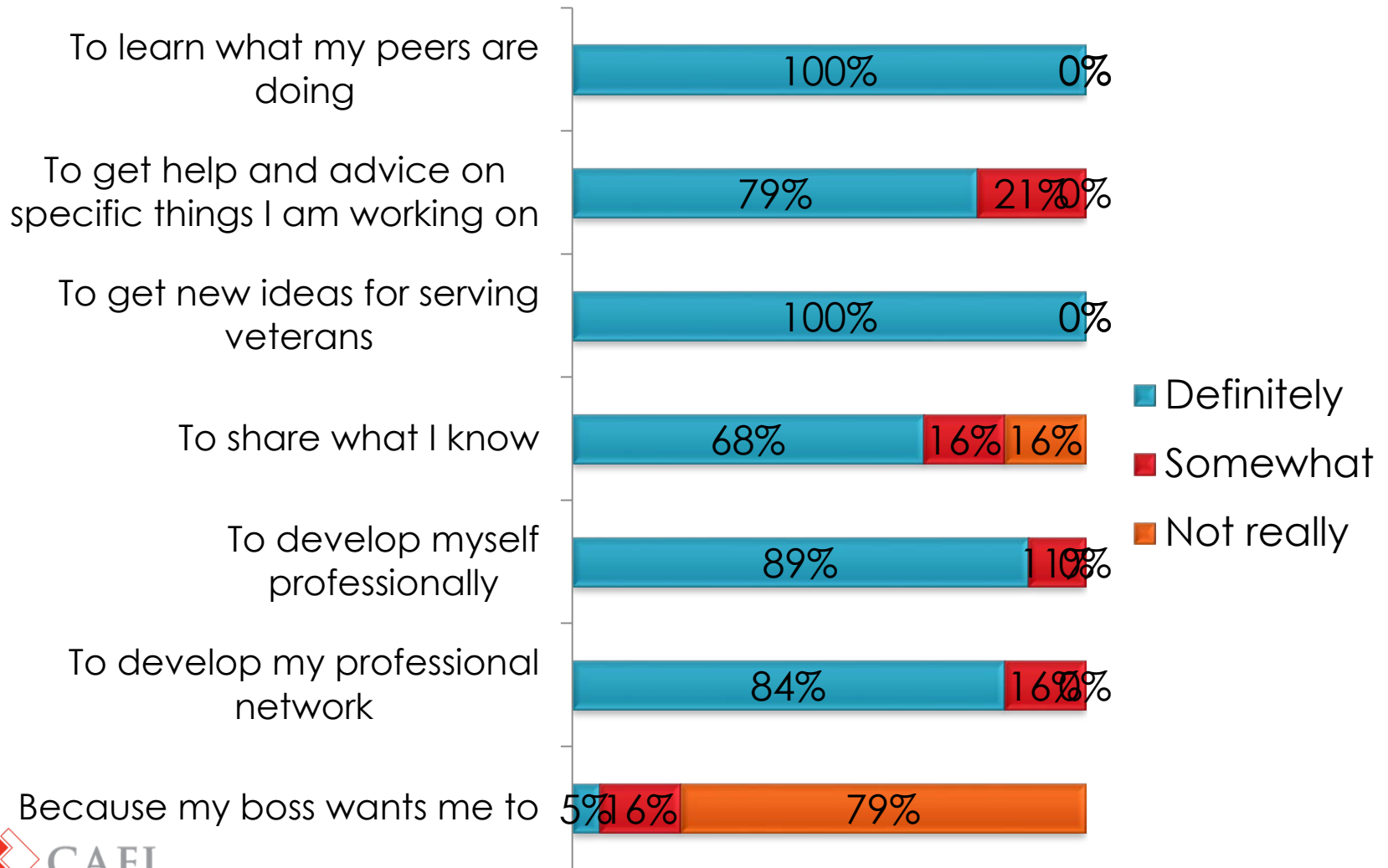
- Finalize the report
- Share with you
- How might you use this?
- How might CAEL use this?

# Why Are We Here?

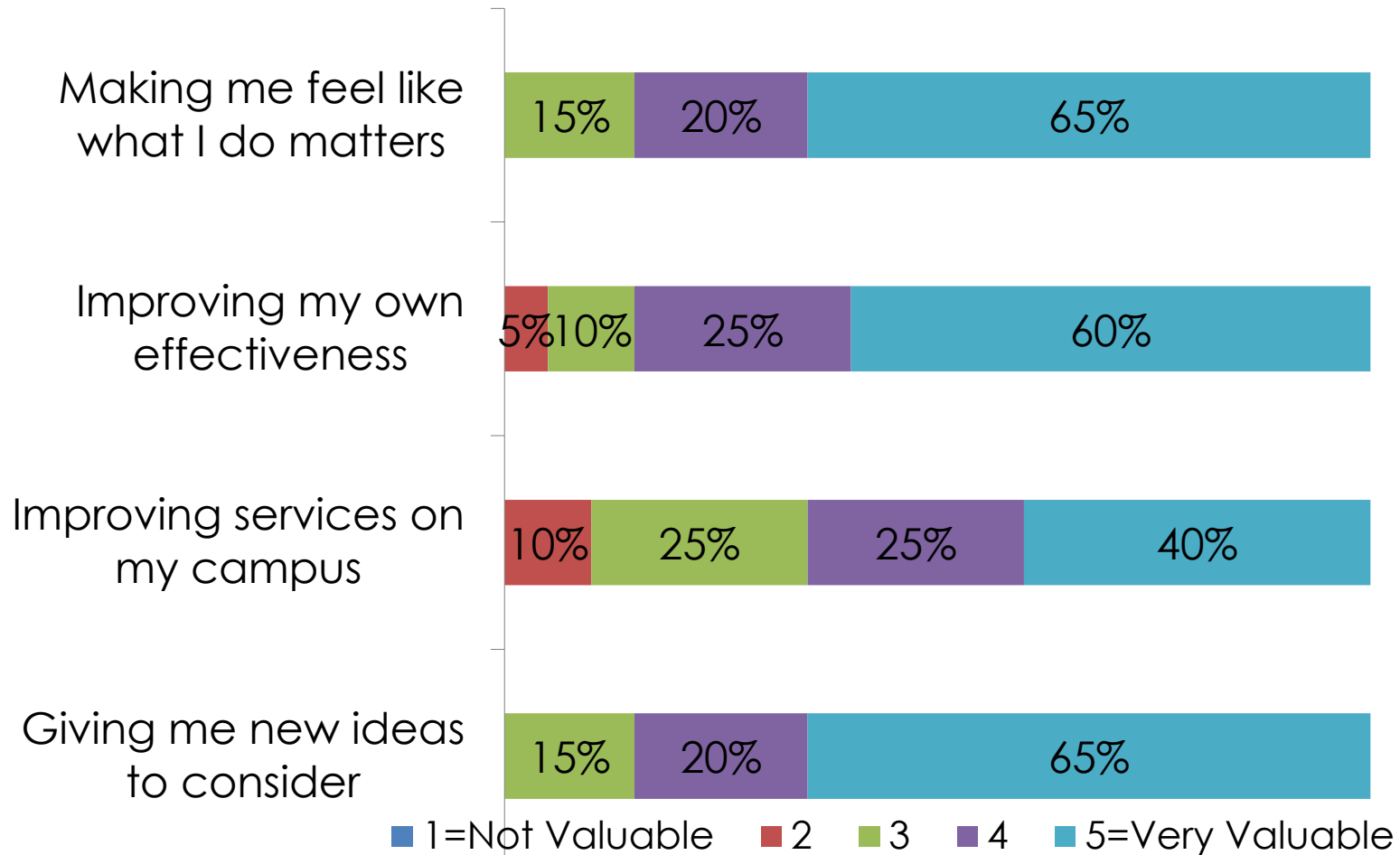
And what should we do next?



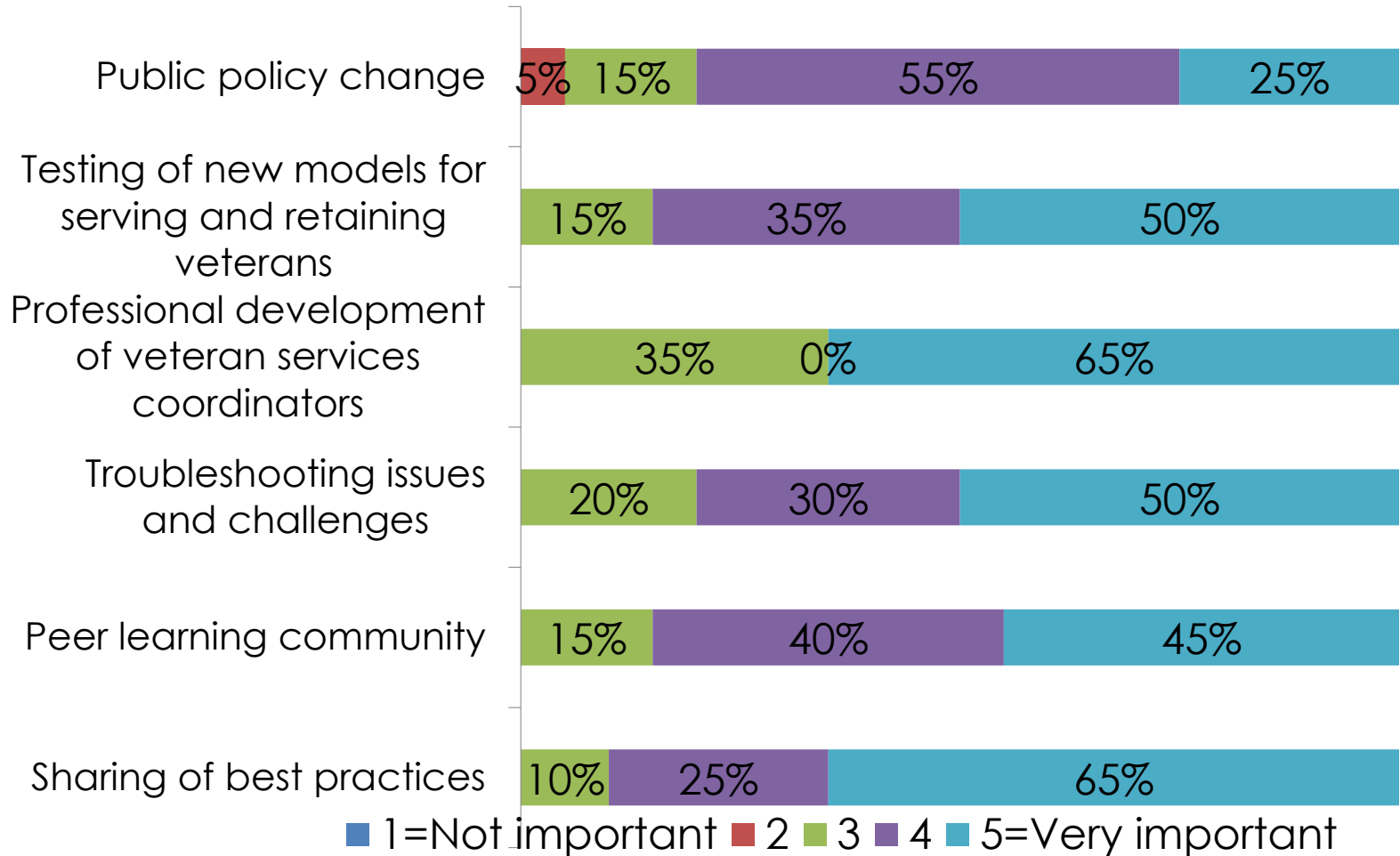
# Reasons for Coming



# What is the Value of This Group?



# Suggestions for Future Activities



# Other Ideas

- reviewing veterans' education support policies and programs at the national level to determine if there are places where the group can influence positive change
- creating standard practice policies and procedures for all Illinois schools of higher learning
- studying best practices nationwide
- keeping members abreast of changes in government policies and providing links to officials that can support veteran student programs.
- New members?

## 2 Big Resource Needs

- Staff and faculty training
- Resources to support mental and emotional health
- Other: student veteran homelessness, remedial education, out of school commitments