

# HLC By the Numbers

## Findings of the 2021 Membership Survey

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Guided by the EVOLVE strategic plan, HLC conducted the 2021 Membership Satisfaction Survey to capture the feedback from institutional representatives and peer reviewers to help inform, update, and continuously improve on HLC work. The survey, to be conducted annually, covered a wide range of topics, including identifying the impact of accreditation, institutions' satisfaction with the value of HLC membership, importance of HLC's thought leadership and advocacy work, experience with HLC processes, engagement with HLC elective programs, and HLC outreach.

The findings revealed a wealth of information that will provide important input for HLC's work. Several important takeaways from the analysis include:

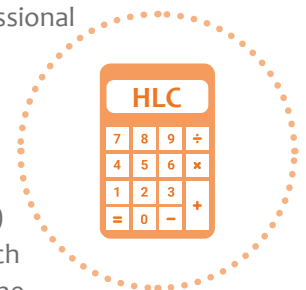
- Institutional representatives and peer reviewers expressed strong appreciation for the responsiveness and the quality of care that permeates the organization. The members overwhelmingly stated that they value HLC as a leader in the higher education industry and as a partner in ensuring the quality of their institutions.
- The members have identified the top two areas of impact by HLC accreditation as the development of a culture of continuous improvement and an increased focus on student learning.
- The findings provide valuable insight for the alignment of HLC's thought leadership and advocacy efforts to areas of importance to institutions.
- Feedback on professional development needs and experience with programming activities gives impetus for future refinement and growth in HLC's elective programs.

### INTRODUCTION

The 2021 Membership Satisfaction Survey was created to gather feedback from HLC member institutional representatives and peer reviewers on their experience with HLC and will help inform areas for improvement and new initiatives. The survey was administered in October 2021 to all institutional contacts and peer reviewers and had a response rate of 12 percent.

Among the survey respondents, 859 (90% of the total) indicated that they were employed at an HLC member institution. Of this group, more than half (54%) of the survey participants represented public institutions, 41% represented private not-for-profit (NFP) institutions, and a small number of respondents represented private for-profit (FP) and tribal colleges. Survey respondents represented a wide range of job roles on campuses. Among them, there were 81 Presidents (CEOs), 145 Chief Academic Officers (CAOs), 22 Chief Financial Officers (CFOs), 352 Accreditation Liaison Officers (ALOs), 227 Assurance System Coordinators, 141 Data Update Coordinators, and others. Among the respondents, 41% of were administrators, 22% were faculty members, 14% were professional staff, and 7% in other job roles.

Peer reviewers were well-represented in the survey, with a total of 387 reviewers and 53 Institutional Actions Council (IAC) members. Other stakeholders such as the mentors and scholars for the HLC Academies also participated in the survey.



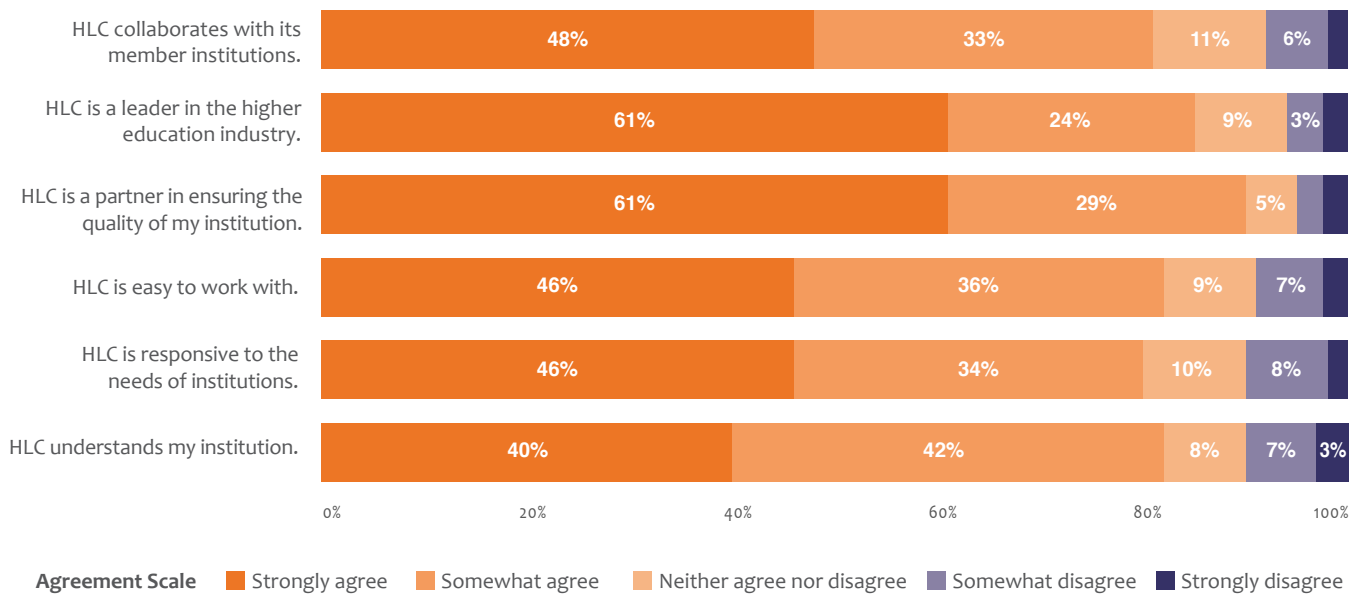
# VALUE OF HLC MEMBERSHIP

## How Do You Define HLC?

HLC included questions about how the membership perceives HLC. As HLC evaluates its role in the dynamically changing higher education ecosystem, these questions will help HLC cement its role for the membership and identify areas where growth is necessary.

When respondents were asked to assess their level of agreement with the defining characteristics of HLC, the majority of them strongly agreed that “HLC is a partner in ensuring the quality of my institution” (61%) and “HLC is a leader in the higher education industry” (61%).

Figure 1: How Do You Define HLC



Note: Percentages are rounded and may not add up to 100%.

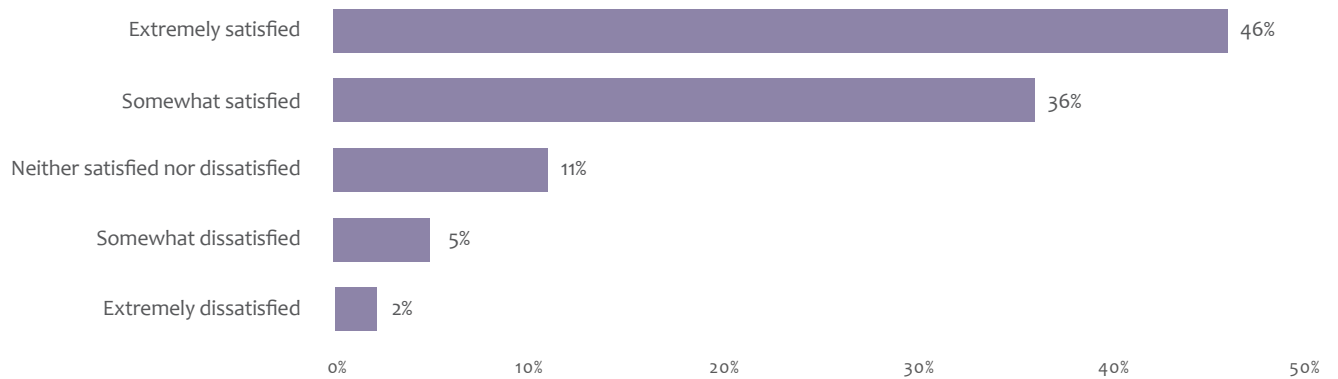
As indicated in the Figure 1, 80% or more of survey respondents expressed agreement (either “somewhat agree” or “strongly agree”) with each of the six statements on defining characteristics of HLC. The share of respondents expressing either somewhat or strong disagreement ranged from 4% to 10%.

## Satisfaction With the Value of HLC Membership

HLC never forgets that its membership is voluntary for institutions and strives to provide exemplary value to its members.

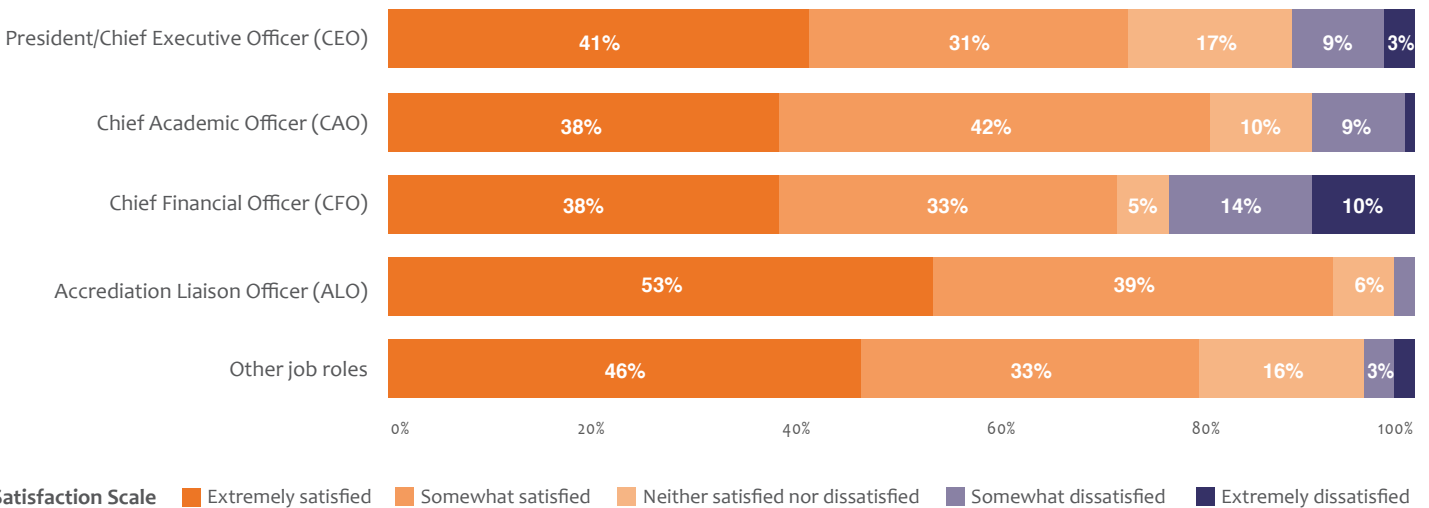
Overall, 46% of total respondents were extremely satisfied and about 2% were extremely dissatisfied with the value that HLC membership provides to their institutions.

Figure 2: Satisfaction With the Value of HLC Membership Overall



Among the key institutional representatives, ALOs expressed the highest level of satisfaction (either extremely or somewhat satisfied) with the value of HLC membership (91%) when compared with CEOs (73%), CAOs (80%), and CFOs (71%). CFOs expressed the most dissatisfaction (either extremely or somewhat dissatisfied) with the value of HLC membership (24%, 5 out of 21 respondents) when compared to CEOs and CAOs (12% and 11%, respectively).

Figure 3: Satisfaction With the Value of HLC Membership by Job Role



Note: Percentages are rounded and may not add up to 100%.

## Impact of Accreditation on Institutions

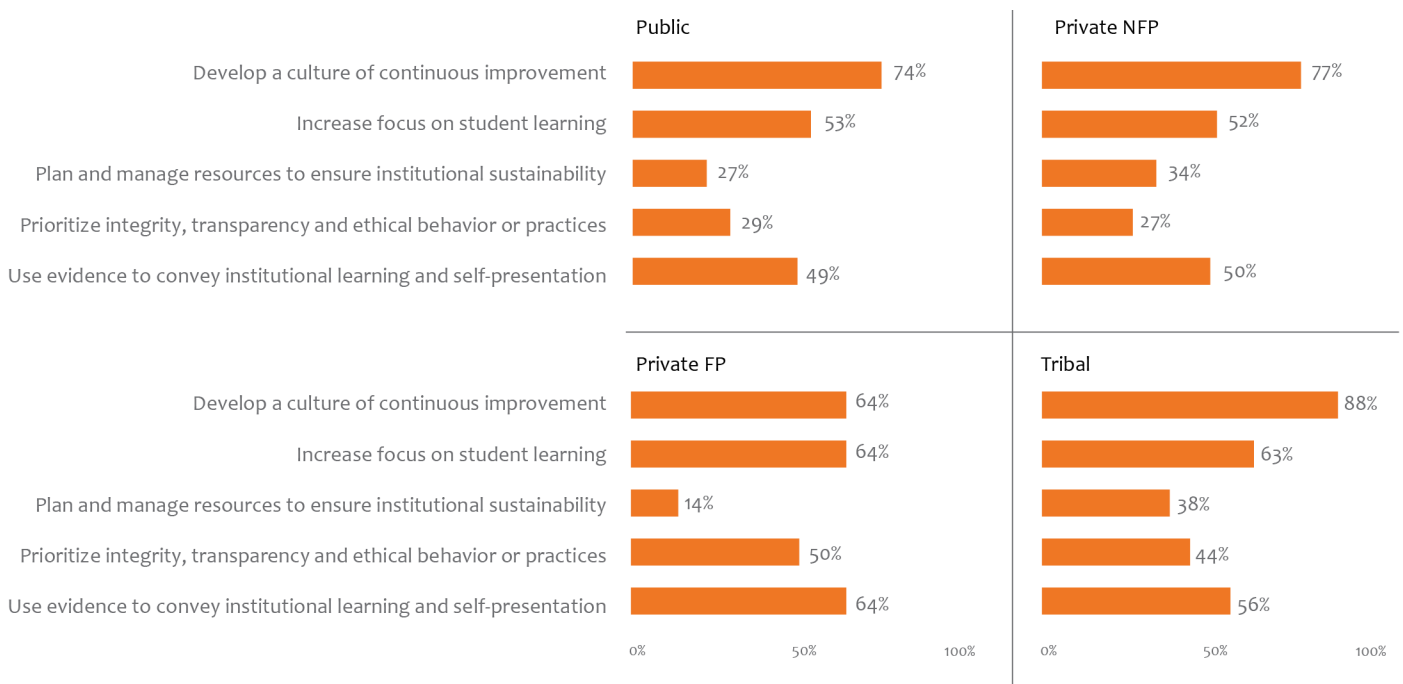
Survey respondents were asked to identify how HLC accreditation has impacted their institutions using the statements from HLC’s Guiding Values. The top three areas of impact as identified by the respondents included: develop a culture of continuous improvement (75%), increase focus on student learning (53%), and use evidence to convey institutional learning and self-presentation (50%).

Figure 4: Impact of Accreditation on Institutions

Rank	Impact of Accreditation	Count	%
1	Develop a culture of continuous improvement	635	75%
2	Increase focus on student learning	449	53%
3	Use evidence to convey institutional learning and self-presentation	425	50%
4	Plan and manage resources to ensure institutional sustainability	254	30%
5	Prioritize integrity, transparency and ethical behavior or practices	244	29%
6	Assure educational offerings are relevant for a diverse, technological, globally connected world	199	24%
7	Affirm providing education as a public purpose	178	21%
8	Govern for the well-being of the institution above the interests of any other stakeholder	175	21%
9	None of the above / don’t know	103	12%
<b>Number of Respondents</b>		<b>844</b>	

The highest share of respondents selecting “Develop a culture of continuous improvement” as an impact factor came from tribal colleges (88%) compared to public (74%), private NFP (77%), and private FP (64%) institutions.

Figure 5: Top 5 Impacts of Accreditation by Institution Control Type



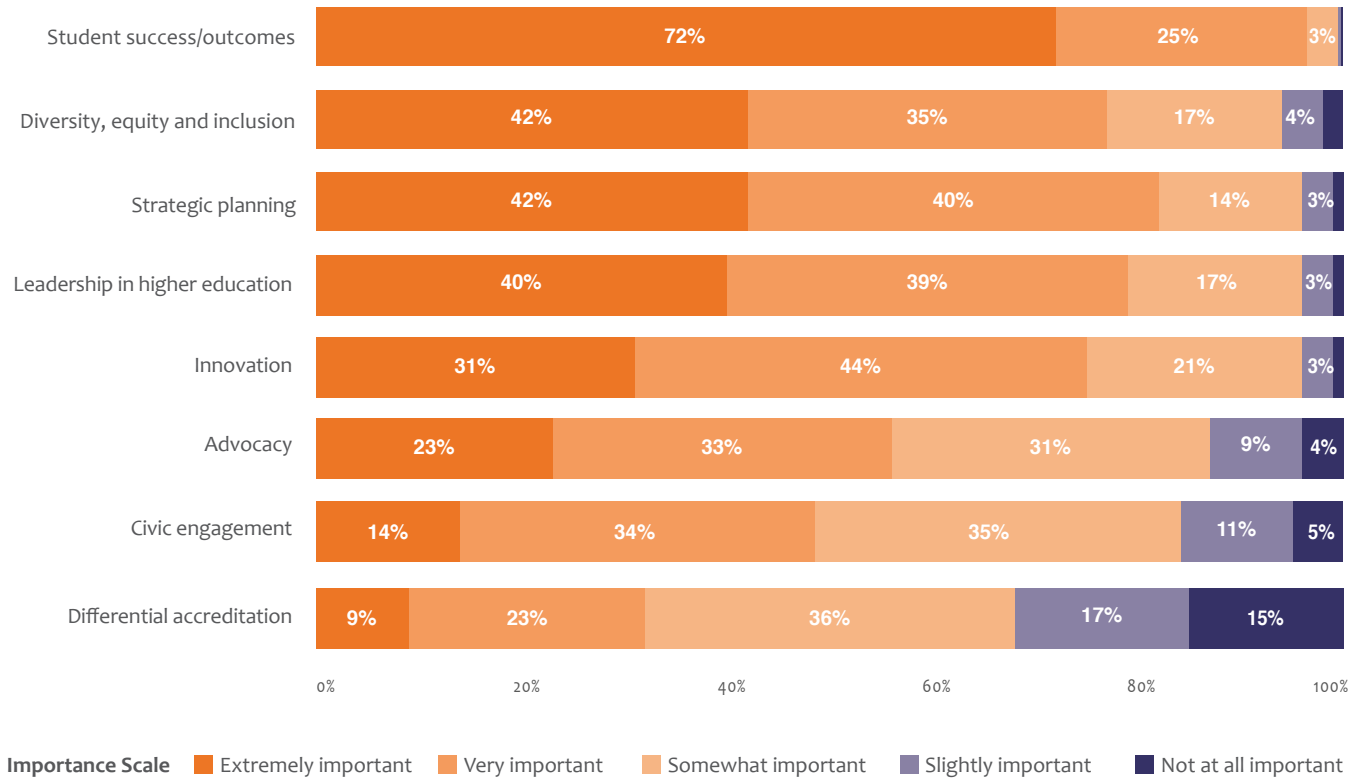
HLC will continue its commitment to these guiding values and work to strengthen its impact and contribution to higher education.

# THOUGHT LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

## Providing Thought Leadership in Higher Education

In the survey, respondents were asked to rank how important to their institutions were the work in the areas that impact higher education.

Figure 6: Importance of Work in the Areas that Impact Higher Education

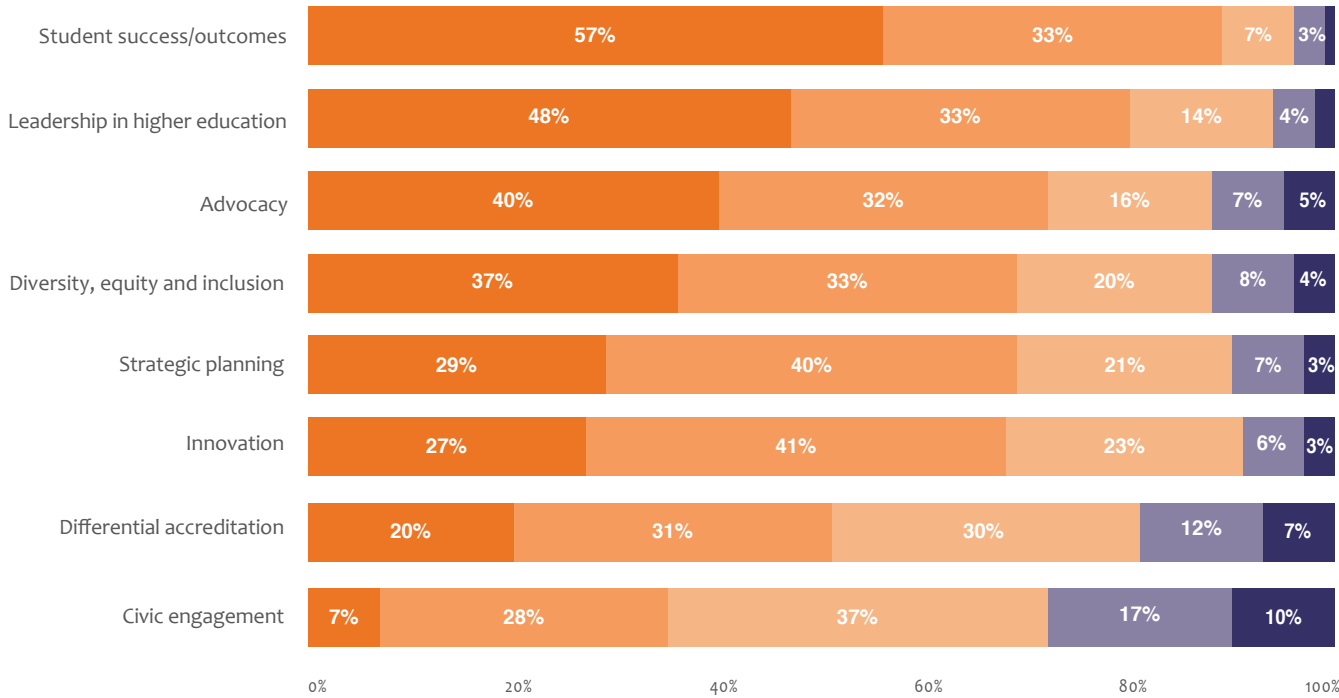


Note: Percentages are rounded and may not add up to 100%

As indicated in the Figure 6, among the top five areas by the importance ranking, student success/outcomes ranked as extremely important by 72% of respondents, followed by diversity, equity, and inclusion work (42%), strategic planning (42%), leadership in higher education (40%), and innovation (31%).

When asked how important it was that HLC be involved in each of these areas, respondents reconsidered the importance rankings when compared to the previous question. Student success/outcomes remained at the top of the list, ranked as extremely important by 57% of respondents, followed by leadership in higher education (48%), advocacy (40%), diversity, equity, and inclusion (37%), strategic planning (29%), innovation (27%), differential accreditation (20%), and civic engagement (7%).

**Figure 7: Importance of HLC’s Thought Leadership Work**

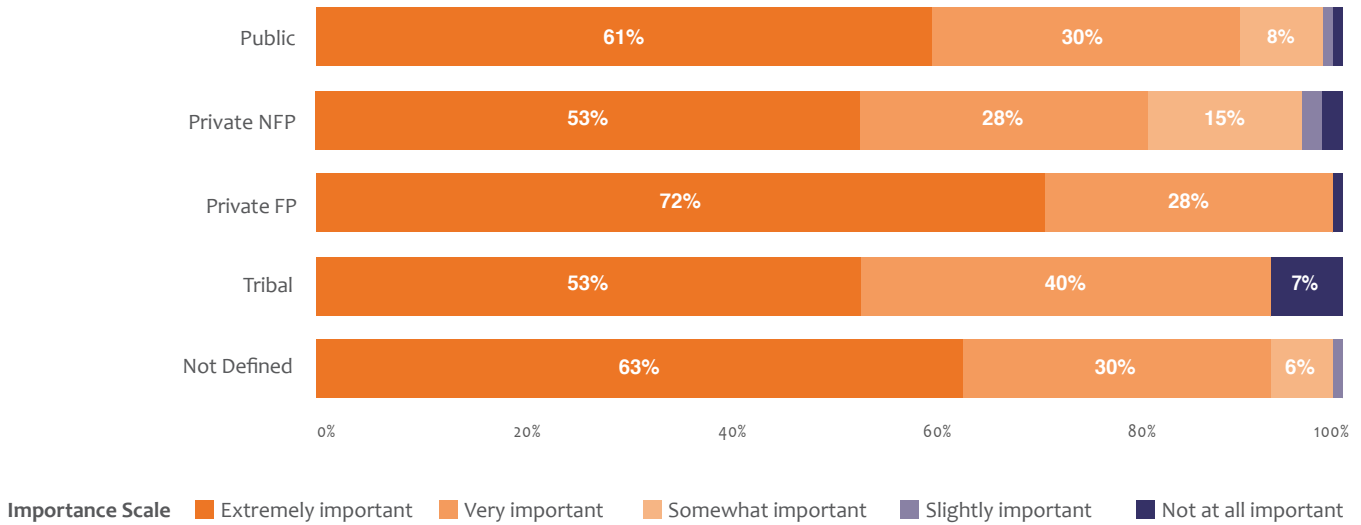


HLC will continue to work with the membership in defining its role in the thought leadership opportunities of higher education.

## HLC Advocacy for the Value of Higher Education

The majority of total respondents considered HLC’s work in advocating for the value of higher education as extremely important (58%) or very important (29%). Public institutions appeared to give greater importance to HLC’s advocacy work, with 91% of respondents considering the work as extremely or very important, as compared to private NFP institutions (81%).

Figure 8: Importance of HLC Advocacy for the Value of Higher Education



Note: Percentages are rounded and may not add up to 100%.

## Alignment of HLC Advocacy Efforts With Institutions’ Focus

Overall, a majority of total respondents (58%) indicated that HLC’s advocacy efforts accurately represented the topics of importance to institutions, while 6% did not share that opinion and 36% were unsure. A larger share of respondents from public institutions confirmed the alignment of HLC’s work (63%) as compared to private NFP respondents (51%).

Figure 9: Alignment of HLC Advocacy Efforts With Institutions’ Focus by Control Type

Control Type	Public		Private NFP		Private FP		Tribal		Not defined		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	120	63%	86	51%	5	63%	5	56%	1	100%	217	58%
No	8	4%	13	8%	0	0%	1	11%			22	6%
Unsure	61	32%	70	41%	3	38%	3	33%			137	36%
<b>Total</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100%</b>

# RESOURCES, PROCESSES, AND COMMUNICATION

## Valuing HLC’s Resources

The majority of respondents indicated that HLC’s resources were extremely or very valuable for their work. The HLC website was ranked highest by respondents as extremely or very valuable (82% of respondents), followed by the Resource Guide (71%), the Leaflet (53%), and recorded webinars (53%).

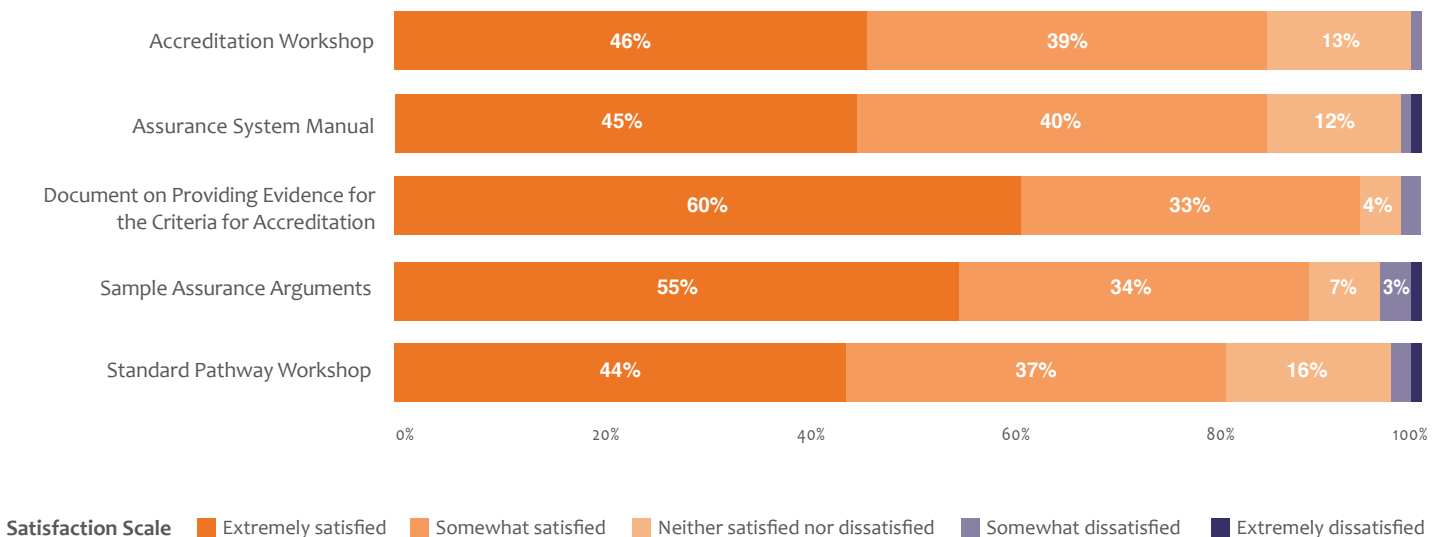
Figure 10: Valuing HLC’s Resources

Resource Type	Extremely valuable		Very valuable		Moderately valuable		Slightly valuable		Not at all valuable		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
HLC Resource Guide	300	39%	241	32%	154	20%	46	6%	21	3%	762	100%
HLC Website	385	49%	257	33%	104	13%	33	4%	6	1%	785	100%
Leaflet	159	21%	243	32%	252	33%	67	9%	33	4%	754	100%
Recorded webinars	142	20%	240	33%	239	33%	68	9%	32	4%	721	100%

## Satisfaction With HLC Resources for Pathway Evaluation

Most respondents expressed satisfaction (either “extremely satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied”) with the resources provided to support institutions in preparation for the comprehensive evaluation process. The guidance on *Providing Evidence for the Criteria for Accreditation* was ranked at the top with 93% respondents either extremely or somewhat satisfied, followed by sample Assurance Arguments (89% of respondents), Accreditation Workshop (85%), and Assurance System Manual (85%), and Standard Pathway Workshop (81%).

Figure 11: Satisfaction With HLC Resources for Pathway Evaluation



Note: Percentages are rounded and may not add up to 100%.

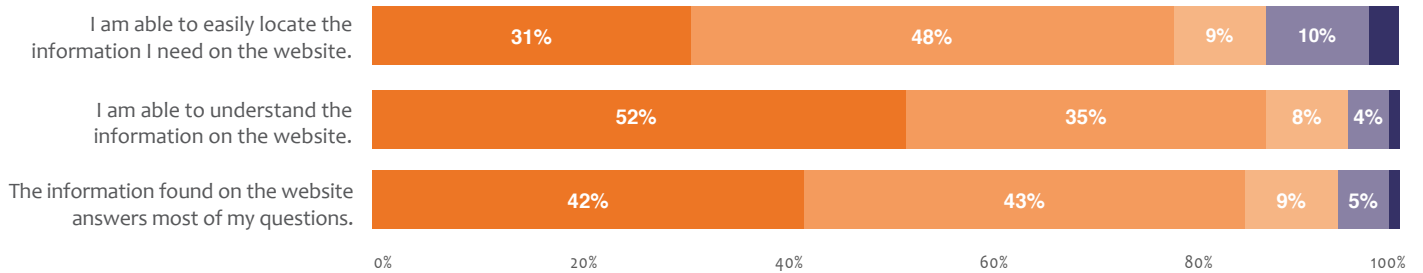
HLC will work to provide additional resources to support institutional representatives and peer reviewers as they manage the accreditation relationship.



## Experience With HLC’s Website

As noted earlier in this report, HLC website is a resource frequently used and highly valued by members and peer reviewers alike. User feedback about the functionalities of the website is provided in Figure 12.

Figure 12: Experience With HLC Website



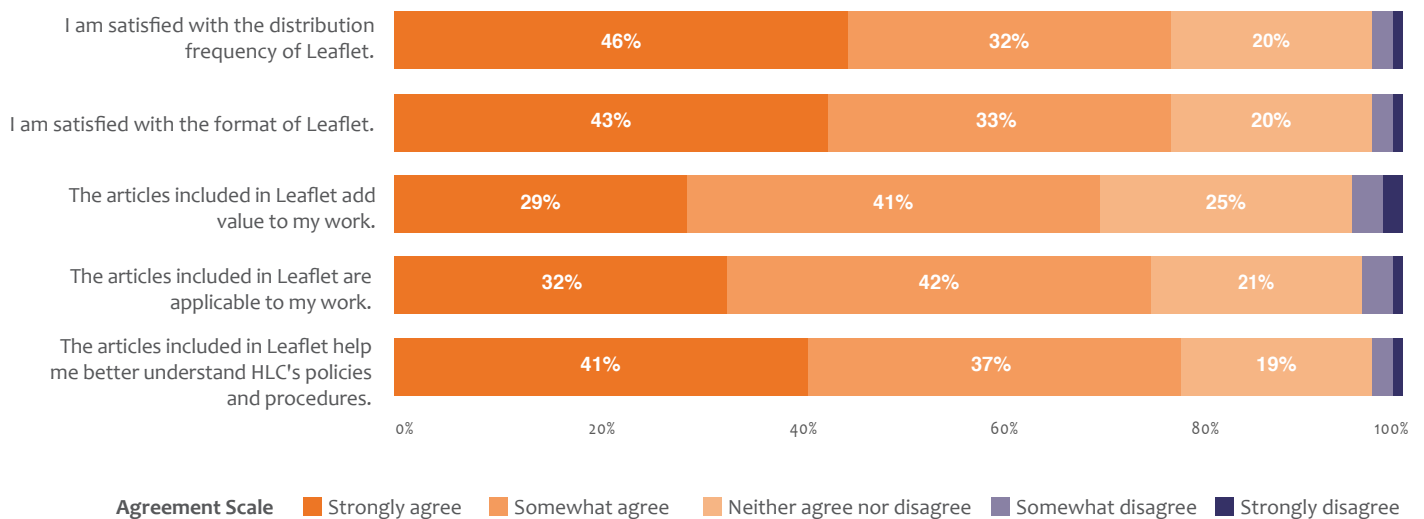
HLC found that 87% of respondents either strongly or somewhat agreed that they were able to understand the information on the HLC website, 85% strongly or somewhat agreed that they were able to find the answers to most of their questions on the website, and 79% strongly or somewhat agreed that they were able to easily locate the information they needed on the website. Regarding the last point on the ease of use, around 13% of respondents indicated having some difficulties searching for information on the website.

HLC will continue to provide clear information and seek new ways to improve searchability of its electronic platforms.

## Experience With HLC’s Leaflet Newsletter

Overall, 78% of respondents indicated that the *Leaflet* helped them better understand HLC’s policies and procedures, 74% strongly or somewhat agreed that the *Leaflet* content was applicable to their work, and 70% rated it as adding value to their work. In addition, the majority of respondents reported satisfaction with the distribution frequency of the *Leaflet* (78%) and with the format of the *Leaflet* (76%).

Figure 13: Experience With HLC Leaflet Newsletter



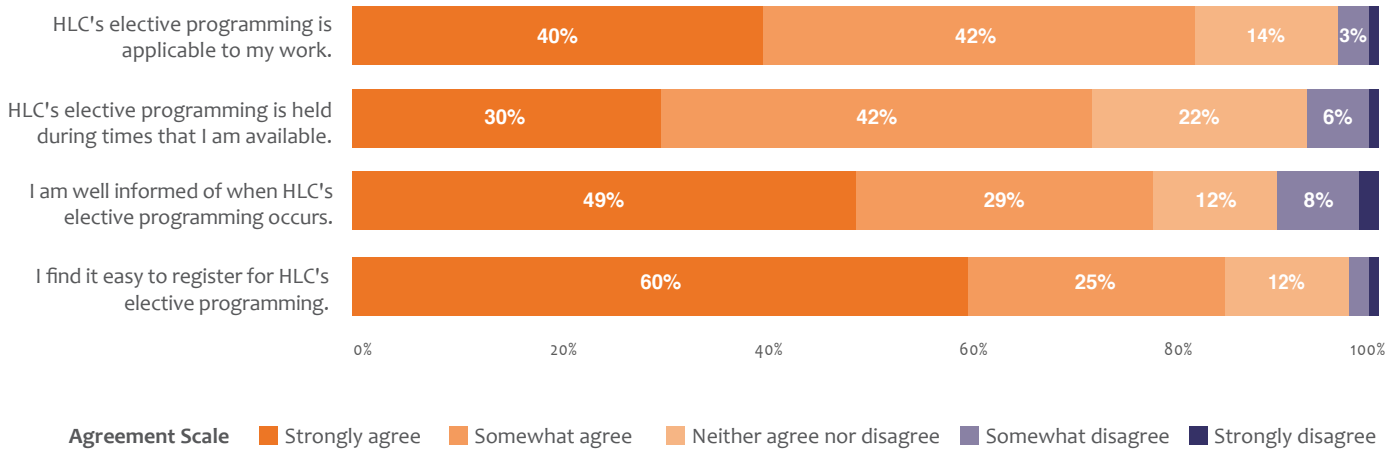
Note: Percentages are rounded and may not add up to 100%.

HLC will continue to provide *Leaflet* and build on the value it brings members.

## Experience With HLC’s Elective Programming

Nearly half of respondents (49%) indicated affirmatively that they were well informed of HLC’s elective programming schedule, and a majority (60%) strongly agreed that it was easy to register for elective programs. Reflecting on the relevance of HLC’s elective programs, a majority of respondents indicated that the programs were applicable to their work (40% strongly agreed and 42% somewhat agreed). A large share of respondents, where 30% strongly agreed and 42% somewhat agreed, found that the programming was offered at times when they were available.

Figure 14: Experience With HLC Elective Programs



Note: Percentages are rounded and may not add up to 100%.

HLC will work to increase the visibility of its elective programming for the membership.

## Areas of Institutional and/or Professional Development Needs

When asked about their professional development needs, the vast majority of survey respondents reported that assessment of student learning (82%), institutional effectiveness (80%) and support for student success (77%) were at the top of the list. Other popular professional development topic areas included strategic planning (62% of respondents), effective leadership (55%) and financial sustainability (52%).

Figure 15: Areas of Institutional and/or Professional Development Needs

	Public		Private NFP		Private FP		Tribal		Not defined	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Assessment of Student Learning	316	83%	246	82%	16	89%	15	100%	73	76%
Effective Leadership	230	61%	140	47%	8	44%	12	80%	55	57%
Financial Sustainability	176	46%	168	56%	6	33%	9	60%	64	67%
Institutional Effectiveness	302	79%	232	77%	14	78%	13	87%	83	86%
Strategic planning	247	65%	187	62%	12	67%	10	67%	50	52%
Support for Student Success	310	82%	216	72%	13	72%	14	93%	74	77%
Other needs	18	5%	13	4%			2	13%	8	8%
None of the above	2	1%	1	0%						
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100%</b>

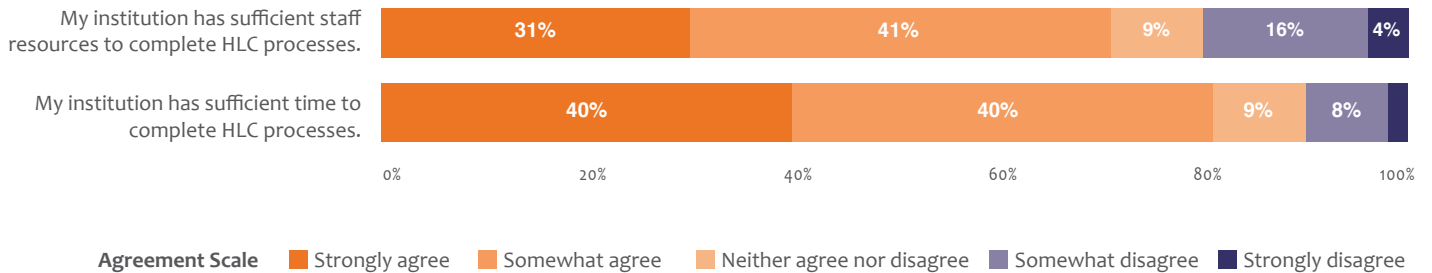
HLC currently offers programming to support these areas and will continue to look at ways to expand opportunities for participation.

## Institutions' Experience With HLC Processes

Following two years of pivoting and adapting to the pandemic conditions, HLC expects that the higher education world is facing challenges like other industries such as staffing shortages, financial burdens, all the while being asked to provide more with less. So how are HLC members experiencing HLC processes?

Overall, 40% of respondents strongly agreed that their institutions had sufficient time to complete HLC processes and 31% indicated having sufficient staff resources to complete HLC processes. The combined percentages of respondents who either strongly and somewhat agreed about these issues resulted in 80% agreement with having sufficient time and 72% agreement with having sufficient staff resources.

Figure 16: Institutions' Experience With HLC Processes



As seen in the Figure 17, the majority of all participating ALOs (56%) strongly agreed that their institutions provided support for their roles as ALOs. A larger share of respondents from Associate's colleges expressed strong agreement on the topic of institutional support (68%) when compared with doctoral-degree-granting (57%), Bachelor's-degree-granting (53%) and Master's-degree-granting institutions (42%).

Figure 17: ALOs on "My institution supports me in my role as the ALO"

Control Type	Strongly agree		Somewhat agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Somewhat disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Public	104	60%	46	27%	14	8%	6	3%	2	1%	172	100%
Private NFP	72	48%	50	33%	16	11%	9	6%	3	2%	150	100%
Private FP	8	80%	1	10%		0%		0%	1	10%	10	100%
Tribal	7	88%	1	13%		0%		0%		0%	8	100%
Not defined	2	100%		0%		0%		0%		0%	2	100%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>100%</b>

HLC will continue to seek input from members and other stakeholders to improve its processes and to enhance support where challenges associated with accreditation activities are identified.

## Peer Reviewers' Experience and Processes

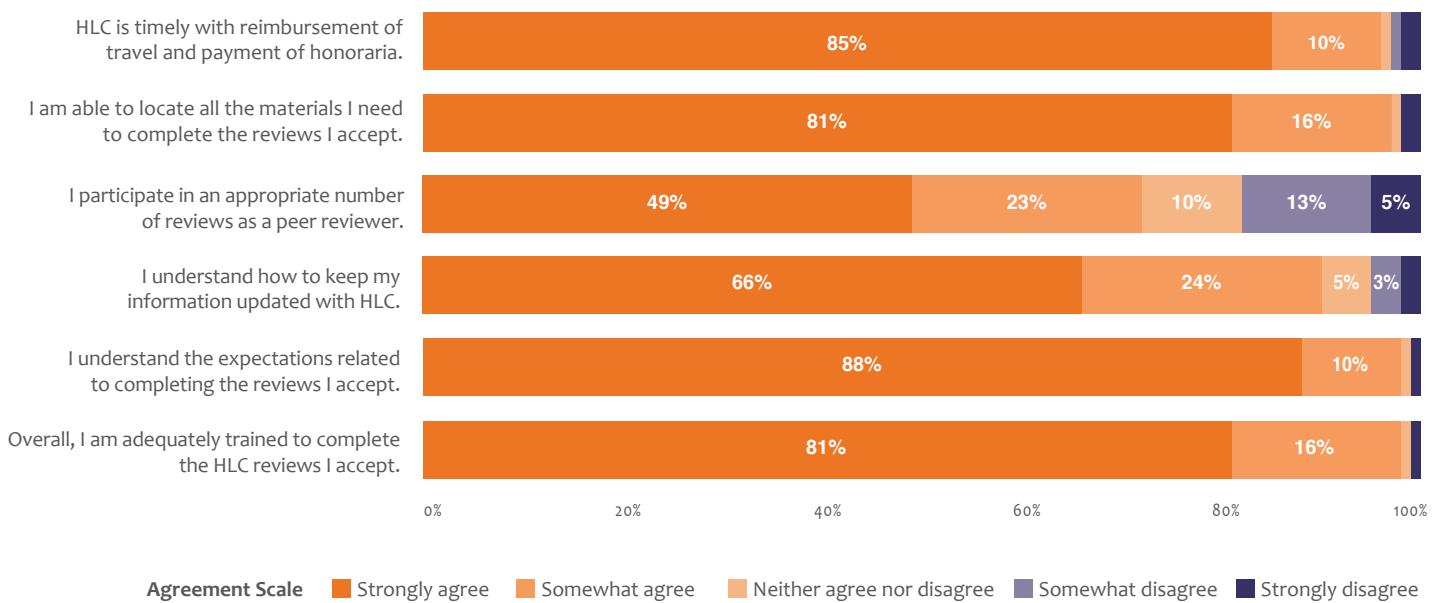
Peer reviewers, who serve as HLC's volunteers, fulfill an essential role in the accreditation relationship.

Regarding the preparation for review assignments as a peer reviewer, the majority of respondents indicated affirmatively (or, in other words, "strongly agreed") that they understood the expectations of the assigned reviews (88%), that they were adequately trained to conduct the reviews (81%), and that they were able to locate all the materials needed for the reviews (81%).

Reflecting on their overall engagement in peer review activities, slightly under half of respondents (49%) strongly agreed that they participated in an appropriate number of reviews, while 5% of respondents strongly disagreed on this same question.

Two-thirds of respondents (66%) indicated affirmatively that they understood how to update their information with HLC. Most respondents (85%) strongly agreed that HLC was timely in processing reimbursements for peer reviewers.

Figure 18: Peer Reviewers' Experience and Processes



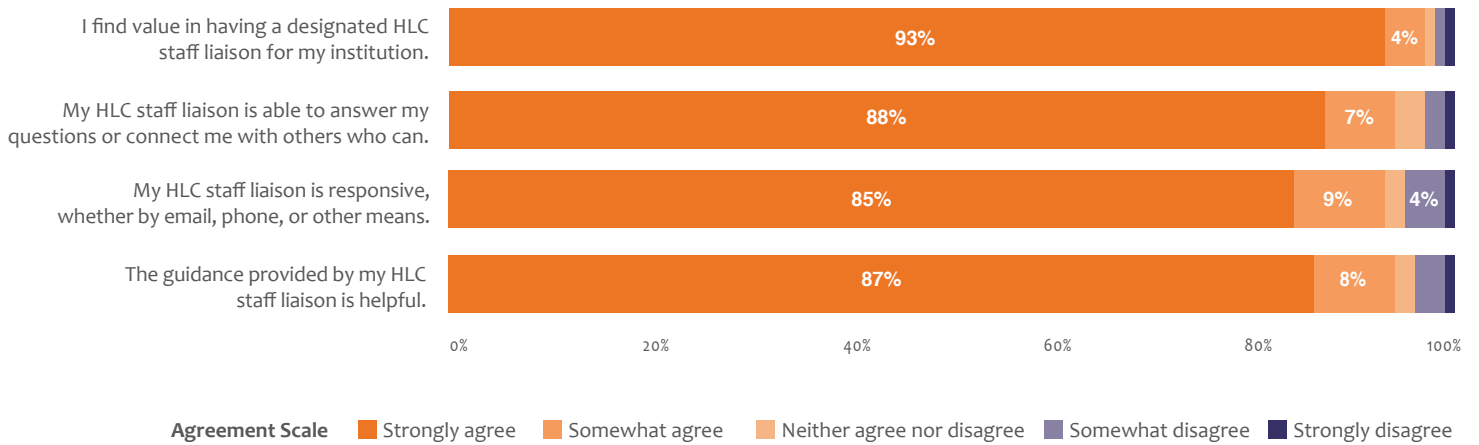
Note: Percentages are rounded and may not add up to 100%.

Following the pivot required by the pandemic, HLC will continue to provide peer reviewers with training opportunities and resources in a timely manner. HLC will also evaluate the assignment scheduling and rotation process to improve the peer reviewers' ability to engage with a variety of assignments.

## Experience Working With HLC Staff Liaisons

The vast majority of respondents reported having a good experience working with HLC staff liaisons in the past year. Specifically, 93% of respondents strongly affirmed the value of having a designated staff liaison for their institution, 88% strongly agreed that HLC staff liaison helped answer their questions, 87% strongly agreed that they received helpful guidance from staff liaisons, and 85% strongly agreed that they received helpful guidance from staff liaisons, and 85% strongly affirmed that HLC staff liaisons were communicating with them responsively.

Figure 19: Experience Working With HLC Staff Liaisons



Note: Percentages are rounded and may not add up to 100%.

HLC will continue to build strong relationships with its member institutional representatives. HLC thanks the membership for their continued feedback and support. HLC is committed to being an exemplary value-added membership organization.