

The background features several large, overlapping circles in shades of purple and yellow. The circles are arranged in a way that they appear to be floating or overlapping each other, creating a dynamic and colorful backdrop for the text.

# Changing the Conversation

Research, Surprising Findings, and the  
Volunteer Screening Program

April 25, 2023



# Agenda

- Background
  - The Volunteer Screening Program (VSP)
  - Context for Research
- Our Approach
- Methods/Analysis
- Findings & Learning Moments
- Q & A

# What is VSP?

## The Volunteer Screening Program

- Partnership between Volunteer Alberta and Government of Alberta
- Provides educational resources and tools designed to help nonprofit voluntary sector (NPVS) organizations improve their volunteer screening processes and procedures
- Offers financial opportunities to aid organizations in their volunteer screening efforts, including the Vulnerable Sector Check Fee Waiver and Volunteer Screening Development Grants





# Context for Research

- Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Social Justice (IDEAS)
  - 6 years of VSP
  - Changes due to pandemic
  - Equity, diversity, inclusion, justice
  - “Best practices” → “Good practices”

# Our Approach

**01. Check Ourselves & Identify Gaps**

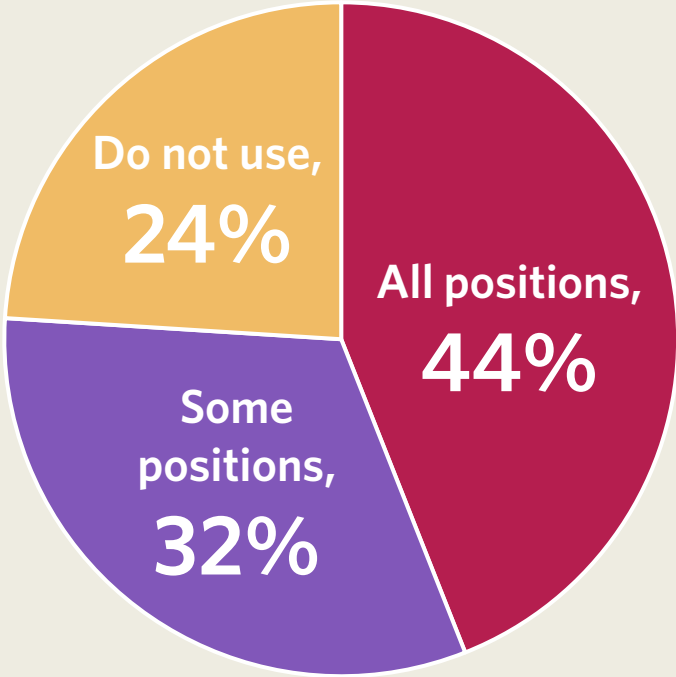
**02. Establish Benchmarks & Trends**

**03. Adapt Our Program**

The activities included:

- Four focus groups with NPVS staff
- Four focus groups with volunteers
- A NPVS Benchmark Survey
- A Volunteer Benchmark Survey

# Methods/Analysis

Outcome	Indicator	Survey Question(s)	Current Benchmark	Future Focus Areas
<p>Nonprofit organizations have an in-depth understanding of the role of screening in the overall volunteer engagement process, and how it affects volunteer equitability.</p>	<p>Increased use of risk assessments for all volunteer roles at an organization</p>	<p>8. How consistently does your organization use risk assessments when developing or updating volunteer positions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All volunteer positions undergo risk assessments</li> <li>- Some volunteer positions undergo risk assessments</li> <li>- No volunteer positions undergo risk assessments</li> </ul> <p>9. What does your organization's risk assessment process look like? (long answer)</p>	 <p>Qualitative data reveals 45% of the answers reflect what VA has identified as good practices in conducting risk assessments.</p>	<p>Data suggests VA could deepen its work with organizations to explain what a risk assessment is; work with them to establish good practices in conducting risk assessments; and to highlight the importance of conducting risk assessments for all volunteer positions on a regular / reoccurring basis.</p>

# Findings & Learning Moments

## Survey Demographics

Nonprofit Survey	Volunteer Survey
→ 71 respondents	→ 38 respondents
→ 89% Nonprofits	
→ Culture/Recreation, Social Services, and Health	
→ 92% work with vulnerable populations	→ 85% did not identify as belonging to a vulnerable group
→ Most serve Calgary Zone, Edmonton Zone, and Central zone	→ Heavy majority volunteered in the Edmonton zone
→ Organizations serve a diverse set of equity-deserving communities. Very few organizations stated that they did not serve any equity-deserving communities.	→ 47% of respondents identified as belong to at least one equity-deserving group. 50% do not identify as belong to an equity-deserving group. One individual selected that they preferred not to say.
→ 79% = paid staff 21% = volunteers	

## Why does your organization screen its volunteers?

**51%**

Public safety/protection of vulnerable people

**14%**

To match volunteers to the right role

**17%**

BOTH, safety & matching volunteers to the right role

## Why do you believe organizations screen their volunteers?

**32%**

Public safety/protection of vulnerable people

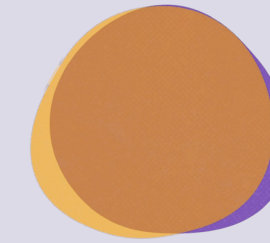
**18%**

To match volunteers to the right role

**21%**

BOTH, safety & matching volunteers to the right role

# Learning Moment: Why Screen?



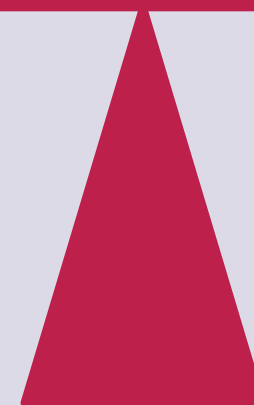
Why does your organization screen its volunteers?

Why do you believe organizations screen their volunteers?

Volunteer Screening should be approached as balanced process to address **both**:

Safety/ Protection

Match/ Fulfillment



# Feedback & Evaluation

How do we know our screening practices  
fit our needs/ volunteer's needs?

# To what extent do your volunteer screening practices fit your organization's needs?

Our volunteer screening practices do not fit our needs

5%

Our volunteer screening practices fit our needs somewhat

31%

Our volunteer screening practices fit our needs completely

64%

Why do your volunteer screening practices not fit your organization's needs completely, and what do you hope to improve within your screening practices?

"Unsure. We use the VSP and templates from the website which are good. A lot has changed over the covid period and perhaps some screening practises need to be revised to fit with the changes."

"It just takes time and time is the culprit."

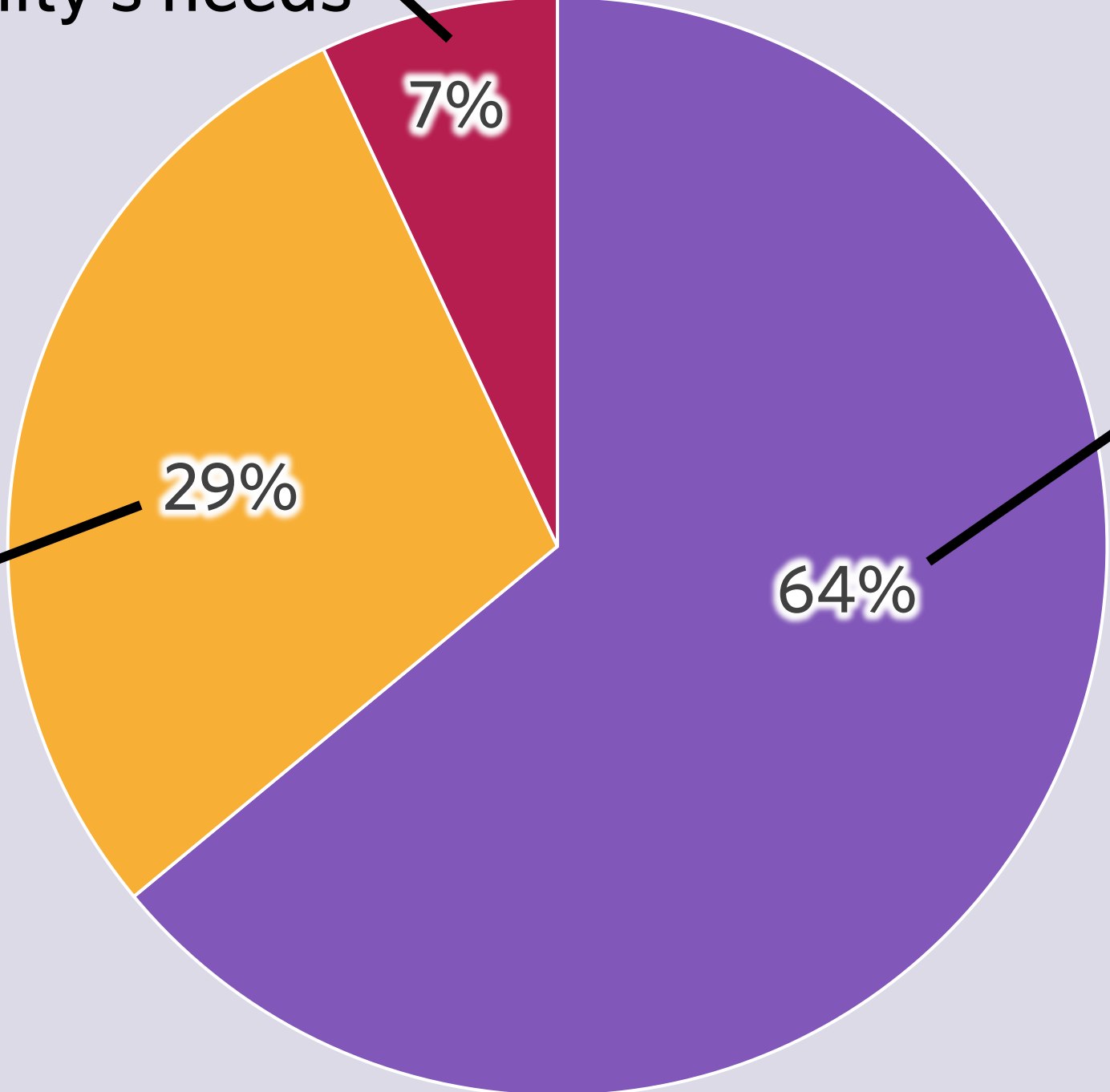
"As we expand our team, we will be looking to better manage our volunteers, ensuring timely updates of VSC and police checks as well as maintaining up to date and accurate volunteer information."

To what extent do your volunteer screening practices fit your community members' needs? For this question, community members include participants/clients, and family or caretakers of participants/clients.

Our volunteer screening practices do not fit our community's needs

Our volunteer screening practices fit our community's needs somewhat

Our volunteer screening practices fit our community's needs completely






Why do your volunteer screening practices not fit your community's needs completely, and what do you hope to improve within your screening practices?

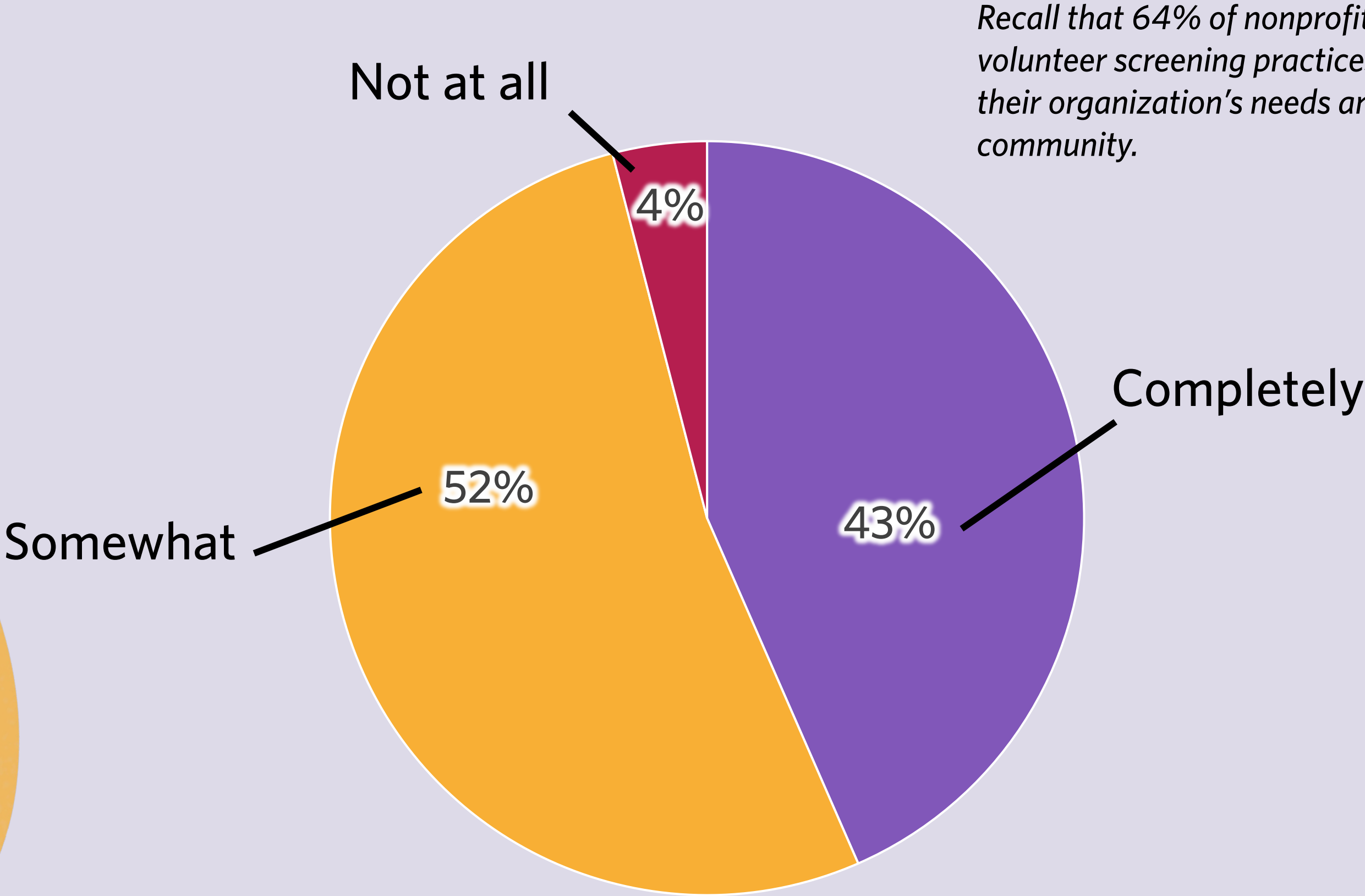
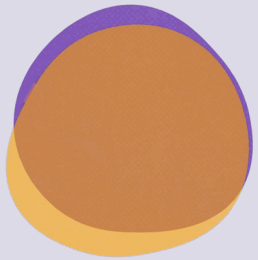
"We have no formal process, and we need one to be posted on our website"

"Some volunteers feel intimidated doing a PIC"



"Timing. We have a session that all individuals need to attend first before the application process. The timing doesn't work for all. Also, not everyone wants to attend this session so they screen themselves out from the onset. Language - this is all facilitated in English and with clients where English is an additional language, some screen themselves out immediately. Culture - screening practises are structured and based around North American Caucasian practises which are sometimes challenging, daunting/overwhelming or confusing to individuals that come from other cultural frames of reference."

# To what extent do you feel the volunteer screening practices you've experienced meet your needs?



*Recall that 64% of nonprofits indicated that their volunteer screening practices “completely” met their organization’s needs and the needs of their community.*



Why do the volunteer screening practices you've experienced not fit your needs completely?

What do you think could improve?



"I've never been screened; there's little opportunity to dialogue about interests. It's all about what the [organization] needs for operations. I might have some flexibility in my role in how I carry out tasks/responsibilities, but that's most often provided after a longer time of service"

"The requirements for screening were not made clear at the time of volunteering."

"I was not able to meet with the volunteer coordinator to explain my motivation for volunteering and abilities for the role."

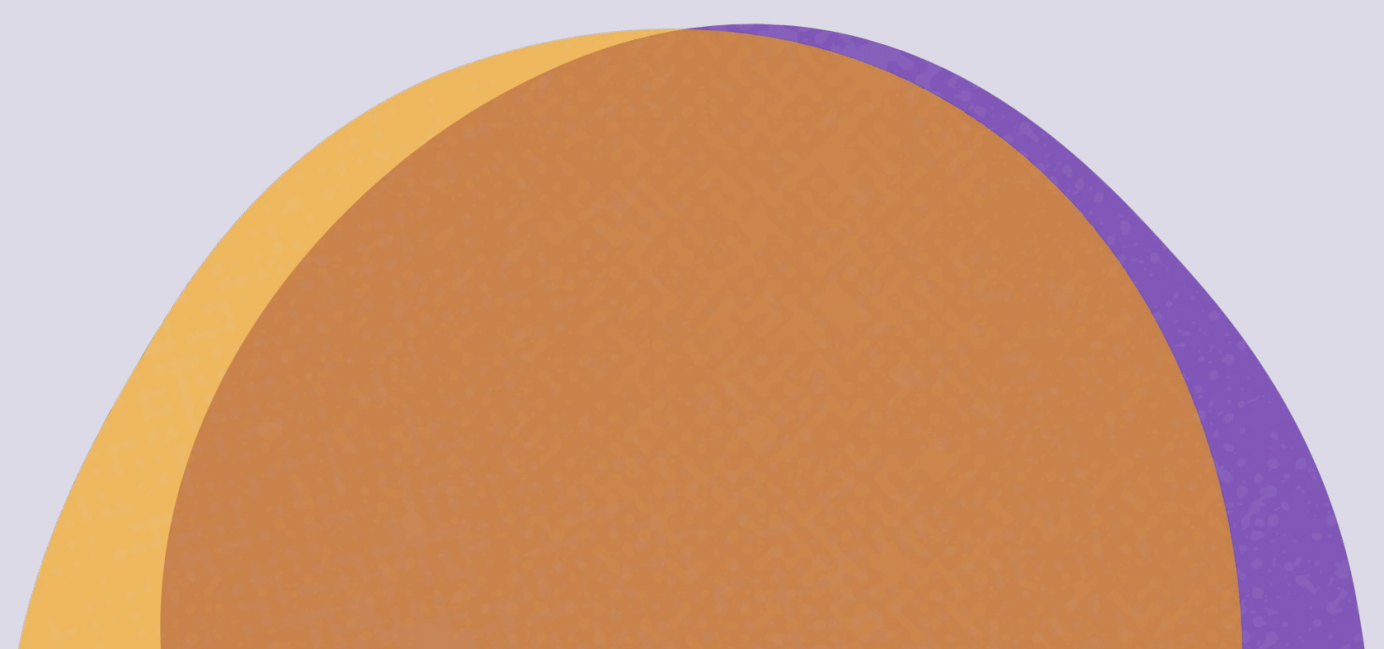
"Because, it's just stressful getting required documents for screening in a volunteer position."



Why do the volunteer screening practices you've experienced not fit your needs completely?

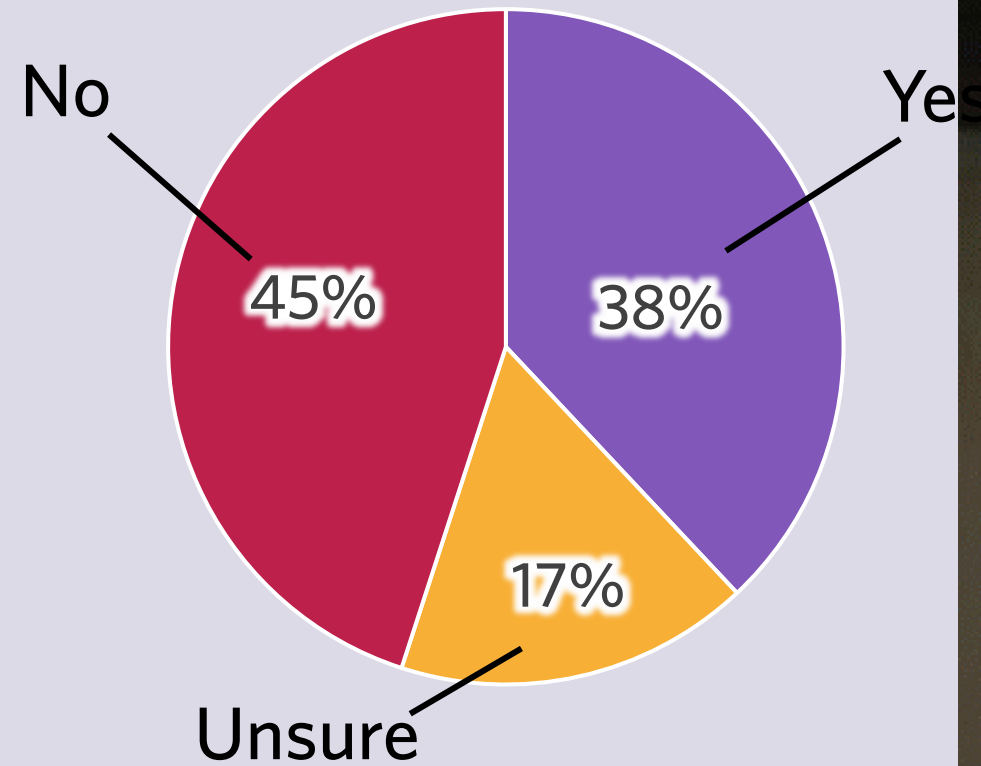
What do you think could improve?

“Screening is just **one portion** of the recruiting process...but **what happens next is what makes the difference** in the volunteer-organization relationship... and that is the onboarding process. **A tight relationship between the volunteer and the organization must be built,** or at least started up to generate positive results. Otherwise, they just deliver “some work experience” for the volunteer, and “some job done” for the organization.”

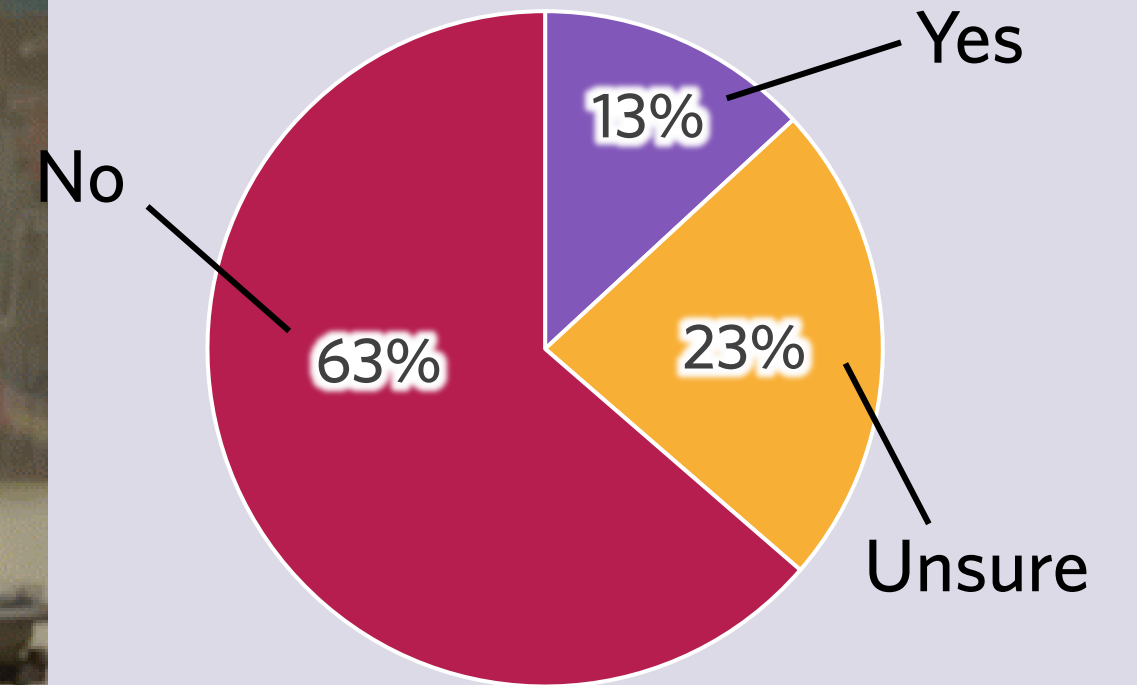


Recall that 64% of respondents to the NPVS Survey indicated that their volunteer screening practices "completely" met the needs of their community.

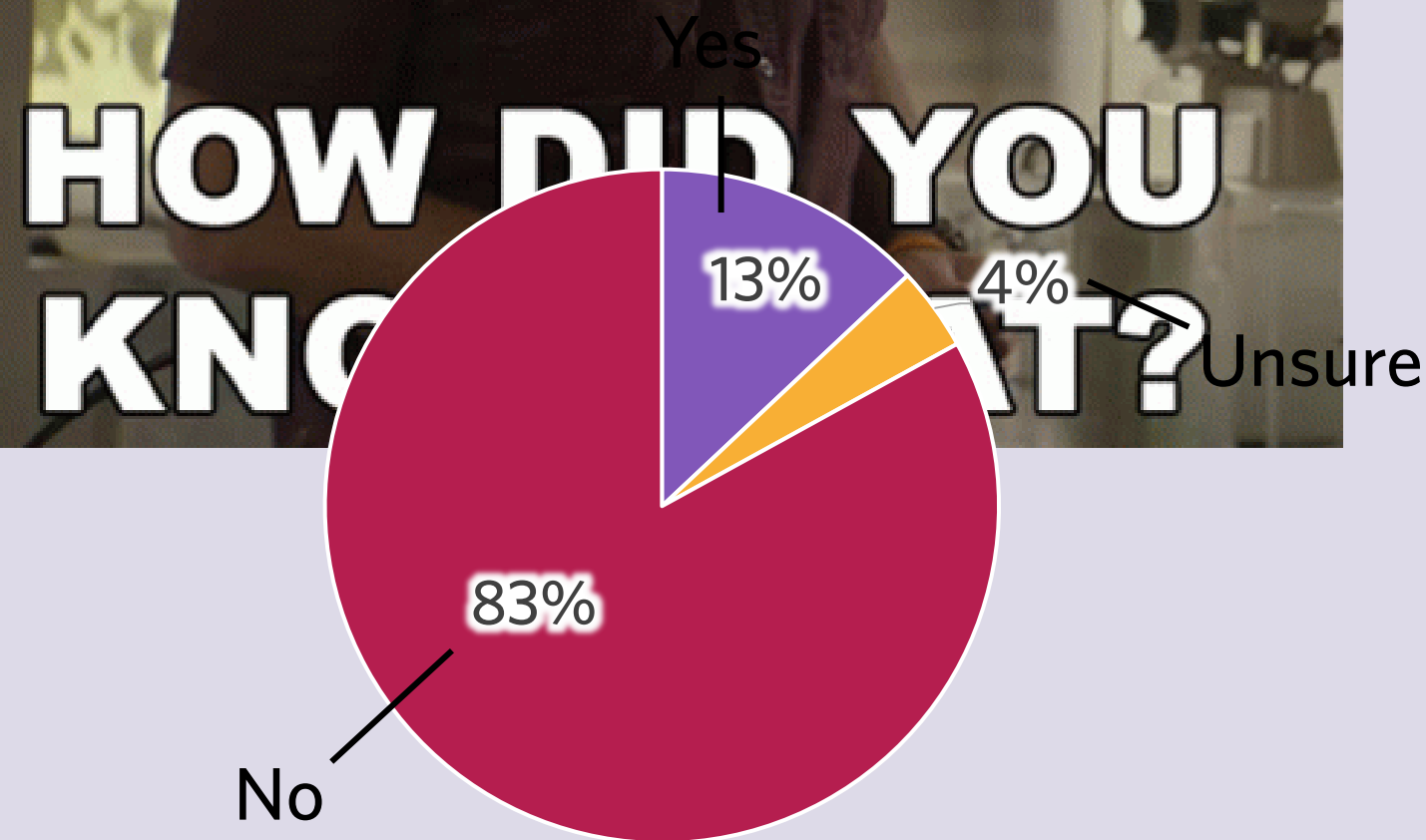
Does your organization seek feedback on its volunteer screening practices from its volunteers?



Does your organization seek feedback on its volunteer screening practices from community members?



Have you ever been asked to provide feedback on an organization's screening practices?





If your organization does not seek feedback on its volunteer screening practices from volunteers/community members, why not?

 They hadn't thought to or didn't know they could/should.

 They feel volunteers/community members don't have enough information or expertise to be involved in those conversations.

 They don't have the resources or capacity to engage community members on these topics.

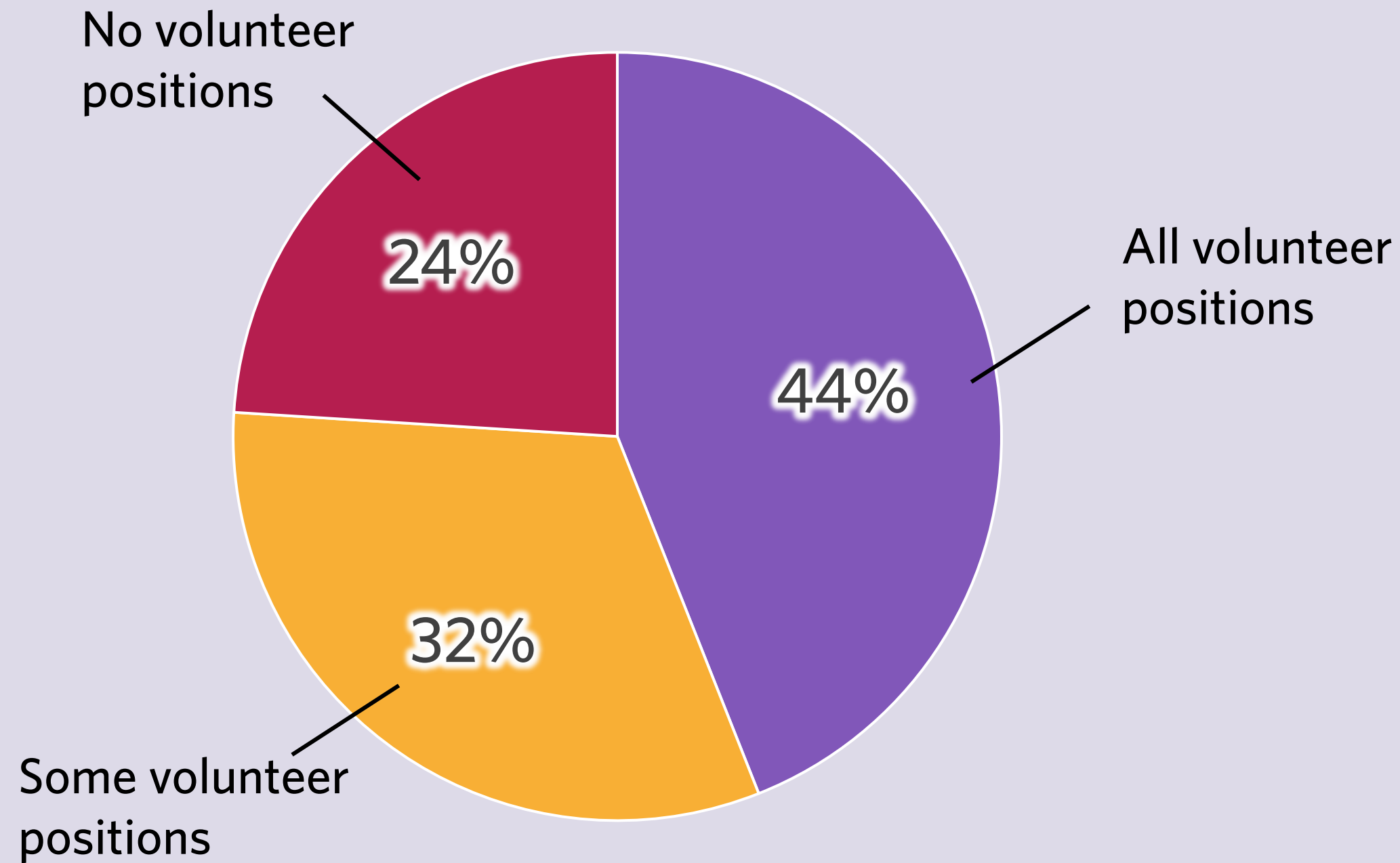


# Learning Moment: Feedback & Evaluation

Do your screening practices fit your/volunteer/community's needs and do you ask those people for feedback on your screening practices?

We recommend organizations take **an intentional and inclusive** approach to seek feedback about your volunteer screening practices and policies. It is good practice to involve volunteers, clients/participants, families, and the wider community in conversations about your volunteer screening practices and policies.

# How consistently does your organization use risk assessments when developing or updating volunteer positions?



# Learning Moment: Risk Assessments

What does your organization's risk assessment process look like?

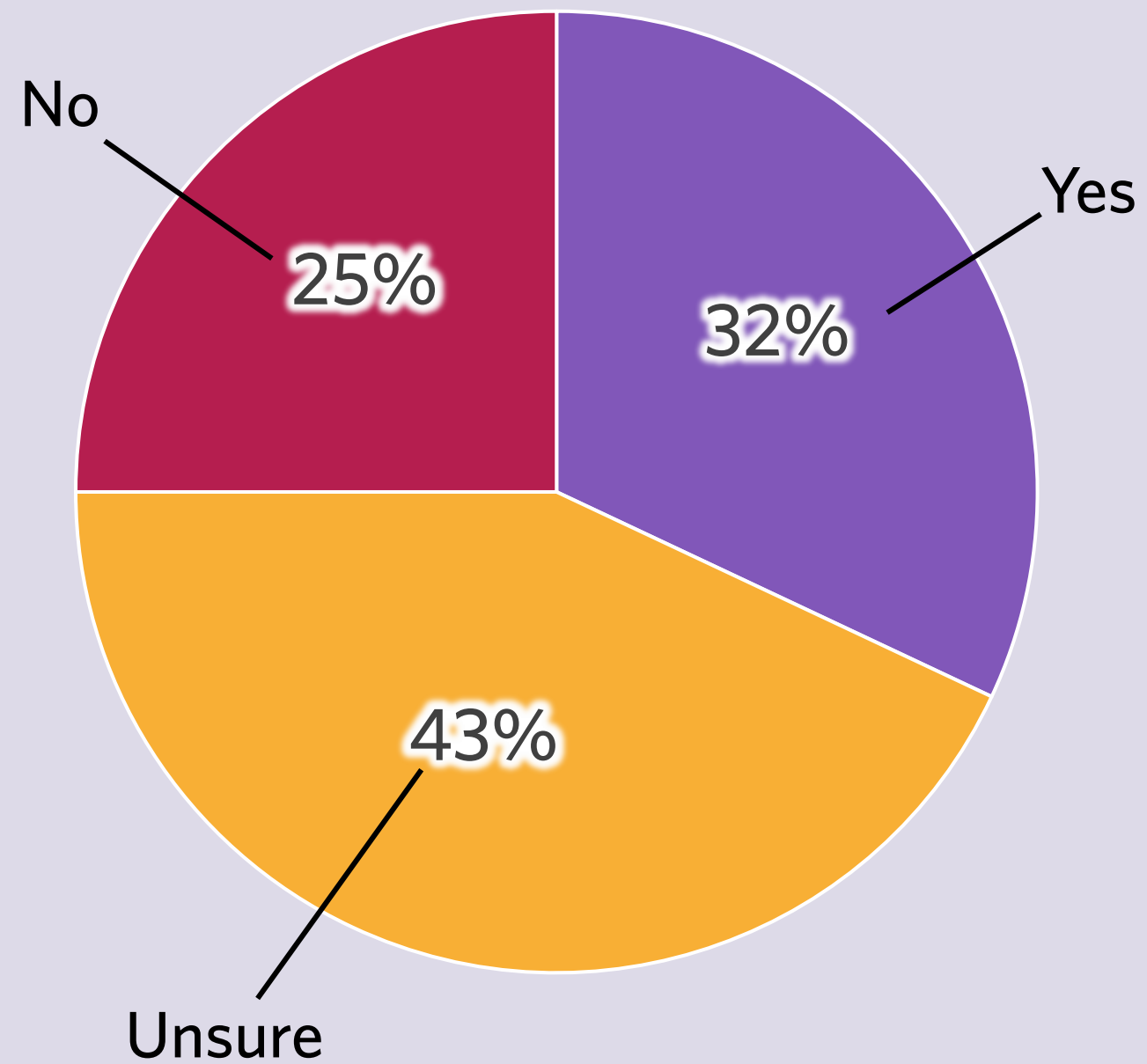
Risk assessments should be conducted on overall volunteer positions, not the individual volunteers. Organizations should regularly be reviewing your volunteer positions overall for the risk to your program participants/clients, the volunteers themselves, or risk to the organization as a whole.



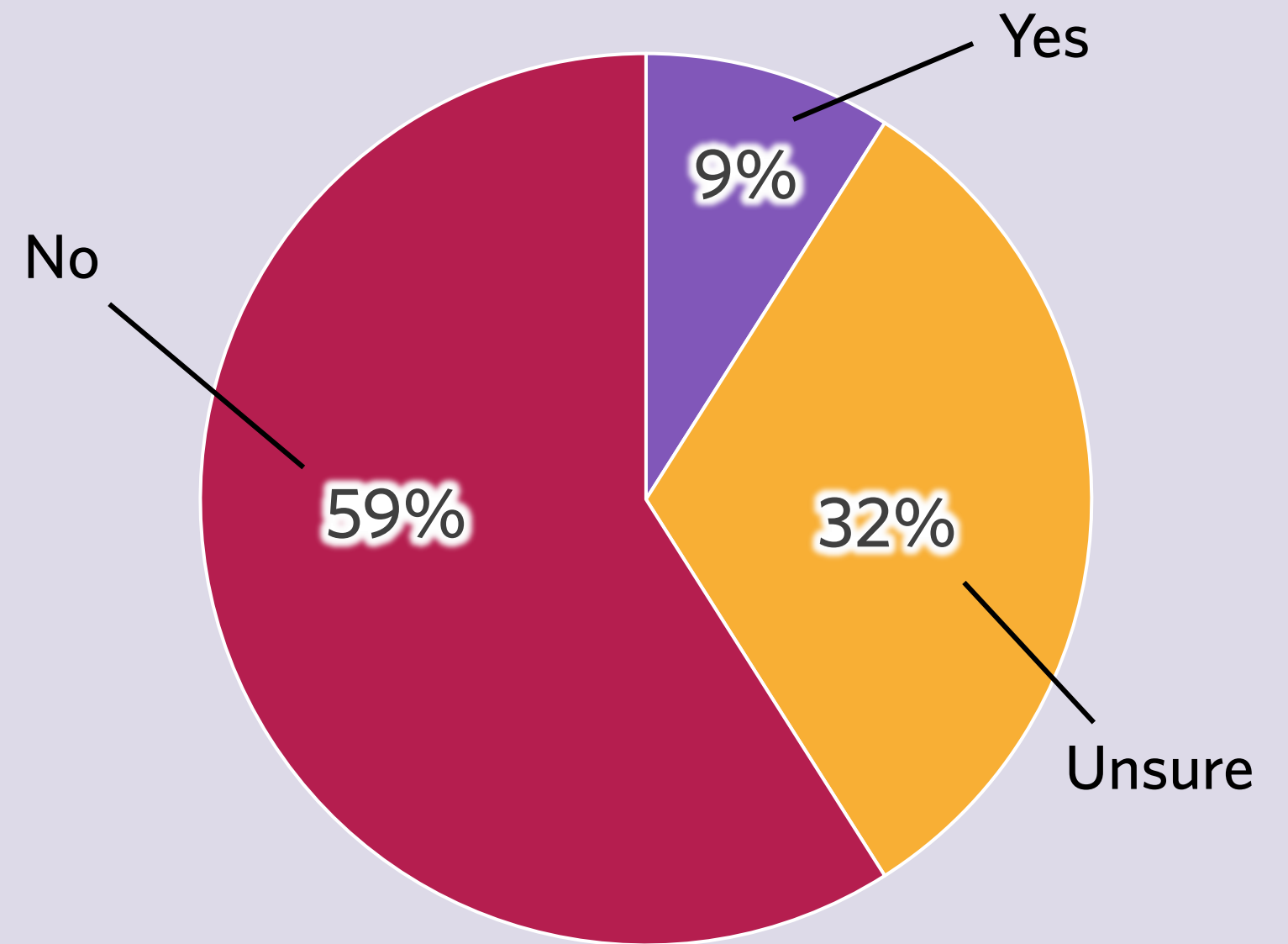
# Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, & Social Justice (IDEAS)

Are your volunteer screening practices  
equitable and inclusive?

Has your organization implemented any volunteer screening policies and/or practices intended to improve equitability for volunteers?



Do you know of any organizations who use volunteer screening practices or policies that are intended to improve equitability for volunteers in the screening process? Or do you recall a time when an organization made an accommodation for you or another volunteer?



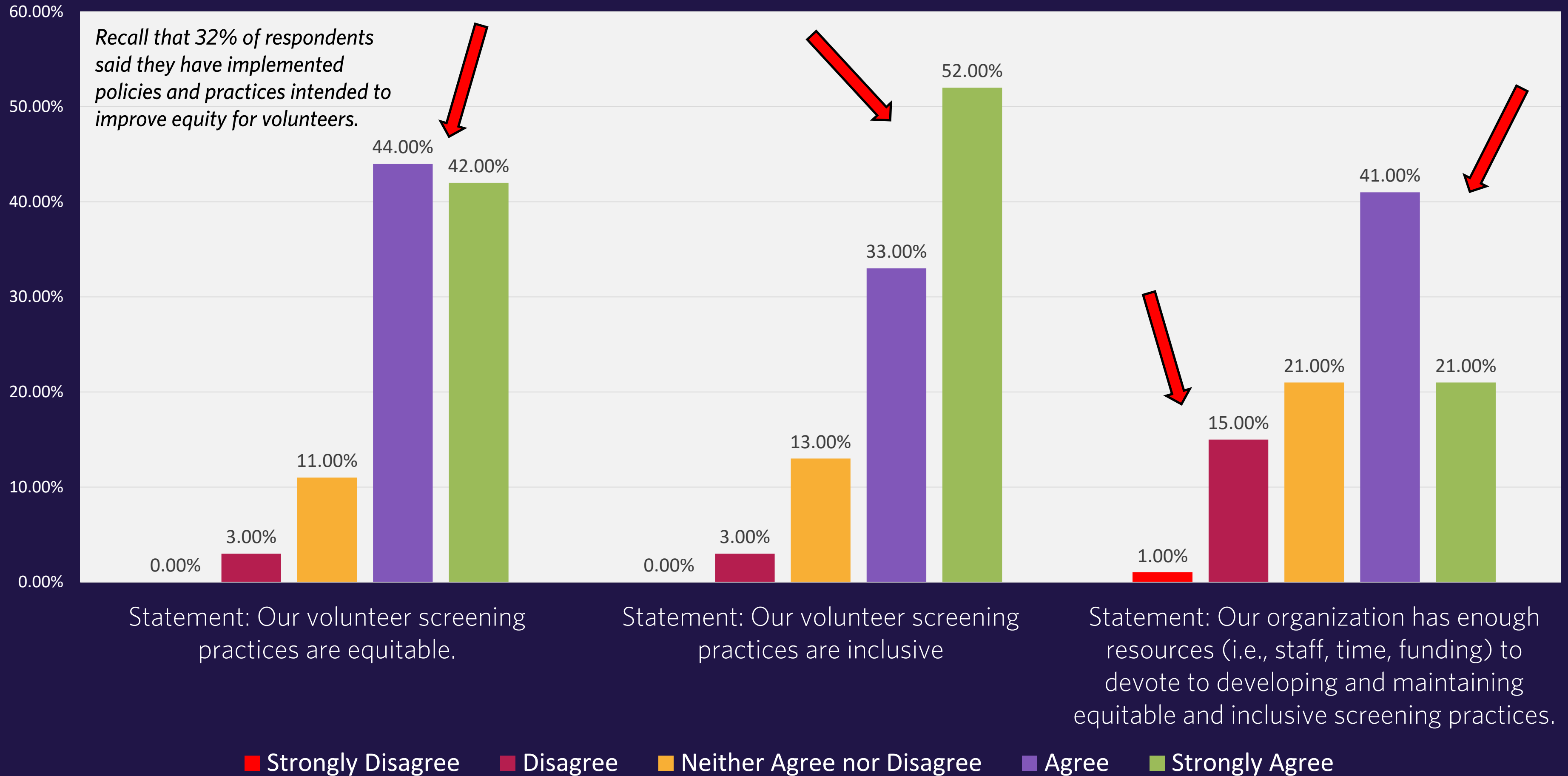
Please provide a description or a link to your equity-based policies/practices.

“Decolonizing screening which has basically meant doing very little screening. We post a position and if the volunteer seems like a good fit, we approve them ... and give them instructions on how to do the job. Most of our positions are virtual. All they need to do is complete the application [online] which takes less than 5 mins.”

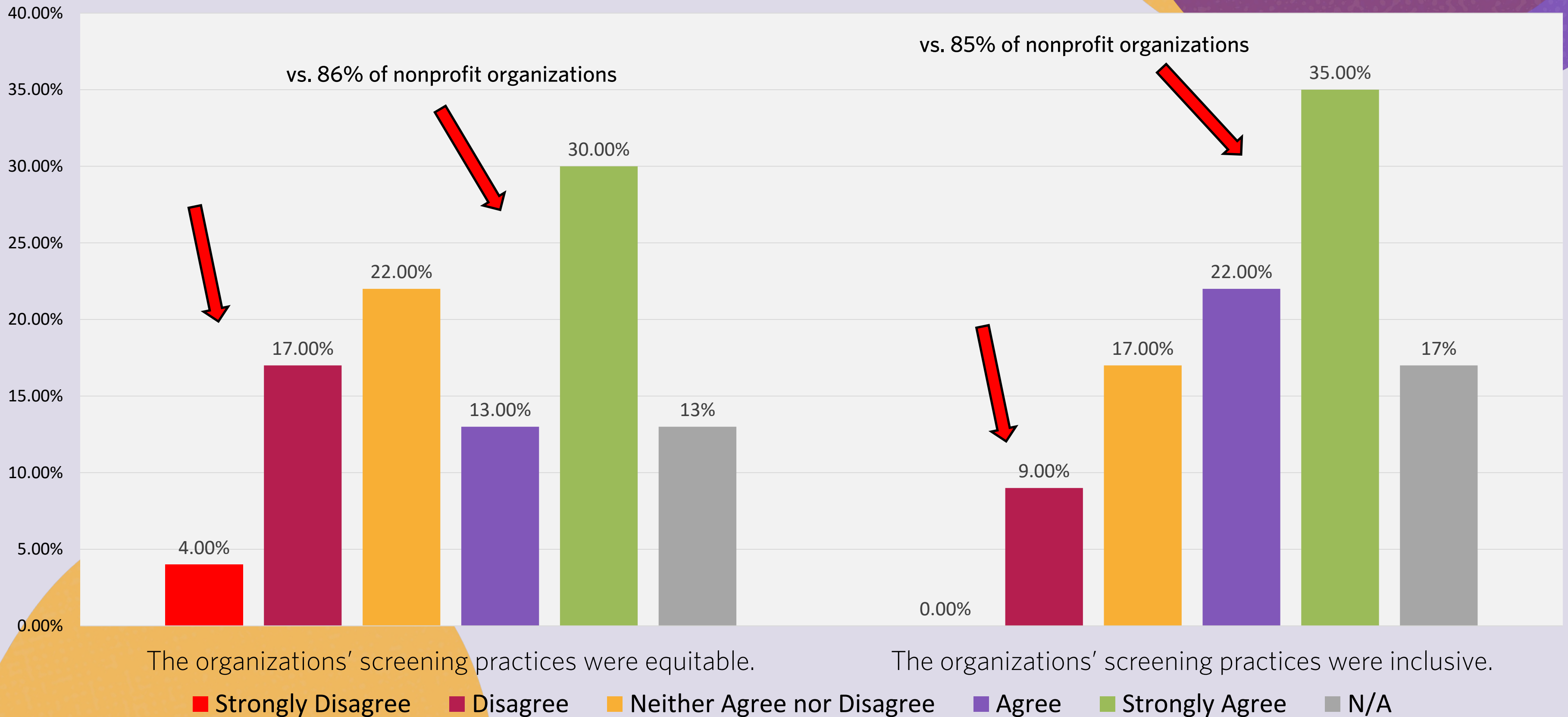
“We have working agreements with various organizations that support vulnerable persons who wish to volunteer with us to help navigate the screening process as well as continuous support during their volunteer time.”



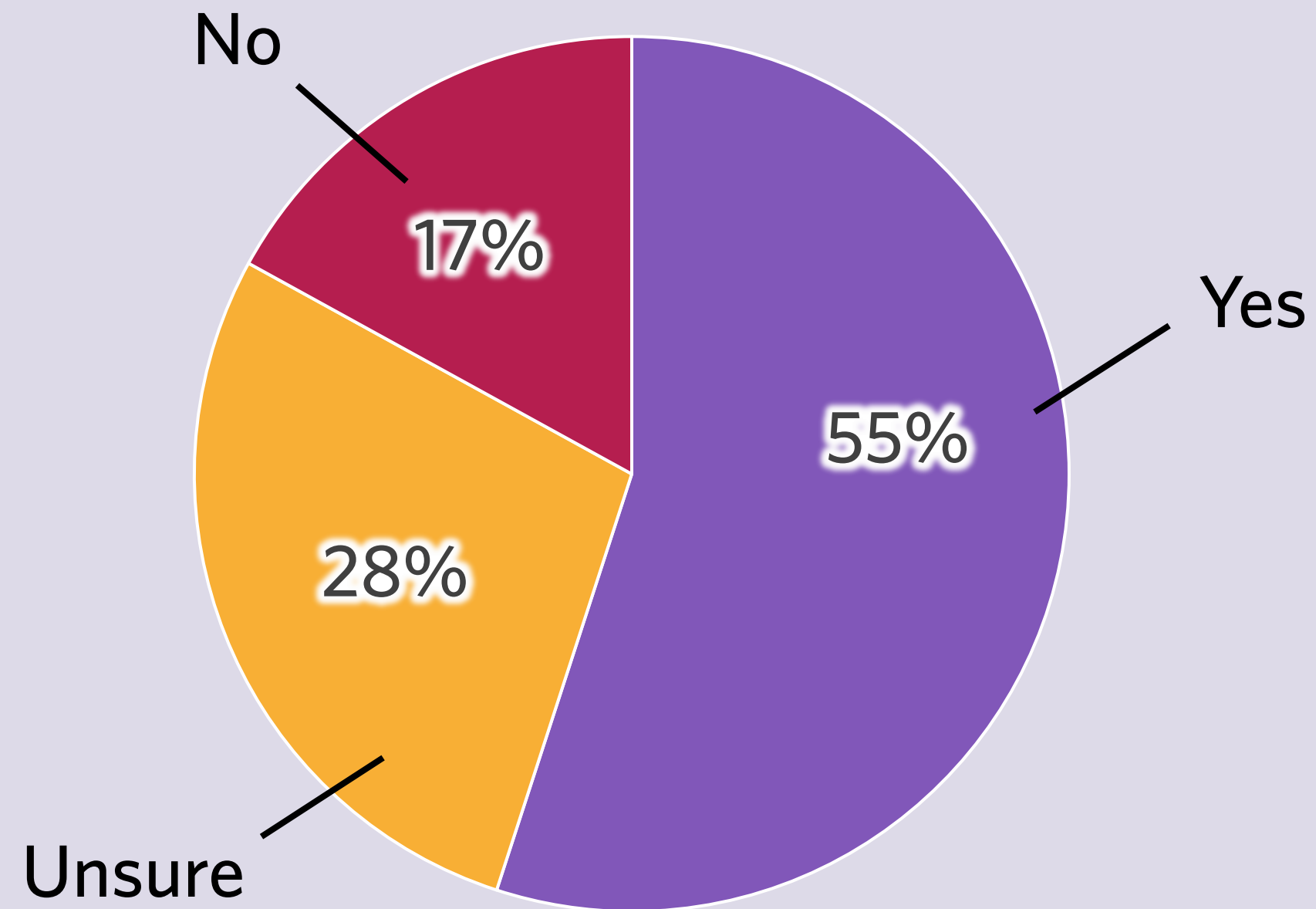
Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding your organization:



Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements. We recognize you may have volunteered with multiple different organizations in the past year, please answer these statements based on the volunteer experience you were most engaged with in the past year.



Is your organization interested in exploring/updating their screening policies from an equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) perspective?



# Learning Moment: Equity & Inclusion

Are your organization's volunteer screening practices and policies equitable and inclusive?

We recommend organizations not assume their policies are equitable and inclusive, and instead, seek feedback from volunteers, participants, and the wider community.

We know that having concrete policies is one way to be accountable and ensure your organization is reducing participation barriers and working towards an entirely equitable and inclusive volunteer program. **However, nourishing a culture of equity and inclusion in your organization** and volunteer programs requires more than policy work. We must also take time as individuals and as organizations to do the deep inner work to understand and interrogate our ways of making sense of the world, and how they have biases embedded within them.

# Overall Screening Process and Background Checks



VOLUNTEER  
ALBERTA

Please explain your understanding of when it is appropriate/necessary to obtain a Vulnerable Sector Check for a prospective volunteer?

28%

Provided answers that VA believes are reflective of good practices\* in obtaining VSCs.

Please explain your understanding of when it is appropriate/necessary to obtain a Vulnerable Sector Check (VSC) for your volunteer role.

4%

Provided answers that VA believes are reflective of good practices\* in obtaining VSCs.

*\*Good practices in obtaining VSCs: Volunteer works directly with vulnerable populations, has a position of trust or authority over the vulnerable population, and/or unsupervised access to the vulnerable population.*

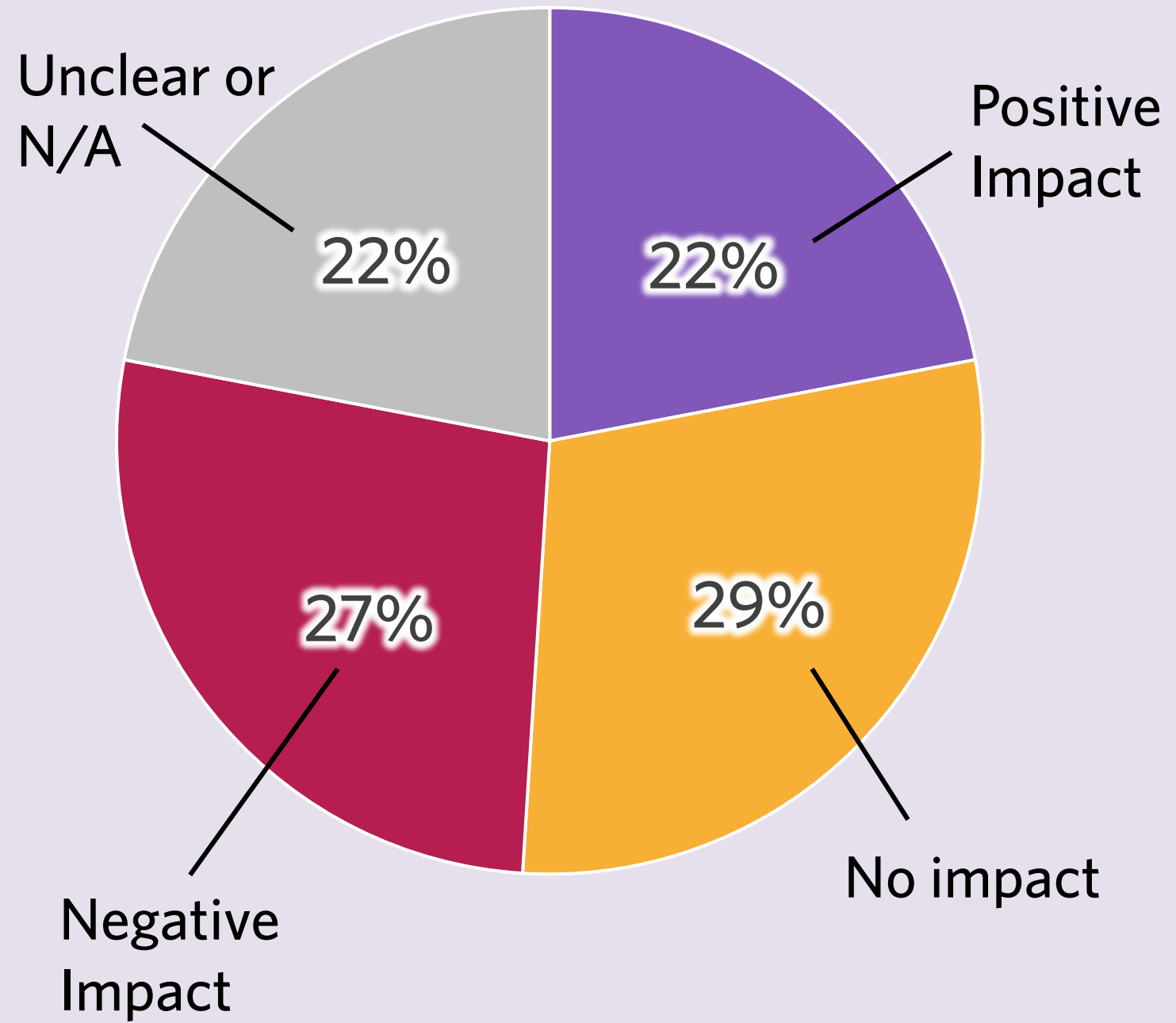
44%

Stated VSCs are appropriate when volunteers are working directly with vulnerable populations, regardless of position of trust or authority, and/or unsupervised access.

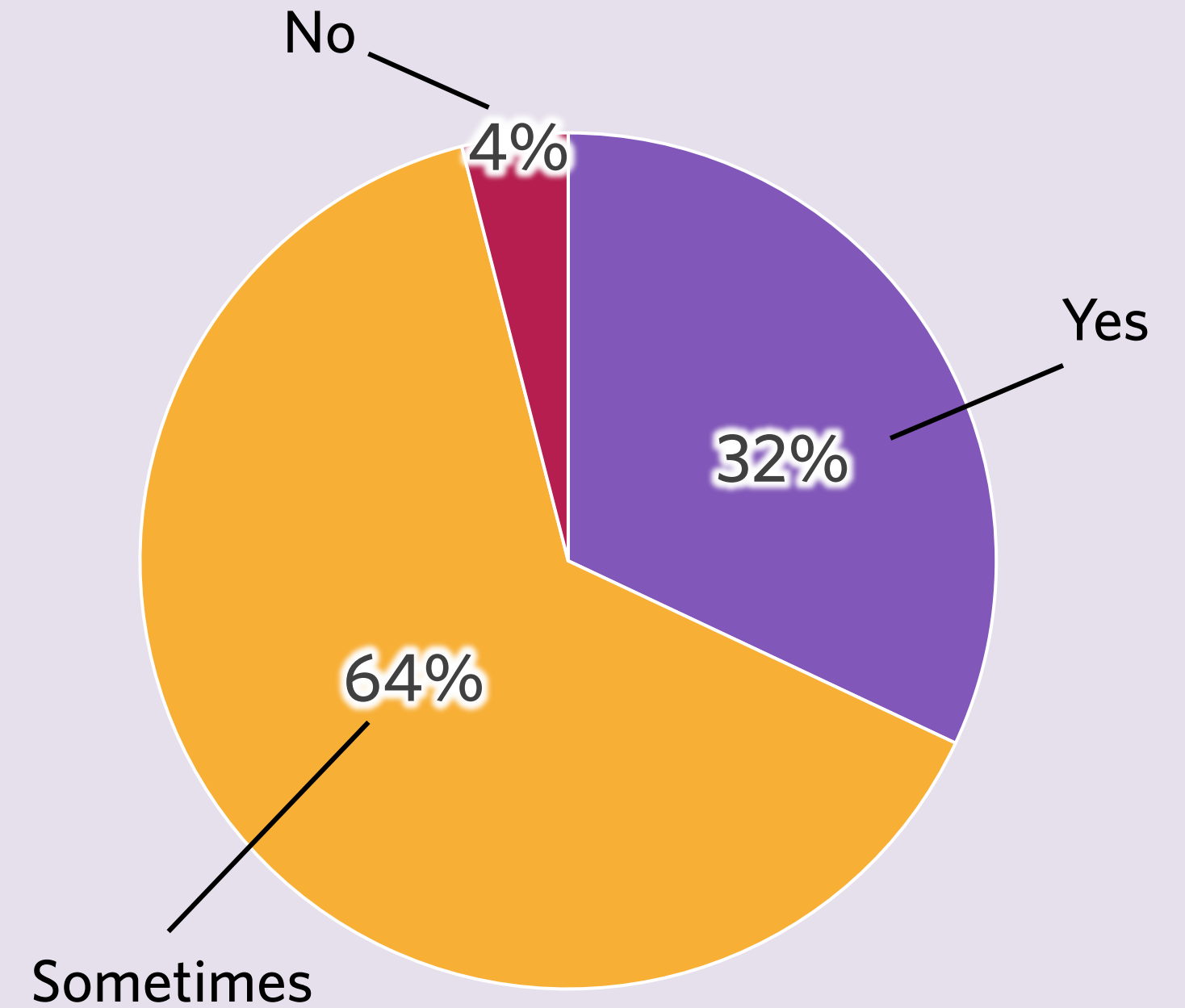
52%

Stated VSCs are appropriate when volunteers are working directly with vulnerable populations, regardless of position of trust or authority, and/or unsupervised access.

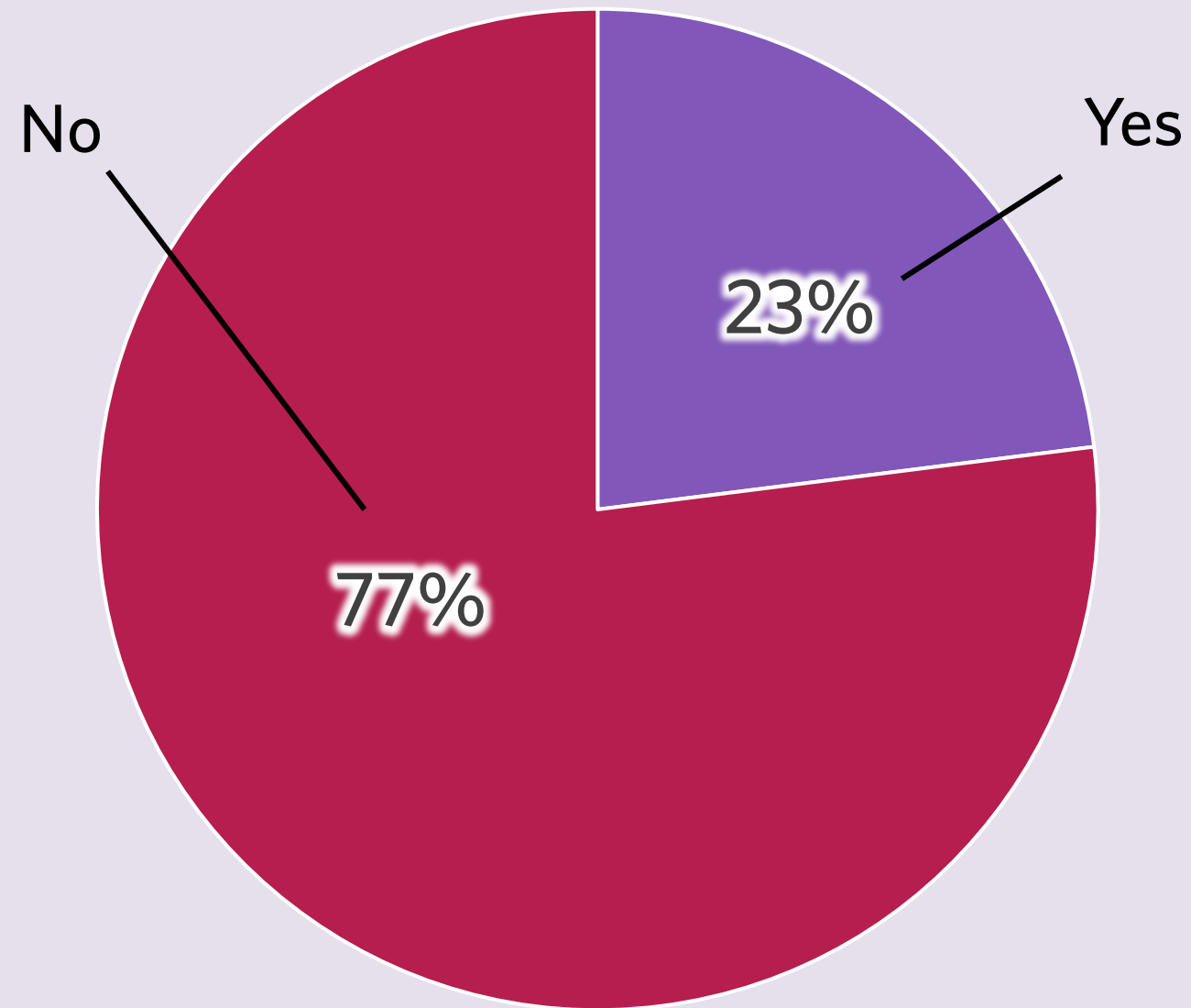
If applicable, how have the use of background checks in your screening process impacted your volunteer engagement? If not applicable, please write N/A.



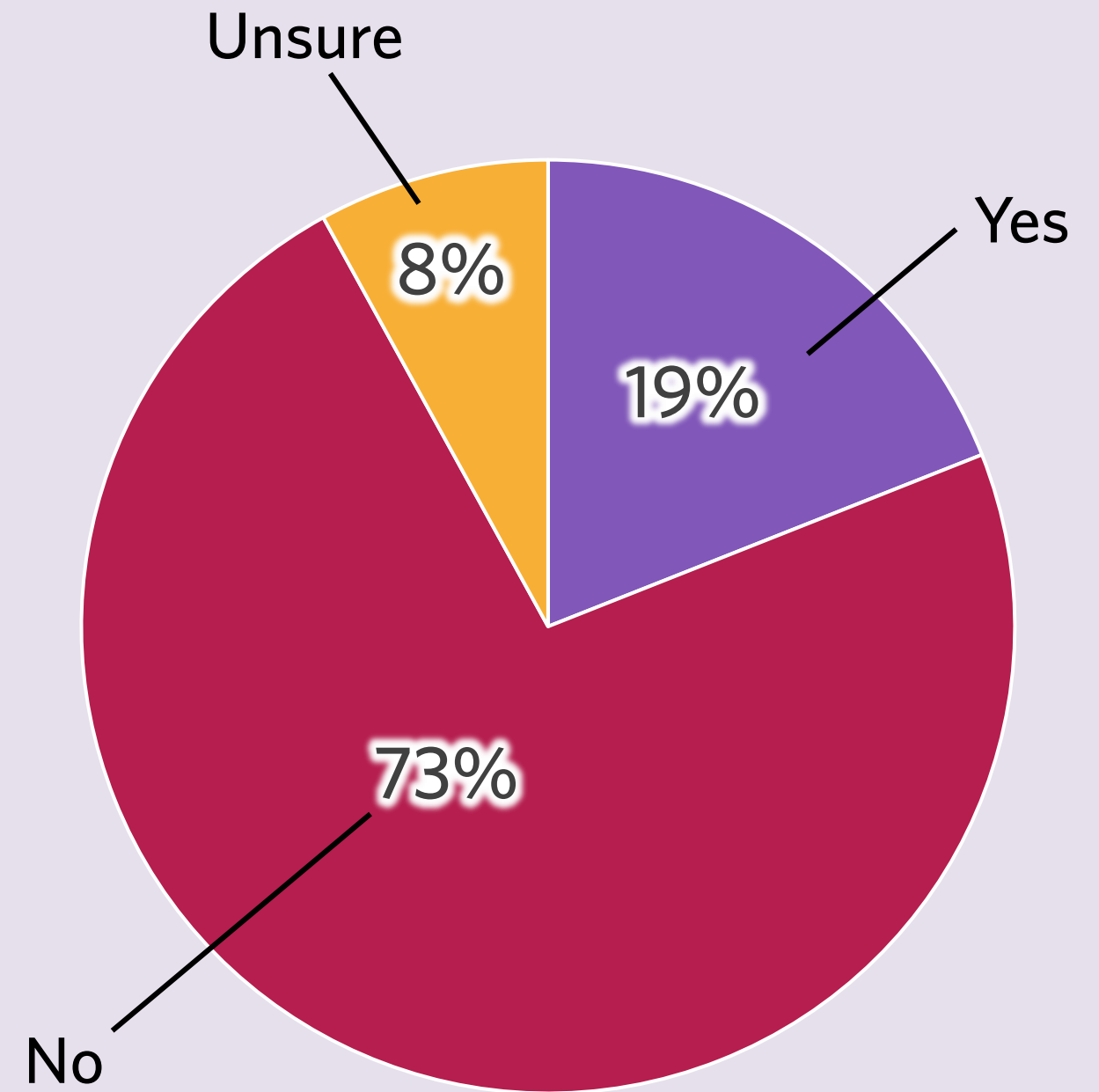
Do you think background checks (PICs, VSCs, CRCs, etc.) should be required to volunteer?



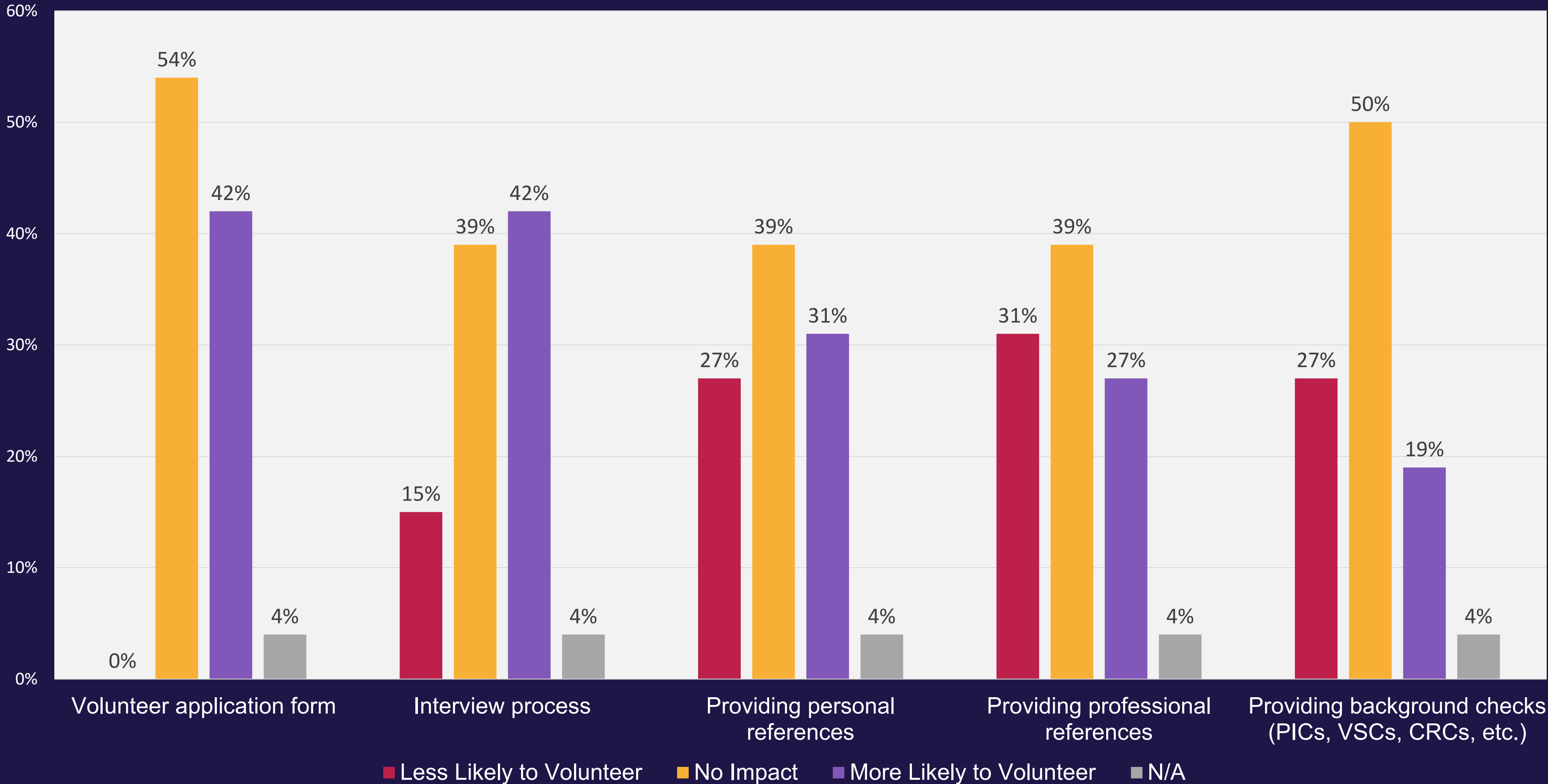
Have you ever not applied for a volunteer role due to screening requirements?



Have you ever experienced volunteer screening as a barrier to volunteering?



On a scale of 1-5, please indicate how each of the below methods of volunteer screening would impact your engagement as a volunteer.



Have you ever not applied for a volunteer role due to screening requirements?

Have you ever experienced volunteer screening as a barrier to volunteering?

On a scale of 1-5, please indicate how each of the below methods of volunteer screening would impact your engagement as a volunteer.

**Would you like to elaborate on your answers to the 3 questions above?**

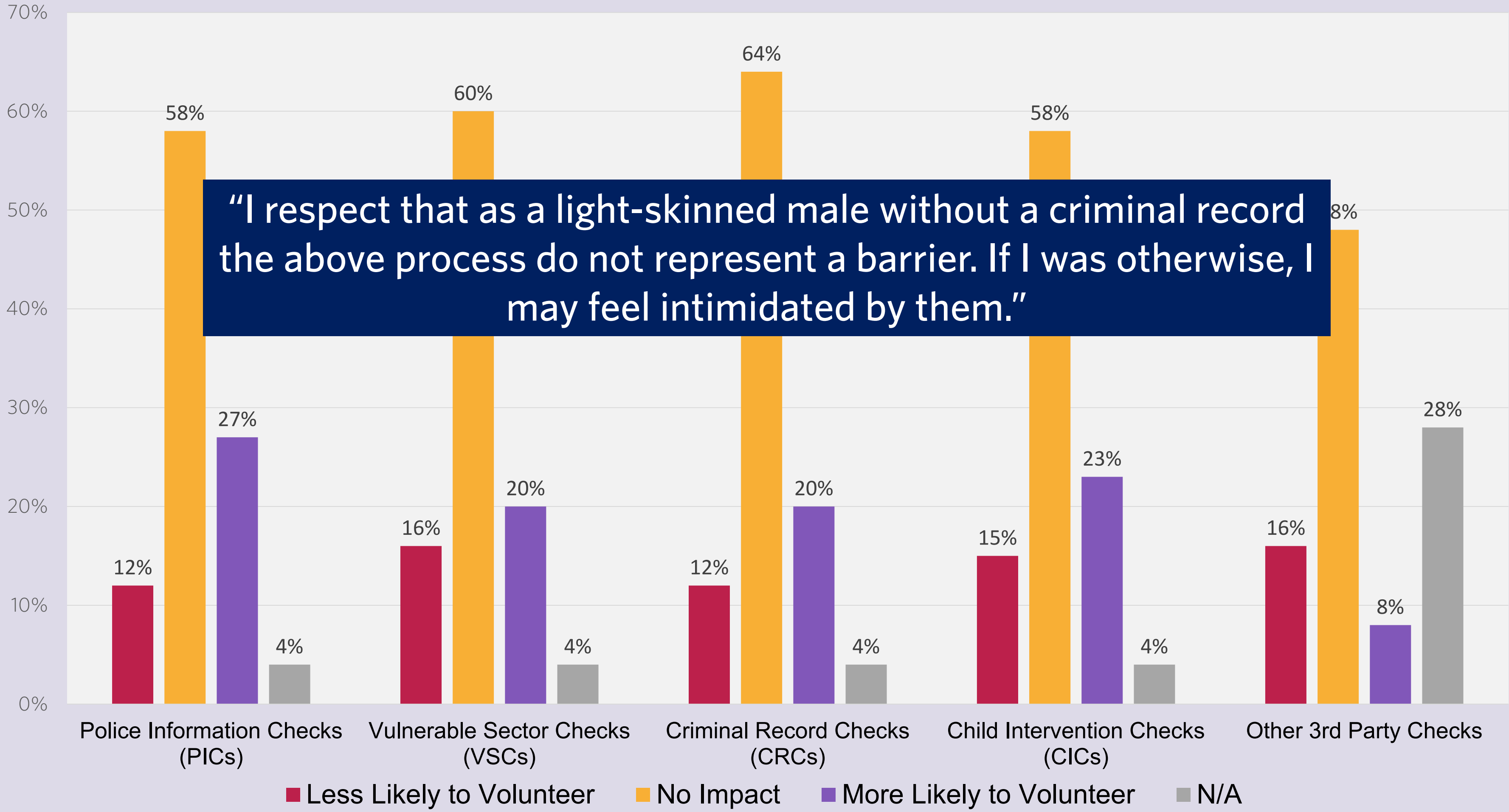
"If I want to volunteer with an organization I am willing to jump through the necessary hoops"

"Information that I can provide myself to the organization (application form, interview, background checks) are relatively straightforward and don't present much of a barrier. Professional references are more of a barrier, as it involves asking others for their time in providing me with a reference."

"The more screening there is, the more complex the job is. I am looking for challenging things."

"I believe a certain level of checks and informal interviews could be conducted but not extreme as though it were a formal paid employment."

If applicable, how would the use of the following background checks in the volunteer screening process impact your engagement/willingness to volunteer for an organization?



“I respect that as a light-skinned male without a criminal record the above process do not represent a barrier. If I was otherwise, I may feel intimidated by them.”

What is your organization's policy or procedure if/when information is revealed on a PIC/VSC/CRC?  
Please write N/A if your organization does not have a relevant policy or procedure.

**46%**

Do not have a policy

**37%**

Deal with situations on a case-by-case basis, but didn't necessarily state that they have clear policies on what may be accepted or not



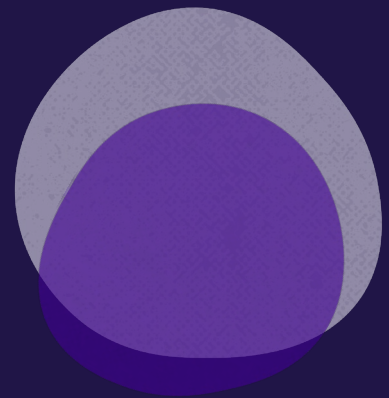
# Learning Moment: Background Checks

Does your organization use good practices in obtaining background checks?

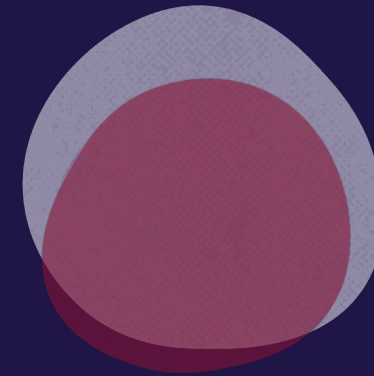
The level of screening, including but not limited to, the extent to which organizations ask for background checks and reference checks, should be **directly related to the complexity or level of risk associated with a volunteer position.**

There are both benefits and challenges to the use of background checks in the screening process. Therefore, we recommend organizations take a **curious and open approach to obtaining background checks** for volunteers. Organizations should consider their recruitment strategy, philosophy/values, and level of risk to participants and volunteers.

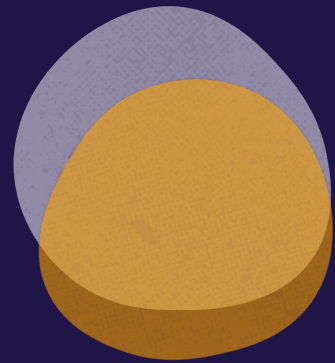
# Overall Takeaways & Learning Moments



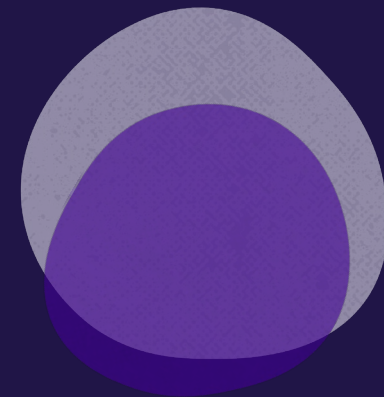
Screening is BOTH safety and match



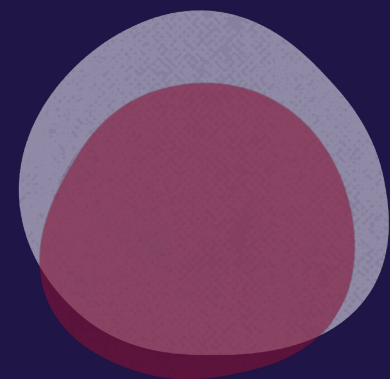
Take an intentional and open approach to feedback with community stakeholders



Risk assessments are conducted on the role



Don't assume your practices are equitable and inclusive – ask and be intentional



Background checks are complex and require careful consideration, they present significant barriers to BIPOC folks.



THANK YOU!

to everyone who participated and shared their  
wisdom, experiences, and time with us!

# Questions?



[www.volunteeralberta.ab.ca](http://www.volunteeralberta.ab.ca)



[screening@volunteeralberta.ab.ca](mailto:screening@volunteeralberta.ab.ca)