



# 2026

# State of the Student Housing Industry Report

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# About this Survey

Now in its third year, the StarRez 2026 State of the Student Housing Industry Report draws on proprietary survey data from 363 institutions globally. This reflects the student housing industry's continued commitment to data-driven decision-making, peer benchmarking, and collaboration across the broader student accommodation community.

This year's report delivers a comprehensive look at the growing trends, persistent challenges, and emerging opportunities shaping student housing. Designed for housing professionals, university administrators, and sector stakeholders, the report provides year-over-year comparisons, new topic areas, and deeper insights to help institutions stay competitive, student-centered, operationally sustainable, and financially resilient in an ever-changing landscape.



## Special Thank You to Those Who Completed the 2026 Survey

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who contributed to the 2026 State of the Student Housing Industry Survey. Your insights, experiences, and willingness to share what is happening on your campuses and within your housing operations made this report possible. Thank you for helping advance a more informed, connected, and collaborative student housing community.

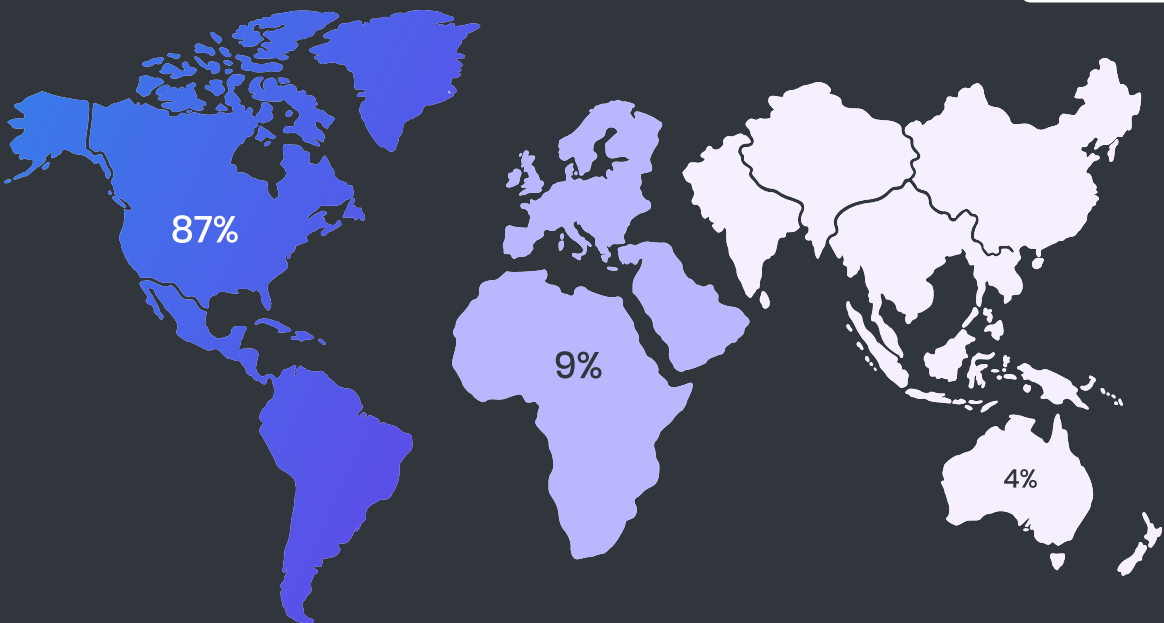


# About this Survey

## Institution Sample Composition

Responses collected between February 17<sup>th</sup> and April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2026.

### Region



COMPLETED SURVEYS

411

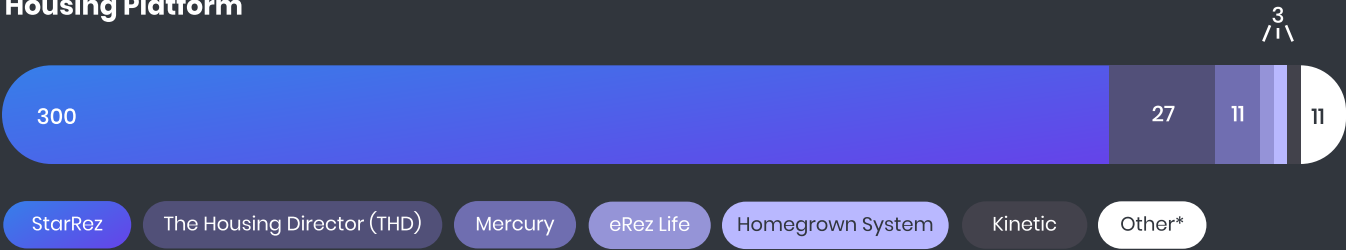
INSTITUTIONS

363

QUESTIONS

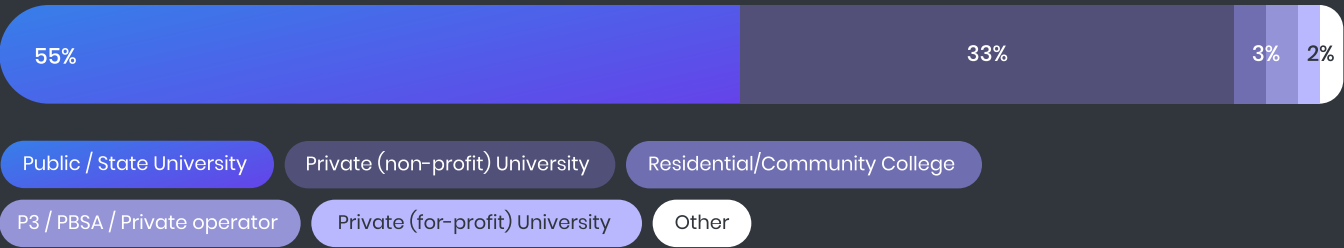
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### Housing Platform

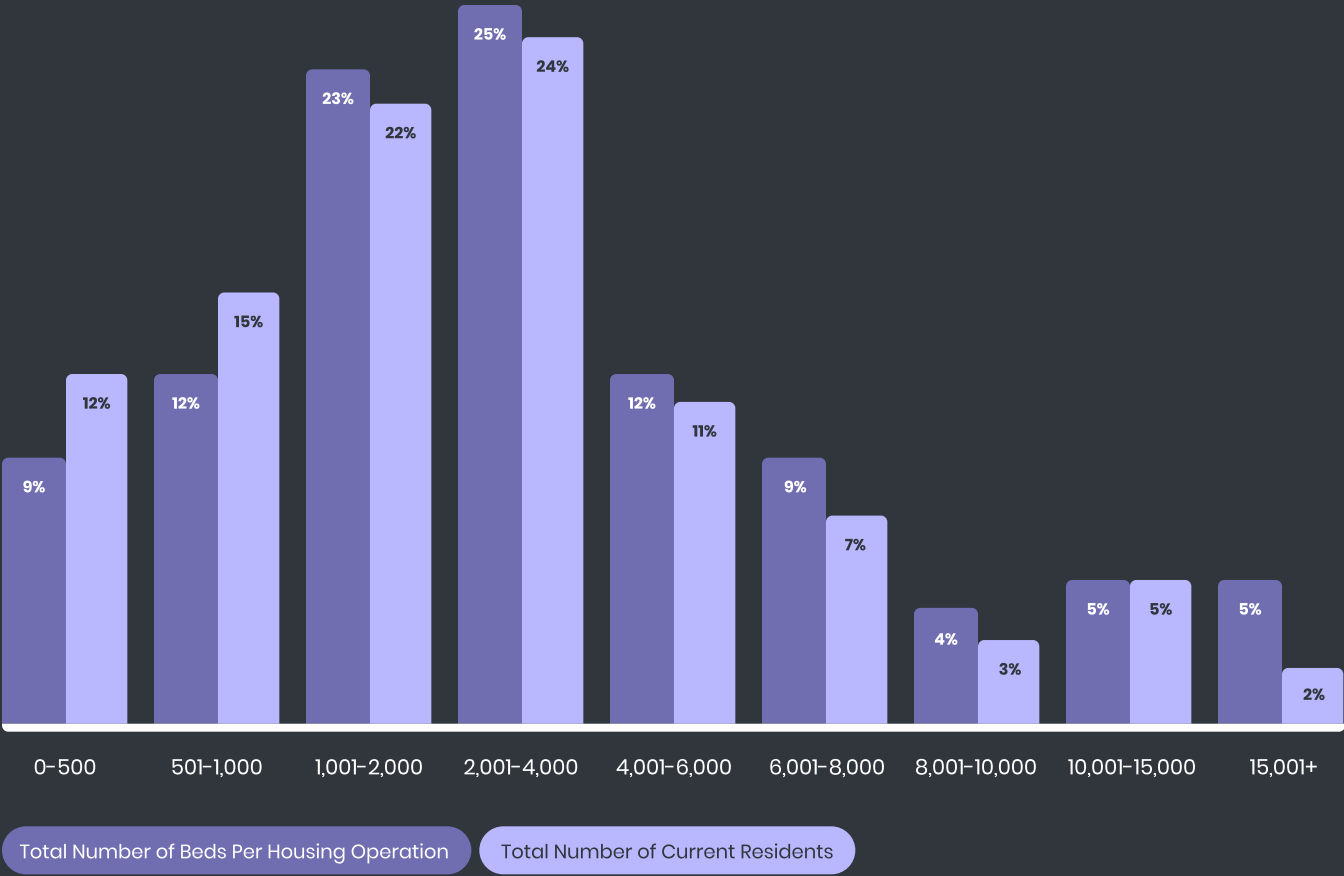


# About this Survey

## Institution Type

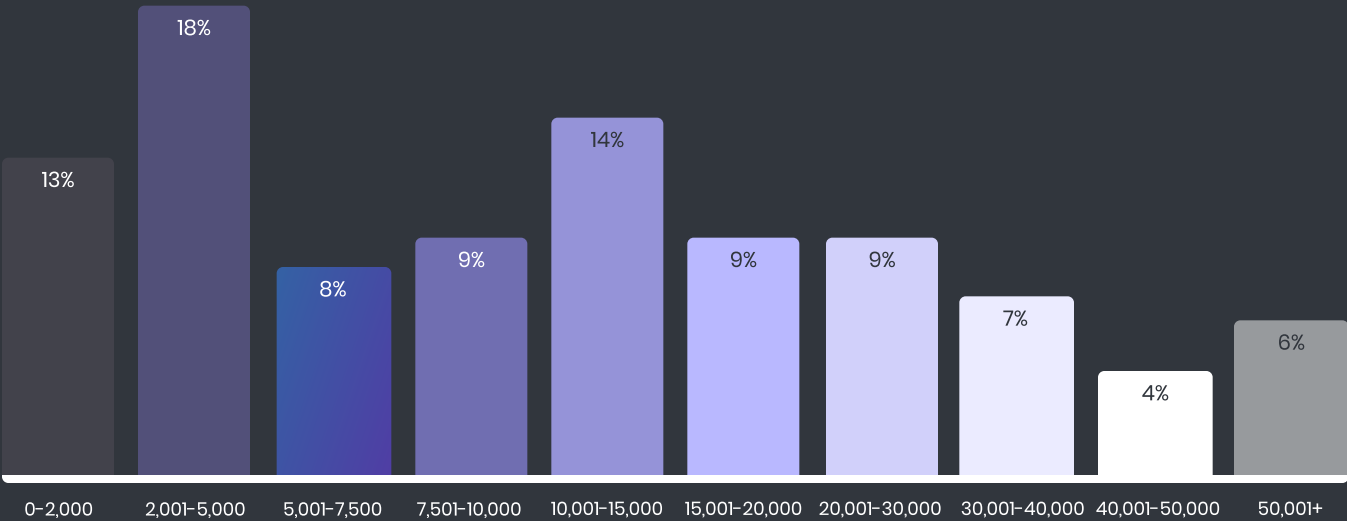


## Total Number of Beds and Total Number of Residents



# About this Survey

## Total Full-Time Undergrad And Grad Enrollment



### How We Define Institution Size

Throughout this report, some findings are broken out by institution size. For consistency, “small institutions” include respondents with fewer than 5,000 enrolled students, “medium institutions” include 5,000–15,000 enrolled students, and “large institutions” include more than 15,000 enrolled students.

## Survey Respondent Role Primary Focus



# Executive Summary

The extensive amount of data in this year's report reads like a collection of individual brushstrokes within a painting. Each insight has its own purpose, texture, and story to tell: occupancy pressure, staff capacity, resident wellbeing, financial strategy, off-campus visibility, and the rise of AI. But when you step back and view the full picture, a larger image comes into focus.

The 2026 findings paint housing as more than a place-based service; it is a connective force across student persistence, staff capacity, financial health, and the full residential journey on campus and beyond. Together, these brushstrokes reveal an industry being asked to manage higher expectations, fuller buildings, lean staffing models, more complex student needs, and faster-moving technology shifts, all while preserving the human-centered support that gives residential life its meaning, color, and impact.

This year's findings are anchored in five defining themes:

## 1. Running Housing at Full Capacity →

For many institutions, "full" is no longer a seasonal milestone; it is the operating model. About two-thirds of institutions report occupancy of 90% or higher, and roughly 43% report occupancy of 95% or higher, leaving limited flexibility for room changes, accommodations, late demand, or disruption. At the same time, 46% of institutions operate with only 0–10 professional housing staff, reinforcing the central tension of 2026: housing teams are being asked to deliver more sophisticated, responsive, enterprise-level experiences without a proportional increase in operational capacity.

# Executive Summary

## 2. From Manual Operations to Intelligent Housing →

The conversation around AI in housing has shifted from curiosity to operational relevance, even as adoption remains early. Only 3% of institutions are actively using AI across multiple housing processes, but a much larger group is preparing for change: 57% are either exploring, piloting, or interested in AI tools. The clearest business case is capacity relief, with 65% of institutions identifying reduced manual administrative work as one of the most valuable outcomes AI could support.

## 3. Housing as a Student Success Strategy →

The residence hall has become one of the institution's most important environments for identifying risk, building belonging, and supporting persistence. Residence life teams are handling complex student needs, with 82% of institutions citing roommate conflict and 61% citing mental health and wellness concerns among the most common resident interactions. Institutions also see the value of earlier intervention: 88% believe earlier visibility into student wellbeing and engagement trends would improve outcomes, yet only 23% are currently using automated alerts or dashboards to proactively identify students who may be at risk.

## 4. The Financial & Enrollment Balancing Act →

Housing operations are increasingly functioning as strategic business units, balancing affordability, enrollment shifts, market competition, and long-term revenue sustainability. Pricing strategies are becoming more data-driven, with 53% of institutions using market analysis, 50% using cost-based approaches, and 45% using competitive analysis to determine housing costs. At the same time, non-academic year housing remains underleveraged: 71% of institutions attribute 25% or less of housing revenue to non-academic year housing, even though 63% say expanding that revenue is a top priority, moderate priority, or emerging area of interest.



# Executive Summary

## 5. The Expanding Student Housing Ecosystem →

The student housing experience increasingly extends beyond institution-owned walls, creating new challenges around visibility, support, and engagement. Once students move off campus, 76% of institutions report having no or very limited visibility into their residential experience and ongoing success. Student data reinforces why this matters: 63% of students say housing stress impacts their academic performance or mental health at least sometimes, and off-campus students are more likely than on-campus students to say housing stress affects them often.

Taken together, these findings show an industry moving from traditional housing management toward a more strategic, connected, and intelligence-enabled model. When respondents were asked to describe the current state of the student housing industry in their own words, the themes that emerged most often were telling: change, evolution, uncertainty, strain, competition, constraint, and resilience. In the full picture, change and evolution are the dominant brushstrokes, but uncertainty and pressure shape the texture of the landscape.

The institutions best positioned for the future will be those that can scale services without overextending staff, connect housing more directly to student success, build financially sustainable operating models, support students beyond campus boundaries, and adopt automation and AI with clear purpose, governance, and care.



# Running Housing at Full Capacity

*Operations, staffing pressure, occupancy, and administrative complexity*

**Full capacity is no longer a seasonal milestone.  
For many housing teams, it is the operating model.**

**Here's what's changing:**

Student housing teams are being asked to deliver enterprise-level residential experiences in an environment where demand remains high, expectations continue rising, and operational complexity is compounding faster than staffing capacity.

In 2026, the data points to a housing landscape defined by two realities at once: pressure remains high, but institutions are adapting. Housing teams are not simply filling beds; they are managing complex residential ecosystems with lean teams, limited flexibility, and more administrative layers than ever before. At the same time, the data also shows signs of operational maturity: professional teams are beginning to scale modestly, staff retention has improved, and more housing operations are moving into fully digital environments.

The challenge is that complexity continues to rise even as institutions modernize, meaning many teams are still carrying significant exception-handling, approval work, communication, and follow-up behind the scenes.





### What it means for you:

Housing leaders need to think beyond occupancy as the primary measure of success. When teams are operating near full capacity, the focus should turn to sustainability: whether staffing models, systems, and workflows can support growing demand without increasing burnout or slowing service.

Institutions that reduce manual work, improve visibility into staff satisfaction and retention, expand self-service where appropriate, and modernize high-volume workflows will be better positioned to scale services without simply asking already-stretched teams to do more.

### Key themes in this section:

-  High occupancy and expansion pressure
-  Staffing capacity, satisfaction, & retention
-  Paperless progress and digital maturity
-  Manual vs. automated operations
-  Administrative burden across assignments, room changes, damages, renter's insurance, front desk work, communications, & reporting
-  Scaling services without scaling teams



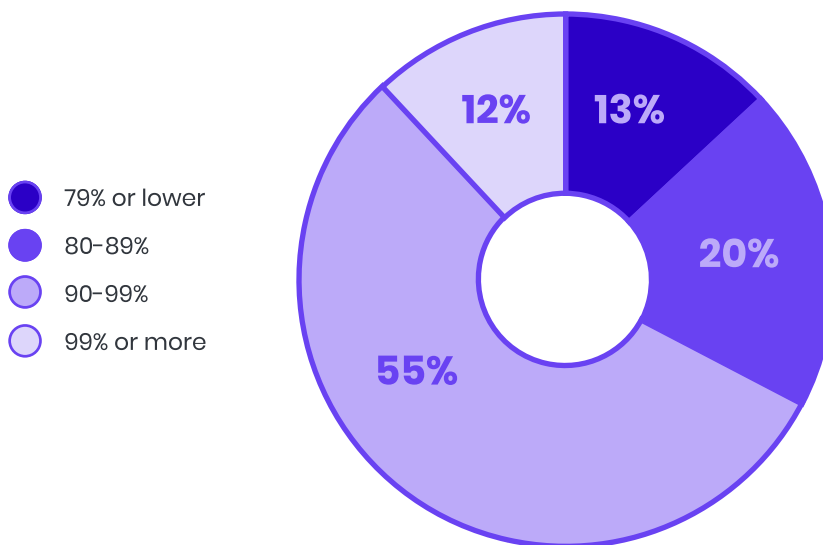
## High Occupancy Has Become a Baseline Operating Condition

In 2026, high occupancy continues to define the student housing environment. Roughly two-thirds of institutions report occupancy at 90% or higher, and about 43% are operating at 95% or higher. More than one in ten report occupancy of 99% or more.

### Occupancy Remains High in 2026

*Roughly two-thirds of institutions are operating at 90%+ occupancy, leaving limited flexibility for room changes, accommodations, late demand, or disruption.*

**Survey Question:** What is your current occupancy rate?



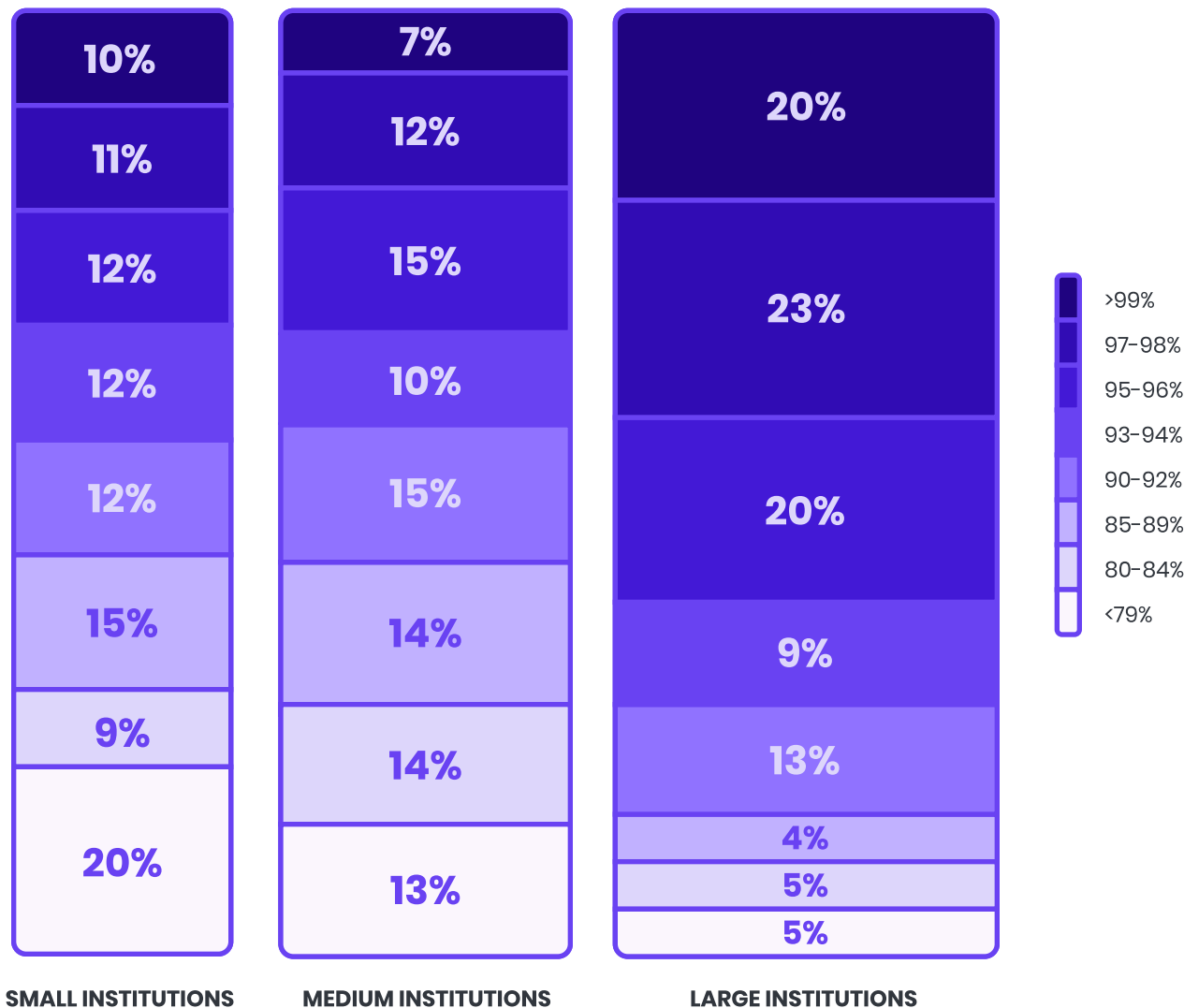
When normalized within each school-size category, large institutions show the highest occupancy pressure: about 85% are operating at 90%+ occupancy, including roughly 63% at 95%+. Medium and small institutions are more spread out, with about 58% of medium schools and 56% of small schools at 90%+ occupancy, suggesting high occupancy is industry-wide but most concentrated among larger housing operations.

That level of utilization is a sign of strong demand, but it also creates operational pressure. When occupancy is high, there is less flexibility to absorb exceptions. A roommate conflict, accommodation request, late cancellation, emergency move, or room change can quickly become a complex operational puzzle. At 95% occupancy and above, the margin for error narrows significantly.

**Large Institutions Face the Sharpest Occupancy Pressure in 2026**

*Large institutions are most likely to be operating near full capacity, with nearly two-thirds reporting occupancy of 95% or higher.*

**Survey Question:** What is your current occupancy rate?





But high occupancy does not automatically translate into immediate expansion. Adding beds is rarely a simple response to demand; it requires capital investment, staffing capacity, enrollment confidence, facilities planning, and long-term operational readiness.

- ✓ Capital investment
- ✓ Staffing capacity
- ✓ Enrollment confidence
- ✓ Facilities planning
- ✓ Long-term operational readiness

For some institutions, the more realistic near-term strategy may be optimizing existing inventory, strengthening assignment processes, exploring off-campus partnerships, or improving flexibility within current housing stock rather than launching new construction.

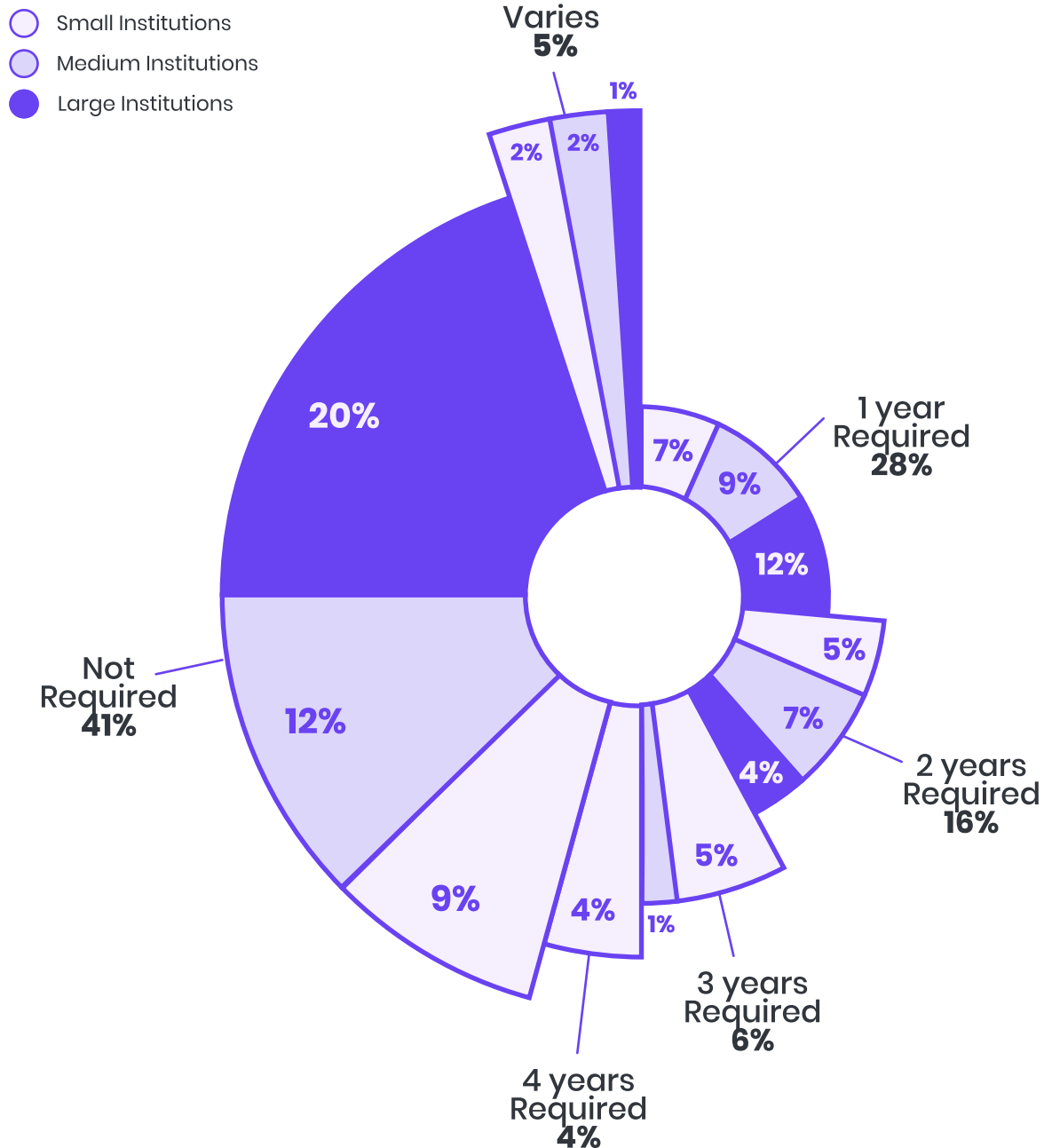
Live-on and residency requirements further shape this pressure. While 42% of institutions report no live-on requirement, 27% require one year, 16% require two years, 6% require three years, and 4% require four years. Another 6% say requirements vary by student population. These policies help institutions plan demand, but they also create a baseline level of housing obligation that teams must support regardless of staffing constraints or system maturity.



## Live-On Requirements Create a Baseline Housing Obligation in 2026

*More than half of institutions have some form of live-on or residency requirement, adding predictability to demand but also increasing pressure on already constrained operations.*

**Survey Question:** Do you have a live-on / residency requirement?



The result is a capacity environment where housing leaders are balancing institutional priorities, student expectations, and limited operational flexibility at the same time.



## Staffing Capacity Remains a Constraint Even as Teams Begin to Scale

Staffing continues to be one of the clearest pressure points in student housing, but the 2026 data also suggests that institutions are beginning to adjust. Nearly half of institutions, 46%, still operate with just 1–10 professional housing staff, and another 24% have 11–25 professional staff. That means many housing operations remain lean. But year-over-year staffing data shows the pattern starting to soften: institutions with 0–10 professional staff declined from 52.27% in 2024 and 52% in 2025 to 46% in 2026, while institutions with 51+ professional staff rose from about 12% in 2024 to 19% in 2026.

And professional staffing scales sharply with institution size: small institutions are overwhelmingly lean, with roughly 84% reporting just 1–10 professional staff, while medium institutions remain concentrated below 25 staff. Large institutions show more scaled and varied staffing models, with the largest share in the 26–50 staff range and roughly 42% reporting 51 or more professional staff, reflecting the greater operational complexity of larger housing operations.



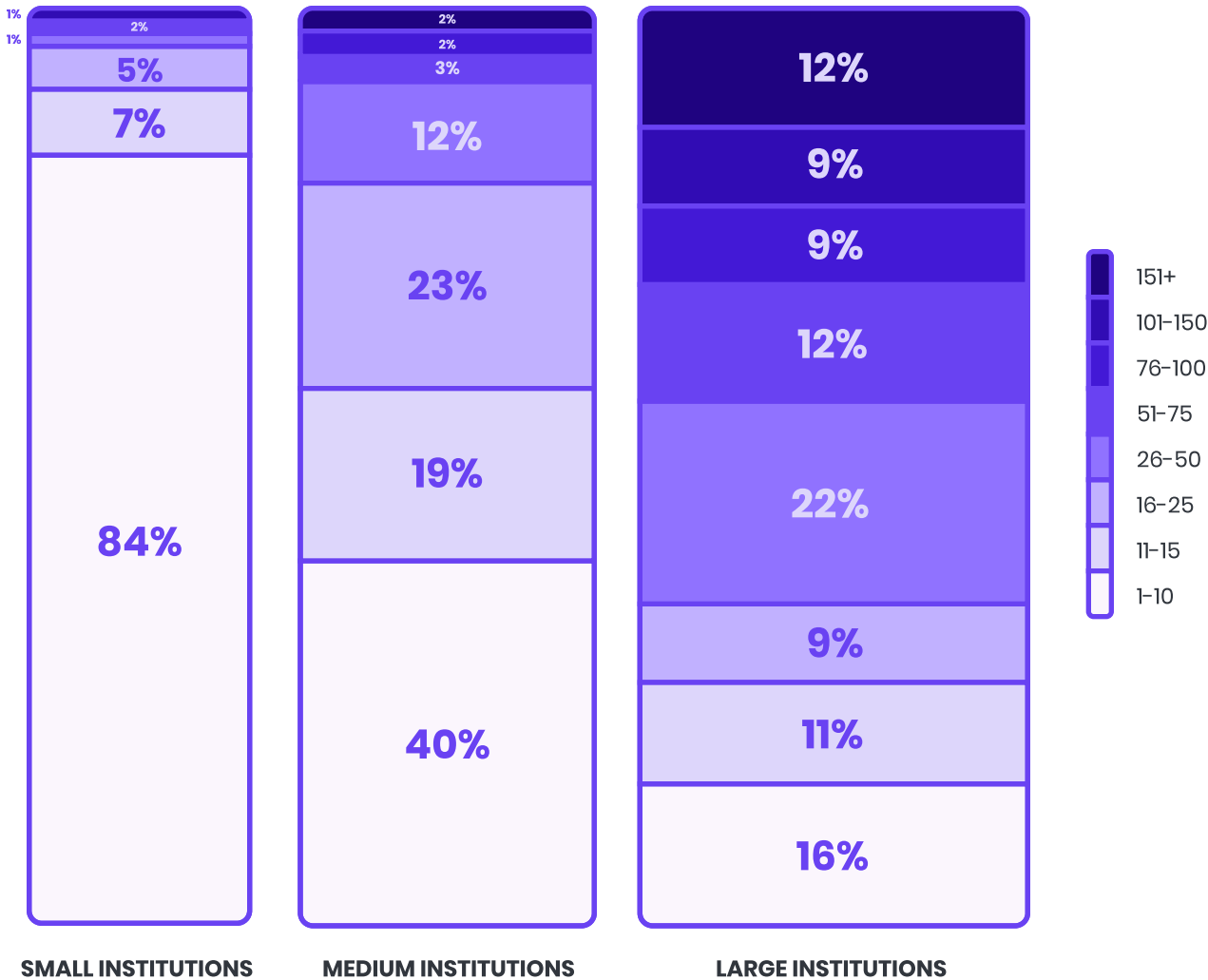
When we look at the data year over year, professional staffing is still heavily concentrated in lean teams, but that pattern is starting to soften: institutions with 0–10 professional staff dropped from 52.27% in 2024 and 52% in 2025 to 46% in 2026.

At the same time, larger teams are becoming more common, with institutions reporting 51+ professional staff rising from about 12% in 2024 to 15% in 2025 and 19% in 2026, suggesting modest scaling as operational demands grow.

Professional Staffing Scales by Institution Size in 2026

*Small institutions are most likely to operate with lean teams, while large institutions show more scaled staffing models and greater variation.*

Survey Question: How many professional staff work in your housing operation?

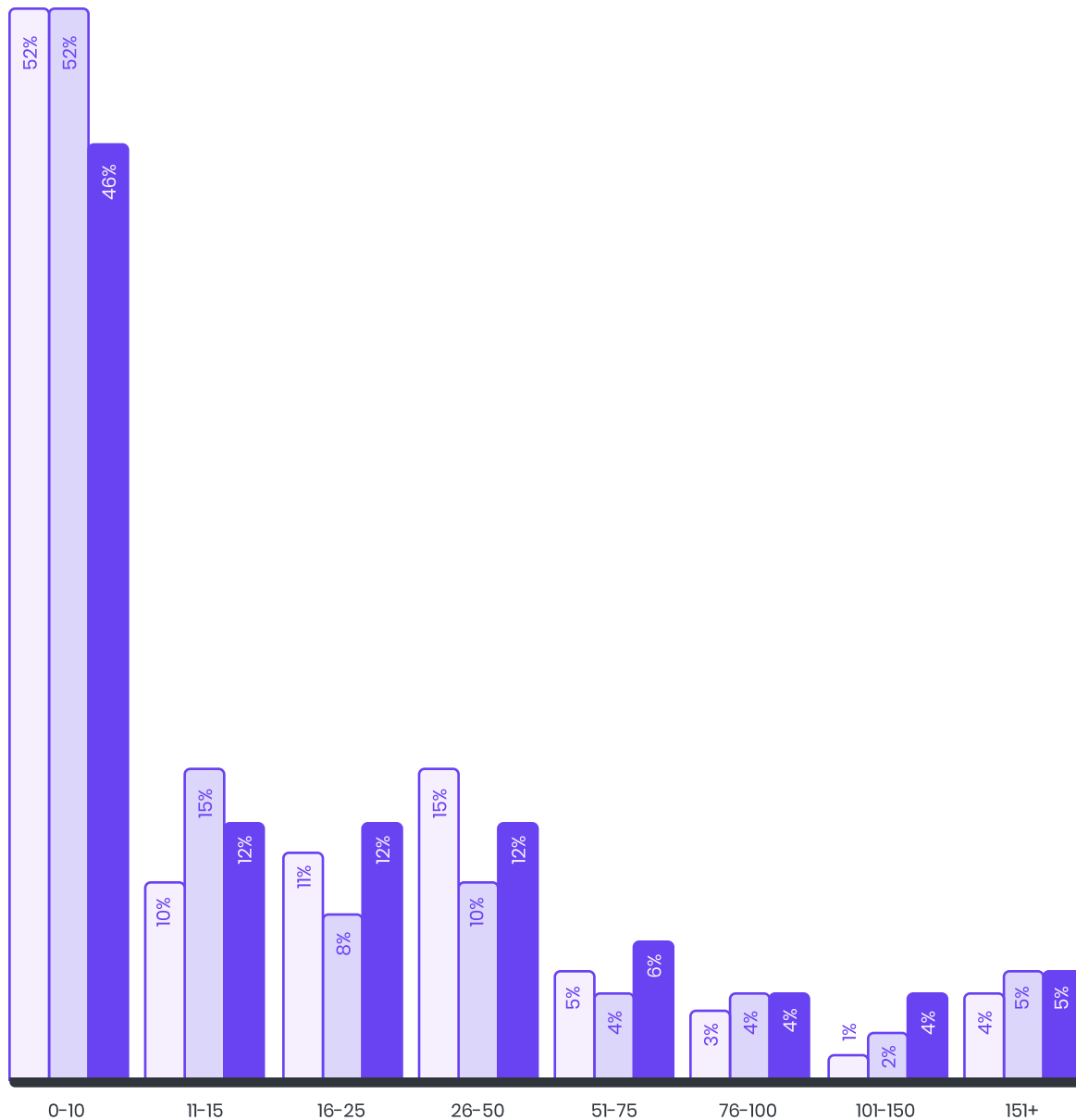


## Professional Staff Teams Are Starting to Scale Modestly

*The share of institutions with 0–10 professional staff declined in 2026, while institutions with 51+ staff became more common.*

**Survey Question:** How many professional staff work in your housing operation?

○ 2024    ○ 2025    ● 2026





This matters because the work of housing is expanding beyond traditional assignments | and occupancy management.

Teams are now expected to support student experience, wellbeing, emergency response, parent and family communication, data reporting, compliance, front desk service, damage management, renter's insurance workflows, and increasingly personalized housing preferences. Even when institutions add staff or modernize systems, the scope of the work continues to broaden.

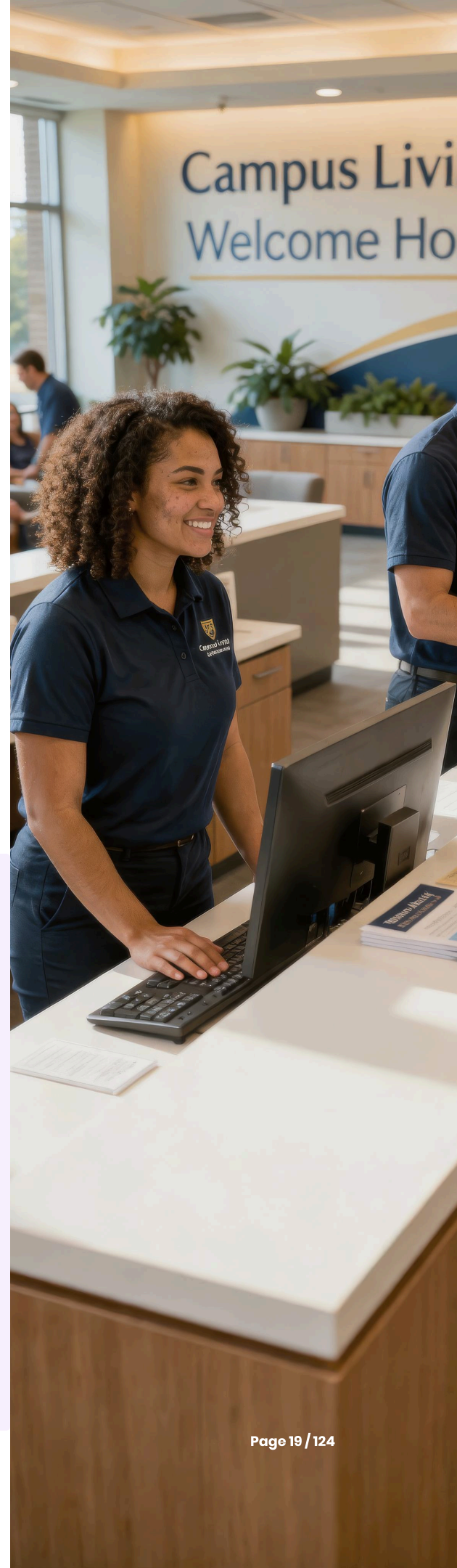
Undergraduate and student staff remain essential, but they do not eliminate the capacity challenge. Resident assistants, community advisors, and student workers extend the reach of housing operations, yet they also require recruitment, training, supervision, scheduling, and retention support from professional staff.



### Scaling Summer Housing Operations

Discover how Boston College moved high-volume summer housing workflows out of spreadsheets and into StarRez. From summer staff hiring and orientation housing to early arrivals and automated communications, BC is saving time, reducing manual tracking, and creating a more scalable experience during its busiest operational moments.

[Read the Full Story](#)



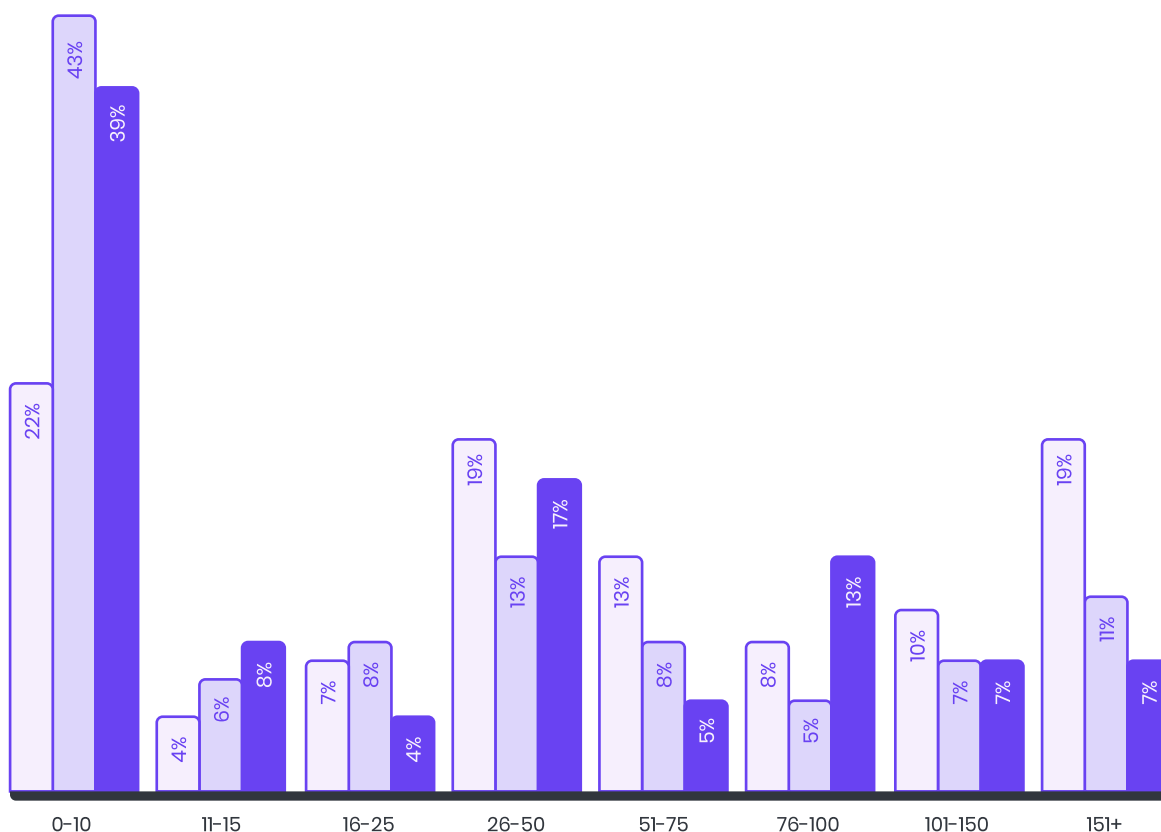


## Undergraduate Staff Models Remain Leaner in 2026

*Institutions with 0–10 undergraduate housing staff remain elevated at 39%, well above 22% in 2024, while the share with 150+ declined from 19% to 7%.*

**Survey Question:** How many undergrad staff work in your housing operation?

○ 2024    ○ 2025    ● 2026



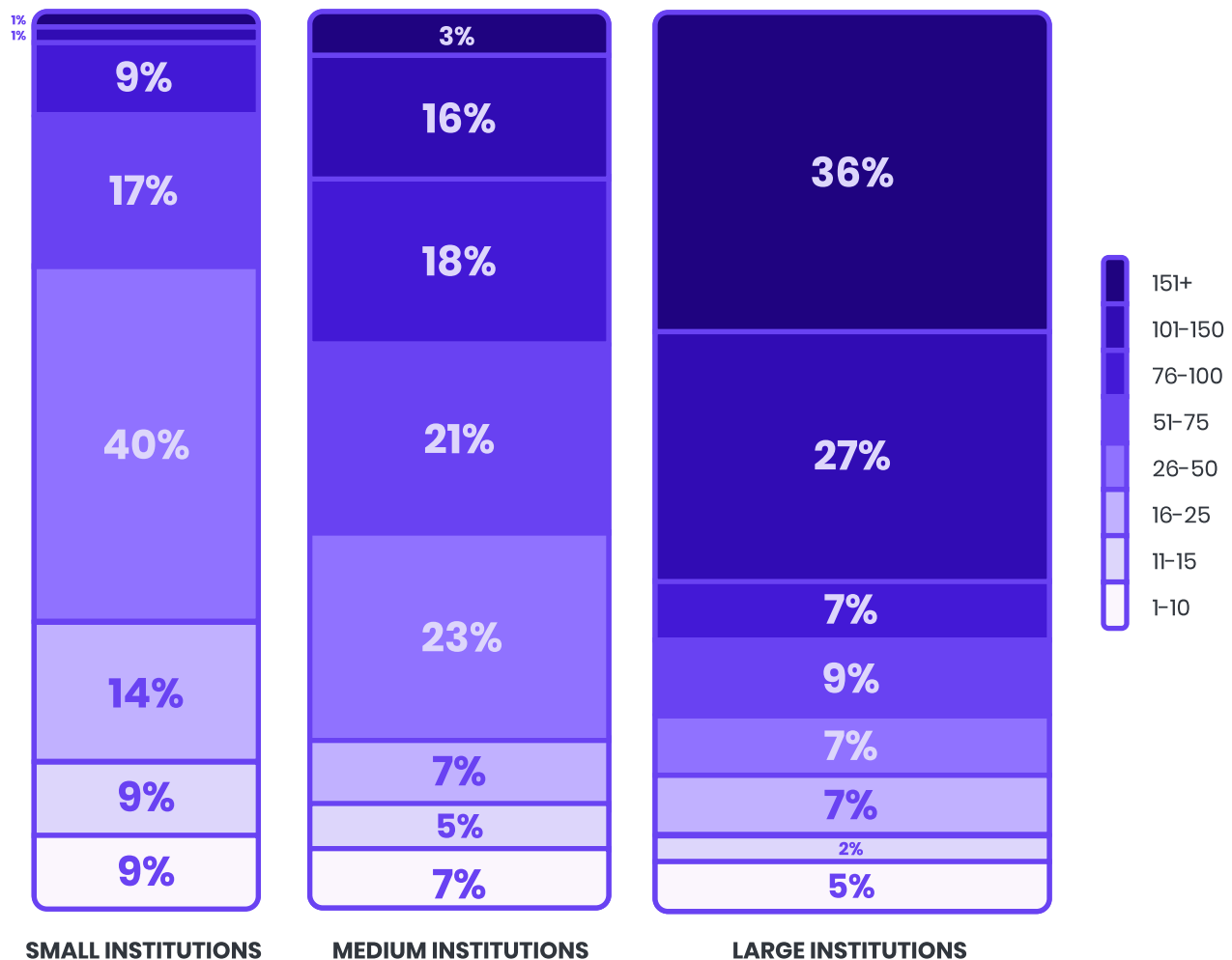
RA staffing scales clearly with institution size: large institutions are concentrated at the highest end, with about 63% reporting 101+ RAs, while small and medium institutions are more commonly clustered in the 26–75 RA range.

We'll explore the residence life implications later in the report, but at this point the data reinforces that RAs remain a major staffing layer for supporting high-touch student engagement at scale.

## RA Staffing Reflects the Scale of the Housing Operation

*Large institutions are most likely to report 101+ RAs, while small and medium institutions are more commonly clustered in the 26–75 RA range.*

**Survey Question:** How many RAs work in your housing operation?



### Your Takeaway:

Right-sizing staff is not only about headcount. It is about whether professional staff, student staff, technology, and workflow design are aligned with the true complexity of the operation. As responsibilities expand, institutions should regularly assess whether staffing models still match service expectations.

## Staff Satisfaction and Retention Reveal a Stable but Strained Workforce

Staff satisfaction and retention data show why the staffing story is more nuanced than pressure alone. On one hand, satisfaction softened in 2026, and many institutions still do not formally track staff sentiment. On the other hand, professional staff retention improved meaningfully, suggesting that teams may be more stable even as day-to-day workload pressures remain.

Two-thirds of institutions do not formally track or measure professional staff satisfaction, which points to a broader visibility gap. Among those that do, surveys are the most common method, used by 75%, followed by staff retention rate at 48% and word of mouth at 37%. This suggests that many institutions still rely on informal signals to understand whether teams are engaged, overextended, or at risk of turnover.

### TRINITY COLLEGE UNIVERSITY of OXFORD

#### Streamlining the Accommodation Journey

Discover how Trinity College Oxford unified the student accommodation experience with a more intuitive, connected housing platform. From 100% signed licence agreements and QR-code check-ins to faster reallocations and fewer student queries, Trinity is reducing friction for students while giving a lean accommodation team more time back.

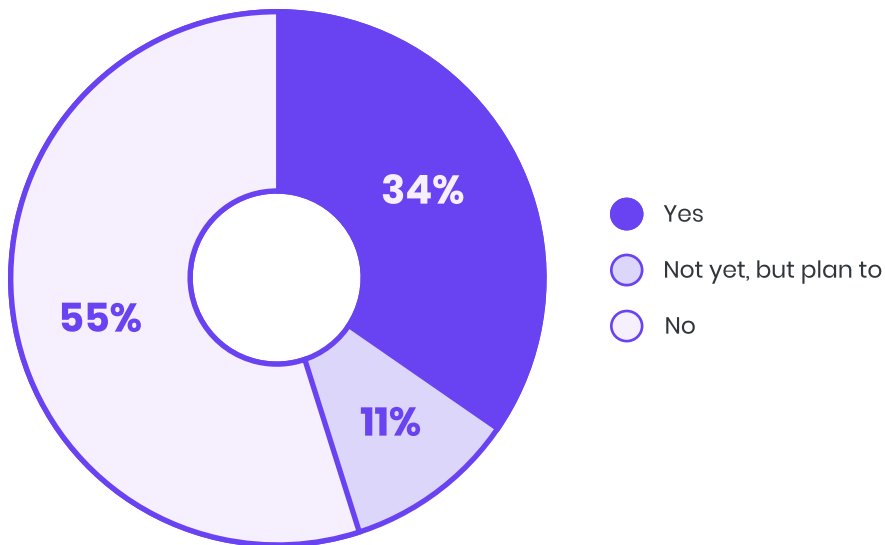
[Read the Full Story](#)



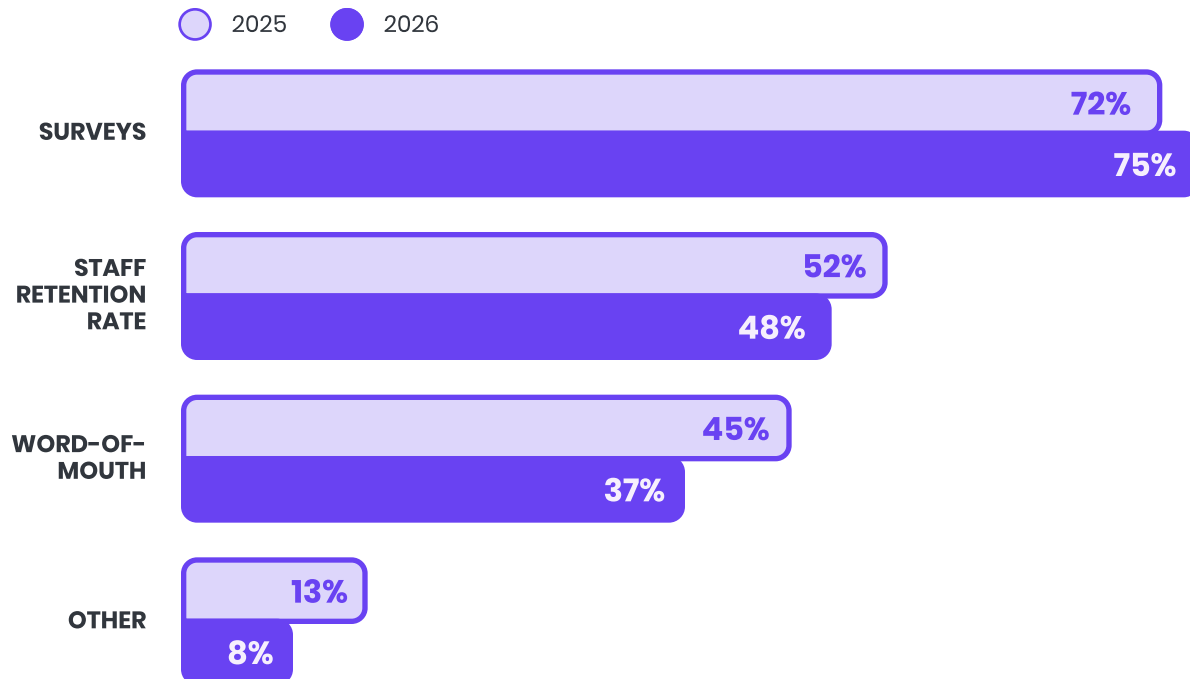
## Most Institutions Still Do Not Track Professional Staff Satisfaction

*Two-thirds of institutions do not formally measure professional staff satisfaction, leaving many teams without consistent visibility into burnout risk or staff sentiment.*

**Survey Question:** Do you track and measure professional staff satisfaction?



**Survey Question:** What methods of measurement do you use?



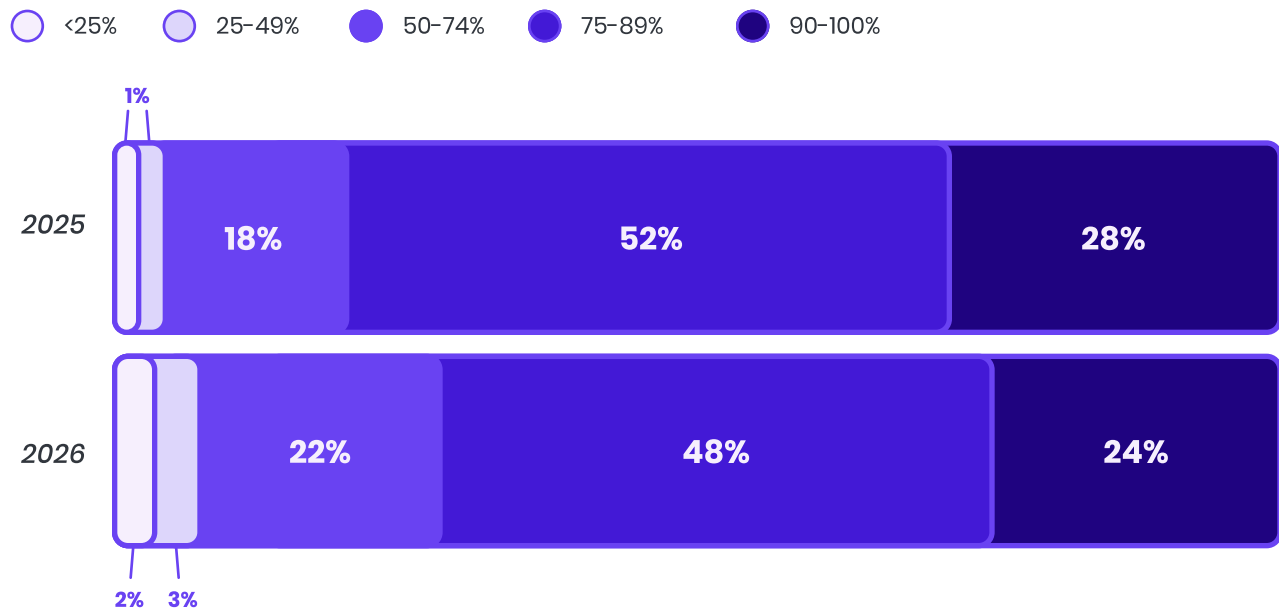


Where it is measured, professional staff satisfaction declined from 2025 to 2026: institutions reporting 75–100% of staff satisfied or very satisfied fell from 80% to 72%, with the highest satisfaction tier, 90–100%, dropping from 28% to 24%. At the same time, the 50–74% range grew from 18% to 22%, suggesting satisfaction remains broadly positive but is less concentrated at the very highest levels.

## Professional Staff Satisfaction Softens in 2026

*Institutions reporting 75–100% of professional staff satisfied or very satisfied declined from 80% in 2025 to 72% in 2026.*

**Survey Question:** What percentage of your professional staff are satisfied or very satisfied with their position?



The drivers of staff satisfaction are also revealing. Compensation is the most frequently cited factor, selected by 73% of respondents. Staffing or understaffing follows at 58%, workload at 55%, and communication at 47%. These are not peripheral concerns. They are structural operating issues. The data suggests that staff satisfaction is closely tied to whether teams have the resources, systems, communication, and workload balance needed to perform effectively.

### ***We wondered...***

What are the top three factors that influence the satisfaction of your professional staff most significantly?

The top drivers of staff satisfaction are compensation, staffing levels, workload, and communication; all core indicators of operational sustainability.

- 1 **Compensation**  
*Mentioned in 73% of responses*
- 2 **Staffing**  
*Mentioned in 58% of responses*
- 3 **Workload**  
*Mentioned in 55% of responses*
- 4 **Communication Between Staff / Campus Partners**  
*Mentioned in 47% of responses*
- 5 **Student Interactions**  
*Mentioned in 26% of responses*
- 6 **Automated Processes**  
*Mentioned in 17% of responses*
- 7 **Family Involvement**  
*Mentioned in 7% of responses*

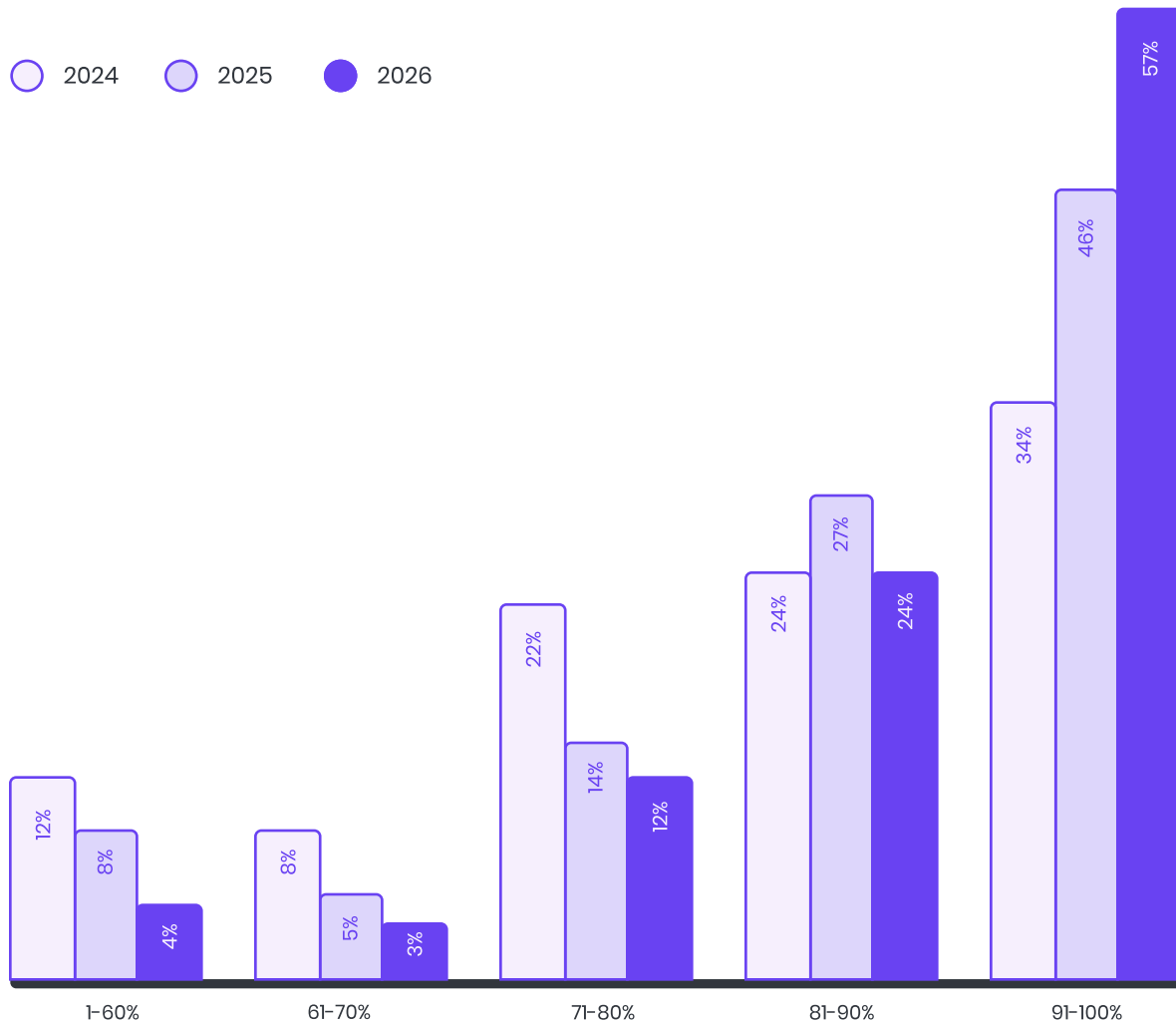
Professional staff retention improved meaningfully from 2025 to 2026, even as satisfaction softened. Institutions reporting 91–100% annual retention rose from 46% to 57%, while every lower-retention band declined.



## Housing Professionals Are Staying, Even as Satisfaction Softens

*Institutions reporting 91–100% annual retention rose from 46% to 57%, while high staff satisfaction declined from 80% to 72%.*

**Survey Question:** What was your professional staff annual retention rate?



The apparent disconnect between satisfaction and retention is one of the more important workforce signals in the 2026 data. The survey does not tell us exactly why retention improved while satisfaction softened; it may reflect stronger team structures, institutional stability, mission commitment, benefits, improved operational support, or broader labor-market dynamics.

Staff retention improving while satisfaction softens could reflect:

- ✓ Stronger team structures
- ✓ Institutional stability
- ✓ Mission commitment
- ✓ Benefits
- ✓ Improved Operational Support
- ✓ Broader labor-market dynamics

But the takeaway is clear: retention alone is not proof that staff are thriving. A team can be stable and still be stretched. In other words, the 2026 data points to a workforce that is more likely to stay, but not necessarily less strained.

Improved retention may reflect better support, stronger commitment, or more stable team structures, but it does not erase the need to address compensation, workload, staffing levels, and communication.



### Your Takeaway:

Do not rely on retention alone as proof that staff are thriving. Retention shows whether people are staying; satisfaction helps reveal the cost of staying. Pair retention tracking with regular staff satisfaction measurement, workload analysis, compensation benchmarking, and manager check-ins to identify strain before it turns into burnout or turnover.





## Digital Operations are Improving, but Partial Automation Still Dominates

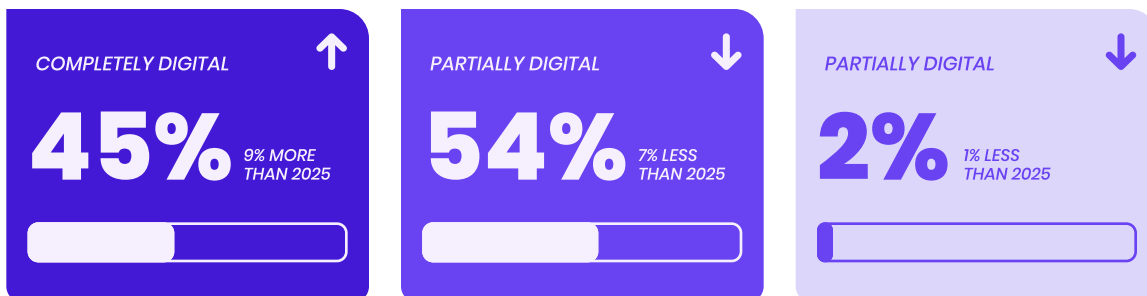
Digital maturity is one of the clearest signs that institutions are adapting. Housing operations continued moving toward fully digital workflows in 2026, with the share of institutions reporting completely digital operations rising from 36% in 2025 to 45% in 2026.

At the same time, partially digital operations declined from 61% to 54% and paper-reliant operations fell from 3% to 2%, suggesting more teams are moving out of hybrid models and into fully digital operating environments.

### Housing Operations Continue Moving Toward Fully Digital Workflows

*Completely digital housing operations rose from 36% in 2025 to 45% in 2026, while paper-reliant operations declined to just 2%.*

**Survey Question:** How paperless is your housing operation?



However, the automation data shows that digitization does not always translate into reduced workload.

Across core housing processes, partial automation is far more common than full automation.

Email communication is 73% partially automated, but only 5% fully automated. Billing operations are about half partially automated and roughly one-quarter fully automated. Room allocation is 64% partially automated and only 12% fully automated. Reporting and analytics are also 64% partially automated, with 9% fully automated. Front desk operations are the clearest area of manual burden: 41% are fully manual, 40% are partially automated, and only 2% are fully automated.



### Empowering the Student Journey

Discover how The University of Toledo transformed housing operations by moving from manual, paper-based processes to connected digital workflows. From room changes and inspections to damage billing and cross-campus collaboration, UToledo is creating faster service, greater transparency, and a smoother residential experience for students and staff.

[Read the Full Story](#)



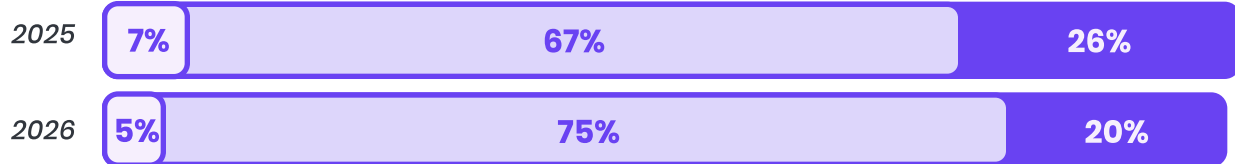
## Partial Automation Remains the Dominant Operating Model

*Most core housing processes are partially automated, meaning staff still manage much of the exception-handling, approval work, reconciliation, and follow-up.*

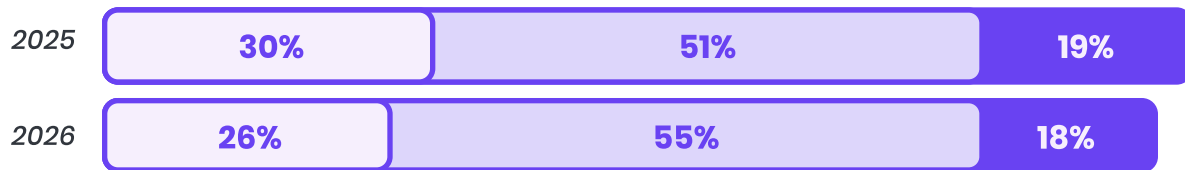
**Survey Question:** How automated are your student housing processes?

☐ Fully Automated
 ☐ Partially Automated
 ☒ Fully Manual

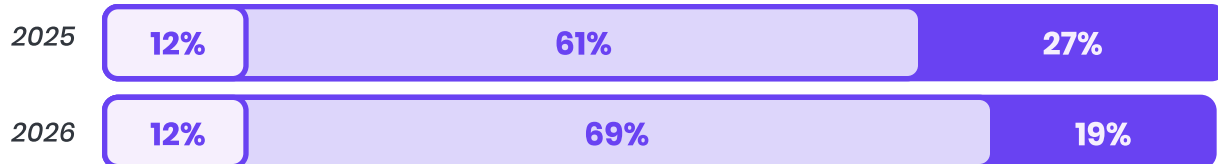
### EMAIL COMMUNICATIONS



### BILLING OPERATIONS



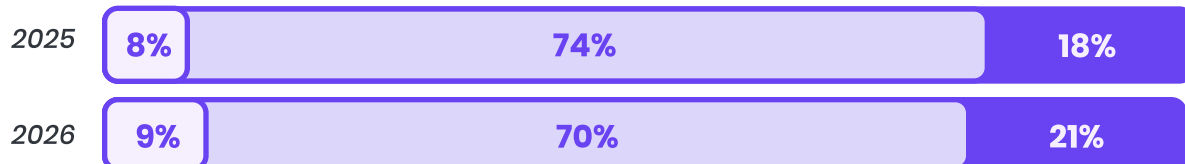
### ROOM ALLOCATIONS



### FRONT DESK OPERATIONS



### REPORTING & ANALYTICS



This means many institutions have digital tools in place, but staff are still managing handoffs, approvals, exceptions, reconciliations, follow-ups, and manual checks. A partially automated process may be easier than a paper process, but it can still require significant staff intervention.

That distinction is especially important as teams try to scale services without scaling headcount. A resident may experience a process as digital because a form, portal, or email workflow exists. But behind the scenes, staff may still be manually reviewing submissions, updating records, routing approvals, reconciling data, and communicating outcomes.

- ✓ Manually reviewing submissions
- ✓ Updating records
- ✓ Routing approvals
- ✓ Reconciling data
- ✓ Communicating outcomes

For housing teams already operating near capacity, partial automation can create the appearance of modernization without fully removing administrative load.



#### **Your Takeaway:**

Audit the difference between “digital” and “automated” in your own workflows. A form that lives online may improve access, but it does not necessarily reduce staff workload. Focus on the processes where staff are still manually reviewing, approving, routing, reconciling, or following up. Then map each step, remove unnecessary handoffs, automate routine actions where possible, and reserve staff time for exceptions, judgment calls, and high-touch student support.



## Room Assignments Now Sit at the Center of Both Operations and Experience

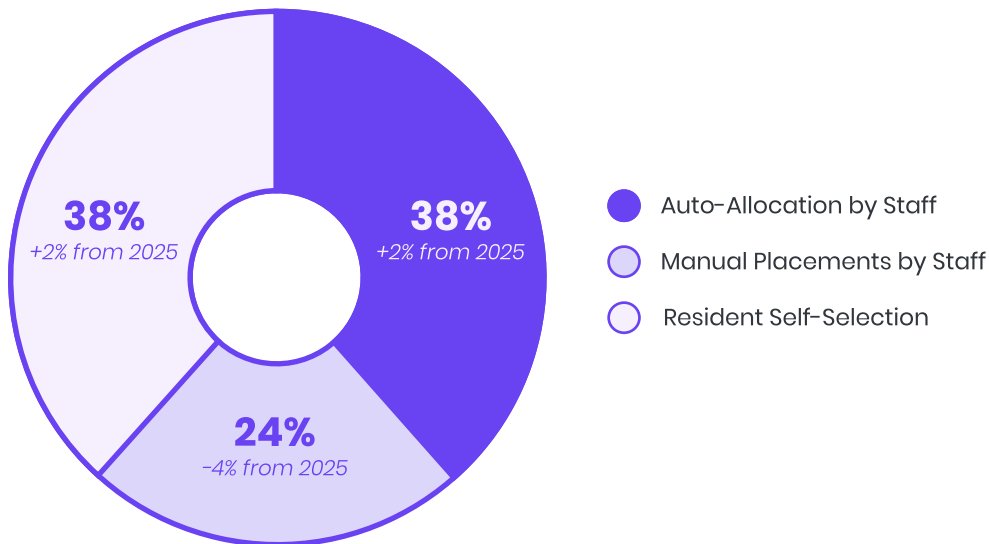
Room assignments remain one of the most visible examples of how operational work and student experience now overlap.

For first-year students, the primary assignment method is split almost evenly between auto-allocation by staff and resident self-selection, each at about 38%. Manual placement accounts for roughly 25%. This suggests that institutions are balancing efficiency, student choice, and the need for staff control in a population that may require more guidance, support, and policy oversight.

### First-Year Room Assignment Methods Are Evenly Split in 2026

*Institutions are balancing auto-allocation, resident self-selection, and manual placement for first-year students.*

**Survey Question:** What is the primary method for creating first year student room assignments?

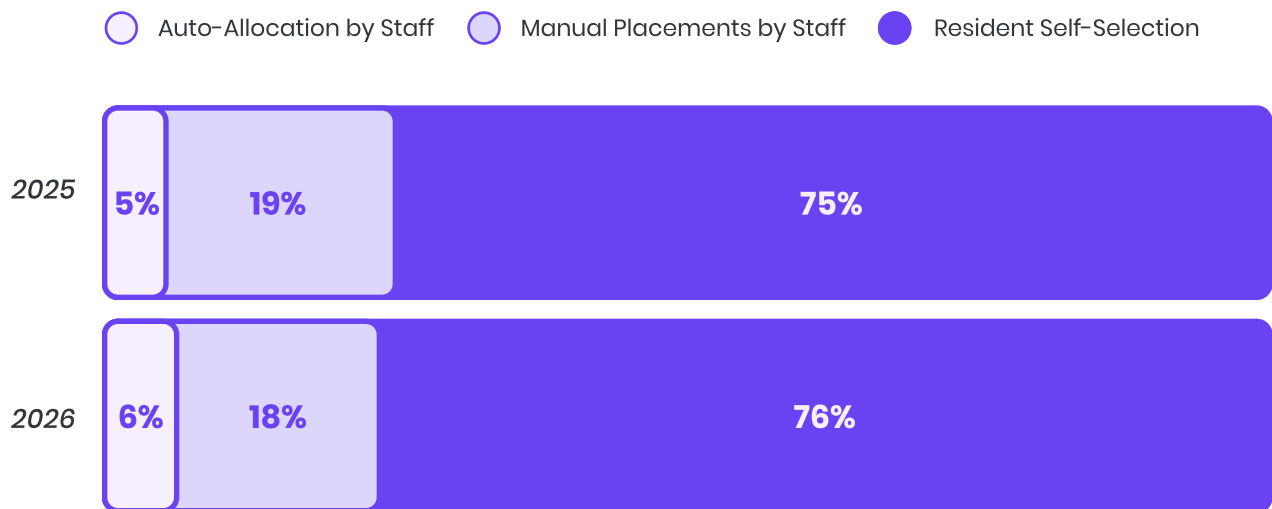


For returning students, the model is much more student-directed. About 79% of institutions use resident self-selection as the primary method for returning-student room assignments. Manual placements account for 13%, and auto-allocation by staff accounts for 6%.

## Returning Students Drive Assignment Autonomy in 2026

*79% of institutions use resident self-selection as the primary room assignment method for returning students.*

**Survey Question:** What is the primary method for creating returning student room assignments?



This shift toward self-selection reflects broader student expectations around control, transparency, and convenience. Students increasingly expect housing processes to feel similar to other digital experiences: clear options, real-time information, and the ability to take action independently.

But self-selection does not remove staff work. It changes the nature of the work. Staff still manage eligibility rules, roommate groups, priority order, accommodations, living-learning communities, conflicts, late applicants, cancellations, and exceptions.

More resident autonomy may also be contributing to a slight decrease in room change requests, as students who have more control earlier in the process may be more likely to begin in a housing situation that fits their preferences. But that only works when the systems behind self-selection can support the complexity.

The more personalized the housing experience becomes, the more important it is that the underlying systems can manage rules, guardrails, and exceptions without pushing every decision back onto staff.



### Scaling Housing with Confidence

Discover how the University of Findlay modernized housing operations with a strategic move to StarRez. From student room self-selection and smarter waitlists to automated residency verification letters, Findlay is proving that smaller institutions can boost efficiency, reduce manual work, and give students more choice.

[Read the Full Story](#)

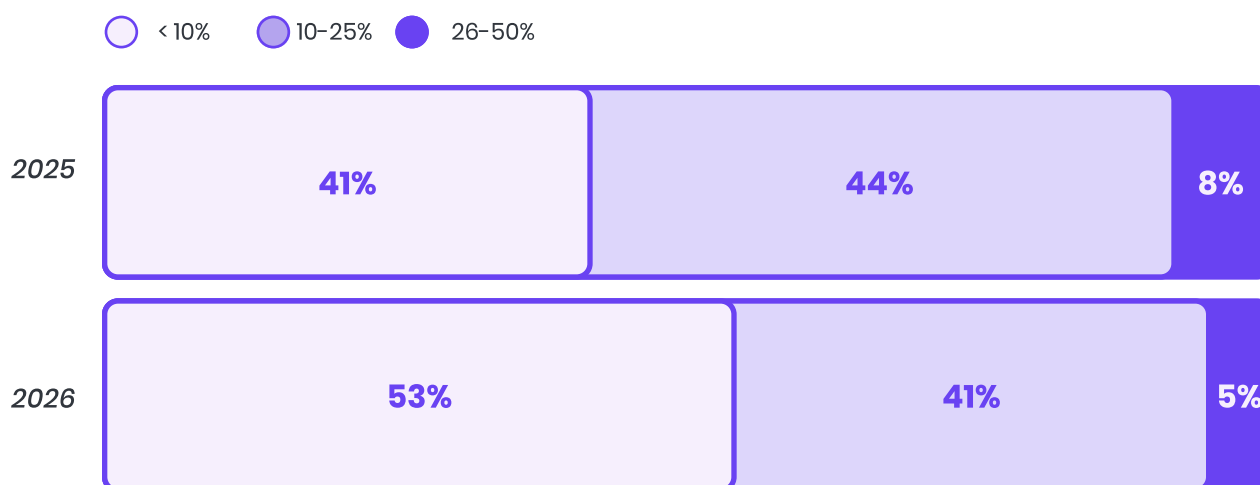


Room changes show this dynamic clearly. Over half of institutions report that less than 10% of their housing population requested room changes in the most recent academic year, up from 41% in 2025, while 41% report requests from 10–25% of residents. This slight decline in request volume may suggest that more student choice upfront is helping reduce some downstream friction. Still, even when the volume is moderate, room changes remain operationally intensive because they involve availability, student wellbeing, roommate dynamics, billing, key or access updates, facilities coordination, and communication.

### Room Change Request Volume Eases in 2026

*The share of institutions reporting that less than 10% of residents requested room changes rose from 41% in 2025 to 53% in 2026, while higher request ranges declined.*

**Survey Question:** What percentage of your housing population requested room changes?



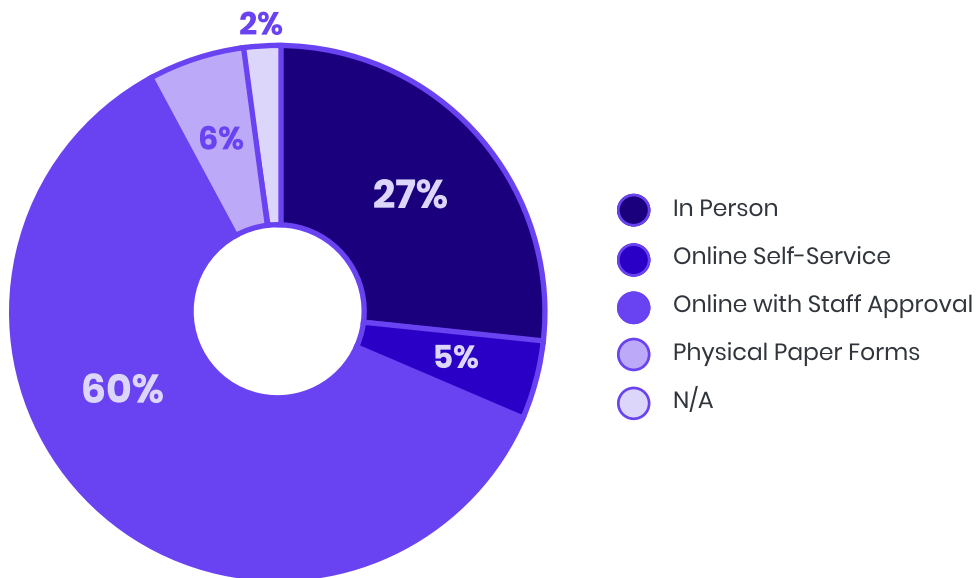
Most institutions process room changes online with staff approval, at 60%. Another 27% still process them in person, 6% use physical paper forms, and only 5% offer online self-service. This shows that room change workflows have become more digital, but they remain highly staff-mediated.



## Room Changes Are Digital, But Still Staff-Mediated

*60% of institutions process room changes online with staff approval, while only 5% offer fully self-service room changes.*

**Survey Question:** How are room changes processed?



### Your Takeaway:

Expand student self-service where it reduces routine administrative burden, but keep thoughtful guardrails in place. Room assignments and room changes are high-impact moments in the student experience, so the goal is not automation for its own sake. The goal is to give students more transparency and control while preserving staff support for complex or sensitive cases.

## Operational Maturity is Improving, but Complexity is Still Outpacing Capacity

The combined picture is clear: housing teams are not facing one isolated challenge, and the story is not simply that operations are becoming harder. The 2026 data shows both pressure and adaptation.

High occupancy reduces flexibility. Lean staffing still limits capacity. Student expectations require more responsive, personalized service. At the same time, professional staffing models are beginning to scale, retention has improved, digital operations are advancing, and room change volume has eased. These are signs of an industry that is maturing.



### Automating Housing Workflows

Discover how Santa Clara University is replacing workarounds with connected, automated housing operations. From room-change requests and mass billing to real-time campus integrations, SCU is reducing manual work, improving accuracy, and creating a more seamless residential experience.

[Read the Full Story](#)



But maturity does not eliminate complexity. Partial automation improves access but does not always reduce staff workload. Staff satisfaction and retention are still not consistently measured. Front desk operations remain heavily manual. Room assignments and room changes increasingly require both digital convenience and human oversight. The same pattern extends across high-touch administrative areas like damage workflows, renter's insurance, communications, reporting, billing, and exception management.

This is the central operational challenge for 2026: institutions are making progress, but they are still being asked to scale the quality and sophistication of the housing experience faster than many teams, systems, and workflows can fully absorb.

This is where the next phase of operational maturity begins. For many housing teams, the journey has already moved from paper-based processes to digital workflows, and from digital workflows to partial automation. The next step is more intelligent, agentic workflow support: systems that do more than collect information or trigger a single task, but can help summarize context, route work, recommend next steps, identify exceptions, and support staff through multi-step processes with human oversight. For most institutions, that future is still emerging. But the direction is clear: the goal is not simply to digitize housing operations, but to make them more responsive, connected, and capable of absorbing complexity without adding unnecessary burden to staff.



### **Your Takeaway:**

Look for complexity clusters: the workflows that generate the most exceptions, approvals, handoffs, student questions, or staff follow-up. These are often the best places to prioritize process redesign, clearer communication, self-service, automation, and eventually AI-assisted or agentic workflow support. Before adding new technology, identify where staff are repeatedly interpreting information, routing tasks, answering the same questions, or making judgment calls that could be better supported by connected data and guided workflows.



# From Manual Operations to Intelligent Housing

## *AI, automation, and future readiness*

**The conversation around AI in housing has shifted from curiosity to operational relevance, even as adoption remains uneven.**

### **Here's what's changing:**

Section 1 showed that housing operations are becoming more digital but not yet fully automated. Many institutions now have online forms, portals, and partially automated workflows, yet staff still carry much of the work behind the scenes: reviewing submissions, routing approvals, reconciling data, responding to repetitive questions, and managing exceptions.

- ✓ Reviewing Submissions
- ✓ Routing approvals
- ✓ Reconciling Data
- ✓ Responding to questions
- ✓ Managing expectations

That gap between digital access and true operational relief is where AI is beginning to enter the conversation. Housing teams are starting to look beyond basic digitization and toward more intelligent, predictive, and eventually agentic workflows, systems that can help interpret information, surface patterns, recommend next steps, and support multi-step processes while keeping human judgment at the center.





In 2026, most institutions are still early in that journey. Only 3% say they are actively using AI in multiple housing processes, while another 20% are using limited AI or automation in specific areas. A larger share are still in evaluation mode: 29% are exploring or piloting AI tools, and 28% are interested but not yet exploring.

That means AI has clear momentum, but adoption is still maturing. The strongest use cases are emerging in areas where housing teams already feel the most pressure: content creation, communications, reporting, forecasting, workflow support, and manual administrative work.

### What it means for you:

AI readiness is becoming part of operational readiness. Housing teams do not need to automate every process overnight, and **agentic workflows should not be treated as a replacement for human judgment**. But teams do need to understand which repetitive, rules-based, communication-heavy, or data-heavy workflows are ready for smarter support and what governance is required to use these tools responsibly.

Institutions that start with clear, practical use cases, such as reducing repetitive administrative work, improving communications, strengthening reporting, and identifying workflow bottlenecks will be better positioned to scale AI thoughtfully as tools, policies, and staff confidence evolve.

### Key themes in this section:

-  AI adoption maturity
-  Operational automation
-  Reporting and analytics
-  Process optimization
-  Communication efficiency
-  Institutional hesitation and barriers
-  Future readiness

## AI Adoption is Early, but Interest is Broad

AI adoption in student housing is still in the early stages. Only 3% of institutions say they are actively using AI across multiple housing processes. Another 20% are using limited AI or automation in specific areas, meaning roughly one in four institutions have moved from interest into some level of active use.

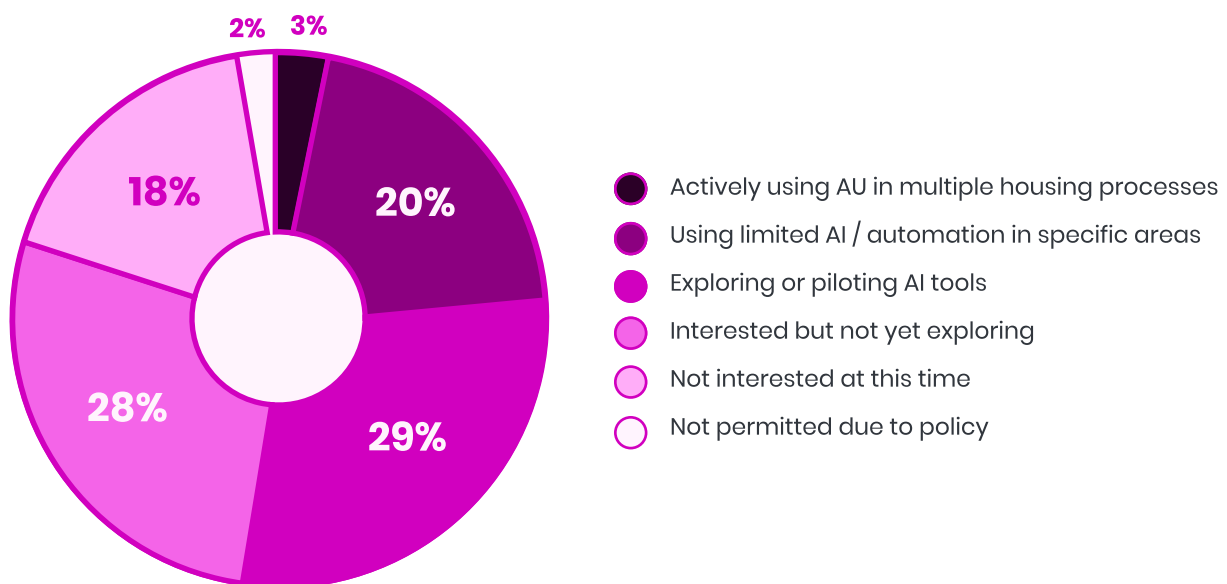
The larger story is the size of the middle market. Twenty nine percent of institutions are exploring or piloting AI tools, while 28% are interested but not yet exploring. Combined, that means a majority of institutions are not fully using AI yet, but they are paying attention.

Only 18% say they are not interested at this time, and just 2% say AI is not permitted due to policy.

### AI Adoption Is Still Emerging in 2026

*Only 3% of institutions are using AI across multiple housing processes, but 57% are either exploring, piloting, or interested in AI.*

**Survey Question:** Which best describes your team's current use of AI in student housing?



This suggests the industry has moved beyond simple awareness. Housing teams are asking more operational questions:

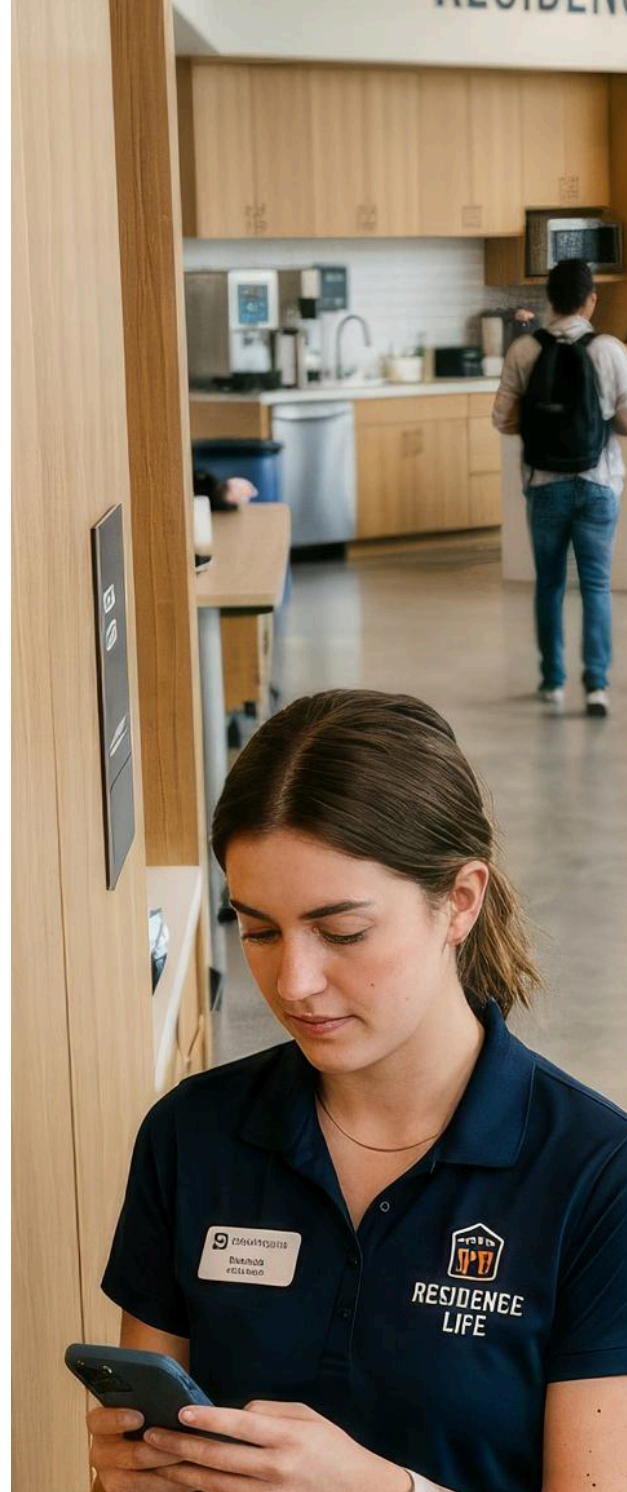
- ? Where can AI save time?
- ? Which workflows are safe to automate?
- ? What data is reliable enough to use>?
- ? How should staff review AI-generated outputs?
- ? How can institutions create guardrails that support innovation without introducing risk?

The next phase will not be defined by whether institutions are curious about AI. It will be defined by whether they can turn that curiosity into governed, practical, high-value use cases.



### Your Takeaway:

Start with a clear AI maturity assessment. Identify where your team is already using AI informally, where automation already exists, which workflows are still highly manual, and which use cases would create the most immediate relief. AI strategy should begin with operational pain points, not with tools.

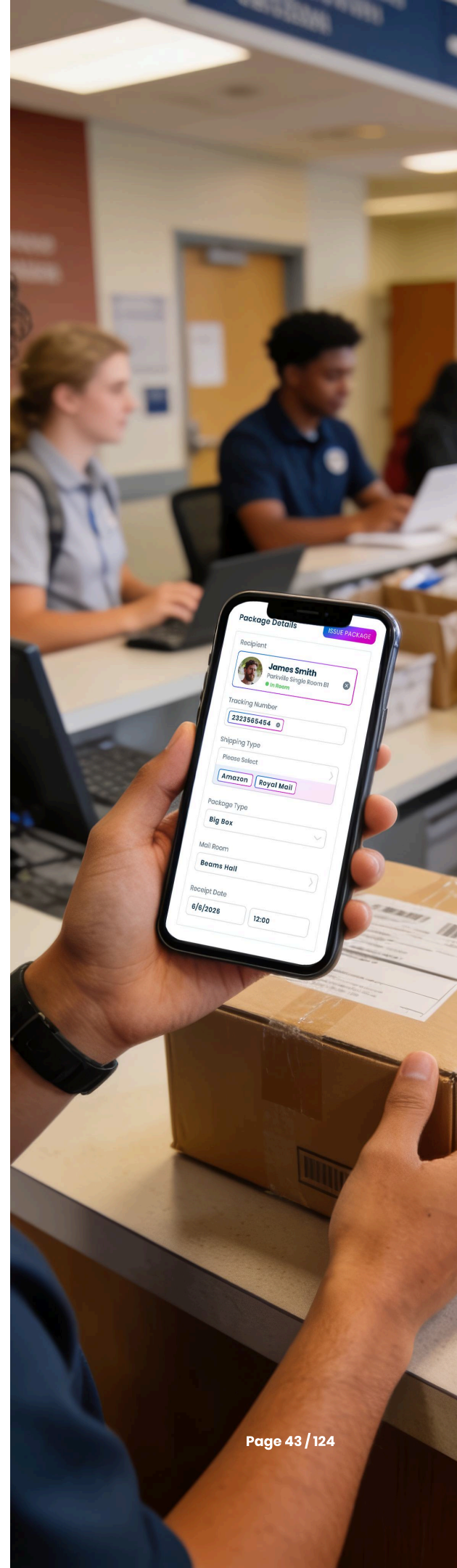


## Early AI Use is Concentrating in Content and Communication

The most common AI use cases are clustered around communication-heavy work. Sixty nine percents of respondents identify content creation (emails, messaging, marketing copy, and reports) as an area where AI is being used or considered. Forty two percent point to student or resident communications, including chatbots, FAQs, and response drafting.

This makes sense. Housing teams manage a high volume of repetitive, time-sensitive communication across applications, assignments, billing, move-in, room changes, maintenance, conduct, and parent or family questions. AI can help draft, summarize, standardize, and personalize those communications while freeing staff to focus on more complex or sensitive interactions.

- ✓ Applications
- ✓ Assignments
- ✓ Billing
- ✓ Move-in
- ✓ Room changes
- ✓ Maintenance
- ✓ Conduct
- ✓ Parent / Family questions



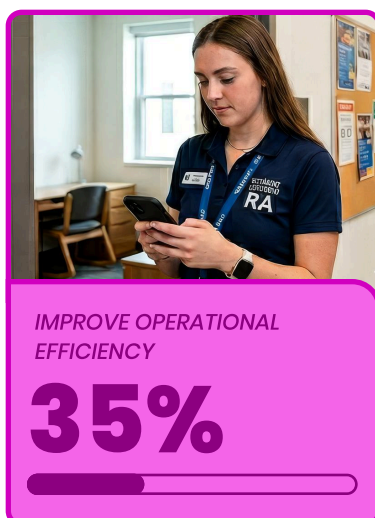
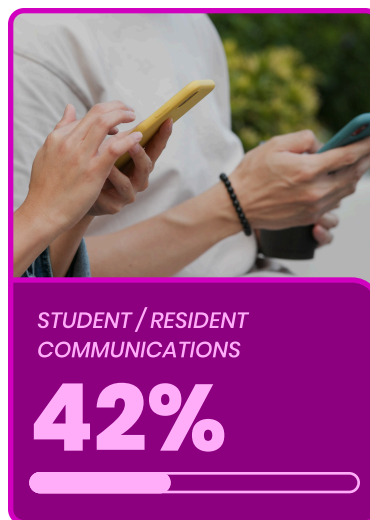


Data-focused use cases are also gaining attention. Thirty eight percent cite data analysis or reporting, including trend analysis, forecasting, and insights. Another 35% point to operational efficiency, such as automation, workflow support, and task reduction. More strategic use cases are less common today, with 14% citing strategic planning or decision support and 11% saying they are unsure or that AI use is managed outside the department.

## Content Creation and Communication Lead AI Use Cases in 2026

*69% of institutions identify content creation as a key AI use case, followed by student communications at 42% and data analysis or reporting at 38%.*

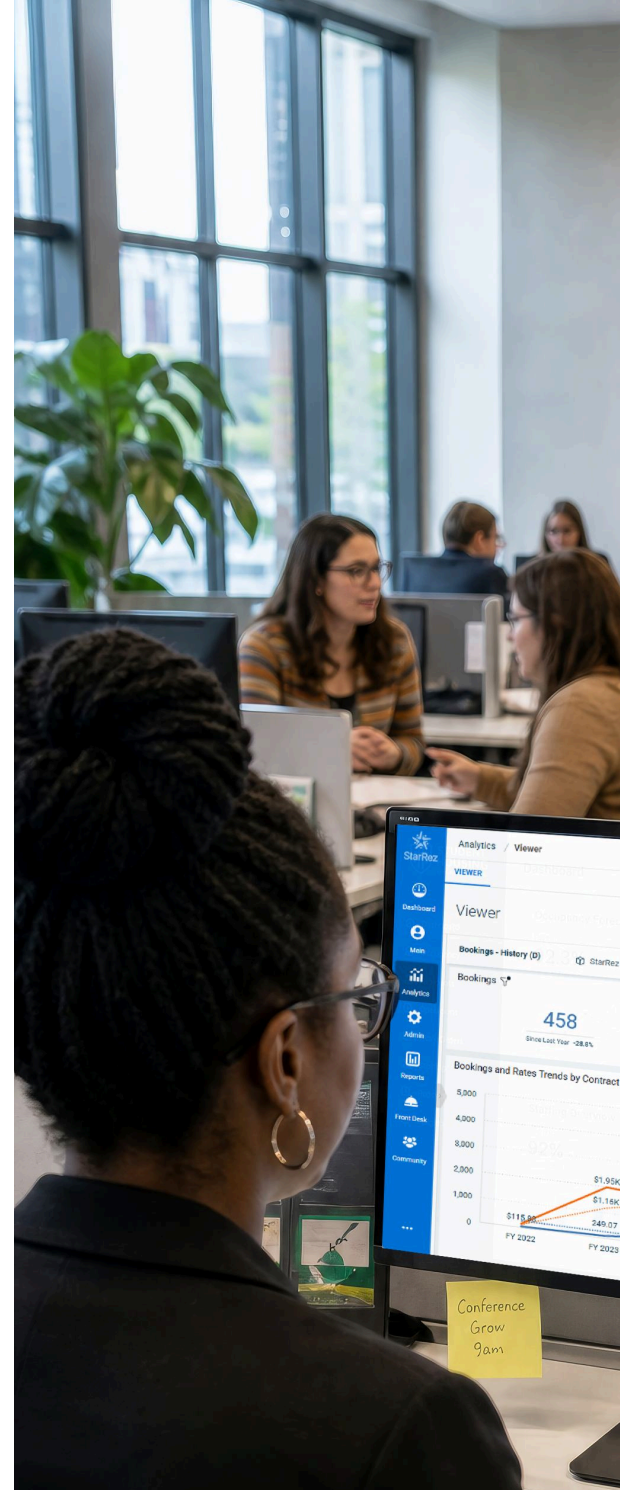
**Survey Question:** What are your team's current use cases for AI today?



The pattern is clear: institutions are starting with use cases that are visible, repeatable, and relatively easy to test. Writing assistance, response drafting, FAQs, and reporting support offer a practical entry point because they address everyday workload without requiring a full redesign of housing operations.

- ✓ Writing assistance
- ✓ Response drafting
- ✓ FAQs
- ✓ Reporting

But the next frontier will be more operational. As teams gain confidence, AI will likely move from helping staff write and respond faster to helping them identify trends, forecast demand, surface risks, and optimize workflows.



#### Your Takeaway:

Use communication-heavy tasks as a safe starting point, but do not stop there. Track the time saved, the quality of outputs, and the level of staff review required. Then apply those lessons to higher-value use cases like reporting, forecasting, occupancy planning, and workflow optimization.



## The Strongest AI Business Case is Capacity Relief

When institutions identify the most valuable outcomes AI could support, the top response is clear: reducing manual administrative work, selected by 65% of respondents.

That finding connects directly to the broader operating environment described throughout this report. Housing teams are managing high occupancy, lean staffing, growing communication volume, more complex student needs, and increasingly digital workflows. AI is not being viewed as a novelty; it is being viewed as a potential capacity strategy.

Other high-value outcomes reinforce the same point. 57% say AI could help improve reporting and forecasting, while 47% point to communication efficiency. Another 28% see value in supporting after-hours or front-desk coverage, and 22% say AI could help identify process bottlenecks. Only 11% are unsure.



### Intelligent Housing Operations

Explore how StarRez Intelligence brings purpose-built AI into the housing lifecycle to help teams save time, boost resident engagement, and make more confident decisions. From AI-assisted communications and note summaries to real-time resident insights, predictive analytics, and responsible automation, StarRez is helping housing teams spend less time on process and more time supporting their communities.

[Learn More](#)



## AI's Greatest Value Is Reducing Manual Work

*65% of institutions say reducing manual administrative work would be one of the most valuable AI outcomes, followed by reporting and forecasting at 57%.*

**Survey Question:** Where do you believe AI could have the greatest positive impact in student housing?

REDUCING MANUAL ADMINISTRATIVE WORK



IMPROVING REPORTING AND FORECASTING



ENHANCING COMMUNICATION EFFICIENCY



SUPPORTING AFTER HOURS / FRONT DESK COVERAGE



IDENTIFYING PROCESS BOTTLENECKS



UNSURE



This suggests that housing teams are looking for AI to solve practical problems first. They need help turning repetitive work into scalable workflows. They need better visibility into patterns. They need faster reporting. They need more efficient communication. And in some cases, they need ways to provide basic support outside normal business hours without adding staff.

The opportunity is not to replace the human side of housing. It is to reduce the amount of time staff spend on repetitive work so they can focus more attention on judgment-based, relationship-centered, and student support functions.



### Your Takeaway:

Prioritize AI use cases that give time back to staff. Start with workflows that are high-volume, repetitive, rules-based, or communication-heavy. Then define what success looks like: fewer manual steps, faster response times, better reporting accuracy, reduced front-desk burden, or clearer visibility into process bottlenecks.



## Barriers are Rooted in Governance, Trust, and Readiness

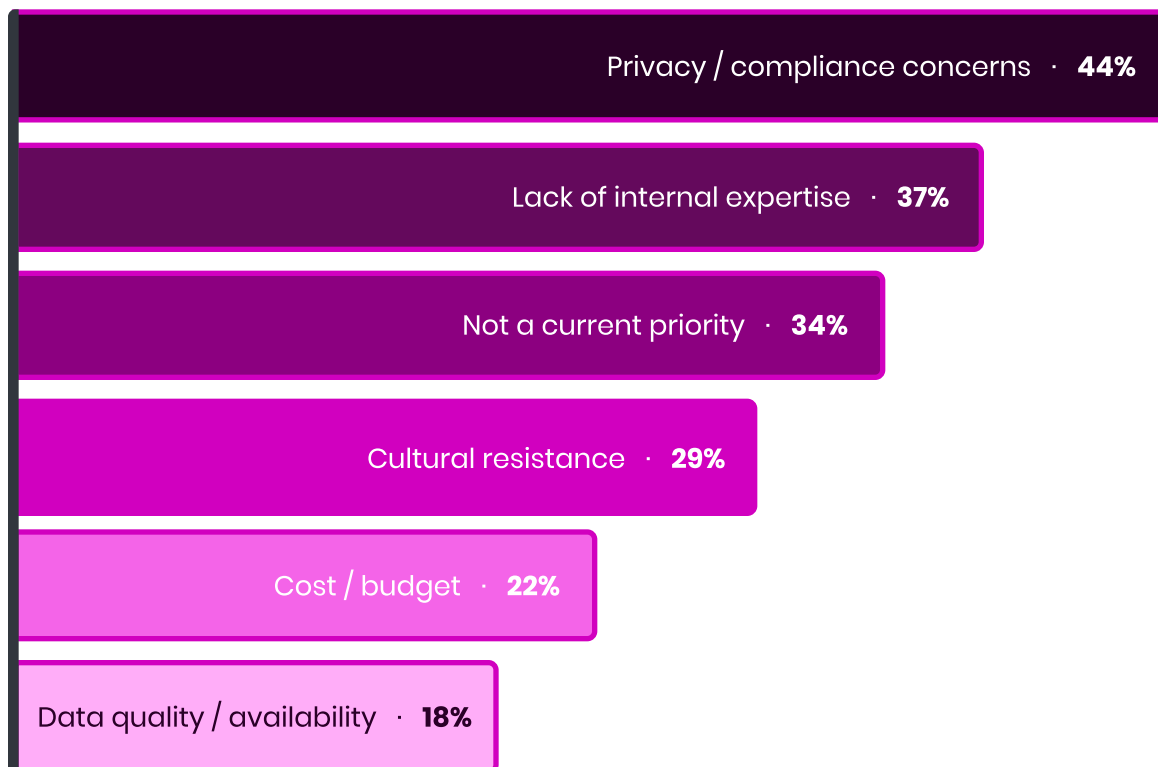
Despite growing interest, institutions still face meaningful barriers to AI adoption. The top concern is privacy or compliance, cited by 44% of respondents. That is followed closely by lack of internal expertise at 40%.

Other barriers show that hesitation is not only technical. Thirty seven percent say AI is not a current priority, 34% cite cultural resistance or lack of trust, and 29% point to cost or budget constraints. Twenty two percent say use cases or ROI are unclear, while 18% cite data quality or availability.

### Privacy, Expertise, and Trust Are the Biggest AI Barriers

*44% of institutions cite privacy or compliance concerns, while 40% point to lack of internal expertise and 34% cite cultural resistance or lack of trust.*

**Survey Question:** What are the biggest barriers preventing your team from adopting AI in housing operations?



These barriers point to a critical reality: AI adoption is not simply a software decision. It is a change management challenge.

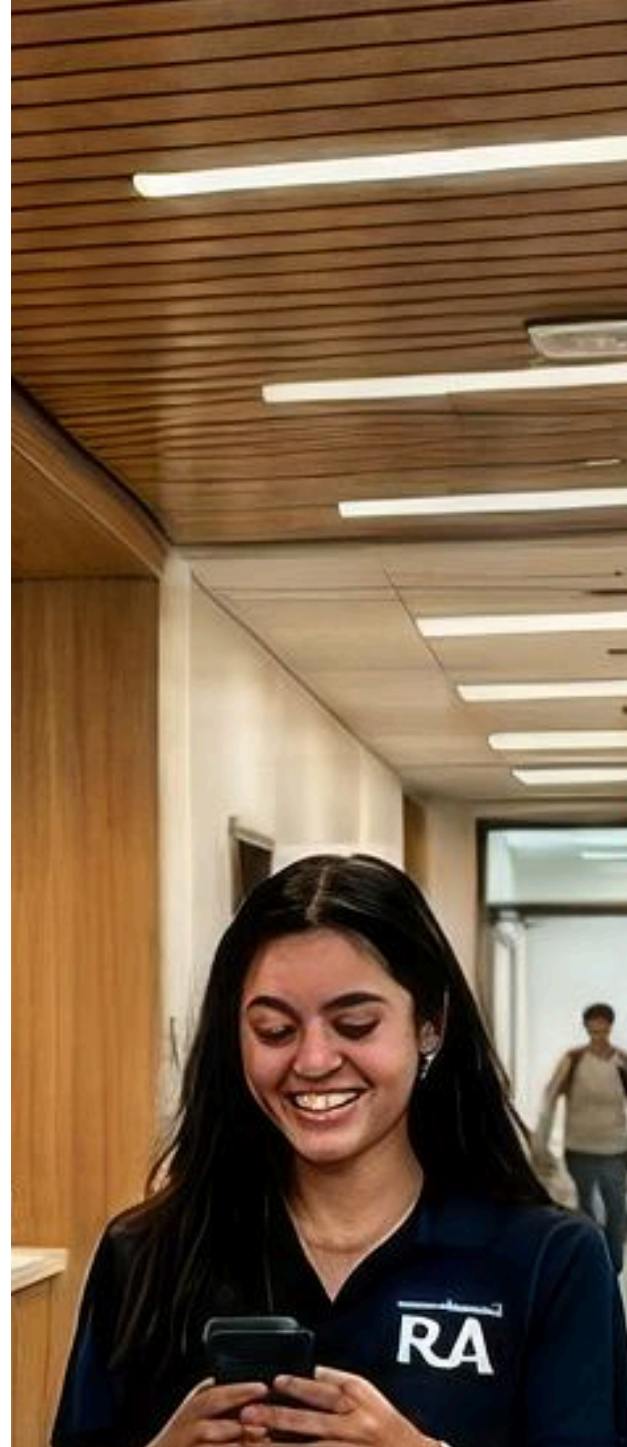
Housing teams need clarity on what data can be used, which processes are appropriate for AI support, how outputs should be reviewed, and where human decision-making must remain central. Staff also need training and confidence. Without that, even promising tools can stall because teams do not know how to use them safely or effectively.

The relatively low share citing data quality or availability, at 18%, may also be worth watching. As institutions move into more advanced AI use cases, data quality may become a larger barrier than teams initially expect. AI is only as useful as the information it can access and interpret.



#### **Your Takeaway:**

Build AI governance before scaling AI adoption. Define acceptable use cases, data boundaries, review requirements, and escalation points. Pair policy with practical staff training so teams understand not only what they are allowed to do but how to use AI responsibly in day-to-day housing work.



## Institutions Expect AI to Matter, but Not All at Once

Looking ahead three to five years, most institutions believe AI will play a meaningful role in student housing operations. Ten percent expect AI to be transformational, fundamentally changing housing operations. Another 40% believe AI will have a significant impact by meaningfully improving efficiency.

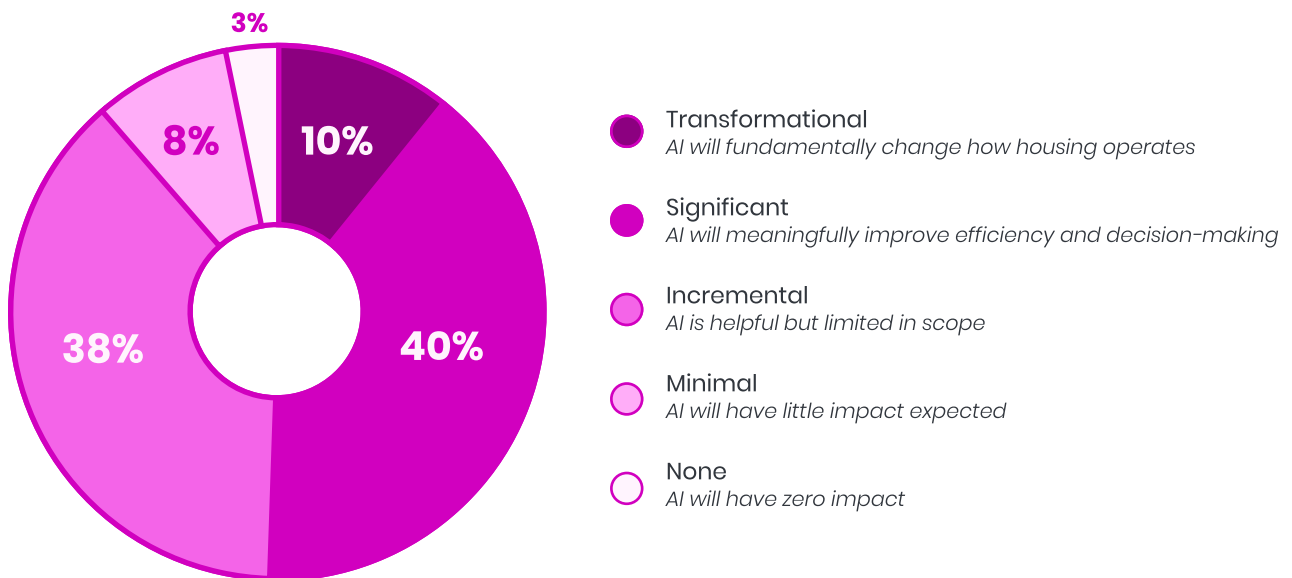
A further 38% expect the impact to be incremental; helpful, but limited in scope. Only 8% expect minimal impact, and 3% expect no impact at all.

Taken together, 88% of institutions expect AI to have at least some positive operational impact over the next three to five years.

### Most Institutions Expect AI to Improve Housing Operations

*50% of institutions expect AI to be transformational or significantly improve efficiency, while another 38% expect incremental benefits.*

**Survey Question:** Looking ahead 3–5 years, how significant a role do you believe AI will play in student housing operations?



This is a balanced view of AI's future. Housing teams are not universally predicting disruption, but they do expect AI to become more relevant.

The dominant expectation is not that AI will replace housing operations, but that it will improve efficiency, reduce manual work, and support better decisions.

That outlook fits the current adoption curve. Institutions are interested, but cautious. They see value, but they need guardrails. They expect impact, but they know implementation will take time.



### Your Takeaway:

Plan for AI as a gradual operational capability, not a one-time transformation. The institutions best positioned for the next three to five years will be those that start experimenting now, document what works, train staff, improve data quality, and build governance that can evolve as the technology matures.



## Housing is Entering the Intelligent Operations Era

The 2026 data tells us that AI is becoming operationally relevant, even if most institutions are still early in adoption.

Only a small share are using AI across multiple housing processes today, but a much larger group is exploring, piloting, or interested. The use cases are practical. Teams want help with content, communication, reporting, forecasting, administrative work, front-desk support, and process improvement. The barriers are also practical: privacy, compliance, expertise, trust, cost, unclear ROI, and data readiness.



### Automation That Keeps Evolving

Explore how StarRez Intelligence helps housing teams save time, simplify everyday workflows, and make faster, more confident decisions with responsible AI built directly into StarRez. Roughly ¼ of all StarRez customers have already adopted our no-cost AI offerings to help drive this automation — and with new features releasing every month, teams can keep finding new ways to reduce manual work and focus more on students.

[Explore StarRez Intelligence](#)



This is the next stage of student housing operations. The industry has already moved from paper-heavy processes toward digital and partially automated systems. Now, housing teams are beginning to ask how those systems can become more intelligent.

The institutions that lead this next phase will not necessarily be the ones that adopt AI the fastest. They will be the ones that adopt it most intentionally; with clear use cases, strong governance, staff training, reliable data, and a focus on improving both operational capacity & the student experience.



### Your Takeaway:

Make AI part of your operational strategy, not a side experiment. Start small, choose practical use cases, measure outcomes, and build trust through transparency and human oversight. Intelligent housing is not about replacing the work of housing teams. It is about helping those teams meet rising expectations with better tools, better data, and more sustainable capacity.



# Housing as a Student Success Strategy

*Residence life, wellbeing, retention, inclusion, and accessibility*

**The residence hall has become one of the institution's most important environments for identifying risk, building belonging, and supporting persistence.**

## **Here's what's changing:**

Housing is no longer viewed simply as accommodation. Institutions increasingly see the residential experience as a central part of student success, where belonging, wellbeing, inclusion, and early intervention all intersect.

- ✓ Student success
- ✓ Belonging
- ✓ Wellbeing
- ✓ Inclusion
- ✓ Early intervention

The resident experience data supports that shift: satisfaction improved in 2026, and resident retention largely held the gains made in 2025, suggesting institutions are sustaining progress even as student needs become more complex.





Residence life teams are often the first to see when a student is struggling. In 2026, institutions report that the most common resident concerns handled by residence life staff include roommate conflict, mental health and wellness concerns, facilities-related issues, noise or community standards, and personal crises. These are signals that connect directly to student wellbeing, satisfaction, and persistence.

### What it means for you:

Housing leaders have an opportunity to position residence life as a core student success

function. Institutions that connect resident feedback, wellbeing indicators, roommate matching, accessibility workflows, and community-building programs will be better equipped to identify risk earlier, respond more consistently, and create residential environments where students are more likely to stay and thrive.

### Key themes in this section:

-  Wellbeing visibility
-  Satisfaction and retention
-  Community-building
-  Inclusion and accessibility
-  Proactive intervention





## Residence Life is the Front Line of Student Support

Residence life staff are managing a broad and increasingly complex range of student needs. The most common resident concern or interaction handled by residence life staff is roommate conflict, cited by 82% of institutions. Mental health and wellness concerns follow at 61%, with facilities-related concerns at 43%, noise or community standards at 27%, and personal crises at 18%.

This data reinforces a key shift: the residential environment is one of the earliest places where student challenges become visible.

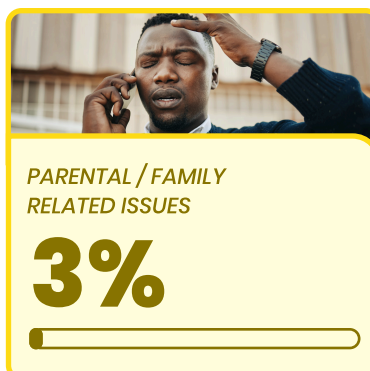
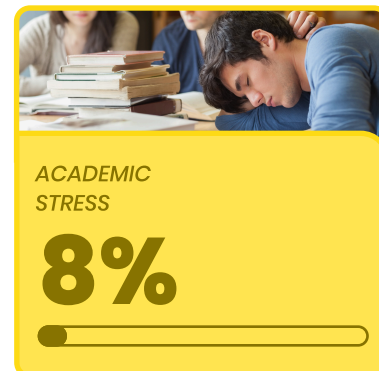
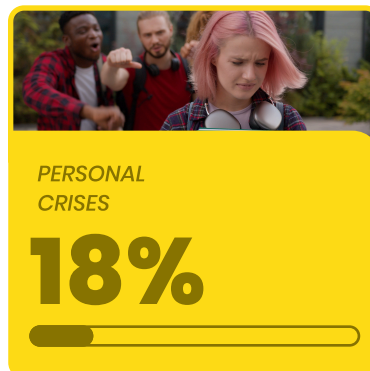
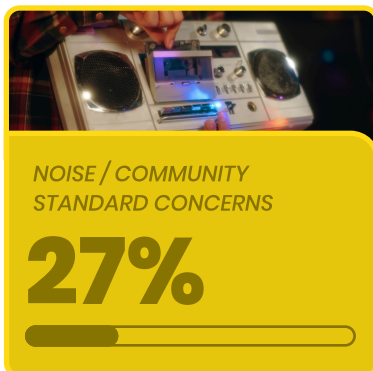
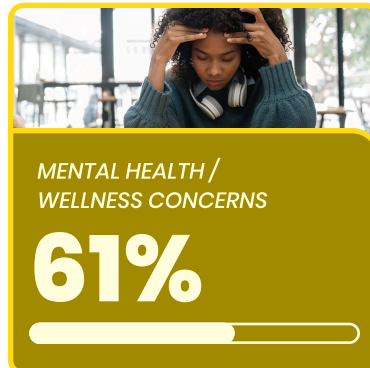
Roommate conflict may point to a mismatch in expectations, communication styles, or belonging. Mental health and wellness concerns may surface in casual staff interactions before they appear in formal support channels. Facilities issues may seem operational, but they can quickly shape how supported, safe, or valued students feel.



## Top Resident Concerns Handled by Residence Life Staff in 2026

*82% of institutions cite roommate conflict as a common resident concern handled by residence life staff, followed by mental health and wellness concerns.*

**Survey Question:** What are the most common types of resident concerns or interactions handled by residence life staff?





Roommate conflict and mental health/wellness concerns dominate residence life interactions, reinforcing housing's role as an early point of visibility into student needs.

The residence hall is no longer just where students return after class. It is where stress, conflict, isolation, belonging, and support often become visible first. For housing teams, that makes residence life a critical partner in broader student success strategy.



Stress



Conflict



Isolation



Belonging



Support



### Your Takeaway:

Equip residence life teams with clear escalation pathways, consistent documentation practices, and shared visibility with campus partners. The goal is not to turn every housing interaction into a formal case, but to make sure patterns are visible early enough for staff to act before concerns become crises.



## Satisfaction is Improving,

## but Feedback Systems Still Have Gaps

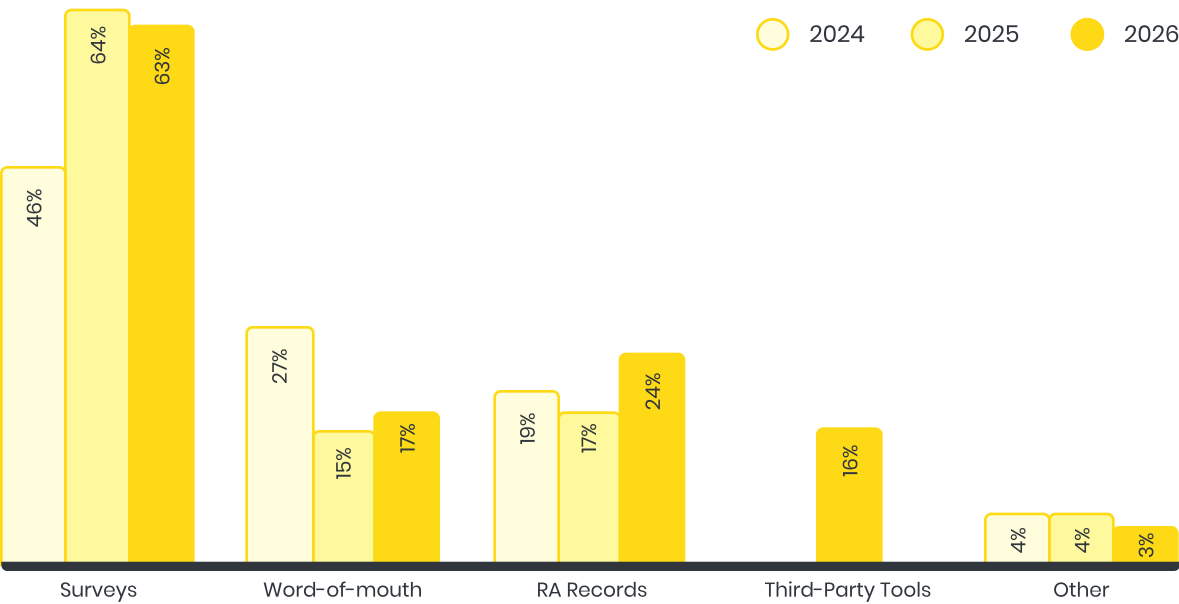
Resident satisfaction strengthened in 2026. The percentage of institutions reporting that 75–100% of residents are satisfied or very satisfied rose from 73% in 2025 to 79% in 2026. The highest satisfaction tier also improved, with institutions reporting 90–100% resident satisfaction increasing from 17% to 20%.

At the same time, the data shows that satisfaction measurement is not yet universal. In 2026, 66% of institutions formally track and measure resident satisfaction, while 34% do not. Among those using feedback methods, surveys remain the dominant tool at 63%, holding steady from 64% in 2025 after a sharp jump from 46% in 2024. RA records also increased as a measurement method, rising from 17% in 2025 to 24% in 2026, suggesting institutions are beginning to place more value on frontline residential insights.

### Resident Satisfaction Measurement Remains Survey-Led, but Gaps Are Growing

*Surveys remain the top method at 63%, while 34% of institutions do not measure resident satisfaction.*

**Survey Question:** How do you measure resident satisfaction?

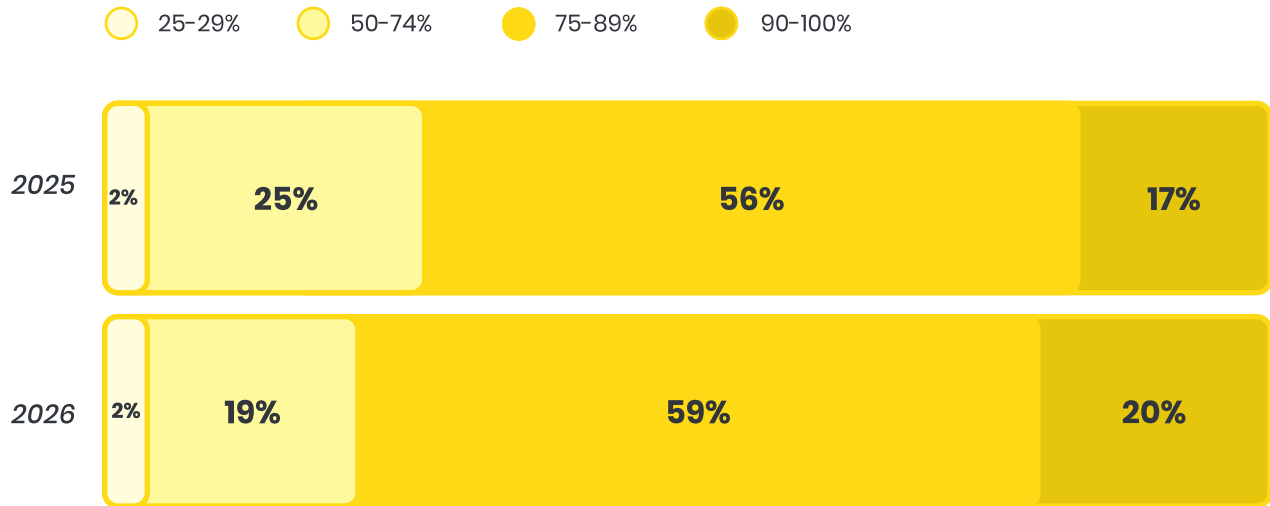




## Resident Satisfaction Strengthens in 2026

*Institutions reporting high resident satisfaction rose from 73% in 2025 to 79% in 2026, but one-third still do not formally track satisfaction.*

**Survey Question:** What percentage of your residents would you say are satisfied or very satisfied with their housing experience?



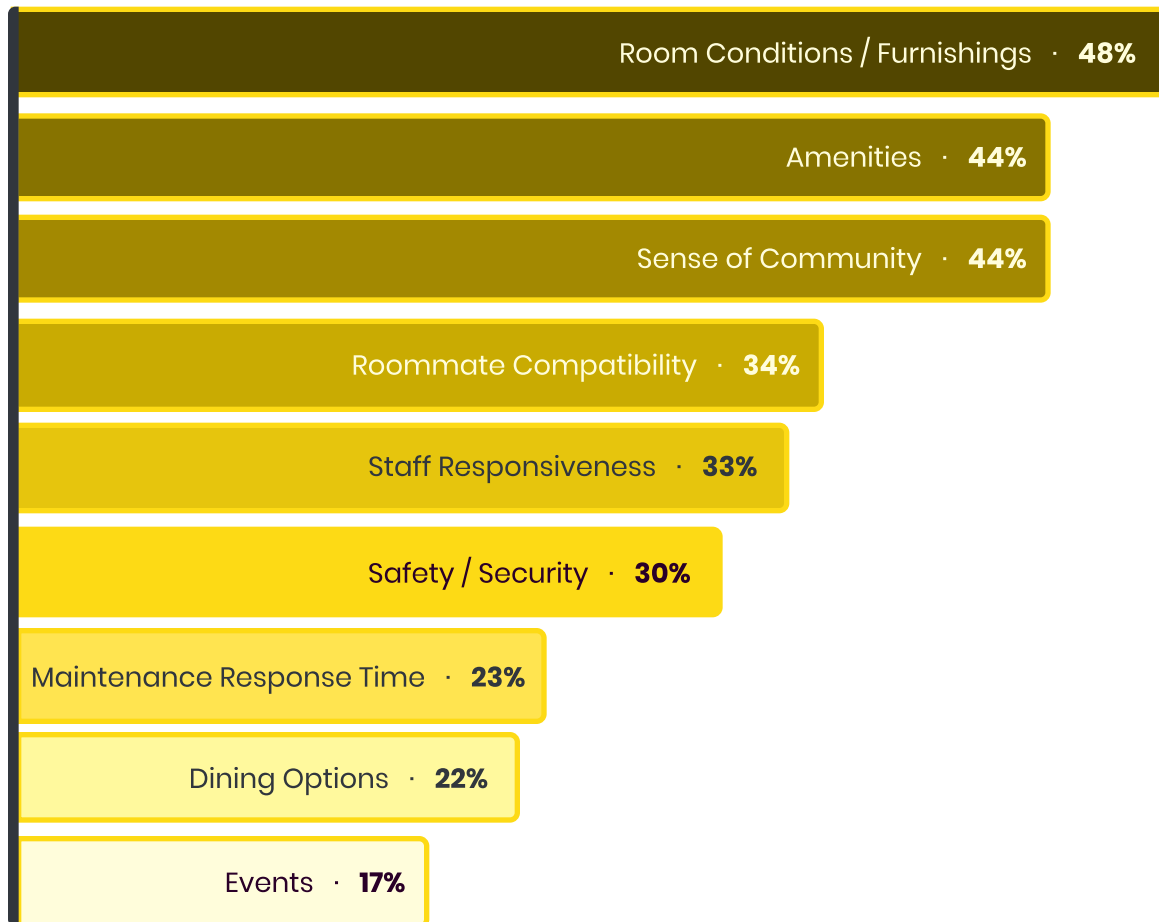
The satisfaction story is encouraging, but it is also incomplete. Strong satisfaction results are most useful when institutions can understand what is driving them. In 2026, the top factors influencing resident satisfaction are room conditions and furnishings at 48%, then amenities and sense of community at 44%. Roommate compatibility follows at 34%, staff responsiveness and support at 33%, and safety and security at 30%.

This shows that satisfaction is shaped by both the fundamentals and the feeling of belonging. Students want housing that is functional, comfortable, responsive, and socially connected. When one of those pieces breaks down, the overall residential experience is affected.

## Top Drivers of Resident Satisfaction in 2026

*Room quality, amenities, and sense of community are the strongest satisfaction drivers, showing students judge housing by both value and lived experience.*

**Survey Question:** What are the top three factors that influence your residents' satisfaction most significantly?



### Your Takeaway:

Track resident satisfaction consistently, but go beyond the headline number. Segment feedback by community type, room type, class year, accommodation status, and roommate matching experience to understand where satisfaction is strongest and where targeted improvements are needed.

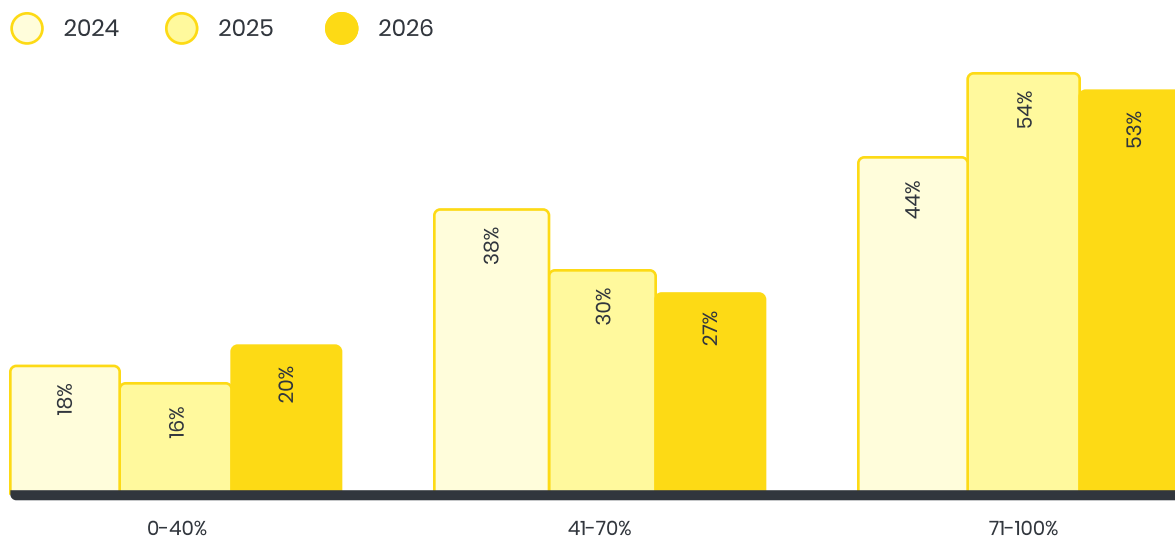
## Retention Remains Strong, but Earlier Visibility is the Next Opportunity

Resident retention remains one of the clearest indicators that housing is connected to student success, especially when viewed alongside satisfaction. In 2026, 53% of institutions report resident retention in the 71–100% range, nearly flat with 54% in 2025 and still meaningfully above 44% in 2024. Combined with stronger satisfaction results, this suggests the industry has largely maintained the resident experience gains made last year. But the data also points to the next challenge: moving from retention as an outcome to retention as something housing teams can influence earlier.

### Resident Retention Holds Steady After 2025 Gains

*Institutions reporting 71–100% resident retention remained strong at 53% in 2026, nearly unchanged from 54% in 2025 and up from 44% in 2024.*

**Survey Question:** What was your resident retention rate from your most recent academic year?



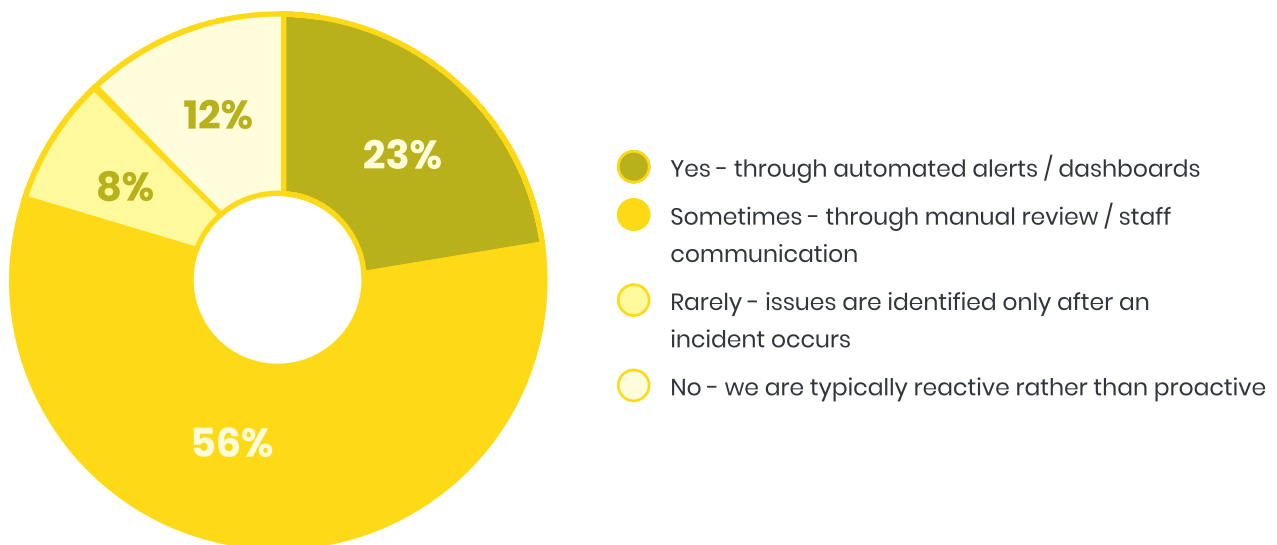
The strongest evidence is in the proactive intervention data. Only 23% of institutions say their team is proactively notified when students show signs of low engagement or may be at risk through automated alerts or dashboards. Most institutions, 56%, rely on manual review or staff communication. Another 8% say they rarely identify risk until after an incident occurs, and 12% say they are typically reactive rather than proactive.

At the same time, institutions overwhelmingly see the value of earlier visibility. Eighty eight percent believe earlier visibility into student wellbeing and engagement trends would either significantly improve student retention and success or moderately improve engagement and support effectiveness.

## Earlier Visibility Is Widely Valued, But Automation Is Limited

*88% of institutions believe earlier wellbeing and engagement visibility would improve student outcomes, yet only 23% use automated alerts or dashboards.*

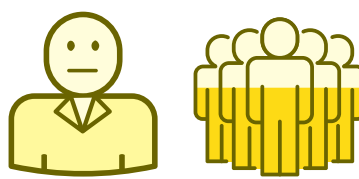
**Survey Question:** Is your team proactively notified when students show signs of low engagement or may be at risk?



**Survey Question:** If your team had earlier visibility into student wellbeing and engagement trends, how do you believe this would impact student outcomes?



Significantly improve student retention · 29%



Moderately improve engagement effectiveness · 59%



Have minimal to no impact · 12%



Housing teams are already collecting many of the signals that matter. Institutions measure student wellbeing through resident conduct, concern, or incident tracking (74%), informal staff insights (71%), student surveys or pulse checks (59%), counseling or student support services data (53%), and academic or engagement indicators (37%). The challenge is not always whether information exists. It is whether the right information reaches the right people early enough to shape the outcome.

## Wellbeing Measurement Relies on Frontline and Incident-Based Signals

*Institutions most often assess student wellbeing through residence life observations at 74%, followed by informal staff insights at 71%.*

**Survey Question:** How does your institution currently measure or assess student wellbeing within residential life or housing?

RA OBSERVATIONS & REPORTS



CONDUCT, CONCERN, OR INCIDENT TRACKING



INFORMAL STAFF INSIGHTS



STUDENT SURVEYS / PULSE CHECKS



COUNSELING / STUDENT SUPPORT



ACADEMIC / ENGAGEMENT INDICATORS



WE DO NOT FORMALLY MEASURE WELLBEING



### Your Takeaway:

Turn housing data into early action. Connect conduct trends, RA observations, survey responses, support referrals, and engagement indicators into a shared visibility model. Even a simple internal process for flagging patterns can help teams move from reacting to incidents toward supporting students earlier.

## Belonging is Built Through Communities, Programming, and Conflict Support

Community-building continues to be one of housing's strongest contributions to student success. When asked which residential communities are most popular or most requested, 64% of institutions point to academic-focused LLCs, followed by honors or scholars programs at 42%. Identity-based housing ranks third at 36%, followed by interest-based or themed housing at 33%.

This suggests students are looking for more than proximity. They want residential communities that align with who they are, what they are studying, and where they are trying to go.



### Build Stronger Residential Communities

Explore how StarRez Community Management helps housing and residence life teams create more connected, engaged communities. From pulse surveys and program management to duty logs, visitor tracking, curriculum planning, and holistic resident profiles, StarRez gives staff the tools to understand resident needs, strengthen belonging, and turn everyday engagement into lasting student impact.

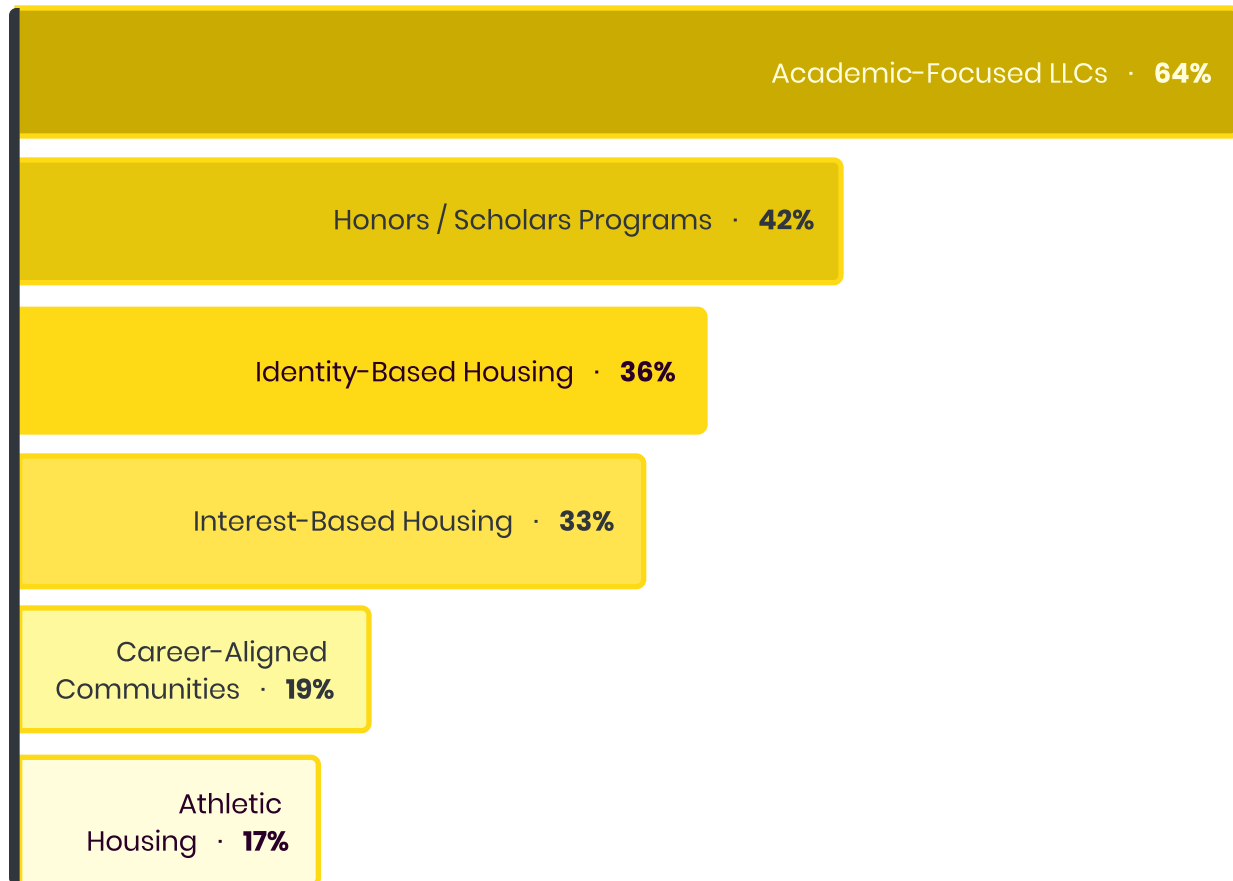
[Learn More](#)



## Residential Communities Reflect a Demand for Purpose and Belonging

*Academic, honors, and scholars programs are the most requested residential communities, followed by identity-based and interest-based housing.*

**Survey Question:** Which types of residential communities are most popular or most requested at your institution?



The retention data reinforces the same point. Institutions say the residence life initiatives with the greatest positive impact on student retention are Resident Assistants (RA engagement) at 77% and social programming at 76%. Conflict mediation or restorative practices follow at 36%.

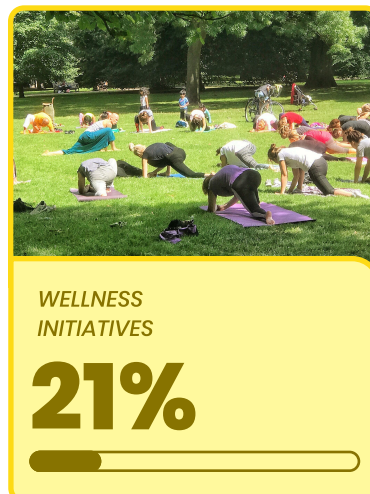
That near tie between RA engagement and social programming is important. Retention is not only supported by helping students connect; it is also supported by helping them navigate conflict, repair relationships, and stay engaged when the residential experience becomes difficult.



## Residence Life Initiatives That Support Retention in 2026

*RA engagement and social programming are the most widely cited retention drivers, showing that mentorship and belonging both matter.*

**Survey Question:** Which residence life initiatives do you believe have the greatest positive impact on student retention?





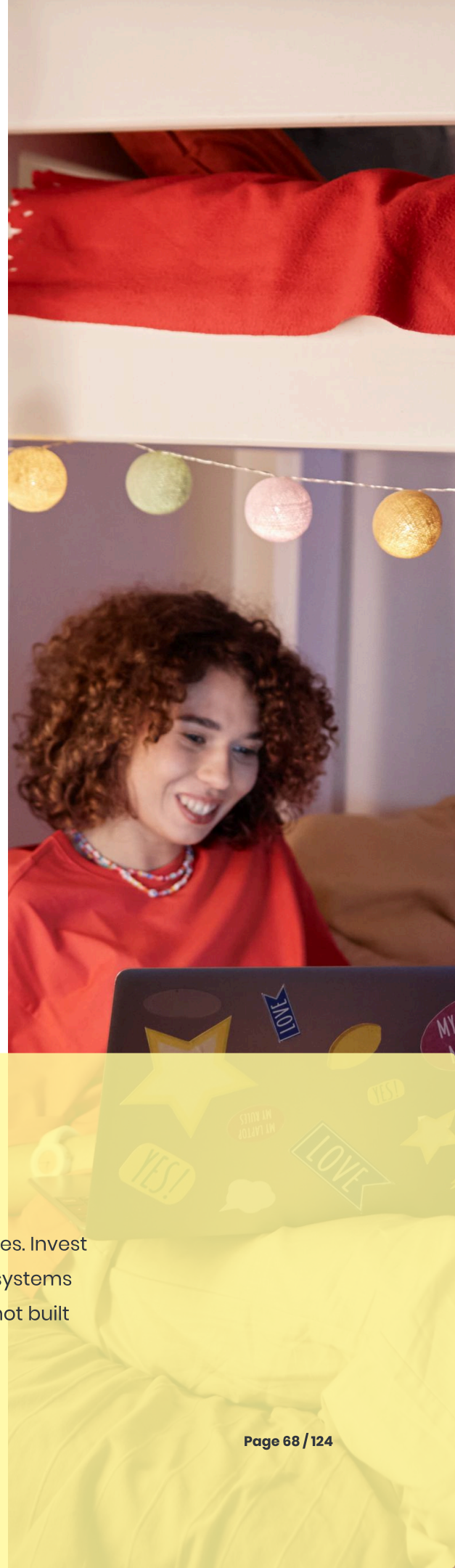
This is where residence life becomes a student success strategy in practice. A well-attended event can help students make connections. A restorative conversation can help them remain in community. An LLC can give students shared purpose. A peer mentor can help a student feel seen before they disengage.

- ✓ Help students make connections
- ✓ Help students remain in community
- ✓ Help students find a shared purpose
- ✓ Help students feel seen before disengaging



#### **Your Takeaway:**

Treat community-building and conflict resolution as linked strategies. Invest in programming that creates connection, but also strengthen the systems that help students navigate friction when it happens. Belonging is not built only through events; it is sustained through support.



## Roommate Matching is a Student Success Lever

Roommate compatibility continues to play a meaningful role in the student experience. It is one of the top drivers of resident satisfaction, cited by 34% of institutions, and roommate conflict is the most common concern handled by residence life staff.

At the same time, roommate matching is becoming more student-directed. For first-year residents, 67% of institutions now allow students to self-select roommates, up from 59% in 2025. Manual assignment by staff declined from 23% to 19%, while auto-assignment dropped from 19% to 14%.

For returning residents, self-selection remains the dominant model. Eighty two percent of institutions allow returning students to self-select roommates in 2026, compared to 84% in 2025. Manual assignment remains limited at 14%, and auto-assignment is just 4%.



### Empower Roommate Connections

Explore how StarRez Room & Roommate Solution helps housing teams simplify assignments while giving residents more choice in where (and with whom) they live. From room and suite self-selection to advanced roommate matching, roommate agreement tracking, and gender-inclusive housing support, StarRez is helping institutions reduce questions, save staff time, and create stronger residential communities.

[Learn More](#)



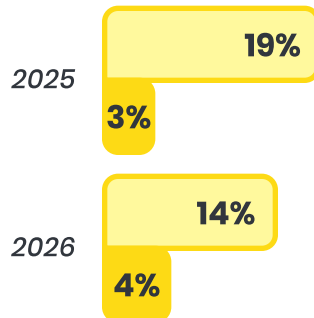
## Roommate Self-Selection Expands for First-Year Residents in 2026

*67% of institutions now allow first-year students to self-select roommates, while returning-student roommate matching remains overwhelmingly student-directed.*

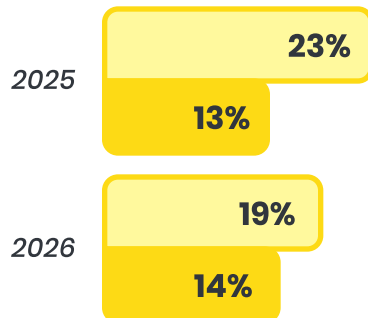
**Survey Question:** How do you primarily handle roommate matching when needed?

● First-Year Residents ● Returning Residents

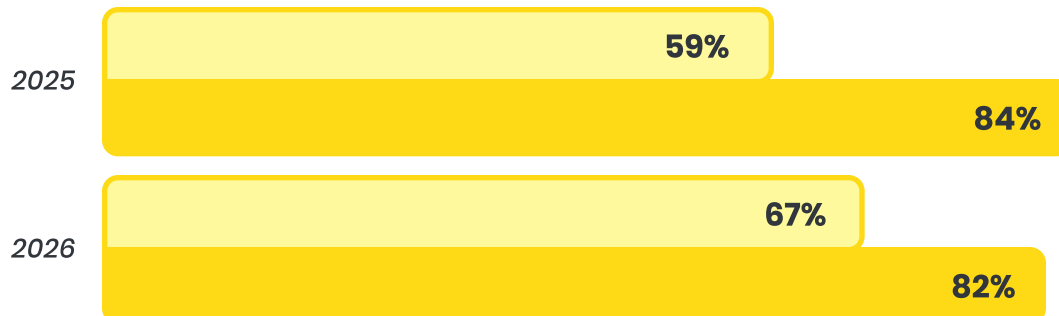
### RESIDENTS ARE AUTO-ASSIGNED ROOMMATES



### RESIDENTS ARE MANUALLY ASSIGNED ROOMMATES BY STAFF



### RESIDENTS CAN SELF-SELECT ROOMMATES





The growth of self-selection reflects a broader shift toward student agency.

Students want more control over who they live with, and institutions are increasingly giving them that choice.

But the persistence of roommate conflict shows that choice alone is not enough. Students still need tools, expectations, agreements, and support structures that help them live successfully with others.

- ✓ Tools
- ✓ Expectations
- ✓ Agreements
- ✓ Support structures



### Your Takeaway:

Use roommate matching as both an operational process and a student success intervention. Pair self-selection with compatibility questions, roommate agreements, early check-ins, and clear conflict pathways. The goal is not just to assign roommates, but to reduce preventable friction and help students build stable residential connections.





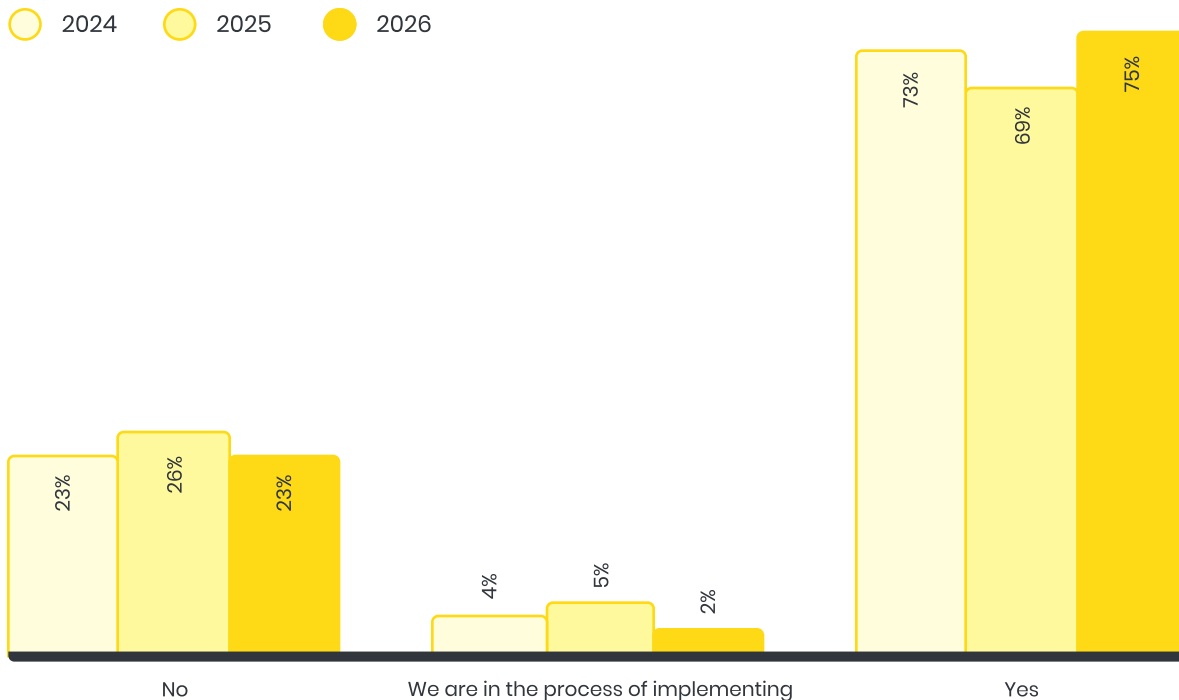
## Inclusion and Accessibility are Now Part of the Student Success Infrastructure

Inclusive housing continues to be a major part of the residential experience. After a temporary dip in 2025, adoption reached its highest level in the three-year history of the study: in 2026, 75% of institutions offer gender-inclusive or gender-neutral housing, up from 69% in 2025 and slightly above 73% in 2024. Another 2% are in the process of implementing it, while 23% do not currently offer it. The pattern suggests gender-inclusive housing remains a durable and growing component of the residential experience, even if year-to-year momentum has not been perfectly linear.

### Gender-Inclusive Housing Rebounds in 2026

*75% of institutions now offer gender-inclusive or gender-neutral housing, marking an increase from 2025 and reinforcing inclusion as a core housing expectation.*

**Survey Question:** Do you offer gender inclusive / gender-neutral housing?



Accessibility accommodations also remain an important part of housing operations. Most institutions report that accommodation requests make up a relatively small share of total housing requests: 59% say less than 10% of requests are for accessibility accommodations. But nearly one-third report higher request levels, with 28% saying accessibility accommodations account for 10–25% of housing requests.

The types of accommodation requests show how broad and complex student needs have become. Institutions report handling requests related to mobility needs (90%), medical needs (85%), Emotional Support Animals (83%), mental health needs such as anxiety, depression, or PTSD (72%), neurodiversity such as autism, ADHD, or sensory processing differences (67%), and sensory impairments or sensitivities (47% each).



### Automating Inclusive Housing Support

Discover how the University of Central Florida streamlined Emotional Support Animal housing through connected systems and automated workflows. From faster approvals and clearer resident records to stronger collaboration with Student Accessibility Services, UCF is making inclusive housing easier to manage and more supportive for students.

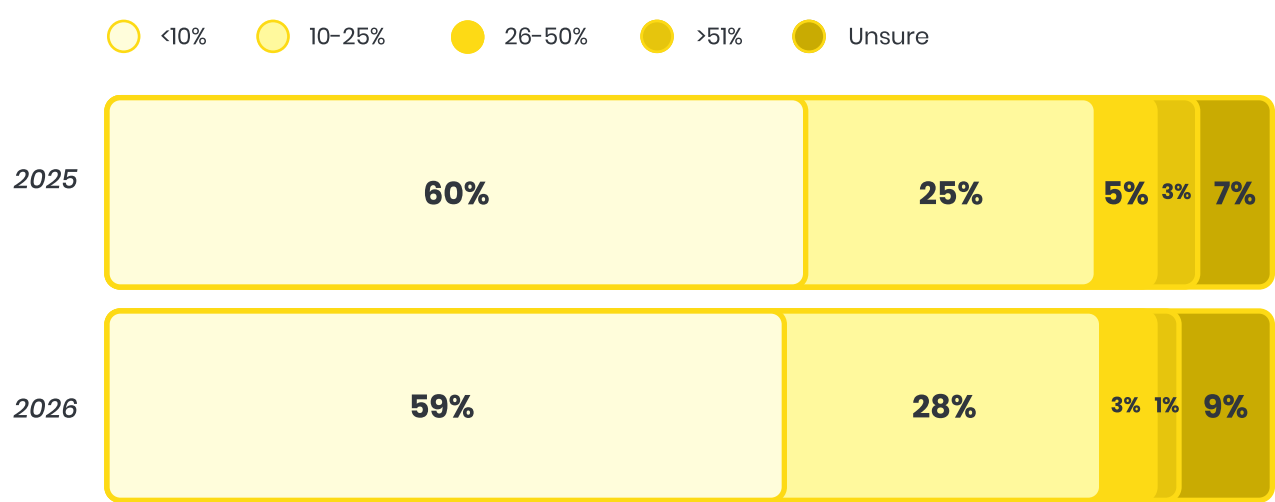
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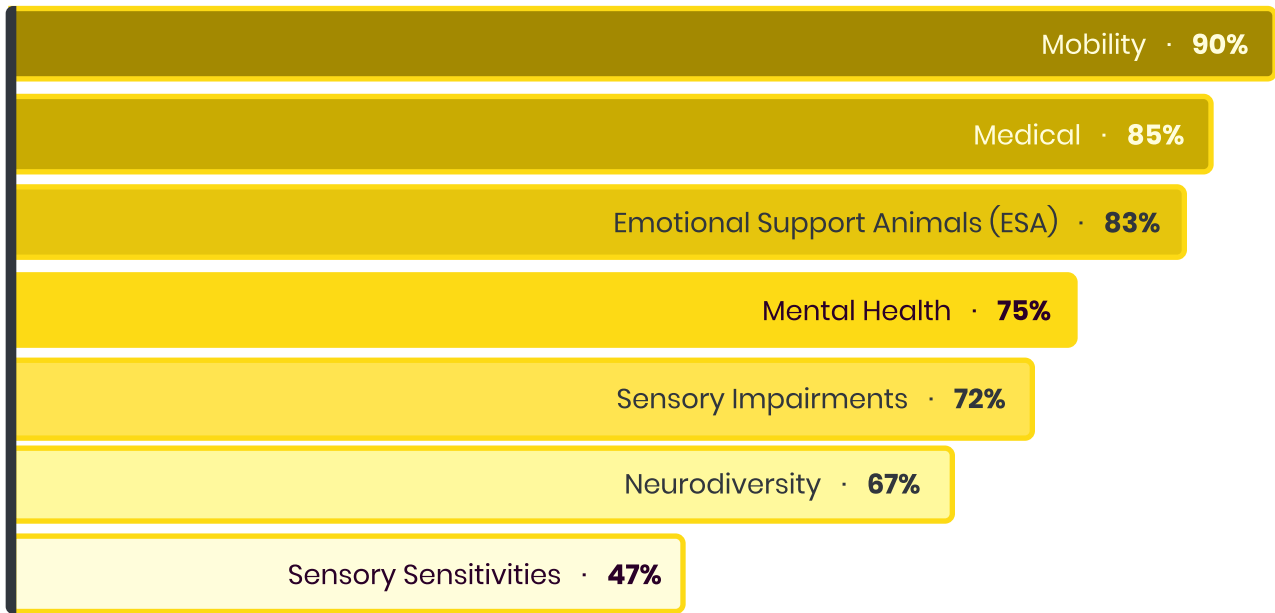
### Accessibility Requests Are Manageable in Volume But Complex in Type

Most institutions report lower overall accommodation volume, but the needs represented span mobility, medical, ESA-related, mental health, and more.

**Survey Question:** What percentage of your housing requests were for Accessibility Accommodation requests?



**Survey Question:** What types of accessibility needs do you support?

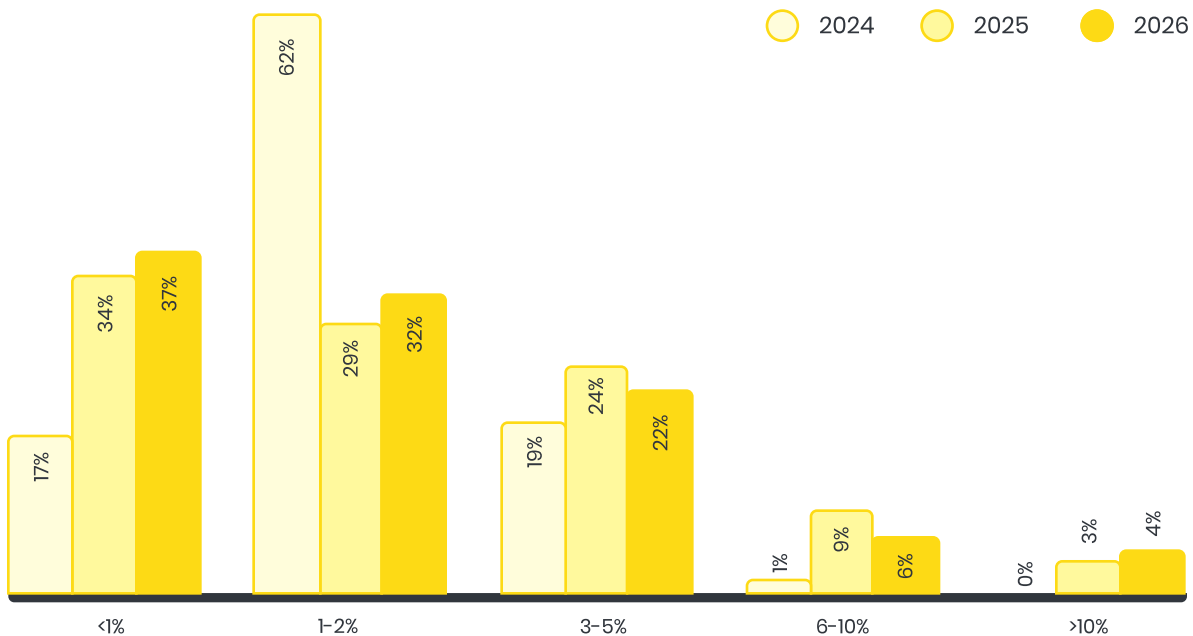


Emotional Support Animals remain part of this broader accessibility and wellbeing conversation. In 2026, 32% of institutions report that 3% or more of their residents have ESAs, and 10% report ESA populations of 6% or more. While that is slightly lower than 2025, it remains well above 2024 levels, suggesting ESA-related workflows are now a sustained part of housing operations rather than a temporary spike.

### ESA Presence Remains Elevated but Stabilizes in 2026

*32% of institutions report 3% or more of residents have ESAs in 2026, down slightly from 36% in 2025 but still above 20% in 2024.*

**Survey Question:** What percentage of your residents currently have Emotional Support Animals (ESAs)?



#### Your Takeaway:

Move beyond compliance-only thinking. Inclusive and accessible housing requires flexible assignment tools, clear documentation processes, staff training, student-centered communication, and coordination across housing, disability services, counseling, and residence life. The institutions that do this well will be better positioned to support both individual student needs and broader retention goals.



## Housing is Becoming a Coordinated Care Environment

The 2026 data points to a clear conclusion: housing is now one of the most important environments for seeing the whole student.

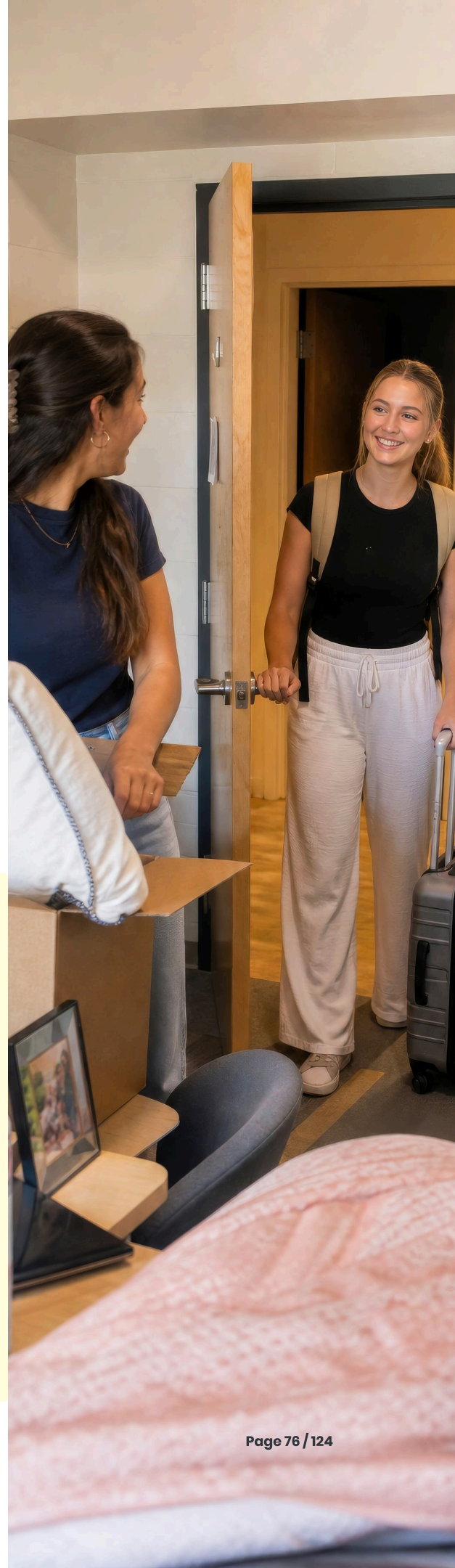
Residence life teams are handling roommate conflict, wellness concerns, facilities issues, conduct matters, and personal crises. Institutions are using satisfaction data, RA records, conduct tracking, surveys, counseling data, and academic indicators to understand student wellbeing. Students are seeking communities that reflect their identities, goals, and interests. Accessibility and inclusion are shaping housing expectations. And most institutions believe earlier visibility into wellbeing and engagement would improve outcomes.



### Smarter Housing Operations

Discover how the University of Wollongong is transforming residential life through streamlined operations, real-time visibility, and a more connected student experience. From student arrivals and conduct tracking to visitor management and 1,400+ events across five residences, UOW is making housing easier for staff and more engaging for residents.

[Read the Full Story](#)



The opportunity now is to connect these pieces into a more coordinated student success strategy.

Housing does not need to own every student support function, but it does need to be integrated into the broader student success ecosystem.

The residence hall is often where risk appears first, where belonging is built daily, and where the decision to stay or leave can be shaped by dozens of small experiences.



### Your Takeaway:

Position housing as a strategic partner in retention and student success. Build stronger bridges between residence life, housing operations, counseling, disability services, student affairs, academic support, and institutional research. The more connected these teams become, the better institutions can move from isolated interventions to a coordinated residential experience that supports persistence.



# The Financial & Enrollment Balancing Act

## *Revenue, pricing, growth strategy, and international students*

**Housing operations are increasingly functioning as strategic business units navigating both enrollment realities and institutional financial pressure.**

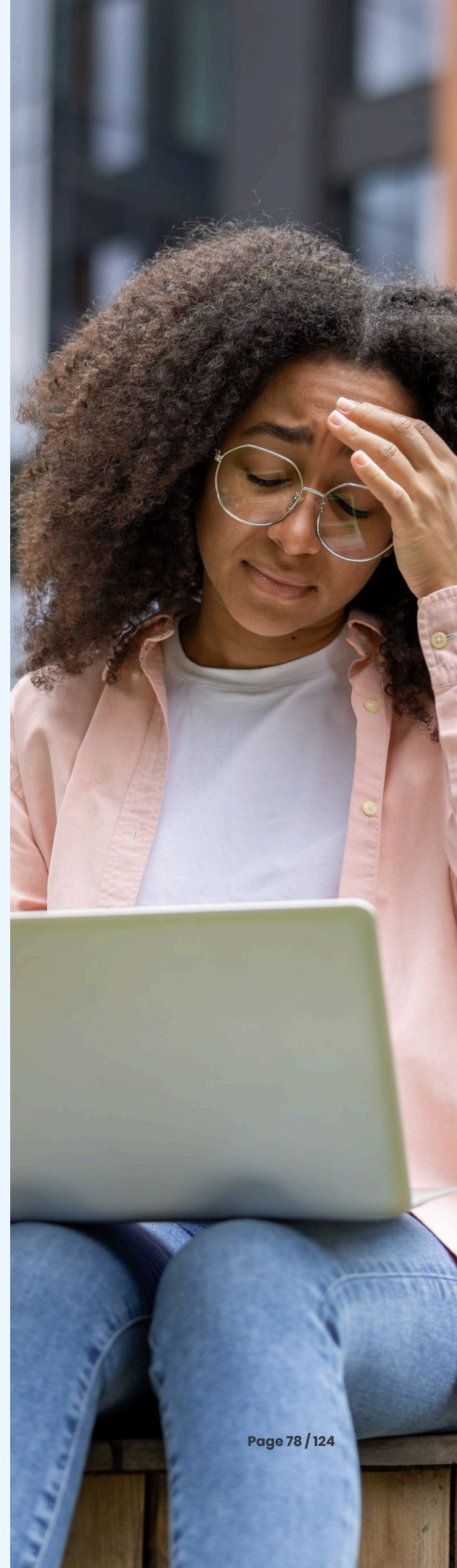
### **Here's what's changing:**

Housing leaders are balancing affordability pressure, enrollment uncertainty, market competition, and long-term revenue sustainability at the same time. The 2026 data shows a clear move toward more sophisticated pricing strategies, with more institutions using market analysis, cost-based approaches, and competitive benchmarking to determine housing costs.

- ✓ Market analysis
- ✓ Cost-based approaches
- ✓ Competitive benchmarking

At the same time, institutions are making cautious decisions about growth. Some are planning new capacity, others are exploring off-campus or master lease strategies, and many are holding steady.

International student housing demand also appears more complex than simply “growing” or “declining.” While global recruitment remains a strategic focus, year-over-year changes in international students requiring housing accommodations point to a more volatile enrollment environment than in prior years.



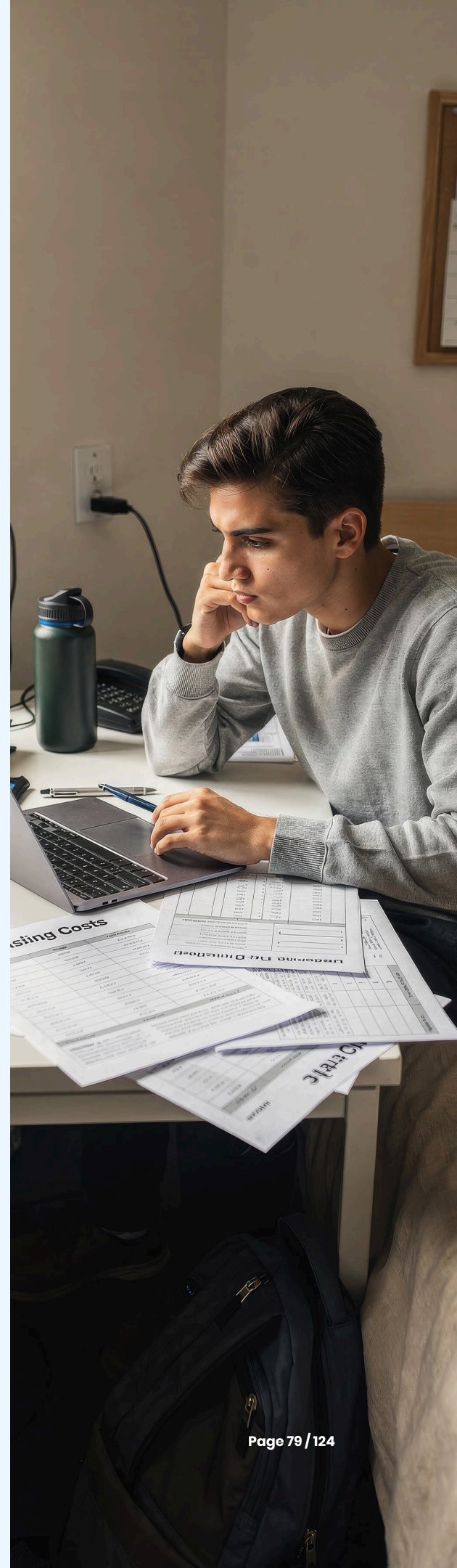
### What it means for you:

Housing leaders need to connect financial strategy with enrollment strategy. Pricing, fees, deposits, expansion, international student support, renters insurance, damage management, and off-campus competition are no longer separate operational decisions. Together, they shape affordability, access, competitiveness, and financial resilience.

Institutions that use market data, understand their local competition, model capacity scenarios, and coordinate closely with enrollment and international student teams will be better positioned to protect revenue while still delivering a student-centered housing experience.

### Key themes in this section:

-  Housing pricing strategies
-  Fees, deposits, and affordability
-  Revenue protection and administrative risk
-  Capacity planning and expansion strategy
-  International student trends and global market focus
-  Competition from build-to-rent and co-living properties
-  Financial sustainability in a more complex housing market





## Pricing Strategies are Becoming More Data-Driven

Housing pricing is a more strategic decision in 2026, with institutions using multiple inputs to determine student housing costs. The most common approach is market analysis, cited by 53% of institutions, followed closely by a cost-based approach at 50% and competitive analysis at 45%.

Together, these responses suggest that housing leaders are evaluating pricing through several lenses: what the local market will bear, what housing costs to operate, and how on-campus housing compares to other available options. Because students and families are weighing on-campus housing against off-campus rentals, PBSA, co-living, commuter options, and other alternatives, pricing is no longer just a budget exercise. It is part of the institution's value proposition.

### Housing Pricing Strategies Are Data-Driven in 2026

*More than half of institutions use market analysis to determine housing costs, while cost-based and competitive approaches are also widely used.*

**Survey Question:** How does your institution or company determine student housing costs?

MARKET ANALYSIS



COST-BASED APPROACH



COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS



UNKNOWN



At the same time, 23% of respondents selected “unknown,” pointing to a visibility gap around how housing costs are set.

Pricing decisions may involve finance, administration, auxiliary services, housing leadership, or broader institutional leadership, but not every housing professional has a clear view into the methodology behind those rates.

That gap matters. When pricing strategy is not clearly understood, it can be harder for housing teams to explain value, respond to affordability concerns, benchmark against competitors, or align rates with the student experience being delivered.



#### **Your Takeaway:**

Review your pricing model annually using both internal and external data. A strong housing pricing strategy should account for operating costs, local market benchmarks, competitor offerings, student affordability, occupancy goals, and the value of the residential experience. Just as importantly, make sure the people communicating housing costs understand how those costs are determined.

## Fees and Deposits Remain Common, but Affordability Pressure is Real

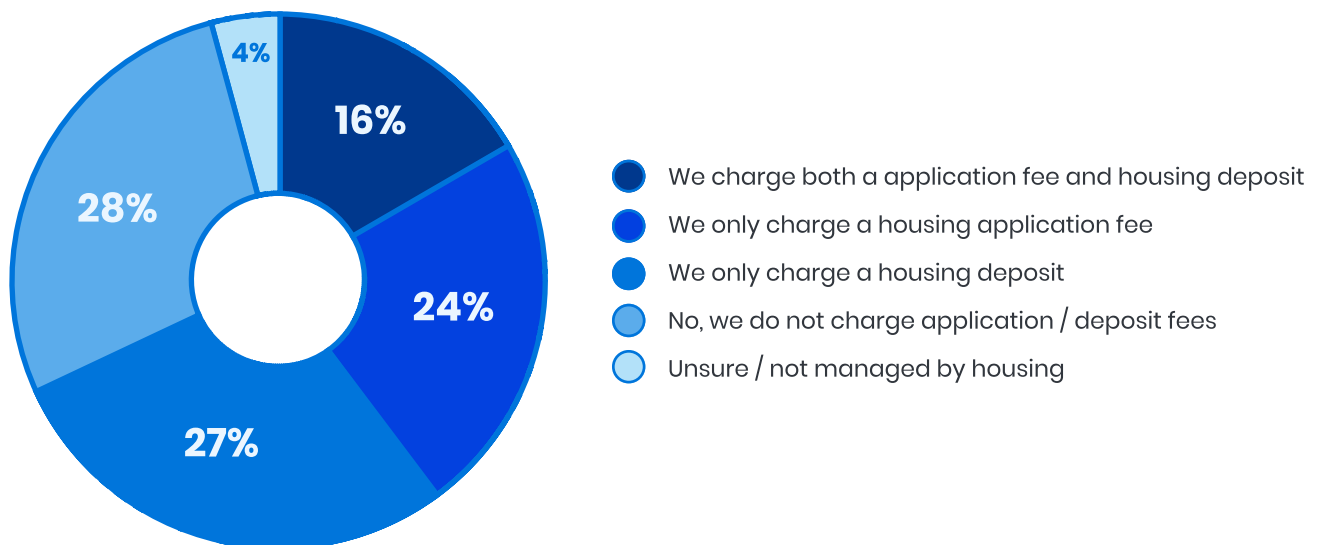
Application fees and housing deposits remain a standard part of the housing process for many institutions. In 2026, about 67% of institutions charge either a housing application fee, a housing deposit, or both.

The most common models are split across three approaches: 27% only charge a housing deposit, 24% only charge a housing application fee, and 16% charge both. Another 28% do not charge a housing application fee or deposit.

### Housing Fees and Deposits Remain Common in 2026

*Roughly two-thirds of institutions charge some form of housing application fee or deposit, while 28% do not charge either.*

**Survey Question:** Do you charge either a housing application fee or a housing deposit?





Fees and deposits can support planning, reduce no-shows, and create a financial commitment from students. But they can also create barriers, particularly for students who are cost-sensitive, first-generation, low-income, or comparing multiple housing options.

This is where the financial and enrollment balancing act becomes clear.

Institutions need tools that support housing operations and revenue predictability, but they also need to ensure that upfront costs do not unintentionally limit access or suppress demand.



### Your Takeaway:

Evaluate whether your fees and deposits are helping or hindering your enrollment and access goals. Consider whether flexible deposit models, refundable structures, payment timing changes, or targeted waivers could reduce barriers while still supporting operational planning.



## Financial Sustainability Also Depends on Managing Risk and Administrative Burden

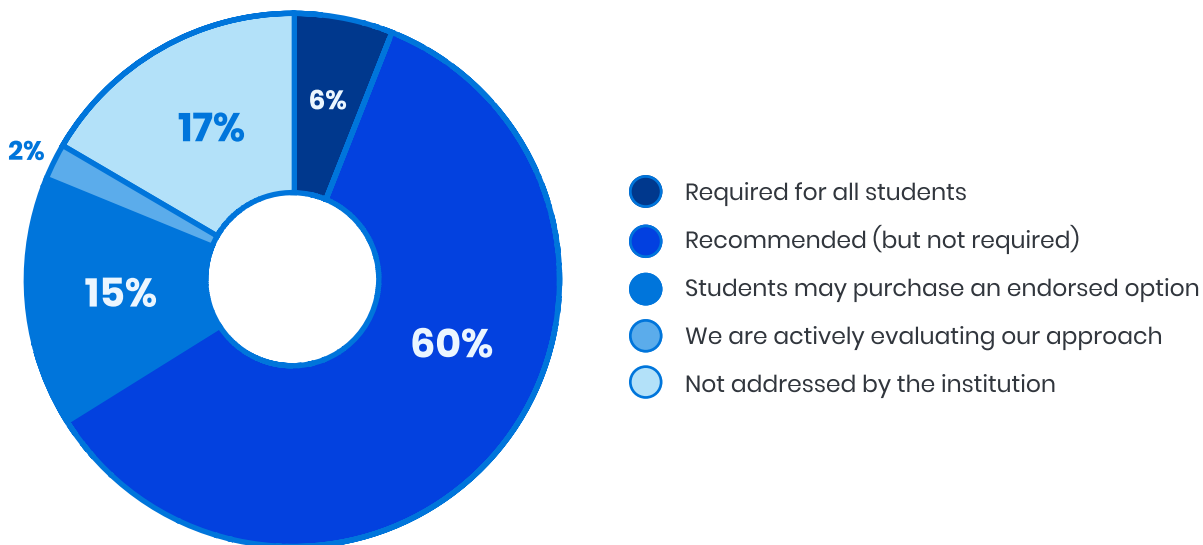
Financial strategy is not only about pricing and revenue growth. It is also about reducing risk, improving collections, and limiting the staff time required to manage complex administrative processes.

Renters insurance is one example. In 2026, most institutions do not require renters insurance universally. Sixty percent recommend renters insurance but do not require it, while 17% do not address it institutionally. Only 6% require renters insurance for all students. Another 15% allow students to purchase a renters insurance plan, while a smaller share either allow students to upload proof of coverage or are actively evaluating their approach.

### Renters Insurance Is Mostly Recommended, Not Required in 2026

*60% of institutions recommend renters insurance without requiring it, while only 6% require it for all students.*

**Survey Question:** How does your operation currently handle renters insurance?



That creates a wide range of institutional risk postures. For some campuses, renters insurance may be treated as a student responsibility. For others, it may be part of a broader strategy to reduce disputes, clarify liability, and protect both students and the institution when property loss or damage occurs.

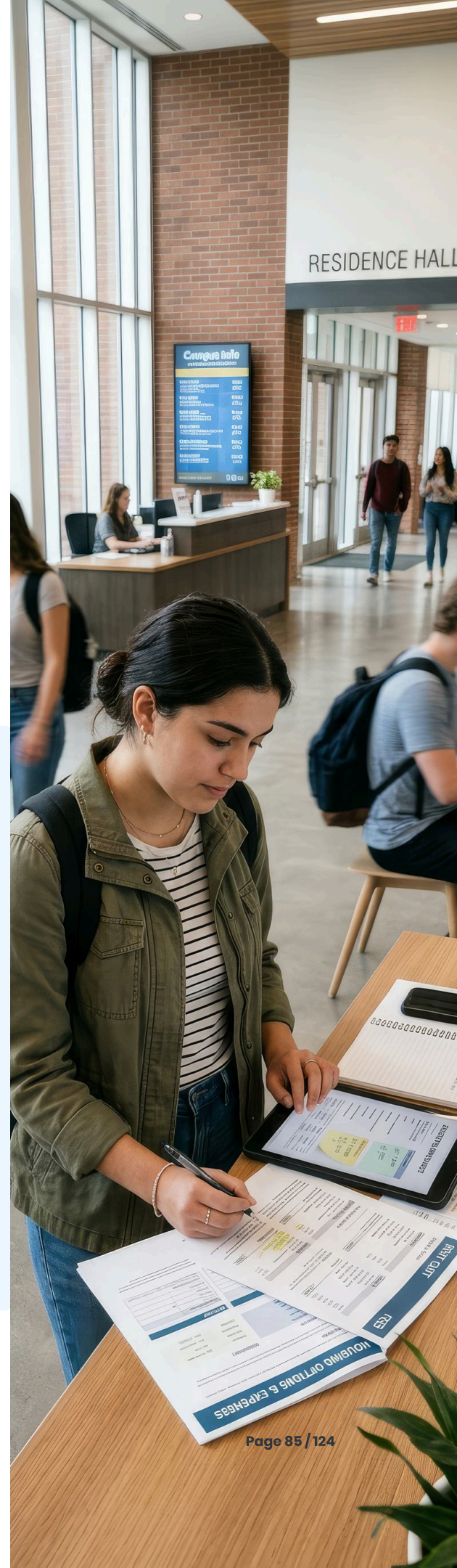
Resident damage management shows a similar pattern. Sixty one percent of institutions describe resident damage management as manageable but time-consuming. Another 16% say it creates a significant staff burden, and 9% describe it as a very high burden or pain point. Only 7% say the process is minimal and largely automated.

## GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

### Embedded Peace of Mind

Discover how Georgetown University is simplifying the housing journey by offering GradGuard renters insurance directly within the StarRez portal. From timely coverage options and familiar application workflows to zero-maintenance setup and fewer manual follow-ups, Georgetown is helping families feel prepared while giving staff more time for high-touch student support.

[Read the Full Story](#)

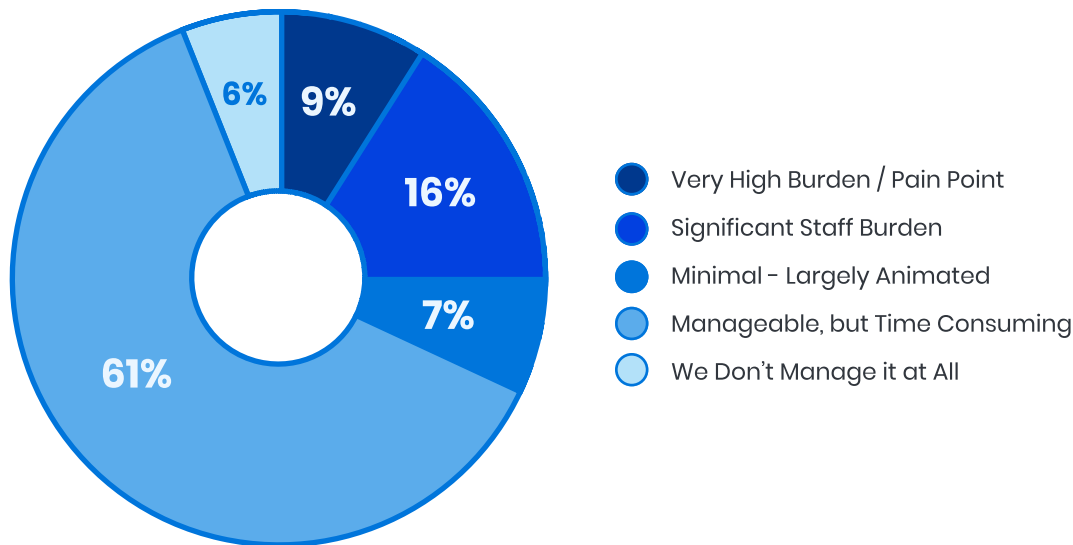


This is a financial issue and an operational issue. Damage workflows often involve documentation, assessment, student communication, appeals, billing, collections, facilities coordination, and reporting. When those steps are manual or disconnected, staff time becomes the hidden cost.

## Damage Management Remains a Time-Consuming Workflow in 2026

*61% of institutions say resident damage management is manageable but time-consuming, while one-quarter describe it as a significant or very high burden.*

**Survey Question:** How would you describe the administrative effort required to manage resident damage by students?



### Your Takeaway:

Treat renters insurance and damage management as part of your financial operations strategy. Standardize documentation, automate billing and communication where possible, and create clear policies that reduce ambiguity for students, families, and staff.

## Capacity Planning is Active but Cautious

At first glance, the expansion data may seem at odds with the occupancy data. If 43% of institutions are operating at 95%+ occupancy, why are 40% reporting no current expansion or on-campus development plans?

The answer is that expansion is not only a demand decision. It is also a capital, staffing, enrollment, operational, and risk decision. In 2026, 40% report no current expansion or on-campus development planned. However, a meaningful share are still exploring growth: 27% are possibly in early planning stages, 23% indicate planned expansion, and 9% are considering expansion through master lease or off-campus agreements. Another 5% are unsure.

### Housing Expansion Plans Show Cautious Growth in 2026

*Despite high occupancy pressure, 40% report no current expansion plans, underscoring that growth decisions depend on capital, staffing, enrollment, and operational readiness.*

**Survey Question:** Does your institution plan to increase total bed capacity within the next 3–5 years?

NO CURRENT EXPANSION PLANS



YES, NEW ON CAMPUS DEVELOPMENT PLANNED



POSSIBLY, IN EARLY PLANNING STAGES



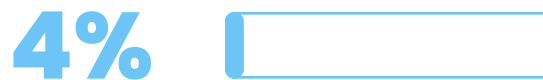
YES, EXPANSION THROUGH PBSA OR P3 PARTNERSHIP



YES, EXPANSION THROUGH MASTER LEASE



UNSURE





This suggests that capacity planning is becoming more nuanced. For some institutions, the answer may be new construction. For others, it may be master leasing, off-campus partnerships, better use of existing inventory, or changes to room configuration. The decision is not only about demand; it is also about capital, staffing, operations, affordability, and risk.

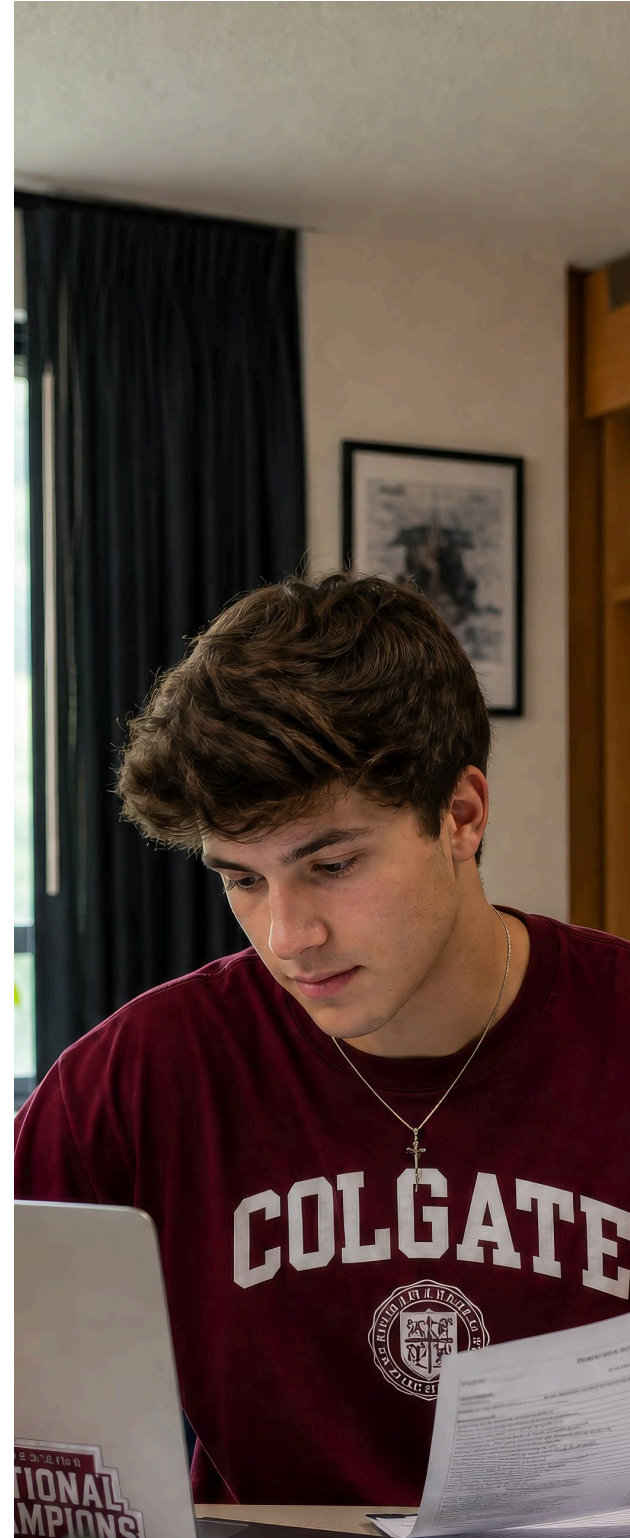
- ✓ Capital
- ✓ Staffing
- ✓ Operations
- ✓ Affordability
- ✓ Risk

Expansion also has operational consequences. More beds can increase revenue potential, but they also increase the volume of assignments, billing, communications, maintenance, damages, accommodations, room changes, student support needs, and reporting. Without the right staffing and systems, growth can add pressure faster than it adds capacity.



#### **Your Takeaway:**

Model expansion as an operating strategy, not just a facilities strategy. Before adding beds, assess staffing capacity, technology readiness, enrollment forecasts, affordability targets, local market competition, and the student support infrastructure required to sustain growth.



## Non-Academic Year Revenue Remains an Under-Leveraged Opportunity

Non-academic year housing continues to represent a relatively small share of total housing revenue for most institutions. In 2026, 47% of institutions say non-academic year housing accounts for less than 10% of revenue, nearly unchanged from 48% in 2025. Another 24% attribute 10–25% of revenue to non-academic year housing, up slightly from 21% the year before.

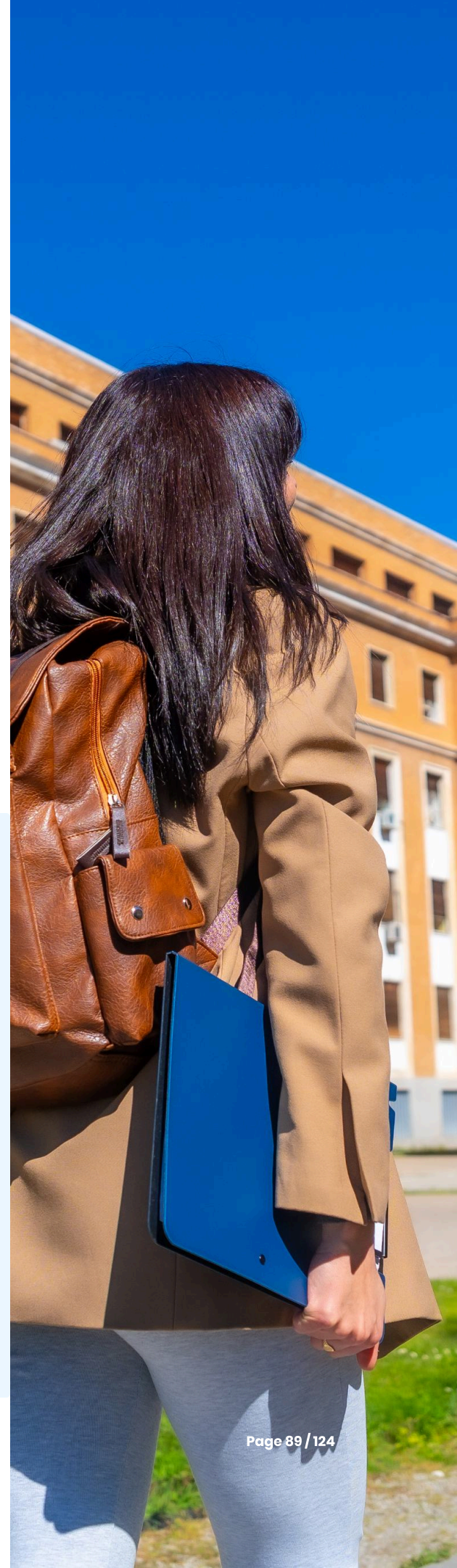
Taken together, 71% of institutions generate 25% or less of their housing revenue from non-academic year housing. Only 3% report that it contributes 26–50% of revenue, and no respondents report it contributing 51–75% in 2026.



### Unifying Events and Housing Operations

Discover how Manchester Metropolitan University brought residential and conference operations together in StarRez to create a clearer, more connected way to manage campus activity. From real-time occupancy visibility and smarter summer planning to streamlined event coordination, MMU is turning operational complexity into strategic growth.

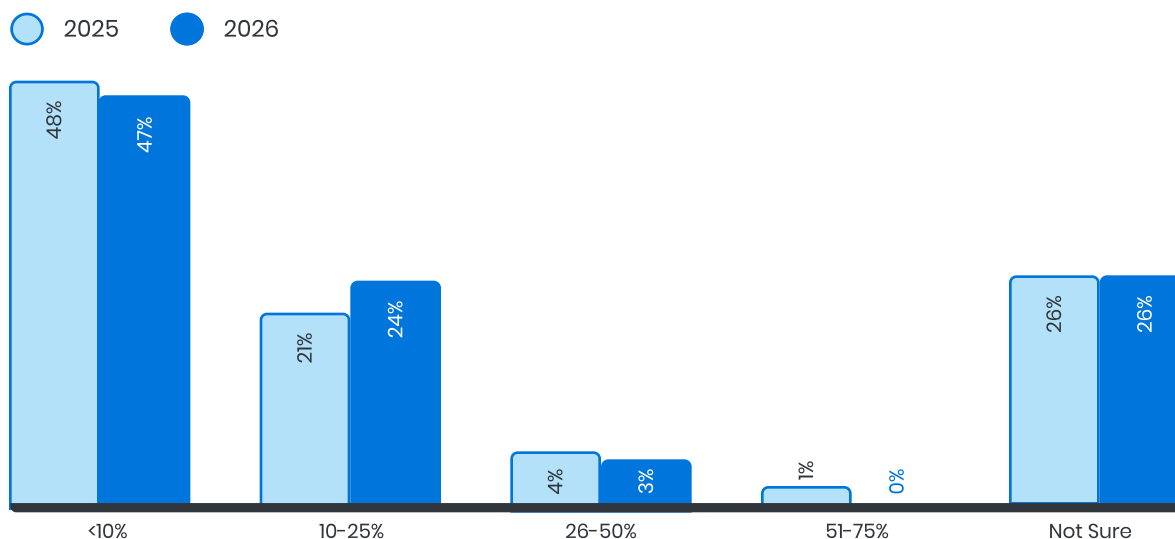
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## Non-Academic Year Housing Revenue Remains Modest in 2026

*71% of institutions attribute 25% or less of housing revenue to non-academic year housing.*

**Survey Question:** What percentage of revenue would you attribute to non-academic year housing?



This points to a meaningful opportunity. For many institutions, non-academic year housing may not be a major revenue driver today, but it remains one of the clearest ways to generate additional value from existing housing assets outside the traditional academic calendar. Conference and event housing is one example of how institutions can activate that opportunity, especially when paired with summer housing, internships, camps, early arrivals, bridge programs, and short-term stays. The challenge is that realizing this value requires more than simply opening beds in the summer. It requires coordinated pricing, marketing, staffing, facilities planning, guest communication, and operational systems that can support short-term or seasonal housing without disrupting academic-year readiness.



### Your Takeaway:

Evaluate non-academic year housing as part of your broader revenue strategy, even if it is not currently a major contributor. Start by improving visibility: track revenue by source, occupancy period, audience type, and operational cost. From there, institutions can identify whether summer housing, conferences, internships, camps, early arrivals, bridge programs, or short-term stays could become a more intentional and sustainable revenue stream.





## RELATED INSIGHT

# C&E Shows the Revenue Opportunity in Action

The 2025 Higher Education Conference & Events Report found that campus event programs are becoming more year-round and revenue-focused, yet many institutions still have room to optimize housing utilization. On average, campuses reported using only about 60% of total housing capacity for conference and event stays, while 70% offer short-term or ad-hoc housing in some capacity. Together, these findings suggest that C&E, summer housing, internships, camps, early arrivals, and short-stay programs can all play a role in helping institutions unlock more value from existing housing assets.

*Explore the full findings in StarRez's 2025 Higher Education Conference & Events Report.*

[Read the Report](#)



# International Student Strategy Requires More Precision

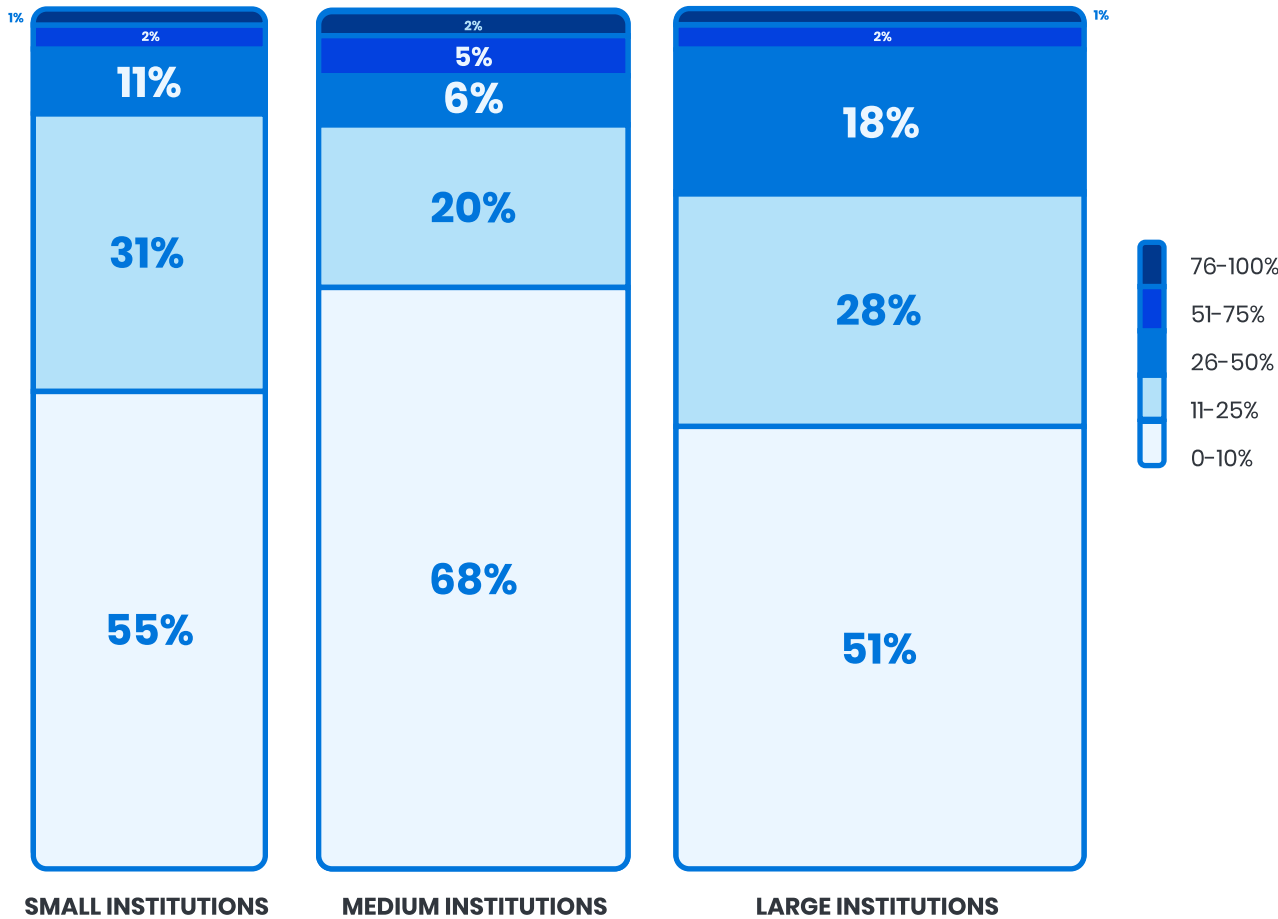
International students remain an important part of the housing strategy for many institutions, but the 2026 data points to a more uneven landscape.

More than half of institutions, 58%, report that international students make up 0–10% of their resident population. Another 26% report international residents in the 11–25% range. A smaller but still meaningful share serve larger international populations: 16% report 26–100%.

## International Student Housing Populations Vary Widely in 2026

*More than half of institutions house 10% or fewer international students, while 16% report international residents make up more than one-quarter of their housing population.*

**Survey Question:** On average, what percentage of your residents are international students?



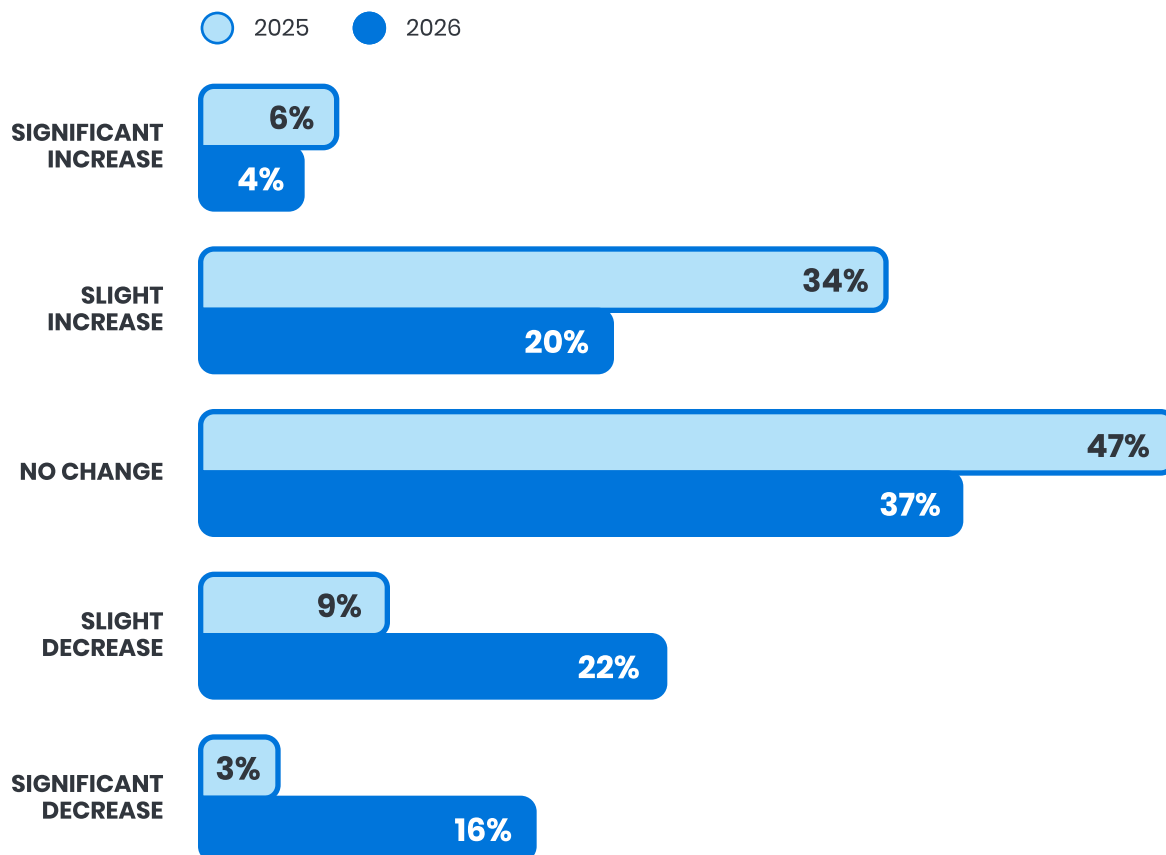
This means international student housing cannot be treated as a one-size-fits-all strategy. Some institutions may need targeted communication and arrival support for a smaller international population. Others may need fully developed global housing strategies that account for cultural expectations, family communication, arrival timing, payment logistics, roommate preferences, and support services.

Year-over-year demand is also mixed. In 2025, 40% of institutions reported a slight or significant increase in international students requiring housing accommodations. In 2026, that figure dropped to 24%. At the same time, institutions reporting a slight or significant decrease rose from 12% in 2025 to 38% in 2026, while 37% report no change.

### International Housing Demand Is More Mixed in 2026

*The share of institutions reporting increased international housing accommodation demand fell from 40% in 2025 to 24% in 2026, while reported decreases rose sharply.*

**Survey Question:** Have you seen an increase year over year in international students requiring housing accommodations?



This does not mean international housing is becoming less important. It means the international enrollment environment appears more volatile and market-specific than in prior years.

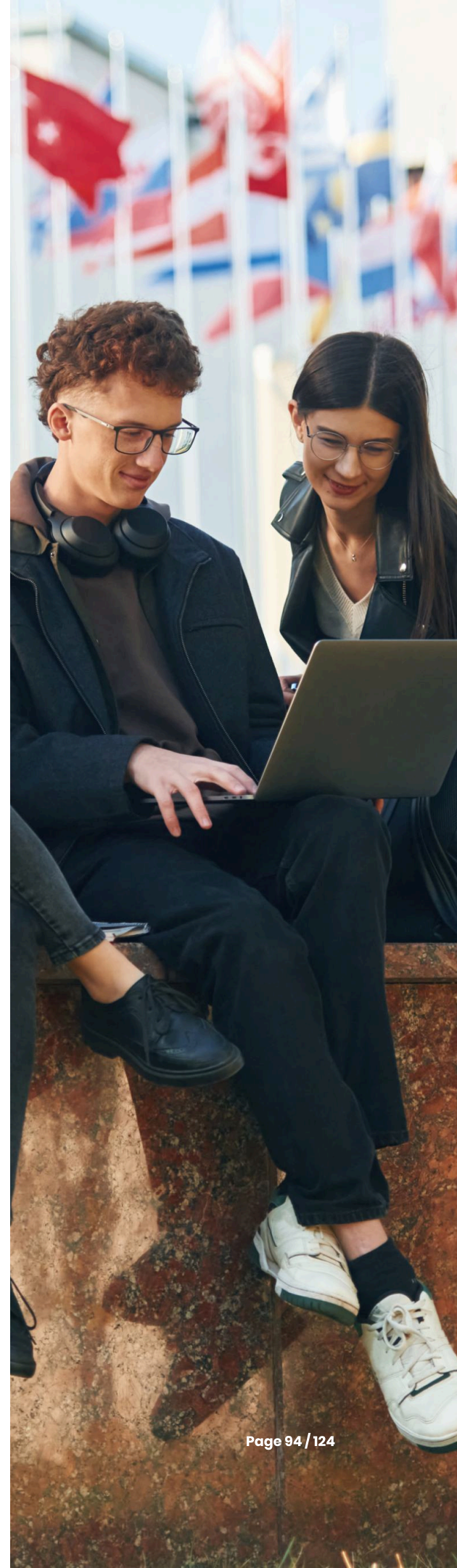
Demand may be growing in some regions while softening in others, shaped by factors such as visa timelines, geopolitical uncertainty, affordability, program mix, recruitment strategy, and available housing options.

For housing teams, the takeaway is not to deprioritize international students, but to move away from broad assumptions about global demand and toward more granular forecasting by market, program, arrival window, and student need.

That need for specificity becomes even clearer when looking at where institutions are focusing their international recruitment and housing strategies.

## **Global Recruitment Markets Remain Concentrated, but Opportunity is Broadening**

When asked which international markets are a top-three focus, institutions most often point to China, cited by 49% of respondents. South Asia, including India, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan, follows at 42%, while Europe is cited by 38%.



## China, South Asia, and Europe Lead International Housing Focus in 2026

*Institutions continue to prioritize established global markets, while Southeast Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa also represent meaningful areas of focus.*

**Survey Question:** Which of the following international markets are your top three focus?



The concentration around China, South Asia, and Europe reflects established enrollment pipelines. But the broader distribution shows that international housing strategy is becoming more diversified. Housing teams may increasingly need to support different expectations around room type, family involvement, communications, move-in timing, payment methods, and community support across regions.

This is where housing becomes part of the international student value proposition. For students researching from abroad, housing is often one of the first indicators of whether an institution feels organized, welcoming, and easy to navigate.



### Your Takeaway:

Partner closely with enrollment, admissions, and international student services to forecast international demand by market, program, and arrival window, especially in a more volatile global enrollment environment. Use housing data to identify which international student groups need guaranteed placement, early arrival support, multilingual communication, flexible housing options, or additional guidance before arrival.



## Competition from Build-to-Rent and Co-Living Remains a Strategic Blind Spot

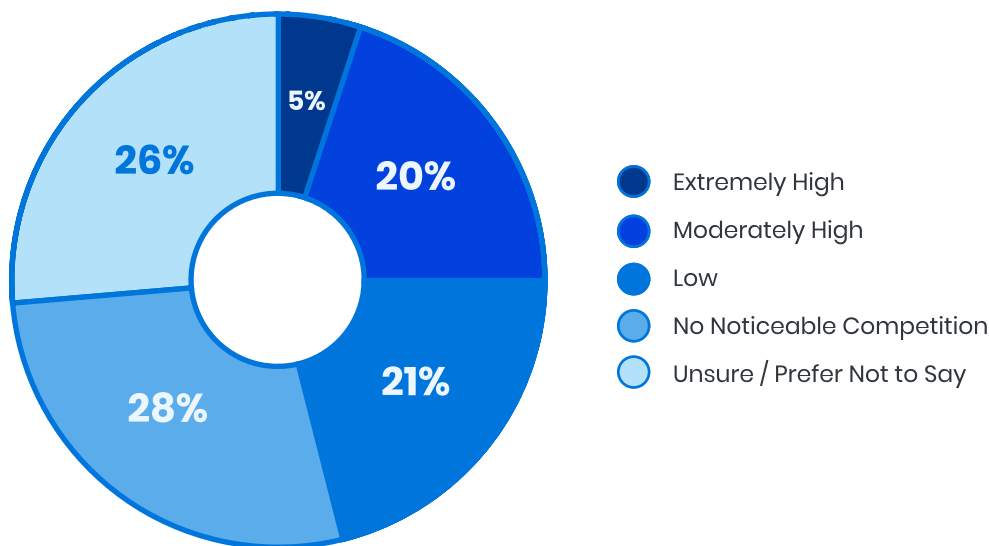
Build-to-rent, co-living, PBSA, private rentals, and university-owned housing are all part of the broader student housing landscape. For students and families, these options are often compared side by side based on price, proximity, privacy, amenities, lease flexibility, availability, and overall value.

In 2026, 25% of institutions report that build-to-rent or co-living properties create moderately high or extremely high competition for their housing offerings. Another 21% report low competition, while 28% say there is no noticeable competition. The remaining 26% are unsure or prefer not to say.

### Build-to-Rent and Co-Living Competition Is Uneven, But Visibility Is Limited

*One-quarter of institutions report moderate or extreme competition, while another quarter are unsure, pointing to a need for stronger local market awareness.*

**Survey Question:** To what extent do build-to-rent or co-living properties compete with your housing offerings for students?



The “unsure” group is important. In a more varied housing market, limited visibility into off-campus options can make it harder for institutions to understand why students choose one housing path over another. Students may be responding to affordability, space, independence, lease terms, location, amenities, or availability — and those preferences can shape demand for on-campus housing even when occupancy remains strong.

- ✓ Price
- ✓ Location
- ✓ Amenities
- ✓ Lease Flexibility
- ✓ Privacy
- ✓ Availability

In some markets, PBSA, build-to-rent, co-living, or private rental options may function as alternatives. In others, they may become important complements to institution-owned housing, especially where campuses face capacity constraints, enrollment uncertainty, limited capital for expansion, or changing student preferences.



#### Your Takeaway:

Build a local housing market visibility process. Track nearby PBSA, build-to-rent, co-living, and private rental options by price, amenities, lease flexibility, distance to campus, availability, and student appeal. Use that insight not only to sharpen your on-campus housing value proposition, but also to inform pricing, renovation, marketing, capacity planning, and potential partnership decisions.

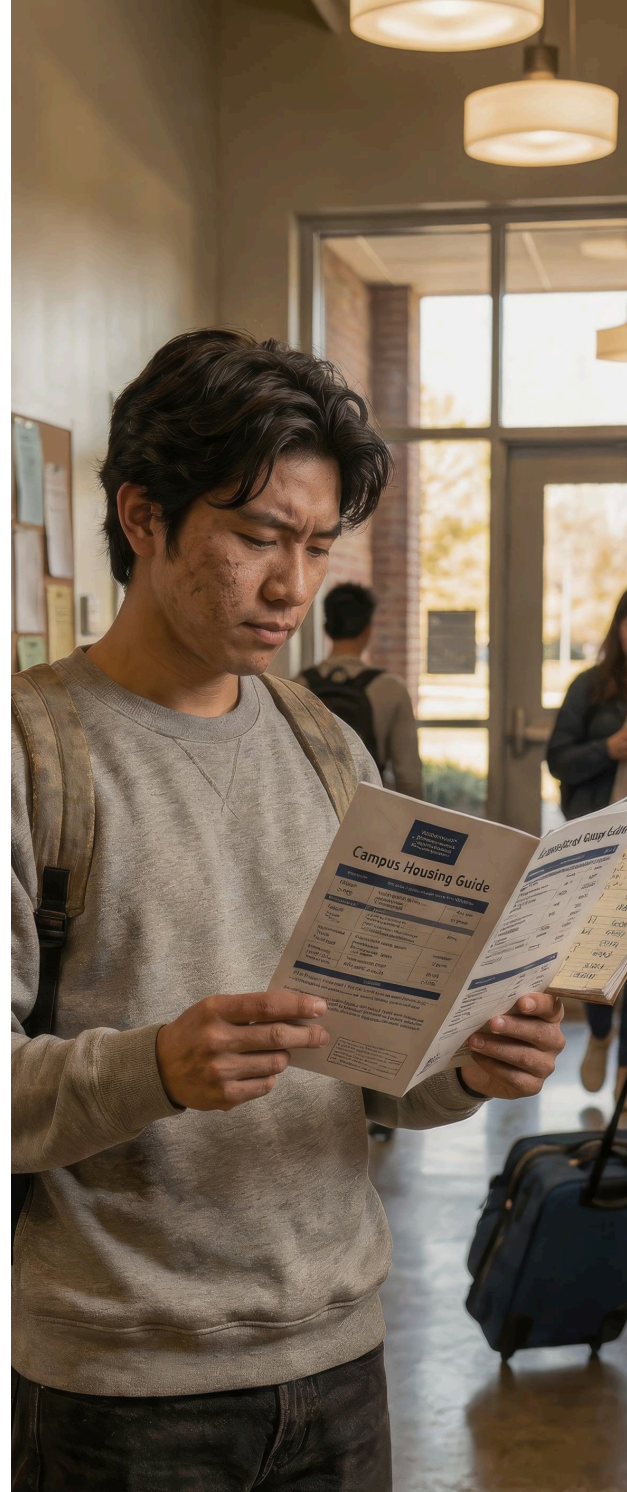


## Housing is Becoming a Strategic Business Unit

The 2026 data tells us that housing leaders are increasingly operating at the intersection of student experience, enrollment strategy, financial sustainability, and market competition.

Pricing is becoming more data-driven. Fees and deposits remain common but must be balanced against access and affordability. Risk-related workflows like renters insurance and damage management are part of the financial equation. Expansion planning is active but cautious. International student housing needs are important but uneven. And external competitors are shaping student expectations, even when institutions are not yet fully tracking their impact.

The institutions best positioned for the next phase of student housing will be those that treat housing as both a mission-centered service and a strategic business operation. That means making financial decisions with student experience in mind and making student experience decisions with financial sustainability in view.



### Your Takeaway:

Connect your housing financial strategy to the full enrollment and student success picture. Bring housing, finance, enrollment, international student services, facilities, and student affairs into the same planning conversations. The goal is not simply to fill beds or raise revenue; it is to build a housing model that is affordable, competitive, resilient, and aligned with the institution's long-term strategy.



# The Expanding Student Housing Ecosystem

## *Off-campus housing, PBSA, visibility, and partnerships*

**The student housing experience increasingly extends beyond institution-owned walls, creating new challenges around visibility, engagement, and student support.**

### **Here's what's changing:**

As students progress through their academic journey, more of their housing experience takes place outside the traditional residence hall. In the [\*2026 Off-Campus Housing Report for Higher Education Institutions\*](#), 56% of student respondents live off campus, and off-campus living becomes especially common after the first two years: 70% + of juniors and of seniors, and 92% of graduate students report living off campus.

For institutions, this creates a new strategic challenge. Students may leave campus-owned housing, but they do not leave the student experience. Their housing environment still shapes affordability, safety, wellness, belonging, academic focus, and connection to campus. The difference is that institutions often have far less visibility, fewer direct levers, and inconsistent support structures once students move beyond campus boundaries.

- ✕ Less visibility
- ✕ Fewer direct levers
- ✕ Inconsistent support structures





### What it means for you:

Housing leaders need to think beyond the residence hall as the endpoint of their responsibility. Off-campus housing, PBSA partnerships, master lease agreements, renter education, local market visibility, and continued engagement are becoming part of a more complete student housing ecosystem.

Institutions that build structured off-campus strategies will be better positioned to support students through one of the most predictable transitions in the student lifecycle, while also protecting institutional goals around retention, wellness, engagement, and enrollment competitiveness.

### Key themes in this section:

-  Off-campus transition
-  PBSA and co-living competition
-  Institutional partnerships and master leasing
-  Student visibility after moving off campus
-  Off-campus housing resources and renter education
-  Maintaining connection beyond campus boundaries



## The Off-Campus Transition is Predictable, But Support Remains Uneven

Moving off campus is not an exception to the student housing journey. It is a predictable stage of it. Student data from the [2026 Off-Campus Housing Report for Higher Education Institutions](#) shows that off-campus living accelerates sharply after the first two years: 70%+ of juniors and seniors, and 92% of graduate students report living off campus.

Institutional leaders recognize that this transition matters. In 2026, 71% of institutions say the transition to off-campus housing has a moderate or significant impact on student experience, wellness, and success, including 58% who describe the impact as moderate and 13% who describe it as significant. Another 25% say the impact is minimal, while only 4% say it has no impact.



### Supporting Every Step of the Housing Journey

Discover how Georgia Tech is connecting on-campus housing operations with trusted off-campus support through StarRez and College Pads. From self-check-in and portal customizations to verified property listings and scalable housing fairs, Georgia Tech is helping students navigate a clearer, more supported path from campus living to off-campus housing.

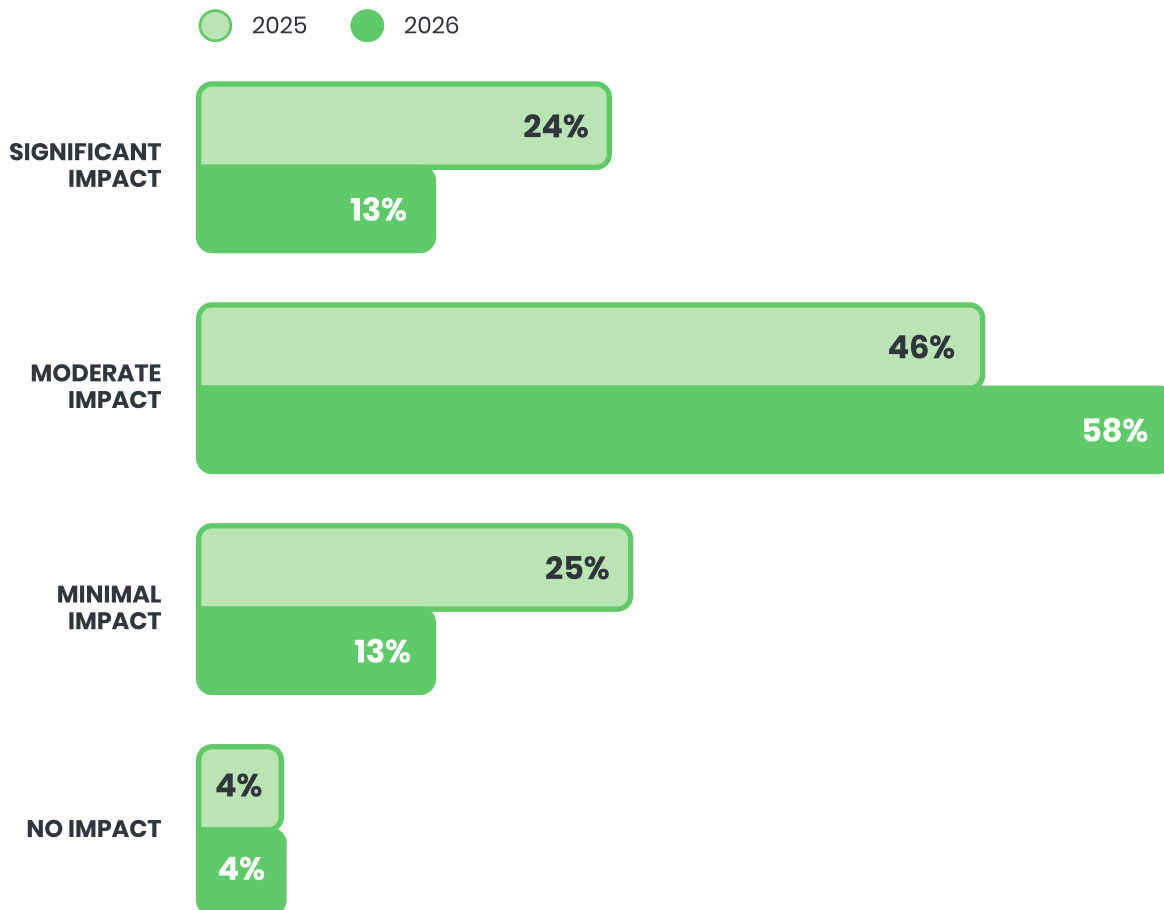
[Read the Full Story](#)



## Off-Campus Housing Remains a Major Student Experience Factor in 2026

*71% of institutions say the transition to off-campus housing moderately or significantly impacts student experience, wellness, and success.*

**Survey Question:** How would you describe the impact of the transition to off-campus housing on students experience, wellness, and success.



Student data backs this up. Overall, 63% of students say housing stress impacts their academic performance or mental health at least sometimes, and 46% say it impacts them often. Only 5% say housing stress never affects them. The divide between on-campus and off-campus students is especially telling: 34% of off-campus students say housing stress often impacts their academic performance or mental health, compared to 21% of on-campus students.

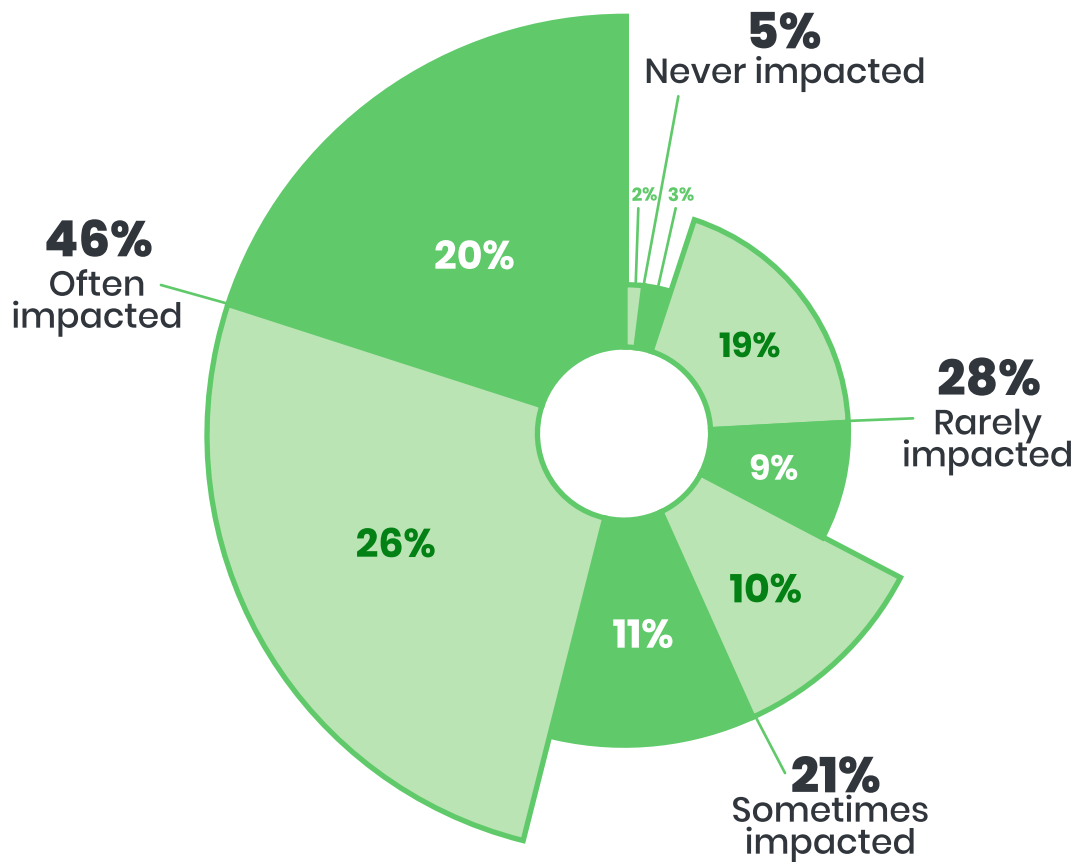


## Impact of Housing Stress on Academic Performance & Mental Health

*Nearly two-thirds of students say housing stress impacts their academic performance or mental health at least sometimes.*

**Survey Question:** How often does housing stress impact your academic performance or mental health?

Off-Campus   On-Campus



Institutions largely understand the off-campus transition as a meaningful student experience issue, but students describe the impact in more direct terms: housing stress is not just inconvenient; it is affecting academic focus and mental health.

That suggests the off-campus transition should not be treated as a handoff out of housing's responsibility. It is a point in the student lifecycle where institutional support often decreases just as financial, logistical, safety, and landlord-related stressors increase.



#### **Your Takeaway:**

Treat the off-campus transition as a planned stage of the student housing lifecycle, not an informal exit from campus housing. Begin support before students start searching, align resources with leasing timelines, and provide guidance on budgeting, lease terms, renter rights, safety, property evaluation, and landlord communication. Institutions do not need to control the off-campus experience to influence it; they need to stay visible, structured, and supportive as students move beyond campus-owned housing.





## Students Still Look to Institutions for Guidance, but Resources Vary Widely

Students may move off campus, but they still look to their institutions for guidance. In the [2026 Off-Campus Housing Report for Higher Education Institutions](#), school resources were the top starting point for students searching for off-campus housing, ahead of property websites, Google, word-of-mouth referrals, and social media. Nearly four in five students also expressed interest in off-campus housing resources or workshops.

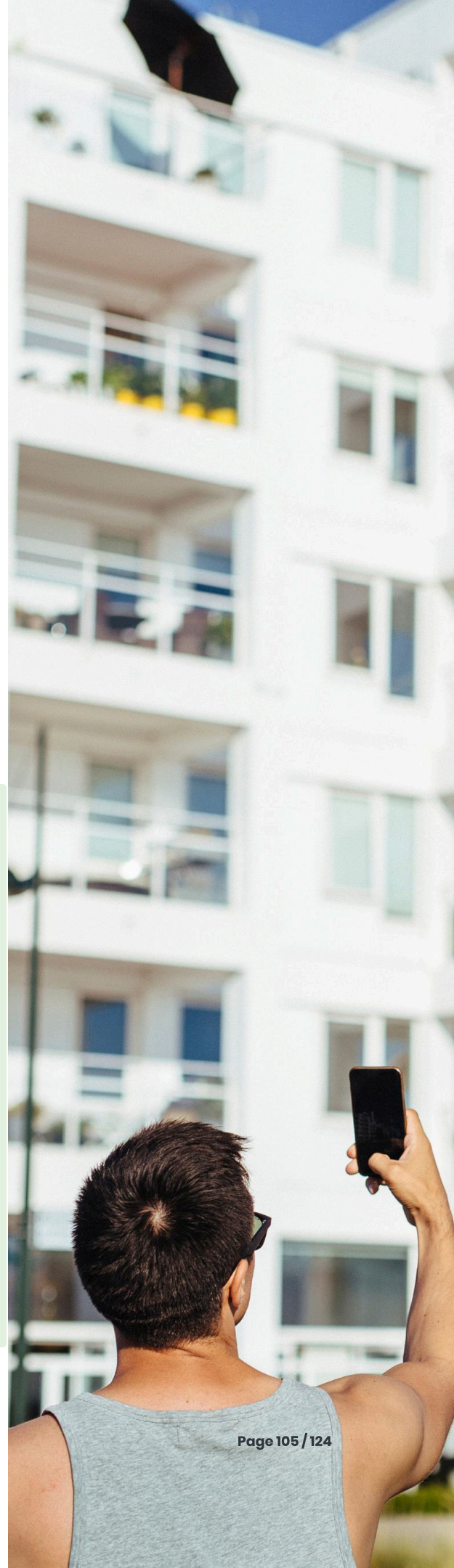
The institutional data shows that many schools are responding, but the level of support varies significantly.



### Support Students Beyond Campus

Explore how StarRez and College Pads help institutions extend student support into the off-campus housing journey. From university-branded housing platforms and verified listings to renter education, roommate and sublease tools, and dashboard insights, StarRez is helping students make more confident housing decisions while reducing administrative burden for campus teams.

[Read the Full Story](#)





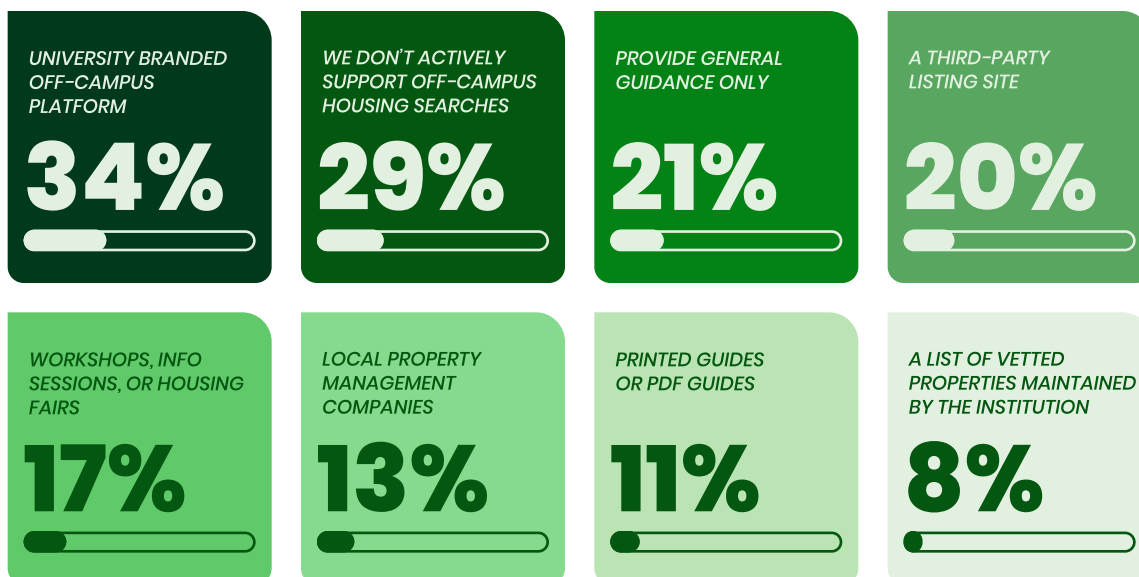
In 2026, the most common off-campus resource is a university-branded off-campus housing platform, used by 34% of institutions. Another 21% provide general guidance only, with no specific resources or referrals, and 20% direct students to a third-party listing site such as Apartments.com, Zillow, or Craigslist; sites not tailored for the student experience.

Other support models including workshops, information sessions, or housing fairs are less common. At the same time, 29% say they do not actively support off-campus housing searches.

## Off-Campus Housing Support Is Growing, But Still Inconsistent

*34% of institutions use a university-branded off-campus housing platform, while 29% do not actively support off-campus housing searches.*

**Survey Question:** Which off-campus resources do you typically direct students to?



However, students are not simply looking for listings. They are looking for trusted, centralized, and structured guidance. Student survey data shows strong demand for education around the highest-risk parts of the off-campus process: 52% want budgeting guidance, 48% want help understanding lease terms and renter rights, 44% want first-time renter basics, 42% want help avoiding rental scams, and 37% want guidance on evaluating rental properties.

## Interest in Off-Campus Housing Education Topics

*Students want guidance on budgeting, lease terms, and renter basics, reflecting financial and legal complexity.*

**Survey Question:** Would you be interested in resources or workshops about off-campus housing topics?



### Your Takeaway:

Off-campus support should be more than a list of links. Build a resource model that helps students evaluate affordability, lease terms, landlord communication, safety, scams, transportation, and neighborhood fit. The strongest approaches combine searchable listings with renter education and clear institutional guidance.

# PBSA Partnerships are Becoming More Relevant but Not Yet Universal

Purpose-built student accommodation and off-campus housing providers are becoming a more visible part of the housing ecosystem, but institutional adoption remains mixed. In 2026, 31% of institutions say they actively partner with off-campus housing providers to provide support or resources for students transitioning off campus, while another 6% are currently implementing this type of partnership. Still, 63% do not currently partner with off-campus housing providers, showing that many institutions are still early in formalizing how they support students beyond campus-owned housing.

## Off-Campus Partnerships Are Emerging, But Most Institutions Still Do Not Use Them

*31% of institutions actively partner with off-campus housing providers, while another 6% are implementing partnerships.*

**Survey Question:** Does your institution partner with off-campus housing providers to provide support / resources for students transition to off-campus housing?

☐ Yes    ☒ Currently Implementing    ☐ No



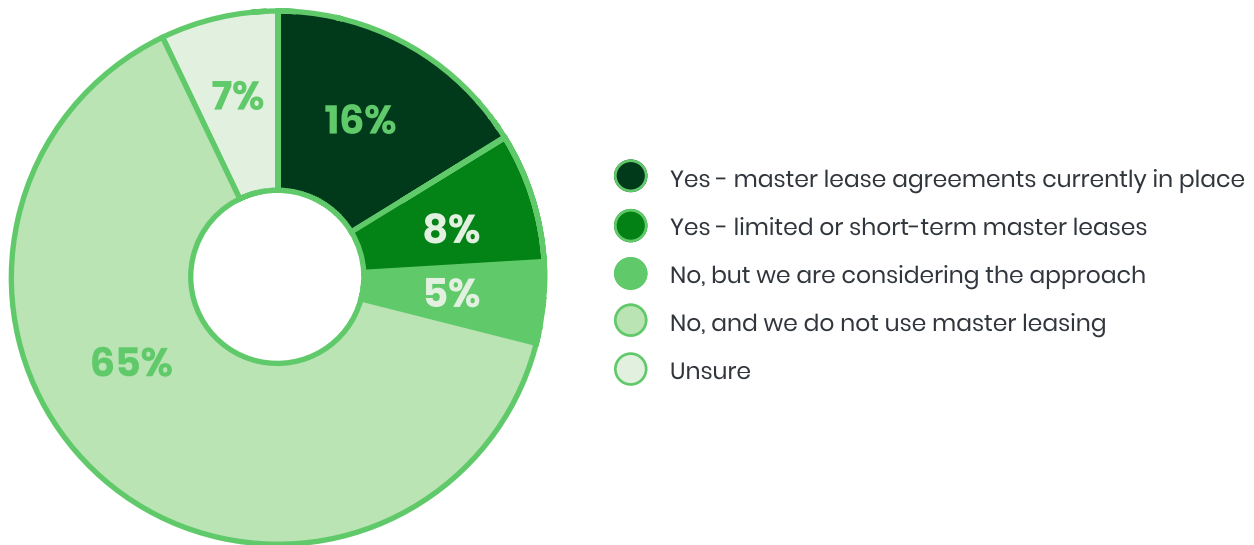
Master leasing is another way institutions are exploring off-campus capacity, but it remains relatively limited. In 2026, 16% of institutions have master lease agreements currently in place, and 8% use limited or short-term master leases. Another 5% are considering this approach. Most institutions, 65%, do not use master leasing, and 7% are unsure.



## Master Leasing Remains a Selective Capacity Strategy in 2026

*24% of institutions currently use some form of master lease agreement, while 65% do not use master leasing.*

**Survey Question:** Does your institution utilize master lease agreements with off-campus or PBSA providers to support student housing capacity?



This suggests that institutions are interested in expanding their housing ecosystem, but many are still weighing questions of risk, oversight, student support, liability, affordability, and operational capacity. For some campuses, formal partnerships or branded platforms may offer enough support. For others, master leasing may become a more direct way to expand capacity or guarantee student access in constrained markets.



### Your Takeaway:

Evaluate off-campus partnerships on a spectrum. Not every institution needs a master lease, but every institution should understand the local off-campus market, identify trusted providers, and determine what level of involvement best supports student success and institutional risk management.

## Students Move Off Campus for Capacity, Privacy, and Affordability

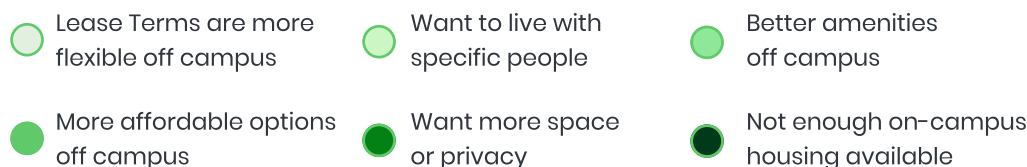
Institutional leaders see several clear reasons students choose off-campus PBSA instead of living on campus. The top reason is not enough on-campus housing available, cited by 30% of institutions. Close behind are students wanting more space or privacy at 27% and more affordable options off campus at 25%.

Other reasons are less common but still important: 11% cite better amenities off campus, 5% say students want to live with specific friends or roommates, 2% cite more flexible lease terms, and 1% cite housing needs related to internships, jobs, co-op, or graduate programs.

### Students Choose Off-Campus PBSA for Capacity, Privacy, & Affordability

*Institutions say limited on-campus availability, more space or privacy, and affordability are the top reasons students choose off-campus PBSA.*

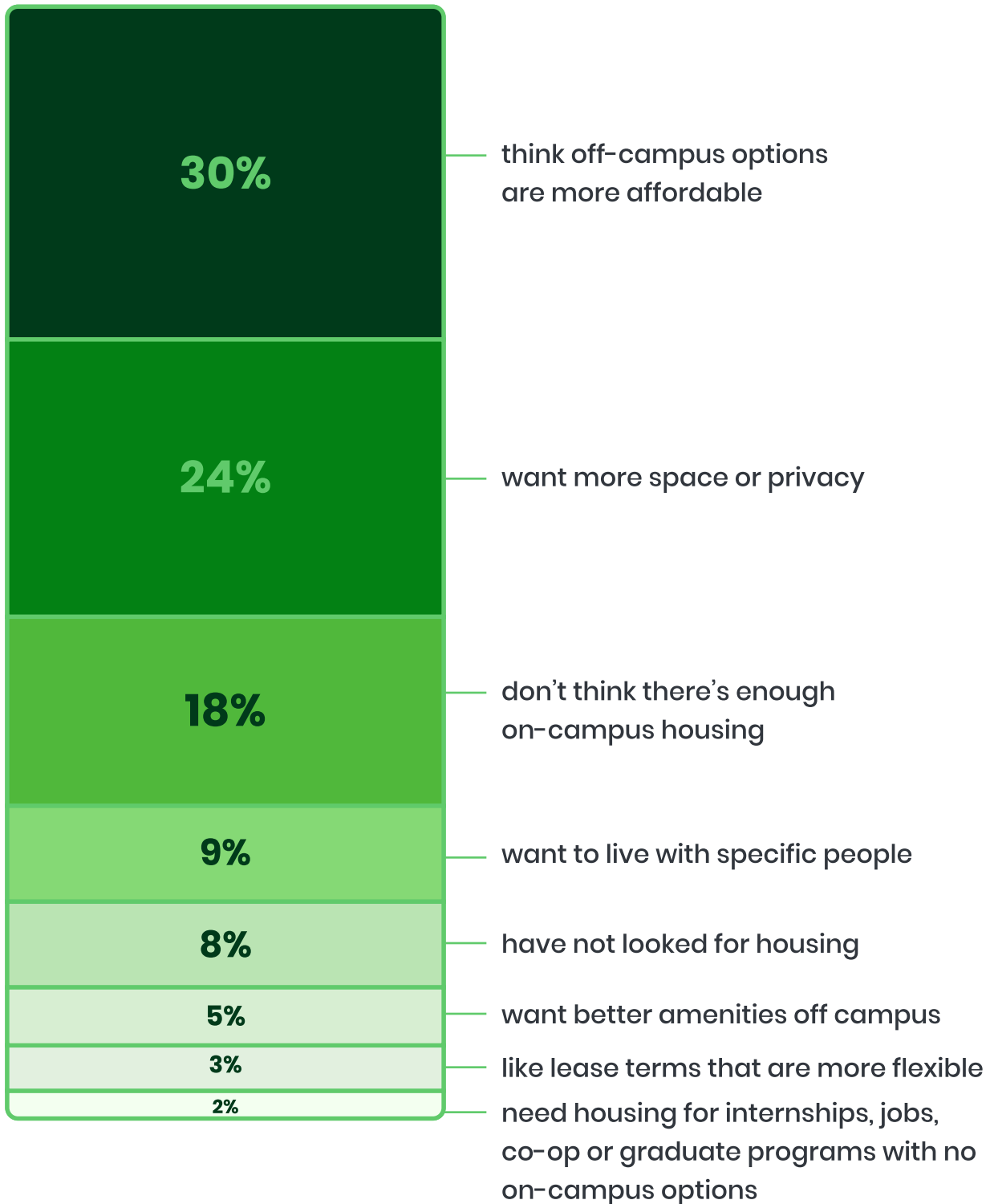
**Survey Question:** What is the primary reason students choose off-campus purpose-built student accommodation instead of living on campus?



Student survey data tells a similar story. When students move off campus, affordability and autonomy emerge as their primary decision drivers. Nearly 30% of student respondents cite more affordable housing options as their main reason for living off campus, while 24% point to a desire for more space or privacy. Capacity constraints also play a major role: 18% of students say limited on-campus housing availability pushed them off campus, signaling a structural challenge rather than a preference-based decision.

## Why Students Choose Off-Campus Housing

*Affordability dominates, while limited campus housing signals a supply issue, not just student choice.*





That alignment between institutional perception and student-reported behavior is important.

It shows that off-campus housing is not simply a lifestyle preference. For many students, it is a practical response to cost, capacity, privacy, and access.



#### **Your Takeaway:**

Use off-campus demand as feedback on your on-campus housing model. If students are leaving for affordability, privacy, or availability, those are strategic signals. They can inform pricing, room mix, renovation priorities, partnership strategy, and how you communicate the value of living on campus.



## Visibility Drops Sharply Once Students Move Off Campus

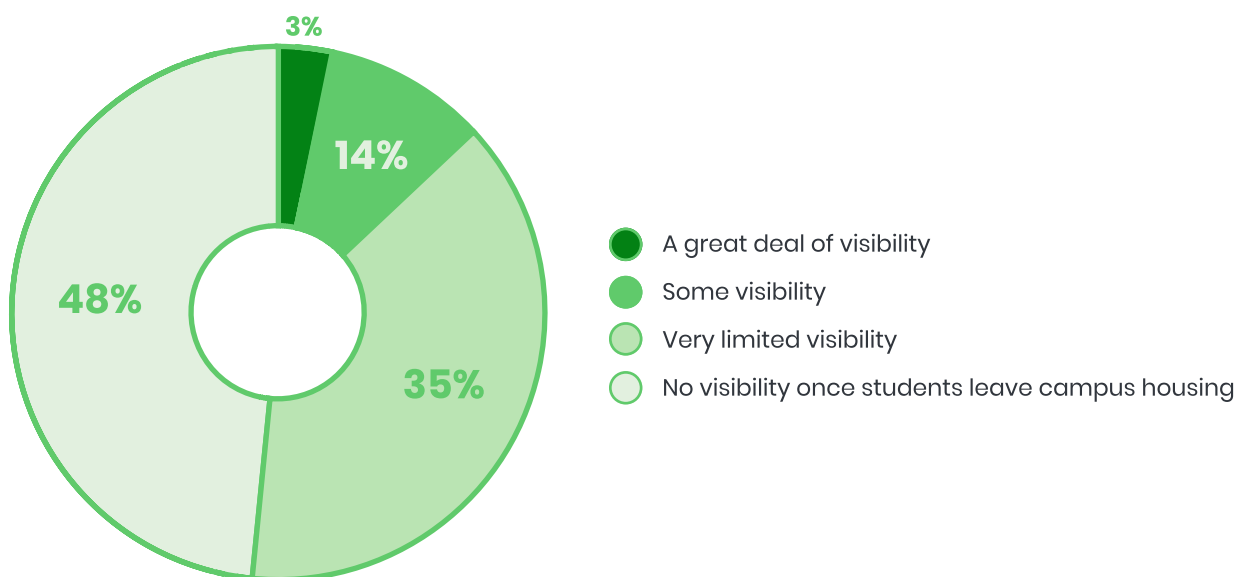
The biggest off-campus challenge is not just that students live elsewhere. It is that institutions often lose visibility into their experience.

In 2026, 48% of institutions say they have no visibility into students' residential experience and ongoing success once they leave campus housing. Another 35% say they have very limited visibility. That means 83% of institutions have little to no visibility into students once they move off campus. Only 14% report some visibility, and just 3% report a great deal of visibility.

### Most Institutions Lose Visibility When Students Move Off Campus

*83% of institutions say they have no or very limited visibility into students' residential experience once they leave campus housing.*

**Survey Question:** How much visibility do you have into their residential experience and ongoing success?

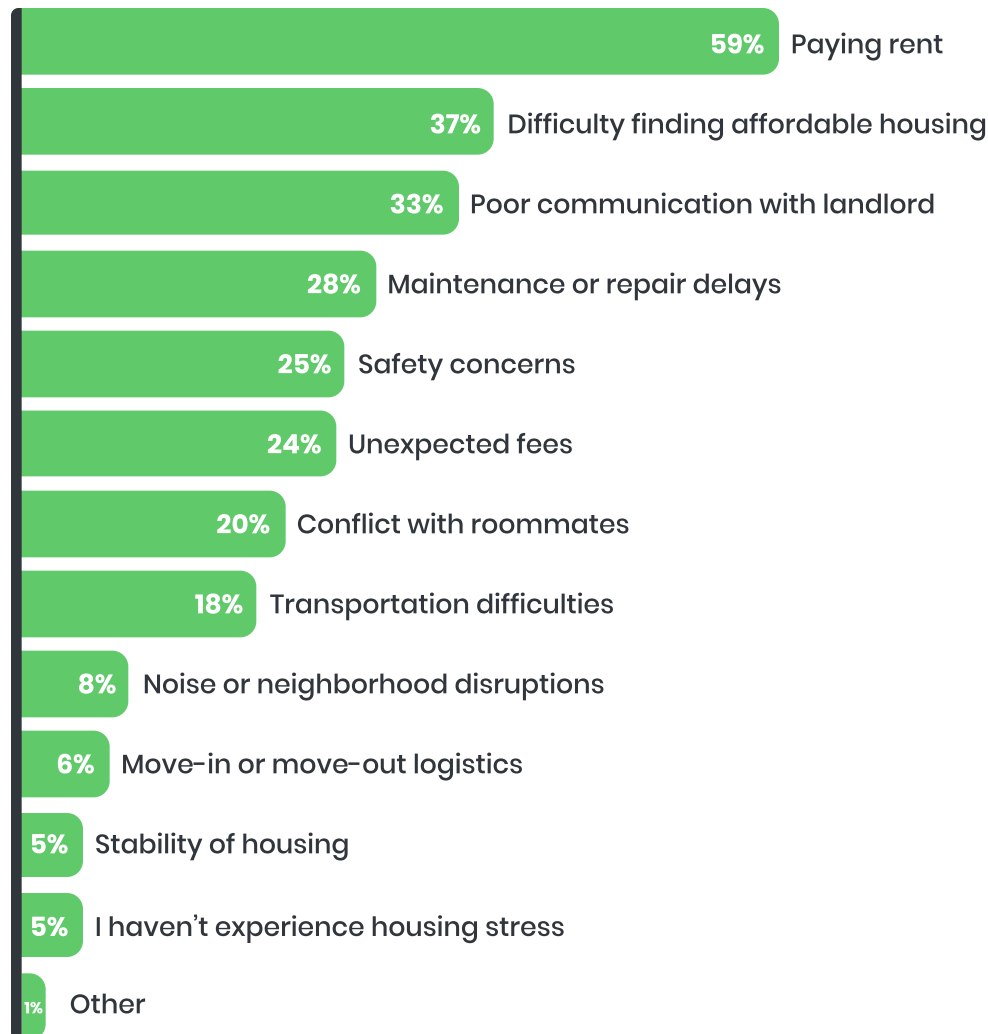


This is a major student success challenge because the risks students face off campus are real. In the student survey, 63% of respondents said housing stress impacts their academic performance or mental health at least sometimes, and off-campus students were more likely than on-campus students to say housing stress often affects them.

The leading student stressors are also the areas where institutional visibility tends to be weakest: 59% cite paying rent or covering housing costs, 37% cite difficulty finding affordable options, 33% cite poor communication with landlords or property management, 28% cite maintenance or repair delays, and 25% cite safety concerns.

## Top Housing-Related Stressors for Students

*Affordability dominates, with rent and finding affordable options emerging as the most significant sources of student housing stress.*



### Your Takeaway:

Think of visibility as a student success tool. Institutions do not need to monitor every off-campus detail, but they do need structured ways to understand patterns: affordability stress, landlord issues, safety concerns, transportation barriers, and student disconnection. Even lightweight data sources can help identify where support is needed.



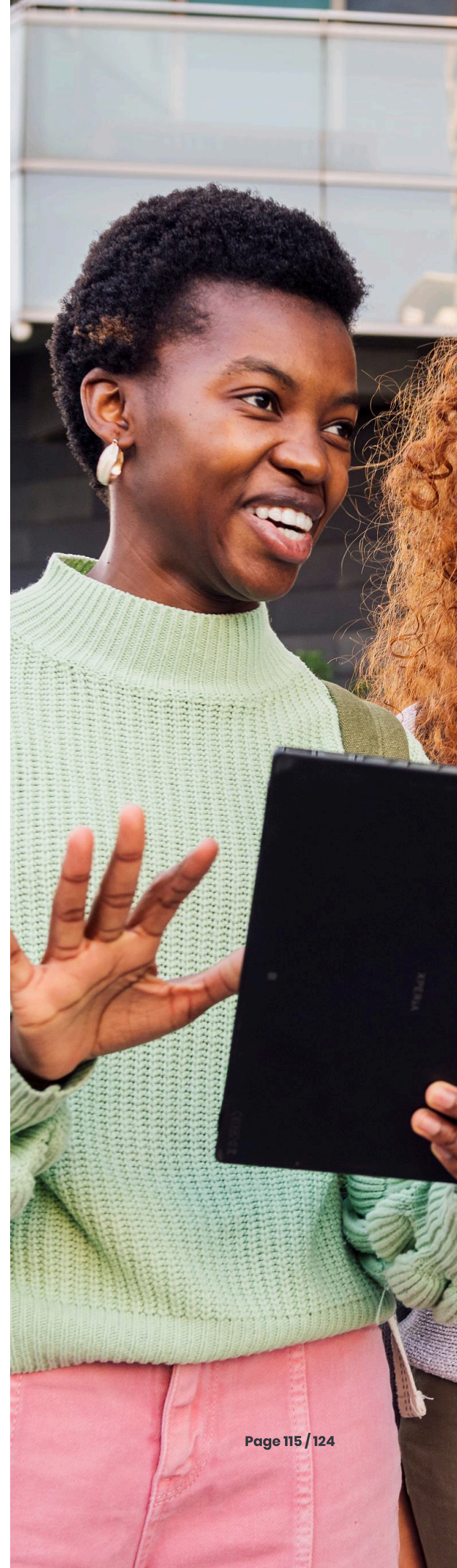
## Engagement Beyond Campus is Becoming Part of the Housing Strategy

Maintaining connection after students move off campus is another area where institutions are still developing their approach.

The most common strategy is continuing access to campus programming or events, used by 50% of institutions.

Another 23% provide off-campus housing resources or listings, and 21% send communications targeted to off-campus students. Smaller shares offer informal or ad-hoc support only (17%), renter education or transition guidance (14%), or orientation and workshops for off-campus living (11%).

At the same time, 26% say they do not have a structured approach to helping off-campus students stay connected to the broader campus experience.





## Off-Campus Engagement Is Often Available but Not Always Structured

*Half of institutions keep off-campus students connected through campus programming, but one-quarter lack a structured engagement approach.*

**Survey Question:** How does your institution help off-campus students stay connected to the broader campus experience?

CONTINUED ACCESS TO CAMPUS EVENTS



WE DO NOT HAVE A STRUCTURED APPROACH



OFF-CAMPUS HOUSING RESOURCES



COMMUNICATIONS TARGETED TO OFF-CAMPUS STUDENTS



INFORMAL AD-HOC SUPPORT ONLY



RENTER EDUCATION



ORIENTATION / WORKSHOPS FOR OFF CAMPUS



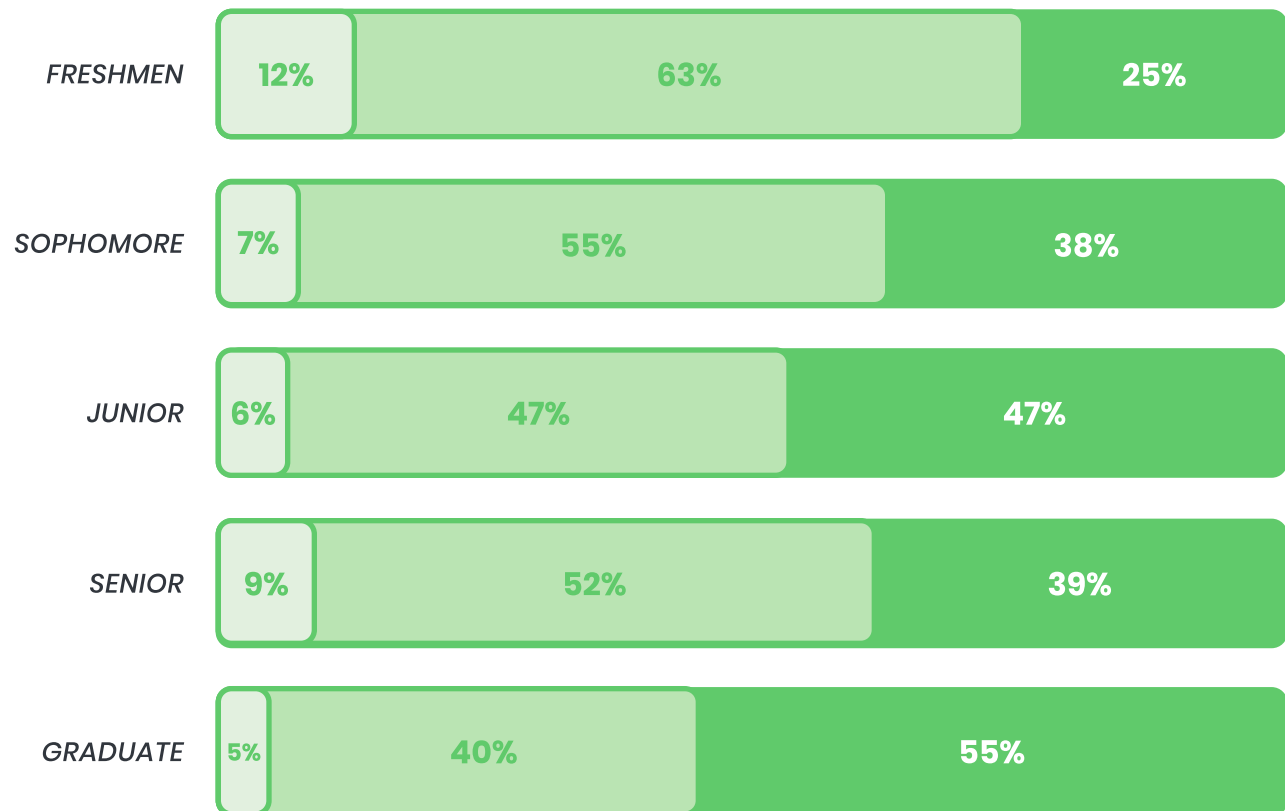
The student data suggests that connection and support still matter after students leave campus housing. Off-campus living can be developmental: 92% of students say their housing experience has prepared them at least somewhat for independent living. But that growth often happens alongside stress, and students continue to value support around safety, communication, and housing quality.

## How Housing Prepares Students for Independent Living

*92% of students feel at least somewhat prepared, highlighting housing as a key developmental experience*

**Survey Question:** How much has your housing experience prepared you for independent living after graduation?

☐ Not prepared
 ☐ Somewhat prepared
 ☒ Very prepared



### Your Takeaway:

Extend engagement beyond campus through intentional touchpoints. Off-campus students should still receive relevant communications, access to programs, renter education, safety resources, and guidance on where to go when housing issues affect their wellbeing or academic success.

## Off-Campus Living Builds Independence, but It Should Not Mean Disconnection

A more complete housing strategy recognizes both sides of off-campus living. It can help students develop independence, navigate adulthood, manage finances, and prepare for life after graduation. But it can also introduce stress, risk, isolation, and reduced institutional visibility.

That is the tension housing leaders now need to manage.

On one hand, institutions cannot and should not control every part of the off-campus experience. On the other hand, the data makes clear that off-campus housing remains connected to student outcomes. Students are making decisions based on affordability, privacy, availability, distance, safety, and responsiveness. Institutions are acknowledging the impact of the transition. Yet many still lack formal partnerships, structured support, and meaningful visibility once students move beyond campus-owned walls.

The expanding student housing ecosystem requires a broader operating model: one that includes on-campus housing, off-campus resources, PBSA partnerships, local market awareness, master leasing where appropriate, renter education, and continued engagement.



### Your Takeaway:

Build an off-campus housing strategy that matches the reality of how students live. Start by mapping the full student housing journey from first-year move-in through off-campus transition and graduation. Then identify where students need information, where the institution needs visibility, where partnerships can reduce risk, and where continued engagement can help students stay connected to campus.

# Looking Forward:

## *Staying Ahead in 2026 & Beyond*

The 2026 data makes one thing clear: student housing is becoming more strategic, more complex, and more deeply connected to institutional success. Housing teams are managing capacity, belonging, affordability, staff sustainability, student wellbeing, off-campus transitions, and the next wave of intelligent operations.

To stay ahead, institutions will need to think beyond individual workflows and toward a more connected housing strategy; one that brings operations, residence life, finance, enrollment, technology, and student support into the same conversation.

### 1. Running Housing at Full Capacity

#### What We Learned:

- ✓ Full capacity is now the operating model, with roughly two-thirds of institutions at 90%+ occupancy and about 43% at 95%+ occupancy.
- ✓ Staffing remains lean, but teams are beginning to scale, with 0–10 professional staff declining to 46% and 51+ professional staff rising to 19%.
- ✓ Digital maturity is improving, with 45% of institutions now fully digital, though many core workflows remain only partially automated.
- ✓ Housing professionals appear more likely to stay than leave, with 91–100% annual retention rising from 34% to 46%, but satisfaction softened, suggesting stability should not be mistaken for the absence of strain.



## 2. From Manual Operations to Intelligent Housing

### What We Learned:

- ✓ AI adoption is still early, with only 3% of institutions actively using AI across multiple housing processes.
- ✓ Interest is building quickly, with 57% of institutions exploring, piloting, or interested in AI tools.
- ✓ The strongest AI business case is capacity relief, with 65% identifying reduced manual administrative work as one of the most valuable outcomes.
- ✓ Practical use cases are leading adoption, especially content creation at 69%, student communications, reporting, and operational efficiency.
- ✓ Institutions expect AI to matter, with 50% believing it will be transformational or significantly improve efficiency over the next three to five years.

## 3. Housing as a Student Success Strategy

### What We Learned:

- ✓ Residence life is increasingly central to student success, with 82% of institutions citing roommate conflict and 61% citing mental health and wellness concerns as common resident interactions.
- ✓ Resident experience metrics largely held their gains, with 79% of institutions reporting high resident satisfaction and 53% reporting 71–100% resident retention.
- ✓ Earlier visibility remains a major opportunity, as 88% of institutions believe wellbeing and engagement insights would improve outcomes, but only 23% use automated alerts or dashboards.
- ✓ Inclusion and accessibility are now core housing responsibilities, with 75% of institutions offering gender-inclusive or gender-neutral housing.

#### 4. The Financial & Enrollment Balancing Act

##### What We Learned:

- ✓ Pricing is becoming more strategic, with 53% using market analysis, 50% using cost-based approaches, and 45% using competitive analysis.
- ✓ Fees and deposits remain common, with about 67% of institutions charging an application fee, housing deposit, or both.
- ✓ Non-academic year housing remains under leveraged, with 71% of institutions attributing 25% or less of revenue to it.
- ✓ Interest in new revenue opportunities is growing, with 63% saying non-academic year housing revenue is a priority or area of interest.
- ✓ Capacity planning is active but cautious, with 40% reporting no current expansion plans while many others are exploring development, master leasing, or off-campus agreements.

#### 5. The Expanding Student Housing Ecosystem

##### What We Learned:

- ✓ 71% of institutions say the off-campus transition moderately or significantly impacts student experience, wellness, and success.
- ✓ Student data reinforces the stakes, as 63% of students say housing stress impacts their academic performance or mental health.
- ✓ Off-campus support remains inconsistent, with 34% of institutions using a university-branded off-campus housing platform while 29% do not actively support off-campus housing searches.
- ✓ 76% of institutions report very limited visibility into students' residential experience and ongoing success once students leave campus housing.
- ✓ Partnership models are emerging, with 31% actively partnering with off-campus housing providers and 24% using a master lease agreement.

## Final Thought

The future of student housing will not be defined by occupancy alone. It will be defined by how well institutions connect people, processes, data, and experience into a housing model that is sustainable for staff, supportive for students, financially resilient, and ready for what comes next.

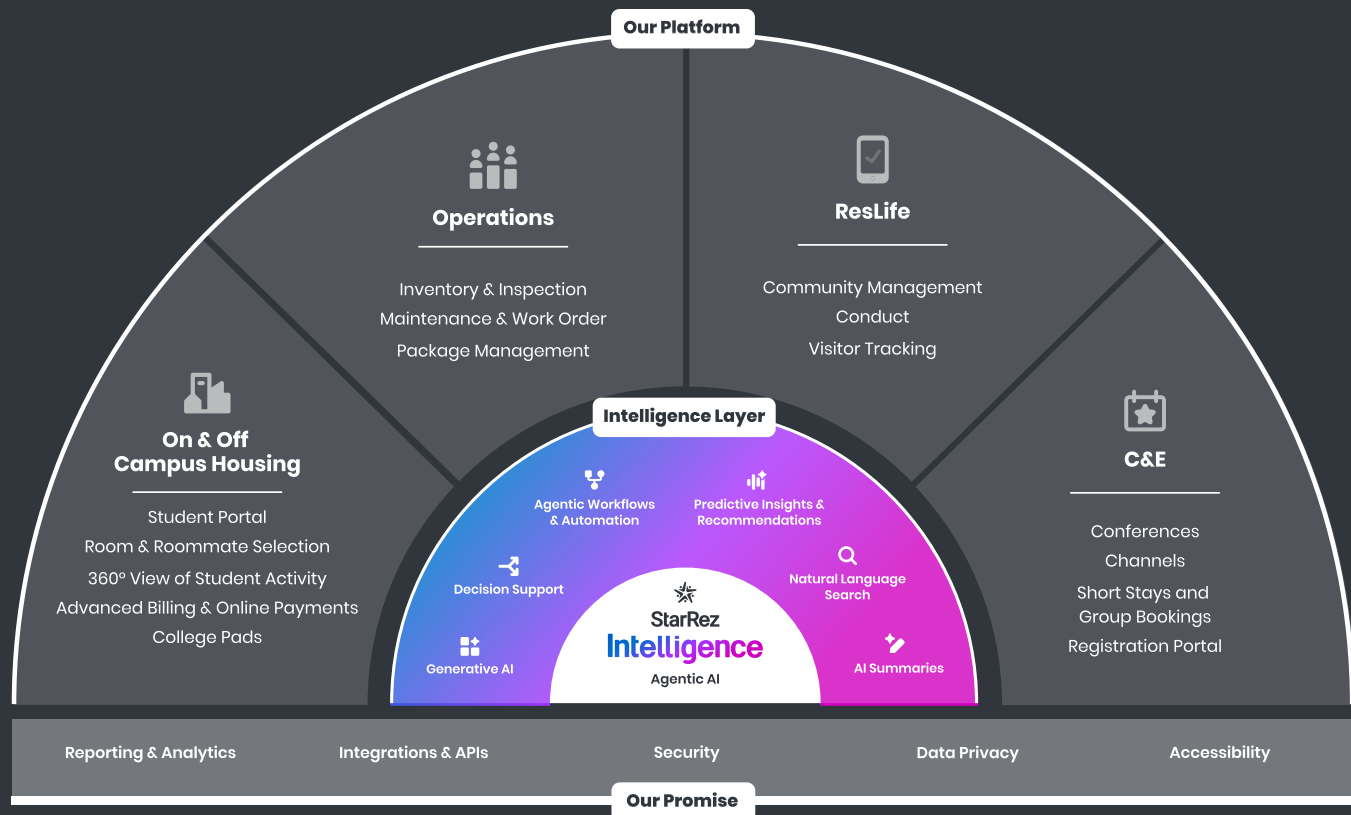
The institutions leading the way will be those that can operate at full capacity without exhausting their teams, use residence life as a strategic driver of belonging and persistence, make financial decisions with both affordability and sustainability in mind, support students beyond campus boundaries, and adopt automation and AI with purpose, governance, and care.

Because when housing works, students feel supported. Staff have capacity to do meaningful work. Institutions gain visibility into the full student journey. And the residential experience becomes a foundation for student success.



# Ready to Turn Insight Into Action?

StarRez helps institutions bring every part of the student housing experience together — from applications, assignments, occupancy, billing, communications, and reporting to residence life, engagement, and off-campus support.



With [StarRez Intelligence](#), housing teams can begin moving from manual, reactive workflows toward smarter, more insight-driven operations that reduce administrative burden, improve reporting, and help teams make more informed decisions at scale. And with [StarRez ResLife solutions](#), institutions can strengthen the community side of housing by supporting resident engagement, programming, roommate agreements, staff workflows, and the day-to-day interactions that help students feel connected and supported.

As housing becomes more strategic, StarRez is here to help institutions build connected, student-centered, future-ready housing operations on campus, off campus, and everywhere the student experience continues to evolve.





StarRez is the global market leader in student housing software and residential community management. Its easy-to-use, all-in-one platform integrates all aspects of housing management, from application to occupancy to maintenance, providing a seamless experience for occupants and administrators alike. StarRez offers our community members both the robust capabilities of a large organization and the care, knowledge, and personalized service of a small business.

With offices in the United States, Australia, and the UK, StarRez is a trusted partner of more than 1,300 community members across 25+ countries, managing more than 3 million residents. Visit [starrez.com](https://starrez.com) to learn more.

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