

A group of people are seated at long wooden tables in a historic room, attending a presentation. A man in a blue shirt stands at the front, gesturing towards a screen displaying a presentation titled "Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) - Drones". The room features ornate wood paneling, a large arched window, and a fireplace mantel with the inscription "STUDY THE WATCHWORD OF FAME". The ceiling is decorated with a large mural. The presentation screen lists topics such as "What are we getting our nose down up and running?", "Target Awareness for Pilots", "Safety", "Security", "Privacy", "Data", "Liability", "Regulation", and "Working with DHS and other partners to coordinate operations".



Purpose and Development

In the fall of 2025, SLELO PRISM launched Partner Engagement Survey for eight weeks to strengthen connections within our partnership network and better understand how we can collaborate to protect the lands and waters of the St. Lawrence Eastern Lake Ontario region. As our partnership has evolved, it became increasingly important to pause, listen, and re-evaluate how we communicate, engage, and work together. The survey was designed to help us reconnect with partners, update essential contact information, understand communication preferences, and gain a clearer picture of the invasive species management work happening across the region.

Partners were invited to participate through a series of outreach emails emphasizing the value of their insights. We highlighted that their feedback would help enhance engagement, improve information sharing, identify new collaborative opportunities, and celebrate the important work they contribute. Whether a partner had been involved for years or was newly connected, their responses were essential in shaping how SLELO PRISM supports the network moving forward. The survey was estimated to take 30 minutes to complete, and all responses were kept confidential.

To capture a full and accurate understanding of partner needs and activities, the survey included seven purpose-driven sections. These sections gathered information on partner and organizational profiles; assessed levels of partnership commitment; reviewed engagement and collaboration experiences; evaluated communication effectiveness; and provided space for partners to highlight their accomplishments. Optional questions on invasive species survey efforts helped identify potential data gaps or overlapping monitoring activities, while the final section invited open-ended suggestions for enhancing inclusion, collaboration, and information exchange.

The survey was also an opportunity to communicate SLELO PRISM's draft partnership expectations, such as attending at least two partner meetings per year, participating in outreach initiatives like NYISAW, reporting invasive species activities (including early detection reports), and sharing data through platforms like iMapInvasives. Early internal notes guided the survey's development with goals of re-establishing personal connections, improving coordination, and expanding education and outreach collaborations.

Overall, the 2025 Partner Engagement Survey serves as a foundational step toward strengthening our partnership network, sharpening our collective strategies, and ensuring that SLELO PRISM remains a collaborative, transparent, and supportive resource for all partners.

Why is Partnership important to SLELO PRISM?

What is a Partner?

Partners can be any organization that has an interest in advancing our mission to protect the lands and waters of our region from the harmful impacts of invasive species and to restore ecological integrity. Activities and collaborations among the partnership should support invasive species management efforts with an emphasis on prevention, early detection, rapid response, management, outreach, and restoration. **If you're committed to protecting our environment and slowing the spread of invasive species, you belong here!**

Partnership Benefits

The strength of a partnership lies in its collective action. Each partner's individual contribution is amplified through active engagement in the network, unlocking greater capacity to prevent, monitor, respond to, and restore areas affected by invasive species. Together, we drive meaningful invasive species management efforts across the region.

- **Networking & Collaboration:**
 - Partners have the opportunity to attend meetings and events where they can share their expertise, network, and learn from an expansive collection of invasive species management professionals.
- **Access to Expertise & Shared Resources:**
 - SLELO PRISM staff and partners are leaders in regional invasive species research and management. By joining the partnership, members gain access to a robust pool of technical resources, data, and expertise.
- **Funding Opportunities:**
 - SLELO PRISM allocates funding annually through Requests for Proposals and a contractual process led by our host organization, The Nature Conservancy. Funding is provided by the NY Environmental Protection Fund and administered by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. This enables partners to implement invasive species work aligned with SLELO PRISM's Five-Year Strategic Plan.
- **Partner Recognition:**
 - Partners are celebrated for their contributions through PRISM network communications, quarterly updates, and annual reports. This recognition helps highlight how each organization's efforts contribute to the broader success of the partnership.



We Value Our Partnership

SLELO PRISM is dedicated to fostering a collaborative and coordinated approach among a diverse network of organizations, stakeholders, and communities. By aligning efforts and sharing resources, data, and expertise, partners play a vital role in helping us achieve our core programming and ambitious goals surrounding invasive species management.

www.sleloinvasives.org/partners

Who Took the Survey

The 2025 SLELO PRISM Partner Engagement Survey received 56 responses representing 32 partner organizations across the region. Collectively, respondents brought over 500 years of combined experience, with individual experience ranging from less than one year to 39 years. Notably, 52% of respondents have been in their current roles for five years or fewer, reflecting a mix of emerging professionals and seasoned experts.

Participation came from all five SLELO counties, with the highest response rates from Jefferson and Oswego counties and the lowest from Lewis and Oneida. Respondents represented a broad range of professional fields, led by Conservation (32%) and Education/Outreach (26%), while Policy/Advocacy roles accounted for roughly 10%. Survey results also showed that 34% of respondents were only somewhat familiar with SLELO PRISM's mission and programs, **highlighting opportunities to strengthen partner awareness and engagement moving forward.**

Thank you...



Department of
Environmental
Conservation



Jefferson County
Soil & Water Conservation District



Department of
Transportation



New York State
Parks, Recreation and
Historic Preservation



New York
Natural Heritage
Program



Indian River Lakes
CONSERVANCY
Protect • Learn • Enjoy • Forever



Cornell IPM
New York State Integrated
Pest Management



NEW YORK STATE
INVASIVE SPECIES
MANAGEMENT



A2A | Algonquin to
Adirondacks
Collaborative



Cornell Cooperative Extension
St. Lawrence County

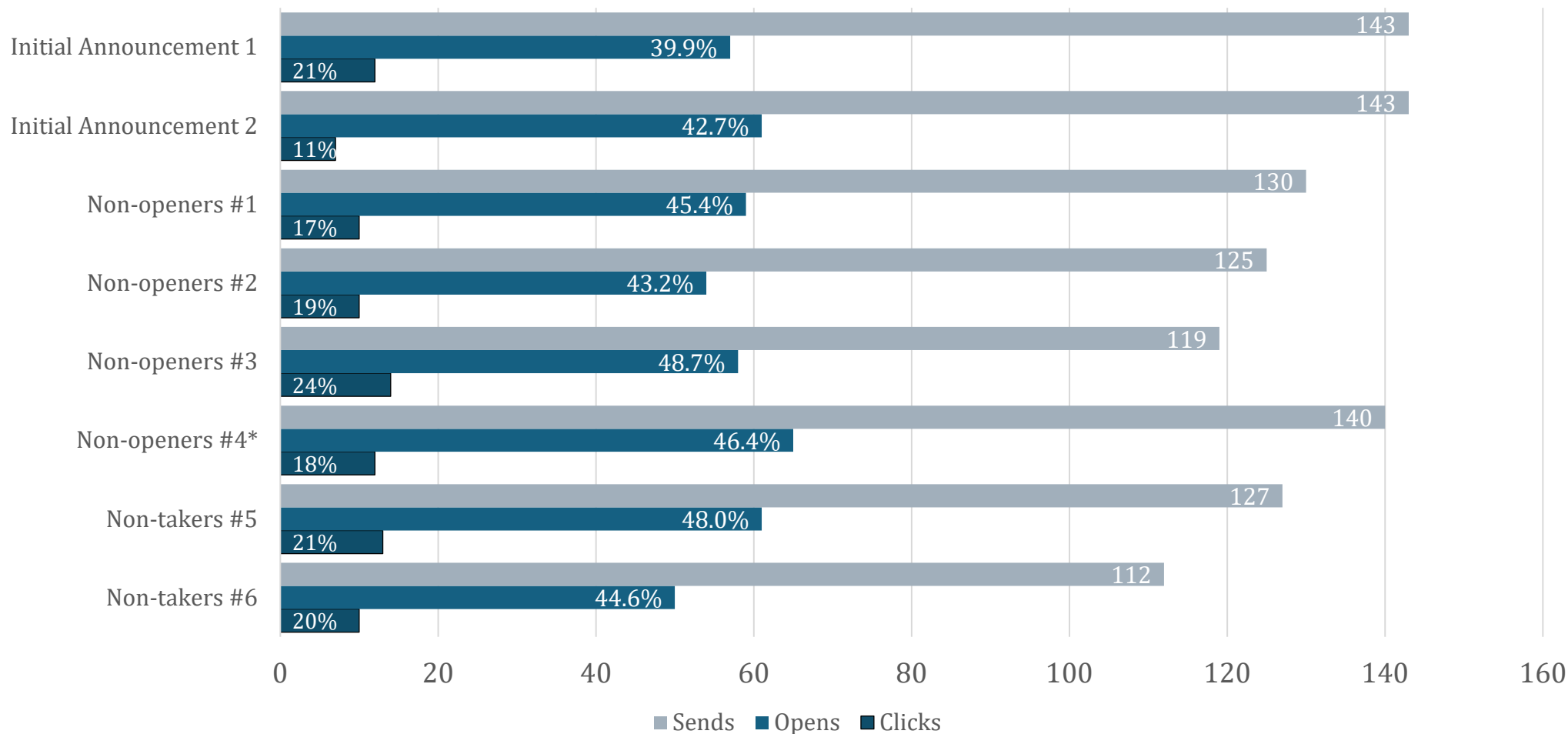
Cornell Cooperative Extension | Jefferson County

Survey Response Strategy

A structured communications strategy was implemented using Constant Contact to maximize participation in the survey. The effort began with two consecutive weeks of initial survey announcements sent to all 143 contacts in our partner and potential-partner list, which included multiple representatives from several organizations. Following the announcements, a planned four-week cycle of weekly reminder emails targeted specifically to recipients who had not opened previous messages was initiated. During the final two weeks of outreach, responder data was reviewed and additional reminders were sent to individuals who still had not completed the survey, ensuring thorough follow-up across the full contact list.

Overall, an average open rate of 46% occurred with 19% of openers clicking through to open the survey. Upon reviewing the campaign data, we discovered that the weekly reminders did not deploy according to the intended settings. As a result, some contacts may have received duplicate emails. Despite this, we did not receive any complaints or unsubscribe requests from partners. Throughout the outreach period, we continued to experience a notable number of bounced emails, particularly from government agency addresses, indicating ongoing challenges with outdated or restricted email domains and Constant Contact being blocked by IT programs. A spreadsheet/alternative option was sent to partners to fill out by hand if they could not access the Google Form. This strategy ultimately ensured persistent, multi-tiered engagement aimed at securing the highest possible survey response rate.

Survey Response Request Strategy



Engagement and Collaboration

The Engagement and Collaboration section of the 2025 Partner Engagement Survey provides a detailed snapshot of how partners have interacted with SLELO PRISM over the last three years and where interest exists for future joint efforts. Overall, engagement levels are strong, though gaps remain in participation, consistency, and communication.

Past Engagement

Survey responses show that **73% of participants have collaborated with SLELO PRISM within the last three years**. These collaborations span a diverse set of activities, demonstrating a broad and active partnership network. However, meeting attendance lags behind overall collaboration rates. While **55% have attended at least one partner meeting in the past three years**, this figure drops to roughly **25%** when non-responding organizations are included, indicating that a significant number of partners do not regularly participate in meetings. Additionally, **16% of surveyed partners reported no collaboration and no meeting attendance**, a number that rises to an estimated **40%** when accounting for all non-responders, highlighting an important opportunity to re-engage or rebuild connections.

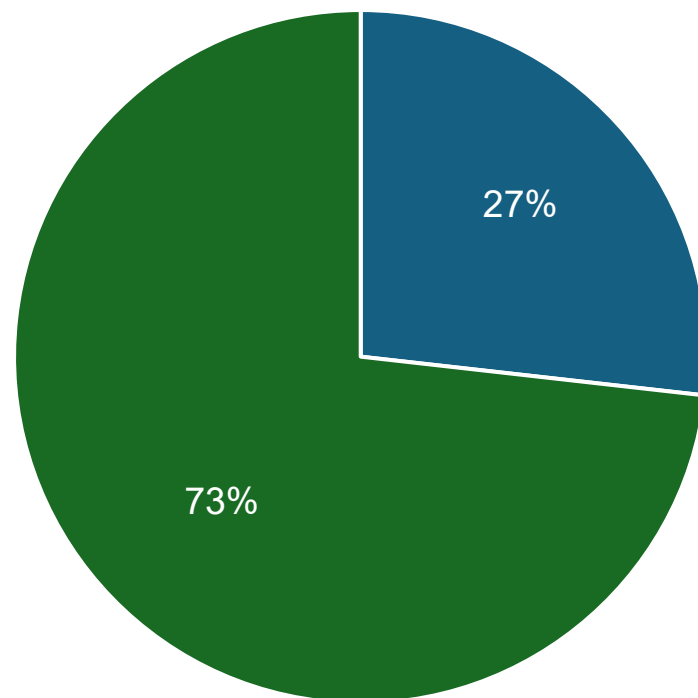
Types of Collaboration

Partners described involvement across six primary areas:

- 1. Education and Outreach Programs / Newsletters** – participation in school programs, community presentations, shared educational materials, and newsletter contributions.
- 2. Event Participation** – attendance at symposia, partner meetings, workshops, and volunteer days.
- 3. Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Work** – fanwort surveys, water chestnut pulls, AISLE projects, and monitoring efforts.
- 4. Restoration & Management** – invasive species removals, biocontrol releases, restoration plantings, and shared site stewardship.
- 5. Special Project Funding** – engagement with grants, RFPs, and contracted restoration and management work.
- 6. Information Sharing & Networking** – listserv updates, committee participation, strategic planning discussions, and communication through partner events.

This range reflects a partnership network that is active, diverse, and engaged in meaningful ecological work.

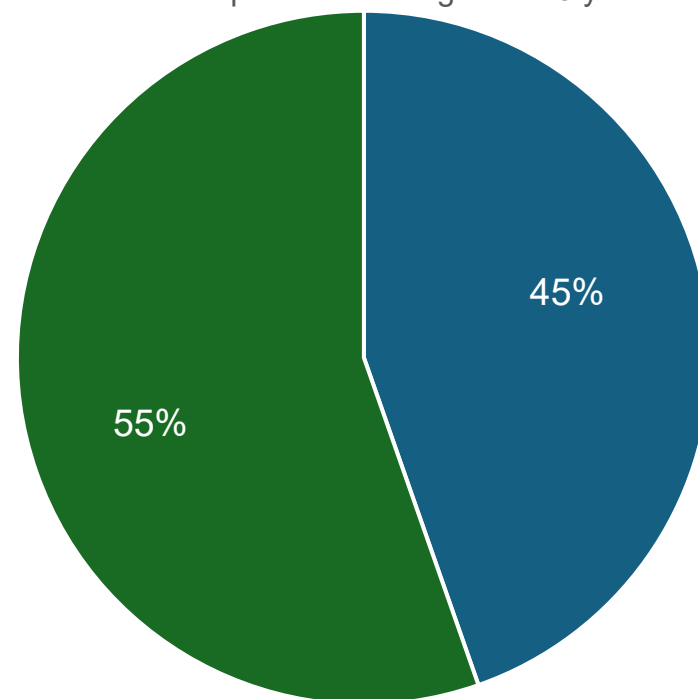
Collaboration in last 3 years



■ No

■ Yes

Attendance at partner meeting in last 3 years



Interest in Future Collaboration

Partners expressed strong interest in additional joint work. The highest levels of interest include:

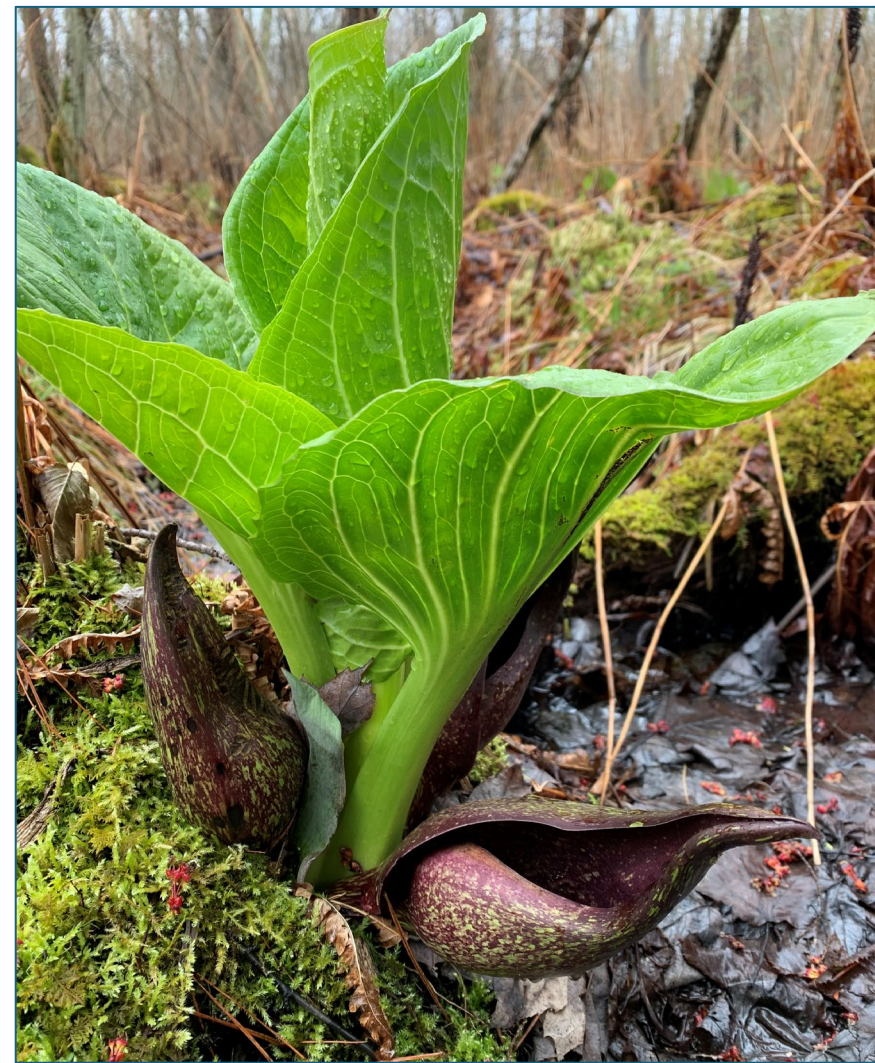
- **Project collaboration (70%)**
- **Co-hosting events or workshops (61%)**
- **Invasive species and restoration data sharing (54%)**
- Moderate interest also exists in **special project proposals (38%)**, **volunteer coordination (34%)**, and **social media collaboration (32%)**.
 - These interests point to clear opportunities for SLELO PRISM to expand structured collaborative pathways, especially in project-based and educational areas.

Identified Barriers to Engagement

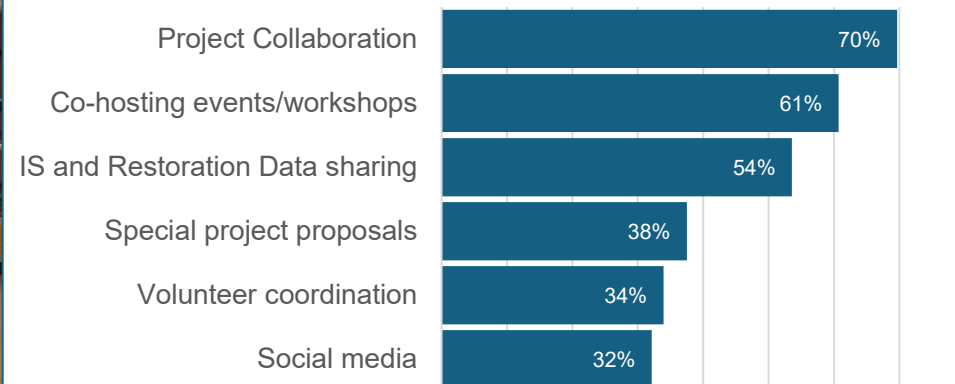
Despite the overall positive engagement, partners identified several recurring barriers that limit participation:

- **Time constraints** and competing priorities
- **Scheduling conflicts**, often due to overlapping work hours
- **Geographic distance**, making travel to in-person events difficult
- **Staffing and capacity limitations**
- **Funding constraints**, particularly among smaller organizations
- **Communication gaps**, including missed updates or unclear expectations
- **Knowledge gaps**, especially among newer staff or organizations less familiar with SLELO PRISM's mission and offerings

These barriers suggest opportunities for improved accessibility, more flexible participation options, expanded virtual offerings, clearer communication strategies, and targeted support to help partners engage more consistently.



Interest in Collaboration



Partnership Commitment Summary

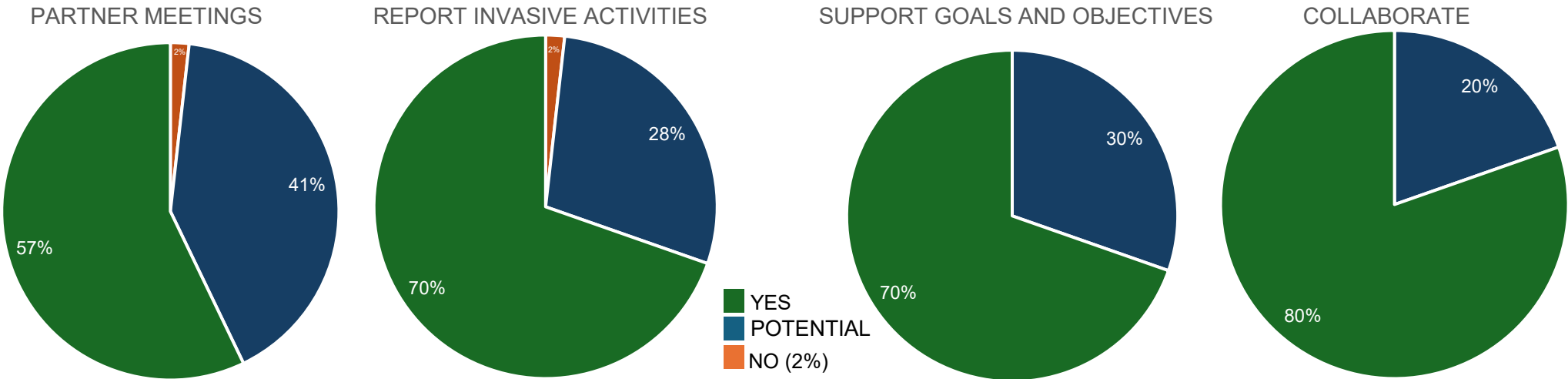
As part of strengthening the partnership network, SLELO PRISM is exploring new ways to recognize active partners and ensure consistent, meaningful collaboration. The survey included a set of draft partnership commitments, to gauge partner capacity and willingness to engage at various levels, and were scheduled for finalization by March 2026 with the release of the Partnership Engagement Survey Report (*this report*).

The new core commitments are as follows:

- 1. Attend at least two partner meetings annually.** SLELO PRISM hosts three partner meetings each year, one virtual (winter) and two in-person meetings are held each year (spring and late fall). Dates and locations are selected with partner input.
- 2. Support the goals and objectives outlined in the PRISM's Strategic Plan.** These goals guide invasive species prevention, early detection, rapid response, management, restoration, and outreach across the region.
- 3. Inform SLELO PRISM of the organization's invasive species activities.** Reporting may be done through SLELO's online outreach form (www.sleloinvasives.org/newsandevents/report-event-stats/), NYiMapInvasives.org, or the annual year end activity survey.
- 4. Collaborate with SLELO staff and partners when expertise is applicable.**

Survey responses reflect strong overall support for these expectations. 57% of respondents indicated they can commit to attending at least two partner meetings annually, while an additional portion expressed potential ability depending on scheduling and capacity. Support for the Strategic Plan was high, with 70% confirming they could uphold its objectives. Similarly, 70% reported they could share invasive species activities through NYiMapInvasives, SLELO's online outreach form, or year end reporting efforts. The strongest response was for collaboration, with 80% indicating they are prepared to collaborate when their expertise is applicable.

These results suggest that partners are broadly committed to the shared mission, especially in areas involving direct collaboration and strategic alignment. However, meeting attendance and data reporting commitments show higher levels of hesitancy, reflecting known barriers such as time constraints, staffing shortages, scheduling conflicts, and geographic distance. Overall, the willingness to engage, paired with practical limitations that may require flexible participation options, additional training, clearer expectations, and continued relationship building. This feedback helped refine partnership requirements, ensuring they remain meaningful, achievable, and supportive of the diverse organizations involved in invasive species management across the region.





Communication and Information Sharing Summary

The Communication and Information Sharing section of the Partner Engagement Survey was designed to understand how partners currently receive information from SLELO PRISM, evaluate satisfaction with communication, and identify what types of content are most valuable.

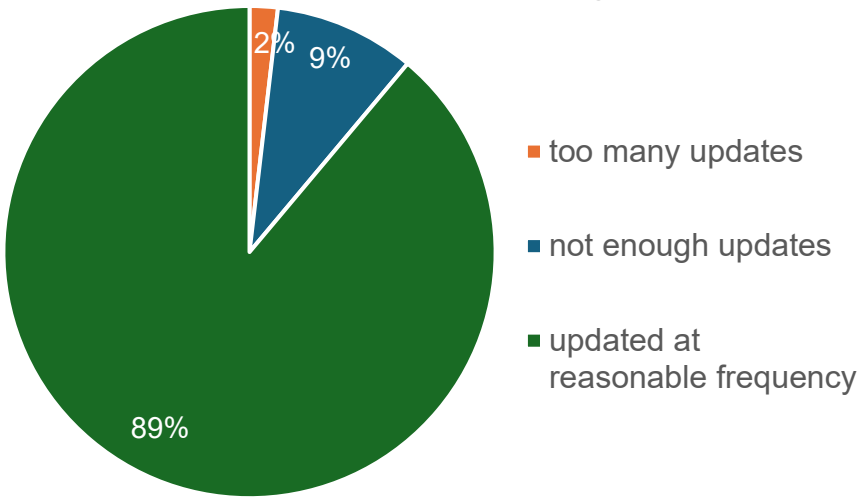
Responses show that email remains the most widely used and preferred method of engagement (95%), while the website, social media, partner meetings, and in-person events each serve as supplementary channels for roughly one third of respondents. This suggests that while partners engage across multiple platforms, email remains the backbone of SLELO PRISM’s information delivery.

Overall, partners expressed high satisfaction with communication frequency and clarity. Eighty nine percent reported that updates are shared at a reasonable frequency, with only a small percentage feeling that updates are not frequent enough or too frequent.

Social media also plays a role in partner engagement. Around one third of respondents indicated they followed SLELO PRISM’s Facebook and Instagram accounts, and many were unsure whether SLELO PRISM follows their organizational pages, highlighting an opportunity for increased mutual visibility and cross promotion. Altogether, responses indicate strong communication foundations, paired with opportunities to refine content, strengthen two-way engagement, and broaden visibility across platforms.

How do you currently receive updates from or engage with SLELO PRISM?	
Email	95%
Website	36%
Social Media	36%
Attending partner meetings	36%
Attending events	32%

Opinion on Content and Frequency of Updates



Communication and Information Sharing Summary (continued)

When asked what type of information they most want to receive, the highest ranked categories were seasonal newsletters, partner meeting invitations, and collaborative opportunities. Partners also expressed interest in updates on and event or volunteer announcements, funding resources, annual reports, and opportunities to access or share invasive species data.

Partners were invited to share information about their own invasive species, conservation, and restoration initiatives. A large majority expressed interest in having their work featured through SLELO PRISM's newsletters, website, or social media, demonstrating enthusiasm for increased storytelling and recognition across the partnership.

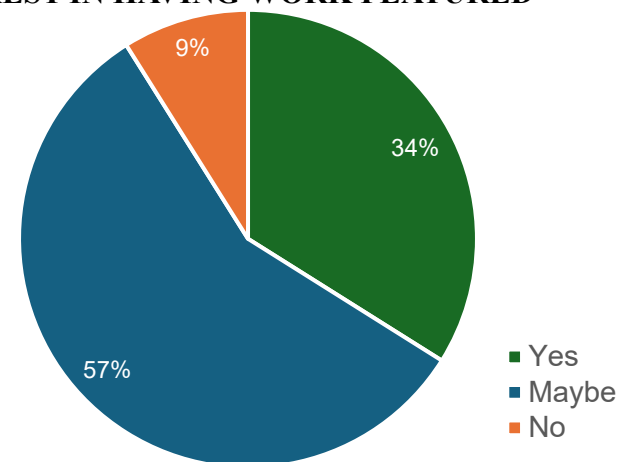
Responses included a wide range of activities such as AIS surveys, water chestnut removals, restoration plantings, invasive species monitoring, education programs, community science efforts, and habitat improvement projects. Many partners also indicated willingness to share photos and project descriptions for promotional use, which provides valuable content for communications and showcases the diversity of work occurring across the region.

These insights reaffirm the importance of celebrating partner accomplishments, elevating shared success stories, and expanding opportunities for organizational visibility within the broader SLELO PRISM network.

INFORMATION PARTNERS WANT TO RECEIVE



INTEREST IN HAVING WORK FEATURED



Invasive Species Surveys and Data Collection Summary

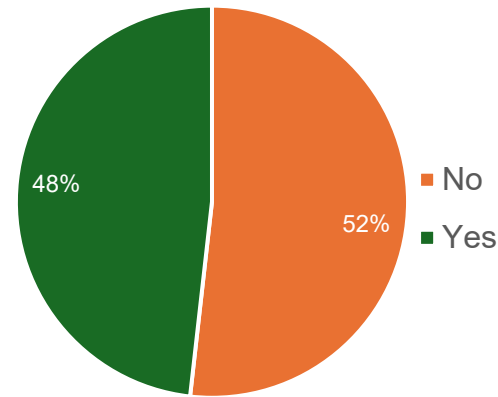
Understanding where invasive species occur within the region and where management activities are taking place is essential for making informed decisions that protect native ecosystems. This survey section was designed to capture how partners are currently contributing to monitoring efforts, how they report data, and which species they prioritize. The responses provide valuable insight into both the strengths of current monitoring work and opportunities for improvement, especially regarding standardized data reporting.

Partner Participation in Invasive Species Surveys

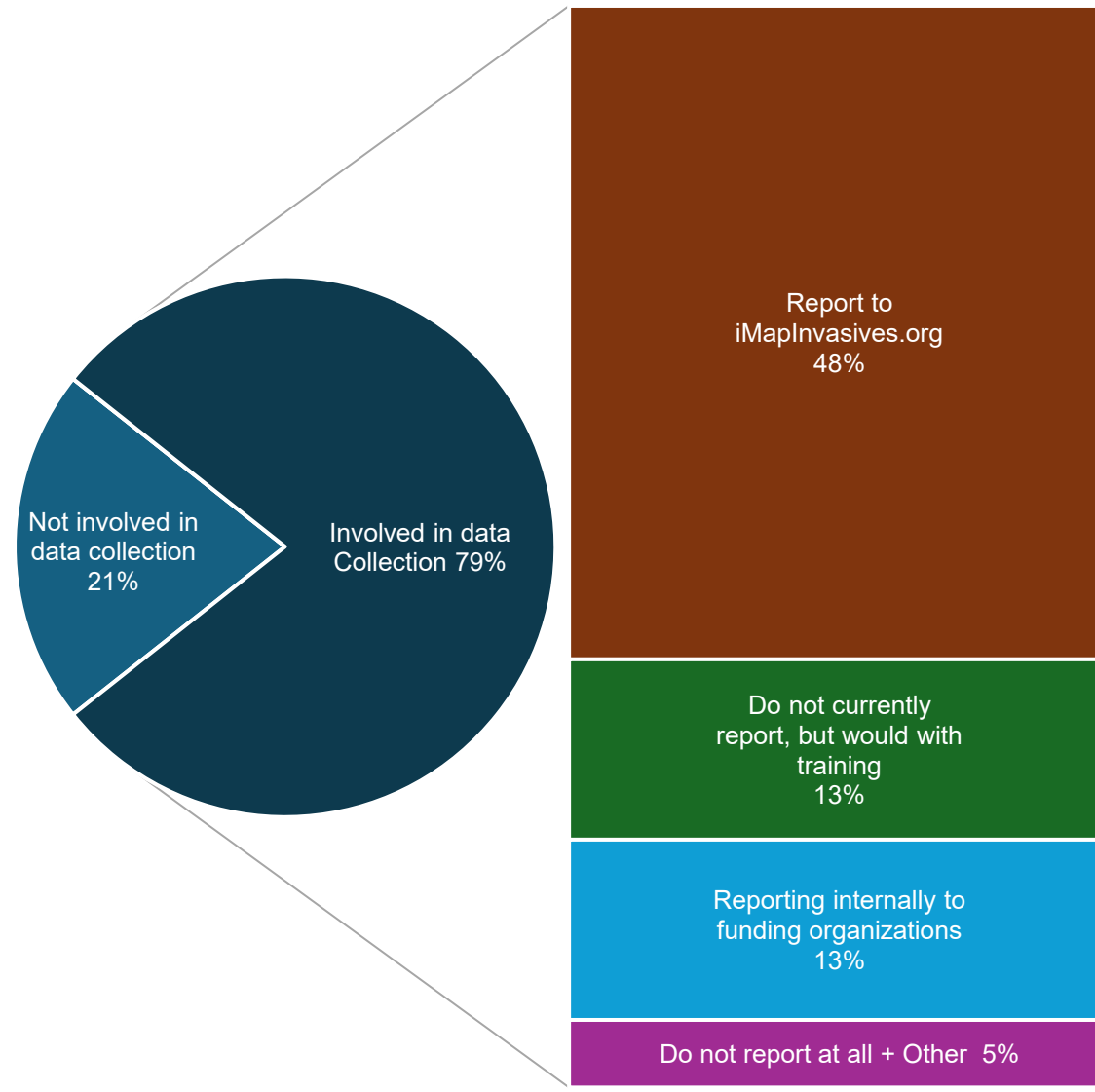
A substantial portion of survey respondents indicated involvement in monitoring activities. **Seventy-nine percent** reported being involved in invasive species data collection, yet only **48%** currently report their observations or treatment data to iMapInvasives, NY’s statewide database used by partners, agencies, and researchers to track invasive species distributions and management. An additional **13%** stated they do not currently report to iMapInvasives but *would* with training or additional support. Another **13%** report only internally to their organization or funding agencies, and **5%** reported not sharing data at all.

These results highlight a critical opportunity: while most partners are engaged in monitoring, the lack of consistent and centralized reporting limits the collective understanding of species distribution and management progress across the region. Reporting to iMapInvasives using standardized methodology is essential, as it allows all partners, whether locally focused or regional, to contribute to a unified dataset. Knowing **where species are present, where they are absent, and where treatment activities occur** is foundational for early detection, rapid response, prioritization, and funding justification. The strong interest in training expressed by several respondents suggests that increasing partner confidence and capacity in iMapInvasives reporting could substantially strengthen regional data quality.

Partners who conduct Invasive Species Surveys



PARTNER INVOLVEMENT IN INVASIVE SPECIES DATA COLLECTION



Tiered Species Survey Efforts

Respondents were asked to indicate which invasive species they currently survey across SLELO PRISM's five-tier ranking system. This system classifies species based on distribution and management priority:

Tier 1 – Early Detection: Species not yet known in the region or extremely limited in distribution; highest priority for rapid response.

Tier 2 – Eradication: Species with limited distribution that may be possible to eradicate.

Tier 3 – Containment: Established species that can be managed locally to slow or prevent spread.

Tier 4 – Local Management: Widespread species where management focuses on high-value sites or specific objectives.

Tier 5 – Research/Watchlist: Species requiring monitoring, research, or evaluation due to emerging concerns.

Data from the survey show varied levels of monitoring across tiers. Tier 1 and Tier 2 species, those most critical for early detection, received moderate attention, with partners commonly reporting surveys for species such as giant hogweed, spotted lanternfly, fanwort, and hydrilla. Tier 3 species, which include widespread but locally impactful species such as phragmites, knotweed, and water chestnut showed the highest overall response numbers. This reflects the prevalence of these species across the region and the ongoing need for monitoring and management. Tier 4 and Tier 5 species were also regularly surveyed, with notable attention to emerald ash borer, purple loosestrife, beech leaf disease, and jumping worm.

Respondents were also able to list additional species not included in the tiered structure. Some species mentioned include Longhorned Tick, Mullein, spongy moth, oak wilt, Spotted wing drosophila, Winged euonymus (*Euonymus alatus*), barberry spp. (*Berberis* spp.), lesser celandine, and privet spp. These responses help identify species of emerging local concern and will be useful for shaping future species spotlights, training opportunities, and updates to the regional priority species list.

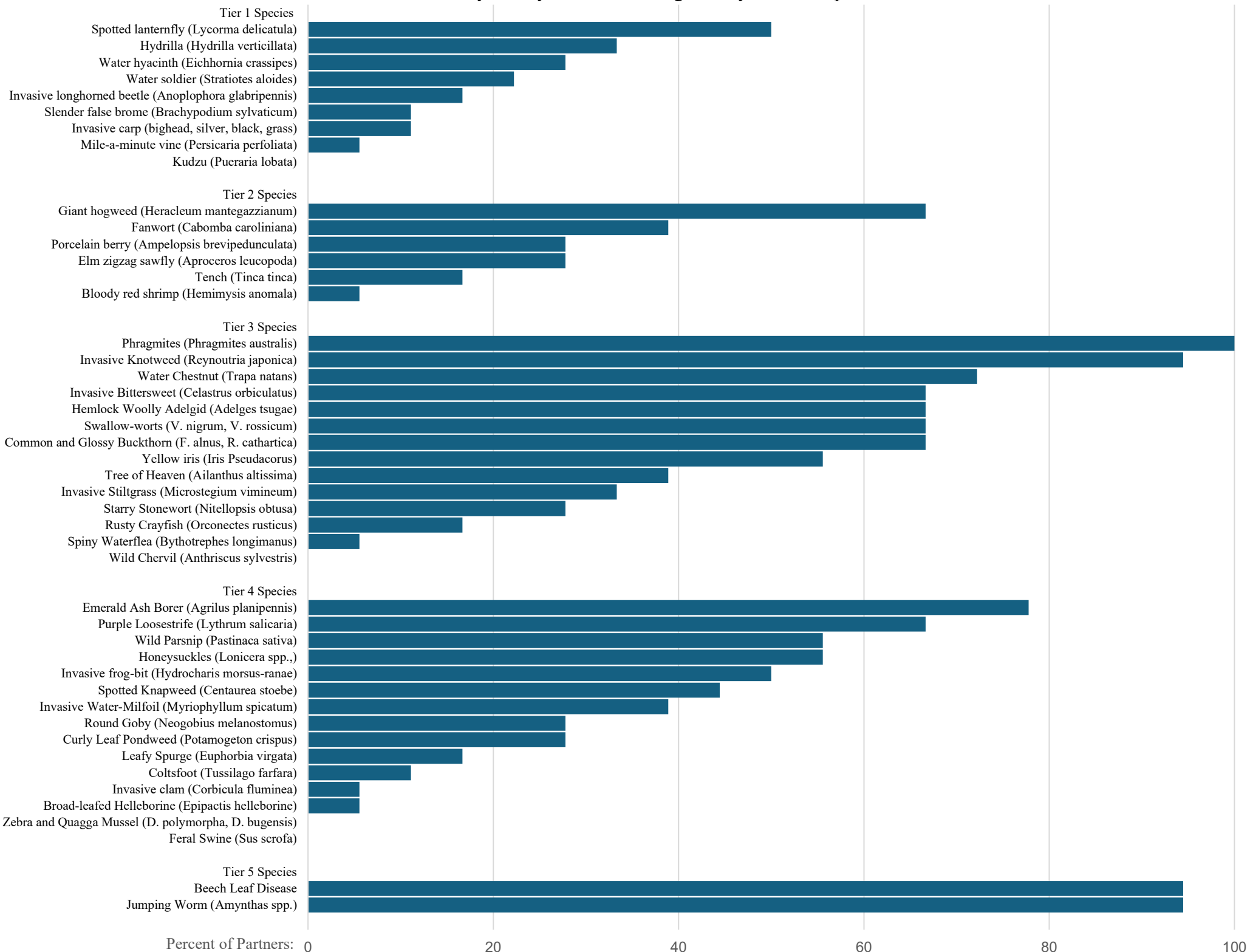
Key Takeaways and Opportunities

The results from this section reveal a strong partner commitment to invasive species surveying, paired with clear needs around data standardization and reporting. While a large majority of partners are actively involved in monitoring efforts, less than half currently report their data to iMapInvasives. This gap suggests that substantial monitoring work is occurring but is not always accessible to the broader management community. Without centralized reporting, valuable information about species distribution, absence, and treatment progress can remain siloed. Clearer communication about why standardized reporting matters will also be essential. A unified dataset allows for more accurate early detection and rapid response, more efficient resource allocation, and stronger justification for funding requests. Treatment data is particularly valuable, as it helps build a more complete picture of management progress, reduces duplication of effort, and highlights areas where additional support or follow-up may be needed. Emphasizing these benefits can help connect partner effort to regional outcomes, reinforcing the value of contributing data beyond organizational boundaries.

This presents a tangible opportunity: increasing targeted training, offering hands-on reporting support, and simplifying reporting pathways could significantly expand shared datasets. Providing partners with quick-reference guides, hosting seasonal “iMap reporting days,” or offering live virtual troubleshooting sessions may help reduce the perceived complexity of data entry and encourage more consistent participation. Increasing support for iMapInvasives training, simplifying reporting pathways, and strengthening communication about why centralized data matters will help ensure that collective monitoring efforts translate into effective regional management.

By expanding training, improving reporting support, deepening communication about the value of shared data, and aligning outreach with partner monitoring priorities, SLELO PRISM can continue to strengthen surveillance capacity and build a more resilient, informed, and connected regional management community.

Percent of Partners that Currently Survey for the following Priority Invasive Species in SLELO PRISM



Next Steps and 2026–2028 Action Plan

The Partner Engagement Survey has provided invaluable insight into the strengths of the current partnership network as well as areas where additional support, coordination, and communication will enhance collaborative success. Respondents shared both positive experiences and candid reflections on challenges, including geographic distance, time limitations, communication gaps, and uncertainty around expectations. The feedback has been essential in identifying meaningful next steps and shaping a multi-year approach to support partners while strengthening the broader SLELO PRISM collaboration framework.

Moving forward, the next phase of work will focus on translating survey results into clear, actionable priorities. The coming months will involve further review of feedback, deeper exploration of identified barriers, particularly those related to communication, data reporting, and meeting accessibility. The new partnership commitments have been refined and are now finalized as of early 2026, which reflect realistic expectations that recognize the diverse capacities across the partnership.

Preliminary Action Plan for 2026–2028

1. Improve Accessibility and Virtual Engagement (2026)

- i. Continue offering hybrid or fully virtual meeting options to reduce geographic and scheduling barriers.
- ii. Record presentations and workshops for partners unable to attend live to be distributed with partner meeting summaries.

2. Expand Collaborative Opportunities (2026-2027)

- i. Establish 1-2 new joint project pathways (e.g., early detection efforts, AIS surveys, community science initiatives).
- ii. Launch an annual “Partner Collaboration Call for Ideas” to identify shared priorities.

3. Strengthen Communication & Information Sharing (2026-2027)

- i. Develop a clear Partner Guide summarizing expectations, benefits, and opportunities.
- ii. Improve communication consistency through seasonal newsletters and clearer event calendars, including NYIS.info.
- iii. Expand mutual visibility by following partner organizations on social media and sharing cross-promotion opportunities.

4. Build Capacity for Data Reporting (2026–2028)

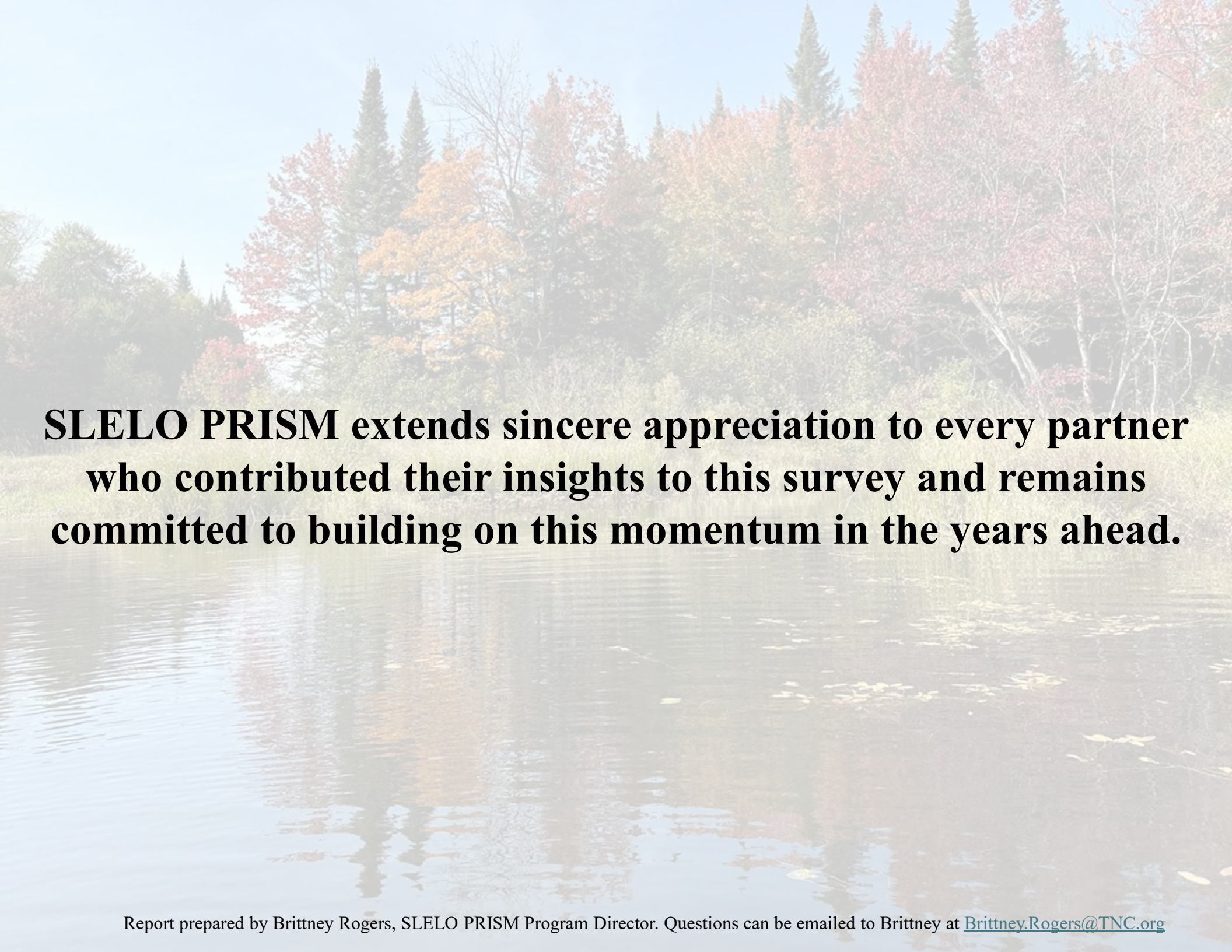
- i. Offer biannual iMapInvasives trainings, including hands-on sessions and virtual office hours.
- ii. Distribute quick-reference reporting guides for observations, treatments, and outreach.
- iii. Set incremental goals to increase partner reporting rates across the region.

5. Enhance Partner Recognition and Storytelling (2027-2028)

- i. Continue to feature partner projects regularly in newsletters, social media, and the SLELO PRISM website.
- ii. Develop a digital “Partner Spotlight Library” to showcase ongoing work across the region.

(These actions are subject to change based on programmatic and funder priorities)

This survey has set the foundation for a stronger, more connected partnership network. The feedback gathered will guide both immediate improvements and long-term planning, ensuring the partnership continues to grow in effectiveness, inclusivity, and impact.



SLELO PRISM extends sincere appreciation to every partner who contributed their insights to this survey and remains committed to building on this momentum in the years ahead.