

Touchstone Energy®

Member Perspectives Report Gen Z Q2 2026



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Study Overview

Member Perspectives Methodology Overview

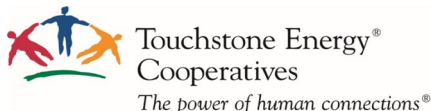
- Survey results were collected from 05/18/2026 through 06/15/2026.
- A total of **4 cooperatives** participated in the Q2 study to collect the perspectives of Gen Z members and/or those living in a member's household.
- To collect survey responses, a screener survey was first sent to determine eligibility. Eligible participants had to be between the ages of 18 and 30 years of age. There were no other eligibility requirements. Members who were contacted but did not meet the age criteria were encouraged to forward the invitation to members of their household within that age range. Anyone who indicated having an immediate family member currently employed by the local cooperative was screened out of the survey.
- From the screener survey, email invitations were sent to all respondents from each cooperative by CFI Group for the full survey. Reminder emails and additional emails were later sent to increase response rate. Respondents to the full survey received one \$20 prepaid card as an incentive for their participation.
- A total of **37 responses** were collected as follows:
 - Boone Power: 16
 - Middle Tennessee Electric (MTE): 7
 - Sioux Valley Electric: 11
 - The Energy Cooperative: 3

Key Findings

Key Findings

- Overall, Gen Z members lack familiarity with electric cooperatives and more specifically with the principles that set them apart from other types of electric utilities.
 - › This lack of familiarity may help explain the low ratings younger members provide of how well their cooperative is upholding the Seven Cooperative Principles in the 2026 Cooperative Advantage Survey.
- Understanding of the member/owner relationship also seems to be limited among this member segment, reflected in this qualitative study and even more pronounced in the results of the 2026 Cooperative Advantage Study.
 - › Based on the 2026 Cooperative Advantage Study, 20% of 18-34 year-old members identify as member/owners as compared to 44% of those 35+.
- Just over half of the 37 Gen Z respondents express some level of agreement that electric utilities should provide more than just power.
 - › However, 25 of 37 (68%) say they would choose a primarily transactional type relationship where they pay a bill and receive a service over a more collaborative one where the utility offers opportunities for input and involvement in the community.
 - › In terms of their expectations, there appears to be a strong emphasis on affordability, reliability and transparency, though educating customers, providing programs/services, promoting sustainability or clean energy and supporting the local community are also expectations mentioned by many.
 - › When asked about the qualities of an ideal electric utility, reliable electric service (89%) and easy-to-understand billing and pricing (70%) are the most commonly mentioned qualities.
 - › The largest number of respondents (21 of 37, or 57%) indicated their desired level of involvement with cooperative activities would be slightly involved, saying occasional updates are enough.

Note: Age ranges used in the Cooperative Advantage Study did not isolate the Gen Z age range used in the qualitative study (18-30). The most comparable age range reported was 18-34.



Key Findings

- Consistent with feedback that they are only seeking to be slightly involved with their cooperatives, reported participation in annual meetings and board elections was very limited. Newsletter readership was higher but still reported by less than half of the respondents.
 - › About one-quarter of respondents report not having read the newsletter or participated in the annual meeting and that they are not likely to in the future.
 - › Just over half (51% - 19 of 37) of respondents say they have not voted in board elections but would consider doing so in the future.
 - › While 38% (14 of 37) of respondents indicated they would be interested in attending cooperative events other than the annual meeting, only one respondent has actually attended one, and 32% (12 of 37) say they are not interested.
 - › Interestingly, data from the 2026 Cooperative Advantage Study shows that the ACSI score and outreach performance ratings among members 18-34 are notably lower compared to those 35+. The largest disparity in the outreach ratings was in efforts to support the local community and relevancy of co-op magazine content.
- According to respondents, the top areas of interest in terms of energy information include how to reduce my energy use and lower my bill (68%), program rebates or financial incentives available to me (51%), and outages reliability and what to expect during service interruptions (41%).
- Awareness and participation in community engagement programs is very limited.
- Renewable energy and energy efficiency programs appear to be of greater interest to Gen Z members than electric vehicles.

Implications and Recommendations

Implications and Recommendations

- Findings from this small qualitative sample suggest that many Gen Z members have limited familiarity with electric cooperatives, the cooperative principles, and the member-owner relationship. This lack of understanding may make it more difficult for younger members to recognize the value of cooperative-specific benefits and distinguish their cooperative from other utility providers.
 - › Consider integrating cooperative education into communications that address topics already relevant to younger members, such as affordability, reliability, sustainability, and community impact. Connecting cooperative concepts to tangible member benefits may help make the cooperative model more meaningful and accessible.
- While some respondents expressed interest in utilities providing services beyond electricity, the findings suggest that many Gen Z members view their relationship with the cooperative primarily through the lens of reliable service, affordable rates, and clear communication. Interest in governance and formal participation appears more limited.
 - › Rather than focusing exclusively on participation opportunities, cooperatives may benefit from emphasizing how member ownership contributes to outcomes that younger members value, including transparency, accountability, service quality, and long-term affordability.
- Responses suggest that many Gen Z members prefer lower-effort forms of engagement, with occasional updates viewed more favorably than active involvement in meetings, elections, or governance activities. This may indicate a preference for staying informed rather than actively participating.
 - › Explore communication and engagement strategies that require minimal time commitment, such as concise digital content, brief feedback opportunities, and targeted updates delivered through channels frequently used by younger audiences.

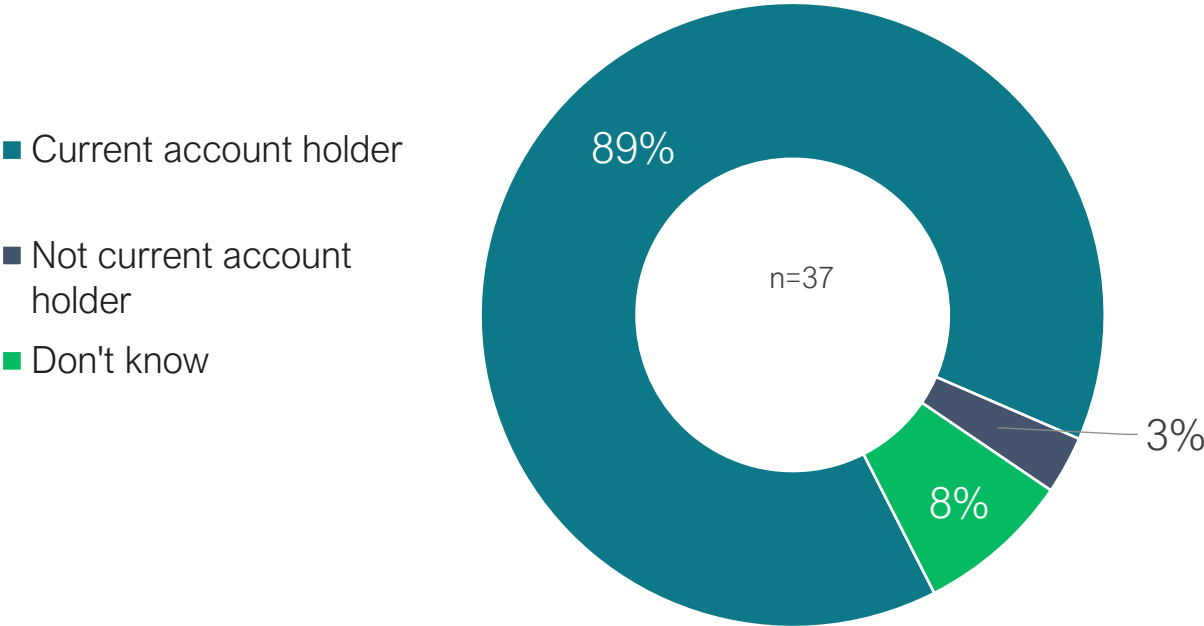
Implications and Recommendations

- Although based on a limited sample, interest appears strongest around practical and forward-looking topics such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, affordability, and sustainability. These topics may have greater relevance to younger members than communications focused primarily on governance or organizational structure.
 - › Consider using these areas of interest as entry points for engagement efforts. Educational content, programs, and communications tied to energy savings, renewable energy, and community impact may provide opportunities to increase awareness while reinforcing the cooperative's broader value proposition.
- Taken together, the findings suggest that the challenge may not be a lack of interest among younger members, but rather a disconnect between what cooperatives traditionally emphasize and the topics younger members find most relevant.
 - › Given the exploratory nature of this research and the small sample size (n=37), these findings should be viewed as directional rather than representative. Future research with a larger sample could help validate these themes and identify the most effective strategies for engaging younger members.

Participant Profile and General Awareness of Cooperative Relationship

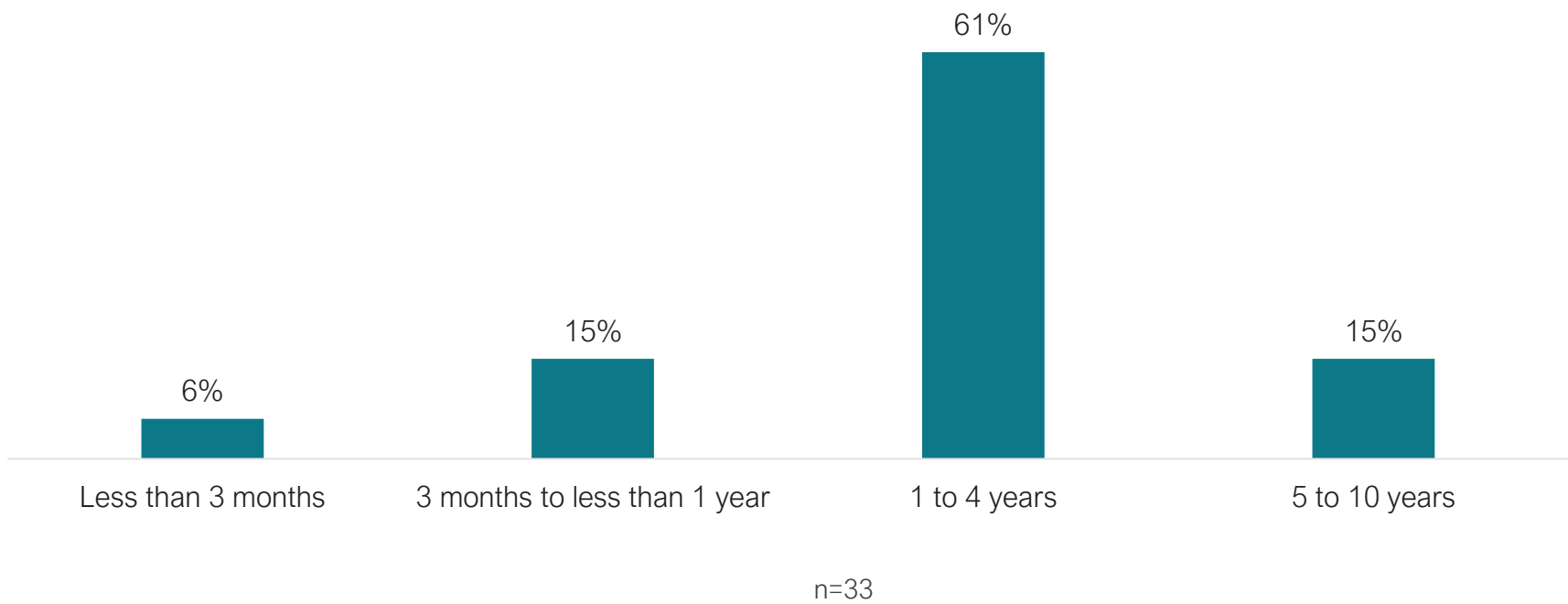
Current Relationship with the Local Electric Cooperative

- The vast majority (89% - 33 of 37 respondents) indicated they are current account holders with their local electric cooperative.



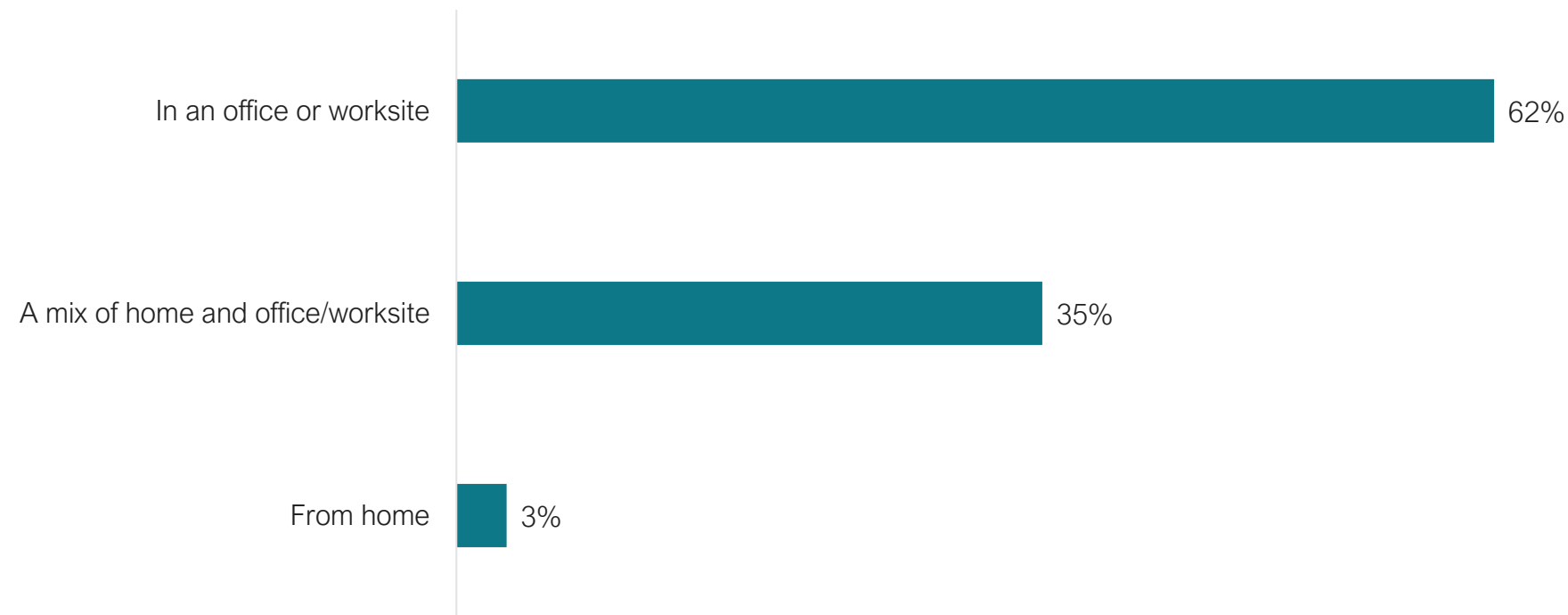
Member Tenure

- Only a small number (6 of 33 respondents) who acknowledge being current members say they have been members for 5 or more years.
- The most common tenure period represented is the 1–4-year range reported by 61% (20 of 33 participants).



Primary Work/Study Location

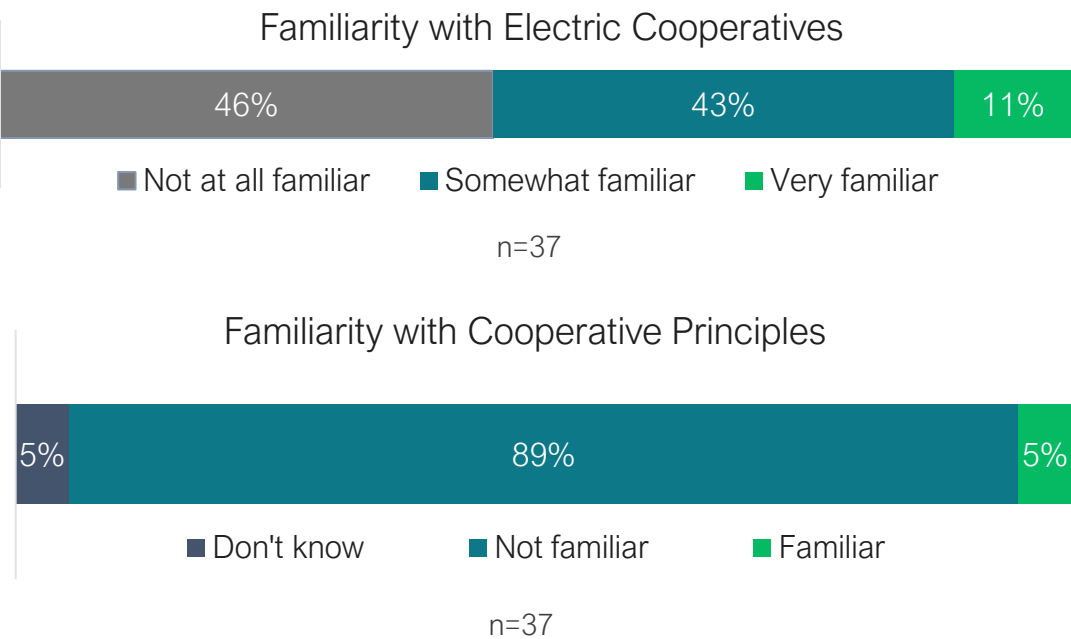
- Over half of respondents (62% - 23 of 37) say they work or study outside of the home in an office or worksite.
- All but one of the remaining participants (13 of 37) reported a mix of home and office/worksite, with only one saying they worked or studied exclusively from home.



n=37

Familiarity with Electric Cooperatives and the Seven Cooperative Principles

- Nearly half (46% - 17 of 37 respondents) say they are not at all familiar with electric cooperatives and only 5% (2 respondents) say they are familiar with the Seven Cooperative Principles.
- This lack of familiarity may help explain why members aged 18-34 rated their cooperative lower compared to older members on upholding the Seven Cooperative Principles in the 2026 Cooperative Advantage Survey.



Ratings of How Well Their Cooperative Upholds Each of the Cooperative Principles
(Data from 2026 Cooperative Advantage Study)

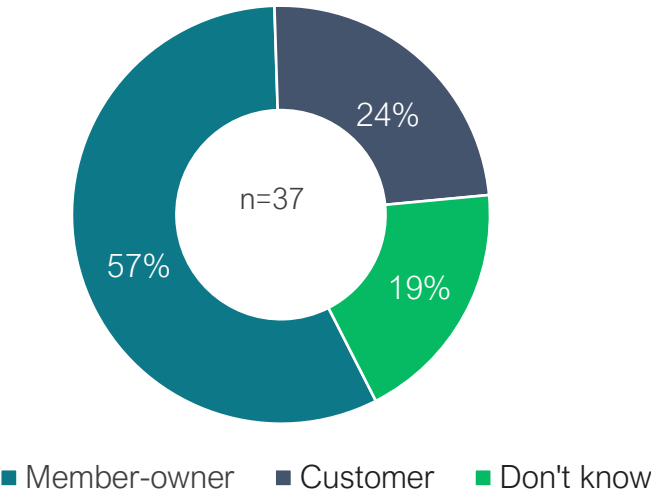
Seven Cooperative Principles	Age 35 and older	Age 18-34
Concern for community	87	79
Democratic member control	84	76
Cooperation among cooperatives	86	77
Education, training and information	84	76
Autonomy and independence	85	78
Open and voluntary membership	86	79
Members' economic participation	84	76

Scores shown are based on respondent ratings of 1-10 on a ten-point scale for each individual cooperative principle that are converted to a 0-100 scale.

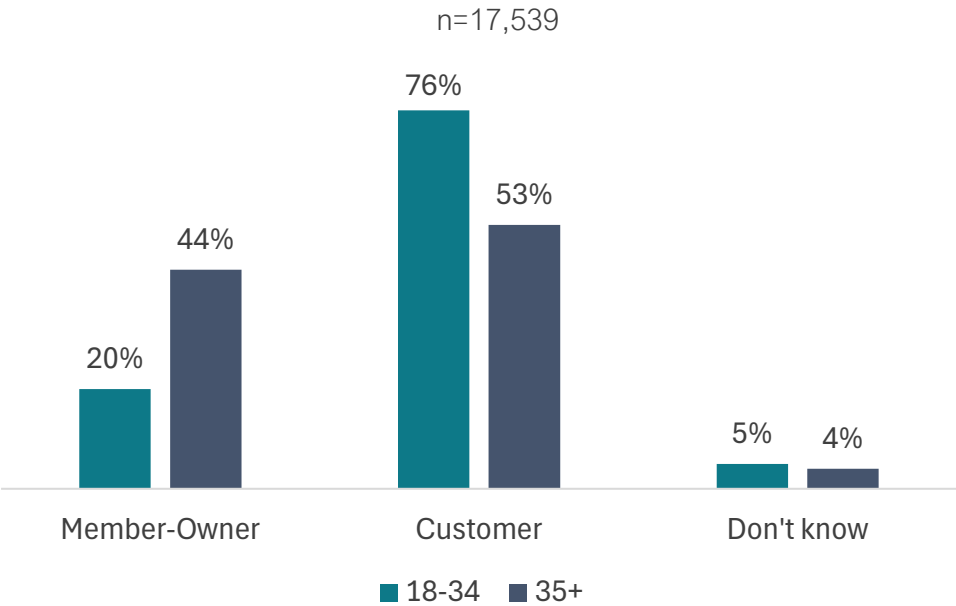
Understanding of the Member Relationship

- Just over half (57% - 21 of 37 respondents) report understanding the relationship between an electric cooperative and the people it serves is a member-owner relationship. The others indicated the relationship was a customer relationship (24% - 9 of 37), or they didn't know (19% or 7 of 37).
- Results from the 2026 Cooperative Advantage Study reflects a much lower percentage of younger members viewing themselves as member-owners and shows a sizable difference compared to older members.

Understanding of the Relationship Between Cooperative and People it Serves

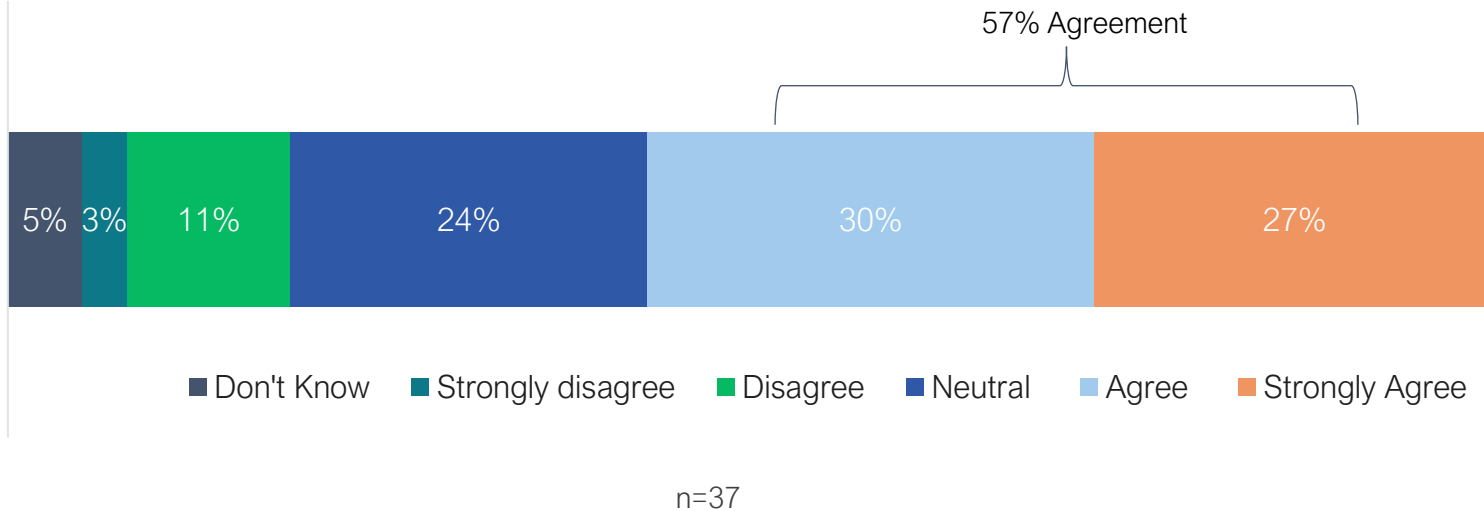


Member Identity Based on Data from 2026 Cooperative Advantage Study



Perceived Role and Desired Relationship with Electric Cooperatives

Electric Utility Should Provide More Than Power

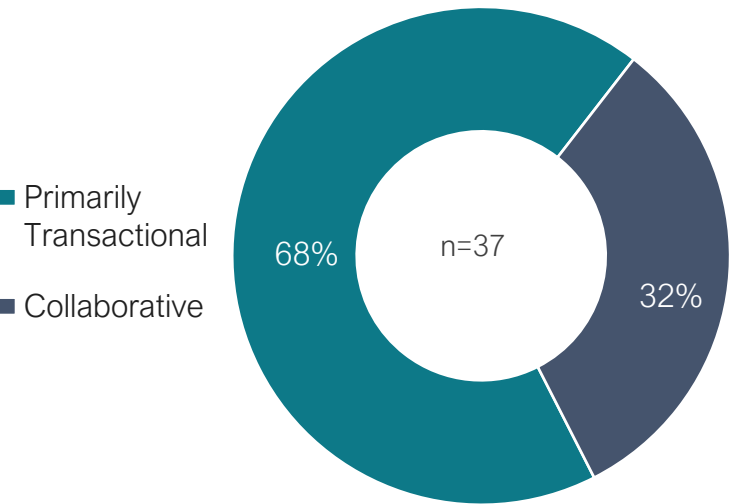


- Over half (57% - 21 of 37 respondents) indicate they believe electric utility companies should do more than just provide power while 14% disagree.
- About one-quarter (24% - 9 of 37 respondents) are indifferent and 5% (2 respondents) say they don't know.

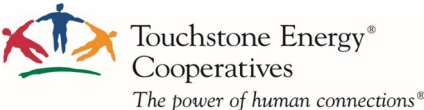
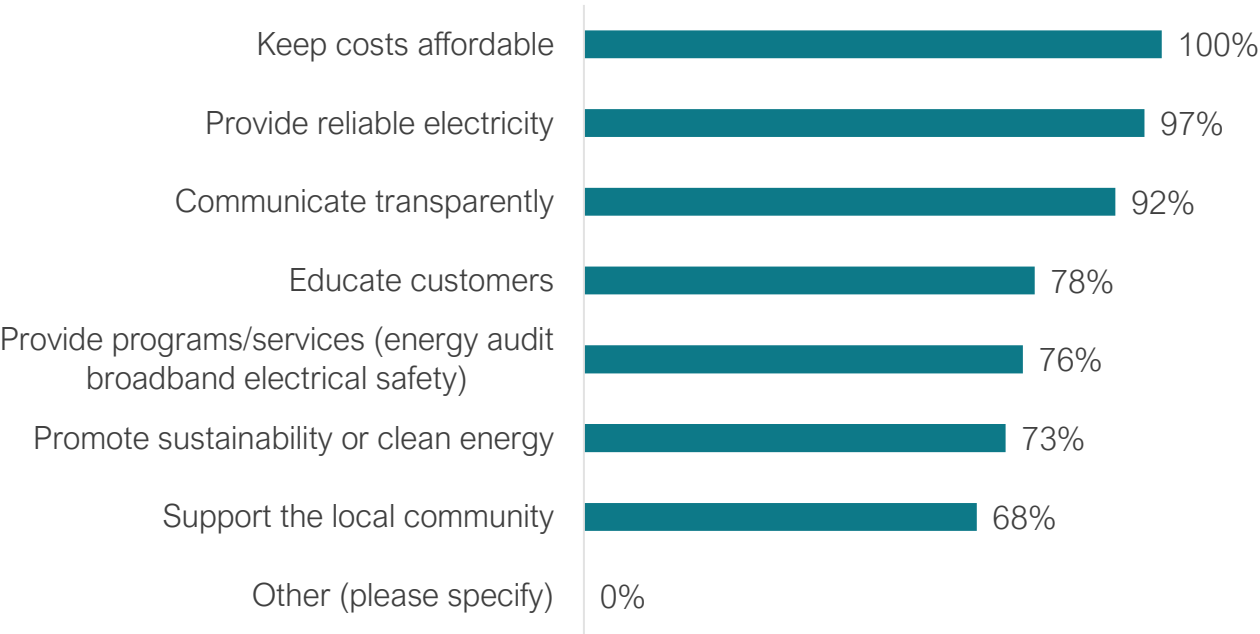
Type of Relationship Desired by Gen Z Respondents

- When asked to choose between having a more transactional type of relationship – primarily paying a bill and receive a service or a more collaborative relationship where the utility offers opportunities for input and is involved in the local community, more than two-thirds of respondents (25 of 37) indicate they want a primarily transactional relationship.
- The vast majority expect electric utilities to keep costs affordable, provide reliable electricity, and communicate transparently. Support for the local community was also identified as an expectation, although it was mentioned by fewer respondents than the other key themes (25 respondents, 68%).

Desired Relationship with Cooperative

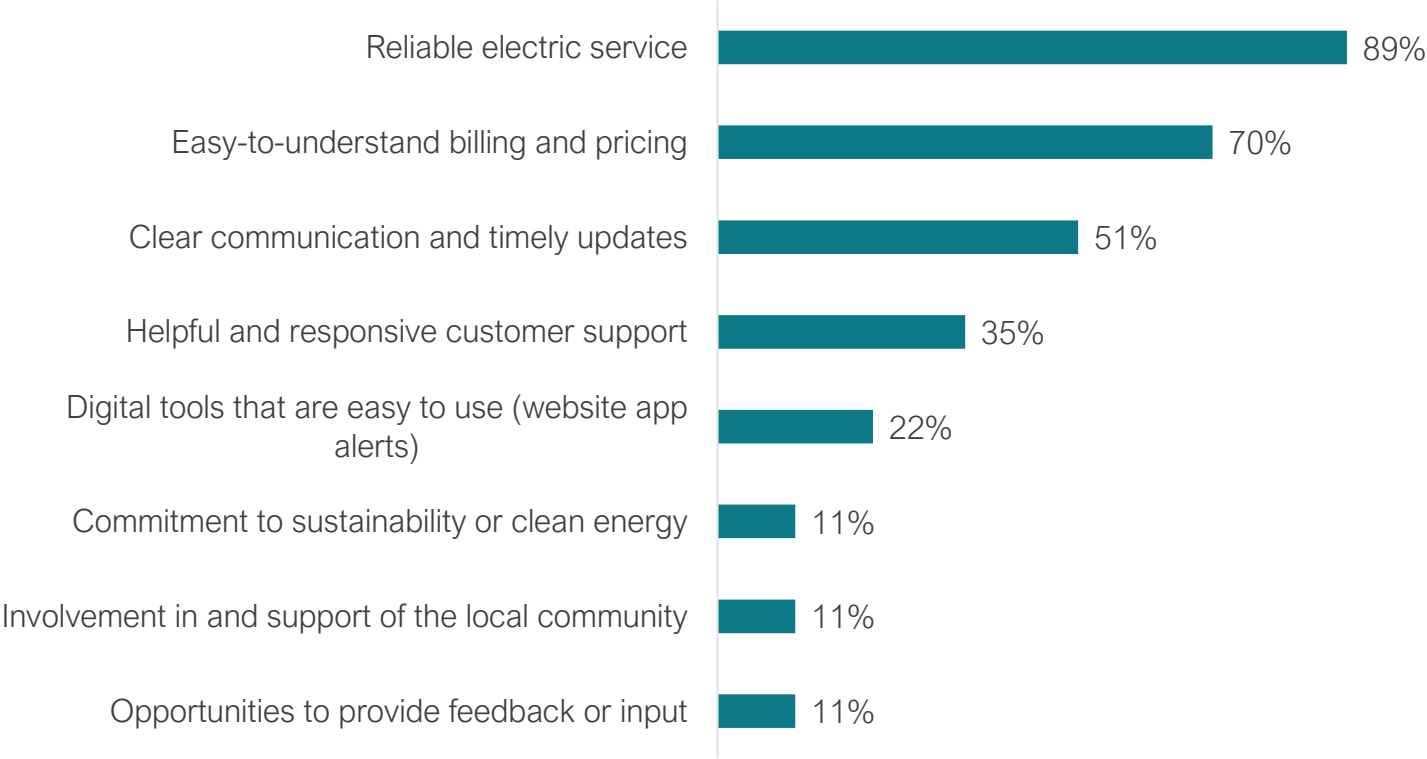


Cooperative Role



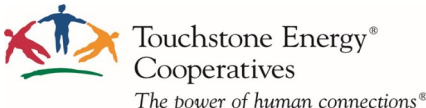
Qualities of an Ideal Electric Utility

- Gen Z respondents identify reliable electric service and easy-to-understand billing and pricing as the most important qualities of an ideal electric utility.
- Only one in ten mentions (11%) identified commitment to sustainability or clean energy, involvement in and support of the local community or opportunities to provide feedback or input as among the most important qualities.



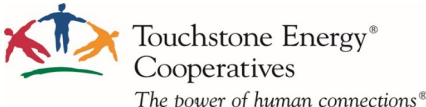
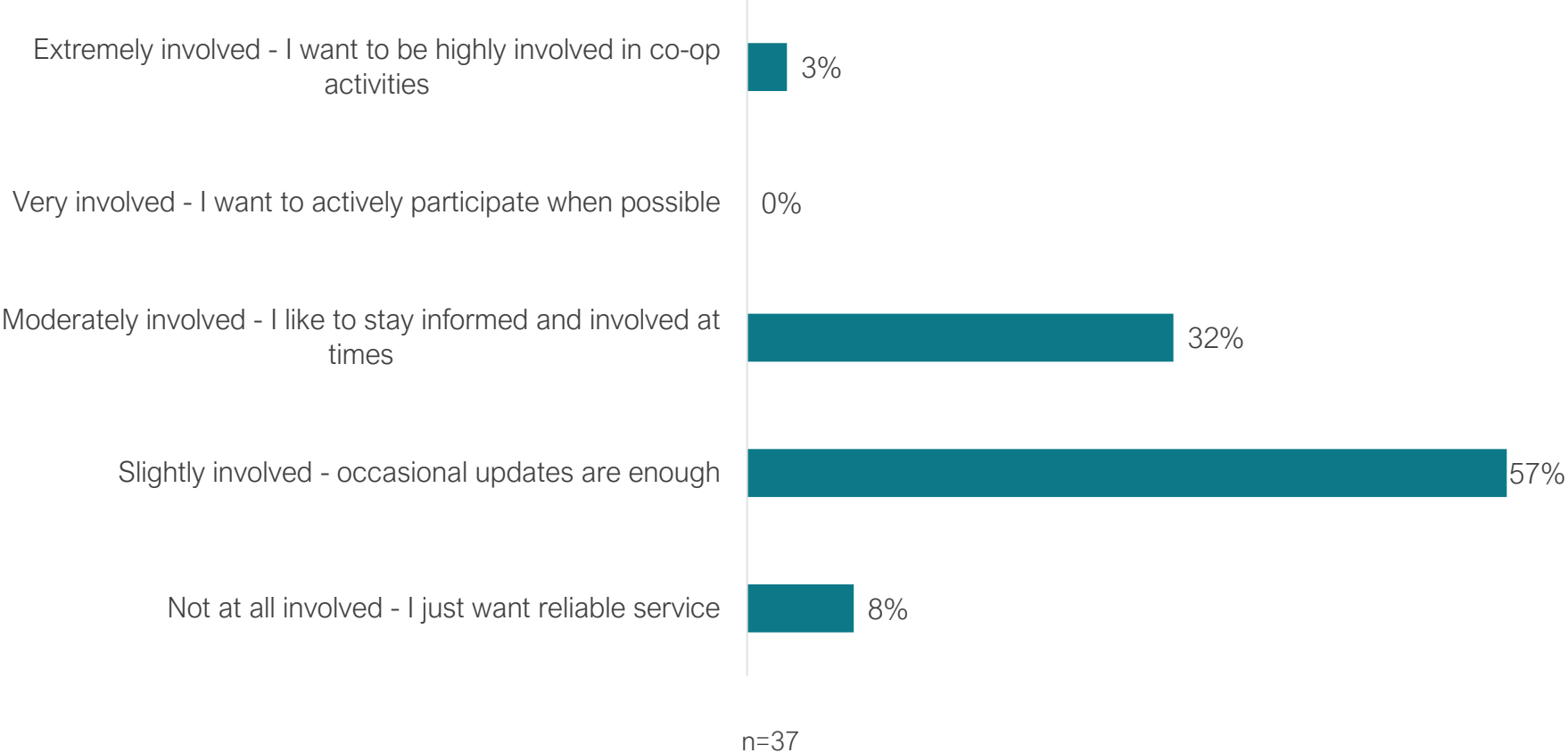
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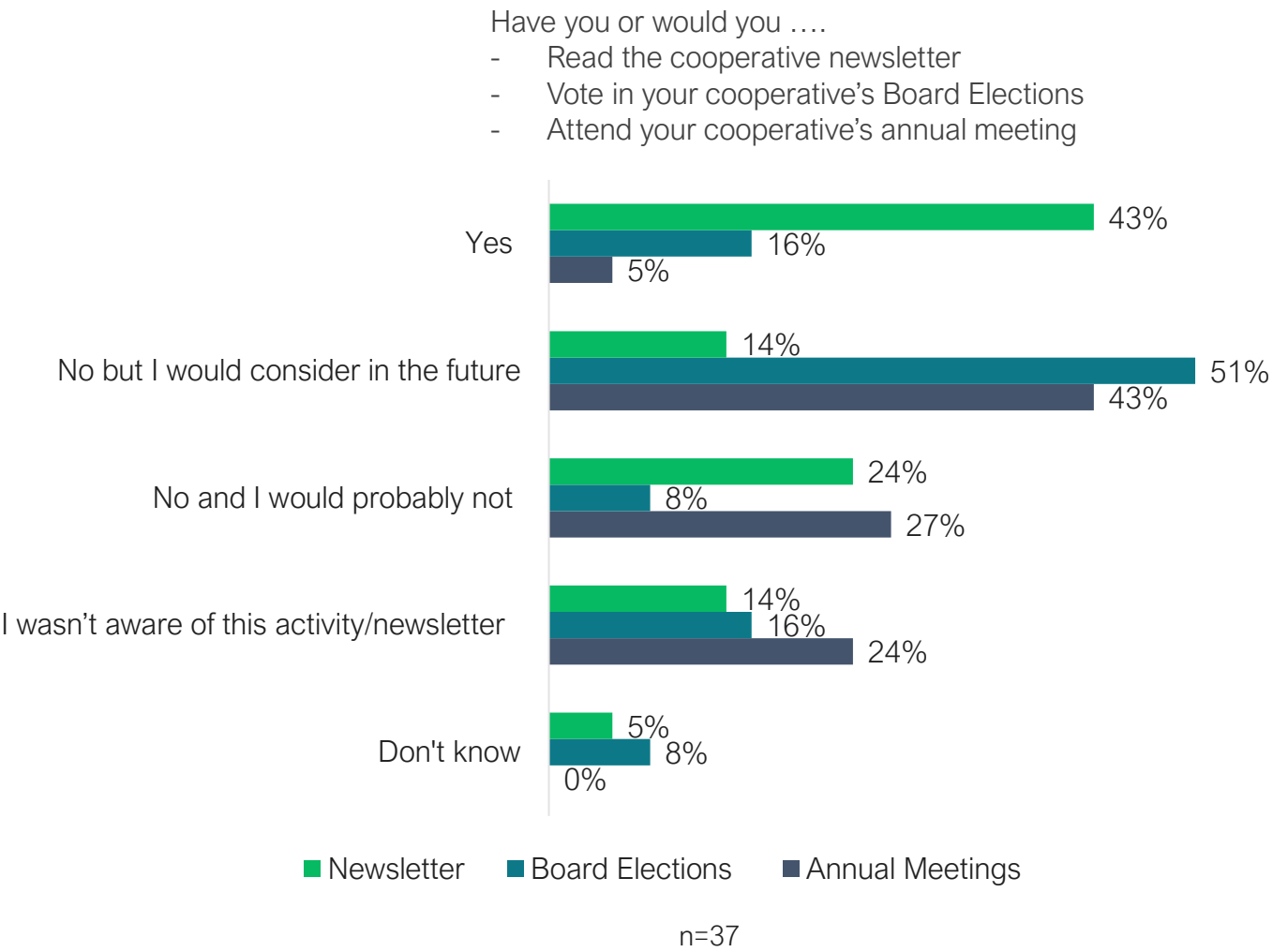
Level of Involvement Desired

- Generally, the desired level of involvement with cooperative activities is low with the largest number of respondents (57% - 21 of 37 respondents), saying they only want to be slightly involved and that occasional updates are enough.

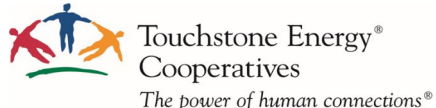


Gen Z Engagement

Participation/Interaction with Elections, Annual Meetings and Newsletters

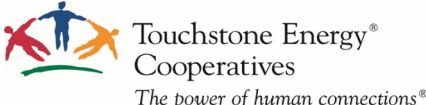
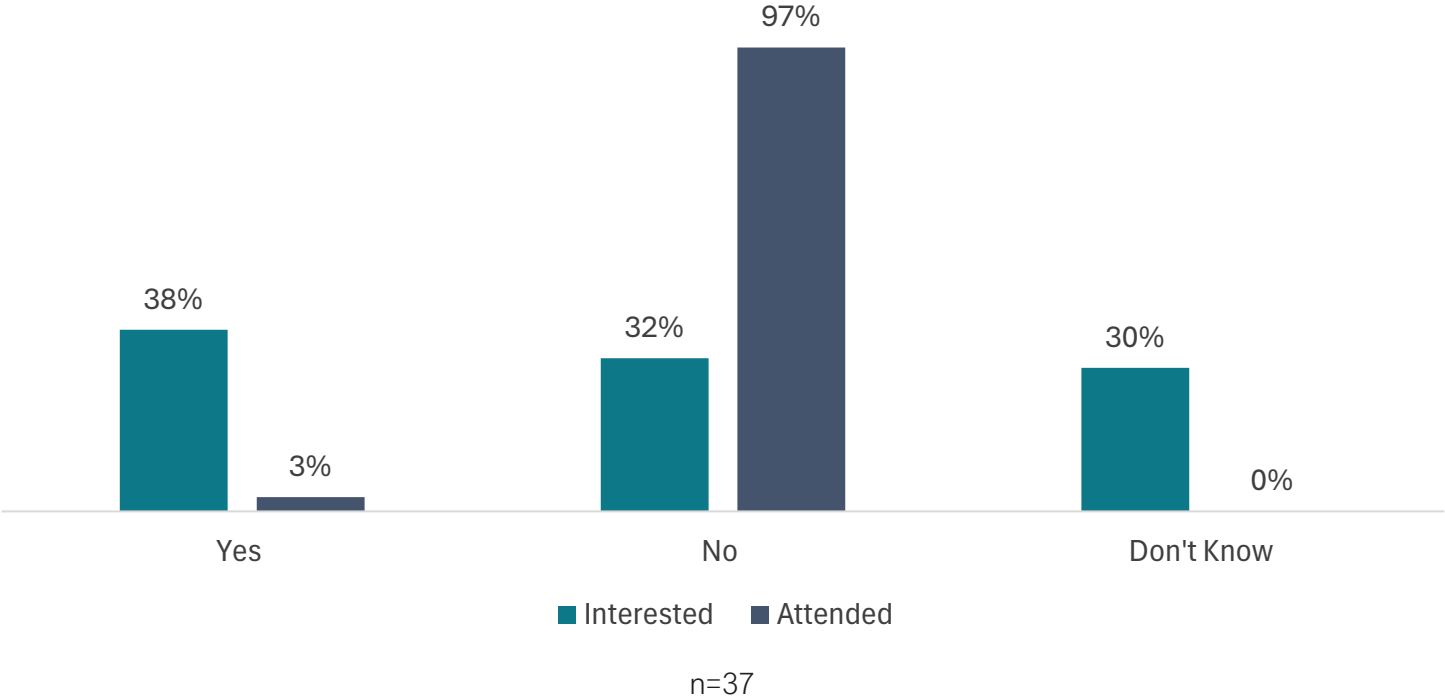


- Current participation in cooperative activities is relatively limited; however, many non-participants indicate they would consider becoming involved in the future, suggesting member engagement may be increased through additional awareness and communication efforts.
- Considering annual meetings, board elections and newsletters, it is the newsletter that the largest percentage of respondents had actually engaged with.



Participation in Other Events

- Although 38% (14 of 37) of respondents indicated they would be interested in attending cooperative events other than the annual meeting, only one respondent has actually done so.
- About one-third (12 of 37) of respondents indicated they are not interested and another 30% (11 of 37) said they don't know how interested they would be.

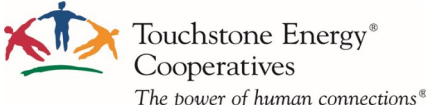


Ratings of Outreach Among Gen Z

- Based on the 2026 Cooperative Advantage Study, members age 18-34 provide lower scores compared to older members for the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) and all the Outreach metrics measured.
- Notably, the largest differences in ratings are for efforts to support the local community and relevancy of co-op magazine content with each being rated 10 points lower among the 18–34-year-old members.

Performance Ratings Based on
Data from 2026 Cooperative Advantage Study

	18-34	35+
Sample Size	460	16,556
ACSI	79	87
Overall Satisfaction	81	89
Compared to Expectations	77	84
Compared to Ideal	78	86
Outreach	76	85
Information provided on energy saving ideas	74	82
Efforts to support the local community	77	87
Efforts to support clean energy programs	75	84
Relevancy of co-op magazine content	76	86
Convenience of annual meeting time	75	84
Holding annual meeting in convenient format	77	85
Timeliness of providing information on annual meeting	80	89



Summary of Suggestions for Motivating Attendance at Annual Meeting and Voting in Board Elections

Annual Meeting Attendance

Members frequently cited incentives as a motivator for attendance, including meals, bill credits, discounted rates, or other tangible benefits.

Convenience was a major theme, with requests for virtual attendance options, convenient locations, flexible scheduling, and advance notice of meetings.

Several respondents indicated they would be more likely to attend if they better understood the meeting agenda, how the information would benefit them, and whether attendance could influence cooperative decisions or outcomes.

Board Election Participation

The dominant theme was a desire for more information and education about board elections, including what board members do, what is being decided, and why voting matters.

Many members wanted a clearer understanding of how board decisions affect them directly, particularly impacts on electric rates, bills, and cooperative operations.

Increased awareness and easier participation were common suggestions, including better communication, digital voting options, candidate profiles, and more accessible election information.

Summary of Suggested Topics of Interest for Newsletters

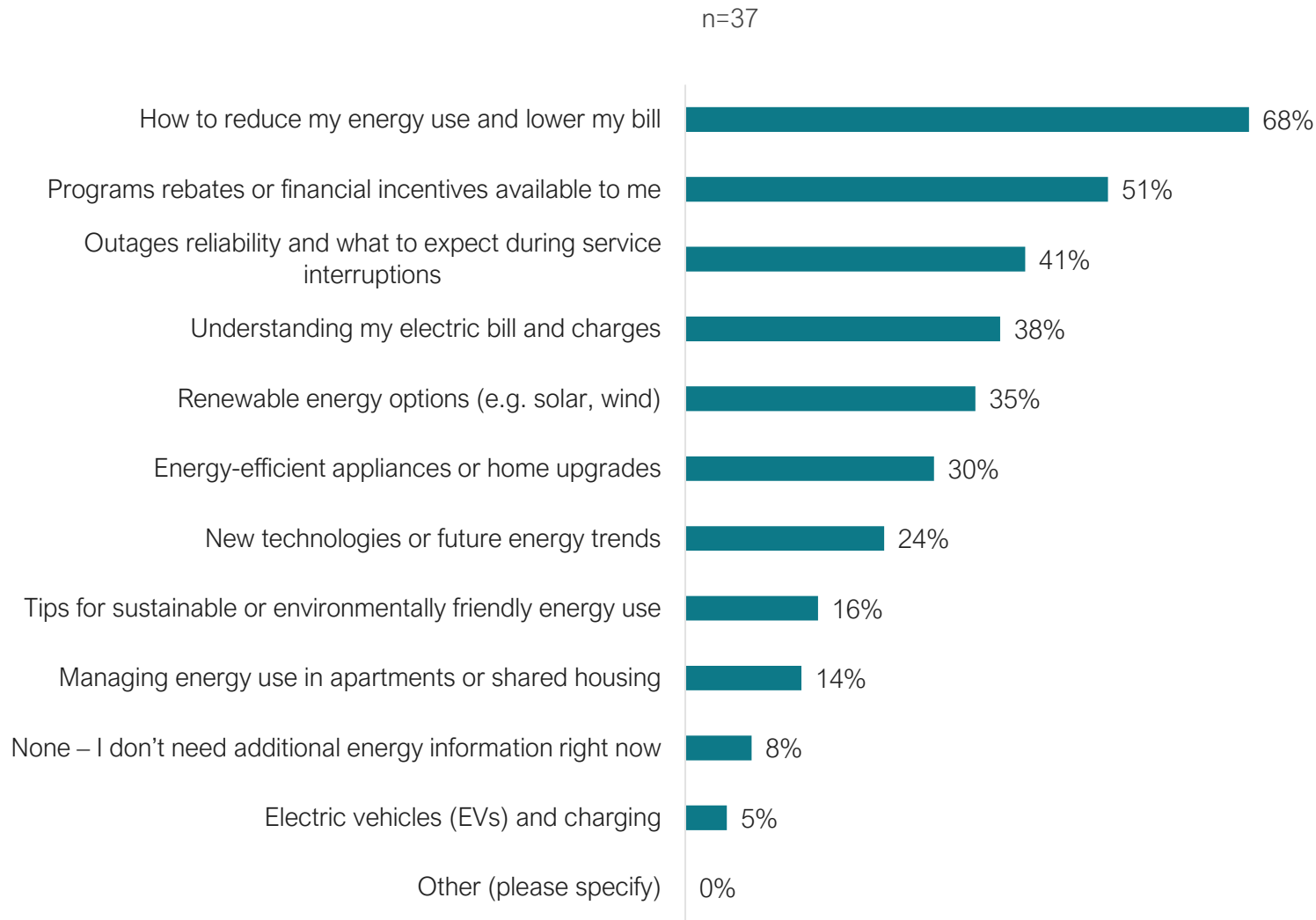
Topics of Interest for Newsletters

Members showed strong interest in local and community-focused content, including local news, community events, business openings and closings, and stories about what is happening in their area.

Many comments requested cooperative and energy-related information, such as power generation, infrastructure upgrades, energy education, sustainability initiatives, incentives, and updates on services.

Human-interest content also resonated, including employee spotlights, member stories, recipes, and practical information focused on lowering energy bills and saving money.

Type of Energy Information of Interest

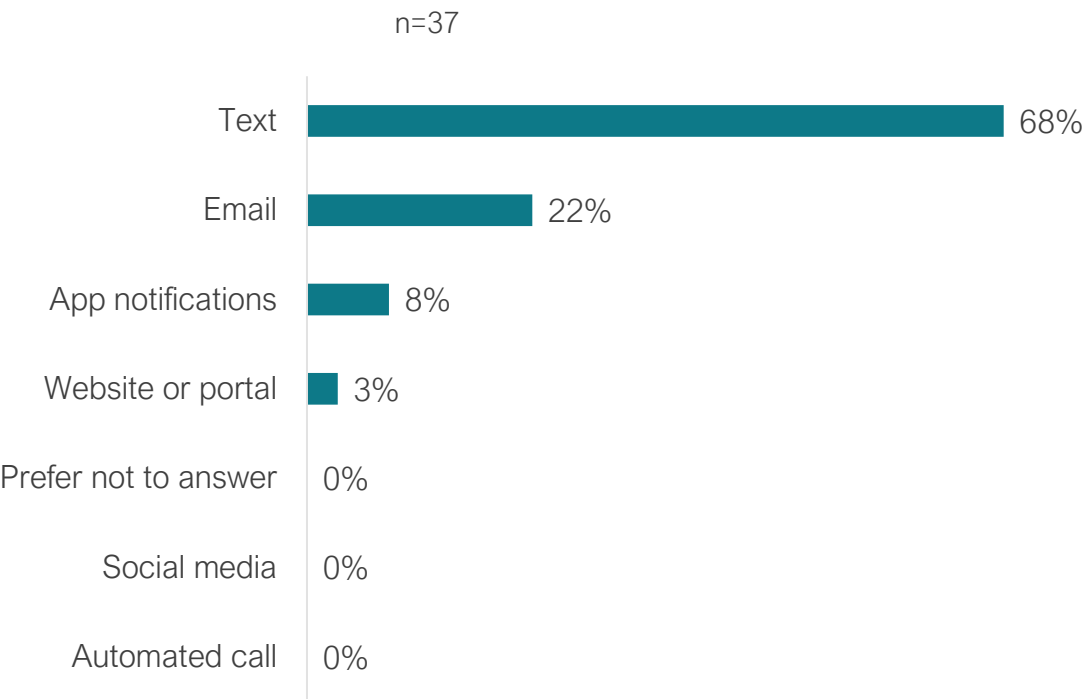


- When asked about what types of energy information they would like to learn more about, the top three topics mentioned were how to reduce my energy use and lower my bill (68%), programs, rebates, or financial incentives available to me (51%), and outages, reliability, and what to expect during interruptions (41%).
- Interest in learning about EVs received the lowest number of mentions, aligning with the low interest in EV ownership expressed by survey participants (See slide 28.)

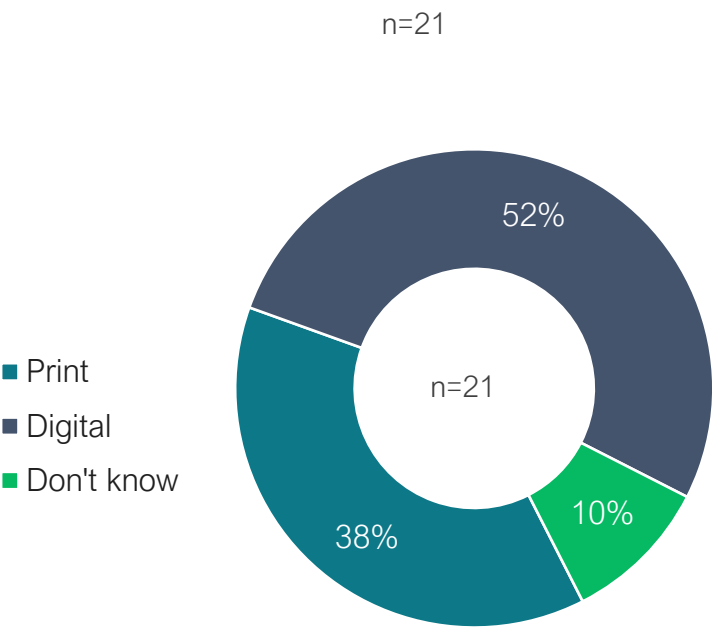
Communication Preferences

- At 68%, text is the most preferred communication method for Gen Z members to receive outage updates, followed by email (22%).

Preferred Way to Receive Outage Updates



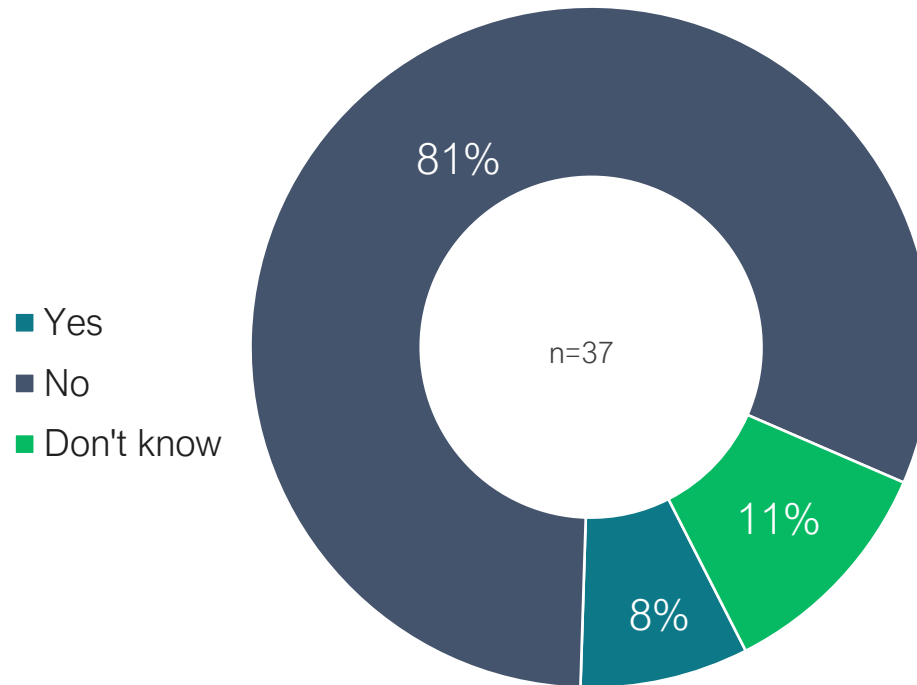
Preferred Way to Receive the Cooperative Newsletter



Awareness of Community Engagement Programs

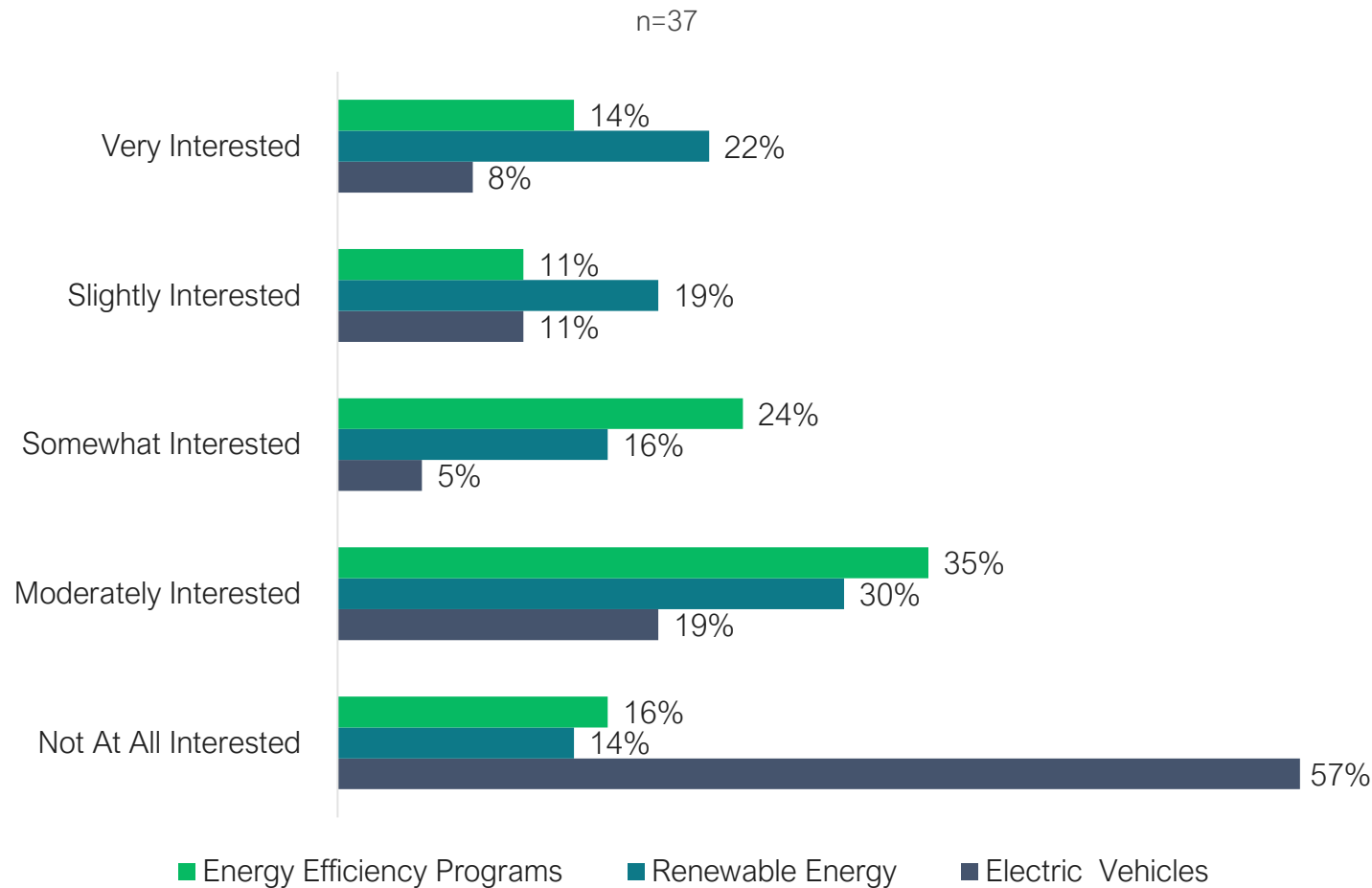
- Only a small number of respondents indicated they are aware of community engagement programs (11% - 3 of 37) and none of those have been involved in any of these types of activities.

Aware of Community Engagement
(e.g., Youth Tour, 4-H, Scholarships, etc.)



Interest in Electric Vehicles and Renewable Energy

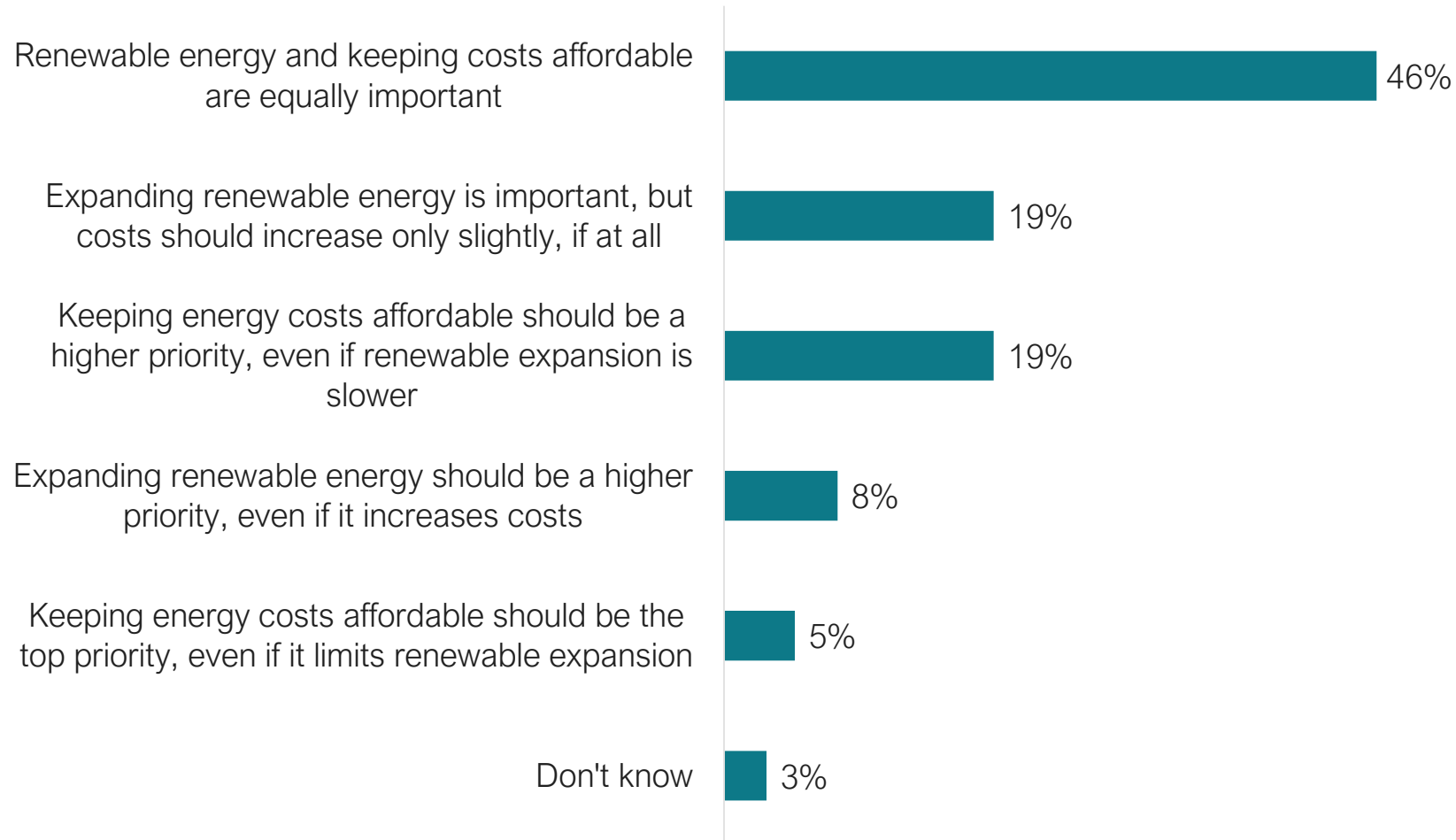
Interest in Electric Vehicles, Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Programs



- Renewable energy is the area of greatest interest among the Gen Z survey respondents, with 22% saying they are very interested and 19% saying they are slightly interested.
- Electric vehicle ownership was of relatively little interest, with 57% of respondents saying they are not at all interested.
- Energy efficiency programs show some signs of interest, with 86% reporting at least some level of interest. However, the largest percentage (30%) of respondents were only moderately interested.

Opinions on Balance Between Renewable Energy and Energy Costs

How do you view the balance between expanding renewable energy and keeping energy costs affordable?



n=37

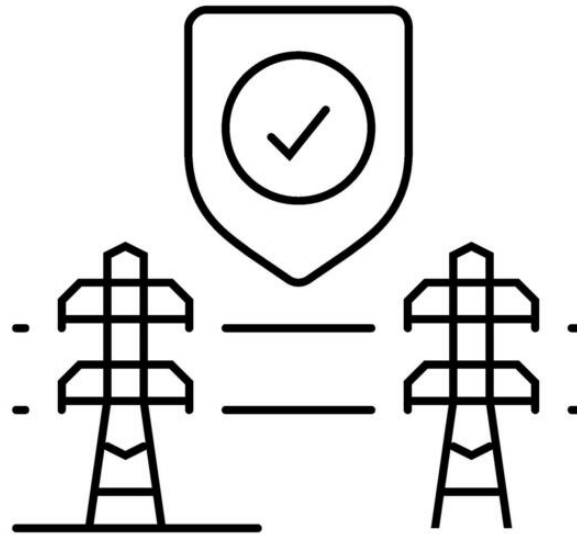
- Among the 37 respondents who answered this question, 46% (17 respondents) indicated that renewable energy and affordability are equally important considerations.
- Responses from the remaining participants were distributed fairly evenly between those who place greater emphasis on renewable energy and those who believe controlling costs should be the higher priority.

Feedback From the Online Discussion Board

What are your thoughts on grid reliability - the cooperative's ability to consistently provide a secure, uninterrupted supply of electricity?

Members view grid reliability as essential to daily life and place a high value on the cooperative's ability to provide dependable, uninterrupted service. Comments reflect strong confidence in current performance and the peace of mind that reliable electricity provides.

"I think it's imperative that it is reliable as our daily lives rely on it. I feel like I haven't had any issues with this so I have a lot of confidence in our cooperatives ability to provide electricity consistently. If there are issues I maybe just don't know about it..?"



"Grid reliability is one of the most important aspects of a power cooperative; having confidence with one's power supply gives a peace-of-mind that makes electric bills feel justified."

How do you view cooperatives as employers, and what job or career opportunities do you think they offer?

Responses suggest an opportunity to increase awareness of cooperatives as employers. While several participants were unfamiliar with available career paths, others associated cooperatives with diverse opportunities, community impact, and potential career development.

“As I work for another cooperative company, I do appreciate everything coops are able to do for their employees and members. I imagine job opportunities/careers are similar to where I work so lots of different opportunities for people!”



“I imagine having a cooperative as an employer is just like any other job, but maybe with more community influence on what exactly you're doing in the job. As a student, I hope cooperatives offer internship opportunities for potential future careers.”

Some people just want to pay their bill and move on. Others want more engagement. Where do you fall—and why?

Engagement beyond basic service appears to be a low priority for many members due to competing demands on their time. When interest in engagement exists, it tends to focus on receiving useful information, understanding cooperative investments, and opportunities that provide a clear benefit.

“I would pay my bill & that is it. My life is so busy I don't think I want to put energy/time into my electricity Co-Op unless its beneficial to me in a way other than just knowing what's going on. I'd be enticed to be more involved with incentives.”



“I would mainly like to just pay the bill, but I also occasionally read the magazine sent by my collective. I enjoy the information, but seldom do I wish that the participation extended further than that.”

Are there ways a local electric utility could feel more relevant to your community or generation?

Responses suggest younger consumers are most likely to connect with utilities through digital communication, community engagement, and visible investments in causes they care about. Sustainability initiatives, local involvement, and convenient communication channels were frequently cited as ways to increase relevance.

“Social media info, text/SMS updates, short form content & funny/clever. Being involved in community aspects - financially supportive & fundraising help for activities. Incentives to be more involved but things that don't take a lot of time.”

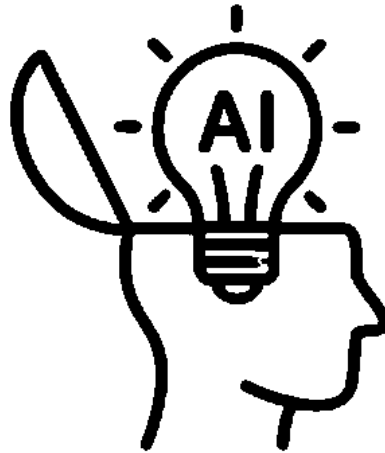


“I believe participation in local events is the best way to drive relevancy. The cooperative could also increase their visibility by driving engagement to these events. The younger generation still enjoys free events if they believe it will be a valuable use of time.”

What are your thoughts on artificial intelligence (AI)?

Gen Z respondents generally view AI as an important and increasingly unavoidable technology that offers significant benefits, but they also believe it should be used thoughtfully, verified by humans, and not relied upon without oversight.

“I feel that it is a great tool to use. It can make mistakes so we cant fully rely on it. I believe you also need to be very careful at what you are entering for information in there as well. Know your limits on what to enter and what not to enter. Overall though, I think it is a very helpful tool. I use it quite often in my life.”

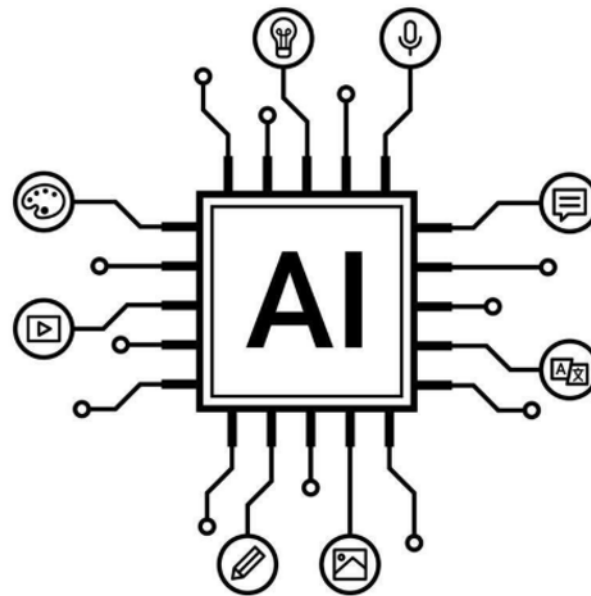


“AI is a tool that either gives people an advantage in the modern world or leaves them behind. It will only continue to grow and people need to adapt in order to continue utilizing it as a tool.”

In what ways, if any, do you use artificial intelligence (AI) in your personal life or in your work?

Gen Z members report a wide range of AI adoption levels. Those who use AI most often leverage it for information gathering, writing, creative tasks, and productivity, while others have chosen not to adopt it due to privacy concerns, personal preferences, or uncertainty about its value.

“I am a creative person and use AI almost daily to discuss ideas, get information, and to study. I have used it for incorporating my cooking ideas into full recipes. On the other end of the scale, I have used it to write code to generate a precise graph for a university project. I utilize it as a tool and accept it as a part of the modern world.”



“Currently I do not use AI for work or my personal life. There are many trends in Dentistry on going towards AI use in the future. At this time, I am keeping my pictures/information off artificial intelligence. I even prefer to see ads that are genuine and not AI created.”

THANK YOU



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Cooperatives
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