WiCyS 2024

Conference Evaluation Report - June 2024

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PREFERRED PROGRAM
EVALUATIONS
"Unlocking Program Potential"

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WiCyS 2024 – Background and Participation

The WiCyS annual conference is regarded as the flagship conference for women and their allies in cybersecurity, and is the nation's largest cybersecurity conference with comparable representation of aspiring and working professionals in cybersecurity. The conference is organized and held in accordance with the mission of WiCyS: to help organizations recruit, retain, and advance women in cybersecurity – all while creating a community of engagement, encouragement, and support.

WiCyS 2024 was held in Nashville, Tennessee, on April 11-13, 2024. This year's event marked WiCyS' 10th anniversary, and attracted 1,950 attendees in-person and 845 attendees virtually. The event proudly showcased its 115 sponsors spanning six tiers of financial support. Over 500 volunteers and members from 10 conference planning committees contributed to the event in various capacities before, during, and after the three-day conference. Travel stipends were granted to 350 deserving attendees, and 1,050 competitive scholarships were awarded. Participants represented 21 countries, the armed forces, diverse backgrounds and skillsets, and a medley of life experiences. Registration for the much-anticipated event reached capacity a mere four hours after the general registration window opened.

WiCyS 2024 – Conference Tracks and Sessions

This year's conference schedule featured a variety of tracks and sessions purposely designed to target the interests of attendees ranging from college students and veterans to mid-level professionals and seasoned executives. From morning to evening, attendees were provided both formal and informal opportunities to learn, explore, practice, network, and apply their knowledge and skills to real-world scenarios. The conference agenda featured color-coded sessions organized by track: **Technical Skill Building, Education & Workforce Development, Research & Innovation, Career Advancement, and Community Ecosystem & Outreach.**

The jam-packed conference schedule included 150 speakers, 69 unique sessions, six leadership events, five empowering keynote presenters, five employer socials, five invite-only breakfasts for select audiences, and one Capture the Flag (CTF). A student poster session showcased the research of 29 undergraduate and graduate students. Nineteen technical and non-technical workshops geared toward students, educators, practitioners, and researchers were open to those who registered in advance. A selection of workshop topics included AI, architectural thinking for security, secure code reviews, ransomware, diverse leadership, imposter syndrome, and legislation impacting cybersecurity. Participants were able to scan QR codes provided at the end of qualifying sessions to receive Continuing Professional Education (CPE) credit.

The WiCyS annual conference has developed a reputation for its distinguished presenters, diversity of topics related to women in cybersecurity, and collection of conference forums that appeal to a variety of audiences. A number of sessions focused on the novel tools, frameworks,

and strategies being employed to address the latest vulnerabilities in our nation's critical infrastructure and defend users against cyber attacks. Presenters delved into contemporary topics impacting women in cybersecurity such as cultivating technical and soft skills for success in the cyber workforce, mentorship, and allyship. Military and college chapters, WiCyS affiliates, and industry and academic leaders joined curated discussions on best practices for supporting and advancing women in cybersecurity. WiCyS 2024 sought to actively engage "career changers" who are transitioning from an unrelated or adjacent field into the cyber workforce.

Participants were generally pleased with the range of presentation themes, and the opportunities for individuals with similar levels of experience to connect through socials, chapter meet-ups, and hands-on activities. Hundreds of attendees flocked to the First Timers Panel where presenters shared what they found most beneficial about the WiCyS conference and how first-time conference goers could get the most out of their experience.

The conference schedule was available on the WiCyS website and the Whova app. Via this event management app, registrants could browse the conference program, view speaker bios and sponsor information, connect with one another prior to arriving in Nashville, and pose questions to the event organizers. The detailed conference program consisted of agendas, session summaries, and a floor map of the Career Fair.

WiCyS 2024 – Career Fair and Career Growth Hub

The Career Fair and Career Growth Hub are consistently two of the most anticipated and highly rated elements of the WiCyS annual conference. The Career Fair and Career Growth Hub were open to all registrants on April 11 and 12, 2024. Exhibitors shared information about their companies/institutions, provided details about job and internship opportunities, collected resumes, and distributed swag to visitors. Several sponsors conducted on-the-spot interviews in a designated meeting room while others were focused on promoting brand awareness and their cybersecurity divisions.

Conference sponsors transformed a part of the convention center into a bustling scene of hiring, sharing, informing, and inspiring. An impressive lineup of 115 organizations representing Fortune 500 companies, small- to mid-size tech enterprises, government agencies, colleges and universities, financial institutions, retail outlets, and healthcare providers were present during the Career Fair. At Career Growth Hub, students were given the opportunity to have their resumes reviewed by their more senior colleagues, sit for professional headshots, and participate in mock interviews to improve their confidence and preparedness to seek employment.

WiCyS partnered with Dr. Blake Urbach, Principal Consultant of Preferred Program Evaluations, to conduct an evaluation of this year's conference. The evaluation of WiCyS 2024 included observations, informal interviews, and anonymous surveys for participants and sponsors. The purpose of the evaluation was to better understand the experience, value, and impact of the conference among its stakeholders, and to inform future WiCyS programming.

The participant survey was designed in SurveyMonkey, and at the conclusion of the conference the survey weblink was distributed to 1,950 attendees. A total of 364 participants responded to this survey (response rate of 19%). Similarly, a weblink to the sponsor survey was emailed to 115 conference sponsors once WiCyS 2024 concluded. A total of 18 sponsors responded to this survey (response rate of 16%). The findings from the participant and sponsor surveys are provided in the results dashboards starting on page seven of this report.

During the three-day conference, Dr. Urbach spoke one-on-one with participants and sponsors to gain insight about their WiCyS 2024 experience. She interacted with students seeking to improve their technical skills, mid-career professionals searching for inspiration, faculty members looking for innovative ways to share their research, and sponsors pursuing talented candidates to join their ranks. Many of the sponsors and industry representatives reported being pleased with the growth and direction of the annual conference, and declared that WiCyS is remaining true to its mission. Select insights and experiences shared by the attendees and sponsors are provided herein.

Sponsors

- I have attended several WiCyS conferences, and this one is the most organized and thoughtfully laid out for participants of the Career Fair.
- The configuration of the sponsor's booths is better than the previous years when we were cramped together. We had more space for our goods and our staff.
- Year after year, I am in awe of the excitement this conference generates.
- It is so exciting for me to meet this many students and recent graduates who are ready to enter the cybersecurity workforce.
- I love the authentic energy, bustle, and encouraging vibe of this conference.
- The diversity of students in this space is tremendous, and is one reason we return as a sponsor year after year.

- Attending WiCyS 2024 provided me a first-of-its-kind opportunity to spend time with my own colleagues away from the office.
- I think the conference has reached peak capacity. I would like it stay at this size so it doesn't lose the intimate feel that I have come to know and appreciate.
- The applicants that are interacting with us at our booth are prepared and polished.

- Only have one volunteer per table at the Career Growth Hub. We are seated too close together and it is difficult have a dialogue with the participant seated in front of us.
- I wanted to attend with my colleagues but we were not all able to secure a ticket. That was disappointing because we hoped this would double as a team-building event.
- I am unsure how to use the QR scanner. Only one person from our booth was provided instruction on how it operates.
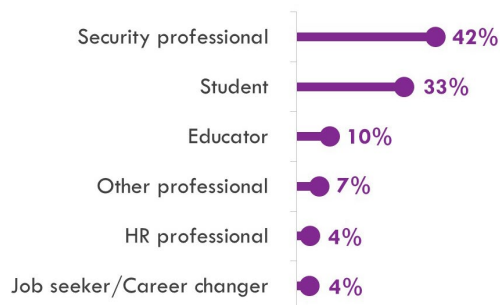
Students and Faculty

- I feel like I am in my element. Being here makes me feel like I am part of something important and impactful.
- I am eager to learn more about WiCyS' mentoring program. I intend to join next year.
- I am an international attendee attending this conference for the first time. I am eager to share what I'm learning here with my colleagues back home.
- I am overwhelmed by the amount of sessions and activities to attend. I want to participate in all of it but have to pick and choose based on my ultimate goal of landing an internship.
- I wanted to attend one of the socials but could not find the details. The convention hall is so massive and I feel a little lost.
- My background is in human resources but I'm entering the field of cybersecurity as a second career. Attending this conference has renewed my faith that I made the right decision and will be successful.
- I am so grateful to have been awarded a scholarship to attend WiCyS 2024. This experience and the networking I've done are going to change my future.
- The sense of belonging that WiCyS fosters is like no other conference I've attended for students or professionals.
- Representation does matter. I am seeing and learning from women who have experienced the same challenges as me. I intend to connect with them via LinkedIn and continue networking after the conference.

WiCyS 2024
Participant Survey Results Dashboard – June 2024

The WiCyS 2024 participant survey was designed to assess the experiences and perceptions of conference participants, and to inform future WiCyS annual conferences and programming. The survey weblink was distributed to 1,950 participants at the conclusion of this year's conference. A total of 364 conference participants responded to the anonymous survey in whole or part. Ninety-three percent of respondents identified as women; males accounted for 5% of the survey sample, and agender participants totaled 1% of those surveyed.

RESPONDENTS BY ROLE

One-third of respondents identified as students, and 42% identified as security professionals.

Role	Percentage
Security professional	42%
Student	33%
Educator	10%
Other professional	7%
HR professional	4%
Job seeker/Career changer	4%

RESPONDENTS BY EDUCATIONAL STANDING

Thirty-eight percent of student respondents were pursuing a bachelor's degree, and another 47% were enrolled in a graduate program.

Educational Standing	Percentage
Bachelor's degree-seeking student	38%
Master's degree-seeking student	37%
Doctoral degree-seeking student	10%
Cybersecurity training program student	8%
Associate's degree-seeking student	6%
High school student	1%

WiCyS 2024
Participant Survey Results Dashboard – June 2024
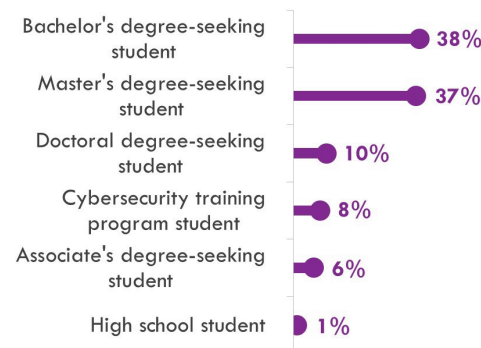
The mission of WiCyS is to help build a strong gender-diverse cybersecurity workforce by facilitating recruitment, retention, and advancement for women in the field. Thirty-eight percent of respondents were residents of Maryland, Texas, California, Florida, or Virginia. Over three-quarters of states had at least one resident in attendance. Twenty-four of the respondents live outside of the United States.

RESPONDENTS BY CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE

For nearly two-thirds of respondents, WiCyS 2024 represented their first time participating in the WiCyS annual conference.

First time in attendance	59%
Attended once	21%
Attended more than once	20%

ADEQUACY OF LEVEL-SPECIFIC SESSIONS

Fifteen percent of respondents indicated that the variety of sessions offered at the conference did not sufficiently meet the needs of participants at their level (i.e., student, entry-level, senior-level, etc.)

Strongly agree	32%
Agree	37%
Neutral	15%
Disagree	10%
Strongly disagree	5%
Unsure	1%
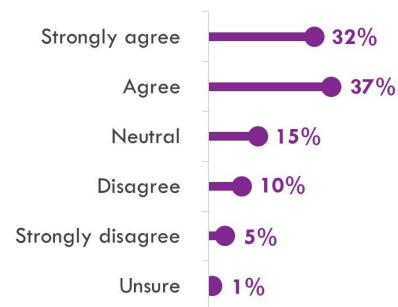
WiCyS represents a global community of women, allies and advocates dedicated to bringing talented women together to celebrate and foster their passion and drive for cybersecurity. The attendees at WiCyS 2024 represented a racially diverse group of attendees from the U.S. and abroad.

RESPONDENTS BY RACE

Nineteen percent of respondents identified as a race that is traditionally underrepresented in STEM.

Race	Percent
White	56%
Asian	17%
Black or African American	16%
Prefer not to answer	9%
American Indian or Alaska Native	2%
Native American or Other Pacific Islander	1%
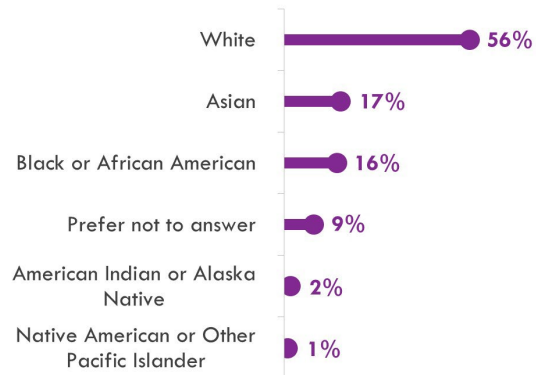
RESPONDENTS BY ETHNICITY

Nine percent of respondents identified as Hispanic or Latine.

Ethnicity	Percent
Non-Hispanic/Non-Latine	86%
Hispanic/Latine	9%
Prefer not to answer	6%

WiCyS 2024
Participant Survey Results Dashboard – June 2024
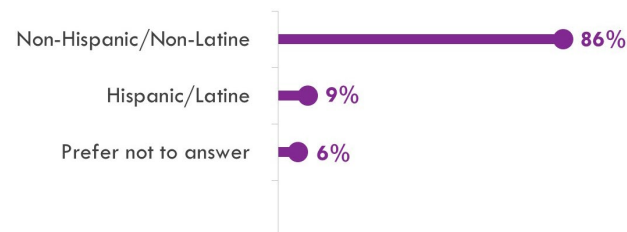
STUDENT-CENTERED CONFERENCE UTILITY

Respondents who identified as students were asked to rate the influence of attending WiCyS 2024 on their academic pursuits. Over 90% of respondents reported feeling inspired by the role models they encountered at the conference. Eighty-eight percent of respondents experienced a gain in self-confidence and learned about careers in cybersecurity or a related field. Nearly one-third of those surveyed did not consider WiCyS 2024 to be a primarily technical conference.

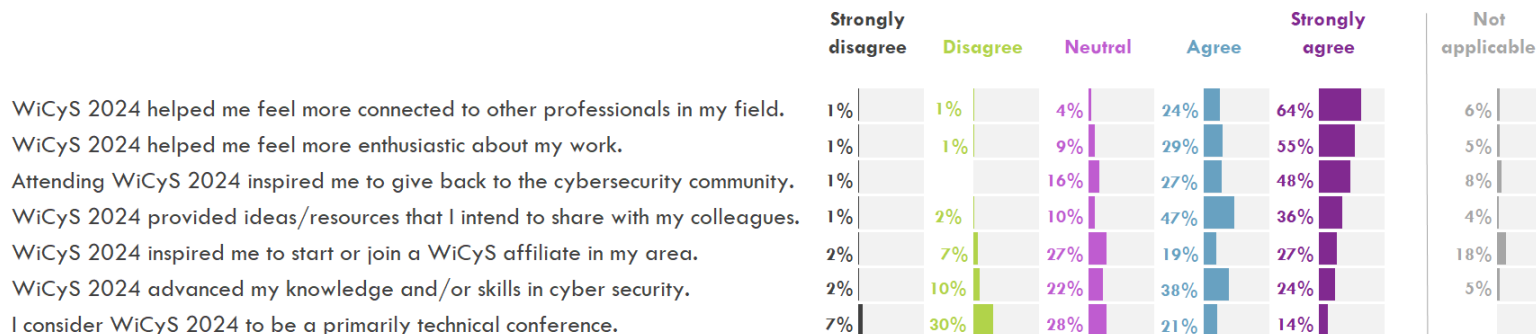|	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I was inspired by the role models I encountered at WiCyS 2024.	2%	3%	4%	19%	73%
WiCyS 2024 helped me learn about career opportunities in cybersecurity/related field.	2%	2%	8%	26%	62%
WiCyS 2024 increased my confidence to pursue a career in cybersecurity/related field.	3%	2%	7%	26%	62%
Attending WiCyS 2024 inspired me to give back to the cybersecurity community.	2%	2%	11%	25%	60%
WiCyS 2024 increased my commitment to complete my current degree program.	4%	1%	9%	31%	55%
WiCyS 2024 helped me learn about academic programs in cybersecurity/related field.	4%	5%	16%	31%	44%
WiCyS 2024 inspired me to start or join a WiCyS student chapter.	3%	3%	32%	29%	34%
I consider WiCyS 2024 to be a primarily technical conference.	8%	23%	21%	33%	16%

WiCyS 2024
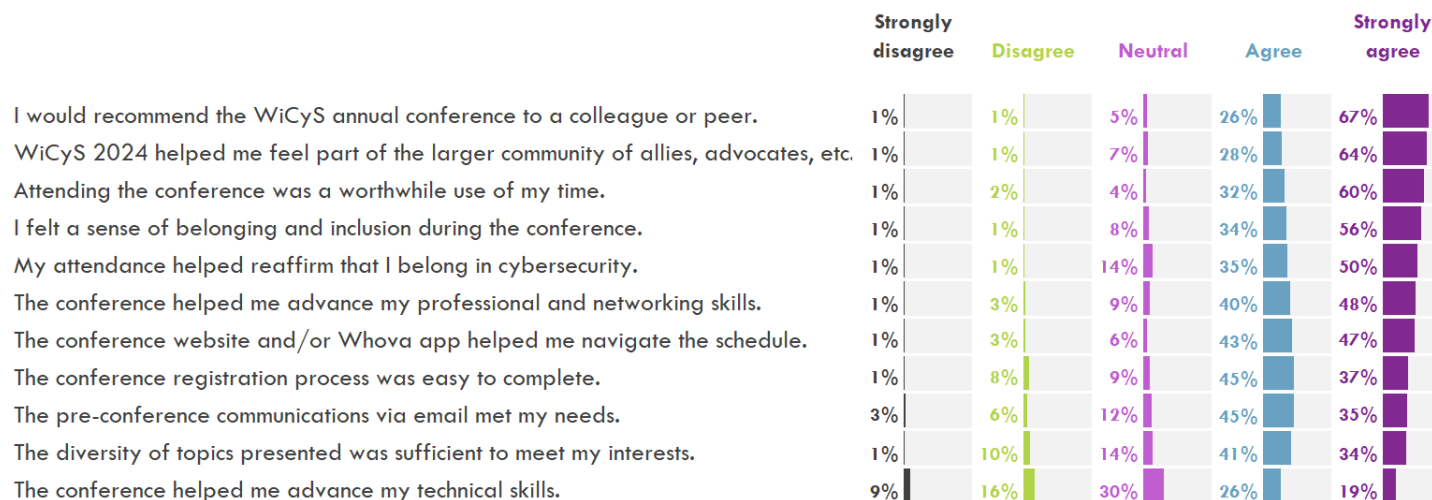# Participant Survey Results Dashboard – June 2024

PROFESSIONAL-CENTERED CONFERENCE UTILITY

Respondents who identified as professionals were asked to rate the influence of attending WiCyS 2024 on their professional pursuits. Nearly 90% of respondents reported feeling more connected to professionals in their field and more enthusiastic about their work. Three-quarters of those surveyed feel inspired to give back to the cybersecurity community. Twelve percent of respondents did not feel that the conference advanced their knowledge/skills in cyber security.
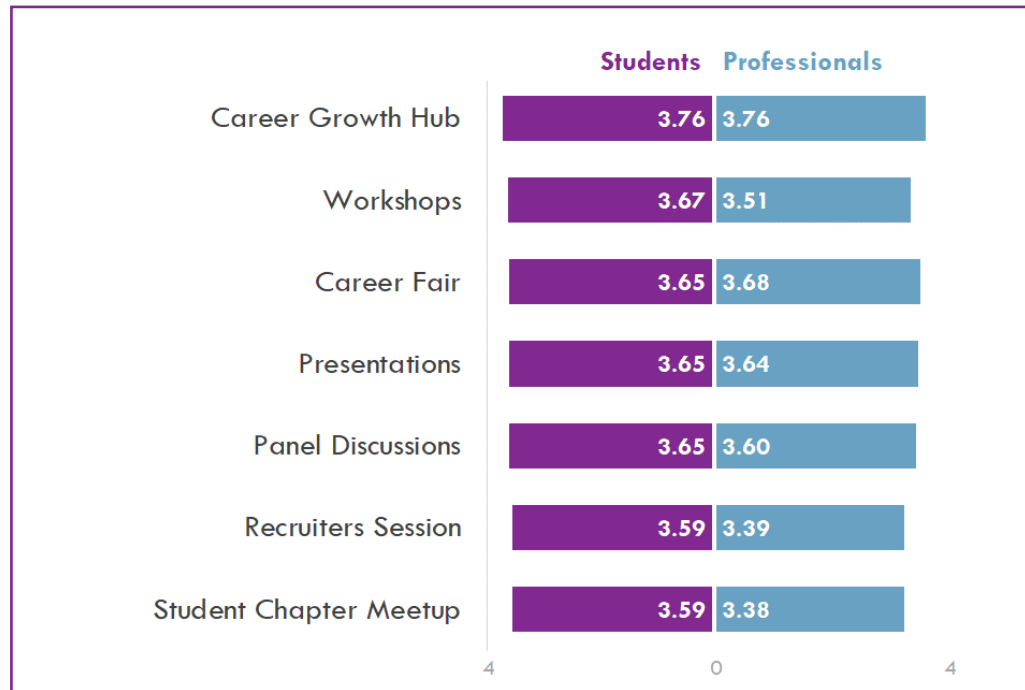
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Not applicable
WiCyS 2024 helped me feel more connected to other professionals in my field.	1%	1%	4%	24%	64%	6%
WiCyS 2024 helped me feel more enthusiastic about my work.	1%	1%	9%	29%	55%	5%
Attending WiCyS 2024 inspired me to give back to the cybersecurity community.	1%		16%	27%	48%	8%
WiCyS 2024 provided ideas/resources that I intend to share with my colleagues.	1%	2%	10%	47%	36%	4%
WiCyS 2024 inspired me to start or join a WiCyS affiliate in my area.	2%	7%	27%	19%	27%	18%
WiCyS 2024 advanced my knowledge and/or skills in cyber security.	2%	10%	22%	38%	24%	5%
I consider WiCyS 2024 to be a primarily technical conference.	7%	30%	28%	21%	14%	

WiCyS 2024
Participant Survey Results Dashboard – June 2024

ATTENDEE PERSPECTIVES ON CONFERENCE ELEMENTS AND PERSONAL GROWTH

Ninety-three percent of all respondents would recommend the WiCyS annual conference to a colleague or peer, and 92% indicated that attending the conference was a worthwhile use of their time. Nine out of 10 respondents reported feeling part of the larger community of allies, advocates, etc. One-quarter of those surveyed did not feel that the conference helped advance their technical skills.
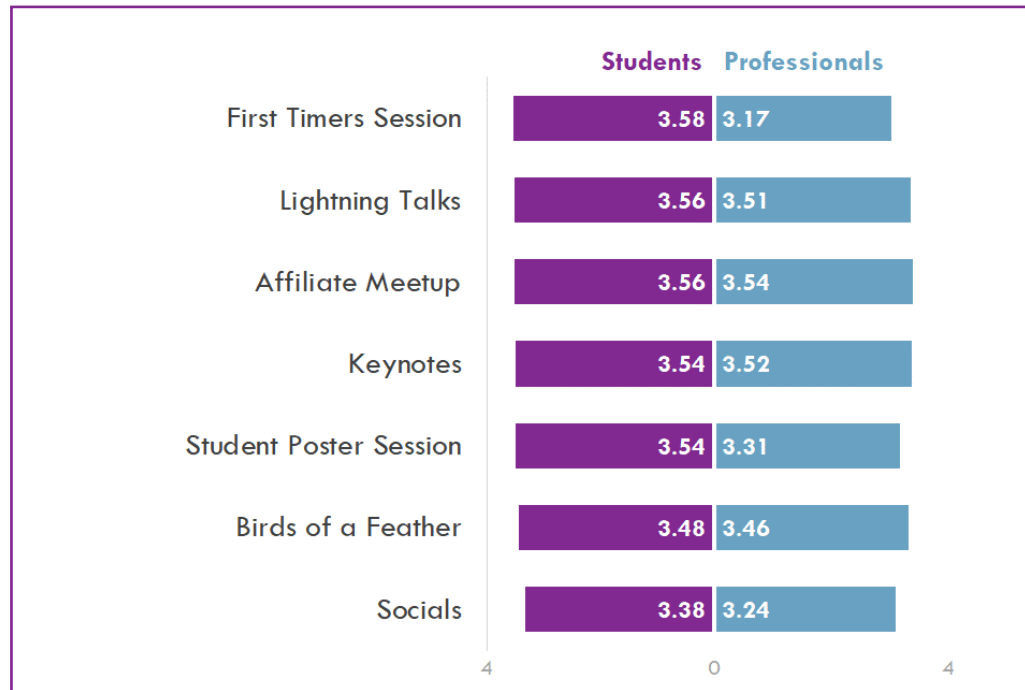
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I would recommend the WiCyS annual conference to a colleague or peer.	1%	1%	5%	26%	67%
WiCyS 2024 helped me feel part of the larger community of allies, advocates, etc.	1%	1%	7%	28%	64%
Attending the conference was a worthwhile use of my time.	1%	2%	4%	32%	60%
I felt a sense of belonging and inclusion during the conference.	1%	1%	8%	34%	56%
My attendance helped reaffirm that I belong in cybersecurity.	1%	1%	14%	35%	50%
The conference helped me advance my professional and networking skills.	1%	3%	9%	40%	48%
The conference website and/or Whova app helped me navigate the schedule.	1%	3%	6%	43%	47%
The conference registration process was easy to complete.	1%	8%	9%	45%	37%
The pre-conference communications via email met my needs.	3%	6%	12%	45%	35%
The diversity of topics presented was sufficient to meet my interests.	1%	10%	14%	41%	34%
The conference helped me advance my technical skills.	9%	16%	30%	26%	19%

WiCyS 2024
Participant Survey Results Dashboard – June 2024

<u>ATTENDEE PERSPECTIVES ON WICYS 2024</u>

Using a scale of "very valuable" (4) to "not at all valuable" (1), respondents were asked to rate the value of each conference forum offered as part of WiCyS 2024. The weighted average for students and professionals highlights the preferences of these two groups of attendees. ("Not applicable" was eliminated from the calculation.) The five highest ranked forums among students and professionals include Career Growth Hub, Workshops, Career Fair, Presentations, and Panel Discussions.

	Students	Professionals
Career Growth Hub	3.76	3.76
Workshops	3.67	3.51
Career Fair	3.65	3.68
Presentations	3.65	3.64
Panel Discussions	3.65	3.60
Recruiters Session	3.59	3.39
Student Chapter Meetup	3.59	3.38

ATTENDEE PERSPECTIVES ON WICYS 2024 (continued)

Overall, attendees were pleased with the conference program and variety of conference forums offered at WiCyS 2024. Requests were made for a greater variety of technical workshops, more socials, and less redundancy among the keynote speaker topics. Several attendees requested a four-day conference, designated blocks of time in the conference schedule for networking, and stretching the Career Fair across two days instead of one.

	Students	Professionals
First Timers Session	3.58	3.17
Lightning Talks	3.56	3.51
Affiliate Meetup	3.56	3.54
Keynotes	3.54	3.52
Student Poster Session	3.54	3.31
Birds of a Feather	3.48	3.46
Socials	3.38	3.24

Among respondents who have participated in the annual conference more than once, their opinion on the growth and direction of the conference is:

"I like adding a day. I also like how this year there was a talk on certifications. That helps make sense of the value of some of the WiCyS resources."

"It's great and I would like to see more senior level content as the organization grows"

"About the same. It needs more advanced technical content!! Talked with many people that said the talks are not advanced enough."

"I really enjoyed this year's conference and feel that it gets better each year. I would still love for some more technical talks, but hopefully that will come with the extra day for the conference!"

"I think it's growing in the right direction. Compared to last year, I saw much more diversity and more technical talks, especially for mid/senior level professionals."

"It's less technical than I recall it being years ago. I think the 'journey' sessions/keynotes are great and having a few are very valuable but I feel like this year that was the majority of the content. Networking opps were great. Venue was fantastic."

WiCyS 2024
Participant Survey Results Dashboard – June 2024

Among respondents who have participated in the annual conference more than once, their opinion on the growth and direction of the conference is:

"The number of attendees is growing. We can aim to enhance the quality of technical talks by creating some tracks like other competitive technical conferences. The popular workshops on new topics (e.g. AI/OSINT etc.) should be held in larger rooms to accommodate as many attendees as possible."

"Would like to see more content added at the senior level and more technical content. This will help with the 'retain' part of the mission."

"The content seems to have been watered down a bit from the technical aspect. It's beginning to feel like the conference is geared specifically to students."

"I like the direction of the conference in most ways and in its core mission to welcome diverse voices into the field. Three things that you may want to watch: 1) making sure technical hands-on workshops are available at every time slot, 2) that employers are engaged at the fair (I heard otherwise for a few), and 3) that company challenges and partnerships are aligned with what the industry is looking for."

"There's still a gap in the number of sessions geared towards leadership roles."

Among respondents who have participated in the annual conference more than once, their opinion on the growth and direction of the conference is:

"The organization and the conference continue to improve with each passing year. I am proud of my WiCyS membership and its mission. The organization is achieving what Dr. Siraj and her team intended at its inception."

"I like that the conference is fairly intimate still, but I think it needs to expand to accommodate for industry need. I always hear about large amounts of people who are unable to come to the event."

"It is a shame that there are so few tickets relative to demand. I was hoping to bring 5 coworkers but I was the only one able to get a ticket before they sold out."

"The growth is amazing and I think it's wonderful that we can involve so many. On the other side it makes connecting a little harder. I know a lot of folks (in Gov space) that couldn't attend because their abstracts weren't accepted so expanding the agenda might be a good idea. Or having some regional conferences might be an idea."

"The conference does not match the growth of the organization. This leads to a lot of anger from members who would like to attend."

Among respondents who have participated in the annual conference more than once, their opinion on the growth and direction of the conference is:

"I have been very impressed by the amount of participants, the quality of the presentations/keynote speeches, the enthusiasm of everyone, and the significance of the relevance of topics covered."

"It has been a mind blowing growth with more workshops and events, more attendees and more sponsors coming into the fold. It has been stories of success each year."

"I like that the conference has gotten bigger so more people can benefit from it, but I feel like it's lost some of the closeness and personal touch of older conferences."

"I think that the conference is still personable even with the growth. When we talk about inclusion, it is hard to say not to let others in. But at some point, we probably need to cap it and ensure that it does not get like Grace Hopper."

"The conference has grown in participation and it's great to see the talks/tracks continue to stay focused on the cyber topics. I hope it does not become like Grace Hopper Celebration where it's too large to make meaningful connections and there is too much content about branding and self-promotion."

Among respondents who have participated in the annual conference more than once, their opinion on the growth and direction of the conference is:

"WiCyS' growth has been noticeable every year I've attended. From what I've seen, the conference is doing a good job of navigating the changing social climate and the networking atmosphere is overall supportive and inspiring. The Career Hub is one of my favorite resources that I saw added after my first time attending."

"I would still like to see the technology to schedule headshots, resume review, and mock interviews."

"I will say that the organization of the conference and the attendees and speakers are incredible. Probably the most impressive conference I have been to. I will say that the keynotes are repetitive, and the talks are beginner friendly to the point I don't learn anything."

"I always leave the WiCyS conference feeling encouraged and inspired! I usually plan my next year's student activities and events on my way home."

"I look to WiCyS to tell me what's on the horizon technologically and what I can do to better prepare my students for the workforce."

"I think this conference was more diverse with respect to attendees when it came to race and ethnicity."

Personal and professional benefits of attending WiCyS 2024

"I was able to connect with former mentees and it was wonderful to meet them in person. I met with colleagues and colleagues of colleagues and expanded my network. At the career fair I bonded with my teammates that I didn't know well. I was energized by the enthusiasm and buzz!"

"Volunteering created a wonderful opportunity to meet other attendees as well as to give back to the community. I underestimated the value of my knowledge until I got the opportunity to share with students and early career professionals at the Career Hub."

"Reignited my passion for the cybersecurity community and helping others in their career."

"The conference reminded me of the value you get from mentoring others."

"It was great to connect with other women in the industry, particularly those with disabilities."

"It validated my sense of belonging to the larger cybersecurity professional bodies and the networking was exceptional"

"Confirmed I know more than I think and that there are others like me in the field (2nd career)"

Personal and professional benefits of attending WiCyS 2024

"I felt that the conference was really welcoming and inclusive. I made a lot of connections and, hopefully, new friends."

"It was great to experience the diverse and accepting community of women in the cybersecurity industry. Also, lots of new ideas of different areas to pursue within cybersecurity."

"As an ally who has always advocated for inclusion and diversity, I found it worthwhile attending the male allyship session where I got more inspiration to continue being the voice for women in the industry."

"It definitely helped me feel and remember I belong in this space. The conversations all helped refill my desire to be in this field and continue on."

"I personally loved seeing such a great number of women in the security space and know for a fact that the struggle is not particular to me. And professionally, I have been encouraged by seeing women in top positions in my space. My goals and dreams no longer look far fetched and unrealistic."

"At WiCyS, I feel a strong sense of belonging. I made an effort to network more than I normally would and it really paid off. I built lasting connections and am excited for the future."

WiCyS 2024
Participant Survey Results Dashboard – June 2024

Personal and professional benefits of attending WiCyS 2024

"WiCyS 2024 benefitted me by helping me to enhance my technical skills as well as inspired me to continue growing and challenging myself in this field."

"The diverse lineup of talks including fuzzing, symbex, and microaggressions in women in cybersecurity was fantastic. As someone who is well versed in blockchain fuzzing, having insight into how it is used in another field of security was really eye-opening. I really appreciated the technical talks at the conference."

"I got to learn about applications of cybersecurity in autonomous vehicles and renewable energy!"

"I learned a lot about certain topics that will help me in my career, such as burnout, soft skills, networking advancement, and general career advice for woman. I will be sharing these lessons learned with other woman in my field."

"I was excited to discover live demonstrations during some of the talks, as I learn best through hands-on experiences. In the future, I would suggest requiring speakers to explicitly mention live demos in their presentations, so attendees like me can better prepare and make the most of our learning experience."

"It would be helpful if the Whova app could provide information on the technical heaviness of each talk, allowing attendees to plan their schedules more effectively."

WiCyS 2024
Participant Survey Results Dashboard – June 2024

Personal and professional benefits of attending WiCyS 2024

"Talking with a number of people about my goals and what I've done so far helped me become more prepared for future job interviews."

"Provided resume and career guidance: I mentored two enthusiastic recent cybersecurity graduates on next steps for their cybersecurity journey."

"Gave me a push + validation on my resume to start applying for jobs"

"I realized that when I start negotiating salary, I should negotiate 25% higher. I also learned important ways to alter my resume. I learned so much about examining malware and about quantum cryptography."

"As an educator in a technical field and always viewing cybersecurity from the technical aspect, it helped me learn about the non-technical side of cybersecurity and how different journeys and backgrounds (educational and industry) all converge into this one field."

"Attending the WiCyS 2024 conference reminded me that I belong. It inspired me to keep pressing, seek mentorship and take on leadership roles. It also made it easier for me to network and learn from peers and role models in the field."

Personal and professional benefits of attending WiCyS 2024

"Networking. Hands down. The safety of the experience to be myself and meet others was very valuable to me."

"The networking possibilities at this conference are unmatched. I was able to meet many industry professionals and hear inspiring stories of women in cyber overcoming adversity to succeed in the field."

"It was inspiring, educational, and great networking opportunities."

"I was able to engage with a lot of senior leaders in a meaningful way and talk with entry level professionals and share my experience with them."

"I met so many people (students and corporate) that I will continue to connect with. The career fair greatly benefited me also."

"I was able to share info about my work and bring students so they could make connections."

"I got to connect with other coworkers on a different level."

"Allowed me new ways of researching and bringing up ideas to my customers."

Personal and professional benefits of attending WiCyS 2024

"WiCyS conference has helped me narrow down the field I want to pursue. This has given me an identity to rebrand me."

"I made some great connections with my fellow attendees and I am inspired to continue my journey in cyber security. It also gave me a good idea of what type of internship I am looking for to complete the capstone for my Master's program."

I'm currently in the final semester of my cybersecurity masters degree and this is the first time that I attended the WiCyS conference. Initially, I was a bit scared & skeptical but the moment I stepped foot in the conference, I felt a sense of belonging and welcomed by my fellow peers."

"The event showcased a variety of panelists, but I believe it would be beneficial to include more professionals from non-computer science and less technical backgrounds. Cybersecurity extends beyond computer science, and having a broader range of perspectives would enrich the discussions. I appreciated the OSINT workshop, which highlighted the contributions of non-technical professionals."

"I met new people who pivoted from different streams into security which was motivating to hear. The SANS workshop was my first tabletop exercise I participated in and I learned a lot from the exercise."

What suggestions do you have for improving the WiCyS annual conference?

"Bring back interactive technical workshops on laptops and teach how professors can better prepare students for CTFs."

"It would be great if there could be a track that is geared towards educators and how we can bring topics and skills into the classroom. A lot of us educators are just starting out and need the support and ideas of what and how to teach the concepts."

"More attention to the question of retaining women in cyber would be appreciated. For example, a social for women in industry one evening would be great. As a mid-career woman, at the socials that were held, it was mainly me mentoring college students. I would have appreciated an opportunity to engage with mid-career and senior-level women to learn how they have coped in similar situations that I am experiencing."

"I would prefer more technical content and not as many 'here is my journey' presentations."

"As mentioned earlier, I would advertise the in-person conference as either technical or non-technical, or advertise two different tracks/trainings. This being my second year attending, but first year in the industry, I was pretty disappointed in the lack of technical presentations/trainings."

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What suggestions do you have for improving the WiCyS annual conference?

"Having more technical sessions dedicated to mid/senior level professionals would certainly improve the overall quality of the conference. More hands-on sessions with realistic expectations would also be beneficial."

"Would like to see more technical presentations and workshops. There were some, but not that many."

"I attended several of the presentations and sessions during the conference and often felt that the subject matter being covered wasn't very technical or was inappropriately labeled as 'intermediate/advanced' when it was rather intro level or more conceptual than technical."

"This was my first professional conference and I was expecting a technical conference for women. I felt more like this was a women's conference for tech which is still very useful and informative but I felt like I had to redefine my expectations after being at the conference for a few hours."

"Also, it feels like it's probably time to stop having academics judge and pick the winners of the CTF instead of actual technical people who work in the field."

"Please have better technical content. I rarely learn from the talks. I'm guessing that industry folks can't really share security techniques, so they just share surface level information. Maybe get more academic presenters."

What suggestions do you have for improving the WiCyS annual conference?

"Whova app is a disaster - people flooded the app with nonsense not relevant to the conference so they could get points and rise in the leader board. So much noise it was hard to access content applicable to WiCyS 2024. The layout was confusing - for future conferences please note which floor things are located on and not just the room names."

"I wish the Whova app had a more user friendly section for the job applications, job hunting, group creating, or link sharing. Once the notification went away it was nearly impossible to find again."

"Provide more staff/volunteers to help navigate the conference. Create 'How Can I Help' booths throughout the event to filter questions. There are many wonderful opportunities to experience but it is overwhelming and you miss out on opportunities because you are trying to navigate your way around via an app. Human interaction is always better."

"Communication for meet ups? There were several I wanted to attend like, WiCyS Mid Atlantic affiliate, First timers, and Forensics and Incident Response but there was no response to where they were doing these meet ups."

"More coordinated organizational facilitation/support for interest group socials on both evenings of conference (Thurs and Fri)"

What suggestions do you have for improving the WiCyS annual conference?

"I'd like to see a little more vetting with the keynotes. Some of them were amazing and others were lackluster. Those speakers need a little more rigor, especially since they're during the meals."

"Less keynote speakers. The number of speakers during the keynote events was too many, drowning out messages."

"I also felt that the keynote presentations went on for much too long and weren't really varied in what they spoke about."

"Another issue was that several of the workshops weren't what the description made them sound like. For example, the federal scholarship meetup was not a meet up at all but rather them sharing about two very specific scholarship the government offers. A few of us went expecting to meet other scholarship for service recipients and to have the opportunity to network with each other and aspiring federal scholars given the name and description."

"I really got the most out of the socials, and 1:1's interactions which were encouraging. In the future I would like to see more panel sessions dedicated to Mgmt. level industry, topics like cyber burnout, topics that cyber deals with on a regular basis that isn't quite as trendy, more like functional topics."

What suggestions do you have for improving the WiCyS annual conference?

"Hosting the conference in the fall to align with the most internship openings"

"For the meetups, maybe have them in rooms configured for conversations rather than lectures."

"Please consider giving vendors (who are there doing work for WiCyS) access to food."

"The Security Training Scholarship cohort would love to have something to put on their badge like the affiliates etc."

"WE invite allies, but don't have a lot that is geared towards them, and don't have a lot of male presenters."

"There really needs to be a section for disability accommodations on the main WiCyS conference website. I would also love if more items on the WiCyS Neuroinclusive Event checklist were followed."

"Have the career fair and CTF open at different times so students can attend both without missing out on one."

What suggestions do you have for improving the WiCyS annual conference?

"Since I was involved in the organizational aspect of social, it would be nice if WiCyS could possibly negotiate with the hotels at the time of booking the discount on catering for us when we do socials."

"Perhaps a workshop on federal education opportunities that allow for more participation and interaction with the audience would be beneficial. I received a lot of follow-up questions from students, faculty, and industry because we ran out of time."

"I'd like to see more executive level sessions - perhaps break out a specific track?"

"I think having each track in the same location makes it easier to navigate between sessions. I would love more hands-on skills labs. Perhaps Apple, Dell, Microsoft would help underwrite the lab equipment so everyone is starting at the same point technology wise. The devices could then be donated to school or shelter for the tax write-off."

"A lot of the talks were pretty basic or about personal security rather than how to implement security on an organizational level. Tagging sessions as beginner/intermediate/advanced might help."

"I really want to see more GRC topics. The conference technical offerings seem biased toward the areas suited for SOC analysts and ethical hacking."

What suggestions do you have for improving the WiCyS annual conference?

"The career fair is a great example. Lots of internships, lots of entry level hiring. Almost 0 leadership hiring here. Why? Because people see WiCyS an entry level conference. They are not looking for their leaders here and that is a problem."

"Also, it would be good to have some of the stalls at the career fair have an international focus or even just to let exhibitors know that there will be an international contingent that would be looking for opportunities and network expansion."

"As a sponsor, I would consider rebranding the Career Fair as a Career and Education Fair since not all sponsors exhibiting were offering internships but did offer resources to further a person's cybersecurity career (boot camps, training, etc.)."

"Split up the career fair to two half days (Thursday, Friday) or (Friday, Saturday) instead of 8 hours in one day. Co-location (or nearby vs opposite wings) of Career Growth Hub and Career Fair."

"My ticket was purchased as part of a company sponsoring WiCyS, and one person never being allowed to enter the conference for meals meant we went out to eat every time. For sponsoring a large amount of money for this conference, not being allowed food for one person did not make a lot of sense."

What suggestions do you have for improving the WiCyS annual conference?

"As speaker, I would love to see more structured support including slides templates, slides review and tech check. I wish there would be better tech support and rehearsal opportunity."

"The conference felt that it was trying to be everything to everyone in Cyber. The conference feels big enough where you may want to consider adding tracks--early career, mid-career, experienced professionals. While there were some sessions scattered for those populations, it would be helpful if there was more of a deliberate focus."

"Expand the diversity of panelists by inviting more professionals from non-computer science and less technical backgrounds. Cybersecurity is a multidisciplinary field, and incorporating a wider range of perspectives would enrich the discussions and provide attendees with a more comprehensive understanding of the industry."

"The biggest draw back to me was lack of sitting spaces. I use a cane or walker to get around, and outside of the sessions there was nowhere to sit and get to know people, mentor/be mentored, or just to get off my feet for a moment between sessions."

"Make it easier to ask for room accommodations. I needed an accessible room and did not receive it, making my attendance ultimately difficult and uncomfortable."

WiCyS 2024
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The WiCyS 2024 sponsor survey was designed to assess the experiences and perceptions of conference sponsors, and to inform future WiCyS annual conferences and Career Fairs. The survey weblink was distributed to 115 sponsors of WiCyS 2024 at the conclusion of the conference. A total of 18 conference sponsors responded to the anonymous survey in whole or part.

RESPONDENTS BY TYPE OF COMPANY

Nearly two-thirds of respondents were affiliated with a privately held for-profit business.

For-profit business	11
College or university	2
Non-profit organization	2
Government	2
FFRDC*	1
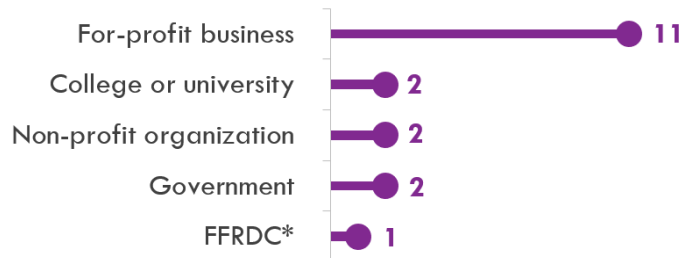
*Federally Funded Research and Development Centers

YEARS OF CONFERENCE SPONSORSHIP

One-third of respondents represented a company participating as a WiCyS annual conference sponsor for the first time.

Sponsored more than once	11
First time as a sponsor	6
Sponsored once	1

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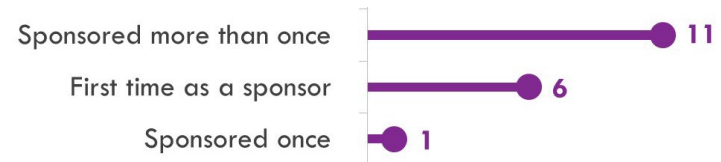
Two-thirds of those surveyed identified as repeat sponsors of the WiCyS annual conference. Among these respondents, one of their primary motivations is to gain access to the talent pipeline. Additionally, they are eager to champion WiCyS' mission and increase awareness of their program/brand.

MOTIVATION FOR REPEAT SPONSORSHIP

Among the repeat sponsors of this event, their motivation for continuing to participate in this capacity is multi-faceted.

Access the talent pipeline	5
Support WiCyS' mission	4
Program/Brand Awareness	3
Network	2
Educate our staff	2
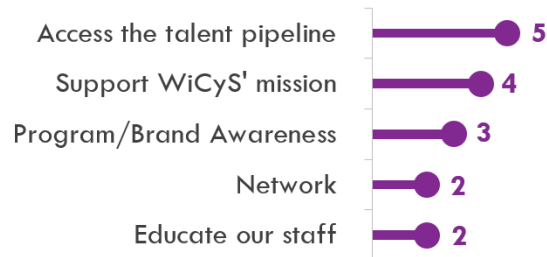
RECRUITING FROM WICYS EVENTS

Nearly three-quarters of respondents have recruited from a WiCyS event (conference, career fair, local meet-up, etc.) on at least one occasion.
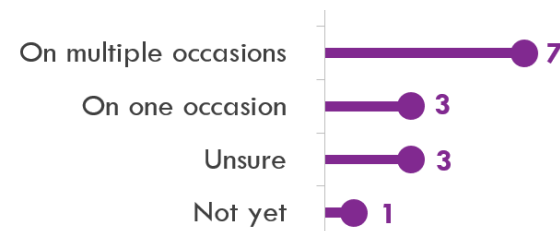
On multiple occasions	7
On one occasion	3
Unsure	3
Not yet	1

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Respondents were asked to rate the importance of several benefits related to their company's WiCyS 2024 sponsorship. The top three benefits rated "very important" were diversity mission support, a commitment to allyship, and branding. One-third of those surveyed deemed scholarship support an unimportant benefit of their sponsorship.
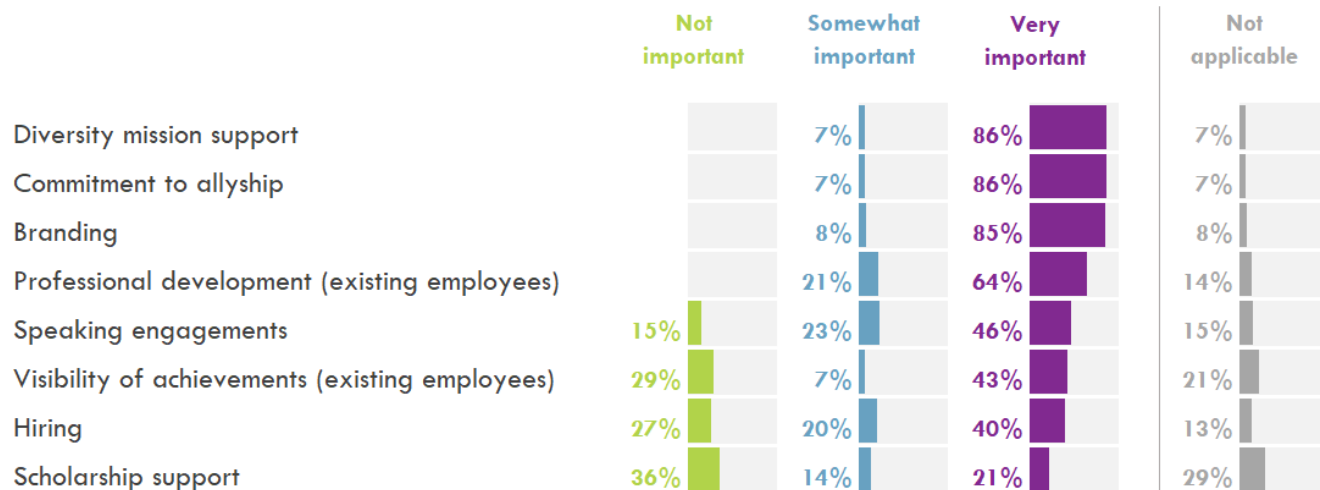
	Not important	Somewhat important	Very important	Not applicable
Diversity mission support		7%	86%	7%
Commitment to allyship		7%	86%	7%
Branding		8%	85%	8%
Professional development (existing employees)		21%	64%	14%
Speaking engagements	15%	23%	46%	15%
Visibility of achievements (existing employees)	29%	7%	43%	21%
Hiring	27%	20%	40%	13%
Scholarship support	36%	14%	21%	29%

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Respondents were asked to rate the priority level of recruiting several classifications of worker for their company. The top three worker groups given a "high priority" rating were employees representing diverse backgrounds, employees with 6-10 years in the workforce, and veterans. Nearly one-third of respondents assigned a "low priority" to recruiting professionals transitioning from another industry.
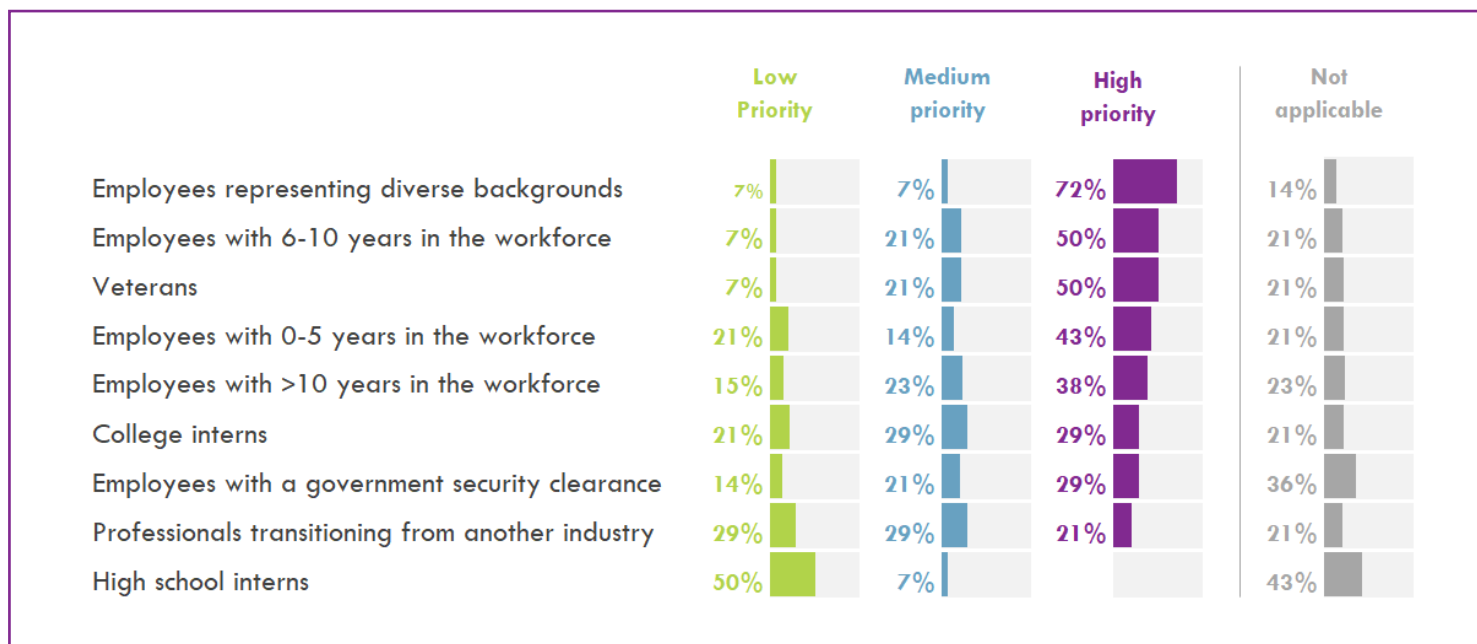
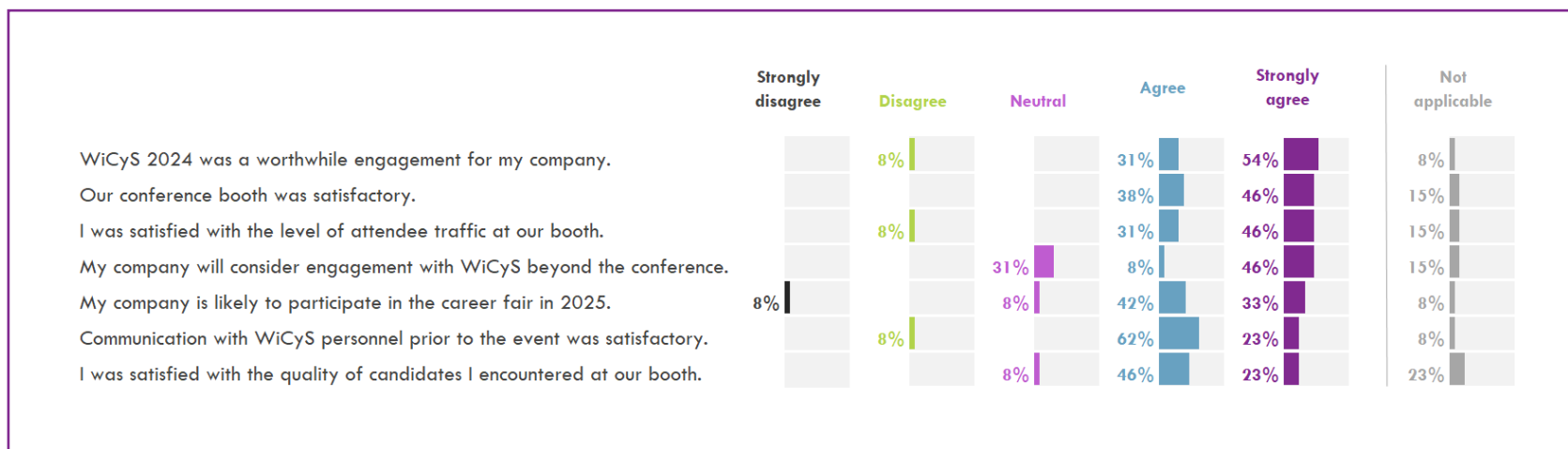|	Low Priority	Medium priority	High priority	Not applicable
Employees representing diverse backgrounds	7%	7%	72%	14%
Employees with 6-10 years in the workforce	7%	21%	50%	21%
Veterans	7%	21%	50%	21%
Employees with 0-5 years in the workforce	21%	14%	43%	21%
Employees with >10 years in the workforce	15%	23%	38%	23%
College interns	21%	29%	29%	21%
Employees with a government security clearance	14%	21%	29%	36%
Professionals transitioning from another industry	29%	29%	21%	21%
High school interns	50%	7%		43%

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Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with several components of WiCyS 2024 using a scale of "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Sponsors were overwhelmingly pleased with the quality of attendees they encountered and the level of attendee traffic at their booths. Nearly every respondent indicated that participating in WiCyS 2024 was a worthwhile engagement for their company, and over half will consider a year-long engagement with WiCyS beyond the annual conference.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Not applicable
WiCyS 2024 was a worthwhile engagement for my company.		8%		31%	54%	8%
Our conference booth was satisfactory.				38%	46%	15%
I was satisfied with the level of attendee traffic at our booth.		8%		31%	46%	15%
My company will consider engagement with WiCyS beyond the conference.			31%	8%	46%	15%
My company is likely to participate in the career fair in 2025.	8%		8%	42%	33%	8%
Communication with WiCyS personnel prior to the event was satisfactory.		8%		62%	23%	8%
I was satisfied with the quality of candidates I encountered at our booth.			8%	46%	23%	23%

Among respondents whose companies have sponsored the annual conference more than once, their opinion on the growth and direction of the conference is:

"Positive. Everyone always has a great time! The virtual tickets this year was confusing - did not realize this was not during the main conference time until students were already awarded virtual tickets."

"The conference continues to retain the intimate feel of a much smaller conference, even though the number of attendees have been steadily increasing."

"From my understanding, the growth and direction of the conference has been extremely dedicated to the recruitment, retention, and advancement of women in the cybersecurity field. The strong strategic partnerships and the sponsors, affiliates and academia attending the events are at the highest level."

"It's great. Would love to see it continue to grow in size."

Among respondents whose companies have sponsored the annual conference more than once, their opinion on the growth and direction of the conference is:

"I love that you are growing as an org, but want to make sure that you continue to focus on the programming and the overall attendee experience."

"The speakers and topics are always targeted towards real time and forward thinking."

"WiCyS has grown very quickly in my opinion and I feel you are focusing on the right things moving forward."

"Frustrating. We sponsor several events throughout the year, but this is the only event that we continually have issues buying passes to attend. The only year we managed to get both guest rooms and passes to the extent we needed was when it was in Ohio."

"The growth is great and hope to see it continue"

WiCyS 2024
Sponsor Survey Results Dashboard – June 2024

How did sponsoring WiCyS 2024 benefit your company's mission and goals?

"We were able to promote our programs"

"Our company is committed to growing our presence in the industry, and fostering relationships with women in cybersecurity from all backgrounds. We have a commitment to continuous improvement and partnering with WiCyS was a step forward on this path."

"Empowered students and faculty to connect with other professionals and learn about the latest in the field of cybersecurity while giving us the opportunity to meet students at the career fair who may be interested in further study! Seeing everyone so happy, excited and curious makes it all worth it!"

"My company has had a longstanding history supporting important causes which are focused on serving underrepresented groups."

How did sponsoring WiCyS 2024 benefit your company's mission and goals?

"Participating allowed us to share our scholarship information with eligible students."

"We have gained very strong new hires from the WiCyS conference which achieves one of our missions to hire a more diverse staff."

"We were able to conduct interviews and provide 8 contingent job offers to cyber engineers."

"Sponsoring WiCyS benefited our company's mission and goals because MITRE accelerates progress when we connect the strengths of government, academia, and industry. Our employees lead as pioneers for the public good to make a difference. We bring communities together to develop more effective cybersecurity and being engaged with this community contributes to this mission."

"It introduces us to candidates who may not know who we are."

What suggestions do you have for improving the WiCyS annual conference and/or career fair?

"Timing for the event doesn't support our intern and new grad hiring cycle, so we don't view this conference as one of our recruiting events. We support for the WiCyS mission and our joint programs."

"I know dates are already set, however, from a sponsor recruiting perspective, potentially having the event earlier in the year helps with internships and recent graduates land opportunities prior to the end of the school year."

"Increase ability to attend for sponsors. Even providing an early bird window for paid passes would be helpful."

"If extending the conference it would be nice to have the career fair open for longer than one day. It is a lot of work and travel for some folks for just one day in the booth."

"I'd suggest ending the career fair earlier, maybe at 4 p.m. Also, we could open it Thursday night for 2 hours so candidates can visit when sessions don't conflict."

"My only feedback for the conference was the lack of water machines/fountains throughout the common areas of the conference hall."

WiCyS 2024
Sponsor Survey Results Dashboard – June 2024

What suggestions do you have for improving the WiCyS annual conference and/or career fair?

"I suggest inviting sponsors to share meals with attendees so we can continuously foster those relationships. This will also help our team to feel more involved in the event overall. I also suggest renaming the Career Fair to maybe Career and Continuing Education Fair since not all companies are looking for interns but are looking to help upskill and certify individuals at all stages in their cybersecurity career. It was confusing for many attendees to speak with us not knowing we were there to help with their education rather than hire them."

"The interview space was great. Only downside was it was only available at same time as career fair. We identified the candidates for interview at career fair. Having it at same time made it difficult to juggle interviews and people in booth. Having time the day after the fair would have been great. It was also nice to have some flexible interview spaces since we ended up interviewing more than one person at a time."

"Clearer information about when the virtual tickets are for (was not clear it was not during main conference) and what is included and how students engage. More details about what the students are filling out when they register for the conference since it includes hosing info (we could help them very little since we didn't know what this said). Ask us sooner if students need the WiCyS membership so that can be taken care of prior to registration opening."