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# Membership in the New Normal

*A Time for Fierce Innovation*

American Museum Membership Conference | 19 May 2025



# Colleen Dilenschneider

Co-Founder, IMPACTS Experience

“Do what you love. **Know your own bone;** gnaw at it, bury it, unearth it, and gnaw at it still.”  
- *Henry David Thoreau*





Scan the code to download the keynote deck.

**Bethany Gotschall**, Content Strategist for IMPACTS Experience, is also here to help facilitate and answer questions.



@impacts-experience  
@colleendilen





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**Caltech**

the David &  
Lucile **Packard**  
FOUNDATION

**IAS** | INSTITUTE FOR  
ADVANCED STUDY

**n=296,223**

US composite

**n=55,767**

Self-identified current and recent members  
(within the past two years)

Now is an important time for  
fierce innovation in membership.



What are the **top**  
**benefits** of membership?

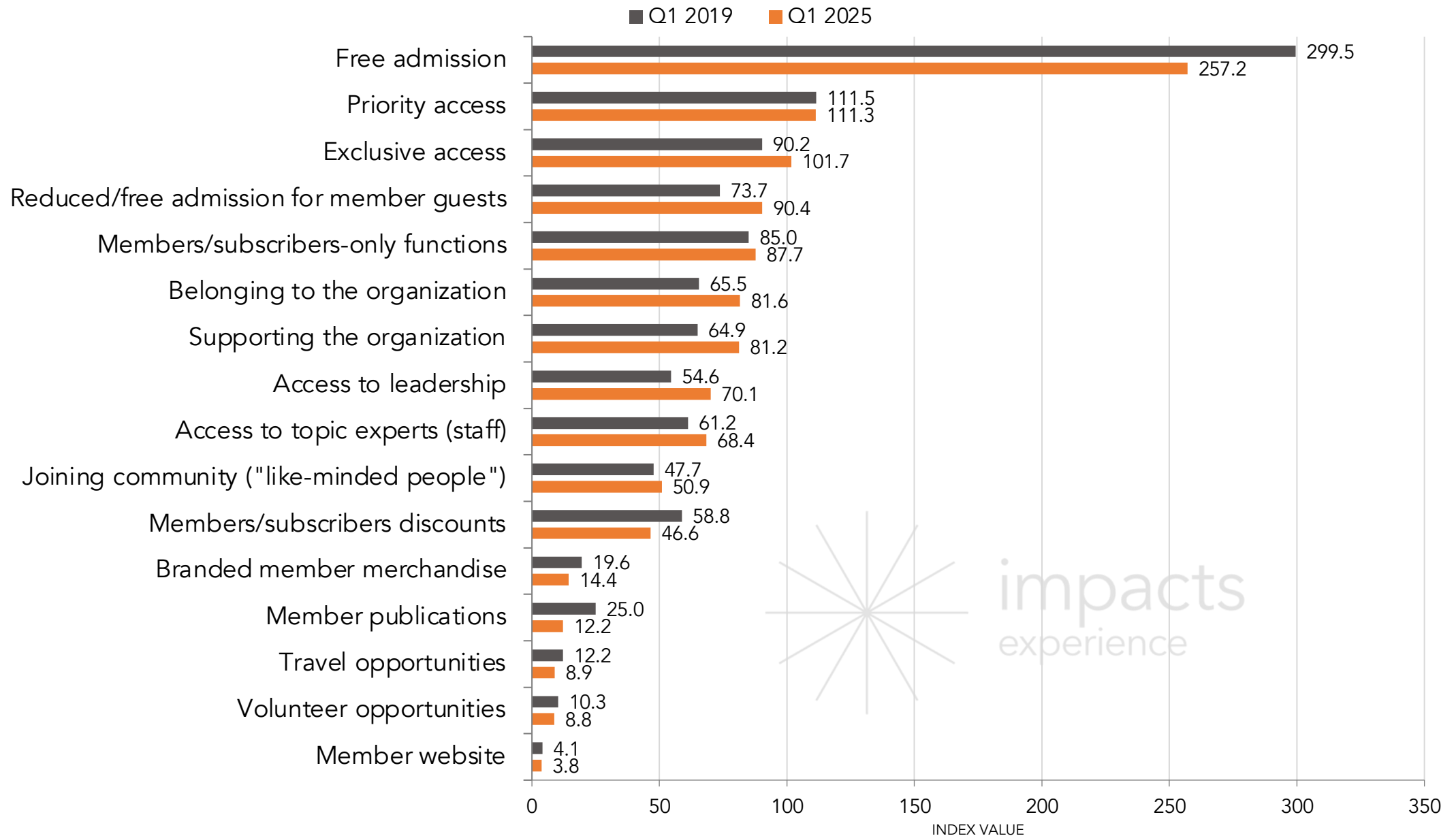
# What is the primary benefit of your membership?

Self-identified members to 81 organizations, Temporal comparison



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Self-identified members to 81 organizations, Temporal comparison



"This doesn't look like a **big change.**"

Large-scale member benefit perception changes take time to reach critical mass.



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Large-scale member benefit perception changes take time to reach critical mass.

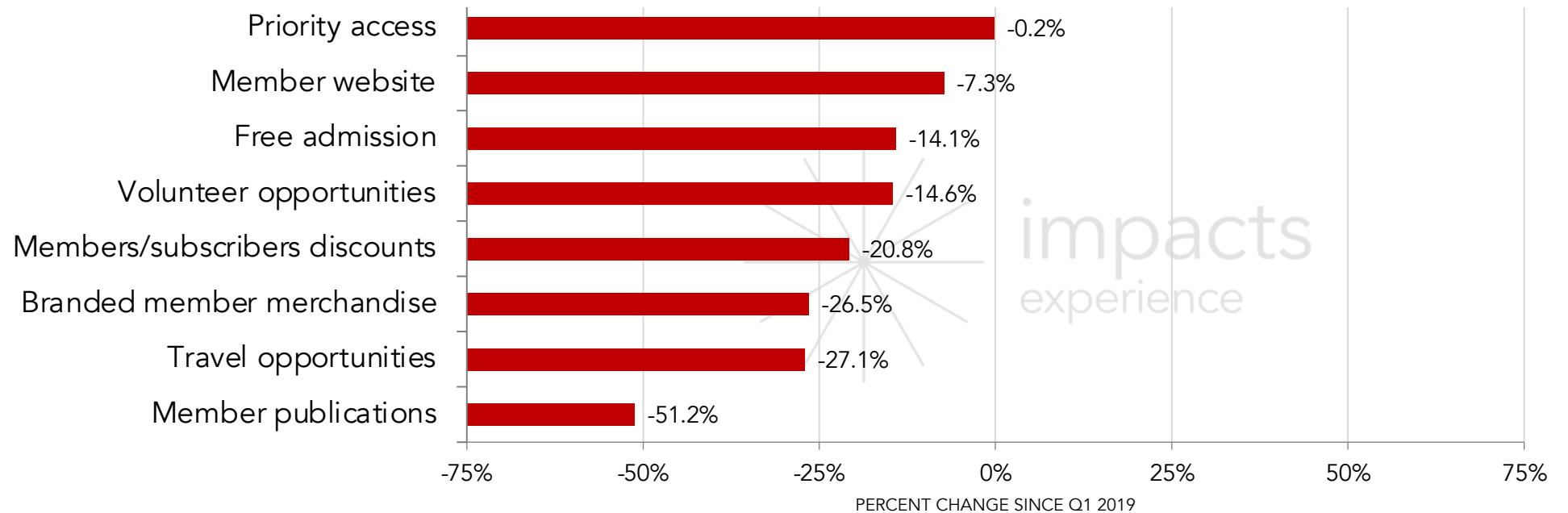
We are arguably **at a tipping point** of membership innovation.





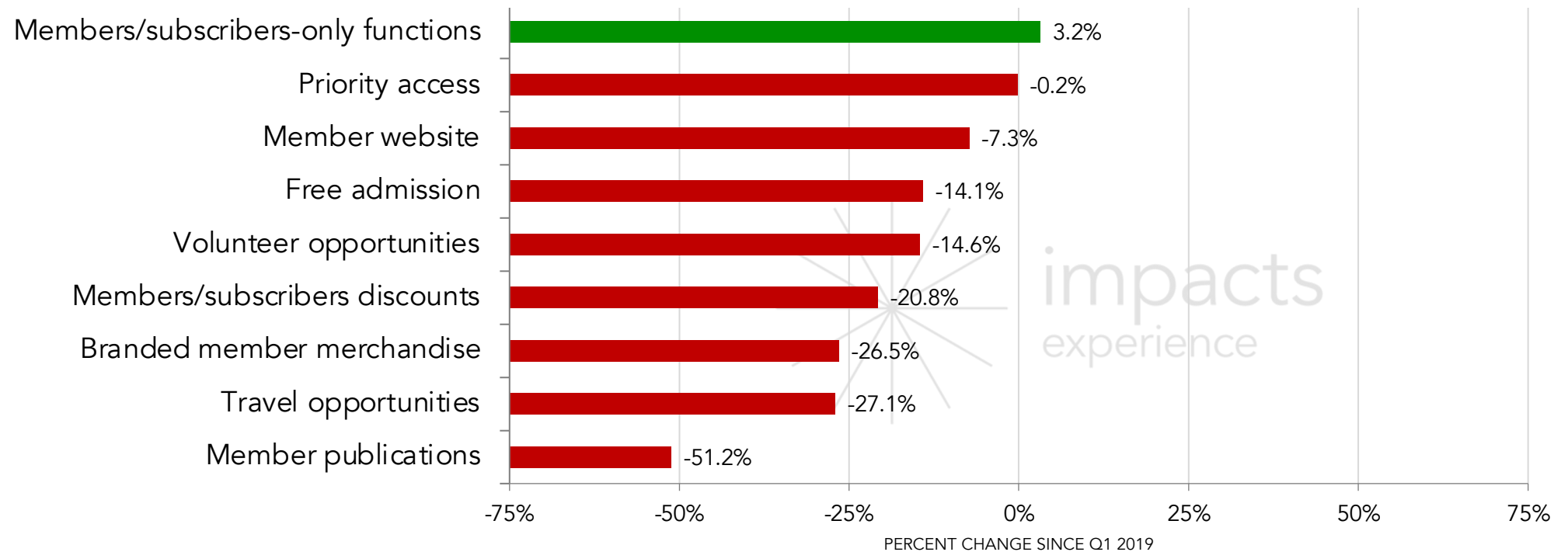
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Self-identified members to 81 organizations, Percent change between Q1 2019 and Q1 2025



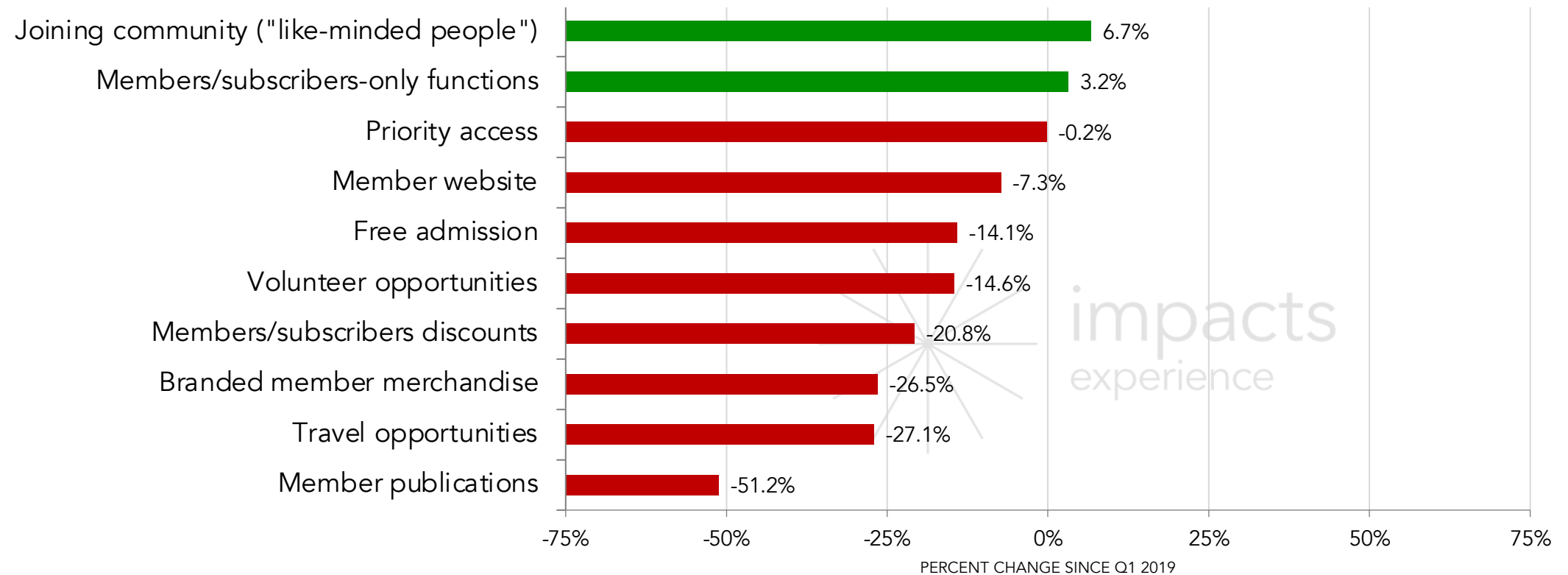
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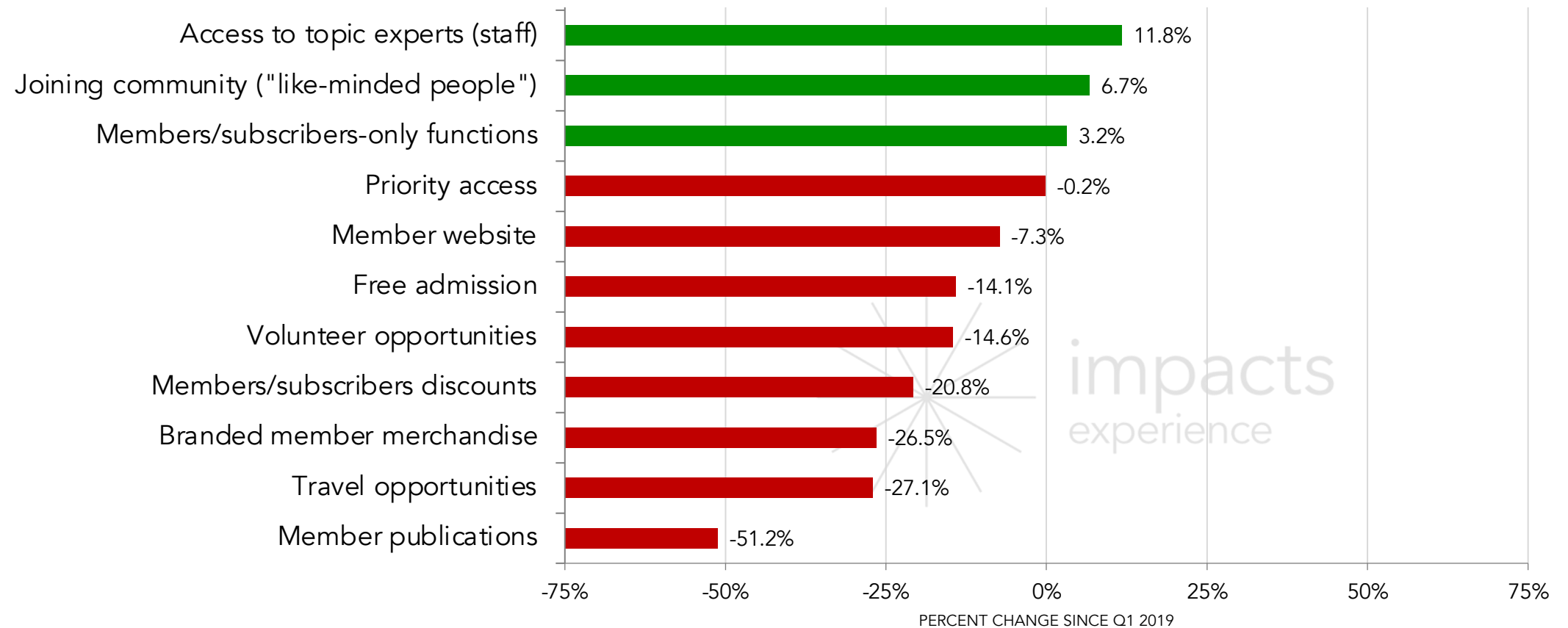
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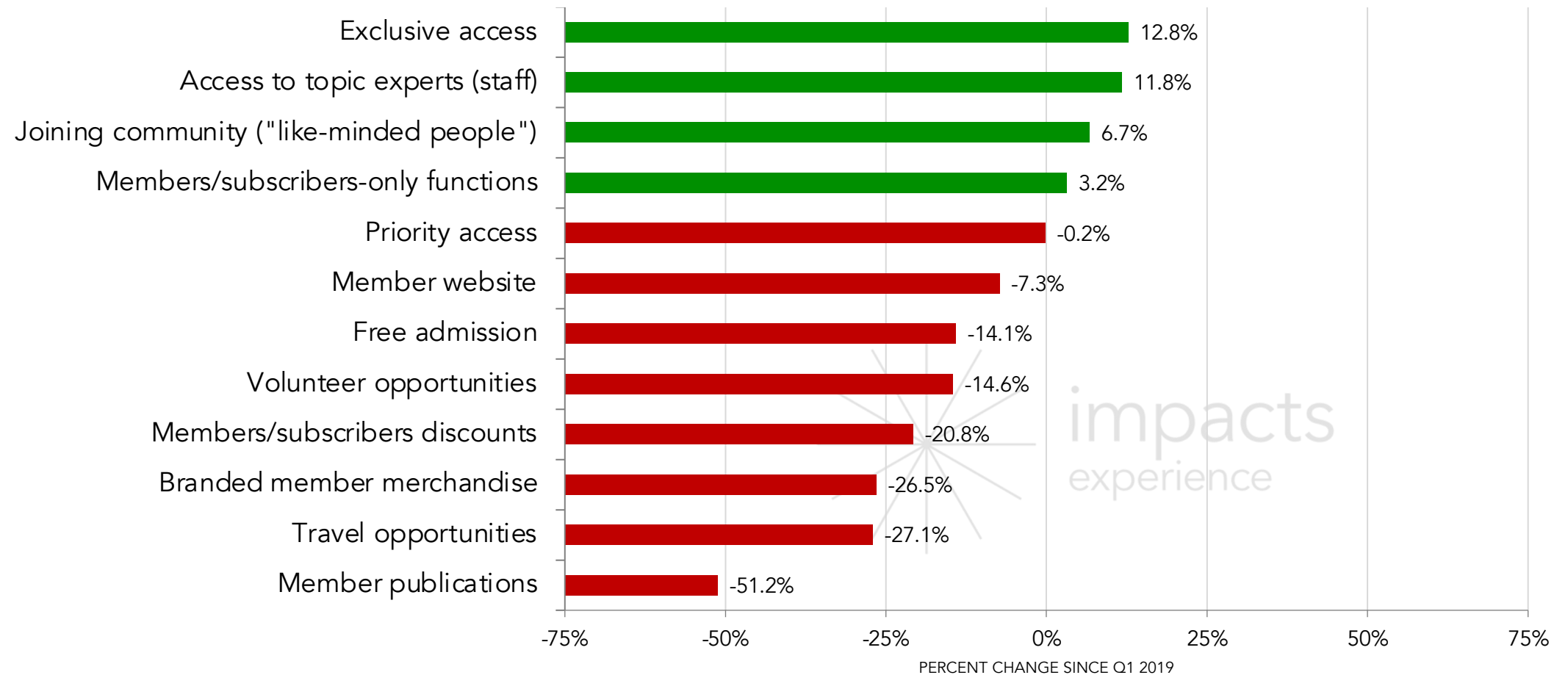
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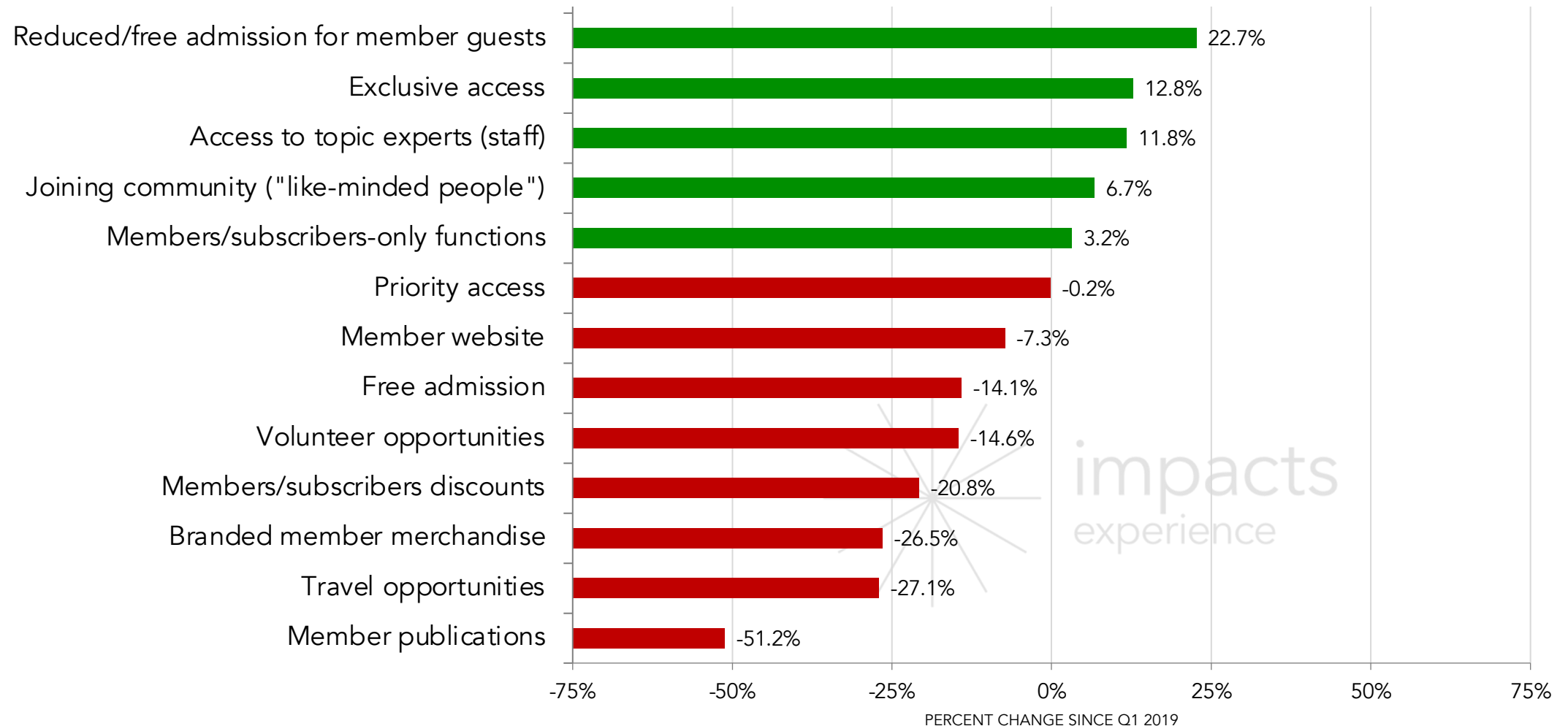
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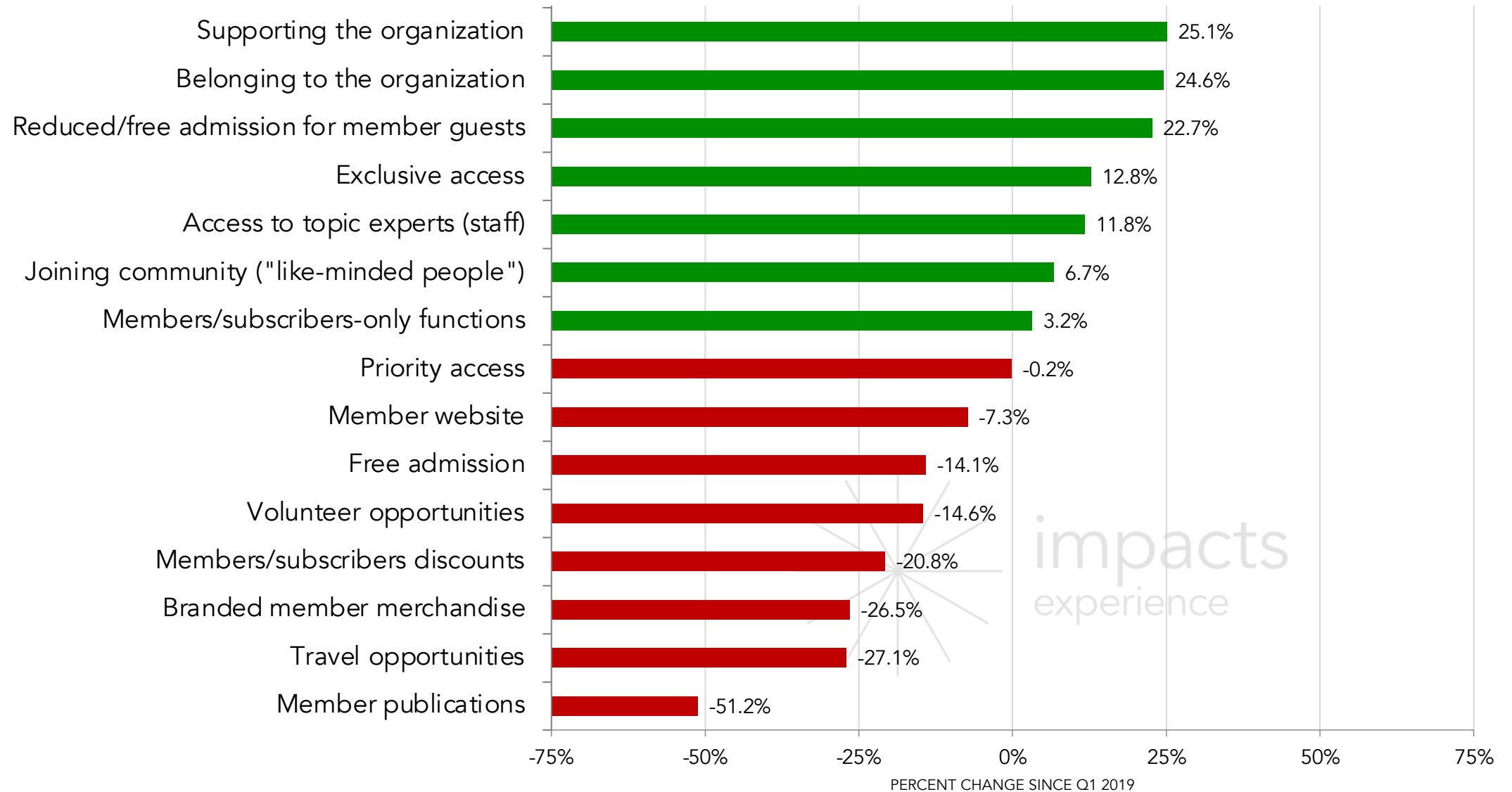
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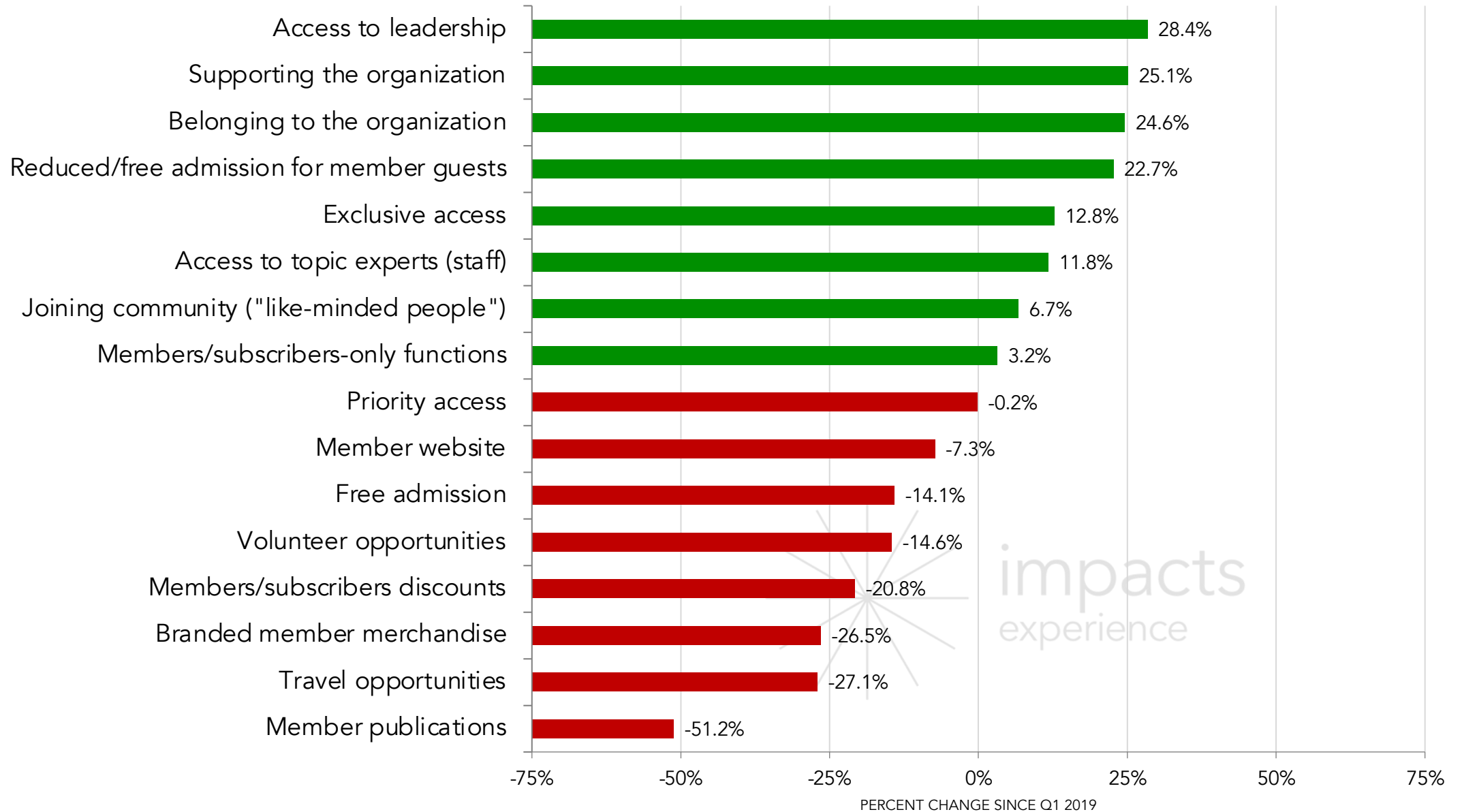
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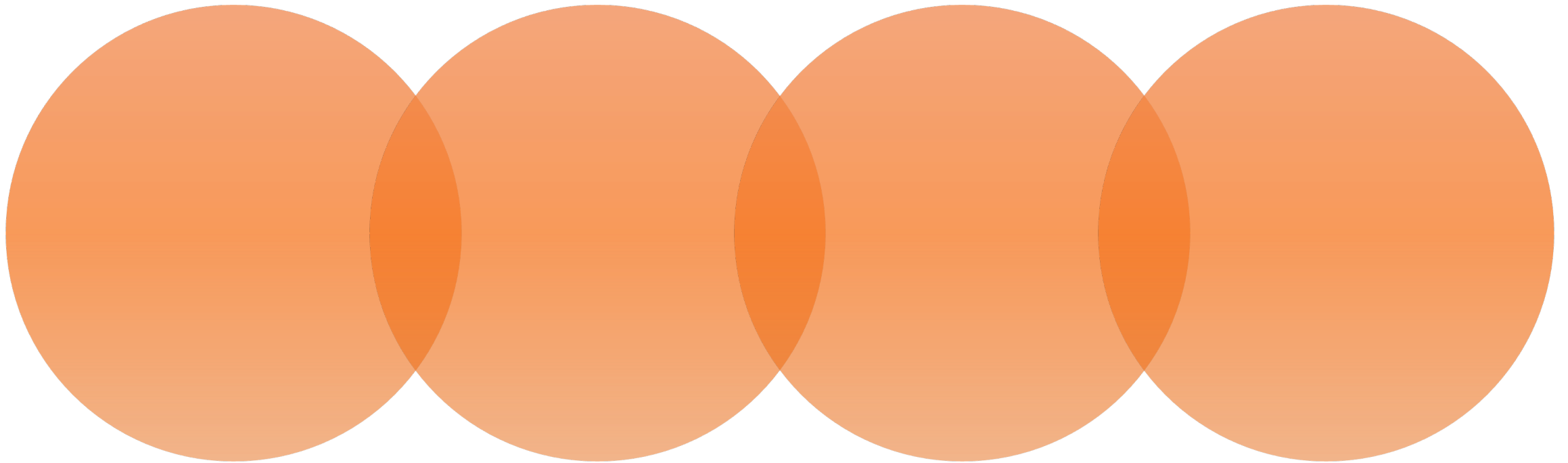
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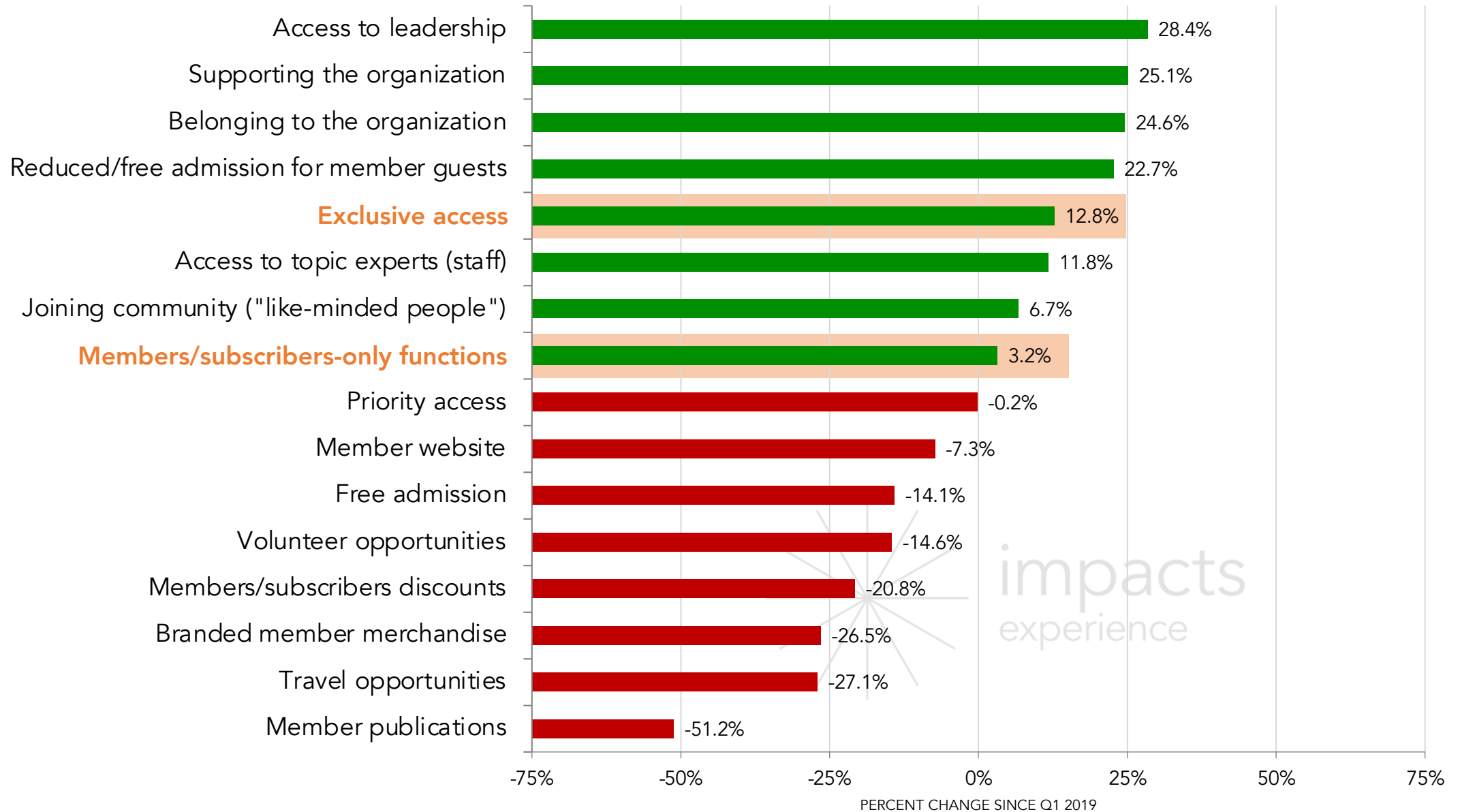
# Membership benefit **areas of growth**

*Connection to your museum's....*



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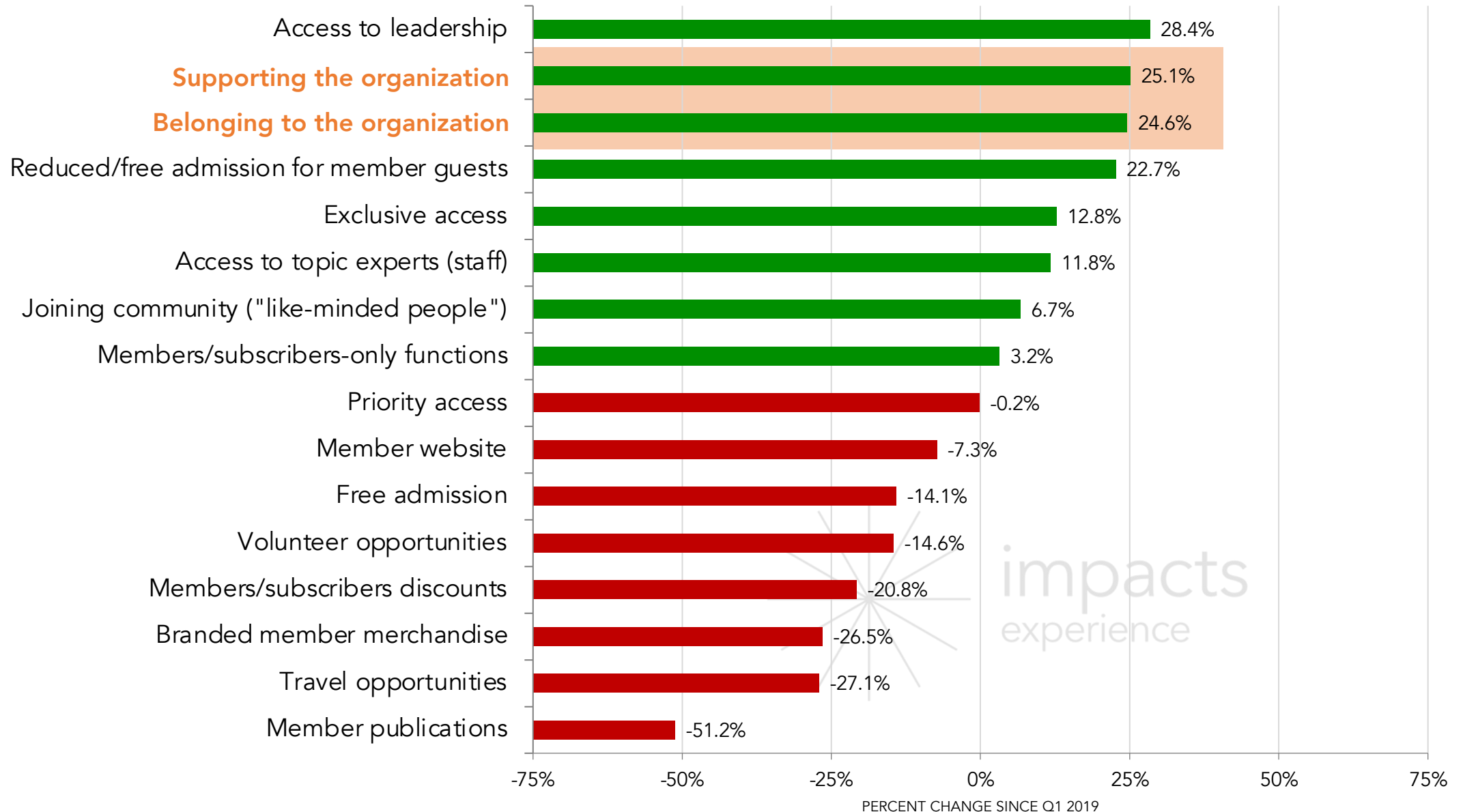
# Connection to unique experiences

**Exclusive access**

**Members-only  
functions**

# What is the primary benefit of your membership?

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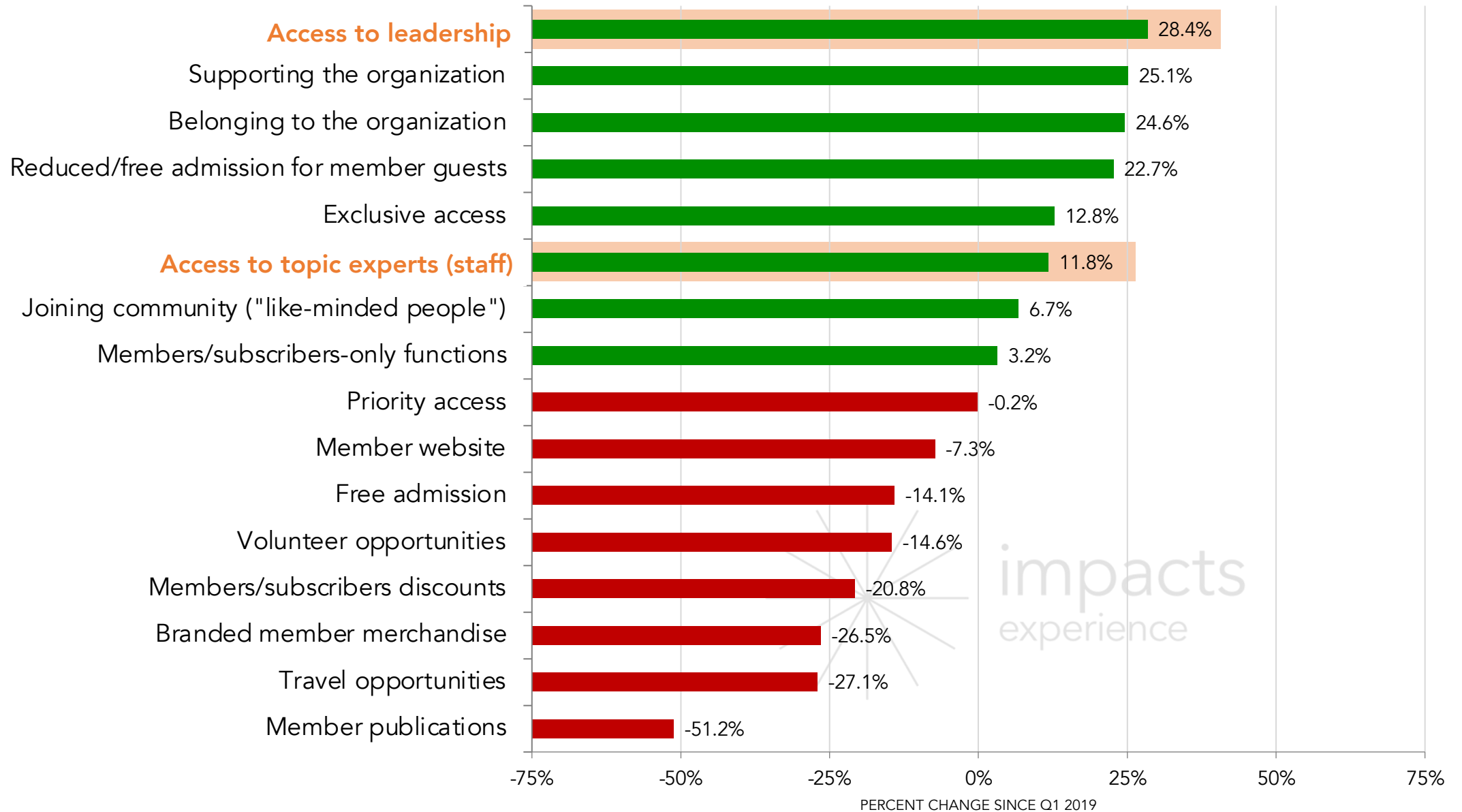
# Connection to your mission.

Supporting the  
organization

Belonging to the  
organization

# What is the primary benefit of your membership?

Self-identified members to 81 organizations, Percent change between Q1 2019 and Q1 2025



# Connection to your people.

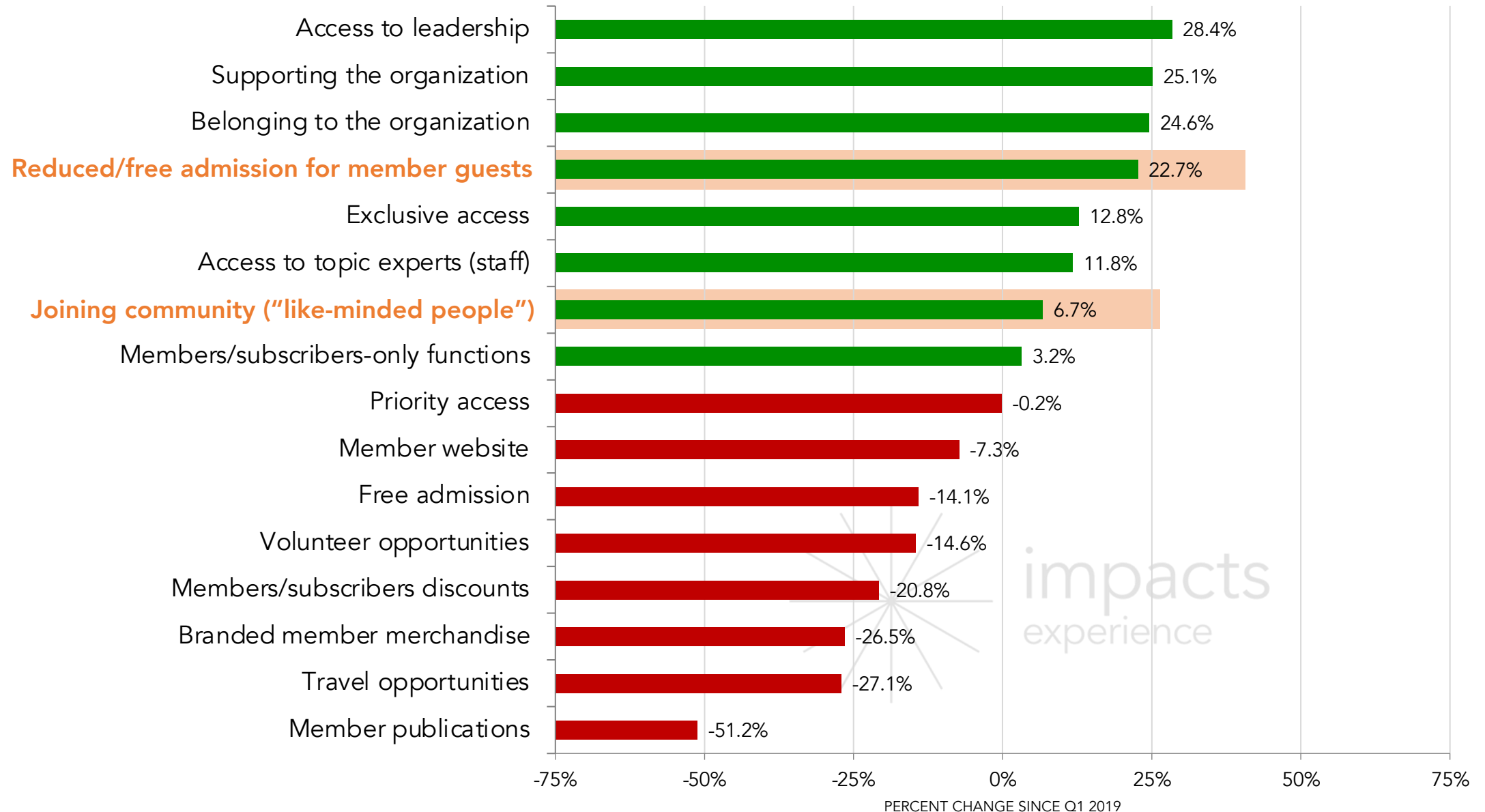
Access to  
leadership

Access to topic  
experts (staff)



# What is the primary benefit of your membership?

Self-identified members to 81 organizations, Percent change between Q1 2019 and Q1 2025



# Connection to each other.

Reduced/free  
admission for  
member guests

Joining a  
community  
(like-minded  
people)

The **future of membership**  
isn't transaction-based.



The **future of membership**  
isn't transaction-based.  
It is **connection-based.**



# Membership benefit **areas of growth**

*Connection to your museum's....*




# Membership benefit **areas of growth**

*Connection to your museum's....*



This benefit is growing overall, but is particularly important to a **valuable subset** of members.

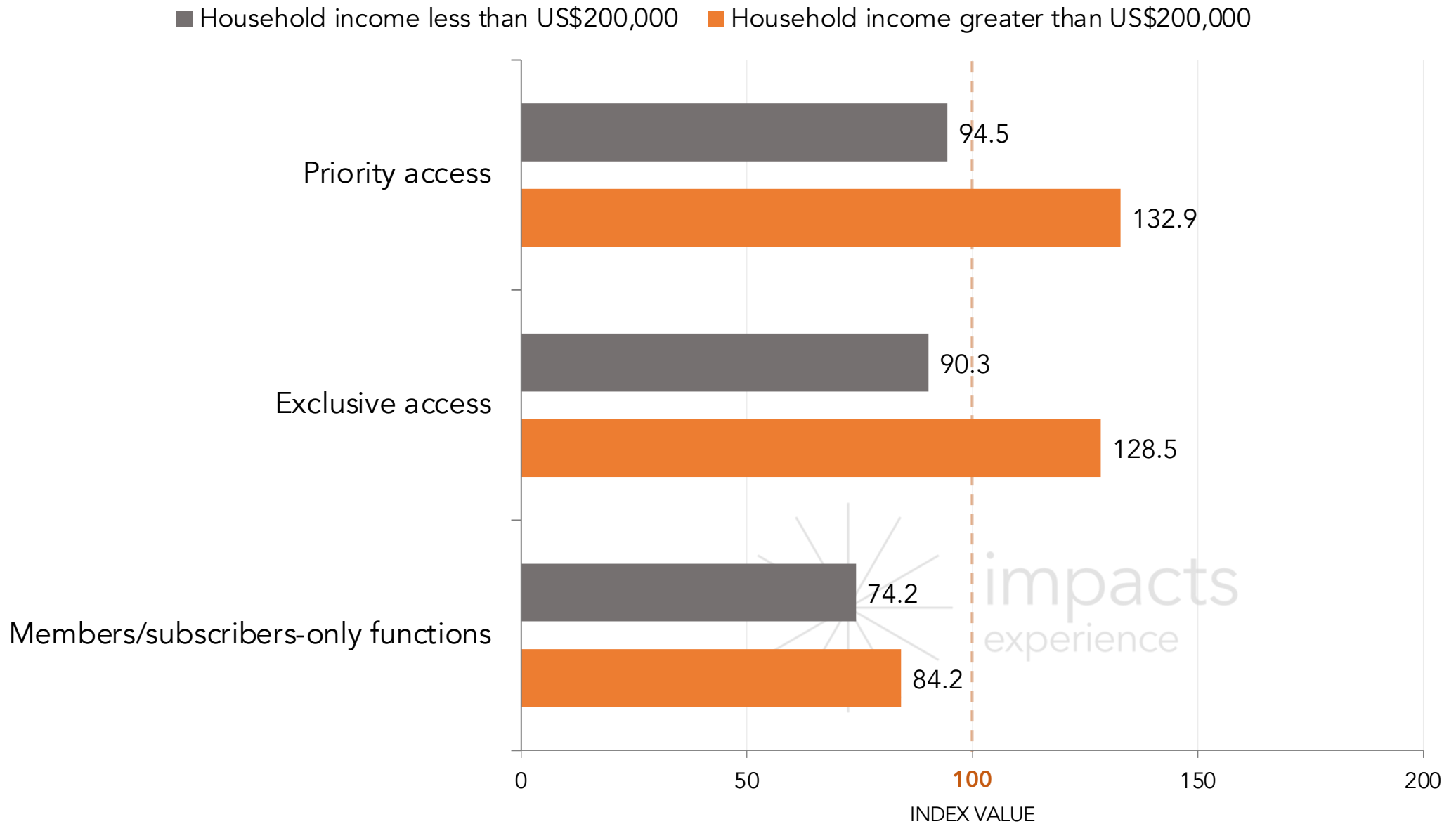


Households with income greater than \$200,000/year made up **35.9% of member households** in 2024.



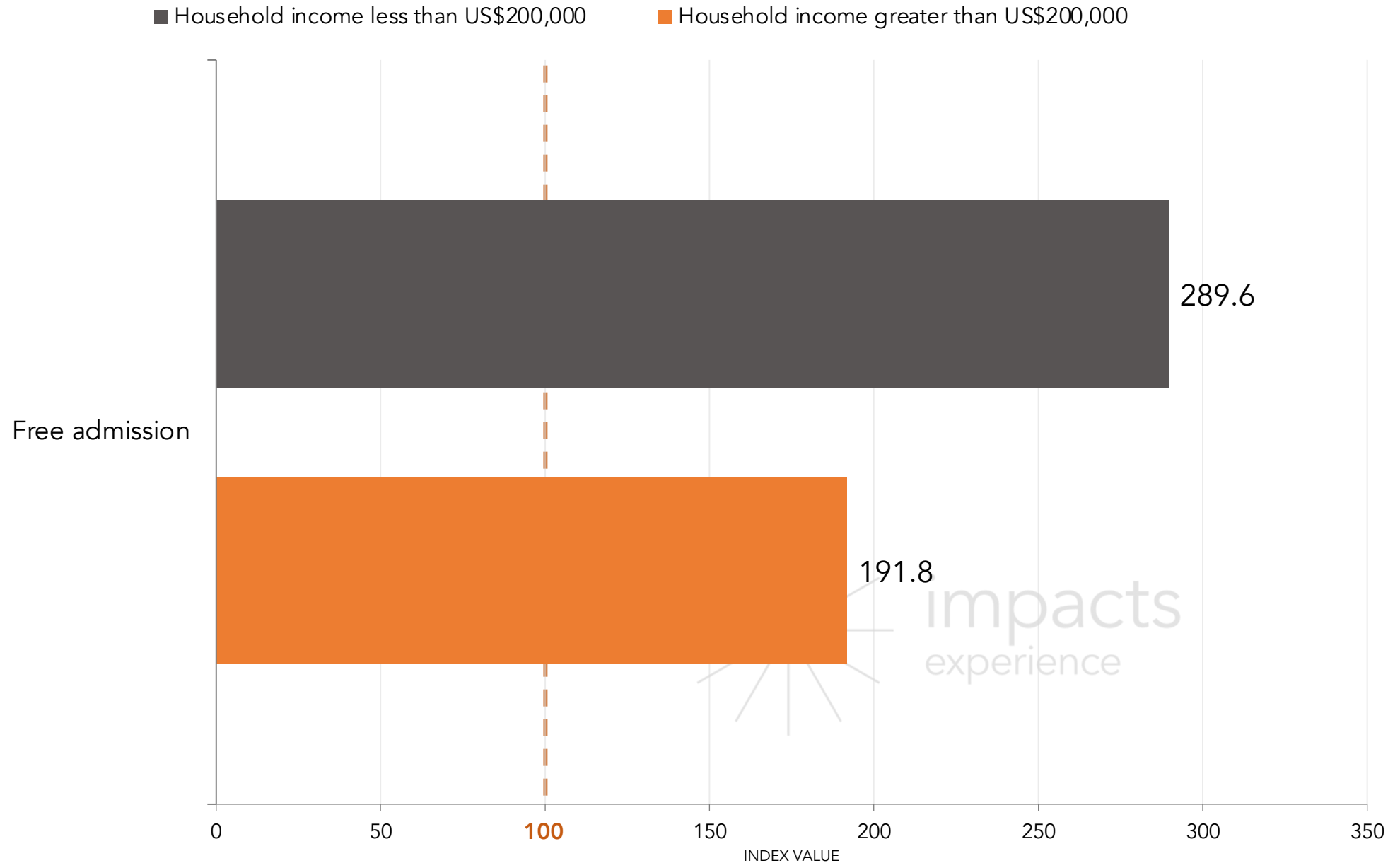
# What is the primary benefit of your membership?

Self-identified members to 81 organizations by annual household income

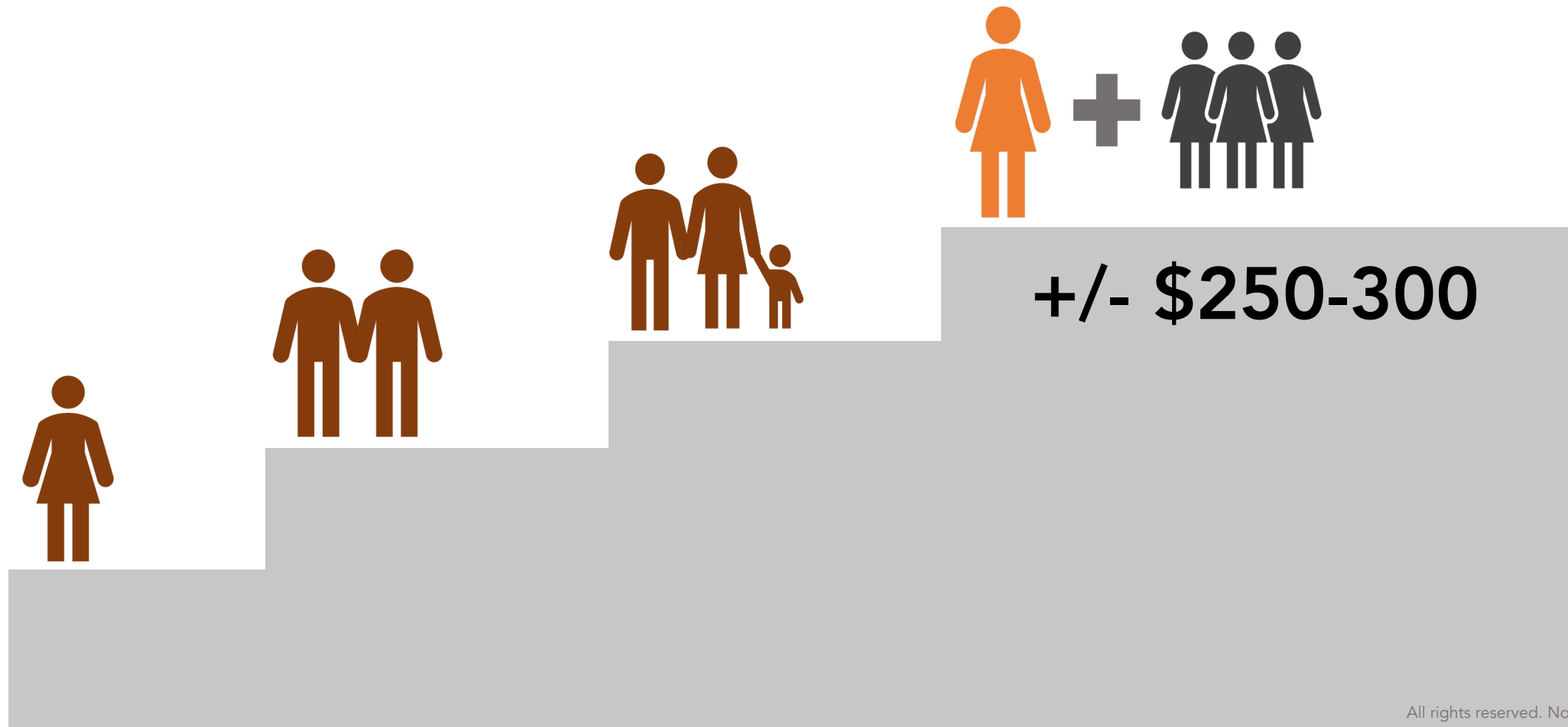


# What is the primary benefit of your membership?

Self-identified members to 81 organizations by annual household income



At what level does a **member** consider themselves to be primarily a **donor**?

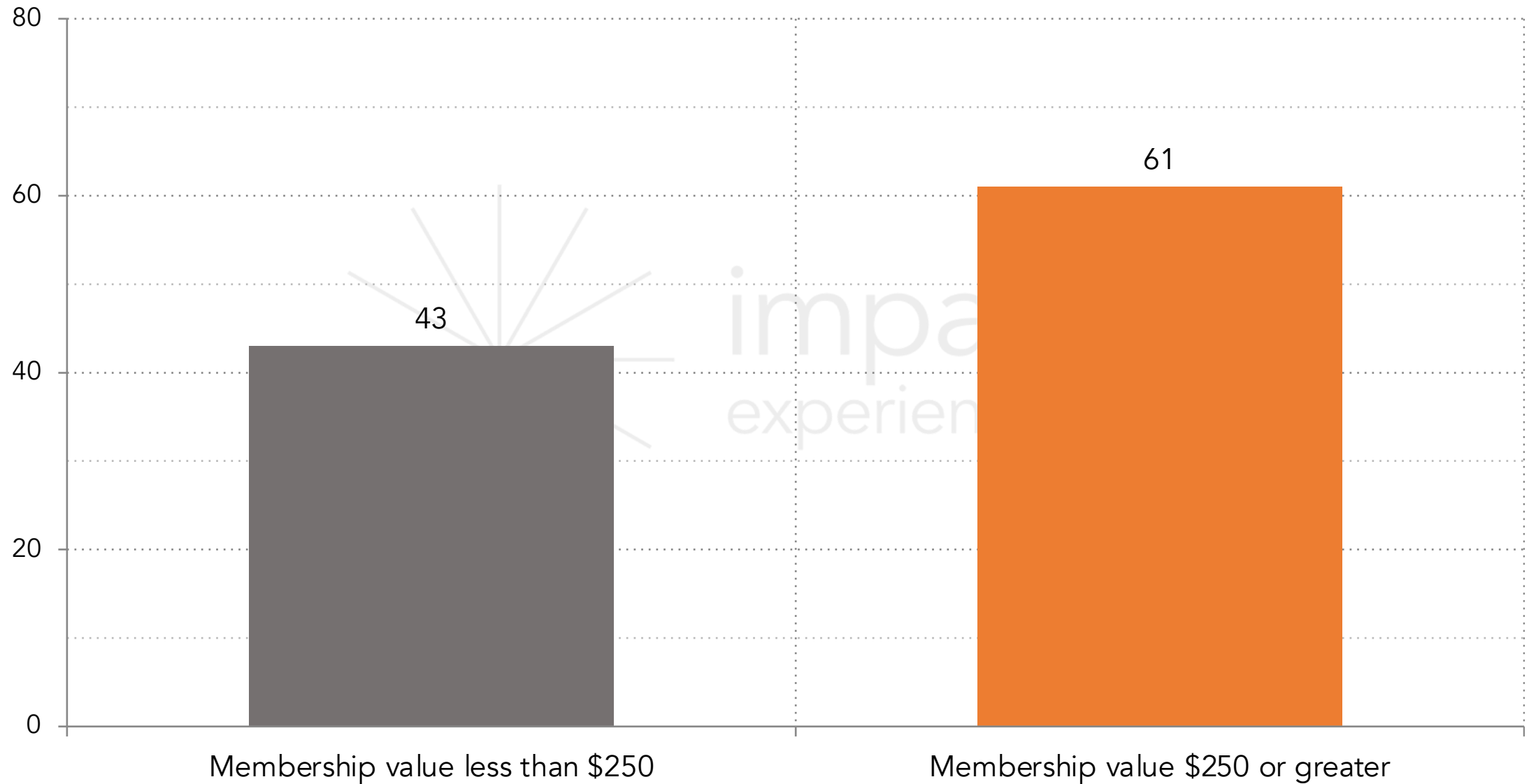


# Why do we **care especially** about these members?

- They are more likely to renew
- They are more likely to endorse the museum
- They are more likely to make an additional donation

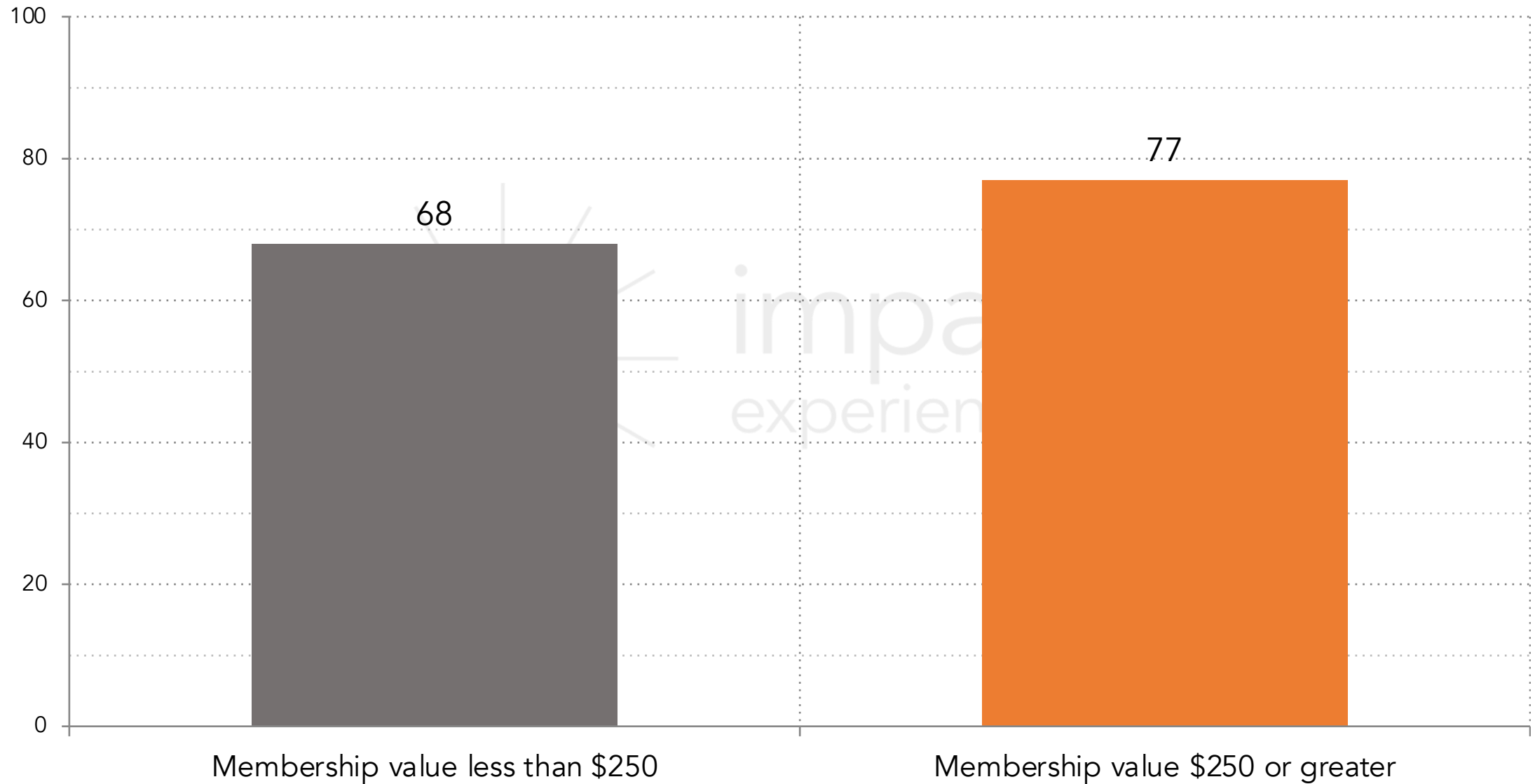
# Propensity to renew by annual membership value

Self-identified member, Temporal comparison, EOY 2024



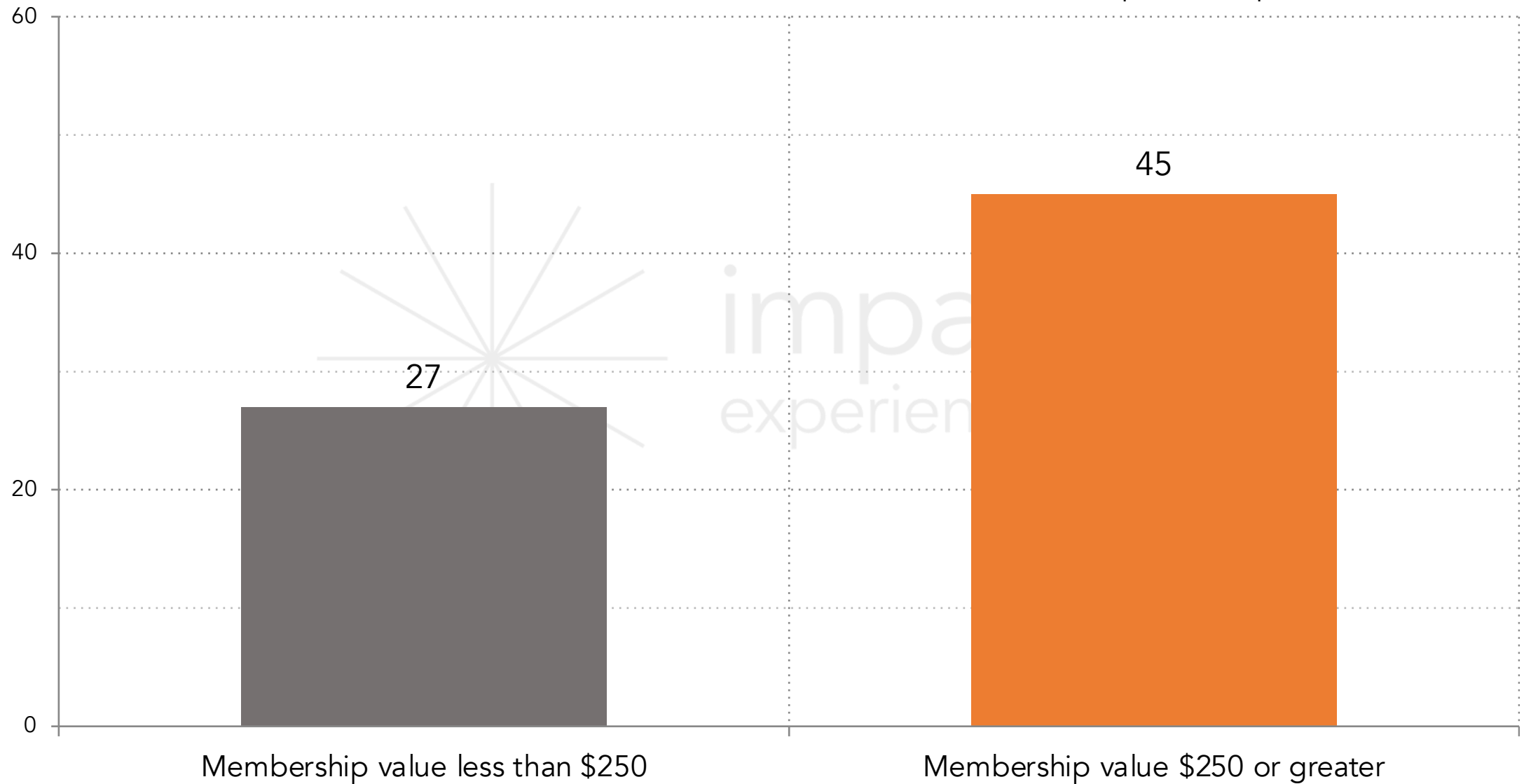
# Propensity to endorse the museum by annual membership value

Self-identified member, Temporal comparison, EOY 2024



# Propensity to make an additional donation within one year by annual membership value

Self-identified member, Temporal comparison, EOY 2024



What if we do not seriously  
consider **our exclusive  
access offerings** for these  
high-value members?



# Premium member dissatisfiers

Dissatisfying member-related experiences by descending rank  
US exhibit-based members with annual membership values of \$250 or greater

RANK	DESCRIPTION	EOY 2019 VALUE	EOY 2024 VALUE	PERCENT CHANGE
1	Limited/nonexistent special access for members (e.g., member hours, member entrance)	114.5	141.5	+23.6%



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3	Waiting in line/"delayed access" ("not being treated as 'special'")	119.6	143.1	+19.6%

Exclusive access

Members-only  
functions

Our members are **special  
to us** – and we tell them so.

A worthy goal is to **make  
them feel** as special as they  
are to our museums.



# Membership benefit **areas of growth**

*Connection to your museum's....*



# What are the three best things that you can do to support the mission of the ... ?

US cultural exhibit-based high-propensity visitors, Lexical analysis by descending frequency of mention

DESCRIPTION	EOY 2019 VALUE	EOY 2024 VALUE	PERCENT CHANGE
Donate to the organization	147.1	150.2	+2.1%

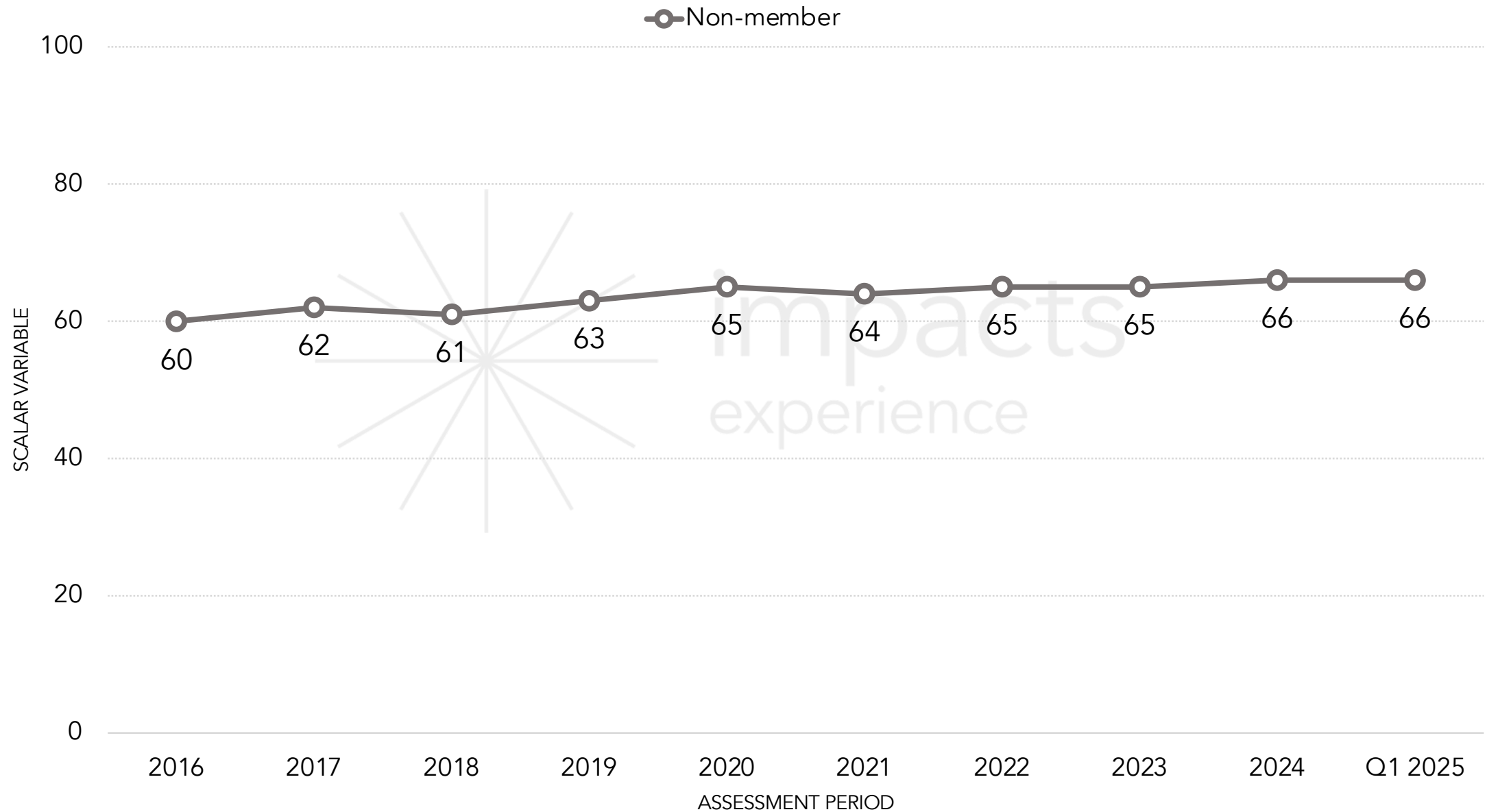
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# Public perception as mission-driven organization

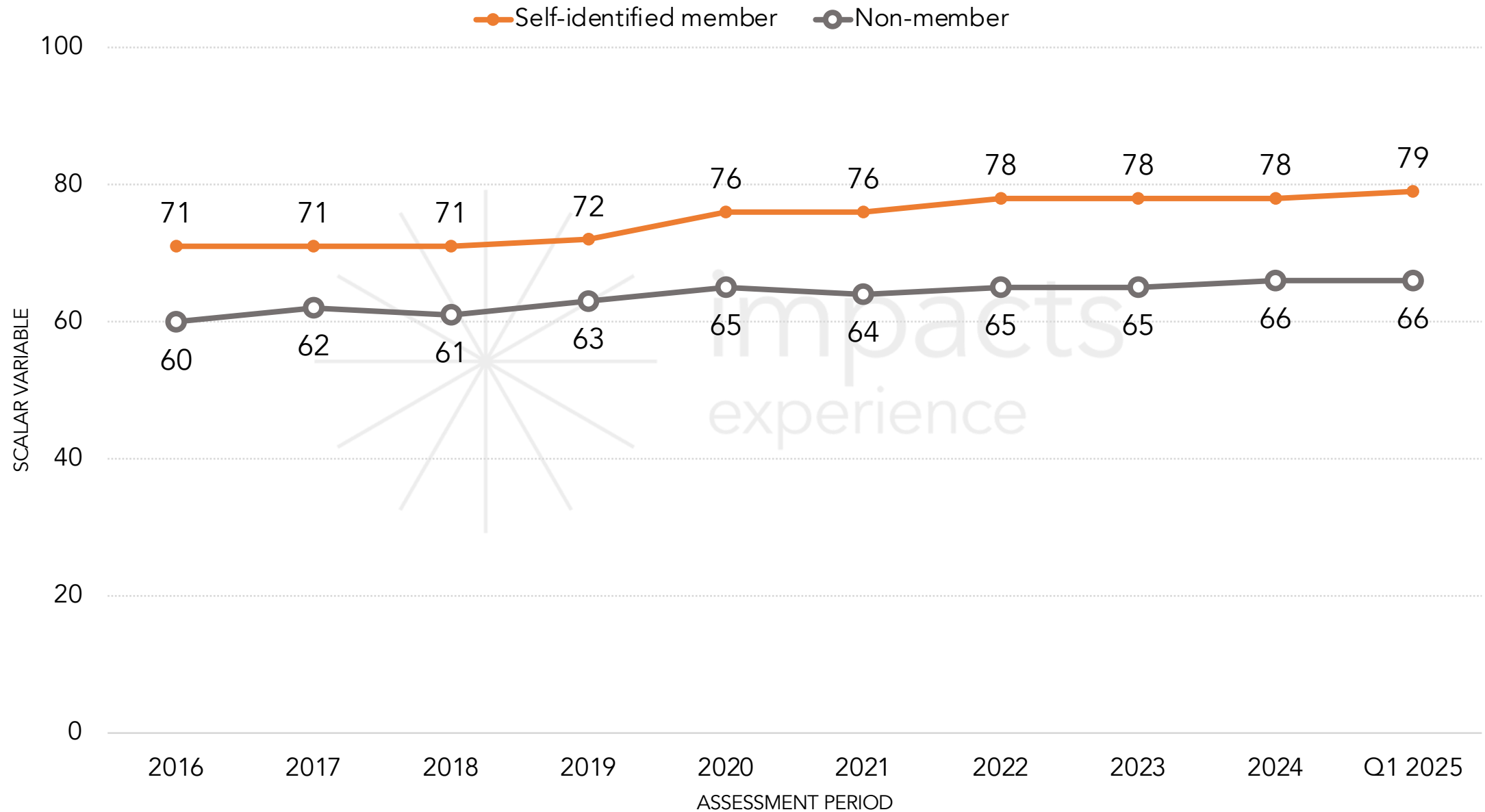
US exhibit-based organization trend analysis





# Public perception as mission-driven organization

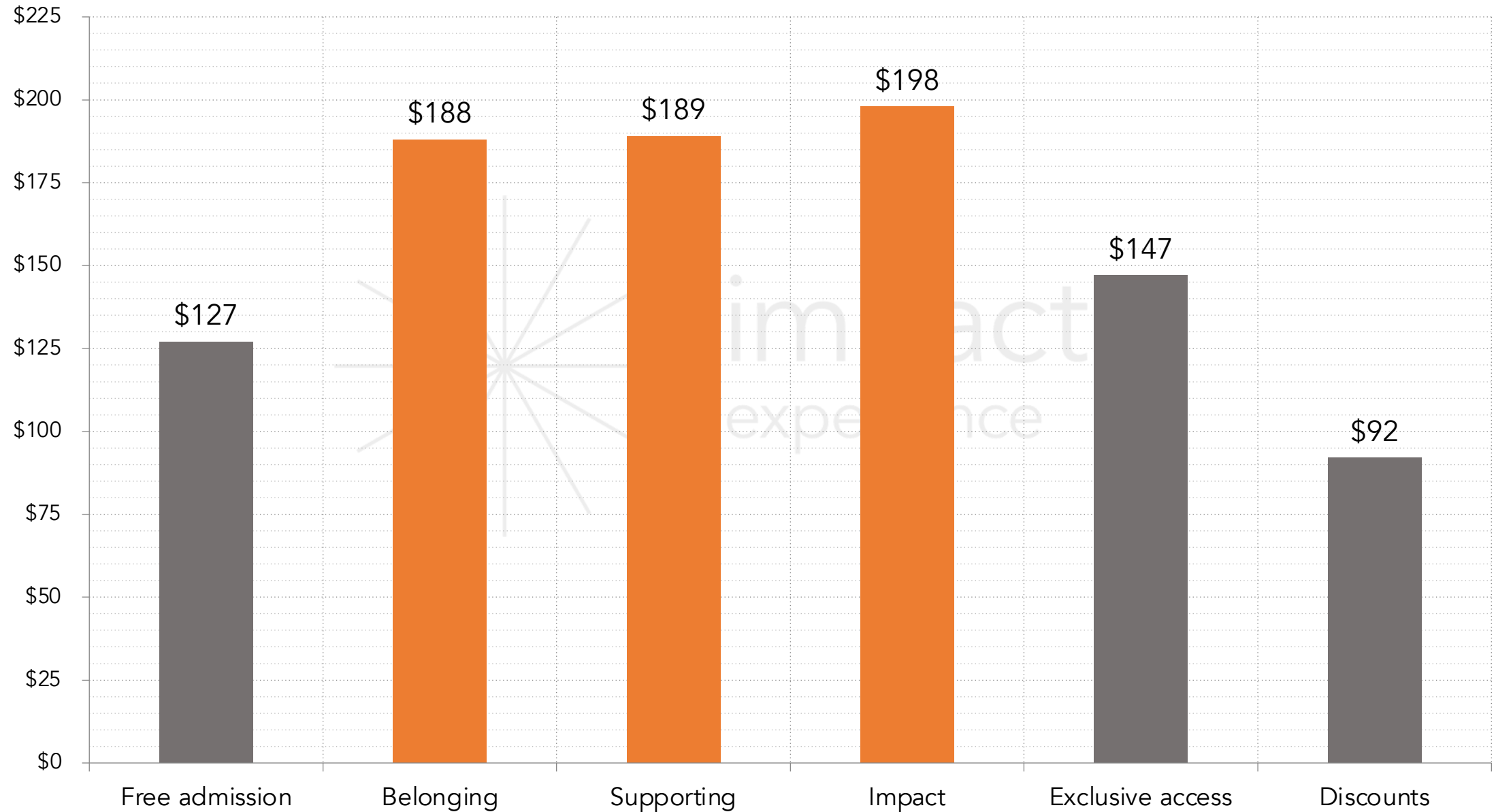
US exhibit-based organization trend analysis



**Mission-motivated** members are  
among our most valuable members.

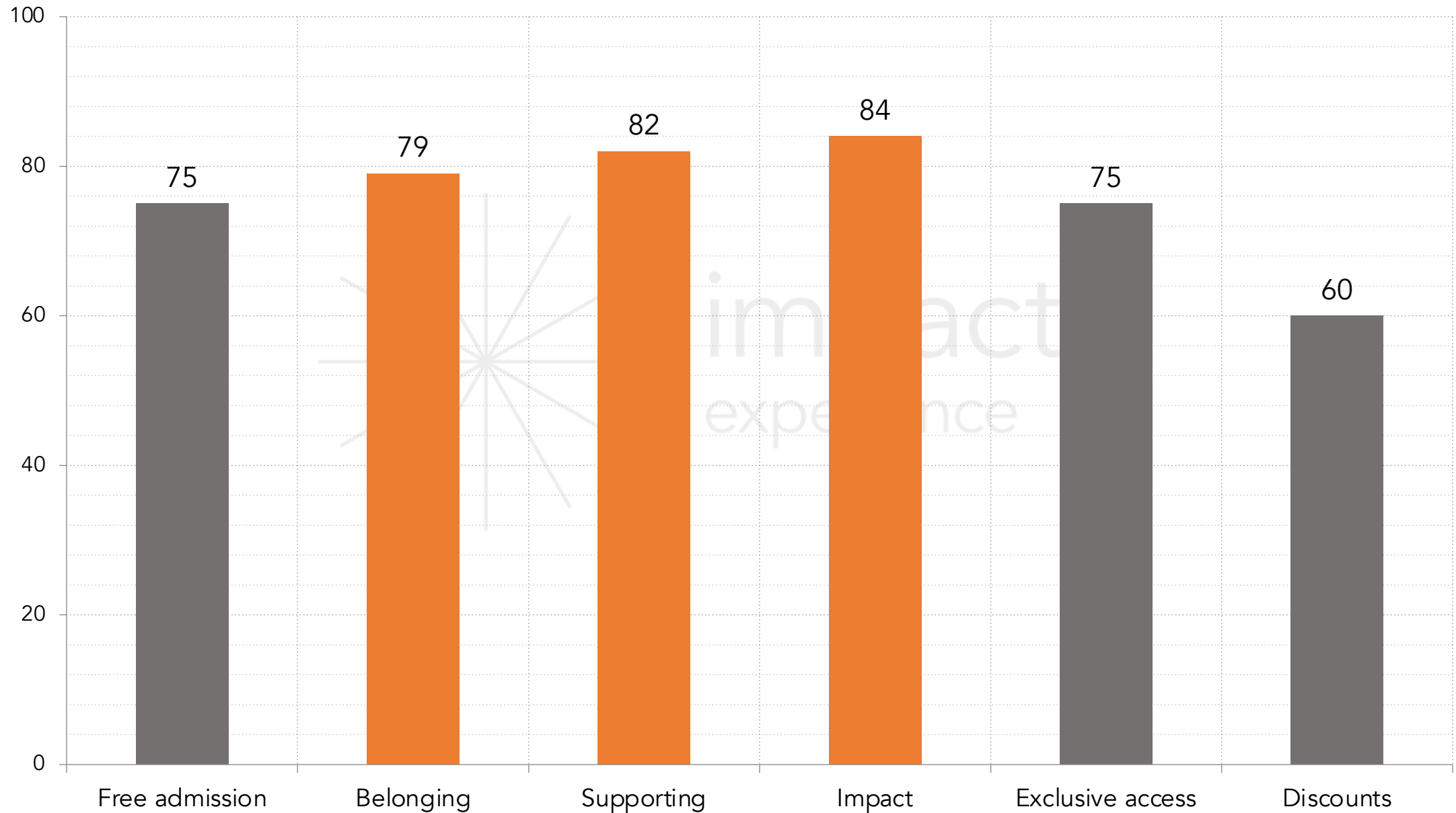
# Average annual membership cost by primary member benefit

Self-identified member, EOY 2024



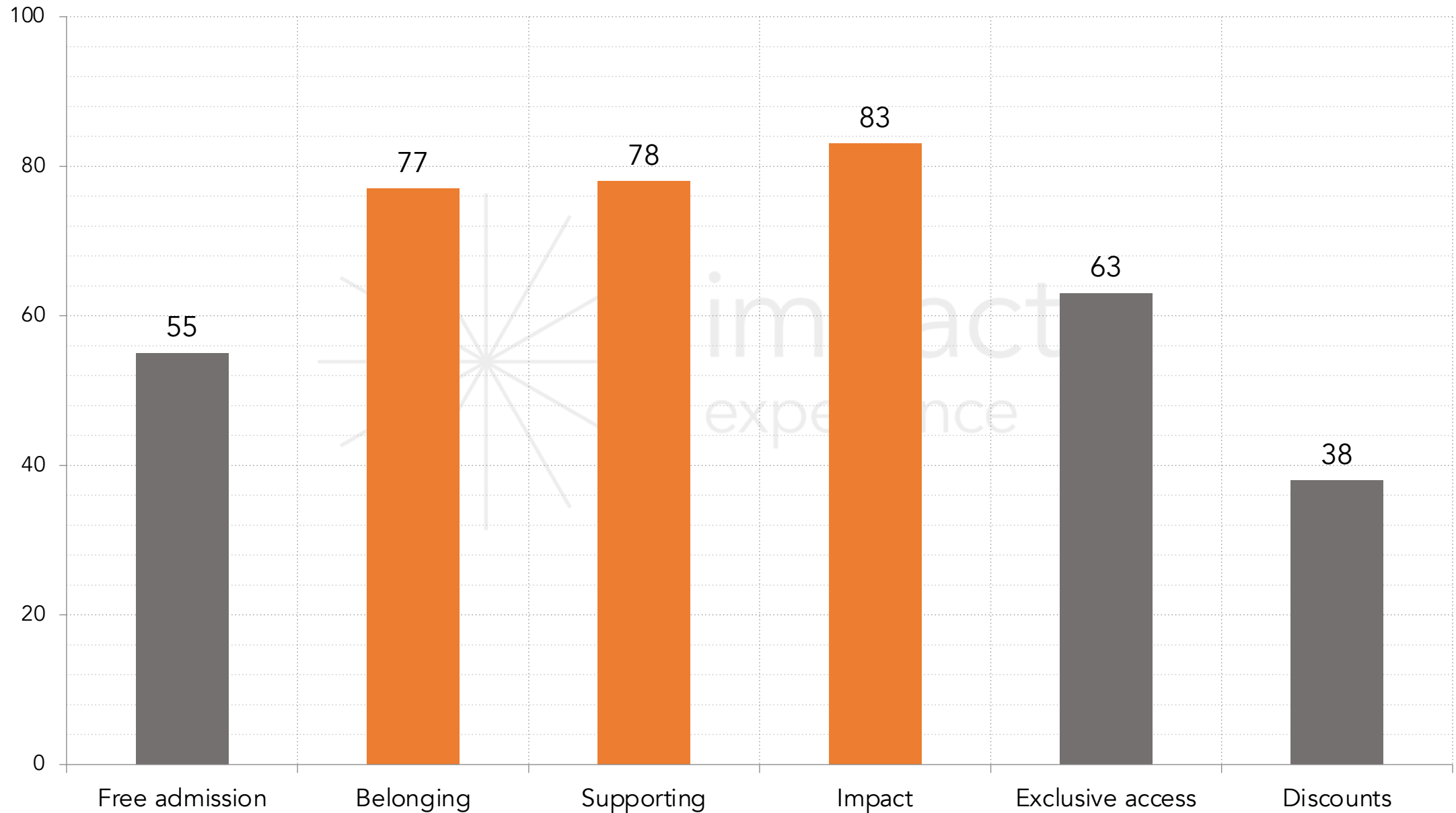
# Value for membership cost by primary member benefit

Self-identified member, EOY 2024



# Propensity to renew by primary member benefit

Self-identified member, EOY 2024



Supporting the  
organization

Belonging to the  
organization



These **primary benefits** are becoming **inextricably linked** to our museums' brands as mission-driven organizations.

# Membership benefit **areas of growth**

*Connection to your museum's....*



# Personal Facilitated Experiences (PFEs)

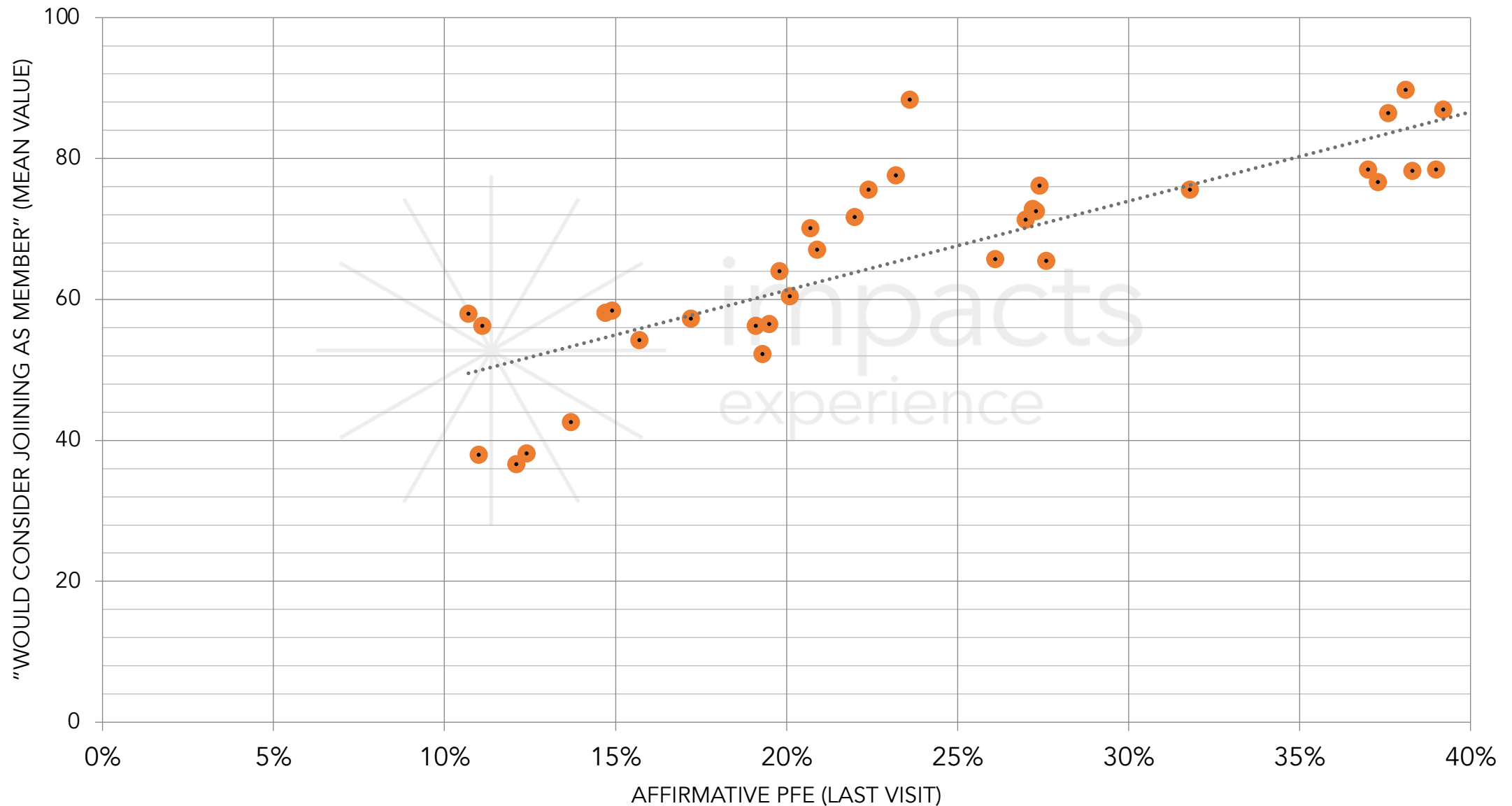
A PFE is a **one-to-one** or **one-to-few** interaction between a staff member or volunteer and an individual, couple, or small family.





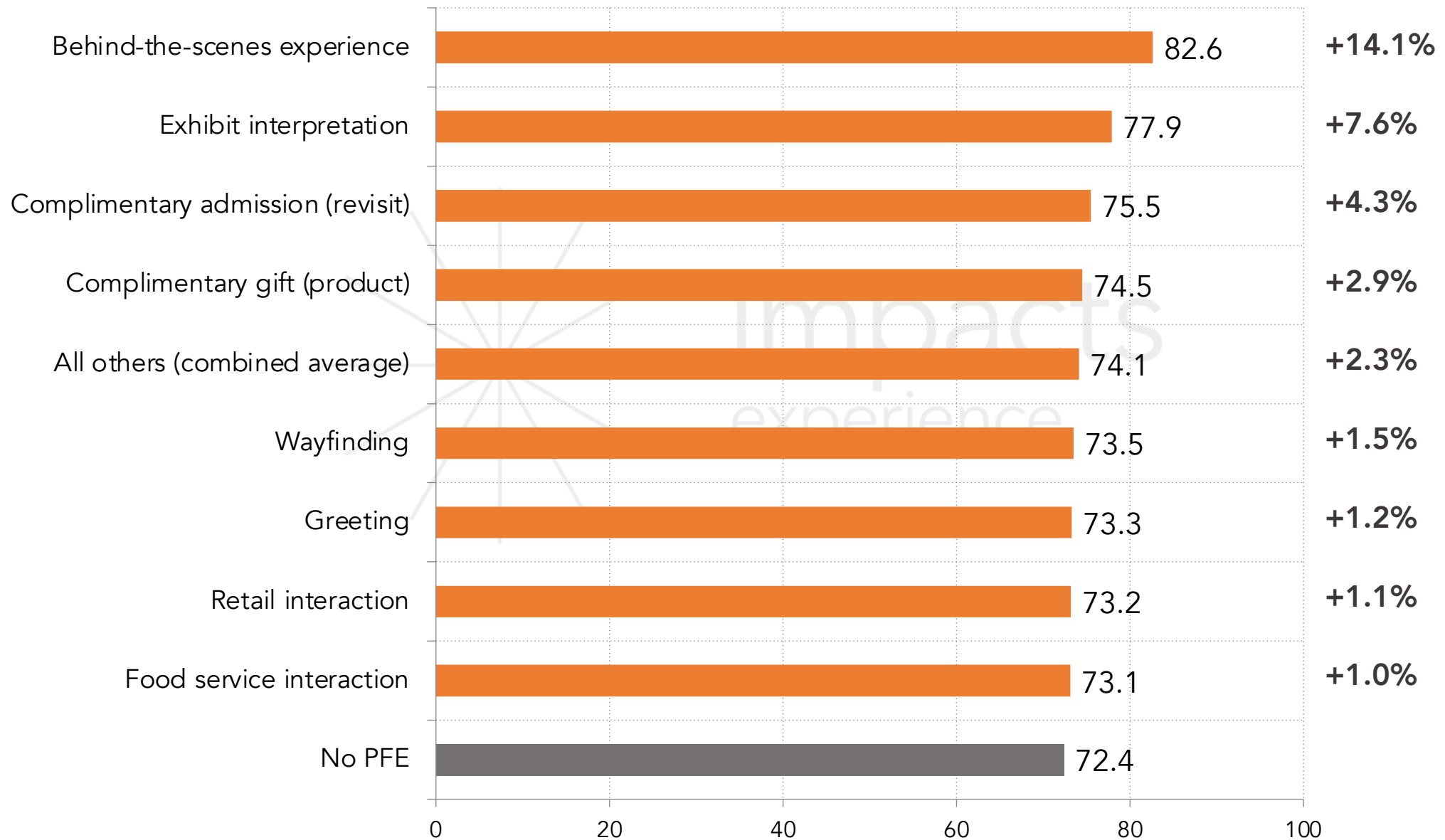
# Bivariate relationship analysis

Willingness to consider joining as member relative to Personal Facilitated Experience (PFE) during last visit  
US museums, Four-year analysis (2021-2024)



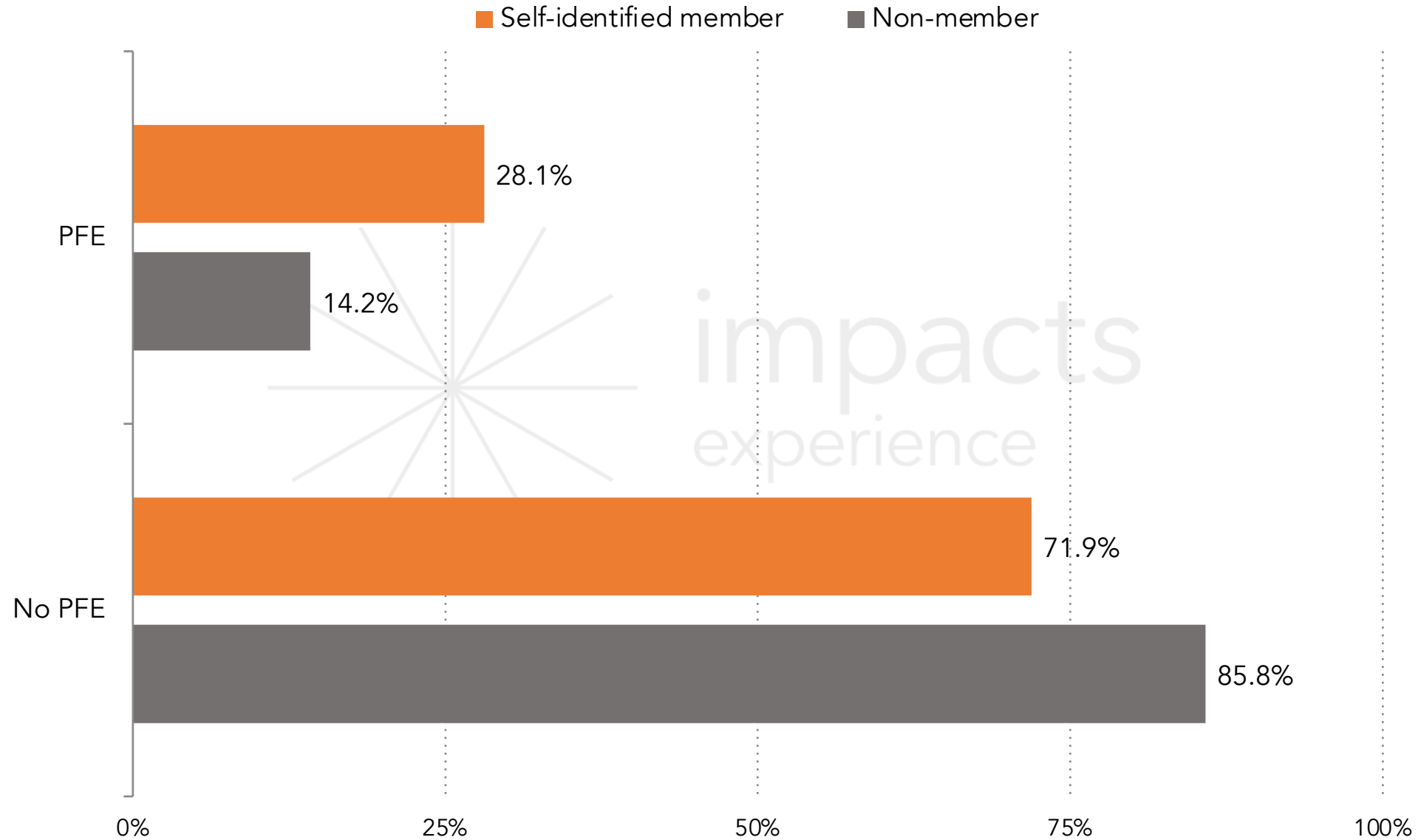
# Overall satisfaction by primary PFE descriptor

44 "large" US exhibit-based visitor-serving organizations, EOY 2024



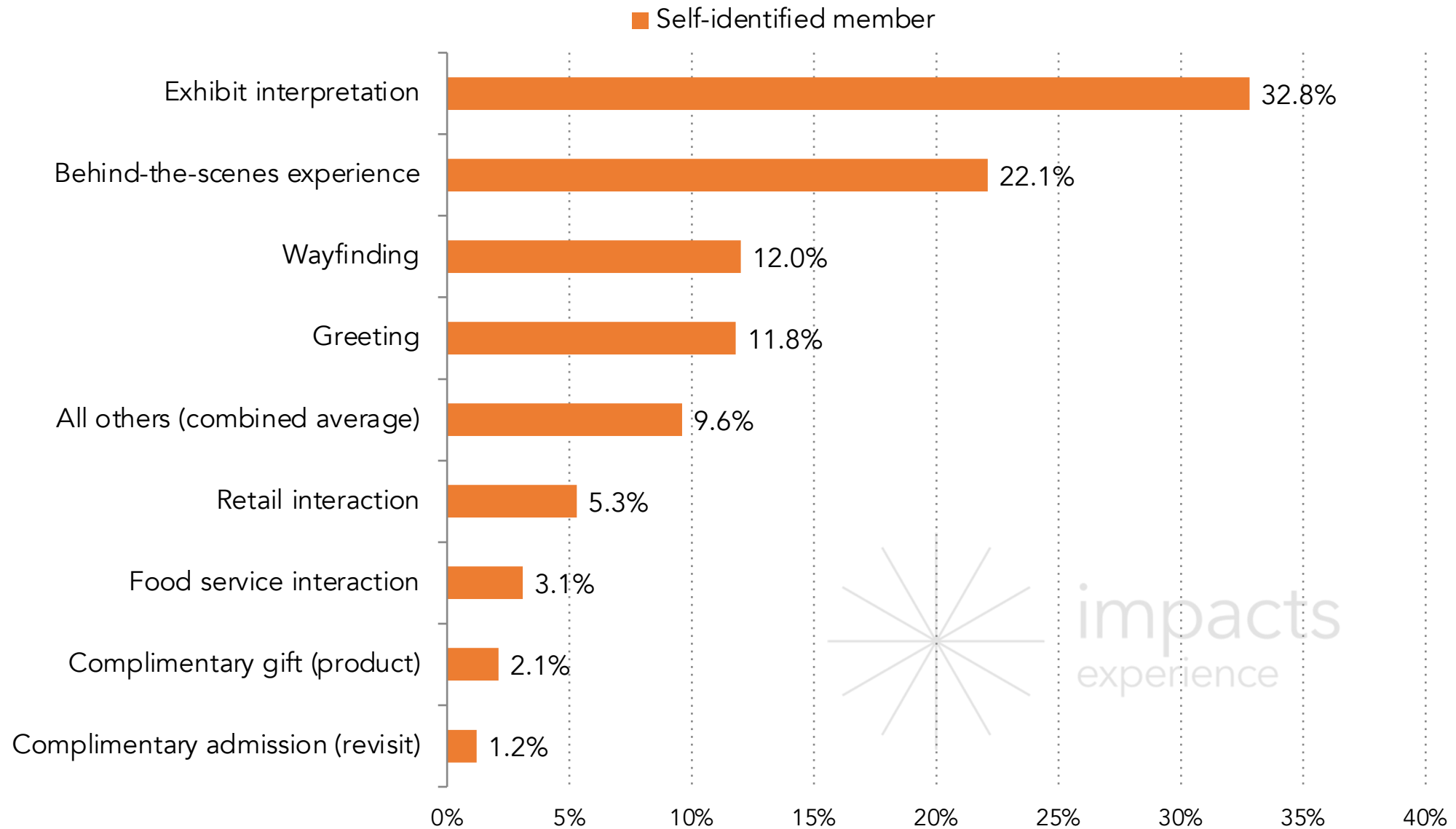
# Primary Personal Facilitated Experience (PFE) descriptor recall

Percent recent visitors indicating primary PFE by type to 29 "large" exhibit-based organizations, EOY 2024



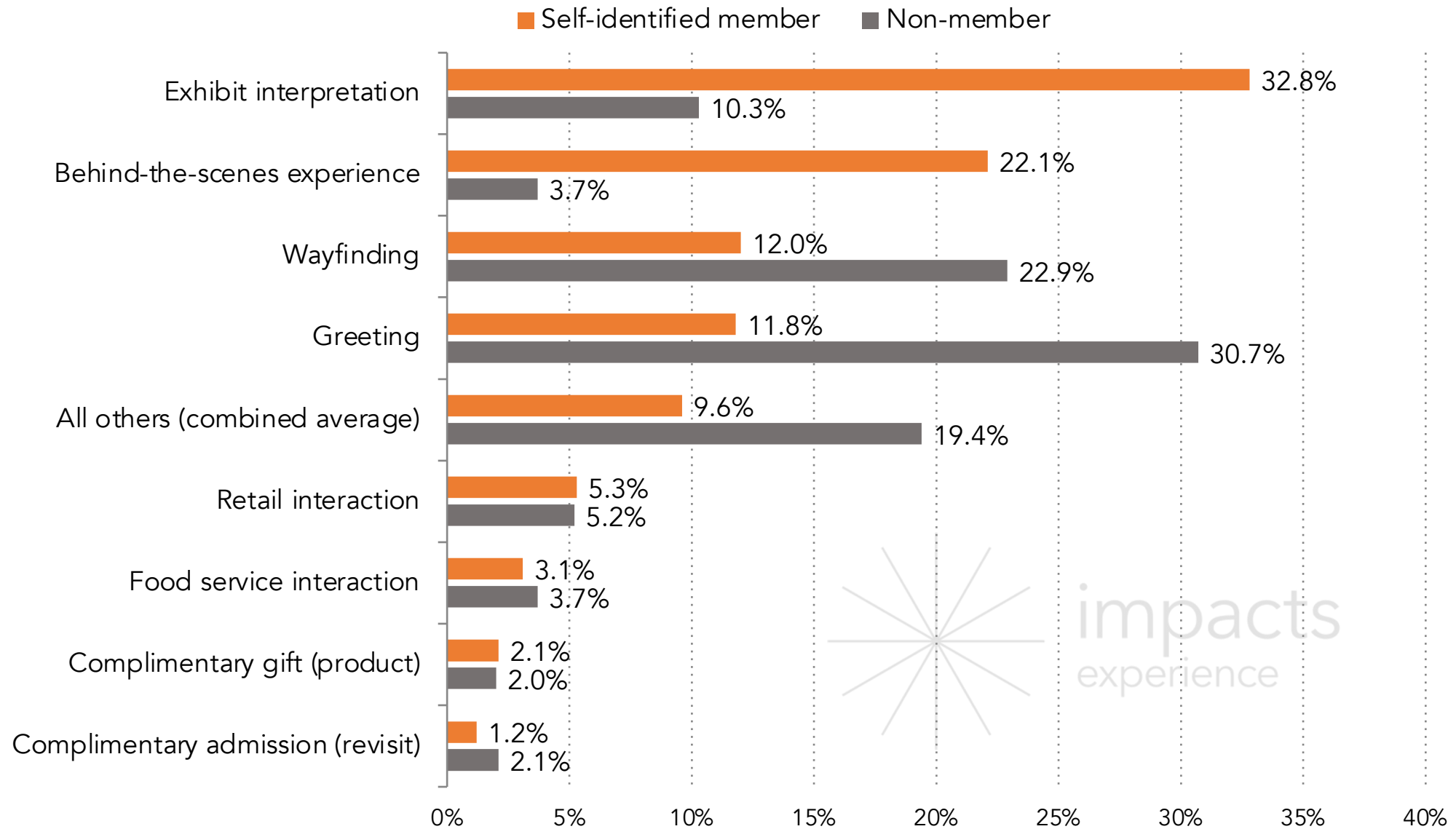
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Percent recent visitors indicating primary PFE by type, 29 US "large" exhibit-based visitor-serving organizations, EOY 2024



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Percent recent visitors indicating primary PFE by type, 29 US "large" exhibit-based visitor-serving organizations, EOY 2024



Access to  
leadership

Access to topic  
experts

**Your people** matter  
to your members.



# Membership benefit **areas of growth**

*Connection to your museum's....*





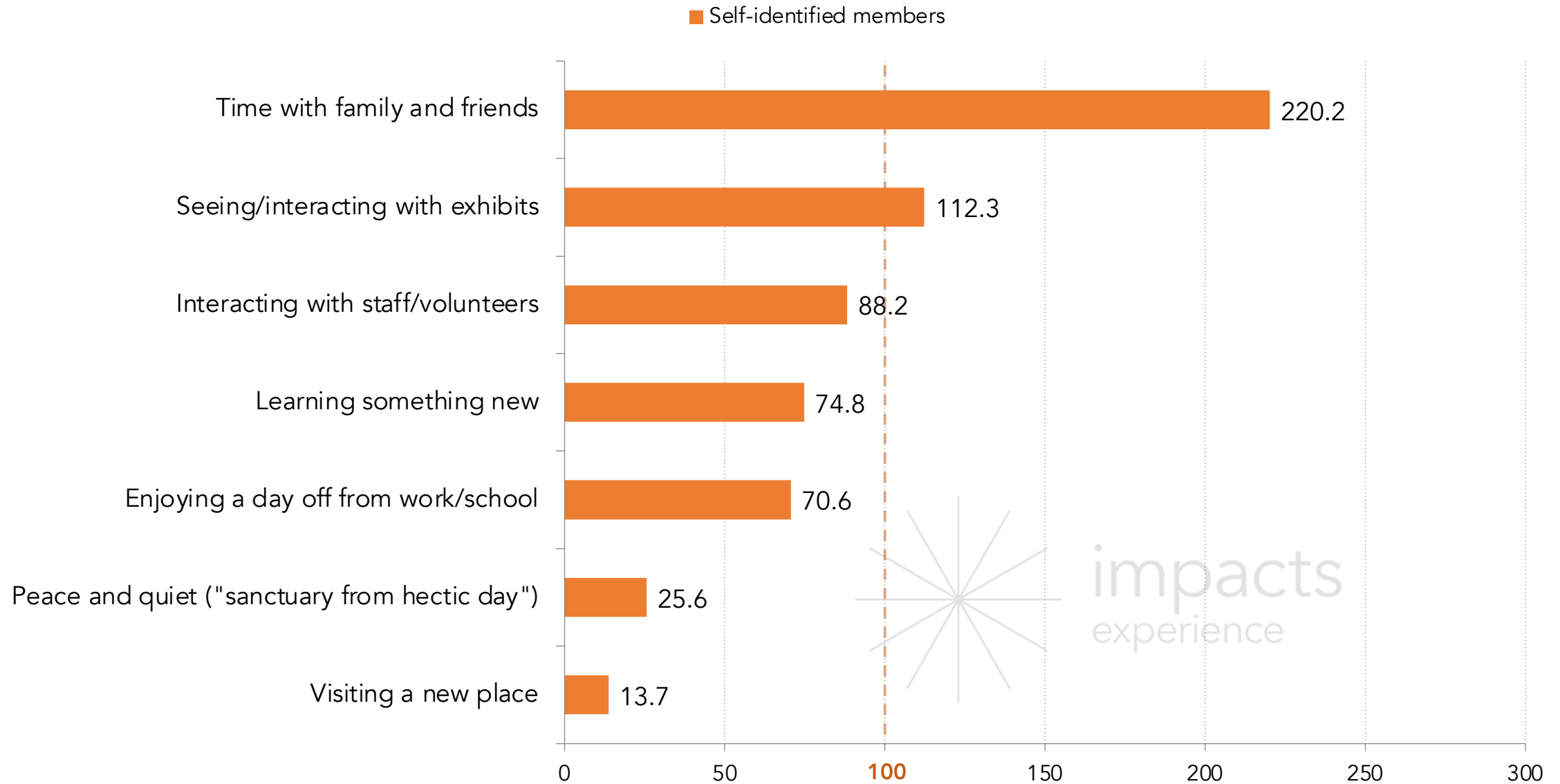






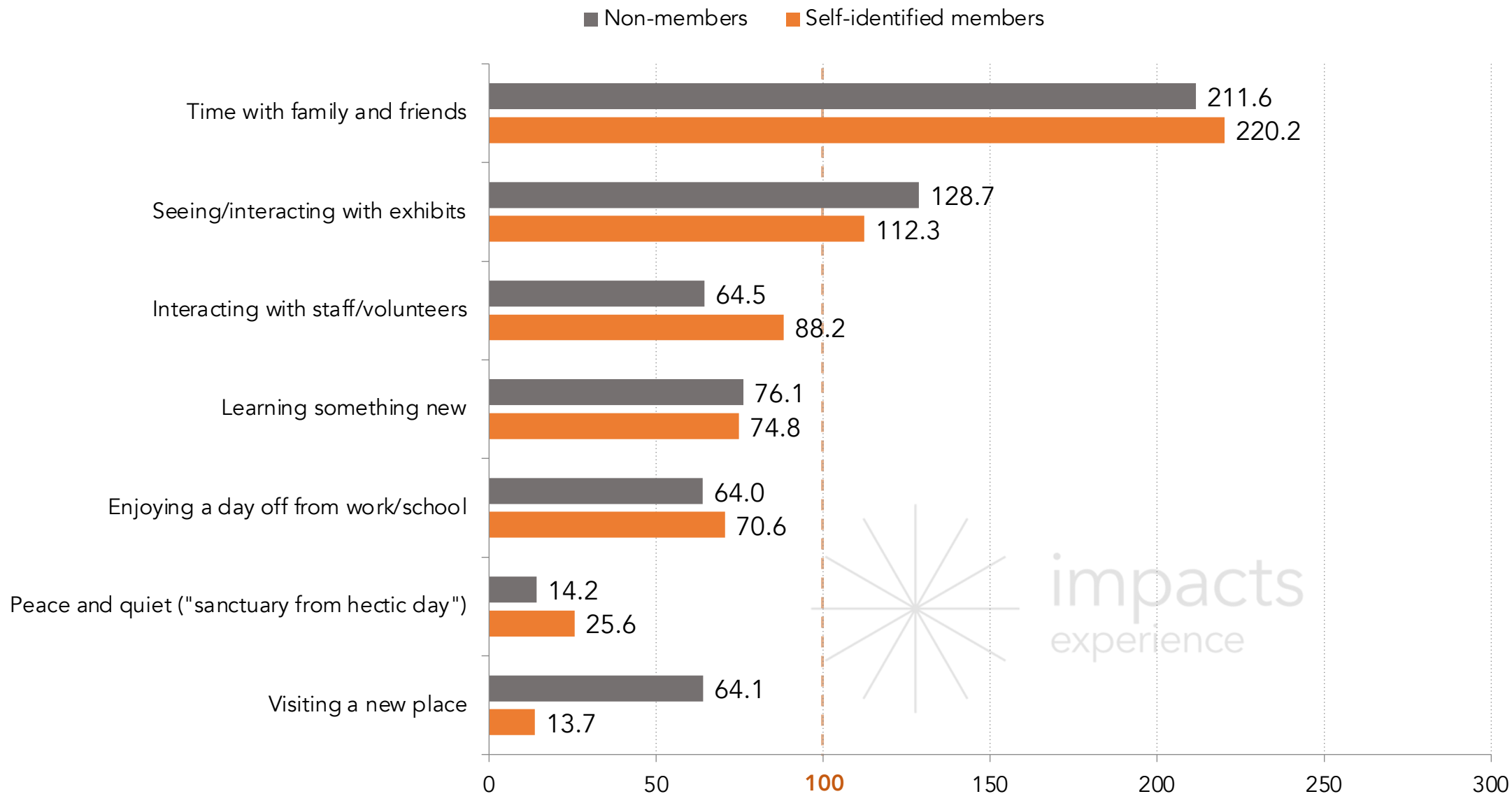
# What is the best thing about a visit to the museum?

Recent adult visitors to the exhibit-based organization, Q1 2025, Members vs. non-members



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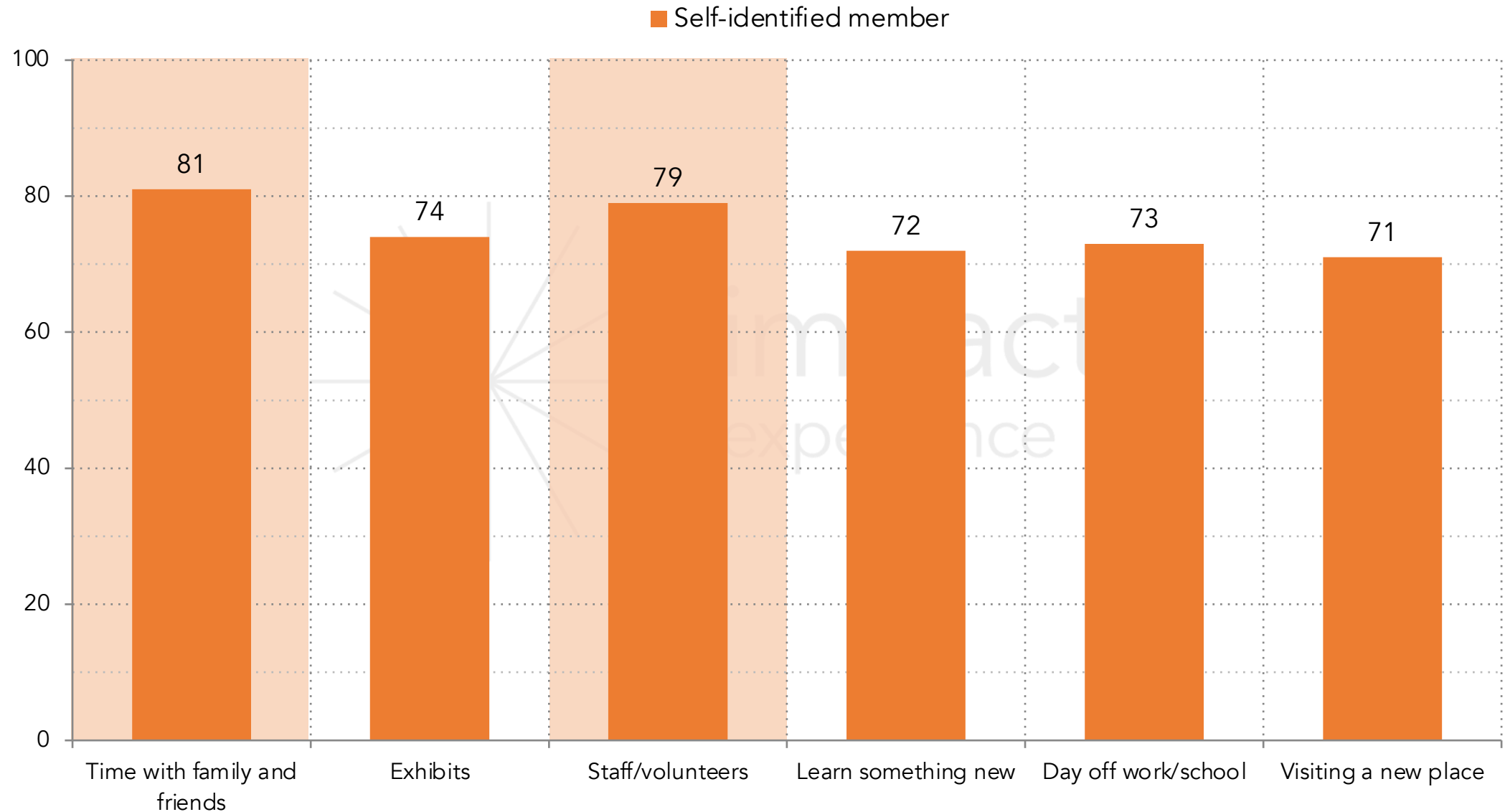


You are facilitators of  
**shared experiences.**



# Overall satisfaction by best visit attribute

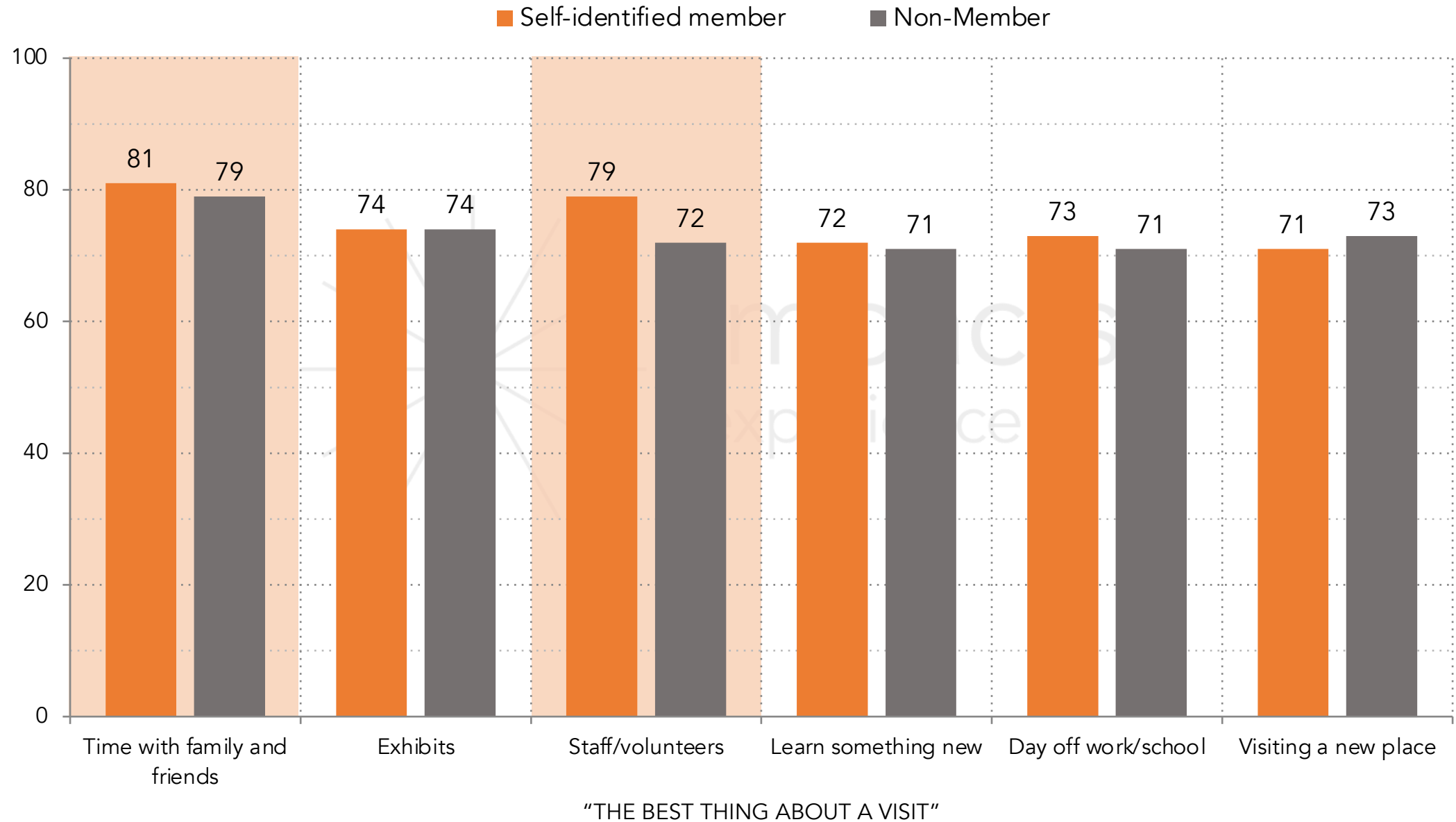
Recent adult visitors to the exhibit-based organization, Q1 2025



"THE BEST THING ABOUT A VISIT"

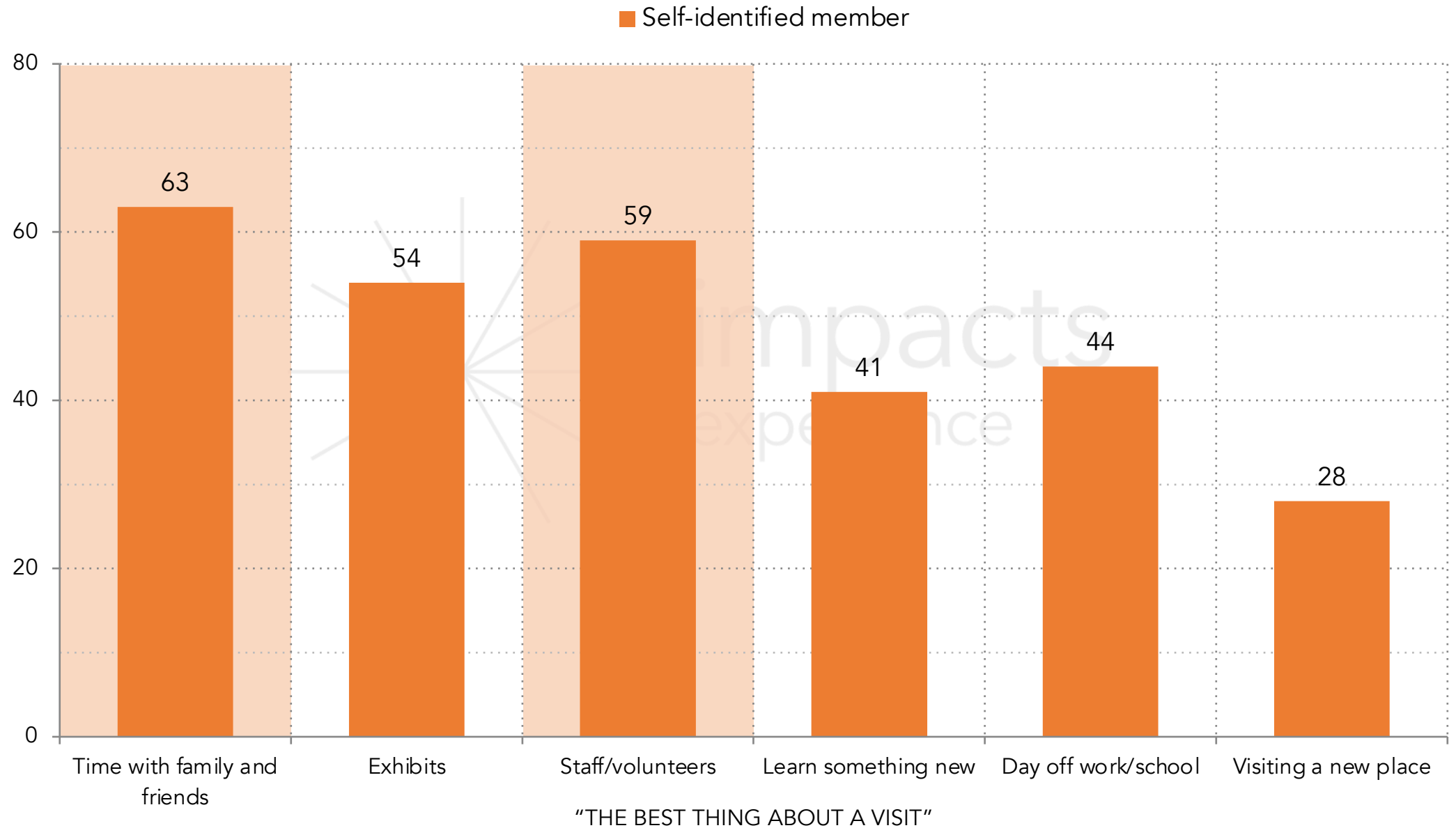
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# Intent to revisit within one year by best visit attribute

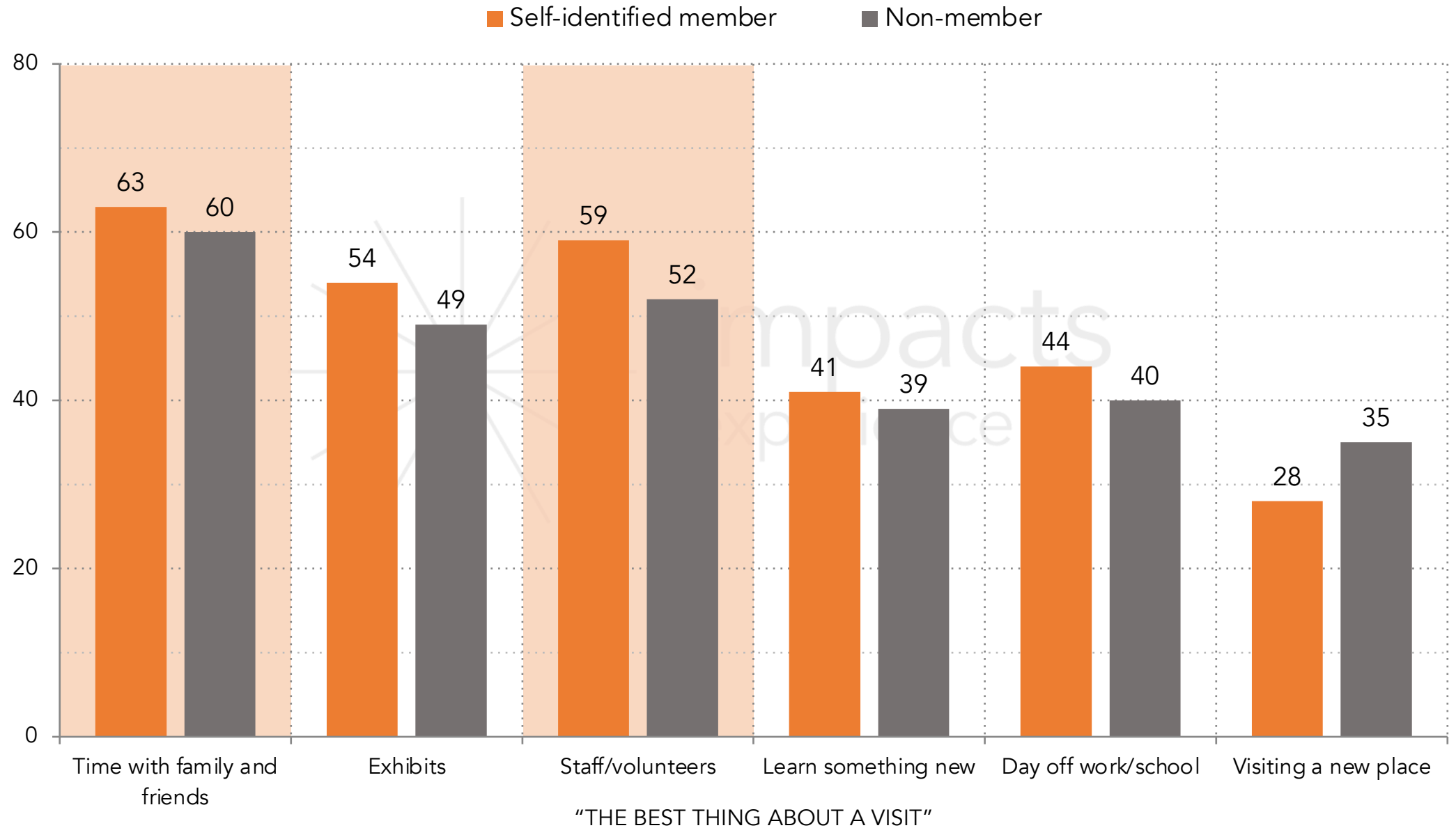
Recent adult visitors to the exhibit-based organization, Q1 2025





# Intent to revisit within one year by best visit attribute

Recent adult visitors to the exhibit-based organization, Q1 2025







You don't just **tell stories.**  
You ***make*** stories.

# What are the three best things that you can do to support the mission of the ... ?

US cultural exhibit-based high-propensity visitors, Lexical analysis by descending frequency of mention

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4	Encourage others to visit the organization	112.3	125.9	+12.1%

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4	Encourage others to visit the organization	112.3	125.9	+12.1%
5	Bring family and friends to visit the organization	90.2	100.5	+11.4%

You are facilitators of **shared experiences** – and members want you to **help them connect with others** around your important work.







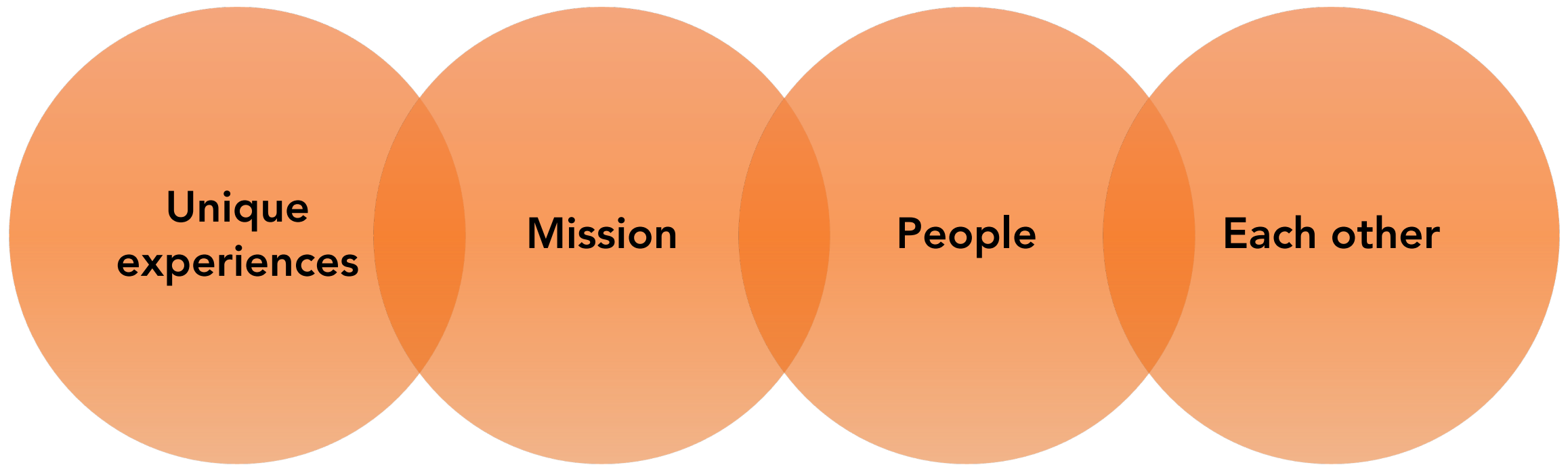








Fierce **membership innovation**  
is in areas of **connection**.



# “How would you describe the **[exhibit-based organization]** to a friend?”

US adults, lexical analysis by descending frequency of mention

NON-MEMBERS	RANK
Good place to take kids	1
Good place to visit	2
Good place to take visitors (friends and family)	3
Good for families	4
Fun (“entertaining”)	5
Good place to go on a date	6
Good value	7
Crowded	8
Good for school/class trips	9
Educational	10

# “How would you describe the **[exhibit-based organization]** to a friend?”

US adults, lexical analysis by descending frequency of mention

NON-MEMBERS	RANK	SELF-IDENTIFIED MEMBERS
Good place to take kids	1	Must-see
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Fun (“entertaining”)	5	Worth the time and money
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Good place to go on a date	6	"Source of pride"
Good value	7	
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Good place to go on a date	6	"Source of pride"
Good value	7	Important
Crowded	8	Community/civic asset ("a treasure")
Good for school/class trips	9	
Educational	10	

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Good place to go on a date	6	“Source of pride”
Good value	7	Important
Crowded	8	Community/civic asset (“a treasure”)
Good for school/class trips	9	“One of the best”
Educational	10	

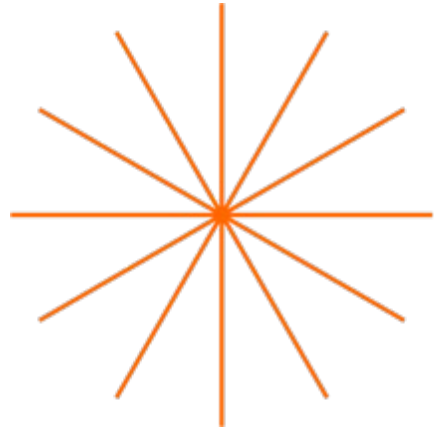
# "How would you describe the **[exhibit-based organization]** to a friend?"

US adults, lexical analysis by descending frequency of mention

NON-MEMBERS	RANK	SELF-IDENTIFIED MEMBERS
Good place to take kids	1	Must-see
Good place to visit	2	Fun ("entertaining")
Good place to take visitors (friends and family)	3	A great resource
Good for families	4	Great for families
Fun ("entertaining")	5	Worth the time and money
Good place to go on a date	6	"Source of pride"
Good value	7	Important
Crowded	8	Community/civic asset ("a treasure")
Good for school/class trips	9	"One of the best"
Educational	10	Good place to take visitors (friends and family)



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