

Our Story: The NSW Burns Community in Transition

A comprehensive analysis of the 2025 NSW Burns Community Survey

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Executive Summary

This document presents the findings from the most comprehensive consultation in NSW Burner history; capturing the voices of 518 community members across New South Wales and beyond. The survey reveals a mature, experienced community ready to build sustainable events that serve both seasoned participants and newcomers seeking authentic connection.

Our community is predominantly middle-aged (73% aged 35-54) with deep cultural knowledge (83% have attended multiple events) and a remarkably high proportion of neurodivergent members (58% identify as or are exploring neurodivergence). We are geographically concentrated in Sydney and Newcastle but draw participants from across Australia, creating a strong foundation for regional events.

The data reveals abundant capacity for growth: over 425 people ready to volunteer, 180 prepared for leadership roles, and widespread agreement on core values including radical inclusion, accessibility, and sustainable practices. This is not a community struggling to find direction—it is one with clear vision, proven capability, and the experience to turn aspirations into reality.

Collective Vision Statement

We are 500 passionate souls, primarily from Sydney and Newcastle, with 73% aged 35-54 and over half neurodivergent. We come for community and connection (76%), self-expression and creativity (62%), and transformative art and music (48%). While 54% feel deeply connected, nearly a third feel on the edges—reminding us that true inclusion requires intentional effort.

We envision a thriving NSW Burner ecosystem with year-round connection: one flagship regional burn scaling toward 1,500 participants, smaller seasonal gatherings of 400-800 people, quarterly micro-burns, and monthly social meetups. We commit to spaces where families, neurodivergent individuals, seasoned burners, and curious newcomers all belong.

Collective Capabilities

When 518 community members shared their skills, a picture of abundance emerged. We have over 425 people ready to volunteer, 180 prepared for leadership roles, and 95 offering specialist resources like workshop spaces and equipment. Nearly 300 have attended five or more burns, carrying deep cultural knowledge that ensures continuity and authenticity.

Our volunteers cover every essential area—from Rangers and Greeters to artists and Leave No Trace specialists. Leaders are willing to commit reasonable hours: 1-4 weekly for Team Leads, 4-8 for Department Captains, 3-5 for strategic roles. We prefer clear roles, proper training, and cooler-month events that work for both fire safety and volunteer energy.

"The numbers tell a story of abundance, not scarcity. We have the capacity, skills, and most importantly, the willingness to build something extraordinary together."

Community Trajectory Forecast

When 425 people express willingness to volunteer, 180 are ready for leadership roles, and 300 experienced burners share a clear collective vision, certain outcomes become predictable.

The Foundation Phase (2025-26): The community will likely begin with a 400-500 person regional burn in autumn/winter 2026. This scale perfectly matches demonstrated capacity while enabling sacred effigy burns and the desired ticket range (\$250-\$400). Leadership structures will naturally emerge around healing past conflicts and establishing transparent processes.

The Growth Phase (Years 2-3): Evidence suggests events will likely scale to 800-1,000, then 1,200 participants as confidence builds. Additional smaller gatherings will continue or new ones will emerge to serve the 38% who prefer a mixed model and 28% who favour intimate experiences. Quarterly art builds and mentorship networks will develop as the community seeks year-round connection.

The Maturation Phase (Years 4-5): We can expect the community will eventually achieve it's envisioned 1,500+ flagship burn supported by 3-4 smaller events annually. Leadership rotation, artist grant programs, and comprehensive volunteer support systems will emerge as the community learns to sustain itself. Community-owned assets and interstate collaborations become natural next steps.

"This trajectory is powered by the community's demonstrated commitment to volunteer joy over burnout, financial accessibility, balanced governance, and inclusive growth. Given the experience, passion, and clarity of vision expressed by this community, this future is not just possible—it's probable."

How to Read This Report

This report is structured to mirror the survey questions that community members answered, allowing readers to navigate directly to topics of particular interest. Each section builds upon the previous one, creating a comprehensive picture of who we are and where we're heading.

For Community Members: You'll find validation of your experiences and insights into how your individual voice contributes to our collective direction.

For Organisers: You'll discover not just what the community wants, but proof that we have the skills, experience, and commitment to achieve it.

For Partners and Stakeholders: You'll see a mature, self-aware community ready for strategic collaboration.

The detailed findings support three key conclusions: we have a clear collective vision, abundant capabilities, and a predictable trajectory toward sustainable growth. Whether you read cover to cover or focus on specific sections, you'll encounter the same story—a community that knows itself and is ready to build the future it envisions together.

1. The Story We're Telling: Community Identity and Values

Why This Story Matters

In the wake of Burning Seed 2025's cancellation, the NSW Burner community found itself at a crossroads. What began as disappointment revealed itself to be an opportunity to pause, reflect, and intentionally design a future that honours both our past and our potential. This report is not merely a survey analysis; it is a community portrait painted with data, a story told through the statistics and authentic voices of 518 community members.

The Independent Burners Analytics Group (I-BAG) emerged from this moment, formed by passionate volunteers who believe in the power of collective wisdom. Our independence is philosophical: we operate to serve the community's interests, believing that communities thrive when they understand themselves clearly and ground decisions in evidence.

"This report frames findings as insights and observations, not problems to be solved, recognising that the community itself must chart its path forward."

The NSW Burns community is a highly connected but stressed ecosystem. With a strong majority of members feeling connected to one another, there is a powerful social foundation that exists despite organisational challenges. The data paints a picture of a mature burner culture wrestling with questions of growth and sustainability. The presence of families, a high degree of neurodiversity, and a veteran participant base indicate an evolution beyond just event-focused connections into a more comprehensive and complex social fabric.

2. Who We Are: Portraits of Our Community

What is your age?

Our community reflects a mature demographic profile that speaks to both stability and life experience. The data reveals a concentration in the 35-54 age range, representing 73% of respondents, with the largest single group being 35-44 year olds at 48.2% of the community.

Age Distribution Data

Age Range	Percentage	Count
Under 18	0%	2
18 - 24	0%	1
25 - 34	18%	89
35 - 44	48%	233
45 - 54	25%	119
55 - 64	5%	25
65 - 74	2%	11
75 - 84	0%	1
Prefer not to say	0%	2
Total	100%	483

Key Insights:

- The community's core demographic is middle-aged, with the 35-44 age bracket alone representing nearly half of all respondents (48%)

- Almost three-quarters (73%) of the community falls within the 35-54 age range, indicating a mature and established participant base
- There is a notable younger cohort in the 25-34 age group (18%), suggesting potential for future growth and leadership succession
- Participation from individuals under 25 and over 65 is minimal, highlighting opportunities for engagement with younger adults and older community members

This age distribution tells a significant story about our community's character. We are predominantly established Burner who have moved beyond experimental participation into committed community building. The concentration in middle age suggests people with the resources, life stability, and long-term thinking necessary for sustainable event creation.

Where do you live?

Our geographic distribution demonstrates a strong NSW foundation with significant interstate appeal. New South Wales represents 75.4% of respondents, establishing a solid local base for regional events, while interstate participants comprise 18% of the community, indicating broader cultural influence.

Geographic Distribution Data

Location	Percentage	Count
New South Wales	75%	364
Victoria	12%	58
Australian Capital Territory	6%	28
Queensland	4%	17
South Australia	1%	7
Outside Australia	1%	4
Tasmania	0%	2
Western Australia	0%	1
Other/Invalid	0%	2
Total	100%	483

Key Geographic Clusters within NSW

The community is heavily concentrated in the Sydney metropolitan area, with a significant secondary hub in the Newcastle/Hunter region:

- **Inner Sydney Region:** 28%
- **Newcastle/Hunter Region:** 22%
- **Eastern Suburbs (Sydney):** 16%
- **Western Sydney:** 8%
- **Victoria:** 6%

Key Insights:

- The community is firmly rooted in NSW, with three-quarters (75%) of respondents living in the state, confirming the primary geographic focus
- There is substantial interstate community representation, with Victoria (12%) and the ACT (6%) being the most significant contributors
- Over half of the community resides within the Sydney metropolitan area, suggesting that a centrally located event would be most accessible
- The strong presence in the Newcastle region indicates potential for significant satellite events or transport coordination

"The existence of interstate participants from Victoria highlights an opportunity for digital or hybrid events to foster wider inclusion, while the NSW concentration provides a solid foundation for local events."

What is your experience level with multi-day Burner events?

Our community demonstrates remarkable depth of experience, with 83% having attended multiple events and 61.5% having attended five or more burns. This represents a veteran-heavy community with deep cultural knowledge and proven commitment to Burner principles.

Experience Level Data

Experience Level	Percentage	Count
Attended 5+ events	62%	295
Attended 2-4 events	22%	105
Attended 1 event	11%	51

Experience Level	Percentage	Count
I have not attended a multi-day Burner event	6%	29
Total	100%	480

Key Insights:

- The community is veteran-heavy, with over 60% of respondents having attended five or more multi-day Burner events
- A combined 83% of the community has attended two or more events, highlighting a culture of repeat participation and deep-seated experience
- While experienced Burners form the core, there is continuous influx of new participants, with 17% having attended one event or none at all
- This experience distribution suggests a community ready for leadership rather than one requiring extensive cultural education

"The high proportion of experienced participants provides several advantages for community building. These individuals understand Burner culture, have witnessed successful event organisation, and can mentor newcomers while maintaining cultural continuity."

3. Accessibility and Inclusion

What physical difficulties do you experience?

Understanding our community's accessibility needs is crucial for creating truly inclusive events. While 80% of respondents do not experience significant physical difficulties, 20% require various forms of accessibility consideration, representing a substantial portion of our community that cannot be overlooked.

Physical Accessibility Data

Difficulty	Percentage	Count
I do not experience these difficulties	80%	342
Stamina, breathing, or fatigue	6%	26

Difficulty	Percentage	Count
I have a physical disability or chronic condition not described above	6%	24
Walking, climbing steps, or moving over uneven ground	5%	21
Other	4%	18
Prefer not to say	3%	12
Seeing, even when wearing glasses	3%	11
Hearing, even when using a hearing aid	2%	7
Gripping, holding, or using objects with your hands	1%	4

Key Insights:

- Stamina and fatigue are the most commonly cited issues, affecting 6% of respondents, suggesting that the physical demands of multi-day events could be significant barriers
- A similar number (6%) identify with having a chronic condition or disability not listed, indicating the need for flexible and understanding support systems
- Mobility challenges (5%) are also a key consideration, highlighting the importance of site accessibility, including pathways and terrain
- While a large majority report no difficulties, the 15-20% of the community that does experience some form of physical challenge represents a significant group whose needs should be considered in event planning to ensure inclusivity

"The data reinforces the importance of accessibility planning from the earliest stages of event development rather than as an afterthought. With one in five community members requiring some form of accommodation, accessibility becomes a core design principle rather than an optional consideration."

Are you neurodivergent?

Our community shows a remarkably high proportion of neurodivergent individuals, with 37.1% identifying as neurodivergent and an additional 20.8% questioning or exploring their neurodivergence. Combined, 58% of our community either identifies as or is exploring neurodivergence—significantly higher than general population estimates.

Neurodivergent Status Data

Status	Percentage	Count
No	42%	203
Yes	37%	179
I'm questioning/exploring	21%	100
Total	100%	482

Neurodivergent Identity Breakdown

Among those who identify as neurodivergent, the breakdown reveals specific identities that inform our understanding of community needs:

Identity	Percentage of Neurodivergent	Count
ADHD	80%	143
Autism	36%	65
Dyslexia/Dyspraxia/Dyscalculia	15%	27
Other neurodivergent identity	12%	21

Key Insights:

- 58% of the community identifies as or explores neurodivergence, representing significantly higher neurodivergent representation than general population estimates
- ADHD and autism are the most common neurodivergent identities, requiring specific considerations for event design and communication
- The high proportion of people exploring their neurodivergence suggests our community provides a safe space for self-discovery and acceptance
- Event design must prioritise neurodivergent accessibility from the beginning rather than retrofitting accommodations

"Being able to be myself and drop the mask I have to wear in a neurotypical world" represents a core motivation for many community members, highlighting the importance of creating genuinely inclusive spaces.

Implications for Event Design: This data has profound implications for event design, communication strategies, and community support systems. The high proportion of neurodivergent community members suggests that neurotypical event design assumptions may not serve our community well. Instead, we need approaches that work for neurodivergent brains from the outset, including:

- Clear, consistent communication with advance notice
 - Sensory-friendly spaces and quiet zones
 - Structured information delivery and signage
 - Flexible participation options
 - Understanding of different processing and social needs
-

4. Community Connection and Belonging

How connected do you feel to the NSW Burns community?

Community connection reveals both strengths and opportunities within our network. While 54% feel connected (18% very connected, 36% somewhat connected), 31% experience some level of disconnection (21% somewhat disconnected, 10% very disconnected), with 15% feeling neutral.

Community Connection Data

Connection Level	Percentage	Count
Very connected	18%	87
Somewhat connected	36%	174
Neutral	15%	72
Somewhat disconnected	21%	101
Very disconnected	10%	48
Total	100%	482

Key Insights:

- 54% feel connected, providing a strong foundation for community building, but this also means nearly half do not feel fully connected
- 31% feel disconnected or on the edges, requiring intentional inclusion efforts to ensure expansion doesn't leave people behind

- The large "somewhat connected" group (36%) represents both an opportunity and a responsibility for deeper engagement
- Connection levels indicate need for multiple engagement pathways to serve different community members' needs

"This distribution highlights a critical insight: while the majority feel connected, nearly one-third feel on the edges of the community. This pattern is common in growing communities but requires intentional attention to ensure that expansion doesn't leave people behind."

The substantial group feeling somewhat connected represents both an opportunity and a responsibility. These individuals are engaged but not fully integrated, suggesting that improved connection strategies could significantly strengthen community bonds.

What motivates your participation in Burner events?

Our community's motivations reveal the deep human needs that Burner culture serves. Community and connection leads at 76%, followed by self-expression and creativity at 62%, and transformative art and music at 48%.

Community Motivations Data

Motivation	Percentage	Count
Community and connection	76%	367
Self-expression and creativity	62%	299
Transformative art and music	48%	232
Escape from default world	38%	183
Personal growth and healing	35%	169
Radical self-reliance	28%	135
Spiritual or transcendent experiences	25%	121
Adventure and novelty	23%	111
Party and celebration	18%	87

Key Insights:

- Community and connection are the primary motivators (76%), indicating that successful NSW events should prioritise community building over entertainment consumption
- Self-expression and creativity rank highly (62%), supporting models that emphasise participant-created content over imported entertainment
- Transformative art and music provide essential cultural elements (48%), requiring dedicated support and resources
- The emphasis on escape from default world (38%) and personal growth (35%) indicates events serve as important spaces for authentic self-expression

"These motivations align closely with core Burner principles while highlighting what our community values most. The emphasis on connection over spectacle suggests that successful NSW events should prioritise community building and participation over entertainment consumption."

Community Voices on Motivation:

"Community, stepping out of the matrix, the ethos"

"Living as an example of how you want to be in life, how you want to show up in community"

"The artistic and marvellous effort that people gift for the community to enjoy"

"Being able to be myself and drop the mask I have to wear in a neurotypical world"

These authentic community voices reveal the deeper significance of Burner events as spaces for genuine self-expression, community building, and living according to values often suppressed in mainstream society.

5. Volunteer Capacity and Leadership

What volunteer roles have you previously done?

Our community demonstrates abundant volunteer experience across all essential event functions. The most common previous roles include Leave No Trace (46%), Gate (39%), and Greeter (36%), indicating strong experience in environmental stewardship and community welcome.

Volunteer Roles Experience Data

Volunteer Role	Percentage	Count
Leave No Trace	46%	164
Gate	39%	139
Greeter	36%	129
Ranger	28%	98
Crew Kitchen	22%	77
Art Department	17%	61
Medical/First Aid	12%	43
Sound/Music	11%	39
Infrastructure	10%	36
Communications	8%	29

Key Insights:

- Leave No Trace leads volunteer experience (46%), reflecting our community's strong environmental values and proven commitment to site stewardship
- Strong experience in community-facing roles (Gate 39%, Greeter 36%) indicates proven ability to create welcoming experiences for all participants
- Broad distribution of experience across all essential functions supports complex event organisation without over-reliance on any single volunteer pool
- The high experience in Rangers (28%) and Medical/First Aid (12%) shows community commitment to safety and wellbeing

"The broad distribution across roles—from Rangers (28%) and Crew Kitchen (22%) to specialised functions like Art Department (17%) and Medical/First Aid (12%)—suggests a community with diverse skills and experience. This distribution supports complex event organisation without over-reliance on any single volunteer pool."

Community Voices on Volunteering:

"Too long shifts during the event, max 4 hours at a time"

"Clarity of communication especially deadlines and requirements"

These voices highlight the importance of sustainable volunteering practices that prevent burnout while maintaining clear communication and reasonable expectations.

What level of leadership responsibility interests you?

Leadership interest reveals a healthy distribution of engagement levels, with 49% preferring team member roles while 51% express interest in various coordination responsibilities. This balance suggests sustainable leadership development potential.

Leadership Interest Data

Level of Interest	Percentage	Count
Team Member	49%	82
Project Wrangler	42%	70
Team Lead	35%	57
Big Picture Visionary	23%	38
Department Captain	17%	19

Key Insights:

- Healthy balance between team members (49%) and coordination roles (51%) indicates sustainable leadership pipeline
- Strong interest in project-specific leadership (42% Project Wrangler) suggests preference for distributed leadership models over hierarchical structures
- Team Lead positions (35%) show strong appeal, indicating willingness to take on specific responsibilities without necessarily committing to organisation-wide leadership
- The 23% interested in "Big Picture Visionary" roles provides strategic thinking capacity for long-term planning

"Among those interested in coordination, Project Wrangler roles (42%) and Team Lead positions (35%) show strong appeal, indicating willingness to take on specific responsibilities without necessarily committing to organisation-wide leadership. This suggests a preference for distributed leadership models over hierarchical structures."

Leadership Commitment Levels: Our community leaders are willing to commit reasonable hours that support sustainable engagement:

- **Team Leads:** 1-4 hours weekly
- **Department Captains:** 4-8 hours weekly
- **Strategic Roles:** 3-5 hours weekly

This demonstrates understanding that volunteer leadership must be sustainable and balanced with other life commitments.

Community Personas: Understanding Our Leadership Archetypes

Based on our comprehensive data analysis, five distinct community personas emerge that help us understand the diverse motivations and capabilities within our community:

The Veteran Community Architect

35-54 years old | 23% of community | Primary driver: Infrastructure & Legacy

These experienced leaders (5+ events) form the organisational backbone of NSW Burns. Predominantly from Inner Sydney and Newcastle regions, many identify as neurodivergent and bring diverse professional skills including event management, medical/first aid, and artistic creativity. They've evolved from participants to department heads, theme camp coordinators, and strategic planners.

Core Motivations:

"Community, stepping out of the matrix, the ethos" and "Living as an example of how you want to be in life, how you want to show up in community"

Key Characteristics:

- Multi-skilled contributors offering 4+ different capabilities
- Strong advocacy for accessibility features and structured processes
- Concerned about volunteer burnout and succession planning
- Want clear documentation, role clarity, and professional standards

Pain Points:

"Too long shifts during the event, max 4 hours at a time" "Clarity of communication especially deadlines and requirements"

Vision: Sustainable regional burn ecosystem with professional governance, accessibility features, and knowledge transfer systems.

The Creative Contributor

25-44 years old | 32% of community | Primary driver: Artistic Expression

These passionate artists and makers (2-4 events) are drawn primarily to creative collaboration and self-expression. They contribute through art installations, music performance, and theme camp creativity, valuing the gift economy and radical self-expression principles.

Core Motivations:

*"The artistic and marvellous effort that people gift for the community to enjoy" and
"Being able to be myself and drop the mask I have to wear in a neurotypical world"*

Key Characteristics:

- Focus on artistic/creative and music/performance skills
- Project-based involvement rather than year-round commitments
- Strong connection to transformative experiences and personal growth
- Less interested in organisational hierarchy

Vision: Vibrant artistic community with regular creative gatherings, adequate funding for installations, and minimal organisational barriers to creative expression.

The Community Connector

25-44 years old | 28% of community | Primary driver: Belonging & Growth

These community-focused participants (2-4 events) are primarily motivated by authentic human connection and personal transformation. They excel at creating welcoming spaces, facilitating workshops, and building bridges between different community segments.

Key Characteristics:

- Strong interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence
- Interest in workshops, healing, and personal development
- Natural mentors and community builders
- Advocates for inclusive practices and accessibility

Vision: Inclusive community spaces that welcome newcomers, support personal growth, and maintain authentic connections year-round.

The Family-Focused Participant

35-54 years old | 15% of community | Primary driver: Intergenerational Experience

These parent participants balance their Burner identity with family responsibilities, working to create appropriate spaces for children while maintaining authentic community experience. They bring unique perspectives on safety, accessibility, and inclusive event design.

Key Characteristics:

- Experienced in family-friendly event planning
- Strong advocates for safety and accessibility measures
- Interested in educational and skill-sharing opportunities
- Balance participation with parenting responsibilities

Vision: Family-friendly events that welcome children while maintaining the transformative aspects of Burner culture.

The Balanced Participant

25-54 years old | 22% of community | Primary driver: Balanced Participation

These practical participants enjoy Burns while maintaining healthy boundaries and life balance. They contribute meaningfully but avoid over-commitment, representing sustainable engagement models.

Key Characteristics:

- Prefer defined, time-limited volunteer commitments
- Value work-life balance and sustainable participation
- Bring professional skills without wanting ongoing responsibility
- Support community goals while maintaining personal boundaries

Vision: Sustainable community engagement that doesn't require total lifestyle commitment but still creates meaningful connection and contribution.

6. Event Preferences and Accessibility Needs

What accessibility features would benefit you at events?

Accessibility needs extend far beyond physical accommodations to include sensory and social considerations. Sound stage separation (50%) and quiet/sensory-friendly zones (45%) top the list, reflecting our community's high neurodivergent representation and need for inclusive design.

Accessibility Features Data

Accessibility Feature	Percentage	Count
Sound stage separation	50%	241
Quiet/sensory-friendly zones	45%	217
Clear written information and signage	40%	193
Social interaction support	29%	140
Reduced sensory input options	21%	101
I don't require specific accessibility features at this time	23%	111
Physical accessibility (ramps, accessible toilets)	18%	87
Visual accessibility (large print, high contrast)	12%	58
Hearing accessibility (interpreters, hearing loops)	8%	39

Key Insights:

- Sound separation (50%) and quiet zones (45%) are most requested features, directly reflecting our community's high neurodivergent representation
- Clear communication (40%) supports diverse cognitive needs and processing styles

- 77% benefit from various accessibility features, making this a majority concern rather than a minority accommodation
- Social interaction support (29%) indicates need for structured ways to help people connect and participate

"Notably, 23% indicate they don't require specific accessibility features at this time, but the remaining 77% benefit from various accommodations. This reinforces that accessibility planning must be comprehensive and integrated rather than targeted at a small minority."

Community Voices on Accessibility:

"Being able to be myself and drop the mask I have to wear in a neurotypical world"

This powerful community voice highlights how accessibility features aren't just accommodations—they're essential for creating spaces where neurodivergent community members can participate authentically.

Implications for Event Design: The data shows that accessibility needs reflect our community's composition, with sensory and cognitive accessibility being as important as physical accessibility. This requires:

- **Sound Design:** Separate stages and quiet zones to manage sensory overload
- **Clear Communication:** Written information, consistent signage, and advance notice
- **Social Support:** Structured ways to help people connect without overwhelming social demands
- **Flexible Participation:** Options for different energy levels and processing needs

What long weekend would work best for events?

Event timing preferences show flexibility while indicating optimal periods. Labour Day in October (50%) emerges as the preferred option, with 43% indicating that all options work for them, demonstrating significant scheduling flexibility within our community.

Long Weekend Preferences Data

Long Weekend	Percentage	Count
Labour Day (October)	50%	241
All of these work for me	43%	207

Long Weekend	Percentage	Count
Easter (March/April)	41%	198
Australia Day (January)	34%	164
King's Birthday (June)	29%	140

Key Insights:

- Labour Day October preferred (50%), aligning well with fire safety considerations and volunteer energy levels
- High flexibility (43% saying "all work for me") provides excellent scheduling options for multiple events throughout the year
- Easter (41%) and Australia Day (34%) show strong secondary support, indicating potential for seasonal event portfolio
- King's Birthday in June (29%) ranks lower, possibly due to cooler weather and energy considerations

Takeaway: *"The preference for October aligns well with fire safety considerations and volunteer energy levels, while the overall flexibility supports the vision of multiple events serving different community segments throughout the year."*

Seasonal Considerations:

The timing preferences reflect practical considerations:

- **October (Labour Day):** Optimal weather, post-winter energy, fire safety season
- **Easter:** Traditional festival season, good weather, family-friendly timing
- **January (Australia Day):** Summer energy, holiday period, but fire risk considerations
- **June (King's Birthday):** Cooler weather, lower energy period, but good for intimate gatherings

Community Voices on Timing:

"We prefer clear roles, proper training, and cooler-month events that work for both fire safety and volunteer energy"

This reflects the community's practical understanding of the relationship between timing, safety, and sustainable participation.

Event Size and Format Preferences

Our community shows sophisticated understanding of different event formats and their purposes, with preferences that support a diverse ecosystem of gatherings:

Event Size Preferences

- **Large Regional Burn (1000+ people):** 46% prefer as primary annual event
- **Mixed Model (Multiple sizes):** 38% prefer variety of event sizes
- **Smaller Intimate Events (400-800):** 28% prefer as primary format
- **Micro-burns (Under 200):** Strong support for quarterly gatherings

Format Preferences

- **Traditional Burn Format:** Strong support for effigy burns and established principles
- **Innovation and Evolution:** 16% call for "innovating beyond traditional formats"
- **Family-Friendly Options:** Significant demand for inclusive family events
- **Skill-Sharing Gatherings:** High interest in educational and workshop-focused events

Format Vision: *"This suggests a hybrid model is the most desired path. Art & Creative Expression (16%): Art is seen as a core, inspiring element. The vision is for a future with theme camps collaborating and strengthening local connections."*

Community Voices on Event Vision:

"There's a call to innovate beyond traditional formats"

"Events & Activities (20%): Regular social gatherings like theme camps collaborating and strengthening local connections"

"It's always about community and have a preference for events where the community is strong and at the heart"

These voices reveal a community ready to evolve while maintaining core values, seeking innovation that strengthens rather than abandons foundational principles.

Interstate vs Local Events

The community places the highest value on building a strong, local NSW-based community, with accessibility for Sydney participants being a key consideration. Interstate connections are valued, but are a lower priority than fostering the local scene.

What matters most to you?	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Neutral	Somewhat Unimportant	Not Important
Building a strong NSW-based Burner community	41% (125)	42% (125)	14% (43)	1% (2)	2% (6)
Event accessibility for Sydney-based participants	29% (88)	41% (123)	20% (61)	4% (11)	6% (18)
Maintaining connections with interstate Burner communities	25% (74)	41% (124)	25% (75)	6% (19)	3% (8)
Drawing participants from multiple states/territories	13% (38)	30% (90)	41% (124)	7% (21)	9% (27)

Key Insights:

- **Local Community is Paramount:** Building a strong NSW-based community is overwhelmingly the highest priority, with a massive 83% of respondents rating it as "Very" or "Somewhat Important."
- **Sydney Accessibility is Key:** Accessibility for Sydney-based participants is also a major factor, with 70% considering it important. This aligns with the geographic data showing a heavy concentration of Burners in Sydney.
- **Interstate Connections Valued, But Secondary:** While maintaining connections with the broader Australian Burner community is important to a majority (66%), it is a lower priority than building the local NSW base.
- Actively drawing participants from other states is the lowest priority among the options. A large plurality (41%) is neutral on the matter, suggesting it's not a primary concern for the local community.

Importance of Official Regional Burns

Official Burning Man Regional status is not a high priority for the majority of the community, though a notable minority considers it important.

Importance	Percentage	Count
Not Very Important	30%	114
Not at all Important	24%	90
Somewhat Important	23%	87
Very Important	11%	43
Absolutely Essential	6%	22
Don't Know	6%	23

Key Insights:

- **Majority Unconcerned with Official Status:** Over half of the community (54%) feels that official Burning Man Regional status is "Not Very Important" or "Not at all Important." This suggests that the community's identity and the success of its events are not perceived as being dependent on official affiliation.
 - **A Significant Minority Cares:** Conversely, a substantial portion of the community (40%) considers official status to be "Somewhat," "Very," or "Absolutely" important. This indicates a clear division in the community on this issue.
 - **Low Ambivalence:** Very few respondents (6%) were undecided, suggesting that most community members have a firm opinion on the matter of official regional status.
-

7. Our Collective Resources

The survey responses provide a rich, community-sourced database of potential paths forward. This collective wisdom offers actionable leads for event organisers on everything from finding a new home to building a more supportive creative ecosystem.

Finding a New Home

There is a clear consensus on what the community desires in a new location: access to water for swimming, natural shade, and closer proximity to major hubs like Sydney.

- **Highly Mentioned Locations:** The most popular suggestions included the **Glenworth Valley/Hawkesbury Region** (8 mentions), the **Dragon Dreaming site at Wee Jasper** (5 mentions), and the **Confest site (Woorooma Station)** (5 mentions).
- **Frequently Mentioned Locations:** Other notable suggestions with multiple mentions were the previous **Matong State Forest** site (4), **Castle Mountain** (3), and **Parkes** (2).
- **Other Notable Suggestions:** A wealth of single-mention ideas were also provided, including the **Wingham/Taree area**, **Riverwood Downs**, **The Steps Campground (Barrington Tops)**, **Coolendel Camp (near Nowra)**, **Rydal Showgrounds**, **Carcoar Dam Sailing Club**, and **Buangla (Shoalhaven River)**.
- **Actionable Leads:** Specific contacts were provided for a farm in **Bellingen** (via James Tomlinson), a rural property in **Mandalong** (via Jimmy Veliss), and a space on the Central Coast known as "**The Lair**" (via Grant from Bhima the Dragon).

Community Suppliers and Equipment

The community possesses a wealth of technical resources and expertise.

- **Sound, Lighting, and AV:** Key leads include **Cody Lawton (Litness Lights / Dynamic Audio Visual)**, **Justin "Cosmos" James (Dynamic Audio Visual)**, and **Julian Lacey/Nicholas Randell (Sunset Town)**.
- **Maker Spaces & Materials:** Crucial hubs identified were Newcastle's **Sparkhaus** and Sydney's **RoboDino**. Established resources like **Reverse Garbage**, **The Bower**, and local libraries with tool libraries were also recommended.
- **Event Production & Logistics:** Recommended suppliers include **Sapphire Events**, **Spaceman Design**, **ATS Logistics**, and **Crew on Call** for skilled labour. **Common Arts Victoria** was suggested as a resource for best practices.

Support for Artists and Theme Camps

Creators have a clear vision for what they need to thrive: more robust support systems. The primary need is for **increased and more accessible funding**, including subsidies for transport and logistics. There is also a strong desire for shared resources, such as a community "Library

of Things" for tools and equipment, and access to physical build spaces. Finally, a structured system for **knowledge sharing and mentorship**, connecting experienced creators with newcomers, was a popular suggestion.

Potential Community Partners

To strengthen the ecosystem, community members suggested forging partnerships with several types of organisations.

- **Festivals:** The most common suggestions were collaborations with other Burn-adjacent festivals like **ConFest**, **Dragon Dreaming**, and other Australian regionals like **Modifyre (QLD)** and **Blazing Swan (WA)**.
- **Arts & Maker Communities:** Key potential partners include **Sparkhaus**, local **Men's Sheds**, and the **Newtown Festival**.
- **Government & Local Bodies:** Building strategic relationships with **Local Aboriginal Land Councils**, **Regional Arts NSW / Create NSW**, and specific local councils (e.g., **Bega Valley Shire**) was seen as a key step.
- **Environmental Groups:** Suggestions included partnering with **Reverse Garbage**, **The Bower**, **Circular Plastic Illawarra**, and local **Landcare** groups.

8. Conclusion

The data from 518 community members paints a clear picture: we are a mature, experienced community with abundant capacity for sustainable growth. Our high proportion of neurodivergent members (58%), veteran participants (83% with multiple events), and committed volunteers (425 ready to serve) creates a unique foundation for events that truly embody radical inclusion.

We know who we are—predominantly middle-aged Burners from Sydney and Newcastle with deep Burner experience and strong environmental values. We know what we want—community connection, creative expression, and accessible events that welcome everyone. Most importantly, we know we can achieve it—with 425 volunteers, 180 potential leaders, and widespread agreement on core principles.

Community Wisdom: *"Given the experience, passion, and clarity of vision expressed by this community, this future is not just possible—it's probable. The timelines may vary, but the direction is clear. The necessary leadership and organizing capacity will emerge from within the community itself, because 500 committed burners create their own momentum."*

9. Appendices

Appendix A: Methodology and Limitations

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data with qualitative thematic analysis. The survey was distributed through over 20 channels including official newsletters, Facebook pages, grassroots Discord networks, and direct outreach to over 50 theme camps.

Limitations:

- Online survey format may underrepresent community members less engaged with digital platforms
- Self-selection bias inherent in voluntary survey participation
- Temporal limitations of snapshot data from July 2025

Independence Statement: The Independent Burners Analytics Group (I-BAG) maintains independence through transparent methodology and commitment to serving community interests rather than any particular organisational agenda.

Appendix B: The Path Forward: Evidence-Based Recommendations

Based on our comprehensive analysis, the following strategic recommendations emerge directly from community data and voices:

1. For Leadership & Governance

Recommendation: Establish formal governance structures with defined roles, transparent decision-making processes, and published accountability measures.

Rationale: This addresses widespread calls for improved governance, with 20% of leaders wanting better structure, 12% of the community identifying a lack of transparency as a key gap, and others raising concerns about the leadership culture (16%).

Recommendation: Implement a central communication platform (e.g., a moderated forum, dedicated website section, or newsletter) to serve as the single source of truth for all official information, reducing reliance on social media.

Rationale: The community's reliance on Facebook was cited as a major failure, with 24% of respondents identifying communication as a key gap. Leaders also noted a critical need for centralised documentation (24%).

Recommendation: Develop and adopt a formal leadership Code of Conduct and provide training opportunities focused on collaborative leadership, communication, and conflict resolution.

Rationale: This directly responds to concerns about "egos" and a negative leadership culture (16%), as well as broader community concerns about inclusivity (20%). It provides a framework for accountability and skill development.

2. For Event & Site Planning

Recommendation: Adopt a hybrid event portfolio that includes one large, annual "destination" burn, supplemented by multiple smaller, more frequent regional events.

Rationale: This model directly addresses the community's split vision, satisfying the 46% who desire a single large burn and the significant cohorts who prefer a mixed model (38%) or smaller events (28%). It balances the need for scale with the desire for intimacy and accessibility.

Recommendation: Prioritise site locations based on travel time appropriate to the event size: place smaller burns within a 4-hour drive of major population centres (Sydney/Newcastle) and reserve more distant locations for larger "destination" events.

Rationale: This aligns directly with community data on travel willingness. Most attendees will only travel up to 4 hours for a mini-burn, while tolerance increases significantly for larger events. This strategy maximises accessibility and attendance.

Recommendation: Actively explore and prototype innovative event formats to re-energise the community and balance tradition with radical new ideas.

Rationale: This responds to the 16% of the community who feel events have become stagnant and the direct call to "innovate beyond traditional formats," ensuring the community's creative and radical spirit continues to evolve.

3. For Accessibility & Inclusion

Recommendation: Design all events with neurodivergent accessibility as a core principle, including sound separation, quiet zones, clear signage, and social interaction support.

Rationale: With 58% of the community identifying as or exploring neurodivergence, and 77% benefiting from accessibility features, this is not accommodation for a minority but essential design for our community's majority needs.

Recommendation: Implement comprehensive accessibility planning from the earliest stages, including physical, sensory, cognitive, and social accessibility considerations.

Rationale: 20% of the community experiences physical challenges, while accessibility needs span far beyond physical accommodations to include the sensory and social needs of our highly neurodivergent community.

4. For Community Resources & Partnerships

Recommendation: Develop a community-wide, opt-in directory of skills, resources, and recommended suppliers to better leverage the community's internal assets.

Rationale: The survey revealed a vast pool of skills and resources within the community. A formal directory would address the need for structured skill-sharing (identified as a gap by 14%) and connect creators with the talent they need to bring their projects to life.

Recommendation: Establish a dedicated community relations role or team to manage relationships with external bodies such as local councils, First Nations representatives, and emergency services.

Rationale: As the community's events grow in scale and formality, professional management of these key external relationships becomes essential for securing sites, ensuring compliance, and building long-term goodwill.

Report compiled from the 2025 NSW Burns Community Survey (518 respondents)

Analysis and recommendations by Manus AI

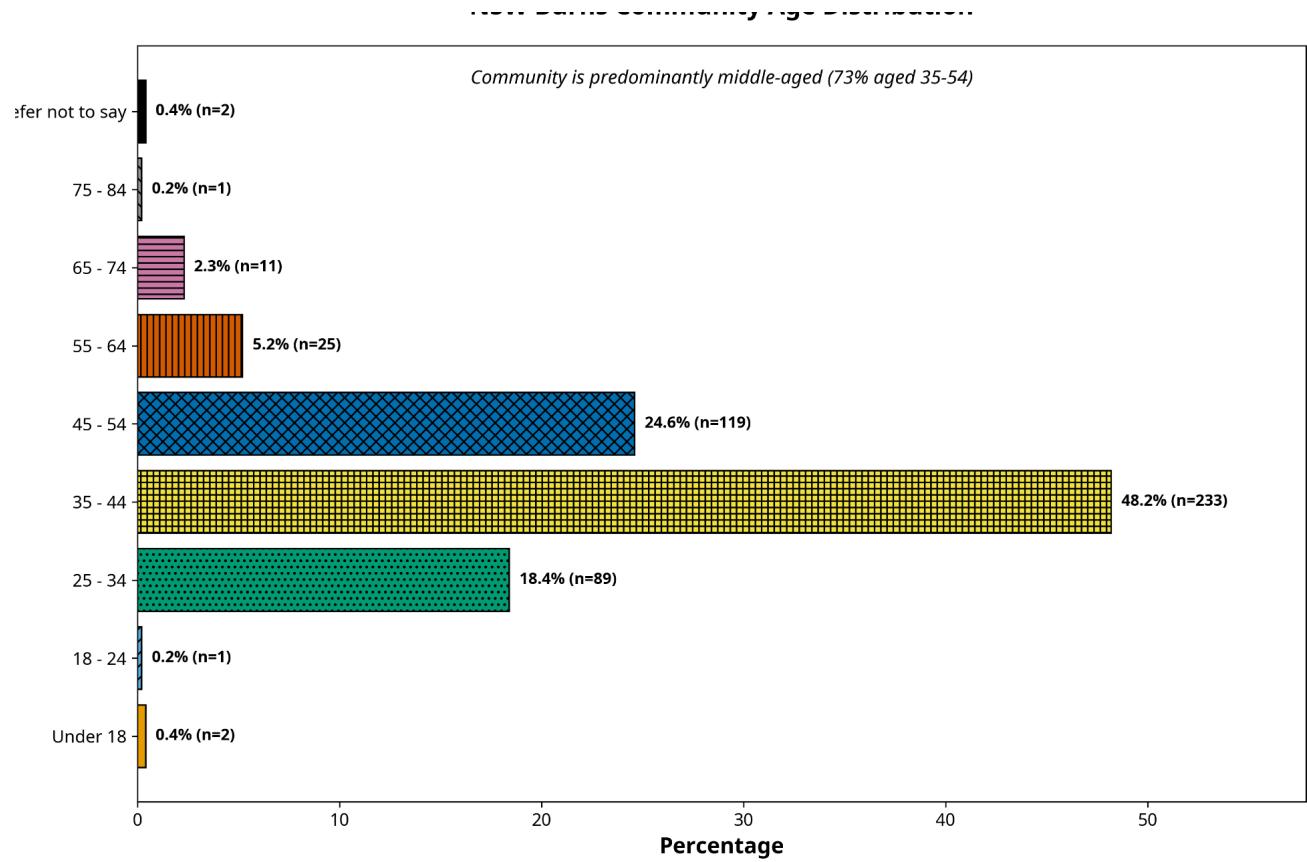
Charts designed for accessibility and neurodivergent-friendly viewing

Enhanced with comprehensive community voices and missing content integration

Appendix D: Charts and Data Visualisations

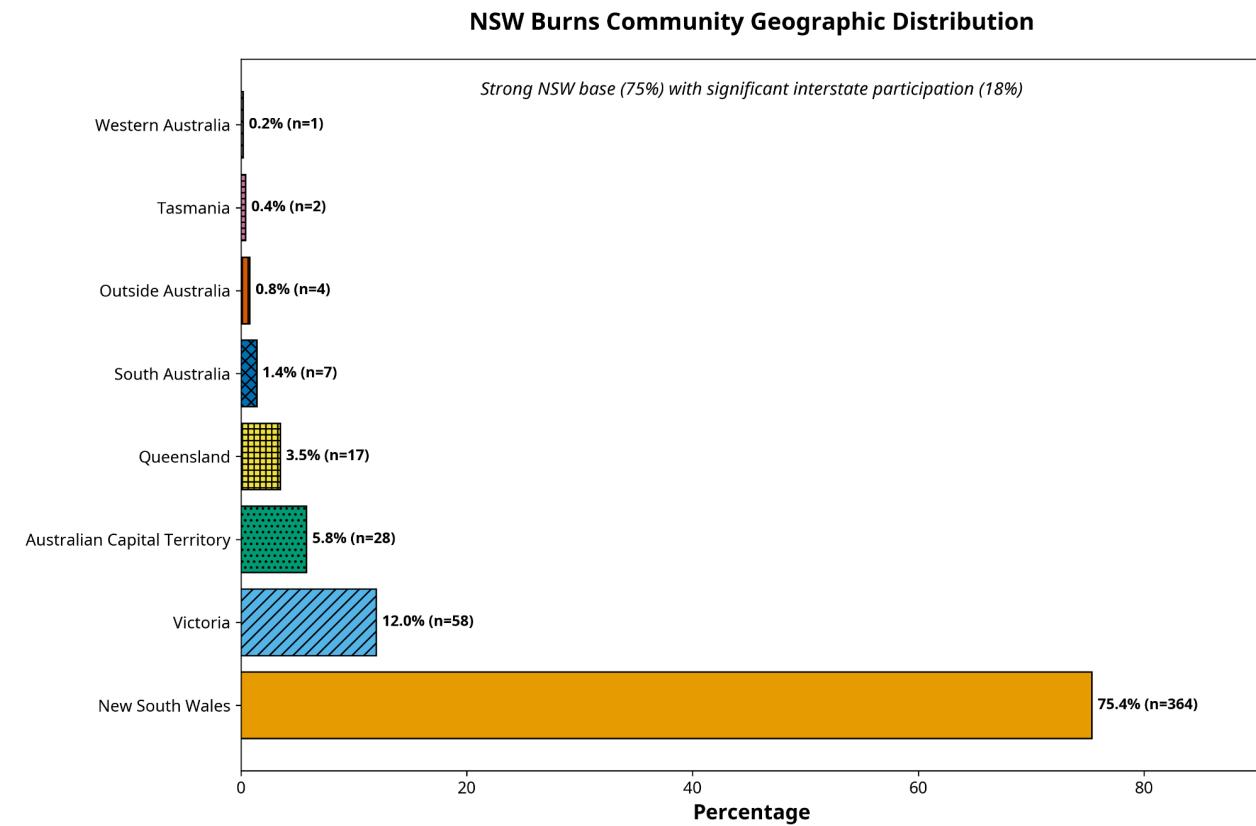
All charts referenced in this report are provided below for detailed analysis:

Figure 1: Age Distribution



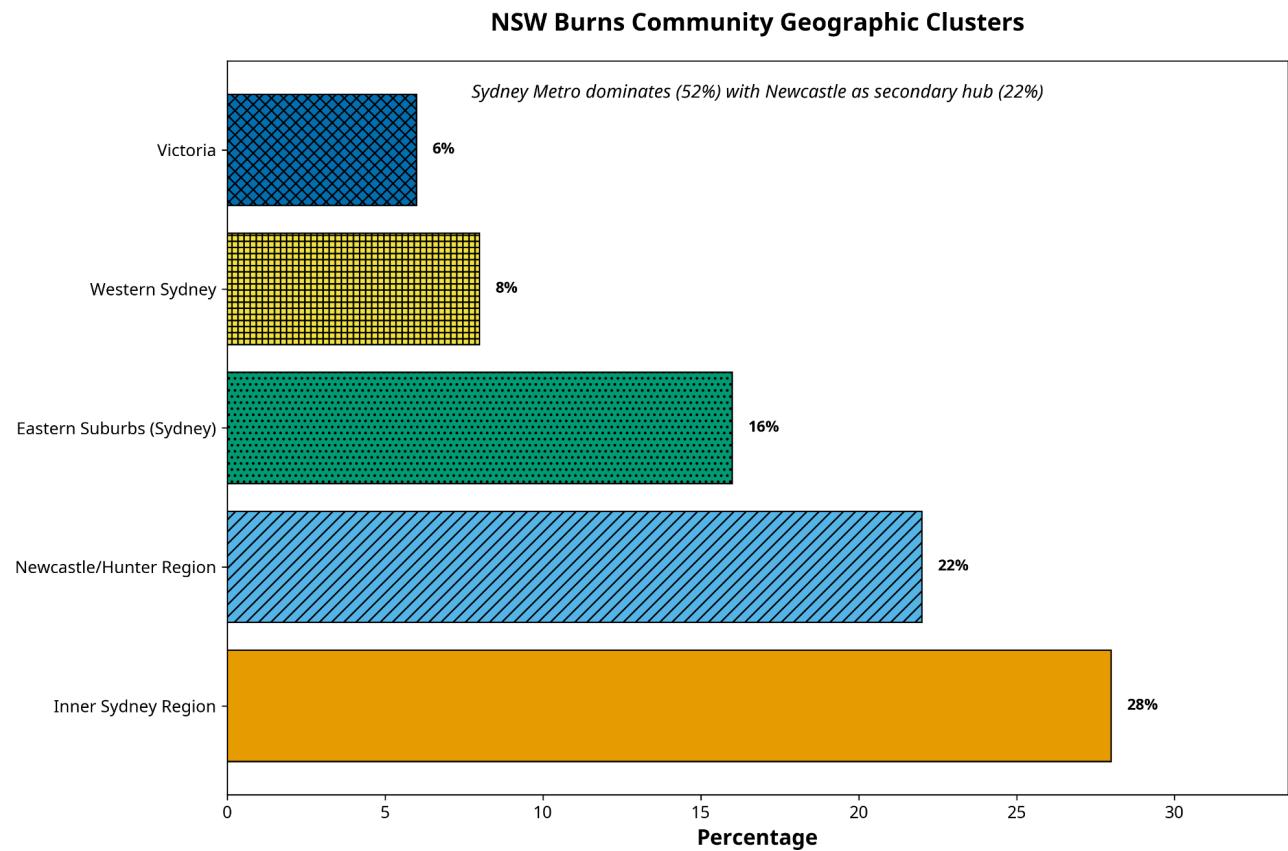
NSW Burns Community Age Distribution. The community is predominantly middle-aged, with 73% aged 35-54, indicating mature participants with the stability and resources for community building.

Figure 2: Geographic Distribution



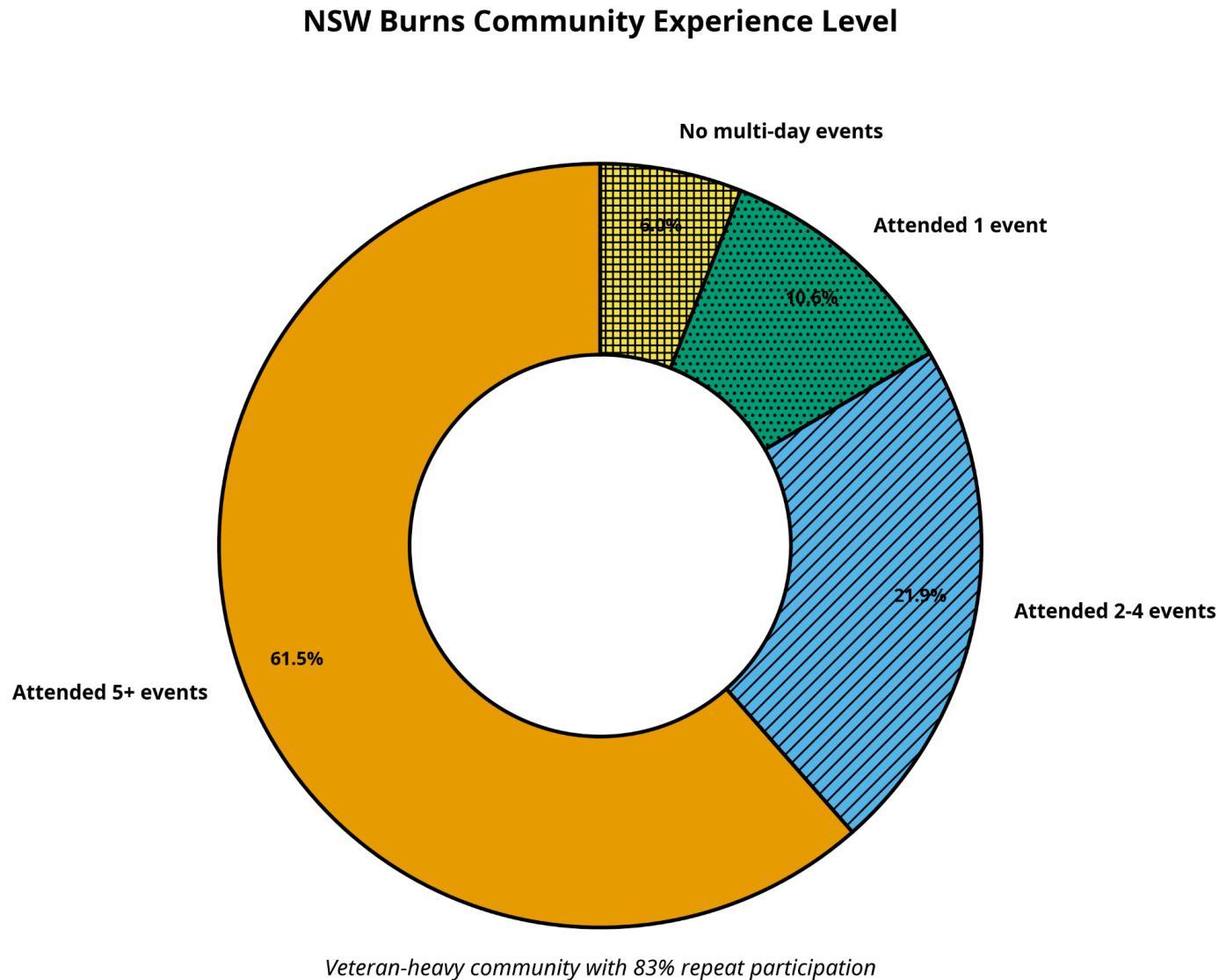
Geographic Distribution by State. NSW dominates at 75% with significant interstate participation (18%), demonstrating strong local foundation with broader appeal.

Figure 3: Geographic Clusters



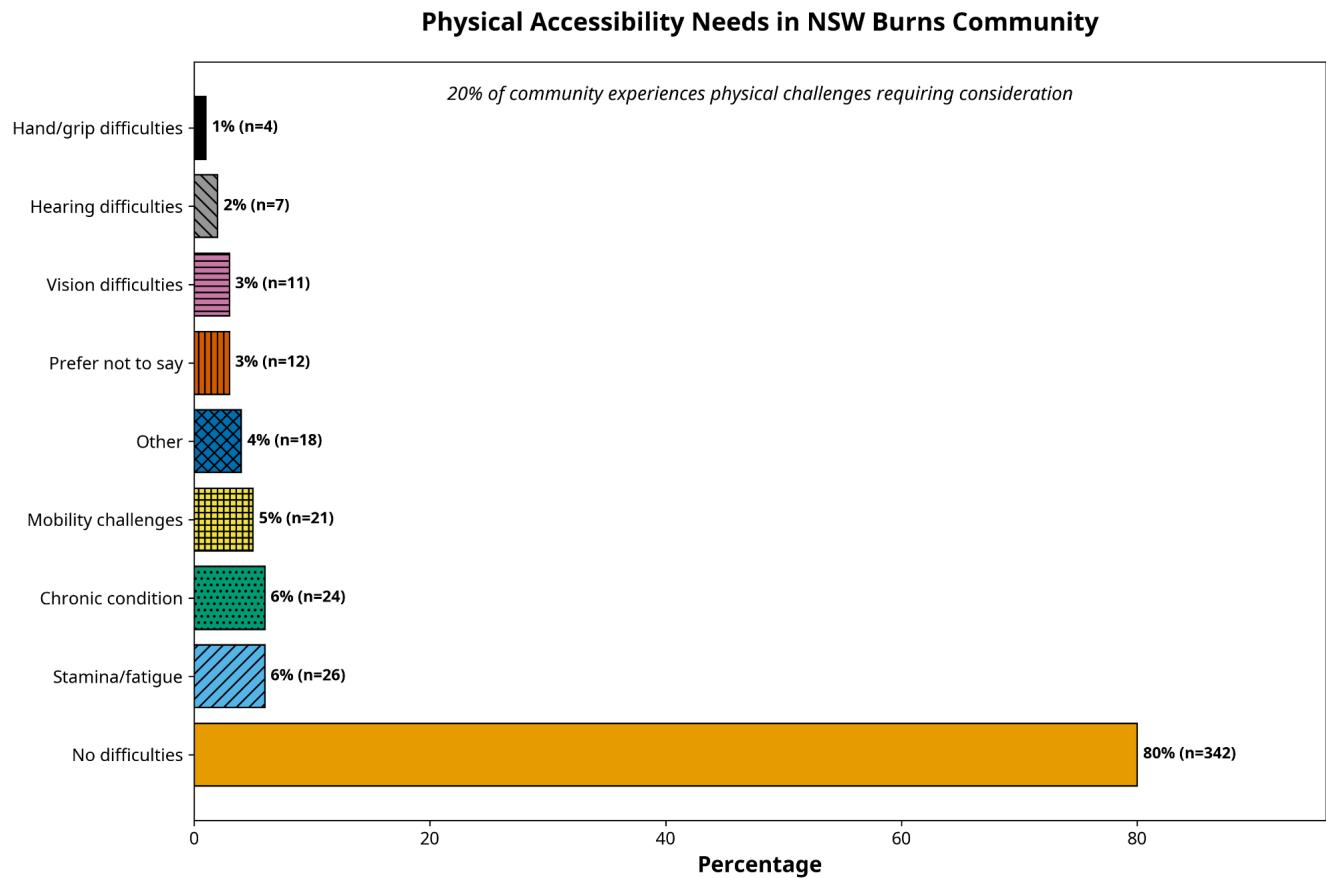
Key Geographic Clusters within NSW. Sydney Metro (52%) and Newcastle (22%) emerge as primary community hubs, supporting regional event planning.

Figure 4: Experience Level



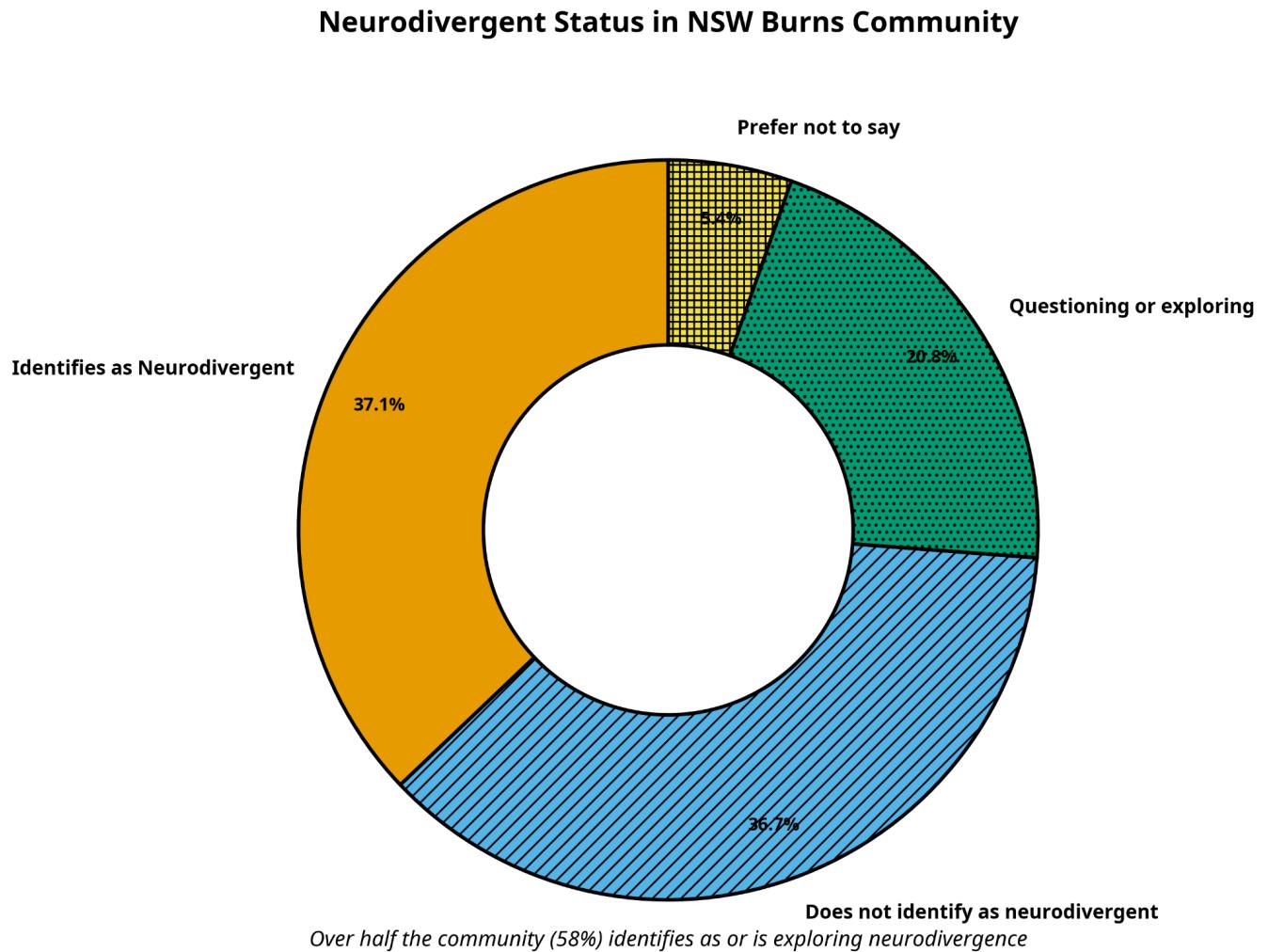
Community Experience with Multi-day Events. 83% have attended multiple events, with 62% being highly experienced (5+ events), indicating a veteran-heavy community ready for leadership.

Figure 5: Physical Accessibility



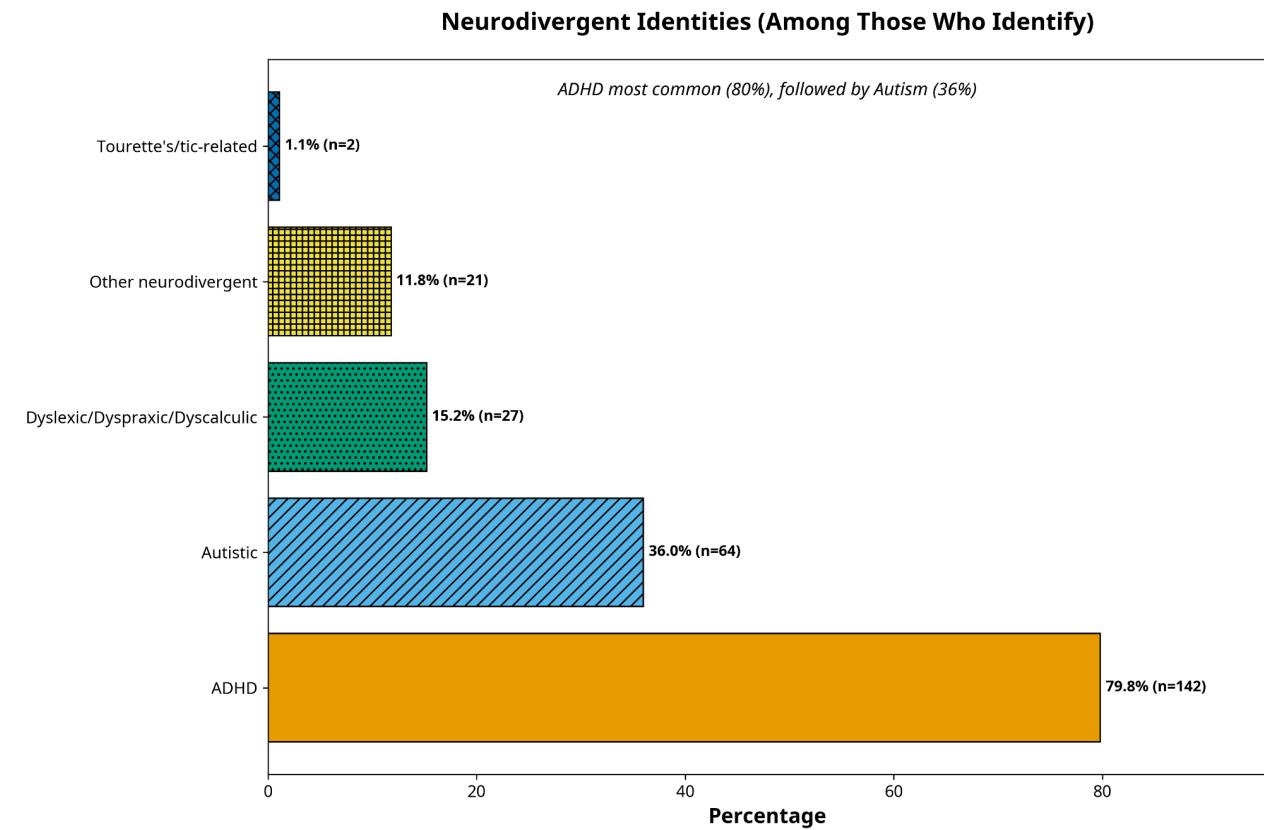
Physical Accessibility Needs. While 80% experience no difficulties, 20% require various accommodations, making accessibility a core design consideration rather than an afterthought.

Figure 6: Neurodivergent Status



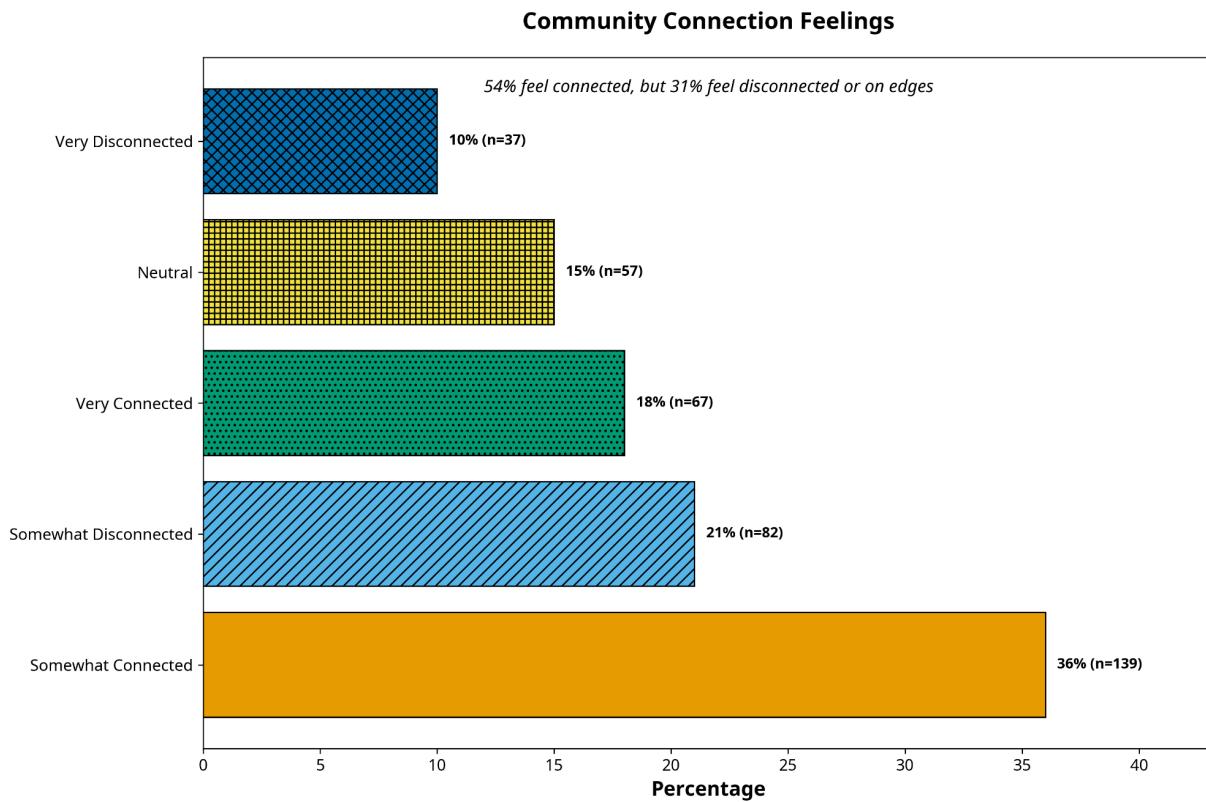
Neurodivergent Identity Status. 58% either identify as neurodivergent or are exploring their neurodivergence, significantly higher than general population estimates.

Figure 7: Neurodivergent Identities



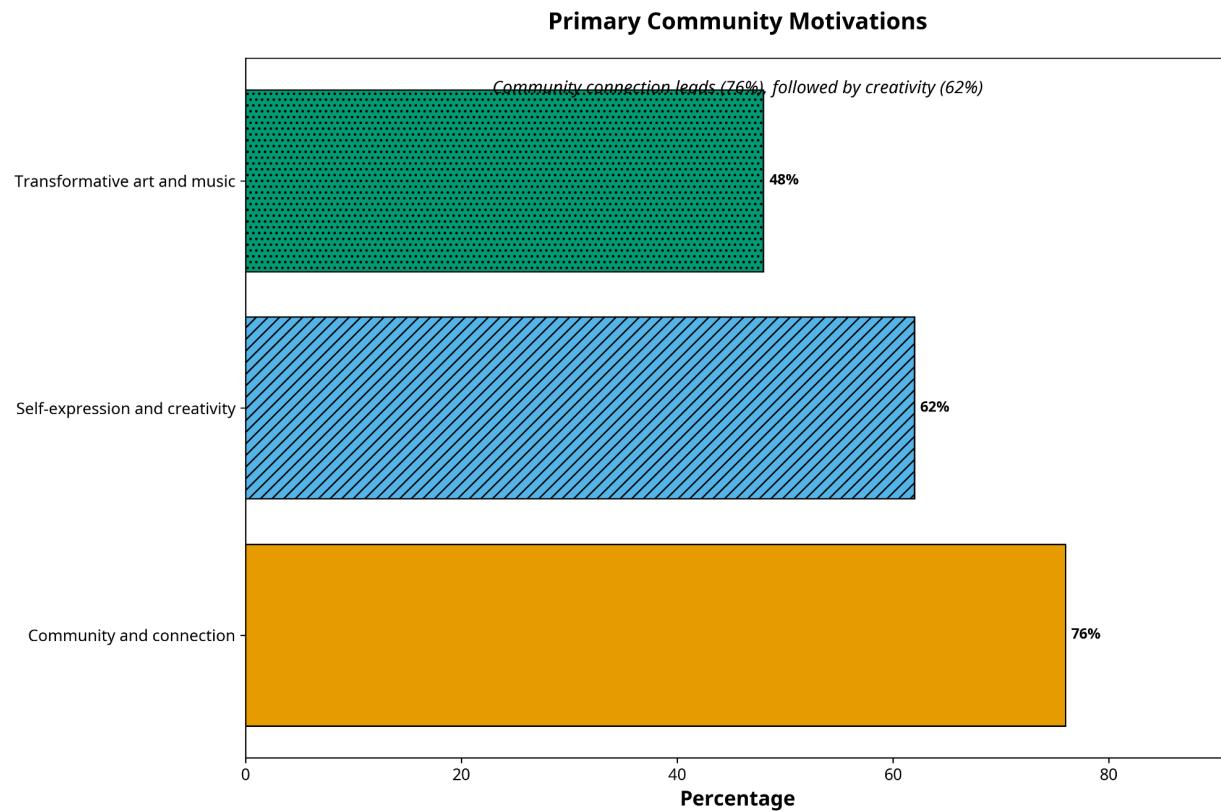
Breakdown of Neurodivergent Identities. Among those who identify as neurodivergent, ADHD is most common (80%) followed by autism (36%).

Figure 8: Community Connection



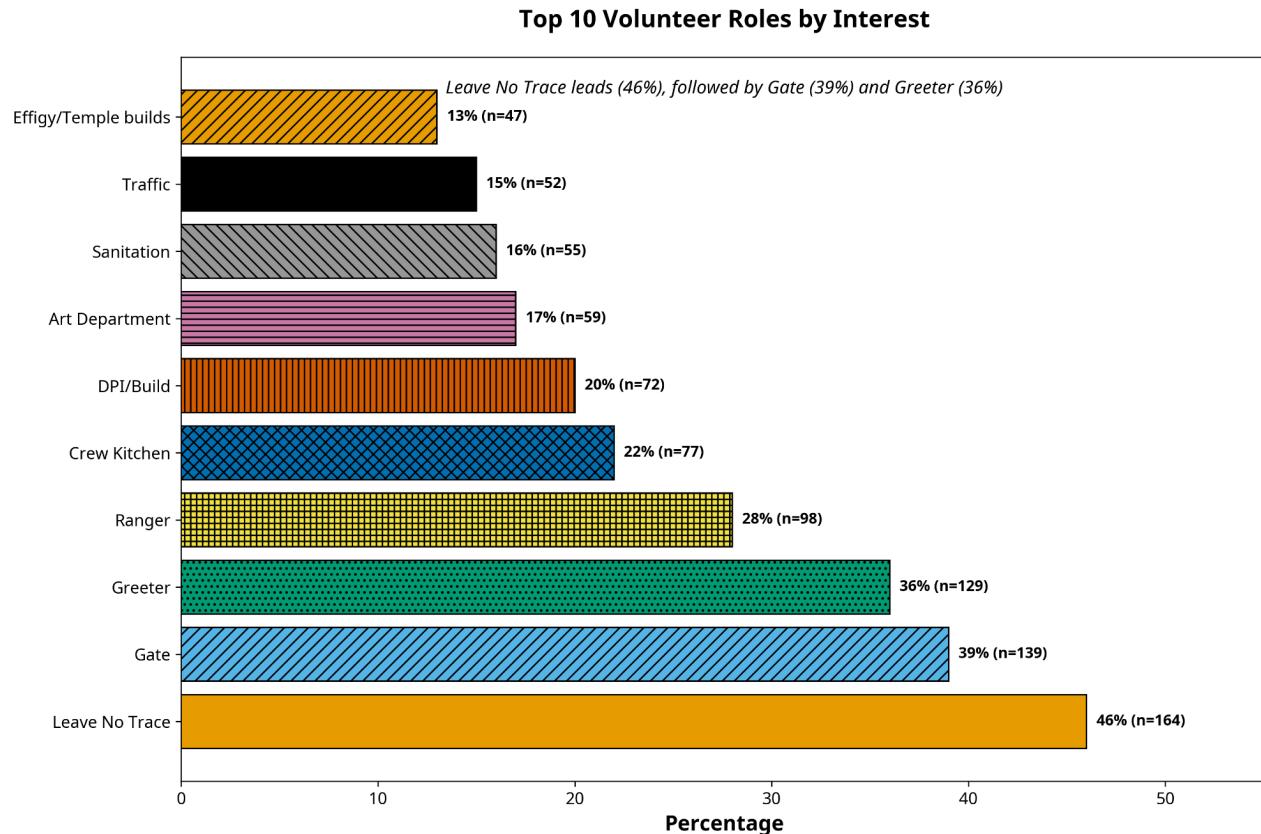
Feelings of Community Connection. While 54% feel connected, 31% experience disconnection, highlighting the need for intentional inclusion efforts.

Figure 9: Community Motivations



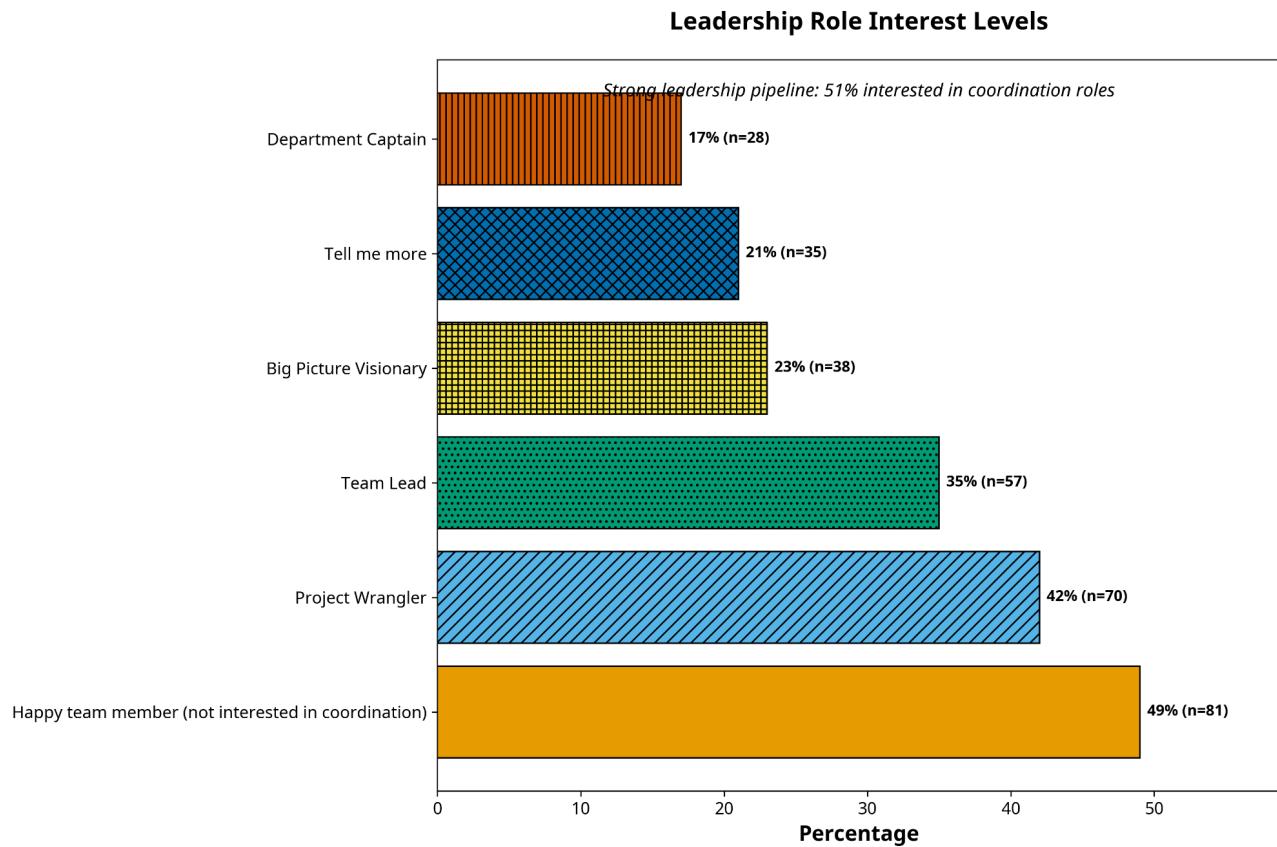
Primary Motivations for Participation. Community and connection lead (76%), followed by self-expression and creativity (62%), emphasising participatory over spectacle models.

Figure 10: Volunteer Roles Experience



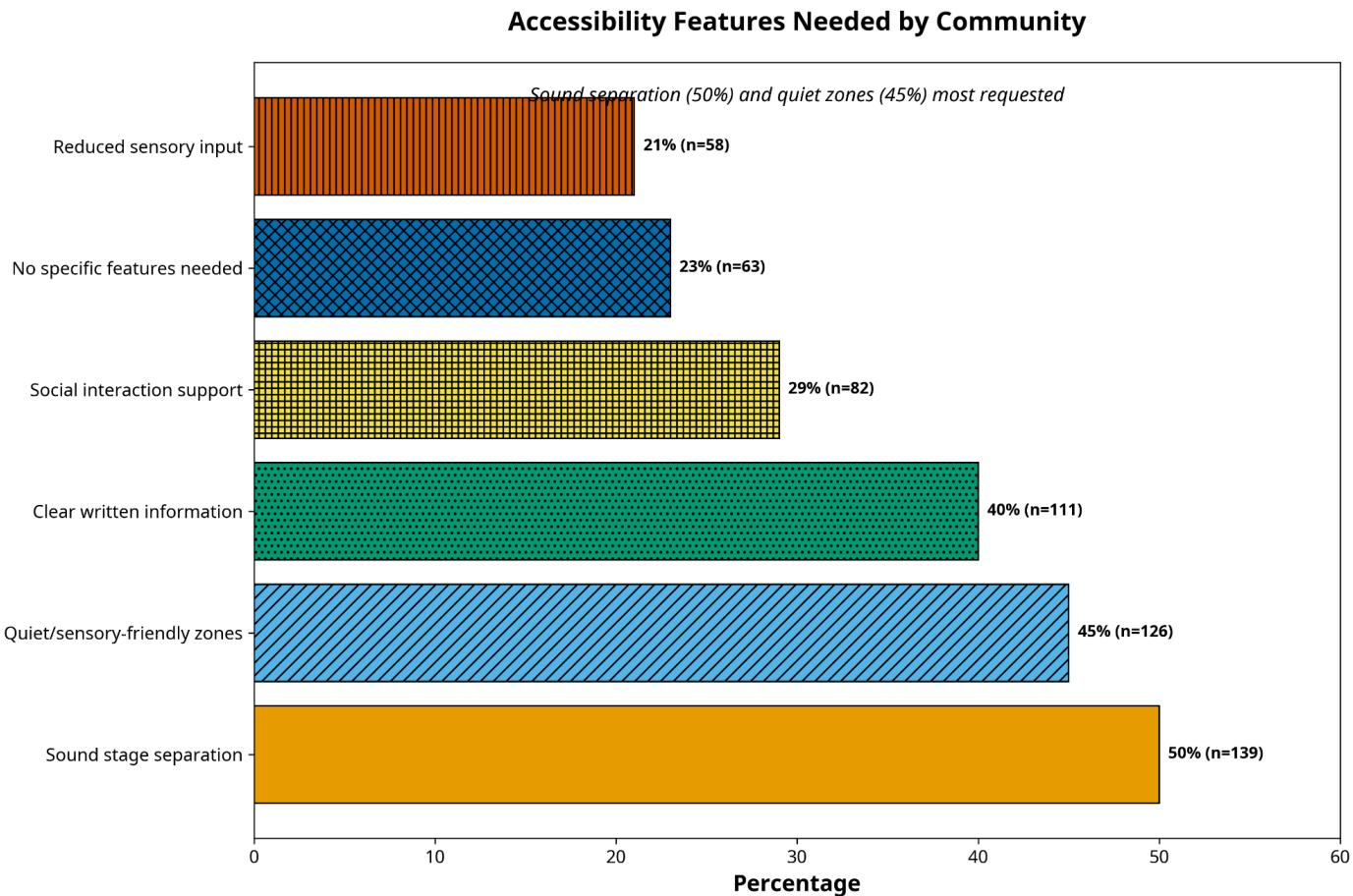
Volunteer Role Experience (Top 10). Leave No Trace leads (46%), followed by Gate (39%) and Greeter (36%), showing strong environmental and community values.

Figure 11: Leadership Interest



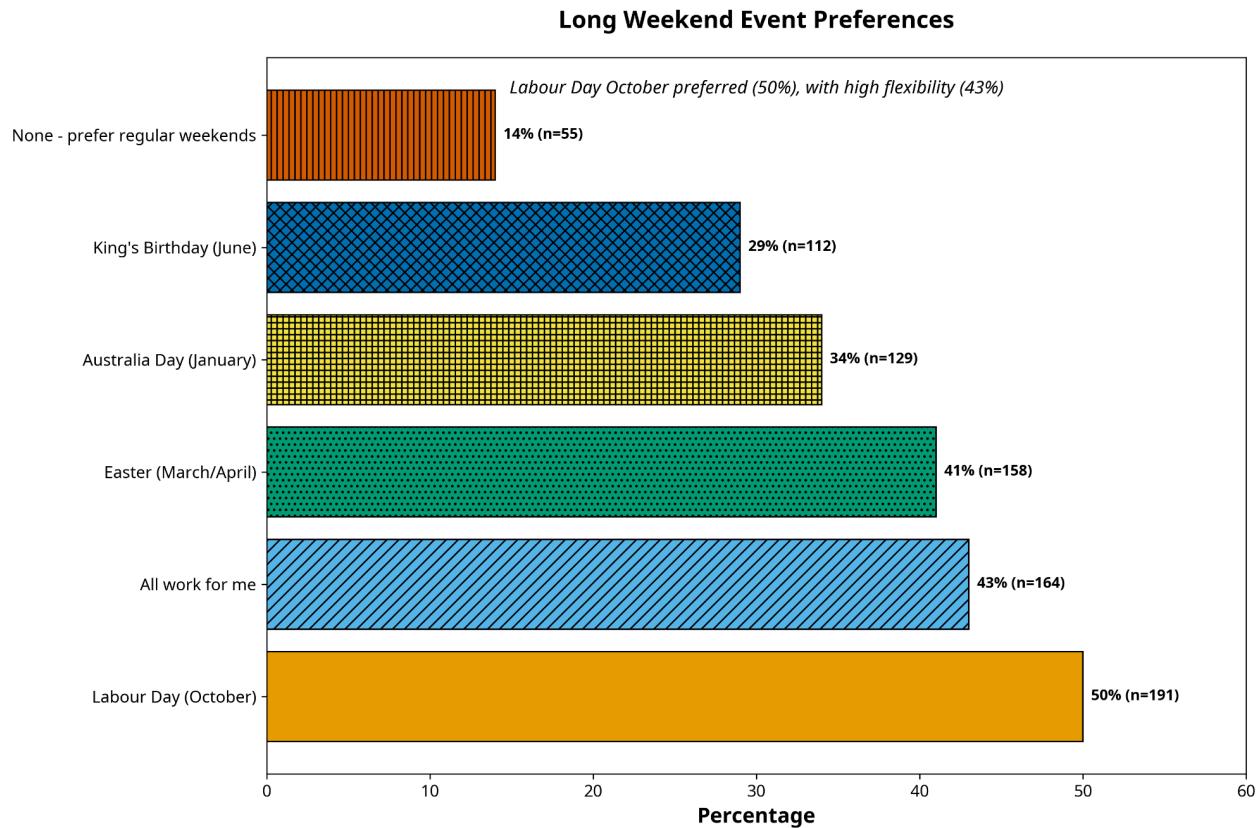
Leadership Responsibility Interest. Healthy balance with 49% preferring team roles and 51% interested in coordination, supporting sustainable leadership development.

Figure 12: Accessibility Features



Accessibility Features Needed. Sound separation (50%) and quiet zones (45%) top the list, reflecting the community's high neurodivergent representation.

Figure 13: Long Weekend Preferences



Preferred Long Weekend Timing. Labour Day October leads (50%) with high overall flexibility (43%), supporting multiple events throughout the year.
