NCIS Membership Survey 2023

The National Coalition of Independent Scholars (NCIS) conducted an online survey of its members in May-June 2023 to ascertain the extent to which members are using the benefits that NCIS offers, demand for new benefits, and opinions for planning a conference in 2024. Members were invited to take the survey in NCIS e-mails that included the link to it. Of the 225 members, 106 (47.1%) responded to the survey and 95 (89.6%) completed it. This report summarizes the survey data, along with stating the questions and including brief notes about interpretation of selected questions.

Executive Summary

Based on these NCIS member survey results, we can say about the background training and affiliations of members that independent scholars who are NCIS members are maturing and mature in their careers, work primarily in fields related to human sciences and humanities, and are not affiliated with other independent scholar organizations. When asked to report the general areas that they work in with opportunity to claim two, approximately 40% of survey respondents said that they work in the humanities, social sciences, and history, but can also use training in the sciences, business, law, and medicine (up to 6% in each major category). The members who responded to the survey have an incredible variety of interests with some tangential commonalities but few with identical areas. Only 5% are affiliated with another professional group for independent scholars.

When asked about their scholarly work, one-third of the survey respondents said that they serve only academic audiences and two-thirds think of themselves as serving lay, non-academic, and public audiences. The most common methods used by members are mixed methods (42%) and qualitative methods (32%), with fewer using theoretical (16%) and quantitative methods alone (7%). Three-quarters of members are working on journal articles and 55% are working on monographs. One-third are working on magazine and news articles and one-quarter on edited book volumes. Ten percent work on podcasts and eight percent curate museum exhibits.

Members tend to have been independent scholars for some time: 38% for 11 years or more and 25% for 5-10 years; only 5% are new to the endeavor. Of the survey respondents, 16% are Associate Members, 79% are Full Members, and 5% are Life Members. More than half (55%) have been NCIS members for 1 to 5 years, having joined during a time when there was a secular trend in the academic job market of an insufficient number of tenure-track jobs to absorb the numbers of educated academics. Unsurprisingly, the duration of membership increases with age. Half of the survey respondents said that they first learned about NCIS from a web search, and 16% by "word of mouth."

Since we asked about interests in topics for workshops and online resources, we have an extensive list of topics to consider adding or enhancing to NCIS member benefits. The most frequently cited items on member wish lists are about publishing. More than one-third of respondents would like more networking opportunities and more resources about "structuring a

book project", "promoting your book project to publishers", and "selecting suitable journals for your research."

When asked about how members use social media to engage with NCIS, Facebook was cited most frequently, with approximately 30% regular or frequent users, and over 20% using it "sometimes." Forty percent rarely or never use the NCIS Facebook page. Fewer members use the LinkedIn profile, Twitter, and H-Scholar.

When asked about membership in NCIS affiliate organizations, 19% said they are members of H-Scholar, 7% are members of UK-FIRE, and only one or two members are involved with the other NCIS affiliates. This suggests that many of the members who are based in the UK and are affiliated with UK-FIRE did not respond to the request to take the NCIS survey.

The demographics of the survey respondents are that slightly more than half are female, 37% are male, and 4% are non-binary and 6% preferred not to answer the question. Only 4% are under 35 years of age, 19% are 36–50, 36% are 51–65, and 41% are over 65 years. Three-quarters of respondents are based in North America, 14% in Europe, 6% in Australia and Asia, and only 2% are in Central and South America. Although 22% of respondents are current and former NCIS leaders and organizers, 55 (51%) of respondents said that they would possibly be willing to serve on the NCIS Board of Directors or an NCIS committee in the future.

The survey asked about use and preferences for NCIS member benefits. Of the membership benefits, the top three more often used are the NCIS professional affiliation (53%), NCIS e-mail address (24%), and NCIS grant funding (20%). Probes about other resources that members have access to revealed that 44% said that they are affiliated with an alumni association and 12% said that they have none. While one-third have access to an academic library through their alumni association, half of the respondents do not. When asked an open-ended question about other member benefits that NCIS does not currently offer but are desired, the most commonly cited was library access (14%), followed by a mentoring program (4%) and networking (4%). The survey questions and open-ended responses together list about 20 more membership benefits that are offered or that could be considered as future additions.

When asked about the usefulness of selected NCIS member benefits, only one-quarter of respondents said that any were useful at all. Similarly, other than reading *The Independent Scholar* journal articles, only 10-20% engaged with *TIS* in other ways in the past 5 years. However, when asked whether they would engage with TIS in any of five given ways in the upcoming 5 years, about 80% said that they would read journal articles and about half would engage in other ways as participants in the publication. Overall, these survey results suggest that members are not aware of all of the benefits, and if they were to learn about them, the benefits would be used more often.

When asked about what members appreciate most about NCIS, three-quarters said "professional identity", about two-thirds said "scholarly home", and half said "research legitimacy." When these responses are analyzed by age, half of those 51–65 mentioned it and smaller percentages of the other age groups made it their favorite benefit. Members aged 36–50 value "potential growth as a scholar" and "research legitimacy" most highly, which makes sense given the earlier stage in

their careers. Those who most appreciate research legitimacy are more often working on book projects than on articles for publications.
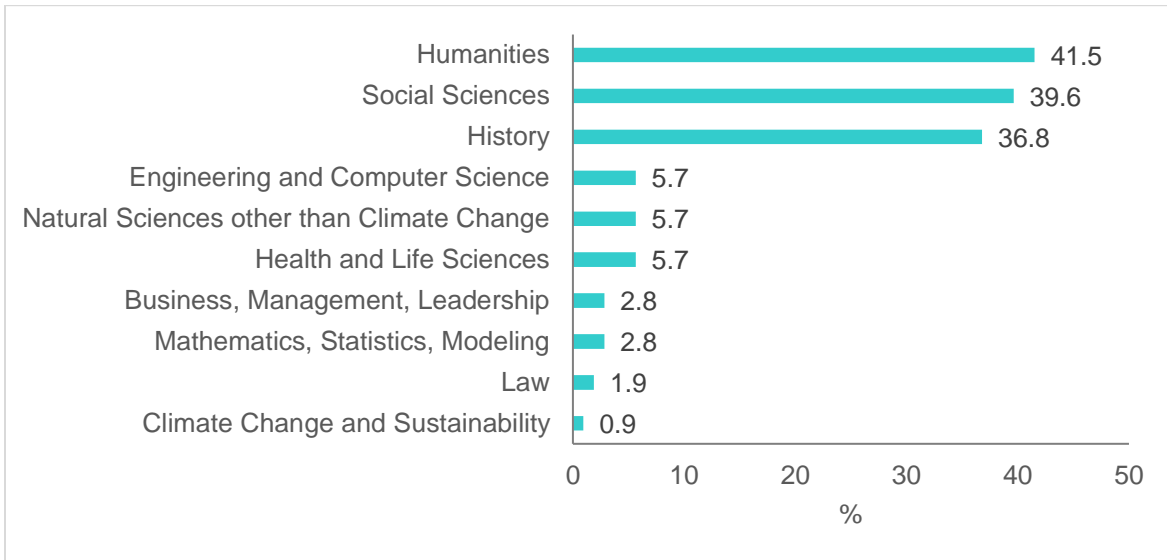
The final section of the survey was about interest in attending an NCIS conference next year. Two-thirds of the respondents who were still engaged in the survey at this point (n=71) are interested in a conference. Only these people were asked the rest of the questions about the conference. They show interest in a range of topics including resources for independent scholars (87%), how to deal with hurdles to independent scholarship (66%), how to gain and maintain credibility (62%), how to manage other aspects of life, and discipline-specific presentations. Overwhelmingly (82%), respondents preferred that the conference be a hybrid format. Slightly more than one-third would consider travelling to Europe and two-thirds would travel to a site in North America. Supposing that the conference was to be held online only, half of respondents said that they would participate more fully in several half days over one week. One-third said they would be more engaged in a conference of full days, or in several 1-2-hour sessions held over a 2-week period. Forty-four respondents said that they would be interested in participating in some way as an organizer or presenter, and at least 16 would volunteer for either the conference organizing committee or program committee.

Sandra A. Ham, Independent Scholar and Biostatistician,
Writing from Buffalo, New York, USA, in September 2023,

Reporting on a survey conducted by the Survey Manager, Kevin Waitkuweit, Independent Scholar at Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana, USA.

Section One: About Your Work

1. What is your general area of independent scholarly work? (check up to two)

2. More specifically, in which academic subdiscipline(s) do you work or identify? The members who responded to the survey have an incredible variety of interests with some tangential commonalities but few with identical areas. The table lists the responses.

20th century political history; U.S. and WW2-era Latin America	Earth sciences	Modern British history; archaeology in the Middle East
20th Century U.S. Diplomacy	Electrical engineering; physics	Modern History; Australian History; Japanese History; Gender; Occupation Studies
African American history; public history	English	Music history
African history and women's history	English literature	Music; art
Agricultural history; 19th century U.S. reform movements	Epidemiology	Musicology; linguistics; identity studies;
American and Latin American History	Ethics	New Testament; early church history
American history; urban history	Ethnomusicology	Non-fiction writing
American studies; Jewish studies; immigration & ethnicity	Film studies	Ornithology
Anthropology	Folklore; anthropology; ethnology; religious studies	Pagan theology
Anthropology; history	Francophone literature; French Canadian culture and literature	Peace education; women and gender studies
Anthropology; mythology; literature; philosophy; theology	French Canada	Philanthropy and social change initiatives

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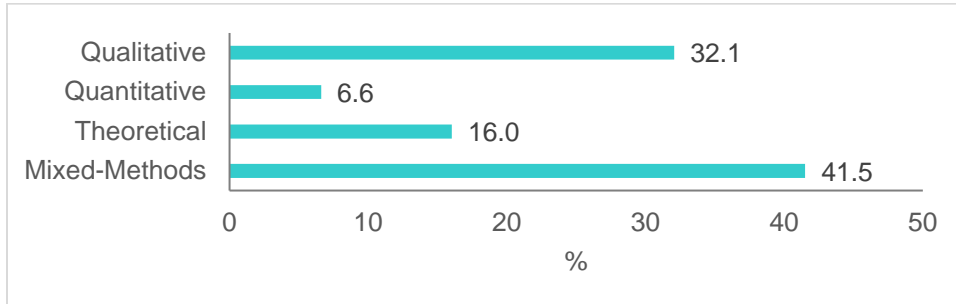|		
Anthrozoology	Health and education	Philosophy
Applied linguistics; composition; higher education	Health informatics	Philosophy; history of ideas
Archaeology; Egyptology; digital humanities	Heirs property; use of "race" in science	Physics; electrical engineering
Art history	History education; Russian Imperial History; US History	Plant pathology
Art theory and philosophy	History of Christianity; sustainable futures	PMP; EQ; Self-esteem; digital integration
Asian and Asian American studies	History of maritime medicine	Political science
Business process management	History; Religion; and Education	Politics; sociology and education
Business; management; leadership	Labor history; American Jewish History; Jewish studies	Psychoanalysis
Gender and women's history	Language; literature & culture; journalism; Islamic studies	Psychology
Career and technical education; Catholic secondary schools	Language; Literature; Area Studies	Quantum field theory; algebraic geometry; number theory
Cell and molecular biology	Latin American History	Religion
Central and East European history	Latin American Studies	Religious studies
Chinese studies	Learning at work; learning in organizations	Scientific communication; doctoral education
Clinical psychology; cross-cultural counseling	Library and information studies; qualitative research; law and social science	Sociolinguistics
Colonial Latin American history	Linguistics (stylistics); local history	Sociology
Criminology	Literacy education	Sociology; anthropology
Cultural studies; language instruction	Maritime and technological history; focus on early modern North Atlantic	Sociology and economics
Cultural symbolism	Matroid theory; programming Language research	Theater studies
Development studies	Mechanical engineering	U.S. history
Developmental psychology; psychotherapy; nursing	Medieval literature/history/art; biography; poetry; 20th century literature in English	Victorian studies; women's studies
Drama; cultural studies	Military history	Visual culture; China

3. Are you affiliated with another independent scholar organization not associated with NCIS? (Check all that apply)

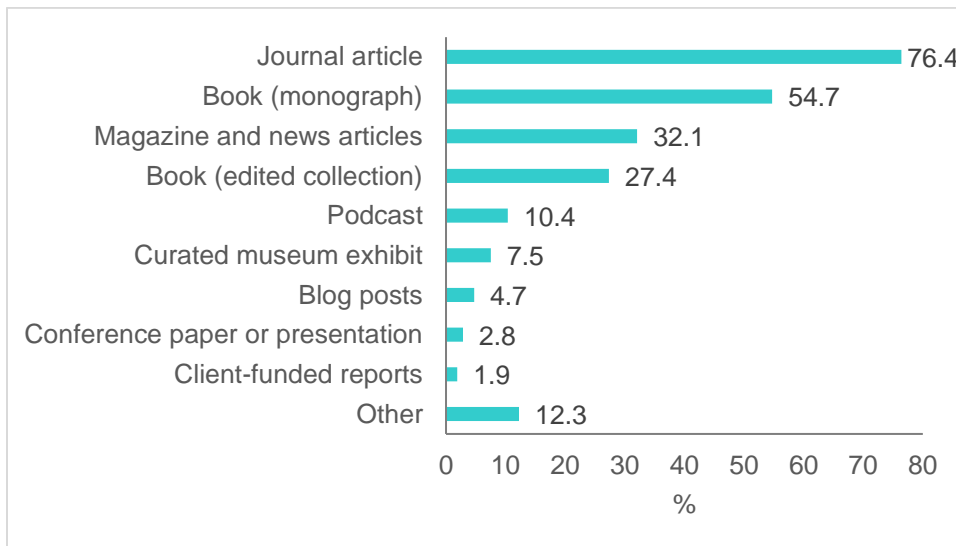| Organization	N	%
Ronin Institute	2	1.9
Institute for Globally Distributed Open Research and Education (IGDORE)	3	2.8
San Diego Independent Scholars	1	0.9
None	101	95.3

4. Do you think of yourself as serving lay, non-academic, or public audiences with your work?

	N	%
Yes	72	67.9
No	32	30.2

5. What is your preferred research method? "Theoretical" includes mathematics and philosophy and "mixed methods" include any combination of methods.
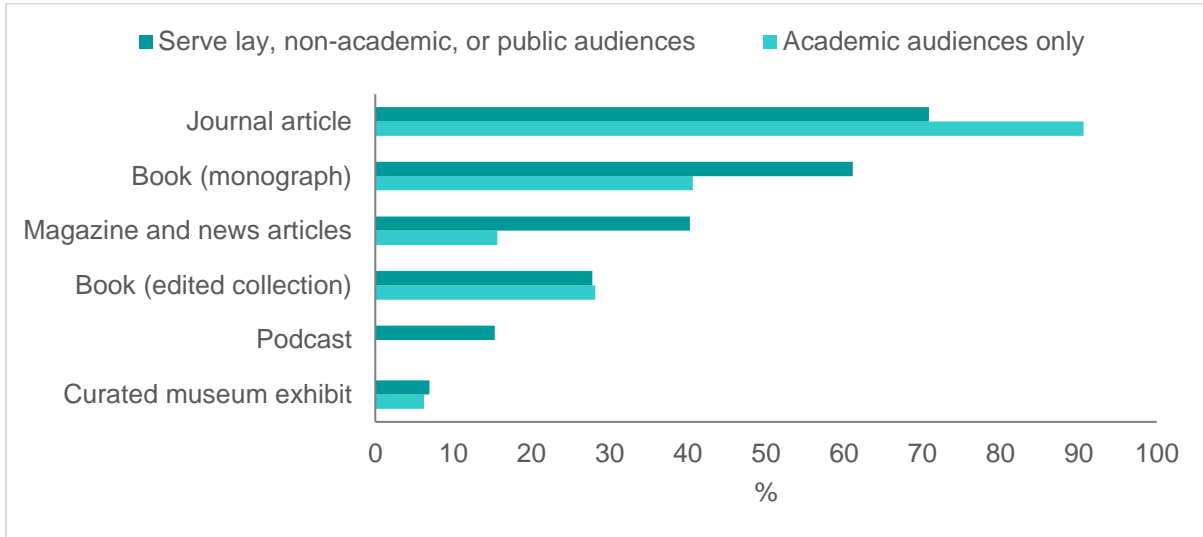

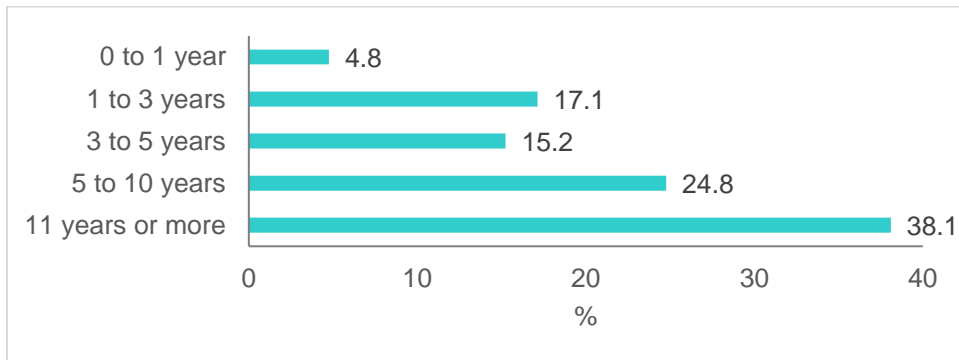6. What sort of research projects do you have (in progress or in mind)? (Check all that apply)

"Other" includes documentary film, webinars for general and academic audiences, encyclopedia articles and editing and encyclopedia, a textbook, cooperative extension articles, public presentations, articles for Academia.edu, a memoir, and fabricating a device.
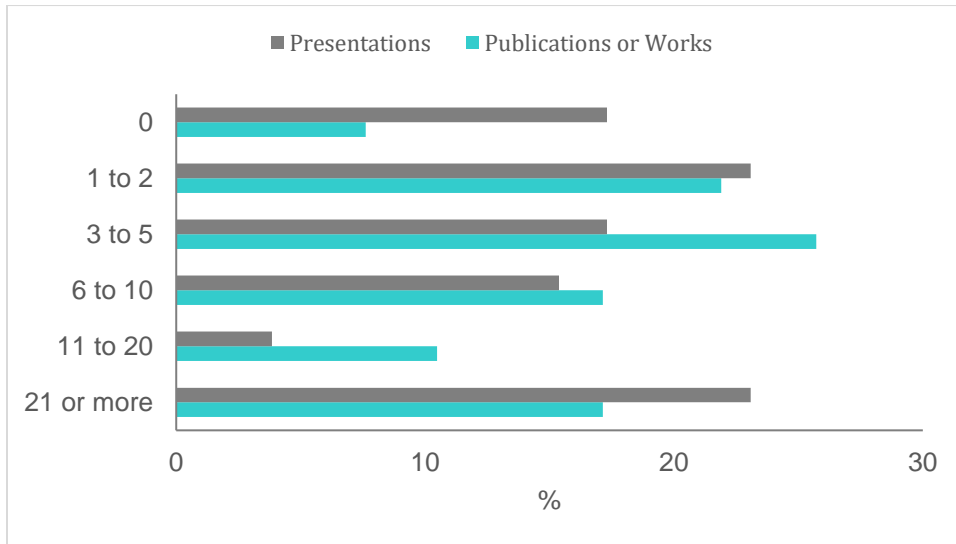
The next chart shows the kinds of research projects by the type of audience. Note that scholars can have multiple target audiences and engage in different types of projects for each audience.

Legend:
- Serve lay, non-academic, or public audiences
- Academic audiences only

Categories (top to bottom): Journal article, Book (monograph), Magazine and news articles, Book (edited collection), Podcast, Curated museum exhibit

X-axis: % (0 to 100)

7. How long have you considered yourself to be an independent scholar? (Time is in years)

Category	%
0 to 1 year	4.8
1 to 3 years	17.1
3 to 5 years	15.2
5 to 10 years	24.8
11 years or more	38.1

X-axis: % (0 to 40)

8. How many publications or works in any format do you have as an independent scholar?
and 10. About how many presentations have you given as an independent scholar? Two-thirds (n=72, 68.6%) give public presentations.
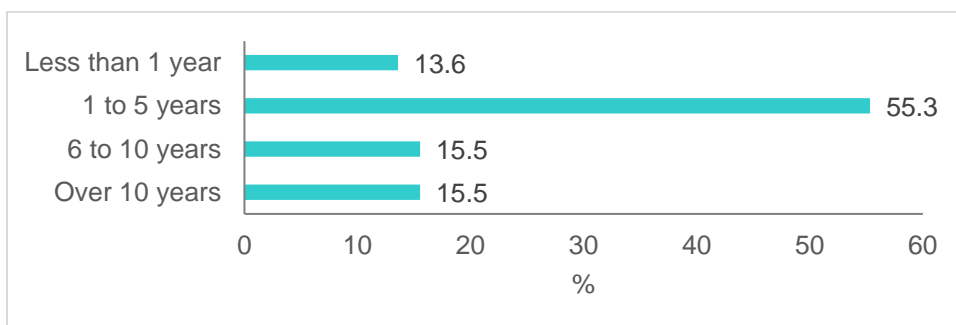

Section Two: NCIS Membership

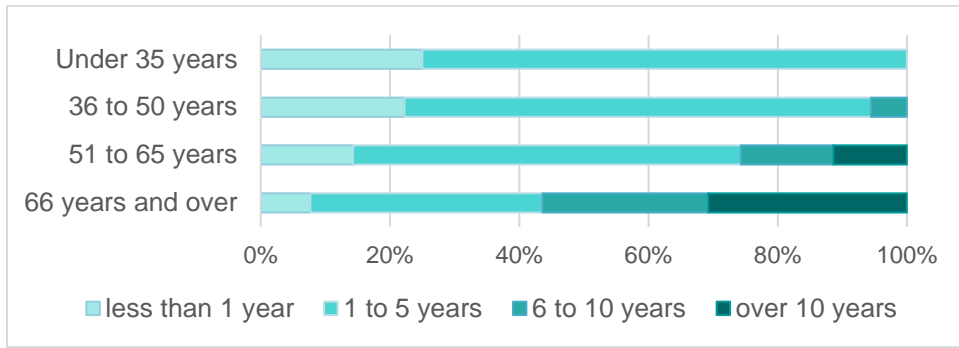11. Are you currently a member of NCIS? Of the 106 respondents, 104 are members.

12. What is your membership level?

	N	%
Associate Member	17	16.3
Full Member	82	78.8
Life Member	5	4.8

13. How long have you been a member of NCIS? The bar charts show the distribution and the distribution by age group.
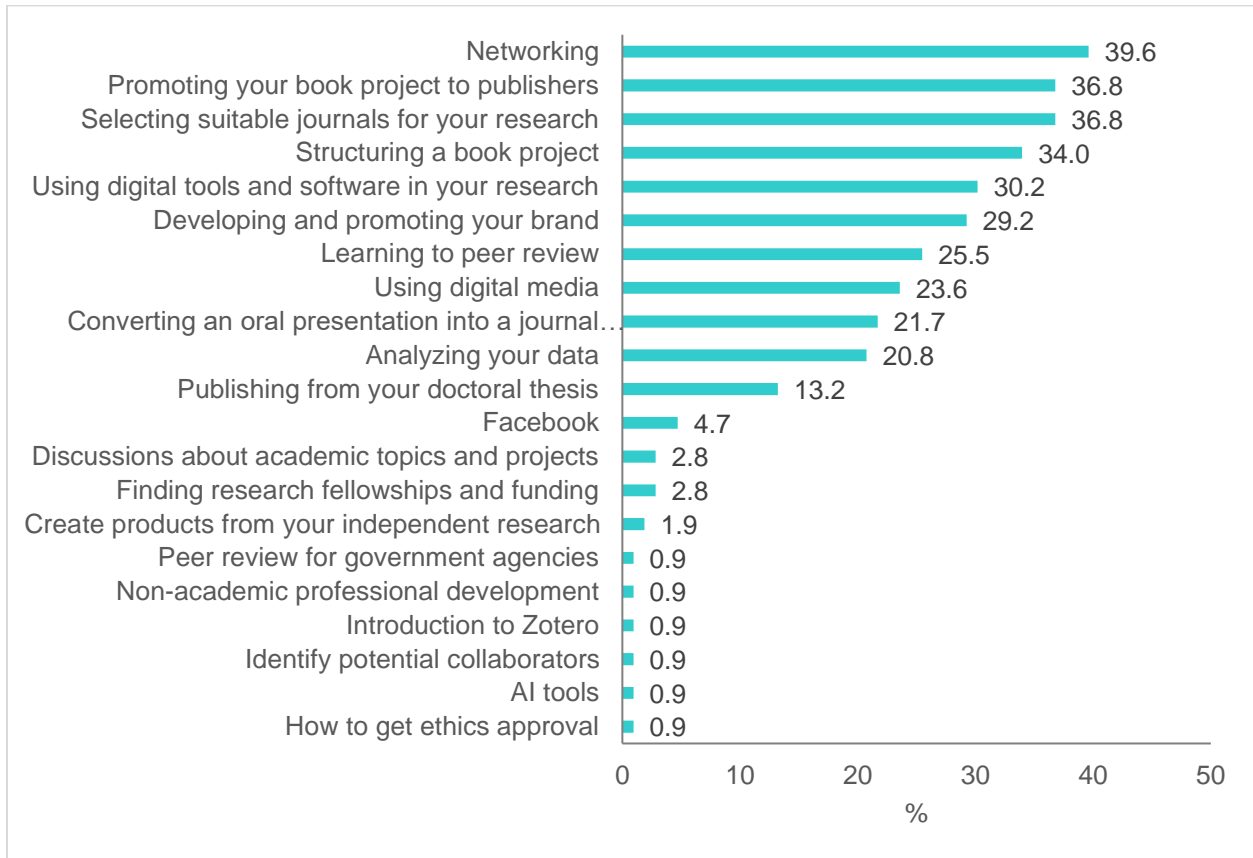
Chart showing years of membership by age group:
- Under 35 years
- 36 to 50 years
- 51 to 65 years
- 66 years and over

Legend: less than 1 year | 1 to 5 years | 6 to 10 years | over 10 years

14. How did you first hear about NCIS?
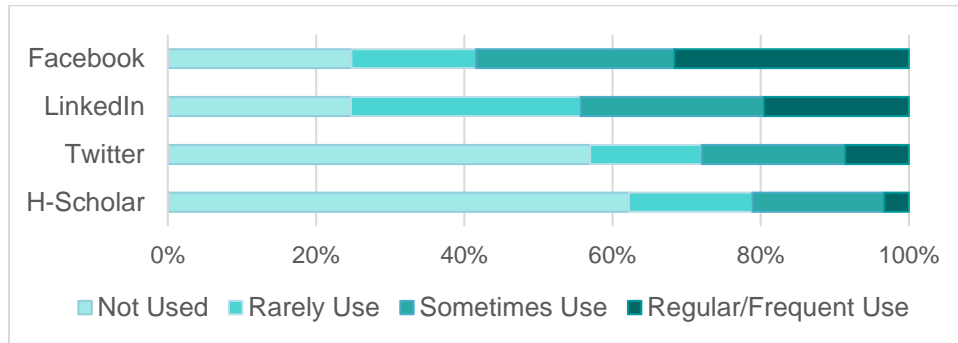
	N	%
Web search	52	49.1
Word of mouth	17	16.0
Facebook	8	7.5
H-Scholar or H-Net	8	7.5
Other independent scholars' organization	3	2.8
LinkedIn	2	1.9
Twitter	2	1.9
E-mail	1	0.9
Research flyer or ad in an academic journal	1	0.9
NCIS conference at my university	1	0.9

15. Which of the following topics would you like to see in NCIS workshops and online resources? (Check all that apply) The chart shows response categories and write-in responses.

Topic	%
Networking	39.6
Promoting your book project to publishers	36.8
Selecting suitable journals for your research	36.8
Structuring a book project	34.0
Using digital tools and software in your research	30.2
Developing and promoting your brand	29.2
Learning to peer review	25.5
Using digital media	23.6
Converting an oral presentation into a journal…	21.7
Analyzing your data	20.8
Publishing from your doctoral thesis	13.2
Facebook	4.7
Discussions about academic topics and projects	2.8
Finding research fellowships and funding	2.8
Create products from your independent research	1.9
Peer review for government agencies	0.9
Non-academic professional development	0.9
Introduction to Zotero	0.9
Identify potential collaborators	0.9
AI tools	0.9
How to get ethics approval	0.9

Note: This question should have had additional response categories including "discussions about academic topics and projects", "finding research fellowships and funding", "create products from your independent research", and "how to get ethics approval."

16. Which social media do you use or would use for NCIS networking / discussions or news? NCIS has a presence on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and H-Scholar.

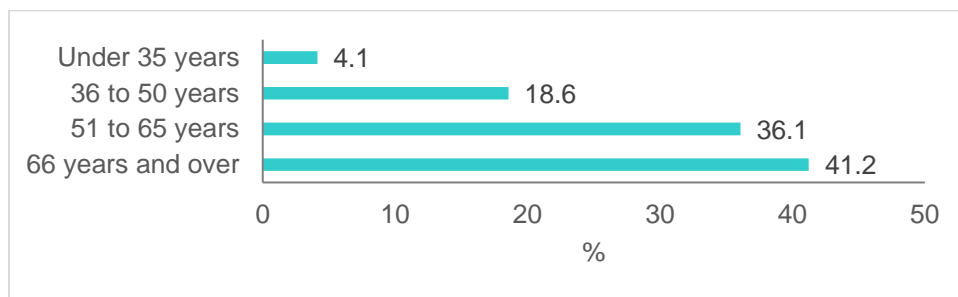17. Are you a member or subscriber to any NCIS affiliate organizations? (Check all that apply)

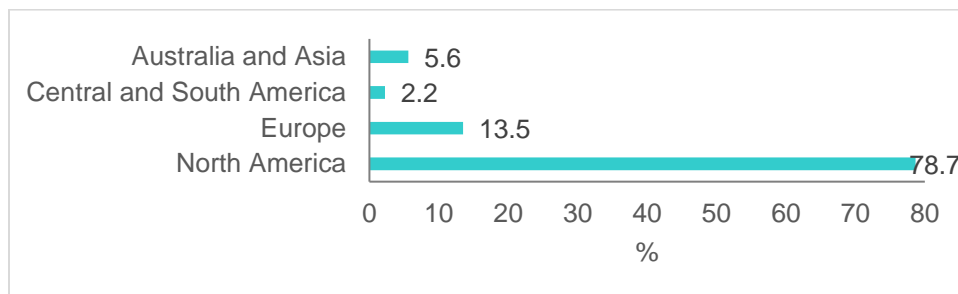|	N	%
H-Scholar	20	18.9
UK-FIRE	7	6.6
San Diego Independent Scholars	2	1.9
Independent Researchers in France IRF/CI	1	0.9
Independent Scholars' Association of Australia	1	0.9
Institute for History Study	1	0.9
Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum	1	0.9
Princeton Research Forum	1	0.9
NW Independent Scholars	1	0.9
CAIS before being defunct	1	0.9

Section Three: Demographics

18. Gender

	N	%
Male	39	36.8
Female	57	53.8
Non-binary	4	3.8
Prefer not to answer	6	5.7

19. Age

20. In what country are you based? Responses are grouped by continent.

21. In addition to your independent scholarship do you hold a regular full-time position unrelated to your research? (Select one)
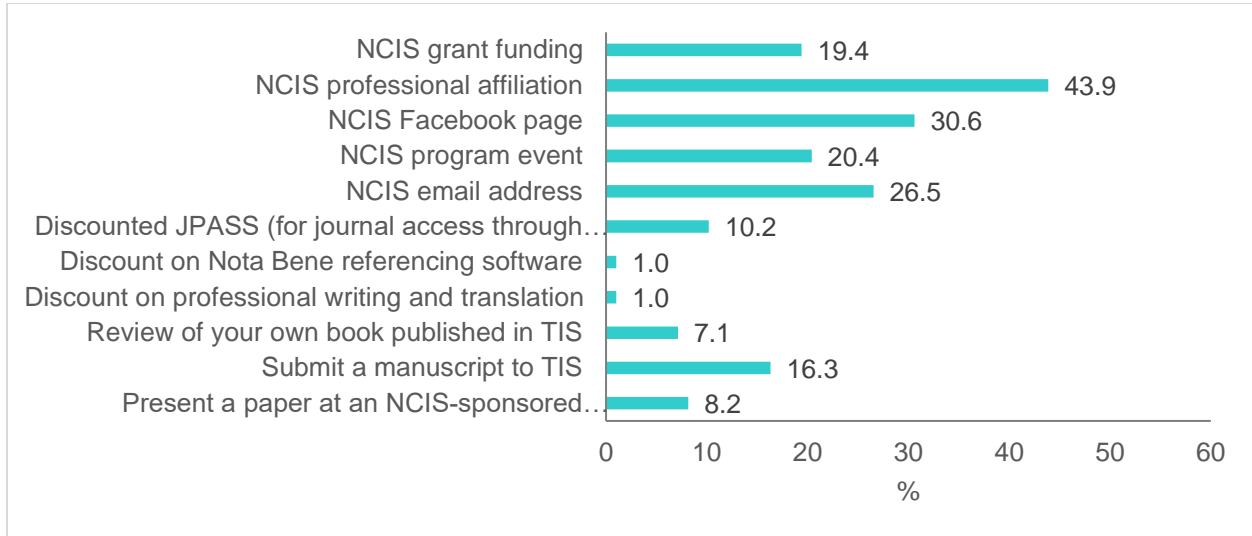
	N	%
Full-time work	20	18.9
Part-time work	33	31.1
Retired	6	5.7
Prefer not to answer	47	44.3

22. Do you have any kind of affiliation with a university or other academic body or research organization?
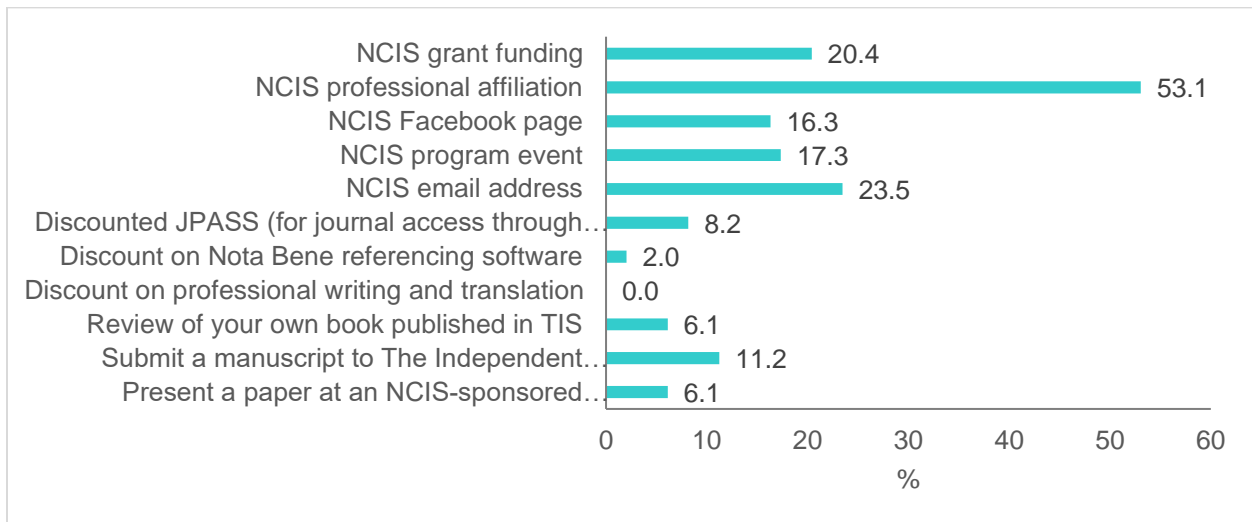
	N	%
Unpaid affiliated status	22	20.8
Employed Part-time	9	8.5
Employed Full-time	5	4.7
Professional society	3	2.8
Publisher	2	1.9
Research institute	1	0.9
Small business	1	0.9
None or retired	23	21.7
Prefer not to answer	40	37.7

Section Four: Member Benefits

23. NCIS offers multiple benefits of membership. Have you used them? Which of them have you used in the past 5 years? (Check all that apply)

Benefit	%
NCIS grant funding	19.4
NCIS professional affiliation	43.9
NCIS Facebook page	30.6
NCIS program event	20.4
NCIS email address	26.5
Discounted JPASS (for journal access through…	10.2
Discount on Nota Bene referencing software	1.0
Discount on professional writing and translation	1.0
Review of your own book published in TIS	7.1
Submit a manuscript to TIS	16.3
Present a paper at an NCIS-sponsored…	8.2

24. Of the membership benefits, which are the top three you use?

Benefit	%
NCIS grant funding	20.4
NCIS professional affiliation	53.1
NCIS Facebook page	16.3
NCIS program event	17.3
NCIS email address	23.5
Discounted JPASS (for journal access through…	8.2
Discount on Nota Bene referencing software	2.0
Discount on professional writing and translation	0.0
Review of your own book published in TIS	6.1
Submit a manuscript to The Independent…	11.2
Present a paper at an NCIS-sponsored…	6.1

25. Do you belong to an alumni association? If so, where? (for those with no alumni affiliation please respond N/A). There is a wide variety of academic affiliations with universities.

	N	%
Alumni affiliation	47	44.3
No alumni affiliation	13	12.3
Prefer not to answer	46	43.4

26. Do you have access to an academic library through at least one of your alumni associations?

	N	%
Yes	35	33.0
No	55	51.9
Prefer not to answer	16	15.1

Note: This question could have been written more clearly to distinguish between any library access and access to online journals and databases. Some library access might not include the resources that are needed, and so access itself is not sufficient for one's work.

27. What other member benefits would you like NCIS to offer?

	N	%
Library access	15	14.2
Mentoring program	4	3.8
Networking	4	3.8
Collaborative support and feedback	3	2.8
Funding	3	2.8
Human subjects review	2	1.9
Academic discussions	1	0.9
Grant expert	1	0.9
Job hunting workshops	1	0.9
Membership directory	1	0.9
Non-academic professional development	1	0.9
Photo ID card and membership certificate	1	0.9
Software discounts (i.e., Nvivo)	1	0.9
Travel and hotel discounts	1	0.9

Note: This is helpful. We should have more detailed discussions about library and online resources. Since there are so many retired members it should not be difficult at all to establish a mentoring program. Explore more about the issues with funding: is it about conference support or about funding for the research itself and needing more information about how to find and win research grants?

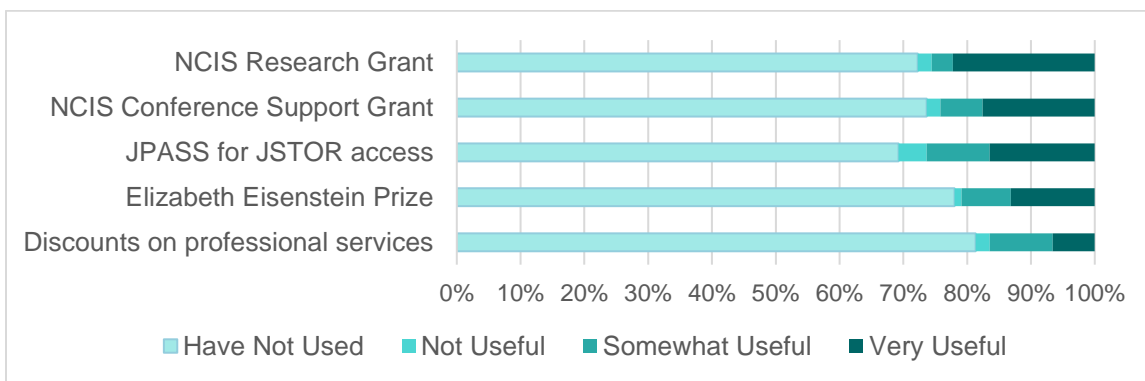28. Have you ever served on the NCIS Board of Directors or an NCIS committee?

	N	%
Yes	23	21.7
No	74	69.8
Prefer not to answer	9	8.5

29. Would you be interested in serving on the NCIS Board of Directors or an NCIS committee?

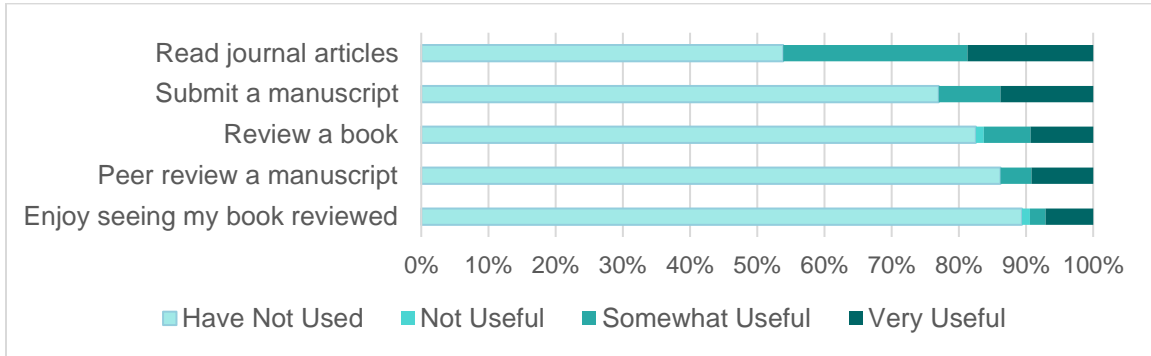|	N	%
Yes	15	14.2
Maybe	40	37.7
No	38	35.8

Note: We have a leadership pipeline! Shadowing program for future officers and board members.

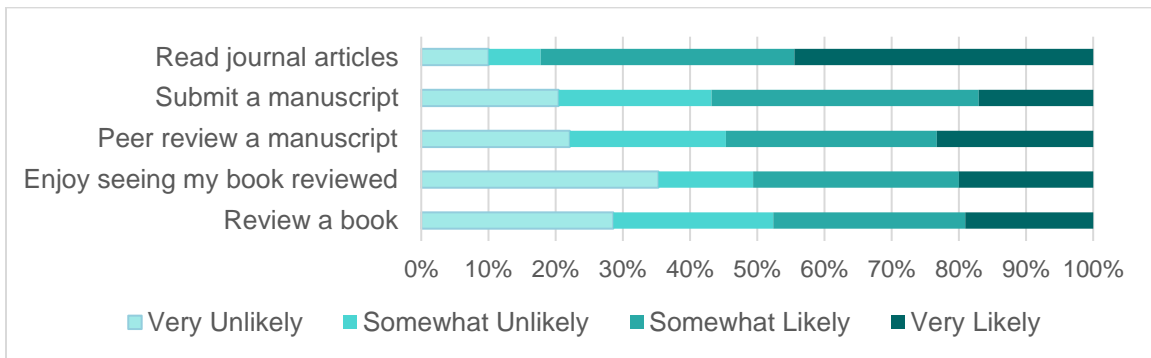30. Based on your experience in the past 5 years, please rate the usefulness of the following NCIS resources:

31. Please describe, during the past 5 years, your use of the following opportunities offered to independent scholars by the NCIS journal, *The Independent Scholar* (*TIS*).
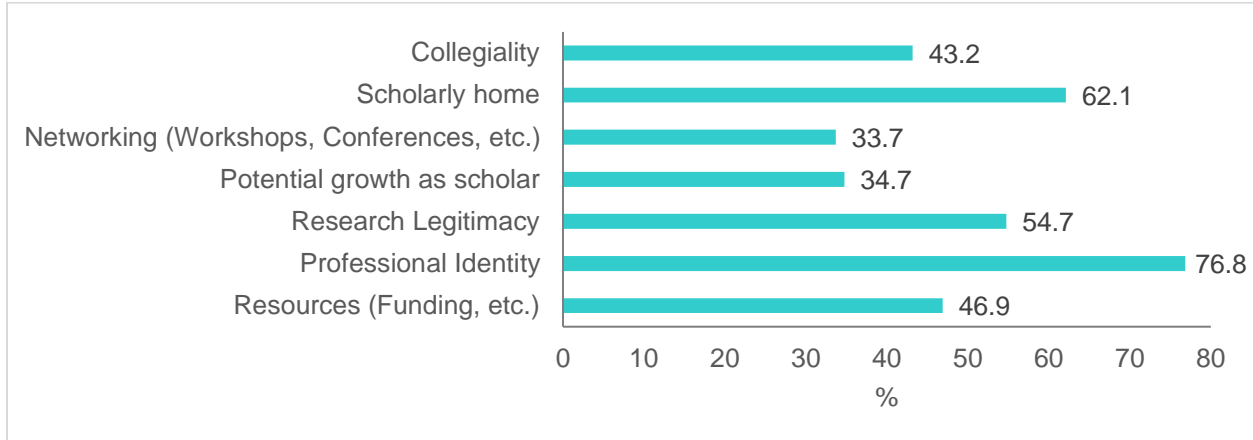

32. Please describe, during the next 5 years, your use of the following opportunities offered to independent scholars by the NCIS journal, *The Independent Scholar* (*TIS*).
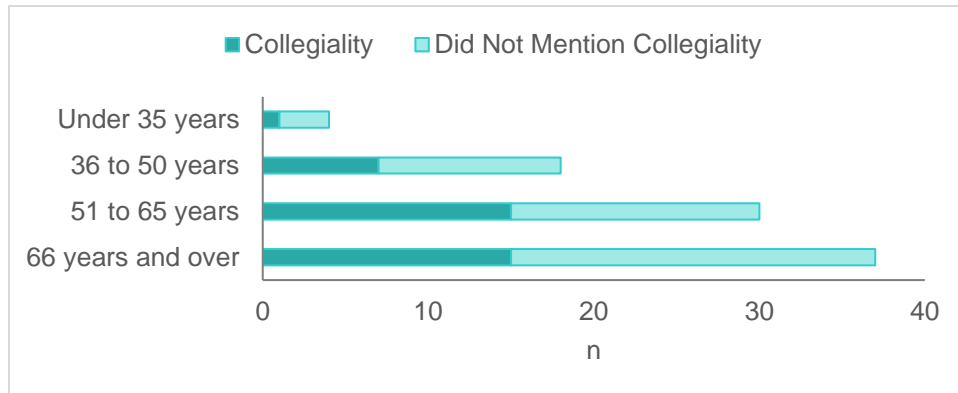

Note: QQ. 31-32 show the effect of member education about NCIS benefits. Have an event about *TIS*, what it is, how it works, what it offers, and how to participate.

33. What do you appreciate most about NCIS membership? (Check all that apply)

Collegiality: 43.2
Scholarly home: 62.1
Networking (Workshops, Conferences, etc.): 33.7
Potential growth as scholar: 34.7
Research Legitimacy: 54.7
Professional Identity: 76.8
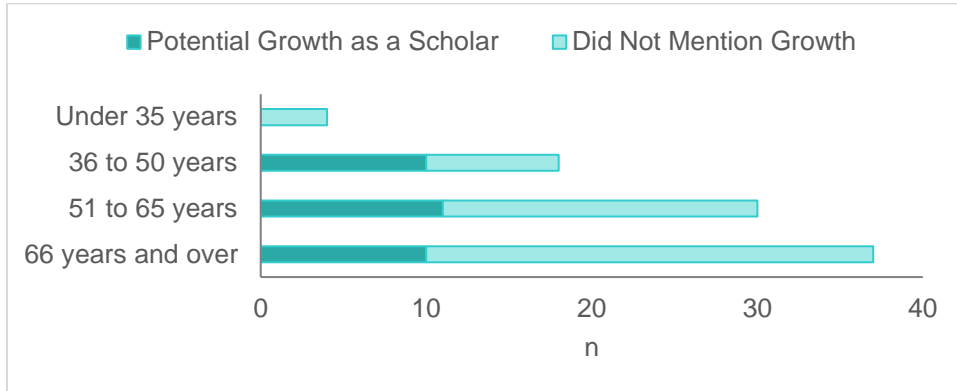Resources (Funding, etc.): 46.9

(% on x-axis, 0 to 80)

Note: NCIS could do more to talk about how it can be used for professional identity and a scholarly home. An added web page to the website that is just about this topic with examples and videos with interviews of members who do it well.
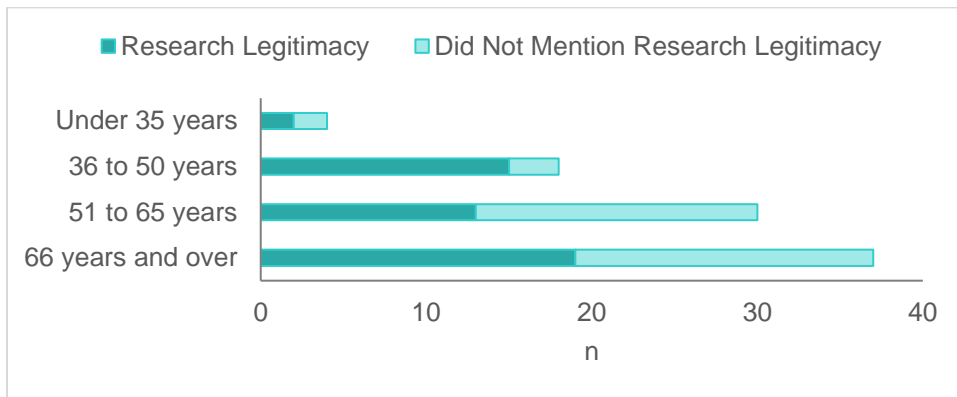
The importance of NCIS offering collegiality varies by age; half of those 51 to 65 years old mentioned that they appreciate this the most.

Legend: ■ Collegiality □ Did Not Mention Collegiality

Under 35 years
36 to 50 years
51 to 65 years
66 years and over
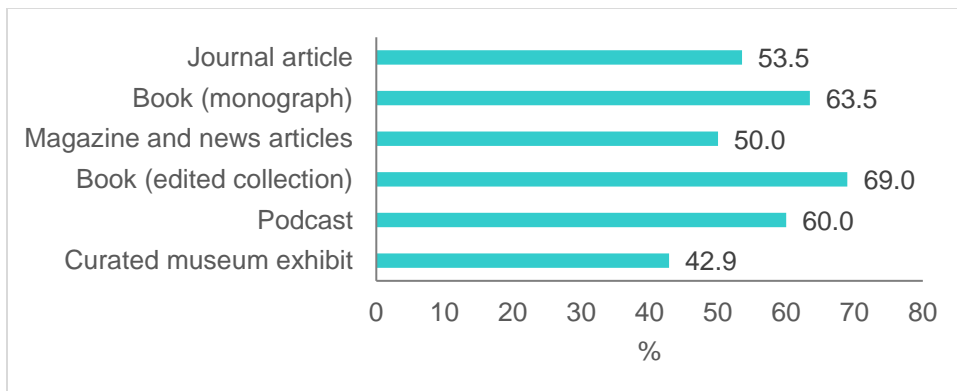
(n on x-axis, 0 to 40)

Potential growth as a scholar also varies by age, with those age 36 to 50 predictably valuing it more than the other age groups.

The importance of NCIS providing research legitimacy varies by age, valued most by those 36 to 50 years old.

The percentage of members who most appreciate research legitimacy varied by the kind of project reported above. Those who are working on books, whether edited collections or monographs, find NCIS to provide research legitimacy more than scholars with other kinds of projects for academic and lay audiences.
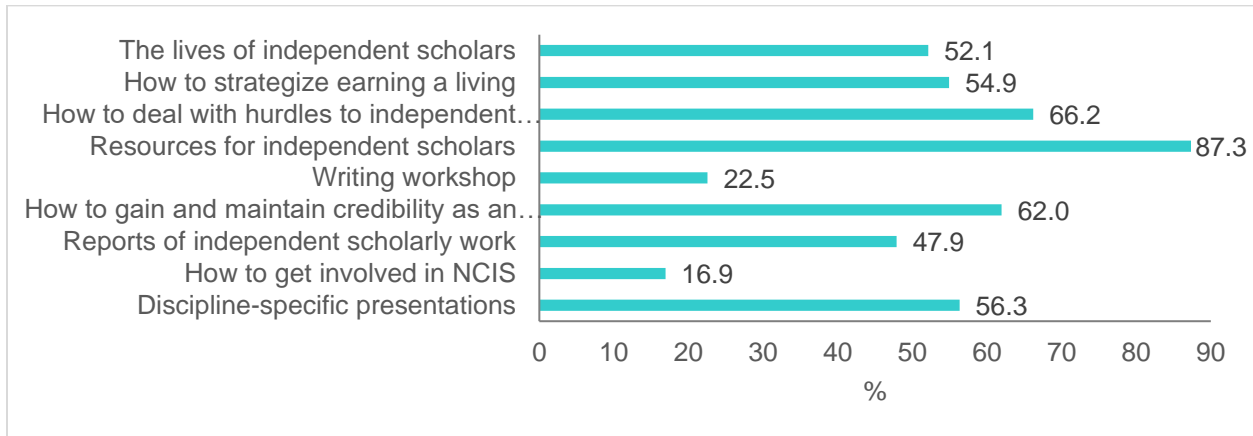
Section Five: Conference Planning

34. Are you interested in attending the NCIS conference next year? Those who said "yes" (n=71) are the denominator for the questions in this section.

	N	%
Yes	71	67.0
No	24	22.6

35. What are you interested in seeing on the conference program? (Check all that apply)

36. How would you prefer this conference to be held?

	N	%
Hybrid (both in-person and online)	58	81.7
In-person only	8	11.3
Online only	6	8.5

37. If NCIS were to host a physical (in-person) conference, to which of the following would you consider travelling? (check all that apply)

	N	%
North America	46	64.8
Continental Europe	27	38.0
Great Britain	26	36.6
No Preference/Does Not Apply	12	16.9

38. What is the maximum would you be willing to pay as a conference fee for in-person attendance? (In US Dollars)

	N	%
$50	4	5.6
$100	14	19.7
$150	16	22.5
$200	13	18.3
$250	8	11.3
$300	3	4.2
It depends on the length and usefulness of the conference	3	4.2

39. If the conference is held in person in a place where you are willing to travel, for how long would you prefer the conference last?

	N	%
1 to 2 days	26	36.6
2 to 3 days	38	53.5

40. What is the maximum would you be willing to pay as a conference fee to attend online? (In US Dollars)

	N	%
$25	12	16.9
$50	23	32.4
$75	13	18.3
$100	13	18.3
$125	5	7.0
$175	1	1.4

41. If the conference is held online only, which of the following formats would likely facilitate your full participation?" (Check all that apply)

	N	%
Full days	24	33.8
Several half days over one week	37	52.1
Several 1-2 hour sessions held over a 2-week period	26	36.6
Several 1-2 hour sessions held over a 3-4-week period	1	1.4
Any of these formats	2	2.8
Would not attend an online conference	2	2.8
Recorded sessions	1	1.4

42. For any online conference sessions, which formats would you likely take advantage of? (Check all that apply.)

	N	%
Live streamed sessions and discussion	54	76.1
Mix of live and pre-recorded presentations, with breakout rooms for discussion	44	62.0
Recorded sessions available to watch for 1 month after the conference ends	43	60.6

43. Would you be interested in participating in some way as an organizer or presenter?

	N	%
Yes	44	62.0
No	26	36.6

44. How would you like to take part? (Check all that apply)

	N	%
Present a paper	43	60.6
Chair or take part in a workshop	20	28.2
Chair or take part in a roundtable discussion	24	33.8
Chair or take part in a panel	25	35.2
Volunteer as a member of the conference organizing committee	8	11.3
Volunteer as a member of the program committee including chairing one conference theme	13	18.3
Volunteer as a member of the program committee in general	16	22.5