



COMPOST CHANGES

UW-Madison overhauls food waste collection program

Food Waste Collection at UW-Madison

Initial Survey Report

Issued: August 4th, 2021

Data Compiled: September 27th, 2021

Initial Report Completed: November 12th, 2021

BACKGROUND

August 4th, 2021: Compost changes: UW–Madison must overhaul food waste collection program

In recent years, UW–Madison maintained a successful campus food waste collection program. However, due to unforeseen circumstances the university must overhaul the program. **Learn more below and please take our survey to help UW determine next steps.**

[TAKE THE SURVEY](#)

Why?

On July 30th, 2021, UW–Madison was forced to suspend collection of food waste (commonly referred to as “compost”) generated on campus. Previously, campus employees collected food waste in a variety of locations on campus, such as buckets, carts, and in dining facilities. The organic material was hauled away to an anaerobic digester. The operator of the digester, Clean Fuel Partners LLC, notified UW–Madison that it would no longer accept food waste at the digester due to its conversion to a renewable natural gas (RNG) production facility. Now, the digester only accepts manure as a feedstock.

What has been done to fix the problem?

In Spring 2021, the UW–Madison Waste & Recycling team sought out a new vendor and issued two different simplified bid requests. However, neither attempt was successful. While UW–Madison has the ability to collect and haul the material, it does not have a vendor to accept the material. Without any immediate options, UW–Madison promptly halted its general collection and management of food waste generated on campus. All “front of house” food waste collection points are suspended. This means that mobile carts labeled “compost” will be removed from buildings. The buckets used in the [Compost Stewards program](#) will be collected and a follow-up survey will be provided to participants.

In the short-term, UW-Madison is considering its own campus processing outlets. If a suitable outlet is found, only collection locations that generate large amount of food waste and employ trained UW staff located in the “back of house” will be considered. These targeted locations have processes for creating a clean material stream. Like many food waste collection programs, [contamination remains a notable concern](#).

Where will the food waste go now?

In the immediate future and if no internal outlets are found, the [food waste will be included in the trash stream and sent to the Dane County Landfill](#). Fortunately, the Dane County Landfill captures an estimated 85% – 90%* of the methane released by the decomposing food waste and converts it into compressed natural gas (CNG) fuel.

**The methane capture rate is based on a model conducted by the [Dane County Department of Waste & Renewables](#).*

What are the next steps?

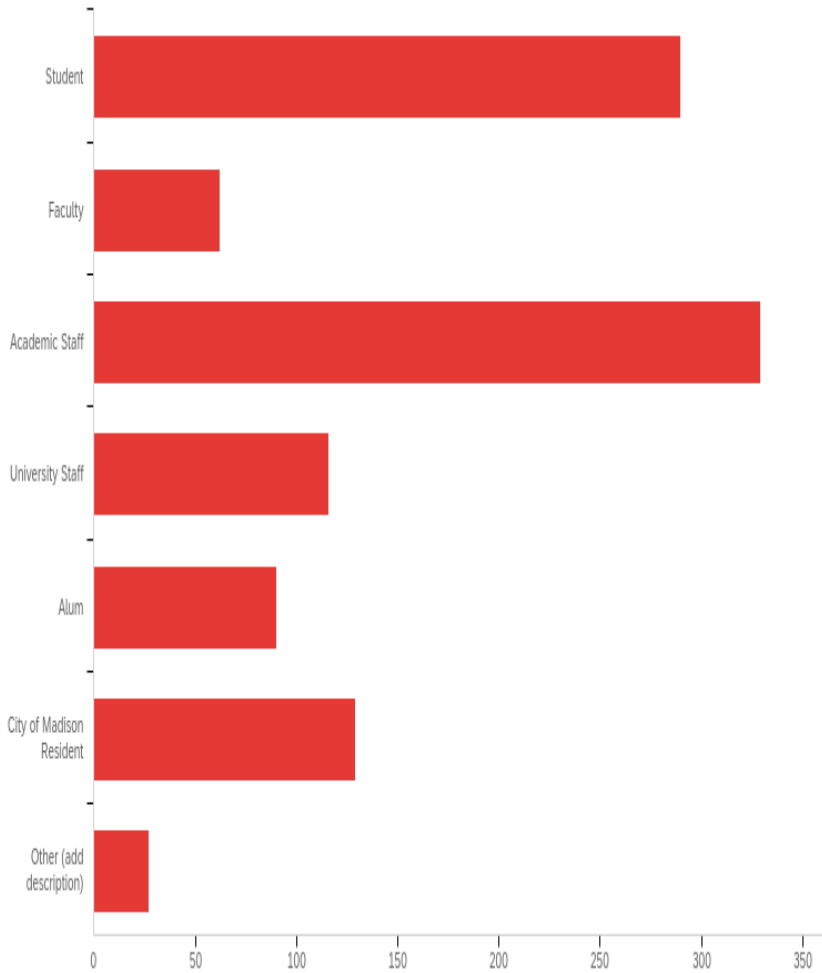
It is critical that UW–Madison and the Office of Sustainability hear from campus users to help inform next steps for a short and long term solution to managing food waste.

Click on the “Take the Survey” button to provide your feedback.

[TAKE THE SURVEY](#)

SURVEY

Q15 - Designation

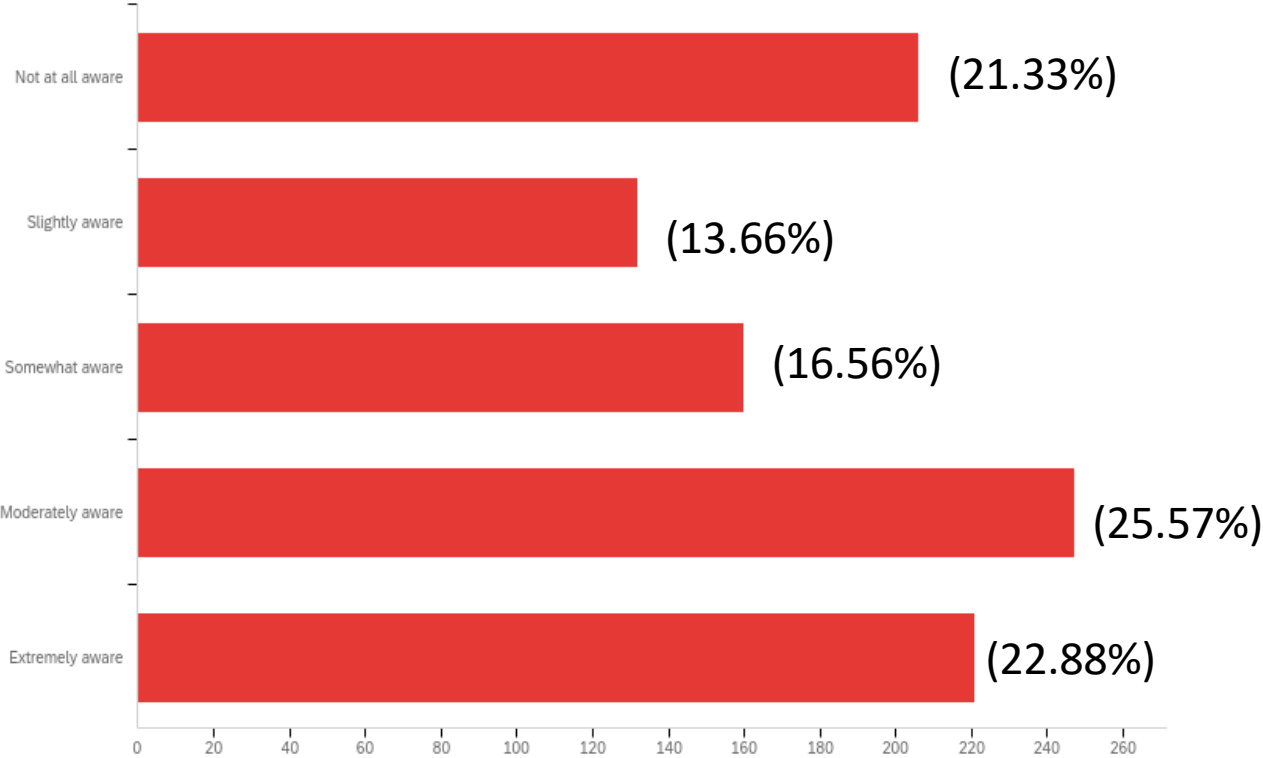


#	Answer	%	Count
1	Student	27.80%	290
2	Faculty	5.94%	62
3	Academic Staff	31.54%	329
4	University Staff	11.12%	116
5	Alum	8.63%	90
6	City of Madison Resident	12.37%	129
7	Other (add description)	2.59%	27
	Total	100%	1043

ANALYSIS

- Based on the survey respondents, students and academic staff were the top respondents.
 - **27%** of students responded
 - **31.54%** of academic staff responded
- However, Faculty and other were the lowest respondents
 - **5.94%** of faculty responded
 - **2.59%** of others responded

Q2 - How aware were you of the food waste collection program that operated on campus from Fall 2009 to Summer 2021?

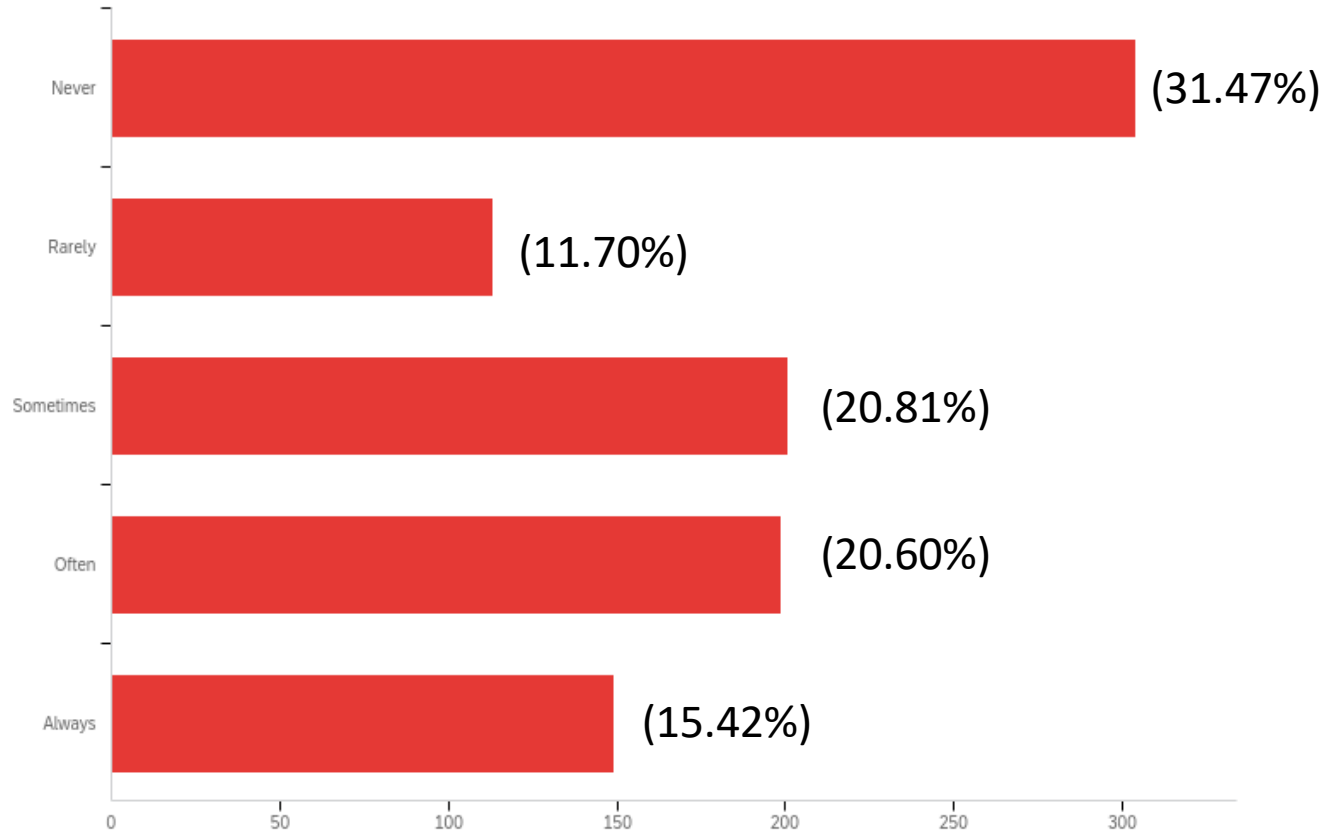


#	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	1.00	5.00	3.15	1.46	2.14	966

ANALYSIS

- **48.45%** respondents were either moderately aware or extremely aware of the food waste collection program
- **51.55%** respondents were either not aware, little aware, or somewhat aware of the food waste collection program.

Q3 - How frequently did you utilize the previous food waste collection program?

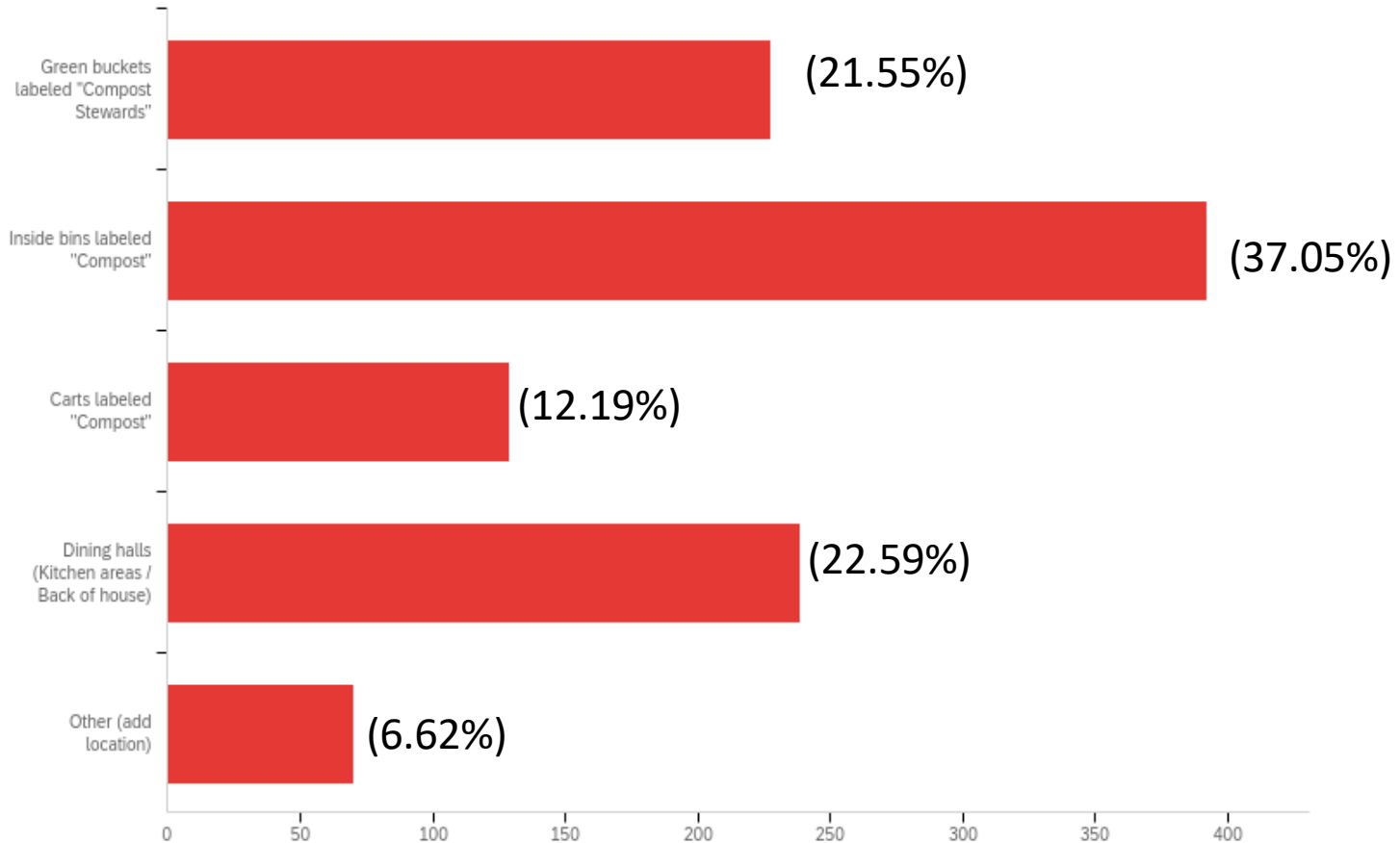


Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1.00	5.00	2.77	1.46	2.14	966

ANALYSIS

- **31.47%** of respondents never used the food collection program.
 - As we discuss next steps, this is a critical aspect to consider
- On the opposite spectrum, **15.42%** always used the food collection program.
- However, **41.41%** of respondents either sometimes or often used the food collection waste program.

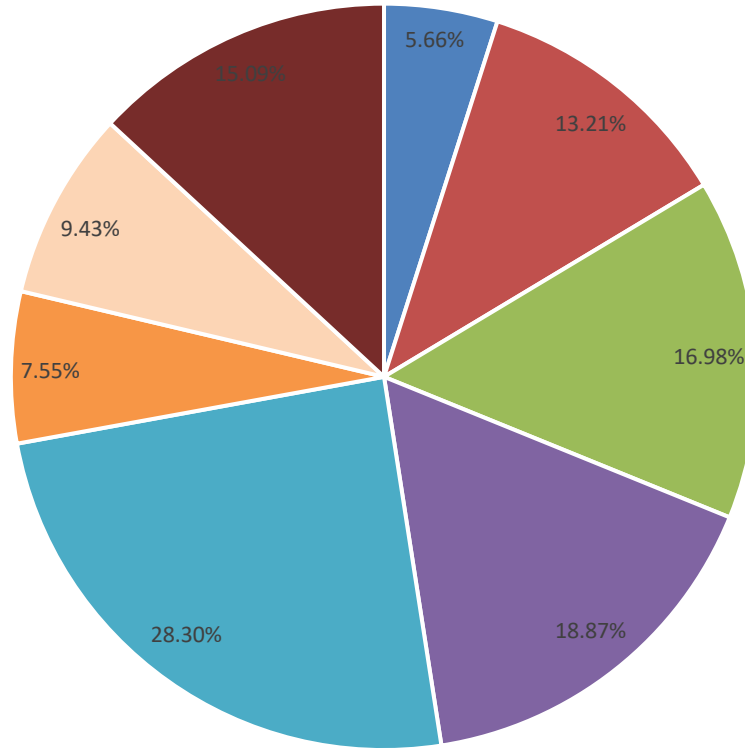
Q4 - Where did you discard food waste on campus (check all that apply)?



ANALYSIS

- The largest response, **37.05%** of respondents discarded their food waste on campus through bins labeled “*Compost*”.
- However, **21.55%** of respondents discarded their food waste on campus through Green buckets labeled “*Compost Stewards*”
 - This is attributed to the Office of Sustainability’s Green Office program
- And **22.59%** of respondents discarded their food waste on campus through the Dining halls on campus

Q4 - Other locations on campus where compost was disposed of



Natatorium

Vet School

Dorm

Science Hall

Trash

Other

Home/Other Locations Off Campus

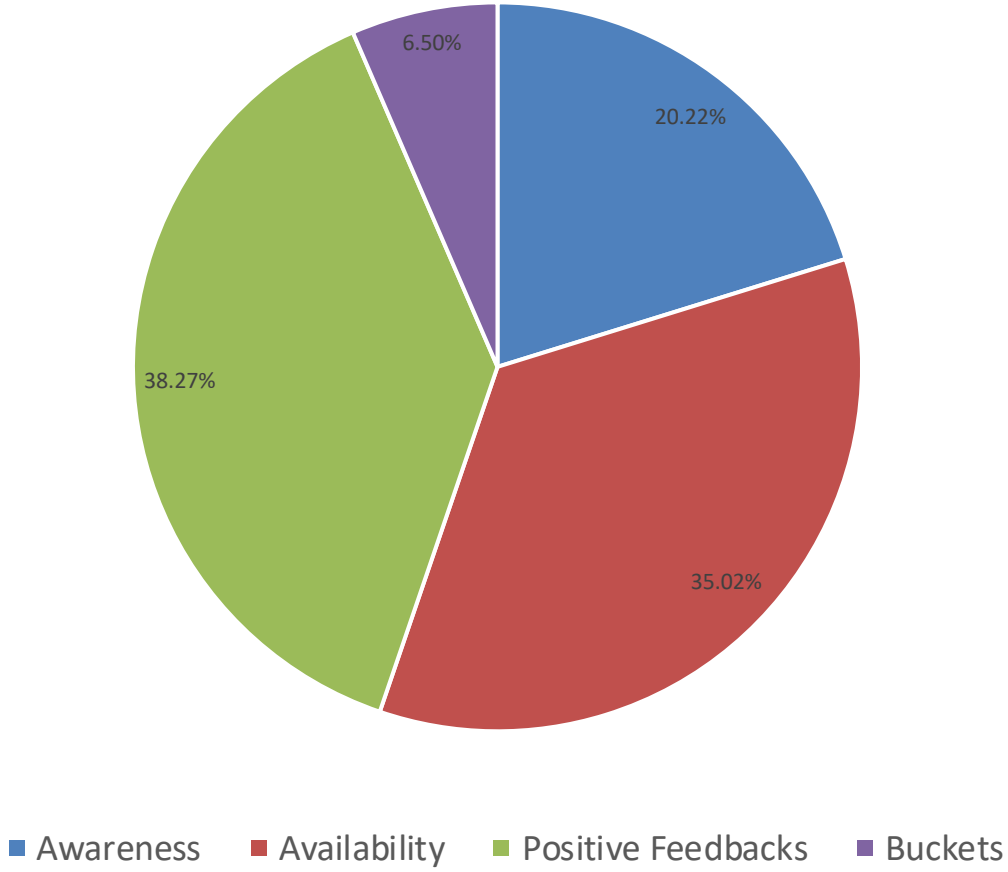
Union South

Q4 - Other locations on campus where compost was disposed of

Answer	%	Count
Natatorium	5.66%	3
Science Hall	13.21	7
Home/Other Locations Off Campus	16.98%	9
Vet School	18.87%	10
Trash	28.30%	15
Union South	7.55%	4
Dorm	9.43%	5
Other	15.09%	8

Q5 - What feedback do you have about the previous food waste collection program?

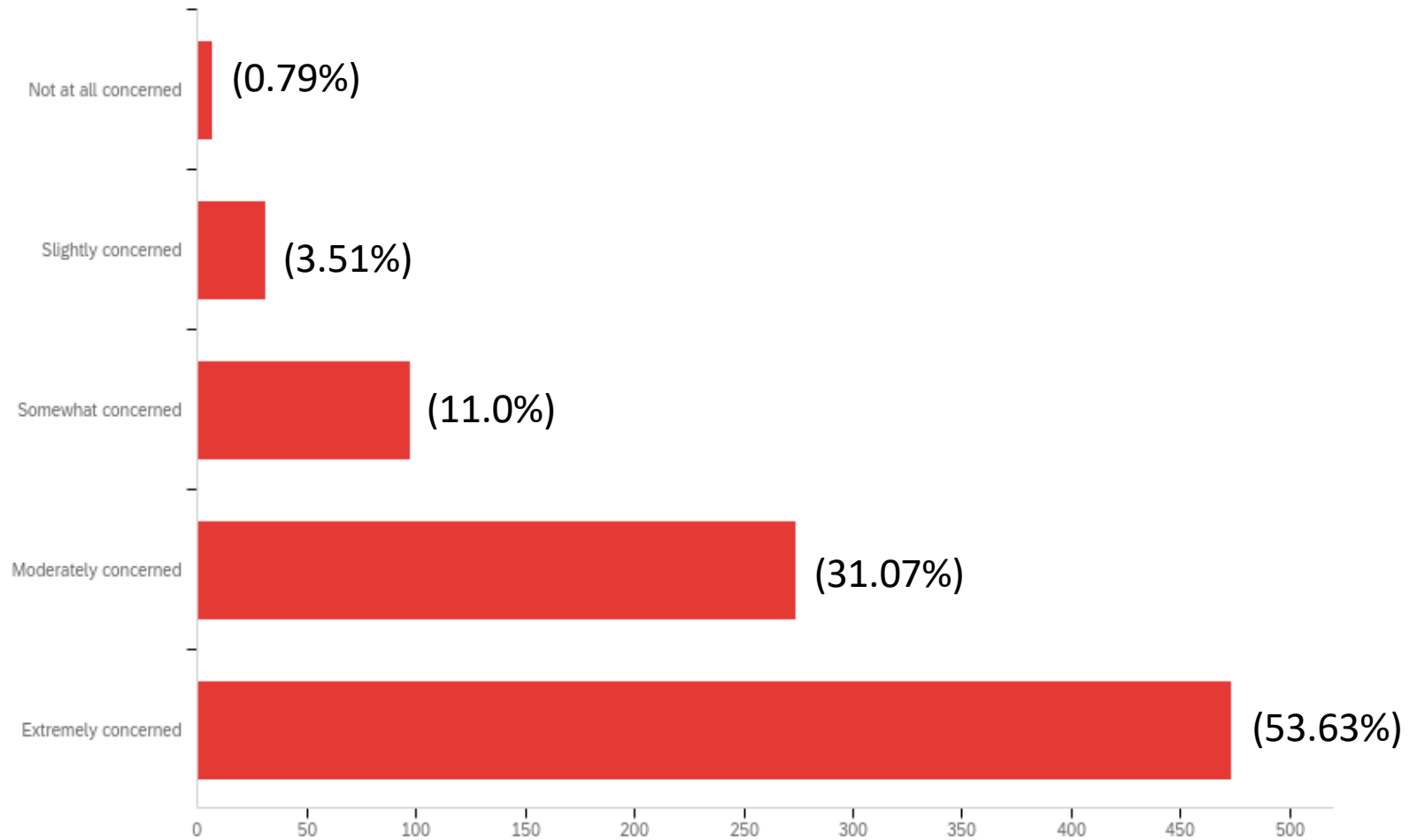
Feedback on previous program



Q5 - What feedback do you have about the previous food waste collection program?

Answer	%	Count
Awareness	20.22%	3
Availability	35.02%	7
Positive Feedbacks	38.27%	9
Buckets	6.50%	10

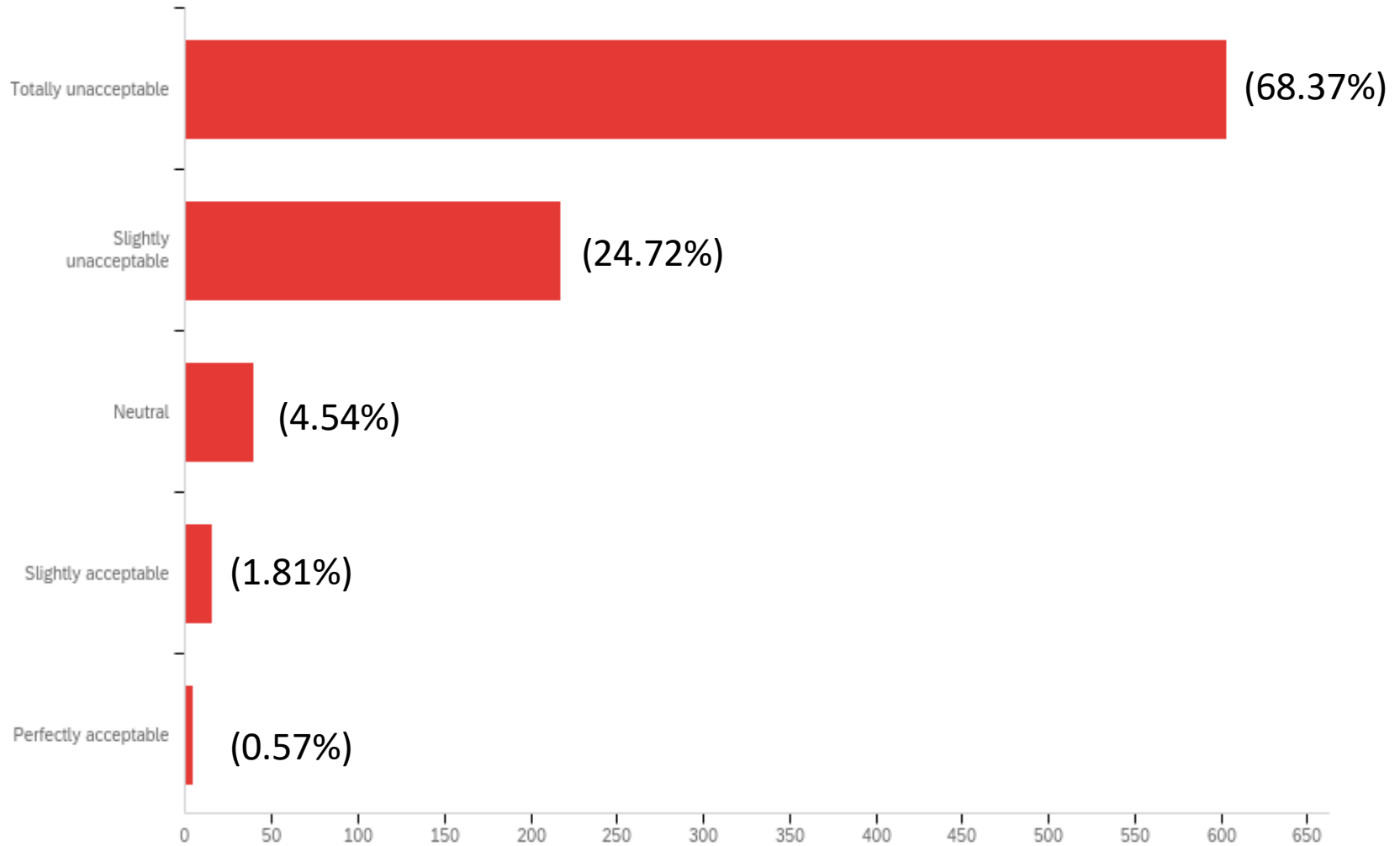
Q6 - How concerned are you about food waste generated at the UW–Madison campus?



ANALYSIS

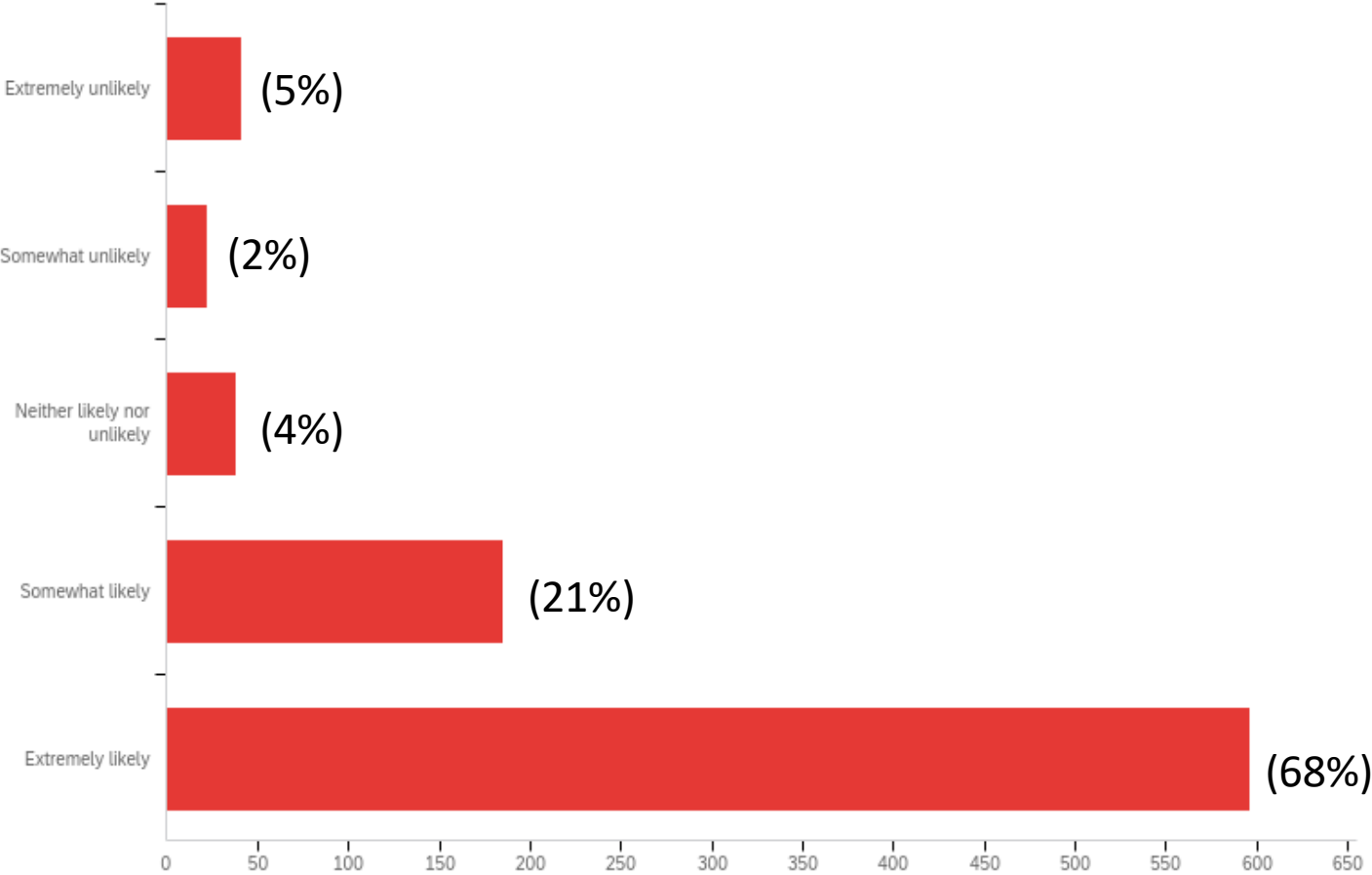
- There is overwhelming concern about food waste generated at the UW-Madison campus with **over half (53.63%)** of respondents indicating that they are extremely concerned

Q7 - To what degree is it acceptable if UW–Madison has no outlet for food waste, other than throwing it away in the Dane County Landfill?



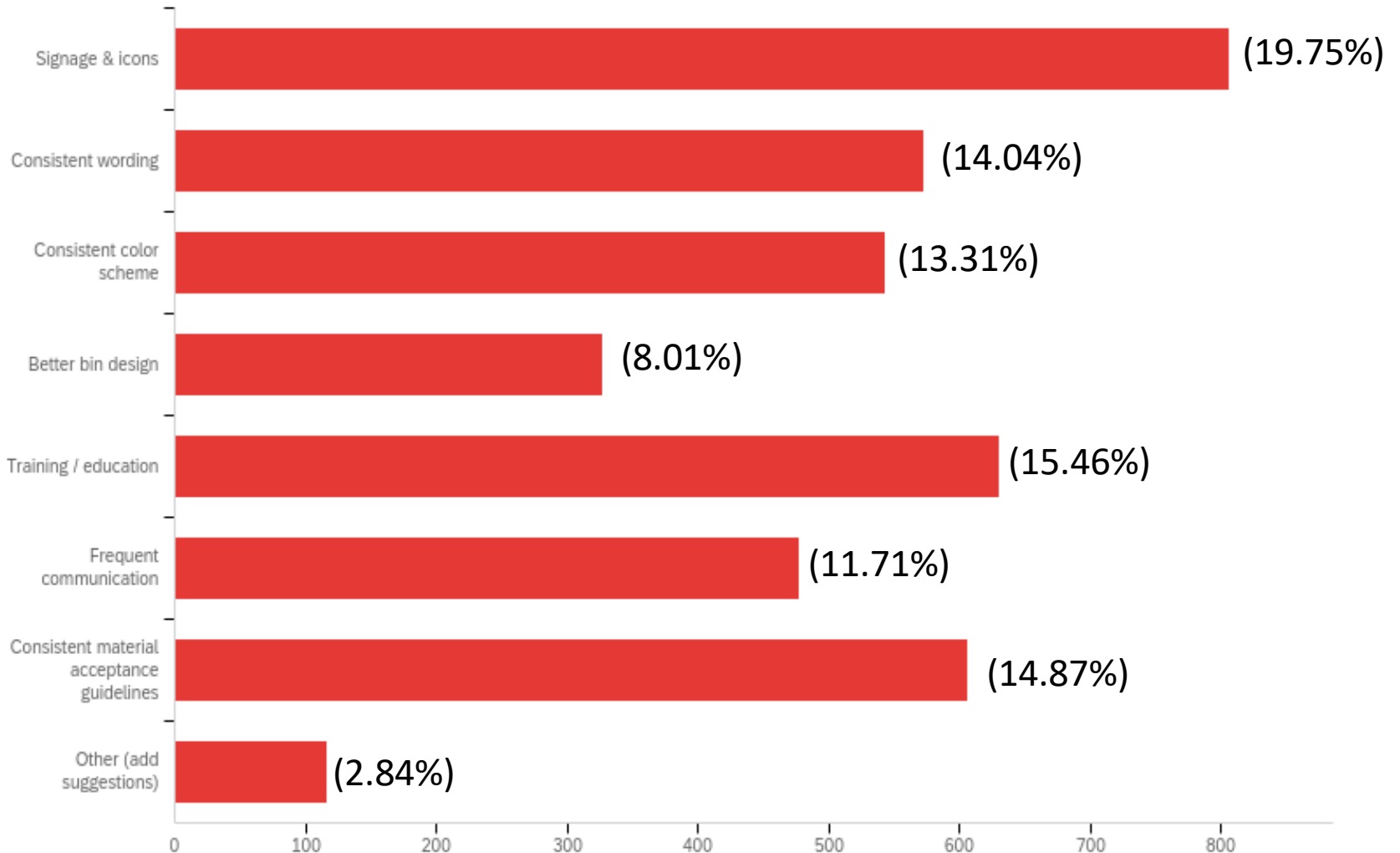
It's evident that respondents believe it is totally unacceptable for UW-Madison to have no outlet for food waste.

Q8 - How likely are you to utilize a food waste collection program if it is re-introduced?



596/882 of responses stated that they are *extremely likely* to utilize a food waste program if it was reintroduced

Q9 - Contamination of food waste/compost bins is a major issue. What communication methods would help prevent contamination of the food waste stream (check all that apply)?



ANAYLSIS

- The majority of respondents think that **signage and icons, training and education, and consistent material acceptance guidelines** would help prevent contamination of the food waste stream through communication methods.
- **50.08%** of respondents thought that these would be successful in preventing contamination of the food waste stream.
- Although, it is fair to say that all of the options had support in order to help prevent contamination.

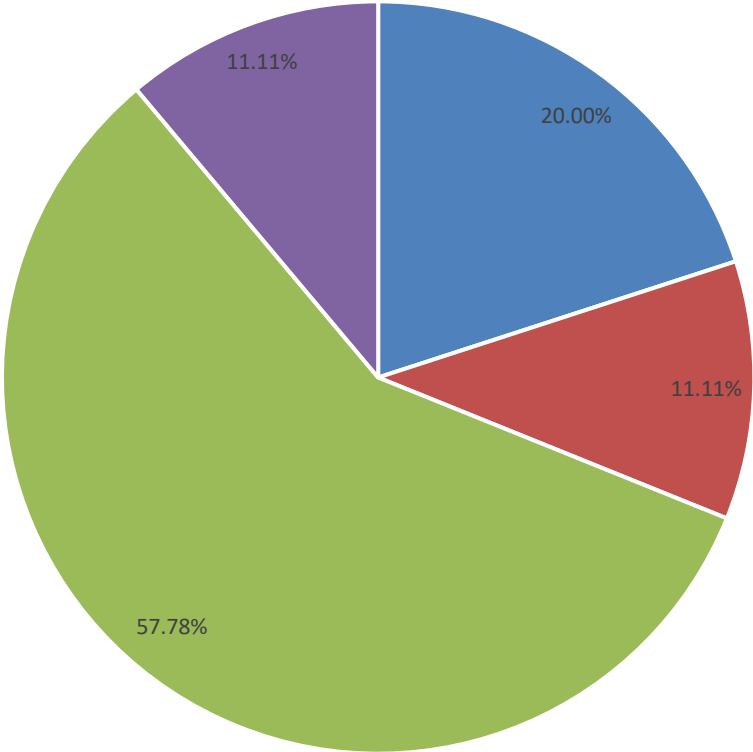
Q9 - Contamination of food waste/compost bins is a major issue. What communication methods would help prevent contamination of the food waste stream (check all that apply)?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Signage & icons	19.75%	806
2	Consistent wording	14.04%	573
13	Consistent color scheme	13.31%	543
14	Better bin design	8.01%	327
15	Training / education	15.46%	631
17	Frequent communication	11.71%	478
18	Consistent material acceptance guidelines	14.87%	607
19	Other (add suggestions)	2.84%	116
	Total	100%	4081

Q9 - Contamination of food waste/compost bins is a major issue. What communication methods would help prevent contamination of the food waste stream (check all that apply)?

Other (add suggestions)

Other Communication Methods

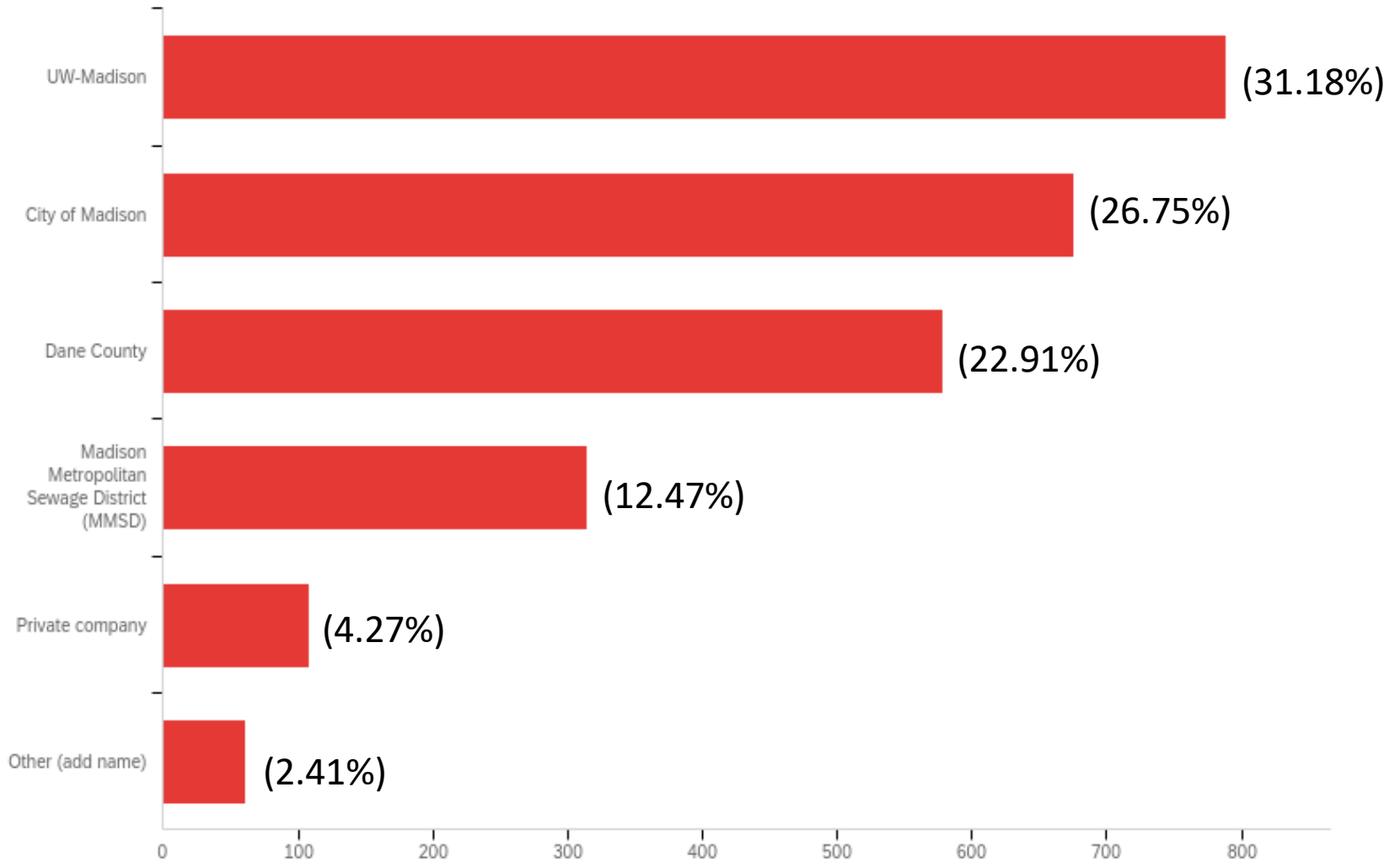


- Stewards
- Investing in more compostable materials
- Education
- Convenience

Q9 - Other communication methods

Answer	%	Count
Stewards	20.00%	9
Investing in more compostable materials	11.11%	5
education	57.78%	26
Convenience	11.11%	5

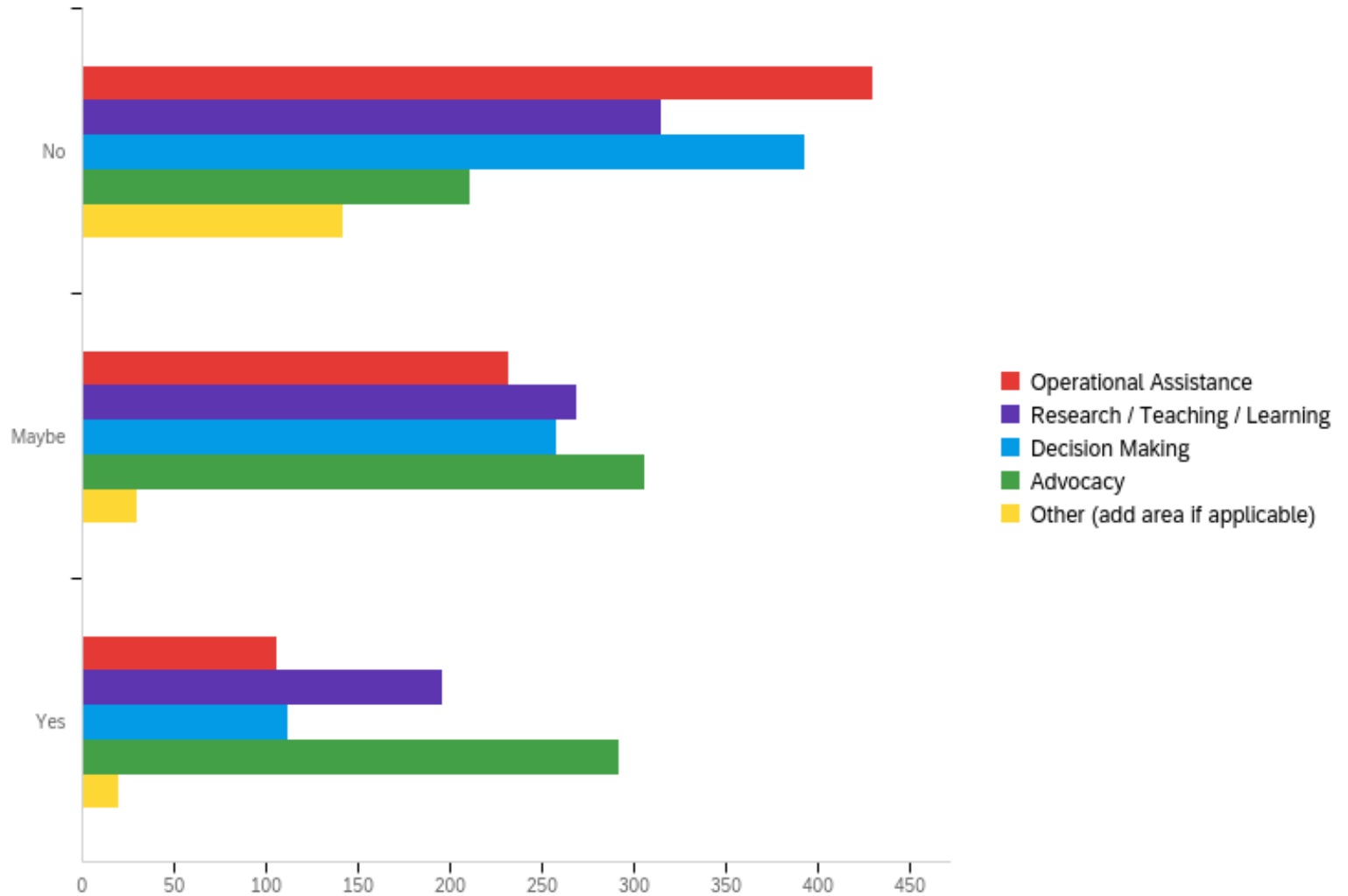
Q10 - Who should be responsible for providing an outlet for inedible food waste (check all that apply)?



ANALYSIS

- **80.84%** of respondents stated that *UW-Madison, City of Madison, and Dane County* should be responsible for providing an outlet for inedible food waste
- However, the majority of respondents (**31.18%**) indicated that *UW-Madison* should be responsible

Q11 - Are you interested in helping with a new food waste collection program at the UW-Madison?



Q11 - Are you interested in helping with a new food waste collection program at the UW-Madison?

#	Question	No		Maybe		Yes		Total
1	Operational Assistance	55.99%	430	30.21%	232	13.80%	106	768
2	Research / Teaching / Learning	40.38%	315	34.49%	269	25.13%	196	780
3	Decision Making	51.51%	393	33.81%	258	14.68%	112	763
4	Advocacy	26.08%	211	37.82%	306	36.09%	292	809
5	Other (add area if applicable)	73.96%	142	15.63%	30	10.42%	20	192

Q12 - Please add any comments, concerns, or suggestions about the food waste management at UW–Madison.

“Sustainable food waste management is necessary for us to move forward as a society. The University ought to be on the cutting edge of things like this, not trailing behind and blaming a lack of existing infrastructure; if a system does not exist yet, who is going to make it happen, if not us??”

“Having a composting program on campus is essential.”

“I have very high standards for UW Madison's sustainability programs as we are a university that is actively providing education for sustainability.”

“Each new class of students is a fresh audience to be told "this is how we do things here" and sustainability is an important consideration for many of them.”

“A productive food waste management system is an essential component of a sustainable, green campus!”