



Barriers to Achieving Carbon Neutrality for Higher Ed Institutions

Survey Results

Over 1,000 higher education institutions worldwide have committed to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 or sooner.¹ While that number is promising, there are significant challenges associated with decarbonizing a campus. To explore those challenges in greater depth, Nelnet Renewable Energy surveyed sustainability professionals, students, and faculty members. We received 252 responses from 38 U.S. states and 17 countries.²

Key Takeaways

Students are demanding aggressive decarbonization efforts. Sixty-three percent (63%) of respondents noted that their administration is experiencing pressure from their student population – mostly to divest from the fossil fuel industry (32%), use more on-campus renewable energy (25%), and/or commit to a more aggressive carbon neutrality goal (18%).

The primary barrier to achieving carbon neutrality is financial. Sixty-six percent (66%) of respondents indicated that their institution either lacks the financial resources to achieve carbon neutrality or has other priorities for those resources.

Scope 3 emissions are viewed as the most daunting. Forty-seven percent (47%) of respondents indicated Scope 3 emissions, which are the result of activities from assets not owned or controlled by the institution (e.g., employee commuting, leased assets, operational waste, business travel, etc.), are viewed as the most challenging to understand and offset.

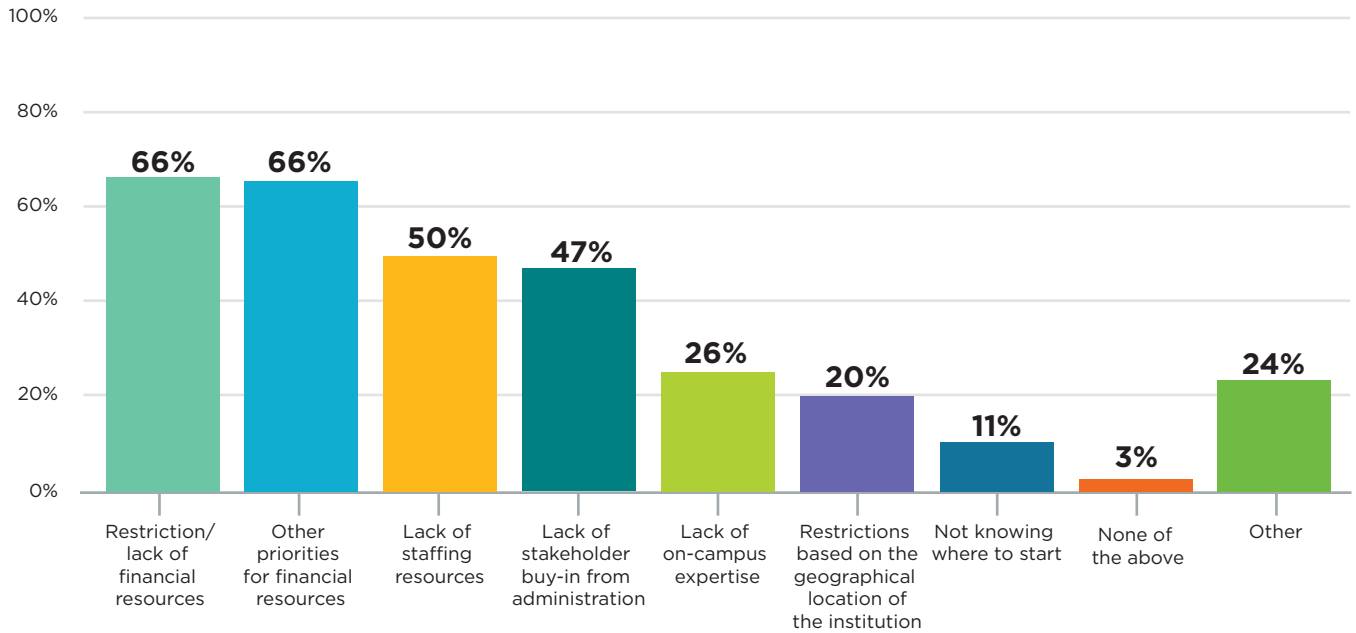
Of the 10 survey respondents who indicated their institution had achieved carbon neutrality, eight of them noted that there is still a commitment to further reduce on-campus emissions, necessarily reducing their dependence on carbon offsetting measures.

¹ EUAC, Race to Zero: Universities & Colleges, <https://www.educationracetozero.org/>

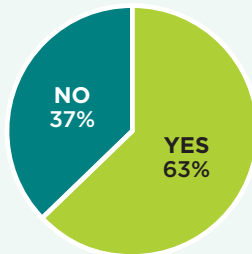
² Nelnet Renewable Energy surveyed sustainability professionals, students, and faculty members through an anonymous questionnaire from May through July of 2022. Our population of 252 survey respondents represents 38 U.S. states and 17 countries.

Key Visualizations

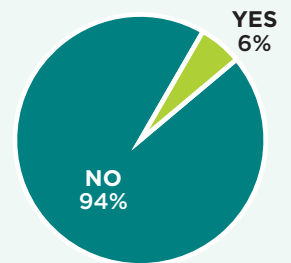
Which of the following has negatively affected your institution's ability to achieve carbon neutrality in a timely fashion?



Is your institution experiencing pressure from its student population to act more aggressively toward on-campus climate action?



Has your institution achieved carbon neutrality?



Have questions?

Reach out to learn more about how Nelnet Renewable Energy can help your institution overcome barriers to carbon neutrality, or simply for more information regarding the survey.

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