

A photograph of an elderly woman with short grey hair and glasses, wearing a rust-colored top, sitting on a grey sofa and looking at a tablet. The image is partially obscured by a large teal circular graphic on the left side of the page.

# Senior Living 2022: The state of engagement and technology

A follow-up survey of senior living leaders  
two years into the pandemic

## Introduction

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, the senior living industry has proved resilient, adapting to change in the face of numerous challenges. From unprecedented staffing and resource shortages to myriad new safety requirements and mandates, leaders, staff, residents, and families have had to fundamentally change their ways of living, working, and interacting.

In this changing landscape, engagement technology has emerged as a means of connecting residents with the wider world, with their loved ones, with each other, and with their personal interests and hobbies. As safety concerns ebb, new challenges emerge, including gaps in the workforce, lapses in group programming, and the high cost of operating amid a global pandemic. In response to the industry's state of flux, senior engagement technology providers have expanded their platforms to address the critical challenges we face today.

As the challenges change, so too must the solutions. How have these new issues impacted the way technology supports senior living residents and their communities? How have staffing challenges affected the way senior living leaders use and view engagement technology solutions? To find out, iN2L surveyed 111 community leaders in December 2021 and compared their responses with similar surveys conducted in March 2019 and June 2020 on the state of engagement technology within senior living.

## Methodology

This report represents the third in an annual series of investigations into the current adoption, state, and impact of technology upon resident engagement within senior living communities. In March 2019, iN2L electronically surveyed 114 senior living community leaders across various functional areas. In June 2020, a similar audience of community leaders received an identical questionnaire. For the third installment, iN2L surveyed 111 senior living community leaders in December 2021. To preserve continuity and follow trends across the previous two reports, the same questions were asked. Two additional sections expand this year's report, one with a focus on pandemic-era staffing challenges and another on the future role of technology within the aging experience.

### Respondents by title

- C-suite & business leads
- Therapy & clinical leads
- Activity leads
- Marketing & sales leads
- Other (billing, finance, hr, dining & housekeeping)

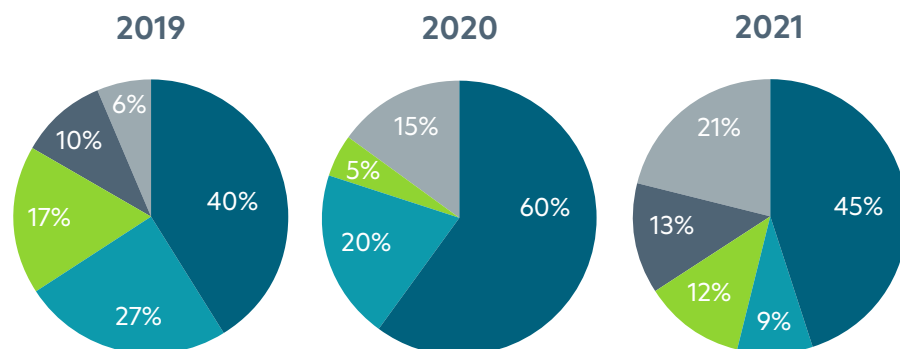


Figure 1

## Those with dedicated technology solutions are most confident in their ability to engage residents

At first glance, nearly half (48%) of all senior living leaders surveyed self-reported their organization's ability to engage residents today as "extremely well" or "very well." When compared to last year's report, this represents a 15% drop in confidence, as 63% of respondents in 2020 selected "extremely well" or "very well." This shift toward the more moderate answers may be interpreted as a direct reflection of operators' late-stage pandemic fatigue and some of the staffing challenges that plague the industry today.

### Success in engaging residents

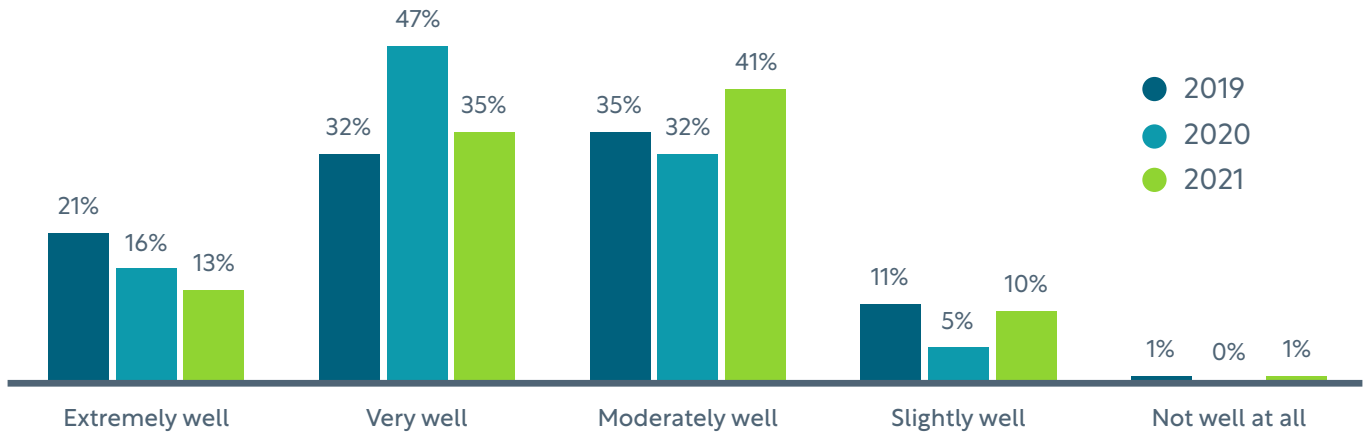
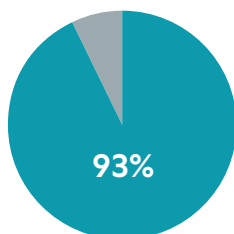


Figure 2

Interestingly, when answers are filtered by engagement technology status, a clear distinction emerges: confidence in the ability to engage residents is directly correlated to having an engagement technology solution in place. Communities that have engagement technology in place are 12% more likely to report that they are doing very or extremely well at engaging residents than communities that do not utilize technology. Of those with technology in place, 93% report an overall positive ability to engage residents, compared to 81% of those without. Of those without engagement technology, 19% report a difficulty or an inability to engage residents, as compared to 7% of those with technology in place.

### Positive ability of organization to engage residents in 2021

#### Communities with engagement technology in place



#### Communities without engagement technology in place

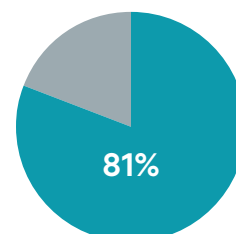


Figure 3

## Engagement technology is considered more important than ever before

Every year, the reported importance of senior living technology increases. Of the 2021 respondents who use engagement technology, 98% believe it is at least moderately important, an 8% increase from last year's report and a 16% increase from the 2019 report. Leaders are even more likely to report that it is very or extremely important—86% of respondents said so, as compared to 78% in 2020, an increase of 10% year over year. This natural progression of year-over-year trends is not unexpected, as senior engagement technology has helped communities adapt to pandemic-era needs, such as new safety measures, smaller workforces, and the need for new ways to connect with loved ones inside and outside of the community.

**98%**

of 2021 respondents believe engagement technology is at least moderately important.

↑ 8% increase from 2020

↑ 16% increase from 2019

**86%**

of leaders report that it is very or extremely important, a 10% increase year over year

The importance of engagement technology to communities

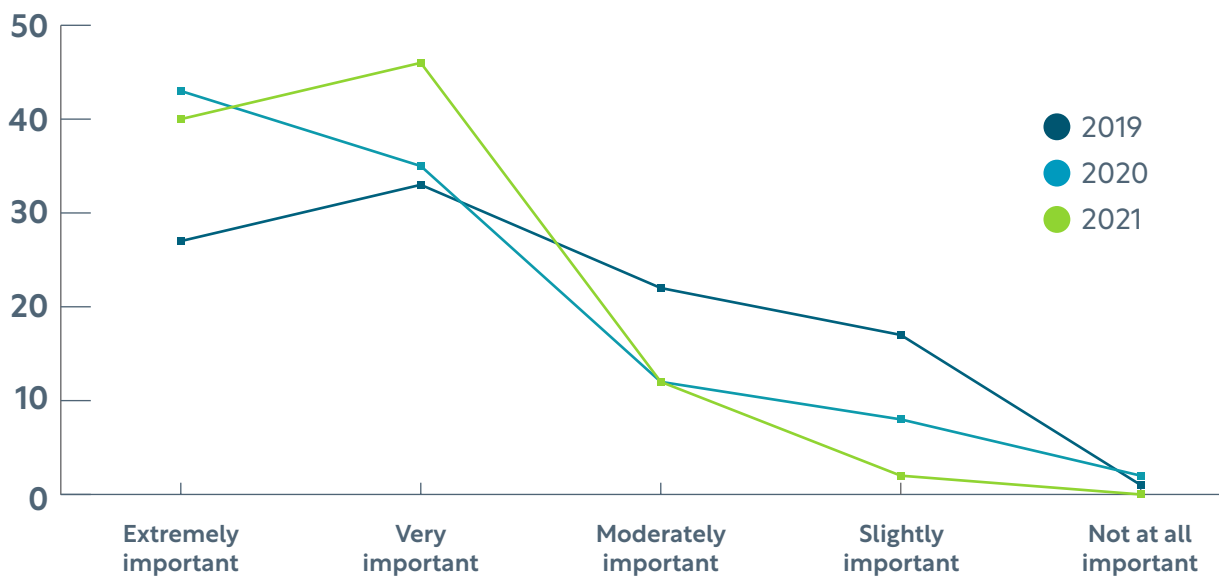


Figure 4

## Investing in engagement technology remains a high priority for senior living community leaders

In trend with previous years, engagement technology remains a highly rated strategic priority for organizations. The data indicates that 82% of senior living leaders place a medium priority or higher on investing in engagement technology. This holds relatively steady from the 87% last year and remains much higher than the 73% reported in 2019. This year, only 18% of respondents would rank engagement tech as a low or bottom priority for their organizations. This year's slight decrease may be explained by urgent pandemic-era challenges that rose to the forefront over the last 18 months. While the strategic focus on engagement technology remains high, staffing and cost control measures have moved up on leaders' list of priorities, co-opting some of the investment focus.

Indeed, industry leaders have shifted their strategic focus to address the urgent needs of today. When asked to define their “top” or number one strategic priority for the year ahead, leaders’ answers resonated strongly with the day-to-day tactical challenges of safely—and economically—operating senior living communities throughout a pandemic and beyond. The most common answers included:

- **Staffing:** invest in measures to build and retain their workforce
- **Census:** maintain a consistent and profitable occupancy rate
- **Cost control:** help manage rising operating costs and rescue thinning margins
- **Resident engagement:** continue investing in measures to support the personalized interests, social connection, and ongoing satisfaction of their residents
- **Health and safety:** establish precautions and safety measures to maintain the health and well-being of all residents

### Investment priority in engagement technology vs. other strategic purchases

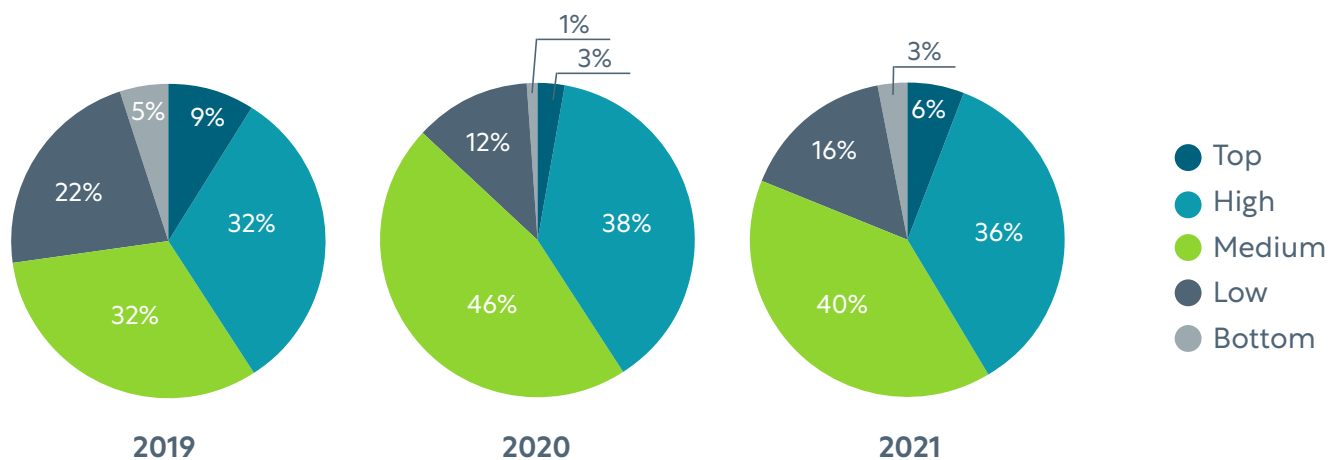


Figure 5

## Engagement tech offers community leaders a clear ROI

The drop from 2020 to 2021 in the ‘definitely yes’ responses may be attributed to the late-stage pandemic’s impact on staffing, budget, and thin operating margins.

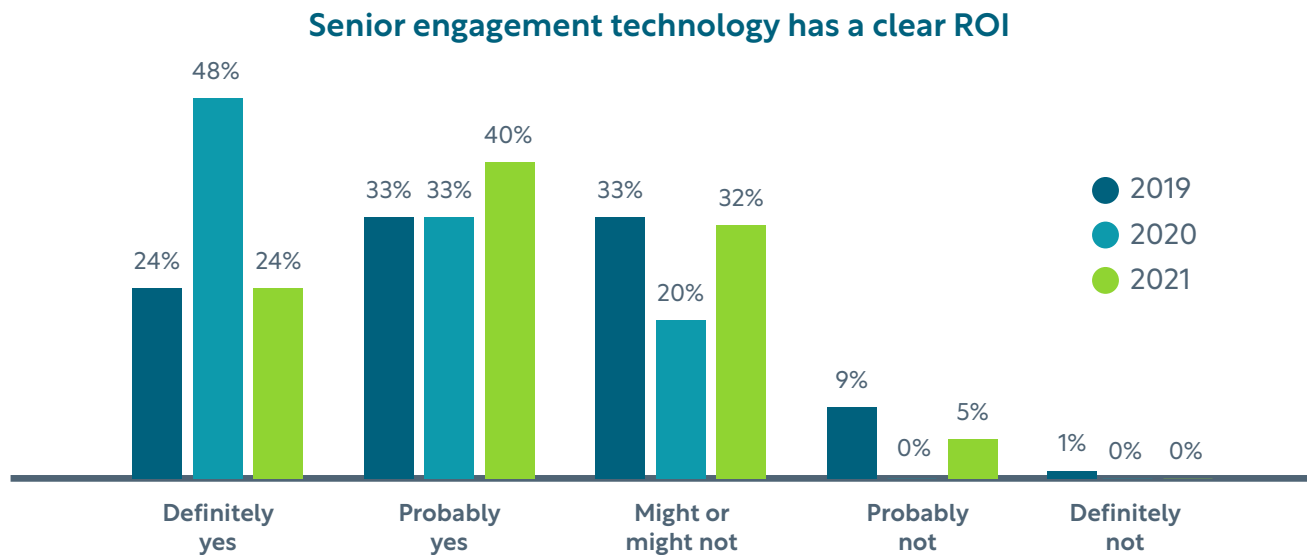


Figure 6

When asked about the value of their engagement technology, community leaders felt strongly that the platforms offer a clear return on their investment. 65% of respondents selected the two strongest options: “probably” or “definitely yes.” While the majority of participants offered strong positive responses this year, there is a drop when compared to last year, where 80% of participants offered the same response.

Across the board, there is a notable trend toward more conservative responses this year—leaders surveyed moved away from the most strongly positive or negative responses. This may be a reaction to the late-stage pandemic’s impact on staffing, budgets, and the thinnest operating margins the industry has seen. During this time, government safety recommendations and mandates were sometimes conflicting and often readjusted, resulting in mixed directives and confusion for community operators. In response, this may have encouraged leadership to adopt a more conservative approach, which is likely reflected by this year’s shift toward middle-ground answer choices and away from the most strongly decisive responses.

Despite much uncertainty on the policy side, leaders indicated high levels of confidence in their engagement technology. The strongly positive ROI responses indicate a high level of executive trust placed on the impact that engagement technology plays within their communities. Engagement technology solutions support communities and their residents through staffing gaps, group programming suspensions, budget cuts, safety mandates, and more. The value this technology brings to a community is evident through metrics such as relationship-building, resident and family satisfaction, and deeper staff support.

## Communities with engagement technology consider it a differentiator

Similar to last year's data, over 80% of executives believe that senior engagement technology provides unique benefits and experiences that help set their community apart. The respondent trend toward the more moderate answer choices is also evident here, with a greater number of respondents selecting "might" or "might not." This increased ambivalence may indicate a natural evolution of the senior engagement technology landscape. Pandemic-era needs, and an understanding of technology benefits, drove increased adoption among many communities, which may have cemented its status as "table stakes" and "need-to-have" instead of simply a "nice-to-have."

### Engagement technology sets communities apart

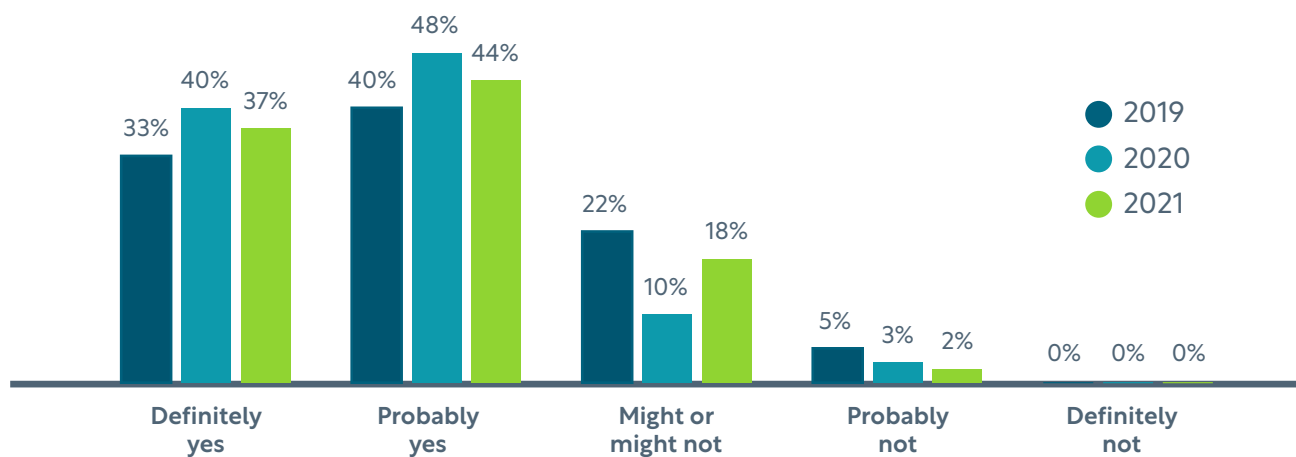


Figure 7

## Engagement technology supports senior living leaders' key goals and helps solve pandemic-related challenges

The pandemic has created a unique set of challenges for senior living facilities. Organizations are struggling to respond to high demand while maintaining daily operations through unprecedented staffing challenges and higher operational costs. While 84% of community leaders agree that getting to know residents on a personal level and providing engaging activities that support these personalized interests is key, 60% of respondents believe that due to the pandemic, they are less able to do so. Interestingly, responses indicate that leaders believe engagement technology can help support these critical gaps. When asked about the key benefits of engagement technology, 42% of respondents selected "helping to deliver personalized care and engaging experiences" and 24% said "helping to foster resident satisfaction and well-being."

**Getting to know residents on a personal level is critical for resident recruitment in 2021**

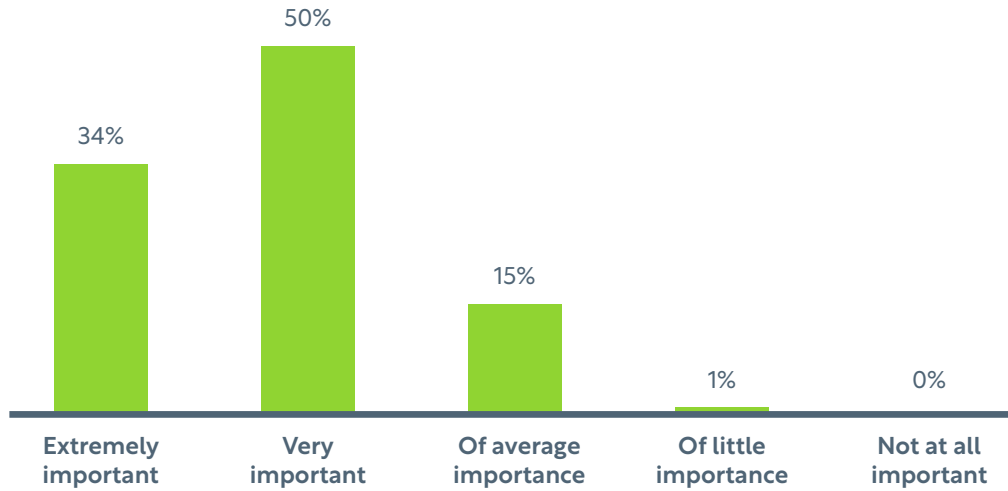
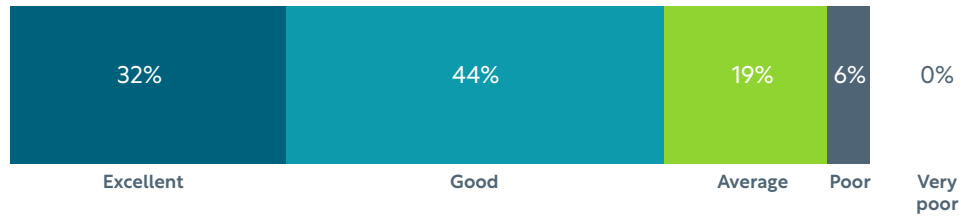


Figure 8

**Pandemic has negatively impacted communities' ability to personalize engagement activities in 2021**

**Ability to engage residents *before* COVID-19 pandemic**



**Ability to engage residents *today vs before* COVID-19 pandemic**



Figure 9



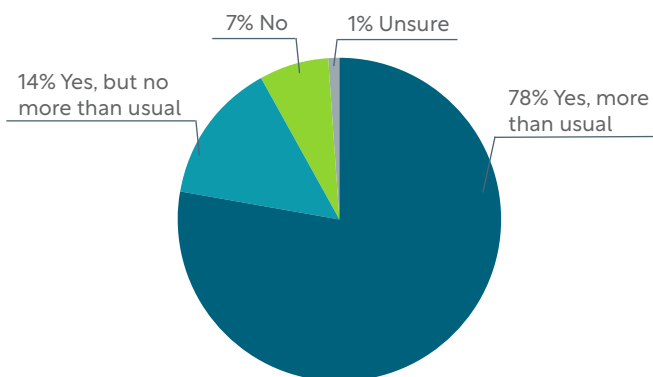
## Leaders feel like current staffing challenges impact the level of personalized care communities can provide

While 90% of leaders report staffing shortages or retention challenges, over 78% of them note that these issues have worsened due to the pandemic. Outside of administrative and operational functions, these workforce challenges are having an impact on the quality of care provided. When asked whether the shortages have limited staff's ability to provide personalized care to residents, three-quarters (76%) of respondents said yes.

Today, these staffing shortages and workforce challenges plague the industry. 99% of respondents noted that they often or sometimes have existing staff take on additional work or other roles to help fill gaps. While this method may address the challenge in the short term, it will likely contribute to increased staff burnout and serve to further exacerbate the issue in the long run. In many other cases, communities are turning to outside resources to help address staffing needs. Over 81% of leaders said that in the last year, they have turned to temporary staffing agencies to help fill gaps in the workforce.

### Leaders feel like current staffing challenges impact the level of personalized care communities can provide in 2021

#### Communities experiencing staffing shortages or retention challenges



#### Staffing shortages affecting personalized care to residents

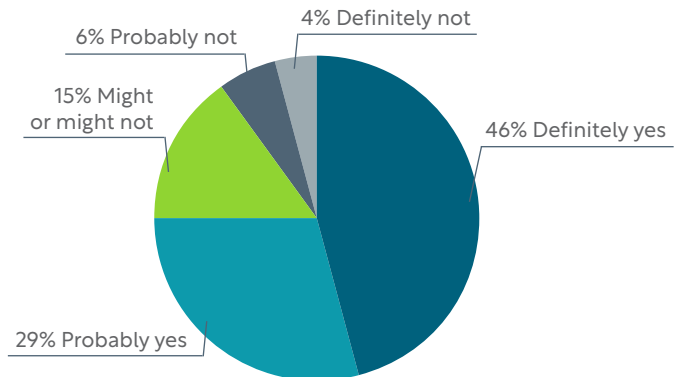


Figure 10

**87%**

of respondents agreed that a tech solution would be moderately or highly valuable.

Engagement technology can provide an alluring option for leaders looking to support their workforce. 87% of respondents agreed that a tech solution that could help fill staffing gaps, complete regular functions, and simultaneously support resident well-being would be moderately or highly valuable. As engagement technology has matured to provide additional features and functionalities, it can provide both an efficient operational and residential backbone for communities in need of extra support. While only about 50% of

respondents currently feel that engagement technology solutions could help fill these gaps, platforms today can create efficiencies that support workforces. For organizations seeking a comprehensive platform, engagement technology can refine administrative processes, reshape budgets, streamline intake tasks, intelligently improve the level of personalized programming, foster social relationships that are key to resident satisfaction, and support key relationships outside of the community's walls.

## The year ahead

While upending the status quo, the pandemic has helped the senior living community focus on what is truly important: personalized satisfaction, long-term well-being, meaningful social connection, and providing support for overburdened employees. While struggling with new challenges—waning margins, a thinning workforce, higher costs, safety regulations, and occupancy concerns—today's leaders agree that senior engagement technology is not only invaluable but a must-have for their organizations. While engagement technology was initially a community differentiator, it is now considered table stakes, a prerequisite for a modern residence that can support the way seniors seek to connect with loved ones and the world.

In 2022, the right content-based solution will continue to connect residents to the hobbies, movies, pictures, and games that delight them the most. It will also help automatically match residents with other like-minded individuals to help create new bonds around shared interests and backgrounds. Technology will be in service of deeper, more meaningful connections that create purpose and meaning in seniors' lives. Throughout the year ahead, engagement technology platforms will also emerge as comprehensive solutions that can support a broader range of functions, from resident engagement, connection, and support, to providing planning, intake, and operational efficiencies that help support staff who are already stretched too thin. As pandemic-era challenges persist, engagement technology continues to mature. The right platform will integrate with administrative, operational, housing, and activities departments to play a vital role in residents' lives while simultaneously helping to streamline processes, create efficiencies, and help solve a community's operational challenges.



LifeLoop was founded with a singular goal: to help senior living communities flourish. Our passion to harness technology to improve people's lives has made us the leading senior living software provider for the largest and most diverse population of senior living communities today. Our comprehensive platform provides solutions that help residents thrive by delivering a more holistic approach to enriching the resident experience, not just through engaging content, but also through empowering the staff who support them and facilitating connections with their families—making senior care exceptional for everyone. To learn how LifeLoop helps communities flourish, please visit [lifeloop.com](https://lifeloop.com).

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