

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF A TOURISM SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM ON CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION:

The research goal is to improve the career development of undergraduate students in a mandatory Tourism Management program at Thompson Rivers University. The study investigates how the tourism industry interacts with academic institutions and assesses how the tourism sponsorship program affects students' career goals and relationships with tourism employers. Moreover, the study analyzes the ways in which incorporating the sponsorship program into the curriculum can enhance first-year students' networking opportunities and employer participation. The Tourism Sponsorship Program intends to improve TRU's co-op education programs and develop career opportunities in the tourism industry through meaningful engagement with stakeholders in the industry.

METHODS:

Ethics Approval: Obtained in April 2024, (File # 103871, 103870, 103568)

Data Collection:

- **Employer Engagement Interviews:** Conducted 11 interviews from May to June 2024 with tourism industry stakeholders.
- **Student Surveys:** Distributed to co-op program participants during their Co-op 1000: Career Management course.

Analysis:

- **Qualitative:** Thematic analysis of interview transcripts to identify recurring themes
- **Quantitative:** Statistical analysis of survey data to assess program impact on student experiences

RESULTS

Figure 1: Engagement and Connection with PSIs and TRU

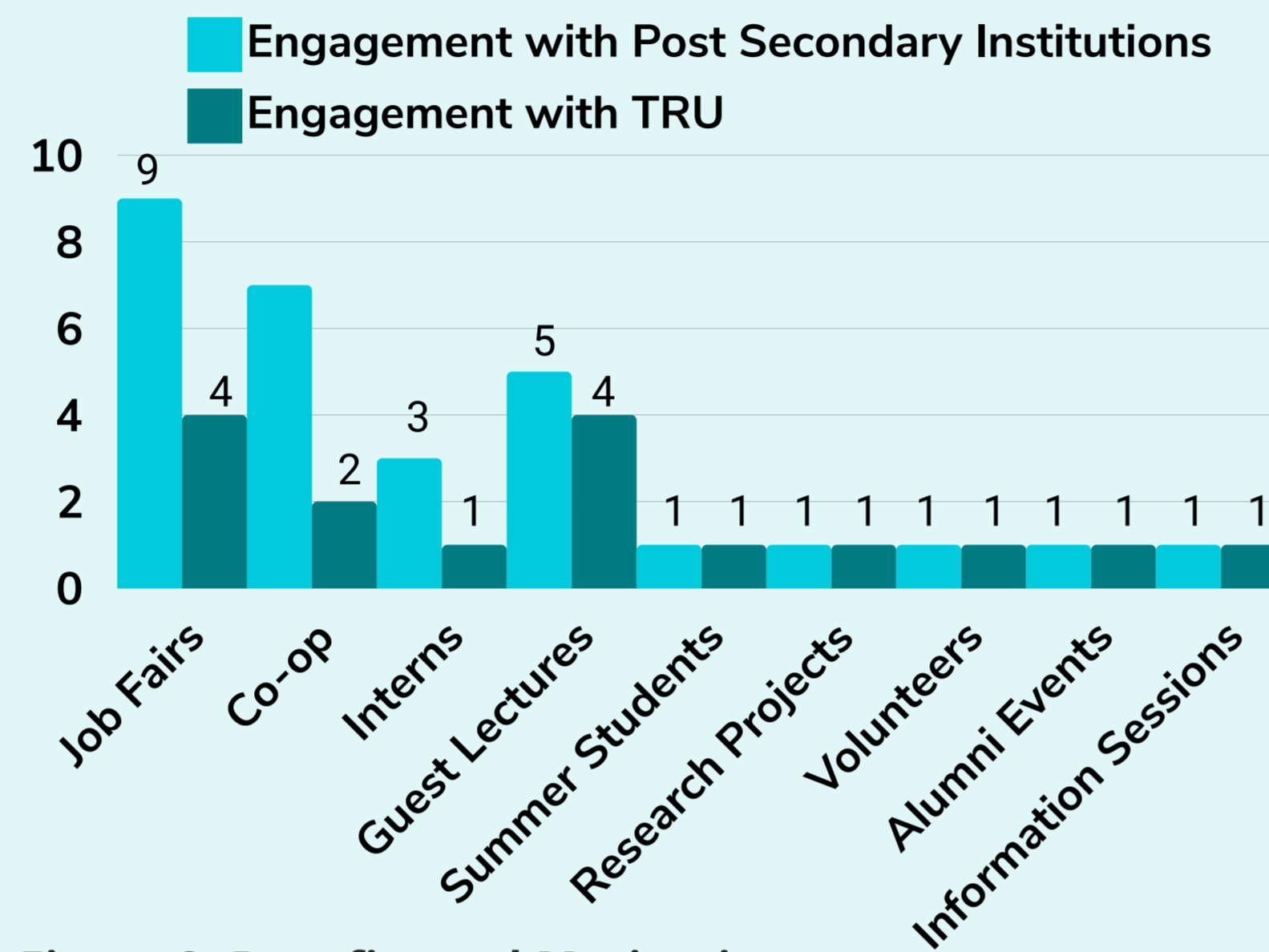
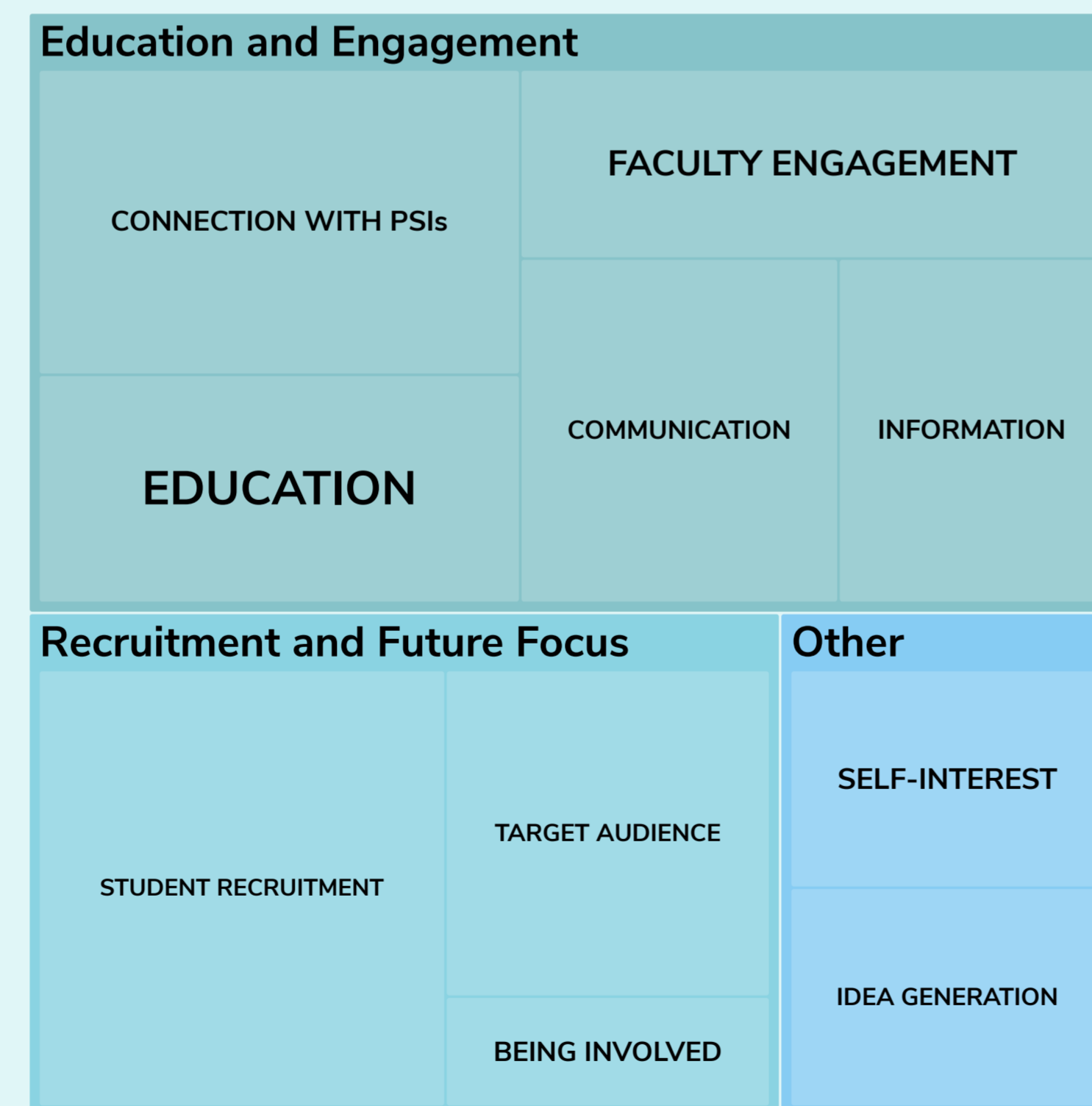


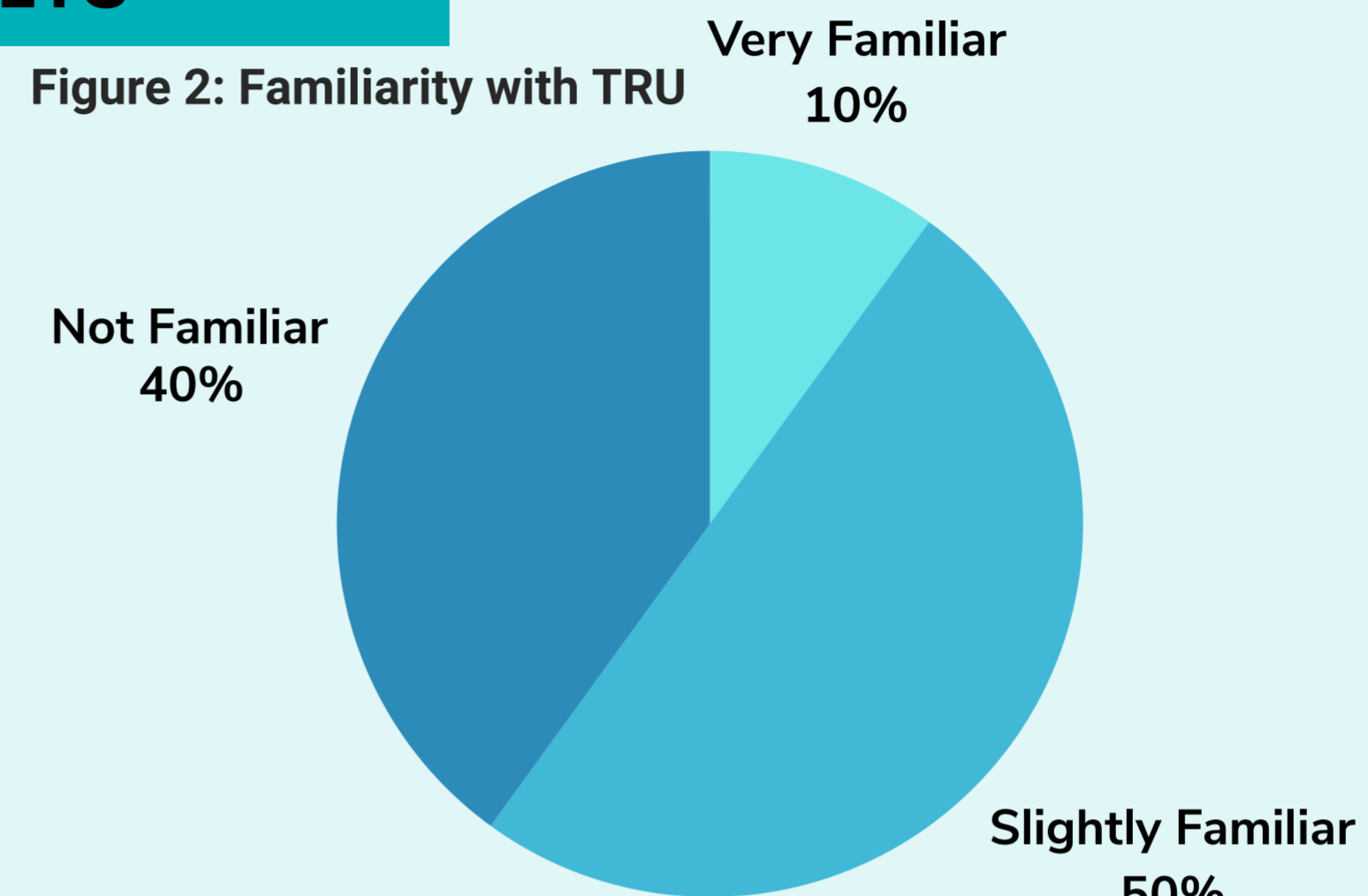
Figure 3: Benefits and Motivations



- identifies the perceived benefits and motivations for employers to engage with PSIs and students. (Figure 3)

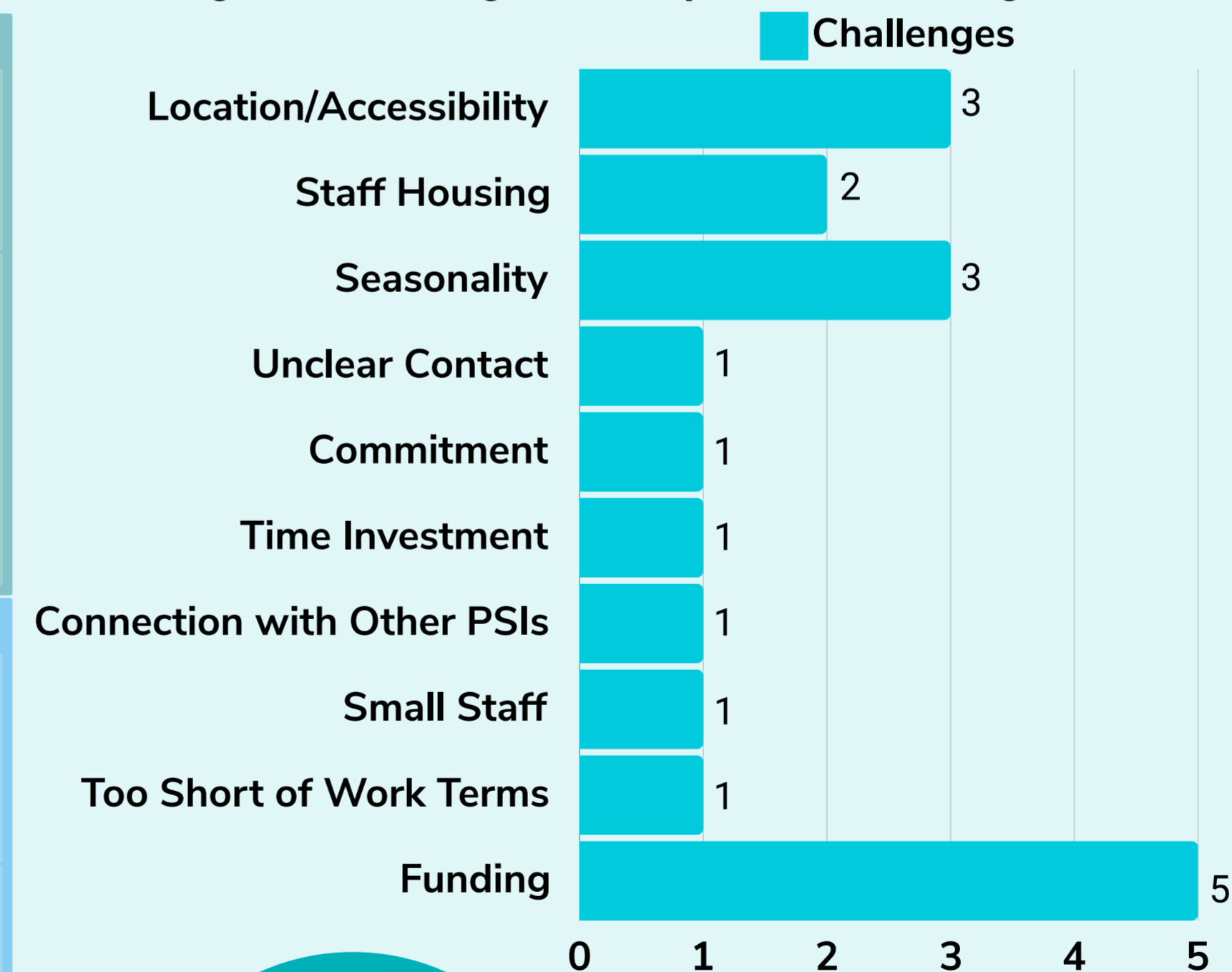
"It's a wonderful opportunity for you to learn from us"
-Attractions and Recreation Employer

Figure 2: Familiarity with TRU



- explores how familiar employers are with specific tourism programs and courses offered by TRU. (Figure 2)

Figure 4: Challenges with Experiential Learning



91% of employers interviewed are wanting to build and maintain a connection with TRU

"The motivation is we need employees ... there's no better employee than somebody interested in your subject"
-Attractions and Recreation Employer

DISCUSSION:

Integrating the sponsorship program within the Co-op 1000 course will benefit both students and employers based on employer and student preliminary results. Students gain valuable networking opportunities and career development support, while employers benefit from a more skilled and engaged workforce. This research highlights the importance of structured industry-academic collaboration in improving co-operative education outcomes.

IMPLICATIONS:

- **For TRU:** Implementation of the Tourism Sponsorship Program model can serve as an effective model within tourism co-operative education programs.
- **For Industry Stakeholders:** Strengthened partnerships with academic institutions can enhance recruitment strategies and workforce development.

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