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WHITE PAPER

From Specs to Success: Aligning OEMs and CPGs Operations



PMMI Business Intelligence

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ABOUT PMMI

PMMI is the leading global trade association for the packaging and processing industries. Our core purpose is to unite the packaging and processing industries across the supply chain, helping our members to exchange knowledge and ideas so that they can continue to succeed in a rapidly evolving global market. We represent over 1,000 companies from across the value chain, and we work with them every day to ensure they can keep on developing innovative manufacturing solutions.

ABOUT VISION 2030

PMMI's Vision 2030 focuses on the discovery, discussion and solutions to the industry's most significant challenges for OEMs and CPGs. It is a critical component of PMMI's suite of continuous improvement forums for its members and the consumer packaged goods (CPG) companies they serve.

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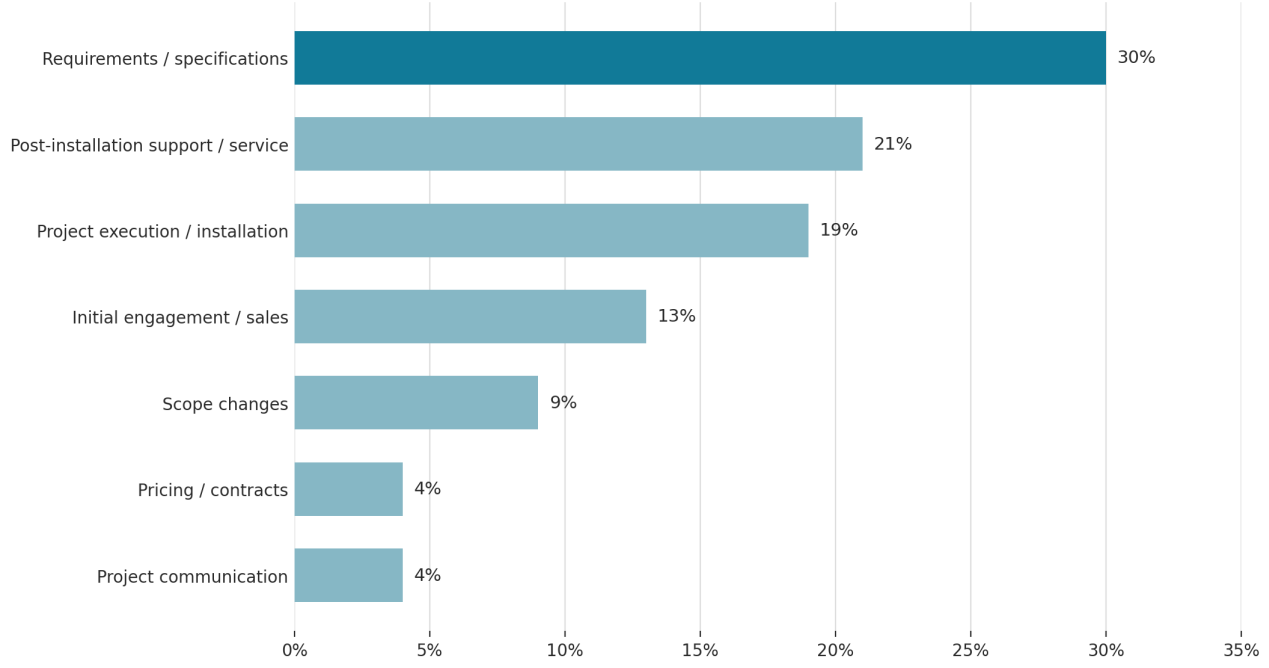
About This Report

Equipment projects depend on a shared understanding between consumer packaged goods (CPG) companies and original equipment manufacturers (OEMs). Yet incomplete requirements, differing expectations and changing specifications can create friction throughout the process, from initial discussions through installation and startup.

At a PMMI Vision 2030 Discovery Session during PACK EXPO International 2026, CPGs, OEMs and other industry stakeholders explored practical ways to strengthen collaboration. Through a moderated panel, eight breakout roundtables and live polling, participants examined two questions: What information can help establish clearer project requirements from the outset, and how can specification changes be managed fairly and efficiently? A facilitated panel discussion, roundtable conversations, and live polling informed the themes presented here.

The discussion also drew on pre-registration feedback. Defining requirements and specifications was the most frequently identified point of buyer-seller friction (30%), followed by post-installation support and service (21%) and project execution and installation (19%). Findings reflect participant perspectives and experiences, not a statistically representative survey of the packaging and processing industry. Live polling allowed multiple selections, so percentages should not be added together.

Where do buyers and sellers experience friction?



Pre-registration question: Where do you most frequently experience friction when working with buyers/sellers? percentages rounded.

Part One | Establishing Shared Expectations At The Start Of A Project

Start with the right information, not necessarily more information

Clear specifications are essential to equipment projects, but participants emphasized that more documentation does not always lead to better early discussions. The challenge is providing enough information for both parties to understand the project and evaluate feasibility without requiring extensive technical work before fundamental questions have been answered.

When asked, what is one document, data set, or piece of information a CPG could hand on OEM at the start of a project that would save weeks, later in the project, several roundtables discussed using a short preliminary specification or request for information (RFI) to communicate the basic requirements of a project. These documents might identify the product or packaging format, desired speed, available footprint, important equipment constraints and other non-negotiable requirements. An OEM could then assess whether its equipment and capabilities are a potential fit before proceeding to detailed engineering discussions.

One roundtable described using a one-page preliminary bid to evaluate equipment concepts before requesting a comprehensive specification review. Another proposed a basis document identifying the product, production rate, footprint, utilities and major technical constraints. Both approaches sought to establish a common starting point and identify potential obstacles before substantial resources were committed.

> *"Formalizing the napkin concept."* — Session participant

Other participants emphasized that more comprehensive user requirements specifications (URS) remain valuable, particularly when projects involve complex equipment, multiple formats, integrated production lines or specific operating requirements.

The discussions did not establish one preferred document for every situation. Instead, they highlighted the importance of matching the information exchanged to the project's scope, complexity and stage of development.

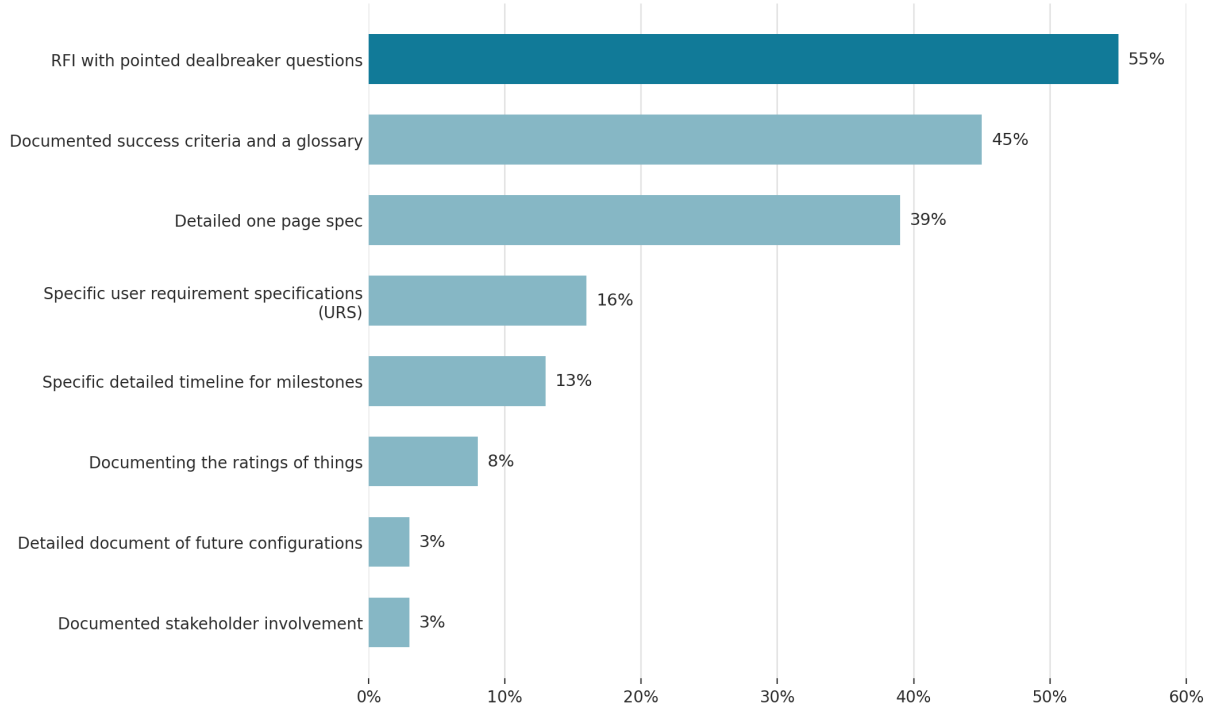
The right information depends on project stage

A preliminary RFI or one-page concept may support early screening, while more detailed specifications remain important as requirements mature.

The discussions also emphasized that the information itself must be meaningful. Participants described projects affected by incomplete packaging specifications, unexpected equipment constraints, insufficient product samples, and plant conditions that had not been fully considered. Available space, utility capacity, product characteristics and integration with existing equipment can all influence whether a proposed solution is practical.

For CPGs, these details may still be evolving when discussions with suppliers begin. For OEMs, missing information can limit their ability to evaluate feasibility or provide reliable estimates. Taken together, the findings suggest that early information exchange is most useful when it identifies both what is known and what still needs to be clarified.

Project initiation: which information would save time later?



Poll question: What is one document, data set, or piece of information a CPG could hand an OEM at the start of a project that would save weeks, later in the project? What's in it and who should provide it? n=38; multiple selections permitted.

Defining success requires more than equipment specifications

Establishing the right technical requirements is only part of the challenge. Participants also emphasized that CPGs and OEMs need a shared understanding of what those requirements are intended to achieve. Equipment that meets its documented specifications may not necessarily deliver everything stakeholders expected from the project.

Participants described how engineering, operations, quality, maintenance and business teams can have different definitions of success. Engineering may focus on equipment capabilities and technical compliance, while operations may prioritize throughput, ease of use, production efficiency or a reliable startup. An OEM may evaluate success based on whether the delivered equipment meets the agreed scope and acceptance criteria. These differences become important when expectations have not been clearly discussed or recorded.

One roundtable described an equipment project in which an incorrect production-rate specification contributed to disagreements after installation. Although a reduced rate had been accepted during factory acceptance testing (FAT), the plant later expected the equipment to meet the original documented rate. Personnel changes further complicated the situation. The example illustrates how specification errors, acceptance decisions and communication gaps can create different understandings of what equipment is expected to deliver.

Another discussion focused on the meaning of successful startup. Participants noted that terms such as vertical startup can be interpreted differently across companies. Without a common understanding of what those terms mean, two parties may believe they have agreed on the same objective while measuring success differently.

Participants also discussed documenting success criteria that reflect the needs of multiple stakeholders, along with a shared glossary of important project terms. In the first live vote, documented success criteria and a glossary received 45% of selections, making it the second-most frequently chosen idea. The larger finding extends beyond how specifications are written.

Clearer definitions of success may help CPGs and OEMs establish a common understanding of what equipment is expected to accomplish, how performance will be evaluated and what constitutes an acceptable project outcome.

> *"All [stakeholders] have different success criteria. Almost like having the CPG success criteria, and then you have the OEM success criteria.."*
>
> —Session participant

The right stakeholders need to be involved before requirements are finalized

Specifications often bring together requirements from multiple functions, but participants described how those expectations can become fragmented when departments are not involved at the appropriate time.

Several roundtables discussed the importance of obtaining input from operations, engineering, maintenance, quality, procurement and other relevant groups before requirements are finalized. Participants also emphasized involving OEM technical teams early enough to identify potential limitations, alternatives or integration challenges.

One discussion highlighted how IT requirements can emerge late in an equipment project after substantial technical planning has already taken place. Controls preferences, network connectivity and cybersecurity requirements may affect equipment design or supplier capabilities. When these expectations are introduced late, both parties may need to revisit earlier decisions.

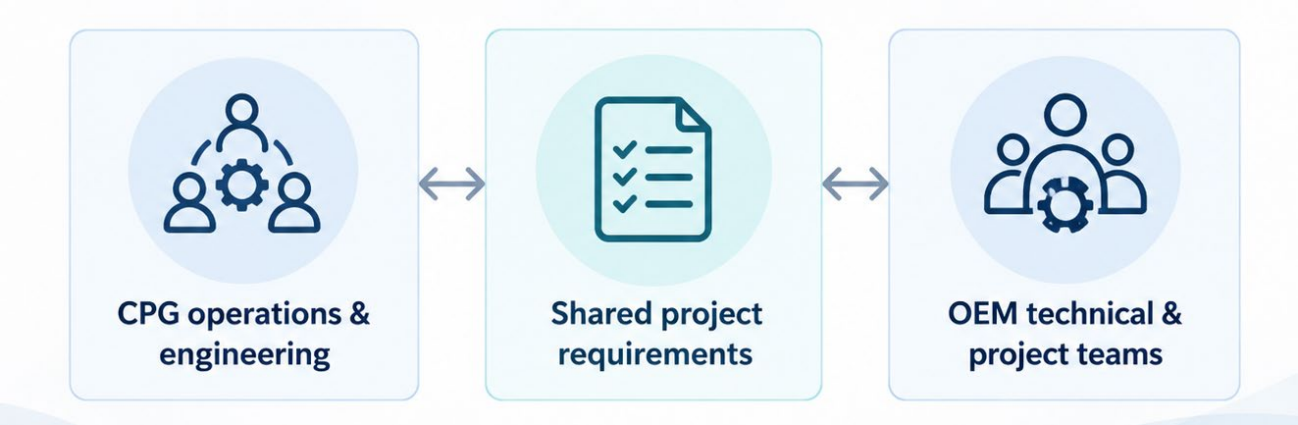
Other participants described gaps between sales and engineering, or between the personnel specifying equipment and those responsible for operating it. An equipment requirement may be understood by the team developing the project but not communicated consistently to the plant team that will ultimately use the system.

The discussions also recognized practical constraints. CPG project teams may not have every requirement finalized when they first approach suppliers, and OEMs cannot always dedicate extensive engineering resources to opportunities that remain preliminary. Participants therefore emphasized bringing the appropriate expertise into discussions as questions become more specific and decisions more consequential. Clear responsibility for gathering, reviewing and communicating requirements was another recurring consideration.

Some participants described the value of a project manager or primary contact who coordinates internal stakeholders and serves as a consistent point of communication with the other organization.

The findings suggest that effective collaboration begins within each organization as well as between CPGs and OEMs. Establishing a common understanding among internal stakeholders may reduce the risk of conflicting requirements reaching suppliers or important operational expectations being overlooked.

Alignment starts within and across organizations



Part Two | Keeping Projects Aligned When Specifications Change

Early communication is only the first step in managing change

Even with well-developed initial specifications, project requirements can change. Participants described changes driven by evolving product designs, packaging formats, operational needs and business priorities. The challenge is not simply preventing changes but understanding their implications and managing them in a way that works for both parties.

A recurring concern was the difference between how a change appears to the party requesting it and what it may require from the party implementing it. A modification to packaging material, equipment configuration or operating requirements may seem limited in scope but can affect machine design, engineering resources, component selection or project scheduling.

One roundtable described how a seemingly minor equipment change could require an OEM to revisit completed work or re-enter an engineering queue, creating delays beyond the physical work involved.

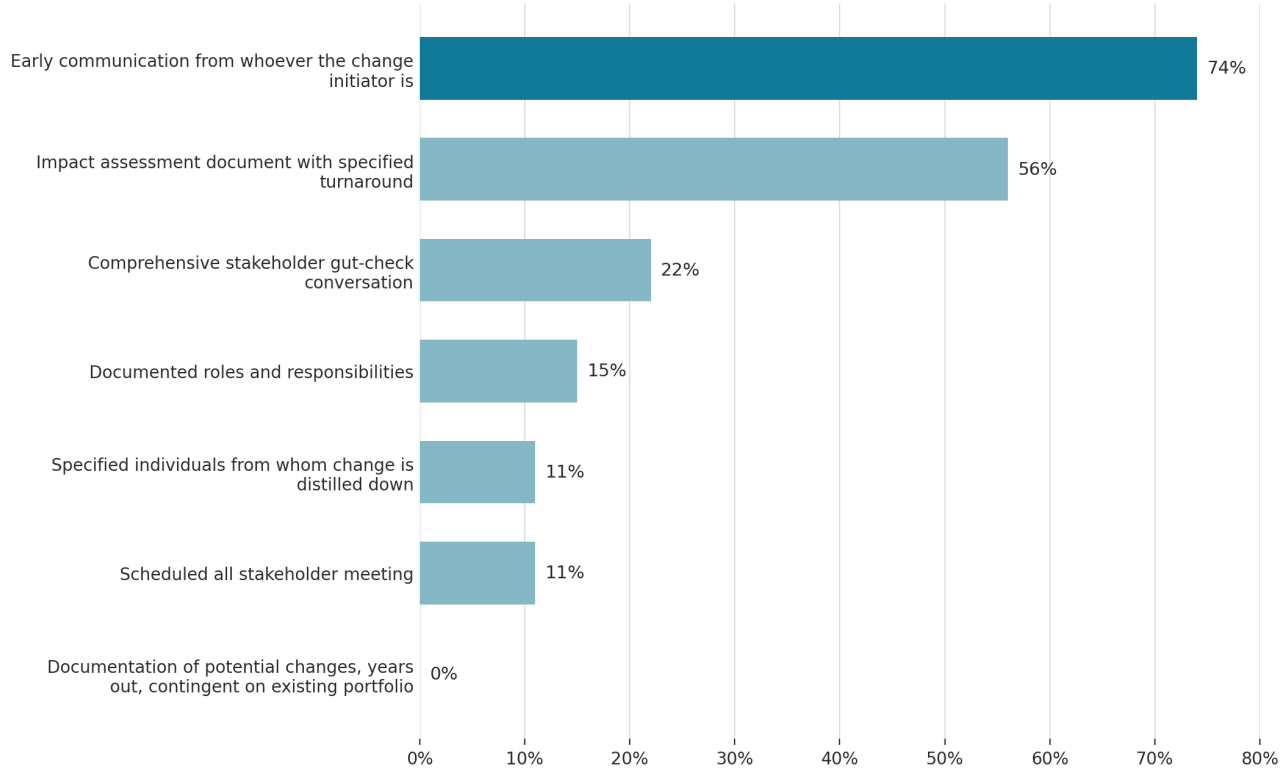
In another roundtable, a participant recounted a project in which changing from paper to plastic cups created equipment-feeding difficulties because the machine had been configured for the original packaging material. The example illustrates how a seemingly straightforward change can have technical consequences when the equipment supplier is not informed before implementation.

> *"I just lost three, four weeks. It's such a simple change."* — Session participant

These examples illustrate why early communication matters. Participants emphasized that changes should be raised when they become known, rather than waiting until the implications are unavoidable. This applies to both CPGs and OEMs, whether a change originates from a new business requirement, a technical constraint or an issue identified during project execution.

74% of respondents selected early communication from whoever initiates the change as a priority. It was the most frequently selected idea.

Mid-project changes: which approaches matter most?



Poll question: When the spec changes mid-project, what process would make it fair and fast for both sides? Describe the steps, who approves, and the turnaround time. n=27; multiple selections permitted.

However, communication alone does not establish how a change should proceed. Participants also emphasized the need to evaluate its consequences before decisions are made. A proposed change may affect cost, timing, equipment performance, quality or previously agreed responsibilities.

Roundtables discussed documenting these potential impacts, identifying what would change from the existing specification and establishing a defined turnaround for reviewing the request. An impact assessment document with a specified response time was selected by 56% of respondents in the second live vote, making it the second-most frequently chosen idea.

Together, the discussions point to a practical distinction between requesting a change and approving one. A shared understanding of the proposed modification, its consequences and the decision required may help both parties evaluate alternatives before making new commitments.

Clear ownership and decision-making help maintain alignment

Managing changes also depends on knowing who is responsible for communicating information, reviewing technical implications and authorizing decisions. Participants described how changes can involve multiple departments within a CPG organization as well as several functions within an OEM. A request may originate with operations, marketing or engineering, while its implications extend to equipment design, project schedules, procurement and installation planning.

Without clearly identified contacts or decision-makers, questions can remain unresolved or move between teams without a definitive response. Several roundtables therefore discussed establishing responsibilities, approval authority and communication channels early in the project.

Some participants emphasized formal documentation, including change records, updated specifications and agreed milestones. Others highlighted the value of direct conversations and regular project check-ins to identify issues before they become more difficult to address. The discussions suggested that these approaches can be complementary: conversations help clarify the problem, while documentation preserves the decisions and commitments that follow.

The session did not establish one universal change-management procedure or turnaround time. Participants recognized that the appropriate process depends on the nature of the change, the project stage and the organizations involved.

The broader implication is that fair and efficient change management depends on shared visibility into both the request and its consequences. For CPGs, this can provide a clearer understanding of how evolving requirements affect project commitments. For OEMs, it can create an opportunity to explain technical and scheduling implications before revised expectations are finalized.

From change request to agreed decision



Conceptual synthesis of approaches discussed; not a universal procedure.

Conclusion | From Specifications to Shared Understanding

The Vision 2030 discussion highlighted a recurring challenge in CPG–OEM relationships: having a specification does not necessarily mean that both parties share the same understanding of what a project requires or what success will look like.

Participants explored how earlier information exchange, clearer operational expectations and coordinated stakeholder involvement can help establish that understanding. They also emphasized that alignment must continue as projects evolve, particularly when changing requirements affect technical decisions, resources or schedules.

The session did not identify one specification format, communication method or change-management procedure that applies to every project. Instead, it highlighted the value of matching the approach to the work involved and ensuring that decisions are understood by the people responsible for carrying them out.

Taken together, the findings suggest that stronger CPG–OEM collaboration depends not only on defining requirements at the beginning of a project, but on maintaining shared expectations through the decisions and changes that follow.

Successful collaboration is built on shared expectations - What a project needs to achieve, what information is required, who must be involved, and how changes will be evaluated along the way.

Additional Session Insights

Pre-registration feedback and live audience polling provide additional context for the Vision 2030 discussion. These results reflect individuals who answered each question and should not be interpreted as representative estimates of the packaging and processing industry.

Pre-registration: Opportunities to Improve Collaboration

Before the session, registrants were asked what change, either within their own organization or on the other side of the buyer-seller relationship, could most improve collaboration within the next 90 days. Responses reflected several areas of opportunity:

01 **Communication and clear owners** — Proactive updates, known contacts and sharing problems early.

02 **Specification alignment** — Define requirements early, use shared templates and flag changes.

03 **Capabilities and shared goals** — Technical involvement and agreed performance objectives.

04 **Installation and service** — Qualified support, clear handoffs and startup follow-up.

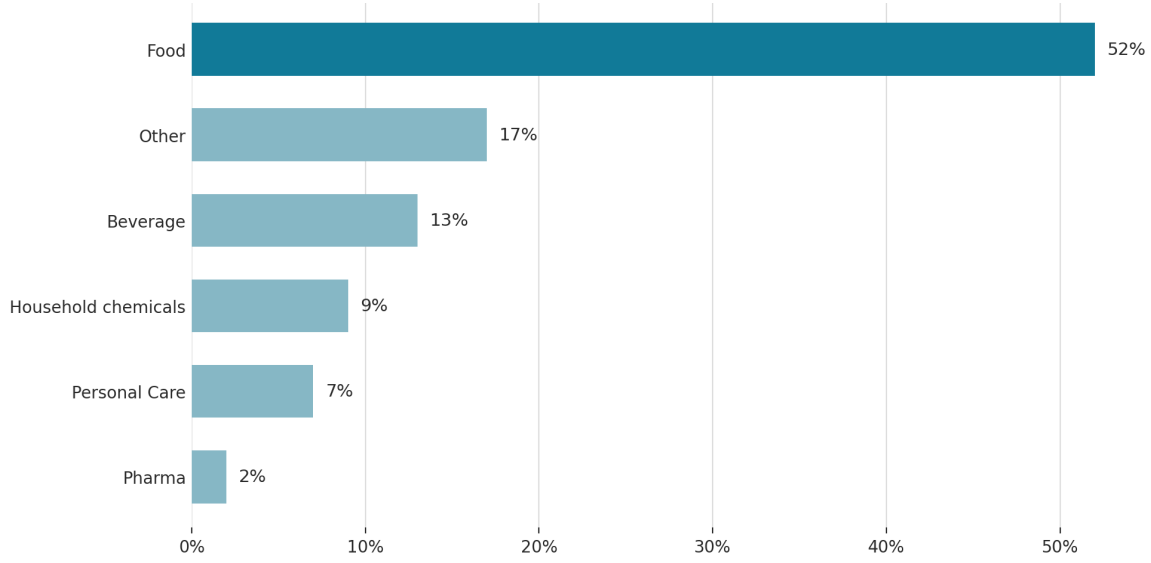
05 **IT, cybersecurity and AI** — Earlier IT involvement and attention to connected requirements.

06 **Contracts and quotations** — Streamlined reviews and faster quotation turnaround.

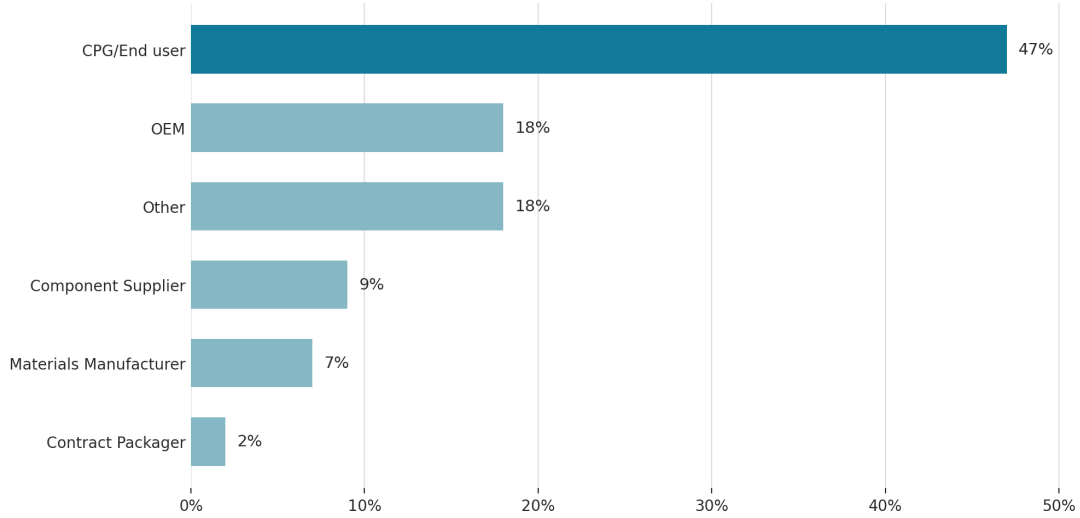
Qualitative themes summarized from session pre-registration; category percentages were not available.

Who attended this Vision 2030 session?

The following charts provide a snapshot of the industries and company types represented at this Vision 2030 session, based on live polling responses. Respondent counts varied by question, so the results do not represent a complete attendee roster.



Live polling: What is your primary industry or industry you serve? n=46; Percentages are rounded and may total more than 100%.



Live polling: Which of these best describe your company? n=45;

Continuing the conversation

Vision 2030 is a critical component of PMMI's suite of continuous improvement forums for its members and the consumer packaged goods (CPG) companies they serve. The suite focuses on the discovery, discussion and solutions to the industry's most significant challenges. Think of these three components as an annual ongoing conversation between CPGs and OEMs.



DISCOVERY

VISION2030

Vision 2030
Where CPGs share their most significant challenges and opportunities through "voice of the customer" workshops.

DISCUSSION

TOP TO TOP
LEADERS COMMUNICATING SOLUTIONS

Top to Top Summit
Where CPGs and OEMs meet to discuss these challenges and opportunities for addressing them.

SOLUTIONS

OpX Leadership Network
Moving Operational Excellence Forward

Solutions Groups
Develop the OpX Leadership Network products through the collective wisdom of thought leaders in the CPG and OEM community.

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