



2021 Pulse Check on Shared Stewardship for Thriving Together Across America

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ReThink Health is the flagship initiative of **The Rippel Foundation**, which is dedicated to fostering equitable health and well-being for all. ReThink Health discovers and shares what it takes to thrive together through shared stewardship and continually explores how to achieve equitable system change in real-world settings. Together with partners and co-investors, ReThink Health works with health care organizations, foundations, corporations, government institutions, and change agents throughout the United States to guide thinking and action that inspire innovative system transformation and to promote shared stewardship as a rising norm. For more information, visit www.rippel.org.

The **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation** (RWJF) is committed to improving health and health equity in the United States. In partnership with others, we are working to develop a Culture of Health rooted in equity that provides every individual with a fair and just opportunity to thrive, no matter who they are, where they live, or how much money they have. For more information, visit www.rwjf.org. Support for the Pulse Check report was provided in part by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

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2021 Pulse Check on Shared Stewardship for Thriving Together Across America

Introduction

Who are stewards?

Stewards work together to create the conditions that everyone needs to thrive, beginning with those who are struggling and suffering. Shared stewardship is not a new idea, but it has not yet become a widespread norm. A growing network of people and organizations see themselves—and one another—as stewards in a movement to thrive together by creating a system that is built for well-being, equity, and racial justice.

What is the Pulse Check?

What will it take to live up to our potential to be good stewards of an equitable and thriving future? *The 2021 Pulse Check on Shared Stewardship for Thriving Together Across America* surveyed more than three hundred leaders who are well-positioned to act as stewards in communities across the U.S. The results track the diffusion of shared stewardship and explore the extent to which the values, priorities, and practices of stewardship are taking hold nationwide.

Fielded from October 2020 to July 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey provides rare and timely insights about stewarding well-being in a period of significant threat and opportunity. The 2021 Pulse Check was led by ReThink Health, the flagship initiative of the Rippel Foundation, in partnership with the RAND Corporation and funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Rippel. It sought to learn:

- To what extent do changemakers across America endorse stewardship **values**?
- What are their **priorities** for investment and action?
- How fully are stewardship **practices** incorporated as organizational norms?
- What kinds of **obstacles** and **momentum builders** are shaping the path forward?

Who contributed?

We invited contributors from a nationally representative sample of places across America.

This report summarizes perspectives from 348 individuals across the following organization types, all of which play a role in fostering equitable, thriving communities:

- governmental public health departments (city or county)
- hospitals
- business associations (for example, local chambers of commerce)
- community non-profits, including multisector partnerships and organizations focused on food, housing, the environment, and faith and social justice

What did we find?

Our findings indicate a notable, though still incomplete, nationwide commitment to create an equitable system for thriving together. The survey finds strong agreement about what the destination is, less agreement about why it should be the destination, and still more differences about how best to get there. Here are several highlights:

Stewardship values

- **More than 90% of respondents affirmed core stewardship values**, including that purpose in life must be larger than both oneself and one's organization, that every person should feel they have power to help shape the world they live in, and that people and organizations should use their wealth to create conditions in which all people can thrive.
- **78% recognize that opportunities for people in their communities to live their best possible lives are not equally shared**, while one quarter of respondents believe to some degree that all people in their communities currently have equal opportunities.
- **26% work on system change as their most important goal**, along with 60% who say it is at least one of their organization's goals.

Stewardship priorities

- **43% would invest more among those who have the most to gain**, including those who are denied equal opportunities because of color, class, gender, and other sources of unjust discrimination.
- **44% would prioritize vital conditions, while 32% would prioritize urgent services.** Even during a national crisis, many respondents emphasized that investments to expand vital conditions should be the higher priority right now (in terms of everyone's time, money, and effort).
- **45% favor being creative with existing resources (rather than seeking additional resources first).** Even though more resources would undoubtedly help, nearly half (45%) believe most problems can be improved by being more creative with existing resources.

Stewardship practices

- **94% believe that working together is the best way** for their organizations to achieve maximum impact, versus going it alone.
- **37% view working relationships as highly effective** across organizations in their community.
- **More than 90% rate their own stewardship practices highly**, but fewer than 50% say the same about others.

What is our hope for the future?

It is through shared stewardship that communities can transcend legacies of injustice and expand the vital conditions. It is our hope that the 2021 Pulse Check will create wider awareness about the critical importance of shared stewardship and what we can do to become better stewards of an equitable and thriving future.

Selected Findings

Stewardship values

- 90+%** affirm core stewardship values for purpose, power, and wealth
- 78%** recognize that some people in their community lack equal opportunities
- 26%** work on system change as their most important goal

Stewardship priorities

- 43%** would invest more among those who have the most to gain
- 44%** would prioritize vital conditions, while 32% would prioritize urgent service
- 45%** believe most problems can be improved by being more creative with existing resources

Stewardship practices

- 94%** believe that working together is the best way to achieve maximum impact
- 37%** view working relationships in their community as highly effective
- 90+%** rate their own stewardship practices highly
- <50%** say the same about the stewardship practices of other organizations

To learn more about stewardship values, priorities, and practices, [click here](#).

Overview

The Imperative of Shared Stewardship

Amidst compounding crises that threaten everyone’s health and well-being, America is seeing a groundswell of support to organize around a single unifying and measurable expectation: All people and places thriving together—no exceptions. This north-star expectation of thriving together cannot be realized with token gestures, technocratic approaches, or narrow programs. To get there, we must think and act very differently.

America is seeing a groundswell of support to organize around a single unifying and measurable expectation: All people and places thriving together—no exceptions.

A growing network of people and organizations see themselves—and one another—as stewards in a movement to thrive together, fostering systemic change with resourcefulness and agility, always seeking to craft a system that is built for well-being, equity, and racial justice. Stewardship is not a new idea, but it also is not yet widespread as a standard way of working together. It involves time-tested practices that have evolved over generations as people have endeavored to move beyond unjust or inhumane legacies and instead pass along a world that enables everyone to thrive.

A recent [study](#) about stewardship as a field of practice observed that, “the strength of our shared stewardship will likely determine whether we sink deeper into an adversity spiral, or whether we find pragmatic ways to create the vital conditions that all people need to participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.” With so much riding on shared stewardship, it becomes imperative to understand its current reach and dimensions.

Led by ReThink Health, the flagship initiative of the Rippel Foundation, in partnership with the RAND Corporation and funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Rippel, the *2021 Pulse Check on Shared Stewardship for Thriving Together Across America* is a large, methodologically rigorous effort to answer four questions:

- To what extent do changemakers across America endorse stewardship values?
- What are their priorities for investment and action?
- How fully are stewardship practices incorporated as organizational norms?
- What kind of obstacles and momentum builders shape the path forward?

The findings detailed below describe the current state of shared stewardship in the U.S. and shine a light on some of the values, priorities, and practices that could move us closer to a future in which all people and places can thrive together.

The results of the Pulse Check reveal that stewards across the nation are relatively well aligned around the ends they seek, albeit with some variation in their rationales. We found relatively small but revealing differences among respondents’ worldviews about why it is important to thrive together. Differences are larger when the subject turns to means, including significant divergence in opinions about priorities and practices. In other words, the survey finds strong agreement about what the destination is, less agreement about why it should be the destination, and still more differences about how best to get there.

The 2021 Pulse Check shares a message of hope: not only are you not alone but you are part of a growing movement.

Who are Stewards?

Everyone can be a steward. Stewards are people, organizations, and networks who take responsibility for working with each other to create conditions that everyone needs to thrive together, beginning with those who are struggling and suffering.

Throughout history, stewards have endeavored to extend what is healthy and humane, while working with equal vigor to resist and remove what is toxic and cruel.



The work of stewardship is frequently daunting. It can feel isolating, as if the problems you face are yours alone. Fortunately, the 2021 Pulse Check provides a message of hope for every steward. Not only are you not alone, but you are part of a growing movement that is becoming steadily more well defined and clear about its approach. And, in clarifying the extent to which certain values, priorities, and practices have taken hold across the country, the 2021 Pulse Check provides a timely and empirically sound resource to further establish shared stewardship as a nationwide norm.

Focus of the Pulse Check: Stewardship Values, Priorities, and Practices

This is the third Pulse Check survey that ReThink Health has conducted. Each survey in this series has taken the pulse of particular issues across America at one point in time. The first two focused explicitly on formal, multisector partnerships for health (also called coalitions, collaboratives, and alliances). [The 2014 Pulse Check](#) sought to describe characteristics of such partnerships, and the [2016 Pulse Check](#) examined how those partnerships develop over time (see also this report in [Health Affairs](#)). The 2021 survey tracks the extent to which essential stewardship values, priorities, and practices have diffused across the country.

For the 2021 Pulse Check, we heard from over 300 leaders in organizations that are well positioned to act as stewards for thriving together in communities across the U.S. We sought to learn what they are doing (or not doing) to steward well-being in their communities, what worldviews guide their work, what factors contribute to (and impede) their momentum, and the extent to which they feel aligned with others.

Stewardship Values, Priorities, and Practices

Stewardship values, priorities, and practices can be embraced by individuals, organizations, and networks across all sectors and across many scales—neighborhoods, cities, counties, states, and nationally.

Stewardship Values

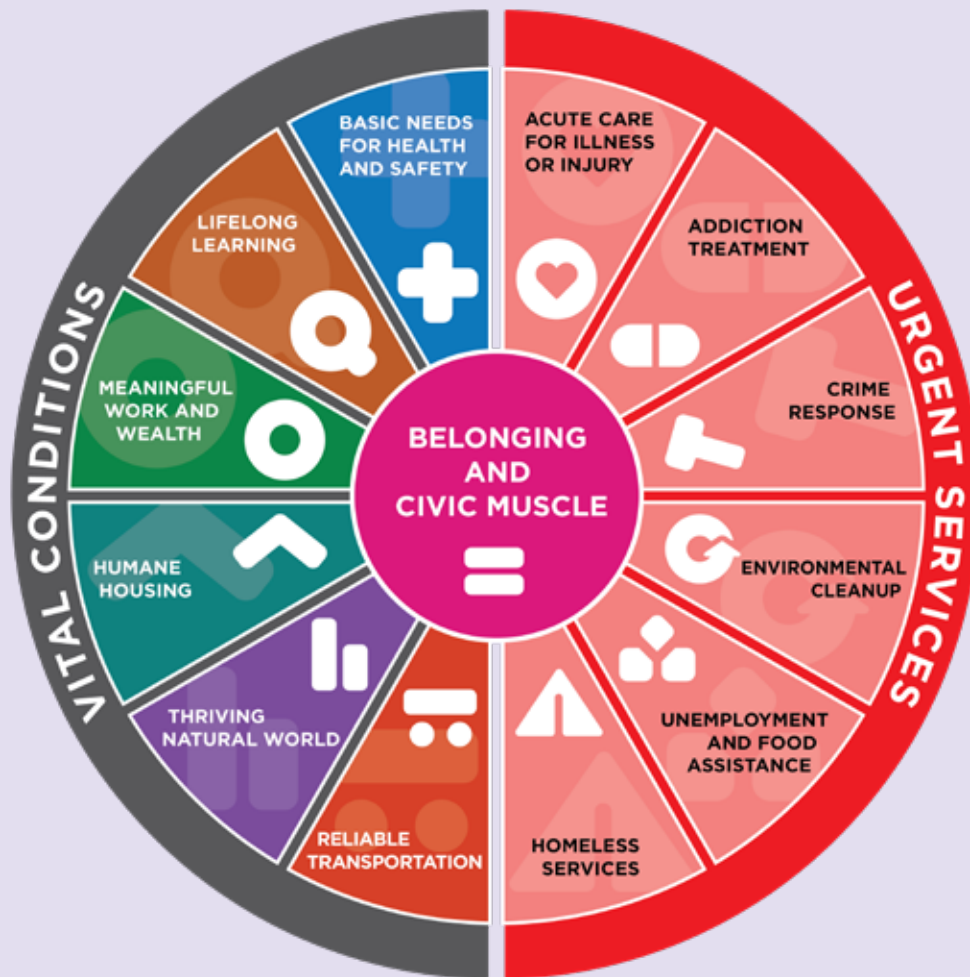
- **Understanding that all people deserve equal opportunities** to live their best possible lives, something that is not yet a reality in America
- **Seeing opportunities for positive change even in times of crisis**, rather than reverting to habits that are rooted in (and reinforce) the status quo
- **Orienting toward system change as a central goal in all efforts**
- **Regarding authentic collaboration** as the central vehicle for enacting system change
- **Investing resources among those who have the most to gain**
- **Prioritizing creative uses of existing resources** instead of seeing the acquisition of new resources as a precondition for progress

Stewardship Priorities

Vital conditions are properties of places and institutions that we all need if we are going to reach our full potential (e.g. food, humane housing, meaningful work and wealth, a sense of belonging). When vital conditions are absent or impaired, people tend to struggle and suffer, driving demand for urgent services. Urgent services are essential—things like acute care for illness or injury, addiction treatment, homeless services, or crime response—but they are temporary fixes that don't directly produce thriving lives. There is no way to “urgent service” our way to thriving.

Stewards in every community strive to make decisions about their priorities and investments in a way that “adds up” meaningfully across organizations to alleviate adversity and unlock everyone's full potential to thrive. They prioritize vital conditions while balancing investments in critical urgent services (see Figure 1). In addition, they understand the special role played by Belonging and Civic Muscle across the entire range of investment priorities: it is both a vital condition itself and a pragmatic capacity that drives equitable progress in every other area.

Figure 1: Well-being portfolio



Stewardship Practices

- **Working with members of your community** as full partners
- **Assessing and planning** for well-being throughout the community, not just for the people directly served by an organization
- **Embedding strategies to increase equity, diversity, and inclusion** within organizations and communities
- **Setting priorities based on both a short-and long-term view** (e.g., beyond 10 years)
- **Crafting solutions that advance multiple goals at once**, also known as multisolving
- **Embracing new ideas** and experimenting with new approaches
- **Investing resources** to expand well-being in the community
- **Sharing in-kind resources** (e.g., staff, space, knowledge) with other organizations
- **Supporting policies** to expand community well-being
- **Strengthening collaboration across organizations** to promote community well-being (e.g., hosting meetings, crafting agendas, facilitating dialogue, sharing information)
- **Managing programs or resources with other organizations** to support community well-being
- **Finding ways to share and integrate data**
- **Monitoring and evaluating collaborative efforts** to expand community well-being, equity, and racial justice

Methods and Limitations

Methods

See [Appendix 2](#) for a detailed description of the 2021 Pulse Check procedures.

Whereas prior Pulse Checks surveyed only one type of organization (i.e., a formal multisector partnership), the 2021 Pulse Check has a much wider array of contributors. Insights from ReThink Health's Ventures project affirmed that while formal partnerships play important roles in communities, other types of organizations also drive change even if they do not work through a formal partnership. The 2021 Pulse Check therefore looks across a wider spectrum of entities that play a role in fostering equitable, thriving communities. It includes contributors from eight types of organizations (see Figure 2):

- Governmental public health departments (city or county)
- Hospitals
- Business associations (for example, local chambers of commerce)
- Community non-profits, including multisector partnerships and organizations focused on food, housing, the environment, and faith and social justice.

The questions in the 2021 Pulse Check survey (see [Appendix 1](#) for the survey instrument) are grounded in observations from ReThink Health's fieldwork with hundreds of individuals and organizations, as well as findings about transformational norms and practices from a growing body of literature across a range of interdisciplinary fields. Some of those fields include democratic governance of common resources, collaborative governance, large-scale community organizing, complex adaptive systems, othering and belonging, learning organizations, network science, and health system dynamics, among others (Ostrom, 2009; Emerson and Nabatchi, 2015; Ganz, 2010; Eoyang, 2001; Snowden and Rancati, 2020; powell, 2012; Senge et al., 1994; Centola, 2018; Varda, 2018; Sterman, 2006).



We designed and pre-tested the Pulse Check questions using focus groups with representatives from each of the eight organization types, including in-depth interviews for cognitive testing. In addition, our methodology produced a nationally representative sample that can be replicated in future surveys.

We followed these steps to build the sample:

- **Identified Places:** We identified the approximately 6,500 incorporated places and Census Designated Places in the United States that have a population greater than 10,000 and less than 500,000. From that set, we randomly selected a sample of 1,200 places. To properly represent larger cities (those with populations greater than 500,000), we randomly selected local neighborhoods, 44 in total.
- **Identified Organizations:** For each location in the sample we randomly assigned an organization type and then selected the largest organization of that type in that location.
- **Identified an Informed Respondent:** The director of the organization (or another informed organization leader) was invited to participate in the survey.

Our primary aim was to obtain a sample that was sufficiently large and balanced across sub-groups to support internally valid observations about the state of shared stewardship in the country. Because the Pulse Check surveys do not track changes over time, this report does not compare findings to prior Pulse Checks.

The task of fielding the Pulse Check was complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which exerted a disproportionate impact on different sub-groups. Notably, the response rate for people working in hospitals and public health departments was one-third that of people associated with business associations and community non-profits. To compensate, we increased the number of invitations sent to hospitals and public health departments and were able to achieve sufficient representation across each intended sub-group. The overall response rate of 9.7% was low in absolute terms but yielded a satisfactorily robust and balanced sample.



Study Limitations

Stewardship is grounded in the idea of co-creating equitable, thriving communities with a diverse ecosystem of constituents. This includes ordinary people in every walk of life, along with organizations in every sector or industry. The 2021 Pulse Check examines the diffusion of stewardship values, priorities, and practices—many of which are oriented towards centering unheard or underheard voices and building shared power—from the perspective of organizational leaders. We included community-based organizations that tend to work closely

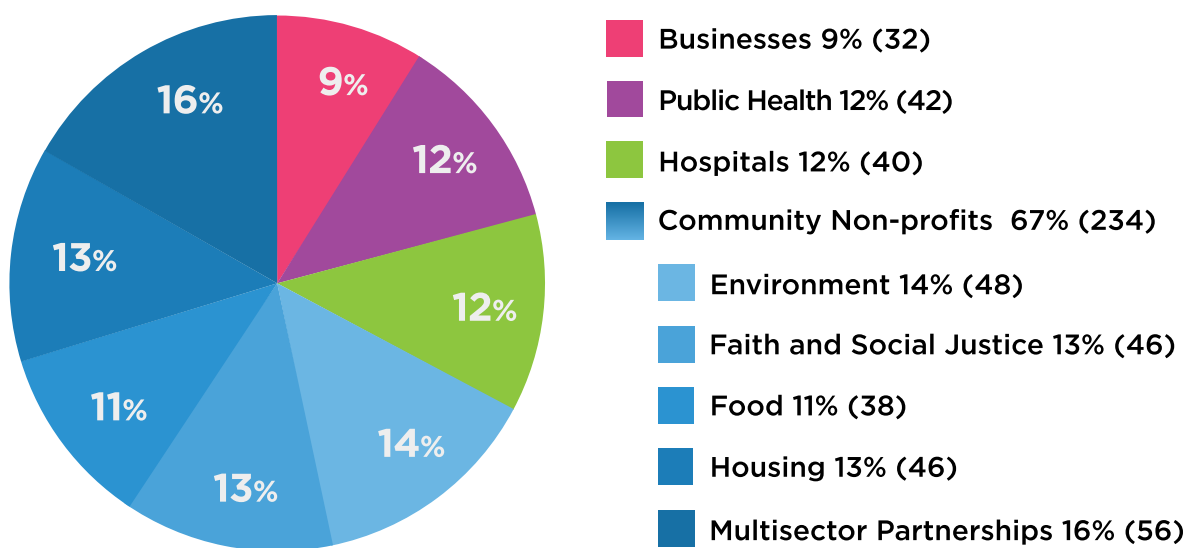
with community residents but did not survey unaffiliated residents themselves. The findings therefore reflect perceptions from organizational leaders, not members of the general public they work to support.

It is possible that respondents differed from non-respondents in notable ways. Because the invitation to contribute was explicitly framed around community well-being, it may have been more attractive to people who hold that as a primary concern and see it as a focus of their work.

In a small number of questions, we found very high rates of agreement (over 90%). Such strong agreement can indicate true alignment but may also reflect the impact of social desirability bias—i.e., respondents providing what they perceive to be the desired answer.

Relatedly, it is important to recognize that what people report does not always align with what they do. Aspirations about what one would like to be true—for instance, always collaborating with partners on an equal footing—may lead one to report a practice that is not fully borne out in daily behavior. Put another way: the 2021 Pulse Check tells us what people say they do—it does not tell us what they actually do. That is in the nature of any survey, but it is useful in revealing the current state of prevailing perceptions.

Figure 2: What organization types contributed to the 2021 Pulse Check? (n=348)



Contributors

We heard from 348 contributors across eight organization types, selected from a nationally representative sample of places across the country.

Respondents' organizations primarily focus on the county level (34%), multi-county level (25%), or city level (14%). Organizational leaders report that their efforts reach racial and ethnic minorities (64%), low-income populations (63%), families (63%), children (61%), and the elderly (56%).

Respondents skewed female (58%), White (87%), and leaned Democrat (45%, compared with 8% Republican and 36% who preferred not to say). Two exceptions, however, are respondents from business associations and hospitals, who are more likely to be male (59% and 58%, respectively) and to lean Republican (22% and 13%, respectively). This is generally consistent with the population of people who hold senior positions in these organizations across the country.

Throughout the report, we often group the eight organizations into four clusters:

- **Governmental public health departments** (city or county)
- **Hospitals**
- **Business associations** (for example, local chambers of commerce)
- **Community non-profits**, including multisector partnerships and organizations focused on food, housing, the environment, and faith and social justice.

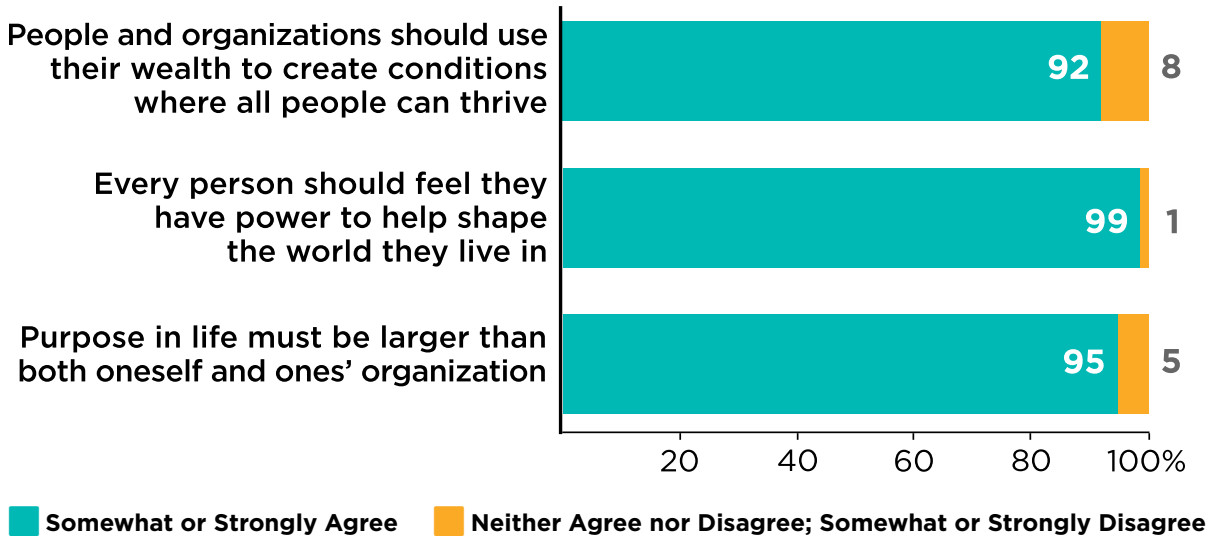
We grouped themes from contributors in this way because there were often strong similarities or differences in responses, both within and across these clusters. Additionally, the clusters reflect major sectors that play unique and significant roles in supporting equitable, thriving people and places in the U.S.

The State of Shared Stewardship Across America

Pulse Check contributors expressed a high level of agreement with three fundamental tenets of shared stewardship (see Figure 3):

- People and organizations should use their wealth to create conditions where all people can thrive (92% strongly or somewhat agree)
- Every person should feel they have the power to help shape the world they live in (99% strongly or somewhat agree)
- Purpose in life must be larger than oneself and one’s organization (95% strongly or somewhat agree)

Figure 3: How much do you agree with the following statements? (n=348)



Numbers may be less than 100, as some chose “not applicable” or skipped the question. See Appendix 3 for details.



To what extent do these perspectives translate to specific beliefs and perceived actions? We examined responses to 19 additional items (see Table 3 in [Appendix 2](#)) that probed five specific areas of stewardship values, priorities, and practices:

- Perceptions of unequal opportunities for all people to live their best possible lives
- Preferences for equitable investment that direct more resources toward those with the most to gain
- The extent to which system change is an organizational goal
- The extent to which the contributor’s organization has internal norms and processes for stewardship
- The extent to which the contributor’s organization engages in collaborative activities with others

Each question had a normatively ideal response—one that reflects the ideals of stewardship for individuals or organizations. For instance, if a contributor said that their organization views system change in its community as its most important organizational goal, that would indicate strong consistency with the premise that stewards should routinely concentrate on the systems that shape our lives. The opposite would be true if the contributor said that system change is not something the organization talks about.

That kind of normative analysis allowed us to create an index of stewardship diffusion that measures the spread and uptake of core stewardship perspectives. A contributor whose answers aligned with the normative stewardship response to every question would have a score of 100. Conversely, a contributor who endorsed none of the expected stewardship responses would have a diffusion score of zero.

The lowest score registered by any contributor was 18, while some scored 100. Across the 348-person sample, the average score was 65 (see Figure 4). Respondents from community non-profits, public health departments, and hospitals tended to score close to the sample-wide mean, while respondents from business associations tended to score lower, with a mean score of 51 (see Figure 5).

Figure 4: To what extent has stewardship diffused across the country? (n=348)

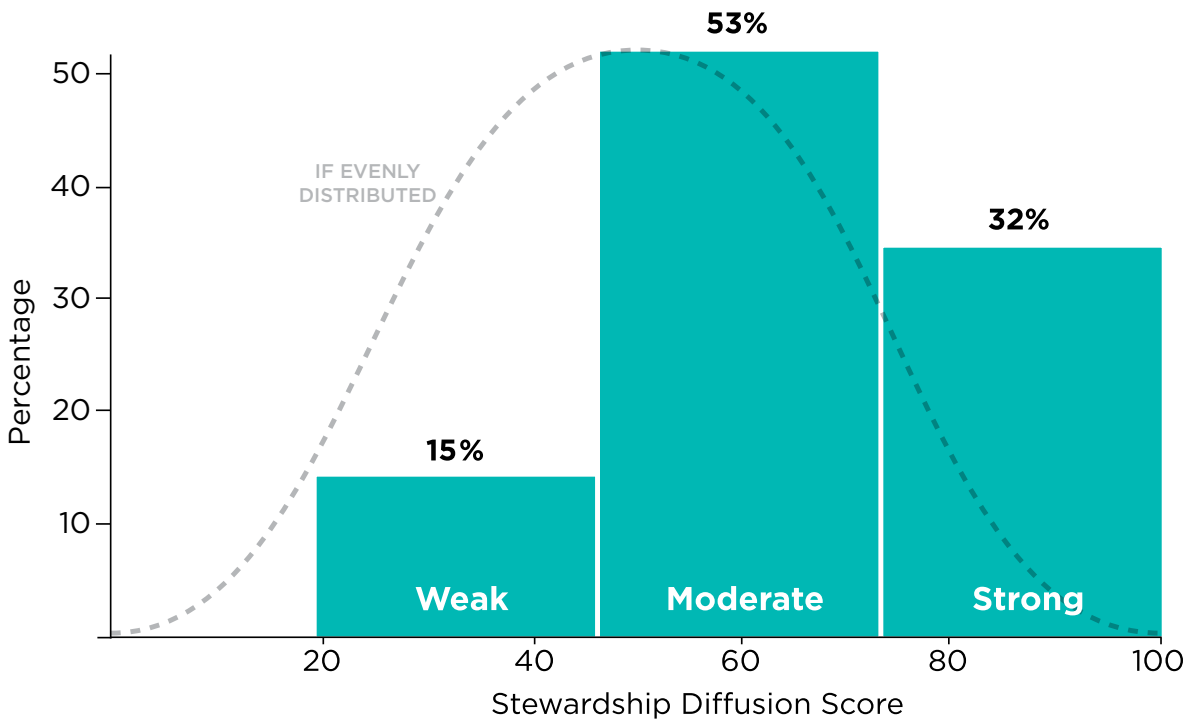
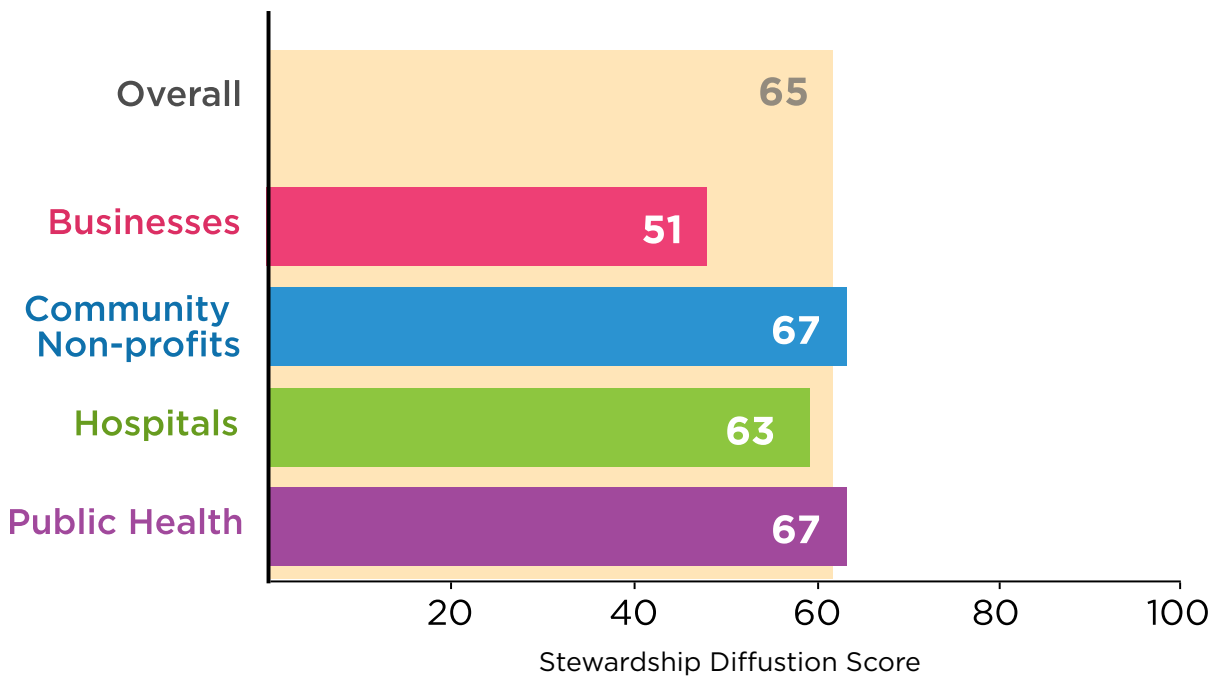


Figure 5: How much has stewardship diffused across key sectors? (n=348)



Numbers may be less than 100, as some chose “not applicable” or skipped the question. See Appendix 3 for details.

Taken as a whole, this degree of diffusion is encouraging: it indicates that the values, priorities, and practices of stewardship are broadly familiar and widely endorsed. It also suggests that future efforts to expand stewardship should focus not only on increasing familiarity with the idea of stewardship but also on enhancing stewards’ ability to apply already-familiar concepts more effectively. It follows that strengthening shared stewardship—within individuals and organizations, as well as across networks of organizations—is perhaps the most important thing we can do to advance the movement for thriving together.

We followed the same process to develop a companion index that measures perceptions of alignment within and between organizations. In this instance, we examined responses to 26 items (see Table 3 in [Appendix 2](#)) that assessed perceptions of alignment with respect to shared stewardship in their communities. Specifically, the questions probed how contributors perceive:

- The effectiveness of working relationships among organizations in their communities
- The extent to which organizations in their communities are working in complementary ways towards similar aims
- The extent to which the contributor’s organization engages in collaborative activities with others
- The extent to which other organizations in their communities engage in collaborative activities

Like the index of diffusion, the alignment score could vary from 0 to 100. The mean alignment score across the entire sample was 59, with a low of 23 and a high of 100 (see Figure 6). These data show moderately high levels of alignment across contributors (see Figure 7). Respondents associated with community non-profits, business associations, and hospitals gave responses that hovered around the mean. Those associated with public health departments reported a higher mean level of perceived alignment (67). As shared stewardship strengthens across the country, we would hope to see the alignment of organizations correspondingly increase.



Figure 6: To what extent are organizations aligned in their stewardship values and practices? (n=348)

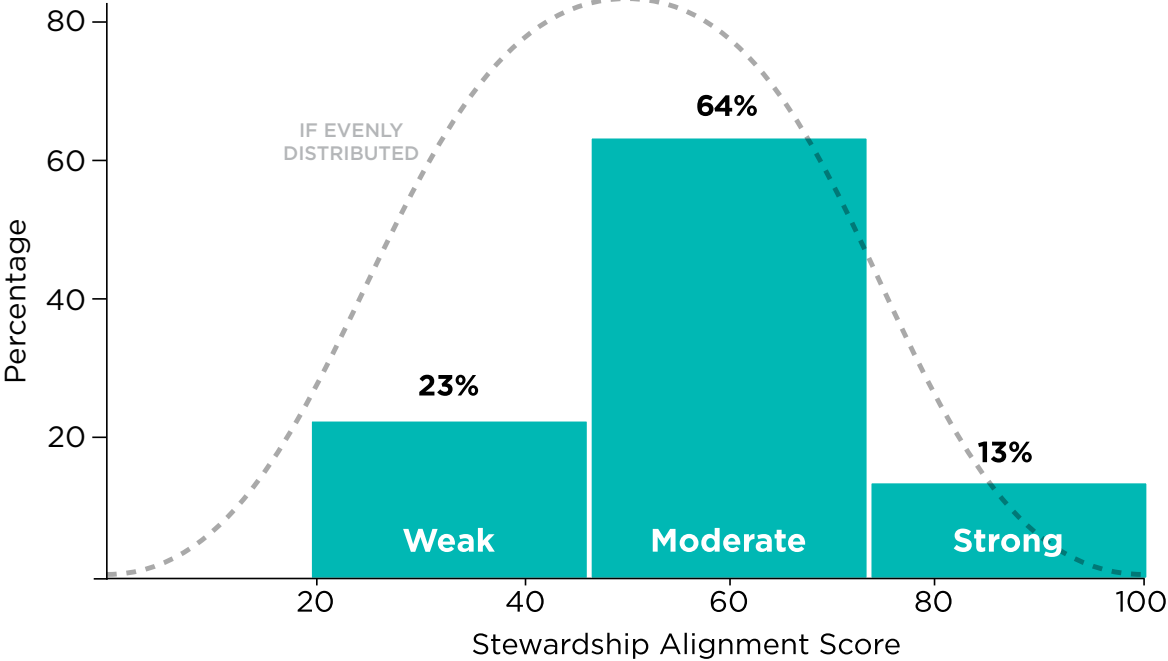
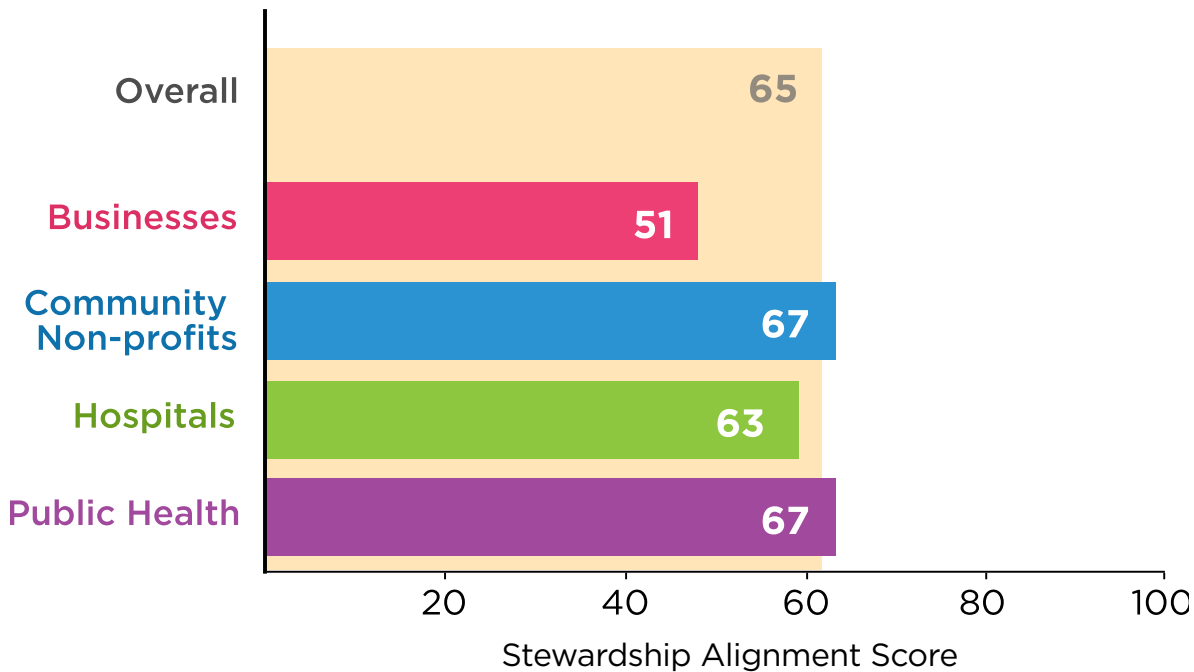


Figure 7: To what extent are key sectors aligned in their stewardship values and practices? (n=348)



Numbers may be less than 100, as some chose “not applicable” or skipped the question. See [Appendix 3](#) for details

We see an unsurprising but notable pattern in the relationship between worldview, diffusion scores, and alignment scores. Whereas nearly all contributors agreed that “every person should feel they have power to help shape the world they live in” (99%), and that “people and organizations should use their wealth to create conditions where all people can thrive” (92%), the few who strongly disagreed scored lower on indices of stewardship diffusion (49% and 45%, respectively) and alignment (50% and 38%, respectively), compared to those who strongly agreed. This finding illustrates the extent to which one’s worldview is tied to one’s uptake of stewardship practices and perceptions of inter-organizational collaboration.

This degree of diffusion is encouraging: it indicates that the values, priorities, and practices of stewardship are broadly familiar and widely endorsed.

Seven Signs of Stewardship on the Rise

Seven strong signs emerged from Pulse Check contributors about the state of shared stewardship across the country. Within each sign, we have highlighted notable patterns across the four organizational clusters (governmental public health, hospitals, businesses, and community non-profits) and flagged major differences within organization types when relevant. Because we sought to understand the values, priorities, and practices of contributors relative to the tenets of stewardship, we have also provided summaries of the relevant stewardship stance for each sign.

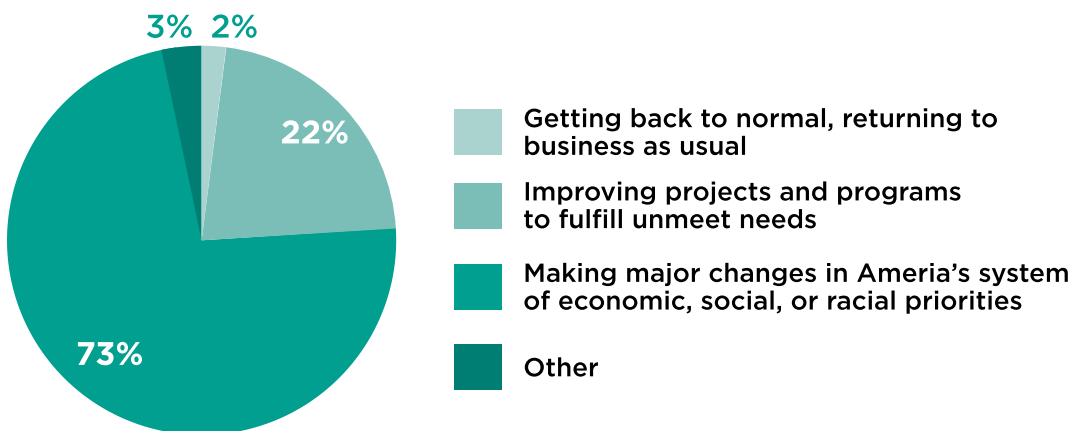
1 Valuing System Change: *Over 90% of respondents saw the crises of 2020-21 (COVID-19, racial injustice, economic distress, etc.) as an opportunity to make positive change for people in their communities, and nearly as many said that system change is a goal of their organizations.*

Relevant Stewardship Stance: Regardless of their sector, stewards ought to prioritize system change in their communities as a central organizational goal, recognizing that transforming conditions is necessary in order for everyone to thrive together. A steward appreciates that advancing system change requires a mindset of abundance—seeing challenges as opportunities to create new understanding and possibility. This mindset allows individuals and organizations to creatively embrace change, rather than to fear it.

Most respondents saw America’s current crises as an opportunity to make positive change for people in their communities (91% somewhat or strongly agree). Of those who saw the moment as an opportunity, a majority (73%) hoped to see “major changes in America’s system of economic, social, or racial priorities” (see Figure 8). Twenty-two percent preferred to focus on fulfilling unmet needs through projects and programs. Only 2% sought a return to business as usual. Only 2% sought a return to business as usual.

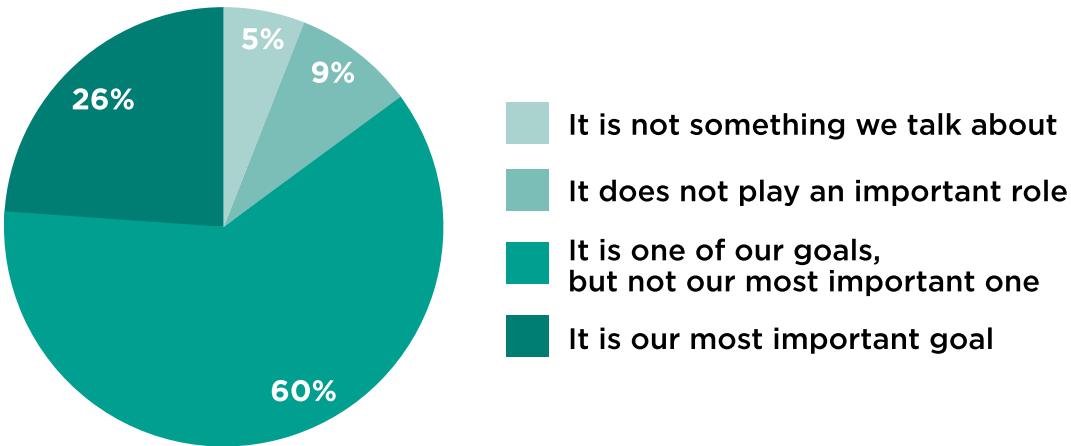
Over 90% of respondents saw the crises of 2020-21 as an opportunity to make positive change for people in their communities.

Figure 8: What kind of positive change do you hope will arise from 2020-21 crises? (n=315)



Eighty-six percent of contributors indicated that their organizations consider system change to be either their most important goal or at least one of their goals, while 14% said that system change is either not an important goal or not something they talk about (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: To what extent does your organization consider system change in your community to be a goal? (n=348)

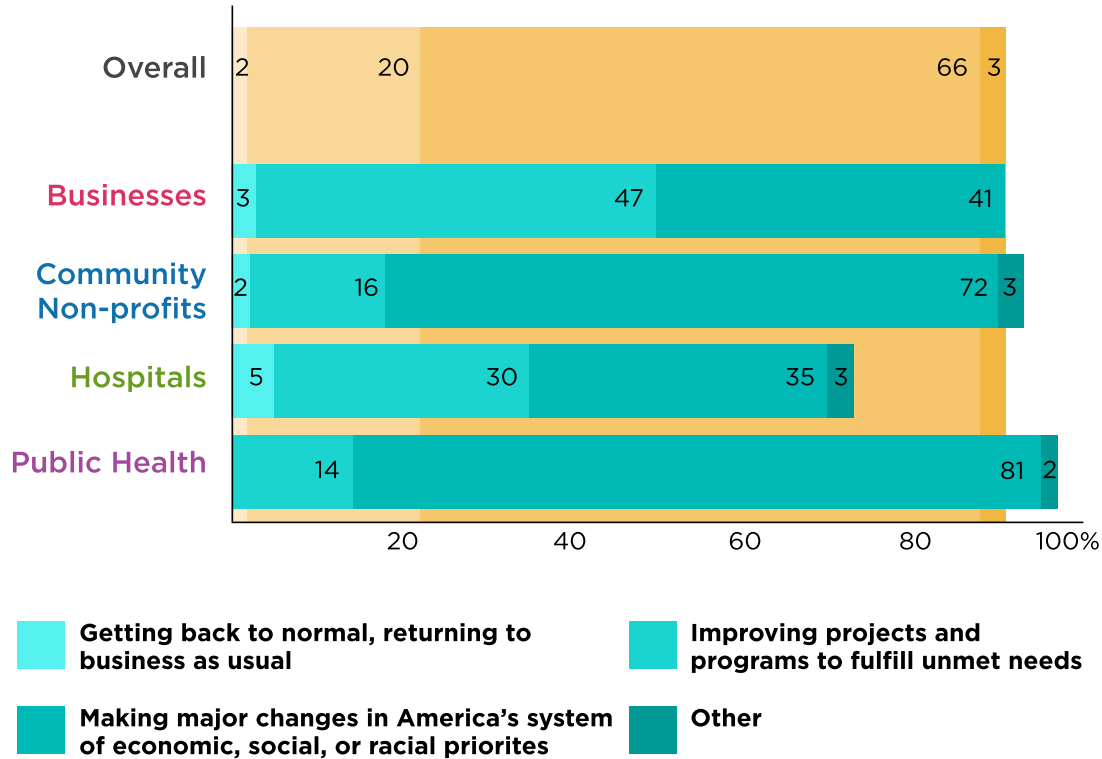


This indicates that respondents not only see our current layered crises as presenting a window of opportunity for building a better future but also recognize the degree to which a systemic response is required. Many of the notable differences we see across the signs trace back to the stewardship value of fully and explicitly committing to system change as an organizational goal.

Notable Differences

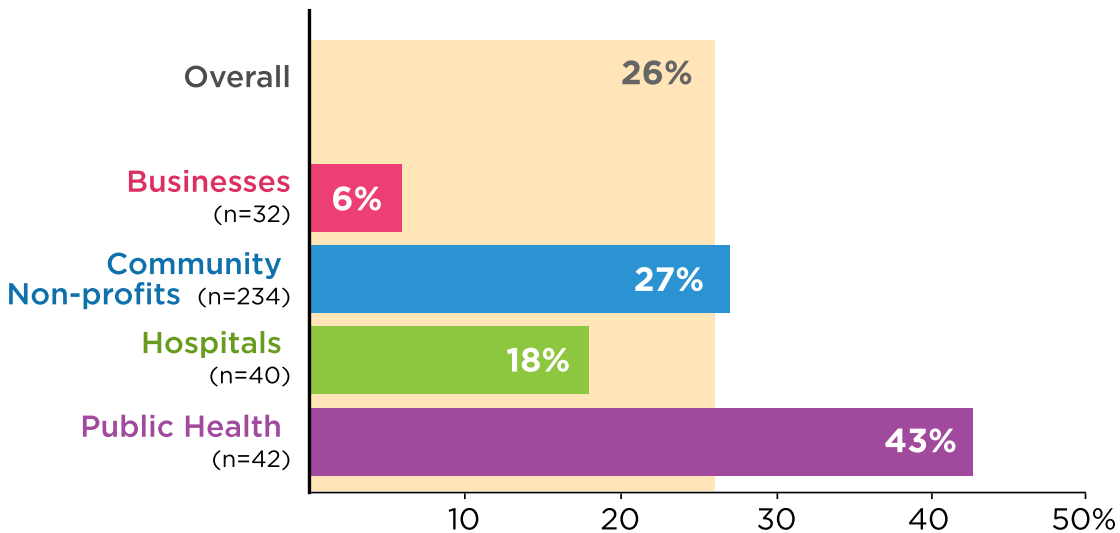
- Respondents affiliated with hospitals (35%) and business associations (41%) were less likely than others to see an opportunity for major change in America’s system of economic, social, or racial priorities (see Figure 10).
- Forty-three percent of respondents affiliated with public health departments cited system change as their highest-priority goal, compared to 27% for those affiliated with community non-profits, 18% for those affiliated with hospitals, and 6% for those affiliated with business associations (see Figure 11).
- Contributors who said that system change was their organization’s most important goal scored higher on the indices of diffusion (77) and alignment (62) than those whose organizations did not talk about it (36 for diffusion, 51 for alignment). These contributors were also much more likely to see current crises as an opportunity to make major changes in America’s system of economic, social, or racial priorities (84%) than those whose organizations do not talk about system change (53%).

Figure 10: What kind of positive change do you hope will arise from 2020-21 crises?
 (By organization type, n=315)



Numbers may be less than 100, as some chose "not applicable" or skipped the question. See Appendix 3 for details

Figure 11: Which organization types prioritize system change as their most important goal?
 (n=348)



We found significant variation across sectors in the degree to which system change is perceived to be an imperative. That variability appears to affect a wide range of related values, priorities, and practices. It may also reflect the extent to which those sectors that hold a large amount of conventional power and resources (like hospitals and businesses) are more likely to report greater comfort with the current system. Further efforts to expand stewardship could entail showing even the most reluctant leaders that their companies—and our country—have much to gain from equitable system change.

2

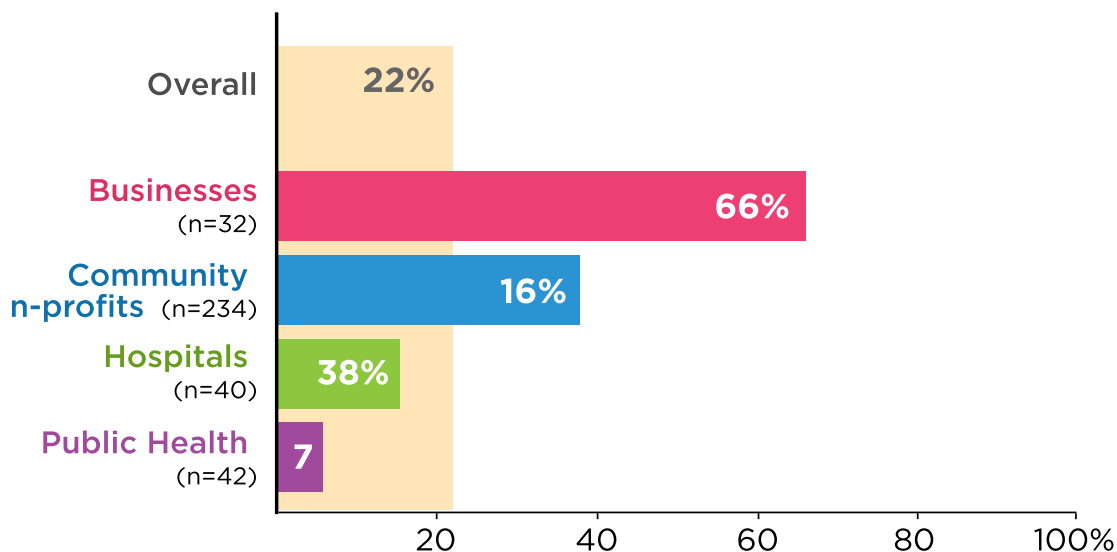
Pursuing Equitable Opportunities: Most respondents felt that people in their communities do not have equal opportunities to lead their best possible lives, but a majority expected that opportunities for people to thrive will become more equitable over the next five years. There was no clear consensus, however, about how to prioritize investments to produce greater equity.

Relevant Stewardship Stance: Stewardship entails an understanding that we cannot thrive together when large numbers of us are struggling, suffering, and experiencing unfair adversity. Stewards should also recognize that many groups of people have been systematically disadvantaged throughout our history and even today are denied equal opportunity. Accordingly, a steward prioritizes investments that help those who have been struggling and suffering the most.

Most respondents felt that a majority of people in their communities are either struggling or suffering (60%). This is a higher level of struggling and suffering than is reported in nationwide surveys, which fluctuated over the past decade between 41-54% (Riley et al., 2021; Witters and Agrawal, 2021). Contributors to this Pulse Check may perceive lower levels of thriving, in part, because their work typically involves encounters with those who are struggling and suffering. The timing of this survey could also have skewed perceptions because it occurred during a period of conspicuous adversity due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most respondents did not feel that people in their communities have equal opportunities to live their best possible lives (78%, see Figure 12). Together with the perception that many people are struggling or suffering, this suggests that a majority of respondents recognize that structural inequities are linked with widespread struggling and suffering.

Figure 12: Do all people in my community have equal opportunities to live their best possible lives? (n=348, % who somewhat or strongly agree)



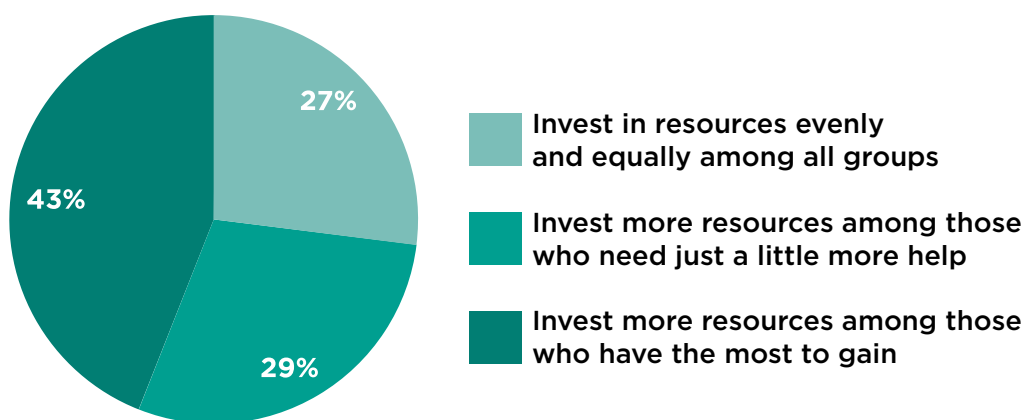
A majority of respondents (64%) anticipate that opportunities for people in their communities to thrive will become more equitable in the next five years. Here too, this positive outlook is consistent with the belief that current crises present an opportunity to shape a better future (91%).

A plurality of respondents think that the most effective way to enable all people in their community to thrive would be to invest more resources among those who have the most to gain (43%), a view matching the principle of “targeted universalism.” By contrast, two smaller groups prioritized investing among those who need just a little more help (29%) or investing evenly and equally among all groups (27%) (see Figure 13).

Notable Differences

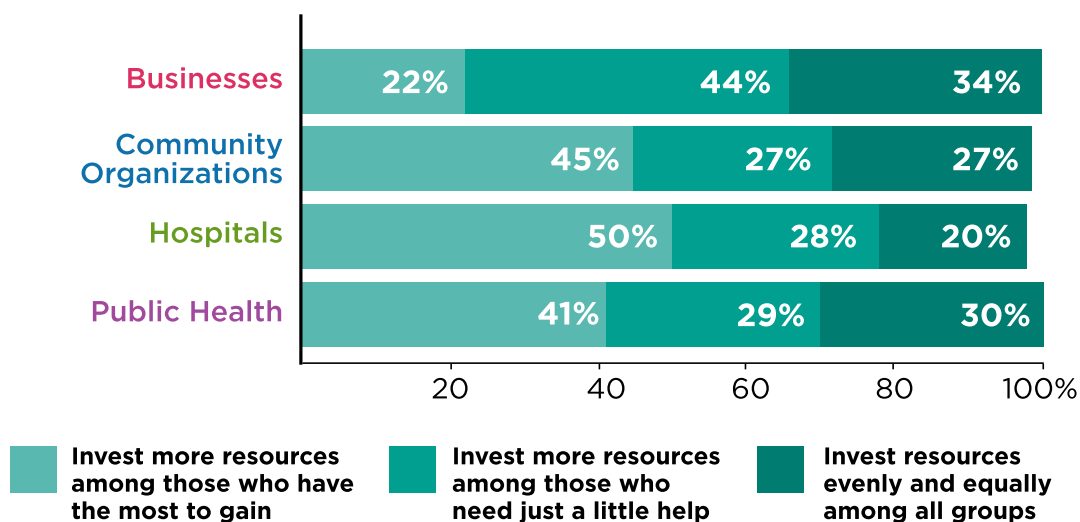
- Among respondents affiliated with organizations that focus on system change, 54% prioritized investing in those who have the most to gain. Such investments were favored by only 16% of respondents whose organizations do not discuss system change.
- Respondents affiliated with business associations were less likely than others to perceive inequality in their communities, with 66% believing that all people in their communities currently have an equal opportunity to thrive. In marked contrast, only 7% of respondents affiliated with government public health departments believed the same thing.
- Looking across the four institution clusters, half of all respondents affiliated with hospitals, as well as about 40% of governmental public departments and community non-profits, prioritized investing in those who have the most to gain (see Figure 14). Those affiliated with business associations were much less likely to prioritize investing in this way (22%).

Figure 13: Which investment strategy would have the greatest impact on enabling all people in your community to thrive? (n=348)



Totals may be less than 100, as some chose “not applicable” or skipped the question. See Appendix 3 for details.

Figure 14: Which investment strategy would have the greatest impact on enabling all people in your community to thrive? (By organization type) (n=348)



Totals may be less than 100, as some chose “not applicable” or skipped the question. See Appendix 3 for details.

These findings indicate that respondents have differing beliefs about how well-being can best be expanded. But, on the whole, close to half of the respondents believe that we can build a more equitable future by investing more among those who have been structurally disadvantaged.

Close to half of the respondents believe that we can build a more equitable future by investing more among those who have been structurally disadvantaged.

3

Prioritizing Vital Conditions: *Even during a time of national crisis, which increased adversity and acute needs, there was a strong belief that it is important to prioritize vital conditions over urgent services.*

Relevant Stewardship Stance: A steward knows that when vital conditions are absent or impaired, people tend to struggle and suffer, driving demand for urgent services—and a steward’s priorities reflect this understanding. Urgent services are essential, but they are temporary fixes that don’t by themselves produce the experience of thriving.

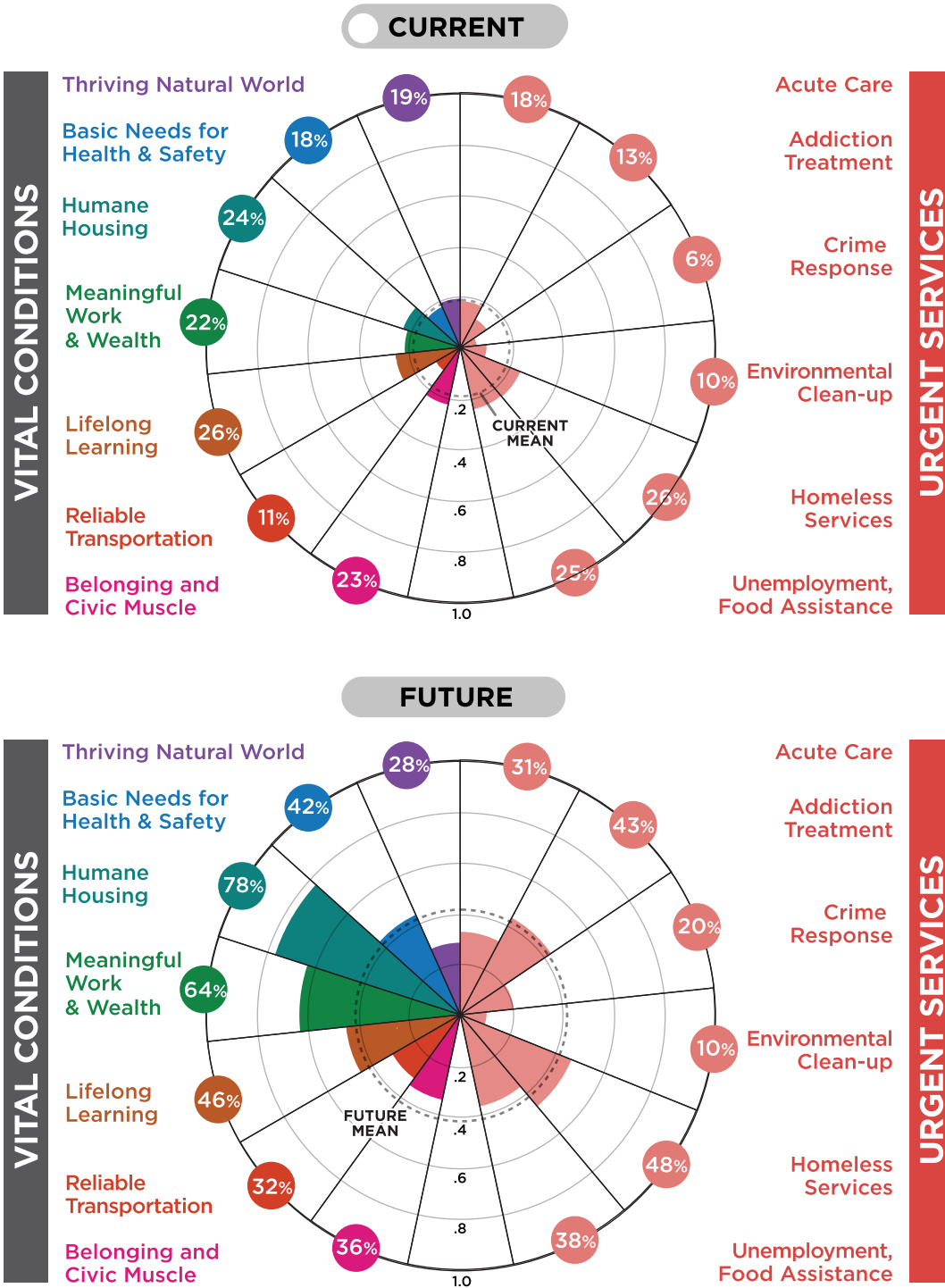
Overall, respondents emphasized that investments to expand vital conditions should be the higher priority right now in their communities (in terms of everyone’s time, money, and effort)—more so than urgent services (44% and 32%, respectively) (see Figure 15). At a time of especially acute demand for urgent services, this emphasis is notable, indicating a strong orientation toward long-term thinking and a preference for solutions that advance multiple goals at once while also offering many co-benefits (often referred to as “multisolving”).

Even during a time of national crisis, which increased adversity and acute needs, there was a strong belief that it is important to prioritize vital conditions.

Figure 15: Portfolio priorities, current and future (n=348, % selected as highest priority)

Portfolio Priorities

What are your organization's highest priorities right now?



Current percentages reflect the extent to which each area is currently a top organizational priority for contributors. Future percentages reflect the extent to which contributors think each area should be a top priority for their entire community.

Figure 15 summarizes patterns of investment based on a larger list of questions about priorities (see the detailed heat maps for Questions 5 and 6 in [Appendix 3](#)).

When asked to assess which areas should be the highest priority (in terms of everyone's time, money, and effort), respondents tended to emphasize their own organization's area of work. However, over 50% of all respondents selected a consistent set of future priorities, all of which are aligned with the vital conditions, including:

- Safe, affordable housing (78%)
- Job opportunities and economic development (65%)
- Racial and social justice (64%)
- Better pay, living wages, and family wealth (63%)
- Education, including early childhood, K-12, and youth development (62%)
- Routine health care (57%)
- Healthy food (52%)

When respondents reported on their organization's current activity (i.e., not what should be prioritized across their community but what they are presently prioritizing), there was an unsurprisingly strong connection to their own organizational mission. However, there were some unifying current priorities, including:

- Healthy food (36%)
- Emergency food assistance (39%)
- Civic life (32%)
- Racial and social justice (32%)
- Education (33%)

Notable Differences

- A close analysis revealed noteworthy patterns about future priorities within hospitals and public health departments. Contributors from hospitals assigned relatively low priority to unemployment assistance (15%), reliable transportation (20%), and safety (38%). Contributors from public health departments assigned relatively low priority to unemployment assistance (17%) and acute care or testing for illness or injury (34%) (see Appendix 3 for a detailed heatmap).
- It is significant that civic life was a relatively high priority for current work among all respondents. Civic life consists of a broad set of activities that strengthen social cohesion and make it possible to achieve society-wide change. It includes voting, volunteering, leadership, organizing, engaging in public work, and building power or civic muscle to do things that no one could do alone. Civic life is the only area to achieve double-digit support from respondents in every sector (see Appendix 3).

4

Infusing Stewardship in Organizational Norms: A large majority of respondents reported that their organizations are enacting a common set of stewardship norms and practices.

Relevant Stewardship Stance: Stewards ought to be committed to constantly translating their values into action. They look to infuse norms and practices for shared stewardship in all facets of their work.

The vast majority of respondents said that their organizations are enacting a common set of stewardship practices, a promising signal that stewardship may be taking hold as a norm in many organizations across the nation (even if actual practice may lag behind) (see Figure 16). Nearly all respondents reported working with members of their communities as full partners (94%), and embracing new ideas and experimenting with new approaches (93%). Setting priorities based on a long-term view (beyond 10 years) was the lowest rated practice among all contributors: public health departments (57%), hospitals (55%), community non-profits (58%), and businesses (59%) (see Table 1).

A large majority of respondents reported that their organizations are enacting a common set of stewardship norms and practices.

The majority of respondents said that they prioritize actions that address many problems at once (78%), invest resources to expand well-being in their communities (78%), share data with other organizations in their communities (73%), have an explicit strategy to improve equity within their organizations (69%), and take a long-term strategic view (58%).

Figure 16: Thinking about your organization’s internal norms and processes, how much do you agree with the following statements? (n=348, % who somewhat or strongly agree)



These are encouraging findings, insofar as they indicate widely preferred practices. But we note that our previous field work with hundreds of organizations across the country has found a persistent gap between stated and actual stewardship behavior. People who are relatively new to stewardship often overstate the depth of their practice compared to veteran stewards, who tend to be more aware of their own shortcomings and room for growth.

Notable Differences

- When asked if they have an explicit strategy to increase equity in their broader community, respondents from hospitals were least likely to say yes (60%) compared to all other sectors (see Table 1). The same was true when contributors were asked about sharing data (securely and confidentially) with other organizations in their communities. Sixty percent of hospital respondents said that they do so, the lowest of any sector.
- Prioritizing actions that address many problems at once (multisolving) is an important stewardship practice. A high percentage of respondents from governmental public health departments said that they do so (88%), followed by community non-profits (79%), hospitals (68%), and business associations (69%).
- A similar pattern existed for prioritizing investments that expand well-being in the community. Ninety-one percent of governmental public health respondents said that they do so, followed by community non-profits (79%), hospitals (75%), and business associations (59%).
- Across all sectors and stewardship practices, setting priorities based on a long-term view (e.g., beyond 10 years) was consistently the practice with the lowest adoption (58%).

Table 1: Responding organizations that somewhat or strongly agree with the following statements (n=348, % somewhat or strongly agree)

My organization...	All	Public Health	Hospitals	Businesses	Community Non-profits
works with members of our community as full partners to achieve common goals	94	93	85	91	96
has structured mechanisms to routinely share data on clients, services, and/or programs with other organizations in our community	73	86	60	81	72
embraces new ideas and experiments with new approaches	93	91	88	97	94
has an explicit strategy to increase equity, diversity, and inclusion within our organization	78	74	83	72	77
has an explicit strategy to improve equity in our community	69	73	60	72	70
sets priorities based on a long-term view (e.g. beyond 10 years)	58	57	55	59	58
prioritizes actions that address many problems at once (i.e. root causes of complex issues)	78	88	68	69	79
invests resources to expand well-being in our community, even if it means sharing our funding with others	78	91	75	59	79

5

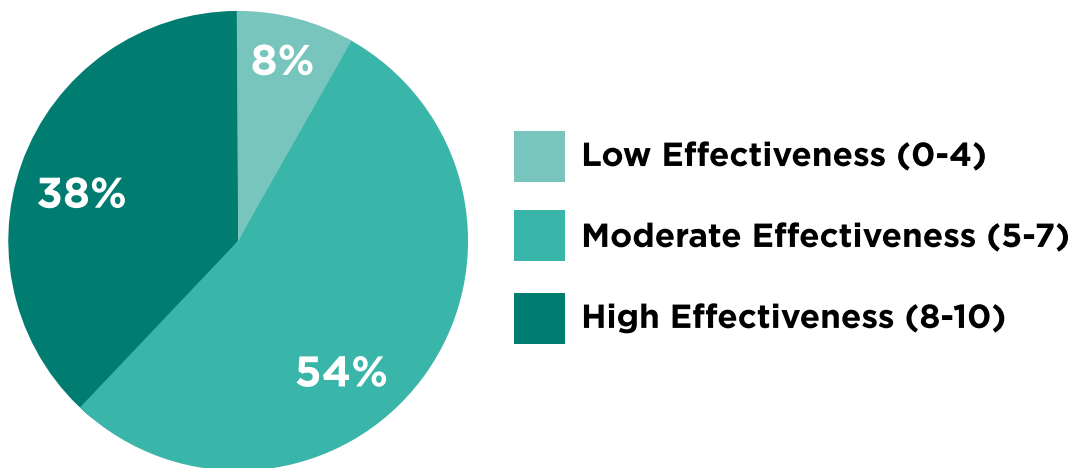
Strengthening Cross-sector Alignment: *The vast majority of respondents (94%) believe that working together is the best way for their organizations to achieve maximum impact in their communities, versus going it alone. Most perceived relatively close alignment within their own sector but low alignment with organizations in other areas.*

Relevant Stewardship Stance: Stewardship is not a solo act, and it becomes increasingly powerful as more people and organizations are drawn into the work together. A steward seeks to understand the values and priorities of others and to support community well-being in complementary ways and with similar aims.

The vast majority of contributors (94%) said that organizations can achieve more impact by working together, whereas a small fraction felt that the cost of working together across organizations outweighs the benefits. Respondents had generally positive opinions about the effectiveness of working relationships across organizations in their communities, with 54% saying that such ties were moderately effective and 38% saying that they were highly effective, compared to only 8% who reported low levels of effectiveness (see Figure 17).

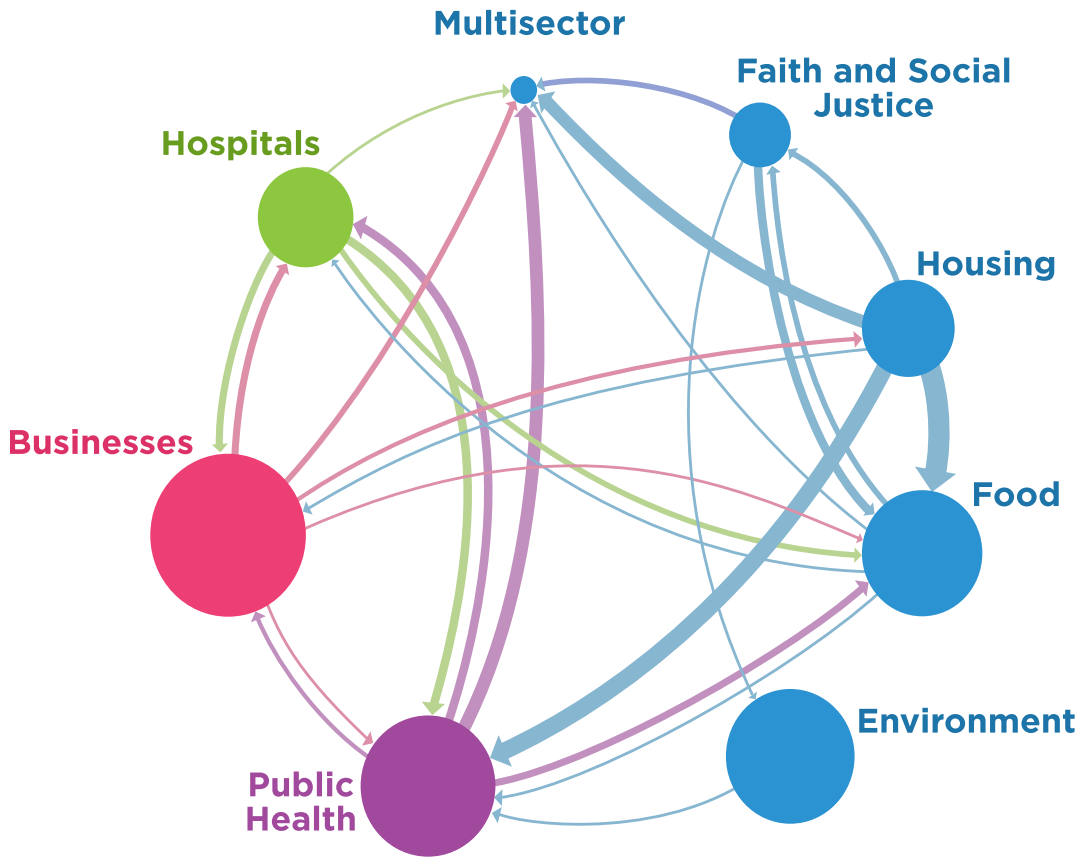
The vast majority of respondents believe that working together is the best way for their organizations to achieve maximum impact in their communities.

Figure 17: To what extent are working relationships across organizations in your community effective? (n=348)



Most respondents indicated that efforts within their own organization type were well aligned but felt that alignment with other organization types was comparatively low. For example, contributors from public health departments reported strong alignment with other public health organizations (71%) but reported much lower alignment with hospitals (45%) and social justice organizations (11%). This pattern holds true even when comparing perceptions between institution types with higher levels of alignment, where 20% or more of respondents said they were well or somewhat aligned (see Table 3).

Figure 18: Where is the strongest alignment? (n=348, sized by average perceived alignment)



The size of each circle reflects the average perceived alignment among contributors from that same sector (i.e., a measure of within-sector alignment). The width of each line shows the relative strength of perceived alignment from respondents who work in other sectors (i.e., a measure of between-sector alignment).

The highest levels of perceived cross-sector alignment were from multisector partnerships (88%), public health departments (83%), and organizations focused on food (80%). The lowest levels of alignment were reported from organizations that focus on the environment (37%) and housing (24%), as well as businesses (22%) and hospitals (20%) (see Figure 18 and Table 2).

Table 2: To what extent do you think your organization and others are aligned? By “aligned” we mean working in complementary ways towards similar aims. (n=348, % of respondents)

Institution Type	Well Aligned	Somewhat Aligned	Not Aligned	Don't Know
Public Health	30	53	13	5
Hospitals	24	47	20	9
Businesses	26	46	22	7
Housing	22	47	24	8
Food	38	42	14	6
Faith and Social Justice	22	50	19	10
Environment	17	29	37	18
Multisector Partnerships	34	54	7	5

Table 3: Which organization types are well-aligned? (n=348)

Cells show the average perceived alignment among respondents in each column relative to other organization types in each row (cells reflect average percentages).

Institution Type	All	Public Health	Hospitals	Businesses	Housing	Food	Faith and Social Justice	Environment	Multisector Partnerships
Public Health	30	71	45	22	24	26	11	21	23
Hospitals	24	45	58	34	13	21	11	4	14
Businesses	26	26	35	78	22	16	4	10	29
Housing	22	19	13	25	57	13	17	6	21
Food	38	36	28	22	63	66	26	18	45
Faith and Social Justice	22	18	19	10	32	23	46	14	12
Environment	17	14	3	9	4	0	28	67	4
Multisector Partnerships	34	53	28	31	46	21	28	31	34

6

Building Collaborative Capacity: *Most respondents reported that their own organizations were involved in many collaborative activities with other organizations to support an equitable, thriving community (like assessing and planning for community-wide well-being). But they tended to believe that other organizations were less engaged in these activities. This indicates a need for organizational leaders to better understand the collaborative efforts being undertaken by others.*

Relevant Stewardship Stance: A steward always searches for ways to engage constructively with others and strives to identify the unique role that each steward can play. To be effective, stewards ought to lean into their own strengths and assets while actively enabling others to lead in areas where they have expertise and capacity.

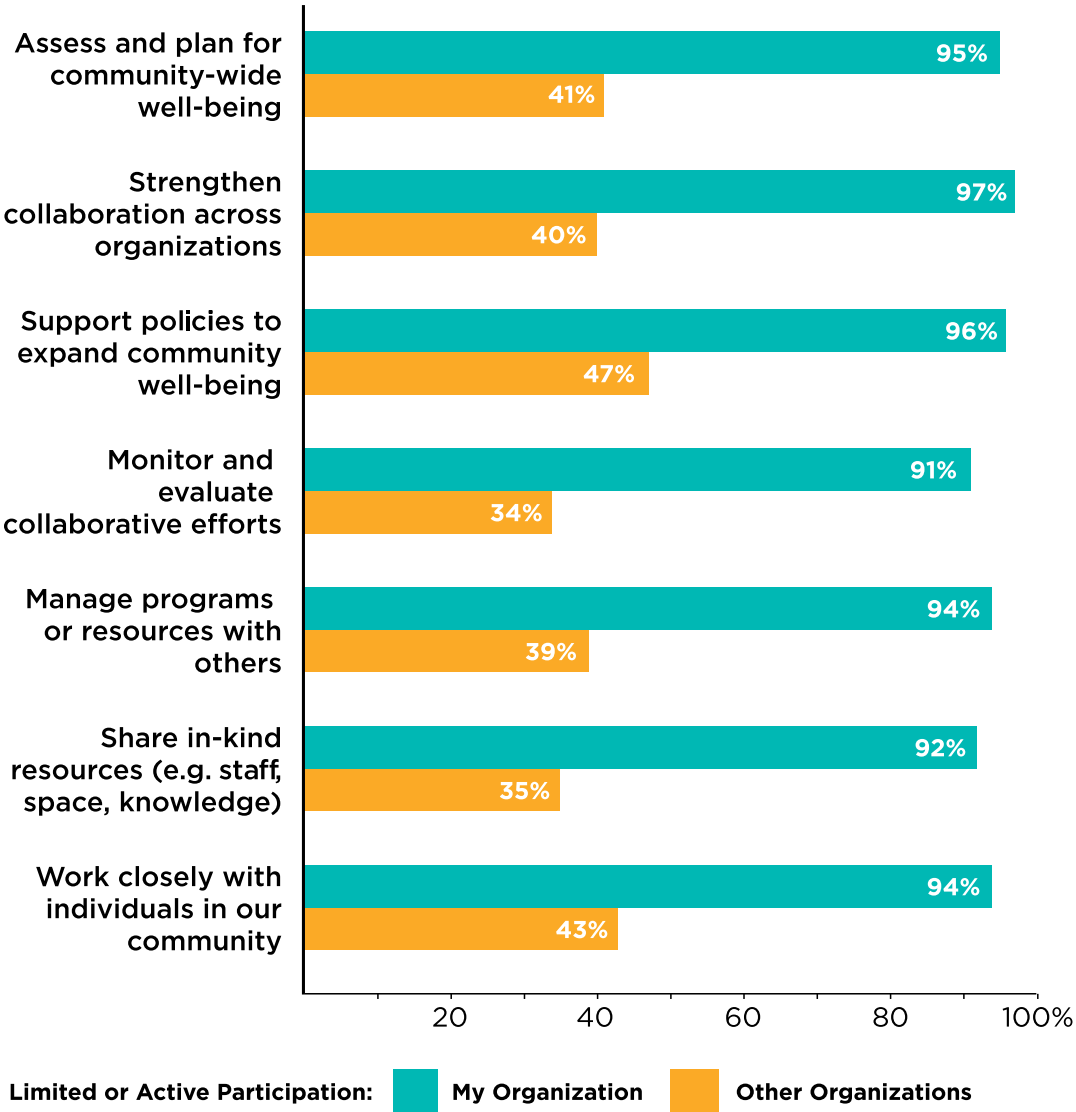
ReThink Health’s fieldwork and nationwide research over the past 10 years has indicated that all organizations that support well-being in their communities ought to be involved to some degree in collaborative action, with dedicated investments in integrative activities that make collaboration effective. The types of collaborative activities an organization takes on should be informed by its mission, experience, and capacity.

Most respondents believed that other organizations were less engaged. This indicates a need for organizational leaders to better understand the collaborative efforts being undertaken by others.

Across every type of surveyed organization, respondents reported engaging in collaborative activities to a high degree, most commonly: strengthening collaboration across organizations (97%), supporting policies to expand community well-being (96%), and assessing and planning for community-wide well-being (95%) (see Figure 19). Importantly, these findings indicate a strong normative commitment to collaborative activities, but they do not characterize the strength or quality of particular efforts. Given that only 37% of respondents perceive a high degree of effectiveness in working relationships across organizations in their communities, there appears to be a disconnect between the reportedly strong commitment to collaborate and the quality of those connections.

For organizations to collaborate effectively, it is important that they have knowledge of the ways in which other organizations in their communities engage in collaborative activities. Respondents tended to report that their own organizations had high levels of involvement in collaborative activities but that other organizations tend to be less involved: for each proposed activity, respondents rated their own organization’s involvement in collaborative activities as being about twice that of other organizations (see Figure 19). This may reflect either a true difference between organizations, a weak understanding of others’ collaborative activities, a tendency to overestimate the strength of one’s own involvement, or a combination of the three.

Figure 19: To what extent does your organization—and others in your community—participate in collaborative activities? (n=348, % with limited and active participation)



Notable Differences

- Active participation in collaborative activities was more common among respondents who were affiliated with organizations that see system change as their most important goal (69%). Among those whose organizations never talk about system change, only 33% participate actively in collaborative activities.
- Ninety-one percent of respondents from public health organizations and 83% from hospitals indicated that they actively assess and plan for community-wide well-being, while a much smaller percentage from business and community non-profits say they do (56% and 54%, respectively). This is likely a reflection of the assessment and planning activities public health departments and hospitals lead that are tied to accreditation (public health departments) and IRS requirements (non-profit hospitals).
- Businesses tended to report the lowest levels of active participation in monitoring and evaluation (34%) and working closely with individuals in their communities (38%).

Table 4: Organizations that have active participation or leadership with other organizations, by type of activity (n=348, % selected)

Type of Collaborative Activity	Public Health	Hospitals	Businesses	Community Non-Profits
Assess and plan for community-wide well-being	91	83	56	54
Strengthen collaboration across organizations (e.g., host meetings, craft agendas)	88	75	66	60
Support policies to expand community well-being	81	65	69	49
Monitor and evaluate collaborative efforts	71	55	34	40
Manage programs and resources with others	74	63	50	55
Share in-kind resources (e.g., staff, space, knowledge)	62	68	47	55
Work closely with individuals in our community	76	65	38	58

7

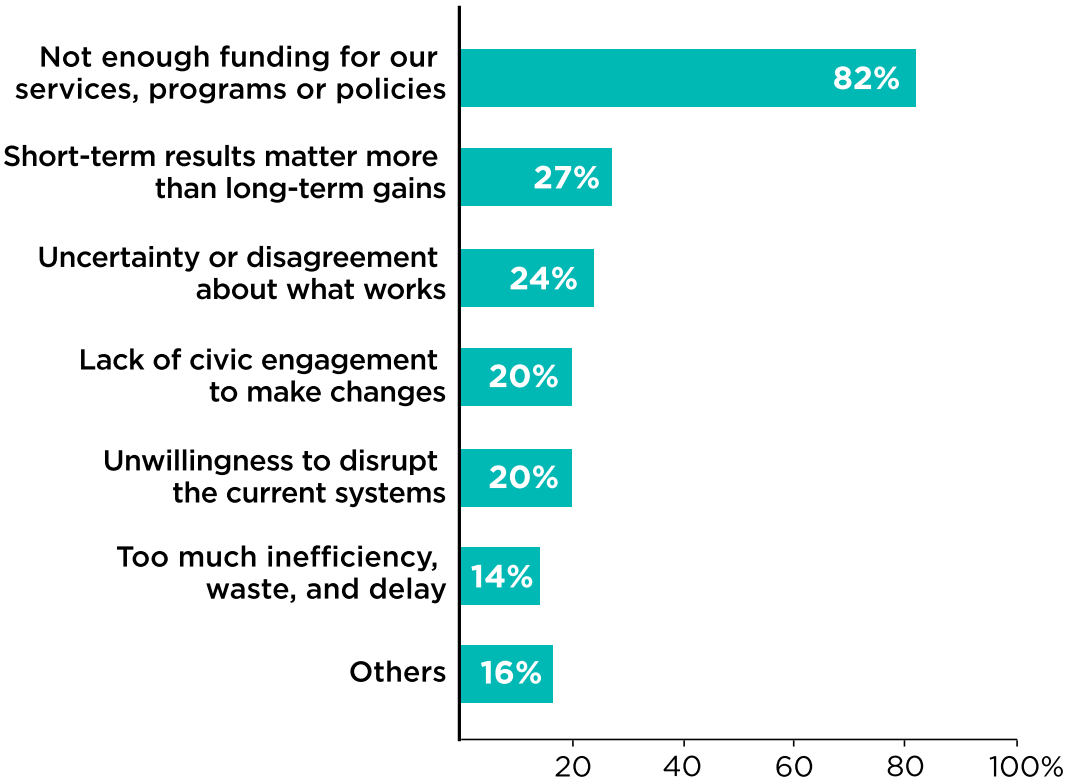
Surfacing Sticking Points and Fostering Momentum: *A significant majority of respondents cited a lack of funding as their primary barrier to fostering equitable well-being in their communities. Financial barriers were also top-of-mind when respondents thought about what would enable their organizations to expand equitable well-being.*

Relevant Stewardship Stance: Stewards should adopt an abundance mindset, rather than one rooted in scarcity. That means solving problems by being creative with existing resources, rather than always looking to gather additional resources.

The vast majority of respondents indicated that their largest barrier is funding for services, programs, or policies (82%). Respondents were not limited in the number of barriers they could pick from the supplied list (see Figure 20), yet 41% selected only a single barrier. This suggests that many organizations see themselves as struggling with a narrow set of challenges, rather than contending with a diverse array of obstacles. When asked what would most help their organizations expand well-being, 74% indicated that their greatest need was for additional resources.

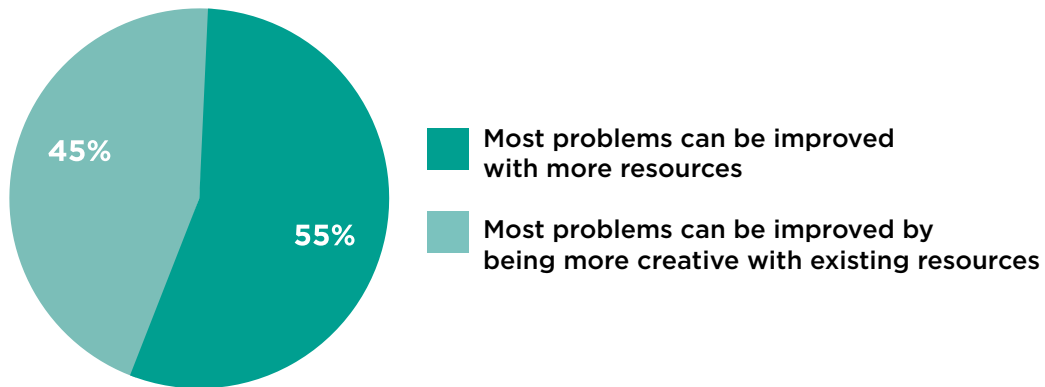
A significant majority of respondents cited a lack of funding as their primary barrier to fostering equitable well-being.

Figure 20: What barriers stand in the way of your organization contributing to equitable well-being in your community? (n=348, % selected)



Although resource constraints are certainly real and an infusion of new resources would provide important benefits in many instances, we note this orientation toward scarcity-driven thinking with concern, because working to increase financial resources often comes at the expense of investing existing resources in more equitable or effective ways. That being said, a large percentage of respondents (45%, see Figure 21) noted that most problems can be improved by being more creative with existing resources (versus obtaining more resources), indicating that mindsets oriented towards abundance are relatively common.

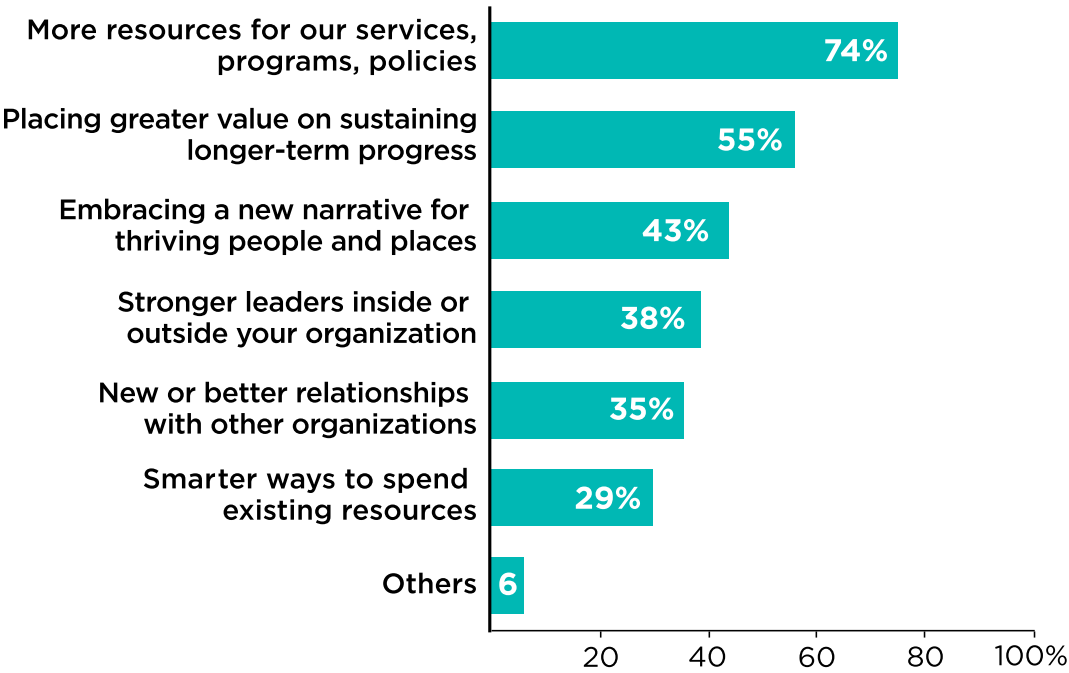
Figure 21: Which statement best represents your view about the resources (e.g., time, money, effort, knowledge, and other assets) that your community needs to expand well-being? (n=348)



In addition to the quest for resources, two other barriers stand out in the survey responses: the need to overcome a focus on short-term results (vs. long-term gains) (27%) and uncertainty or disagreement about what works (24%). In an open-ended question about perceived barriers, respondents cited competition for funding, the tendency for funding to be limited in scope, divisiveness and inefficiency among institutions, a lack of trust between institutions, and a bias towards maintaining the status quo.

When asked what would help their organizations be more effective in expanding well-being, more than half (55%) selected placing greater value on sustaining long-term progress and 43% chose embracing a new narrative for thriving people and places (see Figure 22). In an open-ended question asking about potential momentum-builders, contributors identified leadership development; improved trust and cooperation; as well as greater awareness about system change, equity, and the root causes of complex social issues.

Figure 22: What momentum-builders would help your organization to be more effective? (n=348, % selected)



Notable Differences

- An abundance mindset (i.e., improving problems by being more creative with existing resources) was most evident among businesses (50%) and was cited the least by hospital-based respondents (38%), with public health and community non-profits falling between the two (48% and 44%, respectively).
- A similar pattern existed when assessing whether an unwillingness to disrupt the current system is seen as a barrier. Many more respondents from public health departments (26%), hospitals (23%), and community non-profits (20%) selected that option, compared to only 6% of business-affiliated respondents.
- The opportunity to embrace a new narrative for thriving people and places was identified as a potential momentum builder by only 20% of respondents affiliated with hospitals, much less than respondents from public health departments (52%), businesses (47%), and community non-profits (45%).

Summary

Although humans are capable of inflicting immense harm on each other and the environment, we also have a strong proclivity for love, kindness, and interdependence. Which tendency will prevail in the years to come? What will it take to live up to our potential to be good stewards of an equitable and thriving future? The answers depend on what we value, where we place our priorities for investment and action, and how fully we commit to practices for working together.

There is good news in this first-of-its-kind survey of stewardship values, priorities, and practices. There are also clues about where more work is needed.

Nearly all respondents affirm stewardship values for purpose, power, and wealth—Pulse Check contributors expressed almost universal agreement for three stewardship values related to purpose, power, and wealth. Across every subgroup studied, more than 90% of respondents affirmed that:

- Purpose in life must be larger than both oneself and one's organization
- Every person should feel they have power to help shape the world they live in
- People and organizations should use their wealth to create conditions where all people can thrive



Such strongly espoused ideals stand in contrast to the daily lived reality in communities across America, a reality that is often marked by extreme individualism and organizational fragmentation, by feelings of powerlessness, and by a scramble for scarce resources alongside escalating wealth inequality. If these values are strongly held across the U.S., savvy stewards could leverage them to create a better America—by designing a system that enables all people to participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.

Beyond affirming core values, what does it take to design a system for everyone to thrive?

For example, who sees equal or unequal opportunities for well-being right now? And is system change even an important goal? On those pragmatic questions, Pulse Check contributors had encouraging but mixed opinions (with notable differences among subgroups).

78% see unequal opportunities for well-being—One quarter of respondents believe to some degree that all people in their communities already have an equal opportunity to live their best possible lives. Three-quarters report seeing unequal opportunities for well-being, which is more consistent with most empirical data.

73% want major system change—Three-quarters hope to see “major changes in America’s system of economic, social, or racial priorities,” whereas others prefer to fulfill unmet needs through projects and programs (22%) or to return to business as usual (2%).

26% work on system change as their most important goal—A quarter said that system change is their organization’s most important goal, along with another 60% who said that it is at least one of their organization’s goals (total of 86%). A distinct group (14%) said that system change is either not an important goal (9%) or not something they talk about (6%). Interestingly, 80% of respondents who strongly affirmed that some people in their community lack equal opportunities reported that system change was their organization’s top goal.

These findings indicate a significant but still incomplete nationwide commitment to create an equitable system for thriving together. Even though super-majorities of respondents acknowledge existing inequity and hope for comprehensive system change, only a quarter concentrate on system change as their most important organizational goal.

Can America create a just system for well-being with so few doing the heavy lifting? If not, how can we inspire more people and organizations to join with fellow stewards in a movement to thrive together?

What does the Pulse Check say about nationwide priorities for investment and action?

43% would invest more among those who have the most to gain—The largest fraction of respondents (43%) would invest more resources among those who have the most to gain—a group overwhelmingly made up of people who are denied equal opportunities because of color, class, gender, and other differences. Two smaller fractions would prioritize those who need just a little more help (29%) or would invest evenly among all groups (27%).

44% would prioritize vital conditions, while 32% would prioritize urgent services—Even during a national crisis, many respondents emphasize that investments to expand vital conditions should be the higher priority (in terms of everyone’s time, money, and effort).



There is no shortage of worthy investments that could alleviate suffering and expand the experience of thriving. The question is, where will organizational leaders place their priorities? Pulse Check contributors showed a preference for a portfolio that favors vital conditions over urgent services. There is also a popular desire for more resources to go to those who have the most to gain, even though there is not yet a consensus in favor of such equitable investing.

What do Pulse Check contributors say about routine practices for shared stewardship?

94% favor organizations working together—Nearly everyone believes that working together is the best way for their organization to achieve maximum impact, versus going it alone.

37% view working relationships as highly effective—Most respondents say relationships across organizations are positive, but there is a lot of room to improve: a majority say that working ties have only moderate or low effectiveness (54% and 8%, respectively).

More than 90% rate their own stewardship practices highly, but fewer than 50% say the same about others—Respondents tend to report that their own organizations have high levels of involvement in collaborative activities but feel that other organizations tend to be less involved.

What do Pulse Check contributors regard as obstacles and momentum builders?

82% say their chief challenge is lack of funding—A large majority (82%) see inadequate funding as their main barrier. Indeed, for 41% it was the only obstacle they named. And when asked what would most help, 74% indicated that their greatest need is for additional resources.

45% favor being creative with existing resources (rather than seeking additional resources first)— Even though more resources would undoubtedly help, nearly half (45%) believe most problems can be improved by being more creative with existing resources.

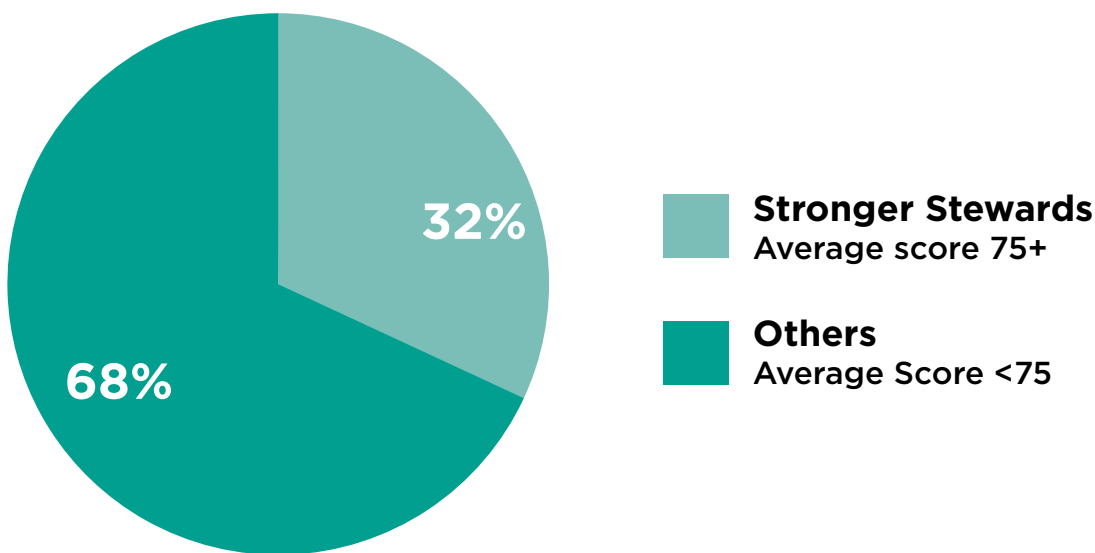
55% look for momentum by valuing long-term progress, 43% by embracing a new narrative—More than half (55%) see the potential to generate momentum by placing greater value on sustaining long-term progress; 43% chose embracing a new narrative for thriving people and places.

Guidance for Strengthening Shared Stewardship

This survey's most comprehensive indicator of the state of stewardship in America is our index of stewardship diffusion. It brings together more than a dozen measures of stewardship values, priorities, and practices. This study reveals that there is room to further spread the basic tenets of stewardship, with a mean index score of 65 out of 100. We should celebrate these signs that the main ideals of stewardship are widely endorsed. But there is danger in focusing on diffusion alone. Stewardship could become a passing fad or be practiced in a way that is too thin to matter. Our main challenge is to spread and deepen shared stewardship through our values, priorities, and practices. Only when stewardship fully takes hold in our head, heart, and hands will we be able to create a world in which all people can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.

About a third of the respondents in this survey stand out as stronger stewards (those with diffusion scores of 75+; see Figure 23). We believe the remaining two thirds can strengthen their stewardship stance by deepening their values, priorities, and practices. How can they begin to make these important shifts? And what can stronger stewards do to take their existing commitments even further?

Figure 23: Stewardship diffusion score: How many are strong stewards? (n=348)



Embrace core stewardship values. Values and worldviews play a large role in shaping individual and organizational orientations to large-scale social change. Our Pulse Check findings show that more people can recognize that there are unequal opportunities for well-being across America. This change would likely affect the investment priorities of potential stewards and the approaches they employ to advance their work.

Three values stand out as especially foundational to enact this mindset shift:

- **We can thrive together:** We aspire to become thriving people in a thriving world and are committed to creating communities in which everyone has a fair chance to participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. Our best hope to realize a resilient and vibrant America for generations to come is to organize local and nationwide action around a single unifying and measurable expectation: All people and places thriving—no exceptions.
- **Justice makes us all stronger:** When large numbers of us are struggling, suffering, and experiencing unfair burdens, it frays our national fabric of justice and stability. Strong stewards reject structural racism and all forms of social exclusion as toxic forces that destroy lives and dehumanize us all. They celebrate human differences and diverse cultures as strengths, not liabilities, when trying to thrive together in a rapidly changing world.
- **We can join each other in shared stewardship:** Ordinary people in every walk of life, along with organizations in every sector or industry, can move into meaningful roles as shared stewards of well-being and justice. That is the way to co-create a society in which everyone can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.

Align strategies and investments with key stewardship priorities. A willingness to invest equitably is necessary to transform an unjust system for the better. Pulse Check findings show that there is space to grow in persuading people to prioritize investments in those who have the most to gain. Potential and strong stewards everywhere can catalyze transformation by undergirding their strategies and investments with the following beliefs:

- **Without vital conditions it is not possible to thrive:** When vital conditions are absent or impaired, people tend to struggle and suffer, driving demand for urgent services. Urgent services are essential, but they are temporary fixes that don't address broader, long-term conditions that are needed to thrive—we cannot “urgent service” our way to thriving.
- **Without reckoning with ever-present legacies of justice and injustice, it is not possible to thrive together:** We have inherited legacies that confer dignity and foster resilience. We have also inherited legacies that dehumanize, exclude, and inflict trauma. The decisions we make today will shape the legacies that we pass on to future generations.
- **Without expanding belonging and civic muscle, we cannot work across differences as shared stewards of the systems that shape our lives:** To achieve lasting change across the country, we need to ensure that all people feel they are an important part of their community. They need to be able to contribute meaningfully to the community's vibrancy and to develop the power to co-create a better future. Building belonging and civic muscle strengthens social ties, increases trust and cooperation and makes it easier to work together. This creates a virtuous cycle: when people feel valued and cared for within the community, they are more likely to contribute to creating healthy, equitable places.

Adopt and deepen stewardship practices. While Pulse Check findings show that stewardship practices are widely understood, we appreciate that there is often a large gap between “doing something” and “doing it for real.” Having a strong stewardship practice means you show up as a steward every day, all day, in every way. It is reflected in the vitality, integration, and coherence of how you think and act. Where should you or your organization start? How can you build on your existing strengths?

Three categories of stewardship practice rise to the level of being essential because of their unique power to support and generate lasting change in any setting:

- **Connect across differences:** Stewardship is not a solo act, and it becomes increasingly powerful as more people and organizations are drawn into the work together. Strong stewards make connections across roles, departments, sectors, geographies, and cultural divides, and they are informed by place-based, multisector, and multicultural perspectives.
- **Create opportunities for progress:** Our success depends on actively breaking from the status quo by continually creating opportunities for a different future to take hold.
- **Learn and adapt:** Circumstances are constantly changing; adaptive approaches help us to move forward together, even in the face of uncertainty.

Of course, such values, priorities, and practices are easy to endorse but hard to enact and even harder to maintain. ReThink Health was founded with a stewardship focus more than a decade ago by a group of veteran changemakers that included Elinor Ostrom (who won a Nobel Prize for her work on stewardship), as well as Marshall Ganz, Peter Senge, Amory Lovins, Don Berwick, and others. Our focus from the beginning has been on learning how to become better stewards in real-world situations.

Stewardship needs to grow, and the 2021 Pulse Check shows promising signs that it is on the rise. But there is no guarantee that our early gains will take hold as a new status quo. Harmful business-as-usual practices resist change because the mindsets and behaviors associated with them have become so entrenched. But we can choose which legacies to continue, which to end, and which to renew. That choice starts with growing our own ability and accountability to embody stewardship norms and practices ourselves, both through outward initiatives and inward growth.



Resources

Reports

[Amplifying Stewardship: Characteristics and Trends Stewards Consider When Expanding Equitable Well-Being](#)

[Thriving Together: A Springboard for Equitable Recovery and Resilience Across America](#)

[Community Health and Economic Prosperity: Engaging Businesses as Stewards and Stakeholders—A Report of the Surgeon General](#)

[WIN with Business](#)

[Shared Stewardship in Health Care](#)

[Stewardship + Equity: Rooting a New Rural Legacy](#)

Initiatives and Networks

[ReThink Health](#)

[Well Being in the Nation \(WIN\) Network](#)

[Civic Stewardship](#)

Resource Collections

[Stewards' Resources](#)

[Thriving Together](#)

[Community Commons: Stewardship Collection](#)

[Healthy Neighborhood Investments: A Policy Scan & Strategy Map](#)

Goals and Measurement

[Healthy People 2030](#)

[The Science of Thriving Together](#)

[Well Being in the Nation \(WIN\) Measures](#)

[IP3 Assess](#)

Multi-Media

[Stewards Rising](#)

[Thriving Together Through Shared Stewardship](#)

[Unsung Stewards Podcast](#)

[Commons Good Podcast](#)

Scholarship

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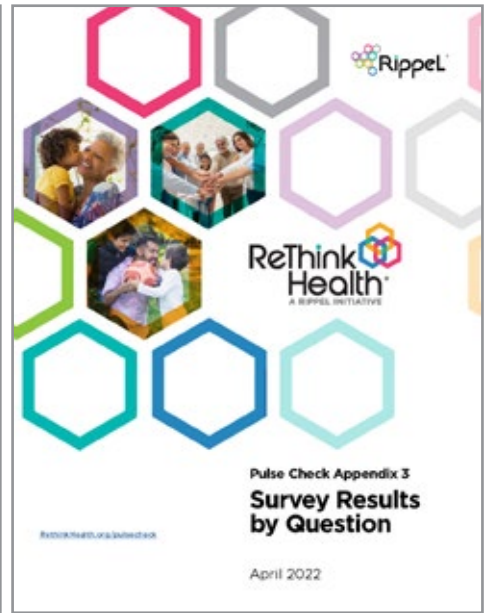
Appendices



[Appendix 1](#)



[Appendix 2](#)



[Appendix 3](#)