



Operational Capacity, Stability, and Shared Resources in the RFSP 2022 and 2023

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Summary of Findings

This report summarizes RFSP partner responses to the 2022 and 2023 surveys on shared resources, stability and operational capacity. The surveys seek to evaluate the third objective of the RFSP:

To improve the stability and operational capacity of at least 75% of the Value Chain Coordination Enterprise Transactional Partners and 90% of the Support Partners through the development of shared resources, tools, and knowledge.

In the Fall of 2021, a team from the UNM Evaluation Lab worked with Christina Keibler of the New Mexico Farmers' Marketing Association (NMFMA) to identify shared resources and to define stability and operational capacity. Upon finding no consensus in the research literature, Keibler and the Lab turned to RFSP partners to come up with a list of potential shared resources and to define stability and operational capacity. Partners shared their ideas in focus groups during the 2021 Sevilleta retreat, and responded to an initial baseline survey based on those ideas during the spring of 2022. The Lab then worked in the latter half of 2022 with Bryan Crawford-Garrett from NMFMA and Juan Abeyta from the RFSP backbone team to refine the survey to make it easier to complete, while preserving most of the language so that responses to the earlier survey could be compared. Partners completed the follow-up survey in early 2023.

In the 2023 survey, 80% of Transactional Partners and 96% of Support Partners reported an increase in at least one area of stability and operational capacity in the past six months. Large majorities of Transactional and Support Partners reported that they gained more awareness of collective impact, gained knowledge on how to access resources, had more dialogue on addressing community needs, collaborated more with others to address systemic change, received strong peer support that helped them in their work, and had more awareness of issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Compared to responses from the earlier survey, 2023 survey responses show an increase in resource sharing and higher proportions of those reporting improved stability and operational capacity. Taken together, these results suggest that the RFSP is indeed increasing sharing of resources, as well as stability and operational capacity among its partners.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: We thank: Bryan Crawford-Garrett and Juan Abeyta for being such wonderful partners; Mary Costello, Arlo Menchaca, and Brisa Rodriguez for their groundwork in this project; Arlo, Brisa, and RFSP partners Ophelia Steppe and Helga Garcia-Garza for conducting the focus groups that defined concepts for the surveys; all RFSP partners for their contributions as focus group participants and survey respondents, and for providing input to understanding survey results. In memory of Christina Keibler.

What is the UNM Evaluation Lab?

The mission of the Evaluation Lab is to build evaluation capacity among public and nonprofit organizations in New Mexico. We do this by training graduate students and community members, and by partnering with nonprofit and public organizations to conduct evaluations.

We also take on external evaluation projects where there is great potential for capacity building and collaboration among stakeholders, as well as training opportunities for graduate students in the MPP program.



1. Background and Overview

This report contributes to a long-term evaluation of the Regional Food Systems Partnership (RFSP) project, which, among other objectives, seeks to:

improve the stability and operational capacity of at least 75% of the Value Chain Coordination Enterprise Transactional Partners and 90% of the Support Partners through the development of shared resources, tools, and knowledge.

In the Fall of 2021, a team from the UNM Evaluation Lab worked with Christina Keibler of the New Mexico Farmers Marketing Association (NMFMA) to identify shared resources and to define stability and operational capacity. Upon finding no consensus in the research literature, Keibler and the Lab turned to RFSP partners to come up with a list potential shared resources and to define stability and operational capacity. Partners shared their ideas in focus groups during the 2021 Sevilleta retreat, and responded to the baseline survey based on those ideas during the spring of 2022. The Lab then worked in the latter half of 2022 with Bryan Crawford from NMFMA and Juan Abeyta from the RFSP backbone team to refine the survey to make it easier to complete, while preserving most of the language so that responses to the earlier survey could be compared. Partners completed the follow-up survey in early 2023.

Reflecting the growth of the RFSP, the number of survey invitees increased from 42 to 50 from 2022 to 2023. The response rate also increased, from 67% to 78%. (See Table 1.)

Table 1. RFSP Participants and Survey Response

	2022	2023
Number invited	42	50
Number who responded	28	39
Response rate (respondents as a percent of those invited)	67%	78%

Source: 2022 and 2023 RFSP Partner Surveys on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity

In what follows, we summarize RFSP partner responses to the 2022 baseline and 2023 follow-up surveys. Responses to open-ended questions about stability and operational capacity, and about shared resources, are provided in Appendices II and III.

2. 2023 Survey Results

We begin by addressing whether the RFSP has improved the stability and operational capacity of at least 75% of the Value Chain Coordination Enterprise Transactional Partners and 90% of the Support Partners. The 2023 survey asks whether, in the past six months, partners increased stability and operational capacity in a variety of organizational and personal areas. (See Table 2 for a list of these areas.)

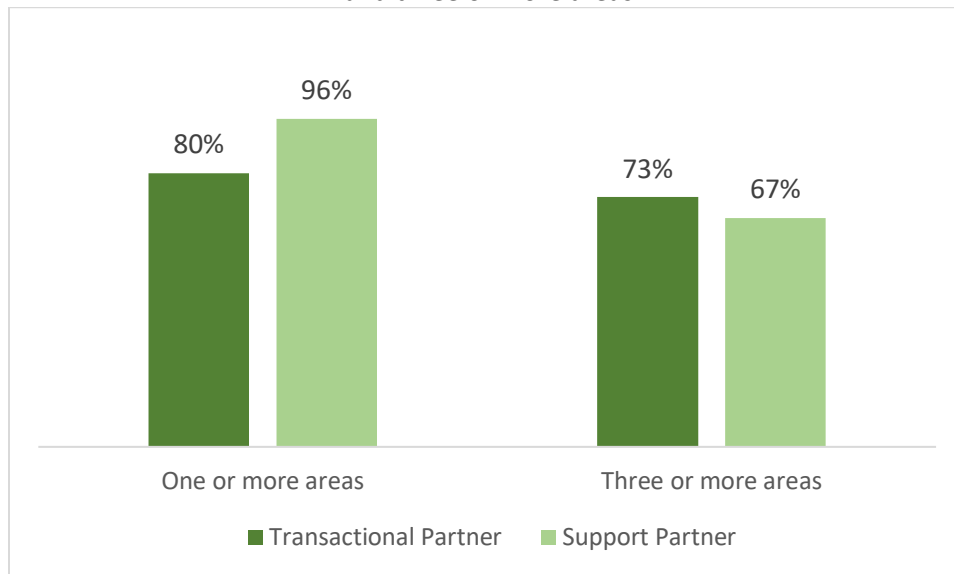
80% of Transactional Partners and 96% of Support Partners reported an increase in stability or operational capacity in one or more areas. 73% of Transactional Partners and 67% of Support Partners reported an increase in three or more areas. (See Figure 1.)

Table 2. Areas of stability and operational capacity

Organization level	Personal work environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial stability • Customer base stability • Staff retention stability • Work effectiveness • Can implement diversity, equity, and inclusion practices • Can meet community needs • Can expand • Resilience 	<p><i>Opportunities for:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional growth • Building professional relationships • Leadership <p><i>Work environment includes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The same opportunities for advancement as privileged coworkers • Time for reflection • Creativity • Job security • Time to enjoy personal life • Time to pursue new opportunities at work

Note: Areas are based on data from the RFSP partners who participated in the 2021 focus groups.

Figure 1. Percent of Partners who reported increased stability and operational capacity in one or more and three or more areas



Source: 2023 RFSP Partner Survey on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity

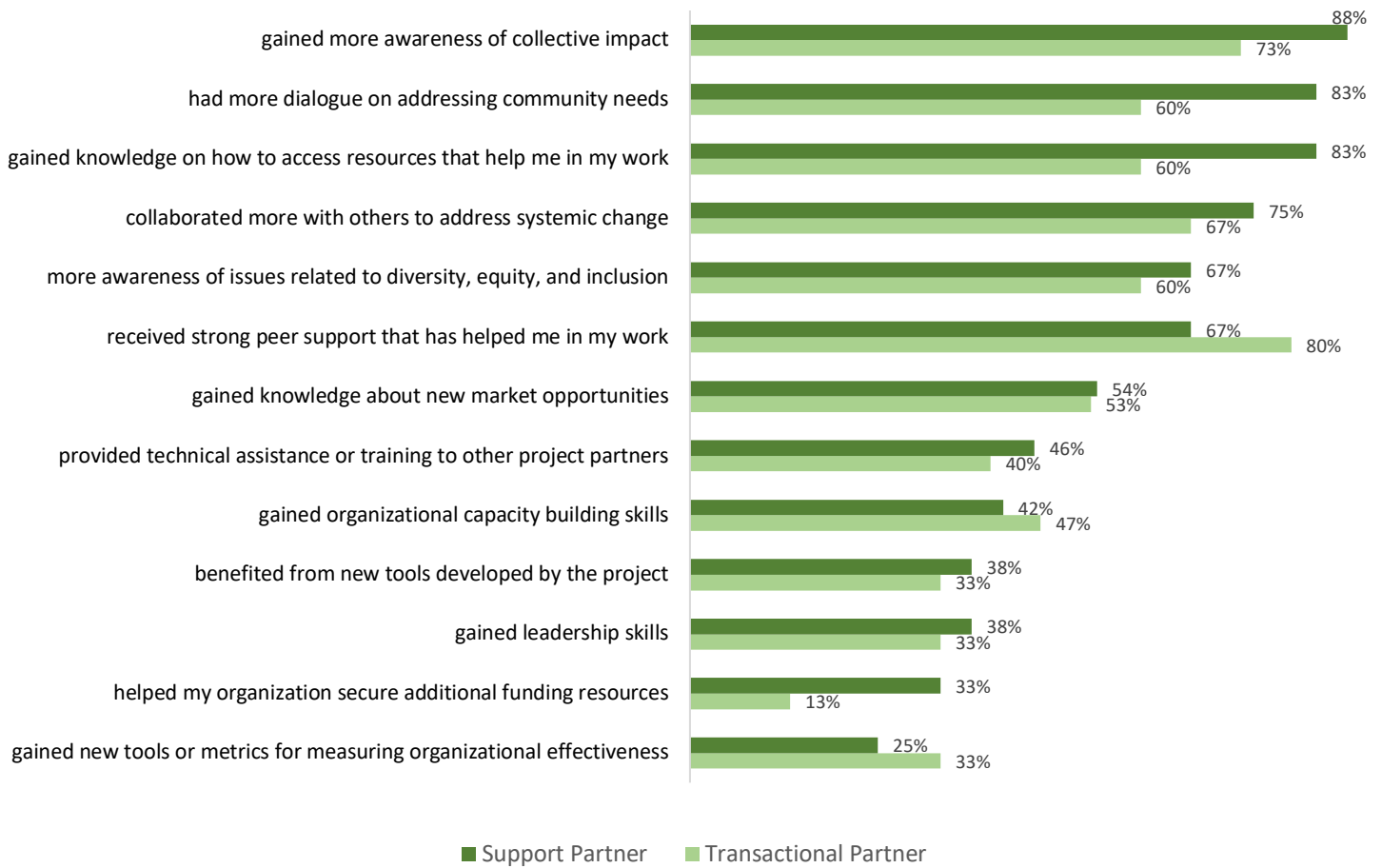
To assess whether we can credibly attribute these changes to the RFSP, we look to a question that asked partners to choose “all that apply” from a list of statements about their experience of project impact. Large majorities of Transactional and Support Partners reported that they gained more awareness of collective impact (73% for Transactional and 88% for Support Partners), gained knowledge on how to access resources (60% and 83%), had more dialogue on addressing community needs (60% and 83%), collaborated more with others to address systemic change (67% and 75%), received strong peer support that helped them in their work (80% & 67%), and had more awareness of issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (60% and 67%). (See Figure 2.)

Moreover, survey responses also support the proposed mechanism for capacity building through shared resources. A large majority of respondents—85% or more—reported sharing personal traits, knowledge and skills, business resources, and resources related to distribution. A smaller percent reported

receiving these resources. Noticeably more respondents reported receiving rather than sharing knowledge and resources related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Except for technology, large majorities of respondents reported sharing and receiving operational resources, including business resources, food distribution and production resources, and nutrition assistance programs and marketing resources. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 2. Changes as a result of RFSP participation

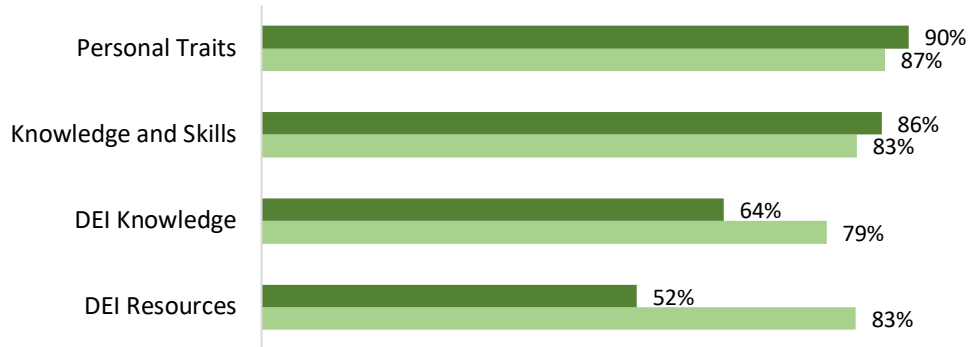
As a result of the RFSP, I have . . .



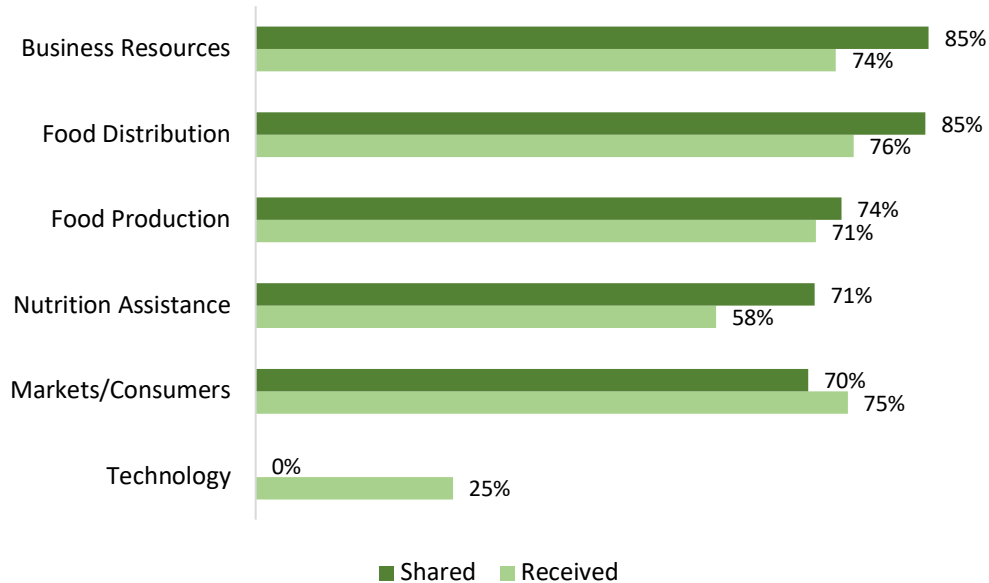
Source: 2023 RFSP Partner Survey on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity

Figure 3. Percent of respondents who shared and received human capital and operational resources

Human Capital



Operational resources



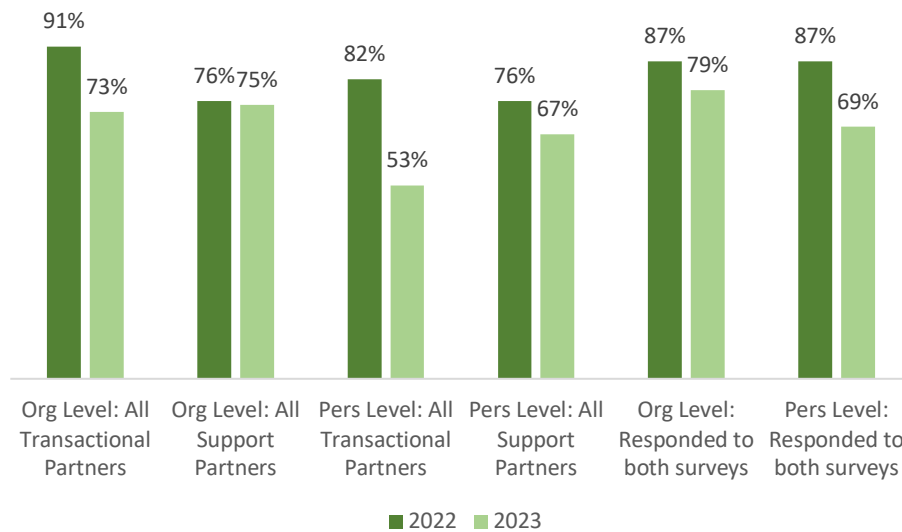
Source: 2023 RFSP Partner Survey on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity

3. Measuring changes in stability, operational capacity and shared resources in the 2022 and 2023 surveys

The previous section used a retrospective question to elicit perceived changes in operational capacity and stability. Another way to measure change is to compare assessments of operational capacity and stability in the 2023 survey with assessments from the 2022 survey. The comparison is complicated because not all partners responded to both surveys. In fact, several new partners joined the project between surveys, and a few left the project. A comparison of only those who completed both surveys will provide the changes they experienced. A comparison of all who completed the 2023 survey with all who completed the 2022 survey will illuminate changes for the project as a whole, including changes in the composition of partners.

Both comparisons show that respondents assessed their organizational and personal work stability and operational capacity less favorably in 2023 than in 2022. The percent of all respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the majority of statements about organizational stability and capacity fell from 82% in 2022 to 74% in 2023. This decline was driven by changes for Transactional Partners. The percent who agreed or strongly agreed with the majority of statements about personal work stability and capacity fell from 79% in 2022 to 62% in 2023. The decline was more pronounced for Transactional Partners. (See Table 2 for the statement topics. See Figure 4 and detailed comparisons in Appendix I.)

Figure 4. The percent who agreed or strongly agreed with the majority of statements about stability and operational capacity in 2022 and 2023: All respondents and those who responded to both surveys



Source: 2022 and 2023 RFSP Partner Surveys on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity
 Note: Those who responded to both surveys include transactional and support partners

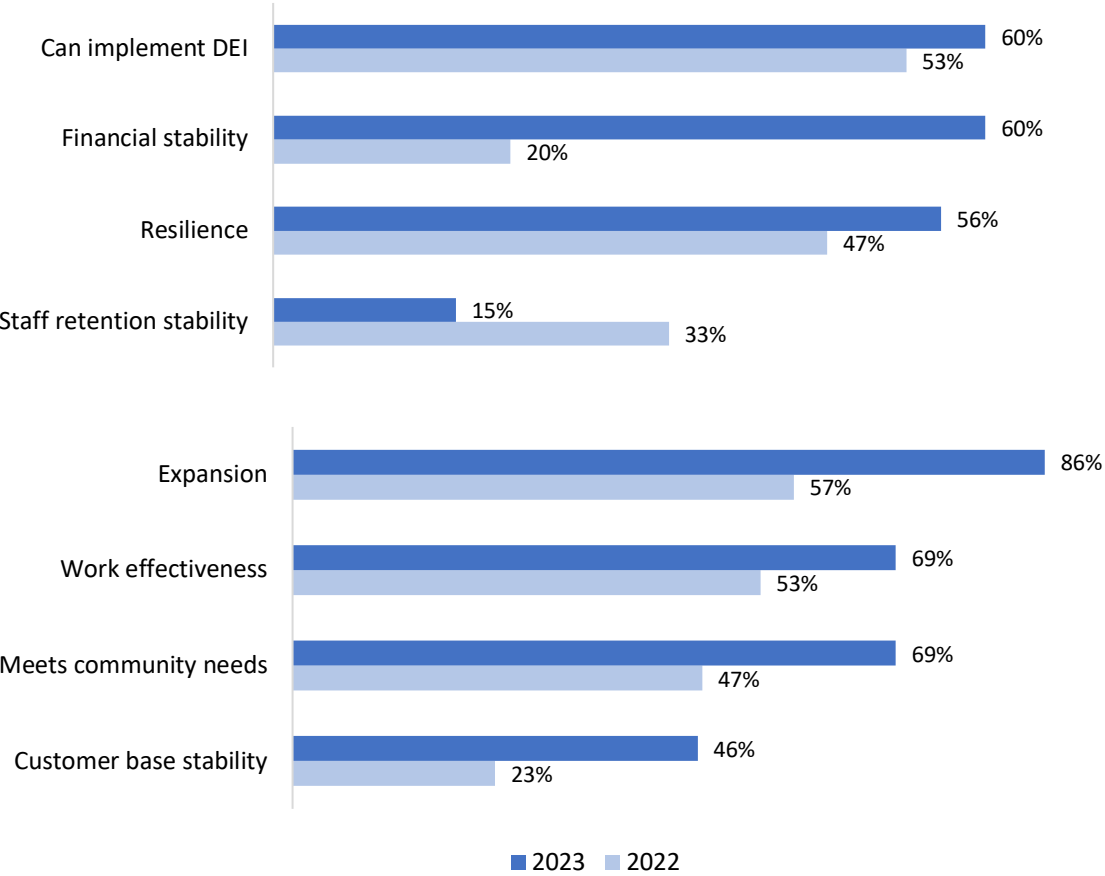
Despite the reported decline in stability and capacity, when asked directly about changes in the past six months, respondents who completed both surveys reported large positive changes between 2022 and 2023. For example, those reporting an improvement in financial stability in the past six months increased from 20% in 2022 to 60% in 2023, and increases of those reporting improvements of 20 percentage points or more occurred for customer base stability, for the ability to expand, and for the ability to meet community needs. The only area where things did not improve over the past six months between the two surveys was staff retention stability. (See Figure 5.)

In addition, more respondents reported improvements in 2023 compared with 2022 in the areas of job security, opportunities relative to privileged coworkers, and professional growth opportunities. However, fewer reported improvements in reflection and creativity at work. (See Figure 6.)

How do we square the overall positive response for increases in stability and operational capacity in the last six months with the lower levels of these measures reported in 2023 (as seen in Figure 4)? One possibility is that partners learned more about stability and operational capacity through working with the RFSP: their original assessments might have been overly optimistic.

The pattern of more partners reporting improvements in 2023 also holds for all respondents. (See Appendix I.)

Figure 5. Percent who reported an increase in organizational capacity in the past 6 months for those who responded to both surveys



Source: 2022 and 2023 RFSP Partner Surveys on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity

Figure 6. Percent who reported an increase in personal capacity in the past 6 months for those who responded to both surveys



Source: 2022 and 2023 RFSP Partner Surveys on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity

Another indication that the RFSP increased stability and capacity is the increased rate of resource sharing between 2022 and 2023.

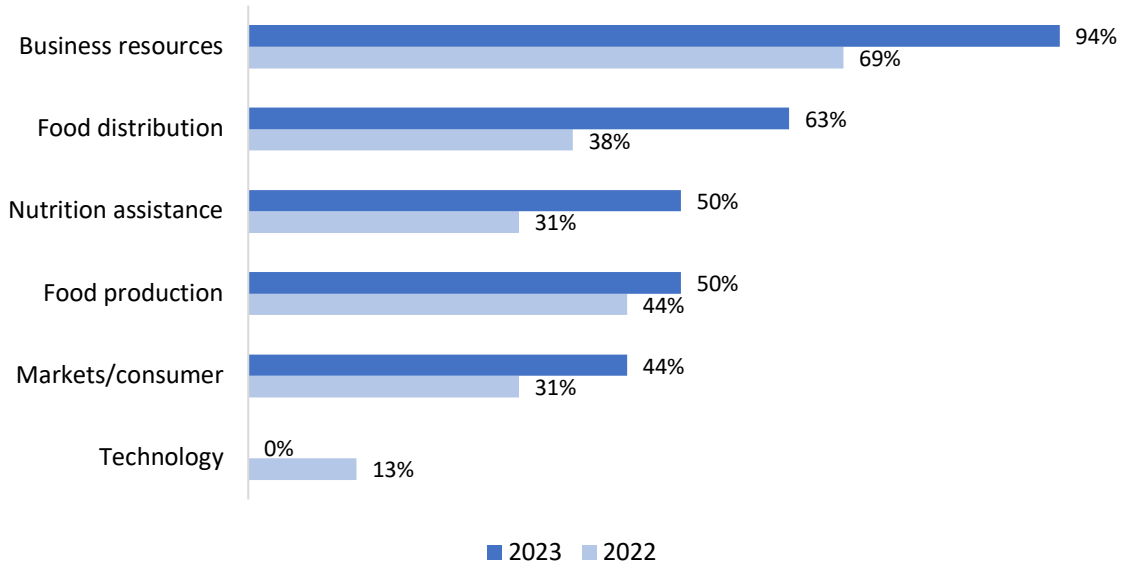
Sharing of *operational resources* increased substantially from 2022 to 2023. 94% of respondents shared business resources in 2023, whereas 69% shared in 2022. Food distribution was shared by 63% of respondents in 2023 compared to 38% in 2022. 50% of respondents shared nutrition assistance program and food production resources in 2023, compared with 31% and 44% in 2022. (See Figure 7.)

For all survey respondents in 2022, Transactional Partners reported that 75% shared network human capital and 71% shared personal traits of human capital. In 2023, network human capital increased to 91% and shared personal traits of human capital increased to 90%. The knowledge and skills of human capital shared was 64% in 2022, and 86% in 2023. RFSP partners also showed an increase in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) knowledge and resources from 2022 to 2023. 46% of respondents shared DEI knowledge in 2022 and 64% in 2023. Shared DEI resources were reported to be 25% in 2022, and 52% in 2023. (See Figure 9.)

Shared operational resources increased by nearly 40 percentage points from around 30% to around 70% in 2022 to 2023 in food distribution, food production, nutrition assistance, and markets and consumers. Business resources shared in 2022 were 39% which increased to 85% in 2023. However,

shared operational resources in technology decreased from 11% in 2022 to none shared in 2023. (See Figure 10.)

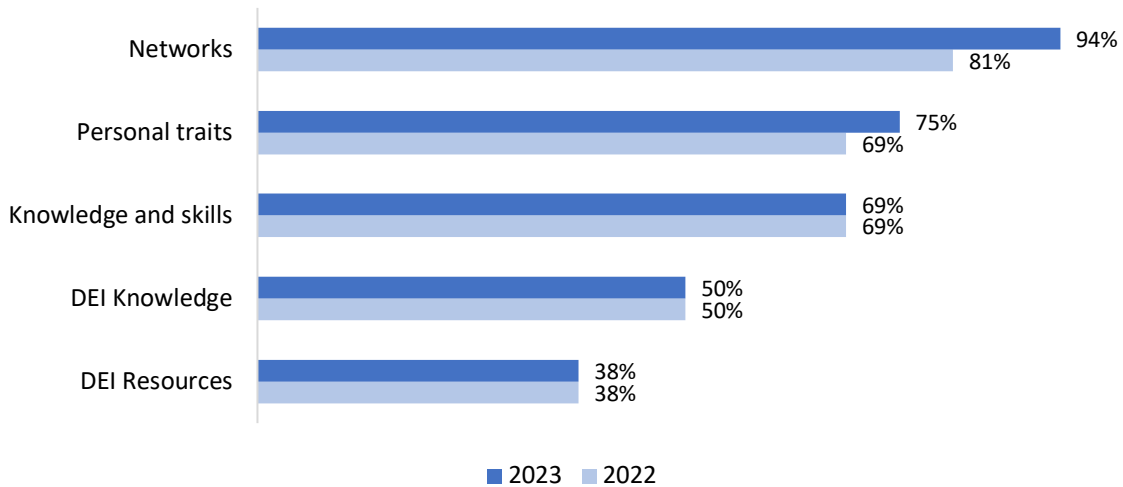
Figure 7. Operational resources shared in 2022 and 2023 for those who responded to both surveys



Source: 2022 and 2023 RFSP Partner Surveys on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity

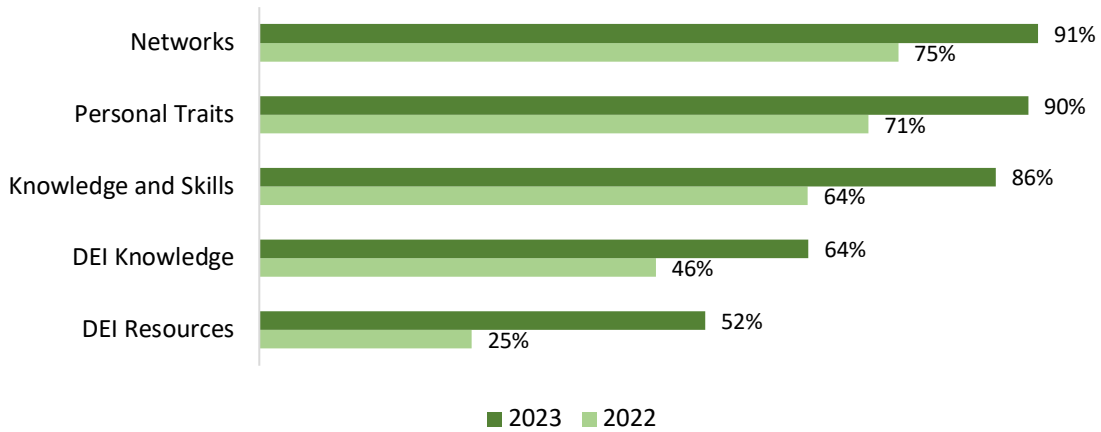
Regarding *human capital*, 94% of those who responded to both surveys reported sharing networks in 2023, up from 81% in 2022. Sharing in other areas did not change much, if at all. (See Figure 8.)

Figure 8. Human capital resources shared in 2022 and 2023 for those who responded to both surveys



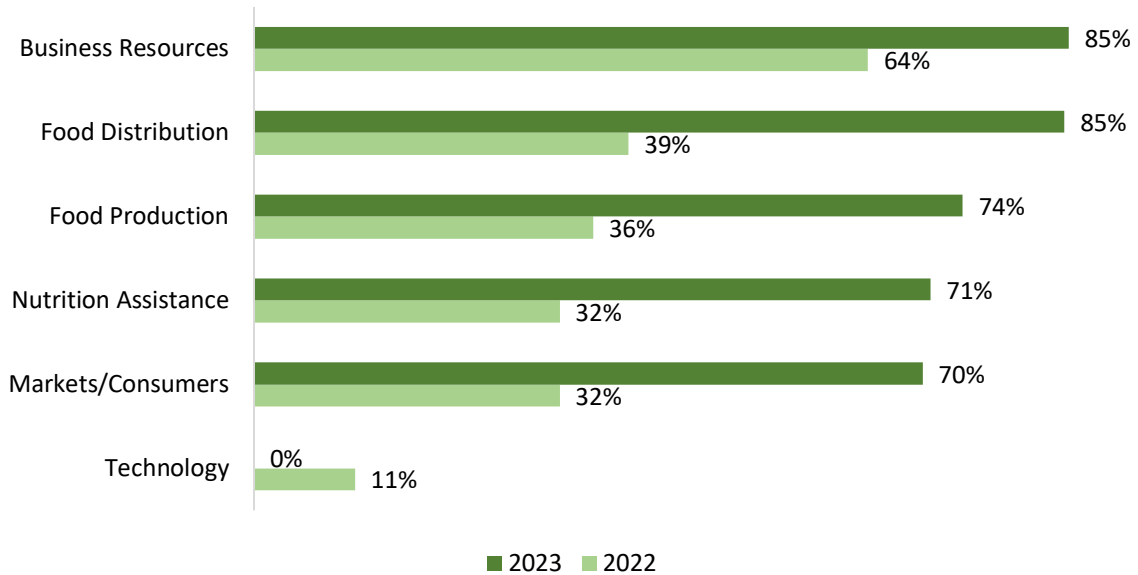
Source: 2022 and 2023 RFSP Partner Surveys on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity

Figure 9. Human capital resources shared in 2022 and 2023 for all survey respondents



Source: 2022 and 2023 RFSP Partner Surveys on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity

Figure 10. Operational resources shared in 2022 and 2023 for all survey respondents



Source: 2022 and 2023 RFSP Partner Surveys on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity

In sum, the increase in reported improvements in stability and operational capacity and the increase in reported sharing between 2022 and 2023 are consistent with the reported retrospective increases in stability and operational capacity in the 2023 survey. These results suggest that the RFSP is indeed increasing the sharing of resources as well as stability and operational capacity among its partners.

Appendix I– Detailed changes in reports of stability and operational capacity in the 2022 and 2023 surveys

The 16 partners who responded to both surveys reported little or no change with regard to customer base stability, financial security, ability to expand, staff stability, and aligning equity values. Respondents reported more stability for two measures: those assessing that their organizations could produce more rose from 62% to 80%, and those reporting the inclusion of diverse communities rose from 67% to 80%. Other measures of stability and operational capacity declined. Assessments of effectiveness declined, from 100% who agreed or strongly agreed that their organization was effective in 2022, to only 75% in 2023. Assessments of resilience and ability to address community needs declined from 100% to 80 and 88%, respectively. (See Figure A1.)

Assessments of several measures of personal stability and operational capacity declined between 2022 and 2023. For example, respondents were less likely to agree or strongly agree that they had opportunities for professional growth and can pursue work-related opportunities. One bright spot was an increase from 75% to 100% of those who agreed or strongly agreed that they had equal opportunities for career advancement, compared to their more privileged peers.¹ (See Figure A2.)

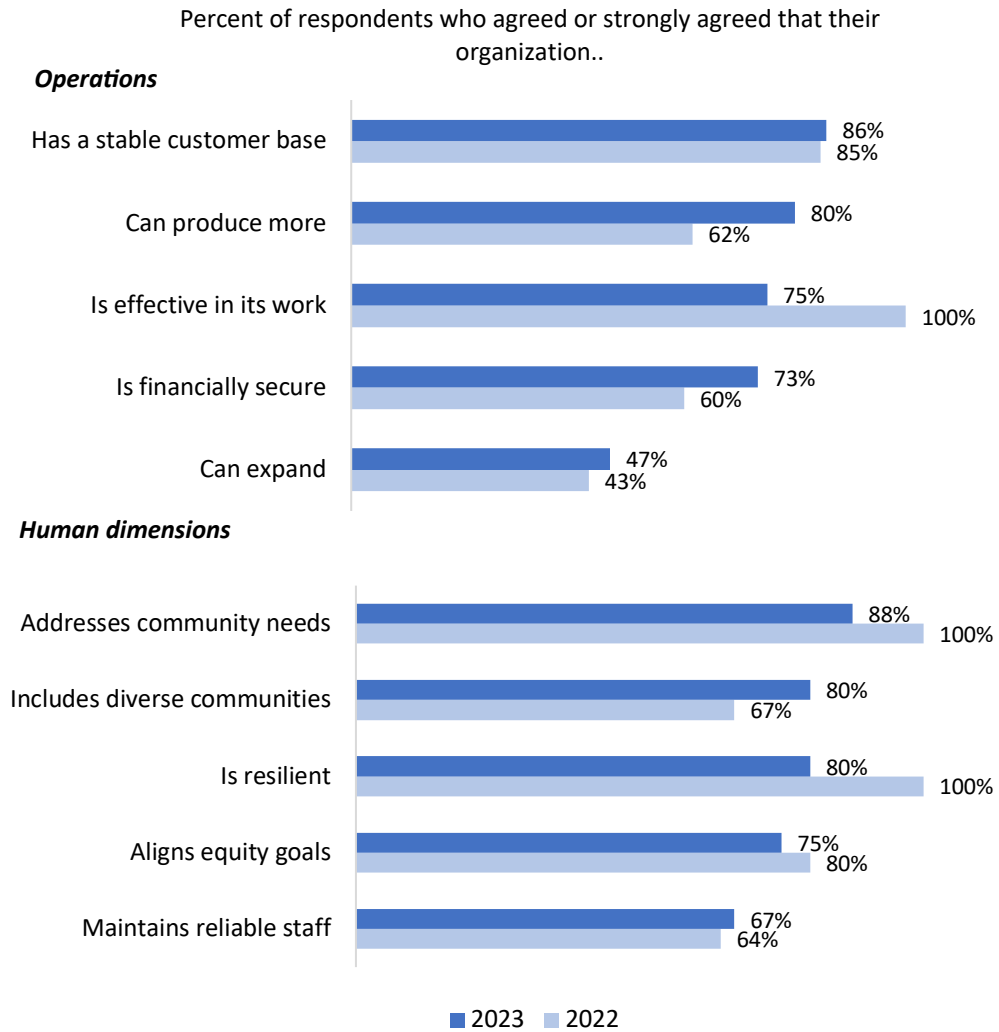
The detailed comparisons are a bit more optimistic for all respondents. Although the changes reported here are not at the individual level, they illuminate changes for project as a whole. Each respondent's percent contribution to the tallies was 3.6% in 2022 and 2.0% in 2023. We focus on percentage point changes that are greater 6 percentage points, since that would indicate a change for at least three people.

Assessments of stability and operational capacity were somewhat higher in 2023 compared with 2022 for customer base (+11 percentage points), ability to produce more (+13 points), financial security (+9 points), maintaining staff (+11 points), inclusion (+13 points), and alignment of organization with equity goals (+8 points). Assessments were lower in 2023 compared with 2022 for effectiveness (-10 points) and resilience (-7 points). (See Figure A3.)

Assessments of stability and operational capacity related to work opportunities and working conditions were about the same in both years, with two notably exceptions. In 2023, 69% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they have equal opportunities for advancement as their privileged counterpart; in 2022, only 50% agreed or strongly agreed. Time to enjoy personal life has also increased from 43% in 2022 to 55% in 2023. (See Figure A4.)

¹ 11 people responded to this question in 2022 and only 8 responded in 2023. In the earlier year, it is possible that people who identified as "privileged" did not agree with the statement because it did not pertain to them. A conversation about responding to that question with "Not applicable" for privileged respondents at the Fall 2022 retreat may have induced this change.

Figure A1. Organizational Stability and Operational Capacity in 2022 and 2023 for those who responded to both surveys

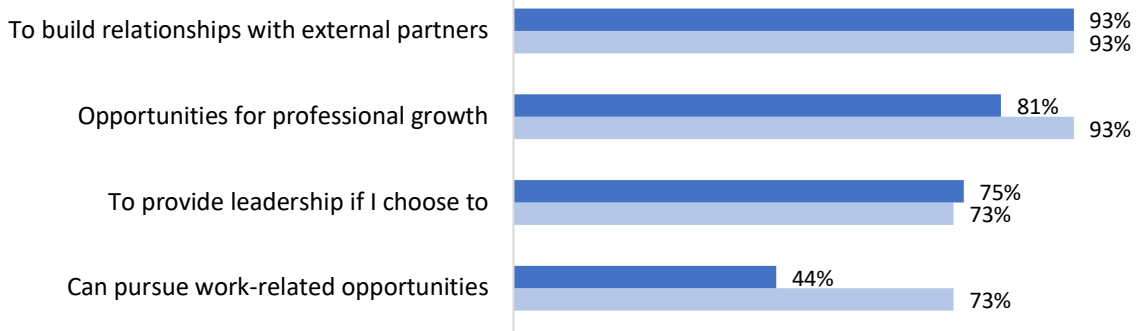


Source: 2022 and 2023 RFSP Partner Surveys on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity

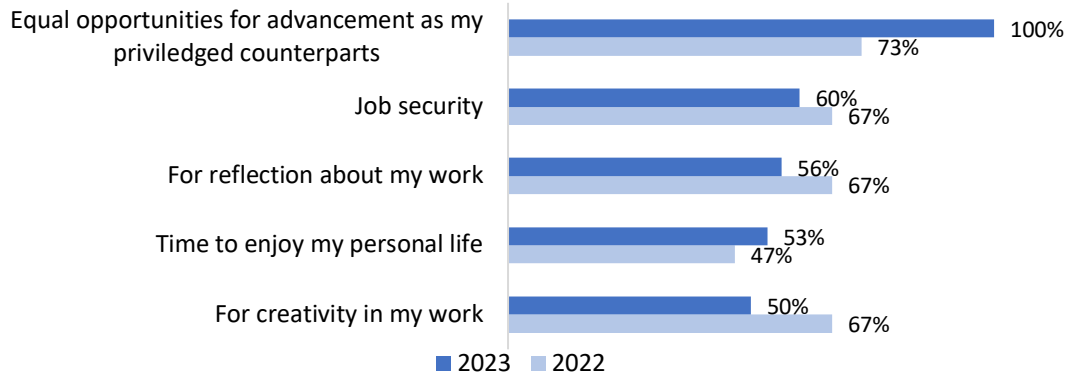
Figure A2. Personal Stability and Operational Capacity in 2022 and 2023 for those who responded to both surveys

Percent of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that they have opportunities at work to...

Work opportunities

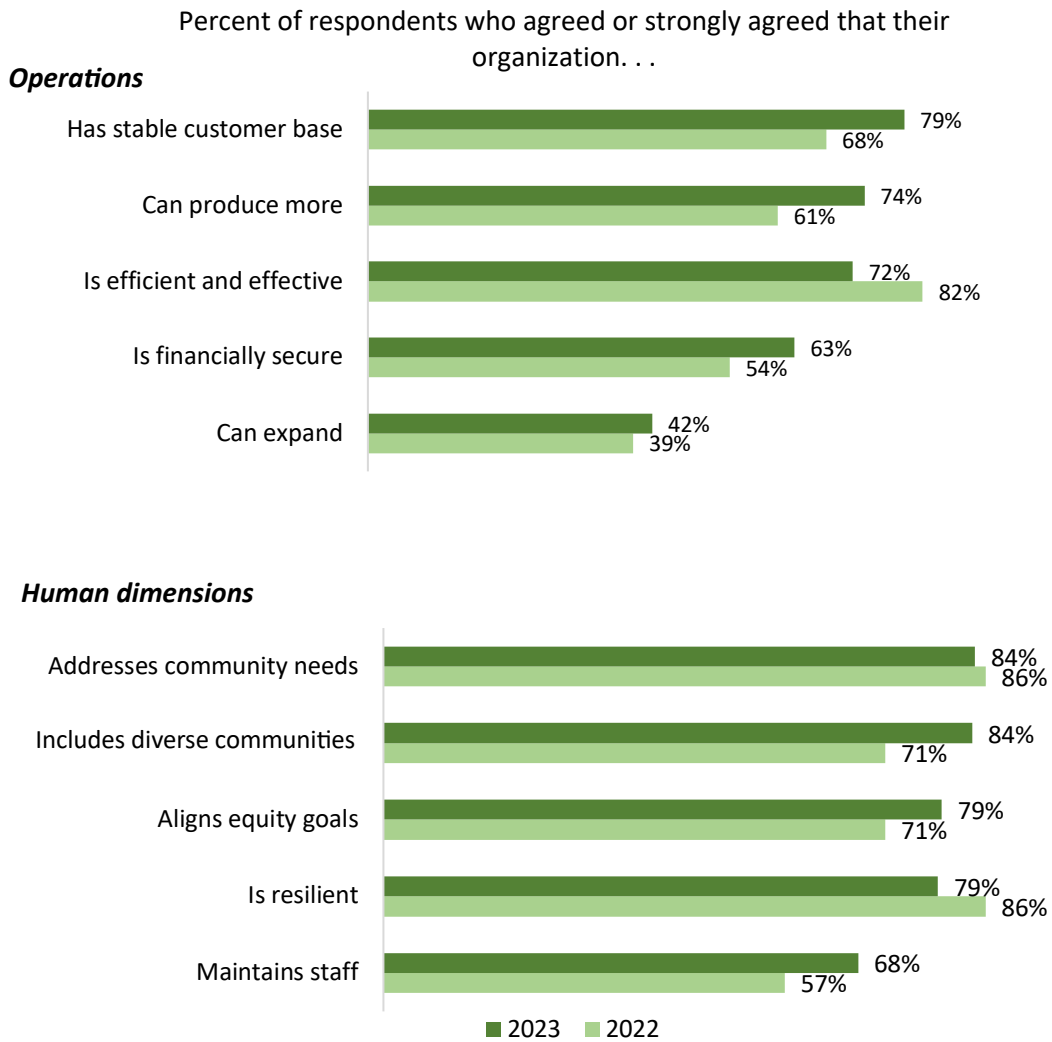


Work environment



Source: 2022 and 2023 RFSP Partner Surveys on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity

Figure A3. Organizational Stability and Operational Capacity in 2022 and 2023 for all survey respondents



Source: 2022 and 2023 RFSP Partner Surveys on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity

Figure A4. Stability and Operational Capacity related to work opportunities and working conditions in 2022 and 2023 for all survey respondents



Source: 2022 and 2023 RFSP Partner Surveys on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity

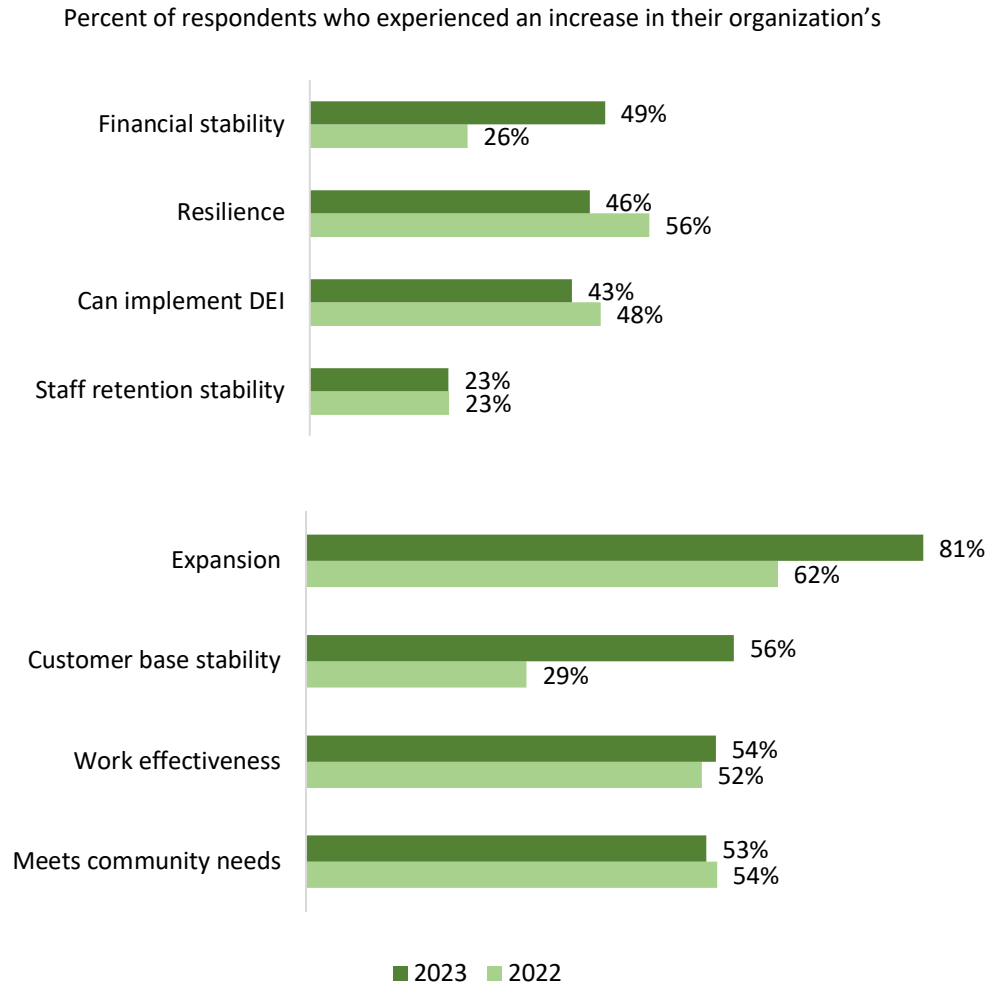
Turning to reports of improvements in stability and operational capacity in the past six months, the group of all respondents were much more likely to report increases in the areas of financial stability, expansion, and customer base stability in 2023. In 2022, 26% of RFSP members reported increased financial stability, compared with 49% in 2023. 62% reported increased ability to expand in 2022, compared with 81% in 2022. And 29% reported increased customer base stability in 2022, compared with 56% in 2023. (See Figure A5.)

In terms of work opportunities and working conditions, more respondents reported improvements in 2023 compared with 2022 in most areas. 68% of respondents reported an increase in leadership opportunities in the past six months in 2023, up from 50% in 2022. Those reporting an increase in professional growth opportunities rose from 33% in 2022 to 56% in 2023. Those reporting an increase for time to pursue new opportunities at work rose from 38% in 2022 to 54% in 2023. And the percent who reported an increase in opportunities relative to privileged coworkers rose to 20% in 2022 from 27% in 2023.

In two categories, respondents in 2023 were less likely to report improvements, compared with 2022. The percent who saw an increase in time for reflection at work decreased to 26% in 2023 from 38% in

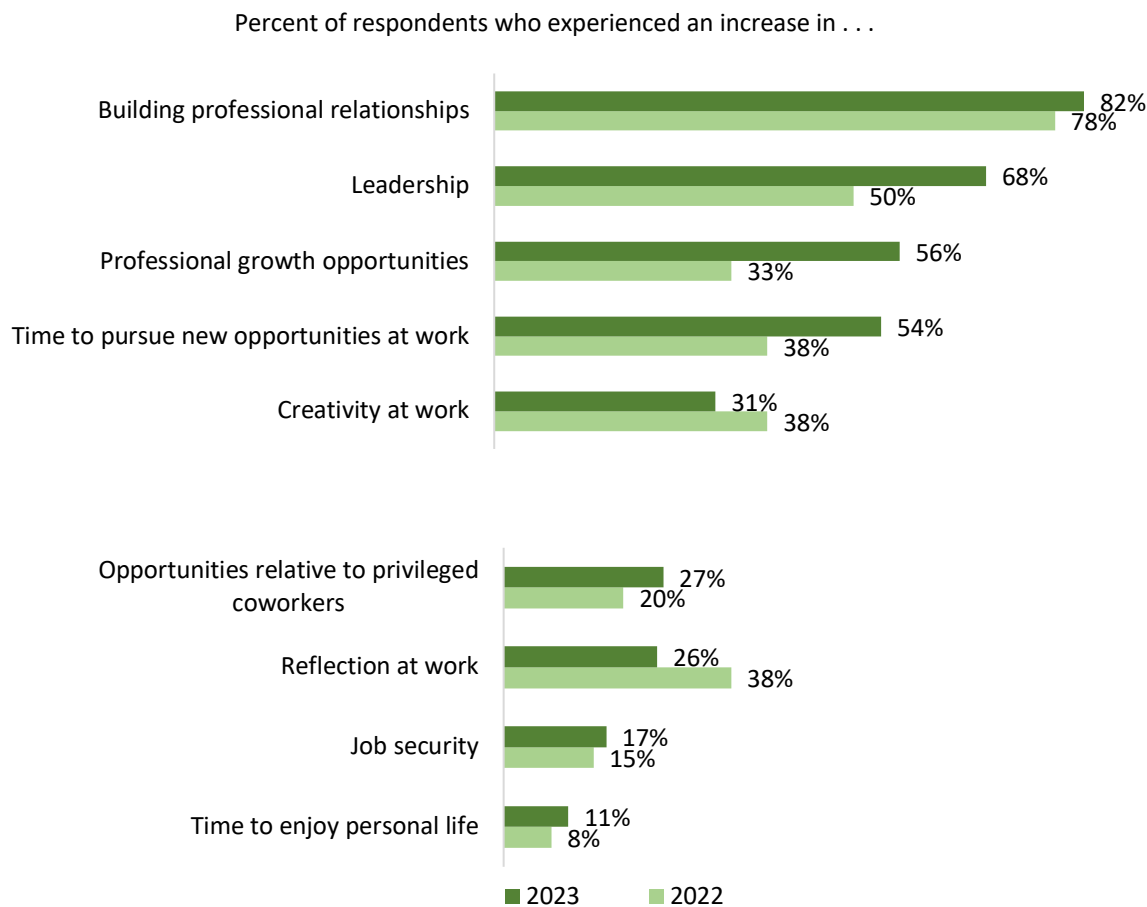
2022. The percent who saw an increase in creativity at work fell to 31% in 2023 from 38% in 2022. (See Figure A6.)

Figure A5. Percent who reported an increase in organizational capacity in the past 6 months for all survey respondents



Source: 2022 and 2023 RFSP Partner Surveys on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity

Figure A6. Percent who reported improvements in working opportunities and work conditions in the past 6 months for all survey respondents



Source: 2022 and 2023 RFSP Partner Surveys on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity

Appendix II – Open-ended responses for improving stability and operational capacity

In your opinion, in what ways can the RFSP project improve the stability and operational capacity of RFSP project partners?

Acknowledge that there is a lot of white privilege in the collective that are new and are not mission driven. And there are others that have been doing this work collectively for all the right reasons with no RFSP grant coordination.

Adding quantifiable goals with deadlines.

being so new to the project I don't have any improvements to offer at this time

Building relationships, creating trust, sharing knowledge, creating shared tools and resources, opening communication channels with one another, learning what others need, learning what others have to share

Building trust among partners to facilitate the sharing of resources, technical knowledge, and networks.

Consider ways to support partner orgs. so that individuals are able to participate more in the RSFP work. How to give people more time and space?

Continue to work toward supporting the establishment of more frequent and set working group meeting times to keep momentum

Develop more infrastructure on food pathways and distribution networks

Get stakeholders together in person, shared grants or access to grant writer, connection to state funds/programs

Give time for non-profits and funders to share what services are currently being offered

Include more senior center providers; attending meetings set in the middle of the day makes it hard.

I'm not quite sure how to answer this question right now, but it definitely seems like providing access to resources and knowledge would be beneficial in supporting the stability and operational capacity of RFSP project partners..

improve food hub strategic partnerships and continue applying an equity lens to any project proposals

Include workshops where we visit a farm//hub for day (half-day)? More in-person engagement opportunities whenever possible.

Invite additional partnerships from various organizations

I'm awe of what our backbone team does and our colleagues come to the work with an openness

Shared resource development if partners are interested. The RFSP is already doing this. It's a great example and can be encouraged by the project partners to do more.

Support for farmers they source from, funding and operational technical assistance

Supporting, building capacity and seeking funding to initiatives led by those directly impacted

Technical assistance; networking; strategic planning

The RFSP project still seems to be defining itself. Building trust will be key in the weeks/months ahead.

There is a lot to unpack in operational capacity: learning non-profit and business management skills. Classes, learning opportunities, funding, healthy and effective boards, support services, etc.

We can work together to create resources that are currently missing.

Appendix III – Open-ended responses for sharing resources

In your opinion, in what ways can the RFSP project further develop the sharing of resources, tools, and knowledge among project partners?

As some partners are requesting shared resources, the RFSP is a good example of how to build that trust and coordinate resource sharing. Keep it up!

Be sure to address the difference in individual & organizational farmers (or groups). What are the unique challenges we face and in what ways can groups/orgs support individuals and vice versa?

Better communication tool than SLACK. Clearinghouse of information and connections. System map of the food system and value chain

Build trust among all partners. the inequities outnumber the diversity, equity & inclusion.

Building trust will be essential for the NM Local Food Portal, projects like the purchase of boxes that helps everyone create trust and bridge needs

Continued identification of needs and strengths, connecting those dots as they arise.

Data sharing; lessons learned sharing; resource bank

Get everyone on Slack! Create our own website!

Have a higher level of coordination among farms to meet the supply/demand of NM communities
Host another in-person meeting with debriefing opportunities, as well as time to engage and plan with one another.

I am currently only connected to Food quality group; I would be interested in working on funding with other partners in the RFSP .

I think the organizations that are doing the hardest work with the less resources are BIPOC orgs. I would like to see our organizations being prioritized as a special category that needs \$\$ resources

I think we're just getting started.

On a great track! Continued trust building through the emerging project pilots will, I believe provide this opportunity.

printed material

Providing tools and outlets for conflict mediation and continued trust building.

Sharing with various organizations who are not currently involve with RFSP

Simplify the sharing process somehow. People are not jumping into the Slack technology. Project partners are long on knowledge but short on time.

Structured engagement opportunities

Work teams have suggested creating asset maps so we can help connect one another to resources, tools and knowledge, but I think it would also be helpful to have project partners who have a special skillset in something present workshops or presentations on what they're doing and how. Sometimes we don't know what we don't know until someone shows us how they're doing it. I think this gets complex, however, because some project partners are still very distrustful of others and don't want to share their knowledge or resources with others. But maybe if we just launched a voluntary initiative that does not obligate anyone to give up their industry secrets, those who are more trusting of other partners can demonstrate their desire to support one another and work together..
