



New Mexico Regional Food Systems Partnership

Operational Capacity, Stability, and
Shared Resources Annual Survey

2024
2023
2022

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With deep gratitude to: Bryan Crawford-Garrett and Juan Abeyta for their outstanding partnership; Mary Costello, Arlo Menchaca, Brisa Rodriguez, Melissa Binder, and the UNM Evaluation Lab for laying the groundwork for this project; Arlo Menchaca, Brisa Rodriguez, and RFSP partners Ophelia Steppe and Helga Garcia-Garza for conducting the focus groups that shaped the survey concepts; all RFSP partners for their invaluable contributions as focus group participants and survey respondents, and for their insights into the survey results. This work is dedicated to the memory of Christina Keibler.

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Operational Capacity, Stability, and Shared Resources in the RFSP 2022, 2023, and 2024



Background and Overview

This report summarizes the New Mexico Regional Food Systems Partnership (RFSP) survey responses conducted in 2022, 2023, and 2024 regarding shared resources, stability, and operational capacity¹. These 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, Christina Keibler of the New Mexico Farmers' Marketing Association (NMFMA) collaborated with a team from the University of New Mexico (UNM) Evaluation Lab to identify resources that were shared among project partners and to define stability and operational capacity within the RFSP. Their findings showed no support in the research literature, prompting Keibler and the Lab to seek input from RFSP partners. Together, they developed a list of potential shared resources and definitions for stability and operational capacity.

The partners participated in a two-pronged initiative. The first prong involved contributing ideas during focus groups at the 2021 Annual Sevilleta Retreat and participating in an initial baseline survey based on these ideas in the spring of 2022. In the second prong, during the latter half of 2022, the Lab collaborated with Bryan Crawford-Garrett from NMFMA and Juan Abeyta from the RFSP backbone team to refine the survey. They aimed to make it easier to

¹ The activities discussed in this report are funded by the United States Department of Agriculture through a NIFA Regional Food System Partnership grant. This grant, titled "Scaling Up New Mexico's Value Chain Coordination Network," is led by the New Mexico Farmers' Marketing Association.

complete while preserving most of the original language for comparison with earlier responses. Partners completed the follow-up survey in early 2023 and again in early 2024.

The 2023 survey showed significant improvements in stability and operational capacity among partners, with 80% of Transactional Partners and 96% of Support Partners reporting progress in at least one area over the past six months. Compared to the 2022 survey, the 2023 results demonstrated increased resource sharing and a higher proportion of partners achieving stability and operational capacity gains.

2024 Survey Summary

The 2024 survey revealed continued progress, as 90% of Transactional Partners and 84% of Support Partners experienced improvements in one or more areas. Moreover, most partners reported engaging in:



These findings indicate that the RFSP is successfully fostering resource sharing, stability, and operational capacity among its partners.



RFSP 2024 Annual Report Overview

This report is part of a long-term evaluation of the New Mexico Regional Food Systems Partnership (RFSP) project, which has a range of objectives, including:

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.

The RFSP's growth is reflected in the growing number of invited survey participants, which increased from 42 in 2022 to 50 in 2023 and 55 in 2024. Meanwhile, the response rate also saw a significant boost, rising from 67% to 78% during the same timeframe. However, despite a larger pool of invited survey participants in 2024, the response rate decreased to 53%, indicating a decline in response engagement. (See Table 1.)

Table 1. RFSP Participants and Survey Response

	2022	2023	2024
Number invited	42	50	55
Number who responded	28	39	29
Response rate (respondents as a percent of those invited)	67%	78%	53%

Source: 2022, 2023, and 2024 RFSP Partner Surveys on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity

The subsequent section provides an overview of RFSP partners' responses from the 2024 survey. Additional insights from open-ended questions on stability, operational capacity, and resource sharing are included in Appendix I.



2024 Survey Results

We first examine whether the RFSP has achieved its target of enhancing stability and operational capacity for at least 75% of Value Chain Coordination Enterprise Transactional Partners and 90% of Support Partners. The 2024 survey assessed improvements in various organizational and personal aspects over the past six months. (See Table 2. for details.)

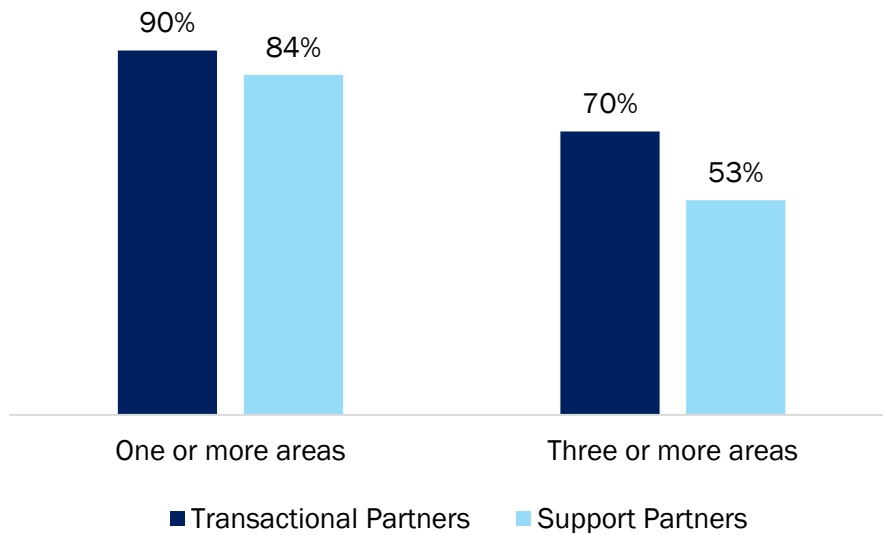
Table 2. Areas of stability and operational capacity

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 group.

The findings indicate that 90% of Transactional Partners and 84% of Support Partners experienced improvements in one or more areas. This marks a 10-percentage point increase for Transactional Partners compared to the 2023 survey, while Support Partners saw a 12-percentage point decrease. Notably, 70% of Transactional Partners and 53% of Support Partners achieved progress in three or more areas. However, there was a decline in improvements in three or more areas for both groups compared to 2023, with Transactional Partners reporting a 3-percentage point decrease and Support Partners a 14-percentage point decrease. (See Figure 1.)

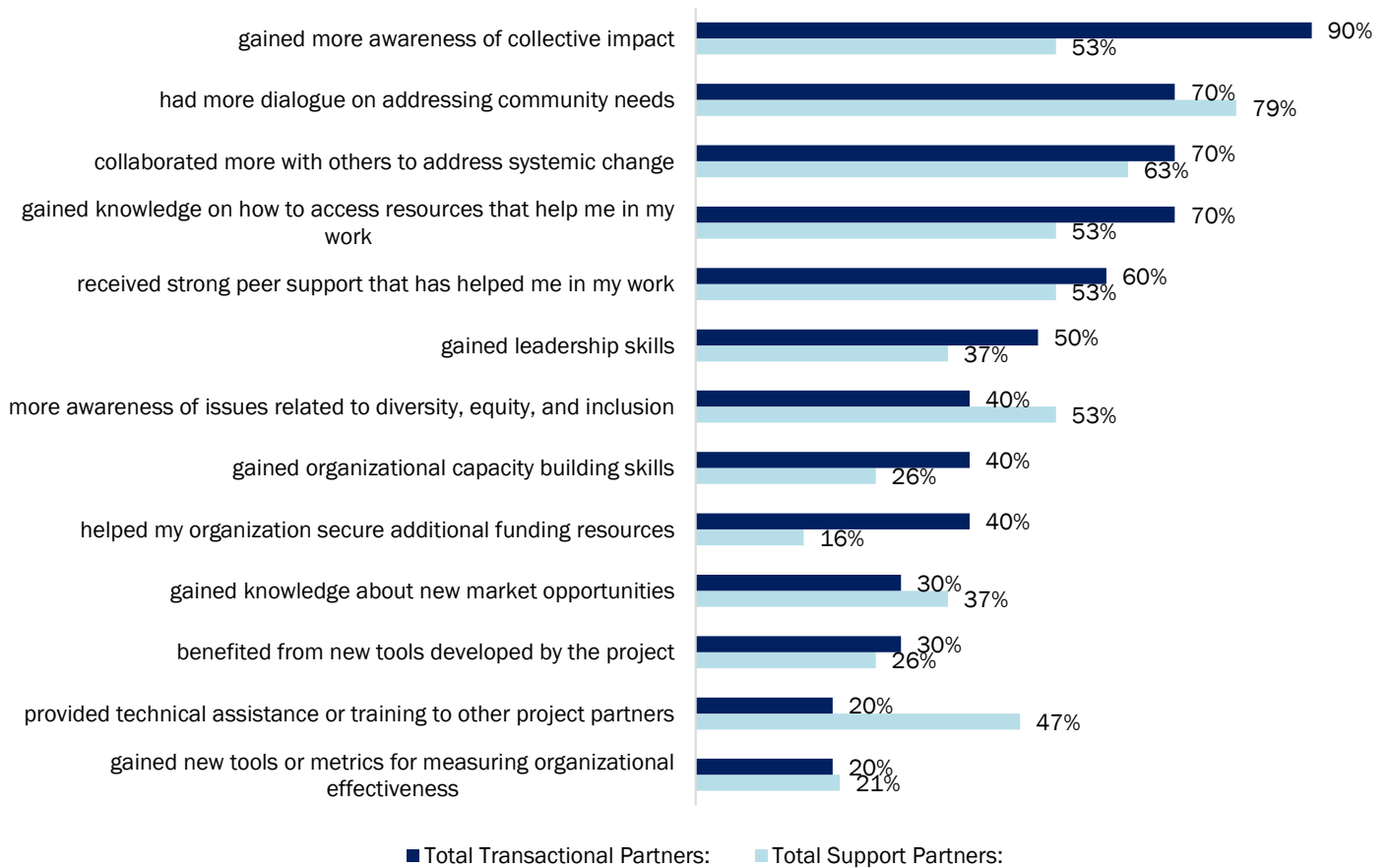
Figure 1. Percent of partners who reported increased stability and operational capacity in one or more and three or more areas



To establish a credible link between the RFSP and these improvements, we analyzed partners' responses to a question asking them to select all relevant statements about their experience with the project's impact. The findings revealed that a large proportion of both Transactional and Support Partners gained more awareness of collective impact (90% for Transactional and 53% for Support Partners), had more dialogue on addressing community needs (70% and 79%), collaborated more with others to address systemic change (70% and 63%), gained knowledge on how to access resources (70% and 53%), received strong peer support that helped them in their work (60% & 53%), and gained leadership skills (50% and 37%). (See Figure 2.)



Figure 2. Changes as a result of RFSP participation
As a result of the RFSP, I have...



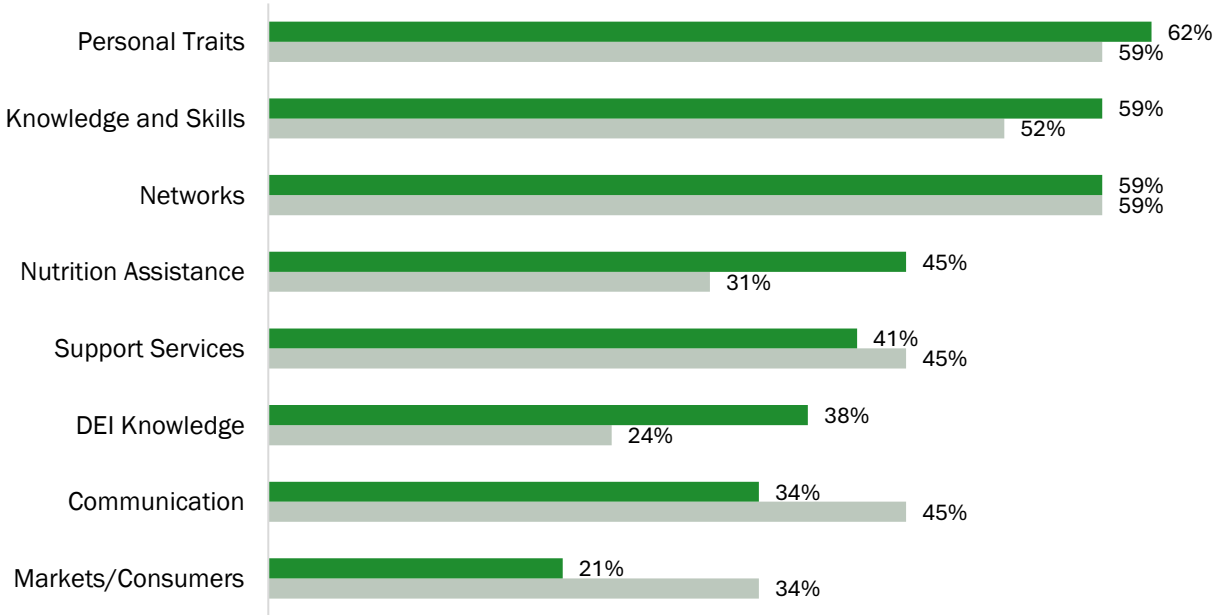
Source: 2024 RFSP Partner Survey on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity

The survey responses also support the proposed mechanism for capacity building through shared resources. A significant majority of respondents (50% or more) reported receiving personal traits, knowledge and skills, networks, business resources, and food production support. While a smaller percentage reported sharing these resources, networking and food production stood out with a higher sharing rate (at least 3 percentage points higher than receiving). Notably, more respondents reported sharing support services, communication, technology, and marketing and consumer resources than receiving them. However, a large portion of respondents did report receiving farming inputs, nutrition assistance, and resources related to diversity, equity, and inclusion more than sharing them. (See Figure 3.)

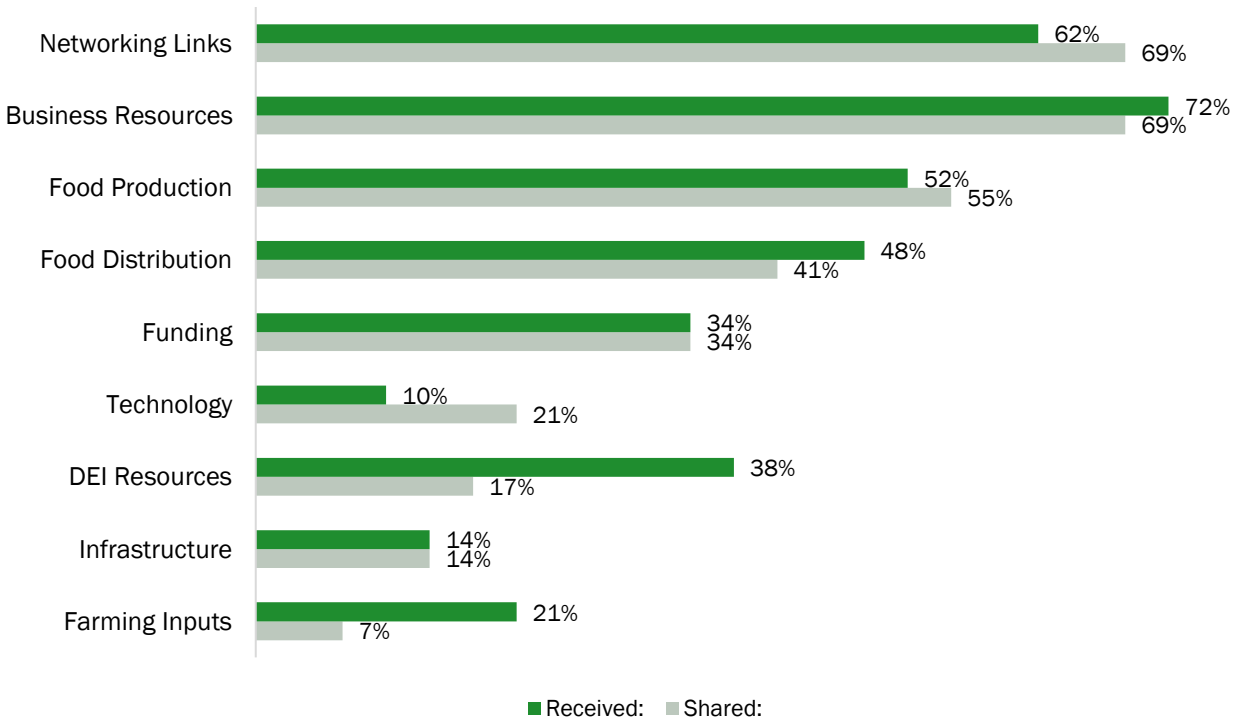


Figure 3. Percent of respondents who shared and received human capital and operational resources

Human Capital



Operational Resources



Source: 2024 RFSP Partner Survey on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity



Assessing Stability, Operational Capacity, and Resource Sharing in 2022, 2023, and 2024 RFSP Surveys

The previous section examined perceived changes in operational capacity and stability through retrospective questioning. Alternatively, change can be measured by comparing assessments from the 2022, 2023, and 2024 surveys. However, this comparison is complex due to variations in partner responses and project participation. New partners joined between surveys, while others left the project. To capture individual experiences, we compared the 2024 survey responses with the combined 2022 and 2023 responses to understand project-wide changes, including shifts in partner composition.

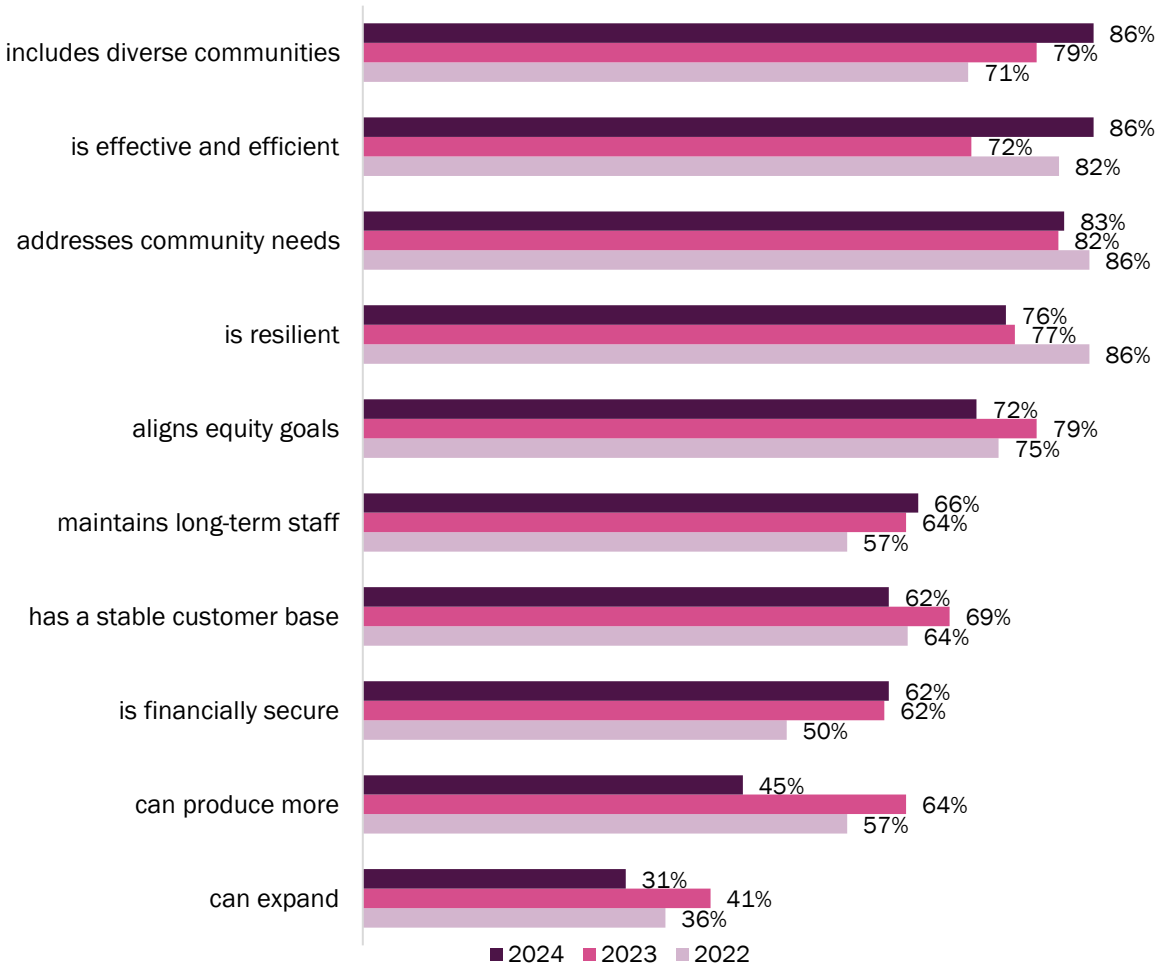
All respondents from 2022 to 2024 were asked to what extent they agreed their organization conducts such components related to organizational stability and operational capacity. In comparing the survey data, there was a noticeable positive trend in several key areas. In 2024, 86% of respondents believed their organization includes diverse communities, an increase from 79% in 2023 and 71% in 2022. Similarly, 86% of respondents in 2024 found their organization to be effective and efficient, up from 72% in 2023 and 82% in 2022. Addressing community needs consistently received high agreement, maintaining 83% in 2024 and 82% in 2023, slightly down from 86% in 2022.

Participants reported their organization's resiliency held steady at 76% in 2024, showing a 10-percentage point decrease from 2022. Alignment with equity goals showed a decline in agreement with 72% agreement in 2024, down from 75% in 2022. Respondents believed their organization's ability to maintain long-term staff saw a moderate increase, with 66% in 2024, 64% in 2023, and 57% in 2022. In contrast, organizations' stability of customers experienced a very slight decline, dropping from 64% in 2022 to 62% in 2024. Financial security was rated positively by 62% in both 2024 and 2023, a significant rise from 50% in 2022.

Respondents also reported a decline in their organization's capability to produce more, with 45% in 2024 compared to 64% in 2023 and 57% in 2022. Furthermore, the ability to expand showed a decrease over time, with only 31% agreement in 2024, down from 41% in 2023 and 36% in 2022. (See Figure 4.)

Figure 4. Organizational Stability and Operational Capacity in 2022, 2023 and 2024 for all survey respondents

Percent of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that their organization...



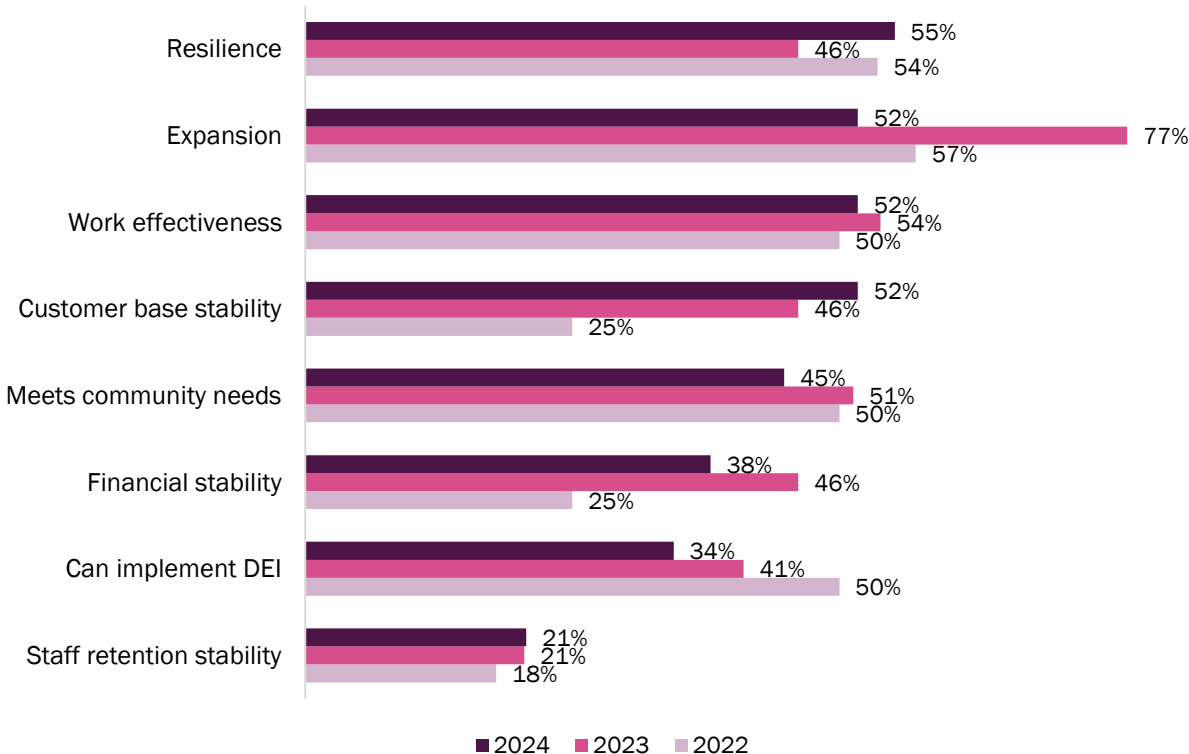
Source: 2022, 2023, and 2024 RFSP Partner Surveys on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity

Overall, the responses suggest a general trend of improvement and stability across most areas, indicating strong and resilient organizations that have made positive strides despite some minor fluctuations. However, when respondents were asked to provide more specific feedback on whether these areas had increased, decreased, or remained the same in the past six months, a different pattern emerged, revealing a more nuanced picture.

When comparing the years 2022, 2023, and 2024, similar trends were observed when respondents were asked about changes in the past six months. For instance, in 2024, 55% of respondents noted an increase in resilience, a slight rise from 46% in 2023, and 54% in 2022. The capacity for expansion experienced a sharp decline, falling from a high of 77% in 2023 to 52% in 2024, which is even lower than the 57% reported in 2022. Work effectiveness was reported to have slight variation over the years, with respondents reporting a 52% increase in 2024, slightly higher than 50% in 2022. Customer base stability consistently increased 52% in 2024, compared to 46% in 2023, and 25% in 2022.

The capacity to meet community needs was reported to have improved slightly to 51% in 2023 from 50% in 2022 but dropped to 45% in 2024. Financial stability saw a marked improvement, with 46% reporting an increase in 2023, up from 25% in 2022, however, 38% of respondents reported their financial stability increased in 2024. The ability to implement Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives showed a decline, with only 34% noting an increase in 2024, down from 41% in 2023 and 50% in 2022. Finally, staff retention stability saw no change from 2023 to 2024 remaining at 21%, however, staff retention is up from 18% in 2022. (See Figure 5.)

Figure 5. Percent of respondents who reported an increase in organizational capacity in the past 6 months



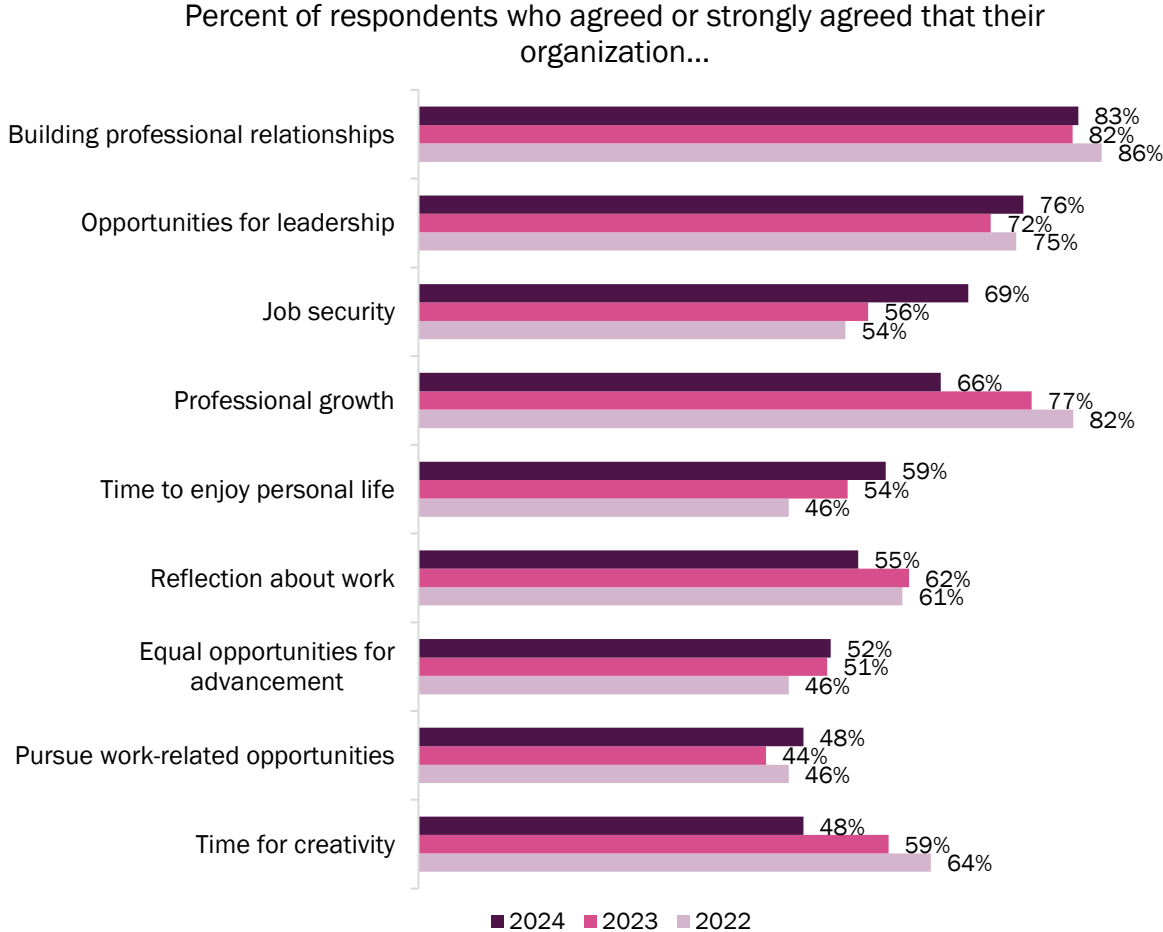
Source: 2022, 2023, and 2024 RFSP Partner Surveys on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity

Respondents were also asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that their organization's stability and operational capacity personally impacted them. The percentage of respondents who felt their organization fosters professional relationships remained relatively stable, with 83% in 2024, 82% in 2023, and a slightly higher 86% in 2022. Leadership opportunities showed consistency, with 75% agreement in 2022, 72% in 2023, and 76% in 2024. In contrast, perceptions of job security significantly increased from 54% in 2022 to 56% in 2023 and 69% in 2024.

Opportunities for professional growth experienced a decline over time, with 82% in 2022, dropping to 77% in 2023, and further to 66% in 2024. However, the percentage of respondents who felt they had sufficient time to enjoy their personal life increased from 46% in 2022 to 54% in 2023, reaching 59% in 2024. The opportunity for reflection about work saw a decline, from 61% in 2022 to 62% in 2023, and further to 55% in 2024.

The perceptions of equal opportunities for advancement showed a slight increase, from 46% in 2022 to 51% in 2023, and to 52% in 2024. The ability to pursue work-related opportunities remained relatively stable, with a slight increase from 44% in 2023 to 48% in 2024, compared to 46% in 2022. In contrast, the availability of time for creativity saw a significant decrease, from 64% in 2022 to 59% in 2023, and further to 48% in 2024. (See Figure 6.)

Figure 6. Organizational Stability and Operational Capacity in 2022, 2023 and 2024 for all survey respondents

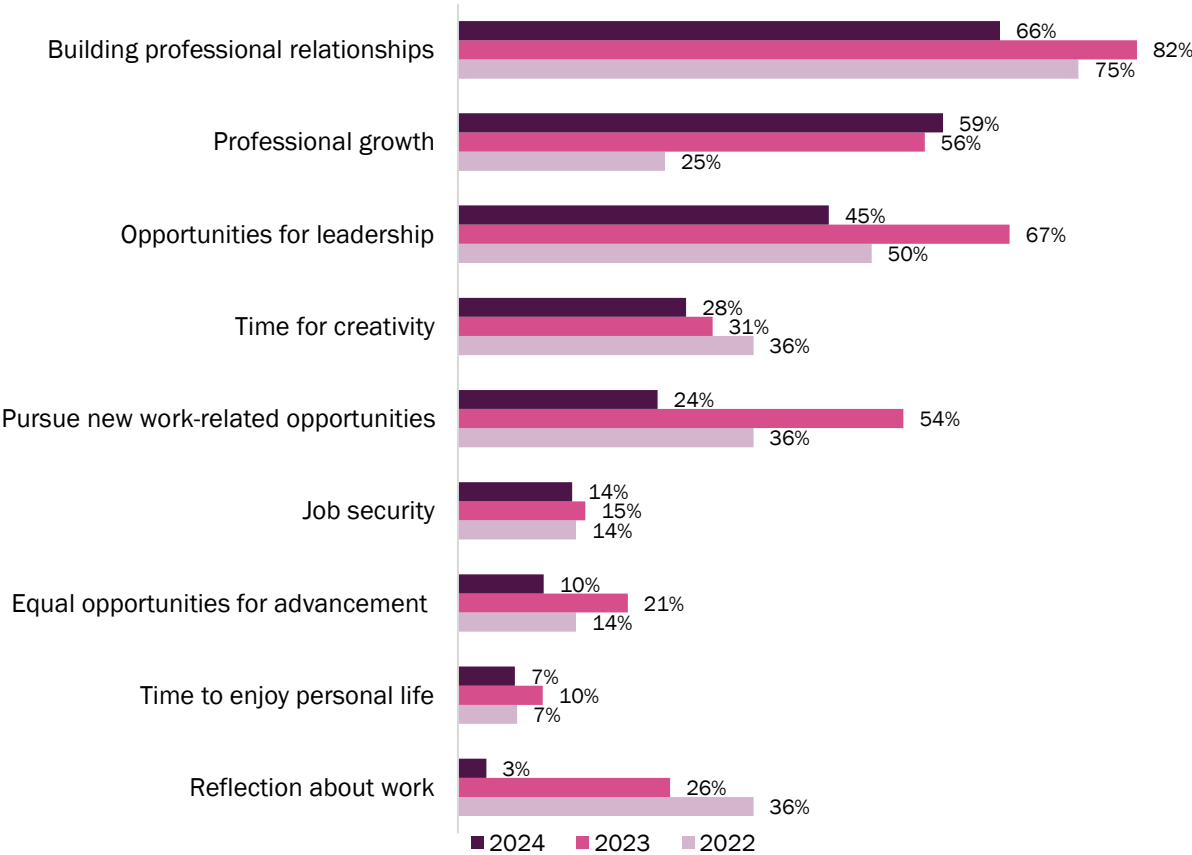


Source: 2022, 2023, and 2024 RFSP Partner Surveys on Sharing Resoures, Stability, and Operational Capacity

The data indicates a mix of improvements and declines over the three years. While there are positive trends in areas such as job security, time to enjoy personal life, and equal opportunities for advancement, significant setbacks are observed in professional growth, reflection about work, and time for creativity. However, when respondents were asked whether these areas had increased, decreased, or remained the same in the past six months, the results showed different trends.

The number of respondents who reported an increase in stability and operational capacity at their organization in the past six months decreased considerably compared to the survey results from 2022 and 2023. Results showed a decline in building professional relationships, falling to 66% in 2024 from 82% in 2023, which was an increase from 75% in 2022. However, respondents did report a consistent rise in professional growth, with figures increasing from 25% in 2022 to 56% in 2023 and reaching 59% in 2024. Opportunities for leadership, time to pursue new work-related opportunities, opportunities for advancement and inclusion, and time for reflection about work have all seen a significant decline, highlighting a mixed overall picture compared to the previous years. (See Figure 7.)

Figure 7. Percent of respondents who reported an increase in the following in the past six months...



Source: 2022, 2023, and 2024 RFSP Partner Surveys on Sharing Resources, Stability, and Operational Capacity

Reasons for Participation

The RFSP attracted participants for a range of reasons. Many representatives joined to share their organizational perspectives and build relationships with others in the local food system. Key motivators included collaborating with peers, gaining knowledge about food system issues, and sharing insights to develop local food system infrastructure. Participants aimed to increase access to local food, address distribution logistics and cost challenges, and receive support for their food hubs or organizations. While some were encouraged to join by their organizations, many participants discovered value in the collaborative process and formed meaningful professional and personal relationships through the project.

Participant Experiences

The RFSP offered participants a range of valuable experiences, with an overall positive outlook. Professional development was a significant gain, particularly in facilitation skills, collective impact processes, and networking opportunities. While some participants found it challenging to balance their facilitation roles with their regular jobs, they reported gaining valuable insights into inclusive processes. The project also enabled participants to build meaningful relationships and connections within the food systems community, which was widely regarded as a significant benefit. While the project faced challenges such as low participation from some partners and occasional tensions requiring mediation, many participants reported gaining valuable knowledge about food systems, food safety, distribution logistics, and other areas that contributed to their organization's financial stability. One RFSP participant highlighted that their involvement in the local food distribution network, particularly through the NM Grown program and supplying institutions like senior centers and schools, has been a major factor in their organization's financial success and growth in southwest New Mexico over the past couple of years. Additionally, participants appreciated the coordinators' intentional and relational approach, which made them feel heard and valued. However, there was a recognized need for greater diversity and Indigenous participation, acknowledging the challenges of outreach due to historical mistrust. Despite this, participants held onto hopes for future collaboration and deeper engagement with tribal communities.

Key Learnings

Through their participation, RFSP participants gained a deeper understanding of New Mexico's local food systems, including history, landscape, relationships, and equity challenges. They learned about farming, ranching, and the journey of food from producers to consumers. Participants developed skills in facilitation, collective impact approaches, incorporating diverse voices, and systemic thinking. They experienced the benefits and challenges of collaborative approaches, including relationship-building and consensus decision-making. Valuable connections, professional development opportunities, and interactions with elders provided intergenerational and cultural knowledge. Participants gained an appreciation for cultural diversity in food and the importance of food sovereignty, along with greater empathy, patience, and understanding across diverse groups. They also learned about challenges faced by specific groups like indigenous communities and farmers and gained knowledge in food safety, distribution, nutrition, and policy.

Personal and Professional Benefits

The RFSP had a profound impact on participants, both personally and professionally. On a personal level, the project fostered meaningful connections, relationships, and a sense of community within the local food system. Initially, some participants felt like outsiders, but they soon found a supportive and inclusive environment that encouraged personal growth. The collective impact framework introduced new ideas and perspectives, leading to a transformative experience.

Professionally, participants gained a deeper understanding of the local food system, including its history, landscape, and equity issues. They also benefited from professional development opportunities, such as workshops, training, and collaboration. New partnerships formed during the project expanded their professional networks, and they gained practical experience in facilitation, food distribution logistics, and data analysis. Notably, some organizations reported increased financial stability as a result of improved local food distribution practices.

Broader Impact on the Local Food System

The RFSP project benefited the broader local food system in New Mexico in several ways. It helped rebuild relationships and trust between local food organizations, producers, distributors, and communities. The project facilitated collaboration and coordination, leading to more efficient distribution networks and resource sharing. Training and education around food safety helped producers meet standards and access new markets. Programs distributing local produce to seniors, schools, and Pueblo communities increased food access and nutrition for marginalized groups, reconnecting elders with culture and improving health outcomes. Additionally, the project brought in funding and resources to support infrastructure development across the state, enhancing distribution and storage capacity.

Sharing and Receiving Resources

Participants in the RFSP shared and received various resources as part of their work. They shared knowledge, insights, and experiences related to food distribution, organizational models, distribution routes, pricing, costs, and tools to improve collective impact and collaboration. Perspectives on equity, access, and infrastructure needs in the food system were also shared. In return, participants received partnership opportunities, support for distributing local food more widely, knowledge of food safety regulations, and feedback on tools and resources developed by the backbone team. This exchange of knowledge, resources, and partnerships helped build relationships and trust between organizations, enabled more efficient local food distribution, provided wider distribution opportunities, and informed efforts to improve equity and access in the food system. However, challenges included a lack of formalized structures for collaboration, uneven participation and engagement from partners, and insufficient progress on data-sharing platforms.

Meeting Expectations

Overall, the RFSP participants did not express any significant unmet expectations. Participants generally had positive experiences and were grateful for the opportunities to connect, learn,

and collaborate through the project. Many appreciated the supportive community and the professional and personal growth opportunities provided by the RFSP. Despite some challenges and frustrations, the overall sentiment was positive, with participants valuing the project's impact on their work and the broader local food system.

Appendix I: 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?
Before the project ends, create a system for sustainability and continuity for the partnerships and collaborations that have happened.
Create and maintain an online resource map. Support food hub network/group.
By continuing to formalize the Hub Network, continuing to engage NM Grown partners in strategic ways, by supporting food quality cross-pollination with regional groups and partners, and continuing the work at the grant's conclusion.
Continue to create opportunities for people to come together and collaborate. Maintain an online library and platform for knowledge sharing.
Ongoing communication among networks.
The RFSP project is doing a terrific job, especially in the areas where there are already strong networks and project partners in place. I have no suggestions at this time. Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback.
Not sure, there was not a lot determined or changed within this grant and its sub-groups that were considered vastly impactful. It was mostly a networking opportunity in the end.
Office days are similar to VCC/NMFA staff accessibility. These could work well for updates and may decrease the time in Zoom calls.
Involve more producers in the committees to better evaluate the needs of the food producers in NM.