

# Help Wanted? Ask Someone 50+

## An Applied Research Brief

*The Pathways to Encore Purpose Project is a collaboration between the Stanford Graduate School of Education's Center on Adolescence and Encore.org to deepen understanding of purpose in the encore years.*

### The research says...

**The majority of older adults exhibit high levels of prosocial values and behaviors.** And, while many are already engaged in activities like volunteering, many more say they care about helping others. For example:

More than half of older adults place great value on **social equity and empathy**. Survey responses demonstrate that:

- 67 percent strongly believe in equal treatment for all;
- 60 percent find it very important to help and care for others;
- 53 percent strongly believe in caring for nature and the environment; and
- 60 percent believe it is very important to seek to understand people who are different from them.

**Many older adults behave in alignment with their prosocial values**, as indicated by activities like volunteering, trying to help others, and trying to take care of those in need. For example:

- 65 percent of older adults said it is “always true” that they try to help others.
- More than half (55%) of the survey respondents said they volunteered at least once or twice per year; 22 percent of respondents volunteer once a month or more. Among the interviewees, about half described being engaged in volunteering. The reason given most often for volunteering is that people feel it is important to help others.
- Nearly half of older adults (48 percent) say they “always” or “often” try to help young people achieve their potential.

More than half of older adults (55 percent) **consider their paid work to be highly personally meaningful**. Among that group, 87 percent had at least one beyond-the-self reason for this sense of meaning in their work, such as helping people (64 percent) or contributing to society or the community (46 percent).

## Prosocial Values

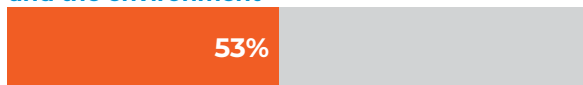
Very important to care for others



Strongly believe in equal treatment for all



Strongly believe in caring for nature and the environment



Believe it is very important to seek to understand people who are different from them

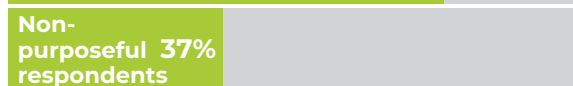


## Prosocial Behaviors

Strongly inclined to help, care for and console others



Often/always try to help young people achieve their full potential



### You can use these findings to:

- Make the case, particularly to youth-serving organizations, that older adults want to help and are ripe for recruiting into both paid and volunteer roles.
- Create more successful recruitment messages for people 50+ by including values like fairness, and by explaining specific ways that their role will help others.
- Include opportunities for volunteers and paid staff to learn more about people who come from different backgrounds, offer different perspectives, or hold different views.
- Recognize and retain people 50+ by making a point of thanking them for the ways they are helping colleagues or contributing to a larger mission.

The Pathways to Encore Purpose (PEP) project is a collaboration between the Stanford Graduate School of Education's Center on Adolescence and Encore.org. The Stanford University research team conducted a nationally representative survey of nearly 1,200 adults, ages 50-90, followed by 102 in-depth interviews to determine what role "purpose" plays in their lives. The study's authors define **purpose as a sustained commitment to goals that are meaningful to the self** and that also **contribute in some way to the common good**, to something larger than or beyond the self.

The research examined older adults' life goals, prosocial values and behaviors, perspectives on the progression to later life, and prevalence of purpose in their post-midlife, or encore, years. This series of applied research briefs highlights each of the six major findings from the Stanford University study, with a focus on what they might mean for practitioners. All six findings can be found at [encore.org/research/purpose](https://encore.org/research/purpose).