

# Living With Purpose in the Encore Years: Not a Zero Sum Game

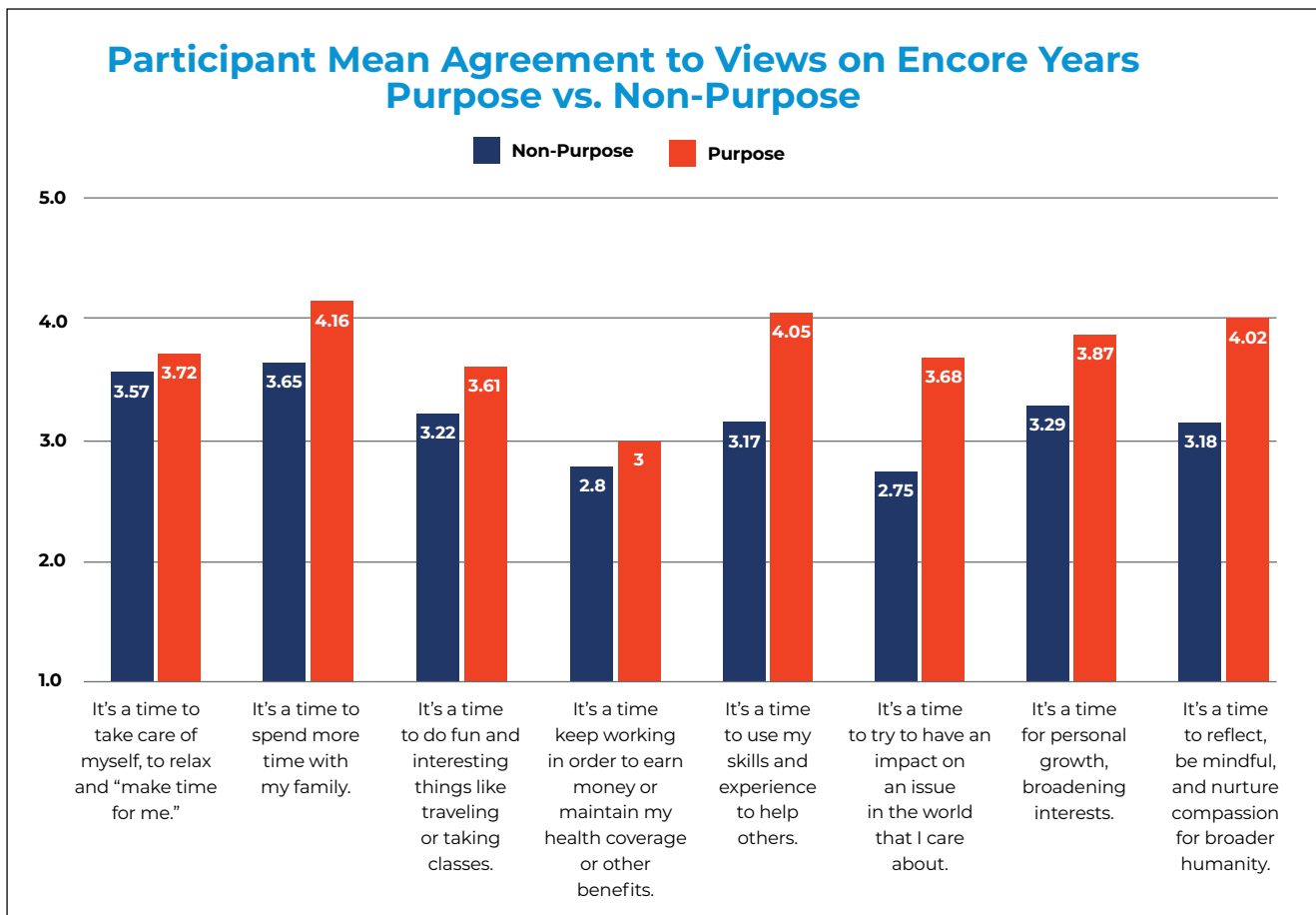
## An Applied Research Brief

*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...

**Purposeful living is not a zero-sum game.** Purposeful living does not crowd out other pleasures and personal goals. Interviews of purposeful respondents provided many examples of satisfying engagement with personal as well as beyond-the-self goals.

This picture of purposeful living is backed up by the survey data, which showed that purposeful respondents strongly endorsed not only beyond-the-self visions for later life but also more self-oriented visions – for example, having time for travel, family, friends, learning. Theirs are not lives of self-sacrifice.



When asked to indicate how well they felt different perspectives of later life corresponded to their own, purposeful respondents in this study rated *all* of the perspectives (both beyond-the-self and self-oriented) more highly as characteristic of later adulthood for them than did non-purposeful respondents. For example, a greater percentage of purposeful respondents (58 percent) than non-purposeful respondents (43 percent) saw later adulthood as a time to do self-oriented activities like traveling or taking classes.

**You can use these findings to:**

- Recruit potential volunteers with messages that emphasize opportunities to learn, make friends, and have fun while making an impact on a cause.
- Help purposeful people choose your cause among all the things they could be doing by highlighting the opportunity's multiple benefits to them and to those they would serve.
- Welcome people with already-full lives into your organization by including messages about flexible, part-time (or part-year) scheduling.
- Engage your most committed or consistent volunteers as ambassadors to recruit others.

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 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).