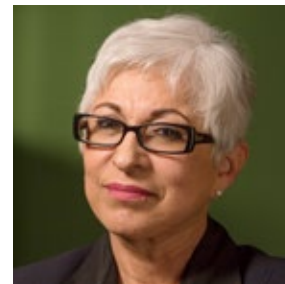
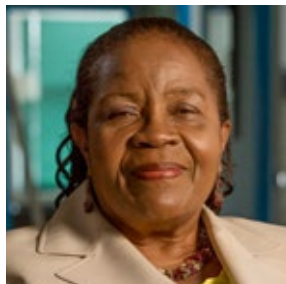


# Purpose in the Encore Years: Shaping Lives of Meaning and Contribution



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## About the Pathways to Encore Purpose Project

The Stanford University-led study described in this report is part of a collaboration between researchers at the Stanford Center on Adolescence at Stanford University's Graduate School of Education and Encore.org. The project has two interconnected aims: to better understand the nature and determinants of purposeful living in the “encore” (post-midlife) years and to use those insights to enable organizations to improve the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of programs that support purposeful aging in widely diverse segments of the population.

The project begins from the assumption that during the productive, active years beyond midlife — the encore years — individuals have the potential to adapt, renew or create lives in which their well-being is grounded in pursuits that are highly meaningful to them while also contributing to the well-being of others, their communities and the wider world.

This study, Purpose in the Encore Years, aims to better understand the nature and implications of purpose for those in their encore years. With a more complete picture of the diversity of encore-stage adults, the authors hope that professionals and organizations will be better able to serve and engage this population.

## About the Stanford Center on Adolescence, Stanford University Graduate School of Education

The Stanford Center on Adolescence (COA) is a scholarly research center that aims to promote the well-being of young people growing up in today's world and to illuminate the lifespan development of qualities, such as purpose, that emerge early in life and continue to evolve throughout adulthood. The COA pursues its mission through scholarly research that can provide information and guidance for parenting, educational practice, and vocational training. A primary focus for the COA is the development of purpose during adolescence and beyond.

## About Encore.org

Encore.org is an innovation hub that taps the talent of the 50+ population as a force for good.

## Acknowledgements

The members of the research team are grateful for the time given to this project by our participants, without whom we could never have done the research. We would like to especially thank those participants who took part in the interviews and opened up their worlds to us.

*Our deepest appreciation goes to the John Templeton Foundation for providing grant support to Stanford University for the Pathways to Encore Purpose project.*

*Principal Investigators: William Damon (Stanford University) and Marc Freedman (Encore.org)*

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## FOREWORD

By Marc Freedman

John Gardner became a professor in public service at Stanford in 1989, after a long and distinguished career that included winning the Presidential Medal of Freedom, serving as President of the Carnegie Corporation, founding Common Cause, and leading the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare during the heart of the Great Society years.

While at Stanford, John — whom I was lucky enough to call my mentor — helped me create Encore.org and co-found Experience Corps, a program to mobilize the time, talent and experience of older Americans to revitalize their communities, provide purpose in their later years, and help young people succeed.

In John's later years, as age and illness began to weigh heavily on him, he took a piece of construction paper, neatly folded it into a square, then inscribed a single word on it — *purpose* — before taping it to the wall above his desk. The touchstone helped him get through his last year of life, his grandson told me. It helped him stay focused on what mattered most.

John would be thrilled to know that Stanford and Encore.org have collaborated on this study of purpose in the encore years.

As researchers, innovators and organizers, we set out to learn more about what purpose looks like for people over 50 today. We found that purpose shapes people's lives — without regard for age, income, health status or geography — in powerful ways, fostering optimism and well-being, and supporting robust engagement with a full array of life goals.

**“True happiness involves the full use of one's power and talents.” — John Gardner**

What we learned affirms our belief in the power of the years beyond midlife, deepens our commitment to channeling this windfall of human talent to improve communities, and strengthens our resolve to ensure that older generations leave a better world for younger ones.

We learned, too, that we must keep asking questions if we are to succeed in building a movement to tap the talent of the 50+ population as a force for good. How can we reach all who want and need to make a difference? How can we encourage those who may not be strongly motivated by purpose beyond the self to give it a try? What changes and innovations might increase the movement's size, breadth and impact? Insights and answers can be found in the ensuing pages.

In our complex world, it's a simple truth that those beyond midlife have a great deal to contribute to society. Our challenge — as John would have surely agreed — is to make it easier for them to follow the purposeful path. So much — in our own lives and the lives of future generations — depends on it.

*Marc Freedman is the president and CEO of Encore.org and the author, most recently, of *The Big Shift: Navigating the New Stage Beyond Midlife*.*

What role does purpose play in the lives of people 50+? And what might the answer mean for people interested in how the United States is aging?

“Pathways to Encore Purpose,” a national study of purpose beyond the self among a representative sample of adults age 50-92, examined life goals, prosocial values and behaviors, perspectives on the progression to later life, and prevalence of purpose in the post-midlife or encore years. The study was conducted by a research team at Stanford University’s Graduate School of Education in collaboration with a team at Encore.org. The teams worked together to make the study’s results accessible and useful to the general public and to organizations and individual practitioners that serve older populations.

## Defining Purpose

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. Throughout this report, “purposeful” refers to people who meet this specific definition of purpose beyond the self; “non-purposeful” refers to people who do not meet this definition.

A growing body of evidence indicates that purpose is associated with academic achievement, vocational success, energy, resilience, and psychological and physical health throughout the lifespan. Purpose can be found in family, work, faith, and other important life missions.

## Findings

Based on nearly 1,200 survey responses and 102 one-hour interviews, this mixed-methods<sup>1</sup> study found that:

1. **The majority of older adults exhibit high levels of prosocial values and behaviors**, such as helping and caring for others, caring for nature and the environment, endorsing equal treatment for all, and seeking to understand people who are different from themselves.
2. **Nearly a third of older adults in the United States (31 percent) exhibit purpose beyond the self** – that is, they identify, prioritize, adopt and actively pursue goals that are both personally meaningful and contribute to the greater good. These commitments are central to these older adults’ identity and sense of meaning in life. Extrapolating to the population as a whole, that’s more than **34 million people** dedicating themselves to making their corner of the world a better place.
3. **Purpose is an equal-opportunity pursuit.** The prevalence of purposeful living does not vary significantly across age, income, health status or geography. The one meaningful difference is that the prevalence of purpose was higher among people of color than among whites. Overall, however, what stands out is that purpose is available to all.

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<sup>1</sup> **Mixed methods** research involves collecting, analyzing and integrating quantitative and qualitative data on the same respondents. In this case, information was collected through a survey and a semi-structured interview.

4. **Purposeful living is not a zero-sum game.** Purposeful living does not crowd out other pleasures and personal goals. Contrary to expectations, people who place a high priority on beyond-the-self goals simultaneously endorse views of later life that embrace self-oriented activities such as continued learning, leisure and the like — even more so than people who aren't engaged with purposeful goals.
5. **People who are purposeful have a positive outlook on life.** The great majority (94 percent) of those interviewed who were purposeful share a trait we call “positivity,” which refers to joy, hopefulness, optimism and other related emotions. Though many people in this group were dealing with serious life problems — such as poverty, poor health, family difficulties and bereavement — they emphasized the joy and satisfaction they experience in their lives, especially in their beyond-the-self engagements.
6. **Freedom is important to purposeful and non-purposeful people in different ways.** In the interview analyses comparing purposeful and non-purposeful adults, half of each group said that a significant source of their well-being was their appreciation of the freedom they were experiencing at this time in their lives. The non-purposeful mostly meant freedom from burdensome responsibilities like paid work and childrearing. The purposeful highlighted the ways they used their freedom for the benefit of all; they loved having the freedom to get more involved beyond the self.

The first four findings are supported by the nationally representative survey data. The last two are based primarily on the interviews. Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative data give us a first-ever picture of how purpose beyond the self looks and functions among older adults.

### **The Value of Purpose**

Historically, researchers and practitioners have used the term “purpose” to convey a sense of meaning or direction. In this study, we use the term to refer specifically to a multidimensional construct of “purpose beyond the self,” defined as “a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self.”<sup>1</sup>

## **Purposeful individuals are among the world's most valuable assets in addressing social issues and making the world a better place.**

This study's criteria for purpose set a high bar. Those who are purposeful place at the top of their priorities goals that are both meaningful to them and that are intended to contribute to something larger. They are actively engaged in pursuing those goals and plan to keep doing so. These commitments are central to their lives and their sense of who they are.

This means that purposeful individuals are among the world's most valuable assets in addressing social issues and making the world a better place. They often take leadership, they show persistence, love what they do, and are motivated by more than self-interest. Due in part to their purpose in life, they not only contribute, they also find life especially satisfying.

## **Conclusion**

This study is good news for older adults as well as for the organizations that might recruit them into paid and unpaid roles. Growing evidence shows that purpose, generativity (the desire to nurture younger generations), and practices like volunteering have robust positive effects for older adults, including positive outcomes on mental and physical health. Further, goals related to positive human relationships, social contribution and spirituality are more closely associated with positive well-being than goals like achievement, power and material success.

To increase community service opportunities for people who have beyond-the-self goals but may not be fully engaged in pursuing them, the authors suggest paying attention to transition points in the lives of people 50+, to their specific interests, and to potential barriers to engagement — for example, the cost of transportation, or juggling multiple work and caregiving roles.

Our research demonstrates the power of purpose in the lives of older adults and underscores the desire of this growing population to contribute to the well-being of others in their community and the wider world.

# Purpose in the Encore Years: Shaping Lives of Meaning and Contribution

## INTRODUCTION

The idea that purpose in life is a powerful force that helps both individuals and societies flourish has become a dominant theme in education, youth services and public discourse about adolescent and young adult development. Following Stanford professor and renowned purpose expert William Damon and others who have led the field in this research, we 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.*

Until now, however, very little has been known about purpose beyond the self among older adults. The few studies of late-adult purpose that have been reported equate purpose with being goal-directed and use measures that lack a beyond-the-self dimension. Prior research has also been limited because it focused exclusively on group averages and other quantitative statistics rather than describing what purpose looks like for individuals who clearly exhibit it.

This report, part of the **Pathways to Encore Purpose Project**, explores these research questions:

- How prevalent is purpose beyond the self in older adults?
- Is purpose beyond the self most often found in those with economic and social privileges or is it more widely distributed?
- How do individuals' purpose goals relate to their other personal goals?
- How do purposeful older people experience their drive toward social contribution?
- How does purpose beyond the self in older adults relate to other aspects of well-being?

Growing evidence that purpose, generativity, volunteering and other beyond-the-self pursuits have robust positive effects for older adults strongly suggests that beyond-the-self purpose is a pivotal personal strength in later life, just as it is for younger people. This report adds to that evidence base and builds on several other bodies of work, including positive psychology, health and well-being, and volunteering. (For a longer description of related literature, please see Appendix 1.)

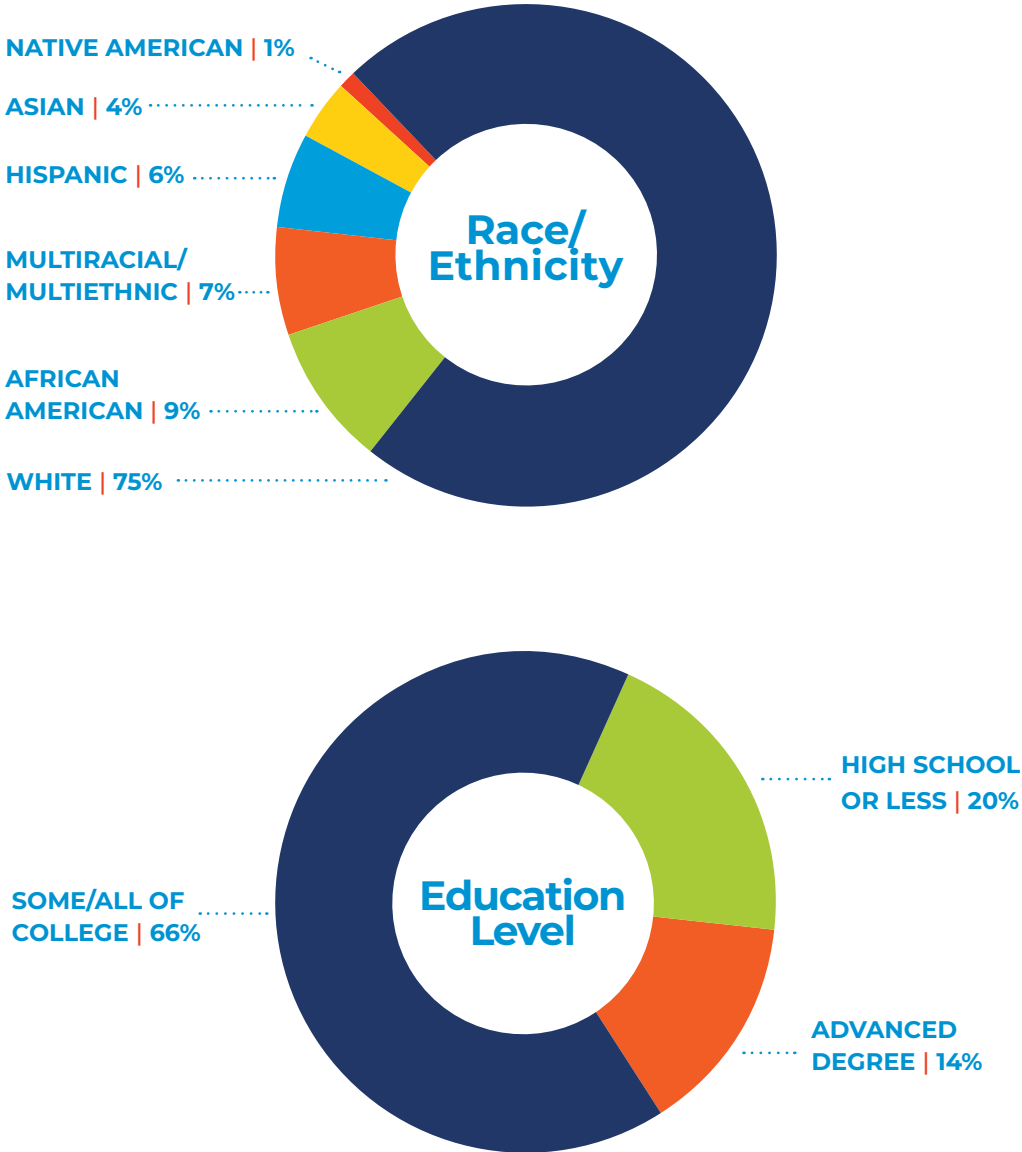
The research we report here seeks to illuminate the nature of purpose in later life and to answer questions posed by organizations like Encore.org that seek to foster older adults' purposeful contributions.



**METHODOLOGY**

The study described in this report includes a nationally representative sample of 1,198 adults age 50 to 92, with a median age of 62. The sample was evenly split between men and women. All 1,198 completed a survey, and a subsample of 102 adults took part in one-hour telephone interviews.

The table below describes the characteristics of survey participants.



Survey participants were presented with a list of 10 life goals, half of which were oriented “beyond the self” and half of which were more self-oriented. (One goal, related to spiritual pursuits, was considered both self-oriented and beyond-the-self.) Participants rated these goals in terms of their importance to them and ranked them in order of importance. They then answered questions about several aspects of their ongoing commitment to their top three ranked goals. Participants were categorized as purposeful if they selected a beyond-the-self goal as one of their top three goals; rated it as at least *very important*; and indicated a strong commitment to pursuing that goal. All other respondents were categorized as non-purposeful for the purposes of this study.

## The Ten Life Goals

### Beyond-the-Self Goals

Work on something that improves the lives of others

Work on something that contributes to the world

Teach what I've learned in life to others

Contribute to building a good community

Pursue my spiritual goals<sup>11</sup>

### Self Goals

Pursue a hobby or sport that I love

Work toward strengthening my financial situation or building up my net worth

Continue or develop a successful career

Gain new skills and knowledge

Find ways to spend time with good friends

Similarly, we categorized those we interviewed as purposeful if their responses showed all of these characteristics:

1. described an “impact goal” — a goal or intention to make a difference on an issue of consequence beyond the self;
2. articulated beyond-the-self reasons for the goal's importance;
3. described significant, ongoing activity toward the goal;
4. articulated beyond-the-self reasons for those activities; and
5. gave evidence that the beyond-the-self concerns and pursuits are a very significant focus of their life — that beyond-the-self concerns constitute a driver of their actions. Respondents returned to the beyond-the-self goal spontaneously throughout the interview, expressed strong feelings about the goal, and/or described their work connected with the goal as a major commitment, one of a small number of central preoccupations.

See **Appendix II** for the complete methodology.

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<sup>11</sup> Spirituality can function as a beyond-the-self and a self-oriented goal. Participants were defined as “purposeful” only if they also ranked one of the other beyond-the-self goals among their top three goals.

## FINDINGS

The findings from this mixed-methods study comprise both nationally representative survey results and results from qualitative analyses of interviews. Each offers its own insights and, taken together, they give us a broader picture of the ways that purpose is expressed in older adults' lives.

Findings from the 1,200-person survey reveal a positive picture of older adults' life goals, prosocial values and behaviors, perspectives on the progression to later life, and the prevalence of purpose. Hour-long telephone interviews with 102 survey respondents allowed us to describe the lives of purposeful older adults and how these individuals differ from others their age who don't exhibit purpose.

**Finding 1. The majority of older adults exhibit high levels of prosocial values and behaviors,** such as helping and caring for others, caring for nature and the environment, endorsing equal treatment for all, and seeking to understand people who are different from them.

This finding has several aspects, including what people say they value and how those values are expressed through paid and unpaid work.

- *Prosocial values.* The survey findings indicate that the majority of older adults place great value on social equity and empathy. Specifically, 60 percent find it very important to help and care for others, 67 percent strongly believe in equal treatment for all, 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.
- *Prosocial behaviors.* Findings indicate that older adults both hold and behave in alignment with their prosocial values, as indicated by behaviors like volunteering. More specifically, 22 percent of respondents volunteer once a month or more, and more than half of those individuals (12 percent of the overall group) volunteer at least weekly. The most widely endorsed reason given for volunteering is that people feel it is important to help others.

In addition to volunteering, older adults reported prosocial behavior more broadly. For example, 65 percent of older adults say they are strongly inclined to help, care for, and console others. Among all respondents, nearly half say they always or often try to help young people achieve their potential. Among the purposeful respondents, 71 percent say they always or often do this.

- *Paid work as a source of meaning.* More than half (55 percent) of older adults consider their own 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) and contributing to society or the community (46 percent).

## Prosocial Values

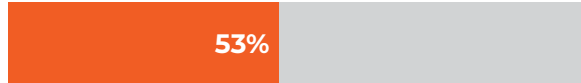
Very important to care for others



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



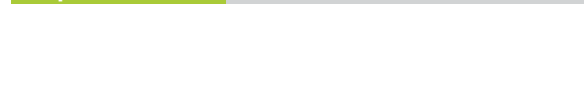
Often/always try to help young people achieve their full potential



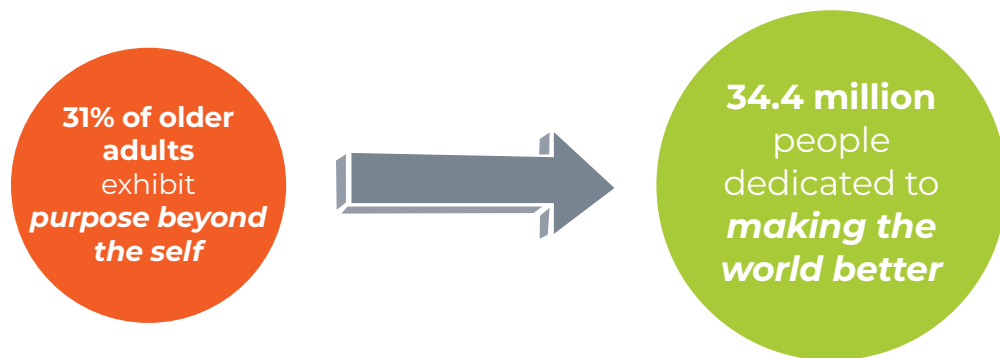
Purposeful respondents



Non-purposeful respondents



**Finding 2. Nearly a third of older adults in the United States (31 percent) exhibit purpose beyond the self** – that is, they identify, prioritize, adopt and actively pursue goals that are both personally meaningful and contribute to the greater good. These commitments are central to these older adults' identity and sense of meaning in life. Extrapolating to the population as a whole, that's more than **34 million** people dedicating themselves to making their corner of the world a better place.



Information from the interviews illustrates the variety of ways that purpose beyond the self is expressed. Given the diversity among the people interviewed, it's not surprising that the issues they are addressing vary widely. Their concerns included poverty, human rights, aging, cultural institutions, religious issues and institutions, youth mentorship, community development, animal rights, health and mental health, and service to a wide array of nonprofits. Many occupy leadership roles in political and humanitarian organizations, such as founder of a nonprofit, director of a community food bank, and nonprofit board member. All maintain significant time commitments to this work. All had been seriously engaged for years at the time of the interview and expected to remain so in the future. Some were paid for their purposeful work; most were not.

In virtually every case, we could trace the origins of the purposeful adults' involvement to their long-standing experiences and interests. Some sought ways to continue using their professional skills after they retired from paid work. For example, one retired accountant went on to assist low-income elderly people in financial planning and tax preparation, while another served on finance committees of nonprofit boards. A transgender woman gave up her government position to work in a café and bakery that served as a meeting place and political center for the LGBTQ community. Several people had adopted animals from shelters or neglectful homes, caring for them and, over time, becoming active in other issues related to animal rights and welfare. In other cases, either the initial engagement or the transition from casual to serious involvement followed an invitation from an organization or individual.

The concept of purposeful commitment connotes intense focus on a single issue or cluster of closely connected concerns. For many of the purposeful respondents in our study, this description is apt, but almost as many engage with multiple issues and organizations. Some examples:

- A man working in dog rescue is also involved with environmental issues and, along with his wife, is training in public health so the two of them can become international health aides when they retire.
- A woman who works to combat drug addiction and homelessness also plays a significant part in the cultural life of her community.
- A man who founded and runs a major international aid organization also started and remains engaged with an organization that tracks and addresses health needs of southeastern U.S. Native American tribes. He is also involved with his church and several military veterans' groups.

**“The idea of citizen science is pretty exciting to me.  
I have been active, oh it’s been over 10 years.  
But in [our] County here, we have salmon in some of the  
streams, and I was one of the stream watchers for the  
county. I would go out every week, at least twice a week,  
and observe a stream and count how many fish,  
how many salmon of different types would show up.  
And so, the idea of citizen science getting  
the laymen involved in science and hopefully getting the  
next generation involved in science is exciting to me.”**

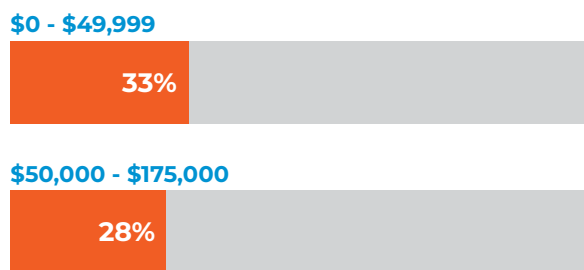
Interview Respondent:

*man still working full-time and volunteering in citizen science and dog rescue*

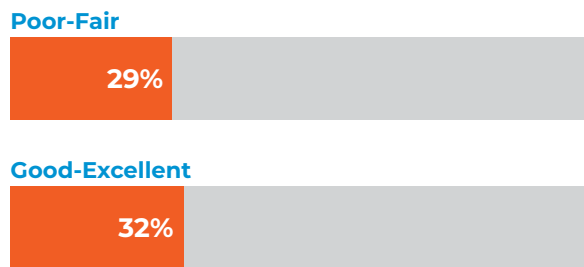
**Finding 3: Purpose is an equal-opportunity pursuit.** The prevalence of purposeful living does not vary significantly across income, health status, age or geography. Overall, what stands out is that purpose is available to all.

From the survey, we learned that people who are purposeful beyond the self come from the full range of educational backgrounds, socio-economic circumstances, ages, genders and regions of the country. The prevalence of purpose beyond the self does not vary significantly across these demographic categories, except that women are slightly more likely than men to be purposeful and people with the highest level of educational attainment (e.g. Ph.D.) were slightly more likely than others to be purposeful. In addition, like other studies of purpose beyond the self, we found that rates of purpose were higher among people of color. This was a statistically and practically significant finding that the authors believe merits further study, and may have important implications for practice.<sup>III,2</sup>

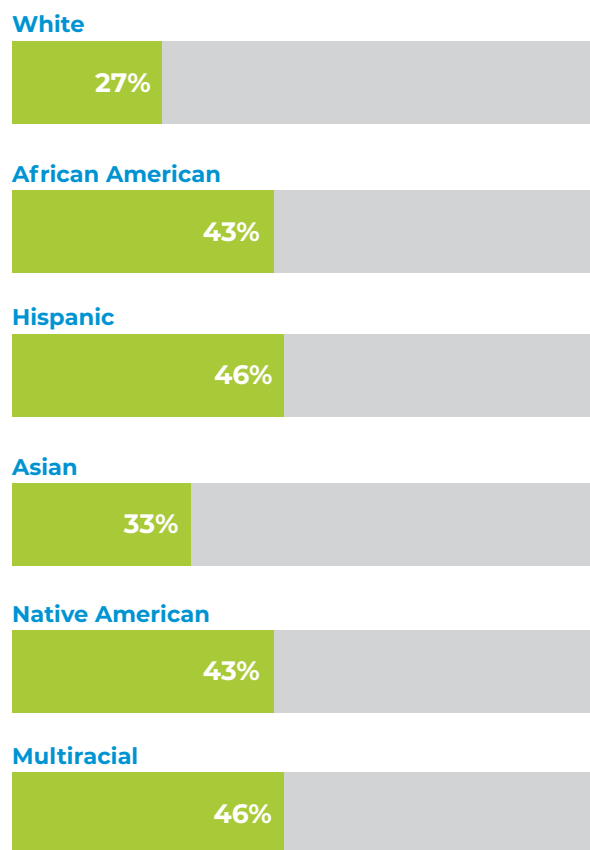
### Purposeful by Income



### Purposeful by Health



### Purposeful by Race-Ethnicity



<sup>III</sup> While there are also statistically significant differences with respect to gender and education, statistical significance does not necessarily imply practical significance. The effect sizes for gender and education — a measure of practical significance — were below the commonly-accepted thresholds for even small practical significance.

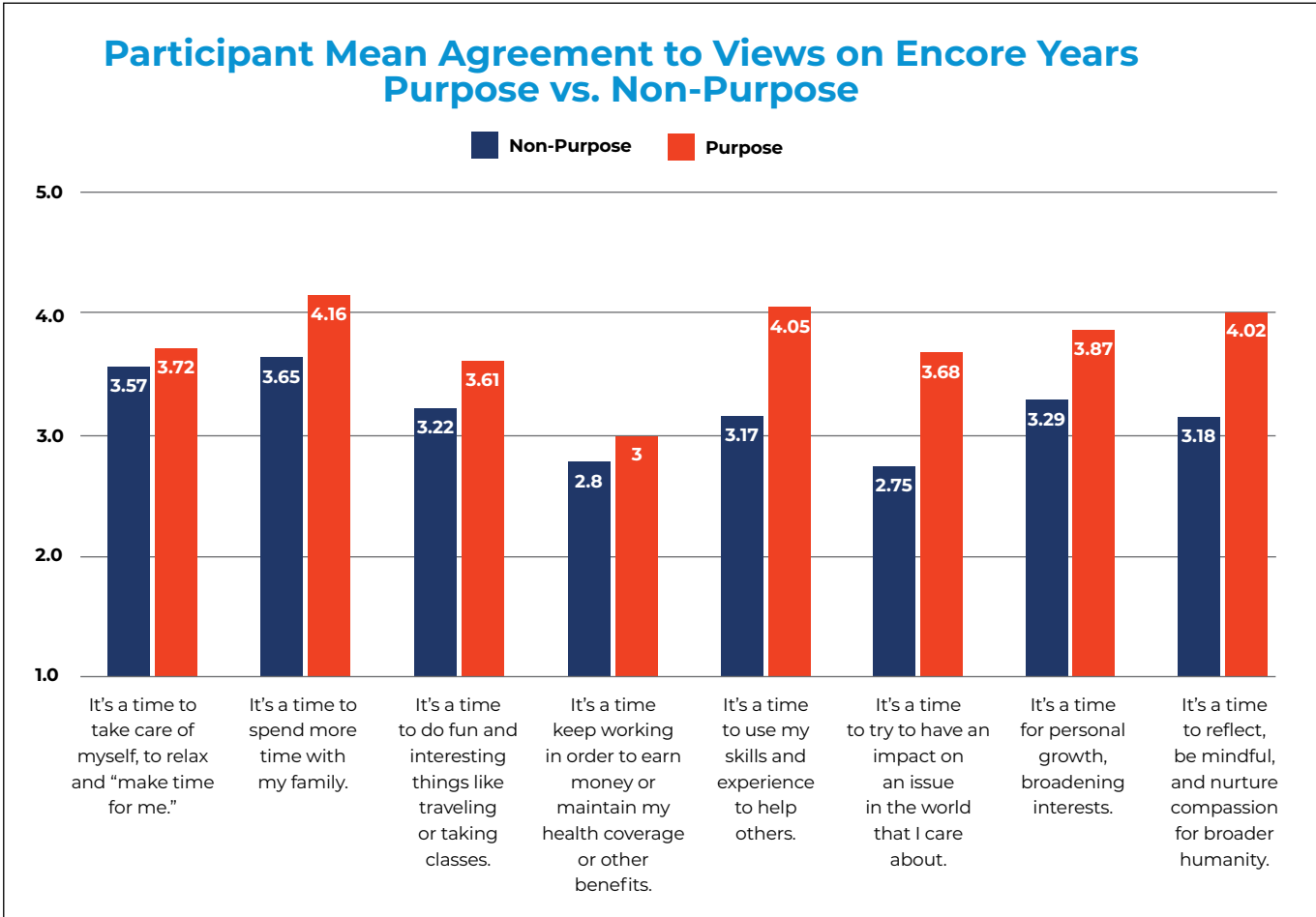
Interestingly, health status was not associated with differences in prevalence of purpose. Those who rated their health as fair or poor are as likely to be purposeful as those who rated their health as good or excellent. Also, the oldest respondents were as likely to be purposeful as younger ones. And people who are still working for pay and those who are retired are about equally likely to be purposeful beyond the self.

Lengthy telephone interviews with 102 survey respondents allowed us to describe the lives of purposeful older adults and how these individuals differ from their age peers who don't exhibit purpose. These interviews affirmed the survey findings; we found that the purposeful participants are extremely diverse, as described below.

While the majority of purposeful interviewees came from the working and middle classes, the group also included several older adults living in poverty and a few who are quite affluent. The 102 people we interviewed represent many ethnicities and six religious traditions. Some are employed, while others have retired from paid work. They are married, single, widowed and divorced. The group includes people who identify as straight, gay and transgender. Their political views are diverse. Some are healthy, while some are disabled or dealing with chronic disease or even life-threatening illness.

The finding that a substantial share of older adults across the range of demographic categories are purposeful beyond the self is good news — for those individuals, their communities and society more generally.

**Finding 4: 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 activities. This picture of purposeful living is backed up by the survey data, which showed that purposeful respondents more 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.



This finding surprised the authors. We had expected that purposeful survey respondents would be more likely to see later adulthood as a time to engage in beyond-the-self activities, whereas non-purposeful respondents would be more likely to see later adulthood as a time to engage in more self-oriented activities. However, this expectation was not borne out. 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. This finding suggests that those with purpose did not sacrifice self-oriented pursuits in their encore years to prioritize beyond-the-self activities, but rather managed to focus both on self-oriented and beyond-the-self-oriented pursuits.

And while this might seem to suggest that purposeful respondents have more physical energy due to better health, enabling them to engage more fully in both beyond-the-self and self-oriented ways, this is not the case. Self-rated health was not associated with differences in prevalence of purpose in the larger sample, and many of the purposeful interviewees had serious health problems. In fact, interviews of those who remain engaged despite serious illness provide especially vivid illustrations of the *joie de vivre* of purposeful individuals and the energy-generating nature of their related activities.

**Finding 5: People who are purposeful have a positive outlook on life.** The survey results show that higher levels of life satisfaction are associated with purpose. Fleshing out this finding, the great majority (94 percent) of those interviewed who were unambiguously purposeful share a trait we call “positivity,” which refers to joy, hopefulness, optimism and other related emotions. Though many people in this group were dealing with serious life problems, such as poverty, poor health, family difficulties, and bereavement — they emphasized the joy and satisfaction they experience in their lives, especially in their beyond-the-self engagements.

For example, a woman pursuing both social-service and cultural goals described the satisfaction of working with people in recovery from addiction by saying, “When someone starts getting it right, and you start watching that change, and them taking on the responsibility of their lives, and trying new things, that’s unbelievable. Just the feeling, the excitement . . . It’s just an incredible, incredible experience, for me at least, to be there, to watch this person week by week, month by month. All of a sudden, they’re paying their bills, they’ve got a job, they’re taking their meds. Little stuff . . . but it’s what they never did before. . . . And you watch that growth and . . . that’s just phenomenal. That’s my reward.”

**“The best way to have real joy in life is to give,  
to help others, whether you give yourself, or give financially.  
Try to do what you can to help each other.  
... I’ve spent most of my life helping others and trying to make  
a difference in the lives of people individually or collectively.”**

Interview Respondent:  
*a Native American social entrepreneur*

**Finding 6: Freedom is important to purposeful and non-purposeful people in different ways.**

In the interview analyses comparing purposeful and non-purposeful adults, half of each group said that a significant source of their well-being was their appreciation of the freedom they were experiencing at this time in their lives. The non-purposeful mostly meant freedom from burdensome responsibilities like paid work and childrearing. The purposeful highlighted their involvement beyond the self.

One interview question asked respondents to describe what seemed special to them in their current, encore stage of life. In response, many people said this stage of life had brought a welcome increase in their sense of freedom. When we compared a group of interviewees who were clearly purposeful with a group whose interviews indicated that they were non-purposeful, respondents in the two groups were about equally likely to refer to valuing freedom – roughly half of the interviewees in each group said that freedom was especially important to them in the encore years.

Despite the two groups' shared emphasis on the importance of freedom, the groups were strikingly different in the meaning that freedom had for them. In every non-purpose case that referred to freedom, the respondent focused on relief at being free of the set schedules of work or, for those not yet retired, free of other life responsibilities. Many went on to say how much they were enjoying doing “whatever they want” every day, and most were enthusiastic about their increased freedom. As an 81-year-old (non-purposeful) woman said: “It’s like being a teenager but having an allowance and being able to do what you want, when you want. It’s just wonderful. . . . I can concentrate on myself. . . . I want to do something fun every day so that by the end of the day, I feel like, ‘Oh, this was a great time in my life.’”

**“You have so much more freedom  
than you have any other time in your life.**

**It’s a gift, and I try to use that gift the best I can every day.”**

Interview Respondent

Although most in the non-purpose group enjoyed their newly acquired freedom, almost a third were ambivalent, glad for the freedom from responsibility but also bored or directionless. These responses contrast sharply with freedom as experienced by the strong-purpose group. One 76-year-old woman said she enjoyed not having to “get up and punch a time clock,” but went on to describe an intense daily routine that began at 6 a.m. with paperwork for her son’s business and went on to several major volunteer commitments throughout the day. It is remarkable and telling that the intense schedule she maintains, despite significant health problems, feels to her like freedom.

Many of the highly purposeful individuals connected their freedom with their beyond-the-self concerns. Some said they had gained a sense of freedom by standing up for what they really believed in — being true to themselves. Some said they had taken advantage of their freedom from previously time-consuming responsibilities to take on more demanding roles aligned with their beyond-the-self purpose. As one said, “You have so much more freedom than you have any other time in your life. It’s a gift, and I try to use that gift the best I can every day.” As another said: “We have more freedom, that’s for sure. But we try to use that freedom to everybody’s benefit.”

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

In addition to coding both purpose and non-purpose interviews for themes like freedom, we also coded the non-purpose cases for expressions of interest in greater beyond-the-self engagement.

For half of the non-purpose cases, movement toward greater beyond-the-self engagement does not seem to be on the horizon. These individuals fall into two main categories: 1) those who relish an easy, undemanding life above all else; and 2) those who are so highly engaged in their self-related goals that they feel fully occupied and uninterested in making any changes.

The other half of those in the non-purpose group are good candidates for more involvement beyond the self. Those who showed this potential fell into three groups:

1. People who express interest in or concern with a particular issue (such as helping animals or tutoring young people), have done some work on behalf of the issue already, and are open to doing more.
2. Those who say they like to be productive, like to help others, and are seeking a greater sense of fulfillment.
3. Those who would like to make better use of the skills they developed in the workplace to make a contribution after retirement.

To this point, a range of **barriers** has kept these individuals from engaging further. For example, two women mentioned that their husbands opposed their volunteering. Two others said that they had recently moved and found it difficult to connect with their new communities. And two more stepped back from engagement when volunteer programs they had been involved with closed; these respondents said they hadn't found other programs that interested them. Several, mostly those who were still working, said they were too busy to do more at present but looked forward to being more involved in the future.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FIELD

A careful review of the non-purpose interview cases suggests a number of recommendations for reaching out to people who have expressed an interest in being more fully engaged. Several of these support best practices already in place among volunteer managers — for example, finding the right fit for a new volunteer based on specific interests. The examples offered in the interviews may encourage new thinking about how or where those best practices can be applied.

Practitioners seeking to engage more older adults in a cause, as well as those interested in boosting older adults' well-being, can:

**Build on people's expressions of interest to find the right match for engaging them in purposeful pursuits.** Rather than reflecting a general wish to “give back,” individual interests are often quite specific. Organizations that match people with a variety of volunteer opportunities can use intake interviews (with individuals or small groups) or simple, written application procedures to identify interests and skills people may want to use or explore in their volunteer projects.

One interviewee, for example, said that he would like to build on his background in science and technology to engage gifted low-income youth in STEM fields. Another man said that he is “an adrenaline junkie” and would enjoy volunteer work with a fire or police department. Another said he loves to tinker with and repair computers, a skill he uses to help his friends but could also make available to organizations with missions that interest him. Two women said that they love dogs and would like to work with an animal shelter. Those who expressed these kinds of specific interests often said they would respond positively if asked, though they didn’t actively seek out opportunities to engage.

**Provide transitional support for affected volunteers when a program closes or changes its focus.**

Even if volunteers enjoy the work and would like to stay involved, many don’t know where to look when a program ends. If programs that close were to provide even minimal support and encouragement for their former volunteers, connecting them with a matching service or website and encouraging them to stay in touch with each other, this could increase the chances that the volunteers would find other opportunities to contribute to some of the same causes.

**Reach out to people new to a community; they may want to volunteer as a way to get to know their new neighborhood and neighbors.** Some of the interviewees said that they had enjoyed contributing to the communities where they used to live but had not been able to connect with similar opportunities after moving. This suggests that it could be beneficial for neighborhood associations and residences like apartment buildings or assisted living facilities to connect their new members with both resources and personal introductions that can help people get reconnected to volunteering.

**Keep purposeful professionals engaged.** Sometimes older adults are purposeful beyond the self during their working lives, but find few outlets for these interests and commitments after they retire. Professional associations in some fields have begun to form interest groups for retiring members that help them explore what they might do next and connect them with opportunities to continue using their professional skills in satisfying ways. The experiences of some of the professionals in our sample underscore the value of this kind of program. Although clearly purposeful about their work, some seemed to be floundering as they attempted to sort out their next steps.

**Connect with occasional volunteers, helping them make the transition to more substantial engagements when they are ready, often after retirement or other life events.** Many respondents who were still working at the time of the interview reported that they would like to step up their engagement after retirement. If organizations were to identify and connect with these individuals prior to retirement, helping them refine and solidify their plans, this intention toward increased engagement would be more likely to stay on track when a significant life transition comes.

**Expand use of stipends or other compensation.** Some low-income interviewees said that they would like to do more to contribute but that they could not cover even the modest expenses that volunteering can entail. These respondents said that even a very small stipend or other compensation would offset this barrier. This suggests that organizations could use modest compensation such as stipends, transportation reimbursement, or on-site meals to expand the talent pool, especially for roles that require a sustained commitment.

In short, don't count anyone out. The research tells us that there's a big appetite among older adults for purposeful engagement. This is as true for people in their 80s and 90s as it is for those in earlier decades. It's true for people who report their health is poor, as well as for those who are healthy. And it's true for people across a wide spectrum of education and income. The best assumption to make, given the findings, is that when you ask someone 50+ to help with a specific need, he or she is likely to say yes.

## **PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Given the importance of purpose both to individuals and to society, the phenomenon warrants continued exploration. Our study, the first to describe what purpose looks like among older adults, suggests valuable questions for future research.

For example: To what extent are people who are purposeful in later life those who learned in childhood or adolescence about the importance of giving back? Do some people exhibit clear purpose in adolescence or early adulthood only to lose these qualities later through disillusion, unfortunate choices or circumstances, or other barriers? Do they tend to be people who found purpose in their midlife work and have maintained that purpose ever since? Might they have responded to major personal or social challenges with a dramatic shift toward social concern and contribution in adulthood?

The one demographic finding showing both statistically and practically significant differences in purpose beyond the self—the role of race/ethnicity—contributes to a small but growing body of research suggesting a higher prevalence of purpose and related constructs for people of color, including older adults. For example, Hart and colleagues<sup>3</sup> found that levels of generativity were higher for African-American middle-to-late adults compared to whites when controlling for education and income; and Ko and colleagues<sup>4</sup> found that levels of purpose (as measured by Ryff's 1989 Purpose In Life subscale) were higher for older African-American adults, relative to whites.

While there is growing attention to these potential racial/ethnic differences in purpose, and some hypotheses about the reasons, Claremont University's Kendall Cotton Bronk<sup>5</sup> concluded in her thorough 2013 review of the literature on purpose that research on the experiences of purpose among diverse groups is sorely lacking. The authors join her in calling for a more robust research agenda to better understand the degree to which experiences and contexts related to race and ethnicity play a role in the development of purpose beyond the self in later life as well as earlier in the life span.

The paths into and out of purpose are no doubt varied and complex. Research designed to illuminate this complexity could help educators and others working to foster purpose find ways to help as many as possible reach their purpose potential.

Some questions are more immediately practical: What can nonprofits, organizations serving older adults (such as senior centers or residential communities), and individual practitioners do to connect with purposeful individuals seeking new opportunities to pursue their passions, and with those whose latent purpose might be ripe for the next level of commitment?

Other important questions concern older adults who are not “purposeful,” who constitute the majority of respondents in this study. Included in this group are many who contribute to their communities, support their families and friends, add elements of compassion and civility to everyday life, and do regular, if not deeply engaging, volunteer work.

Full-fledged purposeful commitment is not the only way to contribute to others and the common good. Nor is it the only way to have a good life in later adulthood. One valuable direction for future research would be to understand distinctive patterns of flourishing in late adulthood that may have prosocial dimensions but are not accounted for by our current construct of purpose beyond the self. A better map of this landscape would help professionals serving older adults or organizations interested in engaging them further individualize approaches that support longer lives filled with meaning, dignity, contribution and well-being.

## ENDNOTES

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## APPENDIX I: LITERATURE REVIEW

The idea that purpose in life is a powerful force that helps both individuals and societies flourish has become a dominant theme in education, youth services and public discourse about adolescent and young adult development. Following Stanford professor and renowned purpose expert William Damon and others who have led the field in this research, we 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.

Until now, however, very little has been known about purpose beyond the self among older adults. The few studies of late-adult purpose that have been reported equate purpose with being goal-directed and use measures that lack a beyond-the-self dimension. Prior research has also been limited because it focused exclusively on group averages and other quantitative statistics rather than describing what purpose looks like for individuals who clearly exhibit it.

This report, part of the **Purpose in the Encore Years Project**, explores these research questions:

- How prevalent is purpose beyond the self in older adults?
- Is purpose beyond the self most often found in those with economic and social privileges or is it more widely distributed?
- Among those who are purposeful, what goals are especially salient?
- How do individuals' purpose goals relate to their other personal goals?
- How do purposeful older people experience their drive toward social contribution? How does purpose beyond the self in older adults relate to other aspects of well-being?

Growing evidence that purpose, generativity, volunteering and other beyond-the-self pursuits have robust positive effects for older adults strongly suggests that beyond-the-self purpose is a pivotal personal strength in later life, just as it is for younger people. This report adds to that evidence base, and builds on several other bodies of work, including positive psychology, health and well-being, and volunteering.

For example, University of Wisconsin Professor Carol Ryff and her colleagues, along with researchers within the positive psychology tradition, have shown that purpose in life contributes to many positive outcomes, including both physical and mental health.<sup>1,2</sup> Ryff's research group and others have begun to describe the physiological bases for these effects, looking directly at the biological correlates of well-being, including immune factors and neuroendocrine response to challenge.

Of course, the fact that purpose in life contributes to better health does not mean it can prevent health problems entirely. If we live long enough, all of us have to cope with health-related issues. This raises the critical question of whether one can maintain a life of meaning, commitment, and hope in the face of inevitable health challenges. Evidence is accumulating for an affirmative response to this question.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

Catherine Heaney (2017), for example, has shown that individuals' sense of wellness or well-being is largely independent of disease, depending more on their sense of purpose and meaning in life than on their physical health status. Heaney's study is consistent with Ryan and Deci's earlier finding that one's sense of vitality is subjective to a large extent, with self-perception of health states being a more significant factor in subjective well-being than objective indicators of health status.<sup>6</sup>

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Research conducted by Robert Emmons and others about what people strive for in life provides clear evidence that the nature of an individual's goals makes an important difference in their well-being. These studies find that what we call *beyond-the-self goals* (in Emmons' scheme, goals that relate to positive human relationships, social contribution and spirituality) are reliably more predictive of high levels of well-being than are achievement, power and material goals.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, goals that are understood to have intrinsic value and are pursued for intrinsic rather than extrinsic reasons are positively associated with well-being, whereas goals representing extrinsic values and motivation are not.<sup>8</sup>

Research on volunteering provides additional evidence for the benefits to individuals of beyond-the-self goals and action. Carr (2015), Greenfield & Marks (2004), Kim & Konrath (2016), Moen & Fields (2002) and others have found that volunteering has a significant, positive effect on the mental and physical health and well-being of volunteers, especially those who are older and/or low-income.

Breaking this finding down more finely, research that follows people over time has shown that, like parenting, volunteering increases meaning-based (eudaimonic) but not pleasure-centered (hedonic) well-being.<sup>9</sup> In a related vein, the eminent psychiatrist and lifespan researcher George Vaillant has shown that *generativity* — the desire to leave a positive legacy for succeeding generations — is the key to successful aging in his samples of both privileged and working-class men and women followed for almost 75 years.<sup>10</sup>

The research we report here seeks to illuminate the nature of purpose in later life and to answer questions posed by organizations, like Encore.org, that seek to foster older adults' purposeful contributions.



## APPENDIX I: LITERATURE REVIEW

### LITERATURE ENDNOTES

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## APPENDIX II: METHODOLOGY

### **Definition: Purpose Beyond the Self**

Historically, researchers and practitioners have used the term “purpose” to generally reflect a sense of meaning or direction. In the present study, we use the term to refer specifically to a multidimensional construct of “purpose beyond the self,” defined as **“a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self”** (Damon et al., 2003).

### **Demographics of the Study Participants**

The **Purpose in the Encore Years Project** (PEP) study included a nationally representative sample of 1198 adults age 50 to 92, with a median age of 62. All 1,198 completed a survey and a subsample of 102 adults took part in one-hour telephone interviews.

Half (50 percent) of the participants identified as female, 73 percent identified as white, 9 percent as African-American, 6 percent as Hispanic, 4 percent as Asian, 1 percent as Native American and 7 percent as multiracial or multiethnic. The sample was socioeconomically diverse: Participants’ average annual household income was \$57,947 and ranged from \$20,000 to \$200,000. Just over half of the sample (56 percent) was married or partnered. In terms of education level, 20 percent of the survey sample reported completing high school or less, 66 percent completed some or all of college and 14 percent received an advanced degree (e.g., M.A., M.D., Ph.D.).

### **The Nationally Representative Survey: Elements and Analysis**

The survey was voluntary and participants received a small payment in exchange for participation. The survey questionnaire included approximately 60 questions about participant demographics, life goals, prosocial values and behaviors, and purpose beyond the self.<sup>1</sup> On average, the survey took about 25 minutes to complete.

*Demographic characteristics.* Participants responded to questions about their age, gender, race/ethnicity, marital/partner status, education, current state of residence, type of residence (city, suburb, small town, or rural area), religion, and household income.

*Life goals and purpose beyond the self.* The measure of purpose developed for this study begins by presenting participants with a list of 10 life goals (e.g., “Teach what I’ve learned in life to others”) and asked them to rate the goals in terms of personal importance (on a scale from 1 = *not important* to 5 = *very important*).

Next, participants ranked their top three goals from the same list of 10 goals. Half of the goals were designed to be more beyond-the-self-oriented in nature (e.g., “Contribute to building a good community”), and half were more self-oriented in nature (e.g., “Continue or develop a successful career”).

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After participants answered the questions regarding the 10 life goals, we asked participants to respond to five statements about their broad commitment toward their top three goals. Participants answered questions about current engagement (“In any given month, I’m usually doing something to…”); meaning (“This life goal reflects my life’s meaning and purpose”); future importance (“I expect this life goal to be important to me for the foreseeable future”); goal clarity (“I’m clear about how to work toward my life goal to…”) and identity (“It’s part of who I am to…”), on a scale from 1 to 5 (i.e. “Not at all true” to “Entirely true”). We averaged the scores on these five follow-up questions about broad commitment to give each participant a “commitment” score toward their goals.

If the participant selected a beyond-the-self goal as one of their top three goals, rated it as at least *very important*, and had a commitment score toward their goal of 4 or more (out of 5), they were categorized as purposeful. All other participants were categorized as non-purposeful. Thus, the non-purposeful group included participants who selected important beyond-the-self goals but were not currently engaged in pursuing those goals, in addition to participants who didn’t select any beyond-the-self goals. Future research will further delineate these groups.

*Prosocial values.* We asked participants a number of questions about their prosocial values. We asked about their views regarding helping others (“It’s very important to me to help the people around me. I want to care for other people”); regarding equal treatment for all (“I am someone who thinks it is important that every person in the world be treated equally . . . and wants justice for everybody, even for people I don’t know”); regarding the environment (“I strongly believe that people should care for nature. Looking after the environment is important to me”) and about seeking to understand those different from them (“I believe it is important to listen to people who are different from me. Even when I disagree with them, I still want to understand them”).

*Prosocial behaviors.* We also asked participants about their prosocial behaviors. We asked about their commitment to and reasons for volunteering (e.g., “Volunteering provides a means through which I can have a positive impact on the world”) and about if and how they find/found meaning in their paid work, depending on whether or not they are currently retired or still working (e.g., “My work is meaningful because it allows/allowed me to have a positive impact on the organization that I worked for”). More broadly, we asked participants whether or not they try to help, care for and console others (e.g., “I try to be close to and take care of those who are in need”); about their engagement with young people (“I try to help young people achieve their potential”) and about their motivations to improve their community (“I get involved in efforts to improve my community”).

*Views on the Encore years.* Lastly, participants were asked to what extent various statements accurately described their personal views on the progression from middle to later adulthood. Some of the items described more self-oriented priorities (e.g., “It’s a time to take care of myself, to relax, and “make time for me”) and some described more beyond-the-self-oriented priorities (e.g., “It’s a time to try to have an impact on an issue in the world that I care about”).

## APPENDIX II: METHODOLOGY

### **Interview Elements and Analysis**

Our interview protocol asked respondents what is important to them and why, and whether and how their lives reflect those priorities. Follow-up questions asked about their life goals and actions in pursuit of those goals. We also asked about interviewees' use of time, social connections, organizational participation, volunteer work, and paid work in retirement. Lastly, we explored their perspectives on aging and mortality, and what role, if any, a sense of freedom plays in their lives. The semi-structured interview was conducted by interviewers trained to probe deeply for elaboration, details and examples.

*Purpose.* Interview transcripts were coded for purpose using methods adapted from an existing coding guide (Stanford Center on Adolescence, 2016) and for other themes with coding guides developed for this study. Purpose coding involved judgments regarding whether the respondent:

1. described what we called an “impact goal,” i.e., a goal or intention to make a difference on an issue of consequence beyond the self;
2. articulated reasons for the goal's importance;
3. described significant, ongoing activity toward the goal;
4. articulated beyond-the-self reasons for those activities; and
5. gave evidence that the beyond-the-self concerns and pursuits are a very significant focus of his or her life — that beyond-the-self concerns constitute a driver of their actions, i.e., respondents either returned to the beyond-the-self goal spontaneously throughout the interview, expressed strong feelings about the goal, and/or described their work connected with the goal as a major commitment, one of a small number of central preoccupations.

### **METHODOLOGY ENDNOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> Respondents were also surveyed on a number of other concepts not included in this report (e.g., well-being, views on aging, etc.).

## **Goals and Activities in Midlife and Beyond Interview Protocol**

### **PURPOSE/PRIORITIES/TIME USE**

*What are some things that are really important to you at this point in your life?*

*What else really matters to you?*

*Can you talk about [X, Y, Z – each item listed by interviewee] , describe and say why it is important to you? **[Ask why is X important to you. Then, why is Y important to you? Z?]***

*How do you spend your time these days?*

*Are there any other activities that you are involved with a lot that you haven't mentioned yet? **[Wait a moment to give him/her time to think.]***

*Can you talk about why it's important to you to spend your time on [X, Y, Z] ?*

*Has the way you spend your time changed significantly in the past few years? If so, how and why? **[If the answer is no, clarify in a general way e.g. sometimes even when people are retired how you spend your time can change. Has this happened?]***

*Is there anything else that really matters to you that we haven't talked about yet?  
**[If yes]** What is it? Can you talk about why that matters to you?*

**[If no purposeful/beyond-the-self commitments or goals are mentioned]** *Have you ever wanted to do something about a problem in the world that you think is important? Can you tell me more about that? Why is that important to you?*

*Do you ever do anything, even small things now and then, to try to make a difference on this? If not, do you have a sense of what is standing in the way of that?*

**[For the next questions, interviewer chooses primary beyond-the-self goal. If none, interviewer chooses respondent's primary goal. If no primary goal, choose one s/he seems to have spent more time on.]** *You said that [X] is important to you. Is that right?*

*Do you have specific goals related to this that you're trying to accomplish? If so, what are they?*

*Are you doing anything about those goals? If so, what are you doing? What challenges have you faced in your wish or efforts to pursue these goals? Has anything prevented you from pursuing these goals?*

## APPENDIX III: THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

*When and how did X first become important to you? How did that come about?*

*How long do you think you'll continue working on X? When do you think you'll stop doing X?*

*What are your plans for this in the next few years?*

### **SOCIAL CONNECTIONS AND COMMITMENTS TO OTHERS**

*At this point, who are the most important people in your life?*

**[Ask about different individuals or groups separately. Next two questions.]**

*How often do you see them or communicate with them?*

*How often do you have occasion to do things – small or large — to help them? What kinds of things do you do for them?*

*Have you ever had occasion to do something (or offered to do something) for someone outside your family and closest friends? Please describe. **[Pause a moment. Anybody else?]***

*Do you ever think of yourself as being a role model for others?*

**[If yes]** *Is that something you intentionally try to do? What does that involve?*

*How often do you have interactions with children, teenagers, or young adults who are not in your family? **[Jot down — ask about each separately.]***

*Tell me about **[X, Y, or Z]**. What does that typically involve? Is this something you value?*

*Do you ever wish you had more of this kind of interaction? Why?*

## APPENDIX III: THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### GROUP OR ORGANIZATIONAL PARTICIPATION

*Are you an active member of any organizations, things like a church or synagogue, a neighborhood organization, an organized self-help group, a book group, something connected with a hobby or interest, or anything like that? If so, how much time do you spend on that and what do you do? [If no, probe a bit more. Reiterate that it doesn't have to be a formal group or institution – it can be associated with an interest or hobby, or be a support group.]*  
*Is this involvement important to you? [If yes] Why?*

*Do you ever do anything for the organization or group or for people who are in it?*  
*[If yes] What kind of thing?*

**[If interviewee has not mentioned being/feeling like part of a community]** *Do you feel that you are part of any community? [If yes] What is that? Do you do anything for the community? [If yes] Please describe.*

### PAID WORK AND RETIREMENT

*If you have spent significant time in your life working for pay, is there some job or career (set of jobs) that seems most defining of your work life? If so, what is that?*

*Are you still in that job or that type of job? [If not] Are you now working at some other job?*  
*[If yes] What is that job?*

**[If not working, ask if retired.]**

**[If retired, ask questions about main defining job, then about retirement.]**

**[If still working in same career, ask work questions about main defining job.]**

**[If still working but in a different type of job, ask work questions about that first, then ask them about the main defining job.]**

**[If still working at a job for pay – either in same field or different one]** *Let's talk now about the work you are doing now? How long have you been doing that? What did you do before?*

*Talking about your current job — Is the work you do personally meaningful to you? If yes, in what ways?*

*What has been important to you about this work; what have you liked; what's been hard about it? Do you expect to retire at some point? When? What will determine when you will retire?*

*What do you hope for in retirement? What will be important for you at that stage? Why? Is there anything you fear about retirement? (Please describe.)*

## APPENDIX III: THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Questions about Main Defining Job

*The next questions are about the work that you've identified as most defining of your work life.*

*Was that work personally meaningful to you? If yes, in what ways?*

*What was important to you about this work; what did you like; what was hard about it?*

**[If retired]** *When did you retire and how did you make the decision to retire then?*

*Are you glad that you retired when you did?*

*What have you enjoyed about retired being and what have you found challenging?*

*To what extent do you feel that you're using the experience and skills from your work life during retirement? **[If using work experience and skills, ask what that involves.]***

*Would you like to be using those skills and experience more than you are?*

*If you would like to be using your work skills and experience but haven't followed up on that, what do you think it would take to make this happen? Are there particular concerns or barriers that keep you from pursuing this?*

### VOLUNTEER/UNPAID WORK

*Have you ever done anything like volunteer work – either on a 1 or 2 time basis or in a more ongoing way?*

**[If no]** *We've talked with a lot of people who have not done any volunteer work and they mention many different reasons for that. What would you say are the reasons you haven't chosen to do volunteer work? **[If yes]** What did that volunteer work involve?*

*Are you doing anything like volunteer work now – either once in a while or in a more ongoing way? **[If yes]** What does that involve?*

*How long have you been doing that?*

*How did you get started with it?*

*Over time, have you become more or less involved?*

*What led you to become more or less involved?*

*Do you find this activity rewarding?*

**[If yes]** *How? **[If no]** Why not?*

*Have these activities ever been challenging or disappointing? **[If yes]** In what ways?*



## APPENDIX III: THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### AGING, LEGACY, MEANING OF ENCORE STAGE OF LIFE

*Do you ever think about this current stage of life you're in as being special in any way or different from other times in your life? [If yes] In what ways is it special or different?*

*Do you feel that being the age you are now influences your priorities and how you want to spend your time? [If yes] In what ways?*

*Some people have mentioned that part of what they are after at this stage of life is an increased sense of freedom. The people who say this mean many different things by it. Do you share this sense of increased freedom as part of what you value at this point in your life? [If yes] What does that mean for you?*

**[For those who say freedom is important]** *Can you say a bit more about what you feel has limited your freedom at other times in your life?*

*Do you ever feel an awareness of your own mortality?*

**[If yes]** *Does the awareness of mortality affect how you think about what's important to you? [If yes] In what ways?*

*Is spiritual growth or involvement important to you at this stage in your life?*

**[If yes]** *What does that mean to you and what activities does it involve?*

### CONCLUSION

During this interview we have talked about things like what's important to you, volunteering, relationships with people who are important to you, experiences with young people in or not in your family .... As we are wrapping up, is anything coming to mind that we might have missed in these or any other categories? Are there any important topics that could help us understand you and what life is like for you, what you are after in life?

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN OUR STUDY. WE APPRECIATE YOUR TIME AND THOUGHTFUL ANSWERS VERY MUCH. YOUR INPUT HAS BEEN VERY IMPORTANT TO THE STUDY.**