



Action Learning Synthesis of ReThink Health's Amplifying Stewardship Together Project

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By: Jane Erickson, Bobby Milstein, Christopher Kelleher, Tina Anderson Smith, and Cierra Bryant

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Authors and Contributors

Rippel and ReThink Health Evaluation Team

Jane Erickson, MPA, MAIR

Cierra Bryant, MPH

Bobby Milstein, PhD, MPH

External Evaluation Team

Tina Anderson Smith, MPH, HSDP
(Anderson Smith Consulting)

Jori Hall, PhD (University of Georgia)

Francisca Fils-Aime, MEd
(Loyola University Chicago)

Editor

Christopher Kelleher (Better Focus)

Project Team

(*former Rippel and ReThink Health staff)

Jane Erickson (Director)

Bobby Milstein (Principal Investigator)

lueh Soh*

Bethlehem Gebremedhin*

Sarah Rial*

Tami Gouvea*

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Executive Summary

The Thriving Together movement is animated by the north star vision, *all people and places thriving together—no exceptions*. This commitment to thriving is rooted in a belief that we can nurture and strengthen communities in which all people have a fair chance to participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.

The work of achieving this goal rests with stewards: people, organizations, and networks who work with others to strengthen the conditions everybody needs to thrive together, beginning with those who are struggling and suffering. Stewards work toward the north star of thriving together by expanding vital conditions—properties of places and institutions that we all need if we are going to reach our full potential, like basic needs for health and safety, humane housing, and meaningful work and wealth.

In 2019, The Rippel Foundation’s ReThink Health initiative launched the project Amplifying Stewardship Together (AST), funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, with the goal of better defining the state of stewardship in the United States and exploring what it would take for stewards to grow the Thriving Together movement.

After decades of steadily increasing interest, ReThink Health believed it was time to expand on its prior efforts to characterize stewardship and clarify what stewards need to sustain their endeavors at scale. Through AST, ReThink Health worked to understand the boundaries and players advancing the Thriving Together movement, to clarify characteristics of exemplary stewards, and to identify approaches for catalyzing further progress. Through the project, ReThink Health conducted nationwide research and investigated how to

frame a compelling case for stewarding equitable well-being to draw others into the work. Together with movement-building stewards, ReThink Health also convened virtual meetings and collaborated to encourage widespread uptake of stewardship norms.

AST further confirmed that stewardship and equitable system change are inseparable—that they each unlock the other. Instead of striving for small victories within an unjust and dysfunctional system, stewards join with others to transform the system itself. That process of transformation, in turn, is made possible when people with diverse talents and perspectives commit to the work of co-creating a new system through *shared stewardship*. That involves establishing a shared dedication to the north star goal of thriving together—and to building relationships that connect across differences, to continually creating transformative opportunities, and to learning and adapting at every turn.

Instead of striving for small victories within an unjust and dysfunctional system, stewards join with others to transform the system itself.

Large actions are important, but the future of the movement is primarily driven by thousands of small decisions that ordinary people make every day. Stewards define success in terms of driving shared action and values. They look for common interests, mutual benefits, and opportunities to share power and build trust. Wherever possible, they build networks based on strong ties, work to increase [intentional interdependence](#), and make everyday decisions informed by how they will affect generations to come.

ReThink Health's research in AST revealed important signals that stewardship is on the rise but has yet to take hold as a nationwide norm. The [2021 Pulse Check](#), which surveyed stewards throughout the United States, produced the nation's first methodologically rigorous assessment of stewardship values, priorities, and practices. The Pulse Check's wealth of data allowed ReThink Health to construct a 100-point scale of stewardship diffusion that yielded encouraging findings about the strength of stewardship practices. It also showed the way to future work. For instance, although the great majority of respondents indicated a strong commitment to stewardship values, the findings also revealed notable gaps in mutual understanding and dedication to system change.

Because AST was developed during a time of upheaval throughout the nation, it provided an uncommon window into how stewards navigate moments of great disruption. Two years into the pandemic, respondents to a tracking poll conducted by ReThink Health felt that COVID and other crises had laid bare the brokenness of the country's systems, making it easier than ever to frame a compelling case for system change. At the same time, however, they noted the tendency of many institutions to cling to the familiar habits of business-as-usual, however broken those approaches may be.

The [vital conditions framework](#) proved to be a significant organizing frame in the wake of the significant, layered crises that came to the fore in 2020. In 2020, shortly after the onset of COVID, ReThink Health helped to organize the [Thriving Together Springboard](#), which brought together more than 100 contributors, all lending their expertise and creativity to develop an ambitious vision for non-governmental action tied to the vital conditions. The Department of Health and Human Services then used the Springboard as the basis for developing a federal plan that ultimately involved more than 40 of the government's largest agencies. The [Plan for Equitable Long-Term Recovery and Resilience](#) (ELTRR), announced in November 2022, laid out commitments for ongoing inter-agency collaboration organized around the Vital Conditions—a watershed moment for the Thriving Together movement.

ReThink Health has observed similar progress in organizations large and small throughout the country. Today, the Thriving Together movement occupies the center of a growing mosaic of stewardship activity. The mosaic consists of six domains that are distinct but mutually reinforcing: frameworks, tools, and curricula; goals, measures, and learning; networks and initiatives; policies; resource flows; and role model stories.

While there are increasingly widespread signs of promising progress, significant gaps exist in vital conditions across communities today, and stewardship is not yet practiced at the scale and strength needed to bridge those gaps. As one project interviewee shared, “When transformational ideas for social change become pervasive, there is also a risk of their being diluted, misinterpreted, and ineffectively implemented.” If the Thriving Together movement is going to continue to gain momentum, much more must be done.

Many of the lessons of AST can be distilled into a set of priorities for stewards to pursue, individually and collectively, to further energize the Thriving Together movement in all contexts and at every scale. They can maximize their prospects for success if they work to . . .

- Deepen their stewardship practices;
- Expand the strength, scope, and activation of their relationships; and
- Improve their fitness to context (make the “right moves at the right time”).

Additionally, through the AST project, ReThink Health identified a number of building blocks that can help to advance the movement:

- Reinforce a unifying narrative;
- Support change within and across individuals, organizations, networks, and the broader movement;
- Use a strong-tie network approach, emphasizing relatively small networks of individuals and organizations who share strong bonds of understanding and trust; and
- Increase intentional interdependence by distributing leadership across networks of organizations, within communities and nationally.

As we strive to advance thriving together, it is important not to focus so much on external action that we overlook the importance of internal evolution. The entrenched structures of the status quo have a powerful ability to erode ambition and sap momentum. That means that stewards have a difficult balance to strike. They have to be persistent but also flexible, humble but also bold, principled but also pragmatic. The task of supporting stewards can’t be piecemeal. Recent years have seen steady growth in the necessary infrastructure, but we have far to go.

While there are increasingly widespread signs of promising progress, significant gaps exist in vital conditions across communities today, and stewardship is not yet practiced at the scale and strength needed to bridge those gaps.

1 Introduction

The world changes according to the way people see it, and if you can alter, even by a millimeter, the way people look at reality, then you can change the world. —James Baldwin

ReThink Health, the flagship initiative of The Rippel Foundation, has joined with others to establish a unifying expectation for equitable well-being in America: All people and places thriving together—no exceptions. The expectation is coupled with a commitment to changing the systems that hold the country’s problems in place, recognizing that business-as-usual practices are powerful impediments to progress. New approaches are needed.

Since its founding 15 years ago, ReThink Health has been dedicated to stewardship, an age-old practice that builds on the natural strength and resilience of people and their communities. Whatever the era or place, stewards work with others to promote justice at every level of society and create systems that build sustainable well-being.

The north star vision of thriving together is anchored in the [vital conditions](#), a practical framework for concentrating on what matters in the quest for equitable health and well-being. By working in coordination to advance interconnected vital conditions, stewards can align their goals and actions with others to create a world in which all people and places thrive. (See [Section 3](#) for a fuller exploration of the vital conditions.)

Many stewards have built strong networks of like-minded allies and many of those networks seem poised to expand. Their progress rests on a set of core stewardship practices that have become increasingly well defined. (See Figure 1 for a concise visual depiction and [page 24](#) for a full discussion.) However, notwithstanding important success stories, stewardship has yet to become a business-as-usual way of working, and necessary investments are not occurring with sufficient strength or persistence to dislodge entrenched dynamics (Erickson et al. 2017; Homer et al. 2016). As a result, efforts to drive transformative change remain disconnected and limited.

Through the [Amplifying Stewardship Together](#) (AST) project, over a period of three years (2019–2021), ReThink Health worked with scores of stewards in different contexts to understand the question, “What does it take to amplify stewardship as a prevailing norm to build a movement for thriving together?” The project was an exploratory study focused on producing a better understanding of shared stewardship, ascertaining how stewardship practices can be strengthened at scale—and examining what it will take to catalyze a broader Thriving Together movement. Furthermore, it strove to delineate the boundaries of the movement: to understand who is involved, clarify what their work consists of, and identify the approaches for catalyzing further development.

Who Are Stewards?

Everyone can be a steward. Stewards are people, organizations, and networks who work with others to strengthen the conditions everybody needs to thrive together, beginning with those who are struggling and suffering.



Figure 1: Essential stewardship practices



- **Connect Across Differences:** Stewardship is not a solo act. It becomes increasingly powerful as more people and organizations are drawn into the work together.
- **Create Opportunities:** Our progress depends on actively breaking from the status quo by continually creating opportunities for a different future to take hold.
- **Learn and Adapt:** Adaptive approaches will help us to move forward together, even in the face of uncertainty and ever-changing circumstances.



By an accident of timing, the project offered a unique opportunity to consider how stewards act in the context of multiple systemic crises, including COVID-19, racial injustice, and economic recession. In all of the project's activities, ReThink Health learned alongside a network of diverse stewards who shared their efforts to navigate system change in the face of such upheaval—and opportunity.

This report provides a summary of insights from the project, building on a previously published [midpoint action learning synthesis](#). The findings will be useful for anyone interested in strengthening stewardship practices within and across communities with the goal of ensuring that everyone thrives together, no exceptions.

...the project offered a unique opportunity to consider how stewards act in the context of multiple systemic crises, including COVID-19, racial injustice, and economic recession.

2 Project Design and Participants

Three Projects at Four Scales

AST was one of three action learning projects that ReThink Health launched in 2019 with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Each project focused on overlapping but distinct constituencies and contexts (see Figure 2).

The projects were bound together by a set of cross-cutting questions:

- To what extent are individuals, organizations, and networks taking on the mantle of stewardship, shifting mindsets and actions for themselves and others?
- What works, for whom, how, and under what conditions?
- How does ReThink Health contribute to this process?

[Portfolio Design for Healthier Regions](#) (PDHR) and [Hospital Systems in Transition](#) (HST) were place-based projects that focused on deepening stewardship practices through tailored coaching and consultation. PDHR explored how stewards within and across organizations in a community can shift investments to the vital conditions, while HST explored stewardship at an organizational scale—specifically hospital systems working to address population health. For more information, including detailed explorations of participant experiences and emerging effects, see the [PDHR evaluation report](#) and [HST evaluation report](#).

Unlike its companion projects, AST was not directed at achieving progress in any single geographic or organizational setting. Rather, the project concentrated on understanding the state of stewardship nationally and investigating how to strengthen it as a norm that can catalyze the Thriving Together movement.

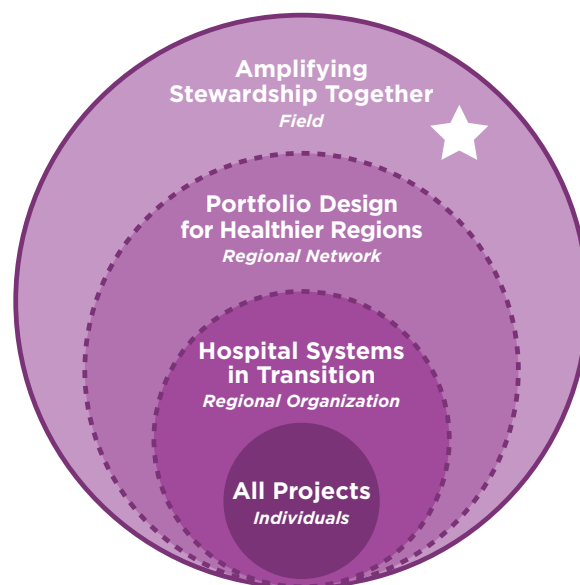
Action Learning Approach

Throughout the three years that AST, PDHR, and HST were underway, ReThink Health's emphasis on action learning facilitated continuous sharing of insights across the three projects. To support the development of this report, the study team collected and synthesized data from across AST's activities, eventually assembling a large set of diverse data sources. See [Appendix A](#), Amplifying Stewardship Together (AST) Project Strategies and Contributors, and [Appendix B](#), Resources Produced through the Amplifying Stewardship Together (AST) Project by ReThink Health and Project Contributors, for further details. The analysis concentrated on identifying strong patterns. At every opportunity, the study team sought to make sense of the data from multiple points of view, triangulating the perspectives of project participants, ReThink Health team members, and external evaluators.

Core Elements of AST

ReThink Health developed the AST project with the assumption that when enough people and organizations amplify stewardship practices in their daily work, the conditions that foster well-being across the country will be strengthened. Recognizing the great breadth and complexity of America's ecosystem for

Figure 2: ReThink Health projects operate across multiple scales



well-being, ReThink Health did not believe it would be practical or effective for a single organization or network to institute a centralized infrastructure for movement building. Instead, it focused on clarifying the principles and approaches that could strengthen stewardship practices across individuals, organizations, and networks.

The project featured four integrated strategies conducted in partnership with a range of contributors.

1. Fostered understanding of stewardship norms and practices through nationwide research; clarified the boundaries and nature of the movement

- Conducted scouting interviews with movement-building stewards (n=16) to understand perceptions of stewardship and define movement-building opportunities, challenges, and practices
- Developed multiple nationwide research efforts that together gathered input from more than 500 participants, including:
 - [Amplifying Stewardship: Characteristics and Trends Stewards Consider When Expanding Equitable Well-Being](#) (n=28)
 - [The 2021 Pulse Check on Shared Stewardship for Thriving Together Across America](#) (n=348)
 - [The Tracking Poll for Stewards of Well-Being](#) (n=98)
- Engaged in sensemaking to integrate insights from concurrent and past work

2. Framed a compelling case for stewarding equitable well-being; shared accessible stories designed to draw others into the work

- With [TheCaseMade](#):
 - Developed a [checklist](#) that organizations can use to strengthen their casemaking capacity
 - Co-authored a [blog series](#) and presented a [webinar](#) on the topic
- Launched the [Unsung Stewards Podcast](#) (n=7) and [Stewards Rising campaign](#) (n=9) as platforms to spotlight illustrative stories of stewards in action

3. Convened a virtual meeting series that enabled participants to discuss and make sense of their efforts during multiple, layered crises

- Over an eight-month period, ReThink Health convened self-identified stewards to reflect on their actions and aspirations and actions in the face of the systemic crises that surfaced in 2020 (n=94)

4. Collaborated with movement-building stewards to encourage widespread uptake of stewardship norms, surface movement-building practices, and advance opportunities for building the movement

- Identified trends, developed insights, and advanced high-leverage activities by engaging in regular sensemaking dialogues with leaders from nationwide initiatives (n=28)
- Contributed to the development of significant nationwide reports including the [Thriving Together Springboard](#) and its governmental counterpart, the federal interagency plan for [Equitable Long-Term Recovery and Resilience](#), as well as the [Surgeon General's Report on Community Health and Economic Prosperity](#)
- Alongside the [Community Initiatives Network](#), developed and launched an online resource for [Recovery to Renewal](#) through the Thriving.US platform

Project Participants

AST primarily engaged experienced stewards who had already established themselves as leaders in the emerging movement. Table 1 includes a summary of the number of participants that joined each AST activity. See [Appendix A](#) for more information about specific participants. They tended to be well-networked individuals who worked in well-networked organizations and often had a history of success in driving transformation efforts. AST participants were diverse in race, gender, age, and professional background but were similar in sharing a desire to act as champions of stewardship within and across communities in the United States.

Some of the stewards concentrated on a particular geographic area while others had a nationwide orientation. Their organizational homes included government agencies, nonprofits, businesses, and philanthropies. Although they tended to operate within specific areas of expertise, they all recognized that the work of stewardship is inherently an exercise in boundary-crossing.

Table 1: Total AST contributors by project activity

AST Project Strategies and Activities	# of Contributors
Strategy: Nationwide research	
Conduct scouting interviews with movement-building stewards (<i>Spring 2019</i>)	16
Amplifying Stewardship: Characteristics and Trends Stewards Consider When Expanding Equitable Well-Being (<i>Summer 2020</i>)	28
2021 Pulse Check on Shared Stewardship for Thriving Together Across America (<i>Spring 2022</i>)	348
Tracking Poll for Stewards of Well-Being (<i>2020</i>)	98
Strategy: Casemaking and story curation	
Unsung Stewards Podcast - Season 1 (<i>Summer 2021</i>)	7
Stewards Rising Campaign: Answering the Call for Change (<i>Fall 2021</i>)	9
Strategy: Virtual meeting series	
Amplifying Stewardship Together Virtual Meeting Series (<i>Spring 2020–Winter 2021</i>)	94
Strategy: Collaborate with movement-building stewards	
Identify trends, develop insights, and advance high-leverage activities with leaders nationwide	28
Total	628

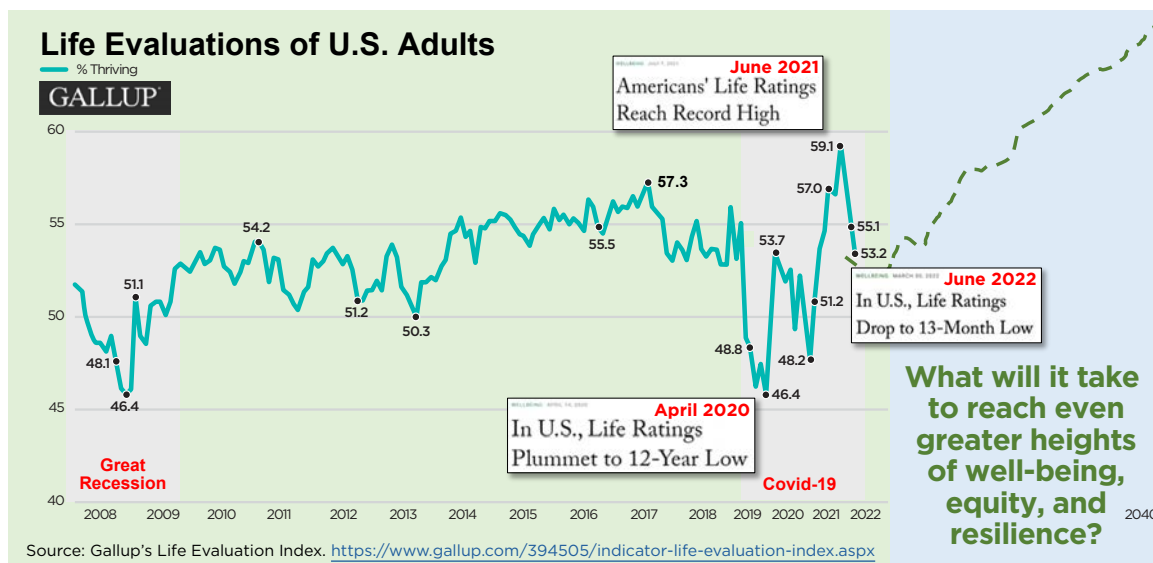
3 Characterizing the Thriving Together Movement

What Is the Focus and Scope of the Movement?

The Thriving Together movement is animated by a vision of hope for a future where all people and places thrive, with no exceptions. Thriving conveys our commitment to create communities where all people have a fair chance to participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. It can be understood as a visceral human experience and a measurable outcome.

Our single best measure of thriving, struggling, and suffering is Cantril's Ladder (Community Commons n.d.; Gallup 2021). This simple two-question scale asks people to rate their well-being on a ladder from 0 (worst possible life) to 10 (best possible life), both now and in five years. When combined, those ratings reveal who feels they are thriving, struggling, or suffering. The measure is routinely tracked across the United States and around the world by groups such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the World Happiness Report, and Gallup, which has polled more than 3 million people over the last decade (see Figure 3). This widespread, consistent implementation of the measure enables standardized comparisons over time and geography.

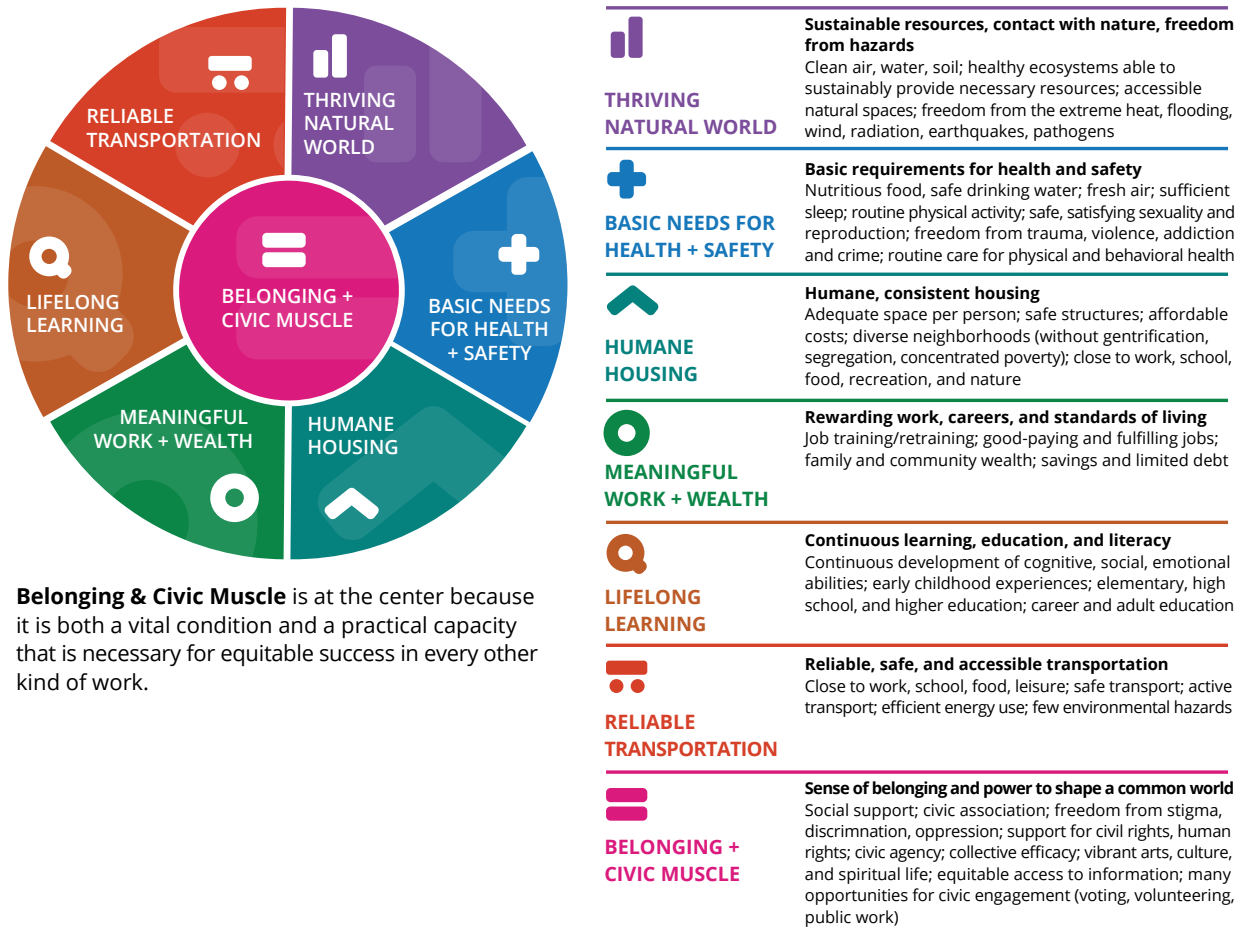
Figure 3: Our quest to thrive together



As discussed in [Section 1](#), our freedom to thrive depends on having a consistent set of vital conditions (see Figure 4). Personal well-being rises and falls from birth to death, but vital conditions persist over generations. Each vital condition is distinct and indispensable. Together, they form an interdependent system that shapes opportunities for people and places to thrive. The Thriving Together movement necessarily works within and across the full range of vital conditions.

The Thriving Together movement necessarily works within and across the full range of vital conditions.

Figure 4: Vital conditions for health and well-being



Belonging & Civic Muscle is at the center because it is both a vital condition and a practical capacity that is necessary for equitable success in every other kind of work.

Vital conditions are properties of places and institutions that we all need if we are going to reach our full potential. When vital conditions are absent or impaired, people tend to struggle and suffer, driving demand for urgent services. Urgent services are essential, but they are temporary fixes that don't directly produce thriving lives.

As ReThink Health and key collaborators described in a 2023 paper, “When people encounter the vital conditions framework, they quickly grasp that conditions usually seen as separate are interdependent. For instance, they recognize that reliable transportation opens options for meaningful work and wealth, which in turn generates resources for humane housing, lifelong learning, and contact with the natural world, along with far greater chances to fulfill basic needs for health and safety. Those who understand the vital conditions become adept at tracing connections such as these and using them to craft sound, systemic solutions, emphasizing those that solve multiple issues at once, rather than siloed approaches (Milstein et al. 2023).”

Stewards also recognize the relationship between vital conditions and urgent services. When vital conditions are absent or impaired, people tend to struggle and suffer, driving demand for urgent services, such as addiction treatment and acute care for illness or injury. Adversity can strike anyone, and when it does, urgent services can be life-saving and life-altering. However they cannot, by themselves, *produce* the experience of thriving. Many of the most effective stewards, therefore, work to combine vital conditions alongside urgent services in a full [well-being portfolio](#).

Who Builds the Thriving Together Movement?

The Thriving Together movement is grounded in the idea of co-creating equitable, thriving communities with a diverse ecosystem of constituents. The work necessarily involves action that operates at multiple scales and includes ordinary people in every walk of life, along with organizations and networks in every sector and industry—all of them shaping the movement with the thousands of decisions they make every day.

Movement-building stewards emphasize drawing more people and organizations into the work of stewardship and deepening the practice of those who have already embraced it. They are a subset of all stewards and differ in degree more than kind. Movement-building stewards tend to have a global viewpoint, striving to create conditions to expand vital conditions and establish stewardship practices as a local and nationwide norm. Some are focused on fueling innovations that will reconfigure business-as-usual practices. Others have a more radical orientation and work to advance entirely new models of social, political, and economic interaction. They hail from many types of organizations, including nonprofits, government agencies, philanthropy, associations, businesses, academia, intermediary organizations that provide capacity-building support to local and regional entities, and beyond (Milstein et al. 2020).

“Movement building isn’t just happening in some elite place. It’s happening where you are.”

—PROJECT PARTICIPANT

How Do Stewards Build the Movement?

Traditional definitions of leadership place an emphasis on advancing the interests of oneself or one’s own group. Leaders are seen as having done well whenever they manage to increase the impact and influence of their particular organization or issue, a mindset that implicitly favors fragmentation and competition over shared action.

The paradigm of stewardship is different. Stewards define success in terms of driving shared action and values. They look for common interests, mutual benefits, and opportunities to connect across boundaries. Instead of striving for small victories within an unjust and dysfunctional system, they join with others to transform the system itself. Stewardship is never a solo endeavor—it is about sharing and strengthening values, priorities, and practices for advancing equitable system change with others. This is why we referred to stewardship as shared stewardship periodically throughout this report.

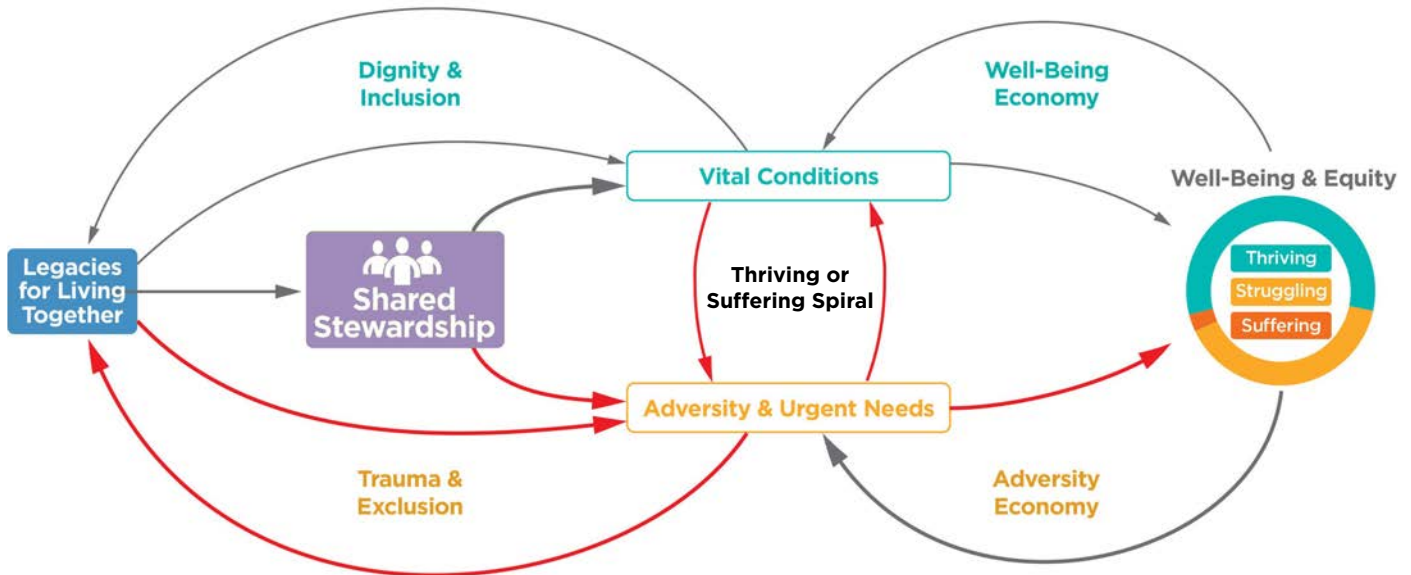
When viewed in this light, shared stewardship unifies the means and ends for navigating toward the north star of thriving together (see Figure 5, Milstein et al. 2020). Figure 5 explains how ordinary people can become better stewards of the systems that shape our lives. It shows the practical dynamics that affect who thrives, struggles, and suffers over generations in a diverse, plural society. Vital conditions produce the experience of thriving, whereas adversity and urgent need produce the experience of struggling or suffering—both of which are invariably tied to our legacies for living together (i.e., how we work across differences in a common world). Those legacies either affirm dignity and inclusion or inflict trauma and exclusion.

Mounting adversity diverts resources from vital conditions, which causes them to decline further, driving even greater adversity. Over time, an adversity economy forms when large fractions of people who are struggling and suffering create markets for urgent service industries. Urgent services are indispensable. But it is dangerous to over-rely on large industrial complexes built around adversity.

Instead, we can grow a well-being economy with incentives for just purpose and profit that focus on the value of expanding vital conditions to unlock everyone’s full potential.

Shared stewardship can steer this system toward an equitable, thriving future. Stewardship is inherently grounded in love and healing, which bring us closer to creating a thriving commonwealth. But when we harm each other and turn a blind eye to inhumane adversity, we fall into a self-defeating trap that pulls everyone down.

Figure 5: Theory of change for thriving together



Source: <http://tiny.cc/SharedStewardshipVideo>

This dynamic understanding helps stewards see that their efforts fit into an increasingly well-defined field of practice. In the words of an AST participant, “By framing stewardship in the context of systems we can see the language, principles, and pedagogy around stewardship—the science around it.”

A recent article in *The Good Society*, the main journal of civic studies, offers an explanation: “Stewardship for well-being is an ancient and still-evolving field of practice concerned with any system that affects who thrives, struggles, or suffers. It is a distinctive way of working across boundaries to reframe how people approach routine work, organizational design, and democratic self-governance. It has been paired effectively with a set of interdependent vital conditions that are the focus of a growing consensus about what produces equitable well-being over time (Milstein et al. 2020).”

Positioning stewardship as a catalyst for the broader movement underscores the importance of clarifying which stewardship practices make the biggest difference in that work. Through systematic fieldwork with thousands of stewards over the past 15 years, ReThink Health has developed a set of [Essential Stewardship Practices](#). The practices will be explored more fully in [Section 5](#), Insights about Movement Building.

(See [Section 5](#), Insights about Movement Building, for a full discussion of stewardship practices and enabling contexts.)



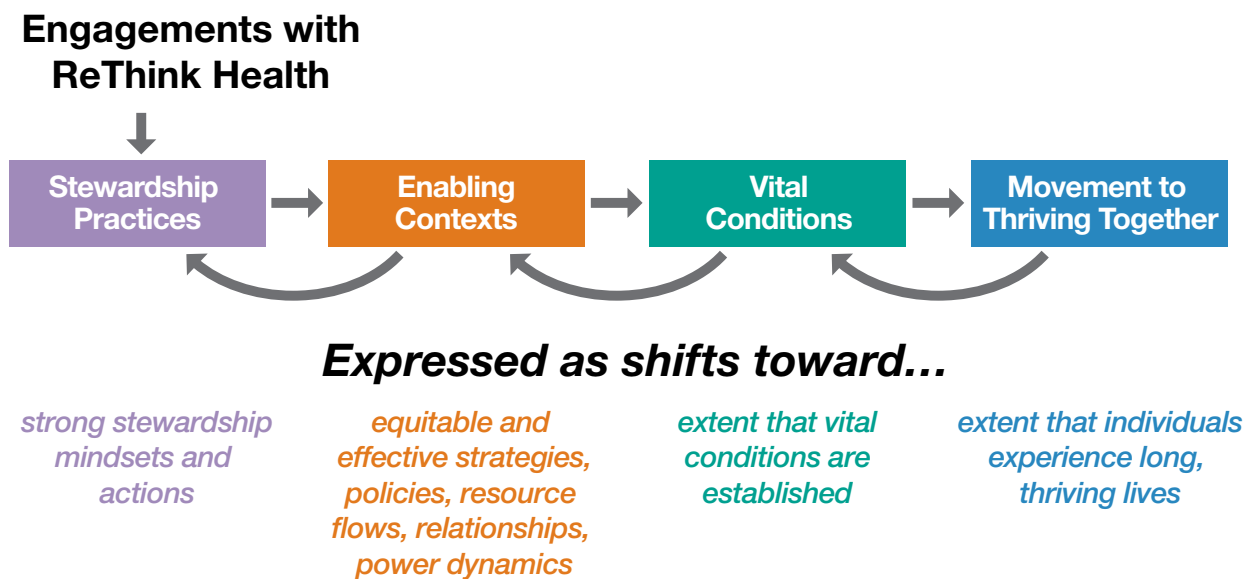
IMAGINE FOX CITIES COPYRIGHT: STACY WEGLEY PHOTOGRAPHY

Figure 6 is a concise summary of the main insights from ReThink Health’s inquiry into what it takes to thrive together through shared stewardship. Strategically, stewards must concentrate on affirming legacies of dignity and inclusion, expanding equitable investments in vital conditions, and measuring movement toward thriving together. However, stewards cannot affect any of those priorities *directly*. Instead, their commitment to specific stewardship practices can alter the enabling contexts that determine the extent to which any of those strategic priorities take hold as a rising norm. Enabling contexts include shifts in organizational strategies, policies, resource flows, power dynamics, and other levers that help to strengthen vital conditions (see Figure 6). As the figure shows, there is reinforcing feedback between each element.

“Shared stewardship is about building conditions that community members need to thrive. It means moving away from a mindset of only continually addressing the urgent needs that we have, which is what most of our systems have been developed to do. Promoting well-being is about promoting vital conditions.”

—PROJECT PARTICIPANT

Figure 6: Stewardship practices enable a movement to thrive together



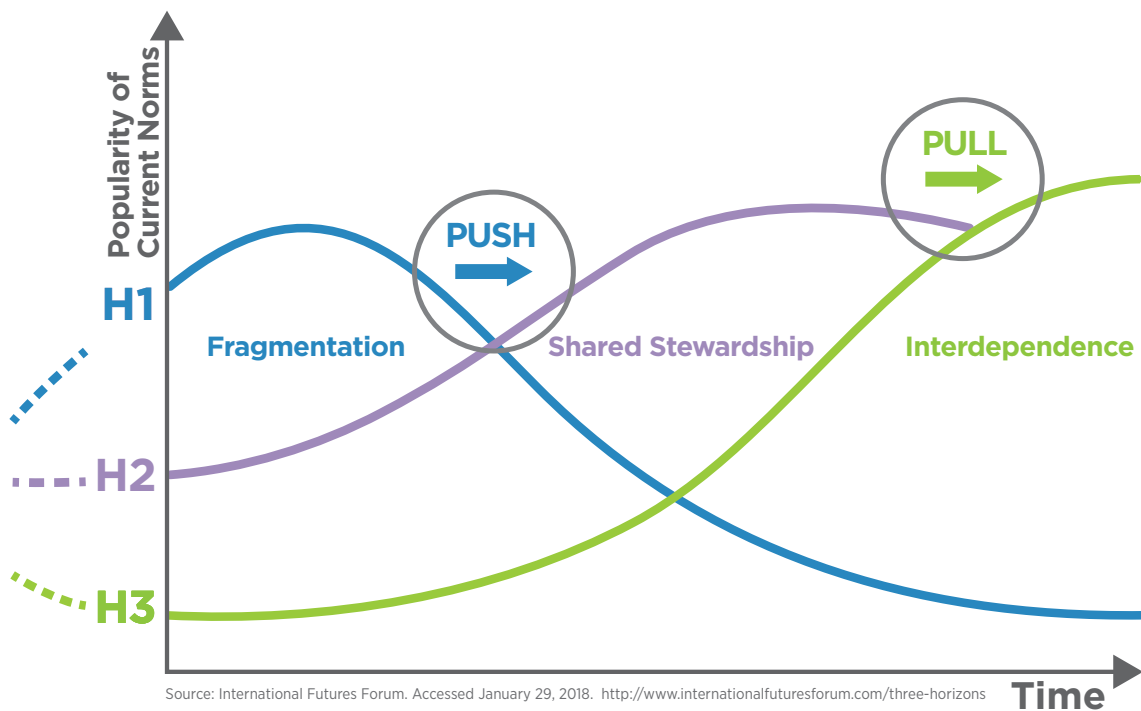
Moving from Fragmentation to Interdependence

How can a diverse array of stewards successfully navigate large-scale social change, appreciating the need for immediate action and long-term, aspirational goals? Individuals and organizations pursuing system change are familiar with these tensions. Frequently, they achieve early success in aligning around visions for the future, only to become bogged down when the time comes to choose a practical course of action. Elinor Ostrom, Nobel Prize winner and a guiding force in the creation of ReThink Health, identified this as a primary obstacle for stewards: the lack of “an adequately specified theory of collective action (Ostrom 2009).”

To address that need and help stewards understand their actions in a larger context, ReThink Health has come to rely on the *three horizons* conceptual model popularized by Bill Sharpe (see Figure 7, adapted from Sharpe 2013). As applied in this context, it situates stewardship along a continuum of change and provides an easy way of understanding the transition from today’s status quo of fragmentation to a future defined by interdependence.

The **present horizon (H1)** is defined by business-as-usual practices that incentivize siloed thinking, short-term benefits, and narrow self-interest. Those practices perpetuate divisive systems of racism, sexism, and other forms of injustice.

Figure 7: Strengthening shared stewardship through three horizons



They manifest in top-down hierarchies that breed transactional relationships and a preoccupation with fiscal efficiency over value-creation, justice, and community well-being.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is a **third horizon (H3)** that is characterized by long-term thinking, interdependence, and a preeminent concern for mutual well-being. This mode of thinking and working emphasizes public good, justice, and shared purpose—all preconditions for ensuring the north star goal of the Thriving Together movement. Stewards work in the middle **between the two horizons (H2)**, skillfully navigating away from business-as-usual toward a future that we most want to create.

Accomplishing that difficult shift requires paying close attention to our legacies for living together. Successful stewards work hard to identify and shed harmful ways of working—and replace them with practices that are generative and just. That involves applying scrutiny to our histories and centering the long-neglected wisdom of marginalized groups and indigenous cultures. The work is both essential and difficult, which makes it all the more important to cultivate a movement that is grounded in specific stewardship practices that can be embraced by all people and organizations.

ReThink Health’s work has revealed that, even in today’s first-horizon world, there are many instances of third-horizon thinking and action. However, because these pockets of progress are disconnected and often occur at the margins, they seldom lead to widespread or enduring change. The best way to alter that is to establish stewardship as a nationwide norm to expand vital conditions and grow the Thriving Together movement.

“The major stumbling block to long-term system change is the tunnel vision that leaders tend to have. Narrow perspectives have many stuck on a path toward short-sighted strategies and siloed approaches that don’t place the multi-faceted needs of community and people first.”
 —PROJECT PARTICIPANT

4 Signs of a Growing Movement

To effectively build and sustain the Thriving Together movement, it is important to understand the extent to which the necessary capacities exist for it to take hold. How prevalent is the concept of stewardship? To what extent do changemakers across America endorse stewardship values? How are their priorities for action and investment aligned with stewardship?

Diffusion of Stewardship Values, Priorities, and Practices

As part of AST, ReThink Health explored these questions by conducting the first-ever nationwide survey of stewardship values, priorities, and practices (Erickson et al. 2022). Fielded from October 2020 through July 2021 in partnership with the RAND Corporation, the [Pulse Check survey](#) collected responses from 348 leaders spanning eight types of organizations (including city or county governmental public health departments, hospitals, business associations, multisector partnerships, and nonprofit organizations focused on food, housing, the environment, as well as faith and social justice). The organizations were selected from a nationally representative sample of places across the United States.

The results reveal seven signs about the state of stewardship in the United States. A few findings hold special significance for clarifying the need to build capacities to advance the broader movement. Encouragingly, more than 90% of respondents affirmed their commitment to core stewardship values, including that “purpose in life must be larger than oneself and one’s organization,” that “every person should feel they have the power to help shape the world they live in,” and that “people and organizations should use their wealth to create conditions in which all people can thrive.” That solidarity about *ends*, however, did not continue when the subject turned to *means*. Only 26% of respondents said system change was their organization’s most important goal, and only 37% said that working relationships in their community were highly effective.

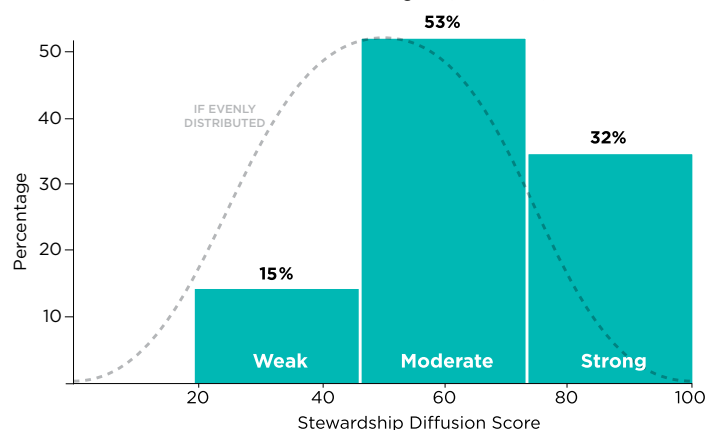
The Pulse Check includes a summary score of stewardship diffusion for each contributor, which measures their relative commitment to more than a dozen values, priorities, and practices on a scale from 0–100. Based on this score, approximately one-third of all contributors stand out as stronger stewards (scores of 75+) (see Figure 8).

Taken as a whole, this degree of diffusion is encouraging: it indicates that the values, priorities, and practices of stewardship are broadly familiar and widely endorsed. It also suggests that future efforts to expand stewardship should focus not only on increasing familiarity with the idea of stewardship but also on enhancing stewards’ ability to apply already-familiar concepts more effectively (Milstein et al. 2022).

For instance, stronger stewards were much more likely than their peers to prefer investments that prioritize those who have the most to gain (see Figure 9).

It follows that strengthening stewardship—within individuals and organizations, as well as across networks of organizations—is perhaps the most important thing we can do to advance the Thriving Together movement.

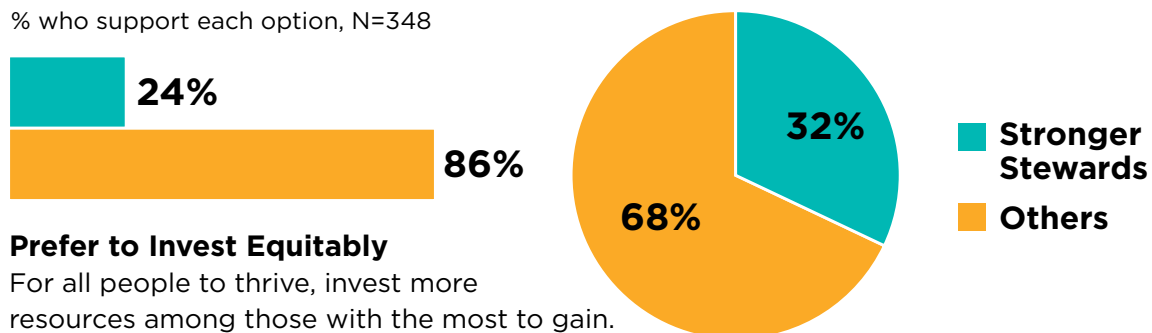
Figure 8: To what extent has stewardship diffused across the country? (n=348)



SOURCE: RETHINK HEALTH'S 2021 PULSE CHECK ON SHARED STEWARDSHIP
[HTTPS://RIPPEEL.ORG/PULSECHECK/OVERVIEW/](https://rippeel.org/pulsecheck/overview/)

Figure 9: Stronger stewards prefer to invest equitably

% who support each option, N=348



SOURCE: HEALTH AFFAIRS. 2022. SHARED STEWARDSHIP: WHO IS WILLING TO INVEST IN PEOPLE AND PLACES WITH THE MOST TO GAIN. [HTTPS://WWW.HEALTHAFFAIRS.ORG/CONTENT/FOREFRONT/SHARED-STEWARDSHIP-WILLING-INVEST-PEOPLE-AND-PLACES-MOST-GAIN](https://www.healthaffairs.org/content/forefront/shared-stewardship-willing-invest-people-and-places-most-gain)

“The next frontier in our field is shifting the norms and culture of organizations and how we partner. We have to move from rhetoric to action so that we can more meaningfully shift power, policies, and resource allocation. And it isn’t just a new set of activities—we have to think differently about what we are doing now.” —PROJECT PARTICIPANT

Signals of Rising Interest in Stewardship

While Pulse Check findings indicate the extent to which stewardship values, priorities, and practices can be strengthened, the extent to which the term and concept are used in public discourse and the literature reveals another dimension.

Stewardship is an old word dating back to the 1600s, and its meaning has evolved over time. Common definitions explain that, “when stewardship first appeared in English during the Middle Ages, it functioned as a job description, denoting the office of a steward, or manager of a large household. Over the centuries, its range of reference spread to the oversight of...many other organizations. In recent years, the long-established “management” sense of stewardship has evolved a positive meaning, “careful and responsible management of something entrusted with one’s care.” (Merriam-Webster n.d.)

A recent report from ReThink Health and RAND provides even more historical context, not for the term itself but for the underlying practice.

“The practice [of shared stewardship] has evolved over millennia as certain people in each generation (albeit too few) have endeavored to set aside unjust or inhumane legacies and instead pass along a world that enables everyone to survive and thrive—continually learning what it takes to create systems for people and places that are prosperous, sustainable, and equitable. Today, in an era marked by deep divisions, unprecedented systemic crises, and new heights of system consciousness, a rising cadre of system stewards are turning—and in many ways returning—to sacred practices for living together that enable all people to participate, prosper, and reach their full potential” (Milstein et al. 2020).

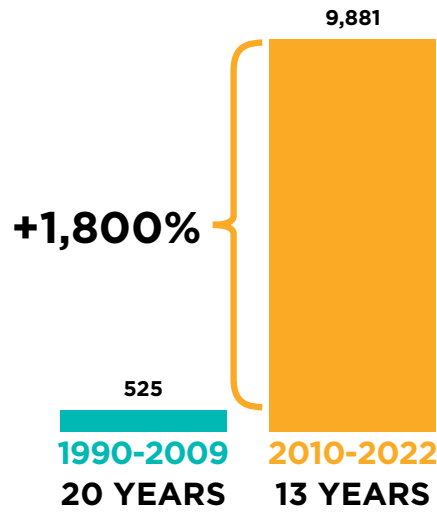
That description fits the pattern of rising use reflected in [Google NGram data](#), which tracks the relative frequency of keywords over time (Figure 10). After an initial jump around the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, explicit conversations about stewardship catapulted to greater prominence in the latter half of the

20th century. Only recently, however, has this work been explicitly framed as a matter of system design and self-governance.

Driven by such strong trends, it is not surprising that scholarly attention to issues of stewardship has also been increasing. A search of *Web of Science* reveals that 9,180 publications included the terms “health or well-being” and “stewardship” in the 13-year period between 2010 and 2022, compared to only 318 citations in the 20 years between 1990 and 2009, an enormous increase (see Figure 11). Such exploding interest suggests that when people confront contemporary questions about health or well-being, more and more conversations are turning to the concept of stewardship.

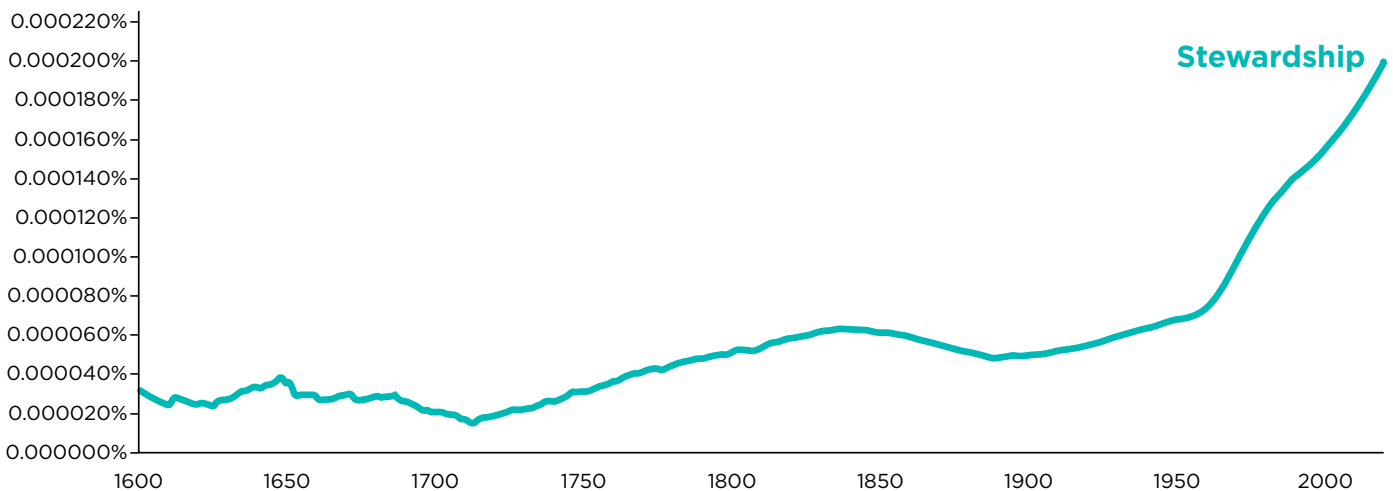
Figure 10: Trends in web of science citations (n=10,406)

“Stewardship + Health or Well-Being”



SOURCE: WEB OF SCIENCE. DECEMBER, 2022.

Figure 11: Rising prominence of “stewardship” from 1600-2019



SOURCE: [GOOGLE NGRAM VIEWER](#), ENGLISH. MARCH 17, 2023.

Themes from ReThink Health’s interviews conducted with movement-building stewards underscore the significance of stewardship being adopted increasingly in different settings. As one interviewee shared, “Because of the power and inertia in our current system, it is often hard to shift even the conversation much less the actions of those within the system. So it is significant when people start reorienting and rephrasing how they are thinking about things. Sometimes even a minor shift in language can be indicative of larger things to come.”

This said, as stewards work to increase awareness about thriving together through shared stewardship, it is equally important to emphasize the significant cultural shifts required for stewardship to take hold as a new norm. As one interviewee shared, “When transformational ideas for social change become pervasive, there is also a risk of their being diluted, misinterpreted, and ineffectively implemented.”

**“This is not a new movement
—it is an evolving one.”**
—PROJECT PARTICIPANT

Volatility—and Opportunity—of the Past Few Years

At the outset of AST, ReThink Health interviewed 16 movement-building stewards (see Table 2) and found that by and large, their view of the movement was tentative and confused. Many felt it was unlikely that a broader Thriving Together movement could develop at significant scale.

When prompted to think about strengthening stewardship practices to build the movement, interviewees were receptive but felt that the task of fundamentally shifting norms for working together to bring about social change was too ambitious, especially across so many sectors and geographies. Interviewees tended to think about the movement only in relation to the areas of work that their organizations directly touched. They were not inclined to think about the field in macroscopic terms or to situate their work within a broader stewardship context.

Table 2: Interviews with movement-building stewards working to support... (n=16)

- Belonging and civic engagement
- Multi-sector, place-based community change
- The reimagining of capitalism
- Environmental justice
- Humane housing
- Health care transformation

Those early findings were not surprising. Indeed, in its original AST proposal to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, ReThink Health wrote that, “to the extent that this work collectively constitutes a ‘movement,’ it is yet unclear what the boundaries are, where it’s converging or diverging, or how it can accelerate.” Today we find very different circumstances, all influenced greatly by the turmoil of the intervening years.

ReThink Health polls and virtual meetings held after the onset of the COVID pandemic showed that stewards were exhausted but undaunted in their aspirations for equitable system change, with renewed focus and hope—and yet, many actively grappled with the immense and challenging nature of change required (Tracking Poll 2020; Soh and Milstein 2020). Nearly all respondents felt that COVID and other crises laid bare the brokenness of the country’s systems, creating new society-wide awareness that has made it easier than ever to frame a compelling case for system change.

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Many also observed, however, that the pull of business-as-usual is strong and that in times of crisis, people and organizations often retreat into short-sighted, narrowly individualistic behaviors. Interviewees noted the large number of sizable institutions—corporations, government agencies, philanthropies—that have leaned into entrenched, self-serving behaviors, turning away from practices that support equitable system change, such as relationship-building, agility, and transparency.

Stewards also worried that rapid efforts to alleviate urgent needs were not well-designed to couple with broader cultural shifts that would help individuals, organizations, and whole communities rebuild in ways that are more just and equitable. As one AST participant put it, “Systems in fear often revert to protect the old family jewels (and business models). Opportunities are obvious, but still hard to trust in times of crisis.”

As the project progressed, ReThink Health observed that stewards across the country were increasingly determined to intentionally shape a broad Thriving Together movement, one that would allow them to realize their shared aspirations more swiftly and effectively. They did so with great realism, recognizing the challenges that are inherent to movement-building. As one interviewee noted,

“It’s really quite simple. You have to be fundamentally fed up and question the entirety of your field for things to actually move. You have to be self-reflective and introspective and look at how you are contributing to the way things are, so that you can work openly with others to build a different path.”

Emerging Infrastructure for Building the Thriving Together Movement

The greater clarity about the need to transform business-as-usual has made it easier to articulate a convincing case for large-scale system change. This was seen clearly in the impressive growth of efforts to organize around the vital conditions as a way of moving the social determinants agenda into wider action (Milstein et al. 2023). In eight weeks from May through June 2020, more than 100 people and organizations helped to craft [Thriving Together: A Springboard for Equitable Recovery and Resilience in Communities Across America](#). That document offered hope by showing how America could reorient around widely held values across all vital conditions and thereby spring forward through adversity toward a future with far greater well-being and justice. Just as important, the Thriving Together Springboard served as a study in how to make an effective case for equitable system change and played an important role in crystallizing the north star expectation of *All people and places thriving together—no exceptions*.

The Springboard was designed to be a non-governmental counterpart to efforts underway at the federal level to develop a whole-of-government plan to enhance well-being and justice across the United States. That effort came to fruition in late 2022 when dozens of departments, agencies, and institutes (now 44) put forth [The Federal Plan for Equitable Long-Term Recovery and Resilience \(ELTRR\)](#), which is explicitly rooted in the [vital conditions](#).

In addition to the Thriving Together Springboard and ELTRR, ReThink Health has observed several significant signs of local and national field maturation. Today, the Thriving Together movement occupies the center of a growing mosaic of stewardship activity (see Figure 12). ReThink Health has observed infrastructure taking shape in at least six domains:

- Frameworks, tools, and curricula;
- Goals, measures, and learning;
- Networks and initiatives;
- Policies;
- Resource flows; and
- Role model stories.

Each domain is distinct but complementary, highlighting the range of elements that help to strengthen shared stewardship, expand vital conditions, and build the movement to Thrive Together within communities and nationwide.

The everyday work of stewards now reinforces and draws strength from a larger and more interconnected ecosystem, creating a positive reinforcing effect. Thanks to this still nascent but increasingly robust infrastructure, stewards who might once have operated in isolation are able to draw on a diverse range of resources and committed partners.

Table 3 offers illustrations of noteworthy progress in each domain of movement infrastructure; the list is not exhaustive, but rather is meant to surface especially noteworthy actions that ReThink Health has observed.

Figure 12: Emerging movement infrastructure for thriving together



Table 3. Examples of emerging movement infrastructure

<p>Frameworks, Tools, and Curricula <i>Resources that help individuals, organizations, and/or networks</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thriving Together Springboard (Resource platform from Thriving Together partners) • Organizing Around Vital Conditions Moves The Social Determinants Agenda Into Wider Action • Community Commons (Online resource platform from Community Commons) • Framework for Excellence in Mental Health & Well-Being (Framework from Well Being Trust) • Shared Stewardship in Health Care (Toolkit from the Community Initiatives Network, and ReThink Health) • Thriving Together Theater (Simulation experience from ReThink Health) • Pathways to Population Health Equity (Toolkit from WE in the World, CDC, and ASTHO) 			
<p>Goals, Measures, and Learning <i>National benchmarks, data platforms, and research</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy People 2030 (National objectives from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) • IP3 Assess (Online data platform from the Institute for People, Places, and Possibility) • Systems and Complexity Informed Evaluation: Insights from Practice (New Directions for Evaluation) • Well-being in the Nation (WIN) Measures (Shared from Well-being in the Nation Network) • 2021 Pulse Check on Shared Stewardship for Thriving Together Across America (ReThink Health) • Civic Measurement Tools (Collection of measurement tools from the Institute for Citizens and Scholars) 			
<p>Networks and Initiatives <i>Groups working nationally and/or locally</i></p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>National</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bridge Alliance • Children and Nature Network • Communities RISE • Stakeholder Health • Well Connected Communities • WIN Network </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>Regional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BeWell Palm Beach County • Healthy Communities Delaware • Imagine Fox Cities • North Sound ACH • Northwest Regional Primary Care Association • Wild, Wonderful, and Healthy West Virginia </td> </tr> </table>		<p>National</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bridge Alliance • Children and Nature Network • Communities RISE • Stakeholder Health • Well Connected Communities • WIN Network 	<p>Regional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BeWell Palm Beach County • Healthy Communities Delaware • Imagine Fox Cities • North Sound ACH • Northwest Regional Primary Care Association • Wild, Wonderful, and Healthy West Virginia
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<p>Policies <i>Supportive policies and resources that help to build them</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advancing Equitable Economies Policy Library (Community Commons, WIN Network) • Healthy Neighborhoods Investments: A Policy Scan & Strategy Map • Justice4O (Leadership collective) • Putting the 'Public' Back in Public Works (Democracy journal) • Community Health and Economic Prosperity (Office of the Surgeon General) 			
<p>Resource Flows <i>Mechanisms that influence and/or affect how resources are allocated and distributed</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Federal Plan for Long-Term Recovery and Resilience (Whole-of-government plan) • Funding Resilience: Advancing Multisector Investments for Equity (George Health Policy Center) • New Pluralists (Funder collaborative) • Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement (Funder collaborative) • Trust for Civic Infrastructure 			
<p>Role Model Stories <i>Venues to share and surface exemplars and stories of their progress</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All-America City Award (National Civic League) • Commons Good Podcast (Community Commons) • Stewards Rising Multimedia Campaign (ReThink Health) • Unsung Stewards Podcast (ReThink Health) 			

5 Insights About Movement Building for Thriving Together

A Steward's Formula for Thriving Together

Looking broadly across AST and other projects that explore stewardship practices, there seem to be three things that any steward working anywhere can do, individually and collectively, to energize the Thriving Together movement:

- Deepen their own stewardship practices
- Expand the strength, scope, and activation of their relationships
- Improve fitness to context—making the “right moves at the right time” across all the vital conditions for health and well-being.

To make these general concepts and their interactions clearer, the AST study team rendered them as a succinct “formula” that stewards can use to make sense of their place within a wider Thriving Together movement. It is not a tool for computation. Rather, it resembles other “practice heuristics” (Scaccia 2015; Forward Party n.d.) that share complex ideas in the style of a simple formula. When tested against insights from ReThink Health’s concurrent and prior work, and in the context of wider scholarship on stewardship, the formula seems to hold true regardless of the type of steward, the roles they play, and the contexts they encounter.

$$S^R \times FC = TT$$

People and organizations with a deep stewardship practice (S), powered by strong relationships (R), and multiplied by their fitness to contexts that affect the vital conditions (FC) can enhance the prospects for thriving together (TT).

S stands for the depth of stewardship practice: Having a deep stewardship practice means constantly working to enhance your stewardship posture. It also entails seeking to integrate that posture into your personal and professional life, including working to influence how your organization operates. Having a strong stewardship practice requires showing up as a steward every day, all day, in every way. (See the following [Stewardship Practices](#) section for a fuller explanation.)

- Depth is reflected in the vitality, integration, and coherence of stewardship mindsets and actions
- Deep stewardship practice can include an array of practices, including . . .
 - Shifting investments (money, time, space, personnel)
 - Sharing decision-making power with external partners, especially those with lived experience
 - Bringing coherence to all acts, small and large, with particular attention to equity and justice
 - Modeling stewardship for others

R stands for the extent of relationships, especially with fellow stewards:

Strength of relationships is about expanding the diversity of people and organizations you are in connection with. It also pertains to the strength of those connections (trust, vulnerability, accountability to one another, etc.), and activating those relationships to advance system change. The stronger and more diverse your relationships are, the deeper and more meaningful your stewardship will be.

- Because stewardship is never a solo endeavor, each new relationship with another steward can have an *exponential* effect
- Key factors include . . .
 - Strength—building a foundation of trust, shared history, etc.
 - Scope—connecting across diverse sectors, scales, and roles
 - Activation—not only having a relationship, but actively leveraging it to advance shared values for well-being and justice.

FC stands for how well stewards fit any context they encounter: Fitness to context is about thinking and acting in ways that are aligned with your context. It’s about adapting to the shifting dynamics that affect any or all of the vital conditions, appreciating that there is no such thing as a best practice that is uniformly true everywhere.

- If stewards are able to adapt to complex, shifting dynamics, it *multiplies* the impact of their practices and relationships
- The term can have a positive value, negative value, or no value
 - It includes responses to inhospitable conditions marked by inertia, indifference, or opposition
 - It also includes “meeting the moment” in any situation
 - Stewards’ efforts and networks will have little effect if they cannot find a way to fit into the contexts that matter most
- Changes in any one aspect of a context may prompt a self-reinforcing sequence of changes in the others, with effects that travel far beyond the initial catalyst

TT stands for the prospects for thriving together: When taken together, all of these elements can enhance the prospects for thriving together. As each element becomes stronger, so too does our collective ability to bring our highest values to life.

- As demonstrated during the compounding crises of recent years, stewards must consistently confront new contexts and still find a way to move toward the north star expectation of thriving together
- As the prospects for thriving together rise, the risks of descending further into adversity decline.

The formula replaces a context-free search for best practices that assumes large-scale change occurs in a linear progression. Instead, it invites us all into an adaptive, dynamic, and intergenerational endeavor to move toward the expectation of thriving together. Success involves thinking and acting in ways that are aligned with our context, constantly working to deepen our stewardship postures, and always seeking to amplify our relationships with others.

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Stewardship Practices

ReThink Health’s work over the last 15 years has led to the identification of essential stewardship practices. Thousands of colleagues across the country contributed to defining and clarifying the practices, resulting in a list that ReThink Health further refined by systematically comparing it to similar structures. It remains open to evolution but reflects ReThink Health’s best current understanding.

These are not the *only* stewardship practices that matter, but they rise to the level of being *essential* because they each display a unique power to generate lasting change in any setting. Importantly, there is nothing particularly novel or newfangled about these essential practices—they all derive from age-old concepts and behaviors.

The practices group into three primary patterns, summarized below and shown in Table 4. Stewards rarely pursue them in a linear fashion, and changes in one practice often cascade into shifts and insights elsewhere. ([Appendix C](#) provides additional detail.) Findings from the [2021 Pulse Check](#) show that stewardship practices are widely understood. However, it is important to appreciate that there is often a large gap between “doing something” and “doing it for real,” hence the importance of having a deep stewardship practice.

- **Connecting across differences:** Stewardship is not a solo act. It becomes increasingly powerful as more people and organizations are drawn into the work together.
- **Creating opportunities:** Our progress depends on actively breaking from the status quo by continually creating opportunities for a different future to take hold.
- **Learning and adapting:** Adaptive approaches will help us to move forward together, even in the face of uncertainty and ever-changing circumstances.

Table 4: Essential Stewardship Practices

Connecting Across Differences	<p>a. Weave Vested Interests: Actively seek to understand the values and priorities of others. Emphasize curiosity, vulnerability, and deliberative dialogue in shaping a way forward.</p> <p>b. Value Unheard Voices: Develop authentic working relationships with residents. Ensure that all change efforts are done <i>with</i>, not <i>to</i> those they are meant to support.</p> <p>c. Earn Trust: Prioritize transparency through continual, authentic communication. Repair harm through honesty and reconciliation. Build and honor mechanisms for mutual accountability.</p> <p>d. Strengthen Interdependence: Distinguish the unique contribution that each steward can make. Create just enough structure for ongoing and emergent forms of collaboration. Nurture alignment.</p> <p>e. Build Shared Power: Build capacity, energy, and power for shared action across individuals and institutions. Draw others into stewardship and help them to deepen their practice so it becomes the de-facto way of working together.</p>
Creating Transformative Opportunities	<p>f. Expand Aspirations: See the “whole system,” not just isolated pieces. Orient all strategies toward the north star of thriving together.</p> <p>g. Change the Story: Cultivate stories of hope, shared humanity, and mutual strength. Change expectations about what is possible.</p> <p>h. Commit to Multisolving: Choose solutions that advance multiple goals at once, are mutually reinforcing, and have many co-benefits.</p> <p>i. Bridge Timescales: Work over the short and long term simultaneously. Appreciate the decades-long nature of the work at hand and the need to make decisions now that bring a different future to life.</p> <p>j. Align Investments: Align financial incentives with community health and well-being. Develop and support funding sources and financing mechanisms that align organizational interests with broader goals for thriving together.</p>

- k. Embrace Complexity:** Appreciate that the work of social change is messy, unpredictable, and always evolving. Cultivate comfort with the unknown.
- l. Promote Abundance:** Eschew zero-sum thinking. See tensions and differences as opportunities to create new understanding and possibility. Solve problems by being creative with existing resources, rather than first seeking more resources.
- m. Habituate Action Learning:** Create a culture of continuous shared learning. Integrate multiple points of view along the way. Regularly adapt to new information and perspectives. Minimize risk by testing small-scale prototypes.
- n. Consider Legacies Past and Future:** Explore positive and negative legacies with candor. Articulate those that need to be left in the past and those that need to emerge to create a different future.
- o. Use Data to Chart Progress:** Actively find ways to share and integrate data. Use that data to support coordination and track shared progress toward the north star of thriving together and the path for getting there.

How to Advance the Thriving Together Movement

As with all ambitious movements for social change, the Thriving Together movement relies on the creation of an ecosystem that integrates multiple nodes of influence (Norris 2023). The goal is to catalyze action that is both distributed (not orchestrated from above) and collective (oriented around shared values and practices). No single group or network is comprehensive enough to drive nationwide transformation by itself and no single campaign or initiative can be sufficient to dislodge the status quo. The balance between collective purpose and distributed action is a difficult one to strike. Groups and organizations need to be able to operate independently, each setting a course that fits its circumstances. At the same time, however, the success of the larger movement requires a degree of alignment on high-order aims and strategies.

“All of us have our strengths. So it’s our ability to know where my blind spot and your strength connect. Our ability to recognize and value and with humility acknowledge that we are far stronger together in sustaining that ecosystem and valuing both the need for and the importance of [continuing to contribute] to that ecosystem.”

—PROJECT PARTICIPANT

ReThink Health has drawn from its work in HST, PDHR, and AST to identify several critical building blocks that can help stewards to navigate these tensions and advance the Thriving Together movement:

- **Reinforce a unifying narrative:** The work of championing stewardship is closely associated with narrative change. Stewards are most effective when they are able to build understanding by using a shared language and set of unifying narratives. For centuries, public discourse in the United States has centered an ethos of “us vs. them” rather than “thriving together”—a dynamic reinforced by narratives that emphasize othering over belonging (powell 2012). The alternative is to develop and embrace narratives that spring from

Stewards are most effective when they are able to build understanding by using a shared language and set of unifying narratives.

and reinforce our shared humanity. Narratives of thriving together celebrate human differences as strengths, not reasons to oppress or destroy each other. They reject zero-sum views of conflict and competition, instead highlighting the gains that come from mutual support and intentional interdependence.

An environment filled with community-specific and national narratives about thriving together can attract the resources and actions that make transformative change possible (ReThink Health, 2022, Rich and Soh, 2022, Rich n.d.). As Marshall Ganz, a founding member of ReThink Health, observed, “Movements have narratives. They tell stories, because they are not just about rearranging economics and politics. They also rearrange meaning. And they’re not just about redistributing the goods. They’re about figuring out what is good” (Moyers 2013). ReThink Health has summarized an initial [checklist](#) of key facets of and use cases for the thriving together narrative.

- **Support change within and across individuals, organizations, networks, and the broader movement:** Efforts to establish an equitable system that is built for everyone to thrive requires changing ourselves as well as our institutions. Across every situation and scale, there are blurry boundaries, with overlapping players and constantly evolving parts. Stewards must learn to see and navigate change under circumstances that are inherently messy and constantly contested. And, while experiences for stewards should be designed to build coherence across these scales, it is important to emphasize the outsized role that inward transformation plays.

As John Lewis observed, “The most important lesson I have learned in the fifty years I have spent working toward the building of a better world is that the true work of social transformation starts within. It begins inside your own heart and mind, because the battleground of human transformation is really, more than any other thing, the struggle within human consciousness to believe and accept what is true. Thus to truly revolutionize our society, we must first revolutionize ourselves. We must be the change we seek if we are to effectively demand transformation from others” (Lewis 2017).

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- **Increase intentional interdependence:** Distributing leadership across networks of organizations is an essential step in system change, within communities and nationally. This requires organizational leaders to cultivate an understanding of their own unique roles—and the roles of others, eschewing the tendency to be “all things to all people.”

The 2021 Pulse Check provided insight on this front. Contributors tended to have a deep understanding of their own organization’s mission, roles, and assets—but a limited understanding of others’ (see [findings on collaborative capacity](#)). This lack of mutual understanding, which drives “do-everything syndrome,” can weaken the ability of organizations to work in aligned ways and partner effectively toward shared aims.

When partners dedicate themselves to exploring their interdependencies, they engage in increasingly candid discussion about capabilities and constraints, expectations and interests. This enables closer alignment, stronger mutual accountability, and the development of deeper and more focused working relationships. It also encourages investment in things that are already working, rather than in wholly new, go-it-alone projects.

- **Use a strong-tie network approach:** Results from AST and [related research](#) demonstrate the importance of distinguishing between different types of networks and favoring those that are based on strong ties—relatively small networks of individuals and organizations who share strong bonds of understanding and

trust. Strong-tie networks may be more effective for scaling transformative change than much larger networks in which understanding and trust are weaker. When looking to seed transformative change, concentrate on the strength of relationships rather than their number. The emphasis should be on cultivating diverse perspectives and ensuring that those whose experiences are typically unheard and undervalued become co-designers and full partners in the decision-making process.

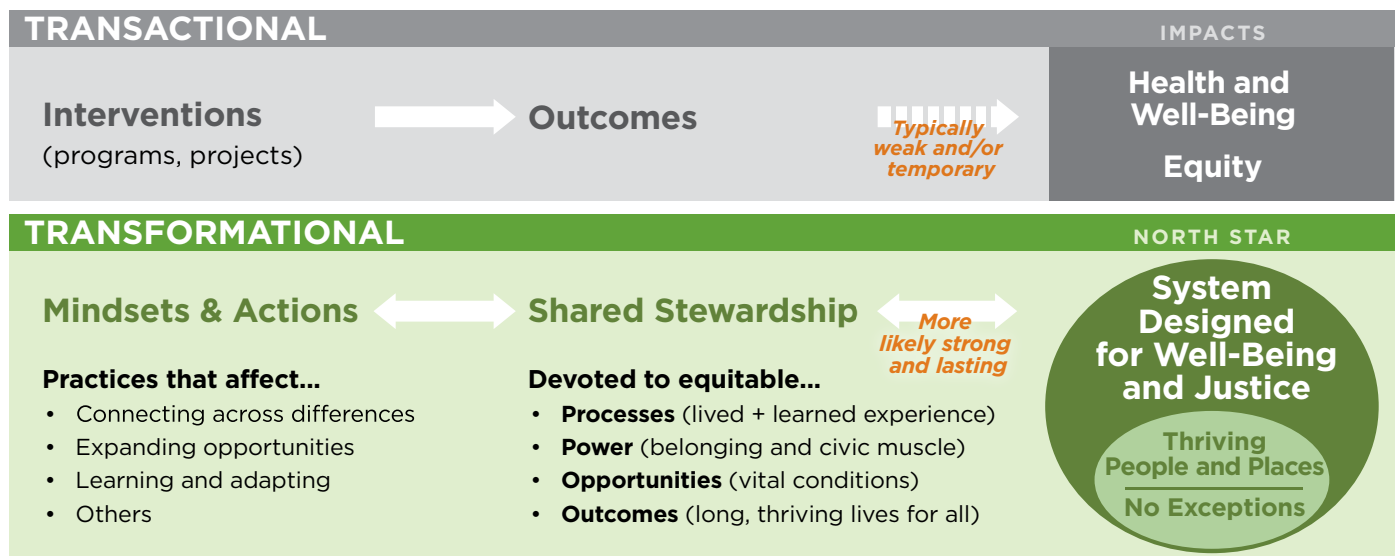
Because strong-tie networks are designed to maximize redundancy and social reinforcement, they are less efficient than weak-tie networks at spreading information—but succeed much better at driving durable transformation. The work of building strong ties is too important to be left to chance—we must get better at tracking and guiding network formation in real time.



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- **Measure movement:** Much measurement today lurches between two extremes. At one extreme are narrow activity-oriented metrics that are geared toward satisfying transactional reporting requirements. At the other end are farsighted goals that are commendable but abstract, lacking in both measurement rigor and immediate relevance. What the movement needs to find is an effective middle ground: stringently evaluating a wide range of accessible data points that are salient indicators of long-term progress toward the goal of thriving together.
- **Emphasize transformational approaches:** Transactional approaches to change tend to focus on discrete programs or projects (see Figure 13). Often those interventions succeed in producing positive outcomes, but they tend to be too narrow and short-term to change the systems that hold problems in place, which greatly limits their impact over time. Ensuring that everyone can thrive together is long-term work that can't be accomplished through only discrete, transactional approaches. Organizations and networks must also focus on building values and practices for shared stewardship, which entails shifting mindsets and actions that fundamentally change how people and organizations work together. Over time, these normative shifts can drive sustainable progress toward the north star expectation of thriving people and places.

Figure 13. Contrasting approaches to change



Adapted from: [Anderson T, et.al. Shared Stewardship and Prospects for Thriving Together. ReThink Health. 2021](#)

6 Conclusion

Rippel and ReThink Health's Commitments for the Coming Decade

Informed by insights from its efforts over the past five years—including the AST project—as well as assessment of emerging trends, the Rippel Foundation, through its flagship initiative ReThink Health, has crafted a [strategic roadmap](#) for the next 10 years. It will continue to partner with others to define and advance four interconnected commitments to support and energize a nationwide Thriving Together movement (see Figure 14).

Figure 14. Four connected commitments



These commitments have already begun to enhance the work that ReThink Health does every day and are inspiring similar commitments by other organizations. If extensively embraced, these commitments can unlock immense potential to break from business-as-usual and establish a new system that is built for well-being, equity, and racial justice. Driven by the power of network diffusion, a rising movement to thrive together through shared stewardship can spark significant shifts across the country within a decade.

- **Reinforce a unifying narrative** by telling stories anchored in widely shared aspirations and assets, not deficits, and making the case that we can thrive together, that justice makes us stronger, and that everyone can be a steward.
- **Bridge differences** by drawing upon diversity as an asset. This involves relying on the wisdom of both lived and learned expertise and working intentionally to connect across lines of color, class, gender, party, and other differences that too often divide us. Those who have historically been excluded must feel that they are embraced for who they are and valued for what they bring.
- **Invest in vital conditions**, especially belonging and civic muscle. This involves doing more to organize around vital conditions as widely held values and solidify understanding that belonging and civic muscle is a particularly powerful vital condition that ought to be more visible, valued, and investable.
- **Measure movement toward thriving together** through systematic evaluation of shared values for thriving together. This entails using a suite of measures— some existing and others to be developed—to achieve sustained movement toward an equitable, thriving future (such as stewardship practices and the balance of vital conditions and urgent services).

ReThink Health pushes the conversation across our field —disrupting the status quo in a way that is boundary-spanning, with a systemic focus.
—PROJECT PARTICIPANT



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See [Appendix E](#) for observations about contrasting consequences that could unfold as these commitments take hold in our work.

In Summary

The AST project helped to define the contours of stewardship, ascertain how stewardship practices can be strengthened at scale, and examine what it will take to catalyze a broader Thriving Together movement. Looking forward, we still have much to learn about the principles of self-organizing that will drive progress across contexts and in every geography. Progress will require learning how to shift and share power while simultaneously implementing accountability structures that build trust while measuring what matters.

“Doing good work together generates the next round of possibilities to leverage what has already been created—including trust, creativity, and shared ownership”

—PROJECT PARTICIPANT

Everyone who aspires to support the Thriving Together movement faces a pair of closely related challenges. The first is to expand the movement by spreading the ethos of thriving together and bringing others into the work of stewardship. The second is to provide more and better practical assistance to those stewards who have already invested themselves in the mission of increasing equitable well-being.

As we strive to advance thriving together, it is important not to focus so much on external action that we overlook the importance of internal evolution. The entrenched structures of the status quo have a powerful ability to erode ambition and sap momentum. That means that stewards have a difficult balance to strike. They have to be persistent but also flexible, humble but also bold, principled but also pragmatic. As in fostering strong-tie networks, the task of supporting stewards can't be piecemeal. Recent years have seen steady growth in the necessary infrastructure, but we have far to go.

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[ReThink Health Action Learning Synthesis: Evaluation of the Hospital Systems in Transition Project](#)

[ReThink Health Action Learning Synthesis: Evaluation of the Portfolio Design for Healthier Regions Project](#)

[Casemaking Checklist for Thriving Together](#)

APPENDIX A:

Amplifying Stewardship Together (AST) Project Strategies and Contributors

Total AST Contributors by Project Activity

AST Project Strategies and Activities	# of Contributors
Strategy: Foster understanding of stewardship norms and practices through nationwide research; clarify the boundaries and nature of the movement	
Conduct scouting interviews with movement-building stewards (<i>Spring 2019</i>)	16
Nationwide research - Amplifying Stewardship: Characteristics and Trends Stewards Consider When Expanding Equitable Well-Being (<i>Summer 2020</i>)	28
Nationwide research - 2021 Pulse Check on Shared Stewardship for Thriving Together Across America (<i>Spring 2022</i>)	348
Nationwide research - Tracking Poll for Stewards of Well-Being (<i>2020</i>)	98
Strategy: Frame a compelling case for stewarding equitable well-being; share accessible stories designed to draw others into the work	
Unsung Stewards Podcast - Season 1 (<i>Summer 2021</i>)	7
Stewards Rising Campaign: Answering the Call for Change (<i>Fall 2021</i>)	9
Strategy: Convene a virtual meeting series that enables participants to discuss and make sense of their efforts during multiple, layered crises	
Amplifying Stewardship Together Virtual Meeting Series (<i>Spring 2020-Winter 2021</i>)	94
Strategy: Collaborate with movement-building stewards to encourage widespread uptake of stewardship norms, surface movement-building practices, and advance opportunities for building the movement	
Identify trends, develop insights, and advance high-leverage activities by engaging in regular sensemaking dialogues with leaders nationwide	28
Total	628

AST Contributors by Project Strategy and Activity*

Strategy: Foster understanding of stewardship norms and practices through nationwide research; clarify the boundaries and nature of the movement

Activity: Conduct Scouting Interviews with Movement-Building Stewards
(n=16, Spring 2019)

Contributors included an invited group of movement builders working at a national and/or regional level and spanning diverse fields.

Alison Omens, Catalina Caro, Patrick Oakford (*JUST Capital*)
Bonnie Midura, Hanh Cao Yu (*The California Endowment, Building Healthy Communities*)
Carol Coletta (*Kresge Foundation, Reimagining the Civic Commons*)
Carol Naughton (*Purpose Built Communities*)
Dalila Madison-Almquist (*All in Cities, PolicyLink*)
David Levine (*American Sustainable Business Council*)
Doug Jutte (*Build Healthy Places Network*)
Elizabeth Sawin (*Climate Interactive*)
Emmy Ganos and Hilary Heishman (*Robert Wood Johnson Foundation*)
Jane Ellery (*Project for Public Spaces*)
Jeff Mohr (*The Omidyar Network*)
Olivia Araiza (*Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society*)
Ruth Rominger (*Garfield Foundation*)
Soma Stout (*Institute for Healthcare Improvement, 100 Million Healthier Lives*)
Stuart Cowan (*Regenerative Economics, The Capital Institute*)
Ted Howard (*Next System Project, The Democracy Collaborative*)

Activity: Nationwide Research (n=474)

Amplifying Stewardship: Characteristics and Trends Stewards Consider When Expanding Equitable Well-Being Report (n=28, Fall 2019 - Spring 2020)

Contributors included an invited group of diverse movement building stewards working at local and national levels.

Adair Mosley (*Pillsbury United Communities*)
Amit Bouri (*The Global Impact Investing Network*)
Becky Bartoszek (*Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce*)
Beth Rabbit (*The Learning Accelerator*)
Cailean Kok, Jane Ellery, Laura Torchio (*Project for Public Spaces*)
Craig Brammer (*Network for Regional Health Improvement*)
Elizabeth Lutz (*The Health Collaborative*)
Frank Nam (*Seattle Foundation*)
Gracy Olmstead (*Writer and Journalist*)
Grant Ervin (*City of Pittsburgh*)
Gregory Paulson (*Trenton Health Team*)
Jamie Hand (*ArtPlace America*)
Jennifer Ito (*Program for Environmental and Regional Equity; University of Southern California*)
Joanna Frank (*Center for Active Design*)
John Wood Jr. (*Braver Angels*)
Julie Rusk (*City of Santa Monica*)
Kia Baker (*Raleigh/Southeast Raleigh Promise*)
Kirk Emerson (*Institute of the Environment; University of Arizona*)
Kostas Skordas (*Appalachian Regional Commission*)

**Note: Organizational affiliations reflect the point in time at which the noted activity occurred and may have changed as of the publication date of this report.*

Mateus Baptista (*Panasonic Corporation of North America*)
Nathaniel Smith (*Partnership for Southern Equity*)
Stanley Litow (*Columbia University; Duke University*)
Thomas Linzey (*Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund*)
Tina Smith (*Just Growth*)
Tony Moore (*Gathering Place*)
Tyler Norris (*Well Being Trust*)
Ulcca Hansen (*Boundless Education*)

2021 Pulse Check on Shared Stewardship for Thriving Together Across America Report (n=348, Fall 2020 - Summer 2021)

Contributors to the Pulse Check survey included invited leaders from a representative sample of places across America spanning eight types of organizations (including city or county governmental public health departments, hospitals, business associations, multisector partnerships, and nonprofit organizations focused on food, housing, the environment, as well as faith and social justice). The identities of individual respondents were kept confidential.

Tracking Poll for Stewards of Well-Being (n=98, 2020)

Contributors included self-selected stewards working to advance equitable system change at local and national levels across the country. Contributors listed below participated in one or more tracking polls conducted in April, June, August, October, and December of 2020. Individual and organizational affiliations are listed according to what the tracking poll respondent provided.

Aaron Bush, Shirley Holland (*Carilion Clinic*)
Amy Heydlauff (*5 Healthy Towns Foundation*)
Anita Chandra (*RAND*)
Anna Creegan (*The Rippel Foundation/ReThink Health*)
Anna Muoio
Anna Scott, Jaala Smith, Mutende Katambo, Steve Daschle (*Southwest Youth & Family Services*)
Anne Kittendorf (*Michigan Medicine; Department of Family Medicine*)
Blythe Madge (*Health Institutions*)
Bernie Sorenson (*Southeast Regional Resource Center*)
Beth Flaherty, Kimberly Barrett (*Imagine Fox Cities Initiative*)
Beth Rabbitt (*The Learning Accelerator*)
Bill Wyman (*Oshkosh Area Community Foundation*)
Brett Sculthorp (*Subtle Health LLC*)
Bob Sachs (*Sachs Talent Advisors; The Leadership Development Group; We Care Services for Children*)
B. Sridhar (*Rotary International*)
Carol A. Cronin (*Informed Patient Institute*)
Carol Naughton (*Purpose Built Communities*)
Caroline Fichtenberg (*Social Interventions Research & Evaluation Network; University of California San Francisco*)
Catherine M. Baase (*Michigan Health Improvement Alliance*)
Christina Koukkos, Rick Brush (*Wellville*)
Christi Rocha (*Leyden Family Service*)
Cooper Norton
Dana Worrell (*Texas Health Resources*)
Debby Galsworthy (*Community Institutions*)
Deniene Willis (*Trustycup Productions*)
Denise Dougherty (*ACT for Health*)
Donal Collins (*BarlowCollins*)

Donna M. Mills, Rebeckah Berry (*Central Oregon Health Council*)
Doug Linkart (*National Civic League*)
Elizabeth Dale, Erin Morton, Felicia Rinier (*Jefferson Health/Thomas Jefferson University*)
Elizabeth Dickey (*Health for All*)
Eric Walker (*Nyserda; Open Buffalo*)
Frank Nam (*Civic Commons*)
Fred Brown (*The Forbes Funds*)
Gary Gunderson (*Stakeholder Health; Wake Forest University*)
Gina Federico (*United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut*)
Glenda Eoyang (*Human Systems Dynamics Institute*)
Hasshan Batts (*Promise Neighborhoods of the Lehigh Valley*)
Heida Keating (*Outagamie County Public Health Division*)
Hope Plavin (*Adirondack Health Institute*)
Howard (*Buena Vista Realty Service*)
Hugh Sheridan
James W. Mold (*University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center*)
Janedra Sykes (*Aboreta Group, LLC.*)
Jane Ellery (*Ball State University; Project for Public Spaces; Sustainable Muncie*)
Jason Schulist (*Boldt Company*)
Jenni Eickelberg (*Thrivent Foundation*)
Jen Lewis-Walden (*Shift Health Accelerator*)
Jerome (*Sun Foods*)
Jessica Dugan (*Bright Impact, LLC.*)
Joan Illardo (*Michigan State University College of Human Medicine*)
Julie Rusk (*Civic Wellbeing Partners*)
Karla Fales (*CareWell Services Southwest*)
Kat Mastrangelo (*Clinic of the Cascades; Volunteers in Medicine*)
Kurt Eggebrecht (*Appleton Health Department*)
Kyra Ochoa (*City of Santa Fe*)
Laura Torchio (*Project for Public Spaces*)
Lawrence (*Gaylan's*)
Lena Hatchett, Alexandra, Zayd Muhammad (*Proviso Partners for Health*)
Liz Weaver (*Tamarack Institute*)
Lyman (*Prestiga-Biz*)
Mary Horatio (*Undisclosed hospital*)
Mary Michaels (*City of Sioux Falls Health Department*)
Matt Guy (*Accelerated Transformation Associates*)
Matt Leighninger (*Public Agenda*)
Michael J. Cohen (*Michael J. Cohen Health Solutions*)
Miriam Messinger (*Interaction Institute for Social Change*)
Patrick McNamera (*Palm Health Foundation*)
Paul Morgen (*ThedaCare*)
Peter Eckart (*Illinois Public Health Institute*)
Peter Kelly (*United Way Fox Cities*)
Rebecca Vinroot (*James City County Department of Social Services*)
Robert (*Cut Above*)
Rodlescia Sneed (*Michigan State University*)
Ruth Rominger (*Garfield Foundation*)
Sara Ivey (*Institute for People, Place, and Possibility (IP3)*)
Shemekka Coleman (*I Am Brilliant*)
Somava Saha (*WE in the World; Well Being in the Nation (WIN) Network*)
Stefani Hartsfield (*Hartsfield Health Systems Consulting*)
Tonya Wells, William Evo (*Trinity Health*)

Trygve Throntveit (*Minnesota Humanities Center; University of Minnesota; Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*)
Ulcca Joshi Hansen (*Boundless; Educating Potential*)
Wanda Webster Stanbury (*Center for Child and Family Achievement*)
William McLaughlin, Merton Finkler (*Fox Valley Health Care Transformation Initiative*)
William Snyder (*Civic Stewardship Initiative*)

Strategy: Frame a compelling case for stewarding equitable well-being; share accessible stories designed to draw others into the work

Activity: Frame a Compelling Case (n=16)

Unsung Stewards Podcast, Season 1 (n=7, Summer 2021)

Contributors included invited exemplary stewards working at local and national levels to advance equitable system change.

Chris Chambliss (*Nehemiah Community Project*)
Fred Brown (*The Forbes Funds*)
Lena Hatchett (*Loyola University & Proviso Partners for Health*)
Pat McNamara (*Palm Health Foundation*)
Randy McFarland (*Best of Proviso Township*)
Shauneequa Owusu (*ChangeLab Solutions*)
Wanda Webster Stansbury (*Center for Child & Family Achievement*)

Stewards Rising Campaign: Answering the Call for Change (n=9, Summer 2022)

Contributors included invited exemplary stewards working at local and national levels to advance equitable system change.

Abby Goodwin (*Palm Health Foundation*)
Anita Chandra (*RAND*)
Dave Spivey (*Trinity Health*)
Erin Morton (*Jefferson Health/Jefferson Collaborative for Health Equity*)
Jerome Adams (*U.S. Surgeon General*)
Lisa Gentz (*5 Healthy Towns Foundation*)
Shirley Holland, Bob Trestman (*Carilion Clinic*)
Somava Saha (*Well Being in the Nation (WIN) Network*)

Strategy: Convene a virtual meeting series that enables participants to discuss and make sense of their efforts during multiple, layered crises

Activity: Amplifying Stewardship Virtual Meetings (n=94, Spring 2020 - Winter 2021)

Contributors included self-selected stewards working at local and national levels to advance equitable system change. This list reflects those names on the registration and attendee list.

Abby Goodwin, Pat McNamara (*Palm Health Foundation*)
Alan Gilbert (*Anthem/Elevance Health*)
Amna Khan, Ceres Khan (*Ceres*)
Amy Heydlauff (*5 Healthy Towns Foundation*)
Anita Chandra, Chris Nelson (*RAND*)
Anna Muoio (*New Capitalism Project*)
Andrew Johnson, Nora Johnson (*Inspire to Change*)
Andrew Mwavua (*Healthfirst*)
Angela Giordano (*Boston University*)
Asher Harris Jr. (*Paul G Stewart Apartments*)
Barbara Fulton (*Eaton Community Health*)
Ben Williams (*Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association*)

Bernie Sorenson (*Southeast Regional Resource Center*)
Beth Flaherty, Kimberly Barrett (*Imagine Fox Cities Initiative*)
Beth Rabbitt (*The Learning Accelerator*)
Bill Cook (*Weber State University*)
Catherine Baase (*Michigan Health Improvement Alliance*)
Christina Elmore (*Oregon Health and Science University*)
Daniel Pagan (*Community Science*)
Deborah Cullinan (*Yerba Buena Center for the Arts*)
Deniene Willis (*Trustycup Productions*)
Doug Jutte (*Build Healthy Places Network*)
Emmy Ganos, June Glover (*Robert Wood Johnson Foundation*)
Eric Walker (*Open Buffalo*)
Frank Nam (*Civic Commons - We Belong Here*)
Fred Brown (*The Forbes Funds*)
Gary Earl (*Gary Earl Health*)
Gary Gunderson (*Stakeholder Health; Wake Forest Baptist Health*)
Gena Morgan (*HealthierHere*)
Gina Federico (*United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut*)
Glenda Eoyang (*Human System Dynamics Institute*)
Glenn Landers (*Georgia Health Policy Center*)
Grant Ervin (*City of Pittsburgh Pennsylvania*)
Hashan Batts (*Promise Neighborhoods of the Lehigh Valley*)
Institute for Healthcare Improvement
Jamie Pfahl (*El Paso County Public Health*)
Jane Ellery (*Ball State University; Project for Public Spaces; Sustainable Muncie*)
Jason Schulist (*Boldt Company*)
Jeanne Solis (*Louisiana Department of Public Health*)
Jeffrey Levi, Jan Heinrich (*George Washington University Funders Forum on Accountable Health*)
Jen Lewis-Walden (*Shift Health Accelerator*)
Joanne Lee (*Healthy Places by Design*)
Jordan Smoczyk (*Carson Tahoe Health*)
Joy Prentice (*Groove for Good*)
Julie Rusk (*Civic Wellbeing Partners*)
Kate Dupont Phillips (*Healthy Communities Delaware*)
Kate Hilton
Kathleen Marks (*Conservation Fund*)
Kitty Bailey (*Be There San Diego*)
Kody Russell (*Kitsap Strong*)
Kostas Skordas (*Appalachian Regional Commission*)
Kyra Ochoa (*City of Santa Fe*)
Lauren Taylor
Lena Hatchett (*Proviso Partners for Health*)
Lindsey Riley (*The Michael J. Fox Foundation*)
Marc Gourevitch (*NYU Langone*)
Marcia Conner
Mary Michaels (*City of Sioux Falls*)
Mateus Baptista (*Panasonic Corporation of America*)
Matt Leighninger (*Public Agenda*)
Miriam Messinger (*Interaction Institute for Social Change*)
Monica Castellano
Nathaniel Smith (*Partnership for Southern Equity*)
Nicole Wilson (*King County*)

Nora Johnson
Pam Scott
Paula Morgen (*ThedaCare*)
Peggy Helm-Quest (*Wisconsin Department of Health Services*)
Peter Eckhart (*Illinois Public Health Institute*)
Rick Bush (*Wellville*)
Sarah McKinstry-Wu (*Urban Sustainability Directors Network*)
Sara Ivey, Michelle Windmoeller (*Institute for People, Place, and Possibility (IP3)*)
Sara Watrous (*Cortland Area Community Centers That Care*)
Sharon Lansdale (*The Center for Rural Health Development*)
Shauneequa Owusu (*ChangeLab Solutions*)
Shemekka Coleman (*I Am Brilliant*)
Stefani Hartsfield (*Hartsfield Health Systems Consulting*)
Steve Amos (*HealthCode*)
Susanne Schnell (*Public Health Institute of Metropolitan Chicago*)
Suzanne Parsel-Dew (*Caneystone*)
Tandra Rutledge (*Riveredge Hospital; Universal Health Services*)
Tasha Golden (*International Arts & Mind Lab*)
Tim Barr (*Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas*)
Tonya Wells (*Trinity Health*)
Trygve Throntveit (*University of Minnesota*)
Wanda Webster Stanbury (*Center for Child & Family Achievement*)
William Snyder (*Civic Stewardship Initiative*)

Strategy: Collaborate with movement-building stewards to foster widespread uptake of stewardship norms, surface movement-building practices, and advance opportunities for building the movement

Activity: Strategizing with Select Super-Multipliers (n=28, throughout the AST project)

Contributors engaged in planned interactions with peer movement builders working at a national level.

Alex Rossides (*Social Impact Exchange*)
Alina Baciu (*National Academies Roundtable on Population Health Improvement*)
Anita Chandra, Christopher Nelson (*RAND*)
Becky Payne, Suzi Gates, Erin McDonald, Paul Reed (*Federal Interagency Workgroup on Equitable Long-term Recovery and Resilience*)
Doug Jutte, Colleen Flynn, Ruth Thomas-Squance (*Build Healthy Places Network*)
Emmy Ganos, Hilary Heishman (*Robert Wood Johnson Foundation*)
Gary Gunderson, Teresa Cutts (*Stakeholder Health*)
Jeff Levi, Jan Heinrich (*Funders Forum on Accountable Health*)
Jennifer Fassbender (*The Reinvestment Fund, Intermediary Learning Network*)
Karen Minyard, Chris Parker, and Glenn Landers (*Georgia Health Policy Center*)
Monte Roulier, Stacy Wegley, Elizabeth Hartig (*Community Initiatives Network*)
Roxanne Medina-Fulcher, Erin Barbaro, Stacy Wegley, Sara Ivey (*Institute for People, Place, and Possibility*)
Shauneequa Owusu (*ChangeLab Solutions*)
Somava Saha, Anne Ekedahl (*WE in the World*)
Tiffany Manuel (*The CaseMade*)
Tyler Norris (*Well Being Trust*)
Ursula Bauer, Greg Fairchild, Doug Jutte (*Office of the U.S. Surgeon General*)

APPENDIX B:

Resources Produced Through the Amplifying Stewardship Together (AST) Project by ReThink Health and Project Contributors

Resources Produced by Project Contributors

- [The Federal Plan for Long-Term Recovery and Resilience](#)
- [Well-Being in the Nation \(WIN\) Measures](#)

Resources Produced by ReThink Health

Blogs

- [Communities RISE Together: Building Belonging and Civic Muscle Through Community Vaccine Mobilization](#)
- [Cultivating Belonging and Civic Muscle to Advance Equity](#)
- [Deciding Where To Invest Is Easier Than We Imagine: Portfolios Everywhere Ought to Prioritize an Equitable Economy and a Connected Society](#)
- [How Stewards can Drive Social Change](#)
- [Insight Spotlight Series: Amplifying Stewardship Together Project](#)
- [Insight Spotlight Series: What are We Learning Alongside Stewards of Equitable Health and Well-Being?](#)
- [In the Midst of National Crises, Stewards are Taking Action Inside Their Own Institutions](#)
- [Leveraging Philanthropy to Cultivate Interdependence](#)
- [Regional Leaders Learn How to Invest Resources to Ensure Health and Well-Being](#)
- [Stewards are Hopeful as the Case for Systems Change is Increasingly Seen and Understood](#)
- [Stewards are Leveraging Relationships to Help Communities Thrive](#)
- [Stewards End the Year with Rising Determination to Make Progress on Systemic Issues](#)
- [Stewards Rising](#)
- [To Catalyze System Change, Become a Better Casemaker](#)
- [What Are We Learning in Our CaseMaking Journey with Rippel Foundation's ReThink Health Initiative](#)
- [What Could Stewards Achieve if We Acknowledged our Limitations, Amplified our Strengths, and Expanded our Horizons?](#)
- [What Will it Take for Regional Leaders to Reallocate Resources in Ways that Ensure Our Well-Being?](#)
- [What Would it Mean for Hospital Leaders to be Stewards of Their Regions' Well-being?](#)

Multimedia

- [How to Make a Case for Healthcare Systems Centered Around Justice](#)
- [Stewards Rising Campaign: Answering the Call for Change](#)
- [Thriving Together Through Shared Stewardship](#)
- [Unsung Stewards Podcast](#)

Reports

- [ReThink Health Action Learning Synthesis: Shared Stewardship and the Prospects for Thriving Together](#)
- [Amplifying Stewardship: Characteristics and Trends Stewards Consider When Expanding Equitable Well-Being](#)
- [2021 Pulse Check on Shared Stewardship for Thriving Together Across America](#)

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Tools, Toolkits, and Training Material

- [CaseMaking Checklist for Thriving Together](#)
- [Institute for People, Place, and Possibility. Thriving Together with IP3: IP3Assess](#)
- [ReThink Health's Primer on Essential Stewardship Practices](#)
- [ReThink Health's Primer on Essential Stewardship Practices – Spanish Version](#)
- [Thriving Together Theater](#)

Websites

- [Thriving.US](#)
- [Thriving.US Building Blocks for Recovery to Renewal](#)
- [Tracking Poll for Stewards of Well-Being](#)

APPENDIX C:

What Do Stewards Believe, Know, and Do?

A Primer on Essential Stewardship Practices

What We Believe: Our Values and Worldviews

We can thrive together: We all share an aspiration to become thriving people in a thriving world. When we translate that aspiration into action, it becomes a commitment to create communities where all people have a fair chance to participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. Our best hope to realize a resilient and vibrant America for generations to come is to organize local and nationwide action around a single unifying and measurable expectation: *All people and places thriving together—no exceptions.*

Justice makes us all stronger: When large numbers of us are struggling, suffering, and experiencing unfair burdens, it frays our national fabric of justice and stability. We reject structural racism and all forms of social exclusion as toxic forces that destroy lives and dehumanize us all. We celebrate human differences and diverse cultures as strengths, not liabilities, when trying to thrive together in a rapidly changing world.

We can join each other in shared stewardship: Ordinary people in every walk of life, along with organizations in every sector or industry, can move into meaningful roles as shared stewards of well-being and justice. Stewards are people and organizations who work with others to create the conditions that everyone needs to thrive together, beginning with those who are struggling and suffering. That is how we co-create a society in which everyone can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.

What We Know About Thriving Together

Without vital conditions, it is not possible to thrive: Vital conditions are properties of places and institutions that we all need all the time to reach our full potential, like humane housing, access to meaningful work and wealth, and a sense of belonging. When those vital conditions are absent or impaired, people tend to struggle and suffer, driving demand for urgent services. Urgent services are essential, but they are temporary fixes that don't address broader, long-term conditions that are needed to thrive—we cannot “urgent service” our way to thriving.

Without reckoning with ever-present legacies of justice and injustice, it is not possible to thrive together: We have inherited legacies that confer dignity and foster resilience. We have also inherited legacies that dehumanize, exclude, and inflict trauma. The decisions we make today will shape the legacies that we pass on to future generations.

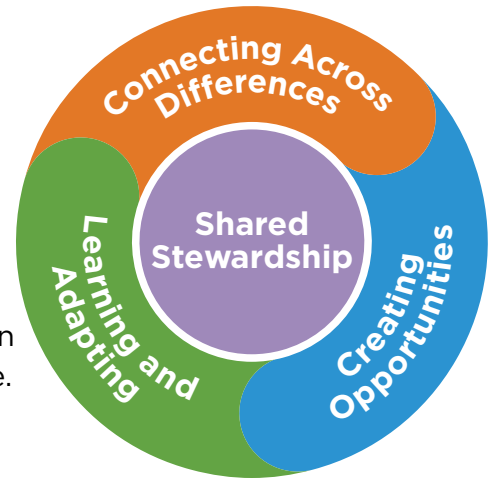
Without expanding *belonging and civic muscle*, we cannot work across differences as *shared stewards of the systems that shape our lives*: Lasting change across the country depends on everyone feeling like an important part of a community, contributing to its vibrancy, and developing the power to co-create a common world. Building [belonging and civic muscle](#) strengthens social ties, increasing trust and cooperation, making it easier to work together. This creates a virtuous cycle: When people feel valued and cared for within the community, they are more likely to contribute and participate in creating healthy, equitable places.

What We Do: Essential Stewardship Practices

There is nothing newfangled or technical about what stewards do, and they don't rely only on experts with special knowledge to guide the way. Instead, their practices are based on age-old concepts that have enabled communities and cultures around the world to sustain legacies for living together over centuries.

We intentionally depict the practices in a circle because stewards hardly ever pursue them in a linear path. Changes in one practice often cascade into shifts and insights elsewhere. Most stewards are already strong in some practices, while others need improvement or are new frontiers altogether.

There are countless practices that stewards enact in their quest toward thriving together. These practices rise to the level of being essential because of their unique power to support and generate lasting change in any setting. The practices group into three patterns that stewards everywhere can deepen to drive progress toward everyone thriving together, no exceptions:



Connecting Across Differences

Stewardship is not a solo act, and it becomes increasingly powerful as more people and organizations are drawn into the work together.

Creating Opportunities

Our progress depends on actively breaking from the status quo by continually creating opportunities for a different future to take hold.

Learning and Adapting

Our world is constantly changing; adaptive approaches will help us to move forward together, even in the face of uncertainty.

Stewardship Practices

Connecting Across Differences

- a. **Weave Vested Interests:** Actively seek to understand the values and priorities of others. Emphasize curiosity, vulnerability, and deliberative dialogue in shaping a way forward.
- b. **Value Unheard Voices:** Develop authentic working relationships with residents. Ensure that all change efforts are done *with*, not *to* those they are meant to support.
- c. **Earn Trust:** Prioritize transparency through continual, authentic communication. Repair harm through honesty and reconciliation. Build and honor mechanisms for mutual accountability.
- d. **Strengthen Interdependence:** Distinguish the unique contribution that each steward can make. Create just enough structure for ongoing and emergent forms of collaboration. Nurture alignment.
- e. **Build Shared Power:** Build capacity, energy, and power for shared action across individuals and institutions. Draw others into stewardship and help them to deepen their practice so it becomes the de-facto way of working together.

Creating Transformative Opportunities

- f. **Expand Aspirations:** See the “whole system,” not just isolated pieces. Orient all strategies toward the north star of thriving together.
- g. **Change the Story:** Cultivate stories of hope, shared humanity, and mutual strength. Change expectations about what is possible.
- h. **Commit to Multisolving:** Choose solutions that advance multiple goals at once, are mutually reinforcing, and have many co-benefits.
- i. **Bridge Timescales:** Work over the short and long term simultaneously. Appreciate the decades-long nature of the work at hand and the need to make decisions now that bring a different future to life.
- j. **Align Investments:** Align financial incentives with community health and well-being. Develop and support funding sources and financing mechanisms that align organizational interests with broader goals for thriving together.

Learning and Adapting

- k. **Embrace Complexity:** Appreciate that the work of social change is messy, unpredictable, and always evolving. Cultivate comfort with the unknown.
- l. **Promote Abundance:** Eschew zero-sum thinking. See tensions and differences as opportunities to create new understanding and possibility. Solve problems by being creative with existing resources, rather than first seeking more resources.
- m. **Habituate Action Learning:** Create a culture of continuous shared learning. Integrate multiple points of view along the way. Regularly adapt to new information and perspectives. Minimize risk by testing small-scale prototypes.
- n. **Consider Legacies Past and Future:** Explore positive and negative legacies with candor. Articulate those that need to be left in the past and those that need to emerge to create a different future.
- o. **Use Data to Chart Progress:** Actively find ways to share and integrate data. Use that data to support coordination and track shared progress toward the north star of thriving together and the path for getting there.

How Were the Essential Stewardship Practices Developed?

This collection of essential practices began with an [initial version](#) in 2016, developed with insights from the ReThink Health [Ventures project](#). The current collection encompasses refinements based on a [trio of action learning projects](#) from 2018-2022, reactions from thousands of colleagues across the country, as well as comparisons with more than a dozen similar summaries of approaches for stewarding the systems that shape our lives together. It reflects our best current understanding, yet remains open to evolve.

We have also created an accompanying [Stewardship Practices Assessment](#) to help changemakers identify strengths and areas for improvement for individuals, organizations, and networks in their journey to become better stewards of an equitable, thriving future. Results from prior similar assessments were used in the implementation and evaluation of our [Hospital Systems in Transition](#) and [Portfolio Design for Healthier Regions](#) projects.

Acknowledgements

The Rippel Foundation's ReThink Health initiative thanks the thousands of fellow stewards whose efforts have informed and inspired these practices, especially participants in the following projects supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: Ventures, Hospital Systems in Transition, Portfolio Design for Healthier Regions, and Amplifying Stewardship Together. In particular, several co-developers and early champions include: Jane Erickson, Bobby Milstein, Ruth Wageman, Sherry Immediato, Ella Auchincloss, Anna Creegan, Katy Evans, and Cierra Bryant from ReThink Health; Emmy Ganos and Hilary Heishman from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation; and Monte Roulter from the Community Initiatives Network.

APPENDIX D:

Summary of Content Linked Throughout the Amplifying Stewardship Together (AST) Action Learning Synthesis

(Content listed in order of first mention in report)

Introduction

- [Negotiating a Well-Being Portfolio](#)
- [Amplifying Stewardship: Characteristics and Trends Stewards Consider When Expanding Equitable Well-Being](#)
- [ReThink Health Midpoint Action Learning Synthesis](#)

Project Design and Participants

- [Portfolio Design for Healthier Regions](#)
- [Hospital Systems in Transition](#)
- [ReThink Health Action Learning Synthesis: Evaluation of the Portfolio Design for Healthier Regions Project](#)
- [ReThink Health Action Learning Synthesis: Evaluation of the Hospital Systems in Transition Project](#)
- [2021 Pulse Check on Shared Stewardship for Thriving Together Across America](#)
- [Tracking Poll for Stewards of Well-Being](#)
- [Casemaking Checklist for Thriving Together](#)
- [What Are We Learning in Our CaseMaking Journey with Rippel Foundation's ReThink Health Initiative](#)
- [How to Make a Case for Healthcare Systems Centered Around Justice](#)
- [Unsung Stewards Podcast](#)
- [Stewards Rising Campaign: Answering the Call for Change](#)
- [Amplifying Stewardship Together: Virtual Meeting Series](#)
- [Thriving Together Springboard](#)
- [The Federal Plan for Equitable Long-Term Recovery and Resilience](#)
- [Surgeon General's Report on Community Health and Economic Prosperity](#)
- [Thriving.US Recovery to Renewal](#)

Characterizing the Thriving Together Movement

- [ReThink Health's Primer on Essential Stewardship Practices](#)

Signs of a Growing Movement

- [Google Ngram 'Stewardship' Search Count](#)

Insights About Movement Building for Thriving Together

- [Complex Contagions and the Weakness of Long Ties](#)

APPENDIX E:

How Could Four Commitments for Serious Stewards Create Momentum and Counter Resistance?

The following table contrasts consequences that could unfold as the four commitments identified in the Action Learning Synthesis of ReThink Health's Amplifying Stewardship Together Project take hold in our work and beyond. Although this is still a work-in-progress, this information can be helpful when scanning for emerging trends and scouting potential strategic partners.

Connected Commitments	What does it CREATE?	What does it COUNTER?
<div data-bbox="191 604 743 863" style="background-color: #e67e22; color: white; padding: 15px; border-radius: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p>REINFORCE A UNIFYING NARRATIVE</p> <p>Tell stories and make the case for HOW we can thrive together</p> </div>	<p>Thriving together narrative</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stories of stewards in action 2. Public will for a just system 3. Creating solutions, possibilities 4. Elevated aspirations 5. Hope 6. Love 7. Abundance 8. Pragmatism 9. Trustworthy information 10. Identifiable narrative, easier to track 	<p>Othering narrative</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invisible stewards 2. Invisible and unjust system 3. Reacting to problems 4. Eroding aspirations 5. Fear 6. Hate 7. Scarcity, zero sum fallacies 8. Fatalism 9. Disinformation 10. Vague “narrative change”, hard to track
<div data-bbox="191 1276 743 1493" style="background-color: #27ae60; color: white; padding: 15px; border-radius: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p>BRIDGE DIFFERENCES</p> <p>Draw upon our diversity as an asset to break through barriers to change</p> </div>	<p>Networks based on bridging</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Multiracial 2. Intergenerational 3. Multisector 4. Grassroots + grasstops 5. Transpartisan 6. Trust, safety 7. Healing 8. Shared fates 9. Allies 10. Lived + learned expertise 11. Experiences of inter-dependence 12. Strong-tie networks, wide bridges 	<p>Networks based on othering</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. White supremacy 2. Overlooked youth 3. Sector silos 4. Grassroots vs. grasstops 5. Hyper-partisan 6. Distrust, fear 7. Harm 8. Separate fates, us/ them division 9. Enemies 10. Technical expertise 11. Illusions of separateness 12. Weak-tie networks, narrow bridges

Connected Commitments	What does it CREATE?	What does it COUNTER?
<p>INVEST IN VITAL CONDITIONS</p> <p>Prioritize investments with many co-benefits, especially belonging and civic muscle</p>	<p>Far-sighted transformative investments</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Solve for pattern 2. Investments in things we truly value 3. Positive incentives 4. Increase assets, enlarge the pie 5. Effects increase over time 	<p>Short-sighted incremental investments</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Solve one problem, make others worse 2. Fighting against things we do not want 3. Perverse incentives 4. Allocate assets, divide the pie 5. Effects erode over time
<p>MEASURE MOVEMENT</p> <p>Measure progress toward thriving together</p>	<p>Forward-looking knowledge for action</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contribution 2. Where are we going? 3. How close to where we want to be? 4. Which changes are significant? 5. Focus on part-whole-greater whole 6. Realist, developmental evaluation 7. Evaluation as navigation 8. Transformation 	<p>Backward-looking reports for others</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Attribution 2. Where have we been? 3. Where are we now? 4. Did anything change? 5. Focus on parts 6. Summative evaluation 7. Evaluation as obligation 8. Improvement

APPENDIX F:

Glossary of Terms for ReThink Health Action Learning Syntheses

Action learning: A learn-as-you-go approach to project design and evaluation that prioritizes rapid cycles of action, reflection, and adaptation, integrating multiple points of view along the way. More than observation, it is a way to build insights informed by everyone involved in a change effort and strengthen capacity across individuals, organizations, and networks.

Belonging and civic muscle: Belonging and civic muscle is central to the [vital conditions](#) that everybody needs to thrive together. Belonging is feeling part of a community, embraced for who you are, and valued for what you bring. Civic muscle is the power to work across differences and shape our common world. Taken together, belonging and civic muscle is both a vital condition unto itself as well a pragmatic capacity that is necessary for equitable progress in every other kind of work. Efforts to expand belonging and civic muscle are both means and ends in an intergenerational movement for well-being, equity, and racial justice.

Complex adaptive systems: Complex adaptive systems are systems with many players, interacting parts, and multiple (and massively entangled) boundaries leading to emergent outcomes that are often difficult (or impossible) to predict by looking only at the individual interactions. They are constantly evolving, with no clear start or end points. Wherever stewards work, locally or nationwide, from within a single organization or across many, they always work in complex adaptive systems.

Emerging effects: Emerging effects are the unfolding consequences of actions within a complex adaptive system. They encompass a full spectrum of results that emerge through engagements with ReThink Health, including shifts in practice of project participants (i.e., mindsets and actions) and shifts in context (i.e., strategies, policies, resource flows, and relationships).

Intentional interdependence: Efforts to overcome fragmentation and work across differences require intentional interdependence. Instead of a futile attempt to be all things to all people, stewards can [distribute leadership across networks of organizations](#), cultivating an understanding of their own unique roles and the roles of others. This can enable closer alignment, deeper and more focused working relationships, and stronger mutual accountability.

Most significant change evaluation approach: An evaluation approach that asks study participants to share experiences of change and identify those that they believe are most significant from their own point of view.

Multisolving: One action with many benefits.

Realist evaluation approach: A practical, explanatory way of evaluating interventions in complex adaptive systems and generating insights that are useful for decision makers by asking, “what works, for whom, in which circumstances?” rather than merely “did it work?”

Sensemaking: The process by which a group interprets a situation, context, or new information, particularly in the absence of straightforward explanations. The process combines multiple perspectives to reach shared understanding, often through iterative actions and group reflection.

Shared stewardship: Stewardship is responsible management of something entrusted with one’s care. A growing network of people and organizations see themselves—and one another—as interdependent [stewards in a movement](#) for well-being, equity, and racial justice. Stewardship is never a solo enterprise. Stewards, by definition, work together to create conditions that everyone needs to thrive together, beginning with those who are struggling and suffering. When changemakers join in a movement of shared stewardship, they can transform legacies of injustice and create a system in which everyone has a fair chance to participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. Stewardship is broader than leadership or governance. It is a way of seeing the world and making decisions that will build and sustain legacies for living together.

Simple rules for shared stewardship: A short, memorable set of shared principles or guidelines (usually five to seven) that support aligned action within and across organizations and residents in a community. Simple rules help to align values, build collective understanding across scales, and shift strategies and investments to expand the vital conditions for health and well-being.

Stewards: Stewards are people, organizations, and networks who work with others to create the conditions everybody needs to thrive together, beginning with those who are struggling and suffering. Everyone can be a steward. They may be affiliated with an organization or act on their own authority.

Strategic casemaking: Strategic casemaking is a way of building public will for equitable system change. By leading with messages about [solutions and inclusion](#), not crisis and separation, it brings new people and organizations into the movement for an equitable, thriving future and strengthens the commitment of those already engaged.

Strong-tie network approach: Recent research found that [strong-tie networks](#)—relatively small networks of individuals and organizations who share strong bonds of understanding and trust—may be more effective for scaling transformative change than much larger networks in which understanding and trust are weaker. Strong-tie networks should be intentionally designed to cultivate a diversity of perspectives, ensuring that those whose experiences are typically unheard become co-designers and full partners in the decision-making process.

Thriving together: More and more changemakers are organizing around a single unifying and measurable expectation: [All people and places thriving together—no exceptions](#). Efforts to thrive together focus simultaneously on well-being, equity, and racial justice. Often used as the north star or moral compass in an intergenerational movement, our quest to thrive together affirms both dignity and plurality—we are unique people in a common world, each trying to live in a way that lets others live as well. When we translate that aspiration into action, it becomes a commitment to create communities in which all people have a fair chance to participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.

Urgent services: Urgent services are services that anyone under adversity may need temporarily to regain or restore their best possible health and well-being. They include acute care for illness or injury (either mental or physical), addiction treatment, crime response, environmental cleanup, homeless services, as well as unemployment and food assistance.

Vital conditions: [Vital conditions](#) are properties of places and institutions that everybody needs all of the time to reach their full potential for health and well-being. They include a thriving natural world, basic needs for health and safety, humane housing, meaningful work and wealth, lifelong learning, reliable transportation, as well as belonging and civic muscle. When one or more vital conditions are absent or impaired, people tend to struggle and suffer, driving demand for urgent services. Urgent services are essential, but they are temporary fixes that don't directly produce thriving lives.

Well-being portfolio design: An intentional effort among stewards in a region to negotiate interdependent investments for well-being, equity, and racial justice. Whether acknowledged or not, every region has a portfolio of combined investments from all sources. Well-being portfolio design is the process of persistently crafting a regional portfolio to unlock everyone's full potential to participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. It entails adjusting the relative balance of vital conditions and urgent services to realize an equitable, thriving future.