Stark County Nonprofit Service Provider Assessment

Prepared by The Center for Community Solutions on behalf of Stark Community Foundation

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Introduction

Stark Community Foundation and its partners conducted a survey to better understand the current and projected state of the nonprofit sector in Stark County. Results were independently collected, compiled, and analyzed by The Center for Community Solutions. We collected 144 valid responses from organizations who serve communities throughout Stark County. The survey was conducted in April 2022. At this time, over two years after the beginning of the global COVID-19 pandemic, service providers were still adapting to the changed environment. Many organizations had returned to in-person services, while others continued to utilize technology tools to connect with clients. As shown in the survey results described below, staffing was a significant challenge for many due to labor market pressures. This report provides a point-in-time snapshot of the experience of a wide variety of nonprofits and other service providers across Stark County.

Key Findings

- Via the survey, service providers across Stark County shared their views of the impact of COVID-19, the challenges facing their organizations and what assistance can help, and impressions of Stark Community Foundation.
- Respondents were particularly concerned about mental and behavioral health issues in the community and jobs and the economy. This is consistent with surveys of other communities, which show that mental health has risen to the top as we emerge from the pandemic.
- The impact of COVID-19 was not consistent. While funding, demand for services, and availability of volunteers grew for some organizations, others experienced decreases. There were few discernable patterns in terms of size or age of nonprofit or issue focus, suggesting that each organization's experience during this time is unique.
- Respondents were also split when asked whether they expected pandemic-related changes to be permanent.
- Taken together, it appears that most of these nonprofits have adapted to the changing external environment and are optimistic about the future.
- However, reliable funding and staff shortages present serious challenges. Grant writing and fundraising was also the most popular area where respondents said assistance would be helpful, followed by fostering collaboration and communications help such as marketing and telling their story.
- From the survey results, it does not appear that there is one urgent or acute need for a particular type of help. Instead, organizations could use a broad array of support.
- While respondents said they think of Stark Community Foundation as a funder first, these service providers look to Stark Community Foundation to be a leader not only as a grant maker, but in fostering collaboration and providing other types of organizational support. The Foundation's role as a convener presents one area of potential opportunity, as this ranked high both on the types of assistance which could help in general, as well as on the question about Stark Community Foundation help in particular.

About the Community

According to the survey respondents, Stark County is a good place to live and work. Some of the strengths of Stark County include an appetite for effective collaboration, the generosity of residents, and its amenities. The Pro Football Hall of Fame, high-quality educational institutions, and parks were all specifically mentioned by a several respondents. The size of the community was something cited by many as something they value about Stark County. Themes also included the diversity of the community, an inclusive approach and its hardworking and dedicated people.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS	
What do you value about the Stark County community?	*What do you think are some of the strengths in the Stark County community?*
• **"We value the way our community comes together to help individuals who are in need. Stark County is a great place to live and a great place to serve."** • **"Big enough to have plenty of resources, small enough to get to know the people who have access to those resources."** • **"It represents a wide diversity of economic and racial backgrounds."** • **"I value the support services provided through robust community agencies that care about improving the quality of life for its residents. I also value the community's adoption of projects that strive to elevate the county and region as a whole in an inclusive manner."** • **"Its resilience. We have had our ups and downs over the last half century, but we maintain an optimist view and work to create a better community."** • **"The people. Stark county is a nice, welcoming, and supportive community."** • **"Stark is inclusive and many people are invited to the table to come up with solutions."** • **"Collaboration and willingness to tackle large issues."**	• "Stark County has great leaders who take an interest in serving our community. New investments are being made in our community to accelerate growth." • "Collaboration. Stark County organizations work well together when it comes to doing what is best for the community." • "The generosity of the community in caring for their fellow neighbors, both by monetary donations and giving of time." • "There are many nonprofits trying to do good work. People have good hearts here." • "Everyone seems to work together and help each other. Great sense of community." • "Great school systems, low cost of living, and a desire to make progress across the county." • "We are diverse in our population and needs. It is a great community to work and partner with others." • "The sense of community. Sense of pride related to certain things (like sports and history of the community). People are nice and kind."

On the other hand, the Stark County community does face challenges. When asked about the most pressing issues facing the Stark County community, mental health was identified as a top community concern by the most respondents, followed closely by the economy and jobs. More than one-quarter of respondents selected substance abuse and addiction and/or housing affordability. This aligns with other research conducted by The Center for Community Solutions which seems to indicate that mental health for both children and adults has rocketed to the top of community concerns.
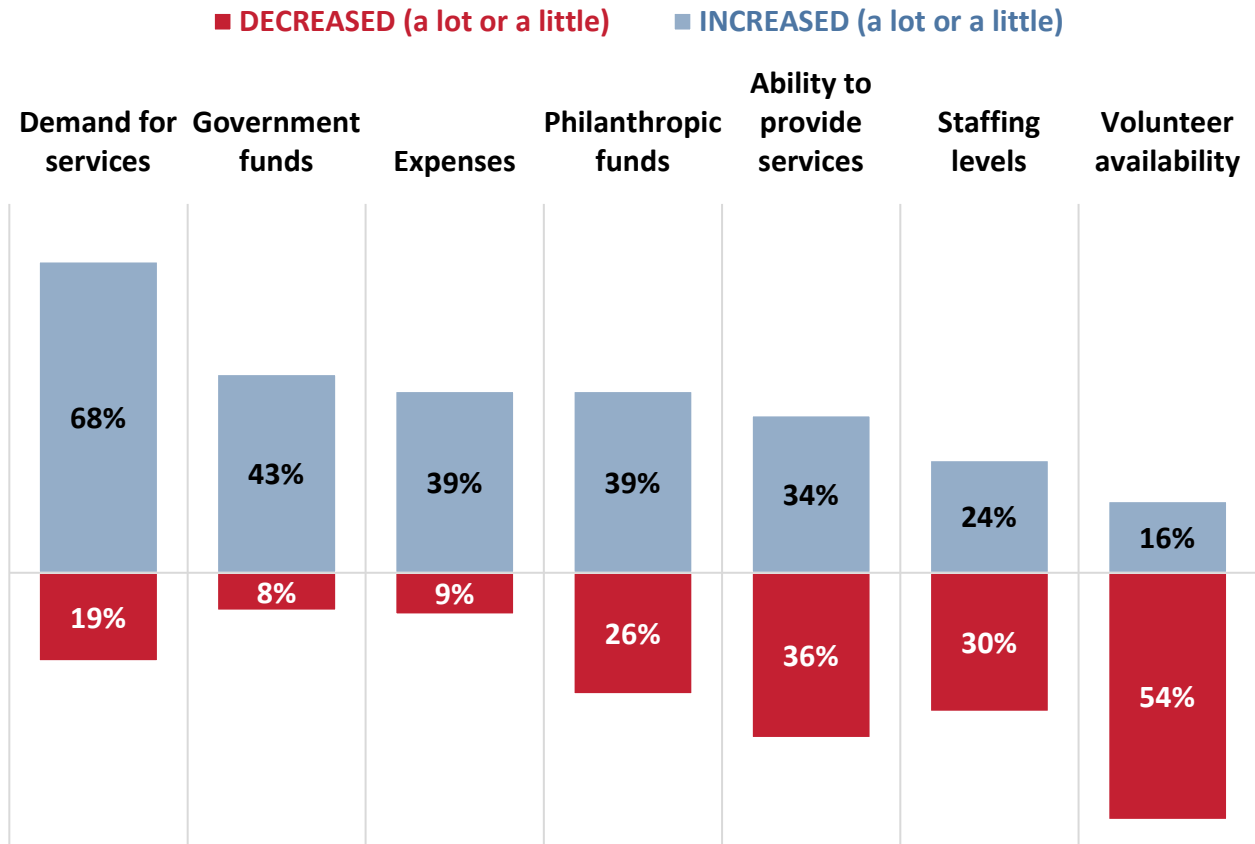
"Please select the three (3) most pressing issues for the Stark County community."

Rank	Issue	Percent of Respondents
1	Mental Health	37.0%
2	Economy and Jobs	34.6%
3	Access to Healthy Food	26.0%
4	Substance Abuse and Addiction	26.0%
5	Housing Affordability	21.3%
6	Education: Pre-K to 12	19.7%
7	Job Readiness	18.1%
8	Social Emotional Issues from Trauma	17.3%
9	Other Housing Issues (e.g., vacancy, blight, development)	15.7%
10	Violence Prevention	11.0%
11	Social Justice Concerns	10.2%
12	Senior Services	8.7%
13	Special Populations (e.g. Individuals with Disabilities, Immigrants and Refugees, etc.)	8.7%
14	Health System Access	7.9%
15	Transportation	7.1%
16	Personal Financial Resilience (Budget/Debt Management)	5.5%
17	Safety	4.7%
18	Reading Literacy	3.9%
19	Medication Access	3.1%
20	Digital Literacy	2.4%

Organization Outlook

Community organizations in Stark County were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the effects were not consistent. In every category, some agencies reported that the pandemic caused increases while other reported decreases. More than two-thirds of respondents said that demand for their services grew due to the pandemic, with 40 percent of agencies indicating a large increase. On the other hand, more than half said that volunteer availability had fallen. Taken together, increases in the demand for services, government funds, and expenses were much more common than decreases. More agencies experienced growth in philanthropic funds, although most reported small increases. The ability to provide services was about evenly split between increases and decreases while falling staffing levels were slightly more common than increases.

"We have all lived through two years of a public health emergency. In what ways has COVID-19 impacted your agency?"

■ **DECREASED (a lot or a little)**   ■ **INCREASED (a lot or a little)**

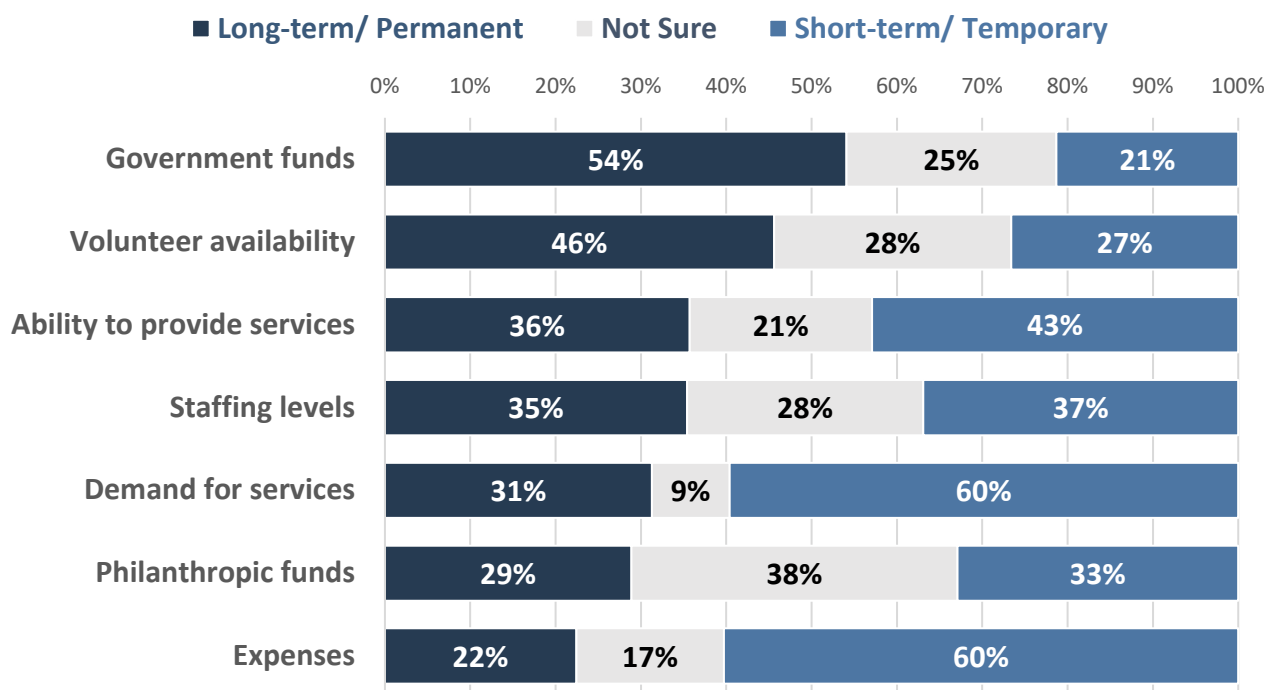|	Demand for services	Government funds	Expenses	Philanthropic funds	Ability to provide services	Staffing levels	Volunteer availability
INCREASED	68%	43%	39%	39%	34%	24%	16%
DECREASED	19%	8%	9%	26%	36%	30%	54%

The organizations who reported that the demand for services had decreased tended to work in areas where in-person interaction is a critical element of their activities. They included arts, culture, and humanities, education and youth services, and sports and recreation. Education and youth services organizations were also the most likely to report that philanthropic funds to support their services had fallen during the pandemic.

Newer organizations that had been operating for less than five years were much more likely to report that their expenses had increased, with half saying expenses had increased a lot. On the other hand, newer organization tended to have recruited more volunteers than the average, with nearly 60 percent saying that the availability of volunteers to support their work had increased during the pandemic.

Many of these changes, especially demand for services and expenses, were expected to be short-term or temporary by agencies in Stark County, although there is a great deal of uncertainty. Changes in government funds and volunteer availability were expected to last longer.

"Do you think the impact will last?"
(Among respondents who experienced a change)

■ **Long-term/ Permanent**   ■ **Not Sure**   ■ **Short-term/ Temporary**

	Long-term/Permanent	Not Sure	Short-term/Temporary
Government funds	54%	25%	21%
Volunteer availability	46%	28%	27%
Ability to provide services	36%	21%	43%
Staffing levels	35%	28%	37%
Demand for services	31%	9%	60%
Philanthropic funds	29%	38%	33%
Expenses	22%	17%	60%

Even given these changes, Stark County organizations tend to have a positive outlook on their future. More than half (53.7 percent) expect to continue to grow at a steady pace, suggesting that nonprofit agencies in Stark County have weathered COVID are preparing for the future. None of the individuals said that their organizations were in danger of closing in the next year and only four indicated that they are struggling and their survival was unknown or they simply were not sure. Struggling organizations all had annual budgets of less than $1 million but the group included both newer and more established nonprofit organizations. All reported that their expenses had increased as a result of the pandemic, and that these changes were expected to be permanent. Several said that funding, either philanthropic or government, had decreased. This may suggest that financial issues are driving the uncertainty.

"How do you feel about the future of your organization?"
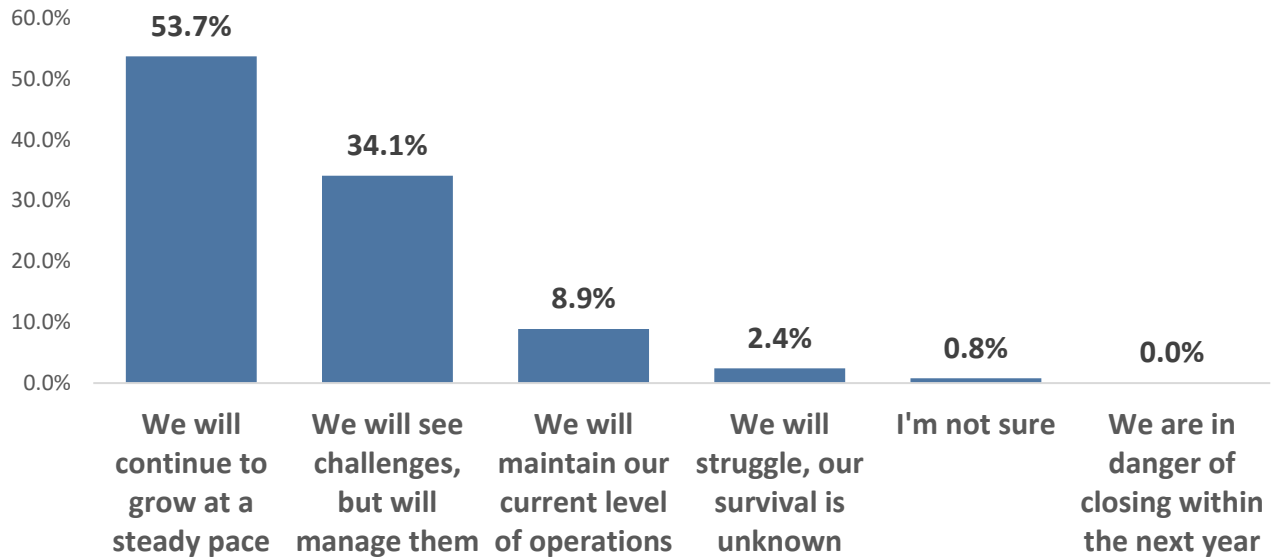
Lack of funding stability and the inability to attract and/or retain qualified staff were by far the most common barriers to the ability of organizations to fulfill their missions, selected as the single greatest challenge by 70 percent of respondents. Only 11 percent reported overwhelming community need, and less than five percent each indicated that board development, adapting to a hybrid service and/or work environment, using technology, or inability to afford or access ancillary services was the greatest barrier. An open-ended question asked respondents to elaborate on these issues. The answers included below are representative of those who selected each primary barrier.

Issue (%)	Descriptions
Lack of funding stability (39%)	• "We have to find some streams of funding we can rely on. Foundation funding is not guaranteed even if you are providing a valuable and needed service." • "Funding sources have fluctuated during this time. It has made it difficult to predict which sources are the most sustainable over time." • "As Stark County decreases in size, we have seen a rapid deterioration in corporate support. While individual support has increased, it has not enough to offset the loss of corporate support." • "We depend on donors, foundations, and corporate support to fund our mission. That mixture is unstable depending on many factors including the economy. We are very worried about recession."
Inability to attract and/or retain staff (32%)	• "Our early childhood program has struggled significantly due to staff shortage. This has caused us to limit the number of children we're able to serve despite having the space capacity and financial resources to do so." • "The staffing needs of our community continue to grow. We hire but unfortunately, some only complete the interview and never show up for work and/or others work one or two days and never return. We offer a competitive starting wage, flexible hours, and a positive work environment but still find it difficult to find long term employees." • "The constant churn of staff does not allow us to focus on staff enrichments and program development." • "As a nonprofit, we are unable to pay a competitive salary and many funding streams do not support staff salaries and operations." • "We have had two positions open for almost a year and cannot find qualified candidates. Or candidates that do qualify want to only work from home or expect more money than we can pay."
Overwhelming community need (11%)	• "The pandemic has affected those in need in our community to a greater extent than the rest of the population. It is harder to reach those who need our services the most." • "The pandemic seemed to add to the stress of people in our community… There have also been people who we serve and who volunteer which have struggled with mental health as a result of the pandemic and its effects." • "Not enough space to serve the entire community."

Issue (%)	Descriptions
Board development (4%)	• "A stronger, more connected board would certainly enhance our fundraising capacity, which right now is very staff-centric. The community has been very supportive, but we need to focus on board development in the near future." • "Many of our board members have served long-term and are unable to recognize our current challenges. While we do have some younger members, they do not have the knowledge or experience to run an effective organization."
Adapting to a hybrid services and/or work environment (4%)	• "Our community relies on live, in person interpreters. However, more and more providers are going to remote video types of services."
Using Technology (4%)	• "Technology and the hardware/software that is constantly changing makes it hard to keep up without a new learning curve."
Inability to afford or access ancillary services (e.g. Marketing, IT, Legal) (3%)	• "Because we are small with a limited budget (and big hearts!) we lack the resources to grow our technology and expand our community reach."

What Can Help?

Over one-third of Stark County service providers said that assistance with fundraising or grant writing and telling their story would be helpful in the short term. Fundraising or grant writing help was also identified as a longer-term need, as was help with collaboration or strategic partnerships. As shown in the chart below, organizations said a wide variety of assistance would be helpful both short and long term, although providing research or best practices, budget development and planning advice, delivering services virtually, general management advice, and financial management or budgeting were less popular.

Two-thirds of the organization identified at least one item that would help in the short or long term, and most identified multiple needs. The average was between 4 and 5 different short-term needs and just over 4 long-term needs.

"What type of assistance or resources would be most helpful to you in the immediate future and longer term?"

■ **Short Term (6 months - 1 year)**   ■ **Longer Term (in the years to come)**

Category	Short Term	Longer Term
Fundraising or grant writing	35%	44%
Collaboration or strategic partnerships	32%	40%
Telling your story	34%	30%
Marketing assistance	31%	26%
Using or upgrading technology	26%	25%
Workforce or hiring	24%	25%
Board development and governance	23%	26%
Program evaluation	24%	22%
Leadership development	21%	24%
Volunteer management	19%	23%
Data collection and analysis	18%	22%
Diversity, equity, and inclusion	18%	22%
HR or support for managing employees	17%	17%
Providing research or best practices	12%	17%
Budget development and planning advice	13%	12%
Delivering services virtually	15%	10%
General management advice	16%	8%
Financial management or budgeting	12%	11%

Many of the needs were about evenly split between short- and long-term time horizons. Although the numbers were smaller, general management advice was one exception, with about twice as many respondents saying they could use this help in the immediate future as opposed to longer term. Funding was identified as the greatest barrier, and also the top type of assistance which could help service providers fulfill their missions. While staffing issues were also a top problem, fewer organizations said that assistance with workforce or hiring would be helpful.

From these results, it does not appear that there is one urgent or acute need for a particular type of help. Instead, organizations could use a broad array of support.

Impressions of Stark Community Foundation

The survey asked a series of questions about Stark Community Foundation. The vast majority of respondents (89 percent) said that they prefer to receive information from Stark Community Foundation via email listserv, which makes sense because the survey was distributed online via these methods. Webinar or virtual meeting (44 percent), event or in person meeting (43 percent), and printed materials (32 percent) were also relatively popular. Fewer were turning to social media to connect with the Foundation.
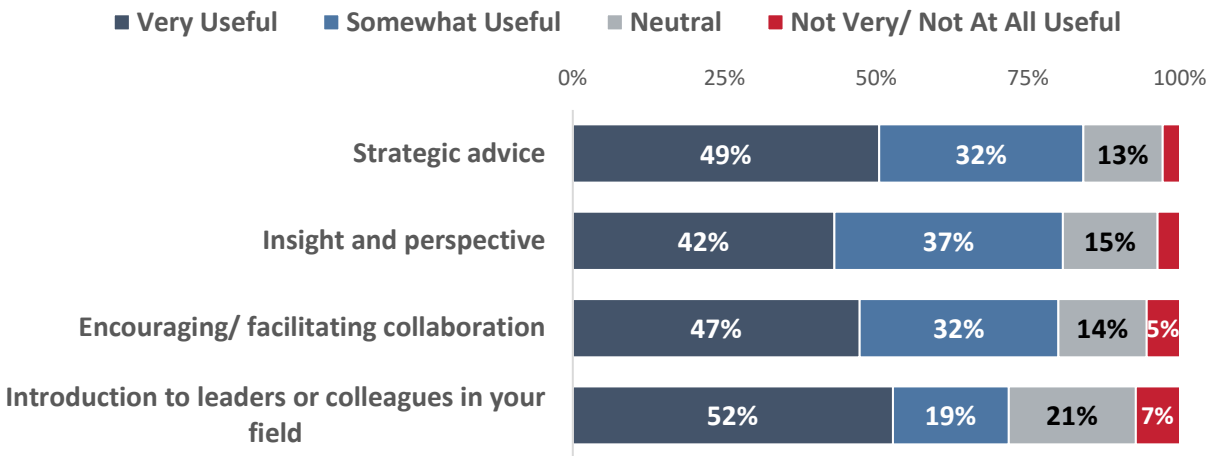
Not surprisingly, most respondents think of Stark Community Foundation as a funder, although more than half indicated that the Foundation is also a community change agent. Less than one in five said they think of it as a convener, which could be an area of opportunity as help with collaboration or strategic partnerships was the second most important type of assistance organizations said they could use. In addition to the options offered, respondents also called the Foundation a gatekeeper, connector, cheerleader, team player, trailblazer, and old-school funder.

"When you think of Stark Community Foundation, what comes to mind? (Please select all that apply)"
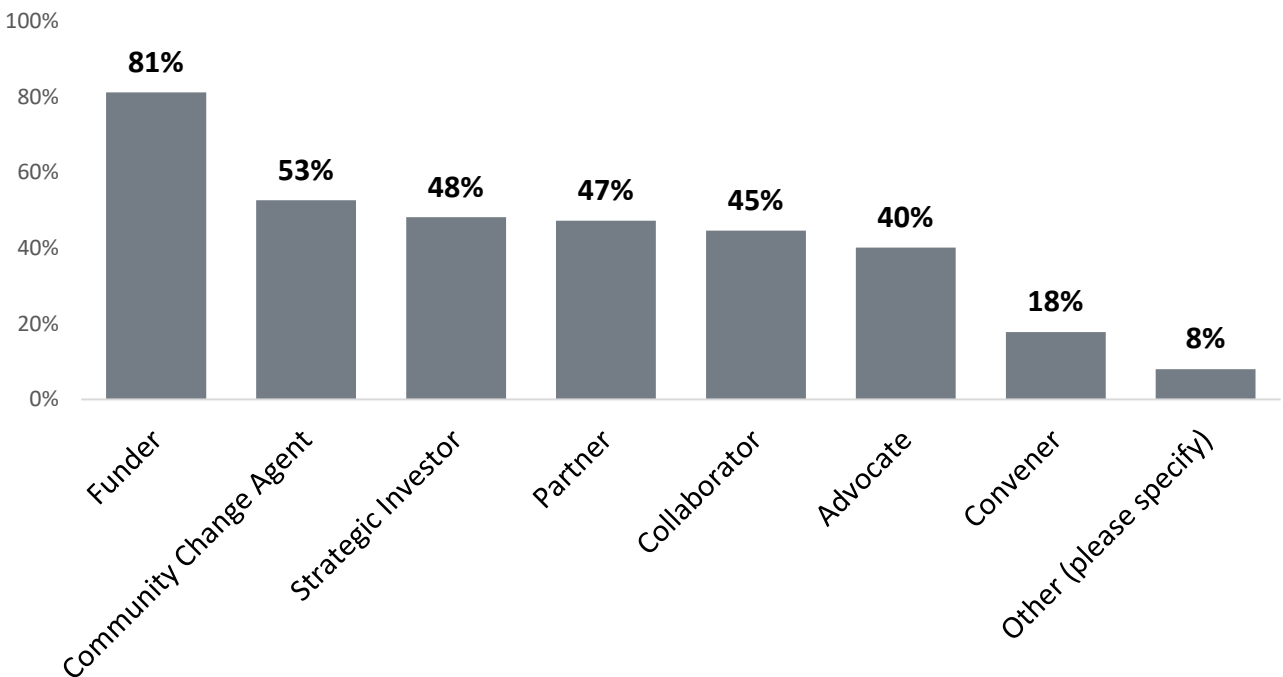
When asked about specific help Stark Community Foundation could provide, over 70 percent of respondents said that every type of assistance suggested would be at least somewhat useful. While all the numbers were high, introduction to leaders or colleagues in your field and strategic advice appeared to be the most popular, as about half of respondents said these two areas would be very useful.

"If offered, how useful might you find the following assistance from Stark Community Foundation?"

■ Very Useful   ■ Somewhat Useful   ■ Neutral   ■ Not Very/ Not At All Useful

0%	25%	50%	75%	100%

Strategic advice: 49% | 32% | 13%

Insight and perspective: 42% | 37% | 15%

Encouraging/ facilitating collaboration: 47% | 32% | 14% | 5%

Introduction to leaders or colleagues in your field: 52% | 19% | 21% | 7%

Specifically, respondents suggested that Stark Community Foundation could "help good programs grow to be great programs." Common themes included fostering collaboration and connections, building organization capacity, addressing community issues such as poverty or workforce development, and using the role of as a funder in various ways. Many suggested specific areas of funding, such as homelessness, supports for older adults, services for students, or behavioral health system investments.
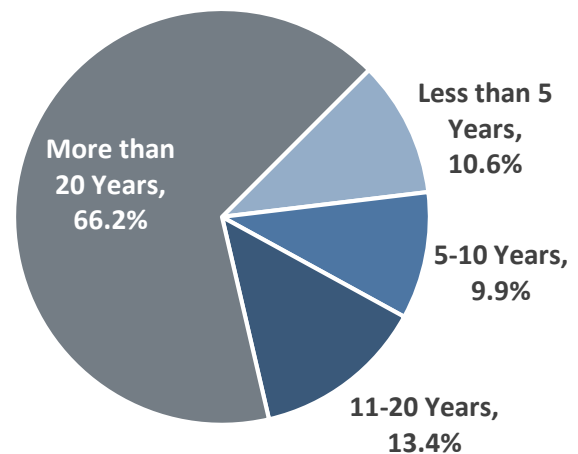
Profile of Responses

Respondents represented a nonprofit organization, grassroots organization, government agency, or church and provided services in Stark County. Respondents were about evenly split between those who serve all of Stark County, those who serve a larger area which includes Stark County, and those who focus efforts in one portion of Stark County.

Service Area of Respondents

Number of Organizations

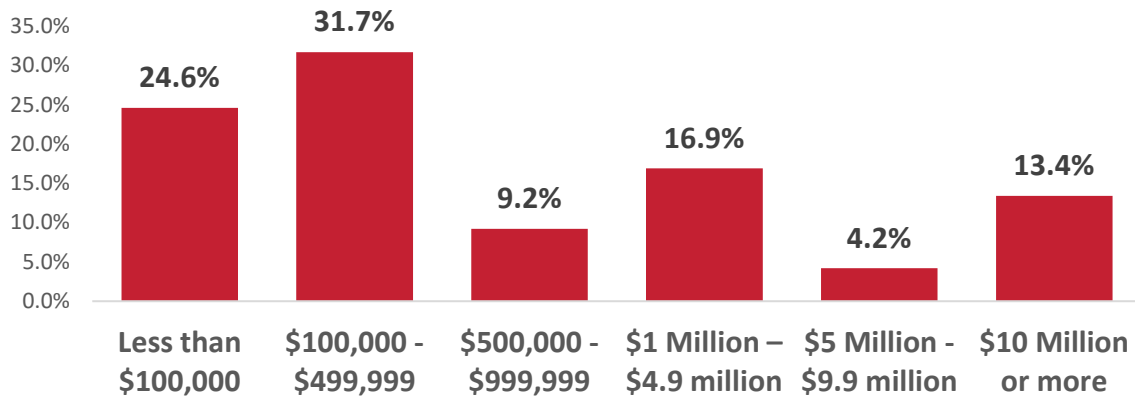|	
Part of Stark County	44
All Stark County	51
Larger Area Which Includes Stark County	49
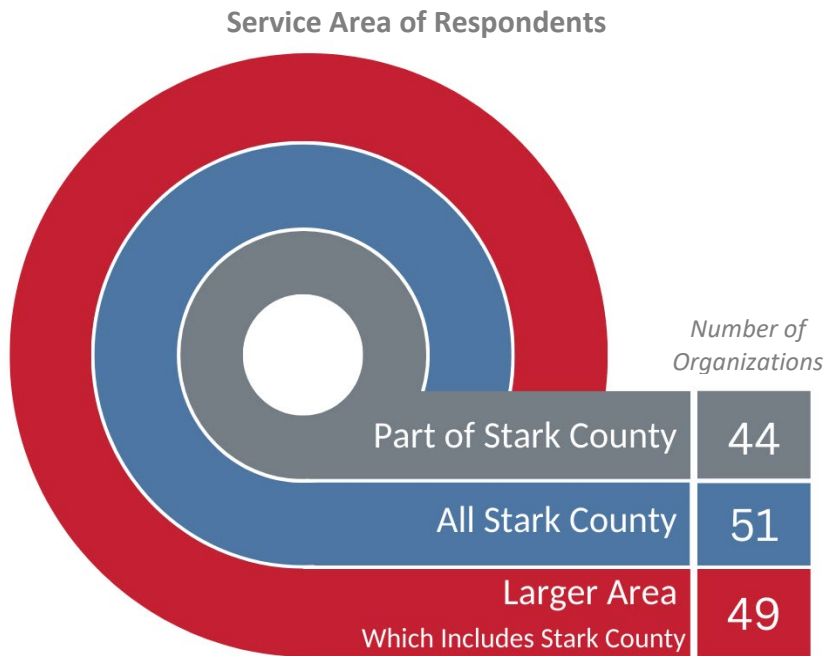
The respondent pool is weighted toward well-established organizations. Two-thirds of respondents (66.2 percent) represented organizations that have been operating for more than 20 years. Respondents were overwhelmingly part of the leadership team at their organizations, and 76 percent were executive directors, presidents, or CEOs.

Over half of the organizations can be considered small or medium-sized based on their annual operating budget, including 26.4 percent with annual operating budgets of less than $100,000. In addition, over 44 percent of respondents are from organizations with 5 or fewer staff members.

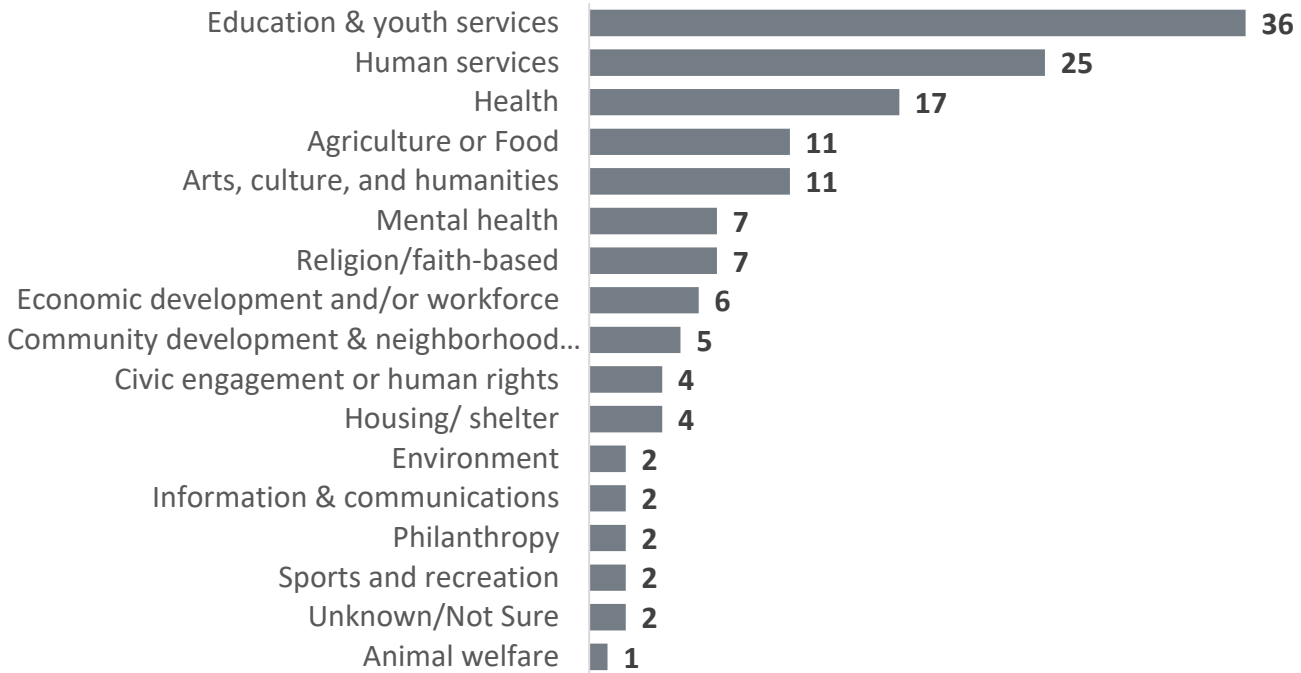*"How long has your organization been operating?"*

More than 20 Years, 66.2%

Less than 5 Years, 10.6%

5-10 Years, 9.9%

11-20 Years, 13.4%

"What is your organization's annual operating budget?"

Budget Category	Percentage
Less than $100,000	24.6%
$100,000 - $499,999	31.7%
$500,000 - $999,999	9.2%
$1 Million – $4.9 million	16.9%
$5 Million - $9.9 million	4.2%
$10 Million or more	13.4%

		n	%
Number of Staff	0	12	8.8%
	1 to 5	48	35.3%
	6 to 10	24	17.6%
	11 to 20	7	5.1%
	21 to 50	23	16.9%
	51 and greater	22	16.2%
Number of Volunteers	0	15	11.5%
	1 to 5	12	9.2%
	6 to 10	16	12.2%
	11 to 20	15	11.5%
	21 to 50	37	28.2%
	51 and greater	36	27.5%
Number of Board Members	0	0	0.0%
	1 to 5	22	15.9%
	6 to 10	45	32.6%
	11 to 20	58	42.0%
	21 to 50	11	8.0%
	51 and greater	2	1.4%

Organizations were spread throughout the county geographically, with a concentration around Canton. They represent a mix of focus areas, with the largest numbers in education and youth services, human services, and health.

"Which of the following BEST describes your organization's focus?"

Focus	Count
Education & youth services	36
Human services	25
Health	17
Agriculture or Food	11
Arts, culture, and humanities	11
Mental health	7
Religion/faith-based	7
Economic development and/or workforce	6
Community development & neighborhood...	5
Civic engagement or human rights	4
Housing/ shelter	4
Environment	2
Information & communications	2
Philanthropy	2
Sports and recreation	2
Unknown/Not Sure	2
Animal welfare	1

Location of Survey Respondents
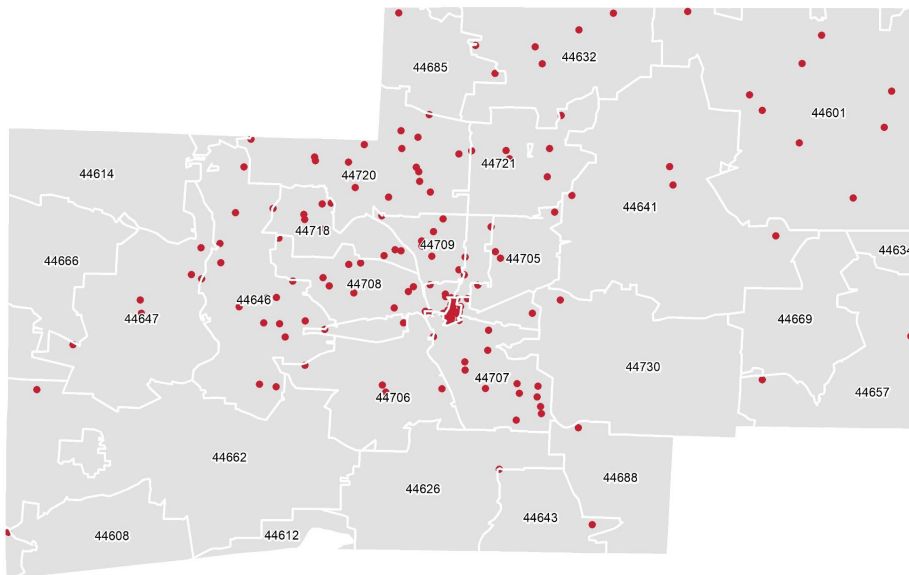
Note: One dot represents one response. Dots are randomly located within each ZIP Code.

The survey reached the intended audience and had a good variety of organization size, age, focus area, and geographic scope.