

MARCH 2026

# NATIONAL STAKEHOLDER STUDY 2026

PULSE SURVEY RESULTS





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# Background

Polaris is launching a multi-year initiative to activate partnerships across the field, strengthening our shared intelligence and research pathways, and building the platforms for coordinated, survivor-centered systems change.

Our first step is to launch the National Stakeholder Study, a collaborative, participatory research study that seeks to understand what the field needs in order to align, act, and sustain collective impact.

The National Stakeholder Study, or NSS 2.0, seeks to continue the work of Polaris's National Survivor Study, which redefined how the anti-trafficking field understood the survivor experience and how research with survivors could be participatory and empowering.

While the original NSS asked, "What do survivors need to thrive?", the NSS 2.0 asks, "What does the field need to succeed?"

## Pulse Survey Design

To kick off the National Stakeholder Study, we first sent out a pulse survey to the field. The goals of this pulse survey were to:

1. Map out stakeholders in the field
2. Begin to brainstorm our shared values, needs, and priorities as a field
3. Start building our team of collaborators

We also wanted to inform stakeholders about our new work in this area and invite them to contribute to a larger discussion around fighting trafficking in the current moment, what that looks like, and what opportunities there are for working together in the future. Although Polaris remains just one voice of many in that conversation, we want our efforts to facilitate collaboration, redistribution of power, and effective leadership towards the impact we want to see in the next decade and beyond: coordinated, system-wide collaboration and victims and survivors reaching sustainable prosperity in their lives.

The pulse survey consisted of 22 questions, covering participant and organization characteristics, the impact of policy and systems change in 2025, feelings about 2026 and beyond, most important values and needs, and interest in collaboration. See Appendix A for the full survey.

The survey invitation was sent to 2,729 individuals, which included potential participants from Polaris’s existing referral directory and internal contact lists that fell within the framework of the different stakeholder groups we intended to reach, focusing on organizational, rather than individual contacts. This list had a high representation of service providers and law enforcement based on the contents of Polaris’s referral directory. Of the total 2,729 invitations, SurveyMonkey indicated that 296 had bounced back, and 1,229 were unopened.

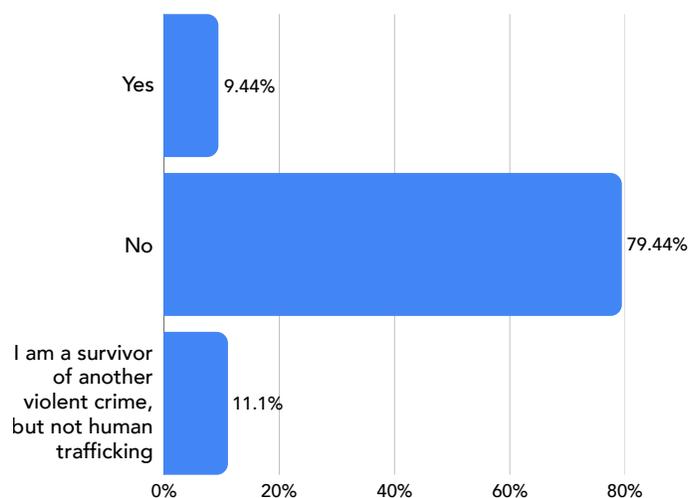
As of February 23, 2026, 219 respondents had entered the survey, and approximately 180 people completed the survey. The survey took participants an average of 14 minutes to complete.

## Participants & Organizations

The survey first asked individuals to give us their name, job title, and organizational affiliation, in order to begin to map stakeholders across the field. We have not included that list here, but it will be helpful in creating a stakeholder map in the larger research project. All of the remaining questions were optional.

Participants were then asked if they identified as a survivor of human trafficking or a survivor of any other violent crime, in order to determine the level of survivor participation in the survey as well as to identify whether lived experience of violent crime may be more widespread than previously identified. While almost 1 in 10 respondents identified as survivors of human trafficking, more than 1 in 5 identified as survivors of some type of violent crime.

Figure 1: Survivor identification (n=180)

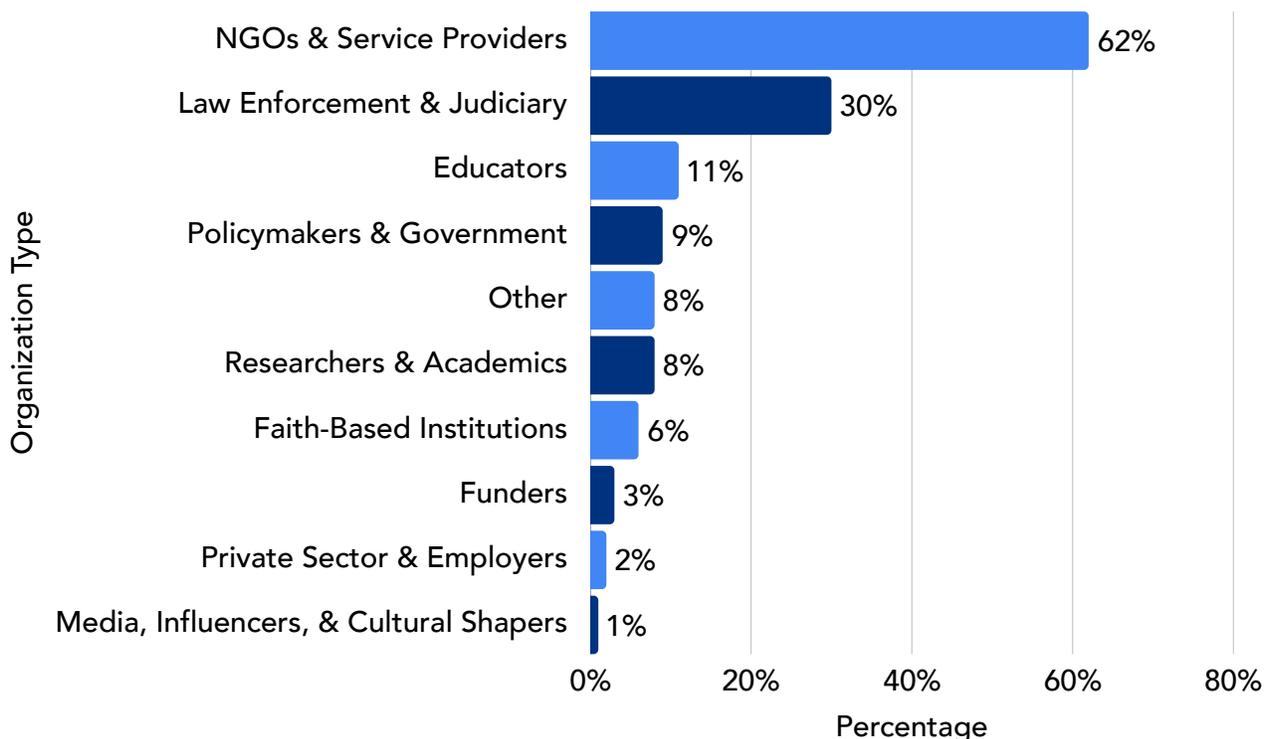




There are, of course, important differences between survivors of trafficking and survivors of other violent crimes, and there are often differences in the way communities address each. However, we know that survivors of both kinds are working within the anti-trafficking movement within all stakeholder groups, and a recognition of other lived experiences of violence may offer one way to reduce artificial barriers between survivors and non-survivors as we shift from tokenizing survivor experience toward meaningful collaboration among stakeholders with diverse lived experiences.

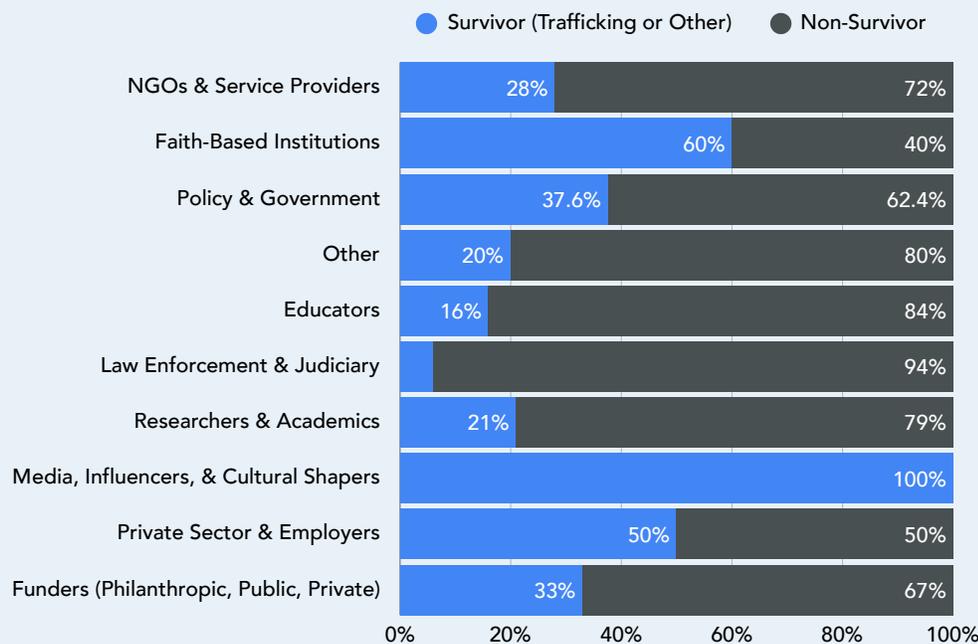
Among respondents, a wide majority represented NGOs & Service Providers (62%), followed by Law Enforcement & Judiciary (30%). This is perhaps not surprising given the high proportion of those two groups among our email invitation list, but it does allow us to give context to the remaining results based on who answered the survey. Respondents could select multiple types of organizations for this question. "Other" responses included public speakers and trainers, evaluators, technology solutions, and multi-sector collaborative work that respondents did not feel fit appropriately within the named categories.

Figure 2: Stakeholder type (n=180)



Within stakeholder groups, we found that each stakeholder group had responses from survivors and non-survivors (excluding Media, Influencers, & Cultural Shapers, whose small number all indicated being survivors). Based on the small proportion of respondents within some stakeholder groups, some percentages below may be misleading; the most well-represented stakeholder groups — NGOs & Service Providers and Law Enforcement & Judiciary — are likely more accurate representations of the proportion of survivor status. Notably, Law Enforcement & Judiciary had the least amount of respondents identifying as survivors, at only 6 percent.

Figure 3: Stakeholder group by survivor status (n=177)



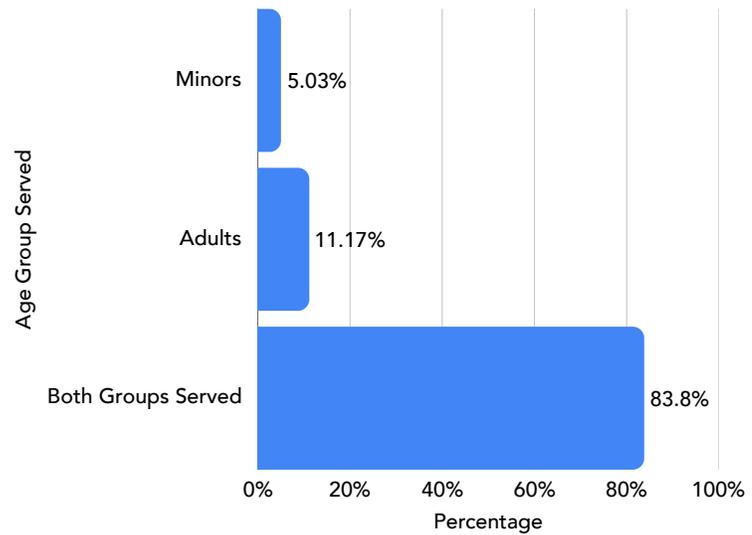
A large proportion of respondents reported that their organizations' work related to both sex and labor trafficking (82%), and the remainder reported work related to sex trafficking only. Among NGOs, a larger proportion reported specialized work related to sex trafficking only (25%). No respondents reported specializing in labor trafficking only.

Figure 4: Type of trafficking (n=179)



Similarly, the vast majority of respondents reported that their work related to both minors and adults (84%), with 5 percent reporting work primarily related to minors, and 11 percent primarily related to adults. Among NGOs we saw slightly more specialization, with 15 percent of work primarily related to adults and 5 percent to minors.

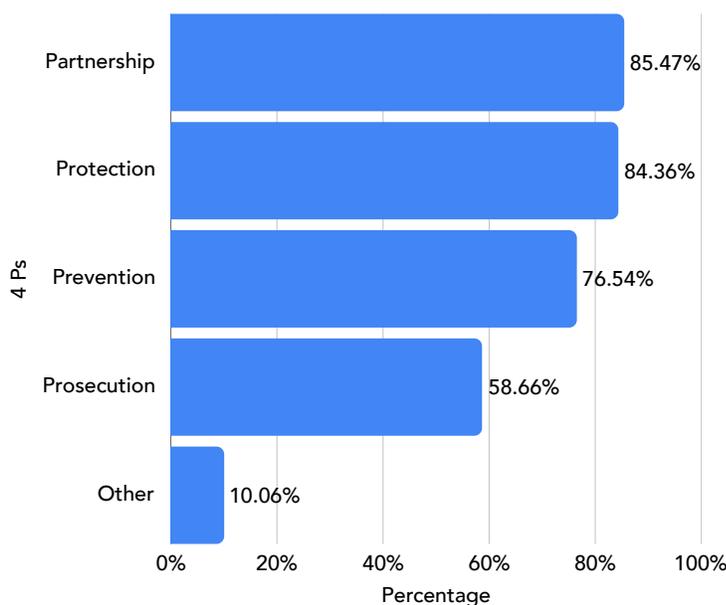
Figure 5: Serve minors and/or adults (n=179)



To further characterize their efforts, the survey asked respondents to categorize their work as relating to one or more of the 4Ps — Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnership — of anti-trafficking work.

- Prevention: Address vulnerabilities and systemic drivers of trafficking.
- Protection: Provide survivors with access to safety, services, and long-term stability.
- Prosecution: Support accountability and enforcement of traffickers and facilitators.
- Partnership: Foster collaboration across sectors and communities.

Figure 6: Four Ps of anti-trafficking work (n=179)



On average, respondents selected 2.50 Ps, with Partnership the most often selected (85%) and Prosecution the least often selected (59%). Among our most represented stakeholder groups, we saw that NGOs & Service Providers selected Protection and Partnership (both at 29% of responses), while (perhaps unsurprisingly) Law Enforcement & Judiciary selected Prosecution most often. See Table 1 for a breakdown of selection by Stakeholder Type in Appendix B.

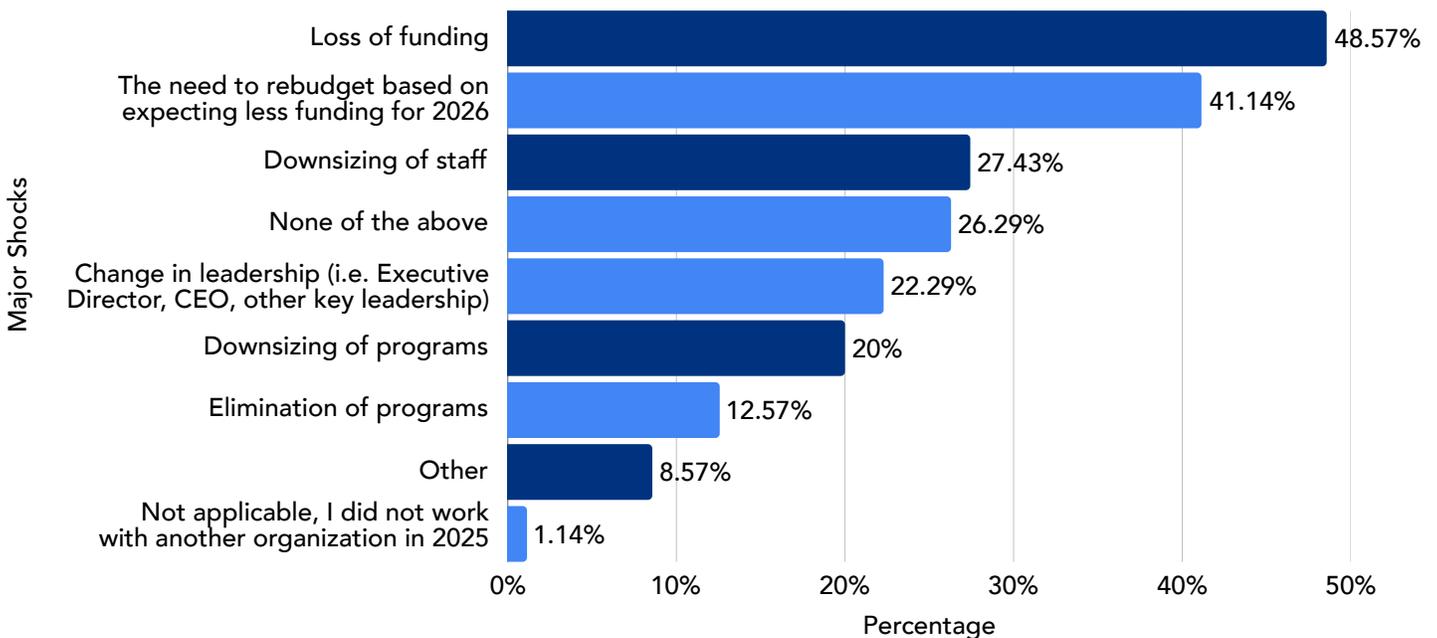
# Impact of 2025 on the Present

In 2025, we saw major changes to many systems, including cuts to funding and resources across the nonprofit sector and in the anti-trafficking field. In this section of the survey, we wanted to better understand how respondents had fared in 2025 and where that left them coming into 2026.

When asked about major shocks in 2025, nearly half of the respondents (49%) shared that they or their organizations had lost funding. Other commonly experienced shocks included the need to rebudget based on downwards projections for 2026 (41%) and downsizing of staff (27%).

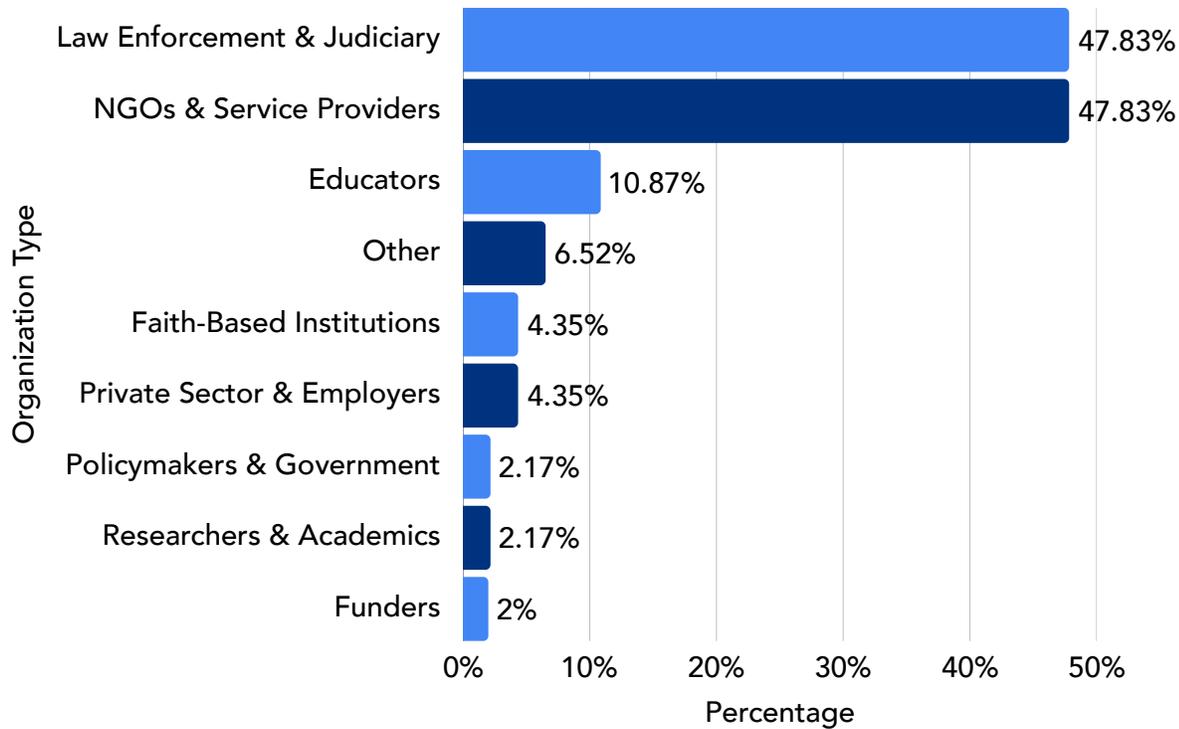
It was notable that approximately one-fourth of respondents did not experience any of the listed major shocks, indicating that the effect of these shocks was unevenly distributed among stakeholders.

Figure 7: Major shocks experienced in 2025 (n=175)



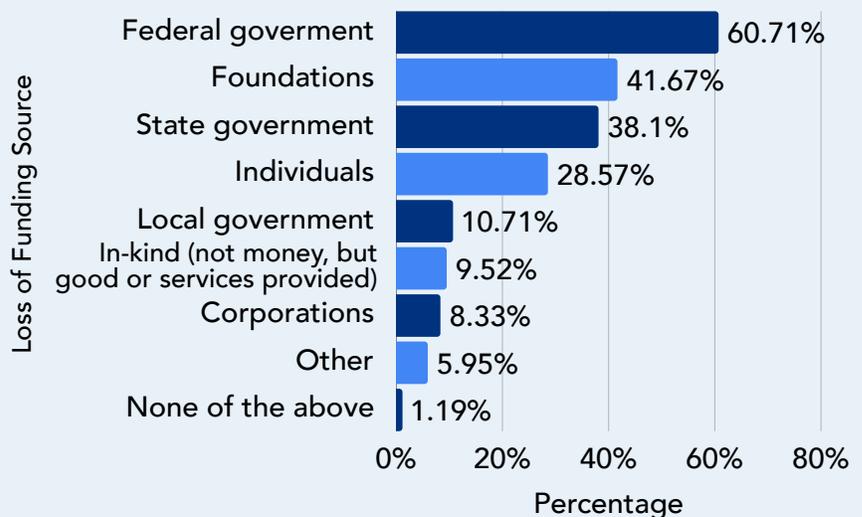
Of those 46 respondents who shared that they had not experienced any of the listed major shocks in 2025, we were curious to see what type of organization they represented. Interestingly, we found that there were equal proportions of respondents in Law Enforcement & Judiciary as there were NGOs & Service Providers selecting "None of the above."

Figure 8: Organization type for those with "none of the above" major shocks (n=46)



To better understand the context of funding loss, we also asked respondents about the sources of lost funding. Of the 84 respondents who indicated they had lost funding, 60% shared that the lost funding was from the federal government, 42% said they lost funding from foundations, and 38% lost funding from state governments.

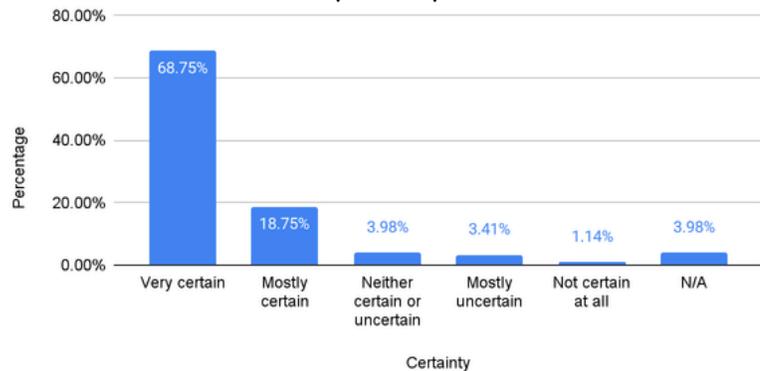
Figure 9: Agencies/orgs lost funding from in 2025 (n=84)





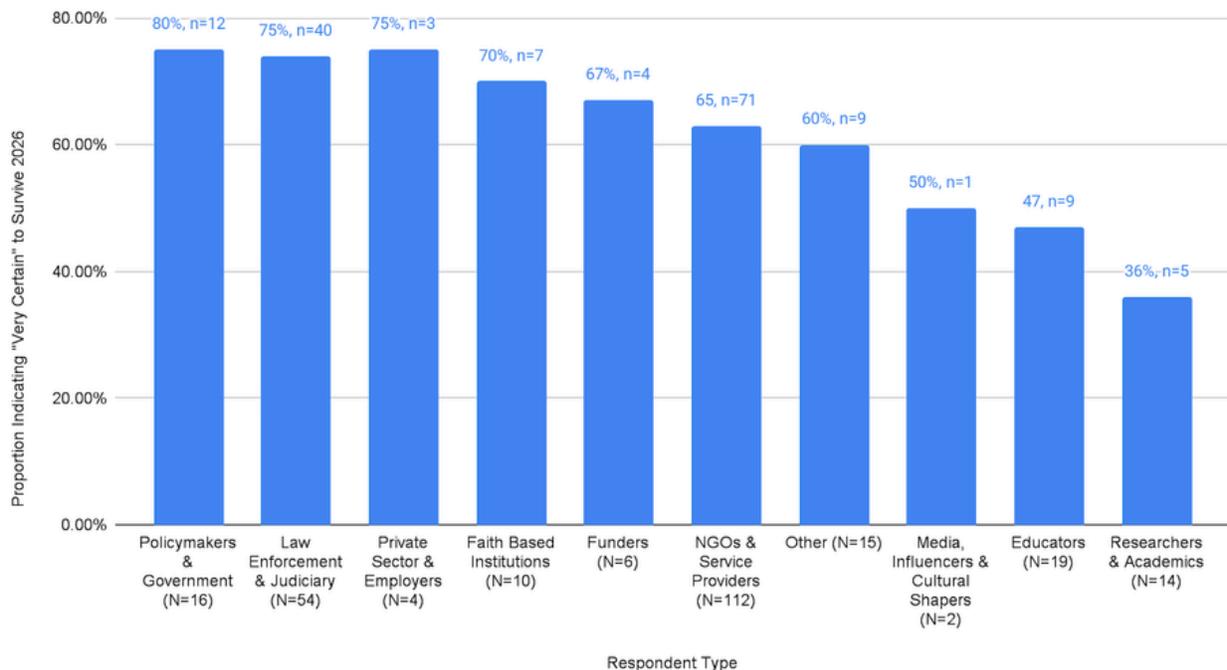
Finally, we were interested in how stakeholders were feeling about their organization’s prospects entering into 2026. Surprisingly, we found that 69% of respondents were “very certain” that they would survive 2026, and less than 5% expressed uncertainty.

Figure 10: Certainty of org survival through 2026 (n=176)



One hypothesis was that specific stakeholder groups, such as Law Enforcement & Judiciary (n=40), which may serve many populations in addition to trafficking victims and survivors, might have been disproportionately contributing to the high proportion of “very certain” responses. Indeed, we found that 75% of law enforcement respondents did select “very certain.” Interestingly, the stakeholder group that was the least likely to endorse strong certainty was Researchers & Academics, though this stakeholder group of respondents was comparatively small (n=5) and may therefore not be generalizable to all researchers in the anti-trafficking movement.

Figure 11: Stakeholder type indicating “very certain” of survival in 2026





When asked at the end of this section if they had any additional context to share, a few respondents shared that while they were confident that their organization would “survive,” there were more nuances to consider. For instance, one member of law enforcement noted that while their agency would likely always exist, it was possible that their priorities could change. Another respondent shared that while their grants may not have been lost, changes in contract requirements could greatly affect their work.

## Shared Values & Critical Needs

At Polaris, we know it is critical to establish shared values and trust with all partners, especially with our most important stakeholder: survivors. In this next section, we wanted to begin brainstorming and building consensus around our shared values and needs as a field.

For both questions, respondents were provided with open-ended comment boxes and could write as much or as little as desired. In analyzing this data, our team identified main themes and selected quotes, featured below, that exemplify each theme.

First, respondents were asked what values they believed should be shared by all organizations and/or people in the anti-trafficking movement. By far the most commonly mentioned value was being survivor led and survivor centered. As one respondent shared, “Survivor input should be sought wherever possible...Survivors are experts in not only their own experiences, but in what works in this field and should be compensated when engaging in activities with agencies.”

Similarly, many respondents discussed the need to be trauma-informed, often in conjunction with talking about the need to be survivor-centered and led. One respondent shared: “A survivor-centered, trauma-informed approach that affirms dignity, hope, and personal agency. Organizations should value meeting survivors where they are, supporting them in reclaiming their lives, and showing them that they matter and are worthy of more than what they have lived through.”

### Top Values Listed

1. Survivor Led / Survivor Centered
2. Collaboration
3. Trauma Informed
4. Respect / Compassion / Empathy



Collaboration was the second most commonly discussed value, with one respondent writing: “To succeed, the anti-trafficking movement needs to be grounded in shared values of collaboration, humility, and integrity. No single organization can solve trafficking alone, so openness to partnership, data-sharing, and learning from one another is essential.”

Finally, many respondents discussed the need for shared respect, compassion, and empathy both for other stakeholders in the field (“the importance of valuing and respecting the perspectives and experience of all people in the anti-trafficking field”), but also of survivors (“non-judgement of survivors and their coping”).

Respondents were next asked, based on their own experience and perspective, what the most critical needs of the anti-trafficking movement are at this moment in time.

### Top Needs Listed

1. Funding and Financial Support
2. Comprehensive Survivor Services
3. Organizational and Service Provider Coordination
4. Awareness and Education
5. Legal and Policy Reform

In discussing the need for funding and financial support, one respondent concisely summarized this theme by saying, “The movement also needs sustainable funding and investment in core capacity, rather than short-term, crisis-driven funding that limits long-term impact and innovation.”

Many responses also addressed the need for comprehensive survivor services, including services that support all survivors: “The anti-trafficking movement needs to continue to support labor and sex trafficking survivors of all backgrounds, regardless of their citizenship, nationality,

race/ethnicity, sexuality, gender, disability, and other identities.” It also includes services that support all elements of survivors’ lives: “We need to see supportive services - housing, case management, legal, physical and mental health, workforce development, education, and more - as being critical to anti-trafficking.”

The need for organizational and service provider collaboration dovetailed with the theme of collaboration as a key value in the anti-trafficking field. One response stated, “At this moment, the anti-trafficking movement most urgently needs greater coordination and strategic focus, particularly across prevention, data, and systems-level change. We have many committed actors, but too often efforts remain fragmented or reactive.”

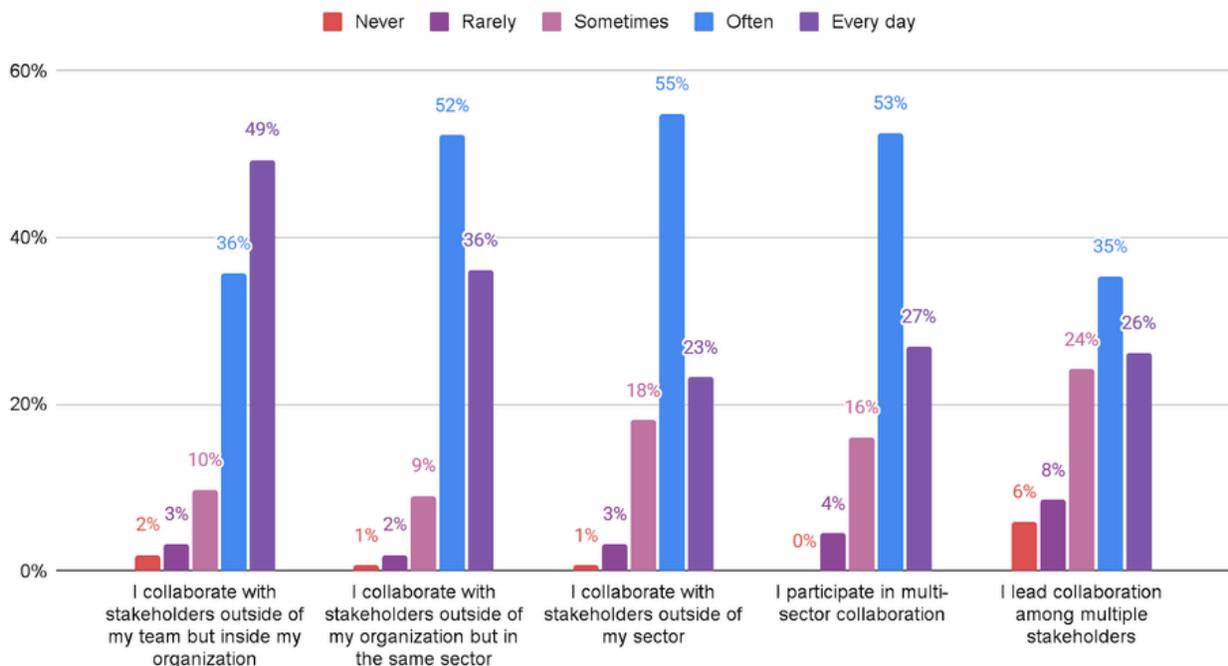
The fourth and fifth most commonly mentioned critical needs pertained to specific areas of work that respondents believed were needed. Awareness and education were brought up by several respondents who expressed their concerns that some organizations were still promoting “inaccurate representations” of trafficking and its causes. A handful of respondents also discussed areas where specific legal and policy reform was needed, including in the “identification of labor trafficking and prosecution of labor traffickers,” as well as “protection for U and T visa applicants.”

## Current & Future Collaboration

As evidenced by several of the themes mentioned above, many stakeholders in the anti-trafficking field see collaboration as both an invaluable feature and a critical current need. For this final section of the pulse survey, we wanted to better understand how stakeholders are collaborating right now, as well as gauge their interest in future collaboration.

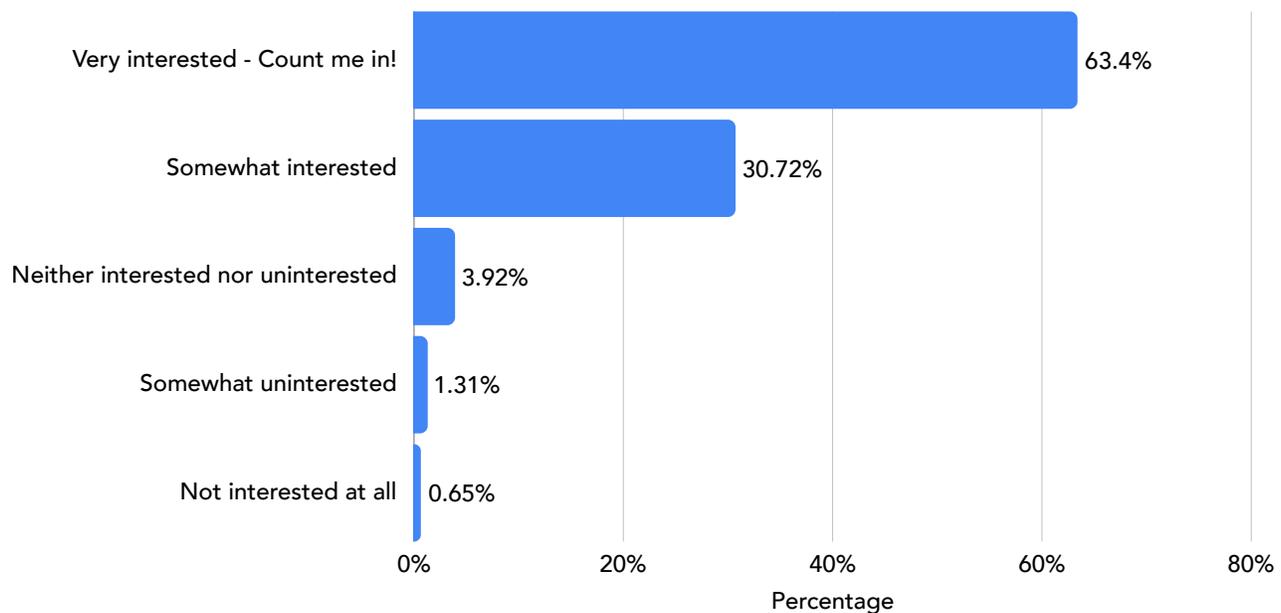
In general, most respondents shared that they were collaborating with others, both inside and outside of their organization, often or every day. Fifty-two percent of respondents shared that they collaborated with stakeholders outside of their organization but within the same sector “often,” and another 36% shared that they did so daily.

Figure 12: Current Collaboration (n=156)



Finally, when asked about interest in future collaboration, over 90% of respondents indicated they were interested, with 63% sharing that they were “very interested.”

Figure 13: Interest in future collaboration (n=153)



## Lessons Learned - Our “So What”?

The results of this survey will influence our work going forward to inform programming, map stakeholders in the field, and design the larger National Stakeholder Study. From this first pulse survey, we gained some key insights:

- While those who represent NGOs & Service Providers and Law Enforcement & Judiciary represent important key stakeholders whom we will continue to engage, additional outreach to organizations outside of these historically primary anti-trafficking partners will be necessary to build a nuanced picture of the field, especially as it relates to wider systems change and survivor prosperity in the long term.
- A large proportion of respondents’ organizations experienced funding loss and organizational upheaval in 2025, and resource sustainability is an ongoing issue for the field (the top critical need reported), though its effects are unevenly distributed. While the National Stakeholder Study is not likely to solve this larger issue, we will keep the topic and capacity constraints in mind as we design research activities.



- Labor trafficking-specific organizations were not well represented in this survey, with no respondents reporting that their organization primarily served labor trafficking survivors. While it is estimated that labor trafficking is much more prevalent worldwide than sex trafficking, in the United States, this may be related to historic underrepresentation in anti-trafficking funding and prosecution, as well as some organizations being more likely to identify as part of labor movements. The research team will do additional outreach to these organizations for their inclusion in the larger study to ensure their expertise is represented and valued in this work.
- Survivors of trauma, and of human trafficking specifically, are present across stakeholders in the anti-trafficking movement, and the most common stated shared value respondents identified was being survivor led or survivor centered, while being trauma informed or having compassion, empathy, and respect were third- and fourth-most noted. We appreciate the confirmation that these values are aspired to across the field and will continue strengthening survivor collaborations, agency, and insight as we build this study and our work ahead.
- A majority of stakeholder respondents held collaboration as a key value (second most noted), reported that they were currently collaborating with other sectors (78% often or every day), and finally, were interested in collaborating with Polaris and others (94% interested) to develop a plan for the next decade. While we know that anti-trafficking stakeholders do not always agree on the methods for fighting trafficking and often have key policy disagreements, we are confident that this research and our ongoing collaborations can help uncover and strengthen key points of intersection for moving forward together.





# Appendix A: Full Survey

First, just a few questions about you that will help us understand who answered the survey.

1. I have read the above information and agree to participate in this research project.  
(Enter survey)
2. What is your name? (open-ended)
3. What organization/entity/agency(s) do you work with? (open-ended)
4. What is your job title or role? (open-ended)

The next question is to determine the amount of survivor participation in this survey. This question is completely voluntary.

5. Do you identify yourself as a survivor of human trafficking? (Note: we will not report this in any way that could connect you to your response when presenting results; we believe you should have the choice whether to disclose survivorship) (select one)
  - o Yes
  - o No
  - o I am a survivor of another violent crime, but not human trafficking

The following questions are intended to help us map the various people and organizations within the anti-trafficking movement and will be used to determine the mix of stakeholders who have influence and interest in the work of ending human trafficking.

6. Please select the primary description of yourself or your organization within the anti-trafficking space:(select all that apply)
  - o NGOs & Service Providers
  - o Funders (Philanthropic, Public, Private)
  - o Policymakers & Government
  - o Researchers & Academics
  - o Law Enforcement & Judiciary
  - o Private Sector & Employers
  - o Media, Influencers & Cultural Shapers
  - o Faith-Based Institutions
  - o Educators
  - o I do not work in or partner with the anti-trafficking field
  - o Other \_\_\_\_\_



7. Approximately how many paid employees does your organization have, including yourself? If you are unaffiliated with an anti-trafficking organization, you can enter 1 for yourself if you are a consultant. (open-ended)

8. If you work with an organization, do you work with volunteers? (select one)

- Yes
- No
- N/A

9. If so, approximately how many per year? (open-ended, number only verification)

10. Does your or your organization's work relate to sex trafficking, labor trafficking, or both? (select one)

- Sex trafficking only
- Labor trafficking only
- Both types of human trafficking

11. Does your or your organization's work relate primarily to minors (children under 18 years old) or adults? (select one)

- Minors
- Adults
- Both groups are served by my/our work

12. Which of the following does your or your organization's work address? (select all that apply)

- Prevention: Address vulnerabilities and systemic drivers of trafficking.
- Protection: Provide survivors with access to safety, services, and long-term stability.
- Prosecution: Support accountability and enforcement of traffickers and facilitators.
- Partnerships: Foster collaboration across sectors and communities.
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

The next section of questions are intended to help us understand how the field has experienced the many changes in resources in 2025. If you are unaffiliated with an anti-trafficking organization, but consulted, please answer the questions below based on your experience working with those organizations you worked with in 2025.



13. Did your organization experience any of the following major shocks in 2025? (select all that apply)

- Loss of funding
- Change in leadership (i.e. Executive Director, CEO, other key leadership)
- Downsizing of staff
- Downsizing of programs
- Elimination of key programs
- The need to rebudget based on expecting less funding for 2026
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Not applicable, I did not work with an organization in 2025
- None of the above

14. If your organization lost funding in 2025 or for future years, was it from: (select all that apply)

- Local government
- State government
- Federal government
- Corporations
- Foundations
- Individuals
- In-kind (not money, but goods or services provided)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Not applicable, I did not work with an organization in 2025
- None of the above

15. Going into 2026, how certain do you feel about your organization surviving through this year? (select one)

- Not certain at all
- Mostly uncertain
- Neither certain or uncertain
- Mostly certain
- Very certain
- N/A

Please let us know if you'd like to tell us anything else about your answers in this section. (open-ended)



The questions in this section are to help us gather insights about the values and needs that stakeholders in the anti-trafficking movement think are the most important for the field.

- 16. What are the values you think should be shared by organizations and/or people in the anti-trafficking movement to succeed at fighting trafficking? (open-ended)
- 17. Based on your experience and perspective, what do you think are the most critical needs of the anti-trafficking movement at this moment in time? (open-ended)

The questions in this section are intended to help us determine how stakeholders currently collaborate and how they would like to collaborate with the anti-trafficking movement and with Polaris in the future.

- 18. Please describe how you or your organization would ideally contribute to the anti-trafficking movement (locally, in your state, or nationally) for the next ten years. (open-ended)
- 19. What is your/your organization's connection to other stakeholders in the field? (select never, rarely, sometimes, often, every day for each bullet point)
  - I collaborate with stakeholders outside of my team but inside my organization
  - I collaborate with stakeholders outside of my organization but in the same sector
  - I collaborate with stakeholders outside of my sector
  - I participate in multi-sector collaboration
  - I lead collaboration among multiple stakeholders
- 20. Please let us know if there are any individuals or organizations you think we should invite to participate in planning the next decade of anti-trafficking work.
  - Name (open-ended in multiple rows)
  - Organization (open-ended)
  - Email (open-ended)
- 21. What is your/your organization's level of interest in joining us in shaping the next decade of the anti-trafficking movement? (select one)
  - Not interested at all
  - Somewhat uninterested
  - Neither interested nor uninterested
  - Somewhat Interested
  - Very Interested - Count me in!



22. Please share any additional information you would like to provide. (open-ended)

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this initial survey to take the pulse of the many stakeholders fighting human trafficking. Please keep an eye out for further communication regarding this initiative and future research activities to be co-designed based on these results and other collaborations.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact [data@polarisproject.org](mailto:data@polarisproject.org)



# Appendix B: 4Ps by Stakeholder Type

Organization Type	4Ps					
	Partnerships	Prevention	Prosecution	Protection	Other	Total
NGOs & Service Providers	29%	25%	13%	29%	3%	100%
Funders (Philanthropic,	33%	28%	17%	17%	6%	100%
Policymakers & Government	25%	26%	23%	21%	5%	100%
Researchers & Academics	26%	30%	13%	22%	9%	100%
Law Enforcement & Judiciary	24%	21%	30%	24%	1%	100%
Private Sector & Employers	25%	25%	17%	17%	17%	100%
Media, Influencers & Cultural Shapers	25%	25%	13%	25%	13%	100%
Faith-Based Institutions	24%	21%	18%	30%	6%	100%
Educators	28%	26%	15%	25%	6%	100%
Other	27%	22%	16%	27%	8%	100%