Growing Pluralism in America

Understanding the Health & Vibrancy of the Pluralism Ecosystem

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Foreword

In April 2021, New Pluralists launched as a pooled fund and collaborative of funders and field leaders working together to advance pluralism in American culture.
We share a vision of creating a society that everyone in the United States can call home—where millions of people of varied backgrounds and beliefs are building community, finding belonging, and drawing on their differences to solve shared problems. We define pluralism as both a worldview and practice that honors every person's dignity, embraces the strength found in our differences, and encourages the negotiation required to solve shared problems.

The intertwined threats and barriers to pluralism are often generational in scope and complex in nature. In this moment, we're seeing a crisis of loneliness and social isolation, leading to ill health and mistrust. Longstanding patterns of inequality and segregation, rooted in centuries-old policies and dehumanizing ideologies, fuel stereotypes of one another and limit progress to create communities that work for everyone. We are grappling with intergenerational conflicts that are playing out in workplaces and political arenas. And, of course, we have the everyday disagreements over how to create communities that work for people of varying faiths, values, and ways of life—and democratic institutions that are struggling to keep pace with demographic, technological, and societal shifts in our dynamic nation.

The problems are vast—but so is the solution set. Many people, communities, and organizations are strengthening pluralistic values in this moment of change. From the onset, New Pluralists recognized that there is a broad set of actors, disciplines, and institutions who were working toward different parts of this puzzle. Thus, we chose to take a strategic ecosystem approach that would weave across this broad set of actors, disciplines, and institutions to enable more collaboration and a growing sense of common cause around enabling a culture of pluralism in America.

What is the pluralism ecosystem?

At New Pluralists, we define an ecosystem as a network of entities that work together to develop new solutions and broadly aligned strategies to advance a common cause. These entities can include governments, universities, private sector companies, civil society, nonprofits, networks, and individual leaders. They often operate across multiple sectors, levels, and disciplines. And they are linked by a social fabric of trust, collaboration, complementary needs, and resources.

For New Pluralists, cultivating a pluralism ecosystem is a strategic choice to bring together often disconnected or disparate initiatives and leaders who are contributing to a culture of pluralism across America. Over the last three years, we have become aware of a wide variety of work that contributes to enabling a functional multi-faith, multi-racial, and politically vibrant democracy, such as:

Themes/Focus Areas

» **Anti-hate and anti-prejudice**
(e.g., efforts to address group-targeted rhetoric and actions, including hate speech, hate crimes, and discrimination)

» **Belonging and welcoming**
(e.g., immigrant inclusion, place-making and community-building, co-generational work, social cohesion, combating social isolation, urban/rural connections, etc.)

» **Bridging and reducing toxic polarization**
(e.g., bridge-building, coalition-building, problem-solving across differences, intra-group work, addressing toxic polarization)

» **Cultural organizing and narrative change**
(e.g., media and digital spaces, addressing misinformation, arts and culture, story-telling, communications, etc.)

» **Faith-based and spiritual approaches**
(e.g., more and spiritual imagination, interfaith and religious pluralism work)

» **Field-building**
(e.g., network steward, convener, backbone organization)

» **Pluralistic conditions, structural othering, and inequality**
(e.g., civil rights and inclusion, systemic discrimination, unhealthy competition, rapid demographic change, work to address racism and economic inequalities, etc.)

» **Protecting and celebrating diversity**
(e.g., cultural celebrations and awareness, protecting minority rights)

» **Research from different fields related to pluralism**
(e.g., research on social conditions, behaviors, and attitudes that support or hinder pluralism)

» **Strengthening democracy**
(e.g., political extremism and authoritarianism, governance and co-governance efforts, lack of accountability, civic engagement, civic education, institutional distrust)

» **Transforming conflict and repairing after harm**
(e.g., reconciliation, racial healing, indigenous peace practices, etc.)

What do we hope to achieve with this assessment?

New Pluralists commissioned ORS Impact, a research and evaluation firm, to create an ecosystem assessment to establish a more robust understanding of the health of the ecosystem and opportunities to further develop and strengthen it. The assessment shares the current status of five elements of a strong ecosystem: (1) a set of diverse and complementary actors, (2) a strong knowledge base, (3) robust support and resourcing, (4) a shared agenda, and (5) infrastructure that maintains connectivity and collaboration. For practitioners, funders, and researchers who are interested in what it will take to make a multi-faith, multi-racial, politically vibrant democracy possible, this assessment offers some important recommendations and signals for how we can strengthen, connect, and build shared momentum across the ecosystem. By reading this and exploring the recommendations, we hope this assessment will invite you into a larger conversation with us about how your work might fit into the growing pluralism ecosystem and help you sharpen how you collaborate with other field leaders moving forward.

We recognize that New Pluralists is one of many organizations helping to build this ecosystem; there are many other efforts underway to understand and connect the adjacent and often overlapping areas of work. In fact, during the creation of this assessment (July 2023-April 2024) a number of complementary mapping efforts were simultaneously underway, including those led by Democracy Funders Network[1], National Civic League[2], and the Council on Foundations.[3] With all of this data, there is a clear opportunity to move into meaning-making to align, make sense of what we are seeing, and coordinate with one another. This also brings forward productive questions about whether the pluralism ecosystem is distinct, or if it's better understood as a sub-component of the larger democracy ecosystem. We see these questions and tensions as healthy, and we believe that learning from and coordinating across multiple ecosystem efforts will help these networks to change, merge, or evolve together over time.

We hope this initial assessment is a robust conversation starter that can sharpen our work together and deepen our resolve toward a more pluralistic culture.

Lauren Higgins

Director of Ecosystems Strategy at New Pluralists

July 2024

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1   Democracy Funders Network and Impala Digital, with support and partnership from Democracy Fund. (in press). *A Central Database for U.S. Democracy Funding.*

2   National Civic League. (in press). *Healthy Democracy Ecosystem Map*

3   The Council on Foundations. (2024). *Coming together, not apart: How philanthropy supports connection in a time of dangerous division.* The Council on Foundations.

Introduction

America's founding ideals of liberty, equality, and justice have always held out the promise of pluralism—people of varied backgrounds and beliefs building community, finding belonging, and drawing on their differences to solve shared problems. Over time, there have been great strides toward this vision, yet it's always been a work in progress. Today, the promise of pluralism remains, but our country is at a crossroads.[4] To meet the moment, organizations, foundations, and leaders across the United States are working together to advance a culture of respect and belonging. To enable a better understanding of the ecosystem of organizations that collectively seek to advance pluralism, New Pluralists' evaluation and learning partner, ORS Impact, conducted an ecosystem assessment to map, describe, and assess the current status of the pluralism ecosystem.

This report begins with a description of the ecosystem assessment's methodology, followed by a summary of findings and evaluator observations to inform ecosystem actors' future efforts to strengthen the ecosystem working to advance pluralism in the United States. The report continues with a more detailed description of the status of the overall ecosystem, each individual ecosystem element, and supporting data for the assessments.

Methodology

New Pluralists understands the collective of organizations and leaders working to advance pluralism as an ecosystem of many networks and fields of practice whose work is related to pluralism. Specifically, ecosystems "consist of different individuals, groups, organizations and institutions that form a community by interacting with one another, and the environmental determinants that influence how these actors work and interconnect."[5]

In 2023, ORS Impact reviewed literature about ecosystems in other areas like entrepreneurship and power building, combined it with resources describing field building, and developed a framework that resonated with how New Pluralists understood the ecosystem at the time. This framework adopts The Bridgespan Group's framework for Field Building for Population-Level Change[6] to assess the ecosystem based on five elements: **actors, ecosystem level-agenda, infrastructure, knowledge base, and resources**, and further explores these ecosystem elements through specific indicators. While the five elements helpfully identify areas to assess, ORS Impact and New Pluralists developed eight specific indicators to measure the status of each element. Table 1, on page 8, describes the ecosystem elements along with the indicators we used to assess each one. Developing these indicators provides a more tangible and replicable methodology for future measurement.

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4   New Pluralists. (2021, August). *New Pluralists vision and strategy.* Retrieved August 2, 2024. *Available upon request.*

5   Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmBH. (2018, February). *Guide for mapping the entrepreneurial ecosystem.* https://www.giz.de/de/downloads/giz2018-en-guide-mapping-entrepreneurial-ecosystem.pdf

6   The Bridgespan Group. (2020, March 27). *Field building for population-level change.* https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/field-building-for-population-level-change

Finally, in order to assess the status of each element, we turned to Bridgespan's Field Building Diagnostic Tool,[7] which identifies three phases in the development of specific elements and of the overall ecosystem:

Emerging
Impact is scattered and sporadic, with only a small fraction of the problem being resolved.

Forming
Impact happens more consistently, as infrastructure, collaboration, and coordination accelerate progress.

Evolving or Sustaining
Impact happens more consistently, as infrastructure, collaboration, and coordination accelerate progress.

To assess the status of the pluralism ecosystem, ORS Impact collected primary data and leveraged secondary data from practitioners, funders, and researchers in the ecosystem. Data sources were designed to include ecosystem actors from within and outside of the New Pluralists network, to the extent possible, to provide a broader description of existing actors including other funders, practitioners, and researchers working on pluralism and/or pluralism-adjacent areas of work. Primary data, collected directly by ORS Impact, included interviews with New Pluralists' network partners, key informant interviews with thought leaders who could provide a different perspective than New Pluralists' more direct partners, and a survey completed by New Pluralists' partners and other organizations outside of the network. To complement the primary data, we referenced two secondary data sources from Research to Impact and the Council on Foundations, which provide specific information about resources from foundations and the ecosystem's knowledge base.

Throughout the report, survey data is reported with percentages of the total sample, while interview data is reported with the corresponding number of interviewees whose comments related to specific themes to provide a sense of prevalence of themes within the total sample. This methodology had some strengths, including the development of an ecosystem assessment framework (see Table 1), a design that allows for future comparable measurement, and opportunities for data triangulation. However, it also had several limitations, like using an illustrative rather than exhaustive sample and a network assessment method that provide insight but are less definitive due to question design. Appendix A provides more details about the data sources and methodology, including sample sizes, strengths, and limitations.

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7   The Bridgespan Group. (2020, March). *Field diagnostic tool: Assessing a field's progression.* https://www.bridgespan.org/getmedia/29a0c7c4-7328-4f30-8f5f-ee-41a6a8689b/field-building-diagnostic-tool-march-2020.pdf

Table 1 | **Ecosystem Assessment Framework**[8,9]

Actors An ecosystem's actors are the set of individuals and organizations that together bring a sense of shared identity and common vision to the ecosystem.	• **Density:** Number of actors in the ecosystem. • **Diversity:** Types of actors by role, approach, geographical distribution, longevity in the ecosystem.
Infrastructure Ecosystem infrastructure is "connective tissue" that strengthens each of the other four ecosystem elements as well as the complementarity between them. Infrastructure exponentially enhances the efforts of actors in the ecosystem by making them more coordinated, connected, and effective.	• **Connectivity:** Degree of connectivity among ecosystem actors, main actors in the ecosystem, mechanisms for connection.
Ecosystem-level Agenda An ecosystem-level agenda refers to the strategic suite of approaches that aims to address shared barriers and unlock collective progress. It is co-created (and continuously adapted) by the ecosystem's actors.	• **Shared identity:** Actor's areas of focus and expected outcomes. • **Shared culture:** Perception of importance of core principles that define pluralism. • **Standards of practice:** Quality standards of practices promoted by ecosystem actors
Knowledge Base An ecosystem's knowledge base is the body of academic and practical research that helps actors better understand the problem, identify and analyze shared barriers to solving it, and develop solutions.	• **Knowledge base:** Number and type of researchers and research areas that contribute to the ecosystem, research gaps.
Resources An ecosystem's resources comprise both financial forms of capital as well as nonfinancial support.	• **Support and access to resources:** Available funding, level of investment in the ecosystem, and trends over time.

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8   Adapted from "Field Diagnostic Tool: Assessing a Field's Progression," by The Bridgespan Group, 2020 (https://www.bridgespan.org/getmedia/29a0c7c4-7328-4f30-8f5f-ee41a6a8689b/field-building-diagnostic-tool-march-2020.pdf).

9   The ecosystem framework originally included two additional elements: standards of practice and innovation. Our data suggests that these elements play a role in ecosystem development, but their prominence in the pluralism ecosystem lies in their contribution to other broader elements. Therefore, we have included our findings on these topics as subsets of one of the elements above.

Overall Ecosystem Status

This section provides a summary assessment of the current status of the pluralism ecosystem. When looking at the specific elements within the ecosystem assessment, data suggests that the ecosystem as a whole, and all its individual elements, are in the emerging phase. Figure 1 shows the status of each element and summarizes our assessment. The section of this report titled Detailed Assessment of the Pluralism Ecosystem provides more information and supporting data that undergird these assessments.

Figure 1 | **Current Status by Element of the Ecosystem**

Overall Assessment

Emerging

Looking across the ecosystem assessment framework, data suggests that the pluralism ecosystem is in an emerging status, as all five ecosystem elements are in the emerging phase and we found some examples of scattered progress and signals of change. Specifically, we found evidence of change in sectors including philanthropy, government, business, and higher education, but these changes have been sporadic thus far, and important challenges remain. In philanthropy, in particular, there are questions about the legitimacy of pluralism as a social theory and way of working, and a lack of clarity about what it entails. Meanwhile, the systemic barriers that uphold division seem to pose a larger threat than any individual foundation or philanthropic collaborative can address on its own. Most of these barriers are systemic in nature, and ORS Impact's report Pluralism in Peril,[10] and Professors Gest and Reny's literature review,[11] help further understanding of the current status of some of these conditions.

Actors

Emerging

The pluralism ecosystem is large, with almost 800 actors working to advance pluralism captured in this assessment—and likely many more, including practitioners, funders, government actors, and researchers who are working across a wide range of approaches and with a variety of audiences. However, these actors have yet to align in ways that leverage strength in numbers to achieve common goals. There is also wide geographical coverage, with ecosystem actors working in all 50 states and some US territories. In addition, there is great diversity in actors' focus areas and approaches to advancing pluralism. The diversity of focus areas and approaches presents a strength in that actors are tackling multiple causes and advancing multiple solutions, and it presents a weakness in that it is easier for actors to relate to and connect their efforts to those focus areas than to see and build upon the intersections that uphold and advance pluralism, and support each focus area in advancing its own goals as well.

Infrastructure

Emerging

There are established nodes of connection among actors in the ecosystem, with a few funders and practitioners as epicenters of partnerships and connections. However, the pluralism ecosystem is, as a whole, loosely connected. However, there is evidence of increasingly formalized structures for connection and collaboration, including 259 networks identified by survey respondents, suggesting that the ecosystem is moving toward the forming phase in infrastructure. Continued investment in connective structures can further strengthen the infrastructure needed

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10 ORS Impact. (2024). *Pluralism in Peril: Assessing the Status of a Core American Value.* https://newpluralists.org/pluralism-in-peril-litscan

11 Gest, J., & Reny, T. (2023, June). *What promotes pluralism in America's diversifying democracy?* https://newpluralists.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/GestReny_Li-tReview.pdf

to more clearly articulate overlapping areas between different focus areas that relate to pluralism, with particular attention to how pluralism acts as the connective frame among focus areas and how actors from different focus areas can contribute to the broader goal of advancing pluralism.

Ecosystem-level Agenda   Emerging

Ecosystem actors work on a wide variety of related but different topic areas that contribute to advancing pluralism, but as leading researchers expressed, "There is no clear definition of pluralism or field north star that articulates a shared vision, goals, and outcomes, which is an overall barrier." Ecosystem actors identified different types of expected outcomes that help advance pluralism, including changes in individual attitudes and beliefs, behaviors and intergroup relations, and cultural and institutional contexts. In addition, most actors in the New Pluralists network think standards of practice are important for the ecosystem and identified benefits including supporting alignment, offering a touchstone for good practice, and serving as a foundation for measurement. However, a majority also see risks in developing standards that could be too rigid for a nascent ecosystem and might be exclusionary and alienating. Given that standards of practice have important benefits for the ecosystem, ecosystem leaders should contend with how to realize the benefits while addressing concerns.

Knowledge Base   Emerging

A wide variety of actors from different but complementary academic areas are contributing to research related to pluralism, but research is more often framed in alignment with other focus areas adjacent or related to pluralism like prejudice, partisan animosity and polarization, democracy and collective action, intergroup contact, systemic bias/ inequality, and reactions to demographic change. As the pluralism ecosystem coalesces around its boundaries and shared identity, researchers are just beginning to connect with practitioners and discuss their research under the broader pluralism frame.

Resources   Emerging

A wide variety of philanthropic funders are supporting pluralism-related work in the US, in significant ways that are increasing over time.[12] Surveyed practitioners spent at least $171 million to implement pluralism-related efforts, with an additional $15.5 million supporting research in 2023.[13] While funding for pluralism-related work is increasing, it remains a small part of overall philanthropic funding in the US.[14] Practitioner organizations in the ecosystem are generally small organizations that devote the majority of their budgets to pluralism, and almost all of them report challenges in finding funding for their work. The creation of New Pluralists as a collaborative and pooled fund committed to supporting the efforts of pluralism practitioners, researchers, innovators, and storytellers for the next 10 years is one prominent example of a coordinated, long-term funding effort. However, New Pluralists' funding makes up a small fraction of the total current funding going toward pluralism, pointing to an opportunity to expand funding coordination in the broader ecosystem.

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12   24% of Council on Foundation's survey respondents reported allocating more than 51% of their grant-making budget to projects that foster connections across difference in 2022.

13   To estimate spending by practitioners and researchers, we gathered organizational budgets and estimated proportions of those budgets being invested in pluralism. That data allowed the creation of low-, medium-, and high-end estimates of total investment, rather than one specific figure. The data represented here are the low-end estimates, as we understand that "at least" these amounts have been invested in pluralism.

14   Pluralism funding is a subset of the $3.4 billion estimated philanthropic funding toward democracy in 2022. Democracy Funders Network estimates that "the $3.4 billion per year estimate would account for only 0.7 percent of all philanthropic funding in the U.S. in 2022." Griffin, R., Lobeck, C., Botero, M., Cooper, S., Diggles, M., McKay, C., & Steffen, E. (2024, January 22). *Field in focus: The state of pro-democracy institutional philanthropy.* Democracy Fund. https://democracyfund.org/idea/field-in-focus-the-state-of-pro-democracy-institutional-philanthropy

Key Observations

Based on the state of the ecosystem, the data presented throughout this report, and our experience with New Pluralists and other philanthropic efforts, ORS Impact offers some observations to inform New Pluralists' and other ecosystem actors' future efforts to continue strengthening the ecosystem. We begin with overall observations for the pluralism ecosystem, and then offer specific observations about how to continue making progress on each ecosystem element.

Understanding pluralism as a broad ecosystem that encompasses many specific, individual focus areas can help better situate the variety of actors and explore opportunities to strengthen the ecosystem.

The variety of actors, approaches, areas of focus, and expected outcomes that exists within the current pluralism ecosystem, along with the challenges in defining pluralism and the lack of clearly defined shared goals, shows that the pluralism ecosystem is emerging, and that actors are working on related areas without centering or even seeing the connection to pluralism. However, more actors are beginning to see pluralism as a broader frame for their work, suggesting that the pluralism ecosystem is a broad issue area that overlaps with other, more specific focus areas like bridging, strengthening democracy, and belonging.

This idea is supported by a recent study from The Bridgespan Group[15] that describes how some fields operate as "nested or overlapping fields, where there is an overlap of specific problem-focused fields that relate to a broader issue area." Broad fields that focus on large issue areas resemble ecosystems, which "consist of different individuals, groups, organizations and institutions that form a community by interacting with one another, and the environmental determinants that influence how these actors work and interconnect."[16] In this case, the main environmental determinant influencing interaction is the shared broad issue area that actors seek to influence or the problem they seek to address. The work of building the ecosystem requires advancing both the overall ecosystem as well as the individual fields or focus areas within it. For example, New Pluralists has identified at least the following 11 focus areas that exist within or contribute to pluralism (see Figure 2) and expects there are likely more focus areas and/or different ways of grouping them.

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15 McHugh, L., Nothmann, E., & Daniels, C. (2020, March 27). *Field building for population-level change.* The Bridgespan Group. https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/field-building-for-population-level-change

16 Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmBH. (2018, February). *Guide for mapping the entrepreneurial ecosystem.* https://www.giz.de/de/downloads/giz2018-en-guide-mapping-entrepreneurial-ecosystem.pdf

Figure 2 | **Focus Areas within the Pluralism Ecosystem**

Anti-hate and anti-prejudice

(e.g., efforts to address group-targeted rhetoric and actions, including hate speech, hate crimes, and discrimination)

Bridging and reducing toxic polarization

(e.g., bridge-building, coalition-building, problem-solving across differences, intra-group work, addressing toxic polarization)

Faith-based and spiritual approaches

(e.g., more and spiritual imagination, interfaith and religious pluralism work)

Pluralistic conditions, structural othering, and inequality

(e.g., civil rights and inclusion, systemic discrimination, unhealthy competition, rapid demographic change, work to address racism and economic inequalities, etc.)

Research from different fields related to pluralism

(e.g., research on social conditions, behaviors, and attitudes that support or hinder pluralism)

Transforming conflict and repairing after harm

(e.g., reconciliation, racial healing, indigenous peace practices, etc.)

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Belonging and welcoming

(e.g., immigrant inclusion, place-making and community-building, co-generational work, social cohesion, combating social isolation, urban/rural connections, etc.)

Cultural organizing and narrative change

(e.g., media and digital spaces, addressing misinformation, arts and culture, story-telling, communications, etc.)

Field-building

(e.g., network steward, convener, backbone organization)

Protecting and celebrating diversity

(e.g., cultural celebrations and awareness, protecting minority rights)

Strengthening democracy

(e.g., political extremism and authoritarianism, governance and co-governance efforts, lack of accountability, civic engagement, civic education, institutional distrust)

These focus areas are in dynamic relationship and sometimes tension with one another, and each one plays a different role in advancing pluralism. Meanwhile, understanding the pluralism ecosystem as a nested or overlapping ecosystem can help identify opportunities to strengthen the individual focus areas, the connections between them, and the broader ecosystem as the higher-level connector that binds all focus areas together in a mutually reinforcing way. Ecosystem actors can use this concept to better understand their relationships with each other, create better onramps for new actors, explore their current and future roles in advancing pluralism, and create a shared understanding of success in building the ecosystem. This distribution of actors also has implications for the definition of success in strengthening a shared vision in the ecosystem. Namely, success might be that actors see themselves intentionally contributing to pluralism even if they don't identify pluralism as their main area of focus (rather than expecting everyone to coalesce around pluralism as a concrete shared goal).

Given the current status of each ecosystem element, data pointed to specific gaps and opportunities to propel each element from emerging to the forming phase.

Actors

The current diversity of focus areas and approaches suggests that while actors may continue to support pluralism by advancing their own missions, their ability to connect their efforts to pluralism, even loosely, will make it more likely that their collective efforts will be complementary and mutually reinforcing. The main growth edge for the pluralism ecosystem is in how connected and aligned actors are to pluralism along a broad set of shared areas of concern and action. Ecosystem leaders—including ecosystem catalysts, funders, practitioners, and particularly those actors acting as conveners and connectors—have a specific role to play in bringing actors along, providing onramps, and developing a shared understanding of pluralism as the common denominator that holds them together as part of a whole. In addition, investing in leadership development to strengthen key actors and cultivate diverse voices by area of expertise or by the role they play in the ecosystem can help elevate new champions who continue to uphold and advance pluralism into the future. Finally, actors identified opportunities to include new and different audiences in the ecosystem to increase its diversity, including the private sector, younger voices, leaders with different education status, and conservative actors.

Infrastructure

Given the variety of actors, focus areas, and efforts that make up the ecosystem to date, continued investment in connective structures is necessary to further strengthen connections among actors. Ecosystem leaders, particularly actors who act as conveners and connectors, have many opportunities to further that development, including:

- Extending formal opportunities for connection and partnership to a broader pool of actors across focus areas to avoid continued siloed work.

- Ensuring that the ecosystem is engaging with actors who may be skeptical and even critical of pluralism to avoid creating an echo chamber of like-minded actors that has little opportunity to grow in ways that truly embody pluralism.

- Finding ways to connect the more than 200 networks aligned with pluralism and leveraging those networks to connect with individual actors.

- Tending to the degree of collaboration among actors, supporting opportunities to move from loose connections to coordination and deeper partnership.

Ecosystem-level agenda

Ecosystem actors are currently working on a wide variety of related but different focus areas. Bringing forth a clearer articulation of pluralism with specific examples of expected outcomes and promising practices can help more actors see themselves as part of the ecosystem. Ecosystem leaders, including ecosystem catalysts and thought leaders, have an opportunity to galvanize support by co-developing a shared agenda with other actors and leveraging nodes of connection and existing networks to further connect the different but related focus areas within the ecosystem. While a single shared goal among all actors might not be realistic or helpful, increased alignment and connections among actors and focus areas would bolster the ecosystem and increase the likelihood of reaching expected outcomes. In addition, given the current tensions about the importance and development of standards of practice in the ecosystem, additional efforts to develop standards in inclusive ways can support the ecosystem in moving toward uptake of high-quality, effective practices that help advance pluralism. Standards of practice have important benefits for the ecosystem, so ecosystem leaders should contend with how to realize the benefits while addressing concerns.

Knowledge base

The ecosystem has a variety of actors, approaches, and implicit theories of change. Future research should continue to monitor the status of pluralism, but researchers, practitioner organizations, and funders should also continue efforts to gather the necessary data to identify promising practices. Efforts like the Research to Impact convening can connect researchers and practitioners and contribute to a collective research agenda. This might require that researchers use different methods to inform practice faster and sooner to enable continuous improvement. However, the creation of knowledge resources is only one step of the process. Finding appropriate dissemination channels to share and discuss findings will ensure collective learning among a broader set of ecosystem actors to inform the ongoing development of the ecosystem-level agenda. Overall, practitioners and researchers should continue connecting research to practice, further bolster the case for pluralism work, identify and address knowledge gaps, and produce high-quality research to help galvanize support from actors who require scientific support to get involved.

Resources

Funders currently investing in pluralism efforts seem committed to continuing their support, but there is an opportunity to expand coordination. While funders work to raise additional financial support for pluralism, they can also close resource gaps by providing more flexible funding rather than program-specific funding and clarifying how organizations can find resources for their work. In addition, understanding how public institutions contribute to pluralism and leveraging their resources can greatly increase the amount of financial resources intentionally invested in advancing pluralism. Overall, funders should support ecosystem actors to not only experiment and try new ways of practicing and promoting pluralism, but also provide long-term resourcing for interventions or practices that are effective.

Detailed Assessment of Ecosystem Status

This section provides detailed assessments of the status of the pluralism ecosystem as a whole and of each of the five ecosystem elements, along with the supporting data from surveys, interviews, and secondary data sources that informed those assessments.

Overall Ecosystem Assessment

Indicators for assessment

- Phase of development of individual elements within the ecosystem assessment framework
- Evidence regarding the ecosystem's efficacy in driving larger social change

Phases of overall ecosystem development

Emerging
Impact is scattered and sporadic, with only a small fraction of the problem being resolved.

Forming
Impact happens more consistently, as infrastructure, collaboration, and coordination accelerate progress.

Evolving/Sustaining
Impact is accelerating at an even faster pace; fields in this phase can achieve impact at scale and then sustain it in response to evolving needs and conditions.

Assessment Summary

To create an overall assessment of the pluralism ecosystem, we considered the phase of development of each element in the framework. In addition, we assessed evidence of the ecosystem's efficacy in driving larger social change thus far. This section summarizes findings for these two indicators.

Looking across the ecosystem assessment framework, **data suggests that the pluralism ecosystem is in an overall emerging status** and there are still many opportunities to strengthen each element and move it toward the next phase of development. In Research to Impact, a convening of leading researchers and practitioners in the pluralism ecosystem in the fall of 2023, attendees reflected on the status of the ecosystem more informally, and their takeaways align with this assessment. They observed that *"the ecosystem of pluralism is relatively new, emerging in response to some of the most difficult moments in recent history,"* going on to say that "*Today, the ecosystem is at an important inflection point. While no longer a series of disparate initiatives responding to crises, the ecosystem is still in the early stage of cohering around a theory of change and building a robust evidence base."*[17]

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17   New Pluralists, More in Common, GSCS, & Over Zero. (2023). *Research to impact 2023 report*. https://newpluralists.org/research_to_impact2023

Regarding the ecosystem's efficacy in driving larger social change, ecosystem actors pointed to evidence of change in sectors including philanthropy, government, business, and higher education, but these changes have been sporadic thus far, and important challenges remain—particularly in philanthropy, where there are questions about the legitimacy of pluralism as a social theory and a lack of clarity about what it entails. Meanwhile the systemic barriers that uphold division seem to pose a larger threat than any individual foundation or philanthropic collaborative can address on its own. Most of these barriers are systemic in nature and ORS Impact's report Pluralism in Peril,[18] and Professors Gest and Reny's literature review,[19] help further understand the current status of some of these conditions.

Notably, when prompted for evidence of accomplishments in advancing pluralism, ecosystem actors gravitated toward work that focused on broader institutional and sector changes. The evidence they pointed to excludes changes in how individuals relate to each other in communities. This is not to say that some changes have not occurred at the individual or inter-group levels, but this report does not capture that evidence because ecosystem actors we interacted with did not bring that evidence to bear.

Supporting Data

Interviewees pointed to specific, yet scattered examples of how ecosystem actors' efforts have contributed to changes across different sectors:

- **Increased interest in and funding for pluralism work in philanthropy:** Almost half of the actors in the New Pluralists network who we interviewed (n=19) mentioned that there has been increased funding or increased interest from funders in pluralism work. A handful of examples in our data point to other changes in the sector, like changes in funding practices where funders are working with others they typically would not work with or structuring grantmaking differently to advance pluralism. For example, one interviewee explained that *"some people who want to foster pluralism are suddenly open to working with people they never would have worked with before, both to foster pluralism and to practice it. It's not just about funding pluralism, it's about practicing pluralism. One of the ways you practice pluralism is by opening up resources to unconventional outlets, people that have traditionally not been in your community."* One example of these changes is the creation of the Solidarity Collaborative, an initiative that *"supports intersectional solidarity between organizations and communities working toward racial justice through dedicated grantmaking and programming support."* An interviewee shared that this type of initiative *"does not necessarily mean money coming to the New Pluralists, but it is actually ensuring that folks are able to be in organizations that are diverse, that organizations can be in deep relationship with each other."*

- *Government officials working with members of other political parties:* Our data points to a few examples of changes in the public sector, particularly elected officials working across difference and championing pluralism. One interviewee described two legislative caucuses in two different states that they see as working pluralistically. They said, *"We have a Republican and a Democrat running each caucus together, collaborating mostly actually on culture and tone-setting events. Essentially, they're organizing networking and relationship-building events that happen outside of the halls of power, that happen outside of the legislative chambers so that they can build relationships with each other and get to know each other as people before they're arguing over policy."* At least two other interviewees pointed to engagement with specific governors and senators who are sponsoring bills or working across difference in their administrations.

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18 ORS Impact. (2024). *Pluralism in Peril: Assessing the Status of a Core American Value.* https://newpluralists.org/pluralism-in-peril-litscan

19 Gest, J., & Reny, T. (2023, June). *What promotes pluralism in America's diversifying democracy?* https://newpluralists.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/GestReny_Li-tReview.pdf

- **Businesses and business networks focusing on belonging and democracy:** Five interviewees noted changes in the business sector, including business networks interested in contributing to a healthy democracy (like the Business Roundtable initiative) and focusing on elections and voting (like the Civic Alliance). An interviewee observed that *"corporations are now really emphasizing some of the themes related to place-based community and belonging."* Another interviewee explained how *"new big tech companies like Anthropic, for example, working on constitutional artificial intelligence (AI), are writing the internal constitution for how AI should work and what the norms should be, which I think hints in the right direction, and we hadn't seen three years ago."* These changes related to how AI works are meant to reduce risks that AI will exacerbate social divisions given how algorithms have worked thus far.

- **Higher education institutions working on social cohesion:** Four interviewees connected to higher education settings identified changes happening in that sector. For example, one interviewee shared, *"I think we see a lot of people hosting dialogue groups, people hosting events or activities that are designed to foster bridge building, or faculty thinking about classes or ways to bring in classroom engagement that will facilitate that social cohesion. Major networks who are leaders within higher education invested in ideas of bridge building, wanting to provide modes of engagement that are productive."*[20]

> **While there has been some sporadic progress in philanthropy and other sectors in the past few years, important challenges remain, most of which are systemic in nature and pose important barriers to pluralism.**

In philanthropy, in particular, there are questions about the legitimacy of pluralism as a social theory and way of working, and a lack of clarity about what it entails. Meanwhile, the systemic barriers that uphold division seem to pose a larger threat than any individual foundation or philanthropic collaborative can address on its own.

When asked to reflect on enabling and challenging conditions, 75% of interviewees' comments were about challenges and barriers to pluralism flourishing in the United States. Most of these barriers are systemic in nature (see ORS Impact's Pluralism in Peril report[21] and Professors Gest and Reny's literature review[22] for more detail). Barriers identified by ecosystem actors included political polarization and incentives that drive division (n=17), media and social media (n=14), economic inequality (n=6), the upcoming 2024 election (n=4), trends on loneliness and lack of connection among people (n=3), segregation (n=3), and global political instability (n=3). One interviewee each mentioned the decline of the perceived value of democracy, de-prioritized individual moral formation, partisan animosity, and theology that promotes conversion of peers.

Interviews with five actors outside of New Pluralists' immediate network also raised additional challenges, such as the lack of clarity about what pluralism is and what it hopes to accomplish that is different from political centrism. In fact, interviewees suggested that pluralism is currently not a topic of concern or conversation among more conservative or progressive actors. Representatives of two foundations that are not involved with New Pluralists similarly questioned whether current pluralism efforts are truly inclusive of diverse voices, and when these voices do come together, is civility a mechanism for silencing historically oppressed voices? These funders also perceive tensions between the values stated in the name of pluralism and actors' own actions outside of the pluralism ecosystem that suggest a lack

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20 Data collection happened before the pro-Palestine protests on university campuses across the United States in 2024. Therefore, our data does not capture perceptions of pluralism efforts in higher education during or after these events.

21 ORS Impact. (2024). *Pluralism in Peril: Assessing the Status of a Core American Value.* https://newpluralists.org/pluralism-in-peril-litscan

22 Gest, J., & Reny, T. (2023, June). *What promotes pluralism in America's diversifying democracy?* https://newpluralists.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/GestReny_LitReview.pdf

of consistent commitment to those values. One funder questioned whether pluralism was part of a *"moment of pulling back from progress made on equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts,"* while another identified pluralism as a *"necessary instrument to achieving social justice goals,"* which showcases the divergence within public discourse on pluralism in philanthropic media over the past year.

Despite these challenges, some interviewees identified enabling conditions for pluralism, but there was less consensus. The most cited enabler was that people are looking for a change in how they relate to others, including a greater focus on human dignity (n=10). A few other interviewees mentioned the following enabling conditions: philanthropy and practitioners' work (n=4); the potential for a new collective vision for the country (n=3); new champions working on the topic, including Governor Spencer Cox from Utah, storytellers, and the broader pluralism ecosystem leaders (n=3); a generational change where younger generations are more open to pluralism (n=2); and a general feeling of momentum and opportunity for pluralism (n=1). Two others mentioned specific enablers for pluralism among individuals within a community: *"The biggest supports, frankly, are in communities where folks may hate the other party, but their neighbor is a member of the other party. When they go out of town, the neighbor comes over and waters the plants, feeds the cat or makes sure nobody breaks in. In very small ways, on kids' soccer teams, pluralism is happening among the parents, at work, etc."* This interviewee suggests that people behave differently within their interpersonal relationships than their politics might indicate, or others might assume, and that everyday interactions present opportunities to connect across difference.

Assessment of Element 1: Actors

Element definition

An ecosystem's actors are the set of individuals and organizations that together bring a sense of shared identity and common vision to the ecosystem.

Indicators for assessment

- **Density:** Number of actors in the ecosystem.

- **Diversity:** Types of actors by role, approach, geographical distribution, longevity in the ecosystem.

Phases of development

Emerging

The ecosystem has a small set of actors that often includes researchers and practitioners who are developing the knowledge base and working on targeted solutions to address part of the problem. They see the need to engage others and define an objective beyond their own organization, discipline, or initiative.

Forming

The set of actors grows and diversifies to include ecosystem catalysts, government actors (for systemic problems), and funder champions. They have a sense of shared identity anchored in seeing the problem in a common way, but through a diversity of lenses—including insights from those most proximate to the problem. They share the goal of resolving the problem in order to achieve their individual missions. Leaders who are respected across the ecosystem also emerge to help direct the ecosystem's progress.

Evolving/Sustaining

A broad set of heterogeneous and complementary actors identify with the ecosystem, and a set of diverse, representative leaders continues to lead the ecosystem toward greater impact. Ecosystem catalysts and other ecosystem intermediaries play a key coordinating and convening role as well. Funders play more targeted roles in the ecosystem, including thoughtfully exiting or transitioning into less prominent roles, as appropriate.

Assessment Summary

The ecosystem is large and growing, but these actors have yet to align in ways that leverage strength in numbers to achieve common goals. Our survey captured almost 800 active actors working to advance pluralism, and there are likely many more, including practitioners, funders, government actors, and researchers who are working across a wide range of approaches and with a variety of audiences. There is also wide geographical coverage, with ecosystem actors working in all 50 states and some US territories, although a majority have a nationwide focus rather than working on a state or local level. Data suggests that there are many other organizations working at more local levels, but that they are not well connected to national actors.[23]

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23 This data includes the 790 applicants to New Pluralists' program, Healing Starts Here, which supports locally led pluralism initiatives. While some of these actors responded to the survey used in this report, many did not, which indicates that there are diverse actors working at local and grassroots levels who could be involved in future assessments of the ecosystem.

In addition, there is great diversity in actors' focus areas and approaches to advancing pluralism. This assessment invited actors to reflect on how they identify the core focus of their work, and to name the methods and tactics they use to advance pluralism based on a set of 11 focus areas and 15 different approaches identified in partnership with New Pluralists. Data suggests that actors currently identify and coalesce around all 11 focus areas that relate to and support pluralism, with bridging and strengthening democracy as the most prominent areas. The diversity of focus areas and approaches presents a strength in that actors are tackling multiple causes and advancing multiple solutions, and it presents a weakness in that it might be easier for actors to relate to and connect their efforts to those focus areas than to see and build upon the intersections that uphold and advance pluralism, and support each focus area in advancing its own goals as well. It is possible that some of the focus areas constitute their own fields of practice, like bridging, belonging, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding, which may be further developed fields, but the pluralism ecosystem has yet to coalesce so that the variety of actors and approaches represents a strength in moving collective goals forward.

Supporting Data

The pluralism ecosystem is extensive—there are many actors working on related efforts.

- We surveyed 201 organizations, which identified 590 additional partners, for a total of 791 unique organizations in the ecosystem captured through this assessment's methodology. There are likely many more organizations working on related focus areas. For example, we know that around 800 other organizations applied for funding from New Pluralists, which were not captured in this assessment.

- 72% of surveyed actors have been working on pluralism-related efforts for more than six years, but funders are relatively newer; 47% of surveyed funders entered the ecosystem in the past five years, compared to 27% of practitioners. Five members of the New Pluralists network mentioned that the tent is getting bigger—there are more actors in the ecosystem today than there were before, and four mentioned that there is a better understanding of what the ecosystem is and the actors within it.

- However, interviewees also mentioned missing actors in the ecosystem like the private sector, younger voices, leaders with different education status, and conservative actors. One interviewee wondered about *"reaching the people who need to be reached versus having all the same people involved in various permutations of the conversation,"* while another noted that *"to date, we've been very narrowly focused on the world of actors as the people who have been more traditionally involved in this space. If everybody who currently works in the space of pluralism was working 10 times harder, we still wouldn't move the needle. How are we bringing in new actors into the space that have an ability to reach new constituencies at scale and creating the on-ramps for them to engage in pluralistic practice?"*

The pluralism ecosystem has a wide geographical reach, and actors work at national, state, and local levels.

- Surveyed actors are working on pluralism across all 50 states, on a nationwide scale, and two actors reported working in US Territories (see Figure 3). Out of the organizations that responded to the ecosystem assessment's survey, 56% are working on a national scale, while around 20% are working on a state level and 25% on a county, city, or neighborhood level. Most funders have a national focus while practitioners are more likely to work in more local areas.

Figure 3 | **Number of Survey Respondents Working to Advance Pluralism by State**
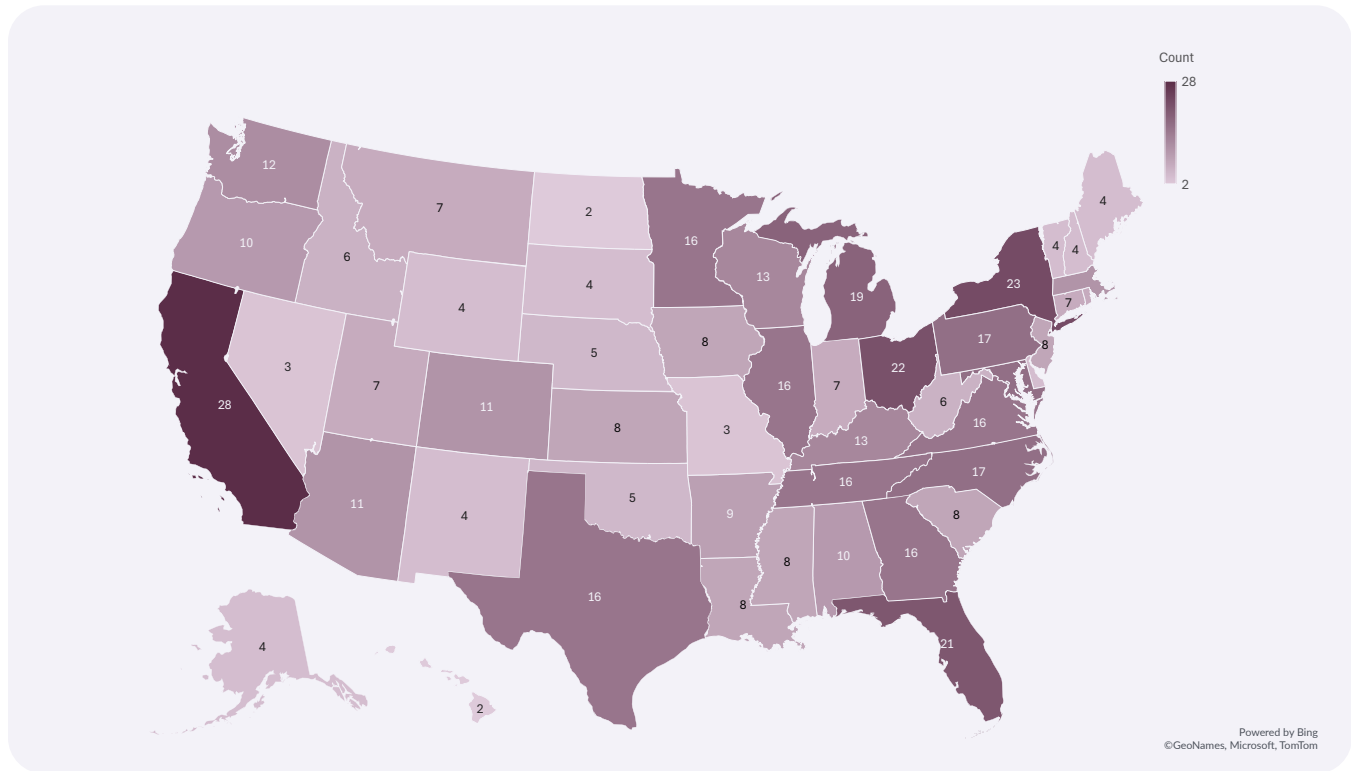
- While this assessment's survey captured actors focused mostly on national and state-level efforts, other data suggests that there are many locally focused actors. In 2022, New Pluralists issued a public call for proposals to invest in a locally led pluralism project and received 790 applications. Of those applicants, 51% worked on efforts at the neighborhood, city, or county level. In addition, 28% of applicants proposed projects that would occur across multiple counties or in a single intrastate region (e.g., the Appalachian Foothills of East Tennessee), and 18% of applicants proposed statewide projects.[24]

- Notably, this assessment's snowball sampling, which started with national actors, did not capture that many locally-focused actors, which suggests a potential disconnect between the national organizations and locally-focused actors that we know exist but did not capture.

Ecosystem actors align with a variety of different focus areas that relate to pluralism.

To map existing actors in the ecosystem, New Pluralists developed a typology of focus areas of work that could capture how different actors are working to advance pluralism. This typology is not exhaustive, but it is illustrative of the types of work that relate to pluralism and borrows from past research as well as Research to Impact findings. As shown in Figure 4, more than half of respondents (52%) are working on bridging and anti-polarization, and around one third are focusing on strengthening democracy, belonging, field building, and cultural organizing/narrative change. Almost all organizations selected more than one area of work, suggesting inter-related efforts across these focus areas. However, six interviewees mentioned that actors in the ecosystem are talking more about pluralism, using the term to describe their work, and recognizing that it is something that matters. More actors are recognizing their work as pluralism related, suggesting the emergence of pluralism as a broader umbrella that connects these different focus areas.

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24 New Pluralists. (2023, January 11). *Healing starts here. Insights from the pluralism field.* https://newpluralists.org/hsh_early-insights-from-RFP

Figure 4 | **Percentage of Organizations Focusing on Each Focus Area**[25]

52% **Bridging and reducing toxic polarization**
(e.g., bridge-building, coalition-building, problem-solving across differences, intra-group work, addressing toxic polarization)

40% **Strengthening democracy**
(e.g., political extremism and authoritarianism, governance and co-governance efforts, lack of accountability, civic engagement, civic education, institutional distrust)

38% **Belonging and welcoming**
(e.g., immigrant inclusion, place-making and community-building, co-generational work, social cohesion, combating social isolation, urban/rural connections, etc.)

29% **Field-building**
(e.g., network steward, convener, backbone organization)

28% **Cultural organizing and narrative change**
(e.g., media and digital spaces, addressing misinformation, arts and culture, story-telling, communications, etc.)

15% **Faith-based and spiritual approaches**
(e.g., more and spiritual imagination, interfaith and religious pluralism work)

13% **Pluralistic conditions, structural othering, and inequality**
(e.g., civil rights and inclusion, systemic discrimination, unhealthy competition, rapid demographic change, work to address racism and economic inequalities, etc.)

11% **Transforming conflict and repairing after harm**
(e.g., reconciliation, racial healing, indigenous peace practices, etc.)

10% **Research from different fields related to pluralism**
(e.g., research on social conditions, behaviors, and attitudes that support or hinder pluralism)

9% **Anti-hate and anti-prejudice**
(e.g., efforts to address group-targeted rhetoric and actions, including hate speech, hate crimes, and discrimination)

7% **Protecting and celebrating diversity**
(e.g., cultural celebrations and awareness, protecting minority rights)

5% **Other***
*Eleven respondents described a few other areas of focus including education, global citizenship, environment, economic justice, and equity, diversity, and inclusion.

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25 Respondents could select multiple responses, so the percentage does not add up to 100%.

Ecosystem actors focus on a wide variety of approaches in their work.

The top four approaches used by ecosystem actors to advance pluralism are storytelling, skill-building and training, network-weaving, and leadership development (see Table 2). Meanwhile, different types of actors use different approaches: funders focus mainly on skill-building, storytelling, network-weaving, and collective action; practitioners mostly on skill-building and storytelling; researchers on research and thought leadership.

Table 2 | **Percentage of Organizations Focusing on Specific Approaches to Advance Pluralism**

Percent of organizations	Approaches
42%	Storytelling, perspective-taking, and empathy building or humanizing
37%	Skill-building and training
28%	Network-weaving and convening
25%	Leadership development
21%	Collective action and collaboration
21%	Narrative work, communications, media campaigns
20%	Deliberative dialogue
19%	Thought leadership
17%	Relational or transformative organizing
14%	Research and evidence-building
13%	Peacebuilding, mediation, conflict literacy, and conflict transformation
11%	Other
8%	Power-building
7%	Healing and repair
6%	Futurism and building alternatives

Assessment of Element 2: Infrastructure

Element definition

Ecosystem infrastructure is "connective tissue" that strengthens each of the other four ecosystem elements as well as the complementarity between them. Infrastructure exponentially enhances the efforts of actors in the ecosystem by making them more coordinated, connected, and effective.

Indicators for assessment

- **Connectivity:** Network density or degree of connectivity among ecosystem actors and description of main actors in the ecosystem along with mechanisms for connection.

Phases of development

Emerging

The ecosystem has some informal, ad hoc mechanisms (such as casual meet-ups) to connect actors, so they can share early lessons and insights. Actors are mainly working in silos.

Forming

The ecosystem relies on more formalized structures, including technical assistance providers and convenings. Intermediaries (often including a respected ecosystem catalyst) strengthen connections across once disjointed efforts and diverse actors—including those closest to the ground level of the work. This infrastructure collectively helps ensure that the rapidly growing understanding of both the problem and effective approaches spreads across the ecosystem.

Evolving/Sustaining

Intermediaries and technical assistance providers continue to strengthen connections, cultivate collaboration, and build the capacity of actors. Their efforts help to sustain progress as it occurs, and also enable the ecosystem's actors to adapt to meet new challenges as the context in which they operate evolves.

Assessment Summary

As evidenced by the data presented in the Actors element, the pluralism ecosystem is extensive in both the number of organizations working on related efforts, and the number of networks connecting those actors in different ways. There are established nodes of connection among these actors, with a few funders and practitioners as epicenters of partnerships and connections. However, the pluralism ecosystem is loosely connected, compared to what is generally considered "healthy network density."[26] Notably, connectivity, as measured in this ecosystem assessment, denotes partnership. Thus, ecosystem actors might be connected to each other, but they are not conducting their work in partnership, which we define as loose connections. The variety of focus areas that relate to pluralism, as identified in the Actors section, might also affect the extent to which organizations partner with each other across focus areas.

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26 "Although the interpretation of network density (*d*) is very much tied to the *context* of the network itself, we can generally say that if d is a number between 0 and 0.3, then the network has a *low density*, and if *d* is a number between 0.7 and 1, then the network has a *high density*." Matni, Z. (2021, August 6). *Social network analysis, part 2*. Information Matters. https://informationmatters.org/2021/08/social-network-analysis-part-2/#:~:text=Although%20the%20interpretation%20 of%20d,network%20has%20a%20high%20density

It is possible that actors within those specific focus areas are more strongly connected, but it is unclear from our data whether that is the case.[27] However, there is evidence of increasingly formalized structures for connection and collaboration, suggesting that the ecosystem is moving toward the forming phase in infrastructure.

While this data has limitations as a definitive measure of ecosystem connectivity, it does suggest opportunities to improve connectivity in the ecosystem. Continued investment in connective structures can further strengthen the infrastructure needed to more clearly articulate overlapping areas between different focus areas that relate to pluralism, with particular attention to how pluralism acts as the connecting frame across focus areas, and how actors from different focus areas can contribute to the broader goal of advancing pluralism.

Supporting Data

There are some established nodes of connection within the ecosystem.

Ecosystem actors named at least 259 networks[28] supporting pluralism efforts and bringing together actors from related focus areas. Of the 791 organizations that responded to the ecosystem survey or were mentioned by respondents, 25 organizations were identified by five or more organizations as close partners in advancing pluralism, 88 were identified by two to four organizations, and all others had one or no connections. Table 3 shows the networks, funders, and practitioners with the most mentions in the ecosystem survey.

Table 3 | **Networks, Funders, and Practitioners with Most Mentions in the Ecosystem Survey**

Braver Angels	**Einhorn Collaborative**	**Interfaith America**
Bridge Alliance	**Essential Partners**	**Listen First Project**
Bridging Movement Alignment Council	**Fetzer Institute**	**More in Common**
Citizen University	**Ford Foundation**	**New Pluralists**
Constructive Dialogue Institute	**Greater Good Science Center**	**Stand Together**
Democracy Funders Network	**Hewlett Foundation**	**The National Endowment for the Arts**

27 This ecosystem assessment looked at connections among organizations under the broader pluralism ecosystem frame. We did not ask how actors working on specific focus areas like bridging and bonding are collaborating with each other.

28 Ecosystem actors identified networks they are connected to in their work to advance pluralism. Some of the identified networks might be individual organizations who lead networks or act as conveners. We did not verify whether each response corresponded to a network or an individual organization.

The pluralism ecosystem, including all organizations that responded to the ecosystem survey and all other organizations identified as partners in advancing pluralism, is loosely connected. On a scale between 0 and 1, where 1 indicates the highest possible level of connection, the pluralism ecosystem is at .002,[29] where .4-.6 is generally considered a healthy network density. This low degree of connection is a signal, which suggests that there are opportunities for organizations to connect with each other more, but it is not a definitive measure of ecosystem density due to limitations with the data.[30] Namely, the ecosystem survey was structured differently from a standard social network analysis survey in that it used an open-ended response option where organizations identified their main partners, rather than a closed list of possible connections. Therefore, the looseness represented by the low degree of connection may also be related to the question structure. Specifically, the degree of connection suggests that one organization's main partners in pluralism efforts are different from another organization's main partners, and that there are few organizations that have partners in common with others.

There is some indication that the ecosystem is becoming more connected and cohesive.

Nine interviewees from within the New Pluralists network mentioned that there is now a better structure in the ecosystem, where there is a better shape to support a collective of actors, knitting people and organizations together for better connections, more coordination, more funding, and more recognition from outside actors. Six interviewees commented specifically on increased connections, speaking to the value of knowing each other, building relationships, and learning from each other.

Nine interviewees saw nascent opportunities for collaboration but without concrete results yet. Within the New Pluralists network, the Experimentation Collaboration Fund, convenings with practitioners and funders, and the Research to Impact convening have served as connective infrastructure. These opportunities are the beginning of more formalized connective structures in the ecosystem. There have been some examples of successful partnerships leading to short-term outcomes and some collaboration is also happening with actors outside the network. For example, one member of the New Pluralists network is working with Habitat for Humanity, YMCA, and Catholic Charities on depolarization efforts, while another is creating empathy tools in partnership with colleagues in academia.

However, six interviewees cautioned that collaboration is only really happening among similar organizations, not necessarily across difference. Four other actors identified a lack of ecosystem-level alignment as a challenge to collaboration, with one of them posing a question for the ecosystem: *"There's all these [actors], funders, practitioners, scholars; how can you align them to understand they're all studying pluralism and make their efforts not only compatible but complementary?"* Individual actors also identified conflicting missions between organizations (n=1), scarce funding (n=1), and a *"culture of niceness"* in the ecosystem (n=1) as challenges to collaboration.

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29 Network density is a ratio of the number of actual connections between organizations or individuals divided by the potential connections that could exist in the network (total reported connections/n*(n-1)). If each actor in a network was connected to every other actor, the network density would be 1. If none were connected, the density would be 0.

30 To assess infrastructure for connection in the pluralism ecosystem, we documented which organizations were identified as key partners in pluralism work by ecosystem actors and mapped connections between organizations using social network analysis based on the ecosystem survey data.

Assessment of Element 3: Ecosystem-level agenda

Element definition

An ecosystem-level agenda refers to the strategic suite of approaches that aims to address shared barriers and unlock collective progress. It is co-created (and continuously adapted) by the ecosystem's actors.

Indicators for assessment

- **Shared identity:** Actor's areas of focus and expected outcomes.

- **Standards of practice:** Perception of quality standards of practices promoted by ecosystem actors.

Phases of development

Emerging

The ecosystem's actors are often focused on distinct pieces of the core problem and are working in their "own lanes," often in ad hoc, localized, or informal ways. Their work is usually narrowly focused on small segments or within tight geographic boundaries.

Forming

Work expands to include a broader set of solutions, such as advocating for policy change or providing technical assistance to ecosystem practitioners. These solutions are designed with scale in mind and are informed by practitioners and those most proximate to the problem. Initially, the efforts overlap as actors experiment and learn about what works. Over time, actors coordinate and adapt their efforts more intentionally. Coupled with growing evidence, the ecosystem agrees on the most effective approaches to scaling impact.

Evolving/Sustaining

Heterogeneous, complementary, and adaptive approaches (e.g., advocacy, education, etc.) are used in concert. This coordinated effort is guided by a cocreated, emergent ecosystem strategy that serves to guide the ecosystem's progress. Supporting policy and regulatory wins further sustains impact and funding for the ecosystem as well.

Assessment Summary

Ecosystem actors work on a wide variety of related but different topic areas that contribute to advancing pluralism, but as leading researchers expressed, "there is no clear definition of pluralism or field north star that articulates a shared vision, goals, and outcomes, which is an overall barrier." Ecosystem actors identified different types of expected outcomes that help advance pluralism, including changes in individual attitudes and beliefs, behaviors and intergroup relations, and cultural and institutional contexts. Data suggests that ecosystem actors' efforts are evenly split among these three outcome categories, which indicates good coverage across the various levels of changes; however, individual ecosystem actors might not clearly see how their work or area of focus connects to pluralism. Researchers and practitioners also reflected on the difficulties in defining pluralism and noted that *"The challenge is how to communicate the principles of pluralism without using the term 'pluralism,' which needs thoughtful consideration of language and framing to connect with diverse audiences effectively."*

In addition to broader alignment on shared definitions and goals, we explored how aligned actors were in their thinking of standards of practice that help delineate what good or effective pluralism-related work should look like. Most actors in the New Pluralists network think standards of practice are important for the ecosystem and identified benefits including supporting alignment, offering a touchstone for good practice, and serving as a foundation for measurement. However, a majority also see risks in developing standards that could be too rigid for a nascent ecosystem and might be exclusionary and alienating. Given that standards of practice have important benefits for the ecosystem, ecosystem leaders should contend with how to realize the benefits while addressing concerns. In the Research to Impact convening, attendees identified lingering questions[31] that point to opportunities for increased alignment at least among core actors in the ecosystem, including:

- What is the goal of pluralism? To simply tolerate or coexist? To validate and celebrate difference?

- Is there consensus that America was founded on pluralistic principles?

- What is the right balance between fixing political structure and political culture?

- Changing environments takes time and buy in. Given the challenges, what types of environments should we focus on now?

- How do we bring elected officials, the for-profit sector, DEI and corporate responsibility sectors, technologists, journalists, and other influencers into this work?

Supporting Data

Ecosystem actors identified a variety of outcomes at different societal levels that would contribute to advancing pluralism. Actors were evenly spread out rather than coalescing around specific outcomes.

To better understand the ecosystem's goals, we asked all interviewees how they would describe the goal which they, New Pluralists staff, and other funders, practitioners, and actors in the pluralism ecosystem are working toward together. Using responses from 43 interviewees, ORS considered both the level of change that each interviewee described (e.g., individual, societal, etc.) and the intended outcomes they describe working toward.

For the level of change, we mapped interviewee responses to Research to Impact's Framework for Understanding What Inhibits or Promotes Pluralism (see Figure 5)[32] and found that interviewees were relatively evenly spread across the three levels of the matrix:[33]
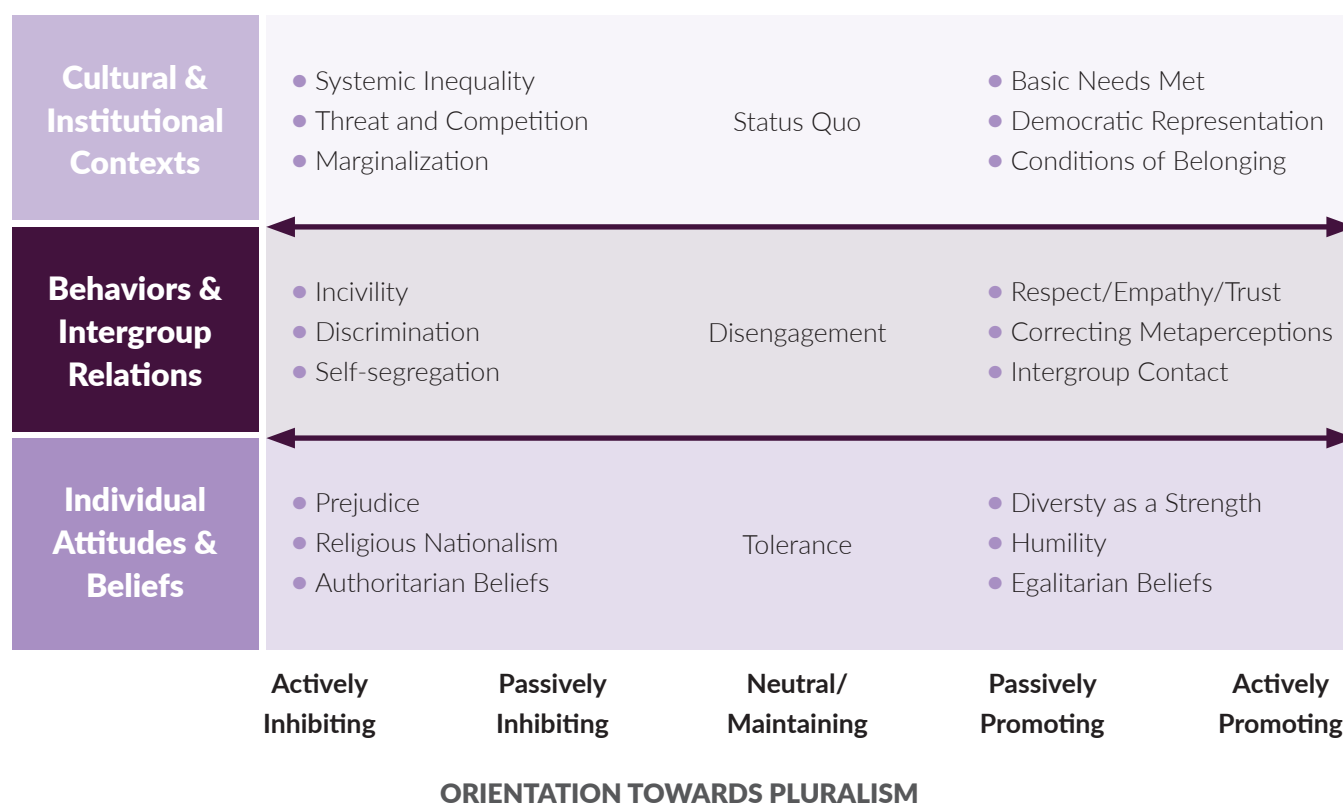
- 20 interviewees described the goal in terms of changes in **individual attitudes and beliefs.**

- 25 interviewees described the goal in terms of changes in **behaviors and intergroup relations.** Of these, 22 spoke to changes between groups specifically, and 11 spoke more broadly to changes within communities.

- 20 interviewees described the goal in terms of changes in **cultural and institutional contexts.**

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31 New Pluralists, More in Common, GSCS, & Over Zero. (2023). *Research to impact 2023 report*. https://newpluralists.org/research_to_impact2023

32 New Pluralists, More in Common, GSCS, Over Zero. (2023). *Framework: What enables or inhibits pluralism*. https://newpluralists.org/rpi_pluralism_framework2023

33 Note that this coding is not mutually exclusive. A single interviewee might describe the shared goal as including both individual-level change and policy change, which means they are included in both the first and third levels.

Figure 5 | **Research to Impact Framework for Understanding What Inhibits or Promotes Pluralism**

Cultural & Institutional Contexts	• Systemic Inequality • Threat and Competition • Marginalization	Status Quo	• Basic Needs Met • Democratic Representation • Conditions of Belonging
Behaviors & Intergroup Relations	• Incivility • Discrimination • Self-segregation	Disengagement	• Respect/Empathy/Trust • Correcting Metaperceptions • Intergroup Contact
Individual Attitudes & Beliefs	• Prejudice • Religious Nationalism • Authoritarian Beliefs	Tolerance	• Diversty as a Strength • Humility • Egalitarian Beliefs
	Actively Inhibiting	**Passively Inhibiting**	**Neutral/ Maintaining**	**Passively Promoting**	**Actively Promoting**

ORIENTATION TOWARDS PLURALISM

We also considered the types of outcomes that interviewees shared they hoped to achieve within each of the matrix levels, and interviewees identified the following outcomes:[34]

Outcomes about individual attitudes and beliefs: Interviewees identified changes that might happen at the individual level as inputs toward outcome(s) at another level of the framework. For example, one interviewee described how part of the work is to equip *"faith leaders to hold diverse spaces and actually create spaces to have difficult conversations about their differences and how to navigate."* While the change is at the individual level (faith leaders), it is an input toward an outcome in intergroup relations: *"talking and understanding across difference."* Therefore, we categorized all outcomes under the other two levels.

Outcomes about behaviors and intergroup relations:

• **Talking/understanding across difference (n=18):** Interviewees see an outcome of this work as individuals and groups talking to one another and increasing their understanding of those who are different than them. One funder explained, *"What we're working towards would be that individuals and groups respecting each other across different beliefs and views of what they see as good... even perhaps approaching others whose values are different from a posture of learning and openness..."* Only one interviewee (a funder) saw this as the only outcome of this work. The other 17 interviewees saw this as one of multiple outcomes this work aims to make progress against.

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34 Note that these outcomes are not mutually exclusive, and some interviewees are included in multiple counts.

- **Joint action and/or problem solving (n=18):** The same number of interviewees see undertaking shared work as one of the intended outcomes of this work. They specifically mentioned solving problems together, taking action together, or otherwise being able to move work forward.

- **Less animosity and/or extremism (n=15):** A little over one third of interviewees see the goal of this work as reducing animosity and/or extremism, especially violence, between different groups in the US.

Outcomes about behaviors and intergroup relations:

- **Belonging (n=12):** Twelve interviewees see belonging as an outcome of this work—either using the word specifically or describing it in other words. For instance, one practitioner who did not specifically use the word belonging instead said that everyone *"feels seen, welcomed, recognized, honored, and opportunity for leadership in the work."*

- **Democracy (n=11):** About one fourth of interviewees see the outcome of this work as building a stronger, more inclusive democracy and/or strengthening democratic practices in the US.

- **Pluralism itself (n=10):** Some interviewees see pluralism as an outcome itself. As one funder said, *"The goal is making pluralism more mainstream, making it feel like a tool or a tactic to address some of the most complex challenges that we're facing today, both at a community level and at the broader national level."*

- **Other goals (n=16):** Other outcomes mentioned by interviewees varied, but included increased respect, building a national narrative, and reducing poverty and inequity.

In addition to expected outcomes in society, 17 interviewees described the goal as building the pluralism ecosystem. For example, when asked what New Pluralists staff, funders, practitioners, and other actors are working toward together, one practitioner said, *"The initiative is trying to create a community of practitioners who are working on different elements of different aspects of a big elephant of pluralism in American society, and to maybe see if there's a field that could be supported in some more coherent or strategic way."* When further probed about what success would look like, the interviewee explained that *"We would have a better articulation of the problem that we're facing. If we were successful, I think maybe we'd have a map of some of the solutions that are currently being tried out right now. Maybe a little bit of a hint at what areas of work need more attention in the field…"*

Most actors in the New Pluralists network think standards of practice are important for the ecosystem, but half also see risks in developing them and only a few could identify existing standards. Instead, more actors identified standards for focus areas related to pluralism.

- More than two thirds (n=29) of interviewees indicated that they think having standards of practice is important.[35] When explaining why standards of practice are important, interviewees primarily saw the following benefits:

  - **Providing alignment on a shared definition or goal (n=12),** meaning they see an opportunity for standards of practice to provide increased clarity and coherence to the field about what pluralism is and how it's practiced.

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35 Forty-two interviewees were asked about standards of practice in pluralism work. Before asking this question in the interview, we defined standards of practice as "socialized and codified norms established within a particular industry or field as characteristics of effective work."

- **Offering a touchstone for good practice (n=10),** meaning they felt that standards of practice would provide principles or criteria for how to know pluralism when they see/experience it, and how to do it well. As one practitioner said, standards of practice could provide markers *"that we're actually practicing something that gets us toward [pluralism] instead of assuming that we're automatically going to do it."*

- **Serving as a foundation for measurement (n=5),** meaning they also see value in standards of practice serving as a foundation for measurement of pluralistic work. One funder explained, *"...if you don't have a core set of norms, it's like, how do you know that any of this is making a difference?"*

- Two interviewees offered additional benefits of aligning around standards of practice, including that they provide credibility and influence (n=1) and that they institutionalize processes (n=1).

However, 20 interviewees also shared risks to defining standards of practice. Six interviewees worried that standards of practice might be too rigid for a still nascent ecosystem and could limit creativity or innovation. They wanted to ensure that any standards of practice are high-level and broad enough that various different methodologies, approaches, and ideas can continue to fit within them. Five interviewees were also concerned that standards of practice might be exclusionary. One practitioner explained that "*they can quickly become grounds for excluding and alienating."* Ten interviewees shared other risks to developing standards of practice, including that they might become more about box checking than actually practicing pluralism (n=2); that the focus should be on the outcome(s) of pluralism instead (n=2); that it could reinforce professionalism and/or elitism in the ecosystem (n=2); that the ecosystem's shared analysis of the problem is too broad (or divergent) to adopt standards (n=2); that it could be an intellectual exercise that unnecessarily divides people (n=1); that they wouldn't be applied consistently (n=1); and that pluralism is intentionally broad and standards feel like the opposite (n=1). One interviewee also raised questions about who would define standards and how, asking how to ensure they're truly representative. Finally, two interviewees questioned who is served by the standards of practice and who we are codifying for.

When asked whether they could think of any standards of practice that already exist in the pluralism ecosystem, only nine could name standards and pointed to New Pluralists' principles as an example. Instead, 11 interviewees identified standards of practice related to one of the 11 focus areas that relate to pluralism, which suggests standards of practice might be better defined in those focus areas, which are narrower in scope, further developed as fields of practice, and relate to specific technical practices compared to pluralism which is a broader issue area.

WALKING THE TALK – EMBEDDING PLURALISM INTO PRACTICE

One question we heard from ecosystem actors was if there were indicators that organizations were acting more pluralistically. One way to assess how and to what extent organizations are walking the talk and acting in pluralistic ways was to identify a set of relevant activities and ask actors to what extent they have recently engaged in those activities. This exploratory work identified and assessed relevant practices, and the results illustrate how ecosystem actors are walking the talk and working in a pluralistic way in service of their expressed goals for social change. ORS Impact collected this data through the ecosystem survey. (Delete the rest of the sentence and footnote number 36.

As shown in Table 4, a majority of practitioners surveyed by ORS Impact are working in ways that embody pluralism, evidenced by practices like working with partners across dimensions of difference, embedding language aligned with pluralism in organizational mission statements, avoiding work that is antithetical to principles of pluralism, and conducting internal trainings for their teams. Notably, a majority of practitioners reported having to avoid work that is antithetical to pluralism, suggesting a large prevalence of calls for proposals or other work opportunities in the sector that are structured in ways that do not advance pluralism.

Table 4 | **Ecosystem Actors Reporting Engaging in Specific Activities**

Activities	Practitioners (n = 136)
Worked across differences	78%
Enhanced language	77%
Avoided antithetical work	68%
Internal training	63%

A second way of exploring whether actors are walking the talk is through the principles that guide their work. New Pluralists developed a set of guiding principles[36] that help explain what it means to act in a pluralistic way. We asked all surveyed ecosystem actors the extent to which these principles are important in their work and found that most principles seem to resonate with ecosystem actors for the most part, with the exception of Taking Responsibility for Repair (Figure 6). While a majority of actors agreed that all other principles were important to a great extent in their work, only 42% said taking responsibility for repair was very important and one in four said it had little to no importance. This calls into question the relative importance actors are giving to repairing and social healing as part of pluralism work, although the lower rating might reflect different definitions of repair and healing among actors. When looking more into this finding, we found that, among the New Pluralists network, funders were less likely to rate this principle as important for their work than practitioners.

Figure 6 | **Importance of New Pluralists' Principles According to Ecosystem Actors (n=180)**
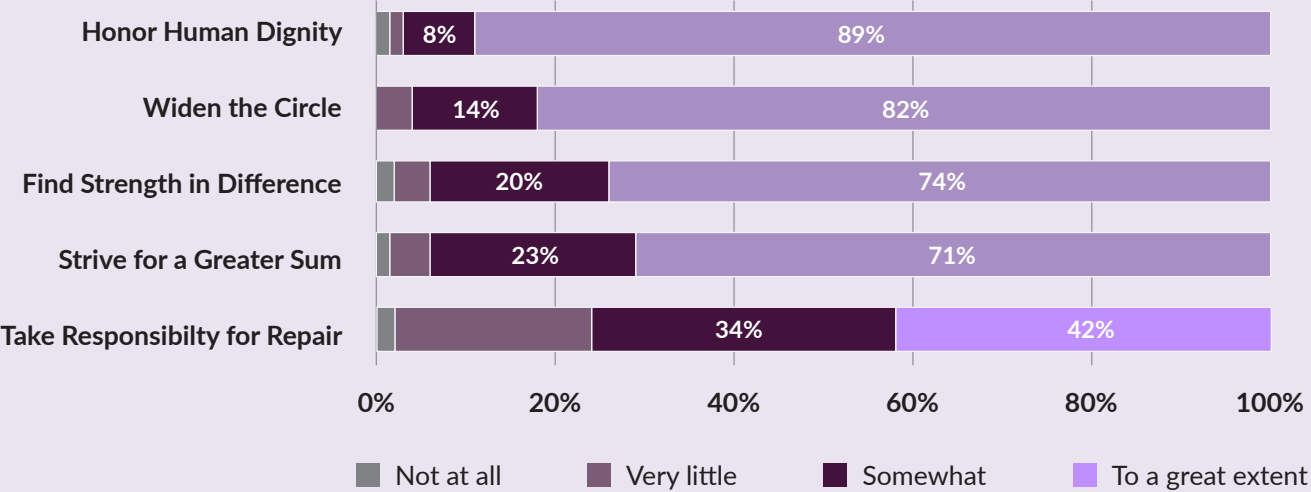
36 New Pluralists. (n.d.). *Approach*. Retrieved August 2, 2024, from https://newpluralists.org/approach/

Assessment of Element 4: Knowledge Base

Element definition

An ecosystem knowledge base is the body of academic and practical research that helps actors better understand the problem, identify and analyze shared barriers to solving it, and develop solutions.

Indicators for assessment

- **Knowledge base:** Number and type of researchers and research areas that contribute to the ecosystem.

Phases of development

Emerging

The knowledge base is relatively new or narrow, often focusing on research describing the magnitude and severity of the problem.

Forming

The knowledge base is growing, with ecosystem actors drawing on it and contributing to it in meaningful ways. It includes both research and practice-based insights that hold the promise of greater impact if spread more broadly in existing systems (e.g., school districts) or channels with population-level reach (e.g., large networked service providers).

Evolving/Sustaining

Researchers and practitioners work together to continuously update the knowledge base per the ecosystem's evolving understanding of the problem, barriers to progress, and effectiveness of solutions, leading actors to adapt based on new insights and evidence.

Assessment Summary

A wide variety of actors from different but complementary academic areas are contributing to research related to pluralism, but research is more aligned with other focus areas adjacent or related to pluralism like prejudice, partisan animosity and polarization, democracy and collective action, intergroup contact, systemic bias/inequality, and reactions to demographic change. As the pluralism ecosystem coalesces around its boundaries and shared identity, researchers are just beginning to connect with practitioners and discuss their research under the broader pluralism frame. There are opportunities to strengthen this element of the ecosystem; for example, the Research to Impact convening was an early ecosystem-wide research and practice gathering, and similar efforts in the future can propel this element of the ecosystem toward the forming phase. Future efforts should continue to connect researchers and practitioners, with special attention to co-designing a research agenda that includes both practice-based insights as well as academic research and begins to answer different questions as they arise such as what works, where, and how.

Supporting Data

Researchers are just as varied as practitioners in terms of the various areas they study related to pluralism

- In preparation for the Research to Impact convening, academic researchers sought to identify actors working on research related to pluralism. Their preliminary research found that at least 144 researchers are working on research related to pluralism, spanning 11 different areas of study (Table 5).[37] A large majority of researchers are psychologists, followed by researchers from political science, business, and sociology. While there are likely many more researchers from different areas of research that this assessment did not capture, this is an illustrative list of the types of research currently supporting the ecosystem.

- Most research captured through this effort concentrated around individual attitudes and beliefs (43%), followed by behaviors and intergroup relations (39%), and cultural and institutional contexts (18%). Within individual attitudes and beliefs, the main subcategories where researchers focus their efforts are prejudice, partisan animosity and polarization, and egalitarianism. Within behaviors and intergroup relations, the main areas of research are democracy and collective action, intergroup contact, and social identity. Finally, within cultural and institutional contexts, the main areas of focus are systemic bias/inequality, reactions to demographic change, and threat and competition.

- While a wide variety of actors from different but complementary academic areas are contributing to research related to pluralism, the knowledge base is most effective when research informs practice and vice versa. In the pluralism ecosystem, researchers are just beginning to connect with practitioners with clearer through lines between insights and potential actions.

- Research to Impact attendees identified some limitations that keep researchers and practitioners from working more closely together,[38] including:

  - **Siloed communities:** Researchers and practitioners move in different professional circles, with few opportunities to connect in-person or online, with no current mechanism to facilitate "match-making." In addition, they often operate in different conditions (controlled vs. dynamic, narrow vs. interdisciplinary) and on different timelines (long vs. short).

Table 5 | **Research Areas Related to Pluralism**

Psychology
Political Science
Business
Sociology
Government
Peace and Conflict Studies
Communications
History
Law
Management
Religious Studies

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37 New Pluralists, More in Common, GSCS, & Over Zero. (2023). *Research to impact 2023 report*. https://newpluralists.org/research_to_impact2023

38 New Pluralists, More in Common, GSCS, & Over Zero. (2023). *Research to impact 2023 report*. https://newpluralists.org/research_to_impact2023

- **Differing incentives:** Researchers are under professional pressure to pursue theoretically novel research and publish in academic journals, while practitioners are under pressure to meet evolving needs and prove to funders that their programs work.

- **Use of data and findings:** Researchers may encounter obstacles in motivating practitioners to conduct experiments with data that can be published, especially if the results challenge the effectiveness of established methods, while practitioners may face challenges related to the context-specific nature of research findings.

- **Funding:** Short funding cycles (1-2 years) and pressure to prove impact limit the ability to try new things, iterate, and fail, and there are few funding opportunities to support research/practitioner collaboration at the start of a project.

- Research to Impact attendees also identified opportunities to strengthen the knowledge base, including:

  - **Filling knowledge gaps:** Exploring the relationship between attitudes and behaviors, the limits of perception gap interventions, which models have the most durable impact (e.g., mindset, contact, institutional), the relationship between social trust and trust in institutions, scalable entertainment and mass media interventions, and intergroup contact with different populations and under different conditions.

  - **Adjusting research practices:** Evaluating the medium- and long-term impact of interventions without being intrusive and within existing funding models, while improving research practices by shifting from "research on" to "research with" and embracing co-creation in the research process.

  - **Connecting research to practice:** Designing research that is more responsive to the speed at which work is happening on the ground and identifying promising practices based on understanding what works, for which outcomes, among which audiences, and under what circumstances.

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF INNOVATION IN THE PLURALISM ECOSYSTEM

In developing our ecosystem assessment framework, we originally included innovation as a separate element because our research into creating entrepreneurship ecosystems indicated its importance. However, the pluralism ecosystem differs from an entrepreneurship ecosystem in its scope and focus, and we did not have a clear understanding of the role innovation could play in this ecosystem. Therefore, rather than including innovation as a separate element in the ecosystem assessment, we first explored its role in the pluralism ecosystem.

Out of 41 ecosystem actors we interviewed who reflected on innovation, five explained the goal of innovation as helping identify what works, what doesn't, and informing future practices whether it means replicating or adapting from what has been developed before/elsewhere. Eight actors identified New Pluralists' own approach as innovative due to their ecosystem focus, their grantmaking strategy, and resources they are helping create like the Belonging Barometer and the Research to Impact Framework on What Enables or Inhibits Pluralism. Other examples of innovation identified within the network included the Bridging Differences Playbook, the Braver Politics debate model, and the Dignity Index. These innovations are made possible by appropriate funding and incentives, willingness to take risks, and learning from others or past practices and adapting in new ways. However, two interviewees questioned the focus on innovation, one by calling for innovation that takes into account local work rather than focusing on national efforts, and the other stating that innovation should not be a goal by itself: *"You do the work because you've got a problem to solve. You work backwards from that problem, and you try to figure out what works. If you come up with something that's never been tried before, then that's great. But the objective can't be having to come up with something that's never been tried before. The real value is in solving the problem and building the community in a smart, just way."* Interviewees' stated opportunities for future innovation included:

Narrative: *"Narrative systems and storytelling work to counter the incentives that drive division."*

People's experience of pluralism: *"Creating experiences for people that both are valuable to them as individuals and that are fun and delightful and also have the byproduct of connecting people to others who are different from them."*

Research to action and action to research: *"How can we innovate on the conversion and translation and uptake from a lot of great research that's happening in fragmented ways to further power and inform the design and evaluation even of programmatic work that already exists?"*

Leadership: *"Reframing what the leaders of tomorrow need in order to build institutions that we would be proud of and excited about that represent pluralist values."*

Technology: *"I see almost no examples of technology-enabled pluralism. Yet it seems as though the polarization work is certainly technology-enabled at the moment and might even be like digitally native polarization, and yet what we're relying on tends to be pretty time-intensive, deep in-person work."*

Policy innovation: *"We've seen a couple examples of that, like Interfaith America doing the advocacy to say that there should actually be government investment in these spaces. If there were good government policies, that would be operated at a very different scale than what's possible with philanthropy."*

Assessment of Element 5: Resources

Element definition

An ecosystem's resources comprise both financial forms of capital as well as nonfinancial support.

Indicators for assessment

- **Support and access to resources:** Available funding, level of investment in the ecosystem.

Phases of development

Emerging

Funders support research, learning, and innovation. However, there is little formal or long-term commitment of resources for building the ecosystem.

Forming

Funders bring greater cohesion to their collective support, putting aside individual, "branded" initiatives and efforts in service of a broader ecosystem-level goal. Funders provide both financial capital and social capital (e.g., connecting grantees to other funders, hosting convenings to share knowledge).

Evolving/Sustaining

A committed set of funders continues to invest in the ecosystem. In ecosystems tackling systemic problems, the systems begin to transform, and policy change unlocks greater, consistent resources for the ecosystem as a whole.

Assessment Summary

A wide variety of philanthropic funders are supporting pluralism-related work in the US, in significant ways that are increasing over time.[39] Practitioners surveyed through the ecosystem survey reported spending at least $171 million to implement pluralism-related efforts, with an additional $15.5 million supporting research in 2023.[40] While funding for pluralism-related work is increasing, it remains a small part of overall philanthropic funding in the US.[41] Practitioner organizations in the ecosystem are generally small organizations that devote the majority of their budgets to pluralism, and almost all of them reported challenges in finding funding for their work.

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39 24% of Council on Foundation's survey respondents reported allocating more than 51% of their grant-making budget to projects that foster connections across difference in 2022.

40 To estimate spending by practitioners and researchers, we gathered organizational budgets and estimated proportions of those budgets being invested in pluralism. That data allowed the creation of low-, medium-, and high-end estimates of total investment, rather than one specific figure. The data represented here are the low-end estimates, as we understand that "at least" these amounts have been invested in pluralism.

41 Pluralism funding is a subset of the $3.4 billion estimated philanthropic funding toward democracy in 2022. Democracy Funders Network estimates that "the $3.4 billion per year estimate would account for only 0.7 percent of all philanthropic funding in the U.S. in 2022." Griffin, R., Lobeck, C., Botero, M., Cooper, S., Diggles, M., McKay, C., & Steffen, E. (2024, January 22). *Field in focus: The state of pro-democracy institutional philanthropy.* Democracy Fund. https://democracyfund.org/idea/field-in-focus-the-state-of-pro-democracy-institutional-philanthropy

The creation of New Pluralists as a collaborative and pooled fund committed to supporting the efforts of pluralism practitioners, researchers, innovators, and storytellers for the next 10 years is one prominent example of a coordinated, long-term funding effort. However, New Pluralists' funding makes up a small fraction of the total current funding going toward pluralism, pointing to an opportunity to expand funding coordination in the broader ecosystem. Finally, funders' efforts to raise additional financial support for pluralism aim to grow the amount of resources, which solves one issue in funding accessibility. However, data suggests that there are other things funders can do, like providing more flexible funding rather than program-specific funding, and clarifying how organizations can find funding, which can also go a long way in supporting practitioners' efforts.

Supporting Data

Funders are supporting pluralism efforts and plan to increase funding in this space. However, almost all practitioner organizations report difficulties in finding funding for their work.

- 24% of Council on Foundation's survey respondents are spending 51% or more of their grant-making budget on pluralism-related work, and New Pluralists has raised $46.5 million through January 2024.[42]

- Meanwhile, practitioners reported spending at least $171 million to implement pluralism-related efforts, with an additional $15.5 million supporting research. Practitioners within the New Pluralists network make up 36% of this total ($61 million).

- Nearly all ecosystem survey respondents (98%) reported spending the same or more money on pluralism in 2023 compared to 2022, and nearly all survey respondents (99%) planned to spend the same or more money on pluralism in 2024 compared to 2023. When looking specifically at funders who responded to the Council on Foundations' survey, 79% of funders who funded pluralism-related work in 2022 planned to increase or maintain their investment levels in 2023. Notably, of the 15% of funders who were not funding this type of work, 78% were either planning to fund such work in 2024 or were considering it.

- Despite current levels of funding and plans to increase efforts to advance pluralism, ecosystem organizations report that funding is hard to get across the board: 91% said it was somewhat or very difficult to get pluralism funding. Between one half and one third of survey respondents face challenges related to a general lack of available funding to cover costs of the work (52%), project-specific funding not being flexible enough to accommodate work (49%), lack of clarity about where to look for funding opportunities (33%), and competition with other ecosystem actors (31%). Respondents also identified other challenges, including:

  Issues with perceived funding trends (n=15), such as:

  - A focus on funding pluralism in practice versus backbone or research work (n=5)

  - Ideologically-motivated funding (n=4)

  - Unwillingness to fund faith-based work (n=3)

  - National funders funding more national rather than local efforts (n=3)

  - Support for structural work over cultural reforms (n=3)

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42 In the ecosystem survey, New Pluralists funders reported contributing $31 million to pluralism efforts in 2023. It is unclear whether these $31 million are included in, or in addition to what New Pluralists raised through its pooled fund.

- Lack of local funders (n=4)

- Lack of funder understanding of organizations' work (n=7)

- Grant-writing capacity within organizations (n=7)

- Challenges faced by new/young organizations (n=5)

- Lack of alignment of efforts with funder priorities (N=5)

- Needing general operating support to advance their work (n=3)

Most organizations in the ecosystem are small but heavily invested in advancing pluralism.

- The ecosystem survey showed that 81% of ecosystem actors have fewer than 20 staff members, and practitioner organizations tend to have smaller staffs than funders or research organizations, with 53% having 1-5 staff members. Ecosystem practitioners outside of the New Pluralists network are smaller still, making up the majority of organizations with 1-5 staff, although their budget size is similar to in-network practitioners. The average practitioner budget going to pluralism in 2023 was $1.3 million.

- 73% of all ecosystem actors focus the majority of their budget on pluralism, and while most devoted the same proportion of their budgets to pluralism in 2023 as in 2022, 38% planned to increase their focus on pluralism in 2024.

- Ecosystem survey data suggests that 78% of practitioners and 90% of researchers receive grant funding for pluralism work. For 60% of those receiving grant funding, grants make up the majority of funding. Only 25% report receiving mostly unrestricted funding, while the other 75% of organizations receive mostly restricted funding. For 70% of them, these funding patterns have remained the same since 2022.

Different areas of work that contribute to pluralism are currently supported by varying degrees of funding.

As Table 6 shows, the number of practitioners focusing on each area of work varies widely, with bridging and anti-polarization work having the most practitioners; these organizations had an average organizational budget of $3.9 million in 2023. Meanwhile, the ecosystem survey reached fewer cultural organizing and narrative change practitioners, but these practitioners had a larger average budget at $5.2 million. In contrast, protecting and celebrating diversity and anti-hate efforts have both the least number of associated organizations and the lowest average budgets. Research organizations are outliers as there are fewer of these organizations in the ecosystem, but their average budget is the highest of all, perhaps as a result of affiliation with universities or other research institutions.

Table 6 | **Areas of Work and Corresponding Number of Supporting Practitioners and Average Organizational Budgets**

Area of work	Number of practitioners	Average organizational budget	Median organizational budget
Bridging and anti-polarization	79	$3,912,768.15	$700,000.00
Belonging and welcoming	63	$3,592,572.40	$592,000.00
Strengthening democracy	51	$1,553,309.69	$700,000.00
Cultural organizing and narrative change	41	$5,189,757.95	$704,000.00
Field-building	36	$3,248,444.44	$1,200,000.00
Faith-focus or spirituality	22	$2,425,275.36	$822,548.50
Pluralistic conditions, structural othering, and inequality	21	$2,274,435.19	$700,000.00
Transforming conflict and repairing after harm	20	$1,811,894.25	$600,000.00
Protecting and celebrating diversity	9	$598,222.22	$380,000.00
Anti-hate and anti-prejudice	5	$861,800.00	$400,000.00
Research from different fields related to pluralism	5	$10,090,000.00	$2,500,000.00

Conclusion

This ecosystem assessment aimed to map, describe, and assess the current status of the pluralism ecosystem to inform future collective efforts by New Pluralists and other actors. While the pluralism ecosystem is in an emerging phase, there are signs of progress and opportunities to continue building on this work in the near future. From developing a better-defined ecosystem-level agenda to strengthening research and better coordinating resource flows, ecosystem actors can adjust their strategies toward more concerted efforts. Ecosystem leaders from the Research to Impact convening reflected on the ecosystem status and shared that: *"The convening underscored that fostering a culture of pluralism is not only necessary, but possible. The ecosystem is now faced with the exciting challenge of leveraging the innovation and expertise of a diverse and growing ecosystem to help chart a new path forward."* Indeed, there are many possibilities, but also great challenges in the systems and incentives that uphold the current system in place. Thus, ecosystem actors must contend with strategies for scaling impact as they work to strengthen their collective approach toward building a culture of respect and belonging in the United States.

Appendix
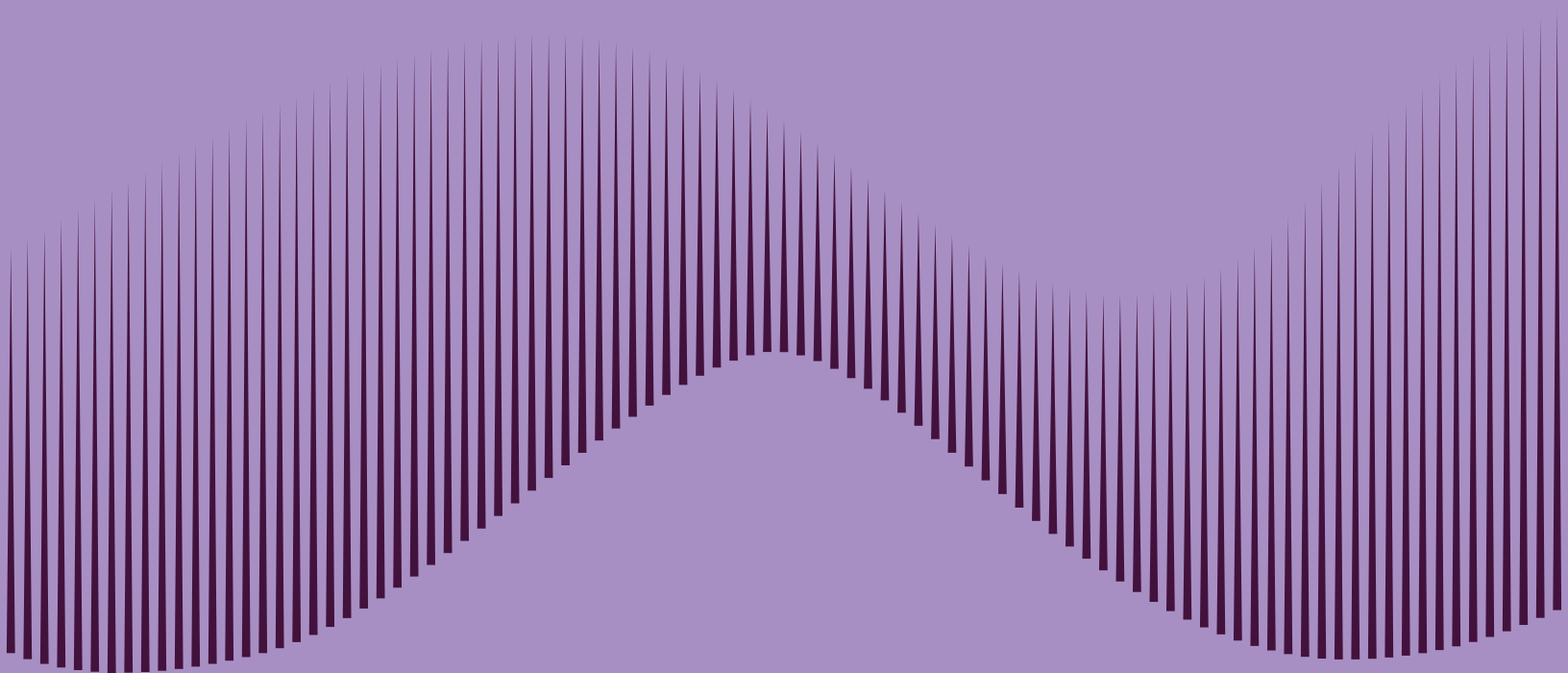
Data Sources, Strengths and Limitations of Methodology

Data Sources

To assess the status of the pluralism ecosystem, ORS Impact collected primary data and leveraged secondary data from practitioners, funders, and researchers in the ecosystem. In developing the data sources for the assessment, the design process began with New Pluralists' immediate network of funders, researchers, practitioners, and storytellers who are advancing pluralism. (These included grantee organizations as well as Field Builders, a set of 40 leaders and organizations, mostly working at the national level, who have been close partners of New Pluralists since its launch.) This network's members represent different types of actors working to advance pluralism, but we recognized that including data only from this network would limit the perspective of the broader ecosystem, which is much broader than the network itself. Therefore, data sources were designed to include ecosystem actors from within and outside of the New Pluralists network, to the extent possible, to provide a broader description of existing actors including other funders, practitioners, and researchers working on pluralism and/or pluralism-adjacent areas of work.

Primary data, collected directly by ORS Impact, included interviews with New Pluralists' network partners, key informant interviews with thought leaders who could provide a different perspective than New Pluralists' more direct partners, and a survey completed by New Pluralists' partners and other organizations outside of the network. For the ecosystem survey, we divided data collection into three steps:

1. We surveyed New Pluralists network partners.

2. We worked with New Pluralists staff to identify other ecosystem actors outside of the network and invited them to complete the survey.

3. We asked respondents in steps 1 and 2 to identify and provide contact information for their five main partners in pluralism-related efforts and invited those partners to complete the survey.

To complement primary data, we referenced two secondary data sources collected by other ecosystem actors which provide specific information about resources from foundations and the ecosystem's knowledge base. Table 7 describes data sources and provides the sample size for each one, where applicable.

Table 7 | **Description of Data Sources and Corresponding Sample Size**

Level	Data Sources	Sample size
Data collected directly by ORS Impact	Interviews with funders, Field Builders, and grantees within the New Pluralists network	N=44
	Ecosystem survey	N=201
	Key informant interviews	N=5
Data collected by other ecosystem actors	Secondary data: Council on Foundations funder survey, which asked foundations to reflect on their funding and work related to pluralism in calendar year 2022	N=133
	Secondary data: Document review of Research to Impact Convening report, which summarizes findings from a convening of researchers and practitioners working on pluralism held in September 2023	N/A

Strengths and Limitations of the Methodology

This section summarizes the strengths and limitations of the methodology used in this ecosystem assessment.

Strengths

- **Framework for ecosystem measurement:** The ecosystem assessment framework provided a detailed methodology to assess the status of an ecosystem, borrowing and adapting various existing frameworks to fit how the pluralism ecosystem has developed over time.

- **Comparability between 2024 baseline and future measurements:** One of the main goals of this ecosystem assessment was to develop a baseline understanding of the current status of the pluralism ecosystem, which could be repeated over time for comparison. The data sources and assessment framework make this assessment replicable to assess change over time.

- **Data triangulation:** Using thematic coding in interviews with different actors combined with the ecosystem survey and secondary data sources, we were able to triangulate data to establish checkpoints for our findings, making our final assessments more robust as they do not depend on any one data source or individual perception.

Limitations

- **Illustrative, non-exhaustive sample:** The sample of ecosystem actors we were able to reach through interviews and the ecosystem survey was not exhaustive. While we attempted to map the ecosystem, we are still missing actors, most notably, those working at local levels and in other adjacent fields or focus areas. Given the size of the ecosystem and the breadth of related focus areas, we could not construct a representative sample within the scope of this assessment. Instead, the snowball sampling approach allowed us to cast the widest net possible within the time boundaries of the study. However, the snowball sampling approach began with actors in the New Pluralists network and other actors already known to New Pluralists staff. Therefore, the sample likely skews toward corners of the ecosystem that are most proximate to New Pluralists rather than providing a more holistic picture of all actors and focus areas related to pluralism. In addition, the knowledge base mapping and Council on Foundations surveys were also illustrative and not exhaustive and depended on those actors' own data collection methodologies. While the sample is not exhaustive nor fully representative of the full ecosystem, we are confident that, between the targeted efforts within the New Pluralists network and the outreach to actors outside the network, we captured a strong, illustrative snapshot of the ecosystem.

- **Network connectivity metrics provide insight but are less definitive due to question design:** To assess infrastructure for connection in the pluralism ecosystem, we documented which organizations were identified as key partners in pluralism work by ecosystem actors and assessed connections between organizations using social network analysis based on the ecosystem survey data. However, the ecosystem survey was structured differently from a standard social network analysis survey in that it used an open-ended response option where organizations identified their main partners, rather than a closed list of possible connections. This question structure has two main implications:

  - The data does not capture all possible connections between organizations in the ecosystem. Instead, it captures illustrative connections among organizations as self-reported by survey respondents.

  - Connectivity, as measured in this ecosystem assessment, denotes partnership, not just any type of connection. Therefore, the looseness represented by the low degree of connection may also be related to the question structure. Specifically, the degree of connection suggests that one organization's main partners in pluralism efforts are different from another organization's main partners.

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