c&e Advisory

Corporate–Non-profit Partnerships Barometer 2026

Beyond Resilience:

Strategic Partnerships Driving Impact in an Uncertain World

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Introduction

Welcome!

Welcome to the 2026 edition of the C&E Corporate – Non-profit Partnerships Barometer – the 17th in our unique annual series of practitioner-led studies.

This year's report draws on the experience of 117 leading corporate and non-profit practitioners who completed our confidential annual survey during July, supplemented by discussions and interviews providing further qualitative insight.

The Barometer series offers continuing insight into the ways in which the corporate – non-profit partnering landscape is evolving. Each year's findings build on previous years' data to deepen understanding of drivers, changing practices and likely future developments in cross-sector partnering and its growing impact on society.

The environment in which these partnerships operate continues to shift. Geopolitical instability, ongoing conflicts and cost-of-living pressures are creating continued uncertainty, while reductions in Official Development Assistance (ODA) are adding further pressure for non-profits and the communities they support. At the same time, ESG commitments face greater scrutiny, particularly in the US, increasing the need for organisations to demonstrate tangible impact and communicate their responsible business ambitions effectively.

Against this backdrop, the 2026 Barometer explores how the role of partnerships is evolving. This year's findings point to collaboration moving beyond resilience, with partnerships increasingly valued for bringing together the capabilities, expertise and resources needed to navigate uncertainty and deliver lasting impact.

> "Against this backdrop, the value of cross-sector collaboration is coming into sharper focus."

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This year's Barometer explores how partnerships are evolving as organisations navigate continued uncertainty and rising expectations. It examines the growing importance of long-term strategic and multi-partner collaboration, changing motivations for partnering, and the increasing focus on effectiveness, efficiency and access to expertise. It also considers how ESG commitments are evolving, the emerging role of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and where corporates and non-profits see the greatest opportunities and challenges ahead.

As always, the aim is to provide practical insight grounded in the lived experience of partnership professionals navigating real-world complexity.

We are grateful to all our respondents and contributors for sharing their valuable perspectives and experiences. We hope this 2026 edition of the C&E Corporate–Non-profit Partnerships Barometer helps inform understanding, investment decisions and partnership practice.

As usual, we welcome your comments and suggestions via: www.candeadvisory.com/barometer or admin@candeadvisory.com

Manny Amadi, MVO

CEO, C&E Advisory

Headline Findings

Partnership under pressure, and growing in strategic importance

Economic strain, political scrutiny and shrinking public funding are forcing organisations to make harder choices. Yet the direction of travel is clear. Corporates and non-profits are making collaboration more strategic, more evidence-led and more closely tied to delivery. The organisations best placed to sustain impact will combine complementary assets, prove value and turn shared intent into practical capability.

Why partner?

Reputation opens the door, while performance keeps partnerships at the table

Reputation and credibility remain the leading corporate motivation for partnering, cited by 82%, while access to funding continues to dominate for non-profits, at 89%. The corporate rationale is also broadening fast. Effectiveness, efficiency, access to people and long-term impact have all gained ground.

The implication is important. Strong partnership propositions must align values, enhance profile and show how collaboration improves performance, extends reach and delivers lasting value for both partners.

Partnering practice and effectiveness

Partnerships are deepening understanding and influencing business practice

Confidence in the value of cross-sector collaboration remains exceptionally high. Some 95% of corporates and 98% of non-profits agree that partnerships improve business understanding of social and environmental issues. More significantly, 70% of corporates say this understanding has helped change business practices for the better.

The opportunity now is to make that change more visible. Partners should define the business and societal outcomes they are seeking from the outset, then build the evidence needed to show how insight is translating into action.

The Stars

The partnerships most admired by peers offer a practical blueprint for excellence

This year, IKEA–World Wide Fund for Nature and Greene King–Macmillan Cancer Support jointly take the Most Admired accolade, each securing 11% of the vote in an unprompted poll of leading corporates and non-profit organisations. The partnerships are recognised respectively for long-term environmental collaboration and for evolving a major fundraising relationship into a broader, deeply embedded partnership.

The multilateral partnership between Tesco, Diabetes UK, the British Heart Foundation and Cancer Research UK follows in second place with 9%, while Boots–Macmillan Cancer Support takes third place with 8%.

Special Topics

Pressure is sharpening the social-impact agenda

Across ESG, funding and AI, organisations are moving towards a more disciplined model of impact. It is more closely integrated with strategy, supported by stronger evidence and delivered through deeper collaboration.

The common thread is resilience: adapting to pressure while maintaining focus on the mission.

Organisational resilience in an era of economic and geopolitical uncertainty

ESG commitment remains resilient, with corporate approaches becoming more selective

Most organisations are holding firm or strengthening their ESG commitments, despite political and economic pressure.

At the same time, corporates are becoming more deliberate. Some 67% are integrating ESG more closely into business strategy, 53% are strengthening the business case and almost a third are reducing some external communication.

This signals a recalibration. The priority now is to embed ESG in decisions, operations and measurable organisational value. Cross-sector partners can provide the expertise, credibility and shared confidence needed to maintain momentum.

ESG pressure is strengthening the case for partnership

While 62% of corporates expect their level of cross-sector engagement to remain stable, 31% plan to increase it.

The shift is stronger among non-profits, with 54% expecting greater engagement and none anticipating a reduction.

In a more contested environment, partnership is becoming a form of resilience infrastructure. It helps organisations retain specialist knowledge, sustain delivery and act with greater confidence when operating alone carries greater risk.

Special Topics

The future of social-impact delivery and partnership models

Funding pressure is reshaping how social impact is delivered

Reductions in overseas development aid (ODA) are causing severe disruption for organisations directly exposed to international aid funding. The effects are increasingly reaching corporates through stretched partners, weakened programmes and lost delivery capacity.

Yet investment in collaboration remains strikingly resilient. Some 80% of corporates and 84% of non-profits report that they will neither increase nor decrease their current investment of funding, time and other resources in cross-sector partnering in the short term.

The lesson is clear. Organisations must protect established partnerships, diversify their resources, address capacity pressures openly and focus investment where collaboration can deliver the greatest additional value.

The next generation of partnerships will be longer-term, broader and more collective

Some 89% of respondents expect long-term strategic partnerships to become more important, while 64% point to multi-partner and collective-impact models. Funding will remain essential, alongside skills, expertise, influence, networks and investment capital.

Traditional bilateral relationships will continue, increasingly operating within wider coalitions and shared strategies. Partners should therefore design for longevity, flexibility and collective action, with ambitions extending beyond a fixed programme or funding cycle.

Special Topics

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

AI's clearest near-term potential lies in measurement and efficiency

Regarding the use of AI, respondents see the greatest potential in improving impact measurement and reporting, selected by 80%, and reducing costs and increasing efficiency, cited by 74%. Expectations are more cautious where AI must interpret complex needs, exercise contextual judgement or engage directly with communities.

The sensible starting point is targeted adoption in high-value areas where AI can strengthen accountability, release capacity and support better decisions while protecting trust and human judgement.

AI awareness is widespread, while organisational readiness remains uneven

Only 44% of respondents consider their organisations very or fairly prepared to realise AI's potential while managing its risks. A further 39% are only somewhat prepared. The implementation gap is now more significant than the awareness gap.

Partners should use collaboration to close it by pooling expertise, developing shared safeguards and aligning expectations around data, transparency, inclusion and responsible use. The advantage will belong to organisations that can turn ambition into trusted capability.

Trends, Prospects & Anticipated Developments in Partnerships

The outlook remains positive, although expectations are becoming more measured

Partnerships are expected to become more important and attract greater investment over the next three years. Yet expectations are becoming more measured, particularly among corporates.

Future growth will be increasingly selective, with resources flowing towards collaborations that demonstrate strategic relevance, complementary value and credible results.

Medium-term prospects for corporate and non-profit partnering

Partnerships are expected to grow in importance, with more cautious corporate expectations

Some 64% of corporates and 84% of non-profits expect cross-sector partnerships to become more or much more important over the next three years. Corporate expectations have softened slightly, although there is little evidence of retreat. Only 4% anticipate any decline, while no non-profits do.

The strategic case remains strong. Partnership leaders will need to connect collaboration more explicitly to organisational resilience, priority outcomes and sustained delivery to turn positive sentiment into commitment.

Drivers of change

Reputation and funding remain central, while capability and cost are reshaping the partnership case.

For corporates, reputation and credibility remain the leading driver of future partnership importance. For non-profits, raising funds in a difficult economic climate still comes first.

Both sectors increasingly recognise the value of combining complementary assets, while corporate pressure to partner in order to reduce costs has risen sharply.

> “ The Partnership Proposition must evolve. The strongest case will combine reputational benefit and funding need with a clear account of how partners can unite distinctive capabilities, operate more efficiently and produce results neither could achieve independently"

The partnership proposition must therefore evolve. The strongest case will combine reputational benefit and funding need with a clear account of how partners can unite distinctive capabilities, operate more efficiently and produce results neither could achieve independently.

The outlook for investment in cross-sector partnerships

Investment is expected to grow, alongside greater scrutiny

A majority of both sectors still anticipate greater investment over the next three years: 52% of corporates and 71% of non-profits. At the same time, more respondents expect investment to remain stable, signalling a more considered and selective outlook.

Partnership budgets will have to work harder. To secure resources, organisations will need a sharper strategic fit, clearer measures of value and a convincing account of why collaboration offers the strongest route to impact.

Part 1:
Why and How Companies & Non-Profits Partner

1.1 Why Partner?

Reputation and credibility remain the leading corporate motive, while funding continues to dominate for non-profits

For corporates, enhancing reputation and credibility remains the foremost motivation for entering partnerships with non-profits, cited by 82% of respondents. While still clearly the leading driver, this represents a 10 percentage-point decrease from the previous year.

Long-term stability and impact has risen by 10 percentage points to 71%, overtaking innovation, at 61%, as the second most important corporate motivation. Access to people and contacts has also grown significantly, increasing by 25 percentage points to 61%. Effectiveness has recorded the largest rise although from a low base, up 36 percentage points to 58%, while efficiency has increased by 20 percentage points to 39%.

These findings suggest that corporates are placing greater emphasis on the practical contribution partnerships can make to organisational performance, delivery and long-term impact.

For non-profits, access to funds remains the primary motivation, cited by 89% of respondents. Long-term stability and impact follows at 67%, with access to people and contacts close behind at 60%. Reputation and credibility and innovation are each cited by 58%.

Access to knowledge has decreased by 11 percentage points to 36%, while access to new markets has fallen by 14 percentage points to 31%.

Q&A

"Why does your organisation engage in corporate – non-profit partnerships?"

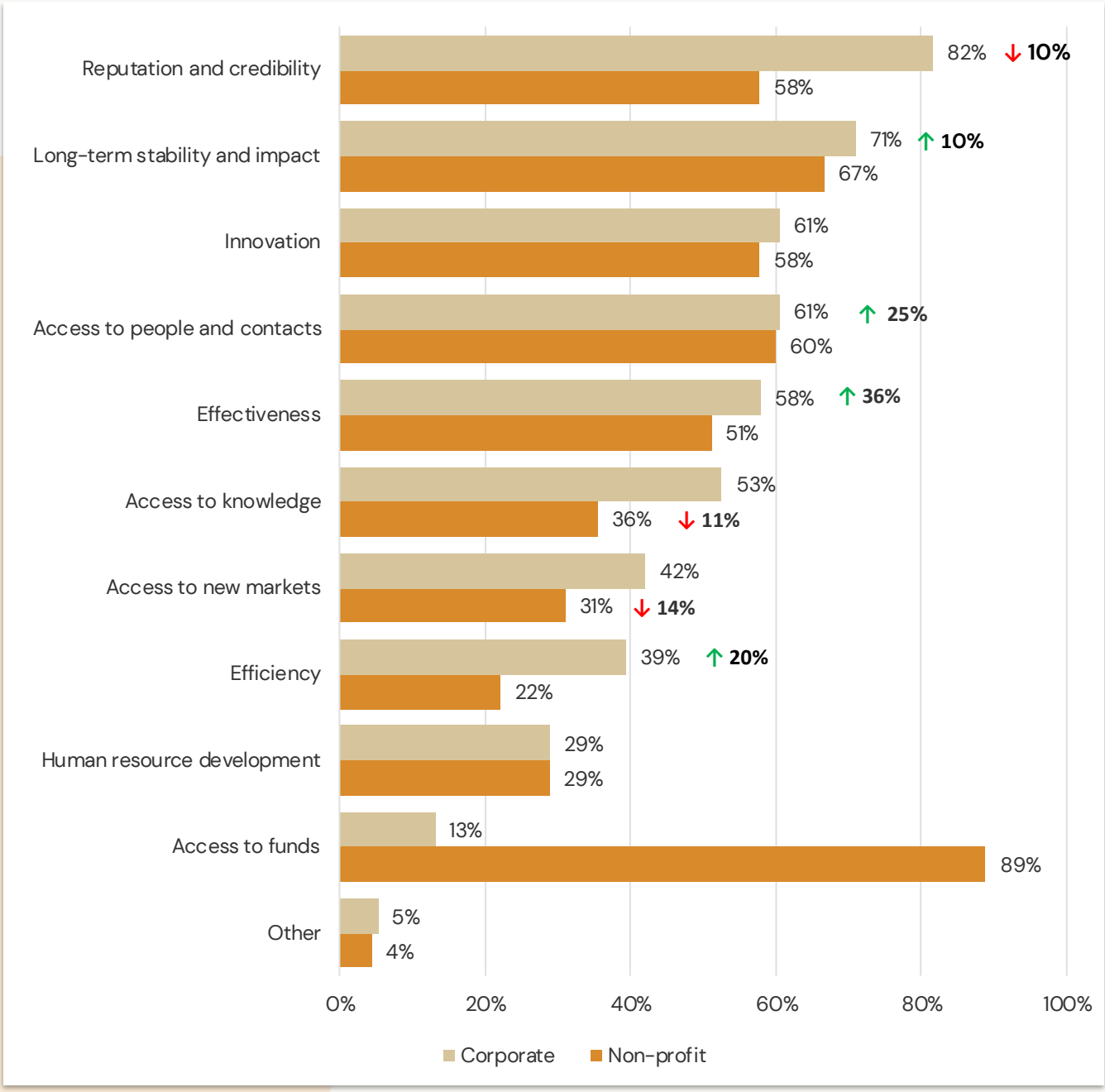

Figure 1: Why companies and non-profits engage in partnerships with each other

Q&A

"Why does your organisation engage in corporate – non-profit partnerships?"

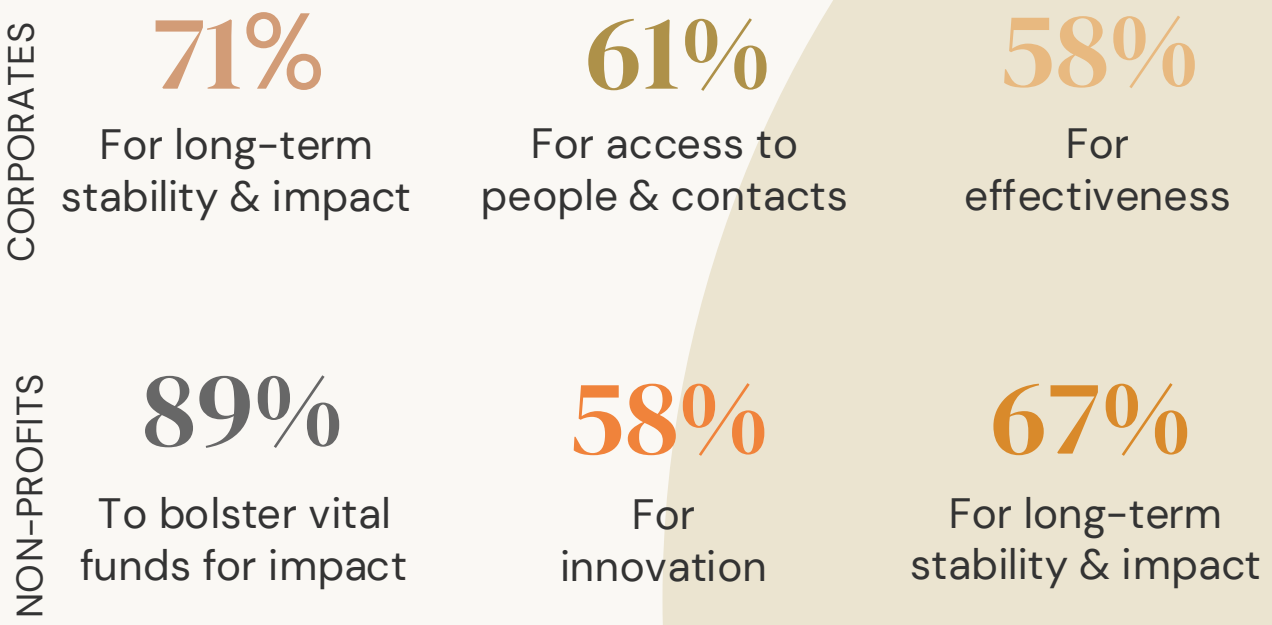

Figure 2: Key reasons why companies and non-profits engage in partnerships with each other

KEY TAKEAWAY

Overall, the core motivations for partnership remain stable, although their relative importance continues to evolve. Funding and reputation retain their central role for non-profits, while the growing corporate focus on effectiveness, efficiency, contacts and long- term impact points to increasingly purposeful and strategically valuable collaboration.

1.2 Enhancing business understanding of social and environmental issues and changing business practices for the better

Partners remain confident that they have helped improve business understanding of societal issues

There continues to be overwhelming consensus that cross-sector partnerships enhance corporate understanding of social and environmental issues. 95% of corporates agree that their key non-profit partnerships have improved their understanding of these issues, including 44% who strongly agree. This represents a small decrease from 97% last year.

Among non-profits, 98% agree that they have helped their key corporate partners improve their understanding of social and environmental issues, compared with 94% last year. More than half, 54%, strongly agree. Confidence therefore remains exceptionally high across both sectors, with only modest movement from the previous year.

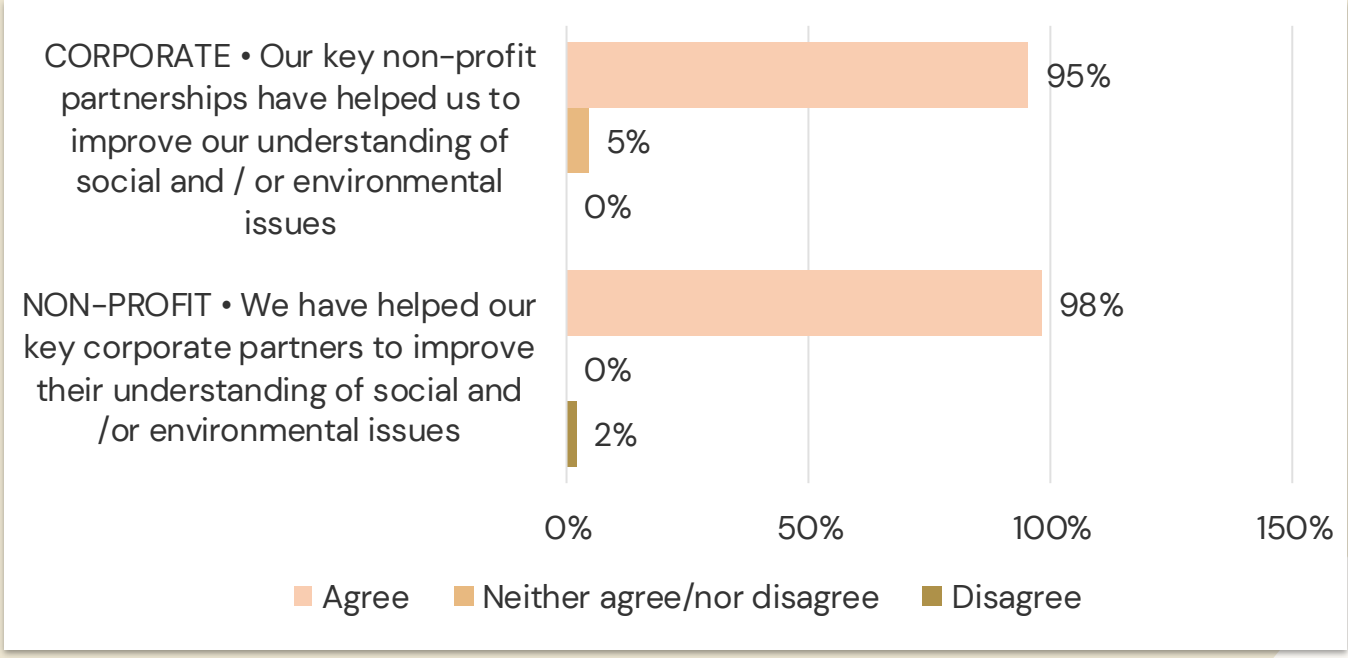

Figure 3: Extent to which partners have helped each other understand the issues they're facing

Cross-sector partnering continues to change business practices for the better

Improved understanding of social and environmental issues continues to influence business conduct. 70% of corporate respondents agree that their partnerships have helped to change business practices for the better, an increase from 68% last year. A further 30% neither agree nor disagree, while no corporate respondents express disagreement.

Among non-profits, 78% agree that they have helped their corporate partners change business practices for the better, a notable 17% increase compared with last year. 18% neither agree nor disagree, while just 4% disagree.

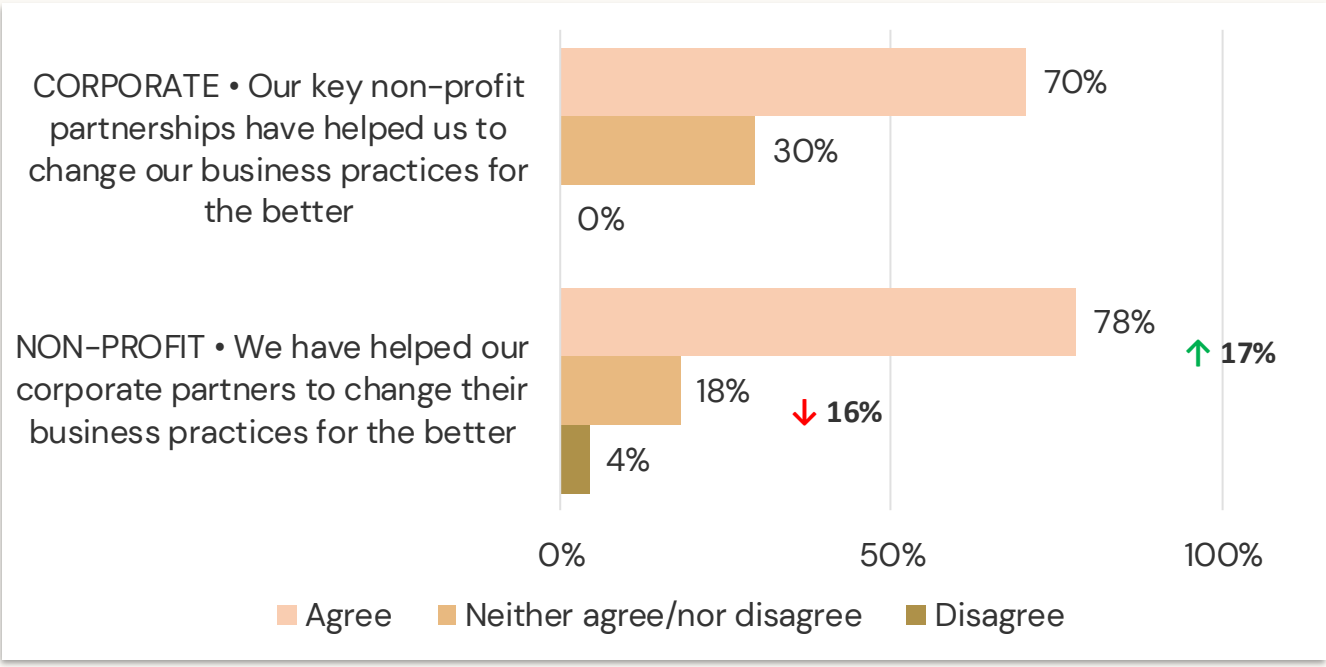

Figure 4: Extent to which partnerships help change business practices for the better

KEY TAKEAWAY

Overall, the findings show that partnerships continue to make a significant contribution to corporate understanding of social and environmental issues. They also suggest a significantly increased perception amongst non-profits of the positive role they play in improving business practices for the better. Furthermore, the findings indicate a growing corporate confidence that this understanding is translating into positive changes in business practice.

1.3 The Stars: the most-admired corporate – non-profit partnerships & partners

IKEA–World Wide Fund for Nature and Greene King–Macmillan Cancer Support share the 'Most Admired' accolade

Once again, in an entirely unprompted, confidential exercise, Barometer survey respondents drawn from leading UK and international companies and non-profits were asked which other partnerships they particularly admire and why.

This year, **the IKEA–World Wide Fund for Nature partnership and the Greene King–Macmillan Cancer Support** partnership share the top spot, each securing 11% of the vote.

They overtake the multilateral partnership between **Tesco, Diabetes UK, the British Heart Foundation and Cancer Research UK,** which had led the rankings for the previous three years and now moves into second place with **9%. Boots–Macmillan Cancer Support,** another long-standing and consistently admired partnership, takes third place with **8%.**

KEY TAKEAWAY

The results highlight the qualities most valued by respondents: long-term commitment, strong strategic and organisational alignment, the effective use of each partner's distinctive assets and expertise, and the ability to deliver clear benefits for both society and the organisations involved.

1st

JOINT FIRST

IKEA–World Wide Fund for Nature:

IKEA and the World-Wide Fund for Nature have worked together since 2002, making theirs one of the longest-running international environmental partnerships between a business and a non-profit organisation. In September 2025, the partners renewed the collaboration for a further five years, taking it to 2030 and into its eighth phase. The partnership has delivered projects in 23 countries across Europe, Asia and South America, focusing on forests, cotton and agriculture, freshwater, climate and biodiversity. The new phase will run projects in 12 countries and will extend the partnership's established work on cotton to a wider range of agricultural commodities, including leather, palm oil and soy.

The partnership has combined changes within IKEA's value chain with field projects and wider efforts to improve industry practice. Its reported achievements include mapping more than 90% of known virgin and old-growth forests in the Carpathian region, with more than three-quarters of these areas now protected; planting more than two million trees across cotton-growing landscapes in India and Pakistan; and training more than 400,000 farming families in climate-smart and regenerative agricultural practices.

The relationship is closely integrated into IKEA's value chain. Work with the WWF on forestry, agriculture, water and biodiversity informs IKEA's sourcing priorities and sustainability strategy, while compulsory supplier standards require wood to be traceable, legally harvested and compliant with strict conservation and social requirements. Suppliers are subject to regular reporting, audits and, in higher-risk cases, forensic testing of wood species and origin. The partnership has also influenced operational decision-making: WWF's Water Risk Filter was used to assess 2,168 IKEA production units, with the findings informing IKEA's water agenda.

IKEA and the WWF have not publicly disclosed the cumulative financial value of their global partnership. However, IKEA provides direct financial support for joint conservation, climate and supply-chain projects, while national IKEA businesses have also raised funds through customer campaigns. The partnership's primary value is expressed through investment in long-term programmes and business transformation rather than through a single fundraising total.

Respondents particularly admired the longevity of the relationship, its integration with IKEA's sourcing and business practices and its ability to demonstrate measurable environmental outcomes:

'A serious environmental and business-focused partnership. Great fit between the partners, plus very long-term, which demonstrates effectiveness.'

'Deep collaboration between two serious organisations over a very long time period. Visible impacts. A proper strategic partnership!'

JOINT FIRST

1st

Greene King and Macmillan Cancer Support:

The social-impact-focused collaboration between Greene King and Macmillan Cancer Support is similarly admired for its longevity, visibility and strong engagement with employees and customers. Since 2012, the partnership has raised more than £27 million, with a record £3.9 million raised during 2024 alone - the highest annual total in its history. Fundraising is embedded across Greene King's pubs, breweries, distribution centres and support offices, mobilising employees, customers and supplier partners through local events, menu donations, digital giving and sponsored challenges.

The relationship has also grown into a broader social-impact platform. During the first half of 2025, Greene King directed more than £1.68 million to Macmillan's Support Line, funding support for an estimated 14,000 people and helping identify more than £14 million in potentially unclaimed welfare benefits. The partners have also developed awareness campaigns, including initiatives addressing prostate cancer and unequal access to cancer support in underserved communities.

For Greene King, the partnership provides a visible way to engage its teams and customers, strengthen the role of its pubs as community hubs and connect its social commitments with practical innovation. The Tub2Pub initiative illustrates this wider integration: in 2025, customers returned more than 240,000 plastic confectionery tubs to Greene King pubs, diverting almost 28 tonnes of plastic from landfill and raising nearly £11,000 for Macmillan. The scheme forms part of Greene King for Good, the company's wider environmental and social programme, combining community participation, charitable fundraising and waste reduction.

The relationship has also developed beyond fundraising into cause-related campaigns that use pubs as community spaces. In March 2026, the partners launched the Early Bell campaign during Prostate Cancer Awareness Month. Participating Greene King pubs rang their traditional last-orders bells early, at 6pm, to attract customers' attention, encourage conversations about prostate cancer and direct people towards information about symptoms and early diagnosis.

Respondents highlighted the way the partnership has evolved from a conventional employee and customer fundraising relationship into a more integrated collaboration:

'A great example of a partnership that started with a narrow fundraising aim, evolving over time into something very strategic for both organisations.'

'Evolution from a transactional fundraising partnership into a deeper, integrated and more substantive partnership, now deeply embedded across both organisations.'

2nd

SECOND PLACE

Tesco, Diabetes UK, British Heart Foundation & Cancer Research UK:

Tesco, Diabetes UK, the British Heart Foundation and Cancer Research UK launched their Helping you to live healthier partnership in 2018. The partnership brings together the charities' health expertise with Tesco's stores, pharmacies, workforce, customer communications and data capabilities to help reduce the risks associated with type 2 diabetes, cancer and heart and circulatory diseases. It was renewed in June 2024 for a further three years. By May 2025, the partnership had raised £32.8 million for the three charities and reported reaching more than 1.5 million people directly through its initiatives since the renewal.

Respondents admired both the scale of the collaboration and its use of Tesco's retail and pharmacy infrastructure to deliver health information and interventions:

'A strong cross-collaboration reaching thousands of people every day with engaging and informative health content and lifestyle-change opportunities.'

'An incredibly impactful partnership aiming to improve the health of the nation and raise funds to support people across the country.'

3rd

THIRD PLACE

Boots and Macmillan Cancer Support:

Boots and Macmillan Cancer Support have worked together since 2009 to make cancer information and support available within local communities. The partnership combines Macmillan's cancer expertise with Boots' pharmacy, beauty and optical services. It has created three specially trained professional roles: Boots Macmillan Information Pharmacists, No7 Boots Macmillan Beauty Advisors and Boots Macmillan Opticians Professionals. These colleagues provide information about cancer and treatment, advice concerning medicines, support with the visible effects of cancer treatment and guidance on eye-related cancers and the ocular side effects of treatment. The partnership has raised more than £23 million for Macmillan Cancer Support.

Respondents emphasised the range of practical services delivered through the relationship, as well as its continuing relevance to Boots customers and people undergoing cancer treatment:

'The partnership features multiple strategic elements, from awareness and funding to skills sharing, staff development and better services for customers going through treatment.'

'It has a huge amount of impact for people living with cancer in communities around the country.'

KEY TAKEAWAY

A notable feature of this year's rankings is the prominence of highly visible, consumer-facing brands. IKEA, Greene King, Tesco and Boots all have extensive physical networks and regular contact with customers, often bringing partnership activity directly into stores, pharmacies, pubs and other community settings. As the nominations were entirely unprompted, this visibility may help explain why these collaborations remain readily identifiable and front of mind among respondents. However, their recognition also reflects the way they use those customer-facing assets to deliver practical support, raise awareness and connect social impact with the everyday experience of the public.

Most Admired Partnerships

Q&A

"Which other corporate – non-profit partnerships do you admire and why?"

[Respondents could list up to three, starting with their most admired partnership]

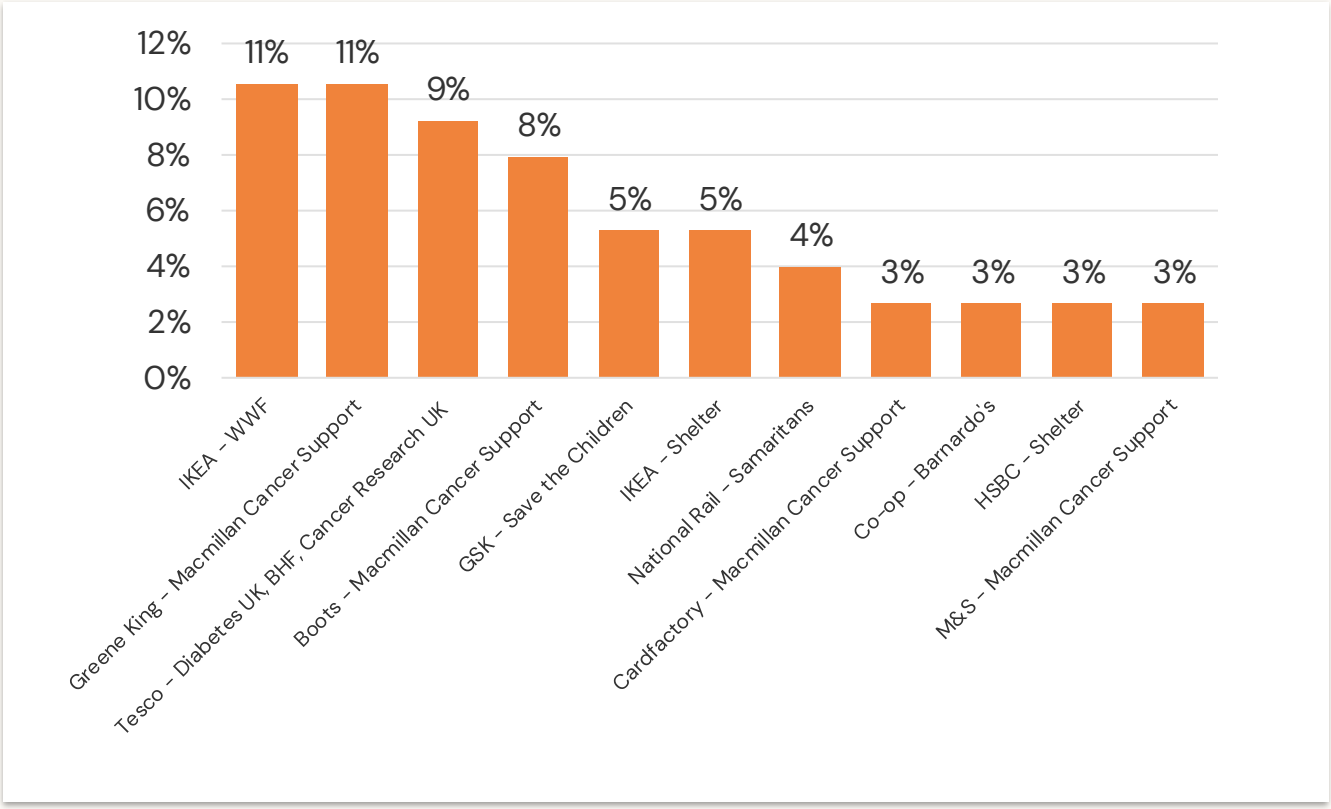

Figure 5: Most Admired Partnerships

Most Admired Partners

CORPORATES

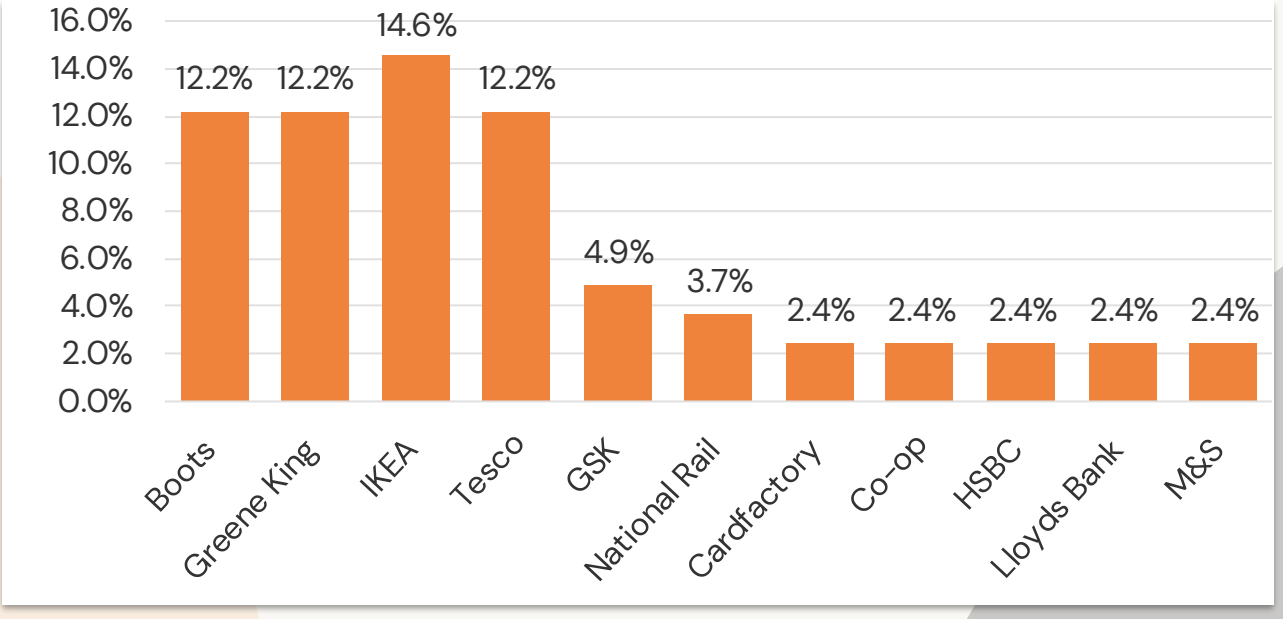

Figure 6: Most Admired Partners, CORPORATES

NON-PROFITS

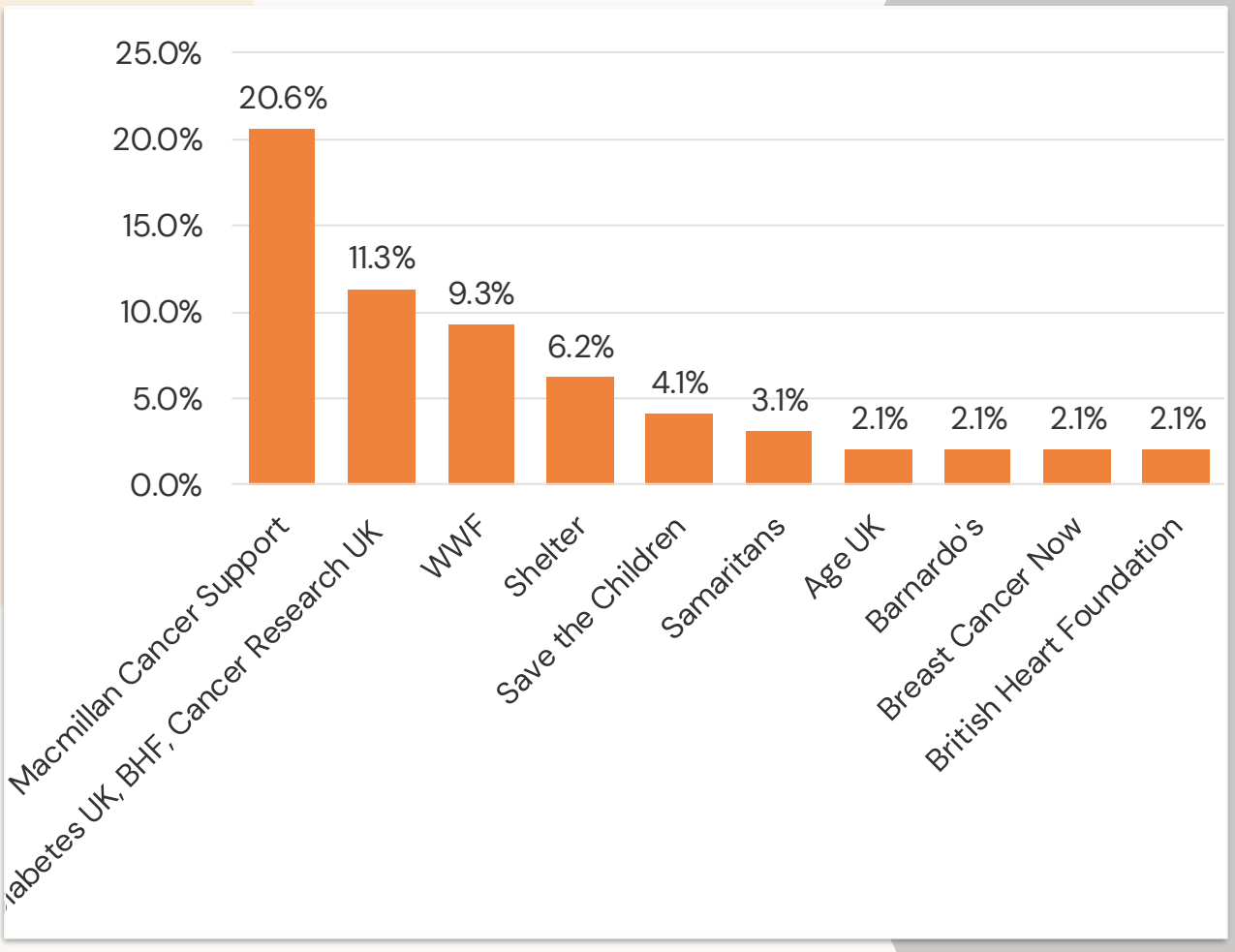

Figure 7: Most Admired Partners, NON-PROFITS

Part 2: Special Topics

2.1 Organisational resilience in an era of economic and geopolitical uncertainty

ESG commitments remain resilient, while organisations adapt their approaches in a more challenging environment

Despite continued economic volatility, geopolitical instability and political scrutiny of ESG and Responsible Business, commitment across both sectors remains broadly firm. The findings point to resilience, alongside a more deliberate and pragmatic approach to how ESG is positioned, communicated and embedded within organisations.

As illustrated in Figure 8, 55% of corporates and 62% of non-profits report making no notable changes to their ESG principles and practices. Stability has become particularly pronounced among non-profits, with the proportion reporting no change increasing by 16 percentage points.

A further 31% of corporates have strengthened their commitment. Within this group, 13% report a significant enhancement, an increase of 13 percentage points, while 18% report enhancing their commitment, a decrease of 25 points. Among non-profits, 39% have strengthened their position, including 13% significantly enhancing their commitment and 26% enhancing it. The latter figure has fallen by 18 percentage points.

The findings also reveal greater caution among a minority of corporates. 15% report reducing their commitment to ESG principles and practices, an increase of 12 percentage points. No respondents in either sector report a significant reduction, and no non-profits report any reduction in commitment.

Overall, Figure 8 presents a picture of continued commitment accompanied by consolidation. Non-profits remain particularly steadfast, while corporate responses reflect a broader range of positions, from renewed commitment to selective retrenchment.

Q&A

"It is widely reported that (catalysed by changes in the US) there is significant and growing pushback against ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) principles and practices, with businesses scaling back sustainability pledges and diversity initiatives in response to political and economic pressures. To what extent (if any) has your organisation amended your ESG policies or practices in response to such external pressures?"

Figure 8: The impact of ESG pushback on ESG commitments

Cross-sector engagement is strengthening in response to ESG pressure

As shown in Figure 9, ESG pushback is also influencing how organisations engage in strategic cross-sector partnerships. While most corporates continue to maintain their current level of engagement, non-profits are increasingly turning towards collaboration.

Q&A

"To what extent is any pushback on the ESG agenda influencing your organisation's engagement in strategic cross-sector partnering with corporates / non-profits?"

In response to the pushback on the ESG agenda, my organisation has/ will…:

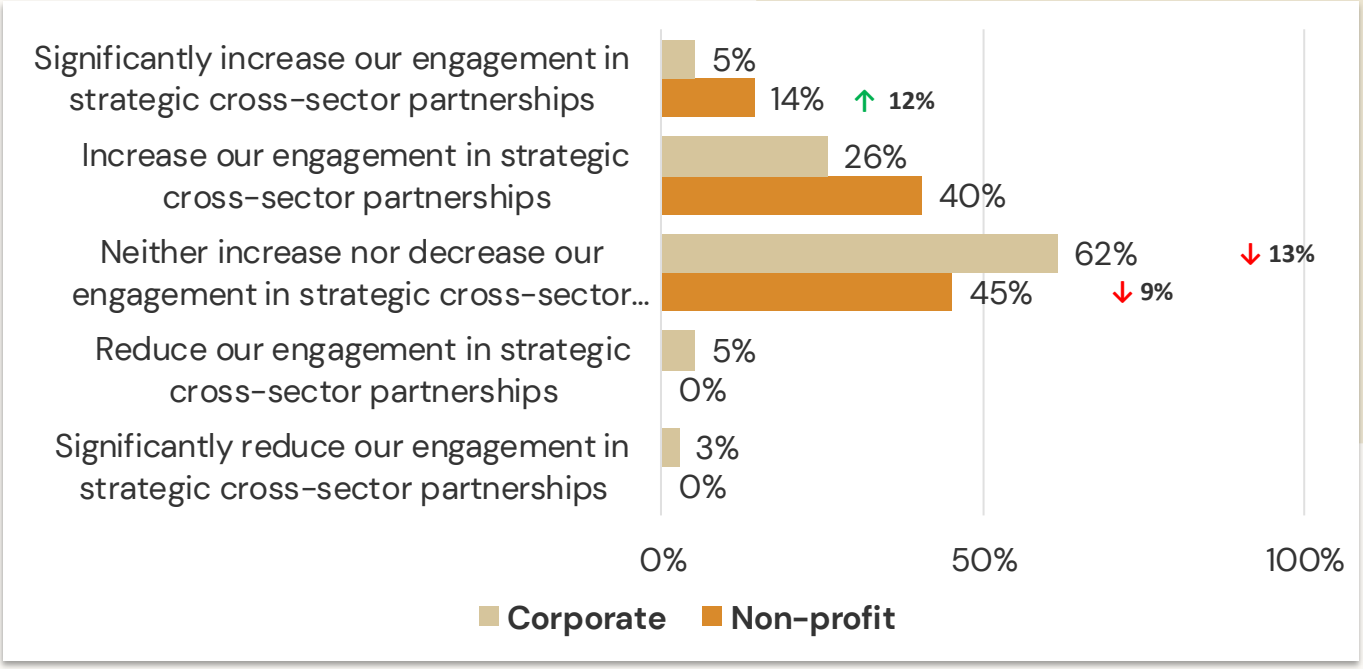

Figure 9: The impact of ESG pushback on cross-sector partnering

Among corporates, 62% expect neither to increase nor decrease their engagement, compared with 75% last year. At the same time, 31% intend to increase or significantly increase their engagement, up from 22% previously. This suggests that a growing group of businesses see strategic partnerships as an important means of sustaining progress, accessing specialist knowledge and responding credibly to complex social and environmental challenges.

The movement is even stronger among non-profits. 54% expect to increase or significantly increase their engagement in strategic cross-sector partnerships, compared with 37% last year. A further 45% expect engagement to remain stable, while none anticipate a reduction.

These findings reinforce the enduring value of cross-sector collaboration. In a more contested ESG environment, partnerships are increasingly providing the relationships, expertise and shared confidence required to maintain momentum.

Corporate approaches are becoming more integrated, evidence-led and carefully communicated

Figure 10 provides further insight into how organisations are adapting their ESG policies and practices. The responses reveal a marked difference in emphasis between the two sectors.

Among corporates, the most common response is to integrate ESG more closely into core business strategy, cited by 67%. A further 53% are increasing their focus on demonstrating the business case for ESG, while 39% are strengthening their initiatives and commitments.

Communication is also becoming more considered. 31% of corporates are reducing external communication around some aspects of their ESG activity, while 25% are reframing or repositioning initiatives. These findings suggest that many businesses are adjusting how ESG is expressed, while continuing to embed its principles within strategy and operations.

A smaller proportion are making more substantive changes. 19% are modifying targets, commitments or timelines, while 8% are delaying investments and 8% are diluting initiatives or commitments.

Non-profits display a more stable pattern. 53% report making no significant changes, while 41% are strengthening their ESG initiatives and commitments. Comparatively few are altering targets, communications or positioning, and none report delaying investments or diluting commitments.

Taken together, the findings suggest that ESG and Responsible Business remain firmly established across both sectors. Non-profits are largely maintaining or strengthening their approach. Corporates are adapting more actively, placing greater emphasis on strategic integration, organisational value and carefully judged communication. Cross-sector partnerships remain central to this response, providing a practical means of sustaining commitment and delivering impact through a period of heightened uncertainty.

Q&A

"If your organisation has made / is likely to make changes to your ESG policies and practices in response to external pressures, please briefly indicate how it is adapting."

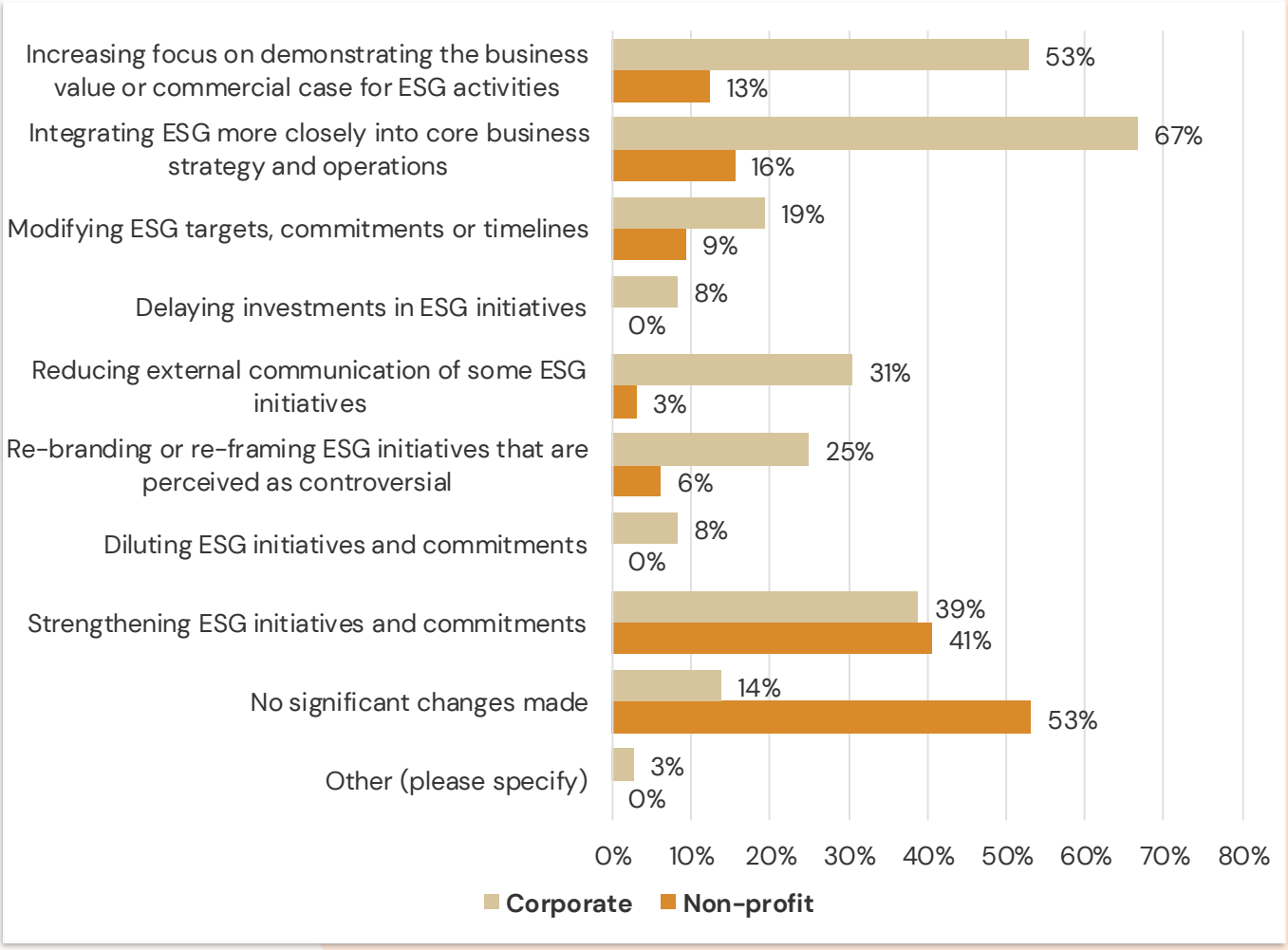

Figure 10: The impact of ESG changes on organisational practices

2.2 The Future of Social Impact Delivery and Partnership Models

ODA reductions continue to place pressure on delivery, while investment in partnership remains resilient

Declining public funding, changing political priorities and growing societal needs are reshaping how social impact is delivered. As traditional funding models come under pressure, expectations of business are evolving beyond financial support towards providing expertise, influence, investment and convening power.

Across both corporate and non-profit respondents, reductions in Official Development Assistance (ODA) are placing continuing pressure on the delivery of ESG, Responsible Business and core mission objectives. The latest findings suggest that the impact is uneven, with the most serious consequences concentrated among organisations directly exposed to international aid funding.

Q&A

"Several governments including the U.S. and U.K. have recently announced reductions in international aid funding, reflecting a broader global shift in priorities. This reduction in ODA has placed significant resource constraints on international humanitarian and development efforts."

Which of the following statements applies to your organisation?

"On the planning, delivery, or impact of my organisation's ESG / Responsible Business goals or core mission, cutbacks in government ODA has/ will..."

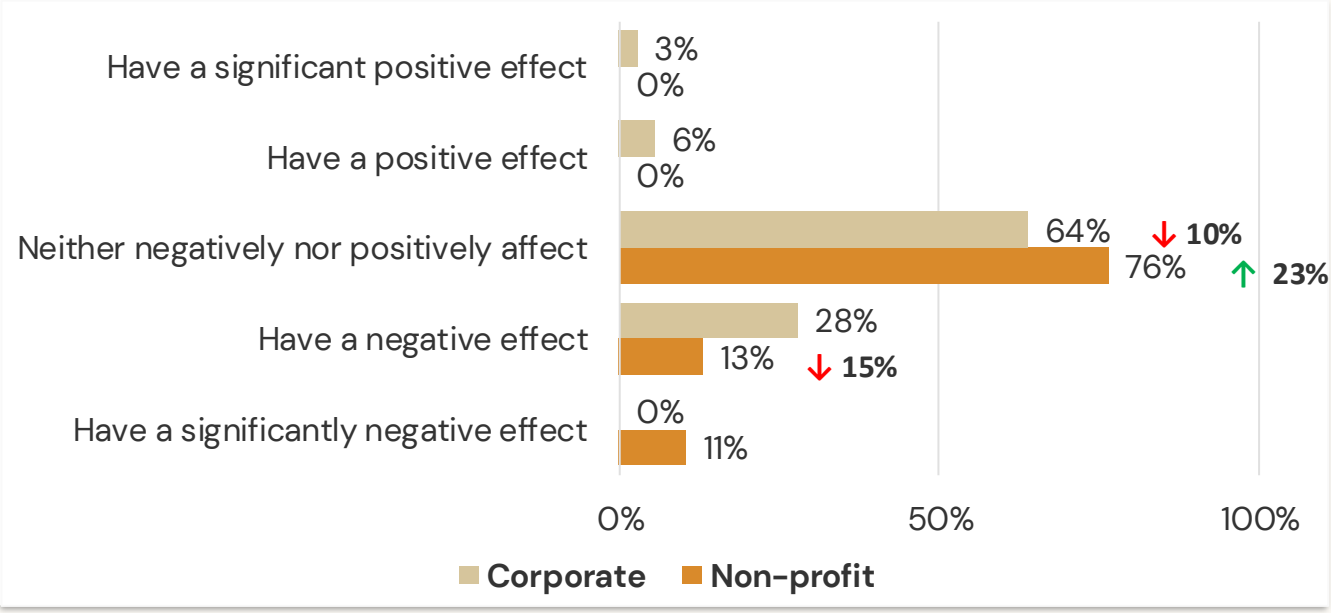

Figure 11: The impact of ODA reductions on ESG commitments

As shown in Figure 11, 76% of non-profits report that ODA reductions have had neither a positive nor negative effect on their organisation, an increase of 23 percentage points from last year. The proportion experiencing a negative effect has fallen from 28% to 13%, while a further 11% report a significantly negative effect. Taken together, almost a quarter of non-profits continue to experience adverse consequences, compared with 45% in the previous year.

The aggregate figures conceal a pronounced divide. As shown in Figure 12, 88% of national non-profits report no effect, while 12% report a negative or significantly negative impact. Among international non-profits, 83% report an adverse effect on the planning, delivery or impact of their ESG, Responsible Business or core mission objectives. Half report a significantly negative effect.

Q&A

"Several governments, including the U.S. and U.K., have announced reductions in international aid funding. Which of the following statements applies to your organisation?"

"Cutbacks in government ODA have or will..."

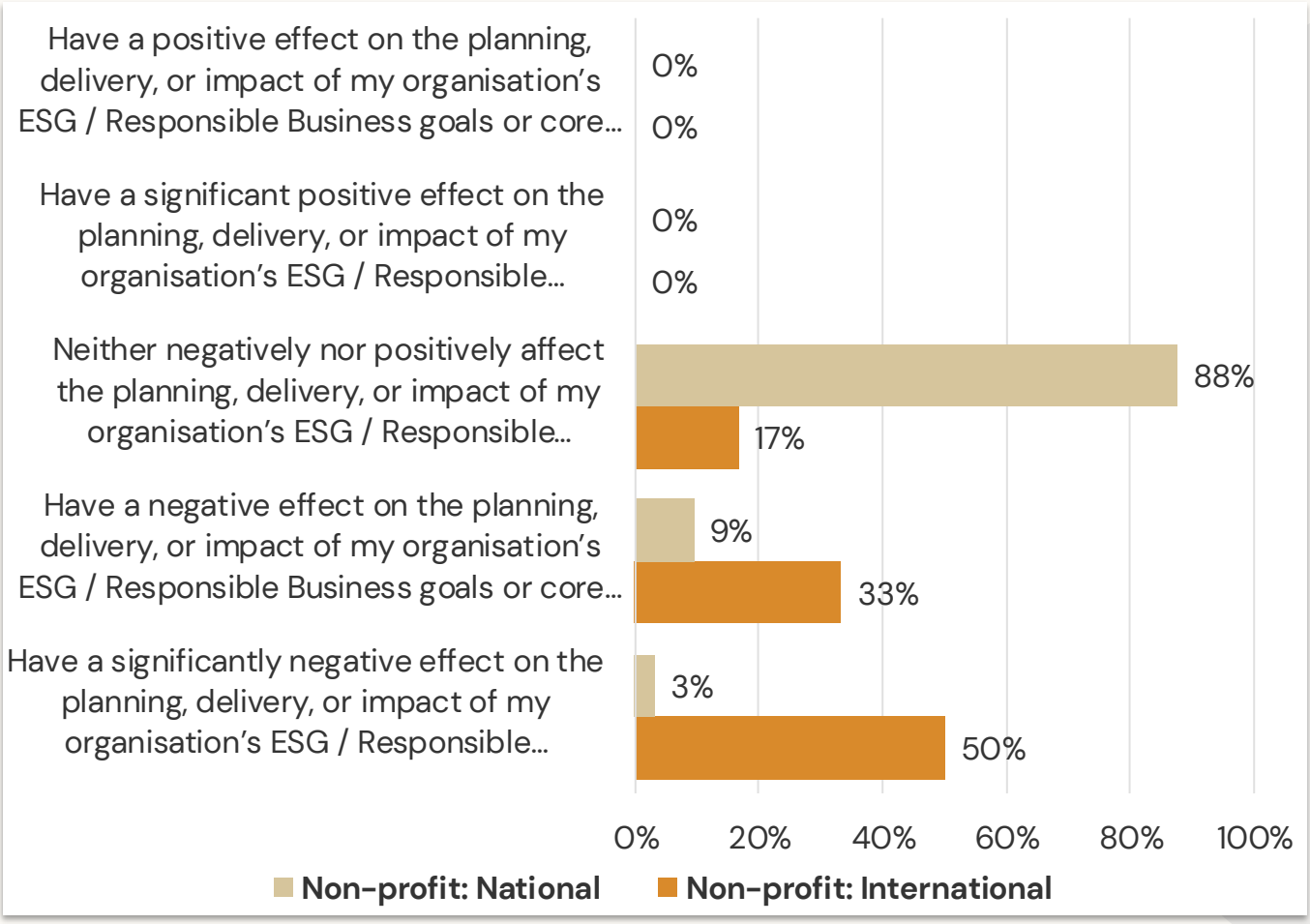

Figure 12: The impact of ODA reductions on national and international non-profits

For those affected, the consequences remain immediate and substantial. Respondents describe major reductions in funding, overheads, programme delivery, organisational capacity, long-term investment and planning. One international NGO reported repeated reorganisations as it sought to 'do more with less', while another summarised the impact as 'reduction in funding = reduction in scale = reduced impact'. Others pointed to reduced FCDO commitments and fewer international funding opportunities. Organisations with limited direct exposure to ODA also anticipate indirect pressure as competition for alternative sources of funding increases.

The funding contraction is also intensifying pressure across the wider sector. Respondents point to growing competition between non-profits, increased demand on corporate, philanthropic and grant-making funders, and greater scrutiny over how increasingly limited resources are allocated. As one respondent observed, the environment may lead funders and partners to become more specific in their priorities and expectations.

Among corporates, the effects remain less direct, although they are becoming more visible. Figure 13 shows that 28% report a negative effect on the planning, delivery or impact of their ESG or Responsible Business goals, compared with 24% last year. A further 9% report a positive effect, while 64% see neither a positive nor negative impact, a decrease of 10 percentage points.

Qualitative responses illustrate how this pressure is reaching businesses through their partners and programmes. One corporate respondent noted that non-profit partners are increasingly stretched for resources and capacity, requiring the company to do more to fill emerging gaps. Another highlighted the loss of USAID as a key partner in a regional decarbonisation programme. These experiences demonstrate how ODA reductions can weaken the wider infrastructure supporting corporate social and environmental action.

Q&A

"How (if at all) is the reduction in ODA affecting / likely to affect the extent to which your organisation engages in strategic cross-sector partnerships?

Reductions in ODA has led / is leading my organisation to:

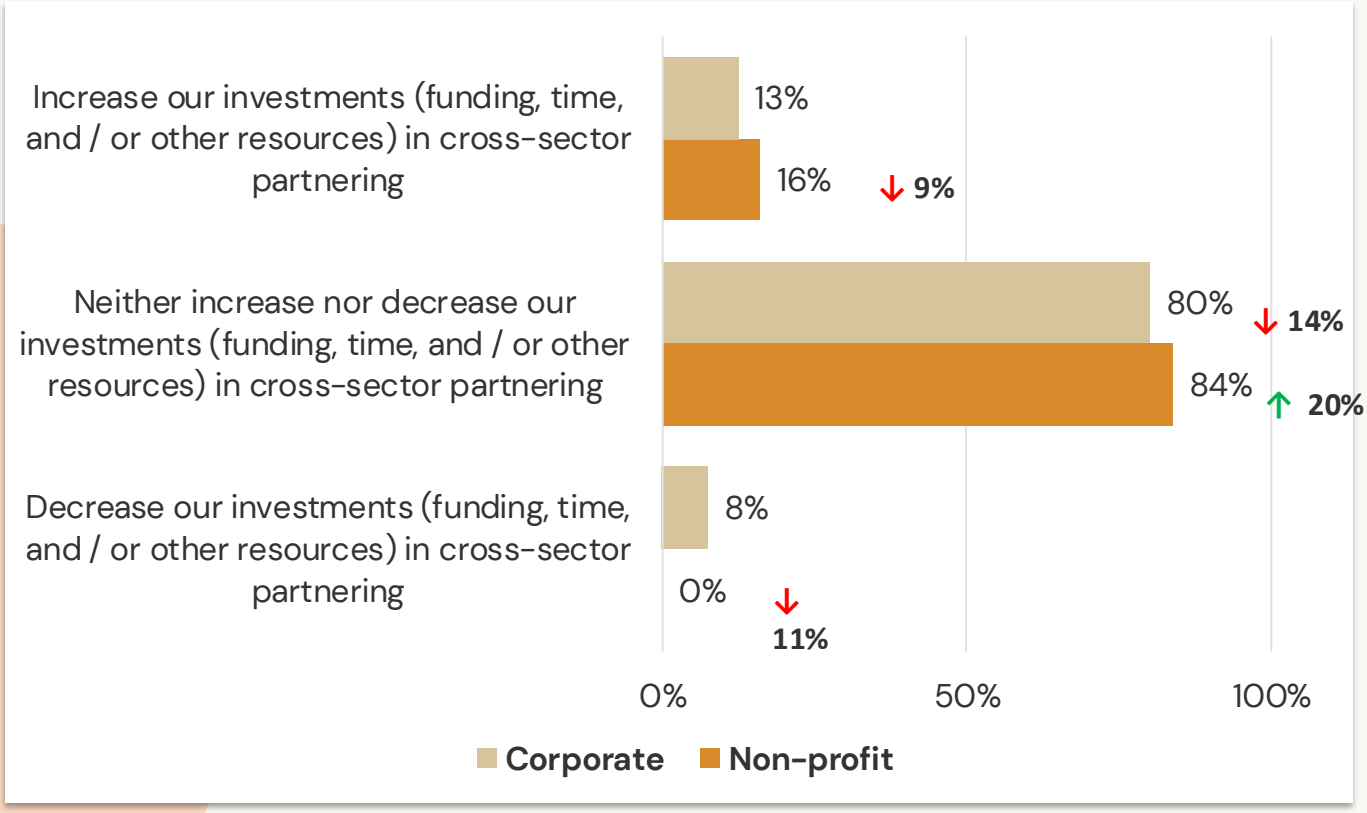

Figure 13: The impact of ODA reductions on cross-sector partnerships

Despite these pressures, Figure 13 shows that investment in strategic cross-sector partnering remains remarkably resilient. 80% of corporates and 84% of non-profits expect to maintain their current investment of funding, time and other resources.

Among non-profits, the proportion expecting to maintain their level of investment has risen by 20 percentage points, from 64% last year. A further 16% expect an increase in investment, while none anticipate a reduction, compared with 11% previously. This suggests that non-profits increasingly regard partnership as an essential means of navigating resource constraints, improving efficiency and diversifying income.

The subgroup findings add some context. Among the international non-profits responding, 83% expect to increase their investment in cross-sector partnership, compared with 3% of national non-profits. Given the small subgroup base, this should be treated as indicative, although it suggests that organisations most exposed to ODA reductions may be placing greater emphasis on partnership to sustain delivery.

The corporate picture is more varied. While most expect investment to remain stable, this proportion has fallen by 14 percentage points from 94% last year. 13% intend to increase their investment, while 8% expect to reduce it. This wider distribution may reflect increasingly selective decisions about where corporate resources can achieve the greatest value.

Overall, the findings reveal significant strain without widespread withdrawal from collaboration. Organisations are protecting established partnerships and using them to access expertise, share resources and strengthen resilience. For the organisations most exposed to ODA reductions, these relationships are becoming increasingly important to sustaining programmes, responding to growing need and building a more diversified future.

Note: A substantial proportion of respondents are not directly involved in international development. The findings may therefore underrepresent the scale of the impact experienced by non-profits and international agencies operating in ODA-dependent sectors.

Long-term and collective approaches will shape the next generation of partnerships

Declining public funding, changing political priorities and growing societal needs are reshaping how social impact is delivered. As traditional funding models come under pressure, expectations of business are extending beyond financial support to include expertise, influence, investment and convening power.

The clearest signal from the findings is that organisations are looking to deeper and more collaborative models in response. As shown in Figure 14, 89% of respondents believe long-term strategic partnerships will become more important over the next three years. Multi partner and collective impact collaborations follow at 64%, reflecting growing recognition that complex social and environmental challenges cannot be addressed by organisations working alone.

The findings also point to a broader understanding of the resources that companies can contribute. Skills and expertise led partnerships and those leveraging corporate influence and networks are each selected by 45% of respondents. Blended finance and investment led partnerships are identified by 37%. **Together, these results suggest that the future of partnership will depend on combining funding with knowledge, reach, relationships and different forms of capital.**

By contrast, only 12% expect traditional bilateral partnerships to become more important. This does not suggest that relationships between individual companies and non-profits will disappear. It indicates that they may increasingly sit within wider coalitions, longer term strategies and shared approaches to impact.

The emerging story is therefore one of evolution rather than retreat. Resource pressures are not diminishing the need for partnership. They are increasing the demand for partnerships that are sustained, flexible and capable of mobilising a wider range of assets. The following findings on ODA reductions reinforce this picture, showing significant pressure on delivery while investment in collaboration remains resilient.

Q&A

"As resources become more constrained and expectations continue to rise, which of the following partnership models do you believe will become more important over the next three years?"

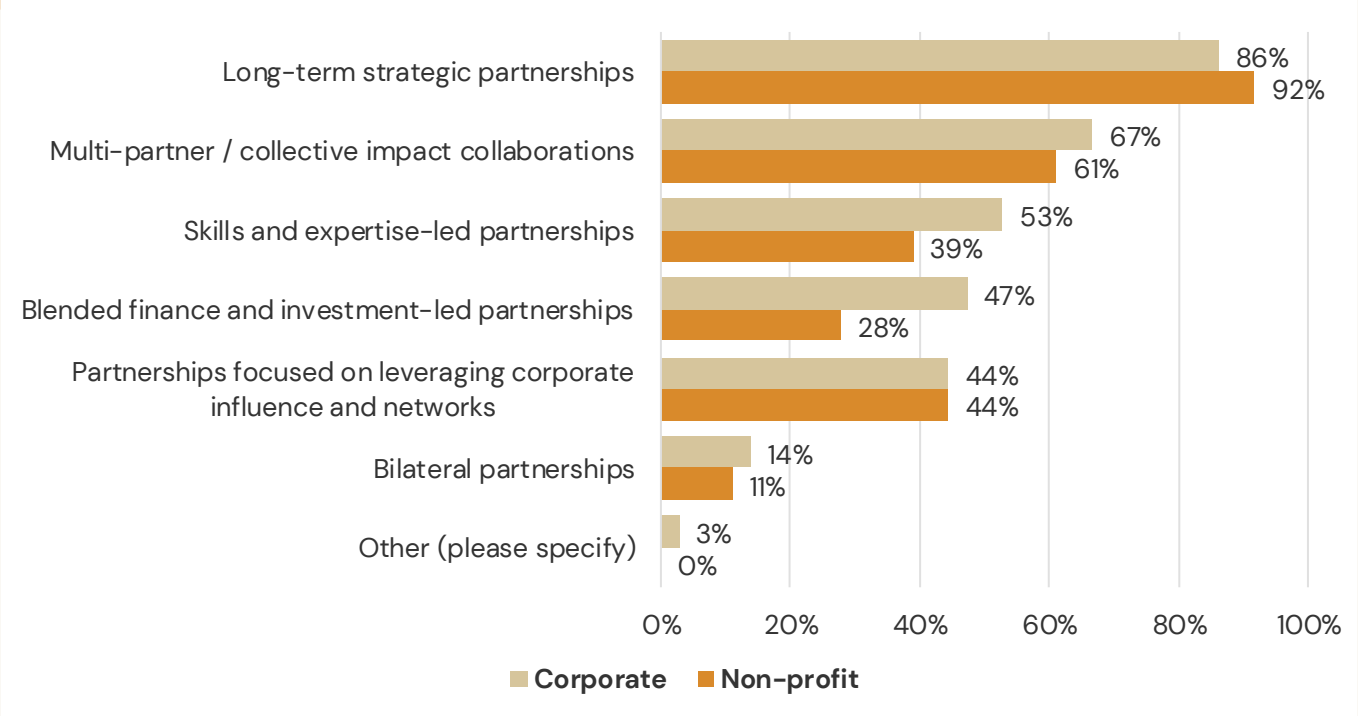

Figure 14: Partnership models of the future

2.3 Artificial Intelligence

AI is expected to strengthen measurement and efficiency, although organisational readiness remains uneven

AI continues to attract growing attention across the corporate and non-profit sectors, with expectations increasingly focused on its practical contribution to organisational resilience and partnership effectiveness. This year's findings show considerable confidence in its potential, particularly where it can strengthen evidence, improve productivity and support better use of constrained resources.

As shown in Figure 15, improving impact measurement and reporting is the most widely recognised opportunity, selected by 80% of respondents. This is followed closely by reducing operational costs and increasing efficiency, cited by 74%. Together, these findings suggest that organisations see the most immediate value of AI in strengthening accountability and enabling teams to deliver more effectively.

A second group of opportunities centres on delivery and collaboration. 40% believe AI could improve service delivery, while 39% see potential to facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing between partners. These applications could become increasingly important as organisations seek to combine expertise, share insights and coordinate activity across more complex partnership ecosystems.

Expectations are more measured in other areas. 31% identify fundraising and supporter engagement as a significant opportunity, while 29% see potential in identifying emerging community needs. Only 19% highlight crisis response and organisational resilience. This suggests that confidence remains strongest where AI can support established organisational processes, with greater caution around applications requiring contextual judgement, trust and direct engagement with communities.

The overall picture is nevertheless one of considerable optimism. Only 6% of respondents are unsure where AI could add value, indicating that most organisations already have a relatively clear view of its potential contribution.

Q&A

"Where do you believe AI has the greatest potential to strengthen organisational resilience and partnership effectiveness over the next three years?"

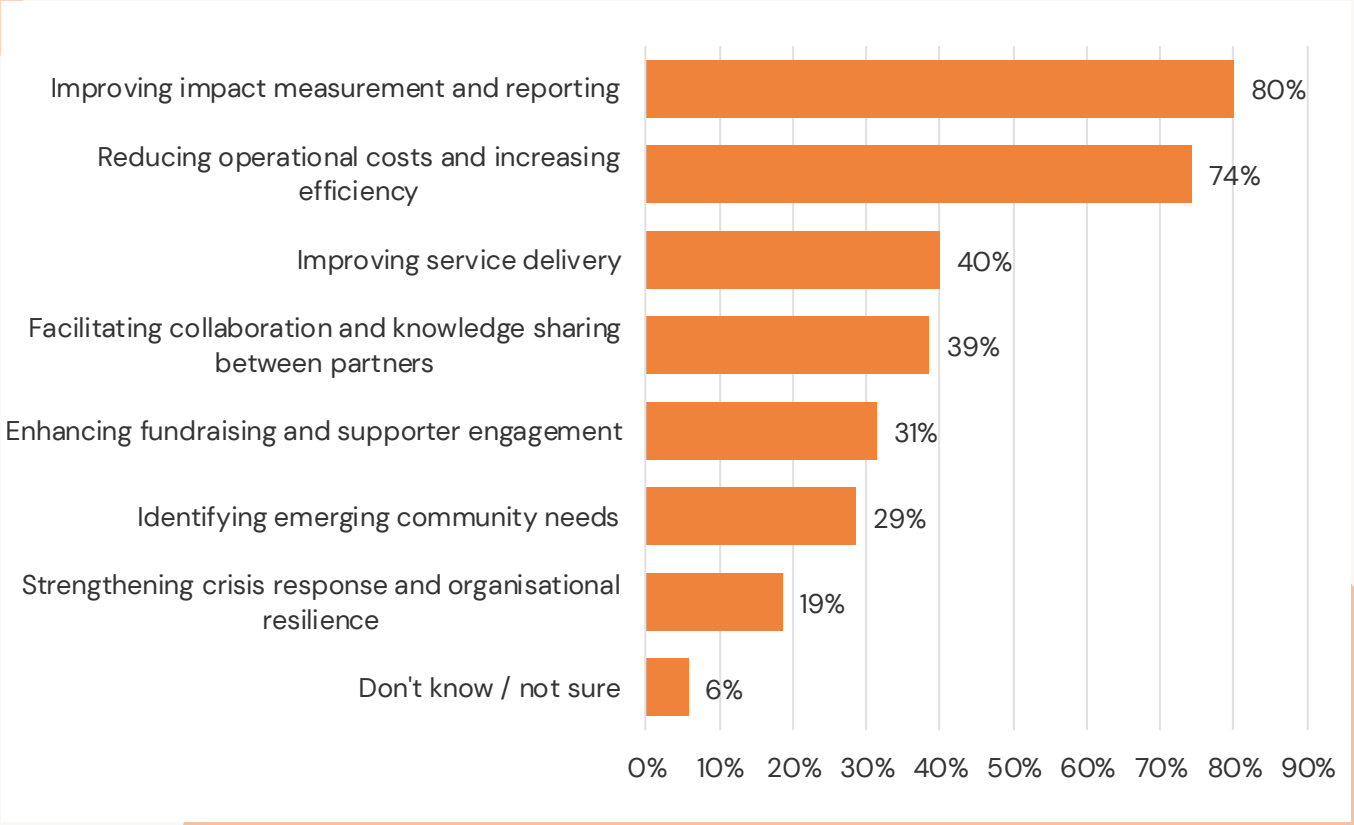

Figure 15: The areas of AI's greatest potential

Organisations recognise the opportunity, but many remain only partly prepared

Figure 16 presents a more cautious assessment of organisational readiness. A total 44% of respondents consider their organisation very or fairly prepared to realise the opportunities offered by AI while managing the associated risks. A further 39% describe themselves as somewhat prepared.

This means that 83% believe their organisation has at least some level of preparedness, although for many the foundations are still developing. Only 15% consider their organisation not very or not at all prepared, while 1% remain unsure.

The findings point to a significant implementation challenge. Organisations increasingly understand where AI could strengthen resilience and partnership effectiveness, but many will require further investment in skills, data, governance and responsible use before these opportunities can be realised fully.

For cross-sector partnerships, this creates a clear agenda for collaboration. Partners will need to align expectations, strengthen safeguards and ensure that the use of AI supports transparency, inclusion and mission delivery. The next phase will depend on converting confidence in AI's potential into practical capability and responsible application.

Q&A

"How prepared is your organisation to realise these opportunities while managing the associated risks of AI?"

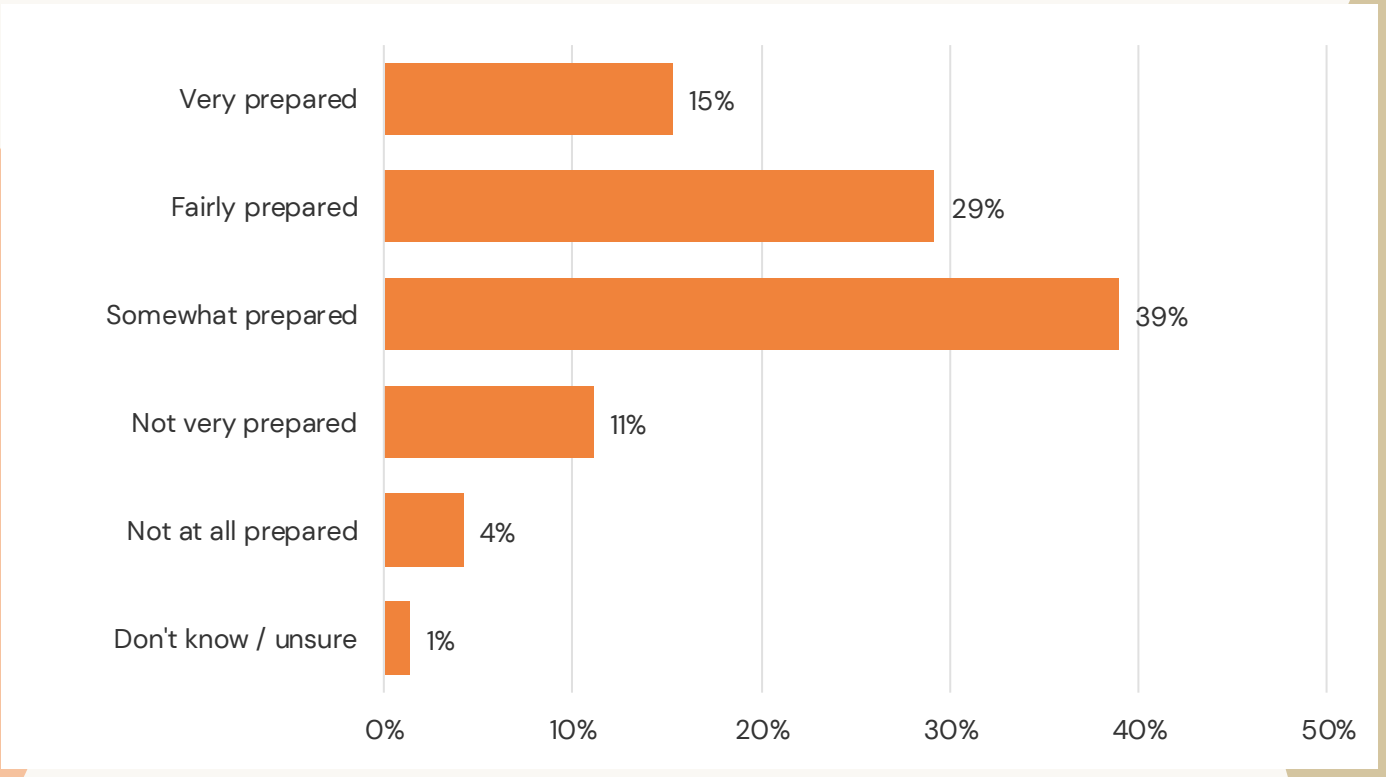

***Figure 16:** Organisational preparedness to realise the opportunities of AI*

Part 3: Mid-term trends, prospects, and anticipated developments in partnerships

3.1 Likely importance of partnerships in the mid-term

Cross-sector partnerships will continue to grow in importance for companies and non-profits

Throughout the life of the Barometer, corporate and non-profit professionals have consistently expected partnerships between their sectors to become increasingly important. This confidence has endured through periods of economic pressure, political change and shifting social priorities. This year's findings continue that pattern.

As shown in Figure 17, 64% of corporates expect cross-sector partnerships to become more or much more important over the next three years. Half believe they will become more important, while 14% anticipate that they will become much more important. This represents a modest decline from 69% last year, driven largely by a fall in the proportion selecting much more important, from 23% to 14%.

Corporate expectations therefore remain positive, although more measured. Almost a third, 32%, believe the importance of partnerships will remain the same, while only 4% anticipate that they will become less important. None expect a significant decline.

Confidence is particularly strong among non-profits. 84% expect partnerships to become more or much more important, unchanged overall from last year. Within this total, however, the emphasis has shifted. 35% now expect partnerships to become much more important, down 11 percentage points, while 49% believe they will become more important, up by the same amount. A further 16% expect their importance to remain unchanged, and none foresee any decline.

The findings confirm the enduring strategic relevance of cross-sector collaboration. While expectations have become slightly more tempered, particularly among corporates, there remains a clear consensus that partnerships will play an increasingly important role in helping organisations navigate constrained resources, respond to complex societal needs and deliver sustained impact.

Q&A

"What is your expectation of the role that partnerships will play in the corporate or non-profit agenda over the next three years"

Would you say they are likely to become...

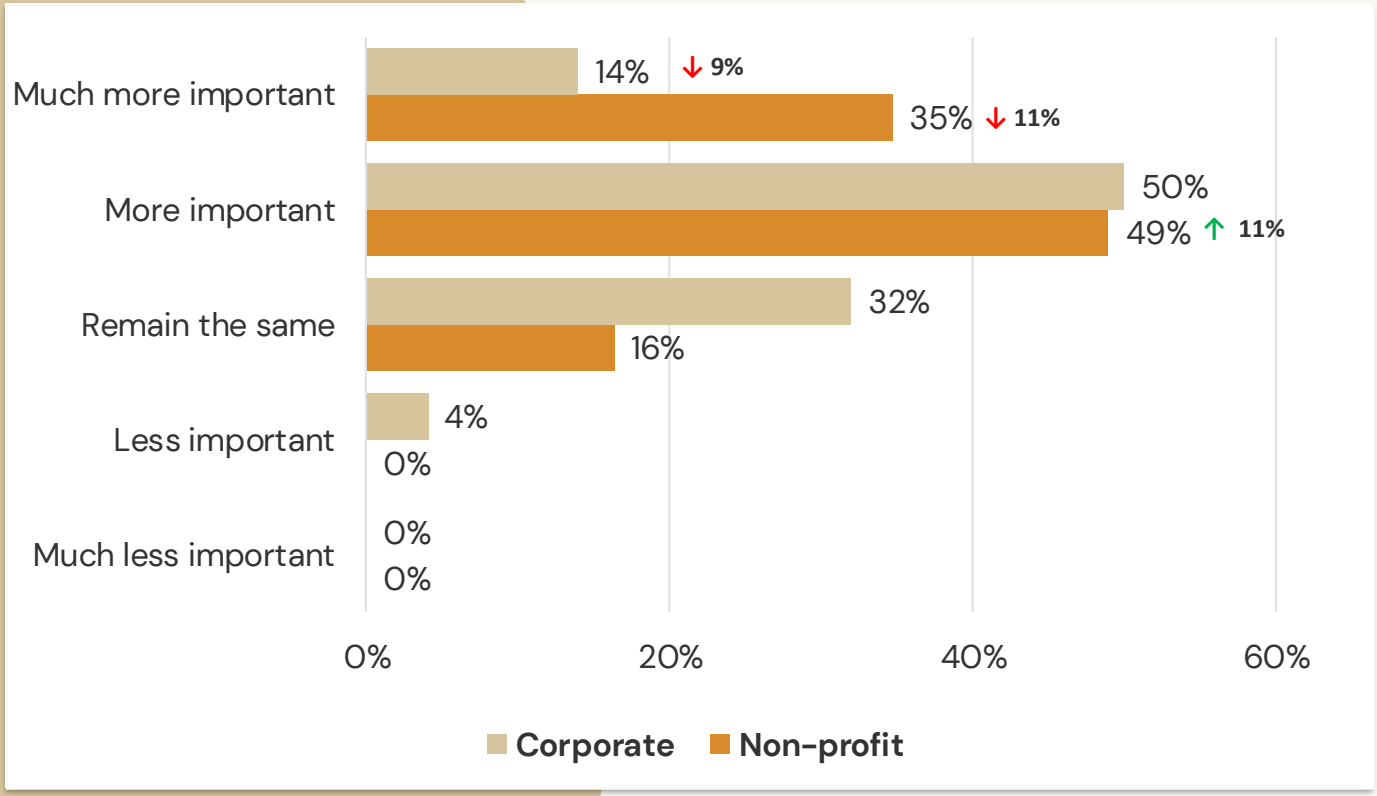

Figure 17: The future importance of corporate – non-profit partnerships:

3.2 Drivers of Change

Reputation, societal expectations and financial pressure continue to drive the growing importance of partnerships

When asked what will make cross-sector partnerships more important over the next three years, corporate and non-profit respondents again identify distinct but closely connected drivers.

For corporates, enhancing reputation and credibility remains the leading factor, cited by 75% of respondents. While still prominent, this has fallen by 14 percentage points from last year. Pressure to demonstrate societal consideration within business practices is also significant, at 64%, reinforcing the continuing importance of responsible business conduct.

Recognition of the value created by combining the different assets of companies and non-profits has grown considerably among corporates, rising by 14 percentage points to 67%. Evidence of successful corporate and non-profit partnerships is also influential, cited by 58% of corporates and 57% of non-profits, with the latter increasing by 10 percentage points.

Economic pressure is becoming a more prominent corporate consideration. 44% identify pressure on resources and the need to partner to reduce costs, an increase of 28 percentage points. Internal stakeholder pressure remains important to 47% of corporates and 30% of non-profits.

For non-profits, the need to raise funds in a difficult economic climate remains the leading driver, cited by 74%. Although this represents a 14 percentage point decline, funding pressures continue to shape expectations of future partnership growth. Pressure on companies to demonstrate societal consideration is also cited by 72% of non-profits, while 67% highlight the importance of leveraging the complementary assets of each sector.

Government and political support is now regarded as a less significant influence. It is cited by 25% of corporates, down 9 percentage points, and 11% of non-profits, down 22 points.

Overall, the findings point to a broadening partnership rationale. Reputation and funding remain central, alongside growing recognition that collaboration can combine complementary capabilities, demonstrate credible impact and help organisations respond to mounting pressure on resources.

Q&A

"In your view, what factors are likely to make corporate-non-profit partnerships more important in the next three years?"

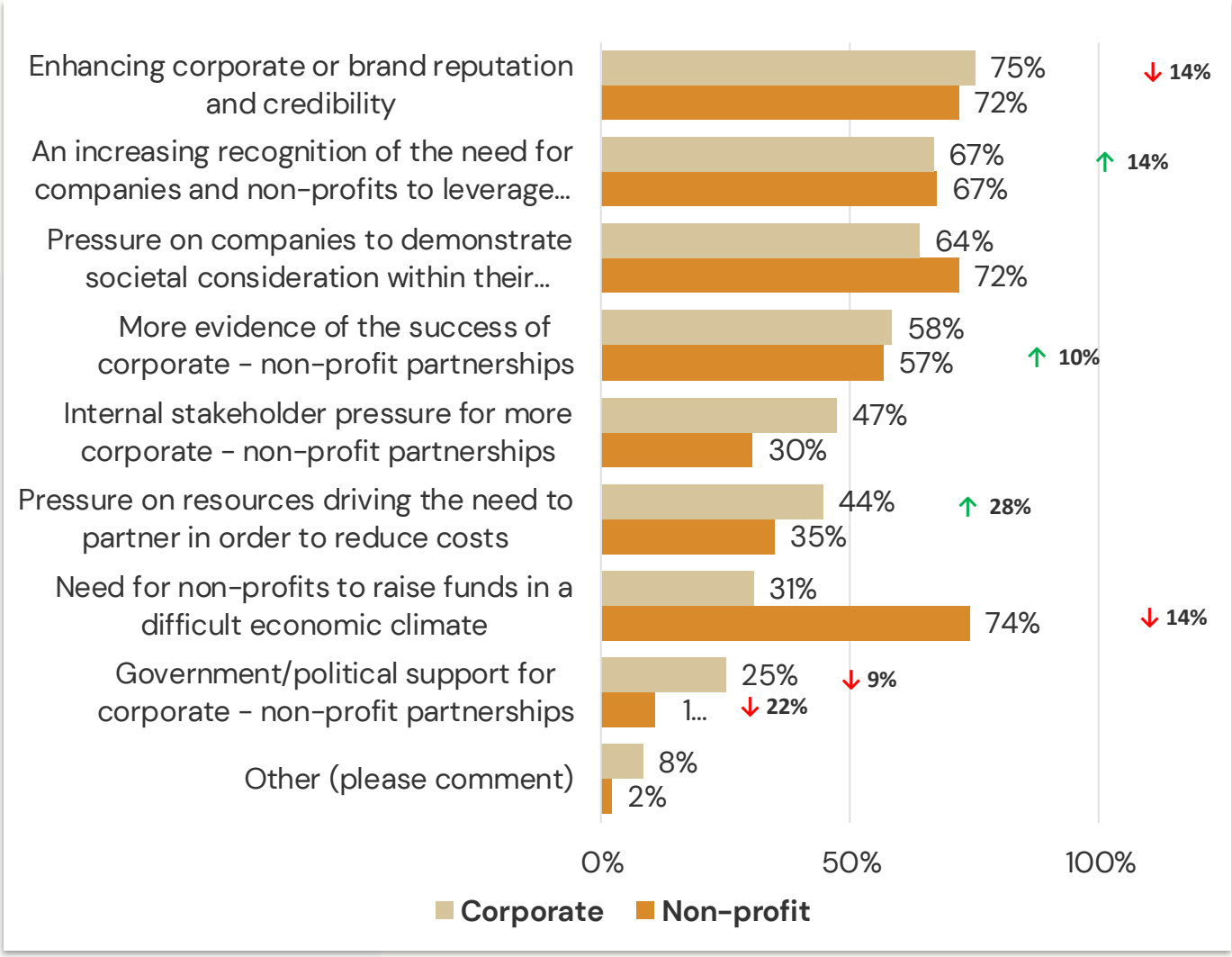

Figure 18: The reasons why partnerships may become more important over the next three years

3.3 The Outlook for Investments in Cross-Sector Partnerships over the Mid-Term

Investment in partnerships is expected to grow, although expectations have become more measured

Corporate and non-profit investment in partnerships is expected to rise over the next three years, although confidence in the scale of that growth has softened.

As shown in the Figure 19, 52% of corporates expect investment to increase or increase significantly, compared with 67% last year. 14% anticipate a significant increase, down from 17%, while 38% expect investment to increase, a decline of 12 percentage points.

Among non-profits, expectations remain stronger. 71% foresee an increase in investment, compared with 78% last year. 10% expect investment to increase significantly, a small rise from 8%, while 61% anticipate an increase, down from 70% previously.

At the same time, more respondents expect investment levels to remain stable. This view is shared by 42% of corporates, up 11 percentage points, and 29% of non-profits, up 13 points. Only 6% of corporates anticipate a decrease, while no non-profit respondents expect investment to fall.

Overall, the outlook remains positive, with a majority across both sectors continuing to anticipate greater investment in partnerships. The rise in expectations of stability suggests a more considered outlook, shaped by constrained resources and economic uncertainty, while confirming that cross-sector collaboration remains a strategic priority.

Q&A

"Is your investment *[commitment, time, resources, etc]* in corporate – non-profit partnerships likely to increase or decrease over the next 3 years?"

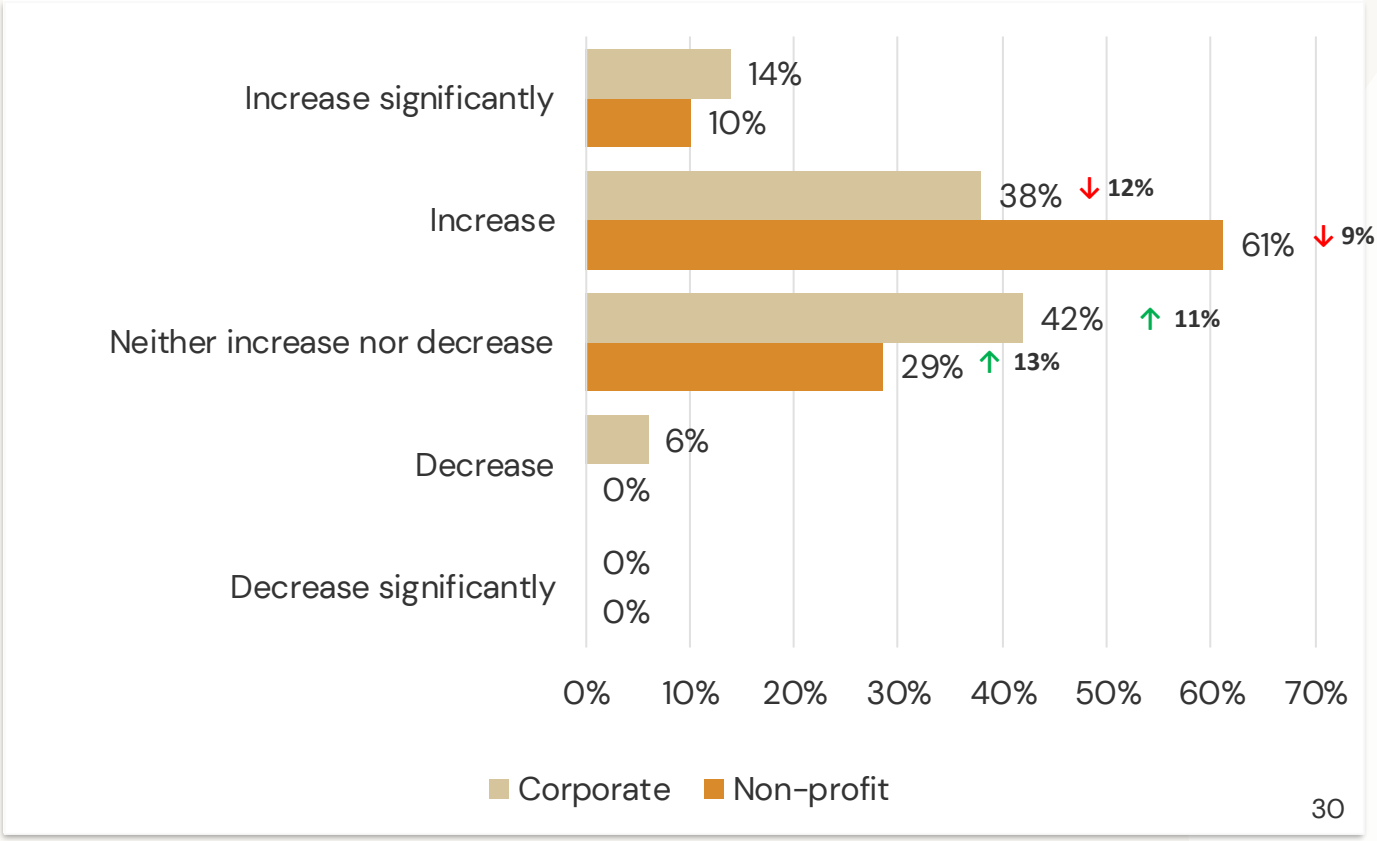

Figure 19: Future investment in partnerships

Concluding Remarks

The 2026 Barometer is published against a backdrop of geopolitical uncertainty, funding pressure and growing scrutiny of ESG and Responsible Business. Yet despite these pressures, the findings point to continued confidence in cross-sector collaboration and its ability to deliver both societal and organisational value.

Partnerships remain strategically important, but expectations are becoming more demanding. Reputation and funding continue to be important drivers, while effectiveness, efficiency, access to expertise and long-term impact are gaining prominence. Organisations increasingly expect partnerships not only to deliver positive outcomes for society, but also to contribute meaningfully to organisational performance.

For practitioners, this raises the bar. Strong partnerships will need clear objectives, complementary capabilities and credible evidence of the value they create. Partners need to be clear from the outset about what they want to change, how progress will be measured and why collaboration offers a stronger route to impact.

The findings also demonstrate resilience. Most organisations are maintaining or strengthening their ESG commitments, with many corporates embedding ESG more closely within business strategy. Funding pressures remain significant, particularly for organisations exposed to reductions in Official Development Assistance (ODA), yet investment in partnerships is broadly expected to remain stable or grow. This suggests that, even in a challenging environment, collaboration continues to be seen as part of the solution.

This year's Most Admired Partnerships reinforce that message. The joint recognition of IKEA and the World Wide Fund for Nature and Greene King and Macmillan Cancer Support demonstrates the value of shared purpose, strategic alignment and sustained commitment. Their longevity also highlights the potential of partnerships that evolve over time rather than remaining fixed around a single objective.

Looking ahead, partnership models are expected to become longer-term, broader and more collaborative. Respondents anticipate greater emphasis on strategic partnerships and multi-partner approaches, alongside a growing contribution from assets beyond funding, including skills, influence, networks and investment capital.

AI presents another opportunity, particularly in areas such as impact measurement, reporting and efficiency. However, organisational readiness remains uneven, making skills, governance, data and responsible use important priorities as adoption grows.

Overall, the outlook for cross-sector collaboration remains positive, although more measured than in previous years. Partnerships with a strong strategic fit, disciplined delivery and clear evidence of results will be best placed to secure sustained support and demonstrate their value.

The opportunity now is to turn resilience into capability – building partnerships that are more strategic, more collaborative and better equipped to deliver lasting impact.

The future remains very bright for cross-sector collaboration which is likely to remain a vital force for addressing complex global challenges.

Manny Amadi, MVO

CEO, C&E Advisory

About the Barometer

Methodology

The C&E Corporate – Non-Profit Partnerships Barometer 2026 was compiled using responses to a confidential online survey of 117 leading UK-based and companies and non-profits engaged in partnerships (many of them operating globally). The survey was supplemented by discussions and interviews with corporate and non-profit participants, providing qualitative insights.

Practitioners on both sides of corporate – non-profit partnerships clearly have a keen interest in the Barometer because it allows them to have a sector-wide perspective on the evolution of the cross-sector partnering landscape and to gain a deeper understanding of the views of their counterparts.

This year's survey included a mixture of new and previously asked questions. This has allowed us to identify new challenges and opportunities in partnering, whilst simultaneously enabling accurate and effective comparison of data against previous Barometer readings.

The online survey and qualitative work took place during June & July 2026.

Sector Representation

Q&A

"Are you completing this survey on behalf of a 'not-for-profit' or a corporate organisation?"

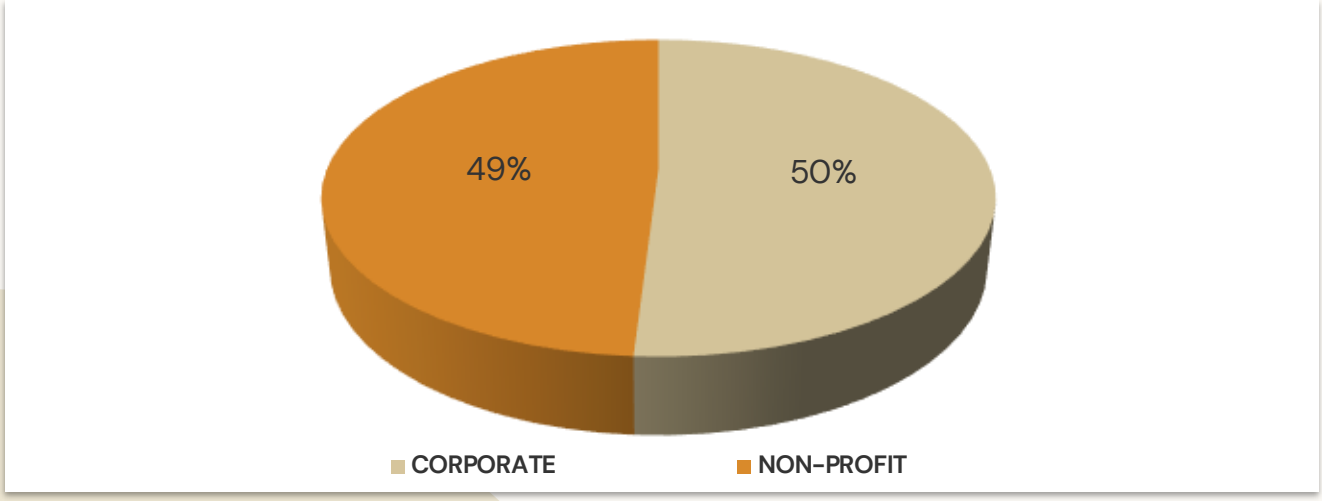

Figure 20: Sector representation

Respondents' Roles

Respondents held a diverse range of professional roles, either directly engaged in, or responsible for overseeing, corporate – non-profit partnerships at a senior level.

"What is your role?"

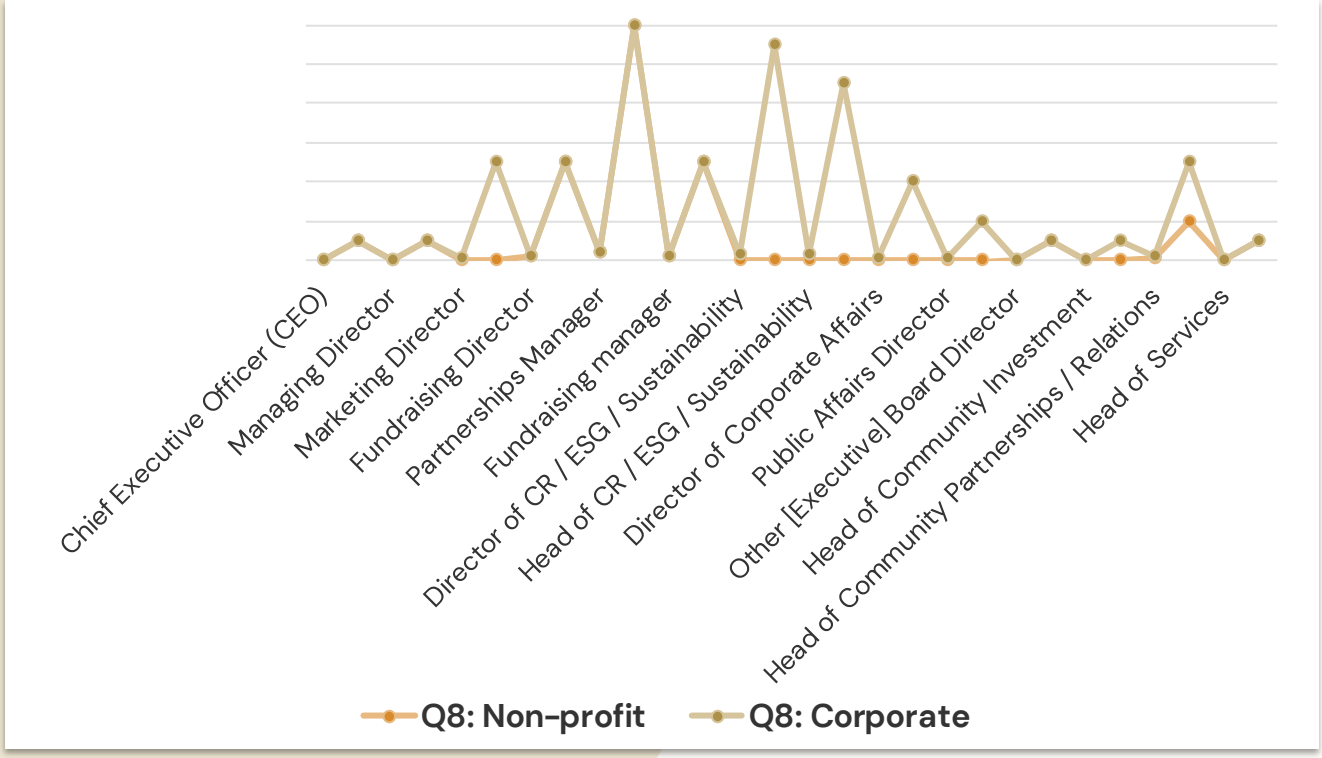

Figure 21: Respondents' roles

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A leading specialist 'business and society' consultancy, C&E Advisory works across sectors, helping purposeful organisations to thrive – by making positive social and environmental change. We work with some of the world's foremost businesses, non-profit organisations, and philanthropists. Working upstream & downstream across the Responsible Business and sustainability value chain, our practice areas cover strategy, programme design, oversight & reviews, performance measurement & reporting, high performance team development and leadership coaching.

And because today's challenges and opportunities require new ways of thinking, C&E is particularly adept at inspiring and enabling sometimes surprising cross-sector collaborations. We have advised – and continue to advise – on some of the world's leading and best-known corporate – non-profit partnerships.

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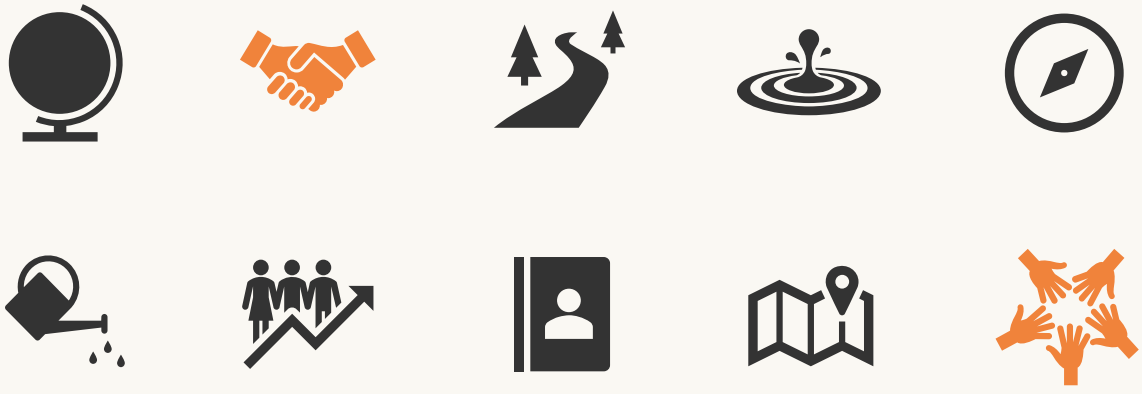

Survey Respondents

Excluding organisations wishing to remain anonymous