



Nonprofit and Co-Funder Experiences with Listen for Good

Reflections on Year One

The Listen for Good initiative was launched to:

- **Support diverse, customer-facing nonprofits** to initiate or improve on their practice of systematically collecting and using feedback from the people they seek to help;
- **Engage more funders** in this effort of supporting, using, and valuing beneficiary feedback; and
- **Build infrastructure** needed for strong beneficiary feedback loops in the social sector, including technology, analytics, reporting, and access to tools and benchmarks.

Listen for Good (L4G) is an initiative of the Fund for Shared Insight (Shared Insight), a funding collaborative dedicated to supporting nonprofit organizations in openness and listening to the people they ultimately hope to serve. Structured as a co-funding/grant-matching opportunity, the first year of L4G (2016) attracted 46 grantee organizations and 28 co-funders.

These funders support their grantees in implementing systematic, rigorous collection and use of feedback by accelerating the development of the infrastructure needed for feedback loops; encouraging experimentation with the use of the Net Promoter System (NPS®); and facilitating nonprofits in sharing their lessons learned so as to catalyze a feedback movement in the field.

In an effort to better understand the impact of these funding efforts, Shared Insight has worked with ORS Impact to study the experiences, lessons learned, and impacts observed by both L4G grantees and co-funders. Over the past year, ORS Impact has continued to deepen our understanding of this work by surveying L4G grantees and interviewing their respective co-funders. The themes and findings from these efforts offer a number of valuable insights for the field of philanthropy, particularly for funders and nonprofits interested in incorporating feedback loops into their work and building nonprofits' capacity for feedback practice.

NONPROFIT EXPERIENCES

- Nonprofit organizations involved in the L4G initiative are **gaining new insights** as a result of their feedback efforts.

All program managers and agency leaders reported gaining at least a few new insights regarding their work, as a result of their involvement in L4G. Program managers and agency leaders indicated gaining the most new insights around their understanding of clients' experiences with programs and services provided.

The amount of new insights gained is related to organizational feedback capacity. As agency leaders' perceptions of organizational capacity increased, so too did the number of new insights reported. In this case, capacity specifically refers to feedback capacity such as the ability to collect, analyze, interpret, and use client survey data to improve programs.

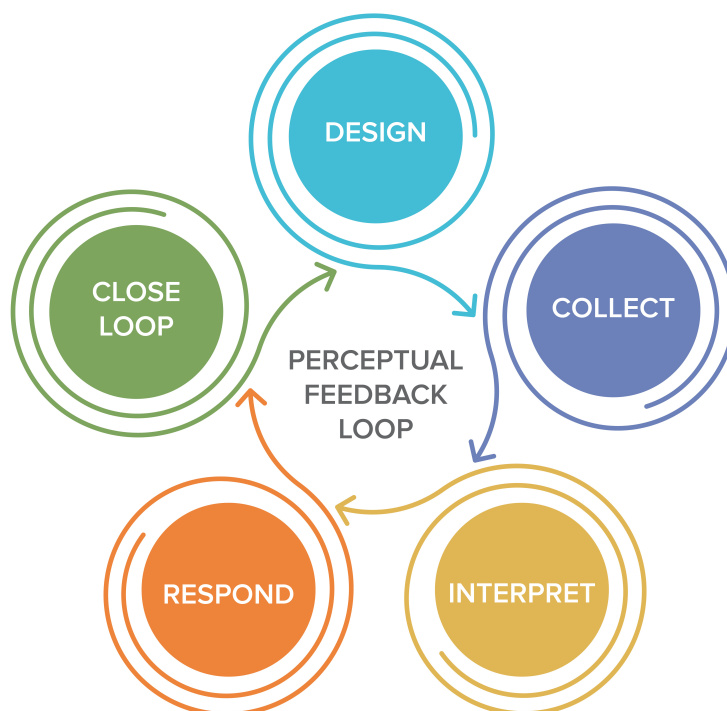
- Nonprofit organizations are **making changes** as a result of their participation in L4G.

About one third of organizations reported using feedback data to make changes to operations, programs offered, and/or how staff interact with clients. For agency leaders, the most common area of change was adjustments to operations (e.g., communication/coordination across programs or processes for how programs are delivered).

For program managers, the most common areas of change as a result of L4G involvement were adjustments made to the programs themselves, as well as adjustments to staff interaction with clients.

The number of changes reported increased with both (a) higher capacity for feedback practice and (b) farther progress through the steps of implementing feedback loops (i.e., designing surveys, collecting data, interpreting and responding to data, and closing feedback loops with communities served), as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 | Steps in perceptual feedback loops



- Core to the overarching purpose of L4G, grantee organizations feel that their **capacity for implementing feedback practices is improving** in all aspects of the L4G process.

Agency leaders and program managers reported gains between their 6-month and 12-month evaluation surveys in each aspect of implementing feedback practices.

The largest gains occurred for the capacity to close the loop with constituents after analyzing and interpreting data. This finding is promising and encouraging considering that closing the loop has previously been a challenge for L4G grantee organizations.

- In addition to gaining new insights, making changes, and developing internal capacities for feedback practices, grantee organizations also reported **a number of organizational benefits** from their involvement in L4G.

Close to 80% of agency leaders felt that their involvement in L4G contributed to an increased organizational focus on the ultimate beneficiaries of their work. In addition, nearly 75% of agency leaders felt that this involvement gave their organization a greater responsiveness to meeting their constituents' needs.

Several leaders described how this work is leading to organizational culture and practice changes, such as an increase in staff engagement with the work, and the development of organizational values (e.g., increasing transparency with clients, a deeper commitment to understanding the wants and needs of clients).



“ We are very excited about the ways in which feedback has informed our work and allowed us to be much more responsive to client opinions. ”

– Agency leader

CO-FUNDER EXPERIENCES

L4G aims to engage more funders in supporting, using, and valuing beneficiary feedback to catalyze a feedback movement.


In interviews with 16 co-funders, several themes emerged in terms of beliefs about feedback, motivations to participate in this work, lessons learned, and experiences with L4G. All of the 16 co-funders expressed that they plan to continue to support higher quality feedback practice among their grantees.

➤ Why do co-funders get involved?

- Several co-funders commented that they participated in L4G because they believed in the positive benefits to nonprofits resulting from collecting and using feedback to enhance their organization or their work.
- Co-funders also spoke about the benefit of leveraging their investments and living out their existing values. For some, these values included the belief that nonprofits would improve their programs and impact by listening to those they serve. Others valued community engagement and authentic relationships.
- Some co-funders also felt their L4G involvement was an incredible learning experience for themselves, and for their grantees as it provided exposure to work happening on a national scale.

➤ How do co-funders think about feedback?

- Involvement in L4G has largely re-affirmed co-funders' thoughts and values regarding how they think about feedback processes and nonprofits.
- In addition, L4G has helped co-funders consider new ideas and potential changes in their internal foundation work, in how they work with grantees, and in their relationships with grantees' beneficiaries.
- Many co-funders mentioned that they gain access to constituent data either by funding research on community-level indicators, or by asking grantees about constituent information.



“ It’s one thing to hear from your grantees that things are going well and programs are working, but it’s always better to hear the real stories and validation of the impact directly from people participating in the grantee’s programs and services. ”

– Co-funder

CONCLUSION

Shared Insight's L4G initiative was conceived as an experiment to scale a "simple but systematic and rigorous way of getting feedback from the people at the heart of our work." Findings from grantee surveys and co-funder interviews suggest that the initiative is well on its way and making steady progress toward this goal.

Participation in L4G is helping grantee organizations gain new insights, make changes to programs and operations, build capacity for implementing feedback practices, and foster cultures of responsiveness and attentiveness to constituent needs. In addition, co-funder involvement is reaffirming important thoughts and values about feedback processes for nonprofits and funders. It is also helping funders generate new ideas and consider potential changes for enhancing their work internally, their work with grantees, and their relationship to the grantees' beneficiaries.

Moving forward, grantees and co-funders alike have expressed interest and buy-in to this work. Their interest in continuing and expanding feedback practices suggests that feedback loops are becoming increasingly prevalent in nonprofit organizational cultures and not just short-term grant-supported projects that conclude with the closing of grant funding. This shift in the field and growing momentum toward feedback practices is a positive sign of growth and an indication of the need for continued investment and support for building capacity for nonprofit feedback practices.

The data for ORS Impact's evaluation came from two sources: a 12-month survey of agency leaders and program managers from 46 grantee organizations, and interviews with 16 co-funders. Response rates from the 12-month grantee survey were fairly high, with 87% of program managers and 85% of agency leaders responding. The 16 co-funders represented a response rate of 76% of 21 co-funders contacted. Seven of the 28 total L4G co-funders were not contacted for an interview because they were either an individual donor who could not answer organizational questions or they were also participating as a core-funder through Shared Insight.

For more information about the samples and full results from the evaluation, please visit the [Fund for Shared Insight website](#) where you can download PDF copies of the full reports from L4G grantees and co-funders.





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1100 Olive Way, Suite 1350 | Seattle, WA 98101 | T: 206.728.0474