



To: Organizations funded by Fund for Shared Insight in 2014 (year 1)
From: Lindsay Louie and Melinda Tuan, project manager
Subject: Grantee Perception Report (GPR) Results
Date: 11/13/16

INTRODUCTION

Our work in the Fund for Shared Insight is all about foundation openness – what we share out and what we listen to, including feedback from grantees and the people we seek to help. We fund many efforts to increase openness and feedback loops, and are also very committed to walking our walk in these areas.

On sharing out, for example, we have always posted the reports we receive from ORS Impact about the progress we are (and in some cases may not be) making vis-à-vis our theory of change and grantmaking. We have also posted several “sharing our thinking” documents about how we develop our grantmaking priorities and criteria, and how we approach grantee selection.

And on receiving feedback, earlier this year asked you to participate in our first Grantee Perception Report (GPR) so we could learn more about your experience working with us. If you filled out the GPR survey – thank you! We received feedback from 13 of 14 possible grantee contacts, or a 93% response rate. (CEP sent the survey to all grantees selected by Shared Insight in our first year of funding – grants made in January 2015.) CEP is able to provide context for the scores both from its overall dataset as well as a custom cohort. For the custom cohort, we selected the 12 foundations with the fewest grantees including New Profit, Inc., which as a pooled fund was the closest analog in the dataset to our funder collaborative.

Also important to keep in mind about the unique context for the Fund for Shared Insight:

- We are a new initiative (compared to many other foundations in the CEP dataset).
- We are a funder collaborative and there are no other collaboratives in the custom cohort group.
- As a funder collaborative, we engage in many other activities in addition to making grants.
- We are making grants in feedback practice and research, which is (are) not yet a field in itself.
- Our grants are relatively large, project grants.
- Our grants are necessarily shorter in duration due to our time-bound initiative.

With this memo, we are sharing our GPR results with you to:

- A. Walk the walk on being open with you.
- B. Close the loop with you and share back what we heard.
- C. Offer the opportunity to receive your insights into interpreting the data if you want to share.

On behalf of all of the Shared Insight core funders, we have written this memo to highlight the key results from the GPR, our reactions and questions about the data, and what we plan to adjust in response. If this memo prompts anything you’d like to share with us or respond to, we welcome you to

contact one of us directly or to use this anonymous open-comment survey if you prefer:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/X9JKR9V>

We do also plan to share a version of this memo and the results on our website soon, but we wanted you -- our grantees who contributed to the survey -- to receive it all first. While we haven't worked out all the details yet, we do expect the Fund for Shared Insight to continue for another three years (after the first three are up in June 2017), so it is important to us to have this data now to inform how we work with grantees going forward.

The GPR is organized into several major categories, which we will use in summarizing the feedback here as well (note that a few categories are simply not relevant -- like our understanding of your local community -- and so those are not addressed in this memo):

- I. Impact on and understanding of grantees' fields
- II. Impact on and understanding of grantees' organizations
- III. Funder-Grantee relationships
- IV. Grant process
- V. Dollar return and time spent on processes
- VI. Non-monetary assistance
- VII. Custom questions and Additional Measures

The GPR contains several open-ended questions. We've woven the qualitative data from those throughout these other categories as relevant. The full set of quantitative data is a lot to read through, but it is included in the **appendix** to this memo if you are interested in seeing any or all of it.

Importantly, recall that Shared Insight's grantmaking falls into three main categories: (1) the practice of implementing high quality feedback loops; (2) research related to feedback loops -- including researching methods of feedback loop implementation as well as efforts to link perceptual data and longer term outcome data; and (3) efforts to increase foundation openness. We will refer to these three categories as **practice, research and openness** for shorthand -- and you will see these referenced in the GPR. There were enough respondents in the practice category that CEP could separate it from Research/Openness -- neither of which had enough replies on its own to be separated out. They are combined because of that sample size limitation and not because strategically they belong together.

Overall Summary of Results and Our Reflections

As we hoped going into the GPR, we see some clear areas of strength and positive grantee feedback/experience as well as some clear areas for improvement. Further, the data affirmed some of our hunches about grantee perceptions -- but also gave us new insights and things to consider that we wouldn't have otherwise.

We are especially pleased to read the verbatim comments -- which were overwhelmingly positive and affirming. That said, even those which provided more critical feedback are centrally important to providing context and detail to help us understand the quantitative scores.

Strengths: We were encouraged to see that we scored well compared to the custom cohort and the overall CEP dataset in several important areas to Fund for Shared Insight. These include the:

- Extent to which we have advanced the state of knowledge in your field
- Funder-grantee relationships – overall and on several sub-measures
- Extent to which we are open to ideas from grantees about our strategy – 99th percentile!
- Scores for our grant application and reporting processes (including those where it was good to be low, not high, like how much pressure grantees felt to modify their proposals in order to be more likely to be funded)
- Percent of grantees who reported receiving non-monetary assistance was also 99th percentile!

Areas for improvement: There were several areas where we scored lower than we hoped or expected. These will be key focus areas for improvement going forward. They include:

- Funder transparency – 33rd percentile overall and below the custom cohort median.
- Reporting and evaluation process activities and feedback about work with ORS Impact – ORS Impact is working with us across all grantees, yet 100% of grantees said they participated in a reporting process and 0% in an evaluation process. As we’ll flesh out more below, perhaps there is confusion about ORS’ role in the initiative since they did interviews with each grantee at the end of year 1 that served as both grant report and a component of the external evaluation.
- In terms of field-related assistance, we would like to score higher on “provided research or best practices” to grantees to improve over time as we share our learnings.

Overall, grantee feedback is more strongly positive from practice grantees than from openness and research grantees and the disparity between the two categories is often fairly significant. Notably though, there are a few areas where the reverse is true and the feedback and experience of openness/research grantees is much more positive than that of the practice grantees. In a few areas, the experience seems to be the same across the board.

To some extent, the scores with disparities were surprising – though upon reflection some of them also make sense. In year 1, our funding allocation was 66.5% to the 7 practice grantees, 18.3% to the two research grantees, and 15.2% to the 5 openness grantees. Practice was not only the largest area of funding, but we have also observed that we exchange a higher volume and frequency phone calls and emails with practice grantees – probably both because there are more of them and because of the nature of their work developing feedback systems and infrastructure. In the case of research, we have focused on intermittent check-ins but understand the nature of that work is perhaps slower and we don’t need to communicate as often. And in the case of openness, most grantees were executing on different types of openness projects where we aimed to communicate and keep in touch as appropriate to the project (and of course to try and be responsive and helpful), but usually did not (from our end) see a need for frequent or regular exchanges.

Now we’ll go category by category and look at more of the nuances in the data.

I. Impact on and understanding of grantees’ fields

Strengths:

- For feedback practice grants, we scored off-the-charts high for the extent to which we have advanced knowledge in your field. We assume from our experience and some of the open-ended comments on this topic that this represents advancing knowledge about beneficiary feedback – not about other things related to the specific fields in which practice grantees work.

- For feedback practice grants, we scored fairly well for our understanding of the field in which you work.

Concerns & Questions:

- We did not score particularly well for most other dimensions of understanding grantees' fields. While first instinct is to want to score high on every possible criterion, upon reflection it did not actually surprise us too much to see these scores. We recognize that we are providing specific and targeted project grants for practice, research and openness that likely relate to varying degrees to what you would consider to be your field of work. Further, especially in feedback practice and research, you work in many different fields and our project funding is not likely to substantially impact those fields.
- Two field-related concerns that were voiced in the open-ended comments related to our not only making grants but also directly operating the Listen for Good initiative and concerns that doing so affects the power dynamics with grantees and/or could undermine their work. Indeed, with the Listen for Good Initiative we are providing substantial technical assistance to grantees and in that way are not only a funder of feedback loops but are also implementing feedback loops. We were glad to be made more aware of these concerns and will consider them in our approach and communications going forward.

II. Impact on and understanding of grantees' organizations

Strengths:

- For the feedback practice grants, we scored quite high for both our understanding of your strategy and goals and improving your ability to sustain the work funded by this grant in the future. These are important areas to us and we were glad to score high on them among the practice grantees.

Concerns & Questions:

- We were not too surprised by low scores for our impact on your organization overall. Again these are project grants focused on feedback practice, feedback research and openness – we appreciate that these projects are just one of many things your organization is focused on and thus that our funding may not be having a substantial impact on your organization overall.
- For similar reasons, it was not surprising to learn that we do not have too strong an understanding of the social, cultural or socio-economic factors that affect your work. That said, in so much as these factors have bearing on your feedback or openness work, we very much hope to learn about and improve on them over time through our conversations.
- One area where we were disappointed to see lower scores was related to organizational challenges. We scored ok in the practice area for how aware we are of challenges your organization is facing – but quite low for research and openness. And we scored low across the board for the extent to which we take advantage of our various resources to help your organization address challenges. This may have to do with the challenges being outside the scope of our project funding, but inasmuch as addressing other challenges affects how well you

can do your feedback or openness work, we want to be helpful if we possibly can.

- We want to acknowledge hearing in the open-ended feedback a few organizational-related points. One talked about how the funding has been for specific projects despite the fact that many of the grant recipients promote openness and sharing as part of their core work; and how it would be great if Shared Insight provide general operating support to those organizations. We appreciate this feedback, are glad to be aware of these concerns, and will take them into consideration for how we approach and communicate our work going forward.

III. Funder-Grantee relationships

Strengths:

- CEP calculates a “summary measure” for all of the grantee relationship questions and the score is fairly strong (just below the 75th percentile) for practice grants (although very low for openness and research).
- Interestingly, we were rated nearly off-the-chart by practice grantees for comfort approaching us if a problem arises – and nearly off the charts by openness/research grantees for our responsiveness. Further, we were rated quite high by practice grantees for how clearly we’ve communicated our goals and strategy and the consistency of our communications (but much lower in these areas by openness/research grantees). Of course, we would like to see these scores be strong in all areas of grantmaking and will make a concerted effort to bring them up for the sub-areas where they were weaker.
- We have prioritized doing site visits and were pleased to see this number at the 75th percentile overall and to have visited over 2/3 of grantees in both practice and openness/research.
- We were quite pleased to have off-the-charts scores from all grantees for how open we are to ideas from grantees about our strategy. Indeed, we are very open to your ideas and we’re so glad that you have experienced that!
- Given that Fund for Shared Insight is a new collaborative effort working in some relatively uncharted areas of foundation openness and beneficiary feedback, understanding the impact and effectiveness of the work and learning as we go are centrally important to us. To that end, we do have a primary focus on assessing the results of the work we fund. We were glad to see 100% of openness and research grantees say we discussed this with you – assessing results of the work funded by our grant – though a bit surprised to only have 2/3 of practice grantees report having discussed this.
- That said, the data flipped for how helpful we have been with your ability to assess progress toward your organizational goals – with very little for openness/research and a nearly off-the-chart for practice. Maybe this is because the practice grants actually help organizations get feedback that can influence organizational goals – directly relevant data – whereas that is less true for the openness and research projects funded by our grants.

Concerns & Questions:

- While the funder relationship summary measure was high for practice grantees, it was very low for openness/research grantees. We'll unpack that more below. In the CEP research on transparency funded by Shared Insight, one thing they studied was the relationship between funder transparency and other aspects of the GPR. They found that funder transparency is a primary predictor of the strength of funder/grantee relationships overall. In this case, that does appear to hold (generally/directionally) true with the funder relationship summary measure at the 41st percentile and the transparency summary measure at the 33rd.
- Scores for how fairly we treated all grantees were middle of the road. This is an important aspect of our work; we were disappointed to see the lower score and really not sure why we scored as low as we did or how to improve. We certainly tried to be fair and open. We would appreciate more detailed input here on how you perceived our fairness (or lack thereof) and how we could improve going forward. In the meantime, we are aware and more mindful of both how we work and communicate vis-à-vis fairness.
- While it was great to have some key strengths on funder-grantee relationships, there were several disappointments where we would have hoped to score better. For openness/research, several scores were very low including the summary measure, how comfortable you are approaching us if a problem arises, how clearly we've communicated our goals/strategy to you, and the consistency of our communications. Interestingly, whereas the practice area scored much higher on most measures, concerning and surprising was that practice grantees rated us so much lower than research/openness grantees for responsiveness.
- The disparities between the research/openness scores and practice scores on the funder-grantee relationship measures was substantial. One observation we've made about this is that we do have many more regular communications with the practice grantees which may be a key reason that the scores are generally higher, except that the increased rate of communications means we are not as responsive. In other words, we exchange many emails and calls with practice grantees and may sometimes be slower to reply, whereas we exchange fewer with openness/research grantees but are much faster to respond.
- We were, candidly, surprised to be in just the 33rd percentile across the board for how transparent we are with your organization – we have tried fairly hard to be transparent in sharing our thinking, processes, strategies, etc. The scores for different aspects of transparency were all fairly low. Unpacking this further:
 - o We were very surprised to score low across the board on our transparency about any changes that might affect funding your organization might receive in the future. We thought we were pretty clear that this is a new, 3-year initiative by funders and that the grants were very likely to be one-time grants. But this GPR tells us that we were not nearly as clear or transparent as we thought! So we're going to consider what we can do differently to improve on this in all aspects of our work – and we welcome suggestions!

- We scored a bit higher in openness/research for our transparency about the selection process and what we're learning about the issue in which we fund. We learned from the open-ended comments that we could be clearer in the future about renewal prospects. We scored low across the board for sharing our experiences with what we've tried but hasn't worked in the past. These scores may be low in part because this is a new collaborative and area of work and so we don't have too much yet that we have learned and can share, nor do we have experiences with what we've tried before that hasn't worked. This is key priority area for Shared Insight and we very much want to improve in these areas going forward.
- It was really interesting to us to score so relatively low on transparency and yet off the charts high on openness. We think that what the data is telling us is that what we share OUT with you (transparency) needs a lot of improvement, but that our openness to your input and ideas is very strong. We're glad about that and we will work to improve on what/how we share out.
- Finally, one open-ended comment shed some additional light on the importance of how we communicate given the many funders and staff involved in this collaborative: "It was hard to tell when information/updates/requests/decision-making were coming from the staff of Shared Insight or the foundations that are part of SI. The two did not seem aligned." This feedback was very much the outlier in the open-ended responses. That said, we appreciate learning that, at least for one grantee, it has been confusing to understand what is coming from staff versus the core funders. We will pay added attention to clarity of communications in the future.

IV. Grant process

Strengths:

- Feedback practice grantees said participating in the selection process was very helpful in strengthening the work funded by the grant (top quartile), and that participating in reporting/evaluation was also fairly helpful (second quartile).
- We were glad to see very low scores for how much pressure grantees felt to modify your priorities in order to submit a proposal that was likely to receive funding (a case where you want to score low and not high!).. Hopefully this also means that we were able to use the proposal process to identify and select organizations with whom we are strongly aligned – it may be that other proposals we didn't fund would have rated much higher for how much pressure they felt to modify priorities, and those would likely have been a less good fit over time.
- We were not surprised to see low scores for how involved we were in proposal development -- as everyone applied through an open, competitive RFP process and we weren't too involved.

Concerns & Questions:

- Openness/research grantees scored very low on the helpfulness of participating in our selection and reporting/evaluation processes, which is not too concerning to us. We don't expect our processes to be valuable to all organizations. One hypothesis for why the practice grantees found more value is that the practice of feedback loops is an area where our process offered stronger guidance and support – so grantees felt they were getting expertise, frameworks, etc. that they didn't otherwise have about high quality feedback loop implementation.

V. Dollar return and time spent on processes

Strengths:

- We were very pleased to be nearly off the charts across the board in terms of our median grant size and median dollars awarded per process hour required. Using your time well is important to us. Further, especially in year 1 of Shared Insight's work, we aimed to make fewer and relatively larger grants and the data shows we did that.

Concerns & Questions:

- None.

VI. Non-Monetary Assistance

Strengths:

- It was great to see off the chart high percentages of grantees who received field-focused or comprehensive non-monetary assistance. We have tried to make connections and provide support beyond the dollars wherever we can.

Concerns & Questions:

- None.

VII. Custom Questions and Additional Measures

Strengths:

- We don't have benchmarks here (you can see what important context they've provided up to this point), but scores were mostly strong for your experiences working with Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors and ORS Impact, and we were glad to see that of course.
- Similarly, scores seemed strong (8.4+ out of 10) for how likely you would be to promote shared Insight as a highly effective partner. Together with the chance to provide open-ended feedback, this was an attempt to ask the net promoter score "recommend" question – which doesn't really apply perfectly in this context but was important to us to test given its central focus in our Year 2 Listen for Good practice grantmaking. Interestingly, 75% of respondents scored us a 9 or 10 ("promoters"), 17% an 8 and 8% scored us 6 or below. That tells us that 1-2 of you have really not found us to be an effective partner but most of the rest of you have.

One person who gave a score of 5 noted that Shared Insight tried to be a good partner but the inevitable power dynamics took over. We have worked hard to be an open, candid funder and break down power dynamics – so we were surprised and disappointed not to have succeeded fully at that.

- Given the focus on beneficiary feedback, we were pleased to see a high score for the extent to which our funding priorities reflect a deep understanding of your intended beneficiaries needs, and a moderate score for the extent to which we understand your beneficiaries' needs. Indeed we are in a unique position because we are funding beneficiary feedback loops across program and issue areas – our expertise and support are in the value and role of beneficiary feedback, not in the particular issues/contexts of your program areas and beneficiaries (indeed none of

the core funders may actually fund in the programmatic area in which you work). We would hope that as practice grantees implement high quality feedback loops and share more beneficiary feedback data with their funders (all work supported in part by Shared Insight), that these scores would go up for those funders of your work (e.g. that ratings for your top 5 funders would go up over time for how well they understand your beneficiaries needs and take those into account in their funding priorities).

Concerns & Questions:

- Research/openness grantees rated their experience with ORS Impact notably lower than practice grantees. There were several positive open-ended comments about ORS Impact, but also several that fleshed out the lower scores including the sense from a few grantees that they seemed “disorganized.” We have shared these ratings and the corresponding open-ended feedback with ORS Impact for their consideration. Shared Insight’s core funders and staff have all had positive experiences with ORS Impact and all of us – Shared Insight and ORS – were surprised by these lower scores. It shows the value of asking – we wouldn’t have known.

Without discounting the feedback, it has also occurred to us that there could be some misalignment of expectations about the ROLE of ORS versus the Shared Insight team that has contributed to the lower ratings and experiences. For example, in the open ended comments, someone noted that the outside evaluation team did not compare favorably to the quality and helpfulness of the Shared Insight team, and another person said they didn’t feel the evaluation team provided any “value add.” It is not ORS Impact’s role at this point in the work and evaluation to be helpful to grantees or necessarily to add value (yet). They are here to help us assess if we are on track and may have evaluation findings down the road that prove not only helpful to the funders but to grantees as well – but we wouldn’t really expect ORS to be considered “helpful” to grantees at this early stage.

All of that said, ORS takes clarity of communications and grantee interactions very seriously and will take this critical feedback into consideration in their approach going forward. We and ORS all hope to see these scores come up over time.