

Fund for Shared Insight Theory of Change: Progress to Date





February 2017

In July 2014, Fund for Shared Insight launched with a [theory of change](#) for how collective funding to support feedback practice, feedback research, and foundation listening and sharing could ultimately improve philanthropy.¹ Within the theory of change, Shared Insight identified outputs and short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes for each of the three focus areas (i.e. feedback practice, feedback research, and foundation listening and sharing). While these represent the hoped-for results of the funding collaborative, Shared Insight has also consistently recognized that this work is emergent and that there is much to learn about how to improve philanthropy so that foundations better listen and share to support greater impact.

This memo captures notes about how the work has continued to evolve since initial grantmaking in fall 2015 and assesses progress in each of the focus areas by using the data available to date.² While ORS Impact will complete a more comprehensive evaluation to assess progress later in 2017 as a follow-up to the baseline scan, this memo is intended to provide a point-in-time update on how Shared Insight is doing against its theory of change.

Note about Assessing Progress

Given Shared Insight’s emergent approach to grantmaking, progress assessments are intended to be point-in-time measures based on the independent assessment of ORS Impact. We are assessing as follows:

RATING	CRITERIA
 On Track	Data suggest the cumulative effect of grants and activities have or will result in the outputs or outcomes originally expected in three years.
 Slightly Off Track, Trending Up	Data suggests that an output or outcome will only be partially met or not achieved to the originally desired extent, but newer additional work in an area shows promise.
 Slightly Off Track	Data suggest that an output or outcome will only be partially met or not achieved to the originally desired extent.
 Off Track	Data suggest that the cumulative effect of grants and activities will not result in expected results.

Appendix A has a full list of grantees from whom data was included for our assessment.

¹ Slight modifications were made to the Theory of Change in July 2016. This memo refers to the updated version.

² Data include: grantee reports, evaluation data (e.g., grantee interviews, media analyses), and existing secondary data (e.g., website reports, Year by the Numbers reports, core funder meeting materials). Data available through January 31, 2017 were considered.



Feedback Practice

Originally Documented Assumptions:

- There is growing maturity in the constituent feedback field with a critical mass of experiments and higher profile organizations beginning to explore this issue in earnest
- Principles of human-centered design and “design thinking” are gaining momentum within the social sector
- There is an increased demand for accountability from clients (e.g., users of nonprofit programs)
- The infrastructure, technology and tools necessary to collect constituent feedback (e.g., SMS messaging) are increasingly available
- There are currently very few examples of independent funders engaged in actively listening to constituents in a rigorous or systematic way to inform their own work
- Philanthropy has historically resisted efforts to incorporate constituent perspectives due to fear about hearing what constituents have to say about the foundation’s work and an ongoing resistance to openly examine failures and missed opportunities
- The value proposition for foundations learning from constituent feedback is in formation and uncharted territory
- There are few examples of successful nonprofit business models in place related to constituent feedback

Evolution of Feedback Practice Work

Shared Insight’s theory of change around Feedback Practice focuses on advancing the use of feedback loops in nonprofits and foundations. In the first round of grantmaking, Core Funders prioritized grants to organizations who had the most rigorous feedback approaches and who had a national presence, with the belief that these organizations’ experiences would be scalable across their networks and most compelling as models for the larger field. This approach also built on the assumption that some examples of strong feedback practices already existed and could be expanded with additional financial resources. Initial grantmaking also included grants to organizations who support infrastructure for feedback practice through platforms, convenings, and other field activities.

Listen for Good (L4G), which Shared Insight launched a little over one year later, represents updated thinking in this area. Rather than just supporting existing models of many different stripes on many different platforms, Shared Insight sought to launch a simple tool that could be used on one platform and used across many different types of “customer facing” nonprofits. Shared Insight was in part responding to the experience of the first year where not all of the grantees were as quick to scale as expected and also to the strong demand from nonprofits around the country to participate in the feedback work. Thus, with L4G, Shared Insight was seeking to explore a hypothesis that more nonprofits could collect higher quality feedback and put it to use through implementation of a simple common tool with six core questions, featuring the Net Promoter System (NPS) on the ubiquitous SurveyMonkey platform. Shared Insight offered technical support as well as financial resources. These shifts show some evolution in the underlying theory of this work. While the first approach would suggest that having strong examples in the field of feedback loops would generate dialogue and use by others, L4G’s approach suggests that: 1) there is value in simplicity—one tool that can be benchmarked and widely deployed; 2) field-level capacity and system needs hinder broader adoption of quality feedback practices; and 3) the field may be more likely to go to scale with a system that works with many nonprofits rather than through proof points of a few.



L4G also included increased intentionality around the funder side of the equation. The original approach primarily used a more passive influence strategy, with the hope that strong grantee exemplars would be meaningful to other funders. But with L4G, Shared Insight built a co-funding component into the design whereby nonprofits must be nominated to participate in L4G by a current or new funder, with the hope that with more “skin in the game” and direct engagement, more funders will attend to what their grantee is learning and be more likely to consider how feedback from the people they are seeking to help could inform their work and their thinking on issues of funding, strategy, and so forth.

Progress to Date

Below we review the actual outputs of Shared Insight and its Practice grantees to date, as compared to their planned outputs. Outputs include cumulative data from Practice grantees (i.e. CEO, LIFT, Habitat for Humanity, Global Giving, Feedback Labs, Keystone Accountability, and YouthTruth) in 2015 and 2016, 2016 interview data, data from the L4G evaluation, and other related evaluation products.

Planned Outputs	Actual Outputs
Growth and improvement in existing approaches and new approaches to listening to and learning from the people we seek to help are piloted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 49 organizations are receiving support to collect high quality feedback from their constituents, including three Practice grantees and 46 L4G grantees. • Feedback approaches tested include: SMS surveys, web-based surveys, NPS survey questions, focus groups, community meetings, and interviews.
Nonprofits and funders collaborate on approaches to seeking and heeding feedback from people we seek to help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 168,217³ unique constituents have provided feedback to Practice grantees; 19,732 unique responses have been captured among L4G nonprofits • Four grantees have provided additional infrastructure to the nonprofit sector in support of their use of feedback loops, including hosting conferences, creating networking and knowledge sharing opportunities, providing data collection capability to schools and districts, and developing a platform for helpful resources to implement feedback loops
Blogs, articles, presentations and other communications efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 23 additional funders are participating as co-funders of L4G grantees⁴ • Five high profile opportunities for funders and nonprofits to collaborate on developing, implementing, and improving the use of feedback loops⁵ were held in 2016. • Fund for Shared Insight communications included two radio interviews, 10 emails campaigns, 20+ speaking engagements, and 24 articles, blogs, and op-eds⁶

³ This number rolls up data across Core Grantees. It does not include data from GlobalGiving (their model makes it difficult to measure the unique number of beneficiaries reached).

⁴ Five L4G co-funders who are also Fund for Shared Insight Core Funders are not included in this total. Some sidecar funders also engaged due to interest in the feedback work.

⁵ One L4G co-funder webinar, White House Convening, Smart Summit (May 2016), Annual Feedback Summit (October 2016), and London Summit (November 2016).

⁶ We did not review the content of all communications for this memo; some may also focus on openness.



While individual grantees report on progress against self-identified outcomes, our overarching viewpoint as the external evaluator allows us to make observations and raise up lessons across grantees about overall progress against the planned short-term outcomes in the theory of change.

Planned Short-Term Outcomes	Lessons/Observations
Systems for hearing from the people we seek to help are used by innovators in nonprofits AND staffed foundations	Infrastructure grantees last fall shared that they were seeing greater demand among their audiences, including more donor feedback participation, greater participation in feedback-related events, and greater uptake for consulting and related services by nonprofits. This represents a change from last year, when there was momentum around the idea of feedback loops but less actual implementation. There is a sense among some that demand for tools is beginning to exceed supply. In general, infrastructure grantees have also seen a shift in the degree to which they are making a case for feedback. Current conversations focus on more advanced aspects of the “how” rather than the “why.” It is less clear, however, that there are similar patterns of uptake among funders. For example, in 2016-17, YouthTruth has surveyed students at more schools than in 2015, but they continue to have limited uptake among funders. We expect to learn more in 2017 and 2018 as that will be the time to see if and how the L4G feedback is finding its ways into the consideration of nominating funders.
Feedback loops from the people we seek to help generate ideas for improvement and course correction in piloted approaches	We see more evidence in the second year of among Practice grantees’ work and from early data from L4G grantees that feedback is generating ideas and supporting changes among those far along enough in the work. For example, L4G grantees who have or are in the process of interpreting results report they are thinking differently about their work (88% of 16 grantees) and are finding both logistical and programmatic changes they can make in response to feedback.
Publication of early results of piloted approaches are distributed, consumed, and debated in the sector	Practice grantees have published more of their work and learnings, and are participating in more speaking engagements in 2016 than in the first year of the work. For example, Feedback Labs has begun publishing two new weekly blog series: Three Things Thursday and Ecosystem Op-Eds. Three Things Thursday highlights lessons learned from feedback practitioners written by guest authors; Ecosystem Op-eds are longer pieces that use current events or trends to explore emerging theory in closing feedback loops. In addition, the recently published Technical Paper, “Getting on the Same Page: Defining Perceptual Feedback,” provides a consistent and practical definition of the term “perceptual feedback,” which was also featured on the Center for Effective Philanthropy’s blog.
Improved nonprofit practice for collecting high quality feedback	One of Shared Insight’s contributions here is more clearly defining what quality looks like in this space: high quality feedback loops are systematically collected, acted upon, and shared back with stakeholders. Among the Practice grantees, we see evidence that nonprofits continue to work to strengthen the quality of their feedback loops. L4G has these aspects of quality specifically built into the design. For both Practice grantees and L4G grantees, using feedback and closing the loop continue to be the most challenging parts of the process.



More dialogue in the sector about the importance of hearing feedback from the people we seek to help and application (and limits) of collecting feedback into the normal course of business	Although grantees are sharing more about their work, our annual media analysis has shown there are fewer instances of relevant “chatter” in the sector overall, and there is slightly less content with alignment around feedback loops. ⁷ Outside of the formal annual review of sector discourse, grantees share there continues to be a positive sense of momentum in the field. Many are seeing growing interest among a broader audience and increasing sophistication in the conversations they have about feedback. This likely includes increased activity this fall, which would not have been captured in our media analysis.
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● **Overall Progress Assessment:** On track (with some reservations about the funder-focused aspects)

Rationale: While it is less clear that the first three years will result in strong changes among funders, there does seem to be positive progress around nonprofit practice and general field momentum. We expect to learn more about the funder-focused changes in the next two years.

Feedback Research

Originally Documented Assumptions

- The value proposition for foundations learning from constituent feedback is in formation and uncharted territory

Evolution of Feedback Research Work

As with Feedback Practice, original grant decisions prioritized actors who would be seen as credible researchers who had proposed more rigorous research. Shared Insight also chose to fully fund fewer studies rather than spread money across a greater number of smaller studies. The original grants to Chapin Hall/i.e. communications for the CalYOUTH project and Feeding America/Urban Institute primarily added to the research base through more of an “action research” approach focused on feedback collection practices. Additional research studies by Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) and REDF/RTI have been added since that time with the goal of supporting research studies that investigate ways feedback can be linked to outcome data. Interestingly, some of the Feedback Practice grantees are also interested in more rigorous internal experiments around feedback practice and linkages with outcomes; there is more overlap and connectivity between these areas of work than originally expected.

⁷ See Media Analysis, July 2015-June 2016 for additional detail.



Progress to Date

To assess actual outputs against planned outputs, we reviewed the 2015 and 2016 grant reports and 2016 interviews with Chapin Hall, IPA, and Urban Institute/Feeding America. REDF/RTI and Center for Effective Philanthropy were both funded later in 2016 and will submit their first reports in 2017.

Planned Outputs	Actual Outputs
<p>X research studies will be conducted that identify how feedback data may be best collected</p> <p>X research studies will be conducted that investigate ways feedback from the people we seek to help can be linked to rigorous outcome measurement such that we can highlight perceptual data as a leading indicator in different contexts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two research grants have been made to better understand how to collect high quality data from different populations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 169 foster youth have been surveyed for the <i>CalYOUTH in the Loop</i> study. – 1,242 food bank clients have been surveyed across two sites by Feeding America and Urban Institute. • Two research grants have been made to better understand the link between perceptual feedback and outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – IPA is incorporating feedback questions and research into seven existing studies. As of 12/1, they had completed data collection with 402 participants for one study and had three studies in process. These are “endline” studies so will be looking back retrospectively at the extent that feedback is linked to outcomes. – REDF/RTI will be incorporating perceptual feedback into their Social Innovation Fund work with opportunity youth. • Center for Effective Philanthropy recently received a grant to examine (1) which aspects of foundation/grantee interaction best predict whether grantees think funders understand their beneficiaries needs, (2) whether grantees think that funders prioritize their funding around their understanding of beneficiary needs, and (3) how the perceptions a grantee has of their foundation's understanding of its intended beneficiaries' needs factors into the overall strength of relationship a grantee has with a foundation.

Planned Short-Term Outcomes	Lessons/Observations
<p>Publication of early results of piloted approaches are distributed, consumed and debated in the sector</p>	<p>Chapin Hall has provided tailored communications through gatherings (briefings, roundtables, conferences, events) with policy makers and practice leaders at the state and local level. Urban Institute is distributing its findings throughout the Feeding America network. IPA and REDF/RTI are too early in their work to share findings.</p>



Progress Assessment: Slightly Off Track, Trending Up⁸

Rationale: With the addition of the REDF/RTI project, the two areas of research inquiry should be well-covered. While the work is underway in all cases, most will just complete their final reports by the end of 2017, meaning little to no consumption and debate can occur. REDF/RTI's SIF grant products will not be finalized until 2020-21, and they have indicated they likely will request a no-cost extension.

Foundation Listening and Sharing (formerly called “Foundation Openness”)

Originally Documented Assumptions

- Philanthropy has historically resisted change
- The value proposition for foundations learning from constituent feedback is in formation and uncharted territory
- Philanthropic infrastructure organizations may see this as a competing effort that diverts resources rather than adds to the pie

Evolution of Foundation Listening and Sharing Work

Increasing the extent to which foundations *listen* to others, especially the people they seek to help, responding to their expressed interests, and *usefully sharing* what they are doing, how they do it, and what they are learning are integral aspects of how Shared Insight believes philanthropy will increase effectiveness.

The original open RFP in 2014 resulted in a fragmented set of proposals. Shared Insight chose to fund the highest scoring proposals focused on practice change through various modes (e.g., research, videos, open licensing work) with the knowledge that, “No one of these five grants alone would be likely to change the field, but taken together, we hope they become an influential constellation to help shift the culture and norms around foundation openness.”⁹ It is not clear that the set of grants had an effect on the sector beyond the direct outcomes accruing from their individual efforts. Of the five original grants, two grants were completed at the end of 2015, and three were completed at the end of 2016. There was also an early and implicit assumption that, due to other efforts in the sector that focus on transparency, there was less need for Shared Insight to focus on the basic principles and need for foundation transparency, something that these early grantees have not experienced.

Since the first round of grants, there have been efforts by a Shared Insight funders workgroup to more clearly define this body of work, including site visits and conversations with sector infrastructure groups, the development of new frameworks to better describe openness, and the issuance of the second-round RFP in early 2016, informed by a first round research grant to CEP on foundation transparency and what nonprofits want to know about foundations. Ten new grants were made in this area in July 2016 and cluster into a few broad types: Research/Evaluation (First Nations, CEP, Women’s Funding Network); Convenings/Trainings (FSG, Exponent, GEO, Forum of Regional Association of Grantmakers, NCFP); and Platforms/Tools (GuideStar, Foundation Center, NCFP). Because these grants are just underway, there are no data yet on their lessons or progress to include in our assessment. In addition, the name for this body of work has shifted over time, from “Support” on the original theory of change, to “Openness” to “Foundation

⁸ Last year we rated this area “on track” due to the addition of the IPA grant. Our downgraded assessment this year accounts for new information about the timeline within which results from these new grants will likely be available.

⁹ November 2014 meeting notes



Sharing and Listening” on the most recent version of the theory of change to better describe the intent around this body of work.

Progress to Date

Data from the following sources was used to assess progress: grantee reports in 2015 and 2016, as well as interviews in 2016 (Center for Effective Philanthropy, Exponent Philanthropy and Foundation Center¹⁰) and grantee reports in 2015 only (Creative Commons, GiveWell).

Planned Outputs	Actual Outputs
Funded organizations innovatively broaden and/or deepen their existing efforts for increasing one- and two-way openness in service of effectiveness	<p>12 organizations have been funded over two rounds to create new efforts to increase openness in service of effectiveness.</p> <p>From the original five grantees, the following have been created:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 “Philanthropy Lessons” videos; campaign website. Videos cumulatively received more than 300,000 views, though less than 20 additional stories were captured through the campaign site. • 8 new “cause” write-ups [Open Philanthropy Project, 2015] • 1 set of principles for Open Knowledge Sharing through IssueLab as well as blog posts, webinars, hosted conversations, and a peer-reviewed article (2015) • 1 report on Transparency released by CEP. Dissemination included promoting findings through two speaking engagements, 10 blog posts, and 14 press mentions.

Planned Short-Term Outcomes	Lessons/Observations
<p>Increased visibility of the benefits of foundation openness</p> <p>Greater awareness about and prioritization of openness in foundations</p> <p>More systems and supports in service of foundation openness</p>	<p>Production of Exponent’s videos and CEP’s research did create some increased visibility related to this work in the past two years. However, in interviews this fall with active grantees, all expressed that while there is not active pushback in the field, a crowded “marketplace” of ideas has limited uptake of the organizations’ work. This included fewer report downloads and webinar registrants for CEP, low uptake on the interactive side of Exponent’s Philanthropy Lessons campaign, and a lower-than-expected number of foundations adopting the suite of open knowledge practices.</p> <p>There is also still some challenge in changing practice since foundations often see themselves as “unique,” so efforts to change practice can feel “custom” and “one-off”. To date, only a small number of foundations are known to have changed transparency practice as a result of Shared Insight’s funding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 foundations adopted new open licensing policies with the support of Creative Commons, out of 16 reached in 2015¹¹

¹⁰ Foundation Center received an extension on its grant report deadline; 2016 data are not included in our analysis.

¹¹ In January 2016, Creative Commons announced that The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation had awarded them an unrestricted multi-year grant for \$10 million. Because of this support, Shared Insight did not re-fund Creative Commons.



- 1 foundation is working on a comprehensive open knowledge strategy with IssueLab (as reported from 2015, see footnote)

Note: It is harder to know the impact of CEP's research and Exponent's videos based on available data. This may under-report some of the potential outcomes from funded work.

Progress Assessment: Slightly Off Track, Trending Up

Rationale: The cumulative results from the previously funded work for Foundation Listening and Sharing continue to be a mixed bag. The research and videos have resulted in some increases in visibility and potentially awareness, but there's little evidence across all funded efforts about changes in prioritization of listening and sharing among foundations.

While too soon to include in key outputs or contribution towards outcomes, early conversations with the new grantees in this area show a broader scope and reach with a more coherent approach to supporting foundation listening and sharing.

Conclusion

As expected within an emergent strategy, much has been learned since we wrote a similar report a year ago, and Shared Insight has continued to experiment and evolve its work across all three primary areas. New grants and initiatives (i.e. new grants in Research and Foundation Listening and Sharing, as well as the launching of L4G) have been additive to the overall trajectory of progress. There is much to celebrate around the progress on key outputs across areas and grantees. It is also worth acknowledging that fully understanding the success of the funded work will be better understood with more time for grants to be completed and the full effect of grantee and Shared Insight activities to be realized. We look forward to delving more deeply into how the field and sector is evolving relative to feedback practice and foundation sharing and listening in our follow-up evaluation this summer/fall.

Appendix A: Data Sources

Grantee	2015 Grant Report	2016 Grant Report	2016 Grantee Interview
<i>Practice</i>			
Center for Employment Opportunities	X	X	X
Habitat for Humanity International	X	X	X
LIFT	X	X	X
<i>Infrastructure</i>			
Center for Effective Philanthropy, YouthTruth	X	X	X
Feedback Labs	X	X	X
Global Giving	X	X	X
Keystone Accountability	X	X	X
National Center for Civic Innovation			
<i>Foundation Listening and Sharing</i>			
Center for Effective Philanthropy	X	X	X
Creative Commons	X		
Exponent Philanthropy	X	X	X
Foundation Center	X		X
GiveWell	X		
First Nations Development Institute			
Forum of Regional Association of Grantmakers			
FSG			
Grantmakers for Effective Organizations			
GuideStar			
National Center for Family Philanthropy			
Women's Funding Network			
<i>Research</i>			
Chapin Hall/i.e. communications/CalYOUTH	X	X	X
Innovations for Poverty Action		X	X
Urban Institute/Feeding America	X	X	X
Center for Effective Philanthropy			
REDF/RTI			

Organizations with gray-shaded rows were not included in this assessment due to timing. Other sources include: 2015-16 Media Analysis; 2016 Grantee Interview Summary; L4G evaluation products; Grantee write-ups; Year in Numbers; Dayspring Website Metrics, and core funder meeting materials. Data available through January 31, 2017 were considered.