

Listen4Good

Online Beta: Midpoint Assessment

November 2020

Introduction

Listen4Good (L4G) was designed as a capacity-building program to help nonprofits build sustainable, high-quality, client-focused feedback loops that lead to meaningful change. At its core, L4G is designed to improve participating organizations' ability to collect, interpret, and use high-quality feedback from clients by using a five-step process (Figure 1). After developing a high-touch coaching model, L4G is experimenting with different ways of supporting nonprofits through the full feedback cycle with less customized support to reach a greater scale of nonprofits. Table 1 summarizes the main characteristics of different cohorts as analyzed in this report.

To better understand what the experience and outcomes would be with a low-touch support model, L4G created a web app, online resources, and other supports, and solicited applications for the Online Beta cohort. Online Beta organizations received a particularly "extreme" version of L4G: access to the interactive web app with push notifications; extremely limited ad hoc support; access to a peer community;¹ and a small stipend (\$5,000) to promote ongoing participation in L4G, evaluation, and feedback activities. The Online Beta cohort also dealt with more complex contextual factors than prior cohorts, with the COVID-19 pandemic and social unrest in response to racial injustice impacting organizations, their staff, and the people they seek to help.

¹ The peer community rolled out after the completion of this midpoint survey.

This memo begins by summarizing findings about the Online Beta cohort’s progress, compares their progress to earlier co-funded cohorts’, and offers observations based on our analysis. While prior evaluations have found that the co-funded cohorts successfully achieved desired outcomes, this report looks at how organizations participating in the Online Beta cohort, the least-supported iteration of the model, fare on outcomes compared to the co-funded cohorts halfway through their engagement with L4G.² For this comparison, we clustered organizations into three groups according to the types of supports they received from L4G (Table 1).

Figure 1 | L4G steps

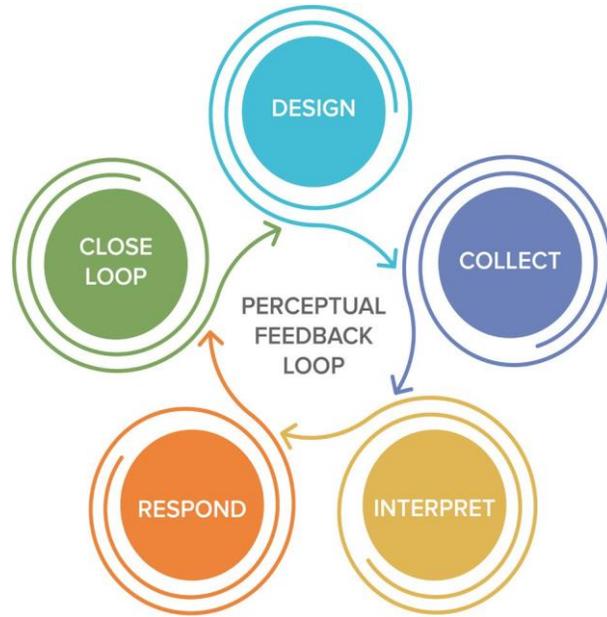


Table 1 | Characteristics of L4G cohorts

	No. of grantees	Grant terms	Grant amount	Model description
Initial Co-funded cohorts	Cohort <i>N</i> : 158 Survey <i>n</i> : 124 ³	18–24 months	\$45,000–\$60,000	1:1 coaching, support materials, continuously improved website and webinar offerings
2018 round 2	Cohort <i>N</i> : 58 Survey <i>n</i> : 43	24 months (extended from 18 due to COVID-19)	\$30,000	1:1 coaching and access to web app

² As of this writing, L4G continues to experiment with the variables of amount of financial and customized/personal supports. Understanding how these affect participation, follow-through in the feedback cycle, quality, and outcomes will continue to be explored in the next few years.

³ The sample size (*n*) might vary from question to question.

2019 Online Beta	Cohort <i>N</i> : 185 Survey <i>n</i> : 132	SurveyMonkey access for 18 months	\$5,000 (honorarium)	Primarily access to web app; extremely limited 1:1 assistance; no coaching
-------------------------	--	-----------------------------------	----------------------	--

Key Takeaways

1. Overall, we found that Online Beta organizations are progressing more slowly than prior cohorts, though COVID-19 also likely impacted feedback work.
2. Online Beta organizations report significantly increased ability to conduct feedback work, which is comparable to past cohorts.
3. Online Beta organizations that progress through the feedback cycle report higher organizational impact than prior cohorts and similar results in terms of learning from and responding to feedback.
4. Despite these promising signs of outcomes by participating organizations, this cohort reports a significantly lower Net Promoter Score (NPS) than prior cohorts.
5. This version of a more scalable model can clearly work for some organizations, even in a challenging external context. More needs to be learned about which organizations don't progress or who is not served well by this version of L4G.

Methods

ORS Impact has surveyed participating organizations from all L4G cohorts, including the Online Beta, halfway and at the end of their L4G cycle, to explore their progress and experience. To assess the extent to which L4G helps organizations achieve expected outcomes, surveys include five key indicators, among other items, that are comparable across cohorts and measure the extent to which organizations

- Improve their ability to conduct high-quality feedback loops
- Gain insights about their clients' needs and preferences
- Make changes responding to clients' feedback
- Experience organizational changes, such as culture, commitment, and sense of program effectiveness

- Are likely to recommend L4G to other nonprofits using the NPS

In addition to these items, we have included indicators of progress, web app use, and web app usefulness, in this report. There are two other methodological notes to raise:

1. ORS Impact's surveys have maintained a core set of questions over time to ensure comparability, but some elements have shifted in response to context. We have included information on each comparison to convey which cohorts we are able to compare in each section given the available data.
2. This survey was conducted 9 months after the Online Beta began, namely halfway through their L4G engagement. Co-funded cohorts had 24-month grant periods, so our midpoint surveys occurred at 12 months. We treat these periods as comparable given that they both refer to the midpoint through L4G engagement.

Online Beta: Midpoint Progress and Outcomes

This section summarizes the Online Beta cohort's midpoint results related to their progress through the L4G cycle and five key outcome measures summarized in Figures 3 through 8.

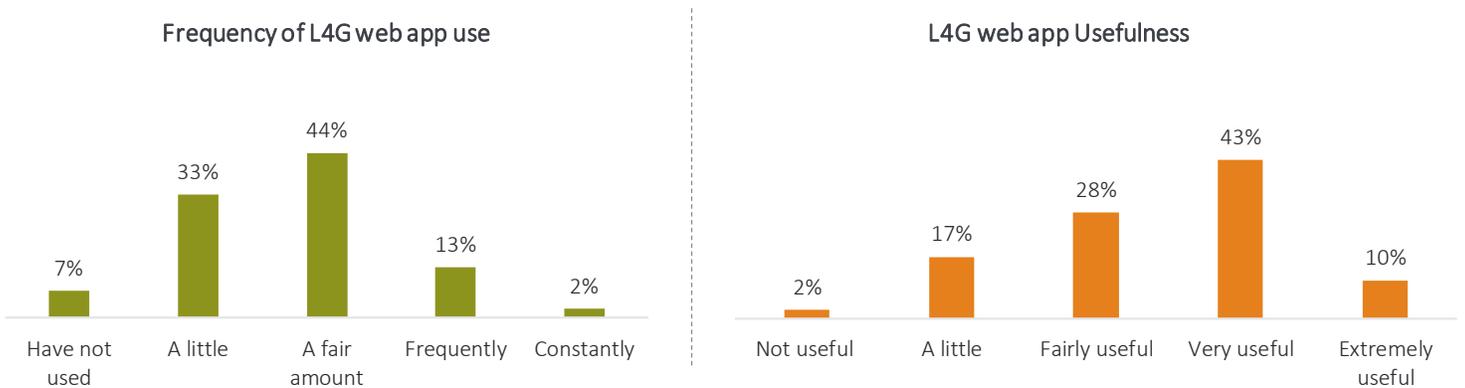
Progress through L4G Steps and L4G Web Use

The Online Beta cohort started in late July 2019 with 185 organizations, and as of October 2020, L4G's administrative data showed that about 20% never started the feedback process. Meanwhile, among the 132 survey respondents, the proportion of organizations moving through the L4G steps declines steadily from step to step, with less than half responding to feedback (Step 4) halfway through their L4G engagement (Figure 3). COVID-19 likely impacted organizations' ability to progress through L4G steps, as survey data shows that COVID-19 negatively affected more than two thirds of organizations' feedback work: 39.4% have stopped but plan to resume their surveying, 25.8% reduced their survey collection, and 1.5% have stopped permanently. However, 18.2% of organizations report that they maintained their feedback plans, and 15.2% increased their efforts to collect feedback from clients during the pandemic.

L4G administrative data is also sobering and offers more evidence of COVID-19's impact: the proportion of organizations reaching Steps 3 through 5 (Analyze, Respond, and Close the Loop) rose steadily before March 2020 and flattened thereafter. Moreover, there is a noticeable decline in the proportion of organizations progressing to any step after March. In a recent internal survey, 47 out of 78 respondents indicated that COVID-19 was one of the reasons for their recent inactivity (e.g., programming cancelled or suspended, program delivery shifted or delayed so surveying later, etc.).

We further explored the extent to which Online Beta organizations used the L4G web app and how useful they have found it so far (Figure 2). Overall, 60% of organizations report using the web app at least a fair amount. However, one third have used it a little, and 7% have not used it at all since signing up. Regarding usefulness, more than half (53%) report that it has been very or extremely useful, while 19% report that it has not been that useful. Our analysis shows a significant correlation between these variables—the more organizations use the web app, the more likely they are to report high usefulness.

Figure 2 | Reported use and usefulness of the L4G web app



Organizational Outcome Measures

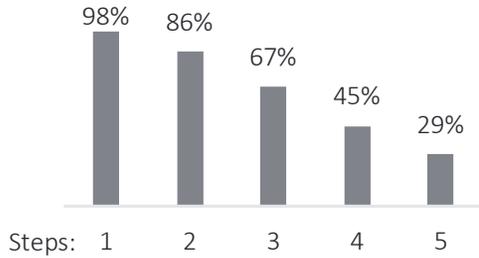
Online Beta organizations' self-reported ability to perform high-quality feedback loops increased from 2.8 to 3.9 on a 5-point scale from before L4G to the midpoint assessment (Figure 4). Meanwhile, 62.1% reported gaining insights in at least one area of their work (Figure 5), and 40.9% reported having made or planning to make changes to respond to feedback in at least one area of their work (Figure 6). Moreover, organizations indicated that L4G has had moderate impact on their organization so far (Figure 7). Finally, the NPS for this cohort so far is 42 (lower than prior cohorts) (Figure 8), and we found that for this cohort, the NPS is positively correlated with the following:

- **Web app use:** organizations that use the L4G web app more are more likely to report a higher NPS score.
- **Ability and organizational impact:** organizations with a higher NPS score are more likely to report higher ability and organizational impact scores halfway through their L4G engagement.

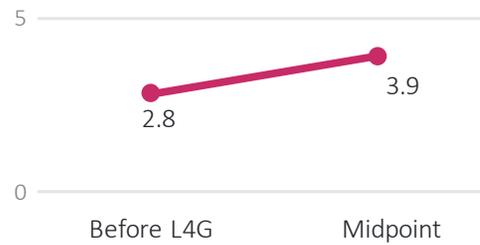
While in this midpoint analysis we focused our analysis on the measures described earlier, our Online Beta survey included additional items designed with the L4G team to assess the extent to which organizations are performing a set of practices associated with high-quality feedback work. Recognizing that how organizations implement feedback loops affects the extent to which and how feedback can advance equity, we included questions about equitable practices in feedback work. For example, these questions relate to translating survey materials, vetting questions with clients when designing the survey, and segmenting data. We have not conducted in-depth analysis of this data yet but will do so upon fielding comparable measures in the cohort's 18-month survey in January 2021. In the meantime, we have shared the data with L4G to inform their support efforts moving forward.

Figures 3–8 | Online Beta performance on key outcome measures

3. Progress through L4G steps



4. Ability for feedback



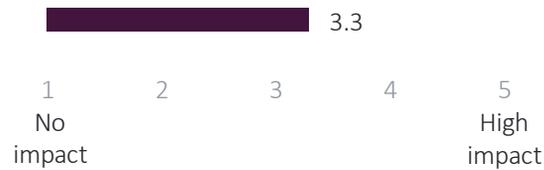
5. Analyzing data



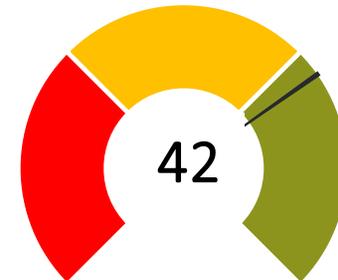
6. Responding to feedback



7. Organizational impact



8. Net Promoter Score



Cross-Cohort Comparison

While prior evaluations have found that the co-funded cohorts successfully achieved desired outcomes, this section looks at how organizations participating in the Online Beta cohort, the least-supported iteration of the model, fare on outcomes compared to the co-funded cohorts.⁴ For this comparison, we clustered organizations into three groups according to the types of supports they received from L4G, as summarized in Table 1 in the introduction.

Progress through L4G Steps

Online Beta organizations are progressing more slowly than prior cohorts.

Our main direct comparison for Online Betas' progress is the first co-funded cohort (2016), as we collected comparable progress data for that cohort. As shown in Figure 9, the rate of progress through the first two steps is high for both cohorts, but progress through data interpretation, response to feedback, and closing the loop are considerably lower for Online Beta organizations. As mentioned earlier, one possible contributing factor is the COVID-19 pandemic, but it is unclear whether it is the only and/or a main factor inhibiting progress.

Figure 9 | Percentage of organizations that complete or are in process in each step by cohort



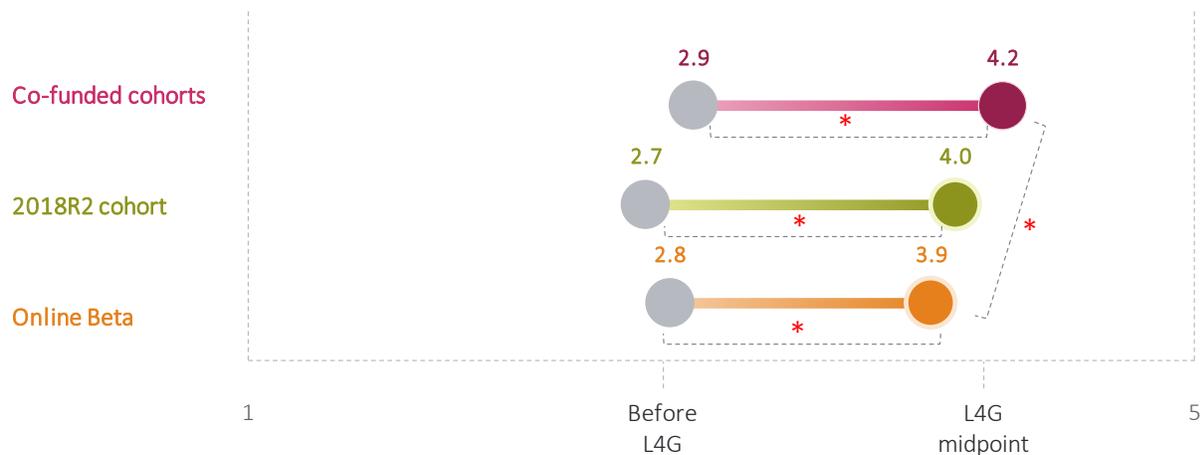
⁴ As of this writing, L4G continues to experiment with the variables of amount of financial and customized/personal supports. Understanding how these affect participation, follow-through in the feedback cycle, quality, and outcomes will continue to be explored in the next few years.

Organizational Outcomes

Online Beta organizations increase their ability to implement high-quality feedback loops but to a lesser extent than the initial co-funded rounds.

To look at capacity to collect high-quality feedback, ORS Impact captures organizations' self-reported ability before L4G and at specific points to conduct specific feedback activities.⁵ As Figure 10 shows, all cohorts report statistically significant increases in average ability scores between before L4G and their midpoint surveys, from around 2.8 to around 4 on a 5-point scale. However, Online Betas' increase to 3.9 is significantly lower than the initial co-funded rounds, who reported an increase to 4.2 on the same 5-point scale. The 2018R2 cohort's score lies between the other two cohorts. When looking at individual ability items, closing the loop and achieving high response rates continue to be lowest items across all cohorts. One noticeable difference is that the Online Beta cohort is the first cohort that did not rate "ability to analyze" as the highest-rated item at the midpoint.

Figure 10 | Increase in ability score from before L4G to halfway through their L4G engagement



* = statistically significant differences

⁵ We ask organizations to report on their ability to do seven items: implement surveys, achieve high response rates, collect useful data, analyze data, interpret the data, use data to improve programs, and close the loop. They report on their own level of ability before they started L4G (retrospectively) and at the point of time of the survey. We look at ratings of the individual items and a summary scale score across all items, which is reported in Figure 10.

Overall, a lower proportion of Online Beta organizations are gaining insights; however, once they reach Step 3 (Data Analysis), Online Beta organizations successfully learn from clients’ feedback.

In addition to improving organizations’ ability to collect high-quality feedback, L4G endeavors to help organizations gain insights from that feedback about key areas of their work.⁶ For this analysis, we established two thresholds for the extent to which organizations were gaining insights:

- **Gaining any insights:** measures whether organizations reported gaining any insights at all (i.e., at least “a few new insights” in at least one area of work)
- **Gaining many insights:** measures whether organizations are getting more than a few insights (i.e., selected “quite a few” or “a lot” for at least one area of work)

As Table 2 shows, as a full cohort, significantly fewer Online Beta organizations had “any” or “many” insights compared to other cohorts at the midpoint. This is not surprising given that only two thirds (67%) of organizations had progressed to Step 3 (Data Analysis) at the time of the survey. Collecting this data on progress through steps allowed us to analyze only organizations that had completed or were in progress Step 3. This second analysis shows that while Online Beta organizations face challenges progressing through the steps, once they reach Step 3, most organizations (93.2%) are able to learn and gain insights from the work. While neither the Online Beta “full cohort,” nor the “adjusted” cohort comparisons are perfect comparisons to prior co-funded cohorts, given how questions were sequenced in the surveys, both are helpful directionally in understanding the dynamics at play within the Online Beta cohort.

Table 2 | Proportion of organizations reporting insights gained by cohort

Cohort	% reporting <i>any</i> insights	% reporting <i>many</i> insights
Full Online Beta cohort (n = 132)	62.1%	57.4%
Adjusted Online Beta cohort (n = 88, only those who reached Step 3)	100%	79.5%
Co-funded (n = 124)	100%	83.9%
2018R2 (n = 43)	97.7%	83.7%

⁶ We asked organizations about insights gained in client needs; client experiences; staff-client interactions; trouble spots; and differences in experiences among client sub-groups. L4G organizations report on the number of insights they get in each of these areas.

Overall, a lower proportion of Online Beta organizations are making changes, but once organizations reach Step 4 (Respond to Feedback), most make or plan to make changes in response to feedback.

For feedback to be impactful, organizations must gain insights and then do something with that new knowledge. To assess the extent to which organizations are making changes in response to client feedback, we asked organizations if they had already and/or if they planned to make changes in four areas of their work: current programming, operations, client-staff interactions, and offering new services.⁷

Our analysis shows that as a cohort, slightly less than a third (27.3%) reported making changes in their midpoint survey, while an additional 13% indicated plans to make changes (Table 3). While these figures lag behind prior cohorts, data suggests a similar pattern to what we found with gaining insights. Namely, when analyzing these data only for organizations that had completed or were in progress in Step 4 (Responding to Feedback), almost two thirds (64.3%) reported making changes, and an additional 32% indicated planning to make changes.

Table 3 | Proportion of organizations reporting changes made or planned by cohort

Cohort	% reporting changes in at least one area of work	% reporting changes made and/or planned in at least one area of work
Full Online Beta cohort (n = 132)	27.3%	40.9%
Adjusted Online Beta cohort (n = 56, only those who reached Step)	64.3%	96.4%
Co-funded (n = 116)	62.9%	99.1%
2018R2 (n = 35)	37.1% ⁸	100%

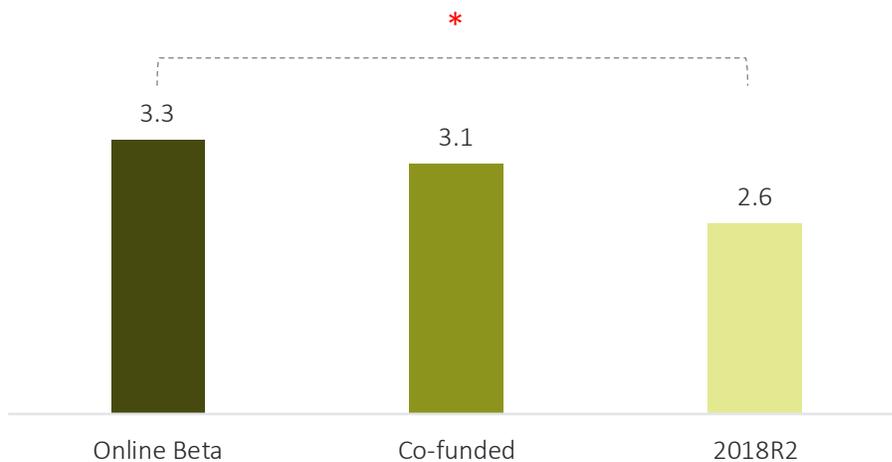
⁷ For this analysis, we calculated the percentage of organizations that reported making changes in at least one of the four areas mentioned. The data should be interpreted as the percentage of organizations that made or planned to make changes in at least one area of their work halfway through their L4G engagement.

⁸ There is a statistically significant difference when comparing the co-funded rounds, the 2018R2, and the Online Beta cohorts. The Chi Square test compares all three cohorts at once, but It is likely that the 2018R2 cohort is significantly lower than the others given the large difference in the percentages presented in the table.

Online Beta organizations report comparable or higher levels of organizational impact than prior cohorts.

L4G has seen and anticipates that engaging in ongoing, high-quality feedback will not only lead to changes for clients or constituents but also that there are changes that accrue to the organizations, including impacts on decision-making, organizational culture, organizational values, interactions with clients, and perceptions of program effectiveness. Overall, the Online Beta organizations rated organizational impact higher than all co-funded cohorts, and the difference was significantly higher than the 2018R2 co-funded cohort (Figure 11).⁹ This is somewhat surprising halfway through L4G engagement, given the slower pace of progress for Online Beta organizations, as we might expect organizational changes to be more likely to occur further along in the process, as organizations spend more time implementing high-quality feedback. One hypothesis is that even initial engagement in feedback work has the potential to start different conversations and drive organizational change, but it is unclear what influenced these ratings.

Figure 11 | Organizational impact scale rating by cohort



* = statistically significant difference

⁹ Co-funded cohorts included here are 2017 and 2018R1, as the 2016 cohort did not receive this question in their halfway survey.

L4G Experience

Online Beta organizations report lower ratings regarding their L4G experience than co-funded cohorts, and these ratings are related to the extent to which organizations use the L4G web app.

To gain an overall assessment of how the L4G process is going for organizations, we asked them to rate how each of the five feedback steps is going. Overall, the Online Beta cohort rated all steps slightly lower than the 2018R1¹⁰ and 2018R2 cohorts, but the difference was only statistically significant for Step 1 (Survey Design). Nevertheless, the ratings from Online Beta organizations are still generally the “well” level, ranging from 3.76 to 4.09 on a 5-point scale.

In addition, Online Beta organizations reported a significantly lower NPS compared to past co-funded cohorts (Table 5).

Table 5 | Net promoter score by cohort

	NPS	% detractors	% passives	% promoters
Online Beta (<i>n</i> = 129)	42*	14.70%	28.70%	56.60%
Co-funded (<i>n</i> = 84) ¹¹	71	6.00%	16.70%	77.40%
2018R2 (<i>n</i> = 43)	79	4.70%	11.60%	83.7%

* = statistically significant differences

Evaluator Observations

1. **COVID-19 impacted organizations’ work and the comparability of outcomes to other cohorts.** As we realized the deep implications COVID-19 would have, specifically for L4G’s nonprofit partners and the people they seek to help, we understood that the pandemic context would affect organizations’ outcomes during this time. While we revisited survey timelines and adjusted our

¹⁰ We did not ask this question in the midpoint survey for the 2016 and 2017 cohorts.

¹¹ Co-funded cohorts included here are 2017 and 2018R1, as the 2016 cohort did not receive this question in their halfway survey.

protocol to include measures that would help understand the pandemic's effects summarized in this brief, this context did affect the comparability of our data across cohorts. The Online Beta cohort was the first cohort to implement L4G's high-quality feedback cycle without personalized coaching, and they did so during an unprecedented global pandemic that upended every aspect of society. We do not have comparable data for this, but we have attempted to lay out results that we do have within that broader context. In the next few months, we will obtain 18-month data from the Online Beta cohort. Data from their entire engagement with L4G will provide insights into how organizations continued to progress over time, albeit with continued effects from the pandemic, social uprisings, and a generally complex environment that is difficult to account for.

2. **The low-touch model is working for some.** According to these interim findings, organizations that stick through the L4G process and advance to later steps successfully learn from and respond to client feedback. For the two thirds of organizations that had reached Step 3 and slightly less than half who had reached Step 4 at the time of our data collection, the web app seems to be working. Data on increased ability, insights gained, changes made, and organizational impact suggest that the low-touch model can work, particularly for organizations that use the web app with relative frequency. These findings suggest that ensuring that organizations are using the web app and progressing through the steps are key aspects for an online-based L4G platform to reach comparable outcomes as a coach-based option. L4G has recognized this and is working on an Online+ approach that combines the web app with targeted coaching at high-leverage points during the L4G process to increase the likelihood of organizations continuing the process.
3. **But not surprisingly, this lightest-touch approach doesn't work for all, which has equity, diversity, and inclusion implications for nonprofit constituents and the nonprofit field itself.** For the 20% of organizations that never started the process and the one third who had not yet reached Step 3, the web app is not working so well. This finding has implications for Shared Insight's EDI commitment. We know from other field research that organizations led by people of color are most often underfunded and under supported philanthropically. L4G and Shared Insight would not want to further entrench those inequities as the feedback work is further scaled. We don't have the data to understand which types of organizations are not moving through, but for feedback to be equitably accessible to diverse organizations, Shared Insight may need to consider how to provide different kinds of on-ramps or supports. Less prepared organizations can also result in less heard voices, as clients don't experience the benefits of high-quality feedback practices if they are involved with organizations that don't move through the L4G process. These individuals and communities still represent voices least heard, and if the organization they engage with is not as prepared to learn from, act on feedback, or close the loop with them, feedback practice might miss the opportunity to be more transformative for those organizations and their clients.

4. **Shared Insight and L4G might need to consider and decide what constitutes adequate progress with new models and a growing number of organizations.** We have now measured organizational outcome data for five different cohorts. The data suggests growth on multiple fronts, but we do not have set thresholds of what constitutes enough or adequate growth over time. What does success look like? How many organizations or what proportion of a cohort should complete a feedback cycle? Who should complete it and with what levels of outcome attainment for Shared Insight and L4G to consider them successful? Does success look the same for different models?

Conclusion

L4G is at an exciting and complex juncture. Balancing a high-touch model that effectively supports small numbers of organizations through high-quality feedback loops with the prospect of reaching a larger number of organizations through a more streamlined model is delicate. While the good news that the web app is working and a majority of organizations have found it useful in supporting their feedback journey is encouraging, elements of its design are still in development. Through continuous experiments, such as Online+, L4G is looking to maximize learnings to hit the sweet spot of online support and coaching moving forward so that more organizations can systematically listen to and respond to the people they seek to help.