Feedback Sustainability

Feedback Practice One Year After Listen4Good

Introduction

ORS Impact surveyed the 2017 and 2018 cohorts one year after the end of their participation in Listen4Good (L4G) to learn about the extent to which grantees continue implementing high-quality feedback loops and what that work looked like after their grant period.

These cohorts were awarded two-year grants, ending in the fall and winter of 2019, and received similar technical assistance support, including L4G coaching and various webinar offerings. The 2017 cohort was composed of 66 grantees, and the 2018 cohort was composed of 46 grantees; response rates were 76% and 72% respectively.[1] Our surveys were conducted in September 2020 and January 2021, so we acknowledge that this data collection occurred during turbulent times—the COVID-19 pandemic, social uprisings, and other events. The challenging context influenced the findings in this report.

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[1] This report reflects the findings of grantees who participated in the survey and does not reflect the experience of all the grantees within the cohorts. As such, we acknowledge that the reported findings could be influenced by selection bias—that is, those who chose to answer our survey might not represent the experience of the entire cohort.
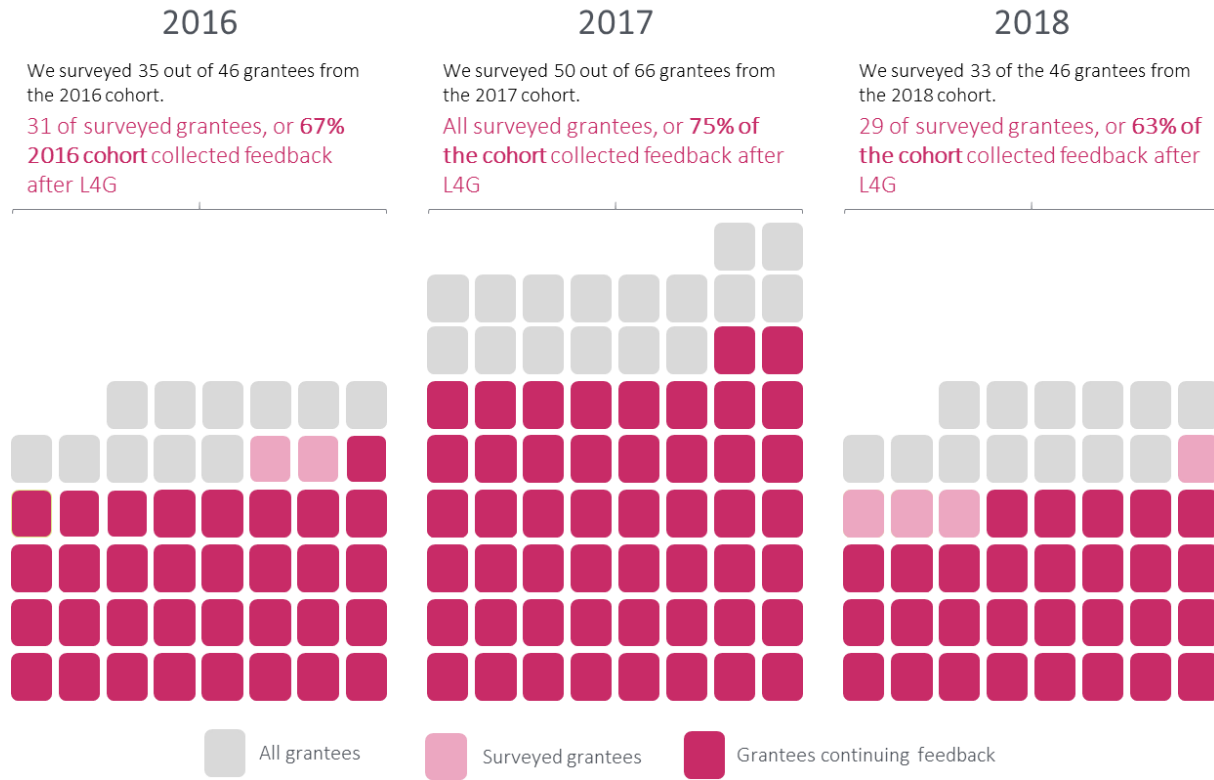
Key Findings

A majority of 2017 and 2018 grantees continued to collect feedback after their L4G grant. The COVID-19 pandemic affected feedback work in different ways, but no organization stopped collecting feedback indefinitely, signaling that feedback work is useful even in challenging times.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented significant challenges for individuals and organizations, especially those providing services and supports to communities. As such, we wanted to learn about the extent to which grantees had continued their feedback work right after their L4G grant and how the work changed with the pandemic.

When asked about the extent to which both cohorts continued feedback work *before* the pandemic started, 50 out of the 66 grantees from 2017 and 29 out of the 46 grantees from 2018 reported continuing feedback on some level.[2] This means that out of the total number of 2017 and 2018 grantees, **at least 76% of 2017 grantees and 63% of 2018 grantees reported collecting feedback after L4G compared to *at least* 67% of 2016 grantees.** While we invited all grantees to complete this survey and provided incentives to those who did, some did not respond. Therefore, we cannot confidently say whether those additional organizations are continuing or not. Hence, we report that **"at least"** a certain percentage of organizations continue feedback—those from whom we have good data to inform our conclusions and learning. Figure 1 shows the minimum number of grantees, by cohort, from the *total cohort sample* who reported continuing feedback after L4G.

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[2] The survey question asked grantees to select whether they continued collecting feedback more frequently, with the same frequency, with less frequency, or not at all a year after L4G and before the pandemic began. We added the percentages of grantees who continued feedback with more frequency, the same frequency, and less frequency as "continuing any level of feedback." We treated the 2016 cohort feedback percentage the same way.
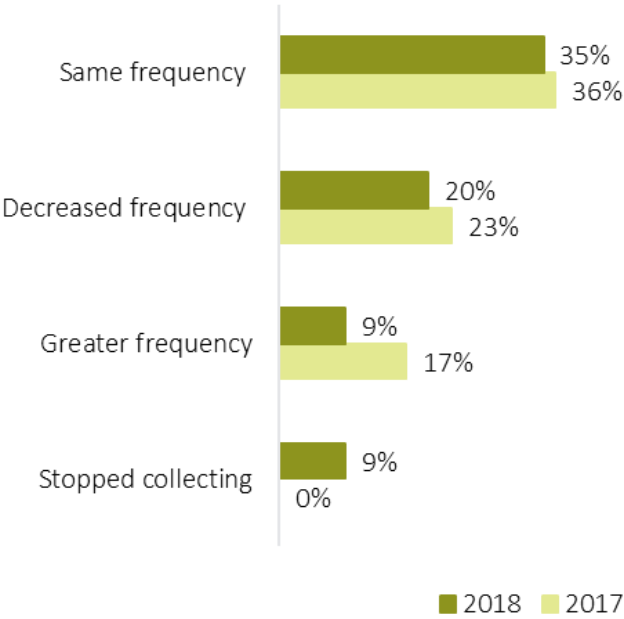
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Figure 1 | Number of Grantees Collecting Feedback After L4G.

2016

We surveyed 35 out of 46 grantees from the 2016 cohort.
31 of surveyed grantees, or **67% 2016 cohort** collected feedback after L4G

2017

We surveyed 50 out of 66 grantees from the 2017 cohort.
All surveyed grantees, or **75% of the cohort** collected feedback after L4G

2018

We surveyed 33 of the 46 grantees from the 2018 cohort.
29 of surveyed grantees, or **63% of the cohort** collected feedback after L4G

All grantees   Surveyed grantees   Grantees continuing feedback

When considering the intensity of feedback practices among the eighty-three 2017 and 2018 grantees who completed our survey, we learned that 53% of 2017 grantees continued collecting feedback with **at least the same level of frequency** as during L4G, compared to 44% of 2018 grantees.[3] Only 9% of 2018 grantees stopped collecting feedback after the end of their grant period, and no 2017 grantees stopped collecting feedback. Figure 2 shows the percentage of grantees from our *surveyed sample* who reported collecting feedback after L4G.

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[3] We added the percentages, per cohort, of grantees collecting feedback at the same frequency and more frequently.
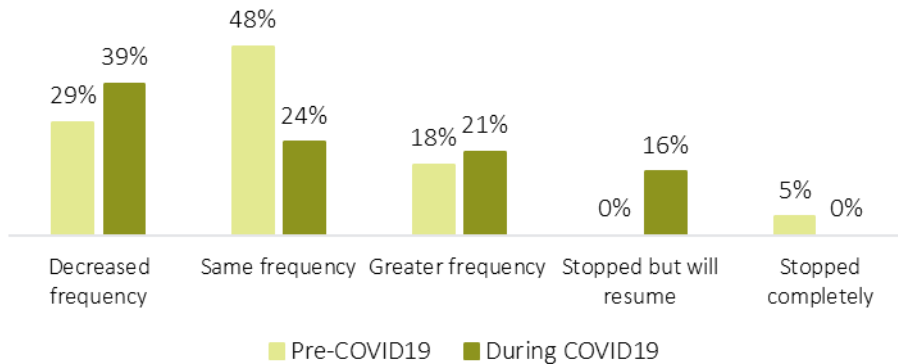
Figure 2 | Percentage of 2017 and 2018 Grantees Collecting Feedback After L4G.

Unsuprisingly, the pandemic decreased feedback work, but it did not stop it. To understand the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on feedback work, we combined the data from both cohorts and Figure 3 combines data from the 2017 and 2018 cohorts to show the effect of the pandemic on grantees' ability to collect feedback. Thirty-nine percent of 2017 and 2018 grantees reduced their frequency of feedback work compared to 29% of grantees pre-COVID-19,[4] and 16% of grantees stopped their feedback work during the pandemic but planned to resume when the COVID-19 situation improves. Notably, about one fifth of grantees reported increasing their feedback efforts during the pandemic. This is a surprising finding considering the hypothesis that COVID-19 would have made organizations stop collecting feedback to attend to urgent client needs. These findings show that feedback practice is sustainable and able to withstand contextual challenges, including a global pandemic.

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[4] More than half of 2018 grantees (57%) reduced their feedback efforts compared to 2017 grantees (28%).

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Figure 3 | Effects of COVID-19 on Feedback Practice.

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Almost all organizations are engaging high- and medium-quality practices in data collection and data analysis, while high-quality practices are less common in responding to data and closing the loop. This pattern also affects high-quality practices meant to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion.
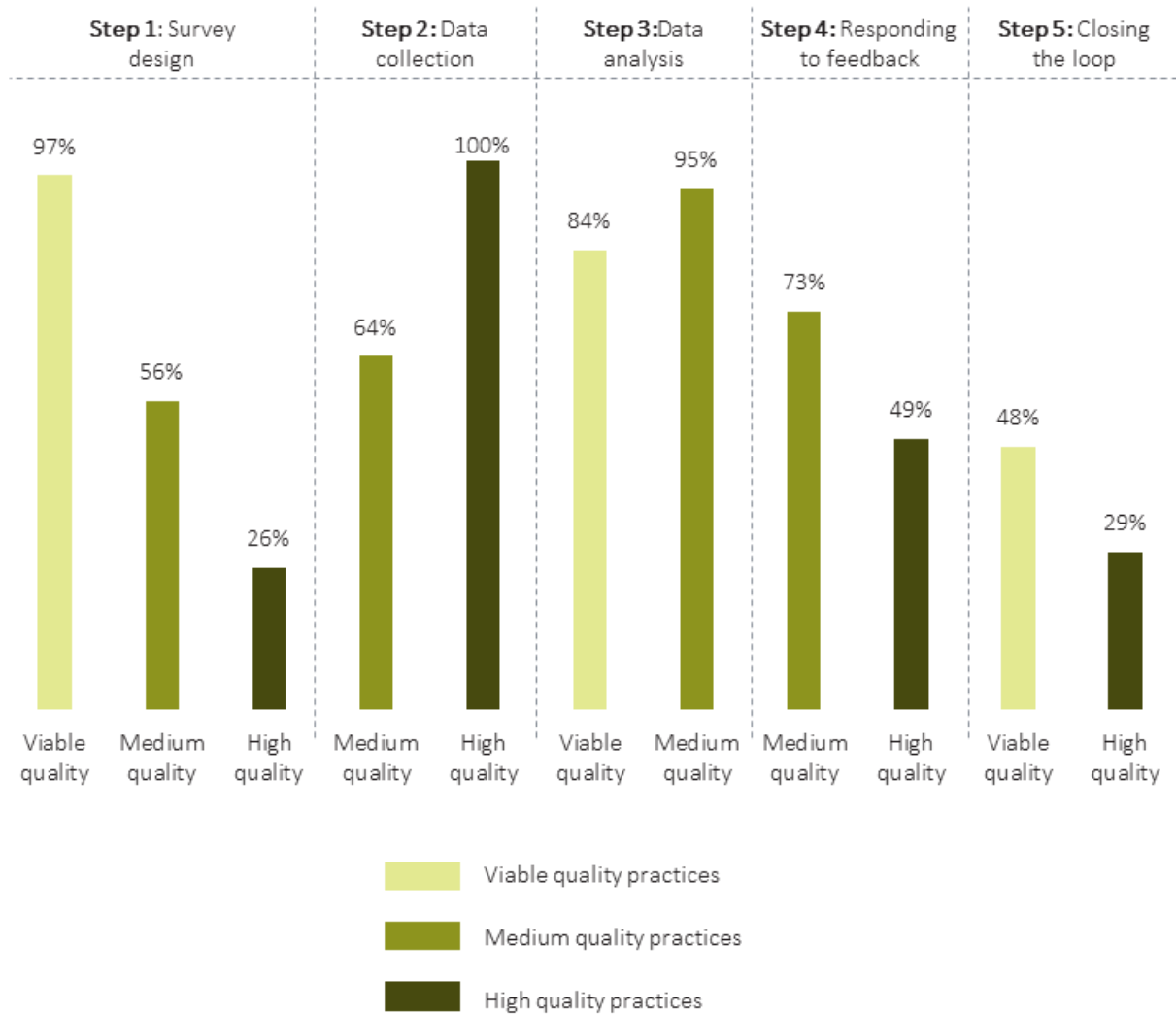
In addition to exploring to what extent organizations continued collecting feedback after L4G, we asked grantees about the extent to which they continued using key practices that L4G has implemented and standardized to ensure *high-quality* feedback. As part of its work to develop standards of practice in the feedback field, L4G is still working on how to assess high-quality implementation across the entire feedback loop. However, as a stepping stone to that methodology, L4G identified practices as signs of "viable," "medium," or "high" quality. We used these categories and combined both cohorts to analyze survey data.

Figure 4 shows the percentage of organizations that reported performing viable, medium, and high-quality practices at least most of the time, per L4G step. We found the following:

- **Almost all organizations are engaging high- and medium-quality practices in Steps 2 and 3: data collection and data analysis.** Our hypothesis was that most organizations would engage in viable-quality practices, and the proportion of organizations engaging in medium- and high-quality practices would decrease gradually. Nevertheless, medium- and high-quality practices have very high uptake in these two steps.
- **Responding to data and closing the loop continue to be the most difficult steps for organizations.** In our surveys during the L4G grant periods, organizations often indicated that closing the loop was the most difficult step. This pattern continues, and Step 4 is the next most difficult. Steps 1 through 3 had at least one type of practice that all or almost all organizations were performing most of the time or always, while the latter two steps in the process did not. It is important to note that our analysis treats all "high quality" practices equally; however, some practices

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particularly in the latter steps require more effort from nonprofit staff so we might not expect the same level of uptake.

Figure 4 | Percentage of Viable, Medium, and High-Quality Practices Per L4G Step[5].

- **Most organizations are engaging in practices that advance equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in data collection and analysis but less so in other steps of the feedback loop.** There are specific practices within each step that can help elucidate disparities in services or make the survey process more inclusive. Most organizations are engaging in these practices during data collection and data analysis (bolded in Table 1), but half or less are engaging in these practices in other steps of the loop. (Appendix 1 shows the most and least commonly performed practices in each

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[5] Please note that not all steps have viable, medium, and high-quality practices.

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step.) As with high-quality practices, not all EDI-related practices take the same level of effort across steps; in fact, practices in steps 4 and 5 likely require more effort than those in steps 1, 2 and 3. This difference in effort might explain why practices that require engaging clients are less prevalent than those requiring actions by nonprofits.

Table 1 | EDI-Related Practices by Step and Proportion of Organizations Implementing Them.
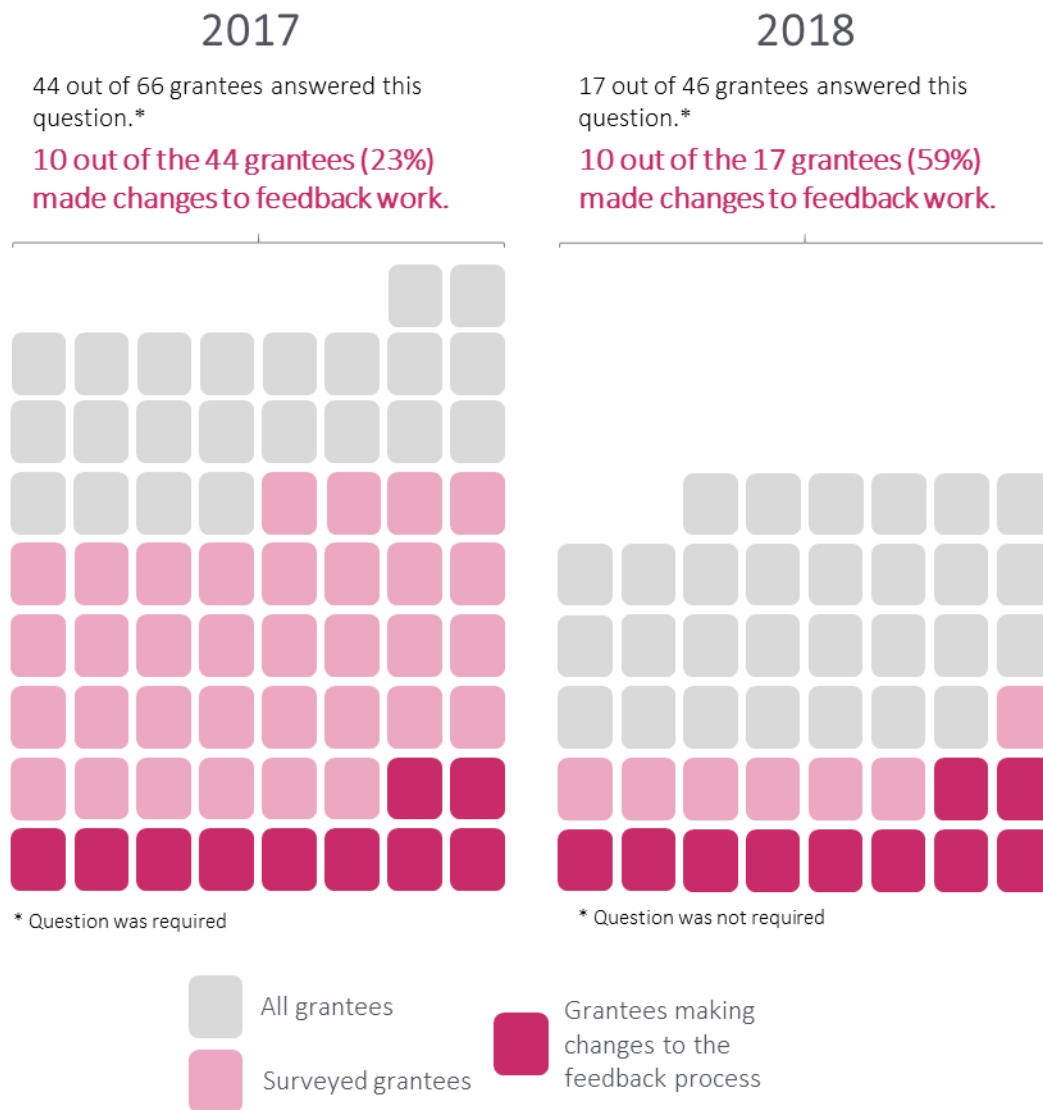
Step	EDI-Related Practice	Percent Implementing Most of the Time/Always
Step 1: Survey design	Translate the survey into non-English languages	56%
	Vet or test questions with clients to ensure comprehension	26%
Step 2: Data collection	Make additional assistance available to clients who may need support to complete the survey	73%
Step 3: Data analysis	Segment data by client demographics and/or service experiences	81%
Step 4: Responding to feedback	Engage clients in identifying solutions to issues raised	49%
Step 5: Closing the loop	Communicate with clients using two-way methods	28%

Some 2017 and 2018 grantees reported making similar changes to the feedback process and the L4G survey.

Several 2017 and 2018 grantees reported different efforts to customize the feedback process and L4G survey questions to better fit the needs of their organization and constituent populations. While some of these customization changes could be positive developments as grantees use the L4G model to its fullest potential to meet their specific needs, it is unclear what level of customization is acceptable to maintain high-quality standards, or at which point changes start affecting quality.

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When asked about changes made to the **feedback process in general**, 23% and 59% of surveyed 2017 and 2018 grantees reported making changes, respectively[6] (see Figure 5). While these percentages are not insignificant, the number of organizations that made changes was small, limiting our ability to make thematic conclusions.

Figure 5 | Number of Organizations Making Changes to Feedback Work.

2017

44 out of 66 grantees answered this question.*

10 out of the 44 grantees (23%) made changes to feedback work.

* Question was required

2018

17 out of 46 grantees answered this question.*

10 out of the 17 grantees (59%) made changes to feedback work.

* Question was not required

- All grantees
- Surveyed grantees
- Grantees making changes to the feedback process

The following are some examples of the kinds of changes that 2017 grantees reported making to the feedback process:

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- Four grantees reported using new tools in their feedback work, such as a new data analysis company and new survey distribution methods, such as distributing surveys on paper, over text, and using Salesforce instead of SurveyMonkey.
- Four grantees mentioned that they changed L4G questions to better fit their organization needs and population.
- One grantee mentioned reviewing their survey distribution cadence, and another mentioned introducing a new survey to be part of their feedback process.
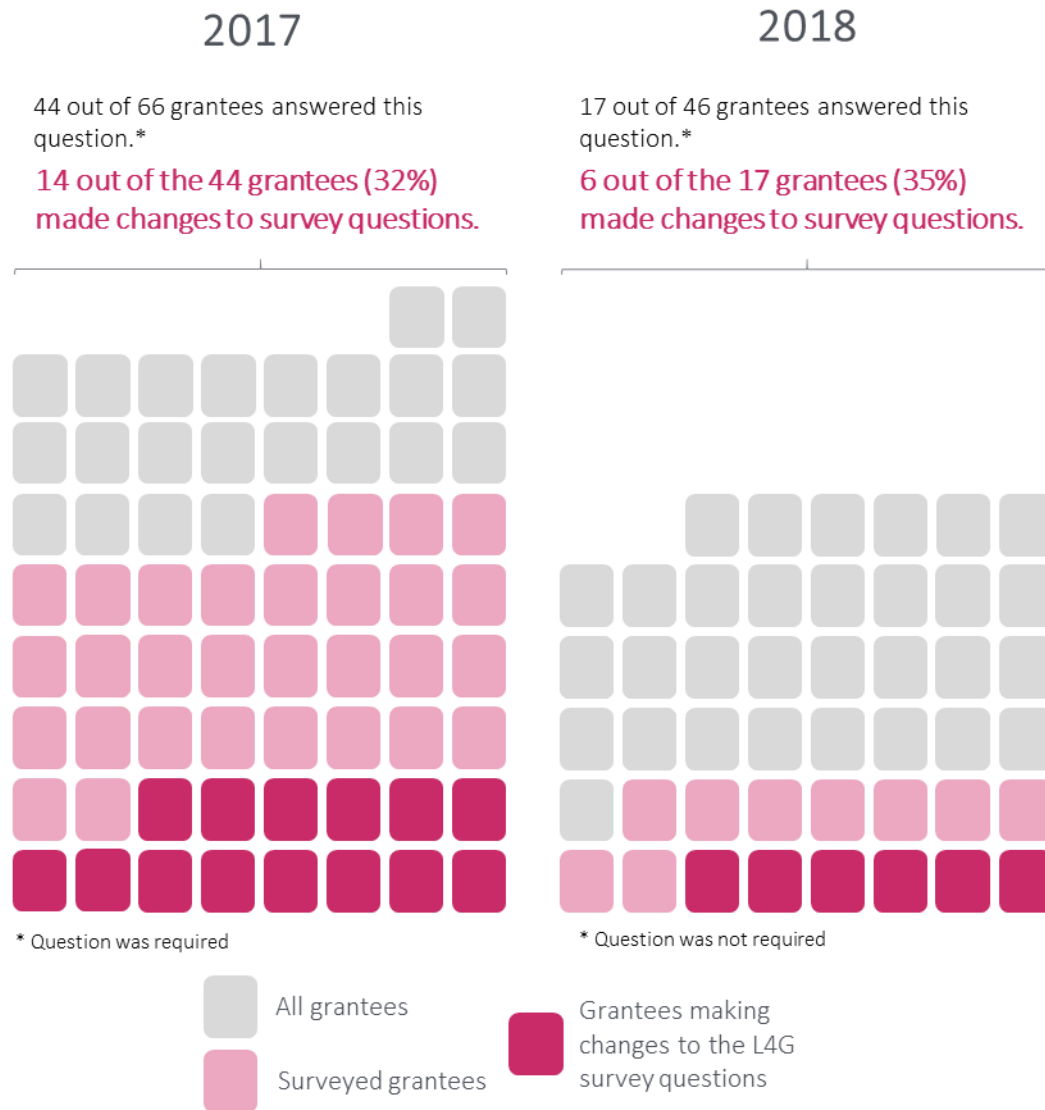
Grantees from the 2018 cohort mentioned similar examples:

- Three grantees mentioned thinking through a different survey distribution cadence, and two grantees mentioned using new survey platforms such as Salesforce.
- One grantee reported reducing the number of survey questions asked.
- Two grantees reported engaging their board and other stakeholders in their feedback work.
- One grantee mentioned changing L4G core questions.
- One grantee reported adding an additional feedback step to communicate the changes they are making as a result of the feedback they have collected.

When asked specifically about the changes made to **L4G survey questions**, 32% and 35% of surveyed 2017 and 2018 grantees reported making changes, respectively[7] (see Figure 6). Again, the small number of organizations reporting changes hinders our ability to report thematic conclusions.

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[7] See Note 5. Percentages refer to organizations responding to this question specifically.

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Figure 6 | Number of Organizations Making Changes to L4G Survey Questions.

2017

44 out of 66 grantees answered this question.*

14 out of the 44 grantees (32%) made changes to survey questions.

* Question was required

2018

17 out of 46 grantees answered this question.*

6 out of the 17 grantees (35%) made changes to survey questions.

* Question was not required

All grantees

Surveyed grantees

Grantees making changes to the L4G survey questions

Examples of the changes reported include the following:

- Six 2017 grantees mentioned modifying existing questions (e.g., editing the core questions to be "less generic," changing the scale on the Net Promoter Score (NPS) question, changing the L4G questions altogether but keeping the "ideology of L4G questions" in the survey).
- Five 2017 grantees mentioned removing and adding questions to the L4G survey to fit their organizational needs.
- Three grantees mentioned changing the survey language to be more easily understood by their constituents.
- One grantee mentioned not using any of the L4G questions anymore, but trying to incorporate the thinking behind those questions into their survey.

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Similarly, three 2018 grantees mentioned adding and removing questions to the survey, and three others reported modifying existing L4G questions, including making questions easier to understand.

At least half of grantees from both cohorts reported that feedback work after L4G was primarily driven by one person who is tasked with collecting and analyzing data and then sharing it with other staff.
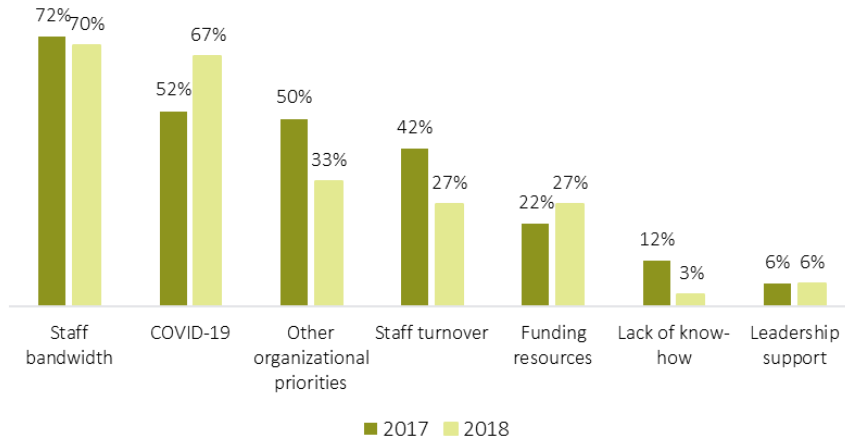
When asked who works on feedback at each organization, 2017 and 2018 grantees answered similarly. Fifty-nine percent of 2018 grantees reported that one person is primarily tasked with coordinating data collection and analysis and then sharing findings with other staff for decision making, compared to 50% of 2017 grantees.[8] The remaining grantees reported that responsibilities for coordinating data collection and analysis is spread out among two or more team members who then share findings with other staff for decision making, minus a handful of respondents who selected "other" and offered additional explanation for their selection. Grantees from both cohorts also reported that leadership at their organizations is more committed to feedback work than fellow staff (average mean of 4 compared to an average mean of 3.6).

Challenges to sustaining high-quality feedback were similar for both cohorts.

Grantees from both cohorts were also asked to report their top three challenges to sustaining high-quality feedback: 72% of 2017 grantees reported staff bandwidth (compared to 70% of 2018 grantees), 52% of 2017 grantees reported COVID-19 (compared to 67% of 2018 grantees), and 50% of 2017 grantees reported other organization priorities (compared to 33% of 2018 grantees). Figure 7 shows the percentage of challenges reported by 2017 and 2018 surveyed grantees.

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[8] For reference, 30% of 2016 grantees mentioned this single lead staffing model, while 67% mentioned a team approach to feedback work. When compared to the 2017 twenty-four-month survey, 50% of grantees reported a single lead model, while 41% reported a team approach. When compared to the 2018 R2 eighteen-month survey, 56% of grantees reported a single lead model, while 44% reported a team approach.
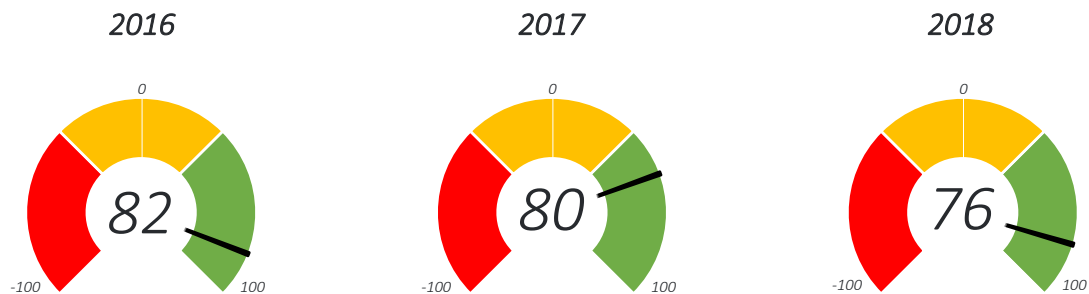
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Figure 7 | Challenges to Sustaining Feedback by Cohort.

Grantees from both cohorts reported that they would highly recommend L4G to an organization like theirs.[9]

Using the NPS system, we asked organizations if they would recommend L4G to other organizations, and both cohorts reported a willingness to highly recommend L4G to other organizations like themselves. Figure 8 shows a comparison of NPS scores across cohorts. **The NPS score of 2017 grantees was 80:** 41 grantees were promoters, 8 grantees were passives, and 1 was a detractor. **The NPS score of 2018 grantees was 76:** 27 grantees were promoters, 4 grantees were passives, and 2 were detractors.[10] These results are similar to what the 2016 cohort reported one year after L4G engagement (Figure 8); however, it is unclear if those who did not reply to the survey would report similar ratings.

Figure 8 | NPS by Cohort

[9] We also asked grantees to share any thoughts that they had about ways in which L4G could have better supported their organization to sustain their feedback practice over time, and we shared the findings of this question with the L4G team.

[10] Note that detractors rate 0-6, passives rate 7-8 and promoters rate 9-10 per the NPS methodology.

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Evaluators' Observations

> **Feedback continues to be a sustainable practice, even during the COVID-19 pandemic.** Our findings showed that grantees continuing to collect feedback from their clients after L4G, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, a time in which organizations could have stopped collecting feedback and redirected their efforts to respond to their clients' urgent needs. Moreover, some also increased their frequency of feedback, suggesting that feedback could have supported organizations' responses to the pandemic. Feedback work could have helped establish the relationships and communication pathways needed to communicate with clients quickly, so organizations could pivot their work to respond to their client's needs. We have found similar levels of sustaining feedback practices across three L4G cohorts, which suggests that the co-funded model, employing a high-touch technical assistance approach, can attain similar outcomes over time. **How can L4G continue to support organizations to sustain high-quality feedback practices as it experiments with different models of technical assistance?**

> **Staffing challenges can hinder sustainability of feedback practices.** According to survey respondents, staff bandwidth is the main challenge for maintaining high-quality feedback loops. COVID-19 and competing organizational priorities, the two other main challenges, exacerbate the demands on staff time and bandwidth, potentially relegating feedback work to a lower priority. In addition, at least half of surveyed grantees reported that one person at their organization is primarily tasked with coordinating data collection and analysis and then sharing findings with other staff for decision making. This is similar to what we found in the previous round and continues to raise a flag, given that staff turnover could leave the organization without the feedback capacity built through L4G. Moreover, if only one person is leading feedback work and they are also facing competing priorities, the bandwidth issue becomes even more serious. **What would it take for organizations to have the capacity they need to sustain high-quality feedback work beyond L4G, and how could L4G, Shared Insight, and the field better support organizations to do so?**

> **Organizations customize the feedback process to fit their organizational needs, which may have implications for L4G's current feedback work.** Some organizations reported making changes to the feedback process to better fit their clients' needs. Grantees mentioned using new analysis tools, new survey distribution methods and customizations, and reducing and adding questions to the L4G survey. While modifying questions or the process to better suit their needs is not necessarily a sign of lower-quality work, L4G designed guardrails to make high-quality feedback work feasible through a short set of questions. **To what extent are there key tenets of the L4G model that should be prioritized and incentivized among grantees to ensure that they "stick" after the program ends—for example, the use of a data collection platform to gather, organize, and collect data? And how much flexibility is there in terms of how those tenets show up: is it acceptable for grantees to change SurveyMonkey for Salesforce or another similar platform?**

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> **Similarly, we saw variability in the types of high-quality practices that organizations continue to implement in their feedback work.** While almost all engage in high- and medium-quality practices in data collection and data analysis, lower proportions do so when responding to data and closing the loop. While some of these practices in the later steps take more effort than those in earlier steps, and It is, perhaps, expected that organizations will change how they do their feedback work overtime, there might be some key practices that L4G is more interested in emphasizing to ensure greater sustainability, particularly around equity, diversity, and inclusion. If in fact feedback should be in the service of equity, then equity-practices should be at the top of the list to ensure greater uptake over time. **How can L4G identify those key practices or principles and help organizations develop habits, beyond capacity, to implement high-quality feedback loops?**

Concluding Thoughts

We continue to see strong sustainability of feedback practices one year after the L4G grant ended; we have found similar results from three cohorts, suggesting that similar outcomes are possible over time. However, challenges remain in strengthening organizations' understanding of and ability to implement high-quality feedback practices in the long run. L4G continues to work on its high-quality standards, which will become increasingly important as more organizations roll out the initiative and start their own feedback journey and as L4G continues to support the growth of the feedback field.

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Appendix 1: Summary of Practices by L4G step

Table 2 | Viable-, medium-, and high-quality practices by step and proportion or survey respondents practicing them most of the time/always.

Degree of Quality	Practices by L4G step	Percent practicing most of the time/always
Step 1		
Viable	Use the L4G core questions	88%
Viable	Include demographic questions to segment results	84%
Medium	Translate the survey into non-English languages	74%
Viable	Consult with staff on the survey goals and/or custom questions	56%
High	Vet or test questions with clients to ensure comprehension	26%
Step 2		
Medium	Train staff/volunteers on how to administer the survey	96%
High	Work to collect feedback that is representative of your client population	90%
High	Administer the survey in a way that provides privacy to clients	73%
High	Make additional assistance available to clients who may need support to complete the survey	64%
Step 3		
Viable	Look at quantitative averages, ranges, and/or trends over time	84%
Medium	Use L4G's external benchmarks to "norm" my organization's client feedback	81%
Medium	Categorize open-ended responses into themes	75%
Medium	Segment data by client demographics and/or service experiences	45%
Step 4		
Medium	Create an action plan to follow through on discussed changes	73%
High	Engage clients in identifying solutions to issues raised	49%
Step 5		
Viable	Communicate to clients using one-way methods	48%
High	Communicate with clients using two-way methods	28%

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