

FUND FOR SHARED INSIGHT

# Assessing the Status of the Feedback Field

April 2024

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# INTRODUCTION

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# INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years, leaders in philanthropy and the nonprofit sector in the United States have been working to shift the way the social sector develops, implements, and evaluates efforts so that these processes more meaningfully include the people and communities at the heart of their work. High-quality feedback and listening practices are key mechanisms through which foundations and nonprofits can operate with greater proximity to communities. Therefore, field leaders are working to make the use of high-quality<sup>1</sup> feedback and listening standard practice in the social sector in the United States. Understanding the challenge of promoting the uptake of these practices among an entire sector, Fund for Shared Insight, along with its core funder partners, field leaders convened in a group called “The Irritants for Change”<sup>2</sup>, and a set of nonprofit practitioners have been working to develop a “feedback and listening field” that enables impact at a greater scale than working to shift practice in one organization at a time.

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*“Funders and practitioners are increasingly acknowledging that scaling individual organizations is insufficient to solve complex, evolving social problems. Achieving population-level change also often requires meaningful, intentional coordination across a field’s actors—known as “building the field”—to elevate and sustain its collective practice.”<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> High-quality feedback refers to feedback that is systematically collected by organizations that respond to that feedback and close the loop with clients.

<sup>2</sup> The Irritants for Change are a group of field leaders working together to make feedback standard practice in the social sector. Appendix A provides a list of the 13 members we interviewed out of a total of 16. Please see <https://feedbacklabs.org/about-us/partners/#irritants> for more information about the Irritants.

<sup>3</sup> Farnham, L., Nothmann, E., Tamaki, Zo., & Daniels, C. (2020, March). *Field building for population-level change*. The Bridgespan Group. <https://www.bridgespan.org/getmedia/6d7adede-31e8-4a7b-ab87-3a4851a8abac/field-building-for-population-level-change-march-2020.pdf>

In 2018, ORS Impact conducted an assessment of the state of the feedback field to measure the extent of progress in building the feedback and listening field. After six years of intentional and focused field-building efforts, an updated assessment of the field's status in 2024 can support Shared Insight's strategic decisions during its final years of operation and other field leaders' decision-making moving forward. Therefore, ORS Impact engaged a group of field leaders in a workgroup to codevelop a field assessment that assesses the current state of the feedback field and its progress over time and informs strategic thinking for Shared Insight and other field actors. This report presents our findings and assessment of the field and lays out some key questions for the leaders to consider. The learning questions codeveloped with the workgroup included the following:

1. Who are the main actors in the feedback field? How do these actors contribute to the field, and who might be missing that would strengthen the field? How diverse is the field?
2. How developed are the different aspects of the feedback field identified in the Strong Field Framework,<sup>4</sup> and how does it compare to 2018?
3. To what degree is the field advancing feedback in service of equity and shifting power?
4. What would it take to continue strengthening the feedback field? Where should efforts focus next? What challenges prevent further development?

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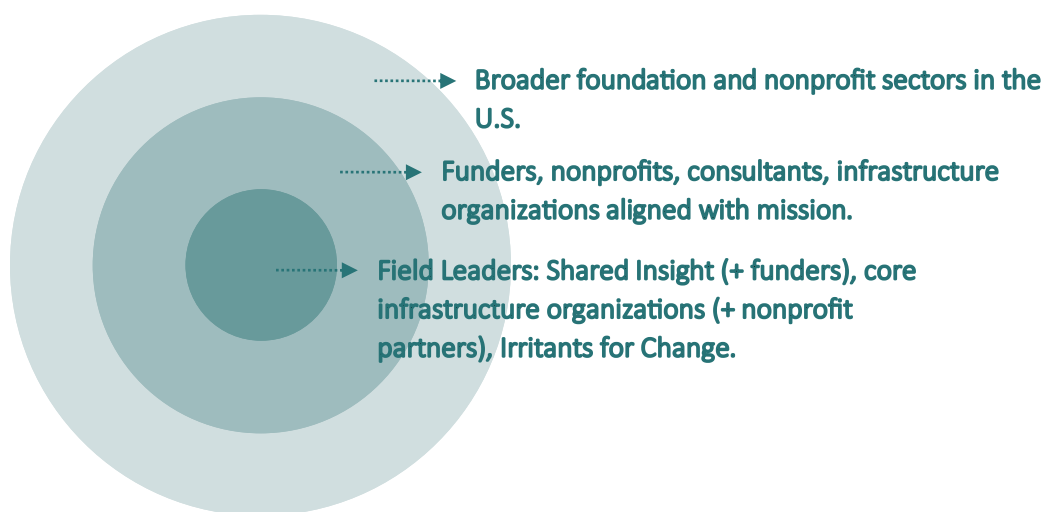
<sup>4</sup> The Bridgespan Group. (2009, June). *The Strong Field Framework*.  
<https://www.bridgespan.org/getmedia/16a72306-0675-4abd-9439-fbf6c0373e9b/strong-field-framework.pdf>

## DEFINING THE FEEDBACK FIELD

Working from the 2018 field assessment findings, ORS convened four members of the Irritants group to reflect on a common definition of the feedback field's shared goal. The group defined the field, with slight shifts from the 2018 version: The feedback field is "a community of actors using complementary approaches to make the use of high-quality<sup>5</sup> feedback and listening standard practice in the social sector in the United States." Notably, there is also a much broader international feedback field, but for the purposes of this assessment, we focus on the field within the U.S.

In 2018 we further defined the community as follows: the set of leaders, advocates, academics, and consultants who seek to improve how organizations listen and respond to clients' needs and preferences by defining and advancing a shared vision around systematically seeking perceptual feedback from their clients, facilitating alignment among stakeholders, setting shared standards, providing technical assistance, conducting research and evaluation, and helping align public policy and funding streams. This definition still holds in 2024, with the further refinement of specifically naming practitioners and funders as subsets of leaders and advocates. The Strong Field Framework and ORS Impact's 2018 assessment did not include a specific focus on mapping actors and relationships in the field. For this 2024 report, we created a high-level map of actors in the field according to their proximity to a core group of field leaders to inform the development of the interview sample. Figure 1 shows a high-level visual representation of actors according to their proximity to core field leaders.

**Figure 1 | Actor map.**



<sup>5</sup> High-quality feedback refers to feedback that is systematically collected by organizations that respond to that feedback and close the loop with clients.

In developing the sample for this assessment, we wanted to include perspectives from a broader set of actors. Therefore, we interviewed field leaders to get their perspectives, but instead of interviewing funders and practitioners who are also most proximate to field-building efforts, we sought to interview leaders within the second concentric circle who could speak about feedback and listening practices and reflect on the field’s progress but who have not been as closely engaged with field-building efforts. Table 1 summarizes the data sources we used for this assessment, and Appendix A shows a list of all interviewees.

**Table 1 | Data sources**

DATA SOURCE	DESCRIPTION
FIELD LEADER INTERVIEWS	Interviews with 13 out of 16 members of Irritants for Change and one focus group with four field leaders to explore the connection between feedback and equity in more detail.
FUNDER INTERVIEWS	Interviews with ten funders
NONPROFIT PRACTITIONER INTERVIEWS	Interviews with five nonprofit practitioners
ONLINE CONTENT ANALYSIS	Systematic analysis of online search results related to the feedback and listening field

## THE STRONG FIELD FRAMEWORK

The Strong Field Framework, developed by The Bridgespan Group and the James Irvine Foundation, identifies five components of a field: shared identity, standards of practice, knowledge base, leadership and grassroots support, and funding and supporting policy. ORS Impact’s 2018 field assessment used this framework to assess the field; therefore, this assessment uses the same framework to enable comparisons over time along the same components. Table 2 summarizes the Strong Field Framework’s components and their definitions.



**Table 2 | Strong field framework components and definitions.**

	ELEMENT	DEFINITION
	SHARED IDENTITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community aligned around a common purpose and a set of core values</li> </ul>
	STANDARDS OF PRACTICE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Codification of standards of practice</li> <li>Exemplary models and resources (e.g., how-to guides)</li> <li>Available resources to support implementation (e.g., technical assistance)</li> <li>Respected credentialing/ongoing professional development training for practitioners and leaders</li> </ul>
	KNOWLEDGE BASE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Credible evidence that practice achieves desired outcomes</li> <li>Community of researchers to study and advance practice</li> <li>Vehicles to collect, analyze, debate, and disseminate knowledge.</li> </ul>
	LEADERSHIP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Influential leaders and exemplary organizations across key segments of the field (e.g., practitioners, researchers, business leaders, policymakers)</li> <li>Broad base of support from major constituencies</li> </ul>
	FUNDING AND SUPPORTING POLICY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enabling policy environment that supports and encourages model practices</li> <li>Organized funding streams from public, philanthropic, and corporate sources of support</li> </ul>

# STATUS OF THE FEEDBACK FIELD

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This section summarizes our findings about the status of the feedback field organized by each element of the Strong Field Framework and offers ORS Impacts' overall assessment at the end.

# OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF FIELD STATUS

To generate an overall assessment of the status of the feedback field, we considered the following:

1. The assessments of the individual elements according to the Strong Field Framework, presented throughout the rest of this report
2. Secondary data providing indicators of progress toward the field's ultimate goal: making feedback and listening standard practice in the United States
3. An overarching assessment according to a field status framework we used in 2018 to describe the status of the feedback field

## ASSESSMENT

The feedback field is stronger today than in 2018; there have been significant improvements across all elements of the Strong Field Framework, and while challenges remain, there are opportunities for current leaders to further position the field for growth and success into the future.

When reflecting on the overall status of the feedback field, most leaders described it as “healthy,” “robust,” and “ahead of where we were when it started,” suggesting that the field has become stronger over time. Indeed, we found evidence of progress across all elements of the field. Table 3 summarizes findings across elements and provides 2018 findings for comparison.

**Table 3 | Summary of 2024 and 2018 findings by element of the Strong Field Framework.**

ELEMENT	2018 STATUS	2024 STATUS
OVERALL FIELD ASSESSMENT	The feedback field is moving out of the “framing” stage and more fully into the “networking” stage, moving from conceptual framing and isolated practice examples to increased networking and a proliferation of fragmented and sometimes proprietary practices.	The feedback field is in the networking phase with evidence of increased networking and uptake of feedback and listening practices in the social sector. Working through current challenges can inform its movement into maturation.
SHARED IDENTITY	A sense of shared identity is the strongest current aspect of the field to support greater feedback practice. There is generally alignment across an array of actors around the definition and goals for the field in this area, and the differences seem to be in roles or vantage points versus differences that are in tension with each other. Additionally, the field still seems to be coalescing around terminology, with relevant content showing up using a number of different key terms. There is also an inconsistent but, in some cases, strong basis from which issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) can continue to be fundamentally built in.	The field has coalesced around a shared goal to advance feedback, and there is evidence that this goal is taking hold among more actors in the sector. Meanwhile, the conversation has expanded beyond feedback to include a broad array of listening practices under an umbrella of increased proximity with communities at the heart of the work. The connections between feedback and equity are clearer, at least among a subset of field leaders. It is unclear to what extent these connections are deeply understood across all, or even a majority of actors. Although some field leaders, including Shared Insight, have moved the goalposts by including shifting power as a goal, the field has not adopted that additional element as part of its shared identity.
STANDARDS OF PRACTICE	There is consensus that this is a natural next area of focus for field work, and this seems to be underway. Some related resources already exist in the field to support nonprofit practice, providing a base for continued work to build upon. There is room to grow, with an opportunity to ensure a focus on EDI is included in the work from the beginning.	There is evidence of various resources and leaders working to establish standards of practice for nonprofits, some of which intentionally center shifting power, while standards for funder practice are more nascent. There are differing opinions about the level of development of standards thus far and about the role that standards should play in the field.

<b>KNOWLEDGE BASE</b>	<p>This is a ripe area for more growth to support high-quality practice. There may be opportunities to make existing research more accessible and available. In the U.S. context, there is an opportunity to consider how to build EDI into the field early on.</p>	<p>The knowledge base today is stronger than in 2018. There are more resources available, more contributors to knowledge products, and readily available information is relevant to the feedback field.</p>
<b>LEADERSHIP</b>	<p>Not surprisingly, given the development of the field to date, there is a small set of known key leaders who are recognized as pushing the field forward thus far. Broader engagement and support among constituencies is growing but nascent.</p>	<p>There is a core set of recognized field leaders who are also top contributors to online content. In addition, there are a growing number of organizations contributing to the field, with some influential players emerging outside of the Irritants for Change group.</p>
<b>FUNDING AND SUPPORTING POLICY</b>	<p>Shared Insight is still seen as the key funder for this work, and some concerns exist about the ability of this amount of funding to take the field to the next level. Like the knowledge base area, it is not surprising that this component of the field is less developed at this point in time. There is some question about opportunities to build upon successful examples of public sector uptake of feedback practice, given the potential reach/scope of public contracting. We found no specific content in this area that connected to EDI.</p>	<p>There is progress in increasing funding and creating incentives for nonprofit feedback practice, but there are important questions about the extent to which current structures can support the uptake of feedback practices on a large scale. Meanwhile, incentives for funder listening are much more nascent.</p>

There is initial evidence of increased uptake of feedback and listening practices in the social sector in the United States, but there are questions about whether the current pace of progress and the scale reached thus far is sufficient to ensure broad uptake in the sector.

While this field assessment did not collect primary data to assess uptake in the broader social sector, there are future measurement plans to gather more information about this. In the meantime, we present the secondary evidence we found through our assessment of the field:

- **Increased number of nonprofits engaged in feedback practices:** We know that at least 928 organizations are working closely with Listen4Good (L4G) to implement high-quality feedback practices, which is a large increase from the 215 partners L4G had in 2018. We also found evidence of high-quality practices outside of the organizations engaged with L4G and beyond direct service.
- **Increased number of nonprofits reporting on their feedback practices:** 31,500 organizations have completed Candid’s “How We Listen” portion of their profile since it began in 2019. While we do not have systematic information on the quality of those efforts, this is a preliminary indicator that many organizations are implementing some form of feedback practice or an indicator that nonprofits are eager to share or reflect on their feedback practices.
- **More funders are shifting practices related to feedback and listening:** All of Shared Insights’ core funders have changed practice across the different types identified in the *Funder Listening Action Menu*, and 142 funders have supported nonprofits’ engagement with L4G, with 60 of them doing so on a recurring basis and 40 supporting L4G’s operations. We’re also seeing changes among funders in other spaces, suggesting a broader yet slower uptake of this concept in philanthropy. Additional research is necessary to explore changes among a broader set of funders.
- **Increased number and diversity of actors engaging with feedback and listening:**
  - The 2023 Feedback Summit held in Atlanta, Georgia, had 174 participants from 124 unique organizations—68% were first-time attendees.
  - Sixty-two different organizations were named as key actors in interviews, and the online content analysis (OCA) identified 165 individual contributors, an increase from the 46 contributors we found in 2018.
  - Increased featuring of *feedback and listening* as topics in conference sessions and published materials.

However, three leaders, one nonprofit leader, and one funder also questioned the pace of progress, and one funder is pushing further in terms of what success would look like:

- **Field leaders:** A field leader who described the field as “robust” also commented that it felt like the field was stagnating and described a need for innovation. Another questioned the pace of movement forward: “Is it fast enough? Is it dramatic enough?” In addition, two mentioned some tensions that have arisen. One pointed out that the intersection of equity and feedback “can add an element of confusion because I think equity is a thing in and of itself, and feedback is a thing in and of itself. Actually, feedback is an excellent way of being equitable. But that's not everything about the feedback.” The other noted that, while nonprofits and funders are recognizing listening and feedback as good practice, “There’s still a very big tension between the wisdom of the crowd and expertise.”
- **Nonprofit leader:** One nonprofit leader mentioned an increased uptake among a subgroup of colleagues but warned that people with decision-making power are not paying attention to feedback in the same way:

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*“I see more and more people reaching out to me to ask me about process. The people that I talked to when the accountability report came out in 2021 are ahead of where they were then now. When I talk to them now, they've made progress. I'm like, 'Okay, great. That's happening.' Simultaneously, though, the people who run mainstream policy [in our sector] do not care about feedback, in my opinion.”*

- **Funder:** Two funder representatives from the same foundation questioned whether the pace of progress thus far is enough given the importance of feedback and listening:

“

*“Although what I have seen is, of course, more organizations seeing the benefit of listening, more organizations in embracing participatory practices, more foundations, especially smaller community foundations, are sharing stories about how they're listening informally and formally. I think the movement continues to grow. We're not at the speed that we think is necessary given how important listening is to our work.”*



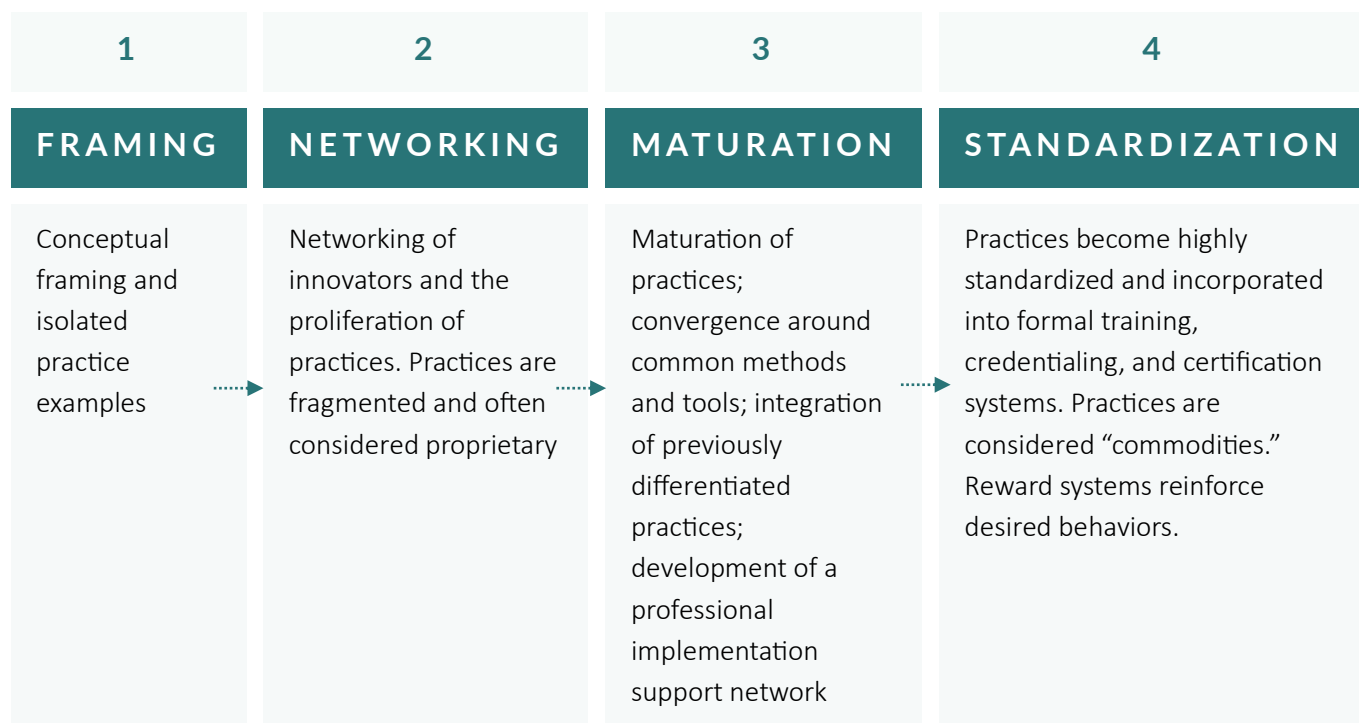
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*“The scale of the efforts on listening versus traditional, what we call top-down evaluation, is such that until there is pretty significant effort (I think in orders of magnitude, 10x differences) for us to bring up orders of magnitude more organizations and individuals touched by customer feedback, it's not even really worth having a conversation about how we're optimizing the partnership between different organizations.”*

**The feedback field is currently in the networking phase, and working through current challenges can inform its movement into maturation.**

In 2018 we found some evidence that the field was moving on from the framing stage, but in 2024 it is clear that the field is in the networking phase as described by Pete Plastrik and John Cleveland. We are seeing increased alignment within networks, new actors and leaders, and new approaches in the field, with increased uptake albeit with a long way to go. However, the overall lack of clarity around standards of practice and the long way to go in ensuring broader uptake in the sector point to opportunities for growth en route to the maturation stage. Figure 2 presents the evolution stages of practice fields.

**Figure 2 | The evolution of practice fields.**



While this approach has a slightly different take on defining field elements than the five components of the Strong Field Framework, it has some useful ways of distinguishing between stages and differentiating “young” and “mature” fields. Table 4 shows characteristics of young and mature fields. Based on these characteristics, the feedback field, which was young in 2018, seems to be moving toward greater maturity, with improvements among the different elements in the framework.

**Table 4 | Characteristics of “Young” and “Mature” Fields**

ELEMENT	YOUNG FIELDS	MATURE FIELDS
IDENTITY	Confused/multiple identities	Well-defined boundaries; easy to know what is “in” and “out”
FRAMEWORKS	Lack of integration between frameworks	Strongly shared frameworks (theoretical premises; principles; ways to organize knowledge)
PRACTICE INNOVATION	Competing “gurus,” each of whom consider their ideas and business models to be “proprietary”	Standardization of methods, tools, enterprises, and so forth for implementations
STANDARDS	Lack of standards in all areas	Well-defined professional standards for defining competence and quality (regulatory; skill certification; testing of innovations)
REWARD SYSTEMS	No real feedback mechanisms from the market	Market feedback matches best practice thinking
NETWORKS	Isolated individual practitioners	Well-developed networks for sharing knowledge and best practice
R&D	Investment happens on a haphazard basis	Well-organized R&D infrastructure to support innovation

# SHARED IDENTITY

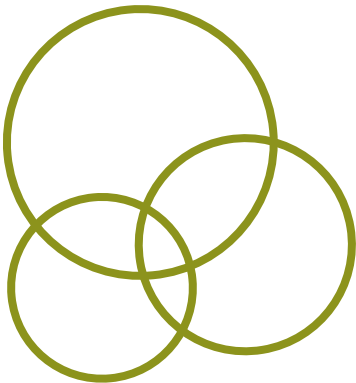


Table 5 | Summary of Shared Identity Findings

ELEMENT DEFINITION		
Community aligned around a common purpose and a set of core values		
2018 ASSESSMENT	2024 ASSESSMENT	
A sense of shared identity is the strongest current aspect of the field to support greater feedback practice. There is generally alignment across an array of actors around the definition and goals for the field, and the differences seem to be in roles or vantage points versus differences that are in tension with each other. Additionally, the field still seems to be coalescing around terminology. There is also an inconsistent but, in some cases, strong basis from which issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion can continue to be fundamentally built in.	The field has coalesced around a shared goal to advance feedback, and there is evidence that this goal is taking hold among more actors in the sector. Meanwhile, the conversation has expanded beyond feedback to include a broad array of listening practices under an umbrella of increased proximity with communities at the heart of the work. The connections between feedback and equity are clearer, at least among a subset of field leaders. It is unclear to what extent these connections are deeply understood across all, or even a majority of actors. Although some field leaders, including Shared Insight, have moved the goalposts by including shifting power as a goal, the field has not adopted that additional element as part of its shared identity.	

## ASSESSMENT

The field has coalesced around a shared goal to advance feedback, and there is evidence that this goal is taking hold among more actors in the sector. Meanwhile, the conversation has expanded beyond feedback to include a broad array of listening practices under an umbrella of increased proximity with communities at the heart of the work. The connection between feedback and equity is clearer but not widespread and has yet to center shifting power.

In 2018, Shared identity was the strongest element of the feedback field, with strong levels of alignment among different actors. While this level of alignment among leaders has remained stable since 2018, there is evidence of broader leadership in the sector and of more leaders sharing this goal and participating in efforts to make it a reality.

However, there is ongoing definitional work in the field. In 2018, field leaders were working to specifically define high-quality feedback and bring leaders to focus on advancing high-quality feedback practices. High-quality feedback has been defined (more details in the standards of practice element), but field leaders have now adopted a broader tent where “feedback” is now discussed in relationship to “listening.” The broadening frame to “feedback and listening” reflected the need to accommodate listening efforts that did not fit within the specific definitions of feedback, like efforts by funders and advocacy nonprofits to better understand the conditions and perceptions of the clients at the heart of their work. In addition to listening, we found accounts of feedback intersecting with other concepts, including trust-based philanthropy, locally led development, and asset-based community development.

Finally, in 2018 we noted that “there was an inconsistent but, in some cases, strong basis from which issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) can continue to be fundamentally built into the goals, values, approaches, and practices of the field.” When describing this connection, funders and nonprofits pointed to the inclusion of community voice in decision-making as a key practice to ensure that strategies better reflect communities’ needs and preferences and are designed with input from people with direct lived experience rather than from afar. However, it is unclear how this ethical imperative has yet to translate into standard practice in the sector. Shared Insight and a core group of field leaders have embedded “shifting power” as a goal in ensuring that feedback practices are in service of greater equity. These leaders see this reframing of feedback practice as a mechanism to advance equity and shift decision-making power to clients as an essential part of the field’s development, which is moving the goalposts from where they were in 2018. While there has been more awareness and an increased dialogue through publications about the connection between feedback and equity in the field overall, there are questions about whether other field leaders and practitioners align with this framing. Most field leaders did not discuss shifting power as a goal and referred to listening and responding as a means for organizations to gather input from clients to inform their own decision-making.

## SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Most leaders and funders agreed that this definition accurately describes the field's efforts, but some argued that it was important to position feedback and listening as a means to an end as they serve a larger purpose. Leaders offered five different end goals of feedback and listening:

- Creating better outcomes and having social impact (12)<sup>6</sup>
- Improving relationships and partnerships with grantees (6)
- Helping organizations understand the impact of interventions (3)
- Creating an accountability measure for philanthropy (2)
- Keeping community voice at the center of organizational decision-making (1)


Most funders (10) aligned their definition with listening to better understand perceptions or the context within which they work, while (8) eight went further and included responding to what they learn as part of the act of listening. This degree of alignment with field leaders' description of high-quality feedback and listening is encouraging given that many of these funders are less directly involved in field-building efforts. This is an early indicator of a broader proliferation of ideas around feedback in the sector, but wider research into funder perspectives and practices later in 2024 will corroborate the extent to which there is greater uptake within the philanthropic and nonprofit sectors.

**Listening has become part of a broader frame for the field to understand feedback:** Field leaders shared that they now think about *feedback and listening* as the core focus for the field. "I don't think it makes sense to talk about the feedback field without looking at listening practice alongside feedback." This broadening definition of the focus opens up the conversation to include different types of practices that are all related to ensuring that people and communities at the heart of the work have ways to communicate with and influence decisions within nonprofits and foundations. In fact, interviewees shared that feedback conversations are often related to other terms in the sector, like *funder listening*, *emergent learning*, *equitable evaluation*, *equity*, and *asset-based community development*.

**Nonprofits and funders connected feedback and listening to including voices least heard in decision-making.** Among nonprofit interviewees, two mentioned specific ways in which feedback can help organizations advance equity: by providing data that helps organizations assess the extent to which their programs and policies are equitable, and by bringing voices to the table to ensure program and policy decisions reflect voices that would otherwise not inform those decisions. On the other hand, most interviewed funders connected feedback and listening to the inclusion of the voices least heard. These voices, such as people of color, people with disabilities, young people, and other communities, are central

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<sup>6</sup> Throughout this report, we use numbers in parenthesis in this format (#) to denote the number of interviewees who spoke about the specified theme.



to more equitable practices to ensure strategies are designed with input from people with direct experience.

# STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

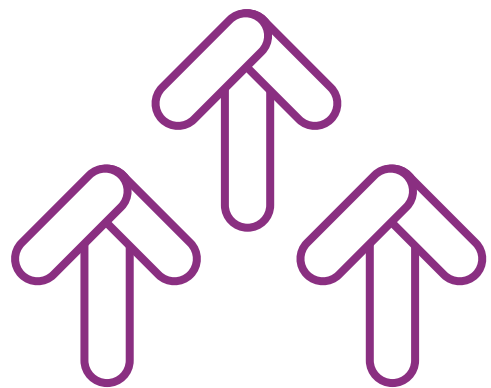


Table 6 | Summary of Standards of Practice Findings

ELEMENT DEFINITION	
Codification of standards of practice, exemplary models and resources (e.g., how-to guides), available resources to support implementation (e.g., technical assistance), respected credentialing/ongoing professional development training for practitioners and leaders	
2018 ASSESSMENT	2024 ASSESSMENT
There is consensus that this is a natural next area of focus for field work, and this seems to be underway. Some related resources already exist in the field to support nonprofit practice, providing a base for continued work to build upon. There is room to grow, with an opportunity to ensure a focus on EDI is included in the work from the beginning.	There is evidence of various resources and leaders working to establish standards of practice for nonprofits, some of which intentionally center shifting power, while standards for funder practice are more nascent. There are differing opinions about the level of development of standards thus far and about the role that standards should play in the field.

## ASSESSMENT

There is evidence of various resources and leaders working to establish standards of practice for nonprofits, some of which intentionally center shifting power, while standards for funder practice are more nascent. There are differing opinions about the level of development of standards thus far and about the role that standards should play in the field.

In 2018, leaders agreed that standards did not exist and identified this area as the next area of focus to continue strengthening the field. In 2024, we find evidence of various resources and leaders working to establish those standards of practice. Products like Shared Insight's equity principles and Listen4Good and Feedback Labs' definition of high-quality feedback loops were identified by field leaders as available resources that can guide high-quality practices. Others also mentioned Shared Insight's FLCP group, GEO, Trust-Based Philanthropy, CEP, the Irritants, and Stand Together Foundation as actors that contribute to definitions of high-quality listening. In addition, Feedback Labs' Feedback Crash Course and Listen4Good's trainings for nonprofit partners are two types of trainings that are now available for audiences looking to learn more and implement high-quality feedback practices. The online content analysis showed 36 resources related to standards of practice published by 19 different field actors in the United States, with 34 additional resources from international actors, while the 2018 assessment found 27 resources.

Some of these available resources are also intentionally embedding equity into the standards of practice in the field through specific practices like data disaggregation and feedback accessibility. These practices are a starting point into deeper conversations about power structures in organizations, which some field leaders are advancing in their efforts to drive toward greater equity through feedback practices. While this is not standard practice in the field yet, it is an important development both in setting standards of practice, and in driving the broader vision that some leaders are advancing of ensuring that feedback is in service of equity.

In addition, we know that more nonprofits are engaging in feedback efforts. At least the subset of them who are working closely with actors from the feedback field are likely embedding high-quality practices into those efforts. When we interviewed nonprofits outside of the core group of engaged nonprofits, we heard similar terms and concepts tied to ensuring high-quality efforts. When describing their feedback and listening practices, these nonprofits discussed consent, client-informed design, consistent and culturally competent approaches, a focus on continuous improvement, and the need to respond to the data and close the loop. This evidence points toward a wider uptake of high-quality practices, even while the field continues to wrestle with the definition and how to embed those practices into the sector as a whole.



However, a few leaders disagreed about the stage and value of standard development. “I think the definition is still open and so it's still emerging, but there are some foundational documents that we've created that I think can really inform and get us to a place where there is a relatively accepted definition of what it looks like.” One funder pointed out that feedback practices can be complex and nuanced in a way that might hinder accessibility to new practitioners, while another continues to find feedback efforts are not inclusive of their constituents (people with disabilities), despite field leaders’ efforts to expand inclusion and accessibility as much as possible. The level of nuance and the diversity of actors in the nonprofit sector present a challenge in the standardization of practices. As one leader mentioned, “There needs to be some standardization to move the field to a more mature point. At the same time, if you standardize everything, you lose the nuance that is necessary, the context that is necessary for organizations to be able to customize their approach to meet their unique needs given the array of service issue areas.” Finally, one funder cautioned about the tradeoffs on focusing too much on standards:

“

*“But I think there's been such focus on the precision and the rigor with the standard that we know cannot be replicated at scale that could unfortunately prohibit the feedback culture to ever get to the level of market penetration that we need to change the face of the social sector.”*

Regarding funder practices, two leaders pointed out that standards are far less developed than for nonprofit practice. One characterized it more as effective practices than standards. The other pointed to Trust-Based Philanthropy and CEP as places trying to codify funder listening—but primarily in the context of listening to grantees—with the Grantee Perception Report (GPR) as the closest to a standard practice. Core Funders had expressed in 2023 that setting standards and providing examples were two areas where Shared Insight could support funders in the further uptake of feedback and listening practices. While Shared Insight published a Funder Listening Action Menu as guidance for the types of activities funders can engage in to advance feedback and listening, the resource was not mentioned by our interviewees, nor did it come up as a resource in the OCA.

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*“I think Listen4Good and the Fund for Shared Insight have tried to create standards for funders and I don't know if they would be called standards at this point, but they would probably be called effective practices for funders to encourage their grantees to learn more about feedback and to get better at their feedback practices.”*

“

*“From the philanthropic world, I think that we’re seeing more and more things come out, particularly as we lean into trust-based philanthropy about how you include those with lived experience, how you focus on equity, but I don’t know if there’s any standard of practice across the board. I think we’re still in our infancy of figuring that out. They also shared that foundations in the circles I work with, are trying to be less white privileged-ish and trying to dismantle our internal historical racism roots that have set up all of our systems, our grant making, our applications. . . . How do we dismantle that so that those with the power aren’t those with the privilege? I think that those are the things that are coming along, but I don’t know if there’s any standard or agreed-upon practices at this point.”*

## SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

**There are various resources and leaders working to establish standards of practice.** Five field leaders mentioned existing products and resources that outline what a high-quality feedback practice looks like for nonprofits. These field leaders pointed to products including Shared Insight’s equity principles and Listen4Good and Feedback Labs’ definition of high-quality feedback loops.

Other actors mentioned as contributors to standards of practice included:

- Shared Insight’s FLCP group
- GEO
- Trust-Based Philanthropy
- CEP
- the Irritants
- Stand Together Foundation

There were 36 U.S.-based resources online that discussed standards of practice; there were 34 other resources from the international field related to standards. These U.S.-based resources included how-to guides, trainings, concept papers, op-eds, and articles, and the main actors contributing to standards are the following:

**Table 7 | Actors contributing resources**

ACTORS CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES	
U.S. State Department	Grantmakers for Effective Organizations
USAID (Learning Lab)	Hewlett Foundation
Center for Effective Philanthropy	Feedback Labs
Atlas Corps	Stanford Social Innovation Review
Aspen Institute	Building Movement
Humentum	Candid
Keystone Accountability	Better Evaluation
Idaho Children's Fund	Impact Opportunity
Bridgespan	Fund for Shared Insight
BUILD Initiative	

**More and different types of nonprofits are working on high-quality feedback.** We interviewed nonprofits outside of the inner circles of field leaders and found echoes of the standards as defined by leaders. Nonprofit leaders described elements of consent, client-informed design, analyzing and responding to insights, focusing on continuous improvement, establishing a consistent and recurrent practice, ensuring cultural competence, and closing the loop. However, some perceive that these standards are illustrative of high performers, not necessarily the norm.

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*“Not unless you're involved in feedback groups, I would say. Every year I feel like I hear new and different foundations incorporating feedback or at least talking about it publicly. I think a standard is developing, but I would say broadly no, because I still think that there's a lot of poorly conceived surveys and a lack of action based on those surveys that makes it kind of tough.”*

A key element within field conversations has been establishing what “high-quality” feedback means and positioning high-quality feedback as the standard that field leaders would like to see take hold among more nonprofits and funders. Funder and nonprofit leaders described how their institutions are working on feedback, and we saw clear evidence of elements of high-quality feedback embedded in how they talk about their practice and in their approaches.

**Funder standards are less developed:**

- Two leaders pointed out that standards are far less developed than for nonprofit practice.
- Two funders identified the GPR as a potential standard practice among foundations.
- Shared Insight’s core funders identified setting standards and providing examples as two areas where Shared Insight could support funders moving forward.
- Shared Insight published the Funder Listening Action Menu, but the resource was not mentioned by any interviewees.

# KNOWLEDGE BASE

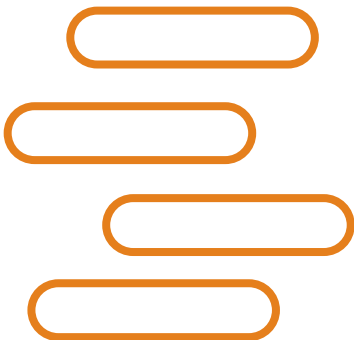


Table 8 | Summary of Knowledge Base findings

ELEMENT DEFINITION	
Credible evidence that practice achieves desired outcomes; community of researchers to study and advance practice; vehicles to collect, analyze, debate, and disseminate knowledge	
2018 ASSESSMENT	2024 ASSESSMENT
This is a ripe area for more growth to support high-quality practice. There may be opportunities to make existing research more accessible and available. In the U.S. context, there is an opportunity to consider how to build EDI into the field early on.	The knowledge base today is stronger than in 2018. There are more resources available, more contributors to knowledge products, and readily available information is relevant to the feedback field.

## ASSESSMENT

The knowledge base today is stronger than in 2018. There are more resources available, more contributors to knowledge products, and readily available information is relevant to the feedback field.

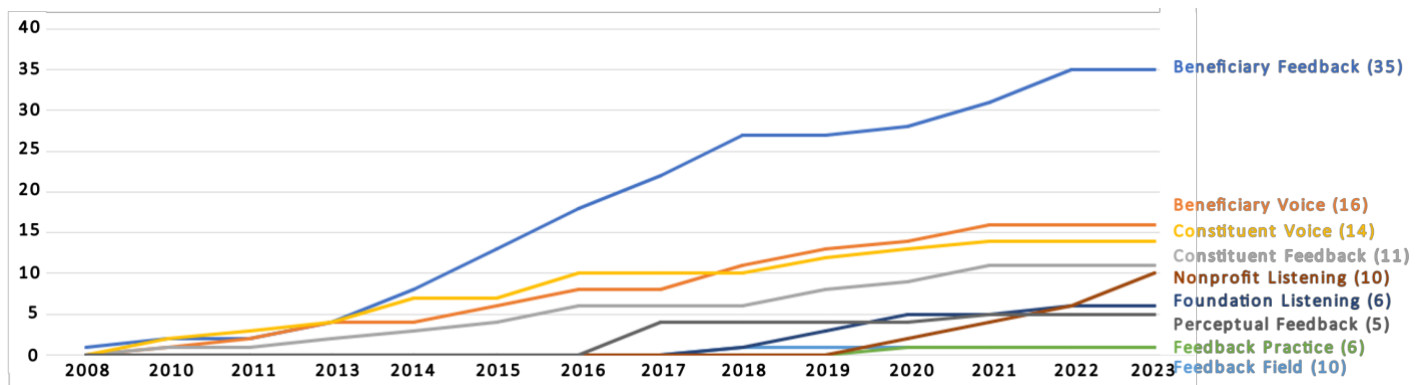
Leaders generally agree that the knowledge base has improved in the field, with more available research about feedback practice and its relationship to outcomes available today than in the past. This perception is not surprising since leaders have been the main contributors to the knowledge base, but the online content analysis corroborates this growth.

In 2018 we found 93 relevant results from U.S.-based sources, while in 2024, we found 450 webpages, 141 (31%) of which were unique webpages related to perceptual feedback in the social sector in the United States. However, when searching for feedback resources, we were more likely to find resources related to international development literature. U.S.-based organizations were less likely to be mentioned, and when they were, the sources tended to be older. Among U.S.-focused resources, the term *beneficiary feedback* produced the most relevant results overall. The main contributors appearing more than ten times in the OCA were:

- Feedback Labs
- Keystone Accountability
- Fund for Shared Insight
- SSIR
- CEP

When looking at the date of publication of resources to assess change over time, we found that within the 141 relevant results in the OCA, 99 had publication dates that we could track. Of those 99 resources, 60 were published between 2008 and 2018, with 39 new resources published since 2019. Publications have continued to increase altogether, but publications related to the terms *beneficiary feedback* and *nonprofit listening* have increased the most in recent years (Figure 3).

Figure 3 | OCA search results by year of publication.



We also assessed whether available resources connected feedback to equity and found that 20% of search results from the OCA and GenAI mentioned equity in some way. Despite this progress, field leaders noted that there are still research gaps regarding the following:

- **The feedback process** to assess the quality of listening and understand what tools and methods to use in contexts constrained by limited capacity.

“

*“I feel like it's time for another jolt of research about in what cases, when, and what parts of feedback practice can have the most impact, or in what cases can it be negative.”*

- **The link between feedback, more effective/efficient programming, and better outcomes**

“

*“Would the field benefit from some huge study that said feedback listening is super important to outcomes? I think something at scale would probably be great for the field as we think about advancing it.”*

- **Emergent practices**, like understanding AI technologies in feedback practice.
- **Continuing the ongoing dialogue about feedback and equity** to clarify terms and support clearer alignment among actors.

It is notable that Fund for Shared Insight invested in a set of studies that sought to measure the connection between feedback and client outcomes. Results from those studies were published during this time period as part of a blog on Shared Insight’s website, but field leaders’ questions about this area of research suggest that those results were not widely shared or have not been widely accessible—these resources did not come up on the OCA. Shared Insight staff have discussed the need to share those results in gray literature so that they are more widely available for the field.

## FEEDBACK IN GENERATIVE AI

Since generative AI (GenAI) is becoming a more prominent research tool, we used two GenAI search tools to assess search results related to the same terms we researched through the search ending-based OCA. GenAI results were much more relevant and aligned with field terms, actors, and content: For four of the nine search terms used, *all* of the answers generated by the AI chatbot were relevant to the feedback field in some way. For the terms *beneficiary voice*, *constituent voice*, *foundation listening*, and *nonprofit listening*, all 10 questions (5 questions asked in two separate GenAI platforms) were relevant. These results suggest that actors in the field using GenAI platforms for research about feedback are likely to receive relevant content that points them to resources related to established field leaders. The question that produced the most relevant content (regardless of term asked) was "What is the relationship between [TERM] and equity?" All results for this question were relevant. This could be a positive sign around feedback and listening's commitment to equity, as it could indicate a strong link between the concepts of feedback and equity.

## SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

**Of the 149 relevant search results, there were 141 unique webpages—a few actors and articles were most prominent within search results.** The webpages that appeared more times in results were

- SSIR article “Listening to Those Who Matter Most: The Beneficiaries”
- Keystone Accountability’s Technical Note 1
- Hewlett “How Foundations Listen to the People They Seek to Serve” report
- Blog/Wiki about the constituent voice model
- SSIR article “How Listening to Constituents Can Lead to Systems Change”



- Collaborative Impact page talking about the Keystone Accountability constituent voice methodology
- Feedback Labs guiding principles
- Feedback Labs blog “Do You Still Use the Term 'Beneficiary'?”

Comparing, cross referencing, and consolidating all webpages produced by search engine results, linkouts<sup>7</sup> from search engine results, and linkouts from GenAI answers, OCA produced a total of 206 relevant<sup>8</sup> web domains. Over half (120, 58%) of the web domains only appeared once; many (81) came up between 2 and 10 times. Five web domains appeared more than 10 times, including

- Feedback Labs
- Keystone Accountability
- Fund for Shared Insight
- SSIR
- CEP

**Overall, 40% of the content produced through search engine and GenAI was relevant to the feedback field.** Relevance overall is heavily skewed by the search results due to the relative amount of content from search results (450) compared to GenAI (90). This seems to have pulled down overall relevance because GenAI results are significantly more relevant than search engine results. *Beneficiary feedback* produced the most relevant results overall (relevant is considered a binary variable—it does not indicate *the extent to which* or *how deeply* relevant each data entry is). *Feedback field* and *feedback practice* are significantly the least relevant, only producing three and four relevant results respectively.

**Some of the search terms we used were already heavily associated with other fields.**

- Many search results that were not relevant for *beneficiary voice* were related to health care.
- Many search results for *constituent voice* were related to the Keystone Accountability methodology and their *Technical Note 1*, while *constituent* terms tended to have results related to government/governing, politicians, and grassroots advocacy.
- Most search results that were not relevant for *feedback practice* were related to feedback in the workplace, supervision, and team management.

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<sup>7</sup> For the OCA, linkouts are considered any content in the search result webpage that contained a hyperlink to another webpage, resource, PDF, etc.

<sup>8</sup> Linkouts were not coded for relevance; linkouts were assumed relevant due to the relevance of the source.

- Many search results that were not relevant for *perceptual feedback* were related to neuroscience and psychology.
- Many search results that were not relevant for *nonprofit listening* were related to social listening and social media monitoring.
- Many search results that were not relevant for *foundation listening* were related to medical, hearing, auditory + language processing.
- Many results that were not relevant for *feedback field* had to do with programming, software, or platforms that would involve a "field" or a comment box for websites. Additionally, *feedback field* has the most ([15 out of 50 search results, 30%](#)) search results that are sponsored.

**One third of all available and dated resources have been published since 2019.** Search engine results were the only resources we could plot dates to. Out of 450 search results, 149 were relevant. Some sort of date was attached to the resource in 99/149; the remaining 50 were unspecified or unknown. Resources that only cited a year were placed on 01/01 of that year. Similarly with an unspecified quarter, the resource was placed at the beginning of the quarter, and with an unspecified day of the month, the resource was placed at the beginning of the month. The period of time that has produced the most resources for the feedback and listening field is between 2016 and 2021. The drop-off after 2021 is likely because resources produced in the last two years have not had time to pick up traction online, so they come up in a Google search. The average number of resources (overall) produced each year between 2016 and 2021 was 9.7 resources compared to only 3.75 between 2008 and 2015. *Beneficiary feedback* has long been the term that produces the highest volume of resources relevant to the feedback and listening field. *Nonprofit Listening* and *feedback* saw a dramatic spike after 2019, increasing from 0 relevant resources produced to 10 in the course of four years.

**One in five resources mentioned equity in some way.** Using the Find command to analyze the content of the 214 relevant GenAI and OCA search results we found that 20% were connected to equity in some way, 77% did not mention equity at all, and 3% are unknown due to methods constraints. Google search results tended to be less connected to equity (15%) than GenAI results (32%). This could be due to the methods of GenAI results, where 1 of the 5 questions asked is "what is the relationship between [TERM] and equity," meaning at least 20% of GenAI results were guaranteed to generate a result that connects the two concepts and practices. The term "foundation listening" connected equity and feedback the most (40% of the results connected), followed by "feedback practice" (33%).

# LEADERSHIP



Table 9 | Summary of Leadership findings

ELEMENT DEFINITION	
Influential leaders and exemplary organizations across key segments of the field (e.g., practitioners, researchers, business leaders, policymakers), broad base of support from major constituencies	
2018 ASSESSMENT	2024 ASSESSMENT
Not surprisingly, given the development of the field to date, there is a small set of known key leaders who are recognized as pushing the field forward thus far. Broader engagement and support among constituencies is growing but nascent.	There is a core set of recognized field leaders who are also top contributors to online content. In addition, there are a growing number of organizations contributing to the field, with some influential players emerging outside of the Irritants for Change group.

## ASSESSMENT

There is a core set of recognized field leaders who are also top contributors to online content. In addition, there are a growing number of organizations contributing to the field, with some influential players emerging outside of the Irritants for Change group.

There is a core set of field leaders recognized by practitioners and other leaders as top contributors to online content related to feedback and listening. Feedback Labs tops that list as the most recognized field leader, joined by other members of the Irritants for Change. Fund for Shared Insight was the second most recognized leader in interviews and the fifth contributor to online content. Other members of the Irritants in this group included Listen4Good, Charity Navigator, and Keystone Accountability (Table 9). There is also an emergent set of nonprofits, funders, and field builders and service providers recognized as leaders but who are not currently part of the Irritants (Table 10). These results suggest that Feedback Labs and Fund for Shared Insight continue to be field leaders as in 2018, while Keystone Accountability continues to be a strong contributor of online content. These were the three main leaders that emerged in the 2018 assessment. However, results also show that there are a growing number of organizations contributing to the field, with some influential players outside of the Irritants for Change group. New organizations like Stand Together Foundation and the Center for Behavioral Design and Social Justice from Project Evident are entering the field and piloting initiatives to drive further progress.

**Table 10 | Frequently named leaders across data sources**

NFP/FUNDER INTERVIEWS (15)	FIELD LEADER INTERVIEWS (13)	ONLINE CONTENT ANALYSIS (149)
Feedback Labs (5)	Feedback Labs (13)	Feedback Labs (20)
Fund for Shared Insight (3)	Fund for Shared Insight (12)	Keystone Accountability (13)
Listen4Good (2)	Charity Navigator (10)	Stanford Social Innovation Review (13)
Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (2)	The Irritants (Listen4Good, Candid)	Center for Effective Philanthropy (12)
		Fund for Shared Insight (10)

**Table 11 | Identified leaders outside of irritants**

NONPROFITS	FOUNDATIONS	PSOs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CEP</li> <li>• Nurse-Family Partnerships</li> <li>• YouthTruth</li> <li>• Ground Truth Solutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stand Together Foundation</li> <li>• Siegel</li> <li>• Barr</li> <li>• Hewlett</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GEO</li> <li>• PEAK Grantmaking</li> <li>• Council on Foundations</li> <li>• Leap Ambassadors</li> </ul>

We also see an increased number and diversity within field actors. When looking beyond the most named actors, we found 62 different organizations named as key actors in interviews, and the online content analysis identified 165 individual contributors, an increase from the 46 contributors we found in 2018. Actors identified in the OCA loosely fell into several categories, including nonprofits, funders, field builders and service providers rating and information platforms, publications, government organizations, and independent contributors. Among these actors, platforms, funders, and field-building and support organizations are playing key roles in strengthening the feedback field and advancing the field’s shared goal. In addition, eleven different publications or journals were identified through the OCA, which serve as dissemination channels for feedback-related content.

Finally, field leaders’ collaborations have created innovative solutions and spaces for current and new leaders to convene, but there are opportunities to work differently to move the field further. Field leaders highlighted places like the close relationship between Shared Insight and L4G, the Irritants group, Feedback Summits, the Feedback Incentives Learning Group, and the Funder Listening Community of Practice to indicate that collaboration is happening. Field leaders still see great opportunity and the need for more collaboration.

However, not all field actors agree on the strategies that will move the field forward in an equitable way. **This is a particular concern for leaders who have worked to intentionally develop field infrastructure to ensure equitable development in the field. There is a concern that new initiatives in the field may result in perverse incentives that disrupt high-quality feedback efforts and in the inequitable distribution of field resources.** In addition, despite progress in this area, two leaders identified gaps in the current field leadership:

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*“I do worry that there needs to be champions with influence. There needs to be influencers still saying this matters. I think we're losing a little bit of that drumbeat in the last year or so because people get busy, organizations move on, etc.”*

“

*“There needs to be some other force that is able to marshal more resources and convene folks to the table.”*

## SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

**Altogether, the OCA generated a list of 221 distinct actors from 178 different relevant search results and GenAI answers.** For the purposes of this analysis, we are considering the organization or individual named as the author of a search result or the publisher of a search result as an “actor.” The vast majority (165) of actors were mentioned only once, and many organizations (51) were named more than once. Overall, five organizations stood out as possible leaders based on the search results and GenAI answers: Feedback Labs (20), Keystone Accountability (13), *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (13), Center for Effective Philanthropy (12), and Fund for Shared Insight (10). Actors identified in the OCA loosely fell into several categories like nonprofits, funders, philanthropy service organizations, platforms, publications, and government organizations. Nearly half of the actors (100) were independent contributors or authors of website articles, papers, or resources.

**Table 12 | Actor types and number of actors mentioned**

ACTOR TYPE	NUMBER OF TIMES MENTIONED
U.S. nonprofit	28 out of 178 relevant search results and GenAI answers...
Funder	14
Field Builders and Service Providers	89
INGOs	20
Government	12
Platform	20
Publication	27
Independent contributor	70
Other	15

- While 28 search results mentioned actors, we consider to be **nonprofits**, nearly half (12) of the search results named the same organization: Center for Effective Philanthropy. Eleven other nonprofits were mentioned, but the majority of them were only mentioned once.
- **Funders** were only mentioned in 14 search results, and only three funders were mentioned more than once: Hewlett (3), Idaho Children’s Fund (2), and Blagrove Trust (2).
- Of all types of actors, **field builders and service providers** appeared the most in search results and GenAI chats (89). Apart from the previously mentioned organizations, Feedback Labs, Keystone Accountability, and Shared Insight, top field builders mentioned multiple times included Better Evaluation (6), Ekouté (6), and Listen4Good (4).
- Eight different **international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs)** appeared in 20 different search results. Almost all INGOs (7) were mentioned more than once, with the sole exception being UK Aid Match. World Bank (including mentions of the Independent Evaluation Group) and USAID (including mentions of the Learning Lab) came up the most (9), followed by the United Nations (HCR and OPS, total of 5) and UKAID (2).

- Additionally, while only 12 OCA results named **government organizations**, the U.K. Department of International Development and the U.S. Accountability Office were mentioned seven times.
- A total of 14 **platforms** were cited in 20 different search results. Over half (8) of the platforms mentioned were only named once; Candid came up in five search results. Other platforms mentioned more than once include Charity Navigator and GreatNonprofits.
- While 27 search results named actors that are **publications or journals**, only 11 different organizations were named. That is because the Stanford Social Innovation Review was mentioned in 13 different search results, while almost all (8) other publications were only mentioned once. These actors seem to serve as dissemination channels for feedback-related content.
- **Independent contributors** were mentioned the second most, with 70 search results generating a list of 100 distinct actors. Independent contributors mentioned multiple times include Valerie Threlfall (8), David Bonbright (5), Fay Twersky (4), and Phil Buchanan (3).

During field leader, funder, and nonprofit interviews, 62 different organizations or individuals were named by 27 interviewees as actors or leaders in the feedback field. The vast majority of actors (45) named were only mentioned once, but three organizations were mentioned more than three times. Feedback Labs was mentioned the most (16), followed by Fund for Shared Insight (13) and Charity Navigator (12). Six organizations were mentioned more than five times; five of them are part of the Irritants group. Other organizations or individuals named more than once include GEO (4), CEP (3), PEAK Grantmakers (2), and the Hewlett Foundation (2).

**Different types of actors play a variety of important roles in advancing feedback and strengthening the field.** The majority (17) of interviewees pointed out that field-building and infrastructure organizations are playing a large role in advancing feedback practice in the social sector. Interviewees described how field-building organizations are convening and building community among feedback and listening practitioners. Additionally, field building and infrastructure organizations are actively curating knowledge about feedback and listening and elevating resources, tools, and models of feedback practice within the field and outside of it. Six field leaders, seven funders, and four nonprofits spoke about the role of field builders in this way.

Among field-building organizations, eleven interviewees spoke about the role capacity-building and support organizations currently play in advancing feedback practice in the social sector. This type of actor is seen as providing tools, resources, and training for practitioners and organizations. Many capacity builders and supporters help organizations build capacity to start a feedback practice by providing technical assistance, socializing important concepts, and sharing methods. Four field leaders, five funders, and two nonprofits discussed this theme.



Nine interviewees highlighted the key role that platforms play as actors advancing the field's shared goals. Interviewees pointed out that platforms often provide introductory tools or overview as a socializing mechanism for feedback practice. They also pointed out platforms' ability to reach a large number of practitioners, funders, nonprofits, and support organizations as the primary reason for their value.

Ten interviewees talked about the important role funders play in the field. All ten spoke about the positional power and influence that funders have to promote listening in the social sector broadly, as well as among other funders and nonprofits. They also discussed the need for greater buy-in and socialization to the values and practices of feedback and listening. Of the interviewees who talked about the important role that funders currently are fulfilling as influencers in the social sector, seven were field leaders and three were funders, but no nonprofits mentioned the role funders are currently playing in advancing the field.

# FUNDING AND SUPPORTING POLICY

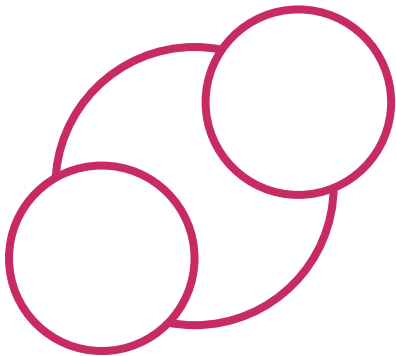


Table 13 | Summary of Funding and Supporting Policy findings

ELEMENT DEFINITION	
Enabling policy environment that supports and encourages model practices and organized funding streams from public, philanthropic, and corporate sources of support	
2018 ASSESSMENT	2024 ASSESSMENT
Shared Insight is still seen as the key funder for this work, and some concerns exist about the ability of this amount of funding to take the field to the next level. Like the knowledge base area, it is not surprising that this component of the field is less developed at this point in time. There is some question about opportunities to build upon successful examples of public sector uptake of feedback practices, given the potential reach/scope of public contracting. We found no specific content in this area that connected to EDI.	There is progress in increasing funding and creating incentives for nonprofit feedback practice, but there are important questions about the extent to which current structures can support the uptake of feedback practices on a large scale. Meanwhile, incentives for funder listening are much more nascent.

## ASSESSMENT

**There is progress in increasing funding and creating incentives for nonprofit feedback practice, but there are important questions about the extent to which current structures can support the uptake of feedback practices on a large scale. Meanwhile, incentives for funder listening are much more nascent.**

In 2018, funding was nascent and scarce. Field leaders at the time saw Fund for Shared Insight as a “critical gap” funder that kept efforts afloat in the absence of additional funding sources, while other incentives for feedback did not exist aside from isolated public sector examples. In 2024, evidence suggests that funding and incentives for feedback practice have increased and improved since the previous field assessment. Of the nine field leaders who commented on funding in 2024, the majority (7) concluded that funding for feedback practice work has increased. While Shared Insight continues to provide field funding, new players are entering the field and funding feedback and listening work in different ways. Specifically, more individual funders are funding and supporting nonprofits’ listening efforts by providing nonprofits access to L4G or in one case, providing “Listening Compensation Dollars,” meant to cover nonprofits’ operating costs related to listening. Some funders are also supporting field-building efforts by funding organizations like Listen4Good, Feedback Labs, and YouthTruth, which provide feedback-related services to nonprofits and work to strengthen the field writ large. While Shared Insight continues to provide funding for these organizations, their diversified funding streams suggest broader support and less dependency on Shared Insight as critical gap funder.

Support for feedback and listening is also diversifying to strategies beyond funding. For example, funders are creating different support systems, like pairing nonprofit partners with foundation evaluation and learning staff who can support feedback practice, providing access to materials and supports like Feedback Labs’ Feedback Crash Course, embedding feedback into broader capacity-building supports, and working to bring other funders on board. In addition to funding, field actors are developing innovative incentives that support feedback and listening work, including Candid’s “How We Listen” and Charity Navigator’s “Charities Rated Highly by their Participants.” Finally, the nonprofits we spoke with are tying feedback to their general operations so that funding is more stable rather than seeking funding specifically for feedback and listening work. These incentive structures are a significant improvement from 2018, when we found no evidence of additional incentive structures aside from project funding.

Despite this progress, there are various questions about whether there is enough funding or if the current models are scalable enough to support broader uptake. Looking to future funding, one field leader was more optimistic, stating, “I think [funding] is increasing. The pivot point for the acceleration of that will come from funders actually believing that it’s part of their cost of operation.” However, another leader mentioned that despite the increases, “funding has not felt scalable,” raising questions about the extent to which the field can expect much more funding in the future. Similarly, another leader expressed concern that while the number of people willing to fund has increased, “Now those funders are looking

elsewhere; it seems like it's slightly less sexy than it was a couple of years ago.” As leaders work to advance feedback in service of equity, they identified the need for investment in different types of services that support organizations’ efforts to shift power to clients, which is related to their feedback practice but requires different supports, which currently have a high cost with no matching funding sources.

Perhaps the strongest questioning of current funding and incentives came from a field leader who questioned whether the current players supporting the field are influential enough to bring about large-scale change in the number of nonprofits working on feedback. “There are a few groups that are giving those 50 to 250 million dollar checks. They haven't written in customer first as the major metric or a major metric that they are [performing] due diligence on.” This field leader pointed to the development of evaluation and randomized control trials as a practice in the field to suggest that the current incentive structures might be insufficient. Instead, government funding and legislation are more likely to generate large-scale uptake of feedback practices if structured correctly:

“My fear with all of this is that the federal government agencies and departments, and state agencies and departments, are not requiring any feedback standards for funding. They dictate the vast majority of funding flows in the social sector. All of those evidentiary standards now have some expectation of a randomized controlled trial or a synthetic control. . . There have been well over 100 major federal or state poverty pieces of legislation that are passed requiring an evidentiary standard of a randomized controlled trial or a synthetic control. I don't know of a single one that requires customer feedback for education, for housing, for juvenile or adult justice, and for child welfare. Again, I think the ethical expectation [for engaging in feedback practice] is there now, but the degree to which that's an enticing enough carrot is an interesting conversation. That's definitely going to need a pretty big stick with the carrot, and there's not yet any stick right now for customer feedback.”

While we did not collect specific information about incentives for listening in advocacy, community development, or among funders, other data suggests that incentives, particularly for funders, are more nascent. Recognizing this, Shared Insight has shifted its focus to funder listening since 2023. Past studies about funder practice changes show questions about how to shift funder practice. So far there have been a few carrots in terms of how-to guides, increased materials, and presentations in conference sessions. However, there is little accountability, and Shared Insight’s core funders called for this as a need in the sector.

## SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

**Funding is increasing, and funders are supporting nonprofit practice in different ways:** Of the nine field leaders who commented on funding, the majority (7) concluded that funding for feedback practice work has increased, but they still see a need for more funding in the field. Feedback can be funded or supported in different ways:

- By supporting L4G participation or providing specific funding for feedback practice
- As part of general operations or flexible funding, which another funder flagged as a hoped-for progression, in the future.
- Supporting advocacy organizations' feedback work; one of them is doing this through L4G
- Pairing nonprofit partners with evaluation and learning staff who can support feedback practice
- Providing access to materials and supports
- Embedding feedback into capacity-building supports
- Bringing other funders on board

“

*“Then, regionally, because we bought into Listen4Good in their second and third cohorts, we brought in a number of other regional funders who were really excited about seeing the results that came out of our first cohort, which we put into a report and we shared. We were very lucky to be able to promote what came out of that. Then, the other funders bought in, and they now fund that piece.”*

**Field leaders have identified other ways to incentivize the uptake of practice in the field** in addition to funding. Working with platforms to develop Candid.org's "How We Listen" section on nonprofits' profiles and Charity Navigator's Encompass Ratings System, field leaders are hoping to pull levers that influence nonprofits' practices that do not depend on funder requirements. The development of these two incentive structures in the past few years points to innovations in the field and is an example of how collaboration among leaders can result in structures and approaches to drive practice change. So far, around 31,500 nonprofits have completed the "How We Listen" section in their profiles, which points to a strong uptake, at least from a set of early adopters. While completing this section is not an indication of the quality of feedback practices, it does serve as an indication that these nonprofits are thinking about feedback and listening and engaging clients in their efforts in some way. Another example is Charity Navigator's "Charities Highly Rated by Their Participants" page, which publishes nonprofits' Net Promoter Scores as an indicator of high-quality organizations. Some funders are also independently incentivizing feedback by asking about feedback practices in grant applications or grant-related conversations.

# EVALUATOR REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSION

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# EVALUATOR REFLECTIONS

1. **Making equity and power a foundational pillar for the field will require even more intentional and strategic efforts.** In 2018 we said this was an area of opportunity, and not much was happening. There is a much clearer conceptualization of the relationship and how feedback can support equity, and there are more intentional efforts to ensure that feedback is advancing equity, at least among a core group of field leaders. However, equity is still not central to the feedback field as a whole; most leaders and actors continue to think about feedback as an input into improved services and strategies in the social sector. Feedback is more connected to improving efforts for organizations that hold power over the services that clients receive. Feedback is not widely seen as a mechanism to address the systemic factors requiring these services in the first place and clients not having decision-making power over their own fate or what they need to thrive. Some leaders, including Shared Insight, have moved the goalposts since 2018 by including shifting power as a goal, but more work is required to reframe the conversation and the field, all while not losing the progress made to date in advancing the uptake of a specific practice within the sector.
2. **Creating a bigger tent to include listening has implications for ongoing field building.** Field leaders have shifted their discourse and shared goals beyond feedback to include listening as well. This decision positions feedback within a broader umbrella of practices that seek to ensure that nonprofits and foundations are meaningfully connected with the people and communities at the heart of their work. This positioning can bring in more actors, funding, and reinforcing efforts that result in broader influence, but it could also distract players from their original goals. Thus, there are important tradeoffs and implications for different types of field leaders and their strategies moving forward:
  - a. **For feedback field actors:** There has been progress in moving the feedback field from the framing to the networking phase. Efforts to define feedback and to create standards of practice and a supporting knowledge base have created a stronger field around a specific practice that leaders hope becomes an expected practice in the sector. With the broadening frame, it is important to ensure alignment among core actors about what elements of feedback practice are key and cannot be compromised on to focus on the uptake of this specific practice.

- b. **For listening actors:** While the feedback field is better defined and more concrete, efforts around listening both for funders and non-direct service nonprofits are more nascent. Additional work to define a shared identity, create standards, develop knowledge, and set up incentives and champions for listening will help move this specific practice forward.
- c. **For all leaders:** Structuring the field as a meeting of overlapping fields can help identify areas where mutual reinforcement can help each subfield without losing sight of its own goals and progress. In a recent exploration of different fields,<sup>9</sup> Bridgespan shared the concept of nested and overlapping fields to explain how fields related to specific issues can overlap under a broad issue area and that the work of field building requires advancing both types of fields—that is, tending to both the intersecting broader field and the individual focused fields (Figure 4). We found accounts of various intersecting concepts and actors who are actively advancing each one, including feedback, listening, trust-based philanthropy, locally led development, and asset-based community development. The intersection between these specific areas and particularly between feedback and listening points to opportunities to support future growth of these overlapping fields, which requires tending to the overlap and to the strengthening of the individual, focused fields.

**Figure 4 | Example of nested and overlapping fields.**



<sup>9</sup> Farnham, L., Nothmann, E., Tamaki, Zo., & Daniels, C. (2020, March). *Field building for population-level change*. The Bridgespan Group. <https://www.bridgespan.org/getmedia/6d7adede-31e8-4a7b-ab87-3a4851a8abac/field-building-for-population-level-change-march-2020.pdf>



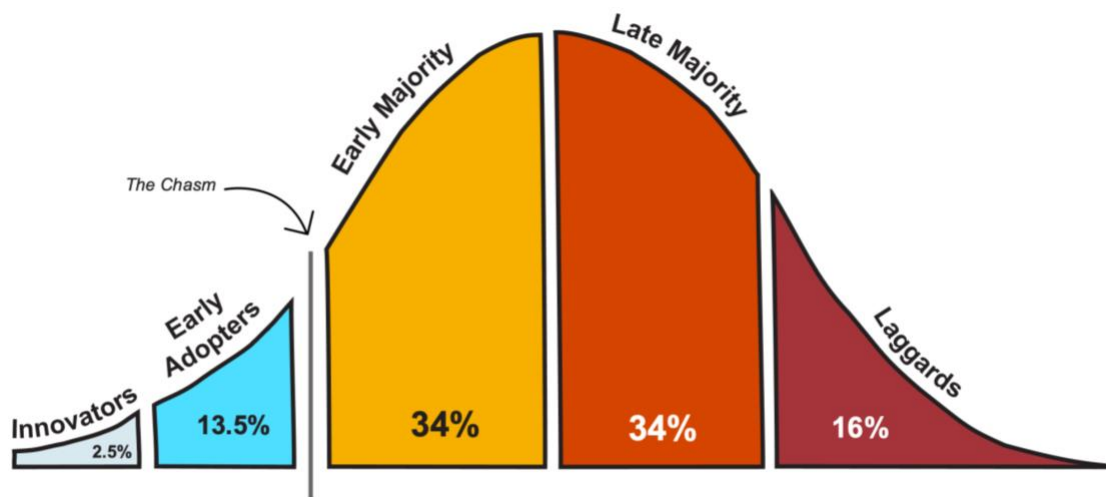
3. **Shared Insight has been a thought leader and key funder in the field but is sunsetting in 2026. Strategically discerning field leaders' next steps can help the field move forward without losing momentum.** While there are new and better positioned leaders in the field, Fund for Shared Insight has and continues to be an active and influential actor. Shared Insight has mobilized significant funding into the field while enabling networking and collaboration among leaders and contributing to progress along all elements of the Strong Field Framework. With its upcoming sunsetting in 2026, Shared Insight is already thinking about how to end well and set up the field for sustainability, but supporting other field builders' own explorations of the right next steps might also be a worthwhile investment. Meanwhile, field builders should think about what it will take to drive the field forward without losing momentum and investing strategically to secure long-term success while tending to the short-term needs of a growing field.
4. **Broader uptake seems to be the next frontier for the field, which entails debating, testing, and aligning on strategies that support the field in crossing the chasm in the diffusion of feedback and listening practice.** The feedback field's shared goal is to make feedback and listening standard practice in the social sector, and while there has been progress toward that goal, several field leaders questioned the pace of progress and called for additional efforts to ensure more widespread and prompt diffusion of this practice. When reflecting on how to accomplish this, field leaders mentioned influential champions, increased and scalable funding, and scalable support services as ways to drive further uptake. Other field leaders called for the development of different incentive structures that require public sector participation to make feedback a standard practice at a broader scale than possible only through social sector incentives.

Diffusion of innovation theory is a framework that can help explain how a given practice is adopted by actors over time. This theory suggests that within a universe of potential adopters, some actors will be ready and eager to adopt a practice faster than others, depending on different dispositions, the advantage they see in the innovative practice, how complex it is, and how observable or tangible results are. Segmenting the target audience according to their readiness for adoption can help promoters of a practice, in this case feedback field leaders, understand what it will take to influence uptake among a specific group and how to get over the "chasm," which is the gap in adoption between early adopters and an early majority of the target universe (Figure 5).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>The Brand Hopper. (n.d.). *Marketing concept: Diffusion of innovation*. <https://thebrandhopper.com/2020/11/13/marketing-concept-diffusion-of-innovation/>

Figure 5 | Diffusion of Innovation<sup>11</sup>



There are currently some competing hypotheses about what will enable the field to cross the chasm, and while field actors can move several strategies forward at once, they must reckon with whether there are promising strategies to align with and whether one strategy can detract from another. Charity Navigator’s Net Promoter Score initiative as an incentive structure compared to Candid’s “How We Listen” section are examples of efforts with distinct hypotheses about what will incentivize uptake in the sector. Thus, field leaders should consider how to manage and learn from innovation and different approaches collectively in the path toward identifying strategies and practices that can promote broader uptake and equitable field growth.

<sup>11</sup> The Brand Hopper. (n.d.). *Marketing concept: Diffusion of innovation*.  
<https://thebrandhopper.com/2020/11/13/marketing-concept-diffusion-of-innovation/>

# CONCLUSION

Over the past ten years, leaders in the philanthropy and the nonprofit sector in the United States have been working to make the use of high-quality feedback and listening standard practice in the social sector in the United States. To do so, leaders have invested resources in building and supporting a feedback and listening field, collectively defined as “a community of actors using complementary approaches to make the use of high-quality feedback and listening standard practice in the social sector in the U.S.” The feedback and listening field is stronger today than in 2018 across all elements of the Strong Field Framework and has moved from the framing to the networking phase. However, challenges and opportunities remain for current leaders to further position the field for growth and success into the future. Further clarifying how feedback works in the service of equity, building on the foundations laid thus far to support the development of this and other adjacent fields, identifying next steps to secure sustainable funding and leadership, and working to cross the chasm to broader uptake are all areas of opportunity for continued growth. Overall, the feedback and listening field is well positioned to continue its path toward greater maturity, but leaders must tend to tough challenges and decisions in the short- and mid-term that will likely shape the field’s future.

# APPENDIX

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# APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

To systematically gather the data to answer the evaluation questions across components, we used two data collection methods:

- Key informant interviews
- Online content analysis and document review

## KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

We conducted 30 key informant interviews with field leaders who are members of the Irritants for Change, funders, and nonprofit practitioners. These key informants provided valuable perspectives about the field's shared identity, the status of the field's standards of practice and knowledge base, the leadership and grassroots support, and the funding and policy landscape (Tables A.1 and A.2). We took different approaches in selecting interviewees across the three categories:

- **Field leaders:** We contacted all 16 members of the Irritants for Change group, and 13 agreed to participate. In addition to the initial interviews, we conducted one focus group with four field leaders to explore the connection between feedback and equity in more detail.
- **Funders:** We worked with Feedback Labs and Listen4Good to identify funders they had interacted with around feedback and listening but who were not already part of Shared Insight's core funders. In addition, we contacted Shared Insight's sidecar funders, which are not as closely involved in ongoing feedback conversations. Altogether, we contacted 14 foundations and interviewed 10 of them.
- **Nonprofits:** We worked with Feedback Labs, Shared Insight, and Listen4Good to identify nonprofits that were engaged in feedback efforts but who were not working with Listen4Good or receiving grants from Shared Insight. We also identified the YMCA, the Boys and Girls Club, and Habitat for Humanity International as key informants given these organizations' size and influence in the sector. Altogether, we contacted nine nonprofits and interviewed five of them.

**TABLE A.1 | List of field leaders interviewed and their organizational affiliation**

FIRST	LAST	ORGANIZATION
Ann Mei	Chang	Candid.org
Britt	Lake	Feedback Labs
Dennis	Whittle	Feedback Labs
Mari	Kuraishi	Jessie Ball duPont Fund
Victoria	Vrana	GlobalGiving
Brad	Dudding	The Bail Project
Jean-Louis	Sarbib	Feedback Labs
Laura	Andes	Charity Navigator
Michael	Thatcher	Charity Navigator
Sasha	Dichter	60 Decibels
Steve	Goodall	formerly JD Power
Valerie	Threlfall	Listen4Good
Melinda	Tuan	Fund for Shared Insight

**TABLE A.2 | List of funders and nonprofits interviewed**

FUNDERS	NONPROFITS
Caring for Denver Foundation	Habitat for Humanity International
Disability & Philanthropy Forum	Maine Youth Action Network
MacArthur Foundation	National Young Farmers Coalition
Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies	The Boys & Girls Clubs of America
Missouri Foundation for Health	YMCA
Moses Taylor Foundation	
Siegel Family Endowment	
Sobrato Philanthropies	
Stand Together Foundation	
Target Foundation	

To analyze the interview and focus group data, we used thematic coding to identify responses connected to the different components of the Strong Field Framework. We then analyzed the coded responses by order of prevalence to identify to what extent interviewees had similar or contradictory perceptions, remaining attentive to instances where outlier perceptions provided relevant and valuable nuance or a different perspective.

## ONLINE CONTENT ANALYSIS

The online content analysis allowed for a systematic review and characterization of available online content related to the feedback field. The learning questions associated with this effort were the following:

- How many and what types of relevant resources connected to the feedback field are readily available online?
- Who are the main authors and organizations contributing to the knowledge base?
- How and to what extent has the makeup of resources/authors changed since 2018?

The methodology entailed an analysis of the first 50 results of Google searches using key search terms. We then reviewed each individual result, recorded basic information—like the title, URL, author, publisher, and date—and coded it according to its

- **Relevance to the feedback field:** whether it was related to perceptual feedback provided by end beneficiaries to social or public sector organizations in the United States
- **Relationship with specific components of the Strong Field Framework:** if it related mostly with shared identity, standards of practice, knowledge base, leadership and key constituency support, or funding

By including a large number of results pages in the sample, we used a wide enough net to include existing and “readily available information.” If a resource exists but does not show up in the first 50 results of a Google search, we consider it as not readily available and thus not an active resource to the field. Descriptive quantitative analysis allowed us to use the resulting database to measure several indicators from the Strong Field Framework tied to this data source.



# GENERATIVE AI - ONLINE CONTENT ANALYSIS

This methodology entailed entering nine predetermined search terms and five predetermined questions into Google Bard and Bing Chat. We then coded GenAI chatbot answers to each question for each term according to whether it was related to perceptual feedback provided by end beneficiaries to social or public sector organizations in the United States. We also assessed the extent to which the resources cited by chatbot responses were connected to feedback field leaders.

**TABLE A.3 | Search terms and questions used in the GenAI search**

SEARCH TERM	AI CHAT QUESTION
Beneficiary feedback	<p>What is [SEARCH TERM]?</p> <p>Who are the main organizations working on [SEARCH TERM]?</p> <p>What are the main publications about [SEARCH TERM]?</p> <p>What is the relationship between feedback and [SEARCH TERM]?<sup>12</sup></p> <p>What is the relationship between [SEARCH TERM] and equity?</p>
Beneficiary voice	
Constituent feedback	
Constituent voice	
Feedback field	
Feedback practice	
Foundation listening	
Nonprofit listening	
Perceptual feedback	

<sup>12</sup> GenAI questions that contained the word “feedback” were not used with search terms that included “feedback”.

## STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

To ensure comparability with 2018, we used a similar design combining interviews, online content analysis, and secondary data. We acknowledge that these data sources have strengths and limitations, which we summarize in the following section.

### Strengths

- **Comparability between 2018 and 2024:** One of the main goals in 2018 was to build a baseline that could be used as a comparison point for future assessments of the field's evolution. Therefore, we designed a methodology and documented our process in a way that ensures replicability, thus allowing us to compare results and assess changes over time. By maintaining a similar design and using the same framework, this assessment provided a qualitative comparison of the status of the feedback field to assess changes between 2018 and 2024.
- **Data triangulation:** Using thematic coding in interviews combined with online content analysis, we were able to triangulate data to establish checkpoints for our findings, making our final assessments more robust as they do not depend on any one data source or individual perception.
- **Strong interviewee sample:** We are confident that we captured a representative sample of perceptions among field leaders. In addition, our targeted sampling of funders and nonprofits from outside of the immediate circle of field leaders provided a more external perspective on the field. While not exhaustive, this sample was illustrative of how the field has developed thus far.
- **Wide net approach:** The breadth of the online content analysis allowed us to review a wide array of resources about feedback that is readily available to the general public through an online search. The addition of the GenAI search provided an additional data point that reflects changes in how field actors might search for information related to the feedback field.

### Limitations

- **It was not an exhaustive approach:** Although we attempted to cast a wide net through the OCA, our approach was not exhaustive, so there may be resources out there that we did not capture. In addition, the final interviewee list included an illustrative but not exhaustive group of funders and nonprofits outside of the field leader circle. Broader inquiry with a greater number of actors in these sectors can provide a more accurate assessment of uptake at a broader scale.
- **Differences in coding of OCA data between 2018 and 2024:** In 2018 we had more detailed codes for OCA results. However, we often found resources that did not include enough detail or information to assess whether they focused on specific steps of feedback loops, were in alignment with Shared Insight's definitions, or represented a specific type of resource. We treated this and other instances of imperfect data as missing data and coded it accordingly. In 2024 we opted to simplify coding to minimize the presence of missing data and excluded codes about the

nature of the resource (research, op-ed, etc.), focus on specific steps of feedback loops, and alignment with Shared Insight's definitions of high-quality feedback. One implication of this change is that in 2018 we only coded 10 search results as "research" and examined those for connections to equity as part of the knowledge base. In 2024, we examined all relevant results for connections to equity rather than just "research" since we no longer have that specific category.

**Potential variability in results given search engines' algorithms:** While the online content analysis process is itself replicable, we have no way of guaranteeing that conducting the exact same analysis at a later point in time would yield the same results. The search results may vary based on Google's search algorithm. This is also the case for the GenAI search as responses can vary from search to search and platform to platform.



**ORS**IMPACT

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