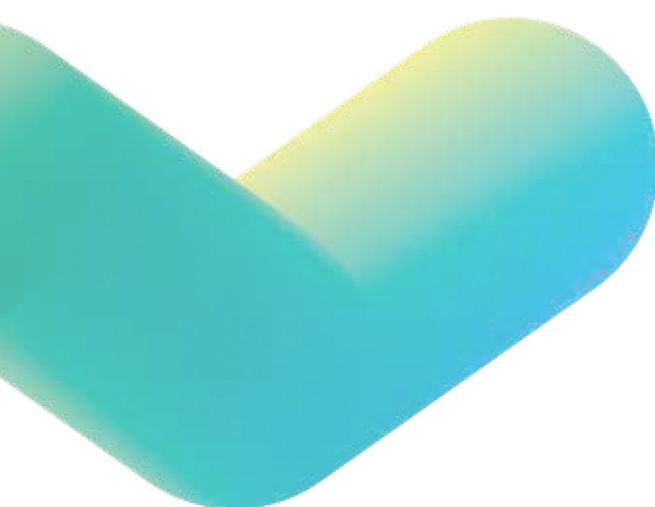*Fund for*
Shared|Insight

Funder Listening Assessment

About this Tool

Fund for Shared Insight created this assessment to help you take a thoughtful look at how your organization listens to, learns with, and shares power with the people and communities most impacted by its work.

It's not a scorecard or benchmark, or about judging where you are; it's about learning.
We hope it sparks honest conversations, surfaces insights, and opens up possibilities for change.

The tool looks at three big areas:

- Motivation and Mindset — what drives your organization's approach to listening, and what assumptions might be shaping it?

- Listening in Practice — how does listening actually happen day to day, and how is listening structured and resourced?

- Response and Accountability — what happens because of listening; how does your organization follow through on what it hears and who it is accountable to?

Each section identifies three levels of practice:

- **Beginning** – Listening is happening in some form but is not yet consistent or strategic. These early efforts, whether driven by compliance, reputational goals, or isolated initiatives, are creating baselines, and offer entry points to build awareness of power dynamics and stronger listening practices over time.

- **Developing** – The organization is developing its listening practices and beginning to align them with internal values and strategies. Some staff recognize the importance of community voice and are adapting practices to be more inclusive and responsive and to balance power. Further progress can come through cultivating more internal champions and continuing to integrate listening across the many dimensions of the foundation's work.

- **Embedded** – Listening is a core organizational commitment. It is integrated into strategy, resourced appropriately, and practiced in ways that shift power, build trust, and shape decision making. The organization is accountable to community and shares responsibility for change — and has the opportunity to support peer funders, contribute to field learning, and help elevate listening as a norm across the philanthropic sector.

As you go through the assessment, mark off where you believe your organization's norms and practices fall along Levels 1-3.

Note that this is not about your individual actions or beliefs around listening, but about your organization's dominant culture and default behaviors.

> You can complete the assessment individually or with colleagues, to support internal learning.

Motivation and Mindset

The values, assumptions, and commitments that shape how your organization listens to community.

Question	Level 1 (Minimal Practice)	Level 2 (Emerging Practice)	Level 3 (Embedded Practice)
1. How does your organization think about power?	Power is rarely discussed. Listening may reinforce existing hierarchies rather than question them.	Staff and leadership are beginning to explore power dynamics and how they show up in relationships, strategies, and systems.	Power is named and examined openly. Listening is intentionally used to rebalance power and build accountability to community.
2. Why does your organization listen?	Listening happens occasionally or to meet external expectations. It may be framed as a public relations effort or compliance requirement.	Listening is increasingly recognized as a strategic practice. Staff can point to examples where community voice influenced thinking, decisions, and/or work.	Listening is core to how the organization learns, builds relationships, and makes decisions. It's part of an ongoing commitment to share power.
3. Who is considered a legitimate source of insight?	Perspectives from community members are seen as anecdotal or secondary. Formal expertise or institutional knowledge carries more weight.	Some community voices are invited into conversations, often through intermediaries like grantees. The value of lived experience is acknowledged.	The organization honors multiple ways of knowing. Community insight is sought out, trusted, and seen as essential to setting direction.
4. What evidence matters most to leadership?	Internal metrics, donor priorities, or reputation concerns often drive decisions. Community feedback may be collected but not prioritized.	Leadership considers community perspectives in key moments, especially when prompted by staff or peers.	Community voice consistently informs priorities, strategies, and resourcing. Listening is treated as essential evidence for decision making.

Listening in Practice

The structures and practices that determine how listening is conducted, and how accessible, equitable, and responsive it is.

Question	Level 1 (Minimal Practice)	Level 2 (Emerging Practice)	Level 3 (Embedded Practice)
5. When and how does your organization listen?	Listening is ad hoc, often tied to strategic planning or crises. Opportunities are limited or surface-level.	The organization gathers input from grantees or community partners, but practices may lack consistency or depth.	Listening is ongoing, relational, and embedded in multiple aspects of the work. It is a regular part of how the organization operates.
6. How are community members engaged?	Community members are asked for input but have limited influence. Participation may feel extractive or symbolic.	Some community members are involved in design or advisory roles. There is openness to co-creation in specific programs or contexts.	Community members are partners in shaping strategy, programs, and decisions. Participation is authentic, reciprocal, and resourced.
7. How does your organization ensure the voices of those most impacted but often least heard are included?	Participation tends to reflect existing relationships. Little effort is made to engage people outside the organization's usual networks.	The organization is taking steps to broaden who is included, experimenting with new approaches to reach people with less access or influence.	Inclusion is intentional and strategic. The organization co-creates spaces for participation and consistently centers those most impacted.
8. How is listening resourced?	Listening efforts are underfunded or treated as extra work. There may be no dedicated staff or budget.	Some staff time and resources are allocated. There is growing recognition that quality listening requires investment.	Listening is a funded priority. Staff are supported, structures are in place, and listening is aligned with organizational strategy.

Response and Accountability

How your organization acts on what it hears, communicates back, and closes the loop with community.

Question	Level 1 (Minimal Practice)	Level 2 (Emerging Practice)	Level 3 (Embedded Practice)
9. Who makes meaning out of what is heard?	Interpretation happens internally. Insights are filtered through staff or consultants without community input.	The organization is experimenting with shared sense-making in selected initiatives or partnerships.	Meaning-making is collaborative. Community members help shape analysis, context, and next steps.
10. How does your organization respond to what it hears?	Community input is acknowledged but rarely acted upon. Decisions often proceed without visible connection to what was heard.	The organization can point to examples of changes made in response to community input. Follow-through is inconsistent.	Community input drives reflection, decision making, and adaptation. Response is timely, transparent, and rooted in mutual respect.
11. How are community members informed about the results of their input?	There is little or no communication back to community members. Feedback loops are not closed.	Community members are sometimes informed about outcomes, though communication may be delayed or general.	The organization closes the loop consistently and clearly. Community members know what was heard, what changed as a result and why.
12. How are you accountable to community?	The organization is primarily accountable to internal or funder audiences.	The organization is trying out ways to share progress and stay answerable to community — through public updates, community advisors, or shared learning.	Clear structures — such as shared decision making, community-led review, or transparent reporting — support mutual accountability. Community members help define what follow-through looks like.

Fund *for* Shared|Insight

Turning Reflection Into Change

Now that you've taken the time to examine how your foundation listens to community — and how that listening connects to strategy, values, and power — consider next steps. Here are some suggestions:

- **Have a conversation with your colleagues.**
  Use your reflections to open dialogue with leadership, staff, grantee partners, or community advisors. What stands out? What surprised you? Where is there alignment — or tension?

- **Identify one or two areas where your practices feel least developed or most important to improve.**
  What could you change? You don't have to change everything at once. Consider one or two practice areas that matter most to your organization. What would progress look like in those areas over the next year?

- **Engage others.**
  Invite partners, grantees, peer funders, or community members to complete the assessment or react to your organization's results. If appropriate, consider co-creating a vision for how listening and response can improve.

- **Plan to revisit this assessment in six months or a year** to gauge where your efforts have made a difference and where there is room to keep improving.

Fund for Shared Insight offers additional resources to help you move from reflection to practice:

- Our <u>Funder Listening Action Menu: Tools & Resources to Shift Power to Communities</u> features curated discussion prompts, resources, and examples of funders already doing the work.

- Our <u>Community Listening Sessions Guide: A Guide for Funders</u> outlines how to host effective, equitable, and accessible listening sessions.

- Our <u>Participatory Philanthropy Toolkit</u> offers a comprehensive set of resources and toolkits to help you design and implement participatory grantmaking programs and practices.