Feedback from the People Served by Nonprofits and Foundations

Listen for Good

Key Findings

- **A majority of respondents provided very positive feedback to the organizations that served them**. Half of respondents (54 percent) provide the highest possible rating on the quantitative Net Promoter question, signaling that they were extremely likely to recommend the nonprofit to a friend or family member. There are multiple potential explanations for this finding.

- **Youth under age 18 and people receiving education-related services rated significantly lower than other respondents**. These groups overlapped substantially, as 94 percent of respondents receiving education-related services were youth under age 18.

- **The Listen for Good survey tool is understandable to the people that participating nonprofits serve**. Respondents' answers to the various quantitative and qualitative questions were generally well-aligned, indicating that the questions made sense to the people answering them.

- **This analysis provides some evidence that the Net Promoter system works in the nonprofit context, and revealed the need for further exploration**. Alignment between quantitative and qualitative responses suggests that the Net Promoter question may tap into other aspects of respondents' experience in the nonprofit context. Additional analysis can shed more light on what factors influence how respondents answer the survey.

Introduction

About Listen for Good

Listen for Good is dedicated to helping foundations and nonprofits strengthen their practice of listening to the people they seek to help. As an initiative of Fund for Shared Insight (Shared Insight), Listen for Good provides grants and technical assistance to direct service nonprofits that, in turn, collect and analyze feedback from the people they serve.

In its first three rounds of funding in 2016 and 2017, Listen for Good supported 46 nonprofit organizations across the country in gathering feedback from more than 29,000 people they serve. Each participating nonprofit collected this feedback using a very brief semi-standard survey composed of open- and closed-ended questions. Central to the survey is the use of the Net Promoter system, which was originally developed in the private sector to measure customer experience and loyalty, and predict future company growth.

Purpose of This Analysis

In early 2017, Shared Insight engaged Harder+Company Community Research (Harder+Company) to analyze the data collected by Listen for Good grantees to date. Together, Shared Insight and Harder+Company identified several research priorities, including to:

- Summarize the quantitative and qualitative data descriptively and identify patterns and/or differences in respondent feedback;

- Assess the effectiveness of the six required survey questions in capturing nonprofit respondents' experiences; and

- Judge the effectiveness of the Net Promoter system in the nonprofit context.

This memo summarizes the findings of that engagement.
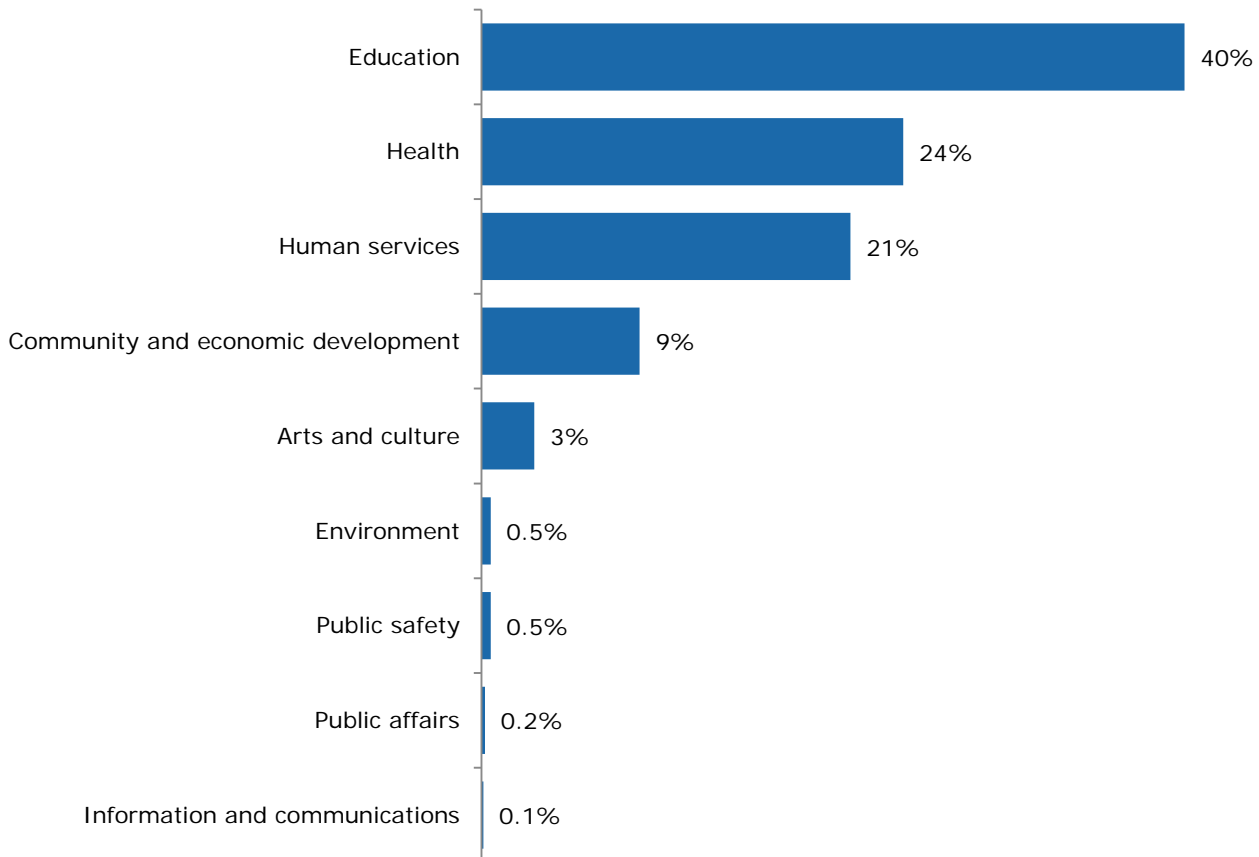
harder + co | community research

Methods

Harder+Company used descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations to summarize responses; ANOVAs, t-tests, and chi-squares to examine patterns within an organization; and regression models to examine patterns across organizations. For the qualitative data, the team coded a representative sample of respondent comments, developed a machine learning algorithm to code remaining respondent comments, and employed regression models to examine patterns between qualitative feedback and quantitative ratings. Finally, to assess the effectiveness of the survey questions and the Net Promoter system, the team used factor analyses, cluster analyses, and regression models.

Listen for Good Nonprofit Grantees and the People They Serve

The 46 nonprofits represented in the dataset provide a wide range of services within nine issue areas, including arts and culture, community and economic development, education, environment, health, human services, information and communications, public affairs, and public safety. The largest proportion of respondents (40 percent) received services related to education, followed by health (24 percent) and human services (21 percent).

Listen for Good Survey: Core Questions

1. **How likely are you to recommend the organization to a friend or family member? (0-10 scale)**

2. **What is the organization good at? (open-ended)**

3. **What could the organization do better? (open-ended)**

4. **How much of a positive difference has this organization made in your life? (1-5 scale)**

5. **Overall, how well has this organization met your needs? (1-5 scale)**

6. **How often do staff at this organization treat you with respect? (1-5 scale)**

Issue Areas of Listen for Good Respondents (*n* = 29,458)

- Education — 40%
- Health — 24%
- Human services — 21%
- Community and economic development — 9%
- Arts and culture — 3%
- Environment — 0.5%
- Public safety — 0.5%
- Public affairs — 0.2%
- Information and communications — 0.1%

Listen for Good nonprofits are located across the United States and range greatly in size and reach. They include organizations with annual budgets of under $500,000 to those with annual budgets of over $20,000,000, as well as organizations with fewer than 50 Listen for Good survey respondents to organizations with thousands of respondents. Roughly a third of Listen for Good organizations (36 percent) had fewer than 100 respondents, while 16 percent had more than 1,000 respondents.

The 29,458 respondents in the dataset reflect the diversity of nonprofits from which they receive services. Forty-one percent identified as Hispanic or Latino, 22 percent as Black or African American, 21 percent as White, 4 percent as Asian, and 11 percent as multiracial/multiethnic or another race. Languages spoken by the respondents included English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, among others. Nearly half of respondents were under age 18.
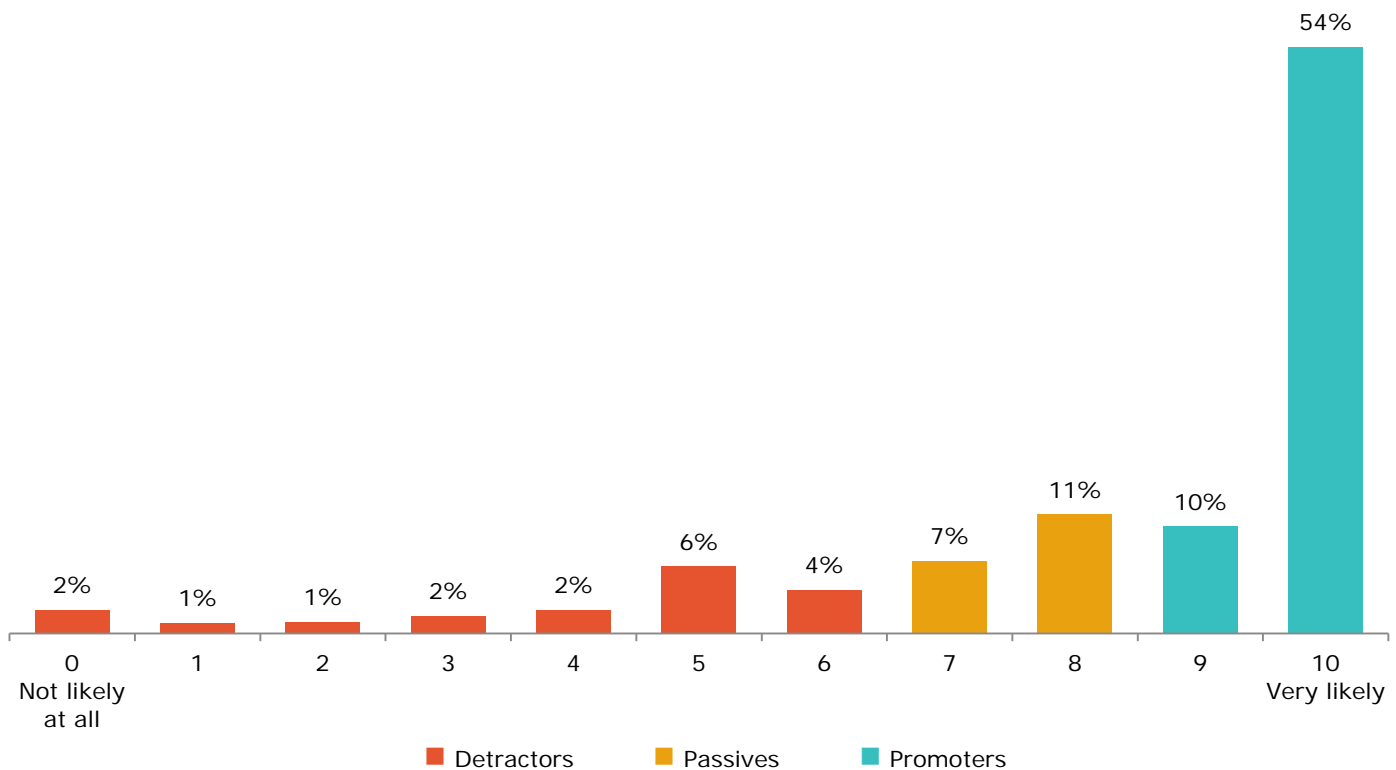
Respondent Experiences with Nonprofits

Overall, respondents offered very positive feedback for the nonprofits serving them. Responses to all of the quantitative questions in the survey (questions 1 and 4–6) clustered toward the most positive response options.

Quantitative Net Promoter Question

The first question in the Listen for Good survey instrument was the quantitative Net Promoter question, which asked respondents if they would recommend the organization providing them services to a friend or family member. About half of respondents (54 percent) provided the top rating of 10 on a 0-to-10 scale.

Net Promoter Ratings (*n* = 28,581)

Bar chart of Net Promoter Ratings. Values by rating: 0 (Not likely at all) = 2%, 1 = 1%, 2 = 1%, 3 = 2%, 4 = 2%, 5 = 6%, 6 = 4%, 7 = 7%, 8 = 11%, 9 = 10%, 10 (Very likely) = 54%. Legend: Detractors, Passives, Promoters.

In order to calculate organizations' Net Promoter Scores, individuals' responses were aggregated by organization, and the proportion of detractors (those rating 0–6) was subtracted from the proportion of promoters (those rating 9–10) at each organization. This produced a score ranging from –100 to 100. Twenty-eight of the 46 Listen for Good organizations had Net Promoter Scores of 60 or higher, 15 had a score between 0 and 59, and three organizations had Net Promoter Scores below 0.
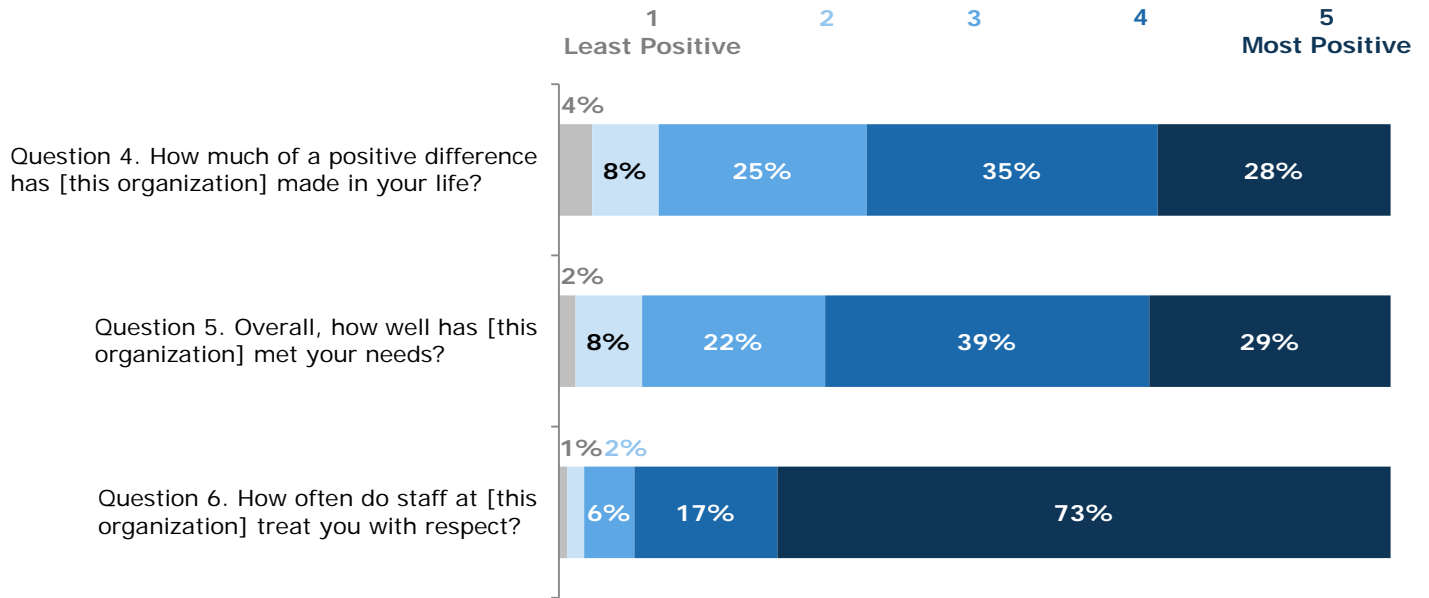
Net Promoter Scores of Organizations (*n* = 46 organizations; *n* = 28,581 respondents)
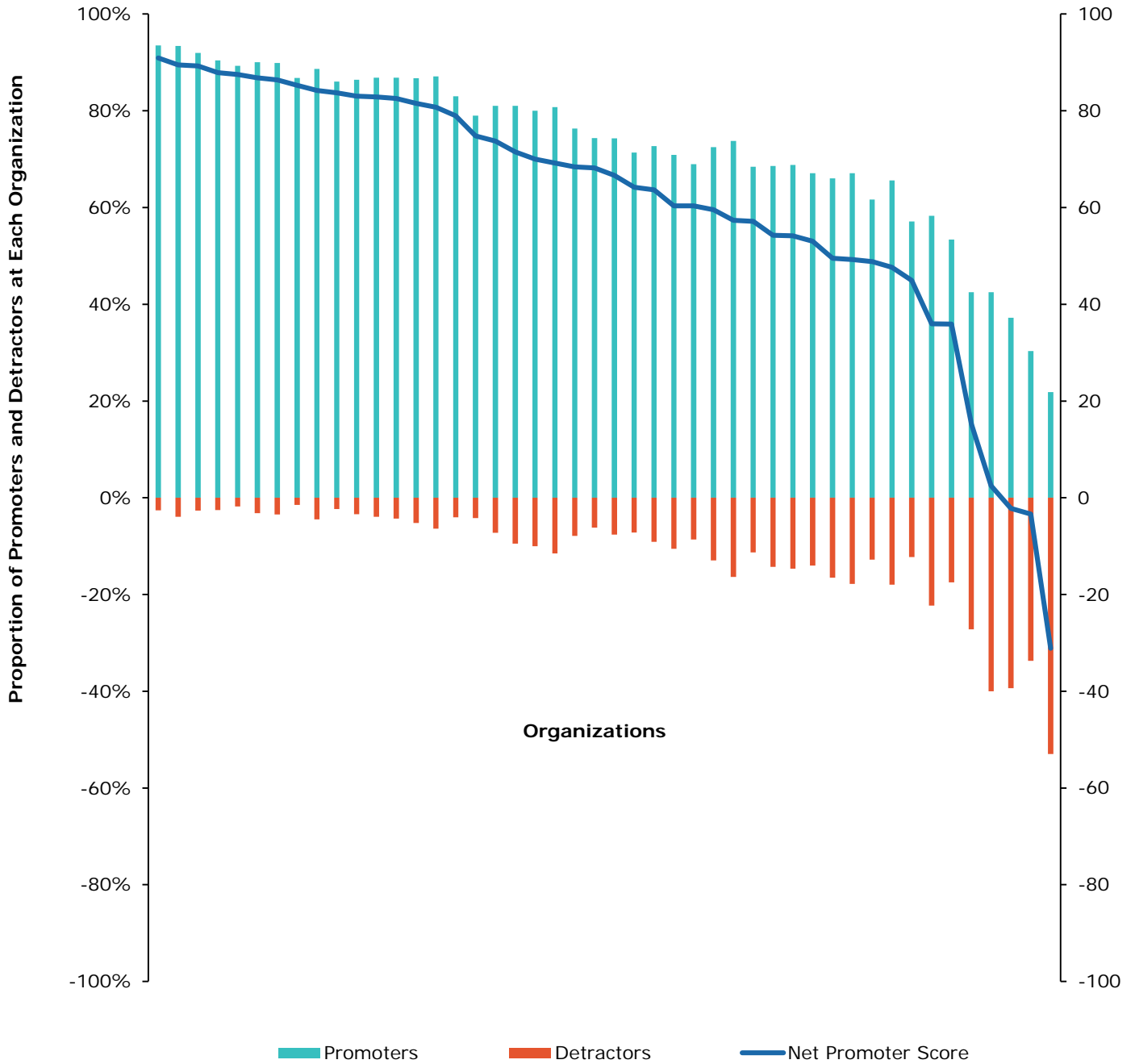
Core Quantitative Questions (Questions 4-6)

Responses to questions 4 and 5, which asked how much of a positive difference the organization has made in respondents' lives and how well the organization has met their needs, respectively, were more varied, compared to responses to the quantitative Net Promoter question. More respondents used the lower ends of the 1-to-5 scales. Responses to question 6, which asked how often respondents felt treated with respect, were comparatively less varied, where 73 percent of respondents indicated that the organizations providing them services "always" treated with them respect, rating a 5 on a 1-to-5 scale.

Summary of Core Survey Question Ratings

	1 Least Positive	2	3	4	5 Most Positive
Question 4. How much of a positive difference has [this organization] made in your life?	4% / 8%	25%	35%		28%
Question 5. Overall, how well has [this organization] met your needs?	2% / 8%	22%	39%		29%
Question 6. How often do staff at [this organization] treat you with respect?	1% / 2% / 6%	17%	73%		

Qualitative Feedback

The Listen for Good survey also included two open-ended questions as part of the Net Promoter system that asked what the organization does well (question 2) and how it could improve (question 3). A large proportion of respondents (79 percent) provided answers to these questions.

When asked **what the organization did well**, about half of survey respondents (49 percent) offered a positive comment about a specific offering of that organization. For example, one respondent wrote, "They are good at helping you with work you haven't completed or with work you don't understand." Another mentioned, "All the help is excellent and the food is good and healthy." Respondents also shared comments about communications, advice, and information provided by the nonprofits serving them (13 percent), as well as treatment by staff (11 percent). Three percent of respondents provided a negative comment for this question, despite the fact that it asked for something the organization did well.

When asked **how the organization could improve**, the largest proportion of respondents (35 percent) stated that they had no suggestion or that everything was good. About a quarter of respondents (22 percent) made requests for the organizations to modify or add to their services. Smaller proportions of respondents made suggestions to improve the accessibility of services (8 percent) or operations (8 percent).

Unpacking Differences in Feedback

One of the research priorities of this analysis was to understand and unpack differences in respondents' ratings. Harder+Company looked for patterns in responses based on many different categories and found significant differences, even after accounting for the fact that some organizations had many more respondents than others. Some of the most striking differences include the following:

Race/ethnicity: In general, respondents who identified as White rated significantly higher than respondents who identified as other races/ethnicities on all quantitative questions in the survey. Respondents who identified as multiracial or multiethnic, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, or as another race/ethnicity that was not specified on the Listen for Good survey instrument rated significantly lower on all quantitative questions in the survey.[1]
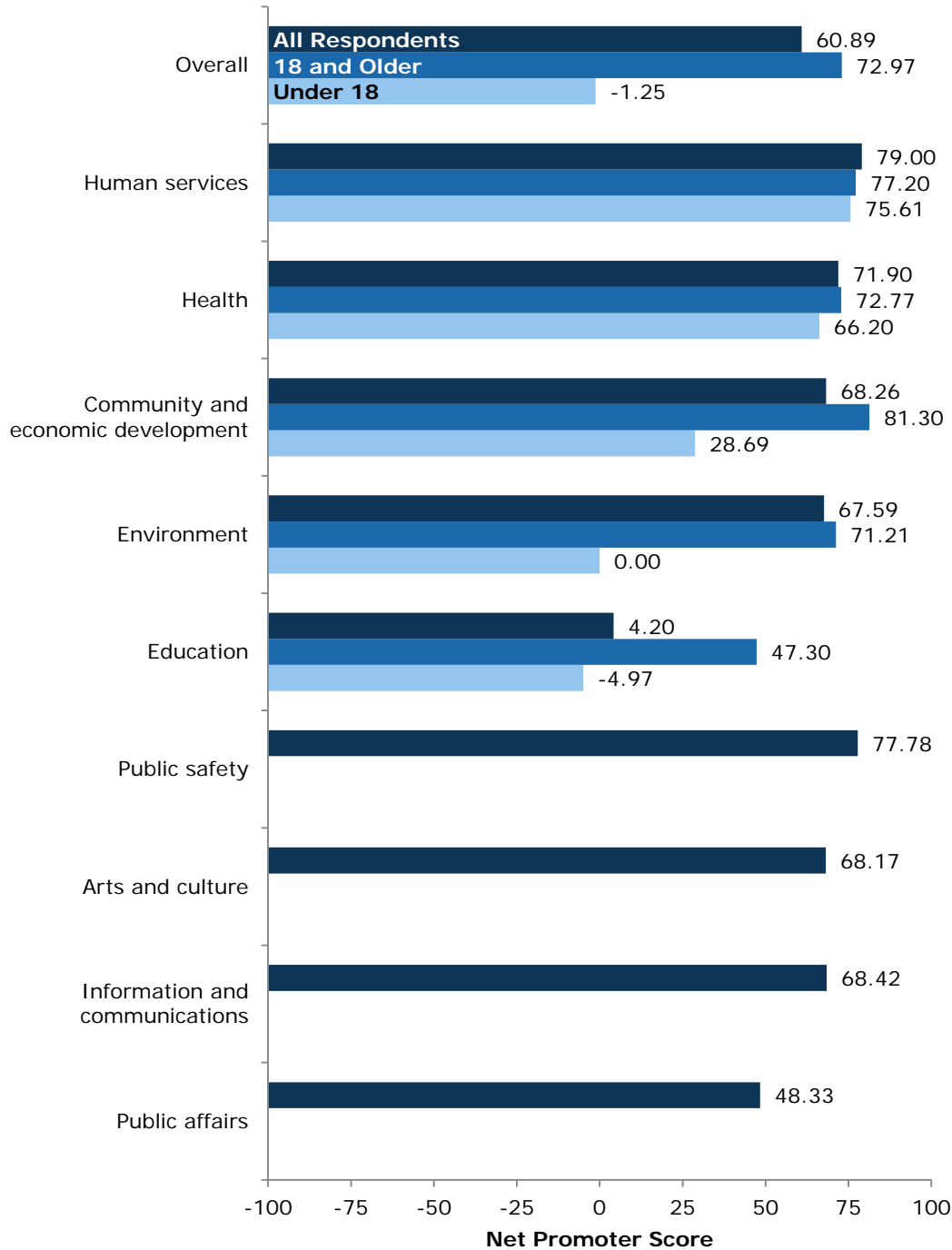
Differences in Ratings on Quantitative Questions, by Respondent Race/Ethnicity
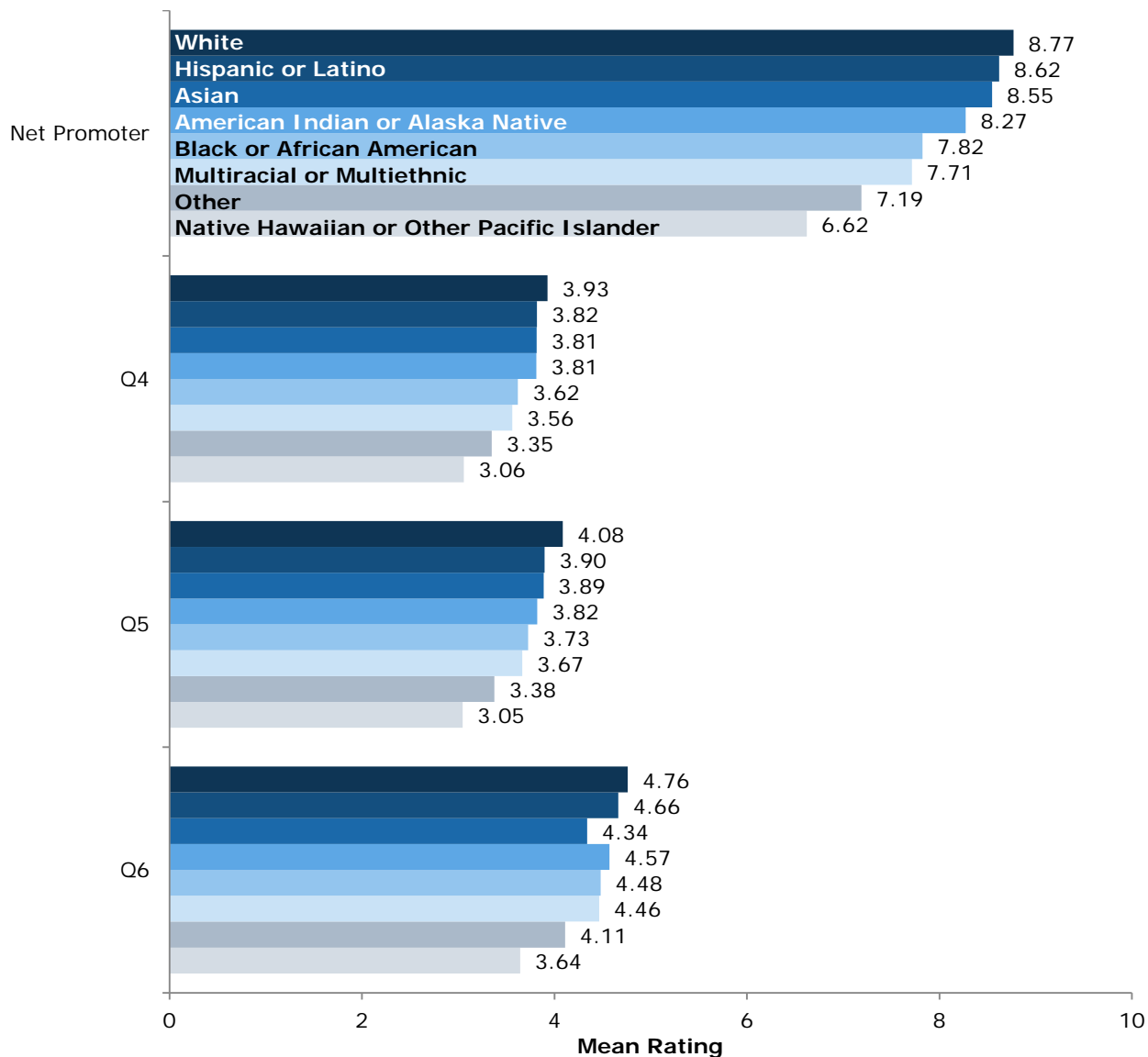
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Age and Issue Area: Youth under age 18 and respondents of education-focused organizations each rated significantly lower than other respondents on all quantitative questions in the survey. These two groups overlapped considerably—nearly all education respondents (94 percent) were youth under age 18. The disparity in ratings between youth under age 18 and older respondents was most pronounced in the community and economic development, environment, and education issue areas. Within the human services and health issue areas, youth under age 18 and older respondents rated similarly.

Net Promoter Scores, by Issue Area and Respondent Age[2]

Net Promoter Scores, by Issue Area and Respondent Age

Issue Area	All Respondents	18 and Older	Under 18
Overall	60.89	72.97	-1.25
Human services	79.00	77.20	75.61
Health	71.90	72.77	66.20
Community and economic development	68.26	81.30	28.69
Environment	67.59	71.21	0.00
Education	4.20	47.30	-4.97
Public safety	77.78		
Arts and culture	68.17		
Information and communications	68.42		
Public affairs	48.33		

Net Promoter Score

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[2] Net Promoter Scores are not available for youth under age 18 in the public safety, arts and culture, information and communications, and public affairs issue areas, because no respondents under age 18 receive services from those issue areas.

Gender: Overall, respondents who identified as female rated significantly higher than those who identified as male on all quantitative questions in the survey. Respondents who identified as another gender or as non-binary rated significantly lower than people who identified as male and female on all quantitative questions in the survey.

Assessing the Utility of the Listen for Good Tool and the Net Promoter System

Does the Listen for Good Tool Make Sense to Respondents?

Beyond understanding the factors that influenced respondent experience, another key research priority for Harder+Company's work with Shared Insight was to assess whether the Listen for Good tool was appropriate and understandable for the people whom nonprofits serve, and thus capable of capturing important information about respondents' experiences. Strong alignment between respondents' quantitative ratings, as well as between their quantitative ratings and qualitative feedback, indicated that **respondents understood the Listen for Good survey questions and were consistent in their ratings throughout the survey.**

For instance, respondents' ratings on all of the quantitative questions (questions 1 and 4–6) were moderately to strongly correlated, signaling that respondents having a good experience generally rated more highly across all measures, while respondents having a poor experience generally rated lower across all measures. Questions 4 and 5 were most strongly correlated ($r = 0.703$).[3]

In addition, respondents who provided the highest ratings on quantitative measures were more likely to indicate that they have no suggestions when asked what the organization could do better. Respondents who provided the lowest ratings on quantitative measures were more likely to give a negative comment when asked what the organization from which they receive services is doing well.

Is the Net Promoter System Right for Nonprofits?

Another research priority was to assess whether the Net Promoter system is appropriate for the nonprofit context. Originally developed in the for-profit sector to measure customer experience and loyalty, and predict future company growth, more organizations in the nonprofit sector are adapting the Net Promoter system to collect feedback from various constituents. Listen for Good's use of the Net Promoter system represents the largest application of the system in the nonprofit context to date.

This analysis provides **mixed evidence regarding the utility of the quantitative Net Promoter question to the nonprofit sector.** On the positive side, some evidence exists that the Net Promoter system works well in the Listen for Good context. Respondents' ratings on the quantitative Net Promoter question were moderately to strongly correlated with their ratings on the other quantitative questions (questions 4–6). This analysis suggests that the Net Promoter question is closely associated with other elements of respondent experience that are more traditionally measured in the nonprofit context, such as whether clients feel that the organizations that serve them meet their needs and treat them with respect.

Findings from the two open-ended questions that are part of Listen for Good's Net Promoter system (questions 2–3) also yielded positive evidence regarding the applicability of the Net

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[3] Through this analysis, Listen for Good sought to understand whether it would be possible to simplify its survey instrument. The strong correlation between questions 4 and 5, along with results from a factor analysis, which suggested that these two questions get at very similar concepts analytically, indicated that removing either question 4 or 5 would be possible without compromising the tool's utility. Informed by this analysis, in the fall of 2017, Listen for Good removed question 4, which asked, "How much of a positive difference has this organization made in your life?"

Promoter system in this context. These questions asked what organizations do well and how organizations could improve. The majority of respondents provided responses to these questions, and most of those comments were on-topic and aligned with respondents' quantitative feedback. For example, respondents who indicated that they had no suggestions or that everything was good when asked how the organization could improve rated significantly higher on the quantitative Net Promoter question.

On the other hand, some evidence from this analysis suggests the Net Promoter system may not work well in the nonprofit context. In particular, respondents' ratings on the quantitative Net Promoter question were clustered more toward the positive end of the scale than they were for questions 4 and 5, which asked about similar concepts. Specifically, over half of respondents, across a wide range of demographic characteristics, issue areas, and types of services received, chose the highest possible rating on the Net Promoter question.

Multiple factors could drive the high quantitative Net Promoter question ratings. Respondents' experiences with nonprofit service-providing organizations may have been genuinely very positive. Alternatively, respondents may have tended toward providing more positive feedback (i.e., a "courtesy bias") because of the timing, context, or mode of survey administration of the survey.

Should Listen for Good Use the Traditional Net Promoter Score Calculation Methodology?

Given how different the nonprofit context is from the for-profit context in which the Net Promoter system was developed, researchers and practitioners have debated whether the traditional method of calculating Net Promoter Scores should be applied across all sectors, where people rating 0–6 are considered detractors, those rating 7–8 are considered passives, and those rating 9–10 are considered promoters.[4] Because the Listen for Good organizations' Net Promoter Scores were generally very positive, Harder+Company explored whether an analytic basis exists for using an alternate method of calculating Net Promoter Scores, where the criteria for being counted as a promoter was more stringent.

As a first step, linear regressions between individuals' responses to the Net Promoter question and other quantitative questions were run and plotted. Harder+Company visually assessed whether the slope of the regression seemed to change at different points, which would indicate breaks between where alternate groupings of detractors, passives, and promoters might be defined. This analysis revealed a strong linear relationship between responses to the Net Promoter question and responses to other quantitative questions, without clear evidence of slope change.

As a second step, Harder+Company conducted a cluster analysis to group respondents' ratings on the Net Promoter question into the three Net Promoter groups, based on their responses to questions 4, 5, and 6. Results of this analysis suggested that those rating 0-3 should be considered detractors, those rating 4-8 should be considered passives, and those rating 9 and 10 should be considered promoters. Using this classification method, Net Promoter Scores among Listen for Good grantee organizations would be even higher.

Based on the linear regression assessment and cluster analysis, **a clear analytic basis for an alternate, more stringent method of calculating Net Promoter Scores did not emerge at this time**.

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[4] See Lawrie, Jock, Matta, Alsono, & Roberts, Ken. (2006). "Value speaks louder than words: The management folly of adopting the Net Promoter Score as the 'one measure' and why value-for-money provides greater insight."

Opportunities for the Future

With nearly 30,000 responses from 46 organizations, the Listen for Good dataset contains a wealth of information. Still, as additional organizations use the Listen for Good tool to collect feedback (another 66 were funded between the start and completion of this analysis project alone), even more opportunities will emerge to draw new insights from this dataset. Further, additional information from sources other than the Listen for Good dataset itself may help further illuminate these findings. Harder+Company suggests several opportunities for additional analysis:

- Future rounds of analysis would benefit from using organization and program data to unpack variations in respondent feedback. Notably, additional analyses are needed to assess how particular program models (e.g., voluntary vs. mandatory) and factors such as the timing, context, and method of survey administration influence respondent feedback. These questions could not be answered using the data available for this analysis.

- Further analysis is needed to better understand the Net Promoter system in the nonprofit context. While there is not currently a strong analytic rationale to support modifying the way that Net Promoter Scores are calculated among nonprofits, this may change as more organizations use the Listen for Good tool. Given how responses to the quantitative Net Promoter question and some other questions cluster toward the most positive response option, additional investigation of differences between respondents who use the highest end of the scales on quantitative questions and other respondents might provide deeper insight. In particular, additional analysis to investigate differences between those rating 10 versus those rating a 9 on the quantitative Net Promoter question could be revealing. After additional organizations have used the tool, data should be re-analyzed and trends should be reinterpreted.

- An opportunity exists to analyze organizations' Net Promoter Scores and other quantitative questions alongside organizational outputs and outcomes. Given that the Net Promoter methodology was developed for the private sector as a strong predictor of company growth, an important aspect of assessing its applicability in the nonprofit sector is to measure Net Promoter Scores against more relevant aspects of performance for nonprofits, such as social outcomes.[5]

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[5] Shared Insight is currently engaging in research to look more closely at this question.