LISTEN for GOOD
Advancing the practice of feedback loops in the social sector
An initiative of Fund for Shared Insight

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
- for Funders -

Updated May 14, 2018

This FAQ focuses mainly on questions from funders about nominating prospective Listen for Good grantees and the associated co-funding. If you have questions about how Listen for Good will work for grantees, please see FAQ for Nonprofits on our website.

List of the questions contained in the FAQ below:
If you have a question that isn't answered here, please email
Lindsay Louie, Project Director, Listen for Good, at llouie@hewlett.org

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1. What is the Listen for Good initiative?

Listen for Good (L4G) is an initiative dedicated to building the practice of listening to the people we seek to help. We invite nonprofits and funders to join us in exploring a simple but systematic and rigorous way of getting feedback from the people at the heart of our work. Listen for Good is focused on applying a semi-standard survey instrument, which includes using the Net Promoter System[SM] (NPS®) employed widely in customer feedback circles, to the nonprofit beneficiary context. Organizations implementing L4G are all customer-facing nonprofits. Since 2016, we have made 158 L4G grants supported by 69 nominating co-funders.

Listen for Good grantees receive $30,000 during an 18-month grant period ($20,000 in the first year and $10,000 in the final six months), as well as access to technical assistance to guide implementation efforts. (Half the grant money is covered by Fund for Shared Insight, the other half by the nominating co-funder.) The core feedback tool is a simple survey, consisting of five standard questions that all participating L4G organizations are required to ask:

- 1. How likely is it that you would recommend […] to a friend or family member?
- 2. What is […] good at?
- 3. What could […] do better?
- 4. How much of a positive difference has […] made in your life?
- 5. How often do staff at […] treat you with respect?
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In addition, organizations can ask four optional demographic questions and add up to five custom questions to their survey.

2. What (and/or who) do you mean by "beneficiary" or "the people we seek to help"?

People use a variety of terminology to describe the people we seek to help, including "beneficiaries," "clients," "ultimate constituents", and "ultimate intended constituents". For the purpose of mutual understanding in the work of Fund for Shared Insight, we primarily use the phrase "the people we seek to help" – recognizing that we don't always reach the people we *want* to help.

Beneficiaries from whom feedback will be collected must be the ultimate intended beneficiary receiving services and represent individuals whose voices are least heard. For example, these might be families visiting food pantries, youth attending afterschool academic and enrichment programs, residents living in public housing, recent immigrants using legal-aid services, or individuals participating in job-training programs. Ultimate beneficiaries as defined here are not teachers, nurses, social entrepreneurs, or others whom we would consider "intermediaries" to the people we ultimately seek to help.

Some funders may want to get feedback from their grantees about their work as a funder. That is also an important feedback loop, but not the purpose of Shared Insight or Listen for Good.

3. What is your definition of a "high-quality feedback loop"? Does it have to be tied to individual beneficiaries or can it be anonymous?

We define a high-quality feedback loop as one in which data are collected regularly; the loop is closed with those who provided feedback; data are used to inform practice; and benchmarks are created to put the data in context.

The feedback/feedback loop can either be anonymous or not; it's up to the individual organization to determine what will be most effective given the context. The decision about anonymity may influence how the organization messages the feedback collection and closes the loop, but high-quality feedback loops can be anonymous or not. Also, there may be organizations that shift over time – for example, starting out with anonymous feedback loops and shifting to non-anonymous ones over time or vice versa.

4. **How are feedback loops, as you define them, related to other concepts, such as community-needs assessments, community-voice initiatives, community-engagement projects, or participatory decision-making efforts? How is this different from efforts around human-centered design?**

The focus of this grant initiative is distinct from other forms of hearing from the people we seek to help, including co-creation or co-ownership of social initiatives. It is also distinct from collecting feedback, input, and other types of local knowledge on an ad-hoc basis, as it is structured to be a regular, systematic, and integral part of ongoing program design and improvement. Feedback can be collected before, during, or after an initiative. We are primarily focused on improving organizations' ability to gather feedback during implementation so it can drive continuous service improvement. Other kinds of community engagement or community/participatory decision-making might include high-quality feedback loops as we define them – the efforts are not mutually exclusive.

Human-centered design (HCD) efforts in the social sector typically involve gathering input from end users before a product or service is developed. An area where HCD tends to fall a bit short is in closing the loop with those end users to test whether the final product, after launch, is meeting their needs. When we talk about feedback loops, we are focused on gathering feedback from end users as they experience the product or service to inform continuous improvement. Again, these efforts are not mutually exclusive and, in fact, we are in conversation with experts working on HCD to better incorporate high-quality feedback loops post-product launch.

5. **What is the Net Promoter System℠ or NPS®?**

In order to expand the practice of high-quality feedback loops, we researched what options might be *simple* enough for the majority of nonprofits to implement and *standardized* enough to begin to create some meaningful benchmarks. A promising idea came from the business sector, where there is considerable experience in soliciting customer feedback in the form of the Net Promoter System℠ (NPS®) – a concept originally created by Bain & Company. NPS is framed around the idea of asking customers if, based on their experiences, they would recommend a service to someone in a similar position. The standard NPS question specifically asks: **"How likely are you to recommend [x organization or program] to a friend or family member?"** on a 0-to-10-point scale, and is followed up by a qualitative question: "What is the reason for your score?" Many companies also add, "How can we improve?" or "What are our biggest strengths and weaknesses?"

An organization's NPS score is calculated by taking the percentage of promoters (those who answer a 9 or 10 on the question), less the percentage of detractors (those who answer 0 to 6). Active users of NPS typically examine additional feedback in each category and close the loop with customers so they know the organization heard them. NPS scores can be transactional (about a specific interaction or product) or relational (about the overall experience of an organization or product). Both kinds of scores help organizations better understand the perceptions and feedback of the people we seek to help.

6. **Has the Net Promoter System been used with the people we seek to help and/or other stakeholders in the nonprofit sector? It sounds like NPS is about customer loyalty and "promotion" of a brand or product. Since that isn't really our goal in our nonprofit work, how is NPS relevant to our context?**

NPS is increasingly being used by nonprofit organizations to gather feedback from stakeholders, such as donors, volunteers, and members, and some nonprofits are experimenting with using NPS with beneficiaries – the exact practice Listen for Good is promoting. Given the relative success of NPS across other sectors – especially the system's ability to simply capture feedback data (quantitative and qualitative) and to build benchmarks to put the data in context – Fund for Shared Insight is interested in developing a broad, coordinated effort to apply and test NPS as an entry point for nonprofits to gather feedback from those they are seeking to help. We interviewed officials at 12 leading organizations that currently use NPS with beneficiaries to understand their experience and inform our approach to this project.

With the Listen for Good initiative, we seek to build on the spirit of NPS to expand and strengthen beneficiary feedback loops in the social sector. We recognize that this may not be the perfect question or the exact right approach, but think that it is a powerful way to advance the conversation. Of course, while businesses inherently want customer referrals or customers promoting their brand/service/product, nonprofits are not typically looking for the same thing. But even if the goal isn't to achieve high customer loyalty or to turn beneficiaries into promoters, we believe that NPS – the rigor of asking questions, the practice of using data, and the feedback-process experience it provides – is a valuable tool for nonprofits seeking to hear from those who are least heard.

All of this said, we want to be very candid that what we seek in this initiative are learning partners who will join us in exploring how NPS, in concert with a simple set of additional questions, can generate meaningful feedback for improvement and help us figure out what we can all learn along the way.

7. What are benchmarks and why do they matter? How will you create them in this initiative?

Benchmarks provide the opportunity to put data in context – a benchmark is a comparative data point or data points that provide interpretive value. For example, let's say you survey your beneficiaries and get a Net Promoter Score of 50. Then you might ask, "Is that a good score, an ok score, or a low score?" Well, it really all depends on the context or comparative data – that is the benchmark. If you know that the high score among peer organizations is a 90, the low is 0, and the median is 55, you learn you are scoring right in the middle and can consider if or how you might improve.

A benchmark can come from a few sources including: (1) your own organization's history – you can benchmark current against past performance; (2) your own organization's work across multiple sites – you can benchmark across multiple sites at a single moment in time and over time, as well; and (3) a data set of other similar organizations. Listen for Good will create the opportunity for organizations to build and use all three types of benchmarks. The third category – a dataset of other organizations – has been the most elusive to date because it requires organizations to ask one or more standardized questions. Listen for Good creates a relatively simple way for nonprofits to ask beneficiaries a standardized question, thus building out benchmarks by issue area.

8. What are the criteria and requirements for nonprofits to receive a grant from Listen for Good?

We will assess proposals received in response to this request for proposals based on the criteria below.

Importantly, this grant opportunity is open to nonprofits located anywhere in the fifty United States serving domestic beneficiaries and working in any issue area as long as the effort is customer-facing. Nonprofits need not have experience collecting feedback from the people they seek to help in order to apply, but they do need to demonstrate a commitment to collecting and using beneficiary feedback going forward.

Threshold Criteria

- Applicants must be nominated by a current or new funder who supports their participation, and who agrees to contribute $15,000 to Fund for Shared Insight's Listen for Good initiative in support of the grant.
- Applicants must be a U.S.-based, 501(c)(3) public charity whose work is focused domestically. Its beneficiaries for this initiative must reside in the 50 United States.
- Applicants must have a minimum annual budget of $500,000 in the current and previous fiscal years.
- Applicants must serve a minimum of 100 unique beneficiaries annually, and have intentions to survey a minimum of 50 respondents at minimum two times per year.
- Applicants must serve, and plan to implement feedback loops with, clients whose voices are least heard. For example, these might be families visiting food pantries, youth attending afterschool academic and enrichment programs, residents living in public housing, recent immigrants using legal-aid services, or individuals participating in job-training programs.

Additional Selection Criteria and Expectations

- Organization demonstrates commitment to design and implementation of high-quality beneficiary feedback loops, defined as:
  - Data are collected regularly (at least 2x/year, ideally more often);
  - Response rate over the course of the year is substantial (targeting 60-80%);
  - Data are used to inform organizational practice (and ideally lead to programmatic changes); and
  - Staff close the loop with those who provided feedback (how this is done will vary by organization).
- Organization embraces use of the standardized question set and data collection via the SurveyMonkey platform; participation in technical assistance offerings provided through L4G; contribution of anonymized data to benchmarks; and sharing data and lessons with Shared Insight and its nominating funder.
- Organization's leadership team demonstrates commitment to engaging in the downstream activities associated with implementing high-quality feedback loops including:
  - Using the data for ongoing improvement
  - Communicating and advocating the value of beneficiary feedback to staff and other stakeholders
  - Dealing with hard situations that could arise from receiving or responding to feedback
  - Closing the loop with beneficiaries
- Organization has sufficient capacity to execute on the proposal and to participate in Listen for Good technical-assistance sessions (group and individual) and Shared Insight's evaluation of the project.
- Organization can collect data in English, Spanish, Chinese (traditional characters), or Vietnamese. If organizations wish to collect data in other languages, they must manually enter data into a pre-programmed survey in one of the above four languages on SurveyMonkey.

9. **As a nominating co-funder, how many nonprofits can our foundation nominate?**

There is no limit to the number of grantees you can nominate. We do encourage you to nominate organizations that *want* to participate and have the capacity to do so. That said, we've heard from funders that have offered this opportunity to multiple grantees and been willing to nominate any that are interested. For reference, in 2016, we had funders nominate as many as nine grantees to participate in Listen for Good.

10. **We have many grantees that fit the criteria for Listen for Good, but we can't nominate them all. How do you recommend we think about which to nominate? What guidance can you offer?**

There is no one right answer to this question, but here are some ways you might think about the ideal grantees to nominate:

- Grantees where data collection from the people that they (and you) ultimately seek to help would be particularly useful/helpful to informing your work as a funder.
- Grantees that you think have the capacity for Listen for Good and leadership who would be excited by this project.
- Grantees that have shown a particularly strong commitment to data and/or learning for improvement.
- Multiple grantees in one cluster, portfolio, or strategy so that you could help to build benchmarks for that particular work, both across grantees you support and for the broader field.

11. **A $15,000 grant would be too big for our foundation, but we want to participate. Can we partner with other foundations and together contribute the $15,000, assuming our grantee nominee proposal is selected?**

We would be delighted to see a funder partner with other funders to nominate a grantee and co-fund that grantee's participation, if selected, in Listen for Good.

12. **Can any funder be a nominating co-funder? What about individual donors, corporate donors, government agencies, etc.?**

The nominating co-funder can be a private foundation, community foundation, corporate funder, or individual donor. It cannot be a government funder.

13. **Do all nominating co-funders need to be current donors to the nominated organization?**

We have a strong preference and priority for nonprofits nominated by current funders. That said, we do not want to stifle interest, so it is possible for a past funder or a new funder to nominate and co-fund a Listen for Good grant for a past or current grantee. We want the data from beneficiaries to be used by funders to inform their work, and we think that is most likely to happen for a current funder of an organization. If a nonprofit were nominated by a past funder, we would contact that funder to ask why it is not a current funder and gauge interest in, and commitment to, using the feedback from beneficiaries to inform its work. If it were a new funder nominating, we would also want to understand its interest in, and commitment to, this work and to the data that will be collected from beneficiaries.

14. **We have at least one organization that we want to nominate. Is there anything we need to do on our end (as the nominating co-funder) to make our nomination official?**

Make sure that the organization knows you are agreeing to nominate it, and that the organization knows to follow the RFP process and timeline. There is a section in the grantee proposal form where organizations have to list you as the nominating co-funder – including a contact person. That is all we need. When we receive the proposal, we'll contact you to confirm your nomination.

If possible, please email us and let us know the organization(s) you are nominating so we know what to expect. Please email: Lindsay Louie, Program Officer at the Hewlett Foundation – llouie@hewlett.org.

15. When and how do we actually make the $15,000 grant (per grantee) to support Listen for Good?

Fund for Shared Insight has contracted with Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors (RPA) to administer the collaborative. Listen for Good co-funders will make their matching grants to RPA, and then grantees of Listen for Good will receive a single grant from RPA for $30,000 over 18 months ($20,000 in the first year and $10,000 in the final six months).

Again, co-funders may nominate one or multiple organizations (no limit per funder) to apply to Listen for Good. As part of nominating, the co-funder is agreeing to provide match funding should the grantee be selected. Nominated organizations will go through a limited due-diligence process with Shared Insight; all nominees may not necessarily be selected for grants.

Once Shared Insight recommends a prospective grantee to RPA, it is ultimately RPA's final decision about whether or not to make a grant. When RPA approves a grant for a nonprofit you have nominated, we will contact you to let you know and ask that you make a grant to Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors for the Listen for Good initiative for $15,000 per grantee. Please note, you will not be able to restrict the grant to a specific grantee (otherwise this would be deemed a pass-through grant, which is not allowed by RPA).

16. What grant proposal and reporting materials will we receive from Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors (RPA)?

Once we receive a proposal from a grantee (or multiple grantees) that you have nominated, we will send you a standard set of proposal materials that covers all the bases related to RPA, Fund for Shared Insight, and Listen for Good, including our theory of change and target metrics, a narrative about the work, and budgets. It will be a comprehensive, but standardized packet – with so many co-funders, it needs to be! Of course, if you have any questions as you process the grant, don't hesitate to contact us.

Because your support will be for Listen for Good's full initiative, we will report back to you on the entire program, including information about the grantee that you nominated, but not limited to your nominated grantee. This should help facilitate greater learning for you and your nominated grantee, and help give you context for this work that you can use in discussing feedback with your nominee.

We have also told all applicants to Listen for Good that, in addition to their formal reporting requirements to RPA and Shared Insight, we expect them to have at least one meeting with their nominating co-funder where they share the data they collect and share how the experience of implementing high-quality feedback loops is going. We hope this is a chance to continue to deepen your shared understanding of the work.

17. If we have multiple grantees that we nominate accepted to Listen for Good, can we make a single grant to Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors (RPA)?

Yes, you can make a single grant to RPA if you have multiple nominated grantees participating in Listen for Good.

18. What will the opportunities be for funders to learn from each other over the course of this initiative?

We are planning to offer regular webinars/conference calls for funders on topics that we think are important and/or that funders request (e.g. how to talk about this work in your foundation, how to discuss the data with grantees, and what to make of benchmarks). We may also hold one or more in-person convenings if there is interest (either stand-alone or in conjunction with another conference or gathering already occurring in the field).

19. We support multiple homeless-serving organizations in our area. Will there be a way through Listen for Good for us to share what we learn with other homeless-serving organizations across the country?

Yes! We hope to engage a number of organizations working on the same issue areas. Through SurveyMonkey, we will generate benchmarking data for each of those issue areas so organizations can compare their results with other similar organizations in a common issue area. We also plan to hold calls so funders can learn from each other along the way in this process – and we could potentially hold calls for funders in a given issue area who aren't involved in Listen for Good to share what we're learning. Your foundation could play a key role on such a call!

20. How do you think (or hope) that the data collected from the people we seek to help will be used by foundations?

We are looking forward to learning a lot more in the months and years to come about how foundations can incorporate hearing from the people they seek to help into their work. We hope foundations use the feedback data in the spirit of learning and improvement, whether at the individual grant level or to inform strategies. At the grant level, being responsive to feedback might mean, for example, adding funding to a project or allocating money differently to better meet the expressed needs. At the grant strategy level, an example of responding to feedback might be considering funding a new area of work after hearing about similar needs from multiple grantees.

Our intention is not to have funders stop or reduce funding for grantees that receive poor feedback. If organizations have low NPS scores or the benchmarks/comparative data show they are receiving less positive feedback than others, we hope that you will encourage them to learn from the others and figure out how they can improve. Such work might not require additional grant funding. Instead, it might focus on helping groups make connections or build networks with better-performing organizations.

Again, at the grant level, we hope feedback will inform organizations' approaches to better serve the people they seek to help. At the strategy level, we hope feedback will inform foundations and grantees about different ways to meet their goals. A 2014 Center for Effective Philanthropy report, "Hearing from Those We Seek to Help: Nonprofit Practices and Perspectives in Beneficiary Feedback", found that while a majority of nonprofits are collecting feedback from the people they seek to help, many feel they could be doing a better job of collecting and using the information and that their funders could care more about the data and feedback process. We hope Fund for Shared Insight and Listen for Good can play a role in changing practices and perspectives for the better over time.

21. Can you share an example of how a nonprofit has used feedback from the people they seek to help?

Overall, we are seeing Fund for Shared Insight grantees use feedback data to make a range of programmatic and operational improvements to their work. For example, we have seen organizations modify their hours of operation, as in the case of one nonprofit that provides benefits-application assistance to recent refugees. And we have seen groups add additional services based on client feedback, as in the case of a food bank that is expanding community partnerships so it can act as more of a resource hub for multiple needs. Other grantees are learning about gaps in their curriculum or in the consistency of their staffing models. For example, one grantee that relies heavily on volunteers for its service delivery decided to improve volunteer training focused on cultural sensitivity in light of patterns they saw in their Listen for Good data. We have also found that organizations that operate multiple sites are using the data in more of a portfolio-management function, identifying best practices, as well as discrepancies in fidelity or service quality, across their various sites.

At some organizations, it is not just the data leading to changes, but the feedback process itself. We are seeing how the implementation of the Net Promoter System is spurring cultural changes, as the experience of systematically collecting client feedback has led to comprehensive conversations, such as the need to be more customer-centric, and opened up new channels of communication. As one grantee commented, "the philosophy of getting feedback now infuses [our] staff meetings." Other organizations that in the past had been reluctant to reach out directly to clients have reported being amazed at how willing clients are to provide feedback and how rich the feedback can be. The process is changing conversations internally about who needs to be "at the table" and consulted when programmatic decisions are being contemplated.

22. What if organizations don't have access to the SurveyMonkey technology?

All grantees will gain access to SurveyMonkey for free and receive training/support from Fund for Shared Insight as part of participating in Listen for Good.

Our funding through Listen for Good can be used to fund items such as tablets, Wi-Fi access on site, and other technology that will ease use of SurveyMonkey. Current Listen for Good grantees are using a variety of methods to collect data, including having participants take surveys at on-site computers, by email, on paper, or by texting them links to the SurveyMonkey site. If paper surveys are used, the nonprofit will need to manually enter the data online into SurveyMonkey.

23. Is the Listen for Good survey just a tool or is it about organizational change?

Ultimately, Listen for Good, when implemented well, is about organizational change. The hope is that organizations will use the survey tool as a starting point to incorporating into their work a more systematic, ongoing way of hearing from the people they seek to help. We hope that organizations will also more fully embrace measurement and evaluation throughout their work.

24. **Will Listen for Good build the organization's capacity to embrace measurement in a systematic, ongoing manner over time?**

Listen for Good is designed to help build organizations' capacity to collect feedback, incorporate feedback into improving their programs, and close the feedback loop with the people they seek to help. We will provide each grantee with some technical assistance (TA), fully funded by Fund for Shared Insight, over and above the $30,000 grants and without contributions from nominating funders. This TA includes three required one-to-one interaction points where our team discusses 1) how to design the survey and implementation plan, 2) how to interpret feedback findings, and 3) how to close the feedback loop. The TA also includes a series of optional group trainings and webinars on various topics, such as how to perform qualitative analysis and how to share findings with nominating funders. According to preliminary feedback provided by grantees during Listen for Good 2016, our TA has increased grantees' confidence across multiple aspects of implementing high-quality feedback loops and, yes, built organizational capacity. However, given the grants are for $30,000, we are mindful of right-sizing our assistance with the grant levels.

25. **How will you gauge the staff buy-in from the nominated nonprofit in the selection process?**

It will be difficult for us to gauge staff buy-in given we are reviewing applications and then interviewing each grantee applicant – including the executive director, implementing program manager, and grants manager – over the phone. Some of our application questions address why the organization is interested in implementing high-quality feedback loops and what their experience has been to date with collecting and responding to feedback. We will learn more in the phone interviews, but the size of the grant does not justify a more comprehensive due-diligence process that could include meetings with the entire leadership team, etc. We hope that nominating funders are thoughtful about which grantees to put forward to participate in Listen for Good and that as a nominating funder of a current grantee, the funders know staff members and their likelihood of buying into the Listen for Good initiative.

26. **As you evaluate Listen for Good, is there any way to actually check in with participants to directly hear their voices?**

We are being careful and clear that we are partnering with the nonprofits to hear from the people they seek to help and not trying to go around the nonprofit to hear directly from individuals about their feedback. Any interpretation of findings will be done in collaboration with the grantee and potentially the funder. Listen for Good is not meant to be a "gotcha" program to evaluate how well the nonprofit is doing in serving its population, rather it is meant to be a learning initiative to foster more understanding of how participants are experiencing a particular service or product and how the nonprofit can learn and improve its programs for better impact.