



**What do people want?
Are we helping them get it?
If not, what can we do differently?**

Feedback 101

www.feedbacklabs.org

Introduction

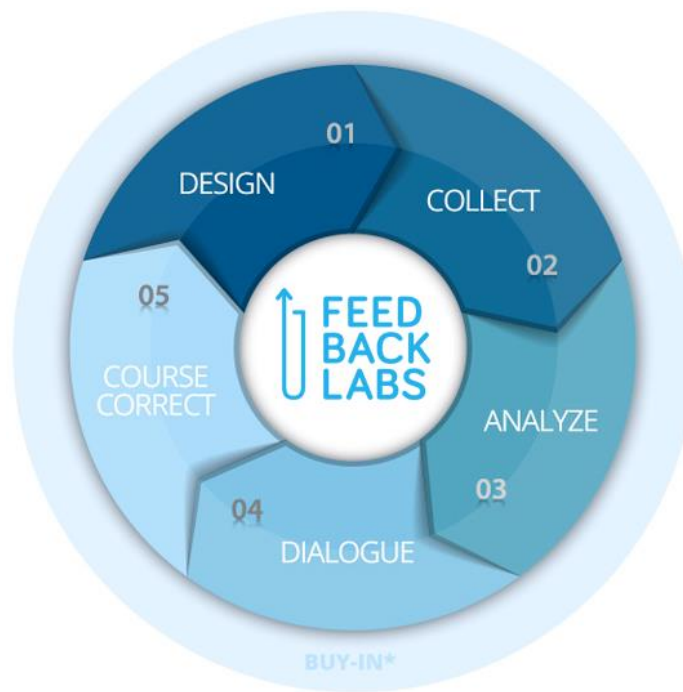
Do you believe that people are **“experts” in their own lives**? Do you think that citizens should have a greater voice in shaping the policies that affect them? Do you want to change the way that your organization or others you work with listen to constituents? **If so, you’ve come to the right place.**

Objective:

Feedback 101 is an introduction to the concepts and practice of feedback and includes a collection of our favorite stories and resources for understanding feedback across sectors and contexts. It is for thinkers and doers in aid, philanthropy, and government. It’s both for those new to the feedback community and those who have been involved but want a deeper understanding of the value, benefits, and practice of feedback loops. Inspiring articles and discussion questions will guide you through the learning process.

By the end of this tutorial, you will:

1. Understand feedback terminology.
2. Grasp the benefits and challenges of listening and responding to constituent feedback.
3. Be able to implement a simple, closed, 5-step feedback loop.



based on the Constituent Voice Methodology™

Learning Strategies:

- **Learning is not limited to one day.** Take time to understand and reflect on the material, rather than rushing to the end.
- **Learn with an open mind.** Feedback in aid, philanthropy, and government is still a nascent field, and many of the articles you'll read use different language to get at the same ideas. Be mindful about how the concepts of transparency, accountability, and constituent voice relate to your practice of feedback.
- **Learn without bias.** "Feedback" is likely not a new concept. Whether reviewing the latest iPhone or asking coworkers to edit a report, you regularly give and receive feedback. However, Feedback 101 will illustrate new approaches to your work that might challenge you and the status quo. Be open to that!



Sections:

- I. Preface
- II. What Is Feedback?
- III. Why Do Feedback?
- IV. How Is Feedback Done?
- V. Extra Credit
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Feedback 101 is broken into bite-sized sections to guide you through an introduction to all things feedback. After a preface, the second section explores the basics of what we mean by "feedback," primarily in a development context. The third section explores the three-pillared argument for feedback: that it's **right, smart, and feasible**. Finally, the fourth section illustrates the feedback loop – the complete process for collecting, analyzing, and responding to constituent feedback.

After these sections, get extra credit and dive into examples across the contexts of **technology, gender, and power**.

Take it further:



At the end of each section, you will find discussion questions and additional resources to guide your thinking. We encourage you to take a bit of time to reflect after each section to ensure that you fully grasp the material and can apply it to the variety of contexts offered in the additional links.

I. Preface

The Feedback Labs network consists of more than 400 organizations around the world committed to putting everyday people in the driver's seat. To do so, we believe that researchers, practitioners, and platform providers – or anyone working in aid, philanthropy, or government – must ask three driving questions:

What do people want?

Are we helping them get it?

If not, what can we do differently?

To find those answers, you need feedback. Feedback is an essential component of the work that nonprofits, aid agencies, and governments must do to truly co-create viable, sustainable solutions for the people they serve.

Why shouldn't everyday people have a say—if not *the* say—over programs that aim to help them?

In the business world, well-functioning private markets excel at providing consumers with a constantly improving stream of high-quality products and services. Why? Because consumers give companies constant feedback on what they do and don't like. Companies that listen to their customers by modifying existing products and launching new ones have a chance of increasing their revenues and profits; companies that don't are at risk of going out of business. Is it possible to create analogous mechanisms to help aid and philanthropic organizations and governments truly listen to what citizens want—and then act on what they hear? The answer is a resounding 'yes.'

A growing number of foundations, governments, and non-profit organizations are incorporating citizen participation in their work. But far more change is needed. The processes in place for citizen engagement across philanthropy and government are piecemeal and incomplete. How do beneficiaries ensure their voices count in determining which projects that aim to help them are funded?

Our ambitious goal is to make feedback loops the new norm in aid, philanthropy, and government. We envision a world where citizens are empowered with creative, field-tested ways to productively interact with these institutions to improve the services they deliver—and ultimately the lives of their constituents.

To get started, read these three articles that examine the growing trend of incorporating feedback into daily work.

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Readings:

[How Feedback Loops Can Improve Aid](#) (Dennis Whittle, 2013)

Aid programs are not all effective. Dennis Whittle, the Co-Founder and CEO of Feedback Labs, tells a life-changing story in Indonesia where he worked as an economist for the World Bank. The experience made him believe in radically improving our ability to listen and ensure constituents have the most say in shaping programs that affect them.

[Get Proximate: The Potential Power of Feedback Loops](#) (Melinda Tuan, 2017)

High-quality service based on high-quality feedback should be central to how funders and nonprofits support their beneficiaries. But, philanthropy does not listen to beneficiary voices frequently enough. When answering the question "why is feedback worth it?" we often examine the cost-benefit to the funder, instead of asking what the cost-benefit is to those being served. By understanding beneficiaries' experiences, funders can better evaluate their grantees' work and discern substantive changes nonprofits should make to programming to better serve beneficiaries.

[When the Government Tells Poor People How to Live](#) (Alana Semuels, 2015)

How can we lift people out of poverty traps? In Worcester, Massachusetts, government officials pushed the program "A Better Life" to include mandatory work counseling. The aim is to increase the number of public-housing residents who are able to lift themselves out of poverty, yet the results are mixed. Some individuals succeed, but many fail due to a lack of communication between the state government and program beneficiaries.



Take it further

1. Dennis Whittle argues that experts, rather than beneficiaries, typically lead international development programs. Do you see this as the norm in aid, philanthropy, and government? Do you think this may hinder programmatic success? If so, how?
2. Melinda Tuan's article pointed out that funders are often unfamiliar to beneficiaries. Does this "distance" pose an obstacle to providing quality services?
3. G. Mariano's "A Better Life" program described in Alana Semuel's article underwent modification based on vertically- and horizontally-gathered feedback. In this case, the program's design relied heavily on feedback from government officials and citizens. Can you remember an instance when feedback played a significant role in how your work was designed? How was it helpful and how could it have been improved?

4. Dennis Whittle is the founder of Feedback Labs and, like him, Feedback Labs also has many interesting stories to tell. To learn more, check out [“About Us”](#)

Expert versus beneficiary-led aid:

- [The Anatomy of Failure: An Ethnography of a Randomized Trial to Deepen Democracy in Rural India](#) (Anathpur, Malik, and Rao, 2016)
- [A Qualitative Analysis of Implementation Challenges in a CDD Project in Rural India](#) (Shruti Majumdar, Vijayendra Rao, and Paromita Sanyal, 2017)

Funder-beneficiary relationship:

- [The What Went Wrong? Foundation](#) (Renee Ho, 2016)
- [“We’ve Opened Pandora’s Box!” Responding to Unsolicited Feedback](#) (Sarah Cechvala, 2017)
- [The Simple Act of Really Listening](#) (Nate Mandel, 2017)

*To learn more about **program design**, check out our [Fundamentals](#) or jump ahead to “How to do Feedback” section in page 13.*

II. What Is Feedback?

The feedback referred to here are the “thoughts, feelings, and perceptions from affected people about a product or service.” Feedback is only feedback if it comes *from* someone, and only if that someone is the *only* source of that specific information. Feedback is not information *about* affected people.

It is not the number of students in a classroom, or unemployment rates, or types of cheese in a supermarket. Feedback is perceptual data from people about their experiences. Feedback is how students feel about safety in their school, whether unemployed people feel respected and well-served by caseworkers, and which cheese tastes the best according to a sampling group.

Urban Edge, a non-profit based in Boston’s Roxbury neighborhood, is an example of an organization that solicits genuine feedback. In 2016, the group, which works to improve the quality of life of the communities it serves, conducted a feedback survey to assess whether residents felt safer as a result of lower crime rates. Contrary to conventional wisdom, residents’ safety perceptions had *declined* 8 percent over three years.

But rather than simply fielding a survey, administrators also had meaningful conversations with about 230 residents to understand why they felt the way they did and to engage them in efforts to create the conditions for them to feel safer. Now they are seeking developers to renovate the building where safety concerns were highest.

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Readings:

[To Obama With Love, and Hate, and Desperation](#) (Jeanne Marie Laskas, 2017)

The President of the United States receives approximately 10,000 letters a day. Upon taking office, President Obama requested that the Office of Presidential Correspondence select 10 letters for him to read each night. These letters were a raw, uncensored source of citizen feedback forwarded to the president and a number of policymakers.

[Blue Ribbon Feedback](#) (Laura Hughston, 2017)

Implementing feedback can be simple. With only pen, paper, and ribbon, Plan International UK developed a tool that allowed every person in the community to be heard and kept Plan accountable for responding to the community's concerns. This tool is now used in 7 countries across Africa and Asia to make aid more accountable.

[Perceptual Feedback: What is it all about?](#) (Threlfall Consulting, 2017)

Are nonprofits behind the times? Yes! According to Valerie Threlfall, "the nonprofit field has the potential to become an antiquated relic - kind of like a rotary phone - while the rest of the world goes digital." To catch up to modern-day expectations, nonprofits need to focus on making feedback more accessible. To achieve this, nonprofits should agree on a universal definition of feedback to ground the conversation and drive the practice forward.



Take it further

1. In the article *Blue Ribbon Feedback*, Laura Hughston shared her insights about how to practice community feedback. She found that people in communities would talk about their experience, but rarely related it to a specific project. For you, is project-specific or community-level conversation more effective?
2. The power of language helps facilitate effective communication. In the feedback community, many organizations are unable to collaborate because they cannot identify potential partners. This obstacle is often due to the range of terminologies used to express the same concepts. In your work, do you feel a universally-accepted term would help to identify other organizations with common interests?

The Office of Presidential Correspondence during the Obama Administration shows another aspect of practicing feedback: feedback as a continual learning process. **Engage in another learning process:**

- [Teaching Smart People How to Learn](#) (Chris Argyris, 1991)

III. Why Do Feedback?

What's the point of trying to close the feedback loop?

The point of feedback is simple—and powerful. When organizations truly listen to their constituents, they can better serve them by making changes based on what people actually want—not what “experts” think they want.

Feedback loops uncover what people say they need to make their lives better and whether organizations are giving them what they want. If the organization isn't doing so, feedback can answer the question: what should be done differently?

If done right, feedback can make people's lives better. It can provide valuable insights to not only improve the delivery of services to constituents but also foster social change. Isn't that what philanthropy and development are supposed to be all about?

In any sector or issue area, feedback is the right, smart, and feasible thing to do. In the sections that follow, we'll look at examples where closing the loop – listening to beneficiaries and acting on their feedback – made a difference ethically (**right**), improved outcomes (**smart**), and did so with practical, accessible tools (**feasible**).

Check out Feedback Labs' explanation of what right, smart and feasible mean in our language at: [Feedback Fundamentals](#).

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1. Right

We have an ethical and moral imperative to treat stakeholders who have traditionally been marginalized, infantilized, disenfranchised, or otherwise considered inconsequential as full and equal partners.

[If Kids Ran Juvie](#) (Eli Hager, 2017)

Every few years, California makes updates to regulations that govern juvenile detention centers. The state has started incorporating suggestions from those who know “juvie” best: the kids. Among other things, California youth have requested greater fairness and respect, counseling services, and more vegetables. Such requests from those most affected should be taken seriously.

[Our Work Must be Persons-Led, Not Systems-Led](#) (Pat McArdle, 2017)

McArdle argues that the social support system is failing because “we fixate on problems instead of people.” After consulting homeless people, the Mayday Foundation turned its approach upside down – and began treating those they seek to help like people, not clients.

[How a Quest by Elites Is Driving ‘Brexit’ and Trump](#) (Neil Irwin, 2016)

By a number of metrics, elites prioritize dynamism and efficiency over equity and stability. Irwin argues that these preferences held by economic elites, rather than the general public, are driven not by differences in expertise, but differences in priorities. Understanding these differences can help us better grapple with the polarization in today’s society.

2. *Smart*

Integrating feedback often directly drives better outcomes in politics, education, health, and community infrastructure.

[Is Feedback Smart?](#) (Elina Sarkisova, 2016)

Gathering and acting on feedback takes resources – but does it lead to better outcomes? And if so – in what contexts and under what circumstances? In this paper, Sarkisova frames the issue of feedback conceptually, reviews existing empirical work, and suggests avenues for future exploration.

[What happens when aid is given as direct cash transfers?](#) (Alastair Leithead, 2017)

In Kenya, charities are experimenting with direct cash transfers – allowing individual recipients to spend the money on whatever they like – as a way to ensure that aid money gets used effectively and efficiently. Evidence collected by these organizations, most visibly GiveDirectly, challenges commonplace arguments that cash transfers make people lazy. A recent report from the Overseas Development Institute details that cash transfers increase people’s income and consumption, improves dietary diversity, and identifies “strong evidence linking cash transfers to increasing school attendance, health care visits, household savings, and increasing investments in productive assets.”

[How’s the Mayor Doing? A Color-Coded App Can Answer That](#) (J. David Goodman, 2017)

After Bill de Blasio was elected Mayor of New York City, his team carefully monitored progress against campaign promises. The de Blasio Administration relies on unified data flows and smartphone apps to make city data available to everyone and remain accountable to citizens.

3. Feasible

Feedback has five steps and each step is feasible. So closing the loop is not only possible – it can be simple!

[Closing the Customer Feedback Loop](#) (Markey, Reichheld, Dullweber, 2009)

Attempts to measure and incorporate customer feedback can be frustrating. Effective customer feedback programs “begin at the front line” with regular employees and build loops that keep customer feedback collection and response front and center. The Net Promoter Score is one way to measure customer satisfaction across industries and overcomes many of the common customer experience-measuring traps.

[Net Promoter Score for the Nonprofit Sector: What We’ve Learned So Far](#) (David Bonbright, Britt Lake, Sophie Sahaf, Reem Rahman, and Renee Ho, 2015)

The Net Promoter Score asks simply: “On a scale of 1-10, how likely are you to recommend this to a friend?” In this post, a number of nonprofits summarize what they’ve learned using this simple yet powerful tool to better listen to the people they seek to serve.

[Listening to Californians](#) (Kim Ammann Howard, 2017)

Last Fall, the James Irvine Foundation held community listening sessions across California. Nearly 400 residents voiced their hopes, fears, challenges, and dreams. These personal stories have helped the foundation better understand and implement their newly focused mission of promoting economic and political opportunity for all Californians.

Right:

- [No Such Thing as a Free Gift: The Gates Foundation and the Price of Philanthropy](#) (Linsey McGoey, 2015)
- [Poverty and Livelihoods: Whose Reality Counts?](#) (Robert Chambers, 1995)
- [The “shared society” needs a strong civil society](#) (NPC, 2017)

Smart:

- [Turns Out, Development Does Bring Development](#) (Lant Pritchett, 2016)
- [Broken Pumps and Promises](#) (Evan Thomas, 2016)
- [Minecraft in urban planning: how digital natives are shaking up governments](#) (Rebecca Hill, 2017)

Feasible:

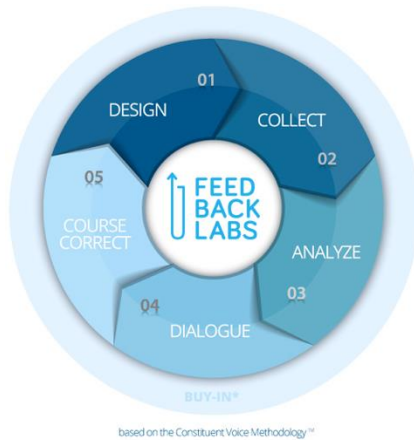
- [16 Key Lessons on Collecting and Using Client Feedback](#) (Chloë Whitley, 2017)
- [Broken Cities: The Effect of Government Responsiveness on Citizens' Participation](#) (Laura Trucco, 2017)



Take it further

1. Which argument for doing feedback resonates with you most?
2. *If Kids Ran Juvie* posits that feedback from individuals of diverse backgrounds is very important. However, some individuals have the implicit bias that feedback coming from “authority” figures is better. Have you ever felt this way?
3. Mayor Bill de Blasio is collecting and acting on feedback. How are other governments doing the same?
4. For us, feedback is the right, smart, and feasible thing to do. Some members argue that “the right thing to do” is more powerful than “the smart thing to do.” Do you agree?

IV. How Is Feedback Done?



Simply collecting feedback is not enough. **Closing the loop** is what matters, and this can be accomplished in 5 steps. Each step is essential for successfully getting and using feedback. Creating **buy-in** among all stakeholders is also crucial to closing the loop, and each step – **design, collect, analyze, dialogue, and course correct** – must occur for the feedback loop to function properly.

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Each part of this section will illustrate one aspect of the feedback loop process by examining a feedback program in northern Ghana. Savanna Signatures, an NGO in northern Ghana that empowers marginalized youth and women through communications technology, is part of the Mobile Alliance for Maternal Action (MAMA) initiative, a global public-private partnership that uses mobile phones to improve maternal health in poorly resourced countries. In northern Ghana, prenatal health information was available only at women's monthly visits to health clinics and could not reach women who lived in remote locations or who did not use clinic services. To ensure that as many women as possible could access health-related content, VOTO Mobile, a Ghanaian social enterprise with a mobile surveying platform, joined the feedback project to facilitate data collection via phone messages.

Before you begin. Buy-in

For feedback to work, you must first establish support among stakeholders at every level – constituents, frontline staff, and management. If everyone buys into the process before it begins, people will be more likely to use the feedback once collected.

In these three stories, we explore how LIFT got buy-in from its clients by responding to feedback, and how Ground Truth Solutions and DFID negotiated buy-in from a wide range of stakeholders to make feedback work.

- [Listening to Beneficiaries Helps Nonprofits Learn What Doesn't Work](#) (Hilary Pennington and Fay Twersky, 2016)
- [Using Client Feedback to Test a Theory of Change](#) (Lynn Morris, 2017)
- [3TT: No Voice is Left Unheard](#) (Andrew Hassan, 2017)
- [DfID's evolving approach to beneficiary feedback](#) (Molly Anders, 2016)

Toolkit:

[How to Use Feedback Surveys for Social Change Network](#) (Keystone Accountability)

[How to Use Text Messaging for Behavior Change](#) (FrontlineSMS)

Step 1. Design

Creating a plan for your feedback loop requires understanding the people you are trying to help and the problem you are helping those people solve. Clearly articulating the goals and procedures of your feedback project – and getting early agreement on them from key stakeholders, including constituents – will allow you to design a feedback system that works for your organization's needs and within your capacity.

The northern Ghana feedback program's success was due to the input of all stakeholders during the design phase. Savana Signatures helped recruit thousands of pregnant women to join the program and test the platform. MAMA created the messaging content, and VOTO Mobile tested its data collection and analysis tool, providing a proof of concept that its product could reach remote communities on a large scale and group together pregnant women based on their stage of pregnancy. Outreach was done through local media, community health workers, and word of mouth.

These following resources explore co-created feedback design, interrogate the problems of the design industry and power, and highlight a variety of practical feedback channels in organizations.

- [Can Decolonized Design Help us learn to truly co-create?](#) (Jess Rimington and Joanna Levitt Cea, 2016)
- [Where Should the Feedback Function Sit?](#) (Sarah Cechvala, 2016)
- [Design Education's Big Gap: Understanding the Role of Power](#) (George Aye, 2017)

Toolkit:

[How to Develop a Theory of Change](#) (Keystone Accountability)

[How to measure success in transparency & accountability?](#) (Twaweza)

Step 2. Collect

Listening effectively requires careful consideration of your constituents' needs and attention to method and procedure. There are many different ways to collect feedback from those you serve. As you do so, follow these principles: keep it simple, find the best times to collect feedback, use the right technology, and only collect what you need.

The VOTO Mobile collection tool recruited 4,000 pregnant women who listened to the message content, with 3,000 completing the program. It conducted a pilot with 500 women and held focus groups to gather feedback on whether the messages were understandable and useful. Women listened to weekly messages that promoted behavioral changes. VOTO Mobile collected passive data, such as the amount of time participants spent on the phone and the best hours to reach them, to learn how to maximize engagement. It collected active data using interactive voice recognition, which captured knowledge and behavioral changes.

Here, we look at a variety of collection strategies – from cities across the US, to health clinics in Mumbai, to refugee communities around the world.

- [Feedback: An Invitation to a Conversation](#) (Nate Mandel, 2017)
- [LabStorm: Provide a Framework to Elicit Meaningful Feedback](#) (Rebecca Koladycz, 2017)
- [Listening for Feedback in Refugee Communities](#) (GlobalGiving, 2017)

Toolkit:

[How to Use Community Mapping?](#) (Ground Truth)

[How to Assess Corruption using the National Integrity System \(NIS\) Framework](#) (Transparency International)

Step 3. Analyze

Feedback can take many forms. Good analysis allows you to see your organization through others' eyes and to identify areas of improvement based on feedback. Often, this requires turning data into information through analysis. In addition to being a stepping-stone to action, analysis allows for benchmarking across organizations.

VOTO Mobile's message management platform analyzed the data on a weekly basis, which continually improved program delivery. Analyzing metadata was instrumental in optimizing listening rates and increasing participation by scheduling messages to be sent at particular hours and at a specific length. Data analysis improved ongoing program adjustment, by grouping women in the right messaging cohorts based on their pregnancy stage.

Drawing on many forms of "listening," these resources examine the limits of polling data and data science, highlight the importance of moving from anecdotal to systematic listening, and debunk the myth of "technologically intensive" analysis.

- [Cirque du Soleil and Peer Review](#) (Sarah Hennessy, 2017)
- [Client Voices in the Humanitarian Data Stream](#) (Alyoscia D'Onofrio, 2016)
- [Politics and the New Machine: What the Turn from Polls to Data Science Means for Democracy](#) (Jill Lepore, 2015)

Toolkit:

[How to learn with Constituents?](#) (Keystone Accountability)

Step 4. Dialogue

This is the most important step of the feedback loop. Reporting your analysis back to constituents – presenting how you understand their feedback – ensures accountability. Dialogue allows you and your constituents to co-create solutions to perceived issues.

In northern Ghana, after a woman received a maternal care voice message, she was asked to provide feedback on the usefulness of the content (Press 1 for Yes and 2 for No). Project designers also communicated through phone calls, allowing them to collect qualitative data. Savannah Signatures also organized a monthly session that brought expectant mothers who did not have mobile phones to the clinic so they could learn from each other.

These resources explore what robust dialogue looks like, and how to make it happen – in refugee camps, business settings, and villages in Nepal.

- [The feedback chain is only as strong as the weakest link](#) (Nick van Praag, 2017)
- [What Great Listeners Actually Do](#) (Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman, 2016)
- [Closing Feedback Loops in Sindukot](#) (Kanchana Sthanumurthy, 2017)

Toolkit:

[How to Analyze Survey Findings?](#) (VotoMobile)

Step 5. Course Correct

After you have co-created solutions, implement them! The loop isn't closed until feedback leads to real action.

In the northern Ghana, the initial program concept had been to use local health clinics to teach women about maternal health. That would mean that some women who were not able to visit clinics frequently, or at all, would be left out. The program expanded to include communication technology as a means of increasing impact through targeting remote communities. There has been an increase in demand for health services, with health clinics even extending their working hours.

Explore these resources for acting on feedback, which include a session from our 2016 Feedback Summit: a primer on agile software development and democracy.

- [Turning the Tide on Authoritarianism](#) (Megan Campbell, 2016)
- [How do we Tell Better Feedback Stories?](#) (Anne Sophie Ranjbar, 2016)
- [What Agile Software Development Taught me about Feedback](#) (Ofir Reich, 2017)

Toolkit:

[How to learn with Constituents?](#) (Keystone Accountability)



Take it further

1. Feedback Labs' model stresses the importance of engaging beneficiaries in multiple steps of the feedback loop. Do you agree with this high level of engagement? If not, why not?
2. Everyone has his or her own approach to project design – what are yours?
3. Learning from peer experience is critical and helps frame how to listen to constituents. Here's more peer-to-peer learning on our ["Three Things Thursday."](#)
4. Need help on solving specific feedback problems in your organizations? Check out "[LabStorms](#)".

Storytelling:

- [You Name, We Fame: Citizen Feedback in Action](#) (Blair Glencorse, 2017)
- [How to understand the impact of aid projects? Storytelling!](#) (Jennifer Lentfer, 2014)
- [User Voice: putting people at the heart of impact practice](#) (Cecilie Hestbaek, Shona Curvers, and Tris Lumley, 2016)

Want to share your own stories and insights about feedback? [Click here](#)

IV. Extra Credit



Technology

This section explores feedback in the context of **technology**, **gender**, and **power** across a variety of sectors, with “deep dives” into smartphones, gender bias in listening, and power dynamic between funders and nonprofits.



Gender



Power

By putting everyday people in the driver’s seat, feedback can fundamentally shift **power** dynamics between elites such as donors and governments and those they serve. Feedback and open data also can make available information about each **gender** and thus help combat gender discrimination. Finally, **technology** makes it feasible to examine feedback practices at scale, but care must be taken to include those without access to technology.

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Technology

[Mark Zuckerberg can't believe India isn't grateful for Facebook's free internet](#) (Alice Truong, 2015)

Facebook's Free Basics internet program was met with resistance in India over concerns of economic discrimination and overstatement of its potential for fighting poverty. The central issue rested in Facebook's choice of which content would be free: "If you dictate what the poor should get, you take away their rights to choose what they think is best for them."

[Philadelphia's beta website prepares for the limelight](#) (Colin Wood, 2016)

The City of Philadelphia publicly launched its new website in beta. This enabled the city to design user interfaces and services iteratively, incorporating citizen feedback throughout the development process.

[Lessons in Audience Engagement from Chicago's Curious City](#) (Andrea Wenzel, 2017)

The radio show "Curious City" answers listeners' questions about Chicago—anything from "what's at the bottom of the Chicago River?" to "where does recycling actually go?" After mapping where questions came from, the team prioritized listening to underrepresented communities by fielding questions on the street and in public libraries.

Let's turn to a specific technology: **smartphones**. Smartphones are a powerful platform for engaging with refugee populations. But if smartphones are the only way humanitarian organizations listen to refugees, those without smartphones will never be heard.

[Fly on the Facebook wall: how UNHCR listened to refugees on social media](#) (Timo Luege, 2017)

A team at UNHCR joined and monitored Facebook Groups used by refugee populations to share information and discuss camp conditions. UNHCR found that social media is a powerful way of listening to highly mobile populations and could be used by other humanitarian organizations to understand refugees' needs and concerns in real-time.

[Humanitarians must help reach the most vulnerable migrants—not just those with smartphones](#) (Laura Walker McDonald, 2017)

Though some refugees use social media to exchange information, many populations don't have smartphones to access social media. Focusing exclusively on new communications technologies to adapt and deliver aid can exclude the voices of those who are most vulnerable.

Gender

[Listening and Responding to Those who Matter](#) (World Vision UK, 2016)

This video features leaders of local NGOs in India and Somaliland working in maternal and child health. These NGOs tested beneficiary feedback mechanisms. Implemented in creative ways, these mechanisms helped improve patient health. Patients also reported feeling empowered because their feedback was sought.

[Why Do So Many Incompetent Men Become Leaders?](#) (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2013)

Women are underrepresented in management positions. Upper management often mistakes confidence for competence and fills leadership positions with self-centered, overconfident, and narcissistic people. Culturally, it is more permissible for men to display these traits than women. A lack of barriers for incompetent men in the professional world simply adds to the weight of the "glass ceiling."

[Gender and Open Data: Is there an App for That?](#) (Charlotte Ørnemark, 2017)

Getting feedback from rural agricultural workers, many of whom are women, has proven difficult. Perhaps this requires shifting the primary data gathering closer to women's realities: making data available about women, gathered by women, for women. Truly open data requires a gendered approach.

Now we'll focus in on the problem of **gender bias in providing and listening to feedback**. The first article finds stark gender bias in university student evaluations and the second in workplace performance reviews. How can awareness of gender biases inform the analysis step of the feedback loop?

[Why Female Professors Get Lower Ratings](#) (Anya Kamenetz, 2016)

In a recent study, researchers found stark evidence of classroom gender bias. At the end of the semester, male and female students ranked their professors. Male professors were evaluated more positively, despite the fact that female professors' students scored higher on the final exam. How should we respond to feedback, knowing that it could be misleading due to biases?

[Gender Bias at Work Turns Up in Feedback](#) (Rachel Emma Silverman, 2015)

Analyzing performance reviews from hundreds of firms, a research team at Stanford found the reviews were biased against women. Reviews criticized women for the same qualities praised in the performance reviews of their male coworkers. "Men were more likely to be given constructive suggestions related to specific skills, while women were more likely to get critical feedback to pipe down and be less aggressive."

Power

[Building a culture of participation in your community](#) (Mary Leong, 2016)

"There is a common perception that public consultations and other citizen engagement processes are just for show, and don't make a difference in the end. How can we build robust cultures of participation in our communities that embrace the plurality in modern societies and take into account the diversity of competing voices, interests, and concerns?"

[Can Your Employees Really Speak Freely?](#) (James R. Detert and Ethan R. Burris, 2016)

Employee feedback is important in any organization, but managers seeking feedback often run into two problems. Managers don't properly address the power dynamic at play in employee-manager relationship, and don't use the feedback to make immediate, visible changes. Good and useful feedback must be collected casually, but often.

A specific example of power in an organizational setting can be found in **philanthropy**. The relationship between a foundation and a grantee is colored by the power that the foundation has over the grantee's funding. That **power dynamic** can be addressed through listening and responding to feedback.

[Living with the Gates Foundation: How Much Difference Is it Making?](#) (Timothy Ogden, 2011)

The Gates Foundation is hugely influential and seems to be unlike any other charitable organization in history – but what exactly is the scope of Gates’ influence? In comparison to other foundations, Gates’ influence seems outsized. Yet compared to the cost and scope of the problems on which Gates aims make an impact, its power seems modest. Critiques of the Gates Foundation reveal an organization that has matured quickly in size and rigor, but that could be more responsive to internal dissenting voices, adaptive to challenges it tackles, and a better listener to its grantees.

[Trickle-Down Community Engagement, part 2: The infantilization of marginalized communities must stop](#) (Vu Le, 2016)

This critique centers on “Trickle Down Community Engagement,” when nonprofits and foundations support organizations that are already well-supported, rather than organizations led by people of color, historically marginalized communities, or other groups “closer to” the problem.

[Plutocrats at Work: How Big Philanthropy Undermines Democracy](#) (Joanne Barkan, 2013)

This article explores the history of “big philanthropy,” beginning with the Rockefeller and Carnegie Foundations and analyzes the recent tactics of the Gates Foundation’s education reform campaigns to assess whether big philanthropy has been or can ever be democratic.



Take it further

Technology

Tech has rapidly scaled problem-solving, but is it without challenges?

- [Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest](#) (Zeynep Tufekci, 2017)

Gender

What can we do to eliminate gender bias? What is the missing piece?

- [Rescuing Girls, Investing in Girls: A Critique of Development Fantasies](#) (Caron and Margolin, 2015)
- [Counting the Invisible Girls](#) (Plan International, 2016)

Power

How does big philanthropy affect funder-grantee relationships?

- [Why Big Philanthropy Needs Scrutiny Not Just Gratitude](#) (Rob Reich and Amy Costello, 2017)
- [Philanthropy in Democratic Societies: History, Institutions, Values](#) (Rob Reich, Chiara Cordelli, Lucy Bernholz)

V. What's Next?

Learning feedback online is great, but it's even better if you can discuss feedback loops with other thinkers and doers in aid, philanthropy, and government. Explore the Feedback Labs Communities' other opportunities to further your feedback practice.

Further Education Materials:

- [Feedback Fundamentals](#) – Get introduced to the ideas, frameworks, tools and approaches that we believe are essential for a strong feedback practice.
- [Ecosystem Op-Eds](#) – Read various perspectives on the big questions at the frontier of citizen feedback and push the boundaries of thought on it.
- [Three Things Thursday](#) – Read how other innovators describe three specific components of their feedback practice that they think makes them successful. These straightforward but profound practices help the Feedback Labs community understand how they can integrate closing feedback loops in their own work.

Get Involved:

- [Newsletter](#) – Stay up to date on the latest in closing feedback loops: content from experts in the field, alerts and promotions on exclusive events, job postings, funding opportunities, and more!
- [LabStorms](#) – Read about or join these collaborative brainstorm sessions designed to help an organization wrestle with a challenge related to feedback loops, with the goal of providing actionable suggestions.
- [Crash Course](#) – An interactive one-day workshop providing the knowledge, skills, and tools to close the feedback loop.
- [Feedback Summit](#) – A gathering of leading feedback thinkers and practitioners from aid, philanthropy, development, government, and impact investing.

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