## Call for Abstracts for Volume 17, Issue 2

*Themed Issue on Funder Listening for Equity*

Abstracts of up to 250 words are invited for Volume 17, Issue 2 of *The Foundation Review*. This issue, sponsored by Fund for Shared Insight, will focus on the role of listening in helping foundations be more responsive and accountable to the people and communities most affected by their decisions. Submit abstracts to tfrsubmissions@gvsu.edu **by October 4, 2024**. If a full paper is invited, it will be due **January 8, 2025,** for consideration for publication in **June/July 2025.**

### Overview

Over the past decade and particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and racial reckoning of 2020, a growing number of foundations have acknowledged the importance of listening and have even made formal commitments to listening, but evidence[1] suggests a persistent gap between intention and practice. Additional resources are needed to help foundations understand and implement listening practices such as systematic feedback loops, participatory processes, and other ways of listening well that can help shift power to the people and communities at the heart of their work. This is an important topic for philanthropy because listening can help foundations address and shift the historical power imbalance between institutions with financial resources and the organizations, communities, and individuals who seek access to those resources in order to address community needs and drive social change.

Other recent movements and initiatives – most notably equitable evaluation, trust-based philanthropy, and participatory philanthropy – are promoting complementary principles and practices that improve philanthropy by centering community voice and expertise, shifting power over decisions and resources to impacted communities, and divesting foundations of outsized power and influence. This convergence is encouraging for the field and for the future of foundation listening. At the same time, it presents an opportunity to offer a clearer definition of listening and what it means to listen well.

### Topics that articles might address in this issue include:

- **Advancing a common definition of listening that shifts power and promotes equity.** What definitions make clear concepts such as "shifting power," "capacity building," and shifting power to what end? How do definitions address listening to the extent that communities are supported and have the capacity to step into the arena of the power that has shifted?

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[1] Evidence could link to most recent Center for Evaluation Innovation *2023 Benchmarking Report,* p11: https://evaluationinnovation.org/publication/2023-benchmarking-report/

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- **Clarifying the role of funder listening in <u>relationship to other concurrent efforts</u> to promote foundation practice change.** Who is the listener? Who is asking the questions? What is the role of the listener? How can we ensure that philanthropic practice is respectful of community voices with attention to how communities are "invited to," "come to," or "set" the table of listening? This also includes how they share in a manner that's authentic to their voice(s). How do you address the culture shift required internally toward the practice of listening and the incongruence that often exists across foundation teams, leadership, program officers, and boards.

- **Listening to racially diverse, historically marginalized communities.** Who represents the community? Who speaks for the community? Who is the community? Who defines this? Do foundations keep going to the same person or groups? What does it take to navigate the current political waters and legal ramifications to hold the line around diversity, equity and inclusion? How can we address the philanthropic and political will to model staying power through challenging times that test foundation, can funder listening build grantee and community resilience? How do funders listen in the time of the Fearless Fund and politicization of race?

- **Presenting the <u>body of evidence</u> that suggests that listening is an effective strategy for developing more equitable practices and supporting equitable outcomes in the social sector, along with tools and examples of application in practice.** How does the evidence show trust in the community? How is trust demonstrated? How to build the will and practice of philanthropy to trust prior to listening or valuing the voices of marginalized communities? (e.g., moves beyond checking a box to authenticity; trust in transformation, training, hiring). How we do the work is already creating a change in the system?

- **Experiences and analyses of different types and sources of listening data.** What evidence is there of listening? How can the risk of cooptation be mitigated? Without experience, culture, and tools, funders can cause harm. What are some examples of harm, or the risks associated when this is not done well? How does funder listening inform or influence changed decisions, strategies, actions? How can listening inform changed behavior/translate into action?

- <u>**Tools and best practices**</u> **for philanthropic listening.** What tools are available to prepare for funder listening and assess their organizational readiness? What tools prepare communities for sharing with funders (or intermediaries tapped to facilitate listening)? What protocols are needed for listening that honor community voices and perspectives? What tools help funders "inspect what they expect" (explicit and implicit reflection tools that lead to action)? How do foundations repair/overcome past histories of philanthropy's failure to listen fully and respectfully? What are the domains of listening in philanthropic practice (resulting in systems change)? Including for example:
  - strategic intent: how a funder plans and executes change strategies
  - ways of working: the internal culture and working norms of a foundation
  - change and outcomes disposition: how a funder thinks about impact and attribution
  - grantmaking approach: specific tactical approach to grantmaking

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## Abstracts are solicited in four categories (authors do not need to specify a category for their submission):

- **Results:** Papers in this category generally report on findings from evaluations of foundation-funded work. Papers should include a description of the theory of change (logic model, program theory), a description of the grant-making strategy, the evaluation methodology, the results, and discussion. The discussion should focus on what has been learned both about the content (e.g., what has been learned about communications strategies, etc.) and about grantmaking and other foundation roles (convening, etc.). We especially seek papers that describe "hard lessons" – efforts that were not successful in achieving the intended outcomes in the timeframe envisioned.

- **Tools:** Papers in this category should describe tools useful for foundation staff or boards. By "tool" we mean a systematic, replicable method intended for a specific purpose. For example, a protocol to assess community or organizational readiness and standardized facilitation methods would be considered tools. The actual tool should be included in the article where practical. The paper should describe the rationale for the tool, how it was developed, and available evidence of its usefulness.

- **Sector:** Papers in this category address issues that confront the philanthropic sector as whole, such as diversity, accountability, etc.

- **Reflective Practice:** The reflective practice articles rely on the knowledge and experience of the authors, rather than on formal evaluation methods or designs. In these cases, it is because of their perspective about broader issues, rather than specific initiatives, that the article is valuable.

Papers should emphasize the practical applications of the findings. Reviewers will be evaluation professionals, foundation program and evaluation staff and board members, and other experts in the content area. Reviews of the full paper will be double blind. Authors can view full manuscript specifications and standards before submitting an abstract at https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/tfr/for_authors.html.

**Book Reviews:** *The Foundation Review* publishes reviews of relevant books. Please contact the editor to discuss submitting a review. Reviewers must be free of conflicts of interest.

### For more information, contact:

Hanh Cao Yu, Ph.D., Editor-in-Chief, Special Issues
*The Foundation Review*
TFReditorinchief@gvsu.edu

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