

LIFT – A Constituent Voice Case Study

Background

Founded in 1998, LIFT is a national nonprofit dedicated to ending intergenerational poverty. Since then, LIFT has helped 100,000 low-income individuals achieve their goals. Today LIFT connects hardworking parents and caregivers of young children to the people, tools, and resources they need. LIFT operates in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, D.C. communities with some of the highest rates of concentrated poverty. By fostering relationships between low-income parents and caregivers of young children (members) and dedicated volunteers (advocates), LIFT helps families build the personal well-being, social connections, and financial strength to secure basic needs and achieve long-term goals and aspirations, like a safe home, living wages, or a better education.

Problem

When working with LIFT staff, members always drive the meeting agenda toward their goals because they know what is best for their families. However, LIFT realized that there was a critical gap in how they measured results and looked for ways to improve program outcomes. Similar to many other organizations, LIFT’s evaluation agenda counted the easily quantifiable results, like the number of job applications completed and the number of jobs secured. However, members’ voice and perceptions of LIFT were not assessed systematically.

“LIFT’s ethos, values and programs have always highlighted member voice and member-driven goal planning. But it dawned on us that we were focused on collecting traditional information that wasn’t reflecting member voice in our evaluation” (Sophie Sahaf, Vice President Program and Evaluation, LIFT).

Approach

With a commitment to rectifying the misalignment between its values and evaluation practice, LIFT began working with Keystone Accountability to implement Constituent Voice™.¹ After a pilot phase in early 2013, LIFT rolled out Constituent Voice to its four cities in September 2014.

How does it work? Members complete short surveys at the end of each in-person meeting on one of several iPads in each LIFT office.



¹ Constituent Voice™ is a method developed by Keystone Accountability to help organizations improve results by optimizing their relationships with their constituents. For more information see the [Technical Note](#).

Survey questions cover three broad categories: service quality, relationship quality, and member loyalty. Each survey contains five to eight questions that have been selected from a larger pool, and members respond to a different set of questions each time they come. This approach allows LIFT to collect information on a diverse set of topics while limiting the burden on individual members, as each survey only takes one to two minutes to complete. Most questions are phrased as sentences to which members respond on a scale of 0 (completely disagree) to 10 (strongly agree), which enable the results to be analyzed using the Net Performance Score.²



LIFT administers surveys on iPads for several reasons. First, the iPads allow members to self-administer surveys, creating space for more honest feedback. The iPads are also a cost-effective alternative to telephone or in-person attempts to gather feedback, which can take significant staff time. Finally, collecting feedback while members are physically in the office allows LIFT to reach those who don't have regular access to a phone or computer.

LIFT has also made important strides in increasing and maintaining a strong response rate. This in part was helped by organizational leadership elevating feedback as a critical information source, and – importantly – tracking to ensure feedback systems were implemented with integrity. Each region had a target set for their survey response rate and progress was reported on a monthly performance scorecard. Regions then were able to reflect on the response rate and how they could improve it, leading to a significant improvement in response rates. In the first year of implementation, the average response rate was 35 percent; by the third year, it had increased to over 60 percent.

These high rates of participation have two demonstrable benefits: Firstly, members are vested in the feedback, and this is evident in how it comes up regularly in conversations with staff; and secondly, staff don't need any convincing that the data gives an accurate and reliable reading of member experience.

“We use the survey as a form of triangulation, to generate ideas or confirm something we thought. But we know surveys alone are not enough” (Sophie Sahaf, Vice President Program and Evaluation, LIFT).

² The Net Performance Score was developed out of Bain's net promoter score and works on a single question where respondents give a rating from 0-10. Those who answer 9 or 10 are considered promoters, passives give 7 or 8 and detractors give 0-6. Detractors are unhappy and could damage the organization through negative word of mouth. The net performance score is generated by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters.

LIFT regularly monitors survey responses for trends and actionable insights and identifies opportunities for improvement. Then staff members “close the loop” with members to help ensure they are drawing the right conclusions from the survey data, and to get members to help them discover more meaning. LIFT does this in two main ways.



First, LIFT shares survey results via television screens in each office. Like most human service organizations, LIFT’s literature features lots of member success stories. While these are inspiring, the survey results add a whole new dimension to how LIFT communicates member experience -- a story in attractive graphs and numbers that captures all member voices. It’s also valuable to hear how members perceive and interpret the data.

Second, to make sure LIFT is interpreting the feedback correctly, and to dig deeper into the trends they see in their results, LIFT runs Constituent Voice focus groups, the first of which were done in 2014. LIFT wanted to collect qualitative details that would confirm or challenge their assumptions about certain findings and provide insight into the rationale behind responses. This process allowed LIFT to not only better understand members’ responses – and how they could improve the phrasing of questions – but also created a space to have a dialogue with members around the challenges they face and how LIFT can better meet their needs. For example, through these focus groups LIFT heard resounding interest from members in more opportunities to connect with peers. These included occasions to share advice on job searches and parenting as well as to simply receive encouragement from others in similar situations. LIFT has since integrated peer groups in many of our programs.



Results

Testing the Theory of Change

LIFT believes that a strong relationship is a critical first step to supporting its members’ progress towards their goals; a trusting relationship, rooted in dignity and respect is a foundation of LIFT’s theory of change. To validate and test this theory of change, LIFT matches members’ survey responses against measures of their progress at LIFT (like the number of goals they’ve completed), to explore whether or not survey scores of relationship quality

consistently relate to member progress. To ensure independence and quality this analysis is done by independent consultants.



By analyzing this data, LIFT was able to establish a positive correlation between high member scores in their relationship with LIFT, and success in achieving their goals. For example, members with high scores on questions related to relationship quality make almost three times as much progress on their goals.

In addition, LIFT found that members with stronger social networks and inner resilience made more progress on their goals.

It also found that members with stronger confidence and capacity to aspire make 40% more concrete steps towards their goals.

Changes to Service Delivery

Over the last three years, these and other insights from LIFT’s Constituent Voice process have helped LIFT elevate their members’ voice and think critically about areas for improvement. As a result, LIFT has made various changes to its operations.

- ✓ Introduction of peer support groups – Both survey data and focus groups pointed to members’ demand to get to know their peers and learn from one another. As a result, peer support groups were introduced. At its offices, LIFT now offers quarterly parent cafes in Los Angeles, a weekly peer support group in Chicago, and informal family suppers for parents in New York.
- ✓ Changes in opening hours – To accommodate members who struggled to attend meetings during working hours, some LIFT offices started opening in the evenings.
- ✓ More emphasis on high quality referrals – LIFT found that some members were better connected to the community, and were achieving much more progress in achieving their goals. As a result, LIFT collected coherent data on referrals to better identify, which referrals had the highest value. Moreover, LIFT invested more in volunteer training to ensure that clear and precise information was shared with members. As a result, LIFT increased the number of members who received services from trusted community partners.

Co-designing programs with members

LIFT recently embarked on a co-design process, building new pilots around financial capabilities and social capital. The voices of LIFT’s members helped identify critical barriers, brainstorm methods to tackling those challenges and make the program approach stronger. This constant cycle of feedback allowed LIFT to continuously refine and improve. This gave LIFT the confidence of developing a service that is valuable and accessible to all of its members.

Over the last few years, LIFT has learned through trial and error about how to meaningfully integrate feedback into their work. What started with a survey evolved into a much broader approach to gathering member input that has influenced the design of program pilots, helped LIFT tweak its program offerings, and has illustrated to members that LIFT values their input and will use it to ensure they are always designing and implementing programs that serve them better. LIFT's organizational culture has always aspired to be 100 percent member centered and member driven. With Constituent Voice, LIFT has the organizational systems that underwrite that culture every day.

Looking ahead, LIFT hopes to collect more open-ended feedback, dive into analysing qualitative feedback, and benchmark its performance against other organizations. This all leads to using feedback to drive better results for members.

Further Reading

- Keystone Accountability <http://keystoneaccountability.org/>
- Feedback Commons: <http://feedbackcommons.org/>
- LIFT: <http://www.liftcommunities.org/>
- LIFT's report *Listening Better: 10 Lessons from LIFT's Member Feedback Survey*: http://www.liftcommunities.org/content/uploads/2016/12/Listening-Better_Dec-2016.pdf