Fund for Shared Insight

Request for Proposals
Frequently Asked Questions
2014 RFPs
GENERAL QUESTIONS

October 2014

The following frequently asked questions and answers reflect the questions we received via email and through open conference calls. We are grateful to the hundreds of people who took the time to ask thoughtful questions that helped clarify our thinking. We hope the following information proves helpful to those who are interested in learning more about our 2014 RFPs. **Please note that these FAQs refer specifically to our 2014 RFPs and are not intended to be guidance for future RFPs.**

Will you fund organizations that are not designated as a 501c3?

A: As stated in our RFP criteria, we are only able to make grants to 501c3 organizations in this funding round. When we said only 501c3 orgs, we meant it – plain and simple.

Will you fund organizations that operate under the 501c3 status of a fiscal sponsor?

A: Yes, we will fund organizations that operate under the 501c3 status of a fiscal sponsor. If and when you apply, please explain your relationship to the fiscal sponsor so we are aware of the situation.

We are applying from abroad. Is it preferable for us to apply through our US-based 501c3 fiscal sponsor, or use our certificate of 501c3 equivalency (or both)?

A: If you have a US-based 501c3 fiscal sponsor and it makes more sense for you to apply through that, we suggest you do so. Just be clear about what your relationship is with that fiscal sponsor in your proposal.

Can we apply for funding that is more than 20% of our annual budget?

A: As we stated in our RFP criteria, we ask that the amount requested be no more than 20% of your annual budget.

Can we apply for funding from more than one category?

A: We will accept proposals from a single organization in all 3 categories. If your organization is conducting work in foundation openness and in practice and in research, and if you meet the criteria, then we would encourage you to apply.

Can we apply for funding for multiple proposals within the same category?

A: We will accept multiple proposals from a single organization in the same category. Keep in mind however, that you will then be competing against yourself so it behooves you to put your best program forward for funding in a single category.

I see that there is a domestic focus for this round of proposals (although international is not entirely out of the question). Do you see that changing in future years? I am wondering if it is worth applying for this year, or if we should wait for another year?

A: As a new initiative and group of funders collaborating for the first time, our focus in year 1 is primarily on US-based efforts to collect feedback from the people we seek to help. We are hopeful that in future years, our group of funders will be more comfortable with funding international efforts but there's no way to predict this at this point in time. Our hope is that our first year of funding grants together will build confidence among the core funders in taking more risks and going beyond our comfort zone, but again, there's no way to know this at this point.

We would encourage you to apply now, as international projects not entirely out of the question, and we'd love to learn more about what good work is going on around the world and the US in year one to help inform our decision-making both this year and in the future. Additionally, we have other funders who have asked us to be on the lookout for "shovel-ready" projects so that they might participate in co-funding projects we select or fund projects we cannot fund due to our criteria limitations. If you are interested in having Fund for Shared Insight forward your proposal to other funders, please be sure to check "Yes" to question (13) on the proposal cover sheet.

Of course, you must balance your decision to apply with your own capacity and timing issues and your own assessment of the probability of being funded.

Do you have a sense if there will be a more international focus in subsequent years?

A: We're not in a position to answer this question at this point. We have seven core funders, many of whom do fund internationally, and some of whom do not. In this first year of collaboration, we're in the process of building trust and learning how we work together best. We have a couple of our funders who are not as comfortable with funding a majority of our projects internationally, so we decided as a group that at least for year 1, we will focus a majority of our funding inside the U.S.

We left ourselves open, depending on how this first year goes, and on whether the comfort level of these funders with funding international projects increases, to re-assess if we will have a more international focus in subsequent years.

Please keep in mind is that the Fund for Shared Insight is a start-up. We began this whole effort in July 2014 and we're learning along the way. We think it will be easier for us to do a good job of being a good funder with U.S.-based organizations in the first year. But keep checking back at our website and make sure you're registered with our contacts database. On the bottom of each page, there's a Contacts link that will bring you to a page where you can enter your name and e-mail address, and we'll make sure your information is captured there so that you can receive any updates and information on the Fund for Shared Insight.

Given the Fund for Shared Insight is a three-year initiative, do you have a preference for making multi-year grants, or a single year grant first and then a renewal grant(s)?

A: We suggest you apply for the amount of money that you need to do your work, which probably means telling us how much money you will need over multiple years, rather than limiting your proposal to a single year. Overall, we are trying to make all of our grants for year 1 in this first round, which is November 2014, and getting the money out the door by the end of the calendar year. It may be that in the first round we don't spend all our money, in which case we will plan to make more grants in the first quarter of 2015. If we do spend all the money in 2014, we will have to wait a year before we're funded up again though this collaborative.

In the beginning of our initiative, we talked about a variety of different areas we could fund over time related to increasing foundation openness. But the feedback we received from peer funders and nonprofits was that we need to stick to our focus for at least 3 years if we wanted to have any chance of making an impact, also recognizing that 3 years is still a very short period of time

to achieve any kind of culture change around how people use feedback from the people we seek to help. All of our core funders are committed to 3 years of funding and are committed to focusing on increasing openness in foundations and in particular funding the practice and research around feedback loops.

Would you consider it a plus or value-added if our proposal included matching funds from other sources?

A: Matching funds are a great idea but not necessary. The key is for us to understand how you will fund your work beyond the Shared Insight grant. If you do have match dollars in play, you do not need to have match funds secured by the application deadline, although you should explain your match/funding plan and timeline in the proposal. We will not preference proposals that come with match funding. In fact, we are planning to help our funded grantees acquire more resources from our colleague funders who have expressed interest in funding on top of what Shared Insight provides. If you are open to having us share your proposal with other interested funders, please make sure to check YES in your Section A: Proposal Cover Sheet (13) which states: “May we share this proposal with other interested funders?”

Will you fund proposals from foundations?

A: We will NOT entertain proposals from foundations including private, corporate, public and other forms of foundations. We’d be happy to be connected with other funders working in this area to see how we might collaborate or coordinate work going forward and welcome any introductions. Also, if those funders have nonprofits that they work with (grantees) those grantees could apply directly to Shared Insight.

Will you fund proposals from community foundations or a United Way?

A: We’ve had questions come in about whether organizations can re-grant dollars that they receive from us and we’re really not interested in funding a community foundation or United Way to do re-granting. However, if the community foundation or United Way is directly operating a program that meets the RFP criteria, then we might consider that proposal.

Can the grant award from Shared Insight be used for re-granting programs?

A: Our intention is not for a re-granting organization to apply for funds purely to re-grant them, but rather to make the grants directly to organizations doing the work outlined in each RFP's criteria. That said there is a line item for re-granting in the project budget template. We put that in just in case it was needed, but were envisioning a situation in which two organizations (or more) applied in collaboration and one needed to provide some funds to the other(s) for the shared work.

For public university applicants, would you be willing to state a maximum rate of indirect costs to avoid an institutionally mandated (high) rate?

A: Yes, we are still debating how to best address this issue. We are thinking of limiting indirects for public universities to 10% and we'd add this on top of the total amount you need for your work.

In Section B question 2, should we include a logic model for our organization as a whole or a logic model for our proposed feedback loop project specifically? Or should we submit our organization's broad logic model and then populate the table in Section C with specifics related to our proposal?

A: The logic model in Section B question 2 should be for the project you are proposing for us to fund. We want to understand how you are thinking of your activities, expected outcomes, and the connection between those two areas. If you happen to have an overall logic model for your organization please feel free to include that as well but please don't create one just for this proposal. Section C should be specifically related to your proposed project and plans and tie back to your logic model for the proposed project in Section B.

Will you fund our impact evaluation?

A: This initiative is about the practice of and research on feedback loops, not general support to help nonprofits build their capacity to evaluate their programs and measure impact or incorporate feedback loops for the very first time.

Will you schedule a one-on-one phone call with me to discuss my proposal?

A: In an effort to be responsive to the many requests for phone calls to further explain our criteria, we hold open conference calls for interested applicants to ask questions and receive live answers. If you would like to receive ongoing information from the Fund for Shared Insight, please provide us with your name and email address at http://www.fundforsharedinsight.org/contact. If after reading the RFP criteria on the website, reviewing these FAQs, and participating in an open conference call you still have questions, please email Melinda Tuan at melinda@fundforsharedinsight.org with your detailed questions and we will do our best to respond promptly and clearly.

Can I email someone with my specific questions?

A: Yes, we are happy to answer your questions via email so long as you are asking us questions that are not already answered on the website and in particular in the FAQ, the RFPs, and the RFP FAQs. If there is a specific question you have about your particular project and an email dialogue with us would help shape how you craft your proposal or whether you propose it at all, please email Melinda at melinda@fundforsharedinsight.org.

What guidelines can you offer on proposal length? Are there page limits? Would you prefer a 6-page concept paper or a 30-page proposal with technical and management sections?

A: We prefer that you be more succinct rather than verbose. We (Lindsay Louie and Melinda Tuan) will be reviewing all of the proposals, so please keep us in mind as you write them. That said you should provide us with whatever we need to know to make good decisions about your proposal. So, while there is no specific page length requirement on restriction, we do suggest in the RFP that most completed proposals range from 5-10 pages for Sections B, C and D, plus additional attachments as applicable. You can read from that that our preference is to read shorter proposals rather than 30-page proposals.

What is your process for reviewing the proposals? Are all of the core funders reviewing the proposals?

A: Lindsay Louie of the Hewlett Foundation and Melinda Tuan, the project manager for Fund for Shared Insight, will review all of the proposals that come in. We also have some other

individuals that will help us and give extra capacity with organizing and doing some financial review and maybe some expert review. In terms of the core funder group, they will all review the recommended proposals from Lindsay and Melinda and may review individual categories of proposals as well.

How will the references at the end of RFP be used?

A: We've been asked if we want just names and contact information for references or actual letters of reference. If you have letters readily available, feel free to submit those with your application, but if not, listing the name and contact information and context of the reference will be helpful. As we move toward making decisions about final candidates for us to recommend for funding, we will be checking references for the most promising proposals and calling or emailing the people you've listed as references to understand more about what they think about your work.

If something is missing from my proposal, or if you have questions for which you need clarification, how will you communicate with applicants?

A: We have a team of people who are going to field these applications, organize them and see what's missing, if anything. Very shortly after you submit your application, you will receive a standard reply acknowledging receipt. If there's something missing, we will e-mail you and request what is missing. If there are any questions for clarification, we will e-mail the contact person listed on your proposal. If you have questions after you've applied, you can e-mail Melinda Tuan, project manager, at melinda@fundforsharedinsight.org.

Does grant implementation need to start right after the grant is awarded in 2014?

A: No, your grant implementation does not need to start up right away, but we do want to see that the funds that are granted in this first year are being used during the first year. Starting up much later than the beginning of 2015 will not give us much to say to our core funders or the greater community about what our funds have facilitated in your work, nor will we have much to evaluate in our first year of funding.

Will those of us who do not qualify for funding this year have an opportunity to apply in another year?

A: Yes, this is a three-year initiative and we are in year one. We are committed to investing in the practice of and research on feedback loops from the people we seek to help. We expect funding will continue at least at the annual level of $5.5M and there will be opportunities in the future to apply. We also plan to provide feedback to all applicants regarding their proposals so that some may strengthen their proposals in the coming year and re-submit as appropriate.

Why was the timeframe so short between when you announced the RFP on 9/4/14 and the 10/15/14 deadline for proposals?

A: We wrote our RFPs with the hope and expectation that organizations already engaged in the work we want to fund would apply. This is why we have the threshold criteria in each of the RFPs as follows:

- RFP I: PRACTICE "Previous experience running at least one feedback experiment"
- RFP II: RESEARCH "Previous experience conducting research that includes perceptual data"
- RFP III: INCREASING FOUNDATION OPENNESS "Previous work influencing foundation practice"

With the short turnaround, we wanted to discourage organizations who have no previous experience with feedback loops or influencing foundation practice from applying. Ideally, all the organizations submitting proposals for the Fund for Shared Insight were already doing what we want to fund and therefore we hoped a six-week turnaround would not be a difficult timeframe for them to meet.