



Asset Funders Network's Members Making Impact: Case Studies for Change & Innovation is a series that spotlights peer-driven investment strategies fueling systemic and policy change across AFN's eight focus areas. Through this series, members will:

- **Discover** innovative mechanisms to advance wealth-building initiatives aligned with AFN's focus areas.
- **Meet** new potential partners in crafting new grants, policies, and partnerships that support their mission.
- **Elevate** awareness of the intersection between AFN's focus areas and wealth-building opportunities.



Charles Schwab Bank Partners with Listen4Good

Incorporating Community Voices into Asset-Building Work

As funders increasingly seek to center community voices in their work, they recognize that this approach can drive even greater impact. Elevating community and grantee feedback in the grantmaking process can amplify and transform philanthropic efforts.

AFN member Charles Schwab Bank (CSB) understands that community perspectives are key to creating philanthropic and asset-building strategies that are inclusive, responsive, and genuinely impactful. Moving beyond prescriptive funding models, CSB is embracing responsive grantmaking that prioritizes the voices of those closest to the issues. They recognize that listening is fundamental to creating economic mobility and that those living with these challenges are often best positioned to identify effective solutions. But how can a foundation or asset funder implement these solutions without starting from scratch in developing the concepts and process? For CSB, that is where [Listen4Good](#) comes in.

Listen4Good Helps Funders Truly Listen

[Listen4Good](#) is a national capacity-building program that trains nonprofit leaders to listen to and learn from their end users, particularly those who have been historically marginalized and excluded, and take action to incorporate feedback into their business decisions. The program provides a clear way for nonprofits and funders to understand the experiences of community members—what's working for them and what isn't—and to share those insights with organizational leaders and funders. The program works for direct service nonprofits like your grantees and also provides funders a format to put their goals into practice.

Partnerships like the one between CSB and Listen4Good can reshape the asset-building landscape, transforming a value (centering community voice) into meaningful and visible action for both nonprofit partners and their clients. CSB recognizes the need to help grantees forge stronger connections with their clients, asks questions that result in deeper feedback, and uses those perspectives to strengthen or innovate their programs.

The Listen4Good initiative was originally highlighted by CSB's regulators and presented as a particularly innovative and responsive program that would also give the bank a favorable consideration in fulfilling its objectives under the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA). A mutually beneficial outcome for all stakeholders. In partnership with AFN, Listen4Good, and other AFN-North Texas foundation members, CSB developed a cohort-based learning community of service providers in North Texas. The funders sponsored five human services nonprofits to participate in Listen4Good's capacity-building program and learning community. This cohort model fostered a shared environment where nonprofits were able to learn from each other, exchange best practices, and solve problems collaboratively. See [this comprehensive report](#) celebrating the learnings that developed through the Listen4Good Dallas Fort Worth Learning Community.

The DFW Learning Community convened five times over the 18-month Listen4Good program. Meetings included training and discussion on survey design and collection, acting on community feedback, visualizing and sharing data for strategic planning, and sustaining feedback systems for continuous improvement. The group worked collaboratively to develop and share community survey questions and data across organizations, which provided valuable insights into client experience trends and enabled the group to identify shared challenges and solutions.



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The engagement of both nonprofit partners and peer funders underscored the positive impact of the Listen4Good project and of continuous learning and improvement through systematic listening. Additionally, the collaborative nature of this initiative and the impact of its learnings on funding decisions were acknowledged by bank regulators in the Bank's 2023 Public Evaluation.

Driving Impact and Making a Difference

Partnering with Listen4Good helped CSB meet its CRA goals and also fostered a deeper connection not only with community partners, but grantees and funders, while gaining insights into community needs.

The benefits to participating nonprofits have been significant. By taking part in the DFW Learning Community, they have been able to:

- Identify best practices and gaps in their own community engagement strategies
- Understand broader patterns in client feedback data
- Go beyond organizational improvement to ecosystem improvement
- Develop connections that last beyond Listen4Good's 18-month program

Shareable Learnings

In addition to supporting nonprofits with capacity building to develop their feedback systems, CSB, which has long collected client feedback in their business lines, also began implementing feedback practices with their grantee partners. They now actively seek feedback from grantee organizations about the CSB funding systems, initiatives, and strategies. The grantee feedback has helped the bank refine their approaches and also ensures that funding practices to philanthropy in the DFW community remain relevant, effective, and easy to navigate.

In response to the Listen4Good initiative, CSB's formal grantmaking process now includes two moments for grantees to provide feedback:

- **FRONT-END FEEDBACK** During the proposal process, CSB has one-on-one calls with grantees to ask what additional support they need to help tailor funding support to their specific needs.

"The Listen4Good learning community offers local service providers a level of comfort and support felt between everyone in the cohort. It's great because it allows us to put down our shields and really open up to each other and get to the core of the issues...It has really led to truthful and authentic conversations which are incredibly vital to enriching the lives of those whom we serve."

GINA NORMAN

Participant
Chief Program Officer, Housing Crisis Center

- **BACK-END FEEDBACK** After grantees receive funding, they are sent a survey through the bank's grant management system requesting feedback on the grantmaking process. The responses are collected by a colleague who is not part of the grantmaking team, ensuring that the feedback remains anonymous and unbiased when compiled and shared with the Bank's Grants and Services Team.

CSB has also adopted a new strategy of engaging in regular group conversations with nonprofit leaders across funding issue areas. These discussions help break down power dynamics, reinforce the importance of ongoing capacity building for grantees' work, and nurture open dialogue.

The combination of active listening, systematic feedback loops, and sharing knowledge with nonprofit leaders across North Texas has been critical for informing some of CSB's community development work. Although the cohort just concluded in 2024, CSB already sees encouraging outcomes. One significant change has been the integration of capacity building as a formal priority in its grantmaking strategy. This support directly responds to grantee feedback, emphasizing the critical need for such support.

Another crucial lesson learned during the process is the importance of recognizing the full cost of building a strong feedback culture, including nonprofit staff time. CSB and their North Texas AFN funding partners supported participating nonprofits by providing a grant to cover the cost of the Listen4Good program AND compensate for the staff time required to engage in the program and develop effective feedback mechanisms. Additionally, CSB funded Listen4Good directly to facilitate grantee learning community convenings, thus ensuring a comprehensive ongoing support system for participating nonprofits to share and learn from each other.

By bringing the lived experiences of community members into the program planning and decision-making process, Listen4Good provides funders and nonprofits with a powerful tool to address the root causes of community needs and solutions for wealth building.

For more information about CSB's partnership with Listen4Good, please contact AFN member Elaina Mulé, Director of Grants & Services for the Community Development Group at Charles Schwab Bank.

"Grantees are always very excited to hear that as a funder, we're also building our own feedback loops. Our dedication to our own feedback practice signals that we know how much hard work goes into soliciting and acting on community needs. It leads to more trust and credibility with our community partners."

ANDREA GLISPIE
Senior Manager of Community Development, Charles Schwab Bank

AUTHORS

ELAINA MULÉ

Director Community Development
elaina.mule@schwabbank.com

SACHI TAKAHASI-RIAL

Director Partners Services
sachi@listen4good.org

DENA JACKSON

Strategic Project Direction
Asset Funders Network

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