Best Practices for Nonprofit Feedback

One of the most meaningful and often overlooked moments in the grant process comes after a nonprofit learns they're not advancing. How your chapter communicates that news can either build trust or damage it. Even though only a few applicants will become Finalists or Grantees, ***every organization deserves to feel respected and encouraged to reapply****.*

This tip sheet outlines Impact100's recommended best practices for handling nonprofit feedback with care, consistency, and integrity.

Why Feedback Matters

- Communicating with applicants who don't move forward shows respect and professionalism
- A kind, consistent message reassures organizations that their time and effort were valued
- Encouraging words can inspire nonprofits to reapply next year. Many of our strongest Finalists and Recipients applied more than once

Best Practices for Communicating with Declined Applicants

- Use a **standard message** for all organizations in the same stage of review
- Keep the tone warm, encouraging, and professional
- Include **general reasons** why proposals may not have advanced (e.g., incomplete documentation, unclear outcomes, or lack of transformational impact or sustainability)
- **Avoid individualized coaching or critique**. Even if well-intended, it can feel subjective or misleading
- Let them know the process is **competitive** and that the decision does not reflect a failure
- Encourage re-application in future cycles

Incorporate Feedback Themes into Nonprofit Training

- Review common reasons proposals don't move forward and share those themes at your next nonprofit info session
- Sample feedback themes you can use:
    - "Several applicants last year did not include IRS documentation."
    - "Many proposals didn't clearly define how the project would be sustainable."
    - "Some projects didn't serve our defined geographical service area."
    - "Some did not explain how success or impact of the project would be measured."
- Sharing broad themes helps future applicants improve without singling anyone out

Additional Coaching – Proceed with Caution

- If your chapter offers broader nonprofit support (like grantwriting workshops or referrals), provide those opportunities **outside** of the grant review process
- Make sure these services are **offered equitably** and not seen as a substitute for or promise of funding