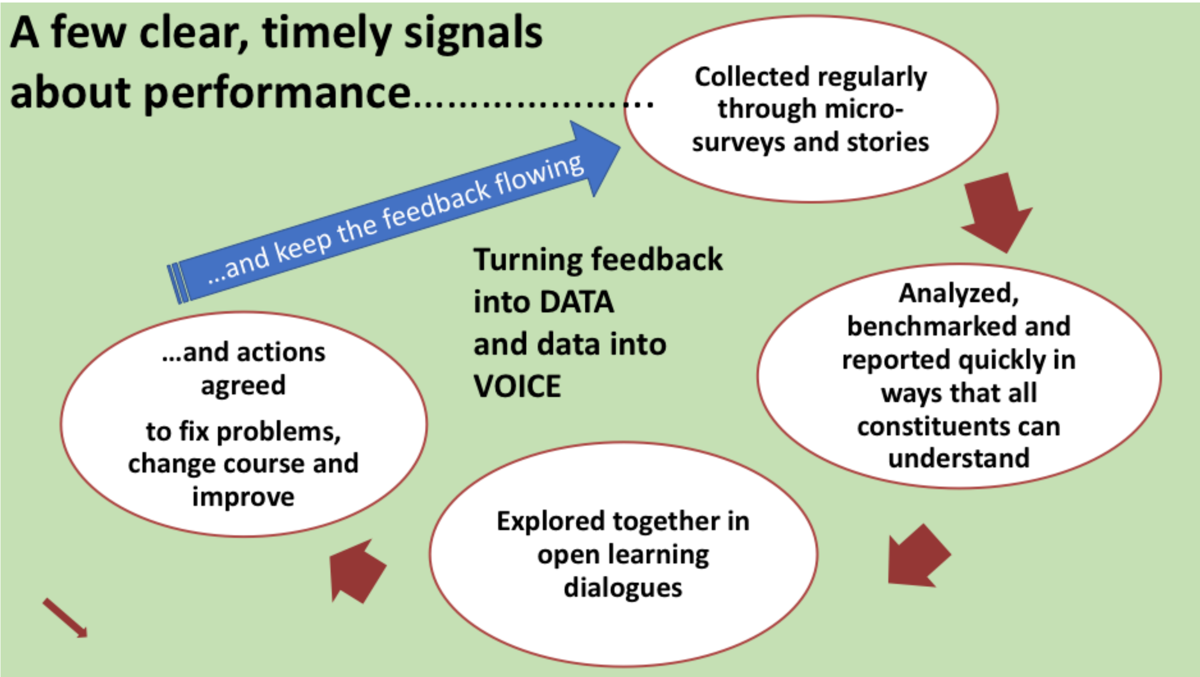
Feedback dialogues:

From clear, timely signals to accountable learning and action

Micro-surveys provide a few clear, timely signals about a program's performance. Discussing the feedback with partners and beneficiaries is where the learning happens, actions are identified and agreed, relationships are strengthened and the data is validated.

The survey alone does not enable partners and target groups to exercise meaningful VOICE. They must actively be part of the process of analyzing and making sense of the data – as well as agreeing what actions should follow. Only by enabling meaningful VOICE in this open and transparent way can a program claim to be truly accountable.



The purpose of the feedback dialogue

It is important to understand what you are trying to achieve with a feedback dialogue. And to design it so that, as far as possible, you achieve the following:

- To make sense of the feedback data together: To interpret the signals from the perspectives of both those giving the feedback and those receiving it.
- To enable those who gave the feedback to see what everyone said – not just their own individual scores.
- To identify the most important signals – or messages – that are expressed through the feedback.

- To explain together what these signals really mean for the program and the way it works with partners – what issues and problems does the data reveal?
    - To identify issues that need attention
    - To identify possible causes of problems
    - To generate new ideas together
- To agree on practical actions – by all constituents (program staff, partners and target groups in the community)
- To understand what is possible – and to manage expectations
- To foster confidence and better feedback loops
- To validate the feedback

Planning a dialogue event

Every program is unique – and the dialogue options must be appropriate for the context. The notes below are suggestions only. We look forward to hearing about your own creative ideas.

If feedback and dialogue are going to be a regular feature in how decisions are made, then feedback should be something that is collected and discussed regularly whenever there is an opportunity to do so.

Each program should try to plan the dialogues to become a regular part of their routine program management meetings.

You do not need to schedule separate long, exclusive dialogue events. Ideally, dialogues can happen during normal scheduled program meetings. For example, if you have regular monthly meetings with partners, perhaps try to discuss a few questions at one meeting and the rest at the following one.

Here is a checklist for planning a dialogue session as part of a routine meeting, or planning a dedicated dialogue meeting:

- Decide on the date, time and venue so that it is convenient for constituents to attend.
- Get feedback from constituents if this is convenient for them.

How frequently will you report back and dialogue?

Some feedback data you will collect on an ongoing basis – such as the touch-point feedback on training events, service points, field days etc.

Other feedback (like the relationship and outcomes questions) you might only collect periodically – in a general survey every 3-6 months or longer.

- In what way and how frequently should we report and discuss the ongoing touch-point feedback on our service relevance and quality?
- In what way, and how frequently should we report and discuss our general feedback on relationship quality and emerging outcomes?

- How many participants is the right number? You should not go much over 25 if you want everyone to participate actively.
- How will you make sure that all those who would like to attend are able to attend?
- What ensure better participation?: One large meeting or several smaller meetings?
- Who should be invited?
- How will you publicise the meeting?
- Will you need to assist with transport and food?
- Which program staff and officials should attend?
- Who will chair and facilitate the meeting?
- How will you make sure that
  - all participants are well prepared for the meeting?
  - all feel free to participate?

Here are some other options for a wider extended dialogue

- You could put up posters in community offices and public places inviting people to discuss the findings and make suggestions by contacting the program office in the area. Examples are places of worship, clinics, local government offices etc.
- You could make copies of the reports and give them to constituent groups to discuss on their own.
- You could ask for a session at a general community meeting or farmer field day that has been planned.
- You could publish findings in community media and invite feedback and suggestions.
- Community radio talk shows could be a good way of reaching a wider public.
- Social media options.

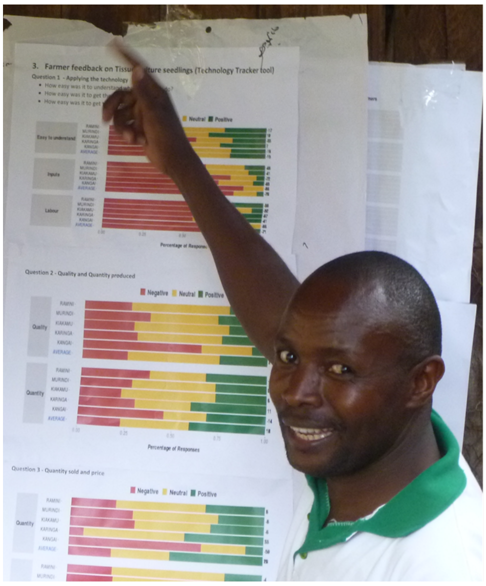
How will you report back?

Whether you have made a printed report, a presentation or a set of posters, you will have chosen graphs that reveal the most important findings.

At the most basic, you will probably present the survey results together with the benchmark.

You might decide not to include any of the filters if there are no major differences to report.

But if you do see any significant differences when you apply one of the filters (e.g. if it shows people from one region gave different scores to people from another, or if women gave different scores from men) then you should include this in the graph that you present for discussion.



Once you have selected your graphs that you think are most important to discuss, you need to decide how best you can share them.

If you have a good internet connection and a data projector, you can link to the online Data Explorer and explore the data live together? Otherwise you will have to produce some kind of report.

Will you…

- compile a presentation using graphics copied from the Data Explorer?
- compile a simple printed booklet – with graphics copied from the Data Explorer?
- print a set of posters – each with one graph copied from the Data Explorer?
  (posters can also be put up in offices or other public places where people can see and talk about them all the time)
- make a set of posters by hand – copying graphs from the Data Explorer onto a flip chart.

Some suggestions for facilitation

Giving and receiving feedback

A dialogue over survey results can be a safe space for people to discuss sensitive issues – because often the issue is raised in the data itself. Participants do not have to raise issues or make accusations. But the quality of the dialogue and the ideas and learning that it generates does depend, like any community engagement, on the quality of facilitation and the willingness of the program to respond openly and honestly to the feedback.

Most constituents at first will not be familiar with giving feedback and discussing it with program managers. In the beginning, participation may be uncertain and hesitant. But with good facilitation it is likely to quickly improve.

A feedback dialogue does not require any different facilitation skills from any other form of community engagement. While we recognize that it is not always practical or possible, Keystone's experience does suggest that you achieve a better and more productive dialogue if the facilitator is independent of the program.

Programs can demonstrate their commitment to listening by

- Having senior managers present – not only junior staff.
- Be willing to consider independent facilitators – maybe even from the community.
- Responding openly and following up on commitments made.
- Ensuring that everyone has a chance to participate.
- Handle misunderstandings and unrealistic expectations sensitively and clearly.

The main focus is the data

Helping constituents understand and draw meaning themselves from data that they have created is an immensely empowering thing.

Everyone should be able to see the graphs as you discuss them, and should be able to interpret the data themselves. In Keystone's experience, after a short explanation of the different elements that make up Net Performance Analysis, even illiterate people can interpret the main findings of the graphs.

GRAPHS SHOULD BE PRESENTED AND ANALYZED ONE BY ONE.

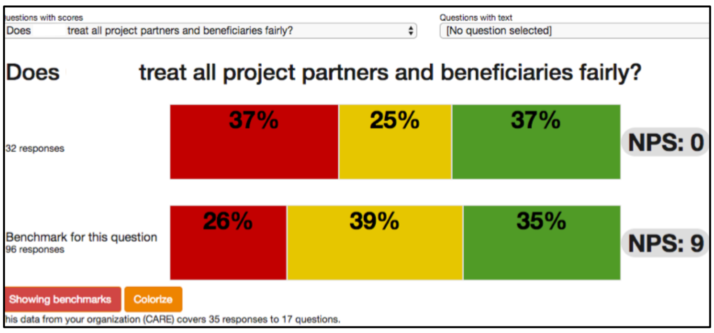
DO NOT EXPLAIN THE GRAPHS FOR PEOPLE. RATHER HELP CONSTITUENTS ANALYZE EACH GRAPH THEMSELVES.

Here are some questions that you can use to facilitate discussion about the graphs you have chosen for each question (starting with the simple results for this survey):

- For this question, which is the biggest group – the positives, neutrals or negatives?
- Approximately how many people feel strongly positive about the program's performance? How many are reasonably satisfied? And how many feel unsatisfied?
- Do most people feel the same way, or are there very different views about this question?
- Is this result what you expected? Does anything surprise you?
- Can we think of reasons why some people gave a positive rating?
- Can we think of reasons why some people gave a negative rating?

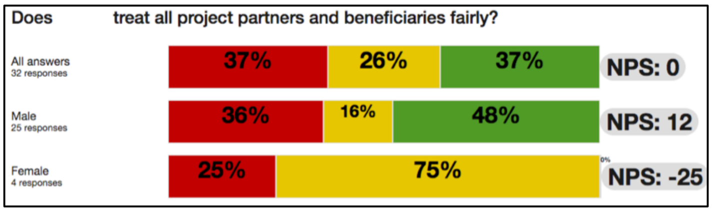
And from this survey compared with the benchmark results of all programs

- Are this program's results better or worse than the average results of all CARE programs? Is the difference small or large?
- What could help us explain the differences?



And from applying any of the filters to the results

- What differences do you see in the results of other groups of respondents?
- What reasons can you think of that would explain the differences?



The most important thing is… to identify and list the issues (regarding services, relationships and outcomes) that emerge.

For every question, before we move on to the next question, we need to ask: What are the important lessons that the program needs to learn from this feedback?

- What issues does it raise that need attention?
- Where is the program performing well?
- What actions should be taken by whom?

And it is very important to document it well. One way of doing this that works quite well is to use a **T-Chart**.

Take a piece of flip chart paper and draw two lines in a 'T' shape that divide it into 3 segments as shown in the illustration. If there are many issues, it may be best to make a T-Chart for each separate issue.

- The top segment is where you write the important issue/s that participants identify that need to be addressed.
- The lower left space is for exploring possible causes of the issue.
- The lower right space is for identifying actions to be taken.

What issue requires action? As you go through the individual graphs, list the issues that emerge from your discussion in this space. • Only list issues that relate to your performance • Do not mention external factors that you cannot influence	
The story/reasons behind the issue?	**What can be done? by whom?**
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Some general facilitation guidelines…

- Unless seriously challenged by evidence, the report should be accepted as an accurate reflection of constituents' (often differing) views
- But be open to criticism of the survey process – and document these points so as to improve how you collect feedback in future
- Differing views and experiences are not a bad thing – it shows that experiences and perceptions differ – and we can learn from exploring why this is
- Encourage contributions from all – especially the silent
- Spot personal agendas and accusations, and try to depersonalize the problem into something the program can solve systemically.
- Manage expectations: Detect when it might not be possible for the program (or any participant) to meet expectations. Help people clarify what they expect from the program – then facilitate a discussion on how practical and possible it is to meet expectations. Try to get agreement on what expectations are reasonable – both from the program and, where appropriate, from other constituents.

And finally, communicate!!

- A summary report should be produced for each dialogue process (whether it was one meeting or a series of meetings). This should be short and only document the main issues identified and actions agreed. Try for not more than one page.
- But do share it and invite feedback.
- Make the changes and let people know!
- Keep the feedback flowing.

The first time you do this expect the results to be disappointing. It takes time to build confidence and trust that giving honest feedback leads to honest action.

Organizations that repeat surveys and dialogues report that their response rates go up – sometimes doubling in 2-3 years – and people engage much more seriously.

And let us know how it is going. We are here to support!