CLOSING THE LOOP

2025

The Five-Step Framework for Feedback That Actually Drives Change

Based on CANDID: The Power of Psychologically Safe Feedback
by Blake Kohler, Remington Rainey, and Marc Weaver

Better beings with listening.

Executive Summary

Most organizations excel at collecting feedback but fail at the steps that actually create change. The five-step feedback loop—Ask, Collect, Analyze, Implement, and Notify—requires deliberate action, not passive hope.

1		2		3		4		5
ASK	→	COLLECT	→	ANALYZE	→	IMPLEMENT	→	NOTIFY

This whitepaper provides a practical framework for designing feedback systems that don't just gather data—they drive meaningful change. Drawing on research in organizational behavior, habit formation, and direct experience with hundreds of nonprofit organizations, we explore why most feedback loops break down and how to build ones that actually work.

When organizations master all five steps, feedback becomes a powerful engine for continuous improvement. When they don't, they create cycles of disengagement and distrust—and the people they serve bear the cost.

> *"This disconnect is what makes the difference between accidental feedback loops and those designed with intention and trust."*

The Crickets Problem

It's a position we've all experienced. You give feedback, but then… crickets. No follow-up. No changes. Just silence. After that happens a few times, you stop giving feedback altogether. Why bother shouting into the void?

Feedback loops can be purposeful or accidental. Things might work out even without a deliberate process. But accidental loops are a gamble—you might hit the jackpot, or you might lose trust altogether. Organizations serving vulnerable populations can't afford that gamble.

Understanding the Feedback Loop

Think of a feedback loop like your home thermostat. It queries the current temperature, collects that data, analyzes it, implements a change if needed, and notifies you of the result. This process runs continuously—the thermostat constantly checks and adjusts to keep things comfortable.

Feedback loops in your organization should work the same way: running continuously so you can respond to marginal changes as they happen, catching small problems before they become large ones. All around us, feedback loops exist—in biology, business, and human services—guiding how systems adapt and improve.

The Five Steps of a Complete Feedback Loop

1

Step 1: Ask

Curiosity drives us to seek information. A nurse asking "What's your pain level?" or measuring blood pressure are everyday feedback queries. The key is intentionality—be deliberate about what you want to know. It all starts with the right questions, asked to the right people, at the right time.

2

Step 2: Collect

Once you ask, collect the information. This can be as simple as listening or as structured as gathering data through surveys or listening sessions. With the right systems in place, collection can happen automatically—freeing human effort for the steps that need it most.

3

Step 3: Analyze

Translate raw data into actionable insights. While collection can be automated, analysis usually requires human expertise—data analysts, consultants, or experienced program staff. This is where many loops stall: organizations collect data but never turn it into understanding.

4

Step 4: Implement

Making change is tough because humans resist it, even when we know what needs to happen. Start small. As James Clear wrote in *Atomic Habits*, change should begin with tiny, consistent actions that build on each other. Don't try to transform everything at once.

5

Step 5: Notify

The step that closes the loop. Let people know their feedback was heard and what you're doing about it. As *CEO Excellence* puts it: "Following up on surveys is the most important part of a survey." When people see you're listening, they open up even more.

Where Organizations Get Stuck

Many nonprofits find it difficult to close the loop because they're overwhelmed by operational constraints, limited resources, and complex reporting structures. They juggle fundraising, service delivery, compliance, and donor relations—often with volunteer workers.

The Busy Trap
Organizations spend all their energy on Steps 1–3 (Ask, Collect, Analyze), leaving nothing for Steps 4–5 (Implement, Notify). Feedback is gathered and filed away, never acted upon.

The Solution
Automate the first three steps wherever possible. Use technology for collection and analysis so human effort can focus on implementation and notification—where it matters most.

WHY LOOPS BREAK

The Broken Feedback Loop

When your feedback loops aren't tuned correctly, the information they provide is skewed. Decisions feel right in the moment but are based on incomplete data. Like driving with a GPS that's out of sync—you feel like you're making progress, but you're reinforcing mistakes.

> *"If the feedback is wrong or missing, we make decisions based on faulty data, leading to unintended consequences."*

Misaligned feedback loops create a false sense of security. If you're only hearing positive feedback because your collection system is unintentionally selective, you'll assume everything's great—while missing vital, unhappy voices among those you serve.

Time: The First Key

Time is one of the biggest factors when closing a feedback loop, but it's not one-size-fits-all. Depending on the size and nature of the actions, the timeline varies dramatically:

Quick feedback: A graphic designer shares a design and gets input in minutes.

Medium-term: Program changes might need weeks to show effects.

Long-term: Working with vulnerable populations might take months or years to see meaningful change.

> *"The goal is to have the minimum amount of time necessary to gather valuable input."*

KEY DIMENSION #2

Trust: The Currency That Fuels Everything

Even more than time, closing the loop requires trust. When you ask people to share feedback, you're asking for an investment of their trust. When you close the loop properly, they earn interest on that investment.

We tend to assume the trust deficit exists on the side of the people we serve—that *they* don't trust *us*. But often, it's the organizations that struggle with trust. They doubt people will give feedback, that it will be useful, or that respondents understand what's needed.

Building trust starts with small wins. When you close a feedback loop by showing people their input led to real change, it creates a self-sustaining cycle. Catholic Community Services provides a compelling example: when competing to operate a new shelter, they held town halls to address feedback piece by piece. People lined up to give *more* feedback because they saw their input leading to real change.

Four Strategies to Fuel Trust

1. Use Anonymity to Strengthen Loops

Building trust sometimes requires an extra layer of protection. Anonymity acts as an emotional safety net—a protective bubble that allows people to express their thoughts without fear of personal repercussions.

2. Allow Peer-to-Peer Feedback

When feedback is given to someone who shares similar experiences, there's an immediate connection that builds deeper trust. Having a peer advocate can make all the difference.

3. Create a Safe and Comfortable Environment

Giving feedback can be intimidating. Imagine trying to offer constructive criticism to a police officer while getting a ticket. When people feel at ease, they're far more likely to provide genuine, useful input.

4. Offer Strength in Numbers

When many voices unite to amplify a message, it becomes much harder to ignore. Group feedback mechanisms unlock voices that would otherwise stay silent.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The Tuning Process

Feedback loops are always at work, whether we notice them or not. When they break down, wrong decisions lead to more flawed feedback, which leads to more misguided actions. Over time, this steers your organization further from its goals.

> *"Just like starting a fitness journey—you might think lifting weights is key, but diet, sleep, and consistency matter too. Refine your questions based on what you learn."*

Audit Your Feedback Loops

Use this framework to assess where you stand. For each feedback loop in your organization:

For each loop, ask:

- **Ask:** Are we asking the right questions to the right people at the right time?

- **Collect:** Is our collection process automated and consistent?

- **Analyze:** Do we have the expertise to turn data into actionable insights?

- **Implement:** Who is accountable for making changes based on feedback?

- **Notify:** How do we communicate back to feedback providers?

Identify broken loops:

- Are there feedback mechanisms that aren't delivering insights?

- Do you have suggestion boxes gathering dust?

- Are town halls seeing declining attendance?

- Has engagement with surveys dropped over time?

Create accountability:

- Assign ownership for each step of the loop.

- Set timelines for implementation and notification.

- Build in regular review cycles to assess loop health.

Remember: **if you don't set up a feedback loop with intention, one will be set up for you by accident.** And accidental loops are a gamble you can't afford when serving vulnerable populations who need to know their voices matter.

This whitepaper is adapted from CANDID: The Power of Psychologically Safe Feedback by Blake Kohler, Remington Rainey, and Marc Weaver, published by Pulse For Good.

About Pulse For Good

Pulse For Good helps nonprofit organizations solve the feedback problem so they can ask, accept, analyze, and act on feedback from vulnerable individuals.

Having collected over **400,000 feedback responses** across **200 locations** around the U.S., Pulse For Good has helped organizations automate their feedback systems, giving them the time and resources to create real change.

Get the Book

CANDID: The Power of Psychologically Safe Feedback explores these concepts in depth, providing frameworks, case studies, and practical strategies for gathering feedback that drives meaningful change.

Available in hardcover, paperback, digital, and audio formats.

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Learn more at **pulseforgood.com**
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The difference isn't
collecting feedback.

It's closing
the loop.

When people see you're truly listening,
they feel comfortable opening up even more.

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Better beings with listening.