

Year Five consultation: Results and next steps

Each year, the Foundation Practice Rating (FPR) team runs a public consultation. This is to gain input from the sector before data-gathering for FPR that year. This report covers the findings from the Year Five consultation (Year Five is 2025/26). It includes all the feedback received, our response to that feedback, and issues for discussion.

The consultation process

The Year Five consultation asked:

- How accurately FPR reflects the needs of charities for information on foundations' diversity, accountability and transparency
- What the FPR team can do to improve this
- How clear FPR's criteria and method are
- How clear FPR's results are
- What the FPR team can do to improve the clarity of the FPR
- For foundations, whether FPR has prompted any changes in foundation's practices.
- Whether foundations responding have been assessed in the FPR over the past four years.
- Whether respondents consider that FPR provides an accurate and fair assessment.
- If not, why not and what we can do to improve this
- How FPR can better support practice improvements across UK foundations.
- What additional resources would be helpful in understanding and acting on the FPR.

It also asked demographic questions, which filtered out respondents from outside the UK (who are ineligible), and determined the type of organisation responding.

Summary of findings

- **A 100% increase in response rates this year.**
- **Most respondents were positive about FPR**, saying that it is clear and/or useful.
- **Encouragingly 85% of foundations responding said that FPR has promoted change in their practice**, including several foundations who have not yet been assessed in FPR.
- Some respondents want less detail about our method; others want more (!). The latter generally asked questions which we already answer in public (e.g. how numerical scores are turned into the letter grades, or how exemptions work). Some respondents ask for things that we have deliberately ruled out, e.g. being a ranking.

- We solicited suggestions about how FPR can be more useful. There are some, notably for more and clearer communications, notably about improving, including: more support / examples / information, and making more findable the examples of a foundation for each criterion (e.g. if you want to know how to achieve criterion X, look at foundation Y.) Several respondents asked us to explain things which we do explain publicly, or asserted things about FPR which are not true, implying that our communications haven't reached them.
- One (only one) respondent was unhappy, e.g. "Less not clear, just rather pointless", "Don't know and don't care - [I] take no notice of the ratings". They are a not-for-profit company which has not been assessed in FPR.

Who responded

Most respondents were in grant-making foundations (41 of 79 respondents), which is good because that was our intended audience. The patterns were similar last year. The consultation for Year Five ran from 13th March 2025 (when we launched the Year Four results) to 31st May, on Survey Monkey. In total, there were 80 'forms' (respondents), an increase on previous years (40 forms in Year Four, 10 in Year Three and 14 in Year Two). One was from outside the UK, which we have discounted, leaving 79. 41 people answered at least one substantive question (a similar proportion to Year Four, when it was 18/40).

The table below shows the distribution of the 79 respondents based on their organisational affiliations.

Type of organisation	Responses	Answered at least one question
A voluntary and community organisation	1	0
A registered, exempt or excepted charity	18	7
A not-for-profit company limited by guarantee	4	2
A community interest company (CIC)	0	0
A charitable incorporated organisation (CIO)	4	4
A public body	1	1
A community benefit society	0	0
A co-operative society	0	0
A private company	2	0
A grant-making foundation	41	23
A corporate foundation	5	2
¹ Other (please specify)	3	2
Total	79	41

¹ These were: one livery company; one media entity / person; and one that just said "ffgf" and nothing else in the form.

Notable comments

“Keep pushing this agenda!”

“I think the FPR is excellent and for years I have been looking in detail at the findings and making improvements to my own charity accordingly”

“I think it is really good but I think there could be more emphasis on sharing and promoting this work within the third sector.”

“The FPR is laudable in its ambitions and a solid starting point and checklist for Foundations not on an EDI [equality, diversity and inclusion] journey and may provide impetus for Trustees / SMTs [senior management teams] to engage”

“As [mentioned] before, everything crystal clear”.

There were many calls for more communications, both about what FPR is, how foundations can improve, why these topics matter - and a nice idea for specific ‘priority action points for foundations this year’ emerging from the previous year’s findings.

Key suggestions that emerged from this consultation and our responses

1. Consider recognising / exempting foundations who may not meet certain criteria but are transparent about why that is the case in their specific circumstances, e.g. who don’t disclose X thing but explain why they don’t.

FPR response: We don’t recall ever having seen a foundation do this. We intend now to compile a list of instances when it happens and then make a call about handling them systematically. However, this kind of rule would involve some judgement, which we try to avoid.

2. Better examples of what gets a top rating and a poor rating. Case studies, and signpost to foundations with good practice, who are willing to talk about their journey, and how they implemented their practice. Practical guidance on how to meet the criteria, and hearing about foundations who do well and who are willing to talk about what they do.

FPR response: FPR’s role isn’t guidance, nor are we resourced for this. We signpost to other resources, such as provided by ACF.

3. Each year, have ‘feature improvements’: ‘suggested focus topics for the year ahead’ based on the previous year’s findings. Highlight changes that foundations could make to address common “downfalls” across the rated foundations. Suggest some easy (and some more advanced) changes.

FPR response: Nice ideas. They are somewhat akin to a stronger version of the Three Commitments. FPR and ACF could work on this.

4. Bring together on FPR's website the criteria and exemptions: those are currently in the report.

FPR response: Fair comment. [FPR criteria are available on the website](#), though the exemptions currently are not.

5. Make clear what FPR's accountability processes are themselves.

FPR is certainly very transparent: we are transparent about all our criteria, process and methods: this document is part of that. All methods, criteria and previous year's reports are on FPR's website. We are accountable for what we do by presenting and discussing them publicly and taking questions about them (see comment above that some people feel that we discuss the method too much!) Before determining the ratings, we send to each included foundation the data about them for them to check.

Findings from consultation responses

We have grouped the feedback into the following sections, which are considered in turn below:

1. how accurately FPR reflects the needs of charities for information on diversity, accountability and transparency of foundations
2. the clarity of FPR's criteria and method, and results
3. the views of foundations in particular - whether FPR has caused them to change practice, and whether they have been assessed, and how change in the foundation sector could be more effectively supported.

1. How accurately FPR reflects the needs of charities for information on diversity, accountability and transparency of foundations

Overall, all except one respondent felt that FPR does this "very accurately" or "somewhat" [respectively; 15 of 41 responses (37%); and 25 of 41 responses (61%)]. The one notably unhappy respondent said that FPR is not at all accurate.

Encouragingly, this pattern was found for both:

- grant-giving foundations (7/23 or 30% answered "very accurately" and 16/23 or 70% answered "somewhat accurately), and
- charities (registered, exempt or excepted) of whom 3/7 or 43% answered "very accurately" and 4/7 or 57% answered "somewhat accurately".

Although the numbers of respondents are small, it is good that there is no big divide in perception between foundations and operational charities.

2. Clarity of FPR's criteria, method, and results

We asked how clear respondents found the FPR's criteria and method. They all said that it was very clear or somewhat clear [respectively 20/36 (56%), and 16/36 (44%)].

Then we asked respondents how clear they found FPR's results. 21/36 (58%) found them very clear. 13/36 (36%) found them somewhat clear. 2/36 (6% - one grant-making foundation and one not for profit company) found them not clear.

Some of the free text responses were pithy and positive ("everything is very clear"), and one was negative ("less not clear, just rather pointless").

3. Foundations' views on whether FPR has caused them to change practice, and supporting change in the sector

27 respondents identified themselves as a foundation: This covers some corporation foundations and others, so is a different figure for the number of "grant-making foundations" given above.

Encouragingly, 85% of these (23) said that FPR had promoted change in their foundation's practice. Six of those have not been assessed by FPR - which demonstrates FPR's "action at a distance" (our term) of prompting change. The other 17 foundations said that they had been assessed by FPR at least once.

This is encouraging to the extent that it indicates foundations improving practices in response to FPR, even if not yet included in FPR. In analysis of the FPR results, we have looked for evidence about whether any change in foundation practice only changes following FPR assessment. In Year Three, there was some tentative evidence that any change in practice could be sector-wide, rather than just change amongst the assessed cohort. In Year Four, there were too few data points to draw any conclusion. This survey response provides some additional (tentative) evidence that changing practice goes beyond just the foundations assessed.

Because survey respondents were self-selecting, we cannot draw any definitive conclusions about the extent of FPR's effect on non-assessed foundations.

33 respondents answered the question of whether they believed that FPR provides an accurate and fair assessment of their organisation. 17 answered that it did (51%). Five said that it did not (15%), and 11 answered that they did not know. We were particularly interested in the explanation given by those who said that it did not provide an accurate and fair assessment. For this group, the comments given were:

- "I really wanted to answer that some of it is fair and accurate but that isn't an option! If you're a foundation that doesn't fit into the normal mould (sic) you end up trying to comply with something that isn't relevant, spending a lot of time doing it, when something more nuanced is needed."
- "Mostly yes but some questions weren't relevant to all organisations, particularly ours due to size such as offering materials in Welsh, publishing staff EDI measures etc"
- "Go deeper than what people say on a website - sector loves ticking to please people like FPR. Go deeper, take a leaf out of IVAR [Institute for Voluntary Action Research] book and ask others for real views."

So, in effect, two said they agreed with some or most of the assessment, but not all. And one felt we needed to go deeper to make a real assessment.

When asked what additional resources would be helpful in understanding and acting on the FPR, 14 of 30 respondents cited webinars, 12 cited blog posts, and 23 cited signposting to information on how to improve.

Lastly, in free text for other suggestions, one respondent emphasised the need to be really clear about how we explain the FPR process, and one asked for improved general visibility.

Conclusions

Overall, it is good to have the engagement through the process. There are some useful pointers about design, communication, and FPR website, which the FPR team will consider.

Lastly, there are various constructive suggestions for broader sector work to support FPR's theory of change, which FPR is discussing further with its Funders Group.
