

Fondation Rideau Hall Foundation

CATAPULTE

Moving Learning Forward

Avançons l'apprentissage

Learning Summary from Feedback Sessions

Catapult's 2025 Open Call offered an insightful view of the pressures and demands facing Canada's funding sector. More than 800 organizations applied, far exceeding previous calls. The volume of interest and exceptionally high caliber of applications exceeded our expectations based on previous open calls. More than half of applications scored above 80 out of 100 and roughly 300 scored above 90.

800+
Applications received

>50%
Applications scored above 80/100

~300
Applications scored above 90/100

This made the process highly competitive and challenged us to find intentional and feasible ways to provide clarity around scores, review, and selection. To this end, we invited the 700+ organizations that were not selected to participate in feedback sessions and a follow-up survey. Of these, 210 organizations expressed interest, more than 100 participated in 18 group sessions between March and June 2026, and 58 completed the survey.

700+ invited › **210** interested › **100+** participated › **18** sessions › **58** surveys

What We Heard from Applicants

While this feedback process required a significant investment of time and resources from RHF, as well as from participating organizations, it proved to be highly valuable and worthwhile. As part of our commitment to supporting youth-serving organizations beyond funding alone, we prioritized creating space for feedback and learning.

Organizations were grateful to hear that they had done well and submitted strong applications. Many said it helped to know they had "hit the mark," even without funding. Despite not having been successful with their application, we also saw a great openness and willingness from organizations to receive feedback and to share their experiences and ideas with us and with one another. This reinforced the importance of sharing back with applicants.

As a program that reaches across geographies, communities, and approaches to youth-serving work, the feedback gathered through this process provides valuable insight into the funding landscape nationally and offers an important reflection point for RHF and the broader sector. In reflecting on what we heard, three themes stand out:

Funding Pressure

Staying Connected

Process Feedback

Three themes from applicant feedback

The sector is under real funding pressure

Across sessions, organizations described a genuine funding crisis. Strong, established programs are competing for shrinking pools alongside grassroots groups who are often the only ones serving their communities. As one participant put it, "if we don't get funding, no one is doing that work." Several noted the stakes are highest for organizations without dedicated grant writers, who absorb a bigger hit when an intensive application is unsuccessful. One applicant was candid: "it's getting harder not to get cynical as an applicant." Universities and larger institutions raised a distinct challenge around disclosing operational budgets, which can distort how their programs compare with smaller organizations. We heard clearly that demand is a signal about the ecosystem itself: the volume of applications reflects a growing number of youth falling through the cracks.

> **"If we don't get funding, no one is doing that work.**

Organizations want to stay connected

In nearly every session, participants asked how to stay engaged with Catapult and with each other. Some exchanged contact information on the spot. In the post session survey, interest in continued engagement was strong: virtual learning sessions, peer networking, and opportunities to share their work were each selected by well over half of respondents. This affirms something we believe deeply: that every applicant, funded or not, is part of the Catapult community, and the value of this program extends beyond the grants themselves.

Virtual Sessions | **Peer Networking** | **Sharing Work**

Each selected by well over half of survey respondents

Catapult's process works well, with ideas to consider

Applicants told us that Catapult's process works well overall. About 9 in 10 survey respondents agreed they had enough time to apply and found the questions clear and the materials easy to use. They also valued the responsive team, concise application, information sessions, and feedback sessions. More than 80% said the feedback would help with future Catapult applications. At the same time, they offered constructive ideas to improve the application process such as ways of reducing burden, strengthening clarity and feedback, and designing accessible processes. These suggestions highlight best practices that will inform Catapult's evolution and should be front and center in the wider conversation about funding practices in Canada.

~9 in 10 | positive application experience

>80% | feedback useful for future applications