Learning Report 2017

accountabilitylab

Catalyzing a New Generation of Active Citizens
and Responsible Leaders Around the World

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Our Vision, Mission & Theory of Change

Our Vision

The **Accountability Lab** is building a new generation of active citizens and responsible leaders around the world.

Our Mission

We train, mentor, and resource change-makers to strengthen systems of accountability and unleash positive social and economic change.

Our Theory of Change

We understand accountability as a complex, non-linear process. As a result, we have developed several **theories of change** over the lifetime of the Accountability Lab. We are proud of the fact that our understanding of the impact of our work is evolving as we iterate and learn. Accountability relates to difficult social and political dynamics and building it requires multiple inter-related activities. Our efforts are just one part of the process of change we hope to see. We prefer to understand a theory of change not just as a way to map out inputs, outputs and outcomes but as a way to understand in practical terms the causality between them; and to support double loop learning (learning that recognizes that the way a problem is defined and solved can be a source of the problem itself). As a result, our theory of change is not an agreed, defined diagram - we see it as a living document that we amend and refine over time as we learn on the ground.

"…We prefer to understand a theory of change not just as a way to map out inputs, outputs and outcomes but as a way to understand in practical terms the causality between them"

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Measuring Our Impact and Learning

Measuring Our Impact and Learning

Understanding our impact is the key to reaching our objectives. As an organization committed to adaptive learning, we value feedback from our stakeholders. Over the last year, we've taken a more considered approach to learning, and have prioritized this as our staff continues to expand.

Our country teams are consistently gathering feedback from our program participants before, during and after our programs. We seek honest, practical feedback that can truly help us improve our work and our engagement with different stakeholders. This learning survey, which was open to our entire community to complete, aligns with that goal.

While gathering feedback and using learning in our decision-making processes is important, we are also more and more focused on how we communicate our learning. Sharing the findings of our learning survey here is one of the ways in which we want to share our successes and challenges with our community. In addition to this, we share learnings on our blog and social media platforms, host quarterly public learning calls, and seek to tell our stories through videos, podcasts and other forms of media that speak to our audience. Check out some of those stories **here**, **here** and **here**.

"...We seek honest, practical feedback that can truly help us improve our work and our engagement with different stakeholders."

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

When we conducted this survey in 2016, we received valuable feedback that we used throughout 2017. We've identified 4 areas for improvement from our previous Learning Report, with the actions we have taken based on those areas outlined further below.

Lesson 1: Provide the accountapreneurs with more individualized and hands-on support

In order to offer more individualized support, we've set out to strengthen our understanding of accountapreneurs work and the stumbling blocks they face (accountapreneurs are participants in our **Accountability Incubator** program which provides hands-on support to young people with great ideas for accountability). Across countries, our staff are creating more touch points with accountapreneurs - such as monthly check-in calls - to provide more constant support in addition to our engagement with them at in-person training opportunities.

We have found there are many benefits to more hands-on engagement with our accountapreneurs. It allows us to refine our understanding of change, provides these change-makers with a constant sense of community and support, and means we can collectively adapt quickly as circumstances change - which they inevitably do.

In Nepal, we're also connecting accountapreneurs across cohorts to foster collaboration and peer learning. An increasing number of accountapreneurs means an increasing opportunity to share ideas, learnings, and challenges in a larger community with growing potential for collaboration. For example, a 2017 Accountapreneur, Kabita Rai, conducted an accountability theater workshop with aspiring young theater artists in eastern Nepal. When participants expressed a desire to also build their leadership skills, we connected them with another accountapreneur, Basanta Adhikari, who also focused on this work in the same city.

"...An increasing number of accountapreneurs means an increasing opportunity to share ideas, learnings, and challenges in a larger community with growing potential for collaboration.."

Lessons Learned

Lesson 2: Expand work to reach more marginalized rural communities

We believe that including marginalized groups, such women, youth and those from rural communities, is central to increased accountability. Marginalized rural communities are often the furthest removed from information and the centers of power where decision-making takes place. Finding new, creative ways to amplify these citizens' voices remains a priority for us.

In Pakistan, our Youth Peace and Accountability Incubator reached out to more than 3000 farmers in rural communities from diverse religious backgrounds to build accountability and help mitigate local conflicts through youth intermediaries. This particular project included community meetings, a three-day long Farmers Peace Festival, youth internships and sporting events.

Our accountapreneurs in Liberia were selected from communities all over the country and next year we will focus specifically on sourcing accountapreneurs from rural mining communities. We've become more purposeful about expanding our recruitment to more remote communities with less access to training, support and capacity building opportunities, and we plan on building on this further in coming years around the world.

"...We've become more purposeful about expanding our recruitment to more remote communities..."

Lessons Learned

Lesson 3: Tap into media, university, and youth group networks to increase visibility

Improving our communications remains a priority across countries. Involving youth groups as volunteers in our Integrity Idol campaign in Nepal, Pakistan, Nigeria, Liberia and Mali has increased our visibility among young citizens. For example, students in Pakistan organized Facebook campaigns in support of their favorite Idols which reached thousands of their peers.

We are growing our reach by gaining traction for our campaigns on national media platforms.

Integrity Idol Pakistan's content ran on...
2 leading TV channels
4 national radio stations for a week

Integrity Idol Nepal was covered by...
20 radio stations (1.1 million listeners)
5 TV stations (5 million viewers)

As our reach expands, we're also focusing on outreach that suits the context. Radio jingles and rap music have been effective tools for reaching young people in Liberia and Nigeria, for example.

Accountability and integrity are the cornerstones of our engagement with the media as well through earned media opportunities (read more in **The Economist** and listen to a **BBC interview with Moussa Kondo**, our Country Director in Mali) and op-eds. This has been effective and we've been able to build a network of journalists who value our content.

"...As our reach expands, we're also focusing on outreach that suits the context."

Lessons Learned

Lesson 4: Increase staff capacity through new hires and additional training

This is one of the most important areas of work in our growing organization. Understanding our staff's needs in terms of capacity building is essential if we are to work efficiently.

Moreover, as we expand our program offering across countries it has become more important to have staff dedicated to Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning, Financial Management and Communications. In 2018 we are planning on bringing on a MEL Manager in Washington, DC; a new MEL Officer in Nepal; and Financial Managers in Mali and Nigeria. In addition to looking at the right skills in our team, we value internal feedback loops, learning across country teams and creating opportunities for reflection on our work.

In Pakistan, our team has grown quickly and we expand, we've had to be more thoughtful about the types of candidates we are hiring. Fayyaz Yaseen, our Country Director in Pakistan, found that investing in the development of young, motivated staff members who fully buy into the Lab's vision and mission will yield greater dividends in the long run. This is an approach we are replicating across country offices.

"...we value internal feedback loops, learning across country teams and creating opportunities for reflection on our work."

Survey Methodology

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Survey Methodology

Following our 2016 impact survey, we decided to dig deeper into our impact in an effort to understand how stakeholders find value in our work. With a commitment to learning and building feedback into our decision-making and program design, we engaged experts about how best to judge our work within the accountability space.

The goal: to gain a nuanced understanding of which parts of what we do are most important and why. We also wanted to gather more concrete qualitative feedback from respondents – both to help us improve our work and to tell better stories about our impact and our beneficiaries.

We designed our 2017 impact survey around these ideas, featuring eight questions that each directly correlate to steps in our evolving understanding of our impact.

To disseminate the survey, we sent out emails with a Google Form link, and our teams on the ground distributed hard copies of the survey to people with limited Internet access.

We received 289 responses from our five key stakeholder groups: program participants; government officials; partners and peer organizations; donors; staff and volunteers. Respondents who didn't fit into these categories could select "other." Members of this group included concerned citizens, academics, students, followers, and others with no direct relationship to the Lab. We averaged stakeholder responses for each question, and then calculated the total, non-weighted average across all stakeholders.

For more information on our impact survey, view the complete dataset **here**.

"...gain a nuanced understanding of which parts of what we do are most important and why."

Survey Methodology

To what extent do you think a lack of accountability is a cause of problems in the country(ies) in which you work?

(on a scale of 0 to 10)

Average score breakdown:

Stakeholder	Score
Participants:	7.9
Government Officials:	9.0
Partners & Peer Organizations:	8.1
Staff & Volunteers:	7.8
Donors:	9.7
Other:	8.3
Average across stakeholders:	8.1
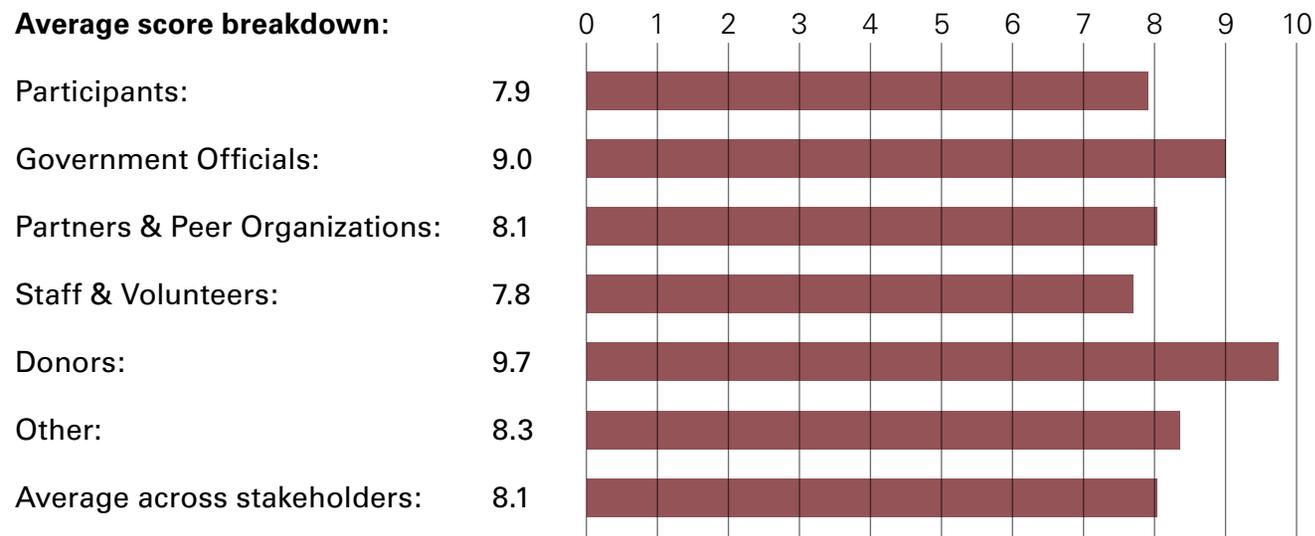
The scores, ranging between 0 (lowest) and 10 (highest), indicate that each of the key stakeholder groups involved with these issues in Liberia, Nepal, Pakistan, Nigeria and Mali sees a strong connection between a lack of accountability and entrenched problems in their societies. We believe that this response underscores the need for the Lab's work to support communities in building accountability.

Survey Methodology

How effective do you think Accountability Lab's programs are at building accountability?
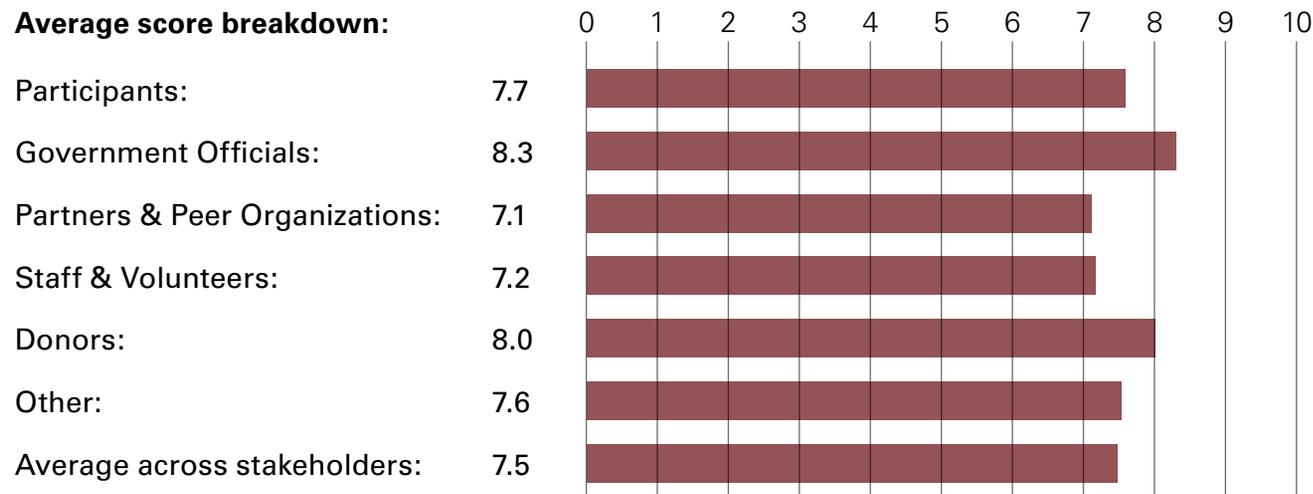
(on a scale of 0 to 10)

Average score breakdown:

	Score
Participants:	7.7
Government Officials:	8.3
Partners & Peer Organizations:	7.1
Staff & Volunteers:	7.2
Donors:	8.0
Other:	7.6
Average across stakeholders:	7.5

These responses received confirm that all our major stakeholders value our work and believe we are building accountability. As we learn and grow, we continue to think of ways to broaden our impact. To that end, we are conducting research with the **MIT GOV/LAB** and Oxford University's **Blavatnik School of Government** to learn more about how highlighting individuals and building coalitions among them can lead to larger, collective changes in integrity. Through our **Accountability Incubators** in Nepal, Pakistan and Liberia we support young civil society leaders to build sustainable, effective tools for accountability, participation and social impact, and our **Citizen Helpdesks** in Nepal, Liberia and Mali leverage feedback loops to bring communities' voices to decision-making processes. We also take note of the fact that government officials provided the highest rating in this category- which is important for us as we seek to work further with reformers within government systems (through **Integrity Idol** for example) to push for greater accountability.

Survey Methodology

Case Study in Pakistan: Speaking Truth to Power in Punjab Province

Sunlight is the best disinfectant. Yet there isn't much sunlight being thrown on local government in Pakistan. The major media outlets focus their coverage on national politics or the big cities. As a result, people in rural areas lack a crucial lever to hold their local officials to account.

Enter the news site tumbhibolo, which launched an Urdu service in the fall of 2016 with the support of the Accountability Lab. The site recruits young people to cover local issues in three districts of Punjab province that are largely ignored by the national media. **The goal: to equip citizens to speak truth to power and to promote civic engagement at the local level.**

The upstart news site, which has a mix of paid and volunteer staff, notched a string of successes in its first 18 months that would make any news organization proud.

Here's a sample of the impact journalism it's producing:

·   A series of stories uncovered the mismanagement of a government program to support wheat farmers in Punjab province. Farmers couldn't get their hands on the wheat bags required to participate in the program because bureaucrats were unlawfully selling them to middlemen. The stories prompted a surprise visit by Punjab province's chief minister to a wheat procurement center and the suspension of several employees.

·   Another investigation delved into the years-long delay in the construction of public gymnasium in the city of Pakpattan. Tumbhibolo found that the contractor had ceased work in order to extract money from the government. It built a social media campaign around the story, which was picked up by Pakistan's largest television broadcaster DAWN and other national media outlets. Under pressure, the government agreed to give the contract to a new builder.

Survey Methodology

- Another story revealed that a new toll-free hotline in Punjab province to report child labor practices has been deactivated since March 2018. Further, the government has no record of the number of complaints they have received or resolved. Tumbhibolo has filed a complaint with the Punjab Information Commission, which must respond within 60 days

Tumbhibolo doesn't use professionals to produce its news articles, videos, features, and investigations, preferring citizen journalists instead. And it's not looking for a monopoly on content. "We are trying to educated citizens that they should use their own social media platforms to highlight the waste of tax funds or corruption," Imtiaz Ahmad Watto, the site's editor-in-chief and a participant in the Accountability Incubator Pakistan, said.

Survey Methodology

What do you think are the most valuable parts of what the Lab does?

(multiple choice)

26%
Building communities
of change-makers

26%
Sharing ideas and learning
around accountability

1%
Other

27%
Youth-focused
accountability programs

20%
Advocacy and efforts to
change policies
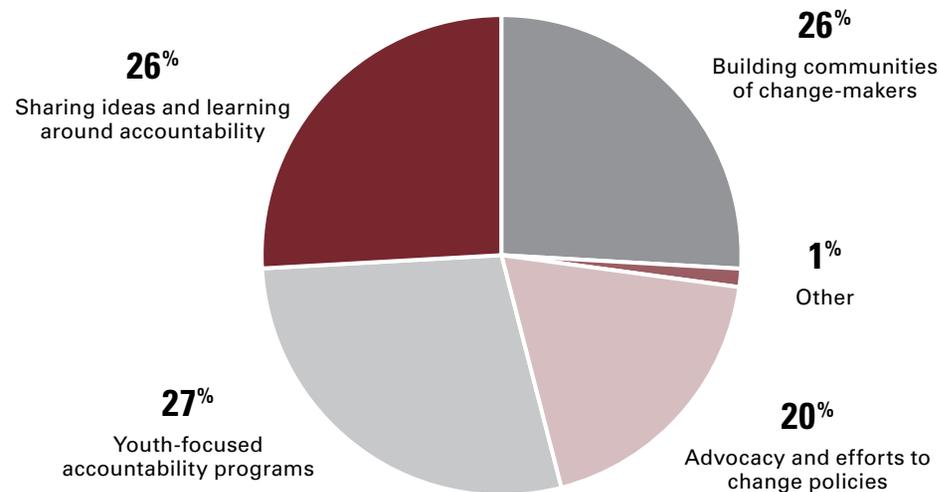
In the responses to this question, we saw even support for the **four main pillars of our work**: **youth-focused accountability programs**; **building communities of change-makers**; **sharing ideas around accountability**; and **advocacy efforts**. Participants were able to select more than one choice, and most selected multiple themes. The equal distribution of support serves as confirmation that our work does touch collectively on some of the key areas of change that we are trying to create - in what we hope is a self-reinforcing way.

Survey Methodology

How effective do you think the Accountability Lab is at supporting active citizens and responsible leaders?

(on a scale of 0 to 10)

Average score breakdown:

Participants:	7.5	
Government Officials:	7.8	
Partners & Peer Organizations:	6.9	
Staff & Volunteers:	6.9	
Donors:	7.7	
Other:	7.0	
Average across stakeholders:	7.1	
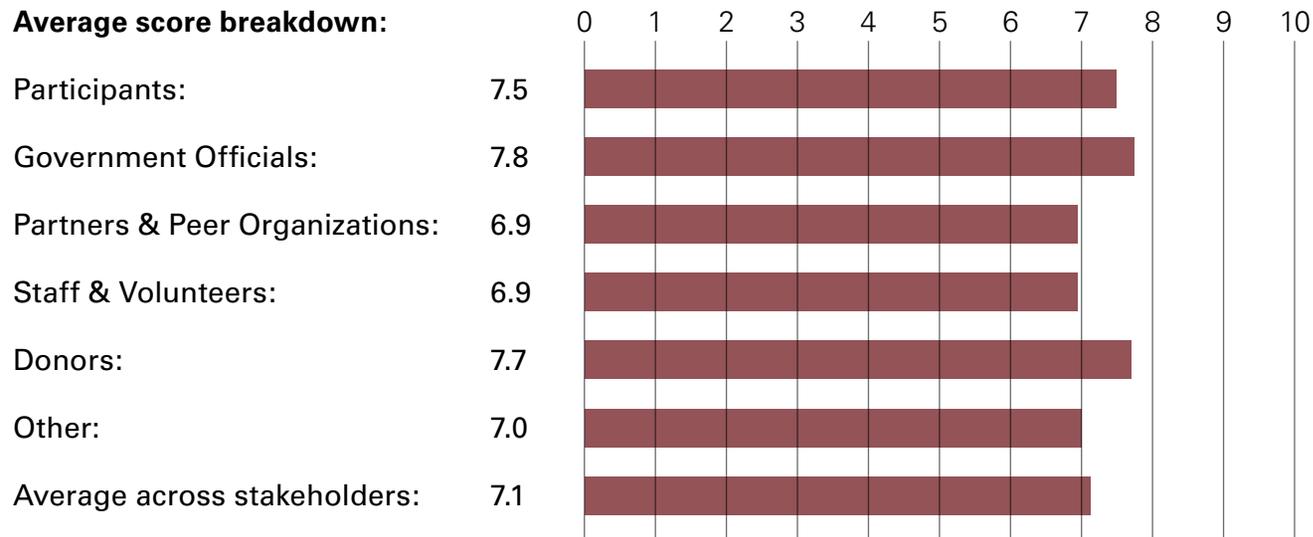
With this question, we sought feedback on whether we are achieving our organizational strategy of supporting active citizens and responsible leaders. Through its programs, the Lab directly supports social entrepreneurs, public servants, artists, and young people. Again, we are encouraged by the relatively high score from government officials in particular, as part of our strategy in 2017 was to better connect our efforts to build accountability outside government with those change-makers within the public sector who can push for change.

Survey Methodology

In this respect we are thinking more critically about how we can create ecosystems in which integrity and accountability are valued – thereby broadening our impact. One strategy is to increase opportunities for networking and collaboration. We have developed an Integrity Fellowship in Nepal, for example, which has allowed for over 20 young people to shadow Integrity Idols in the government agencies where they work. We will soon expand this program to other countries.

We also opened a co-working space, iCampus, in Liberia this year to bring individuals and civil society organizations focused on accountability and integrity together under one roof. The space has hosted over 100 events in under a year and now has 4 permanent co-working organizations and thousands of members. iCampus also serves as the local affiliate of the **OpenGov Hub** of which we are a member in DC and founder in Nepal.
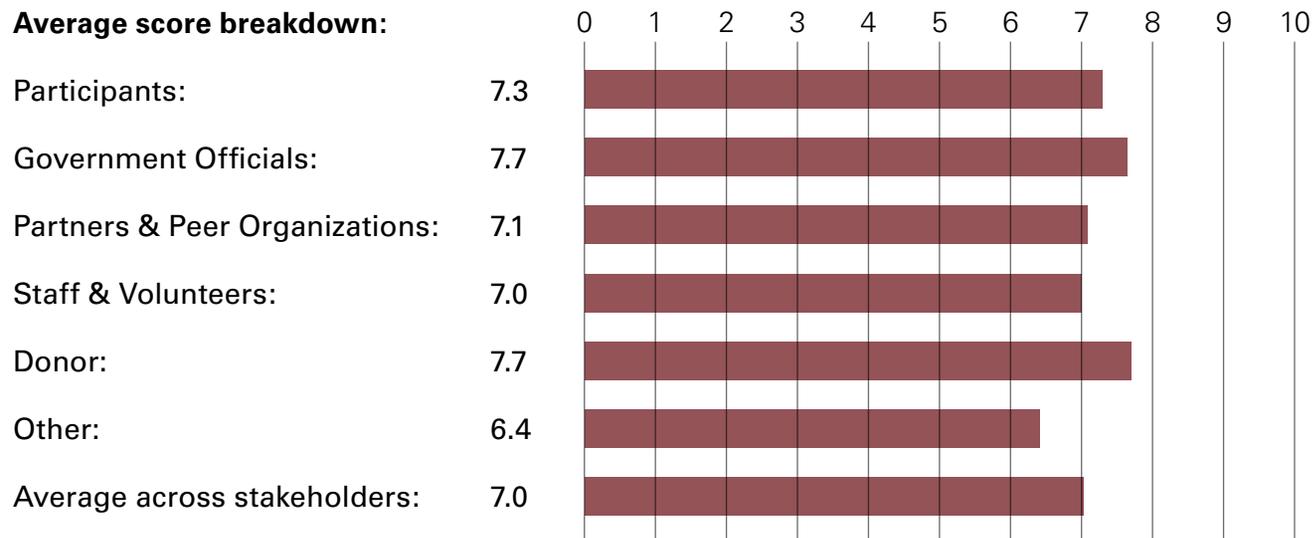
In time, we hope that this initiative will foster joint learning, capacity building and greater collaboration between actors in the space.

Survey Methodology

Do you think Accountability Lab is influential in terms of the work it does?

(on a scale of 0 to 10)

Average score breakdown:

Participants:	7.3
Government Officials:	7.7
Partners & Peer Organizations:	7.1
Staff & Volunteers:	7.0
Donor:	7.7
Other:	6.4
Average across stakeholders:	7.0

The responses to this question confirms that our main stakeholders broadly view the Lab as influential. We asked this question not to celebrate this but rather to understand the leverage we might have to push messaging around accountability. Through our work, we seek to change behaviors and attitudes in order to shift entire societies toward accountability. We also seek to change narratives around integrity in the civil service and governance in general. To do so, we recognize that we must have credibility and standing with the public in the countries where we operate. We believe that we must be seen as a plausible change-maker – one that has a plan and the capacity to carry it out. **The positive responses are encouraging, but we recognize growing our organization's influence as an area that requires constant and thoughtful cultivation.**

Survey Methodology

Case Study: Building a space for creative engagement

2017 marked the opening of the New Media Lab (NML) at iCampus, a co-working space jointly managed by Accountability Lab and iLab in Monrovia. The NML features state of the art audiovisual equipment and production support. Liberia has no shortage of talented youth who are constantly seeking new ways to express themselves. This unique facility provides active citizens, especially youth, with a well-equipped space to learn, collaborate, and produce content that tells their stories and strengthens accountability. The NML also welcomes civil society organizations who want to create content showcasing their work. Bringing together artists, activists, and organizations who share our vision has broadened our network and understanding of different communities' challenges.
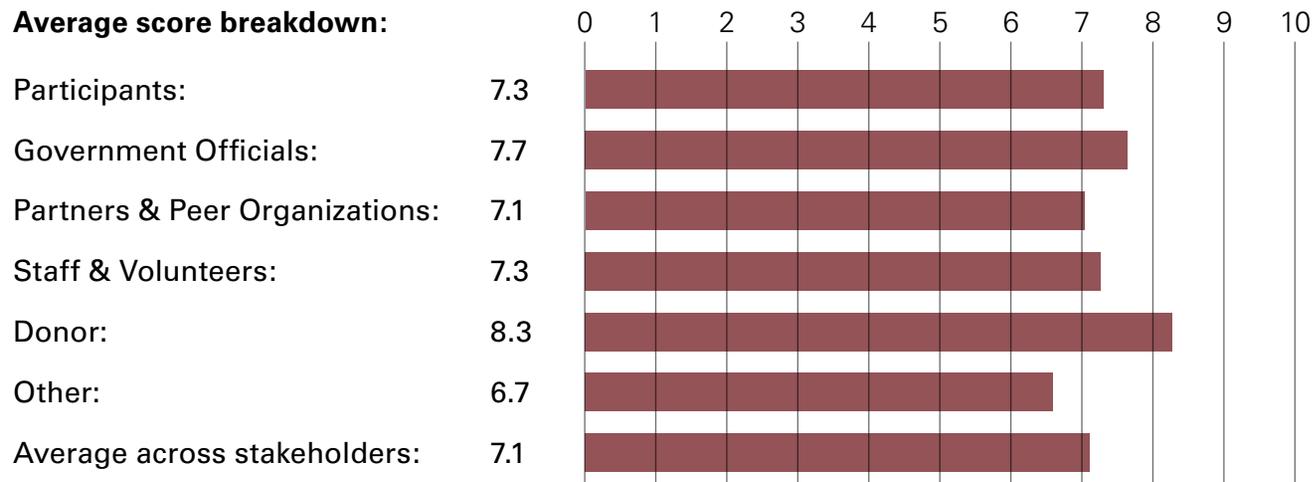

In addition to the impact on the young artists who have participated in training opportunities and used the NML to produce content, another layer of impact is found in citizens who are exposed to their messages. Songs, jingles and radio dramas around integrity or participating in elections have the power to spark conversations and inspire citizens to play a role in Liberia's political process. While the NML is still relatively new, the ability to support a creative community committed to accountability is exciting.

Survey Methodology

How effective is the Lab at changing what it does based on learning and feedback?

(on a scale of 0 to 10)

Average score breakdown:

Participants:	7.3	
Government Officials:	7.7	
Partners & Peer Organizations:	7.1	
Staff & Volunteers:	7.3	
Donor:	8.3	
Other:	6.7	
Average across stakeholders:	7.1	

For the past two years, we have made it a point to improve how we learn and adapt based on feedback. Last year we phrased this question less precisely, asking, "Do you believe the Lab changes what it does based on learning and feedback?" We believe the new phrasing encourages respondents to grade us on a curve against other similar organizations. Though the questions differed slightly, this year's scores show an improvement in each stakeholder group except for participants, staff & volunteers. Our donors' belief in our ability to change what we do based on learning and feedback rose from 6.9 in 2016 to 8.25 in 2017. We will continue to refine how we gather and use feedback, as learning remains a core priority across our organization. Adaptive learning is a priority for us, and we in 2018 we will strengthen our capacity for Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) by adding staff focused on this in DC and in our country offices.

Survey Methodology

Has the Accountability Lab (or the people it works with) changed your behavior?

This was an open question. Across stakeholder groups, we received feedback that their engagement with the Lab had a positive impact on their behavior as it relates to integrity. In particular, feedback received from civil servants and community partners point to a few behavioral shifts, most notably:

·   Increased desire and capacity to act with integrity in their work;

·   Feeling more open about discussing corruption, accountability and integrity; and

·   Becoming more accountable and able to convince others of the importance of integrity.

Feedback included:

"My interaction with staff at the Accountability Lab helped my ethics and enabled me to adjust my behavior towards accounting for funds that I am given to do whatever project."
– Donor

"They have increased in me the desire to continue to do the right thing at all times and at all places."
– Government official

Survey Methodology

"After [engaging] with AL, I have designed a course on accountability and civic leadership. We regularly organize the campaign, write articles, produce opinion [pieces], make videos and conduct training and discussion.

Today I am a regular voice-raiser on accountability issues in my region."

– Partner

"The Accountability Lab's creativity and forward-leaning thinking has challenged me to be more innovative, open-minded, and to consider ways in which to increase accountability by altering incentive structures."

– Partner

Survey Methodology

To what extent has your interaction with the Accountability Lab helped you to connect with other organizations who support your work?

When asked this open question, respondents overwhelmingly stated that engagement with the Accountability Lab has helped them connect with organizations who support their work or catalyzed their thinking around partnerships. Respondents commented that engagement with the Lab helped them in the following ways:

· Exposure to leaders from various sectors who can be potential collaborators down the line;

· Connections to personal and professional development opportunities;

· Seeing the value of collaboration, some respondents were prompted to working with individuals in different government agencies;

Feedback included:

"[It] has improved my coordinating efforts with other law enforcement agencies."
– Government official

"To a very large extent, it has helped me to meet and share ideas with so many people and organizations."
– Participant

Survey Methodology

"Accountability Lab is a trusted organization among the community of donors, throughout its recommendation letter to others donors, the CERC, the NPO that I lead have received its first multi-years grant."

– Partner

Survey Methodology

As a result of your engagement with the Lab do you feel more able to create change you want to see?

With this question, we wanted to get a sense for our ability to inspire, empower, and support the people with which the Lab engages. We were pleased to see that 82% of survey respondents replied "yes" to the question, while only 7% said "no". The strong positive response can be seen as evidence that we're achieving our strategy of supporting active citizens and responsible leaders. Another 11% of respondents chose "other." Among this group, several provided details, explaining they had just gotten started with the Lab or weren't sure yet whether or how much the experience had empowered them.

"...we're achieving our strategy of supporting active citizens and responsible leaders."

Survey Methodology

How can the Accountability Lab improve what it does?

This was an open question, and we'd like to share the 5 most common answers provided, coupled with the ways in which we seek to address this feedback.

1. Adopt a more focused approach to our work

While we're always open to new ideas for promoting accountability, we recognize we must nurture the programs we already have in place lest we spread ourselves too thin. We are an agile organization, and we are focused, more than ever, on reflection, learning and consolidating our work. While we plan to grow our footprint, most of our energy will go toward developing and expanding our existing programming. Our goal is to learn, improve and deepen our impact. We are investing in new ways to learn, and a number of research studies are under way to get a clearer understanding of the impact of our programs, including Integrity Idol and the Citizen Helpdesks. On a staff level, we are hosting regular learning calls to unpack specific elements of our work and share experiences across countries, and we are gaining more feedback from our fellows and accountapreneurs through learning diaries. Using different methods to study our work, provide space for introspection and peer learning all strengthen our understanding of our impact and feeds back into our programs.

2. Build an international community of people with integrity

Our response: We've learned that our accountapreneurs, Integrity Idols, country directors, volunteers and other stakeholders are interested in forging networks with their counterparts in other countries. Now that we have a presence in six countries, we plan to think strategically about how to foster a cross-national ecosystem for people working on accountability issues. We have started by using

simple, accessible tools to spark conversation across borders. These include shared Whatsapp groups for the accountapreneurs and Integrity Idols and increasing the Lab staff's collaboration across teams. In 2017 we also hosted, for the 1st time, an Accountability Lab Country Directors' gathering in Tunisia to discuss strategy and programs. There is so much value in feeling part of a global network of change-makers, and the idea is to strengthen and build on this over time.

3.   Improve our storytelling

Our response: We recognize the importance of our public profile to maximize our impact. In the coming year, we plan to draw more attention to both our successes and challenges, and to the Lab itself through more frequent blogs, podcasts, videos and other content drawing from the country teams. Using different media tools, we want our community to become more familiar with the civil servants, accountapreneurs and other stakeholders impacted by our work. We'll also be thinking more strategically about identifying our target audiences and how best to engage them through a new communications and marketing strategy.

4.   Provide more training for staff

Our response: Our staff is growing constantly. This year we're focused on supporting learning and knowledge development and setting clearer performance expectations so we can become more efficient and effective as an organization. One first step is expanding staff members' access to training and opportunities for experiential learning and conferences. As part of this we have now set aside a percentage of our budget to support opportunities of this kind. In 2018 we are also going to work on inter-country knowledge sharing between technical functions.

"...thinking more strategically about identifying our target audiences and how best to engage them through a new communications and marketing strategy."

Survey Methodology

5. Implement a strong monitoring and evaluation plan

Our response. We recognize that gathering feedback is vital for learning. As a start, we will bring a Programs and Learning Manager onto our Washington, DC team, and we will create MEL positions in our country offices to be more intentional about our learning work. In the coming year we will also build MEL plans for all our offices and streamline our processes in this regard. Our goal is to be more thoughtful about the data we collect and how we use that in our decision-making processes to enhance our programs.
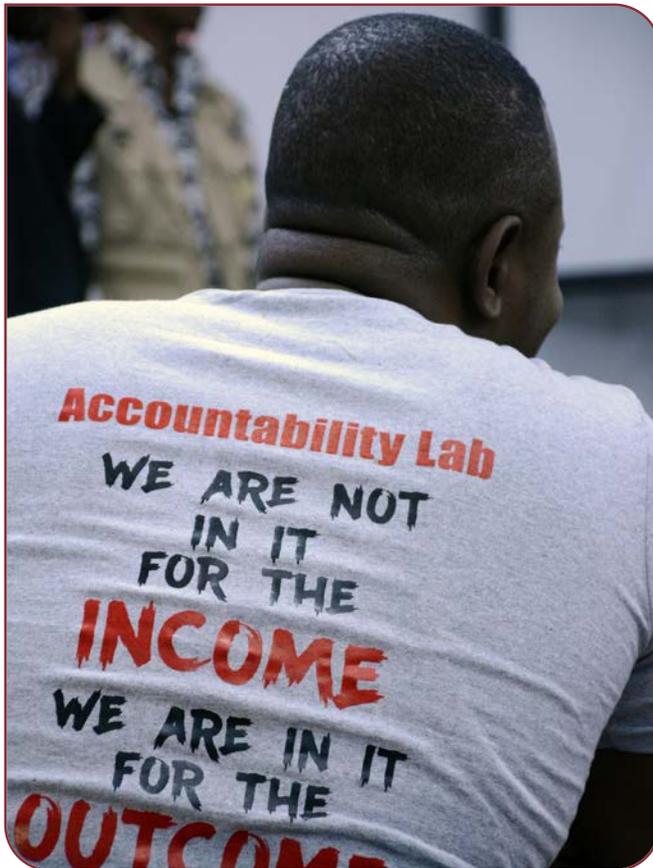
"...Our goal is to be more thoughtful about the data we collect and how we use that in our decision-making processes to enhance our programs."

Conclusions

This report is an exercise in being thoughtful and deliberate about how we gather feedback and use it to grow and improve. Each year, we strive to refine our questions, draw out keener insights, and reflect on them more deeply. While the review is not scientific and we have kept it intentionally brief, we were heartened by the positive response to our vision and programs from our key stakeholder groups. We are also taking the feedback on the areas in which we need to improve very seriously.

If you have feedback on what we do and how we do it we would love to hear from you.

Contact us at **info@accountabilitylab.org** with any feedback, ideas or questions;
or find us on Twitter **@accountlab**.

"...we strive to refine our questions, draw out keener insights, and reflect on them more deeply."