

What core value drives the work of your nonprofit organization?

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Authenticity, Achievement, Adventure,
Authority, Autonomy, Balance, Beauty,
Boldness, Compassion, Challenge,
Citizenship, Community, Competency,
Contribution, Creativity, Curiosity,
Determination, Fairness, Faith
Fame, Friendships, Fun, Growth,
Happiness, Honesty, Humor,
Influence, Inner Harmony, Justice,
Kindness, Knowledge, Leadership,
Learning, Love, Loyalty, Meaningful Work,
Openness, Optimism, Peace, Pleasure,
Poise, Popularity, Recognition, Religion,
Reputation, Respect, Responsibility,
Security, Self-Respect, Service,
Spirituality, Stability, Success, Status,
Trustworthiness, Wealth, Wisdom

Two organizations. One family, and a missing question.

Hours of operation:

Doors open Monday through Friday from 9 to 5.

The last intake is at 4 p.m.

No appointment needed.

The standard bell schedule for Wake County elementary schools is 9:15 a.m. to 3:45 p.m.



*How do you know you are
making a difference?*

Action Research Methods + Data Tools to Improve Nonprofit Impact

Meghan Manfra



Matt Elliott
Marshall Worth



Follow along resources

<https://tinyurl.com/ncnpc25data>



Case Study: El Futuro

Pausing to Learn, Not Just Perform



The Challenge

After two decades of expanding clinical and community programs across North Carolina, El Futuro's data systems couldn't keep pace with their growth. Critical insights remained trapped in spreadsheets, reports required manual assembly, and staff had little time to step back and learn from the data they worked so hard to collect.

Our Approach

- Audited and mapped existing data systems to reveal workflow gaps and duplication
- Conducted in-depth staff interviews to surface learning barriers and operational pain points
- Created a **"Walk → Run → Fly"** roadmap for building evaluation capacity incrementally
- Designed mock dashboards and data visualizations to engage staff and funders in learning before automation



The Turning Point

Rather than continuing to perform without reflection, El Futuro made a bold choice: pause and study their own practice. They asked a transformative question: "How can we use data not just to report outcomes, but to *learn, improve, and measure our true impact?*"



The Takeaway

By slowing down to study their systems, El Futuro built the foundation to move faster later — transforming data from a reporting burden into a **tool for reflection, learning, and continuous improvement.**



DATABULL
Nonprofit
Data Strategists



El Futuro

Your turn

What's one **issue, challenge,**
or **question**

*[in your business or
organization]*

that you are ***passionately***
curious about **understanding**
more deeply?



Your Turn: Gap Analysis

What's the
current state?



What do you think
exists in the gap—
what assumptions,
systems, habits, or
blind spots might be
at play?

What's your
desired state?



Action Research

Action research is an inside-out, practitioner-driven approach that empowers those closest to the work to systematically study and improve their own practice.

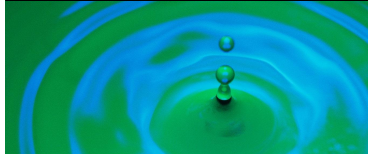


Action Research drives innovation and sustainable organizational change

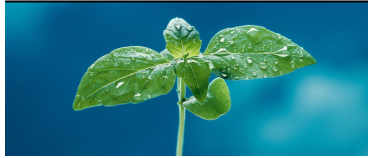
“People support what they help create.” – Marvin Weisbord



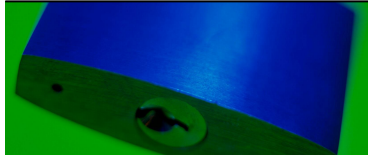
Action Research + Data Builds Better Nonprofits



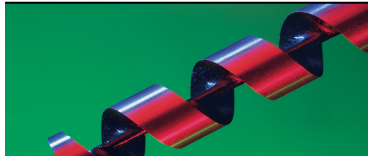
Empowers Employees



Increases Adaptability



Builds Internal Capacity



Connects Action with Impact

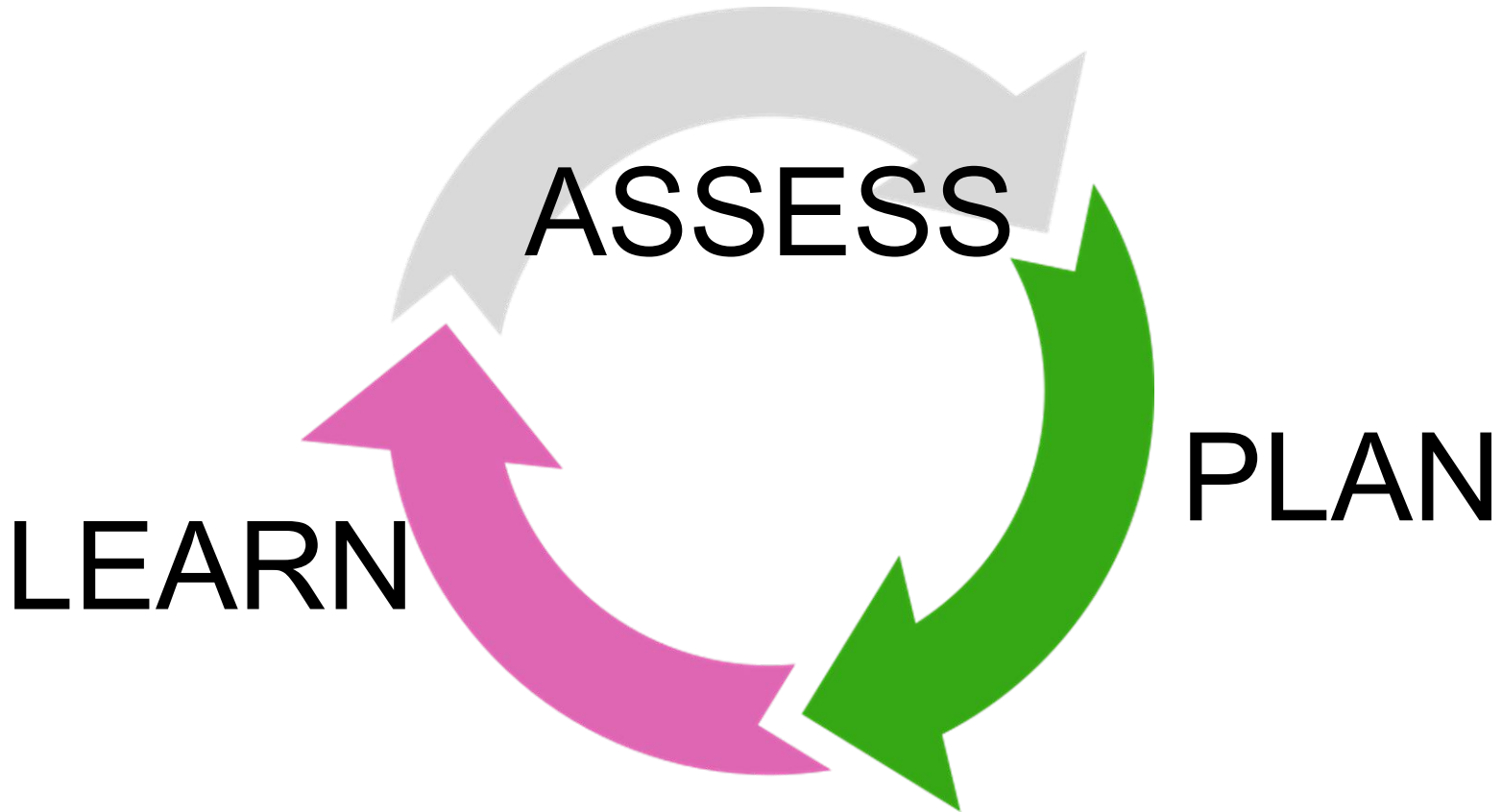




Picturing a Nourished Community: Strengthening Food Security in Appalachia with the Help of PhotoVoice

By Laura Johnston, activist and member of the AppalFRESH (Appalachian Food Research for

The Action Research Cycle



Turning Research into Real-World Action

Women's Independence Scholarship Program

1

The Challenge

While WISP has decades of transformative impact empowering survivors of intimate partner abuse through education, capturing and communicating that long-term success has been difficult. Alumni data is dispersed across systems, surveys are labor-intensive, and existing metrics focus primarily on short-term academic outcomes rather than sustained personal and economic stability.

2

Our Solution

Data Bull will built the infrastructure and processes needed to sustain a high-quality, multi-year data collection and analysis effort. Our approach includes:

- **Longitudinal Data Design:** Created a secure, scalable database structure for tracking alumni outcomes over time.
- **Survey Modernization:** Developed automated and user-friendly survey tools to improve participation and accuracy.
- **Integrated Analytics:** Visual dashboards and reporting tools to translate findings into clear insights for leadership, funders, and community partners.
- **Impact Communication:** Turned complex data into accessible visuals and narratives that highlight progress, resilience, and return on investment.

3

The Impact

60% reduction in reporting time, unified data infrastructure for strategic decision-making, and unprecedented visibility into program outcomes.

A longitudinal data study will allow WISP to clearly demonstrate the *lasting effects* of its mission — showcasing how education changes the trajectory of survivors' lives. By tracking outcomes in employment, financial independence, health, and family well-being, WISP can:

- Strengthen grant proposals and donor confidence with quantifiable, long-term results.
- Identify opportunities to refine programs and strengthen wraparound services.
- Build a data-driven narrative that connects WISP's mission to measurable, generational change.

WISP Longitudinal Study

Comparative Impact Analysis: Graduates vs. In Progress

Women's Independence Scholarship Program • September 2025

69 Responses: 31 Graduates | 34 Still in Progress (12% Response Rate)

Executive Summary

This comparative analysis examines 31 program graduates versus 34 recipients still completing their education, revealing distinctive trajectories and consistent benefits. Graduates demonstrate higher employment rates (65% vs 56%) and stronger income outcomes (45% earning \$40k+ vs 21%), while both groups report similarly high rates of improved career prospects (87% vs 79%), quality of life enhancement (94% vs 91%), and mental health improvement (90% vs 88%). The findings indicate that WISP creates immediate wellbeing benefits during the educational journey while building toward substantial economic gains post-graduation.

96%

EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS RATE

83%

CAREER PROSPECTS IMPROVED

65%

GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT RATE

92%

QUALITY OF LIFE IMPROVEMENT

89%

MENTAL HEALTH IMPROVEMENT

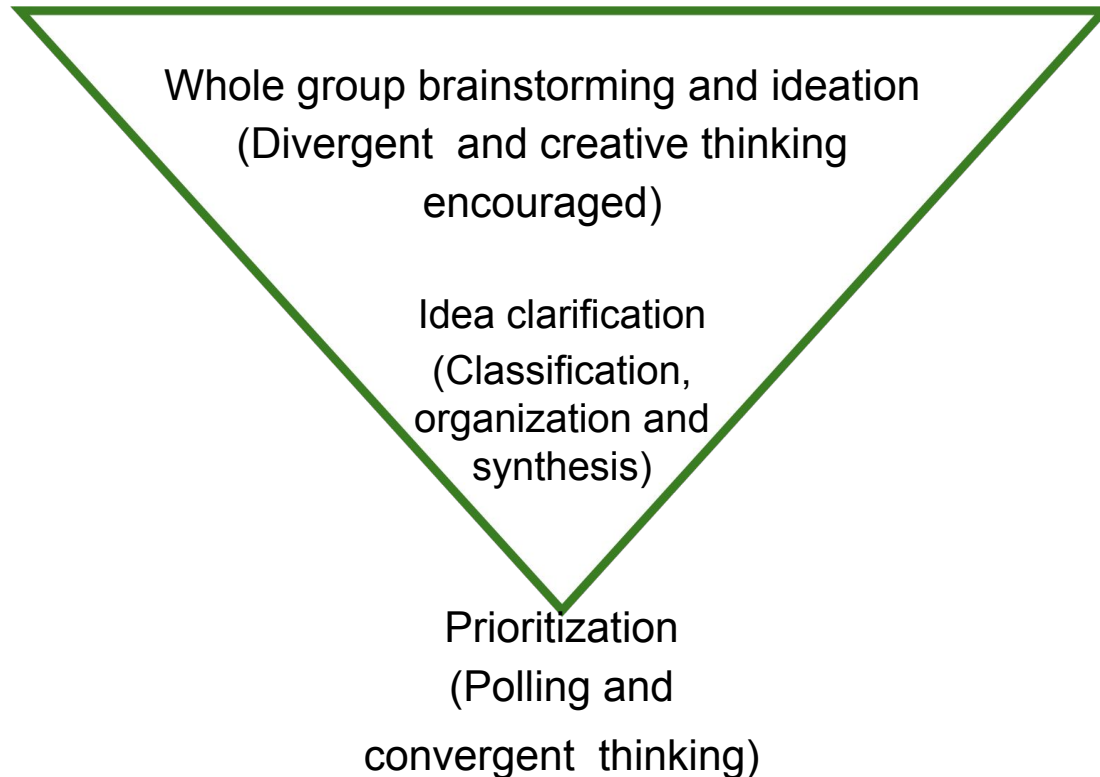
45%

GRADUATES EARNING \$40K+

Assess: Grounds action in evidence



Whole group activity: Nominal group technique



Whole group activity: Nominal group technique

For example:

1. Return to our values from opening activity
2. Share values and organize by type
3. Prioritize values as a whole group

How can you integrate this strategy into your practice?



Your Turn: Gap Analysis

What's the
current state?



What do you think
exists in the gap—
what assumptions,
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blind spots might be
at play?

What's your
desired state?

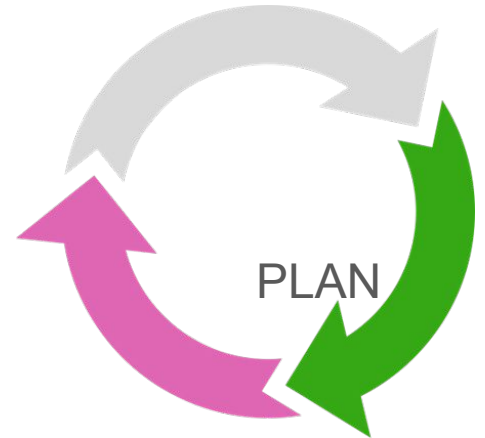


Your turn: Suggested prompts

- "What do you believe is the biggest barrier preventing us from achieving greater impact in our community?"
- "What are the most important factors that would help our stakeholders (e.g., clients, funders, partners) feel more engaged in our mission?"
- "If we could improve just one internal process to better serve our clients or community, what should it be?"
- "What unmet needs do you see in the community that we are not yet addressing but could?"
- "What aspects of our operations are the most challenging to coordinate effectively across teams?"



Plan: Transforms insight into action



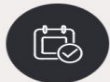
Data is Everywhere

- What are potential sources of data related to your everyday practice?
- What data do you already have access to?
- Who are key stakeholders you would like to consider?



Making Data Work for Your Mission

We transform fragmented information into strategic insights that drive funding, improve programs, and amplify your impact story. Our comprehensive approach takes you from data chaos to clarity—empowering your team to make confident, mission-aligned decisions.



Organize

Clean and centralize fragmented donor and program data across all platforms into unified, accessible systems.



Analyze

Build intuitive dashboards and meaningful KPIs that provide real-time visibility into what matters most.



Predict

Leverage analytics and AI to forecast trends in donor giving, volunteer engagement, and program outcomes.



Tell the Story

Translate complex data into compelling impact reports and funding narratives that resonate with stakeholders.

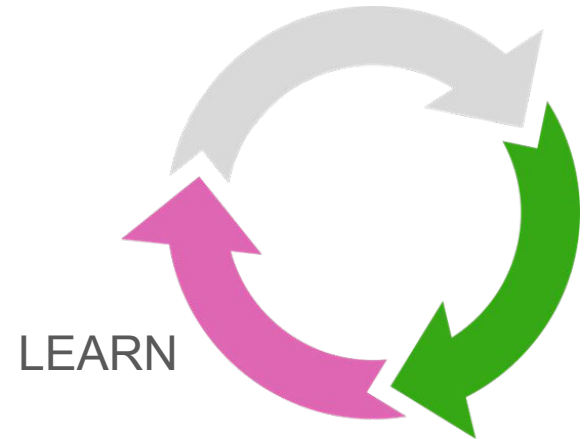
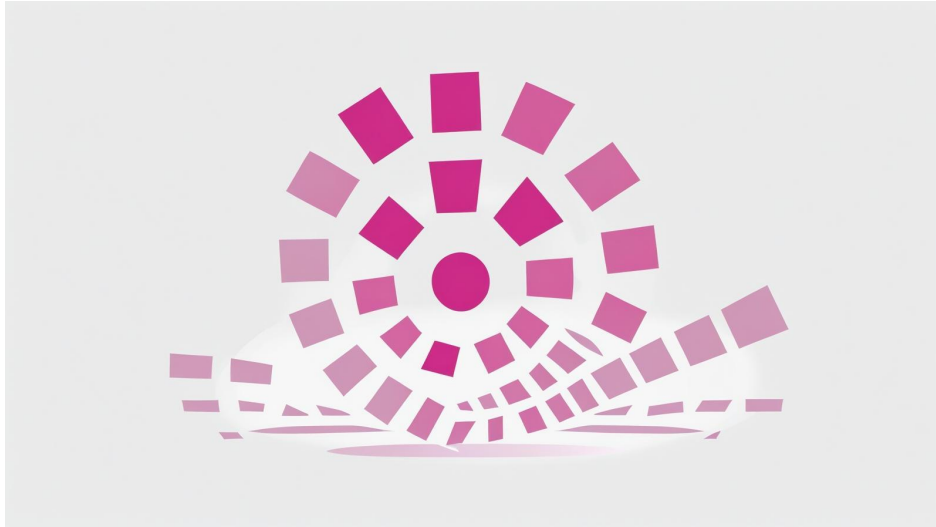
From scattered spreadsheets to strategic intelligence—we help you harness the full potential of your data to demonstrate impact, secure funding, and serve your community more effectively.

You turn: Developing your theory of change

1. What new idea(s)/strategy(ies) will you implement to address your issue(s)?
2. What values and assumptions guide your work?
3. What additional data would you like to collect?
4. When can you collect the data?
5. Who can you enlist as a critical partner in this work?

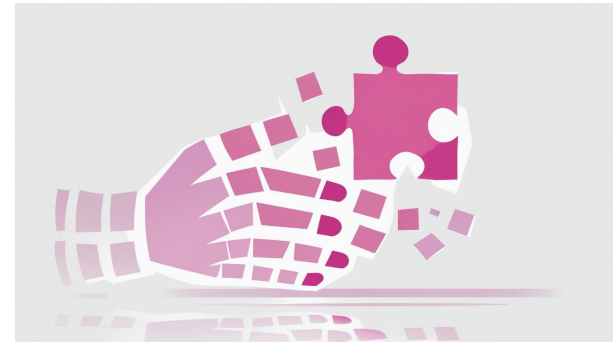


Learn [by doing]: Transforms experience into insight by reflecting on outcomes, identifying what worked and why, and applying those lessons to drive continuous improvement and future success.



Leveraging new AI tools strategically and responsibly

- You probably already have access: Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini, ChatGPT
- Security first: Remove names/identifiers, use aggregate data, check your organization's IT policy
- Your new research assistant: Ask questions of your data, eliminate routine admin tasks
- The "messy data" problem-solver: Clean formats, find patterns, spot trends
- Translation layer: Turn numbers into stories



Your turn: A call to action

How can you start today?

- Run one action research cycle in a small area
- Lead internal change efforts
- Empower your colleagues and employees
- Start small, stay curious, track learning



Connect with us

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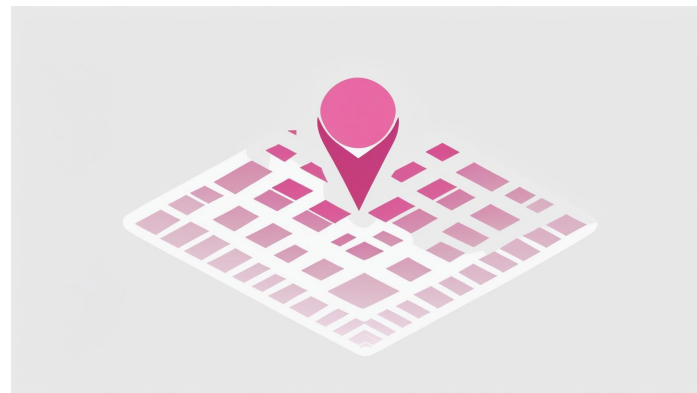
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Two new AI focused workshops for small to midsize business and nonprofit organizations

<https://tinyurl.com/AIworkshop2026>



<https://www.actioninprofessionallearning.com/book-online>

