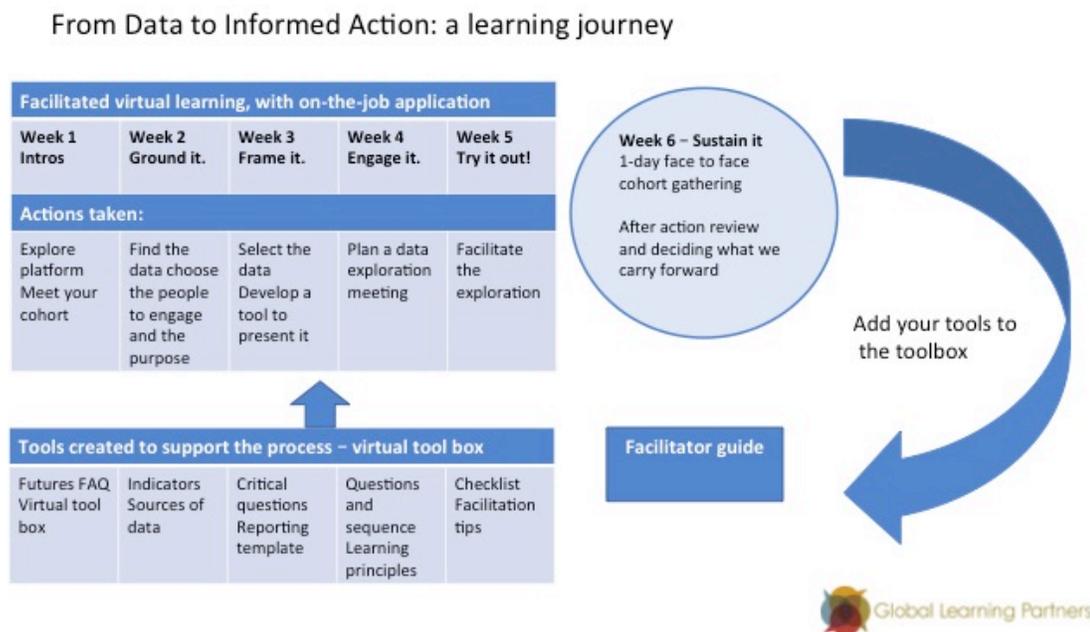


The Futures Project Pilot

Key Findings and Recommendations

The Prosperity Agenda (TPA) and Global Learning Partners (GLP) piloted a learning program called “From Data to Informed Action” with six CAP agencies from Oregon, Idaho and Washington states. The program incorporated a virtual training, on the job application and reflection with agency teams, and one face-to-face meeting at the end to exchange key learning.

A development team comprised of 6 agency representatives, TPA and GLP created the prototype, participated in the pilot and gathered in June to describe the experience of the whole learning program, name what worked for learning, explore some data¹ related to level of completion and degree of engagement with the learning program, and generate suggestions for changing or strengthening. We used this input to develop the below recommendations.



Pilot Strengths

Action oriented learning. A key success factor in the pilot was using data agencies already collected. The program reinforces ‘learning by doing’ rather than ‘learning how you might do it’. This created engagement and ensured accountability in this learning program. People really searched for their data

¹ See appendix

around the assigned dimensions of poverty. They saw what they are collecting and what they aren't. They analyzed their real data and discovered questions worth exploring.

Cohort model with diverse agencies and agency level teams. The combination of a diverse group of agencies, and the use of 3-4 member teams within agencies strengthened the potential for learning and action, generated ongoing interaction between agency team members, and between agencies around their data, and the content they were exploring in the learning program. Offer a clear description of who this program is for, and freedom within agencies to select their team members from all levels (e.g. frontline staff, mid-manager level, directors and leadership).

Virtual stepwise process. Ruzuku, the online platform, worked fine. Easily accessible, helpful for keeping the action oriented learning on track and to facilitate an exchange between agencies. A weekly reminder kept people on track. The weekly workload was intense (see recommendations for change), and people who fell behind had trouble catching up. Still, the structured stepwise approach, when followed, allowed clear direction for people in the agencies.

Facilitators who monitor the dialogue, offers resources, and help to troubleshoot. Dedicated facilitation of the virtual gathering made participants feel supported. Helped them to ask questions when they were unclear and generated a feeling of respect, safety and inclusion - critical factors for adult learning.

Potential Changes

Adjust the program to incorporate two face-to-face cohort gatherings.

- *Start the course with a face-to-face in-person session.* This gathering introduces the Futures Dimensions of Poverty, their indicators, and the overall learning program. Prepares people to undertake the “learning by doing” component that is reinforced in the online work. Participants will choose the dimensions they will explore, identify the futures indicators they are already collecting and identify the questions they want to ask of the data.
- *Include a face-to-face session for peers to share their findings from the data with each other and get feedback **before** they facilitate their meetings.* Designing and facilitating an internal meeting about their findings in the data generated more anxiety than doing that with their cohort. This step would allow agency teams to share their findings and plans for their internal meeting, practice facilitating a portion of it with the cohort, get input into how to strengthen it, and plan next steps for implementing their new skills in their agency practice. As they practice, they will also be exchanging what they are learning from their outcome data, and this will lead to a rich knowledge sharing between agencies about their results and best practices.

Adjust the sequence of the learning program to separate data analysis from presentation preparation. This aligns with the ‘Data to Informed Action’ framework. In the pilot, participants planned for both simultaneously resulting in confusion and some sense that they were “taking two courses at once.”

Offer choice as to what indicators to try out. Show the whole picture of the dimensions of poverty and invite agency teams to identify which aspects they want to explore based on what big questions the agency has. Other dimensions are added as the skills and internal processes are built in each agency.

Provide a clear description of the learning program to agency leaders. Work with them to ensure understanding and select participants from their agencies. Some participants initially believed this was a program about information technology and databases. Develop a module incorporating leadership buy-in for the continuous learning process that trickles down throughout the organization and supports the project's goals.

Potentially extend the time parameters of the weekly modules (e.g. up to 10 weeks) or add more modules allowing more space. Extend modules requiring more work and time to allow agencies to 'catch up' within the learning program.

Week 1 (in-person) - introduction to program, explore Dimensions, select indicators, plan for finding data, create learning community

Week 2 (virtual) - set up team, find data

Week 3 (virtual) - keep looking or start analyzing data

Week 4 (virtual) - keep analyzing exchange findings

Week 5 (virtual) - plan meeting, define group, purpose and agenda, select outcomes

Week 6 (virtual) - plan for meeting, keep planning, create tool for sharing outcomes

Week 7 (in-person) - practice portion of meeting, get/give input, finalize presentation

Week 8-9 (no module) - Facilitate meeting in agency.

Week 10 (virtual) - lessons learned, ways to utilize generated outcomes to inform continuous improvement.

Make the following adjustments to the online learning modules. Develop clear outlines, delineating tasks and schedule, at the start and close of each module to clarify what gets done by when. Finalize videos to make them universal and incorporate examples from pilot agencies. Content should be revised outlining clear task oriented direction and outcomes.

Moving Forward and Building Capacity

Recruit and incorporate facilitators in the next design and facilitation phase. Consider one person from each state or one person representing all three states. Grow the pool of facilitators using outstanding participants from earlier cycles.

Create a standard program that can be used across agencies. Finalize videos to remove references to pilot or to this specific cycle, simplify language, incorporate examples from pilot agencies, etc.

Develop strategies to build leadership buy-in. Inform leadership and utilize their perspective in the early stages of the next cycle.

Some poignant quotes from participants regarding advice to the next cohort:

“Ask a lot of questions in the beginning to discover where your group is at. Then ask lots of questions to find the purpose of the meeting and go from there.”

“Do not become discouraged! Ask questions, the project Team will help you through it.”

“Be sure to allot time for this very important project! Lead with what you know, find out what you don’t know, and figure out how to use this information to influence funders, policy-makers, leadership teams, etc. Always center the voices of your clients!”

“Build a diverse team to work through this project – invite members from all levels of your organizational hierarchy. Offering varying perspectives creates rich and productive conversations.”

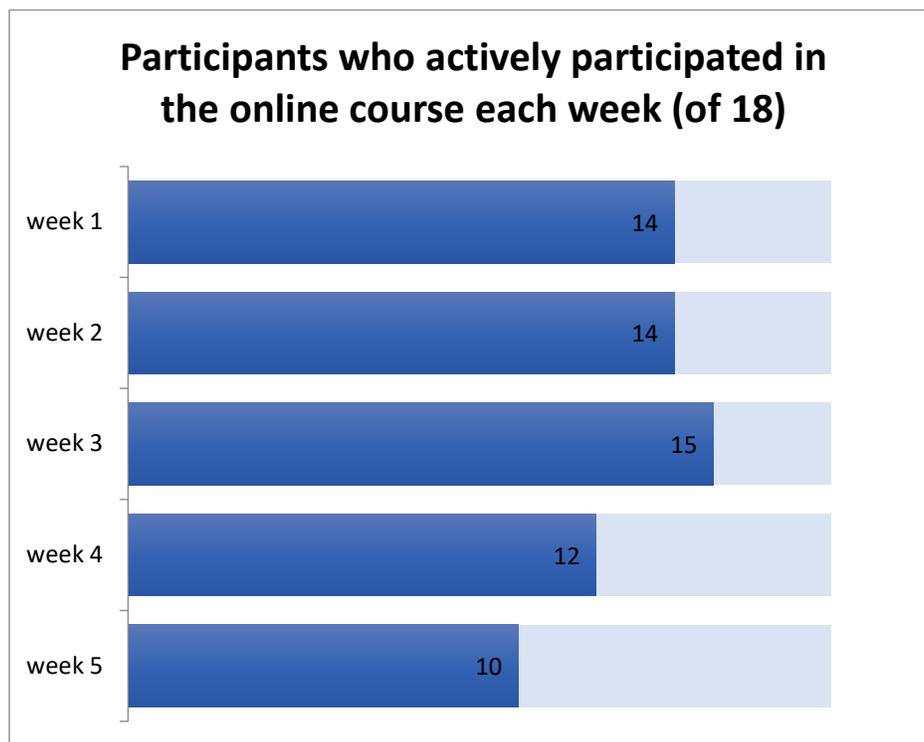
“Be patient with the process and your progress.”

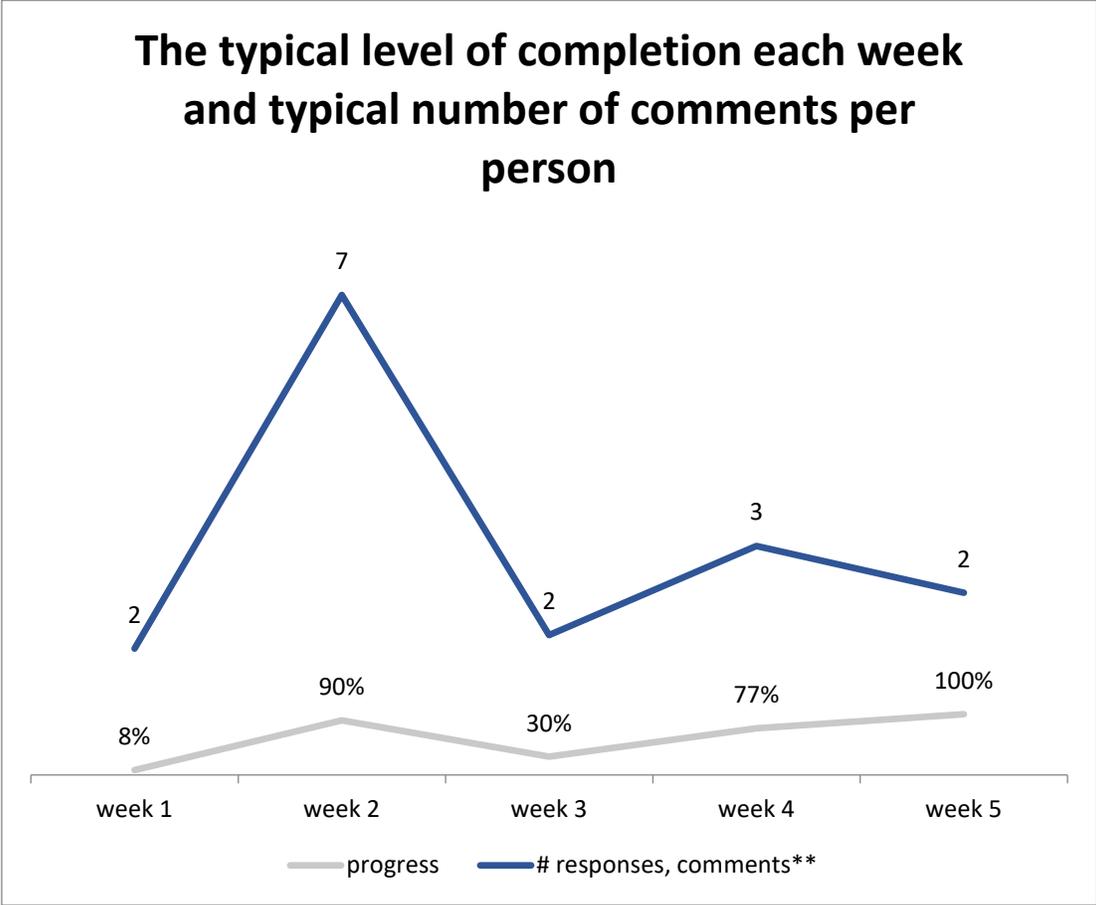
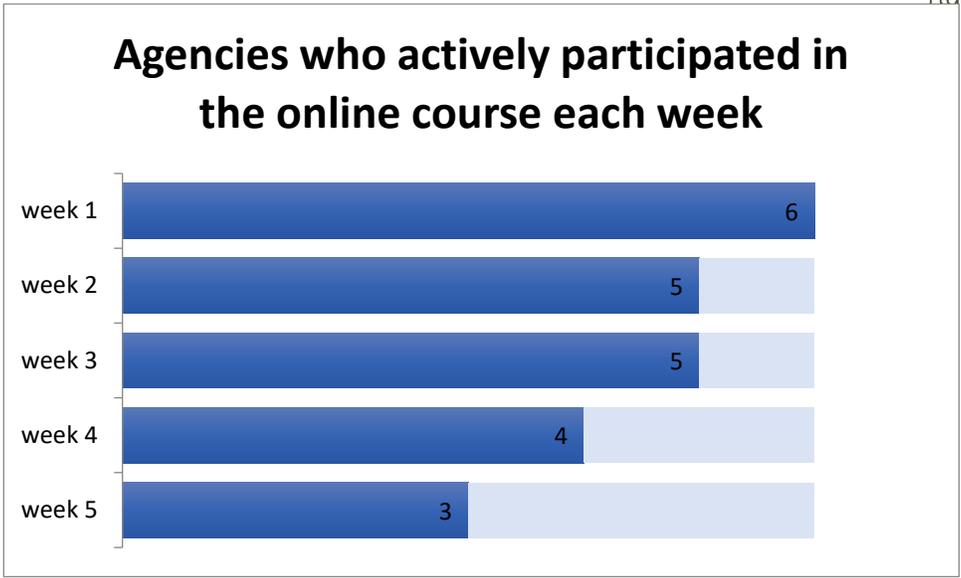
“The Futures project is a process, so be good to yourself and give yourself time to absorb everything. It’s okay if you don’t get everything at first. Trying is great success. Learning is great success.”

The findings presented in this brief will inform important improvements to the Futures project as TPA solidifies the second cycle of agency participants. As the network of CAP agencies throughout the Pacific North West gradually become exposed to the benefits of the Futures project, these findings and recommendations will provide not only a framework for the continuous improvement process on the local and community level, but also inform and support the national network of one thousand Community Action Agencies across the country.

APPENDIX A: A Look at the Data

We examined two indicators to see the level of engagement in the online course: (1) the percentage of completion (based on participants clicking “mark complete”) and (2) the number of comments and responses each participant posted that week in the online platform. We tracked these numbers at the close of each week. They do not show any work from the previous weeks completed after Monday. And we excluded the one invitee who never registered.





Responses and comments spiked in Week 2, and then were relatively stable, typically 2 to 3 for the other weeks. (These were calculated as a mean).

The typical level of completion (mean) went up, down and up again.

Another measure denoting the % of time spent for analyzing data or meeting preparation might be helpful in the future to indicate engagement.