

# DEFINING THE PROBLEM

A Workout for Continuous Improvement

*Workout 1 in a Series of 4  
Find all workouts at [impactfl.link/workouts](https://impactfl.link/workouts)*



# THIS WORKOUT HAS 3 SECTIONS:

## DEFINING THE PROBLEM

This workout will help everyone understand the problem you will be investing time + energy into solving. Your team may be motivated and ready to address the problem, or meeting for the first time. Either way, *Defining the Problem* is a great place to start aligning on exactly what the problem is!



60 minutes



1 to 10 people



Workout 1 of 4

**STEP ONE:** Share the Data Sources

**STEP TWO:** Predict What the Data Might Reveal

**STEP THREE:** Review the Data and Observe Trends

**STEP FOUR:** Discuss Inferences About the Data

**STEP FIVE:** Define Your Understanding of the Problem

**STEP SIX:** Create Your Problem Statement

Protocol adapted from [http://scholarshipinitiative.org/docs/data\\_driven\\_inquiry.pdf](http://scholarshipinitiative.org/docs/data_driven_inquiry.pdf)

## DEFINING THE PROBLEM: EXAMPLE



### SCENARIO:

Angela is a school leader at a Florida high school. She has been reviewing many different data sources and is alarmed by the increase in absenteeism she is seeing over the past two years.

While she believes that looking at other data sources, like academic performance and school climate, are also important in the discussion, Angela knows her team's input and analysis of the situation are key to ultimately planning and implementing a solution.

By the end of the meeting today, Angela hopes her team can align on what they see as the problem they would like to take on this year.

### Every workout includes:



**Workout Overview:** A rundown of the workout, including what it is, how long it might take, and when a team might line up and leverage this workout.



**Mantras for the Moment:** To help teams get their heads in the game, we've included mantras we think will help your team stay centered on performing at optimal levels and keep pace when faced with challenges.



**Coaching Tips:** Think of these as your pep talks before + after the workout! Some tips, reminders, + inspiration to support the team and keep everyone focused on what matters most.



**Pulse Checks:** Throughout the workout, we have moments to pause + check in. These questions will help you and your team quickly assess form, feeling, and progress towards the finish.

## COACH'S CORNER

FACILITATION TIPS AND HELPFUL HINTS

The goal of this workout for continuous improvement is to build strength, improve endurance, and shed the mindsets and practices that are not serving you and your team as you work towards your goals of improvement.

While completing this workout solo is doable, we think we are better together! Activate a team that will push your thinking + motivates you to keep going. Find a comfortable space, project this workout, so everyone is on the same page, and get working!

**The Workout**  
*Slides 3 - 12*

**The Example**  
*Slides 13 - 21*

**The Facilitator's Guide**  
*Slides 22 - 27*

# THE WORKOUT

# DEFINING THE PROBLEM

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Workout 1 of 4

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# STEP ONE

## Share the Data Sources 5 minutes

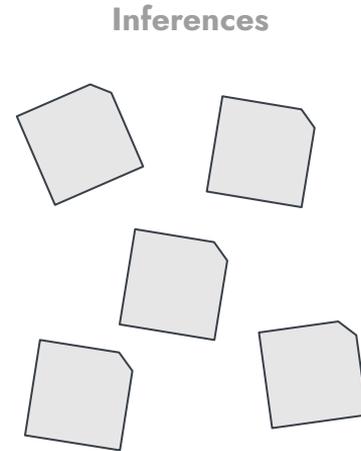
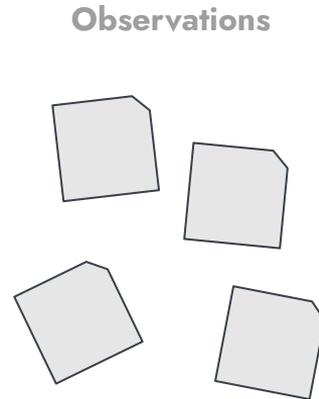
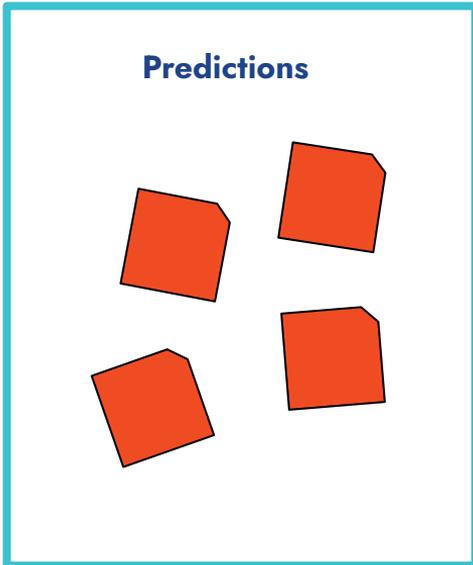
Share a brief explanation about the data the team will engage with during this process and why these specific data sources were selected. The team should not have access to the data just yet!

<b>WHAT</b> <i>What data source will we analyze today?</i>	<b>WHY</b> <i>Why are these data sources important?</i>
<b>DATA SOURCE #1</b>	<b>Selected because...</b>
<b>DATA SOURCE #2</b>	
<b>DATA SOURCE #3</b>	

# STEP TWO

## Predict What the Data Might Reveal 10 minutes

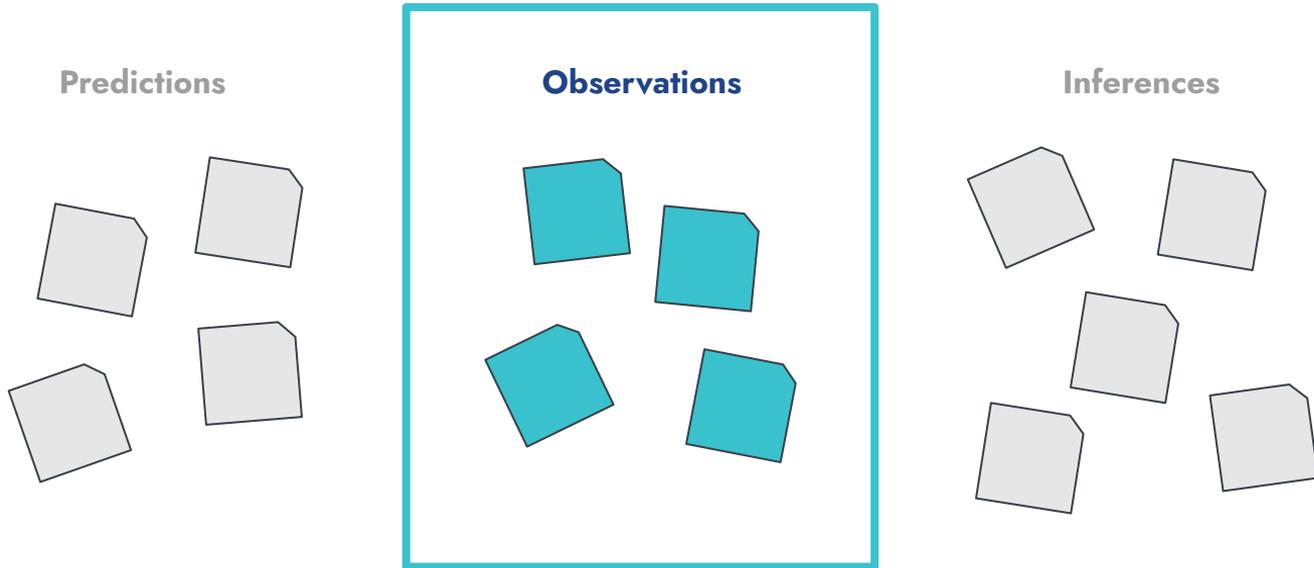
Participants share what they believe the data will show based on past experiences and assumptions. Once predictions are captured, have everyone review what others shared.



# STEP THREE

## Review the Data and Observe Trends 20 minutes

After spending time reviewing the data independently, participants share observations without reaching conclusions or making recommendations.

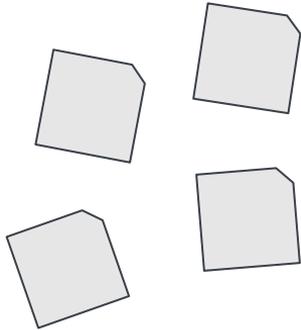


# STEP FOUR

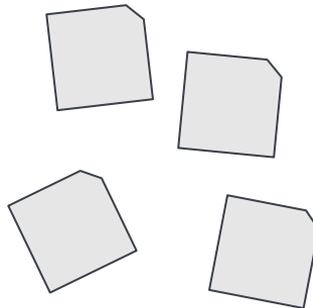
## Share Inferences Based on Insight 15 minutes

As a team, share inferences you can make based on your observations of the data.

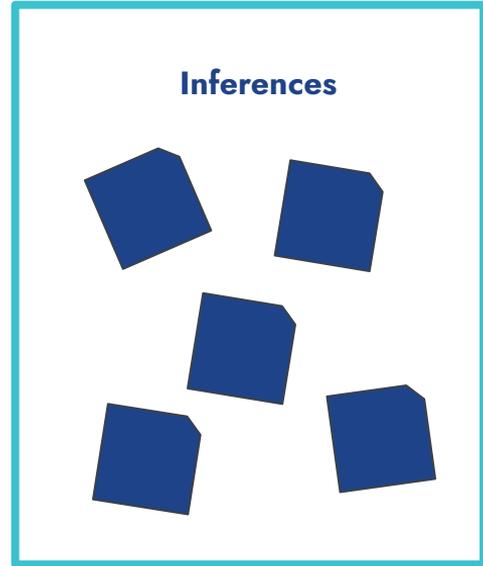
Predictions



Observations



Inferences



# PULSE CHECK



Do we feel we have examined the data and are ready to define our understanding as a team? Have we made space to address any clarifying questions about the data?

**Yes!**

**Awesome! Move on to Step 5 to define your team's understanding of the problem.**

**No!**

**It sounds like your team is feeling like some more conversation might be needed! We recommend going back to Steps 2-4 and continue discussing.**

# STEP FIVE

## Define Your Understanding of the Problem 10 minutes

Use the 3-2-1 protocol to help your team leverage your learnings to inform your understanding of the challenge your team is working to solve.

<b>THREE</b> <i>things that you know for sure about the problem you are trying to address</i>	<b>TWO</b> <i>wonderings you still have about the problem you are trying to address</i>	<b>ONE</b> <i>concern you have about the problem you are trying to address</i>
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	
3.		

# STEP SIX

## Draft Your Problem Statement 15 minutes

Create the first draft of your problem statement. Keep in mind [the criteria](#) of a powerful problem statement when drafting your team's statement.

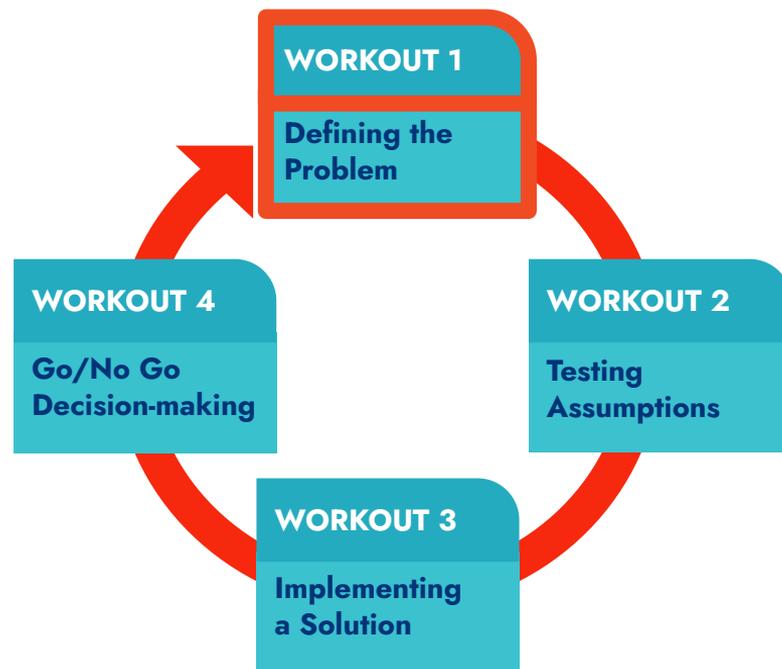
Who is affected? ( <i>name specific group</i> )	
What is affecting them? ( <i>% data goes here</i> )	
Where is the problem happening? ( <i>name where the problem is most impacting</i> )	
<b>Problem Statement:</b>	

# IMPACT FLORIDA WORKOUTS

Inspired by the COVID Recovery Cadre, Impact Florida workouts are designed to guide teams to improve student experience and learning outcomes. They can be used as standalone tools or as a four-step process to implement a new practice, intervention, or initiative. This is workout 1 of 4.

Impact Florida is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that believes excellent classroom instruction can move the needle for all students. We focus on supporting education leaders and teachers with the knowledge and resources they need to ensure that great teaching and learning is consistently realized in all Florida schools.

**More at [impactfl.org](http://impactfl.org).**



**How did it go?** Share your workout experience with us at [www.impactfl.link/workouts](http://www.impactfl.link/workouts).

# THE EXAMPLE

# DEFINING THE PROBLEM: *EXAMPLE*



## SCENARIO:

Angela is a school leader at a Florida high school. She has been reviewing many different data sources and is alarmed by the increase in absenteeism she is seeing over the past two years.

While she believes that looking at other data sources, like academic performance and school climate, are also important in the discussion, Angela knows her team's input and analysis of the situation are key to ultimately planning and implementing a solution.

By the end of the meeting today, Angela hopes her team can align on what they see as the problem they would like to take on this year.



Angela selects last year's data on the following: failure rates, discipline, and counselor referrals and shares why those three data points have been prioritized.

## WHAT

*What data source will we analyze today?*

- ❑ **1st + 2nd Quarter Attendance for 9th Grade**
- ❑ **1st + 2nd Quarter Academic Report for 9th Grade**
- ❑ **Fall Semester Panorama Student Perception Survey**

## WHY

*Why are these data sources important?*

**As we saw in our most recent district report, absenteeism across our district has increased steadily over the past two years.**

**Today we are going to spend time as a school team, analyzing data to see if it is impacting student academic performance, as well as the way students engage with peers, teachers, and staff.**

# STEP TWO: Predict What the Data Might Reveal



Before looking at the data, team members add predictions of what they think the data sources will reveal. Each prediction is placed on a post-it and shared with the team.

## Predictions

9th graders feel overwhelmed during the transition to high school.

Some students feel disconnected from the school community

Absenteeism higher during certain times of the year

Low attendance = low grades

Attendance is lower in certain types of classes

Attendance is lower during the first + last periods of the day.

# STEP THREE: Review the Data and Observe Trends



After spending time reviewing the data independently, the team shares observations. Angela intervenes when a team member's observation is more of a recommendation or solution.

## Observations

Absences are lower at the start of the school and through the first month.

61% of students answered favorably when asked questions about their sense of belonging.

There is evidence that shows students with higher absenteeism are more likely to fail two or more classes.

Absenteeism is greater among students who qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch

## STEP FOUR: Share Inferences Based on Insight



Now that the team has made observations, Angela has the team share inferences based on insight, helping the team further synthesize the information and align on its implications.

### Inferences

Not all students have access to internet to complete assigned coursework.

Grading practices are inconsistent and not always representative of student comprehension

When students get behind on coursework it can leave them feeling discouraged from going to class

Students might have jobs or need to take care of siblings, leaving little time to complete assignments outside of class

Students who don't have healthy + meaningful relationships with peers, teachers, and staff tend to be absent more.

# STEP FIVE: Define Your Understanding of the Problem



Angela then prompts the group to define their understanding of the problem based off of those headlines using the 3-2-1 protocol.

## THREE

*things that you know for sure about the problem you are trying to address*

1. There is a direct connection between attendance and academic success.
2. There is a percentage of students who do not feel engaged in the learning experience.
3. More students show up during the first month of school, but then our absences increase.

## TWO

*wonderings you still have about the problem you are trying to address*

1. We wonder what mitigating circumstances our students are dealing with outside of school?
2. We wonder why more students do not feel a stronger sense of belonging?

## ONE

*concern you have about the problem you are trying to address*

1. Which to prioritize, academic performance or student belonging and engagement.

# STEP SIX: Draft Your Problem Statement



Together, the team uses this frame to craft the problem statement that will ensure team alignment on what they are trying to achieve to address absenteeism at their school.

Who is affected?	9th Grade Students
What is affecting them?	61% responded “favorably” to a sense of belonging at school
Where is the problem happening?	At our school
<b>Problem Statement:</b> 39% of 9th grade students do not have a favorable sense of belonging at our school.	

# Criteria for Problem Statements

1-2  
Sentences

Clearly  
identifies what  
you are trying to  
solve

Takes 20  
seconds or less  
to understand

Includes a  
data point

Can be  
measured

No implied  
causes

No implied  
solution

# THE FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

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# WORKOUT OVERVIEW



## USE THIS WORKOUT WHEN...

your team needs a way to clearly articulate a challenge you are solving with clarity and specificity.

## USE THIS WORKOUT BECAUSE...

your team understands the importance of being aligned on the problem in order to work with shared purpose.

## YOU WILL NEED...

data sources (we recommend no more than three), space to work + engage as a team, chart paper, sticky notes, markers, + wall space.

## AT THE END OF THE WORKOUT, YOU WILL HAVE...

a problem statement that is informed by data and addresses the who, what, where, when, and why of a specific challenge.

## SO THAT YOU CAN...

ensure your team has a shared vision on the challenge you are investing time and energy on, in order to create impact in incremental ways.

# MANTRAS FOR THE MOMENT



## Be Honest

We understand the value of truth, especially when it is hard to hear.



## Be Clear

We leverage processes that help us align as a team so our decisions lead to action and impact.



## Be Resilient

We know that identifying the problem brings us one step closer to a solution.



# Pre-Workout Coaching Tips

- ✓  Before getting started, be sure you've identified no more than three data sources that will be leveraged throughout the process. In order to support your team with making honest predictions and checking assumptions, we recommend not sharing data sources prior to the meeting.
- ✓  There is no "I" in team! Let go of titles + hierarchy and identify a facilitator and a timekeeper. Everyone else on the team will play the role of motivator.
- ✓  This is hard work, and we don't want you to get overheated! There is nothing wrong with taking breaks along the way so you can catch your breath and refocus the team.
- ✓  Finding the right tempo is everything! We recommend having your favorite pump-up songs ready when you need them. Check out the Impact Florida team's go-to's when getting in the zone: [Songs With Impact](#).

# Post-Workout Coaching Tips



- ✓ **YAY! You did it!** Defining the problem will allow you to consider meaningful + impactful solutions in the future. Be sure to celebrate achieving this milestone with your team before ending the meeting.
- ✓ **Now that your team can clearly articulate what it is you are trying to solve, it might be a good idea to share it out with other team members who weren't a part of the process**
- ✓ **Members of your team might be feeling anxious. We recommend circling up and reminding the team that this is just the first step in the process and that you will work together to learn more about potential root causes and identify possible solutions.**
- ✓ **Now that you are aligned on the problem, check out [Workout 2: Testing Assumptions](#) to validate your problem statement.**



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**FLORIDA**

Great Teaching Matters

**LEARN MORE AND FIND OTHER RESOURCES AT [IMPACTFL.ORG](https://www.impactfl.org)**

*This workout series was created in partnership with*

