



THE **Data Coach**

Joyful Spaces & The Data Coach

Transforming Scattered Data
to Sustainable Insights

About the Partners

About Joyful Spaces

Joy as Resistance is a Denver-based nonprofit organization that exists to increase radically inclusive, supportive spaces for LGBTQIA+ youth. Their Joyful Spaces program provides education and training for educators and youth-serving professionals, including:

- LGBTQIA+ Inclusivity Training
- Gender & Sexuality Alliance (GSA) Support
- Inclusive Practices Assessment
- Responsive coaching

Since 2022, Joyful Spaces has partnered with over 20 schools and nonprofit organizations in Metro Denver. The program has served 825 youth and adults since its inception.

About The Data Coach

The Data Coach (TDC) exists to help nonprofit organizations better organize, analyze, and use their data to achieve their missions. Founded by Lindsay Morgia, M.S., M.P.P., TDC offers three primary services:

1. **Data and evaluation services**, including assistance with data collection, analysis, and reporting
2. **Data coaching** for nonprofit staff members (1:1 or small group)
3. **Data ReSet**, which connects nonprofits with an expert to identify problems with their data and figure out effective solutions to improve data quality

TDC also offers free resources to nonprofit organizations to help them solve pressing data challenges. We do this through our blog, our YouTube channel, workshops, and webinars.

The Situation

When program manager Erica Castro (they/them) contacted The Data Coach (TDC), they were in trouble. Despite being the only revenue-generating program at their organization, Joyful Spaces was at critical risk of being shut down over budget and organizational issues.

While Erica had been diligent about collecting feedback from program participants since its inception, finding time to analyze the data was an ongoing challenge with all their other responsibilities as a program director.

Erica wanted to “check for efficiency in capturing data...to prove the work was making an impact on the community,” which would allow them to apply for additional grant funding. They also wanted to know if there were additional questions they should include to enhance their skills as a facilitator and make informed decisions about future program improvements.

During the initial call, TDC and Erica collaboratively decided that our goals for this project would be:

1

Demonstrate the need for Joyful Spaces in the community and show what the program has accomplished so far

2

Ensure that the data collection tools used to collect client information and feedback capture accurate information for future decision-making

Goal #1: Demonstrating Community Need and Proving Current Program Impact



SERVICE

Data and Evaluation Services: Qualitative Analysis

Making Sense of the Data Already Collected

During their directional call, Lindsay found that while Erica had reviewed some quantitative data, the qualitative data from open-ended survey questions hadn't been touched. Lindsay offered to analyze data from three different currently untapped sources: partnership interest forms, scholarship applications, and workshop feedback from 2022 to present.

To analyze all those open-ended responses, Lindsay uploaded the deidentified data into MaxQDA, a qualitative coding software. Coding enables researchers to categorize quotes and group them based on what they have in common. Lindsay used a combination of descriptive and in vivo coding:

- **Descriptive codes** summarize the primary topic (like "facilitators" or "activities")
- **In Vivo codes** use the participants' own words (like "gender elephant" or "gender galaxy").



All open-ended responses underwent an initial coding process, followed by multiple rounds of re-coding to ensure consistency and accuracy. In total, 653 responses received at least one code. Once all responses were coded, Lindsay exported the data to Excel for quantitative analysis of the themes identified in the feedback. The distribution of responses across the following common categories:

- Feedback for the facilitator
- Comments about workshop activities
- Useful concepts from the workshop
- Topics participants wished to learn more about
- Suggestions for improvement

What the Data Revealed

The findings showed that:

- Participants spoke highly of Erica’s facilitation skills. The most common descriptors that they used for their facilitation style include “knowledgeable,” “open,” and “engaged.”
- Over 30% of responses mentioned that the real-world scenarios used during the training were the most helpful. Practicing in a safe environment helped launch group discussions about different ways to handle potential situations without worrying about “wrong” answers.
- The most useful topics included discussions of gender (35.8%) and definitions of LGBTQIA+ terminology (19.8%). Participants shared that an improved understanding of language would help them communicate with students and colleagues more effectively.
- Participants also have recommendations for improvement, including better time management and more participation options, such as quiet reflection and small-group rotation.

All of the uncovered information helped demonstrate the positive effect Joyful Spaces had on participants' learning and development, plus revealed specific insights Erica can use to make changes to the program in the future.

Reflections

When Erica first saw the findings report, they had an emotional reaction:

“Tears of joy - I think my work can feel like an uphill battle or caught in the weeds at times because I am not often able to take a forest point of view look at what IS working while also being given an avenue to work closer within my values of using participant / client voice to inform where we go next. I also think it was a moment that really moved me because I was able to sit with the ways the program and its services have really made an impact in our community in the ways our mission promises. It was so validating!”

And that data made a real difference. The next time Erica applied for a grant, they said:

“We were able to accurately, and with great detail, describe the impact using numbers rather than solely qualitative data to describe the communities impacted and the change over time that occurred in order to reach our goals. These goals and statistics were a requirement of the grants that we applied to, our funders want to hear stories and they also want to know how many youth are impacted and at what scale and exactly how — **I was able to give them this in a confident and concrete way than I wasn't able to prove before.**”



Goal #2: Creating Sustainable, Accurate Data Collection Systems For Future Decision-Making



SERVICE

Data and Evaluation Services: Expert Feedback

Strengthening the Data Collection Tools Themselves

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While analyzing existing data was crucial, TDC also reviewed the surveys Erica was using to collect ongoing data. TDC reviewed three surveys provided by Erica:

1. The Joyful Spaces interest form
2. The workshop feedback form for adults
3. The workshop feedback form for youth

Using their own 20-point rubric, TDC reviewed the surveys for the following:

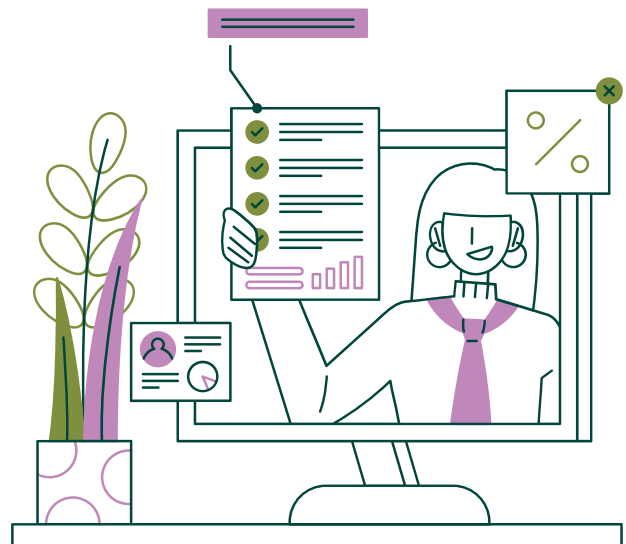
- **Validity issues:** Are we asking the right people the right questions to get the data we want?
- **Response biases:** Does the survey have questions that are confusing, unfamiliar, or phrased in a way that might prompt people to give answers that don't truly reflect their opinions or experiences?
- **Non-response biases:** Is there anything about the survey that might cause people to skip questions or not complete it?
- **Any privacy and confidentiality concerns**

The review process revealed the following issues, which are all quite common for nonprofit organizations:

- The surveys had a lot of open-ended questions, which take time, energy, and a specific skill set to analyze correctly. Additionally, when surveys have too many open-ended questions, participants may skip them if they take too much time to complete.
- Some questions contained language that could be confusing or unfamiliar, like "radically inclusive spaces." Confusing language can lead people to skip questions or give answers they wouldn't otherwise give.
- Other questions were potentially leading or could cause participants to frame their responses in a more positive light. For instance, asking scholarship applicants about their approach to cultural change could lead people to make up an answer, even if there is no specific plan in place.
- No links to an organizational privacy policy on any of the forms.

After the review, TDC provided specific feedback on each of the surveys to help Joyful Spaces get more complete responses and improve the quality of the data they received, including:

- Ideas for new questions that could shed light on program efficacy, impact, and feedback for the facilitator
- Converting some open-ended questions to multiple-choice and other question types to save time during analysis
- Adding language that explains how Joyful Spaces protects data privacy



- Suggestions for re-wording questions to increase clarity and lower the risk of response biases
- Thoughts about changing the question order for a better flow and participant experience
- Removing specific questions that were not relevant to program goals and objectives

Joyful Spaces reviewed the feedback and provided their own ideas and suggestions, which TDC used to make the final revisions.

The Result?

Three new feedback surveys that are better design to:

- Show the effect of the program on participants
- Provide the program director with more specific feedback about their facilitation skills
- Make it easier for the program director to analyze the data quickly upon receipt

Reflections

When Erica reflected on what they'd hoped to get of the survey feedback process:

“I hoped to get a more organized, accurate, and comprehensive understanding of my program's strengths and weaknesses. I hoped to get pointers and suggestions for how to be more efficient with my data collection and participant feedback surveys, and all surveys used internally and externally to drive the direction of the work, and hopefully even use the data to apply to grants to keep the work going!”

When asked what was most helpful about going through the actual process, Erica said:

“**Lindsay was so thorough!** It should be noted that uploading large and niche components of data into a generator like ChatGPT just isn't the same as having someone who is an expert review your data collection process. **There is a human understanding to improve work with other humans, especially in the social impact field,** that is invaluable.”

Looking back at the whole experience, Erica added:

“I feel that I learned throughout the process - key terms related to data, legalities to be mindful of when collecting data from people, and the importance of attention to detail when framing questions. Plus, the impact that unconscious bias can make, being the one who created the surveys/data collection processes.”

Our Results

Through this partnership, Joyful Spaces and The Data Coach achieved three concrete shifts. More importantly, they did it in a way that built Joyful Spaces' own capacity to sustain and evolve the work:

Data-collection tools built for the long term.

Together, they designed data-collection tools to provide the program with essential insights from the people directly impacted by its training programs. These tools were designed to be sustainable for one person to analyze and act on regularly.

Data analysis that proves effectiveness.

The qualitative coding and findings enabled Joyful Spaces to demonstrate program effectiveness to new leadership and to apply for additional external funding. Erica went from having raw data to having the complete data story.

Data knowledge for the future.

The collaborative nature of the relationship helped build Joyful Spaces' internal data knowledge (including collection, bias, privacy, and analysis), which they can apply as the program continues to grow and evolve.

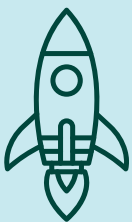
The Data Coach helps nonprofits better **organize**, **analyze**, and **use** their data to achieve their missions.



Hi, I'm Lindsay Morgia,
M.P.P., M.S.!

I spent 15 years as an analyst in the nonprofit and public sectors before founding The Data Coach. During that time, I realized my passion for teaching nonprofits proper data collection and analysis, applying it to key organizational decisions. I excel at working collaboratively to make data accessible and less intimidating to staff without a data background.

Now, I leverage these skills to help nonprofits and fellow consultants build capacity for insightful research and drive community impact.



Is your data working for you?

Use [this link](#) or the QR code to take our **free Data Health Assessment** to evaluate your current data practices and get ideas for improving your data quality.



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