


Operationalizing Responsible Data for Children Principles: Introduction to the Studio Methodology

An approach to collaboratively and responsibly define, prioritize, and unlock the data needed to inform decisions and programs that seek to improve children's wellbeing.



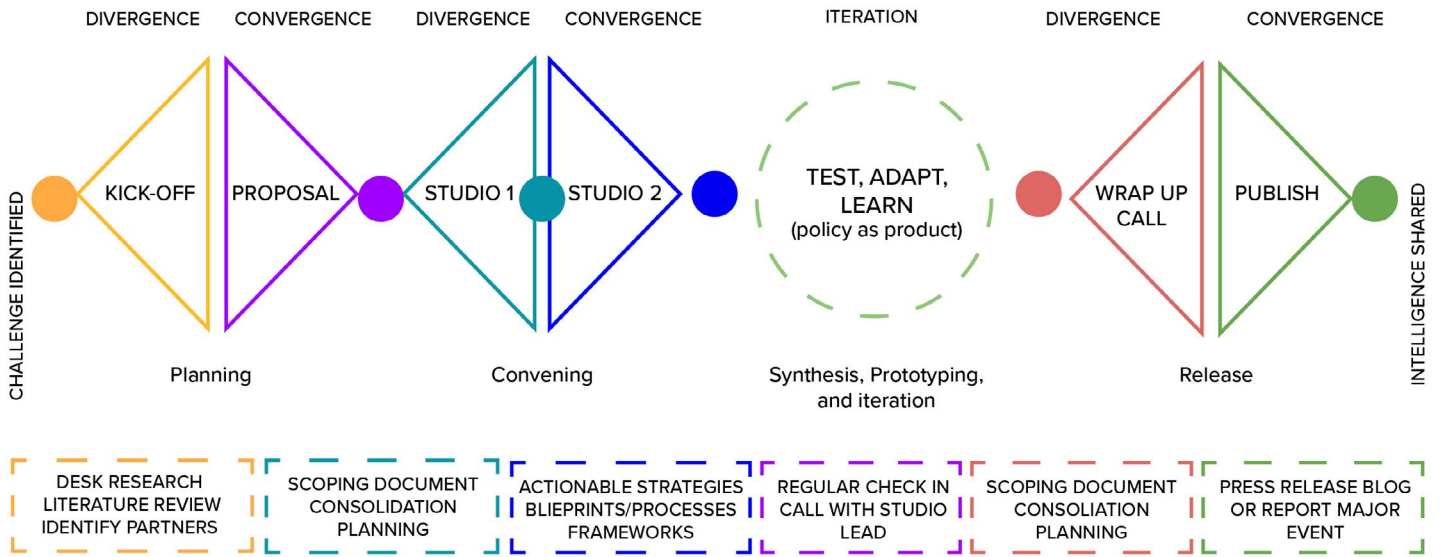
Organizations seeking to address the needs of children through the use of data often work in complex environments where there are a multitude of actors, policy considerations, and interests. Filtered through so many complicated considerations, it can be difficult to identify and prioritize problems, let alone define the questions and data needed to pressing challenges. Organizations who use data for and about children need a new methodology that can allow them to use data responsibly and effectively to focus on important challenges, break them into manageable components, and work with other stakeholders to develop and test new data-driven solutions.

The **Responsible Data for Children (RD4C) Studio Methodology** offers a way to achieve these ends. Inspired by resources such as the UK Design Council's [Double Diamond Methodology](#) and The GovLab's [100 Questions Methodology](#), the studio methodology allows organizations to explore and collaboratively define strategies related to child welfare and data. The methodology (pictured below) is divided into four phases:

1. Planning (which includes Kick-Off and Proposal);
2. Convening (which includes two studios);
3. Synthesis, Prototyping, and Iteration (which involves Testing, Adapting, Learning); and
4. Release (which includes a Wrap Up Call and Publication).

Through these phases, studio participants are able to ideate different ideas (divergent thinking) before coming together to unite on focused action (convergent thinking).





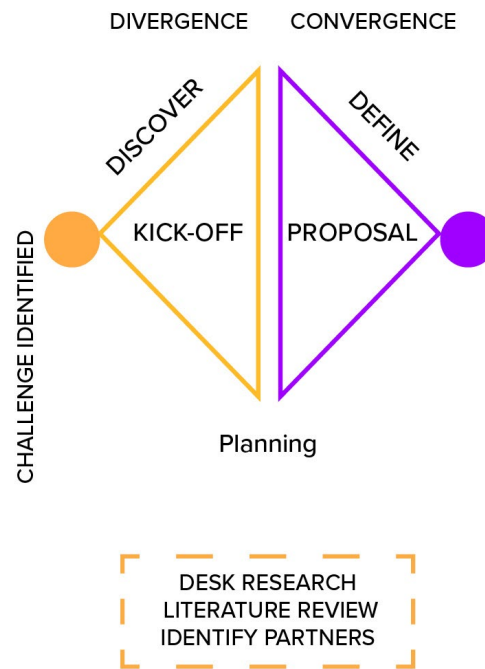
Iterated from the UK Council's (2019) "Double Diamond Framework for Innovation" and Agile Development

A method for creating actionable strategies

In this document, we will explain how the RD4C team (co-led by The GovLab and UNICEF) approaches each part of this methodology and the corresponding products. To illustrate how an organization can follow this methodology to promote responsible data for children, we provide an example taken from our recent work in [Uganda](#) to promote better management of refugee children’s data related to mental health and psychosocial services (MHPSS).

Methodology

PHASE 1 — Planning: Kick-off and Proposal



Before launching any project involving data, it is important to understand what the project hopes to address and why the use of data is useful. As such, the studio methodology begins with the RD4C team's partner **identifying a challenge**—a problem in the world that the partner (and any of their collaborators) have an interest in addressing through the responsible use of data. Challenges should start off fairly broad (e.g. better handling data about refugee children in Uganda) but have in mind a specific partner that an organization can work with (e.g. the Government of Uganda, UNICEF and UNHCR Uganda).

After settling on what this challenge is and a partner, planning can formally begin. The planning phase is divided into two parts:

1. **Kick-Off:** The RD4C team meets with its partner and any other relevant stakeholders to evaluate the opportunities, needs and areas of focus. This introductory meeting is intended to help all participants understand:
 - a. What organizational or policy challenges is the partner hoping to overcome through the use of data?
 - b. Who would be the intended beneficiary of this support?
 - c. What type of support would be most beneficial for recipients to receive? How can data help provide that support?
 - d. Are there partners/stakeholders that should be included in the conversation?
 - e. How should this effort be organized? Should engagements be online, in-person, or hybrid?



It is likely that in this kick-off meeting, the RD4C team and its partners will focus on some particular aspect of a larger problem (e.g. improving the handling of data about children’s mental health and psychosocial services). As this focus becomes more pronounced, the RD4C team may conduct desk research, interviews, and other activities to understand the context they hope to address and scope out the parameters of the challenge. This research will naturally feed into the next phase, the proposal.

- 2. Proposal:** Based on the input received in the kick-off call and additional desk research, the RD4C team and its partners may develop a product (**Challenge Identified**) that may include:
- a draft proposal or terms of reference that **defines the problem in specific terms** (the GovLab’s [Problem Definition Tool](#) may be useful for this);
 - the studio modules that will be used to support the work (explained below in “Convening”);
 - a month by month timeline for activities;
 - the list of partners involved and their role;, and
 - any desired outcomes (e.g. a report, a set of policy recommendations, the terms of reference for a new project or initiative).

This proposal grounds conversations that have taken place and orients any prior desk research toward achievable goals. It may be useful to frame the challenge in a way that cuts across sectors to encourage organizers to think from different perspectives and embrace creative problem-solving.

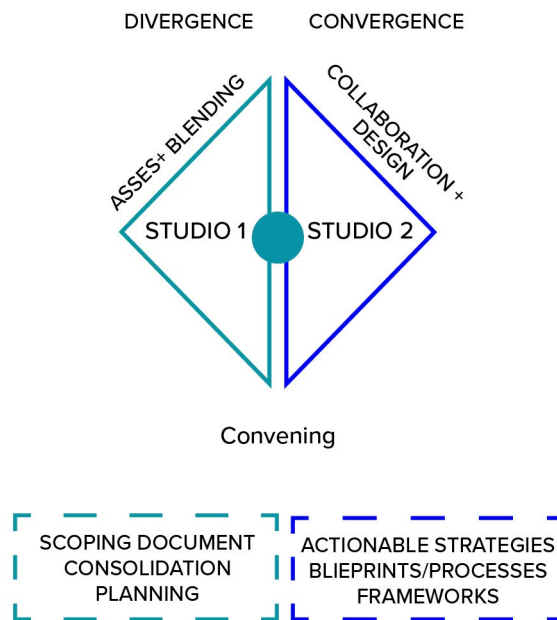
Example: Responsible Data for Children in Uganda

In 2022, The GovLab and UNICEF and UNHCR HQ (under the auspices of the RD4C initiative) met with colleagues at UNICEF and UNHCR Uganda to discuss ways that the RD4C team could support its Ugandan colleagues improve the handling of data for and about refugee children. As a result of these discussions, the partners identified a shared interest in mental health and psychosocial services (MHPSS) data.

Over the course of several weeks, UNICEF and UNHCR Uganda shared with the RD4C team a series of documents explaining the current state of MHPSS data for refugee children in Uganda while the RD4C team conducted extensive fact-finding research using information on the open web. Based on this research, RD4C presented a draft proposal and timeline for how it could conduct a studio series in Uganda, which UNICEF and UNHCR Uganda revised. Partners discussed potential invitees to a studio series, logistics (e.g. accommodations and travel), and overall goals.

The partners finalized a proposal and decided to host a studio series over a week in September 2022. Partners agreed to focus on answering one core question: How can the Government of Uganda and partners improve the responsible use of MHPSS data for and about refugee children in Uganda—particularly in ways that increase the effectiveness and reach of existing services?

PHASE 2 — Convening: Studio 1 and 2



In the second phase, The RD4C team and its partners bring together the stakeholders identified in the Planning phase to develop bespoke, fit-for-purpose solutions to a policy challenge or opportunity facing them. This effort is divided into three parts, the first focused on generating ideas, the second on summarizing and prioritizing these inputs, and the third on collaboratively building solutions based on those ideas. Each part is implemented in collaboration with the partner and studio participants.

- 1. Studio 1 (Identification and Ideation):** In the first studio, The RD4C team and partners host a collaborative discussion. This meeting will ideally take place with all the stakeholders identified in the proposal and curated through discussions with partners.

This meeting serves to **assess the problem space**. In a semi-moderated format, participants may identify organizational or sectoral needs or challenges otherwise preventing them from achieving a desired outcome. The goal of this studio is to understand the dynamics that different participants find themselves under, with a goal of arriving at several broad solutions that can be discussed more at Studio 2. Ideally, this assessment (**Problem Defined**) reveals what data is currently available and the challenges that stakeholders have in using it responsibly and effectively.

Either during the studio or to supplement it, partners also may find it beneficial to consider adding several modules to expand or enhance the conversation. These modules can include:

- a. Pre-Reader:** Partners develop a pre-reader, a short informational briefing, to contextualize the challenge, gap, or asymmetry that the studios hope to resolve. Pre-readers can include short biographies of participants, an overarching agenda, and a summary of existing literature.
- b. Expert Presentation:** Partners may find it useful to begin a studio with a presentation or keynote speech from an individual with notable experience with the problem area to inspire or inform studio participants.



- c. **Breakout Groups:** Partners may divide studio participants into groups organized around themes, sectors, or issues of importance and ask them to produce 1–3 ideas for the studio at large.
 - d. **Whiteboarding:** Using a centralized white board or other tools, partners keep track of ideas that emerge from the discussion and keep them visible for other participants to react to and discuss.
 - e. **Group Voting:** Partners include a studio session in which studio participants can vote on 1–3 ideas that they believe are especially important to the problem space. It may be useful to follow the [KJ Method](#) in which similar ideas are clustered and combined and participants are asked to prioritize different clusters. In the next round attendees assess each idea for feasibility,
 - f. **Focus Groups:** Partners (or participants themselves) may hear from select constituencies affected by the problem area to understand what their concerns are and how they hope the problem might be addressed.
 - g. **Site Visits:** Partners (or participants themselves) may visit facilities and talk to experts relevant to the problem area to understand the challenges that service providers or beneficiaries face.
2. **Mid-Term Summary Report/Presentation:** Following the first studio, The RD4C team and its partners will reflect on the discussion and identify the most promising, data-related approaches for addressing the problem area. The RD4C team and its partners will then develop a short summary report or presentation describing these approaches and the discussion that led to them. This report/presentation can be shared with all stakeholders participating in the studio series prior to the second studio or at the start of it.
3. **Studio 2 (Evaluation):** The second studio seeks to evaluate the approaches developed in Studio 1 and validate them according to relevance, feasibility, and timeliness. After discussing the action items in a collaborative, semi-moderated fashion, participants may be asked to develop a strategy or series of actions that can allow these items to be realized (e.g. if a challenge identified in Studio 1 was the absence of training resources, Studio 2 would ask participants to think what training would entail, who would be responsible for it, and the resources needed). The goal at the end of this process will be to have a short list of **Policies or Prototypes Selected** that the partners can pursue as well as an actionable strategy or blueprint through which this prototype can be pursued by the partner institution.

Studio 2 may include a number of activities to support participants through this process, described below:

- a. **Presentation:** The RDC4 team or partners may provide a short 10–15 minute presentation on the criteria they intend to use to evaluate solutions and strategies to achieve them.
- b. **Group Voting:** The RD4C team and its partners may ask participants to vote on which 1–3 solutions they consider to be the most useful to develop further.
- c. **Local Voices:** Partner institutions may invite beneficiaries or other relevant groups to talk about their own personal lived experiences and the ways that potential solutions could affect them.
- d. **Roleplay or Simulation:** The RD4C team and partners may organize participants into an roleplaying exercise in which they act in response to a crisis or incident using the identified solutions. Participants may represent internal or external stakeholders and identify pathways toward real-world action.



Example: Responsible Data for Children in Uganda

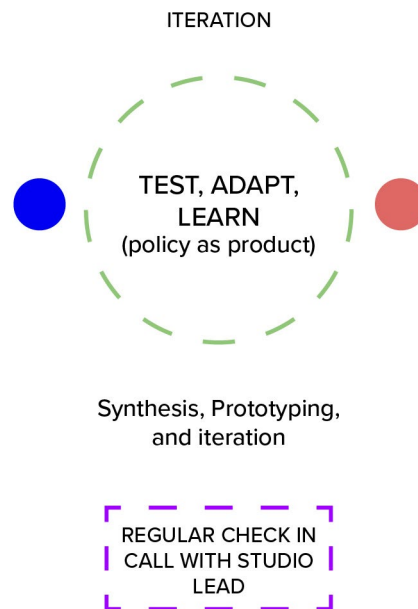
The RD4C team arrived in Uganda and—after meetings with UNICEF and UNHCR senior management—hosted two initial studios. The first of these studios, held Monday, 19 September 2023, included participation from national policy-making stakeholders such as Uganda’s Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development; Ministry of Health; and the Office of the Prime Minister; Bureau of Statistics. A second studio, held Wednesday, 21 September, involved field practitioners directly involved with providing MHPSS services to refugee children. Both studios looked at identification and ideation. After a brief presentation, the RD4C team pushed a to list the challenges and opportunities that existed across the data lifecycle and how these opportunities and challenges might be acted upon.

Following these studios, a site visit to Mbarara Regional Referral Hospital and a series of focus groups at Nakivale Refugee Settlement, the RD4C team and its partners UNICEF and UNHCR Uganda held a brief discussion on which issues to focus on for a final studio.

After synthesizing insights into a presentation, the RD4C team and its partners held a final studio in Kampala on Friday, 23 September. Drawing from promising themes from the previous two meetings, the partners asked participants to develop strategies for developing a taxonomy for MHPSS data, developing a data catalog and directory, and a responsible data governance framework. In a break-out group format facilitated by RD4C organizers, participants identified several action items that the Government of Uganda and others could take to achieve these goals.



PHASE 3 — Synthesis, Prototyping and Iteration: Test, Adapt, and Learn



In the third phase, The RD4C team and partners synthesize the results of the studio exercises into a “synthesis document” (**Lessons Learned**) that describes the problem space, studio processes, and proposed solutions in as much detail as possible. This document can serve both as a source of information for studio participants and the general public and a guide for the partners themselves to rapidly prototype, test, and iterate one or more of the solutions identified in Studio 1 according to the strategy identified in Studio 2.

- 1. Prototypes:** Based on the inputs from the two studios, The RD4C team and its partners co-design a prototype policy or program to address the problem first identified in Phase 1. This output may vary in length, scope, and type but is ideally specific enough to be immediately actionable by the partners and their collaborators. This process can be conducted using rapid prototyping methods.
- 2. Testing, Adapting, and Learning:** The partner institutions then take the co-developed prototype and deploy it in the context in which they work. For a period of 1–2 months, the partners provide one another regular updates on how the prototype has been used, any changes that have been made upon deploying it in the field, and what the overall experience has been.

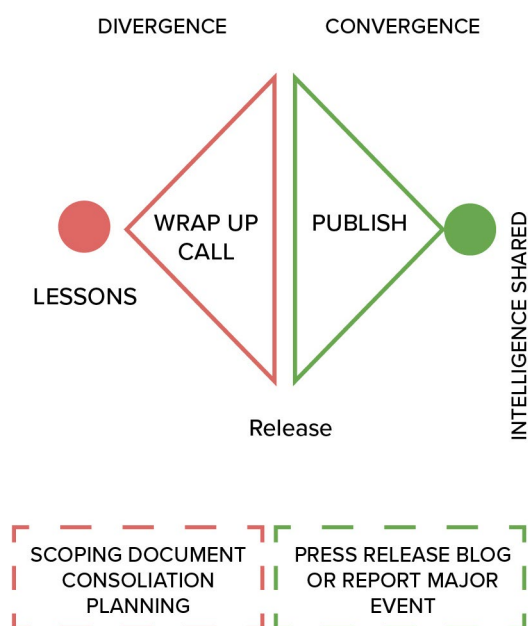


Example: Responsible Data for Children in Uganda

Upon leaving Uganda, the Responsible Data for Children initiative produced a short report synthesizing major findings and identifying several possible prototypes for the Government of Uganda and its partners to pursue further.

UNICEF and UNHCR Uganda subsequently reviewed and revised this document and presented it to Uganda's National MHPSS working group and other stakeholders for discussion and potential implementation. This work has fed into the government's efforts to update and standardize its taxonomy around MHPSS and the government's effort to integrate MHPSS related indicators into an ongoing indicator mapping exercise spearheaded by the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development.

PHASE 4 – Release: Wrap-Up Call and Publish



In this final stage of the methodology, the partners assess the solutions together with stakeholders and develop a final report, blog, or event summarizing the results of their work (**Intelligence Shared**).

- 1. Wrap Up Call:** Partners hold a final call to reflect on their experiences with the methodology and its outputs. This call allows partners to understand one another's experiences and how their work might be improved for the future.
- 2. Publication:** The partners publish a summary of the engagement in a public setting. This summary could take the form of a press release, a blog or report, or a presentation at a major event. This work serves as a public record of the engagement and to support larger efforts to promote responsible data for children.



Example: Responsible Data for Children in Uganda

The Responsible Data for Children initiative has remained engaged with its partners UNICEF and UNHCR Uganda to understand their experiences and the results of the work. They subsequently presented the results of the engagement at a [UN Data Strategy event hosted by the UN Secretary-General's Office](#).

Closing Reflections

The RD4C Studio methodology has allowed the RD4C team to rapidly assess data responsibility challenges, co-develop solutions with actors in the field, and test them. If this work is of interest to you, you would like to partner with RD4C, or you are interested in deploying this methodology yourself, please reach out to us at rd4c@thegovlab.org.