

THE **INS** GROUP PLAYBOOK

INSIGHTFUL LEADERSHIP. LASTING IMPACT.

ISSUE 12

GOAL: Achieve Success with Adaptive Thinking and Winning Innovation

A MESSAGE FROM OUR HEAD COACH

It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change. ~ Charles Darwin

In a world of rapid change and ongoing challenges, nonprofits are being called to respond and lead with purpose, agility, and creativity. This Playbook issue showcases what success looks like when organizations embrace adaptive thinking. It celebrates bold ideas, reimagined resources, and the courage to learn through trial, error, and persistence.

The main article offers a compelling look at nonprofits rewriting the rules. From 412 Food Rescue, which quickly retooled its app to deliver food safely during the pandemic, to GiveDirectly, which challenges traditional funding norms by providing direct cash assistance. These organizations show that innovation often begins by asking, "What can we do with what we already have?"

I see that same spirit in the **Southern Virginia Latino Association (SOVALA)** spotlighted in this issue, an organization I have the privilege of supporting through strategic planning and capacity-building efforts. From its grassroots beginnings, SOVALA has become a trusted anchor for Latino families in southern Virginia. Through planning, deep listening, and an unwavering commitment to community, SOVALA is a shining example of what this Playbook is all about: resilience, relevance, and results.

I am especially inspired by the Playbook's "Take Five" practice. These short, honest check-ins invite teams to share what didn't work and reflect without judgment. It's a powerful way to build trust, nurture creativity, and remind everyone that mistakes are just steps on the path to impact. I have seen firsthand how this openness helps nonprofits move forward more clearly and confidently.

The INS Group is proud to partner with organizations like SOVALA that are shaping the future with purpose and adaptability. If this Playbook proves anything, meaningful change follows when we embrace curiosity and lean into learning.

Let us keep growing, transforming, and reimagining together.



RUTH PEEBLES, MPA
PRESIDENT & FOUNDER



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ADAPTIVE NONPROFITS TURN CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

Nonprofits face tighter budgets, shifting needs, and global curveballs that demand constant adaptation. Standing still isn't an option. Thriving in this moment takes bold thinking, deep collaboration, and the guts to ask **"What if?"** and then act. It's less about flashy innovation and more about curiosity, resilience, and real progress.

Below, we highlight six nonprofits that aren't just surviving, they are redefining what is possible to build a more sustainable, impactful future.

1 Repurposing Existing Programs

Innovation doesn't always mean starting from scratch. Some organizations rethink what they already have, adapting existing programs to meet new needs, save resources, and spark meaningful change. It's a shift from "What can we build?" to **"How can we reshape what we have?"**

CASE STUDY: 412 FOOD RESCUE

When the pandemic disrupted food distribution, 412 Food Rescue reimaged its existing Food Rescue Hero app by introducing a No-Contact Rescue Protocol. This quick pivot kept food moving safely – and became a lasting innovation.

Today, that one adjustment helped power:



150+ million
pounds of
food rescued



59,000+
volunteer
drivers



Expansion to 24+
cities across the
U.S. and Canada

By reimaging existing tools, 412 Food Rescue transformed a crisis into a catalyst and built a national model for impact.

2 Failing Forward

Innovation comes with risk, and risk sometimes means failure. The most forward-thinking organizations don't hide missteps; they learn from them. They ask, **"What can we learn from this?"** and **"How can we do better next time?"** and turn setbacks into springboards for growth.

CASE STUDY: THE HEWLETT FOUNDATION

The Hewlett Foundation embraces failure as a tool for learning. Instead of burying mistakes, they spotlight them through initiatives like the internal "Worst Grant" (later "Worst Strategy") Contest, which invites staff to reflect on what didn't work and why. They even publicly examined a \$20 million initiative that fell short, using it to spark honest dialogue and improve future efforts. By normalizing failure as feedback, Hewlett builds a culture where learning drives lasting impact.

3 Listening Deeply to Communities

The most effective solutions don't come to communities – they come from them. By shifting from a top-down model to true collaboration, organizations build trust, equity, and solutions that have lasting impact.

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Take 5

We learn as much from our mistakes as we do from our successes. During staff meetings, take time to share efforts that didn't work to inspire growth and spark discussions.

These short, judgment-free check-ins let team members reflect on challenges and share lessons learned. A culture of openness and curiosity builds trust, encourages a growth mindset, and fuels creativity.

Idealist.org calls these "failure shares" or "failure meetings" and offers a practical guide to help you get started. Quick and meaningful, they strengthen team connection and empower everyone to move forward with clarity, resilience, and fresh ideas.



Southern Virginia
SOVALA
Latino Association

SOVALA began as a small but determined advocacy group based in Martinsville, Virginia focused on immigration support. However, as the Latino community's needs expanded, so did the organization's mission. It has become a reliable strategic nonprofit committed to education, empowerment, and trust. Under the leadership of Executive Director Hur Eli Marin Salgado, SOVALA is proving that progress doesn't always come from radical reinvention; it comes from deep listening, clever problem-solving, and consistently showing up for their community.

"We'd hold forums with the sheriff's office, help students navigate college, and partner with the Mexican consulate for ID services," explained Salgado. "That's when we realized the community didn't just need quick fixes, they needed long-term, reliable support."

Turning grassroots passion into a sustainable organization required a mindset shift. SOVALA began tracking resources, building a community database, and positioning itself as a dependable source of support, especially crucial during political uncertainty when accurate information and trust were essential.

A prime example? Quarter-sized flyers. With the community spread across rural areas, door-to-door outreach wasn't feasible. Instead, SOVALA designed pocket-sized flyers that people could carry, share at work, and

Digital innovation is no longer optional for nonprofits – it is a strategic imperative to fuel growth and resilience. Digital-first nonprofits lead the way, using adaptive thinking and tech-forward strategies to deepen impact.

12.7% Growth, making them more resilient during economic shifts.

99% Surge in online revenue over five years, compared to just 36% growth in offline giving.

18.6% Increase in major gifts.

32.4% Rise in mid-level donations.

These numbers speak clearly: embracing digital innovation enhances donor relationships and builds long-term sustainability.



Please reach out for a free consultation to learn how our custom solutions fit your needs.

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