SESSION 2 · NCCHCA ANNUAL PRIMARY CARE CONFERENCE 2026

Executive Decision-Making in a Volatile Environment

Leading through funding, policy, and operational risk — without losing decision discipline.

60-minute executive workshop · Tools included

EP Hughes Consulting

WORKSHOP MAP

Your 60 minutes

Six working blocks. Each one stress-tests one piece of your decision method.

Time	Segment	Output
0–6	Define volatility and decision pressure	*Live volatility signal*
6–16	Separate facts, forecasts, assumptions, values	*Cleaner executive conversation*
16–30	Volatility-tested decision workflow	*Non-negotiables + options*
30–43	Scenario + sensitivity practice	*Robustness check*
43–54	Bias under pressure + decision record	*30/60/90 review plan*
54–60	Commitment and handoff	*One action next week*

THE PROBLEM

Volatility changes the decision environment.

What's moving is not your job description — only the conditions you're doing it in.

WHAT'S MOVING

Funding scenarios & grant conditions

Medicaid managed care requirements

Payer behavior & revenue cycle

Workforce availability & burnout

Cyber, vendor, and digital risk

WHAT LEADERS STILL OWE

Clear rationale

Visible trade-offs

Execution discipline

A review cadence when reality changes

Volatility doesn't change what you owe. It changes how you have to deliver it.

TEACHING MOMENT

Confidence doesn't come from certainty.

It comes from being explicit about four things — before you decide.

01

What must be true

for this decision to work

02

What could change

and shift the answer

03

What we will monitor

as the leading signal

04

When we will revisit

the call deliberately

Strong leaders don't wait for perfect information. They make assumptions explicit — and book the revisit point on the calendar before they leave the room.

SHARED LANGUAGE

Label the inputs before you debate them.

Facts, forecasts, assumptions, and values are not the same animal.

Fact

EXECUTIVE QUESTION

What do we know now?

EXAMPLE

Current payer mix; AR days; open positions.

Forecast

EXECUTIVE QUESTION

What may happen?

EXAMPLE

Medicaid payment timing; grant renewal; denial trend.

Assumption

EXECUTIVE QUESTION

What are we relying on?

EXAMPLE

Staff can absorb workflow change.

Value

EXECUTIVE QUESTION

What matters most when conflict?

EXAMPLE

Access vs. margin; speed vs. optionality.

Volatility worsens confusion when teams debate different input types as if they were the same thing.

CORE WORKFLOW

Volatility-tested decision workflow

Six stages. Each one protects against a different way volatility breaks a decision.

01	02	03	04	05	06
Frame	**Non-negotiables**	**Options**	**Scenarios**	**Sensitivity**	**Record + Review**
What must we decide, by when	Mission, cash, compliance, safety	Three credible alternatives	Base, downside, upside	What would flip the call	Rationale and 30/60/90 cadence

A good volatility workflow protects three things: mission, cash, and decision momentum.

The Canvas, upgraded for volatility.

Two new fields — Volatility signal and Trigger — make the moving parts visible.

Decision

What must we decide now?

Volatility signal

NEW

What changed or could change?

Non-negotiables

Mission, compliance, safety, cash, board limits.

Options

Three credible choices — include a hybrid.

Scenario

Base / downside / upside.

Trigger

NEW

What tells us to revisit?

Owner

Who acts, and who monitors?

Full editable Canvas in your handout. Use it on a real decision before next Monday.

ACTIVITY 1 · 6 MINUTES

Run a volatility scan on your real portfolio.

Four domains. Name what's moving fastest in each.

1

Funding

Grant renewal, cash timing, payer rates

2

Policy

Medicaid managed care, HRSA, state/federal changes

3

Operations

Capacity, cyber & vendor risk, access demand

4

People

Vacancies, burnout, leadership bandwidth

PROMPT

Which signal could change your decision fastest? Pick one. We'll work it for the rest of the hour.

SCENARIO PLANNING

Three scenarios. One page.

A scenario isn't a prediction. It's a rehearsal for action.

BASE **Expected**	DOWNSIDE **Adverse**	UPSIDE **Favorable**
WHAT CHANGES Funding holds. Payer behavior consistent with last quarter.	WHAT CHANGES Cash exposure rises. Revenue delayed. Compliance pressure.	WHAT CHANGES New funds. Improved rate. Capacity unlocked.
LEADERSHIP RESPONSE Proceed with planned option. Routine monthly review.	LEADERSHIP RESPONSE Conserve cash. Escalate review. Pause discretionary.	LEADERSHIP RESPONSE Accelerate or expand. Confirm owner and resource.
TRIGGER TO ACTIVATE Monthly dashboard stable.	TRIGGER TO ACTIVATE AR > target; grant condition triggers; payer risk.	TRIGGER TO ACTIVATE Confirmed opportunity + owner identified.

The point is not to be right. The point is to be ready.

PRACTICE CASE

A funding and revenue cycle squeeze.

Table task — 8 minutes. Bring it to the volatility workflow.

THE SITUATION

Your health center faces delayed cash receipts, rising denials from a key payer, and uncertainty in a grant-funded service line. The leadership team must decide whether to pause a planned expansion, proceed, or redesign the plan.

AT YOUR TABLE

1. Name 2 non-negotiables
2. List 3 credible options
3. Choose one trigger to revisit

DEBRIEF LENS

- ? *What did you treat as fact?*
- ? *What assumption is most fragile?*
- ? *What's the board-ready trade-off?*

ROBUSTNESS

What would flip your decision?

Three executive questions. If none can flip your call, you may be defending a preference.

01

Cash

At what cash exposure or timing delay does the preferred option become unsafe?

02

Compliance

What grant, Medicaid managed care, or HRSA requirement would force escalation?

03

Capacity

What staffing or operational constraint makes the recommendation unrealistic?

If nothing can flip your recommendation, you're defending a preference — not testing a decision.

BIAS UNDER PRESSURE

Pressure amplifies bias. Plan for it.

Four traps that get worse under volatility — and four counters that fit executive time.

Confirmation bias

Searching for evidence that supports the urgent option.

Counter: One disconfirming question per claim.

Rationalization

Retrofitting reasons after a preferred answer emerges.

Counter: Decision rationale written *before* recommendation.

False consensus

Mistaking quiet rooms for aligned teams.

Counter: Independent first takes — in writing, before discussion.

Loss aversion

Overweighting visible losses; underweighting future opportunity.

Counter: One downside scenario *plus* one upside, planned in parallel.

TOOL · 30 / 60 / 90 REVIEW CADENCE

Turn a one-time bet into a learning loop.

Three review checkpoints. Each asks a different question.

CHECKPOINT 30 DAYS	CHECKPOINT 60 DAYS	CHECKPOINT 90 DAYS
THE QUESTION: **Are early signals moving as expected?**	THE QUESTION: **What assumption should change?**	THE QUESTION: **Do we stay, adapt, or stop?**
EVIDENCE TO REVIEW: *Leading indicators, implementation issues, traction*	EVIDENCE TO REVIEW: *Financial, workforce, compliance updates*	EVIDENCE TO REVIEW: *Outcome indicators + scenario triggers*

The cadence turns volatile decisions into learning loops instead of one-time bets.

TOOL · DECISION RECORD

The Record, upgraded for volatility.

Five fields, written before the outcome arrives. Scenario triggers make it volatility-ready.

Decision / recommendation	*We recommend…*
Non-negotiables	*Mission, cash, compliance, safety — what we won't trade off.*
Scenario triggers	*Base: ___ · Downside: ___ · Upside: ___*
Rationale / trade-off	*We accept X to protect Y, because…*
Owner + 30/60/90 cadence	*Owner: ___ · Reviews on dates ___ / ___ / ___*

Editable record in your handout. Pair it with the 30/60/90 cadence — they're designed to work together.

THE SERIES

Where Session 2 fits.

Three sessions. One layered method. This one is the pressure test.

01

Decision quality workflow

Six-link framework. Canvas, matrix, record.

02 YOU ARE HERE

Volatility-tested decisions

Workflow under pressure. Scenarios + cadence.

03

Calibrated intuition + stakeholder narrative

Blink Check. Speed and trust.

Can your decision discipline hold when the environment is moving? That's today's question.

CLOSE · COMMITMENT

One volatility upgrade. This week.

Small enough to do. Important enough to matter.

01

Write

One downside scenario
for a current decision.

02

Name

One trigger that tells
the team to revisit.

03

Schedule

One 30-day review point
with an owner.

Volunteers — one sentence each. What's the upgrade you're taking back?

DISCUSSION

What's moving fastest for you right now?

Thank you. See you in Session 3.

REFERENCES & SOURCES

Sources and further reading

— NCCHCA conference submission packet: Session 2 objectives and outcomes.

— Methling, Abdeen & von Nitzsch (2022). Heuristics in multi-criteria decision-making: value of reflection on objectives, alternatives, and weights.

— Decision quality practice: distinguishing process quality from outcome luck; use of review cadence and decision records.

— Schoemaker, P. J. H. (1995). Scenario Planning: A Tool for Strategic Thinking. Sloan Management Review.

— Hubbard, D. W. (2014). How to Measure Anything, 3rd ed. Wiley. (Sensitivity testing under uncertainty.)

— HRSA Health Center Program Compliance Manual — for governance and scenario triggers.