



Leveraging Automation and AI to Strengthen Financial Operations

From crisis recovery to financial leadership



Snapshot of GHAPS



Grand Haven serves approximately 5,000 students across multiple school buildings and programs. The district is 100 square miles in Northwest Ottawa County.



\$100 million total expenditure budget, including General Fund, Capital Projects, and Federal/State programs.



Over 800 employees supporting instruction, operations, and student services.



Strong tax base with non-homestead exceeding \$1 billion, making stewardship of resources essential.



Why We're Here

To Restore & Protect Public Trust

The community depends on school financial leaders to steward taxpayer dollars responsibly. Once trust is broken, it takes years to repair — our role is to prevent that breach and rebuild confidence.

To Safeguard Educational Resources

Every financial decision directly impacts the classroom. Strong financial leadership ensures funds stay focused on students, programs, and long-term district priorities.

Build Sustainable, Transparent Financial Systems

Compliance is not enough. We must implement structures, policies, and tools that promote ongoing transparency, efficiency, and audit-readiness — even during leadership transitions or crises.

Lead the Profession Forward Through Innovation

We are no longer just gatekeepers. We are strategic leaders. Leveraging data, AI, and modern reporting is essential to elevate school finance and model best practices across the K-12 landscape.



The Crisis at GHAPS

In **November 2021**, GHAPS uncovered suspicious bond fund payments tied to fraudulent vendor activity, triggering a forensic audit and review of internal controls.

Key Process Implementations:

-  Improved vendor verification
-  Invoice approval all electronic
-  Rigorous accounts payable check run review
-  Annual fraud awareness training
-  Administrator Finance Handbook implemented
-  Cash handling policies updated
-  Additional reporting for financial transparency



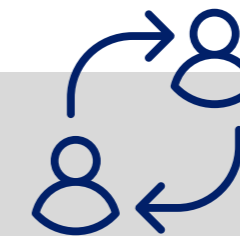
\$944,410 in fraudulent activity discovered

Multiple invoices issued and paid to Infinity Electric

Impact of the Crisis



Financial losses



Administrative turnover



Eroded public trust



Impact on Operations

Trust Collapsed

Every decision was viewed through a lens of suspicion.

Implemented individual employment contracts

Operational Burden

Manual processes and added requirements strained capacity

More audits, staff, approvals, and hand-offs slowed operations and change.

Heavy Scrutiny

Decisions faced intense review and public questioning

Reinforced the need for strong controls and clear communication.

Workflow Inefficiencies

Paper-heavy, manual processes increased errors and delays

Valuable staff time was tied up in repetitive, low-value tasks.

The New Reality

We must operate with a heightened sense of vigilance

Sustained focus on controls, training, and continuous improvement.

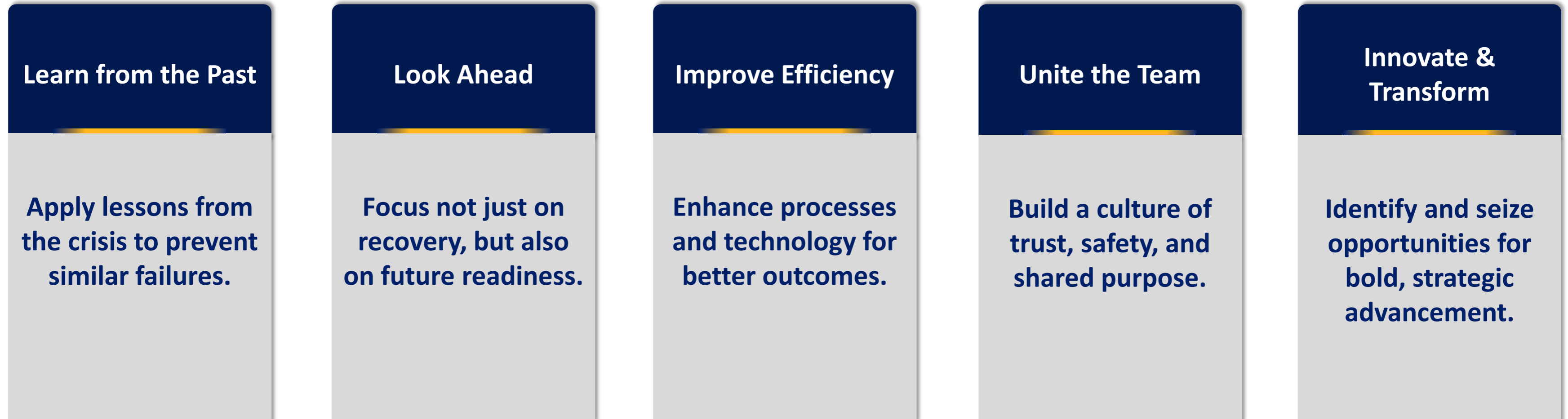
Key Takeaway:

The crisis exposed vulnerabilities, but it also created urgency.

It became the catalyst to modernize processes, strengthen operations, and implement innovative processes.

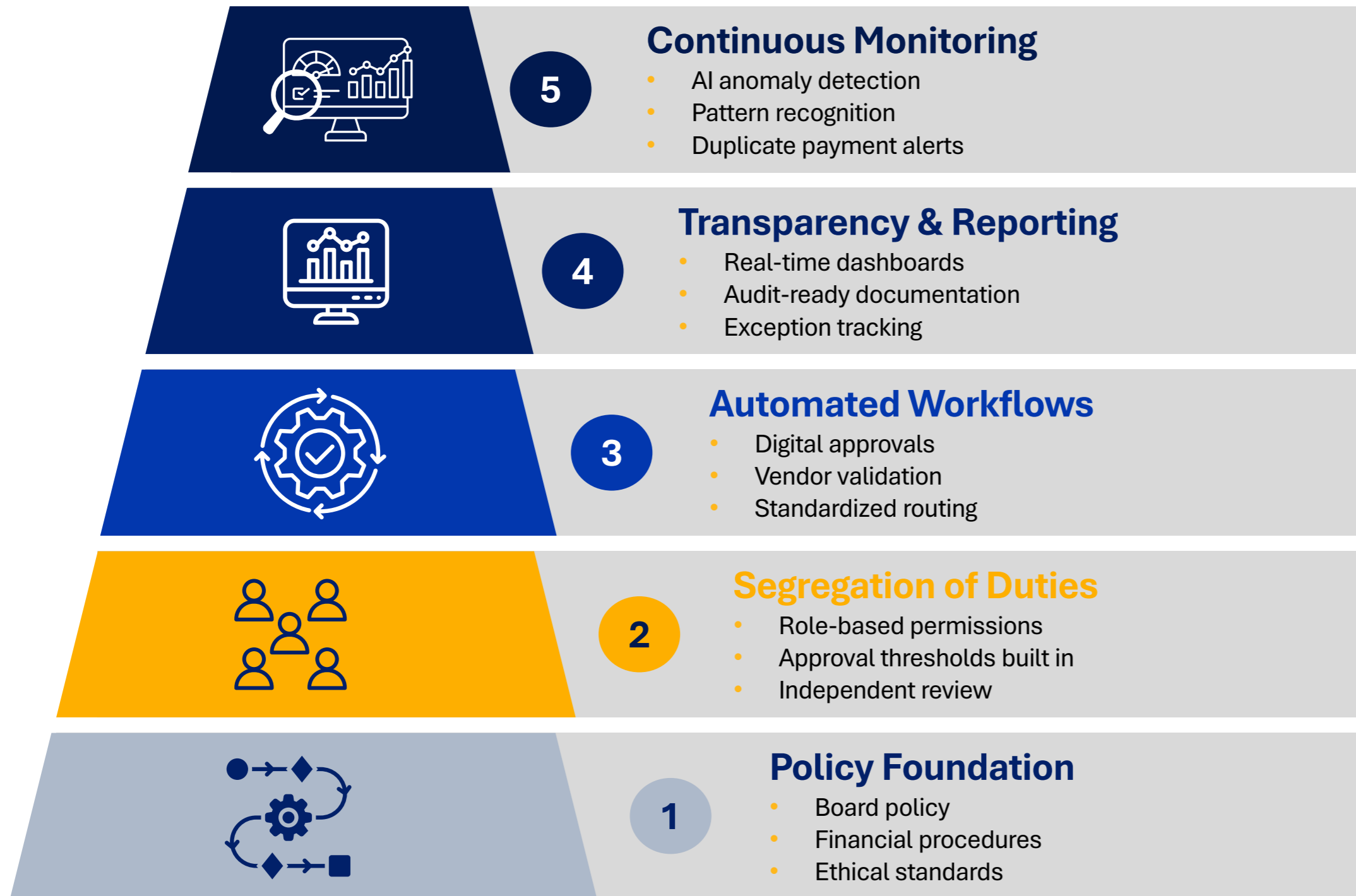


Turning Point – Why Rebuilding Wasn't Enough





Modern Internal Controls Framework



After the crisis, GHAPS did not just add controls. We **redesigned the control environment** to reduce reliance on manual oversight and **increase system reliability**.

Goal:

Create processes that remain strong even during staff turnover or leadership transitions.

Key Shift:

Controls embedded into systems rather than **dependent** on individuals.

Why This Matters

Strengthen consistency



Reduces fraud risk

Builds long-term public trust



Why Invoice Automation?



Tighten Controls



Increase Efficiency



Improve Visibility



Future Readiness

1

Standardizes approvals and reduces fraud and error risk.

2

Cuts manual work and frees staff for higher-value tasks.

3

Provides real-time status, audit trail, and accountability.

4

Creates a workflow that can adapt as district needs evolve.

The Right Tool:

Invoice automation is the right strategic tool to transform accounts payable from a manual cost center into a value driver, freeing our team to focus on strategic cash management rather than paper-pushing.



Invoice Process Before & After

BEFORE	AFTER
Manual and Slow	Automated and Efficient
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Paper-based process✓ Invoices delayed✓ Manual approvals, chasing signatures✓ Outdated audit trail✓ Repetitive status follow-ups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Digital invoice workflow✓ Automated approval routing✓ Fraud controls embedded✓ Audit-ready, searchable records✓ Role-based status dashboards

Key Outcome:

Invoices now move through a digital, centrally controlled process that is transparent, secure, and more efficient.



Implementation Steps

Phase 1

Payment Hub

- ✓ Centralized payment processing
- ✓ Vendor outreach and enrollment managed by Commerce
- ✓ ACH, card, and check payment options
- ✓ Card payments prioritized to maximize rebate revenue

Phase 2

Full Invoice Automation

- ✓ Digital invoice submission
- ✓ Automated workflow routing and approvals
- ✓ Reduced manual data entry and handling
- ✓ Modern audit trail and documentation
- ✓ Reduced time spent on AP process

Key Takeaway:

We started by modernizing how payments were issued, then expanded into full automation to create a more efficient and controlled end-to-end process.



Staff Adjustment & Training

Gradual Rollout

- **Started small** to monitor issues
- Refined workflows and processes
- Built confidence before scaling up

1:1 Trainings

- **Delivered personalized training**
- Met with staff based on role
- Focused on their responsibilities

Adjustment & Support

- **Provided time** to adapt and ask questions
- Responded to feedback throughout the rollout
- Give ongoing assistance as needed

Key Takeaway:

Successful adoption requires more than new software. It requires intentional support for the people using it and ensuring they have bought into the reason for the change.



Efficiency Gains

Our investment in invoice automation has generated measurable results through rebate revenue and time savings. This allows us to reinvest money, but also time into improving other areas of the district.


- 1 Faster Processing**
Invoice approval times dropped from several days down to an average of less than a week from received to processed, saving **over 3,000 hours** of staff time per year.
- 2 Cost Savings**
Increased rebate revenue through Commerce Bank managed payments and increasing card spend volume by over \$1.5 million per year.
- 3 Fewer Errors**
Automation removes the manual element where human error could occur
- 4 Improved Visibility**
Gained real-time insights through a centralized dashboard that displays invoice status, workflow efficiency, top vendor spend, number of invoices processed, and days payable outstanding.

Key Benefit:

Invoice automation lets us do more with less, redirecting time and resources to higher priorities.

Example




Grand Haven
Area Public Schools

[Forgot your password?](#)

Login
Reset

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CommercePayments | AP Invoice Automation

Inbox

New Documents (8) | Pended (0) | CC'd (2)

Voucher #	Invoice #	Invoice Date	Invoice Amount (\$)
10004263	25.1501	10/1/2025	\$555.00
10004381	2500002565	10/8/2025	\$1,560.20
10004358	25-0006812	9/30/2025	\$3,447.00
10004417	56480-07	9/30/2025	\$6,280.00
10004776	74949	10/22/2025	\$8,000.00

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ommercePayments | AP Invoice Automation

Invoice Processing

Invoice

Invoice Number: 2500002565
 Invoice Date: 10/8/2025
 Amount (\$): 1,560.20
 Allocated: \$1,560.20
 Remaining: \$0.00

Invoice Description: TAX COLLECTION FEE

Invoice

Invoice Number: 2500002565
 Invoice Date: 10/8/2025
 Amount (\$): 1,560.20
 Allocated: \$1,560.20
 Remaining: \$0.00

Invoice Description: TAX COLLECTION FEE

Quantity	Description	Unit Price	Amount
1,076.0	TAX COLLECTION FEE	\$1.45	\$1,560.20

SECOND HALF (50%) OF 2025 TAXES @ \$2.90 PER PARCEL, 1076 PARCELS TOTAL
 Total Invoice: \$1,560.20
 Credits Applied: \$0.00
 Pmts Applied: \$0.00
 Invoice Balance: \$1,560.20

Payments may be made by credit card, call (844) 783-4763 or pay online at [www.corcentric.com](#)

Allocations | Line Items

Account Search	Batch Year	Fund	Function	Object	Program	State Code	Location	Amount (\$)	Reference	Actions
	26	11	1259	7620	BUO	0	000	1,560.20		



Why AI?

We integrated AI to enhance our financial processes with advanced capabilities that **assist in auditing transactions** with **faster speed** and greater accuracy than human capabilities.

1

Smart Matching (Invoice Automation)

AI quickly reviews invoices uploaded and provides all necessary information to feed back into our ERP system.

2

Improved Accuracy

AI powered review and validation reduce manual data entry mistakes.

3

Fraud Detection

AI tools flag unusual patterns or inconsistencies based on the information provided while building the tool. This assists in preventing fraud and errors.

4

Time Savings

AI Tools scan faster and more consistently, saving significant time compared to **manual review**.

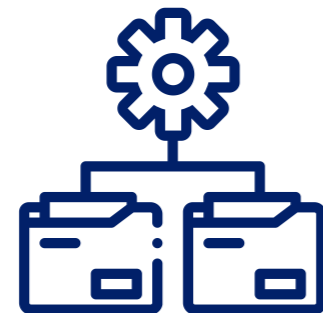


AI Agent Concept



Data Analysis

Scans and interprets financial data



Task Automation

Handles repetitive processes



Risk Alerts

Flags anomalies and risks



Smart Insights

Generates reports & recommendations





Fraud Risks in Schools



Fake or Altered Invoices

Fraudulent invoices bypass controls and lead to improper payments.



Payroll Fraud

Ghost employees or inflated hours siphon off school funds.



Unauthorized Vendors

Payments go to vendors that are not approved or verified.



Weak Oversight

Manual processes make it harder to catch issues early.



AI Agent Examples



Check Register Review

AI agent reviews check register information for abnormal patterns and flags invoices for further investigation or review.

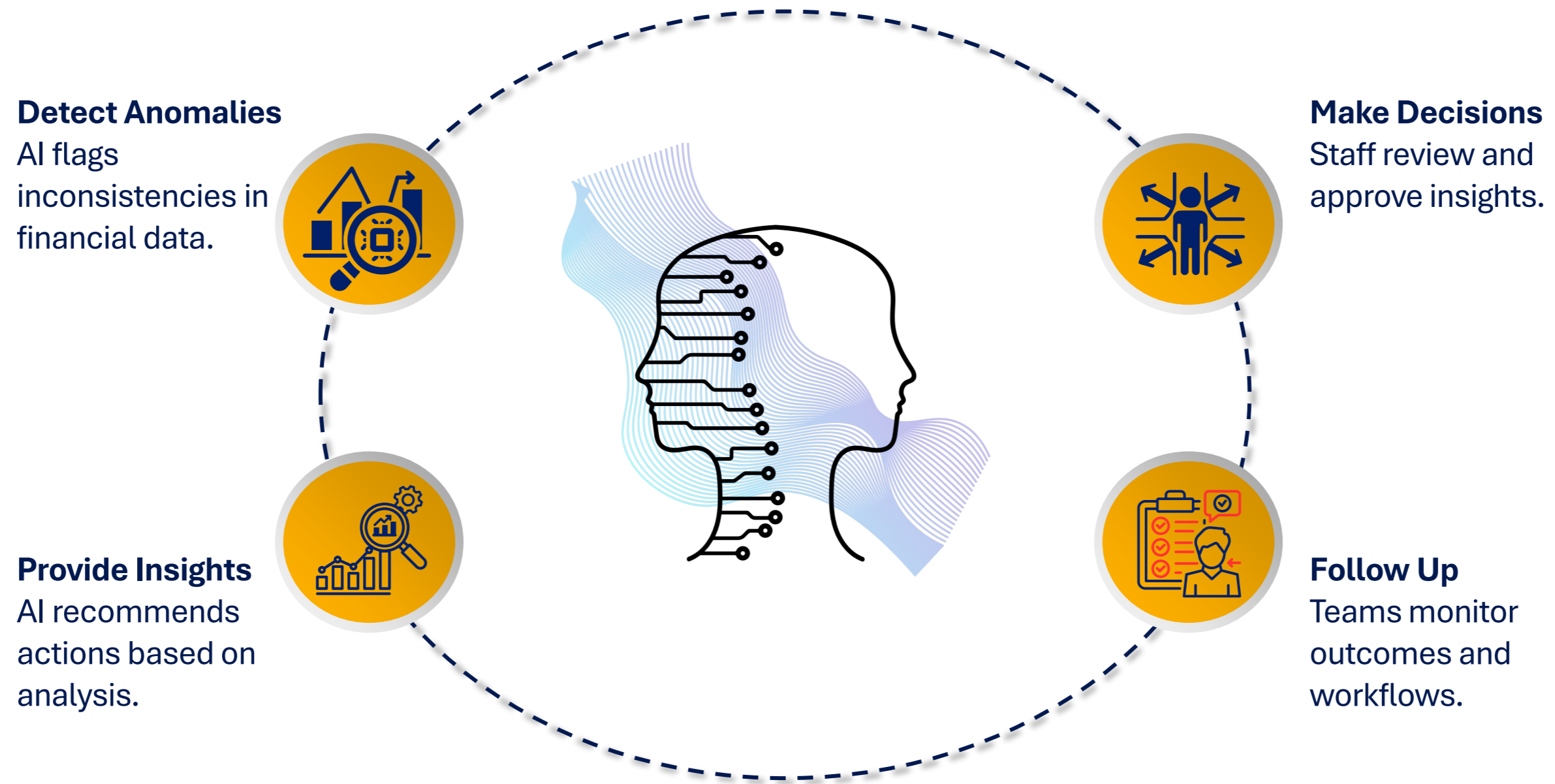


PO Splitting

AI agent detects purchase orders that have been split to sidestep approval policies and prevent proper oversight.



Human & AI Partnership





Things to Consider with AI

Data Security

- Protect sensitive information
- Ensure AI vendors use secure data practices

FERPA Compliance

- Safeguard student educational records under FERPA regulations

Personal Information

- Be cautious when handling personal and employee data
- Follow privacy laws and district policies

Bias & Transparency

- Monitor for algorithmic bias in AI systems
- Maintain transparency in decisions and processes



Getting Started





In Closing



Integrity

Build systems that protect public funds and support transparency.



Efficiency

Automate routing work so staff can focus on higher-value financial leadership.



Innovation

Use AI thoughtfully to enhance oversight, improve decision-making, and prepare for the future.