

The Nonprofit Dimensions Planning Workbook: For Nonprofit Finance Teams

Step-by-step exercises to clean up your coding and design dimensions that work.



Who This Is For

This workbook is for nonprofit finance teams who are planning or redesigning their G/L structure with dimensions – whether you're:

- moving to a new finance system,
- cleaning up an overgrown chart of accounts, or
- rethinking how your dimensions support reporting and budgeting.

It's especially useful if you want:

- clearer, simpler dimensions that people actually use,
- a structure that supports board, funder, and restricted fund reporting, and
- a chance to step back and decide which lenses truly matter (and which can go).

If you're staring at your current coding structure thinking, "We can't keep adding one more segment forever," this workbook is for you.

How to Use This Worksheet



Solo pass (20–30 minutes):

Complete Sections 1–4 with your first honest draft.



Team session (45–60 minutes):

Review Sections 5–7 with your finance team + a program leader if possible.



Commit to next steps (15 minutes):

Identify the top reporting outcome to improve first and confirm which lenses support it.

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What You'll Get Out of This Worksheet

By the time you finish, you will have:

- A clear map of what you track today (even if it's not “official” dimensions)
- A simple way to spot where data gets messy or duplicated
- A draft dimension structure that supports board reporting, funder reporting, and restricted fund tracking
- Clarity on which lenses matter most for decisions — and which can go
- A prioritized list of reports that would see immediate improvement

What to Do With Your Results

When you've worked through the pages in this workbook, you can use your notes to:

- Brief your implementation partner or internal project team
- Align finance and program leaders on which reports matter most
- Sense-check your draft dimensions before you lock them into a new system

You don't have to fix everything at once. Start with one priority report and one or two dimensions that will make it easier to trust.

“

You don't need a perfect structure on day one — you just need a clear, shared one you can build on.

Kinley Graham, Director of Pre-Sales, Sparkrock



SECTION 1—Quick Self-Assessment (Scorecard)

Don't overthink this — your first instinct is usually right.

Scale:

Rate each statement:

- 1 = Not true today
- 2 = Sometimes true
- 3 = Consistently true

Statement	Rating
We have a clear purpose for each dimension/lens we track.	
Our dimension values are named consistently.	
People use dimensions consistently (not just when they remember).	
Our board reports are easy to produce and easy to trust.	
Our funder/grant reports don't require heavy cleanup.	
Restricted vs. unrestricted reporting is clear and reliable.	
We can explain variances quickly (what happened + where + why).	
Our reporting structure supports program performance (“program margin”) when relevant.	

SECTION 1—Quick Self-Assessment (Scorecard)

Don't overthink this — your first instinct is usually right.

Quick Results

Top 2 strengths:

1. _____

2. _____

Top 2 pain points:

1. _____

2. _____

If we fixed ONE thing first, it would be: ¹

1. _____



SECTION 2 — Your Organizational Context

This section helps you identify why you report the way you do — and which lenses matter most.

A) Reporting Audiences (check all that apply)

- Board / Finance Committee
- Executive Leadership
- Program Leaders / Budget Owners
- Funders / Grantors
- Auditors
- Regulators (Form 990, T3010, etc.)
- Other: _____

B) What Each Audience Must See

Board needs to see:

Funders need to see:

Restricted funding needs to show:

Internal decisions require:

SECTION 2 — Your Organizational Context

This section helps you identify why you report the way you do — and which lenses matter most.

C) How Reporting Actually Feels (pick a few)

When you think about your monthly / quarterly reporting, it feels:

- Clear and repeatable
- Technically correct, but hard to explain
- Different every time we run it
- Dependent on one or two people
- A scramble right before deadlines
- Mostly on track, just too manual

Other words: _____

When a big report is due (board, funder, audit), we mostly feel:

- Calm — we know which reports to run
- Braced — we'll get there, but it'll take work
- Worried — something will probably break or disagree
- Resigned — "this is just how it is for nonprofits"

If reporting could feel different, we'd want it to be more:

- Confident (we trust the numbers)
- Faster (less prep time)
- Consistent (same answer no matter who pulls it)
- Self-serve (fewer one-off requests)
- Less spreadsheet-dependent

D) Where Does the “Truth” Live Today?

- In our finance system
- In a spreadsheet we maintain
- In a monthly “mapping file”
- In someone’s brain (legendary, but risky)
- A mix of the above

E) Biggest Reporting Friction (rank top 3)

- Inconsistent coding
- Too many values / duplicates
- Unclear ownership
- Too many “special cases”
- Reporting structure doesn’t match how we run programs
- Restricted funds reporting is painful
- Grant/funder reporting requires rework
- We can’t isolate variances quickly
- Other: _____

SECTION 3 — Your “Lenses” Map (Everything You Track Today)

(Dimensions or not — everything counts.)

Even if you don't use formal dimensions today, you're still using lenses: spreadsheet columns, segments, custom fields, categories, filters.

Capture all of them here:

SECTION 3 — Your “Lenses” Map (Everything You Track Today)

Quick Checks

The 1-2 lenses we rely on most:

The 1 lens that causes the most confusion:

Values we suspect are duplicated:

SECTION 4 — Spotting Messy Data (Quick Diagnostic)

Use this to identify pain points before designing anything new.

A) Do you see any of these patterns? (check all that apply)

- Duplicate values (e.g., Program A / Prog A / Pgm-A)
- Same name, different meaning
- Too many values to manage
- Coding varies by person or department
- Reports differ depending on who runs them
- People “hack” new values mid-month
- Old grants/programs never retired
- “Misc/Other” is a junk drawer

B) Top 3 messy areas to investigate first:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

SECTION 5 — Dimension Design Rules (“Guardrails”)

A dimension is a consistent lens that adds meaning to a number — so reporting isn't just accurate, it's useful.

The Four Guardrails (check truth today)

Guardrail	Status (Circle)	Notes
Every dimension exists for a reason.	✓ / ! / ✗	2-3 key decisions our main dimensions support: _____
Every value has an owner.	✓ / ! / ✗	Owner role(s) for our core dimensions (Finance, Programs) _____
We keep it lean. (Fewer, better, high-quality dimensions.)	✓ / ! / ✗	Where we may have “just in case” dimensions/values: _____
We design for insight, not just compliance.	✓ / ! / ✗	Top 1-2 reports we want this structure to serve first (e.g., board, funder, restricted funds): _____

“Should This Be a Dimension?” Decision Prompts

Before adding a new lens/value, answer:

Will this change decisions or actions?

Yes No

Will we use it consistently (not just “this one time”)?

Yes No

Does it have a clear owner and naming rules?

Yes No

Can we report on it without manual manipulation?

Yes No

Rule of thumb:

If it’s “just this one report,” it belongs in documentation – *not* in your structure.

Quick Tips for Healthy Dimensions

- Any new dimension or value must pass the four questions on this page. If it doesn’t, keep it in documentation or notes, not your structure.
- Capture the “why” for every approved value: what decision it supports, who owns it, and which report it feeds.
- Keep a “maybe later” list for ideas that don’t pass yet and revisit it during regular reviews.
- Time-box experiments and clean up: after a few months, decide whether to keep, retire, or move trial lenses to notes, and do a quick dimension sweep once or twice a year.

SECTION 6—Reports People Actually Use (Outputs Inventory)

List your core recurring reports and test whether your current lenses support them without heroics.

Report	Audience	Frequency	What Decision It Supports

Continue with reports from last page.

Report	Required Lenses	Pain Level (1-5)	Fix Needed

SECTION 6 — Reports People Actually Use (Outputs Inventory)

Quick Reflection

If we improved ONE report first, it would be:

Because it impacts:

- Trust Speed Decisions Compliance All of the above

Adoption Note:

Budget owners use dimensions more consistently when they understand the reports those dimensions power.

Tip: When people understand what a dimension powers, adoption improves.

SECTION 6 — Scenario Lab (Board, Funder, Restricted, Program Margin)

Use these scenarios to pressure-test whether your chosen lenses help answer real questions quickly.

Scenario 1: Board Variance Explanation

Situation:

The board asks: “Why are we over budget this quarter – is it one-time or structural?”

The first lens I’d use is:

The second lens:

What I’m trying to isolate is:

- Program Location Grant Timing Staffing Vendor
- Other: _____

What “clean data” would look like:

What slows us down today:

SECTION 6 — Scenario Lab (Board, Funder, Restricted, Program Margin)

Use these scenarios to pressure-test whether your chosen lenses help answer real questions quickly.

Scenario 2: Funder Reporting (Compliance)

Which lens should separate funder/grant activity?

Which lens supports eligible vs. ineligible/functional categories?

Where rework happens today:

One fix that would reduce rework next quarter:

Additional Notes:

Scenario 3: Restricted Funds View

How do we identify restrictions today?

Where confusion shows up:

What rule would prevent miscoding:

Who should own this lens long-term:

Scenario 4: Program Performance (Optional)

(Use if relevant for fee-for-service or sustainability analysis.)

What counts as program revenue:

What costs follow the program directly:

Which shared costs need a consistent approach:

Which lens makes this report trustworthy:

One rule to keep it consistent month-to-month:

Optional note: Not every nonprofit needs “margin” reporting.

What matters is having a consistent way to answer sustainability questions.

SECTION 7 — Common Nonprofit Dimension Translations

Different systems use different language. What matters is the question each lens answers.

Dimension Label	Meaning	Best Use Case	Caution
Program	Services / team activities	Program budgets, outcomes alignment	Avoid vague names
Department	Functional area	Operating budgets, accountability	Don't confuse with Program
Fund	Restricted vs. unrestricted	Fund balances	Define rules clearly
Grant	Funding instrument	Funder compliance	Must have lifecycle/retirement
Location	Site/region	Multi-site reporting	Keep names consistent
Project	Campaign/event	Time-bound efforts	Retire after end date
Class	Often restrictions or functional expenses	990/T3010 alignment	Define clearly
Customer	Donor / funder / payer	Revenue source clarity	Avoid mixing individuals/institutions
Vendor	Supplier	Spend concentration	Standardize names
Item	Service/fee category	Revenue analysis	Don't let it become a junk drawer

SECTION 7 — Common Nonprofit Dimension Translations

Different systems use different language. What matters is the question each lens answers.

Quick Prompts

In our world, “Class” really means:

“Customer” means:

Donor Funder Contract payer

Other: _____

Projects we would track:

Additional Notes:



SECTION 8 — Draft Dimension Structure

This is the direct output of all your work so far.

A) Proposed Dimensions (the lenses we will treat as official)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

B) Lenses We Will NOT Use as Dimensions

(But may keep as attributes, tags, documentation, or notes.)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

SECTION 8 — Draft Dimension Structure

This is the direct output of all your work so far.

C) Dimensions Required for Key Reporting

Board reporting requires:

Funder reporting requires:

Restricted fund tracking requires:

Program performance (if used) requires:

Additional Notes:

SECTION 9 — Priority Improvement List (Reports + Dimensions)

End the worksheet with a crystal-clear shortlist of where to start.

Priority	Report to Improve	Why It Matters	Lenses Needed	Complexity (Low/Med/High)
#1				
#2				
#3				
#4				

READY TO EXPLORE YOUR OPTIONS?

Want to see these dimension ideas in real finance software? Connect with the Sparkrock team to explore options.

