

Burnout Self-Check

A reflective tool for nonprofit leaders

Burnout in nonprofits is often talked about as a personal failure — a lack of resilience, boundaries, or self-care. In reality, burnout is usually a signal that systems, expectations, and capacity are out of alignment.

This self-check is designed to help nonprofit leaders pause and notice early warning signs — not to assign blame, but to surface patterns that deserve attention. Burnout doesn't appear overnight. It accumulates quietly when strain goes unnamed.

How to use the Burnout Self-Check

Use this tool when:

- You feel constantly behind, even when working hard
- Everything feels urgent and reactive
- Rest doesn't feel restorative anymore
- You're worried about your own sustainability or your team's

This is not a diagnostic tool. It's a reflection aid meant to support honest awareness and conversation.

Personal Load

- I feel responsible for more than my role reasonably requires
- I struggle to disconnect from work, even when I'm off
- I'm often the bottleneck for decisions or progress
- I feel pressure to "hold things together" for others

Work Environment

- Urgent issues regularly crowd out important work
- Expectations are unclear or constantly shifting
- Work expands without corresponding adjustments to capacity
- Systems rely heavily on individual effort rather than structure

Energy and Focus

- I feel mentally exhausted more often than energized
- Small problems feel disproportionately heavy
- I have difficulty prioritizing or finishing work
- My motivation is driven more by obligation than purpose

Team and Culture Signals

- I notice signs of burnout or withdrawal on my team
- People hesitate to take time off or set boundaries
- The organization relies on heroics to stay afloat
- Stress is normalized as “just part of the work”

Reflection

Patterns matter more than any single response.

If several of these statements resonate, it may be a sign that the issue isn't effort or commitment – it's alignment. Burnout is often an organizational signal, not a personal one.

Final reflection

Sustainable leadership isn't about enduring strain indefinitely. It's about noticing when the work, systems, and expectations no longer match the reality of the people doing it – and having the courage to respond.

