

Mission Filter Checklist

A practical decision tool for nonprofit leaders

Nonprofit leaders are asked to say yes constantly—to new ideas, new partnerships, new programs, and urgent needs. Over time, that pressure can blur priorities and stretch teams past their capacity.

This checklist is designed to slow the decision down just enough to ask the right questions. Not to shut ideas down—but to ensure that what you say yes to truly serves the mission, the people doing the work, and the organization’s long-term health.

How to use the Mission Filter:

Use this checklist whenever you are considering:

- A new program or service
- A new partnership or funding opportunity
- Expanding an existing initiative
- Taking on “one more thing”

This is not a scoring exercise. If several questions give you pause, that’s a signal—not a failure. The goal is clarity, not justification.

The Mission Filter

1. Mission Alignment

- Does this clearly advance our core mission—not just relate to it?
- Can we explain how this directly benefits the people we exist to serve?
- If we said no to this, would our mission actually be compromised?

2. Strategic Fit

- Does this align with our current strategic priorities?
- Are we pursuing this because it fits our plan—or because it feels urgent or attractive?
- Will this strengthen focus, or introduce distraction?

3. Capacity Reality

- Do we currently have the staff time and skills required to do this well?
- If not, what work will be delayed, reduced, or dropped to make room?
- Are we assuming people will “just stretch,” or have we named the real tradeoffs?

4. Financial Sustainability

- Is there adequate funding for both startup and ongoing costs?
- Does this create future financial obligations we haven't fully planned for?
- If funding ended tomorrow, could we responsibly unwind this work?

5. Operational Impact

- What systems or processes would need to change to support this?
- Does this add complexity to reporting, compliance, or coordination?
- Are we prepared to maintain this operationally—not just launch it?

6. Leadership Load

- Who will be responsible for owning this work day to day?
- Does this concentrate responsibility on one person or distribute it appropriately?
- Are we building systems—or creating another dependency?

7. Long-Term Cost

- One year from now, will we be glad we said yes?
- Does this move us closer to sustainability—or further into constant urgency?
- What is the cost of saying yes compared to the cost of saying no?

Final reflection

If an opportunity only works when people overextend, absorb hidden costs, or rely on heroic effort, it is not aligned with sustainable leadership.

Strong impact does not come from doing more.

It comes from doing the right work—well, and for the long haul.

