

When Your Nonprofit Accountant Leaves

YOUR 30-DAY SURVIVAL CHECKLIST

Losing your bookkeeper or finance director is stressful for any organization. This checklist is designed to help you move through the first 30 days with confidence, protect your organization from financial risk, and make a smart decision about what comes next. Work through each section in order and check off items as you go.

If this seems overwhelming, Jitasa can help!

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DAYS 1-3: IMMEDIATE TRIAGE


Your first 72 hours are about securing access and preventing anything from falling through the cracks. Don't worry about the big picture yet. Just get control of the keys.

SECURE ACCOUNT ACCESS

- Locate login credentials for your accounting software
- Change passwords on all financial accounts the departing person had access to
- Revoke their access to banking portals, payroll platforms, and bill pay systems
- Confirm who currently has signatory authority on bank accounts
- Identify any credit cards in their name or under their sole control

IDENTIFY IMMEDIATE DEADLINES

- Check for any payroll runs due in the next 14 days – confirm who can execute them
- List any vendor bills due in the next 30 days
- Check for upcoming tax filings (payroll taxes, sales tax, state filings)
- Note your 990 filing deadline and whether an extension has been filed
- Flag any grant reporting deadlines in the next 60 days

 *Payroll is your most time-sensitive risk. If there's any uncertainty about who runs it, resolve this in the first 48 hours.*

LOCATE CRITICAL DOCUMENTS

- Find your most recent bank reconciliation and financial statements
- Identify where backups of financial records are stored
- Find the most recent audit report (if applicable)
- Gather all active grant agreements and their associated reporting requirements

DAYS 4-7: ASSESS WHAT YOU HAVE

Now that the immediate risks are contained, take stock of where things actually stand. This phase is about honest assessment and documenting what you're working with.

DOCUMENT THE STATE OF THE BOOKS

- Are the books current, or are there months of unreconciled transactions?
- When was the last bank reconciliation completed? Date: _____
- Are accounts payable and receivable up to date?
- Are all restricted grant funds tracked correctly and separately?
- Are there any transactions you don't recognize or that can't be explained?

MAP WHAT THEY WERE DOING

- Make a list of every recurring task the departing person managed
- Identify which tasks were done manually vs. automated
- Note any vendor or bank relationships that only they managed
- Confirm whether any passwords or credentials existed only in their head
- Ask if they kept any spreadsheets, templates, or procedures outside the main system

NOTIFY KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- Inform your board treasurer or finance committee about the transition
- Notify your external auditor (they'll want to know, and they may have guidance)
- Alert any grant officers with upcoming reporting deadlines
- Let your bank know about the change in contact if applicable

DAYS 8-14: IDENTIFY THE GAPS

This is when you start to see the full picture. Some things will be fine. Others may require urgent attention. Document everything you find. This list will become your handoff package for whoever comes next.

COMPLIANCE CHECK

- Are all payroll tax deposits current with no missed payments?
- Is the 990 filed for the most recently completed fiscal year?
- Are any state registrations or charitable solicitation renewals overdue?
- Are 1099s filed and distributed for all contractors from last year?
- Are all grant reports submitted and on time?

BOOKS HEALTH CHECK

- Is the chart of accounts structured correctly for nonprofit fund accounting?
- Are restricted and unrestricted funds clearly separated?
- Are functional expense allocations (program, admin, fundraising) being tracked?
- Does QuickBooks (or your software) reflect the actual balances in your bank accounts?
- Are there any duplicate entries, unexplained adjustments, or missing transactions?

INTERNAL CONTROLS CHECK

- Does more than one person have visibility into the bank accounts?
- Is there a check-signing policy, and does it require dual approval above a threshold?
- Are financial reports being reviewed by the board or finance committee monthly?
- Is there a written financial policy for your organization?

DAYS 15-21: STABILIZE OPERATIONS

By now you have a clear picture of what's working and what isn't. This phase is about keeping the organization running smoothly while you work toward a permanent solution.

KEEP THE LIGHTS ON

- Confirm payroll is set up to run without disruption through at least the next two cycles
- Set up a temporary process for approving and paying bills
- Assign an internal member or board member as the day-to-day finance point of contact
- Set up calendar reminders for all compliance deadlines in the next 90 days
- Ensure someone has read access to the accounting software to monitor activity

PREPARE A TRANSITION PACKAGE

- Write up a summary of the current state of the books (clean, behind, or messy)
- List all active vendors, payroll setup, and recurring transactions
- Compile all login credentials and account access information securely
- Gather all grant agreements, budgets, and funder contacts in one place
- Document the software stack (accounting platform, payroll, bill pay, etc..)

Pro tip: *The better your transition package, the faster any new partner can get up to speed and the less time you'll spend onboarding them.*

DAYS 22-30: MAKING A DECISION

Now it's time to decide what comes next. Many organizations in transition default to posting a job listing but this isn't always the right answer. Take the time to evaluate your real options before committing.

HIRE VS. OUTSOURCE: THE CORE QUESTION

Ask yourself honestly:

- Do we need a full-time person, or do we need full-time coverage?
- Do we need someone local and inhouse? Or can this be done remotely?
- What happens to our books the next time someone leaves or gets sick?
- Does our organization need nonprofit-specific expertise, or will a general bookkeeper do?
- Would outsourcing give us access to a deeper bench of expertise at a comparable cost?
- What is the true fully-loaded cost of an in-house hire (salary, benefits, PTO, training)

IF YOU'RE EVALUATING ACCOUNTING PARTNERS

Not all accounting firms understand nonprofits. Before you sign with anyone, ask these questions:

- Do you work exclusively with nonprofits, or do we share a team with for-profit clients?
- Do you understand fund accounting, grant tracking, and functional expense allocation?
- What is your response time commitment for client communications?
- Who specifically would work on our account, and what happens if they leave?
- Is your pricing fixed-fee, or do you bill by the hour?
- Are your staff certified in nonprofit accounting (e.g., AICPA Not-for-Profit Certificate)?
- What does your onboarding process look like for an organization in transition?

Need A Guide?

Download Jitasa's free Buyer's Guide for a complete framework of what to look for, what questions to ask, and what red flags to avoid.

[Download](#)



You don't have to figure this out alone.

Jitasa works exclusively with nonprofits. We've helped thousands of organizations navigate exactly this kind of transition — quickly, cleanly, and without judgment about the state of the books.

If you're in the middle of this right now, we'd love to help.

[Learn More](#)