

Helping Hands Unlimited

Finance Team Overview

Helping Hands Unlimited is a committed nonprofit organization striving to serve its community while navigating the challenges of a stretched finance function. The organization maintains basic financial operations with timely budgeting, consistent reporting rhythms, and a generally functioning accounting system. However, outdated systems, limited internal controls, underutilized software capabilities, and overburdened staff have created bottlenecks that impact strategic decision-making and audit readiness.

Finance Team Roster:

- Linda – Finance Director
The institutional memory and glue of the department, working 60+ hours a week and single-handedly managing budgeting and oversight.
- Jordan – Accounts Payable & Payroll Lead (and unofficial IT)
Handles multiple roles, including creating vendors, issuing checks, and bank reconciliations—with too much access and not enough oversight.
- Tina – Part-Time Staff (in theory)
Clocking full-time hours in a part-time role, mostly reacting to fires and trying to keep the system afloat.
- Gary – Intern
Enthusiastic and eager, learning QuickBooks through TikToks and trial by fire.

This small but dedicated team is doing their best under pressure, though the need for capacity building and structural improvements is clear.

1. Planning & Budgeting

Helping Hands Unlimited prepares its overall budget on time, with strong Board oversight and clear accountability through trained budget holders and aligned accounting codes. Overhead costs are separately and transparently budgeted, and monthly cash flow forecasts are in place. However, grant budgets are often developed last-minute by finance staff without program input, leading to unrealistic and poorly linked activity costs. Budget worksheets meet donor formats but lack explanatory notes, causing frequent donor queries. Some core operational areas, like IT and staff development, remain underfunded, relying on pending grants with no backup plan. The Board only reviews major grants, limiting oversight of smaller ones.

2. Grant Management

Helping Hands Unlimited maintains strong grant management practices, with signed agreements securely stored and logged, consistent senior management review of grant terms, and procurement staff well-briefed on donor-specific rules. Project teams monitor compliance closely, and donor funds are strictly used as intended, with regular reconciliations and separate accounts. Financial reports are usually submitted on time using a shared tracking system. However, poor coordination between finance and program teams leads to inconsistencies between financial and narrative reports, raising donor concerns. Additionally, while the organization partners with small local sub-awardees, it has not formally assessed their financial capacity, leading to delays and reporting issues.

3. Accounting System

Helping Hands Unlimited has a solid foundation in place for its accounting system, with consistent transaction entry and documentation, and regular monthly cash reconciliations. However, the Chart of Accounts is more of a historic artifact than a practical tool—misaligned with the organization's current operations and confusing for non-financial staff. While the system functions, it doesn't yet take advantage of key nonprofit features like tracking by donor, grant, or program, making financial analysis more cumbersome than it should be. Payables and receivables exist in theory but don't get much attention until the annual audit, when the external auditors sweep in with a flurry of adjusting entries to bring everything into focus. Audit readiness, it seems, is more of an event than an ongoing state.

4. Financial Reporting

Financial reporting at Helping Hands Unlimited happens on a dependable rhythm—monthly reports go to leadership, budget holders get their updates, and the board stays in the loop quarterly. The numbers are there—cash, payables, receivables—but they don't always add up to a complete picture until the auditors work their magic at year-end. Budget comparisons are generated, though variance explanations can be a bit minimalist, and connecting financial data to real program activity requires a bit of creative interpretation thanks to a vague Chart of Accounts and limited tracking by funder or program. The monthly close doesn't quite tie everything up, especially for non-cash accounts, which often linger unresolved until audit season rolls around (typically well past the six-month

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mark).

5. Internal Controls

Linda keeps all passwords in a floral notebook labeled “DO NOT LOSE.” Dual approval? That’s just Linda approving her own expense reports... twice. Jordan, who handles AP, can create new vendors, issue checks, and reconcile the bank account—all without independent review. System access is technically controlled by the accounting team, but in practice, the Controller assigns full administrative rights across the board, and no one actively monitors who can do what. The office dog once chewed through the check run... and honestly, that was the least risky thing happening that day.

6. Staff Capacity

Linda, the Finance Director, is working 60-hour weeks because... she's the only one left who remembers how the budget template works. Jordan is covering three roles (payroll, AP, and unofficial IT), while Tina, officially part-time, is clocking full-time panic. Most of the team’s time is spent keying in data, chasing down missing invoices, and patching spreadsheets—leaving little to no bandwidth for reviewing trends, identifying risks, or supporting decision-making.

7. Staff Expertise

Gary, the intern, is learning QuickBooks by watching TikToks. Jordan is excellent... but only if the process hasn’t changed since 2017. Deep financial analysis, strategic forecasting, or understanding organizational impacts of the numbers? Not exactly in the current skill set. Without stronger technical expertise and oversight, the finance team operates more like data-entry clerks than true partners to leadership.
