FOR VOLUNTEER-RUN ORGANIZATIONS

Financial Controls Self-Assessment

Twenty-five questions, fifteen minutes, and an honest conversation between two people who care about the organization.

What this is

Twenty-five questions about how money moves through your organization. It takes about fifteen minutes with your treasurer and one other board member, and it scores itself.

It is not a test, and there is no passing grade. Most volunteer organizations score somewhere in the middle, because they were built by people doing their best without anyone ever handing them a system. That is the normal condition, not a failure.

How to use it

Answer as things **actually work**, not as your policies say they should. The gap between the two is usually where the risk lives, and you are the only person who will see these answers.

Do it with two people, out loud, with a pen. One person answering alone will unconsciously score the way they wish things were — and the argument about whether the answer to question 15 is really “yes” is the most useful fifteen minutes your board will spend this year.

Scoring

Tick one box for each question. **Yes = 2 · Part = 1 · No = 0.** Add them up at the end; the maximum is 50. Where a question does not apply to your organization at all, score it 2 and make a note.

Organization

Completed by

Date

Section 1 — Who can move money

#	Question	YES	PART	NO
1	Does every payment out of the organization involve two people — one who approves it and one who executes it — with both knowing what the payment is for?			
2	Are there at least two current signing authorities, and does the list the bank holds match the people actually in those roles today?			
3	Do electronic payments — e-transfer, online bill payment, pre-authorized debit — require a second person to approve before the money moves?			
4	Does each person with online banking access have their own individual login, rather than everyone sharing one username and password?			
5	When someone leaves a financial role, is their access removed within thirty days, and can you name the person responsible for removing it?			

Section 2 — Cash

#	Question	YES	PART	NO
6	Is cash from gates, concessions, raffles and tournaments counted by two unrelated people, on site, before it leaves the venue?			
7	Do both counters sign a count sheet that reaches the treasurer separately from the cash itself?			
8	Are float amounts fixed, written down, and reconciled after every event?			
9	Is cash always deposited or secured somewhere the organization controls, rather than going home with a volunteer overnight?			

Section 3 — Reimbursements and spending

#	Question	YES	PART	NO
10	Does every reimbursement require an itemized receipt, with no exceptions for anyone?			
11	Does someone other than the person being paid approve every reimbursement — including the treasurer's own?			
12	Is there a written spending limit above which board approval is required, and is it actually followed?			

13	Are any credit or debit cards in the organization's name, with statements reviewed by someone who does not hold a card?			

Section 4 — Reconciliation and oversight

		YES	PART	NO
14	Are all bank accounts reconciled every month, without exception?			
15	Does a person other than the treasurer independently see the bank statement — receiving it directly, or having read access to the account?			
16	Does the board see the actual bank balance alongside the book balance every month, rather than a summary of what the treasurer concluded?			
17	Does the board receive budget against actual figures, with an explanation for anything significantly off?			
18	Are financial reports detailed enough that an ordinary director could notice an unusual payment if one appeared?			

Section 5 — Records and continuity

		YES	PART	NO
19	If your treasurer disappeared tomorrow, could someone else reach every account and record within a week?			
20	Are financial records stored somewhere the organization controls, rather than on a volunteer's personal computer or in a personal email account?			
21	Is there a written list of every account, platform and subscription the organization uses, and who has access to each?			
22	Are records kept as long as your bylaws and funders require (usually seven years) — and could you produce last year's if asked this afternoon?			

Section 6 — People and structure

		YES	PART	NO
23	Has the treasurer role changed hands in the last five years, or is there a written succession plan if it has not?			
24	Does anyone other than the treasurer genuinely understand how the books are kept?			

25	Has your board ever discussed fraud risk openly — structurally, not as an accusation about anyone currently serving?			

Your total, out of 50	

BEFORE YOU LOOK AT YOUR SCORE

Five answers that matter more than the total

A **No** on any one of these is worth acting on before anything else, even if your overall score is strong.

Q3	One person can move money electronically with nobody watching. This is the most common structural gap there is, and on most business banking it is a free setting you can change today.
Q4	Shared logins mean no audit trail. Nothing can be traced to a person, which removes both the deterrence and the ability to clear an innocent one.
Q11	The treasurer approves their own reimbursements. Expense reimbursement is the channel most long-running small-organization frauds actually run through.
Q15	Nobody but the treasurer ever sees the bank statement. Changing this does more work than everything else on the list combined.
Q19	You have a continuity problem regardless of fraud. One illness, one resignation, one falling-out and the organization cannot pay its bills.

What your score means

42–50	**Strong.** Better than most volunteer organizations manage. Check your red flags, then focus on keeping this true through the next board turnover — which is where controls usually quietly disappear.
32–41	**Reasonable, with gaps.** The structure is mostly there and something specific is missing. Your lowest-scoring section is the answer.
20–31	**Significant exposure.** Not unusual, and not a reflection on anyone currently serving. But there is enough opportunity here that a problem would likely run for years before anyone noticed. Start with the red flags.
Below 20	**Address this now.** Most of what would catch a problem is absent. Almost everything needed to fix it is free and takes a single board meeting to adopt. None of it requires money.

WHATEVER YOU SCORED

Fix these three first

These remove the most opportunity for the least effort, and none of them cost anything.

1. Turn on dual authorization for electronic payments.

Most business banking supports it. It takes one phone call and it closes the largest gap most organizations have.

2. Have someone other than the treasurer receive the bank statement.

The president, or a director with no payment authority. They do not need to reconcile it. They need to look at it, and the treasurer needs to know that they will.

3. Require a receipt for every reimbursement, including the treasurer's.

Especially the treasurer's. Write it down as a policy so that it is not a personal request about one person.

The conversation this is really about

The hard part is not the controls. It is that adopting them requires a board to sit in a room and consider, out loud, that someone they like and trust might one day take money.

Boards hate this, and it is worth naming why they should do it anyway. Controls are not about this treasurer. They are about the treasurer you will have in four years, chosen by a board that does not exist yet.

They also protect the person currently in the chair. When money goes missing and there were no controls, the person with the access is the person who gets suspected — whether or not they did anything at all. A treasurer with nothing to hide should want a second pair of eyes on the statement, and most of them, put that way, do.

If this turned up more than you expected.

Most of what this assessment finds can be fixed by the people already in the room, and if you work through it and never contact me, that is a good outcome and the reason it is free.

If you would rather have someone go through it properly with you, that is what I do. **hello@garethgilson.ca** · **garethgilson.ca**