

# Organizational Independence Transition Plan

## Environmental Grantmaking Foundation

PORTFOLIO WORK SAMPLE

# Liz Sahadi Smith

## Collection

Enterprise Strategy & Systems Design

## Engagement Type

Strategic Consulting Proposal, Competitive Bid – Invitation Only

## Client

Environmental Grantmaking Foundation, transitioning from parent fiscal sponsor

## Submitted

October 2025

## Workplan Delivery Deadline

Dec. 15, 2025

## Proposed Investment

**\$32,000 fixed fee**

# How to Read This Piece

## Work Submission

This is an original work submission: a competitive, invitation-only RFP response. It demonstrates expertise in organizational infrastructure design, multi-stakeholder communications strategy, technology systems planning and complex project management for a multi-party governance transition.

## What This Shows

Organizational infrastructure design, multi-stakeholder communications sequencing, technology systems planning and complex project management across simultaneous governance, legal, financial and communications events.

# Executive Summary

The client was separating from a parent fiscal sponsor to become an independent 501(c)(3) – a governance, legal, financial and communications event happening simultaneously across multiple stakeholder groups operating under active donor agreements, contractual obligations and international grant relationships.

The client needed a decision-ready transition workplan by Dec. 15 that boards and counsel could act on, plus a practical path to begin implementation in January without building an internal finance department before the organization was ready.

## Scope — Part I Only

Deliver the Organizational Independence Transition Workplan covering five workstreams: governance and legal, finance and banking, personnel and vendors, technology and data, and grants/donors/communications.

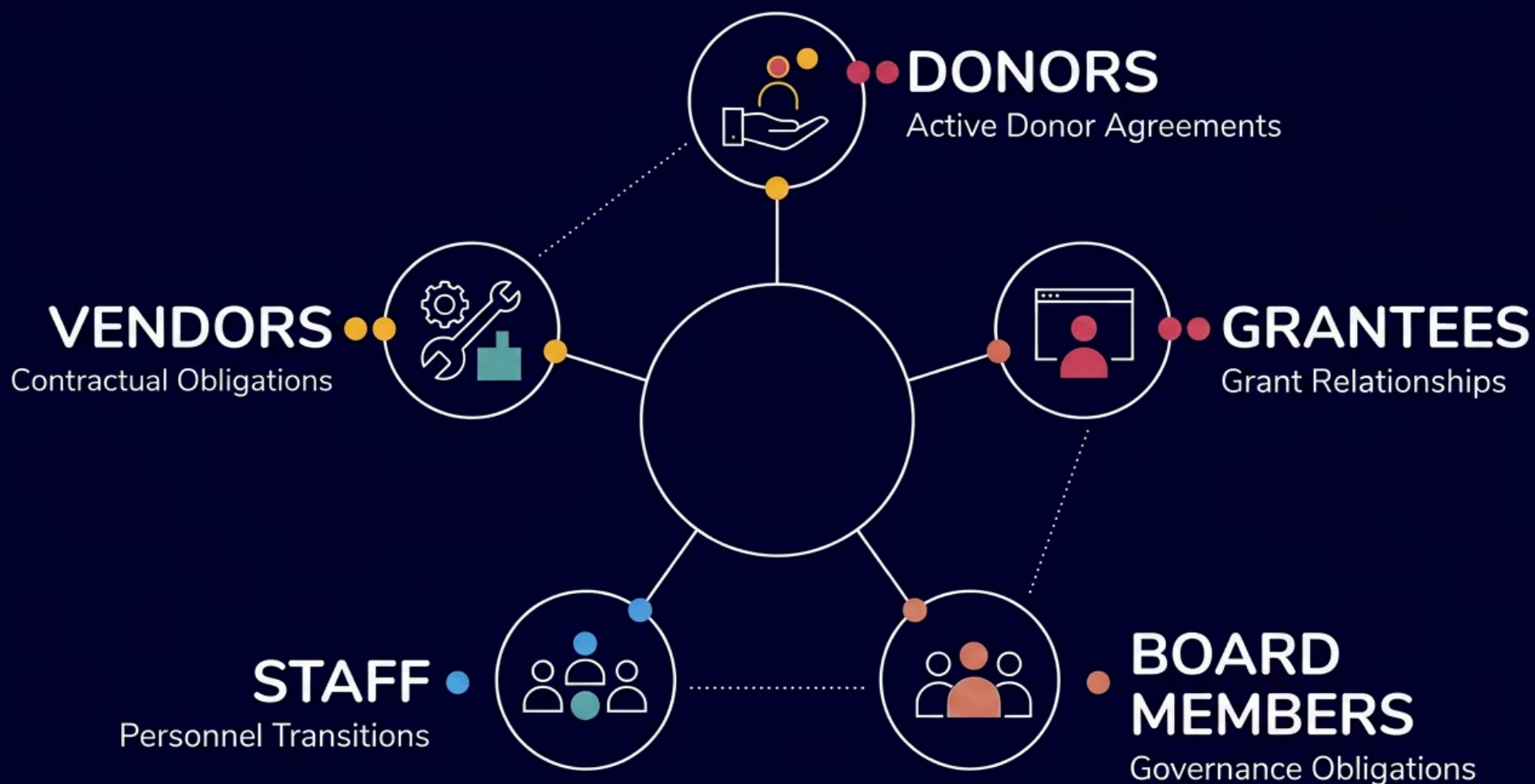
Implementation tools – vendor shortlists, policy drafts, RFP templates – delivered with the workplan so January could move fast.

## Part II Note

The proposal explicitly declined to serve as the organization's ongoing finance department. Instead, the workplan included a complete RFP designed to seat a specialized accounting firm by Feb. 1, with a clean handoff architecture built in from the start.

# What This Transition Required

The communications challenge alone was significant. Donors, grantees, board members, staff and vendors all needed different messages, at different times, governed by different legal constraints. Sequencing that communication incorrectly – or letting operational milestones drive communication timing without explicit planning – creates confusion, triggers donor agreement violations and erodes the trust a new organization needs most at launch.



# Approach and Workplan

1

## Governance and Legal

- Review fiscal sponsorship agreement – map contractual requirements, approvals and notice periods
- Prepare 501(c)(3) filing checklist: Form 1023, Articles, Bylaws, state filings, EIN, registered agent
- Draft board resolution package: transition approvals, signatory authorities, banking resolutions
- Research and recommend state of incorporation based on costs, compliance and operational needs
- Develop D&O insurance specifications and carrier shortlist
- Draft Transition Services Agreement outline and asset/obligation transfer checklists
- Research international entity options: jurisdictions, structures, tax implications, coordination requirements

**Deliverables:** Fiscal sponsorship compliance map, 501(c)(3) checklist, Articles/Bylaws outlines, board resolution package, D&O specs, TSA framework, international entity memo

2

## Finance, Banking and Controls

- Shortlist banking partners – operating and investment accounts with fee/service analysis
- Draft financial policies: internal controls, AP/expense, purchasing, month-end close, reserves, investment guidelines, grant payment controls
- Create pro-forma chart of accounts and 12-month budget
- Design Part II vendor RFP scope: monthly accounting, AP, payroll coordination, audit readiness, compliance, financial reporting and grant tracking – with evaluation rubric and onboarding plan

**Deliverables:** Banking shortlist, financial policy drafts, treasury policy, pro-forma chart of accounts/budget, Part II RFP package

3

## Personnel and Vendors

- Map personnel transitioning from parent fiscal sponsor: employees vs. consultants, classifications, timeline
- Shortlist PEO/payroll providers, research benefits options (health, retirement), prepare cost analysis
- Identify critical vendors – legal, audit, insurance, IT, banking, payroll – with selection criteria and RFP templates
- Draft 90-day implementation runbook: action plan, ownership, dependencies, decision points

**Deliverables:** Personnel transition plan, PEO/benefits shortlist with costs, vendor landscape map, 90-day runbook

4

## Technology and Data

*Liz Sahadi Smith, Lead*

Evaluate and recommend platforms across six categories – two to three options each with cost comparison and integration requirements:

System Category	Purpose
Financial management	Accounting and financial management platform
HR/payroll	Recruitment, onboarding, personnel management, payroll and benefits
Expense management	Third-party vendor contract payments, invoices, bill-pay
Grants management	Incoming and outgoing grants tracking
Travel management	Booking and logging of business-related travel
Data and file storage	Centralized storage of contracts and operational documents

- Develop data migration plan and access control matrix (role-based permissions)
- Design board financial dashboard and reporting templates: donor reports, grant compliance, KPIs

**Deliverables:** Technology stack recommendation with costs, data migration plan, access matrix, reporting templates

5

## Grants, Donors and Communications

*Liz Sahadi Smith, Lead*

### Donor Agreement Audit

Review and catalog all outstanding donor pledges and grant agreements – expiration dates, outstanding amounts, reporting requirements and assignment provisions. Categorize every agreement across three tracks:

<b>Track 1</b>	Transferable with no approval required
<b>Track 2</b>	Transferable subject to approval
<b>Track 3</b>	Non-transferable

Document services retained by parent fiscal sponsor vs. transferred to independent organization, with timeline for each.

### Communications Strategy

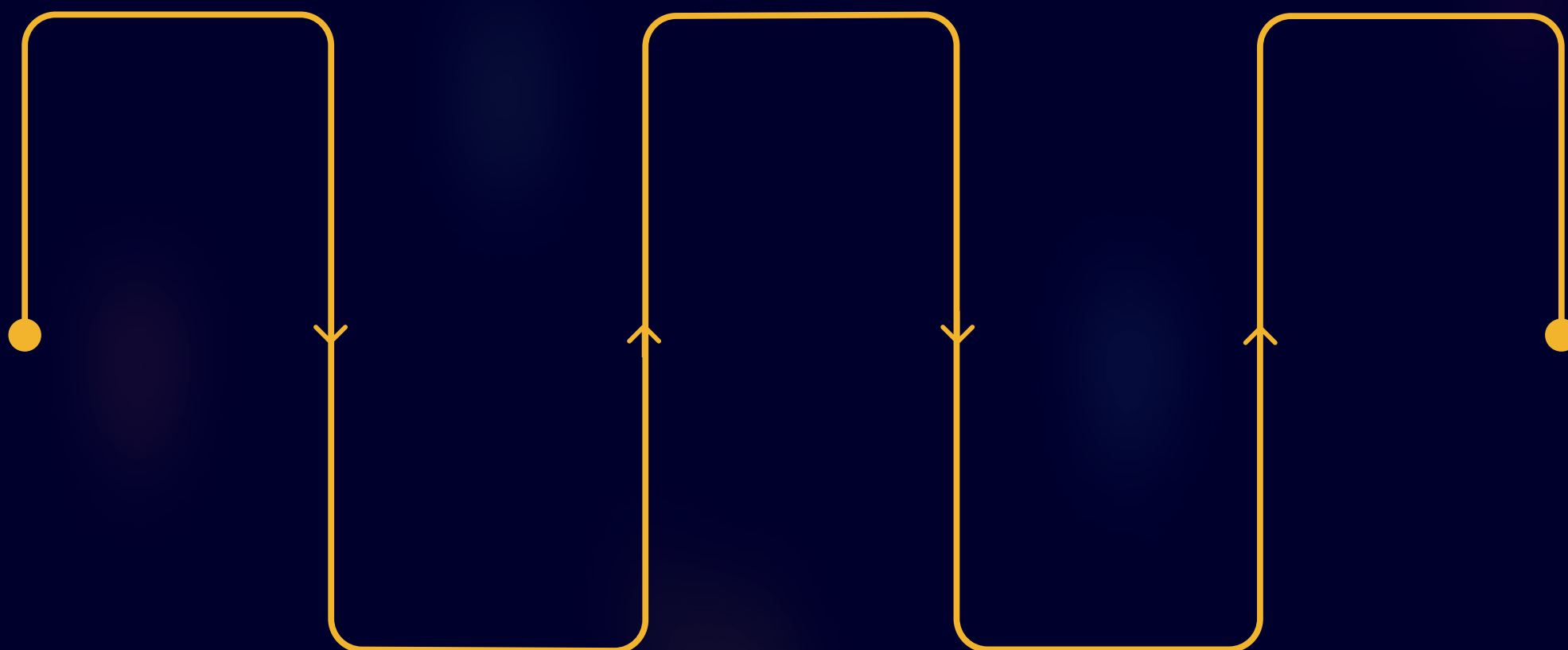
- Map all stakeholder groups requiring communication: board, donors, grantees, staff and vendors
- Build messaging framework synchronized with legal and operational milestones – no communication goes out before its corresponding compliance trigger is cleared
- Draft stakeholder-specific messages and FAQ for each audience
- Establish project governance structure: weekly decision meetings, RACI matrix, action log, monthly board checkpoints

③ **The sequencing logic:** Donor communications must be governed by the assignment provisions in each individual donor agreement before any public messaging goes out. This catalog-first, message-second architecture protects donor relationships and prevents inadvertent contract violations during the transition window.

**Deliverables:** Donor agreement catalog with transfer analysis, service transition documentation, communications plan with audience-specific messages and FAQ, timeline graphic, project governance framework

# Timeline

Phase	Dates	Activity
1	Week 1 – Oct. 21 – 25	Kickoff, document harvest, risk register, decision cadence confirmed
2	Weeks 2 – 5 – Oct. 28 – Nov. 22	Draft all workstreams; produce policy drafts, vendor shortlists, Part II RFP; coordinate with counsel; weekly progress reviews
3	Weeks 6 – 7 – Nov. 25 – Dec. 6	Integrate feedback; finalize policies, vendor shortlists, banking recommendations, pro-forma budget/COA, communications package, donor agreement catalog
4	Week 8 – Dec. 9 – 12	Assemble comprehensive workplan with master Gantt chart, decision log and all attachments; quality review; board presentation prep
5	Dec. 15	Deliver final Organizational Independence Transition Workplan; present to leadership
6	Dec. 16 – Jan. 31 (included)	Light PM support – up to 25 hours – to launch implementation: board approvals, vendor RFPs, account openings, filing coordination, Part II vendor onboarding



The engagement runs eight weeks from kickoff to final delivery, with a built-in light PM support phase through January 31 to ensure implementation launches without delay.

# Complete Deliverables Package

The final workplan includes:

1

## Executive Summary

Approach, timeline, critical decisions, risk mitigation

2

## Five Workstream Plans

Governance/legal, finance/banking, personnel/vendors, technology/data, grants/communications

3

## Master Gantt Chart

With dependencies and critical path

4

## Decision Log

With open items and deadlines

5

## Implementation Budget

Legal, filing fees, software, insurance, etc.

6

## Appendices

All policy drafts, templates, checklists, vendor analyses and sample documents

✔ **Format:** Board-ready document with clear ownership assignments and actionable next steps.

# Why This Approach Works

## Board-ready, not theoretical.

Every deliverable is designed for immediate use – policy drafts boards can adopt, vendor shortlists with evaluation criteria, communications with pre-cleared messaging.

## Speed with controls.

Fast progress with appropriate guardrails built in from the start – approval hierarchies, segregation of duties, audit trails.

## Clean handoff.

By February, a finance firm inherits functioning infrastructure – chart of accounts, policies, banking, procedures – not unresolved to-dos.

## Realistic scope.

Ongoing financial services require a finance department, not project consultants. This workplan builds the foundation so the right specialists can succeed.

# Investment

Fixed Fee, Not to Exceed


# \$32,000

Includes full scope through Dec. 15 delivery, up to 25 hours of PM support (Dec. 16 – Jan. 31) to launch implementation, weekly coordination throughout the engagement and unlimited email/phone consultation during business hours.

## Payment Structure

- 50% (\$16,000) upon contract execution
- 25% (\$8,000) upon draft workstream delivery – target Nov. 22
- 25% (\$8,000) upon final Workplan delivery – Dec. 15

**Optional:** Additional January PM hours at \$250/hour – pre-approved cap set by client.

 **Excluded (client responsibility or pass-through):** Legal counsel fees, filing fees, D&O premiums, software subscriptions, Part II accounting/payroll costs, audit fees, banking fees and benefits/PEO costs.

# About Liz Sahadi Smith

Strategic communications executive with 25 years of experience architecting institutional narrative, governing AI-era brand reputation and building resilience infrastructure for organizations operating under high public scrutiny.



## Narrative Arbitrage — Category Engineering

Engineered the climate-adaptive healthcare category to bypass political friction and generate \$18M in earned media value. The category was adopted by partner organizations statewide.



## Algorithmic Brand Governance

Architects organizational Share of Model strategy, ensuring authoritative citation status in AI-generated outputs and governing how institutional reputation is synthesized across media and information platforms.



## Resilience Architecture — Reputational De-risking

Designs crisis communications infrastructure that outlasts staff transitions and survives narrative hijacking. Built systems that achieved 143% positive sentiment across 113 consecutive days of record heat and contributed to the first heat death decline in a decade.



## Relational Capital Stewardship

Manages high-value media and institutional relationships as balance-sheet assets — PBS/WETA documentary feature, coverage in The New York Times, Reuters, AP, NPR, BBC and Politico. 91% award win rate — 20 wins from 22 submissions.



## Growth Operations — Narrative ROI

7x donation increase in one week: \$15,000 annually to more than \$100,000 in seven days. Verified by Chief Development Officer. 544 national media placements generating \$18M in earned media value, verified by Cision.

---

[lizsahadismith.com](http://lizsahadismith.com)

*Liz Sahadi Smith — Strategic Communications — Phoenix, Ariz.*