FREE

Funding Readiness Assessment & Infrastructure Guide™

for Nonprofits & Mission-Driven Businesses
A Practical Self-Assessment & Resource Guide
for Nonprofit & Mission-Driven Leaders

01	02	03
CLARITY	**CAPACITY**	**CASHFLOW**

WHAT'S INSIDE

- Research findings from Wayne County interviews
- 3-Phase Digital Infrastructure Roadmap
- 21-Point Nonprofit Self-Assessment
- LLC Readiness Assessment: new in this edition
- Personally vetted tools and tech recommendations
- Executive Implementation Sundays Schedule
- Banking and Nonprofit Resources
- About the Researcher

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Funding Readiness Assessment and Infrastructure Guide™

A Practical Self-Assessment and Resource Guide for Nonprofits and Mission-Driven Businesses

A Personal Note to You

You found this guide because something in you already knows it is time. Maybe the funding keeps falling just out of reach, even though the work you are doing is real. Maybe you are just getting started and the word "infrastructure" already feels like a lot. Maybe someone told you to "get your documents in order" and you nodded, because you did not want to admit you were not sure where to start.

Yes. That was me too.

I know infrastructure is not the most exciting conversation at the table. Nobody starts a nonprofit or launches a business because they were passionate about bylaws and domain emails. We get in because of the vision. The people. The mission. But here is what I had to learn, and what the research keeps confirming: the organizations that get the funding are not always the ones doing the best work. They are the ones who built the systems to show it.

Detroit hustles harder than anywhere I have ever been. But hustle without structure is just exhaustion. This guide is about making infrastructure the move, the thing that actually unlocks the doors you have been knocking on.

No shame in where you are starting. None. The gap is not your passion or your potential. It is information and access. That is exactly what this is for.

Take what serves you. Share it with someone in your circle who is ready. And if you want to build this out in real time with a community that gets it, the Funding First Sprint™ was built for exactly this moment.

With gratitude and Detroit grit,
Shecara Y. Vardiman, M.A.
Founder • Leader • Researcher • Guide

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What the Research Is Showing

The following insights reflect patterns from doctoral research with nonprofit leaders, senior executives, program managers, board members, and LLC owners in Wayne County. No names. No organizations. Just the truth of what the data is revealing.

FINDING 01	The Domain Email Gap
	Many organizations are operating without a professional domain email address. Gmail, Yahoo, and Hotmail remain the primary communication channels for organizations actively seeking grants and institutional funding. Funders notice immediately.

FINDING 02	Technology Adoption Is Reactive
	Leaders are not opposed to technology. They are overwhelmed by it. The gap is not motivation; it is structured guidance on where to start and what to prioritize.

FINDING 03	Documentation Determines Fundability
	Organizations with clear documentation, governance infrastructure, and consistent digital systems are measurably better positioned to respond to funding opportunities and to recover when resources become constrained.

FINDING 04	LLC Owners Face the Same Gaps
	Mission-driven LLC owners face identical infrastructure challenges to their nonprofit counterparts, yet most funding readiness resources are built only for nonprofits. This guide closes that gap.

Why This Matters: These are not isolated gaps. They are sector-wide patterns that create predictable barriers to funding, sustainability, and scale. This guide is a direct response to what the research is revealing.

Your Digital Infrastructure Roadmap

Digital readiness is not a destination; it is a progression. The three-phase roadmap below shows the sequence that gives leaders the highest return on their time and resources. Do not skip phases; each one builds the foundation for the next.

01

PHASE 1: Foundation
Establish your professional identity online before anything else.

- Purchase your organizational domain name
- Set up a professional domain email: info@, director@, ceo@yourorg.org
- Create or update your website: mobile-friendly with mission, programs, and contact info
- Set up one centralized cloud storage folder for all organizational documents

02

PHASE 2: Operations
Build the systems that allow your organization to function consistently.

- Implement a project management tool for task tracking and team accountability
- Organize and digitize all governance documents: articles, bylaws, 990s, board roster
- Set up a basic CRM or contact management system for donors, partners, and stakeholders
- Establish consistent social media presence on at least one platform
- Create a shared communication channel so leadership is not managing operations by text

03

PHASE 3: Funding Readiness
Align your infrastructure to respond to funding opportunities quickly and credibly.

- Build a funding readiness folder: budget, narrative, 990, determination letter, board list, impact data
- Create or update your organizational case statement: who you are, what you do, why it matters
- Set up basic impact tracking so program data is accessible and reportable
- Research and identify 5 to 10 aligned funders before you need them
- Establish a 90-day funding calendar so applications are planned, not reactive

Digital Readiness Self-Assessment

Use this checklist to identify your current gaps. Be honest; this is for you, not a reviewer. Score 1 point for each item currently in place.

Part 1: Digital Identity

☐ Professional domain email is in use: info@yourorg.org, not Gmail or Yahoo

☐ Organizational website is active and current

☐ Website is mobile-friendly and has a secure (https) connection

☐ Email signature includes title, organization name, and website

☐ Consistent social media presence on at least one platform

Part 2: Documentation and Governance

☐ Articles of Incorporation filed and accessible

☐ IRS 501(c)(3) determination letter on file

☐ Bylaws are current and reflect actual governance practices

☐ Board roster documented with current member information

☐ 990 tax filings are current and accessible

☐ Conflict of interest policy signed annually

Part 3: Technology and Operations

☐ Project management or task system in consistent use

☐ Documents stored in a shared, accessible cloud location

☐ Leadership communicates through a centralized platform

☐ Basic data tracking system in place for programs and participants

Part 4: Funding Readiness

☐ Current budget is document-ready to attach to any application

☐ Organizational narrative or case statement is written

☐ Impact data is collected and reportable

☐ Determination letter and 990 are findable within 10 minutes

☐ At least 5 aligned funders have been identified

Score Your Readiness

Total your checked items and find your readiness level below. Use your score to identify exactly where to focus next.

SCORE	READINESS LEVEL	YOUR NEXT MOVE
0 to 5	Foundation Gap	Start Phase 1 today: domain and email first.
6 to 11	Building	Complete Phase 1. Begin Phase 2 documentation.
12 to 16	Developing	Strengthen Phase 2. Begin Phase 3 preparation.
17 to 21	Ready	Focus on the funding pipeline and strategic diversification.

LLC Readiness Self-Assessment

New in This Edition

Designed for LLC owners and mission-driven for-profit leaders. If you operate a hybrid structure, complete both assessments. Score 1 point for each item currently in place.

Part 1: Legal and Business Formation

☐ Articles of Organization filed with your state

☐ Operating Agreement drafted and signed by all members

☐ Employer Identification Number (EIN) obtained from the IRS

☐ Business bank account open, separate from personal accounts

☐ Registered Agent designated with a current address

Part 2: Brand and Digital Identity

☐ Business domain name purchased

☐ Professional domain email in use: ceo@, info@, or hello@yourbusiness.com

☐ Website is active, mobile-friendly, and reflects current services

☐ Google Business Profile created and verified

☐ LinkedIn company page active and updated

Part 3: Financial Infrastructure and Banking

☐ Accounting software in place: QuickBooks, Wave, or similar

☐ Invoicing system established with a consistent schedule

☐ Monthly income and expense tracking is current

☐ Business banking established: Navy Federal Credit Union, Huntington, PNC, or Comerica are strong options

☐ Business credit score is known and actively being built

☐ Profit and Loss statement can be produced within 24 hours

Part 4: Operations and Systems

☐ Services or products clearly defined with documented pricing

☐ Client onboarding process documented and repeatable

☐ Contract or service agreement template in use for all clients

☐ Project management tool in consistent use

☐ Cloud storage organized for client files and business documents

Banking & Funding Resources

INCLUDED IN THE FUNDING FIRST SPRINT™

Banking partnerships, CRA resources, and Michigan-specific
funding infrastructure are covered in depth inside the
Funding First Sprint™.

Sprint participants receive curated Michigan banking partners,
CRA lender profiles, nonprofit tech resources, and live implementation support.

Join the Sprint → shecarayvonne.com/fundingfirstsignups

Tools I Personally Recommend

These are tools I use, have vetted, or have seen transform how nonprofits and mission-driven organizations operate. I am not compensated by any of these platforms. I recommend them because they work, especially for organizations operating with lean teams and limited resources.

Domain and Professional Email

Google Workspace
Domain Email + Collaboration

Domain email, Drive, Docs, and Meet in one platform. Nonprofit discount available through Google for Nonprofits.

Microsoft 365 for Nonprofits
Domain Email + Productivity Suite

Outlook, Word, Excel, and Teams at deeply discounted nonprofit rates. Ideal for Microsoft-native teams.

Website Builders

Squarespace
Website Builder

Clean, professional templates. Best for organizations needing a credible web presence quickly.

Wix
Website Builder

Flexible drag-and-drop builder with a free tier. Good for building your first web presence on a tight budget.

Duda
Professional Website Builder

What I personally use for client sites: built for performance, clean design, and professional results.

Tools I Personally Recommend (continued)

Project Management and Operations

Notion
All-in-One Operations Hub

My personal command center: task management, documentation, team wikis, and planning. Free plan is robust for small teams.

Trello
Visual Task Management

Simple, visual board-based task tracking. Excellent for teams new to project management tools.

Asana
Team and Project Management

More robust workflow management for growing teams tracking programs and operational projects.

Document Storage and File Organization

Google Drive
Cloud Storage + Collaboration

Free, accessible, and universally recognized. Every nonprofit should have a shared Drive with governance documents organized and accessible.

Dropbox
Cloud File Storage

Clean interface and reliable syncing. Good for organizations managing a high volume of files.

Communication and Team Coordination

Slack
Team Communication

Reduces email clutter and centralizes communication by channel and topic. Free plan works well for small teams.

Google Meet and Zoom
Video Conferencing

Both reliable for virtual meetings. Google Meet is included with Workspace. Zoom free plan is sufficient for most needs.

Tools I Personally Recommend (continued)

CRM and Contact Management

HubSpot CRM

Donor and Contact Management

Free CRM with robust features. Excellent for managing donor relationships and stakeholder communication. No tech expertise required.

Bloomerang

Nonprofit-Specific CRM

Purpose-built for nonprofits. Tracks donor giving history, engagement, and retention: the metrics that matter most for fundraising sustainability.

Tools I Personally Recommend (continued)

Financial Tracking

QuickBooks Nonprofit

Accounting and Financial Management

Industry standard for nonprofit financial management. Tracks income, expenses, and generates funder-ready reports.

Wave

Free Accounting Software

Completely free accounting for small organizations: invoicing, expense tracking, and basic financial reporting with no subscription.

AI-Supported Workflow Tools

Claude by Anthropic

AI Writing and Research Assistant

My top recommendation for drafting grant narratives, board communications, and strategy work. Built for precision and depth.

ChatGPT by OpenAI

AI Writing and Research Assistant

Useful for content drafts and research support. Always review and personalize the output: AI supports your voice, it does not replace it.

Canva

Design and Visual Content

Professional-quality graphics, presentations, and social content without a designer. Free plan is extensive; nonprofit discount available.

MailerLite

Email Marketing and Automation

My preferred email platform for mission-driven organizations: clean interface, generous free plan, and excellent automation capabilities.

Your Immediate Next Steps

Regardless of where you scored, here is the sequence that produces the fastest, most credible transformation in how your organization shows up digitally and to funders.

THIS WEEK
Purchase your domain and set up your professional email. This single action changes how every person who receives a message from you perceives your organization. It costs less than $15 per month and signals to funders that you are a real, organized entity. Do this before anything else.

THIS MONTH
Create your shared Google Drive folder and move all governance documents into it. If documents are missing, start the process to obtain or update them now. Your EIN letter, articles of incorporation, bylaws, and 990s should be findable from anywhere within 10 minutes.

THIS QUARTER
Build your funding readiness folder. Gather your budget, narrative, determination letter, and impact data into one accessible location. When an opportunity arrives, you will be ready to respond in hours, not scrambling for weeks.

"Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it."

HABAKKUK 2:2

The work you are doing matters.

The mission you carry deserves infrastructure that matches its importance.

You did not get this far by accident. You will not go further on effort alone.

Structure is not the opposite of passion. It is the thing that allows passion to last.

Write the vision. Build the structure. Trust that the resources will follow.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

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Scholar-Practitioner • Nonprofit Founder • PhD Candidate, Organizational Leadership

Shecara Y. Vardiman, M.A., is a Detroit-born scholar-practitioner whose work sits at the intersection of organizational leadership, nonprofit capacity-building, digital equity, and community-rooted change. She is the founder of Esteem We Inc. and Detroit Possible™, organizations she has led for more than a decade at the intersection of youth development, systems building, and leadership development.

Her doctoral research, grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model, examines how nonprofit leaders perceive technology adoption and its impact on mission effectiveness across Wayne County, Michigan. Her work bridges academic rigor with lived experience, translating research findings into practical tools that leaders in under-resourced communities can immediately apply.

Shecara's professional background spans hospitality operations with global brands including Hilton, Westin, and Loews; business development and management consulting; and more than a decade of nonprofit infrastructure building. She is known for her ability to see what is missing, ask the right questions, and build systems that let purpose scale.

Research. Structure. Impact.
Where leadership theory meets real-world change.

shecarayvonne.com

Executive Implementation Sundays

Free weekly virtual sessions for nonprofit leaders, LLC owners, and mission-driven founders ready to build, implement, and troubleshoot their organizational infrastructure in real time. Led by Shecara Y. Vardiman, M.A.

Every Sunday	4:00 PM to 5:30 PM ET
Format	Virtual via Zoom • Free to attend • No registration required
Who It Is For	Nonprofit leaders, LLC owners, hybrid leaders, and Funding First Sprint™ participants

2026 Schedule

DATE	SESSION FOCUS	TIME
Sunday, March 8, 2026	Session 1: Clarity and Calling	4:00 to 5:30 PM ET
Sunday, March 15, 2026	Session 2: Structure and Setup	4:00 to 5:30 PM ET
Sunday, March 22, 2026	Session 3: Funding Readiness	4:00 to 5:30 PM ET
Sunday, April 12, 2026	Session 4: Strategy and Sustainability	4:00 to 5:30 PM ET
Sunday, April 19, 2026	Session 5: Digital Infrastructure Build	4:00 to 5:30 PM ET
Sunday, April 26, 2026	Session 6: Funding Pipeline Development	4:00 to 5:30 PM ET
Sunday, May 10, 2026	Session 7: Grant and Contract Readiness	4:00 to 5:30 PM ET
Sunday, May 17, 2026	Session 8: Operations and Systems	4:00 to 5:30 PM ET
Sunday, May 24, 2026	Session 9: Scale and Sustainability	4:00 to 5:30 PM ET

Join Every Session

Zoom Link: https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84668862413

Password embedded in link • Meeting ID: 846 6886 2413

Every Sunday at 4:00 PM ET • Free • No registration required

Scan to join

READY TO BUILD? JOIN THE FUNDING FIRST SPRINT™

Cohort 1 Begins:	Thursday, March 5, 2026
Live Sessions:	Thursdays, 7:00 to 8:30 PM ET
Format:	Virtual • Replays included
Investment:	$497 full tuition • Payment plan available
Registration Closes:	Wednesday, March 4, 2026

Learn More

shecarayvonne.com/fundingfirstsprint

Sign Up / Sales Page

shecarayvonne.com/fundingfirstsignups

Implementation Sundays:

Sundays 4:00 to 5:30 PM ET • Free • No registration required