



We're seeing a lot of nonprofits heading into budget season without clear data and it's costing them. Too often, staff time is just *guessed at*. Budgets are built on hopes, not actuals. And time - the biggest expense in nonprofits - isn't tracked or coded in a way that helps you or your partners and donors understand what's really going on.

**Here's what else we're noticing:**

- **Inefficient processes:** paper receipts, spreadsheets, double data entry.
- **No preset categories in expense tools**, so transactions can't be traced by program or project.
- **Under-allocated program costs**, which leads people to wrongly think "too much of the budget is spent on staff" - when the reality is, your people are the programs.
- **A lack of awareness** that industry standards and best practices even *exist*. Too many nonprofits are making it up as they go - not because they're careless, but because no one ever told them otherwise.

**It doesn't have to be this way.**

Credit cards like Ramp and Brex let you snap a picture of your receipt and sync it directly to your accounting system with a note and category code. [Clockify](#), [Timesheets.com](#), or [Toggl](#) make it easy for staff to code time in under 5 minutes a day.

**The goal isn't to be perfect. It's to stop guessing.**



Use this [free tool](#) to:

- Allocate overhead fairly
- Track time without spreadsheets
- Tie your dollars to your actual work
- ...and budget like you know what you're doing (because you do).

**Need help making your systems smarter or budgets more funder-ready?**

[we'll help you clean it up](#)

## a note of thanks to Tablespoons Bakery

This month, we're pausing to say thank you to [Tablespoons Bakery](#), a Richmond treasure that officially closed its doors after more than a decade of inclusion, joy, and cookies.

Tablespoons provided meaningful job training and employment to young adults with developmental disabilities, becoming a community hub and model for what's possible. We've had the joy of working with them, ordering from them, and cheering them on - and they've left a mark.

Founder Elizabeth Redford shared the news with grace and grit, pointing to rising costs, diminished funding, and personal health challenges. Her message is something every nonprofit leader should read. It's not just about closure. It's a wake-up call.

Because this isn't just about one beloved bakery. It's about **what's at stake for all mission-driven organizations** in a political environment where:

- Nonprofits focused on human rights, freedom of speech, public health, equity, inclusion, and the environment are seeing their missions - and in some cases, their nonprofit status - come under attack through shifting policies and political pressure,
- Government support is shrinking or unstable, even as community needs skyrocket,
- And the public often overlooks what it takes to keep nonprofits going - or what communities lose when they're gone.

[read elizabeth's message here](#)

We honor Tablespoons for showing what inclusive, community-rooted work can look like. And we hope their story sparks hard questions for all of us:

- ✦ Are we doing enough to safeguard the missions and values at the heart of our work?
- ✦ Are we planning and budgeting for **a future with less public funding - and more public need?**
- ✦ And are we helping people understand the real cost and real value of the work we do every day?

## team update: welcome, quillin!



We're thrilled to welcome **Quillin Musgrave** to the Blue Octopus team as our Senior Project Manager!

She brings a can-do attitude, decades of experience in human services, and a fresh perspective that already has us rethinking how we do things. And she owns our favorite vegetarian spot, [Harrison Street Cafe!](#)

Quillin is jumping in behind the scenes on everything from project coordination to content wrangling, and you may be hearing from her soon. When you do, know you're in good hands.

## tidbits from the tank

- **Tool We're Loving:** [Ramp](#) + [Clockify](#). Snap, code, done.
- **Laura's Tip:** "Simple systems work. A few time/project codes and a five-minute-a-day habit can give you the clarity you've been missing."
- **Shelley's Tip:** "Stories stick. Pair every big number or goal with a story people can relate to."
- **What We're Reading:** [Revisiting the Overhead Myth](#) – A smart, clear take on why investing in infrastructure, systems, and staff isn't overhead—it's the work.

**That's a wrap on this edition of *The Inking*. Questions, comments, wild ideas?**

**Hit reply!**