Building trust, accountability, and operational excellence

Fortify Your Mission: Strengthening Internal Controls for Sustainable CSO Operations

Session Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will:

- Understand what internal controls are and why they're essential for CSOs.
- Recognize common control weaknesses and risks.
- Apply practical, low-cost strategies to strengthen controls.
- Develop one actionable step to improve their organization's control environment.

“In one word, how do you feel when things go wrong in your organization?”

Why Internal Controls = Mission Protection

- Internal controls are not bureaucracy — they are the armor that protects your mission.
- They prevent errors, fraud, and misuse of resources.
- They build donor trust and ensure sustainability.

The 5 Pillars of Strong Internal Controls

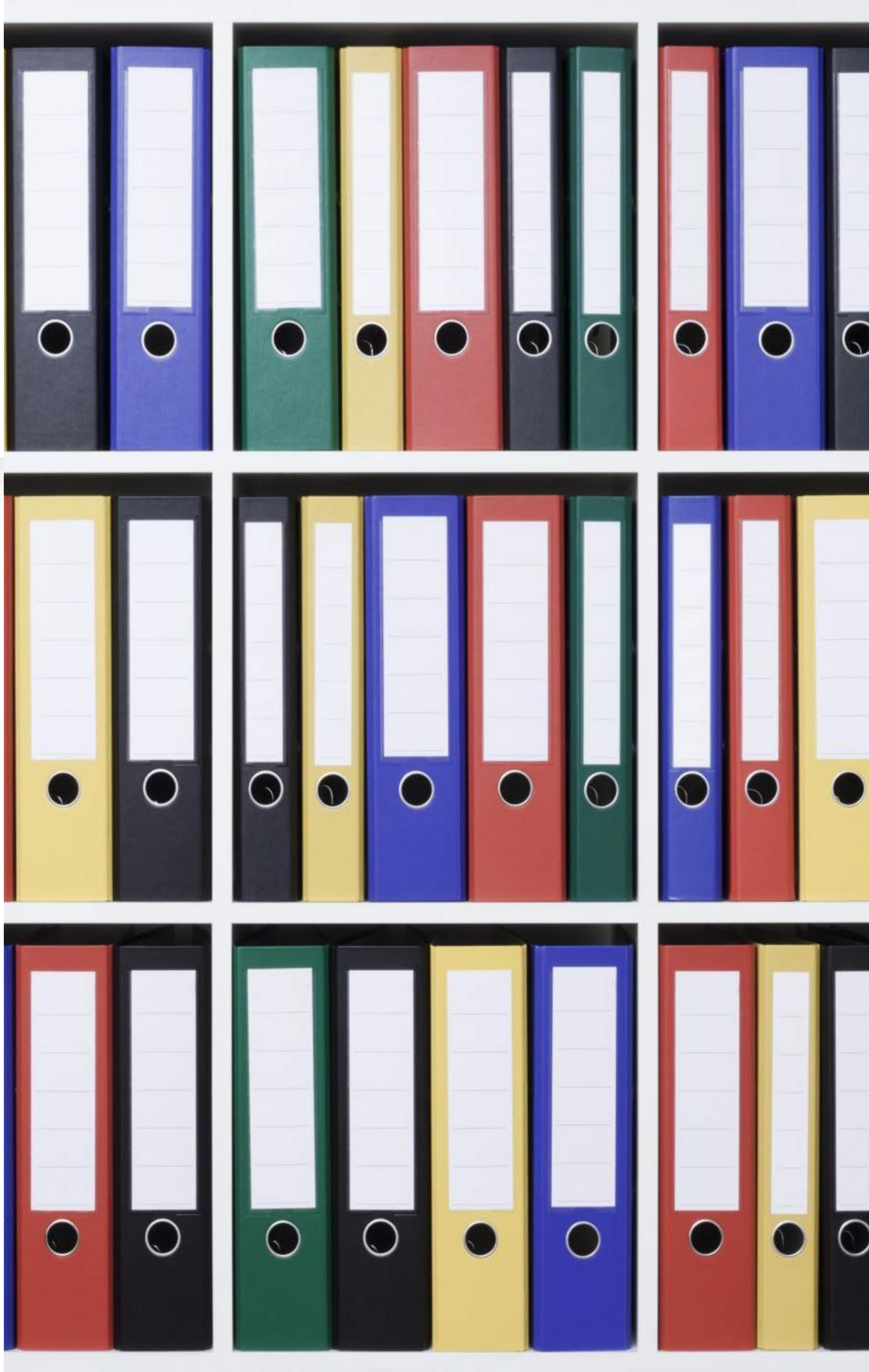
- **Control Environment – Leadership tone, ethics, structure.**
- **Risk Assessment – Identify and analyze threats.**
- **Control Activities – Clear policies and segregation of duties.**
- **Information & Communication – Reliable, transparent reporting.**
- **Monitoring – Continuous review, feedback, and adjustment.**

“Which of these feels most familiar in your organization?”

The Diagnosis: Common CSO Gaps

Common areas of weakness:

- **Finance:** One person does everything.
- **Procurement:** No transparent vendor selection.
- **HR:** Role confusion or ghost workers.
- **Governance:** Inactive Board oversight.
- **Program:** Weak documentation and verification.



The Toolkit: Strengthening Your Controls

1. Document Policies & Procedures.
2. Segregate Duties.
3. Approval Matrix – Define spending limits.
4. Use Checklists for key processes.
5. Internal Reviews.
6. Board Oversight.
7. Capacity Building.

“In the next 30 days, I will strengthen [area] by [specific action].”

Process Visualization Exercise

Visualize a simple process (e.g., payments or procurement).

Prompt: Identify where a second person should verify or approve.

Reflection & Peer Coaching

- Share one area you’ll improve and your first step.
- Partners ask one supportive question.

On return: “Give a thumbs up if your next step feels realistic.”

The Accountability Loop

Internal controls are not a one-time fix — they're a living system:

- **Plan → Implement → Review → Improve → Communicate.**
- Review and update regularly.

Note: Leadership sets the tone for visible accountability.

Quick Wins for This Quarter

- ✅ Introduce dual-signature rule for all payments.
- ✅ Require receipts and reports before reimbursements.
- ✅ Conduct a mini internal audit of one process.
- ✅ Create a monthly report for your Board.
- ✅ Train staff on basic control principles.

Key Takeaways

- Strong controls = Strong mission.
- Integrity and transparency build sustainability.
- Start small, measure progress, and celebrate compliance.
- Each strengthened control builds confidence and trust.

“Accountability is not about control — it’s about trust.”

Closing & Q&A

Remember: Every strengthened control safeguards your mission.