

Constraint *Identification* Cheat Sheet

Find the domain that sounds like your organization. That's where to start.

01

Strategic Clarity

The plan exists — but no one uses it. Direction is unclear. Every initiative feels equally urgent.

TRIGGERS

- Priorities shift constantly
- Budget not tied to strategy
- Board meetings are reactive
- Staff asks "why are we doing this?"
- Plans approved, never executed
- Multiple "top priorities" compete
- Strategy disconnected from operations

TEST QUESTION

If leadership had to pick **ONE** priority for the next 90 days — could they agree in under 10 minutes?

02

Financial Engine

Funding doesn't match stated priorities. Money is chased, not chosen. Strategy follows revenue.

TRIGGERS

- Living grant-to-grant, no reserves
- Revenue concentrated in 1–2 sources
- Grants fund programs, not strategy
- Budget doesn't reflect priorities
- Board not engaged in fundraising
- No earned revenue or diversification plan
- Mission follows money, not the reverse

TEST QUESTION

Does your revenue portfolio reflect your strategic priorities — or the other way around?

03

Leadership & Governance

Leadership capacity is the lid on the organization. When the leader is the bottleneck, nothing moves.

TRIGGERS

- ED is bottleneck for all decisions
- Board managing instead of governing
- No succession plan at any level
- Board-ED trust is fragile or absent
- High senior leadership turnover
- Leadership development not funded
- ED buried in operations, not strategy

TEST QUESTION

If the ED were out for 30 days — would the organization maintain its direction and momentum?

04

Program Effectiveness

Programs run without clear outcomes or consistent measurement. Impact can't be demonstrated to funders, boards, or communities.

TRIGGERS

- Programs run without defined outcomes
- Impact data is inconsistent or missing
- Funders ask for proof you can't provide
- Programs exist because they always have
- No logic model or theory of change
- Staff unsure what success looks like
- Programs can't scale without breaking

TEST QUESTION

Could you show a funder right now — clear evidence your programs produce the outcomes you claim?

05

Adaptability & Innovation

The organization cannot change fast enough. Structural habits, outdated models, and unchanged programs hold back growth.

TRIGGERS

- Same programs, same model — for years
- New ideas stall in committee
- Community needs shifted, programs haven't
- Staff afraid to raise problems
- No learning culture or feedback loops
- Funding model unchanged in 5+ years
- Structural problems mistaken for financial ones

TEST QUESTION

If your community's needs shifted significantly — could your organization adapt its model within 12 months?

Intervention Playbook — *Removing Your Constraint*

Once you've identified your domain, these are the moves that actually break through it.

01 Strategic Clarity

IMMEDIATE (DAYS 1-30)

- Name the 3 priorities — eliminate or pause all others
- Build a one-page strategic summary the whole team can use
- Connect budget line items to each priority

ELEVATE (DAYS 31-90)

- Launch monthly 30-min strategy check-in with leadership team
- Present strategy update to board — make it a standing agenda item
- Schedule a board strategy session — end it with a voted, documented top-3 priority list

02 Financial Engine

IMMEDIATE (DAYS 1-30)

- Map every revenue source — what percentage comes from 3 or fewer funders?
- Identify one new revenue stream that aligns with your strategy
- Start a reserve fund — even \$500/month is a start

ELEVATE (DAYS 31-90)

- Activate board in fundraising — assign specific roles and dollar targets
- Hire or contract a fund development officer — someone who pays for themselves
- Eliminate programs with low mission impact and low revenue return

03 Leadership & Governance

IMMEDIATE (DAYS 1-30)

- Define what ONLY the ED decides — delegate everything else explicitly
- Conduct a board governance reset — 2 hours, one working session
- Create a decision matrix: who decides what, by when

ELEVATE (DAYS 31-90)

- Create a COO or Operations Manager position to free the ED for strategy
- Move inactive board members off — a board of 13 that shows up beats 19 that don't
- Identify and invest in two people on your team for expanded leadership roles

04 Program Effectiveness

IMMEDIATE (DAYS 1-30)

- Define success for each program — one measurable outcome per program
- Identify your highest-impact program and double down on it
- Eliminate or pause programs with low mission alignment and low impact

ELEVATE (DAYS 31-90)

- Build a logic model or theory of change for your top program
- Create a consistent data collection system — one dashboard, one source of truth
- Use outcome data to drive board and funder conversations — not just activity counts

05 Adaptability & Innovation

IMMEDIATE (DAYS 1-30)

- Conduct a program audit — when were these programs designed, and do they match today's community?
- Create one safe feedback channel for staff to surface problems without risk
- Identify one structural assumption your org has never questioned — question it

ELEVATE (DAYS 31-90)

- Pilot one new program model or delivery approach in the next 90 days
- Build a learning culture — make post-program reflection a standing practice
- Review your funding model: what would it take to add one non-grant revenue stream?

THE FRAMEWORK

The 4-Step Constraint Protocol

Apply in order. Don't skip steps. This is a discipline, not a one-time fix.

1 IDENTIFY

Find It

Locate the single constraint limiting your throughput. Use the cheat sheet. Take the assessment. Don't guess — diagnose.

2 EXPLOIT

Maximize It

Get the most out of what you already have. Don't invest more until you've maximized existing capacity. Most organizations skip this step.

3 COORDINATE

Align Everything

Align every other part of the organization to support the constraint. Stop optimizing things that aren't the bottleneck.

4 ELEVATE

Break Through

Now invest to eliminate the constraint entirely. Once it's resolved, a new constraint will surface — start the process again.