



INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN CASE STUDY

Making complex content
understandable for non-experts
working in small nonprofits



CONTEXT

The Story Arc Learning team partnered with **Baltimore Children's Youth Fund (BCYF)**, a Baltimore-based nonprofit organization managing public funds to support children and youth in living healthy lives where they are ready to succeed in school and can live in stable, safe, and supportive communities.

BCYF had a vision of developing a new learning library, #BCREDS, that would provide training for nonprofits seeking financial support. A key challenge BCYF saw in their funding applications was a lack of financial literacy among small nonprofits. Knowing this content can be technical, dense, and often confusing, their team approached us in search of a story-driven approach. The goal was to translate complex content into a compelling and easily understandable learning experience.

Together, BCYF and our team embarked on a journey to develop a new e-learning course providing instruction on basic principles of financial reporting for learners in the nonprofit sector without a finance background.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Translated highly complex content into engaging material for non-experts
- Created empowering courses with the intention for learners to leave feeling more confident and prepared
- Incorporated BCYF's new branding to enrich the visual elements and create a more appealing experience
- Designed far-reaching elements that would expand beyond the course to make an impact in the broader community
- Assisted in loading the e-learning course and other content into a newly launched learning management system





CONTENT

Our instructional designers carefully considered how to make technical financial content feel more accessible to learners with little to no financial literacy skills. To simplify the material, we created short explainer videos integrated into interactive elements to make trickier concepts more easily digestible. Scaling the initial content down in this way allowed learners to feel less intimidated.

Interactive features and practical application exercises supported a more self-paced atmosphere and allowed learners to test themselves as they proceeded through the course. Small assessments infused throughout the course provided opportunities to evaluate comprehension. To maximize engagement, our team created the story of four fictional organizations. Learners followed them throughout the course to see real-world examples and practice the content in hypothetical scenarios.

Supporting learners throughout the course was a newly created character named Brandy, a fully-fledged narrator who guided learners through the material. Focused on authenticity and relatability, our team worked closely with the BCYF team to ensure she would connect with learners. Test users quickly latched onto her and found Brandy to be both personable and representative of the local Baltimore community. Brandy became a key factor in BCYF's marketing strategy, showing the impact compelling, authentic stories can have on learners and programs.

CREATIVITY

With our storyboarding expertise, our team created a four-part e-learning course placing the fictional organizations, complete with names, branding, challenges, and stories, at the center of the content. Each organization (dedicated to a different need, including music education, arts after school, sports programming, and tech for teens) was designed to represent small-scale nonprofits with limited team members where administrators wear many hats and can benefit from training in multiple areas.

Using Articulate Rise and Storyline 360, as well as Vyond for a multitude of videos, we created an engaging, story-driven course with interactive assessments, downloadable infographics, and sample report templates.

We focused on the needs of the nonprofits BCYF supports, designing lasting elements that would reach beyond the e-learning course to the community at large. Brandy and the #BCREDS initiative, including this micro-credential course, will provide professional learning for Baltimore-based nonprofits delivering youth-oriented programming.

