

## Why Nonprofit Work Moves Slowly — Even with a Two-Person Team

Jane Boyd, co-founder, Smiles and Hearts Foundation.

If you've ever worked in a nonprofit, you know the feeling: you have big dreams, a clear plan, and a heart that's ready to change the world... but everything moves slower than you expected.

Emails take forever to get answered. Grant decisions drag on. Projects that should take a week somehow stretch into a month. And even when it's just two people leading the way — like the two of us at Smiles and Hearts Foundation — things can still crawl forward at what feels like a snail's pace.

It's easy to get frustrated. But over time, we've learned something important: the slow pace isn't a sign that we're doing it wrong. It's a sign that we're doing it right.

### Every Voice Counts

Even when your team is small, you're never really working alone. Every big decision usually involves a few other voices — a school principal, a donor, a local partner, or a community leader who deserves to be heard. That back-and-forth takes time. But it's what keeps the work honest, inclusive, and grounded in real need, not just good intentions.

### You're Wearing Every Hat

In a tiny nonprofit, the founders do everything. One day you're writing a grant proposal, the next you're updating the website, ordering supplies, or sorting out tax paperwork. It's a lot. Progress feels slow not because of laziness or confusion — but because every detail is landing on the same two desks.

### The Paperwork Is Invisible Work

Behind every moment of impact — a student holding a science kit, a teacher smiling with new supplies — there's a trail of documents, receipts, forms, and follow-ups. Nonprofits run on transparency and accountability. That means taking the time to track every dollar, record every donation, and report every result. It's not glamorous, but it's what builds trust — the kind that keeps doors open later.

### The World Moves on Its Own Schedule

No matter how quickly you're ready to move, you can't rush everything. Foundations have review timelines. Donors make decisions once or twice a year. Partner schools run on academic calendars. Vendors take time to source, pack, and ship materials. We've learned that part of this work is learning to move in rhythm with everyone else — not just our own momentum.

### Heart Work Is Heavy Work

This kind of work isn't just about logistics. It's emotional. When you care deeply — about the kids, the teachers, the communities — you carry those stories with you. You can't rush through that. It takes energy, reflection, and rest to keep your heart steady for the long run.

### You're Building While You're Running

Bigger organizations have entire departments for grants, accounting, or communications. Smaller teams are building those systems as they go. It's like laying down the road while you're already driving on it. It's messy and slow, but it's how lasting foundations are built.

### Careful Is Better Than Fast

We've learned to slow down not out of hesitation, but out of respect. Our work touches real people — children, teachers, families — and getting it right matters more than getting it done quickly. Listening, testing, and adjusting along the way help us make sure what we build truly lasts.

### Trust Takes Time

You can't buy trust — you earn it by showing up, following through, and staying consistent. It takes time for communities to believe that you'll keep your promises. It takes time for donors to see that their money is well-spent. Slow, steady reliability builds something speed never can: credibility.

### In the End

When things feel slow, we remind ourselves of this: roots grow deep before anything grows tall. The same is true for nonprofits. The first stages are about grounding the work — in faith, integrity, and purpose — so that it can stand strong for years to come.

At Smiles and Hearts Foundation, we've stopped wishing for speed. We've started valuing depth. Because when the goal is lasting change, slow isn't failure. Slow is faithful.