THINKING BEYOND GREAT PLAINS

A Practical FAQ for Nonprofits Moving from Microsoft GP to the Cloud

YOUR NONPROFIT ROADMAP TO THE MICROSOFT CLOUD

Microsoft Great Plains will reach end-of-life in 2029. That doesn't mean your system stops working overnight, but it does mean rising risk, higher maintenance, and more manual work over time. This FAQ is designed for nonprofit and K–12 finance leaders who want clear, practical answers as they plan a low-risk move from Great Plains to the cloud.

Have more questions after reading? Talk through your options with a nonprofit ERP migration expert at Sparkrock.

Why plan your move now:

- End-of-life support deadlines are fixed
- Implementation partners will book up before 2027
- Security and compliance expectations keep rising
- You can spread the change over multiple years instead of rushing

Who this guide is for:

- Nonprofit finance leaders on Microsoft GP
- K–12 school boards planning their next ERP
- CFOs and controllers responsible for audit & compliance

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Understanding Great Plains End-of-Life

Great Plains has supported nonprofits and K–12 organizations for many years. Now, Microsoft is winding it down. Before you make any decisions, it helps to be clear on what “end-of-life” really means—and what it doesn’t.

What does ‘end-of-life’ actually mean for Great Plains?

End-of-life means Microsoft will stop investing in keeping Great Plains current and secure. As of December 31, 2029, Microsoft will no longer release updates, fixes, or regulatory changes for GP. Your system may still run, but it will no longer evolve with new security requirements, tax rules, or payroll changes. Over time, that leaves your organization on a frozen platform that becomes harder and more expensive to maintain.

Is Great Plains already being phased out?

Yes. Microsoft has started a gradual wind-down:

- April 1, 2026 – No new Great Plains licenses will be sold.
- December 2028 – Final update to tax rules, payroll tables, and reporting requirements in GP.
- December 31, 2029 – End of technical support and new fixes from Microsoft.
- 2030 and beyond – GP enters “maintenance mode.” Any regulatory or compliance changes will require manual workarounds.
- April 30, 2031 – Critical security patches stop being released.

Each stage increases your reliance on workarounds and custom fixes rather than vendor-supported updates.

With our new system we’ve reduced the need for 1.5 full-time employees and have been able to reallocate these resources from data entry into more strategic duties.

David Williams, Communication & Technology Director, Action Group

Does GP stop working on December 31, 2029?

No. GP won't suddenly shut down when it reaches end-of-life. However, from that point on, you'll be running on software that no longer receives security updates, regulatory changes, or bug fixes. The older it becomes, the more likely you are to face security gaps, broken integrations, and headaches around payroll or tax changes.

Why are people talking about 2027 as a risk year?

Many organizations plan to wait until closer to 2029 to decide on their next step. That creates a likely implementation bottleneck around 2027–2028 as everyone looks for migration partners at the same time. For nonprofits and K–12 organizations—who already have more complex reporting and compliance needs—there is a real risk of reduced vendor availability and higher pressure on timelines.

What does planning ahead actually look like?

Planning your next step off Great Plains doesn't have to mean starting a full migration tomorrow. It's about taking small, smart actions now—like documenting your integrations, evaluating your reporting pain points, and identifying gaps in compliance or automation.

These insights form the foundation of a smooth, low-risk transition later. The organizations that plan ahead today will be the ones making confident, informed decisions when deadlines get closer.

Sparkrock's knowledge of our industry and willingness to find solutions to our unique reporting needs made them the best choice for now and the future.

Corrine Owen, Director of Finance and Asset Management, Kenora District Services Board

The Hidden Costs of Staying on Great Plains Too Long

On paper, it can look cheaper to keep GP in place—especially if you've already invested heavily in it. But end-of-life changes the math. This page looks at the risks and costs behind "doing nothing."

What are the main risks of staying on Great Plains after end-of-life?

For nonprofits and K–12 organizations, the biggest risks are:

- Security vulnerabilities – No new security patches after the final dates means increased exposure.
- Compliance gaps – Tax, payroll, and regulatory changes will no longer be built into GP updates.
- Higher maintenance costs – Aging infrastructure, customizations, and workarounds become harder to support.
- Shrinking GP ecosystem – Fewer partners and third-party tools will invest in an end-of-life product.

You can keep GP running, but you will increasingly rely on manual fixes and workarounds to keep up.

What hidden costs should we watch for if we stay on GP?

Hidden costs often show up as:

- Extra time spent exporting data to spreadsheets and re-keying numbers
- Consulting fees for custom reports, patches, or integrations
- Hosting and infrastructure for on-premise or older environments
- Complexity around audits and compliance checks
- Staff stress and burnout from constantly working around system limitations

These costs may not sit in a line item labelled "Great Plains," but they are part of the true cost of staying.

What are our main options if we're on GP today?

Most nonprofits and K–12 organizations in the Microsoft ecosystem have three realistic paths:

1. **Stay Temporarily**
    - Continue using GP while updates are still available.
    - Plan to defer your migration decision, knowing the timeline is fixed and pressure will increase as 2027 approaches.
2. **Migrate to Business Central**
    - Move to Microsoft Dynamics 365 Business Central, a modern cloud ERP.
    - Gain strong core ERP features and tight integration with Microsoft tools.
    - Add nonprofit-specific capabilities through third-party apps and custom integrations.
3. **Choose a Specialized ERP Built for Your Sector**
    - Move to Sparkrock, a cloud ERP that extends Business Central.
    - Stay in the familiar Microsoft ecosystem while also gaining features like fund accounting, commitments and encumbrances, grant and project tracking, collective agreement management, and more—designed specifically for nonprofits, K–12, and public sector organizations.

Why would a specialized ERP like Sparkrock be worth considering vs. standard Business Central?

Standard Business Central is a strong general ERP, but it's not built around nonprofit and K–12 requirements. With Sparkrock, you get:

- Fund and program-focused accounting
- Commitments and encumbrance management
- Project and grant tracking
- Collective agreement and payroll rules
- HRP capabilities that connect HR, scheduling, time entry, and payroll back to finance

All of this sits on top of Microsoft Dynamics 365 Business Central, so you still benefit from Microsoft's security, longevity, and innovation—plus the nonprofit-specific functionality you need.

How do we know this move will support growth, not just replace GP?

The goal isn't just to switch systems. It's to give your finance and HR teams better tools to manage funding, staffing, and reporting so they can support your mission more effectively. With Sparkrock, nonprofits are:

- Reducing month-end close from weeks to days
- Reallocating staff from data entry into more strategic work
- Cutting penalties and errors tied to manual processes
- Gaining clearer visibility into programs, funds, and outcomes

That's where a move off GP becomes a growth opportunity, not just an IT project.

You're in Good Company

Ready to talk about your GP roadmap?

Whether you're just starting to explore options or already comparing systems, we're happy to be a sounding board.

Let's talk about:

- Your current Great Plains environment
- Timelines and risk around end-of-life
- What a move to Sparkrock could look like for your team

Book a Great Plains migration strategy call
Email: connect@sparkrock.com | Web: sparkrock.com/great-plains

Why Move from Great Plains to a Cloud ERP?

Moving from an on-premise system like GP to the cloud can feel like a big leap—especially when your data is sensitive and your teams are already busy. This page addresses common concerns about cloud, security, and day-to-day impact.

Is the cloud really safer than keeping Great Plains on our own servers?

Cloud security today is built on layers of protection most organizations can't easily match on their own. With Sparkrock, your ERP runs on Microsoft's trusted cloud infrastructure, with:

- Enterprise-grade data protection and encryption
- Built-in privacy controls
- Ongoing security monitoring and updates

As GP reaches end-of-life, staying on an unsupported on-premise system often becomes riskier than running a modern, well-maintained cloud platform.

Can we meet our compliance and audit requirements if we move to the cloud?

Yes. Sparkrock is designed for nonprofits and public sector organizations across the U.S. and Canada, with a strong focus on audit-friendly controls and reporting.

Moving to cloud ERP helps you:

- Keep up with regulatory changes through ongoing updates
- Maintain clear approval and audit trails
- Provide your auditors with accurate, well-structured data directly from the system

Instead of relying on manual reconciliations, you gain a single, consistent source of financial truth.

What about data residency—can our information be stored in-country?

For many nonprofits and K–12 organizations, data residency is non-negotiable. Sparkrock uses Microsoft's regional data centres, which means your data can be hosted within the appropriate jurisdiction, supporting your compliance obligations and internal policies.

How does a cloud ERP change day-to-day work for our team?

Moving from GP to Sparkrock gives your team:

- Browser-based access – Work securely from the office, home, or in the field.
- Mobile access through mySparkrock – Submit, review, and approve expenses, see schedules, enter time, and access key information without being tied to a desk.
- Faster close and approvals – Automated approvals, budget checks, and integrated reporting help you cut days off close cycles and reduce back-and-forth emails.

The result is a finance and HR team that spends less time chasing data and more time supporting strategic decisions.

What specific benefits are organizations seeing after moving off GP to Sparkrock?

Organizations moving from GP to Sparkrock are:

- Reducing the time and stress of board and funder reporting
- Saving on manual work equivalent to full-time positions
- Improving data accuracy and cutting penalties tied to errors
- Giving managers direct, controlled access to their own financial information

In short, they're gaining more confidence in their numbers, and more time to focus on their mission.

What to Expect from a Great Plains to Sparkrock Migration

A system migration is a big decision, but it doesn't have to be chaotic. Sparkrock's approach is designed to reduce risk, respect your team's capacity, and set you up for success from the first month-end close.

What does a typical Great Plains to Sparkrock migration involve?

Sparkrock follows a structured migration approach that includes:

1. Design and Configuration
    - Redesign and simplify your Chart of Accounts.
    - Identify key dimensions (such as funds, grants, programs, or locations) for reporting.
    - Align your new finance structure to your actual operations and reporting needs.
2. Data Migration and Testing
    - Extract data from Great Plains (and any other legacy systems).
    - Clean and standardize it, then bring it into Sparkrock for testing.
    - Validate historical transaction integrity so you can trust your reports from day one.
3. User Training and Testing
    - Train key users responsible for core processes like requisitions, budgeting, approvals, and reporting.
    - Run User Acceptance Testing so your team can practise real-life workflows and confirm that the system supports your procedures.
4. Go-Live and Support
    - Go live with a planned cutover and clear communication.
    - Enter a "hypercare" period—typically around four weeks—where support levels are higher, issues are resolved quickly, and your first month-end close in the new system is closely supported.

COMMUNITY SERVINGS FOOD HEALS

TEAM RUBICON BUILT TO SERVE

Fairview Parkwood COMMUNITIES

How disruptive is the move from GP to Sparkrock for daily operations?

The goal is to keep disruption as low as possible. While any system change requires effort, a structured plan helps you:

- Protect critical cycles like payroll and month-end
- Schedule key steps around your busiest periods
- Test processes before go-live so there are fewer surprises

Most organizations experience a learning curve, but with training and hypercare support, this period is temporary—and leads to smoother operations long-term.

What happens to all our historical data in Great Plains?

In a GP migration, Sparkrock works with you to decide:

- Which master data (vendors, customers, accounts, employees) to bring over
- Which open balances and transactions to migrate
- How much historical detail you want in the new system

Historical data is extracted from GP, cleaned, and brought into Sparkrock so you can still run meaningful reports. For very old history, many organizations keep read-only access to GP or archived reports, while using Sparkrock for current and forward-looking analysis.

Our staff is already stretched. How realistic is it to take on a project like this?

It’s true that your internal team needs to be involved—especially finance, HR, and IT. Sparkrock’s role is to share the load by:

- Providing clear templates and guidance for decisions
- Leading configuration and technical work
- Offering focused training instead of generic sessions

Planning ahead (rather than waiting for a last-minute deadline) gives you more flexibility to pace the work around other commitments.

How does the move from GP to Sparkrock improve our reporting?

With Sparkrock, you move from a heavily segmented, GP-style chart to a combination of:

- A cleaner Chart of Accounts
- Dimensions (such as funds, programs, grants, locations, and departments)
- Account sets and nonprofit-specific structures

This gives you:

- Clearer, more flexible reports
- Better visibility into programs and restricted funds
- The ability to answer new questions without redesigning your entire chart

Built-in reporting covers many needs directly in Sparkrock, and for deeper insight or visual storytelling, you can extend this with Microsoft Power BI.

What should we do first if we're still on Great Plains and not sure where to start?

A good starting point is a migration strategy conversation focused on:

- Your current GP environment and integrations
- Your reporting, funding, and audit requirements
- Your timeline, budget, and capacity

From there, you can build a realistic roadmap that respects your constraints while keeping you ahead of end-of-life deadlines.

READY TO EXPLORE YOUR OPTIONS?

Book a Great Plains migration strategy call with Sparkrock to talk through timelines, risk, and next steps for your organization.