

Sinking Fund Categories Checklist

A simple priority-based checklist to choose what to save for first - without creating too many categories at once.

How to use this checklist

Start with Layer 1 if your budget feels tight. Add Layer 2 when the basics feel steady. Use Layer 3 for future upgrades after your budget protection categories are funded.

Start With 3 Categories

<input type="checkbox"/>	One annual bill Example: insurance renewal, annual subscription, license renewal.
<input type="checkbox"/>	One seasonal expense Example: holidays, gifts, back-to-school, seasonal utilities.
<input type="checkbox"/>	One maintenance or repair category Example: car maintenance, home repair, pet medical care.

Repeat-Size-Stress Test

Before creating a category, answer these three questions. If the answer is yes to at least 2 of 3, it probably deserves a sinking fund.

Question	Yes?	Notes
Does this expense happen again?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Repeating costs are easier to plan for than they feel.
Is it too large for one paycheck?	<input type="checkbox"/>	If one paycheck cannot absorb it, spread it out.
Would ignoring it create stress later?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Stress is a signal that the category may need a plan.

Layer 1 - Budget Protection Categories

Start here. These categories protect your monthly budget from predictable expenses that often arrive unevenly.

Essential categories

<input type="checkbox"/>	Car maintenance and repairs Oil changes, tires, registration, inspections.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Insurance premiums Car, renters, home, life, or annual renewals.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Medical and dental costs Copays, prescriptions, glasses, dental visits.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Annual subscriptions Software, memberships, apps, annual fees.

Often-forgotten essentials

<input type="checkbox"/>	Home or renter repairs Small repairs, replacements, moving supplies.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pet medical care Vet visits, medication, vaccinations.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Work-related expenses Tools, uniforms, licensing, training.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Taxes or license renewals Documents, permits, license fees.

Layer 2 - Life Rhythm Categories

Add these once Layer 1 feels steady. These are recurring seasonal, family, and lifestyle costs.

Seasonal spending

<input type="checkbox"/>	Holidays Decor, meals, gifts, travel extras.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Birthday gifts Family, friends, coworkers, kids.
<input type="checkbox"/>	School expenses Supplies, photos, events, activities.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clothing and shoes Seasonal clothing, replacements, kids growth spurts.

Recurring life costs

<input type="checkbox"/>	Seasonal utilities Heating, cooling, winter or summer spikes.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Guests or hosting Food, cleaning, extra household items.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal care Haircuts, grooming, skincare, beauty.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Family events Graduations, weddings, reunions, celebrations.

Layer 3 - Future Upgrade Categories

Use these for goals and upgrades after your basic budget protection categories are working.

Goals and upgrades

<input type="checkbox"/>	Travel Flights, hotel, gas, food, activities.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Furniture Planned replacements, mattress, desk, sofa.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Home improvement Paint, tools, small projects.
<input type="checkbox"/>	New tech or phone Phone replacement, laptop, accessories.

Future planning

<input type="checkbox"/>	Hobbies Equipment, supplies, lessons.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Courses or learning Classes, books, certifications.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Moving costs Deposits, boxes, transport, setup costs.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Big celebration Wedding, anniversary, milestone event.

Beginner Starter List

If the full list feels too big, choose 3-5 categories from this starter list first.

Category	Why it matters	Beginner amount	Use?
Car maintenance	Repairs, tires, oil changes, inspections.	\$50/month	[]
Annual bills	Subscriptions, renewals, annual fees.	\$10-\$30/month	[]
Medical or dental	Copays, prescriptions, glasses, dental visits.	\$25-\$75/month	[]
Holidays and gifts	Predictable seasonal spending.	\$20-\$60/month	[]
Home or renter repairs	Repairs, replacements, moving costs.	\$25-\$100/month	[]

My Sinking Fund Category Plan

Category	Layer	Target	Due date	Monthly amount

Categories to pause for now

Avoid starting with categories that are vague, rare, mostly wishful thinking, competing with urgent bills, too small to track separately, better covered by an emergency fund, or lifestyle upgrades while budget protection categories are empty.

Monthly Review Notes

Use this page once a month to keep your category list clean and realistic.

Question	Notes
Which category actually got used?	
Which expense surprised me this month?	
Which fund needs a higher amount?	
Which fund can pause for now?	
Which category should I add next?	
Which category is no longer needed?	

Simple rule

Start with the category that has already hurt your budget once. A short list you actually fund is better than a perfect list you abandon.