

# Scope Creep or Smart Scope

A founder's method to decide what to build now, what to park, and what to say no to.

## Summary

Scope creep is not the enemy. Unfocused scope is. Features flow from five sources: founder vision, user feedback, development ideas, bugs, and enhancements. Your job is to apply guardrails, read behaviour in analytics, and make firm calls. This guide gives you a simple, repeatable method to choose features during MVP and during growth, with scorecards, thresholds, templates, and an operating cadence.

## What this guide covers

- The five inputs that inflate scope
- Guardrails that keep scope smart
- MVP decision method and scorecard
- Growth decision method and scorecard
- Analytics to trust over opinions
- Triage, cadences, and communication scripts
- Worksheets you can copy into your backlog

## The five inputs that inflate scope

1. Founder vision - The strategic bet. Sets the non-negotiables for who the product is for and what job it must nail.
2. User feedback - Requests, complaints, and wish lists. Useful signal once filtered for ICP fit and behaviour data.
3. Development team ideas - Engineering and design improvements, technical enablers, and UX polish.
4. Bugs and defects - Break trust fast. Fixing the right ones lifts activation and retention.
5. Enhancements - Iterations that reduce friction, speed up time to value, or harden scale.

Treat them as inputs, not your roadmap.

## Guardrails that keep scope smart

- ICP clarity: Name the ideal customer profile by segment, size, and use case. If a request is outside ICP, default to no.
- One core job: State the single job to be done the product must win in the next 90 days.
- Non-goals: List the things you will not do this quarter.
- North Star and critical path: Pick one primary outcome and the shortest path to first value.
- Decision rights: Founder owns the final call. PM curates evidence. Eng lead sizes effort. Data lead validates impact.

## MVP1's decision method

Goal Prove problem–solution fit and get new users to first value quickly.

Primary metric Activation rate and time to value for your ICP.

### Decision steps

1. Classify the request: Bug, enhancement, net new, or technical enabler.
2. Map to ICP and core job: If outside ICP or not on the critical path to first value, park it in Later or No.
3. Evidence checks: Look at funnels, event counts, task completion time, and drop-off points.
4. Score with the MVP Scorecard.
5. Decide and schedule: Build now, A/B test behind a flag, park for later, or decline.
6. Close the loop with users: Thank them, share your reasoning, and ask for a lightweight validation if needed.

### MVP Scorecard

Dimension	Weight	How to judge
Impact on activation	x5	How much it helps new ICP users reach first value faster.
Evidence strength	x4	Quality of analytics signals over anecdotes.
Confidence	x3	Team confidence in the diagnosis and solution.
Effort inverse	x3	Easier items score higher. Use t-shirt sizing and invert to 1-5.
Risk containment	x2	Ship behind a flag, reversible design, small blast radius.

MVP Score = 5xImpact + 4xEvidence + 3xConfidence + 3xEffortInverse + 2xRiskContainment

**Thresholds** Build now if score is 60 or higher and affects at least 20 percent of new ICP users. Test 45 to 59. Park 30 to 44. Decline if below 30 or outside ICP.

### Bug triage for MVP

Priority	Definition	Action
P0	Breaks sign up, onboarding, or first value.	Fix immediately.
P1	Blocks common actions.	Fix within the cycle.
P2	Cosmetic or edge cases.	Batch for later.

## Growth decision method

**Goal** Drive retention, expansion, and efficient scale for a product-led business.

**Primary metrics** Retention cohorts, feature adoption, expansion revenue, and NPS tied to usage.

### Decision steps

1. Segment the signal: Which ICP tier or plan level is requesting it. Volume and revenue coverage.
2. Link to growth levers: Acquisition, activation, retention, referral, or revenue.
3. Quantify the opportunity: Cohorts, frequency, ARPU uplift, and support load reduction.
4. Score with the Growth Scorecard.
5. Decide and schedule: Sequence by compounding effect and platform health.

### Growth Scorecard

Dimension	Weight	How to judge
Reach	x2	Percentage of active users who benefit in the next 90 days.
Retention lift	x4	Expected effect on 8 and 12 week retention.
Revenue impact	x4	Conversion, expansion, or plan differentiation.
Experience uplift	x3	Reduction in friction or support tickets.
Moat and differentiation	x2	Harder to copy, strengthens positioning.
Confidence	x2	Strength of evidence and prior experiments.
Effort inverse	x3	Favour low effort, high leverage work.

Growth Score = 2xReach + 4xRetention + 4xRevenue + 3xExperience + 2xMoat + 2xConfidence + 3xEffortInverse

### Thresholds

- Build now if score is 65 or higher with clear outcomes.
- A/B test or beta 50 to 64.
- Park 35 to 49.
- Decline if below 35 or it adds bloat.

## Listen to what users do, not just what they say

### Instrument the basics

1. Events: Sign up, complete onboarding step, create first object, share or export, invite, upgrade, churn.
2. Funnels: Activation funnel and one core journey to first value.
3. Time to value: Median minutes to first value by segment.

4. Feature adoption: Weekly active use counts and cohorts.
5. Support and success: Ticket tags, reasons for churn, task success rate.

### **Evidence ladder**

- 1) Behavioral analytics
- 2) Support and sales notes mapped to events
- 3) Usability tests and session replays
- 4) Surveys and interviews.

Move up the ladder before building.

## **Operating cadence**

- Weekly triage: Review new requests, bugs, and analytics. Score, call, schedule.
- Fortnightly planning: Lock the next two weeks. No surprise insertions.
- Monthly roadmap review: Check North Star progress and reassert non-goals.
- Quarterly bets: Three to five growth bets only. Everything else supports those bets.

### **Decision roles**

1. Founder: guardrails and final call.
2. PM: evidence curator.
3. Engineering lead: sizing and risk.
4. Data lead: instrumentation and impact verification.

## **Communication scripts**

1. **Say no, clearly and kindly**  
Thank you for the suggestion. Right now we are focused on helping [ICP] achieve [core job] faster. Your request sits outside that focus. We have logged it and will revisit if our priorities change.
2. **Validate a risky idea**  
We are exploring an option that may help [metric]. If you would like early access, reply with yes and we will add you to the beta.
3. **When you ship an enhancement**  
We have improved [flow] so you can [benefit]. This should reduce your time to [outcome] by [estimate]. Tell us how it feels once you have used it twice.

## **Worksheets and templates**

### **MVP feature one pager**

- Problem and ICP segment
- Core job this supports
- Behavioural evidence
- Success metric and target
- Experiment design and flag plan
- Effort t shirt size and risks
- Owner and timeframe

### Growth feature one pager

- Revenue and retention hypothesis
- Segment coverage and plan level
- Moat and differentiation
- Adoption plan and lifecycle messaging
- Support impact and SLO changes
- Rollout, guardrails, migration

### Scoring worksheet - MVP example

Feature	ICP fit	Impact (1-5)	Evidence (1-5)	Confidence (1-5)	Effort Inv. (1-5)	Risk (1-5)	Score
Guided import	Y	5	4	4	4	3	71

### Scoring worksheet - Growth example

Feature	Reach	Retention	Revenue	Experience	Moat	Confidence	Effort Inv.	Score
SSO for upper plans	4	4	5	3	3	4	3	≈ 76

### Practical examples

1. MVP - Several users ask for custom templates. Analytics show most new users drop at the first import step.  
Decision: build a guided import with sample data. Defer custom templates.
2. Growth - A minority of high value customers ask for SSO. Reach is small but revenue and retention impact is high.  
Decision: ship SSO on upper plans to support expansion and sales velocity.
3. Bug - Mobile sign up fails on older devices. P0. Fix immediately and monitor activation.

### Final word

Great products are built by teams that can say yes with conviction and no without apology. Let the five inputs inform you. Let the guardrails focus you. Let behaviour in the product lead you. Then execute with a steady cadence and clear communication.

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