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# A Consumers Guide to Grants Management Systems

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# INTRODUCTION

Grantmaking programs are complicated to manage. Even the relatively small programs can involve tracking dozens of applications, reviewers, requirements, and payments. But grants management software can help by saving grantmakers time, making their processes more effective and transparent, and even transforming the way they do business.

Grantmakers' choices are growing each year, and the systems available to them range in complexity and price. Small packages can support straightforward online application, review, and progress reporting processes for under $3,000 a year, while a specialty solution for a very large grantmaking organization can cost upward of $200,000 per year.

How do you choose the right system for your needs? This report is a good place to start—we've done a lot of the work for you. We'll explore the available options for accepting and reviewing applications and tracking grants throughout their lifecycles, take a look at what grants management systems do, and compare the strengths and weaknesses of the packages available for U.S.-based foundations. Then we'll recommend packages that might work for your organization based on your specific needs.

This report focuses on systems that help private foundations manage their grantmaking process through the entire grants lifecycle, including payment tracking. Systems that only address a portion of the grantmaking process or are targeted to other types of grantmakers were not included in this report.

Community foundations differ from private foundations in several important areas (including unique functionality such as fund development, full fund accounting, or donor portals) that fall outside the scope of this report. However, a few of the systems reviewed here do also address the needs of community foundations. (To learn more about how the needs of community foundations differ from those of private or corporate grantmakers, download the January 2012 *Consumers Guide to Integrated Software for Community Foundations* for free at http://www.idealware.org/reports/community-foundations.)

## This report focuses on systems that help private foundations manage their grantmaking process through the entire grants lifecycle.

We also did not include systems specifically designed to help grant recipients manage proposal submissions and grants they've received. A few systems included in this report—such as Common Grant Application, PhilanTrack, and ZoomGrants—are designed to support both grantees and grantmakers, while some, like Fluxx, offer separate products to meet these needs.

## What's Changed Since the Last Report?

We released the first edition of *A Consumers Guide to Grants Management Systems* in 2008, with subsequent major revisions in 2011 and 2013. A separate 2012 edition focused on grants management systems for community foundations. Since then, we've found that the field of systems has evolved substantially.

There's more of an emphasis on workflows to automate processes, and on integrating grants management systems with external sources of data and other systems used by foundations. Cloud-based systems now greatly outnumber those which must be installed on a local server, and there's a strong trend toward a more widely accessible user interface, with vendors embracing modern web design practices so that even casual users can quickly find the data they need.

Overall we see a marketplace that is evolving. Some historically well-established major players, such as MicroEdge's GIFTS, continue to support existing clients, but are no longer widely-available. Relatively younger companies—including Fluxx, Foundant, and FluidReview—have grown their client bases significantly. Since 2013, some longstanding providers have consolidated (such as Altum acquiring PhilanTech) while others have seen investment from outside the grantmaking space. Most notably, Blackbaud acquired MicroEdge in 2014.

Some vendors are exiting the private foundation market altogether. Good Done Great, which supports a diverse client base of private, family, and community foundations, has moved into the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) market, and now works exclusively with corporate foundations. Many long-standing solutions have seen their client bases remain the same or decline since our 2013 report. In coming years we predict more generalized grants management vendors will begin seeking under-served niche markets or exit the marketplace altogether.

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## What's New in Our Methodology?

In this edition of the report, we've expanded our criteria to reflect the sector's growing interest in measuring the impact of each grant, which allows us to better understand how each system can aid foundations in evaluating their grantees' outcomes.

## Grants Management System Vendor Roadmap

Finally, this year we're also publishing a supplement called the *Grants Management System Vendor Product Roadmap*, in which vendors are invited to share their plans for the systems reviewed in this report. We'll work with those vendors who choose to participate to update the supplement three more times in six-month intervals as a way to keep you up to date on product changes between editions of the *Consumers Guide*. If you signed up to download this report, we'll email you each time the *Vendor Product Roadmap* is updated.

# HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

This report is not meant to be read cover-to-cover. The first section, *Considering Grants Management Systems*, highlights the features and functionality you can expect to see in this type of software as well as considerations for selecting and implementing a new system. If you're implementing a grants management system for the first time, these pages will provide context about the types of solutions available as well as an explanation of some of the terms you'll see throughout. If you're looking to replace your organization's existing system, you'll learn how the market has changed, including functionality that may be new since you last compared options.

The second section, *Comparing Grants Management Systems*, takes a closer look at the specific systems reviewed for this report. Each will excel for some foundations but fall short for others, and there is wide variety among the systems we reviewed. We've grouped them into six categories based on cost, functionality, and specific use cases:

- Low-Cost for Simple Needs
- Flexible Relationship Management
- Complex Online Data Collection
- Complex Application Review Needs
- Strong Outcomes Measurement and Reporting
- Substantial Functionality for the Needs of Large Foundations

If you already know that your organization's needs match one of these use cases, that section can help you start defining a short list of solutions. For each we've provided descriptions highlighting the pros and cons, particular audiences or use cases, and pricing estimates to help you get an idea of how it fits into the overall marketplace.

We've also provided an easy-to-read chart for each category to allow you to see at a glance how each system rates across high-level functionality, as well as quickly compare the systems on your shortlist by

## These criteria are not intended to be a list of what every system should be expected to provide.

cost and functionality. (For more information about the framework we used to determine the ratings, see *Appendix B: How We Rated the Systems*.)

Once you've identified a shortlist of systems you think might meet your foundation's needs, you can view the full review for each in the third section, *Reviews of the Grants Management Systems*. We include detailed descriptions of how each system compared when we evaluated them against the list of 174 requirements during vendor product demonstrations. We selected these criteria through interviews and conversations with foundation staff, consultants, the vendors themselves, and grants management experts to provide a well-rounded view of what we expect grants management systems as a whole could provide.

*Note that these criteria are not intended to be a list of what every system should be expected to provide.*

Different products approach the needs of foundations in different ways, and vendors have different philosophies about how to approach these needs. Some systems were developed for particular niches of the sector, while others play to their strengths and are designed to be used in tandem with separate, third-party solutions.

As with all technology decisions, you should start by talking to the staff members who will be using the new system. What do they like about your current solution? What functionality is missing? What would they want from a new system? What are must-have features and what are nice-to-have features?

Once you've identified your shortlist, talk to other foundations already using those systems to learn what they like or don't like about them. Remember, this report can only tell you what is available to meet your needs, but you'll have to do the work to define those needs.

# CONSIDERING GRANTS MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

# DO YOU NEED A GRANTS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM?

If your processes are complex enough that you're wondering whether a grants management system might be helpful, it's probably worth taking a look at the available packages. Generally speaking, grants management processes can be complicated. Even grantmakers who give just a dozen or so grants a year might find a system useful—especially if they involve multiple people in the review process, pay grants in more than a single payment, require progress reports from grantees, or want to look at reports that summarize information about their grantmaking in aggregate.

Another key benefit of a packaged system, even for a small foundation, is the ability to collect data online—for example, grant applications or grantee progress reports. If you're considering shifting your processes online, a grants management system can provide both online and grant-tracking functionality in a single package.

As a rule of thumb, if you find your grants can't easily be tracked on a single Excel worksheet, a packaged system is worth considering. You should also look at the available packaged options if you're debating building something yourself, such as a Microsoft Access database to track grants or web forms to accept online applications. Custom-built functionality is almost always a bigger long-term investment, both

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to build and support, than organizations expect. It should be a last resort when it's clear nothing on the market will meet your needs. We reviewed strong solutions that start at under $3,000 per year, putting them within the reach of nearly every organization; if you're relying on Excel to track grants, you'll likely find ample enticement to make the move to a dedicated grants management system.

# WHAT TYPES OF SYSTEMS ARE AVAILABLE?

As you start to consider your options, think through what types of systems might work for you before considering specific systems: online hosted or installed; integrated with back office services; specialized for community foundations; or custom-built.

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## Online Hosted Systems

Once an exception in the marketplace, these days the majority of grants management systems are hosted entirely online, accessible through web browsers. In this model, sometimes called Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) and more popularly known as "the Cloud," you pay a software vendor to provide online access, and the software—along with all your grants data—is stored on the vendor's servers. The benefits are that you don't have to purchase any hardware, the vendor handles software updates and data backups, and your staff can access the system from anywhere there's an Internet connection. This model also places significantly less burden on your foundation's IT department (at least in theory).

But ongoing security breaches involving online services have led some to question this kind of system. The truth is, it can be quite secure—in fact, many banks and hospitals with far greater security needs rely on similar models. Security issues are not limited to Cloud-based platforms; similar breaches have occurred with systems installed on site at organizational data centers behind company firewalls. In this year's update, we've asked more about how software vendors protect the security and integrity of your data.

The online systems currently available typically offer strong support for online data collection, including online applications, review processes, and progress reports. They range from straightforward, inexpensive packages starting at under $3,000 per year all the way up to very sophisticated, customized systems for more than $200,000 per year.

## Installed Systems

A more traditional option, installed systems are purchased upfront and installed onto your network and your staff's computers. Many of these systems only run on the Microsoft Windows operating system, so if your organization uses Mac or Linux machines, you may have a difficult time finding one that's compatible. With this model, you're responsible for software updates and data backups.

The few installed systems still available tend to be strong in the kinds of features that can help your staff manage a complex process—such as the ability to code grants with keywords and easily create printed letters—but can be weaker in online data collection. Some require external modules to support online applications and progress reports, or to let you send email from within the system. They typically cost more in the first year than the online systems, ranging

from under $3,000 to $200,000 or more for the first year, but many are more affordable on a per-year basis after that.

A few of the higher-end systems use a different installed model in which you purchase and install their software on your own web server. As with an online hosted system, your staff can then access it from anywhere there's an Internet connection, and it easily supports online data collection. It also provides more control over technical details than a hosted system. However, you'll need to purchase the hardware required to host the system, and you'll need qualified IT staff to install and update the software and back up the data. You'll also need to ensure that the system is hosted securely and reliably.

## Systems Integrated with Back Office Services

A few companies provide online grants management systems as part of a much larger service offering that includes staff support for a full range of back office services, such as payment processing, mailings, accounting, and tax preparation. One of the products reviewed in this report is available as part of such a package—it meets our eligibility requirements for inclusion since it is also available as a standalone system.

## Specialized Community Foundation Systems

Community foundations often have such complex requirements on top of the more universal grants management needs that a group of software packages has been developed to meet them. Because this report focuses on private foundations, it doesn't cover complex fund accounting (including donor-advised funds), donor portals, or other functionality unique to community foundation systems.

However, we've included two systems in this report that either specialize in or exclusively serve community foundations: Smalldog, from Smalldog Net Solutions, and Fusion Labs' Granted GE/Spectrum, both of which meet our eligibility criteria for grants management systems. Additionally, Bromelkamp's

First Pearl and First Akoya.net are also available in versions tailored to the needs of community foundations, and several systems in this report are also used by a significant number of community foundations. (For more information about the needs of community foundations and systems designed for them, see Idealware's January 2012 *Consumers Guide to Integrated Software for Community Foundations*. You can download that report for free at http://www.idealware.org/reports/community-foundations.)

## Custom-Built Systems

This report focuses on packaged solutions. For large foundations with unique needs, building your own custom system can be a tempting alternative, but also a time- and cost-intensive one. Going down this road merits caution. Make sure you have a good reason to build a system around your needs rather than standardizing your processes to better match industry best practices. And think through the long-term ramifications of becoming a software developer—you'll not only need to pay to create the system initially, but to maintain it and upgrade it to match changes in your processes or other software packages. The experts we interviewed for this year's update reported that building custom systems is growing less common as a strategy for grantmakers, too, so think about reaching out to peer institutions to find out what they are considering.

If you are looking into building a custom system, consider starting with a flexible platform, such as Salesforce, Microsoft's SharePoint, or the Microsoft Dynamics CRM. This strategy can give you solid base functionality that can be customized and built on to meet your needs. Salesforce is a highly extendable online system with strengths in managing constituent information and internal workflow. (One such example of a grants management solution on top of Salesforce is foundationConnect from roundCorner, reviewed in-depth in this guide.) SharePoint provides a toolset with sophisticated document management facilities and support for integrating online and offline data. A few of the vendors reviewed in this guide—including Fluxx, Versaic, and WizeHive—offer highly flexible platforms that can be extensively configured to meet your foundation's needs, too.

# WHAT DO GRANTS MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS DO?

It's difficult to think about your own needs or evaluate the systems that are available without a solid understanding of what types of features are possible and which are common. Based on our interviews with foundation staff and reviews of various systems, we learned a few things about what's typically available and about what's desirable. More is not always better. The right system for your organization is the one that best supports your needs, not necessarily the one that has the most features. Feature-rich solutions can also be needlessly complex, and may present an unnecessarily high learning curve for your staff.

Use this section to construct a list of the features that might be useful to you, and then carefully prioritize the list for your own organization.

## Internal Tracking

At its simplest, a grants management system needs to do two things: store basic information about grant proposals so you can easily retrieve it (for example, name, sponsor, contact, and purpose) and track the proposal's status as it moves through your process. Useful additional features include the ability to upload documents, such as financials, in various file formats. Every system we looked at handles these basic functions, but with varying degrees of ease and flexibility.

If you plan to receive grant proposals by means other than an online application, such as email or post, make sure the software accommodates you. While some packages provide forms to facilitate data entry, others expect all grant proposal information to be entered by grantees and make it difficult or impossible for grantmakers to change proposal names, update contacts, or upload documents themselves. Some even require grantmakers to log in as grantees, which is an awkward step.

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The ability to categorize grant proposals also varies widely between systems. Consider how you'd like to label grant proposals in order to group them and report on them—for example, by grant program, by geographic or population-based categorization code, or by other fields such as dates. Will the system allow you to define new fields, or will it limit you to a few core categories? Can you define those categories for a grant application or only for approved grants? Can you split grants across multiple categories, and track allocations by percentage or actual dollar amount? Grantmakers sometimes need to make similar updates to data across several grant records. Some grants management systems nicely facilitate batch changes to data while others leave you to make such updates on a record-by-record basis. Vendors that also provide consulting services model may perform batch updates for you.

There is renewed interest in the grantmaking community in a common vocabulary, or in more technical terms, a shared taxonomy for the sector that is implemented in grants management systems. We asked vendors about their willingness to support this strategy, too. The taxonomy most widely supported by the systems we reviewed is the NTEE System used by the IRS and the National Center for Charitable Statistics. Some systems also support the categories used by the Foundation Center, but most expect clients to build out these codes themselves.

## Online Applications

Grantmakers are increasingly accepting grant proposals online, but grants management software varies widely in its support for online applications. Some systems barely support them at all, while others are built around them. When implemented thoughtfully, online applications can be an opportunity to streamline the application process for both grantmakers and grantseekers by eliminating the need to manage paper proposals, ensuring all required information is complete upon submission, and automating compliance checks and communications.

Systems also can streamline the application process by limiting the information provided by applicants until they are determined to be strong candidates for funding. Some systems include an interactive qualifying round, sometimes called an eligibility quiz, in which applicants answer a few questions to determine whether they're eligible for funding before taking the time to complete a more lengthy application.

Most allow at least a two-stage process that supports both an initial Letter of Intent and a more detailed proposal. If your application process contains multiple stages, check to see if the software will roll information from one stage to the next so grantees don't have to re-enter data as they move through the different stages. Most systems also allow applicants to avoid redundant data entry by letting them reuse information from one application to the next. Some systems support branching capabilities in online forms to collect different information from applicants based on the information they provide.

It's critical to consider the experience of filling out application forms from the perspective of the grantseeker. For example, online forms can "time out" unexpectedly, losing all of the grantseeker's work. Some systems mitigate this by automatically saving online form entries at regular intervals. A few simply warn users to save, while many others present a save button and rely on user diligence to make sure they don't lose any work. Applicants should also be able to save incomplete applications and return to them. Most online application schemes let you use browser-based spell-checking to proof your work, but a few packages include built-in spell-checkers.

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Most systems allow grantees to register themselves and set a user name and password. You can limit the registrations by selectively sharing the web address. Some of the more advanced systems let prospective grantees set up multiple accounts for a single application—for example, to allow a financial staff member to enter budget information—and transfer account histories between logins without contacting the foundation or the vendor. A few even support submissions from other sources, such as references, that are kept invisible to the applicants.

Most systems will allow applicants to upload attachments, in some cases including video or audio files—check if the file formats you need are supported and that virus scans for such uploads conform to your foundation's specifications.

Once applications are submitted, applicants should receive confirmation emails. Some systems let you customize the text of that email. Check to make sure application data flows seamlessly into the grantmaker interface—if not, you'll have to take the time to do manual data transfers.

You might also want the ability to collaborate with applicants on applications in progress, and provide comments and feedback before the applications are even submitted—some systems will let you do so. Some allow applicants to check the status of their requests online as they move through the review process, reducing or eliminating the need for grantseekers to call for updates. A few systems have even streamlined the online application process so that applicants can log in and see all proposals in progress with any funders who happen to use the grants management system to manage their processes rather than having to register multiple accounts.

There are emerging opportunities to connect grants management systems to third party data sources to further streamline the application process. One example of this evolution is the Simplify Initiative, a collaboration between GuideStar and TAG, which eliminates duplicate data entry for grantseekers by transferring the data in their GuideStar profile to the grants management systems of the potential funder. While several of the vendors in this report already support Simplify data out-of-the-box, most have not yet adopted this initiative, citing a lack of customer interest. A small number of systems have built in more limited functionality focused on automating charity status checks that pulls data directly from the IRS Business Master File.

## Form Design and Flexibility

Online applications collect information from prospective grantees in online data fields like text boxes, drop-down boxes, and checkboxes, and let grantees upload files. More advanced systems might include complex budget forms, or the ability to submit a portfolio of work. Most also support applications with multiple pages and sections, but only allow the use of their built-in spell-checkers. You should be able to set character limits for text fields in the system and be able to display prominently to applicants how many characters

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are left; ideally, you can display word counts, not just character counts. Most systems also let you customize in-application help for grantees, either through hover-over text, FAQs, or more innovative means, like videos.

All systems allow you to customize the fields that you collect. Some make it easy for you to add or update applications, while others charge you for every change. Check to see if you can customize forms with your organization's logo, colors, and fonts to match the rest of your website.

## Application Review

Once you've received grant applications, a grants management system should help manage the process of reviewing them and deciding what to fund. For simple tracking purposes, some systems provide a "checklist" to help ensure you have all the information you need to consider a grant.

Make sure it's easy for application reviewers to view all the information necessary to consider an application. For example, does the system let them see whether you've previously awarded any grants to the applicant? It can also be useful to provide reviewers a stripped-down version of the system so they don't have to wade through every detail of an application to read the relevant information and add their comments. If it's important for your reviewers to view paper versions of applications (in a board meeting, for example), can you easily print a summary, or only a (lengthy and wasteful) document with every field and attachment in the proposal?

Software packages provide varying degrees of support for more complex review processes. For example, will the system let you track comments and scores from more than one person? Can you define complex scoring criteria, such as multiple scores grouped into categories? Can scoring criteria vary between different grant programs or do you have to apply the same standards to all applications? It may be useful to be able to view summary statistics about those scores—for example, comparing average scores between different proposals—and allow reviewers to see the scores and comments of other reviewers.

Many systems allow reviewers to see and rate applications online. This allows internal staff to review applications from any location, and provides an opportunity for you to involve people from outside your organization as reviewers. If you do plan to include external reviewers, consider features that allow you to manage this process in detail. Can reviewers choose which proposal to review, and easily see and print both the proposals and any attachments? Can they flag conflicts of interest—for example, if they work for the same university as a grant applicant? Can you match reviewers to proposals based on keywords, demographic data, or level of expertise, or see how the average scores of reviewers compare in order to identify those who will typically score proposals higher or lower? Can foundation staff be notified when reviews are completed—either via email or within the system?

## 501(c)(3) and OFAC Status

As a routine part of the review process, grantmakers often check applicants' tax exempt, or 501(c)(3), status. Many grants management systems allow you to easily click through on an Employee Identification Number (EIN) to see the applicants' record and tax status on GuideStar, the online nonprofit organization database. Some allow you to screen capture the GuideStar record, which is useful for audit purposes. A few even check the status of each organization automatically and flag those that are not tax exempt, autofilling relevant information in the system, and can check against all organizations classified as 501s by the IRS, not just 501(c)(3).

Laws passed in the wake of September 11, 2001, suggest that grantmakers should check all grantee organizations and contacts against the Office of

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Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) and Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) lists of individuals and organizations with terrorist ties. Software features that facilitate or automate this verification will streamline your process. Some systems integrate with external OFAC list-checking websites or systems to make it easier to flag possible matches. Others provide these list-checking features within the grants management system itself. Some grantmakers may be interested in systems that can complete both the 501 and OFAC checking processes in batch, and can generate an audit trail of every time this information was checked for compliance purposes.

## Creating Letters and Board Dockets

Grants management processes can be document-heavy. Grantmakers often need to create not only printed letters, but also board dockets that allow board members to review all proposals under consideration. Systems with sophisticated functionality in this area allow you to create your own letter and docket templates, which can include personalized text, mail-merged grant data, and custom formats, fonts, and logos. Many integrate with Microsoft Word's mail-merge functionality. As board dockets can be very lengthy documents spanning hundreds of pages, consider looking into what options the system provides for viewing these files electronically. Few systems will provide specific formats for viewing and annotat-

ing board dockets from tablet devices, but almost all will allow you to at least save generated documents as a PDF file in the same format as print templates. Worth noting is that an entire separate class of software exists to enable the creation and viewing of electronic board documents—these board portal tools provide more functionality for comments and annotations on the docket than a standard .PDF and are designed specifically with tablets and other mobile devices in mind. (For more information about board portal software, see Idealware's *A Consumers Guide to Board Portals*. You can download that report for free at http://www.idealware.org/reports/consumers-guide-board-portals.)

## Email

Grantmakers have wholeheartedly embraced electronic communications over printing and mailing traditional letters. Most grants management systems support email in some form. Most store addresses and let you send email by clicking on a contact, and some allow you to email multiple contacts at once—for example, to send information about an upcoming event to all the grantees in a particular program.

Email templates, such as a boilerplate email informing applicants that their application has moved to the next stage in the review process, can be helpful. Many systems allow for more robust templates, including support for mail-merged fields (such as the project name) or file attachments (such as a budget spreadsheet template). Some also offer in-system spell-check and delivery statistics that show how many messages were opened, read, deleted, or rejected by recipients' servers.

The ability to send automated emails from the grants management system can be a useful way to email grantees a notification upon receipt of a completed application, or when due dates for deliverables are approaching. Most systems provide some support for emails triggered by schedules and system events, and a few provide robust control over such automated email.

Email delivery reports can be useful for grantmakers who intend to send bulk email from their grants management systems. A few solutions in this report offer email delivery reports including open, click-through, and unsubscribe rates, but most do not. If your organization plans to send bulk email through its grants management system, you'll also want to consider

how this email is sent. Some systems send out email through your own organization's email server, which works fine for individual emails, or emails to a few dozen people, but is risky if you email thousands of prospective grantees. On a big list, some people will flag your email as spam no matter how careful you are. Over time, those complaints build up, and you run the risk of having your whole domain blacklisted. That means that none of your organization's email—including email directly from staff members—will go through. It's not likely, but it does happen, and it can take weeks to get removed from blacklists when it does.

# Most grants management systems support email in some form.

In general, we recommend sending broadcast emails through vendors' servers, which would mean either choosing a system that allows that or opting for a third party broadcast email tool instead. We also recommend steering clear of systems that send out group emails via blind copy rather than one-to-one—that's another spam trigger.

## Relationship Management

During the course of a grant, grantees are likely to interact regularly with various people at your organization. Grants management systems can help track these interactions. What communications have you sent a grantee? Who have they spoken with, and about what?

To do this effectively, a system must track organizations separately from individual grants—to allow you, for example, to see what conversations you had about a previous grant when a new one is under review. It can also be helpful to track the names and roles of individual staff members at a grantee organization.

This is particularly important for large institutions such as universities, where different researchers may apply separately for grants.

Grantmakers sometimes give grants to units of larger organizations—for example, they may award money to the school of education within a university. Your grants management system should let you track these grants by business unit as well as by the organization in which it lives. Many systems that support email or mail-merged letters also automatically store records of those communications. It's also useful to be able to store a log of communications for a particular contact or grant—for example, to track email sent outside the system, or telephone communications with grantees.

In addition to logging emails sent within the grants management system, it can be useful to capture into the system emails sent externally—for example, through Outlook. A few systems allow you to do this easily, and some even let you synchronize your contacts with Outlook.

## Grant Requirements & Outcomes Evaluation

Many grants include reporting, site visit, or other requirements. A number of packages provide checklist functionality that lets you define those requirements or others, such as the need to do a site visit, and assign them to staff or grantees with a due date. Some systems require you to manually set up requirements for each individual grant. Others let you set up default requirements that can be applied to all grants—and then, perhaps, customized on a per-grant basis.

Once they are set up, you can track which requirements are upcoming, completed, or sometimes even "approved"—to note, for instance, that a progress report was read by your staff and approved.

Some systems allow you to set up automatic email reminders that alert staff members or grantees when requirement deadlines are approaching. Some let grantees log in to a website to see approaching deadlines online.

If you require written progress reports from grantees, make sure the system provides the ability to affiliate those reports with the grantee. For example, can you

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attach a document to the grant record? Can you enter specific information as data fields on the record—say, the number of people served by the grant? If you can enter data fields, can this information then be used in reports that summarize metrics across all grantees—for example, to know that your grantees collectively provided food to 4,523 children in 2013? What about comparing metrics across groups that you can configure in the system?

A number of systems use online forms to collect these types of detailed data fields, including narrative information, quantitative metrics, or even detailed budget information. If you plan to collect data online, consider how easily you can update the forms. Some systems let you customize them yourself. Others require you to pay the vendor for each change. Will it let you use the collected data in summary reports?

In the past few years, the nonprofit sector as a whole has witnessed greater demand for measuring the effect individual programs are making in the lives of their participants and the community as a whole. We asked the vendors to demonstrate how each system can support the work of foundations trying to measure the impact their grants have on their target demographics or toward their stated objectives.

While outcomes management has different goals than regular post-award progress reports, overall the grants management systems use the same workflow and functionality (like online forms and custom reports)

to meet both needs. Most systems are able to roughly support this through custom fields and ad-hoc reporting, without much attention or development paid to the strategies or research behind program evaluation. However, several products in this report provide modules or tools dedicated to this need, although each does so in slightly differing ways.

# Many systems store wire transfer information and can facilitate electronic grant payments.

Because of the variety of ways systems approach outcomes, it's important to think carefully about what your foundation wants to measure and the particular strategy you want to (or already) use. If you want to simply measure grantee progress against a few stated objectives for your programs (for example, if a particular percentage of populations served must be veterans or children), most systems will likely meet your needs. However, if you hope to compare your grantees' results against national benchmarks, or want to measure the total effect of a grant on a population (as opposed to what changes would have happened without intervention), you will likely need a considerably more complex solution.

## Payments

Once you approve a grant, you will need to manage the payment process. Grants management systems can help with this as well.

In many software packages, setting up a payment schedule for a grant mimics the process of setting up grant requirements. Some require you to schedule each payment manually, or automatically default to paying the entire grant in a single lump sum on the established grant start date. Others allow you to set

one or more default payment schedules, which you can then assign to a grant—for example, to say that every grant within a particular program is a three-year grant with a payment on the first of each year. Some systems also offer a payment scheduling "wizard" to distribute payments over time. However you initially define payment schedules, it's useful to be able to then manually adjust them to specific circumstances for a particular grant. If your foundation makes program-related investments (PRIs), think about how the system will let you schedule out repayments. Will it generate them automatically based on the amount and duration? Or will you need to manually enter each expected payment (a daunting task when loan repayments may take three or four years)? Can the system calculate the interest for these repayments?

Grantmakers often tie payments to specific grantee requirements—for example, a second payment may be contingent on the receipt of a progress report. To support this, make sure the grants management system allows you to link payment to requirements, and that it uses this information to generate payment reports.

Systems vary in their support for payment special cases. Check whether it's straightforward to award grants to one organization but pay another, such as a fiscal sponsor, or whether you're able to update the amount of a grant in the middle of a grant period to account for unforeseen events without losing the record of the approved grant amount. Can you make grants in currencies other than U.S. dollars, or in multiple currencies—and if so, will the system track the exchange rate not just at the time of grant approval but at the time of payment? Can you report on grants made in other currencies, including exchange rate data, and do payment reports carry program codes and other meaningful information?

If your organization requires paper check requests for accounting, make sure the system supports them—some can even be configured to print checks directly from the system. Alternatively, consider more streamlined ways to generate grantee payments. Many systems store wire transfer information and can facilitate electronic grant payments. Whichever method you use, make sure you can store payment information, such as date paid, check number, and amount, within the grants management system itself,

# When looking at budget functionality, it's critical to understand what tracking method the system is using.

where it's easily accessible. Can you void payments in the system, place them on hold, and track sophisticated transactions like quid pro quo and in-kind payments?

Many grants management systems integrate with external accounting systems like QuickBooks or Dynamics GP (formerly Great Plains). Such integration can streamline the payment process by transferring information about upcoming payments into the accounting system and then retrieving data on payments that have been made. Vendors of packages with no accounting system integration are often willing to custom build this facility for an additional cost.

As more systems allow for greater self-service for grantees, it's also worth considering whether you want payment schedules and associated conditions or requirements accessible from the grantee portal. If so, can grantees view just the installments they have already received in the system, or can they view all scheduled and received payments?

Finally, most grantmakers will want to control who has access to payment information. Most of the systems in this report allow you to restrict access to payment information through permissions, and according to payment status.

## Budgeting

There is wide variance among grants management systems in budgeting your organization's granting funds. A few offer no budget support at all, while others allow budgeting only through heavy customization. There are some packages, however, that include strong

budgeting components. Most commonly, budgeting features let you define the amount of money you plan to devote to each grant program or category and then generate reports to compare these budget amounts to the amount spent. More versatile systems allow you to track by both program and subprogram, or split grants between programs.

The ability to base budgeting on a previous year's budget can save time and effort for many organizations. Several packages we reviewed allow this, and some even allow you to create budgets for multiple years.

When looking at budget functionality, it's critical to understand what tracking method the system is using. Foundations budget by one of two different methods: by the amount paid out to grantees over that year (common among corporate and community foundations, and sometimes called a cash method of budgeting) or by the amount awarded that year regardless of when it is paid (common among private foundations, and sometimes called an accrual method of budgeting). None of the systems reviewed tracked budget figures for both these methods at the same time, although some let you choose one or the other.

A number of grantmakers expressed interest in tracking budgets across multiple categories—for example, program, geography, and population—and "what if" scenario planning to see how a certain course of action would affect budgets. A few of the packages in this report provide some support for building "what if" scenarios. Another specialized need is support for interest repayments on Program-Related Investments, or PRIs, which most systems could accommodate through customization, and a select few can provide out-of-the-box.

## System Reporting

System reports can help manage grants processes and provide updates to others. At a minimum, you should be able to create the basic reports you need to monitor your workflow, evaluate your practices, and report on your activities—for example, the amount of money committed and paid for the year, sorted by program, or grant details required for a Form 990-PF (Return of Private Foundation). Such basic reports are con-

sidered standard, and most software packages provide for them out-of-the-box. The ability to customize these reports to better meet your needs and save those customizations for future use can save a lot of time and money, but not all systems allow this. Also, many of the systems that do provide standard reports and queries provide a lot of them. Is there some way to customize or filter the list to bookmark your preferred reports? A growing trend in the sector is opening up reporting access to casual users of the grants management system, not just experts. We evaluated the approachability of the reporting interface for the first time in this report. (For a list of the basic data you need to be able to get out of your system and more useful information, download GMN's free report, *Assessing the How of Grantmaking,* at http://www.gmnetwork.org/projectstreamline/articles-topic/evaluate-practices/assessing-grantmaking.)

From time to time you may want more customized reports. Support for such ad hoc reports varies widely among grants management software packages. Make sure you have access to all the data that might be useful in such a report, including any custom fields you've defined and information submitted in grant applications or progress reports. For simple ad hoc reports, the ability to export this data to Excel, where you can format it, might suffice. But for more complex reports, some systems provide a set of tools that let you define the data you'd like to see, as well as report columns and formatting. Some of these tools are basic, and allow limited support for customizing reports. Others are limited only by your ability to apply them—reporting tools are complex, and can be confusing to users without experience managing databases. Look carefully at the features to judge whether someone on your staff will be able to effectively create reports. Also, make sure you can save a report format once you've invested time in creating it.

Reporting abilities in grants management systems are becoming more sophisticated, and many now offer the ability to automatically run reports and send them out at intervals you set, either to you or individuals you define, as well as to present information in visual forms like charts, graphs, and maps. Some systems also contain standard report templates, like the eGrant and hGrants format from the Foundation Center, or the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) standard. Dashboards are also becoming increasingly important, and some systems allow users to configure their own dynamic views of data.

## Some of these tools are basic, and allow limited support for customizing reports. Others are limited only by your ability to apply them.

Document management systems and newer versions of operating systems like Microsoft Windows allow you to search within documents. Those who have used this feature and find it helpful may wish for the ability to search the content of attachments to grant records.

Finally, if your organization categorizes grants using hierarchical codes, make sure the system supports it—for example, will it associate Pre-K and Elementary codes with Education? Not all systems offer this advanced feature.

## Permissions and Workflow

If multiple staff members will use the system, make sure you can set different levels of access. This will help protect critical data by limiting who can update it.

Many systems support varied access to individual features—for example, some users can read but not update any information, or update grant information but not approve grants or change their amounts. The granularity of these access rights varies widely among systems. Some provide for a few different, preset roles. Others allow you to define read/update/delete rights for each module. A few even allow you to define rights for each individual data field.

In many cases, disabling functionality or features for a particular user or group doesn't remove it from their view. Users with read-only access may still have to navigate through disabled screens or fields to reach the information they need. Systems that provide simplified interfaces to improve ease of access for simple tasks or for users with less complex needs, such as reviewers, might be a better option for larger foundations with wider pools of users.

Audit logs—a record of who made updates to what fields, and when—can also be useful. If a system includes an audit log, check to see what actions are logged. Is it every change, or just a few core ones?

The grants management process often is a series of tasks which need to be done by specific people, in a particular order. Because of this, an increasing number of foundations want a system that manages the workflow—for example, assigning grants or tasks to individuals or roles and providing a customized view that spells those tasks out for each staff member. Systems that support configurable workflows can simplify grants management for organizations with entrenched processes.

## Data Access

Whether your system is hosted (Software-as-a-Service) or installed, the grants data it contains is yours. You should be able to access it at will. Being able to extract your data from the system is critical in order to back it up—always a good idea—or to migrate it to a new grants management system. If your system is hosted on the vendor's servers, make sure the vendor guarantees specifically that you will be able to fully export all grant data and all attached files on request. Systems that allow you to do this yourself, without relying on the vendor, are even better.

Easy data access can also allow you to interact with your data through other systems—for example, to export grants data to a website as a text file, or to Excel for sorting, calculating, and formatting more sophisticated reports. The ability to import files is also helpful—for example, to manually load information from an external accounting system.

## If you want a system to integrate with other software packages, such as QuickBooks or Crystal Reports, check to see how the connection is configured.

If you want a system to integrate with other software packages, such as QuickBooks or Crystal Reports, so that data flows from one system to the next without manual intervention, check to see how the connection is configured. Is an Application Programming Interface (API) or Open Database Connectivity (ODBC) connection provided so your own programmer can configure it? What data can be accessed this way? Is it read-only, or does it let you write to the database? Some require the vendor to set up any integration with external packages for you—often at extra cost.

As mobile devices grow in popularity, users look increasingly to work from their smartphones and tablet computers. While many web-based applications are accessible via smartphone web browsers, their screen size can make it impractical to use them unless the vendor either provides a view optimized for mobile browsers or builds a compact smartphone application, or "app," to facilitate access. Using a web-based grants management system from tablet computers can be practical without a specialized app or mobile view given their larger screen size relative to smartphones. Mobile device access is still new territory so it pays to get detailed information from the vendor if this is something that interests you.

Most of the web-based systems we reviewed have eschewed mobile apps in favor of "responsive" web design, which will automatically rearrange fields, forms, and sections of the user interface to match the size of each user's screen. While this provides a convenient means of viewing grant records from a smartphone or tablet, it may not provide the ideal environment for filling out forms or answering questions with radio buttons or checkboxes. As a result, if it's important to you that reviewers can easily rate grant applications from mobile devices, look for systems that can provide a dedicated mobile interface for those use cases.

We also asked about ways in which vendors protect the security and integrity of your data within the system.

## Overall Customization

Most grants management systems are designed to appeal to the broadest spectrum of users possible, taking into account that large foundations, for example, will have different needs and processes than small, private foundations. To this end, most systems let you customize the programs and codes you use to categorize grants. Systems that support online applications, reviews, and progress reports also let you customize the fields collected within these online forms—although some require a fee to the vendor to update them.

But the differences among the systems become more apparent when you begin to consider their ability to add custom "internal tracking" fields—fields used by staff rather than the online data fields used to gather grantee information. A few systems don't let you add any new internal use fields. Others let you add fields, but only into a limited "custom field" area, which can become disorganized and awkward if you add a number of fields. Check to see if you can remove fields or change the names of existing ones, and if custom fields have the same permissions as system-generated ones.

If you want to capture specific application or progress report information from grantees, check to see where the system will store it. Some provide useful views of this information. Others dump it into that same disorganized "custom field" area, forcing you to set

up custom reports to view it effectively. Grantmakers who serve international or ethnically diverse populations may also be interested in a system's ability to support custom language sets for online forms, based on program or geographic location.

# Most grants management systems are designed to appeal to the broadest spectrum of users possible.

A few systems can be almost completely customized to your needs, with custom fields, labels, interfaces, processes, and functionality, but they require the vendor's involvement in the customization. This can be useful for organizations with unique needs, but it can be very expensive and more difficult to support down the road. Before you pay to customize a system to your existing process, revisit the processes to see if they can be streamlined or improved. Are they truly unique? You might be better served by moving toward the best processes used by a number of foundations, and therefore easier and cheaper to support. If you choose to have the vendor customize the system, make sure they are experienced with this type of work and that they allow heavily customized systems to remain on the upgrade path.

## Ease of Use

All grants management systems are fairly complex, so your staff is likely to require training. However, functionality should be relatively easily to learn and to remember. Are fields and functions intuitively named and easy to find? If staff need cheat sheets or guesswork to run basic processes, they're more likely to opt out of using the system, or to resort to workarounds.

Can users easily find the actions they need to take without returning to a main menu? The system should also effectively support power users—those most familiar with the system. Can your grant administrator perform common tasks quickly and efficiently?

## Support and Training

Whatever else you need in a grants management system, you can be sure you'll need customer support. All the reviewed vendors offered solid, basic-level support: phone support, system documentation, and at least informal training upon request.

In terms of phone support, the difference is likely to be on price and quality. How much do you have to pay, either per incident or per year? Are existing customers typically able to reach someone knowledgeable when they call for support? Online support is also increasingly common, including videos, FAQs, chat support, and other web-based support for technical issues.

Good documentation, whether printed or online, is also critical. Ideally, information is available in the form of hypertext within the system—for example, to let you see what clicking a button will do before you actually click it. If you're rolling out a system to a number of people in your organization, you should be able to tailor the documentation to your own processes.

Different vendors provide different types of training, from affordable over-the-phone and online options to more formal training at your own offices. Ask the vendor whether they have training materials and how much you will pay.

## Installation and Maintenance

It is important to know what will be required to use the system you choose. For most online hosted systems, a major web browser and enough Internet bandwidth is likely all you need. For installed systems and for web-based systems you host yourself, there can be many other requirements. You will want to know what kind of server hardware you will need. Additionally, there will likely be software prerequisites, like web server software and a core database like SQL

or Microsoft Access, and you may need to increase bandwidth to accommodate access to Cloud-based grants management systems. Will the vendor help with setup and maintenance? If not, then you might need to hire a consultant to assist you.

## Stability in the Market

Finally, consider vendor stability. Choosing a grants management software package and moving your data into it is a considerable effort. You don't want to be forced to repeat this work in a year because a vendor has gone out of business. Ask some background questions. How long have they been in business? How many clients do they have? Does the revenue earned from the grantmaking system cover the personnel and operational expenses required to support it?

Because the grants management market supports niche software solutions, 20 or so clients are often sufficient for a vendor to support operations. But if they have fewer than 10 clients or so, or if their revenues don't cover their expenses, the vendor is likely not yet at a very stable point, and their long-term viability is more of a risk.

## Specialized Needs

This report focuses on the core grants management functions shared by most foundations, but some grants management systems provide a number of additional functions typically focused on the more niche needs of particular types of foundations. As we've discussed, this report doesn't cover functionality specifically intended for community foundations (like fund development, full fund accounting, or donor portals), but corporate foundations have their own set of needs.

For instance, corporations often want matching gift functionality to track employees' charitable donations and the corporation's possible grants. Matching gift functionality tracks donations by employee, as most corporations will only match a finite per-employee amount. In addition, some corporate philanthropy arms count employee volunteer hours as community contributions. Many foundations use separate systems to track this, but a few grants management systems offer integrated volunteer hour tracking functionality.

# WHAT DO THESE SYSTEMS COST?

Prices for grants management systems vary widely, but follow three primary models:

- **Yearly fees**. Most hosted systems charge an annual fee that is often scaled to usage. It's likely to be based on some combination of the total number of system users, how many grants applications you accept, how many documents you store, and how many programs (with separate system processes) you run. A few systems define this yearly fee based on the amount of assets you are administrating within the system, rather than your actual system use.

- **License and maintenance fees**. Rather than an annual fee, most installed software packages charge a per-user up-front fee for purchase and installation—anything from a few thousand to hundreds of thousands of dollars. Many also offer an à-la-carte menu of optional modules that can substantially affect the license cost. In addition, there's

typically an annual "maintenance" fee, generally 15 percent to 20 percent, which covers phone support and software updates—this fee is more common with installed solutions, but a few of the hosted systems in this report price support separately from the annual licensing costs. The maintenance fee is often optional, but skip it at your own risk—phone support is important, and without updates your software will become out-of-sync with the vendor's latest version, making it difficult (and likely expensive) to purchase add-on modules in the future.

- **Setup and configuration costs**. Most vendors charge setup and configuration fees—this is true of both hosted and installed systems. Some vendors' pricing structures are simple, charging specific fees for analyzing and documenting your system requirements, customization, online application building, report creation, and data migration. A few cover all these services in the base pricing structure. Others use complicated pricing models that let you choose exactly what services you want. Remember, whether you pay the vendor, hire a consultant, or choose to tackle setup or installation yourself, there's often a lot of work to do. Data migration in particular is a time-consuming and often underestimated task.

In general, hosted systems cost less up front than similar installed systems, but are more expensive in terms of ongoing vendor fees.

> In general, hosted systems cost less up front than similar installed systems, but are more expensive in terms of ongoing vendor fees.

The comparison charts in the next section include price estimates for each system, for both a minimal implementation of the package typical for small organizations and a complex installation for a larger organization. The "First Year" cost represents any license costs, setup costs, or fees for the first year of service. The "Yearly" cost is the recurring maintenance fee or annual fee you would expect to pay each year.

# COMPARING GRANTS MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

## SmartSimple GMS360°

SmartSimple's GMS360° is a flexible, easy-to-use system —qualities that have been enhanced in recent updates with new global search functionality. This system lets you create relatively complex online forms that can contain a wide variety of field types, including rich text fields with formatting toolbars and internal tracking fields that can be made invisible to applicants. New functionality allows users to create multiple versions of the same form and display different versions to different applicants automatically through conditional logic. Uploaded files can be version-controlled and indexed, making their contents available to queries and reports. The system provides useful support for managing relationships, broadcast email, mail-merged letters, and reporting, as well as integrated task lists and dashboards to manage each user's work. Payment functionality and Budgeting are particularly strong, with support for payment workflows, multiple currencies, and interest repayment schedules for program-related investments. SmartSimple implementation starts at about $15,000, depending on number of programs and complexity of grant workflows and processes. Annual support and maintenance are included in monthly user fees. "High usage" staffers, such as grants administrators and program officers who use the system more than forty hours a month, are billed at $1,176 per user per year (billed on a monthly basis). "Low usage" staffers who are logged into the system for less than forty hours per month are billed at $192 per year (again on a monthly basis), and there is no charge for users who use the system less than two hours a month. External users, like reviewers or board members, are billed annually at $2,400 total (on a monthly basis). License fees are based on actual usage and the system automatically audits the user type for fair billing.

# COMPARISON CHARTS

The six charts on the following pages compare the 29 systems we reviewed against six sets of specific criteria:

- Low Cost for Simple Needs

- Flexible Relationship Management

- Complex Online Data Collection

- Complex Application Review Needs

- Strong Outcomes Measurement and Reporting

- Substantial Functionality for the Needs of Large Foundations

While every grantmaker will base software decisions on a different set of factors, these charts help by explaining the various packages' strengths and weaknesses in areas important to most foundations. You can find the framework used to determine the ratings in Appendix B.

# FLEXIBLE RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

| FLEXIBLE RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT | | | | | | SmartSimple GMS360° | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Small Grantmaker, basic functionality | | | | | | | |
| First year cost | | | | | | $17,000 to $25,000 | |
| Ongoing yearly cost | | | | | | $7,500 to $12,000 | |
| Large Grantmaker, basic functionality | | | | | | | |
| First year cost | | | | | | $25,000 to $100,000 | |
| Ongoing yearly cost | | | | | | $12,000 to $20,000 | |
| Internal Tracking | | | | | | ● | |
| Online Applications–Grantmaker Experience | | | | | | ● | |
| Online Applications–Grantseeker Experience | | | | | | ● | |
| Form Design & Flexibility | | | | | | ● | |
| Application Review | | | | | | ● | |
| 501(c)3 & OFAC Status | | | | | | ● | |
| Letters & Board Dockets | | | | | | ● | |
| Emails | | | | | | ● | |
| Relationship Management | | | | | | ● | |
| Grant Requirements & Outcomes Evaluation | | | | | | ◐ | |
| Payments | | | | | | ◐ | |
| Budgeting | | | | | | ● | |
| System Querying and Reporting | | | | | | ● | |
| Permissions & Workflow | | | | | | ● | |
| Data Access | | | | | | ● | |
| Overall Customization | | | | | | ● | |
| Ease of Use | | | | | | ● | |
| Support & Training | | | | | | ● | |
| Stability in the Market | | | | | | ● | |
| Support Customer Experience | | | | | | ◎ | |
| Training Customer Experience | | | | | | ◎ | |
| Implementation Customer Experience | | | | | | ● | |

• None  ◎ Basic  ◐ Solid  ● Advanced        ‹ 5 responses  ◎ Below Average  ● Good  ● Outstanding

*with module or app at additional cost

**with customization

*** Small foundation parameters: Five named users, five concurrent users, 50 external reviewers, $10,000,000 asset base, 10 grants per year. Basic functionality to review applications, track and pay grants, and to accept applications online.

*** Large foundation parameters: Twenty named users, 10 concurrent users, 50 external reviewers, $1,000,000,000 asset base, 100 grants per year. With all functionality covered in this report.

| COMPLEX ONLINE DATA COLLECTION (CONTINUED) | SmartSimple GMS360° | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Small Grantmaker, basic functionality | | | |
| First year cost | $17,000 to $25,000 | | |
| Ongoing yearly cost | $7,500 to $12,000 | | |
| Large Grantmaker, basic functionality | | | |
| First year cost | $25,000 to $100,000 | | |
| Ongoing yearly cost | $12,000 to $20,000 | | |
| Internal Tracking | ● | | |
| Online Applications–Grantmaker Experience | ● | | |
| Online Applications–Grantseeker Experience | ● | | |
| Form Design & Flexibility | ● | | |
| Application Review | ● | | |
| 501(c)3 & OFAC Status | ● | | |
| Letters & Board Dockets | ● | | |
| Emails | ● | | |
| Relationship Management | ● | | |
| Grant Requirements & Outcomes Evaluation | ◐ | | |
| Payments | ◐ | | |
| Budgeting | ● | | |
| System Querying and Reporting | ● | | |
| Permissions & Workflow | ● | | |
| Data Access | ● | | |
| Overall Customization | ● | | |
| Ease of Use | ● | | |
| Support & Training | ● | | |
| Stability in the Market | ● | | |
| Support Customer Experience | ◎ | | |
| Training Customer Experience | ◎ | | |
| Implementation Customer Experience | ○ | | |

• None  ◯ Basic  ◐ Solid  ● Advanced          • < 5 responses  ◎ Below Average  ○ Good  ● Outstanding

| COMPLEX APPLICATION REVIEW NEEDS (CONTINUED) | | | SmartSimple GMS360° | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Small Grantmaker, basic functionality | | | | | |
| First year cost | | | $17,000 to $25,000 | | |
| Ongoing yearly cost | | | $7,500 to $12,000 | | |
| Large Grantmaker, basic functionality | | | | | |
| First year cost | | | $25,000 to $100,000 | | |
| Ongoing yearly cost | | | $12,000 to $20,000 | | |
| Internal Tracking | | | ⬤ Advanced | | |
| Online Applications–Grantmaker Experience | | | ⬤ Advanced | | |
| Online Applications–Grantseeker Experience | | | ⬤ Advanced | | |
| Form Design & Flexibility | | | ⬤ Advanced | | |
| Application Review | | | ⬤ Advanced | | |
| 501(c)3 & OFAC Status | | | ⬤ Advanced | | |
| Letters & Board Dockets | | | ⬤ Advanced | | |
| Emails | | | ⬤ Advanced | | |
| Relationship Management | | | ⬤ Advanced | | |
| Grant Requirements & Outcomes Evaluation | | | ◗ Solid | | |
| Payments | | | ◗ Solid | | |
| Budgeting | | | ⬤ Advanced | | |
| System Querying and Reporting | | | ⬤ Advanced | | |
| Permissions & Workflow | | | ⬤ Advanced | | |
| Data Access | | | ⬤ Advanced | | |
| Overall Customization | | | ⬤ Advanced | | |
| Ease of Use | | | ⬤ Advanced | | |
| Support & Training | | | ⬤ Advanced | | |
| Stability in the Market | | | ⬤ Advanced | | |
| Support Customer Experience | | | ◎ Below Average | | |
| Training Customer Experience | | | ◎ Below Average | | |
| Implementation Customer Experience | | | ◯ Good | | |

• None ◯ Basic ◗ Solid ⬤ Advanced  • < 5 responses ◎ Below Average ◯ Good ⬤ Outstanding

# STRONG OUTCOMES MEASUREMENT AND REPORTING

| STRONG OUTCOMES MEASUREMENT AND REPORTING | | | | | | | SmartSimple GMS360° |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Small Grantmaker, basic functionality | | | | | | | |
| First year cost | | | | | | | $17,000 to $25,000 |
| Ongoing yearly cost | | | | | | | $7,500 to $12,000 |
| Large Grantmaker, basic functionality | | | | | | | |
| First year cost | | | | | | | $25,000 to $100,000 |
| Ongoing yearly cost | | | | | | | $12,000 to $20,000 |
| Internal Tracking | | | | | | | ● |
| Online Applications–Grantmaker Experience | | | | | | | ● |
| Online Applications–Grantseeker Experience | | | | | | | ● |
| Form Design & Flexibility | | | | | | | ● |
| Application Review | | | | | | | ● |
| 501(c)3 & OFAC Status | | | | | | | ● |
| Letters & Board Dockets | | | | | | | ● |
| Emails | | | | | | | ● |
| Relationship Management | | | | | | | ● |
| Grant Requirements & Outcomes Evaluation | | | | | | | ◐ |
| Payments | | | | | | | ◐ |
| Budgeting | | | | | | | ● |
| System Querying and Reporting | | | | | | | ● |
| Permissions & Workflow | | | | | | | ● |
| Data Access | | | | | | | ● |
| Overall Customization | | | | | | | ● |
| Ease of Use | | | | | | | ● |
| Support & Training | | | | | | | ● |
| Stability in the Market | | | | | | | ● |
| Support Customer Experience | | | | | | | ◎ |
| Training Customer Experience | | | | | | | ◎ |
| Implementation Customer Experience | | | | | | | ○ |

• None    ◯ Basic    ◐ Solid    ● Advanced        • < 5 responses    ◎ Below Average    ○ Good    ● Outstanding

*with module or app at additional cost

**with customization

*** Small foundation parameters: Five named users, five concurrent users, 50 external reviewers, $10,000,000 asset base, 10 grants per year. Basic functionality to review applications, track and pay grants, and to accept applications online.

*** Large foundation parameters: Twenty named users, 10 concurrent users, 50 external reviewers, $1,000,000,000 asset base, 100 grants per year. With all functionality covered in this report.

# SUBSTANTIAL FUNCTIONALITY FOR THE NEEDS OF LARGE FOUNDATIONS

| SUBSTANTIAL FUNCTIONALITY FOR THE NEEDS OF LARGE FOUNDATIONS | | | | | | SmartSimple GMS360° |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Small Grantmaker, basic functionality | | | | | | |
| First year cost | | | | | | $17,000 to $25,000 |
| Ongoing yearly cost | | | | | | $7,500 to $12,000 |
| Large Grantmaker, basic functionality | | | | | | |
| First year cost | | | | | | $25,000 to $100,000 |
| Ongoing yearly cost | | | | | | $12,000 to $20,000 |
| Internal Tracking | | | | | | ● |
| Online Applications–Grantmaker Experience | | | | | | ● |
| Online Applications–Grantseeker Experience | | | | | | ● |
| Form Design & Flexibility | | | | | | ● |
| Application Review | | | | | | ● |
| 501(c)3 & OFAC Status | | | | | | ● |
| Letters & Board Dockets | | | | | | ● |
| Emails | | | | | | ● |
| Relationship Management | | | | | | ● |
| Grant Requirements & Outcomes Evaluation | | | | | | ◐ |
| Payments | | | | | | ◐ |
| Budgeting | | | | | | ● |
| System Querying and Reporting | | | | | | ● |
| Permissions & Workflow | | | | | | ● |
| Data Access | | | | | | ● |
| Overall Customization | | | | | | ● |
| Ease of Use | | | | | | ● |
| Support & Training | | | | | | ● |
| Stability in the Market | | | | | | ● |
| Support Customer Experience | | | | | | ◎ |
| Training Customer Experience | | | | | | ◎ |
| Implementation Customer Experience | | | | | | ○ |

• None ◯ Basic ◑ Solid ● Advanced    • < 5 responses ◎ Below Average ○ Good ● Outstanding

*with module or app at additional cost

**with customization

*** Small foundation parameters: Five named users, five concurrent users, 50 external reviewers, $10,000,000 asset base, 10 grants per year. Basic functionality to review applications, track and pay grants, and to accept applications online.

*** Large foundation parameters: Twenty named users, 10 concurrent users, 50 external reviewers, $1,000,000,000 asset base, 100 grants per year. With all functionality covered in this report.

# HOW TO DECIDE

There are a number of options in grants management software packages. That's good, but it can make choosing difficult. What questions should you ask to narrow down the choices to focus in on the packages likely to work best for you?

- **Do you need a particular type of software package**? If you want an online system that your staff can access from anywhere, you'll likely want to prioritize Online hosted options. Organizations that value control of infrastructure should consider systems that can be installed on in-house hardware.

- **Do you plan to take all your applications online**? More than any other criteria, the packages vary in their ability to receive applications online, and to deal gracefully with applications received in paper form. If online applications are part of your strategy, look carefully at the features offered in this area to see if they'll meet your needs, and at what price. If you plan to continue receiving at least some applications in paper, though, make sure the ability to easily get these applications into the system is high on your list of requirements.

- **How sophisticated are your needs**? Read through the description in this report of what grants management systems can do, and think through how much of the more-advanced functionality described is necessary for you. If the vast majority of functionality described doesn't really apply for your processes, the less-expensive and less-complex systems might work well for you. Don't assume that more functionality is better; an inexpensive and streamlined system might be just what you need. On the other hand, if you'll need a number of the functionalities described as more advanced, you may need to look to the more-complex, expensive packages.

- **How well do your processes match typical ones**? It's important to try to align your processes with grantmaking best practices before choosing a new grants management system—tailoring a system to idiosyncratic processes is, at best, expensive, and may be impossible. Take care before deciding you have unique needs. It's quite common to think your processes are unusual in an important way, but in many cases these processes can be tweaked to match best practices without sacrifice. However, if you have truly unique needs, you'll need to look for a system that can be substantially customized—often, by a vendor willing to update their software for an additional fee.

- **What types of software can your infrastructure support?** Online hosted software is appealing to many organizations, as it doesn't require any hardware, software, or maintenance support. If you choose a software package that needs to be installed on your own computers, however, you'll need to consider how well you can support that package. What software will fit within your current technical

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It's important to try to align your processes with grantmaking best practices before choosing a new grants management system.

environment? For instance, if your staff is using Macs, you may have trouble finding a package that can be easily installed. Will your existing hardware support the new software, or will you need to purchase new equipment? Will you need to bring on a staff member or consultant to maintain and upgrade the software? If you'll need additional resources, make sure you account for that in the price of the software.

Hopefully, the information in this report will help you narrow down the options to a handful of choices. You'll certainly want to take a careful look at those systems yourself before making a final decision. Think through your needs carefully—which of the features described here are critical for you? Which are only nice to have, or not useful for your organization? What other features, which aren't discussed here, might be useful?

With that list of important features in hand, contact the vendors and ask for demo. Ask them to show you exactly the features you consider important. Consider giving them a script which walks through the tasks that you'd like to see demonstrated—for example, "I check the grantees that have progress reports due, and create a letter to mail to each of them." This can be very useful to help compare different systems to each other.

Use these demos to narrow down your choices to only a couple, and then ask those vendors for pricing information. For some systems, pricing is straightforward. For others, it's quite complicated, and may take some time for the vendor to estimate. Make sure you know what is included in the price. Will the vendor move any existing data into the system? Set up the system for you? Do more complex customizations?

# It doesn't matter how good a particular grants management system is if it doesn't fit your organization's needs.

A grants management system is only useful if it fits your organization's needs. It should make the jobs your already busy staff does each day easier and more efficient, allowing you to focus on your foundation's mission. There's much to consider when choosing such a system. Each of the available options has its own strengths and feature mixes, and cost isn't a guarantee of anything—especially since every grant-maker's needs differ. But if you do your homework and compare what's available with an honest evaluation of what you need, you'll find a system that will help you manage your processes more efficiently and communicate better with grantees.

# REVIEWS OF THE GRANTS MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

# SMARTSIMPLE GMS360°

SmartSimple's GMS360° is a flexible, easy-to-use system—qualities that have been enhanced in recent updates with new global search functionality. This system lets you create relatively complex online forms that can contain a wide variety of field types, including rich text fields with formatting toolbars and internal tracking fields that can be made invisible to applicants. New functionality allows users to create multiple versions of the same form and display different versions to different applicants automatically through conditional logic. Uploaded files can be version-controlled and indexed, making their contents available to queries and reports. The system provides useful support for managing relationships, broadcast email, mail-merged letters, and reporting, as well as integrated task lists and dashboards to manage each user's work. Payment functionality and Budgeting are particularly strong, with support for payment workflows, multiple currencies, and interest repayment schedules for program-related investments. SmartSimple implementation starts at about $15,000, depending on number of programs and complexity of grant workflows and processes. Annual support and maintenance are included in monthly user fees." High usage" staffers such as grants administrators and program officers who use the system more than forty hours a month, are billed at $1,176 per user per year (billed on a monthly basis). "Low usage" staffers who are logged into the system for less than forty hours per month are billed at $192 per year (again on a monthly basis), and there is no charge for users who use the system less than two hours a month. External users, like reviewers or board members, are billed annually at $2,400 total (on a monthly basis). License fees are based on actual usage and the system automatically audits the user type for fair billing.

- **Pricing (small org)**: First Year: $17,000 - $25,000
- **Pricing (small org)**: Annual Recurring: $7,500 - $12,000
- **Pricing (large org)**: First Year: $25,000 - $100,000
- **Pricing (large org)**: Annual Recurring: $12,000 - $20,000

## Internal Tracking

- **Grant Cycle Linkages**: All information for each grant proposal is linked together through its entire lifecycle.
- **Tracking by Grant Status**: You can easily retrieve grant information and status.
- **Tracking by Program Cycle or Board Meeting Date**: Can track by program cycle or board meeting date.
- **Tracking by Categories and Codes**: Can track by categories, such as geographic or population-based codes, and by percentage or dollar allocation if the categories are tied to the budget.
- **Splitting Categories**: Lets you split grants across codes.
- **Custom Categorization Codes**: Lets you define custom categorization codes for tracking and reporting.
- **Updating Basic Grant Information**: Lets you easily update basic grant information such as project names or codes throughout the process.
- **Attaching Files to Grant Record**: Lets you easily attach files to grant records, organizational records, and personal profiles, including Word documents, Excel spreadsheets, and PDFs.
- **Searching for Grant Records**: Grants and applications are searchable by a number of criteria, including organization's legal name, EIN, application ID, program, and grant cycle. The vendor has added considerable enhancements around searching.
- **Handling Paper Applications**: Applications received as paper can be easily entered into the system from the new applications area of the Submission Manager. Forms can be filled in PDF and the data imported back into the system.
- **File Attachment Method**: The system uploads attached documents to the server and stores a link to that uploaded file in the database. The system also supports Google Drive as an alternative to the vendor's server(s).

- **Batch Updates to Grant Records**: Lets you perform batch updates of defined coding and other fields.
- **Support for Industry Taxonomy**: The system has support for the NTEE syntax within the system, and the vendor is willing to work with clients to incorporate other taxonomies into the system.
- **Ability to View Related Records and Data Across Records**: Lets you easily see related records and data across records.

## Online Applications

- **Support for Both Individual Applicants and Organizations**: The system allows for both individual applicants and organizations to apply for grants from the same grant program.
- **Creating Online Applications**: Lets you create an unlimited amount of online applications with file uploads, dropdown boxes, checkboxes, and text fields without additional charges from the vendor.
- **Number of Online Application Forms**: Lets you create unlimited different online forms to support each grant program.
- **Eligibility Branching**: Eligibility quizzes can branch to multiple applications.
- **Application Branching**: Grant application forms can branch—for example, to show a different set of questions for fiscal-sponsored organizations and 501(c)(3) organizations.
- **Support for Multiple Stages**: Supports multiple application stages, including an automatically scored eligibility quiz, a Letter Of Intent stage, a more detailed proposal stage, and many other stages as needed. The system also supports branching at the point of registration.
- **Online Application Integration**: Data from online applications can be accessed from the core grants management system—no download or upload of data files is required.
- **Multiple Logins for Grantees**: Supports multiple logins for grantees on a single application—for example, allows separate people to complete financial sections and proposal sections.
- **Transfer of Account and History**: The vendor reports that grantees or applicants can transfer their account and history to new staff contact if a foundation's business rules allow for this.
- **Reuse of Application Data**: Carries over contact information and other appropriate data for an organization or grant from one year's application form to another, or from a Letter of Intent to a proposal—for example, a narrative entered in a Letter Of Intent doesn't have to be re-entered in a proposal.
- **Application Autofill from Tax Record**: Grant seekers can automatically fill in their organization profile by entering their EIN number, through GuideStar's Simplify Initiative.
- **Viewing Proposal Status Online**: Applicants can view their status online.
- **Custom Confirmation Messages**: Lets you customize a confirmation message to be sent upon submission of an application.
- **Application Formatting**: Grantmakers can extensively format applications—for example, use rich text, create groups of questions, and create multiple pages.
- **Spell Checking**: Grantees can easily spell-check applications and all attachments.
- **Saving Incomplete Applications**: Applicants can save partially completed applications and return to them later.
- **Application Auto-Saving**: Applications in progress are automatically saved at regular intervals. The auto-save interval is configurable.
- **User Registration**: System registration follows standard best practices—applicants enter email address and password and are sent a confirmation email. Clients can opt for manual approval of registration requests or to allow applicants with accounts to create their own additional accounts for their organization.
- **Lost Credentials**: Both applicant and grantmaker can quickly and easily reset lost credentials.
- **Viewing Applications**: Applicants can easily view or print applications at any stage in the process.
- **Preview Packet**: The applicant can create a preview packet of their grant which includes either copies of all uploaded documents or links to them.
- **Mobile Device Application Access**: Grantee portal views are responsively designed to be compatible with mobile browsers. The vendor also provides a standalone Android app.

- **Duplicate Accounts**: The system checks the email address of each new registrant to make sure it doesn't already exist in the system and prompts the registrant if there is a match. There is a process for grant makers to review applicants to look for duplicates on the back end.
- **Unified Accounts Across Grantmakers**: The vendor reports that the platform allows for applicants or grantees to manage all grant information for all of their funders in the system.
- **Collaboration Between Grantseeker and Funding Organization**: The system allows the grantee to work on a proposal, save it as a draft, allow a reviewer to comment or make suggestions, and then work back and forth until a proposal is complete. For instance, a reviewer could add a note visible to the applicant, and configure a trigger to alert the applicant of the note's existence. As of the publication of this report, the vendor has launched an update to the system, which provides the ability to add field-level comments to submitted application.
- **Security Scan for Uploaded Documents**: Offers a full virus scan feature to prevent malicious files from being uploaded onto the application.

## Form Design and Flexibility

- **Look and Feel**: Lets you customize online application forms to match the look and feel of your website, including colors, fonts and navigation. You can also fully match the style sheet of your foundation's website.
- **Character and Word Counts**: The system includes character and word counts for application questions, and an administrator can set and adjust character limit for any field.
- **In-System Help for Applicants**: The system includes in-system help text editable by the foundation staff. Help text can be presented either in-line or as tool-tips.

## Application Review

- **Viewing Relationship History**: Lets you see a history of a relationship with prospective grantees—for example, the communications history, what grants they've applied for, the applications that were declined, and the applications that were granted.
- **Requirements Checklist**: Supports checklist functionality to define what information or documents you require from prospective grantees.
- **Reopening Submitted Applications**: Lets you reopen online applications once they've been submitted if more information is required from the applicant.
- **Printing Grant Summaries**: Reviewers can easily print grant summaries or full grant information as a PDF. Audio and video attachments can be viewed within the system.
- **Reviewer's Portal**: Provides a simplified "portal" interface to allow reviewers to see and review grant applications more easily.
- **Viewing files**: Lets reviewers easily view selected documents associated with the request and stored in the system. Audio and video files are playable within the browser, and documents are converted to a single PDF.
- **Grant Review Workflows**: Lets you define automatic steps and rules, or "workflow," for the grants review process and configure a workflow without the assistance of the vendor. Workflows can branch based on various factors, such as request amount.
- **Multiple Reviewer Support**: Multiple reviewers can each rate an application on a number of different factors and add comments. Reviewer comments can be made visible to the foundation staff as soon as they are saved as a draft.
- **Scoring Flexibility**: Supports different information or scoring schemes for different programs.
- **Online Application Review**: Supports online viewing and reviewing of applications.
- **External Reviewer Profiles**: Lets you track external reviewers' interests and potential conflicts of interest and use those criteria to assign applications for review. You can also create and save review panels to assign to requests.
- **Comment Sharing Among Reviewers**: Lets you choose whether to allow reviewers to see each other's comments and grades.

- **Numeric Review Scores**: Lets you view numeric review scores and report them as summary statistics—for example, average score—and aggregate them.
- **Review Status Notification**: Proposal owner and grants management staff can be automatically notified when reviews are completed, either via email or internal message, or both.

## 501(c)(3) and OFAC Status

- **501(c)(3) Status Checking**: Automatically checks Employee Identification Numbers against a standard 501(c)(3) nonprofit registry, and flags those not listed. The system uses the IRS database and also supports similar lists from the Canadian Revenue Agency and Inland Revenue of the UK. Automatically checks Employee Identification Numbers against a standard 501(c)(3) nonprofit registry, and flags those not listed. Provides updates based on the revocation list. The tax status automatic check includes auto population of related fields for legal name, EIN, and tax status, and includes date and time stamp, which can serve as an audit trail demonstrating completion of due diligence step(s). Lets you perform checks and updates in batch.
- **OFAC Status Checking**: Lets you compare organizations and individuals against standard OFAC, SDN, and other terrorist watch lists within the grants management system itself. The OFAC check is supplied by OFAC Analyzer and includes date and time stamp which can serve as an audit trail demonstrating completion of due diligence step(s). Lets you perform checks and updates in batch.
- **Manual Lookup Through GuideStar**: Lets you access GuideStar data for organizations within the system itself, through the Simplify Initiative.
- **Documentation for Organization Lookup**: The vendor provides documentation showing clients how to export the necessary grants data with the Foundation Center through the API on the system wiki.

## Letters and Board Dockets

- **Default Print Format**: Lets you define a default format for printing grant application summaries, choosing which fields to include as well as customizing fonts, colors, and logos.
- **Mail-Merge Fields in Letter Templates**: Lets you create letter templates in Microsoft Word, or an equivalent web-based word processor, that include mail-merged information about grants and organizations, and lets you customize their fonts, colors, and logos.
- **Printing Series of Summaries**: Lets you print letters or summaries for a series of grants or grant applications in a single step.
- **Pre-Print Viewing and Customization**: Lets you view and customize individual letters before printing them.
- **Board Docket Attachments**: Lets you attach documents to the board docket, and includes a dedicated interface to manage board meetings and the creation of documents to support them.
- **Electronic Signatures**: The system supports electronic signatures with an external approval process.
- **Electronic Templates**: Includes templates for print and electronic formats. Tablets can be supported through PDFs.

## Emails

- **Emailing Individuals and Groups**: Lets you send email through the system to a single individual or group that meets particular criteria. Group emails are not sent as blind copies, but rather as one-to-one to minimize the likelihood of being caught in a spam filter.
- **Email Template Flexibility**: Lets you create emails for individuals and groups based on templates that include both standard text and "mail-merge" type inserted data. You cannot edit one-off emails from a batch sent out based on a template.
- **Email Attachments**: Lets you attach files to emails sent to individuals and groups.
- **Email Delivery Reporting**: Lets you see the open rate, click-through rate, and unsubscribe rate for each email. You also can see the number of people who clicked on each link and bounce reports.
- **Event-Triggered Email**: Lets you set up and send automatic emails based on certain events, such as online application submission. Email configuration is done through the workflow engine.

- **Schedule-Triggered Email**: Lets you set up and send scheduled reminder emails to applicants and grantees. Lets you schedule emails based on date or elapsed time. Email configuration is done through the workflow engine.
- **Outbound Email Method**: Emails are sent through the vendor's email service to protect you from blacklisting and the vendor takes a series of steps to ensure email is not flagged as spam. Alternatively, email can be sent through the client's email servers or through third party email services, which may require an additional fee.
- **Spell Checking**: Lets you spell check emails within the system.

## Relationship Management

- **Tracking Individual History**: Lets you keep a record of an individual's association with a record, even if they leave, for historical and audit purposes, and they will not show up as an active contact for communications.
- **Tracking Organizational Grant History**: Tracks organizations separately from individual grants to allow you to see a history of all grants to an organization.
- **Tracking Hierarchical Business Units**: Can track individual business units under a larger organization and see grants for both the individual units and the larger organization.
- **Multiple Contacts Per Organization**: Lets you associate multiple contacts with an organization and define their relationships to you and to a specific grant.
- **Customized Communication by Contact Role**: Lets you communicate with a contact according to their relationship with the grant or organization—for example, send the payment letter to the payment contact, or email a reporting reminder to a report contact—through role-based communication.
- **Record of Correspondence**: Automatically stores a record of all system-generated letters and emails for each grant.
- **Call and Email Logging**: Lets you keep a log of outside communications, such as phone calls and emails, with a particular contact at a grantee organization.
- **Email Capture**: Lets you automatically capture emails from external email systems into grantee or organization records—for example, by including a special grants management system email address in the bcc field. Each grant in the system has its own unique email address to capture messages related to that grant.
- **Contact Synchronization**: System allows you to automatically synchronize contacts with Outlook.

## Grant Requirements & Outcomes Evaluation

- **Defining Grant Requirements**: Lets you define a default set of grant requirements by program and customize them for individual grantees. A grant can be associated with any number of pre- and post- activities.
- **Branching for Evaluation**: Lets you "branch" evaluation data collection based on type of grant.
- **Grant Requirement Deadlines**: Grantees can view grant requirement deadlines online.
- **Viewing Grant Requirements**: Lets you easily see which requirements grantees have met, and which they have not.
- **Tracking Individual Grantee Outcomes**: The system automatically calculates progress toward grantee or program outcome goals using submitted progress reports. Foundation staff can view both outcome goals and actuals on the same screen.
- **Online Progress Report Submission**: Lets grantees submit progress report information through online data fields, which you can then summarize across grantees in reports.
- **Deadline Reminder Emails**: Lets you automatically email grantees to remind them about upcoming deadlines and pull field information from requirements into reminder emails.
- **Progress Report Tracking**: Can track both that progress reports have been received and that they have been approved by staff.
- **Storing Progress Report Data**: Lets you store progress report information submitted by grantees in multiple data fields, which you can then summarize across grantees in reports.
- **Creating Online Progress Report Forms**: Lets you create custom online progress report forms (for example, corresponding to different programs) without paying additional vendor fees.

- **User Groups**: The system can support user groups to collect uniform data for evaluation purposes through a variety of means, including manual grouping of organizations, cross tab views, and ad hoc reporting.
- **Overall Approach to Outcomes Reporting**: Lets foundation staff define outcome goals by program and for individual grants, and automatically calculates progress toward those goals using submitted progress reports.

## Payments

- **Default Payment Scheduling**: Lets you define a default payment schedule that applies to all grants and then adjust the amounts and dates for each grant individually.
- **Viewing Payment Schedules**: Lets you see what scheduled payments are upcoming and whether the grantee has met the requirements linked with that conditional payment.
- **Check Requests**: Can generate a paper check request for accounting, but it's not possible to print a check directly from the system.
- **View Scheduled Payment Amount (Annual)**: Can view the amount scheduled to be paid out in a given year, including payments for grants awarded in previous years.
- **Schedule-Based Payment Viewing**: Lets you see what payments are due based on a schedule, and whether the grantee has met the associated prerequisite requirements.
- **Third-Party Payee Support**: Supports payments to individuals or organizations other than the primary grantee (for example, fiscal sponsors).
- **Electronic Payments**: Supports ACH payments and wire transfers by storing required information and confirmation codes for successful transactions.
- **Viewing Payments Made**: Lets you see what payments have been made, including amount, date paid, and check/ACH payment/wire transfer number.
- **Accounting Integration**: Integrates tightly with QuickBooks, Sage 300 (formerly Accpac), and SAP. The vendor states they can also facilitate data transfer to most other GL systems.
- **Automated Payment Approval Process**: Supports an automated payment approval process with configurable workflow steps.
- **Multi-Currency Support**: Supports grants made in multiple currencies by storing currency and exchange rate information.
- **Multi-Currency Reporting**: Lets you report on grants and payments made in any currency.
- **Contingent/Conditional Payments**: Allows for payments to be made contingent or conditional upon a specified grant or payment requirement.
- **Payment Controls**: Lets you configure audit/security controls to ensure that only certain staff can change payment information.
- **Scheduling Repayments for Program-Related Investments (PRIs)**: The system can automatically generate a repayment schedule for PRIs, using the same scheduling functionality as for payments. ACH payments are not supported for interest repayments.
- **Payment Notes**: Lets you include notes on payments, which can be made private for certain users or public for all users to see.
- **Payment Reporting**: Lets you report on payments that carry coding attributes of associated requests, organizations, and contacts.
- **Viewing Payment Schedule Online**: Grantees can view the payment schedule for their award(s) online through the grantee portal. The schedule displays both paid and upcoming payments.
- **Other Payment Issues**: Lets you void payments and place payments on hold as statuses within the system. There's no default ability to track quid pro quo and in-kind payments, although this could be tracked in custom fields. There's no ability to update payment details or create payments (e.g., general ledger account, fund, etc.) in batch.

# Budgeting

- **Budget Tracking Configuration**: You can decide whether the budgeting features track the amount paid out in a particular year or the total amount awarded.
- **Budget Amount Reporting**: Lets you enter a budget amount and disbursements for each grants program and report on that information with actuals (approved and pending).
- **Hierarchical Budget Tracking**: Budgets can be tracked in hierarchically defined categories or program areas.
- **Basing Budgets on Past Years**: Lets you use previous years' budgets as a base and adjust them for current year.
- **Multiple Programs Per Grant**: Can split grants across more than one program for budgeting and payment-tracking purposes. You can also manage multiple budgets and draw funds on a per-grant basis.
- **Multiyear Budgeting**: Lets you easily set up multi-year budgeting.
- **Drafting Budgets for "What-If" Scenarios**: Lets you set up "what-if" scenarios by creating and saving a new budget as a draft.
- **Budgeting and Grant Requests**: Budgeted line items can create grant requests and feed directly to disbursements.
- **Tracking Repayments for Program-Related Investments (PRIs)**: The system supports interest repayment on PRIs.

# System Querying and Reporting

- **General Reporting Approach**: The process of running reports is easy enough for casual users to run queries independently. There is also a more advanced reporting sub-system for expert users.
- **Searching and Filtering**: Lets you search or filter to find a particular set of grants based on status, program, and cycle, and view pre-packaged reports based on this customized set of grants.
- **Report Modification**: Can make small updates to standard reports—for example, to change the columns displayed, or the grouping—to meet slightly different needs.
- **Favorite Reports, Queries, and Actions**: Lets you quickly view favorite reports and queries without navigating a much larger set.
- **Saving Modified Reports**: Lets you name and save reports that you create or modify.
- **Ad Hoc Reporting**: Supports ad hoc reports within the system, which can include, and filter by, nearly any field displayed to users. These reports can include custom data columns, data sets, sorting, grouping, logos, and headers, but some formatting requires HTML/style-sheet expertise. The system also supports ad hoc reporting from nearly any field displayed to users by exporting data to Excel for formatting.
- **Grant Summary Tracking**: Can track summaries based on hierarchical codes—for example, to show grant money paid to each education sub-program as well as total education grants.
- **Data Reportability**: Virtually all system data—including data entered into online applications, review forms, and grantee progress reports—can be included in reports.
- **Report Drill-Down**: Lets you drill down for more information on some or all reports.
- **Attachment Searching**: Lets you search the contents of file attachments.
- **Automating Reports**: Lets you setup reports to automatically run and send to individuals or groups.
- **Visual Reports**: Lets you create, view, and export data in a visual graphic representation such as charts and graphs.
- **User Dashboards**: Provides "dashboard" views that summarize the grants currently relevant to each individual user. Users can create their own dashboards. Any data point within the system can be aggregated across the system and made into a report or dashboard, and users can monitor indicators personalized to them.
- **Industry-Standard Reporting Templates**: Contains report templates to easily align data with reporting standards used by the sector, such as Foundation Center reporting Excel format, Reporting Commitment hGrant format, and IATI.

# Roles and Permissions

- **Permissions Granularity**: You can grant individuals access to granularly view, edit or delete data for a wide variety of system functions.
- **Field-Level Permissions**: You can define user or group permissions on a field-by-field basis. Additional field-level permissions can be set by user role or status, program type, and the time period.
- **Role-Based Interfaces**: Can provide a role-specific internal interface for each role in the system—for example, an admin view, a board view, program staff view, and a reviewer view—to provide a simpler experience for users with less-complex needs.
- **Audit Logging**: Records the majority of data updates, along with the data and the user who made the update, in an audit log.
- **User Dashboards**: Provides "dashboard" views that summarize the grants currently relevant to each individual user.
- **Users Task Lists**: Provides users a "task list" when they sign onto the system.
- **Task Assignment**: You can assign tasks, such as reviews, to other users.
- **Board/Management View**: Provides a focused, roles-based view for management and board members that can be customized to meet specific organizational needs.
- **Role-Based Task Assignment**: Assigns tasks to users based on rules and roles.

# Data Access

- **Data Export**: Lets you export all data visible to users into another file format, such as .xls or .csv.
- **Custom Data Feeds**: Provides an Application Programming Interface (API) to allow a programmer to create custom data feeds to or from an external system. Web services, AJAX, and .Net APIs are provided.
- **Mobile Device Application Review**: Provides a responsive interface specifically designed to see, code, approve, and add review comments from a mobile or tablet device. Provides a standalone app for Android devices that allows for application review.
- **Grant Information Review from a Mobile Device**: Provides a responsive interface specifically designed to let you see grant summaries and details from a mobile or tablet device. Provides a standalone app for Android devices that allows you to see grant summary and grant details from a mobile or tablet device.
- **Data Integrity**: The vendor reports that the system protects the integrity and security of data within the system through the use of redundant hardware, uninterruptible power supplies, certain types of RAID arrays, error-correcting memory, use of a clustered file system, using file systems that employ block level checksums.

# Overall Customization

- **Dropdown Fields**: Lets you customize dropdown values for fields such as program or grant code, as well as change field types.
- **Internal Tracking Fields**: Lets you add custom "internal tracking" fields for staff use.
- **Custom Fields**: The system lets you create an unlimited number of custom fields with the same permissions as system-standard fields, and you can track the creation or change of custom fields in a log for historical documentation.
- **Online Information Customization**: Lets you customize the information requested in online applications and review forms, including visual design aspects.
- **Vendor Customization**: Vendor will extensively customize system to your needs, possibly at additional cost.
- **System Extendibility** : Vendor permits clients to extend system functionality via access to underlying database and code (as allowed through the API).
- **Support for Customized Systems**: Vendor permits extensively customized systems to remain on the upgrade path.
- **Support for Multiple Languages**: Lets you define custom language sets based on user, group, or giving program.
- **Customization by Foundation Staff**: Almost all configuration or customization as described above can be performed by the user, without involvement from the vendor.

# Ease of Use

- **Interface Layout**: The interface is polished looking and neatly laid out.
- **Intuitive Labels**: Navigation and action items are labeled intuitively, so that a user doesn't have to understand language specific to the system in order to effectively use them. The user interface is configured to meet the specific needs of the client.
- **Easily Taking Action**: On the core interface pages, the user can easily find the actions he or she is most likely to take. The user interface is configured to meet the specific needs of the client.
- **Optimization for Experts**: The system pulls together the information and actions an expert user is likely to need so as to minimize the number of steps and clicks needed.

# Support and Training

- **Phone Support**: Vendor provides unlimited phone and email support at no additional cost. The vendor can provide tech support for applicants as well, but at additional cost.
- **Online Support**: Vendor provides unlimited online or chat support through the Community Portal at no additional cost.
- **Manuals and Documentation**: Vendor provides a wiki at smartsimple.org that houses documentation for SmartSimple. There are also support videos on YouTube, and additional resources can be found on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Documentation is created by the vendor to facilitate the training of new hires.
- **Training**: User training at the SmartSimple facility is included with every system or via WebEx Sessions. On-Site training is available on a fee basis. Additional training is also provided. SmartSimple offers training for end users and system administrators.
- **User Support Forums**: Vendor provides an online community portal with user discussion forums and live chat. The SmartSimple LinkedIn and Facebook groups provide additional forums for discussions.

# Installation and Maintenance

- **Installation and Maintenance**: This online hosted system is accessible from any major web browser. There are three hosting options: 1) Multitenant: Vendor hosts multiple clients on one server; 2) Dedicated server: Vendor hosts SmartSimple for client on a separate server and 3) Self-hosted. The client hosts SmartSimple on its own server, which can be either Windows, Amazon, or Linux-based.

# Vendor Background

- **History**: The vendor has been in business since 2002. SmartSimple GMS360° has been in use since 2004
- **Client Base**: The vendor reports that it has 67 clients for GMS360°. The breakdown by type of grantmaker is: 19% government, 27% corporate foundations, 22% independent organizations, 13% family foundations, 9% community foundations and 1.5% charities.
- **Sustainability**: The revenue earned from the grantmaking system currently covers the personnel and operational expenses required to support it. The company is managed by the founding ownership team. There is no debt financing and no outside investments.

# Customer Experience Survey

- **Number of Survey Respondents Who Reported Using the System**: 3
- **Percent of Survey Respondents who Would Recommend the system**: 76 percent.
- **Training Score**: 0.94
- **Implementation Score**: 0.97
- **Support Score**: 1.01

# APPENDICES

# APPENDIX A: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## Eligibility Criteria

The constituency for grants management systems can be divided into two broad groups: software for private foundations (including corporate and family foundations) and software for community foundations. While this report focuses primarily on grants management software for private foundations, we have included two packages that are either widely-used by community foundations, or primarily at that audience.

Further, we decided our definition of a grants management system would include only systems capable of managing the full grant cycle, and which are offered as free standing products rather than part of a foundation "back office" management service. Systems on our list that we knew met these criteria were included on our final roster, and we emailed an eligibility questionnaire to vendors of systems less known to us to determine whether their software fit our grants management system definition. We also disseminated widely a call for participation through the lists of the Technology Affinity Group (TAG) and Grants Managers Network (GMN). Through this process, we rounded out our final roster of 29 systems to review.

## Product Selection

We started with a list of grants management systems that included products known to Idealware, the Technology Affinity Group, and Grants Managers Network .

From this list, we invited both vendors who participated in our 2013 report and vendors of products that we knew met our selection criteria to demo their grants management solution for our 2016 report. We then emailed an eligibility questionnaire to vendors of products we were not familiar with.

Based on responses to our questionnaire, we added four new systems which had not been reviewed in previous versions of the report. Three products included in previous versions of the report were not included in the update process: GrantStream's Grant-Right (now Grants by Benevity), because the vendor did not respond to our requests for a demonstration within the research period, and MicroEdge GIFTS and GIFTS Alta, as the vendor is no longer actively taking new clients for those systems. This left us with 29 grants management systems to review.

## Evaluation Criteria

We started with the criteria used for our 2013 grants management report, then solicited feedback on our criteria from three experts in the grants management field. In October 2013, we distributed our evaluation criteria to the vendors included in the 2013 version of the report with a call for comment and revision. In addition, Idealware met with representatives from the vendors included in the 2013 report for a roundtable discussion in November 2015 for additional feedback on the review criteria and overall structure of the report.

That process, paired with our expert interviews, resulted in the addition of 11 new and revised criteria to use when evaluating the 29 grants management systems in this updated edition of our report. Our features comparison is based on a rubric derived from these evaluation criteria. This rubric is, in turn, based on the one we used in the earlier editions of this report, with some changes that reflect both the addition of the new criteria and the current state of the field of grants management systems.

From late December 2015 through March 2016, Idealware conducted detailed software demos of 29 grants management packages. These packages were evaluated against 174 criteria for reviews. The results can be found in the previous section.

# Customer Experience Survey

In February 2016, Idealware distributed a customer experience survey through the lists of the GMN and TAG community, as well as directly to the vendors of the grants management systems included in this review. We had 779 people take the survey. For each review, we've published how many people reported using the grants management software in the survey, and a score based on their reported experience with the training, support, and implementation offered by the systems' vendors. For many systems, the sample size was very small, and this survey should not be taken as a rigorously scientific research method. It's our hope that the survey represents a facet of the grants management landscape that is different from the function-based write-ups in this guide.

# APPENDIX B: HOW WE EVALUATED THE SYSTEMS

The reviews are much easier to understand when the vast amount of information gathered is considered through the lens of typical grantmaker needs. In order to more easily compare strengths and weakness across packages, we created a rating system based on the common needs expressed in interviews and the features on which packages typically differed. While every organization will need to decide on the criteria that is important for their own needs, and thus may rate criteria quite differently than we did, this rating system can provide a starting point for comparison.

## Internal Tracking

| None / Not Acceptable | Basic | Solid | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Does not meet the criteria for **Basic**. | • Can track a project name, request amount, and organization.<br>• Can track the program with which a grant is associated.<br>• All information for each grant proposal is linked together through its entire lifecycle.<br>• You can easily retrieve grant information and status. | Meets **Basic** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Lets you attach documents to a grant record, possibly by logging into the system as an applicant to do so.<br>• Can track by program cycle or board meeting date, and by categories such as geographic or population-based codes.<br>• Lets you search grants and applications by a number of criteria, including organization's legal name, EIN, application ID, program, and grant cycle.<br>• Lets you easily update basic grant information like project names or codes throughout the process. OR, applications that are received in paper can be easily entered into the system without logging into a separate interface as a grantee.<br>• Lets you easily view related records and data across records. | Meets **Solid** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Lets you easily attach external documents to a grant record, without logging into a separate interface as a grantee.<br>• Lets you define custom categorization codes for tracking and reporting.<br>• Lets you easily update basic grant information like project names or codes throughout the process.<br>• Lets you easily enter applications received in paper into the system without logging into a separate interface as an applicant.<br>• Lets you perform batch updates of defined coding and other fields.<br>• The system stores attached documents in the database as objects rather than links. OR, the system uploads attached documents to the server and stores a link to that uploaded file in the database.<br>• Can track by percentage or dollar allocation across programs. |

## Online Applications—Grantmaker Experience

| None / Not Acceptable | Basic | Solid | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Does not meet the criteria for **Basic**. | • Lets you collect application information online and view it. <br> • Can include custom dropdowns and text fields in applications. <br> • Lets applicants upload files as part of their application. | Meets **Basic** criteria, plus: <br><br> • Can include file uploads, dropdowns, checkboxes, and text fields in application fields. <br> • Supports multiple application stages, including an automatically scored eligibility quiz, a Letter of Intent stage, and/or a more detailed proposal stage. <br> • Automatically pulls data from online applications into the core grants management system—no download or upload of data files is required. <br> • Supports multiple logins for grantees on a single application. OR, grant application forms can branch at all stages, possibly through customization. <br> • There is a virus scan or security feature to prevent malicious files from being uploaded onto the application or downloaded onto the system. | Meets **Solid** criteria, plus: <br><br> • Lets you create new online applications without additional charges from vendor. <br> • Lets you customize a confirmation message to be sent upon submission of an application. <br> • Lets applicants upload a wide variety of files as part of their application. <br> • The system allows both individual applicants and organizations to apply for grants from the same grant program. <br> • Supports multiple logins for grantees on a single application, AND grant application forms can branch at all stages, possibly through customization. <br> • Supports multiple application stages, including an automatically scored eligibility quiz, a Letter of Intent stage, a more detailed proposal stage, and as many other stages as needed. |

## Online Applications—Grantseeker Experience

| None / Not Acceptable | Basic | Solid | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Does not meet the criteria for **Basic**. | EITHER: <br><br> • Lets applicants view their status online. <br> • System registration follows standard best practices—applicants enter email address and password and are sent a confirmation email. <br><br> OR: <br><br> • Grantee portal views are responsively designed to be compatible with mobile browsers. | Meets **Basic** criteria, plus: <br><br> • Lets applicants save their application and return to it at a later point. <br> • Carries over contact information and other appropriate data for an organization or grant from one year's application form to another, or from a Letter of Intent to a proposal—for example, a narrative entered in a Letter of Intent doesn't have to be re-entered in a proposal. <br> • Applicants can easily view or print applications at any stage in the process. | Meets **Solid** criteria, plus: <br><br> • Both applicant and grantmaker can quickly and easily reset lost credentials. <br> • The applicant can create a preview packet of their grant, which includes either copies of all uploaded documents or links to them. <br> • The system checks the email address of each new registrant to make sure it doesn't already exist in the system, and prompts the user if it is a duplicate. <br> • Eligibility quizzes can branch to multiple applications. <br> • Grant seekers can automatically fill in their organization profile by entering their EIN number or from a previously-submitted application. OR, Applicants can collaborate with a reviewer on a proposal to address comments or suggestions within the system itself, prior to submitting the final application. |

## Form Design & Flexibility

| None / Not Acceptable | Basic | Solid | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Does not meet the criteria for **Basic**. | • Lets you, or the vendor, customize online application forms with your logo, at a minimum.<br>• Lets you adjust character or word counts for at least some fields in online forms. | Meets **Basic** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Lets you adjust character or word counts for all fields in online forms.<br>• Lets you adjust character count, and displays prominently how many characters remain on a field.<br>• Lets you customize in-system help for applicants or grantees. OR The vendor provides technical support for applicants. | Meets **Solid** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Lets you, or the vendor, customize online application forms to match the look and feel of your website, including colors, fonts, and navigation, at no additional cost.<br>• Lets you adjust word as well as character count, and displays prominently how many words or characters remain on a field.<br>• In-system help is customizable (by you or by the vendor) in the form of online videos, FAQs, wikis, or another sophisticated option. |

## Application Review

| None / Not Acceptable | Basic | Solid | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Does not meet the criteria for **Basic**. | • Supports at least a single review comment and rating for each application.<br>• Lets reviewers easily print grant summaries. | Meets **Basic** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Lets you see a history of a relationship with prospective grantees—for example, what grants they've applied for or been given in the past.<br>• External or internal reviewers can print grant summaries or full grant information (including attachments). Lets multiple reviewers each rate an application, with at least one comment and one numeric grade for each application.<br>• Provides a simplified "portal" interface to allow reviewers to see and review grant applications without navigating the full grants management interface.<br>• Proposal owner and management staff can be automatically notified when reviews are completed, either via email or within the system.<br>• Supports checklist functionality to define what information or documents you require from prospective grantees. OR, provides strong online application functionality, including the ability to reopen online applications once they've been submitted if more information is required from the applicant. | Meets **Solid** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Lets multiple reviewers each numerically rate an application on a number of different factors, and add comments.<br>• Supports different information or scoring schemes for different programs.<br>• Supports online viewing and reviewing of applications.<br>• Lets you track external reviewers' interests, potential conflicts of interest, and geographic location or area of expertise and use those criteria to assign applications for review.<br>• Lets reviewers see each other's comments and grades, if you allow it.<br>• Lets you view numeric review scores and report them as summary statistics—for example, average score—and aggregate them.<br>• Lets you define automatic steps and rules, or "workflow," for the grants review process.<br>• Supports checklist functionality to define what information or documents you require from prospective grantees. |

## 501(c)(3) and OFAC Status

| None / Not Acceptable | Basic | Solid | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Does not meet the criteria for **Basic**. | • Lets you click on organizations to view their record and tax status in a standard registry of 501(c)(3) nonprofits, such as GuideStar. | Meets **Basic** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Lets you create a list of organizations in a format that can easily be used to check them against standard OFAC and other terrorist watch lists, potentially in a different system.<br><br>• The tax status automatic check includes auto population of related fields for legal name, EIN, and tax status. | Meets **Solid** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Automatically checks Employee Identification Numbers against a standard 501(c)(3) nonprofit registry, and flags those not listed.<br><br>• Lets you compare organizations and individuals against standard OFAC and other terrorist watch lists within the grants management system itself.<br><br>• Includes date and time stamp, which can serve as an audit trail demonstration completion of due diligence step(s).<br><br>• Lets you perform checks and updates in batch. OR, the vendor will perform checks and updates in batch for you. |

## Letters & Board Dockets

| None / Not Acceptable | Basic | Solid | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| While letters and dockets are quite different from a process perspective, they are technically very similar, and most systems have a similar level of support for each. | | | |
| • Does not meet the criteria for **Basic**. | • Lets you print a view of each grant application.<br><br>• Lets you insert mail-merge data into letters, possibly by way of downloading data into Microsoft Excel. | Meets **Basic** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Lets you define a default format for grant application summaries and choose which fields to include.<br><br>• Provides several standard letter and electronic templates that you can generate using grant record information. | Meets **Solid** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Lets you define a default format for printing grant application summaries, choosing which fields to include, as well as customizing fonts, colors, and logos.<br><br>• Lets you create letter templates that include mail-merged information about grants and organizations, and lets you customize their fonts, colors, and logos.<br><br>• Lets you print letters or summaries either individually or for a series of grants or grant applications in a single step.<br><br>• Lets you view and customize individual letters before printing them.<br><br>• The system provides support for electronic signatures, possibly with external verification. |

## Emails

| None / Not Acceptable | Basic | Solid | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Does not meet the criteria for **Basic**. | • Lets you send email through the system to a single individual, but not to a particular group of people at once. OR, Lets you easily send an email to a particular a group of people at once, but not to individuals. | Meets **Basic** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Lets you send email through the system to a single individual or a group of people who meet particular criteria. Group emails are not sent as blind copies, but rather as one-to-one.<br><br>• Lets you set up and send automatic emails based on certain events. OR, Lets you set up and send scheduled reminders to applicants and grantees. | Meets **Solid** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Lets you create email to individuals and groups based on templates that include both standard text and "mail-merge" type inserted data.<br><br>• Lets you set up and send scheduled reminders to applicants and grantees<br><br>• Lets you see the open rate, click-through rate, and unsubscribe rate for each email, the number of people who clicked on each link, and bounce reports.<br><br>• Lets you attach files to emails sent to individuals and groups. |

## Relationship Management

| None / Not Acceptable | Basic | Solid | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Does not meet the criteria for **Basic**. | • Tracks organizations separately from individual grants to allow you to see a history of all grants to an organization.<br><br>• Lets you note interactions with a grantee with at least a single comment field. | Meets **Basic** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Lets you associate multiple contacts with an organization, and define their relationships to you and to a specific grant.<br><br>• Lets you keep a log of communications such as phone calls and emails with a particular contact or a grantee organization.<br><br>• Lets you keep former staffers that were associated with a grant on an organization's record without making them active contacts for communications.<br><br>• Can track individual business units under a larger organization. OR, Lets you automatically capture emails from external email systems into grantee or organization records. | Meets **Solid** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Automatically stores a record of all system-generated letters and emails for each grant.<br><br>• Lets you keep a log of communications such as phone calls and emails with a particular contact at a grantee organization.<br><br>• Can track individual business units under a larger organization.<br><br>• Lets you communicate with a contact according to their relationship with the grant or organization (for example, send the payment letter to the payment contact, or email reporting reminder to report contact).<br><br>• System allows you to automatically synchronize contacts with Outlook. OR, System allows you to automatically export system contacts to Outlook or Exchange. OR, System lets you automatically capture emails from external email systems into grantee or organization records. |

## Grant Requirements & Outcomes Evaluation

| None / Not Acceptable | Basic | Solid | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Does not meet the criteria for **Basic**. | • Lets you easily see which requirements grantees have met, and which they have not.<br><br>• Can automatically email grantees to remind them about upcoming deadlines. OR, Lets grantees submit progress report information through online data fields.<br><br>OR:<br><br>• The system provides a dedicated functionality for evaluating and reporting on outcomes across all grantees in the system. | Meets **Basic** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Lets you define a default set of grant requirements for all grant opportunities.<br><br>• Lets you store progress report information submit¬ted by grantees in multiple data fields.<br><br>• Can automatically email grantees to remind them about upcoming deadlines.<br><br>• Lets grantees submit progress report information through online data fields.<br><br>• Lets grantees view grant requirement deadlines online, possibly through customization.<br><br>• Foundation staff can view both original outcome goals and grantee responses from submitted progress reports on the same screen. OR, The system can support evaluating and reporting on grantee outcomes through custom reports, possibly with customization.<br><br>• The system automatically calculates progress toward grantee or program outcome goals using submitted progress reports. | Meets **Solid** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Lets you define a default set of grant requirements, by grant opportunity or program, and customize them for individual grantees. OR, Emails to applicants can include information spe¬cific to the grant program in question.<br><br>• Lets grantees submit progress report information through online data fields, which you can then summarize across grantees in reports.<br><br>• Lets you create custom online progress report forms (for example, corresponding to different programs) without paying additional vendor fees.<br><br>• Supports evaluation metrics based on user groups—i.e., you can summarize and report on data based on grantee's programs, geographic location, or other criteria.<br><br>• Data collection can branch based on type of grant.<br><br>• The system provides a dedicated functionality for evaluating and reporting on outcomes across all grantees in the system. |

## Payments

| None / Not Acceptable | Basic | Solid | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Does not meet the criteria for **Basic**. | • Lets you define a payment schedule for each grant.<br><br>• Lets you see what scheduled payments are upcoming.<br><br>• Lets you see what payments have been made, including amount, date paid, and check number. | Meets **Basic** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Can generate a report of the amount scheduled to be paid out in a given year (including carryover from previous years' grants).<br><br>• Lets you see upcoming scheduled payments and whether the grantee has met requirements linked with that payment.<br><br>• Supports payments to organizations other than the primary grantee (for example, fiscal sponsors).<br><br>• Lets you include a note on a payment.<br><br>• Supports grants in a single currency. OR, Allows for payments to be made contingent or conditional upon a specified grant or payment requirement.<br><br>• Lets you pull reports on payments which carry coding attributes of associated requests, organizations, and contacts.<br><br>• Grantees can view the payment schedule for their award(s) online through the grantee portal. The schedule can display either paid or upcoming payments, but not both. OR, The system allows users to manually define a repayment schedule for PRIs. | Meets **Solid** criteria, plus:<br><br>• The vendor has experience in integrating with at least one external accounting software package (if the accounting system is not built in).<br><br>• Can generate a paper check request for accounting.<br><br>• Lets you include a note on a payment.<br><br>• Supports wire transfers by storing required information and confirmation codes for successful transactions.<br><br>• Supports grants made in multiple currencies by storing currency and exchange rate information.<br><br>• Lets you define a default payment schedule that applies to all grants, and then adjust the amounts and dates for each grant individually.<br><br>• Allows for payments to be made contingent or conditional upon a specified grant or payment requirement.<br><br>• Lets you configure audit or security controls to ensure that only certain staff can change payment information.<br><br>• Supports an automated payment approval process with configurable workflow steps.<br><br>• Lets you void payments, make refunds, and place payments on hold, which are attached to workflows within the system.<br><br>• There is the ability to update payment details and create payments (e.g., general ledger account, fund, etc.) in batch. OR, There is the ability to track quid pro quo and in kind payments.<br><br>• Grantees can view the payment schedule for their award(s) online through the grantee portal. The schedule displays both paid and upcoming payments, OR The system can automatically generate a repayment schedule for PRIs. |

## Budgeting

| None / Not Acceptable | Basic | Solid | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Does not meet the criteria for **Basic**. | • Lets you track either the amount awarded or the amount budgeted in a particular year. | Meets **Basic** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Can split grants across more than one program for budgeting purposes. OR, Lets you use previous years' budgets as a base and adjust them for current year. | Meets **Solid** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Lets you choose whether to track either the amount awarded or the amount budgeted in a particular year.<br>• Can track budgets in hierarchically defined categories or program areas.<br>• Lets administrators view the impact a particular grant will have on future year payouts with a "what if" type feature. OR, Lets you track interest repayments on PRIs (possibly through customization).<br>• Can split grants across more than one program for budgeting purposes. |

## System Querying and Reporting

| None / Not Acceptable | Basic | Solid | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Does not meet the criteria for **Basic**. | • Lets you run pre-packaged basic reports, such as a standard 990 report, upcoming payments, or the list of grants currently being reviewed. | Meets **Basic** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Lets you search or filter to find a particular set of grants based on status, program, and cycle, and view pre-packaged reports based on this customized set of grants.<br>• Lets you save reports that you create or modify.<br>• Supports ad hoc reports, which can include nearly any field displayed to users, possibly by exporting data to Excel for formatting.<br>• Virtually all system data—including the data entered into online applications, review forms, and grantee progress reports, if supported—can be included in reports.<br>• Lets you quickly view favorite reports without navigating a much-larger set. OR, can make small updates to standard reports.<br>• There is a process of running reports that is easy enough for casual users to run queries independently. | Meets **Solid** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Supports ad hoc reports within the system, which can include custom data columns, datasets, sorting, grouping, logos, and headers.<br>• Can make small updates to standard reports.<br>• Reports can be set to automatically run and sent to individuals or groups.<br>• Users can create their own multiple unique dashboards, or a vendor can do this for you.<br>• Lets you quickly view favorite reports, and possibly queries and actions, without navigating a much-larger set.<br>• Lets you save ad hoc reports that you create or modify.<br>• Lets you search the con¬tents of file attachments.<br>• Lets you drill down for more information on some or all reports.<br>• Lets you create, view, and export data in a visual graphic representation such as charts and graphs. |

## Permissions & Workflow

| None / Not Acceptable | Basic | Solid | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Does not meet the criteria for **Basic**. | • Lets you grant individuals access (or not) to certain large areas of system information, such as a module. | Meets **Basic** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Has at least two different internal interfaces—for example, an admin view and a reviewer view—to provide a simpler experience for users with less complex needs.<br><br>• Records a number of specific actions—for example, grant approvals, status changes, and new grantee records—in a system audit log.<br><br>• Lets you grant individuals granular access to view, edit, or delete data for a wide variety of system functions. | Meets **Solid** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Lets you define user or group permissions on a field-by-field basis.<br><br>• Provides "dashboard" views, which summarize the grants and tasks currently relevant to each individual user.<br><br>• Lets you assign tasks, such as the review of a progress report, to particular users through workflow functionality.<br><br>• Provides a standard, focused, roles-based view for management and board members. OR, Assigns tasks to users based on rules and roles. |

## Data Access

| None / Not Acceptable | Basic | Solid | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Does not meet the criteria for **Basic**. | • All data stored within the database can be extracted by someone other than the vendor. OR, The vendor agrees to provide data in a standard file format (such as .csv) as part of the standard license agreement.<br><br>• Lets you export core grant data, such as project name, program, and grant amount, into another file format, such as .xls or .csv, in a way that it can be used for further reporting. | Meets **Basic** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Lets you export most data visible to users into another file format, such as .xls or .csv, in a way that it can be used for further reporting.<br><br>• Provides a method, such as an API or a direct ODBC database connection, to allow a programmer to create custom data feeds to an external system. OR, Provides apps or views designed specifically for mobile devices (for any purpose). | Meets **Solid** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Lets you export all data visible to users into another file format, such as .xls or .csv.<br><br>• Provides a method, such as an API or a direct ODBC database connection, to allow a programmer to create custom data feeds to an external system. |

## Overall Customization

| None / Not Acceptable | Basic | Solid | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Does not meet the criteria for **Basic**. | • Lets you customize the information requested in online applications, if offered, potentially at additional cost.<br>• Lets you store custom information submitted by grantees, such as application narratives or progress report metrics, in separate fields.<br>• Lets you customize dropdown values for fields such as program or grant codes. | Meets **Basic** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Lets you customize the information requested in online applications and review forms at no additional cost. OR, vendor will extensively customize system to your needs, potentially at additional cost. | Meets **Solid** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Lets you add custom "internal tracking" fields for staff use, potentially at additional cost.<br>• Lets you customize the names of fields displayed in the interface, potentially at additional cost.<br>• Lets you add a virtually unlimited amount of custom fields, with an audit log to track their creation.<br>• Vendor permits clients to extend system functionality via access to underlying database and code (as allowed through the API). |

## Ease of Use

| None / Not Acceptable | Basic | Solid | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Does not meet the criteria for **Basic**. | • Most individuals could learn how to use the system with training. | • Users can easily find the actions they are most likely to take (possibly by looking through a considerable list of options).<br>• The interface is polished looking (though potentially otherwise flawed). | Meets **Solid** criteria, plus:<br><br>• The interface is polished looking and neatly laid out.<br>• Navigation and action items are labeled intuitively.<br>• Users can easily find the actions they are most likely to take.<br>• The system pulls together the information and actions an expert user is likely to need. |

## Support & Training

| None / Not Acceptable | Basic | Solid | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Does not meet the criteria for **Basic**. | • Vendor can be reached for questions.<br>• Vendor provides either online or printed help manuals. | Meets **Basic** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Vendor provides training, potentially at additional cost.<br>• Vendor provides phone support. | Meets **Solid** criteria, plus:<br><br>• Vendor provides unlimited phone and email support within a yearly fee or maintenance package.<br>• Vendor provides initial training in person or via the Internet at no additional cost, and additional training sessions can be scheduled. |

## Customer Experience with Support

| None / Not Acceptable | Basic | Solid | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| • The vendor declined to distribute Idealware's survey and/or we did not receive enough responses to be statistically meaningful. | • Number of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with positive statements regarding support was below 1 point of our average score. | • Number of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with positive statements regarding support was within 1 point of our average score. | • Number of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with positive statements regarding support was above 1 point of our average score. |

## Customer Experience with Training

| None / Not Acceptable | Basic | Solid | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| • The vendor declined to distribute Idealware's survey and/or we did not receive enough responses to be statistically meaningful. | • Number of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with positive statements regarding support was below .25 points of our average score. | • Number of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with positive statements regarding support was within .25 points of our average score. | • Number of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with positive statements regarding support was above .25 points of our average score. |

## Customer Experience with Implementation

| None / Not Acceptable | Basic | Solid | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| • The vendor declined to distribute Idealware's survey and/or we did not receive enough responses to be statistically meaningful. | • Number of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with positive statements regarding implementation was below .25 points of our average score. | • Number of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with positive statements regarding implementation was within .25 points of our average score. | • Number of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with positive statements regarding implementation was above .25 points of our average score. |

## Stability in the Market

| None / Not Acceptable | Basic | Solid | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Does not meet the criteria for **Basic**. | • The software package has been in use by clients for more than one year. OR, The vendor reports that the software package has more than 10 clients. | Meets **Basic** criteria, plus:<br><br>• The software package has been in use by clients for more than three years while supported by the same vendor. OR, The vendor reports that the software package has more than 20 clients.<br><br>• The revenue earned from the software package covers the personnel and operational expenses required to support it. | Meets **Solid** criteria, plus:<br><br>• The software package has been in use by clients for more than three years.<br><br>• The vendor reports that the software package has 50 clients or more. |

# APPENDIX C: CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE SURVEY

**Grants Management Consumer Experience Survey - 2016**

1. What system do you use to manage your grantmaking process?

Other (please specify)

2. About how long have you had the system you currently use?

3. Would you recommend this system to another grantmaker?

4. Does your vendor offer multiple tiers of support (Basic, Premium, etc.)?

5. If so, did you elect to purchase the premium support level?

6. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding *support* for the system you use?

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree | I've never contacted this vendor | I don't recall |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| It's generally easy to reach someone with a particular problem or questions. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| In general, the people I've reached were able to solve my problem/answer my question. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| In general, my questions or issues are resolved within an hour or two. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| In general, my questions or issues are resolved within 24 hours. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| The vendor provides useful online avenues in which to research an issue or solution myself. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| The vendor is consistently available and prompt in terms of responding to a question or other need. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I generally hear from the vendor about pending updates to the system. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| In general, it is clear to me what is in an update. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| In general, updates to the system are relevant to our needs. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

7. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements regrading the *implementation* of the system you use?

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree | I don't recall | I was not involved in implementing the software |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The implementation of the software went according to schedule. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| The implementation of the software went according to budget. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| The representatives of the vendor during the implementation phase were knowledgeable. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| The system delivers on the promises the vendor made during the sales process. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Small issues from implementation were resolved within a few days. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Larger issues from implementation were resolved within 1-2 weeks. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

8. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the *training offered by the vendor*?

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree | I don't recall | I was not involved in training on the software |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The training offered by the vendor covers areas of interest to me and my organization. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| The training offered by the vendor is generally helpful. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| The training offered by the vendor is generally easy to understand. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| The training offered by the vendor is generally easily accessible. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| In general, the quality of training offered by the vendor is worth what we pay for it. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

9. If using a hosted/online solution, about how often has there been a time when you couldn't access the system?

[                    ]

# APPENDIX D: ABOUT THIS REPORT

## Authors

### Kyle Andrei, Senior Researcher

As Senior Researcher, Kyle is responsible for researching software through demos, interviews, and surveys, and using that information to create Idealware's reports and articles. In addition, Kyle also draws on his broadcast experience to produce Idealware's Ask Idealware videos. Outside of Idealware, Kyle volunteers with the Maine League of Young Voters as chair of the Civic Guide Committee, providing nonpartisan guides to the civic process in Portland. Kyle is a graduate of Indiana State University, where he studied broadcasting, managed the student radio station, and volunteered on local election campaigns.

### Chris Bernard, Research and Editorial Director

Chris is a career writer and journalist with two decades of experience in newspapers, magazines, advertising, corporate and nonprofit marketing and communications, and freelance writing. Prior to Idealware, he was managing editor of a newspaper and a senior copywriter at an ad agency. Since 2007 he has overseen Idealware's editorial and communications efforts, driving the creation and publication of more than a hundred articles, reports, and other resources and managing the communications calendar. Outside of his work at Idealware, he's an award-winning author and a frequent speaker and lecturer at literary conferences and festivals around the country.

### Amadie Hart, Researcher

Amadie Hart is a contract writer and researcher for Idealware and President of Hart Strategic Marketing LLC. Amadie founded the company in February 2012 to provide smart marketing and communications consulting to nonprofits and small businesses. She helps clients develop strategic online marketing plans, create and implement online communications strategies, redevelop website content, make decisions about content management and customer relationship software, and integrate social media into outreach efforts.

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## About The Report Partners

### Idealware

Idealware, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, provides thoroughly researched, impartial, and accessible resources about software to help nonprofits and the philanthropic sector make smart software decisions. By synthesizing vast amounts of original research into credible and approachable information, Idealware helps organizations make the most of their time and financial resources. Visit www.idealware.org to learn more or view our hundreds of free articles, resources, and reports.

### Grants Managers Network

Grants Managers Network's mission is to improve grantmaking by advancing the knowledge, skills, and abilities of grants management professionals and by leading grantmakers to adopt and incorporate effective practices that benefit the philanthropic community. Grants Managers Network is a leader in identifying and promoting effective grantmaking practices through field-wide change efforts. Learn more at www.gmnetwork.org.

### Technology Affinity Group

The Technology Affinity Group (TAG) is a nonprofit membership organization that promotes the power of technology to advance the goals of the philanthropic sector. TAG is an active community of professionals responsible for aligning technology with the philanthropic objectives of their organizations, striving to provide the highest quality resources and learning opportunities for TAG members in an open environment built on trust and a shared belief in the greater common good.

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