

## California Arts Council



**How SmartSimple's Platform enabled the California Arts Council to grow and scale beyond boundaries.**

### At a Glance

The California Arts Council had just six months to move to a new grants management system before their previous provider deprecated its software. Despite the time crunch, SmartSimple delivered a system that not only accommodated the state agency's complex granting processes, but also empowered their staff with the ability to evolve it as their grantmaking needs grew.

**SmartSimple client since:** 2017

**Type of giving:** Grants

**Dollars granted:** \$24,451,331

**SmartSimple product/services:**

- [SmartSimple Cloud for Grants Management](#)

### Key pain points:

- Inflexible software that couldn't manage entire lifecycle
- Manual administrative process
- Disparate and disjointed data collection process

### New system must-haves:

- A new, flexible system to scale the program
- Intuitive software that was easy to adopt by staff
- A configurable system to accommodate the different classifications and user roles



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**Kala Kowtha**  
IT Specialist



California Arts Council is a SmartSimple Cloud user

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### About California Arts Council

The California Arts Council is a state agency based in Sacramento whose mission is to advance the state of California through the arts and creativity. Its 11 members are appointed by the Governor and the State Legislature, and bring diverse experience from the arts and creative sectors, arts education, community development, state and local governments, and nonprofit and for-profit sectors of California's economy."

The California Arts Council encourages public participation in the arts within the state, helps build arts organizations at the local level, assists with the professional development of arts leaders, promotes awareness of the value of the arts, and directly funds arts programs for Californians.

### Big changes in little time

The California Arts Council tried to make the most of their previous grants management system (GMS), but it had its limitations with respect to what more they could do. While their former system facilitated incoming applications, it didn't provide features to manage their entire grantmaking lifecycle. This meant that administrative staff was dealing with a disjointed and manual process for contracting, accounting, and payments that involved having to compile data from other systems.

The worst news came when their previous software provider sent them an email announcing that they were phasing out the solution, leaving the arts council with just six months to find a new GMS. "We didn't know what to do in that short amount of time," says Kala Kowtha, IT Specialist for the California Arts Council, who at the time had recently joined the team. To make matters worse, their previous software provider offered minimal support during this time and extracting all their grantmaking data became the arts council's responsibility.



At the time, the California Arts Council was managing 12 programs with a total of around 1,700 organizations registered in their system, as well as receiving 1,500 submitted applications and funding an average of 1,000 California organizations annually. Switching to yet another system that didn't accommodate their entire granting life cycle was out of the question.

### The search for a new, more flexible grants management system

Over the course of their search, the California Arts Council reviewed seven different solutions and decided on SmartSimple Cloud. "We liked the flexibility offered and felt like we were best able to scale our programs with SmartSimple's platform," says Kala. With a more flexible grants management system, they could better tailor their own system to their requirements now and into the future.

Even though they were able to export all their historical data from their previous system, the Council saw this as an opportunity to rebuild their GMS from scratch and didn't import their data into SmartSimple Cloud. This was done deliberately due to the rapid implementation timeframe and the preference of not wanting to compromise the integrity of their new system with incomplete data. From this experience, Kala learned exactly what she needed from their system, saying "when you're thrown into the pond, you learn how to swim."

### A grants management system designed to grow with

During the implementation of SmartSimple Cloud for Grants Management, the Council was in a time crunch. There were a lot of programs and branches to build out. Over the course of their GMS selection, additional grant programs needed to be taken online. Nevertheless, SmartSimple's Implementation team got them up and running without skipping a beat or compromising the user experience for applicants. "Overall, SmartSimple's Implementation team worked very well with us," says Kala.

Working with their new SmartSimple Cloud, Kala and the rest of the administrative staff are no longer limited within the confines of their former, now-sunsetted software. "We're now able to add even more organizations into our system," says Kala. Along with the ability to scale with their needs, they now have a GMS that's tailored to the exact needs of their

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grantmaking programs thanks to the flexibility afforded by SmartSimple's user classification features. "We're able to assign roles and attributes to different users throughout the grant lifecycle, so they only see the data they need to see," says Kala.

Kala was able to take full control of their SmartSimple Cloud and started making configuration changes on her own. "There's a high comfort level with our system and what it has to offer," says Kala. With the intuitive settings offered in SmartSimple, she was able to configure a new grant application cycle entirely, making for a much more efficient administrative process. "Whenever I needed support, it's there. The one-on-one attention to the clients is truly an admirable quality of SmartSimple. We felt listened to," says Kala.

### Evolving into the future

The California Arts Council is currently developing a second system with SmartSimple that will serve as a content management system (CMS) to power its Arts in Corrections program. In partnership with the California Department of Corrections, the program improves access to the arts for incarcerated individuals, so that when they're released, they're able to cope in a healthier way. Despite being a different solution, it's still powered by the same SmartSimple platform.

With their new CMS, the California Arts Council will be able to run ad-hoc data reports to their federal funders. And as they're expanding their arts programs, SmartSimple Cloud is keeping pace alongside them. "There are quite a few enhancements that are nice to have and we discover them every day. It's the nature of the system and it's constantly evolving," says Kala. ●