

City of Phoenix Office of Arts & Culture



How the City of Phoenix Office of Arts & Culture gained greater efficiency, agility and resiliency with SmartSimple.

At a Glance

The City of Phoenix's Arts & Culture Department was faced with a basic, point software solution that could no longer handle their growing grantmaking needs. In fact, their old solution shut down during one of their application deadlines, causing undue stress for both their staff and applicants. Making the switch to SmartSimple Cloud for Grants Management provided a much more seamless solution to efficiently review applications, effectively disburse emergency funding, and simplify the application submission process that lessened anxiety for applicants. The decision to switch to SmartSimple Cloud couldn't have been more timely to handle rapid response grantmaking during the COVID-19 pandemic, which they were well-equipped for.

SmartSimple client since: 2019

Type of giving: Grants and programs to strengthen diversity and inclusion in the arts and culture sector for all Phoenix residents.

Dollars granted: \$1 million annually

Old system: Basic portal without reporting capabilities

SmartSimple product/services:

- [SmartSimple Cloud for Grants Management](#)

Key pain points: An inefficient grantmaking process without reporting capabilities.

New system must-haves: A flexible, future-proof system that centralizes all data, has robust reporting capabilities, handles payment processes, and is easy to use for reviewers, staff and applicants.



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Sarah Leon

Community Investments and Engagement Director



City of Phoenix Office of Arts & Culture is a SmartSimple Cloud user

Request a demo and learn more about SmartSimple Cloud for Grants Management at www.smartsimple.com

About the City of Phoenix Office of Arts & Culture

The City of Phoenix Office of Arts & Culture supports a community that makes up the fifth largest city in the US. The arts funder works toward a mission to provide fair treatment, access, and opportunity for all individuals in the arts.

Their equity strategy aims to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of marginalized groups from the Office of Arts and Culture programs and to strengthen diversity, and inclusion in the arts and culture sector for all Phoenix residents.

A grantmaking process on the verge of collapse

The City of Phoenix Office of Arts & Culture wasn't working with a software platform that could address the growing needs of their large and diverse groups of applicants and staff. "We worked with just an online portal that wasn't great at keeping records," says Sarah Leon, Community Investments and Engagement Director for the City of Phoenix Office of Arts & Culture.

"Some of our tools were a little outdated and weren't serving the community very well. Maybe fifteen years ago it did, but we weren't efficient. It's a big goal for us to be efficient," continues Leon.

Things went from bad to worse when their portal shut down on the application deadline date. "That was really



challenging and we quickly needed something more dependable that wouldn't confuse people," says Leon. Things started to shift once they started working with SmartSimple Cloud. "Our leadership team supported the idea of getting a more robust solution for managing our grantmaking, and we were able to do it on a very tight turnaround," continues Leon.

Rising to the challenge and setting a standard

COVID-19 has changed how many sectors approach their work, including the grantmaking landscape. Having a resilient system to disburse emergency funding to communities in need was a priority. "We got \$2.6 million from the Federal government to help with arts and culture with a fast turnaround because the city needed to use the funds quickly," says Leon.

The City of Phoenix Office of Arts & Culture not only met this challenge, but also grew their grants program with funding opportunities all while introducing SmartSimple Cloud for Grants Management. "We just had a newly-built system and we were still in the process of learning how to use it. However, SmartSimple stepped in at no charge to help strategize how to roll out the money quickly. We disbursed the funds so fast that the process we've built together set a standard for other departments."

Easing applicant stress during an anxious time

Even during COVID-19, the City of Phoenix Office of Arts & Culture found greater confidence with their streamlined grantmaking process to support their community. "People have a lot of anxiety, especially in the art world, so it was nice to bring something that didn't bring more uncertainty," says Leon.



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Sarah and their team found SmartSimple Cloud's Meeting Module for panel reviews to be simple and very helpful. "We didn't have a tool like that before. We had to email everyone before, and now we have something much more centralized. Even now in a remote state, we're able to review easily," says Leon. In a time when things come with so many questions, the stability of their new system didn't add to the list. "Learning new systems can be quite daunting, but in this situation, once I figured out how it works, I learned to build things pretty fast," continues Leon.

Another aspect that elevated their grantmaking to the arts and culture sector was parsing out the data that is only relevant to particular staff roles. "I really like the Submission Manager and Filtered Views, I get to select the granting information I need and be able to download it," says Anel E. Arriola, Community Investments and Engagement Manager for the City of Phoenix Office of Arts & Culture. "From being able to assign different roles to different staff to having different reviewers evaluate specific grants has been an easy process, especially in this time when we are all required to work remotely," continues Arriola.

More room for imagination

Now with a more efficient grantmaking process and being able to address the granting needs of their community, the City of Phoenix Office of Arts & Culture has a strong foundation and their eyes on the future. "Because everything has moved so fast, we suspect there's a lot of abilities that SmartSimple Cloud has that we don't know exist, so we're excited to explore," says Leon. "We love having the room to imagine and explore what more we can do with our new system and we're excited to surprise our community," adds Arriola. ●