

Ohio Arts Council



Moving the Ohio Arts Council to a sustainable, future-ready grants management solution.

At a Glance

The Ohio Arts Council decided to get a custom-built system to manage the up to 2,000 awards they handle at a time. After 10 years, however, the system was dated and they needed a platform that was flexible, and able to change as arts granting processes and practices did. SmartSimple Cloud provided complete configurability, a high level of transparency, and the powerful security they needed to meet their complex reporting needs and protection for the proprietary information that flows through their system.

SmartSimple client since: 2014

Type of giving: Grants

Dollars granted: \$13 million since 2015

Old system: Custom

SmartSimple product/services:

- [SmartSimple Cloud for Grants Management](#)

Key pain points:

- An outdated system
- Old system requires an extensive overhaul that was going to be very expensive to upgrade

New system must-haves:

- Complete operational transparency
- Robust reporting capabilities
- A high level of security
- Ease of use for staff and applicants

“As a grants management system that could grow with us, SmartSimple Cloud for Grants Management struck the perfect balance between being easy to use and still being nuanced enough to handle how we do things... SmartSimple Cloud allows us to be nimble and won't ever hold us back from executing big ideas or initiatives.”

Dan Katona

Deputy Director



Ohio Arts Council is a SmartSimple Cloud user

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

About the Ohio Arts Council

The Ohio Arts Council is a state agency that funds and supports quality arts experiences to strengthen Ohio communities culturally, educationally, and economically. It supports creative expression for artists, organizations, students, educators, and for the public across its cities and towns. The Council ensures that the arts enhance quality of life, enrich education, build Ohio's economy, and tell stories of communities.

An early adopter in search of a new solution

As a medium-sized arts granting organization, the Ohio Arts Council manages 1,000 to 1,200 grant awards at any given time, while reviewing an additional 1,000 new applications each year.

With the volume of information the Council had to review and process, they started looking early on for an online-based system as a means of consolidating their processes. “We moved away from a paper-based system back in 2005 and were one of the early adopters among state arts agencies to use an online system,” says Dan Katona, Deputy Director of the Ohio Arts Council. “Online systems for grants management were so new [at the time]. It was a really exciting time for us to get involved in such an interesting process.”

A limited custom-built system no longer met their needs

The Council's first system was a custom one. They relied on an outside programmer to keep it working, as they had no way to make any changes themselves. But after 10 years they found that their system wasn't keeping up with the times or growing with the organization. “Since the system had been custom-built, it was going to take a significant amount of money to update. So much had changed in both the arts and technology landscapes, and what we had just wasn't meeting our needs anymore.”



Looking for a grants management system that could grow and evolve with the changing times, Dan and his team started their search, and that's when they found SmartSimple Cloud for Grants Management.

"Right from the start, we were very impressed with both the balance of functionality and power that were the guts of the system," continues Dan. "Not only was what [SmartSimple Cloud] could do impressive, it was user-friendly, accessible, and we could work with it without needing to hire programmers. We're a small team without a lot of technical expertise, but we got the training we needed from the SmartSimple team to be able to manage the system ourselves. As a platform that could grow with us, it struck the perfect balance between being easy to use and still being nuanced enough to handle how we do things."

An opportunity to update and integrate processes

It had been a long time since they'd really analyzed their granting process, so the team took their time reorganizing how they managed and administered their procedures. "It was great working with the SmartSimple team during this time. They really helped us review and revise how we did things, giving us some very intelligent changes and fixes. We discovered things along the way we'd never thought of, and were so glad to have the level of support we did."

In particular, the Council enjoyed working with SmartSimple's President, Cameron McLean, and Systems Solutions Architect, Bob Longworth. "Cameron and Bob were great to work with," adds Dan. "They never told us they couldn't do what we asked for, and they never made change requests seem like they were unreasonable. Even when we transitioned [from Implementation to Support], we were never made to feel like our questions were too trivial, or that we were asking too much."

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A well-received grants management solution

Feedback from all the Council's users has also been overwhelmingly positive. "Applicants and grantees are reporting the system is really easy to use and functions smoothly. We've also been impressed with the security of SmartSimple's system. A big concern for artists is intellectual property; knowing their work is protected and their identities are safe, so a robust and secure site is a big deal for us.

"As a steward of public dollars, we need to be aware and accountable for how and where we spend our money. SmartSimple Cloud is very reasonably priced since we only pay for what we use. We are glad to be able to share that we are being responsible with taxpayer funds."

"SmartSimple Cloud truly is an infinitely configurable system that makes our work better. We can make changes quickly, tally up information for reports at a moment's notice, and get funding dollars out the door without spending weeks and months getting programmers to set everything up for us. SmartSimple Cloud allows us to be nimble, and won't ever hold us back from executing big ideas or initiatives." ●