GROW Central Florida

How the GROW Central Florida Program turned from passion project to a highly-recognized organization in 6 months.

"SmartSimple has given me an avenue to serve more people."

Colleen Gonzalez
Founder & Executive Director

At a Glance

GROW Central Florida was a brand new and expanding nonprofit organization in dire need to "grow" out of their paper-based management system. With an administrative team of one, too much time was getting lost tracking down applicant information through emails and collecting information through different filing systems and Excel spreadsheets. In one month, SmartSimple configured a platform that centralized all of their key applicant and inventory information and easily managed their daily tasks.

GROW Central Florida is a SmartSimple Cloud user

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SmartSimple client since: 2018

Type of giving: Recess toys for schools and durable goods and resources for running programs, new running shoes for students, and playground revitalizations

Old system: Paper-based and Excel spreadsheets

SmartSimple product/services:

• SmartSimple Cloud for Grants Management

Key pain points:

• Too much administrative time tracking down equipment orders and requests scattered in different documents and filing systems

New system must-haves:
• A centralized, online program organizes applicant information and resource requests
• A shared calendar that tracks rental timelines and reservation dates
• A platform that creates comprehensive reports on milestones and organizational activities

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About GROW Central Florida

Founded in 2015, GROW is a nonprofit organization that provides material support to increase opportunities for physical activities and healthy living for Central Florida school children. In an effort to help teachers not have to pay out of pocket for equipment, GROW partners with grassroots volunteers, local law enforcement to assist poorly-funded school health & wellness programs in Central Florida to support cross country running programs, playground revitalizations, recess toys for schools, shoes for runners in need, and family engagement events. GROW Central Florida's work has been gaining recognition including nomination for Florida Blue Foundation's Sapphire Awards.

Big problems for a small organization

GROW Central Florida was experiencing administrative difficulties for an organization with one full-time administrator and one volunteer driver. While serving 44 schools with unique needs, they were struggling to manage their inbound inventory donations and request forms for equipment rentals through paper-based forms. Colleen Gonzalez, Founder & Executive Director of GROW, stated "we were working with paper and spreadsheets and it was a nightmare. I was constantly circling around and had to hunt down where all the equipment was." GROW was facing difficulties tracking when schools needed the equipment, how long, and how many items because the information was scattered through different emails and spreadsheets.

When looking for a solution, Gonzales sought a "one-stop-shop" to keep all inbound and outbound workflows organized and centralized. "We needed to funnel everything into one place, especially when people need something, they can request it through the platform." In a nutshell, GROW was looking to simplify their process and ease the administrative workflow. SmartSimple answered the call.

Shedding paperwork and growing projects

When building the system, SmartSimple was helpful every step of the way and Gonzales loved working with the support staff. "The people that helped build the portal were amazing. The SmartSimple staff were very specific and communicative." Once the program was configured to GROW Central Florida's needs in a matter of months, they experienced immediate benefits.

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Colleen Gonzalez
Founder & Executive Director

Gonzales found organizational value in the flexible features that helped declutter the equipment request process. "SmartSimple Cloud's user portals allow schools to ask for exactly what they need, much like a library. Schools can ask for a reservation date to borrow from our inventory, and the calendar function allows them to know where their goods are and when they're promised to be returned.

By utilizing the SmartSimple Cloud's automated system features, Gonzales saved a lot of administrative time. "There is no more back and forth in emails to sign contracts and agreements, and I don't have to have binders full of papers." Their system uncluttered the process of collaborating with school staff and volunteers as well through automated workflow emails, "everyone gets a notification alerted people on progress on their requested equipment."

Looking towards the future full of growth

Fully equipped with a system that centralized their workflow and data, GROW found value in tracking their progress and were able to report and present their accomplishments to new schools and counties through compelling presentations and visuals. Gonzales states, "people can't argue with the numbers, and the numbers really shine through with our data-backed presentations."

GROW now has 40 volunteers in their system and their goal for 2019 is to expand their programs to new counties (Orange, Lake, Seminole, Polk) to continue to offer more resources to low-parent engaged and low-resource communities.

As of October 1, 2018, Colleen quit her full-time job to become executive director of GROW due to the success and efficiency of the program. Gonzales can now document more numbers and can apply for larger grants. By simplifying their administrative processes, GROW Central Florida can focus on their mission and helping kids grow up healthy and happy, "SmartSimple has given me an avenue to serve more people." ●