

Girls First Fund



How Girls First Fund scaled its international grantmaking with a more flexible, intuitive, and all-in-one grants management system.

At a Glance

Girls First Fund (GFF) was founded as a donor collaborative with a compelling mission: to ensure that all girls have the opportunity to realize their full rights and potential. From the outset, GFF knew that it would need a robust and flexible cloud-based system to manage a complex grantmaking process that could reach community-based organizations in multiple countries. GFF started working with SmartSimple in 2019 during its inaugural year of grantmaking. With SmartSimple's help, GFF's mission and team were empowered with a new grants management system that eliminated hours of manual data entry from their workload while providing flexibility to meet the fund's evolving needs.

Best of all, the new cloud-based system enabled easier engagement with organizations in remote communities that previously faced barriers to accessing international funding, while also supporting the fund's multi-language users to quickly master their new application portal. One year later, GFF has granted \$5.8 million globally to 150 organizations, held 165 focus group discussions with 69 local stakeholders, and facilitated workshops with grantees in six countries. Thanks to the new system powered by SmartSimple Cloud, GFF now has greater agility to respond to the changing needs of its grantees, particularly during COVID-19, and with an eye to further expand grantmaking.

SmartSimple client since: 2019

Type of giving: International Grants

Old system: Survey form-based solution, spreadsheets, documents

SmartSimple product/services:

- [SmartSimple Cloud for Grants Management](#)

Key pain points:

- Non-centralized processes made managing multi-language grants cumbersome
- Applicants with unreliable internet couldn't always save their work on applications/reporting
- Previous system was underutilized and mainly used for processing payments

New system must-haves:

- Reduce language and accessibility barriers for applicants and grantees in remote areas
- A more flexible system that could adapt as the organization developed and refined its grantmaking strategy
- More visibility over payment processing across teams
- Centralized due diligence processes for international grantmaking



"Most of our manual work has been eliminated since using SmartSimple Cloud. Just being able to push a button and have grant agreements auto-populate rather than having to go in and manually enter changes and updates for 150 organizations has been huge"

Beth Zimmerman
Program Officer



Girls First Fund is a SmartSimple Cloud user

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

About Girls First Fund and Geneva Global

Girls First Fund (GFF) envisions a world where girls have access to the skills and resources they need to live a life free from child marriage and create their own futures. Managed by Geneva Global, GFF is a donor collaborative that launched in 2018 to fund community-led organizations addressing the issues of child marriage and gender equality.



GFF officially launched its grantmaking in 2019, a year dubbed “The Learning Year” because it was heavily focused on learning from grantees, community members, and girls about their needs and how the fund could best provide them with the most appropriate support.

In that first year, GFF granted amounts ranging from \$5,000 to \$50,000 to 150 organizations across six countries: the Dominican Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, India, Nepal, Niger, and Uganda. Roughly 40% of these organizations were historically underfunded.

GFF is a philanthropic fund of Capital for Good USA, a U.S. 501(c)(3) public charity, with services provided by Geneva Global, a certified B Corporation that provides advice and services to support a wide range of philanthropists, foundations, nonprofits, mission-driven companies, and other charitable organizations to maximize their social impact.

A system to connect remote community-based organizations to funding

Before implementing SmartSimple Cloud for Grants Management, GFF wasn't using its existing grants management system to its full capacity. “We had a grants management system that we used primarily for payment processing,” says Beth Zimmerman, Program Officer, Girls First Fund. “So, for other funds we worked on, we had to do a lot of manual data collection and monitoring. As you can imagine, it was pretty cumbersome.” It was also difficult for GFF's team to quickly pull reporting and the exact data they needed.

As GFF prepared to place its inaugural grants, it wanted to have a system in place that would be both empowering and easily accessible to applicants and grantees. “We knew we needed to identify a system that would reduce barriers and give applicants access, not just to applying for our funding, but also to get exposure to a system that might propel them to be able to apply for other funding as well,” says Beth.

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Beth Zimmerman
Program Officer

One of the biggest funding barriers was language. GFF currently works with applicants and grantees in English, French, Spanish, Hindi, and Nepali. Before transitioning to SmartSimple Cloud, the fund was frustrated by difficulties with configuring, accepting, and reviewing grant applications when it came to working with multiple languages.

Another critical barrier was ease of use for the applicants and grantees. Many applicants are nascent organizations that had never applied for a grant online before.

With many living in remote areas with often unreliable internet access, they needed to easily auto-save their applications or progress reports in case their connection cut out. “Some of the groups that we were funding had never before received international funding. They didn't have experience with reporting or with having to interact with the donor,” says Malorie Tull, Senior Program Officer of Girls First Fund. “These groups have been able to utilize and navigate the system. That was a huge factor for us.”

Building a global grantmaking solution on-the-fly

GFF approached SmartSimple in October 2018, but it needed to go live before the entire system could be finalized. Although GFF's grantmaking strategy was still being solidified at the time, SmartSimple was able to implement the system iteratively while also providing step-by-step guidance throughout the process. “There was a lot of calibration, at least in the initial few months, to figure out what we needed to communicate for SmartSimple to be able to build what we were envisioning while it was still in-process,” says Beth.

The SmartSimple team helped GFF configure SmartSimple Cloud and delivered a personalized solution around the fund's unique requirements. After a brief learning curve, the GFF team was soon able to run with its new system. "Since then, we've done additional configuration work and those projects have gone really smoothly," says Beth. "One thing I've always appreciated about SmartSimple is that for any need we've had, they've figured out a solution."

The fund's new grants management system allows program officers to painlessly access and generate grant agreements and board dockets at the push of a button. It also simplified financial and due diligence processes, organizing large data sets and complex information into an easily accessible hub. Tasks once performed manually are now automatic, such as verifying bank information and SWIFT codes, or checking expiry dates on registration documents. "Most of our manual work has been eliminated since using the system," says Beth.



Responding swiftly to emerging needs

COVID-19 hit when most of GFF's grantee partners were at the end of their first year of funding. Suddenly, these partners had to scale back the programming they had originally proposed. In response to these emerging community needs, GFF knew it needed to be more flexible with the types of grants offered.

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The GFF team decided to respond by shifting program support towards the core needs of grantees for greater flexibility, and offering no-cost extensions where needed. Thanks to the flexibility built into SmartSimple Cloud, the amendment process was quick and easy to implement, with features allowing grant managers to quickly document changes to the grant or add questions to reporting.

GFF sets its sights on expansion

Now equipped with a cloud-based automation and collaboration platform to manage all its grantmaking globally, the GFF team can use the added flexibility to strengthen mentoring and support of current grantees. Meanwhile, GFF continues to find new ways to improve its internal processes. "We've talked about streamlining our donor reporting a bit more and building out some more quarterly push-button reports," says Malorie. "There's also some potential for our Monitoring, Evaluating, and Learning (MEL) processes."

Supported by its new system, GFF has gained the efficiency to generate even more impact. "I don't think we could do what we're doing with the number of people we have if we didn't have the system in place. There's no way." ●