Massachusetts Life Sciences Center

MASSACHUSETTS LIFE SCIENCES CENTER
Investing in the State of Innovation

How MLSC built a Grants Management System without writing a single line of code.

At a Glance

Massachusetts Life Sciences Center (MLSC) was using a custom grants management system with very limited functionality. There was no ability to scale the system for new requirements without the developer doing extensive and costly programming work. It wasn't intuitive, and lacked essential security protocols. By moving to SmartSimple Cloud, a highly flexible platform, MLSC was able to build a system that had all of the original functionality. They also gained the ability to build new features at any time to meet the organization's increasingly complex requirements without adding a single line of code.

> "There's no need to revamp your process to accommodate the [SmartSimple Cloud] software; instead, the software is modified to accommodate you."

Ryan Mudawar
Director of Academic and Workforce Programs

smartsimple CLOUD | Research Grants Management

Massachusetts Life Sciences Center is a SmartSimple Cloud user

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

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SmartSimple client since: 2015

Dollars granted: $575 million to date

Old system: Custom-built system

SmartSimple product/services:

• SmartSimple Cloud for Research Grants Management

Key pain points:

• No ability to make changes on their own
• No customer support
• Not user-friendly
• No automation

New system must-haves:

• Ability to make modifications as needed
• Responsive customer support
• Robust reviewer portal

About Massachusetts Life Sciences Center

The Massachusetts Life Sciences Center (MLSC) is a $1 billion public–private partnership with the mission of advancing the life sciences sector in Massachusetts. Their work includes creating jobs in the life sciences and supporting vital scientific research. The MLSC makes financial investments in public and private institutions that are advancing life sciences research, development and commercialization. To date, MLSC has invested more than $575 million in state funding and invested in projects that have created thousands of new jobs across the state.

Constrained by the limits of a custom system

MLSC needed a simple solution for their granting activities. "We contracted a one-person shop to quickly build a very basic custom system that would do specific, general tasks. At the time, we didn't have the time nor the manpower to shop around for a proper grants management system," says Ryan Mudawar, Director of Academic and Workforce Programs.

The MLSC team used the system for several years, but they discovered a custom system was limited and frustrating to use. "There was essentially no customer service since the system was built by one person with no staff. There was no way to update the program ourselves; we had no control over the design or the ability to make any modifications. Even if we just wanted a minor change on an application - such as adding a comma - we'd have to email the developer, explain what the issue was, and wait for him to respond."

"Not only was the entire process incredibly time-consuming, we had to pay every time we wanted something changed no matter how small. On top of that, the system wasn't reliable. We were plagued by technical glitches, and every year it was something new. Both our internal and external users experienced problems; documents wouldn't save, data wouldn't upload, and application details were not displayed in a neat or organized manner. Our reviewers were

constantly frustrated with content being lost, not saving, and having the system crash on them."

MLSC's old system also lacked connectivity, and if a new portal was needed it was simply added in with no real consistency. "Applicants didn't even have to enter passwords, and internal staff had to share administrative credentials to access the portal."

Looking for a more complete, robust solution

Ryan and his team decided it was time to look for a new system. They needed something that was more stable and reliable. They wanted a system where they had the ability to make their own changes in-house. "The challenge was that we knew getting an off-the-shelf system wouldn't be able to do everything we wanted. While our custom program was really bare bones and basically did what we needed, it was not user-friendly."

Ryan hired a consultant to help him and his team research what other options were available, as well as identify the one that would be the best fit for MLSC. "Believe it or not, some of the vendors we came across couldn't even do basic tasks such as providing applications in printable PDF format, so it was great to have someone whose sole purpose was to facilitate the outreach and RFP process."

Discovering the nearly limitless options of a configurable platform

After a thorough review, MLSC chose SmartSimple Cloud. Different from their original custom software system, SmartSimple Cloud is a configurable platform that offers unparalleled flexibility. Clients have the freedom to make changes or add new functionality that fits their needs. And, with a platform like SmartSimple Cloud, it can all be done without adding a single line of computer code.

Organizations of all sizes and scopes can re-create their own unique process. There's no need to revamp your process to accommodate the software; instead, the software is modified to accommodate you.

"I have to admit that, at first, we were a little skeptical. The SmartSimple team seemed so confident they could provide everything we needed and more. We were particularly concerned about our internship program because it has a very unique application and vetting process. But none of the other vendors we saw could meet or commit to our needs aside from SmartSimple, the choice was obvious."

> "It's so much cleaner and more user-friendly than our old custom system. Everyone is also much more comfortable now that we have a proper login process."
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> **Ryan Mudawar**
> Director of Academic and Workforce Programs

A new sense of freedom and flexibility with SmartSimple

As a configured rather than a custom system, SmartSimple Cloud provided something new that Ryan hadn't seen in software before. "Having the ability to configure our own applications and use the review manager tool to efficiently assign reviews in bulk has been a great benefit for us. And being able to do these and other system modifications whenever we need is fantastic. We would never have to 'live with' something we didn't like or want just because it was easier to deal with it then try to get it changed."

The implementation of MLSC's system went very well. Ryan and his team liked the SmartSimple approach, "They have something called a Task Tracker that documents and formalizes every request that we submit or change that we ask for, so everything was tracked and it kept everyone fully organized. At any time I could review the conversation thread to see exactly what changes were made and why."

Ryan reports that their SmartSimple Cloud platform has been a success. "It's so much cleaner and more user-friendly than our old custom system. Everyone is also much more comfortable now that we have a proper login process. Applicants and reviewers appreciate getting emails directly from SmartSimple Cloud and the ability to store applications and reviews in draft form, logging back into the system to complete their work as they need."

His team has also had good success with SmartSimple's Community Support team, "The Community Support team is amazing. They're very responsive, always able to reply to requests in a short time frame. They're also great at explaining what they've done and helped us understand how we can replicate changes ourselves in the future." ●