Submittable
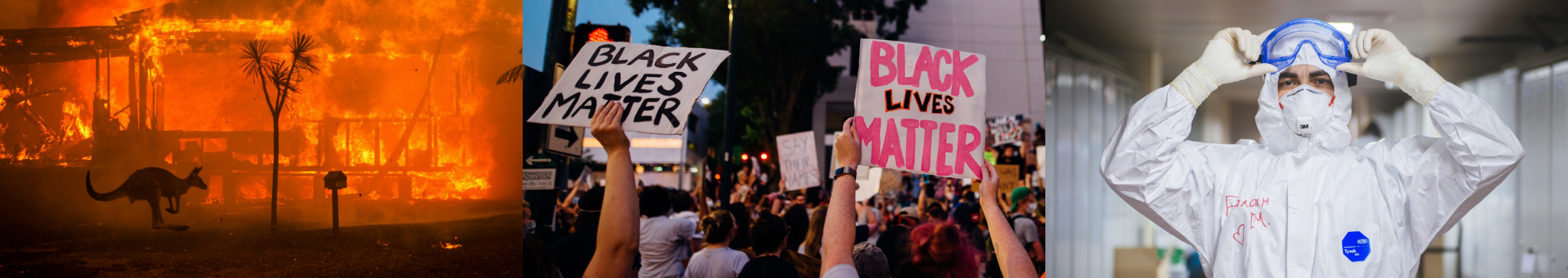
The Next Generation of Grants Management Software

A buyers' guide for the new era of philanthropy

Contents

An introduction to the moment

Philanthropy has just experienced the most disruptive period of change in the last 50 years. 2020 was tumultuous and transformative, and for grantmakers and nonprofits alike, it served as a catalyst for change.

Long-held practices were challenged and reinvented. Organizations scrambled to work remotely, distribute funds digitally, and rapidly create new grant programs. Software was thrust into the spotlight as we looked to technology to overcome the chaos.

It was a long slog, but in the end we survived—and emerged with better ways of working.

But did grant management software help or hinder this transformation?

A new, values-driven philanthropy

New themes and paradigms have cast philanthropy in a different light. Grantmakers are reexamining everything, including behaviors and work processes. The role of technology has changed. The old philosophy of 'do no harm' has become 'do more good.' Software, once valued for its ability to enable our most complex processes, must now support new cultural and organizational *values*.

The software itself must unlock creativity, shine a light on inequity, and promote transparency and fairness. It must bridge the distance between funder and grantee. And, it must simplify and expedite the end-to-end grants process. Technology must actualize 2020's clarion call for change.

Can grant management software help your organization adapt to this new philanthropy?

This guide is intended to provide a new way of thinking about technology, and how it can better support your team, partners, and mission. It frames philanthropy's work differently, focusing on *outcomes, mission,* and *values* rather than listing individual

features and functions out of context. In fact, an excessive focus on functionality, without proper regard for the people behind the work of grantmaking, was a major source of problems to begin with.

Grantee-focused philanthropy finally takes root

A new imperative emerged from the events of 2020: *grantee-focused philanthropy*.

Nonprofits articulated their most urgent needs: faster capital with fewer restrictions and less administrative burden. Grantmakers rose to the challenge, addressing the root causes that made it so hard for nonprofits to thrive.

In many cases, the real impediment to that change was complex, inflexible software. As philanthropy raced to address a host of challenges, it became apparent that many grant management platforms are built for an inefficient way of working. Many are designed to *enable* complexity, not reduce it. And as philanthropy now demands more from technology, grant management software is struggling to rise to the challenge.

Many grant management solutions are designed to enable complexity, not reduce it.

Philanthropy is evolving towards a new ethos, aiming to level the playing field for nonprofits. Grantmakers must look through a new lens when considering how technology can support their work. Three themes articulate the most important ways in which grantmaking has evolved, and provide a new frame for choosing grant management software that supports the future of philanthropy.

Emergent and evolved grantmaking is:

TRUST-BASED

STREAMLINED

EQUITABLE

Philanthropy's evolution: Three essential themes

Trust-based grantmaking

Trust-based philanthropy is a grantmaking movement that encourages stronger, higher-trust relationships among funders and grantees. This approach values connection and collaboration over due diligence and paperwork. Funders are encouraged to reduce restrictions and requirements, and define strategy, programming, and impact in tandem and equally with their partners.

In 2020, many grantmakers like the Ford Foundation committed to end the nonprofit starvation cycle by issuing multi-year general operating support grants, and increasing the percentage of unrestricted funding.

Mutual trust and transparency are core tenets of trust-based philanthropy, and they change the dynamic of the traditional power imbalance between funder and grantee. Rather than dictating the terms of engagement, funders are changing their processes to be more inclusive and transparent, balancing the power-sharing arrangement of the relationship. Nonprofits are given more purview to influence how impact is defined and measured, and how project goals are achieved. And grantmakers are contributing resources beyond funding, like data, network access, and domain expertise.

Technology plays a major role in helping organizations build trust-based relationships. Grant management software must support greater collaboration, transparency, data sharing, and impact measurement. It must bring funders, applicants, and grantees together in an environment that facilitates robust collaboration and learning in both directions.

Submittable: Key Features for Trust-Based Grantmaking

Features to look for should facilitate transparency and center people.

✔ Democratize your process with a visual online gallery option

✔ Build relationships with open in-app communication

✔ Manage your process over years with additional forms and progress reports

✔ See and measure your impact with quantitative—and crucially, qualitative—impact reporting
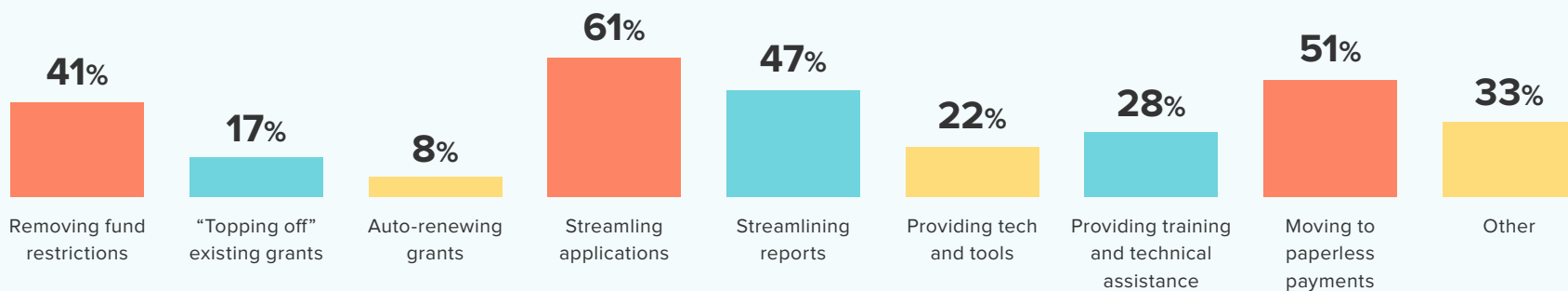
Streamlined Grantmaking

Building on the idea of trust-based philanthropy, streamlining the grantmaking experience is core to the new philanthropy. During the COVID crisis, many grantmakers realized their application, review, and payment processes were too slow and administrative to meet the moment. Philanthropy turned to new processes and ways of working aimed at reducing overhead and administrative burden.

Movements like trust-based philanthropy and **#FixTheForm** are compelling grantmakers to shed beliefs, processes, and technologies that slow the grantmaking process. Simplifying and streamlining paperwork, email, and other tedious tasks

benefits staff and grantees. How? Time saved by reducing this work can be invested instead on mission-critical functions—like building relationships and helping grantees reach their goals.

This transformation is already well underway. In 2020, 61% of respondents to the Technology Association of Grantmakers *State of Philanthropy Tech* survey stated they are streamlining applications, 47% are streamlining reports, and 51% are moving from checks to digital payments. Each of these demonstrates funders' commitment to making the grants process faster and simpler.

In what new ways has your organization supported grantees/nonprofit partners in response to society's challenges in 2020?

41%	17%	8%	61%	47%	22%	28%	51%	33%
Removing fund restrictions	"Topping off" existing grants	Auto-renewing grants	Streamling applications	Streamlining reports	Providing tech and tools	Providing training and technical assistance	Moving to paperless payments	Other

Technology Association of Grantmakers: 2020 State of Philanthropy Tech

More evidence of streamlining taking place across the sector includes:

- A major corporate grantmaker reduced the number of distinct applications from over 60 to just four.
- A large private foundation discovered that dozens of their grant applications differed by only 20%. They are combining applications to reduce the total number and simplify the overall process for both staff and applicants.
- A cohort of influential grantmakers is working together to develop a **common grant application for philanthropy**.

The common theme across these initiatives is a further simplification of the grantmaking process, making it possible for nonprofits to spend less time fundraising and more time on mission.

The right technology can enable progress towards form simplification through simple tools like branching logic and form duplication. But reducing the number of applications and simplifying the review process is just the starting point. Grant management software should automate the end-to-end workflow, reducing the hands-on effort it takes for staff to usher an application through the grantmaking process.

Submittable: Key Features for Trust-Based Grantmaking

Consider features that eliminate tedious tasks for both your team and your applicants.

✔ Screen for eligibility criteria before applicants fill out your entire form.

✔ Allow applicants to collaborate with each other in real time.

✔ Use conditional logic to keep forms concise and relevant.

✔ Ask for what you need, when you need it with additional forms.

✔ House and organize all forms within a single portal.

✔ Duplicate forms and questions easily.

✔ Rely on technology to verify and extract data in automated review.

✔ Get awards to applicants quickly and securely with electronic funds distribution.

Equitable Grantmaking

Perhaps the most important theme to emerge in philanthropy is *Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging*, or *DEIB*. Philanthropy is taking a hard look at its own history of controlling the funding process, and committing to making things more fair and inclusive for nonprofits and their constituencies. Many funders are introducing new programs to tackle social exclusion and racial injustice. And they are implementing new work processes, guidelines, and safeguards to ensure more equitable access to capital for the nonprofit sector.

Analysis of demographic data from partners, programs, and communities is providing new insight on the equity of grantmaking. Many organizations are using this data to assess the distribution of their funding, and taking action to seek out new grantees that have been overlooked or excluded from the process. Expanding the tent to include diverse and marginalized people and organizations is a key tenet of the new ethos driving philanthropy.

Grantmakers are also committing to address the power imbalance that for years has been deeply embedded in the sector. Many are discovering that establishing stronger partnerships and relationships with the nonprofits they fund is the key to achieving positive, long-lasting outcomes. This means inviting partners and community members to be heard in the planning, decision-making, and funding processes. Known as **participatory grantmaking**, this level of engagement aims to rebalance the dynamic among funders and grantees.

Again, technology is a key factor in helping philanthropy achieve greater equity. Grant management software must collect the right data and provide flexibility with regards to keeping the data confidential during the review process. It must also empower the insights and intelligence needed to enable learning and make better funding and partnership decisions. The use of automation tools and a system designed to facilitate transparency will ultimately lead to fairer and more equitable outcomes.

Submittable: Key Features for Equitable Grantmaking

Tools that help you run an equitable process include those that empower applicants, facilitate objective reviews, and deliver insights.

✔ Favor high accessibility standards as determined by a Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT).

✔ Support diverse file types, including image, video, and audio.

✔ Rely on review rubrics and dynamic scoring options for a more objective process.

✔ Reduce bias by concealing certain applicant responses, such as demographic data.

✔ Use permission levels to ensure confidential reviews.

✔ Evaluate your progress toward DEI goals with advanced reporting.

Evaluating Grant Management Software

Grant management software is the driving force behind our organizations. We rely on digital platforms for nearly every aspect of our work. From creating and submitting grant proposals to reviewing and selecting applications. For managing program budgets and distributing financial awards. And for capturing data that reveals the impact of our work. And now they must take on a new task: helping us navigate the changing values and workflows that are redefining philanthropy.

In the not-too-distant past, philanthropy was more transactional than collaborative:

- Grant applications grew in length and complexity, and required major time and effort from staff, stakeholders, and applicants, even for simple proposals.
- The funding process got overly complex, slow, and restrictive.
- The voices of the grantees working to improve communities were sometimes unprioritized and went unheard.

Grant management software, in turn, was purpose-built to facilitate this kind of grantmaking. Its extensive configurability supports the most complex and burdensome of applications (and leads to endlessly difficult, hard to support systems). It requires hundreds of data elements that nonprofits must dutifully supply. Budgeting is restrictive and slots every dollar a nonprofit receives into a category, requiring extensive tracking and updating (*postage, really?*).

These legacy systems are so convoluted that it takes many months, staff members, and consultants to get through a basic implementation. Simple changes take days. The user experience is frustrating and unintuitive. Truth be told, grantmakers have been using these systems because they didn't have a choice.

Yesterday's grant management software simply doesn't align with philanthropy's new ethos:

- Speed and agility
- Transparency and accountability
- Outcomes and impact
- Trust and partnership
- User experience

Philanthropy needs more from technology, and buyers should expect grant management software to reflect these new values and ways of working.

10 key features to look for in your next grant management software

Given the emergence of the new movements and ideas, many organizations are taking a hard look at their grant management software and asking how it can support new ways of working. They're discovering that most systems are not designed for simplicity, collaboration, transparency, and equity.

As the world of philanthropy evolves and embraces new ideas, here are 10 key features to consider when evaluating new grant management software:
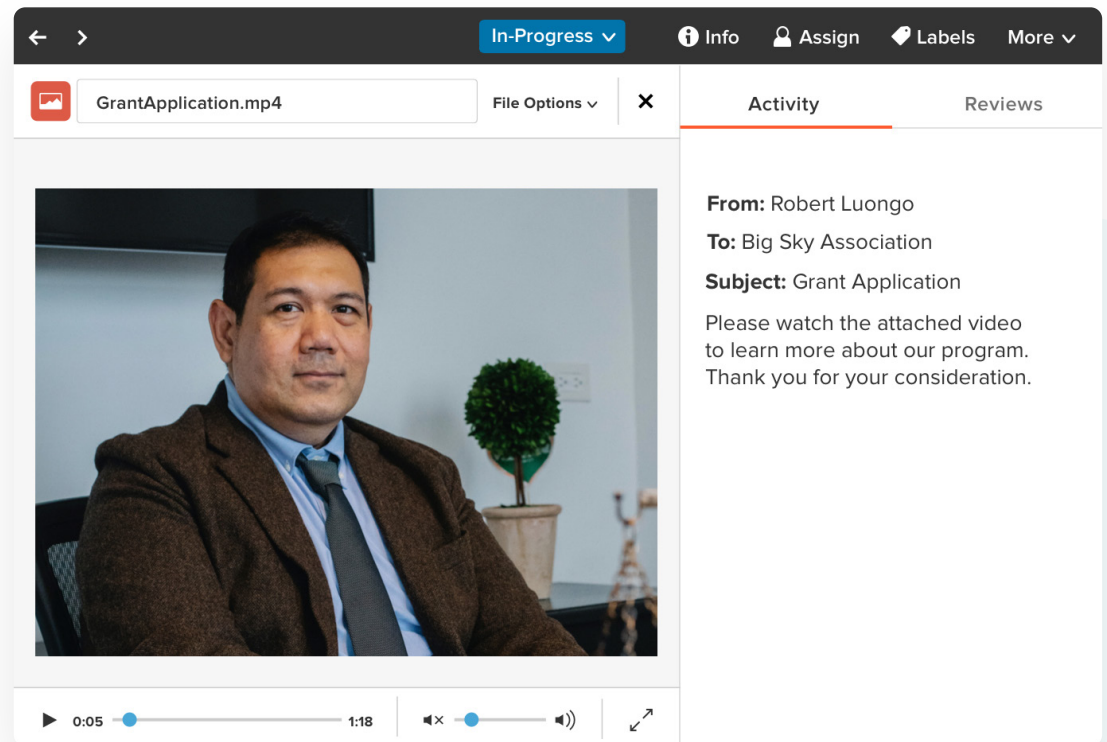
1. Full grant life-cycle management

Modern grant management software must streamline the grantmaking process from start to finish. From eligibility quizzes and very short initial consideration forms, to more robust proposal forms, progress reports, and impact reports, all forms should be supported by the platform and grouped together in one place for ultimate convenience and transparency among all stakeholders.

2. Inclusive and accessible application forms

Video-based applications and progress reports incorporating photos and other images are replacing traditional forms in today's grantmaking. A modern grant management solution must support diverse communication styles by allowing applicants and grantees to tell their stories using videos, photos, and audio in addition to text.

Further, grant management software should have a VPAT (Voluntary Product Accessibility Template) which affirms that it is accessible to users with a wide range of disabilities. Be wary of platforms that have had a VPAT but do not share the results.

Allow applicants to tell their stories through diverse media, including video, which your team can easily watch during review without downloading.

3. Time-saving automations

Automation is key to reducing the administrative work of staff and applicants. Reviews and approvals must be informed by automated intelligence to help reduce workload, promote fairness and equity, and identify insights into grantmaking.

Automated review not only saves time, it can also help reduce fraud and avoid the misappropriation of funds through tasks such as data extraction and verification.

GENERAL SETTINGS   ASSIGNMENTS & NOTIFICATIONS   **REVIEW WORKFLOW**   GALLERY VIEW

Review Workflow

Stage Name *	Review Type *	Review Form	Auto-Assign Reviewers
Data Verification	Automated Review	Data Verification Form	Review Bot
Stage Name *	**Review Type ***	**Review Form**	**Auto-Assign Reviewers**
Team Review	Custom Review	Grant Review Form	Multiple Team Members
Stage Name *	**Review Type ***	**Review Form**	**Auto-Assign Reviewers**
Final Approval	Yes/No/Maybe Voting	Not Applicable	Multiple Team Members

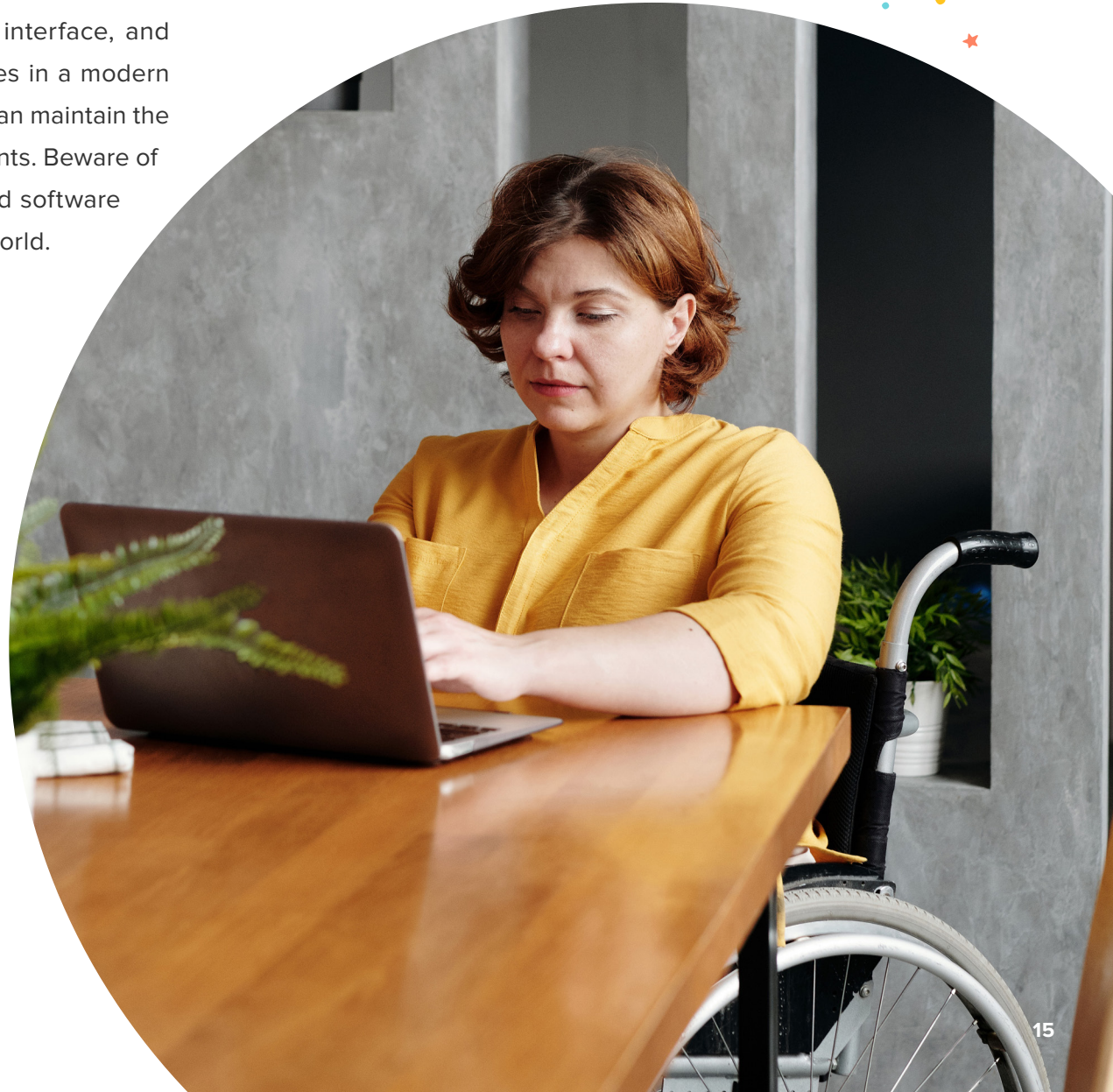**+ Add New Stage**

Save Form   Cancel and return to list

4. Intuitive design

Drag-and-drop form building, a modern user interface, and intuitive design elements are must-have features in a modern platform. These ensure that non-technical staff can maintain the system without the help of an IT staff or consultants. Beware of systems that began life as on-premises installed software and are continually trying to adapt to the new world.
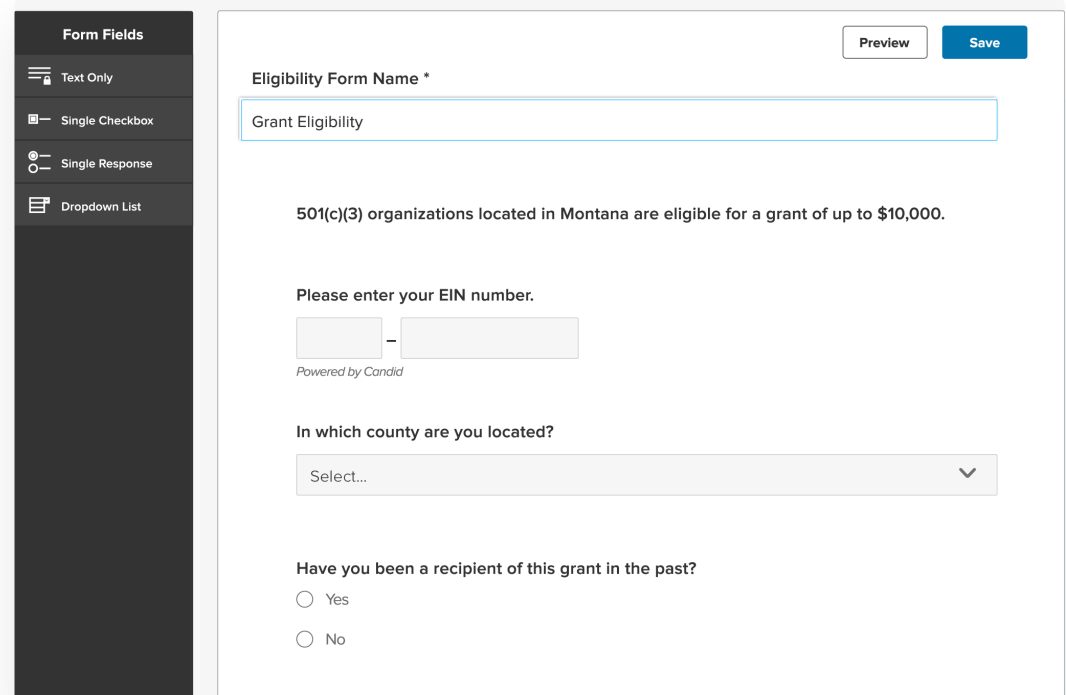
5. Reduced applicant burden

Focusing on the applicant experience is a core tenet of today's philanthropy. Branching logic and intelligent applications eliminate unnecessary data collection by allowing grantees to skip irrelevant sections or questions.

Eligibility screening ensures applicants won't waste valuable time on an opportunity they do not qualify for—screening also saves time for your review team.

Moreover, movements like #FixTheForm highlight the fact that funders must enable applicants to preemptively access all application questions in order to appropriately and conveniently prepare.

Grant management software should also provide reasonable, customizable character limits, and enable applicants to save their work or auto-save a draft for them.

Finally, grouping and linking forms reduces the need for applicants to provide the same information multiple times.
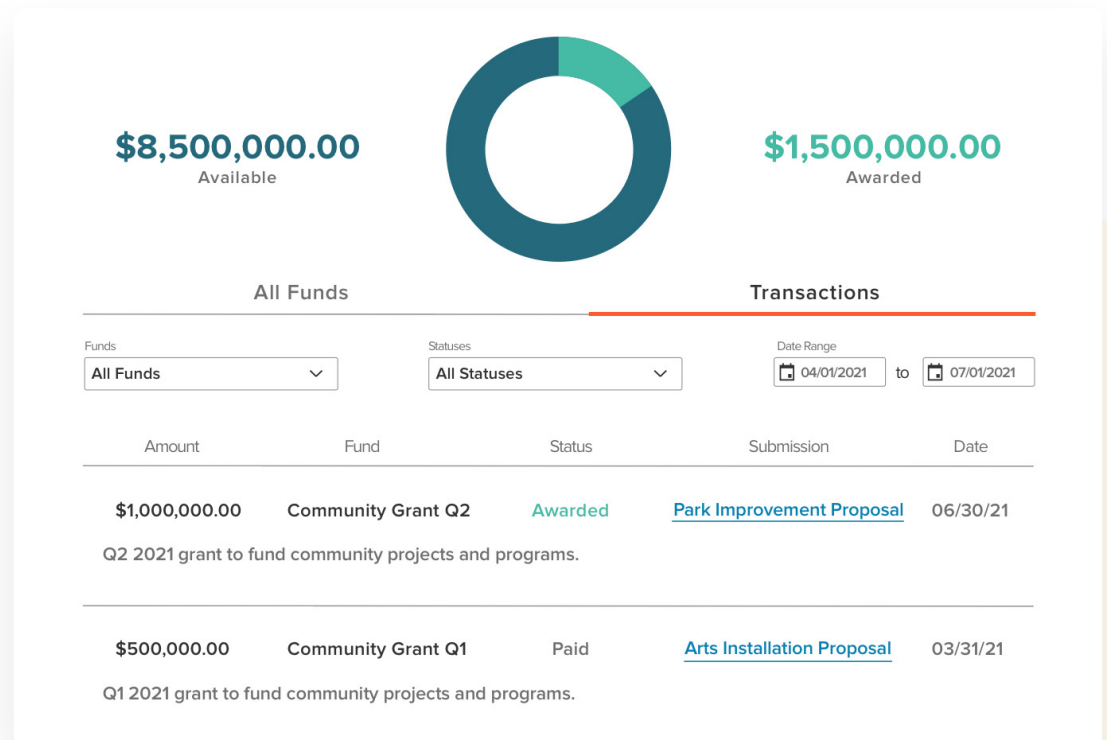
Form Fields

- Text Only
- Single Checkbox
- Single Response
- Dropdown List

Preview   Save

Eligibility Form Name *

Grant Eligibility

501(c)(3) organizations located in Montana are eligible for a grant of up to $10,000.

Please enter your EIN number.

─

Powered by Candid

In which county are you located?

Select...

Have you been a recipient of this grant in the past?

○ Yes

○ No

Eligibility screening ensures applicants don't waste their time on an opportunity they don't qualify for. Look for integrations with Candid that can pull nonprofit information directly into your review portal based on the IRS EIN number.

6. In-app funds distribution

A grant management solution must be capable of sending electronic grant payments directly from the system in order to expedite funding and eliminate the work associated with issuing paper-based checks. Electronic payments can shave days or weeks off of the time it takes to get funding to a grantee.

Tracking and distributing funds within a single platform ensures grant money will get to awardees quickly and securely and you'll always be aware of your capacity to give.

$8,500,000.00
Available

$1,500,000.00
Awarded

All Funds | Transactions

Funds	Statuses	Date Range
All Funds	All Statuses	04/01/2021 to 07/01/2021

Amount	Fund	Status	Submission	Date
$1,000,000.00	Community Grant Q2	Awarded	Park Improvement Proposal	06/30/21
Q2 2021 grant to fund community projects and programs.				
$500,000.00	Community Grant Q1	Paid	Arts Installation Proposal	03/31/21
Q1 2021 grant to fund community projects and programs.				

7. Tools for objective review

Grant management software must promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging through smart tools for review. Confidential review through various permission levels avoids undue influence and bias among teams.

Concealing applicant demographic data reduces bias while still gathering essential data for reporting and assessment.

Review rubrics ensure fair evaluations, while also giving administrators tools to identify outliers who may need additional training.

· ·

Help prevent conscious and unconscious bias by concealing certain information, such as personally identifying or demographic data, from your review team.

← →   **In-Progress** ⌄   ⓘ Info   👤 Assign   🏷 Labels   More ⌄

Have you ever applied for funding with us?

Big Sky Association is committed to funding students who are representative of different and diverse backgrounds and experiences, including but not limited to diversity of ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, religion, ability, culture, and socioeconomics. Your participation in this voluntary demographic survey will help us to meet our goals.

Race (select all that apply)

[Concealed]

Gender

[Concealed]

Sexuality

[Concealed]

Do you identify as disabled or non-disabled?

[Concealed]

Activity | Reviews

Type a note...

all | notes | assignments | ratings | labels

2 hours ago ADMINS ONLY
Tung Pham voted Yes

3 days ago ASSIGNED TEAM
Christine Buchanan said:
This has been completed but needs to be reviewed by admins.

1 month ago VEIWABLE BY SUBMITTER
Automated submission response sent to
(Concealed submission)

2 month ago VEIWABLE BY SUBMITTER
Automated submission response sent to
(Concealed submission)

8. Robust integrations

Integrations with databases like Candid (formerly GuideStar) save everyone time.

A robust API that allows grant management software to send or receive data from other software or databases in real time is a key requirement. Older systems tend to have outdated APIs that only provide access to a fraction of the data within the platform. And many rely on clunky overnight file transfers to update critical information.
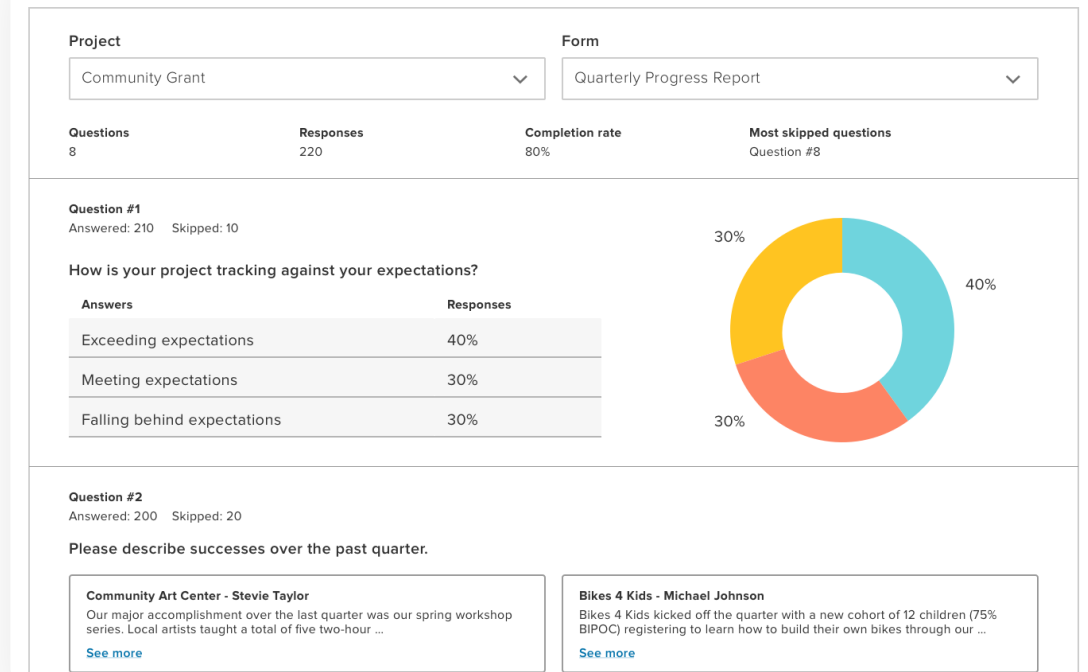
9. Impact reporting

Impact reporting is one key to establishing trust-based relationships. Grant management software must allow grantees to play an equal role in defining and describing the impact of their work. And, it must allow grantmakers to quickly and easily create reports and visualizations to review and assess the data they are collecting.

Impact reports must allow for diverse storytelling and encompass both qualitative and quantitative data, and lead to micro insights and action regarding individual awardees, as well as macro trends and learnings across the entire grantmaking program.

A powerful impact reporting tool must aggregate both qualitative and quantitative data so that you can understand the full scope of your impact.

Impact reports

Project	Form
Community Grant	Quarterly Progress Report

Questions	Responses	Completion rate	Most skipped questions
8	220	80%	Question #8

Question #1
Answered: 210   Skipped: 10

How is your project tracking against your expectations?

Answers	Responses
Exceeding expectations	40%
Meeting expectations	30%
Falling behind expectations	30%

30%
40%
30%

Question #2
Answered: 200   Skipped: 20

Please describe successes over the past quarter.

Community Art Center - Stevie Taylor
Our major accomplishment over the last quarter was our spring workshop series. Local artists taught a total of five two-hour ...
See more

Bikes 4 Kids - Michael Johnson
Bikes 4 Kids kicked off the quarter with a new cohort of 12 children (75% BIPOC) registering to learn how to build their own bikes through our ...
See more

10. Comprehensive collaboration

Grant management software must help facilitate teamwork—on the front and back end—to enable communication, collaboration, and transparency. Multiple applicants should be able to work together on their grant application in real time.

Reviewers, staff, and administrators should be able to communicate seamlessly with one another and with applicants through in-app messaging to keep everyone on the same page—without having to toggle over to their email inbox.

A visual online gallery view of displayed submissions, with flexible options for voting, democratizes the process by empowering community members to participate in decision-making.

A solution for philanthropy's next era

Grantmaking and philanthropy look fundamentally different in 2021 than they did in 2019. A new ethos aimed at sharing power, expediting access to capital, and streamlining processes has taken hold. Grant administrators, program officers, and executive directors are pausing to examine the software and data used to facilitate the complex work of grantmaking. In many cases, the old systems simply aren't designed to accommodate the new values and ways of working. Considerable time, energy, and many sleepless nights were spent figuring out how to respond to an onslaught of change and rapid evolution. In the end, most foundations and nonprofits survived. Some even discovered better ways of working. Now it's time to align with technology that is purpose-built for modern philanthropy. We wish you the best of luck in your search for grant management software, and we're happy to show you how **Submittable** can help.

Authored by Sam Caplan

Sam Caplan is the Vice President of Social Impact at Submittable. Inspired by the amazing work performed by grantmakers of all stripes, at Submittable, Sam strives to help them achieve their missions through better, more effective software. Sam has served as founder of New Spark Strategy, Chief Information Officer at the Walton Family Foundation, and director of technology at the Walmart Foundation. He consults, advises, and writes prolifically on social impact technology, strategy, and innovation.

Submittable

Submittable is a social impact platform that makes it easy to launch, manage, and measure any kind of social impact program. Since 2010, Submittable has helped organizations collect nearly 20 million applications for thousands of customers all over the world.

submittable.com | **855.467.8264**