Science Foundation Ireland

How Science Foundation Ireland provided an easy-to-use platform for all users with a built-in messaging system and robust track and reporting capabilities.

At a Glance

Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) had been using a custom system from the start that never really worked. External users called frequently for assistance and the SFI team would often just tell them to email their submissions rather than spend hours trying to sort out problems. They wanted a system that was completely intuitive for everyone to use no matter how infrequently they accessed it. With SmartSimple Cloud, SFI found a solution that was not only easy to use, it was able to do so much more than just accept applications. For the first time, they were able to centralize all their tracking and reporting in the same system that stored all applications and reviewer notes. The number of calls from applicants was reduced drastically and they no longer needed to use email as a workaround.

"We could see functionality that was emerging and how flexible the [grants management] system was. It was clear to us that SmartSimple's promises would really be delivered on."

Donal Keane
COO

Science Foundation Ireland 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: 2009

Type of giving: Research Grants

Dollars managed: €460 million (Approx. $501 million USD)

Old system: Custom

SmartSimple product/services:

• SmartSimple Cloud for Research Grants Management
• Premium Support

Key pain points:

• Difficult to use
• Never worked properly
• Badly structured
• Not adequately administered by vendor

New system must-haves

• Centralized system
• Intuitive to navigate even for occasional users
• No excessive training required to access

About Science Foundation Ireland

Founded in 2001, Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) is the national foundation for investment in scientific and engineering research. SFI invests in academic researchers and research teams who are most likely to generate new knowledge, leading edge technologies and competitive enterprises in the fields of science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM). The Foundation also promotes and supports the study of, education in, and engagement with STEM and promotes an awareness and understanding of the value of STEM to society and, in particular, to the growth of the economy.

Rapidly outgrowing their old system

For their first five years of operation, Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) had no formal system in place for the creation, submission, reporting, tracking and awarding of research grants. "We did have a system built for us but it never really did what we wanted it to do," says Donal Keane, COO of SFI. "We have a lot of people who use the system only once in awhile, and every time they went to use it, they'd wind up calling us for help. Since it was so difficult to sort out problems, we'd usually just give up and have people email us their applications or grant reviews."

The lack of usability became a bigger issue as time went on and the foundation grew from 11 awards in their first year to several hundred in subsequent years. "At any given time, we're managing hundreds of millions of Euros to be allocated between about 600 active awards."

"We needed a system that was reflective of a foundation that was growing. The biggest problem was that the system we were trying to use wasn't web-based, so every time we put out a call, applications would need to be downloaded to the system and then uploaded again for our researchers; not exactly efficient or state-of-the-art."

An intuitive solution to meet their users' needs

Donal and his team went in search of a solution that would accommodate SFI's evolving needs. "The main thing we were looking for was a system that was intuitive to use. We have a number of people who might only ever access the system occasionally or even just need to use it once to apply for, or review, a specific research grant. We didn't want to have to provide an instruction manual or have our staff on call 24/7 to lead applicants and reviewers by the hand through the entire process."

SFI's first impression of SmartSimple Cloud was extremely positive. "SmartSimple definitely had the most flexible platform on the market. The competition only offered 'out of the box' solutions, while SmartSimple's presentation showed us not only the functionality of their software, but the passion and commitment to shaping the system we wanted. It was very clear what SmartSimple would be able to do for us."

"From the very early stages of the implementation process, we could see the broad scope of functionality that was emerging, and how accessible this solution was going to be for all our users. While their competitors seemed to require us to employ a virtual in-house army to manage and support their systems, SmartSimple takes responsibility for the upkeep of their platform. There was no way we could ever staff the resources we would have needed to use one of their competitors."

The added benefits of Premium Support Services

Recently, SFI added Premium Support Services to their service package. "Our system quite literally needs to be up and running all day, every day. Multiple departments at SFI use SmartSimple Cloud and our applicants and reviewers access the system at all hours of the day and night. Having access to a Dedicated Support Representative (DSR) with intimate knowledge of our entire system is invaluable to keeping everything running smoothly."

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"We manage absolutely everything through our SmartSimple Cloud system, so Premium Support Services has been a perfect complement to our system. Our DSR helps us with anything we need, and having regular calls with the Director of Customer Experience has helped us with things like understanding how new upgrade features can be put to use to enhance our system. Our team gets excited about upgrades because they know they will get additional insight on features and how to integrate new functionality."

"SmartSimple Cloud has massively improved practically every department at SFI. Everything that relates to granting is done in the system, so we can manage calls for new proposals, administer review panel meetings, distribute awards and track them over their lifetime through a range of reporting options. We don't use paper for anything anymore. Virtually everything is done through SmartSimple Cloud. Our system even integrates with our accounting software so reviewers can submit expenses directly through their own portals and be reimbursed almost immediately. SmartSimple Cloud also offers the ultimate in transparency so we can easily share all our work with our stakeholders."

"Having a fully integrated system that joins departments, processes, and programs across global partnerships gives us the ability to do the live, real-time budgeting that is critical to our research granting model. We're always looking for new ways we can use SmartSimple Cloud to automate even more of our processes."