



Communications and transparency are top priorities for the Toronto Arts Council

Synopsis:

The Toronto Arts Council (TAC) had been processing grants manually. Application deadlines would run late due to the sheer volume of data entry required, and the review process was generating literally boxes of paper. With SmartSimple, TAC was able to cut down significantly on the amount of paper they used and eliminated nearly all data entry work. With everything automatically tracked by contact in the system, they were also able to keep tabs on every single communication, eliminating concerns that emails or reports were past due or missing. They also worked with SmartSimple to create an interactive mapping feature that shows where their funds are being used to boost stakeholder transparency.

Statistics:

Client Name: Toronto Arts Council

SmartSimple Client Since: 2013

Type of Giving: Grants

Dollars Granted: \$18 million annually

Old System: Manual

Key Pain Points: Too much paper being generated, too much time spent on manual data entry, no way to properly track communications

New System Must-Haves: Detailed communications tracking, reduction in paper files, less time on manual processing, more granular reporting capabilities



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With communications features like group email and system-generated emails that are automatically saved, we have a complete record of each interaction with our applicants and clients. Every point of contact is attached to each individual's record in SmartSimple, so even when there is staff turnover, no historic knowledge is lost as everything is safely stored in our system,

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*Andrew Suri, Director,
Grants Management*

About The Toronto Arts Council

Since 1974, the Toronto Arts Council (TAC) has been the city of Toronto's funding body for artists and arts organizations. From emerging to well established artists and arts organizations, TAC supports creative endeavors in every region of the city. Through its funding, TAC cultivates enrichment, and proudly reflects Toronto's vibrancy through the diversity of artists, arts communities and audiences it serves.

A manual system with limited capabilities

The Toronto Arts Council (TAC) had been relying on an entirely manual process using a very old version of Filemaker - a cross-platform relational database application - to track data. "There was too much paper and we had limited resources for all the data entry and administrative work. As the years went by and the volume of programs and applications were increasing, it became clear we needed a better solution," says Beth Reynolds, Director of Grants.

TAC brought in a consultant to help find a solution that would reduce both paper and manual administrative work. "After seeing SmartSimple's demo, it was very clear they were the answer we were looking for," continues Beth. "The other systems we reviewed didn't provide the level of personalization we needed to structure a solution that would reflect how we work. **None of the other vendors we evaluated had the diverse features to suit our needs. SmartSimple had the capabilities to do exactly what we needed.** Their whole team was so focused and friendly. They knew the right questions to ask; they knew what they needed from us to build the system the way we wanted."

Superior communications functionality saves time and effort

"The most impressive aspect of our SmartSimple system is how much it has improved our communications," says Andrew Suri, Director, Grants Management. With communications features like group email and system-generated emails that are automatically saved, we have a complete record of each interaction with our applicants and clients. Every point of contact is attached to each individual's record in SmartSimple, so no historic knowledge is lost as everything is safely stored in our system."

"With SmartSimple, we have the ability to add notes to applications and reports to request further information. The system instantly sends an email to that person and shows them what specifically needs revising while locking down the rest of the document. This has been a real time-saver, eliminating back and forth emails with clients by making our request perfectly clear. **Clients easily understand exactly what is being asked of them and they reply more quickly with the correct details the first time we ask.**"

"I like the automated workflows," adds Beth. "For example, we can set up automatic notices for grants officers for incoming reports required from clients. Instead of constantly having to dig through different spreadsheets to see if a report has been received, the grants officer is emailed as soon as it's entered."

"Another feature we have made great use of is the payment scheduler," says Andrew. "We have a few programs that require multiple payments to be made either to different artists or over a specific period of time that rely on actions such as the reports Beth mentioned. **SmartSimple has smoothed out our entire process, ensuring timely award payments and reducing errors in our accounting activities.** We can reconcile payments with our

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Toronto Arts Council is hosted on Amazon Web Services

bookkeeper during audits and prepare specific paperwork for auditors so much more easily, saving hours of time digging out information and creating more spreadsheets.”

A new feature enhances funding transparency

“After our system had been up and running for a while, we went back to SmartSimple to ask if they could create a new tool for us,” continues Andrew. “To provide complete funding transparency, we wanted to build a map on our website that would show all our stakeholders and the general public exactly where our grants were making an impact in Toronto. **Our purpose was to ensure people knew that we were truly a city-wide arts funder, not just supporting projects in the downtown core, but all across Toronto.**”

The SmartSimple team created an **interactive mapping feature for TAC** that offered site visitors the opportunity to drill down into the data about each initiative TAC supported. Information can be accessed by art form (dance, theater, visual arts), type of venue, geographic region, and even by strategic initiative.

“If you were interested in what musical events were funded in Scarborough, you would simply enter your search criteria and the map populates with the information you’re looking for. **By zooming in, you can not only locate the number of events taking place within that area, you can click on specific points on the map to see what exact initiative we funded, its location and whether the event is free or there is a charge to attend,**” says Andrew.

“The SmartSimple mapping feature has been also a great way to share our data openly with City Councilors and the granting community to demonstrate our impact and openly show precisely where and how our funding is being used.”

Self-sufficiency and easier applications

“Overall, I love that we can manage the system without needing a dedicated IT support person on site,” shares, Beth. **“We were actively encouraged to explore and learn the system. I was so happy to discover we could do everything ourselves.** And, since we have limited resources, not having so much time taken up with data entry has freed up our time to explore new initiatives.

The TAC community has also provided positive feedback. **One grant applicant emailed Beth and said, “Your new online application is fantastic. It’s intuitive, easy to follow and saves paper. Thanks for making things easier!”** Grants adjudicators also found using SmartSimple saved time during the review process. “Because everything from the applicant is available to review online before the assessment meetings, we managed to cut some adjudication processes down from four days to two days,” adds Beth.

“We would happily recommend SmartSimple to anyone looking for a grants management system,” concludes Andrew.

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About SmartSimple

SmartSimple is a global leader in cloud-based automation software, offering unique process solutions used by over 250 clients in more than 192 countries. Some of the largest companies in the Fortune 100, as well as global foundations and government agencies, choose SmartSimple to enrich their impact story and create greater efficiencies in their granting processes.

About GMS360°

SmartSimple GMS360° is a robust, end-to-end grants management solution that makes it easy for foundations to track, manage and report across multiple grants programs, giving true insight into the impact of your funding efforts.

In a single online solution, GMS360° gives you complete control and visibility over the entire granting process. From the initial call for proposals to reporting on final outcomes, GMS360° helps foundations stay on top of everything from correspondence with applicants, to monitoring budgets and reporting, eliminating hours of paper shuffling and administration.

No two foundations are alike. That's why the technology behind GMS360° comes with the flexibility to fit your unique needs and deliver innovative solutions that transform how you manage your granting programs.

Our commitment to making processes work better and freeing our clients to do more good goes beyond the technologies we create – **it's at the very heart of our business.**

Michael Reid
Co-Founder, Chief Operating Officer
SmartSimple



Discover more.

Contact us to request a demo that's tailored to your granting needs.

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a month from over
250 organizations
in more than
192 countries.

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