



## Escaping the confines of a custom grants management system

### Synopsis

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's 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.

### Key Stats

**Client Name:** Massachusetts Life Sciences Center (MLSC)

**SmartSimple Client Since:** 2015

**Type of Giving:** Grants

**Old System:** Custom-built system

**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



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

Ryan Mudawar  
Director of Academic and Workforce Programs  
Massachusetts Life Sciences Center

## About the 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."

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Massachusetts Life  
Sciences Center  
is hosted on  
Amazon Web Services

## Discovering the nearly limitless options of a configurable platform

After a thorough review, MLSC chose SmartSimple. Different from their original custom software system, SmartSimple 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, 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.

## A new sense of freedom and flexibility with SmartSimple

As a configured rather than a custom system, SmartSimple 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 system 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 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.

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## About SmartSimple

SmartSimple is a global leader in cloud-based automation software, offering unique process solutions used by over 300 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.

## SmartSimple's Discover Solution

SmartSimple's Discover Solution is a robust, end-to-end grants management platform 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, SmartSimple gives you complete control and visibility over the entire granting process. From the initial call for proposals to reporting on final outcomes, SmartSimple 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 SmartSimple's Discover Solution 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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smartsimple.com

SmartSimple interacts with over **215,000** unique users a month from over **300** organizations in more than **192** countries.

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