CUSTOMER STORY:
Hamilton Community Foundation

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Hamilton Community Foundation, in Hamilton, Ohio, has been using a paper-based scholarship program since its first award in 1954. As the Foundation and the community it served grew, so did the problems associated with paper applications. The paper process shortcomings really came to light on application deadline dates. High school students were often unable to get their applications into the office on time. In some cases, school counselors ran into the foundation office at the closing hour to ensure that their students’ applications were received.

“Donors within the community have the money to give, and we have a large population of students who need the money,” says Vice President Katie Braswell. “We needed a tool to help us better connect these two groups.” Braswell wanted a scholarship technology that would make the application process easier for students and reviewers.

Braswell chose AcademicWorks because of its functionality and value. She particularly liked the easy application process for students, the review process, profiles to highlight donors, and the ability to export information to their foundation management software.
“AcademicWorks is easy to work with and very thorough as they helped us move from paper to online,” said Braswell. “It was important to fully complete the worksheets provided by AcademicWorks during the implementation process,” continued Braswell. “The details they ask for were very helpful in the migration process.”

“Students now go to one website to apply for all scholarships,” said Braswell. The applicant selects whether they are a high school senior, current college student, or non-traditional student. This selection prompts additional relevant application questions. The system automatically matches them to all the scholarships for which they qualify.

Once applications are received through AcademicWorks, reviewers log-in to review online. Reviewers are set up to view and score all of the eligible students for a particular scholarship and provide final scores back to Braswell. She then makes the final awarding decision after verifying each student’s qualifications.

Students receive notification of their awards through emails sent from AcademicWorks. When students log-in to accept their award, they are prompted to submit their thank-you letter to the donor, a photo, and RSVP for a donor reception.

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Once the awards have been made, all donors receive an information packet about their scholarship’s recipients from the Foundation. “We include a select set of answers from the applicant’s submitted application, a thank-you letter, and a photo,” says Braswell. All of this is compiled and sent to donors at least two weeks before the scholarship reception.

The new process is easy for students because they no longer have to submit a separate application for each scholarship. The process is also much easier for high school counselors to support students who are applying. “Since we made the switch to AcademicWorks, I have received fewer questions from counselors and students than in years past,” noted Braswell.

Donor stewardship has also benefited from the tools offered in the AcademicWorks platform. “Because it is a small community, announcements made by students on social media sometimes made it to the donors before the Foundation’s,” says Braswell. “With AcademicWorks, that no longer happens.” Donors also appreciate the ability to see all the scholarships and donor profiles in a single location.

**Simplify Scholarship Management**

Braswell highly recommends AcademicWorks to other community foundations looking to upgrade their scholarship process. “AcademicWorks listens to their clients and makes improvements that will help their customers succeed.”