

CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT

Manatee County Human Services Division



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—Kristi Hagen, Senior Human Services Analyst

Charged with overseeing millions in grant money for the benefit of children and adults in need, Manatee County Human Services Division adopted Blackbaud Grantmaking and realized the benefits of a collaborative online process with greater efficiency and outcomes-based accountability.

Complete grantmaking solution fulfills promise for Manatee County government.

Of Florida’s 67 counties, 11 have passed a children’s services tax, including Manatee County, which distributes over \$13 million in grants a year for children’s programs to more than 50 nonprofit agencies in the tourism-driven coastal community.

In the past, Manatee County’s Human Services Division relied heavily on a paper-driven process for grant applications, oversight, and reporting for Children’s Services, which was not only time consuming but also created challenges in data management. The first few attempts to break free with technology from their paper-driven process either fell short or created new frustrations. However, now with Blackbaud Grantmaking, the staff sees real improvements with a streamlined online application

Manatee County Human Services Division is powered by Blackbaud solutions for:

- ✓ Grantmaking

process, easy-to-use dashboards, and robust grant tracking capabilities for Children’s Services awards. At the same time, the division successfully uses Blackbaud Grantmaking to expedite annual distribution of \$3.6 million in funds to address challenges of adult residents who are disabled, homeless, or otherwise impoverished.

The transformation to a comprehensive yet effective and intuitive grantmaking solution is a win for everyone involved in the process—applicants, advisory board members, and staff—and ultimately Manatee County’s children and vulnerable adults.

With Blackbaud Grantmaking, Human Services Manager Susan Ford said she saves weeks of time a year on office tasks and can follow the progress of Children’s Services staff much more easily than before. Likewise, the contract managers she oversees can provide more meaningful reports in less time, increasing productivity and allowing them more time to visit the programs funded by Manatee County Children’s Services. “Blackbaud Grantmaking enables our contract managers to be out in the field actually monitoring programs in person every 60 days, versus once or twice each year,” Ford said.



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—Susan Ford, Human Services Manager

Emerging from a Paper-driven Process

Ford and Senior Human Services Analyst Kristi Hagen recalled how Manatee County Children’s Services used to require an annual, daylong, in-person event during which nonprofits each hand-delivered copies of a 30- to 40-page paper grant application.

Staff would provide copies of those applications to the 13 volunteers on the county’s Children’s Services Advisory Board in batches of 10 or so at a time. Each reviewer would turn in a scoring sheet for each applicant, with staff ultimately keying in hundreds of scores into an Excel spreadsheet. And once the Manatee County commissioners officially approved grant awards, staff handled oversight and reporting with a paper-folder based system.

Their first attempt to replace this manual process with an online application didn’t resolve many of their pain points: the software solution they adopted was built around a process that still required printed applications and handwritten scores during the review process.

On the next try, a software vendor built a custom system for Children’s Services that only lasted two years. “It was an epic failure, and again, we had to print all applications and accept handwritten scores on paper,” Ford said. “We could not make any changes or additions to the system without contacting the program developers and paying for each change.

A Better Way from Beginning to End

With the subsequent switch to Blackbaud Grantmaking, Manatee County Children's Services finally found a flexible solution that worked for staff members—not against them. Meanwhile, Manatee County Neighborhood Services also found Blackbaud Grantmaking effective in receiving and distributing funds geared toward at-risk adults, even though that effort had different parameters and procedures.

Blackbaud Grantmaking works well for governments because it's a comprehensive, all-in-one solution that can be scaled to meet a variety of complex needs, even as it keeps the user experience as simple as possible. "I would recommend Blackbaud Grantmaking for other government organizations, yes, definitely," Hagen said.

For Manatee County Children's Services, the improvements realized with Blackbaud Grantmaking are noticeable from the start with the applicant portal:

- A pre-screening process verifies an applicant is a qualified nonprofit located in Manatee County.
- Application options are now available in accordance with the county's target areas: child welfare, behavior, adoption preservation, and grade-level reading.
- Step-by-step guides answer anticipated questions along the way.

In the past, Children's Services had to hire a consultant to help answer "constant calls" related to the application, Ford said. "Our application is so much easier to use now. Very few times do applicants come to us and say, 'I don't understand what you want us to do.'"

Likewise, members of the Children's Services Advisory Board can access all applications and scoring guidance online with Blackbaud Grantmaking's reviewer portal. "They can review applications anywhere as long as they've got an Internet connection," Ford said. "Before they had to carry around these humongous binders."

Manatee County's Children's Services managers use Blackbaud Grantmaking throughout the year for program oversight, leveraging time saved on office reports for more frequent in-person visits with grant recipients.



With more efficient, collaborative tools for reporting, countless hours are saved on office tasks. In turn, contract managers can visit grant recipient programs in person every 2 months vs. 1-2 times a year.

POWER EFFECTIVE GRANTMAKING

Rethink change

Provide a comprehensive yet simple-to-use, scalable solution that's ideal for government.

- ✓ Move from paper folders to online portals
- ✓ Transform reporting and oversight
- ✓ Increase transparency and accountability
- ✓ Save everyone time

About Blackbaud

Leading uniquely at the intersection point of technology and social good, Blackbaud connects and empowers organizations to increase their impact through cloud software, services, expertise, and data intelligence. We serve the entire social good community, which includes nonprofits, foundations, companies, education institutions, healthcare organizations, and the individual change agents who support them.





Meanwhile, Blackbaud Grantmaking facilitates collaboration and allows supervisors to easily see what staff members have accomplished. “I can create dashboards that track what my people are doing,” Ford said. “Before, I had to walk down the hall and pick up their files.”

Ford estimated saving weeks of work hours herself, just on quarterly reports.

Hagen and Ford encouraged Blackbaud Grantmaking newcomers to take full advantage of Blackbaud University training and develop a vision for how they want to use the solution. “Don’t be afraid to try new things,” Hagen said. “We’re learning more every year, every day even, in understanding how Blackbaud Grantmaking can work for us.”

Drive success and provide greater accountability with a complete, outcomes-based grantmaking solution.

[Learn more](#)

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