TIP SHEET

Lessons Learned from 2020: Foundations Are Shifting Gears Towards Future-Proof Grantmaking

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2020 has brought foundations some incredible challenges. Yet it has also been a bit of a wake-up call to foundation leadership and grantmakers globally—that there's a great opportunity to "future-proof" their grantmaking people, processes, and grants management systems (GMS). Here are five tips to ensure your foundation's grantmaking is future-proof and prepared for whatever lies ahead.

1 Define your requirements.
Who is using your GMS? What do they individually need and want it to do? Which grantmaking processes do you need your GMS to handle? What other technology in your office does it need to integrate with or at least complement? What do your applicants/grantees want and expect from this system? Who must access your GMS remotely, and what functions do they need access to? These are just a few of the many questions you and your team must ask yourselves as you evaluate you current—or prospective—grants management systems. Invest the time to explore these questions and record your responses, so you'll know exactly what system requirements are necessary for your organization.

2 Gather referrals from your peers.
Many of your foundation and grantmaking peers are already practicing future-proof grantmaking, meaning their people, processes and grants management systems have "shifted gears," to respond well in 2020 and prepare themselves for what 2021 and beyond may bring. Talk to your peers, and not just those in leadership and decision-making positions, but the grantmaking users who spend time in their GMS every day too. While it's important to understand the leaders' points of view from the budgeting, investment, and practicality side, it's equally important to find out what the users see as the strengths and weaknesses of the system—and of the company who built the system.

3 Pick a partner, not just a GMS.

The GMS you invest in is likely to be in place for several years, so it is essential to partner with a vendor that will become a strategic partner in your success from day one. What is the company's roadmap for the system, and does in include a continuous investment in improving the platform? Does the vendor offer cloud-based versions of their solutions, and how long have they been building in the cloud? How long have they been building grantmaking and other technology for nonprofits, and do they have stability and longevity in the industry? Do they have customer success and customer-support teams, and what access will you have to them and when? Select a vendor-partner that will invest in your long-term success and commit to supporting you long after the agreement is signed and the implementation is complete.

4 It's not just about the GMS.

Your grants management system is likely only one piece of your foundation's technology stack. You may have fundraising, constituent relationship management (CRM), accounting, business intelligence, and other software. And wouldn't it be nice if all this technology could work together? Many modern cloud solutions offer APIs, which allow for seamless data flow between systems without the need for duplicative data entry. If a standard set of APIs don't currently exist between two solutions, the next best option is a clean data export/import process, which can still provide time savings and lessen the chance of data entry error from one system to the next.

5 You don't have to go it alone.

Assessing your grants management future readiness can be a challenging task. We all know how hard it is to self-evaluate, but we also know that it is an essential part of any journey towards improvement. In the same way, your organization must be prepared to do a clear-eyed review of its performance under stress—to determine what worked, what didn't, and what changes are necessary to create a future-proof grantmaking infrastructure. Some organizations will have the means to conduct these internal assessments, but others may need to bring in an external, industry expert to conduct the analysis. In either case, you and your team need to be able to be able to answer future-proof readiness questions like...

- Were we able to quickly adapt our grants management programs to address an the pandemic this year?"

- Were our systems able to deliver grants management functionality securely during the switch to remote work?"

- Did we prepare our people to function effectively as our operating model changed, and did we provide them with the training and support needed when they needed it

Explore more tips, tricks, and resources for ways your foundation can future-proof its grantmaking—and CRM, fund accounting, and other processes too—at our Resources site: www.foundations.blackbaud.com

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