

CHOOSING THE RIGHT

Government Grant Management Software: A Buyer's Guide



Submittable 



Dropdown List

Select your sector/NAICS code category

☐ 11: Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting

☐ 21: Mining

☐ 22: Utilities

☐ 23: Construction

☐ 24: Manufacturing

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☐ 48-49: Transportation and Warehousing

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WHEN IT COMES TO CREATING A POSITIVE CITIZEN EXPERIENCE, government grantmakers aren't compared to each other. They're compared to the everyday customer experience citizens have across the internet—from online shopping to paying bills.

For grant programs, a positive citizen experience starts with the right government grant management software.

Right now, government grantmakers have some catching up to do. According to the [Springbrook National Citizen Expectation Survey](#), 74% of respondents expressed that their interactions with local government websites ranged from “somewhat user-unfriendly” to “not user-friendly at all.”

The good news is that government leaders and the public agree that citizen experience needs to be a top priority. In the Springbrook survey, 98% of households said they want local governments to prioritize adopting top-tier user experiences. And the [National Association of State Chief Information Officers \(NASCIO\)](#) named improving the citizen experience as one of their [top priorities](#).

With everyone on the same page, now is the time to build something better. But grantmakers can't do it alone. They need to find software partners who can help create a citizen experience that is equitable, secure, and matches the customer experience and ease people have come to expect from every digital platform.

Before diving into the software features, it's important to acknowledge two new realities for government grantmakers.




REALITY 1

Equity and compliance are now intertwined


Government grantmakers can no longer think of equity and compliance as two separate pursuits. As the [latest Uniform Guidance updates](#) clarify, equity is now a key component of compliance. In their reasoning for the updates, the White House explicitly [called out accessibility and transparency](#).

The truth is that a burdensome grant process cannot be equitable. If the process is unnecessarily complicated or it creates barriers to access, [certain communities will feel those burdens](#) more acutely. To create a compliant and effective program, government grantmakers must craft an applicant experience that limits the friction and administrative burden for everyone.

 Impact Audio

A compliance wonk breaks down Uniform Guidance changes

David Clark explains how the latest compliance updates are reshaping government grantmaking.



David Clark

Managing Director at BDO

[LISTEN TO THE EPISODE](#)

Program success hinges on a positive citizen experience

A government grant program's outcomes hinge on an equitable application process. If your application is creating a barrier for some citizens, that inequity is going to show up throughout the program and erode public trust.

Studies on administrative burden have identified costs in time and resources associated with applying for government assistance, including learning costs, compliance costs, and psychological costs.

These burdens are not distributed equally. In the journal article, [***Administrative Burden in Citizen–State Interactions: A Systematic Literature Review***](#), the authors explain this dynamic: “Burdens have distributive consequences and are likely to fall harder on those with fewer resources in the form of human and administrative capital administrative literacy, and bureaucratic self-efficacy.”

A negative citizen experience can also reverberate far beyond the program to impact citizens' relationship to government more broadly. The article explores this ripple effect: “Burdens are consequential. The impact of burdens is likely to extend beyond

people's experiences and influence outcomes such as civic and electoral participation, health, and take-up of benefits.” In essence, what's at stake is the citizens' trust in the government at large.

Grant programs present a unique opportunity for government agencies to build trust with the public. But that only happens if citizens feel like they can easily access funding they qualify for through a secure process that respects their time and reflects their lived experience. Throughout the process citizens need:

- **Clarity:** Straightforward instructions about what they need to do and how to do it.
- **Ease:** An uncomplicated digital experience that doesn't waste their time.
- **Inclusivity:** A reflection of themselves and their lived experiences in the program at a high level and in the details.
- **Consistency:** A system and workflow they can learn once and rely on every time they apply for funding, ideally across programs.

What to look for in a government grant management system

No single software feature is going to make your program successful, but the right set of features can help you deliver a positive applicant experience and deliver on your promises. Here's what to look for as you explore [government grant management software](#).

1. One portal to house the whole grant process

Grant management software should give you one portal for the full grant process—from building an application form to post-award reporting.

Giving everyone a single destination for managing their involvement in the program simplifies the experience for applicants and administrators. There's no confusion about where to go when, and program managers don't have to spend their time closing the gaps that inevitably form when you try to piece together multiple solutions.

Look for a grant management software that houses your full grant lifecycle—from application setup to post-award monitoring, and everything in between.

Features to look for:

- **In-app messaging:** Keep all communication in one place and connected to a funding application.
- **Real-time collaboration:** Allow applicants to work together or with service providers to complete an application.
- **Budget building:** Define goals and objectives to carry through to post-award monitoring.
- **Organization profile:** Connect applicants to an organization or business via an Employer Identification Number (EIN) or Unique Entity Identifier (UEI), while giving applicants the ability to search for their organization by name.

The Tennessee Board of Regents

The [Tennessee Board of Regents](#) oversees the community and technical college system of Tennessee. They shifted from a fragmented system to a unified grant management software. With Submittable, the team:

- Cut program launch time from a week to an hour
- Eliminated the restriction on the number of applicants per institution
- Attracted a more diverse submission pool

[Read the full story ▶](#)



2. A short learning curve to help you move quickly

Government grant programs need the agility to move quickly to meet community needs. To accomplish this agility, the software you use must be intuitive and easy to learn for everyone—applicants and administrators alike.

Look for a software that has a short learning curve for everyone—even people who don't have a strong technical background. Avoid software that [requires coding](#). The interface and workflow must be straightforward and intuitive.

The learning costs associated with applying for funding can be a big barrier for applicants. If they don't have the technical knowledge to complete the process or time to learn, they likely won't apply. Or, if they do, their support requests might bury your team. Take time to explore the user experience from their perspective to ensure it's easy to navigate.

The grant software should also give your team full control. The right GMS allows you to create and manage programs without relying on IT specialists. If you need to make a change, even after a program is live, you can do so without having to work through a third party.

Though it's important for your team to have full autonomy when you want it, it's essential to have strong [implementation and technical support](#) available when you need it. Make sure

you have real people you can call on if you need help along the way.

Features to look for:

- **Drag-and-drop forms with branching logic:** Create an application in minutes with an easy-to-use [form builder](#).
- **Global fields:** Standardize reporting across programs with global fields.
- **Funds distribution:** Send funds straight to awardees with the [click of a button](#).
- **Revision requests:** Allow staff and applicants to collaborate to produce the best possible proposal.

The State of Minnesota Tax Rebate Program

The [State of Minnesota Tax Rebate program](#) delivered up to \$1,300 to families in an effort to provide citizens relief from inflation. In partnership with Submittable and US Bank, the Minnesota Department of Revenue:

- Launched the program in 27 business days
- Delivered \$989 million
- Made payments to more than 2 million residents

[Read the full story](#) ►

3. Automations to ease the reviewer burden

When government teams are facing thousands or even millions of applications, automations are essential. Automations remove some of the manual labor that goes into reviewing each application and free your team to do more impactful work.

With an [automated review](#) process, you cut down on human error. You can create a workflow that makes sense for your program, automating the more tedious work like verifying tax information. Then, reviewers can pour their energy into the parts of the review process that require more thoughtfulness. For instance, reviewing mission statements or program strategy might take a more human touch.

When it comes to cutting down on manual tasks, what's good for the reviewer is often good for constituents. When a program manager isn't stuck doing tasks like manually checking 1099s, they can respond faster to applicants who need assistance. They have the bandwidth to work directly with citizens when necessary.

The study [Does Reducing Street-Level Bureaucrats' Workload Enhance Equity in Program Access? Evidence from Burdensome College Financial Aid Programs](#) finds a clear connection between the workload of financial aid program administrators and program outcomes. When the administrative workload went down, more low-income students got access to the program. It offers an important lesson for every government grant program—reducing the

administrative workload can have a direct impact on program access and outcomes.

Features to look for:

- **Auto-labeling:** Automatically tag applications with [custom labels](#) that help you categorize, sort, and assign reviewers to applications.
- **Data validation:** Use automations to instantly verify publicly available data such as tax information or revenue before moving applications forward.
- **Eligibility quizzes:** Use an eligibility form at the front of your application to ensure only eligible applicants spend time on applying.
- **Tiered reviewer levels:** Calibrate permissions and assignments for internal and external reviewers.

The State of Washington Department of Commerce

The Working Washington Round 4 Grant provided funding to small businesses across Washington state. With a small team, the [Department of Commerce](#) needed to automate and streamline the review process. Partnering with Submittable, they:

- Delivered \$235 million to small businesses
- Reviewed more than 16,000 applications
- Received 60% of applications via a mobile device

[Watch their full story ►](#)



4. Accessible design to meet every citizen where they are

No citizen should be excluded from a program because they can't access the application. Grant management software must have accessibility at the core of its design, allowing your program to meet every citizen where they are.

Accessible design is important for everyone. It helps you reach applicants with disabilities, applicants who lack broadband access, and applicants who speak a local language. It can be the deciding factor on whether someone gets the assistance they need.

Accessibility is not just a matter of accessing the application. That doesn't mean much if there are barriers that prevent people from completing the full application process, accessing support when they need it, and following up with any additional communication or reporting required post-award. Every component of the grantmaking lifecycle should be fully accessible for everyone.

As much as a digital application portal can improve access,

it has to be done right. **One study** found that in counties with low internet connectivity, access to online applications was associated with a more than 10% decline in total SNAP enrollment. This is one reason applications must be mobile friendly, to allow communities without reliable internet access the ability to complete a digital application via a wireless network.

Features to look for:

- **Mobile friendly:** Ensure every community can apply for funding even if they don't have reliable broadband internet.
- **VPAT for disabilities:** Give every applicant a positive experience with software that's certified for people with permanent or temporary disabilities.
- **Localization:** Translate forms and provide support in a local language or dialect.
- **Support for applicants:** Choose a software that has a dedicated support team and helpful resources for applicants.
- **Auto-save:** Help applicants maintain their progress without ever losing their work.

5. A secure system with compliance and monitoring

Grant management software should help you deliver on your promises consistently with built-in security, compliance, and monitoring. Plus, with software that keeps the full grant lifecycle in one place, your team will be perpetually audit ready.

In the past, some agencies got caught compromising on security when they needed to move quickly. In a [retrospective report](#), the US Senate Committee on Small Businesses and Entrepreneurship, found \$200 billion of fraud in COVID relief programs. Agencies that weren't equipped to react swiftly to a crisis wound up sacrificing fraud prevention so they could get money out to citizens as fast as possible.

Grant management software shouldn't make you choose between moving quickly and running a secure program. Your team must be able to respond to citizens' urgent needs without worrying that they'll be the subject of a future congressional report.

Features to look for:

- **Fraud prevention tools:** [Stop fraud](#) without adding friction to the application process with tools such as knowledge-based authentication quizzes and identity verification.
- **Financial, impact, and milestone reporting:** Tie reporting directly to application and award data.

- **Automated reminders:** Ensure grantee reports arrive completed and on time.
- **Automatic updates for approved budget amendments:** Automatically update the budget for future reports and dashboards.



6. A thought partner who prioritizes innovation

Adopting a new grant management software is an investment in the future. You're creating the infrastructure for your current grant programs and you're laying the groundwork for their evolution. Choosing a software goes beyond finding all the right features. You need a partner who can help you define and achieve your long-term vision.

Look for a partner who prioritizes innovation and has a roadmap that aligns with your vision. Ideally, a software isn't just for a single program, but has the potential to be a full-scale solution across programs and agencies.

Finding a true partner gives you someone you can collaborate with as you face unexpected challenges or launch new initiatives. Make sure you know the people you'll be working with and that they have experience with the kind of programming you run.

Features to look for:

- **Strong road map:** Get clarity about the future with a clear roadmap that incorporates customer feedback.
- **A dedicated implementation and customer success team:** Work directly with people who have experience with programs like yours.
- **Robust reporting:** Set your team up to evolve with [robust reporting](#) that makes audit prep seamless with a downloadable audit report.

The State of Maryland Department of General Services

The Maryland Department of General Services [Capital Grants and Loans division](#) administers over 3,000 capital grants, estimated at about \$3 billion. They recently replaced their antiquated system with a modernized solution built by Submittable. Now, every grant from the department benefits from:

- Real-time updates that provide transparency and clarity
- Enhanced accessibility for everyone, including citizens with disabilities
- A streamlined process that is easy for applicants and speeds up decision making
- Consistency across programs

[Read the full announcement ►](#)

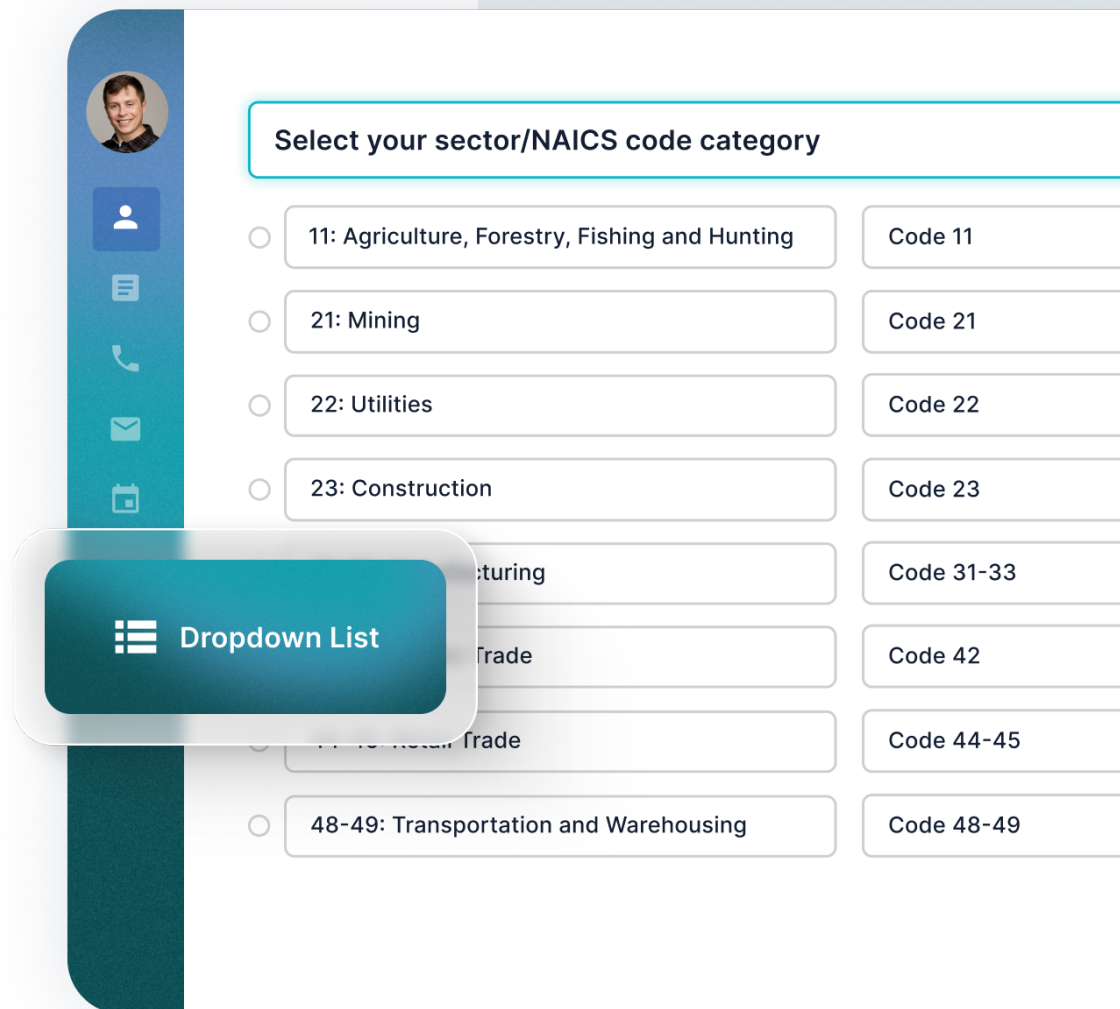


The right software can have a transformative impact

If you're thinking it might be time for new software, you're probably right. And the sooner you get started finding the right option, the better. Because no applicant should be stuck in a process that's not working. There's too much at stake—for them, and for all of us.

Switching to a software that improves the citizen experience can make your whole program run more smoothly, transforming your day-to-day experience. Plus it gives you the expertise and track record to level up your career.

If you're interested in how Submittable can help, [reach out to us](#). We're happy to help.



The screenshot displays a user interface for selecting a sector/NAICS code category. On the left, a vertical sidebar contains a user profile picture and several icons: a person, a document, a telephone, an envelope, and a calendar. The main content area features a header "Select your sector/NAICS code category" followed by a list of radio buttons and corresponding categories. A "Dropdown List" tooltip is visible over the "Manufacturing" option.

Radio Button	Sector/NAICS Code Category	Code
<input type="radio"/>	11: Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	Code 11
<input type="radio"/>	21: Mining	Code 21
<input type="radio"/>	22: Utilities	Code 22
<input type="radio"/>	23: Construction	Code 23
<input type="radio"/>	Manufacturing	Code 31-33
<input type="radio"/>	Trade	Code 42
<input type="radio"/>	Trade	Code 44-45
<input type="radio"/>	48-49: Transportation and Warehousing	Code 48-49



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