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Harnessing the Future of Federal Grants Management.

Why low-code can best support the
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Manual process after manual process. Complex data sets existing in silos. Inputs and outputs that don't communicate with each other. The constant yearning to spend time doing higher-value work. These are just some of the frustrations grants managers face as they deal with developing and implementing effective systems to run and manage federal grants programs.

The quest to modernize IT is almost cliche at this point. Every federal agency has a plan, and it's been this way for quite some time. The challenge is how much federal agencies still need to budget to maintain current systems and operations and how little of that budget is left for truly innovative acquisitions and investments. Simultaneously, new compliance and transparency standards for organizations to follow place added pressure on organizations to automate data collection, management, and reporting for compliance reasons. The added scrutiny is due in large part to a lack of innovation. Antiquated IT systems severely restrict the government's ability to keep up with policy demands and often provide a poor experience to the very constituents they are trying to serve.

This paper identifies three key catalysts that are changing the federal grants management landscape and explores how technology can help support this rapidly evolving environment.

Grant-funding agencies continue to see increased regulations with stricter parameters, mandates, and requirements.

Policies demand transparency and scrutiny.

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with stricter parameters, mandates, and requirements. This means that organizations must work smarter at every step, from the grant proposal and administration process to proposal preparation and pre-award administration to the grants accounting processes and post-award reporting.

The impact of the original Digital Accountability and Transparency (DATA) Act, signed into law a half decade ago, has been profound and dynamic. Of the many outcomes, it required all of the federal government's spending information to be hosted and published in one single, unified data set. Before this unprecedented imperative, different types of federal spending information were all tracked in different ways and reported to different places. This included grants, which were submitted to the Awards Data System. It's clear to see how slow and inefficient that process was. Today, the public can more easily track the economic impact of Congress' spending decisions, and constituents can more easily match laws Congress passes to the grants and contracts that are awarded under those laws.

In a recent study profiling the DATA Act into 2022 and beyond, Deloitte[1] described the law's ultimate, positive impact:"to enable federal spending data to flow automatically from its originators to all users."

Leveraging agile methodologies to drive innovation.

While the goal of the DATA Act was to gain financial transparency, along the way the act has created the first government-wide data framework and the first government-wide project to use the agile methodology.

The DATA Act team delivered on time and under budget because they instituted an agile approach to the development process – a methodology the private sector has used for decades.

1.   https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/public-sector/articles/data-act-open-data-law.html

Agile is successful because a team consistently goes back to end users for feedback as they build an application, which results in co-creation between the developers and the users.

In order to build off of the success of the DATA Act initiative and accelerate mission success, government agencies must digitally transform their process infrastructure. Organizations can use agile methodology to meet their unique grants management challenges by leveraging low-code, cloud-based platforms. With this technology, agencies can quickly develop an application for a specific need or capability while also extending their return on investment by deploying additional applications to support internal demands. This type of innovation and speed to mobilization is the key to revolutionizing how federal grant processes are managed.

Maximizing return on investment (ROI).

In the "do more with less" reality that the government is constantly facing, agencies should always be looking for ways to align grants to their mission, particularly for priority mission purposes where the agency has a unique goal. Program managers should also look across government for any grant programs that could benefit from coordination and collaboration — and perhaps technology consolidation.

Grant managers can no longer measure themselves by how quickly they get grant funding out the door or by a perfect record of grantee financial compliance.

With the reporting and transparency yielded by the DATA Act, the end result has been a truly more efficient government. But both grant recipients and grant makers need to own responsibility for their part of the solution. One way to do that is to use technology to both improve efficiency and provide evidence of performance. Grant makers can no longer measure themselves by how quickly they get grant funding out the door or by a perfect record of grantee financial compliance. Federal grant facilitators now have to be more serious about achieving mission goals and producing research results. Capturing performance data across all federal grantees — and sharing it openly online — could be a key step toward the accountability that the government is seeking.

Fortunately, private-sector innovation can help facilitate the transformational change agencies need to meet evolving requirements. Agencies can leverage technology to quickly develop an application for a specific need or capability, while also extending their return on investment by deploying additional applications to support their internal demands. This is particularly valuable in rapid-response situations, where organizations must quickly deliver grant funding in response to natural disasters, acts of terrorism, or other emergency conditions. Innovation and speed to mobilization is the key to revolutionizing how federal grant processes are managed.

Accelerate the grants journey.

IT modernization initiatives remain central to every agency's mission: improve efficiency while budgets are being slashed, l transform to create agile services, and accelerate delivery to their stakeholders. However, cloud and mobile-first mandates add an additional layer of complexity as organizations digitally transform their infrastructure. These concurrent demands for agency efficiency and compliance require a highly agile, flexible, secure, on-demand platform.

The Appian Low-Code Platform meets these demands. It enables sophisticated grants management functionality to help agencies manage programs end to end, from application intake to award through close-out. With the ability to create powerful, dynamic dashboards, Appian enables grantees and agencies to effectively address all aspects of the grant lifecycle, including, but not limited to, programs, applications, and awards.

Agencies can use Appian to make the necessary platform modifications for continuous process improvement. They can also collect metrics about process performance, collaboratively assessing outcomes and making decisions about possible improvements through dashboards that allow decision-makers to drill down into the grants management process.

In today's highly demanding government operations, the process of bringing an application into an existing agency environment and assuring continuing quality needs to be less stressful. Appian is here to help, empowering agency leaders to do this and more for their organizations.

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Appian is the unified platform for change. We accelerate customers' businesses by discovering, designing, and automating their most important processes. The Appian Low-Code Platform combines the key capabilities needed to get work done faster, Process Mining + Workflow + Automation, in a unified low-code platform. Over 200 government agencies globally trust Appian and our open, enterprise-grade architecture. For more information, visit **appian.com /government**.