

## Client Story (Tech)

# How Girls First Fund scaled its international giving with a flexible and intuitive grantmaking system

### Synopsis

Girls First Fund (GFF) was founded as a donor collective with a compelling mission: to ensure that all girls have the opportunity to realize their full rights and potential. From the outset, they knew that their non-centralized and largely manual system, while adequate at first, wouldn't scale with their grantmaking as it evolved. GFF started working with [client name] in 2019, during their inaugural year of grantmaking. Meanwhile, they were gaining traction and needed to go live before a fully solidified strategy could be put in place. With [client name]'s help, GFF acquired a new grants management system that eliminated hours of manual data entry from their workload while giving them flexibility to meet their evolving needs. Best of all, their new cloud-based system enabled them to easily reach first-time grantees in remote communities that had high barriers to access, while empowering their multi-language user base to quickly master the application portal. Just one year later, the Fund has granted \$5.8 million globally, held 165 focus group discussions with 69 local stakeholders, and facilitated conventions with grantees in six countries - comprising a total of 174 site visits. Because of their new system, GFF has greater flexibility to quickly respond to the changing needs of their grantees during COVID-19, with an eye to further expand their grantmaking.

### Key Stats

**Client Name:** Girls First Fund

**Client Since:** 2019

**Type of Giving:** International Grants

**Old System:** SurveyMonkey Apply, spreadsheets, and manual processes

### Key Pain Points:

- Non-centralized, manual processes made grants management work cumbersome
- Applicants with choppy internet connection couldn't save their application/reporting work
- Outdated grants management system mainly used for payment processing

### New System Must-Haves:

- A more flexible system that could adapt as the organization grew
- Reduce language and accessibility barriers for remote applicants and grantees
- Payment processing with more visibility across teams
- Due diligence processes for their international grantmaking

*“Most of our manual work has been eliminated since using [client name]. As someone who used to draft a million grant agreements by hand, just being able to push a button and it auto-populates all the fields we want without having to go in and manually enter them for 150 organizations has been huge.”*

*Beth Zimmerman, Senior Associate  
Girls First Fund*

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## About Girls First Fund

Girls First Fund (GFF) envisions a world where girls have access to the skills and resources they need to live a life free from child marriage and carve out their own futures. Launched in part by Geneva Global, GFF is a donor collaborative that formed between 2017 and 2018 to fund community-led organizations addressing the issues of child marriage and gender equality. GFF officially launched their grantmaking in 2019, a year they dubbed “The Learning Year” because it was heavily focused on learning from grantees, community members, and girls about their needs and how the Fund could best provide them with the most appropriate support. In that first year, GFF granted amounts ranging from \$5,000 to \$50,000 to 142 organizations across six countries: the Dominican Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, India, Nepal, Niger, and Uganda. About 40 percent of these organizations were very small and historically underfunded.

### A system to connect remote community-based organizations to funding

Before implementing [client service] for their grantmaking, GFF wasn’t using their existing grants management system to its full capacity. **“We had a really outdated grants management system that we really just used for payment processing,”** says Beth Zimmerman, Senior Associate, Girls First Fund. **“So, for other funds we worked on, we had to do a lot of manual data collection and monitoring. It was all done through Excel documents which, as you can imagine, can be pretty cumbersome.”** It was also difficult for GFF’s team to pull reporting and the exact data they needed.

Recognizing that most international funders had cloud-based grants management systems in place, GFF wanted a better solution that would be both empowering and easily accessible to their applicants and grantees. **“We knew we needed to figure out systems that would really reduce barriers and give applicants access, not just to applying for our funding, but also allowing them to get exposure to a system that might propel them to be able to apply for other funding as well,”** says Beth.

One of the biggest barriers to funding was language. GFF worked with applicants and grantees in French, Spanish, Hindi, and Nepali. Before transitioning to [client service], they had been using SurveyMonkey for accepting grant applications, and were frustrated by the “messy” experience of some of the translations.

Another critical barrier was ease of use for the applicants and grantees. Many of their applicants were tiny organizations that had never applied for a grant online before. Many live in remote areas