3 Ways Dashboards Help Grantmakers Make Sense of Their Data

INTRODUCTION

You know the total number of grants you made this year. You know the dollar amounts of those grants. You know the impact areas each of those grants affected. But until that data is pulled together in a meaningful way, these are just numbers. And there is only so much you can do with just numbers.

Seeing your data through charts, graphs, and dashboards starts to change that. Data visualisation not only provides great insight into what's happening at your organisation, but it can also save you valuable time by putting key information at your fingertips.

Data Visualisation for Grantmakers

A single star is interesting. A constellation tells a story.

When you have one data point, you have one data point. It provides a narrow window into your operations. It does not give you context or connection. The magic happens when you start combining those data points. Even a basic Excel graph can start to show you trends and identify outliers. But with purpose-built dashboards designed specifically for grantmakers, you can see an array of valuable insights into your data and save time by focusing on what is most impactful.

Good data visualisation tells a story. Individual numbers displayed in rows and columns become patterns and charts that not only give you answers but can also pose additional questions. Perhaps you launched your new website with a more streamlined application this time last year. When you see an increased number of applications starting at that time, you know why. You can then drill in to see if the increase came from new organisations or grantees already in your CRM, and create a campaign based on the answer.

While it is possible to build reports using data from individual spreadsheets and disparate programs, it's unnecessarily time-consuming and prone to human error. You often spend more time on the "visual grammar," such as what graph type and what colours to use, than actually analysing the data. All of that slows down the process and makes the insights less relevant with every passing day. With all the information in one place, you can create easy-to-understand graphs and dashboards that show you what is really happening within your organisation, and with just a few clicks of your mouse.

Dashboards Help You Plan Your Day

The workday typically starts out hopeful: hours ahead of you to check off tasks and move projects forward. But often the urgent gets in the way of the important. Before you know it, it is the end of the day and you're not sure what you've accomplished. While dashboards may not keep your phone from interrupting your focus time, they can help you prioritise what you do between phone calls. In the case of grant management, you can set up dashboards that highlight what is outstanding, from your grant applications to your internal processes, so you know what to tackle next.
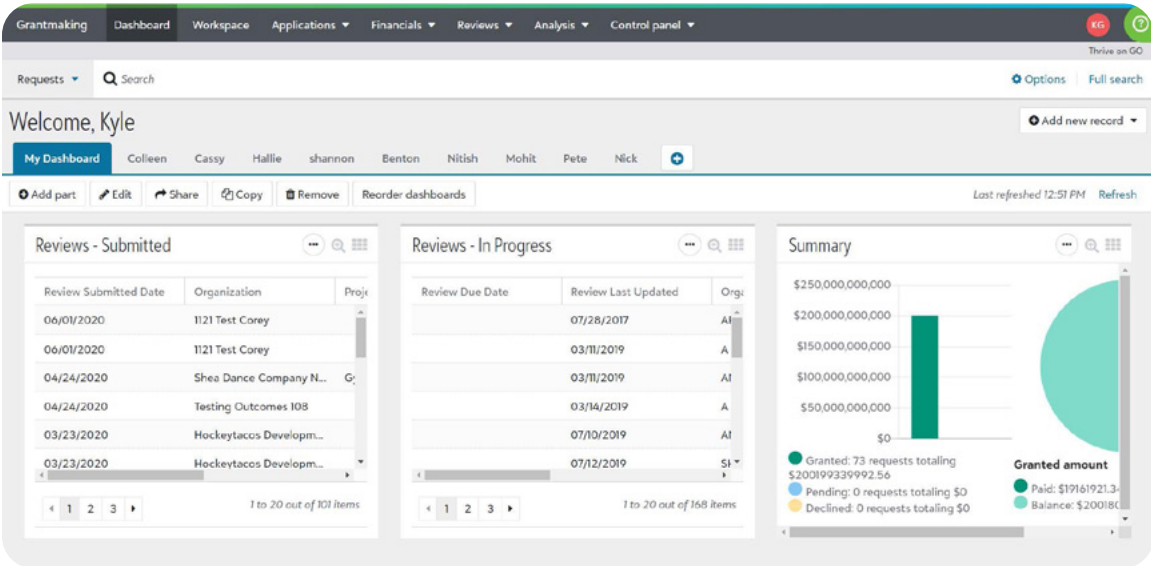
With reports and data visualisation built for grantmakers, you can see at a glance which grant applications need follow-up.

This can include grants that are missing data as well as grantees that haven't submitted their reports. You can also create a dashboard to track the status of applications and what status letters (or reminders) need to be sent.

Dashboards can also help keep your staff accountable, saving you time by not having to follow up on projects as often. Your team members and those involved in the process can see the approval and review status in the dashboard, so they are less likely to fall behind. Dashboards can also put fund and project balances front and centre, so you don't need to check in with your finance team for updates.

If you are like most grantmakers, you pull the same reports each month or each week.

Sometimes it requires pulling data from different platforms to get the information you need. With purpose-built reports already built into your grant management system, you won't have to recreate the wheel or adjust Excel formulas each time you run your reports. You can even customise the reports and reorganise the standard dashboards, so you'll have what you need to know right at your fingertips.

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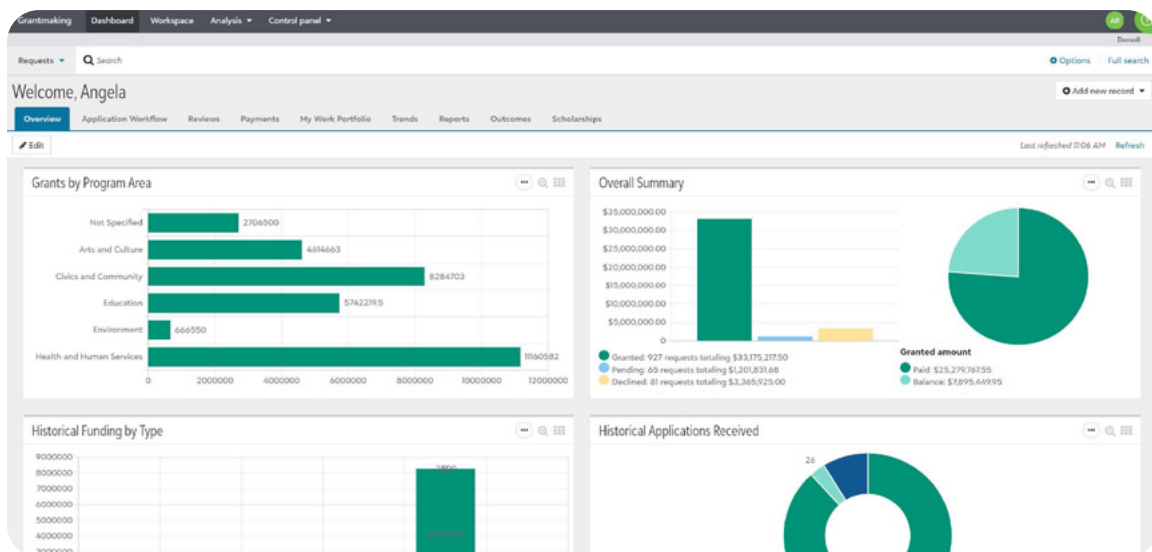
Save Time Answering Impact Questions

Custom dashboards also provide a clear window into the impact you are making in the communities you serve. And that is information your Board members and leadership want to know. Instead of reactively responding to those questions when they come in, you can proactively create dashboards that they can access. Setting up recurring reports and assigning view-only permissions can get in front of questions from important stakeholders. It also empowers your stakeholders with real-time data whenever they need it.

When you see your Board president's name in your inbox, it's hard not to drop everything and respond to it. But these types of requests can break up your day, keeping you from focusing on meaningful work. Many studies have shown that you lose time when you switch from project to project. So, when you are reviewing recent grantee feedback reports and you get an email for a report request from your Board finance chair looking for impact areas from the past two quarters, it makes it harder to get back into research mode.

With a grants management system such as Blackbaud Grantmaking™, you can get in front of questions and give your leadership autonomy to find the answers they need without an intermediary. Once you've created a dashboard with the information you want to share, you can schedule reports to automatically be sent to your stakeholders on a regular basis.

Instead of waiting for the inevitable request from your Board president about the number of grants approved year to date, you can schedule a report, so they know to expect it on the 15th of every month.

When your historical data is housed in tabs on a spreadsheet, it can take a formula wizard to get thatinformation together for a long-term view. With purpose-built dashboards, your historical data is built-in, giving you a deeper look at your data, with comparisons and multi-year reports. You can look out across a longer timeline to see how the work you are doing today is trending over quarters, years, and decades.

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Save Time Compiling Board Reports

Thankfully, the days of printed tomes being the best way to distribute Board packets ahead of meetings are long gone. While most organisations have a digital option for their Board members (even if some members still require the hardcopy version), the reports are often timeconsuming for you to compile for each meeting. With a grant management platform, dashboards make the information for Board reports easy for you to access and easy for your stakeholders to understand.

Like the reports you need for your day-to-day prioritisation, dashboards make it easy for you to save the reports and searches that you and your Board care the most about. If you know your Board president will want to see a breakdown of grantees by impact area, and your Finance Chair asks every meeting about restricted fund balances, you can have those reports saved and ready to add to the packet.

Another option is to give stakeholders personalised, view-only dashboards that they can check on their own time. Instead of seeing a static graph, they can sort and manipulate the data within the platform and come to the meeting with informed questions.

Even if you are creating a Board report separate from your grant management platform, the dashboards can easily be exported as images and inserted into your document. You don't need to export the data into a different program to add it to the report.

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Dashboards Give You Time for Impactful Work

Visualising your donations, your grants, and the programs you support through dashboards does more than save you time. It shows you the work your foundation is doing in a way that prompts questions and new ideas. With purpose-built dashboards and reporting, you not only have more time because you don't have to create them by hand, but you also now have more time to create a greater impact by thinking strategically about what this information tells you.

Find out how Blackbaud's Grantmaking solution can help you make sense of your data through purpose-built dashboards and reporting, so you can be more effective with your grants.

Learn more