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## Grantmaking zooms through ZoomGrants

By Tracee Sioux

FORT COLLINS - A step in the green direction is also streamlining grantmaking for applicants and grantors alike. Fort Collins-based ZoomGrants is taking the process paperless, saving thousands of dollars for each proposal.

"We manage an online grant proposal and review process for private foundations and local governments," said Geoff Hamilton, president and founder of ZoomGrants, which launched in 2002. "It's a national market, but we serve cities and counties across the country on the public side."

Before ZoomGrants' online technology, grantors would receive reams of paper in a grant application. The paper would then be photocopied for all the grant reviewers in an organization.

The process was costly. ZoomGrants estimates the average cost of a single paper grant with 40 applicants, at 15 pages each with 15 grant reviewers, at around \$8,010 for 9,000 sheets of paper. Add to that staff salary to make and distribute the copies, including benefits and time, at \$12,500 for a total annual expense of \$20,510.

ZoomGrants streamlined the process with new software, accessible by each grant reviewer, using no paper, cutting staff time, allowing all applicants to fill out the grant application online free-of-charge. That reduced the cost to between \$1,495 and \$3,999 per year.

ZoomGrants charges vary according to how many grants an organization awards each year and which tier of licensing a grantmaker purchases, though an unlimited number of applicants can apply without increasing the charge to grantmakers. Applicants, usually students or nonprofit organizations, hoping to be awarded scholarships or grants are never charged.

### Business zooming along

"Business is going very well, it's growing," reports Andy Smith, vice president of ZoomGrants. "This culture that 'private folks do more with less' has been a stimulus for our business in a lot of ways. We use green technology, it saves staff time and it saves real money by not having to go to Kinko's to make copies. Governments are wisely using technology to streamline a lot of processes. We've got the right solution at the right time, we're finding."

ZoomGrants currently serves more than 30 customers including the cities of Fort Collins and Loveland and Washington, D.C., and clients in California, New Jersey, Nevada and Washington. More than 80 nonprofits in Larimer County have submitted proposals from a granting agency using ZoomGrants.

Darcy McClure, vice president of community investment for the United Way of Larimer County and former community partnership manager for the city of Loveland, sees ZoomGrants as a great improvement in the grantmaking process.

"United Way will start using (ZoomGrants) next month," McClure said. "We used them when I worked for Loveland and it was a great improvement being able to go to an online system. It's easier for agencies applying for grant funds too, because it's Web-based, they can go in, work on it, save, and have someone else sign on to help provide input.

"For the city, it was a very good experience," she continued. "It absolutely saves money, especially time spent processing grant applications and managing documents and money in terms of staff time. I can comfortably say that it saved thousands of dollars in terms of staff time



saved."

The city of Fort Collins began using ZoomGrants during the Fall 2009 funding cycle. Prior to that, nonprofit organizations were required to submit 20 to 30 copies of applications that ranged from eight to 20 pages.

"We would have stacks and stacks and stacks of applications," said Sharon Thomas, city grant administrator. "ZoomGrants eliminated all of that. Everything is submitted electronically. It's been really good for staff as well as for applicants.

"They have been very accommodating and wonderful to work with," she added. "They really listen to their customers and make changes."

A notable private client is the Phoenix Suns basketball team, which uses ZoomGrants to administer multiple grants and scholarships. Their review committee has 35 people on it and one of their grant programs received over 300 applications.

"The amount of paper that ZoomGrants has saved them is very significant," Smith noted.

### **Personal experience**

Hamilton, who wrote the ZoomGrants system, received his MBA from Colorado State University with a concentration on nonprofit management. He also worked as a graduate assistant building websites. After graduation he was looking for a job as a grant administrator.

"I realized I would have to go through stacks and stacks of paper proposals if I did get that job. I didn't want to go through all that paper," he recalled. "So I started building an online system. Once I realized this could be its own business, I stopped looking for a job."

ZoomGrants has six employees and intends to hire several more by year-end. The company focuses on the triple bottom line: people, planet and prosperity, according to Smith.

"We grow the business because of our commitment to customer service and we focus on the intuitive nature of our technology so it's easy and simple to use for all users," he added.