Kalamazoo County

Kalamazoo County Partners with AmpliFund

Taking Charge of Their ARPA Funding

AmpliFund

Amanda Morse, Finance Director for Kalamazoo County, Michigan, knows her way around the financial management of a County. With her 24 years of experience in Finance, and 22 using software systems to manage those finances, it would be a fair assessment to say there was not much that could surprise the Finance Department at Kalamazoo County. Then the Treasury allocated their American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.

Recognizing Challenges

The County was already in the process of replacing their financial system when they began to notice a gap in their ability to manage grants. They were able to track details, but not much else.

"Financial systems couldn't track all of the pieces associated with managing a grant that we were looking for." Morse explained.

They were using spreadsheets to supplement the basic functionality of their financial system, but they were becoming overwhelmed even before the influx of the $51 million dollars allocated to them through the ARPA State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (SLFRF). The County knew that meeting reporting deadlines would be critical for maintaining compliance, so they decided it was time to enlist the support of a purpose-built grant management system.

Morse said, "When we got the American Rescue Plan funding it changed the way we needed to think about our grants program. We were used to managing the grants we received to make sure we were meeting those expectations, but now we needed something to help us give out grants." At the time, they thought they didn't have a very large pool of grant money being awarded regularly, but after looking objectively at their program, the County realized they were awarding grants more often than they thought. Their lack of visibility was a result of using a legacy system not purpose-built to manage awards, forcing the Finance Department to rely on paper-based documentation and record keeping in other systems to bridge that gap.
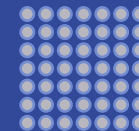
💡 Implementing a Solution

Once beginning to implement AmpliFund, the County started to notice that they were gaining a lot of visibility into their grants program in unexpected ways. By centralizing all their grant data in one location, they were able to begin formalizing grant processes and standardizing across the board. This high-level attention to processes allowed them to direct their attention to the details of growing their grants program. The County decided to set up a detailed, customized application for their opportunities, and their Implementation Team Lead from AmpliFund encouraged them to think about how to use the system to create a grant agreement by importing data right from the application itself. Morse said, "Thinking about what we need at the end of awarding while at the beginning of the process helped to streamline our thinking, and it helped us make sure we were asking the right questions and getting the right data from our applications."

The ease-of-use and the customization options were really enlightening for them as well. Initially, Morse was concerned that too much customization could lead to roadblocks down the line, which can be a common experience with customized software. She also knew that too little customizations could potentially leave them unable to gather all the data they needed for reporting. Unlike other systems, AmpliFund is designed specifically for grants and is configurable, not custom-built from scratch.

This allowed the County to configure what they needed without having to wait for an entire system to be designed.

After implementing AmpliFund, Morse said, "AmpliFund doesn't allow for so much customization that it is paralyzing, but it also doesn't box you in. It can be as much or as little as you want it to be."

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Amplifying the Impact

When awarding funding for a housing program that community members were asked to apply for, they received positive feedback that the applicants thought the system was easy to use. At that point, the County decided to set the system up for application review as well. Their Board of Commissioners, 11 individuals in total, had particular interest in having the ability to conduct review and scoring because they had never been able to be a part of that process before implementing AmpliFund. Now, due to the ease-of-use and automated workflows, the Board can see the full scope of their grants programs and how their work helps to meet the needs of the community.

The County suddenly had the ability to track everything they needed to manage their awards such as an award's status, any amendments, emails, approvals, documentation, reimbursements, and the workflows that were associated with each award. As Finance Director, Morse now has a real-time snapshot of the data she needs to see what is in the works for grants being awarded, whereas that data was not being gathered before partnering with AmpliFund. This has freed up capacity for the County to focus on what is coming down the road.

"I don't know what we would have done with the ARPA money without AmpliFund, to be honest."

Amanda Morse
Finance Director, Kalamazoo County, Michigan

AmpliFund helped the County gain a better handle on their internal communication practices as well. Morse recalled the ways that they previously may not have known if conversations had taken place, or what reviewers said when they scored applications, which was a challenge solved by using a purpose built system. She said, "Having the ability to document discussions or conversations for someone else to use later on in the process is really helpful." Setting up reminders and having a shared calendar helps them stay on top of their reporting deadlines and helps them see who is responsible for each step in the process.

By centralizing their grants data, standardizing their processes, and automating the steps needed in those processes that required a huge time and resource investment before, the County is now able to use that time to concentrate on the impact their funded programs are making in Kalamazoo County.

Learn how your organization can benefit from AmpliFund.

Let's Chat