Grants Program Management eBook

Regina Alvarado, Principal, Strategy & Life Sciences, IQVIA

Introduction

Table of contents

In this eBook, we look at the role of grants professionals in life science companies, the challenges they face working with internal stakeholders, and how technology and data-driven insights can help.

Introduction

Table of contents

Overview

SERIES OVERVIEW

Anyone visiting a physician, no matter how small the complaint, wants to feel confident that their healthcare provider is up to date on the latest scientific and medical developments. That is the goal of licensing board and professional organization requirements for independent medical education (IME).

A highly organized system of approximately 1,680 accredited education providers, accreditation, standards, and regulatory organizations, government agencies, and watchdog groups work to govern, track, and deliver the education healthcare providers need to stay current. In 2020, educators delivered more than 1 million hours of instruction and over 45 million interactions with healthcare providers.[1]

The professionals who manage company grants programs have both external- and internal-facing responsibilities. In our conversations with grants professionals from the industry, we often hear that the following topics pose professional challenges:

1. Communicating the value of supporting IME
2. Measuring outcomes
3. Adapting to globalization
4. Capturing and aggregating program data
5. Operational program management

In the eBook that follows, we will review each of the challenges listed above and offer our perspectives and discuss key points for your consideration when managing your own grants program.

1. ACCME Data Report. "Rising to the Challenge in Accredited Continuing Education – 2020.

The dollars involved in supporting medical education programs are significant. In 2020, **1,680 IME accredited education providers** delivered the following:

45 million
interactions with healthcare providers

1 million
hours of instruction

$2.2 billion
education

Part 1: Communicating the value of supporting IME

A key component of being able to speak to the value of IME is the overarching grants program strategy. Defining and documenting a strategic plan requires careful thought and consideration given to identifying medical areas of interest and unmet need, optimal program types for delivering the content, the correct intended audience to receive the information, appropriate geographic region(s), accredited or non-accredited status, and more. Having an agreed-upon grant program strategy makes it easier to demonstrate the grants program's purpose and benefits to the various stakeholders. Its creation requires that companies consider the "why" behind the decisions to include or exclude certain criteria in the strategic plan.

Stakeholders

Therapeutic area commercial leadership

Medical Affairs

Organizational leadership

Compliance and Legal

WORKING WITH THE VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS

Internal stakeholders view the grants process through different lenses. Key points, perspectives, and recommendations are summarized below.

- **Therapeutic area commercial leadership.** These individuals are very interested to learn what IME is being supported and may want more information regarding who the IME program will be reaching, learning objectives, programming type and how this relates to the healthcare providers with whom they interact. Grants professionals should work with their legal and compliance teams to determine the types of information that would be appropriate to share with the commercial teams.
- **Medical Affairs.** Medical Affairs teams are usually part of the grants review committee, and they are tasked with reviewing grant requests from scientific and medical perspectives. However, caution is warranted because Medical Affairs teams are also focused on managing relationships with healthcare providers – especially key opinion leaders (KOLs). Viewing grant activities through the lens of KOL relationship management can lead to compliance issues.
- **Organizational leadership.** When presenting to organizational leadership, come prepared to provide a broad perspective on the types of funding and high-level impact of your grants program. These professionals understand that compliance and transparency are important investments in the company's reputation and at the same time, they may want to be assured that grant funding is aligned with the company's mission.
- **Compliance and Legal.** These groups typically are looking at activities to be sure they align with company policies, industry best practices, and accrediting organization requirements (for CE/CME programs), among other factors. They may also review from a public perception perspective and consider the reputation of the organization requesting the grant support. Compliance will need certain information to enable auditing of programs. Legal is usually involved in the grant review process, either as a reviewer on the Committee or during the contracting or LOA (Letter of Agreement) process.

Part 1: Communicating the value of supporting IME

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS FOR GRANTS PROFESSIONALS:

- **Collect the right information up front.** Make sure IME grant requests include clearly stated outcomes measurements, learning or program-level objectives and appropriate, data-based measurement strategies.
- **Demonstrate impact.** Show leadership that supporting independent educational programs that focus on independent science can be impactful in changing healthcare provider behavior in a way that is beneficial to patient outcomes.
  - Plan regularly scheduled meetings with stakeholders to walk them through the grants program at a high level.
  - Highlight requests that show an improvement in healthcare provider behavior or a significant impact on a patient population or community.
  - Consider using or implementing a robust grants management technology system that enables quick insight into historical data, past performance, and outcomes to help focus conversations on data-driven analyses.
- **Share information compliantly.** Partner with your legal and compliance teams to create processes for sharing appropriate information about grant activity with other parts of the organization. A grants management technology system can help with this through role-based permissions for dashboard reviews and reporting.

SUMMARY

Using technology and data-driven insights can help with demonstrating the impact of your grants program. This is essential to gaining continued support from key stakeholders. A technology platform purpose-built for life sciences, with embedded compliance and streamlined workflows, can help accelerate funding, improve efficiency, and provide visibility across the full suite of funding programs. Pharma companies should look for a technology solution that is open and flexible and can provide more complex outcomes reporting and analytics dashboards for easy consumption of insights. At the same time, technology needs to support standardization and increased collaboration across regions and countries. Keep these factors in mind while choosing a solution that simplifies compliance, improves efficiency and program effectiveness, and helps grants professionals communicate with stakeholders today.

For more details, please download our free white paper that expands on the key points highlighted in this chapter.

A technology platform purpose-built for life sciences, with embedded compliance and streamlined workflows, can help accelerate funding, improve efficiency, and provide visibility across the full suite of funding programs.

1. ACCME Data Report. "Rising to the Challenge in Accredited Continuing Education – 2020." 2021.

Part 2: Measuring outcomes

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "OUTCOMES"?

Merriam-Webster has a simple definition of the term *outcome*: "something that follows as a result or consequence."[1] Specific to grants, *outcomes measurement* is described as follows: "...outcomes record the changes that occur as a result of your program. Outcomes are the difference you've made as a result of the outputs: the decrease in hunger, the decrease in disease, the increase in a person's ability to care for themselves, etc."[2]

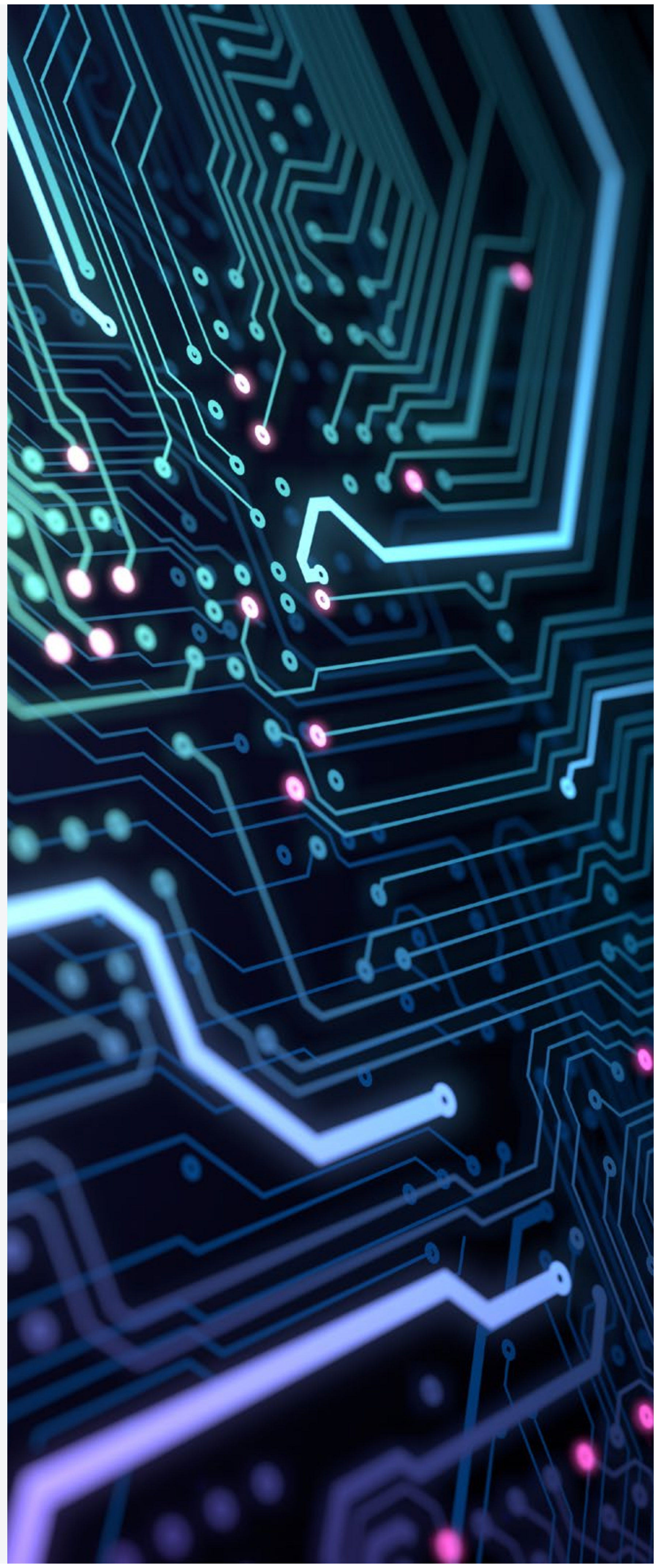
WHY DO WE MEASURE OUTCOMES FOR GRANTS?

Commercial supporters should seek to understand the impact of the grants they provide, whether it is a monetary amount or a product donation. The purpose of a grant is to have a positive impact on a specific population such as increasing disease state awareness, fostering educational information dissemination for healthcare providers (HCPs), or increasing caregiver knowledge. In the life sciences industry, there is a specific interest in supporting grants that improve patient outcomes.

Tracking and measuring outcomes enables future decision-making for the Grant Review Committee. Would we or should we support this type of program again? Should we provide funding to this organization again?

Organizations who are delivering the program (the grantees) are also measuring outcomes for similar reasons, or they should be! They will want to demonstrate the effectiveness of their programs to gain additional funding for future programs and expand their program offerings to reach new audiences.

Measuring and tracking outcomes provides confirmation that programs receiving grant support are achieving the stated goals and that funding is directed to programs with the highest level of impact.



Part 2: Measuring outcomes

THE TACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

What types of questions should grants professionals ask? What types of information should be checked? Consider these:

- Was the funding spent as it was supposed to be? Was the organization a good steward of the funding provided? If not, you may want to reconsider supporting them again.
- Did the actual expenses match up with the proposed budget? Submitting a final program budget after the event is completed is a standard requirement. Check to see how accurate their projections were. Also check to see if any funds were unused and need to be refunded.
- Was the program completed on time? This is another standard item to verify and demonstrates the grantee's capabilities to complete the program as described in their application materials.
- What were the attendee responses? Did they complete a pre- and post-test? Were there any unexpected findings or results? This process starts with the review of the requestor's plan for measuring outcomes as part of the initial application. Does it seem reasonable? Is it applicable to the stated learning objectives? Does it appear that it will capture an accurate measurement of the intended result(s)? The grantee should share these results with the commercial supporter, at the very least in a summary report format, to demonstrate results. Data-driven measurements are very helpful, and so are subjective assessments in which the grantee asks the attendees for written comments on their perceptions of the program's success or outcomes.

Part 2: Measuring outcomes

HOW CAN TECHNOLOGY HELP DRIVE OUTCOMES MEASUREMENTS?

One of the challenges faced by commercial supporters is procedural: what to measure, how to collect it, and how to implement it.

1. Identify what you want to measure and what data you will need to collect.

This will be different based on the grant type. For example, a charitable contribution will have different goals and planned outcomes than an educational grant. Therefore, the data you collect will be different.

2. Design your grant application form accordingly.

Make sure you include the necessary data collection fields that enable the outcomes measurement analyses you want to perform. There can be baseline information similar across all grant types that you want to collect such as intended audience/attendees, geographic location, disease state, etc., and unique fields by program type, accredited status, grant type, or other factors.

3. Implement information collection and review processes.

This process should include communicating to the grantee a timeframe for when the outcomes information is due back to you and what information and documents need to be submitted as substantiation. Consider what is needed to collect and receive this information, such as fields in an online form. Also determine who will receive and review this information once it's submitted.

- Consider adding a brief statement about consequences of non-compliance such as, *"Failure to provide the required post-program information may impact receipt of future grant support."* Your LOA (Letter of Agreement) should contain more details about the requirements for submitting the post-program information including supporting documentation (e.g., final budget).
- You may need to set up multiple outcomes measurement report requirements (milestones) if it's a long-term program or a program series.

The grants professional should present outcomes measurement information to the grant review committee on a regular basis. But what if you don't receive an outcomes report? And what if the outcomes are not what was anticipated or expected? How will you address these situations? Sometimes the outcomes measurement data (and other information) may not be available immediately after the program is finished, and if enough time passes, it can easily be forgotten. A grants management system can streamline and simplify the collection process.

- Use automated periodic reminders and alerts for the grantee and the grants professional to track requirements. Specific action can be taken for late or missing outcomes reports.
- Configure a dashboard on the user's home page (after logging in) to show late/overdue tasks. If not resolved, the status of these tasks can remain visible for when that organization submits another request for support.
- Standardize the collection of information with written instructions, online tutorials and help text, pre-configured forms, and lists of required documentation.
- Once received, the grants professional can circulate the information through the system to the Grant Committee for review and discussion at the next committee meeting.

Part 2: Measuring outcomes

OTHER BENEFITS OF USING A GRANTS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

- Search and view outcomes by a variety of criteria such as program type, audience, delivery format – basically, anything you captured in the request form.
- Identify trends based on data-driven analysis of various criteria which can be combined for many different perspectives.
- Capture data and information by milestone for long-term single programs or multiple-event program series to track intermediate progress as well as at the end of a program.
- Create reports and visualizations for senior leadership, brand management teams, compliance, etc.

SUMMARY

A technology platform purpose-built for life sciences, with embedded compliance and streamlined workflows, can help automate the process of receiving, reviewing, and analyzing program outcomes. Analytics dashboards and reports provide easy consumption of insights, including outcomes, across departments, teams, regions, and countries. Leveraging these capabilities will help grants professionals communicate with stakeholders and provide them with the key information they need to demonstrate important impacts of supporting these programs.

1. Merriam-Webster online dictionary available at: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/outcome
2. Professional Grant Writer. (2021). What are Outcomes Versus Outputs in Grant Writing? Available at: https://www.professionalgrantwriter.org/understanding-difference-outputs-outcomes

Part 3: Adapting to globalization

Companies supporting grants may receive requests for programs and events occurring outside their own country. Sometimes these are educational events, but more often, these requests are for charitable contributions and product donations. Through these programs, grant supporters can assist with providing important educational information and other support to underserved areas and populations. How can a grants management system help with adapting to globalization in its grant making processes? What are some considerations for a commercial grant supporter when reviewing these request types?

STREAMLINED PROCESS MANAGEMENT

Grant management systems can enable a standardized and optimized submission process for grant requesting organizations independent of location. Once the baseline process for application submission and review is defined, it can be used for any type of application. In a similar way, application forms can be structured for consistency with minor changes based on certain aspects of the form such as request type using “if/then” logic.

In addition to request type, you may need to customize other aspects of the application submission process. For example, different types of documents may be required.

A grants management system also affords other advantages:

- Tech-enabled application receipt and review regardless of time zones
- Global budget review displaying different currencies
- Multiple language capabilities
- One simple, easy to access, centralized point of view to track activities globally

Part 3: Adapting to globalization

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Many of the typical considerations for reviewing and managing grants apply to a global grant program. A few other questions to think about include:

- Are these activities permitted in that location?
- What transparency reporting obligations are in effect? What information is needed to comply with disclosure requirements?
- If the request is for a product donation, is the product approved for use in that country?
- What happens to a donated medical device after it is used? Is the organization able to discard or destroy it in an environmentally compliant way?
- Will the funds be provided to a locally based organization who then distributes them to their international group, or is the request for payment coming from an organization based outside your own country? Are there any tax implications?
- How will devices or products be shipped and are there special requirements for international shipments of drugs or devices (e.g., import/export)?
- If your company will donate products that use consumables, what happens when the initial supply is exhausted?

SUMMARY

A grants management system can automate many of the request receipt and review processes, as is well known. It is also an important tool that can help demonstrate appropriate due diligence in reviewing requests, especially when there are additional considerations for supporting programs and activities outside one's own country. These systems can help reduce the review time required and serve as a centralized point for the company to easily and quickly view all activities supported under their overarching grants program. Reporting capabilities and customized dashboards enable customized views by user type to focus on the desired information to help demonstrate the impact and value of the company's grants program.

Regardless of location, a commercial supporter should always review the request in line with program guidelines, budget, and alignment with the company's specific areas of interest.

Part 4: Capturing and aggregating program data

So you've set up a grants program and are receiving applications and taking action on them. You are communicating with grant requestors and recipients. Grant managers are categorizing requests. Reviewers are entering decisions in the online workflow. Payments and product donations are going out and reconciliations, milestone updates, and outcomes measurement reports are coming in.

What do you do with all the data generated by these activities? Or rather, what *can* you do?

- You can analyze the data in a multitude of ways if you've captured what you need in the system.
- Dashboards can be updated in real time; reports are static and reflect a given state at a particular point in time. Both are useful depending how the information will be used.
- You can export it to merge with data stored in other systems for customized views.

Okay, all that sounds great. Where do you start?

POTENTIAL REPORT TYPES

Historical reviews

- Giving history with an organization
- Program types supported over a specific period of time
- Regional grant activity compared to disease prevalence and incidence
- Audience and attendee types

Simple reports

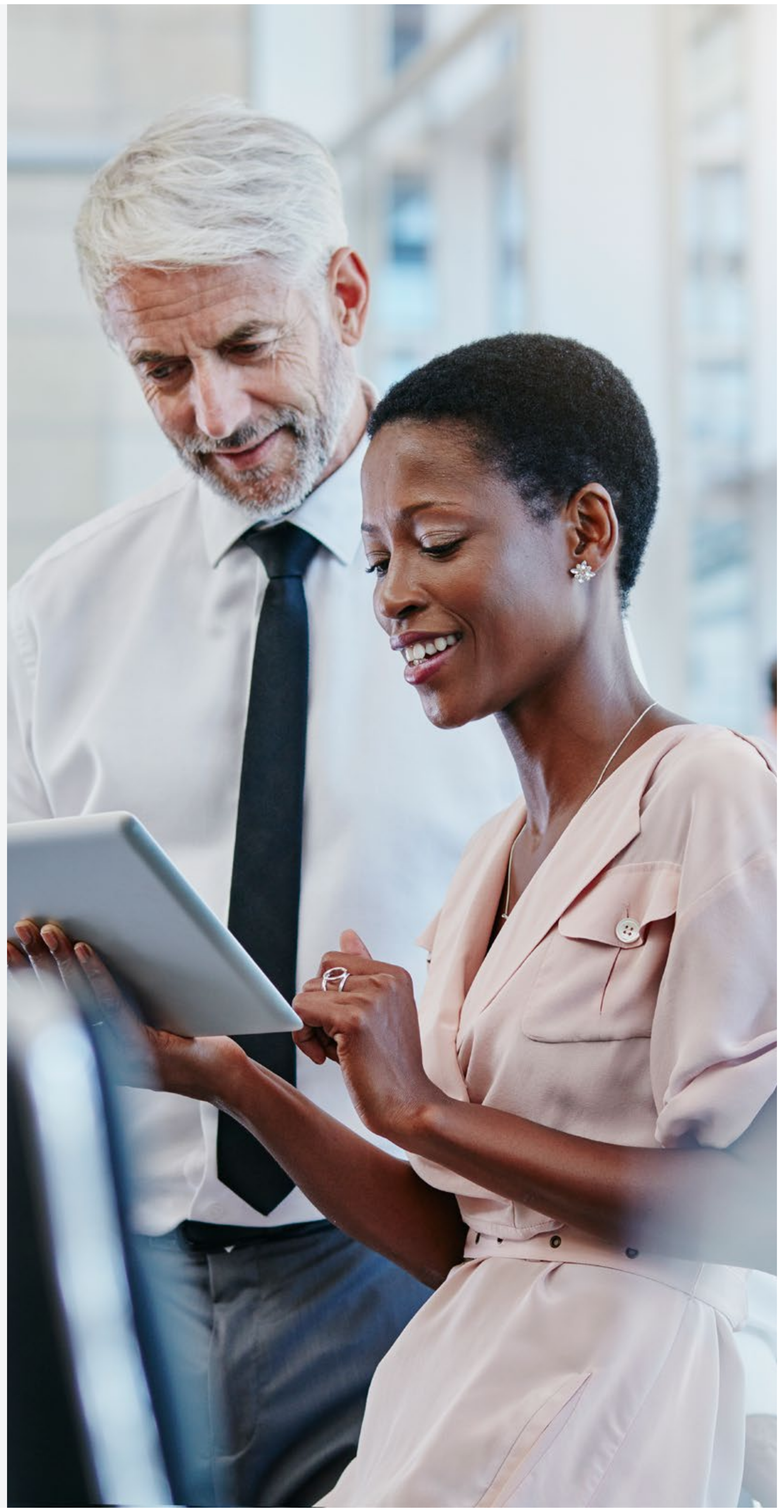
- Total amount spent to date
- Total number of organizations supported, sorted by type, location, or activity
- Total number of products donated

Advanced comparison reports

- Average grant amounts given for specific program types or for a therapeutic area (time-based or not)
- Total grant dollars by therapeutic area out of total budget
- Total grant amount given to one organization as a percentage of the whole budget
- Total potential numbers of HCPs reached by program type

Compliance reports

- Transparency disclosures
- Missing reconciliations, late LOAs, late or missing milestone reports



Part 4: Capturing and aggregating program data

Step 1: Determine the end point(s).

- What would you like to know or demonstrate about the value of the grant program? What questions are people asking about your organization's grant activities? These probably range from relatively easy requests, e.g., how many programs have we approved and how much budget have we spent so far, to more complex activity analyses such as what program types have had the greatest impact on HCP education. External parties may be interested in reading about grant activities too, especially those focused on environmental impact or programs targeted to specific groups.
- Who are your stakeholders? What are their interests? What information would they be most interested in seeing? In Part 1 and in our white paper, we reviewed each stakeholder group and their perspectives on the grants program.

Step 2: Identify the data you need to capture to get to the desired end point(s).

- You can start with the application form fields, but the data gathering process really begins when someone views your grants website and reads about the required information for submission. These instructions should be clear and concise to make sure you can collect what is needed for application review and grant program activity analysis.
- Consider the information you gather when a requestor creates an account in your system. Can you gather anything useful here?
- Grant requests usually require a budget submission. If you are using an online template, you can capture a lot of useful data in this form.

Step 3: Design a way to find and analyze the data you collect.

- Reports and dashboards are very nice, but if they don't pull the right data or show the relevant view to the user, then all the effort and time you put into designing data capture processes are lost. Role-based views enable users to see what they will be most interested in when they want to see it.
- Consider data export requirements. If your grants system – which is really a workflow management tool – doesn't have the capabilities of producing the reports you need, or the grants data needs to be combined with other data from different systems, how easy is it to export the data fields you need?

SUMMARY

Using program data can help showcase the value and importance of the grant program through reports, dashboards, and other data analysis tools. It requires a balance of time and effort with the expected benefits. However, this is usually a one-time investment spent mostly on setting up the data capture processes (or optimizing existing ones) with minimal time required for maintenance and updates. Don't overlook opportunities to capture new and different information or combine it in unique ways for customized perspectives based on stakeholder interests and expectations.

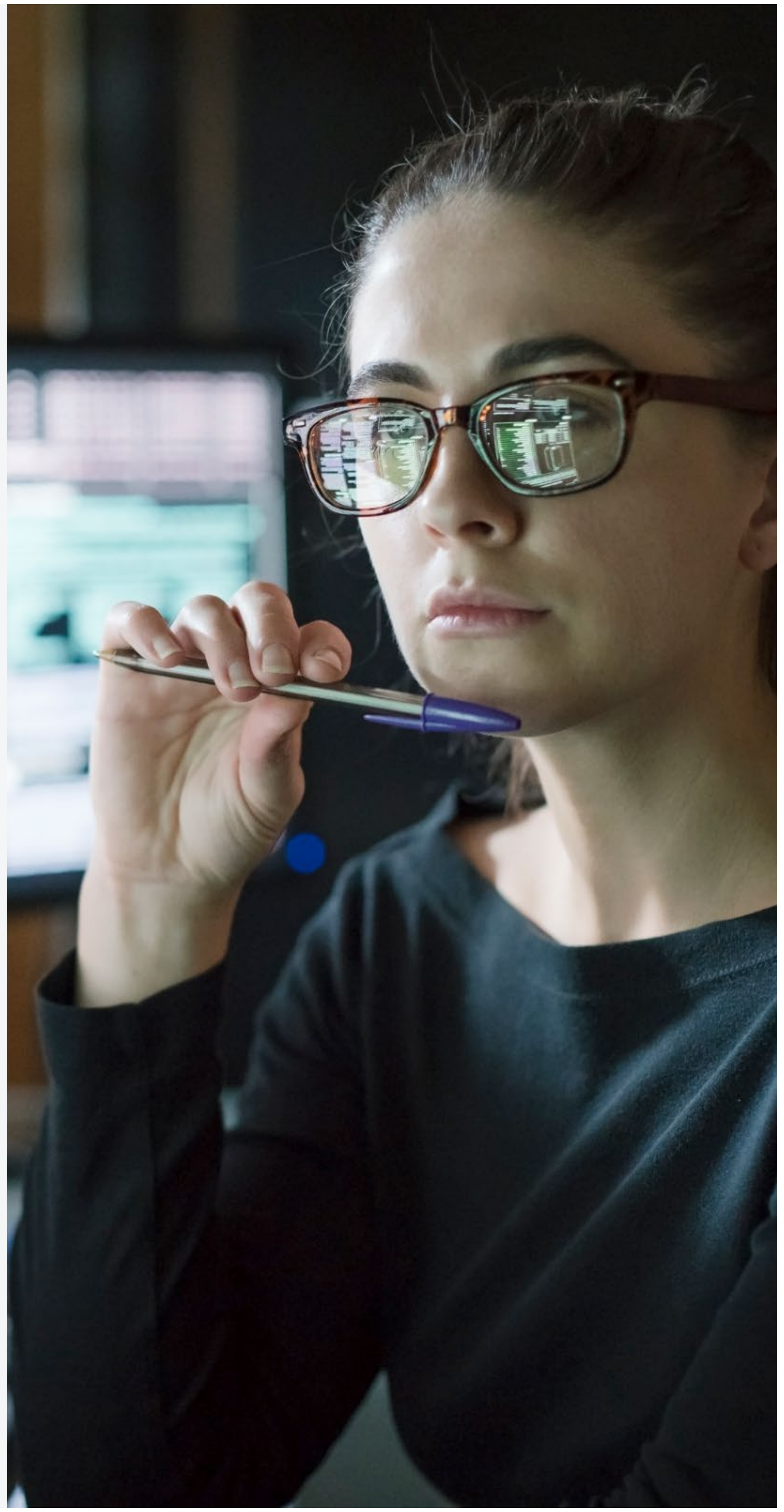
Part 5: How technology and data-driven insights can help demonstrate the value and importance of grant programs

OPERATIONAL PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

Grants professionals play a critical role in managing the end-to-end process from the initial request receipt through to the decision, and if approved, after approval for certain follow-up activities. It's important that the workflow management system support the grant professional in managing their responsibilities as well as the actual requests. In combination with the company's business rules for grants program management, the capabilities and features of the system are critical drivers for successful operational processes. In this chapter, we will look at four areas where technology can bring specific benefits to grants operations.

Automation

- **Grant request intake and review.** Eligibility questionnaires can help screen out ineligible requestors. Pre-application questions can direct applicants to the correct application form for their request type or area of interest and eliminate the need for redirection by the grant manager, or for the applicant, a declination and request to resubmit using the correct form. Responses on the request form can automatically direct an application to the relevant reviewers.
- **Due diligence processes and fraud/identity checks.** Through interfaces and links with other systems, this process can be completed behind the scenes when a requestor submits their application.
- **Letters of Agreement (LOAs) and contract review/signature.** Systems can create and send the LOA (or contract), then store the final copy within the grant record itself.
- **Payment process.** Upon receipt of the signed LOA/contract, a payment can be scheduled through connections with a company's AP system. The grant manager may request a payment directly in the grants system leveraging a partially automated process as well, e.g., a milestone report which is uploaded and needs to be reviewed before the payment request is submitted.



Part 5: How technology and data-driven insights can help demonstrate the value and importance of grant programs

Workflows

- **Role-based permissions.** Users can be set up with standard roles that have pre-determined permissions that enable them to perform only certain designated functions.
- **Custom workflows.** As described above, based on certain criteria, applications can be directed to the correct reviewers. There can be multiple criteria used in these instances. For example, the therapeutic area field + request type directs to the designated grant manager according to the business rules.
- **Multiple workflows.** Through technology, you can easily design and manage many workflows without relying on memory or paper documentation for the process. There can be multiple applications of logic (e.g., if/then scenarios) to direct information appropriately.
- **Reduce review time.** By enabling online reviews, the grant manager can route requests for review through the system. Comments and decisions are captured and retained. Reviews can be completed in a timely manner when convenient for the reviewers. Where a decision cannot be reached through online reviews, the grant manager can facilitate a discussion that focuses only on those items requiring additional consideration.
- **Dashboards, reminders, and alerts.** These features help keep tasks on track for completion in the agreed-upon time frames. The grant manager no longer needs to manually track request status if there's a dashboard to show requests in their various stages. These features can also be enabled for approved grants at any stage for internal and external users, e.g., a grant request is awaiting your review, the LOA needs to be signed and returned, a milestone report is due next week for your IIS, and more.

Part 5: How technology and data-driven insights can help demonstrate the value and importance of grant programs

Compliance

- **Centralized and standardized information.** Part of the system setup process should include agreement on what documentation is required for each grant type, and what is optional for the review process. This also helps demonstrate the company's commitment to managing a compliant grants process. Centralizing this information helps the compliance team manage the company's transparency reporting obligations and audit grant activities.
- **Internal audits.** Compliance audits are not the only type of audit process that may involve grants activities. Using a system with reporting capabilities which is also storing all the supporting documentation can facilitate responses to an internal audit.
- **Compliance oversight.** Compliance policy requirements can be embedded into the workflow to automatically flag certain types of grant requests that may not comply with company policy, or at the very least, require additional consideration. For example, many companies prefer not to be the sole supporter of grant programs.
- **Standardized communications.** This can apply to the workflow section as well, because using pre-approved, standardized messages saves time for the grant manager in responding to applicants and grantees. It also ensures that the language and terms used in the messages have been reviewed and approved by the appropriate parties, such as Legal and Compliance, before use.
- **Document, document, document.** Compliance teams love to see complete documentation of activities and a system can help you achieve this. You can designate certain application fields as required; you can halt the process if the necessary information is not provided, etc. Letting the system manage everything associated with a grant request, whether approved or declined, can greatly facilitate compliance reviews of the grant program.

Part 5: How technology and data-driven insights can help demonstrate the value and importance of grant programs

Strategy and impact

- **Budgeting.** A grants management system can automatically track and report on approved vs. declined requests, or requests by category such as therapeutic area, geographic location, audience, etc. This helps you answer the question of where the grant budget was spent. Did you spend more than you thought you did in supporting a specific organization or therapeutic area? Did the actual spending on grant activities align with the strategy you set at the beginning of the year?
- **Impact.** You can review numerous factors to assess impact. This is usually best done by combining multiple criteria such as outcomes reports, program types, and audience. For example, who actually attended the programs compared to the audience that the program organizers intended to reach? Did certain types of programs reach more of the desired attendees than others?

SUMMARY

A grants management system can help you manage many of the day-to-day operational tasks that grant managers need to track, manage, and complete. From basic workflow and process management tasks to a strategic evaluation of your grants program, you can leverage the system to save time, increase efficiency, and demonstrate the impact of grants on the HCP and patient communities.