



**Development
Services Agency**

Ohio Small Business Relief Grant and Bar and Restaurant Assistance Fund

Category: Cross-Boundary Collaboration & Partnerships

State: Ohio

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Executive Summary

The economic downturn resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted small businesses across the country. As public health agencies at both the federal and state level have worked to keep people safe and informed during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, government agencies have also been working to lessen the financial hardship facing individuals and businesses. In Ohio, the Development Services Agency is responsible for providing oversight and coordination of the state's economic development by providing support to entrepreneurs, small businesses, and minority-owned businesses in the state and supporting communities in growing their economies. In response to the coronavirus outbreak and the impact it has had on Ohio's small businesses, the Development Services Agency quickly adapted its mission to support these businesses and provide much-needed financial relief. The Development Services Agency worked with various other state agencies to develop an online application for the Small Business Relief Grant and the Bar and Restaurant Assistance Fund.

Idea

Small businesses employ 47.3% of the U.S. private workforce and drive the majority of Ohio's economy. The COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges for small businesses across the country. In response, the State of Ohio created two grant programs to help ensure these businesses survived the COVID-19 pandemic: a \$125 million fund for small businesses and a \$36 million fund for bars and restaurants. Multiple state agencies came together in handling the distribution of these funds to Ohio businesses in this time of crisis. This required extensive cross-agency collaboration and overcoming hurdles around information and data sharing. Due to the urgent need for these programs, the Development Services Agency was tasked with developing the grant applications in an accelerated timeline of 4 weeks.

The Salesforce technology the team developed to manage the grant programs provide a comprehensive view of the applicants, their application statuses, and grant distribution. On the public facing application side, the platform also provided a user-friendly experience for Ohio residents by making the process of applying for a grant centralized and straightforward (*Figure 1*). The application leverages Ohio's single sign-on system, OHID, to simplify applicants' log-in and application process, thereby improving interactions between government and residents (*Figure 2*).



Figure 1 – Grant Application Landing Page

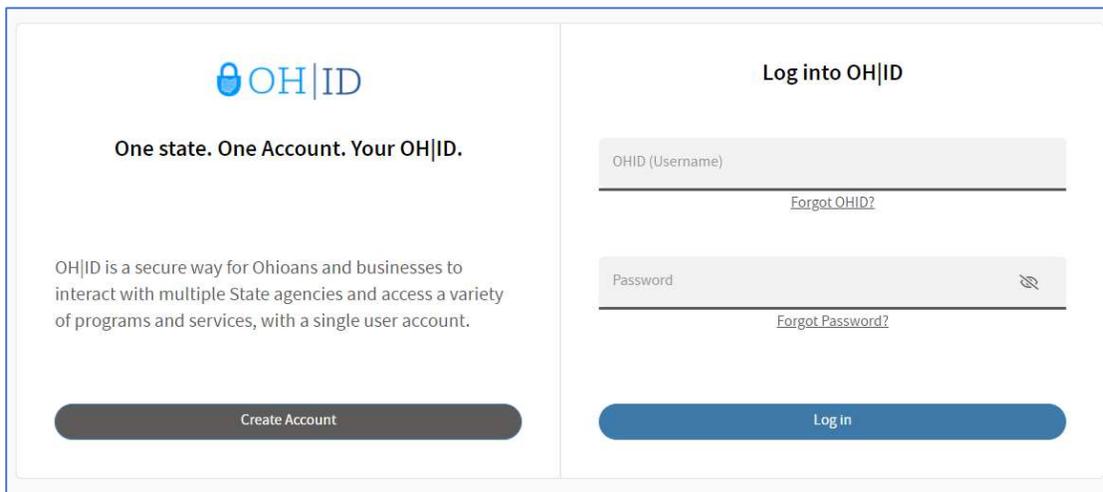


Figure 2 – OHID Login

Implementation

The Ohio Development Services Agency collaborated with the Department of Commerce, the Department of Taxation, the Office of Budget & Management, and InnovateOhio Platform to develop the grant applications for the Small Business Relief Grant and the Bar and Restaurant Assistance Fund. The Ohio Development Services Agency led the construction and management of the Salesforce application, which they stood up in four weeks. The Development Services Agency chose to build the applications on their Salesforce platform that is built using clicks, not code, meaning it can be built quickly and easily adjusted. The Department of Commerce and the Department of Taxation worked with the Development Services Agency to create a process to determine a business' eligibility, and the Office of Budget and Management was responsible for distributing the funds once the recipient was through the approval process. The InnovateOhio Platform provided the ability for applicants to use the state's single sign-on system in order to simplify how these businesses interacted with state government.

Initially, an application was only needed for the Small Business Relief Grant. Two weeks before the launch, however, the state of Ohio expanded the program to also include the Bar and Restaurant Assistance Fund. This required the Development Services Agency team to adapt the application to be able to support this new grant type and collaborate with different agencies to ensure a process for approvals and grant distribution were in place. For example, they worked with the Department of Taxation and the Department of Commerce to verify the liquor licenses for Bars and Restaurants.

Impact

Ohio's Small Business Relief Grant program allocated \$500,000 to each of its 88 counties and the remaining \$81 million from the total \$125 million available was distributed to applicants on a first-come, first-served basis. On its first day there were 16,745 applications for the Small Business Relief Grant, and 12,500 companies were each awarded \$10,000. The Bar and Restaurant Assistance Fund received 2,810 applications and distributed \$2,500 to each of these establishments.

To review the impacts from the grant programs, The Development Services Agency built a dashboard on Tableau allowing the agency's leadership to track and monitor applications in near-real time (*Figure 3*). They were developed to obtain a comprehensive view of each applicant, including who applied, where they were in the application process, who had been approved, and who had not yet submitted their application. They were also able to monitor where applicants were located in the state, which is data the Development Services Agency used to ensure the grant distribution was as equitable as possible. DSA CIO, Scott Brock and his team were able to identify which counties lacked companies applying in high numbers. The team noticed companies located in Southeast Ohio counties were not reaching the \$500,000 minimum per county. This allowed the agency to perform additional outreach to increase awareness and encourage small businesses to apply.

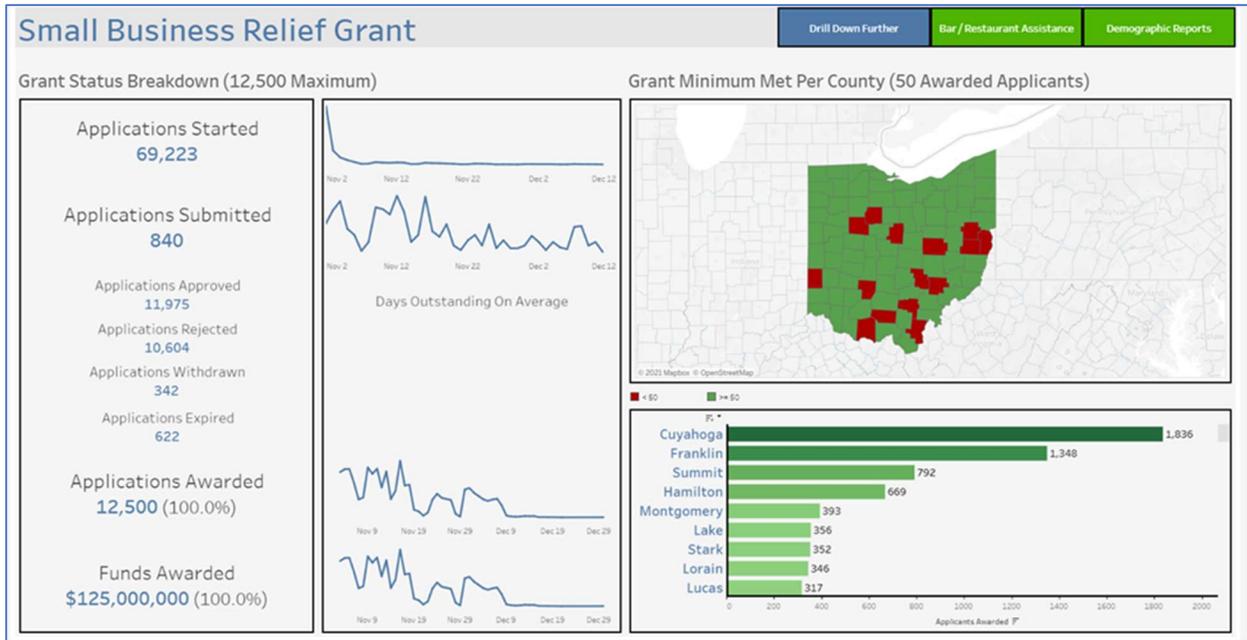


Figure 3 – Small Business Relief Grant Dashboard

The initial response was overwhelming, with more applicants than grants available for the Small Business Relief Grant. Recognizing the need for more financial relief, Ohio recently expanded the program. The Development Services Agency is currently reviewing 19,000 applications that did not receive initial funding and is beginning a second round of approvals. Businesses have expressed that these grant programs offered tremendous assistance in a time of need. A restaurant in Chillicothe, Ohio said that “one of the \$10,000 Small Business Relief Grants will help our small shop in Chillicothe survive until Spring 2021.” A business in Logan, Ohio wrote that they are able to pay their rent and phone bill, their two biggest monthly expenses, for the next several months, and will no longer need to dip into their retirement savings. Another business in Youngstown, Ohio wrote, “You’re saving a lot of small people like us from complete disaster.”

Overall, the success of this project stems from the collaboration efforts given by each agency involved. All aspects of the grant application and its back-end processes were paramount to delivering impactful assistance to over 15,000 Ohio businesses and counting. In the midst of a stressful pandemic, these agencies came together and produced a system that yielded positive results to countless Ohioans, all within an accelerated timeline of 4 weeks.