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Salesforce and Outbound Funds Module

Is it a viable Grants Management Solution for Foundations?



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Overview

During the summer of 2020, North Peak Solutions, a Salesforce consulting firm focused exclusively on nonprofits and the philanthropic sector, set out to learn more about how grantmakers select, customize, and maintain their grant management/grantmaking systems (GMS). From these conversations, North Peak hoped to develop recommendations for grantmakers on whether a GMS built on Salesforce and a relatively new product called the Outbound Funds Module could meet their needs.

What is the Outbound Funds Module (OFM)?

OFM is a free, open source product that customizes Salesforce for grant management. In 2017, a group of Salesforce users, developers, and consultants began building an open-source, community-supported solution to customize Salesforce for grantmaking organizations, as well as other organizations that distribute funds. In June 2018, OFM was released as a free, open source product. For the first time, grantmakers had a solution they were able to personalize while retaining the ability to collaborate with other organizations on best practices for setup, configuration and customization.

Since then, as a part of Salesforce.org's Open Source Commons program, over 50 volunteers have contributed to enhancements, changes, and upgrades. North Peak has worked closely with the volunteers developing this product since its inception and has implemented it for organizations seeking to manage their grantmaking efforts in Salesforce.

In May 2020, Salesforce.org announced the addition of OFM to their suite of open source offerings. We are excited to be involved in the evolution of a free, open source tool that is built for the community by the community.

OFM was created as an alternative to existing GMS options, including:

1. A GMS built from scratch using Salesforce. This solution can offer a system that closely aligns to the organization's processes. However, it can be costly, difficult to maintain, or make it hard to collaborate with similar organizations.
2. A totally out-of-the-box GMS, where a foundation purchases and implements a fully configured product. This solution can provide robust functionality but all-in-one products can also be challenging and costly to adapt for unique needs.

OFM Functionality

The OFM package is installed directly into Salesforce and uses existing Salesforce features. It provides highly configurable architecture to streamline the management of:

- Funding programs - Create unlimited funding programs that indicate total funding available, requested, and paid.
- Funding requests - Track funding requests, including total funds requested, funding program applied to, status, completed and outstanding internal tasks, and applicant contact information.
- Applicant and grantee requirements - Manage items owed to your organization or owed to the grantee.
- Disbursements - Record and schedule disbursements of funds, and track this data at the grantee, funding program, and global levels.
- GAU Expenditures - Link Disbursements to General Accounting Units to understand draw-downs from funds. This object is only available if your organization uses Salesforce's [Nonprofit Success Pack](#).

Learn more about OFM functionality [here](#).

Salesforce.org & OFM

The Outbound Funds Module will remain a free and open source data model for grants management in Salesforce. As a Salesforce offering, it will benefit from the weight of Salesforce.org developers behind the product, and users will have access to push updates, official Salesforce support, and documentation through the [Power of Us Hub](#). Additionally, Salesforce.org will work in conjunction with a community advisory group - a group of community volunteers responsible for developing and stewarding OFM over the last three years - on the OFM roadmap.

Salesforce.org is also building a paid grants management product that relies on OFM as a foundation. This product is planned for release later in 2020 and will extend OFM offerings.





Learning from the Experts: How Foundations Select and Build Out GMS

Key Questions

North Peak interviewed 12 foundations with diverse missions, budgets, grantmaking processes, and systems to learn about their approach to grantmaking from end-to-end, including the advantages and pain points of their existing GMS. We hoped to answer the following questions:

- What are common processes and tools leveraged by foundations and how, if at all, can OFM align to these tools and processes?
- How do foundations make their GMS purchasing and development decisions?
- What works well for foundations about their existing processes and what pain points exist?
- What organizations are well-suited for OFM? Are there organizations for which OFM would not be a fit?
- Aside from possible technical limitations, are there other barriers to OFM adoption (i.e. total cost of ownership, access to technical or peer support & knowledge, organizational buy-in, etc)? Are these addressed by existing offerings and resources, or do true gaps exist?

Profile of Foundations Interviewed

- Foundation assets ranged from \$5 million to \$10 billion.
- Six foundations primarily accepted open applications while six foundations primarily accepted applications by invitation only.
- The number of grants made ranged from ~30-700 annually.
- Four of the 12 foundations raised funds for grantmaking; eight foundations did not fundraise.
- Four foundations primarily made single-year grants while eight made both single- and multi-year grants or primarily multi-year grants.

Foundation Grant Management/Grantmaking Systems and Tools

To understand whether OFM could meet foundations' GMS requirements, we needed to understand the tools and processes that defined their GMS.

The 12 foundations leveraged GMS that ranged from simple to complex. There was no one-size-fits-all tool. Most foundations added customizations and leveraged additional tools (integrated or un-integrated) in order to design a complete GMS, because their core tool, as offered, didn't fully meet their needs. For some foundations, their grant making processes were not strongly reliant on a technology; for others, their approach to grantmaking required multiple systems and customization that no one product could deliver.

However, there were common tools and processes that many foundations leveraged in their grantmaking process.

These included:

Online Application Portal or Form: Most foundations used an online application portal or online form to accept grant applications. These included: foundationConnect portal, Foundation Source, Benevity, SmartSimple Software, Blackbaud Grantmaking, GIFTS Classic, Cybergrants, Salesforce Communities, and Wufoo Forms. Some of these systems sat on top of existing CRM databases; some foundations manually transferred data between their applicant portal and database of record; others maintained an application solution that was totally separate from other databases. Some of these portals and related databases included heavily automated grant management processes and integrations with other tools, while others had little automation and few integrations.

Document Generation: A number of foundations relied on document merge tools to generate grant documents, including contracts and PDFs of applications for internal review. For other foundations, grant documents were prepared and collated offline.

Signature Collection: Two foundations used an e-signature service to collect grant contract signatures, while many others collected signatures by emailing PDFs to grantees to be signed and emailed back.

Email Sync: For at least two foundations, syncing emails from their email provider into their database was critical to their grant management process. Communications with applicants and grantees and grant documents were tracked through email and synced to their database in order to track interactions and grant requirements. Tools included offerings native to their GMS or third party applications.

Payment Management and Accounting: While some foundations tracked pending and paid payments in their database of record, very few foundations integrated their finance and accounting software with their GMS. Frequently, grant disbursement requests to the finance department occurred offline.

501(c)3 Verification: A handful of foundations relied on 501(c)3 verification tools to confirm applicants' charitable status in order to determine eligibility to apply. These charity-checker tools were especially useful for foundations that provided multi-year grants or were providing a grant with multiple payments, to ensure their grantees remained in good standing throughout the lifecycle of the grant.

OFAC Check Tool: Foundations, especially those engaged in international grantmaking, relied on an OFAC check tool to ensure their grants would not be used to support terrorism.

Excel and Google Sheets: Most foundations conducted budget forecasting using Excel or Google Sheets. Frequently, program officers kept shadow budgets in spreadsheets as well.

How Do Foundations Select Their GMS?

A foundation's decision about what GMS to select and how to customize it was multidimensional. Foundations considered their technological needs but their decisions also hinged on a number of other factors, including recommendations from peers, cost, available technical support, staff structure, and the culture of the foundation. Their choice of GMS was not generally impacted by whether they made multi-year or single-year grants or if their applications were open or invite-only.

Technological Considerations

Need for Low Automation/Few Integrations

A number of foundations leveraged GMS with little automation and/or few integrations. For the Pierce Family Foundation and Stupski Foundation, their personalized approach to grantee relationships mitigated the need for heavily automated systems. Both foundations noted that the less their grantmaking processes relied on technology, the more room they had to build long-term, meaningful relationships with their grantees.

“Missed grantee reports are an opportunity (for the Program Officer) to reach out and work together with the grantee... There is a level of flexibility and uniqueness to each grant and there’s not a lot of structure (from the GMS) telling it to do something else. This creates individualized attention to different grantees.”

- Gwyneth Tripp, Grants Manager, Stupski Foundation

For other foundations, their GMS had little automation because of the flexibility of their application process. A number of foundations spoke of the fluid nature of each grant application, where program officers often tailored applications to the unique contexts of applicants. For Mark Houck, Grants & Impact Analyst at the Stoneleigh Foundation, this meant “striking a balance between creating a data infrastructure that works for the majority of grants and giving staff flexibility to dig deeper on individual projects.”

Andrew McFarland, Grants & Knowledge Manager for Tempest Advisors, noted how starting with a light, stripped-down system enabled his foundation to design and launch their GMS within three months. The benefits of a light and flexible system have become particularly evident amid Covid-19, where the foundation’s grantmaking priorities and data collection strategy had to quickly pivot to meet unforeseen needs related to the global pandemic: Andrew was able to easily modify the database to track new data related to the pandemic.

Need for Heavy Automation/Multiple Integrations

Other foundations relied on a highly automated GMS and/or multiple integrations. Often, these foundations managed a large volume of grants and multiple grant programs. They also had appropriate staffing resources to support and manage a complex system as well as buy-in from the grants team and other departments for advanced system automation and integrations.

Hewlett Foundation, which makes between 500-700 grants per year, is transitioning from disparate systems to Salesforce with a Community Portal to support their application and grantmaking process. Hewlett has an appetite for, and capacity to build, a complex and highly integrated system. Hewlett is using custom Salesforce approval processes and workflows to streamline their grants management processes and prospective grants pipeline, and has built custom features to track fund expenditures. Hewlett also uses a number of integrations, including Guidestar, an OFAC checker, and DocuSign.

As a counterpoint to Tempest Advisors, the Rogers Family Foundation was able to respond swiftly to needs that arose from COVID-19 in part because their GMS is highly sophisticated. The foundation, which is using foundationConnect with a Salesforce Community, heavily incorporates automation and integrations in their grantmaking processes. Their system helped them move from discussions with applicants, to grant approvals, to payment disbursements within 72 hours.

For the foundations we spoke to with significant automation and integrations, these tools were essential to the continued success of their grantmaking strategies.



Need to Manage both Inbound and Outbound Funds

Four foundations interviewed made grants and raised funds for grantmaking. While the complexity of their GMS varied, these foundations primarily handled grantmaking and fundraising in two different and un-connected systems. One system was designed for grantmaking, while the other system was designed for fundraising.

The Thierer Family Foundation was an exception: they adopted a Salesforce and OFM-based solution expressly because they sought to manage both inbound and outbound funds in one system.

Cost and Grant Volume

Cost and grant volume factored into foundations' GMS decision making process. Thierer Family Foundation forewent an online applicant portal and an integration with their Quickbooks solution because "we hate to spend money on some of these tools and then you don't use them that often. If we were taking in hundreds of applications, we'd pay for something," according to Heather Forsythe, who oversees grant management at the foundation.

Foundation Culture and Capacity

As foundations described how they selected and built their GMS, they frequently referenced change management and staff orientation towards change. Dana Wellhausen, the Senior Director of Strategic Operations at the Rogers Family Foundation, highlighted that adoption of new tools and technologies requires that the people who are ultimately responsible for using new technologies "have a say with how comfortable they are in replacing manual processes with automated processes and upskilling to meet their new technological needs."

Mark Houck at the Stoneleigh Foundation noted that one should be prepared to show demonstrable impact in the lives of the grant staff when considering new technologies: "If this [tool] cuts down on work, for example, the end-of-year board report, it could be a good tool to consider."

Available Technical Support

While some foundations preferred to build and customize their own GMS, for others, the access to technical support that comes with an off-the-shelf product was important.

Ann Puckett, IT Manager at the Grand Rapids Community Foundation, explained, "If no one owns it, then you're responsible. Who is going to help train me, who is going to support me? People get scared of that." Laura Jansen, Grants and Administrative Manager at the Pierce Family Foundation, noted that "free" products like Salesforce (which offers nonprofits up to 10 free licenses via its P10 program) are not really free because you "need to pay someone to set it up properly for you...and it's not terribly intuitive."

Foundations using fully configured products did speak to tradeoffs. It was occasionally frustrating to contact technical support for minor modifications. However, most foundations felt confident their needs would be met through their support contracts.

Peer Vetting

Many of the foundations that spoke to us highlighted the importance of GMS recommendations from peer organizations. Peer reviews perhaps held as much weight as their own technical assessment of a GMS product. To know other foundations were happy with a product was critical to purchasing or implementation decisions.

“It’s hard to know what you don’t know. To know [a product] is peer vetted is important... It is nice to know how long it took [to implement] and what implications it has for other parts of your work,” said Gwyneth Tripp, Grants Manager, Stupski Foundation.





Implications for Organizations Considering Outbound Funds Module for their GMS

The priorities, processes, and tools that foundations shared for how they select and build out their GMS helped shed light on which foundations might find an OFM-based solution to be a good fit.

OFM Technical Considerations

Among organizations we spoke to, there was no grantmaking process for which a Salesforce + OFM system couldn't be tailored to meet foundations' needs.

OFM is a highly customizable solution that can work for grantmakers of different sizes and types; from private and family foundations to community foundations to crowd-funding platforms to grantmaking nonprofits. OFM can be kept simple or scaled up to meet complex needs of grantmakers. And, organizations can take a modular approach to their solution, changing it over time as their processes and approach evolve.

Common tools as described in the section on Foundation Grant Management/Grant Making Systems and Tools can be integrated with Salesforce and work alongside OFM to support a single platform-approach to grant management.

However, a number of clear use cases for foundations that are particularly well-suited for a Salesforce + OFM solution arose. Foundations with the following needs should consider an OFM-based solution:

1. **Foundations that have highly customized grantmaking processes with the potential for these processes to change over time.** While many out-of-the-box products are easy to set up, they can be inflexible and costly to modify. If foundations need to tailor their processes in a unique way, OFM can support this. Examples of this might be:
 - a. Re-labeling fields or adding additional fields.
 - b. Adding and customizing automation. Because OFM is built on Salesforce, automation such as processes to approve disbursement requests or email alerts to users based on activity in the system can be easily configured.
 - c. Selecting best-in-class integrations that aren't available for off-the-shelf products.
 - d. Significant customization of application forms: while OFM itself is not an application tool, foundations can integrate and customize tools or platforms to manage application processes.
2. **Foundations that are managing both inbound and outbound funds.** Instead of managing grantmaking and fundraising in two separate systems, with OFM, foundations can manage grantmaking and fundraising in Salesforce.
3. **Foundations that have or need a CRM solution in addition to a GMS.** Instead of administering a CRM that supports relationship management outside the sphere of grantmaking separately from a GMS, foundations can build one solution for both business areas with Salesforce + OFM.
4. **Foundations using Salesforce Communities for their applicant portal should consider OFM if they are currently using the Opportunities object in their portal to manage grantees' requests for funds.** If the opportunity object is referenced in their applicant portal, it requires the use of Partner Community licenses. However, if an organization uses OFM, they can manage funding requests with a custom object that enables

them to use less expensive Community licensing. Foundations will need to create a strategy for a shift in data architecture-- namely, the use of opportunities to manage grantmaking, which will require changes to existing business processes and a data migration plan.

For a foundation that is accustomed to an out-of-the-box solution or for a grants manager without Salesforce experience, coordinating the moving parts of a platform-based GMS may seem overwhelming. **But we've heard that foundations that require customized integrations and automation are already supplementing their out-of-the-box solutions with additional tools and customizations.**

OFM Cost

OFM is a free tool but like any free Salesforce tool, there are costs associated with implementation. These include staff time dedicated to system management as well as user training, the cost of an implementation partner (if the foundation elects to leverage external support), and the cost of systems integrated to the GMS.

Conversely, out-of-the-box solutions also require an investment of time and resources and can quickly become expensive. When considering cost, foundations should assess their appetite for the flexibility of an OFM-based, modular approach vs. the one-size-fits-all, plug-and-play approach of other systems.

OFM & Foundation Culture and Capacity

Unlike a fully configured product, for which a foundation might need to adapt their processes to meet the constraints of the system, OFM can be customized according to a foundation's priorities and business processes. It's essential for those working in the system to build skills to use OFM and identify and prioritize opportunities to improve the solution over time. Those charged with using the system should have a seat at the table to make decisions about how to design and implement OFM.

OFM Technical Support

Some foundations that assessed OFM in the past were unsure of the technical support available. As OFM has evolved, so have technical support options:

1. Now that OFM is a Salesforce.org product, users will have access to push updates, official Salesforce support, and documentation within the Power of Us Hub Knowledge tab. Users can also pay for Salesforce premium support services.
2. Foundations can leverage Salesforce consulting firms to support them in their grantmaking data strategy, system implementation, and system troubleshooting.
3. Salesforce users can join the [Outbound Funds Module Group in the Power of Us Hub](#). Members can learn about best practices in customizing OFM directly from OFM creators, see how peers are leveraging the solution, and access community-supported troubleshooting.

For foundations integrating systems to OFM, many vendors offer their own robust technical support.

OFM Peer Vetting

OFM is still a relatively new option in the GMS space, so organizations pursuing an OFM-based solution are early adopters paving the way for others. These early adopters and the people who created OFM have formed a burgeoning learning community, whose primary venue for collaboration is a [group within Salesforce's online Power of Us Hub](#). Foundations interested in influencing the direction of OFM's development should consider becoming active in the OFM group as an early adopter or a potential adopter.

The OFM open-source community continues to nurture and improve OFM, and the solution now has the support and involvement of Salesforce, which speaks to its long-term durability. Foundations looking to implement a GMS that has widespread market adoption and extensive peer vetting should keep an eye on this community-- as it continues to grow, so will the volume of peer recommendations and reviews.

If a foundation is curious about OFM's fit for their foundation but seeks help to evaluate the feasibility of this solution, they can engage a consultant to assist with this assessment.



Conclusion

Organizations that expressed frustration with the rigidity of their existing systems or the difficulty of creating a custom system from scratch, an OFM-based GMS is a viable alternative. It provides a foundation for a tailored GMS that can be customized to varying degrees. And, for organizations that require substantial flexibility to adapt their technology for unique needs or anticipate frequent changes to their processes, an OFM-based solution is a very strong option, as it is designed to accommodate high levels of customization in ways that commercial-off-the-shelf products are not.

Foundations described the choice as “Buy vs. Build” -- they can buy an out-of-the box, fully-designed product that may not reflect their business processes and evolving needs, or they can use the OFM architecture to build to their processes. The latter option requires additional in-house resources to implement the solution and manage it on an ongoing basis. For foundations already using Salesforce, the barriers to adopting OFM are significantly decreased.

It seems the main barriers to adoption for organizations will be: (1) The effort of administering and training staff on a platform-based GMS like Salesforce + OFM, where different applications or tools are connected to a base system. (2) Limited peer vetting.

As it relates to (1): It's true that this approach requires a significant initial investment in strategy and, likely, training for the system's designated manager. However, we learned that most foundations were already customizing their GMS and integrating--or else using in parallel--additional systems in order to create a truly comprehensive solution tailored to their team's needs. As foundations weigh the costs and benefits of a GMS, the level of customization they require can help inform their selection.

As it relates to (2): The power of a peer's recommendation can't be discounted. Salesforce's online OFM community offers direct access to the solution's original creators and its current product team. Furthermore, this community continues to offer support on existing functionality while engaging users across foundations and nonprofits to inform OFM's continued development. Additionally, as more foundations adopt OFM-based systems over proprietary solutions or highly customized versions of off-the-shelf products, they will be leveraging a shared data model. A shared data model to track funding activity and impact can support the philanthropic sector in continuing to grow a common language for best practices and learnings on impact measurement, process improvement, and other areas of operation, enabling funders to meaningfully collaborate with peers well beyond the point of technology decision making.



Contributors

North Peak is deeply grateful for the time, energy, and expertise of the foundation staff who shared their insights with us.

1. AmFar: Kent Cozad, Director, Grants Administration and Compliance
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3. EQT Foundation: Ellen Rossi, President
4. Grand Rapids Community Foundation: Ann Puckett, IT Manager
5. Pierce Family Foundation: Heather D. Parish, Co-Executive Director; Laura Jansen, Grants and Administrative Manager; Marianne Philbin, Co-Executive Director
6. Ploughshares Fund: Cara Marie Wagner, Senior Program Officer; Lorely Bunoan; Grants and Technology Manager; Raul Araiza, Program Associate
7. Rogers Family Foundation: Dana Wellhausen; Senior Director of Strategic Operations; Bonnie Look, Grants & Program Operations Manager
8. Stoneleigh Foundation: Mark Houck, Grants & Impact Analyst
9. Stupski Foundation: Gwyneth Tripp, Grants Manager
10. Tempest Advisors: Andrew McFarland, Grants and Knowledge Manager
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| Appendix

Key Activities and Considerations for Implementing an OFM-Based GMS

The following section outlines the critical steps organizations must take to successfully implement an OFM-based solution, including important considerations that can impact the level of expertise and amount of time necessary to successfully manage the work.

System Implementation Activities	Considerations
User Discovery & System Design	<p>The level of complexity and amount of time a discovery requires typically depends on (1) Number of departments or teams that will be impacted by the solution; (2) Each team's current level of clarity and standardization in process.</p> <p>The discovery phase presents an opportunity to consider how existing processes might be modified or streamlined. Given that OFM is so flexible, foundations can optimize processes that may have been in place to conform to an out-of-the-box system.</p>
Salesforce Configuration	<p>Many organizations will be able to rely on point-and-click means to customize their systems. While this approach requires less technical expertise than coding, it does require a high level of Salesforce expertise.</p>
Custom Development	<p>Many organizations will require no custom development. Organizations with sophisticated or very unique needs may need to consider this.</p>
Third Party System / Application Set up	<p>See below for a list of third party systems and applications to consider.</p>
Security / Permissions	<p>Consider whether any data in your internal system needs to be hidden from particular users. Salesforce offers extensive options for protecting data based on the record, type of data, or user.</p>
Reports and Dashboards	<p>Salesforce offers a suite of basic reports. Organizations will need to configure reports to meet their needs and will need to create any dashboards for their users.</p>

Data Migration	Organizations will need to consider whether to migrate data from legacy systems or spreadsheets into Salesforce. Data cleaning and manipulation (in order to prep it for import to Salesforce) is the most time-consuming part of this effort, and while it doesn't require strong technical expertise, it does require meticulous attention to detail and a very strong knowledge of your data. Salesforce offers native tools for importing data, and there are options for third party tools as well.
QA	It's important that both your system administrator and your users participate in system review and testing, to ensure the solution is technically sound as well as user-friendly.
Ongoing Activities	
User Training	Organizations should plan to provide users with training leading up to system launch, covering every major workstream to be managed in the system. Organizations should also plan to offer ongoing training and support, including refresher sessions on specific processes.
Admin Training	Every organization will need someone responsible for actively managing the system, including setting up (or working with a partner to set up) the solution, training and supporting users, engaging in regular data cleaning, and managing a roadmap of enhancements. This person will need to dedicate time for ongoing learning and professional development in order to keep up with Salesforce and other system updates and best practices.

These are the major integration systems and applications organizations might need to include in a comprehensive GMS. Salesforce's [AppExchange](#) offers a ready market for these solutions, including the tools described by foundations in their interviews. Organizations should work with vendors and/or technology consultants to determine the level of complexity required to connect their systems to Salesforce.

Integrated Systems / Third Party Applications	Considerations
Grantee & reviewer portal integration	<p>Organizations should plan to connect Salesforce with their selected portal for grantees and reviewers.</p> <p>There are also many third party application portal and form tools integrate with Salesforce to provide this functionality. Salesforce Communities offers an option for Grantee portals that doesn't require integration to Salesforce. It needs to be designed based on your specific needs (rather than purchased as an off-the-shelf product), which can be labor-intensive; Salesforce offers templates to help simplify this effort.</p>

Personal email integration set up	Organizations can integrate Salesforce with Gmail and Outlook to automatically or selectively sync emails to applicants, grantees, and others.
Accounting System Integration	<p>If organizations plan to streamline processes for funding disbursements, it will likely be beneficial to integrate with your Accounting system to manage these.</p> <p>Salesforce's Accounting Subledger product offers templates for syncing data to many common accounting platforms.</p>
eSignature Tool	Organizations that use an e-signature service should consider integrating it with their system.
Validation Checking	Organizations can use applications or custom automation to support OFAC and 501c3 checks.
BI Tool	For many organizations, Salesforce (and possibly, applicant portal system) reporting offerings will be sufficient. However, if your organization is synthesizing data across multiple systems, a third party BI tool might be useful.
Email marketing platform	Organizations that plan to use data in their GMS to inform mass communication efforts should consider integrating their system with their email marketing platform.
Email and document generation, mail merge tool	Organizations can benefit from installing an application to support email and document generation and mail merge.
Data cleaning and management tool	Organizations can benefit from installing an application to support data management.