

# Grants management in TRIM Context

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## Introduction

Grants management is a technical, complex, and highly compliance-driven field. On both sides of the grantor/grantee fence, it is critical to ensure that mutual expectations are well understood and implemented, that performance targets are met and properly reported on, and that financial matters are documented in a comprehensive and accountable manner. In order for this to be possible, administrators must juggle large amounts of documentation covering every step in the process of the grant from application through performance to final closeout of the grant whilst complying with stringent process requirements and deadlines. Enterprise Content Management (ECM) suites such as TRIM Context 6 help to minimise the pain of dealing with these situations, minimising headache and ensuring that relations between the parties are not confused by information disjunctions.

## Grants management requirements

Monetary grants are both a blessing and a burden. Grants are an excellent means of promoting projects of public utility, but at the same time the use of public monies ensures that the highest levels of accountability must be observed by all parties. Granting organisations not surprisingly are concerned to ensure that the money they provide is used for the purposes for which it was granted, and that the projects are progressing at a satisfactory rate. Therefore, grant relationships are usually governed by a complex set of quasi-contractual and regulatory obligations, including regular progress reports, strict accountability mechanisms, and stringent auditing requirements. Moreover, granting organisations themselves are bound by regulations on records-keeping and accountability, and must also be able to find and manage information relating to thousands of grants, while at the same time dealing with large volumes of documentation and correspondence generated by accountability processes. Grantees must ensure that they retain all information which is relevant to their auditing and reporting obligations, comply with deadlines for submission, track both electronic and paper documents, and all assets acquired with grant monies. Thus grants management is an area which is heavily governed by compliance concerns with respect to document retention and management, process, and accountability.

TRIM Context 6 ensures that this labyrinthine process can be navigated with minimum fuss by providing tools to ease the process at every step. It can help administrators manage their documents and correspondence, produce customised documents from standard content, help them avoid missed deadlines, ensure that information critical to audit and reporting obligations are maintained, and even integrate with larger corporate or grants-management systems.

## Managing documents

As a fully-fledged enterprise content management system, TRIM Context provides tools to manage documents throughout their life-cycle, from creation in collaborative environments to destruction and the proper recording of the destruction. For grant applicants, this facilitates collaborative grant application writing through version control, ensures that important documents are kept in a central, organised, and searchable manner, and ensures that all documents are kept for as long as they are needed to comply with grant obligations. Strong support for classification and search helps to bring sanity to the large numbers of documents collected in the course of administering a grant - grant administrators can have one file for budgetary matters, one file for progress reports, one file for contractual documents, etc. Moreover, TRIM Context's support for full content indexing, search on document metadata and hit highlighting means that administrators can quickly identify documents relevant to particular issues. The net result is that administrators can track all of their documents, both physical and electronic, and maintain historical data on changes to them and their movements indefinitely.



## Reusing content

ECM systems excel at helping organisations to reuse content and avoid reduplication of effort. At the most basic level, this advantage arises from the ability to rapidly identify already existing relevant information within the system through strong classification and search functionality as discussed above. TRIM Context 6, however, goes one step further and provides integrated Document Assembly functionality. This allows the definition of standard content clauses and document blueprints which may be reused directly from within Microsoft Word. It also allows blueprints to draw on other metadata stored in the ECM to auto-fill parts of the document such as address, addressee, reference number, etc. This will be of immediate utility to grant-seekers entering standard descriptions of a project and its budget into numerous grant applications, and to grantors generating large amounts of standard correspondence for the hundreds of grants they administer. Thus, TRIM Context can allow administrators to ensure consistency and efficiency in the way they produce standard documents.

## Correspondence tracking

The processes of applying for grants and complying with progress reporting requirements generate a large amount of correspondence. TRIM Context can help preserve information about correspondence through the new Mail Communications Management functionality in TRIM Context 6. This allows reliable and comprehensive tracking of information related to communications based on a document or record within the system. Any one document may have multiple communications associated with it, and information such as historical addresses, courier reference numbers and salutations are all preserved perfectly. Thus if a grant applicant wished to track when and to whom a grant application document had been sent in order to see whether a potential grant had been missed or a reply was due, she would have all the information on communications including the document at her fingertips. Correspondence management can thus help to bring sanity and searchability to large volumes of correspondence.

## Action tracking and workflows

The heavy emphasis on compliance and accountability in the field of grants management means that grants administrators will often have deadlines to comply with, and all the more so if they administer more than one grant. TRIM Context helps administrators to ensure that they do not inadvertently transgress any critical procedural requirements through its action tracking and workflow tools. Workflow ensures that correct processes are followed according to the letter of the requirements of the particular grant. TRIM Context 6 allows the design of complex workflows, reflecting the real-world requirements of decision making processes, and includes support for Boolean branching, parallel workflows, and approval stages (with rollback if approval is not granted) within an intuitive graphical workflow design editor. Action tracking is much simpler than workflow, and simply ensures that e-mail alerts are produced when tasks become due, or overdue, ensuring that administrators do not forget to perform vital administrative tasks.

## Audit, reporting, and authenticity of records

Government grants almost invariably have stringent audit and reporting requirements. Grantees must be able to demonstrate that the grant has been performed as originally proposed, and in accordance with high standards of accountability and transparency. During the day-to-day course of administration of records, TRIM Context ensures the authenticity and reliability of the documents contained within the system in a number of ways. Firstly, strong and nuanced support for access control means that within a multi-user system, critical documents cannot be modified or deleted without sufficient privileges. Moreover, the system tracks any and all changes or deletions of documents and preserves metadata of destroyed documents, so there will always be a record of what a document was, when and by whom it was modified, and when it was destroyed.

## Integration

In recent years there have been moves in some areas to produce centralised clearing-houses for grants information. An excellent example is grants.gov, a US Federal government initiative intended to provide a central location for grantor and grantee organisations to communicate about grants. One of the most exciting aspects of this initiative is the open architecture for integration it implements - a web service, service-oriented architecture approach to sharing information. TRIM Context is ready to integrate with open systems like this through its new web service, the TRIM Connectivity Toolkit. As a standards-based web service, the Connectivity Toolkit allows integrators their choice of platform and programming language, allowing a bridge between the Connectivity Toolkit and services like the grants.gov web service to be constructed with minimum fuss, with industry standard tools. For services in which integration through the Connectivity Toolkit is inappropriate or in which a richer Windows-based GUI experience is desired, TRIM Context also provides a powerful COM SDK. This allows integrators on the Windows platform full access to the functionality and dataset of the TRIM Context system, and ensures the possibility of interoperability with a wide range of third-party systems. TRIM Context thus provides the tools administrators need to fully integrate their grants management into their other information system, proving that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

## Standards compliance

In a heavily regulated area such as grants management, compliance of technology solutions with well respected standards relevant to their field of competence is a must. TRIM Context 6 is certified compliant with a host of the most important and influential document and records management standards, including ISO 15489, the international standard for records management, Department of Defense records management directive DoD 5015.2 STD, and the UK National Archives records management standard. Customers should rest assured that TOWER Software will continue to strive to provide a high quality, standards compliant solution into the future.

## Conclusion

Grants management is a technical, complex, and highly compliance-driven field. TRIM Context 6 was designed from the ground up for just such situations. Not only can TRIM Context help grant administrators on both sides of the grantor/grantee fence administer their numerous documents in an organised and searchable manner, but it also provides numerous advantages in terms of the way administrators work. By managing all of the organisation's documents throughout their lifecycle, allowing information reuse, preserving communication metadata, facilitating good business process through workflows, and ensuring that stringent audit and authenticity requirements are met by the information repository, TRIM Context ensures that compliance and efficiency are easily achieved.

## About TOWER Software

TOWER Software, a leading enterprise content management (ECM) provider, delivers electronic document and records management (EDRM) solutions. TOWER Software's award-winning solutions empower organisations to manage and secure their vital information assets. The TRIM Context® solution is a single, integrated platform that manages business information throughout its complete lifecycle. By relying on its proven domain expertise, strong strategic partnerships, and powerful solutions, TOWER Software enables organisations to improve the accuracy of information on which business decisions are made; maximise efficiency by finding business critical information more quickly and easily; and achieve and maintain standards compliance across industries, resulting in sustained competitive advantage. TOWER Software is a privately held company with operations in North America, Europe and Asia Pacific.

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