

Vibrant Grants

An end-to-end grant workflow for community-driven nonprofit leaders

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Executive Summary

We collaborated with **New Sun Rising**, an organization in Pittsburgh, PA that helps non-profits to make it easier to find, apply for, and write outcome reports for grant opportunities. Our solution, Vibrant Grants, is an **end-to-end grant workflow** that leverages basic info about non-profit organizations to surface relevant opportunities, facilitates warm introductions between organizations to collaborate on proposals, and guides leaders through the process of gathering, analyzing, and leveraging data to improve their self-advocacy with grantors. **Vibrant Grants has been well received by NSR and its Clients alike and is currently slated for full implementation in the future.**

About the Partner

New Sun Rising is a **social enterprise incubator** that supports public benefit initiatives and their leaders throughout Greater Pittsburgh. In short, it's a Y-Combinator for non-profits.

NSR delivers on this mission through three main pillars:

Capacity Building

Getting from an idea to a fully developed organization

Accessible Funding

Raising the capital necessary to deliver impact

Data & Advocacy

Helping orgs leverage data to communicate their impact and value

The Opportunity

The recent political climate has made grants harder for NSR and its Clients to win, creating pressure to operate more efficiently. Our team was challenged to help by **augmenting NSR's digital service ecosystem**, which had grown into a fragmented set of tools, each built for a specific, emergent need. By aligning these offerings around a common purpose, we could help nonprofits accelerate their development, streamline operations, and maximize the benefit they deliver to their communities.

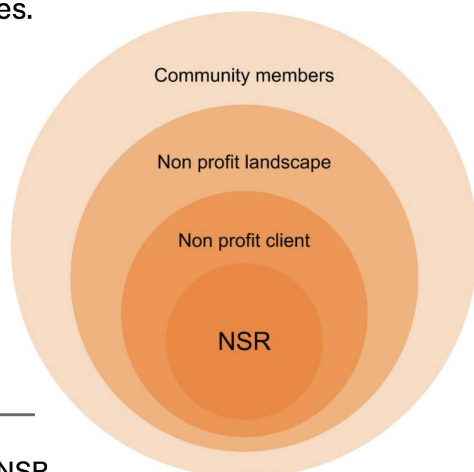


Fig. 1: Simplified ecosystem map of NSR

Approach - Over 7 Months

- 1 Building a foundation**
System mapping → Discover how services fit together
Directed storytelling → Align on envisioned solution
MoSCoW analysis → Prioritize features
- 2**
PESTLE analysis → Design in context with the market
...and more!
- 3 Seeking input & strengthening relationships**
Card sorting → Evaluate NSR service ecosystem
Usability testing → Understand existing NSR systems
- 4**
Semi-structured interviews → Hear lived experiences
Field work → Learn Clients' processes in real life
... and more!
- 5 Design & engineering**
Crazy 8s → Discover potential solutions
Divergent concept testing → Think outside the box
- 6**
Feasibility testing → Reality-check AI use cases
Iteration testing → Test the most promising features
Refining designs → Use feedback to continue iteration
- 7**
Usability testing → Hear from Clients and staff
Functional codebase → Built the hardest features out
... and, of course, more!

Key Insights

Non-profit leaders are community-oriented, not business-minded or data-driven.

Our interviews and field work showed that non-profit leaders are **exceptionally skilled at delivering impact, but less equipped to do all of the administrative work** that keeps their organizations running: data gathering, impact tracking, and grant finding. Cutting down on those tasks can save them time.

Grant finding, writing, and reporting are perceived as comprising a single, cohesive workflow.

We first saw grant work as three distinct phases: finding, applying, and reporting. But concept testing revealed leaders don't perceive those boundaries. To them, **grant work is divided not chronologically, but by specific grant opportunity**. So we designed a solution that treats grants themselves - not grant lifecycle phases - as the most atomic.

Finding relevant grant opportunities can be overwhelming and time-consuming.

Clients raised this in field work, and concept testing showed it was worse than we thought. The **grant ecosystem has no central database, no standardization**, and is full of listings that take a long time to read. Helping leaders surface relevant grants can also save them a lot of time.

Non-profits often avoid experimenting with new tools to manage risk.

Interviews showed that the uniqueness of each non-profit's work discourages them from trying new tools once they find one that's "good enough." That told us **our solution would need to deliver significant value with minimal setup** if we wanted Clients to actually use it.

Outcomes & Deliverables

We developed Vibrant Grants, an end-to-end grant workflow for community-driven non-profit leaders.

1. **A comprehensive front-end prototype** that both models Vibrant Grants and will help NSR kick-start a revamp of the design system they use throughout their existing digital service ecosystem.
2. **Fully-engineered implementations for the most complex and novel features, plus comprehensive in-code documentation of outstanding engineering work.** Given that time and money are quintessentially limited resources for non-profits like NSR, we recognized that minimizing the additional work they would have to do to get Vibrant Grants up and running would improve the odds of it getting deployed.
3. **Recommendations for future design work.** Our research and design efforts surfaced a vast array of potential improvements that could be made to the minimum viable product that we produced, many of which would streamline the user experience.

Impact

NSR and its Clients have told us that our solution will empower them to find relevant grant opportunities faster, leverage data and partnerships more effectively, and craft better grant applications and reports. They were also delighted by our commitment to remaining limited and transparent in our use of AI. **By spending less time on grant work and securing higher chances of success, NSR and its Clients stand to save lot of time** that can instead be spent on what matters most: supporting and improving their communities.

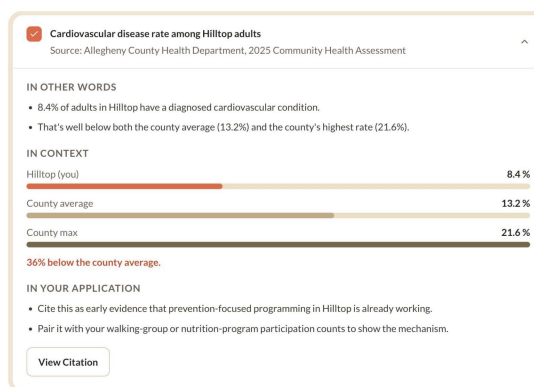


Fig. 2: Relevant data points surfaced that help Clients write and report on grants

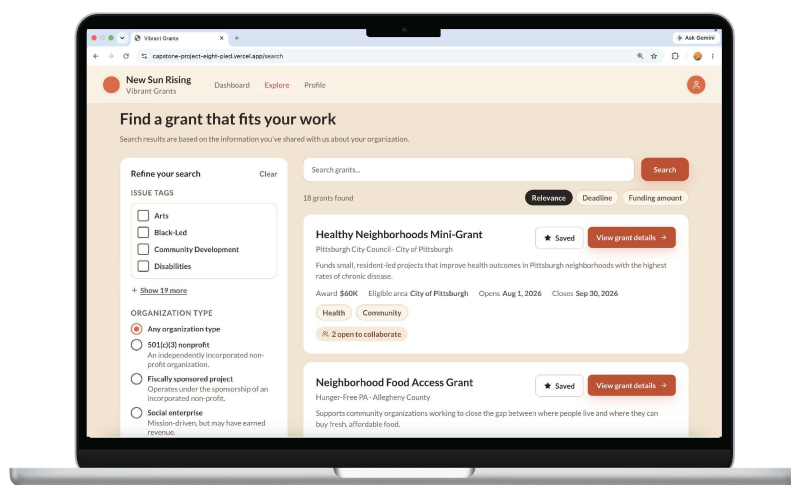


Fig. 3: The "Explore" page of Vibrant Grants, where Clients can discover relevant grants and filter grants according to their preferences