



# CLIENT STORY NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

## PROFILE

Type: Foundation

System: GIFTS

Modules: IGAM, ReviewerCONNECT

## National Geographic Society revs up their review process with ReviewerCONNECT™

The National Geographic Society recently brought their entire grants application and review procedures online using IGAM and ReviewerConnect, swapping a tedious, time-consuming review cycle for a remarkably smooth and manageable process.

### Background

Since 1890 the National Geographic Society's Committee for Research and Exploration has supported more than 7,500 projects and expeditions — including the excavation of Machu Picchu, the discovery of Titanic, and the work of Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey, and the Leakey family. The Committee continues to fund vital research, embodying the Society's 115-year-old mission: "to increase and diffuse geographic knowledge." After more than a century, the National Geographic Society today is propelled by new concerns: the alarming lack of geographic knowledge among our nation's young people and the pressing need to protect the planet's natural resources. As their mission grows in urgency and scope, the Society continues to develop new and exciting vehicles for broadening their reach and enhancing their legendary ability to bring the world to their millions of members.

Ultimately, the Committee's staff found themselves caught up in the day-to-day administration, with little time available to correspond with grantees and reviewers or to focus on the bigger picture of their grantmaking.

A MicroEdge GIFTS user since 1999, The Committee for Research and Exploration awards grants for scientific field research and exploration, funding projects that have both a geographical dimension and relevance to other scientific fields, with a broad scientific interest. This committee awards approximately 250 grants per year to individual researchers all over the world.

### The Challenge

The Committee for Research and Exploration receives approximately 900 grant applications each year, and their review process is quite extensive. When a potential grantee applies for funding, they must also list three other researchers in their field that can evaluate the proposal. These three researchers, plus additional reviewers selected and utilized by the Committee — as many as nine reviewers overall — are then asked to review the proposal and provide feedback during the review process.

Before implementing the MicroEdge Solution, when an application was received it had to be entered into the system manually, including the names and addresses of all recommended reviewers. Then, each reviewer was sent a copy of the proposal by email, a time-consuming and tedious process from an administrative perspective. Additionally, all responses — from the initial application through the review feedback — often had to be manually entered as well. For a small staff of seven, the administrative burden was tremendous.



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Further complicating the Committee's prior review process was the fact that there was no simple, convenient way to organize, track, manage and communicate with their pool of reviewers. The existing process required staff members to look up each application individually in order to locate outstanding reviews or to contact a reviewer, an impossible task given the number of applications they handle and the highly dispersed nature of their reviewer pool. Ultimately, the Committee's staff found themselves caught up in the day-to-day administration, with little time available to correspond with grantees and reviewers or to focus on the bigger picture of their grantmaking.

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### The Approach

The National Geographic Society recognized that a shift to online submissions would ease their application process, but they also required a solution to help them communicate with their vast pool of reviewers and to tackle the formidable task of managing such a far-reaching review process. The Committee looked at many different options – existing solutions from grants management technology vendors, building an in-house solution, or even the possibility of having a custom solution developed. After extensively researching their options, The National Geographic Society decided to bring their application and review processes online and they embarked upon a joint development project with MicroEdge. Through a combined effort, they collaborated closely on the features and functionality. The resulting solution tied these two aspects of their operations together through technology to create a seamless, efficient and considerably more cohesive process. And best of all, it could be used to help other organizations as well.

### The MicroEdge Solution

National Geographic Society now has an entirely online application and review system using MicroEdge's IGAM Internet Grant Application Module and ReviewerConnect. Through this revolutionary implementation, they have significantly improved the efficiency and effectiveness of their intricate review process, meeting all of the goals they originally set out to meet.

### Streamlined Application Process – IGAM

With the IGAM Internet Grant Application Module, a potential grantee – located anywhere in the world – fills out the online form, including a section that requires them to provide three research contacts that can back their proposal. National Geographic Society brings the application data along with the review contacts directly into GIFTS and automatically creates reviews for the experts provided. The full review cycle is then handled entirely through the ReviewerConnect interface, including all contact with both internal and external reviewers.

### Comprehensive Online Review Process – ReviewerCONNECT

Using a standard Web browser, reviewers can access and review grants assigned to them via their own personalized Web account. Furthermore, Committee members and resident experts within National Geographic Society often use ReviewerConnect to evaluate and offer feedback, serving as additional reviewers in the process. This seamless and fully electronic process using the Internet greatly streamlines and shortens the review cycle, enabling reviewer feedback to be instantly available for analysis.

### Enhanced Communication – GIFTS, IGAM, ReviewerCONNECT

So far, over 4,500 reviews have been processed with ReviewerConnect, and it has been a very smooth transition. "We've improved our reviewer response rate dramatically," says Theresa Kelley Minogue, Program Officer and Database Manager for the Committee for Research and Exploration at the National Geographic Society. "Either we hear from the reviewer ASAP that they cannot review the proposal, or in most cases, we receive the actual review feedback very quickly." Additionally, the system automatically calculates total scores for proposals, so the Committee can identify top proposals at a glance.

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Today, evaluations submitted online are instantly recorded to and available in GIFTS, so the Committee saves valuable time gathering and tracking feedback and processing review paperwork. And in only two minutes, staff members can find all of the reviews that haven't yet been completed and send out a reminder. Where it was previously an unfeasible task to identify outstanding reviews, staff members can now easily communicate with their reviewers. This gives the National Geographic Society's staff more time to work on their outreach programs. "We save about 1,400 hours per year with ReviewerConnect. Our people are happier, as we're able to spend that time to better communicate the efforts of our grants to different arms of the National Geographic Society, and to the public at large."

MicroEdge Solutions has helped National Geographic reach the goals of their organization, both online and offline; because so much of their work has moved on-line, ReviewerConnect has helped the National Geographic Society make a significant contribution to conservation by saving more than 60,000 pieces of paper per year.

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### Future Plans

The success of ReviewerConnect and IGAM has prompted the National Geographic Society to extend the system to two other grant programs, where they will undoubtedly reap similar results. To sum it up nicely, Theresa reveals, "Every day, it seems like we're coming up with a new way or a new reason to use ReviewerConnect."

**ReviewerConnect has helped the National Geographic Society make a significant contribution to conservation by saving more than 60,000 pieces of paper per year.**

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