

Three emergency relief programs. Nearly 4,000 businesses. One Quickbase platform.

How Watkyn helped Philadelphia turn urgent public relief programs into a lasting economic-development platform.

Client: The City of Philadelphia, Office of the Director of Commerce / Department of Commerce, with the Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation (PIDC) · **Sector:** Municipal government · **Engagement:** Six years, 2020–2026 · **Platform:** Quickbase, with Formstack intake, Quickbase Pipelines, document and e-signature workflows, and PIDC payment-system routing

Summary

When Philadelphia needed to stand up emergency small-business relief in March 2020, the Department of Commerce and PIDC needed more than an online form. They needed controlled intake, eligibility review, scoring, decision routing, applicant communications, document generation, and disbursement routing, all under public scrutiny and on a timeline measured in days. Watkyn built the Quickbase applications that carried that work. As additional relief programs followed, each with its own rules, Watkyn built each as its own application on the same platform pattern, then connected the relief work to Commerce Central, the Department's system of record. From 2020 through 2026, the relationship continued without interruption and the engagement grew from emergency response into a multi-program operating platform for the Department's economic-development work: a sustained public-sector engagement measured in years, not months.

Why this was a serious software problem

This was not a simple application form. The platform had to support high-volume intake, eligibility screening, tax-compliance handling, weighted scoring, role-based review, committee decision-making, applicant communications, document generation, partner disbursement routing, and public reporting. Each relief program had different rules. But the City needed the same thing every time: a controlled process that could move quickly and survive scrutiny.

The problem

In March 2020, as the pandemic forced Philadelphia to restrict business activity, the City and PIDC moved to establish the COVID-19 Small Business Relief Fund, one of the first local relief funds in the nation. Administering it meant screening thousands of applicants for eligibility, evaluating each against weighted scoring criteria, routing applications through several layers of review, keeping applicants informed, and preparing grant and loan documents for disbursement, all at high volume, under public scrutiny, and on a timeline measured in days. Without a purpose-built system, a relief effort of that scale risked being overwhelmed by volume, inconsistency, and delay at exactly the moment speed mattered most.

The Department also faced a longer-standing challenge beneath the emergency. It operates through multiple offices, among them Workforce Development, Neighborhood Economic Development, Economic Opportunity, and Finance and Administration, each interacting with many of the same businesses across the city, with no shared system tying those interactions together. Addressing that would have to wait until the immediate crisis was under control.

What Watkyn built

The Small Business Relief Fund system. Watkyn built the relief-administration application on Quickbase — chosen deliberately, because in an emergency, speed and reliability mattered more than bespoke architecture. It carried every application through a complete, auditable lifecycle: eligibility screening, substantive evaluation against weighted scoring criteria, and final review by a decision committee of economic-development leaders, with role-based access controls so each team saw exactly what its stage required.

Fast facts from the public record

COVID-19 Small Business Relief Fund:

- 7,232 applications
- 6,112 eligible applicants
- 2,083 approvals
- \$13.3M awarded
- first funds disbursed April 10, 2020
- more than 90% disbursed by the end of May.

Restaurant & Gym Relief Program:

- 914 businesses awarded
- \$12.1M awarded
- \$13,200 average award.

Philadelphia CHIRP (hospitality-industry relief):

- 1,161 applications
- 981 businesses selected
- over \$17M in grants (Philadelphia's allocation of a statewide program).

Public-record scale across three programs:

- 3,978 awards and selections across three relief programs
- more than \$42M in public relief awards · one Quickbase-based program platform.

"This partnership was instrumental in helping us distribute resources to small businesses quickly and efficiently in a time of great need."

— Libby Peters, Senior Director of Policy and Operations, Philadelphia Department of Commerce

More relief programs, each built fast. As the City followed with additional relief efforts, the Restaurant & Gym Relief Program and Philadelphia's allocation of the statewide COVID-19 Hospitality Industry Recovery Program (CHIRP), Watkyn built each as its own application, sized to its own rules. On Quickbase, standing up a new purpose-built program this way was quick, which is much of the point: the platform let Watkyn deliver several distinct, fully featured relief programs under repeated public-program deadlines, without forcing one program's rules into another program's workflow.

Integrated intake and automated data flow. Applicants applied through online intake forms integrated with the platform, so submissions flowed straight into the review workflow without re-keying. Automated pipelines moved data between intake, the program applications, and PIDC's payment systems; document generation and electronic signature were built in where programs needed them. The result was an integrated system, not a set of disconnected forms, giving a high-volume public program the controlled data flow it depends on.

Real-time reporting and dashboards. Live dashboards gave Department leadership and PIDC an up-to-the-minute view of each effort: applications received, approval rates, and breakdowns by industry, demographics, and city council district, so administrators could monitor progress and respond to emerging patterns as they happened.

Automated applicant communications and document routing. The applications sent status notifications automatically as applications moved through review, keeping business owners informed without staff having to field a constant stream of inquiries. For approved applications, the system prepared preliminary grant and loan documents and routed them to PIDC for disbursement, removing a manual step that would otherwise have slowed the most consequential part of the process.

Commerce Central: a department-wide system of record. Once the emergency eased, Watkyn built Commerce Central, the department-wide system of record the City had originally engaged the firm to create. It gave every office one reliable view of the city's businesses. Over the following years, Watkyn built applications that connected to it and fed it, so staff in any office could see a business's full history of participation across every program, including:

storefront improvement · commercial-corridor cleaning · business security-camera reimbursement · hospitality relief · forgivable small-business loans · citywide tax relief · workforce and HR programs · customer-service case management · event management · contracts · payment workflows

Program outcomes on the public record

The outcomes below belong to the City of Philadelphia, PIDC, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and their funding partners. Watkyn's role was the system that carried every application from intake through review, scoring, decision, and disbursement routing. The figures are drawn from published City and PIDC reports and announcements.

COVID-19 Small Business Relief Fund. One of the first local relief funds in the nation, with applications opening March 23, 2020, one week after the City restricted non-essential business activity. The Fund received 7,232 applications requesting over \$146 million; 6,112 applicants were eligible, and every application was individually reviewed and scored. \$13.3 million in grants and zero-interest loans was awarded to 2,083 small businesses, with first funds disbursed April 10 and more than 90% of funds disbursed by the end of May. On average, applicants received a decision within 17 business days, and the typical time from decision to disbursement was 7 days.

Source: [City of Philadelphia initial findings report, June 2020](#)

COVID-19 Restaurant & Gym Relief Program. The City's impact report documents \$12.1 million awarded to 914 restaurants, gyms, and indoor-exercise businesses, at an average award of \$13,200, a second relief program built as its own application to fit its own rules.

Source: [City of Philadelphia Restaurant & Gym Relief Program impact report](#)

Philadelphia COVID-19 Hospitality Industry Recovery Program (CHIRP). Philadelphia's allocation of a statewide Pennsylvania program: from 1,161 applications, 981 hospitality businesses were selected to receive over \$17 million in grants, a third relief program run on the same platform and built as its own application.

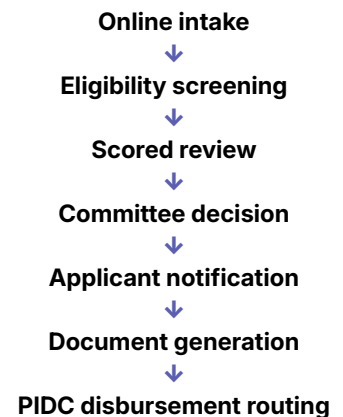
Source: [City & PIDC CHIRP awards announcement](#)

Environment and integration pattern

- Quickbase
- Formstack intake
- Quickbase Pipelines
- PIDC payment-system routing
- automated document generation
- electronic-signature workflows
- Outlook and SharePoint integration
- department-wide business records in Commerce Central

How an application moved through the platform

Every relief application followed one controlled, auditable path — the kind of documented process public programs must be able to defend:



Later, once Commerce Central was in place, each program's participation record was connected to it, so a business's involvement in relief became part of its full history with the Department.



The City's and PIDC's reports also documented each program's reach across neighborhoods, industries, and applicant demographics, the reporting that gave Commerce and PIDC the accountability record a public program requires.

What this proves

This engagement shows that Watkyn can take a complex public program from urgent need to working system under real pressure; stand up multiple distinct programs quickly when requirements differ; build role-based, auditable review workflows; integrate intake, program applications, and partner payment systems into one controlled data flow; and, when the pressure lifts, deliver the durable system of record that ties it all together, then sustain and grow it across a six-year relationship. It is also a proof case for Quickbase as a serious public-sector operational platform in experienced hands, capable of running high-volume, high-scrutiny programs, not just simple internal tools.

Relevant past-performance categories

- **Grant and loan administration**
- **economic-development programs**
- **high-volume public intake**
- **eligibility and scoring workflows**
- **multi-stage review**
- **dashboards and public reporting**
- **document generation**
- **payment routing**
- **Quickbase modernization**
- **department-wide system of record**

Use this pattern when you need to

- Launch a new grant, loan, or relief program quickly.
- Replace spreadsheets and email with auditable review workflows.
- Give leadership real-time dashboards across applications, awards, geography, and demographics.
- Connect public intake forms to internal review, documents, signatures, and payment routing.
- Maintain a single record of each constituent, business, applicant, vendor, or participant across multiple programs.

The pattern fits municipal departments, state agencies, and public authorities; higher education institutions; nonprofits managing grant programs; and any agency evaluating Quickbase for multi-program operations.

Need to launch or modernize a public-program system?

Watkyn builds Quickbase and custom software platforms for agencies that need controlled intake, eligibility review, scoring, approvals, reporting, document generation, payment routing, and long-term support. Tell us what you're administering, replacing, or trying to launch.

Talk to us about your program system

Watkyn acknowledges The City of Philadelphia and its Office of the Director of Commerce in connection with the activities described in this case study. Program outcomes described here belong to the City of Philadelphia, PIDC, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and their funding partners.

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In the client's words

"Watkyn built a great solution to a complex issue for us on Quickbase. They moved quickly to help us launch this program under a challenging timeline, and supported us throughout the implementation. This partnership was instrumental in helping us distribute resources to small businesses quickly and efficiently in a time of great need. This experience has opened up our eyes to the possibilities of Quickbase and Watkyn will continue to be a key partner moving forward."

— Libby Peters, Senior
Director of Policy and
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