

# Best Databases for River and Watershed Groups, 2015-2016

(from the LeadGreen Survey of Databases for River and Watershed Groups.

n = 97 responses since May 2014)

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## Key Findings

### Move to online databases

The great majority of the responding groups have moved to online databases, for which they pay between \$500 and \$18,000 a year. Almost all judge their databases to be worth the cost.<sup>1</sup>

Those still relying on spreadsheets (Excel), Access, or databases installed on their own computers (FileMaker, Giftworks) are less satisfied.

### No database is considered easy. The best come with support.

The more powerful the databases are, the more complex. The sorest spot for respondents was generating reports. The most satisfied organizations have IT-savvy staffers who use their databases often, control the quality of data going in, and manage the reports. Aside from large organizations with their own IT departments, respondents best like databases that provide phone support (DonorPerfect, Salsa, WaterGrass<sup>2</sup>).

### Slow movement toward a single, integrated database.

Organizations are moving slowly to integrate all their fundraising and volunteering in one database. About half of the respondents allow people to sign up for programs online but most get the list as a spreadsheet they have to enter into the database manually (if ever). Almost all take online payments, but once again, most have to enter them into their database manually. Only one respondent had integrated their database with their accounting system.

The organizations that *do* have integrated signups and payments say that the integration helps fundraising and makes it possible to handle more people and manage bigger events. They also trust their data more and do more with it.

Some organizations are integrating program information into databases as well, which allows them to track results in real time and improve outreach. They use the more customizable client-relationship-management systems (CRMS) - Salesforce, WaterGrass, and CiviCRM.

### New option for small groups

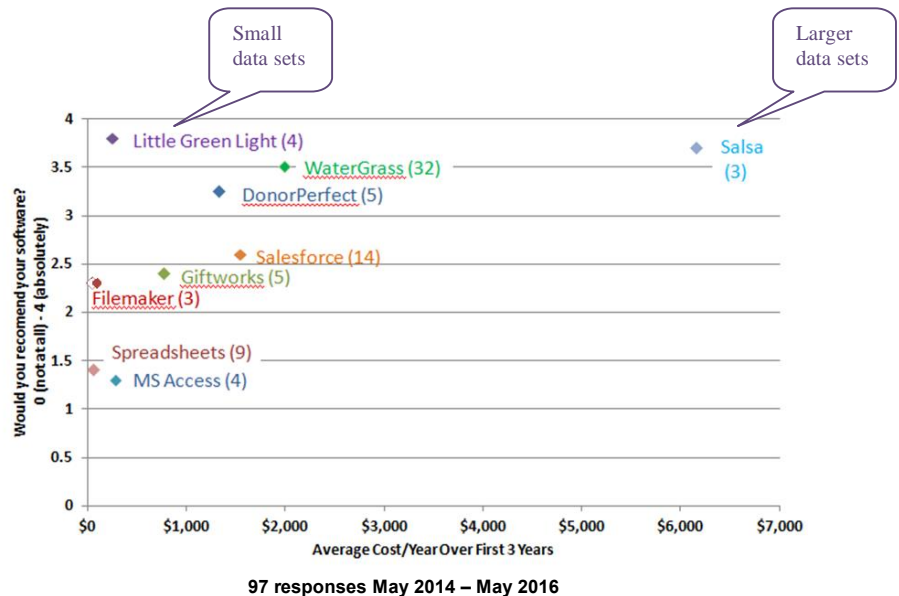
Little Green Light is an inexpensive basic system that also takes online donations and signups. It's recommended by the four small organizations using it.

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<sup>1</sup> The organizations which pay the most are the ones using databases services like Salsa that charge by the size of their contact list. In the most expensive case that list has nearly 100,000 contacts, which are the basis of the group's considerable advocacy clout. The group judges the database worth its cost.

<sup>2</sup> WaterGrass is a product of LeadGreen. WaterGrass clients do the Survey annually, so our sample tends to have a higher percentage of WaterGrass than we would encounter in a random sample of river and watershed groups.

A graph of the databases which had more than three responses. Databases with lower annualized costs are farther left, higher costs on the right. Lower average recommendations are lower on the graph. For example, Little Green Light is a highly recommended, inexpensive online database for small groups with few contacts.



### Salesforce databases are now the most common, though not the easiest.

Previously the most common database among river and watershed groups was Microsoft Access. Now it's Salesforce, a very powerful CRMS offered free to nonprofits. Salesforce can integrate with the most common email, advocacy, event and accounting software, often at reasonable prices. But the Salesforce platform itself is complex and requires customization. The most satisfied users are larger organizations with IT staff, or groups with access to external support. Organizations without IT staff or support are usually frustrated.

The most highly rated of the Salesforce customizations is WaterGrass, designed for river and watershed groups. It comes with support, and gets good ratings across a broad range of groups (large to mid-size). Like Salesforce, it integrates with many services and can be extensively customized. Like Salesforce, some users find it unintuitive.

### Other recommendations

Other databases which were recommended by their users but had fewer than 3 responses were: eTapestry, Kindful, ROI, NationBuilder, and CiviCRM.

### Integration with email

Only organizations with CRMSs (Salesforce, Salsa, WaterGrass, CiviCRM) can pull their bulk email response data back into the database where they can analyze it to improve their outreach. Almost all organizations use some sort of e-mail provider. The most common are Vertical Response, MailChimp, and Constant Contact.

### Integration with advocacy

The Salsa database allows organizations to build advocacy campaigns which direct constituents right to their elected representatives. Recently, similar online advocacy tools have appeared which integrate with Salesforce or KnowWho, CQRC Engage, and Action Network are driving down the cost of this kind of service, previously too expensive for most river and watershed groups to consider.

## Features

	Includes Support	Email Service Integration	Online Payment	Integrated Event Signup	Volunteer Management	Integrated Petitions & Advocacy	Automatic Watersheds & Sub-watersheds	CRMS (built to track relationships)	Price rises with number of contacts
Donor Perfect Online	\$	X	X	\$	\$				!
Filemaker									
Giftworks	X	X	X	\$	\$				!
Little Green Light	x	X	X		X			X	!
Microsoft Access									
Salesforce		X	\$		X	\$		X	
Salsa	X	X	X	\$	\$	\$			!
Spreadsheets (Excel)									
WaterGrass	X	X	\$	\$	X	\$	X	X	

**Includes Support** - Most highly-rated packages include phone support. Little Green Light provides limited phone support; Donor Perfect charges for support plans.

**Email Integration** ó Generates an email list that goes into an email provider like Vertical Response or Mail Chimp, where you can track the response rate. The most robust of these (Salesforce, WaterGrass) pull the open and click-through data back into the database itself so you can use that information to target your next mailing.

**Online Payment** ó Accept payments from online forms, typically charging from 3-5% of the transaction. The best (and most complicated) match the donation to the donor, the donation type, and the fundraising campaign. Some simply return an Excel spreadsheet of donations, which have to be entered manually.

**Integrated Event Signup** ó Allows participants to sign up for your events online, and their registration goes back into the database. The best match to the person, the type of event, and the fundraising campaign. Some are suited to large events, with tickets, tables, etc.

**Volunteer Management** ó Allows you to track volunteer hours and tasks. The best help organizers manage events by letting volunteers register online, tracking their attendance, and speeding the processing of volunteer hours and tasks.

**Integrated Petitions and Advocacy** ó Allows you to post a petition or publicize a campaign which people can sign up for online. The data goes into the database, and web visitors are directed to call or email their representative, complete with suggested language. Salsa was built for this; Salesforce and WaterGrass can integrate with Salsa and other online advocacy services.

**Automatic Watersheds and Subwatersheds** ó Populates watershed, subwatershed, and HUC-12 code from the mailing address, which is useful for targeting outreach.

**CRMS** – Customer Relationship Management Systems are flexible systems built to track your work with individuals over time. Most non-CRMS databases were originally created for one purpose ó advocacy (Salsa) or fundraising (Giftworks, Donor Perfect, eTapestry). They tend to do those particular things well but be less flexible. The Salesforce databases are more customizable, and can be configured to handle everything from water quality data to citizen complaints to volunteer management.

**Price Rises with Number of Contacts** ó Some products charge by the number of contacts you have in the database. In general, the increased charge is worth it, because larger lists give you better fundraising and more influence. But some cost-conscious groups limit the number of people they track just to avoid higher fees, which works against the point of a database. The number of contacts can rise quickly if you do good outreach, so you should choose a database that has a price structure you're comfortable with as you grow.

