

Funding Beyond Federal: BrainWaves Consulting's Atom Story

Overview

A One-Person Firm, A High-Stakes Portfolio

BrainWaves Consulting is a solo grant practice based in San Francisco. Founder Melanie Das, PhD, a biomedical scientist turned funding strategist, helps research-driven startups find, write, and submit grants and raise non-dilutive capital.

These companies do serious research but lack the infrastructure a university takes for granted — no sponsored research office, no team to handle registrations, no pipeline of opportunities. Melanie is all of that for them at once, and to date she has helped clients secure more than \$20 million in grant funding.

*“If federal funds are paused or terminated, the cost of not looking at non-federal funding can **completely stop a company in its tracks. It can make or break an institution.**”*



Melanie Das, PhD
Founder, BrainWaves Consulting

The Challenge: When Federal Funding Froze

Melanie's first weeks on Atom lined up with a change in the federal administration and a wave of restrictions across research funding. The most important consequence for her clients was specific: the small-business grants they relied on were paused. The companies that leaned on those workhorse grants were suddenly left high and dry.

- Small-business grants — her clients' workhorse — paused for months
- Few grants that for-profits actually qualify for
- No single database for foundation grants aimed at research
- Other foundation tools weren't a strong fit for research groups

The Solution: Semantic, Research-First Discovery

After working through grants.gov, Pivot, and other foundation-focused tools, Melanie chose Atom for two reasons: it was easy enough to train a team on, and its semantic search matched the way research actually works.

*“If I could imagine a software for finding grants, **this is exactly how I would want it to look.**”*



Melanie Das, PhD
Founder, BrainWaves Consulting

Why Atom worked for BrainWaves:

- **Semantic search:** describe the full complexity of a program instead of ticking a category box
- **“Why it's a great fit”** on every result — strategy she can hand straight to a client
- **Weekly newsletters** that track what's open versus still forecasted, saving hours of manual checking
- **Eligibility match + chat** grounded in the actual RFP, so screening takes seconds instead of 30 pages

Real Impact: Diversifying Every Client's Funding

When small-business grants paused, Atom's deep research surfaced foundation opportunities her clients had never heard of — good-fit ones she could forward within minutes of building a profile. For research-focused for-profits, almost nobody else had been able to surface that funding.

“One of my clients said, ‘Oh my God, I had never even heard of these opportunities. I don't know how you find them.’”



Melanie Das, PhD
Founder, BrainWaves Consulting

The Results

- **Grants written per client tripled**, lifting the ceiling that scarce opportunities had put on the business
- **Every client now diversified** into foundation funding alongside federal grants
- **Hours saved each week** from automated tracking of forecasted and open solicitations
- **Meeting-ready RFP checklists** built in minutes, grounded in the real solicitation — no hallucination

What Melanie Tells Other Grant Teams

*“Semantic AI is the future. Using a program like Atom gives us a **hidden competitive advantage** — it lets us jump ahead, find grants, and pounce on them.”*



Melanie Das, PhD
Founder, BrainWaves Consulting

Key Takeaways

- Diversify funding before you're forced to — concentration is a single point of failure.
- Semantic search surfaces good-fit opportunities that checkbox categories miss.
- Grounding AI in the real RFP turns discovery into trustworthy, meeting-ready prep.
- A team of one can punch far above its weight with the right discovery engine.

Interested in learning how Atom Grants can transform grant discovery at your organization? Contact us to schedule a personalized demonstration.