



CASE STUDY · HEALTH SYSTEM RESEARCH

How Denver Health Grew Grant Engagement **800%** with Atom Grants

OVERVIEW

Denver Health, one of the nation's largest safety-net health systems, had an expensive grant discovery tool its researchers had quietly stopped using — just 13 active investigators across a research community in the hundreds. After switching to Atom, close to a thousand researchers are now set up on the platform, grant email clicks have risen 800%, and the number of opportunities researchers view has quadrupled, with foundation funding surfacing alongside the usual federal grants. The platform's reach now extends well past discovery into proposal development, where the grants team uses it to build sponsor checklists, draft budget justifications, and raise the quality of what Denver Health submits.

INTERVIEWED FOR THIS CASE STUDY



Amanda Breeden, CRA
Associate Chief of Research



Sarah Haley
Grants Manager



Kim Findley
Project Manager, Public
Health Institute



Laura Podewils
Associate Director, Learning
Health Systems & Evaluation

The Challenge

Denver Health's research community spans hundreds of investigators across a central Office of Research and a Public Health Institute, with no dedicated research-development department to push adoption of new tools. The system had paid for a well-known discovery platform, but almost no one was using it.

“We previously used a competitive product, but had a real challenge with uptake.”



Amanda Breeden, CRA
Associate Chief of Research

Several obstacles stood in the way:

- A keyword discovery tool that surfaced non-applicable opportunities
- Only about 13 investigators active on the old system
- Frustration and low buy-in across research teams
- Forecasted grants that meant constantly re-checking agency sites
- Manual searching that leaned on federal funding, or returned irrelevant results

Why Atom?

With no dedicated research-development department, the team needed a platform that would earn adoption on its own. The decision came down to three things, and a fourth that has grown in importance since.

1. Intuitive User Experience

The platform's low barrier to entry was decisive. Researchers could be enrolled and productive in seconds, and the weekly email did the work of getting them back in.

“Anyone considering an alternative to what they have — this is the lowest-barrier platform for investigators I've seen on the market.”



Amanda Breeden, CRA
Associate Chief of Research

2. Personalized, Research-First Discovery

Instead of a portal to search, each researcher gets a weekly readout matched to their interests — set per division, so clinical care, community engagement, and systems-change work all get surfaced, not just traditional research.

“I’ve entered a research interest for every division I work with — HIV, hepatitis, community engagement, testing, outreach, training — and grants pop up that are a good fit for each one.”



Kim Findley
Project Manager, Public Health Institute

3. Forecast Tracking That Never Misses a Deadline

Many opportunities are forecasted long before the real solicitation drops. Atom watches the calendar so the team doesn't have to, flagging the moment a favored grant changes status.

“I keep a favorited list of forecasted opportunities, and when the status changes I get a notification. Now I know I can share it and apply — instead of finding out a grant is due in a week.”



Kim Findley
Project Manager, Public Health Institute

4. Support That Carries Past Discovery

Atom's usefulness did not stop once a researcher found the right opportunity. For Sarah Haley's team of six grant analysts, the platform works on the submission side too — building checklists straight from the solicitation, answering questions against sponsor requirements, and drafting budget justifications and templates researchers can start from. That reach past discovery turned Atom into a tool for the grants office, not only for investigators, and it is where the team sees the most room to grow.

Implementation Process

Denver Health's research community leans cautious about new tools, so the team took a measured approach:

1. **Pilot first:** Amanda used herself as the guinea pig and applied for two grants through the platform
2. **Gradual rollout:** two to three months to fully implement across a change-cautious community
3. **Back-end onboarding:** researchers added in 30 seconds, turning a hallway conversation into an active user

Value showed up well before full adoption. Once seasoned investigators realized the weekly email was not spam but something they could actually act on, they dug in within the first two to three weeks.

*"I can be on a call with someone, add them on the back end, and **30 seconds later** their research interests are there and they have an email in their inbox."*



Amanda Breeden, CRA
Associate Chief of Research

Results & Impact

Dramatic Increase in Engagement

Because the matches land close to each person's real interests, the once-ignored weekly email became something researchers open and act on.

*"Based on the last six months, we've had about an **800% increase in email clicks** — almost 400 in April alone, which is incredible for such a small organization."*



Amanda Breeden, CRA
Associate Chief of Research

By the Numbers

13 → 1,000

Researchers set up on the platform

800%

Increase in grant email clicks

4x

More opportunities viewed per researcher

More questions are also being asked directly in the platform — a behavior that did not exist on the old system at all.

Funding Beyond the Federal Government

Early on, nearly every recommendation was federal and forecasted, with long turnarounds. Over time, more foundation funding has surfaced — options a public-health team can't always wait on a federal cycle to get.

“Now I’m seeing more foundation grants come in, like the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Gilead. Those are really helpful, because the federal ones can take a long time.”



Kim Findley

Project Manager, Public Health Institute

What It Changed Day to Day

For the people doing the searching, Atom quietly became the only place they look. The comprehensiveness of the matches removed the reflex to double-check three other sources.

“I now only rely on Atom for searching, because I haven't identified a need to go anywhere else.”



Laura Podewils

Associate Director, Learning Health Systems & Evaluation

Proposal Development

Discovery is only half of how Denver Health uses Atom. Once an opportunity is in front of a researcher, Sarah Haley's team of six grant analysts has to turn it into a submission, and that is where the platform has changed the work. For a lean team supporting a large research community, Atom handles the groundwork so analysts can spend their attention on quality.

Checklists That Catch Every Sponsor Requirement

Every sponsor has its own requirements, and a single missed detail can sink an otherwise strong application. The team uses Atom to build checklists straight from the solicitation and to answer questions against it, so nothing slips between the opportunity and the submission.

*"Being able to build those checklists, answer the questions, and then make sure that all aspects of the proposal meet the sponsor requirements and are submitted as high a quality as possible. Having Atom as a resource allows us to have that **additional attention to those details** and keep the proposals as high quality as we can."*



Sarah Haley
Grants Manager

Templates and Budget Justifications

The platform also gives analysts a running start on the documents researchers dread most. Instead of drafting from a blank page, the team can produce a first version shaped by what the sponsor is actually asking for, then hand it to the researcher to refine.

*"The best thing that it allows us to do is to come up with a **template for a budget justification** or anything along those lines to be able to provide to the researcher based off what's being asked for."*



Sarah Haley
Grants Manager

Advice for Other Institutions

Asked what they'd tell a peer evaluating Atom or standing up grant discovery for the first time, the team kept returning to what it does for the people behind the work.

*"It comes down to employee satisfaction — my team knowing they have that support behind them, and that the organization is **willing to invest in them.**"*



Sarah Haley
Grants Manager

*"I should probably be on your payroll, because I've sent so many people your direction. Your team **listens and implements quickly** — that can't be said for every product out there."*



Amanda Breeden, CRA
Associate Chief of Research

Key Success Factors

Denver Health's turnaround with Atom can be attributed to several factors:

1. **Relevance that earns the click** — matches close enough to real interests to rebuild trust
2. **Personalized delivery** — a weekly inbox digest instead of a portal and a listserv blast
3. **Frictionless onboarding** — researchers added on the back end in seconds
4. **Forecast tracking** — status alerts that remove the risk of a missed deadline
5. **Mission fit** — interests set per division, from clinical care to community engagement
6. **Support past discovery** — sponsor checklists, templates, and draft documents that lift proposal quality

Looking Forward

Denver Health continues to expand Atom across its Office of Research and Public Health Institute, from individual funding strategy to institutional planning. With adoption now the norm rather than the exception, the platform has become the default first stop for finding funding across the system, and an increasingly central part of how proposals get built.

*"I foresee research administration smartly utilizing AI as much as they can. For the future of Denver Health, I really see us being able to produce **higher quality proposals** based on the fact that Atom is helping us with the lower hanging fruit and helping us get a baseline to be able to provide to researchers, and saving their time as well — whether it be templates or draft documents that they can start with and then modify on their own."*



Sarah Haley
Grants Manager

About Denver Health

Denver Health is one of the nation's largest and most comprehensive safety-net health systems, serving the Denver community since 1860. Its research enterprise spans a central Office of Research and a Public Health Institute, together supporting hundreds of investigators and public-health programs, without a dedicated research-development department.

About the Interviewees



Amanda Breeden, CRA serves as Associate Chief of Research, where she has spent 13 years. She led the move off the previous discovery tool and tracks the engagement metrics behind the rollout.



Sarah Haley is Grants Manager, leading a team of six grant analysts who use Atom day to day, for discovery and, increasingly, for proposal development.



Kim Findley is a Project Manager with the Public Health Institute, managing funding discovery across divisions from clinical care to community engagement.



Laura Podewils is Associate Director of Learning Health Systems & Evaluation, and now relies on Atom as her single source for finding funding.

THE RESULTS, IN SHORT

13 → 1,000

Researchers set up on the platform

800%

Increase in grant email clicks

4×

More opportunities viewed per researcher

Ready to do the same at **your
institution?**

Schedule a demo to see how Atom can help your faculty discover and win more funding opportunities.

atomgrants.com

