

How Memphis Set Records for Grant Submissions with Atom Grants

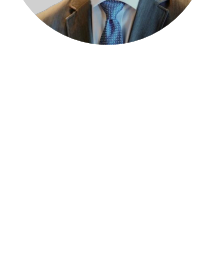
Overview

The University of Memphis, a newly classified R1 research institution, faced a critical challenge: their expensive grant search platform was severely underutilized, with fewer than 100 users per year among 700+ research faculty. After implementing Atom, they achieved remarkable results including a 1,000% increase in user engagement, record-breaking NSF and NIH submissions, and expanded research participation across traditionally non-research colleges.

The Challenge

As Dr. Brian Evans, Assistant Director of Strategic Research Initiatives, explains:

*“We were spending a lot of money on a search platform that had **very little engagement.**”*



Brian Evans, PhD
Assistant Director

The University of Memphis faced several key obstacles:

- Low faculty engagement with existing grant search tools
- Resource constraints as a cost-conscious R1 institution
- Complex search processes that deterred faculty participation
- Limited reach to non-traditional research departments
- Inefficient grant discovery leading to missed opportunities

Why Atom?

The research development team evaluated multiple platforms before selecting Atom. The decision came down to three critical factors:

1. Intuitive User Experience

The platform's design significantly reduced barriers to faculty adoption. Dr. Erin Nelson, Associate Professor and Associate Director for Research and Education at the Institute for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership noted:

*“The initial setup process was astonishingly good. **It was really comfortable** to just dive into using this tool because of that.”*



Erin Nelson, PhD
Associate Professor

2. AI-Powered Contextual Search

Traditional grant search platforms overwhelm users with thousands of irrelevant results from simple keyword searches. Atom's AI technology transforms the search experience by understanding the full context of a researcher's work, delivering precisely targeted funding opportunities that match their specific research focus. As Brian noted *“Atom is great because you can paste in an entire abstract and it'll take those contextual clues and actually give you search results that are more tailored to exactly what you need. You're not looking for a needle in a haystack.”*

3. Partnership & Continuous Improvement

Unlike traditional grant platforms that offer static, take-it-or-leave-it solutions, Atom operates as a true partner that evolves with its users' needs. The platform actively solicits feedback and rapidly implements improvements, ensuring that the tool continuously adapts to the changing research landscape and user requirements.

*“The greatest thing about Atom is that they actually **listen to feedback.** I've already seen features improve, and functionalities added.”*



Brian Evans, PhD
Assistant Director

Implementation Process

The University of Memphis took a collaborative approach to evaluation and implementation:

- 1. Internal Review:** The research development division conducted thorough testing
- 2. Committee Evaluation:** The development action committee, comprising associate research deans from every college, reviewed the platform
- 3. Unanimous Approval:** “Everybody was on board immediately after testing out the platform and getting a look at it”

Results & Impact

Dramatic Increase in Faculty Engagement

Faculty engagement surged after implementing Atom, setting a new benchmark for participation across the institution.

*“We’ve had **more faculty use Atom** in the last year than we had use our old system in the last decade.”*



Brian Evans, PhD
Assistant Director

- **From <100 to 600+ users:** Over 1,000% increase in faculty engagement
- **Campus-wide adoption:** Engagement spread across all colleges and departments
- **Consistent usage:** All pre-award coordinators now use Atom regularly

Expanding Research Participation

“Colleges that typically haven’t applied for a lot of funding, especially in communication and fine arts, we’ve seen a huge increase in engagement and submissions,” Evans reports. Faculty who were previously *“left in the dark”* now have access to relevant funding opportunities.

Record-Breaking Submissions

These unprecedented submission numbers reflect not just increased quantity, but a new culture of research ambition and competitive positioning that has emerged across the institution in line with its new R1 status.

*“This fiscal year **we have set records** for submissions and I attribute that to the fact that people are engaging with Atom.”*



Brian Evans, PhD
Assistant Director

Administrative Insights

The platform's administrative tools have transformed strategic planning: *“We can look and see what people are applying to and we can tailor the services that we offer and the professional development specific to what they’re looking into.”*

Strategic Impact on R1 Status

The University of Memphis recently transitioned from R2 to R1 classification, making research growth critical to maintaining their new status. Evans emphasizes Atom's role in this journey: *“We came from nothing to something pretty quick and we’re still adjusting to it, but the fact that we have Atom as an effective resource to use as we continue to adjust to this transition has made a huge difference.”*

Return on Investment

Despite challenging funding conditions, the University has maintained strong performance:

*“Considering the funding landscape and all the federal cuts, **we're still matching** what we did before.”*



Brian Evans, PhD
Assistant Director

The platform serves multiple strategic functions:

- Individual faculty consultations for funding strategy
- Career trajectory planning for researchers at all levels
- Alternative funding discovery in a constrained federal landscape
- Professional development planning based on faculty interests

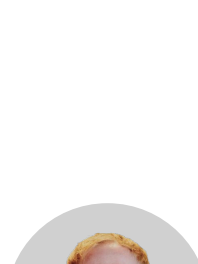
Personal Impact: A Researcher's Perspective

Dr. Evans shares his personal connection to the platform's value: *“I wish more than anything that I could have had a tool like Atom Grants when I was a postdoc. Back then I was relying on word of mouth and doing extremely tedious, meticulous searches that were a huge time sink. If I had had Atom Grants back then, it would have made all the difference.”*

Advice for Other Institutions

Both Evans and Nelson recommend Atom to peer institutions:

*“We **highly recommend Atom** as an innovative solution in a rapidly evolving landscape.”*



Brian Evans, PhD
Assistant Director

*“Without a doubt, **I would recommend it.** To have something that's just so straightforward at the onset is incredible.”*



Erin Nelson, PhD
Associate Professor

Key Success Factors

The University of Memphis's success with Atom can be attributed to several factors:

- 1. Leadership buy-in** from research administration
- 2. Collaborative evaluation** process involving multiple stakeholders
- 3. Focus on user experience** over complex features
- 4. Strategic alignment** with institutional R1 goals
- 5. Continuous feedback** and platform improvement

Looking Forward

The University of Memphis continues to leverage Atom as they solidify their R1 status and expand research capacity across campus. The platform has become integral to their research ecosystem, supporting everything from individual faculty development to institutional strategic planning.

About the University of Memphis

The University of Memphis is a public research university serving over 21,000 students. Recently classified as an R1 research institution, the university is home to more than 700 research faculty across multiple colleges and has achieved record-breaking grant submission numbers.

About the Interviewees

Dr. Brian Evans serves as Assistant Director of Strategic Research Initiatives at the University of Memphis. He holds a doctorate in biomedical engineering and brings extensive experience from academia, pharmaceutical, and biotechnology investment sectors.

Dr. Erin Nelson is an Associate Professor in Public and Nonprofit Administration and Associate Director for Research and Education at the Institute for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership. She specializes in foundation and philanthropic funding to complement federal grant opportunities.

Ready to transform your institution's research development? Schedule a demo to see how Atom can help your faculty discover and win more funding opportunities.

