How NDSU Transformed Grant Discovery with Atom's AI-Powered Platform

Overview

North Dakota State University (NDSU) faced the challenge of efficiently connecting researchers across diverse disciplines with relevant funding opportunities. This case study explores how NDSU implemented Atom's AI-powered grant discovery platform to streamline the process and empower their research community.

The Challenge

Heidi Grunwald, Associate Vice President for Research and Faculty Development at NDSU, describes the primary challenge:

*"You're **charged with being an expert** in all these fields... constantly asking, how do we dish up more targeted lists."*

Heidi Grunwald, AVP

The research office struggled with:

- Serving diverse faculty needs across multiple disciplines
- Creating targeted funding opportunity lists for different research areas
- Keeping pace with the evolving foundation, federal, and state funding landscapes

Selection Criteria

When evaluating Atom as a solution, NDSU focused on several key criteria:

1. Ease of implementation: *"Low barrier to entry in terms of implementation timeline"*
2. Minimal faculty burden: *"We don't want faculty to have to go somewhere and upload a CV or pre-populate a profile"*
3. AI-powered approach: Moving beyond traditional Boolean keyword searches
4. Administrative efficiency: Reducing the central office's burden of *"trying to be everything to everyone"*

Why Atom Was Different

Atom's approach offered significant advantages over traditional grant discovery tools:

*"It was about the low barrier to entry, quick implementation and **low burden on faculty**. That was a big deal for me."*

Heidi Grunwald, AVP

Key differentiators included:

- AI-powered personalization that adapts to changing research interests
- The ability to create topic-specific favorites lists
- Exploring funding opportunities by simply inputting research abstracts
- Low-friction implementation requiring only basic faculty information

Faculty Perspective

Dr. Dane Mataic, Assistant Professor of Sociology and Director of the Water Resources Research Institute at NDSU, shares his experience:

*"As I started to dive into Atom, **I found it more intuitive**."*

Dane Mataic,
Assistant Professor

Dr. Mataic highlighted several benefits:

- Discovery of opportunities outside his primary expertise
- Intuitive searching across unfamiliar research domains
- Time savings compared to manual searches across multiple websites
- Centralized tracking instead of maintaining spreadsheets

Key Results and Benefits

Since implementing Atom, NDSU has seen:

1. Strong engagement across faculty, researchers, and even graduate students
2. Extension to research centers beyond the main campus
3. Enhanced collaboration among interdisciplinary research teams
4. Discovery of alternative funding sources in a challenging federal funding landscape

As Heidi notes:

"Our federal landscape is just incredibly demoralizing right now... ***This kind of tool is even more important for faculty***"

Heidi Grunwald, AVP

Conclusion

For institutions considering AI-powered grant discovery, Heidi Grunwald, Associate Vice President for Research and Faculty Development at NDSU, offers this straightforward perspective:

"I would say, ***this is a no-brainer.***"

Heidi Grunwald, AVP

Key Takeaways

The implementation of Atom's AI-powered grant discovery platform at NDSU demonstrates several important benefits for research institutions:

- Reduced Administrative Burden: The central research office no longer needs to function as "mini-experts" across all disciplines, freeing up resources for other strategic initiatives.
- Enhanced Faculty Productivity: Researchers can efficiently discover relevant funding opportunities without the time-consuming process of manually searching multiple sources or maintaining complex tracking systems.
- Cross-Disciplinary Opportunities: Faculty are discovering funding sources outside their traditional domains, opening new avenues for innovative research and collaboration.
- Adaptability to Funding Challenges: In an uncertain federal funding landscape, Atom helps researchers identify alternative funding sources they might otherwise miss.
- Low Implementation Friction: With minimal setup requirements and no need for extensive faculty training or profile creation, the platform achieved rapid adoption across the institution.

Long-Term Impact

NDSU's experience suggests that AI-powered grant discovery platforms like Atom can serve as a strategic asset in building a more resilient and diverse research portfolio. By connecting researchers with targeted opportunities that align with their evolving interests, institutions can foster a more dynamic and adaptable research ecosystem. The solution has proven valuable not just for established faculty but also for graduate students and research centers beyond the main campus, indicating its versatility across different institutional contexts and career stages.

*"**I think it's a great system** that streamlines the research process."*

Dane Mataic,
Assistant Professor

Future Directions

As funding landscapes continue to evolve, tools that efficiently connect researchers with relevant opportunities will become increasingly critical for institutional success. NDSU's experience demonstrates that AI-powered approaches offer significant advantages over traditional methods, particularly in their ability to adapt to changing research interests and funding environments.

Interested in learning more about how Atom's AI-powered grant discovery platform could benefit your institution? Book a demo today or reach out to our founder: tomer@atomgdants.com

Atom Grants