



USF's Path to \$1 Billion: Scaling Research with Smart Grant Discovery

Overview

The University of South Florida (USF) faced a critical challenge: their faculty, particularly early-career researchers, were struggling to discover relevant funding opportunities in time to develop competitive proposals. After losing their previous grant discovery platform, USF needed a solution that would be easy to implement, intuitive for faculty to use, and deliver highly relevant results.

In partnership with Atom Grants, USF implemented an AI-powered grant discovery platform that has transformed how their researchers find funding opportunities. The results speak for themselves: smooth implementation with zero faculty complaints, positive feedback from users, and successful grant applications directly attributed to the platform.

The Challenge

The university identified several key challenges:

- **Late Discovery:** Faculty were finding opportunities too late to develop quality proposals
- **Irrelevant Results:** Previous platforms generated too much noise, causing faculty to tune out
- **Barriers to Entry:** Complex interfaces deterred faculty engagement
- **Early-Career Faculty Needs:** Tenure-track researchers needed better support to establish their research careers

Ross DuBose, Assistant Director for Research and Innovation, notes:

*“The **biggest barrier** to grants is finding an opportunity and finding it early enough”*



Dr. Ross DuBose
Assistant Director

Why Atom?

The decision to partner with Atom came after a compelling demonstration at the Society for Research Administration International conference. *“I gave them the name of one of our active faculty researchers and they put her name in and pulled up a list of possible grant opportunities that included two of the opportunities we were actively applying for”* recalls DuBose.

Key Differentiators

USF chose Atom based on three critical advantages:

1. **Ease of Entry:** *“The biggest selling point for Atom Grants over the competitors was the ease of entry for our faculty members. The way that Atom Grants establishes a profile with no direct input from the faculty and gives them a starting point.”*
2. **Comprehensive Coverage:** *“The breadth of coverage by Atom Grants. The digging into the non-federal funding space in particular was a positive.”*
3. **Improved Relevancy:** *“One of the reasons we tried Atom Grants is because the claim of the relevancy of what you find... they claimed there was a much higher relevancy than what Pivot gets you.”*

Implementation & Results

Smooth Deployment

The implementation process exceeded expectations. John Johnson, Associate Director of Research at University of South Florida, St Petersburg, explains *“The implementation was smooth. It was really relatively simple...”*

*“...We **got going relatively quickly** compared to the implementation of anything else we’ve ever dealt with.”*



John Johnson
Associate Director

Faculty Adoption Success

USF’s systematic approach to measuring success included:

- **Survey Response:** 12 responses from 60 faculty surveyed (20% response rate)
- **Positive Feedback:** Positive responses with no negative feedback
- **Comparative Satisfaction:** Direct comments stating *“I’ve used Pivot. This is better than Pivot”*
- **Zero Complaints:** *“To have faculty not complain about a new electronic thing says a lot”*

Measurable Outcomes

*“We’ve had a few folks **find opportunities** through the platform and move forward with grant applications”*



Dr. Ross DuBose
Assistant Director

- Faculty have found and pursued grant opportunities directly through the platform
- Improved user engagement compared to previous solutions
- Enhanced support for early-career researchers
- Streamlined grant discovery processes across both campuses

Strategic Impact

Alignment with Institutional Goals

USF has set an ambitious goal of reaching \$1 billion in research funding. DuBose explains the strategic importance: *“We are very aggressively attempting to expand our research portfolio. Part of that is finding the right opportunities and matching them with the right faculty member.”*

Long-term Faculty Development

Johnson emphasizes the broader institutional strategy: *“Maybe they’re not contributing to our one billion dollar goal that much in five years, but they represent our future in the next ten. And so we really need to make sure that our younger researchers are on track... We need to nurture our faculty so that they can be successful here.”*

Responsive Partnership

The ongoing relationship with Atom has been particularly valuable: *“The team at Atom Grants has been very responsive to questions, open to feedback.”*

*“They implemented some of our suggestions already, which is **always nice to see.**”*



Dr. Ross DuBose
Assistant Director

Recommendations for Other Institutions

From the USF Team: *“I would say to consider how much your faculty are engaging with the current platform and whether a platform that gets your faculty going without any input would enhance that interaction... the ease of use has been a nice way to get the project going.”* – Ross DuBose

“The ease of use is a big thing... being able to implement it right away and have our faculty use it without much training and being actually not complaining about it... So if you don’t have a lot of resources to devote to this type of thing, this was a good platform because it was relatively easy to implement and it’s easy to use for your faculty.” – John Johnson

About the Participants

Dr. Ross DuBose – Assistant Director for Research and Innovation, USF Sarasota-Manatee

- PhD in Pharmacology
- Decade of experience in academic writing and journal editing
- Leads the Sarasota Manatee campus Office of Research

John Johnson – Associate Director of Research, USF St. Petersburg campus

- 30 years of experience in grants administration
- Former NYU research administrator (20+ years)
- Part of USF’s Research Development Institute

Next Steps

USF continues to evaluate long-term outcomes while expanding their use of Atom Grants. As Johnson notes: *“We’ll see longer term, but ultimately it’s about our faculty. If it makes our faculty happy... so far having no major complaints is a good thing.”*

The university’s experience demonstrates the right grant discovery platform can transform institutional research capacity while supporting faculty success at every career stage.

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