

Leveraging GenAI helps an agency secure critical federal funding

The Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services turns to AI to streamline research and write applications for federal grant opportunities.

The better the question

How can AI help secure funding for critical health care services?

Oklahoma's behavioral health agency is exploring the use of GenAI to innovate and streamline the grant writing process.

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The Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS) is a pivotal provider of essential support for mental and emotional health, significantly enhancing the wellbeing of local communities. As an entity serving the entire state, it delivers a comprehensive range of services that include prevention, treatment and recovery assistance, alongside training, educational resources and financial support for community-based providers. Furthermore, the agency manages a diverse array of facilities, including inpatient hospitals, behavioral health clinics and crisis intervention centers, to address the varied needs of Oklahoma residents.

The substantial and vital mission of ODMHSAS is facilitated by approximately \$80 million in federal grants received annually. Each year, the agency identifies more than 50 grant opportunities that have the potential to enhance its programs. While ODMHSAS chooses to apply for roughly half of these grants, the application process demands significant labor and time, often extending beyond two months from the release of the grant details to the final application submission.

The grant journey begins with the agency collecting essential information, including supportive data. A writer then meticulously crafts a detailed narrative, usually 10 to 20 pages long, that meets the grant's specific requirements and effectively demonstrates the agency's ability to use the funds to achieve their stated goals. This comprehensive process ends with the submission of the carefully prepared application.

"Although grant writing is often a lengthy and complex process, it's a vital step in acquiring the funds necessary to serve our communities. We at ODMHSAS are fully committed to uncovering innovative approaches to streamline this process to enhance and accelerate the support we provide to those in need," says Kadedra Smith, Grants Management Specialist at ODMHSAS.

Recognizing the potential offered by emerging technologies, ODMHSAS consulted with Ernst & Young LLP (EY) practitioners to explore how an investment in generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) and automation could refine and boost the efficiency of the grant application process



ODMHSAS turns to GenAI to enhance grant writing capabilities

AI powers research and content creation, converting insights into applications for Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

In May 2024, ODMHSAS introduced their grant writing team to EY Impact, a web-based platform that utilizes both public and proprietary data to identify areas of need and facilitate the grant application process. With EY Impact, the team can tailor their initial grant searches to specific health factors, subscribe to alerts for new funding opportunities, and utilize the platform's generative AI-based writing capability to draft the initial application narrative.

The agency piloted EY Impact for its application to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's State Opioid Response (SOR) grant, which funds the majority of opioid abatement activities across the state. Faced with a two-month deadline to develop and submit a detailed 25-page proposal, the team took several strategic steps to enhance the tool's utility.

They expanded EY Impact's analytical reach by integrating 85 distinct data sets from authoritative entities such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Survey on Drug Use, and local health departments. Additionally, they incorporated 42 pages of SOR grant guidelines, which detailed the precise formatting, numbering and structuring requirements, along with the specific criteria for each application section. To ensure the tool was well-versed in the expected writing style, they uploaded successful grant applications from the past three years.

A multi-agent framework was introduced to seamlessly automate the grant writing process by collecting data—both public and proprietary—along with behavioral health strategies and ODMHSAS's past responses, efficiently generating the content needed to meet the SOR grant requirements. Finally, the team engaged experienced grant writers to test the platform and provide feedback, which was instrumental in refining the tool's performance and enhancing the user experience.

"The EY Impact tool transcends typical software and offers a context-aware system that adeptly handles grant-specific prompt nuances. Its effectiveness lies in the way our RAG [retrieval augmented generation] models integrate with multiple large language models. This ensures that each proposal is not only compliant but also deeply aligned with the grant's unique requirements," notes Amy Jones, Principal at Ernst & Young LLP.

■ The better the answer

ODMHSAS secures \$15m grant

EY Impact redefines grant writing, turning a 3-week task into 48 hours and helps secure vital funds for opioid response initiatives.

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EY Impact completed the first draft of the SOR grant application in 48 hours, significantly faster than the manual process that previously took three weeks. After a few adjustments, ODMHSAS submitted the application.

In October 2024, ODMHSAS received the State Opioid Response grant, securing over \$15 million.

"We designed EY Impact to streamline the federal grant application process for organizations like ODMHSAS," explains Fanny Ji, Manager at EY. "Our collaboration with their team focused on refining the tool to enhance their chances of winning grants, speed up the application process, and discover new opportunities."

EY Impact has streamlined the grant application process for ODMHSAS, enabling the quick production of a personalized and data-driven SOR submission. The integration of emerging technology with experienced writers increased efficiency and effectiveness. Advanced analytics and AI improved the quality of the initial grant application draft, illustrating the significant benefits of this innovative approach. EY Impact transformed the traditional processes and created impactful outcomes that will resonate well beyond this single agency.

"We are unwavering in our commitment to enhancing EY Impact," says Jones. "Our goal is to continually foster trustworthy and seamless collaboration between people and AI and adhere to the principles of responsible AI. We are dedicated to further safeguarding the privacy of source material and we vigilantly monitor output for biases to prevent potential GenAI hallucinations. This approach helps to ensure both the ethical integrity and reliability of our AI systems, thereby boosting confidence and enabling responsible transformations."

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