



COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE
VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

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Dear Foundation for the National Institutes of Health:

I am writing to apply for the Scientific Project Manager – Neuroscience position at FNIH. I possess many of the communication, leadership, project, and time management skills required to succeed in this position.

Currently, I am an NRSA-funded postdoctoral fellow at Vanderbilt University. I have been broadly trained in neuroscience at the undergraduate and graduate level (where I also was NRSA-funded) with experience in both animal and human models of reward, motivation, and decision making and have collected and analyzed data at the genetic, neural, and behavioral level. Throughout my 10 years as a PhD and postdoctoral trainee, I have mentored 20 undergraduate students, receiving UNC Psychology Department's 2014 Graduate Student Mentor Award. Mentoring requires strong communication, time management, and organizational skills which I also have used effectively in my own research projects.

In my research as both a graduate student and postdoctoral fellow, I have worked with a variety of collaborative teams, including experts in genetic analyses, fMRI data modeling, and PET data analysis. Over my 10+ years as a researcher, I have collaborated with 5+ teams at 6+ academic institutions (including Yale, Duke, Berkeley, Colorado, and the University of Chicago) on a variety of research projects. This has resulted in 15 [publications](#) (9 as first-author) with 9+ senior researchers as co-authors. During the past year, I have managed a team of 5 undergraduates, 2 research assistants, and 1 high school student working on 6 different research projects (2 of which will lead to senior honors theses this year). In addition, I am working closely with a research group at Duke to assist in data organization, analysis, and dissemination of a complex, multi-visit neuroimaging study containing a variety of complex, multimodal data. These past and current experiences have helped me learn to manage multiple projects simultaneously, including insuring deliverables are met. One particular accomplishment in this area was working with a computer programmer to automate the processing of the PET data collected (up to 3 different sessions of data) as part of the aforementioned multi-visit neuroimaging study. This experience helped me learn to communicate the key aspects of our data and what needed to be accomplished to someone unfamiliar with neuroscience and the insights we could glean from the data we were collecting. We are currently working to publish (4 papers in revision) this data and will make much of it publically available through the Open Science Framework and Neurovault websites.

Beyond my background in working collaboratively in my research endeavors, I also have experience in communicating science to a variety of audiences including presentations at a community college as part of the 2014 brain awareness week, [Science Club Nashville](#), as a participant in the 2018 [Brain Twitter Conference](#), as a blogger for [Health:Further](#), and in my own [self-published pieces](#). By taking a course on management and business practices for scientists, I have also learned how to communicate effectively with individuals when it comes to business plans and problems. As part of this course, we worked in teams to consult on a project management problem at a core lab at Vanderbilt. This experience showed me that getting to the root cause of a problem is difficult and requires a great deal of meetings, discussions, and open communication. We discovered the problem the client thought they had regarding project and workflow management was a result of something more fundamental (defining roles and

responsibilities of workers) which had to be addressed before any new management software or technology would be of use. I have also taken part in the [Vanderbilt Tech Venture Challenge](#) where I worked with a team (in a short 6-week timeframe) to develop a commercialization plan for a new medical device developed at Vanderbilt. This involved understanding the competitive landscape, thinking about target markets, pathways to FDA approval, product distribution, pricing, and much more. Our team ultimately were named runners up (2nd place) in the capstone pitch event to outside “investors”. All these experiences demonstrate my ability to convey information effectively to non-academics.

In regards to my leadership skills, I have been a member of the [Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association \(VPA\)](#)'s Executive Board serving as Treasurer (2016-17) and Vice-President (2017-18). During my first year on the Board, I helped the VPA navigate a move from the Vanderbilt University Medical Center to the Graduate School and increase our attendance at VPA events in both raw numbers (from ~300 to over 500 attendees at all events in 2016-17 versus 2017-18) and diversity (now ~34% of attendees are from outside the Medical School (vs ~10% previously) with an average of 18 departments represented at any VPA event). This transition also entailed myself and other Board members learning how to work with a newly-formed Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPA) on initiatives to increase postdoc engagement at Vanderbilt. This included the creation of a master email listserv containing all postdocs based on HR records and the institution of a postdoc orientation program to inform newly arrived postdocs of resources available to them, including the VPA. We also created a VPA website which the association controls and which I have served as co-webmaster since 2017. This has allowed us to reach our large (~550) postdoc community and serves as a central hub for postdocs to stay informed of VPA and OPA events/resources. In addition to these VPA Board accomplishments, I served for the past 2 years on the [VPA Symposium](#) Planning Committee which involved arranging programming for ~150 postdoc attendees (including organizing a new faculty panel each year) and arranging and coordinating ~50 faculty from 30+ departments across campus to judge posters at the 2018 Symposium. While serving in these leadership and project management roles with the VPA, I also helped the BRET office at Vanderbilt coordinate speakers (from academia, government, and industry) for the past two [Career Symposia](#), identified and liaised with judges for Vanderbilt's 2018 [3-Minute Thesis Competition](#) (which featured 49 presentations from across the university), and wrote profile and career development pieces for *The POSTDOCKET*, the newsletter for the National Postdoctoral Association (see resume). These experiences clearly demonstrate my ability to handle multiple projects simultaneously and work with teams to achieve desired endpoints.

Taken together, I think I offer a unique set of skills that would help in project management at FNIH. I have demonstrated the ability to work in collaborative teams in both an academic and professional setting to accomplish a variety of goals (publications, pitches, VPA events/outreach). Furthermore, I have a range of experiences in communicating in written, oral, and online formats to broad audiences. Through these experiences, I have learned how to interact with a variety of stakeholders at the academic, institutional, business, and public levels. Finally, I have managed a variety of scientific projects through to completion, including publications in high-impact journals, presentations at major academic conferences, and mentoring of undergraduate students performing independent research. I think my skills would translate well to the Scientific Project Manager role at FNIH and be an asset to your organization.

Thank you for your consideration,

Christopher J. Smith