Former Fellow Follow-Up with Dr. Zélia Worman, Director of Researcher Engagement and Education

Zélia Worman, PhD, is the Director of Researcher Engagement and Education for Velsera, Cambridge, Massachusetts, a precision-medicine focused company that empowers diverse biomedical research communities and accelerates medical breakthroughs to positively impact human health. At NICHD, Dr. Worman completed her postdoctoral training from 2016–2018 in the lab of Henry Levin, PhD, senior investigator in the Section on Eukaryotic Transposable Elements. There, she studied the contribution of polymorphic transposable elements in the development of mental illness and neurological disorders.

Researcher engagement and education wasn’t Dr. Worman’s first career move following her postdoctoral work. When she first joined Velsera (at the time Seven Bridges), she served as a program manager for the company. Prior to that, she was a support scientist and scientific program manager at the NASA-funded Translational Research Institute for Space Health (TRISH), Houston, Texas, a position she spoke about as a career panelist at the 15th Annual NICHD Fellows Retreat on May 31, 2019.

Curious about this unique career trajectory? Check out our Q&A with Dr. Worman to learn more about her work at Velsera and the winding path she took to get there:

What did you do as a program manager when you first joined Velsera?
At Velsera, a company formed from Seven Bridges, PierianDX, and Ugentec, I managed and led the Cancer Genomics Cloud and SPARK platforms for the National Cancer Institute and Pancreatic Cancer Action Network (PanCAN), respectively. This means that I ensured the fulfillment of

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Letter from the Editor

We have our first “Former Fellow Follow-up” of the year! Dr. Zélia Worman, former postdoctoral fellow in the lab of Dr. Henry Levin, Section on Eukaryotic Transposable Elements, talks about the path she took to become Director of Researcher Engagement and Education for a private company. In this informative Q&A, fellows can follow how Dr. Worman explored several types of positions outside the lab before finding her perfect fit.

We also have a “Rep Report” that is packed with exciting opportunities for fellows. In particular, the NIH Fellows Committee (best known as FelCom) is filling several liaison and chair positions now. Don’t delay—letters of interest are due April 4! Serving in a leadership position on a committee is an excellent way to gain some of the communication and teamwork skills needed for many career fields.

For our pre-med trainees, the “Clinical Corner” column has returned after a brief hiatus. This installment includes a recap of the recent Q&A session on preparing a medical school application. If you weren’t able to make the event last month, this quick summary highlights the main points covered—including advice on letters of recommendation, prerequisite courses, and MCAT preparation.

Enjoy the change in season, and see you next month!

Your Editor in Chief,
Shana R. Spindler, PhD

This is a newsletter for NICHD fellows, by NICHD fellows. We want to hear from you! Please send your questions, comments, and ideas to our editor at shana.spindler@nih.gov.
all contractual obligations for my programs and created and managed project roadmaps, while ensuring company priorities. I engaged with legal, engineering, product, marketing, and financial teams regularly.

Some of the things I do include talking to our government and non-profit clients (NCI and PanCAN) regularly to make sure the platform we are building (features, datasets, and tools we have) are in alignment with their vision and what the researchers need. I then use this information to discuss with internal teams in the engineering and product departments to understand when we can deliver to our client and check whether there are roadblocks I can help with. Once the tool or dataset is released, I help train researchers on how to make the most of it by teaching our users how to use the platform.

**What do you do now as Director of Researcher Engagement and Education for Velsera?**

Given my involvement in teaching as a program manager, my role at Velsera has evolved to leading all outreach and engagement activities for our team. In this role as the Director of Researcher Engagement and Education, I lead a team of community engagement staff who 1) provide support to researchers using our platforms, 2) educate students and investigators on how to use the cloud for their research, and 3) connect healthcare and life sciences to reveal the true promise of precision medicine—a continuous flow of knowledge between researchers, scientists, and clinicians around the world.

**How did you decide when to make each career shift?**

As a postdoc at NICHD, I always enjoyed the research aspect of the work, but I also enjoyed mentoring students and looking at the big picture. The more I worked on the project, the more I wanted to make a broader impact by leading big initiatives and engaging with researchers.

To see how I could do this, I volunteered and participated in extramural activities and classes across the NIH throughout my time as a fellow, including working as a detailee at NHGRI in the Office of Education and Community Involvement Branch. I knew for a while that I wanted to make a career change, but since I was not 100% sure on what that was, I explored a lot. My mentor, Dr. Henry Levin, was incredibly supportive and provided guidance and opportunities for growth throughout my time as postdoc. Once I was confident that I wanted to try program management as a career, I started applying for jobs.

At first, I was just getting a feel for what it was like to apply for jobs outside academia—for example how to build a resume. Then I received a couple of interviews and was eventually offered a position that was too exciting to refuse.

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My next career step was to work for the NASA Research and Education Support Services (NRESS) as a support scientist. There, I supported the Translational Research Institute for Space Health (TRISH) as a scientific program manager. I helped in programmatic development and portfolio analysis, and I became an essential member of both the Science and Operations teams.

In particular, I helped streamline the procedures for writing funding announcements and led the writing on several funding opportunities. I also helped develop outreach efforts at conferences aimed at informing potential proposers about TRISH’s mission and research objectives. One of my proudest achievements was leading the effort to start a young investigator’s award, “Go for Launch,” which resulted in two successful transitions to independent positions in the first year.

While with TRISH, I had the opportunity to participate in cross-cutting initiatives throughout the institute and learn about health technology companies and innovative research topics. In addition, I was honored to be one of the founding members of the TRISH Diversity initiative aiming to increase equality and access to space health funding to traditionally under-served communities.

Although I loved my job with NRESS and TRISH, a new opportunity arose with Seven Bridges, for which I would have opportunities to interact and manage projects with and for the NIH. The exciting world of cloud computing and the amount of publicly available health data made me want to change my career from NASA to Seven Bridges (now Velsera).

What is the job application and hiring process like for program management?
The job application requires a resume (maximum of two pages) and a cover letter explaining why you’re interested in the job and why you’re a great match for the position. I went through several rounds of interviews.

The first interview was with the recruiter to make sure my expertise and salary expectations aligned with the job. The second interview was a team interview, where I presented my NICHD research. Following that, I had three individual interviews (with my future manager, the department manager, and a future colleague). After a total of five interviews, I was offered the position.

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**What do you find the most challenging about your work?**

The most challenging moments as a program manager (or director!) are when there are competing priorities for the same resources. We must maintain the delivery of milestones within the requested timelines of our multiple stakeholders. This requires coordination between me, other program managers, and leadership from different teams (product, marketing, technology, and others). This can be quite difficult to manage. Communication and organizational skills are especially important, as is maintaining the big picture of what is best for our customers, researchers, and the company.

**What do you find the most rewarding?**

The most rewarding moments for me are when we deliver above and beyond what the customer was expecting within time and budget, and we can teach researchers how to take advantage of a new product, using our platforms. During the training and engagement sessions we provide to universities and NIH staff, watching researchers and students discover something new is incredible. For those who have taught a class before, it’s the equivalent of seeing students “get it,” and they can then build their own ideas on how to make their next project succeed.

**What type of career progression is available in program management?**

Depending on the company, there are several career paths one can take in program management. At Velsera, you can grow into a leader and participate in strategic development of a particular disease area to support research and precision medicine. You can also change your career path to focus on other areas, such outreach and engagement (which was the case for me!), or you can become a principal investigator and write grants that are exciting to you and the company.

Since program management touches most areas of the company, you get a high-level view of how a whole organization operates (with some specificity to your area). The growth possibilities are numerous.

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What skill sets are helpful for people who’d like to enter a program management career path?

For program management, outstanding communication and organization are a must. The ability to give a great presentation is very useful, since program managers interact with stakeholders on a regular basis. You should also be comfortable prioritizing work (your own and your team’s) and managing the needs and concerns of internal and external stakeholders. Understanding how to manage a budget is also helpful.

Some companies require or prefer a Project Management Professional (PMP) certification, but it’s not always needed if you can demonstrate the equivalent skills.

Were there any workshops or programs at NIH that helped you prepare for your career transitions?

I took the introduction to PMP at the Foundation for Advanced Education in the Sciences (FAES), which was very helpful to understand some key concepts, such as “milestone,” “deliverable,” and “critical path.” If those words mean nothing to you, a project management course would be great to take! FAES doesn’t seem to have the exact offering anymore, but this Project Management Essentials course is similar.

Do you have any final tips for fellows who are thinking about a career path similar to yours?

Try things outside of your comfort zone! There are lot of cool things out there—inside and outside the NIH—that are interesting, engaging, and need your expertise. Start by looking at detail opportunities, ways to volunteer, and explore how your interests could become your career.

Above all, have fun! Being a fellow at NIH has a lot of benefits, including enjoying your time as a researcher while learning what your next career move could be.
Clinical Corner: Medical School Application Guidance

Erin Walsh, PhD, director of the NICHD Office of Education, led a virtual Q&A session last month for postbacs who are putting together medical school application packages. Participants asked several important questions about the process, recapped here for those who couldn't attend.

What are the general guidelines for requesting recommendation letters?
Dr. Walsh suggested visiting the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) main website every application cycle to review updated instructions on recommendation letters. For general guidance, she discussed when recommendation letters should be requested and by whom they should be written.

When: Applicants should contact all recommendation writers several months in advance in order to have application packages complete by June, at the latest. Always be sure to check in with your undergraduate pre-med advising committee, as applicable, since they may have specific deadlines and instructions.

Who: When selecting your recommenders, consider who can speak to your career-relevant experiences and ask if they are willing to write a strong letter that highlights your competitiveness. If appropriate, provide recommenders with information about yourself that you would like to emphasize in your application, so that they can shape their letters to match your goals after medical school.

How can postbacs complete necessary coursework and/or boost their academic credentials?
Dr. Walsh recommended that course deficiencies can be completed at an accredited institution. She added that trainees who want to boost their GPA can consider an academic postbac, a master's program, or a suite of courses at an accredited university.

For trainees who would like to gain more background knowledge in a particular area, Dr. Walsh noted that FAES is a fantastic resource. She added that the NIH Office of Intramural Training and Education (OITE) website offers additional information on postbac opportunities outside the NIH.

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What’s the best way to study for the MCAT?
Dr. Walsh noted that courses designed to help people learn how to take the exam (test taking strategies) tend to be the most helpful. Some resources to consider can be found on the AAMC website and through the OITE. She added that practice exams provided by AAMC often correlate well with actual test performance.

When taking the practice exams, Dr. Walsh urged trainees to pretend it’s the real test to most accurately reflect later on areas that need improvement. “Consider saving the AAMC practice exams until you’re ready to prove that your studying has been sufficient,” Dr. Walsh emphasized.

A meeting attendee mentioned that MCAT-specific study cards are available through flashcard apps, and a quick online search will reveal potential plug-ins for making practice tests mirror the look of the actual MCAT exam.

For additional questions about applying to medical school, please contact Dr. Walsh (erin.walsh@nih.gov) or reach out to Ms. Veronica Harker (veronica.harker@nih.gov) to be added to the next Q&A session.

RELATED CONTENT
• The Medical School Search and Application Process
• Graduate and Medical School Application Panel Recap
The Rep Report

By Hyo Won Ahn, PhD

As the current NICHD Basic Sciences Institutes and Centers (IC) Representative, I represent NICHD postdoctoral fellows at the NIH Fellows Committee (FelCom) meeting every month and share the latest news with you here. Do you have a concern or question that you want brought up at the next meeting? Contact me, Dr. Hyo Won Ahn, at hyowon.ahn@nih.gov.

FelCom has six open positions—check them out! For additional information, please use the contact details below:

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<td>Recreation &amp; Welfare and Health and Wellness Council Liaison</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Manami Bhattacharya (<a href="mailto:manami.bhattacharya@nih.gov">manami.bhattacharya@nih.gov</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Committee Co-Chair</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nick Madian (<a href="mailto:nicholas.madian@nih.gov">nicholas.madian@nih.gov</a>), Anthony Yeraham (<a href="mailto:antony.yeraham@nih.gov">antony.yeraham@nih.gov</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Research Advisory Committee Chair</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Francesca Barone (<a href="mailto:francesca.barone@nih.gov">francesca.barone@nih.gov</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service &amp; Outreach Subcommittee Co-Chair</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Alex Vendola (<a href="mailto:alex.vendola@nih.gov">alex.vendola@nih.gov</a>), Kristin Warren (<a href="mailto:kristen.warren@nih.gov">kristen.warren@nih.gov</a>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women Scientist Advisor Committee Co-Chair</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rebecca Voglewede (<a href="mailto:rebecca.voglewede@nih.gov">rebecca.voglewede@nih.gov</a>), Agnes Karasik (<a href="mailto:agnes.karasik@nih.gov">agnes.karasik@nih.gov</a>)</td>
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Please submit a statement of interest by COB Tuesday, April 4, to both FelCom Co-Chairs: Vasty Osei Amponsa (vasty.oseiamponsa@nih.gov) and Marja Brolinson (marja.brolinson@nih.gov) if you are interested in running for one of the above positions.

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The Visiting Fellows Committee (VFC) has two open positions:

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<td>VFC Brown Bag Seminar</td>
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<td>Science Voices from Home</td>
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Please contact harrison.daly@nih.gov and aditi.chaurasia@nih.gov for details.

MENTOR A SUMMER INTERN!
This year, the NIH Summer Internship Program (SIP) will be in-person! Most “front-line” mentors for summer interns are graduate students and postdocs. If you are interested in mentoring a summer intern, talk to your advisor about selecting one together through the SIP portal, which is the huge database of almost 2,000 applications.

If you’ve never mentored a summer student and have concerns about how to be an effective mentor, OITE offers a workshop on mentoring a summer intern. If you have questions, please reach out to the director of SIP, Dr. Yewon Cheon (yewon.cheon@nih.gov).

INTERESTED IN A TEACHING OPPORTUNITY DURING THE SUMMER?
Consider being a Summer intern summer journal club leader! The registration deadline is Friday, April 14, at 5:00 p.m. Submit your journal club description here. Please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Alexis Schirling (schirlingam@mail.nih.gov) if you have any questions.

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The Fellows Safety Committee has resources to connect you with the ergonomics department at the NIH to have a free ergonomic assessment done both in the lab and at their computer workstations. Virtual assessments of home computer workstations are also available. If anyone is interested in these services, please contact co-chairs Dr. Anna SantaMaria (anna.santamaria@nih.gov) or Dr. David Mallick (david.mallick@nih.gov).

The Outreach Liaison invites research fellows and postdoc fellows to share their research and experiences with the wider community in the popular I am Intramural NIH blog. If you would like to be considered for a profile, please send a brief description of yourself and your research (no more than a few sentences) to Dr. Anindita Ray (anindita.ray@nih.gov).

The Service and Outreach Subcommittee noted that the Maryland bioGENEius competition, hosted by Learning Undefeated, is looking for science judges in their virtual event on April 10–14. Please note that they are looking for scientists with graduate degrees, preferably a PhD. A registration link can be found here.

The Women Scientists Advisors (WSA) committee would like to invite you to the following events:
» The 2023 WSA Scholar Symposium recognizes three women fellows for their outstanding research. The symposium will be held on Thursday, April 13, from 10:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m. by Zoom. Please consider joining to support NICHD graduate student Ms. Zoe Piccus (Le Pichon lab), one of the WSA Scholars for 2023!
» The WSA 30th Anniversary Seminar Series are held monthly until May. Check the link for more information.

Did you know that there are several ways to stay informed on postdoc activities and events?
» Fellows listserv is the main source of FelCom event advertisements, so don’t forget to sign up.
» Visiting fellows can also sign up for the Visiting Fellows listserv.
» There is an NIH postdoc Slack channel to connect with other postdocs and join social events (sign up with a non-NIH email).
April Announcements

AFFINITY GROUP MEETINGS
To promote interactions between groups, the Affinity Group Heads recently decided to share information about their meetings. Please consider dropping into another Affinity Group’s meeting to hear what your colleagues are up to in their labs. The details on when each group meets, along with a point of contact for the meetings, can be found in the monthly OSD News Bulletin.

Looking for a particular lab? This chart (PDF) lists the labs associated with each Affinity Group.

THE NIH FELLOWS EDITORIAL BOARD OFFERS FREE EDITING SERVICES
The NIH Fellows Editorial Board (FEB) offers all NIH and FDA fellows a free, fast, and confidential scientific document-editing service. This all-volunteer Board composed of NIH fellows edits various documents, including manuscripts, book chapters, and grant proposals for grammar, form, and clarity. The editors also review essential elements pertinent to the document, such as figures and figure legends (editors do not comment on scientific merit!). Authors generally receive written feedback in 10 to 12 business days.

For more information and submission requirements please visit the FEB website at: https://ccr.cancer.gov/trainee-resources-editorial-board.

SAVE THE DATE: NIH CAREER SYMPOSIUM TO BE HELD MAY 8–10 (ALL VIRTUAL)
The NIH Career Symposium is scheduled for Monday–Wednesday, May 8–10. Mark your calendars now—this is a great event that highlights the diversity of career choices available to biomedical researchers!

NIH UNITE: ENDING STRUCTURAL RACISM (ESR) ACTIVITIES
The NIH UNITE initiative was established to identify and address structural racism within the NIH-supported and the greater scientific community.

The ESR Intranet includes various resources like the Toolkit, Newsletter, FAQs, and other information.

UNITE Milestones and Progress and the Co-Chairs Corner (public ESR webpages) are other avenues to stay informed on UNITE efforts.
April Events

THURSDAY, APRIL 13, 1–4 PM
NICHD DIR Tenure-Track Investigator Virtual Symposia Series
“Disentangling host-microbe interactions through the analysis of high dimensional multi-omics data”
Hosted by Jamie Morton, PhD

This series provides tenure-track investigators within NICHD the opportunity to organize a virtual mini-symposium to showcase their area of science to the NICHD DIR and larger NIH intramural community. These symposia are open to all faculty, trainees, and staff at the NIH.


THURSDAY, APRIL 13, 2–3 PM
Virtual Discussion of Under the Skin: The Hidden Toll of Racism on American Lives and on the Health of Our Nation*
With book author Linda Villarosa, New York Times journalist

A former executive editor of Essence Magazine, Ms. Linda Villarosa is a member of the Association of LGBTQ Journalists (NLGJA) Hall of Fame and has been recognized with awards from the American Medical Writers’ Association, the New York Association of Black Journalists, the National Women’s Political Caucus, and many others. She teaches journalism, English, and Black Studies at the City College of New York. You can access her full biography to learn more.

Dr. Diana Bianchi will lead this virtual fireside chat with Ms. Villarosa about racism and the toll it has on individuals and health, with a particular focus on maternal and infant health. The discussion will also touch on mental health and environmental justice challenges that exacerbate public health problems. NICHD staff will be able to ask questions during a moderated session following the discussion.

Zoom information and other details will follow soon in a calendar invitation.


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MONDAY, APRIL 17, 1–2 PM (VIRTUAL)
The National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) Division of Intramural Research (DIR) Webinar:
The Research of the NIMHD Intramural Program: Examples of Varied Career Paths and Methodologies

Registration required

Speakers to include:
» Dr. Sherine El-Toukhy, Earl Stadtman tenure-track investigator and NIH Distinguished Scholar in the NIMHD Division of Intramural Research
» Dr. Leonardo Mariño-Ramírez, Earl Stadtman Investigator in the Epidemiology and Genetics Research Area of the NIMHD Division of Intramural Research
» Dr. Paula Strassle, health services researcher and Staff Scientist in the NIMHD Division of Intramural Research

For webinar-related questions, please contact dami.kim@nih.gov.

WEDNESDAY–THURSDAY, APRIL 19–20
Postbac Poster Day
( Hybrid event with in-person posters on April 20 )

Postbac Poster Day provides an opportunity for NIH postbacs to discuss their research projects and at the same time develop their communication and networking skills. For more information, please visit https://www.training.nih.gov/postbac_poster_day.

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THURSDAY, APRIL 27, 9 AM – 4 PM
NIH’s 29th Annual “Take Your Child to Work Day”
Limited in-person events, along with virtual and prerecorded activities

This event will provide children grades 1–12 an opportunity to see how your efforts contribute to the NIH and inspire them to explore career paths in science and public service.

The Office of Research Services, Program and Employee Services is the primary sponsor of TYCTWD 2023. Please email any questions and comments to Take-Your-Child-To-Work@nih.gov.

THROUGHOUT APRIL
Three-Minute Talks (TmT) Individual Coaching/Practice Sessions with Scott Morgan

Practice your talk and obtain feedback on oral presentation skills and speech development.

This event requires registration. For more information, please contact Katherine Lamb at katherine.lamb@nih.gov.

The NICHD and NIH TmT competitions are scheduled for early June and during the last week of June, respectively. Dates will be announced in the coming weeks.

ONGOING EVENTS AROUND CAMPUS
NIH-Wide Office of Intramural Training and Education Events
For more information and registration, please visit Upcoming OITE Events.

NIH Library Training and Events
For more information and registration, please visit the NIH Library Calendar.