

The AMS Board for Early Career Professionals wants to highlight members of the weather, water and climate enterprise who exemplifies the AMS Mission just a few years into their career. Our "Perspectives from Early Career Professionals" segment aims to highlight early career achievements in multiple sectors of meteorology.

This segment features Dr. Amanda "Manda" S. Adams, Program Director for Educational and Cross-Cutting Programs at the National Science Foundation (NSF). She received her B.S. in Meteorology-Climatology at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, and went on to the University of Wisconsin-Madison to attain her M.S. and PhD. At the NSF, she makes recommendations on how taxpayer money is spent on science and science education. She oversees all aspects of the merit review process, including requesting proposals, picking the right experts for review, and making recommendations on what should be funded. In 2016, she received the American Meteorology Society Award for Early Career Achievement, as chosen by the AMS Board for Early Career Professionals.

BECP: What path did you take to get to the position you are currently in today?

MA: My current job was never in my intended career path. I was in a tenure track faculty position before coming to NSF. While I was looking for a new job I was focusing on other academic positions. I was at a National Academies meeting, talking with a colleague about looking for a new job and she told me about my current job. I didn't think I was far enough along in my career to be a program director at NSF, but she convinced me that I was perfect for the job and should apply.

BECP: How important were internships early on to get to where you are today?

MA: As an undergrad, I interned at two different tv stations. I went to graduate school initially thinking that I would get a masters degree and then go work in tv. While that ended up not being my career path, I credit those internships with helping develop my ability to communicate about science as well as being what initially motivated me for graduate school.

BECP: When applying to your first (or subsequent) job, what was the interview process like?

MA: Funny story in that I never interviewed or even knew I was applying for my postdoc. I had seen the job ad, and thought it looked interesting. There were no details on how to apply, just an email address if you had questions. So I sent an email saying why I thought the position was a good match with my skill set, attached my cv, and said I would love to talk more with them about this opportunity. A few months later, while I was on the phone turning down a faculty position that wasn't right for me, I got a voicemail offering me the postdoc position. I used to say I was lucky because I turned down 2 faculty positions that year (without having accepted any job) and the postdoc offer came at the perfect time, even though I didn't actually know I had applied. But calling that "lucky" does a disservice to myself. I think that what that story shows is that there are always opportunities when you can articulate your skill set well.

BECP: What was the most difficult part of the job search process for you?

MA: Uncertainty can be brutal. Not knowing where you will work, what you will be doing, or who you will be working with is stressful! I get so annoyed when senior scientists tell postdocs to enjoy the time as a postdoc, as it is the best time of their career. While certainly postdocs do not have as many commitments to service and teaching as more senior colleagues, and thus can focus more on a single

research project, the uncertainty about the future makes being a postdoc one of the most stressful times in one's career!

BECP: Do you have any helpful tips for someone going through the job search right now?

MA: Remember that "desired qualifications" in a job posting are the wish list of the employer. And they are not usually going to find everything on their wish list, so if you have half of the desired skills go ahead and apply. There will be plenty of people that tell you "no", so you don't need to tell yourself "no" by opting out of applying. Also don't look for your dream job, look for jobs that you would enjoy doing for a few years and will give you new skill sets so that the job will open up opportunities in the future. Know who you are and what your skill set is. At one point on a job interview for a faculty position, I was asked if I would ever consider doing tropical and/or hurricane research. While I am a mesoscale modeler, I had always stuck to boundary layer processes (lake effect snow, wind energy, topographic flows, glacier-atmosphere interactions etc). My response to the question was, "I am pretty much a high-latitude girl". I got the job, and at some point actually did research with a student and another faculty on how hurricanes might impact offshore wind farms. But in the interview process I stayed true to who I was and what my interests and skill set were.

BECP: What is it like to be an early career professional and work at NSF?

MA: NSF is a great place to work! It is a common misconception that you have to be very senior in your career to work at NSF. Most program director positions only require that you are 6 years post your PhD (some are even less). There are also opportunities as Science Assistants for those who have just finished their BS, MS or PhD.

BECP: What is something unique you've been able to accomplish/experience so far in your career?

MA: Getting to be a part of the Earth Science Women's Network (ESWN) Leadership Board, and helping to transition ESWN to a formal non-profit organization has been very rewarding. Additionally, developing the idea and helping craft the solicitation for the Geosciences Opportunities for Leadership in Diversity (GOLD) program at NSF has been a source of great pride. Helping to move our community to a more diverse and inclusive scientific field is extremely rewarding. I think early in one's career it is easy to fall into the mindset that you need to sort of play by the rules for awhile before you can make change. I am happy that I have already had many opportunities to make positive changes for students, early career scientists and underrepresented groups. Studies show that diversity in the workforce improves diversity of ideas and productivity thus it is critical for the Atmospheric science community to be developing a diverse workforce.

BECP: To reach this point in your career, what role have mentors and advisors played?

MA: Mentors are extremely important. However it is important to recognize the role of peer mentors. Someone just a smidgen ahead of you in your career can be a great source of knowledge as they are more current on the job market than more senior colleagues. I have benefited greatly from having multiple mentors. Some are great mentors when it comes to specific areas of research, others are better at helping me develop teaching skills, or mentoring me in how to negotiate a salary.

BECP: Who do you seek out for advice and why? To whom do you routinely provide advice, if anyone?

MA: I am extremely lucky that in my current job, my direct supervisor is also a mentor to me. I maintain a wide network of peer mentors through the ESWN. In my current position, I frequently provide guidance to early career scientists about applying to NSF for funding. Often times, a lot of the mentoring I do is simply helping connect someone to the right person to help them. I also feel good advice should be shared and not hoarded to give you a leg up. As a faculty I used to regularly share my teaching materials with anyone who asked for them. I recently shared my teaching statement and teaching portfolio with someone that was developing a training for postdocs going on the job market.

BECP: What do you want to be doing in 5 years? Why?

MA: I hope that in 5 years I love my job and that I am making a positive influence on the Atmospheric science community. If you had asked me 5 years ago where my career would be, I would never have guessed that I would be at NSF. While I love my current job, I hope that I stay open to opportunities I may not even know about.

BECP: How do you feel the field has changed? Where do you think it's going?

MA: The private sector is growing immensely. But in small private companies it is not enough to only know meteorology. If a company has few employees, they need those employees to be flexible and able to serve multiple roles in the company. Thus skills in communication, business, big data analytics, etc are becoming more and more important.

BECP: Any advice for early career members who wish to submit grants or proposals to organizations like NSF, but don't know where to start?

MA: Read through NSF program descriptions and solicitations, as well as the abstracts of recent awards that have been made by programs and try to identify which program your idea best fits within. Then contact the program director by sending them a short 1-2 page description of your current draft and ask them if it fits within the scope of their program. Most program directors want to help early career scientists navigate NSF, and can help you find the right fit. Then read the solicitation very carefully when writing your proposal. Also, ask a program director if you can serve as a reviewer for their program. Serving as a reviewer or panelist is one of the best ways to develop your proposal writing skills as you get to see what others do in their proposals.

