CENTER FOR ASTROPHYSICS
HARVARD & SMITHSONIAN

SMITHSONIAN ASTROPHYSICAL OBSERVATORY

Search for the Research Administrative Services Supervisor
Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory
Cambridge, Massachusetts

THE SEARCH

The Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory (SAO) seeks a seasoned and entrepreneurial administrative leader to serve as its Research Administrative Services Supervisor (RASS). Reporting to the Chief Operations Officer, the RASS will oversee a multi-faceted office and provide the highest-quality support to the SAO's scientists and administrators. The office is responsible for the overall operation of research administration, including the submission and administration of sponsored awards, compliance, cost analysis, subaward administration, and external relations.

The RASS will join during a remarkable period of innovation and historic interest for the Observatory as well as space and earth sciences. With forward-thinking momentum currently underway, the RASS will have the opportunity to lead during this exciting era and develop policies, procedures, and a workplace culture with efficacy, collaboration, clarity, and innovation as guiding principles.

One of fourteen Smithsonian education and research centers, the Observatory's mission is to advance our knowledge and understanding of the universe through research and education in astronomy and astrophysics. In partnership with the Harvard College Observatory, the Observatory is part of the Center for Astrophysics, the largest and most scientifically diverse astrophysical institution in the world. Nearly 600 staff, including 300 scientists, are part of the Observatory and work in partnership with the Harvard College Observatory's 200 employees to conduct a broad program in space and earth sciences. Key areas of research include exoplanets, the sun and solar weather, asteroids and comets, stellar evolution, galaxy formation and evolution, and the study of black holes. Ground and space-based instrumentation such as the Chandra X-Ray Observatory are all designed, built, and operated by Smithsonian and Harvard scientists, engineers, and partners and represent the most advanced equipment and research leading to breakthroughs in science.

The RASS is a systems-thinker, solutions-oriented, and inspiring leader with comprehensive knowledge of all aspects of research administration. They must understand the value, importance, and challenges of supporting world-class scientists while meeting complex regulatory requirements. The successful

candidate will possess excellent interpersonal and communication skills and bring a demonstrated track record of envisioning large-scale system transformation, successful implementation, and monitoring for improvement.

The Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in the recruitment of the Research Administrative Services Supervisor. All inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed in confidence as noted at the end of this document.

ABOUT THE SMITHSONIAN ASTROPHYSICAL OBSERVATORY

The Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory (SAO) was created in 1890 as a research center of the broader Smithsonian Institution. In 1955, the observatory moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts. In that era, the SAO created the world's first satellite-tracking network, establishing the organization as a pioneer in space science research. In 1973, the Smithsonian and Harvard formalized the collaboration as the Center for Astrophysics | Harvard & Smithsonian (CfA) under a single Director. SAO has continued its leadership in the advancement and diffusion of knowledge by developing orbiting observatories, utilizing large ground-based telescopes, and applying computational approaches to help answer the most pressing questions in astrophysics.

SAO is at the forefront, internationally, of the scientific exploration of the universe. Its broad programs of research range from ground-based astronomy and astrophysics research to space-based research, the engineering and development of major scientific instrumentation for space launch, as well as for use in large ground-based facilities and research designed to improve science education. The research objectives of SAO are carried out primarily with the support of government and Smithsonian Institution funds, with additional philanthropic support. Government funds are in the form of federal appropriations or in the form of contracts and grants from other agencies, while institution funds are made available to SAO in the form of grants from the institution's restricted funds, special purpose funds, bureau activities, business activities, and non-federal contracts and grants.

Consistent with the broader Smithsonian mission, SAO scientists are dedicated to the increase of knowledge about those physical processes that shape the natural world, and to the diffusion of this knowledge to the scientific community, to teachers and students, and to the public. SAO scientists typically publish over 1,000 refereed papers per year. In FY 2024, the SAO had a budget of $158M million, of which 71% (or $93.3 million) were from grants and contracts.

SAO is led by Dr. Lisa Kewley, who joined in July of 2022. A distinguished astrophysicist and Professor of Astrophysics at the Harvard Department of Astronomy, Dr. Kewley is the Director of the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, Director of the Harvard College Observatory (HCO), and Director of the Center for Astrophysics (CfA). Dr. Kewley's executive management team is comprised of Dr. Michael McCarthy, Deputy Director of the Center for Astrophysics, Chief Operating Officer, Heather Williams, Professor Daniel Eisenstein, Professor and Chair of the Harvard Department of Astronomy, Mr. Purvang Patel,

Executive Director of the Harvard College Observatory, and four Associate Directors who together oversee the CfA's science, technology and engineering, internal relations, and facilities and telescopes, and an external relations lead.

Together with SAO scientists, collaborators, and administrators, Dr. Kewley is implementing a new vision for the next generation of space and ground-based telescopes, petabyte-scale data handling, new diversity and inclusion initiatives, and nationwide education and outreach programs. With great public interest in astrophysics and other space sciences, coupled with a collective enthusiasm and forward-thinking momentum for the future of SAO, this is an exciting time to be part of the largest and most scientifically diverse astrophysical institution in the world.

About the Center for Astrophysics

SAO is part of a joint institution known as the Center for Astrophysics in conjunction with the Harvard College Observatory.

The Center for Astrophysics has a storied history and brings together two of the premier astrophysical research groups in the world to explore the cosmos and pursue studies of the basic physical processes that determine the nature and evolution of the universe. These groups trace their collaboration to 1955, and the CfA was formally established in 1973. In the 50 years since its inception, the CfA has had a profound impact across all areas of astronomy and astrophysics. Today, it is organized into scientific divisions: atomic and molecular physics; high energy astrophysics; optical and infrared astronomy; radio and geoastronomy; solar, stellar, and planetary sciences; in addition, the CfA is home to the Institute for Theory and Computation. The CfA also operates a science education department that develops curricula and materials that reflect current scientific and educational philosophy and operates education and outreach programs for schools across the nation. Scientists at the CfA have included several winners of the Nobel Prize in Physics and currently includes 15 National Academy of Sciences members and 14 members of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

The size, scale, and joint institutional support of the CfA has been a key factor in developing the infrastructure and instrumentation to perform world class astrophysics. The CfA supports a large suite of ground-based telescopes located in Arizona, Chile, Hawaii, Greenland, and the South Pole. The CfA has a prominent role in NASA space missions, including hosting the mission and data operation centers for the Chandra X-Ray Observatory, one of NASA's premier space telescopes, and a suite of orbiting observatories and instruments aimed at the study of the sun, stars, exoplanets, and the dusty universe. The Giant Magellan Telescope, currently under construction in Chile, will help CfA scientists conduct research on dark matter, black holes, exoplanets, life in the universe, and more.

The CfA is comprised of approximately 600 SAO staff members and an additional 200 from HCO. The scientific work is collaborative, with Smithsonian and Harvard colleagues working closely to produce scientific innovations and advance the organization's mission. Guided by a memorandum of

understanding, CfA operations and resources are not blended. Operational and financial policies and procedures governing the work of the CfA is nuanced and varied and is dependent on the personnel and procedures involved. Administrative guidelines depend mostly on a person's affiliation with the Smithsonian or Harvard and their respective institutional policies and procedures, or the funding purpose and sources involved. Examples include distinct Smithsonian and Harvard budgets and procurement guidelines, human resources policies, and administrative systems utilized to manage operations. The continued success of the CfA and SAO depends largely on administrative functions that are clear, consistent, and synergistic.

ROLE OF THE RESEARCH ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES SUPERVISOR

The Research Administrative Services Supervisor oversees a multifaceted office, with primary responsibility for ensuring the proper administration of the SAO-sponsored research activity. This office lead is responsible for the overall operation of the SAO research administrative support activities with responsibility for functional areas of research administration, including 1) the submission and administration of sponsored awards; 2) compliance; 3) cost analysis; 4) subawards administration; and 5) external relations. The individual is also responsible for overseeing the execution and administration of Chandra XRay Center [CXC] scientific observing subgrants on behalf of NASA.

RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Reports to and works with the COO. Works with the executive management team in the development and modification of policies and plans for the SAO Research Administrative Services and makes decisions regarding direction, emphasis, and execution.
2. Fosters and facilitates positive and engaging interactions between multiple scientific Divisions, administrative Departments, and Centers/Institutes within the SAO to develop, improve, and communicate effective processes and policies to support the mission and strategic vision of the CfA that enhance organizational agility, accountability, and transparency.
3. Actively seeks and promotes opportunities for funding from various sources, including government agencies, foundations, and industry partners.
4. Takes the lead in developing systems, policies, and procedures that support the pre- and post-award program functions, including coordinating, reviewing, and submitting all proposals, monitoring grant budgets and projections, administering cooperative agreements, and disseminating account information to faculty.
5. Effectively manages and ensures programs comply and are consistent with legislation, regulations, and policy requirements of the SAO and other funding agencies.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE RESEARCH ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES MANAGER

Systems Building

The Research Administrative Services Supervisor (RASS) will develop scalable, efficient, reliable systems that broaden the range of where proposals are submitted and support the scientific discoveries in astrophysics. They will develop processes and procedures that are innovative and manageable and eliminate administrative hurdles to allow scientists to focus on the scientific merit of their research portfolio. This work will require the RASS to be a hands-on partner with SAO executive leaders and primary investigators to ensure system designs align with institutional goals and provide maximum benefit. An example of a clear opportunity lies with the current proposal system, which is antiquated and cumbersome, lacking the ability to generate real-time data. The successful RASS will help determine what technological enhancements will make the greatest positive impact on the research enterprise without disregarding the immediate priorities already identified.

Strategic Leadership of People

The RASS is responsible for managing and growing a high-performing team, whose work is defined by quality, timeliness, and responsiveness to the needs of principal investigators and administrators. In hand with systems building, the RASS will need to make strategic decisions about staffing models, including filling vacant positions, to ensure manageable staff workloads and expanded capacity for scientists to pursue scientific discoveries. The RASS will need to define the vision, goals, and performance expectations for the department. With a keen interest in mentorship, they will need to bring the team along by cultivating trusting relationships, speaking with candor, and targeting skill development. The RASS will provide professional development and cross-training opportunities that build staff competency and expand the knowledge and expertise of the research administrative service department. They will foster a culture that is customer-oriented and seeks to continuously improve.

Remove Barriers to Success

The RASS will take a comprehensive approach that combines support, empowerment, and growth to ensure that scientists, administrators, and support staff thrive as a part of a cohesive institution. To this end, the RASS must create an environment where individuals have the resources, guidance, and opportunities to perform their duties. A clear opportunity for this work involves the onboarding of new scientists, many of whom have not experienced the proposal process and need training and support in building and managing successful research portfolios. These system improvements must ultimately help researchers refine the nontechnical aspects of their proposals to improve their chances of success. With the appropriate, targeted training and education programs, the research administrative service can instill confidence in individuals to take on new challenges.

Another key opportunity lies with the accessibility of information from the new systems. Enabling the SAO's talent requires easy access to meaningful data measures that capture progress, success, and failure. The systems can be optimized to classify and categorize research topics, identify teams, and expand collaborations across research departments.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory seeks an experienced research administrator to support the institution's mission. Significant experience with financial and operations management and human resources in a large and complex environment is required. In addition, the ideal candidate will bring many of the following experiences, skills, and qualities:

- Experience in leading research administration or sponsored programs, including pre-award and post award activities, at an academic or healthcare institution of similar size or complexity;
- Significant depth and knowledge in research administration topics, including proposal process and requirements, academic policies related to federal and non-federal contracts, Uniform Guidance, Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) and Code of Federal Regulations (CFR);
- A proven track record of providing visionary leadership, as well as effective management of a complex organization within the context of a large university or comparable public or private sector research organization;
- A history of success in working with faculty, researchers, and administrators from all sectors of campus and with representatives of federal agencies, industry, and international organizations;
- A demonstrated ability to lead complex organizational processes effectively and to nurture a culture that is in service of and support to the research and entrepreneurial efforts of faculty;
- Excellent skills in communicating to a wide range of audiences, including listening to a broad array of stakeholders;
- Knowledge and understanding of the current legislative, regulatory, and public policy environment impacting research;
- Ability to build, motivate, and supervise a team, including organizing workflow to accomplish objectives, identifying training needs and opportunities, developing incentives, and building performance management systems;
- Ability to lead through influence and persuasion;
- Active listening and building trust across various constituent groups;
- Proactively identify and respond to the emerging challenges in the field of research administration with involvement with relevant national organizations; and
- Bachelor's degree required, advanced degree in a related field preferred.

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

The Research Administrative Services Supervisor position is considered GS-14, Trust Fund [Non-Federal] Indefinite, full-time, in-person, and based in Cambridge, MA. The salary/bonus compensation range for this role is $140,000-$180,000.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website for the search: https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/smithsonian-astrophysical-observatory/research-administrative-services-supervisor. Electronic submission of materials is required.

Andrew Lee, Managing Partner
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The Smithsonian Institution is committed to ensuring that employees, applicants for employment, and affiliated staff are treated equitably in an environment that is free from discrimination and harassment based on race, color, religion, sex (including gender identity, gender stereotyping, pregnancy, and sexual orientation), national origin, age, disability, genetic information, parental status, marital status and/or participation in protected EEO activity.

Isaacson, Miller and The Smithsonian Institution are committed to creating an inclusive environment and welcome applications from candidates with disabilities. If you have any accommodation or access needs, we are happy to provide reasonable accommodations.