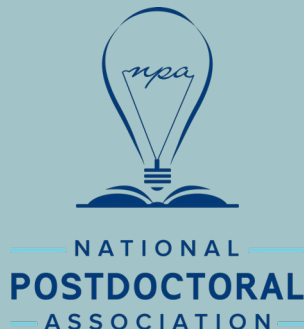


Advancing Policies and Practices to Support Postdoctoral Success: *A National and Local Perspective*

Caleb C. McKinney, PhD, MPS

Professor and Senior Associate Dean for Training, Program Development, and
Academic Innovation at Georgetown University School of Medicine
Member and former Chair, National Postdoctoral Association Board of Directors



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Graduate Education



WHAT IS A POSTDOC?

A **postdoctoral scholar** ("postdoc") is an individual holding a doctoral degree who is engaged in a temporary period of mentored research to acquire the professional skills needed to pursue a career path of their choosing.



NATIONAL
POSTDOCTORAL
ASSOCIATION



HOW MANY POSTDOCS ARE IN THE UNITED STATES?

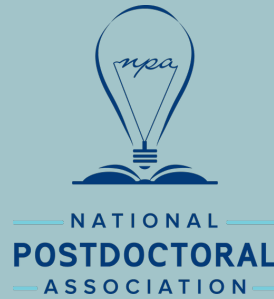
- According to our report, *Pressing Forward in Supporting Postdocs: 2023 National Postdoctoral Association Institutional Policy Report*, our institutional members serve **72,000 postdoctoral scholars**.
- In 2017, the NSF estimated there were approximately **64,783 academic postdoctoral appointees** in science, engineering, and health fields conducting research at U.S. academic institutions.

Postdoctoral Research Fellowship: Importance for the Fellow

- **Skill development:** Postdocs provide opportunities to hone existing technical skills, learn new ones, and develop "soft skills" like project management and communication.
- **Research independence:** They learn to define and test their own hypotheses with greater independence than in graduate school and develop the skills to run their own lab.
- **Career advancement:** The position helps build a stronger CV through a larger publication record, more extensive experience, and an expanded professional network.
- **Career refinement:** A postdoc allows for a period to solidify or change research interests and can serve as a bridge to various positions, including in academia, industry, or government.

Postdoctoral Research Fellowship: Importance for the Institution

- **Research output:** Postdocs are integral researchers who contribute significantly to the institution's research programs, help carry out projects, and increase the overall intellectual strength of the lab and department.
- **Mentorship:** They play a vital role in mentoring graduate students and other junior scientists, which helps develop the next generation of researchers.
- **Reputation and funding:** The work of successful postdocs enhances the reputation of the institution and their laboratories, and their success in securing grants can increase the inflow of grant support.
- **Collaboration:** They help build alliances and intellectual bridges to other institutions through their collaborative research efforts.



Mission Statement

To improve the postdoctoral experience by supporting a culture of inclusive connection. At the individual, organizational, and national levels, we facilitate enhanced professional growth, raise awareness, and collaborate with stakeholders in the postdoctoral community.

NPA Strategic Pillars

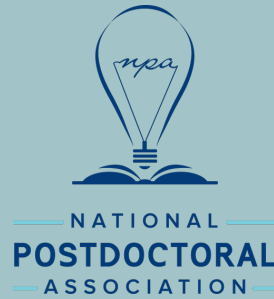
Advocate for
Our
Constituents

Champion
and Model
Greater
Diversity,
Equity,
Inclusion &
Belonging

Promote
Member
Career &
Professional
Development

Achieve
NPA
Operational
Excellence





NPA continuously seeks to understand
how changes in policy are affecting the
postdoc position



Pressing Forward in Supporting Postdocs

2023 National Postdoctoral Association
Institutional Policy Report

Kryste Ferguson, MEd
National Postdoctoral Association

Bhishma Amlani, PhD
Flagship Pioneering Stealth Co.

Thomas P. Kimbis, JD
National Postdoctoral Association

SIGMA XI
THE SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH HONOR SOCIETY

2023 NPA Institutional Policy Report

The NPA Institutional Policy Surveys are conducted every three years; this fourth iteration captures responses from approximately 120 institutions representing more than 50 percent of the **72,000** postdoctoral scholars (“postdocs”) at NPA member institutions.

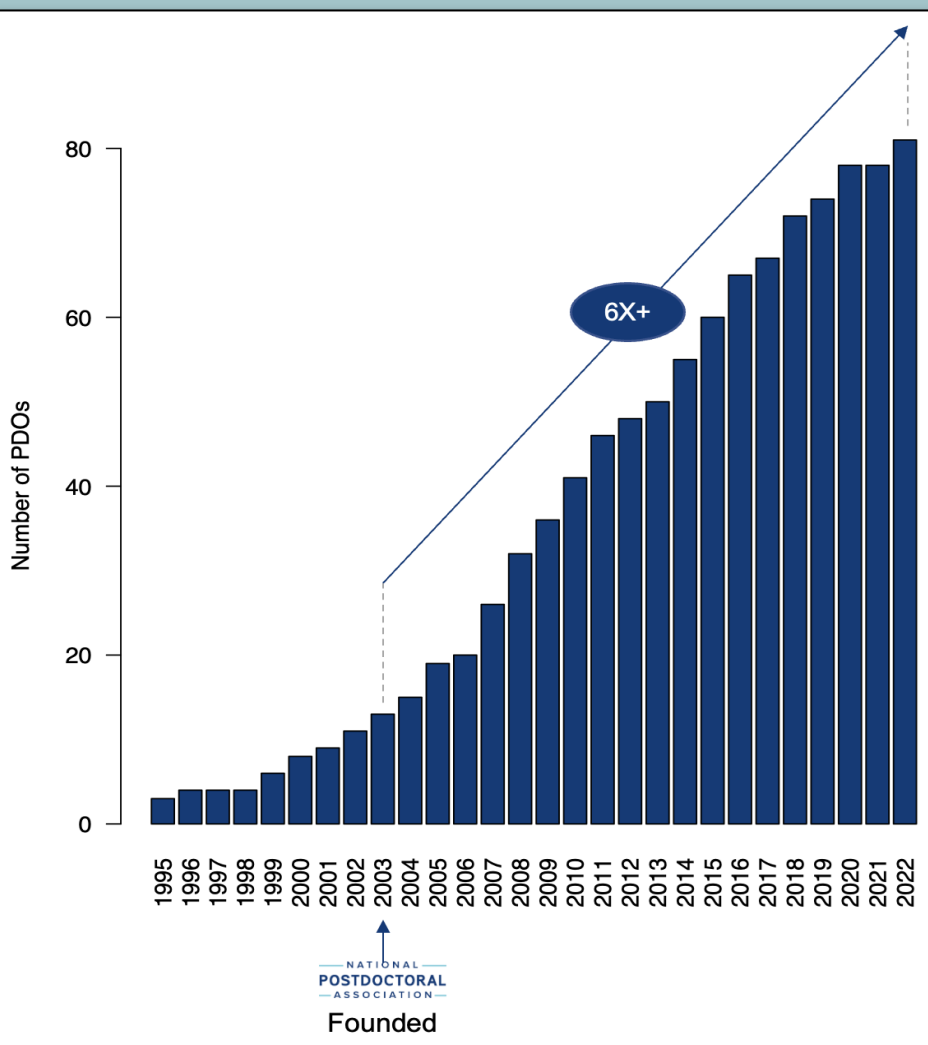


Key Recommendations

1. Pay Postdocs a Living Wage with Comprehensive Benefits
2. Provide Proper Institutional Support for Postdoc Offices and Associations
3. Collect Data on Postdoc Demographics and Outcomes
4. Provide a Postdoc Handbook & Data Transparently Outlining Institutional Policies

2023 NPA Institutional Policy Report

Provide Proper Institutional
Support for Postdoc
Offices and Associations



NPA Working to Improve the Postdoc Experience: Recommended Postdoctoral Policies and Practices

Structure

Postdoc Definition, Role
and Duration

Compensation & Benefits

Administrative Policies

Growth

Mentorship

Career Development:
developing
professional skills and
exploring diverse
career paths

Community

Diversity, Equity,
Inclusion and Belonging

International Issues

Wellness

Recommended Postdoctoral Policies and Practices

Download from here →



Toolkits to guide implementation

A. [Postdoctoral Priorities](#)

A1. [Postdoc Definition, Role, and Duration](#)

- Definition and title
- Allocation of protected time for professional development
- Timeframe for transition to independence

A2. [Compensation](#)

- Establishment of compensation scale
- Locality pay adjustments
- "Rest of US" locality pay level
- Consideration of service time
- Encouragement for above-minimum compensation practices
- Annual compensation adjustments
- Alignment with the latest congressionally-approved GS pay scale
- Equity in compensation across institution

A3. [Benefits](#)

- Comprehensive benefits package for fairness and equity
- Recommendation for comparable benefits packages
- Family-friendly benefits
- Accessibility to retirement programs
- Moving expense allowance

A4. [Mentorship](#)

- Annual career planning and review
- Mentoring compacts or agreements
- Infrastructure and resources maintenance
- Implementation of evidence-based mentor training programs for faculty, postdocs, and staff
- Faculty policies recognizing and valuing effective mentorship
- Incentivization of faculty groups to function as mentoring teams
- Evaluation and feedback mechanisms

A5. [Professional Development](#)

- Preparation and transition to an independent career
- Advancement of professional skills
- Centralized training fund
- Sharing professional development resources across organizations

A6. [Well-being](#)

- Healthy work environments
- Application of the U.S. Surgeon General's framework

- Enhancement of work/life balance
- Behavioral health support and counseling
- Recognizing signs of behavioral distress and preventing burnout
- Diverse resources for populations with additional needs
- Building relationships and community

A7. [Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging \(DEIB\)](#)

- Promotion of inclusivity
- Adherence to legal requirements
- Designation of DEIB representative
- Execution and communication of DEIB policies
- Utilization of formal recruitment mechanisms
- Establishment of DEIB professional development processes
- DEIB training for mentors

A8. [International Issues](#)

- Establishment and support of an international office
- Tools, platforms, resources, and opportunities
- Visa length
- Inclusive eligibility criteria

B. [Administrative Essentials](#)

B1. [Institutional Entities](#)

- Postdoctoral Office (PDO)
- Postdoctoral Association (PDA)
- Postdoctoral Advisory Committee (PDAC)

B2. [Appointment and Termination Process](#)

- Centralized appointment process
- Issuance of appointment letter
- Notice of appointment terminations

B3. [Onboarding](#)

- Mandatory postdoc-specific orientation
- Postdoctoral handbook

B4. [Communication](#)

- Website and listserv
- Additional modes of communication
- Inclusive language practices

B5. [Intellectual Property and Authorship](#)

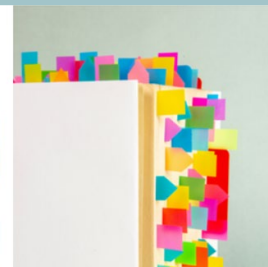
- Dispute resolution processes
- Designation of intellectual property dispute resolution officers

B6. [Data](#)

- Annual climate survey
- Demographic data collection
- Exit interviews
- Career outcomes tracking



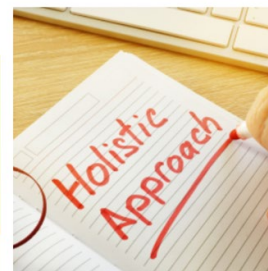
National Postdoc Appreciation Week Toolkit



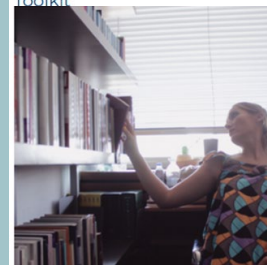
Postdoc Association Toolkit



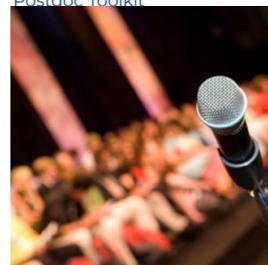
Organizational Members Toolkit



Supporting the Whole Postdoc Toolkit



Postdoc Office Toolkit



Postdoc Symposium Toolkit

NPA Programming!

- National Postdoc Appreciation Week
- NPA Annual Conference March 12-14, 2026 in San Francisco
- *SmartSkills* Course
- IMPACT Fellowship Program
- Postdoc Leader Community Forum
- Special Emphasis Summits
- Volunteer & Leadership Opportunities





NATIONAL
POSTDOCTORAL
ASSOCIATION

The national
voice of the
postdoctoral
community



Reasons to join the NPA: Postdocs

1

Connect

with grad
students and
postdocs
across the
country.

2

Learn

from subject
matter experts on
career
exploration and
more.

3

Empower

your career by
volunteering with the
NPA to grow leadership
skills & your network.

Joining is easy!

Scan the QR code, or visit www.nationalpostdoc.org/join.
The NPA will send your membership material within 5 days.

*Affiliate memberships are free for postdocs and graduate students of NPA member institutions. Research institutions can join the NPA as member institutions using the same link.

Improving the Postdoctoral Experience at Georgetown University: support structures and policies

A photograph of the Georgetown University main building, a large stone structure with multiple spires and a prominent clock tower. In the foreground, a bronze statue of a man is visible. The sky is clear blue.

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Graduate Education

Postdoc support in place at GU in 2016:

- Department and Program level activities (ie, NIH Training grants)
- Postdocs occasionally invited to graduate student events
- Off and on grassroots postdoc led efforts

Community can transform culture



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](#)

John Kotter's Model of Change

Photo from Georgetown University Medical Center:
<https://biomedicalprograms.georgetown.edu/blog/postdoc-research-showcase-symposium-2018/>



Screenshot from Georgetown University Postdoctoral Association Website
<https://sites.google.com/georgetown.edu/georgetownnpda/home>



Postdoc support in place at GU by 2024:

2017

- Became an institutional member of the **National Postdoctoral Association**
- Campus-wide Georgetown University Postdoctoral Association (GUPDA) with a permanent budget line
- Annual Campus-wide Postdoctoral Research Symposium
- Permanent Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Training and Development located in the Biomedical Graduate Education office
 - Academy for Transferable Management Skills Project Management Course
 - Career Advising
 - Annual virtual postdoc recruitment event
 - Annual postdoc orientation in collaboration with benefits and office of global services
- Webpage with clearly outlined postdoctoral fellow benefits
- GUPDA-appointed Postdoc position on the Med Center research committee
- Inaugural GU-wide Policy for Postdoctoral Fellow support and administration

2024

Projects and initiatives underway:

- Working on establishing a university wide office of postdoctoral affairs, likely either housed under graduate education or under research
- Standardizing benefits offerings across appointed types and funding sources
- Continue exploring campus resources for inclusion of postdocs