



The National Postdoctoral Association (NPA), representing 79,000 postdoctoral scholars pursuing careers beyond the PhD, supports the fair treatment of postdocs and wages commensurate with their education, experience, and valuable contributions to society.

**The NPA reiterates our previous recommendation that postdoctoral salaries be increased to at least \$50,000, consistent with recommendations from the National Academy of Sciences<sup>1</sup>.** In 2013, over two-thirds of postdocs were paid at or below the National Institutes of Health (NIH) National Research Service Award (NRSA) minimum standard (then \$39,264; currently \$42,840)<sup>2</sup>. This is despite the fact that postdocs work an average of 53 hours per week<sup>3</sup>. Currently, postdoctoral scholars are generally considered exempt from overtime regulations under the “Learned Professional Exemption.” The proposed salary changes to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) will require institutions employing postdocs to determine whether they remain exempt if the salary minimum for exemption is raised to \$50,440. While postdoc salaries should be raised, the NPA is concerned that if the proposed change to \$50,440 is made effective immediately, it may have unintended consequences that would negatively affect postdoctoral scholars in the short term. For example, without additional funding to offset the increased cost, institutions may reduce the number of postdoctoral scholars they employ. Additionally, institutions might choose to move postdoctoral scholars into non-employee classifications, thus *potentially* decreasing postdoc salary, and *eliminating access to employer-sponsored health insurance* and other employee benefits.

Given the enormous complexity and cost of transitioning a large segment of the scientific workforce from an exempt to non-exempt status, the NPA recommends a graduated approach to increasing salaries. Increasing the NIH NRSA minimum stipend levels by approximately 5% per year would result in a \$50,000 annual stipend within three years, without compromising postdoc employment or receipt of benefits. This approach would allow institutions time to allocate resources, adapt hiring practices, and adjust the number of PhDs produced each year to fit within these new budgetary constraints. We anticipate that this committed, albeit, gradual, increase in salary levels would have a positive impact on postdocs while minimizing the need to reduce the postdoc workforce numbers.

---

<sup>1</sup> National Academies of Science. (2014). *The postdoctoral experience revisited*. Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press.

<sup>2</sup> Ferguson, K., Huang, B., Beckman, L., Sinche, M. (2014). *National Postdoctoral Association institutional policy report 2014: Supporting and developing postdoctoral scholars*. Washington, D.C.: National Postdoctoral Association.

<sup>3</sup> Stephan, P. (2013). How to exploit postdocs. *BioScience*, 63(4), 245-246.