

# From Ph.D. to Professoriate: The Role of the Institution in Fostering the Advancement of Postdoc Women

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The goal of NPA ADVANCE: *From Postdoc to Faculty: Transition Issues for Women Scientists* is to adapt and disseminate promising institutional practices for assisting postdoc women to transition to the professoriate. The National Postdoctoral Association (NPA) will promote these promising practices through workshops, a national Summit on Gender and the Postdoctorate, a new resource handbook, and an online informational clearinghouse.

## The Postdoctorate

### Postdoc Career Life Cycle

A significant number of men and women leave the academic career pipeline before the tenure track, with less than a third of postdocs obtaining tenure-track positions. While market pressure plays a large role there are also other factors, particularly for women who are more likely than men to depart academia.

### Reasons Postdoc Women Leave Science

From the literature, the leading factors for postdoc women are:

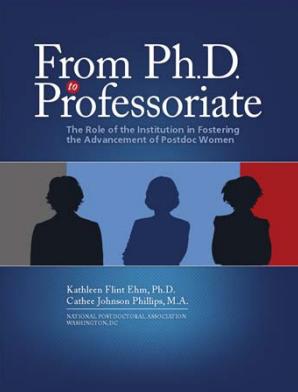
- The challenges of family formation**, particularly during the short-term postdoc position that offers no stability and often limited family-friendly benefits.
- A perceived lack of mentoring**, where postdocs often rely solely upon their busy postdoctoral supervisor, or "PI," as their primary mentor and can have difficulty taking time away from research themselves for mentoring activities.
- Feelings of isolation** for postdocs who more closely align with the lab or workgroup than with the institution and fall into a "grey area" between students and faculty.
- Lack of confidence**, where there is evidence that postdoc women are less likely than their male peers to feel qualified for a principal investigator position and are less likely to re-apply a second time for such a position.

**International and underrepresented minority (URM) postdocs** face these same challenges and, in some cases, to a greater degree.

## Mentoring

The cornerstone of the postdoctoral experience, mentoring should be fostered in numerous ways, supporting the mentors as well as postdocs in finding mentors.

- Treat, and reward, mentoring as a "core" part of research.
- Develop structured mentoring programs to encourage multiple mentors for postdocs, which could encompass one or more of the following:
  - One-on-one mentoring.
  - Mentoring orientation activities.
  - Group-based mentoring.
  - Provide training in mentorship for mentors and mentees.
  - Encourage the development of mentoring plans, and the use of other mentoring tools like the Individual Development Plan (IDP).
- Peer mentoring.
- Increased exposure to potential mentors through networking.



*From Ph.D. to Professoriate: The Role of the Institution in Fostering the Advancement of Postdoc Women* is a new resource book developed by the National Postdoctoral Association as part of NPA ADVANCE. The book provides an overview of our current understanding of the various factors impeding postdoc women's continuation in academia and recommended practices that have shown promise for aiding these women in overcoming these obstacles. The goal is to help focus institutions' efforts to support postdoc women to foster their career advancement. As a companion to this book, an expanded compendium is available online, which includes more detailed examples of adaptable models from the community:

[www.nationalpostdoc.org/advance/clearinghouse](http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/advance/clearinghouse)

## Postdoctoral Policies and Services

As a first step, institutions should consult the NPA Recommended Policies for institutions that describes a baseline of postdoctoral policies thought to foster postdoctoral success and satisfaction.

### Family-Friendly Policies and Services

In addition, establish family-friendly benefits for all postdocs at an institution, ensuring that postdocs with different sources of funding have equitable benefits. Among these are:

- Clear guidance on family-friendly policies and practices in order to avoid case-by-case implementation, especially where there are differences by postdoc funding source.
- Paid parental leave provisions for all postdocs.
- Unpaid family leave for those postdocs who may not be covered by FMLA.
- "Postdoc clock" extensions for extended family-related leaves.
- Affordable dependent care options for healthcare, independent of funding source.
- Portable childcare subsidies usable at any eligible childcare service.
- Postdoc access to any available "dual-career" job assistance.
- Compliance reviews regarding Title IX pregnancy protections for postdocs, such as maternity leave offerings, pregnancy safety protocols, and accountability for equal treatment of pregnant postdocs

### Services for Postdoctoral Supervisors

- Enhance communication about postdoc policies and procedures.
- Provide resources to postdoctoral supervisors on postdoc policy, particularly family-friendly policies and guidelines.
- Foster mechanisms for limiting the impact on research of a postdoc's pregnancy or leave period, such as: flexible work schedules and standardizing accommodation strategies during pregnancy and leave.

## Who Will Find This Resource Useful?

- Offices of postdoctoral affairs;
- Graduate schools that include postdocs in their purview;
- Career centers, training offices or programs that serve postdocs;
- NSF-funded ADVANCE programs that include postdocs in their activities;
- Postdoctoral associations;
- Offices of international services;
- Researchers who supervise and mentor postdocs;
- Institutional leaders seeking an overview of the key gender issues for postdocs;
- Federal funding agencies;
- Professional societies; and
- Individual postdocs.

## Career and Professional Development

Career and professional development services have the potential to impact all postdocs, but particularly postdoc women. Postdoc offices can be a natural home for these, but other offices can consider extending their services to postdocs.

- Establish a coherent postdoctoral training program or curriculum.
- Use the NPA core competencies as a guide for postdoctoral training, at the institutional, departmental or individual level.
- Encourage networking activities for postdocs, including training, and networking venues such as postdoctoral associations.
- Provide access to career development resources, including:
  - Tools for career planning.
  - Institutional career services for postdocs.
  - Insight into the faculty search process.
  - Workshops and resources on career-life balance.

## Commentaries

The volume also includes invited commentaries from the following authors.

***A Perspective from Leadership: Critical Considerations in Retaining Postdoctoral Women of Color in Academia***  
By Sibby Anderson-Thompson and Deborah Stroman

***Achieving Cooperation between Universities and Federal Granting Agencies to Create a Flexible Family-Friendly Workplace***  
By Mary Ann Mason

***Mentoring Postdoc Women from an Institutional Perspective***  
By Donna J. Dean and Cynthia L. Simpson



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