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The National Postdoctoral Association (NPA) respectfully submits the following testimony regarding the status of postdoc women of color in the academic science, engineering and medicine disciplines to the Committee on Advancing Institutional Transformation for Minority Women in Academia, under the auspices of the National Academies Committee for Women in Science, Engineering and Medicine (CWSEM).

Postdoc Women of Color

Reliable data on postdoc women of color is limited. The National Postdoctoral Association (NPA) does not currently collect data on the postdoc population at the national level but has identified the following data collected by other groups related to this population:

- In 2005, approximately 10 percent of postdocs who responded to the Sigma Xi Postdoc Survey (<http://postdoc.sigmaxi.org/>) indicated they were underrepresented minorities. Of those who reported themselves as underrepresented minorities, 62 percent were women (http://www.sigmaxi.org/postdoc/by_minority/about_you_short.html).
- The 2012 Science and Engineering Indicators reported that the percentage of woman doctorate holders who were employed in academic postdoc positions in 2008 was 39.4 percent, a percentage that has steadily increased since 1973, when it was 14.3 percent¹.
- The 2012 Science and Engineering Indicators reported that the percentage of underrepresented minorities who were doctorate holders employed in academic postdoc positions in 2008 was 8.3 percent². This percentage has also steadily increased since 1973, when it was 2.4 percent.

¹ National Science Board. (2012). Science and Engineering Indicators 2012. Arlington, VA: National Science Foundation. (Table 5-8).

² Ibid. (Table 5-9).

Current Data on Women of Color in the National Postdoctoral Association

The NPA tracks data on gender, race/ethnicity, citizenship, country of origin, education, and employment of its members when they enroll. Responses to such questions are always optional; for example, some 38% of our members chose “prefer not to say” or did not respond to questions regarding race/ethnicity when enrolling.

Currently, some 37% of our members have identified themselves as women, and 7 percent of our members have further identified themselves as women of color (American Indian/Alaskan Native; Black or African American; East Indian; Inter-racial; Middle Eastern; Hispanic/Latino; Asian/East Indian; Asian/Inter-racial; and Other). Within this group, the majority also reported on their terminal degrees, titles, and citizenship:

- Fifty-nine percent of the women of color responded regarding their terminal degrees: Of those responding, the majority holds doctorate degrees, while 7 percent hold bachelor’s degrees and 4 percent hold master’s degrees.
- Eighty-eight percent of the women of color reported their title/position: Of those responding, the majority are postdoctoral researchers, while 5 percent are graduate students and 13 percent hold other positions, including but not limited to president or CEO (1.4 percent of the women of color responding) or assistant dean, associate dean, director, or coordinator of postdoctoral affairs (3.5 percent of those responding).
- All but two of the women of color responded regarding U.S. citizenship: Of those responding, 83% identified themselves as U.S. citizens or U.S. permanent residents, while 15% identified themselves as “U.S. Temporary Visa (J1, H1-b, other)” and 2.5% as “Other.”

The NPA’s Efforts and Activities to Promote Diversity

One of the NPA’s strategic priorities is to facilitate diversity in the postdoc community. It is hoped that our efforts will foster the retention of women of color through the postdoctoral period of the career. The NPA is a 501(c)3 educational non-profit organization, and our activities are guided by our official Diversity Statement and Statement of Inclusion:

Diversity Statement

The National Postdoctoral Association seeks to promote diversity and ensure equal opportunity and inclusion for all persons in the membership, leadership and activities of the National Postdoctoral

Association regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, disability, country of origin, field of research, socio-economic status, religion, age, marital status, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

Statement of Inclusion

The National Postdoctoral Association aims to advance the United States' research enterprise by maximizing the effectiveness of the research community and enhancing the quality of the postdoctoral experience for all participants. A diverse postdoctoral community has positive effects on research and teaching and enhances the work environment by offering broadened perspectives and encouraging critical thinking. It is therefore a goal of the NPA to create an environment that promotes diversity and inclusiveness, and to create opportunities for all of its members to interact with tolerance, understanding, and respect for others.

The NPA is committed to achieving diversity and inclusiveness among its constituency, and advocates equality for all postdocs, regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, disability, country of origin, socio-economic status, religion, age, marital status, sexual orientation, or gender identity, in all disciplines at all organizations that train postdoctoral fellows. This commitment to diversity and inclusiveness extends to the practices and policies of the NPA, and the NPA strongly urges institutions to embrace this commitment as part of their individual missions.

The NPA strives to ensure that all members have open access and opportunities to contribute to the organization through leadership positions, involvement within the committee structure, and participation in annual meetings and other NPA sponsored events. The NPA promotes advocacy for increased diversity among postdoctoral scholars and fosters diversity through activities, policies, and practices that are attuned to this commitment.

The NPA Diversity Officers

Since its inception, the NPA staff and volunteers have devoted time and energy to increasing diversity in the postdoctoral community. Currently, the NPA's two volunteer Diversity Officers serve as the public face of diversity postdoc issues for the NPA and as the primary resource and expert advisor for the NPA Board of Directors, the staff, and committees.

Recommended Strategies to Increase the Participation of Underrepresented Groups

In 2011, the NPA Diversity Officers led a taskforce that developed the *NPA Recommended Strategies to Increase the Participation of Underrepresented Groups*

(<http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/underrepresented-groups>).

The NPA Annual Meeting Postdoc Travel Awards

Preference is given to applicants who are from underrepresented groups in their fields of study.

The NPA Workshop Program

The NPA requires that at least one workshop covering some aspect of increasing diversity be offered at its Annual Meetings. Most recently, at its 2012 meeting, the workshop *Effective Strategies to Diversify Your Institution's Postdoctoral Population* was organized and moderated by Albert Roca, Ph.D., Diversity Consultant, www.minoritypostdoc.org.

The NPA staff and volunteers also organize and host or present workshops for postdocs in other venues. In regard to fostering diversity, the NPA hosted the 2010 workshop *LET'S TALK! Expanding Dialogue in the Postdoctoral Community towards Broadening Participation in the Social, Behavioral, and Economic (SBE) Sciences*³. Participants included postdocs from the National Science Foundation (NSF) Directorate for Social, Behavioral & Economic Sciences (SBES) Minority Postdoctoral Research Fellowships (MPRF) program, as well as SBES postdocs from the NPA membership.

The NPA ADVANCE Program

The goal of the NPA ADVANCE project, *From Postdoc to Faculty: Transition Issues for Women Scientists*, is to foster the transition of women postdocs into the professoriate⁴. The NPA ADVANCE staff has been working to adapt and disseminate promising institutional practices for assisting women scientists and engineers in making this transition, drawing on successful models from past ADVANCE programs as well as from the postdoctoral community. These models have been promoted through workshops at our Annual Meetings, the National Summit on Gender and the Postdoctorate, and an online informational clearinghouse (www.nationalpostdoc.org/advance). Currently, a resource handbook is being developed that will be published in the fall of 2012 and will include commentary on retaining women of color in the academic career pipeline.

Challenges or Barriers Faced by Women of Color

³ The workshop was supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 1049638. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

⁴ The NPA ADVANCE project is supported by the National Science Foundation Grant No. #0819994 through an ADVANCE Partnerships for Adaption, Implementation, and Dissemination (PAID) Award. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

Through the NPA ADVANCE and other programs, the NPA has identified challenges and barriers faced by postdoc women as they advance in their careers. The key findings of focus groups conducted as part of the NPA ADVANCE project (www.nationalpostdoc.org/advance-focus-groups) were:

- Family concerns loom large for these women, primarily due to “dual-career” issues with their spouses or partners and secondarily due to children.
- Finances were a major source of secondary concern, since family formation often created additional financial hardships that were hard to manage on a postdoc salary (e.g. childcare costs, mortgages, “supporting the family”).
- Participants talked about various struggles with the “postdoc clock,” namely the unspecified, but limited amount of time one should be a postdoc.
- A common concern for participants was being in “limbo” or having a lack of clear status and in many cases this concern was linked to feelings of isolation and lack of confidence.

For postdoc women of color, our work to date suggests that:

- The sense of isolation is more pronounced;
- They face unconscious bias related to both gender and race/ethnicity; and
- There is a lack of role models.

In regard to role models, mentoring of postdoc women of color is impacted by cultural identity, “political” power, and other factors. The participants in the 2010 “Let’s Talk” workshop offered their insights in regard to effective mentoring of those from underrepresented groups⁵:

Having an effective mentor of the same cultural identity is beneficial but there are at least two other factors to consider:

- *A mentor of the same cultural identity may have little resources or power within an institution; if so, the postdoc should seek an additional mentor with those resources and power.*
- *A mentor who understands and respects a postdoc’s personal or social background and the ways in which that background informs the postdoc’s research is not always someone who shares the postdoc’s ethnic background.*
 - *For example, for a postdoc married and/or with children, it may be as beneficial to have a mentor who is married and/or with children (or who understands the*

⁵Johnson Phillips, C. (2011). *Workshop Proceedings: The Postdoctoral Experience in the SBE Sciences*. Washington DC: National Postdoctoral Association.

challenges of balancing career and family needs) as having a mentor from the same ethnic background.

Such factors strengthen the case for building a network of multiple mentors.

Key Policy Recommendations

The NPA recommends:

- Federal agencies, institutions of higher education, and professional societies/associations should continue/expand any efforts or engage without delay in a long-term effort to collect data on women of color in the scientific academic workforce. The dearth of reliable data on this population and the issues they face makes it extremely difficult to make informed recommendations regarding the advancement of women of color in the workforce.
- Federally-funded programs such as the NSF ADVANCE program and the NSF MPRF program should continue to be funded. Such programs should emphasize the need to identify challenges and barriers and promote practices and policies that facilitate the advancement of women of color.
- Funding agencies and institutions should review their policies and, if needed, take steps to ensure that they are family-friendly to postdoc women, including postdoc women of color. They should assertively disseminate information regarding these policies to postdocs.
 - As part of the NPA ADVANCE project the NPA has developed an online Clearinghouse of Promising Practices (<http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/advance/clearinghouse>) as well as maternity and paternity guides for postdocs (<http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/publications/family-friendly>).
- Funding agencies should offer/continue to offer administrative supplements for support during family leave, such as the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) primary care-giver technical assistant supplements, and assertively market these opportunities.
- Funding agencies and institutions should hold supervisors/principal investigators accountable for facilitating effective mentoring for postdocs, including recognizing the challenges faced by postdoc women of color in this regard, and provide the supervisors with the resources needed for effective mentoring to take place. *Please note:* The NPA recognizes that not every supervisor makes an effective mentor nor has time to mentor those who report to him/her, but certainly the supervisor should be obligated to facilitate such mentoring.