National Postdoctoral Association
Recommended Postdoctoral Policies and Practices

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Table of Contents

Forward

A. Postdoctoral Priorities
   A1. Postdoc Definition, Role, and Duration
       a. Definition and title
       b. Allocation of protected time for professional development
       c. Timeframe for transition to independence
   A2. Compensation
       a. Establishment of compensation scale
       b. Locality pay adjustments
       c. “Rest of US” locality pay level
       d. Consideration of service time
       e. Encouragement for above-minimum compensation practices
       f. Annual compensation adjustments
       g. Alignment with the latest congressionally-approved GS pay scale
       h. Equity in compensation across institution
   A3. Benefits
       a. Comprehensive benefits package for fairness and equity
       b. Recommendation for comparable benefits packages
       c. Family-friendly benefits
       d. Accessibility to retirement programs
       e. Moving expense allowance
   A4. Mentorship
       a. Annual career planning and review
       b. Mentoring compacts or agreements
       c. Infrastructure and resources maintenance
       d. Implementation of evidence-based mentor training programs for faculty, postdocs, and staff
       e. Faculty policies recognizing and valuing effective mentorship
       f. Incentivization of faculty groups to function as mentoring teams
       g. Evaluation and feedback mechanisms
   A5. Professional Development
       a. Preparation and transition to an independent career
       b. Advancement of professional skills
       c. Centralized training fund
       d. Sharing professional development resources across organizations
   A6. Well-being
       a. Healthy work environments
       b. Application of the U.S. Surgeon General’s framework
c. Enhancement of work/life balance
d. Behavioral health support and counseling
e. Recognizing signs of behavioral distress and preventing burnout
f. Diverse resources for populations with additional needs
g. Building relationships and community

A7. **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB)**
   a. Promotion of inclusivity
   b. Adherence to legal requirements
c. Designation of DEIB representative
d. Execution and communication of DEIB policies
e. Utilization of formal recruitment mechanisms
f. Establishment of DEIB professional development processes
g. DEIB training for mentors

A8. **International Issues**
   a. Establishment and support of an international office
   b. Tools, platforms, resources, and opportunities
c. Visa length
d. Inclusive eligibility criteria

**B. Administrative Essentials**

B1. **Institutional Entities**
   a. Postdoctoral Office (PDO)
b. Postdoctoral Association (PDA)
c. Postdoctoral Advisory Committee (PDAC)

B2. **Appointment and Termination Process**
   a. Centralized appointment process
   b. Issuance of appointment letter
c. Notice of appointment terminations

B3. **Onboarding**
   a. Mandatory postdoc-specific orientation
   b. Postdoctoral handbook

B4. **Communication**
   a. Website and listserv
   b. Additional modes of communication
   c. Inclusive language practices

B5. **Intellectual Property and Authorship**
   a. Dispute resolution processes
   b. Designation of intellectual property dispute resolution officers

B6. **Data**
   a. Annual climate survey
   b. Demographic data collection
   c. Exit interviews
   d. Career outcomes tracking
National Postdoctoral Association
Recommended Postdoctoral Policies and Practices (2024)

   e. Data-sharing plan

B7. **Conflict, Mediation, and Grievance Processes**
   a. Ombudsperson appointment
   b. Performance issue policies
   c. Policies addressing misconduct, harassment, and grievances

**Foreword**

The National Postdoctoral Association (NPA) believes that an improved experience for the postdoctoral researcher requires that institutions in academia, industry, and beyond set policies to provide appropriate compensation, enforce equal treatment across the community, foster effective mentoring, and better recognize the value and contributions of postdoctoral researchers. These commitments must be made at the highest levels, with institutional leaders providing the appropriate processes, mechanisms, pathways, programs, incentives and disincentives. Adoption of any recommendation is not expected where superseded by state law. The postdoctoral position within this document refers to a researcher working in academia or other fields, including industry, and seeking a career within academia or beyond. The audiences for these recommendations are whole institutions, as their implementation requires action by a variety of offices and personnel.

**A. Postdoctoral Priorities**

*These recommendations cover areas of high visibility to incoming and existing postdocs.*

**A1. Postdoctoral Definition, Role, and Duration**

   a. **Use a clear, common definition and title for postdoctoral researchers.** As defined by the NPA, a postdoctoral researcher ("postdoc") is an individual holding a doctoral degree who is engaged in a temporary period of mentored research and/or scholarly training for the purpose of acquiring the professional skills needed to pursue a career path of their choosing. Institutions should adhere to a common definition of the postdoc position and its attributes throughout the institution, including equal benefits and treatment regardless of discipline, funding source or mechanism, or nationality. The institution’s definition of the postdoc should clearly include that postdocs are either employees of the institution or will receive employee-level benefits equal to full-time employees at the institution. Institutions should avoid using the term “trainee,” as it is seen as diminutive while recognizing the importance of training to postdocs and all positions. Institutions should use clear and consistent titles for postdocs throughout the organization and ascribe learning, mentoring, and professional development objectives to the role. Institutions should ensure that all personnel are made aware of this definition so they can accurately understand the postdoc position and how it differs or shares similarities with other institution positions, including staff scientists.
b. **Provide protected time for professional development in the formally stated position or role of the postdoc.** Postdocs should receive a set percentage of protected time to pursue professional development activities outside of regular research responsibilities, including but not limited to self-directed research, mentoring (as a mentor and/or mentee), teaching, professional networking, conference attendance, and career skills development. This percentage should be set at a minimum of ten percent (10%) of postdocs’ time. Institutions hosting postdocs should establish this policy in writing and share it transparently with current and prospective postdocs, principal investigators, faculty, Postdoctoral Office (PDO) leaders, staff interacting with postdocs, and other members of the greater postdoctoral community. Language reflecting this policy should be included in the postdoc offer letter and applicable memoranda of agreement. Clear communication is essential to ensure a common understanding across the full postdoctoral community, where great power differentials often exist, to demonstrate that the institution upholds and supports this position. Violations of this mandate (e.g., principal investigators preventing postdocs from conducting professional development activities) should be taken seriously by the institution, such as by withholding future postdoc appointments or reporting the action to the appropriate funding agency.

c. **Establish a time frame for postdoctoral transition to independence.** Institutions should define the maximum length of time an individual may be classified as a postdoc, taking into account the number of years previously spent at other institutions in a postdoctoral position. The NPA recommends a five-year limit on the length of service as a postdoc, including time spent across multiple institutions. Extensions to the postdoctoral appointment are appropriate in cases involving family leave and other extenuating circumstances. The institution should define a process for requesting, reviewing and approving extensions. When there is a mutual desire to retain the postdoc at the institution in a new position, the postdoc should be encouraged to apply for such an appointment promptly, well in advance of the maximum postdoc appointment period. Institutions should develop procedures for postdocs in this situation to provide transparency and reduce inequities.

### A2. Compensation

a. **Establish a minimum baseline compensation scale for postdocs based on the General Schedule federal pay scale with locality adjustments.** Postdocs should be compensated fairly based on their level of education and skills provided to their institutions, adjusted by the local cost of living. Institutions should set a minimum postdoc wage (stipend or salary) in accordance with the U.S. federal government General Schedule (GS) classification and pay system scale. The annually-adjusted GS pay system, vetted annually by economists, ensures that inflationary factors are appropriately incorporated in postdoc pay. All
postdoc compensation levels should be set at no less than this level and should be increased to include locality pay for the institution’s geographic area where applicable (see below).

b. **Adjust the minimum compensation level to include locality pay.** The GS system includes clear definitions of geographic areas for purposes of applying locality pay. Institutions should offer a minimum wage no less than the GS locality pay for the work location. For example, in 2024, the recommended minimum range spans from $72,553 (see RUS below) to $90,310 (San Francisco, the highest locality amount). Institutions may wish to offer minimum pay amounts above these levels. Locality pay provides increased equity by helping provide appropriate compensation adjusted for local housing, food, and childcare costs.

c. **Where no specific locality pay is applicable, use the GS-11 “Rest of US” level as the minimum for postdoc pay.** The GS-11 level is commensurate with the starting level for PhD holders in federal hiring. The “Rest of US” (RUS) figures for GS-11, Step 1, for postdocs whose work is not located in areas with specific locality pay levels, show the NPA recommended minimum compensation for postdocs. (This level is $72,553 for 2024, for example. The base level GS-11 table should not be used as it does not reflect locality.) It is understood that it may take some institutions several budget cycles to fully implement this recommendation. In addition, those institutions seeking to offer compensation levels, such as those wishing to be more competitive with industry, may want to consider RUS GS levels higher than GS-11 as a baseline for compensation schedules.

d. **Compensation should reflect service time.** Minimum postdoc wages should include annual increases of one Step for each year of service, starting with GS-11, Step 1 for entry-level postdocs on the appropriate locality scale. The high end of this scale is GS-11, Step 5, reflecting the NPA-recommended five-year limit on years of service as a postdoc.

e. **All recommended levels are for minimum, not average or maximum, compensation levels.** Nothing in this recommendation is intended to dissuade institutions from offering compensation at higher levels than these recommended as minimum levels.

f. **Adjust compensation levels annually.** Compensation amounts should be adjusted to reflect the new GS pay scale issued annually by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

g. **Match timing as appropriate.** Institutions should use the latest Congressionally-approved GS pay scale available at the start of the institution’s fiscal year in determining postdoc compensation levels. The release of GS pay scales for the federal fiscal year (Oct 1 - Sept. 30) may be delayed due to the Congressional budget approval process, and many institutions have fiscal years that differ from the federal fiscal year. In the case of delayed availability of GS pay scales that make an annual adjustment to postdoc compensation based on GS levels impossible, institutions should budget for an appropriate, informed increase,
relying on sources such as the president’s budget request to Congress, and realign with the GS pay scale in the following year.

h. **Set equitable postdoc compensation policies across the institution.** Minimum pay should be equitable for postdocs across all disciplines, although given market dynamics, institutions may choose to offer higher compensation rates to postdocs in specific disciplines. Compensation above minimum levels should be provided along with an analysis of equity issues, as is often done with faculty compensation. Institutions should develop policies to allow administrators to award postdocs merit-based raises at any time, not just annually.

**A3. Benefits**

a. **Provide a comprehensive, fair, and equitable benefits package to all postdocs comparable to that received by other employees at the same institution, regardless of funding mechanism, discipline, or nationality.** Institutions should provide postdocs with a benefits package that is equitable compared to its other full-time employees. Institutions should provide part-time postdocs with benefits analogous to those received by other part-time employees.

b. **Offer a benefits package that reflects similar benefits other employers offer to individuals with doctoral degrees.** At a minimum, institutions should provide health (including mental health), dental, and vision insurance plans to all postdocs and their families. For international postdocs, these insurance coverages should satisfy minimum visa requirements. Institutions should also offer life insurance to postdocs at similar levels and premiums to those provided to other employees. Additionally, institutions should provide clear policies for vacation and sick days allowed for postdocs, disability and medical leave, and family leave benefits.

c. **Extend family-friendly benefits to all postdocs.** Institutions should recognize that many postdocs are at a stage of life when family issues are as important as professional development. Family-friendly benefits should include adherence to the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) for non-exempt employees, paid parental leave, access to on-site childcare and/or subsidies, dependent coverage for health insurance, support programs for foreign spouses, and part-time status options.

d. **Provide access to a retirement program.** Institutions should provide postdocs with the ability to contribute to a retirement program while providing matching contributions at a rate provided to other institution employees. Recognizing the temporary nature of the postdoctoral position, institutions may establish special rules for vesting by postdocs and for allowing employer-matched contributions earlier than for other employees.

e. **To remove barriers, institutions should consider developing a process for providing moving expense allowances to incoming postdocs if financial**
need is demonstrated. Institutions should consider providing such allowances to all incoming postdocs regardless of financial need to ensure greater parity.

A4. Mentorship

a. Facilitate effective mentoring and personal responsibility through career planning with an annual review. Establishing clear understanding between postdocs and mentors is critical for a successful relationship. The NPA recommends using an individual development plan (IDP), adapted as appropriate for different fields of study and to reflect any institutional guidelines. An effective IDP opens communication, identifies expectations, establishes objective criteria for success, career goals, recognizes the importance of training and service, and should be flexible to allow new opportunities to be pursued when they appear. An IDP should include defined time and resources devoted to research and career development activities independent of the mentor’s research. An annual review of the plan and the progress made is needed to ensure that both parties’ expectations are met and that appropriate modifications of the plan or the approach to the plan are made. The postdoc should also be able to comment on the progress of the self-directed goals over the course of the year. By actively fostering and supporting mentorship ecosystems, institutions create an environment that values mentorship, enhances the professional development of faculty members and trainees, and contributes to the academic community’s overall productivity, success, and well-being.

b. Require the development and use of mentoring compacts or agreements for every mentoring relationship. Working together, the mentor and mentee should develop a written compact or agreement outlining each party’s expectations, goals, responsibilities, and preferred modes of communication. The compact or agreement should be tailored to meet the mentee’s developmental needs.

c. Build and maintain infrastructure and resources for promoting effective mentoring. Institutions should provide faculty and postdocs resources, such as handbooks, funding for mentoring activities and access to networks or communities, and programs to provide structured frameworks and guidelines for fostering effective mentoring relationships. Further, institutions should designate and support faculty mentoring champions across the institution, to serve as advocates, sponsors, and resources for the high-quality mentoring of faculty and postdocs.

d. Offer and require evidence-based mentor training programs to faculty, postdocs, and staff. These programs should include communication, cultural competence, inclusive mentoring practices, expectation and goal setting, and address power dynamics. Mentoring training should involve face-to-face discussions and be required both during the onboarding process (orientations) and at least once every four years.
e. **Establish and enforce policies for faculty that recognize and value effective mentorship.** These policies should include establishing clear expectations for mentorship and articulating its importance in annual reviews and faculty promotion and tenure processes. Such policies should incentivize faculty members to engage in effective mentorship and provide a framework for quality mentorship activities. Additionally, institutions should appoint a committee of faculty and postdoctoral representatives to review mentorship activities and programs and a rewards system that publicizes the accomplishments of exemplary mentors. Most importantly, institutions should have a process to monitor training environments and remediate or remove faculty or staff displaying unacceptable mentorship qualities. Mentors who engage in abusive activities should be held fully accountable for their actions with significant repercussions, as detailed herein regarding misconduct policies.

f. **Encourage and provide incentives for faculty groups to function as mentoring teams.** The presence of a mentoring team enriches the mentoring experience and contributes to the overall success and development of postdocs. Success is achieved as mentoring teams offer postdocs diverse expertise, comprehensive support, increased availability, collaborative learning, and networking opportunities, and reduced bias and power dynamics. Including mentors both within and outside the postdoc reporting chain as part of the mentoring team that could provide academic and/or professional or career support is encouraged.

g. **Enact mentorship evaluation and feedback mechanisms to assess the quality and effectiveness of mentorship.** Evaluation and assessment can include soliciting mentee feedback, conducting mentorship surveys, or establishing mentorship committees to review and evaluate mentorship activities with the purposes of identifying improvement areas, providing mentors with constructive feedback, and helping ensure equity in training.

**A5. Professional Development**

a. **Provide guidelines and standards for advanced training in preparation for an independent career and appropriate resources to support this training.** The NPA has established core competencies to offer guidance on relevant training for postdocs. These competencies are meant to serve primarily as a basis for (1) self-evaluation by postdoctoral researchers and (2) developing training opportunities that mentors, institutions, and other advisors can evaluate. Per the postdoc's role, professional development is a protected activity to be upheld and defended by the host institution. Professional development should be inclusive of and accessible to all postdocs and include practices and topics that promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. Professional development is intended to assist postdocs during their postdoctoral periods in preparing for the transition to their subsequent positions,
as well as succeeding in those next positions.

b. **Enable a richer postdoc experience by providing opportunities to acquire, develop, or improve professional skills that will help postdocs achieve their career goals.** In an era of increasing complexity for the research enterprise, postdoctoral researchers pursue professional opportunities not only in academia but also in industry, government, nonprofits, and entrepreneurship. The PDO is responsible for assessing postdoc training at an institution, but other offices and mentors will be implicated and may lead certain components. Some specific professional development opportunities stand out as offering significant benefits to postdocs regardless of the size of the institution or intended career pathway, such as the following ones aligned with NPA core competencies:

- **Discipline-specific conceptual knowledge:** Provide an understanding of the broader research field and scientific approaches.
- **Research skill development:** Provide postdocs with the technical training they need to carry out independent research, including new research techniques, experimental design, data analysis, and interpretation.
- **Responsible conduct of research (RCR):** Provide access to RCR training in areas such as those currently recommended by the NIH and other applicable agencies.
- **Communication skills:** Includes interpersonal communication, public speaking, science/research writing and speaking, communicating technical information to lay audiences and teaching opportunities and pedagogy training. For those following an academic career, includes grant-related workshops, including writing and editing, and responding to reviewers’ comments.
- **Professionalism:** Provide postdocs with opportunities to develop skills to work in diverse teams, collaborate across teams within and outside their institution, and build professional relationships.
- **Leadership, mentorship, and management:** Provide postdocs opportunities to participate or lead committees, both scientific and within the university, training in mentorship with avenues to work with mentees, and training in areas such as negotiation, conflict management, and project management.
- **Career exploration:** Exposure to a variety of careers, such as seminars, panels, and internships, to aid in career choice decisions and provide opportunities for postdocs to network with professionals in different fields and make connections to aid in career exploration and transition.
- **Position application development:** Includes drafting of resumes and CVs, personal statements, biosketches, LinkedIn profiles, and other evolving components of the application process. These materials should
be discussed at annual performance reviews to help ensure postdocs are developing the CVs and/or resumes needed to be competitive in their desired careers.

c. **Provide training funds for postdoc use.** Institutions should offer scholarships for courses and conferences open to all postdocs. The funds should be accessible to postdocs when funding is not available through a grant or principal investigator, especially when the topic of the travel and course is related to professional development activities. Such training may include networking opportunities, leadership skill development, or cross-disciplinary sharing of research. It is recommended that postdocs apply to receive such funds, as winning competitive funding awards bolster professional resumes.

d. **Share professional development across organizations.** Institutions should contribute to centralized efforts to develop and share professional development resources, case studies and best practices across institutions through organizations such as the NPA in order to promote efficiencies and assist postdocs and PDO personnel.

### A6. Well-being

a. **Promote and maintain work environments that are healthy, respectful, and free of abusive conduct.** Abusive conduct should not be tolerated in academic and research environments in the interest of the well-being of all community members and the excellence of the work they produce. Abusive conduct includes discrimination, harassment, and bullying that creates an intimidating environment and may interfere with a postdoc’s work. Postdocs should be encouraged to report such behaviors without fear of retaliation.

b. **Use the U.S. Surgeon General’s framework for promoting and maintaining a positive and safe work environment.** Using the U.S. Surgeon General’s framework for fostering well-being in the workplace, institutions should incorporate and implement policies prioritizing workplace safety. In alignment with the U.S. Surgeon General’s framework, institutions should assert an unwavering commitment to the safety of all community members. Abusive conduct, including discrimination, harassment, and bullying, should be categorically unacceptable and appropriately addressed. It is imperative to recognize that abusive conduct creates an intimidating environment and can negatively impact a postdoc’s work productivity and career intention. In addition to safety, institutions should provide autonomy and flexibility, foster a sense of purpose and recognition, create inclusive and connected communities, offer opportunities for growth and feedback, and demonstrate a commitment to work/life balance using the practices described below and language herein covering misconduct.

c. **Enable better work/life balance.** Institutions should appoint an individual lead at the institutional level (e.g., chief wellness officer) to lead well-being initiatives. At a minimum, institutions should provide resources and training for faculty and
postdocs emphasizing health and safety. This could include workshops on effective time management, setting clear work expectations and boundaries, promoting fitness and healthy living, and meaning and purpose. Importantly, policies should be implemented that encourage disconnecting from work after work hours and during vacation and break times (link to grievance policies on professionalism).

d. **Provide access to adequate behavioral health support and counseling.** Institutions are responsible for providing behavioral health programs and initiatives, such as counseling services, support groups, and access to mental health professionals, to their postdocs. Institutions should raise awareness about the availability of such programs and encourage open discussions about behavioral health and well-being through seminars, workshops, and awareness campaigns.

e. **Provide resources and training to faculty and staff on recognizing signs of behavioral distress and preventing burnout.** Faculty and staff should receive training on identifying postdocs experiencing behavioral health challenges and providing appropriate support alongside professional behavioral health services. Faculty and staff should also receive training and support to prevent their own burnout.

f. **Provide diverse resources for populations with additional needs.** Offer specialized support and resources tailored to the challenges and experiences of international postdocs and underrepresented groups, including but not limited to members of LGBTQ+ and historically minoritized communities. This could include providing resources and support for peer support networks, conducting regular check-in sessions to assess the well-being and specific challenges being faced, and organizing events and celebrations that acknowledge the diverse backgrounds and identities of an institution’s postdoc community.

g. **Facilitate opportunities for postdocs to build relationships and community.** Provide opportunities for postdocs to foster relations among postdocs, institutional organizations, and the greater community. Institutions should facilitate opportunities for postdocs to connect by hosting social and networking events and including these in programming. Postdocs’ inclusion in institution committees contributes to a sense of belonging and provides opportunities to connect with individuals in other groups and those in leadership positions. Facilitating networking opportunities with alums and professionals in the community will enable postdocs to connect with individuals outside their institution and assist in job searches.

**A7. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB)**

a. **Ensure that all members of the postdoc community feel secure and welcome, that the contributions of all individuals are valued, and that all voices are heard.** Institutions should seek to promote diversity and ensure
equal opportunity, inclusion, leadership, and activities for all postdocs, regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, disability, country of origin, field of research, socio-economic status, religion, age, marital status, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

b. **Promote inclusive communities in a legally compliant manner.** Institutions should develop appropriate language and policies to allow appropriate discussion of concepts that promote inclusion in a legal manner; examine legally compliant nomenclature, terminology, and processes used by institutions in jurisdictions with similar environments; and consider partnering with other universities or entities in states without DEIB restrictions to potentially fund and lead DEIB activities consistent with state laws.

c. **Designate an office or individual within the institution responsible for DEIB actions for the postdoc community.** These entities should help ensure support systems are in place to promote the retention and success of postdocs from underrepresented communities. If the institution has an existing DEIB office, ensure that postdocs are included within its scope and aware of its work. If the institution is unable to create a separate office, it should create a Postdoctoral Advisory Committee (PDAC) focused on promoting DEIB for postdocs. If possible, funds should be set aside for postdocs, other staff, and students to pursue projects that further DEIB goals.

d. **Clearly state the university positions on DEIB, including how the institution intends to advance DEIB, to ensure all understand these positions apply to the postdoc community.** Collaborate and communicate with other offices within the institution to ensure that DEIB policies apply equally to postdocs as they do to students, faculty, staff and other employee communities.

e. **Create formal recruitment mechanisms to ensure increased diversity of the postdoctoral population.** Commit to diversity at the postdoc level by staying current with concepts and approaches that increase postdoctoral diversity and acting upon them, such as developing relationships with other institutions traditionally populated with individuals from underrepresented communities to assist in recruiting. PDO leaders should connect with human resource offices as well as graduate school offices to maximize the appropriate dissemination of recruitment material across diverse populations. Providing recruiting opportunities to external partners, such as the Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics & Native Americans in Science (SACNAS) and the Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minoritized Scientists (ABRCMS), will help advance this work. Ensure all postdoc position openings are advertised widely, not just by word-of-mouth, to transcend traditional means of privileged connectivity.

f. **Bring DEIB into the professional development process.** Provide appropriate training to postdocs to assist them in writing their DEIB statements. Include DEIB topics often in postdoc professional development training, and view all professional development activities through the DEIB lens to emphasize DEIB
aspects within all training as possible. Assist international postdocs and include their international experiences in defining this DEIB process.

g. **Train mentors in DEIB policies.** Proper training will help ensure mentors are aware of DEIB issues and resources needed to either address these issues or refer postdocs to the appropriate personnel.

### A8. International Issues

a. **Create an international office.** Postdocs who are non-U.S. citizens or permanent residents face unique challenges that their mentors may not be able to meet without additional assistance from elsewhere in the institution. A dedicated office for international researchers is a critical resource for prospective researchers and those already at the institution. The PDO should work closely with the office for international researcher services to ensure that the particular needs of international postdocs are being addressed by directing them to resources available on campus and within the wider community. Programs to support international postdocs could include offering legal seminars or international coffee hours so postdocs are aware of resources and the support system available to them.

b. **Proactively provide postdocs with tools, platforms, resources, and opportunities to advocate for their needs.** Proactive efforts to meet the complex and dynamic needs of international postdocs require proper planning. Institutions must recognize the myriad of solutions and tools needed by international postdocs to address the many issues these individuals and their families face. Institutions are strongly encouraged to stay current with these needs through tools such as the *NPA Onboarding International Postdocs Guide (2023)*, which covers an extensive array of approaches to assist in complex areas such as immigration, tax, and cultural issues.

c. **Issue visas for the entire length of the postdoc contract or project.** International postdocs would benefit from visas that last for the entire duration of their contract as opposed to requiring costly annual renewals. Visa duration also impacts other facets of postdoc life, such as state driving licenses with durations linked to the visa dates. If a postdoc does need to renew their visa during their appointment, their institution should provide them with protected leave time and reasonable support, with special consideration and treatment for those who face lengthy administrative processing times.

d. **Use eligibility criteria inclusive of internationals.** It is also beneficial for professional development resources to consider international postdocs while promoting inclusivity, equity, and belonging, such as including citizenship status in program eligibility criteria.
B. Administrative Essentials

*These recommendations may be accomplished through internal institutional actions that require no or low level of engagement with postdocs and are often procedural.*

B1. Institutional Entities

a. **Establish a Postdoctoral Office (PDO) with dedicated staff.** The PDO should be staffed by individuals dedicated to supporting the postdoctoral community. The office should be adequately staffed based on the number and needs of postdocs and ideally be centralized and reside outside of any school. Institutions with more than fifty postdocs should employ at least one dedicated full-time employee to the PDO for maximum benefits to postdocs. A close partnership with the institution’s postdoctoral association (see below) will provide a mechanism for postdocs to give feedback to the PDO and ensure they meet postdoc needs. If creating a PDO is not feasible, an existing academic department should be responsible for overseeing postdoctoral researchers, e.g., vice provost for research or division of graduate studies, and carry out the recommendations herein assigned to the PDO. The PDO should expand its efficacy for postdocs by partnering with other institutional offices to promote better postdoc access to staff who understand the specific needs and benefits of postdocs, such as human resources, career services, or international offices.

b. **Establish a Postdoctoral Association (PDA).** Managed by postdocs at the institution, the PDA provides an avenue to foster community within the institution, opportunities to gain professional skills, and a platform to advocate for postdoc needs. The PDA works closely with PDO staff, providing a mechanism to facilitate open lines of communication with the administration and giving postdocs an independent and accessible avenue to provide input to the administration. If establishing a PDA is not feasible, the appropriate office should establish defined policies to keep postdocs engaged in planning and executing programs designed for their benefit. Additionally, the PDO and the PDA should jointly strive to accomplish the goal of implementing the recommendations outlined in this document.

c. **Establish a postdoctoral advisory committee (PDAC).** Institutions should establish a PDAC and collaborate with the PDA to determine its composition (e.g., PDA leadership, faculty, and staff), including a critical representation of postdocs. The PDAC should collaborate with the PDO to identify postdoctoral community needs, advise on programming, and advocate for postdocs across the institution.

B2. Appointment and Termination Process

a. **Utilize a centralized appointment process.** Postdoc positions should be posted on institutional and external job boards, following institutional human resources policies for recruitment, candidate review, and equitable hiring. A centralized
appointment process enables an institution to track the demographics of the postdoc community accurately and enables effective communication and management of the community.

b. **Issue a clear and detailed appointment letter for a period of at least two years.** An appointment letter describing the employment classification, start and end dates, duties and responsibilities, funding source, stipend/salary and benefits information, processes for the postdoc to exit the position prior to termination, any conditions for reappointment, including how often reappointments occur, and policies and services relevant to the postdoc appointment and termination should be provided to all postdocs. A minimum appointment time of two years provides greater certainty for the postdoc than shorter appointments. It aids international scholars in ancillary actions tied to the appointment period, such as driver’s licenses and visa durations. The letter should be filed with a centralized human resources office and the centralized PDO, in addition to the department chair or dean in the postdoc’s reporting line.

c. **Provide reasonable notice for appointment terminations.** When there is a need to end a postdoc appointment early due to funding issues (as opposed to performance or behavior issues), the postdoc should be given reasonable notice (at least 90 days) that allows time for the postdoc to find a new position. If an appointment is ended due to performance or behavior issues, the postdoc should be given reasonable notice (at least 90 days) that allows them time to exercise their rights to the institutional appeal or employee relations review processes, as discussed in the section on conflicts below. Reasonable notice periods are particularly significant for international researchers on visas that are tied to their employment status.

### B3. Onboarding

a. **Provide a mandatory postdoc-specific orientation.** The PDO should provide an orientation for new postdocs within three months of their start date, allowing postdocs to understand expectations, benefits, relevant campus resources and offices, and career skills development programs so they can make the most of their appointments. Orientations should include an introduction to institutional resources, representatives from relevant offices and groups (PDA, international office, benefits or human resources, security, etc.), an overview of professional development programs, an introduction to the Individual Development Plan (IDP), any workplace flexibility policies, as well as activities such as community building to foster connection or professional development. Institutions should consider offering orientation both in person and virtually, including asynchronously, for broad accessibility.

b. **Create and disseminate a postdoctoral handbook.** A handbook that includes essential policy information, as well as local information, is an indispensable reference and resource for postdocs. Ideally, this handbook would be produced
as a collaborative effort between the PDO, PDA, the international office, and the human resources office. Consultation with other offices, such as those providing DEIB services and career and professional skills training, should be sought if available. Among other resources, the handbook should contain information on authorship and intellectual property policies, as well as an overview of conflict resolution, misconduct policies, and termination policies, instructions on how to report mistreatment, information on well-being services, and contact information for the appropriate ombudsperson office. The postdoc handbook should be easily accessible online for reference and routinely updated.

B4. Communication

a. **Maintain a website and listserv as core communication mechanisms.** PDOs should establish and maintain a website and listserv to reach all postdocs, including those recently onboarded. An internal website for postdocs serves as a resource for postdocs seeking to learn about policies, programming, the current postdoc handbook, and contact information for a staff member who can help answer questions and orient postdocs to relevant resources. A listserv, or newsletter, shared among all postdocs ensures that they are aware of relevant opportunities and decreases the number of emails they receive. Institutions should strive to have postdocs from all disciplines receive information and begin communication as soon as postdocs are onboarded.

b. **Use additional modes of communication for maximum impact and to accommodate postdoc differences.** Institutions should exercise a broad range of modalities (e.g., posting physical flyers) to reach the greatest postdoc audience, maximize access, and accommodate learning styles (e.g., asynchronous versus live events). Additionally, the PDO should use social media outlets to disseminate information to current and past postdocs and consider creating community groups within popular online communities (e.g., LinkedIn) to promote a continuum of connectivity among current and former postdocs. With a growing number of remote and off-campus postdoc positions, institutions should ensure these postdocs are considered and included in communication and outreach methods.

c. **Use language across the institution that is inclusive of postdocs.** Use terminology such as "academics" rather than "faculty and staff" and ensure that postdocs are included in institutional communications, including "all-campus" ones, received by faculty, students, staff, and other employees.

B5. Intellectual Property and Authorship

a. **Establish clear policies regarding intellectual property and processes for resolving disputes arising from them.** Policies regarding intellectual property and authorship should be provided to all postdocs, as well as those who work with them, as soon as the postdocs are accepted into their positions.
b. **Provide a designated individual to assist with intellectual property disputes.** The designee (e.g., an ombudsperson) should be capable of mediating intellectual property and authorship issues. This individual should have research experience, understand the relevant policies regarding intellectual property and authorship, and be capable of directing issues as needed to appropriate offices (e.g., legal).

**B6. Data**

a. **Conduct a regular climate survey of postdocs.** Utilizing a regular survey provides PDAs and PDOs with valuable information regarding the needs and concerns of their postdoc populations. Climate surveys for postdocs should consider addressing career development needs, career intentions, satisfaction, and mentorship. PDOs should consider working in partnership with their institution if there is already an annual survey to avoid over-surveying postdocs. Information obtained from surveys should be used to aid in determining the specific issues important to postdocs on an institution-specific basis.

b. **Track postdoc demographics.** Tracking institutional postdoc demographics over time can provide valuable information about a postdoc population. Postdoc demographics such as the number of postdocs, citizenship status, gender, and underrepresented minority status can help ascertain changes and trends, identify areas of improvement and need for program adjustment, and provide transparency and shareable data.

c. **Conduct exit interviews:** An exit questionnaire provides feedback regarding the success of the postdoc program, enables the institution to track the career outcomes of postdocs’ first positions and assess postdoc productivity, such as publications, independent funding, scholarly presentations, journal and grant reviews, mentorship, and participation in professional development programs. Maintaining such outcome data over time would inform the institution about the effectiveness of their training programs, help establish an alum network to benefit current and future postdocs, and enable policy decisions to be driven by data. These interviews would ideally be conducted by the administrative body overseeing postdoctoral research at an institution or other impartial entity in such a way as to encourage honest feedback without fear of reprisal. Complementing these with entry interviews would provide comparative data, including changes in career intentions.

d. **Track career outcomes of postdoc alums.** Institutions should maintain a postdoc career outcomes database and adopt a taxonomy. Career outcomes tracking should consider including median time to postdoc completion, job sector, job location, job function, and location. In addition, institutions should consider tracking career outcomes longitudinally, and updating them regularly. Maintaining such outcome data would inform the institution about the effectiveness of its training programs, identify shifts in professional development needs, help
establish a postdoc alum database, and enable policy decisions to be driven by data. Furthermore, institutions should consider combining career outcomes and demographic information to understand trends in disaggregated data. Information from several institutions would provide valuable data regarding postdoc career trends.

e. **Implement a data-sharing plan.** A data-sharing plan guides what postdoc data should be shared, with whom, and how, in order to improve the postdoc experience. Public sharing of anonymized data can provide transparency in postdoc demographics and career outcomes, and help postdocs assess institutional fit before joining. Data from multiple institutions would provide valuable insights regarding trends impacting the research workforce.

**B7. Conflict, Mediation, and Grievance Processes**

a. **Provide an ombudsperson to assist with conflicts.** The ombudsperson should be an individual outside the academic reporting line of the postdoc who serves with impartiality and confidentiality and promotes open disclosure without fear of reprisal. Ensure the ombudsperson has had appropriate training (e.g., Title IX), is fully versed in institutional processes, and has access to all necessary resources. The ombudsperson should offer constructive paths forward to resolution, not all of which are through grievances.

b. **Identify and establish policies to address performance issues.** Policies addressing performance issues should be transparent and included in the postdoc handbook. When a performance issue is raised, the postdoc should be made aware and given an opportunity to improve via a performance plan with clear timelines and milestones to resolve the performance issues before termination is considered.

c. **Identify and establish clear policies to address potential misconduct, harassment, and grievance issues affecting postdocs.** Policies should be clearly written and provided to postdocs, as well as those who work with them, when postdocs are accepted into their positions. This includes transparent policies for postdoc grievances and those who have grievances with postdocs. Policies should be easily accessible to international postdocs and be informed by diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, as well as the institution’s accessibility policies. Processes should include the latest recommendations for the appropriate treatment of research trainees (AToRT) as developed by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC). Institutions should set multiple pathways toward the resolution of misconduct so not every conflict must follow the grievance process. Policies should be adopted with significant repercussions for any staff or faculty member who is found responsible for repeated violations. Institutions are encouraged to develop multiple reporting chains to ease the burden of communicating misconduct issues.
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