



THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF  
IMMUNOLOGISTS

**Submission by The American Association of Immunologists  
to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Request for Information (RFI): Re-envisioning U.S.  
Postdoctoral Research Training and Career Progression within the Biomedical Research  
Enterprise**

**April 14, 2023**

**Perspectives on the roles and responsibilities of the academic postdoc (e.g., what the postdoctoral position means to you, how you view it).**

The American Association of Immunologists (AAI), the nation's largest professional association of research scientists and physicians who are dedicated to understanding the immune system through basic, translational, and clinical research, appreciates this opportunity to comment on postdoctoral research training and career progression within the U.S. biomedical research enterprise. We begin by endorsing the thoughtful comments submitted by the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology on April 6, 2023. In addition, AAI wishes to emphasize the following points.

AAI views postdoctoral scholars ("postdocs") as skilled scientists who have significant expertise in a particular field and a multitude of capabilities, and who should be valued as such. The "trainee" label does not reflect their expertise and skill, and AAI urges NIH to reevaluate its use. The postdoc position should be a period of advanced training, designed to foster independence, that serves as a steppingstone to a desired career. It should have a defined timeframe appropriate for the postdoc's ultimate career goals and enable the postdoc to make contributions to their scientific field.

AAI believes that principal investigators (PIs) and institutions should invest in the postdoc's research and career development, whether in academia or other sectors (e.g., industry, policy, law, etc.). This could include meaningful training in obtaining funding, mentoring, leadership, running a lab, budget management, data management, study section service, and pursuing careers outside of academia, etc. While a postdoc's responsibilities include a level of dedication to the research and a respect for their PI's goals, time, and resources, a postdoc should not be treated as a laboratory "workhorse," and the expectation should not be that the postdoc position is a period of unreasonable personal sacrifice. It is essential that the position accommodate family responsibilities, provide sufficient financial stability, and offer health and emotional wellness benefits.

**Fundamental issues and challenges inhibiting recruitment, retention, and overall quality of life of**

expertise, and knowledge; they should be paid as professionals and should not have to live “student” lifestyles. Current stipend levels do not always reflect regional cost of living, representing a barrier to recruiting and retaining postdocs in high cost of living science hubs (e.g., New York, Boston).

Another major barrier is the lack of available and adequate benefits, including parental/family leave, accessible and affordable childcare (a barrier that disproportionately affects women), and retirement benefits like employer-matched contributions. Scientists often enter their late 20s - mid 30s without having significant retirement savings or financial stability and may never catch up to their peers in other sectors. Low pay and inadequate benefits select for well

---

1451 ROCKVILLE PIKE, SUITE 650, ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20852  
PHONE: 301