

April 14, 2023

Dr. Tara A. Schwetz
Acting Principal Deputy Director
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20892

RE: National Institutes of Health Office of the Director Request for Information on Re-envisioning U.S. Postdoctoral Research Training and Career Progression within the Biomedical Research Enterprise

The American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology is an international nonprofit scientific and educational organization that represents more than 11,000 students, researchers, educators and industry professionals. The ASBMB strongly advocates for strengthening the science, technology, engineering and mathematics workforce, supporting sustainable funding for the American research enterprise and ensuring diversity, equity and inclusion in STEM.

The ASBMB is heavily invested in offering services and professional development programming to students and early career research pr(n)-4 (d)-4 (e)1 (es)-5 (ea-5 (ea-6 (c)d)-3.9n)-4 (g)a-225.9n 004 2c 0 -

Lastly, postdoctoral positions are temporary positions for Ph.D. holders to obtain careers in academia, industry and other sectors. However, the value of pursuing a postdoc for nonacademic careers is not well quantified. Data should be collected and disseminated detailing the outcomes of graduate students and postdocs (salary and position level) across sectors, reporting the degree to which postdoc positions contribute to career progression in nonacademic sectors. This data would help recruit and retain postdocs who seek nonacademic careers.

Fundamental issues and challenges inhibiting recruitment, retention and overall quality of life of postdoctoral researchers in academic research

Postdocs experience significant challenges in today's academic environment, including salaries below the living wage, unclear expectations and timelines for postdoctoral research, and inequitable support from institutions. Mitigating a few of these challenges would go a long way in increasing recruitment, retention and quality of life for postdoctoral researchers

First, the inherent temporality of the position often means postdocs are underpaid and lack necessary benefits such as health insurance, childcare and funds for retirement plans etc, which are essential for long-term financial health. To recruit and more importantly, retain postdocs, these barriers must be removed. It's vital for postdocs to have access to employment benefits that support and build financial stability.

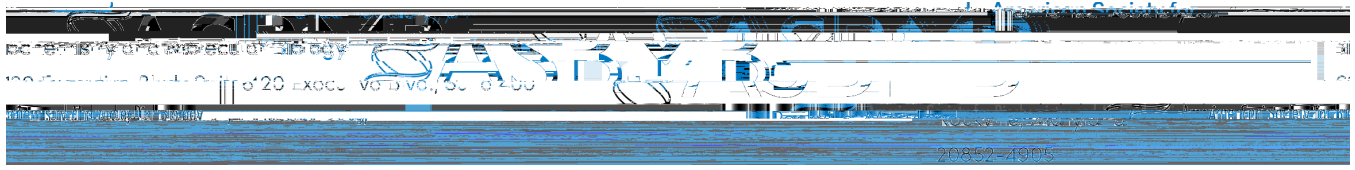
Second, a systemic issue inhibiting postdoctoral recruitment and retention is the "trickle down effect" caused by the stifling competition and lack of work-life balance in academic environments. Graduate students and postdocs observe their advised peers struggling and become increasingly unwilling to pay the opportunity cost required to secure faculty positions that are outrageously competitive and few perks in comparison to the challenges

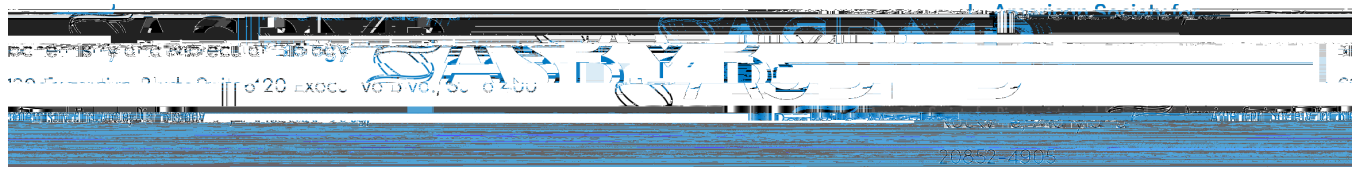
Third, postdocs often feel isolated. They are neither students, staffers nor faculty members and lack visibility in institutions and society. Additionally, postdocs often leave behind their support systems when relocating for positions, worsening mental health, work-life balance and limiting the participation of historically marginalized groups. The NIH should require postdoctoral offices at institutions and consider strategies to fund them

Lastly, postdoc recruitment should become more comprehensive and transparent to increase the overall quality of the research enterprise and ensure inclusion. Recruiting postdocs is a challenging effort for many investigators; it relies heavily on networking, often disadvantaging students at under-resourced institutions. The NIH should incentivize and provide tools to conduct large-scale postdoc recruitment events that are equitable and accessible to all.

Existing NIH policies, programs or resources that could be modified, expanded or improved to enhance the postdoctoral training ecosystem and academic research career pathways

While the NIH offers multiple resources that enhance postdoctoral training, the ASBMB recommends NIH play a more active role in setting policies that benefit postdocs, encourage institutions to cultivate positive work environments, and expand programs that retain postdocs in academia.





Lastly, the [National Postdoctoral Association](#) has a wealth of tools, knowledge and advice to help postdocs succeed. The ASBMB recommends the support and disseminate these resources to the broader scientific community when appropriate.