Purpose

- The **National Postdoctoral Association** (NPA) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit association headquartered in Washington, D.C.
- The **mission** of the National Postdoctoral Association is to improve the postdoctoral experience by supporting enhanced research training and a culture of enhanced professional growth to benefit scholarship and innovation.

Membership

- The NPA serves the **postdoctoral community**, including some **2,500 individual members** and some **190 institutional members** and the 60,000-plus postdoctoral scholars at these institutions.
- Of the 108 research universities classified as “very high activity” research institutions by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, nearly two-thirds are members of the NPA. Of the 61 members of the Association of American Universities, 52 are NPA members.

Quick Facts about Postdoctoral Scholars (based on available data)

- A **postdoctoral scholar** (“postdoc”) is an individual who has received a doctoral degree (or equivalent) and is engaged in a temporary and defined period of mentored advanced training to enhance the professional skills and research independence needed to pursue his or her chosen career path.
- According to the **2012 Science and Engineering Indicators**: “The number of S&E doctorate holders employed in academic postdoc positions climbed from 4,000 in 1973 to 18,000 in 2008.”
- Traditionally, institutions have not kept records of postdoctoral scholars (although more and more institutions are doing so today); as a result, it is not clear how many postdoctoral scholars are in the United States—but the National Science Foundation (NSF) has estimated that there are from 43,000 to 89,000 postdocs in the United States.
  - The NSF emphasizes that these numbers are estimates, because its surveys focus mainly on postdoctoral scholars who have earned their Ph.D. in the United States and thus do not include representation of international postdoctoral scholars who did not complete their degree in the United States.
- The majority of postdoctoral scholars (estimated at 60 percent today) are “international postdocs,” here on temporary visas.
- The median salary of postdoctoral scholars is $42,000 a year—“44% less than the median salary for nonpostdocs up to 5 years after receiving their doctorates.”

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3 Ibid.
• The average postdoctoral scholar puts in significant “overtime,” working 51 hours a week, although they are not paid for overtime.
• It is likely that the postdoctoral scholar, or “postdoc,” is in his/her early thirties and married.
• There is a good chance that this scholar has at least one child, although at least one survey indicates that many delay having children because of the cost.
• The number of doctoral recipients in the social sciences who earned their degree in the United States and have held a postdoctoral position has steadily increased since 1972, from 18% to more than 30% by 2005. The number has also increased for those in mathematical and computer sciences, from 19% to 31%.
• The percentage of underrepresented minorities who held Ph.D.s in science and engineering and were in postdoctoral positions increased from 2.4% in 1973 to 8.3% in 2008.

Highlights of NPA’s Efforts

Since 2000, the postdoctoral experience has gained new visibility on the national level, with the NPA playing a major role in elevating that awareness. We believe our initiatives have provided constructive contributions to at least the following:

• Formal adoption of a definition of “postdoctoral scholars” by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Science Foundation (NSF).
• Establishment of the NIH Pathways to Independence award to help postdocs successfully transition to tenure-track faculty positions.
• Congressional requirement (America COMPETES Act) that NIH expand its data collection efforts regarding postdocs supported on research grants and that NSF require mentoring plans in all research grant applications that seek funding for a postdoctoral scholar position.
• Assistance to numerous universities across the country in establishing Postdoctoral Offices (PDOs) and Postdoctoral Associations (PDAs)
• Development of resources in support of postdocs, including recommended practices for PDOs and PDAs; a toolkit on responsible conduct of research; a summary of core competencies to be developed during a postdoc; and a “Survival Guide” for international postdoctoral scholars.

The NPA holds Annual Meetings, which provide the only national venue dedicated solely to the postdoctoral community. We organized and convened the first-ever National Summit on Gender and the Postdoctorate, funded by an NSF ADVANCE-PAID grant, and we are publishing a resource guidebook regarding the retention of postdoc women in the scientific workforce.

The NPA launched National Postdoc Appreciation Day on September 24, 2009, in order to increase awareness of postdocs and to recognize the contribution that they make to the U.S. research enterprise. More than 70 institutions across the country participated that year. In 2010 we expanded this to a full week, National Postdoc Appreciation Week (NPAW). In 2012, NPAW was held September 17-21, and 112 institutions in 32 states and Canada organized 203 events. In 2013, NPAW will be held September 16-20.

Currently, we advocate for increases in the National Institutes of Health (NIH) training stipends, the requirement of mentoring plans on NIH grants, more independent funding for postdocs, better benefits for postdoc fellows, increased data collection regarding postdocs, and more. We are working to increase diversity in the scientific workforce. We encourage postdocs to be proactive and to consider all of their career options, and we encourage faculty and postdoc office administrators to provide appropriate mentoring and opportunities for professional and career development.

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7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid. (chap. 5, p. 30).