

BPDA Recommendations for Postdoctoral Policies¹

The mission of the Boston Postdoctoral Association (BPDA) is to improve the postdoctoral experience by serving as a representative body that

- (i) furthers the common interests of, and
- (ii) addresses the shared concerns of all postdocs working in Boston and the surrounding areas.

The BPDA will support and advocate for postdocs, organize events for postdocs, and serve as a communication platform for the postdoctoral associations.²

Advocacy is central to the mission of the BPDA. The BPDA Advocacy Committee has therefore chosen three recommendations to address first.

To improve the experience of Boston-area postdoctoral researchers, our aim is for every BPDA member institution to adopt the following recommendations:

1. Minimum salaries for all postdoctoral researchers, regardless of funding source, should be *at least* equal to the current NIH NRSA stipend levels, accounting for all years of relevant postdoctoral experience.

The BPDA recommends that institutions plan to transition towards postdoctoral salaries that meet the recent National Academies' recommendations: a minimum starting salary of \$50,000 (2014 dollars), adjusted annually for inflation, and higher based on regional cost of living.³ For example, based on a 24.8% higher regional cost of living in the Greater Boston area⁴ and an annual inflation of 0.8% in 2014⁵, the adjusted minimum starting salary would be \$63,000 in 2015. In addition to this minimum starting salary, the BPDA recommends to include commensurate salary scales for past experience similar to the NIH NRSA stipend scale, i.e., a 4% salary increase for each full year of relevant postdoctoral experience.

2. Institutions should provide equal benefits for all postdoctoral researchers, regardless of funding source. The BPDA appreciates past efforts by institutions that already provide equal benefits for all postdoctoral researchers. Other institutions should strive towards this aim by providing benefits to externally funded postdoctoral researchers, who are frequently considered ineligible for certain benefits.

By law, postdoctoral researchers contributing to federally-funded research are considered to be **both trainees and employees**^{6,7}. Yet at many institutions, postdoctoral researchers are not eligible for the same benefits as other employees. The BPDA recommends that institutions plan to transition towards the recent National Academies' recommendations, which state that postdoctoral researchers should receive benefits that are "commensurate with benefits given to equivalent full-time employees."³ This includes the opportunity to contribute to a **retirement plan** with employer-matched contributions.⁸

3. Postdoctoral appointments should be limited to a **maximum total of 5 years** for a given individual (barring extraordinary circumstances)^{9,3}; this total should take into account the number of years previously spent in a postdoctoral position at other institutions.⁸ Institutions should develop reasonable mechanisms for promotion to non-tenure track positions (such as staff scientist or instructor).

¹ Recommendations were prepared by Kearney Gunsalus (Tufts University) and Tobias Otto (Dana-Farber Cancer Institute) as a product of BPDA Advocacy Committee meetings (11/2014-06/2015), and were ratified by the BPDA Council on September 30, 2015. Amended by the BPDA Council on October 31, 2015.

² Bylaws of the Boston Postdoctoral Association. Article 1.2 Mission. Ratified May 15, 2015.

³ The Postdoctoral Experience Revisited. 2014. National Academy of Sciences; National Academy of Engineering; Institute of Medicine. ISBN: 978-0-309-31446-6.

⁴ This adjustment for regional cost of living is based on the 2014 General Schedule (GS) Locality Pay Table for the "Boston-Worcester-Manchester, MA-NH-RI-ME" area (U.S. Office of Personnel Management). The General Schedule is also used by the NIH and other federal agencies to determine researchers' salaries (together with the Research Grade Evaluation Guide, RGEG).

⁵ Consumer Price Index Detailed Report. December 2014. Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor.

⁶ The Code of Federal Regulations, Title 2 (Grants and Agreements), part 200 (Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards), section 400, subsection f (2 CFR 200.400(f)) as of January 1, 2014, states: "For non-Federal entities that educate and engage students in research, the dual role of students as both trainees and employees contributing to the completion of Federal awards for research must be recognized."

⁷ OMB Clarifies Guidance on the Dual Role of Student and Postdoctoral Researchers, Notice NOT-OD-15-008, October 10, 2014, NIH. "Yes, the Uniform Guidance 200.400(f) requires the recognition of the dual role of all pre and post-doctoral staff, who are appointed to research positions with the intent that the research experience will further their training and support the development of skills critical to pursue careers as independent investigators or other related careers."

⁸ Recommendations for Postdoctoral Policies and Practices. 2014. National Postdoctoral Association.

⁹ This should include an option to "stop the clock" for parental leave (i.e., parental leave should not be included when calculating the duration of an individual's total postdoctoral appointments).