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Providing a national voice and seeking positive change for postdocs

NPA Accomplishments 2003-2006

The National Postdoctoral Association was founded early in 2003, with an ambitious agenda to enhance the quality of the postdoctoral experience. Since then, the NPA has assumed a leadership role in addressing the many issues confronting the postdoctoral community. This relatively new organization has made substantial progress by forging key alliances, seeking opportunities to raise awareness, and serving as a catalyst for the development of new standards and policies.

Providing a National Voice

NPA leaders have provided effective advocacy on a range of issues affecting postdocs. These include:

- Submitted a white paper calling for policy changes within the National Institutes of Health (NIH), including the establishment of expanded career transition awards. As a result, the NIH has now established the Pathways to Independence award to help postdocs successfully transition to tenure-track faculty positions.
- Submitted comments and testimony to multiple federal agencies and national organizations, including: the National Science Board; the U.S. Department of Homeland Security; the NIH; the U.S. Office of Science and Technology Policy, and the National Academies.
- Represented postdocs at more than 175 national and regional meetings and conferences.
- Contributed to a statement on visa reform issued by the Science and Security Group, which resulted in favorable editorials in the *New York Times* and other leading national media outlets.
- Conducted scores of media interviews with national and internationally prominent publications, including *Science*, *The Lancet*, *Nature*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *C&E News*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *The Scientist*, which identified the NPA as one of the top five news stories of 2003.
- Co-sponsored multiple national conferences and meetings examining the status of postdocs, in partnership with organizations such as: Sigma Xi, SACNAS, the National Academies, and various research institutions.

Seeking Positive Change

The NPA is working closely with federal agencies and other national organizations to implement policy changes that will benefit postdocs, while also working to foster policy changes at the institutional levels. As a result:

- More than 130 institutions have now adopted portions of the NPA's Recommendations for Postdoctoral Policies and Practices.
- The NIH leadership has:
 - identified the NPA as one of the key drivers of its policies regarding postdoctoral training.
 - increased the institutional allowance to cover the rising costs of health insurance for postdocs supported on research fellowships and training grants.
 - issued new guidelines for professional development and data collection for postdocs supported on institutional training grants.
- The National Science Foundation has:
 - earmarked funds for a feasibility study on expanding the data collected on postdoctoral scholars and has invited the NPA to serve in an advisory capacity on this project.
 - issued new guidelines on postdoc mentoring for principal investigators with research grants funded by the GeoSciences Directorate.
- The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) has issued draft principles on federally-supported postdoctoral training programs, addressing such issues as adequate compensation and quality mentoring.

Developing New Resources

The NPA has gathered a wealth of resources relating to the postdoctoral experience, building on the work of allied organizations and creating new tools and information as needed. These efforts include:

- Creation of an NPA Survival Guide for International Postdocs.
- Publication of the quarterly NPA newsletter (the POSTDOCKET) and periodic email updates (NPA E-Alerts).
- Development of a website with extensive resources for all stakeholders in the postdoc debate, including an Institutional Policy Database with information on more than 130 institutions.
- Establishment of an on-line Job Bank for postdocs, including scholarships, fellowships and other professional opportunities.
- Development of toolkits for use by Postdoc Associations and Postdoc Offices in establishing and maintaining effective policies, programs and services.
- Conducted regional site visits to campuses and other institutions seeking technical assistance and support, with special emphasis on helping postdoc associations and offices.
- Creation of new resources for graduate students on making a successful transition to a postdoctoral training position, including workshops, conferences, and website materials.
- Development and dissemination of Recommended Practices for Disciplinary and Professional Societies, along with a forthcoming online database documenting their implementation.

Organizational Development

In order to represent the postdoctoral community effectively, the NPA has conducted outreach campaigns to attract new members and forge key alliances. In its first four years of operations, the NPA:

- Secured an \$800,000 start-up grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and attracted AAAS as an organizational sponsor.
- Held four Annual Meetings with growth in attendance and programmatic offerings each year.
- Attracted more than 125 institutional members representing more than 40,000 postdoctoral scholars.
- Recruited a distinguished Advisory Board that has included: senior officials at NIH, graduate and medical school deans, and leaders of various professional societies and voluntary health organizations.
- Incorporated as a non-profit professional society in the District of Columbia, and approved by the IRS as a tax-exempt charitable organization in 2005.

Future Plans

The NPA is working tirelessly to address the needs of the postdoctoral community. These are just a few of the numerous projects planned for the remainder of 2006:

- Analysis and reporting of the Sigma Xi Postdoc Survey data to ensure that postdoctoral policies and practices are based on the best evidence available.
- Action in support of policy changes within NIH, NSF and other funding agencies to promote professional development, successful career transitions, mentoring and improved training conditions for postdoctoral scholars.
- Outreach to institutions, encouraging implementation of the NPA's recommended practices and providing support of newly forming postdoc associations and offices.
- Developing new benefits and services for members of the NPA.

Get Involved!

The NPA is a rapidly growing, dynamic organization committed to enhancing the postdoctoral experience. To learn more about how you can become involved in the exciting work that the NPA has undertaken, please visit our website, send us an e-mail, or give us a call.

Contact Information:

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