

## **Issues Faced By International Postdocs**

The majority of postdoctoral scholars (60 percent) are foreign nationals. The largest numbers of scholars come from the Europe, Australia, China, India, South/Latin America, and African and Middle Eastern countries. International postdocs and mentors are often faced with distinct challenges like immigration, cultural, and communication barriers. It is extremely important to address these challenges. The National Postdoctoral Association have recognized few of these issues and provided necessary solutions to these challenges as summarized below.

### **Immigration issues**

One of the most sensitive issues for international postdocs is visa status, which is tedious, expensive, and confusing. There are different types of visas (F-1, J-1 H-1B, etc) available which determine the duration of stay and whether or not spouses can obtain employment authorization. It is crucial for the postdoc and the mentor to understand the important deadlines and requirements in advance so that the status of the trainee is never jeopardized during the length of the training period. Also, it is important to stay abreast of any changes in immigration and visa policies.

### **Transitioning to life in the U.S.**

Acclimating to a new country and understanding the culture might be overwhelming for international postdocs. Institutions should provide assistance to the new trainees in terms of housing suggestions, information on setting up bank accounts and utilities, getting a social security number, understanding tax issues and legal seminars, mentoring advice, safety, and transportation.

### **Dealing with communication barriers**

Communicating with peers or mentors, trying to understand social and workplace etiquette might also be challenging initially. Few of the international postdocs may be fluent in English, but it can be challenging for most of them. The inability of the postdoc to communicate with the mentor might potentially hinder the postdoc's capability to prosper. Taking English as a Second Language (ESL) support classes as offered by most of the institutions might improve the trainee's language skills. Learning to communicate well will help postdocs become better professionals.

### **SOT PDA Resources for International Postdocs**

1. NPA has a great resource list on their site, including information on visa status, legal seminars, income taxation, and mentoring advice: <http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/international-issues-34>
2. NPA also has a very useful document entitled "International Postdoc Survival Guide": <http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/publications/international-postdoc-resources/international-postdoc-survival-guide>
3. NCSU has a great webpage with resources, including translator services, detailed guides of what to do upon arrival to the US, obtain housing and utilities services, getting a driver's license and SSN: <http://www.ncsu.edu/grad/postdoctoral-affairs/resources.html>

4. Stanford's international postdoc webpage is very useful. They have links to workshops and seminars that are held on campus for their postdocs. They also post PDF files of the workshop presentations and include numerous useful links that would be of interest to international postdocs. Topics include items such as tax information, spouse/partner information, scholarship information.  
<http://postdocs.stanford.edu/scholars/international.html>
5. Links to postdoctoral fellowships for non-citizens:
  - a. Rockefeller has compiled a list available here:  
<http://www.rockefeller.edu/sr-pd/index.php?page=PostdocPrograms>
  - b. A lab website from Brandeis includes funding for non-US-citizens, European citizens, and research exchange programs:  
<http://grigoriefflab.janelia.org/fellowships>
  - c. Smithsonian has two or three postdoc fellowships that are open to everyone: <http://www.smithsonianofi.com/fellowship-opportunities/>
  - d. NIH fellowships open to non-US citizens:
    - i. <https://www.training.nih.gov/postdoctoral/vf.asp>
    - ii. <https://www.training.nih.gov/postdoctoral/index.asp>

These and other resources for postdocs can be found on the SOT website at:  
<https://www.toxicology.org/ai/spd/PD-Links.asp>