

## **Postdoc Data Project 2008 Focus Groups: Moderator's Guide**

### **I. Introductions**

- A. Moderator Introduction
- B. Taping/Confidentiality and Privacy
- C. Purpose of Group
  - 1. Obtain feedback on salience and relevance of specific key concepts related to postdocs
  - 2. Understand professional and personal motivations for taking a postdoc appointment
  - 3. Identify perceptions and expectations of a "successful postdoc"
  - 4. Understand the range of mentoring relationships
  - 5. Gather feedback on how to obtain data/ask questions about the topics described above
- D. Ground Rules
- E. Group Introduction

### **II. Concepts**

- 1. [Present List of Concepts] Which of these would you like to see explored in a study of postdocs?
- 2. [From the Selected Concepts] Now, which ones do you consider as the top <five> concepts?
- 3. Are there other concepts that we should discuss?

### **III. Professional and Personal Motivations for Taking a Postdoc**

- A. Why did you even consider a postdoc? Why were you interested?
  - 1. Think back: what first triggered your interest? Then what furthered it?
    - a. Career interest? Expected for advancement in career?
    - b. Needed for advancement?
    - c. What other choices did you consider? What appealed about them? Did not appeal?
    - d. How did you finally decide what to do?
      - i. What kind of information did you have? From where?
      - ii. With whom did you discuss your interests/considerations (peers, mentor, ...)
    - e. How did you find/choose your specific position?

#### IV. Successful Postdoc

- A. What are your main responsibilities?
- B. Let's fill in this statement: My postdoc will be a "success" if I can \_\_\_\_\_
  - 1. Publish papers
  - 2. Find time for activities away from research to develop skills in
    - a. Grant writing
    - b. Manuscript review
    - c. Presenting findings at conferences
    - d. Teaching
    - e. Managing labs/programs
  - 3. Attend conferences
  - 4. Network with researchers outside of my department/lab
  - 5. Create marketable/profitable products; apply for patents
  - 6. Work as part of interdisciplinary teams
  - 7. Increase independence in research
  - 8. Explore my own research topics
  - 9. Improve problem solving skills
  - 10. Increase subject matter knowledge
  - 11. Obtain a permanent job at the end of the postdoc

#### V. Mentoring

- A. Do you have a mentor?
  - 1. How were you assigned to this person?
  - 2. Do you have more than one mentor? How does that work?
- B. Did you and your supervisor/advisor/mentor write a plan or proposal that outlines the expectations and responsibilities of your position?
  - 1. Tell me more about this plan ...
    - a. Who initiated it?
    - b. What is specified in the plan?
    - c. In what ways does it reflect your personal career development goals?
- C. How often do you and your supervisor/advisor/mentor meet to discuss your research?
  - 1. Do you have regular meeting times with your mentor?
  - 2. How much do you talk informally?
  - 3. What do you talk about (research vs. career development)?
  - 4. What works about your mentoring relationship? What could stand to be improved?
- D. Does your mentor ...
  - 1. Acknowledge that the postdoc position is for training
  - 2. Encourage open communication
  - 3. Promote ethical standards for the conduct of research

4. Provide sufficient opportunities to acquire the skills necessary to become an expert in an agreed upon area of investigation
5. Encourage a progressive increase in the level of responsibility and independence to facilitate the transition to a fully independent career
6. Encourage interaction with scientists in and outside the department/lab
7. Encourage attendance at professional meetings to network and present research findings
8. Ensure research by the appointee is submitted for publication in a timely manner and that she/he receives appropriate credit for the work she/he performs
9. Acknowledge postdoc's contribution to the development of any intellectual property and clearly define future access to tangible research materials according to institutional policy

## **VI. Funding**

- A. Please describe your primary source of funding.
  1. How is your current position funded?
    - a. Grants/Contracts
    - b. Fellowships
    - c. Institutional funds
    - d. Foreign governments
    - e. Personal sources
  2. Do you have more than one source of funding?
  3. Who is the funding awarded to?
    - a. You
    - b. PI
    - c. Lab/Center/Institution
  4. Does the funding source determine the duration of your appointment?
- B. Benefits
  1. What types of benefits do you receive from your appointment?
  2. Are there any benefits that you wish you had?

## **VII. Transitions from Postdoc to Permanent Positions**

- A. What do you want to do after this postdoc?
  1. Find a permanent position in academia
  2. Find a permanent position in government agency
  3. Find a permanent position in industry (either for / not-for-profit)
  4. Find another postdoc
- B. Do you have plans to seek a position (permanent or postdoc) in the near future?
  1. In the U.S.? Home country? Another country?
- C. Have your long term career goals or interests changed since you started your current postdoc? In what ways?
- D. What affects your decisions and choices for your future career?
  1. Family

2. Spouse career or employment
3. Student loan debt
4. Desire to stay in the same location
5. Employment market

E. Have you taken time off for personal reasons since PhD?

**VIII. Wrap up**

- A. Thanks
- B. Follow up information