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# Compact Between **Postdoctoral Appointees** and Their **Mentors**

*A framework for aligning the postdoctoral appointee mentor-mentee relationship*

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To download this document, go to [www.aamc.org/postdoccompact](http://www.aamc.org/postdoccompact).

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## Introduction

The *Compact Between Postdoctoral Appointees and Their Mentors* presents guiding principles intended to support the development of positive mentoring relationships between postdoctoral appointees and their mentors. A successful mentee-mentor relationship requires commitment from the postdoctoral appointee, mentor, and institution. This document offers a set of broad guidelines that are meant to initiate discussions at the local and national levels about the mentee-mentor relationship.

There are several potential uses for this document. Among those suggested are the following:

- As a starting point for discussions between postdoctoral program directors, administrators, faculty, postdoctoral appointees, and other institutional leaders about the issues addressed by the compact
- As a recruitment tool to signify programmatic commitment to postdoctoral appointees
- As an attachment to offer letters from mentors to postdoctoral appointees
- As part of a contract that could be signed by the postdoctoral appointees and their mentors
- As part of the orientation for new postdoctoral appointees
- As part of the orientation for new faculty
- As a component of the appointee-mentor annual evaluation process
- As a source of topics to be discussed in faculty mentorship programs
- As a component of faculty evaluations
- As part of an educational database for faculty promotion

This compact was originally drafted in 2006 in collaboration with representative of the AAMC Group on Graduate, Research, Education, and Training (GREAT Group) and its then postdoctorate committee. It is modeled on the AAMC's *Compact Between Resident Physicians and Their Teachers*, available at [www.aamc.org/residentcompact](http://www.aamc.org/residentcompact), and was used as a model for the AAMC's *Compact Between Biomedical Graduate Students and Their Research Advisors*, available at [www.aamc.org/gradcompact](http://www.aamc.org/gradcompact). Input on the document was received from GREAT Group representatives, members of the AAMC governance, and other members of the postdoctoral community, including the National Postdoctoral Association. At its annual business meeting in October 2006, the GREAT Group unanimously endorsed the document. The document was subsequently endorsed by the then AAMC Executive Committee on October 20, 2006. In 2016, a team consisting of representatives from the GREAT Group and the AAMC Council of Faculty and Academic Societies (CFAS) reviewed and updated the document. The GREAT Group, CFAS, and AAMC staff leadership provided input on the revised draft.

## Compact Between Postdoctoral Appointees and Their Mentors

Postdoctoral appointees typically join an institution to advance their training in a chosen discipline after recently obtaining their terminal degree (e.g., PhD, MD, DVM). This training, which should be for a defined period of time, is conducted under the supervision of one or more investigators who are qualified to fulfill the responsibilities of a mentor. In addition to the primary responsibility of conducting research, the postdoctoral appointee may also undertake leadership, service, and teaching activities that together provide a training experience essential for professional development and career advancement.

### Core Tenets of Postdoctoral Training

#### Institutional Commitment

Institutions that train postdoctoral appointees must be committed to maintaining the highest standards for scientific and professional training and for a program that, when completed, has prepared the trainee with the skills necessary to function independently as a scientific professional. Institutional oversight must be provided for terms of appointment, salary, benefits, grievance procedures, and other matters relevant to the support of postdoctoral appointees. A responsible institutional official must be designated to provide this oversight, and a suitable office should be available for the administrative support of postdoctoral affairs, including maintaining and making available career outcomes data. The institution should actively engage in creating and sustaining a diverse and inclusive environment.

#### Quality Postdoctoral Training

Individuals should be trained to formulate meaningful hypotheses, design and conduct interpretable experiments, adhere to good laboratory practices, analyze results critically, understand the broad significance of their research findings, and uphold the highest ethical standards in research. The development of additional skills—including oral and written communication, grantsmanship, peer review, teaching, mentoring, laboratory management, and other leadership skills—is considered integral to this training.

#### Importance of Mentoring in Postdoctoral Training

Effective mentoring is critical for postdoctoral training. In addition to the research mentor, postdoctoral appointees are encouraged to seek advice and input from multiple individuals who can provide feedback about personal and professional development. It is expected that the primary research mentor will dedicate time to the trainee's career development. A good mentor-mentee relationship is reciprocal and characterized by mutual respect and an understanding of each individual's expectations. A mentor should be approachable, available, and willing to share knowledge; listen and communicate effectively; provide encouragement and constructive criticism; and offer expertise and guidance. Similarly, the mentee should be approachable, available, and willing to offer ideas and solutions; listen and communicate effectively; be open to constructive criticism; and seek and respond to expert guidance.

### **Foster Breadth and Flexibility in Career Choices**

Postdoctoral appointees must have opportunities to learn about and develop a skill set that can be used in a wide range of professional careers. The responsibility for providing these opportunities should be shared by the mentor and the institution. It is important to note that postdoctoral positions are intended for those seeking advanced research training and should not be viewed by graduate students, postdoctoral appointees, or their mentors as the default step after the completion of doctoral training.

## Commitments of Postdoctoral Appointees

- **I acknowledge that I have the primary responsibility for the development of my own career.** I recognize that I need to explore career opportunities and follow a path that matches my individual skills, values, and interests. I understand that there are tools such as the individual development plan that I should use to help me define my career goals and develop my training plan.
- **I will develop with my mentor a mutually agreed upon research plan that includes well-defined goals and timelines.** Ideally, this plan should be developed early in the appointment period and reviewed at least annually.
- **I will seek regular feedback on my performance and career planning and ask for a formal evaluation at least annually.** I will use this feedback to seek opportunities for development and to build on my strengths.
- **I will perform my research activities conscientiously, maintain complete and accurate research records, and catalog and maintain all tangible research materials that result from the research project.**
- **I will respect all ethical standards—including compliance with all institutional, state, and federal regulations—as they relate to responsible conduct in research, possible conflicts of interest, privacy and human subjects research, animal care and use, laboratory safety, authorship, peer-review guidelines, and data ownership, reporting, and sharing.** I recognize that this commitment includes asking for guidance when presented with ethical or compliance uncertainties and reporting on breaches of ethical or compliance standards by me and/or others.
- **I will show respect for and will work collegially with mentors, faculty, trainees, staff, and other individuals with whom I interact. I will contribute to an environment that is safe, equitable, and free of harassment.** I will be an active, contributing member to all team efforts and collaborations and will respect individual contributions. I am also committed to communicating the value of biomedical research to advancing the public good.
- **I will endeavor to assume progressive responsibility and management of my research project(s) as it matures.** I recognize that assuming responsibility for the conduct of research projects is critical to my career path.
- **I will have open and timely discussions with my mentor concerning the dissemination of research findings and the distribution of research materials to third parties. I will also work with my mentor to disseminate research results in a timely manner.**

- **With respect to data ownership, I acknowledge that original notebooks, digital files, and tangible research materials belong to the institution and will remain in the lab when I finish my appointment, in accordance with institutional policy.** Only with the explicit approval from my research mentor and in accordance with institutional policy may I make copies of my notebooks and digital files and have access to tangible research materials that I helped to generate during my postdoctoral appointment. I will discuss data ownership with my mentor and reach mutual agreements on future access to tangible research materials and ideas.
- **I recognize that I have embarked on a career requiring lifelong learning.** To meet this obligation I must stay abreast of the latest developments in science, especially in my specialized field. I will do this by engaging in activities such as reading the literature, participating regularly at relevant seminar series, attending scientific meetings, and interacting with leaders in my field and collaborators. In addition, I will apply for appropriate fellowships and awards that support my transition to independence.
- **I will actively seek opportunities outside the laboratory (e.g., professional development seminars and workshops on oral communication, scientific writing, collaborative research, and teaching) to develop the full set of professional skills necessary for success in my chosen career.**
- **I recognize that the relationship with my mentor continues after my formal training period, and I will commit to being a supportive colleague throughout my professional life.**

## Commitments of Mentors

- **I acknowledge that the postdoctoral period is devoted to advanced training intended for the development of skills needed to promote the career of the postdoctoral appointee.** I will ensure that the postdoctoral appointee has sufficient opportunities to acquire the skills necessary to become an expert in an area of research investigation. I will work with the postdoctoral appointee as the appointee creates a documented individual career development plan, which I will use as the basis for periodic discussions. I will respect the appointee's individual career goals.
- **I will ensure that a mutually agreed upon research plan with well-defined expectations and goals is established early in the postdoctoral training period.** I will review the plan's progress regularly.
- **I will provide regular feedback on performance and career planning and provide a formal evaluation at least annually.** I will be accessible to give advice and feedback on career planning and the postdoctoral appointee's individual development plan to help define career goals and identify training milestones.
- **I will strive to maintain a relationship with the postdoctoral appointee that is based on trust and mutual respect.** I will provide an environment that is intellectually stimulating, emotionally supportive, safe, equitable, and free of harassment. I acknowledge that open communication is essential.
- **I will demonstrate respect for all postdoctoral appointees as individuals without regard to gender, race, national origin, religion, disability, or sexual orientation, and I will cultivate a culture of tolerance among the entire laboratory.**
- **I will promote all ethical standards for conducting research—including compliance with all institutional, state, and federal regulations—as they relate to responsible conduct in research, privacy and human subjects research, animal care and use, laboratory safety, authorship, peer-review guidelines, and data reporting, ownership, and sharing.** I will clearly define expectations for the responsible conduct of research in my lab and make myself available to discuss ethical, safety, and any related concerns as they arise.
- **I will provide the appointee with guidance and mentoring and will seek the assistance of other faculty and departmental/institutional resources when necessary. I will also encourage the postdoctoral appointee to seek input from multiple mentors.** I recognize that I must serve as a role model for the postdoctoral appointee and provide access to formal opportunities/programs in complementary areas necessary for a successful career.
- **I will provide a supportive training environment to facilitate the postdoctoral appointee's personal and professional growth.** I will encourage the postdoctoral appointee to progressively increase levels of responsibility and independence to ensure a successful transition to an independent career.



- **I will ensure that the research performed by the postdoctoral appointee is submitted for publication in a timely manner and that appropriate credit is given to the appointee for work done. I will acknowledge the appointee's contribution to the development of any intellectual property.**
- **I will clearly define future access to tangible research materials according to institutional policy and will discuss this with the trainee and reach mutual agreements that support the trainee's transition to independence.**
- **To foster career development, I will encourage and assist the postdoctoral appointee to apply for appropriate fellowships and awards that support the transition to independence. I will encourage and facilitate the interaction of the postdoctoral appointee with fellow scientists both intra- and extramurally, including the appointee's attendance at professional meetings to network and present research findings.**
- **I recognize that there are multiple career options available for postdoctoral appointees and will provide assistance in exploring appropriate options.** I recognize that not all postdoctoral appointees will become academic faculty. To prepare postdoctoral appointees for a variety of career paths, I will direct them to the resources that will allow for exploration of various careers, and I will be available to discuss these options.
- **I will commit to being a supportive colleague to postdoctoral appointees as they transition to the next stage of their careers and, to the extent possible, throughout their professional lives.** I recognize that the role of a mentor continues after the formal training period.



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