

Navigating the Job Market During COVID-19 and Beyond Community Post Questions:

How to find postdoc opportunities at the NIH and other institutions if you're applying as an external applicant?

Postdoctoral training in the NIH Intramural Research Program (IRP) provides the opportunity for recent doctoral degree recipients to enhance their research skills in the resource-rich National Institutes of Health (NIH) environment, which consists of more than 1200 laboratories/research projects located on the main campus in Bethesda, MD and the surrounding area as well as in Baltimore and Frederick, MD; Research Triangle Park, NC; Hamilton, MT; Framingham, MA; and Detroit, MI. Trainees pursue basic, translational, and clinical research free from the demands of obtaining grants and teaching, although opportunities to do both are available.

At the NIH, postdocs work in a highly collaborative research environment with leading scientists and clinicians. They share the NIH campus with the largest translational research hospital in the nation. They explore areas such as bioinformatics, biophysics, epidemiology, immunology, cell and molecular biology, neuroscience, health sciences, structural biology, sensory and communication neuroscience, molecular pathology, biobehavioral research, and developmental biology.

The postdoctoral community at the NIH is large (approximately 3,100 strong) and vibrant. Trainees come from across the U.S. and around the world, with large contingents from the People's Republic of China, India, Korea, Japan, and various European countries. Support for international postdocs is provided by the NIH [Division of International Services](#).

Announcements of some [currently available postdoctoral positions](#) are posted online. Given the large size of the NIH postdoctoral program, new positions become available daily. Additionally, some postdoctoral positions are not posted; information on such positions can be obtained by contacting the PIs directly.

Eligibility: To be eligible for postdoctoral training in the NIH IRP, individuals must hold a doctoral degree (PhD, MD, DDS, or the equivalent) and have no more than five years of relevant research experience since receipt of their most recent doctoral degree. U.S. citizens and permanent residents are appointed to Postdoctoral Intramural Research Training Awards (IRTAs); citizens of other nations are appointed as Visiting Fellows.

You can find NIH postdoc positions at https://www.training.nih.gov/career_services/postdoc_jobs_nih

How to overcome the feeling of possibly not being able to land a successful career in academia?

Honestly, this feeling is something we all experience when seeking a job in academia. It's normal. You should try to focus your energy on putting your best case forward for each position you choose to target. You need to target a couple of different levels of institutions that have different expectations for publication, teaching, and grantwriting success. You need to tailor your application to the ad for each position, not send out flotillas of identical materials. And if you don't get hired in your first round of searches, take any feedback or advice that you receive to heart—don't ignore it. Ask your mentors for suggestions about how to improve your dossier, and/or adjust your roster of targeted jobs.

If you are targeting a position at a PUI, it's reasonable to seek a 1- or 3- year visiting professor position to build your teaching CV. You can do this either in parallel with your tenure-line job search (as

a backup), or as a way of “testing out” whether teaching at a PUI is truly for you before committing to a tenure track search. These visiting positions are advertised after the main wave of tenure-track positions have been filled, or whenever personnel gaps such as FMLA leaves or faculty sabbaticals require them. If you can show research activity with undergraduates during a visiting professor position, you will be an even stronger candidate for a later tenure-track job search.

How is the current job market?

It has opened up again, after many institutions imposed hiring freezes or delays during the first year of the pandemic. But the general rule is that you never know how the market is for your specific menu of skills and interests until you apply. Even when the overall market is thin, your perfect position may be among those being advertised. For those with big data skills especially, the research institution hiring market is solid. For those with experience supervising undergraduate research and a research plan that is do-able at a PUI, there were hires completed even during the pandemic. The critical factor is always how well your credentials and experience match the specific needs of the hiring institution or department.

How long do you anticipate changes to the job market from COVID-19? Will the effect be different at small liberal-arts institutions versus larger R1 institutions?

Some liberal arts institutions like Lycoming College established regular COVID-19 testing for students, and already held instruction and faculty hiring searches in person during the 2020-21 academic year, with modifications for physical distancing. Others will be returning to in-person instruction and hiring thaws in Fall 2021. While there may be a glut of applicants from 2020-21 still in the pool, there will also be a slight increase in the number of advertised positions in this cycle. Some institutions that depend heavily on collecting room and board fees to balance their budgets became severely financially stressed, and those may put off hiring for another year or two. But what matters most in any hiring cycle, pandemic or not, is the match of your dossier to the needs of the hiring department.