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Postdoctoral Program Guidelines

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The Postdoc Professional Development Program Leadership Team

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Abstract

We, the Postdoc Professional Development Program (PD2P) leadership team, wrote these postdoc guidelines to be a starting point for communication between new postdocs, their staff mentors, and their managers. These guidelines detail expectations and responsibilities of the three parties, as well as list relevant contacts.

Acknowledgments

Contributions and edits from many Sandians are gratefully acknowledged. These Postdoc Program Guidelines are based on the Truman Fellow Guidelines, written by Marie Garcia and Yolanda Moreno. Cindy Lovato-Farmer provided legal advice, Karen Gardner and Jessica Pascual ensured that this document followed HR guidelines, Jessica Matto advised on foreign national issues, Kevin Bieg advised on patents, and Glenn Kubiak advised on proposal writing concerns.

Sandia's Chief Technology Office, led by Steve Rottler, strongly supported the Postdoc Professional Development Program's leadership team as we wrote these guidelines. Karla Weaver's final edits and stylistic advice are much appreciated. Marie Garcia introduced the leadership team to many of the above reviewers, as well as has been a tireless mentor to the team.

Gayle Thayer and Wendy Cieslak founded PD2P in FY2007 to provide professional development opportunities for Sandia postdocs. On behalf of all of Sandia's postdocs, the authors thank Gayle and the original PD2P leadership team.

Finally, Steve Rottler's strong support for postdocs at Sandia National Laboratories and his desire to improve the postdoc experience led the creation of these guidelines. The authors are extremely grateful for his advocacy and inspiration.

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1. Guiding Principles of the Postdoc Program

The purpose of the Postdoc Program is to bring in talented, creative people who enrich Sandia's environment by performing innovative R&D, as well as by stimulating intellectual curiosity and learning. Postdocs are temporary employees who come to Sandia for career development and advancement reasons. In general, the postdoc term is 1 year, renewable up to five times for a total of six years. However, center practices may vary; check with your manager. At term, a postdoc may apply for a staff position at Sandia or choose to move to university, industry or another lab. It is our vision that those who leave become long-term collaborators and advocates whose relationships with Sandia have a positive effect upon our national constituency.

Guidelines and Principles

A successful postdoc experience results in technical and research advances for Sandia and learning and professional growth for the postdoc. The postdoc experience at Sandia is best facilitated when the interests of the postdoc's future are known, considered, and worked toward by the postdoc, mentor, and manager. Open communication between these three parties is necessary to achieve the goals of advancing the postdoc and fulfilling Sandia's research goals.

Great science is facilitated when the postdoc has access to resources such as funding, lab space, and equipment time. Equally important are professional interactions such as access to collaborators and opportunities to present research findings in and outside of Sandia at conferences, meetings and seminars. The postdoc should understand how his/her projects and research contribute towards the overall project goals as well as to Sandia's core mission.

Additionally, the postdoc experience at Sandia is especially enriching when the postdoc takes advantage of available resources. To this end, the mentor and manager are expected to understand, communicate and support personal career development as part of the postdoc experience. This includes encouraging the postdoc to take advantage of seminars, Sandia and TEDS courses, and workshops, including external and postdoc focused workshops. Postdocs should use such resources to address areas of weakness, advance their career, or advance their scientific understanding.

As the postdoc is a learning position, the mentor should provide his/her postdoc with timely and constructive feedback on his/her research progress. The postdoc and manager, as well as the postdoc and mentor, should meet, at least semiannually, for career development discussions. The progress and goals towards the postdoc's research, professional development, and future career should be discussed in these career development meetings.

2. Relationship between Postdocs, Staff Mentors, and Managers

Table 1: Matrix highlighting the relationship between postdocs, their staff mentors, and their managers.

| | Postdoc (PD) | Staff Mentor | Manager |
|--------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Independence / Management role | Directed by senior staff. | Provides regular guidance regarding technical project(s). | Provides guidance at least semiannually and as needed. |
| Expectations | Research productivity and accomplishments that meet project goals and position PD for the next job. | Provide career development and prepare postdoc for career and provide exposure. | Advise PD with respect to future career plans. Suggest interactions to broaden PD's network. |
| Pursuing additional funding | Allowed as appropriate for level of maturity and following center practices. | May include PD as co-author on proposals. | Suggest avenues for future research funding. |

Expectations of postdocs

The Postdoc Program provides the opportunity for postdocs to support Sandia's national security mission. In doing so, the postdocs will broaden their education, development, and scientific research experience.

Postdocs are expected to contribute to the research efforts of Sandia and make available the most recent developments of university science and engineering departments. Postdocs should seize the opportunity to derive significant professional accomplishment and advancement of their career goals by conducting world-class research. Postdocs are encouraged to participate in scientific and technical conferences, present seminars, and/or publish the results of their work, within the limitations of project guidelines.

Expectations of the manager and mentor

The scientific mentor and manager are essential to the postdoc experience. The emphasis on research mentoring allows postdocs to become integral members of Sandia research and development teams while having the opportunity to acquire unique skills and growth during career development.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

Postdoc:

Once hired, a postdoc is expected to perform research related activities under the guidance of a staff mentor. This shall include such things as:

- Responsible for technical work direction and execution
- Work closely with staff mentor and project manager to ensure the project maintains technical and Sandia mission relevance, feasibility and evolutionary growth
- Serve as technical reviewer for other projects when requested
- Comply with all Sandia and DOE ES&H, security and other requirements

Staff Mentor:

A staff mentor is expected to:

- Be a sounding board for discussion about project progress and key decisions or hurdles.
- Identify possible opportunities that might logically strengthen project alignment with existing or emerging Sandia mission needs and make informed recommendations whether identified opportunities are worth further exploration.
- Provide tips on how to get things done at Sandia. Help the postdoc optimize the use of available Sandia resources by advising whom to go to for learning from or collaborating with a relevant technical specialty.
- Involve postdoc in the proposal writing process where permitted and as appropriate.
- Inform postdoc of intellectual property considerations.
- Advise on balancing a strong research focus with long-term career development. Identify proper scientific forums for disseminating project results and help the postdoc produce significant impact peer-reviewed journal publications.
- Support postdoc career development by providing opportunities for the postdoc to attend meetings, seminars, trainings, and other events appropriate for the postdoc's background and career goals. Also, support the postdoc's attendance at events organized by the Postdoc Professional Development Program (PD2P) such as proposal writing workshops, technical seminars, poster sessions, and career fairs.

Postdoc Manager (line manager of postdoc):

A postdoc's line manager is responsible for taking reasonable measures to ensure that his/her postdoc has what is needed to conduct his/her research project and for supporting the postdoc's career development. This shall include such things as:

- Understanding the postdoc's technical and career goals and expectations
- Providing regular and ongoing performance feedback.
- Encouraging the mentor to provide the postdoc with useful technical feedback.
- Providing resources (equipment, facility access, office space, etc.) as budget and space allow.
- Introducing postdocs to potential collaborators.
- Informing postdoc of intellectual property considerations
- Identify and discuss appropriate time charging for professional development activities such as attendance workshops and seminars. Explain that such activities may be considered "cost of doing business."
- Strive to ensure project compliance with all Sandia and DOE ES&H requirements

- Help prepare the postdoc for successful transition to next career move, whether it is at Sandia or another institution, i.e. introduce postdocs to organizations with potential for job opportunities.
- Supporting postdoc career development by identifying opportunities for the postdoc to attend meetings, seminars, trainings, and other events appropriate for the postdoc's background and career goals. Also, supporting the postdoc's attendance at events organized by the Postdoc Professional Development Program (PD2P) such as proposal writing workshops, technical seminars, poster sessions, and career fairs and business needs and budget allow.

4. Performance Evaluation

The postdoc's manager and staff mentor are encouraged to provide ongoing performance feedback to post docs and to conduct an informal performance evaluation at least once each year for their postdoc. There is a suggested form posted on the Postdoc Professional Development Program website (https://prod.sandia.gov/pd2p/self_assessment.html) that might be of use. But, any form could be used. While not a formal PMF, the review process can aide in aligning postdoc progress with career goals, professional development and with programmatic concerns coming from management.

5. Funding, Proposals, and Intellectual Property

Funding:

Financing sources and terms vary. Postdocs should discuss this with both their manager and staff mentor.

Proposal writing:

As proposal writing is a critical skill for national lab staff and academics, mentors are encouraged to involve postdocs in the proposal writing process. Regardless if the postdoc is listed as an author/co-author, writing proposals is valuable career experience for the postdoc. However, as postdocs are temporary employees, postdocs may leave Sandia before a grant is funded or completed.

Practices regarding postdoc participation in proposal writing as authors or co-authors vary by center. In many centers postdocs are permitted, and sometimes encouraged, to pursue additional research funding. However, several centers (eg: 8600) explicitly prohibit postdocs from applying for LDRDs to avoid both fracturing the postdoc's time and the possibility of staff reporting to postdocs.

The LDRD office permits, with center approval, postdocs to apply for LDRDs both as PIs and co-PIs. The LDRD office advises that the funding fraction of proposals led by postdocs is low.

Intellectual property:

Prior to starting work at Sandia, postdocs should be aware of intellectual property considerations. The intellectual property for research done at Sandia National Laboratories belongs to Sandia. If

a novel device or process is invented while the postdoc is employed by Sandia, a Technical Advance, which discloses the invention, should be filed with the Legal Technology Transfer Center. The patent process is described in more detail in SAND2004-3053, “Writing Reports to Facilitate Patent Applications” and at <http://info.sandia.gov/legal/intellectual/patent.html>. Likewise, if the post-doc creates copyrightable works, such as software that may be distributed to third parties, Sandia may need to assert copyright in such materials. The copyright assertion process is described at <http://info.sandia.gov/legal/intellectual/copyright.html>. As the U.S. patent law will change to a first-to-file system effective spring 2013, Sandia is currently assessing possible changes to its internal patent processes.

If a postdoc is continuing research from their graduate program for which he or she has filed, or is in the process of filing a patent, this should be disclosed to the postdoc’s management. The postdoc’s manager should assist the postdoc in working with Legal to determine how they should plan their research given such considerations.

6. Term of Appointment, Salary, and Benefits

Term of appointment:

The postdoc appointment is generally a one-year appointment that may be renewed up to five times, for a maximum total of six years. Postdocs may work at either of Sandia’s principal locations—Albuquerque, New Mexico, or Livermore, California. Prior to starting work at Sandia, postdocs must have completed all requirements for their PhD program. If the PhD degree has not yet been awarded, the postdoc should provide a letter from their college/university’s graduate office certifying that all requirements have been met. Furthermore, the PhD must have been conferred within one to five years prior to employment at Sandia.

The employment relationship at Sandia is employment-at-will. As such, both Sandia and employees have the right to discontinue employment with or without cause, at any time, and for any reason (see Corporate Procedure HR100.1.9, Use the Unified Hiring Process).

Salary:

Due to market changes, Human Resources may periodically make adjustments to postdocs’ starting salaries. If that occurs, the salary of current postdocs will automatically be increased.

Benefits:

Postdocs are full-time temporary employees of Sandia National Laboratories and are eligible for a benefits package that includes health, vision, and dental insurance; savings and income plan (401k); paid holidays and vacation, and an incoming relocation benefit.

Tuition assistance:

Postdocs are considered temporary employees and therefore are not eligible for the Labs’ Tuition Assistance Program. (See Corporate Procedure No: HR100.2.13, Participating in University-Based Education Programs).

7. Applying for Regular Staff Positions at Sandia

Postdocs are encouraged to be proactive in their career planning. There is no guarantee that, as a postdoc, you will be hired as regular staff. Postdocs have been hired both by the organization in which they did their postdoc, other organizations within their postdoc center, and by other centers. Postdocs should be aware of the GPA requirements for staff positions, which are detailed in Corporate Procedure HR100.1.9, Use the Unified Hiring Process.

Postdocs may apply for internal Sandia job postings. Postdocs interested in regular employment at Sandia may set up automatic e-mail notification of internal Sandia job postings. Such notifications are available through the “Advanced Search” option on the internal Jobs/Careers website.

Managers are reminded that the postdoc population is an excellent pool of high-quality talent, both for their own organizations and Sandia in general. Staff mentors and managers are encouraged to help postdocs develop strong networks to assist the postdoc in finding a permanent position, whether inside or outside Sandia.

Date of service:

Date of service is considered the date of hire into the postdoc position. The postdoc position is considered a category of temporary employment (see Corporate Procedure HR100.1.9, Use the Unified Hiring Process). Postdocs converted to Sandia regular employees are treated, for service date purposes, as regular employees from their initial hiring date as postdocs, provided there is no more than a 30-day break in service.

8. Applying for Positions External to Sandia

Many postdocs continue on to careers as university professors, researchers in industry, or staff members at other national labs. Sandia hopes that former postdocs continue to collaborate with Sandia. Postdocs interested in external positions are encouraged to develop broad professional networks through conference attendance and their publication record.

Workshops on applying for faculty positions are sponsored both by PD2P and by professional organizations such as MRS or IEEE. Los Alamos invites Sandia postdocs to attend the annual LANL Postdoc Career Fair, which features recruiters from industry, government, and the national labs (http://www.lanl.gov/projects/pda/committee_career/careerfair_employers.shtml).

9. Available Resources

Post-Doctoral Professional Development Program:

<https://prod.sandia.gov/pd2p/index.html>

New Employee Connect:

NM: https://sharepoint.sandia.gov/sites/ES_NEC/default.aspx

CA: <https://sharepoint.sandia.gov/sites/CAHRnewHire/default.aspx>

Please note that the NM website has information of use for all postdocs and Sandians.

International Postdocs:

International postdocs are an integral part of Sandia's mission. To make the most of their assignments, it is important for international postdocs to understand Sandia's unique security culture, which requires that every Sandian work within and abide by security regulations and restrictions. Access to Sandia's facilities, information and resources is granted on a need-to-know basis, which ensures that sensitive, classified or export controlled information is protected. International employees' access is determined by a Foreign National Request (FNR), a DOE-required security plan that is electronically submitted and approved by Sandia management and security personnel. This document lists the physical areas, cyber resources and scope of work that a specific international employee is authorized to access. Any changes to an international postdoc's access must be recorded and approved in the FNR before enhanced access takes place. As a general rule of thumb, international postdocs may access Sandia's physical site between the hours of 6:00am and 6:00pm and will be assigned to work on the Sandia Open Network (SON). Deviations from these rules must be approved through the FNR.

For assistance with immigration, international hiring or a foreign national-related workplace issues please contact Amy Stacks, 3544, NM, or Jessica Matto, 8522, CA.

Joining the Foreign National Networking Group offers a networking opportunity for FN postdocs.

Employee resource groups:

For more information about these groups and to join, please see the listing at

https://sharepoint.sandia.gov/sites/ES_NEC/nec_participate_resources.aspx

New Mexico Groups

[American Indian Outreach Committee \(AIOC\)](#)

[Asian Leadership Outreach Committee \(ALOC\)](#)

[Black Leadership Committee \(BLC\)](#)

[Disabilities Awareness Committee \(DAC\)](#)

[Hispanic Leadership Outreach Committee \(HLOC\)](#)

[Sandia Women's Action Network \(SWAN\)](#)

California Groups

[African American Outreach Committee \(AAOC\)](#)

[Asian Pacific Leadership Committee \(APLC\)](#)

[Hispanic Leadership Committee \(HLC\)](#)

[Sandia Women's Committee \(SWC\)](#)

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