Finding a Postdoc Lab In the Sciences

In many scientific fields, an academic postdoctoral research position is the most common next step for graduating PhDs. For research-based academic careers, doing a postdoc is almost always essential and choosing the right lab can be a major determinant of success. Postdoc experience can also be helpful for teaching-based academic careers as well as research-based industry careers.

Identifying labs of interest: Know your professional goals!

**Research topic:** Are you passionate about this topic? Can you learn AND contribute knowledge?

**Track record:** Where are former postdocs from this lab? Do current postdocs seem satisfied?

**Mentoring Style:** Think about what you need to be successful- is this advisor a logical choice?

**Institution:** What resources does the university/department have? What is the school’s reputation?

**Funding:** What is the current and likely future funding situation of the lab?

**Group dynamics:** Would I realistically work well with this PI and the current members of the lab?

**Personal:** Will I be happy living in this region? Will this lab support the work/life balance I desire?

Making connections and applying: 3 main ways

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Network</th>
<th>Cold-Outreach</th>
<th>Application-Based</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your PhD advisor</td>
<td>Publications</td>
<td>Job postings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborators</td>
<td>Seminars/Talks</td>
<td>Journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference connections</td>
<td>Department websites</td>
<td>Societies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suggestions</td>
<td>Universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Job boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fellowship programs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Cold-outreach tips**

- **Conferences** are a great time to establish connections with labs of interest so you are a known when you apply. All lab members are good contacts: PI, postdocs and grad students.
- UChicagoGRAD recommends making **initial contact** with lab of interest ONE YEAR before your expected defense date.
- **Email Subject** should include “UChicago” (or your current PI if the recipient is likely to know their name): and “Postdoc Position.” Use email body as cover letter and attach CV as pdf.
- **Cover letters** must be tailored to each individual lab. Do your research to identify specifically why you want to work there and highlight competencies you bring that help the lab.
- **Follow-up** if you do not hear back for two weeks with polite reminder as a reply to your original email and C.V. re-attached.

On-campus interviews

- **Research presentation** to lab or larger seminar group is often the most important part: tailor your talk to audience’s interests.
- Read publications beforehand and ask questions about the research that demonstrate your knowledge and interest.
- Get lab members to open up about their experience.
- Send Thank You notes to everyone you meet within one day.

Notes on funding

- It is essential to know the funding health of the group. Obtaining your own funding as a postdoc is also important to success.

**Know current funding sources**

- Government grant info is available online
  - NIH RePORTER
  - NSF Award Search

- It is okay to ask about funding during your interview.

**Plan to obtain more funding**

- Identify any institutional grants available for each lab
- Mention any interest in applying for specific grant funding in cover letter
- Look for external sources of postdoc funding to bring with you