

# 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

### Professional Network

- Your PhD advisor
  - Direct email/call
  - Introduction
- Collaborators
- Conference connections

### Cold-Outreach

- Publications
- Seminars/Talks
- Department websites
- Suggestions
  - Advisor
  - Colleagues

### Application-Based

- Job postings
  - Journals
  - Societies
  - Universities
  - Job boards
- Fellowship programs

## 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

