



## **School of Medicine Post Doc Administration Policy**

### **Purpose:**

To document School of Medicine (SOM) requirements for funding, hiring and maintaining postdoctoral (Post Doc) appointments in SOM Departments, Centers, and Institutes. Postdoctoral appointments as fellows or trainees are limited-term training positions offered to individuals with scientific expertise who require additional mentorship prior to the next phase in their chosen career path.

### **Background:**

VCU maintains a Postdoctoral Scholars Policy found here: <https://research.vcu.edu/integrity-and-compliance/compliance/policies-procedures-and-compliance-notice/>

### **Appointment Requirement Highlights Per Policy:**

- The duration of an appointment will be noted in the initial letter of appointment.
- Appointments are for no longer than one year with the potential for renewal, if appropriate, based on satisfactory progress, performance, programmatic need, and availability of funding.
- Postdoctoral appointments should not exceed *a total of five years* for all combined years of institutional training.
  - Exceptions beyond five years may be made in one-year increments for a total of seven years with prior written permission of the department/school and final review and approval by the Division of Postdoctoral Services.

### **NIH Post Doc stipend scale:**

- NIH maintains and annually updates the Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award (NRSA) Stipends, Tuition/Fees and Other rates.
- In FY24 the NIH increased the Post Doc stipend levels by 8%, the largest increase in years.

### **School of Medicine Requirements:**

School of Medicine guidance in part is to ensure our compensation setting practices for Post Docs allows us to stay competitive nationally to attract the best Post Doc scholars to our programs.

### **Post Doc Titles:**

- **Post Doc Fellow** –Post Docs supported on research projects or other non-NRSA fund sources. These Post Docs will have the working title of Post Doc Fellow in VCU's HR system.

- **Post Doc Trainee** – Post Docs appointed to NRSA training grants (T32) or those who receive individual fellowship (F32) awards. These Post Docs will have the working title of Post Doc Trainee in VCU’s HR system.

**SOM Minimum Post Doc Stipend Requirement:**

- All new Post Docs hired in SOM must be paid at least the NRSA YR0 post doc rate in effect on the day of initial appointment.
- This minimum applies to both Post Doc Fellows and Post Doc Trainees. This ensures SOM remains competitive with Post Doc stipend rates nationwide.
- Post Doc Trainee stipends must follow the NRSA stipend scale for all years they are appointed to the training grant or fellowship.
- SOM strongly encourages that Investigators follow the NRSA stipend scale for the relevant stipend level for a Post Doc Fellow year(s) of experience, as long as performance is at least satisfactory, to enhance competitiveness and equity across all Post Docs whether NRSA funded or not.

**Budgeting & Funding Post Doc Positions:**

- Post Doc positions typically are supported by sponsored (extramural) resources such as research grants, cooperative agreements, training grants, fellowships, etc.
  - Non-sponsored alternative fund sources include start-up or retention packages.
  - Department overhead is acceptable to cover short-term gaps in stipend support.
  - E&G is not an appropriate fund source; unless approved in advance by SOM.
- Budgeting Post Doc costs in Sponsored Programs
  - NRSA Training grants/Fellowships (Post Doc Trainees): Budget using NIH guidance and stipend scale that is updated annually for the federal fiscal year.
    - Rates other than YR0 can be used to budget and should be used as appropriate to the years of experience a Post Doc will have when awarded or appointed.
  - Research Project Post Doc Budgeting (Post Doc Fellows):
    - Budget Post Doc positions as TBD and use the YR03 NRSA stipend rate *at minimum* for all years of the project unless the sponsor published proposal guidelines require a different practice.
  - K99 Budget Guidance: The Post Doc portion of a K99 should be budgeted using the appropriate NRSA stipend level for the applicant Post Doc based on the proposed project start date proposed.
    - If the Post Doc stipend already exceeds the NRSA rate for years of experience, then the current stipend rate should be used.

**Post Doc appointments:**

- **Initial Appointments (new Hire, 1 year)**
  - All Post Docs are hired through VCU HR and receive VCU’s full benefits package.
  - Per VCU Post Doc Policy; post docs should receive initial appointments letters as well as annual renewal notices.

- SOMHR has a standard initial hire/appointment template for both Post Doc Fellows and Post Doc Trainees.
- Departments must work with HR to ensure Post Docs are classified as either Fellows or Trainees based on their funding source.
- **Renewal or Re-appointments (Continuation years, up to 4 additional years)**
  - Post Doc positions must be renewed annually and documented as such via an appointment renewal letter.
  - SOMHR has standard Post Doc appointment letter templates to issue for renewal years.
  - SOMHR will initiate renewal appointments at least two months prior to the current appointment expiration to allow sufficient time for processing.
    - Principal Investigators and/or the home department of the Post Doc must confirm the intent to renew the position and confirm they have the funding.
    - Post Docs on visas require more advanced planning for renewal to ensure appropriate time to process the visa renewal through VCU Global Education.
  - At the point of annual renewal of a Post Doc appointment, SOMHR will review compensation with the department and update it as required.
    - Post Doc Trainee: The NRSA stipend scale must be followed when processing renewal appointments on these awards.
    - Post Doc Fellow: SOMHR will review to ensure the Post Doc is paid at least the NRSA YRO minimum currently in effect if the PI/Department has not requested any additional stipend adjustment to coincide with the renewal.
    - SOMHR will process the appropriate pay action to coincide with the renewal appointment as needed.

**Merit increases for Post Docs:**

- All VCU Post Docs with satisfactory performance are eligible to receive across the board merit or cost of living increases approved through standard VCU/State procedures.
- For Post Doc trainees: this could result in the merit increases causing the stipend to exceed the allowable NRSA rate during the course of a budget year.
  - If this occurs departments must fund the unallowable portion (amount exceeding NRSA stated stipend level) with department resources.
  - Requests for SOM funding to support this overage will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

**For questions on this Policy please contact:**

SOM Office of Research Administration: [somresadmin@vcuhealth.org](mailto:somresadmin@vcuhealth.org)

**For question or assistance with Post Doc appointments please contact:**

SOM Human Resources: [SOMHR@vcuhealth.org](mailto:SOMHR@vcuhealth.org)