

Tips and Strategies for Success in ASP

The following tips were generated during the November 2016 Postdoc Retreat. Experienced postdocs answered questions from first-year postdocs and added tips and strategies during the discussion.

What timelines do people use for setting up research? How do you structure your time while you're an ASP postdoc over the two years?

About publishing PhD related work

- In my first year, I published old work and started collaborating with colleagues at NCAR. Now in my second year, I am publishing work from ASP work.
- I spent my first year publishing work that grew out of my PhD. I wasn't quite ready to jump into new work.
- I also am publishing my work from ASP late in my postdoc. This is normal.

About establishing collaborations at NCAR and beyond

- Multitasking is really important. Don't wait a year to start collaborating with people here.
- Go ahead and start talking to people now about collaboration. Then during other parts of the day, work on previous projects. You can work on more than one project, including a more risky project and then more established ones.
- A good strategy is to give a seminar pretty early on so that people know what you are doing and people can approach you.
- People at NCAR are very responsive when you approach them about collaborating. If you are interested in talking to people, send them an email to meet up.
- Read the Staff Notes for seminars to learn about other projects and talk to the speaker after, if you liked it.
- Each ASP postdoc meets with the ASP Director after three months. This is your time to make these first connections, give a seminar early on, and to think about what you want to be doing.
- Think about resources outside. I am working with a scientist on a project in Chile and have 2 months salary from that project. I have been writing proposals that will fund me going beyond the ASP program.

How should I manage time with respect for doing everything expected: like wrapping up PhD work, publishing, reviews, and job search?

- One of the challenges of ASP is that most days there is nothing on my calendar. I structure my calendar with certain activities in the morning and others in the afternoon. I make lists, and I have three months of calendars on the board, and I make goals for each day, each week, and each month. That forces you to break things up into smaller chunks, and to feel accomplishment when you get things done.



- **Multitasking:** I write things out for each day (four items). I usually only finish #1 and 2, and so the next day I may work on #3 and 4. It's nice to mix it up. I used to do numerical simulation and here I am doing observation. If things cause delays such as problems with the data, it's good to start on your research here early in your postdoc.
- Take the time to make a plan and revise it with someone can help not to waste time. I learned that I want to pursue science project management instead of scientific research.
- Meet with someone (your officemate, advisor, Rebecca, or Rich Rotunno) and talk about your different projects and which tasks to make a priority. Doing this frequently can help keep you on track.
- Consider mapping things out on a calendar or on a whiteboard. Make a plan for your 3-month meeting.

How do you choose where to expand your research and take risks on?

- What surprised me when I started; I learned that you don't need to do what you proposed in your application. This was good, because others had already solved the problem that I had planned to work on. Feel free to expand and take risks on a subject that you feel is interesting to you.
- The exciting part of the ASP is the freedom and chance to broaden your horizons. I recommend having a project that is familiar to you and another that is more risky and something you want to explore.
- Check out the opportunities. We learned about a field campaign in the Midwest, and two of us scraped together a truck, instrument, two SOARS summer interns, and make a field project that was part of that bigger campaign. You can make these connections and bring them wherever you go. It's a bridge between your PhD and where you go in future.
- Talk to the ASP Director if you are interested in learning about pursuing other careers, such as science communication, project management, etc. There is a lot of freedom to pursue other things while you are in the ASP program.

How soon do people usually start applying for jobs?

- It depends on the field, but it is good to work on it right away and develop those materials and interview skills.
- The job application process took much more time than I expected. Preparing the materials, doing interviews, etc. is very time-consuming.
- Think about it for you personally about the balance between dealing the stress of applying for jobs, which takes an emotional toll, and getting other work done. Think about this when you decide to apply.
- I started applying for jobs one year before I finished my PhD. Writing those application materials was not trivial for me. I got completely different advice from different faculty advisors, and I didn't know what was correct. I have developed a better idea, also with support from the group that was developed within ASP. I am still improving these materials and finding the balance, for instance, between using too much jargon and being too general.



- It depends on which jobs are available.
- If you apply and happen to get the job, but wanted to stay in ASP, you can negotiate for deferments for the job you are going to. One year is quite common for faculty positions.
- Sometimes people get so stressed with proposals and job applications, that they don't get any research or writing done, which is not ideal. Ultimately, your productivity is what will help you, going forward.

What are some general tips for success?

- ASP has a supplementary fund that you can submit a small proposal to, e.g. for a small field campaign. Twice a year ASP puts out a call for proposals for additional travel needs, if you have an idea for a visitor to bring here, to do a field project and hire student assistants, or to work on instrumentation. You can also submit proposals outside of these times.
- Create/join a group in ASP for writing or for preparing job materials, and meet weekly.
- It depends on what you define as success. I tried for a long time to become research scientist/faculty, and realized that this wasn't for me.
- Look at the postdoc as a bridge and build new collaborations.

