

Cornell University

Postdoc Onboarding Handbook



Cornell Postdoctoral Association (PDA) & Office of Postdoctoral Affairs

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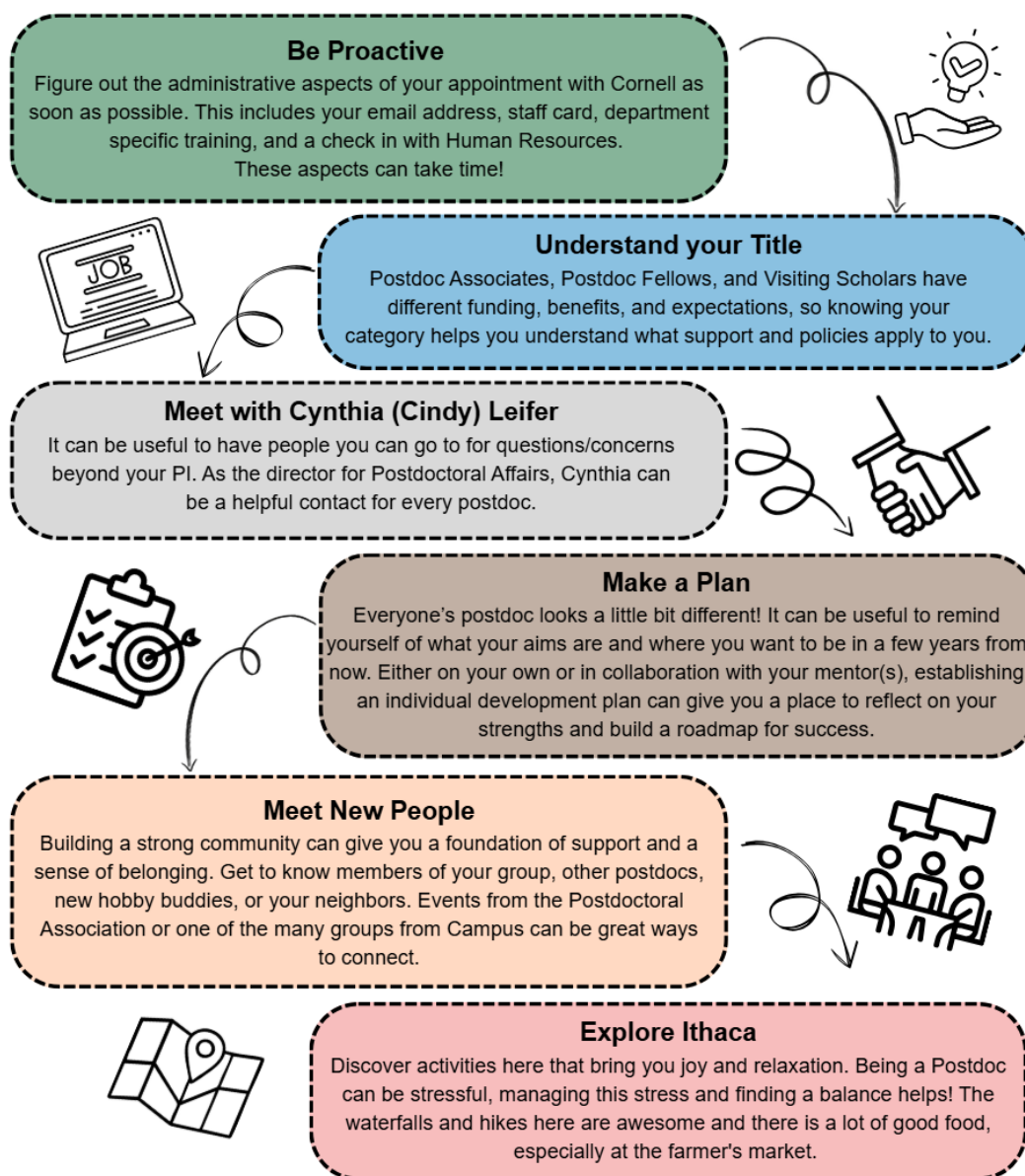
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Welcome!

Being a Postdoc comes with many perks; you can often set your own timelines, explore exciting ideas and methods, and make invaluable new connections. Yet, structures and expectations may be less defined at first, and it can take time to get settled into your new project, university, and city. As postdocs who recently navigated our transition to Cornell, we understand these challenges! Drawing on our shared experiences, we wrote this handbook to offer practical information and recommendations to support you in a smooth transition, no matter your background.

While this handbook provides a range of resources and advice to help you navigate your time here, use these postdoc-recommended quick tips to get started!



Postdoc Onboarding Handbook

Section 1 - Moving to Ithaca



On behalf of the Postdoc Association, welcome to Ithaca! Moving to a new place can be challenging, even to a place as welcoming as here. Below you will find resources to help ease your transition, wherever you are coming from. If your questions are not answered in this handbook, please feel free to reach out, attend our events, or post in the PDA WhatsApp group (reach out to Cindy Leifer at postdocs@cornell.edu, or a PDA member [email addresses are on the [PDA website](#)] for the most up-to-date link).

General information and resources can also be found at the Cornell Office of Postdoctoral Affairs website, which includes advice on [living in Ithaca](#) and [essentials in Ithaca](#)!

1. Housing Resources

a. Finding Housing:

- i. [Furnished Finder](#) - A general website for furnished rentals for varying amounts of times.

- ii. [Zillow](#), [Apartments](#), [Redfin](#), and [Realtor](#) - Are all helpful websites for housing with both furnished and unfurnished options. It can be useful to crosscheck these sites, as there isn't a universal source for local housing!
- iii. [Cornell University Hasbrouck Apartments](#) - This website is for on campus housing and is especially good for postdocs moving as a family
- iv. It can be useful to ask for housing through one of the unofficial university WhatsApp groups, such as through the IGPS (International Graduate and Professional Students association) Community which offers a subgroup for housing.
- v. Many landlords will try to sync leases with the academic calendar, so they may ask you to have a shorter (or longer) lease in your first year if you move in after August! There also tends to be more apartments available in the months leading up to the Fall semester.
- vi. Housing slightly outside of Ithaca is often a bit more affordable! Dryden, Lansing, Groton, and Trumansburg can be great options as long as you are satisfied with your transportation options.

b. Helpful Info

- i. Utilities (electricity, heat, water, internet, waste disposal, snow shoveling) may cost between \$150 and \$500 per month depending on the size of an apartment and the season. When comparing housing options, be sure to understand which utilities are provided by the landlord and which utilities are paid for by the tenant in addition to rent.
- ii. Beware old houses might contain lead painting which can be harmful, especially for children. You can ask the landlords for lead testing. Find information through the [Environmental Protection Agency](#).
- iii. [Laws in New York have recently changed](#) to offer more protections to tenants. Most importantly:
 1. The most a landlord can charge for a security deposit is 1 month of rent. For example, a landlord offering a \$1500/month apartment may ask for a maximum of \$3000 at signing (\$1500 first month's rent plus \$1500 security deposit).
 2. The most a landlord can charge is \$20 for a credit and background check.
 3. Landlords must have a "[good cause](#)" to evict you or to not offer you a lease renewal.

- iv. Check out the [Ithaca ReUse Centers](#) for affordable used furnishings!

2. Transportation

- a. *Public Transportation* - The TCAT buses are free for postdocs with Cornell ID. The timetables are at the bus stops and in the TCAT App (delays can occur). The spouse may get an ID card ([ID Cards | Registrar](#)) which has benefits for the gym. Mystop ([myStop® Mobile - Apps on Google Play](#)) gives real-time tracking of TCAT buses
- b. *Biking* - Biking in Ithaca is potentially difficult with all the hills. One way to use bikes occasionally is with [Ithaca Bikeshare](#).

Here are examples of decent bike lanes:

- i. [City of Ithaca Bicycle Map | Cayuga Lake](#)
- ii. [Cycling on Campus](#)
- c. *Driving* - Driving is a flexible way to get around either by driving yourself or by using carpool services!
 - i. Parking Resources:
 - 1. Parking on campus is expensive, but it is possible to get a parking pass through [the Department of Transportation and Delivery Services](#)
 - a. Parking passes for:
 - i. A lot (further away, north campus, requires shuttle if want to go to main campus)
 - ii. B lot (close to CVM, ~15 min walk to engineering quad)
 - 2. Downtown, there is paid street parking in most areas, Monday-Saturday from 9 am to 6 pm. Generally, parking is free after 6 pm and Sundays. Through the ParkMobile App parking fees can easily be paid digitally.
 - 3. Parking Garages are available downtown and include Green Street Garage (Convenient for Commons, free on Sat/ Sun), Seneca Street Garage, Dryden Road Garage, Cayuga Street Garage
 - ii. Car Rental and Carpooling:
 - 1. Short term car rental is available through [Ithaca Carshare](#)
 - 2. At the airport daywise car rental (like Ithaca carshare) is possible, prices are depending on the season.
 - 3. Carpooling resources include:
 - a. [Finger Lakes Rideshare](#)

- b. [Uber](#) - Can be expensive and have limited availability depending on where you are trying to travel/ the time of day. Note, Lyft does not work well in Ithaca.
- c. Occasionally it is possible to organize rides via event specific WhatsApp groups or e.g. through the Postdoc WhatsApp group.

3. Food

a. Restaurants

- i. For vegetarian food, check out [Moosewood Restaurant](#)
- ii. For vegan food, try [Angelhearts Donuts](#). (Their donuts are very good!)
- iii. Some of the PDA members' favorite restaurants include:
 - 1. [Maxie's Supper Club & Oyster Bar](#) - Cajun and Creole inspired food, on the pricier side but worth it for special occasions
 - 2. Tacos CDMX - Authentic street tacos located in Press Bay Alley
 - 3. [Thompson and Bleecker](#) - Fresh brick oven pizza, pasta, and salads in a shared plate format, paired with excellent vibes
 - 4. [Hound and Mare](#) - Delicious breakfast sandwiches and cafe-style coffee and tea
- iv. The more upscale restaurants are often found around the Commons, e.g., French, Italian, Asian Fusion, Tapas

b. Grocery Stores

- i. Local grocery stores include:
 - 1. Wegmans and Tops - General grocery stores
 - 2. P&C Fresh - Locally owned
 - 3. Green Star - Community owned/ co-op
 - 4. Walmart Supercenter - Retail store with a grocery section
 - 5. Ren's Mart, Winli Supermarket, Green Castle Asian Market, and Ithaca Tofu - Asian Markets
 - 6. Trader Joe's - Known for their large snack selection
 - 7. Aldi - Budget friendly
- ii. The [Ithaca Farmers Market](#) (April-Dec) and affiliated Winter Market (Jan-March) are great alternatives to traditional stores for purchasing local, fresh ingredients!

4. Activities

- a. Hiking is great around Ithaca. Trails can be found using websites like [AllTrails](#) and [Ithaca Trails](#). State Parks also offer a variety of nice trails, with maps often available at the park entrance.
- b. In summer, swimming can be possible in lakes and creeks e.g. in:
 - i. Taughannock State Park
 - ii. Buttermilk Falls State Park
 - iii. Robert Treman State Park
 - iv. *Note:* Swimming is sometimes closed due to water conditions, you can check in advance using NYS [Parks Explorer App](#)
 - v. *Note:* sometimes people go to other swimming locations, but be sure to check whether it is legal, whether there will be life guards, and if the location is safe for swimming.
- c. Ithaca community clubs have activities throughout the year, some clubs include:
 - i. [Finger Lakes Runners Club](#) (training on tuesday, fun run thursday).
 - ii. [Finger Lakes Cycling Club](#)
 - iii. [Ithaca Yacht Club](#)
- d. [Greek Peak Ski Resort](#) offers skiing, snowboarding, and snowtubing in the winter as well as mountain biking, an aerial ropes course, and a mountain coaster in the warmer months. It can be quite affordable to learn skiing there! You may also find cross country equipment rental through Cornell outdoor education.
- e. [Ithaca Boat Tours](#) and [Discover Cayuga Lake](#) offer local boat tours to explore and learn about Cayuga Lake!

5. Events

- a. [Cornell Events Calendar](#) can be used to find talks, performances, seminars and more
- b. [Visit Ithaca Events Calendar](#) is helpful for finding local events like tours, wine tasting, theater shows and many more
- c. University sporting events can be found at [Cornell Athletics](#). While it can be challenging to get tickets for men's hockey, the women's sports are great and you can often grab a last minute ticket.

6. Fun places to visit

- a. [Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art](#) is free of charge and has a permanent exhibition as well as seasonal exhibitions
- b. [The History Center In Tompkins County](#) offers a glimpse into how Ithaca was first founded and grew to what it is today

- c. [Sciencenter](#) is great for kids, with hands on exhibits
- d. [Museum of the Earth](#) is a local natural history museum
- e. [Corning Museum of Glass](#) bridges the divide between the art, science, and history of glass working. It is a bit of a drive, but well worth it!
- f. Ithaca has a range of lovely parks to visit, including Stewart Park and Cass Park.
- g. Ithaca Generator is a community of inventors, crafters, designers, engineers and artists, if you are into crafty things!
- h. Tompkins County Public Library is right at downtown Ithaca
- i. Ithaca has some good thrift/ antique stores to visit, including [FOUND in ITHACA](#), [Evergreen Ithaca](#), and [The Grain Bin Market](#). Instant Replay Sports and Ithaca Reuse also have plenty of stuff to explore. Keep an eye out for pop-up thrifting events too!
- j. A short drive away are some lovely little towns, including the pretty Skaneateles, the village of Watkins Glen and the lovely Trumansburg and many more places to discover. Use the [Ithaca Roadtrip Guide](#) to get some ideas for your next adventure!

7. Bars

- a. Cocktail Bars:
 - i. Bar Argos/ the Argos Warehouse (and check out Jazz on Wednesday evenings)
 - ii. The Greenhouse
 - iii. Nowhere Special (great if you're particularly adventurous)
- b. Breweries:
 - i. Personal Best (board games, shuffle board, and a trivia night)
 - ii. Liquid State (karaoke nights, and trivia nights)
 - iii. Salt Point (large outdoor space with yard games)
 - iv. Ithaca Beer Company
 - v. Brewers and Hopshire (both in Dryden, a short drive from Ithaca)
- c. There are many other bars around town, including:
 - i. Bike Bar
 - ii. Reinhouse ()
 - iii. The Westy
- d. Wineries (the Finger Lakes region is home to over 100 wineries!):
 - i. Six Mile Creek (only winery in Ithaca proper; does live music on Thursday nights in the summer!)
 - ii. More info [here](#)

For more general information and resources, check out the Cornell Office of Postdoctoral Affairs website, which includes advice on [living in Ithaca](#) and [essentials in Ithaca](#)!

Are you moving to Ithaca with your family? → Turn to Section 4 of this handbook for more family-centered tips!

Wait, are you moving to Geneva (instead of Ithaca)?! We didn't forget about you! Check out this link to learn more about living in Geneva - <https://www.cityofgeneva.ny.gov/327/Live-Well>

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Section 2 - Navigating Campus



1. **Cornell ID:** As a postdoc at Cornell, you will get a Cornell ID card. It can help you get into your building after work hours and can be used to pay for food and coffee (as long as you add money!).
Your Cornell ID will be active on the first day of your appointment and will remain valid for the duration of your time at Cornell. The card will be deactivated if your appointment ends or is interrupted.
You can get a Cornell ID for your spouse. This will add benefits for them to go to the library, the sportcenter Helen Newman Hall, and the gym.
2. **Titles and position:** For postdocs, the most common titles (name of the position) are postdoctoral associate and postdoctoral fellow. A third, less common title is visiting fellow. Each position comes with different funding, benefits, and expectations, so knowing your category helps you understand what support and policies apply to you.
 - a. *Postdoctoral associates* are postdocs funded through the University and are considered employees (academic, non-professorial staff). They

receive employee benefits including health benefits, retirement, and the ability to take credit courses.

- b. *Postdoctoral fellows* are commonly postdocs funded through external funders. While not all benefits available to University employees are available to fellows some, such as the Wellness Abo and health insurance, can be acquired.
 - c. *Visiting fellow* is a title used in some departments for postdocs with external funding. This position comes with a yearly library fee and has access to some, but not all of the University Employee Benefits.
- 3. Food on Campus:** Cornell offers plenty of options for meals, snacks, and coffee across campus. As a postdoc, you can take advantage of **MealChoice**, which gives you **10% off** food purchased from Cornell Dining locations, including all-you-can-eat dining rooms, cafés, and food courts. Even better, lunch at any all-you-can-eat dining room is just **\$9.50** (make sure you ask for a punch card too! Buy ten get one free.). To get started, simply load funds onto your Cornell ID card. You can download the GET Mobile app to add money or place an online order.
- 4. Library:** As a postdoc at Cornell, you get access to one of the largest university library systems on the planet. [Cornell Libraries](#) hold over 8 million volumes, which means if the paper or book you need exists, there's a very good chance Cornell already has it. Can't find what you need? Make sure you ask one of the super friendly librarians that know exactly how to find what you are looking for. Need more than just books? The libraries offer reservable workspaces, research support, and subject librarians who specialize in specific fields and can help you hunt down obscure sources, strange citations, or that one reference everyone else keeps misquoting.
- 5. Sports and exercising:** Being a postdoc is rewarding, but sometimes your brain works overtime while your legs... not so much. Luckily, Cornell has plenty of ways to get moving, break a sweat, or just channel your inner ninja. With access to state-of-the-art gyms, swimming pools, climbing walls, and fitness studios, you can lift, stretch, swim, or climb your way through the week. If you haven't already, make sure you join Cornell PDA WhatsApp group to connect with other postdocs for sport and other activities.

Your Cornell ID gives you access to all facilities, and most programs are either free or discounted. If you are enrolled in the Cornell health insurance called "Cornell Program for Healthy Living", you receive a \$15 monthly discount from

either the Ithaca YMCA, Island Fitness or the Cornell Wellness Program (**the discount makes the Cornell Wellness free, let me repeat: FREE**).

6. Fun places

- a. *Secret Garden*: Wander through beautiful gardens like Farrand Garden (behind the A.D. White House) or Minns Garden and discover cozy spots like Wee Stinky Glen, perfect for a mindful break or a quick nature reset between meetings.
- b. *Campus Lore*: Fancy a romantic stroll? Legend says that a walk around Beebe Lake with someone special *might* keep you together forever.
- c. *Classic Cornell Treats*: No fun list is complete without **Cornell Dairy Bar** ice cream, yes, it's as good as they say.
- d. *Botanic Gardens*: Just beyond the academic bustle are the **Cornell Botanic Gardens** – 4,000 acres of curated landscapes, woodlands, and one of Ithaca's best sledding hills (yes, even winter has perks).

Pro Tip: Download the [Things to Do at Cornell](#) PDF to find even more hidden gems, and low-key ways to explore your new town.

7. Driving/Parking on campus

- a. *Getting around campus by car?*
Cornell has plenty of parking options, but a little planning goes a long way. Most postdocs can purchase a parking permit, which gives access to designated lots and garages. Daily visitor parking is also available if you're just swinging by. There are also temporary paid parking options via the [ParkMobile app](#). Parking fees may vary widely across campus. Find out where is cheaper to park using [Parking for University Employees | Facilities and Campus Services](#)
- b. If you are ok with a life without driving (because parking lots can still be FAR from your office or your lab) consider a life with a bus which is free with your Cornell ID and could drop you off right where you need to go!

8. Easily overlooked resources:

- a. For disability services, request [Accessibility & Accommodations](#) through the [Cornell Office of Civil Rights](#).
 - i. *Note:* Employees with disabilities who are also enrolled in courses at Cornell may be eligible for classroom accommodations through Student Disability Services.
- b. The [Office of the University Ombuds](#) is a confidential, independent, informal, and impartial resource available to students, staff, and faculty at

the university to address conflicts, concerns, or other issues affecting their work, life, or study at Cornell.

- c. Need mental health support? Cornell's [Faculty & Staff Assistance Program](#) provides professional counseling and support tailored to meet the unique needs of Cornell employees.
 - i. This program offers several [group counseling options](#), including one specifically for postdocs!
- d. For information on reporting discrimination or harassment, use this [reporting system](#) through the Cornell Office of Civil Rights
- e. The [Cornell Statistical Consulting Unit](#) offers free one-hour consultation for some of the departments, with drop ins welcome. They also offer workshops and materials.
- f. English Language Support Office (ELSO) offers writing and speaking support, including [GenAI Writing Tutoring](#), which is currently free for Postdocs, thanks to the support from the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs.

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Section 3 - Campus Community



Being a postdoc can feel like an isolating experience. We are moving away from friends and family to a new, unfamiliar place. Except, unlike in grad school, we don't have a cohort or an easy way to connect with other people at a similar career stage. Luckily, Cornell has several ways in which you can connect and build community with other postdocs and Cornellians!

1. For general connection, check out:

a. *Postdoc Association (PDA)*

- i. Events / Monthly Postdoc Socials / Professional Development Workshops - Informal gatherings, often with food and a fun activity! Keep an eye out for advertisements and come hang out. Several events are held at lunchtime, providing opportunities for postdocs with children to participate!
- ii. PDA WhatsApp - Reach out to Cindy (postdocs@cornell.edu) or the PDA chairs for the most up-to date link!

- b. Engage with other postdocs and people in your department through organized groups or one-on-one interaction

2. Are you looking for connection through a specific hobby, interest, or identity? Try:

a. Affinity groups/ Colleague Network Groups:

- i. [Workforce Affinity Groups \(WAGs\)](#) - employee-run communities with specific themes/topics to connect faculty and staff with common interests across Cornell.
- ii. [Colleague Network Groups](#) - Identity based groups, including Disability, LGBTQ+, Men of Color, Veterans, Women of Color, and Young Professionals.

b. Cultural Centers:

- i. Cornell has a number of cultural centers open to postdocs that offer events, resources, and the opportunity to build community!
 - 1. [Asian & Asian American Center](#) - Works to connect and collaborate with students, staff, faculty, and members of the Ithaca community to create a physical space for connection that acknowledges and celebrates the rich diversity of the APIDA academic experience.
 - 2. [Diwan Center for Muslim Life](#) - Aims to provide a positive Cornell Muslim experience to foster spiritual growth through classes/ discussions, Friday prayers, cultural events, and pastoral care.
 - 3. [Roitman Chabad Center at Cornell](#) - Provides opportunities for community building through Shabbat, holidays, classes, a schmooze, one on one study, and more.
 - 4. [Grinspoon Hillel at Cornell](#) - Offers events and resources to support a sense of home and belonging as well as a place to learn about, practice, and lead Jewish life.
 - 5. [Ujamaa Residential College](#) - A cultural center where students can learn about the African Diaspora and build community by engaging with education, social, cultural, and recreational programming. An option to join as a non-resident member is available!
 - 6. [The Buddhist Sangha](#) - Provides a welcoming sangha (community) at Cornell University for those who engage with and practice Buddhism as a religion and philosophy.
 - 7. [Office of Spirituality and Meaning-Making](#) - Provides spaces, communities, and experiences for observance, exploration,

ethical reflection, and meaningful connections with respect to religion and spirituality.

8. [Gender Equity Resource Center](#) - Offers resources and programming that supports education, empowerment, and strength for women and gender-expansive students.
9. [LGBT Resource Center](#) - Serves as a physical space for students to study and relax, professional and student staff to assist students, and educational, identity-based, and signature programs which welcome all LGBTQ+ students and allies from all backgrounds.
10. The organization for International Graduate and Professional Students (IGPS) organizes various events for internationals, Postdocs are welcome! Most events are advertised through their WhatsApp group, a link can be found [here](#).

c. Unofficial Cultural Groups:

- i. There are many unofficial groups on campus that have formed as a result of shared culture and identity! You can find these groups in a few ways:
 1. Attend social events and connect with other postdocs, word of mouth can be a powerful tool for connection
 2. Look out for posters and advertisements for cultural events on campus bulletin boards
 3. Use the PDA WhatsApp to virtually reach out to a portion of the postdoc community
 4. Ask a PDA member, we'll do our best to connect you with the right people :)

3. If you'd rather keep your campus connections professional, that's perfectly ok too! Take a look at:

a. Professional Societies

- i. [Society of Women Engineers \(SWE\)](#)
- ii. [Biomedical Engineering Society \(BMES\)](#)
- iii. [Society for the Humanities | Society for the Humanities](#)

b. Institutes/Hubs/Working Groups/Journal Clubs

- i. [Mechanobiology Hub at the Weill Institute for Cell and Molecular Biology](#)
- ii. [Structural Biology Hub](#)
- iii. [Menopause Initiative](#)
- iv. [Stem Cell Program](#)
- v. [Center for Innovative Proteomics Journal Club](#)

- vi. [Cornell Center for Social Sciences Postdoc Working Group](#)
- vii. [Department of Neurobiology and Behavior Journal Club](#)
- viii. [Cell Biology Journal Club](#)
- ix. [Laboratory for Accelerator-Based Sciences and Education Journal Club](#)
- x. [Cornell Center for Immunology](#)
- xi. [Center for Vertebrate Genomics \(CVG\)](#)
- xii. Others (Ask around your department, there are likely ones we missed!)

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Section 4 - Information for Family



Being a postdoc is intense. Being a postdoc with a family? That's next-level. Between experiments, papers, grant deadlines, and job searches, parenting can feel like one more full-time role layered onto an already packed schedule. The good news is, you don't have to figure it all out alone. Cornell and the broader Tompkins County community offer real, practical support. These resources exist to ease the stress, save you money, and give you back a little breathing room. Skim now, save for later, and remember: support is available!

1. Cornell Specific Resources:

- a. Cornell's [Benefits Resources for Parenting](#) details the supportive resources available to you and your family at Cornell, including family-friendly activities that are offered on campus and financial help programs.
- b. Need a little help with childcare expenses? Cornell's [Child Care Grant](#) can give you financial support so you and your partner can work, or look for work, without the extra stress.

- c. Curious about your parental leave options? Cornell's [Parental Leave](#) policies cover everything you need to know about taking time for a new child.
- d. Some postdocs on the Ithaca campus may be eligible to apply for the Cornell Postdoc Parental Leave Support Program (PD PALS) following the birth or adoption of a child. The program is designed to assist postdoctoral associates and the team in which they work so that their research can continue during their leave. The funds are distributed to the lab and certain conditions apply. See the [PD PALS website](#) for additional information.

2. Option(s) to buy gently used items for babies and kids:

- a. [Jillian's Drawers](#) - Looking for budget-friendly, gently used baby gear? Jillian's Drawers has it all: cloth diapers, toys, carriers, and more. As a bonus, the store has a play area, hosts workshops, rents equipment, and even offers a breastfeeding clinic. *Heads up, some items aren't listed online, so it's worth popping in to see what's available.*
- b. [Finger Lakes Toy Library](#) - Need toys for playtime without breaking the bank? The Finger Lakes Toy Library loans toys to families, encourages creative play, and promotes reuse so your kids can have fun while supporting sustainability.
- c. [Babies First - First Unitarian Society of Ithaca](#) - A local, all-volunteer group that lends a hand to families in need by providing free baby equipment. Think cribs, strollers, and other essentials. Perfect for families who could use a little extra support!
- d. Check out local facebook groups, like Ithaca Families Gift Economy

3. Birth and postpartum care:

- a. [Ithaca Doula Collective](#) - This collective of doulas offers hands-on, non-judgmental support for birth, postpartum, breastfeeding, and even challenging situations like miscarriage or adoption. Think of them as friendly experts who guide you through every step of your family journey.
- b. [Moms PLUS+ - Parent Pregnancy & Lactation United Services](#) If you're a parent or soon-to-be parent in Tompkins County, this free home-visit program connects you with a nurse who can help with maternal and child health. Insurance isn't required, so everyone is welcome.
- c. [Child Development Council](#) If you think you might need childcare, start to look as soon as you know you are expecting. Infant spots are sometimes difficult to secure at local childcare centers, but there are lots of alternatives that the Child Development Council can help you identify.

4. Resources for Older Children

- a. [Ithaca Youth Bureau](#) - Offers a broad range of recreation and youth development services, supports, and opportunities. Check out the 'Local Resources' tab under 'About' for additional mental health and youth/family resources in the Ithaca area.
- b. [Youth Programs](#) - Provides a list of other programs available in Ithaca and Tompkins County.
- c. [Tompkins county resource on children's camps](#) has information and a Summer camp guide. Note that while summer camps for older children are popular, these camps fill up very quickly and planning should start in January or February for that summer.

5. Family Friendly Things to Do

- a. Ithaca offers many opportunities for family fun!
 - i. Movies in the Park - A free family friendly summer movie series in Stewart Park
 - ii. Roller or Ice Skating at the [Cass Park Rink](#)
 - iii. Bowling at Cornell's [Helen Newman Bowling Center](#)
 - iv. Museum of the Earth
 - v. Insectapalooza is a fun family event held each year by the Cornell Entomology Department.
 - vi. Cornell Open House is held each April by the Cornell College of Veterinary Medicine and is a full day of activities with opportunities to learn and interact with many different types of animals. Kids can get their favorite stuffed animal repaired at the Teddy Bear ER.
 - vii. Check out these links for more!!
 - 1. [Things To Do With Kids in Ithaca | Museums & Discovery trail](#)
 - 2. [Family Activities Around Ithaca | Working at Cornell](#)
- b. If you're up for a drive, here are some other options:
 - i. [The Strong National Museum of Play](#) is a fun, interactive museum in Rochester, NY which allows kids to learn and explore through play.
 - ii. [Rosamond Gifford Zoo](#) is a AZA (Association of Zoos & Aquariums) zoo in Syracuse, NY that is home to more than 900 animals representing 216 species on 43 acres.
 - iii. [The Great New York State Fair](#) in Syracuse, NY offers fun for people of all ages and typically runs in late August to early September.

- iv. [Corning Museum of Glass](#) in Corning, NY is a great place for older children to watch glassblowing and possibly even make their own piece.
- c. If you need a break and a date night, several local places offer “Parent’s Night Out” opportunities for group, paid, babysitting (e.g. YMCA or Finger Lakes Gymnastics Center)

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Section 5 - Professional and Career Development



A postdoc is an excellent opportunity to sharpen the skills you gained in graduate school, while also expanding your professional toolkit! As you do so, be mindful of the importance of building a strong mentoring network and leveraging the training resources here at Cornell, and beyond. Below you will find key contacts and other resources that will hopefully help you thrive during this chapter of your career.

1. Tips for success as a postdoc

- a. Connect with other postdocs! Without a cohort or formal classes, it can be difficult to build community and feel supported. Here are some things that can help:
 - i. **Your Department:** look for existing groups/clubs in your department, most have a postdoc group of some sort so just ask around
 - ii. **Cornell-wide:** Join the PDA or just attend PDA sponsored events
 - iii. Check out the “**Campus Community**” Section of this handbook

- b. Remember that everyone's career goals are different, it's ok to not have the same postdoc experience as your colleagues! Instead, establish a personalized plan for yourself (ideally with the help of mentors) to help you keep track of your progress.
 - i. Try identifying things like:
 - 1. Your top priority career goal(s) (i.e. professorship, medical writer, project lead in industry, etc). Don't be afraid to consider more than one possible path and explore alternatives to the traditional academic vs industry route!
 - 2. Necessary technical and soft skillsets for your career goals, including your strengths and potential areas of growth. Use the sections below to learn how to gain or grow your skills!
 - 3. Your values in the professional setting, working in alignment with your values will help make your work more fulfilling!
 - ii. Have a meeting at the beginning of your postdoc to set clear expectations and milestones, and check in annually.
 - iii. Using an Individual Development Plan template like the ones below can help. The National Postdoc Association has a [guide to using an IDP effectively](#) to plan out your research and professional development goals.
 - 1. [Science Careers MyIDP](#)
 - 2. [Imagine PhD IDP](#) for humanities and social sciences
 - 3. American Chemical Society [Career Planning Tool](#)
- c. Here are some more [general tips for postdocs!](#)

2. Resources

- a. [Office of Postdoctoral Affairs](#) - Here to help you navigate Cornell, address potential challenges, and make your time here more pleasant. Offers info about Ithaca/ Cornell, career and professional development services, as well as social and community building events.
- b. [Center for Teaching Innovation](#) - Partners with the Cornell teaching community to explore and foster inclusive, evidence-based teaching practices. Provides services and programming to build invaluable skills and establish a teaching philosophy.
- c. [CIRTL Network](#) - The Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching, and Learning (CIRTL) Network encompasses more than 44 public and private research universities and minority-serving institutions in the United States, Canada, and the United Arab Emirates. Cornell University has been a member institution of the CIRTL Network, allowing postdocs to participate in [Cross-Network programming](#) at no cost, and benefit from

expertise at other institutions as they network with potential collaborators or institutions they might like to work at eventually.

- d. [Einhorn Center for Community Engagement](#) - This center is a hub of community engagement at Cornell, supporting a university culture where students, faculty, staff and partners work together to create a better world. They offer courses and programming, including a [Community-Engaged Learning Online Program for Cornell Faculty and Staff](#), which aim to teach Cornellians how to foster strong community connections that help shape our work.
- e. [Other Free Memberships](#) - Cornell offers free membership to a number of organizations that offer professional development and career exploration assistance, as well as networking opportunities. Be sure to check them out!
- f. “Important” people
 - Cynthia Leifer (Cindy) (cal59@cornell.edu) - The Director of the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs
- g. Helpful list serves to join
 - i. As a postdoc you will automatically be added to the postdocs@cornell.edu listserve. This is a great source of up-to-date information and opportunities from the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs.
 - ii. A monthly newsletter is sent to current postdocs and is full of timely professional development activities, grant/fellowships, and other important information. It comes from Constant Contact, so make sure it doesn't go to junk mail!
 - iii. PDA Listserv - Postdocs can sign-up to directly receive PDA events and resources by following this [link](#) to subscribe to our listserv!

3. Courses and Programming

- a. [Postdoc Leadership Program](#) - Cultivate your leadership style while learning invaluable tools along the way.
- b. [Inclusive Teaching Institute for Graduate Students and Postdocs](#) - Reflect and connect with other graduate students and postdocs to share knowledge, explore how and why social identities come into play in the learning environment, consider how to remove barriers and take into account the breadth of backgrounds your students come from.
- c. [Course Design Institute](#) - Learn to write syllabi, establish goals and corresponding assessments, and other valuable teaching skills.
- d. [Teaching Portfolio Program](#) - A self-paced program designed to help graduate students, graduate teaching assistants, and postdoctoral associates document their teaching experience for the job search.

- e. [NextGen Professors Program](#) - A career-development program focused on preparing Cornell graduate students and postdocs for faculty careers across institutional types.
- f. [Building Mentorship Skills for Academic Careers](#) - Gain mentoring skills for collaborative research.
- g. [Academic Job Search Series](#) - Interactive workshops to demystify the academic job search.

4. Teaching Opportunities

- a. If your professor teaches a course, ask to guest lecture or TA
- b. Tutoring undergrads/ high school students
- c. [Propose a summer course](#) in School of Continuing Education and Summer Sessions
- d. [Cornell Prison Education Program](#)
- e. Offer a seminar for [BIOG 1250](#)

5. Other opportunities

- a. Career Fair
- b. Local tutoring networks
- c. Seminar lunches - many departments will give grad students and postdocs an opportunity to have lunch or coffee with a seminar speaker
- d. Stand alone workshops (keep an eye out in Office of Postdoctoral Studies Newsletter)

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Section 6 - Tips for International Folks



Welcome to Ithaca, New York, in the United States of America! Living and working in a new culture brings some quirks that can be challenging at times. To make the most of your time, below are some resources and contact points that we hope will be useful to you.

1. Tips for first steps:

- a. Cornell's Office of Global Learning provides information on [Your First Week](#) to help with getting started in Ithaca! Their staff is responsive and will invite you to international coffee hour, which is nice to get to know other international people.
 - i. A critical point from this page is that all Cornell employees in paid positions need to apply for a Social Security number (SSN) because SSNs are required for tax reporting. You can apply after you have been in the U.S. for at least 10 days, and your job or appointment has started.

- b. *Phone Card* - Prepaid phone cards are often the easiest option when moving to the United States! In most cases, you can activate your prepaid plan with just a passport and US address, no SSN required. Some options include:
 - i. [AT&T](#) - Offers a balance between coverage and cost. Consider going there in person, they are also helpful if you want to obtain a dual SIM.
 - ii. [MINT Mobile](#) - A great affordable option, but be sure to check their coverage in your specific area!
 - iii. [Verizon](#) - Excellent coverage, but at a higher cost.
- c. *Bank Account* - Set up a bank account ASAP to ensure you can easily access your income. Using direct deposit often helps you receive and access your funds faster than receiving a physical check.
 - i. [Chase](#) - This is one of the most accessible options for international postdocs! You have to go there in person, but you can open a checking account with a passport or other foreign ID, no SSN required.
 - ii. If you receive income from international sources/want to transfer money between countries, consider [Revolut](#), [Wise](#), or [Western Union](#)
- d. *IDs/Licenses* - Don't want to carry your passport everywhere? You can get an ID! In New York State, postdocs can get either a Standard ID or a REAL ID at DMV.
 - i. A Standard ID is valid for identification, driving, and most everyday purposes, but it cannot be used to board domestic U.S. flights or to enter certain federal facilities.
 - ii. A REAL ID meets enhanced federal security standards and can be used for domestic air travel and federal facility access. It is optional and requires additional documentation to obtain, but it is usually valid for the duration of your visa. Regardless, REAL ID does not replace a passport or visa, your passport remains the primary document for immigration status and international travel.
- e. *Housing* - Consider a short term housing option, like a sublet or a short term lease so you can get to know the area before committing to where you will live for the duration of your postdoc!

2. Taxes

- a. Remember to file your taxes every year before April 15 for the previous calendar year! Since Cornell is not a tax firm, the University cannot provide any legal advice on taxes. More often than not, you can find some

free or cheap tax filing tools online. If your taxes are more complicated, you can try to pay someone to do them for you too.

- b. Look out for free webinars or opportunities for free consultations that are shared in the newsletter and on the postdocs@cornell.edu listserv.
 - c. Cornell has free access to Sprintax to assist with filing: [Tax Preparation Help | International Services](#).
 - i. Sprintax Calculus: You should register with this system as soon as you can since it helps Cornell determine your tax status and may affect your paycheck tax withholding.
 - ii. Sprintax tax preparation support is an outside vendor that Cornell contracts to assist staff, students, faculty, and postdocs with their taxes.
- 3. Visa** - Are you on an F-1 (OPT/STEM OPT), J-1, H-1B, or O-1 visa? Information and guidelines on your visa can be found at the various websites of Cornell. Make sure you are aware of your visa requirements, and the differences between your visa and your status inside the United States - they mean slightly different things!
- 4. International travel** - If you intend to travel outside the US, be sure to check in with [Global Cornell](#) to ensure you know policies for work and personal travel, how and whether or not you need to register your travel, and important numbers and services you should know when you travel.
- 5. Key contacts**
- a. [International Services](#)
 - b. The PDA WhatsApp community - In general people are responsive and open to provide advice! While informal advice from peers is useful, always check with federal guidelines so you stay up to date with the correct information.
 - c. The organization for International Graduate and Professional Students (IGPS) organizes various events for internationals, Postdocs are welcome! Most events are advertised through their WhatsApp group, a link can be found [here](#).
- 6. Languages:** For language support, the [English Language Support Office \(ELSO\)](#) offers resources, such as [English conversation classes](#), or help in revising documents or presentations. ELSO provides support for all postdocs regardless of whether they are non-native, or native English speakers.

7. Cultural Quirks

a. *Ithaca*

- i. Ithaca's culture is shaped heavily by Cornell and Ithaca College, which means people value intellectual curiosity and community engagement. Residents often describe the city as friendly and welcoming, with a strong emphasis on neighborliness and civic participation.
 1. Directness with kindness - People tend to be straightforward but polite.
 2. Community involvement - Volunteering, attending local meetings, and supporting local businesses are seen as part of being a good neighbor.
 3. Inclusivity - Social spaces are generally LGBTQ+ friendly, environmentally conscious, and politically active.
 4. People plan around the academic calendar - Housing, traffic, and even restaurant crowds shift dramatically between semesters and breaks.
 5. *Note:* A great way to meet friendly people and practice small talk is at the weekly [Ithaca Farmers Markets](#)
- ii. People talk about waterfalls constantly, it's a genuine point of pride.
- iii. Everyone has an opinion about Wegmans, it's more than a grocery store; it's a cultural institution.
- iv. Weather-related small talk is an art form. You'll discuss snow, rain, and microclimates more than you ever imagined.
- v. Events are hyper-local, word-of-mouth and community boards matter more than big advertising.

b. *United States, generally*

- i. Tipping is expected! Leaving 15–20% at restaurants and for many services is standard, even though it's technically optional. It may be helpful to learn about who is paid a minimum wage and whose income depends on tips in American restaurants, so you can decide on how you would like to tip at different places.
- ii. Air conditioning is intense in the summer. Indoor spaces are often kept very cold and people wear sweaters indoors.
- iii. Large portions and bottomless drinks are common in restaurants.
- iv. Drinks are typically served with a lot of ice, which can surprise newcomers, but you can always ask for no ice
- v. Friendliness doesn't always mean friendship. Warm, casual conversation doesn't necessarily imply deeper social commitment and chatting with strangers in stores, elevators, or lines is normal.

Navigating postdoc life can be difficult when you have also just moved to a whole new country. But it can also be an incredibly rewarding and exciting experience! We are here to support you, and we have a strong international community where everyone is eager to help. Don't get discouraged when you get stuck, find a friendly PDA member (or maybe even someone from the same home country as you) to provide some guidance! We hope you enjoy your time in Ithaca as much as we do. Cheers!

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Final remarks

The start of a Postdoc is an exciting time. Whether you come from close by or from far away, whether you explore a new field or build up straight on your PhD work, whether you know exactly what you want to do afterwards or you are still figuring things out, we wish you all the very best on your path.

Enjoy your time at Cornell and welcome again!

This is the first version of the Cornell Postdoc Onboarding Handbook (2026).

We plan to update the handbook once a year. If you have any comments or suggestions, please email Cornell PDA, emails are on the website:

<https://postdocs.cornell.edu/about/postdoctoral-association/>.

Finally, if you enjoyed this handbook and want to get involved in strengthening the Cornell Postdoc Community, please reach out and consider joining the Postdoc Association!