

National Lab/Research Scientist Career Timeline

↓ Years 1 – 2

Align skills with mission

Identify 2–3 labs/centers aligned with your methods and application space.

Build “team science” evidence: shared datasets, cross-group work, reproducible workflows.

Strengthen applied/transferable skills: instrumentation, modeling, data pipelines, safety culture.

↓ Year 3

Network intentionally + translate your research

Attend at least one lab seminar/webinar/recruiting event; do 2 informational interviews.

Draft a mission-aligned research summary (what you can deliver in 6–18 months).

Develop a portfolio of outputs (papers, software, protocols, datasets, prototypes, patents).

↓ Years 4 – 5

Apply strategically

Prepare materials emphasizing impact, reliability, and collaboration: CV, research statement, selected works, references.

Practice interviews focused on: problem framing, execution, teamwork, and measurable outcomes.

Track hiring mechanisms: postdoc-to-staff pathways, term positions, fellowships, contractor roles.

When you apply: target institutions by mission fit (teaching load, advising expectations, student population).