

Caltech Postdoctoral Association

2025–2026 Report

The Caltech Postdoctoral Association (CPA) seeks to foster a **sense of community**, provide resources for **career and personal development**, and provide a framework for **representation** on campus and in the **local community** for postdoctoral scholars from all departments of the Institute.

CONNECT

JOIN our mailing list:
postdocs@caltech.edu

CHECK US OUT on Instagram:
@caltechpostdocs

TALK TO US on Slack:
caltechpostdocs.slack.com

SEND US an email:
cpa@caltech.edu

VISIT our website:
cpa.caltech.edu

FROM THE CHAIR

This year marked the 25th anniversary of the Caltech Postdoctoral Association. Founded in 2001, the CPA has spent a quarter-century representing postdoctoral scholars and helping create an environment in which they can thrive, both scientifically and personally.

Over the past year, the CPA organized more than 50 events spanning career development, scientific exchange, outreach, advocacy, wellbeing, and social activities. Our social events attracted an average of 120 postdocs ($\sim$25% of Caltech's $\sim$500 postdoctoral scholars), while workshops and smaller activities typically drew around 50 participants (10%). The Postdoc Launch series featured 15 speakers across eight seminars, and we expanded career programming through faculty lunches, workshops, and new opportunities to connect with Caltech alumni.

Mental health and advocacy remained important priorities. We organized workshops on stress management and wellbeing, and provided opportunities for postdocs to discuss mental health concerns. Working with IMSS, we established automatic enrollment in the CPA mailing list and helped the Caltech Spouses Club launch its own website. A survey identified housing as the leading concern among postdocs and their families, prompting discussions with Institute leadership about a pilot programme to allocate a limited number of housing units on a rolling basis ($\sim$4 weeks) to incoming postdocs.

Our outreach activities included STEM for Families and participation in Explore JPL, where we helped organize 24 public talks delivered by Caltech postdocs and graduate students. Explore Caltech, which welcomed approximately 2,000 visitors at its previous edition, has been rescheduled for March 2027. We also celebrated the CPA's 25th anniversary during National Postdoc Appreciation Week, with five days of activities culminating in an anniversary celebration.

On a more practical note, the CPA finally has a dedicated storage space, thanks to PMA, which generously offered us a rather Harry Potter-like closet under the stairs of East Bridge. After years of storing supplies in volunteers' offices, this is a welcome improvement!

I want to thank our Board members, committee volunteers, division representatives, and campus partners for the time and dedication they have brought to these (very successful) activities. We are also grateful to the Office of the Vice Provost and Caltech's academic divisions for their continued financial support.

As the CPA enters its next quarter-century, we look forward to strengthening the connections, sense of belonging, and exchange of ideas that make Caltech's postdoctoral community an essential part of the Institute.

Guillem Megias Homar
Chair, Caltech Postdoctoral Association

THE YEAR AT A GLANCE

56
EVENTS HELD

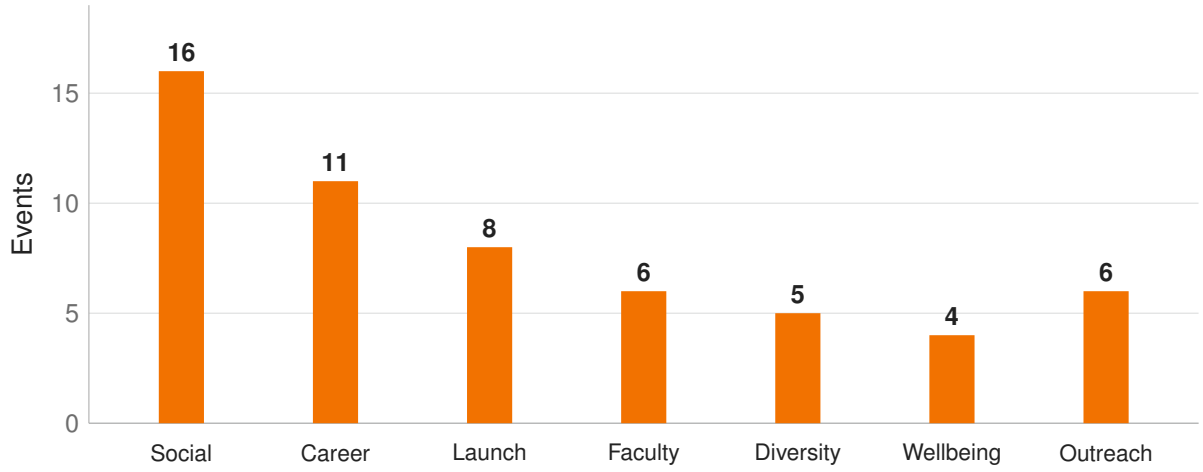
120
AVERAGE SOCIAL ATTENDANCE

$84 k
FY26 CPA BUDGET

25
YEARS

New this year

- **Mental Health and Wellbeing.** We launched a wellbeing programme with workshops on stress management, self-regulation, and mental health, alongside a listening session where postdocs could discuss their concerns and experiences.
- **Explore JPL collaboration.** The CPA co-organized the Caltech Live programme at Explore JPL, featuring 24 public talks by Caltech postdocs and graduate students.
- **New alumni connections.** In partnership with the Caltech Alumni Association, we launched a new initiative to connect current postdocs with Caltech alumni working across different fields.
- **Improved postdoc communications.** Working with IMSS, we established automatic enrollment of all postdocs in the CPA mailing list. We also helped launch a dedicated Caltech-hosted website for the Spouses Club.





CAREER EVENTS

Throughout the year, the CPA organized career events addressing the transition from postdoctoral research to positions in academia, industry, national laboratories, and other sectors. Working with Caltech's Career Achievement, Leadership, and Exploration (CALE), Center for Teaching, Learning, and Outreach (CTLO), the Caltech Alumni Association, the Employment and Recruitment Services, the Rosen Bioengineering Center, and external speakers, the programme combined practical job-search workshops with discussions featuring researchers, Caltech alumni and professionals at different stages of their careers.

Among the events organized this year were:

- **Beyond the Straight Line (December 8).** Former Caltech postdoc Dr. Ladan "Loddie" Foose shared her transitions between scientific research, consulting, corporate leadership, and entrepreneurship, including the role of nonlinear career decisions.
- **Transferable Skills (February 17).** In collaboration with CALE, a workshop on identifying skills developed through academic research and communicating their relevance to industry employers.
- **Professional Headshots (March 31).**
- **Beyond the CV (April 14).** Kylene Barker and Emily Eirich from Caltech Employment and Recruitment Services discussed resumes, interviews, LinkedIn profiles, networking, and the use of AI tools in industry job applications.

- **Career Panel and Networking Happy Hour (April 16).** Six Caltech alumni working in academia, scientific publishing, biotechnology, and investment discussed their career trajectories and answered questions, followed by an informal networking reception.
- **Bagels, Brews and Big-Pharma Views (April 24).** Dr. Kevin Campos, Vice President and Head of Process Research and Development at Merck, joined postdocs for an informal discussion of careers and research leadership in the pharmaceutical industry.
- **Beyond Conventional Career Paths (May 15).** Caltech alumnus Tyson Mao discussed his unconventional career trajectory, followed by a small-group conversation organized with the Rosen Bioengineering Center.
- **Careers at National Laboratories (June 18).** Dr. Jin Qian, Staff Scientist at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, discussed research independence, funding, mentorship, and career opportunities in the national laboratory system.
- **Demystifying the Faculty Job Process (September 3).** Organized in collaboration with Caltech's Center for Teaching, Learning, and Outreach (CTLO) as part of National Postdoc Appreciation Week, this workshop addressed the faculty hiring process and provided guidance for postdocs preparing for academic job applications.
- **Making the Leap: Resumes, Interviews, and the Postdoc-to-Industry Transition (October 1).** Kylene Barker and Emily Eirich from Caltech Employment and Recruitment Services led an interactive workshop on preparing industry resumes, navigating interviews, and approaching the job market.
- **Alumni x Postdocs Mixer (October 16).** In partnership with the Caltech Alumni Association, the CPA also launched a new Postdoc–Alumni Mixer initiative during Alumni weekend, designed to connect current postdocs with former Caltech researchers and alumni working across different fields.




Caltech Postdocs
Career Panel &
Networking Happy Hour



SOCIAL EVENTS

Throughout the year, the CPA organized regular social gatherings, seasonal celebrations, and informal meetups for Caltech postdocs and their families. Recurring events such as Cool Ales and Cool Beans provided opportunities to meet colleagues from outside their research groups, while larger celebrations brought postdocs together at the Alumni House, Dabney Gardens, and other locations across campus. Many events welcomed newly arrived postdocs, partners, and families.

Event highlights

Cool Ales — Chen Breezeway | Throughout the year

The CPA's recurring after-work gathering brought postdocs together for drinks, snacks, and informal conversations. Sessions in January, May, and other months provided a regular meeting point, particularly for postdocs new to Caltech.

Cool Beans — Bridge Portico and Chen Breezeway | Throughout the year

Morning coffee and bagel gatherings offered a daytime alternative to evening socials. Held at locations including the Bridge Portico and Chen Breezeway, these events gave postdocs an opportunity to meet over coffee during the working day.

Halloween Party — Alumni House | October 30, 2025

The CPA hosted a Halloween celebration at the Alumni House, with costumes, karaoke, food, and drinks. The event brought together postdocs and friends for an evening outside the usual campus routine.

End-of-Year Celebration — Dabney Lounge and Garden | December 12, 2025

Postdocs gathered for an end-of-year party with food, drinks, and music, marking the close of 2025 with a semi-formal evening celebration.

Lunar New Year — Dabney Gardens | February 27, 2026

The CPA celebrated the Year of the Horse with dumplings, festive drinks, games, and prizes. Partners and families were also invited to join the celebration.

Spring Social — Alumni House | March 27, 2026

A spring gathering at the Alumni House featured Persian food and drinks, bringing postdocs together for an evening celebration following the spring equinox.

Summer Celebration — Alumni House | July 31, 2026

The CPA organized a summer party with food, refreshments, and a yellow-and-white dress theme. The event continued the series of seasonal gatherings at the Alumni House.

CPA 25th Anniversary Celebration — Hameetman Patio | September 25, 2026

The CPA celebrated its 25th anniversary with an evening gathering bringing together Caltech postdocs to mark a quarter-century of the association. The celebration began with an all-postdoc group photograph in front of Gates-Parsons, followed by dinner, drinks, anniversary cake, raffles, and commemorative merchandise giveaways at Hameetman Patio.

REPRESENTATION & ADVOCACY

Throughout the year, the CPA worked with Caltech's administration and campus offices to address concerns raised by postdocs and improve access to institutional resources. The main priorities were housing, communication, and support for postdocs and their families.

Issues raised and actions taken

- **Postdoc communication.** Working with Information Management Systems and Services (IMSS), the CPA established automatic enrollment of all postdocs in the CPA mailing list. This ensures that incoming postdocs receive information about events, resources, and opportunities without having to subscribe manually.
- **Housing affordability and availability.** The CPA supported a survey to identify the principal concerns of postdocs and their families. Housing emerged as the leading concern among domestic, out-of-state, and international postdocs alike. In response, the CPA initiated discussions with Caltech's Chief Operating Officer and Housing Office about a pilot programme that would reserve a number of housing units for postdocs on a rolling basis. These discussions remain ongoing.
- **Support for postdoctoral families.** In collaboration with IMSS and International Scholar Services (ISS), the CPA helped establish a new website for the Caltech Spouses Club, hosted at `https://spouses.caltech.edu`. The website provides a dedicated institutional platform for the club and its activities.
- **Awareness of institutional resources.** The CPA worked to improve communication about existing resources available to postdocs, including career development, the Institute's Family Economic Support Program, wellbeing, and family support services, through its mailing list, events, and collaborations with campus offices.

Campus partners

These efforts involved collaborations with Information Management Systems and Services (IMSS), International Scholar Services (ISS), the Caltech Housing Office, and the Office of the Chief Operating Officer, alongside continued engagement with other campus offices supporting postdoctoral scholars.



MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

The CPA organized workshops and discussions addressing stress, mental health, and the pressures of postdoctoral research, offering opportunities for postdocs to discuss their experiences and concerns.

Mental Health Listening Session — Morgan Library | February 13, 2026

The CPA organized a listening session for postdocs to discuss mental health, anxiety, and related concerns within the academic environment.

From Overwhelmed to Organized — Chen 130 | March 16, 2026

A workshop addressing workload management and strategies for managing competing responsibilities.

Practical Tools to Deal with Stress — Chen 130 | April 27, 2026

Dr. Karla Hernandez led a workshop on strategies for recognizing and managing stress.

Mental Health and Self-Regulation — Noyes 153 | September 21, 2026

Organized in collaboration with the Caltech Staff and Faculty Consultation Center (SFCC) during National Postdoc Appreciation Week, Dr. Hernandez presented evidence-based techniques for mental wellbeing.



DIVERSITY

Throughout the year, the CPA organized events celebrating the different cultures, backgrounds, and experiences of Caltech's postdoctoral community. Activities included participation in public celebrations, museum visits, literature discussions, and family-friendly gatherings.

Event highlights

LA Pride — Los Angeles | June 14, 2026

The CPA organized a Caltech float for the LA Pride parade, inviting postdocs to participate in one of Southern California's largest LGBTQ+ celebrations.

Juneteenth Museum Visit — California African American Museum | June 21, 2026

To mark Juneteenth, the CPA organized a visit to the California African American Museum in Exposition Park. The self-guided visit was open to postdocs, their families, and friends, with parking reimbursement provided.

CPA Book Club — Caltech | July 14, 2026

The CPA Book Club brought postdocs together to discuss *Afterglow: Climate Fiction for Future Ancestors*, an anthology exploring possible futures through climate fiction. Copies of the book were provided to participants.

Cultural Potluck and Family Day — Tournament Park | September 24, 2026

Organized during National Postdoc Appreciation Week, the Cultural Potluck invited postdocs and their families to share dishes from different cultural traditions. The afternoon featured children's activities, including bubbles and water games, as well as prizes for participants' favorite dishes.

These activities brought together postdocs and their families through events extending beyond the laboratory and the usual academic setting.




ifornia African American Museum
CAAM





FACULTY LUNCH SERIES

Between May and October 2026, the CPA organized seven small-group lunches at the Athenaeum with Caltech faculty and invited guests. Held approximately monthly, these lunches give postdocs the opportunity to ask questions and discuss topics including the faculty job market, hiring and tenure processes, mentorship, and academic career paths. Attendance is capped to allow for direct conversation between participants and the invited guest. This year's guests represented several Caltech divisions and included Caltech's historian David Zierler.

Prof. Karthish Manthiram
CCE – May 2026

Prof. Alireza Marandi
EAS – June 2026

Prof. Marianne Bronner
BBE – June 2026

Prof. Nick Hutzler
PMA – July 2026

Prof. Fiona Harrison
PMA – July 2026

David Zierler
Caltech Historian – September 2026

Prof. Kareem El-Badry
PMA – October 2026



POSTDOC LAUNCH

The Postdocs Launch seminar series gives Caltech postdocs the opportunity to present their research to colleagues from across the Institute. Between May and October 2026, the CPA organized eight lunchtime seminars featuring 15 postdoctoral speakers, with an average attendance of 50 postdocs per session. The talks covered topics ranging from gravitational-wave astronomy and quantum sensing to developmental biology, medical imaging, and energy storage.

Held approximately every two weeks on Fridays, each seminar typically featured two talks within a one-hour session, followed by questions and discussion. Speaker biographies, abstracts, and portraits were circulated ahead of each event. An anonymous QR-code feedback system allowed attendees to provide speakers with comments on their presentations, offering an opportunity to develop their scientific communication skills. Lunch and refreshments were provided before the talks, allowing time for informal conversations among postdocs. The seminars were held primarily in Chen 130, with additional sessions in Noyes 153.

The series continues to provide a regular forum for postdocs to present their work, practice communicating research across disciplines, and learn about ongoing research throughout Caltech.

Dr. Kevin Shu (PMA)
The Joys of Convex Optimisation

Dr. Rashid Alavi (MedE)
Can Smart Wearables Detect Silent Heart Attacks? Novel Frameworks through Cardiovascular Fluid Dynamics and Electrocardiography

Dr. Vignesh Ravichandran (BBE)
Un-FROG-ettable Fluorescence

Dr. Sabrina Wahler (CCE)
From Small Boom to Big Boom: Predictive Modeling of Energetic Material Performance

Dr. Joe Ouadah (BBE)
How Sociality Evolves: The Origins of Same-Sex Sexual Behavior

Dr. Sankhabrata Chandra (CCE)
Exploring Europa's Surface and Atmospheric Composition Through Analog Studies in Support of the Europa Clipper Mission

Dr. Donghyeon Oh (EAS)
Listening to the Body Across Scales: Ultrasound Imaging from Microvessels to Whole-Human Cross Sections

Dr. Demet Kirmizibayrak (PMA)
The Science of Being Late: From Stadiums to Black Holes

Dr. Leonardo Badurina (PMA)
Quantum Interferometers at the Dark Frontier: Charting the Dark Matter Landscape with Matter-Wave Interferometers

Dr. Sijie Ji (EAS)
Making Health Visible: Intelligent Sensing Systems for Continuous and Adaptive Care

Dr. Sergi Junyent Espinosa (BBE)
Building Yourself: How Cells Collaborate and Sometimes Compete to Create the Early Embryo

Dr. Sophie Bini (PMA)
What Are We Learning About Black Holes After a Decade of Gravitational-Wave Astronomy?

Dr. Lena Bögeholz (BBE)
Protein Quality Control in the ER Shapes Ciliogenesis

Dr. Simo Pajovic (EAS)
Dual-Polarized, Nonreciprocal Absorption of Mid-Infrared Light

Dr. Prabhat Prakash (CCE)
How Grain Boundaries Enable Binder-Free Solid-State Batteries



EXPLORE CALTECH/JPL

Explore Caltech, the CPA's annual science outreach event, has been rescheduled to March 2027 to avoid overlapping with Explore JPL, held on October 10, 2026. As part of Explore JPL, the CPA co-organized the Caltech Live programme, featuring 24 public talks delivered by Caltech postdocs and graduate students.

Planning is already underway for the next edition of Explore Caltech (March 6, 2026, which will bring hands-on science demonstrations, research booths, and public talks back to campus. The previous edition attracted approximately 2,000 visitors, including local families and members of the Pasadena community.



STEM FOR FAMILIES

STEM for Families is a hands-on science programme organized by the CPA for families and their children. Led by Caltech volunteers, the sessions introduce scientific concepts through experiments, demonstrations, and interactive activities.

Viscoelastic Materials in Food
February 26, 2026

Looking at Atoms Using Light
March 26, 2026

Chemistry is Colourful
April 29, 2026

Fantastic Life of Frogs
May 28, 2026

Building Microscopes
July 2, 2026



POSTDOC APPRECIATION WEEK

From September 21–25, 2026, the CPA celebrated National Postdoc Appreciation Week (NPAW) with five days of events organized in collaboration with several campus partners. This year's celebrations were particularly special, coinciding with the 25th anniversary of the Caltech Postdoctoral Association. The programme combined professional development, wellness activities, and informal gatherings.

Over the course of the week, events included:

- **Mental Health and Wellbeing Seminar.** Dr. Karla Hernandez, from the Staff and Faculty Consultation Center (SFCC), presented practical strategies for self-regulation and mental wellbeing.
- **Coffee, Matcha, Gelato, and Donuts.** Social gatherings held at different locations across campus, accompanied by CPA merchandise giveaways, provided opportunities for postdocs to meet outside their research groups.
- **Professional Headshots.** A photography session at the Turtle Ponds offered postdocs professional portraits for job applications, academic profiles, and professional websites.
- **CCID Breakfast.** A morning gathering organized with the Center for Inclusion and Diversity brought postdocs together for breakfast.
- **Family-Friendly Cultural Potluck.** Postdocs and their families gathered at Tournament Park to share food from different cultures and spend an evening together outside the laboratory.

The week concluded on September 25 with an all-postdoc group photograph in front of Gates-Parsons with VP Jackson, followed by the CPA's 25th anniversary celebration at Hameetman Patio, with dinner, raffles, and commemorative giveaways.


25
YEARS
CALTECH POSTDOCS




25




UPCOMING
COMMUNITY
EVENTS

CPA Events Throughout the Year 2025-26

Halloween Party, Oct 30, 7pm, Alumni House

Thanksgiving Happy Hour and Quiz, Nov 21, 5pm, Chen Breezeway

Career Seminar: Loddie Foose, Dec 8, 12pm, Chen 130

End-of-Year Celebration, Dec 12, 7pm, Dabney Lounge and Garden

CPA Pop-Up Social and Merch Giveaway, Jan 16, 1–3pm, Resnick Sustainability Center Breezeway

Cool Ales, Jan 30, 5pm, Chen Breezeway

Mental Health Listening Session, Feb 13, 5pm, Morgan Library

Transferable Skills Career Workshop, Feb 17, 12pm, Noyes 147

STEM for Families, Feb 26, 5–6pm, Chen 130

Lunar New Year Celebration, Feb 27, 5pm, Dabney Gardens

From Overwhelmed to Organized, Mar 16, 12pm, Chen 130

STEM for Families, Mar 26, 5–6pm, Chen 130

Spring Social, Mar 27, 7pm, Alumni House

Professional Headshot Session, Mar 31, 10:30am, Turtle Pond

Beyond the CV: Industry Careers, Apr 14, 12pm, Chen 100

Career Panel and Networking Happy Hour, Apr 16, 4pm, Broad 100

Big-Pharma Views with Kevin Campos, Apr 24, 9:15am, Red Door Cafe

Practical Tools to Deal with Stress, Apr 27, 4pm, Chen 130

STEM for Families: Chemistry of Colors, Apr 29, Caltech Chemistry Club

Cool Ales, May 6, 5pm, Chen Breezeway

Cool Beans, May 14, 10:30am, Bridge Portico

Career Discussion with Tyson Mao, May 15, 12pm, Chen 240A

Faculty Lunch: Karthish Manthiram, May, Athenaeum

STEM for Families, Mar 28, 5–6pm, Chen 130

Postdoc Launch Seminar, May 29, 12pm, Noyes 153

Faculty Lunch: Alireza Marandi, June, Athenaeum

Faculty Lunch: Marianne Bronner, June, Athenaeum

LA Pride, Jun 14, Los Angeles

Career Discussion: National Laboratories, Jun 18, 3pm, Chen 130

Juneteenth Museum Visit, Jun 21, 2pm, California African American Museum

Postdoc Launch Seminar, Jun 26, 12pm, Chen 130

STEM for Families, Jul 2, 5–6pm, Chen 130

Postdoc Launch Seminar, Jul 10, 12pm, Chen 130

CPA Book Club: Afterglow, Jul 14, 4:30pm

Faculty Lunch: Nick Hutzler, July, Athenaeum

Faculty Lunch: Fiona Harrison, July, Athenaeum

Postdoc Launch Seminar, Jul 24, 12pm, Chen 130

Summer Celebration, Jul 31, 6pm, Alumni House

Postdoc Launch Seminar, Aug 7, 12pm, Chen 130

Coffee and Bagels Social, Aug 19, 10:30am, Chen Breezeway

Postdoc Launch Seminar, Sep 4, 12pm, Chen 130

Faculty Lunch: David Zierler, September, Athenaeum

Postdoc Launch Seminar, Sep 18, 12pm, Chen 130

National Postdoc Appreciation Week, Sep 21–25, Campus-wide

Mental Health and Self-Regulation Seminar, Sep 21, 12pm, Noyes 153

Gelato Social and CPA Merch Giveaway, Sep 21, 3pm, Resnick Breezeway

Professional Headshot Session, Sep 22, 10am, Turtle Pond

Matcha Pop-Up, Sep 22, 2:30pm, Bridge Portico

Cool Beans, Sep 23, 10am, Chen Breezeway

Donuts and CPA Merch Giveaway, Sep 23, 3pm, Schlinger Patio

CCID Breakfast, Sep 24, 10am, Center for Student Services

Cultural Potluck and Family Day, Sep 24, 4:30pm, Tournament Park

CPA 25th Anniversary Group Photo, Sep 25, 4:45pm, Gates-Parsons

CPA 25th Anniversary Celebration, Sep 25, 5:30pm, Hameetman Patio

Making the Leap: Industry Career Workshop, Oct 1, 11:45am, Chen 130

Postdoc Launch Seminar, Oct 2, 12pm, Noyes 153

Explore JPL: Caltech Live, Oct 10, JPL

Faculty Lunch: Kareem El-Badry, Oct 19, Athenaeum

CPA Leadership

Guillem Megias Homar, Chair
Vignesh Ravichandran, Treasurer
Emily Towner, Secretary

Committee Chairs

Amin Tajik, Social
Florence Müller, Outreach
Jaeda Patton, Diversity
Vignesh Ravichandran, Career
Jineun Kim, Career
Jessica Griffiths, Advocacy
Ninadini Sharma, Strategy and Communication
Dennis Ko, Ex-officio member

CPA members

Margarita Gavrilova
Amin Yousefpour
Dennis Ko
Ethan Quinn

Division Representatives

Jineun Kim, BBE
Ninadini Sharma, BBE
Vignesh Ravichandran, BBE
Martin Thomaschewski, EAS
Esther Lahoud-Heilbronner, GPS
Emily Towner, HSS
Mandy Chen, PMA

Explore Caltech Team

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Amin Tajik

Postdoc Launch Team

Erica Sutcliffe
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Caltech Postdoctoral Association