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## Read all about our exclusive NPP Alumni Advice

### NPP Alumni of 3 months, 1 year and 4 years share newsworthy knowledge

You asked, we listened. We caught up with three former NPP fellows and are reporting back on where they are now, how they got there and what they learned along the way. We have the scoop on how they transitioned from their postdoc to their current positions, how they were able to successfully use the experience and knowledge they gained as an NPP in their respective careers and are serving it up along with their valuable advice on how to make the most of the NPP fellowship.

#### 3 months



**L**ukasz Sterczewski  
**WHAT ARE YOU DOING NOW?**

I am an assistant professor at Wroclaw University of Science and Technology in Poland. My research focuses on laser spectroscopy for detection of organic molecules. While on Earth it is important for air pollution monitoring, in space it may play a key role in the search for extraterrestrial life.

#### **HOW DID YOU GET FROM NPP TO YOUR CURRENT POSITION?**

As an NPP fellow, I applied for a prestigious Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship to the European Commission. It is aimed at helping researchers integrate with a new institution, establish an independent research group and support mobility.

#### **HOW DID NPP HELP YOU?**

For a foreign national, NPP was one of the very few ways of fulfilling one of my greatest dreams – to conduct research in a NASA Center, or more specifically at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL). One of the unique lessons I learned from my experienced JPL colleagues is goal-oriented long-term planning. Instead of being temporarily excited about volatile yet time-consuming research ideas, I now spend more time developing a strategy that builds on my prior techniques and instruments rather than that requiring me to start from scratch at each step.

**WHAT CAREER LESSONS/ADVICE WOULD YOU SHARE WITH CURRENT POSTDOCS?**

I think it is essential to establish collaborations with several complementary research groups within the first few months of the fellowship. It really helps to make research progress even in limited lab access conditions. It is also important to present research to a wider audience. When our ideas are exposed to criticism from people outside our field, we are more likely to adapt our visions to the needs of potential customers or users. In my case, I greatly lowered the size and complexity of the instrument I was planning to develop during my NPP tenure thanks to feedback I received from chemical engineers at Caltech.

#### **WHAT DO YOU KNOW NOW THAT YOU WISH YOU HAD KNOWN DURING YOUR FELLOWSHIP?**

I wish I had known how quickly time goes by. Small side projects are exciting, but they distract from holding on to our bigger vision. On the other hand, research flows in a turbulent rather than laminar fashion.

Check out Sterczewski's website at <https://sterczewski.com/>.