

How to Complete Your Individual Development Plan (IDP)

Your postdoctoral training is a critical period of growth as you prepare for your future career, whether in academia, industry, or another path. Your relationship with your mentor is key to that growth; maintaining clear, open communication is important to optimize your training and research experience. The Individual Development Plan (IDP) is designed to help catalyze this communication, help you reflect on your goals, make plans to help achieve those goals, and address challenges that arise along the way. Effective use of the IDP can help align your goals with those of your PI, ensuring mutual understanding and success.

The Role of Clear Communication

Establishing clear and open communication with your PI is crucial. While you may have specific goals and expectations for your postdoc to achieve your career aspirations, your PI will also have expectations for your contributions to their lab and projects. Use the IDP process to have an honest discussion with your PI to clarify both sets of expectations and develop a mutual understanding. This ensures that your path forward is collaborative and realistic.

Aligning Expectations and Goals

The IDP should serve as a roadmap that reflects your career aspirations while incorporating your PI's expectations. This includes identifying:

- The skills and training you need to achieve your career goals.
- Research objectives and milestones you are expected to meet during your postdoc.
- Opportunities for growth and development within the lab and beyond.

These discussions should focus on finding a balance between meeting your current responsibilities and preparing for your future.

Setting Timelines and Milestones

Time is another critical component of a successful IDP. Discuss with your PI:

- How long do you anticipate being a postdoc?
- Key milestones, including publication timelines, skill acquisition, and networking goals.
- A realistic timeline for starting your job search based on your training goals.

Establishing a clear timeline helps ensure that you stay on track to achieve both your short- and long-term goals.

Creating Specific Career Goals

The most effective IDPs include specific, actionable goals. Define your career objectives and identify the steps required to achieve them. For example:

- If pursuing academia, specify the skills you need, such as grant writing, teaching experience, or leadership development.
- If transitioning to industry, list the technical and transferable skills to develop, such as project management or familiarity with regulatory environments.

Outline clear actions to meet these goals and revisit your progress regularly.

Implementing and Following Up

After completing your IDP:

- Share your IDP with your PI!
- Use the meeting to lead a constructive discussion, ensuring your goals and expectations are aligned.
- Present the IDP to your mentorship committee so they can help guide you to achieving your goals.
- Follow up annually to evaluate progress, make adjustments, and document achievements.

By fostering open communication, aligning goals, and planning strategically, the IDP can be a valuable tool to guide your postdoctoral journey and prepare you for the next step in your career.

Use the template below or any of those found in “Other IDP Templates and Examples” to help you create your personalized IDP for your needs and goals.

INITIAL MEETING

Part I. Career Goals

Describe your long-term goals. These should paint a vision of your future.

- a) Research Goals: What specific area(s) of research do you wish to explore during your postdoctoral training? Are there specific methods or approaches that you would like to gain familiarity with and/or become expert in?
- b) Professional Development Goals: What professional skills would you like to acquire during your training? Examples might include: public speaking, grant writing, manuscript preparation, team-work personnel management, teaching, mentoring, etc
- c) Career Goals: What are your first and second choices of long-term careers - i.e. what position do you hope to hold 10 years from now? Be as specific as you can, and indicate relative enthusiasm for each choice.

(Optional) What are the primary factors driving these goals (e.g., personal interest in specific research area, teaching, business, government, writing; etc.)?

Part III. Objectives

What are some activities that might help you achieve the research and professional goals you outlined on the previous page?

- a) Research Objectives (list 1-3): For example, a course, meeting or workshop attendance (specify if possible); fellowship or grant application; anticipated publication (list tentative title if appropriate); may include objectives in the coming year or longer-term objectives. Include a relative timeline for each objective (i.e. are these objectives dependent of each other? Do some make sense to approach immediately, while others make sense to delay?)
- b) Professional Development Objectives (list 1-3): For example, courses, meeting or workshop attendance (specify if possible); teaching/mentoring; service opportunities; etc.

Part IV. Agreed Upon Action Plan for Next Year

Consider the following as you develop an action plan with your mentor. Work jointly on them with this during or after the discussion.

- a) List any activities you and your mentor agree you should participate in to achieve your professional/career goals in the coming year.
- b) Do you have guaranteed funding for the next year? If not, what backup plans are in place?
- c) Can you and/or your mentor undertake specific actions supporting your success (e.g., modifying working styles, having meetings to discuss progress, and networking opportunities)?
- d) How can your faculty mentor help you achieve your goals?

- e) This IDP is a living document, and the goals within should be revisited throughout the year. Are there specific goals that you and your mentor should discuss before your next annual meeting?

ANNUAL MEETING

Part I. Progress

Look at your IDP from the last year and use it to answer the following prompts.

- a) Briefly review your research progress in the past year. (If you have any publications, presentations, fellowships, etc., include them here.)
- b) What other activities have you been involved in? Have you been satisfied with the balance of activities? (E.g., coursework/training, teaching/mentoring, professional/career development, grant/manuscript writing, clinical duties.)

Part II. Goals and Objectives

1. List objectives in each of the following categories for the coming year.

- a) Research Objectives:
- b) Professional Development Objectives:

2. What are your near-term research goals for your postdoctoral training period? For each goal, identify areas where you need improvement or additional training. Include any techniques you want to learn, collaborations to pursue, etc.

Part III. Mentoring

Your faculty mentor can provide guidance in many areas, and a continuing discussion should be valuable. Input from others about your research, professional development, work/life balance, or other areas may also be helpful, and you may want to consider using some or all of this IDP form as a basis for conversations with each of your mentors. In the space below, consider the breadth of mentoring you currently receive.

- a) What have you found most beneficial from the mentoring you have received? Is there anything that would improve the mentoring you receive?

Part IV. Career Goals

Think about your career goals, both short-term and long-term. Review last year's IDP to see if these have changed, and address why this may be in the following questions.

- a) What are your current career goals? Include more than one if identified.
- b) What steps are you taking to enhance your ability to attain these goals? How can your mentor best support you in reaching your career goals?
- c) When do you anticipate beginning a job search? Do you feel comfortable with the resources you have? How can your faculty mentor help?

Part IV. Agreed Upon Action Plan for Next Year

***Consider the following questions as you develop an action plan with your mentor:
List any activities in which you and your mentor agree you should participate in to achieve your professional/career goals in the coming year.***

- a) Do you have guaranteed funding for next year? If not, what backup plans are in place?
- b) Are there specific actions that you and/or your mentor can undertake that will support your success (e.g., modify working styles, meetings to discuss progress, networking opportunities)?
- c) How can your faculty mentor help you achieve your goals?
- d) This IDP is a living document, and the goals within should be revisited throughout the year. Are there specific goals that you and your mentor should discuss before your next annual meeting?