Individual Development Plans (IDPs) provide a planning process that identifies both professional development needs and career objectives. Furthermore, IDPs serve as a communication tool between individuals and their mentors.

- Long-term career options they wish to pursue and the necessary tools to meet these; and
- Short-term needs for improving current performance.

IDPs are an important part of postdoctoral mentoring, and summaries of trainee experiences provide information to training grant reviewers.

Outline of IDP Process
The development, implementation and revision of the IDP requires an interactive effort between the trainee and the mentor.

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The IDP Process for Postdoctoral Trainees

Step 1. Conduct a Self Assessment
- Assess your skills, strengths and areas which need development. Formal assessment tools can be helpful. (Useful information can be found in Resources: Self Assessment at the end of this document).
- Take a realistic look at your current abilities. This is a critical part of career planning. Ask your peers, mentors, family and friends what they see as your strengths and your development needs.
- Outline your long-term career objectives. Ask yourself:
  - What type of work would I like to be doing?
  - Where would I like to be in an organization?
  - What is important to me in a career?

Step 2. Survey Opportunities
- Identify career opportunities and select from those that interest you.
- Identify developmental needs by comparing current skills and strengths with those needed for your career choice.
- Prioritize your developmental areas and discuss with your mentor how these should be addressed.
Step 3. Prepare an IDP
The IDP maps out the general path you want to take and helps match skills and strengths to your career choices. It is a changing document since needs and goals will almost certainly evolve over time as a postdoc. The aim is to build upon current strengths and skills by identifying areas for development and providing a way to address these. The specific objectives of a typical IDP are to:

- Establish effective dates for the duration of your postdoctoral appointment.
- Identify specific skills and strengths that you need to develop (based on discussions with your mentor).
- Define the approaches to obtain the specific skills and strengths (e.g., courses, technical skills, teaching, supervision) together with anticipated time frames.
- Discuss your draft IDP with your mentor.
- Revise the IDP as appropriate.

Step 4. Implement Your Plan
The plan is just the beginning of the career development process and serves as the road map. Now it’s time to take action!

- Put your plan into action
- Revise and modify the plan as necessary. The plan is not cast in concrete; it will need to be modified as circumstances and goals change. The challenge of implementation is to remain flexible and open to change.
- Review the plan with your mentor regularly. Revise the plan on the basis of these discussions.

The IDP Process for Mentors

Step 1. Become Familiar with Available Opportunities
By virtue of your experience you should already have knowledge of some career opportunities, but you may want to familiarize yourself with other career opportunities and trends in job opportunities.

Step 2. Discuss Opportunities with Trainee
This needs to be a private, scheduled meeting distinct from regular research-specific meetings. There should be adequate time set aside for an open and honest discussion.

Step 3. Review IDP and Help Revise
Provide honest feedback - both positive and negative - to help postdoctoral trainees set realistic goals. Agree on a development plan that will allow postdocs to be productive in the laboratory, classroom, etc. and adequately prepare them for their chosen career.

Step 4. Establish Regular Review of Progress
The mentor should meet at regular intervals with the postdoctoral trainee to assess progress, expectations and changing goals. On at least an annual basis, the mentor should conduct a performance review designed to analyze what has been accomplished and what needs to be done. A written review is most helpful in objectively documenting accomplishments.

This document was developed by the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB)’s Science Policy Committee. For more information, contact: Jennifer A. Hobin, Ph.D., FASEB Office of Public Affairs (301-634-7650) or jhobin@faseb.org. It has been modified for use by Case Western Reserve University, Office of Postdoctoral Affairs.
Self Assessment


The Postdoc Experience


Career Opportunities


Resources on Non-Academic Careers


*these resources are not considered endorsements, per se*