Individual Development Plan

For mapping your academic and professional development

An Individual Development Plan (IDP) helps you:

- assess your skills, interests, and values;
- create a plan for achieving your academic and professional goals;
- communicate with your mentors about your evolving plan and needs.

Creating an IDP is a process through which you reflect, plan, and discuss, and ultimately achieve, your academic and professional goals. It is your responsibility to develop and maintain your IDP. You are encouraged to share your IDP with your mentors.

This document is one example of an IDP tool, endorsed by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Graduate School and modified by the University of Arizona office of Postdoctoral Affairs. It includes step-by-step instructions, a self-assessment questionnaire, and forms for writing goals.

It is a good idea to revisit your IDP at least annually to update and refine it as your goals change or come into sharper focus. You will also want to record your progress and accomplishments.

The University of Arizona office of Postdoctoral affairs has other IDP-related resources that may be useful to you at: https://postdoc.arizona.edu/content/individual-development-plan-idp

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Assess Write Discuss Implement Revise

Basic steps of the IDP

For postdoctoral scholars	For mentors
1. Conduct a self-assessment	Encourage postdoc to take the initial steps
2. Write your IDP	
3. Discuss all or part of the IDP with your mentor	Review goals and help postdoc revise as needed
4. Implement a plan	
5. Revise and update your IDP as needed	Regularly review and provide support

STEP 1: Conduct a self-assessment

Start the IDP process by taking some time to reflect on your skills.

On the next few pages, rate your confidence in your ability across following nine areas of professional development:

Inquiry, discovery, and creation

Disciplinary expertise and interdisciplinary connections

Leadership

Career development

Management of projects and people

Communication

Value diversity and inclusion

Interpersonal effectiveness

Personal effectiveness

Step 1: Self-assessment

Rate your confidence in your ability to do the following activities.

1 = very unconfident; 2 = somewhat unconfident; 3 = neutral; 4 = somewhat confident; 5 = very confident

Inquiry, discovery, and creation
Inquiry, discovery, and creation describe characteristics of higher order thinking embodied by postdocs, including analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

	1	2	3	4	5
Create, invent, or produce new and innovative concepts or products					
Evaluate information, critique, and make judgements based on internal or external evidence					
Pursue answers to complex questions					
Think and act innovatively to create opportunity					
Challenge conventional thinking					

Disciplinary expertise and interdisciplinary connections
Core to the postdoc experience, disciplinary expertise and interdisciplinary connections inform solutions to complex problems and creating new knowledge.

	1	2	3	4	5
Acquire depth and breadth of knowledge in my subject area					
Develop advanced skills in my subject area					
Work with peers and colleagues across disciplines					
Embrace the values of my profession					
Employ critical and analytical thinking and problem solving					
Obtain funding for my research or project					
Conduct myself ethically and professionally					
Seek and use information and technology appropriate to my discipline					

Leadership

Leadership occurs at all levels of successful organizations, regardless of formal authority or management role.

	1	2	3	4	5
Guide strategy and vision (e.g., on team projects)					
Move ideas into action					
Inspire others to new ways of thinking or acting					
Foster creativity and innovation in people around me					
Understand the dynamics of organizations					
Be proactive and take risks					
Acquire resources (e.g., get financial support from leadership or collaborative support from others)					

Career development

Career development is a lifelong, proactive process of planning and implementing personally-defined career goals.

	1	2	3	4	5
Assess my skills, values, and interests					
Obtain mentorship to support my career development					
Explore careers (e.g., conduct informational interviews)					
Market myself (e.g., using LinkedIn or other online platforms)					
Apply for job openings (e.g., write a cover letter and create a targeted resume/CV)					
Interview for jobs successfully					
Negotiate for salary, benefits, and other resources					
Participate in professional service					
Build and communicate my transferable skills to potential employers					
Take a lifelong approach to managing my career (e.g., implementing both short- and long-term professional goals)					

Management of projects and people

Managing projects and helping other people develop their potential requires experience and an understanding of systematic approach methods, evaluation, and effective use of resources.

	1	2	3	4	5
Manage projects effectively by setting goals and monitoring results					
Supervise and/or mentor others					
Provide constructive feedback to others					
Manage financial resources (e.g., reading financial statements or budgeting)					
Employ systems and technology for productivity					

Communication

Communication is a bidirectional exchange of information, made effective through understanding the intersection of media, audience, and message.

	1	2	3	4	5
Select and use optimal media for a particular message (e.g., when to use written, oral, visual, digital, smart media)					
Write for experts in my discipline					
Write for a broad audience (i.e., those who are not experts in my discipline)					
Creatively engage with the public about my scholarship or research					
Write effective grant proposals					
Use effective technical writing skills for my discipline					
Navigate the academic publishing landscape in my discipline					
Consult and listen well					
Communicate honestly with mentors, protégés, and peers					

Value diversity and inclusion

True learning calls for free and open debate, requires respect for all individuals and ideas, and prepares postdocs to live and work in a world that speaks with many voices and from many backgrounds and experiences.

	1	2	3	4	5
Learn from and work effectively with people from cultural backgrounds different from my own (i.e., demonstrate cultural competence)					
Demonstrate equitable and inclusive leadership skills					
Promote equitable, inclusive, and respectful workplaces and/or classrooms					
Cultivate relationships with people from different backgrounds, experiences, and cultures					
Recognize differences and similarities as they enhance and enrich experiences for all					

Interpersonal effectiveness

Interpersonal effectiveness entails recognizing and assessing the impact of one's behavior on others, as well as understanding and cultivating positive relationships with peers, coworkers, and advisors.

	1	2	3	4	5
Form teams and collaborate					
Appreciate and/or foster the diverse perspectives of people around me					
Network effectively with others in professional settings					
Negotiate successfully (e.g., among people with conflicting ideas)					
Resolve conflict between people or groups of people					
Mentor others (e.g., help train undergraduates in my discipline)					
Help create a positive climate (i.e., a workplace or classroom where everyone feels comfortable and appreciated)					
Work effectively with my faculty advisor, mentor, and/or supervisor					

Personal effectiveness

Personal effectiveness describes a set of attitudes and attributes that are needed for lifelong career success.

	1	2	3	4	5
Maintain an openness to new ideas and perspectives					
Cultivate an attitude of curiosity and enthusiasm for discovery					
Stay motivated					
Demonstrate resilience					
Demonstrate integrity					
Practice introspection					
Engage in activities that improve conditions for others or help shape the future of my community (i.e., civic engagement)					
Be healthy physically, emotionally, and financially					
Manage time effectively					
Stay organized in academic, employment, and personal responsibilities					
Experience joy and passion in the course of normal professional activities, at least weekly					

Interpreting your responses to the self-assessment

Take a moment to consider your responses to the self-assessment. Note subareas where you feel most confident (rated 4 or 5) and least confident (rated 1 or 2). Circle any to which you feel committed to developing; these will be used in goal-setting (see following pages).

Step 1: Self-assessment

What are your current responsibilities and requirements?

As part of the self-assessment process, ask yourself some questions related to your current responsibilities and requirements. Doing so will lead you to actions or goals to incorporate into your plan. Your aim is to develop skills that will lead to your success in your current position.

What are the requirements and responsibilities you must meet during the next year? Two years?

Are there particular technical skills or discipline-specific knowledge that you need to develop?

Are there scholarly activities you would like to accomplish or work toward during the next year? Two years? (Examples: join a professional organization, present at a conference, co-author a paper…)

Other?

Comments:

Step 1: Self-assessment

What are your career aspirations?

In preparation for creating a truly individualized IDP, ask yourself some questions related to your career goals. Consider using various resources to see how your values and interests align with potential career goals. Some of these resources include: myIDP (myidp.sciencecareers.org) for STEM fields, and other resources available from the UA office of Postdoctoral Affairs (https://postdoc.arizona.edu).

What type of work would you like to do? What is important to you in your future career?

What competencies are required for your chosen career? How well do your current skills match the competencies required for your chosen career?

What are your short-term goals related to career exploration? (Examples: learn about science writing, conduct informational interviews, find out where graduates in my field are working …)

How will you develop a network related to your career exploration goals?

Other?

Comments:

Step 2: Write the IDP

The IDP helps you map out the general path toward achieving your goals. The goals you include in your IDP are based on the strengths and weakness that you identified in Step 1, plus any other specific skills and knowledge needed to prepare for your career.

Use the following four tables below to get started. You can expand and modify them to fit your own list of goals and strategies. Some postdocs have transferred and expanded the tables into Excel spreadsheets to track multiple goals over time.

Be sure to identify specific and achievable objectives or skills, and write these in a way that makes very clear what you are going to do. Use a "S.M.A.R.T. Goals" format: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound.

- A **Specific goal** will usually answer the five "W" questions:
  What: What do I want to accomplish?
  Why: Specific reasons, purpose or benefits of accomplishing the goal
  Who: Who is involved?
  Where: Identify a location
  Which: Identify requirements and constraints

- A **Measurable goal** will usually answer questions such as:
  How much?
  How many?
  How will I know when it is accomplished?

- An **Attainable goal** will usually answer the question:
  How can the goal be accomplished?

- A **Relevant goal** can answer yes to these questions:
  Does this seem worthwhile?
  Is this the right time?
  Am I the right person?
  Does this match my overall life goals?

- A **Time-bound goal** will usually answer the questions:
  When?
  What can I get done by 6 months from now?
  What can I get done by 6 weeks from now?
  What can I do today?

And remember, your IDP is a living document that should be updated and changed as often as necessary.

Meyer, Paul J (2003). "What would you do if you knew you couldn't fail? Creating S.M.A.R.T. Goals". Attitude Is Everything: If You Want to Succeed Above and Beyond. Meyer Resource Group, Incorporated.

Self-assessment summary

Confident (4's and 5's)	Unconfident (1's and 2's)

Goals: Current responsibilities

Consider what you need to do to be successful in your current position. List your goals, the approach/strategy you plan to use to obtain your goals, and the time frame for accomplishing them. Be sure to have an outcome statement that is clear enough to allow someone (including you!) to know if you have met your goal.

Goals	Approach/strategy	Time frame	Outcome(s)

Goals: Career aspirations

Consider your career aspirations and what you need to do to prepare yourself for the next steps in your career trajectory. List your goals, the approach/strategy you plan to use to obtain your goals, and the time frame for accomplishing them. Be sure to have an outcome statement that is clear enough to allow someone (including you!) to know if you have met your goal.

Goal	Approach/strategy	Time frame	Outcome(s)

Goal prioritization

	Near term (within the next 6 months)	Long term (more than 6 months)
High priority		
Low priority		

Step 3: Discuss with your mentor

Your mentor can be an important ally. Discussing what you discovered from your skills assessment and talking about your career goals and interests with your mentor might help you identify developmental needs and areas to work on.

Some might feel it is risky to share their weaknesses or their interest in a career outside academia with their mentor. While it is not necessary to share your entire IDP right away, consider how feedback from your mentor might support your plan and provide you with insights and resources.

In addition to your primary mentor, you might consider sharing parts of your IDP with other people who represent a broad range of experiences and perspectives; for example, other faculty members, friends, family, and staff.

It may be useful to keep track of the time/date/content of the meetings you have had with your mentor about this version of the IDP. Use the space below to do this.

Step 4: Implement a plan

Put your plan into action. Stay organized and seek out the support you need to stay on track. Commit to the plan, but also remember that you will need to be flexible and modify your plan as your goals or circumstances change. Keep your IDP in a convenient place and check it often. Add your IDP deadlines to your calendar to integrate them with deadlines for other work and personal events.

Step 5: Review and revise your IDP

Review the IDP (with your mentor, if possible) on a regular basis and revise/update. At a minimum, you should revisit and discuss your IDP (with your mentor) annually. And, importantly, celebrate your achievements!

Your name: Today's date: