How to complete your Individual Development Plan (IDP)

• **Step back and self-assess!**
  When you’re focused on research, it’s easy to lose sight of the bigger picture, your interests and strengths, and your career goals. Go to this website, create an account, and complete the “Assessment” sections: [https://myidp.sciencecareers.org/](https://myidp.sciencecareers.org/)

  Use the questions in this web-survey as a jumping off point to 1) understand your research and career goals and vision for an initial IDP or 2) research progress, development, and goals for an annual IDP meeting.

  Additional resources on IDP’s are available at [https://gradschool.utah.edu/individual-development-plan](https://gradschool.utah.edu/individual-development-plan), including other downloadable IDP formats that you may prefer.

*The following IDP is a modified version used by Stanford University, Office of Postdoctoral Affairs and edited by Drs. Bryan Welm, K-T. Varley and Rod Stewart (with permission).*

• **Set an annual meeting with your faculty mentor.**
  Your relationship with your mentor is a key aspect of growth; maintaining clear, open communication is important to optimize your training and research experience. The IDP is designed to help catalyze this communication, help you reflect on your goals, make plans to help achieve those goals, and to address challenges that arise along the way.

  You are responsible for scheduling annual meetings with your faculty mentor to discuss your IDP. Share your completed IDP forms with your faculty mentor before your meeting.

• **Lead the discussion.**
  This meeting is a great time to bring up additional questions and set expectations about your working relationship. There is no single prescribed pathway to success. Rather, everyone takes a unique path; designing that path requires reflection on your part and collaboration with your mentor and others.

Complete your initial or annual self-assessment by writing answers to the following questions. You may create your own document or enter them in the appropriate sections of this document:
Initial IDP and Meeting

Part I. Career Goals
1. Describe your long-term goals. These should paint a vision of your future.
   a) Why do you want a PhD degree?
   b) Research Goals: What specific area(s) of research do you wish to explore during your training? Are there specific methods or approaches that you would like to gain familiarity with and/or become expert in?
   c) 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.
   d) 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 II. Objectives
What are some activities that might help you achieve the research and professional goals you outlined on the previous page?

1. Research goals (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?)

2. Professional Development Objectives (list 1-3): For example, courses, meeting or workshop attendance (specify if possible); teaching/mentoring; service opportunities; etc.

Part III. Agreed Upon Action Plan for Next Year
To be developed jointly by the postdoc and the mentor(s) during or after the discussion

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) 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)?
   b) How can your faculty mentor help you achieve your goals?
   c) 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?
Part I. Progress

1. Briefly review your research progress in the past year. (If you have any publications, presentations, fellowships, etc., include them here.).

2. 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.).

3. Are you becoming an expert in your field? Write a brief (1/2 page) outline of a review you would write about the state-of-the art and future challenges in your field (with citations).

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 training period? For each goal, identify any areas where you feel you need improvement or additional training (e.g., new data analysis methods). Include any techniques you want to learn, collaborations to pursue, etc.

3. What professional skills would you like to acquire during your next year of training? Here is an article about the non-technical skills that PhDs find valuable in their careers: https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0185023

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 useful, 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.

1. What have you found most beneficial from the mentoring you have received?

2. Is there anything that would improve the mentoring you receive?

3. Have you reached out to other faculty as secondary mentors?

Part IV. Career Goals

1. What are your current career goals? Include more than one, if identified.

2. 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?

3. 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

To be developed jointly by the trainee and the mentor(s) during or after the discussion

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) 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)?

b) How can your faculty mentor help you achieve your goals?

c) What is the best way for you to prevent burn-out or disillusionment? Do you need to maintain varied activities or projects, work on projects with other people, schedule breaks/vacations, etc?

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?