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Office of Postdoctoral Affairs

Postdoctoral Trainee Individual Development Plan

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 and implementation of the IDP requires an interactive effort between the trainee and the mentor.

Basic Steps	*… for Postdoctoral Scholars/Fellows*	*… for Mentors*
Step 1:	Conduct a self assessment	
Step 2:	Survey opportunities with mentor	Discuss opportunities with postdoc
Step 3:	Write an IDP Share IDP with mentor	Review IDP
Step 4:	Implement the plan Revise the IDP as needed	Establish regular review of progress Help revise the IDP as needed

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. Discuss and Help Revise 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.
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 2. 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: Heather Rieff, Ph.D., FASEB Office of Public Affairs (301-634-7650) or hrieff@opa.faseb.org. It has been modified for use by Case Western Reserve University, Office of Postdoctoral Affairs.

*Resources**

Self Assessment

Fiske, P. S. (2001). Put Your Science to Work: The Take-Charge Career Guide for Scientists. Washington, D.C.: American Geophysical Union.

Bolles, R. N. (2002). What Color is your Parachute? A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers. Berkeley, Calif.: Ten Speed Press.

The Postdoc Experience

Kern, S. (2002). Fellowship Goals for PhDs and MDs: A Primer on the Molecular Biology Postdoctoral Experience. Cancer Biology and Therapy 1: 74-75.

National Academy of Sciences. (2000). Enhancing the Postdoctoral Experience for Scientists and Engineers: A Guide for Postdoctoral scholars, Advisers, Institutions, Funding Organizations, and Disciplinary Societies. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Career Opportunities

American Association for the Advancement of Science. Science's Next Wave. [On-line]. Available: http://nextwave.sciencemag.org/us/

The Scientist. Archives: Profession. [On-line]. Available: http://www.the-scientist.com/professionarchive.htm

The Chronicle of Higher Education. Career Network Advice Columns. [On-line]. Available: http://chronicle.com/jobs/archive/advicearch.htm

Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology. (1997). Graduate Education: Consensus Conference Report. Bethesda, M.D. FASEB. [On-line]. Available: http://www.faseb.org/opar/educrpt.html

Heiberger and Vick, eds. (1996). The Academic Job Search Handbook (2nd ed.). University of Pennsylvania Press.

Reis, R. M. (1997) Tomorrow's Professor. Preparing for Academic Careers in Science and Engineering. New York: IEEE Press. 1997.

On-line Listserv: Tomorrow's Professor. Available: http://sll.stanford.edu/projects/tomprof/newtomprof/postings.html

Barker, K. (2002). At the Helm: A Laboratory Navigator. Cold Spring Harbor, NY: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press.

Resources on Non-Academic Careers

Robbins-Roth, C. ed. (1998). Alternative Careers in Science. Leaving the Ivory Tower. San Diego, Calif.: Academic Press.

Kreeger, K. Y. (1999). Guide to Nontraditional Careers in Science. London: Taylor & Francis Group.

these resources are not considered endorsements, per se