

CREATING AN INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN: Making the most of your graduate and postdoctoral experience

Setting goals can help you be more intentional about the experiences you have in your training, and can provide key steps to heading in the right direction for you. The best goals are SMART: **specific, measurable, achievable (actionable), relevant, and timely**. They should also be aspirational, and move beyond merely a “to-do” list that becomes burdensome. Where do you see yourself heading? Who do you want to become? What experiences will help you get there?

1. Do a self-assessment or inventory of your current skills, knowledge areas, talents, strengths, and passions.

Some existing tools to help with self-assessment are, for example:

- i. AAAS tool (science based but broadly applicable for research):
<http://myidp.sciencecareers.org>¹
- ii. Visual DNA (capacities – “who am I” - and personality assessment):
<http://www.visualdna.com>

2. After some self-reflection, identify areas that you want to develop further over the next year keeping in mind your longer term goals.

Once you have a good handle on your skills and strengths, you can see where there are gaps between where you are and where you aspire to be. Are there classes, workshops, online tutorials, etc. that can help you grow your skill set in certain areas? Informational interviews, networking, or job shadowing that can help you break in to a career?

3. Allow yourself to think creatively and broadly.

When you consider where you want to head in your professional life, for example, rather than focusing on a specific job think about what kind of contribution you want to make, or what kinds of problems you want to solve. Does this mind-set help you identify some of your passions or interests that could be fulfilled and utilized in various types of jobs or sectors?

4. Searching for what to set goals about?

Reflect on your various daily activities, weekend hobbies, as well as your role models. What do you wish you knew more about, had the capacity for, or aspire to? Break that into concrete actions or experiences which will help you get there. Choose specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely goals for the near term.

5. Identify points in time to assess how you are doing with your goals.

Whether it is once a month or every three months, what evidence can you see that you are making progress? What new goals do you need to set? If you are not making progress on your goals identify why not. Is something getting in the way, or is it the wrong goal for right now? Re-commit to your goal, adjust your strategy, or release your goal and start again if it is not working for you.

6. Choose a conversation partner.

This person could be your faculty mentor or a peer, someone to talk with about your goals and arrange to have a conversation about your progress on your own timetable. If it is helpful to check in more frequently, ask for that. Being accountable to others can help you stay focused on your goals when new tasks and opportunities arise.

7. Keep your goals visible.

How you manage your goals will be personal. Some people make a “vision board” to literally map their goals and intentions for the year on a wall they can see regularly. Others tape their goals into their notebook or calendar to check on a weekly basis. Still others prefer an e-format to update more regularly. The important thing is to choose a method that works for you that will motivate you and feel satisfying, and not just be another task on the to-do list.

Possible Themes and Topics for Goal Setting

It can be challenging to think of what to set goals for in your life, here are some ideas to help jumpstart your thinking. The more specific the better.

Academic

- **What specific knowledge do you need to gain to accomplish your research projects?**
 - Are there courses or trainings you need to take?
 - Are there tutorials you would like to do with mentors or advisors?
- **What specific skills (methods or techniques) do you need to acquire?**
 - Are there graduate school or lab courses that would help you learn these skills?
 - Could working with other students, postdocs, or faculty members help you attain these skills?
 - Would collaborating with another lab help you reach your goals?
 - Would you like to gain more experience in teaching?
 - Are there specific teaching opportunities that you know of? How can you obtain these?
 - Is there any formal or informal training that may help you feel more confident teaching?
- **What presentations do you anticipate giving?**
 - Do you plan on presenting at conferences?
 - Do you plan on presenting to your dissertation committee?
- **Do you plan on publishing any papers?**
 - Are there certain journals that you are targeting?
 - What are the anticipated titles/topics of the manuscripts?
 - What are the anticipated dates of submission?
 - Are these first author or collaborative publications?
 - If you anticipate on co-authoring, do you need to reach out or follow-up with potential collaborators?
- **Are you planning on submitting applications for funding?**
 - Who are the sources of the funding and what type of award do you seek? When are the deadlines?
 - What are next steps to get ready to submit?

Career

- **What is your overall career goal?**
 - Where do you see yourself working, and in what capacity, in 10 years? (long-term)
 - Where do you see yourself working, and in what capacity, in 5 years (medium-term)
 - What do you want to accomplish towards reaching your career goals in the next year (short-term)
- **Are there relationships with mentors, advisors, or faculty that you hope to cultivate?**
 - What steps can you take to make these connections?
 - Are there letters of reference that you hope to obtain before you are on the job market?
- **Are there any professional development workshops or trainings that you hope to take?**
 - What are the topics? (e.g., leadership, management, collaboration, mentoring)
- **Are you interested in setting up informational interviews, job shadowing, or interning?**
 - If so when does this fit into your timeline?
 - What companies would you ideally like to intern for?
 - Do you have any contacts at these places?
 - Are there upcoming networking opportunities where you can make contacts?

Personal Goals (Optional)

- **Are there things that you could do to make your life feel more balanced?**
 - Would you like to set goals around fitness, eating more healthfully, contemplative time?
 - Do you want to spend more time with your partner, friends, or family? How can you make time in your schedule for this?
- **Are there any financial goals you hope to reach or debts/loans that you plan on paying off by a certain time**

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN for (Trainee/Year)_____

GOAL	Why is this goal important to you?	What do you need to help you accomplish this goal?	What is your timeline for this goal?
ACADEMIC GOALS			
1.			
2.			
3.			
CAREER GOALS			
1.			
2.			
3.			
PERSONAL GOALS (Optional)			
1.			
2.			
3.			

In setting goals, think about what is possible, and even what is audacious. For some guidance on goal setting themes and topics, please refer to the next page. Think about what aligns with your vision and values and commitments. What would you do if you were 10% braver? Where do you get energy in your work and in your life? How can you cultivate more of that?

5 Year Plan Overview

As an IDP is an overall plan for training, goals for every year in training is important to keep in mind to help postdocs/graduate students progress and build upon goals in successive years. In addition, certain goals for a career may need to be met on a timely basis. However, the length of training may not be 5 years for all, so use the number of years appropriate for the individual's training period.

Year 1 Goals
Year 2 Goals
Year 3 Goals
Year 4 Goals
Year 5 Goals

Discussed with Advisor or Mentor (date): _____

Plan to revisit with Advisor (date or time frame): _____