



PALS Program

Peer Alliance for Learning and Support

Program Scope: The Peer Alliance for Learning and Support (PALS) Program promotes interdisciplinary capacity building among NextGen community members through a reciprocal peer mentoring relationship focused on shared knowledge transfer, skill development, and relationship building. Each participating NextGen will be provided with a PAL in a different discipline (i.e., computer scientists will be paired with biologists, and vice versa) who they can reach out to when they need guidance on a particular imageomics-related research problem/task or when navigating difficult situations with other researchers or faculty.

Expectations for each PALS partnership:

- Commit to making the time to meet on a regular basis. It is recommended that you meet at least 2-3x per month. You may create a meeting frequency that works best for the two of you; however, establish clear expectations from the start and be flexible when needed.
- Keep the contents of sensitive (non-science related) conversations confidential.
- Practice active listening.
- Provide each other with honest, direct, and respectful feedback.
- Establish needs/goals and method of communication at the beginning of the relationship.
- Keep one another informed of research progress, challenges, and other concerns.
- Share knowledge and experience with one another.
- Be responsive to each other's questions and concerns.
- Contribute to the evaluation and refinement of the PALS Program by completing short surveys

A critical component of a successful partnership is establishing clear expectations at the beginning. You may use the **Co-constructed Protocols** outlined in this handbook to set expectations and goals. You may also use it as a facilitation guide to create any individual SMART goals related to interdisciplinary learning and discovery that you and your partner identify. At your first meeting you need to establish the following:

- Scheduling and logistics of meeting
- Frequency and mode of communicating between meetings
- Responsibility for rescheduling any missed meetings
- Confidentiality "Off-limits" conversations
- Giving and receiving feedback
- Working with formalized goals

[Sign-up for a match](#)

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Co-constructed Protocols

Adapted from Gateway to Learning

By creating co-constructed protocols, you can find out more about each other and the focus you have in mind for your relationship. Use this 3-step process to discover what you hope to gain from the PALS program while setting goals and expectations with each other.

Step 1: Who Are You?

Fill out this worksheet in advance of meeting with your PALS partner and share your answers with them when you meet.

- **Personal Background:** Life history, academic/career history, experiences, core values, personal motto, familial or current living situation obligations or pressures.

- **Goals:** Personal, research, career, progress toward achieving them, obstacles to achieving them.

- **Perspectives:** Keys to success, interdisciplinary developmental needs, your commitments.

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• **Thinking Process:** How you like to learn, solve problems, or make decisions, areas of interest.

• **Skills and Abilities:** What you do best, what you want to do more of, what you want to learn to do.

More conversation starters to consider

Adapted from America Corporate Partners

- What are your short-term and long-term goals?
 - Who do you talk to when you need advice?
- How do you handle professional obstacles/roadblocks?
- How do you deal with criticism? How do you prefer to receive feedback?
- How do you stay motivated? How do you handle stress?

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Step 2: What are Our Goals and Expectations?

One of the most important things both partners can do is agree to expectations, goals, and ground rules for your partnership.

Write your thoughts to the questions below individually, then fully discuss them with each other.

1. What do I hope to gain from you?

2. How do I want this partnership to function?

3. How much face-to-face time can I invest?

4. What should be the approximate length of our meetings?

5. What other support will/do I need from you?

6. What ground rules do I want for our meeting/relationship (e.g., confidentiality, reciprocal trust/respect, commitment, etc.)?

7. What is my ideal frequency of contact?

8. What is my preferred contact method?

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Step 3: Co-Constructed Protocols Worksheet

This worksheet sets the parameters of a PALS partnership to meet the needs of both people. Any questions and answers from the previous two steps can be used to help complete this worksheet.

Planning Meeting

Date:
Time:
Place:

Goals/ Expectations

- 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
-

Teaching/ Learning Styles

Teaching Style	Learning Style

Preferred Method of Communication

“Hot Buttons”

Ongoing Meeting Schedule

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SMART Goals and Action Plan Worksheet

Adapted from Think Marketing and Indeed

Use this worksheet to develop an interdisciplinary-focused SMART goal that you would like to work toward then set an action plan to make it happen. You may base it on one of the goals/objectives you identified in the co-constructed protocols worksheet or construct a new goal as the need arises.

Step 1: Developing a SMART goal



Specific	Measurable	Attainable	Relevant	Time-Bound
<p>Make sure your goals are focused and identify a tangible outcome. Without the specifics, your goal runs the risk of being too vague to achieve. Being more specific helps you identify what you want to achieve. You should also identify what resources you are going to leverage to achieve success.</p>	<p>You should have some clear definition of success. This will help you to evaluate achievement and also progress. This component often answers how much or how many and highlights how you'll know you achieved your goal.</p>	<p>Your goal should be challenging, but still reasonable to achieve. Reflecting on this component can reveal any potential barriers that you may need to overcome to realize success. Outline the steps you're planning to take to achieve your goal.</p>	<p>This is about getting real with yourself and ensuring what you're trying to achieve is worthwhile to you. Determining if this is aligned to your values and if it is a priority focus for you. This helps you answer the why.</p>	<p>Every goal needs a target date, something that motivates you to really apply the focus and discipline necessary to achieve it. This answers when. It's important to set a realistic time frame to achieve your goal to ensure you don't get discouraged.</p>

¹Image adapted from Thinkmarketingmagazine.com

Specific: Who is involved? What do you want to accomplish? Is there a location(s) involved? What are the requirements and constraints? Why do you want to accomplish this goal (purpose) and what are the benefits to you?

Measurable: What are the milestones that will inform you of progress toward attaining your goal? What will inform you that you've accomplished your goal? What are the action items needed to reach your goal?

Attainable: Is your goal reasonably achievable in the timeframe you established?

Relevant: Does it align to your values? Does it fit with your long-term objectives?

Time-bound: What is an ambitious, but realistic, timeframe for completing your goal? Will this timeframe keep you motivated? How will you prioritize your action items to accomplish your goal in this timeframe?

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Step 4: Creating an Action Plan

Take one action item defined in the step 1 and discuss how to implement it using the process below. Your partner can act as a “mentor” by helping to facilitate the discussion using their disciplinary knowledge and move it toward a definable action chosen by you – it is your responsibility to take action and create something that is easily incorporated into daily activities and is short term.

1. Incorporate practice: Consider simulating the actual situation, asking “what if” questions and role playing or rehearsing what the action will look like in real time. To begin, the mentor should help you develop a model for how to incorporate the practice into different situations or daily life (what are the steps to take, what can hinder progress, how to overcome obstacles). Next, you should undergo guided practice, attempting to roleplay the situation while receiving frequent feedback from the mentor. Finally, you will attempt the roleplaying task independently with feedback from the mentor reserved for conclusion of roleplaying activity.

2. Reflect on outcomes: Did things go as planned? If not, what actions are needed? What was learned that has broader application?

Move to action!

- The first action plan is:

- The target date for completion is:

- What do we want to work on together, or what do I need to practice?

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References

1. Abell, MJ. Protégé Toolkit. Gateway to Learning
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3. Planning for new objectives? Here is how to create SMART goals. (2020, November 3). Retrieved October 23, 2020, from <https://thinkmarketingmagazine.com/how-to-create-smart-goals/>