



Individual Development Plan (IDP) for Career Development Professionals

A Guide for Managing Your Own Career Using an IDP

The purpose of this worksheet is to guide individuals who are pursuing careers in graduate/postdoctoral career development through the process of creating their own **Individual Development Plan** (IDP). The worksheet is designed as an IDP tool for all career levels, from those preparing to enter this field, practitioners seeking to grow within their current positions, or those looking to advance or pursue a career transition. It will guide you through exercises that assess your values, interests, progress and growth; set goals and define an action plan; and consider the resources, mentorship, and community that you may need to help you develop a fulfilling career. The IDP process is one that you can return to again and again, as you continue to evolve professionally.

Are you returning to update your IDP?
Click here to jump to the first prompt!

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Introduction

What is an IDP?

An **Individual Development Plan (IDP)** is an action plan developed by you for your own professional development. It is driven by your own career goals and shaped by your unique values, needs, interests, and priorities.

IDPs have been used in various sectors for decades. Since the introduction of the IDP framework by *Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology* (FASEB) to support biomedical postdoctoral career development 20 years ago (Hobin, et al., *Life Sciences Education*, 2014). IDPs are now increasingly used as a framework for supporting the career and professional development of graduate students and postdocs across disciplines. You may be familiar with interactive online tools developed for this purpose (e.g., [myIDP](#) [AAAS; sciences], [ChemIDP](#) [ACS; chemistry], [ImaginePhD](#) [GCC; humanities and social sciences], [PHaSS](#) [Kennedy Krieger Institute; public health]). In addition, many universities or training programs have developed their own IDP worksheets or tools.

Box 1. Definitions*

- **IDP process:** the process an individual takes to create an IDP. The process includes four core components: self-assessment, contextual exploration, goal-setting, and decision-making.
- **IDP:** the product of that process, created by the individual themselves. This may include documentation of what they learned via reflective exercises, career exploration, or other parts of the IDP process. At its core the IDP is an action plan: the individual's career vision statement and set of goals for the coming months with defined actions they will take toward achieving those goals.
- **IDP tool:** a worksheet or online website designed to guide an individual through the process of creating an IDP.

*Adapted and reference from: O'Dwyer, L., Schlatterer, J.C., Fuhrmann, C.N., Kuniyoshi, C.Y. (2023) *Measuring Organizational IDP-Process Outcomes for STEM Graduate Students: User Guide for the Impact Indicators and Instruments for Individual Development Plans (I3IDP) Survey Toolkit*. Washington DC: American Chemical Society. <https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.edu.I3IDPUserGuide>

We designed the attached IDP worksheet with YOU in mind: to support the career progression of graduate and postdoctoral educators. It focuses on your professional milestones, learning goals, career progress, and overall well-being.

About This IDP Worksheet

The IDP worksheet is designed to prompt your reflection and focus across a breadth of areas, enabling you to prioritize what is important to you. Sections include:

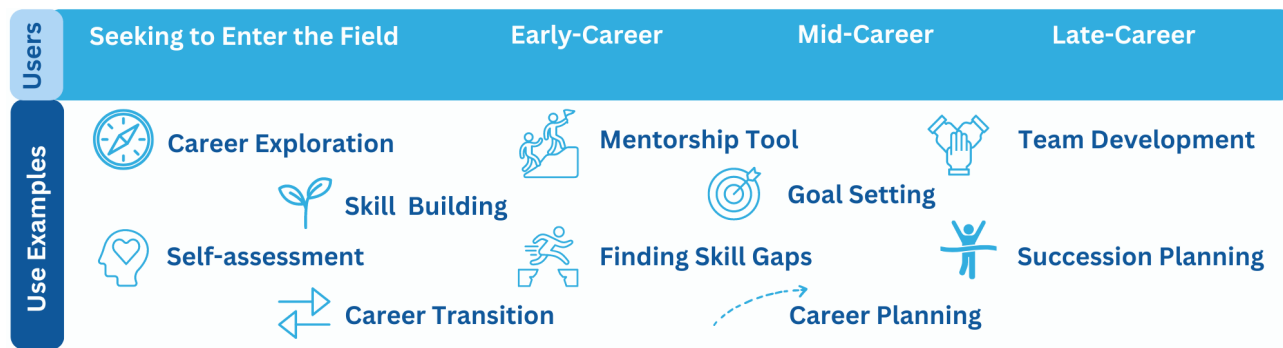
- **Self-assessment** (which includes considering your values, interests, skills, progress, and challenges or barriers you have experienced)
- **Career vision** (an opportunity to reflect on where you'd like to see your career move in the next few years)
- **Goal setting and Creating an Action Plan** (defining priority goals for this year and laying out an action plan for steps you will take to help you advance those goals; defining resources you may need)
- **Mentorship** (considering how the mentoring relationships you already have and communities you are already a part of can support you in your goals; identifying areas where you want to seek additional mentorship)

At the end of the document is a list of resources you may consult for further exploration.

Tailored to the Needs of our Field

The prompts and exercises in this IDP tool are tailored for individuals entering or progressing within the field of graduate and postdoctoral career development. This may include staff, faculty, postdocs, students, or interns. The IDP for Career Development Professionals is a document designed to serve a wide range of career stages for a variety of uses, and can be tailored to meet an individual's specific needs.

Figure 1. Different Uses of the IDP



One key way that we have tailored this IDP tool is to pair it with the [Graduate Career Consortium \(GCC\) Graduate Professional and Career Development Professional Competencies](#). The GCC Core Competencies were developed by members of the GCC Professional Development Committee. In 2021-2023, they were used and honed by a subgroup of the committee to analyze the prevalence of skills described in job ads for this field. Parts of our GCC IDP tool will point you to this resource, which can be helpful for identifying areas of growth depending on your own interests and career trajectory. Examples of Core Competencies subsections are:

- Career Coaching, Advising
- Communication
- Diversity, Inclusivity & Cultural Awareness
- Financial/Budgeting
- Informational Management
- Knowledge of Populations, Disciplines
- Leadership, Management & Administration
- Marketing/Outreach & Technology
- Mentoring, Training, Teaching & Education
- Program and Event Administration
- Relationship Building/Networking Skills
- Research, Assessment & Evaluation

Using This IDP With Your Mentees or Direct Reports

If you supervise or mentor staff or faculty in this field, encourage them to develop their own IDPs or use parts of the worksheet for their professional development. Encourage them to complete the worksheet prior to the meeting, and use it to develop their own agenda for the meeting. Though it may be tempting to tie this to annual performance evaluations, recognize that the IDP is about their own goals and priorities—not the goals of their current role. Offer to support them in their goals, and encourage them to meet with other mentors to attain multiple perspectives.

Supporting Your Wellness

One key reason for creating an IDP is to support your overall well-being. Career well-being--or feeling fulfilled through one's work-- is not only an important component of your career development, but is also one of the [five essential elements of overall well-being](#). Through the process of periodically returning to and revising your IDP, you will engage in reflection about what you enjoy in your

work, the strengths you bring to your work, your key values and what you find rewarding. The IDP process can support a growth mindset and re-claiming agency for your own career. It can also help you identify challenges and barriers you face, and recognize areas where you want to seek more resources or mentorship.

Self-Assessment

Self-assessment is a term borrowed from vocational psychology to describe the process of reflection and building self-awareness. This is an important core component of the IDP process, as it creates space and time for reflection that will promote ongoing professional growth, further your identity formation and evolution, and center your goals on topics important to you.

Reflect on Where You're At

The first step is to consider your career development over the past few months or a year to help you celebrate your accomplishments, make your progress visible, identify gaps or challenges, and find areas for growth. Postdocs, students, and interns are encouraged to reflect on their studies and training in this section.

List your top 3 career-related accomplishments from last year:

Were there any unexpected challenges that impacted you? If so, reflect on how you responded to the challenge, what you learned, and what you would have changed?

What behaviors or practices are most helpful and supportive to your work, development, and wellbeing? List them and then reflect on how they might be supporting you and your colleagues.

Skills Assessment

After reflecting on the past year, review the [GCC Graduate Professional and Career Development Professional Competencies Assessment](#) and identify your strongest skills and those you'd like to develop.

What are your 3 strongest skills in your current position?

What skills do you feel are underutilized?

What 3-5 skills or experiences would you like to develop?

Interests Assessment

Career interests may include the roles and responsibilities of your current role. What do you do on a daily basis that you enjoy? What brings you the most satisfaction? What about your role is least satisfying? Some examples may include career advising, workshop design and execution, stakeholder and partner meetings, or establishing a new internship program.

Reflect on your current role and what aspects you enjoy most (list 2-3)?

When you think about your current role, what aspects do you enjoy least (list 2-3)?

What changes can you make to create more balance in your work that will lead to better alignment with your interests?

Values Assessment

This is an opportunity to reflect on your values and center them in your career development. Note that although in our roles we often help individuals make career decisions with values in mind, reflecting on your values is also important to do periodically once you are in a role. Work that is in alignment with your values can lead to feelings of fulfillment. In contrast, feeling out of alignment with your values can bring tension into your work. Values can include examples such as institutional and team structure and size, collaborative culture, centering equity and inclusion in your work, and/or flexibility in working hours and location.

If you need some help prioritizing your values, you might start by organizing them using [The Career Values Card Sort](#), a free and simple values assessment tool.

What are your most important values? (list your top 3-5)

You might think of these as your non-negotiable ones.

Are your top values currently being fulfilled? In what ways? What are ways you can enhance this?

How have your values informed your career choices?

Career Vision

Now that you've reflected on your current skills, interests, and values as part of your self-assessment, take a moment to imagine what your professional future could look like. You might start by considering your career stage. For example, are you a graduate student or early career professional looking to break into the field? Are you interested in shifting the focus of your current role, or perhaps moving in a new direction to expand your responsibilities? Are you seeking to find ways to recenter your career around your values, interests, skills, needs, or life goals? Are you interested in seeking a new position or major career change?

If you are still learning about roles in the field of graduate and postdoctoral education, you can explore potential career paths in [ImaginePhD](#) under the "Higher Education Administration" and "Human Services" [job families pages](#).

Take a moment to imagine yourself in 5-10 years from now. What are you doing? Where are you located? What brings you enjoyment in your career?

Write a brief sentence statement describing any significant shifts or advancement that you are seeking right now in your career.

Creating an Action Plan

Next, bring your thoughts from the self-assessment and your career vision together to create an action plan for the coming several months. It is focused on long-term career goals and where you see yourself over the next 1-5 years.

Broad Goals for the Coming Year(s)

As a first step toward creating an action plan, write down broad goals. Refer back to the previous sections to help you identify these goals. You can include those you hope to achieve in the next six months or one year, and even goals for the next 2 to 5 years. These goals will form the basis of your IDP action plan for this year. For this step, you may find it helpful to draw a cluster diagram, or “mind map,” or even just free write for several minutes on paper or on a whiteboard.

Types of broad goals you may want to include:

- relate to current projects you are working on,
- are skills you would like to develop,
- cultivate new forms of knowledge and expertise,
- enhance your well-being,
- expand your professional network or attain further mentorship,
- identify career directions to explore or pursue.

Goals for the Coming Years

Use the space below to write down or sketch out at least 4-5 goals you’d like to achieve over the next few years:

Prioritize

Write out your most important goals and rank them. Amongst the broad goals you have defined above, which are the most important to you? Which are the most relevant for moving toward your desired career vision?

Define an Action Plan

For each of your top priority goals above, define an action plan. What steps (“actions”) will you take to reach or make progress toward these goals this year? For example, you may have 3 to 10 actions per goal. In your IDP, these can be on a timescale of weeks or months.

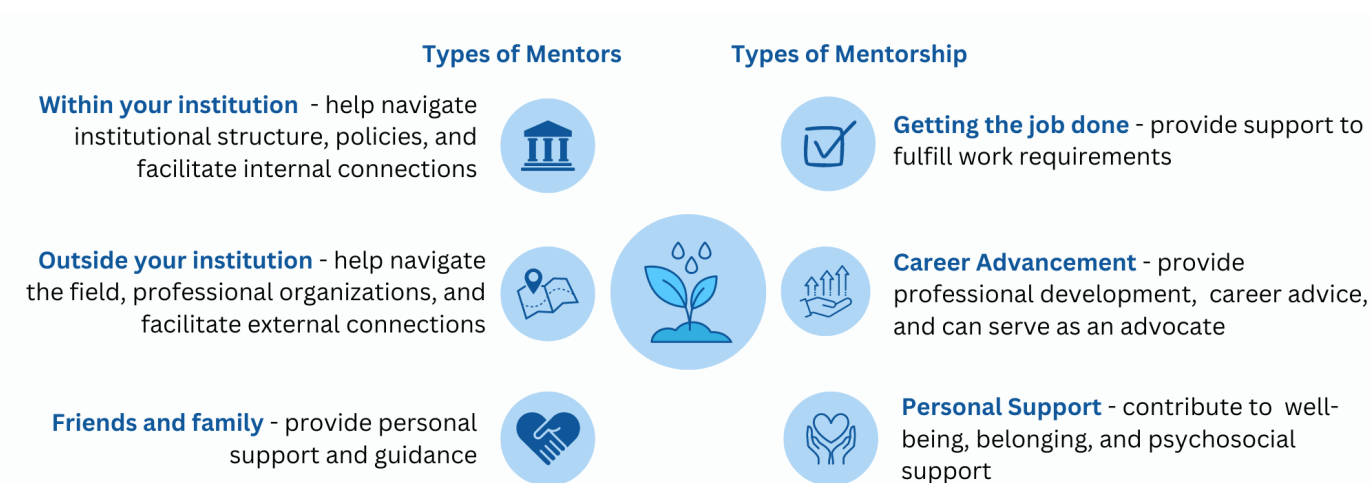
Reflect on Resources You May Need

Reflecting on the goals you have set above, what resources will you need to help you accomplish these goals? Be specific. Examples include time, funding, space, staffing, mentorship, training, feedback. Define actions you can take to attain the resources you need, which you identified above. What strategies will help you do so? You may want to talk with mentors for ideas. Add these actions to your action plan.

Mentorship

Mentorship is a key resource to support your professional development, career growth, and wellbeing at all career stages. Discussions with mentors can be helpful as you work through the steps above to develop or update your IDP; and, your mentors are a network you can turn to as you work toward your IDP goals. Mentorship can also be mutually beneficial for both individuals: feeling that you are connected with like-minded individuals can enhance your sense of belonging, fulfillment, and engagement with your work. Here, you will map your current mentorship network to identify people who help cultivate your strengths and support your growth. Then, you will identify areas where you may need further mentorship and brainstorm some new potential mentors.

Figure 2: Develop a Broad Mentoring Network



Map Your Current Network

Reflect on your recent mentors and the areas where you currently receive support. Example mentorship areas include:

- Wellness; balancing work and life responsibilities
- Handling work challenges
- Considering your skills and strengths
- Discussing opportunities for growth and skills development
- Navigating microaggressions and systemic biases
- Understanding your organization/institution

- Time management, prioritizing goals, and “saying no”
- Enhancing your professional network
- Any of the goal areas you identified in your IDP

Use the table below to define your mentorship network. This is an opportunity to reflect on the mentorship you already receive and mentoring resources available to you. This exercise can also help identify gaps and areas where you can expand or strengthen your network, which you will do in the next step.

Name (or initials) of Mentor or Name of Mentoring Group	Mentoring Area(s)

Identify Mentoring Opportunities

Looking at your action plan for this year and the table above, in what areas do you feel you may need further mentorship? Are there current mentors that you can leverage in new areas? In what areas might you benefit from seeking additional mentors?

Considering your mentoring needs, where and how might you find additional mentors? Mentoring relationships often begin with a coffee, conversation at a conference, or a Zoom call. Whether early or mid-career, remember the value of doing [informational interviews](#) as a way to connect around shared interests. Check your university's human resources unit or office of diversity to see if there are affinity groups--groups at the organization with shared social identities or interests. Social media such as LinkedIn can also be a useful resource for finding and meeting new individuals. Leverage the [GCC Mentoring Program](#) (apply annually; join the [GCC Message Boards](#) to receive updates). And, develop connections with other GCC members informally at the annual conference and through regional meetings.

Congratulations! You have developed your IDP. Use your plan as a guide as you move forward through the coming months. Like any plan, this one will need revisions. But know that the thoughtfulness you have put into the process now will support you as new challenges and opportunities arise. Take some time to return to this worksheet periodically, to reflect, reset, and consider your next priorities forward. Though you may strive to support others' professional development, remember that your own wellbeing and career fulfillment are crucial--the best way to help others is to "put your own face mask on first!"

References & Resources

Adapted From

- [Individual Development Plan \(2014\)](#), UMass Chan Center for Biomedical Career Development, Fuhrmann, C.
- IDP for Early-Career Faculty (2023), UMass Chan Investigator Career Advancement Program, Fuhrmann C. and Schwartz, M.
- Harvard IDP, Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University

Resources for Self-Assessment

Values assessment tools:

- [Imagine PhD](#) - This is a free online career exploration and planning tool created and sponsored by the Graduate Career Consortium that was designed with humanities and social sciences in mind but it is relevant for all disciplines.
- [The Career Values Card Sort](#) - This free and simple values assessment tool has you rank 24 career values by importance.
- [myIDP](#) - This individual development plan is a free online tool primarily for individuals pursuing science careers in industry.
- [ChemIDP](#) - This is a free online career planning tool for chemical scientists from the American Chemical Society.

Skills assessment tool:

- [GCC Core Competencies Assessment](#), a skills assessment tool developed by the GCC Professional Development Committee.

Resources for Goal Setting

- [Goal Setting Strategies for Scientific and Career Success](#), myIDP (Strategies for drafting an action plan for your IDP)
- [Office Timeline](#) or other software can help you quickly create a [Gantt chart](#)

Resources for Mentorship

- [Mapping a Mentoring Roadmap and Developing a Supportive Network for Strategic Career Advancement](#), Beronda L. Montgomery
- [The NCFDD Mentor Map](#), Centralizing on your needs as an academic, our mentoring map offers an opportunity for you to map your current mentoring

network, identify your unmet needs, and plan how to expand your existing network to meet your current needs.

Resources for Career Wellbeing

- [Your Career Well-Being and Your Identity](#) - People underestimate the impact of their career on their overall well-being by Tom Rath and Jim Harter Adapted from Wellbeing: The Five Essential Elements
- [Design Your Pathway to Wellness](#) - Use this Personal Wellness Plan to create a path to wellness that's right for you. Come back to these questions often as the semester goes on to stay on track with your wellness goals.
- [Career Well-Being: Key to Happiness](#) - Tips to strengthen your career well-being and happiness.

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