Individual Development Plan Guidelines for Postdoctoral Scholars

Individual Development Plans (IDPs) provide a planning process that identifies the Postdoctoral Scholar’s general individual research goals, professional development and career objectives and can also serve as a communication tool between postdoctoral scholars and their PIs (supervisors/faculty mentors).

Goals
Help postdocs identify:
- Long-term career options they wish to pursue and the necessary tools to meet these; and
- Short-term needs for improving current performance

Benefits
Postdocs will have a process that assists in developing long-term goals. Identifying short-term goals will give them a clearer sense of expectations and help identify milestones along the way to achieving specific objectives. The IDP also provides a tool for communication between the postdoc and the PI.

Outline of IDP Process
The development, implementation and revision of the IDP require a series of steps to be conducted by the postdoc and their PI. These steps are an interactive effort and require that both parties participate fully in the process.

BASIC STEPS

... for Postdocs
  Step 1: Conduct a self assessment
  Step 2: Survey opportunities with PIs
  Step 3: Write an IDP, share IDP with PI and revise
  Step 4: Implement the plan and revise the IDP as needed

... for PIs
  Step 1: Become familiar with available opportunities
  Step 2: Discuss opportunities with postdoc
  Step 3: Review IDP and help revise
  Step 4: Establish regular review of progress and help revise the IDP as needed
Execution of the IDP Process:

Postdocs-

Step 1 - Conduct a Self Assessment (attached):

- Assess your skills, strengths and areas which need development
- Identify what you feel you have mastered and what skills, knowledge and experiences you believe you need to acquire in order to advance your career
- 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?

This self assessment tool is not to rate you and provide a score; it is intended to be used as a working document to help initiate and direct the communication between you and your PI. It provides a bulleted list/description of skills, knowledge and experiences you have either acquired or wish to acquire to address the discipline-specific needs contained within each category. The success is dependent upon your ability to articulate each bulleted item clearly and be able to identify the broader concepts in the context of the lab’s current objectives or future goals. By keeping the assessment in terms of tangible goals, the development plan will have clear objectives that both you and your PI can acknowledge and assess as research advances in the lab. Therefore, your professional development may advance while your expected research, teaching and or laboratory responsibilities are also met.

While it is understood that the experiences and demands towards your development are heavily directed by the expectations specific to your field of research, there are some general concepts and topics that provide a universal starting point. This document starts the self assessment from a more general framework, but you are strongly encouraged to alter or augment it to better suit the specific needs and demands of your discipline in conjunction with your PI.

Step 2 – Survey Opportunities with PI.

- **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** what you feel are the most-to-least important items you would like to work on as a postdoc.
- **Solicit** feedback and discussion from your PI; does the assessment cover all relevant aspects specific to the discipline and your professional development?
Step 3 - Write 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 PI).
- Define the approaches to obtain the specific skills and strengths (e.g., courses, technical skills, teaching, and supervision) together with a timeline.
- Discuss your draft IDP with your PI.
- 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 PI regularly. Revise the plan on the basis of these discussions.

P.I.s (Principal Investigators)-

Step 1. Become familiar with available opportunities.
By virtue of your experience you should already have knowledge of some career opportunities, but you may want to familiarize yourself with other career opportunities and trends in job opportunities.

Step 2. Discuss opportunities with postdoc.
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.

Step 3. Review IDP and help revise.
Provide honest feedback - both positive and negative - to help postdocs set realistic goals. Agree on a development plan that will allow postdocs to be productive in the laboratory and adequately prepare them for their chosen career.

Step 4. Establish regular review of progress.
The PI should meet at regular intervals with the postdocs to assess progress, expectations and changing goals. On at least an annual basis, the PI 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.