

Individual Development Plans for Postdoctoral Research Fellows

The NIH recommends that grantees develop an institutional policy requiring an Individual Development Plan (IDP) for every graduate student and postdoctoral fellow supported by an NIH grant. Specifically, the NIH encourages institutions to begin reporting IDPs in the Research Performance Progress Reports (RPPR) by October 1, 2014. Although some departments at JHUSOM have created their own IDP forms, the Advisory Board of the Associate Dean for Postdoctoral Affairs has created a recommended IDP template that can be used by both postdoctoral fellows and Principal Investigators (PI).

Overview:

An IDP for postdoctoral fellows provides a means for the PI and postdoc to work together to:

- Identify short- and long-term career goals and discussion of time frame for fellowship completion
- Define milestones for expected scholarly contribution, including authorship of publications, grant writing, presentations *etc.*
- Determine the postdoctoral fellow's progress in development of relevant skills
- Identify professional development resources that may be beneficial for the fellow

Both postdoctoral fellow and the PI should prepare an annual IDP that includes discussion points, short-term and long-term goals, and a review of milestones. These meetings will facilitate an ongoing process and provide a framework in which postdoctoral fellow and PI move towards achieving shared specific goals. By focusing on an individual's specific skill set, interests, and goals, it is anticipated that a highly successful plan can be developed and implemented.

Advantages for Postdoctoral Fellows and Principle Investigators:

In the current competitive job market postdoctoral fellows must work on professional development in parallel with developing their research skills. Annual formalized meetings will provide an opportunity for better communication with regard to goals and expectations of both the postdoctoral fellow and PI. Discussion about diverse careers and how to better prepare for these should be an integral part of the IDP. Documentation will also stimulate discussion as to how to better achieve set goals.

As reviewed by Hobin *et al.*¹: "Goal setting has a positive impact on performance and career outcomes. The development of specific plans makes it more likely that goals are reached and 'people who develop and implement strategies to pursue career-specific goals achieve greater career success as measured by salary, promotions, and level of responsibility'."Postdocs who developed training plans with their advisors at the start of their appointments published more papers, reported greater satisfaction with their postdoctoral experience, gave their advisors higher ratings, and experienced fewer conflicts with their advisors compared with postdocs who had not developed plans²."

References:

1. Hobin et al. (2014) Putting PhDs to Work: Career Planning for Today's Scientist. CBE –Life Sciences Education 13, 49-53
2. Davis G (2006) Improving the postdoctoral experience: an empirical approach. In: The Science and Engineering Workforce in the United States, ed. R Freeman and D Groff, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Further Information:

<https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-13-093.html>

<https://nexus.od.nih.gov/all/2013/07/23/individual-development-plans-for-nih-supported-trainees/>

Suggested Template: Individual Development Plan for Postdoctoral Fellows

An Individual Development Plan (IDP) is an integral part of mentoring. However, the mentoring process should be ongoing, active, and driven by the mentee. In preparation for the meeting to discuss the IDP, both postdoctoral fellow and PI document elements that are key in career and professional development planning. The outcome of the meeting should be a series of agreed upon action items with a reasonable timeline for implementation. Both mentor and mentee should keep documentation of the meeting. The goal of the IDP is to facilitate a free and candid exchange so that significant issues can be discussed. The meeting should occur at least annually, though more frequent meetings could be beneficial. The following guidelines are a suggested set of steps in completing and revising the IDP.

Key Resources:

AAAS myIDP: <http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/>

FASEB IDP Template: <http://www.faseb.org/portals/2/pdfs/opa/idp.pdf>

Step One: The postdoctoral research fellow begins writing their IDP.

The postdoctoral fellow should begin writing their IDP. The fellow is free to choose their own customized IDP format; however, we *recommend* using the AAAS online tool called **myIDP** (<http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/>) and/or the framework by FASEB (<http://www.faseb.org/portals/2/pdfs/opa/idp.pdf>). myIDP allows postdoctoral fellows to examine their skills, interests, and values and provides advice on diverse career paths. It leads postdocs through a process to set out main career goals and set up smaller, specific goals needed to attain overall career goals.

Step Two: The postdoctoral research fellow and the mentor sit down to discuss and revise the IDP.

A. For the meeting, the postdoctoral research fellow should bring

- Portions of their pre-written IDP they want to share with their PI
- A mission statement describing the vision for long-term career plans (one paragraph)
- CV (Postdoctoral CV format: https://drive.google.com/file/d/OB_wrvHF2rx6Na0NET2NlcjB4eIU/edit?usp=sharing)
- Progress Report (list achievements over the past year, if applicable)

B. The PI and the fellow should discuss and document the following:

- Identification of short- and long-term career goals
- Discussion of timeframe for fellowship completion
- Define milestones for scholarly contribution, including authorship of publications, grant writing, presentations, *etc.*
- Define postdoctoral fellow's progress in development of relevant skills including:
 - Discipline-Specific Conceptual Knowledge
 - Research Skill Development
 - Communication Skills
 - Professionalism
 - Leadership and Management Skills
 - Responsible Conduct of Research
 - Job Market Skills
- Identification of professional development resources that may be beneficial

Examples of useful questions to ask during the conversation:

- What will be our regular meeting plan?
- What are the PI's expectations regarding productivity and how will that be assessed and communicated to the fellow?
- How can the postdoctoral work best transition from the PI's research goals to an independent research plan?
- What's the best strategy for job applications?
- Should other mentors be involved?
- Is the interaction with other lab members/collaborators going well?
- Is the Center/Department providing the necessary support?
- Are there any concerns to be discussed?
- Networking: can the mentor help?

C. Summarize agreed upon major plans to be implemented before the next meeting. Set a timeline for the next meeting(s).

Step Three: A formalized annual or semi-annual IDP should be written. The fellow and PI should work together develop goals, actions plans, and timelines. Both should keep documentation of the meeting and set the date for the next IDP review.

Step Four: Both PI and fellow should sign the IDP Completion Signature Form and return to the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs to complete the annual reappointment process.