

INTRODUCTION

National Institutes of Health

As of October 1, 2014, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) strongly encourages institutions funded by NIH awards to develop and use Individual Development Plans (IDPs) for graduate students and postdoctoral researchers. IDPs provide a structured opportunity to plan career development activities as part of graduate and postdoctoral training. Annual grant reports to NIH must include “a description of whether the institution uses IDPs or not and how they are employed to help manage the training and career development of those individuals.”

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Although IDPs were originally used for graduate students and postdoctoral scholars in the sciences, the IDP can be a valuable addition to any student/postdoc’s career planning. It facilitates a self-evaluation of skills and goals that should lead to a career plan and implementation of that plan. The IDP is an iterative process and ideally, should include collaboration between the student/postdoc and their mentors or advisors. It can be used to positively affect the relationship with committee members or mentors so that there is a plan everyone can support that will lead to a better training experience.

Individual Development Plan

An Individual Development Plan (IDP) is a valuable planning document that gives students and scholars an opportunity to effectively set goals and identify career paths for the future. The planning process serves as an ideal communication tool between student and mentor. IDPs help identify professional development needs and career objectives; this is of great benefit to students as it allows students to monitor their progress throughout their programs and/or appointments. Furthermore, it is important to note that Individual Development Plans are flexible. Graduate Education encourages students and scholars to revisit their plans as they see fit so that they best approach their career goals.

Individual Development Plan Four Step Process



Step 1. Self-Assessment

Conduct a self-assessment. Self-assessments are important to help identify strengths and weaknesses while also providing you with insight into the proficiency of your skills. Utilize your experiences from the past year in order to help identify your skills, interests and values. [My IDP](#)¹ provides an extensive assessment that will give graduate students and postdocs detailed lists of skills, interests and values. While [my IDP](#) is geared to those in the STEM fields, this assessment is valuable for all graduate students and postdocs as you begin your Individual Development Plans.

Although [my IDP](#) is a valuable resource, it may not be useful to all graduate students and postdocs. For those seeking to complete their assessment without a formal tool follow the guidelines below to complete Step 1 in creating your Individual Development Plan.

Take a realistic look at your current abilities by identifying your experiences from the past year. Utilize the topics below to assess your skills, strengths and areas in which development is needed. Include specific examples of how your experiences and accomplishments have developed your research skills, scientific knowledge, management and leadership skills, career planning, and responsible conduct of research.

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¹ My IDP is a career planning tool for graduate students and Post Docs. Website is maintained by the America Assn. for the Advancement of Science

1. Brief overview of your research project and major accomplishments in the past year

2. Publications

3. Patents

4. Honors/Awards

5. National or other professional meetings attended

6. Seminar Presentations

7. New areas of research or technical expertise acquired in the past year

8. Teaching activity

9. Clinical activity

10. Committee or other service activity

11. Other professional activities not identified above

12. Other activities and/or interests (See table 1.0 for key terms)

Table 1.0 (terms taken from [my IDP](#))

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| • Designing experiments | others | • Writing grant proposals |
| • Creating (and giving) presentations | • Analyzing | • Attending conferences |
| • Learning how to use new equipment | • Writing position papers | • Performing research with animal subjects |
| • Developing curricula | • Performing research with human subjects | • Mentoring one on one |
| • Developing collaborations | • Teaching | • Serving on committees |
| • Working in a team | • Negotiating agreements | • Analyzing financial data or budgets |
| • Assessing trends | • Networking with others | • Planning or organizing events |
| • Leading or supervising | • Work-related travel | • Learning new fields |
| | • Speaking (or writing) about science | |
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13. Key strengths and skills identified by My IDP assessment tools

Step 2. Career Exploration

As you continue on in the process of creating your Individual Development Plan, connect with your mentor to discuss career opportunities. Additionally, research each career deeply by reading articles and books, attending events, networking and conducting informational interviews. Browse professional society websites to obtain more information on career paths.

Use the items below to help guide you through Step 2.

1. Identify career opportunities and select those that interest you.
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2. Identify developmental needs by looking at your current skills and those needed for your career choice.
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3. Prioritize your developmental areas and discuss with your mentor how these should be addressed.
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4. Utilize resources offered on campus in order to develop the appropriate skills for your desired career path. List workshops/seminars that may be useful below.
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Step 3. Set goals

Setting both short-term and long-term goals is important as you progress through your training. Goals will keep you accountable and benefit your growth as you develop skills for now, later and your future.

1. Identify two long-term career goals:
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2. Identify the following types of short-term goals (Career advancement/Skills development/Project completion):
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Step 4. Implementation

Put your plan into action! Revise and modify your plan as necessary and review the plan with your mentor regularly.