Individual Development Plan for Postdoctoral Fellows
(to be completed upon appointment)

Individual Development Plans (IDPs) provide a planning process that identifies both professional development needs and career objectives. Furthermore, IDPs serve as a communication tool between trainees and their mentors, and provides a professional mentoring structure for postdoctoral trainees. An IDP can be considered one component of a broader mentoring plan.

Goals
Help trainees identify:
- Long-term career options they wish to pursue in postdoctoral training, and encourages career focus on specific areas of excellence and training;
- The necessary tools to prepare for these options, including techniques and other specialized training experiences;
- Short-term needs for improving current performance.

Benefits
Trainees will have a process that assists in developing an integrated training experience that takes advantage of existing strengths while acknowledging areas of needed improvement. Identifying short-term goals will provide a clearer sense of expectations and help identify milestones along the way to achieving specific training objectives. The IDP is therefore a roadmap for career development during the period of appointment.

Outline of IDP Process
The development, implementation and revision of the IDP requires a series of steps to be conducted by the postdoctoral fellow and their mentor. These steps are an interactive effort between the postdoctoral fellow and the mentor.

BASIC STEPS

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Execution of the IDP Process

... for Postdoctoral Fellows

Step 1. Conduct a Self Assessment.
- Assess your skills, strengths and areas which need development. Formal assessment tools can be helpful. (Examples can be found in Resources: Self Assessment at the end of this document). In the context of a career in research, this should include an assessment of the levels of inquiry (e.g., cellular/molecular, systems, human subject) that will constitute the major emphasis of your independent research career.
- Take a realistic look at your current abilities. This is a critical part of career planning. Ask your peers, mentors, family and friends what they see as your strengths and your development needs.
- Outline your long-term career objectives. (For useful information see Resources: Career Opportunities at the end of this document). Ask yourself:
1. What type of work would I like to be doing?
2. Where would I like to be in an organization?
3. What is important to me in a career?

Step 2. Survey Opportunities with Mentor.
- Identify training areas and select from those that interest you.
- Identify developmental needs by comparing current skills and strengths with those needed for your career choice.
- Prioritize your developmental areas and discuss with your mentor how these should be addressed.

Step 3. Write an IDP.
The IDP is a roadmap that matches skills and strengths to your career choices. It is a changing document, since needs and goals will almost certainly evolve over the course of your appointment. 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 achievement benchmarks for the current appointment year.
- Identify specific skills and strengths that you need to develop (based on discussions with your mentor).
- Define the approaches to obtain the specific skills and strengths (e.g., courses, technical skills, teaching, supervision) together with anticipated time frames.
- Discuss your draft IDP with your mentor.

Step 4. Implement Your Plan. 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.

Step 5. Review and Revise. Review the plan with your mentor regularly. Revise the plan on the basis of these discussions and as your personal career goals evolve.
...for Mentors

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 (refer to sources such as National Research Council reports and Science career reviews; see also Resources: Career Opportunities at the end of this document).

Step 2. Discuss opportunities with your trainee.
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 postdoctoral fellows set realistic goals. Agree on a development plan that will allow postdoctoral fellows to be productive in the laboratory and adequately prepare them for their chosen career.

Step 4: Assess new tasks and training opportunities in light of the IDP. Does a workshop or training opportunity help advance the plan? Are activities getting in the way of hitting achievement benchmarks?

Step 5 Establish regular review of progress.
The mentor should meet at regular intervals with the postdoctoral fellow to assess progress, expectations and changing goals. On at least an annual basis, the mentor 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.

RESOURCES

Self Assessment

The Postdoc Experience

Career Opportunities


Resources on Non-Academic Careers


Web based resources:
Science Careers  http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/
Nature Jobs  http://www.nature.com/naturejobs/index.html