**CREATING AN INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN:**

Making the most of your graduate and postdoctoral experience

Setting goals can help you be more intentional about the experiences you have in your training, and can provide key steps to heading in the right direction for you. The best goals are SMART: **specific, measurable, achievable (actionable), relevant, and timely**. They should also be aspirational, and move beyond merely a “to-do” list that becomes burdensome. Where do you see yourself heading? Who do you want to become? What experiences will help you get there?

1. **Do a self-assessment or inventory of your current skills, knowledge areas, talents, strengths, and passions.**

Some existing tools to help with self-assessment are, for example:

* + 1. AAAS tool (science based but broadly applicable for research): <http://myidp.sciencecareers.org>[[1]](#footnote-1)
    2. Visual DNA (capacities – “who am I” - and personality assessment): <http://www.visualdna.com>

1. **After some self-reflection, identify areas that you want to develop further over the next year keeping in mind your longer term goals.**

Once you have a good handle on your skills and strengths, you can see where there are gaps between where you are and where you aspire to be. Are there classes, workshops, online tutorials, etc. that can help you grow your skill set in certain areas? Informational interviews, networking, or job shadowing that can help you break in to a career?

1. **Allow yourself to think creatively and broadly.**

When you consider where you want to head in your professional life, for example, rather than focusing on a specific job think about what kind of contribution you want to make, or what kinds of problems you want to solve. Does this mind-set help you identify some of your passions or interests that could be fulfilled and utilized in various types of jobs or sectors?

1. **Searching for what to set goals about?**

Reflect on your various daily activities, weekend hobbies, as well as your role models. What do you wish you knew more about, had the capacity for, or aspire to? Break that into concrete actions or experiences which will help you get there.Choose specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely goals for the near term.

1. **Identify points in time to assess how you are doing with your goals.**

Whether it is once a month or every three months, what evidence can you see that you are making progress? What new goals do you need to set? If you are not making progress on your goals identify why not. Is something getting in the way, or is it the wrong goal for right now? Re-commit to your goal, adjust your strategy, or release your goal and start again if it is not working for you.

1. **Choose a conversation partner.**

This person could be your faculty mentor or a peer, someone to talk with about your goals and arrange to have a conversation about your progress on your own timetable. If it is helpful to check in more frequently, ask for that. Being accountable to others can help you stay focused on your goals when new tasks and opportunities arise.

1. **Keep your goals visible.**

How you manage your goals will be personal. Some people make a “vision board” to literally map their goals and intentions for the year on a wall they can see regularly. Others tape their goals into their notebook or calendar to check on a weekly basis. Still others prefer an e-format to update more regularly. The important thing is to choose a method that works for you that will motivate you and feel satisfying, and not just be another task on the to-do list.

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN for (Trainee/Year)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| GOAL | Why is this goal important to you? | What do you need to help you accomplish this goal?[[2]](#footnote-2) | What is your timeline for this goal?[[3]](#footnote-3) |
| ACADEMIC GOALS |  |  |  |
| 1. |  |  |  |
| 2. |  |  |  |
| 3. |  |  |  |
| CAREER GOALS |  |  |  |
| 1. |  |  |  |
| 2. |  |  |  |
| 3. |  |  |  |
| PERSONAL GOALS |  |  |  |
| 1. |  |  |  |
| 2. |  |  |  |
| 3. |  |  |  |

In setting goals, think about what is possible, and even what is audacious. Think about what aligns with your vision and values and commitments. What would you do if you were 10% braver? Where do you get energy in your work and in your life? How can you cultivate more of that?

Discussed with Advisor or Mentor (date): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Plan to revisit with Advisor (date or time frame):\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. The AAAS has developed an exceptional and vetted tool for IDPs in the sciences (myidp). Some may want to use this tool for your entire IDP plan. The self-assessment section is excellent and provides a print out of skills and interests that can be used to plan or share with others. The goal setting section itself needs more scaffolding, which is why we created the following worksheet. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Think about what resources, experiences, activities you will need to help you accomplish your goal. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Think about what you will see, do, or be if you accomplish this goal, or make progress toward it. How will you know you are “done”? If you notice it is hard to say what you would see or do or be at the end of your goal-experience, you need to reframe the goal to be more concrete and specific and actionable. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)