

# Individual Development Plan for Postdocs

*Office of Postdoctoral Affairs  
NC State University*

**Individual Development Plans (IDPs)** provide a planning process that identifies both professional development needs and career objectives. IDPs can also serve as a communication tool between individuals and their mentors.

The IDP should help postdocs to identify:

- Long-term career goals, and the skills required to obtain those positions
- Short-term goals to reach their long-term career opportunities

An IDP is a living document that is meant to be revisited and changed as one's career progresses. We recommend that postdocs schedule time every six months to review, update, and revise their IDP based on the previous six months progress.

## **Role of Department**

The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs at NC State recommends that postdocs complete an IDP at the beginning of their postdoctoral appointment and share in their initial meeting with their faculty mentor. IDPs can be used as part of the annual review process to evaluate personal performance and to set new goals.

## **How to Complete Your IDP**

1. **Conduct a self-assessment** of your skills, interests, and core competencies. Use this to identify areas you want to improve or gain more knowledge.
2. **Develop your IDP** based on your self-assessment, career goals, and resources. Frame your goals as SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, timely) goals to improve your ability to reach them. Refer to resources to frame your goals, including NPA's Core Competencies for Postdocs, professional standards within your field, and position descriptions for aspiring positions.
3. **Discuss your goals with your mentor.** Set up a meeting with your faculty mentor to discuss your completed IDP. Develop goals within your current position to achieve your long-term goals and ask for feedback on other goals or opportunities you may not have considered. This is a good opportunity to raise any additional questions regarding your position and set expectations about your working relationship.
4. **Develop an action plan** for accomplishing the goals set out in your IDP, including sub-goals and timelines. Set a time for a follow up meeting.
5. **Secure an accountability partner.** This may be a mentor or peer with whom you share your IDP and who will hold you accountable for achieving your goals.

# Skills Assessment

*There are several general skills assessments available for early career scientists and postdocs, most notably the skills, interests, and values assessments from [Science Careers](#), and assessment of the [Core Competencies](#) from the National Postdoc Association. Postdoc may also incorporate a discipline-specific set of competencies identified within their field of study.*

## **National Postdoc Association Core Competencies for Postdocs** [Core Competencies Assessment](#)

### Discipline-Specific Conceptual Knowledge

Postdocs should have a broad base of knowledge about their discipline, as well as depth of knowledge about their specific research area. Within their research area, postdocs should understand the limitations and gaps of the current research, and how their research can address those deficits. A broad knowledge of research outside their field of expertise can help postdocs to make new connections to their field.

### Research Skill Development

As advanced researchers, postdocs are expected to be able to develop strong experimental design, collect and analyze data, apply for grants, and publish research articles.

### Communication Skills

Postdocs must learn to communicate their research effectively, not only within the research community, but also to a broader, public audience. This includes effective communication in the following areas:

- Writing
- Speaking
- Teaching and Mentoring
- Interpersonal Communication

### Professionalism

Adhere to the professional standards and practices of the immediate workplace, institution, and discipline. Contribute to the professionalism of the discipline through involvement in professional societies, and the institution through involvement in committees or organizations.

The National Postdoc Association identified the following types of professionalism:

- Workplace professionalism – connecting with the immediate working team
- Institutional professionalism – connecting with the research infrastructure
- Collegial professionalism – connecting with the discipline of expertise
- Universal professionalism – connecting with the society in representing expertise

### Leadership and Management Skills

Leadership and management skills include project management, personnel management and supervision, the ability to facilitate effective teamwork, and pursuing leadership opportunities at the local, institutional, regional, and national level.

### Responsible Conduct of Research

Postdocs should participate in training in responsible conduct of research to ensure they are conducting research in ethical and responsible ways.

### **My IDP – Science Careers**

[Skills Assessment](#)

[Interests Assessment](#)

[Values Assessment](#)

# **Individual Development Plan**

## ***Self-Assessment Reflection***

*Use the results of your professional self-assessments, past performance evaluations, and self-reflection to identify areas of strength, your professional interests and values, and areas for improvement.*

### **Strengths**

### **Areas for Interest**

### **Important Values**

### **Areas for Improvement**

## **Individual Development Plan**

### ***Career Goals***

What is your first choice career goal?

What skills are necessary for this career?

What is your second choice career goal?

What skills are necessary for this career?

When would you like to transition into a new role?

What other factors must you consider when developing career opportunities (visa restrictions, partner, family etc.)?





## Resources

AAAS. (2015). *My IDP*. Retrieved from <http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/>

Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB). (2017). *Individual development plan for postdoctoral fellows* [PDF file]. Retrieved from <http://www.faseb.org/portals/2/pdfs/opa/idp.pdf>

Stanford University, Office of Postdoctoral Affairs. (n.d.) *Individual development plan (IDP) – Initial meeting form* [PDF file]. Retrieved from [https://postdocs.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/opa\\_idp-initial\\_0.pdf](https://postdocs.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/opa_idp-initial_0.pdf)