

Mapping Your Future: An IDP for Postdocs



Your postdoctoral fellowship is a great opportunity to move closer to your career goals. Completing an IDP will give you time to reflect on what you need to be successful, and creates an opportunity for you to have constructive conversations with your supervisor and others on how to reach your goals.

Completing an Individual Development Plan

Step 1 **Identifying Goals**
Your fellowship is a time where you need to be productive in your research, career, and professional activities. Setting goals will help you be more successful and purposeful with your time. Use the attached sheets to guide you through this process.

Step 2 **Guidance**
Meet with your supervisor and/or mentor(s) who can help you maximize your research accomplishments and offer guidance on your timeline, areas of skills development, and your career goals.

Step 3 **Review and Reassess**
Visit your IDP annually with your supervisor and mentors. This is a time to evaluate whether you are on track with your research and career goals. Ask your supervisor to provide a written review of what is working well and areas that need more attention. What skills do you still need or want to pursue? Develop a new plan for the upcoming year.



Setting your Goals

Career Goals: What are three careers you would like to be employed in the next 1-3 years? Use Appendix A for help in answering this question. Name 6 people/organizations you have connected with to learn more about these options.

Research Goals: What specific areas of research will you explore during your fellowship? Are there any specific techniques, skills, access to materials, knowledge that you hope to gain? (List 3-5). Appendix C can offer some guidance.

How will you meet your goals? Is there formal training available? Can you learn these informally? Will you need funding to travel? Are any goals contingent on other activities? When is training available?



If a tenure track position is one of your goals, what are the research questions that you would like to explore beyond this fellowship? This will help inform your research statement for your tenure track applications:

Professional Goals: Based on the career directions you have set for yourself, what supporting skills do you intend to work on? Teaching, mentoring, public speaking, grant writing, managing teams, grant writing, time management, business acumen, leadership, project management, etc. (2-5 goals).

Who offers training to help you meet your goals and when is training available?



Goals and Planning

3 Key Accomplishments (from previous timeframe)

Research Goals (for upcoming timeframe)

Professional and Personal Goals (for upcoming timeframe)

Our communication strategy (for upcoming timeframe)
Frequency of meetings, feedback on progress, summary of meetings



Goals and Planning

January

February

March

April

May

June

July

August

September

October

November

December



Progress Report

1. What research goals were met¹? (Did you have any publications, conference presentations, techniques mastered, completion of research projects?)
2. Are there other research activities that you participated in? (Discussion groups, side projects, new collaborations).
3. What professional goals were met?
4. Are there other professional activities that you participated in?
5. What research and professional activities benefited you the most and why?
6. What have been your challenges over the past year to meet your goals? Have you been able to take action to overcome these challenges?

¹ Typically IDP's are planned for one year, however if your fellowship is for a shorter time, then your goals and expectations would need to be adjusted for this shorter time frame.

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| 7. Have you set new research goals for upcoming year? | Yes | No |
| Have you identified new professional and personal goals? | Yes | No |
| Have you completed a new timeline? | Yes | No |

8. Will you need assistance to meet your new goals and how/what will you need?

9. What is your funding situation? Do you need to renew visas, work permits, and related documents?

10. Identified strengths (please give examples of specific situations when possible).

11. Potential Areas for Improvement

12. Supervisor Comments

Name of Employee

Signature

Date

Name of Supervisor

Signature

Date

Leadership Plan

As a postdoctoral fellow, you will have acquired a number of skills beyond the large research toolkit you can list in your CV/resume. These accomplishments set you up towards the next progression – leadership. Leadership takes on many definitions, is culturally based, and can look different in different situations. Transformational leadership (James MacGregor Burns) highlights visionary thinking and coaching a team to bring about change. Your leadership journey will require you to know who you are and to learn about people before you can bring action to a team or organization.



Leading yourself

What are your values? Think about life events that have triggered strong positive emotions for you. Have you thought about creating a mission statement for yourself? How would you brand yourself? You will need to take time to reflect on these questions and how they will play a role in your professional life.

Leading others

Your doctoral work show-cased your ability to work on your own, yet our lives are filled with interactions with people. Over your lifetime you have accumulated many different skills that enable you to work more effectively and positively with others. Have you worked in a team environment? Think about your research collaborations, volunteer roles, academic and former work experiences – what worked well for you and what did not? Have you had to resolve conflicts? Where did you succeed? What are the things that trigger negative responses from you? Know what these are so you are not blind-sided by them and have more time to respond in a professional manner.

Leading organizations

Having spent many years immersed in a research role, many postdocs may not feel they have strong business acumen or experience with organizational strategy. These are key components of leading organizations. Your ability to manage a project, keep abreast of disciplinary and industry issues, and make recommendations for change are all part of business acumen. Setting new research goals, applying for grants, and completing research projects also demonstrate organizational strategies. Think about the strategies that you have in place to make them happen. How can you build on these successes? Who are you adding to your mentorship circle as you build your experiences?

Appendix A. You and your career opportunities

About You

You will want to take a hard look at what are your skills and strengths. Ask your friends, peers, mentors, family, former supervisors what they think are your strengths. Write them down. What are your values? What environments give you energy? What do you want out of a career? Once you feel you have a good idea of what you need to be successful and what you can offer your employer/career option, have a look at the jobs available to you.

Online Resources:

- [VIA Character Strengths Assessment](#) is great for my millennial
- <https://www.truity.com/test/personal-strengths-inventory>
- <https://outsmartyourbrain.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/4DominantCommunicationStyles.pdf>
- Dominant Communication: <https://outsmartyourbrain.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/4DominantCommunicationStyles.pdf>
- <https://www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test>
<http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes2.asp>
- <https://www.valuescentre.com/our-products/products-individuals/personal-values-assessment-pva>
- [Values Survey in eClass Course](#)

Employment

Finding jobs is difficult when you are not even sure what job titles people have and where you can look. The [Government of Canada site](#) has a Career Handbook that allows you to look up different job titles depending on your area of expertise/interest, the Skills and Knowledge section can give you an idea of jobs you may be suited to do, and also links you to current job postings. [ALIS Alberta](#) is a site that can also help you find job titles by pursuing the [OCC info \(Occupation Info\)](#).

With more than 90% of recruiters using LinkedIn to seek out job candidates, you can open the jobs tab at the top of your home page to search out jobs. Most job search sites allow you to set up search agents to send you postings and this can save you time. Reach out to people you find in LinkedIn and ask them if you can do an informational interview about their job.

Best job searching sites include:

[Glassdoor](#)
[Indeed](#)
[LinkedIn](#)

Self Care

Your well being has utmost importance for you to meet your goals. Here are a couple questions to explore:

- When and where do you work best?
- What are your key stressors?
- What supports do you have that help you stay positive, focused, and healthy? (This can include people, apps, sports, hobbies)
- How have you included these supports into balancing your work and personal needs?
- Do you need to do anything different? Will you need different resources/support?

The Informational Interview

A common approach to learn more about a job role, company, or career path is to conduct an informational interview with the person. This can be in person or over the phone and should take no more than 30 minutes. This means you need to have a clear idea of what you want to ask. You can always ask at the end of your interview if you can follow-up with them if you have more questions as you want to be respectful of their time. Follow-up with a thank-you note or email and let them know if you have been successful in your career pursuit. Always good to build your network.

These questions are adapted from the University of Buffalo School of Management handout created for their students. Please rephrase these questions to fit your personality, your knowledge of the industry or issues facing the company, flow of the conversation, and your way of speaking:

Work Life

- Could you describe one of your typical workdays?
- What parts of your job do you find most challenging?
- What do you find most enjoyable?
- Are there any negatives to your job?
- How many hours do you work in a typical week?
- Which seasons of the year are toughest in your job?
- How would you describe the corporate culture?
- Does your work involve any lifestyle changes, such as frequent travel or late-night business events?

State of the Industry

- Is this field growing enough so that there's room for someone like me?
- Are too many or too few people entering this profession?
- What developments on the horizon could affect future opportunities?
- Has your industry changed dramatically in the past five years. What have you seen from inside your company? Where do you think the changes will happen in the next five years?
- Why do people leave this field or company?
- Who are the most important people in the industry today?
- Are there opportunities for self-employment in your field? Where?
- How does your company compare with others?

Money and Advancement

- What would be a reasonable salary range to expect if I entered this field? What is the long-term potential?
- What is the advancement potential in the field? What is a typical path?
- What path brought you to your job?
- If you could start all over again, would you change your career path in any way? Why?
- What is the background of most senior-level executives?

Skills and Experience

- What qualifications do you seek in a new hire?
- How do most people enter this profession?
- What skills are required in your position on a day-to-day basis? Can you share some examples?
- My research experience has been in the area of _____, defining problems such as _____. In your opinion, what types of positions would this experience qualify me?
- What professional journals and organizations should I be aware of?

Appendix B. Considerations for your timeline

Successful timelines require that you consider all your work and personal commitments, as well as how you will cope if things take longer or unexpected events take place. Mapping out your commitments helps balance competing demands on your time, reduces stress, and allows you to take corrective action.

1. **Research Plan and Progress:** Will I be developing my own approach for my research project or am I moving along a predetermined project? Do I need to write a research proposal? Is this a collaborative project and who else will be working on it? What the timelines that have already been established? What are the expectations around the project? How will the research results be managed? How much time do I need to review the literature, experiments, data collection, and analysis? Does my research depend on data/literature from other researchers/libraries/institutions, permissions, or travel visas?
2. **Research Preparation:** What resources do I need in place to move my research forward (human/animal ethics approval; travel visas; courses; access to equipment and facilities, immunizations)?
3. **Teaching and mentoring responsibilities:** Will I have teaching responsibilities? Can I give guest lectures? How much time will I need to allot for course development, developing lectures and assessments, grading, and meeting with students? Am I informally training other members of the research group? Am I mentoring undergraduate students with their research projects?
4. **Professional Development (PD):** Besides taking courses, professional development activities can include networking, participating in society and professional group activities, taking on committee roles, working on your linked in site, meeting a mentor, and doing job information interviews. How much time will I allocate for these activities? What activities will I take on?
5. **Courses/Training:** Are you learning a new technique, required to take a course that allows you to do your field season, or using new voice capture technology for your interviews? Is the course required for your research or for your personal development? Whether your course is formal or informal, you need to determine when you can take it, allot time to learn the material, and think about a back-up plan if you get sick and need to postpone your training.
6. **Fellowship/grant applications:** What grant/fellowship applications are available to me? When are they due? How much time will I need to complete the applications? Do I need materials such as reference letters, and who will provide them? Are there activities I need to pursue to make my application competitive (e.g. leadership/research/volunteer/publication activities)? If I don't secure funding, how will this affect my timeline?
7. **Publication and Presenting:** How will I schedule writing and reading time in my daily routine? How many publications do I want to have published/submitted for review by the end of my program? Will there be co-authors? How will authorship be determined? When and where can I present my research? Who will cover the costs for conferences? Will I need travel visas?
8. **Supervision:** What are my supervisor's expectations around how I spend my time (e.g. being in the lab, research and writing activities, professional development activities, teaching)? How often will we meet? Will I have a formal review after a year?

Personal Considerations

9. **Children:** Do I have children or plan to have children during my fellowship? How much time will I take for maternity/paternity leave? Do I have support systems to help me (daycare, family, friends)? What kind of support can I expect from my supervisor/department/spouse/partner?
10. **Care for elderly parents:** Am I responsible for the care of elderly parents? Do I have support systems? What kind of support can I expect from my supervisor/department/spouse/partner?
11. **Spouse/partner:** Am I in a personal relationship that needs to be nurtured with my time and attention?
12. **Personal goals:** What are my personal goals outside of my academic responsibilities (e.g. participate in a community project, travel, hobbies)?
13. **Exercise and healthfulness:** How will I allot time to exercise and take of my body in my daily routine?

Appendix C. Research Related Activities

While obtaining a tenure-track is only one of many directions to take your postdoctoral experience, having a competitive CV is a necessity. Here are some suggestions to consider during your fellowship:

1. Subscribe to the GAP ([Grant Assist Program](#)) list-serve that is most related to your research division (Social Sciences and Humanities – SSHRC; Science and Engineering – NSERC, Health related – CIHR).
2. Ask you PI/Supervisor if you can see their successful grant applications.
3. Co-write a grant application with a PI.
4. Serve as a journal reviewer.
5. Meet other postdocs and review each other's fellowship/grant applications
6. Attend workshops offered by GAP
7. Learn how research funding is managed at the UofA by attending sessions offered by the Research Service Office.
8. Get writing help from [Academic Success Centre](#) or [Centre for Writers](#).
9. Authorship guidelines can be found on the [FGSR webpage](#)
10. Copyright assistance is provided by the [Copyright Office](#)
11. Intellectual Property [guidelines](#)
12. Get assistance from UofA Libraries for writing (how to link in your references using Endnote and similar options), how to manage your research data and materials, how to access and create public databases and more. Connect to the [UofA Libraries](#).