INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (IDP)

***Theoretical Framework***

The development of an Individual Development Plan is grounded in the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) Framework. SCCT is a theory that incorporates a variety of concepts (such as interests, abilities, values and environmental factors) in order to explain how academic and career interests develop, how educational and career choices are made and how academic and career success is obtained.\* Three intricately linked variables serve as the basic building blocks of SCCT: 1) self-efficacy beliefs, which refer to an individual’s personal beliefs about his or her capabilities to perform particular behaviors or courses of action; 2) Outcomes expectations, which refer to beliefs about the consequences or outcomes of performing particular behaviors; and 3) personal goals, which can be defined as one’s intentions to engage in a particular activity or to attain a certain level of performance.

***IDP goals***

The purpose of the IDP is to provide a planning process that identifies both professional development needs and career objectives. IDPs also serve as a communication tool between individuals and their mentors. The goals of the IDP can be summarized as follows:

1. Identify short and long-term career goals and discussion of time frame for program completion
2. Define milestones for expected scholarly contribution, including authorship of publications, grant writing, presentations, *etc*.
3. Determine the trainees progress in development of relevant skills
4. Identify professional development resources that may be beneficial for the trainee

The IDP focuses on the development of the core competencies of the National Postdoctoral Association (outlined below) and their development in line with the trainee’s career aspirations.

* Discipline specific conceptual knowledge
* Research skill development
* Communication skills
* Professionalism
* Leadership and Management skills
* Responsible conduct of research

**IDP Process**

The development, implementation and revision of the IDP requires a series of interactive steps that should be conducted by both the trainee and their mentor. A summary is presented here, but each step outlines in more detail below.

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|  | For Trainees | For Mentors |
| Step 1 | Conduct a self-assessment; identify skills, interests and target areas for improvement, gain of knowledge or strengthening of skills. | Become familiar with available opportunities. |
| Step 2 | Discuss goals and opportunities with mentor. | Discuss opportunities with trainee. |
| Step 3 | Write an IDP, share with mentor and revise, if needed. | Review trainee’s IDP and offer input. |
| Step 4 | Implement the IDP. Revise the IDP as needed. | Establish regular review of progress and help revise the IDP as needed. |

***IDP Timeline***

* Within the first month of the program start: the trainee will use the IDP form in order to create a draft of their IDP.
* Within the first three months of the program start: the trainee schedules a meeting with their mentor to discuss the IDP draft. During the meeting, the trainee’s goals and accomplishments will be discussed in the light of the core competencies and the trainee’s career aspirations.
* After the meeting, the trainee will revise the form and present it to the mentor for finalization and signature. This will serve to formalize the process and document the meeting outcomes.
* At 6 months and 12 months: the mentor and trainee will have follow-up meetings where the IDP can be revised and amended as necessary.
* If a trainee is entering a second year of the program, the mentor and trainee will have follow-up meetings where the IDP can be revised and amended as necessary every 6 months.

***References:***

\*Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D. and Hackett, G. 1994. “Toward a Unifying Social Cognitive Theory of Career and Academic Interest, Choice, and Performance” [Monograph]. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 45:79-122.

**Step 1. Conduct a Self-Assessment.**

A) Take a realistic look at your current skills and strengths and identify areas that need development. Also talk to your mentors, peers, family and friends about what they see as your strengths and needs. Some skills that are particularly relevant to scientific careers are listed below, but feel free to add additional ones.

Rate yourself in the following areas (strong, acceptable or needs improvement):

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| **Skill** | **Rating** |
| • technical abilities/bench skills |  |
| • knowledge/familiarity with scientific literature |  |
| • logic and problem solving abilities |  |
| • quantitative skills/statistics |  |
| • social skills/networking/collaboration/conflict management |  |
| • writing skills |  |
| • oral communication skills |  |
| • organizational ability |  |
| • self-motivation |  |
| • decision-making |  |
| • creativity |  |
| • work ethic |  |
| • perseverance |  |
| • ability/desire to take risks |  |

B) Think about how you allocate your time and effort. From now until your next meeting with your mentor, what percentage of your time should be spent on the following components of the program experience?

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| **Activity** | **Time** |
| • Research |  |
| • Background reading |  |
| • Grant writing |  |
| • Paper writing |  |
| • Coursework |  |
| • Attending research-related meetings or seminars |  |
| • Presenting at research meetings |  |
| • Teaching/Supervising junior students |  |
| • Organizing group activities/serving on committees |  |
| • Job search process |  |

C) Outline your short term (1 – 12 months) and long term (10-15 years) career objectives. Some questions to ask yourself include:

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| --- | --- |
| **Questions** | **Career Objectives** |
| • What question do I want my research to address? |  |
| Do I have a clear plan for how to proceed? |
| • How many presentations (poster/oral) do I expect |  |
| to result from my research? |
| • How many research papers and reviews do I expect |  |
| to publish from my research? |
| • What type of work would I like to be doing |  |
| immediately after this program? |
| • What type of career do I desire? (academic research |  |
| and /or teaching, non-academic research, nonresearch- |
| related e.g. consulting, policy, writing) |
| • What is important to me in a career? |  |
| • What skills are most important in my desired career? |  |
| • Who are my best role models for that career? |  |

**Step 2. Discuss Assessment with Mentor**

* Make time for a dedicated discussion, separate from your research discussions.
* Identify your developmental needs by comparing current skills and strengths with those needed for your career goals.
* Prioritize your developmental areas and discuss with your mentor how these should be addressed.

**Step 3. Write an IDP (see template on next page)**

The IDP maps out the general path you want to take and helps match skills and strengths to your career choices. It is a changing document, since needs and goals will almost certainly evolve over time. The aim is to build upon current strengths and skills by identifying areas for development and providing a way to address these. Each of the six core competencies should be addressed within this document. The template provided is just that, a template; feel free to expand the template as deemed necessary.

The specific objectives of a typical IDP are to:

* 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.

**Step 4. Implement Your Plan**

The plan is just the beginning of the career development process and serves as the road map.

Now, put your plan into action! 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. Review the plan with your mentor during your 3 month, 6 month and 12 month meetings. Revise the plan on the basis of these discussions.

**Individual Development Plan (IDP)**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Mentor: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date Reviewed with Mentor: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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| **SKILL** | **CURRENT ABILITY** | **TARGET ABILITY** | **DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY** | **CRITERIA TO JUDGE SUCCESS** | **TIME FRAME** | **EVIDENCE** |
| **Discipline specific conceptual knowledge** | | | | | | |
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| **Research skill development** | | | | | | |
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| **Communication Skills** | | | | | | |
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| **Professionalism** | | | | | | |
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| **Leadership and Management Skills** | | | | | | |
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| **Responsible Conduct of Research** | | | | | | |
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