

Professional Development Plan for NCSA Postdocs

Professional Development Plans (PDPs) provide a planning process that identifies both professional development needs and career objectives. Furthermore, PDPs serve as a communication tool between individuals and their mentors.

Goals:

Help individuals identify:

- Long-term career options they wish to pursue and the necessary tools to meet these; and
- Short-term needs for improving current performance.

Benefits:

Postdoctoral research associates will have a process that assists in developing long-term goals. Identifying short-term goals will give them a clearer sense of expectations and help identify milestones along the way to achieving specific objectives. The PDP also provides a tool for communication between the postdoc and mentors.

Outline of PDP Process:

The development, implementation and revision of the PDP require a series of steps to be conducted by the postdoc and their mentor(s). These steps are an interactive effort, and so both the postdoc and the mentor(s) must participate fully in the process.

BASIC STEPS		
	For Postdocs	For Mentors
Step 1:	Conduct a self assessment	Become familiar with available opportunities
Step 2:	Survey opportunities with mentor	Discuss opportunities with postdoc

Step 3:	Write a PDP, share PDP with mentor and revise	Review PDP and help revise
Step 4:	Implement the plan; Review PDP once per semester for duration of appointment and revise as needed	Implement the plan; Review PDP once per semester for duration of appointment and revise as needed

Execution of the PDP Process

...For Postdocs

Step 1. Conduct a self assessment.

- Assess your skills, strengths and areas that need development.
- Take a realistic look at your current abilities. This is a critical part of career planning.
- Outline your long-term career objectives. Ask yourself:
 - What type of work would I like to be doing?
 - Where would I like to be in an organization?
 - What is important to me in a career?

Step 2. Survey Opportunities with Mentor.

- Identify career opportunities 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 a PDP.

The PDP maps out the general path you want to take and helps match skills and strengths to your career choices. It is an evolving document, since needs and goals will almost certainly change over time as a postdoc. 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 PDP are to:

- Establish effective dates for the durations of your postdoc appointment.
- Identify specific skills and strengths that you need to develop (based on discussions with your mentor(s)).

- 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 PDP with your mentor.
- Revise the PDP as appropriate.

Step 4. Implement your Plan.

The plan is just the beginning of the career development process and serves as the road map. Now it's time to take action!

- Put your plan into action.
- Review the plan once per semester with your mentor(s) and revise and modify the plan as necessary.

...For Mentors

Step 1. Become familiar with available opportunities.

By virtue of your experience you should already have knowledge of some career opportunities and trends in job opportunities.

Step 2. Discuss opportunities with postdoc.

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 PDP and help revise.

Provide honest feedback- both positive and negative – to help the postdoc set realistic goals. Agree on a development plan that will allow postdocs to be productive and adequately prepare them for their chosen career.

Step 4. Establish regular review of progress.

The mentor should meet with the postdoc once per semester to assess progress, expectations and changing goals.