Your Individual Development Plan (IDP) is an ongoing guide – developed by you with input and support from your Supervisor – for charting your career path and achieving your goals. Creating an IDP is the first step in taking ownership of your career. This exercise should help you identify your professional strengths and opportunities, and determine individual goals and the specific learning activities needed to reach those goals.

# Where Do You Begin?

An IDP can help set you up for success in the job you have, while preparing you for the job you want. Whether you have created an IDP before or not, these tips will help you better identify and describe your goals, choose tasks that will help you achieve these goals, and document key information important to support, measure and manage the work necessary to advance your career.

# Brainstorm and Prepare

Thinking about your career and professional aspirations, answer these questions:

1. How am I doing in my current job?
* In what areas do I excel?
* In what areas do I fall short, and what can I do to improve?
* Do I have all of the skills necessary to succeed?
1. What are my short-term career goals and developmental needs?
2. What developmental activities in my current job could help me develop for my target job?
3. Are there projects or experiences at work that could be helpful in my development?
4. Are there formal learning opportunities (e.g., conferences, trainings, classes) that I would like to participate in?

Be open and honest with yourself about the answers to these questions and the work you need to do to advance your career. Seek the perspectives of others in the work place such as your direct team, peers, mentors and Supervisor. Most importantly, document any goals or tactics that stand out during your brainstorm.

# Create Smart, Stretch Goals

What got you here won’t get you there. Do not be afraid of setting tough, but realistic, career goals. Good career goals will help you to identify and focus your developmental efforts, bringing you closer to where you want to be in your career. Make sure your IDP goals:

1. Complement the mission, vision, goals and competencies of the organization.
2. Are SMART – Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound.
3. Include any competencies you wish to develop.
4. Contain the strategies you will use to accomplish your goals.
5. Include the resources and support you will need.

# Options for Development

There are many ways to learn and development. Below are some alternatives to training that you can use to accomplish your developmental goals.

## On-the-Job Training

Studies suggest that 70% of learning happens while a team member is performing his or her job. Learning occurs every time you take on a new challenge or encounter a new situation at work. If you know the goals you are trying to accomplish, you can actively seek new ways to learn that will get you closer to achieving those goals. Here are a few examples of on-the-job learning:

1. Challenging projects.
2. Added responsibilities.
3. Stretch assignments (i.e., a task that is beyond your current knowledge or skill level to help “stretch” you developmentally).
4. Rotational work assignments.
5. Cross-Training assignments.

## Learning from Others

Whenever you get feedback from a peer or meet with a mentor or trusted advisor, you are experiencing valuable learning that can help you achieve your career goals. Here are a few ways you can learn from others:

1. 360-degree feedback / peer feedback.
2. Mentorship.
3. Team projects.
4. Direct reports and peers.
5. Job shadowing.
6. Networking.

## Learning through Education

Formal learning is another way to gain the knowledge and skills that can help you reach your career goals. These learning opportunities are usually focused on specific topics with well-defined learning objectives (or objectives for what you will be able to do afterward). The following are some examples of learning through education:

1. Assessments.
2. Targeted training.
3. Continued education.
4. Industry groups, Seminars, or Conference.
5. Reading and research.

# Prepare to Overcome Obstacles in Your Career

Most, if not all, people will encounter obstacles that stand in the way of pursuing their career goals. Whether obstacles arise in the workplace or in your personal life, it will be up to you to work through them. First, identify what is holding you back. Seek out feedback from other team members, peers, your supervisor or other trusted sources. Then, find and apply resources to side-step or overcome the hurdle. See if any of the following obstacles resonate with you:

## I Don't Have Time to Set Goals

You’re a busy person with a lot of commitments. So, it’s easy to feel overwhelmed when you try to fit career development into an already packed schedule. Remember you aren’t alone – reach out to a supervisor or mentor for help deciding the areas you should focus on. Start small and work with them to brainstorm one or two simple, straightforward career goals for the upcoming year. Once you have had practice creating clear and measurable goals, the task won’t seem as difficult or time-consuming in the future.

## I Feel Unsure of My Skills and Abilities

Not having confidence in yourself and your skills and abilities can sometimes keep you from doing your best work and moving forward in your career. People experience a lack of confidence for many different reasons – you might think you’ll look foolish if you try something new or different. Or, you might think you’ll disappoint yourself or your coworkers if you suggest an uncommon solution or innovative approach. Seek support from a mentor or reach out to a human resources team member to discuss your uncertainty.

## I Like My Job, but I Do Not Know Where to Go Next in My Career

You enjoy your job, but you have been in the same one for some time. It’s becoming difficult to stay motivated and you no longer feel like you are learning new skills. You are ready for a new challenge and you're ready to take that next step in your career, but you don’t know where to start. Reach out to human resources for career mapping resources or search them online.

## I Don’t Have the Experience and Training Needed for my Target Job

You shouldn’t rule out a career possibility because of a lack of experience or training. These things can often be acquired, especially if you have the strengths and talents needed for a particular position. Your career is not a sprint, it’s a life long journey. Keeping in this mind, review the Options for Development on Page 2 of this reference aid and think about how you might create a plan to gain experience and training needed for a target job.