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Introduction

Career development is an iterative multi-stage process of self-assessment, career exploration, career choice refinement and finally focused job searching. This guide provides an overview of the process and key resources for each stage. The National Postdoctoral Association (NPA) has developed this guide for postdocs to help them navigate their career exploration and job search experiences.

The NPA has also developed “A Postdoc’s Guide to the Postdoc Timeline” to help postdocs plan and gain success in their professional development and career goals.
The Key Stages of the Career Development and Job Search Process

The process of moving from career exploration through the job search process is well-characterized by the video developed by the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF MIND: The Fantasy, The Ideal, and The Reality of Career Exploration). A summary of the steps can be easily viewed in The MIND Career Exploration Road Map (also developed by the MIND program at UCSF).

**About Career Exploration**

Consider aspects to incorporate into your future career and learn about potential career options to start. Self-assessment tools take inventory of your skills (things you’re good at), your interests (things you like to do), and your values (job attributes that are important to you) to identify satisfying careers that might be a great fit. You can also explore by researching different career fields, trying out careers using a job simulations tool or taking on part-time internships, and talking to people who are in various careers through informational interviewing and networking.

**About Job Searching**

Once you've gone through the career exploration and refinement process, you’re ready to move into your focused job search. This phase involves developing focused job search materials, preparing for interviews, and preparing for the negotiation phase once an offer is made.
Career Exploration

Self-Assessment

Self-assessment is important throughout the career process. An initial self-assessment can help you identify and refine your interests, ideal work tasks and environments as well as your work style. Periodic self-assessment can also help guide you in creating your individual development plan and refining your goals as you move through your postdoc.

Some good self-assessment websites oriented toward those with doctoral degrees include myIDP and ImaginePhD. If you are interested in pursuing an academic career, check out the Academic Career Readiness Assessment developed by UCSF.

Career Paths and Options

There are a variety of career options after the completion of your postdoc. Fortunately, there are also a number of sources to help you understand and explore these different paths. Some common paths include research, teaching, administration, policy, communication, consulting and entrepreneurship. The positions can be in all areas of research enterprise including: higher education, other non-profit organizations, industry, government agencies or a business you may start yourself.

Excellent tools include:

- Overview of PhD Career Fields by the University of Chicago myCHOICE Program
- InterSECT Job Simulations (try out potential careers)

Informational Interviewing and Networking

As part of your exploration, you want to conduct test-runs to see if one or more potential career paths is a good fit. In addition to reading and researching paths, another great strategy is to conduct informational interviews. Informational interviews are informal conversations that help you learn more about what it's like to work in a particular type of position.

Networking is also a critical part of the career exploration and job search processes. Networking involves creating focused connections within your area of career interests. Networking can serve many purposes, including identifying sources for informational interviews, potential job leads, or potential professional collaborators and mentors. Many people are uncomfortable with the idea of networking, but good networking involves a mutually beneficial connection, and it's important to remember that you also bring value to the relationship. The Career Center at UC Berkeley has compiled a guide for Informational Interviewing.

Creating and maintaining an up-to-date LinkedIn profile is great way to stay in touch with people you meet. Many recruiters use LinkedIn to search for talent, so having a complete profile is very helpful for the job search.
Career Exploration (continued)

An important tool during both the networking and interview processes is the elevator pitch. The elevator pitch is a short statement that briefly explains your research and career goals. Developing a succinct and focused statement that can be adapted for different contexts is an art developed with practice. The American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (ASBMB) has created a short video that discusses tips for elevator pitches, introductions, and etiquette.
Job Search

Job Search Materials

During the job search process, you may be asked to submit a variety of materials. Frequently, this will include a focused cover letter and either CV or resume. However, this may also include a teaching or diversity statement, or samples of publications or other work products depending on the position sought. Several elements are important to this process. First, your documents should be focused toward the position and speak directly to the skills requested in the job description. To be the most competitive, it is important to demonstrate your fit, either through direct or transferable skills. Second, if you are applying online, the automated tracking system (ATS) may screen your materials for key word fit with the position. The Graduate School at Cornell University has prepared examples of job search materials.

Interviewing

Interviewing is the process where you and the employer both ask questions to see if you are a good fit for the positions. While it is important to sound natural during the interview, it is also important to prepare for the interview so that you make sure you showcase your relevant skills and are not caught off-guard by some of the questions.

UCSF Office of Career and Professional Development has compiled interview tips for postdocs who are interviewing for academic jobs and job outside academia:

- Academic Jobs
- Jobs Outside Academia

Negotiating

Negotiating is a key part of the job search process, but one that many candidates are uncomfortable with. However, employers often expect you to negotiate, and it’s important for you to research competitive salaries for the type of position, background and geographic area. Practicing negotiating can also help you feel more comfortable and prepared when you reach that point. The article “Get What You Seek” published in Nature reviews some negotiating tips for PhDs.
Helpful Career Resources

Career Development

As you move through the career development process, it is important to be aware of and take advantage of the many resources available to you. These resources listed below may include written sources, workshops, presentations, panels or webinars, individual appointments or group meetings, and other types of engagement. Some of the categories of resources include:

- Your Postdoctoral Development Office (PDO)
- Your organizational or regional Postdoctoral Development Association (PDA)
- The National Postdoctoral Association (NPA)
- Your campus career development office (as a postdoc or as an alum)
- Career programs in professional associations and conferences
- Career columns in publications (science-focused or general higher education)
- Online groups, blogs and other social media aimed at doctoral and postdoctoral careers
- Books and articles

Helpful books:


Guides for Career Exploration and the Job Search Process

There are several career guides that have been developed with the graduate student and postdoctoral scholar in mind. These guides cover details around exploration, informational interviewing and networking, developing resumes, CV’s and cover letters, interviewing and negotiating. Some of these guides include:

- UCLA Career Preparation Toolkit for Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Scholars
- Career Planning Guide, The Graduate Center, City University of New York
Helpful Career Resources (continued)

- University of South Florida Graduate Student Career Guide
- University of Georgia Graduate Student Career Guide
- Videocasts and online resource guides prepared by the NIH Office of Intramural Training and Education (OITE)

Check your institutional website and career center for resources and services available to your own your campus.

Websites for Career Exploration and the Job Search Process

There are a number of websites developed to consolidate career exploration and job search information for postdoctoral scholars. Here are several examples:

- University of North Carolina Career Resources for Postdocs
- Harvard Medical School/Harvard School of Dental Medicine, Office for Postdoctoral Fellows, Career Information
- Duke University Office of Postdoctoral Services
Career Issues for Specific Populations

Career searching can be both exciting and challenging. However, there may be additional challenges and questions for specific populations. International candidates, underrepresented candidates, parents, LGBTQ and other populations may face specific issues. The NPA website has additional resources on its International and Diversity pages.
Conclusion

You have a huge variety of career options available and this may sometimes feel overwhelming. However, it is important to remember that there are many career resources available to help you with the process. Working with others, whether a PDO or career specialist, a PDA support group, or others via social media are all great ways to stay focused, receive feedback and feel supported through the process.

*Best of Luck from the NPA!!*