The Individual Development Plan (IDP) is widely used in the workplace to assist employees in mapping out and achieving their career goals. Students who complete an IDP finish their programs faster and have an easier transition into the workplace. Using the IDP, you will identify activities and actions that align with your career goals and will develop a plan to address skills gaps you would like to strengthen. As you prepare your IDP and professional development direction, here are actions you may want to consider.

TIPS

1. **Take adequate time.** It can take more than a day to really explore career options. Follow current trends about job markets. Keep an open mind about various career paths. Many positions such as tenure track jobs have limited openings and therefore you need to plan for more than one path. Consider carefully your career goals and values and be realistic about your career path. Recognize your career directions may also change over time.

2. **Secure funding.** Funding options might include Teaching or Research Assistant (TA/RA) positions, scholarships/grants, internships, and other forms of employment on and off campus. Funding can lead to experience in the workplace and the opportunity to explore career options.

3. **Understand your academic requirements.** You need to plan your academic progress to successfully complete your program. This includes planning for scholarship/grant applications, candidacy exams, ethics and IPD/PD requirements. Find out early what your requirements are and be aware of any deadlines associated with them.

4. **Prioritize.** Develop long-range and short-term plans that consider coursework, program requirements, research and publication, family and work obligations, and personal goals. Schedule your time and do the important things first. Map out a monthly or week-by-week basis ensuring that it aligns with your long-range plan for program completion.

5. **Double the time.** Unexpected challenges can and do arise. Most people underestimate the time needed for experiments, the acquisition of data, and securing primary/secondary resources. Build in contingency plans. Securing travel visas, funding, and permissions to gain access to library materials can take time. What will you do if these things fall through?

6. **Consider other schedules.** Your program will require you to work with other people and perhaps booking access to other facilities. You will need to consider the availability of your supervisor and/or committee members as you plan your research and meeting major academic milestones.

7. **Get it done.** Whether you are thesis or course based, your program is a stepping-stone in your career path. Recognize that you will not be able to explore all the complexities of the questions you are exploring in your research or studies. Complete your program and move on.

8. **Practice good communication.** Understand your supervisor’s expectations and share your own. Provide a schedule of what you hope to accomplish short and long term and meet regularly with your supervisor/committee to discuss your progress.

9. **Network and get involved.** Take responsibility to connect with people in your research area and careers in which you are interested. There are many ways to be engaged with the larger university community as well as the external community. For example, sharing your research will develop your network and communication skills. Engaging the general public and demonstrating your research relevance to society will also build your passion for your discipline.

10. **Revisit your IDP annually.** A highly valued and least practiced activity is reflection. Take time to chart your progress, evaluate where you want/need to be in six months or a year, and identify a plan that can get you there. Your goals may have changed from the previous year, different opportunities may have presented themselves, and you need to make space in your calendar to think clearly about the direction you will take.
Researching Your Career Options

• Career Centre at University of Alberta http://www.caps.ualberta.ca
• Speak with faculty members
• LinkedIn
• Society/Associations/Organizations in Discipline
• Alberta Learning Information Services (ALIS) http://alis.alberta.ca/index.html
• City of Edmonton http://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/jobs.aspx
• North America Industry Classification http://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/subjects/standard/naics/2012/index
• US Department of Labor https://www.dol.gov
• What Can I Do With This Major - www.isu.edu/career/majors/default.html
• www.jobbank.gc.ca (Government of Canada)
• www.jobs.alberta.ca (Government of Alberta)
• www.academia.edu/Jobs (Academic, Research Assistant, Postdocs)
• http://www.universityaffairs.ca/search-job/ (University Affairs Academic job postings)
• http://www.researchgate.net/jobs (Academic, Research Assistant, Postdoc)