National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Career Academy for Natural Resources
Natural Resource Stewardship Training Program

Professional Development Plan
For Natural Resource Professionals

National Park Service
Natural Resource Stewardship Training
Stephen T. Mather Training Center
www.nps.gov/training/nrs/

This guide is intended to be used in conjunction with the National Park Service, Career Academy for Natural Resources E-learning course *Introduction to the Career Academy for Natural Resources and Foundational Natural Resource Series*. This guide can be used as a stand-alone document; however, users may be better served using it in conjunction with the course. Register on DOI Learn and take the course too!

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Introduction

Why Create a Professional Development Plan?

A professional development plan is a roadmap to help you take charge of your career progress and develop the seven essential natural resource and additional leadership competencies. Working with your supervisor and others, you can identify the competencies and developmental activities that will help you accomplish the important work the National Park Service (NPS) requires of you and build skills for your future.

This document is designed to help you work through steps of self-evaluation that you can use to begin to develop your roadmap. In the following steps you will:

Work through exercises to remind you of some of your most satisfying and energizing work experiences.

- Answer questions that help you explore your career goals.
- Understand the benefits of engaging others in a collaborative learning environment.
- Understand how to use competencies in creating a development plan.
- Plan developmental activities that will enrich and expand your current and future performance.
- Take action to build your career plan.
- Assess and move forward.

Working through this document will provide information that you and your supervisor can use to develop your Individual Development Plan (IDP). The IDP Resource Guide will help you understand how supervisors and employees work together to develop an IDP. You can download the guide at Training Resources section of the Natural Resource Stewardship (NRS) Training web page. The developmental activities that are identified to strengthen your natural resource and leadership competencies are recorded on an IDP. Several examples of completed IDPs are included in Appendix D.

Creating a professional development plan is your responsibility. The plan looks at your career over a long time-period. It is dynamic and will change as you progress. Update it to reflect your growth, celebrate your accomplishments and address new challenges or opportunities.

The Planning Process

I. Know Your Story

As your career journey unfolds and you pursue professional development, there is ample support along the way from the NPS, your supervisor, colleagues, mentors, and your professional network. To embark on this journey, the most important story is yours and what you want to achieve in your career.

Different kinds of exercises can help you narrow down how your professional passions may best align with your career direction. In this guide you will be provided with a series of questions that can help you think about the decisions you need to make. Some choices may be very clear, others more difficult.

You may want to keep a career journal to record and later reflect on what you discover about your experiences. Journaling aids you in analyzing current and past experiences, and learning

more about yourself, your interests and strengths. A journal is a way to set goals, consider career-related assignments, projects and tasks, and track progress. It heightens self-awareness and records valuable information.

Here is an exercise to start your reflection process. The questions will remind you of what you like and don't like doing. It will help you define your capabilities and strengths so you can build on them. Turn to Appendix A to record your responses. This can be the start of your journaling.

Visualize and write down some notes about a work experience that was very satisfying and energizing for you. Here are a few questions to use in learning from this experience:

- What knowledge, abilities and talents did you use?
- What was achieved?
- Did your efforts seem to be a valuable contribution?
- Who did you work with and how was it a rewarding experience?
- What influence did you have?
- What was most satisfying for you?
- How was your career passion reinforced?
- How can you bring more of this experience into your career?

Visualize a work experience that was very dissatisfying for you and describe the worst aspects of it. Use the criteria above to remember what you don't like or want in a work situation.

II. Engage Others

Colleagues, mentors, supervisors, and co-workers can help you create a collaborative learning environment and support your career development. Encourage others to help you focus on the most important parts of your job performance, ask for feedback about your demonstrated strengths and progress, and work with people who can help you learn from your mistakes.

Openly address issues and share experiences, resources, and best practices with **colleagues** in your professional network including federal and state agencies, universities, and your local community. Expanding your interdisciplinary professional network is essential for effective performance and career growth. In today's world, technology and social networking support wide-spread professional collaboration.

Mentors are experienced professionals who can ask questions, listen, and give advice, guidance and feedback. They recognize that there are different ways to reach a destination and know people and resources that can help you get there. Mentors within the NPS can share their institutional memory, often knowing what has been tried and why it worked or didn't work. Connecting with mentors can be centered on specific resource issues, moving to new or more complex assignments, or more broadly around your career choices and development. Engaging with well-chosen mentors encourages win-win outcomes.

Your **supervisor**, along with you and your **co-workers**, are collectively responsible for shaping an environment of continual learning, performance improvement and preparation for future challenges and assignments. In the next section you will learn more about using competencies to determine your developmental needs. Enlist others to help you identify and prioritize competencies for development, observe what people are doing to demonstrate a well-performed competency, and identify an array of learning opportunities to build competencies.

III. Explore Competencies

Your professional development plan is a tool for identifying and developing the essential natural resource stewardship competencies you need for quality performance. A competency is a combination of knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviors which, when acquired, allows employees to perform a task or function at a defined level of proficiency. All federal positions and many private sector jobs are based upon competencies. National Park Service universal competencies are needed at all levels by all employees across all career fields. National Park Service technical competencies are specific to a given occupation like natural resources.

The natural resource career field has identified seven essential core competencies. The natural resource competencies have been categorized, and further refined into two functions, the discipline specialist and program manager. Descriptions can be found on the Competencies page of the NRS Training website.

Exploring the website competencies page, select “Competencies for Discipline Specialist” or “Competencies for Program Manager” on the left menu. You will notice that there are three levels within both sets of competencies. Select the level of your position from the tabs labeled entry/ developmental, journey, or advanced to see the essential competencies and sub-competencies at each level. For easy reference, you can print the competency guide for the discipline specialist or program manager which displays all levels of the sub-competencies in a table format.

When planning your developmental needs, compare the sub-competencies required by your current position and level to your capabilities. Once you have developed the skills needed for your current job, compare them to the skills needed at the next level to help you determine future developmental needs.

Natural resource competencies identify the need for leadership skills at all levels. The NPS uses the Executive Core Qualifications for developing leaders and five leadership competencies:

- Leading Change
- Leading People
- Results Driven
- Business Acumen
- Building Coalitions

These competencies apply to all employees and managers. You can learn more about them by visiting the Office of Personnel Management’s Senior Executive Service Executive Core Qualifications page.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Conservation Training Center has an excellent Leadership Competency Development Model.

IV. Professional Development Planning

Professional development planning is a long-term process designed to help you with your road map, perform self-assessments, determine developmental needs, reflect on your growth, acknowledge successes, and address new career directions and development.

- **Exploring Your Career Goals: A Professional Development Questionnaire**

Now that you have a better understanding of competencies, another exercise and series of questions will be valuable to help you focus on your professional development. Completing Appendix B, Exploring Your Career Goals: A Professional Development Questionnaire will help you further define and describe your career aspirations, interests, priorities and goals. Think about and use the information you captured in the Know Your Story Exercise. The responses to these questions will help you fill out your professional development plan in the next section.

- **Professional Development Plan**

Use the information from the Know Your Story exercise and Professional Development Questionnaire to begin crafting a professional development plan. Your professional development plan is a tool for identifying and developing the essential natural resource stewardship competencies you need for quality performance. The form for this exercise is in Appendix C. You can capture the information any way that you choose. It is important that you record your information so it is useful to you, and you can retrieve it to work with your supervisor and mentors. Update your plan to reflect your growth and prepare for future assignments.

V. Take Action

You have the responsibility for determining your career goals and future professional and leadership directions. Use your professional development plan to prepare for your meetings with your supervisor to discuss the competencies, knowledge, skills and abilities required of your current position. Be prepared to discuss your developmental needs and short- and long-term goals. This is also a good time to print and review the IDP Resource Guide which describes the role of the employee and supervisor in this process. It also describes a variety of developmental activities.

Steps for you and your supervisor:

1. **Discuss your expectations** and your supervisor's expectations about your work as an individual, and as a team member. Review your current and upcoming responsibilities and assignments.
2. **Select and agree** on no more than two or three professional development sub-competencies and one or two leadership development sub-competencies for you to further develop.
    - Decide what key tasks need to be accomplished for each sub-competency.
    - Describe what successful performance of key tasks look like so that you have a shared expectation of your targeted performance. How will each sub-competency be demonstrated when it is performed well or, what does it look like in action?
3. **Prioritize** which sub-competencies to further develop and then research, agree on, and schedule developmental activities that will build these competencies. Establish ways to apply what you are learning and measure your improved performance.

- The Career Academy for Natural Resources is designed to help you in performing the essential core competencies by providing a wide variety of learning opportunities that can help you succeed in your job. For information about the Career Academy for Natural Resources, please visit the Natural Resource Stewardship Training website.

4. **Build your IDP** to schedule the developmental activities that will strengthen your performance of the identified competencies and record ways you can apply and measure new learning and skills. This form will be signed by you and your supervisor indicating mutual support of the plan. Sample IDP forms are included in the Appendix D.

VI. Assess and Move Forward

Take time to reflect on and assess your experiences and progress. Asking some questions can help increase your self-awareness and influence your choices.

- Are you clarifying and moving towards your career goals and expanding your job performance?
- Have you taken some risks, and sought out challenging projects or assignments? What is the payoff for you?
- Have you identified and worked with one or more mentors? What are the benefits of these experiences?
- Are you asking for and receiving ongoing feedback about your performance, both the task and relationship roles and functions?
- How have you increased your skills as an interdisciplinary team member and leader?
- What have you learned in the past year about yourself and your career?

Revisit your responses to the Exploring Your Career Goal: A Professional Development Questionnaire, Appendix B and find out what has changed. Professional development planning is a long-term process designed to reflect your growth, acknowledge successes and address new career directions and development.

Appendixes

Appendix A

Know Your Story Exercise

Visualize and write down some notes about a work experience that was very satisfying and energizing for you. Here are a few criteria to use in learning from this experience.

- What knowledge, abilities and talents did you use?
- What was achieved?
- Did your efforts seem to be a valuable contribution?
- Who did you work with and how was it a rewarding experience?
- What influence did you have?
- What was most satisfying for you?
- How was your career passion reinforced?
- How can you bring more of this experience into your career?

Visualize a work experience that was very dissatisfying for you and describe the worst aspects of it. Use the criteria above to remember what you don't like or want in a work situation.

Appendix B

Exploring Your Career Goals:
A Professional Development Questionnaire

Reflect on and capture some of your satisfying and dissatisfying experiences as you respond to the following questions that are designed to help you to further explore your career aspirations, interests, priorities and goals. Write as much as you can for each question. Use them with a partner, supervisor, colleague, or mentor—or on your own. They can help you develop and refine your professional development plan.

"To love what you do and feel that it matters—how could anything be more fun?" – Katherine Graham

1. What are my overall career aspirations and goals, over the next year, five years and twenty years?

2. What experiences could help me explore my career possibilities? Consider opportunities such as temporary job rotation, details, committee and task force assignments, project assignments, coaching, mentoring, learning groups, professional organizations, networking, reading, volunteer work, shadow assignments, classroom and e-learning courses.

3. What specific contributions do I want to make in natural resources management and to NPS?

4. What are my career field competency strengths? What competencies need further development and why?

5. What are my leadership strengths? What leadership competencies need further development and why?

6. What professional achievements am I most proud of and why? What strengths do I want to enhance that relate to my achievements?

7. What work interests me the most? What people do I like working with? What influence do I want to have and why?

8. What can I do to advance my science and scholarship on a continuing basis?

9. What can I do to advance my professional credibility and scientific integrity?

10. What can I do to expand my professional networking?

11. How can I enhance my interdisciplinary collaboration and team work? How can I better engage with partners?

12. What professional and personal factors will impact my choices this year and over the next three years?

13. What potential changes within and outside of NPS—challenges, opportunities, budgets, new requirements, changing technology and trends—could impact my job and career this year and over the next three years?

Appendix C
Professional Development Plan

Name: _____ **Title/Series/Grade:** _____ **Date:** _____

	Current Year	Next 5 Years
Professional Goals		
Work Assignments and Developmental Activities		
Natural Resource Competencies to Develop		
Competency:	**Sub-competency:**	**Sub-competency:**
	Successful Performance:	**Successful Performance:**
Competency:	**Sub-competency:**	**Sub-competency:**
	Successful Performance:	**Successful Performance:**
Competency:	**Sub-competency:**	**Sub-competency:**
	Successful Performance:	**Successful Performance:**

	Current Year	Next 5 Years
Leadership Competencies to Develop		
Competency:	**Sub-competency:**	**Sub-competency:**
	Successful Performance:	**Successful Performance:**
Competency:	**Sub-competency:**	**Sub-competency:**
	Successful Performance:	**Successful Performance:**
People to Network With	**1.** **2.** **3.** **4.** **5.**	
Ways to Apply My New Learning		
Feedback I Will Seek on My Performance		

Appendix D

IDP Examples

The following examples show IDPs written for two natural resource sub-competencies. Before selecting developmental activities, the supervisor and employee identified a key task and performance description for each sub-competency.

Example #1: The first sub-competency is DS-3a: Basic knowledge of NPS history, mission, goals, guideline, and policies.

A key task: Applies knowledge of NPS law, policy, and guidelines to routine natural resource stewardship actions.

What does this key task look like when performed well by employee?

- Conducts natural resource stewardship operations in a manner that adheres to NPS laws, policies, and guidelines.
- Provides natural resource stewardship advice to staff and partners that is consistent with NPS laws, policies, and guidelines.

Assess your current performance to determine what developmental actions will most help you perform the identified key tasks well.

Example #2: The second sub-competency is DS-5a: Ability to develop an active network of professional interaction with peers in the scientific community

A key task: Identifies and engages scientific expertise inside NPS, academic institutions, nongovernmental and governmental agencies to address resource issues.

What does key task look like when performed well by employee?

- Meaningful relationships are developed with a wide range of professionals (local, regional and national) as needed to grow, strengthen and complement personal and program capabilities.
- Resource stewardship is improved through professional interactions, including personal networks, peer review, speaking at conferences, and collaboration with a diverse set of audiences including colleagues, co-workers, and the public.

Assess your current performance to determine what developmental actions will most help you perform the identified key tasks well.

The Natural Resource Stewardship Training website provides exercises, reading materials and resources to use as part of your developmental activities.

Individual Development Plan (IDP)—Example #1

Employee's Name: _____ **Title, Series and Grade:** _____

Natural Resource Stewardship Essential Competency: NPS Resource Stewardship

Sub-Competency: DS-3a: Basic knowledge of NPS history, mission, goals, guidelines, and policies

Developmental Action	Resources Required	Start/End Dates	Supervisor's Role	What Are Measures Of Success?
1. Read and discuss park enabling legislation and planning documents	Park enabling legislation and planning documents		Meet and discuss with employee	Use references in resource management discussions and briefings and when addressing issues.
2. Enroll in e-Learning Module 1, *Orientation and Development: Natural Resources and Science*	Computer		Approval of enrollment and work time	Apply relevant laws, NPS policies and guidelines when addressing issues and presenting/defending recommended actions. Decisions and actions adhere to laws, policies and guidelines.
3. Review *NPS Management Policies, 2006*	Get the document, visit the website		Ensure employee has a copy	Continually use as a reference for discussions, briefings and meetings. Resource management actions adhere to policies.
4. Enroll in *Interdisciplinary Resource Protection and Law*	Partial travel funds		Approval and travel fund support	Apply at interdisciplinary resource management meetings, with partners and stakeholders. Expanded use of professional network.

Individual Development Plan (IDP)—Example #2

Employee's Name: _____ **Title, Series and Grade:** _____

Natural Resource Stewardship Essential Competency: Professional Credibility

Sub-Competency: DS-5a Ability to develop an active network of professional interaction with peers in the scientific community

Developmental Action	Resources Required	Start/End Dates	Supervisor's Role	What Are Measures Of Success?
1. Build an NPS interdisciplinary network by contacting resource professionals at other parks, regional office and program offices.	Names, phone numbers and contact time		Recommend contacts	Natural resource issues are addressed with advice from interdisciplinary professionals throughout NPS
2. Contact resource professionals in Federal agencies, state and tribal groups, universities and CESUs	Names, phone numbers and contact time		Recommend contacts	Resource issues are addressed from an ecosystem perspective.
3. Connect with a mentor who has credibility in scientific community and steers you to valuable contacts	Time allocated for mentoring		Support mentoring process	Resource management approaches reflect diverse interdisciplinary perspectives
4. Attend meetings and conferences, make presentations and use technology for social networking and collaboration	Travel funds		Approve travel	A broad spectrum of professional interdisciplinary advice is available and used.
5. Read *Networking for People Who Hate Networking*, Devora Zack	Funding to order book		Approve funding for resources	Networking efforts are expanded; employee is aware of own preferred style.