

Career Exploration Guide

The key to your professional development program experience will be following a simple format. You will want to figure out where you want to go, what you need to do to be able to go there, create a plan to get you there, and then do it. For some, it is easy to identify their career goals including the next steps. If you already know what you want to do, you might want to skip ahead to the next stage in the program. However, if you are not sure what you would like to do, or are feeling stuck in your current positions, this guide may help you to identify a direction for your career.

This guide is not a step-by-step process, but more of a collection of tools that may help you to identify what you want to work towards in your career and, more specifically, what your more immediate goals could be for professional development. Read through the guide and find the tools that you feel would help you the most to progress in your professional development program.

How to start

As you begin, recognize that you will get out of the professional development program what you put into it. It will require you to make an investment in yourself. Set aside some time to do some reflection regarding your career development.

You will want to identify your values. What is important to you in a job and a career? How does your job fit in with the other values you hold in your life? Identifying your values can help you to make decisions on what you are willing to do moving forward. It may help you identify if you want a change to align your work more closely with your values.

You will also want to compile an inventory of your skills and abilities. This can be a general review, or you can go more in depth by using the Strengths Analysis document in the resources section of the program web page. The main idea is to know what you can do for work. You will want to build on your strengths. You are looking for your current state and the experiences that you have accumulated that will allow you to continue working in that area, or you can use your strength to move to something else.

Career Tip: regularly review and update your resume and LinkedIn profile. Include new experiences and skills. Make a habit of recording experiences that will help you in the future.

Another thing to think about is what interests are in your job description. What do you like doing? Where are your natural talents? It can be helpful to identify your preferences to figure out what you would like your career to become. Aligning your career aspirations with your values, skills, and interests can help ensure a good fit and help keep you engaged in your work.

Another good idea in this prep stage is to look at your resume and LinkedIn profile. How up-to-date are these? It's always a good idea to keep these documents current. When you review your experiences, you can identify a trajectory or patterns that can help you think about your future. Some additional ideas about how to approach your current career state can be found below in the Career Fitness Test section.

Remember that the important thing to do at this stage is to take some time to think about your values, skills, and interests and then think about where you would like to go in your career. If your career seems overwhelming, focus on your next step. Is there a promotion or other position in your department you would be interested in? Is there a certification that would allow you to do something you would enjoy? What would be a way you move ahead? You don't always have to change positions to do this. You can apply the same thinking and analysis to your current position to figure out how you can grow in place.

Self-Assessment

One way to identify what you value in work is to start with an assessment. There are many of these available online or through books dedicated to careers. Below, you will find one such self-assessment. To take this assessment, circle the most true statement for you as you complete this sentence for each row:

“I prefer ...”

Lots of change	vs	Stability and Predictability
Detail oriented tasks	vs	Big-picture oriented tasks
Interdependent with a team	vs	Working on projects independently
Defined assignments	vs	Flexible creative assignments
Competing	vs	Collaborating
Formal	vs	Informal
Fast pace	vs	Steady pace
Doing new things	vs	Doing the familiar
Doing the impossible	vs	Doing the realistic
Dealing with new people	vs	Dealing with familiar people
Dealing with customers directly	vs	Dealing with other employees
Great visibility	vs	Outside of the limelight
Regular feedback and encouragement	vs	Just being left alone to do my job
Focusing on what I've been trained to do	vs	Learning new things
Working alone	vs	Working in teams
Unstructured workday	vs	Organized and predictable workday
People-focused	vs	Profit-focused
Opportunities to climb	vs	Opportunities to make a difference
Working with things	vs	Working with ideas
Working with people	vs	Working with things
Working with ideas	vs	Working with people
Being the expert	vs	Utilizing the experts

Status and recognition	vs	Knowing what I do makes a difference
Being appreciated by others	vs	Feeling good about what I do
Making decisions where there are right and wrong answers	vs	Making decisions where there are no clear right or wrong answers
Making decisions on my own	vs	Making decisions as a team
Family and work-life blended	vs	Work and family kept separate
Being self-reliant	vs	Being interdependent

This activity can help you identify what parts of a job are most important to you. You may see patterns emerge and you consider the results. With your responses in mind, try to answer the following questions.

- What do you value at work?
- What about your job is interesting to you?
- What would you like to do more of at your job or how would you like to contribute differently than you currently are?
- How are you using your strengths in your current role?
- How would you like to use your strengths in the future?
- What skills or knowledge are you interested in gaining to help with your career?
- What rewards and recognition matter most to you?
- What steps do you need to take to enhance your strengths and build new ones?

Use the answers to these questions to guide you towards jobs and opportunities that match what you value.

Next Steps and Ideas

An assessment like the one above isn't the only way to think about what you would like to do for professional development. You can ask around with your co-workers or other similarly situated employees or friends and see what has worked for them. Check out the numerous websites, workshops, and books dedicated to the subject. Talk to people who know you best and ask them what they think. It may take some reflection on your part, but seeking diligently to find your path can help.

You may also find yourself in a position where you know what you want to do but are not sure how to get there. There are many ways you can find out more information about a particular field or job. The following are a few ways that may be helpful as you explore your options.

Job Postings

One way to identify jobs or goals you can work towards is to keep an eye on job postings. BYU sends out a weekly email with all of the current open positions on campus every Monday. Sign up for the email at yjobs.byu.edu. You don't need to be actively looking for a new job to subscribe to the email. When you see the email, look for jobs that are interesting to you. Read about the position and look at what kinds of skills, experience, and education the jobs require. If there is a job that sounds interesting to you, it may help you to identify what kind of experiences you will need to get to be a good candidate. You may find that you need a specific degree or certain skills. These can all turn into goals for your professional development. Spend some time looking at BYU's open positions to learn what catches your eye.

While we certainly want you to spend your career here at BYU, you can also look at positions that are posted outside of BYU. You can gain many of the same benefits listed above by looking at what is required for jobs on any job board.

Networking

When people think of networking, they often have ideas of going to a meet-and-greet or a work social event. Your mental picture may even involve exchanging business cards. While those events may still happen, most of the networking you do will be either online – using tools such as LinkedIn or even Facebook Groups and other online communities, or by meeting directly with people. Networking is about finding ways to interact with people and learning more about them and their careers. Develop a good sense of curiosity around people's jobs and ask questions. This can happen in meetings at work, by inviting people to lunch, or in line at the Cougar Eat.

Online Opportunities and Groups

You can learn a lot about a particular field or job by studying about it online. There may also be podcasts, journals, blogs, newsletters and other sources of information about a particular type of work or job. If you don't know where to start, an Internet search can get you started. You could also talk to a person doing that job and ask what they are reading, listening to, and watching to stay current in their field. In some professions, there are also communities or societies you can join to meet with others in the field. Some of these groups also offer certifications or training that may also be helpful. If you are interested in a job, chances are there are lots of ways to learn more by searching online.

Informational Interviews

One of the most effective ways to network is to conduct Informational Interviews. This involves talking with someone over lunch or setting up a short meeting or zoom call to ask about their job and experiences. Look for people you already know who can either share their experiences or introduce you to someone they know who would be willing to talk to you. LinkedIn is a great tool to search for people in your expanded network who may have a job you are interested in pursuing.

When talking to someone, it is important to be curious. Come prepared to ask good questions about their work. Look for opportunities to either make connections or help in some way. Most of all, seek to learn all you can. Ask the person if they know anybody else who would be good to talk to about the field or that type of job. These interviews can give you a better picture of what the job is like, what types of skills and experiences are needed to do the job, and helps you see if you can picture yourself in that job.

If you would like to know more about informational interviews, check out the BYU Idaho P2B talk from Chris Galbraith about how he used informational interviewing to advance his opportunities. You may not need to do everything he is talking about in this video, but it is a good rundown to give you ideas about what it is, and the types of things you will want to ask in an interview. See the video [HERE](#).

No matter what method you use, doing research about a job or career field can help you identify what you need to do to get there.

If you are already in your chosen field, doing this type of work can also help you identify possible next steps to help you advance. This could include a promotion, but you may also find out what other people have done to grow in their jobs and keep the work engaging.

Career Fitness Test

Another way to approach thinking about your career is to look at your current job and evaluate your current state. Many people enjoy their jobs and are not as interested in changing jobs but would like to look for ways to grow within their position. There are also many things you can do to make sure you are engaging in lifelong learning and staying sharp with your skills. A Career Fitness Test, much like a physical fitness test can give you an idea of where you are in your overall career fitness and help you know what kinds of things you can work on for your professional development.

You may find that you have progressed as far as you can in your job or field at BYU. There may not be a place to move up. Thinking about your job in this way can help make career development relevant to you as well.

Do some reflection to help identify professional goals and motivations:

- What motivates and energizes you at work?
- What kinds of experiences and opportunities would you like in the future?
- Are there opportunities in your current role that could help you learn and grow or prepare you?
- Are there places where your motivations and the needs of your department or the university are in alignment?
- Are there specific things you would be interested in learning?
- Is there a degree or specialized training you are interested in learning?

This isn't an exhaustive list of questions but can get you started thinking about where you are and what you want to do. You may also want to talk to colleagues, friends, mentors, and your supervisor to help you identify the answers to some of those questions. Once you identify something that sounds interesting, it will present a gap between where you are currently, and where you would like to be.

What gaps can you identify between where you are and where you would like to be?

As you work on your development plans, consider these questions:

- What are your talents/strengths?
- What parts of your job do you enjoy doing?
- Where are your biggest opportunities to improve?
- Are there gaps in your knowledge, skills, or experiences?
- Look at your recent PDPs, or other assessments. Do you feel they are consistent with your self-assessment of your talents and skills and development needs?

Other questions to consider:

- What skills have I learned/sharpened? How has that made an impact? What can I now do that I couldn't do a year or five years ago?
- How well do I think this job fits me?
- Am I doing my best? Do I love what I'm doing?
- What is the overall organizational health? How about higher education in general? What are the trends in higher education that may impact me or provide an opportunity? What about in my specific field?
- Are my 'brand assets' current? (resume and LinkedIn profile)
- What trends are most impacting your job or field right now?
- What surprises you most about your job?
- Which projects are most common/ important in your work?
- What impact does your job have on campus? On students? On the mission and aims of BYU?

Summary

Taking time to consider your career development and identifying opportunities can be a source of engagement and fulfillment. There are many ways to approach your professional development. The key will be taking ownership of your progress. This can be summarized by this simplified plan:

1. Figure out what you want to work towards
2. Identify what you need to do to get there
3. Create specific plans and goals to move you towards what you want
4. Work on those goals until you achieve them

The Employee Development Program will help guide you through this process. You may utilize all of the resources on the Employee Development Program website to help you identify opportunities, set goals, work with your supervisor, and continue your lifelong learning.