

Career planning and development for early-career scientists.

Early career development can be looked at as being of two major phases. The first phase is the formal educational process leading to an awarded degree, postdoctoral training, and potentially formal certification in a scientific discipline. The second phase is the informal education of becoming successful in the business of science. During both phases of your early career it is important to prepare yourself educationally to capitalize on an opportunity when it presents itself. Since you cannot predict what the opportunity might be, having a broad understanding of the scientific disciplines with which you will be interacting during your early career is essential. There is plenty of time in your life to become highly specialized, but doing that too early can be too limiting. To maximize your training and early career development it is important to develop good relationships with multiple mentors. These mentoring relationships do not, and should not, always be formal but include people who can provide you with insights and accumulated wisdom from a variety of perspectives. A critical attribute of all successful individuals is their ability to know and understand themselves so that they can honestly assess what strengths and weaknesses they have that could influence their own career development. For some people having a formal Individual Development Plan that provides specific training activities and career goals is effective. The most important thing to remember is that you must take control of your career; you need to seek out mentors as well as mentor others, ask for training in areas you desire to understand, and say yes to opportunities as they arise.