



# HOW TO: Create an Employee Professional Development Plan

Studies regularly show that one of the most effective ways to recruit and retain great employees is to support their professional development. Many professional development opportunities cost money, but many others cost nothing. Use this checklist to create professional development plans for each member of your team that will show how much your organization values them.

**Consider creating an organization-wide professional development framework. To do this, you'll need to know:**

- What skills and abilities your organization seeks in its employees.
- What skills your employees need to improve to deliver the mission.
- What resources—including money, time, and information—exist to invest in skills development.
- How your organization will offer professional development (e.g., will you hold your own programs quarterly, cover employees' attendance at an annual conference, etc.?).
- How you will communicate professional development opportunities to your team.

## Ask team members to assess their own skills.

- Create a survey that asks them to identify strengths they bring to the role and challenges they face.
- Find out what skills, career paths, and competencies interest your team members.

## Review the skills assessments with an eye to your team's needs.

- Compare your assessment of each individual's skill level and their work record with their self-assessment.
- Look for opportunities where individuals' skills and interests align with the goals of your team.

## Build resources for professional development at your nonprofit.

- Seek nonprofit discounts from third-party providers.
- Include pitches for training funds in your grant applications.
- Consider peer-to-peer coaching opportunities (can one employee train another on a key skill?).
- Explore mentoring and skills training options through professional association memberships.
- Ask Board members for referrals who could provide pro bono training in needed areas.
- Use the "train-the-trainer" approach; ask employees who develop a new skill to train others.

## Collaborate with employees to build their professional development plans.

- Consider where the employee needs support to make the most of their strengths and address their challenges.
- Revisit job descriptions. What skills and competencies can the employee improve that will impact their job performance?
- Revisit your nonprofit's mission and strategic plan. Are there organizational gaps that professional development could help close?

## Guide employees to monitor progress, celebrate wins, and navigate challenges.

- Ask employees to record the professional development steps they take, what they learned, and how they applied lessons and takeaways.
- Review progress regularly with employees.
- Discuss challenges and additional opportunities for learning.



## Helpful Resources.

[4 Best Professional Development Practices for Nonprofits](#) - Nonprofit Hub  
[Employee Development Plan \(With Template and Two Examples\)](#) - Indeed  
[Nonprofit Human Resources Best Practices Toolkit](#) - Taproot Foundation  
[Professional Development Plan](#) - Duke University