

# THE INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN GUIDE

General Guidelines for Charting Your Career Path



*Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program*

*April 2010*



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## CREDITS

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The Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program would like to thank the Uniformed Services University for allowing us to adopt this publication and adapt it for use within the wildland fire service.

## INTRODUCTION

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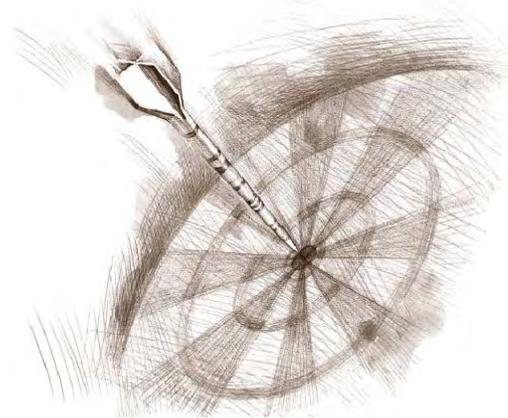
This guide explains the responsibilities of the employee and supervisor in completing the Individual Development Plan (IDP) and outlines a step-by-step process for preparing an IDP. The IDP is developed by the employee and their supervisor. As the IDP is built, the employee and supervisor will outline development objectives and career goals. The employee and supervisor will also select learning activities for achieving these objectives and goals.

The purpose of an IDP is twofold. First, it ensures that the employee maintains the current level of job proficiency through continued training and developmental activities. Secondly, the employee charts a career path by identifying new knowledge, skills and abilities to pursue, as well as learning activities needed to reach the established goals. Third, the IDP will support organization mission and career field needs.

While your agency may not require all employees have IDPs, it is strongly recommended one be prepared.

This guide will help you:

- Analyze your career goals and objectives.
- Learn how to make IDPs.
- Prepare your formal IDP.
- Analyze the organization's needs for individual development planning.
- Get ready for the employee-supervisor conference.
- Find and use resources for individual development planning.



## WHAT IS AN IDP?

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IDPs are individually tailored and describe objectives and activities for the employee's career development. IDPs can be a win/win strategy because they benefit both the employee and the organization. Employees benefit, because implementing an IDP helps them enhance their knowledge, skills, and experiences. Improved competencies help them achieve personal and career goals both inside of and external to the organization. The organization benefits by developing improved employee capabilities, work load planning, and resume needs. Competent employee performance, plus the added bonus of improved moral, and personal job satisfaction can make the organization more effective.

IDPs work by helping an employee and supervisor clarify things that are important to them and plan to achieve them. In the IDP are career objectives, and the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to achieve these objectives, as well as, activities that will provide employees the opportunity to learn and apply the knowledge and skills.

An IDP is a written plan for the benefit of both employee and supervisor. It describes competencies that the employee will apply and enhance and how this development will occur. This includes the following:

- Responsibility areas – IDPs describe the areas of responsibility assigned to the employee as stated in his/her position description and the competencies needed to perform the responsibility.
- Developmental activities – Each responsibility area is accompanied by one or more specific developmental activities that will enable the individual to achieve or practice that competency.
- Time line with milestones and date completed – Realistic start dates, end dates, and other major milestones are established for each activity. The date completed should be listed when the employee can document proficiency based on the competency, skill, or ability obtained.

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## WHEN TO PREPARE AN IDP

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Timing is an important factor in developing the IDP because the following processes work together to establish the same objectives:



- The performance appraisal.
- The training needs analysis.
- Career development planning.
- The IDP.

The optimum time for preparing the IDP is during the first few weeks immediately following the performance appraisal.

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## WHAT'S IN AN IDP

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An IDP should include all of the developmental assignments, activities, and training courses indicated for the employee as a result of the:

- Training needs analysis.
- Mandatory or core competencies.
- Career counseling.

It should include:

- Any activity that is intended to improve performance at the employee's present position or a target position.
- The desired time frame for completion of training.

## CORE COMPETENCIES AND BEHAVIORS

The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) and the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG), working on behalf of the National Integration Center Incident Management Systems Integration Division (Department of Homeland Security), have identified and compiled the core competencies and behaviors for each ICS position identified in the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and in the National Interagency Incident Management System Wildland Fire Qualification System Guide PMS 310-1.

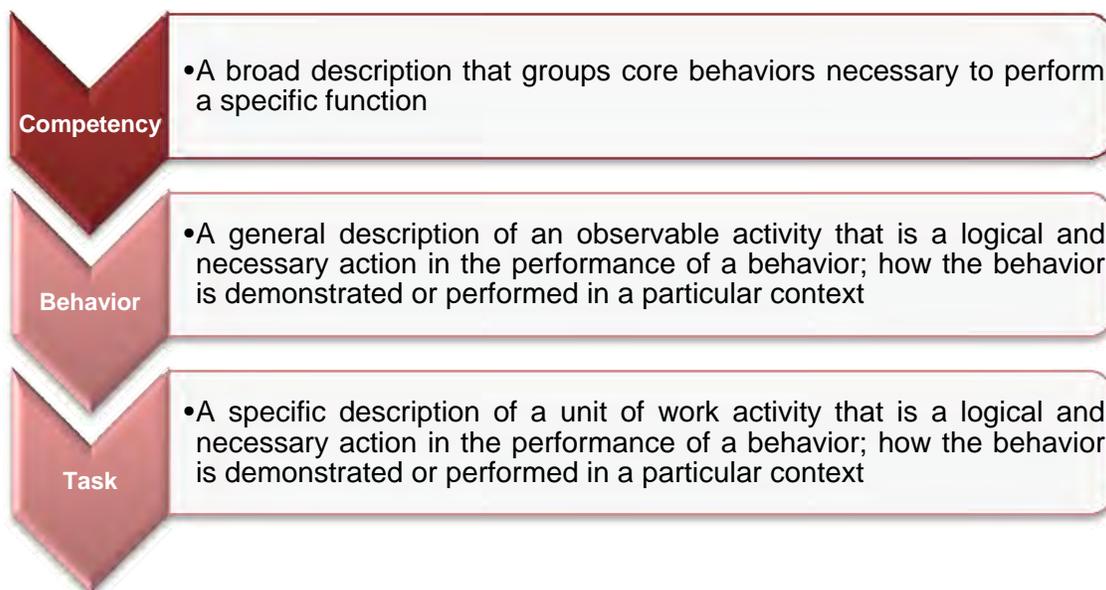
The NWCG developed core competencies and behaviors for all additional (non-ICS) NWCG positions. (See <http://www.nwcg.gov/pms/taskbook/taskbook.htm>.)

These competencies and behaviors form the basis for position specific training, position task books (PTBs), job aids, and other performance-based documents.

There are three primary benefits of identifying competencies:

1. Competencies are a national “benchmark”—they standardize qualifications without interfering with local decision making about training.
2. Shared competencies make interagency crossover and collaboration easier.
3. Competencies are a critical component for the development of performance-based training.

The following brief descriptions will help distinguish between the terms “competencies,” “behaviors,” and “tasks”:



Competencies and behaviors among positions are similar. This similarity may hide critical differences in proficiency level and the environment or type of incident in which the position is expected to perform. These critical differences are typically captured in the tasks of each position.

## RESPONSIBILITIES

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### EMPLOYEE

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Each employee has the primary responsibility of working closely with their supervisor to develop and monitor his or her IDP.

This includes:

- Identifying short-and long-range goals, developmental objectives, and activities to achieve these goals.
- Identifying additional knowledge, skills, and abilities required to achieve the stated career objectives.
- Discussing and obtaining concurrence of goals, objectives, and developmental activities with first-line supervisors or team leaders.
- Satisfactorily completing all assigned reading, education, and developmental assignments.

### FIRST-LINE SUPERVISORS OR TEAM LEADERS

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First-line supervisors or team leaders are responsible for assisting each of their employees in the development of their IDP and supporting developmental activities outlined in the IDP. This includes:

- Performing a developmental needs assessment, in cooperation with the employee, to assist the individual in planning and formulating actions to successfully accomplish identified career objectives.
- Counseling employees concerning career development and encouraging employees to set goals to improve their performance through systematic and continuous self-development.
- Assuring that developmental activities support the objectives of the IDP.
- Evaluating the development, activities, and training completed by each employee.

## PROCEDURES

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### WHERE AM I NOW?

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Conduct a self-assessment to determine current skills, interests, and values. In addition to an assessment of current job strengths and areas of improvement, ask questions such as:

- What do I value?
- How satisfied am I in my current job?
- How well does my job meet my needs?
- If I wanted to make a change, what would it be?
- How do others see me?
- How do I want to be seen?
- What kind of personal do I want to be?
- What makes me happy?



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## WHERE DO I WANT TO BE?

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Once you have reviewed your current skills, interests and values, begin to examine the options available. Ask questions such as:

- Do I want to move up or over to a new organization?
- Do I want to enrich my present job?
- Do I want to develop new skills?

If so, which ones and why?

Talk with supervisors and managers and see what options are available. Interview, collect information, and ask others about their perceptions of you. Do a reality check—match your needs with your options.

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## HOW WILL I GET THERE?

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After deciding where you want to be, identify developmental areas. Ask questions such as:

- What specific skills, knowledge and abilities do I possess?
- What do I strengthen now to meet where I am?
- What do I strengthen for future assignments?

Determine your barriers.

- What do I need to overcome the barriers?
- What is in my way?
- Where do I need to change?

Identify the sources of the barriers and determine the need and actions to overcome them.

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## WHAT IS MY CURRENT LEVEL OF COMPETENCY?

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You may want to conduct a job analysis to determine exactly what job-related tasks are necessary for successful performance of the job. These tasks can then be used to identify the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities needed. Once identified, the employee and the supervisor can determine the areas within which improvement is needed. Ask questions such as:

- Why does the job exist?
- What is its purpose?
- What are the major duties and responsibilities involved?
- What special requirements are necessary or helpful to know?



## EMPLOYEE CHECKLIST FOR PREPARING AN INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

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### IDENTIFICATION OF PERSONAL GOALS

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1. Identify the assignments or job duties you would like to complete this year.
2. Define your short-range (1 year) goals.
3. List future activities that you would like to accomplish.
4. List possible career paths open to you.
5. Define your long-range (1-3 years) goals.
6. Ask yourself:
  - Are my goals realistic?
  - How strong is my desire to achieve these goals?
  - Are my goals compatible with my strengths and weaknesses?
  - Are my goals compatible with the parts of my job that I like and dislike?

### IDENTIFICATION OF ORGANIZATION GOALS

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1. Identify organizational core competencies.
2. Identify career field core competencies and career ladders.
3. List long-range training opportunities that provide rotational assignments or developmental assignments outside your chosen career.

### IDENTIFICATION OF OBJECTIVES

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1. Read your job description.
2. Read your most recent performance appraisal.
3. Read your office/division mission and function statement.
4. List specific job activities that you enjoyed in the past year.
5. List specific job activities that you did not enjoy in the past year.
6. Identify elements of your job where you excel.
7. List those elements of your job where you believe performance could be improved.
8. List those activities within your office/division that are interesting to you.

### IDENTIFICATION OF DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

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1. List the ten most common tasks that you perform. (Tasks are single activities that cannot be meaningfully broken down into smaller elements.)
2. Identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are needed to perform each task.
3. Identify and prioritize the knowledge, skills, and abilities you do not have or those you need to strengthen.
4. Identify short-term developmental activities that will help you acquire the needed knowledge, skills, and abilities.
5. List the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to improve your performance.

# SUPERVISOR CHECKLIST FOR REVIEWING INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

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## REVIEWING THE IDP

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1. Are the employee's goals realistic based on your assessment of the employee's capabilities and past performance?
2. Are the employee's goals consistent with our office/division needs, core competencies, and organization goals?
3. Do the proposed developmental activities support the employee's goals?
4. Has the employee considered a full range of potential developmental activities, including self-study, on-the-job training, seminars, workshops, professional society meetings and conferences, details, and special assignments?
5. Do the developmental activities address performance improvement areas noted in the most recent performance appraisal?
6. Are any additional developmental activities needed to address upcoming changes in responsibilities and planned assignments or to maximize cross training of the staff?
7. Is the level of proposed developmental activities reasonable given the anticipated workload?
8. Are proposed developmental activities within the employee's capabilities?

## ANALYSIS OF ORGANIZATIONAL NEEDS

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1. Thinking from the perspective of the organization as a whole, and of your specific supervisory perspective, what are the organization's needs and objectives, now and in the future?
2. What are the functions and tasks that must be accomplished in your organization's daily work if it is going to meet those objectives?
3. What competencies are needed among your staff to accomplish these functions and tasks?
4. What competencies does each of the individuals within your span of control possess?
5. What are the gaps between competencies needed, and the competencies now present in your organization?
6. In what ways can you bring the required competencies that already exist to bear on the functions and tasks that must be accomplished?
7. What competencies should each individual develop from the organization's point of view?  
From the employee's point of view?

IDP objectives result from negotiation and mutual agreement. Supervisors act on behalf of the organization to ensure that development or application of targeted competencies is needed by utilizing the targeted competencies will result in greater satisfaction with their work and enhanced potential for career progression.

## DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES

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Developmental activities are undertaken by an individual to achieve a developmental objective. Some objectives may be achieved by the familiar means of formal training and attending events such as conferences and seminars. However, the skills, knowledge and abilities that comprise many competencies may be better learned and practiced by means of other activities. Activities other than formal training classes or attending meetings that are appropriate for IDPs include the following:

- Job shadowing.
- Reviewing and analyzing examples.
- Internship, apprenticeship.
- On-the-job training.
- Video- or computer-based instruction.
- Special project/assignments.
- Structured interviews with content experts.
- Reading.
- Research.
- Correspondence courses.
- Self-development.
- Mentoring.
- “Just doing it.”
- Rotational assignments.



In most cases, these activities are not as expensive as formal training. They can often be accomplished without travel while on the job.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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☞ **I am interested in attending a one-day seminar I just found out about. It is not in my IDP. Can I still go?**

The IDP attempts to identify all your developmental activities, but sometimes other options become available after you have prepared your IDP. So, the fact that the seminar is not identified on your IDP does not mean you cannot attend.

☞ **I am satisfied with my current job, and I am not interested in moving into any other position. What can an IDP do for me?**

Because “development” does not just mean moving up or into another job, the IDP can be concerned with your growth in your current job—mastery of skills or learning different facets of the job. Employees planning to stay in their current jobs still must work at keeping skills current, remaining productive, and being successful. Very few employees are in a job that will look the same in two years. Requirements for your job may be constantly changing and it is critical to be current—if not ahead of the game.

☞ **Once something is on the IDP, can I change it?**

Absolutely, unexpected situations can make some planned training impossible, and things can happen that require activities that were not planned.

☞ **Is this a performance appraisal? What effect does the IDP process have on performance appraisals?**

This is not a performance appraisal. The IDP focuses exclusively on the employee’s growth and development. Actual performance will certainly enter into the discussion, but the IDP discussion is not a performance review. Performance appraisals and IDP discussions are two separate but related conversations. Care should be taken to keep them so, especially if the two discussions are held at the same time. The performance appraisal reviews the past and the IDP discussion plans for the future.

☞ **How can I learn about training opportunities?**

Your development needs should be a regular topic of discussion between you and your supervisor. Announcements of agency programs are usually circulated to supervisors and posted on websites. Periodically you should talk with your supervisor or training officer about opportunities available to you.

☞ **Is it required that training be applicable only to my present job?**

Generally, yes. However, in some cases, you may be given training relevant to your projected future assignments or to accomplish special agency initiatives.

## TIPS FOR THE FIRST-LINE SUPERVISOR OR TEAM LEADER

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Employees use IDPs to maintain and improve their employability and thus advance their careers. However, the supervisor uses IDPs to enhance the organization's ability to achieve its objective, both now and in the future. Specifically, supervisors use IDPs to encourage employees to enhance their competencies and to make the best use of their competencies. Hence, IDPs include objectives to improve knowledge and skills and to build experience that will be used to benefit the organization as a whole. The responsibility also includes assigning work to employees that allows them to make a maximum contribution to mission accomplishment.

However, in a more general sense, the supervisor's responsibility is to recognize that employees are the organization's greatest assets, and to help develop these assets. That development is not limited to near-term organizational needs and requirements. It takes into account the organization's longer range needs and the need to help every employee maintain optimism and sustain motivation that leads to doing the best possible job every day. The organization relies primarily upon supervisors to make this happen. Fulfilling this role requires a willingness to invest in people. It also requires an understanding of the organization's:

- Goals.
- Needs.
- Functions.
- The competencies needed to accomplish the functions.
- The competencies possessed by the individuals in the supervisor's human resource pool.
- A plan for using and developing available resources that takes into account where individuals are now, and where they can be in the short-term and long-term future.

The approach does more than identify knowledge and skills employees must learn. It seeks ways to change and add assignments to allow the development and practice of unused or undeveloped competencies. It takes the broad view across the organization and the long view over the coming years in imagining and evaluating career development. It empowers and motivates individuals to produce and grow, and to serve the organization at the same time they are building their careers.



## DEFINITIONS

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**Classroom Training.** Structured learning that takes place in a classroom setting. Classroom training varies in format and type of activity depending upon content and time available. Classroom training is generally most effective when followed by on-the-job or laboratory experiences that reinforce learning and provide opportunities for practice.

**Computer-based Training (CBT).** Structured learning this is self-paced and takes place at a personal computer. CBT can play a key role in closing skill gaps and improving on-the-job performance. CBT is extremely versatile, and permits employees to use their time most efficiently, because they are not required to spend the entire day in a formal classroom. CBT also halts the loss of knowledge because the organization owns the training resource, and it is available for training or review at any time. CBT includes CD-ROM and web-based training.

**Contextual Learning.** Contextual knowledge is learning that occurs in close relationship with actual experience. Contextual learning enables students to test theories via tangible real world applications.

**Competency Profile.** A list of knowledge, skills, and abilities that can be linked to specific job tasks.

**Distance Learning.** Any approach to education delivery that replaces the same-time, same-place face-to-face environment of the traditional classroom.

**Distributed Learning.** A type of distance learning that is technology enabled, learning-team focused, facilitated by a content expert, and delivered anytime and anywhere.

**Developmental Activity.** Training, education, or other developmental assignments (e.g., reading reference material) that expand upon the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform current and future duties, and accomplish developmental objectives.

**Development Needs Assessment.** A systematic process by which the supervisor and employee identify the employee's specific developmental activities and priorities based on a review of the position description, job analysis, performance appraisal, organizational goals and objectives, and analysis of the employee's experience, training history, and career developmental goals.

**Development of Job Aids.** Formulating a list of procedures, list of references, or other brief documentation targeted to help the individual more effectively perform a job or task.

**Goal.** A goal is something pertinent to your work and career aspirations, such as mastering a skill in your current job or attaining a higher position. The goal should imply some work and challenge, but it should not be so high that it cannot be reasonably obtained. Short-range goals are planned to be accomplished within 1-2 years, and long-range goals are planned to be accomplished within 3-5 years.

**Learning Objective.** A summary of knowledge, skills, and abilities the employee will be expected to achieve.

**Individual Development Plan (IDP).** The IDP is an individually tailored written plan developed by the supervisor and employee outlining the employee's developmental objectives and the developmental activity for achieving these objectives. The purpose of an IDP is to increase the current proficiency, development, and progression of the employee through a systematic development plan.

**Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** Knowledge is an organized body of information, usually of a factual or procedural nature. Skill is the proficient verbal or mental manipulation of data, people, or things that are observable, quantifiable, and measurable. Ability is the power to perform an activity at the present time. Generally, skill pertains to physical competence, knowledge pertains to the mastery of a subject matter area, and ability pertains to the potential for using knowledge or skill when needed.

**Objective.** A developmental objective, for the purposes of IDP, is something pertinent to the employee's work and career and is worthwhile to obtain. Developmental objectives should be as specific as possible (e.g., to learn to evaluate computer systems with multi-level security features).

**On-the-Job Training (OJT).** Training that is conducted and evaluated in the work environment.

**Reading or Research Project.** Review of specified set of reading on a topic or the completion of a research project and resulting report.

**Rotational Assignment/Detail.** Temporarily placing an individual in a special job where he or she has the opportunity to learn and develop specific skills needed for his or her regular job.

**Self-Development Program.** Learner-controlled experience generally involves the use of prepared materials in a self-paced structure with options for sequencing and level of detail required. This type of activity is appropriate when self-study materials are available, numbers of people needing the training are small, individual backgrounds and needs vary, and an individual will benefit from a customized schedule of instruction. This type of activity is also appropriate when large numbers of individuals need training but cannot be easily assembled in the same place at the same time. Subject matter that is enhanced through the synergism of training participant interaction is not recommended as part of a self-development program.

**Shadowing.** Learning through first observing the work of a qualified individual and then practicing the application of the same skill or set of skills followed by feedback and evaluation.

**Simulation Training.** The application of classroom or other learning in a realistic but not actual situation in which the participant can practice skills. Simulation training may involve the use of specialized equipment or, in some cases, scenarios and role playing.

**Structured Discussion.** Working with a mentor or other individual to learn about a specified topic through discussion. The structure might include preparation of questions for discussion or prerequisite reading or other research.

**Symposium/Conference/Workshop/Seminar.** Any of a variety of events focusing on a specific topic or area of concern.

**Task Force or Committee.** Serving as a member of a task force or committee for the purpose of gaining knowledge and/or experience in a particular area of expertise.