



Manager Toolkit: Career Development Conversations – Pilot Program

This toolkit provides managers with the guidance and resources needed to effectively discuss career aspirations and a Career Development Plan (CDP) with their employees, fostering trust, connection, and a focus on future growth.

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The Importance of Career Development Conversations

Sac State Findings

In response to President Wood's Fall 2023 listening tour, Sac State introduced **Strategic Activity #14: "Promote Sac State Staff"** into its Strategic Plan to prioritize staff development and advancement. A dedicated committee was formed to lead the effort, and the Learning and Development (L&D) team undertook a needs assessment to understand priorities and training gaps. During summer 2024, L&D conducted **13 focus groups with staff** and **8 with managers** to gather insight. The findings underscored a strong campus-wide interest in professional and career growth, with staff seeking development opportunities and managers expressing a need for resources and guidance to initiate effective career development conversations with their teams.

Research Findings

Career development conversations are vital for organizational success, driving engagement, and retention. According to LinkedIn, 94% of employees are more likely to stay at companies investing in their development, which means these discussions can reduce employee turnover and associated costs.¹ Here are other important statistics:

- 87% of millennials rate "professional or career growth and development opportunities" as important to them in a job.²
- 47% of employees would like their boss to have an active role in their career growth.³
- 42% of millennial workers state that learning and development is the most important benefit (after salary) when deciding on their next career move.⁴

These statistics highlight the critical role of career development in employee engagement and retention, underscoring the importance of these conversations.

Regular 1:1 Meetings Come First

Gallup finds that a manager having one meaningful conversation per week with each team member develops high-performance relationships more than any other leadership activity.⁵

Before initiating a career development conversation, it is crucial to already have consistent, scheduled 1:1 meetings with your direct reports. These regular meetings help build rapport and trust, laying the foundation for more meaningful career development discussions. They can be as short at 20-30 minutes or as long as 1 hour, and we recommend that you *allow the employee to drive the first portion of the meeting*.

¹ LinkedIn. (2018). *2018 Workplace Learning Report: The rise and responsibility of talent development in the new labor market*. LinkedIn Learning. <https://learning.linkedin.com/resources/workplace-learning-report-2018>

² Gallup. (2016). *How millennials want to work and live*. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/238073/millennials-work-live.aspx>

³ Doodle. (2020). *Career development in a pandemic: What employees want from leadership*. <https://doodle.com/en/resources/research-and-reports/career-development-in-a-pandemic/>

⁴ TalentGuard. (2024, August 21). Millennials: Moving up or moving on. <https://www.talentguard.com/blog/millennials-moving-up-or-moving-on>

⁵ Gallup. (2025, March 27). In new workplace, U.S. employee engagement stagnates. *Gallup Workplace*. Retrieved from <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/608675/new-workplace-employee-engagement-stagnates.aspx>

Advantages of weekly 1:1 meetings include:

- Decrease unscheduled interruptions
- Provide a platform for honest feedback; creating a “safe space” for questions and concerns from the employee
- A regular cadence provides a dedicated time to offer feedback
- Employees who have regular meetings with their managers are nearly three times more engaged

Career development conversations can be seamlessly integrated into these ongoing 1:1 meetings. They provide a valuable opportunity for managers and employees to discuss new or evolving career aspirations and address areas of importance to the employee.

Career Development Conversations

These discussions are voluntary and can be initiated by either the employee or the manager, for the benefit of the employee. Research indicates that employees would like to have career development discussions quarterly to support employee growth.

Not sure where to start? Try these steps:

1. **Invite the Employee:** Explain your intention and ask if they are open to a discussion.
2. **Schedule a meeting:** Explain the purpose and inquire as to what they want to discuss.
3. **Use Tools:** Encourage them to also utilize available [career self-assessment tools](#).
4. **Collaborate on a Plan:** Work together on a Career Development Plan to document the discussion.

It is important that this process is collaborative with the employee’s input and at their pace.

Eligible Employees to Participate in the Career Development Plan Process

The following groups of employees are eligible⁶ for the Career Development Plan process:

- Non-Represented Staff (e.g., Confidential Staff)
- California State University Employees Union (CSUEU) members - Units 2, 5, 7 and 9
- American Professionals of California (APC) members - Unit 4

Completion of a Career Development Plan

An employee wishing to pursue educational goals may, with the guidance and support of their Appropriate Administrator may develop a Career Development Plan (CDP). This plan may include attainment of a certificate, an associate degree, an undergraduate degree, a graduate degree or other achievement appropriate for the employee's professional growth.

⁶ Union of American Physician and Dentists (UAPD) for Unit 1 has training requirements as defined by the Medical Board of California (MBC). Teamsters Unit 6 employees are encouraged to make use of professional development and certifications offered through Facilities Management “APPA: Leadership in Educational Facilities” association membership. Statewide University Police Association (SUPA) for Unit 8 has training and development as defined by the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

If the manager has questions or is navigating questions from the employees, please contact your [University Labor and Employee Relations representative](#).

Learning and Development Events and Programs

When possible, take advantage of existing [Learning & Development](#) (L&D) programs and events. L&D offers many live professional development opportunities throughout that year, in partnership with the Chancellor's Office L&D program and other campuses! This enables L&D to provide robust offerings on a wide range of topics. View the [L&D Events calendar](#) to learn more.

Additionally, employees have access to online e-learning systems. View Learning & Development's [Support](#) page for quick links to online training.

Goals for Performance Evaluations

As a reminder, professional development can be a part of an employee's annual performance review goals. For example, Appropriate Administrators can recommend employees complete professional development hours (e.g., 4 hours a month or 40 hours per year) or recommend the completion of campus online e-course certificates, etc.

Tips for Managers Regarding Fee Waiver Usage

The California State University (CSU) [Employee Fee Waiver and Reduction Program](#) (Fee Waiver) provides eligible CSU employees with the opportunity to enroll in work-related courses necessary for improving skills applicable to existing employment with the CSU or necessary for advancement in the CSU in accordance with an approved individual Career Development Plan as a career employee in the CSU.

Managers should consult with the Benefits department (benefits@csus.edu) for specific advice regarding the employee fee waiver program if they have questions regarding its use and requests for release time.

Release Time Tips

The Appropriate Administrator may authorize the use of State time for all units, except Unit 8, for **one (1) class** depending on the needs of the department. The Appropriate Administrator may also deny the request if it impacts the operational needs of the department.

- Depending on details within each CBA, the Appropriate Administrator shall grant the employee reasonable release time for one (1) on-campus course per term if 1) the course is job-related or part of an approved Career Development Plan, AND 2) the operational needs of the department are met.
 - If an Appropriate Administrator does not approve release time from work for one (1) course, the Appropriate Administrator and employee may agree that the employee can opt to use his or her lunch hour (not to exceed 60 minutes) to attend class.
 - If release time has been approved from work for one (1) course, and the employee wishes to take a second course during the work day (using the fee waiver program), the following options exist:
 - The Appropriate Administrator can deny the second course based on the CBA and operational needs.

- The Appropriate Administrator and employee may agree that the employee can opt to use his or her lunch hour (not to exceed 60 minutes) to attend class.
- Employees cannot combine their 15-minute breaks with their lunch to have an extended lunch period in order to attend class.
- Employees may have to take fee waiver classes on their own time.

Flexible Work Schedules

Are flexible work schedules appropriate to help employees complete coursework through the fee waiver program?

A “flexible” work schedule refers to a temporary adjustment in how an employee's standard 40-hour work week is distributed, while maintaining 8-hour workdays. Employees may request such changes in writing to the Appropriate Administrator, and approval must be obtained in advance. Flexible schedules are intended for short-term use only, and not exceeding one semester.

However, there are cautions to managers regarding flexing work schedules as you must be consistent and equitable when considering all employee requests.

- It is the Appropriate Administrator’s responsibility to ensure that flexible schedule approvals are consistent, compliant, and meet department operational needs.
- Service to our students and colleagues during normal business hours takes precedence over requests for flexible schedules.
- Employee work schedules that deviate from the standard university work schedule (Monday – Friday 8 hours/day) must have approval in advance from their Appropriate Administrator and may have implications for the employee’s compensation.

Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBA)

Many CSU Employee [Collective Bargaining Agreements](#) (CBA) provide surprising and creative options for employee’s professional development. The CBAs encourage professional development of employees and provide much guidance in the areas.

Learn more about [Eligible Employees to Participate in the Career Development Plan Process](#).

California State University Employees Union (CSUEU) CBA for Unit 2, 5, 7 and 9 employees > Article 22: Professional Development

Highlights:

- Training for any newly assigned job duties.
- Training to improve an employee’s performance.⁷
- Opportunity for a temporary assignment in a higher level position on a training basis.⁸

⁷ For many options, you will want to contact Employee & Labor Relations or Classification and Compensation for guidance before discussing details and options with the employee. Additionally, the CBA provides guidance around employee compensation when working in temporary assignments.

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- An employee seeking a temporary training assignment for the purposes of attaining additional skills for a specific classification or skill level.
- Professional development opportunities, including the employee fee waiver program, training directly of benefit to the campus, continuing education and more.

Compensation for Hours Worked While Attending Training

Non-exempt CSUEU employees need to be compensated for training mandated outside of the employee's regular working hours. When discussing professional development with an employee, be clear about what training is associated with the current position and should be done during normal work hours.

- Fee waiver: employees may have to take fee waiver classes on their own time.
- Unit 2 continuing education required to obtain or renew a license or certification by law has separate guidance in the CBA.

Temporary Training Assignment Request

CSUEU CBA [Article 22](#) clarifies that employees may submit a written request to the manager (e.g., email) for a temporary training assignment. However, the granting of a temporary training assignment request is at management discretion, similar to a temporary assignment. The granting will be dependent upon the campus' ability to arrange a training opportunity and, if applicable, provide coverage in the employee's work area while they are away. Additionally, the employee in the temporary training assignment will be expected to produce work and have clear outcomes during the training. The CBA provides distinct guidance on this process and the steps that must be completed related to this type of request.

APC's CBA for Unit 4 employees > Articles 15 and 16: Career Advancement and Professional Development

Highlights

- Except as provided for elsewhere in the CBA, the employee shall be responsible for acquiring education and training on their time and at their expense as necessary to meet the requirements of the Career Development Plan.
- The Appropriate Administrator shall approve requests from the employee for enrollment in the CSU fee waiver program, provided such requests are consistent with the Career Development Plan and subject to provisions of Article 16, Professional Development.
- The Career Development Plan is subject to at least annual review and renewal by the Appropriate Administrator.
- A full-time permanent employee may request an opportunity for a temporary assignment in a higher level position on a training and development basis.
- Options for Professional Development leave.
- The Bargaining Agreement for Unit 4, Academic Professional of California (APC), has a program to reward their employees for achieving specific educational milestones, such as a master's and/or doctoral degree. [Article 23](#) describes the Educational Achievement Stipend (EAS) Program unique to APC employees.

Summary

By prioritizing career development conversations, you are investing in your team's future and the overall success of the organization.

As a reminder, it is strongly recommended before finalizing any CDP, or if you or employees have questions you are not comfortable answering, please consult with campus [University Labor & Employee Relations \(ULER\)](#) or [Learning & Development \(L&D\)](#) departments.