



THE HANDBOOK FOR EFFECTIVE

Career Conversations

Introduction

At the University of Arizona, our employees are a top priority.

As an organization, we want to make sure they have everything they need to succeed. Career Conversations have been designed as a method to provide each employee with a tailored development and growth plan for the upcoming year.

A purposeful focus on professional and career development increases skills, leads to new opportunities, and boosts employee engagement and productivity.

Career Conversations are a valuable tool developed at U of A to help supervisors engage employees in open discussions regarding their roles and aspirations.

The benefits of Career Conversations include:

- Encouraging growth and putting focus on an employee's future with the University of Arizona;
- Highlighting what an individual was able to accomplish in the past 12 months and providing an opportunity for recognition of their achievements;
- Framing conversations around what an employee wants to learn and the skills they need to develop as part of their growth plan; and
- Providing an opportunity to discuss how supervisors can support employees in attaining their goals.

This handbook is designed to help you implement impactful Career Conversations to retain and develop employees on your team.



What is a Career Conversation?

Career Conversations are a 5-step structured discussion between staff members and their supervisors.

They are designed to support staff success and growth through reflection, planning, problem-solving, and honest and constructive feedback.

Career Conversations are framed and scheduled by supervisors, but staff members lead the conversation after reflecting on their significant accomplishments, key strengths, and goals for the future. Continued check-in meetings should occur throughout the year.

With the support of their supervisors, staff members can chart a path to success and achieve their career aspirations.

A Career Conversation is Not:

- A performance review
- A regular 1:1 meeting





Step 1: Kick-Off

The Kick-Off is the first step in the Career Conversations framework

Supervisors, although it is the employee's responsibility to articulate their career goals, it is up to **you** to provide guidance on when Career Conversations will take place and what your expectations are for the experience.

Proper planning during this stage is key.

Inform your team that the Career Conversations process is happening.

We recommend doing this digitally so that you can include important details and share resources. Email, Teams, Confluence, or project management software are examples of good ways to accomplish this. Remember – this process is a flexible one, so please use what works best for your team.

In your communication, set expectations regarding filling out the sections of the Career Conversation form and what will happen during the meeting itself, especially if you have new employees.

Please share valuable resources with the employee so they are set up for success. Make sure they have a copy of the Career Conversations form, the SMART goals template, a copy of the University Pillars and Values, and any resources specific to your unit's work or processes.

Different units have different needs. If your unit uses a form other than the Career Conversations form, continue with that document. The important thing is that you and your employees hold and document conversations about their engagement and career growth.

An editable email template to send to your staff with this information can be found on page 6 of this guide and on the Career Conversations webpage.





Set the Stage

Schedule the Career Conversation meetings.

Determine the location and time of day for the meetings. Make sure you have provided your team with ample time to fill out the form and reflect on the last 12 months. A Career Conversation cannot be thoughtfully completed in only a few days, which is why this planning phase is so critical.

The length of the meeting can vary, but we recommend at least 30 minutes.

Consider sending calendar invitations if your team engages in computer-based work, but always use whatever method works best for your staff.

You may want to offer a check-in opportunity to employees before the Career Conversation meeting. This way they can ask questions about completing the form or any information they may need.

Note: If you have a new employee on your team, or a team member whose job scope has recently changed, you may want to delay their Career Conversation until you both understand what their next year of work will look like.



It is important to plan your opening and tone for the interviews before the conversation takes place. Do not underestimate the power of deliberately preparing the environment you wish to create, including your body language and facial expressions.



Communicate

Supervisors, here is an email template to get you started.



You can find a downloadable version of this letter on the Career Conversation website.

Hi everyone,

The growth and career development of everyone on our team is very important to me. The work you do is so valuable, and I want to understand your needs and goals so I can better support your success. That is why I would like us all to engage in the Career Conversations process over the next several weeks.

The first step is for you to download and complete the Career Conversation form. Please fill it out as completely as you can. I am excited to review and celebrate your accomplishments and strengths, and to learn more about and discuss your goals for the upcoming year.

In preparation to complete the form, you may want to review your current job description, previous Career Conversation forms, our division goals, and the job descriptions of any roles you might like to hold in the future. This information will give us an excellent foundation for discussing how to move forward with intention. In addition, you may want to avail yourself of the SMART Goals template and list of University Pillars and Values found on the Career Conversations website.

Please email your completed form to me by X DATE. I will then review each of your forms, add my thoughts to them, and return the form to you. We will then meet for X MINUTES to map out your development plan for the next year. After, I will add a final summary for us and you can upload the document to UAccess.

I will reach out to each of you soon to begin scheduling these interviews beginning the week of X DATE. It is important to me that you have adequate time to reflect on your goals and complete the form thoughtfully. In the meantime, please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or concerns.





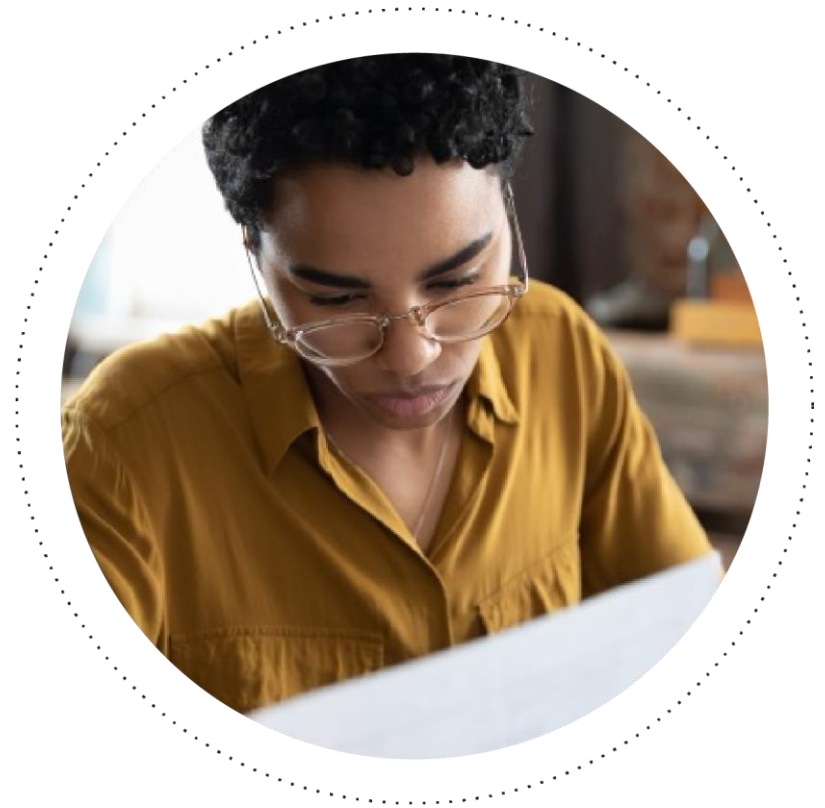
Step 2: Review

After you have scheduled the interviews and communicated expectations, set aside time to thoughtfully review and respond to each Career Conversation form.

You play a significant role in the job satisfaction and engagement levels of your staff. Don't underestimate how critical your guidance and input are to your team members' growth and success. After your staff submit their Career Conversation forms to you, it is your responsibility to review each one, provide meaningful comments aimed at the development and success of your team members, and return the form to them before your scheduled Career Conversation meeting.

As a manager, providing this kind of feedback is one of the more impactful tasks you can undertake; please set aside sufficient time to give each employee and their form the time they deserve. Career planning can be a significant tool in employee retention and increased team productivity. Don't shortchange this process.

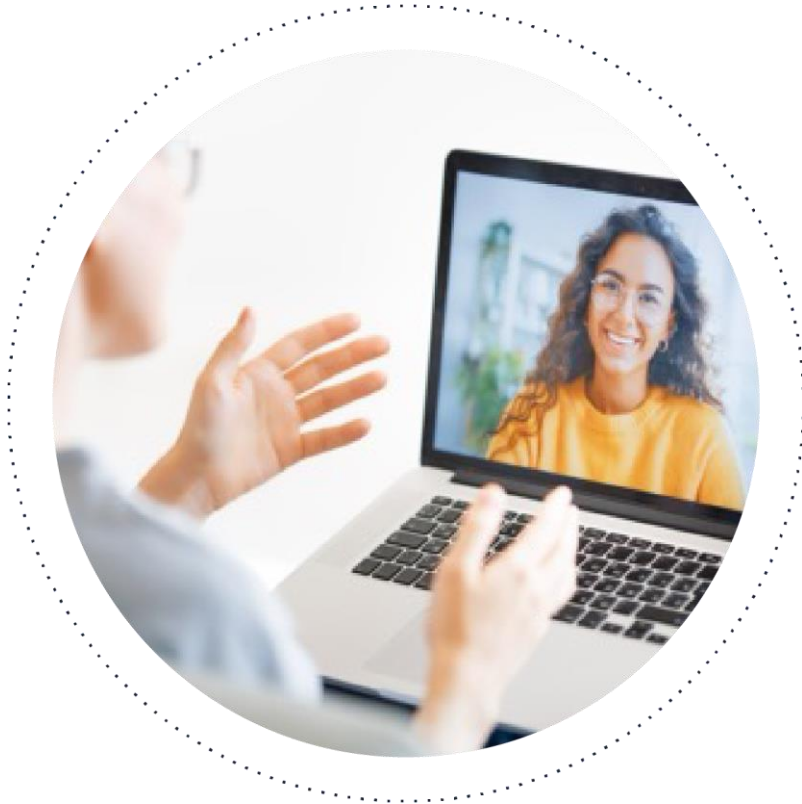
As you review each form, try to maintain a mindset of curiosity and appreciation. What can you learn about each member of your team from this process?





Step 3: Conversation

Use the Career Conversation meeting as an opportunity to cultivate trust, show genuine interest in learning about your employee's motivations, and reassure them that their openness is valued and will be used constructively to improve their work experience.



Prior to each Career Conversation meeting, reflect on your employee's strengths, areas for growth, level of engagement, and preferred manner of working/thinking; these all play a large role in constructing an impactful developmental plan. Having them in mind will allow you to engage in meaningful, two-way dialogue as you and your team member plan for the future.

In addition to reviewing your employee's accomplishments and SMART Goals, make sure to discuss a flexible work plan, if appropriate, and what LinkedIn Learning classes may support their development.

Lastly, Career Conversations should always be conducted in-person or over a video call. It is not appropriate to hold the conversation over the phone or to simply email the completed form to the employee. Connecting with someone face-to-face allows for the conversation to be organic and engaging.

As you close the interview, be sure to reserve the final 5-10 minutes to identify action items and desired outcomes you both would like to see. Be clear about which actions you each will take and how you will communicate updates and share progress or request further support, as needed.

Let your final words be positive and express appreciation for the employee and their openness with you.





Learning More

Job goals should not be the totality of the conversation.

If appropriate, consider asking your team member a few questions around engagement to learn more about what motivates them and makes them thrive in their role. Curiosity in understanding the following areas can go a long way towards their retention:

- What is your employee's favorite part of their job?
- What are they proud of?
- What knowledge or skills would they like to share with colleagues?
- If they could have their dream job, what would it be?
- Which of their talents are they not using in their current role that they would like to incorporate?
- How would they like to be recognized for the work they do?
- Do they feel they are getting clear goals and objectives? If not, how can you help them clarify that and better align their work with their goals?
- What can you do, as their supervisor, to enable their growth or empowerment?





Step 4: Summary

After you and your employee have discussed their goals and your feedback, the next step is for you to add summative comments about the conversation to their form.



An effective summary will capture the essence of your conversation and distill it onto its most important ideas and action items.

Please be thoughtful about the summary you provide, as it will be a guidepost for your employee for the upcoming year.

If you can, schedule time the same day as the Career Conversation is held to write this summary; that will keep the information top-of-mind for you and will make the summary more impactful for your employee.

After adding your comments to the form, type your name on the signature line and return it to your employee for their review.



Step 5: Upload

Uploading and Approving the Career Conversations form in UAccess is the last step of the framework.

After meeting with your team member and including your summative comments on the Career Conversation form, your employee will upload the document into UAccess.

You will receive a notification asking you to log in and approve the document, which counts as 'signing' it and finalizes the process.

Storing completed Career Conversations documents in UAccess has multiple benefits:

- It provides a centralized location to store the documents that is secure and accessible.
- It creates a simple way for supervisors and employees to look back at the goals set each year and to reference them in further check-ins regarding progress made.
- It makes it easy to track achievements.

If your unit uses a form other than the Career Conversations form, please upload whatever document you used in UAccess.

If you need assistance with the UAccess Career Conversations portal, or for changes to be made after the form has been uploaded, please email EmployeeSelfService@arizona.edu.





Follow-Through

Feedback and employee growth and is not complete after one conversation.

After the Career Conversation concludes, the next steps are to follow-through on the information that was shared and the action items that were identified, and to schedule quarterly **check-ins** to review your team members' progress.

Revisiting the document encourages your employees to stay focused on their goals and provides a tangible update on the progress they have made toward attaining success.

This type of feedback, when given regularly throughout the year, leads to:

- Better performance and higher productivity
- Stronger teams and work groups
- More trust and a culture of positive change
- Greater job satisfaction and engagement
- Early signs of performance challenges



Ongoing feedback and meaningful career development increases success and engagement and retains valuable people.



Conclusion

Retaining and developing University of Arizona employees is a top priority, especially during times of uncertainty.

Career Conversations are a valuable strategy for building trust and creating a safe place for employees to share their perspectives and career goals. These structured conversations enable you and your employees to create actionable strategies that will help motivate, develop, and retain your team.

Career Conversations empower supervisors to identify and address key motivators and learning opportunities that can turn disengagement around and equip employees to perform at their best.

We trust that this handbook will support your development strategy to increase success and engagement and improve retention so that employees thrive across your unit.

Note: If you are responsible for tracking completion rates of Career Conversations for your unit, please visit the Career Conversations dashboard under the Business Officer Central area in UAccess Analytics.

