

5 Tips for Building a Career in Health Services Research

There is a perception that a career trajectory is linear. But in reality, there are wins, setbacks, plateaus, and challenges throughout the journey. Keeping an open mind and being flexible during the forks in the road can help you take calculated risks and move forward in your career. The realities of navigating a career in health services research (HSR) were covered during the 2021 Annual Research Meeting in the session **Options for Building a Successful HSR Career**. This tip sheet provides a practical approach to help you build a successful career.



1 Conduct an honest self-assessment.

- Where are you in your career? Just starting out? Mid-career? Looking for your next opportunity? Loving your current position and wanting to get the most out of it?
- What is your cultural background? Where are you from? How does this shape what you need in a work environment?
- How do your identities, values, and beliefs influence the work you want to do? (Note: These will be a guide for all your life decisions, not just your career choices.)



2 Create a vision for your career.

- Break down the vision of your career into mini goals to determine the steps you need to take and what your current priorities should be.
- Choose your research topics strategically to fulfill your vision rather than passively allowing your research topics to choose you.
- Take care of yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually. By taking care of you, you'll be able to show up better in your work.
- Find a way to be and stay in community.



3 Look for opportunities (and be open to unexpected ones).

- Evaluate potential bosses carefully when interviewing for jobs.
 - Look for a boss who is vested in their own career and who will take an active interest in helping you develop in your career.
 - Are they someone who you can learn from and will help you advance in your career?
- Identify organizations, departments, groups that will be supportive.
- Take jobs that align with your values and fit into your lifestyle.



4 Once you're in the door: embrace, cultivate, and prioritize.

- Embrace the mission of the organization you are working for.
- Cultivate strategic relationships throughout the organization.
- Use your time wisely and say no so you can focus on the priorities.
- Choose mentors who emulate the qualities of the life you want.
 - Work-life balance
 - You can have multiple mentors – in your career and outside of work.



5 Determine when it's time to move on to the next opportunity and take action.

- It may be time to move on if:
 - you dread going to work on Monday morning.
 - you're no longer learning at your job.
 - you're being called to do things or be a certain way that do not align with your values or vision.
- Make a plan before taking action by revisiting your vision and getting clear on your goals for your next opportunity.

Helpful Hints

- Find a research topic you are passionate about and enjoy.
- Sometimes a job may not be what you want but it will give you the skills you need.
- Jobs may call on you to learn things you didn't expect that are outside of your research (e.g., conflict resolution, project management, communicating with team members).
- Create goals in four 6-month cycles; looking at it this way it can be easier to create achievable goals and see your progress.
- Stand in solidarity with and support other colleagues with marginalized identities.