Careers in clinical and translational research do not necessarily follow a clear trajectory. Given the range of experiences and research topics among TL1 trainees, it can also be difficult for trainees to discern their next steps, and it may be unreasonable to expect all mentors to provide extensive career advice for all possible academic/research career trajectories for their trainees. To help trainees clearly define their career goals, create realistic action plans to achieve them, and bolster their confidence to independently navigate their career path, we provided TL1 trainees with a career coach who they meet with individually approx. 5 times each academic year.

During interviews conducted to evaluate mentoring experiences among trainees, several TL1s considered their career coach part of their mentoring team and discussed the added benefits they perceived from having a career coach during their training. For example, one post-doc TL1 noted, "something that has been helpful during the TL1 is also having a career coach, so that is kind of like another outside mentor, someone to help, not just with kind of this stage right now, but also figuring out long term plans." Another TL1 post-doc mentioned that they "cannot advocate enough for a career coach" and discussed how "having those sessions to really interrogate your life values in the context of your career, your goals, what you see for the future, and if that aligns with your goals, that was very good, and...it wasn't just platitudes, the career coaching really acknowledged that this is really hard
and...this career path, as with many careers, is rife with trade-offs and understanding the trade-offs and making the best decision for you is the key."

For other CTSA's interested in implementing career coaching, we recommend that trainees are given the opportunity to learn about a career coach's coaching style and allowing the trainee to make choices on who they want to work with. To provide this opportunity for our trainees, we asked career coaches (we generally had 3 or 4 career coaches available a year) to create short videos introducing themselves and their coaching styles/techniques. Trainees were then able to designate their preferred career coach, with most receiving their first choice. We also provided the opportunity in the next academic year for trainees to switch career coaches if they