

## **Guidelines for Search Committees**

Search committees play a vital role in recruiting, evaluating, and recommending the most qualified candidates for employment by the University. Search committee members are often the first University employees that a candidate will meet. Each member has an opportunity to represent the University as a diverse and welcoming community while carrying out the search in accordance with University policies and procedures.

At any point in the process, the [Office of Institutional Equity](#) (OIE) is available for consultation, to answer questions and discuss specific situations, offer recommendations and search committee training. Please contact OIE staff at 860-486-2944, for assistance.

### **Composition of the Search Committee**

The hiring manager may appoint either the search committee chair who is charged with selecting the committee members, or both the chair and the remaining members of the committee. The structure of search committees will vary among departments, offices, schools and colleges, depending upon the position to be filled. The composition of a search committee is key to a broad and inclusive search and the committee should:

- Include individuals with different backgrounds, perspectives, and expertise.
- Include individuals with knowledge of the substantive area and the technical expertise to effectively evaluate candidates' qualifications.
- Represent a diverse cross section of the University population, including members with a demonstrated commitment to diversity.
- Include appropriate stakeholders such as peers of the new hire, supervisors, and those with similar positions.

### **Committee Membership**

A search committee member cannot serve on a search committee when he/she is also an applicant for the position. In the event that a search committee member is well acquainted with or has a conflict of interest regarding an applicant, the member must:

- Notify the search chair and the committee of the nature of the relationship; and
- Recuse him/herself from the entire committee if unable to perform an objective and equitable review of all candidates; or
- Recuse him/herself from the evaluation and interview of only the known applicant, with the agreement of the chair and committee

Any questions regarding specific conflict situations should be directed to OIE for further guidance.

## **Committee Responsibilities**

A search committee is responsible for writing the job description and qualifications, recruiting for the position, evaluating applicants, participating in the interview process, and recommending finalists. Members should be available to participate fully and consistently in the entire process and to perform duties as assigned by the search chair.

## **Confidentiality**

Members of a search committee need to maintain a strict level of confidentiality to protect the privacy of the candidates and to preserve the integrity of the search process. It is each committee member's responsibility not to discuss any details of the search with non-committee members. All public comments should be made exclusively by the search chair, in consultation with University Communications.

Written and electronic documentation pertaining to any given search may be subject to public record requests (Freedom of Information Act - FOIA) by candidates or other individuals. Requests may encompass committee member notes and e-mails. It is important to be mindful of the possibility of FOIA requests during the search process. The [Public Records website](#) offers more details about FOIA and contact information for inquiries related to FOIA by candidates or committee members.

## **Recruitment**

Search committees are responsible for fulfilling the University's requirement to demonstrate "good faith efforts" to diversify the applicant pool by proactively and aggressively recruiting for all open positions. A recruitment plan should include strategies for attracting a diverse and qualified pool of applicants. All search committee members should be actively engaged in executing the recruitment plan, including utilizing professional contacts, engaging in formal and informal networking, utilizing non-traditional advertising such as listservs and on-line publications, discussing the position among members of relevant membership in professional organizations, and attending conferences.

Search committee members also should be aware of [recruitment goals](#) for the position in order to determine recruitment strategies and sources to attract applicants from these under-represented race and gender groups. Please bear in mind that the goals are for *recruitment* of a diverse applicant pool but play no role in candidate *selection*.

All recruitment efforts need to be documented and provided to the search administrator for entry into RSA prior to receiving approval to interview.

## Applicant Evaluation

Committee members may only use the published minimum and preferred qualifications for the position in evaluating application materials. Members should discuss and agree on the criteria to be used in evaluating each qualification prior to reviewing application materials. All applicants must be objectively screened against the same criteria.

While there is no standard screening method, a search [matrix](#) can be a useful tool in objectively assessing applicants' qualifications. Matrices can be as simple or complex as the committee members deem necessary to effectively evaluate the applicants.

There is no rule regarding the number of candidates a search committee must interview ("A" candidates). Only candidates meeting or exceeding minimum qualifications should be ranked "A". Interview candidates must be selected without regard to race or gender – again recruitment goals are in reference to the diversity of the candidate pool but play no role in candidate *selection*.

## Unconscious Bias and Assumptions in Candidate Evaluation<sup>1</sup>

The evaluation of applicants should be objective and equitable, based solely on the qualifications in the job description/advertisement and the quality of the application materials. Research in this area has demonstrated that every person brings a lifetime of experience and cultural history that shapes their perspectives as related to candidate selection.

Good practices to counterbalance the effects of inherent bias include:

- Learning about research on biases and assumptions and striving to minimize their influence on the evaluation of candidates.
- Developing criteria for evaluating candidates and applying them consistently to all applicants
- Spending sufficient time evaluating each applicant
- Evaluating each candidate's entire application and not depending too heavily on only one element, such as the prestige of the degree-granting institution or post-doctoral program or the letters of recommendation.
- Explaining the decision for rejecting or retaining a candidate based on evidence in the candidate's file as related to the qualifications
- Periodically evaluating the committee's decisions to consider whether qualified women and underrepresented groups are included and whether evaluation biases and assumptions are influencing decisions.

For additional information, please refer to the links below.

<https://wiseli.wisc.edu/research/reports-publications/>

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<sup>1</sup> [Based on Searching for Excellence & Diversity: A Guide for Search Committee Chairs, a guide developed by the Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Institute \(WISELI\) at the University of Wisconsin Madison.](#)

## **Interviews**

Before inviting candidates for interview, all appropriate documentation regarding initial candidate rankings must be submitted to the Office of Institutional Equity for approval. (Please see the [Checklist for Interview Certification](#)). Once the search committee receives OIE approval, the committee may go through as many rounds of interviews as necessary to identify the selected candidate. It is important, however, to be consistent during the interview rounds. For example, if your first round of interviews is conducted via telephone or Skype, conduct all interviews via telephone or Skype regardless of the geography of any given candidate, (yes, even if one of your candidates is in state or on campus). After the first round, if you move to on-campus interviews, interview every candidate on campus.

All members of the committee should participate in all interviews to ensure fair and consistent evaluation of each applicant. Prior to conducting any interview, all search committee members should discuss the objective(s) of the interview, the main topics or areas to be covered during the interview, and the itinerary and arrangements for each candidate. Interview questions must be related to the job and essential to determining the candidate's qualifications for the position.

Committees should develop a core set of questions for all applicants that will elicit sufficient information to make an evaluation of the candidates' qualifications and allow an equitable comparison of the candidates. To ensure equity, the interview experience should be consistent, providing the same opportunities to each candidate.

In addition, committee members should review the [Guidelines for Interview Questions](#) to be aware of questions that are unlawful and should not be asked during the interview. Everyone participating in the interview process should be made aware of inappropriate topics and questions. Also, please bear in mind that the same questions that are inappropriate or unlawful during a formal interview are also inappropriate and unlawful in a social or less formal interview session with an applicant.

## **Recommendation of Final Candidates**

Once the interviewing stage has been completed, the committee should identify the candidate(s) to be recommended to the hiring manager for hire. Depending on the charge given to the committee, the recommendation may be a ranked or unranked list with an explanation of the candidates' strengths and weaknesses as related to the qualifications of the position.

*Faculty searches:* The hiring manager should communicate the offer and negotiate with the selected candidate. Before a final offer is made to a candidate, the candidate evaluations must be submitted to OIE via [Recruiting Solutions](#) for approval and the offer letter to Human Resources for review. (Please see the [Checklist for Hire Certification](#))

*Staff searches:* Once the hiring manager has made a final decision about the selected candidate, the candidate dispositions must be submitted to OIE via the RSA system for approval and the offer letter to Human Resources for review. (Please see the [Checklist for Hire Certification](#)).

Candidates that are unsuccessful should be notified of their non-selection as soon as a firm decision has been made about their status, even if the search process is still underway. Finalists not chosen should be notified as soon as possible after an offer has been officially accepted by a higher-ranked finalist. Please click for [sample decline letters](#).

All members of your search committee are required to attend [Search Committee Training](#). Trainings are offered University-wide throughout the year, and individual trainings are available upon request.