

Best Practices Guide for Faculty Search Committee Processes
Office of Faculty Academic Advancement, Leadership, and Inclusion
Emory University School of Medicine

Approved by: Dean's Faculty Advisory Committee and Council of Chairs

Purpose: We strive to attract diverse faculty talent who will contribute to the School of Medicine mission of fostering the highest standards in education, biomedical research, and patient care. This document serves as a supplement to the [Emory University Guide to Search Committees](#) and appropriate Human Resources policies and is specifically designed to ensure the use of best practices in all School of Medicine faculty and leadership position searches.

Guiding Principles:

- Search Committees are assembled for leadership positions such as decanal positions, chair, vice chair, and division director; tenure-path faculty positions; and other strategically important faculty positions following dean/provost approval.
- The membership of the committee should be aligned with our commitment to interdisciplinary collaboration and an inclusive culture and comply with the oversight of the Emory Office of Equal Opportunity Programs².
- The confidentiality of prospective candidates and of search committee deliberations must be respected at all times.

Responsibilities and Procedure:

The search *committee chair or co-chairs* is/are responsible for setting the frequency of meetings; leading those meetings in an efficient and effective manner; providing brief interim reports to the executive sponsor (e.g., chair, dean) on the progress of the search process; assigning tasks to committee members such as soliciting and reviewing letters of interest and curriculum vitae, conducting screening phone/skype interviews, and serving as host(s) for candidates invited for first interviews.

Search Committees are typically advisory to the chair/dean; thus negotiation with prospective candidates (including compensation, office/laboratory space, and other resources) are outside of the scope of the committee.

Committee responsibilities include:

1. Receive and ensure understanding of the charge to the committee³
2. Review and approve position description
3. Develop announcement/ad for the search and prioritize appropriate methods of distribution (e.g., relevant professional journals/websites, targeted letters to appropriate sector of the academic community). HR personnel should assist in posting the position vacancy as per university processes and in arranging for external advertising in

appropriate venues that ensure broad and inclusive reach of potentially qualified candidates.

4. Seek names of potential qualified candidates from a variety of sources such as national conferences, consultation with internal and external field leaders, etc.
5. Identify and contact potential candidates
6. Review all submitted materials (CV and cover letter required)
7. Screen applications for qualified candidates relative to the specified qualifications and essential functions of the position. At the discretion of the committee chair/co-chairs, further screening of a large pool of qualified candidates may be done through audio/videoconferences by a subset(s) of the search committee through structured questions.
8. Select a minimum of 3 or more typically 6-12 qualified candidates to invite for “airport” style panel interviews using structured questions (for some searches, these may be performed through video conferencing).
9. Prioritize semi-finalist candidates (typically 3-6) for on-site confidential interviews with key leaders and stakeholder and host a small group dinner for each candidate.
10. Collect confidential feedback using standardized evaluation forms and prioritize a short list of qualified candidates.
11. Prepare and provide a final report to the department chair/dean. Typically, this report will briefly summarize the committee’s process and deliberations and include an unranked list of 2-4 qualified candidates; the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate relative to the position specifications should be detailed in the report. If there was dissent with the final candidate list within the committee, this should be noted. With the guidance of HR professional, accounting of self-identified gender and race/ethnicity of the applicant pool and short list should be submitted as an appendix.

Composition of the Search Committee

The size of search committees may vary depending on the scope and level of the position for which the search is being conducted; typically 10-15 members for leadership positions and a minimum of three members for faculty positions. Attention to diversity of gender, gender identity and/or sexual orientation, ethnicity, ability, and professional degree among the membership is strongly encouraged, and should be representative of the composition of the faculty body. Where appropriate, cross-departmental faculty, staff, students and/or residents and other stakeholders should be included.

Charge to the Committee

The executive sponsor should join the initial meeting to charge the committee. This includes an outline of the absolute and desired qualifications and competencies to be included in the position description, institutional priorities for the successful candidate, envisioned timeline, scope, and support for the committee’s work, and the imperative of confidentiality. The executive sponsor

should place emphasis on seeking a diverse candidate pool and encourage committee members to avoid common cognitive errors that result in biased assessments. The sponsor may also present his/her vision for the ideal candidate, the relative merits of technical expertise versus leadership experience in the ideal candidate, and review guiding principles and procedures for the search.

Mitigating Bias in Searches

At the first search committee meeting, the full committee is required to undergo a discussion of unconscious bias led by a SOM certified unconscious bias trainer¹ prior to initiating any part of the search process. In this session, sources of bias will be reviewed as well as best practices to mitigate their influence. Additionally, a SOM equity liaison² will be appointed to all chair and decanal position searches in the SOM; for other positions, a request should be made to FAALI and every attempt will be made to supply an equity liaison. The SOM equity liaison is a trained individual who will serve as an ex officio member of the committee to monitor and guide the committee on mitigating bias in all its functions.

Position specification, job postings, and review of applications

1. All such materials should provide clarity of minimum and preferred qualifications relative to the essential functions of the position.
2. Advertisements should include “Emory University is an EEO/AA employer.”
3. Ideally, positions descriptions should convey our commitment to excellence, equity, and diversity and be screened for stereotype-primed language. Position descriptions and postings should be reviewed with attention to gendered or otherwise biased language such as “assertive, action-oriented leader,” or “proven track record³”.
4. Position descriptions and job postings should be written to attract the widest possible range of qualified candidates; specifically with appropriately limited “required” qualifications distinguished from those that may be “preferred”.
5. Job postings should be placed in both field-specific journals and job forums and resources highlighting women and under-represented minorities such as:
 - a. ELAM <https://drexel.edu/medicine/academics/womens-health-and-leadership/elam/job-postings-search-committees/>
 - b. National Medical Association <https://career.nmanet.org/>

¹ Coordination and scheduling of certified trainers is done through the Emory School of Medicine Office of Faculty Academic Advancement, Leadership, and Inclusion (FAALI)

² The SOM Equity Liaison will work closely with the search committee chair/co-chairs to help guide the group in issues related to bias, including review of position description materials, advertisements/postings, structured interview questions, and all committee meetings and deliberations.

³ Excellent resources include: 1) Gender Decoder: <http://gender-decoder.katmatfield.com/>, 2) University of Arizona “Avoiding Gender Bias in Reference Writing”: https://csw.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/avoiding_gender_bias_in_letter_of_reference_writing.pdf

- c. Association of American Medical Colleges: <https://careerconnect.aamc.org/>
 - d. Women in Higher Education: <https://www.wihe.com/>
 - e. HBCU Career Center: <http://thehbcucareercenter.com/>
6. Job postings and ads should ideally be available for a minimum of three weeks before selecting candidates for interviews.
 7. Where there is an available database that could widely reach potentially qualified individuals (e.g., a field-specific vice chairs' organization in the setting of a chair search), these may be used to distribute notices of the position and invite applications.
 8. Search committee members should also take advantage of their professional networks to solicit diverse, qualified candidates who may not be actively seeking new opportunities.
 9. Interviews should *not* be scheduled until a diverse pool of applicants that is representative of the field with respect to gender and UIM representation is identified.

“Airport” Style Panel Interviews

1. Develop and prioritize evaluation criteria prior to candidate interviews and consistently apply to all candidates. Unconscious bias may cause use of different standards to evaluate candidates. Additionally, evaluators may shift or emphasize criteria that favor candidates from well-represented demographics groups.⁴
2. Allow for time (typically 5-7 min) for the candidate to describe his/her experience relative to the specific qualifications of the position and reason for interest in the position.
3. Panel interview questions should be tailored to the position qualifications and be behavioral based^{5, 6}. This method of questioning encourages candidates to describe how they responded to past challenges relevant to the most relevant job competencies.

Examples:

Non-Behavioral Based	Behavioral Based
“How do you usually deal with a difficult student?”	“Tell us about a time you faced a particularly difficult challenge involving a student. What was the situation and what did you learn from it?”

⁴ Biernat M, Fuegen K. Shifting Standards and the Evaluation of Competence: Complexity in Gender-Based Judgment and Decision Making. *Journal of Social Issues* 2001;57(4), 707-724.

Uhlmann EL, Cohen GL. Constructed Criteria: Redefining Merit to Justify Discrimination. *Psychological Science* 2005;16(6), 474–480.

⁵ Behavioral-Based Interviewing: Tools and Templates for Enhancing Candidate Selection. 2008. The Advisory Board Company, Washington, DC.

⁶ Candidates should never be asked questions aimed at determining age, marital/partner status, family planning, gender or gender identity, race/ethnicity/ancestry, sexual orientation, membership in non-professional organizations, birthplace, ability, or religion. Interviewers need to be mindful that candidate dinners are also part of the interview process.

“Would you say you are an innovative thinker?”	“Tell us about a time you had to think outside the box to solve a research goal that proved more difficult than you first thought.”
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4. Allow the opportunity for the candidate to ask questions of the search committee
5. Search committees may consider incorporating situational questions, e.g., describing a typical scenario that may arise in the position and ask the candidate to address how he/she would approach such a situation.
6. Best practices include distributing the panel interview questions among members of the search committee and having the same committee member ask the same question of each candidate.
7. Total panel interview time is typically 45min to 90min for each candidate.
8. Search committee members should individually fill out evaluation forms on each candidate during and/or immediately after his/her panel interview. The evaluation form might include a Likert scale to assess competencies relevant to the position. Ideally, evaluation forms should be available in electronic form configured to ensure anonymity of responses.
9. Debriefing after a panel interview is an opportunity to amplify versus mitigate bias typically at play in group search processes.

All Committee Deliberations

1. The chair/co-chairs, with the guidance of the equity liaison, have the responsibility to ensure that interview debriefing discussions and selection deliberations are conducted with an express purpose of mitigating implicit bias.
2. Best practices for post-interview debriefings include allowing each committee member to briefly express his/her assessment of the candidate’s competencies relevant to the position description without embellishment. In order to avoid conformity bias (i.e., “groupthink”), all committee members should have this same opportunity prior to group discussion. Varying the order in which committee member discuss their assessments can help to ensure no single member’s view exerts disproportionate influence.
3. Attention should be paid to dampen power dynamics in the committee; for example, if a C-suite leader expresses a strong opinion about a candidate, a student or junior faculty committee member may be less inclined to thereafter verbalize an opposing view. Wherever possible, the committee chair/co-chairs should refrain from presenting their own assessments until all members have had the opportunity to weigh in.
4. Where biased language may creep into the conversation (e.g., “I’m not sure that as a women, she would have the gravitas to control that division”), the group should discuss this and reframe the deliberations with the help of the equity liaison).

Other Resources:

Emory College of Arts and Sciences Detailed Search Procedures

<http://college.emory.edu/faculty/policies-forms/Detailed-Search-Procedures-2019-2020-for-Departments.pdf>

Emory University Compliance and Regulatory Information

<https://www.emory.edu/home/about/compliance.html>

Emory Guide for Search Committees

<http://college.emory.edu/hr/documents/guide-for-search-committees.pdf>

Best Practices: Faculty and Leadership Searches. Yale University Office of the Provost. 2016.

<http://faculty.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Best%20Practices%20for%20Conducting%20Faculty%20and%20Leadership%20Searches%2009-12-2016.pdf>

Johnson SK, Hekman DR, Chan ET. If There's Only One Women in Your Candidate Pool, There's Statistically No Chance She'll Be Hired. Harvard Business Review. April 26, 2016.

<https://hbr.org/2016/04/if-theres-only-one-woman-in-your-candidate-pool-theres-statistically-no-chance-shell-be-hired>