

Essential Elements of a Successful Search

PREPARATION: BEFORE YOU MEET WITH YOUR SEARCH COMMITTEE

1. **Build a diverse search committee**

Including women and minority members on your search committee can offer diverse perspectives and new ideas that may enhance your efforts to recruit and evaluate candidates. Some search committee chairs also recommend inviting graduate student representatives, delegates from the academic staff, and members from external but related departments to join your search committee.

2. **Hold your first meeting well before your application deadline**

Holding your first meeting well before your application deadline will allow your search committee to develop and implement an effective recruitment plan and will provide the time needed to discuss and establish criteria for evaluating applicants.

TIPS AND GUIDELINES: RUNNING AN EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT SEARCH COMMITTEE

Building rapport among committee members

1. **Gain the support of your committee members**

Active involvement of every member of the committee can help you reach a broad base of potential candidates. To generate active participation, set the tone in the first meeting. In productive search committees, the committee members feel that their work is important, that each of them has an essential role in the process, and that their involvement in the search process will make a difference. **Some tips include:**

- Begin with brief introductions to get your committee members talking and comfortable with each other. The assumption that members already know one another may not be correct—particularly if the search committee includes a student representative or members from outside the department.
- Be enthusiastic about the position, potential candidate pool, and composition of the search committee.
- Remind committee members that in this age of tight budgets each position is precious and that it is up to them to ensure that the best candidate is in the pool.
- Explain that the search process is far more idiosyncratic and creative than the screening process and stress that committee members can put their individual stamp on the process by shaping the pool.

2. Actively involve all committee members in discussions and search procedures

A broad pool is generated by a broad group of people. You will need assistance from every member of the committee, and the more work the committee does; the less you have to do. Try to make sure that each member of the committee feels involved, valued, and motivated to play a significant role in the search.

Some tips include:

- Look at each member of the committee while you are speaking.
- Provide and use NAME TAGS or TABLE TENTS until you are confident that *all* committee members know each other.
- Include in your first meeting at least one exercise in which you ask for a contribution from each committee member—this might be a discussion of the essential characteristics of a successful candidate or a brainstorming session about people to contact to help identify candidates.
- Try to note body language or speech habits that indicate someone is trying unsuccessfully to speak and then give them an opening.
- Be especially sensitive to interpersonal dynamics that prevent members from being full participants in the process. Many of us may assume, for example, that senior faculty are more likely than junior faculty to have connections or ideas about people to contact for nominations, or that students will be less critical in their evaluations. Sometimes these assumptions are correct, but we have all had our assumptions challenged by the junior colleague who nominates a great candidate or the student who designs an insightful interview question.
- Before leaving a topic, be sure to ask if there are any more comments, or specifically ask members of the committee who have not spoken if they agree with the conclusions or have anything to add. Be sure to do this in a way that implies you are asking because the committee values their opinion; try not to embarrass them or suggest that they need your help in being heard.
- If you notice that a member of the committee does not speak at all, you might talk with them after the meeting and mention that you are grateful that they are donating their time. Ask if they feel comfortable in the meeting and if there is anything you can do to facilitate their participation. This may be particularly important if your committee has a student member who is intimidated by having to speak in a room full of faculty.

3. Run efficient meetings

The first meeting can be a lot like the first class of a semester or the first day of rounds—it shapes the attitudes of the committee members about the process and their role in it. The goal is to make the committee members feel that what they are doing is important so that they will make time for the meetings and for work outside the meetings. It is essential that the committee members feel that attending committee meetings is a good use of their time and that their presence will make a difference. **Some tips to achieve this include:**

- Present an agenda with time allotted to each topic and generally try to stick to the plan.
- Begin by reviewing the agenda and obtain agreement on agenda items. If one committee member is digressing or dominating a discussion, gently and politely try to redirect the discussion by referring back to the agenda (e.g., “If we are going to get to all of our agenda items today, we probably need to move to the next topic now”).
- If you deviate from your agenda or run over time, acknowledge it and give a reason (e.g., “I know we spent more time on this topic than we had planned, but I thought the discussion was important and didn’t want to cut it off”) so that your committee members feel that their time was well spent, that the meeting was not a random process, and that they can anticipate useful and well-run meetings in the future.
- Try to end your meetings on time so that all committee members are present for the entire discussion.

Tasks to accomplish in your initial meetings

1. **Discuss and develop goals for the search** and use the agreed upon goals to develop recruitment strategies and criteria for evaluation of candidates.

2. **Discuss and establish ground rules** for the committee. These should cover such items as:

- **Attendance**

It is a good idea to require all search members to attend all search committee meetings and activities. The work of a search committee is cumulative and it can be very frustrating if a member who has missed one or more meetings raises issues and/or questions that have already been discussed at previous meetings. More importantly, evaluation of candidates can be hampered when one or more committee members have missed discussion of all candidates' qualifications. In order to help search members attend all committee meetings, it is important to schedule meetings well in advance. If you can, establish a schedule of meetings at the outset.

- **Decision-making**

How will your committee make decisions? By consensus? By voting? It is important to determine this at the outset.

- **Confidentiality**

“One of the biggest challenges of maintaining confidentiality within the search is avoiding off-the-cuff informal comments search committee members may make to colleagues,” says John Dowling, Sr. University Legal Counsel, UW–Madison. He recommends that to keep the process as focused and self-contained as possible, **specifics of the search should not be discussed with anyone outside the search committee until finalists are announced.** This policy respects and protects the privacy of candidates and protects the committee or hiring group. Those making the selection must be free to discuss the candidates during committee meetings without fearing that their comments will be shared outside the deliberations. The names of candidates who have requested confidentiality should not be brought up even in casual conversations. **This information should be held confidential in perpetuity, not just until the search is over.**

- **Other common ground rules** you may wish to establish include turning off cell phones, routing pagers to an assistant, being on time, treating other committee members with respect even if there is a disagreement, etc. Whatever ground rules you establish should represent a consensus and should be accepted by the entire committee. They may need to be reviewed and updated periodically.

3. **Discuss roles and expectations of the search committee members**

Make sure your committee members know what is expected of them in terms of attending meetings, building the candidate pool, evaluating candidates, etc. **Make sure your committee members know that participation in this search will require considerable time and effort.**

Some of the roles/expectations for search committee members include helping to:

- publicize the search
- recruit candidates
- develop evaluation criteria
- evaluate candidates
- develop interview questions
- interview candidates
- host candidates who interview on campus
- assure that the search process is fair and equitable
- maintain confidentiality

4. Raise and discuss issues of diversity

Use the material in the brochure *Reviewing Applicants, Research on Bias and Assumptions* to guide your discussion.

5. Review University policies and procedures for search committees

Faculty Search and Screen Procedures Manual

Anticipating problems

Despite your best efforts to gain the support of your search committee and to actively involve them in the search process, your meetings and efforts may not proceed as smoothly and effectively as you would like. It may help to anticipate problems and think about how to resolve them. You can seek advice from your department chair or from past search committee chairs. Some common problems that former search committee chairs have identified are listed below, along with resources that may help you overcome them:

1. Resistance to efforts to enhance diversity

- Allow all members of the search committee to voice their opinions and participate in a discussion on diversity and the search committee's roles and responsibilities in recruiting and evaluating a diverse pool of candidates.
- Remind your search committee that they represent the interests of the department as a whole and, in a broader context, the interests of the university.
- Stress that failure to recruit and fairly evaluate a diverse pool of candidates may jeopardize the search; that it may be too late to address the issue when and if you are asked, "Why are there no women or minorities on your finalist list?"
- Rely on your discussion of diversity in this workshop and on the materials in the *Faculty Search and Screen Procedures Manual* to help you facilitate a discussion of diversity within your search committee and/or to respond to resistance.
- Consider inviting someone with expertise on research documenting the value of diversity to your committee meetings (e.g., a representative of your college's Diversity Action Committee or a member of the ADVANCE-Purdue Leadership Team or someone from the Office of Institutional Equity).

3. One member dominates the meetings

- Review and/or refer to the ground rules you established for your search committee meetings.

4. Power dynamics of the group prevent some members from fully participating

Although a search committee composed of a diverse group of individuals is recommended and helps you to incorporate diverse views and perspectives into your search, you should also recognize that differences in the status and power of the members of your search committee may influence their participation. Junior faculty members, for example, may be reluctant to disagree with senior faculty members who may later evaluate them for tenure promotion. Minority and/or women search committee members may not be comfortable if they are the only member of the search committee to advocate for minority and/or female candidates. Though minority and/or women search committee members can help you recruit a more diverse pool, it is not reasonable to expect them to be the only advocates for diversity. As search committee chair you should evaluate your committee's interactions to assess whether such power imbalances are influencing your search. If so, you can attempt to improve the group dynamics by:

- having private conversations with relevant members of the search committee
- reviewing/establishing ground rules that encourage participation from all members

Concluding your meetings

1. Assign specific tasks to committee members

For example, each committee member could be asked:

- to identify or contact a specified number of sources who can refer you to potential candidates
- to suggest a certain number of venues for posting job announcements
- to review a specified number of applications

2. Remind committee members of their assigned tasks

Before your next meeting, send committee members a written or emailed reminder of their assigned tasks so that they know they are expected to follow through and to report on their activities at the next meeting.

3. Hold committee members accountable

Ask each committee member to report on his or her search activities at every committee meeting.

This handout is reproduced and adapted with permission from WISELI, the Women in Science and Engineering Leadership Institute at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. It is based on the following publications: Eve Fine and Jo Handelsman, *Searching for Excellence and Diversity: A Guide for Search Committee Chairs* (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2005).

Searching for Excellence & Diversity

SUMMARY OF TOP TIPS

1. **Build rapport among committee members by setting a tone of collegiality, dedication, and open-mindedness.**
2. **Run efficient meetings and empower all committee members.**
3. **Make sure committee members know what is expected of them and establish ground rules for such items as attendance, decision-making, treatment of candidates, etc.**
4. **Assign tasks and hold committee members accountable.**
5. **Air views about diversity and other controversial issues.**
6. **Identify people and places who can refer you to potential candidates.**
7. **Search broadly and inclusively, save sifting and winnowing for later.**
8. **Recruit aggressively and make personal contact with potential candidates.**
9. **Discuss research on assumptions and biases and consciously strive to minimize their influence on your evaluation of candidates.**
10. **Ensure that every candidate interviewed on campus – whether hired or not – is respected and treated well during their visit.**
11. **Once the successful candidate has arrived on campus retention efforts will ensure the candidate's success. Be sure to prepare the candidate's work area, include the candidate in informal networks, and make use of mentoring efforts such as the ADVANCE-Purdue Mentoring Institute.**