HERC Search Committee Toolkit

Before the Search: The Committee

Academic institutions have long recognized the importance of equity, diversity, and inclusion. A diverse faculty means a more robust curricula, a richer landscape of research, and broader viewpoints for faculty and students to experience. A commitment to diversity in hiring ensures that the best candidates are not overlooked because of unconscious or structural biases. The hiring committee is an ideal place to lay the foundation for an equitable and inclusive hiring process.

Forming the Search Committee

A Search Committee should receive a formal written charge setting forth the expectations for the position and the search committee’s role in helping to fill it.

A Search Committee charge should cover the following essentials:

- The position to be filled with a rank(s)/title(s) noted;
- The tasks and role of the committee in the search;
- The scope of the search (e.g., internal, local, national, international);
- A deadline for receiving recommendations from the committee;
- Affirmative Action considerations (applicable institutional hiring goals, federal laws regulating acceptable and unacceptable inquiries);
- Confidentiality.

Each search should begin with an organizational meeting of the Search Committee and the hiring authority who will charge the committee, review the Affirmative Action procedures, emphasize the need for confidentiality, and, if available, review the institutional Search Committee Guidelines, and/or process and procedures.

If not already established, the Search Committee chair should be selected. The committee should discuss the responsibilities of the individual members and expectations for attendance, record keeping, decision-making, confidentiality, and decorum.
Committee Considerations for an Equitable Search

A Search Committee can lay the groundwork to conduct an equitable and broad search by evaluating the current diversity of your department/unit and noting any opportunities for expansion (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, age, or discipline). It is important to form a committee that includes gender, racial, and ethnic diversity. A committee that lacks diversity is less likely to recognize unconscious bias, limiting the committee’s ability to recruit and evaluate the best candidates. Below are questions that will aid your process.

Committee Composition
- Have we assembled a committee inclusive of gender, racial, and ethnic diversity?
  - If no, could a faculty member from a complementary department serve on the committee?
  - Alternately, is there a trained diversity advocate that might serve on the committee?

Diversity and Equity
- Does the committee understand what constitutes diversity and support the need for a diverse candidate pool?
- Does the committee understand how unconscious biases (positive and negative) impact assumptions individuals make about candidates based on race, gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, family/marital status, etc.?
- What are our conscious biases (positive and negative) about academic pedigree, publication, funding, research focus, and “fit” in our department/discipline/institution?

Outreach and Recruitment
- What resources and individuals can we engage at our institution to assist with the stages of the search and hiring process? For example: diversity and inclusion offices, academic affairs, human resources, women’s center, LGBTQ center, and dual career/partner hiring offices.
- What resources can we engage in our community/discipline regionally, locally and nationally?

Process Questions
Articulate and document the committee’s process to confirm the steps and to reduce potential errors later in the search.

- Will the committee make decisions by vote or consensus?
- Will absentee votes be allowed?
- Will decisions be open or confidential ballot? Confidential voting protects untenured faculty from feeling uncomfortable if dissenting.

Additional Resources


• Project Implicit, Harvard University.

• Searching for Excellence and Diversity: Recruiting Resources for Search Committees. Women in Science and Engineering Leadership Institute, University of Wisconsin-Madison.
