Best Practices for an Inclusive Search Process

An inclusive search is one that provides equal opportunity to all applicants regardless of their background. When decisions are made in a fair and equitable manner, free from biases that are for/against any individual or group, we can focus on the merits of each individual and hire the person best suited for the role. This document outlines best practices for being inclusive throughout the various stages of the recruitment and selection process. The information provided is not an exhaustive list. It is intended to be a working document to help guide our recruitment and hiring efforts.

Inclusive Outreach and Recruitment

Inclusive Job Descriptions/Position Announcements

- Developing a well written, gender-neutral and inclusive job description/position announcement will demonstrate to candidates that the University of Illinois is an inclusive employer that considers all applicants regardless of their background
- Refer to the Search Process Toolkit for guidance on Writing Inclusive Job Descriptions and Position Announcements

Select the Search Team

- The composition of the search committee/interview team is critical to its success
- Build a diverse committee that includes individuals who:
  - Have broad perspectives and backgrounds
  - Are committed to conducting an open, fair and equitable search
  - Are welcoming to all applicants
  - Have enough time to devote for the expected timeframe
- Refer to the Search Process Toolkit for additional information on Forming a Search Committee

Train the Search Team

- Understanding bias and learning about strategies to prevent bias are essential for a successfully inclusive search
- Ensure the hiring manager, search committee and anyone else involved with the search process are trained on how to be fair and equitable
  - The DiversityEdu online educational program must be completed before reviewing any application materials
  - Additional training resources are available in the Search Process Toolkit
Confidentiality

- To maintain the integrity and fairness of the search, confidentiality is critical
- Refer to the Search Process Toolkit for Confidentiality in the Search Process guidance

Good Faith Efforts

- Recruitment and outreach efforts are critical in ensuring a diverse pool of candidates, and should be geared towards addressing underrepresentation – i.e., if there is a placement goal and/or hiring benchmark for the vacancy, recruitment should be focused on this demographic
- Refer to the Good Faith Efforts job aid in the Search Process Toolkit for additional guidance on conducting and tracking your efforts

Strategies to Increase Diversity of the Applicant Pool

- Utilize a wide variety of recruiting methods
- Do not rely on the same sources repeatedly – each search is unique
- Revisit your pipeline – our networks tend to look just like us
- Assess efforts and adjust when needed

Custom Applicant Source Codes

- Codes that can be used to track where an applicant found out about the position
- If codes are utilized when advertising, a report can be requested to review the Applicant Demographics by Source Code
- This data can be used to assess good faith efforts
- Refer to the Search Process Toolkit for the Custom Applicant Source Code Job Aid

Diversity of the Pool Report

- Diversity of the pool reports can be requested from college HR staff
- Report will provide aggregated data and no names are included
- This data can be used to assess if recruitment efforts were successful
- Best practice is to run before the posting comes of job board to determine if the close date should be extended to conduct additional recruitment
- To find out who in your college/unit can access the report, refer to the Search Process Toolkit for the Applicant Demographic by Source Code and Diversity of the Pool Report Access list
Inclusive Evaluation and Interviews

Application Evaluation Best Practices

- Before reviewing any applications, determine job-related criteria that will be used to evaluate applications and be sure all reviewers agree on/understand the criteria.

- Develop a written document that outlines the evaluation criteria and be consistent by using the same evaluation process for all applicants.

- To ensure equity, spend sufficient time reviewing each application – at least 15 minutes.
  - If you think you have made a decision very quickly and you haven’t read the entire application/resume, spend the rest of the time trying to disprove your conclusion.
  - Quick decisions are more likely to be a result of implicit bias (both positive and negative).

- Question your judgments to see if unintentional bias may have impacted your selections.
  - Does it seem most of the highest rated applicants are those who are most similar to you? (i.e., similar education, experience, backgrounds, etc.)
  - Does it appear that all the highest rated applicants seem to have either male-sounding names or white-sounding names?
  - Does it seem that candidates with degrees from major research universities are being rated higher?

- Review the applications anonymously by using the cornerstone Anonymize Applicants feature (refer to Search Process Toolkit for more information).

- Recognize that applicants can be qualified in a variety of ways – Even if they come from a different industry, they may have transferable skills.

- Keep in mind that soft skills such as communication, teamwork, active listening, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and adaptability, are just as important as technical skills.

Veteran Applications

- Many military veterans went straight from school to joining the military; it is possible they have never applied for a job before.

- Translating skills from military to civilian roles can be difficult for some veterans.

- Keep transferable skills in mind when reviewing applications.
  - Customer service example: Even though they may not have customer service experience in an office setting, they may have military experience that is applicable to providing customer service.
  - Refer to Military Skills Translator for additional examples.
Interview Best Practices

- Create a welcoming environment
- Treat all applicants with the same respect
- Focus on established evaluation criteria
- Consider giving candidates an opportunity to demonstrate skills, rather than just answer abstract questions
- Hold off on comparing the finalists or picking a favorite
- Minimize conversations/topics that are not related to the position
  - Some candidates may share personal information
  - While you cannot remove the conversation from memory, you can choose to not pursue the topic in further detail
  - Do not make note of the conversation in evaluation and do not use the information when making selection/non-selection decisions
- If a candidate mentions difficulty with any medical condition or references disability during questions about job, direct them to OAE for information
- Remember that interviews are a two-way conversation, and the applicant is also assessing us
- Share benefits information with finalists
  - University of Illinois System Benefits
  - Dual Career Talent Attraction Resources
  - You’re Welcome

Interview Questions

- A core set of questions should be developed in advance and asked of every finalist, while allowing for individual follow-ups
- Interview questions should be related to the knowledge, skills, abilities and experience necessary to carry out the duties that are specified in the job description
- Committee members should also be familiar with what questions should not be asked – refer to the Search Process Toolkit for Pre-Employment Inquiries - Topics to Avoid
- If a Diversity-Related Interview Question would be applicable to position being filled, refer to the Search Process Toolkit for examples

Interview Stakeholders

- It is strongly recommended for both the search committee and stakeholders to include diverse individuals
- Diversity is more than race/ethnicity – diverse identities can include age, gender, religious affiliation, veterans, individuals with disabilities, members of the LGBTQ community, national origin, etc.
Can include individuals from outside a hiring department or the University

Ensure interviewers are aware of inclusive interview practices and know what topics should be avoided (refer to Search Process Toolkit for guidance)

**Online/Virtual Interviews**

- Ensure the interview platform being used is accessible and user-friendly
  - If someone isn’t familiar with the platform, provide clear instructions for how to use it
  - If someone would prefer a phone interview instead of a video interview, be flexible and accommodate the request if feasible
- Create a fair starting point for all finalists by sharing best practices in advance
  - Encourage virtual backgrounds, or offer to provide them with a virtual background
  - Remind them of the importance of good lighting, testing the volume/speakers in advance and eliminating distractions
- Offer the interview agenda and questions topics, in an accessible form, ahead of time if requested or as an inclusive practice
- If planning to use interactive features, such as a whiteboard, check-in with participants in advance to determine if they will be able to use the feature, or if not, what alternative can be used instead
- Utilize a closed captioning feature or enable automated transcription, if available in the platform
- Ask participants to state their name first when speaking
  - Enables those who are blind or participating via dial-in to know who is speaking
  - Anyone relying on a sign language interpreter will be able to engage more fully
  - Transcription services will properly identify the speaker
  - Easier to manage when two or more people start speaking at the same time
- When sharing screen, verbally describe what is being shown visually
- If any documents are shared during the video call, be sure they are in an accessible format

**In-Person Interviews and Presentations**

- Create a fair starting point for all finalists by sharing information in advance such as where to park, how to dress, an itinerary and interview topics
- Consider individual mobility limitations - Where are you holding the interviews? Do you have multiple seating options? Etc.
- Do not impede doorways, hallways, restroom entrances
- For larger presentation-type interviews:
  - Be sure you invite individuals who are deaf/hard of hearing to move to the front
  - Have the presenter use a microphone; unless it interferes with their own accommodation request
- Provide alternative format printed materials when needed (i.e., large print, audio, etc.)
Interviewing Individuals with Disabilities

- Some candidates may need an accommodation for the interview
- Examples of accommodations may include, but are not limited to:
  - A sign language interpreter
  - An advance copy of the interview questions
  - A time of day to be interviewed that is best for their ability to communicate or focus
  - A room that is appropriate for someone using a mobility device
  - A quiet interview setting
- Many people with disabilities do not disclose if they have a disability
- If an applicant has a noticeable disability or reveals a disability during the interview, concentrate on the individual, not on the disability
- If there has been an accommodation request made prior to the interview, it should not be discussed with the committee or discussed during the interview with the employee
- If a candidate indicates they would like to request an accommodation, please have them reach out the Accessibility and Accommodations Division at 217-333-0885 or accessibility@illinois.edu

Interviewing Veterans

- Professional behavior in a military setting is different than the civilian setting
  - Some veterans may not be comfortable selling themselves – hiring and promotion process was based on performance record and self-promotion was frowned upon
  - May hesitate to ask follow-up questions – used to receiving orders/not questioning
- Keep transferable skills in mind when interviewing
  - Customer service example: “Tell me about a situation where you realized a person needed help. How did you realize the person needed assistance and what did you do? What was the outcome of this situation?”
- Remember to keep the interview legal when hiring military veterans
  - Do not ask interview questions related to the candidate’s type of discharge or current military status
  - Do not ask a National Guardsman if they will be deployed soon
  - Do not ask questions that could relate to or uncover information about injuries sustained during service, a potential disability or PTSD
  - 10 Things Veterans Won’t Tell You in a Job Interview

Social Media

- In general, our review should focus on application materials requested
- Use of social media checks should be limited and used with great caution as it could reveal information that is not related to qualifications or disclose a protected class
• Unless a candidate lists a professional social media account on their application materials, search committees should limit any social media checks to LinkedIn as that is a professional oriented site (other sites should be considered personal and not relevant)

• If there is job-related reason to check social media, keep the following guidance in mind:
  • Only look at public content; never ask for candidate’s passwords
  • Be consistent – if reviewing one finalist’s social media, then review all finalists
  • Should be checked later in the process (i.e., after interviews)
  • If review affects hiring decision, document why and save a screenshot
  • Focus on candidate’s own content, not what others have said about them

**Evaluating the Finalists**

• Be aware of bias and redirect conversations when needed
• Be able to explain every decision for removing or advancing a candidate by documenting the process
• Justification for selection/non-selection must be job-related and based on specific qualifications, experience, references, and interview
• Avoid vague statements such as “not a good fit” or “best qualified”
• Avoid comments (either orally or written) that are not job-related

**Reference Calls or Emails**

• Should have a structured set of questions
• Document a summary of all reference checks
• Hiring manager should be prepared to document in case check doesn’t go well
• Refer to the [Search Process Toolkit](#) for Reference Checking Resources

**Reference Letters**

• Reference letter writers may inadvertently describe candidates in stereotypically gendered ways
  • Letters for men are an average of 16% longer, more likely to mention accomplishments, and more likely to use formal titles (vs. first name only)
  • Letters for women are 2.5 times as likely to provide minimal assurance, 50% more likely to use “grindstone” adjectives, and 7 times more likely to mention personal life
• If signs of bias are noticed, consider if other materials should be used to evaluate the candidate more fairly