

Guidebook Three: Evaluating Applicants

The purpose of this guidebook is to provide information and tools to assess candidates' qualifications based on their application materials. Making consistent decisions about a candidate based on their materials ensures each candidate is assessed equitably. This also allows search committee members to quickly reference notes about each candidate.

Working with the Affirmative Action Officer and Diversity Search and Outreach Program Manager

The hiring authority, search committee chair, and the search committee are encouraged to work with the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Recruitment Program Manager and Affirmative Action Officer from the Department of Human Resources when the search process begins for guidance and support.

Contact information:

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Recruitment Program Manager: Teresa.Hernandez@colorado.edu

Affirmative Action Officer: David.Pacheco@colorado.edu.

These individuals can provide information on the following:

- Compliance with federal laws and policies governing the hiring process
- Affirmative Action placement goals
- Inclusive search strategies and practices

The Affirmative Action Officer can also provide a demographic report of the current applicant pool. The purpose of the report is to allow the committee to review the demographics of the applicant pool. Based on how applicants identified (if they elected to self-identify their gender, race/ethnicity, disability, and/or veteran status), the report can provide the committee with the makeup of the pool. The demographics report is not intended to identify characteristics of individual applicants based on their identities. The report provides a confidential overview of the reported demographics within the applicant pool.

This report is best requested prior to the application deadline and review of applications, to assess if additional outreach is justified to further diversify the pool.

Determining Criteria Prior to Review

Agreeing on criteria prior to screening applications will enhance the committees' ability to be consistent and objective. Using consistent criteria provides a foundation to identify top candidates more accurately. Objective evaluation criteria can also assist in mitigating unconscious bias.

Defining Terms Prior to the Application Review

In addition to defining the knowledge, skills, and abilities of desirable candidates, it is also helpful to define terms and ideas related to the qualifications. Common words and phrases that are helpful to define include:

- Excellence
- Expertise
- Demonstrated/Proven experience
- Potential
- Successful record
- Outstanding scholar

Defining terms can help mitigate unconscious bias by surfacing subjective interpretations and differences based on committee members' own lenses.

Conducting an Applicant Review Exercise

Search committees can practice their application review skills by conducting the following exercise:

1. Secure application materials from a former (and similar) search
2. Select one candidate from the pool
3. Remove the name from the application documents prior to the review to protect their confidentiality
4. Ask each committee member to review the application materials and evaluate the candidate using the established qualifications, definitions, and criteria

The committee can then discuss the evaluation based on each member's evaluation of the candidate. This exercise can surface differences in how committee members interpret terms and qualifications and prepare them for issues that may arise as the review process continues.

Using an Applicant Evaluation Rubric

Rubrics allow committee members to reference the qualifications as advertised in the job posting and more easily discuss and compare candidates based on objective search criteria during the review process. Using an applicant evaluation rubric provides for an objective, defensible, and inclusive process.

The search committee should agree on the criteria being assessed and how each criterion will be evaluated (i.e., which criteria should be weighted more than others). Selection criteria must be applied consistently for each candidate. A preliminary screening can be conducted to eliminate applicants who do not meet the required minimum qualifications.

Elements of a rubric

- 1) A listing of minimum and preferred qualifications, as well as desired competencies to be assessed. Competencies may be best vetted at the interview stage.
- 2) A weighting method (if desired)
If a weighting method is used, required and important qualifications should be weighted more heavily than others.

A ranking method

A variety of ranking methods can be used. Numerical rankings are common and are best if a three-point scale is used. Challenges associated with numerical rankings include the possibility of creating a false belief that only the individual with the highest number is qualified. Additionally, numerical rankings across multiple criteria may not be adjusted based on priorities. Finally, numerical rankings without weighting are sometimes overruled in the final decision. While this is acceptable, documentation would reveal that the final selection and the numerical rankings were not aligned, which could be difficult to defend. Examples of non-numerical rankings could be yes/maybe/no, or top, secondary, not under consideration. Non-numerical rankings eliminate the challenges associated with numerical rankings.

3) Application Documents

Documents to be included in the rubric may include the curriculum vitae, cover letter, finalists, letters of recommendation, and a commitment to diversity and inclusion.

4) Commitment to Diversity Statement

It may be desirable to evaluate a candidate's commitment and experience with diverse communities. Asking applicants to submit a statement addressing this may be appropriate for the position and could be tailored to the department (asking the applicant to connect their experience to the department's diversity goals for example). If used, this criterion should have also been listed in the job posting. See the following links for diversity statement samples and guidance that can be used when evaluating diversity statements:

[Samples of Diversity Statement Questions](#)

[Guidance When Evaluating Diversity Statements](#)

[Rubric to Assess DEI Statements](#)

5) Applicant names

See the following rubric template and a sample: [Applicant Screening Template](#) and [Applicant Screening Sample](#)

The search committee should also create a plan for mitigating bias during the application review process. Focusing on the objective search criteria identified and defined by the committee is the best way to mitigate bias when reviewing applications. For additional background on the role of bias in the search process, our [Examples of Bias Based Hiring Practices](#) document outlines unfair evaluation of women and other historically underrepresented or minoritized communities.

Reference the [Criteria Evaluation Best Practices Matrix](#) for additional review strategies.

Before creating a rubric, conduct an applicant material check to ensure that none of the applicants are missing materials. Contact applicants who are missing documents and provide a deadline to submit them. Providing this opportunity also assists in our efforts to recruit top diverse talent. (Shropshire, S., 2018, February 8).

Sharing Rubric Ratings in Committee Discussions

Once committee members have rated applicants using the rubric, committee members can share their ranking. The use of the rubric makes discussions regarding applicant strengths and weaknesses more orderly and allows the committee to group candidates. It also allows differences between committee members to emerge.

Notifying Applicants in the CU Boulder Search Committee Portal

Once candidates are screened and a list of semi-finalists emerge, those not moving forward should be notified. The Talent Acquisition team in HR can assist in sending notifications to non-selected candidates. General, (not specific) reasons can be provided to the candidate not moving forward, however, you are always welcome to partner with the Talent Acquisition to guidance to these scenarios. Reason codes are available on the CU Boulder search committee pas are email templates that provide general reasons. Criteria used to eliminate applicants must be job-related and documented. Note: Selecting the most appropriate reason code when marking a candidate as not selected is important in our reporting efforts to follow affirmative action requirements and to measure campus DEI efforts.

Letters of Recommendation and Unconscious Bias

Unconscious bias can occur during the review of letters of recommendation. Letters written for women, for example, tend to be shorter in length and focus on interpersonal skills rather than knowledge, skills, and abilities as compared to men-identified candidates. [The Potential Influence of Unconscious Bias](#) handout provides additional information. To help mitigate bias, one strategy is to wait to collect letters of recommendation for only the finalists rather than from all candidates in the pool. Not only is this a time saver for candidates, letter providers, and the search committee, it also allows the committee to focus on the candidate's qualifications and contributions and consider all factors. For example, if an author of a letter of recommendation is well respected in the field, this should be only one of many factors considered when evaluating candidates. There will be candidates who do not have well-known mentors or who do not hail from highly regarded institutions. However, they may be top candidates based upon their work, their life experience, and their resiliency. As such, evaluating applicants based upon their application without letters of recommendation is one strategy to mitigate bias. The [Examples of Bias in the Hiring Practices](#) handout reveals information regarding the unfair evaluation of women and other historically underrepresented communities.

When a Committee Member Knows a Candidate

There will be times when candidates know committee members. Committee members should share who is known to them and the committee should determine a plan for the committee member to continue to participate or recuse themselves from evaluating and interviewing the candidate. Discussing concerns with the search chair first can be helpful to determine a plan for

communicating with the committee. Contact the Department of Human Resources with questions.

Internal Candidates

Internal candidates should be provided with the same questions, assessments, and evaluations as external candidates. Avoid relying on prior information about the candidate. Rather, focus on the materials and information the candidate provides during the search process. A valuable exercise is to consider what is known and not known about the other candidates. It is not uncommon for committee members to want to grant internal candidates an interview as a courtesy rather than because of their standing among the other candidates. This philosophy should be discussed and resolved prior to the review of applications. For example, if including an internal candidate as a courtesy means excluding other promising candidates, it may not be advisable.

Source:

Shropshire, S. (2018, February 8). Faculty Selection Committee Diversity Training [Webinar]. The Academic Network.