

**Department of Horticulture
Faculty Search Committee Best Practices and Templates (Final Draft)**

Development of the Draft Position Description

The position description is a critical document in the search process. It serves to keep the process transparent and on track to conduct a successful search because assessment rubrics and subsequent candidate interview questions should be aligned with the position description.

In response to strategic needs and following discussions with appropriate faculty groups, the HRT Strategic Faculty Positions Committee (SFPC) initiates faculty position descriptions, using the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR) template (Appendix A). Previous horticulture position descriptions may be available in D2L for the SFPC to utilize as a guide while they develop a new position description. If the position has a teaching component, the SFPC should consult the undergraduate and graduate program committees to determine the courses or areas that the individual hired will be required to teach. The SFPC and faculty associated with the program area/s related to the position, along with the Department Chair, should agree on proposed **required** and **preferred** qualifications.

At this point, the SFPC will then vet the **proposed position description** with the HRT faculty at the next faculty meeting for any suggested revisions and to ensure there is clarity in both required and preferred qualifications and responsibilities.

Department Chair and DAC Form a Search Committee (SC)

After the draft position description has been developed and vetted by the faculty, the Department Chair, in conjunction with the departmental advisory committee (DAC), will select a search committee (SC) chair. It is preferable that the SC chair is a tenured faculty member with previous departmental or institutional SC experience. If, during the search, the SC chair can no longer serve due to a conflict of interest (Appendix B) or other circumstance, that individual will be replaced by another tenured faculty member on the committee or, if none exists, a tenured faculty member to be added to the SC by the Department Chair.

The Department Chair, the SC chair, and the DAC will then identify individuals to be submitted to CANR for approval to serve on the SC. The goal is to achieve a committee that is diverse in terms of faculty rank and classification (tenure system, fixed term, academic specialist), role (e.g., faculty members, graduate students, stakeholders and support staff, as appropriate to the position), program area reflecting the FTE expertise and composition of the position (i.e., percent research, teaching, and extension appointment), and with ability to properly promote the goals for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) established by the university, college, and department.

The proposed committee may be convened to discuss any final potential refinements to the position description, then the Department Chair will submit the draft position description and the

proposed SC composition to CANR *via* the Position Request Form for approval to begin the formal search.

Search Committee Affirmative Action Officer (AAO)

Upon CANR approval of the SC members and a position number assignment from Human Resources/FASA (Faculty and Academic Staff Affairs), the SC chair shall arrange a meeting of the official SC. The beginning of this meeting shall be attended by the Department Chair and the HRT Office Manager to review responsibilities of the committee and HRT support staff (see Appendix C). Afterwards, a SC member will be selected to serve as an **affirmative action officer (AAO)** within the committee. The AAO has five key charges:

- a. Help ensure that the committee is operating in accordance with best practices, as outlined in current university and college level policies.
- b. Inform the SC chair and members if any issues are raised that may not be, or are not, in accordance with best practices.
- c. Provide input to help ensure inclusivity in the search.
- d. Track and record relevant data (e.g., recruitment efforts and information about the applicant pool) with help from the HRT Office Manager.
- e. Draft the committee AAO report (with support from the SC chair) (Appendix D).

Search Committee Charge and Instructions

The SC is required to meet with the CANR Associate Dean for DEI to discuss the basics of academic hiring, record keeping, and how to foster anti-bias in academic hiring. The development of the distribution list of potential individuals, associations, institutions, and departments to advertise the position also should be discussed.

As the advertising distribution list (traditional and specific to the FTE) is generated, the SC and the AAO should be vigilant in recognizing potential bias (e.g., Who is more likely to be alerted? Are there groups with whom the committee is less likely to have connections? How can those gaps be filled?). The SC chair and the AAO will create a spreadsheet to track all outreach and advertising efforts, and add any listservs and networks that may have been overlooked. Additionally, they shall consider how the committee's proposed advertising efforts align with the assessment rubric(s) created for the position (see below), and whether the networks reflect the strengths and expertise required in the position.

Advertising the Position

The SC chair will work with the Department Chair, the HRT Office Manager, and CANR Human Resource (HR) Director to get the position officially “posted” in the university position management system (*Page Up*).

- a. Committee members, HRT faculty and academic staff members should reach out to their networks to actively advertise the position, solicit names of potential candidates for the SC

- chair to contact, and encourage qualified individuals to apply. It is helpful to the AAO for SC members to document who they contact in their personal networks in advertising the position.
- b. As the position advertisement circulates and the application process is underway, committee members and faculty may be contacted by interested applicants. *They should forward all questions about the position and requests for detail, beyond those in the position description, to the SC chair.*
 - c. In addition to replying to questions from potential applicants, the SC chair should consider providing periodic updates to applicants to advise them of how the search is progressing (Appendix E), because personal communication creates a favorable impression during recruitment.

Initial Application Screening Process

Prior to receiving applications to review and evaluate, the SC needs to outline the process for initial screening and ranking. **Best Practices** for faculty searches should be followed, e.g.,

- all communications with applicants/candidates will be the responsibility of the SC chair.
- the SC chair should remind the committee that no elements or discussions related to the search should be shared outside of the SC.
- any SC member who has a conflict of interest (COI, see Appendix B) with a candidate in the pool should abstain from all discussions and votes with respect to that candidate.
- develop evaluation, screening, and interview timelines that are acceptable to everyone on the committee. If the timeline must be changed, the SC chair should inform the entire SC and the applicants.
- only complete applications will be considered. The SC chair can remind applicants to submit all missing materials, but a cutoff date should be agreed upon.
- the basis for assessing applicant qualifications is the well-defined position description.
- a form with assessment rubrics should utilize a numerical scale (e.g., 1-3, 1-5, 1-10) based on the position description required and preferred qualifications. Establish parameters for how the SC should consider these criteria.
- assessment factors must be relevant to an applicant's qualifications within the position description criteria, **e.g., notions of "cultural fit" are irrelevant and a form of illegal discrimination.** Similarly, speculating on an applicant's long-term happiness or commitment (e.g., Would they come? Would they like us? Would they use the position to seek an opportunity at another institution?) does not align with the position description and **can constitute illegal discrimination.**

- the assessment form should include a comment box, and all comments must relate to the position description and required and preferred criteria. The completed forms must be retained for a minimum of 3 years by the Department. Thus, the SC chair should collect the evaluations at each stage and ensure that the HRT Office Manager receives all documents for electronic archiving.

- determine how ratings for individual applicants will be used and discussed, e.g., will the SC chair display every committee member's applicant scores or only composite committee scores for each applicant? The screening process should entail active, confidential discussions and deliberations.

- all SC members have an equal voice during discussions and an equal vote.

The screening process should not allow any applicant to be disqualified based on one person's review. Thus, all SC members should evaluate each applicant's complete application dossier.

The SC will develop a consensus list and summary report of those applicants who are: 1) not qualified based on the initial assessment rubrics for the position; 2) recommended to be advanced to "candidate" status for first round virtual/video interviews; and 3) any remaining candidates not in the "unqualified" or "first round interview" pools (Appendix F). The unqualified applicants should be reported to HR and contacted by the SC chair with a letter thanking them for applying and advising them that they are no longer under consideration (Appendix G).

The applicants who are recommended for advancement to "candidate" status for first round virtual/video interviews (ca. 6-10 people) comprise what the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion (IDI) refers to the "long-short list" of applicants. This essentially represents the recommended pool from which the department, college, and university will hire. The SC can, but is not required to, request that IDI review the composition of the recommended pool (which will be based on the voluntary survey that applicants complete as part of the application process).

The SC chair must seek Department Chair permission to invite candidates for first-round interviews (i.e., telephone/Zoom interviews). Letters of recommendation then must be requested for all virtual/video interview candidates (Appendix H).

First-Round Interviews of Candidates on the Long-Short List (Recommended Pool)

First-round interviews for long-short list candidates typically are conducted by virtual/video interviews. Because there are usually about 6-10 candidates, these interviews are somewhat abbreviated (30 to 60 minutes).

- a. It is recommended that interviews begin with each candidate providing a 5 to 8 minute introduction/presentation about themselves and their fitness for the position (see Appendix D).
- b. Interview questions should relate to the position description and be part of the assessment rubric used to evaluate the first-round candidates.

- c. For interview consistency, the SC should develop a schedule for which members will ask which questions of each candidate.
- d. To the extent possible, interview requests and questions should be formatted identically. Although each candidate is asked the same questions, follow-up questions/discussion can vary somewhat as guided by, and appropriate to, each candidate's responses.
- e. It is helpful and acceptable to provide the candidates with the topics on which they will be questioned prior to the interview.

First-Round Interview Candidates Review Process

Upon completion of the first-round interviews, the SC will meet to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates based on the virtual/video interviews and letters of recommendation.

- a. The committee's conversation must follow the assessment rubric based on criteria listed in the job description.
- b. After a complete discussion, the SC should identify the distinct skills, expertise, experience, and other potential contributions of each candidate as related to the required and preferred qualifications in the position description that would add value to the HRT faculty.
- c. The SC will develop a summary of each candidate's strengths and weaknesses, along with a recommendation for "short-list/campus visits."
- d. In most cases, the SC should reduce the list of candidates to be invited for campus interviews to three (greater than this number will require approval of the CANR Office of the Dean).
- e. The SC chair will develop a report and complete the Academic Final Interview List Approval Form (Appendix J) that explains the rationale for each candidate regarding their recommended status: 1) advancement to the campus interview list, 2) placement on a "suitable but not in the top "X" number to be invited" list, or 3) their elimination as unsuitable. This report and form will be sent to the Department Chair who will provide it to the CANR Dean and IDI for final approvals.
- f. Any First Interview candidates who were found to be unacceptable should be contacted by the SC chair with a letter/email thanking them for applying and advising them that they are no longer under consideration.

Campus Interviews for Candidate Finalists

The SC chair will confirm the date for each candidate's interview and, working with the HRT Office Manager, promptly send "save the date" announcements to the entire department and other interested parties, as well as develop an interview schedule with the appropriate administrators in CANR (Deans/Directors or their designees) associated with the position responsibilities (see Appendices J, K). These are often breakfast meetings. Also, a meeting with a member of the WorkLife office is highly recommended so that candidates may ask questions about life at MSU and in the greater East Lansing area. Lunches also should be scheduled with the SC graduate student rep and horticulture graduate students, and in cases of stakeholder involvement with the position, with the SC stakeholder rep and key stakeholders. Each candidate should be asked about special interview accommodations (e.g., food allergens or mobility constraints) or requests (e.g., whether they would like a tour of the community after the interview process is completed).

Each candidate will be assigned a faculty member of the SC to serve as host (noted on the itinerary, with pertinent contact information). The SC host will complete the candidate's interview schedule (Appendix M) following a standardized campus visit itinerary with individual and group faculty member meetings, as feasible, to ensure that interview experiences and feedback about each candidate are similar. The SC member host also should arrange for all transportation needs, coordinate last minute changes to the itinerary, and introduce the candidate for their seminar/s. A copy of the campus visit itinerary should be shared with each candidate at least one to two weeks in advance of their visit (the earlier, the better). The format and requested content of each seminar should be shared with the candidates and with the HRT faculty, staff, and students.

Once the candidate has agreed to participate in the campus interview, the SC chair should provide an email introduction with the candidate's host for completing and/or refining the itinerary. Once the presumed final itinerary has been established, it should be shared with the department immediately.

The SC should develop a standardized evaluation survey (Appendix N) to be used by anyone attending the candidate seminars or meeting with the candidates. This should be provided in print form at each candidate's seminar as well as electronically on D2L following the completion of each candidate's final seminar.

Recommendations for the campus visit include:

- a. Promptly pick up each candidate from the airport. Consider greeting them with a standardized "interview support bag" that might include a water bottle, snacks, and pertinent campus and community brochures.
- b. Plan inclusive meals (e.g., diverse small groups of faculty and academic staff).
- c. During visits, utilize accessible buildings whenever possible.
- d. Provide the candidate space where they can rest, leave their belongings, and review/update their seminar presentation slides.
- e. Schedule break times for candidates. Provide access to snacks, water and restrooms throughout the day.
- f. Be sure that each scheduled visit on the itinerary provides a "liaison" to guide the candidate around campus to the next interview location.
- g. The SC chair should strongly encourage the HRT faculty and staff to attend all seminars, teaching, and extension sessions as feasible, and to refrain from completing evaluation surveys until they have availed themselves of all opportunities to learn about each candidate.**
- h. Graduate student, MSU Extension, and/or stakeholder SC members should strongly encourage their peer cohorts to attend the appropriate sessions and meals.
- i. The evaluation surveys will be made available to all individuals who have interacted with the candidates. Evaluators should be reminded to submit their surveys by the deadline set by the SC (e.g., post-final seminar).
- j. The conclusion of each candidate's campus visit should include an exit interview with the SC (Appendix O) and an exit interview with the Department Chair.

Review/Evaluation of Campus Interviews

Once the interviews are complete, the SC graduate student and stakeholder/external members should schedule a meeting of their respective colleagues to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate. Each should provide a written report to the SC chair, which will be shared verbally later at a faculty-wide meeting called to discuss the qualifications of the candidate finalists.

All SC members should be present for the committee's discussion of the finalists. The SC chair and AAO should create a process to guide a structured, open, and respectful committee conversation.

- a. It is optimal to begin with a review of the position criteria and to organize the discussion around those elements.
- b. Summaries of feedback (i.e., the evaluation survey forms) collected from the HRT faculty, students, and stakeholders who attended the various campus interview sessions should be shared with the entire SC at this meeting.
- c. After a robust discussion connected to position criteria is completed for all candidates, a private ballot will be held in which each SC member must vote using an agreed upon scale (e.g., acceptable, unacceptable) or ranking procedure.
- d. Committee members will jointly develop a comprehensive overview of each of the finalist's strengths and weaknesses related to each major criterion within the job description, including the required and desired qualifications. The SC chair will prepare this report for presentation at the faculty-wide meeting to discuss candidates.

The Faculty Meeting and Vote

- a. The SC chair will present the committee's report at the faculty meeting to discuss the candidates, and should communicate the process that was used throughout the work of the SC to guide a structured, open, and respectful conversation. The graduate student representative should verbally provide the report of the graduate students' feedback before faculty-wide discussion commences. As applicable, the SC chair will present the written report from the stakeholders.
- b. Graduate student and stakeholder SC members should vote during the SC vote, but not during the faculty vote.
- c. Each faculty member should take all discussion points into consideration and not allow themselves to be persuaded to vote to support or dismiss an applicant based on one person's comments or view.
- d. If an individual faculty member is unable to attend the discussion but wishes to express their opinion, the faculty member may draft a written statement to the SC chair, and the chair will present the statement during the faculty discussion.

Report Submitted to the Department Chair for Position Offer and Negotiations

The SC chair will submit a summary report (Appendix P) with the committee's recommendation(s) to the Department Chair and a summary of the faculty vote. The Chair will take the SC and faculty recommendations into consideration when developing a summary report for requesting permission from the CANR/MABR/MSUE Administration to make an offer. At this point, all communication with the candidate to be offered the position is conducted hereafter by the Chair.

Once college approval has been secured, the SC chair should then communicate with the remaining candidates as follows:

- any interviewed candidates who were found to be unacceptable should be contacted with a letter/email thanking them for applying and advising them that they are no longer under consideration.
- any interviewed candidates who were found to be acceptable but were not the top candidate should be contacted with a letter/email indicating that an offer has been made but that they are still under consideration until the outcome of the offer is known.
- any First Round candidates who were found to be acceptable but were not invited for a campus interview should be contacted with a letter/email indicating that an offer has been made but that they are still under consideration until the outcome of the offer is known.

If an unsuccessful candidate contacts the SC chair or an SC member for feedback regarding their application or interview, these contacts should be referred to the SC chair for consideration of whether or how to respond in general terms -- and usually by phone rather than in writing. When in doubt, the SC chair should contact the Department Chair or Human Resources.

Resources

MSU Handbook for Faculty Searches with Special Reference to Affirmative Action

<https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/faculty-academic-staff/affirmative-action/index.html>

MSU Faculty Handbook – Appendix C (checklist of SC Activities) <https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/faculty-academic-staff/affirmative-action/AAappendixC.html>

MSU Faculty Search Toolkit

https://inclusion.msu.edu/_assets/documents/hiring/FacultySearchToolkit-final.pdf

MSU F/T Faculty & Academic Staff Searches (2021-22 guide) <https://cal.msu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/56/2021/09/2021-2022-College-Guidelines-for-Fixed-Term-System-Searches-8.3.2021.pdf>

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Posselt, J., Hernandez, T. E., Villarreal, C. D., Rodgers, A. J., & Irwin, L. N. (2020). Evaluation and decision making in higher education: Toward equitable repertoires of faculty practice. *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*: Volume 35, 1–63.

Appendices - Checklists, Templates, and Examples

- Appendix A: CANR Position Description Template for Requests to Initiate a Search
- Appendix B: Search Committee Conflicts of Interest
- Appendix C: Checklist for Coordination of SC Chair and HRT Office Manager Duties
- Appendix D: Affirmative Action Reporting
- Appendix E: Example of Update Communications with Applicants
- Appendix F: Summary Report for the Long-Short List of Applicants Advanced to Candidacy or Eliminated
- Appendix G: Example of Thank-you Note for Applicants No Longer Under Consideration
- Appendix H: Example of Request for Letters of Recommendation
- Appendix I: Example of First Round Interview Process and Questions
- Appendix J: Academic Final Interview List Approval Form
- Appendix K: Candidate Interview Checklist
- Appendix L: Guidelines for Arranging Candidate Meetings with CANR Administrators
- Appendix M: Template for Candidate Interview Schedule
- Appendix N: Template for Interview Evaluation Survey
- Appendix O: Example of Exit Interview Questions
- Appendix P: Summary Report After Completion of All Interviews