Part 2: Preparation

Preparing to launch an approved competitive search involves multiple steps, and the earlier the unit can begin, the better.

Multi-year Planning

Ideally, preparation for a specific search should begin one or more years prior to when the job ad will be written and posted. Long-range hiring plans allow the unit to think strategically about how individual searches fit within short- and long-term goals for maintaining or enhancing excellence in research, teaching, service, and outreach—and to articulate that thinking to deans or chancellors, students, advancement officers, community stakeholders, and potential applicants.

Units should share their long-term “wish lists” of potential hires with their allies across campus and across the UW system. How might units work together to meet similar or mutual goals?

Potential for Cluster Hires

Multi-year planning may help the unit think about how individual searches might be fruitfully bundled into a “cluster hire,” or how the unit might collaborate with one or more other units to organize a cluster hire across multiple disciplines or across multiple UW campuses.

Cluster hires can be especially useful for attracting applicants working in relatively small or new fields or subfields as well as for attracting applicants from historically underrepresented backgrounds, since cluster hiring signals a significant commitment to—and investment in—a specific area of research, teaching, service, and/or outreach.

More information about cluster hires is available in the Toolkit.

Forming Search Committees

As the unit prepares for a specific search, its leadership should think carefully about how to form the official search committee:

- There are multiple models for effective search committees: what is possible and practical will depend on the size of your unit, how your sub-units typically
interact, how many searches you conduct in a given hiring season, and your overall unit culture and climate. Keep in mind that how you form search committees signals what you value and how power works in your unit. Sample search committee models are available in the Toolkit.

- Make sure the search committee is diverse and inclusive, since the committee will likely be the first point of contact for potential applicants. The committee’s composition sends a message to potential applicants about the unit’s climate.

- Include individuals who will provide a range of different perspectives and expertise, and who will provide a demonstrated commitment to diversity and inclusion. Depending on the nature of the position, you may want to invite at least one person from outside the unit to serve on the committee. You may also want to include a graduate student representative; many units always include a student representative as a best practice.

- It is helpful, for instance, to balance senior and junior faculty who are close to the specific subfield of the search with at least one faculty member who is outside the specific subfield. It can also be helpful to have a member of your unit’s leadership team (e.g., an associate or vice chair) serve ex officio on all search committees to make sure the unit’s broader interests—including its commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion—are represented at meetings.

- If the unit has a diversity committee, consider asking at least one member to serve on the search committee. If the unit does not have a diversity committee, consider using the occasion of an approved hire and the development of a new search process as an opportunity to develop one. The diversity committee’s role is to ensure that members of underrepresented groups have been recruited as applicants and given full and careful consideration.

- Be mindful not to overburden members of underrepresented groups with a disproportionate number of committee assignments. If a particular faculty member is needed on the search committee, where might she or he be relieved of other duties?

Informing Search Committees

Unit leadership should meet with search committees before they begin their work in order to:

1. Officially charge the committee and introduce the Interfolio system. It may be useful to have your Interfolio administrator join you.
2. Discuss the unit’s specific goals for the search and its expectations for the search process, including the expectation of confidentiality. Maintaining confidentiality of committee deliberations can be especially challenging if there are internal applicants or other applicants who are well-known to the unit, such as alumni.

3. Outline the ideal search and recruitment timeline.

4. Emphasize the importance of each committee member’s regular attendance at meetings and full participation in the search process.

5. Detail available fiscal resources and administrative support.

Moreover, unit leadership should:

- Ask the dean or the appropriate divisional or associate dean to meet with the committee early in the process to reiterate the importance of inclusion, the advisory role of the committee, and the need for confidentiality. The Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Advancement is also available to meet with search committees at any stage of the process.

- Arrange a formal training session on interrupting bias, either for committee members or for the unit as a whole. The Office for Faculty Advancement offers a number of relevant workshops, which can be arranged through our online request form.

- Create a clear plan for how the committee will communicate with each other, the unit, campus allies, and candidates.

- Make sure all committee members understand they will be expected to participate in recruitment efforts, including personal outreach to potential applicants and to candidates.

In addition to forming and informing search committees, part of preparation includes creating an assessment rubric and creating an assessment plan, both of which are described below in the Assessment section of the Handbook.

Finally, as you prepare for an approved competitive search it is important to devise clear strategies for enlisting the whole unit in the search process. In other words, how will the unit build consensus around its choices?

- At what point(s) will it be appropriate to inform the unit of the committee’s progress and recommendations?
● At what point(s) will it be appropriate or necessary to gather the unit’s input, and in what form(s)? For instance, will the unit as a whole discuss and/or vote on which candidates from the short list are invited to campus, or will the search committee make such decisions on its own?

● How can the unit—including not only faculty but also graduate students, post-docs, and alumni—assist in creating a broad applicant pool?

● How can the unit assist in recruitment efforts?

Similarly, it is important to think about which other units within your college or school and/or across the university’s three campuses may be able to offer assistance at various stages of the search process.

● Which other units might help create a broad applicant pool?

● Which other units should attend job talks, or meet with candidates?

● Which other units will be especially useful during recruitment efforts?

Monitoring and Supporting Search Committees

Unit leadership should also think carefully about how to monitor and support search committees through the entire hiring process.

● At which points in the process will it be useful to check in with the committee chair, request relevant data, or require a written report? Before the job ad is posted? Before the committee begins to assess applications? When the committee creates a “long” short-list for preliminary interviews? When the committee creates a short list of finalists for campus interviews? Before the chair reports to the larger unit?

● Your Interfolio administrator will be able to help you access de-identified, aggregate (i.e., anonymous) data about your applicant pool for specific positions. National databases can help you access availability data for your broad discipline or field; some academic associations also gather data on numbers of graduates in their fields or subfields. Links to several of the better-known national databases are available in the Toolkit.

● Given what leaders know about the unit’s prior history with faculty hiring, are there any points in the process where problems are more likely to occur? If so, how might unit leadership effectively coach the committee or the unit as a whole toward better outcomes?
• Keep track of issues that arise during the search process to discuss at the debriefing.

Debriefing Search Committees

Unit leadership should plan to debrief search committee chairs and, when possible, full search committees at the conclusion of the hiring season. This is an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of your unit’s hiring process, as well as an opportunity to learn from both successes and any problems that arise.