



Thinking about Cluster Hiring

“Cluster” hiring has received a lot of press as a mechanism for building interdisciplinary research teams (see, for example, the article from *Inside Higher Ed* from May 2015 included in this section of the Toolkit). But cluster hiring can also be an effective tool for **attracting faculty candidates working in relatively small or new fields or subfields**, and for **attracting faculty candidates from historically underrepresented backgrounds**.

Depending on how a cluster is organized, it can signal a significant commitment to and investment in a particular area of research, teaching, service, and/or outreach by a unit, a college or school, a campus, and/or the university as a whole.

Cluster hiring can be **formal** or **informal**, and clusters can be conceived as:

- multiple positions in a specific field or subfield within a single unit;
- multiple positions in a specific field or subfield across multiple units;
- multiple positions organized around shared interdisciplinary research interests across multiple units, colleges/schools, or campuses.

Formal cluster hiring requires extensive advance planning, especially if the goal is to collaborate across units, colleges/schools, or campuses. Both timing and budgets have to be coordinated in order to run effective simultaneous searches. The advantage of this coordination is that two or more searches can be advertised and promoted as a formal cluster hire and thus as a significant investment in the field or subfield. **Potential candidates are invited to imagine themselves as part of something larger than an isolated position within a single unit.**

Informal cluster hiring occurs when units work with their natural “allies” within their college or school, across their campus, or across the university as a whole to coordinate two or more searches that have already been planned or approved.

For example, if the College of the Environment plans to hire in the area of Sustainability Studies and Social Justice and the Department of American Indian Studies within the College of Arts and Sciences plans to hire in the area of

Sustainability Studies in Native Communities, the two units can coordinate their advertising for the two positions so that potential candidates for either are aware of both; they can agree to have a representative serve on each other's search committees so that each unit is aware of the larger pool of candidates and how potential finalists might complement each other; and they can coordinate campus visits so that finalists meet with representatives from both units and thus have a sense of **the broader university community** in their field.

Or, if several units across Seattle, Tacoma, and Bothell campuses plan to hire in some aspect of Native American studies, broadly defined—in history, in linguistics, in anthropology, in art history, in English, in education, in social work, in public health, in the Information School, in the Law School, in the College of the Environment, in the Business School, in the Evans School, etc.—these units can coordinate their advertising, search committees, and campus visits to indicate to all potential candidates **the breadth of the university's commitment** to the larger field. As with a formal cluster, in an informal cluster potential candidates are invited to imagine themselves as part of something larger than an isolated position within a single unit. In a sense, the coordinated search lays out a diagram of **potential networks of collaboration and support for new faculty hires**.

Whether formal or informal, with its emphasis on building communities and networks, **cluster hiring has the potential to benefit both the initial recruitment of highly competitive candidates and the future retention of highly valued colleagues**.

The key to effective cluster hiring is to first identify and build relationships with allies within your college or school, across your campus, and across the university.