Fostering Full Participation During Search Committee Meetings

In any group decision-making setting, including search committees, power dynamics influence the extent to which group members feel their voices are heard and meaningfully considered.¹ This is often especially true for historically minoritized, early-career, professional track, or student members of a search committee. Moreover, research shows that faculty members from historically minoritized groups are often expected to be the “voice of diversity” during search committee deliberations.² Such tokenization has the potential to undermine the expertise of historically minoritized faculty and increase their emotional labor, while also absconding other committee members from their responsibilities in creating a fair and equitable process.³ This brief summarizes practices that search committees can use during meetings to help foster the full and meaningful participation and voice of all search committee members.

Ask Search Committee Members to Come Prepared

- Create and share an agenda prior to each meeting.
- Set expectations for key tasks/activities that search committees should complete prior to the meeting (e.g., reviewing CVs and cover letters).
- Consider asking search committee members to submit their written feedback prior to the meeting:
  - If search committee members will be asked to provide quantitative scores, it can be useful for the search chair to request those scores prior to the meeting, to avoid committee members’ being anchored/influenced by the scores provided by other committee members.
  - This can also be a way for the search chair to understand if the full range of perspectives is being heard in the meetings and to enhance the participation of committee members who prefer written communication over verbal.

Determine Deliberation and Feedback Structure

- Determine and clearly communicate a deliberation structure. Examples of different structures include allowing early-career or student members to speak first; rotating the speaking order; and asking each search committee to “present” a candidate.
- Evaluate and discuss each candidate file individually, based on the criteria (not in comparison or relative to other candidates in the pool). Ideally, a similar amount of time should be dedicated to each candidate.

When offering feedback, committee members should be prompted to point to specific pieces of evidence that inform their evaluation (e.g., based on the CV).

Determine and clearly communicate how decisions will be made (e.g., voting, consensus) and how disagreements will be handled.

### Engage as Allies

- Echo the comments/feedback from colleagues.
- Ensure that those who have not yet offered feedback have the chance to do so.
- Be self-aware: monitor how much “airtime” you are using, and allow others to speak first.

### Agree to Mutual Expectations

- Statements of Mutual Expectations (SME) (See Appendix) are written descriptions of roles, responsibilities, and behaviors of search committee members. They operationalize and cement the practices that the search committee will use, for instance, by describing key roles of search chairs and committee members; setting expectations for preparation, confidentiality, and communication; and outlining processes that the search committee will use to make decisions.
- SMEs can help a) enhance transparency and clarity of search committee processes and procedures; b) remind search committee members of key processes and procedures); and c) serve as accountability guardrails when/if behaviors/actions do not align with the SMEs.
- Ideally, SMEs are formulated with the input of the full committee at their first meeting, and referred to throughout the decision-making process.

**Strategies Adapted From**


Appendix:  

Mutual Expectations for Search Committees

In this document, we outline the mutual expectations for our search committee, which were developed to create an inclusive, collaborative working environment. After reading this document, please sign and date the agreement at the bottom and return it to the search committee chair.

**Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion**

- As a committee member, I value equity, diversity, and inclusion in terms of both the dynamics within the committee as well as in the processes we use to evaluate candidates. Realizing the role of bias in hiring, our committee has agreed to the following practices: **ADD AS RELEVANT.**

**Attendance and Full Participation**

- I commit to being present at all committee meetings. If I am unable to attend a session, I will notify the search committee chair before the meeting.
- I agree to be on-time for meetings, including staying through the entire meeting and ending meetings on-time. I also agree to limit my use of technology during the meeting, including responding to email or text messages, especially if/when the search committee meetings virtually. I agree to complete my assigned committee work prior to the meeting.

**Communication**

- I acknowledge discussion, interaction, and thoughtful participation are critical components of making the search committee effective. I agree to self-monitor my participation by avoiding speaking for more than 2-3 minutes continuously so others are able to contribute to group conversations. I agree to avoid side conversations.
- I agree to keep committee deliberations confidential and agree to involve all search committee members in conversations regarding candidates when reasonable.
- I agree to be respectful in my communication, including by giving credit appropriately and keeping my constructive and aimed at the content of the discussion, not at the individual.
- To foster more inclusive conversations, I agree that graduate student and early-career faculty members will be invited to offer comments at the beginning of each meeting, followed by more seasoned committee members.

**Deliberations**

- Our committee expects about 150 applications and anticipates doing phone interviews with candidates on the medium shortlist and on-campus interviews with the four shortlist candidates before making a recommendation to our chair. To reach agreement on the medium and final shortlist, our decision will be made by vote. At least 75% of the committee must agree to proceed before the medium or final shortlist is determined.

Name (Printed):__________________________  Signature:__________________________

Date:_______
Adapted from Harvard Graduate School of Education Participant Code of Conduct and the Inclusive Scientific Meetings Guide (Pendergrass et al., 2019).