



## **Increasing Women in Neuroscience (IWIn) Toolkit: Candidate Recruitment and Evaluation: Discussion Questions**

### **Recruitment**

This portion will prompt the viewer to read different recruitment-related scenarios (reviewing applications, spousal hiring, etc.) and select the correct answer from a list of options. The different answer choices — correct and incorrect — will be followed by a brief explanation that may link to additional resources.

#### ***a. Inappropriate questions***

You are at dinner with a faculty candidate. A senior colleague in your field addresses the candidate, “I know that we are not supposed to ask these things, but do you have a spouse or partner who will need a position? Or do you have any children and want to know about the New York City schools? Is there anything that I can do to help?”

#### **Which of the following statements best characterizes this situation?**

- Questions that are unrelated to the job should be avoided.
- Questions about schools are OK, but asking about the spouse might be a problem.
- It’s fine to ask these types of questions and let the candidate answer, as long as nothing important is done with the answers
- It’s a good idea to ask questions like this because it helps the candidate more realistically think about the pros and cons of position.

*Feedback: (shown after the learner makes a selection)*

Any question that is not related to the job, such as the ones asked and those listed below, should invariably be avoided — some are illegal.

- \* Are you married?
- \* How many children do you have living at home?
- \* Do you plan to have children? Or, do you plan to have more kids?
- \* What work does your spouse/partner do?
- \* Have you ever been arrested (an arrest is different than a conviction)?
- \* When did you graduate from high school?
- \* Where were you born? Are you a U.S. citizen?
- \* Is Spanish your first language?



- \* Do you have any disabilities?
- \* Will you require days off for religious holidays that University does not observe?

For more information, refer to:

[http://www.hr.arizona.edu/successful\\_searches/questions\\_to\\_avoid](http://www.hr.arizona.edu/successful_searches/questions_to_avoid)

<http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/practices/index.cfm>

<http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/religion.cfm>

***b. Search committee***

After reviewing 136 applications for your department's one open position, your committee now has a short list. There are no female or minority candidates on the short list. You were planning to revisit the applications, but an influential senior faculty member on the committee feels very strongly about one of the candidates on the short list. This white male candidate fits a narrow niche about which the senior faculty member feels very strongly. Although the committee previously recognized the benefits and importance of diversity in the faculty, after a brief discussion, the committee followed the senior member's recommendation and hired the white male.

**Which of the following statements regarding this scenario is/are true?**

- It's generally best to follow a senior member's recommendation, because their perspective invariably recognizes higher value.
- The diversity problems generally work themselves out, so this was clearly the best move.
- Even if the white male is more qualified in some areas, a minority or female candidate should have been hired because diversity is the better long-term value.
- Criteria / guidelines around how the applications are to be evaluated should be established before any applications are reviewed.

*Feedback:*

Although some of the statements might be debatable, this scenario exposes a potential gap in the committee's commitment to diversity and perhaps unintended bias. Clear guidelines and targets that are based on big-picture views of real data should be in place to crystalize such a commitment to diversity, represent the consensus, and make it difficult for the committee to deviate away from a critical-path diversity initiative. Prior to reviewing any applications, general discussions about bias and how it affects everyone



can help align the committee. It is essential for individuals on the search committee to reach out to and invite qualified female and underrepresented minorities (URM) candidates to apply for the position early in the search process. This will reduce the chances of scenarios such as the one above occurring. If there are still no women or URM candidates on the short list after these committee efforts, a discussion of why there are no such applicants is appropriate. If the pool is small and limited, the department may want to consider forming a committee to invite promising individuals to visit and present their research before they apply for a position, so that a relationship is established and bridges built to the future. Another alternative would be to initiate a new, “open” search with a broadly defined position.

***c. Letters of Recommendation***

**You notice that one of the candidates in the applicant pool whose work you think is promising has several strong letters in addition to a couple of short, unconvincing letters in her file. Based on your knowledge of her subfield and her own file, you think she is a candidate worth considering.**

- Reach out directly to the candidate and recommend that she remove the unconvincing letters from her portfolio.
- Early in the process, create a compelling and objective case, based on criteria listed on the evaluation form, for why this candidate is worth considering and present it to the committee. Remind the committee that letters of reference for women tend to be shorter and raise more doubts than letters for men.
- Identify similar flaws in other applications to help even out the playing field.
- Argue that it’s necessary to include at least one woman on the short list to avoid the appearance of bias.

***Feedback:***

We know that letters of recommendations on behalf of women and URM candidates tend to be shorter, raise more doubts, bring up personal issues and are perceived as less supportive for a candidate than letters on behalf of white male candidates. A discussion of the data that demonstrate this bias should be engaged in prior to review of candidates. Occasionally it is necessary to remind reviewers of this during the review process.

Make sure that criteria are objectively stated prior to candidate review, and consider using an appropriate candidate evaluation form for this purpose. When the criteria are not clearly and objectively stated we are more likely to fall back on schemas that result in selection of majority candidates.



- Sample Candidate Evaluation Form  
[http://www.advance.iastate.edu/pdfs/fac\\_search\\_resources/EF-initial%20screening%20form.pdf](http://www.advance.iastate.edu/pdfs/fac_search_resources/EF-initial%20screening%20form.pdf)

***d. CV review***

At the first meeting of the search committee you notice that two of the members of the committee have given good evaluations only to candidates from Ivy League institutions who have articles published in *Cell*, *Nature*, *Science*, and other “highly ranked” journals. Because the sum of scores from committee members was used to select the short list of candidates for interview, the process of evaluation has excluded qualified women and diverse candidates from the shortlist. What can you do?

Check any or all of the following that are appropriate or correct:

- Remind the committee that candidates are to be rated based on the sum of the objective criteria that were agreed upon previously, not just one criterion.
- Prior to reviewing applications, the committee should discuss the criteria to be used in judging candidates.
- Nothing — if they are not publishing in those journals they are not very good and probably won’t get funded anyway.
- Give their candidates low scores to get even.

***Feedback:***

Many prominent universities have only recently started graduating women and minorities in some fields. A system of evaluation that excludes individuals from minority serving institutions, or individuals not from certain institutions, introduces biases that discourage diversity.

Remind the committee to rank candidates separately on several different criteria, rather than using a single aggregate ranking. This helps reduce the tendency for impressions of excellence based solely on one or two criteria, such as journal impact factor, rather than evidence-based judgments of multiple, specific criteria and engagement with the candidate’s scholarship.