

PRESIDENT'S SEARCH PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

Approval Authority: President

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Amendments: none

Category: President

These guidelines are intended to assist in search processes for academic and senior non-academic administrators. They may also be useful, at least in part, in a variety of search processes. work in progress, Principles and Practices is meant as a guideline and is expected to evolve over time with experience and periodic evaluation. These principles along with the execution of the [CONFIDENTIALITY AND NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT DECLARATION](#) will create the framework for the committee to do its work.

A. Preamble

Members of search committees — collectively and individually — bear responsibility for the integrity and fairness of the search process and are accountable for its success. In fulfilling this responsibility on behalf of the University, members are expected to adhere to a set of guiding principles in conducting their deliberations, whether those principles are stated formally. They must not only act, but be perceived to act, fairly and with collegiality.

This set of Working Principles is intended to provide a framework for search committees as they proceed through the various phases of their mandate, and to reinforce and maintain the high quality that is essential to these important decision-making processes. It is meant to reflect the University's values, to contribute to the achievement of its recruitment goals, and to build on examples of good practice within the institution and beyond. While this set of principles has been prepared primarily to guide searches for academic and senior non-academic administrators, many of the elements are relevant to search and appointment processes more generally.

As a matter of standard practice, these principles may be included in the normal communications related to search processes (that is, the establishment of the search committee, call for nominations, etc.) In some cases, particularly high-profile searches that generate broad community interest, search committee members may, however, wish to acknowledge more formally their obligations and responsibilities by signing off on a disclosure statement. This additional step can send useful signals to the University community and to the larger public about the integrity of the search process, especially if concerns seem likely to arise about objectivity or confidentiality. The promulgation of a charter signals publicly a collective commitment to an exemplary process and it also helps committee members in a variety of circumstances to deal readily with challenges related to confidentiality.

B. General Expectations

(1) Absolute Confidentiality

Confidentiality is mandatory in order to ensure frank discussion and to respect the input and participation of everyone involved in each phase of the committee's work. This requirement will ensure that the qualifications and appropriateness of individual candidates can be discussed openly within the committee, and that none of these discussions, even in part, will be disclosed. Members are committed to upholding the highest standards of confidentiality with respect to the committee's activities. It is important to note, too, that this obligation of confidentiality continues once the committee's work is complete and an appointment made.

If there is any doubt at any time about the information that may be shared outside of the committee, members will seek the advice of the committee chair.

In the case of a serious breach of confidentiality, the committee will normally be dissolved, and a committee of new members convened.

(2) Focus on the University

Members agree that the primary focus of the search committee is on the broad and best long-term interests of the University and that every decision will be considered relative to this framework. Committee members should keep firmly in view the University's [Mission, Vision and Values](#), the University's academic plan as approved from time to time, and, as appropriate, program academic priorities and special needs.

(3) Meeting Attendance

It is expected that members will make every effort to attend all meetings of the search committee. This will help the committee to move toward decisions quickly, fairly, and in a focused manner. In exceptional circumstances, a committee may consider making provisions for a member who is unable to attend the majority of the scheduled interviews. Examples of such provisions could be: that they would be primarily an observer in the interviews they could attend, not asking any of the agreed and assigned standard questions; that the committee chair undertake to brief a member on the issues raised in a meeting missed by one member; or that the member participate via conference call or videoconference. Note that many of NOSM University meetings and other events are held via video conference. Travel may be required for in-person meetings and any applicable expenses incurred will be approved by the Chair consistent with NOSM University travel and reimbursement policies.

(4) Full Engagement of Members

The success of search committees depends a great deal on the degree to which individual members are engaged in each stage of the process. It is critical that each member be fully engaged in the fair, objective, and comprehensive assessment of each candidate prior to short-listing, as well as in the assessment of candidates who are short-listed.

(5) Timely Progress Updates

As part of the commitment to collegiality and to transparency, there should be timely and appropriate communication with the University community (and in some searches, with external constituencies) on progress of the search. Normally, this means periodic updates from the committee chair on milestones the committee has reached and assurances that its work is proceeding on schedule.

In any communication on behalf of the committee, the chair will be the official and only spokesperson for the search committee.

(6) Role of a Search Consultant

Most searches can proceed expeditiously and effectively without engaging an external search consultant. However, a search consultant may be particularly helpful when there are special challenges in the scope of the search, profile of the position, types of candidates to be approached, or anticipated pool of applicants. Ideally, the search committee should define and agree upon the role of a search consultant in advance of engaging the firm. In some circumstances, time constraints, cost considerations, and RFP processes may render it necessary to engage a firm in advance of the committee's first meeting. Nonetheless, early role clarification is important. Depending on the committee's needs in particular searches, the specifics of the consultant's role will vary. Normally, a search consultant or firm will play the role of advisor and provide support to the search committee. A consultant must not diffuse the responsibility and accountability of the committee members — which is to recommend or to select the best and most appropriate candidate for the position.

To fulfil the mandate defined by the committee, the search consultant will also be required to adhere to any set of working principles or charter of expectations espoused by the committee.

C. Expectations with Respect to Candidate Identification & Initial Assessment

(1) Early Disclosure of Strong Personal Views, Potential Biases, or Assumptions

It is normal that members might be familiar with candidates or organizational structures and have strong personal views about the suitability of particular candidates. On occasion, a member may have had previous interactions with a candidate, such that a presupposition of personal bias might be made. As well, committee members may have *a priori* assumptions about candidates or the position. Early acknowledgement and declaration of any such strong views, potential biases or working assumptions are appropriate and respectful of the process. It will help to ensure frank and open discussion throughout the committee's deliberations and help to prevent late disclosures that are prejudicial to a fair process since personal bias can create both unreasonably favourable and unfavourable views of a candidate.

In this context, it is important to note that NOSM University affirms its commitment to uphold and apply the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and to work conscientiously in accordance with legislation and its own policies, to promote equal opportunity and equity. Care must be taken to ensure compliance with the *Ontario Human Rights Code* in the hiring process, as described in the Universities policies on hiring, as amended from time to time. To this end, all hiring decisions must avoid discrimination on any of the prohibited grounds listed in the *Code*: race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, record of offences, marital status, family status, and same-sex partnership status. Avoidance of discrimination must be built into all stages of the hiring process.

Finally, Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) became NOSM University – the first independent medical university in Canada – effective April 1, 2022. More than just a medical university, its purpose is to address the health needs of the region. While advocating for equitable access to care, the university contributes to the economic development of Northern Ontario. NOSM University relies on the commitment and expertise of the peoples of Northern Ontario to educate health-care professionals to practice in Indigenous, Francophone, rural, remote, and underserved communities. With a focus on diversity, inclusion, and advocacy, NOSM University is an award-winning socially accountable organization renowned for its innovative model of distributed, community-engaged education and research.

(2) Constructive Commentary

Members are expected to offer constructive comments on and assessments of individuals, taking care to provide objective evaluation and/or clarification of individuals' strengths and areas for further growth or exploration. One guide for members will be to consider the impact of a particular statement, as worded, if it were to be made public. A member's focus should be to identify the factual basis or evidence for a given opinion, and to provide that to the rest of the committee when presenting one's view. This is not intended to discourage frank discussion but rather it is meant to ensure that comments are objective and articulated in the context of the specifications of the position and the committee's criteria for evaluation.

(3) Focus on the Position Specification

In assessing candidates throughout the search process, committee members will be expected to focus consistently and continuously on the skills, relevant experiences, and other key attributes in the agreed position specification. Thus, it is very important to have both a clear position specification and open discussion about any additional attributes that are deemed important to the success of the eventual incumbent. Normally, a position specification is developed from wide consultation and identifies institutional or divisional needs for the next several years, as well as the relevant qualities successful candidates require in that context. It should be expressed in language that is as concrete and specific as possible so that it provides a clear point of reference against which to measure candidates.

It is important to note that specifications for Deans, Directors of Centres/Institutes, and Chairs, for example, are defined in their respective policies and position descriptions and the fundamental expectations of these positions cannot be changed by the search committee. In addition to the policy framework, however, priorities for the successful candidate may be identified by a review process that informs the search committee's work.

(4) Avoiding Commentary Outside of the Committee

It is expected that committee members — in a variety of settings, both professional and personal — will receive advice and recommendations on issues and possible candidates. In social settings and elsewhere, colleagues and acquaintances may be aware that one is a member of the search committee, and they will likely have heard of, or will speculate on, the names of potential or actual candidates who might be before the search committee for consideration. This input can be very helpful to the committee's work, especially during its information-gathering phase. That said, while it is important to hear external advice and/or recommendations, it is essential that members do not share their own

commentary, assessment, or reflections on names or issues before the committee or believed to be before the committee.

(5) Due Diligence & Reference Checking

Thorough and rigorous reference checking and due diligence should be planned and executed systematically at the appropriate time in the search process. In developing an approach appropriate to the search, the committee may take into account such factors as the importance of consultation with key stakeholders, sources for information regarding past administrative, teaching, and scholarly accomplishments, statements from short-listed candidates themselves, and interviews with candidates.

Committee members are asked to refrain from informal reference checking/due diligence unless they are specifically assigned the task by the chair of the search committee.

(6) Candidacy of Committee Members

In drawing a committee together, the chair should take into consideration the potential candidacy of committee members but cannot be expected to determine *a priori* the appropriateness or otherwise of any one person's qualifications or interests. In addition, a committee member may be identified at some point in the committee's deliberations as a potential candidate or may wish to be considered. For example, a search committee may choose to consider all committee members qualified for the position, using a process determined in advance by the committee. In instances where a committee member is identified as a candidate, the member should resign from the committee as soon as possible in order not to compromise the process. Declarations of candidacy by committee members after the process is well advanced should be discouraged, as these candidacies will almost always raise concerns about fairness and due process.

Exceptions may be made in those instances where: a committee member was seen as a candidate early in the process but did not seek the position; the field is deemed unsatisfactory by the committee; and a determination is made that the chair should approach the committee member to reconsider and enter the process.

D. Expectations with Respect to Final Candidate Evaluation

(1) Consensus on Priorities & Critical Success Factors

To evaluate fairly the qualifications and relative rankings of final/short-listed candidates, there needs to be committee consensus on the position's current and highest priorities that will have to be weighed in reaching a final selection decision.

Ultimately, since short-listed candidates will have different strengths and experiences, the committee will need to determine "trade-offs" among the priorities and critical success factors it has identified and agreed upon. As much as possible there should be consensus on those "trade-offs."

(2) Assessing Controversies or Unpopular Decisions

Any successful administrator in any sector will have taken calculated risks or made changes to the status quo that may not be universally popular. As well, universities by definition are at times publicly disputatious places. Most candidates with meaningful administrative experience will accordingly have participated in some difficult decisions or weathered controversies.

Committee members, individually and collectively, must ensure that the facts of these controversies or unpopular decisions are well understood. Apparently adverse experience may raise questions about a given candidate's judgment or character, or may highlight that candidate's courage, confidence, initiative, and capacity for growth.

A range of perspectives derived from comprehensive reference checking and due diligence is therefore important in helping committee members to form balanced conclusions.

(3) Reserving Judgement

It is appropriate and fair that members wait until all due diligence is complete before reaching a conclusion on any short-listed candidate. With comprehensive reference-checking, many valuable perspectives and facts will emerge to clarify, enhance, or bring caution to the information the committee obtains from its candidate interviews.

(4) Articulating Reasons for a Decision

Consistent with the principles of fairness and accountability, when committee members express a final preference(s) among candidates, it is expected that they will explain their reasons in relation to the position specification, desired attributes, and agreed priorities.

E. After the Search

The search committee's responsibilities should not end once the candidate is appointed to the position. Members of the committee — collectively and individually — can play a vital role in ensuring the candidate's success. Members should be expected to provide direct and indirect support to the individual once they assume the position, as well as serve as ambassadors for the appointment both within the immediate and broader University communities (and, depending on the nature of the appointment, in the external community). As noted, members are also expected to maintain continued confidentiality about the proceedings and deliberations of the search committee.