The Search Process

SCREEN 1

BGSU is committed to achieving equal opportunity in education, professional training, career advancement and university employment. As an employer, BGSU has an obligation to ensure fairness and equity in every search process. Open and broad-based searches not only help to achieve the most diverse applicant pools, but are also important in our demonstration that diversity is an educational value. This is something that we ascribe to as a University and full, fair and open searches help us to achieve that goal. This module will help you understand the steps necessary to achieve these goals.

SCREEN 2

This process includes establishing a search committee and communicating the charge, conducting appropriate interviews, and making the best selection decision possible.

SCREEN 3

Every search process begins with the formation of a search committee which should be diverse – this committee should reflect the diversity of the institution that serves the broader community. In order to provide a variety of perspectives as well as sensitivity to equal opportunity, the composition of the search committee should be diverse in gender, ethnicity, and other characteristics as appropriate. We often hear comments like – “but we don’t have any staff or faculty of color in our department”. We challenge you to seek out women and people of color campus-wide, within the broader community, in other constituent and affinity groups such as the Black Faculty & Staff Council, the Latino Faculty and Staff Council, the LGBT Faculty & Staff Council, and the like.

Likewise, faculty within other University departments that may not be tenured in the discipline can make an assessment of an applicant’s administrative abilities and/or soft skills like leadership, teamwork, collaboration, verbal and written communication skills, ability to organize and prioritize, etc. While knowledge in the discipline is a major factor, it is not the only factor.

SCREEN 4

Once the membership of a search committee is identified, the race and gender of its members should be submitted to the Office of Equity and Diversity for review and approval. Upon approval, the Chair of the search committee should convene a kick-off meeting to provide the members with its charge. Responsibilities of a search committee should include, but are not limited to the following:

1. The Search Committee Chair establishes the job-related criteria and procedures for screening upon which all applicants will be reviewed.
2. The Search Committee is also responsible for reviewing and evaluating all candidates which will include reference checks for those under serious consideration.
3. All relevant search documents such as resumes, the assessment matrix, email communications and the like must be maintained for a period of five years.
4. The Search Committee will determine the best qualified candidates to be interviewed (phone screen, search committee, campus, etc.).
5. And finally, the Search Committee will make a recommendation of their candidate of choice to the hiring authority.

SCREEN 5

Unlike cultural norms and rater errors, interviewers should ONLY ask job-related questions because allegations of disparate treatment can result from inappropriate questions. That is to say that interview questions should be preplanned, standardized and relevant. Inappropriate questions involving race, religion, gender, marital status, and the like must be avoided during the entire interview process. Refer to “Quick Tips – Guidelines for Pre-employment Inquiries” module for more information.

However, let’s not assume that just because you’re not sitting around a formal table that a particular conversation is not part of the interview process. Remember, as far as the applicant is concerned, the interview began upon arrival in town or at the airport, and will continue until they leave. It doesn't matter that the setting is— a meeting on campus or socializing in someone's backyard at a barbecue – it is part of the interview.

Speaking of informal gatherings, you should always be careful when you introduce alcohol into a interview process, especially in social settings where people may tend to consume more. You don’t always know the tolerance level of the candidate or your colleagues, let alone the other people that may be invited to the gathering. If someone in that setting engages in impermissible conduct, or "loosens up" to the point that they make some harassing comments, BGSU could be held liable for the behavior even though it is occurring off campus. The only reason the applicant is here is because we invited them and as far as they are concerned, even relaxed conversations in an informal setting are a part of the official interview.

SCREEN 6

With all that said, when you are screening applications or applicants, be mindful to:

Peruse the applicants thoroughly and document all decisions made at each pivotal step during the screening process. This should take the form of a rating sheet or some type of evaluation/assessment tool.

Understand and be sensitive to rater errors and cultural norms. Each and every one of us should challenge the process if you sense the screening discussion is side-tracked. Committee members are your colleagues and you should be comfortable enough to push back if irrelevant discussions about a candidate occur.

Verify credentials and early and thoroughly check references. Make sure you are consistent with all candidates.
Over the years, we have had applicants and committee members raise questions about the practice of contacting individuals that are not on the applicant's reference list. The issue usually comes up when members on the committee know individuals at the institution where one of the applicants has studied or is employed. Because of this connection, the committee member decides to contact the person they know and ask for an opinion about this applicant. If this individual gives an opinion of the applicant that is unfavorable, it often undermines the applicant's potential in the eyes of the rest of the committee. Such a negative impact can happen even when the applicant's own references are very favorable and supportive. From an EEO perspective, there are a number of problems in soliciting information from individuals not on the reference list. First, it is fundamentally unfair to the applicant since the person has complied with our request to supply references. If you feel that an applicant's reference list is lacking some important people, you can ask for more information. For example, if the department chair or current supervisor is not listed, you may want to ask why. If the dissertation advisor or a major professor is absent from the list, you may ask why. But under most circumstances, the people on a reference list are expected to be those best positioned to comment on the applicant's potential as a future employee.

Another danger in soliciting opinions from personal contacts is that they may not have any formal responsibility for evaluating the applicant. They may have no way of knowing how the individual performs in the workplace. Moreover, there may be some hostility or bias coloring the opinion of the individual giving the opinion. Just because the contact has an office down the hall or sees the applicant occasionally on campus, or may have heard a student make a negative comment about the applicant, the committee member should not rely on such information for making an evaluative judgment. These practices can effectively sink a candidate! In fairness to the applicant, if you are faced with contradictions between how they appear on paper and information received from personal acquaintances or professional contacts, at a minimum, you should do some additional checking, do not automatically discount an applicant on the basis of unsubstantiated information. Evaluate and assess the process – particularly if the process is not yielding the desired outcomes. And while vacancies are undesirable, when the applicant pool is depleted– meaning your strongest candidates either withdrew or declined the offer, declare the search as failed and start over. If it is not your top or the “best and the brightest”, you may spend some time on the back-end working an exit strategy.

SCREEN 7

With every step of the recruitment process, perseverance, consistency and thoroughness are essential. Upon reflection of the search process, committee members should self-assess whether they have “leveled the playing field” by asking themselves individually and collectively if:

All applicants were given the same information about the position and the search process, and asked the same basic set of questions?

Was the interview site and process accessible to persons with disabilities?

Has comparable information been sought out about all candidates at each step of the screening and interview process such as reference checks?
And, have all interviewers been encouraged to examine their own biases during the entire search process as they relate to “rater errors” regarding “cultural norms”?

SCREEN 8

In accordance with federal regulations, once the search has concluded with an official acceptance of employment or is declared as “failed”, all search documentation must be maintained. BGSU’s Search and Screen Policy requires that documentation be maintained for a minimum period of five years from the date of the selection recommendation or the date the search is withdrawn from active status.

The types of records that must be maintained include all written records of meetings, including emails; procedural decisions, departmental and committee votes, search and screen forms, advertising ads, budgets, selection criteria, dossiers, correspondences, notes and telephone conversations with candidates, letters of reference, candidate rosters and rankings, and interview questions, notes and schedules. Retention of these records should be delegated to the Committee Chair.

SCREEN 9

Although the spirit of equal opportunity and affirmative action cannot be legislated or regulated, these strategies and procedures are designed to provide fair treatment that contributes to the equality of opportunity and leveling the playing field.

As such, the Office of Equity and Diversity provides leadership and support toward developing a comprehensive and institutional-wide approach and sustaining a diverse and pluralistic community of students, faculty and staff.

SCREEN 10

Feeling a little overwhelmed? Well, we hope not! It's been our intention to assist you as you begin a critical venture.

There are few activities that we undertake that are as critical as recruiting and selecting employees. It's the employees, after all, that put the face on BGSU. How well searches are conducted directly affect the institution's ability to reach its goals and visions to be one of the best urban universities, recognized locally, nationally, and internationally for its achievements.

While we've pointed out the possible pitfalls and potholes along the way, we also hope you now feel better about the road to recruiting and hiring the best.

The contents of this presentation can be found on the Office of Equity and Diversity’s website.

As you proceed with this important work, please do not hesitate to contact our office should you ever have any questions.
You can reach the Office of Equity and Diversity by calling (419) 372-8476. Or you can go to our website which is located at http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/oed/index.html.

Or

You can reach the Office of the Provost regarding faculty hires (419) 372-2915. Or you can reach their website which is located at http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/provost/index.html.

Or

You can reach the BGSU Office of Human Resource by dialing (419) 372-8421. Or you can visit their website which is located at http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/ohr/.

Thank you for your time.