

NIH Office of Intramural Research (OIR)

NIH Equity Committee Recommendations: Best Practices for Transparent Scientific Director Searches

Considering the NIH-wide [commitment](#) to equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and fairness, it is crucial to conduct transparent searches for Scientific Directors (SDs) of the NIH Intramural Research Program (IRP). Transparency is highly advantageous to Institutes and candidates. This document outlines recommendations for announcing the search, committee formation and availability, communication channels, and final selection. These guidelines align NIH with common academic transparency practices and the recommended [Roles and Review of Scientific Directors and Clinical Directors \(or Equivalent\)](#). That document states: "Recruitment for SDs/CDs will be public and open, with a transparent process that is communicated to the IRP before the search is initiated, and transparency about the composition of the search committee." Open communication regarding Scientific Director searches increases staff morale as it informs and engages the staff of an Institute or Center (IC) in the selection of the leadership that will profoundly affect their futures at NIH.

The NEC recommends the following best practices for these searches:

1. **Announcement of the Search:** When a search is announced publicly, the DDIR will at the same time communicate this announcement to all NIH Principal Investigators (PIs). This announcement should contain a description of the posted position and the goals/timing of the search.
2. **Committee Disclosure:** The name of the Chair of the search committee should be announced publicly. At the same time, the Deputy Director for Intramural Research (DDIR) should communicate this information to all NIH intramural staff. Disclosing the search committee Chair and the goal of the search at the outset of the process increases confidence that the search will be transparent and performed with the best interests of NIH in mind. Other than the Chair who may be designated as the point of contact for feedback (see #4), unsolicited contact with any committee member will be prohibited to ensure there is no external pressure by candidates or by PIs, but search committee members can reach out to potential candidates to encourage application. Questions about the search should be forwarded to the chair or other point of contact specified by the IC.
3. **Advisors to the Search:** During the search, groups at NIH committed to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDI, OSWD, OIR, WSA, UNITE) should be consulted, since these groups can advise on the recruitment of diverse candidates. In particular, the OSWD should be involved in generating a list of potential candidates whose applications should be solicited by the search committee, and the names of other potential candidates should be solicited from the groups named above and more broadly across the NIH. During the search, members of these NIH groups should either be included in the committee as voting or non-voting members or be formally solicited for feedback on the process of the search.
4. **Staff Feedback:** A clearly defined process should be instituted for PIs and staff of the appropriate IC to voice general concerns and priorities early in the process either to the chair of the search committee or the selected point-of-contact. This information will be invaluable to search

committees as they seek appropriate candidates. This defined process for staff input should be communicated by the DDIR or the point-of-contact directly to the institute staff.

5. **Finalist Transparency:** As it is in the best interest of the candidates and the IC to allow PIs and other staff to interact with the Finalists, the Finalists should present seminars either to the IC staff, or, if one or more of the Finalists do not want their candidacy known, to the search committee. To the extent possible, all Finalists should meet with the IRP PIs in small groups. Staff should have the opportunity to provide feedback.
6. **Search Committee Report:** The list of Finalists should be unranked but should include details on strengths and limitations for each of the referred candidates, and their commitment to DEIA.

These suggestions will create an open, collaborative environment. Opportunities for IRP staff to provide input and feedback will increase support for the process and the selected SD. Opportunities for the finalists to interact with IRP PIs will allow the candidates to obtain more information about the position for which they have applied and allow PIs to be helpful advocates for the institute