CURRENT PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION
In early 2021, the DEI Recruitment subcommittee conducted structured interviews with all SERC Principle Investigators and a subset of lab staff who have been involved in the hiring process within the past five years.

A series of 53 questions related to current lab and administrative hiring practices were addressed during these interviews. Answers primarily related to hiring lab staff and interns (i.e., not PI positions).

Questions related to overall hiring strategy, job ads, search committee formation, interviewing, references, and the final decision-making process.

**WHERE WE ARE NOW**

Current lab hiring practices

**GOAL:** Understand current hiring practices at SERC to identify relevant areas for improvement to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.
Cluster hires involve hiring for more than one open position simultaneously. Even for labs that have pursued cluster hires, this is a rare practice. In most cases, funding amount and timing are the biggest stated obstacles to cluster hires.

33% of labs have ever pursued a cluster hire.

Search committees explicitly involve more than one lab member at some point during the search process. See page 04 for more details on the current use of search committees in lab hiring at SERC.

94% of labs utilize search committees for hires.
On average across labs, 80% of hires were conducted via search committee.

Search committees are highly variable in size and composition across labs and types of positions being hired.

Most labs have included PIs, postdocs, and technical staff in application review and the selection process for new employee hires and interns. Some hires (typically interns) do not include the lab PI in the search committee.

In some cases, committees include members of multiple labs. This tends to occur when projects span multiple labs or the staff will split time across lab groups.

100% OF COMMITTEES ARE CONSULTATIVE

When search committees are used, they are always consultative, with committee members having the opportunity to provide direct input on the final decision.

Are search committee members explicitly selected to represent the diversity of the lab, and to ensure an awareness and commitment to DEI values?

Most labs do not explicitly consider DEI guidelines when selecting search committee members, although some are moving towards this practice.
83% of labs include required qualifications. Required qualifications typically include factors such as level of education and specific skills.

83% of labs include preferred qualifications. When included, 33% of labs always make it clear that preferred qualifications are flexible and not barriers to apply.

89% of labs include a DEI statement. Labs that include qualifications emphasizing values, such as teamwork.

Negotiable Salary

"Negotiable" is an ambiguous term for many SERC hires, as there is often flexibility in the step, but not grade of a hire.

Streamlined Process

Most labs strive to make the process clear and easy for trust hires, but feel impeded by USA Jobs for federal hires.

Labs typically post job ads through the following venues:
- personal network (67%)
- ecolog (61%)
- professional societies (44%)
- social media (33%)
- university job boards (28%)
- SERC website (17%)
- other listservs (17%)
- HBCUs or Hispanic-serving institutions (14%)
- government agencies (11%, not including USAjobs)
- local programs (6%)
INTERVIEW

94% of labs standardize interview questions

In most cases, interview questions are standardized across all candidates, although many labs allowed room for the conversation to flow off script when needed.

65% of labs standardize interview venue

Many labs conduct interviews in a standardized venue across all candidates. These typically occur over video call, although 2 labs explicitly use phone interviews only to avoid visual biases.

One week

Most labs give candidates 1-2 weeks notice when scheduling interviews.

Interview Topics

Are the following topics included in the interview, either formally or informally?

Questions emphasizing values

- Formally included: 89%
- Informally included: 5%
- Not included: 6%

On-the-job learning opportunities

- Formally included: 82%
- Informally included: 18%

Time for candidate to ask questions

- Formally included: 100%

Many labs use candidates' questions as part of the evaluation process.
REFERENCES

WHEN ARE REFERENCES REQUESTED?

Many labs request references only for shortlisted (top choice) candidates, typically following the interview stage.

A subset of labs request letters of reference for all applicants, although these are typically labs who have only hired interns or postdoctoral fellows (i.e., letters are included in the application process as dictated by the SI Office of Fellowships and Internships).

REFERENCE TYPE

53% of labs request letters only, while the remaining 46% utilize a combination of letters and phone conversations with references depending on the position.

Positive Flags:
- good character
- teamwork abilities
- confirmation of stated skills
- positive relationship with reference

Negative Flags:
- lukewarm/faint praise
- examples of negative behavior/poor work
- hostility (typically discredits the reference)
**EVALUATION**

**39% OF LABS USE A QUANTITATIVE RUBRIC**

Few labs have used quantitative rubrics for evaluation of candidates in the past. However, all labs expressed interest in creating rubrics in advance of the interview to ensure fair comparisons across candidates for future hires.

**MOST LABS USE A RANK SYSTEM FOR CANDIDATES**

Labs typically rank candidates based on their evaluation of the described criteria (see right). If a selected candidate declines a job offer, most labs move on to their next ranked choice. If no qualified next choice exists, then most labs initiate a new search.

On average, how much emphasis in candidate evaluation is placed on...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills 56%</th>
<th>Values 33%</th>
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<td>11 of 14 labs weight a candidate's existing skills as 50% or more of their emphasis in candidate evaluation.</td>
<td>Values considered include teamwork, willingness to learn, and problem solving.</td>
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<td>Percent emphasis on existing skills ranges from 30-75% across labs:</td>
<td>Some labs used situational questions to evaluate candidates' values.</td>
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<td>• 2 of 14 labs partially weight existing skills (up 40% emphasis in evaluation)</td>
<td>Larger labs tend to place greater emphasis on teamwork values, while public facing labs tend to emphasize flexibility in the workplace.</td>
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<td>• 8 of 14 labs moderately weight existing skills (41-60% emphasis in evaluation)</td>
<td>References are often consulted to confirm a candidate's values.</td>
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<td>• 4 of 14 labs heavily weight existing skills (greater than 60% emphasis in evaluation)</td>
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<td><strong>When evaluating candidates for internships, much less emphasis is typically placed on existing skills and higher emphasis is placed on values and commitment to DEI.</strong></td>
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**Gut 17%**

Most labs do not rely on "gut feeling" in candidate evaluations, although some look for particular red flags.

**DEI 6%**

8 of 13 labs do not consider commitment to DEI in evaluation.

*Note: values in chart do not add to 100%, as they were averaged across labs within category rather than across categories.**

**Not every lab provided answers to each of the questions related to emphasis in decision making.**
PROVIDE UNSOLICITED FEEDBACK TO ALL CANDIDATES

Few labs provide unsolicited feedback to candidates regarding their application and interview along with an explanation of the hiring decision. All labs are willing to provide feedback upon request.

INFORM NON-SELECTED CANDIDATES OF FINAL DECISIONS

Most labs inform all candidates when a final decision has been made. One lab only informs those who were interviewed. One lab only informs the successful candidate.

Informing Selected Candidates:
- 18% of labs inform by phone only
- 29% of labs inform by email only
- 53% of labs inform by email followed by a phone/video call

All labs provide selected candidates an opportunity to follow up with questions/concerns when making their decision.

88% of labs encourage the selected candidate to reach out to current and/or former SERC staff with questions. For the 22% of labs that do not formally include this information with the job offer, all are happy to provide contact information for SERC staff upon request.

Informing candidates who were not selected:

89% OF LABS INFORM NON-SELECTED CANDIDATES OF FINAL DECISIONS

28% OF LABS PROVIDE UNSOLICITED FEEDBACK TO ALL CANDIDATES
MINIMIZING BIAS

Every lab described approaches taken to minimize bias in the selection process.

The only commonality among labs in approaches to minimizing bias is that there is no standardized approach.

Some examples of approaches taken by labs to minimize bias in the selection process are as follows:

- having a discussion among the search committee members about their own possible biases in an effort to recognize and mitigate bias in selection
- focusing on job needs and expectations throughout the process
- providing flexibility in scheduling the interview
- utilizing standardized interview questions across all applicants
- not inquiring into personal details (e.g., family status, health) about an applicant
- independent review of applications by each committee member, with subsequent discussions to identify consensus
- not looking at applicant names or genders in review
Based on our understanding of current hiring practices at SERC and a review of the literature related to best practices in hiring to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, the DEI Recruitment subcommittee has developed recommendations for hiring outlined in pages 12-X.

We put forward these recommendations with the understanding that each hiring opportunity is unique, and that not every recommendation may be achievable for every position.

Nonetheless, careful consideration of the following recommendations at the outset of the hiring process will help the entire community to achieve our goal.

**GOAL: Standardize hiring across SERC to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion within the SERC community.**
Recommendations that most labs are already achieving are in plain text. **Recommendations that are achievable but not widely in use are in bold.**

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SERC Equal Opportunity Statement for job ads:
The Smithsonian Institution is an equal opportunity employer, committed to a policy of non-discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, sex, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, age, religion, marital/parental/caregiver status, and disability. The SERC community recognizes the value of diversity in promoting innovative science and creative solutions, and we strongly encourage candidates from all backgrounds to apply. We recognize that each applicant for this role will bring unique skills, knowledge, experiences, and background to this position; as such, we will be looking for candidates who possess many, but not necessarily all, of the qualifications and experience listed above.