

Building a Deep Candidate Pool, to Identify Outstanding Faculty

This document offers some strategies for building deep candidate pools for faculty positions at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS). A deep pool of strong candidates increases our chances of finding the most outstanding person for a position.

To begin with, building a pool is a sustained process that begins long before a search is requested, let alone authorized. We encourage faculty to, on an ongoing basis, deeply learn fields, their emerging areas, and the most outstanding people in those fields—and not to engage in this work only during the year in which your department has an authorized search. Learning a field, seeking out leads on promising scholars, and actively reaching out to them is a continual process. If you do this work well, it will be clear in your search request that you know the field thoroughly and can build a deep pool of excellent and diverse candidates. This will strengthen your search request and, ultimately, your case.

Continual seeking and pursuit of leads also enables you to build relationships over a longer time period. This can be to your department's advantage in years when a search opens up. This is especially relevant with regard to early-stage scholars, who may not be ready for a position when you first get to know them, but who become prime candidates for recruiting in later years when your department has an authorized search.

In addition to scouting talent on an ongoing basis, a second key to building a good pool is to actively, and in multiple ways, go beyond your personal networks. Experience has shown that we miss out on talent by scouting in too limited a fashion. Depending on personal networks can also magnify the effects of implicit bias. Instead, we ask that you significantly broaden your outreach, to maximize exposure to potential colleagues. Utilizing the national professional organizations in our disciplines is one way to extend our reach. Every search should strive for national or international outreach.

Below are some specific strategies for building a deep pool of outstanding candidates.

1. On an ongoing basis, seek and use the insights of *all* your colleagues, including assistant professors, postdocs, and graduate students in your department. As these early-stage scholars are often close to emerging research areas and outstanding people working in these areas, actively reach out to these colleagues, make clear that you value their input, and ask whether they have heard lectures at conferences or read papers by junior scholars who seemed exciting to them.

2. On an ongoing basis, invite assistant professors, postdocs, and senior graduate students from other schools to brown-bag lunches or similar events, to learn about their work. Convening brown-bag talks or similar events on a regular basis is one way to incrementally expand your knowledge of people in the field.

3. At conferences, actively get to know potential candidates and build relationships. For example, FAS departments have had striking success in expanding their candidate pools (and affecting outcomes) by attending talks or poster sessions, engaging intellectually with early-stage scholars who impressed them, and inviting those people to apply to a position or to come to Harvard to give a talk. You can also attend conference social events, or your department can convene a social hour at conferences for people who, whether or not they want to apply to a position, would like to learn more about the department and its goals. We encourage you to engage in these relationship-building efforts every year, not just in the year

of a search, in order to get to know the most outstanding people. Follow up on strong scholars who you meet at these events, and actively reach out to them during the year of a search.

4. Advertisements

a. During a search, scrutinize your advertisement with an eye toward subtle messages it may send about who the job is for and who Harvard is for. Avoid overuse of terms like “excellent.” Individuals may opt out of applying, thinking that they do not meet the bar for excellence. Include in the advertisement language such as, “seeking candidates who can grow the department in new directions.”

b. During a search, widen (to a national or international extent) the circle where you place advertisements and actively follow up on leads.

- **If you don’t already do this, add to the list of places where you advertise outlets focused on groups that are underrepresented in the academy.** It’s not that candidates will not see an ad posted in a more mainstream location. It’s that seeing the ad in a source targeted at underrepresented groups signals that Harvard encourages everyone to apply.
- **In addition to contacting individual colleagues, utilize national or international listservs of leaders in your field to uncover candidates who might otherwise not come to your attention—and actively reach out to those candidates.** Please see the template below for an example of how to reach out to individual colleagues and listservs.

Note: As the template below indicates, asking for specific names can help us to identify candidates who might otherwise self-select out of applying to Harvard. Moreover, inviting people to apply has, in the experience of FAS departments, motivated people to apply who were otherwise not planning to do so, widening the pool and affecting outcomes.

Note: In writing to listservs, and in your other canvassing efforts, it is important to ask for recommendations of people who may be early in their assistant professorship. Such candidates have had time to show how they manage teaching and research.

Template: Canvassing email that can be sent to colleagues at other schools

FROM: [NAME OF FAS FACULTY MEMBER]
TO: [NAME OF COLLEAGUE AT OTHER SCHOOL]
SUBJECT: Harvard Search Request

Dear [NAME]:

I'm writing to ask for your help as Harvard seeks outstanding candidates for a faculty position. The search committee has advertised widely, but they know that the best candidates sometimes remain unknown or else self-select out of applying to Harvard. [Insert, as appropriate: "While I'm not on the search committee,"] I've agreed to reach out to colleagues to help spread the word.

[Insert the position description from the advertisement here.]

Would you please circulate this email broadly to your community to announce the FAS's interest in any candidate who is interested in this position? The application deadline is [insert deadline]. The ad is available here [please hyperlink "here" to the advertisement].

If there are especially strong candidates who may be reluctant to apply without additional encouragement, please do send me their names. I'll relay those names to the search committee, so that they can learn more about those individuals' work and possibly invite them to apply.

Thank you in advance for your help.

Best,

[NAME OF FAS FACULTY MEMBER]
[TITLE]
Department of [DEPARTMENT NAME]
Faculty of Arts and Sciences
Harvard University