



Managing Conflicts of Interest in Faculty Searches

The School of Medicine is one of the nation's preeminent institutions for medical education, biomedical research and clinical care. Our mission is to continue to attract and retain the highest quality faculty members who will, working collectively, have the experience, knowledge and insight necessary to respond to new research and programmatic opportunities and be a central focus for excellence in patient care.

The faculty search process is crucial to realizing this mission. Our goal is to recruit the best possible candidates through search processes that:

- are conducted with integrity and transparency;
- are thorough, comprehensive, and national in scope;
- use the resources available to ensure and maintain a diverse candidate pool;
- move expeditiously and systematically;
- respect confidentiality;
- provide candidates with appropriate access to information;
- leave all involved with a sense of fairness;
- provide the requisite information and administrative flexibility to enable a final decision by the department and a smooth appointment process;
- and result in the recruitment of an outstanding candidate who will flourish as a member of the Stanford Community and bring distinction to the School and University

The goal is to avoid any conflicts of interest during the search process, whether real or perceived. Current Stanford faculty members with a real or perceived conflict would generally include the PhD advisor, post-doctoral sponsor, mentor, or any other faculty member with a significant supervisory or collaborative relationship, for example, someone who closely supervised the candidate in the clinical setting. Note that these recommendations on managing conflicts of interest also apply to candidates who are not affiliated with Stanford but who have a mentorship or collaborative relationship with a current Stanford faculty member in the department. Consult the Office of Academic Affairs if guidance is needed in specific situations.

Particular individuals with whom there may be a perceived conflict of interest include a candidate who:

- is currently a student, postdoc, resident, fellow, or employee at Stanford
- was employed at Stanford in the past (e.g. Instructor, Clinician Educator, Senior Research Scientist)
- completed MD, PhD, residency, fellowship, or post-doctoral studies at Stanford
- is now or has been in the past affiliated with Stanford as, for example, a consulting or visiting faculty member
- has or is collaborating with a member of the search committee

Before commencing a search

The chair and committee members (and if needed the department chair and division chief) should provide the names of any known candidates who are likely to apply. This list should be included, with CV's for candidates, in the Initiation of Search package.

If a candidate with a conflict is known to the department as a likely finalist in an upcoming search, it is best to proactively avoid including on the search committee any faculty member with real or perceived conflicts.

After commencing a search

Sometimes a candidate with a conflict of interest will apply who was not on the list of "known candidates" as described above. If this happens and the candidate reaches the definitive pool and interview process, any committee members with conflicts or relationships must step down from the committee. Search committees should be modified earlier rather than later to exclude all faculty with real or perceived conflicts. This is new guidance from the University and represents a change in our practice.

Faculty who step down from the committee may attend the candidates' job talks. Informal social meetings with the candidate, such as dinners with department faculty including search committee members, may include faculty with conflicts of interest. Faculty with conflicts may not attend meetings where the candidates are discussed, ranked, or voted upon.

As usual, OAA must approve any search committee changes.

Concluding a search

If a candidate with a conflict of interest begins to emerge as the candidate of choice, the following strategies are recommended:

- If most of the recommendation letters provided by the candidate are internal, solicit two additional external letters beyond those provided by the candidate during the search process, for an unbiased assessment and to strengthen the case. Please note that the solicitation letters should be signed by a faculty member who does not have a conflict such as a mentor or collaborator relationship with the candidate. If the candidate's packet already includes several non- Stanford-related letters, additional letters typically are not needed.
- The search committee chair should speak with the Vice Dean to discuss details of the search process and candidates, how the candidate emerged, what steps were taken to avoid real or perceived conflict of interest, and a strategy for the final recommendation. This should take place as soon as possible once the choice of the top candidate is beginning to become clear.