American Library Association  
Association for College & Research Libraries  

Librarian Recruitment:  
Guidelines for the Screening & Appointment of Academic Librarians  

DRAFT REVISION

These Guidelines for the Screening and Appointment of Academic Librarians have been developed to serve as an outline of the prototypical recruitment process. Within academic libraries, recruitment for a librarian position may follow different processes depending on the employment category used for librarians or other factors at that particular institution. Librarians may be hired as faculty (tenure-track or non-tenure-track) appointments, academic appointees, or as administrative or professional staff.

This framework is written to accommodate various appointment types and, accordingly, likely fits none perfectly. The primary objective of these guidelines is to outline the overall recruitment process and serve as a framework for managing librarian recruitments in a strategic, proactive, and consistent manner. Some aspects of these guidelines are more prescriptive while other parts are descriptive – this is intentional in that the more prescriptive aspects relate to federal and state laws while other aspects are descriptive in that they will ultimately be defined by institutional and library policy, procedures, and practice.

The primary audiences for these guidelines include library administrators, human resources professionals and staff, and search or screening committees. Libraries are encouraged to use these guidelines to develop their own local procedures that best fit institutional and library-specific policies, procedures, and practices as well as federal and state laws, regulations, and rules. Candidates may also use these guidelines to inform their understanding of academic library recruitment processes and practices.

It is the responsibility of the senior administration of the library and human resources staff to establish an environment where fair, effective and transparent searches are possible.

Identifying the Stakeholders and Roles

Recruitment for a librarian actively involves a number of individuals and groups within an academic library setting. These include:

- Director/Dean/University Librarian/Vice Provost (hereafter Director) – As the senior administrator in an academic library, this individual is responsible for authorizing the recruitment and/or final hire, and broadly ensuring that recruitment procedures are fair and appropriate
- Associate or Assistant Director/Dean/University Librarian (hereafter Associate Director or AD) – As the senior division-level administrator, the AD may be responsible for outlining the goals and criteria for recruitment. In some cases, this individual may serve as the hiring authority and be responsible for making the final hiring decision.
- Direct Supervisor – The individual who serves as the direct supervisor for the position is typically involved in the recruitment. The level of involvement is determined by the institutional and library policies,
procedures, practices and culture. In some cases, the supervisor is directly involved and responsible for developing the position posting and chairs the search or screening committee. In some institutions, the direct supervisor is not directly involved in the search or screening committee; this might be by choice or dictated by policy.

- **Human Resources Officer (hereafter HRO)** – The Library’s Human Resources Officer is responsible for managing and overseeing recruitments, providing advice on the application of federal and state employment laws and institutional policy, and serving as a resource to all parties involved in the recruitment, including candidates. This role also includes providing training on established procedures and best practices. The HRO or library human resources staff facilitates the work of the search/screening committee, coordinates communication with candidates, arranges for travel, and manages interview logistics. In some institutions, the HRO may serve as either a regular or ex-officio, voting or non-voting member of the search or screening committee. In some cases, the HRO or a human resources staff member may not serve on the search committee, but is available on an as-needed basis.

- **Search or Screening Committee Chair** – The individual or individuals appointed to chair the search or screening committee are responsible for managing the work of the search committee, consulting with the AD, Direct Supervisor, and HRO as needed. Local policy and practice determines if the chair is the direct supervisor or not, and appointed or elected.

- **Search or Screening Committee Members** – Recruitments are managed by a search or screening committee. A search committee has broader responsibilities and authority than a screening committee which focuses on review of applications while other aspects of the recruitment are managed by other parties. The type of committee formed will be determined by local practice. For the purposes of these guidelines, the more fulsome role and responsibilities of a search committee charged with recruitment for a faculty or faculty-equivalent position are outlined here, and the term search committee or committee is used hereafter. The individuals appointed to the search or screening committee are often representatives from throughout the library and may include librarians and/or staff. Search committees may include members from the university-at-large, either by choice or by policy or practice. The search committee members are responsible for ensuring the recruitment attracts the broadest, most qualified applicant pool possible and then reviewing applications, conducting preliminary interviews, coordinating on-site interviews, seeking feedback on candidates, and preparing a recommendation for the hiring authority.

**Forming the Search Committee**

Forming the search committee is one of the first steps in the recruitment process. The rationale of engaging a search committee, whether appointed or elected, is to maximize the involvement and input of library and university stakeholders in the recruitment process.

Typically, the Director of the library will be the person authorized to initiate a recruitment and will initiate the appointment of a search committee.

**Role of the Search Committee, Search Committee Chair & Members**

The primary role of the search committee is to strategically manage librarian recruitment by actively planning the stages and timeline of the search, seeking nominees and applicants in order to produce the most qualified applicant pool possible, screening applicants to identify the best candidates, managing logistics of interviews, conducting interviews, and making a formal recommendation for hire.

These important processes and the inherent decisions involved are delegated by the hiring authority to the search committee in varying degrees depending on the institution and/or the position. With recruitment considered as the first phase in the onboarding of the selected candidate, the search committee plays a critical role in ensuring a successful hire for the organization.
The Search Committee Chair has overall responsibility for managing a proactive, timely, fair and legal search process. These responsibilities include:

1. leading the committee in all phases of its work;
2. promoting a collegial working atmosphere within the committee;
3. keeping library administrators and staff informed of progress on the search;
4. working with all committee members to follow processes and ground rules;
5. developing a recruitment strategy and advertising plan to encourage a diverse applicant pool;
6. maintaining evaluative equity, consistency, and fairness throughout the process;
7. ensuring compliance with applicable federal and state laws, institutional and library policies and procedures, and appropriate human resources standards, guidelines and frameworks promulgated by library associations, in particular the ACRL’s Diversity Standards1
8. making sure the committee treats all candidates in a welcoming and professional manner;
9. maintaining confidentiality of the candidates, while balancing the library’s expectations or standards for transparency of the process;
10. maintaining communication with candidates, keeping them informed of the process and timelines;
11. ensuring all candidates are provided with appropriate consistent and timely information about the institution, library, and position at the appropriate stage of the search;
12. providing non-selected applicants with timely notice as soon as a firm decision is made; and
13. ensuring completion and submission of the formal recommendation for hire and all required documentation on the search.

While each institution determines the responsibilities of recruitment committees, most will expect the search committee to perform all or some of the following responsibilities:

1. providing input on recruitment strategy, position posting, and advertising venues to attract as broad a pool as possible;
2. marketing the position as well as the library and institution to nominees, applicants, and stakeholders;
3. reaching out to library and university stakeholders and subject matter experts to identify potential candidates, specifically asking contacts to provide names of potential candidates, including persons from underrepresented groups;
4. thoroughly reviewing and assessing all initial applicant materials using the criteria formulated by the committee;
5. communicating with candidates in a timely, respectful, professional and courteous manner to ensure candidates feel welcome and valued by the institution; and
6. understanding the potential for implicit bias and take action to ensure equity in their decision making.

A search committee might have either a voting or non-voting member or members responsible for oversight of Affirmative Action and/or diversity and outreach efforts. Such responsibilities would include:

1. researching a wide variety of advertising options that might net the broadest applicant pool;
2. reviewing the recruitment plan to ensure broad recruitment;
3. reviewing the hiring criteria and job advertisement to avoid artificial barriers that are not bona fide requirements of the position and/or ensuring qualifications for the position are not described in a way that unnecessarily excludes qualified candidates;
4. practicing active recruitment methods and strategies;
5. comparing the applicant pool with availability data and deciding if additional recruiting is warranted;
6. using proactive techniques to combat implicit bias; and
7. helping to ensure the process is welcoming and inclusive for all candidates.

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Types of Search Committees – Ad Hoc vs. Permanent or Standing Search Committee

Institutions may appoint and charge an ad hoc search committee for a specific search OR may use a permanent or standing committee of appointed and/or elected personnel who are charged with conducting all searches for librarians.

Search Committee Composition

The primary goal in the formation of a search committee, elected or appointed, is to create a body representative of the constituencies affected by the position and may include staff from the library and the university. The search committee should include staff committed to diversity and excellence. Every effort should be made to form committees that are representative of the diversity of the library, institution and the profession.

Persons accepting appointment to the committee disqualify themselves as candidates for the position. Search committee members should disclose any potential conflict of interest relative to the position or a specific candidate to determine if they should recuse themselves. Institutional or library policy may provide guidance on what constitutes conflict of interest.

Charge to the Search Committee

The charge to the search committee may be drawn from institutional policy, or procedures, or provided by the hiring authority. A clear and precise charge to a search committee might include:

1. position announcement/posting, unless the committee is charged to develop this document;
2. specific information or concerns relevant to the position and the rank or level of the position;
3. anticipated salary range;
4. suggested timeline and key dates for the overall recruitment, including potential preliminary and on-site interview dates or timeframes, proposed offer date, and optimum date of hire, as applicable;
5. the optimum and/or maximum number of finalists to be recommended for on-site interviews and date for submission of finalists for consideration;
6. responsibility for developing a proposed interview schedule, process, and questions;
7. how the qualifications of finalists are to be presented;
8. responsibility for conducting and/or reviewing results of reference checks, which might be in the form of letters of reference or phone reference checks;
9. affirmative action/equal opportunity requirements and who is charged with promoting diversity;
10. the method and frequency of search committee communication with the hiring authority;
11. arrangements for payments and reimbursements to search committee members and candidates and clerical assistance available related to the recruitment process;
12. standards for documenting committee actions and preserving committee records;
13. expectations for the formal recommendation and specifics on how it is to be conveyed (acceptable/not acceptable, in rank order, sole recommendation, etc.); and
14. importance of confidentiality and discretion during, and after recruitment.

Search Committee Procedures

One of the most important responsibilities of the search committee is to maintain a fair, equitable and legal search process. Key to that responsibility is establishing fair, and objective evaluation criteria based on the position posting and consistent application of the criteria to all candidates. Adding “special” or additional criteria for one candidate and not for another in the midst of the process is not equitable, nor is evaluating candidates in a manner where the
criteria are not applied equitably. In order to develop evaluation criteria, the committee should refer to the job
description and position announcement/posting prior to beginning the review of applications.

It is also important to provide all candidates a similar experience during interviews. The following standards support
consistency during recruitment:
1. requiring all candidates to submit the same information (e.g., cover letter, curriculum vitae, publications,
   reference letters and/or names of references, a portfolio of work samples, etc.);
2. developing a candidate evaluation tool or rubric with agreed upon criteria prior to reviewing
   applications;
3. using standard campus visit agendas and pre-visit checklists; and
4. providing all candidates with the same background information package.

Search committee discussions and decisions should be evidence based. It is important to develop interview
questions (for the candidates and references) that are measurable and that allow equitable, consistent evaluations of
the candidates.

Search Committee Communications

Libraries are encouraged to develop standardized communication templates for the various types of communication
managed by search committees. These might include, email text templates for communication with candidates and
with library staff, report templates, etc.

Generally, all communications from the search committee are managed by the search committee chair. A search
committee chair may elect to delegate responsibilities to specific committee members. Additionally, there must be a
determination as to how the search committee will communicate with each other and with stakeholders.

Communication will also be informed by relevant legal, regulatory, and/or policy requirements at the institution.
For example, email and written materials may be subject to public records laws and requests in some states, and
meetings, whether in person, via e-mail or via telephone, involving members of the search committee may be
subject to open meetings requirements, including prior announcement.

Regardless of the standards, all search committee members must adhere to them.

Describing the Position

Creating and advertising the position is often the first responsibility of the search committee and must be completed
in order to initiate recruitment.

Position announcements or postings are drawn from the position/job description. When writing the position or job
descriptions, employers usually:
1. write a summary description of the position which focuses on answering the question: Why does this
   position exist? The summary is typically 2-3 sentences in length.
2. describe the duties assigned to the position, grouping together those which are similar.
3. translate duties into the abilities and skills needed to do the job. Specify necessary skills as far as possible
   in precise job-related terms.
4. identify any specific knowledge requirements for the job or requirement of some evidence of ability to
   learn.
5. where relevant, indicate specific qualifications and level of education required for the job.
6. identify experience required to carry out the job.
7. Identify any other requirements of the position, such as certifications or licenses.
Typically the parent institution will have procedures in place for managing the process of creating a new and/or revising an existing position. Some general guidelines to remember include:

1. keep in mind the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) which a candidate must possess to perform the work, and which form the basis for the recruitment and selection processes.
2. research the job duties and necessary KSAs through the library, professional resources, and on the Web for similar positions to determine reasonable attributes for the assigned work.
3. network with other similar libraries to find out how they’ve approached positions of this type.
4. reference local, regional, and national associations, such as ARL, for similar positions.
5. consult with colleagues through subject-related lists to determine new and innovative approaches to describing the work under consideration.

Position announcements or postings are drawn from the position or job description and are developed as a way to advertise the position. Position postings (also known as position vacancy announcements or recruitment advertisements) should reflect the language used in the position description, especially the summary statement and should include the following elements:

1. functional title of position;
2. rank or level of the position
3. list of duties and reporting relationships;
4. required or minimum qualifications;
5. desired or preferred qualifications;
6. type of position and level or rank;
7. salary (minimum or range or maximum);
8. benefits information, including relocation assistance or support to be provided;
9. list of materials that need to be submitted by candidates;
10. application deadline (firm deadline or first consideration date or date when application review will begin, if the review of applicants is ongoing and will continue until position is filled);
11. date position is available (if applicable);
12. name of person to whom to submit application materials; and
13. a point of contact for questions or issues in submitting materials, particularly in the case of online application systems;
14. institutional statement related to diversity and/or EEO/AA policy and practice.

Postings provide information about the community institution, library, and or division and department as well as information or links to strategic plans and initiatives.

Emerging trends, and institutional initiatives may need to be reflected in certain positions, particularly managerial and leadership positions where the individual will be expected to plan, implement, manage, and monitor new initiatives and/or significant change processes within the library.

In any case, it is important to evaluate what the assigned responsibilities will be, and what will be required from the individual selected. The key to a successful recruitment is the accuracy of the position description, which should outline the place the position holds in the organization.

Determining Required/Minimum and Preferred/Desired Qualifications

After outlining the position duties, determining the qualifications – required or minimum and preferred or desired – is the most important element of the position posting as qualifications will guide the work of the search committee in its review of applicants. It is essential that efforts are made to ensure qualifications allow for diverse work experience, education, and skills and avoid inappropriate and/or discriminatory requirements.
To be considered as a viable candidate, most organizations require an initial screening to ensure that required qualifications are met. Initial review of applications should focus on who meets required qualifications, not preferred qualifications. The goal is to ensure that candidates are reviewed in a fair manner and are not eliminated too early in the process or in an inappropriate way. In some institutions, determining who meets required qualifications is the first step in ensuring equal opportunity/affirmative action goals are met and/or that the pool is viable.

Required qualifications must be supported by the needs of the job and not stated in a manner that is discriminatory or exclusionary. It is critical to think carefully about required qualifications and to not set the bar so high that few qualify. All required qualifications should be reviewed to determine if they are necessary, clear, non-discriminatory, and measurable. For example, entry-level jobs would not normally require experience. In requesting knowledge or experience, wording is critical. For example, in the case of a specific type of knowledge, does the position require “demonstrated knowledge of” or “demonstrated experience with” or will knowledge” suffice.

In developing required qualifications, keep these things in mind:
1. be specific not vague. Ask for the minimum or a range. For example, a posting should state “at least one year of experience” not “some experience” which is difficult to measure.
2. limit the qualifications to those that are measurable and necessary for the performance of the work.
3. clearly communicate any boné fide physical requirements. Be very cautious when considering physical requirements as these must be directly related to specific job duties.

Preferred qualifications are those qualifications that are not essential to the position, but would help the candidate be successful in less time or are otherwise desirable. In developing preferred qualifications, keep these things in mind:
1. include those qualifications that would make the transition for the new employee easier.
2. look at the skills of all employees working in the unit and think in terms of complementing those skill sets.
3. keep in mind long-term strategic goals.

Advertising the Position

Academic libraries first advertise the position within the campus community and in appropriate regional and national publications, taking care to notify all potential groups of candidates protected by equal opportunity/affirmative action legislation. In some cases, advertising venues will be stipulated by institutional policy or practice.

Libraries also advertise via websites and in print publications as well as individual solicitations via email and invitations through message boards and electronic discussion lists focused on the library profession and/or higher education. Parent institutions may also advertise on national or regional higher education related sites.

ACRL’s Diversity Standards recommend that libraries go beyond the traditional avenues to advertise positions, by contacting library associations and LIS programs that support diversity and ensure continued diversity in the profession.

A sound practice is to notify all library staff of posted vacancies and ask individuals to share the posting with colleagues and/or to nominate potential applicants.

Screening and Evaluating Applicants
The purpose of the screening process is to narrow the overall pool of applicants to those individuals who most closely fit the required and preferred qualifications for the position. Depending on the size of the initial pool, screening may require multiple reviews and stages of candidate elimination before the search committee has identified a manageable number of finalists for interviews.

Since screening is such a critical phase of the process, it is useful for the committee to discuss the qualifications and expected evidence for meeting the qualifications, and develop the evaluation method or rubric before screening of applications begins. This helps to ensure that consistent standards are applied and that the review is an evidence-based approach that is done objectively and fairly.

1. Each committee should screen and evaluate applicants according to library and institution-wide policies. All applications will undergo an initial screening for compliance with the qualifications and requirements as stated in the position description.
2. Candidates who do not meet the stated minimum qualifications or who do not submit required application documents need not receive further consideration. It is desirable to communicate with this group of applicants as soon as possible to inform them that they are no longer in the candidate pool.
3. Fair, objective, and consistent procedures that are clearly related to the advertised qualifications should be used to narrow the field of candidates to a short list, whom the committee will invite for interviews.
4. Before the short list has been finalized, it is useful to review all the qualified applications a second time to ensure qualifications have not been overlooked or overvalued in the first reading.
5. The committee should follow institutional policies related to internal applicants, nepotism and spousal/partner hires. Applicants from any of these categories should not receive special consideration or be held to a higher standard than other applicants.
6. An important responsibility of the HRO and search committee chair is to develop a screening process that is free of structural biases and to monitor for personal biases as the process unfolds. Search committee members should be counseled before screening begins about avoiding bias toward protected classes of individuals under federal law as well as other forms of unconscious bias that might prevent an applicant from receiving full consideration. Examples of unconscious bias might be assumptions about candidates with non-traditional career paths or from other regions of the country.
7. In addition, the HRO and search committee chair should establish guidelines for managing personal or professional information about candidates learned through social media or other avenues outside the traditional information channels.
8. If there are delays in the screening process for any reason, it is appropriate to update applicants about their status.
9. Screening may also take the form of assessing the fit between the institution’s anticipated salary or salary range and the salary expectations of viable candidates. This may take the form of requiring applicants to report their salary expectation or salary history in the application materials or having a telephone conversation prior to finalizing the list of applicants for onsite visits. Before disqualifying a candidate on this basis, the employer should verify their understanding of the candidate’s expectations.

Preparing for Candidate Interviews

Following the review of applications, the next step is to interview. Institutions may have multiple levels of interviews.

Types of Interviews

Search committees may use a mix of types of interviews.

Telephone or Video-Conference Screening Interviews
Once consensus has been reached on the qualified applicants, the search committee may conduct telephone, video-conference or other comparable interviews with the top candidates. These interviews are preliminary or screening interviews and normally last 45 to 90 minutes. Conducting these interviews with applicants can help committee members learn more about the applicants than can be gleaned from written materials. The purpose of this type of preliminary interview is to:

- verify continued interest and candidate suitability for the position;
- acquire any substantive information that may be helpful in completing elements of the candidate evaluation rubric that were not supplied in the application materials;
- assess the candidate’s interpersonal and communication skills; and
- acquire any substantive information that may be helpful in further narrowing the applicant pool.

To conduct these screening interviews with applicants, the committee should:

- have at least two committee members participate in the interview, but include as many as possible.
- develop a list of questions to ask during the interview.
- limit the number of job and competency related questions to 5 - 7 open-ended questions, so applicants have an opportunity to engage with the interviewers.
- use the questions to address any concerns about the candidate’s background or qualifications which have been discussed with the committee.
- take and retain careful notes during the interview.
- share the results of the interviews with the committee, ignoring any information which is not job related.

Email Interviews

Email interviewing is an alternative to the telephone or video-conference screening interviews, when time, financial constraints, or geographical boundaries are barriers. The method can present a number of challenges, including the difficulty of changing direction if a more promising tangent emerges from the conversation, the disadvantage of not being able to get the interviewee back on track if the conversation strays, and the inability to offer immediate clarification if the questions are misinterpreted. In order to mitigate these challenges, a mixed mode interviewing strategy may be considered.

Airport or Abbreviated Campus Interviews

Another type of preliminary interview is the airport interview or abbreviated campus interview, often conducted for senior administrative positions but might also be used for cluster hires (the hiring of several positions at once). Members of the search committee and potential candidates travel to a central airport or offsite location near the university where the interview is conducted. Meeting at an airport enables a search committee to interview a large number of candidates in a short period of time with a degree of confidentiality. These interviews may run from 1 to 3 hours, allowing the search committee to see multiple candidates in a day or two.

On-site Campus Interviews

At the conclusion of telephone or airport interviews, a limited number of finalists are invited to campus for on-site interviews.

The on-site campus interview is typically the culminating interview and may run from 1 to 3 days, depending on the type and level of the position. For most librarian positions, a full-day interview is the norm. The interview includes meetings with the search committee and with administrators and colleagues. Candidates may be expected to deliver a presentation. Interviews may also include meals and receptions that allow candidates to meet other employees.
Interview schedules are preferably designed to include the same elements for all candidates, although the specific elements may be done at different times of day based on availability of interview participants and/or room availability. All parties should adhere to this schedule in the interest of time and fairness.

Interview Guidelines

Guidelines for interviews are developed to ensure that both federal and state laws and institutional and library policies are followed. The following guidelines help to ensure consistency in dealing with applicants

1. Interview expenses of travel, meals, and lodging for the candidates should be borne by the inviting institution whether the interviews are held on or off campus. When this is not the practice, the candidate should be so apprised when an invitation is issued. Whatever the institutional and library practices are, complete detailed information about policy and practice should be provided to candidates in writing so they are informed about preferred providers, discounts, expense limitations, and what expenses will be covered.

2. If a presentation is required of the candidates, the topic and written instructions should be clearly communicated in writing to each candidate. Instructions should include information on room setup and available equipment, time allowed for the presentation topic, time for questions and answers, and the composition of the audience.

3. Once the interview schedule is finalized, candidates should receive a copy and information about the library and its parent institution in advance of the interview.

4. Once candidates have confirmed dates, the search committee is responsible for communicating information about interview dates and schedules and sharing candidate applications with interview participants within the library and on campus. Generally this is done via email and the complete interview schedule, presentation topic (if applicable), candidate cover letter and resume or curriculum vita are shared via email with either invited participants or the entire library staff, with personal information (home address, personal email, and phone) redacted.

5. The search committee develops questions for candidate interviews. Questions should be job-related and speak to the functions of the job and qualifications. Avoid questions that seek out personal information or that may solicit responses that contain non-compliant or unusable information that may introduce bias in to the search.

6. Employers should be willing to make appropriate and reasonable accommodations to enable a candidate with a disability to participate in an interview and should be willing to explain what is involved ahead of time. Seek information from candidates on what is needed and guidance from institutional policies and campus experts on how to handle requests from candidates. Focus on the individual, not the disability or accommodation.

7. The search committee should model interactions with candidates, which should be professional, courteous, respectful, and objective.

8. Many candidates are interested in learning more about the community and what it is like to live and work within the community – campus, local, and regional. Be prepared to provide answers to questions related to housing availability and costs, school quality, child care options, economic and job outlook for spouses and partners, entertainment, and other work-life issues.

9. Make institutional resources available to candidates as appropriate and/or if available. This might include access to realtors and relocation companies.

Evaluating Candidates, Making the Recommendation and Preparing the Offer

Following interviews, the recruitment process moves into the final stages which focus on evaluating all candidates who have interviewed on-site, checking references, and moving to the offer stage. This stage may involve both the search committee and/or human resources officers and/or administrators.
The search committee is expected to seek feedback from interview participants on candidates who interviewed on-site.

In many cases, the search committee is expected to check references. In some instances, reference checks might be performed instead by the human resources officer or the supervisor for the position.

Institutional policy on reference checks should be reviewed to ensure that appropriate processes and procedures are followed. The following general guidelines are useful in conducting reference checks.

1. Outline type and number of references required. Ideally this should be outlined in the position posting so candidates can provide what is expected as part of their application. Candidates should be asked to list a specific number of references who can provide substantive information about his or her professional qualifications and aptitude. Candidates may also be asked to provide specific types of references such as current or previous supervisors or administrators in a direct reporting line, peer, library or campus colleagues, and/or direct reports that the candidate has supervised.

2. Establish when reference checks are conducted. Some institutions conduct reference checks prior to inviting candidates on-site for interviews; the advantage to this method is that the library might further narrow the number of on-site interviews and can move the offer stage quickly after interviews are completed. A disadvantage is that it is time-consuming to check multiple references for multiple candidates and can delay interviews. Most institutions conduct reference checks after on-site interviews are completed.

3. Identify the candidates for whom references will be contacted. Some institutions only check references for the candidate selected while others check references for all candidates invited for on-site interviews.

4. The committee should only solicit formal references from the list provided by the candidate. In the event the committee needs to check other references, input and permission of the candidate should be sought in advance. This might be the case if the institutional or library policy requires or specifies specific types of references such as current or previous supervisor, direct report, or campus colleague or peer, and the candidate has not provided that type of reference. In some cases, a search committee might need information related to a specific aspect of a person’s background and may need to discuss what is needed with the candidate so that the candidate can determine who can best provide the information.

5. Develop questions for reference checks. Whether seeking letters of reference or conducting telephone reference checks, the committee should develop a list of common questions to be answered by all references. These questions should focus on key responsibilities of the job and the candidate’s credentials, qualifications, experience, and accomplishments, as well as characteristics and qualities. When requesting the letter of reference, the committee can ask the reference to respond to the specific questions in the form of a letter. When a telephone reference is conducted, the questions and the position posting can be sent to the individual in advance and then used to guide the conversation. Committees should always ask the reference to identify how they know the candidate. Unique questions relevant to particular candidates are also permissible if necessary to fully assess their qualifications.

6. Reference checks are considered privileged information. Information gathered in reference checks is included in the search committee report and is part of the information summarized and shared with the hiring authority. In addition, it is the responsibility of the committee to let references know what information will be or might be made available to candidates in accordance with institutional policy and practice and/or state laws.

The search committee should only contact references listed and do so in accordance with institutional and library policy. However, within a tightly networked profession, it is not uncommon for the committee to receive unofficial or informal information regarding candidates. This might take the form of interview participants and/or library staff
seeking out information from peers and colleagues at the candidate’s current or previous workplace or from former colleagues. Institutional policies may provide guidance on the appropriateness and/or use of such information; in the absence of policy guidance, ethical considerations should determine how to handle such information. Care should be exercised that such information is not used in an adverse manner to disqualify candidates unless attempts are made to verify the information via credible and appropriate sources.

Institutional and library practices on making the recommendation vary. In some cases, committees may be asked to only indicate if candidates are acceptable or not; while in other cases, the committee may be asked to recommend the top candidate or rank the candidates. The nature of the search committee recommendation should determine how a disagreement between the search committee and hiring authority will be handled. In most cases, search committees are advisory and the final decision will be made by the hiring authority and/or senior administrators.

The offer stage is usually handled by the human resources officer or other administrators. In some cases, institutional practices may require levels of approval outside the library either before or after a verbal offer is made. Once the hire is approved, a contingent offer is made to the candidate selected in the form of a formal written offer that details the specific terms of employment.

Once an offer has been accepted, the next stage involves additional checks – credentialing background, criminal, and employment verifications. Such verifications should be handled in accordance with institutional policy and state laws and regulations. Upon satisfaction of these checks, the offer is no longer contingent.

Once a candidate has received and accepted the offer, all other candidates should be notified. The method of contact to notify candidates is best determined by how far they advanced in the process.

1. Personalized letters or emails are appropriate for candidates eliminated in preliminary screening processes or after telephone interviews.
2. A phone call followed by a letter or email should be sent to all applicants who interviewed on-site to thank them for their interest while indicating that the search has concluded.

Many institutions use online application systems that will generate automatic emails updating candidates as their status is updated in the system. While this is efficient, the messages are often brief and terse. A more personalized email would leave candidates with a better impression of the library.

**Concluding the Search**

Concluding a search involves some wrap-up steps. The search committee should work with the HRO to document the search and compile all search-related documents in accordance with retention policies and practices. Debriefing with the search committee may be an additional step that ensures recruitment practices are reviewed and improved continuously.

Announcing the new hire to the organization should include formal discharge of the search committee members with thanks and appreciation for their work.

The final step is planning for the onboarding of the new employee.

Additional best practices that could improve subsequent searches include:

- maintaining data on previous applicants and maintaining contact with them in order to cultivate future applications for other vacancies
- following up with those who declined positions for insights into why they turned the offer down, and
• soliciting information on how applicants learned of the vacancy for use in assessing efficacy

In the Event of an Unsuccessful Search

Searches end without a successful placement for a variety of reasons and in some cases no obvious reason at all. In the event of an unsuccessful search, the stakeholders should assess their contributions to an effective and active search and the search processes. Critical elements for review include the salary, and the design and description of the position itself, including the qualifications. The search processes, including the following, should also be assessed prior to reinitiating: advertising, screening, and evaluating.

About these Guidelines

These guidelines were developed by the ACRL Screening and Appointment of Academic Librarians Task Force chaired by Brian Keith, University of Florida. Members included: Bridget Burke, North Dakota State University; Pat Hawthorne, University of Nevada, Las Vegas; Melissa Laning, University of Louisville; Eileen Theodore-Shusta, Ohio University; and Carole Urbain, McGill University.