**Recruitment and the Match**

Stew Mackie, MD and Jon McGreevy, MD, MSPH

Edited by Caren Gellin, MD and Daniel Sklansky, MD

Introduction

Pediatric residency program recruitment is an essential part of program director responsibilities and an annual ritual for the program. Recruitment is the mechanism to attract residents who align with your program’s aims and missions. Recruiting high quality applicants allows trainees to thrive and strengthen the residency program and institutional culture. The match process starts formally in September with the opening of ERAS; however, a program should begin planning in early summer to ensure faculty availability and development in interviewing best practices, identifying recruitment strategy, and coordinating logistics. The recruitment process involves nearly all stakeholders of a residency program including program coordinators, associate program directors, chief residents, residents, department faculty, and in some cases the department chair. By having a thoughtful approach to the recruitment process, programs can attract residents who will thrive in the program.

Schedule of Dates

The schedule of exact dates changes each year as determined by AAMC, NRMP, and APPD. A general calendar is provided below:

**Mid-September:** NRMP registration opens

**End of September:** Programs can access applications in AAMC PDWS

**Mid-October:** APPD recommendation to begin offering interviews (typically 2 weeks after programs can access applications)

**October-January:** Interview applicants

**End of January:** NRMP quota change deadline

**Beginning of February:** NRMP rank system opens

**End of February:** NRMP rank list certification due

**Mid-March**: Program fill notification, SOAP and Match Day

AAMC’s Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS)

ERAS applications are accessed through the [AAMC Program Director Workstation](https://auth.aamc.org/account/#/login?gotoUrl=http:%2F%2Fpdws.aamc.org%2Feras-pdws-web) (PDWS). The 2024 cycle for ERAS applications included several changes with the experiences section. Highlights include limiting experiences to 10, selecting the top 3 most meaningful experiences, and allowing better descriptions of different aspects of the experiences It is important to check the AAMC and ERAS websites annually for new updates.

*Signals and Geographic Preferences*

Beginning with the 2023 recruitment cycle, MyERAS added signals/preferences to the Biographical Information section of the application. ***These signals/preferences are only intended to help in the selection for interview process.*** There are 3 domains: Geographic Preference, Setting Preference and Program Signals. Each applicant can choose up to 0-3 geographic divisions to signal. See geographic divisions [here](https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-residencies-eras/publication-chapters/biographical-information#geographic). Programs in signaled divisions that the applicant applies to will see the signal; programs that the applicant applies to outside of the preferred divisions will not see any information. If the applicant selects “I do not have a division preference” then all programs will see this response. There is a free text domain for the applicant to explain the reason for selecting the division. For setting preference, applicants indicate a preference or lack of preference for urban, suburban, or rural settings for their training program as defined [here](https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-residencies-eras/publication-chapters/biographical-information#setting). Applicants can then provide a free text explanation for their selected preference.

Pediatrics allows for up to 5 program signals. These signals can only be seen by programs receiving the signals. Preliminary data shows that nearly 100% of applicants use program signals and they use all 5 of their signals. Applicants may only designate one 1 signal per program and all signals are equally weighted. Signals help program directors identify applications to review earlier in the applicant evaluation process. This process continues to evolve.

Holistic Review, Selecting Applicants to Interview and Ranking Applicants

The APPD recommends that every program engage in holistic review of applications to consider the mission of your institution/program as well as the “whole” applicant. The AAMC has excellent [resources](https://www.aamc.org/services/member-capacity-building/holistic-review) to guide you through the holistic review process.

Many programs have a very large number of applications to review to invite applicants for interviews. Metrics to predict success as a resident and in future careers are lacking. Thus, we recommend that Program Directors work collaboratively with a team to evaluate applications holistically. Filters can be used in ERAS to highlight aspects most important to the training program. The following is a guide for both the invitation and rank list process:

1. Define the number of total spots the program plans to interview. Programs often will interview 10-20 applicants per available residency spot. Consideration of where your program went down to on the rank list in prior matches, geographic area, and other variables (such as a new Program Director, presence of citations from the ACGME, or other challenges or strengths) should be considered.
2. Develop a rubric or rating system to perform a holistic review of applicants both during initial selection to interview and final rank list. Select a cut-off for those that would meet criteria to offer an interview. If assigning points or weights to different portions of the application, consider the mission of your program and those attributes that align with your mission and the culture of the institution.

Areas often used in the development of a rubric include:

* 1. Medical Student Performance Evaluation\*
  2. Research productivity\*
  3. Prior experiences (including extracurricular activities and personal statement)\*
  4. National ranking/reputation of program medical student attended
  5. USMLE/COMLEX scores
  6. Letters of Recommendation
  7. For ranking, interview\* - Many programs have included behavioral interviewing or multiple mini interviews (MMI) to more reliably evaluate interviews.

\* Areas predictive of resident performance based on low-quality research on a systematic review performed by Lipman et al.

1. Share rubrics with key stakeholders to ensure agreement that rubric aligns with the mission of the residency program and to assess for potential.
2. When determining who will be invited to interview, tiers of applicants can help with efficiency in maximizing invites to applicants and filling all available spots. ***Programs should never invite more applicants than interview spots as this is a violation of NRMP policies. In addition, all applicants must be given 48 hours to accept invites (complete list of NRMP policies can be found*** [***here***](https://www.nrmp.org/policies/)). It is also worth thinking about different time zones when developing interview schedules.
3. When determining rank list after interview, a systematic way of having interviewers fill out the rubric(s) can help to organize a large amount of data. This can be done in ERAS, Thalamus or other software programs such as Excel/SmartSheet. Program Coordinators are often helpful in developing forms and sending out information to those completing the ranking. These data can then be sorted by and reviewed by the intern selection committee for final rank list determination.
4. Review rubrics at the end of recruitment season with the intern selection committee for further reiteration and optimization.

Interview Day Scheduling

The coordination and scheduling of interviews is a time consuming and challenging process but thankfully there are a variety of software applications that have made the process easier. Beginning in June 2023, all ERAS residency and fellowship programs have complimentary access to Thalamus Core and Itinerary Wizard for interview management. The advantage of this system is that it integrates with ERAS and that applicants can self-schedule, change or cancel interviews. There are additional products from Thalamus which can be purchased to augment your pre-screening, selection, and interview day process. Alternative applications to coordinate interview days include Interview Broker, Rezrate, Signup Genius or manually by your program administrator or other personnel (typically using a spreadsheet-based application).

<https://thalamusgme.com/>

<https://www.interviewbroker.com/interview/>

<https://www.rezrate.com/>

<https://www.signupgenius.com/>

APPD recommends a 2-week waiting period after the release of Dean’s Letters (MSPE) to complete a holistic review of applicants prior to sending interview invites.

Interview Day

Virtual interviews became the norm following the COVID-19 pandemic. Many organizations have supported this change to extend beyond the pandemic given improved equity in ability for all applicants to interview without financial limitations. The AAMC, APPD, and NRMP have published best practices over the past few years for interviews in terms of allowing in-person, hybrid, or completely virtual interview experiences.

The advent of virtual interviews has brought up new challenges in conveying the culture of an institution and a program. Most applicants will have a perceived idea of the culture and priorities of your residency program based on the program website, social media presence, and what they have heard from others about the program. This results in the applicant understanding your “residency program’s brand.” Ensuring that the brand of the program aligns with your institution’s culture and the program’s core values (those aspects that are intrinsic to who the program is) allows the best fit applicant to match to your program *(Mackie et al. 2023)*.

The interview day allows you as a program to further develop this understanding of your program’s brand and core values. This should include emphasizing the program’s mission, as well as how this translates into the unique experiences of the program. Another important aspect of the interview day is allowing applicants to understand better the geographic area that they will be living in and serving as a pediatrician. While there is no standard set-up for the day, commonly programs will have:

* An introductory period by program leadership (Program Director and/or Associate Program Directors) speak to applicants as a group
* Chief Resident and/or current residents’ session with applicants to give insight into life as a resident
* Interviews with faculty and program leadership on a one-to-one basis
* Larger resident meet and greets during the interview day and/or during an evening “happy hour”
* Opportunity for applicants to see aspects of the structured learning of a program such as a morning report, didactic, or a case-based learning session
* PowerPoints or videos embedded into the above areas to show the residents, hospital and surrounding geographic area

Residency programs should consider getting feedback of the process from applicants to further optimize their recruitment process and ensure that applicants understand the residency program’s mission and core values.

National Resident Matching Program (NRMP)

While applications are accessed through AAMC’s ERAS system, the Match occurs through the NRMP. Therefore, programs (and applicants) must register with NRMP and your rank list ultimately needs to be certified within NRMP.

The NRMP has policies for participation in The Match for participants, programs, medical schools and institutions. These policies are in place to ensure there is complete, accurate and timely information provided by all involved parties and to prohibit the use of coercive tactics by programs and applicants to influence match results. As program director, you will be asked to acknowledge the program specific policy and agreement annually when registering the program for The Match. It is important to understand that participation creates a binding contract between the applicant and program. The program must offer an employment contract to the matched applicant and the applicant must matriculate to the matched program. There is a process for applicants and programs to waive this binding agreement after The Match has occurred. Programs cannot offer positions to applicants who have matched elsewhere in a concurrent year, denied waiver or have a confirmed match violation.

Other areas of frequent questions with the NRMP agreement include the responsibility of disclosures, ranking interest and access to Match data. Prior to rank certification deadline, programs must disclose any Visa requirements, pre-employment screening policies, institutional policies and be able to provide an employment contract. Similarly, at the time of application all applicants must disclose any prior residency training, any gaps in medical training and any legal actions that may influence their ability to perform their profession or their ability to be licensed.

<https://www.nrmp.org/intro-to-the-match/the-match-agreement/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idsfJ1N9tFU&t=2s>

Intern Selection Committee

An intern selection committee is a standard part of most residency programs in developing the rank list with the following purposes:

1. Ensure the viewpoint of key stakeholders in the ultimate rank list of a program.
2. Mitigate bias and prevent a few members of the institution from having an overly heavy input.
3. Ensure that the mission of the institution and program are at the forefront of the process.

The committee should include the Program Director, Associate Program Director(s), and may include:

* Residents
* Chief residents
* Clinical Competency Committee members
* Core faculty leaders
* Institutional leadership (such as Chairs)
* Other medical staff that will work with residents (such as nurses)
* Program administrative staff (such as Program Coordinators)

The intern selection committee is typically tasked with the review of the final list of applicants to ensure the final rank list is in alignment with mission and goals of the program. It is recommended that all committee members have training in implicit bias (the Harvard Implicit Association Test can be a good place to start this work; <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>), be well acquainted with the program’s mission, and understand the culture of the program and institution. The intern selection committee is also a resource to help review the rubrics/ranking systems to determine applicant interview invitations and the final rank list with the goal that these rubrics and rankings are in alignment with the program’s mission.

APPD best practice recommendations

* Program Directors should be familiar with NRMP and ERAS policies and review updates annually to be aware of best practices and systematic changes to the process
* Programs should develop a holistic mission driven review of applications which highlights the program’s core values and mitigates bias for both the initial review of applications and the final rank list determination
* An intern selection committee should be developed that encompasses multiple stakeholders to finalize the rank list and review rubrics for selection of applicants to interview and final rank list determination.
* A thoughtful approach should be taken to the interview day which encompasses ability for applicants to discuss the program with program leadership, current residents, and faculty to better understand the culture of the institution/program, the distinct aspects of the program, and the geographic area that the program is located in.
* Applicants should be surveyed at completion of the interview cycle to evaluate the interview process, allowing iterative changes to promote the institution’s and program’s core values and mission.

Resources

<https://www.nrmp.org/intro-to-the-match/the-match-agreement/>

<https://www.aamc.org/services/member-capacity-building/holistic-review#mission>

Lipman JM, Colbert CY, Ashton R, French J, Warren C, Yepes-Rios M, King RS, Bierer SB, Kline T, Stoller JK. A Systematic Review of Metrics Utilized in the Selection and Prediction of Future Performance of Residents in the United States. J Grad Med Educ. 2023 Dec;15(6):652-668. doi: 10.4300/JGME-D-22-00955.1. PMID: 38045930; PMCID: PMC10686656

Mackie SA, Borman-Shoap E, Magliola R, and Wretzel S. Utilization of Core Values and Branding to Recruit the Best Trainees for Your Program, *Academic Pediatrics*. 2023 Vol 23. doi.org/10.1016/j.acap.2022.03.004

<https://www.nrmp.org/policies/>