

<b>SOP HR.04.00</b>	<b>Recruitment and Search Committee Best Practices</b>
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Related Policies/Links:	<a href="#">Checklists - Search Committee by Employee Classification</a> <a href="#">COS PeopleAdmin Workflow Chart</a> <a href="#">Office of Postdoctoral Affairs</a> <a href="#">OIED Guidelines for Recruiting a Diverse Workforce</a> <a href="#">PeopleAdmin Training Materials &amp; Resources</a> <a href="#">Reference Check Guidelines</a> <a href="#">REG 05.55.02 – Hiring Procedures for Faculty and EHRA Personnel</a> <a href="#">REG 05.55.04 – SHRA Recruitment and Selection</a> <a href="#">SOP HR.02.02 Offer Letter and Change Notification Process</a> <a href="#">University Records Retention and Disposition Schedule</a> <a href="#">University Talent Acquisitions Recruitment Process</a>

**1. Purpose/Introduction**

The Recruitment and Search Committee Best Practices Standard Operating Procedure is designed to provide the College of Sciences with guiding procedures for search committees after a position for recruitment has been approved to post or posted. All Hiring Officials need to assess their need for a position to be filled through recruitment, receive approval to fill a position, and use the PeopleAdmin system to initiate the recruitment process. [Checklists](#) have been developed to guide hiring officials and department representatives through this process in conjunction with this SOP.

This SOP is designed for EHRA, SHRA, and Post Doc employee classifications. For information on Student Workers and Temporary employees, reference [COS Recruitment and Hiring of Students and Temporary Workers SOP](#).

**2. Definitions**

**AA/EOE** - Affirmative Action / Equal Opportunity Employment

**COS HR** – Abbreviation for College of Sciences, Human Resources Office

**DVF** - Departmental Voting Faculty

**EHRA** - Abbreviation for employees Exempt from the State Human Resources Act.

**Interim Report** - Required approval before EHRA candidates are contacted for an interview

**OIED** - Office for Institutional Equity and Diversity

**PeopleAdmin (PA7)** - The position management and applicant tracking system used by NC State University.

**Postdoc** - Abbreviation for Postdoctoral Research Scholar, Postdoctoral Teaching Scholar, or Postdoctoral Fellow. The 3 classifications are based on the responsibilities and/or the funding source of the Postdoc.

**RDF** - Recruiting Diverse Faculty (RDF) committee is a group of NCSU faculty members who have voluntarily joined together to promote recruitment and retention of diverse faculty across the university through faculty to faculty engagement and provision of academic resources and tools to assist departments in this process.

**SAAO** - Senior Administrative and Academic Officers, classified by either Tier I or Tier II, are exempted from the State Human Resources Act.

**SHRA** – Abbreviation for employees Subject to the State Human Resources Act.

**Tier 1 or Tier 2 Applicants:** Tier 1 applicants are those that have been selected to be interviewed. Tier 2 applicants are those not yet ready to be ruled out from the candidate pool.

**Unit Equity Officer** - Unit equity officers are senior level faculty or administrators who regularly interact with other senior leadership within their division or department. Please note in the PeopleAdmin system, this is called Unit AA Officer.

**UHR** – Abbreviation for University Human Resources.

### 3. Procedures

#### 3.1 Best Practices for Preparing the External Advertisement (Job Posting)

- In preparing an external advertisement, review previous advertisements and compare them to the duties listed on the PA7 position description and position posting.
- Use a combination of the Primary Function of the Organizational Unit, Primary Purpose of the Position, and Departmental Required Skills to paint a picture of the organization. For example, the needs of the organization and how the position works to fill those needs. Be sure to include specific requirements such as CV/Resume, Cover Letter, Reference Letters, Research Statement, Teaching Philosophy, etc. Remember the essential items for the posting: Who, What, When, Where, How. For additional assistance, you can consult COS HR.
- Verify advertising budgets with your Business Office. Keep in mind that advertisers may charge fees per letter or word, and it might be necessary to create a “short” version of an advertisement as well as a “full” version.
- It is required to direct applicants to the NCSU Jobs Website. **No applicants can be considered unless they have applied to the PA7 Job Posting.**
- The external posting should not include requirements that are more specific than requirements in the PA7 job posting.
- All advertisements must be approved by University Human Resources. Contact COS HR for recommendations on how to submit to UHR.
- It is recommended that EHRA Faculty positions be posted on a national job board for at least 30 days in the event that a Foreign National candidate is selected and requires sponsorship.
- [Appendix 1](#): Diversity, Inclusion, AA/EOE Statement must be included in the External Advertisement(s).

#### 3.2 Establishing the Search Committee and Setting Expectations

##### 3.2.1 Creating the Search Committee

The search committee is selected to provide input and assist in the recruitment process but ultimately, the hiring official makes the final candidate selection. To establish the search committee, it is important to consider the position classification to determine the size of the search committee. It is recommended that a search committee should consist of a minimum of three people, including the hiring official. The hiring official is typically the chair of the search committee, however, in the case of faculty hires, the hiring official (often the Department Head) would appoint a chair to lead the search process.

There is no recommended maximum amount of committee members, however, be aware that too many members on the search committee could delay and detract from an efficient search process. It is best practice that interviews are scheduled with a full or subset of the committee (versus one-on-one) throughout the interviewing process.

### 3.2.2 Establish a Search Timeline

Each committee should form a realistic timeline based on the position classification (EHRA, SHRA, etc.), when to review applicants, when to schedule interviews, and complete the recruitment process in an expedient fashion. It often helps to start at the end of the process and work backwards: When do you need to have the position filled by? Based on that date, when do you need to start interviewing? Are there any major events that may interrupt the timeline? Remember, different types of positions have different requirements for posting length and background checks.

### 3.2.3 OIED Training

Search committees at NC State have the important responsibility of hiring talented individuals to join the university community. [Search Committee Training \(OIED-EOE\)](#) is an informative learning experience for university students and all employee classifications who participate in or who are planning to participate in the hiring process. Individuals outside of the university may also take the training but will need to request access by contacting your department HR Partner.

Equal Opportunity and Equity offers live and online module training options. Either option enables NC State participants to learn more about how to conduct an equitable and inclusive hiring process. Participants who are active in the recruitment process should plan to take the online module once per year and attend a live training session once every three years. Registration for both training opportunities is available in the [REPORTER](#) system.

If you have questions about the hiring process or about how to register for a training opportunity, please contact Equal Opportunity and Equity at [equalopportunity@ncsu.edu](mailto:equalopportunity@ncsu.edu) or 919-513-0574.

### 3.2.4 Ensure Diversity of the Committee

The Faculty Search Toolbox, [Guidelines for Recruiting a Diverse Workforce](#), and other resources for recruitment and search committees can be found here: [diversity.ncsu.edu/eeo-and-hiring-practices/](http://diversity.ncsu.edu/eeo-and-hiring-practices/). These tools are catered specifically for EHRA searches, but contain information that may be useful and applicable in SHRA searches. Diversity is a priority for every employee type and COS HR is available to provide assistance with ensuring diversity of searches.

Check with the [COS HR Unit Equity Officer](#) periodically to be sure that the search is attracting diverse candidates. If not, be willing to extend the search.

### 3.3 Explanation of Search Files & Retention

- The Hiring Official must ensure that proper search committee documents are retained and comply with the applicable provisions set by the University. Search Committee Documents include, but are not limited to: Application Materials, Resumes, Applications, Forms, Interview Notes, Policies, and Reports.
- After the search has been completed, all search committee documents need to be turned in to COS HR: [cos\\_humanresources@ncsu.edu](mailto:cos_humanresources@ncsu.edu)
- COS HR will destroy search records of all non-selected candidates 3 years after the date position is filled and if no charge of discrimination has been filed. If a charge of discrimination has been filed, destroy after 1 year from resolution of charge.
- See: [University Records Retention and Disposition Schedule](#)

### 3.4 Period of Recruitment

**Posting Period** - The length of the period of recruitment is determined by the position classification.

- **EHRA SAAO & Tenure/Tenure-Track Faculty:** Minimum 20 business days
- **EHRA Non-Faculty & Professional Faculty:** Minimum 10 businessdays
- **Post Doc External Posting:** No minimum number of days to be posted
- **SHRA:** Minimum 5 business days

- **Non-UTS Temporary:** Minimum 5 business days

### 3.4.1 Competitive Searches

The University and College recommends external competitive searches to ensure a truly diverse candidate pool and smooth hiring process. A competitive search must always interview at least 3 well-qualified candidates. Internal searches are not considered competitive searches. Apart from Post Doc recruitments, internal-only searches are not recommended.

### 3.4.2 Applicant Review

It is recommended that the Search Committee continue reviewing applicants throughout the posting period so that when the minimum period is completed the Search Committee is immediately prepared for next steps in the Applicant Review process.

### 3.4.3 EHRA Recruitments

It is required to have an approved Interim Report prior to contacting candidates. The Interim Report consists of Tier 1 and Tier 2 applicants, but only those approved as Tier 1 can move forward in the offer process. Once applicants are approved in the Interim Report, the Search Committee may contact applicants for an interview. You should not place an applicant in Tier 1 status, unless you plan to interview everyone with that designation. Tier 2 applicants are those not yet ready to be ruled out from the candidate pool. If an applicant is unacceptable for the position you should not designate them as a Tier 2 choice. You should use another appropriate designation in the PA7 system.

Multiple Interim Reports can be submitted during the Recruitment process. Reference the COS PeopleAdmin Workflow Chart to understand system routing. Committees can expect 1-3 day turnaround at each approval step.

### 3.4.4 SHRA Recruitments

Interim Reports are not required for SHRA recruitment. COS HR and UHR Talent Acquisition and Employment provides professional expertise to hiring officials throughout the entire SHRA recruitment process. Reference the [COS PeopleAdmin Workflow Chart](#) to understand system routing. Committees can expect 1-3 day turnaround at each approval step.

### 3.4.5 Recruiting Diverse Faculty (RDF) committee

RDF offers training for units and departments focusing solely on the faculty hiring process. This program dives further into the search process by looking at how faculty diversity impacts a unit and shows participants how to utilize these techniques to reach a broad base of applicants. To schedule a training, please contact [Dr. Eileen Taylor](#).

See [Appendix 3](#) for the message sent to Deans & Department Heads on July 8, 2020 introducing RDF available resources.

### 3.4.6 Post Doc Recruitments

The University [Office of Postdoctoral Affairs](#) provides suggested [recruitment](#) guidelines. Reference the [COS PeopleAdmin Workflow Chart](#) to understand system routing. Committees can expect 1-3 day turnaround at each approval step.

### 3.4.7 Closing the Recruitment

When the Search Committee chair is ready to close the recruitment posting, the chair should contact the department HR Partner. The HR Partner contacts COS HR and COS HR contacts UHR Talent Acquisition and Employment. Remember to manually take down any external postings outside of PA7. A recruitment can be reopened if needed, but will have to remain posted for the duration of the original posting period requirements as listed in section 3.3.1-Period of

Recruitment/Posting Period.

### 3.5 Sharing of Application Documents

- [Appendix 2](#)

### 3.6 Interview best practices

- A minimum of three qualified candidates must be interviewed. If a minimum of three qualified candidates cannot be identified, the search committee must either extend the search or contact COS HR for further instructions.
- Interview formats and questions must be equivalent for each phase of the interview process. For example, if you conduct phone interviews for phase one, all candidates should be interviewed by phone. It is crucial that you ask the same questions of all candidates in your interview pool, and that your questions are legal and non-discriminatory.
- Consistency of a process is critical to ensuring fair and equitable treatment and opportunity for candidates. The Search Committee should be prepared to defend a deviation from the process. In most cases, a deviation is not defensible. As a reminder, review [Guidelines for Recruiting a Diverse Workforce](#) throughout the recruitment process. The OIED guidelines state to "Schedule interviews and events to ensure consistent treatment of all candidates, including internal candidates."
- For EHRA Faculty recruitments, the search committee should develop questions related to teaching and advising, research, scholarly impact, fit with department's priorities, etc.
- For EHRA Non-Faculty and SHRA recruitments, the search committee should develop questions related to the position and should include some behavior, scenario, and skills related questions. [Sample Behavioral Based Interview Questions](#).
- Develop interview questions related to the competencies and responsibilities of the position.
- For a large candidate pool, it may be best to conduct phone interviews to narrow a pool of applicants for in person interviews.
- It is required that a minimum of 3 qualified applicants are interviewed to be considered a competitive search.
- Information is provided in the [College of Sciences Virtual Interviewing Best Practices](#) document for methods to ensure that virtual interviews can be consistent and equitable across candidates.
- Information is provided in the [Sciences Diversity Recruitment Resources](#) document to provide resources for external recruitment sites geared to attract diverse candidates.

### 3.7 Consideration of Department Bylaws and Department Processes

- Departments must follow all relevant University Policies, Rules, and Regulations (PRR). Department Bylaws cannot conflict with the University PRR. Each department should consult with their HR Partner to review its approved Bylaws regarding DVF voting for EHRA faculty candidates to interview, if applicable, and final candidate selection. Some departments have a secret ballot system and others may use a different voting system.
- For EHRA Non-Faculty, SHRA, Post Docs, and Non-UTS Temporary employee classifications, use your department's approved process to identify the final candidate.

### 3.8 Reference Checks:

- A minimum of two references must be contacted before submitting the Hiring Proposal for EHRA Non-Faculty, SHRA, Post Docs and Non-UTS Temporary. While references are not required for EHRA faculty, it is recommended that you contact two references (letters of reference are acceptable in lieu of a phone call). UHR Talent Acquisition and Employment provides Reference Check Guidelines here: <https://ts.hr.ncsu.edu/recruitment/reference-checks/>.
  - The selected candidate's current supervisor must be contacted for a reference check.

However, due to sensitivity concerns, this can be done after the candidate has been notified they are the top finalist.

### 3.9 The Hiring Proposal:

- Once the hiring official has taken into consideration the recommendation of the search committee, the hiring official makes the final candidate selection and contacts the HR Partner to initiate the Hiring Proposal. Depending on the classification of hire, the HR Partner will guide the Hiring Official through the remaining steps.
- The PA7 user guide for submitting the Hiring Proposal is listed here: <https://hr.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/PA-TrainingGuide-Hire-Applicant-Tracking.pdf>

### 3.10 Offer Letter and Regret Letters

- **Offer Letter Process**  
Please refer to [SOP HR.02.02](#) for the College Offer Letter Process.
- **Regret Letters**  
Notification letters should be sent to all interviewed applicants, and copies of these notification letters should be maintained in the search file. Notification letters can be sent electronically or printed and mailed. A notification letter template can be found on University Human Resources website in the Recruitment section of the Forms webpage: <https://hr.ncsu.edu/forms>

### 3.11 Finalizing the Search and Retention of Files

#### 3.11.1 Finalizing the Search in PA7:

- **Finalize the Hiring Proposal:** Once the offer has been accepted, update the Hiring Proposal with the Final Accepted Salary. Move the Hiring Proposal to the status of "Offer Accepted".
- **Finalize the Posting:** Move the selected Applicant to "Offer Accepted". Move the Posting to a status of "Designate as Filled" after the person has started the position.

#### 3.11.2 Retention of Files

- **New Hire File:** A department personnel file will be created for your selected candidate in COS HR. The department may also choose to keep a copy of the personnel file. This should include the new hire's application materials including application, resume, and any other materials submitted as part of the application. This file will remain active for as long as you employ this person and will be retained for 30 years after the employee separates.
- **Transferred File:** If a selected candidate is a transfer within NC State University, the COS HR Coordinator will contact the employee's former HR department to request a transfer of the personnel file.
- **Search File:** Retain a search folder that contains interview questions, notes from all interviews, references, copies of external advertisements and all documentation pertinent to the hiring decision. This file should be retained for three years from the last date of activity as stated in section 3.3
- **File Retention:** is maintained in COS HR with the HR Coordinator, per the [file retention schedule](#).

4. Changes and Review

Subsection	Summary of Changes	Date
<b>Appendix 2</b>	Additional guidance from Office of General Counsel regarding sharing application materials with DVF during the search process	6/18/2018
<b>2 - Definitions</b>	Standardized definitions	8/5/2019
<b>3.4.4 EHRA Recruitments</b>	Updated Tier 1 and Tier 2 interim report information	8/5/2019
<b>Whole Document</b>	Updated links to external forms and webpages	8/5/2019
<b>Whole Document</b>	Changed Talent Solutions to Talent Acquisitions	8/5/2019
<b>3.2.3 OIED Training</b>	Updated section with instructions for REPORTER	8/6/2019
<b>Employee Life Cycle Grid</b>	Removed. Grid is no longer used in COS HR	8/16/2019
<b>3.4.1 Period of Recruitment</b>	Added No minimum number of days to be posted for a postdoc posting; fixed formatting	5/19/2020
<b>3.1 External Advertisement Appendix 1</b>	Added "Diversity, Inclusion" in 3.1. Updated Appendix 1.	6/23/2020
<b>All</b>	Replaced NTT & Non-Tenure Track with Professional Faculty	9/10/2020
<b>Definitions</b>	Added the definition of RDF	1/19/2021
<b>3.2.3 OIED Training</b>	Updated language from <a href="http://diversity.ncsu.edu/eeo-and-hiring-practices/">diversity.ncsu.edu/eeo-and-hiring-practices/</a> , under Recruitment and Hiring.	1/19/2021
<b>3.4.5 Recruiting Diverse Faculty (RDF) committee</b>	Added section for "Recruiting Diverse Faculty (RDF) committee"	1/19/2021
<b>3.6 Interview best practices</b>	Added "College of Sciences Virtual Interviewing Best Practices" document. Added "Sciences Diversity Recruitment Resources" document.	1/19/2021
<b>Whole Document</b>	Changed Talent Acquisitions to UHR Talent Acquisition and Employment	1/25/2021

**Appendix 1:**

**AA/EOE Statement must be included in External Advertisement**

National advertisement for all vacant EHRA administrative and faculty positions at NC State is highly recommended. All advertisements must include the following statements:

**NC State is committed to diversity, inclusion and equal opportunity**

NC State University is an equal opportunity and affirmative action employer. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity, age, sexual orientation, genetic information, status as an individual with a disability or status as a protected veteran. Persons with disabilities requesting accommodations in the application and interview process, please call 919.515.3148 or send an email to [ada\\_coordinator@ncsu.edu](mailto:ada_coordinator@ncsu.edu).

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Other suggested statements which may be included in addition to the required statements in the recruitment advertisement are:

- NC State University is especially interested in qualified candidates who can contribute, through their experience, research, teaching and/or service, to the diversity and excellence of the academic community.
- The university is responsive to the needs of dual career couples.



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**Appendix 2:****Sharing Application Materials with Individuals Outside the Search Committee**

*These guidelines were developed by Human Resources in partnership with NC State University Office of General Counsel. Questions? Contact David Perryman, Assistant Director of UHR Talent Acquisition and Employment at david\_perryman@ncsu.edu or 919.515.4276*

Unless departmental faculty are part of the duly constituted search committee, application materials at the initial phase of candidate review should not be shared with departmental faculty members (or other individuals). This applies even where the applicant has answered “yes” to the *question “The application materials of semi-final or final candidates for this position may be shared with relevant reviewers beyond just the hiring official and search committee. If you are a semi-final or final candidate, do you agree to the release of your application materials to relevant reviewers?”* listed on the candidate profile. The rationale is that initial applicants are not “semi-final” or “final” candidates. Once the search committee has narrowed down the pool of candidates to those who would be given further consideration (ex: meet position requirements and preferences), those applicants may be considered “semi-finalists” and materials could be shared with the departmental faculty.

General Counsel has advised that the Reference Letters (unless provided as attached to the application) are not considered part of the "Application Materials" provided by the candidate. The Office of General Counsel helped with drafting the following guidelines:

- 1) The interpretation and application of personnel privacy law with respect to a situation where you have a question from a DVF to be able to see "all materials" of faculty members during the initial and middle phases of the hiring process does not change-- that is, the search committee and hiring authority chain should be the only folks reviewing application materials of candidates.
- 2) When the hiring phase gets to the "final candidate" stage-- that is, coming to campus for interviews/seminars, etc., then application materials can be made available to others outside of the search committee and hiring authority chain based on the waiver checked by the applicant as part of the application in the PeopleAdmin process. At that stage, still not appropriate to share reference letters.
- 3) At the final phase--that is specifically when the DVF is preparing to vote on the preferred candidate's initial rank and appointment (so for example with tenure, tenure track, etc.) then at that point, it is permissible to share the reference letters collected by the hiring authority and/or search committee with the DVF. This is okay per [NCSU POL 05.20.01](#) (section 6.2.1). The reference letters--and other materials being considered by the DVF on the candidate--should be provided to the DVF in a secure manner

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**The following are best practices to keep in mind:**

- Review the candidate profile to confirm that the candidates have agreed to release applicant materials beyond the committee if they are considered a “semi-finalist” or “finalist”. Even if the applicant checked “yes” on the candidate profile, contact the individual to confirm their permission for the sharing of materials to occur before providing materials with the larger departmental faculty.

This can be done informally by a telephone call with a notation in the file or even an e-mail notifying the individual that you are planning to share the materials with the departmental faculty and asking for confirmation from the candidate that it is okay to do so.

- As a best practice, it would also be prudent and advisable to have the candidate material available in a read-only format and provided in a fashion where it could not be duplicated and distributed beyond the departmental faculty—that is, either viewable in hard copy in the departmental office or on a confidential or “looped” drive where only authorized people who have been granted access are able to view the information.
- Please note that reference letters may not be shared outside the search committee (unless the reference letters were submitted by the applicant as part of the application materials).
- Faculty beyond the search committee should not be permitted to read letters of reference submitted by others on an applicant’s behalf that were not part of the original candidate submission even if the applicant gives permission—these letters should remain confidential within the search committee. Faculty beyond the search committee should not be informed of the names and institutional affiliations of the reference letter writers. The members of the duly constituted search committee and the hiring authority should be the only persons to review and consider these materials.
- Search committee and departmental faculty should be made aware of the potential consequences of disclosure of applicant materials to unauthorized persons—that is, it is a misdemeanor pursuant to N.C. General Statute 126-127; in addition, it could lead to civil liability to the university or to the individual based on violations of privacy.

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**Appendix 3:**  
July 8, 2020

Dear Deans and Department Heads:

We are writing to bring your attention to the existence of the Recruiting Diverse Faculty (RDF) committee on campus.

We are a group of NCSU faculty members who have voluntarily joined together to promote recruitment and retention of diverse faculty across the university through faculty to faculty engagement and provision of academic resources and tools to assist departments in this process. Since our founding in 2015, we have worked directly with faculty and administrators and have seen progress in the hiring of diverse faculty. (see 2017 report [here](#) and story [here](#))

*In this very critical time, we acknowledge that changes are needed across campus, and that you are likely working on college-specific plans to combat racism and systemic bias, and improve diversity, equity, and inclusion. To assist you, we are renewing our efforts and reaching out to remind you about the resources we offer, and let you know about new resources we are providing.*

Consultations with Faculty Search Committees

Upon request, members of our committee will consult with your search committees and facilitate a session on how you can increase the number of diverse applicants, approach evaluation of candidates, and increase awareness of systemic bias in the faculty hiring process.

*We have a unique perspective as faculty who can speak to other faculty in an open and honest manner about what we as faculty can and should do to achieve diversity, equity, and inclusion at NC State.*

Resources Available

We have a resource library of discipline-relevant academic research on faculty diversity, examples of departmental diversity plans, templates for candidate evaluations, links to OIED hiring pamphlets, presentations on the need for hiring diverse faculty and reducing unconscious bias, and examples of faculty diversity statements available upon request.

Top 5 Action Items for Faculty

Here are five, research-supported action items you can implement immediately:

1. Write a commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for your department and college, and add it to your strategic plan. You can see an example from CHASS [here](#).
2. Require faculty to specify in their plans of work how they are individually and personally working to achieve a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace. Actions can include reviewing and updating their course materials, attending DEI workshops/conferences, inviting diverse researchers for workshop presentations, advising a diverse student organization. See more at [this link](#).
3. Create a departmental DEI committee with broad representation from all faculty levels and groups. Have them set clear and measurable goals and timelines.
4. Develop a departmental Recruitment and Retention plan - see [CHASS plans at this link](#).
5. Require faculty to complete the OIED search committee training before beginning your next search, and have faculty complete individual diversity training specific to faculty and staff in academia.  
**Diversity.edu is available free of charge for all NC State Staff and Faculty - see [this link](#). For search committees, we recommend starting with [Diversity Recruiting on LinkedIn Learning](#).**

We ask that you commit to using the RDF for consultations and resources for future hiring in your departments. Thank you for your efforts in making NCSU a more diverse, inclusive and equitable environment.