

Research Associate Hiring Policy

Rev 0: Effective Date 4/1/17

Scope

Research Associate (RA) appointments are term positions with fixed end dates intended to provide a full-time program of advanced academic preparation and research training. At Fermilab, these are postdoctoral appointments that are not intended for long-term, indefinite, or career appointments at the lab,

A Research Associate is an individual who has received a doctoral degree (or equivalent) and is engaged in a defined period of mentored advanced training to enhance the professional and research independence needed to pursue his or her chosen career path. At Fermilab, the postdoctoral experience emphasizes continued research training. The Research Associate conducts research under the general oversight of a more senior scientist or other mentor in preparation for a career in academia, industry, government, or the nonprofit sector.

Research Associate positions are often the next career step after obtaining a PhD, and are frequently required for continuing to advance to the next step in an academic or laboratory scientific appointment. Fermilab, as a government contractor has an obligation is to ensure that diverse candidates are given an equal opportunity to compete. Fermilab seeks to attract promising researchers and educators from different backgrounds, races, ethnic groups, and other diverse populations whose life experience, research experience and employment background will contribute significantly to the laboratory's mission.

These procedures are intended to cover all Research Associate positions at Fermilab including Lederman and Schramm Fellows. They are supplements to the Fermilab employment policies that govern all employees. RA's financial support can be from DOE base contract funds, or other funding sources such as ECA's, NASA grants, PECASE awards, etc. In all cases the RA will be a Fermilab employee and the search conduct will follow these procedures.

Key features of these procedures include

- Clear explanations of the RA term lengths and renewals
- A focus on increasing the diversity and quality of the lab's scientific workforce through the search and hiring process
- Accountability of the search committee, search committee chair, and division head for the appropriate conduct of the process.
- Example documents to aid committee chairs and additional material in the helpful suggestions sections

Deviations from these procedures in a search are permitted, but need to be justified in the summarizing letter that the search committee chair writes at the end of the process.

Employment Terms

Research Associate appointments are term positions with fixed end dates, and are subject to the following conditions

- Appointments are typically made for an initial three-year term, and may be renewed for up to two additional years by the appropriate Division Head, until a fixed end date.
- Extension of appointment beyond a total of five years is possible only when warranted by special circumstances, and requires documented academic justification, and approval by the Director.
- Normally, individuals cease to be eligible to receive new Research Associate appointments seven years after the award of the degree. The director, in special circumstances, may waive this requirement, such as when the individual has changed fields or had a career interruption.
- Research Associate appointments may be extended due to a health condition in accordance with laboratory [sick](#), [LTD](#), [FMLA](#) and [Reasonable Accommodation](#) policies. An automatic one-year extension of the appointment will be made for birth or adoption of a child prior to the end of the initial term. Please see the [Expectant Parent Brochure](#).
- All other aspects of employment are covered by the standard laboratory employment policies and procedures, which can be found [here](#).

It is within the Laboratory's sole discretion not to extend a Research Associate's term. An extension is normally contingent upon various factors including but not limited to satisfactory performance, conduct (including compliance with all applicable Laboratory policies), availability of funding, and programmatic need. If the Laboratory decides not to extend a Research Associate's term after the fixed end date, his or her employment will end at that time and no further notice will be provided to that effect. If there is a management decision to not extend an RA's appointment, the individual should normally be informed of that decision one year before the end of the current term.

Search Procedures

For the unusual case of a targeted hire of an individual, the advertising, searching, and interviewing procedures below are not followed, but a summarizing letter is required. (See Reporting the Final Recommendations section below)

Maximizing size, quality, and diversity of the applicant pool

Fermilab seeks to attract promising researchers and educators from different backgrounds, races, ethnic groups, and other diverse populations whose life experience, research experience and employment background will contribute significantly to the laboratory's mission. The search and hiring procedures described below place a strong emphasis on bringing diversity and quality

to the workforce. In order to accomplish these goals, all scientists at the lab should, at some level, always be in recruitment mode. Here are some helpful suggestions for effecting this;

- The WDRS recruiter who specializes in scientific hiring is a critical partner in the process, and is a valuable resource for suggestions and advice
- This [Scientific American article](#) describes some of the benefits of diversity in science.
- Browse through the [APS Minorities Speakers List](#) and [APS Women Speakers List](#) for persons in the field of hire. Invite them to speak to the department and have a discussion about potential minority candidates while they are visiting. Be similarly proactive in seeking out speakers who are veterans or individuals with disabilities.
- Try to broaden the applicant pool academically by reaching out to neighboring academic fields. For example, encourage applications from nuclear physics candidates for a high energy physics job.
- Actively recruit minority PhD candidates among the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) that have PhD programs in physics Howard, Hampton, Alabama A&M, and Florida A&M. Look also at the [Fisk-Vanderbilt Bridge Program](#). Review the NSF published list of universities that graduate the largest number of minority PhD's in physics. AIP also has these statistics (see <http://aip.org/statistics>).
- Circulate the position to other experimental collaborations at Fermilab and elsewhere via the collaboration spokespersons.
- Always be in a recruitment mode - do not wait for searches to announce vacancies. This mode means keeping an eye out, inside and outside of the Laboratory, for opportunities to expand professional networks to include women, persons of color, veterans, and individuals with disabilities. Establish friendly relationships with them so that if called and asked to be a candidate for an open position they'll be likely to agree. Seize the opportunity to recruit and network at national meetings.
- To succeed in a competitive market we need to be proactive in recruiting exceptional candidates who have not yet completed their degree, even in the case that they will not be able to begin employment for some time.

Initiation of the Search

Procedure

1. *The search starts with a discussion between the hiring manager and line management up to the division head that results in agreement on what position needs filling. This drives the definition of the essential job functions, requirements and desired attributes of the job. The hiring manager is defined in the personnel requisition as the person responsible for the search. Often this is the person who will be the supervisor of the person to be hired and usually this person chairs the search committee.*
2. *The funding for the search is split between DOE contract funds for allowable costs, and FRA provided funds for costs for which DOE funds cannot be used. For recruitment activities, the distinction between allowable and unallowable costs most commonly relates to funding shared dining experiences. DOE funds can only reimburse the costs of the business meal for participants who have travelled over 100 miles to attend. FRA funds are used for full or partial reimbursement of lab staff attending the interview lunch*

or dinner. The division head will allocate funding for the allowable costs of the search, and communicate the correct task codes and procedures to the hiring manager. The funding for non-allowable costs is provided and managed by the office of the COO. The division head will contact the COO's office to inform them of the search, confirm the non-DOE budget and task code, and communicate that information to the hiring manager. The hiring manager is responsible for conducting the search within the budget provided

3. *The hiring manager initiates a personnel requisition in FermiWorks.*
4. *Once fully signed, the personnel req is received by WDRS, the WDRS scientific recruiter will contact the hiring manager to set up the client engagement meeting.*
5. *The purpose of the client engagement meeting between the WDRS recruiter and the hiring manager is to discuss the nature of the search, the application deadline, the job requirements and salary offer range, agree on a text for the job advertisement, and on where the ad will be placed. There is standard text that must go in every ad and the WDRS recruiter will provide this. They also establish selection criteria and procedures for screening, interviewing candidates, and keeping records.*
6. *The ad shall require reference letters be submitted at such time that they can be used in the process of forming a short list. Candidates should have a minimum of three letters.*
7. *Placement of the job ads in the agreed upon locations is the responsibility of the WDRS recruiter, with assistance from the hiring manager.*
8. *The hiring manager will identify an administrative assistant who can assist with the search process. They may assist the hiring manager and recruiter in organizing and scheduling meetings, reserving space, travel arrangements, etc., as needed.*
9. *If using [Academic Jobs Online \(AJO\)](#) to conduct the search the WDRS recruiter should set up the opening in AJO and ensure that it uses the same text as the job advertisement. The WDRS recruiter will ensure that the committee has full access to the AJO opening. There is a special WDRS recruiter login that gives access to the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) information on each candidate that is hidden from the committee.*

Helpful Suggestions

In discussions of the position, the hiring manager, the division head, and the WDRS recruiter, working with the compensation group, will

- Develop broad hiring goals. Get consensus on areas of specialty and other specific requirements while planning to cast the hiring net as widely as possible.
- Make sure that the position description does not needlessly limit the applicant pool and that it clearly identifies essential job functions.
- Consider among selection criteria the demonstrated ability of the candidate to work with diverse employees and communities.

The recruitment of Research Associate positions is national and international in scope. Line ads should typically be up for at least 30 days on the laboratory's website and in leading publications/websites such as: CERN Courier, Physics Today, InSpire, Academic Jobs Online, and the American Physical Society. Consider using the tools of the following organizations to make your position known to a broader pool of potential applicants.

- [APS Committee on the Status of Women in Physics](#)
- [National Society of Black Physicists,](#)
- [National Society of Hispanic Physicists,](#)
- [National Society of Black Engineers,](#)
- [Society for the Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science,](#)
- [Society of Mexican American Engineers and Scientists,](#)
- [Society of Women Engineers](#)

[Academic Jobs Online \(AJO\)](#) is commonly used for scientific hiring both in the university community and at Fermilab. For more details on AJO, the scientific recruiter in WDRS can be contacted.

Hiring Committee Makeup

Procedure

A guiding factor in the formation of the hiring committee and its activities must be that the procedures followed by the committee should be transparent and documented in a summarizing letter written by the committee chair. In the interest of full transparency, any outside communication between a committee member and a candidate relevant to the hiring process (whether in person, phone, e-mail, etc.) should be reported to the full committee.

The makeup of the committee should be as follows:

- *The line manager for whom the successful applicant would work should typically chair the committee and be the hiring manager.*
- *If different from the line manager, potential managers and mentors of the successful candidate should be on the hiring committee.*
- *The majority of committee members should be Fermilab scientists, employee's holding a Ph.D. in physics, and, if applicable, engineers. Not all members need to be scientists/engineers.*
- *The committee will have at least one member external to the department making the search, and if possible, the member should be from another division. Outside may also include outside of the search field (e.g. an experimentalist for a theoretician search and vice-versa; a Cosmic Frontier person for an Intensity Frontier position). Having this member be outside of Fermilab is allowable, but may not be practical or desirable.*
- *The committee should be diverse. (e.g. not all male, not all from the same ethnic background)*
- *Everyone is responsible for diversity. The search chair will select a committee member to be responsible for promoting the recruitment and hiring of minorities, women, veterans, and individuals with disabilities. The [APS Tips for Hiring and Recruiting Minorities and Women for Faculty Positions](#) should be followed here. The individual needs to be a leader and need not be a woman, minority, veteran, or individual with a disability. That individual will be responsible for writing sections 6 and 7 of the summarizing letter, as described in Reporting the Final Recommendations section below.*

The size of the committee should be large enough to fulfill these recommendations and ensure enough opinions to have a meaningful selection process. It is preferable that all committee members should have completed the lab's interview training. At a minimum, the committee chair and one other committee member should have completed this training. Regardless of training, the committee must operate within the constraints of all applicable labor and employment laws and policies of Fermilab. A typical committee size for a single hire is 4-6 people.

Helpful Suggestions

Hiring committees should actively generate a candidate pool. Respecting the time of the hiring committee members, they are still encouraged to devote time to the high priority goal of seeking out outstanding candidates, and not merely sort through application materials as they arrive.

Conventional advertising methods are valuable but can never be as effective as personal contact. Search committee members should take every possible opportunity to make personal contact with potential candidates at professional meetings/conferences and with leaders in universities and industry who may have special insight into candidates that are in the pipeline, especially women and underrepresented minorities. Experimental collaborations have email lists that can be used to advertise the position.

A major task before the committee is to acknowledge and attempt to mitigate the biases that exist in all of us. One major step in this mitigation, of course, is to use a committee rather than an individual to perform a search, but this is not sufficient. The [short piece by Meg Urry of Yale on the Status on Women in Science](#) is a good starting point to learn more about implicit bias and the references therein should also be consulted. In addition each committee member is encouraged to take the 12 minute [Harvard Project Implicit](#) study.

Initial committee tasks

Procedure

In initial meetings of the selection committee, they will:

- 1. Ensure that all committee members have been given a copy of this document and that they have read it and the documents referred to in it.*
- 2. Ensure that hiring criteria are directly related to the requirements, qualifications, and essential functions of the particular position, clearly understood, and accepted by all members of the committee.*
- 3. Review and agree on the criteria and process for selecting a reduced set of candidates for interview and the eventual selection of person(s) to receive offers.*
- 4. Committee members should make the chair aware of any conflicts of interests or any apparent conflicts of interest.*

Helpful Suggestions

Conflicts of interest or apparent conflicts of interest can arise (for example if a committee member writes a letter for an applicant). Carefully choosing committee members, acknowledging potential conflicts in committee proceedings, and perhaps adjusting committee procedures can mitigate these. In general such situations and the response to them should be documented in the summarizing letter.

Forming an interview list

Procedure

- 1. The committee should review the application packets and form a shortlist to call for interview. The application materials are confidential.*
- 2. The shortlist should reflect the lab's diversity goals. If it does not, this will need to be explained and/or justified in the committee chair's summarizing letter, and should be discussed by the committee chair and the Division Head before finalizing the shortlist.*
- 3. The WDRS recruiter needs to be present at the shortlist forming meeting and will provide AJO EEO information*
- 4. Applicants who are not called for interview should be sent letters informing them of that by the hiring manager. These letters should be sent as soon as the decisions have been made.*

Helpful Suggestions

The applicant pool may be so large that it may not be practical to have all applications read by all committee members. In this case, there are various schemes that can be used where all applications are read by several committee members, but only a subset of applications are read by the entire committee. In all cases, more than one committee member should review each application. Committee notes should be fact based, and evaluations should be clearly connected to the selection criteria.

Phone or video interviews may also be employed to shorten a list of high-quality applicants to a manageable number to interview. Generally, these interviews are to be conducted as a group with the candidate and take no more than an hour. It is ideal to have one person lead the interview, asking a set of predetermined questions (with follow-up from the committee). One person should take notes on the questions and answers. A single group phone interview is generally inadequate for a hiring decision, and should not be a substitute for a full interview.

[Click this link for an example rejection letter for someone not interviewed](#)

Interviewing Candidates

Procedure

The interview process serves two roles: (1) to identify the candidates who best match the job criteria described in the posting, and (2) to attract the candidates to Fermilab. As such, the interview will include:

- *A presentation by the candidate,*
- *Meetings with all members of the hiring committee. For absent committee members, an in person or phone interview at another time will be conducted.*
- *A meeting with the WDRS Recruiter to provide information on the non-scientific aspects of working at Fermilab,*
- *Meetings with Fermilab management (e.g. department head, division head) and others as appropriate.*

If an in-person interview is not possible because of travel, visa, or other issues, a video interview can take be substituted. In that case, the committee must take efforts to make the interview comparable to an in-person interview. The candidate should still make a presentation. The candidate should meet with all committee members in individual or small-group phone meetings. This may require the interview to take several days, but should not require any additional time of the committee members. In general, an in-person interview is greatly preferred.

All candidates should have a consistent experience.

1. *Once the committee has selected a short list of candidates to interview, the chair of the hiring committee will work with the administrative assistant to arrange for an interview at Fermilab. At the time of the interview request, the hiring committee chair will:*
 1. *Email links to information on the non-scientific benefits of working at Fermilab, as well as contact information for the WDRS recruiter to whom the candidate can address questions.*
[*Click this link for an example email.*](#)
 2. *Before the interview occurs, the hiring-committee chair will:*
 1. *Review the slides on "Guidance for Scientific Interviews" with the hiring committee.*
[*Click this link for the slides*](#)
 2. *Construct an interview schedule with the hiring committee. The schedule will include a meeting with the WDRS Recruiter and must include breaks throughout the day.*
[*Click this link for an example 1 day schedule*](#)
[*Click this link for an example 2 day schedule*](#)
 3. *Check with the candidate that they have received an electronic copy of the interview schedule, informational packet, and link to the employment application from the WDRS recruiter.*
3. *On the day of the interview the hiring-committee chair will:*
 1. *Meet with the candidate when they arrive at Fermilab to go over the schedule and ask if they have any questions.*

2. *Ensure that the candidate has a contact person who is responsible for helping him/her throughout the day. This may either be the hiring committee chair, a designated member of the hiring committee, or administrative staff.*
4. *In advance of the interview committee members will*
 1. *Review the job description and look over the candidate's application materials*

Helpful Suggestions

In addition to the above, these are some recommended best practices for the hiring committee.

When developing the interview schedule, the hiring committee chair is encouraged to:

- Ask the candidate if there is anything that they would like to see or anyone with whom they would like to meet while at Fermilab.
- There are advantages and disadvantages to group interviews. Having some members conduct their interviews with the candidate in pairs can reduce the candidate interview time to something manageable. The chair should take care in forming the interview pairs to ensure an effective and positive experience.
- It is usually beneficial to have the candidate's presentation early in the schedule.

Tips to make the candidate visit a positive experience include:

- Lunch and/or dinner with the candidate. It is important to ensure that people from Fermilab are confirmed in advance to attend these activities. Allowable costs and funding for these should have been arranged and explained to the committee as described in the initiation procedure of this document.
- Time should be reserved for informal interaction with Fermilab employees outside of the scientific group performing the search. Include potential peers of the candidate who are diverse in terms of age, gender, race among other things, to enable him/her to ask questions about work-life issues.
- A meeting with other people in the subject area who are not on the search committee. For example having a neutrino experimentalist meet with lab neutrino theorists.
- The interview may also include a tour of scientific and/or non-scientific areas of the lab.

In advance of the interview, the hiring-committee chair may:

- Contact the job candidate on the evening of their arrival to make sure that they have arrived and they know where to go the following day.
- Speak with WDRS to reserve the designated parking spot in the front of Wilson Hall and make sure the candidate knows that they can park there on the day(s) of their interview.
- Ask the candidate if they would like extra time in their travel schedule to explore the local area.

After each interview the committee chair should gather the interview notes from each committee member, or alternatively conduct an interview closeout meeting with as many of the committee members as possible, as soon as possible after the interview. The interviewers then each briefly

report their observations. This catches responses while they are fresh, and the committee chair can compile summary notes expeditiously.

Deciding on the Final Recommendations

Procedure

As soon as possible after all the interviews have been conducted the committee should meet and

- 1. Review the selection process agreed upon in the initial meetings*
- 2. Complete the candidate selection recommendations*
- 3. Review the information that will go into the summarizing letter*

Helpful Suggestions

These procedures do not dictate how the final recommendations are reached but there are several techniques that can be helpful

- Score candidates on a predetermined set of criteria. These should be reflected in the job posting. WDRS has an [interview evaluation form](#) that may be useful here
- There should be diversity considerations in this pre-determined list
- Straw polls can be helpful
- Having people rank candidates prior to the meeting ensures independent assessment and provides an excellent starting point for discussion

Reporting the Final Recommendations

Procedure

- 1. Once the committee has decided upon its final recommendations, a draft summarizing letter will be circulated to the committee members by the chair. It will contain*
 - 1. The final result of the search*
 - 2. The names of all the interviewees*
 - 3. Evaluations of all the candidates who were interviewed*
 - 4. Details on how the search was conducted including advertising, decision criteria, and selection process*
 - 5. An explanation of any deviations from this search procedure*
 - 6. Demographic details provided by the Scientific Recruiter on the applicant pool and list of interviewees*
 - 7. A statement of whether and how the candidates would advance the diversity goals of the lab*
- 2. After the committee review and acceptance, the chair sends the summarizing letter to the Division Head, with CC to all stakeholders (defined at the personnel req stage)*

[Click this link for an example summary letter](#)

Making the Offer

Procedure

- a. *Having received the committee's letter the Division Head makes a decision to accept or reject the committee's recommendation. If an offer is desired to be made,*
- b. *A letter-to-hire from the hiring committee chair is given to the division head, with the recommendation to hire, the position, the proposed starting salary and date, and some background on the nominee. The Division Head will forward the letter to the Scientific Recruiter with a request to make a formal offer, or noting the reasons why the division is not pursuing the request. At this point the candidate can be informed that they have been selected, but that no formal offer will be made until the background check is complete*
- c. *After WDRS completes the background check, and the results are positive, the Scientific Recruiter will e-mail a formal offer letter.*
- d. *Further discussion and negotiation with the candidate is handled the WDRS Recruiter attached to the search, with assistance as needed from the Division Head and committee chair. It is the WDRS representative who is responsible for seeing the process through to completion.*

If the offer is not accepted, further iteration through this phase may be necessary depending on the other candidates and the decision of the Division Head.

Helpful Suggestions

[Click this link for an example scientist offer letter](#)

Wrapping Things Up

Procedure

Once the offer is accepted, or no longer being made, there are a few things needed to complete the search

- *If using AJO (Academic Jobs Online) a snapshot of the search should be taken by the WDRS recruiter to preserve the details of the candidate pool*
- *The people interviewed but not offered a job should be sent letters by the hiring manager thanking them for their interest.*

By the time the process is complete, all candidates who applied for the position should have been sent a letter. This should be done in a timely way. At each stage of the process the hiring manager is responsible for sending a letter to candidates not selected, informing him or her that they are no longer under consideration for the position.

Helpful Suggestions

Below is a link to an example letter indicating the subject matter and tone of a rejection letter for someone who was interviewed.

[Click this link for an example rejection letter for someone who has been interviewed.](#)

In the event of a conflict, the provisions of Appendix A of the prime contract take precedence over the provisions of these procedures or any other Fermilab form or guidance document.

These procedures are not a contract or guarantee of any kind and is not intended to create any obligations on the Laboratory. These procedures may be terminated or changed by the Laboratory at any time, with or without notice, in the Laboratory's sole discretion.