

Program Signaling for OBGYN Residency Applications

Purpose: Signaling allows applicants a reliable and equitable approach to demonstrate a sincere interest in specific programs. Residency programs may choose to consider signals as they select applicants to interview.

Background: Over the past decade the number of applications to OBGYN residency programs has climbed to over 70 applications per applicant. This has not improved match rates and has resulted in application congestion. Application congestion results in a flood of applications to programs and may result in programs filtering applications using metrics that may not identify the best residents for their program such as USMLE Step Scores, clerkship grades, and reputation of medical schools. Many applicants, faculty, and deans directly contact program directors to indicate applicant's interest. This creates inequity in the process because some applicants with personal advocates or mutual contacts can create an unfair advantage over an applicant reaching out independently, who may go unnoticed. A more transparent, equitable and reliable system for communicating applicant preferences to residency programs is critical.

Process: The signaling program is voluntary. **Both applicants and programs must opt in to participate in signaling.** Applicants who participate in the signaling will assign up to three (3) gold signals and fifteen (15) silver signals to residency programs of their choosing. Gold indicates *highest* interest in a program and silver indicates *very high* interest in the program. Programs will receive a list of all signals from applicants indicating gold or silver. Signals are not further presented in any particular order.



Applicant Guidelines

1. The signaling program is a voluntary program. While many believe that signaling is beneficial to both applicants and programs, applicants and programs' participation is entirely voluntary. Applicants will indicate their participation in the signaling program at



the time of submitting their ERAS application. There are no anticipated downsides to participating in signaling as programs will not know if an applicant did not signal them or just opted out of signaling.

2. Applicants should signal all programs that they have both a strong interest in and where they have a reasonable ability to receive an interview **INCLUDING** their home programs if they are interested in them. Applicants are strongly encouraged to consider their personal values and goals, consult faculty advisors, as well as utilize resources to explore residency programs such as individual program websites, AMA FREIDA, (including the RRR Alignment Check Index (ACI) pilot), AAMC Residency Explorer, and any other resources they would typically use. The applicant's goal should be to find the programs that best align with their goals and where they are most likely to be competitive.
3. Given the large number of signals available for OBGYN applicants, applicants **SHOULD** signal their home programs as well as programs where they may have completed a sub-internship if those programs are among their preferred programs. Applicants should plan to use all their signals. There is no known advantage to not using all their available signals.
4. Programs will receive a list of applicants who have signaled them. Programs will not know which other programs an applicant may have signaled.

Program Guidelines

1. Signals are not intended to be used as a screening tool, however some programs may choose to use them in the initial application review. Programs should perform a holistic review of the entire application and make decisions based upon the merit of the application. The signal is one of many tools to be utilized when deciding to whom interviews will be offered.
2. The signaling program is a voluntary program. While many believe that widespread participation in this program is beneficial for applicants and programs, programs must **OPT IN** to signaling by indicating their participation at the time of ERAS enrollment. Applicants will then see that program appear on the list of programs they may signal.
3. Programs **MUST NOT**:
 - a. Require a signal to review and offer an interview to applicants
 - b. Disclose the names, AAMC registration number or any identifiable information of applicants who have signaled their program to any individual outside their residency selection committee
 - c. Ask interviewees to disclose the names or number of programs that they have signaled. It is a violation of the NRMP match agreement prohibiting programs from asking applicants where they have applied for residency
 - d. Disclose the number of signals they have received

Mentoring and Career Advising Guidelines

1. Applicants **MUST OPT IN** to participate in the signaling program. This is a voluntary choice made by the applicant.
2. Advice to applicants on whom to signal should be based upon individual review of the applicant's overall application package, including alignments with the program's requirements and values. Resources such as individual program websites, AMA FREIDA (including the RRR Alignment Check Index (ACI) pilot), and AAMC Residency Explorer are some tools that exist to advise students on their alignment with programs.
3. Applicants **SHOULD** signal only programs to which they desire to interview and from whom they believe they have a reasonable chance of receiving an interview offer.
4. Applicants **SHOULD** signal home programs and programs where they have participated in sub-internship if they are interested in interviewing at those programs.
5. Mentors should provide honest advice based upon a holistic review of the applicant's entire application package when advising.
6. Applicants ultimately must make the final decision on which programs to signal.



General FAQs

1. *What is the benefit to an applicant to signal a residency program?*

Signaling allows an applicant to demonstrate a genuine interest in a residency program. High number of applications mean many applicants do not undergo holistic review. A signal is an equitable approach to indicate interest in a program and increase an applicant's visibility to a program, encouraging holistic review of their application. The signals allow applicants to be noticed by programs regardless of their "competitiveness."

2. *Has signaling been useful in other fields?*

Signaling has been utilized in other specialties. Otolaryngology conducted a pilot study of signaling in the 2020 Match cycle. They demonstrated that applicants who signaled a program were more likely to get an interview at that program.

3. *Is it mandatory to use all my signals? Can I signal a program more than once?*

It is not mandatory for an applicant to use all their signals. However, we recommend applicants use all their signals as there are no recognized disadvantages in doing so. Applicant SHOULD NOT signal a program more than once as the program only sees one signal regardless of the number of signals selected. Also, applicants should not be submitting a gold and a silver signal to the same program as there is no advantage in doing so.

4. *Is signaling in conflict with the NRMP Match Agreement?*

No. As long as all NRMP Match rules are obeyed, there is no violation of the Match agreement. In fact, section 6.2 of the Match Participation Agreement for Applicants and Programs allows applicants and programs to express interest in each other. They may NOT solicit verbal or written statements indicating commitment. Programs cannot ask applicants to reveal the names, specialties, or other identifying information about programs to which they have applied or interviewed. The signaling program expressly forbids programs from asking or receiving any information about applicants' signals.

The signaling program, however, provides an equitable way to indicate interest in a program. Currently, many back channels, such as emails, phone calls, and other personal communications are completed by faculty, deans, and applicants to indicate interest in programs. While this is not a Match violation, many applicants do not have access to these extra channels. The signaling program provides the same opportunity for *all* applicants who voluntarily choose to participate.



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5. ***If a program doesn't receive a signal, does that mean an applicant won't get an interview?***

Each program can choose which applicants to interview and may not rely on preference signaling to determine interview offers. It is clear from the Otolaryngology signaling pilot that applicants who signaled a program were more likely to receive an interview offer. The application itself indicates interest in a residency program, and programs may offer interviews to applicants who have not signaled them. Signaling offers a transparent and reliable method of communicating very high program interest, but programs will use other factors to inform decisions around interview offers.



Applicant FAQs

1. Do I have to participate in the signaling program?

No. The signaling program is a voluntary program. Signaling is meant to provide an equitable opportunity for applicants to indicate high interest to a program, and for programs to identify and holistically review applicants. This is an OPT IN program. Programs will not know that an applicant has not signaled them or has opted to not participate in signaling.

2. Will there be additional costs to participate in program signaling?

No. There are no additional costs to participate.

3. How many signals will I receive?

Each participating applicant will receive three (3) gold signals and fifteen (15) silver signals. The gold signals are a means of indicating the *highest* level of interest in the program and the silver signals indicate a *very high* level of interest.

4. Can I only apply to programs that I have signaled?

No. Applicants can apply to as many programs as they desire. It is recommended to consult with an advisor in OBGYN to determine the right number of programs to which to apply based upon your individual application package.

5. How do I decide which programs to signal?

Similar to deciding to which programs to apply, each applicant will need to reflect on their application and their alignment with programs. It is recommended that you consult with OBGYN advisor in reviewing your ENTIRE application, your goals in training, and other factors that may influence where you want to train (community vs. university-based, geography, etc). Several tools such as program websites, AMA FREIDA including the RRR Alignment Check Index (ACI pilot), and AAMC Residency Explorer can aid both applicants and advisors in choosing which programs are best choices for application and signaling.

6. Don't signals only benefit programs?

While preference signals will help programs know which applicants are highly interested in their programs, it may improve the chances of applicants who have a true interest in a program to be seen by that program regardless of their perceived “competitiveness” or personal connections. Currently, the average program receives >600 applications without an ability to determine genuine interest. Because of this, applicants who do have a genuine interest may be overlooked in the myriad of applications. Signals will likely allow those applicants with a genuine interest to be considered by those programs.

7. Should I place all my gold signals on “reach” programs?

While it is the applicant’s choice to place signals as they choose, signals should be placed on the programs that you are most interested in receiving an interview AND where you have a reasonable chance of getting an interview.



8. *Should I use my signals on my home program or programs where I have completed a sub-internship?*

Yes, if those are programs at which you are interested in interviewing.

9. *How will I know that a program received my signal?*

The programs will be receiving your signals at the time they review your applications since the signals are submitted with your application.

10. *Am I guaranteed an interview at programs I have signaled?*

No. The signal is a tool for you to indicate interest in the program and your desire to interview. Programs will utilize their application review process and decide upon whom they wish to interview.

11. *Can I still receive an interview offer at programs I have not signaled?*

Yes, as signals are only one factor in the application review process. Each program can choose which applicants to interview and may not rely on preference signaling to determine interview offers. It is clear from the Otolaryngology signaling pilot that applicants who signaled a program were more likely to receive an interview offer. The application itself indicates interest in a residency program, and programs may offer interviews to applicants who have not signaled them. Signaling offers a transparent and reliable method of communicating very high program interest, but programs will use other factors to inform decisions around interview offers.

12. *Will my signals be made public? Will other programs know where I signaled?*

No. Applicant signals are confidential. Programs will receive a list of only the applicants who have signaled them. They will not know whom you have signaled.

13. *How will I know which programs are participating in signaling?*

The signaling program is a voluntary program and programs must OPT IN to participate. Applicants will see a list of the programs participating in signaling at the time of their ERAS application.



Residency Program FAQs

1. Do I have to participate in the OBGYN signaling program?

No. While preference signaling may help programs identify interested applicants in order to direct resources for holistic application review towards those most interested in their program, this is an OPT IN program. Programs have to indicate their desire for participation at time of ERAS application. There are no anticipated downsides to receiving this information in a more transparent, reliable and equitable way that minimizes the effort of reading and interpreting emails and calls from applicants and their advisors reaching out to convey interest.

2. Will programs be charged an additional fee to participate in program signaling?

No. While this is an OPT IN program both for programs and applicants, there are no additional fees associated with participation.

3. How/When will programs receive signals?

Programs will receive signals with ERAS applications which is typically around the end of September.

4. How should programs use the signal data?

Programs will receive both gold and silver signals. Gold indicates an applicant expressing *highest* interest, and silver indicates *very high* interest. Programs will need to individually decide how signals are ultimately used. While programs should consider all applications received regardless of an associated signal, signals may be used to assess genuine interest and may identify candidates that programs may not have recognized as a potential recruit. Applicants are limited to a total of 18 signals, so programs should recognize that many highly qualified and potentially interested applicants will be in the non-signaled group.

5. Does a program have to offer interviews to all applicants who have signaled them?

No. Signals are one of many tools for programs to use to assess alignment with their program when conducting their application review and consideration for interview offers.

6. What if I do not get enough signals from applicants to fill my interview spots?

Programs can interview any applicants for their program regardless of whether they have shown additional interest using a signal. The application itself communicates interest in the residency program. As applicants are limited in total number of signals, programs should review and expect to offer interviews to applicants who have not signaled their programs. They should consider conducting their application reviews as they have always done in previous years and use the signals as an additional indicator for higher interest from an applicant.

7. Will applicants who have trained at my home institution or completed a sub-internship signal my program?



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Applicants are advised to signal programs, including their home institutions and sites where they have completed a sub-internship, if they are interested in receiving an interview offer from those programs.

8. *Will the number of signals a program receives be made public?*

No. Programs will only receive the list of applicants who have sent them a signal. Programs, as part of their participation in signaling have agreed not to share the number of signals they have received.

9. *What if an applicant doesn't signal my program? Is it because they aren't interested or because they aren't participating?*

Programs can only tell if an applicant has signaled them. They will not know whether the lack of a signal indicates that the applicant is not participating in signaling or is simply not signaling them.