

## Program and Geographic Signaling for OBGYN Residency Applications

**Purpose:** Signaling provides applicants with 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. To provide a more transparent, equitable and reliable system for communicating applicant preferences to OBGYN residency programs, program signaling was introduced in the 2022-2023 application cycle. This will be used again in the 2023-2024 application cycle. This year AAMC ERAS is also introducing geographic preferences for all programs participating in signaling.

**Program Signaling Process:** The signaling program is voluntary. **Both applicants and programs must opt in to participate in signaling.** OBGYN applicants who participate in signaling may 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 presented in any particular order.



**Geographic Preferences:** For the 2023-2024 application cycle, the AAMC is offering all specialties that participate in signaling the use of geographic preferencing. According to the AAMC guidelines, a residency applicant may choose up to three of the following nine regions. Then, with just 300 characters, an applicant may explain each of their preferences. For example, they might highlight ties they have to a region, such as family or ancestry in the location. Their geographic preference will only be shared with programs in that geographic area. Applicants can use less than 3 or may choose no geographic preference.

- Pacific West: AK, CA, HI, OR, WA (28 programs)
- Mountain West: AZ, CO, ID, MT, NM, NV, UT, WY (9 programs)
- West North Central: IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, SD (13 programs)
- East North Central: IL, IN, MI, OH, WI (58 programs)
- West South Central: AR, LA, OK, TX (34 programs)
- East South Central: AL, KY, MS, TN (14 programs)
- South Atlantic: DC, DE, FL, GA, MD, NC, SC, VA, WV (53 programs)
- Middle Atlantic: NJ, NY, PA (68 programs)
- New England: CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT (16 programs)

### 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 and programs where they completed a sub-internship 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, the RRR Alignment Check Index (ACI), 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. 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 sole 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 to other programs or applicants

### 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

for OBGYN. 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. *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 numbers 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." From the 2022-2023 data, an applicant who does not signal has approximately 5% chance of receiving an interview.

**5. *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.

**6. *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), and AAMC Residency Explorer can aid both applicants and advisors in choosing which programs are best choices for application and signaling.

**7. *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. 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 more highly considered by those programs.

**8. *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.

**9. *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.

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

Yes. If you have an interest in receiving an interview from your home program or programs at which you completed a sub-internship, you should signal that program.

**11. *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.

**12. *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.

**13. *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 first year’s data in OBGYN 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.

**14. *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.

**15. *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.

**16. *How will programs use geographic preferences?***

This is the first year that OBGYN will be using geographic preferences. It is likely that programs will take into account both preference signals and geographic preferences when reviewing applications.

**17. *Do I have to choose 3 geographic preferences? Is there an advantage choosing “no geographic preferences”?***

This is the first year that OBGYN will have geographic signaling. At this time, there is no

data on how OBGYN program directors will be using geographic preferences. Data from other specialties in previous years indicate that choosing geographic preference with a signal might have additional advantage of securing interviews over choosing no geographic preference with a signal. All applicants will have the opportunity to choose up to 3 regions or choose “no preference.” We recommend that if you have geographic preferences that you indicate that in your application. Because this is the first time OBGYN will have geographic preferences, we strongly recommend following the guidelines from the AAMC and consulting your local advisors.

**18. What if I place a program signal on a program that is not in one of my geographic signal regions?** This is the first year that OBGYN will have geographic signaling. It is possible that an applicant may have a desire to interview at a program not in their 3 geographic preference regions for various reasons. Applicants can place signals on programs outside of their geographic preferences. Although there is no data currently on what a signal means when placed outside an area with no geographic preference, the value of a gold or silver signal will still likely be indication of interest to a program.

**19. Will programs see a list of my geographic preferences?**

Programs will only see an applicant’s geographic preference if it is in their regions. Programs will not be able to see all the applicant’s geographic preferences.

### 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-sigaled 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?***

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.

10. ***Are programs required to participate in geographic preferences?***

The AAMC has required that all programs that opt in for preference signaling will be required to participate in geographic preferences.

11. ***Are programs required to utilize geographic preference information?***

No. Programs participating in signaling will receive geographic preference data. It is up to the program and their selection committee to utilize any and all data that they deem useful in the application review process.

12. ***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



RIGHT RESIDENT  
RIGHT PROGRAM  
READY DAY ONE

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.