

## **Unified approach guidelines 2025-2026**

### Aspects of the unified approach:

1. Common timeline for fellowship offers
  - a. Interviews begin August 14, 2023
  - b. First offers can be made October 2, 2023
  - c. All offers must be valid for at least 24 hours
2. Public listing of participating fellowships
3. CAP Common application recommended, but program decision
4. Virtual interviews strongly preferred, but program decision
5. Code of conduct for programs and applicants

### Participation

A date for commitment of programs to the unified approach will be established each year. After that date an enlisted program is committed to the unified approach through completion of that recruitment cycle. Programs may request to join the unified approach after this date, but withdrawal after that date is considered a violation of the Unified Approach.

A fellowship program must list all of their open positions in the unified approach to participate. A single program may not have some participating and some non-participating positions. Note that programs may accept internal applicants earlier than October 2 and still be considered participating; see Internal Applicants below. Different fellowship programs at the same institution need not all have the same participation status.

Participation requires following the guidelines laid out in this document and in the code of conduct.

### Public listing of programs:

The American Society of Cytopathology will request specific program information and will compile and publicly post in the Unified Timeline website the information provided by programs. Programs are solely responsible for confirming the accuracy of posted information and requesting corrections as necessary. Applicants should contact programs directly with any program queries.

Programs are encouraged to keep their program website up to date with their participation in the unified approach and the consequent dates of interviews and offers.

### Applications:

The CAP Common Application Form is recommended to simplify applications. However, it is recognized that some programs may require information in a different format due to institutional requirements; therefore, there is no requirement to accept the form. Programs that do accept the form may require a secondary institution-specific form.

There is no required opening or closing date for accepting applications. It is encouraged that programs not begin reviewing applications before July 1, and consider all applications received at least until the opening of the interview season.

#### Internal Applicants:

Participating programs may, at their discretion, offer positions to internal applicants before the common offer deadline. Such an early offer should only be completed if it is the preference of both the program and the applicant. The applicant must be given the option to go through the regular interview process at that program and other programs and be considered along with other candidates at the regular offer date. Early internal offers should be accepted and reported to the APC or sponsoring society before August 14, 2023, so external applicants are not interviewed for a position for which they are not in consideration. Internal applicants who have not accepted an offer by August 14 may be made an offer on the regular offer date of October 2, 2023 or thereafter.

Internal candidates are defined as those currently enrolled in the affiliated residency program or an affiliated fellowship program, or those who have already accepted and will be enrolled in a residency or fellowship at the institution during the year preceding the offered position.

A program making an early offer to an internal candidate before August 14, 2023 is considered to be participating in the Unified Approach.

#### Interviews:

Programs may begin making scheduling arrangements for interviews at any time. However, interviews must not begin until the defined date (August 14, 2023). There is no required end date for interviews.

Virtual interviews are strongly encouraged, as they save time and money for applicants and programs alike and are widely preferred by applicants. Programs that commit to offering virtual interviews in the public listing may not change that commitment after the public listing is posted. While a pure virtual interview system is preferred, programs committed to offering virtual interviews may choose to offer the applicant a choice of virtual or in person interview, but must treat either modality as equal, and must guarantee in writing (email or otherwise) to applicants that their choice of interview modality will not affect the program's ranking of them.

#### Pre-offer communication

Programs and applicants may communicate between the interview and the initial offer date. Communications should follow the rules established by NRMP for communication with residency applicants (<https://www.nrmp.org/policies/> and in particular, <https://www.nrmp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2023-MPA-SMS-Program.pdf>, Section 6.4 Restrictions on Persuasion). In brief: Programs cannot make a formal offer before the initial offer date. Programs may choose to indicate to an applicant how they plan to rank that applicant, and applicants may choose to indicate to a program how they plan to rank that program. However, programs cannot ask applicants how they plan to rank the program, and vice versa. Programs and applicants cannot

indicate a contingent ranking (e.g. we will make you our first offer IF we know you will accept it). Programs and applicants must be honest in their communications with one another. If conducted with honesty and integrity, pre-offer communications can be very helpful in optimizing the post-offer matching of applicants with programs.

#### Offers:

Programs may make offers by email beginning at 11:00 am Eastern time on the date selected for first offers. The initial offer must be by email. Programs may subsequently contact applicants by other means, but should not initiate phone calls or text messages to applicants except between 8am-5pm in the applicant's local time zone.

The number of "initial" offers must be equal to (or less than) the number of available positions in the program. Similarly, the number of outstanding subsequent offers must never be greater than the number of remaining unfilled positions in the program. A program may not offer more positions than it has available at any time.

All offers must be valid for at least 24 hours from the date and time stamp on the email. After 24 hours the program may offer the position to another applicant even if the initial applicant has not responded to the offer. Once the program has made an offer to another candidate, the original offer is void. If the first applicant subsequently indicates a desire to accept the offer after the program has offered the position to another applicant, the program must wait until they have an open, unoffered position before renewing the offer to the original applicant.

When an applicant accepts an offer by email, the agreement is considered final. Neither the program nor the applicant can withdraw from the agreement. Applicants who have accepted a position may not continue to search for a preferred position elsewhere. Programs may not knowingly make offers to applicants who have accepted a position. A program may choose to cancel an offer to an applicant if it becomes aware that an applicant withdrew from a previous acceptance at another program to take the position.

Applicants may not hold more than one offer at the same time, and so must decline all non-preferred offers immediately.

Programs offering two-year fellowships may offer a position for both years on or after the offer date corresponding to the first year of the fellowships. Programs may offer two consecutive fellowships (e.g. general surgical pathology followed by a subspecialty) as a package offer for both years on or after the first offer date corresponding to the first year of the fellowships.

#### Matching of unfilled programs with available applicants after the offer date

The public listing of programs will indicate programs that have remaining positions. Applicants who have not accepted a position are free to contact these programs at any time on or after the initial offer date. Programs may arrange interviews at any time and make offers at any time after the offer date.

The public listing will remain active until the next year's listings are posted.

#### Code of conduct

The code of conduct outlines specific requirements, as well as general expectations of integrity and fairness. Programs and applicants agree, by agreeing to participate in the unified approach, to follow the code of conduct, and to follow the rules and guidelines herein.

Violations of the code of conduct can be reported confidentially by emailing [jrice@cytopathology.org](mailto:jrice@cytopathology.org) or [FellowshipInquiries@apcprods.org](mailto:FellowshipInquiries@apcprods.org). ASC and APC staff will not share the identity or email address of the individual making the report with anyone in the ASC or APC without permission of the reporter. These reports will be investigated by the specialty representative to the FDAHC or another designated individual. Any reports that are found to likely represent a violation will result in a letter of suspected violation.

Program violations will result in:

- A letter of suspected violation sent to the program director, Chair of the sponsoring department, and sponsoring institution GME officer
- Further consequences as determined by the department Chair and/or GME office
- Potential for exclusion from the Unified Approach in future years
- Further consequences as determined by the sponsoring society

Applicant violations will result in:

- A letter of suspected violation sent to the applicant, the residency director of the applicant's residency program
- Further consequences as determined by the residency program director
- Potential for exclusion from the Unified Approach in future years