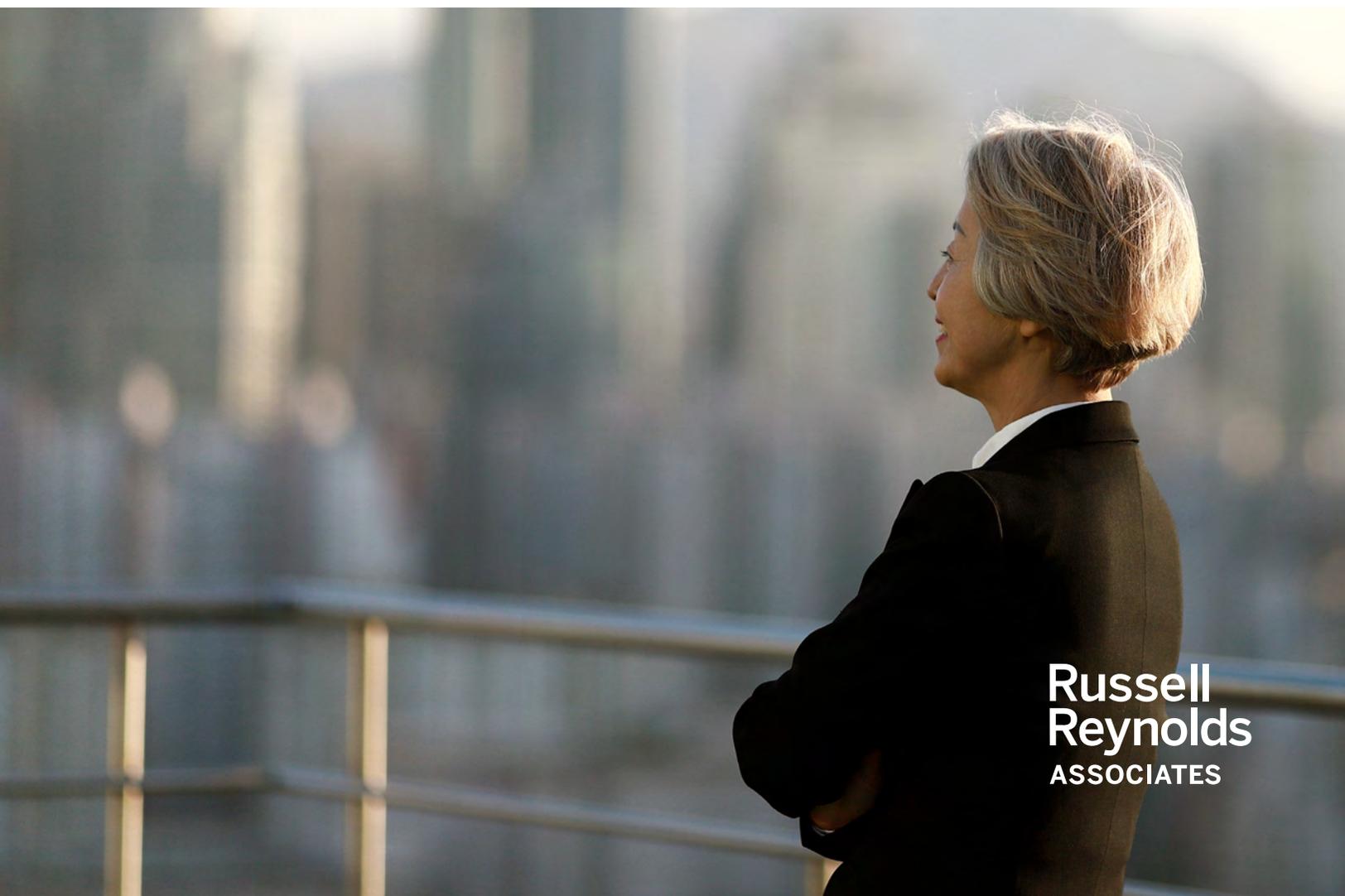


# The Myths, Realities, and Costs of Department Chair Search Practices in Academic Medicine

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**Russell  
Reynolds**  
ASSOCIATES

What if the academic medicine industry were able to reduce the cost associated with the traditional academic search process and predictably improve candidates' success? This can be achieved by leveraging modern leadership assessments, cultural alignment analyses, and equitable search practices. Equally important, what is the actual cost in time, professional morale, and clinical and academic productivity to complete a department chair search, and how do those costs pose a risk to long-term success?

To address these questions, many of today's leading academic institutions are testing the boundaries of hidebound search processes rooted in mythology. Throughout our executive search work, Russell Reynolds Associates has identified the benefits of dismantling those myths.

### Myths

- 1 Professional networks will yield diverse best-in-class leadership for the future

Partnering with executive search firms yields more diverse candidate slates and greater diversity among placements
- 2 Successful academic physicians are automatically trained to become great team leaders

Chair candidates must be evaluated for leadership competencies, rather than only evaluating a track record of academic success
- 3 Search committees must be comprised of 10 to 15 clinicians and administrative leaders

Modern search committees are smaller in size, thoughtful in composition, reflect diversity, and operate with more efficiency
- 4 A comprehensive national search requires 12 to 18 months of time

Comprehensive national searches in academia take, on average, 6 months to complete when engaging an executive search firm
- 5 Search Committees must interview 10 to 15 candidates to achieve a successful outcome

Successful searches focus on the best talent for the organizational strategy and culture, not the number of candidates



# Improving success predictability and outcome

1

Professional networks will yield diverse best-in-class leadership for the future



Partnering with executive search firms yields more diverse candidate slates and greater diversity among placements

As of December 2021, women accounted for 22% of department chairs (20% of permanent chairs and 28% of interim/acting chairs).<sup>1</sup> This number was 14% in 2010. While this increase in gender diversity is cause for celebration, it remains slow, especially when considering just over half of the US population is female.

Racial diversity suffers the same fate. For example, we note that US medical school deans (interim and permanent) identifying as URiM (under-represented in medicine) only rose by one percentage point between 2010 and 2021, from 11% to 12%.<sup>2</sup> As for department chairs, 77% identified as White<sup>3</sup> in 2020, while the 2020 Census established that 57.8% of the US population identified as White.<sup>4</sup>

Partnering with executive search firms improves the diversity of candidate slates. Search firms with large networks and a history of promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) can optimize the art and science of the search process across sectors and functions, globally. In 2021, Russell Reynolds placed 41.6% racially and/or gender diverse department chairs. In addition to search services, leadership assessment and transition services can enable diverse leaders to thrive in their new roles by providing thoughtful onboarding.

**While the increase in gender diversity is cause for celebration, it remains slow**

**Partnering with executive search firms improves the diversity of candidate slates**

2

Successful academic physicians are automatically trained to become great team leaders



Chair candidates must be evaluated for leadership competencies, rather than only evaluating a track record of academic success

Academic institutions have historically prioritized the triple threat, excelling in patient care, research, and education. Leadership recruitments have typically begun with a CV filtration exercise, seeking specific levels of peer reviewed publications, national recognition in a clinical specialty, or R01 grant funding. This outdated approach has resulted in the selection of some individuals with an outstanding CV, yet were ill-prepared to lead and inspire teams, to build a financially stable operation, or to communicate a forward-looking strategy for the department.

Today's leaders must demonstrate a track record of leading, developing, recruiting, and retaining teams and people; building relationships across a complex academic institution; developing innovative strategies; driving performance results; fostering DEI; and leveraging business and financial acumen. Forward-thinking institutions recognize the importance of inspirational and inclusive leadership, multidisciplinary collaboration, strategic acumen, an execution orientation, business acumen and financial stewardship. These attributes cannot be easily gleaned from a CV.<sup>5</sup> Using Russell Reynolds' proprietary Leadership Span (LSpan) model, leadership competencies and capabilities are assessed to provide predictable outcomes for the executive leaders placed.



# Time and cost savings

3

Search committees must be comprised of 10 to 15 clinicians and administrative leaders



Modern search committees are smaller in size, thoughtful in composition, reflect diversity, and operate with more efficiency

Having completed over 375 searches in academia over the past five years, we have noted no correlation between the size of the search committee and the success of a search. Michigan State University notes that based on their experience, search committees with at least five members and at most nine members are most effective,<sup>6</sup> and Emory University recommends between seven and nine individuals to be on search committees.<sup>7</sup> In addition, a committee that is too large diminishes each person's sense of belonging, and contribution falls off sharply.<sup>8</sup>

**Large committees diminish each member's sense of belonging, and contribution falls**

Instead of scrambling to over-include, focus on selecting a small group of people that best represent the interests of stakeholders who will be most impacted by the search's outcome. Since the success of a search is not dependent on the size of the committee, it is in the academic institution's best interest to evaluate the benefits of a smaller and thoughtfully selected search committee. Benefits of reducing the number of search committee members include:



Reducing the length of a search, as schedule coordination is simplified



Freeing employees' time to focus on their jobs, thus focusing on the organization's academic mission and strategic objectives



Creating a decision-making body that allows for open discussion with a carefully selected audience



Boosting morale of employees overburdened by requests to be on search committees<sup>9</sup>

Carefully consider how to build an efficient and diverse search committee. If the goal is to recruit best in class leadership, then it is critical to include committee members who are best qualified to assess leadership talent. Broader constituents can participate in stakeholder interviews in the early stages of the search and perhaps in interviews later in the process. The committee must be built for speed, decision-making and engagement, considering that exceptional academic department chairs can raise US News and World Report rankings, advance cutting-edge research, and train the next generation of physicians.



4

A comprehensive national search requires 12 to 18 months of time



Comprehensive national searches in academia take, on average, six months to complete when engaging an executive search firm

Leveraging data gathered from over 6,600 assignments Russell Reynolds completes annually, we have found that, on average, our teams support organizations in concluding senior leadership searches, including department chair searches, in approximately six months.

While searches for niche specialties may take longer, it is safe to conclude that most department chair searches can be completed successfully in half a year's time. On average, deans are conducting two to three chair searches per year, which equates to roughly 10% of all chairs for each respective organization. Academic medical centers could save hundreds of thousands of dollars in search committee members' time each year by reducing the length of its chair searches.

**Academic medical centers could save hundreds of thousands of dollars in physician time each year by engaging an executive search firm to reduce the length of chair searches**

5

Search Committees must interview 10 to 15 candidates to achieve a successful outcome



Successful searches focus on the best talent for the organizational strategy and culture, not the number of candidates

While interviewing 10 to 15 candidates can provide a greater sense of visibility and control to search committees, our experience shows that an effective profile calibration process followed by interviews with six to eight candidates yields similar success and helps reduce the overall length of the search.

Thorough leadership needs assessment, leveraging relevant stakeholder input at the beginning of the search

Search partners conducting a competency-based interview with prospects of interest and making key recommendations

Prioritization of prospects of interest, rather than reviewing every individual that submits an application

In-depth vetting related to ability to relocate, compensation expectations, potential involvement in other searches, and overall motivations

Regular calibration with the search committee chair

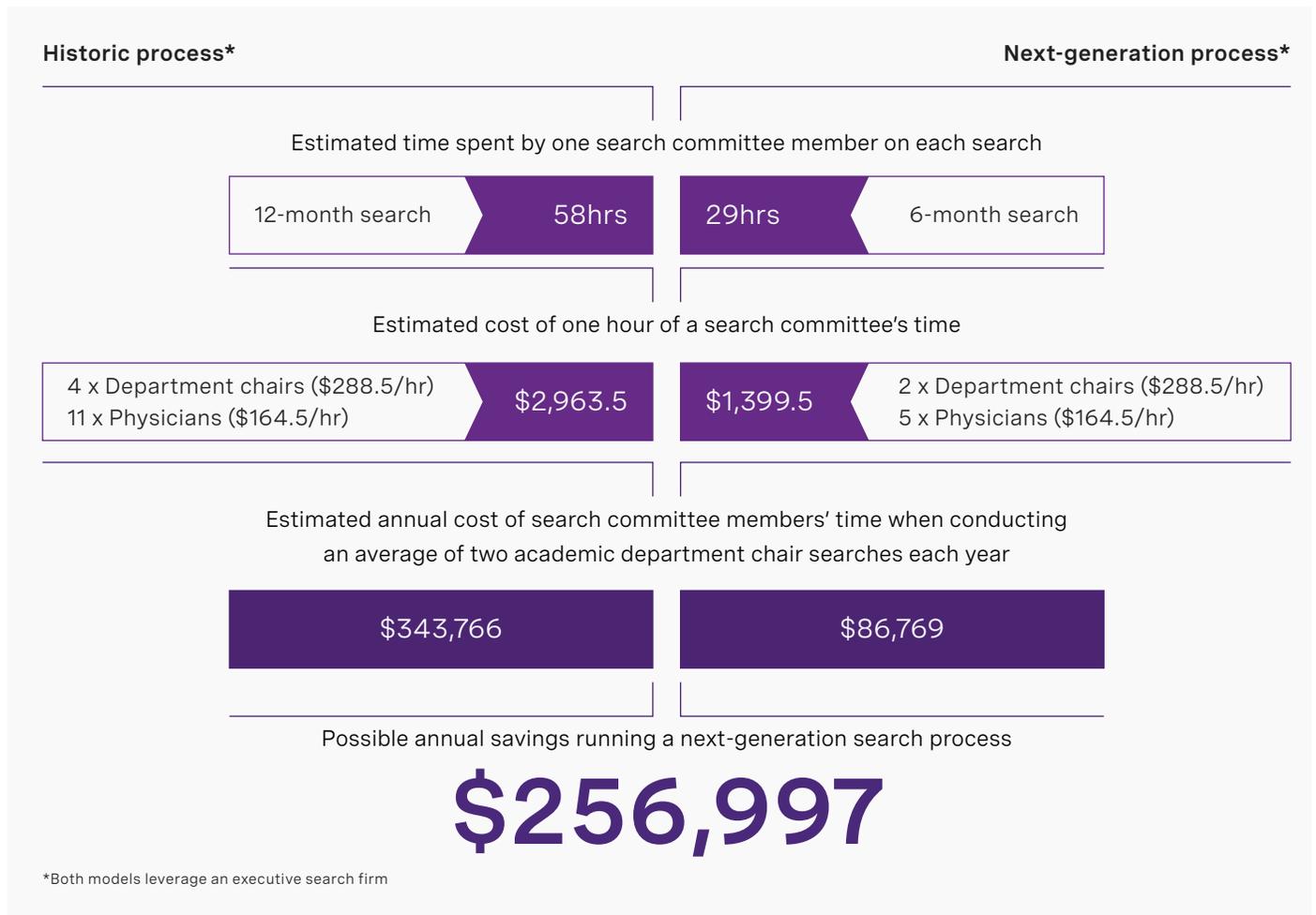
Search partners setting clear expectations with the committee related to the evaluation of prospects

Unconscious bias training for the search committee

We recommend search committees fight the urge to interview more than eight candidates and instead focus on profile calibration to ensure that the search committee only interviews the most fitting candidates. With many pressing priorities for the search committee members, search consultants can help guide the committee toward leaders who are best aligned with departmental needs and the organizational culture.

# Summary of benefits to a modernized, sophisticated search committee process

## Time and cost savings



## Broad-based sourcing

- National access to the top physician leadership talent based on a clearly defined position specification, reaching beyond the personal networks of the committee and relatively ineffective journal advertisements
- Curated presentation of physician-scientists aligned with department, institutional and U.S. News and World Report rankings
- Focus on diversity in thought, gender, and underrepresented groups, while tapping into Russell Reynolds' long-standing relationships with affinity groups and key opinion leaders
- Direct person-to-person phone calls made by search consultants to persuade passive candidates to consider an opportunity

## Professional time optimization

- Reducing the length from 12-18 months to six months, which enables search committee members to advance organizational goals and contribute to the academic mission
- Enhanced physician engagement and positive collegial interaction on a professional recruitment process
- Stakeholder conversations with informed points of view on the field and cultural impact

## Cultural alignment

- Defining the professional advancement path with institutional readiness in mind, instead of political expediency
- Optimizing the candidate experience and increased probability of recruitment through attention to detail and optimal candidate experience
- Setting a course for the future strategic objectives through clear cultural alignment
- Search consultants conduct in-depth 360-degree references to deeply assess a candidate's alignment with organizational culture

## Diversity

- Changing the candidate paradigm through an integrated approach to developing diverse and inclusive candidate slates
- Not only identify, but also successfully recruit physician leaders from historically underrepresented groups through a positive candidate experience
- Support search committees to reduce bias in the candidate selection process
- Develop a position specification that appeals to a diverse audience, while also highlighting the institution's commitment to DEI and addressing health inequities in the community

## Predictable outcomes

- Using Russell Reynolds' proprietary Leadership Span (LSpan) model, leadership competencies and capabilities are assessed to provide predictable outcomes for newly placed executive leaders
- This assessment tool empowers search committees to gain additional visibility into a candidate's likelihood of success, beyond the insights gathered through interview and reference feedback

**By engaging executive search firms and utilizing modern leadership assessments, academic medical centers can improve cultural alignment, lower burnout rates among faculty members, and increase diversity in leadership all while reducing the cost and time expenditures involved in the process. The benefits in partnering with search executives result in quantifiable time savings and costs, as well as qualitative professional morale among physicians and search committees.**

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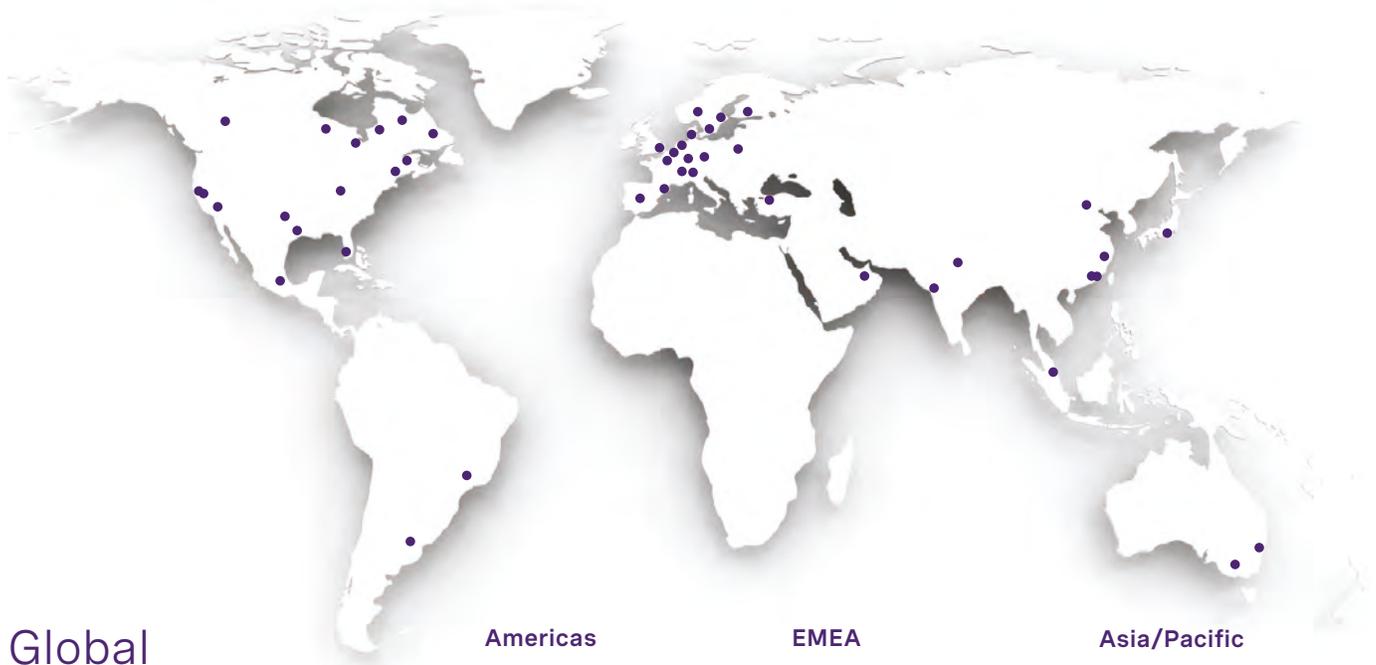
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# About Russell Reynolds Associates

Russell Reynolds Associates is a global leadership advisory and search firm. Our 470+ consultants in 47 offices work with public, private and nonprofit organizations across all industries and regions. We help our clients build teams of transformational leaders who can meet today's challenges and anticipate the digital, economic and political trends that are reshaping the global business environment. From helping boards with their structure, culture and effectiveness to identifying, assessing and defining the best leadership for organizations, our teams bring their decades of expertise to help clients address their most complex leadership issues. We exist to improve the way the world is led.

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