

Q1. Program Directors – Can you briefly describe your process of how you select applicants for interview? For ranking?

Artemis (U Cincinnati) – I look through everyone's application information and CV, and then their recommendation letters. Most applicants are strong candidates, so as long as there are no red flags in their application packets, they will get an invitation for an interview. After the applicants have been interviewed, we have a meeting with all the interviewing faculty and discuss each candidate, and base ranking on how we feel an applicant will fit into our program.

Christine (U Washington) – We interview virtually all candidates who apply. We look for candidates who demonstrate excellent work ethic, team player attitudes, passion for MSK and education (we are an academic institution, and our fellows are heavily involved in helping educate our other trainees). These are the types of residents we rank highly.

David (U Colorado) – We perform a "holistic review" much like other programs, weighing basic common application components, personal statement, and letters of recommendation for a complete package. As a more "procedure-heavy" program, we like to ensure that applicants understand the more unique makeup of our fellowship year, and show an interest in the procedural side of MSK Radiology. As the MSK community is small, LOR and emails from mentors can go a long ways. The only difference with the rank list is the addition of the interview and how it adds to the overall application package.

Drew (U Wisconsin) – Key things I look for to select applicants for interviews: chief resident or other voluntary leadership experience (willingness to go the extra mile); strong, non-generic LORs; strength of residency program; and some indication that the applicant is specifically interested in our program. For the rank list we incorporate those same factors but applicants can be bumped up or down the list based on how they were perceived during their interview.

Filipe (U Miami) – CV and Letters.

Imran (Northwestern) –

- a. When determining the applicants to whom we will extend interviews, I review all applications to assess academic accomplishment, investment and motivation to do MSK radiology fellowship, and whether the applicant has any connections to our institution or region, among other factors. Letters of recommendation showing a deeper connection between the letter writer and the applicant can provide clearer insight into an applicant's abilities, work ethic and personality, and may help separate applicants who are otherwise close. We rank applicants before the interview season and give higher ranked applicants a greater choice of potential interview dates. We target 11-12 applicants per fellowship position.
- b. In addition to me, our fellow(s) and at least one other faculty member participate in all of the interviews, so our rank list represents a collaborative effort rather than just one person's opinion. After each interview session, I and the other interviewers meet to discuss each applicant for that session, which helps us to form our preliminary rank list. With each successive session, we update the ranking to include the newer interviewees. Following the last interview session, I hold a ranking meeting with other MSK faculty that have interviewed to include any new information we might have gathered, to determine whether there are particular candidates we should rank to match or consider not ranking, and to solidify the rank list. Before finalizing our rank list, I will often reach out to our higher ranked applicants to let them know we have considered them highly. If they demonstrate reciprocal interest, it may help me confirm their rank position.

Jeff (Jefferson) – We typically get an overwhelming number of applications, so initially applicants are filtered out by considering multiple factors, including strength of training program, board scores, CV, personal statement, and LORs. Once interviews have been conducted, our final rank list is determined primarily based on how we feel each applicant will “fit” into our program.

Robert (U Mississippi) – We are a small regional program, so we don't get a large number of applicants. I basically email the applicants' materials around to each of our MSK faculty, and get a yes or no about interviewing. After the interviews, it's just a short meeting to decide how to rank the candidates. We don't have formal criteria, just based on the faculty's impression of who would be good to work with.

Q2. NMMC (Newest Members of the MSK Community) – All three of you have decided to move a long distance to do your fellowship. In a way that is a bit different than many people who choose to stay at your home institution. Can you describe your thought process in making this decision?

Eddy (BIDMC → Stanford) – I am originally from Hawaii, so being on the west coast and closer to my family was an important factor when choosing a fellowship program. I strongly considered staying at my home program for fellowship, but ultimately thought doing a fellowship in the area that I ultimately wanted to work and live would be the better option. There are definitely a lot of benefits to staying at your home program, but going to another institution provides the opportunity to gain another perspective and learn new approaches and techniques to MSK radiology.

Philip (U Colorado → MGH) – Each year at my current residency institution (the University of Colorado), I would estimate that roughly half of each year's graduating class makes the decision to stay put here. It makes sense for any number of reasons, including the strength of our fellowship training programs here across the board, the sense of familiarity with the people and the culture, family considerations, the desire not to move, the desire to practice in this geographic region long-term, etc. For me personally, I was more than willing to make a big move for the sake of enhancing my educational/training experience. What helps is that I don't have any major roots in or attachments to Colorado. Plus, it does not feel like a big sacrifice at all in the grand scheme of things when you consider all of the sacrifices it has taken to get to this point along the path to becoming an attending physician. Truth be told, I'm very excited to make the move because I have intentionally tried to seek out diverse experiences by living in different places and learning at different institutions throughout my adult life. Institutional bias is a real phenomenon and one of my goals with this move is to gain a well-rounded perspective of what radiology can look like beyond the University of Colorado. I see this relocation as just another chapter in my journey through which I get to grow as a person and make new friends and colleagues, hence the excitement. Living on the East Coast and training at MGH is truly a one-of-a-kind opportunity that I'm thrilled about and I absolutely intend to take full advantage of it.

MeNore (Mt Auburn → UCSD) – I was excited for a change after 5 years in the same city and interested in getting to explore California with my next step. I'm also aiming to live on the west coast after my training, so this big move helped me check a lot of my boxes!

Q3. Program Directors – How have you altered your application process for virtual recruitment?

Artemis (U Cincinnati) – There haven't really been any big changes to our process besides the virtual interviews. We have been interviewing a larger number of candidates likely due to an increase in the number of applicants. We have also added some photographs and online material about the program and the city, since people don't have the chance to physically visit, to get a bit of a better picture of their potential working environment for a year.

Christine (U Washington) – Our paper application materials (application form, CV, letters of recommendation, etc) have not changed, and everything needed for a complete application is listed on our website. For our virtual interviews, we have strived to shorten the interview “day”. Our fellows meet with at least two faculty members and then have an opportunity to chat with a fellow. This year, we are using RezRate, which should streamline the process even further. The details are still being sorted, but we hope this will be an even smoother, easier process!

David (U Colorado) – As studies have shown, we've interviewed more people to ensure a strong and complete match. While I encourage applicants to get their applications in early, we've seen a trend in applications coming in spread out over the course of a month (perhaps more due to the SSR match format with hard date to begin interviews), so we take more time in reviewing them and offering spots. We've also ensured that our online resources are as informative and correct as possible to try and giving prospective applicants the best view of our program.

Drew (U Wisconsin) – The main change made for virtual applications is that we invite a lot more people to interview to ensure that we fill all of our positions. We've tried different things to give applicants a sense of the section and locale with mixed success.

Filipe (U Miami) – We have been interviewing more applicants than we usually did when was in person. I think the interview process lose a lot when virtual but giving the cost, time, etc I don't know how easy will be to be back to the old format.

Imran (Northwestern) – We have tried to make the virtual experience as similar to the in-person interviews as possible. The biggest downside to virtual recruitment is that the applicant cannot see our location and our facilities, which may be appealing to candidates doing a 1-year fellowship. To address this, we updated and improved our fellowship website's resources to give potential applicants more information about the location, structure and character of our program, and to provide contact information and links to the application materials. On the other hand, virtual recruitment puts less stress on the clinical schedule, making our attendings more available to conduct interviews. As a result, we can be more flexible in the dates we can offer virtually, and occasionally, we may even be able to offer interview dates with only one or two applicants.

Jeff (Jefferson) – We have transitioned to a completely electronic application process, though this was initiated pre-pandemic. Virtual interviews have allowed us to better streamline the interview day, though we do miss meeting applicants in person!

Robert (U Mississippi) – The application process itself hasn't changed.

Q6. Applicants – What were the top 3 things that influenced your decision on where to apply?

Eddy (BIDMC → Stanford) – Quality and strength of clinical training, opportunities to be involved in education and research, and geography were my top 3 factors that influenced my fellowship decision.

Philip (U Colorado → MGH) – The top three things that factored into my decision on where to apply were: 1) comprehensiveness of the training experience (both based on Internet research and word-of-mouth), 2) geographic location in terms of desirability for fellowship and longer term for practice, and 3) the reputation of the programs based on insights from my mentors in MSK radiology (and that is because of how highly I respect and value their opinions). My rank list was most influenced by similar factors as where to apply with the top three things being: 1) where I felt I would receive the most complete training experience (working with experienced and reputable faculty radiologists, reading across all modalities, and performing a variety of procedures), 2) where I prefer to be for that year of fellowship, and 3) the name brand and reputation of the program.

MeNore (Mt Auburn → UCSD) – For where to apply: department culture since I was looking for a warm culture of community that could help me grow in academics, an emphasis on didactic lectures and weather. For my rank list, I used the same top 3 factors, especially my sense of the department culture that I got during the interview. Throughout the whole process, I got so much help by talking with my mentors about their perspectives.

Q5. Program Directors – What is your program’s policy on internal vs external applicants?

Artemis (U Cincinnati) – If we have internal candidates who are considering staying as fellows but are also considering other programs, then we will interview external candidates but typically give priority to the internal candidates and rank them first. If we have two internal candidates that want to stay on as fellows, then we will fill internally and not participate in the interview process or match.

Christine (U Washington) – We welcome ALL candidates to apply. We go through the match, and we interview virtually all who apply to our program

David (U Colorado) – We invite both internal and external applicants to apply, and are evaluated equally. Internal applicants can certainly have the benefit of being "known entities", however still must go through the match and are encouraged to seek a full spectrum of fellowship opportunities available to them. As our past matches have shown, we have had some internal candidates match, however have filled a significant majority of the time through external matches.

Drew (U Wisconsin) – In general, we accept all internal applicants into our fellowship unless there are major red flags. We do require them to submit all the same application materials as our external applicants.

Filipe (U Miami) – We don't have official policy about that. But if we have internal applicants that are well qualified and wants to stay we usually keep.

Imran (Northwestern) – Our goal is to have the best MSK radiology fellows who fit into our institutional culture, demonstrate academic achievement and aptitude, have a desire to contribute to MSK radiology during and after fellowship, and are service-oriented toward patients and referrers. Our preferred class is composed of both internal and external fellows. Internal applicants have demonstrated their capabilities over several years, and usually have a strong interest in our program and staying in the region for fellowship. On the other hand, some of our best fellows have been external applicants. As a result, internal applicants are often given favor during the ranking process but are not guaranteed a fellowship position.

Jeff (Jefferson) – We have no official policy, but we generally give external applicants the same consideration as internal applicants. We have 3 MSK fellow positions each year and typically have strong interest internally from our residents, so they may fill 1-2 of those spots. However, it is my position that external candidates enrich the fellow experience and are invaluable to the strength of our program, given their often diverse perspectives.

Robert (U Mississippi) – It's not an official policy, but I would say that there is almost certainly a bias toward internal candidates. Assuming that they are someone you want to spend a year working with, an internal candidate has the advantage of being a known quantity, while even a well-recommended external candidate is a little bit of a risk.

Q4. Applicants – Given the virtual interviews, what was the best way for you to find out about the programs you were interested in?

Eddy (BIDMC → Stanford) – When forming my fellowship program list, I relied on my MSK mentors and co-residents who went into MSK to get a sense of the strength and reputation of the different fellowship programs. At the interview stage, the virtual interviews were generally very helpful in giving an overall sense of the program and I was usually able to ask faculty and fellows a lot of questions throughout the interview day. The main drawback of the virtual format was not being able to get a feel for the atmosphere of a program or see the reading room, hospital, surrounding area/city, etc. To get a better sense of these things, I reached out directly to a few MSK fellows that I met during my virtual interviews, which was generally really helpful.

Philip (U Colorado → MGH) – Admittedly, getting the inside track on my programs of interest and finding specific information on each program was a challenge. Unfortunately, the fellowship application process is a black box of sorts and being as informed as possible boils down to how willing you are to go the extra mile. In my case, I started out by perusing websites but there is a lot of variability in terms of the information provided. I found myself often trying to get a better sense of what each training program had to offer. Ultimately, I turned to folks who had been through the process before, namely the MSK fellows at the University of Colorado, the MSK fellows at my programs of interest, and the MSK faculty at my institution, especially the more junior faculty who are less removed from the process. Similar to the variability in website layout and content, there was also variability in the transparency of different programs with some featuring their fellows as a part of the interview day or process and others not, some willingly providing contact info for their fellows and some not, some with fellows who were willing to take time to talk to me on the phone or respond to my emails and some not, etc. An additional avenue I explored a little bit (although should have leveraged more) was interacting with radiologists who I met “virtually” at the programs I interviewed at because many of them trained or knew folks at some of the other institutions I was interested in. In some instances, the conversation organically turned to their thoughts and opinions about other programs but it wasn’t always a topic of discussion given that the focus was more on the interview for that program at that time.

MeNore (Mt Auburn → UCSD) – The best way for me was to talk to the current fellows, mostly during the question and answer sessions. A lot of fellows also shared their email address, and scheduling a time to talk on the phone at another point before rank lists were due also helped me learn more about the programs.

Q8. Program Directors – What is the best way for an applicant to communicate with your program? Does it help or hurt to contact the program or have others contact applicants for you (to put in a good word)?

Artemis (U Cincinnati) – The best way is through our program coordinator who will relay or forward all information to me. There is no harm in contacting the program, especially with questions or if there is a strong interest in joining the program, as long as it is within reason.

Christine (U Washington) – You are ALWAYS free to contact us to express your interest. The best person to contact is our program coordinator, Trixie Rombouts (btrxe@uw.edu). She will ensure the email is relayed to the appropriate people.

David (U Colorado) – I think it's absolutely okay to contact a PD with a sincere interest in a program (especially come interview invite and rank list time); however, any communication needs to have a real purpose that could not have been done with a website visit, and not just be a "mad libs" (fill in the school) I-like-your-program-a-lot statement. Yes, having a faculty mentor reach out on your behalf to help convey that interest and vouch for your amazingness can be very useful, but needs to be done sparingly. This is a small community, and if people feel like they're getting burned, they'll remember it for years.

Drew (U Wisconsin) – Most important communication tips: be available and responsive; be courteous to everyone at the program; thank you emails are not required but can be effective, particularly if personalized to the individual interviewer. Hearing an endorsement of a particular applicant from a colleague I know and trust at another institution is particularly powerful. Take advantage of that if you can.

Filipe (U Miami) – Usually emailing our Adm. Assistant, but I am also always available. I think helps contacting and having others putting a good word, Demonstrates an extra interest when comparing to the one who do not do that.

Imran (Northwestern) – The best way to contact our program is to either email me or our fellowship program coordinator. It absolutely helps to contact us. We would like fellows who

are genuinely enthusiastic about being a part of our training program, and this communication helps us to recognize their interest. Although it might not overcome great differences in academic achievement, in some instances, it can help distinguish applicants who have otherwise similar profiles.

Jeff (Jefferson) – Applicants can feel free to reach out to our program coordinator, but I am also always reachable by email at jeffrey.belair@jefferson.edu. Personal endorsements from known, trusted MSK faculty can be invaluable in helping you secure an interview and/or high rank position.

Robert (U Mississippi) – For my program, communicating directly with me is the best way. That may be an advantage of a small program, that doesn't have many layers of bureaucracy. For me, it would go a long way if someone reached out to put in a good word for an applicant. It's pretty easy to accentuate the positive in recommendation letters, but an applicant would really stand out if they had someone who was willing to speak up on their behalf.

Q7. NMMC – What are some things that you are glad you asked about or wish you had asked about?

Eddy (BIDMC → Stanford) –

Things I'm glad I asked about:

1. -What are strengths of the program? What are aspects of the programs that could be strengthened?
2. -Do you anticipate any major changes to the program?
3. -Are cases reviewed/read out in person?
4. -What type of academic opportunities do fellows have?

Things I wish I asked about (mostly directly to fellows):

1. -How is call?
2. -How is the area?
3. -What is the atmosphere like? Do you have time to hang-out with your co-fellows?
4. -Are there moonlighting opportunities?
5. -Do you have any academic or conference time?

Philip (U Colorado → MGH) – I am glad I asked programs about all of the factors that I deemed most important in my rank list decision-making. Those factors included typical daily/weekly schedule and workflow, call responsibilities, opportunities for moonlighting, research, teaching, networking, and participation in multidisciplinary conferences, employee benefits, the level of support that exists for the job search, what working with the faculty is like, what life is like in that particular city, where folks live, why fellows at that program selected that program (i.e. strengths and weaknesses) as well as what matters now to those fellows with the benefit of hindsight, and feeling of preparedness for practice beyond training. I honestly cannot think of too many regrets I have regarding things I should have asked but didn't. When it is all said and done, I don't know that asking about anything else would have influenced my decision much because choosing between my top programs for rank list purposes was essentially like splitting hairs, i.e. by far, one of the most difficult decision of my life. It was a great "problem" to have and I am fortunate and humbled to have received interview offers from so many top-notch fellowships.

McNore (Mt Auburn → UCSD) – I'm glad that I asked programs to describe their approach to teaching! I benefit the most when there's time for didactic sessions and case conferences, and programs vary in how these are weighed. It was also helpful that I asked what made the program "fit" for the fellows and staff I got to meet.