

Holistic Considerations for the Admission Cycle

This guide serves as a starting point for identifying holistic strategies you can implement across all phases of the recruitment and admission cycle at your institution. It was created by innovators and leaders in medical school admissions in collaboration with AAMC staff.

SUGGESTED USE

You can use this guide in a variety of ways:

- To review each phase of your current admission process and identify actions that you might want to incorporate in future cycles to make your admission process more mission aligned.
- To focus on and make changes to one phase of your process.
- To monitor changes you have already implemented in your current cycle.
- To note opportunities for change in future cycles.

When selecting which strategies are appropriate for you to implement, we encourage you to consider the medical school's mission, goals, and resources, as well as the political and legal landscape nationally and in your state (for example, legislative climate, gubernatorial priorities and policies, state referenda).

KEY CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

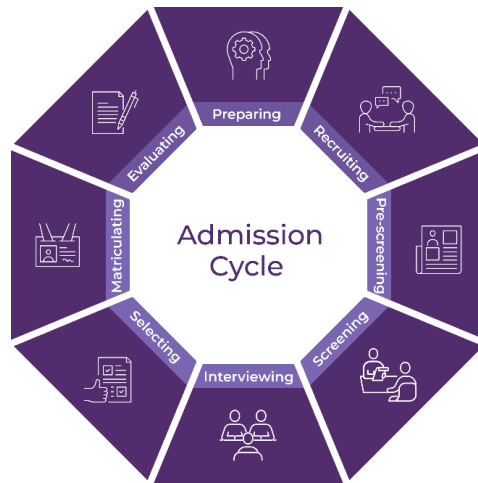
Definition: Holistic Review

A flexible, individualized way of assessing an applicant's capabilities by which balanced consideration is given to applicants' experiences, attributes, and academic metrics (EAMs) in identifying individuals who may contribute to your school's mission, goals, and learning environment and succeed as a medical student and future physician.

Resources

- [Holistic Review Primer](#)
- [Holistic Review in Medical School Admissions and Selection: A Strategic, Mission-Driven Response to Shifting Societal Needs](#)

The Admission Cycle



Definitions: Admission Cycle Stages

- **Preparing:** Inventorying the strengths and resources of the school and the needs of the community it serves and linking these to the mission, goals, and diversity interests of the institution. Reviewing evaluation results from the previous cycle and determining if changes need to be made to admission criteria (that is, keeping, adjusting, removing, or adding). Creating or revising any rubrics and other tools, as well as committee and interviewer training to be used during the upcoming cycle. Setting guidelines for evaluating application files that can be consistently and equitably applied to all applicants.
- **Recruiting:** Implementing outreach strategies to attract the kind of students who, upon graduation, will become physicians who reflect and embody the school's mission, goals, and diversity interests.
- **Pre-screening:** Passive pre-screening (that is, built into the application management system) includes practices such as communicating academic thresholds to receive a secondary application. Active pre-screening includes practices such as screening the most mission-aligned applicants first.
- **Screening:** Assessing application files for mission alignment in a way that is consistently and equitably applied to all applicants.
- **Interviewing:** Evaluating an applicant's personal attributes, competencies, and readiness to enter medical school and providing applicants the opportunity to acquire information about the medical school.
- **Selecting:** Making mission-aligned decisions about applicants who have been interviewed. Selection decisions include:
 - **Accept:** Applicant to whom an official offer of acceptance has been extended regardless of whether they have responded to the offer.
 - **Hold:** Applicant still under consideration but for whom additional information or review may be necessary.
 - **Reject:** Applicant who has been denied admission and is no longer being considered for that cycle following admissions committee review.
 - **Wait-list:** Applicant who has been placed on a school's alternate list.

- **Matriculating:** All accepted applicants officially enroll and are in attendance when classes begin.
- **Evaluating:** Establishing a mechanism to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the admission process for all programs. There are two components:
 - Evaluating the admission process itself. This goal may be accomplished through evaluating pool yields (for example, applicant, interview, accepted, matriculated, denied, wait-listed) for sufficient variety of applicants to fulfill your mission and goals. Evaluating also involves reviewing scoring in the screening, interviewing, and admissions committee phases and reviewing outcomes of recruitment and advising strategies.
 - Evaluating medical student performance outcomes once applicants matriculate. This goal may be accomplished through outcomes reporting on rates of promotion, retention, and graduation, including specifics such as remediation, grades or grade trends, leaves of absence, disciplinary decisions, and relationships between admission requirements like prerequisite coursework and medical school curriculum; passage of United States Medical Licensure Examination (USMLE) steps and score for Step 2; match rate; and selection of specialty and/or practice decisions that are aligned with the school’s mission.

Key Terminology

Diversity: All aspects of human differences, including socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, language, nationality, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, geography (including rural and highly rural areas), disability, and age.

EAMs: Experiences, attributes, and academic metrics.

- Experiences: Life circumstances and chosen activities applicants have experienced, as well as the context in which these experiences have taken place.
- Attributes: Applicants’ skills, abilities, personal qualities, core competencies for entering medical students, and relevant demographic identities.
- Academic metrics: Quantitative academic components of an applicant’s portfolio.

Medical student performance data: Data relating to student performance, including data on institutional and national assessments, courses that students enroll in and complete, clinical rotation evaluations, grade-point average, remediation, retention, degree or credential attainment, and enrollment status.

Mission aligned: A medical school’s admission policies, procedures, and criteria are set up specifically to align with the mission and goals of the medical school.



Mission-aligned applicant pool: A variety of applicants whose experiences, attributes, and stated interests support the mission-aligned criteria identified by the school.

Partners and collaborators: The AAMC is moving away from using the term “stakeholder.” We use “partners and collaborators” throughout this document as synonymous with what “stakeholder” is traditionally understood to mean in an educational context.


Rubric or structured rating form: A comprehensive guide for consistently evaluating applicants against a structured set of defined criteria or attributes.

Holistic Considerations for the Admission Cycle: Checklist



We are offering this checklist in an editable format so that you can customize it for your institution. You can access the Microsoft Word version at aamc.org/HolisticAdmissionsChecklist.

Holistic Considerations for the Admission Cycle: Checklist			
Admission Cycle		Considerations	Partners and Collaborators
Preparing 		Ensure key partners and collaborators, including the medical school dean, are committed to implementing a holistic review process. Uphold a culture of accountability at your institution by reviewing and evaluating your admission and student support processes annually.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dean - Curriculum and assessment deans - Admissions committee - Board of trustees/regents - Provost/chancellor/president - Student support services in toto
		Define your school's standards for success and what EAMs are required for or related to achieving success in the curriculum and longer-term outcomes considering the supports available.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Curriculum and assessment deans - Basic science faculty - Clinical faculty - Residency program directors (those who accept your students)
		Review all admission criteria to ensure alignment with mission.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions committee - Admissions dean and office staff - Those who touch the application in an evaluative manner
		Develop a plan for how you will interact with applicants and advisors at each stage of the application cycle.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advisors - Medical students - Everyone formally involved with interview day and revisit events - Everyone involved with recruitment of prospective applicants
		Provide annual, mandatory training for admissions committee members, screeners, and interviewers in holistic review, identified EAMs, bias mitigation, rubrics, and decision processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions committee - DEI personnel at the institutional and college level
		Use bias mitigation tools to assess the equity and inclusiveness of admission rubrics, tools, materials, and processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DEI personnel - Medical students - Data analysis personnel at the college
		Identify admissions committee members, interviewers, staff members from other units, and other partners and collaborators participating in the process who reflect the mission characteristics you seek in your student body.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions committee - Department chairs - Dean - Medical students Dean - Medical students



Holistic Considerations for the Admission Cycle: Checklist

Admission Cycle	✓	Considerations	Partners and Collaborators
Preparing 		Informed by prior classes, identify data to be collected, used in decision-making, and evaluated to measure effectiveness of holistic review processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Curriculum and assessment deans - Admissions dean - Institutional effectiveness - Registrar - Learning support specialists
		Assess the experiences, attributes, and academic metrics of the admitted class to determine if they are in alignment with your mission and goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions dean - Institutional effectiveness - Registrar - Dean of students
		Review AMCAS® (American Medical College Application Service®) and TMDSAS (Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Service) matriculation reports to determine which accepted applicants you are losing and which medical schools you are losing them to.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AMCAS/TMDSAS staff - Admissions dean/director - Admissions committee - Dean
		Analyze past graduates' performance data to understand how characteristics and/or prior academic achievements of applicants are associated with academic and professional achievement during the medical school, graduate medical education (GME), and practice phases to yield data-informed admission criteria.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions dean/director - Institutional effectiveness - CQI personnel - GME dean(s)
		Assess long-term outcomes such as program completion, time to program completion, residency specialty, residency placement location, practice location, career choice, and population served to determine if and how characteristics assessed in admissions contribute to the fulfillment of your mission and goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dean - Curriculum and assessment deans - Student affairs dean(s) - Alumni affairs - Development officers
		Evaluate the interrater reliability of admissions committee scores for each applicant at the end of each cycle.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions dean/director - CQI personnel - Admissions committee
		Evaluate who you have invited to interview and if the variety of interviewed applicants would help you fulfill your mission and goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions committee - Admissions dean/director
		Evaluate applicant interview scoring to determine if there are group-level differences (e.g., experiences or backgrounds) in how applicants have been scored.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions dean/director - CQI personnel - Admissions committee - Interviewers
		Evaluate whether there are group-level differences (e.g., experiences or backgrounds) in applicants that receive offers of acceptance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions dean/director - CQI personnel


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Admission Cycle		Considerations	Partners and Collaborators
Recruiting 		Establish a strategic recruitment plan. This includes developing a strategy and alignment of resources for recruiting applicants with a special focus on those applicants who will help you fulfill your mission and goals and are likely to accept a seat offer at your school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions team - DEI team - Communications - Pathway program director/staff - Pre-health advisors and mentors
		Create recruitment materials. Ensure your mission, application requirements, and thresholds are clearly and transparently defined and articulated in all materials (e.g., website, printed recruitment materials, presentations).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions team - Joint degree program directors/staff - DEI dean/director - Community organizations - Pre-health advisors, faculty, and mentors
		Build relationships with key partners and collaborators. Develop direct communication channels with the admissions officials for pathway programs (e.g., BA/MD and other joint degree programs), prehealth advisors, premed mentors, community groups, and existing outside pathway programs that work with prospective students aligned with your school mission to build access to your program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions team - DEI dean/director - Pathway program director/staff - Pre-health advisors, faculty, and mentors at mission-aligned undergraduate institutions
		Execute various types of mission-aligned recruitment activities promoting access to targeted applicants (e.g., applicants underrepresented in medicine), which may include presentation of prehealth fairs, conferences, and clubs, dissemination of recruitment materials, contractual agreements with undergraduate institutions, and institution-specific programming that encourages applicant recruitment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions team - DEI dean/director - Pathway program director/staff - Prehealth advisors, faculty, and mentors at mission-aligned undergraduate institutions
		Analyze surveys for best practices for recruitment. Survey participants who attended outreach and recruitment activities to assess effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions team - Communications - DEI dean/director





Holistic Considerations for the Admission Cycle: Checklist

Admission Cycle	✓	Considerations	Partners and Collaborators
Prescreening 		Review the screens built into your applicant management system for mission alignment.	- Admissions team and committees
		Consider uniquely mission-aligned requirements for your secondary application and communicate them transparently on your website.	- Web development team - Communications team - Government relations
		Determine mission-aligned filters to help tailor your pool for selecting applicants to interview.	- Admissions committee
		Refine screening criteria using prior graduates' performance data and consideration of the effectiveness of student support services.	- Student support personnel - Student affairs office - Curriculum office and committees - Student progress and promotions committee
		Use prior cycle evaluation data to incorporate academic thresholds based on the relationship of academic metrics (MCAT®, GPA, prerequisite courses) with performance outcomes throughout your MD program.	- Admissions office team - Curriculum and/or assessment office and committees
Admission Cycle	✓	Considerations	Partners and Collaborators
Screening 		Create a structured screening tool (e.g., rubric or rating form) that reflects your desired EAMs.	- Admissions committee - Assessment or teaching and learning support unit
		Consider reviewing applicants with the greatest mission alignment first to prioritize them for interview slots.	- Admissions dean/director - Admissions committee
		Determine and curate what information reviewers have access to after the pre-screen is completed. For example, if outcome-informed academic thresholds were used for pre-screening, consider removing academic metrics (i.e., MCATs and GPAs) to ensure that screening is focused on the remaining factors that need to be evaluated.	- Admissions dean/director
		Consider having more than one independent screen per applicant to inform interview decisions.	- Admissions dean/director
		Provide training to ensure interrater reliability and validity for your applicant screening tool.	- Assessment team or research support office
		Establish a protocol for continually addressing instances of low interrater reliability or error.	- Admissions team
		Continually determine whether you are screening out mission-aligned applicants and the reasons why that might be occurring.	- Admissions team and committee


Holistic Considerations for the Admission Cycle: Checklist



Admission Cycle	✓	Considerations	Partners and Collaborators
Interviewing 		Create a structured interview tool (e.g., rubric or rating form) that reflects critical pre-professional competencies and desired mission-aligned experiences and attributes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions dean/director - Admissions committee or other governance - DEI personnel - Assessment personnel
		Develop interview questions that are informed by the critical pre-professional competencies and desired mission-aligned experiences and attributes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions dean/director - Admissions committee - Assessment personnel
		Consider a structured interview process where all applicants are evaluated on the same competencies, interviewers are assigned questions, and multiple independent assessments are conducted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions dean/director - Admissions committee or other governance - DEI personnel - Assessment personnel
		Train interviewers how to conduct behavioral interviews using the structured interview tool.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions dean/director
		Train interviewers how to write unbiased narrative comments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions dean/director - DEI personnel
		Consider omitting academic metrics if providing application data and materials to interviewers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions dean/director - Admissions committee or other governance
		If you are using a highly structured interview model, consider not including any application materials to ensure the interview is solely based on the structured questions and scenarios.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions dean/director - Admissions committee
		Provide opportunities for interviewees to interact with current students and faculty to highlight school mission and strengths that are separate from the formal interview(s).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions team - Medical students - Faculty (clinical and basic science) - Student affairs - DEI personnel
	Separate the interview day, when there are opportunities for recruiting, from the interview itself, which should focus on assessment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions dean/director - Admission staff 	

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Admission Cycle		Considerations	Partners and Collaborators
Interviewing 		Evaluate the interrater reliability and validity for your structured interviewing tool.	- Admissions dean/director - Institutional research/data analyst
		Determine which interview questions allow the admissions committee to better assess mission alignment.	- Admissions dean/director - Admissions committee - Curriculum and student affairs leaders, if not already represented in admissions committee
		Survey interviewees about their interview experience to make improvements to communication, expectations, and the interview experience as a whole.	- Admissions dean/director - Admissions team
		Analyze yield data to understand which screened applicants were interviewed and which were not.	- Admissions dean/director - Institutional research/data analyst
Admission Cycle		Considerations	Partners and Collaborators
Selecting 		Determine what criteria you want to use in your final selection process and how much influence (weight) each criterion has on final decisions.	- Admissions dean/director - Admissions committee
		Ensure you have structures and selection processes in place to use your wait list to shape your class and increase the number of mission-aligned applicants in your acceptance pool.	- Admissions dean/director - Admissions committee
		Take an inventory of the composition of your admitted class and compare to applicant pools in the cycle to determine effectiveness of holistic review strategies.	- Admissions dean/director - Institutional research teams
		Evaluate whether mission-aligned applicants are scored or ranked differently than other applicants.	- Admissions dean/director - Institutional research teams
		Provide the admissions committee with transparent access to the rank list and which applicants are being accepted.	- Admissions dean/director - Admissions committee chair
		Provide the admissions committee with year-end data reports related to offers, acceptances, withdrawals, and rejections.	- Admissions dean/director - Admissions team
		Analyze yield data to understand which interviewed applicants were accepted and which were not.	- Admissions dean/director - Institutional research teams

Holistic Considerations for the Admission Cycle: Checklist

Admission Cycle	✓	Considerations	Partners and Collaborators
Matriculating 		Explore ways to ensure your second look is equitable for all applicants (e.g., socioeconomic status, parental status).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions dean/staff - Student affairs dean/staff - DEI dean/staff
		Develop a protocol for following up with applicants who withdraw from your offer to identify opportunities for improvement in the next cycle.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions dean/director
		Work with institutional colleagues from student affairs, assessment, curriculum, and DEI to develop a thoughtful handoff from admissions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions dean/director - Student services team(s) (student affairs, financial aid, records) - DEI team - Curriculum and assessment teams
		Explore how to make the white coat ceremony and other early meaningful experiences (e.g., orientation, convocation) inclusive of all accepted applicants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student affairs dean/staff - DEI dean/staff - Admissions dean/director - Dean
		Take an inventory of the composition of your matriculated class and compare it with those of prior years to determine effectiveness of holistic review strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions dean/director - Admissions committee chair
		Use the AMCAS and TMDSAS data tables to benchmark and compare your previous and current classes with national-level data on mission-aligned selection criteria.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions dean/director - CQI personnel
		Use your student responses to the Matriculating Student Questionnaire to determine if and how you might make changes to your recruitment and selection processes to attract and matriculate applicants aligned with your mission.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions dean/director - Admissions committee - DEI dean
		Analyze yield data to understand which applicants matriculate and which do not.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions dean/director - CQI personnel

Holistic Considerations for the Admission Cycle: Checklist			
Admission Cycle		Considerations	Partners and Collaborators
Evaluating 		Formative evaluation occurs within all stages and can be done throughout a given cycle. Summative evaluation occurs at the end of the cycle and informs the next cycle. Identify opportunities to improve your next admission cycle based on your multiyear analysis of longitudinal data from applicants and matriculating students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assessment team - CQI personnel - Institutions research team - Institutional research/data analyst - Student affairs
		Review relevant accreditation documents related to admissions and student selection, including results from previous LCME reviews and institutional responses, to ensure continuous alignment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accreditation team
		Ensure continuous compliance with university, state, and federal regulations (e.g., FERPA, LCME, and state public records requirements).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legal counsel - Compliance office

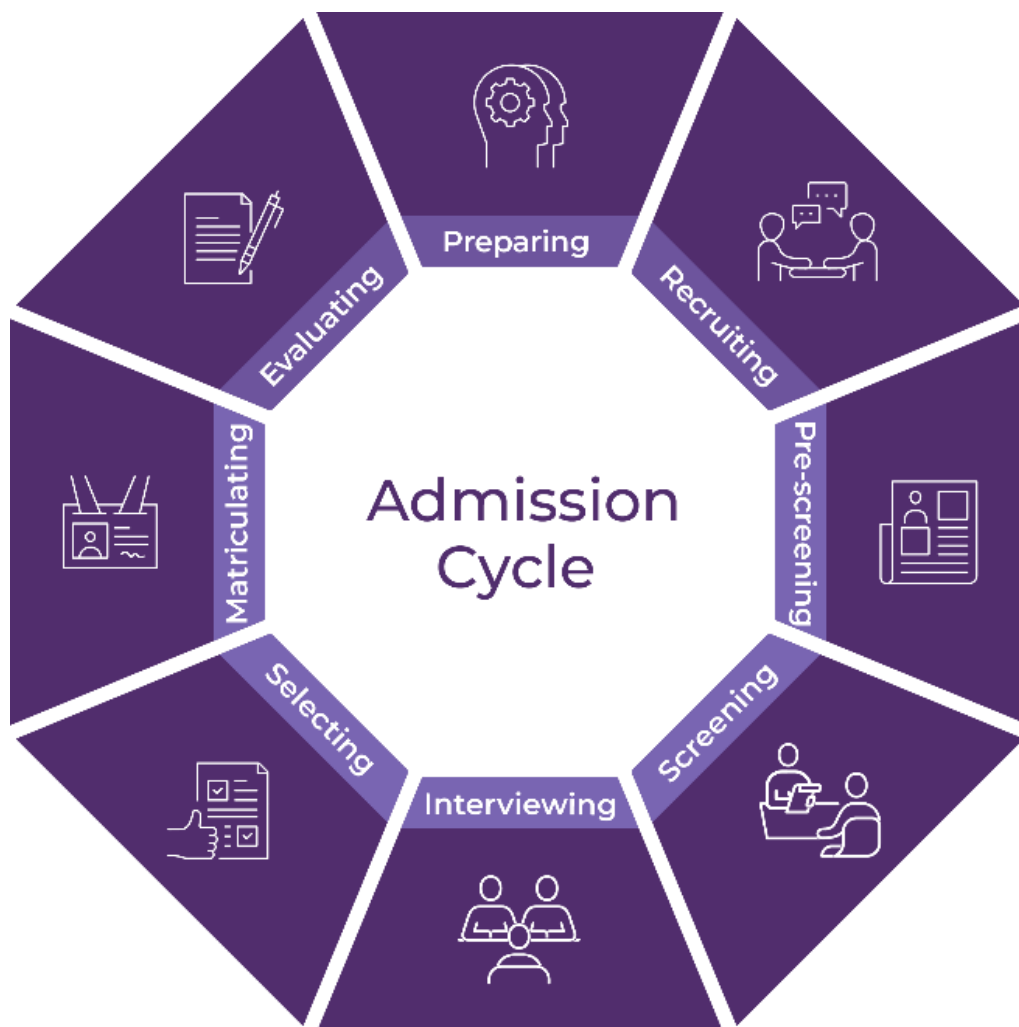
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Planning Worksheet

Planning Worksheet Overview

This worksheet will help you capture all the strategies you want to implement or adapt at your institution. Use it to list the desired action items your team identified and the target date for completion.



Planning Worksheet				
Admission Cycle		Action Item	Partners and Collaborators	Target Date
Preparing 				
Recruiting 				
Pre-Screening 				
Screening 				
Interviewing 				
Selecting 				

Planning Worksheet				
Admission Cycle		Action Item	Partners and Collaborators	Target Date
Matriculating 				
Evaluating 				

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AAMC COLLEAGUES

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