



Program Signals: A Guide for the 2026 ERAS® Season

What are Program Signals?

Program signals allow applicants to express interest in residency and fellowship programs at the time of application. These signals help programs make interview decisions but are only one factor among many in the selection process.

Pros and Cons of Different Signal Approaches

	Small Number of Signals	Two-Tier Signal (Gold/Silver System)	Large Number of Signals
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourages applicants to use signals strategically.• Higher interview invitation rates for those who signal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allows applicants to differentiate strong (or strongest) preferences.• Distributes signals more evenly across programs.• Gold signals have higher interview rates than silver, which still improves chances compared to no signal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allows applicants to indicate interest in a wider range of programs.• Broadens opportunities for applicants across different competitiveness levels.• Current data suggests offering more signals is likely effective in reducing application volumes.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fewer programs receive signals, concentrating them among select programs.• Some applicants feel limited by the small number of signals available, not being able to include all the programs of interest.• Programs cannot completely rely on signals to gauge applicants' interest in the program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not all applicants see a meaningful distinction between gold and silver signals.• Some programs may weigh gold heavily and devalue silver.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can dilute the impact of individual signals.• More difficult for programs to interpret meaningful interest.



Key Findings from the 2025 ERAS® Season

Overall participation

93% of ERAS-participating specialties opted-in to program signaling.

Applicant decision factors

Top influences for sending signals included:

- Geographic preference.
- Career alignment.
- Proximity to family.
- Perceived interview likelihood.
- Program fit.

Application behavior

Signals contributed to a decrease in the average number of applications per applicant.

Interview invitation rates

- **1-Tier System**
Higher rates for those who signaled; nearly zero for those who did not.
- **2-Tier System**
Gold signals resulted in more interview invites than silver; both outperformed applicants who didn't signal.
- **Variability by applicant type**
MDs benefited the most; DO and IMG applicants saw mixed results depending on specialty.



Next Steps for Specialties Considering Program Signals

- Review data to determine the most suitable signaling model.
- Engage with the community to discuss potential changes.
- Reach out to the ERAS team for guidance (erasRMteam@aamc.org).
- Specialty leadership submits a Program Signal Participation Agreement for the 2026 ERAS season.



Learn more about
Program Signaling for
the 2026 ERAS® Season.