

What Is Program Signaling?

A program signal is a way for applicants to proactively indicate interest to a limited number of fellowship programs during the application process. These signals serve as a nudge to programs that you're particularly enthusiastic about training there. While a signal doesn't guarantee an interview, it can help your application stand out in a highly competitive landscape.

Understanding Program Signaling: What It Is and How to Use It Effectively

As you prepare your fellowship applications, one strategic element to consider is *program signaling*. Introduced to enhance the recruitment process, signaling is your opportunity to express genuine interest in specific programs. But what exactly does that mean—and how can you use it wisely?

Why Does Signaling Matter?

In a virtual and increasingly expansive application environment, programs are receiving more applications than ever. Signaling helps programs identify which applicants are especially interested in their program at the time of application submission.

Programs also recognize that signaling is just one piece of the overall application. Your experiences, letters, and fit with the program still matter tremendously. A signal does not override those elements - it complements them.

How Should You Use Your Signals?

Here are a few best practices to guide your signaling decisions:

- **Be genuine:** Only signal programs that you are interested in at the time of application submission. Signals should reflect true interest, not just strategy.
- **Do your homework:** Research each program's focus areas, faculty, curriculum, and values to ensure your signal is informed and meaningful.
- **Be thoughtful:** Hospice and Palliative Medicine fellowships have chosen to allot applicants five signals, so think carefully about where they'll have the most impact. Programs vary in size and competitiveness; you might balance high-reach programs with ones where you feel you're a particularly strong match.
- **Be prepared for change:** A signal reflects your interest at the time of application. It's completely normal for your preferences to evolve after interviews and further interactions. However, a signal cannot be reassigned after application submission.

What a Signal Is Not

It's important to understand what signaling doesn't do:

- It doesn't guarantee an interview.

- It doesn't replace other forms of interest, like reaching out with thoughtful questions. It doesn't lock you into a decision- you can change your mind later.

Prohibited Program Behaviors Related to Signaling

When it comes to program signaling in the fellowship or residency application process, there are important **restrictions on what programs are *not* allowed to do**, especially within structured signaling systems like ERAS or NRMP. The goal is to ensure fair, equitable, and non-coercive experience for applicants. Here's what programs *are not allowed to do*:

- **Asking Applicants to Reveal Their Signals**
 - Programs may not ask or pressure applicants to disclose which programs they signaled. Programs MAY ask why the applicant signaled their program, but they MAY NOT ask why an applicant did NOT signal their program.
 - This includes formal interview settings and informal communications (e.g., email, social media, networking events).
- **Offering Interview Slots Based Solely on Signals**
 - While signals may indicate interest, interviews should not be offered solely based on whether an applicant signaled.
 - Programs are expected to continue reviewing non-signal applications seriously.
- **Offering Different Application Requirements for Signaled vs. Non-Signaled Applicants**
 - It is not permissible to have two tiers of application requirements or deadlines based on signaling status.
- **Discouraging Applicants from Signaling Other Programs**
 - Programs should not suggest that signaling them means the applicant should not consider or signal elsewhere.
 - Applicants retain full autonomy over their signal choices.
- **Misrepresenting What a Signal Means**
 - Programs must not imply a signal is a commitment or a guarantee of interest from either party.
 - Signals reflect interest at the time of application only and are not binding.

These limitations are intended to protect applicants from being coerced or strategically disadvantaged and to maintain the integrity of the match process.

FAQ:

What is a program signal?

A limited opportunity to tell a few programs you're especially interested in them.

How many signals do I get?

It varies by specialty or match system. Check official guidance for your year.

Does signaling guarantee an interview?

No, it can help, but it's not a guarantee.

Can a program ask where I sent my signals?

No. That's not allowed.

What if I'm applying to more than one specialty or discipline?

Plan your signals carefully. If allowed, you can split them across specialties but be strategic. Consider where you're most competitive and where a signal might have the most impact. Also, make sure your application materials (like your personal statement) reflect your dual interests clearly and honestly.

Can I change my mind later?

Yes. A signal shows interest at the time of application, it's not binding.

We wish you all the best as you navigate this exciting next step in your training journey and welcome you to the Hospice and Palliative Medicine family.

Mollie Biewald MD

mollie.biewald@mssm.edu

Chair of Fellowship Training Committee

Laura Witt, MS-HSM

LWitt@aahpm.org