

2025–26

Applicant Preference Signaling FAQs



Association of University
Professors of Ophthalmology



sfmatch

Residency and Fellowship Matching Services

Q

What is preference signaling?

A

Preference signaling, also known as program signaling, is a process where applicants can indicate a heightened level of interest in a program by sending the program a signal in the residency match process. When you submit your application, you can select specific programs to signal your heightened interest.

Medicine also incorporated preference signaling into their match process. The response from applicants in those specialties was similarly positive. Ophthalmology introduced preference signaling for the first time in 2024.

In the 2025 residency match cycle, 21 specialties, including ophthalmology, will participate in program signaling.

Q

Have other medical specialties used preference signaling in their selection process? How was it received by applicants?

A

ENT piloted preference signaling in the 2021 match cycle. They found that the addition of preference signals dramatically increased the chance an applicant received an interview from the programs they signaled. This benefit extended across the spectrum of applicant competitiveness and demographics. 77% of applicants indicated they thought preference signaling was a positive change to the match process.

In the 2022 match cycle, Urology, Dermatology, General Surgery, and Internal

Q

How will programs use my signals?

A

Each program will decide for itself how, when, and whether to use signals in its selection process. There is no uniform or prescriptive method for integrating signals into their evaluation process.

Q

How do I submit my signals to the programs I am interested in?

A

When you prepare your application with SF Match, you will have the opportunity to select up to ten (10) programs you want to signal. Your signals will be delivered to the programs when you submit your application.

Q

How many signals will I have?

A

Each applicant will have 10 signals.

Q

If I use my signal at a program that does not offer me an interview, can I reuse that signal for a different program?

A

No, signals cannot be retracted or reused once signals are sent.

Q

Do I have to use all 10 signals?

A

No, you may decide how many signals you would like to use; however, there is no downside to using all signals, and we strongly recommend you do so.

Q

If I signal a program, am I guaranteed to get an interview?

A

No, signaling a program does not guarantee an interview. However, signaling communicates your heightened level of interest in that program.

Q

Can I send more than one signal to the same program?

A

No, you can only send one signal per program regardless of your level of interest in that program.

Q

What if a program has two tracks in SF Match (research and clinical)? Does one signal apply to both tracks, or do I need to signal each track separately?

A

If you are strongly interested in both tracks in a program and want each to receive a signal, you would need to signal each track separately, thus using 2 of your 10 signals.

Q

Do I have to use all my signals during my initial application distribution, or can I send unused signals if I later apply to additional programs?

A

You are not required to use all 10 signals during your initial application distribution. You may send unused signals to additional programs on subsequent application distributions. However, you cannot add a signal to a program to which you have already applied.

Q

Are programs allowed to share information about the signals they receive with other programs?

A

No, programs are not allowed to share information on the signals they do or don't receive with other programs. This would be a violation of SF Match rules.

Q

Once I submit my signals, do I have any ability to change them or modify them?

A

No, once you submit your 10 signals, you cannot modify or change them.

Q

Will I still be able to personalize my personal statements to indicate my unique interest in specific programs?

A

Yes, SF Match allows unique personal statements for each program. You may use these personal statements to communicate specific interest in any program, regardless of whether you sent them a signal.

Q **Do I need to signal my home program if I am strongly interested in it?**

A Yes, you should signal the 10 programs you want to express strong interest in. If this includes your home program, a signal should be sent to this program. Faculty advisors at home institutions are also being advised to tell students to signal their home program if strongly interested in it.

Q **Do I need to signal programs where I have completed or plan to complete visiting electives?**

A Yes, if you have a heightened interest in programs in which you have or plan to complete a visiting elective, you should signal these programs. We recognize that some students may not have yet completed a visiting rotation at the time of their application submission. In this situation, we recommend discussing signaling of the program with a faculty advisor or mentor.

Q **Should I signal programs at which I complete or plan to complete an away rotation?**

A Yes, you should signal the 10 programs you want to express strong interest in. If you rotate or plan to rotate at a program where you have a strong interest, you should signal that program. Some students may not have yet completed a visiting rotation at the time of their application submission. In this situation, signaling should be discussed with a faculty advisor or mentor.

Q **Are there recommendations for how to use my signals?**

A You should signal the 10 programs you want to communicate your heightened interest in. The decision on which programs to send signals should be tailored to your individual needs and preferences. Consult with your advisors on how best to strategically use your signals. Relevant factors may include personal/family needs, career goals, geographic preferences, and the relative competitiveness of the applicant.

Q **Do I need to confirm that a program has received my signal?**

A No, when you submit your application with your assigned signals, the signals will automatically be delivered to the programs.

Q **Are programs allowed to advise me to send or not send them a signal?**

A Programs are not allowed to advise applicants whether they should signal their program. Even if you think a program knows of your heightened interest, you should signal them if they are in the top 10 programs you are interested in.

Q **Will applicants who signaled a program be ranked higher on the final rank list than those who did not?**

A Every program will incorporate these signals into its selection process differently. How applicants are ranked on the final rank list will be at the discretion of each program.

Q

Will programs tell us how they plan to use the signals they receive (for example, post their plan for using signals on a website), or can we call to inquire?

A

Programs may decide to publicize how they will use their signals, but it is not mandatory. Be mindful that this process is still relatively new. Many programs do not yet know if or how they will use the signals. They may also change how they utilize signals throughout the process. We do not recommend contacting programs to inquire about how they intend to use their signals.

We encourage any program that has decided definitively not to use signals in its selection process to make that information easily accessible to applicants.