



NRMP® Call for Public Comment Regarding Consideration of a Two-Phase Main Residency Match

The NRMP Board of Directors is evaluating the feasibility of a proposed Two-Phase Main Residency Match, to replace the current Match® and Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program® (SOAP®) processes and requests your input.

The public comment period will be open through Friday, September 2, 2022, and may be accessed: <https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/6961115/2022-Two-Phase-Match-Survey>. This version of the call for public comment is intended to augment the two-page document for those desiring more explanation.

Introduction: Since 1952, the mission of the NRMP (“The Match®”) has been in part to provide a matching process that is fair, equitable, efficient, transparent, and reliable for all participants. The Match was born of the need to manage the chaos and inequity that had become the norm during the residency training program offer and acceptance processes. Program directors would pressure applicants into training decisions early in their medical school education, reducing their ability to investigate training opportunities and restricting the time for applicants to respond to training offers. At the same time, applicants would hold offers until they were sure a better offer wasn’t forthcoming, creating a bottleneck and affecting opportunities for other applicants awaiting an offer. For 70 years, the NRMP has proudly served as the steward of a system that supports and promotes equity within the transition to residency and that continuously evolves to meet the changing needs of applicants, programs, institutions, and medical schools through improved Match processes, offerings, and resources.

Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program®(SOAP®): One such evolution was the implementation of SOAP. In 2012, SOAP was established to address instability and inequity during the post-Match period known as the “Scramble”, an ungoverned period during Match Week whereby unmatched or partially matched applicants attempted to obtain unfilled positions through an “open market”. SOAP created an orderly process for applicants who were partially matched or unmatched after the algorithm was run to apply for unfilled positions. With SOAP, eligible unmatched or partially matched applicants apply to unfilled programs, programs review applications and conduct short interviews, and then programs create preference lists of applicants to whom they intend to offer a position. Offers are extended to applicants through the NRMP’s Registration, Ranking, and Results® (R3) system in a series of rounds during which applicants have a two-hour window in which to accept or reject an offer. The process relies on a highly compressed timeline and program-preferenced offers to applicants and, by necessity, utilizes robust policies and requirements to ensure an orderly, equitable, and fair process.

For 10 years, SOAP has objectively improved the process for obtaining unfilled positions by employing policies that minimize the intrusion of third-party promises of a residency position. However, one must acknowledge the realities of applicants and programs participating in SOAP.

- At the onset of Match Week, programs learn if their positions have filled and applicants receive their Match status (i.e., matched, partially matched, or unmatched).

- Partially matched and unmatched applicants must, within a short time, ingest and reconcile their result (which may be career changing), update supporting documents, meet with advisors and mentors, research and apply to unfilled programs, and prepare for brief interviews if offered.
- After applications are submitted, applicants wait for contact from programs for brief interviews and then an offer for a training position during SOAP rounds. If no offer is received, or the offer is not accepted, the applicant may participate in subsequent rounds until all rounds are complete.
- Unfilled programs must, within a short time, convene a team of faculty and staff to review their Match status and reconcile the needs of the program, review applications, conduct interviews, and select applicants to whom they will make an offer. Programs generally review high numbers of applications and have limited time during which they may thoroughly evaluate and interview candidates.
- After offers are extended during the round, programs wait for an acceptance or refusal of the offer by an applicant. If the program's position(s) remains unfilled upon conclusion of the round, the program may extend offers in subsequent rounds until all rounds are complete or their position(s) are filled.

What problems are we trying to impact? While SOAP has objectively improved the process for obtaining unfilled positions, the process relies on a highly compressed timeline and program-preferenced offers to applicants. Increasing numbers of applicants, broad variation in recruitment methodologies by programs, and increasing stress among applicants and programs, leads the NRMP to consider possible solutions to alleviate some of the stressors inherent in the current transition to residency based on available evidence.

The time is ripe to seek ways in which improved Match processes and policies may:

- *Address issues impacting applicant wellness and agency:* Enhance processes that promote equity for all applicants, provide for applicant preferencing throughout the Match cycle, which is not provided for in SOAP, and reduce stressors associated with the current structure of Match Week.
- *Establish capacity for thoughtful decision-making:* Create opportunity for more thoughtful career development decision-making, allowing more time for applicants to seek advice and make well-reasoned decisions about training.
- *Support a holistic approach to the application and interview period:* Adjust timelines to support proactive, holistic application review and interview strategies, facilitating a program's ability to more thoroughly gauge alignment of applicant characteristics with program aims and mission.

Two-Phase Match Framework: A Two-Phase Match proposes two complete Match cycles within the footprint of the current Match period (September through March) and eliminating the current Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program[®] (SOAP[®]).

Guiding Principles: While not all encompassing, the following are overarching principles of a Two-Phase Match proposal:

- Each phase:
 - Requires submission of rank order lists by both applicants and programs, which is currently offered only during The Match (and not SOAP)
 - Utilizes the matching algorithm (applicant-proposing)

- Provides for time between each phase for applicants to research and vet program choices
 - Provides for time between each phase for programs to engage in a more holistic review
 - Increases the time for contact between programs and applicants not provided for in the compressed timelines of SOAP
 - Has two Match Days, providing for the release of the full results to all participants to facilitate transition planning and program planning
- Unmatched applicants and unfilled programs are rolled over from Phase One fostering continuity of participation, with all outcomes and agreements from Phase One honored throughout Phase Two.
 - Programs newly accredited by the ACGME, after the Rank Order List (ROL) Certification Deadline for Phase One, may register to participate in Phase Two.
 - Applicants who are ineligible to participate in Phase One, and whose eligibility status changes, would be allowed to register for and participate in Phase Two.

Proposed Timeline:



Summary and Request for Public Comment: Achieving fair and equitable processes for all participants across the matching cycle remains a critical principle of the Match. A Two-Phase Match would provide for preferencing by all participants in all phases of the Match, reduce some of the stressors inherent in the current matching and SOAP process, and improve the Match experience without altering the general Match timeline. However, the NRMP is cognizant that an evolution of the Main Residency Match process could result in changes in application, interview, and ranking behaviors, impact current eligibility verification timelines, and require a reimagining of Match Day ceremonies into more general Match celebrations. To that end, the NRMP Board is soliciting public comment on the perceived benefits and challenges associated with implementation of a Two-Phase Match.

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<https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/6961115/2022-Two-Phase-Match-Survey>.

On behalf of the NRMP Board of Directors and NRMP Staff, I thank you for your time and input regarding this very important discussion.

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