



No Match Monday
Emergency Medicine Advising Guide:
Program Directors Edition

Last edited June 2022

A Guide for Program Directors on How to Navigate the Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program (SOAP)

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<https://spooniversity.com/how-to/what-is-the-difference-between-sell-by-best-by-and-eat-by>

This guide is for Emergency Medicine Program Directors who receive notice that their programs did not fill in the Main Residency Match. The purpose of this guide is to explain and discuss how to participate in the Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program (SOAP).

The Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program (SOAP) is the process through which programs offer positions that were not filled in the matching algorithm to eligible applicants who went unmatched in the Main Residency Match¹.

Preparation

While no one wants to be pessimistic about the match, preparing for the possibility of not filling is critical for being able to optimize the SOAP process. Having appropriate time and resources are paramount to being ready for the SOAP.

It is helpful for Program Directors (PDs) to plan to be in town and be free from clinical duties during match week in order to best optimize preparation for the SOAP. The SOAP process is extremely time consuming so make sure you have planned adequate time to participate. It is also important to know who from your education faculty team will be available to assist. You need to have members of your residency team free and available for at least Tuesday and Wednesday of this week, but it will be beneficial to have one of your Assistant Program Directors (APD's) available each day of this week. Ensure that the Chair of the department is aware of the events of this week and have adequate coverage included in schedule requests for your team. If possible, having residents on standby as well could be very helpful as applicants will likely want to hear from some of the residents about their points of view.

Preparation Checklist:

- Program Director and Training Program Administrator have blocked off/flexible schedule
- Application review team
- Applicant contact plan
- Interview team
- Virtual interview set-up and plan
- Resident availability for interviews
- Scoring system and rank list plan

Another part of the preparation is to know where to go for the different processes that this week brings. Here are the different platforms you will use for the week:

- The notification that your program has not filled will come from National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) Registration, Ranking, and Results (R3)

- Medical students will apply to programs via the SOAP in Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS)
- Program interview invitations will go out through e-mail or through interview scheduling software (e.g. Thalamus)
- Interviews are at the discretion of the program. This can be done by video conference, phone, or in person depending on the current state of pandemic restrictions and specialty guidance.
- Notification of residency offers and their acceptance/rejection will go through NRMP R3.

Resources:

As with a sick patient in the Emergency Department, it is important to load the boat in a situation like this. Make sure the appropriate people are aware of the situation--this includes your department chair and hospital/institutional Designated DIO.

- [SOAP for Programs Video](#)

How the SOAP Works:

As an overview, the SOAP is managed in the NRMP's R3 system. The process begins at 9:00am the Monday morning of match week when programs are notified of their fill status. If a program did not fill, the SOAP process continues through four rounds of applications and offers until concluding the Thursday evening before match day. All rounds of SOAP matching take place on the Thursday of match week. See an example [Match Week and SOAP Calendar](#).

A major difference in the SOAP process compared to the main match is that applicants, or their representatives, are not allowed to contact programs outside of ERAS application until a program makes contact with the applicant.

Monday:

Step 1: The notification

On Monday, you will be notified of your fill status. Just like not matching, not filling can be a very isolating and discouraging experience. You just spent months of your life on recruiting, application review, and interviewing and for what? How could this have happened? It might feel like the floor just fell out from under you and it is perfectly okay to go through the stages of grief in those first few moments. It is important not to wallow and be able to start to look ahead to the next steps you can take to move forward.

Step 2: Deciding to Participate in the SOAP

As a residency program, you have the choice to decide whether or not to participate in the SOAP. Some questions you can ask yourself are:

1. Do we need to fill that open spot(s) or can we operate with a smaller class this year?
2. Do we want to recruit from the pool of unmatched applicants through the SOAP, or do we think we have a good chance to fill our open spot(s) through pathways outside of the SOAP? Importantly, you **CANNOT** send out offers until AFTER the SOAP ends on Thursday.

See instructions from NRMP on how to set up [SOAP participation](#). You need to activate your account settings to allow for SOAP participation even before the main match occurs. This does not commit you to participating, it simply sets you up to allow you to do so.

Pros of participating in the SOAP:

- The SOAP provides a formal process for which to fill open spots for programs. Like selling a house using a realtor--it's not necessary, but it takes care of a lot of the legwork for you.
- We all know the match algorithm is not perfect and each year there are totally reasonable EM applicants who due to poor application strategy or the whims of statistics go unmatched. Participating in the SOAP gives you the chance to discover and recruit these gems.
- Although the experience is intense and the hours are long, participating in the SOAP can allow you to have your open spot(s) filled by match day. There is comfort in the finality of having everything done and knowing what you are getting.

Cons of participating in the SOAP:

- We also all know that while there are gems to be found, there are also applicants who go unmatched for some very tangible reasons. Participating in the SOAP may feel like "settling" or like a set up for taking on learners with insurmountable challenges. Truthfully, you don't know what's out there until you start reviewing applications and you don't have to send out offers to anyone you would not feel comfortable training.
- The experience is intense and the hours are long. At the end of a long application season, you just may not feel like you have the energy, personpower, or support available to engage in this step of the process.

Tuesday/Wednesday:

Step 3: Reviewing Applicants

Tuesday morning at 8:00AM ET, ERAS opens the Program Director's Work Station (PDWS) for you to begin reviewing applications. Keep in mind, applicants can only apply to a total of 45 programs during the SOAP process and most will likely use all 45, or close to it, during the first round.

Just as we advise unmatched applicants to reflect on their application to try to determine “why didn't I match?,” you will likely start looking at applications with a similar thought in your mind, “why didn't this person match?” Sometimes the answer will be very clear, but you have to be careful to stop yourself from suspecting every application of having a fatal flaw. Remember that some of these applicants were the victim of a bad strategy or lack of good advising and will make great EM physicians at the right program. Take an introspective look at your program--what are your strengths? What skills gaps or educational challenges do you have experience with and confidence you can manage? One underused option to gain some clarity is always to reach out to letter writers or to the residency leadership team at programs where the applicant may have completed rotations. We know letters lack transparency and can contain a miscalculated message that a brief conversation with a colleague at the institution in question can clear up.

Remember also that applicants can't reach out to you until **you** initiate contact with them.

Be prepared to receive and review a large number of applications in a short period of time. A recent informal survey of PDs revealed that they received between 40 and **600(!)** applications that day. The number of applications received did not seem to correlate with the number of available positions either, so be prepared.

The aspirational principle of holistic review should still hold as you begin to sort through applications to your program. There may still be scenarios that you are not willing or able to take on. For example, if your institution does not have any available visa sponsorships, then it is okay not to review applicants whose training will require this.

Tuesday/Wednesday:

Step 4: Offering Interviews

Interview Strategy

An important difference to keep in mind with the SOAP vs the main match is that the SOAP algorithm is driven by program, rather than student, preference.

You may start contacting applicants on Tuesday as soon as you start receiving applications. It can be helpful to begin sending out interview offers in a rolling fashion rather than to wait until all applications are evaluated and send out the offers all at once. Just as in the main match, you may wish to create a primary list of applicants to interview and a “waitlist” to contact should applicants on the primary list decline the interview.

Interview offers may take place over the phone or by email. Since applicants need to evaluate programs and make decisions efficiently as well, it can be helpful to send interview candidates any online promotional materials you sent to applicants during the main match to help them get to know your program.

You may utilize any interview scheduling program with which you and your program coordinator are comfortable. Due to the compressed timeline of the SOAP, there are no mechanisms in place for ensuring applicants are not double (or triple) booking themselves. Anticipate cancellations and schedule changes, maintain flexibility.

Interviews will typically be held via virtual platform or by phone. It can be helpful to confirm that applicants have received the necessary links ahead of the interview time as some schools have firewalls set up that block these types of emails.

How many interviews to do is one of the biggest questions that PDs have when going through the SOAP. Too many is a waste of time, but too few and you may not fill. The true answer is that there is no “correct” number, as it may depend on the number of positions you have open, the perceived competitiveness of your program, as well as your program’s demographics and geography. In our PD survey, about half of the programs reported interviewing between 10-20 candidates per open spot, but some programs interviewed less and filled in the first round and others interviewed more and still had to go deep into the SOAP match to fill. There is extremely limited time, if any, to interview additional candidates in between rounds of the SOAP on Thursday, so you need to plan to interview everyone prior to the first round.

Tuesday/Wednesday:

STEP 4.5: Create SOAP preference list in R3

There is considerable strategy that goes into creating your SOAP preference list in R3. To understand the need for strategy, a program that has three open spots is able to send out three offers in the first round. Those three individuals that receive your offer will likely also receive offers from other programs. They then have two hours to choose

which program they will “match” to. In round two, if a program has an unmatched position after the preceding round, any applicant that accepted another position in round one will become unavailable. You will have to choose whom to offer in successive rounds for any remaining open positions based on remaining applicants. This means, simply choosing the “best” candidate with the highest scores, isn’t necessarily the best strategy. These “top” candidates will likely have multiple offers and if that individual doesn’t choose your program, you will lose out on the ability to offer other applicants that receive and accept offers in that round. Consider geography, interest in the specialty and interpreted interest in your program when making your list. While it is wonderful to get the best candidate in the SOAP, it is also unfortunate to miss out on all the other very good candidates who end up accepting offers elsewhere because you offered your spot to someone who may not have had a genuine interest in your program (or specialty).

Our advice is to create a preference list of applicants that you believe will realistically accept your offer. Although you will only send out a single offer per available spot in the first round, many students match in that first round so you will find that a large portion of your list will become unavailable for subsequent rounds and you will want to start with a robust list of potential candidates. Utilize part of the interview to gauge interest in both the program and if applied to a different specialty, their commitment to EM.

Thursday:

Step 5: Offer and Acceptance

SOAP Round 1

Once your program and applicants have entered their preference lists, the SOAP algorithm will generate the first round of offers which will be visible to applicants at 9:00AM ET. Applicants have two hours to either accept or reject any offers they receive before the offers automatically expire. Applicants will not be able to get offers back once they have expired.

SOAP Round 2

If your program has not filled its open position(s) in round 1, an updated list of eligible applicants will be made available at 11:05 AM ET, once the first round has been completed. The majority of open positions will be filled in the first round and most applicants will have submitted all or nearly all of their 45 allowed applications in the first round, so it is very unlikely that you will receive any new applications after round one is completed. If your program still has available positions, you will have until 11:55AM ET to modify and re-certify your program preference list for round two.

Applicants receive round two offers at 12:00PM ET and have until 2:00PM ET to accept or reject any offers made.

SOAP Round 3

If your program still has an unfilled position(s), you will have until 2:55PM ET to modify and re-certify your program preference list for round three.

Applicants receive round three offers at 3:00PM ET and have until 5:00PM ET to accept or reject any offers made.

SOAP Round 4

If your program still has an unfilled position, you will have until 5:55PM ET to modify and re-certify your program preference list for round four.

Applicants receive round four offers at 6:00PM ET and have until 8:00PM ET to accept or reject any offers made.

After round four, the SOAP is completed. If your program or any other program has any unfilled positions, including those programs not participating in the SOAP, you submit your number of remaining unfilled positions on the List of Unfilled Programs. Applicants can then begin contacting any remaining unfilled programs and programs can update the list as positions are filled.

Recruiting Outside of the Match

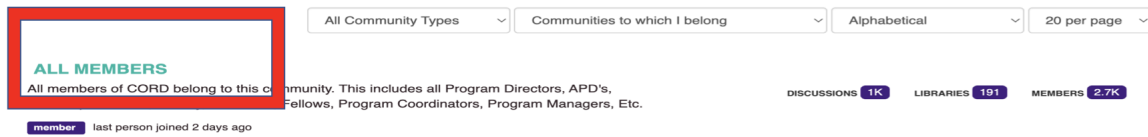
If you do not fill through the SOAP process or choose not to participate, you may choose to recruit outside of the match. One important thing to remember is that by the rules of the match, if a program participated in the main match, they are not allowed to recruit independently until after the SOAP process is complete. Failure to wait for the SOAP process to conclude could result in a program's being suspended from further match participation.

Recruiting outside of the match may include using email, phone calls or word of mouth. Students have the option not to participate in the SOAP as well, so there may be some candidates waiting for the SOAP to conclude to begin their residency position search, such as those who may be graduating off cycle and were not eligible to participate in the match process. The pool is likely to be small, and a great place to get the word out that your program has an available spot is to send an email through the CORD listserv that your program still has spots to fill.

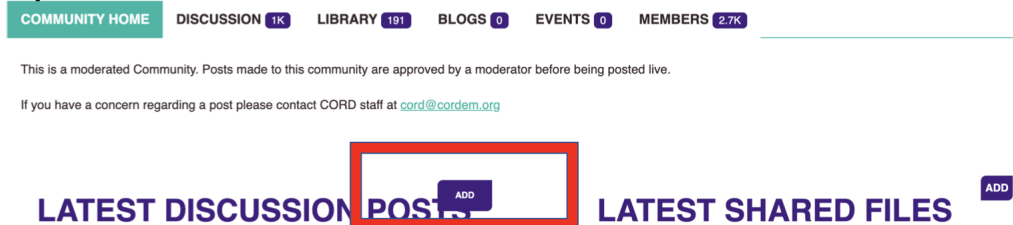
1. Log into your CORD account at: <https://www.cordem.org/> (log in button is top right of screen)

2. Click on “My Communities” and you will see “All Members” Click on that

MY COMMUNITIES



3. You will see the below screen, click “Add” located by latest discussion posts



4. After clicking “Add” you will see the screen below. Feel free to write the description of your program then click post.

START NEW THREAD

Post to community

ALL MEMBERS

Cross post to (optional)

NO ADDITIONAL THREADS

Discussion subject

Yes Automatically insert content preview for links

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Words of Advice

Remember, the SOAP exists for a reason and it is okay if a program does not fill all of their spots in the main match! Not filling is something that program leadership and institutions should not take personally. With the changing landscape of medicine and EM as a specialty, particularly with the effects of COVID restrictions on away rotations and interviewing, the process of recruiting and matching into EM has evolved from where it was just a few years ago. If there is one thing that we've learned from Emergency Medicine, it's that we support each other through the tough times and can get through any problem together. You are never alone and should not feel embarrassed or isolated. CORD and the EM community are here for you to provide help and support through the SOAP.

REFERENCES:

1. <https://www.nrmp.org/residency-applicants/soap/>
2. <https://www.cordem.org/globalassets/files/academic-assembly/2016-aa/handouts/new-programs--leaders/npl-fair---soap-for-the-program-director.pdf>