

Supporting Dual-Career Families: It Takes a Village, or Maybe Just a Good, Strong Bicycle Wheel

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Dual-career matters have become such a significant component of faculty recruitment and retention that you can't talk about one without the other. Since most of our faculty have working partners and spouses—some of whom are also academics, some in other professions—providing dual-career assistance can be crucial for a successful recruitment for the institution and long-term happiness for our faculty families.

At Harvard, we take a holistic approach. We are recruiting or retaining a family, not just an individual. We focus on fostering strong partnerships, both internally and externally, to make the transition and long-term experience of the faculty family as smooth and productive as possible. We concentrate on developing networks, making connections, and opening doors.

We think of it as a bicycle wheel. The dual-career job-seeker and the institutional point-person or “broker” are in the center of the wheel. The important partners are the spokes. Deans, department chairs, and faculty help to evaluate candidates for faculty positions; HR recruiters match job-seekers to relevant administrative positions and make introductions to hiring managers; colleagues in Work/Life work closely with families on their dependent care and schooling needs, among other things; colleagues in the housing office help identify housing options that work; and experts in the international office help faculty and their dependents from other countries to obtain work visas.

For spouses who are academics, the [Higher Education Recruitment Consortium](#) can point out relevant job opportunities at HERC-member institutions in our region, and offer professional development webinars and events for members and job-seekers and resources to facilitate more diverse and effective search and hiring processes. Since we have a robust network of colleagues at area institutions, we can often help each other by circulating CVs and resumes; we gather regularly to discuss best practices and new ideas to inform what we do. The bicycle wheel never seems to stop rolling!

None of these efforts are unique to Harvard. Many universities have recognized the importance of focusing on the needs of family members in faculty recruitment and retention. Some important studies have highlighted the needs of dual-career couples and an increasingly diverse faculty, including the [Dual-Career Research Report by the Clayman Institute for Gender Research at Stanford University](#) and the [Dual Career Survey Report by the University of Virginia](#). [Articles](#) that highlight [helpful dual-career practices](#) are also being written.

By fostering strong and ongoing partnerships, we are creating positive, productive experiences and a sense of good will that carries throughout the work and life experience of our faculty families, and all the people and institutions who support them. The bicycle wheel gets stronger as it rolls.