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## What are Best Practices for Conducting Hiring Interviews?

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## What are Best Practices for Conducting Hiring Interviews? (Blog Post)

Posted on August 3, 2020

When it comes to conducting hiring interviews, many managers rely more on their gut instincts regarding what questions to ask and how to evaluate candidates' responses in order to decide who to hire. Given the importance of hiring for achieving agency outcomes, it makes sense to invest time and attention into planning how to conduct your interviews. The QIC-WD reviewed the research on [hiring interviews](#) and found evidence of a number of factors that can improve the effectiveness of your interview practice.

- **Plan ahead.** As with many things in life, advance preparation will yield the best results when you conduct hiring interviews. If your agency has recently conducted a job analysis to describe the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) needed to perform the job you're hiring for, you're in luck and can use those results to create your interview. If not, you will want to take time to think through what KSAs are needed. Consider the ways in which your good performers and poor performers differ as suggestive of potential KSAs that are important, such as writing skills, speaking skills, knowledge of computer spreadsheets, or handling difficult customers with tact and patience. You will want to create interview questions that allow applicants to illustrate whether they have these important characteristics. For example, if the job requires the ability to think critically about situations, you could create an interview question that asks the candidate to "think out loud" or analyze a common on-the-job situation you describe, so that you can learn how they would approach that type of situation in the future. If a particular skill is important for a candidate to have in order to perform the job well, don't leave it to chance to find out if they possess that quality; design a question to determine it. However, avoid focusing on knowledge, skills, or situations that will be covered in post-hire training or learned on the job. For example, if new employee training teaches new staff how to use agency protocols to conduct an assessment, it would be inappropriate to have an interview question that asks job candidates to explain the agency's assessment protocol.
- **Add some structure.** For each question you've created, you'll need a way to decide if the candidate's answer is a good one or not. The best way to do this is to create what is called a descriptively anchored scoring scale. Basically,



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this is a bulleted list of the key things that a candidate should ideally say (or not say) when they answer the question that would illustrate their level of competence in this area. For example, you could create a rating scale from 1 to 5, with specific descriptive examples listed next to each number to indicate what each one represents in terms of potential answers a candidate could give. The examples listed for a “5” would be the best possible responses and those listed for a “1” would be the poorest potential responses. Strive to create an interview question and answer key for each one of the most important knowledge or skills needed for doing the job. Once you’ve created all of your questions and the descriptively anchored rating scales, assemble them all into a written document that lists each of the interview questions followed by that question’s scoring key. Use this document as your road map to guide the interview for all of your candidates for the position. Having a predetermined set of questions that tap into the needed characteristics and a scoring guide for each question will help you to treat all candidates fairly and leads to more accurate decisions about which candidate comes closest to having all the qualities needed to do a good job.



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- **Create questions that tap into situations.** Research shows that there are two types of interview questions that will elicit useful information on which to judge your candidates.
  1. A **situational question** describes a situation that the candidate may encounter on the job and asks them to explain what they would do in that situation and why.
  2. A **behavior description question** asks the candidate to describe a situation from their past that illustrates how they have responded. For example, you can ask the candidate to tell you about a time when they had to use their discretion in a difficult situation with an unhappy customer.

While research has shown that the two types of questions are not interchangeable or equivalent in the type of information candidates provide, neither question type has been shown to be clearly superior. Some knowledge or skills lend themselves better to one or the other type of interview question. Both types of questions are most effective when they are scored with descriptively anchored rating scales, meaning that you think through what a “good” and “poor” response might be to each question and create a brief list of indicators of each type of potential response on your answer key.

- **Train and standardize interviewers.** Research shows the value of using the same interviewers for all candidates you’ll be interviewing for a position, either a single interviewer or a panel of interviewers. Either way, you’ll

achieve greater consistency in how candidates are evaluated if you provide the interviewers with an orientation (in advance) to the purpose of the interviews, the list of interview questions, the desired answers, and how the questions relate to the job in question. If you choose to use an interview panel, consider (in advance of the interview) how to integrate the panel members' views of the candidates to

inform your decision-making. For example, if your panel will be interviewing a series of consecutive candidates all day, leave time in between each candidate for the panel to rate the candidate and discuss their impressions while they're still fresh. You may wish to average across all panelists' ratings of a candidate or use consensus discussions to resolve any differences and arrive at final hiring decisions.



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For more information on evidence-based practice in hiring interviews, refer to the QIC-WD's Umbrella Summary on [Employment Interviews](#).