



WISCONSIN STATE FAIR PARK INTERVIEW & SELECTION GUIDE

The employment interview is a critical part of the hiring process as much of the hiring decision hinges on the interview between the employer and the candidate. This document serves as a resource for staff who need guidance on how to plan and conduct employment interviews, including how to create questions that elicit responses that are essential to making a hiring decision and to avoid illegal discrimination. It serves as a supplement to the [WSFP Recruitment & Selection Policy \(Section VIII.B\)](#). This guide should be used by hiring supervisors who ultimately conduct the interview and recommend or make the hiring decision.

THE INTERVIEW

The interview is essentially an information-gathering activity for both the employer and the candidate. For the hiring organization, the interview enables the hiring official to collect information to assist in making a hiring decision (e.g. reference checks). For the candidate, the interview provides information to help him or her decide if the organization and job are a match for his or her education/work background and career/job goals.

Therefore, a good employment interview should accomplish the following:

1. Provide the employer with facts and information to make a decision about whether a match exists between the position and the candidate in terms of what is required for success.
2. Provide the candidate with information to help make a decision on whether a match exists between his or her interests; goals; knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs); and the organization's needs.
3. Treat all candidates fairly, equally, and professionally. This helps WSFP select the best candidate, persuade a candidate to accept a job offer, and also prevent the potential for public relations and/or legal challenges.

PLANNING THE INTERVIEW

A good interview elicits facts and information from the candidate so that the employer can decide if the candidate is a "best fit" for the job. The most effective interview approach is to obtain specific information that demonstrates that the candidate is likely to succeed, if hired. To do this, the interview must be carefully planned and conducted. Job-related questions should be developed and the interviewers must assess how the information they collect will be used to evaluate the candidates. To develop good interview questions:

1. Analyze the job. Identify the critical or essential elements of the job. The interviewers should focus on key job responsibilities and the person's skills and abilities to perform those key responsibilities.
2. Develop job-related questions to collect as much information from the candidate as possible. These questions can take several forms:
 - a. Situational/Experience-based questions ask the candidate to provide specific examples of how and when he or she has successfully performed certain activities that are important to the job.
 - b. Job knowledge questions assess whether the candidate has the required knowledge to do the job.
 - c. Simulation questions require the candidate to analyze job situations and describe how he or she would react or perform.
 - d. Questions that focus on job-related areas like "willingness" to meet work requirements (e.g., long/weekend hours and shift work), motivation, and interest.

Prepare open-ended questions which make the candidate provide specific examples of when he or she has performed the activities required of the vacancy. For example, if the job requires analytical skills, the question may be: *"Please give me a specific example of how you have analyzed a problem and identified a solution which was implemented."* For a supervisory position: *"Describe a specific example where you effectively dealt with a performance problem."* Don't accept generalized or hypothetical examples (that is, a response which would probably begin, *"In a case like that I would..."*).

In all cases, the supervisor must know in advance what he or she considers a “good” response. One approach is to develop a sample response that will enable the interviewers to systematically evaluate each candidate’s responses. Sample responses are quite specific, and they clearly suggest that some answers are better than others (See [Attachment #1](#) for a sample question and response). At a minimum, have some idea of how to identify a suitable candidate for the position.

SELECTING THE INTERVIEW PANEL

The next step is to decide who will be the interviewers. The people chosen should be individuals who are knowledgeable in the field and know the requirements of the position. Generally, interviewers’ are at the same level or above the level of the vacancy. However, there are situations where it may be worthwhile to have people who are at a lower level participate on the panel (e.g., subordinates interviewing candidates for a supervisory position).

At least a two- or three-member interview panel is recommended. An effort should be made to have a balanced panel, which includes two members from targeted groups, e.g., female, minority, and/or a person with a disability. There may be situations where it is not possible to find two panel members who represent targeted groups. If this is the case, proceed with selecting other qualified panel members. Reference the [WSFP Balanced Panel Policy](#).

SCHEDULING INTERVIEWS

1. Schedule the interested candidates to interview at a specific date and time. Reference Section VIII.B of the [WSFP Recruitment and Selection Policy](#) for specific responsibilities of those involved in scheduling.
2. If possible, provide each candidate with information regarding the position, e.g., copy of the Position Description (PD), organizational chart, etc., if not already included in the job announcement. If time does not allow for mailing or emailing a PD, the candidate could arrive earlier than their interview time to review the PD prior the interview.
3. Provide the candidate with details on where the interviews will be held (e.g., a map or directions to the building, where they can park, where to go once in the building). In addition, let the person know what they should bring to the interview (e.g., resume, names of references, writing sample).

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

1. The first impression the panel gives is just as important as the first impression the candidate gives. This includes attire, punctuality, and physical surroundings.
2. Arrange appropriate interview space in an area free from traffic and distractions. Make sure the area is uncluttered and presentable. Have a separate waiting/holding area. Set up the room to ensure that it is not intimidating to the candidate.
3. Make the individual feel comfortable; this can be done by establishing rapport with the candidate. For example, talk about the weather, a recent sporting event, or something in the local news.
4. Introduce each member of the interview panel, their name and title/position.
5. Outline the interview procedure. Tell the candidate what is going to happen during the interview. For example, the interviewer might say that the interview will include describing the job, then one person or all panel members will ask questions that will allow the candidate to relate his/her background to the job requirements, and then time will be allowed for the candidate to ask questions. Let the candidate know if the interview will be timed.

Note: It is recommended that interviewers alternate asking the questions so that the candidate feels that he/she is talking with everyone and is more comfortable. It can be difficult if just one interviewer is asking the questions because the candidate may have a hard time deciding whom to look at.

6. Explain the position. “Sell” the position and WSFP, but do not “oversell” them. Provide an accurate picture of the organization and department, the job, training, etc. Creating unrealistic expectations will not be to the long-term benefit of WSFP or the candidate. Job decisions should be based on realistic

information, from the view of both the employer and the candidate. Avoid any negative comments, remarks, or personal opinions about the position, organization, or other state agencies.

7. Tell the candidate that the panel members will be taking notes during the interview and, although they may not have eye contact with them, they are listening. The purpose in taking notes is so interviewers can recall each candidate and the interview.
8. Ask the pre-determined questions. While panel members may follow-up on responses provided by candidates for clarification or ask specific questions they have regarding the candidate's work/education history based on the resume or application, they should not ask a job-related question of one candidate that they would not of the next. For example, an interview panel member for an Office Assistant position may ask a candidate about their recent work history or gaps in employment shown on an application/resume but should not ask the candidate if they have experience in Microsoft Office products if they do not ask all other candidates the same question as that question could definitely be weighted heavier than other questions and thus, propel a candidate to the top.
9. Listen. While this may seem obvious, many interviewers spend a majority of the time talking, not listening. The main objective of interviewers should be to obtain information – and that requires listening. A good guideline is that the candidate should talk for 70 to 80 percent of the time.
10. Remain in command. Make sure the interview covers the questions you need to cover. If the candidate takes too much time answering a question, politely thank him or her for the response and move on. At times, the candidate may miss the intent of the question. If necessary, ask the question again, clarify, or press for more information. In order to ensure that all interviewees are treated equally, it is important to refrain from coaching the candidate.
11. Allow the candidate to ask questions as the interview must enable the candidate to evaluate whether the job is right for him or her.
12. Ask for permission to contact their references. If a current supervisor is listed as a contact, verify that it is okay to contact that person.
13. Describe what will happen next in the selection process. If possible, provide some time estimates of when the candidate will be contacted again.
14. Thank the candidate for their time.

EVALUATING INTERVIEW RESULTS

After the interview, the interview panel must evaluate the responses. The fundamental question is: *To what extent did the candidate demonstrate that he or she is a best fit for the job in the areas covered by the interview?* To answer that question, the interview panel should focus on job-related substance as well as organizational fit.

Document the interview evaluations in some manner. At a minimum, interviewers should make detailed notes on each candidate's responses and record any significant observations of job-relevant behavior (delivery, organization of responses, extent to which responses satisfy sample or desired responses, etc.). (See [Attachment #2](#) for Common Mistakes to Avoid When Evaluating Candidates) Interview notes/evaluations should be kept for four calendar years from the date of the interview, in accordance with the [WSFP Records Retention Policy for HR](#).

THE INTERVIEW AND LEGAL ISSUES

Poorly conducted interviews can result in legal action. Federal laws dating back to the 1960s, as well as state laws, make it illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, color, gender, age, disability, arrest or conviction record, pregnancy or childbirth, marital status, genetic testing, religion, national origin or ancestry, sexual orientation or political affiliation (these are known as protected classes). (See s. 230.18, Wis. Stats.) As a result of the creation of these laws, it is incumbent upon interviewers to avoid asking questions which *in any way* relate to these factors. If questions related to these factors are asked, legal action by the candidate could result.

The best way to ensure that hiring decisions are fair and based on merit is to restrict interview questions to job-related areas. Focus on the job's requirements. For example, if long hours or weekend work is required, do not

ask candidates whether they have child care responsibilities; instead, ask all candidates if they are able to commit to working long hours or weekends as required by the job. If the job requires lifting or walking, do not ask a visibly disabled candidate if his or her disability would be a problem; instead, ask each candidate if they can perform the required task. (See [Attachment #3](#) for a listing of permissible inquiries)

If a candidate *volunteers* any protected class information, the interviewer is not allowed to follow up on the information. They must instead inform the candidate that all hiring decisions are made in accordance with the law and based on the candidate's merit/demonstrated ability to do the job. They should then steer the conversation back to the actual interview as soon as possible.

If the interview focuses on job-related areas and the interview panel covers the same areas with all candidates, then legal problems should be minimal or non-existent. If there is any doubt as to whether the interview question may be discriminatory, the panel should not ask the question.

Note: Additional information on interview questions and potential legal issues can be found in the Department of Workforce Development's publication, [Wisconsin's Fair Employment Law, #1 in a Series, Fair Hiring & Avoiding Discriminatory Interview Questions](#).

CHECKING REFERENCES

Reference checking is frequently the final selection activity a hiring supervisor engages in and, therefore, an important part of the selection process. Some points to follow when conducting reference checks:

1. Check at least two references. Obtaining multiple references allows the supervisor to look for consistency among comments and to demonstrate reasonable care was used in the hiring process. The best references generally come from former supervisors. Peers and subordinates are also excellent references. The most effective approach is to contact the references by telephone or in person. Generally, writing or sending email to the contact is not effective, because it is more difficult to ask follow-up questions or have the level of dialogue that may otherwise occur when speaking directly to the person.

In addition, many employers may be hesitant to provide any information about past employment relationships because of the potential for allegations of slander. An option is to have the candidates sign a release that allows the reference to provide information regarding the individual without legal implications. If you are having trouble obtaining more than just job titles and dates, contact HR.

2. Use people to do reference checking who are familiar with the position. The individual should be prepared to ask follow-up questions where needed. For example, a reference contact may say, "She was the best employee we ever had." In this situation, follow up with a question such as, "Could you give me examples of how her performance was so outstanding?"
3. When calling an individual for a reference, identify yourself. Assure the contact that any discussion will be held in confidence and used for hiring purposes only. Ask the person if they are available to answer your questions; if not, arrange a time to call back. Briefly explain the position and ask your prepared questions.
4. Be consistent with each contact and ask the same questions about each candidate.
5. Ask open-ended questions about job performance. Avoid questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no." Be sure that all questions relate directly to job performance. A good question to ask the contact at the end of the discussion is, "Would you hire this person for the position for which he/she has interviewed? Why or why not?" (See [Attachment #4](#) for Sample Reference Questions)
6. Verify licenses and degrees if important to the position. One of the most common deceptions on resumes is claiming to hold a degree that was never conferred or a license that was never issued. If appropriate, call the state licensing board or the college or university registrar's office for confirmation for those positions where degree/license is critical.
7. Maintain documentation on all reference checks as part of the selection process materials, in accordance with the [WSFP Records Retention Policy for HR](#).

Proceed with making a hiring decision after completing the reference checks.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTION AND RESPONSE GUIDE*

Question – An XYZ analyst within our agency uses a variety of analytical techniques while performing their daily duties. Please explain the training and/or experience you have had in the applied use of statistical tools and analysis techniques and give us some examples of when you applied use of those tools and techniques.

Response:

More than Acceptable	Candidate has education and experience in using statistical tools and analysis techniques. An excellent candidate will have a minimum of three courses in descriptive statistics, correlation, and significance testing. Person will have experience collecting and analyzing large data sets. He/She has been able to apply this to on-the-job situations, i.e., using SPSS, SAS, SYSTAT, or Minitab or other standard commercial statistical packages to analyze data, using formulas frequently on the job, etc. Candidate will provide examples of when he/she used statistical tools and techniques and the outcome. Examples indicate a high level of usage and extensive knowledge.
Acceptable	Candidate will have a minimum of two courses in descriptive statistics, correlation, and significance testing. Person will have some hands-on experience in the use of statistical tools and analysis techniques such as via an Excel spreadsheet or similar routine. Response may indicate an interest in working with statistics. Candidate will provide examples of when he/she used statistical tools and techniques and the outcome.
Less than Acceptable	Candidate will have little or no education or experience in the use of statistical tools and analysis techniques. Candidate may have taken a Statistics course in school but will need formal or on-the-job training in order to apply this knowledge when developing exams. No real opportunity to apply what was learned in the classroom to practical problems. Candidate is unable to provide examples of when he/she used statistical tools and techniques.

*It may be useful, but not required, for each interviewer to assign a numeric (5=more than acceptable, 3=acceptable, 1=unacceptable) or categorical (A-B-C) evaluation to each candidate's responses in each of the areas covered by the interview. This may facilitate interviewer discussion (optional), aid in sharpening their evaluations, and help in tabulating and summarizing the results. Another technique would be for each interviewer to rank order the candidates from high to low on some basis but this rank-order approach encourages a global evaluation that risks increasing not only contrast effects between candidates but halo error as well. In addition, rank-order techniques do not work well when more than a handful of candidates are to be interviewed and evaluated.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID WHEN EVALUATING CANDIDATES

Do not base your evaluation on irrelevant or unimportant job or candidate characteristics. Frequently, those involved in the selection process will try to interpret the candidate's information in terms of something other than its likely implications for job success. For example, they may attempt to interpret the candidate's information in terms of personality or character traits. "I get a feeling of flexibility and creativeness from her." Or they may simply focus on how the candidate "came across." "This candidate seems like a dud." While such generalizations may or may not be true, their relevance to the candidate's probable job success is unclear. To help avoid such problems, think only in terms of the direct relevance of candidate based information to probable success in the high importance job areas. Avoid the temptation to infer personality or character traits from candidate information. Avoid basing a decision on "similar to me" or how the individual compares to current employees.

Do not make overall judgments. Many times evaluators will make an overall judgment about the suitability of a candidate, e.g., "I was extremely impressed with this candidate." Then they use this overall judgment as the primary basis for evaluating the candidate in specific high importance areas. In other situations, the interviewer will base a decision on first impressions and physical appearances. This is technically referred to as "halo error." The result of halo error is that the candidate gets about the same evaluation in each high importance area, despite the fact that the candidate might differ considerably from one area to the next. To avoid problems, pay close attention to the broadest possible sample of candidate information, and then make careful independent evaluation of the candidate on each high importance item.

Do not make quick evaluations and decisions. There is evidence that evaluators often make quick judgments about job candidates. "Snap" evaluations almost certainly reduce decision quality. To avoid such problems, give the candidate a chance and review all of the person's information that has been furnished in the high importance areas. This will increase the likelihood that the broadest possible sample of high importance applicant information will be reviewed and evaluated in making predictions about job success.

Do not overemphasize negative information. Evaluators may place greater emphasis on negative or "bad" information than on positive or "good" information when evaluating candidates. If negative information dominates the evaluations, it is likely that the evaluators will make quick or "snap" decisions about the candidates or only pay attention to a small portion of what the candidate furnished.

Do not compare the candidates with one another when evaluating them. There is evidence which suggests that how a job candidate is evaluated depends upon the nature of the preceding candidates. These are termed "contrast effects," and the term means that interviewers may contrast one candidate with the other candidates. For example, a candidate might receive relatively lower evaluations if preceded by a number of "high quality" candidates than if preceded by a number of "low quality" candidates. To help avoid contrast effects, evaluate each candidate against those job areas of the position you've identified as high importance rather than against other candidates.

INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

Interview questions should elicit information that will allow the employer to determine the candidate's job-related skills and experience, availability to work the hours required, qualifications and ability to do the work, goals, intelligence, aptitude, and personality. The following guide may be helpful in defining, under federal anti-discrimination laws, what inquiries/questions are permissible and those that are not. Interviewers should consult with Human Resources should there be any doubt or questions *prior* to an interview.

SUBJECT	APPROPRIATE*	INAPPROPRIATE
Address	What is your address?	Do you own or rent your home? How long have you lived at your present address?
Age	Can you show proof of age upon hire? Are you over 18 years of age? If not, can you produce a work permit upon hire?	Age Birth date Dates of attendance at elementary or high school (or college) Dates of military service
Arrest or Criminal Record	Have you ever been convicted of a crime? (if the information has bearing on necessary job functions) *WSFP interviewers should avoid initiating <u>any</u> questions related to arrest or criminal record.	Have you ever been arrested? About convictions unless the information bears on job performance.
Credit Ratings or Garnishments	Nothing, unless job related.	About credit ratings since it usually has little or no relation to job performance. *It is a Civil Rights violation to refuse to hire an individual if the refusal is based even in part on the person's poor credit rating.
Citizenship	Indicate that proof of the applicant's legal right to work in the U.S. will be required after the hiring decision.	Are you a U.S. citizen? Where were you born? Where were your parents born?
Disabilities	Are you able to perform the essential functions of this job? About knowledge and skills necessary to perform the job requirements.	Do you have any disabilities? What is the nature or severity of your disability?
Education	Training and experience related to job requirements.	About education that is not related to job performance.
Family	About freedom to travel if job requires and ability to meet work schedule requirements.	About family planning, family size, children's ages, child care plans, spouse's employment or salary.
Gender	Applicant's gender but only if gender is a required qualification (demonstrably related to job performance).	Questions regarding pregnancy, birth control, children, child bearing, or childcare plans. Questions inquiring whether an applicant's spouse will allow him/her to travel.

SUBJECT	APPROPRIATE*	INAPPROPRIATE
Height & Weight	About ability to perform the job requirements <u>only</u> if height or weight is a qualification, which is demonstrably related to safe and efficient job performance.	How much do you weigh? How tall are you? (The Civil Rights Act indicates that unless an employer proves otherwise, height requirements are discriminatory).
Marital Status	Nothing	Whether person is married, single, separated, divorced, engaged or widowed.
Military Service	Questions regarding relevant experience gained during military service.	Questions regarding military experience, e.g., dates of service and type of discharge.
Name	Current legal name “Is additional information, such as a different name or nickname necessary in order to check job reference?”	Whether person has worked under a different name. Questions which divulge marital status or ancestry.
National Origin	Ability to speak, read, or write English or a foreign language if the job requires.	About ancestry, birth place of applicant, parents or spouse.
Notice in Case Of Emergency	Statements that the name and address of an individual to be notified in case of accident or emergency will be required <u>upon hire</u> .	Name, address, and <i>relationship</i> of relative or other individual to be notified in case of accident or emergency.
Organizations	List all job-related organizations, clubs, or professional societies to which you belong.	About all organizations the person belongs to or organizations which indicate race, color, creed, gender, marital status, religion or national origin. Questions related to political affiliations or union membership.
Pregnancy	Nothing	Are you pregnant or planning to become pregnant? Are you planning to start a family?
Race	Statement that a photograph may be required <u>after the hiring decision is made</u> .	Questions requiring applicant to identify race, complexion, color of skin, hair or eyes. Questions requiring applicant to identify attitudes about working with, supervising or being supervised by, a person of another race.
Religion	Statement of the employer’s regular working hours, days, or shifts and asking whether the applicant can work that schedule.	Religion of applicant. Any questions which lead to elicit information about an applicant’s religious affiliation, e.g., involvement in church groups.

* Any questions utilized must be posed to all candidates interviewed

SAMPLE REFERENCE QUESTIONS

1. What were the beginning and ending employment dates for this individual?
2. What position(s) did the individual hold? Salary history?
3. How long have you worked with or supervised this individual?
4. What were the individual's most recent job duties?
5. What can you tell me about the quality and quantity of this individual's work?
6. How would you describe this person's ability to meet deadlines?
7. What kind of supervision did this person require?
8. Did this individual get along well with management and peers?
9. How is this individual a team player?
10. How would you describe this individual's attitude toward work?
11. How would you describe the individual's overall performance?
12. How was this person's attendance? Was he/she punctual?
13. Why did this individual leave your company?
14. Would you reemploy this person if you had the opportunity?
15. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Additional questions that might be asked for professionals, managers, or executives:

1. How would you describe this individual's leadership, managerial, or supervisory skills?
2. Describe the quality of this individual's written and verbal communication skills.
3. How do you rate this individual's ability to plan short-term? Long-term?
4. Provide examples in which this individual had to make sound and timely decisions. What were the results?
5. Did this person plan and administer a budget? If so, what was the size, and how did this person manage it?
6. How would you describe this individual's technical skills?
7. How well did this person manage crisis, pressure, or stress?
8. How many people did this person directly supervise, for how long, and what were their levels (professional, blue collar, technical)?

Note: Ensure that the questions asked relate to the position to be filled.