BEST PRACTICES FOR EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEWS

AUDIENCE: HR Community, Hiring Managers/Supervisors, Interview Panel Members

In alignment with our institutional statement on diversity and in support of the University of Wisconsin–Madison's mission, vision, values, and commitments, this resource provides best practices for the entire interview process.

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

To ensure a thorough and effective interview process, please consider the following steps:

- Review the Job Description and Candidate Materials
    - Thoroughly examine the job description to understand the key responsibilities and qualifications required.
    - Carefully review each candidate's resume, cover letter, and any other submitted materials to identify their strengths and areas for further exploration during the interview.
- Assess Potential Contributions
    - Consider how a new employee would add value to the productivity and overall goals of the department.
- Develop and Refine Interview Questions
    - Create a set of interview questions that are directly related to the job requirements and the candidate's potential contributions. *Refer to the Office of Human Resources Best Practices for Inclusive Interview Questions Job Aid for examples.*
    - Consider whether questions (e.g., "Describe your job history") are already answered by the candidates' application materials. Ideally, the interview should expand upon information during the initial screening route, not reiterate it.
    - Do not ask yes/no questions.
    - Consider how each question addresses specific qualifications/scenarios related to the position, and how elements/examples could appear in a candidate's answers. Understand that a candidate's answer and experience may not be an exact match to what the search committee is expecting.
    - When scheduling interviews, consider the time allocated for each question and ensure candidates have sufficient space to respond. For simpler, single-scenario questions, allow approximately three minutes for answers. For longer, multipart questions, allocate closer to six minutes per question. Additionally, reserve at least ten minutes at the end of the interview for candidates to ask their questions to the panel.
    - Consider sending the interview questions at least 24 hours in advance. This will help ease the candidate's potential nervousness and allow them to give more thoughtful answers.

- As a best practice, send the candidate a copy of the position description at least 24 hours before the interview. Include the confirmation of their interview time and venue, the interview format, and the names of the interview panelists. This will help the candidate feel prepared for the conversation without taking time away from the actual interview.
    - If the interview will be onsite, be intentional about which space you are hosting the candidate in, especially about parking and public transit accessibility. Be prepared to offer the candidate a parking pass/validation. Consider the general accessibility of the space, such as handicapped ramps and elevator availability.
    - If a meal is provided during the interview process, be sure to collect and accommodate for the candidates' dietary restrictions.
    - Consider the interview schedule and whether days fall on specific national/religious holidays.

- Mitigate Unconscious Bias
  - Review the interview questions and make any necessary revisions to avoid any unconscious bias. Discuss potential biases among the search committee, including biases in favor of certain experiences and educational backgrounds. Ensure that your questions are inclusive, fair, and consistent across all candidates.
  - Watch 'Mitigating Unconscious Bias in Hiring Practices Video'
- Develop and Organize the Interview Panel
  - Carefully consider who is going to be on the interview panel – what are their relevant knowledge, skills, and experience? How will they interface with this position?
  - Clearly identify who will lead the interview and assign specific questions to each panel member. This ensures a structured and efficient interview process.

By following these guidelines, we can conduct interviews that are fair, comprehensive, aligned with our institutional diversity statement, and our overall strategic priority.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

To ensure a positive candidate experience, follow these best practices:

- Accessibility for Virtual Interviews
  - Copy-paste interview questions into the chat as they are asked and consider enabling closed captions.
  - Ensure that all panel members are in a quiet place and using headsets with microphones.
  - Offer time prior to the interview for the candidate to test their equipment. All panel members should ensure their technology is functional in advance of the interview time.
- Punctuality.
  - Start and end the interview on time to respect the candidate's schedule and demonstrate organizational efficiency.
- Panel members should introduce themselves and briefly (one or two sentences) describe how they interface with the position.
- Consider having a panelist do a time check midway through the interview to ensure that everyone's schedules are respected.

- Consistency
    - Ask the same job-related questions across all candidates. If the candidate does not fully answer the questions, ask for follow-up.
- Thoughtful Responses
    - Do not rush the candidate - allow them time to think about their answers. If the candidate is struggling to produce an answer at the moment, offer the chance to skip the question and come back, if time allows.
- Active Listening
    - Let the candidate speak without interruption. Regardless of whether the interview is onsite or virtual, panel members should minimize distractions and avoid multi-tasking.
    - If something the candidate said was unclear, ask for follow-up or clarification. Considering that UW-Madison strives to hire candidates with transferable skills, it is important to understand that not all experiences/anecdotes will be immediately relatable to the interview panel.
- Objective Notetaking
    - Take fact-based notes during the interview. This helps to accurately assess each candidate and provides a reliable reference for post-interview discussions. Avoid personal notes (i.e., feelings/thoughts that are not directly relevant to the position)
- Next Steps
    - Inform the candidate of the next steps in the hiring process, including a potential timeline.

POST-INTERVIEW

To ensure a thorough post-interview process, please follow these best practices:

- Gather Feedback
    - Use an Interview Evaluation Form: Collect detailed feedback from all interviewers using a standardized evaluation form. This ensures consistency and helps in objectively assessing each candidate's performance. Personal notes should not be shared.
- Debrief and Discuss
    - Conduct a Debriefing Session: the interview panel meets to discuss each candidate's strengths and areas for improvement. This collaborative discussion helps in making a well-informed decision.
    - Depending on the make-up of the committee/panel, consider conducting one-on-one debriefs between each panel member and the hiring administrator as well. This approach can help mitigate the effects of groupthink.
- Create Summary Evaluations
    - Summarize Evaluations: Compile a summary evaluation for all candidates based on the feedback collected. This summary should highlight key points and provide a clear comparison of the candidates.
- Reference Checks
    - Verify References: Conduct thorough professional reference checks for the final candidates. This step is crucial to validate the candidate's qualifications and past performance.
- Timely Follow-Up

    - Communicate Promptly: Follow up with all candidates in a timely and personalized manner, regardless of whether they are selected as a final candidate. This demonstrates professionalism and respect for the candidates' time and effort.
- Provide Feedback (optional)
    - Offer Constructive Feedback: Provide feedback to candidates who did not advance in the process. This can be valuable for their professional development and leaves a positive impression of your organization.

If you have any additional questions, please contact Talent Acquisition at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Office of Human Resources. They are available Monday through Friday, from 7:45 AM to 4:30 PM, and can be reached at 608-265-2257 or uwjobs@wisc.edu.