

## Conducting Successful Interviews

The interview is the first opportunity for an organization and a candidate to get to know one another, so it is imperative to prepare well. You should start preparing by compiling a list of questions and/or issues you would like to probe with each interviewee.

In addition, some things you can do before the interview include:

**Decide what type of interview process** is right for this job and with whom each candidate should interview. Depending on the level of the position, you may determine that a multi-step process is appropriate. For example, round one might be a telephone interview, round two an in-person interview, and round three a presentation made by the candidate to multiple members of the hiring team.

**Inform candidates well in advance** about the interview process and times, type of interviews to be conducted, location and length of interviews, and with whom they will be interviewing.

**Begin in a manner that provides a comfortable atmosphere for the candidate.**

Depending on each candidate's knowledge of the company, the interviewer can provide a short history of the organization and his/her role in the organization before the questions begin.

**Ask open-ended questions.** In order to draw out the most significant information from a candidate, create questions that are "open-ended," allowing the candidate to express ideas and explain his or her experience and work style. For example, ask, "What is important to you in a workplace?" instead of, "Do you like structure in a workplace?" Or ask, "Tell me about a time you led a cross-functional team" instead of, "Have you ever led a cross-functional team?"

**Interview for results.** When compiling the list of questions, focus on what results the candidate may have achieved. For example, if you are hiring a new COO for your organization and managing budgets is a key role for this position, instead of asking, "Have you managed budgets before?" ask, "What outcomes did you achieve when managing the budget in your previous job?"

**Probe for ability to manage and work in teams.** For example, you might ask "Tell me about an example of your work with international teams. How did you manage a group of people you worked with so remotely?"

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**Assess each candidate for fit with your organization's culture.** Assessing for fit with your culture can be challenging; however, when hiring for senior management positions, fit is incredibly important. Understandably, an organization's culture is not easy to define. There are some questions, however, that you can ask yourself after interviewing someone to help you assess a candidate's fit, such as "Does the candidate share the same values as our organization? Can I imagine the candidate working effectively with our team? Would I be able to work with this person?" Avoid going overboard on the perfect fit, as balancing cultural fit with the goal of building a team with a diverse set of backgrounds, experiences, ideas, and working styles is critical.

**Steer clear of personal, private, and discriminatory questions.** The following areas are among those legally off-limits in interviews: age, citizenship (although you can ask if an employee is authorized to work in the U.S.), race/ethnicity, disability, gender, health issues, marital status, national origin, personal finances, family information, and religion. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has a complete list of things to avoid, summarized later in this toolkit. Make sure to avoid these areas even in informal conversation with candidates. If a candidate voluntarily discloses information in any of these areas, do not pursue the topic.

**Create consistency across candidate interviews.** It is important for each candidate to be interviewed by the same individuals within your organization. At the same time, remember that each candidate has a set of unique experiences, strengths, and weaknesses—allow for opportunities to probe more deeply in different areas for each candidate.

**Listen to how a candidate answers your questions.** While asking the right question is important, listening to what is and is not said is even more critical to assessing the candidate's fit with the position. Have an idea ahead of time of what a "good answer" is to your question, but be flexible and open to answers you have not thought of. Once you have listened to a candidate's answers, if there are comments that raise questions, make sure to probe further.

**Probe specifically for candidates moving into the nonprofit sector for the first time,** or making significant intra-sector transitions. Many individuals with significant experience in the government or for-profit sector are interested in "bridging" to the nonprofit world in order to connect their skills and experiences to a mission about which they feel passionate. Ask questions that give these candidates an opportunity to explain how their skills and passions translate from one role or sector to another.

**Invite the candidate to ask questions.** Remember that this is a two-way process, and candidates may have questions about the role and the organization to help them assess fit. Pay attention to the quality of questions, as it may be informative about the candidate.

**Discuss compensation at the appropriate time.** It's important to establish realistic expectations regarding compensation at the outset of an interview process. You want to ensure that, should a candidate become a finalist, your organization can make an attractive offer. You may want to ask candidates who have advanced through a phone screen for a general sense of their expectations around compensation for the position and/or any deal-breakers related to compensation. This is to ensure, early in the process, that the candidate and the organization are aligned in their thinking on compensation ranges for the position.

**Let candidates know what to expect** in terms of timeframe and next steps in the process.

**After interviews, update assessment grids for all active candidates.**

## Sample Interview Questions

### Sample “beginning” questions:

Tell me about your current/most recent role at XYZ organization.

Why are you interested in working in the XYZ role at our organization?

What skills/experience do you hope to gain working at XYZ organization?

### Sample “results” questions:

What do you see as your greatest achievement in your role as ABC at XYZ organization?

Why?

What do you see as your greatest challenges/failures in your role as ABC at XYZ organization? Why?

What are the most significant weaknesses in your performance? How do you compensate for those weaknesses?

Describe the job where you have been least effective. What do you think the reasons are?

Give me an example of where you disagreed with a decision your boss and/or colleague made. What was the situation? How did you handle it? What was the outcome?

Tell me about a time when, because of your analysis, there was a major change of direction or key decisions in your organization.

What was the most difficult/complex decision you had to make in your last position? Would you do it differently next time? If so, how?

What is your decision making style? Provide an example of when you have made a rapid decision and when you took a significant amount of time to make a decision.

How do you plan your work? Prioritize your work?

If your most recent supervisor had to characterize your strengths and weaknesses, what would he/she say?

How comfortable do you feel working in an ambiguous environment? Describe a situation where you have had this experience.

Describe a typical day at your last (or current) position.

**Sample questions to understand a candidate's ability to manage and work in teams:**

Provide some examples of working in a team environment. What was your role? What was your contribution?

Think back to a team meeting you recently participated in. What was your role in this meeting?

What is different about the way you and your most recent supervisor manage people?

Give me an example that describes your working style (e.g., probe for independent vs. collaborative; deadline-focused vs. not...).

Tell me about the best and worst supervisees you have ever managed. How did you work with these supervisees?

Give me an example of how you have provided professional development opportunities to your supervisees.

Give me an example of when you have persuaded a colleague or team member to change his or her approach. How did you do it?

If your most recent supervisor had to characterize your ability to work in a team, what would he/she say? And your supervisees?

How do you give feedback? How do you take feedback? Provide examples.

**Sample "bridger candidate" questions:**

Tell me about your experiences volunteering at XYZ organization (use resume information about past and current nonprofit experience). What did you like best about it? What did you like least about it?

Why do you want to work in the nonprofit sector?

How do your experiences translate to the nonprofit sector?

How do your experiences in the ABC role at the XYZ Corporation translate to this role at our organization?

Why do you want to work with our organization?

How does our mission tie to your passions?

What are your expectations about working in the nonprofit sector?

What is your leadership style? Describe a team meeting you recently attended—what was your role? How did you interact with your team?

Tell me about a time when you have worked in an environment that makes decisions in a consensus-driven way.

**Sample “cultural fit” questions:**

What did you enjoy most/least at your previous job?

Where do you see yourself in three to five years?

What is important to you in a workplace?

What qualities do you look for in a supervisor? In a colleague? In a supervisee?

What are your passions? How do your passions tie to the mission of this organization?

What is your leadership style?

How do you make decisions?

**Note:** The content of this piece was excerpted from the more comprehensive Hiring Toolkit. The Hiring Toolkit: Navigating the Hiring Process may be accessed at:

<https://www.bridgestar.org/Resources/Toolkits/NavigatingHiring.aspx>

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