Interview Guidance – Best Practices

Audience: Recruiters, Hiring Managers, Department Recruiting Assistants, Interview/Search Committee Participants

Overview

The following guidance has been developed to ensure a fair and equitable hiring process, free from bias, with a focus on providing a positive candidate experience. Everyone is responsible for building a sense of belonging in the recruitment and hiring process. When you make it a goal that every candidate interaction is a positive and inclusive experience, it will strengthen Carnegie Mellon University's reputation and brand, resulting in greater productivity, collaboration, connection and engagement from your workforce.

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Compliance Obligations and Community Values

Carnegie Mellon University is held to compliance standards during our hiring process. Maintaining a compliant recruitment and interview process ensures that our hiring process is fair and follows all relevant laws and regulations. Upholding CMU's commitment to a diverse, equitable, inclusive recruitment process is equally important.

Equal Employment Opportunity
Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) laws prohibit discrimination against a job applicant or an employee because of the person's race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy and related conditions, gender identity, sexual orientation and marital status), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information.

Affirmative Action
Defined by OFCCP regulations as the obligation on the part of the contractor to take action to ensure that applicants are employed, and employees are treated during employment, without regard to their race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability, or status as a protected veteran.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging
At CMU, we seek and cultivate diverse populations and perspectives and promote equity, inclusion and belonging. We do so because it is paramount to our health and well-being.

Determining your Interview Process

When you have a job opening in your department, you need to determine your interview process. This can be discussed and determined with the HR recruiter during the initial intake and/or recruitment strategy meeting. This is an effective way for recruiters and hiring managers to identify which candidate is best for the job.

Generally, it is recommended that the interview process consists of no more than three to four rounds of interviews in total.

- **Phone screen** – Typically conducted by the HR recruiter or the hiring manager, phone screens are an initial screening to ensure the candidates who are advanced to the hiring manager meet the minimum requirements. The phone screen can also confirm alignment in expectations such as compensation, work posture, etc. This conversation serves to help identify a short list of candidates to be invited for first-round interviews. Generally, phone screens range from 20 to 30 minutes in duration.
- **First-Round interview(s)** – Typically conducted by the hiring manager and/or search committee members, the first-round interview can be an in-person or virtual meeting with potential candidates. The goal is to get to know the candidate better and assess their skills and experience with the needs of the job and/or key competencies identified. Generally, first-round interviews range from 30 minutes to one hour in duration.
- **Second Round or Final interview(s)** – Typically conducted by department leadership, senior staff and/or various campus partners and stakeholders, the second round or final round interviews are typically in person but can also be conducted virtually. This round includes deeper, more specific questions to follow up on certain topics from the first interview and better understand how the top candidate(s) would acclimate to the position and work environment based on key competencies, skills or experience identified. Generally, second or final-round interviews range from 30 minutes to one hour in duration.

While we recommend no more than three rounds of interviews for most roles, some positions, typically senior level, may require additional rounds of interviews. A streamlined interview process can help us to compete in a competitive employment market and provide a positive candidate experience. Lengthy interview processes increase the risk of candidates losing interest or withdrawing from consideration resulting in us losing top talent and lengthening the time a role is vacant.

Consult with your recruiter on how best to approach your interview process to ensure optimal results.

Collaborative Interviewing – Interview Panel/Search Committees

To allow for a fair and equitable hiring process, the Office of Human Resources recommends using an interview panel/search committee during the hiring process. Search committees help to bring diversity and multiple perspectives to the hiring process. Being on the search committee requires a time commitment, so it's important to be thoughtful about who is on this committee and make sure all participants can attend all scheduled interviews.

The hiring manager should meet with the search committee before the interview(s) to discuss critical success factors for the role (qualities, skills, experiences, and characteristics that a successful candidate would possess). It is also encouraged to identify an interview facilitator who will be responsible for greeting the candidate, opening and closing the interview.

When determining the interview/search committee, hiring managers are encouraged to compose a committee of a cross-section of individuals to bring diverse representation to the team. Individuals participating in the search committee must keep candidate information confidential. Additional recommendations for search committees can be found in our [Search Committee Guidance [pdf]].

Format and duration of interviews

The format and duration of interviews should be determined by the hiring manager before the interviews are scheduled. Candidates must have a consistent experience.

Format of Interviews

- Determine whether your interviews will be conducted virtually or in person.
  - Once the interview format is determined, interviews should be conducted in the same manner for all candidates. However, this can waver in exceptional circumstances. (e.g., the candidate is out of state).
- Determine if your interviews will be panel-style (generally 3–5 people interviewing a candidate at once) or multiple interviewers in one-on-one sessions.
  - The panel should generally consist of three to five members. We recommend no more than three separate interview panels, and that interview length does not exceed 3–4 hours in total in one day.
  - If hosting a panel interview, identify an interview facilitator. This individual will take the lead in greeting the candidate, opening and closing the interview.

Mitigating Bias

Unconscious bias occurs when someone who does not know you makes assumptions about your character, intelligence or capabilities based on how you look, speak or behave. This person does so without realizing that they are thinking or reacting this way.

When reviewing applicants for a position, it is important to identify the criteria for which you will advance candidates before looking at candidates and design an environment to mitigate bias. To mitigate bias, a best practice is to perform joint applicant reviews or assessments by including others on your team as part of this search process, particularly at the hiring manager review stage. These individuals can be assigned as "department recruiting assistants" on the requisition.

Interview and evaluation techniques are also key to mitigating bias. During recruitment, interview committees need to be as consistent as possible when interviewing each candidate. This includes developing a standard set of interview questions, a well-planned interview schedule and a standard way to evaluate candidates. The hiring manager and/or search committee should be consistent across all interactions with candidates.

For more information related to ensuring a legal and compliant hiring process, please refer to our Do's and Don'ts of Interviewing Guidance [pdf].

Candidate Outreach and Communication

Hiring managers should strive to provide a positive and consistent candidate experience. To help ensure this, the Office of Human Resources has created resources for hiring managers to consider using in their outreach to candidates to invite, schedule and confirm interviews. These can be found on the Talent Strategy page. Whether you are conducting your interviews virtually or in person, it is important to provide information regarding the interview details and format to the candidate in advance.

Upon determining the interview date and availability, the hiring manager or the designated contact facilitating and/or scheduling the interview is encouraged to send the candidate a confirmation email and/or calendar invite containing the following information:

- General order of events/agenda
- Date and time of the interview
- Format of the interview (phone, Zoom, in person, etc.)
    - If virtual, provide a video conferencing link
- Position for which they are interviewing
- Names and titles of those they will meet

It is also recommended the following attachments are included in the correspondence:

- The day's agenda (if multiple interview sessions are scheduled)
- The job advertisement

Preparing for the Candidate Interview

When preparing for the interview, hiring managers should consider the following:

Interview Questions and Guide: Interview questions should be prepared in advance and shared with those involved in the interview process.

To aid managers during the process, the Office of Human Resources (OHR) has developed a customizable interview guide template [docx] and behavioral competency-based question bank [pdf]. This guide is designed to be flexible, allowing managers to customize it according to the specific critical competencies required for the position.

By identifying diverse competencies and incorporating relevant behavioral interview questions, the guide enables you to enhance the interview process. OHR encourages the hiring manager to identify core competencies associated with the position and prepare an interview guide for each round of interviews.

To alleviate any confusion during the interview, it is suggested to assign each interview question to a member of the search committee and/or interview panel.

The same interview guide, with set questions, should be used for each candidate participating in that round of interviews. If hosting multiple rounds of interviews, a separate guide should be developed with different questions. The guide developed for subsequent rounds of interviews should be used for each candidate participating in that round of interviews.

Interview Facilitator: It is a best practice to assign an interview facilitator to greet the candidate, open and close the interview.

Additional Context and Information: In addition to identifying and preparing interview questions, those involved in the interview process should be prepared to provide the candidate with information regarding the role, including job responsibilities, expectations, the team and/or CMU. It is suggested the hiring manager share the following with those involved in the search process in advance of the interview. Communication templates can be found on the [Talent Strategy page](#).

- Format of the interview (virtual or onsite)
- Location/address of the interview
- Schedule/agenda
- Candidate's resume
- The job advertisement
- Interview guide and candidate evaluation form
- General overview of the process/number of interview rounds, and anticipated timeline for feedback

Conducting the Interview

A candidate's interview is one of the most important tools to evaluate a candidate thoroughly. There are numerous ways to conduct an interview, and they can take place through different methods, including phone, video or in person. The format of the interview may also differ from one-on-one to a panel to an open forum.

Introductions and Realistic Job Preview

It is important to designate an interview facilitator for your sessions (virtual or onsite). At the beginning of each interview, provide brief introductions of the interviewers (name, department, brief overview of how the role may interact with their team, etc.).

We also encourage the facilitator to provide an overview of what makes the team/CMU/division unique and provide a brief overview of the candidate’s day-to-day tasks, hours, work posture and other requirements.

It is also suggested that the interview facilitator briefly describe the interview schedule and let the candidate know what to expect during the session (behavioral-based questions, time for questions at the end, etc.).

During the Interview

The interviewer may need to ask follow-up questions to get a better understanding of an applicant's thoughts, to clarify unclear answers or to obtain more specific information. It is beneficial to use questions such as "Could you please tell me more about ...?" and "Can you give me an example of ...?" to get more details from the candidate.

On-Campus Interviews

If hosting an onsite interview, it is recommended that you designate a point of contact who will greet the candidate upon their arrival and ensure the candidate has their contact information before the interview.

When selecting a location to conduct the interview, you should ensure the environment is conducive to a productive meeting by limiting distractions.

Virtual Interviews

If conducting the interview virtually, you should ensure the environment is conducive to a productive meeting by limiting distractions (close all open tabs, no food and no cell phone). Ensure technology is in working condition (strong Wi-Fi connection, select a professional virtual background on Zoom, make sure the camera and microphone are functioning, etc.) and remain muted while the candidate speaks. The interview facilitator should be provided with host access to manage the waiting room and allow participants and the candidate to enter the interview session. The interview facilitator will take the lead in greeting the candidate, opening and closing the interview session. See Virtual Interviewing Guidance [pdf] for more information.

Concluding the Interview

When concluding the interview, the hiring manager or interview facilitator should offer the candidate the opportunity to ask questions. In addition, describe the timeframe for the next steps which includes remaining interviews, when they can expect an update, and when a decision will likely be made. Be sure to thank the candidate for their time and provide contact information for any follow-up questions. Lastly, promote the CMU community by providing candidates with information about the resources and support that are available to employees.

Candidate Assessment and Evaluation

Upon completion of the interview, all search committee members or interview panel participants should assess and evaluate each candidate. All assessments and evaluations should be completed independently within 1–2 days after the interview is conducted and sent to the hiring manager and HR recruiter. The hiring manager should set expectations and communicate a timeline to complete assessments and/or provide feedback. The overall assessment and evaluation should focus on the candidates' responses to the questions asked and how successfully they demonstrated or failed to demonstrate their related experience.

The Office of Human Resources has developed a standardized candidate evaluation template [docx] for use by hiring managers to ensure all candidates are being assessed fairly and consistently. OHR encourages the hiring manager to prepare the evaluation form in advance, listing the core competencies associated with the position for that round of interview and share with the search committee and/or interview panel participants in advance of the interview, or shortly after the interview concludes so they can evaluate the candidate timely.

Concluding the Search/Decisioning

Reference Checks

Once final candidates have been identified, the hiring manager should work with their HR recruiter to conduct reference checks. Additional information about the reference check process and guidance can be found on the Conducting Reference Checks page.

Offer Preparation and Extension

Once a finalist is identified, the recruiter can assist in the review of the proposed offer details to ensure alignment with budget, market and internal equity, extend a contingent verbal offer and serve as the point of contact to help manage any offer negotiations. Upon obtaining a contingent verbal offer acceptance, the recruiter will prepare a contingent written offer within Workday to extend to the candidate for electronic acceptance.

Pre-Employment Background Checks

Upon a written offer being extended, the recruiter will initiate the pre-employment background checks (if applicable). Please review CMU's Staff Background Check Policy [pdf] for more information.

Finalizing the Hire

Upon receipt of the written offer acceptance and successful completion of the background check, the recruiter will notify the hiring manager and finalize the hire in Workday.

Candidate Dispositioning/Notification

It is important to notify all remaining candidates that they were not selected for the role and disposition them within Workday with the applicable reason code. We encourage the hiring manager to personally contact the candidates who were interviewed but not selected for the position. The HR recruiter will disposition all other candidates. The Office of Human Resources recommends dispositioning the remaining active candidates within three days of finalizing the hire. See the System Guide: Workday Recruiting- Disposition Candidates [pdf].