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| Maine management Learning series |
| Competency Based Interviewing |
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| **Bureau of Human Resources, Office of Employee Relations** |
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Selection Process Overview

**Manage Candidate/Interview**

* Competency Interview
* Work Sample
* Realistic Job Preview
* Background Check

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**Advertising/Recruiting**

**Candidates**

**Start Up Employee**

* Orientation & Training
* Individual Development Plan

**Source and Screen**

* Employment Application
* Screening Interview
* Resume Evaluation
* Performance Test

Competency Based Interviewing Definition

An Interviewing process resulting in the interviewee telling a layered story related to and demonstrating mastery of each competency by reflecting on an internal question for each competency to be assessed, with the details coming from short, probing questions.

Competencies for Successful Interviewing

To increase our effectiveness in selecting qualified people, our goal is to use a structured approach to interviewing that involves “competency-based” or behavioral type questions.

**What are competencies?**

Competencies are patterns of behavior that distinguish high performers from others in the same job. They are patterns of behavior done:

* More often,
* More effectively, and
* By the best performers in a given role or work environment

**Why use Competency-based Interviewing?**

There are many benefits to competency-based interviewing:

* Focuses on what the candidate did in the past.
	+ To start with, if focuses the conversation on past behavior, which is the best predictor of future performance; asking candidates for detailed information about what they’ve done vs. what they “would do” yields better data on how they are likely to act.
* Expectations of the interviewer are clear.
	+ Helps everyone know what to probe on by using a set of predetermined questions to gather specific evidence of high performing behavior.
* More objective and can be justified.
	+ Isn’t based just on a gut feel! You are able to gather data that either reflects what is required for the job or conflicts with it.
* More consistent approach to interviewing.
	+ Provides a similar process for all candidates to ensure that we treat them fairly and that we target the right areas for each role.
* Helps determine a candidate’s cultural fit, experiences, and skills that are important to positions within the State of Maine
* Provides questions targeted at the candidate’s values, their actual experiences from previous roles, and key skills they have obtained along the way.

Representative Differences

Between Competency Based and Traditional Interviews

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| --- | --- |
| Standard | Competency Based |
| * A series of standard questions are posed to each applicant
 | * Accepts that past behavior is the best way to “predict” future behavior
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| * Hypothetical situations are discussed
 | * Increases the likelihood that applicants with the best chance of being successful are offered the position.
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| * Applicant weaknesses or deficiencies are explored
 | * Creates an applicant-centered objective, interview
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| * Occasionally, ways to catch an applicant (e.g. in an exaggeration of distortion) in a “negative” are used
 | * Results in applicants telling several self-selected “stories” in their words about past events that were important to them.
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| * The process is interviewer centered
 | * Useful in later coaching and performance planning
 |
| * Applicants can feel that they were not in a position to be seen in their best light or feel constrained by the process
 | * Improves general communication skills of interviewer
 |
| * Awkward or “unfair” questions get asked
 | * Focuses on what applicants do, not think they do
 |

Planning the Interview

**Identify the critical knowledge, skills and abilities you want to hire for.**

**KSA’s are the essential work knowledges, skills and abilities** required to successfully perform the duties of the job classification.

**Work knowledge** includes both professional/technical knowledge and business/agency specific knowledge.

**Identify the behavioral competencies** you want to hire for.

**Build KSA’s and behavioral competencies** into the selection process.

**Selection process includes:**

* Recruitment process;
* Evaluation of applications and identifying candidates to be interviewed;
* Candidate interviews and evaluation;
* Reference checks;
* Probationary period.

**Don’t forget about performance tests.**

Core Competencies

**Initiative**: Drives for results and success. Sets high standards of performance. Pursues aggressive goals and works hard to achieve them. Displays a high level of effort and commitment to performing the work.

**Adaptability**: Handles day-to-day work challenges confidently. Is willing to adjust to multiple demands, shift priorities, ambiguity and rapid change. Shows resilience in the face of constraints, frustrations or adversity. Demonstrates flexibility.

**Planning and Organizing Work**: Defines and arranges activities in a logical and efficient manner. Effectively uses resources including time, money and materials.

**Decision Making**: Shares information and involves appropriate others in the decision-making process. Makes timely, logical decisions. Decisions are modified based on new information when appropriate. Takes responsibility for decisions.

**Judgment/Professionalism**: Works to build respect, excellence, and confidence when interacting with internal and external customers. Brings integrity to interactions and processes; contributes to the improved image of State Government.

**Customer Service**: Seeks feedback from internal and external customers. Anticipates customer needs and provides quality services to customers. Continuously searches for ways to increase customer satisfaction.

**Teamwork**: Contributes to organizational goals. Fosters collaboration among team members and among teams.

**Interpersonal Relations**: Shows respect and tolerance for each person. Relates well to others, possesses good listening skills, and demonstrates trust, sensitivity and mutual respect. Recognizes the contributions diversity brings to job performance and creativity.

**Oral Communications**: Speaks clearly and expresses self well in groups and in one-on-one conversations. Demonstrates attention to and conveys understanding of comments and questions of others.

**Written Communications**: Conveys information clearly and effectively through formal and informal documents.

Supervisory/Leadership Competencies

**Delegation/Follow-up-assigns responsibility to empower others**: Coordinates work efforts when necessary. Ensures expectations are being met by exercising managerial accountability.

**Staffing**: Forms the right structures and teams. Demonstrates leadership and holds employees accountable for safe work practices, fair employment practices and State and Federal AA/EEO requirements.

**Coaching & Counseling**: Provides timely and specific feedback plus helpful coaching and guidance. Adapts approach to each individual.

**Employee Development**: Collaboratively determines what else the employee needs to develop within the current job and to each individual.

**Planning & Organizing**: Develops short and long range plans that are appropriately comprehensive, realistic, and effective in meeting goals. Integrates planning efforts across work units; handles multiple demands and competing priorities; and manages meetings effectively.

Other management/supervisory competencies

Perseverance

Change Management

****Achievement/Results Orientation

Maine Management Service Leadership Competencies

**Visionary**: Establishes and maintains a long-term, big picture perspective to move Maine State Government forward. Communicates the vision through Maine State Government in the form of distinctive strategies, policies, objectives and action plans that maximize Maine State Government's ability to meet constituent needs.

**A Supportive Coach**: Monitors others' work efforts and follows through with constructive guidance and recommendations. Takes steps with employees to develop people with the necessary skills, abilities and competencies. Acts as a mentor for others, particularly in Maine State Government.

**An Effective Communicator**: Articulates information clearly, adapting communication styles to match others. Creates an atmosphere in which timely and high quality information flows smoothly and effectively between self and others.

**Models Integrity**: Builds trust through demonstration of ethical behavior and personal authenticity. Demonstrates principles and values that model those of the organization. Follows through on stated vision regardless of difficulty. Sets standards for work, processes, and personal behavior, holds the organization accountable to those standards.

**Customer Focused**: Focuses efforts on discovering and meeting the customer's needs. "Customers" include Maine State citizens’ internal colleagues, peers, or team members.

**Results Oriented**: Focuses efforts on attaining clear, concrete, timely, and measurable outcomes of importance to the organization. Uses time and resources on activities that will yield the greatest benefit by regularly evaluating and comparing work being done to goals, resulting in a sense of urgency.

**Has Sound Judgment**: Uses common sense and works collaboratively with others to create effective action plans based on appropriate information. Gains perspective from all available resources, develops an understanding of a situation, and reaches conclusions based on information gathered and applies intuition with sound analysis.

**An Analytical Thinker**: Understands situations or complex issues or problems by breaking them down into smaller pieces or tracing the implications or impacts using a step by step approach. Strive to understand causal relationships and to identify appropriate approaches or solutions.

**Innovative:** Acts as a creative resource for others by either offering new and novel ideas or facilitating an environment that encourages others to offer new or novel ideas. Consistently challenges current thinking, and always looks for ways to 'take a different approach.

**Systemic Thinker:** Connects information, processes, and events by organizing divergent information and searching for common themes, patterns, and causal connections. Simultaneously sees the practical and political issues inherent in any situation.

Code of Ethics-Maine State Government

1. Be guided by the highest standards of honor, personal integrity, and fortitude in all public activities in order to merit the respect of other officials, employees and the public. Strive to inspire public confidence and trust in Maine State Government institutions.
2. Serve the State with respect, concern, courtesy, and responsiveness, recognizing that government service means service to the people of Maine; keep the Legislature and public informed on pertinent issues.
3. Strive for professional excellence and encourage the professional development of associates and those seeking to enter the field of public administration in order to provide effective and responsible government to the citizens of Maine. The primary role is to provide the best possible and most cost effective service to the citizens of Maine.
4. Approach organization and operational duties with a positive attitude and constructively support open communication, cooperation, creativity, dedication and compassion.
5. Avoid any interest or activity which is in conflict with the conduct of official duties. Serve in a manner as to avoid inappropriate personal gain resulting from the performance of official duties.
6. Respect and protect the privileged information to which there is access in the course of official duties.
7. Use discretionary authority to promote the public interest.
8. Accept as a personal duty the responsibility to be informed of emerging issues and to administer the public’s business with professional competence, fairness, impartiality, efficiency and effectiveness.
9. Support, implement, and promote programs of affirmative action to assure equal opportunity in the recruitment, selection, and advancement of qualified persons from all elements of society.
10. Respect and value the work done by all State employees.

The Executive Order associated with the Code of Ethics is published on the Bureau of Human Resources Website under Rules & Policies> Human Resources Policy and Practices Manual> Section 6.4

<http://www.maine.gov/bhr/rules_policies/policy.htm> The State of Maine Competency-Based Interview Guide

Designing the State of Maine Competency-Based Interview Guide involved creating targeted questions for the superior competencies identified in the competency model.

**What is a Targeted Question?**

A targeted question is aimed at eliciting a behavioral event story that will provide evidence of the presence or absence of a specific competency. The targeted questions are open-ended. These questions require the interviewee to expand his/her answers and provide more information.

**Example Targeted Questions:**

“Give me an example of a time when you felt you had to go against company policy, what was the situation? What was your thinking at the time?”

“Describe for me a situation (in the recent past) when you successfully persuaded someone to do something.”

**Common Forms and Beginnings for Targeted Questions:**

“Tell me about your most successful….X”

“Describe your most difficult… X”

“When have you had to … X? Walk me through the situation in detail.”

“Give me an example of a time when you…”



More on Getting Competency Based Information- Probing the Events

Your job is to accurately identify the important decisions, actions and conversations in the candidate’s story and then skillfully probe for details. Probing is any type of request for additional information.

**Keys:**

* Get and overview.
* Use follow-up questions.
* Cover significant events.
* Get the outcome or results.

**Get an Overview:**

Ask the candidate to provide a brief summary of the situation and the sequence of events. This should include:

* What the situation was about.
* How he/she first got involved.
* The key events in the situation.
* The time frame of the situation.
* The outcome or result.

Once you have established a clear overview of the situation, ask the candidate to take back to the beginning of the situation and walk you through it as it unfolded, beginning with the time he/she first got involved. Taking clear notes of the overview will provide you with a “road map”.

**Cover significant Events**

Keep the candidate moving toward the most significant events in the situation by referring to the road map notes that you took during the overview.

However, you don’t need to get everything that happened. If a situation involves a series of meetings, you should ask:

* “Is there one meeting in particular that stands out that you could tell me about?”
* Get the Outcome or Results
* Ask Questions like:
“How did it turn out?”
* “What was the final result?”

Information Mining

During a competency-based interview, there will be times when a critical part of the story will surface. When recognized, the interviewer should “dig deeper” with short direct questions around “Thinking, Feeling, Doing, or Saying.” That is, ask several questions tat dig into this right vein of information about this person and the competency being explored. This process is shown graphically below.

Time

Interview Starts



**T D**

 **?**

**F S**

**T D**

 **?**

**F S**

**T D**

 **?**

**F S**

**T D**

 **?**

**F S**

**Sample Questions**

T? - How were you able to come up with the idea you just described? What made you think of that?

D?- Specifically, what did you (as a member of the team) do that resulted in that success?

F?- How did you feel about your boss’ decision? How were you feeling when all of this took place? How did you feel when this started? How do you feel about it now?

S?- What did you say when she asked you that? What did he (or you) say then? Tell me exactly what you said to her after the announcement.

**Common Interviewer Responses**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| And then what happened?And what was your role?How did you feel about that?What did you think about that? | What did you say then?Then what did you do?Uh-huh (or nod head) |

Probing for Greater Depth

**Context**

* Tell me about the situation.
* What was your role?
* Who was involved?

**Action/Behavior**

* What did you actually do?
* What was the very first step?
* What was the next thing you did?
* Can you walk me through that? What happened first?
* What did you say to him/her?
* Can you tell me what the exact words were?
* Tell me what was said, as if I were hearing a tape recording.

**Thoughts**

* What was going through your mind?
* What were you thinking?

**Emotions**

* What were you feeling when that happened to you?
* How did you feel at that point?
* What was your first reaction to that?
* How did you feel when he/she said (or did) that?

**Results**

* How did it all turn out?
* What was the final result? How have things gone since then?
* What happened after your part was over?
* Is there anything else that would be useful for me to know about that situation?

Asking Good Follow-Up Questions

****Below are the types of statements you will have to probe more fully, to get the information you need to determine a person’s capabilities and skills.

**Remedies for abstract Descriptions of What the Candidate Did, Thought, or Said**

* Candidate: “I convinced her that it was the right thing to do”
* **Follow-up: “what did you actually say to her and what did she say in response?”**
* Candidate: “I made the decision to go ahead with the project”
* **Follow-up: “When you said you ‘made the decision’, what actually happened? What were your thoughts?”**
* Candidate: “I beat the bushes and got the whole thing organized.”
* **Follow-up: “What did you actually do? For example, what was the very first step you took?”**
* Candidate: “I figured out a way to make it work.”
* **Follow-up: “When you said ‘I figured out a way’, tell me what was going through your mind.”**

**Remedies for Statements of the Candidate’s Usual or Typical Behavior**

* Candidate: “I prepare for these types of assignments weeks in advance.”
* **Follow-up: “What did you do in this particular case?”**

**Remedies for Theories about Appropriate Behavior**

* Candidate: “I feel you should always treat people fairly and equally.”
* **Follow-up: “Can you tell me about a particular situation when you did that?”**
* Candidate: “The way I manage people is to give them as much responsibility as they can handle.”
* **Follow-up: “Can you recall a time when you did that for a particular individual?”**

**Remedies for Summaries of What the Candidate Did, Thought, or Said**

* Candidate: “To make a long story short, I got the salary I wanted.”
* **Follow-up: “Can you back-up and tell me about an event that was especially significant in you getting that salary?”**
* Candidate: “Over several months of trying to get an appointment, I got in to see her.”
* **Follow-up: “Can you tell me about one of those times when you tried to get an appointment?”**

**Remedies for Descriptions of What the Candidate Did as Part of a Group**

* Candidate: “We found out about the change in plans at the last minute.”
* Follow-up: “Who is ‘we’?”
* Candidate: “We got together and talked about what we should do next.”
* Follow-up: “Tell me about what you did as a part of the group.”

Interviewing Tips

Here are some quick tips to help you gather information throughout your interview.

**Try to…**

* *Listen*- Really listen to what the candidate is saying and how they are saying it. Stay open minded.
* *Probe*- For thoughts and feelings behind the actions- use follow-up questions to help get at the important details.
* *Ask for specifics*- Ask for specific examples and within those examples, ask for specific thoughts, words, and actions clearly attributable to the candidate- stay away from or clarify the use of “we” statements.
* *Keep Questions brief*- if a question is too long, complex, or not understood by the candidate, re-phrase it to make more sense. The general rule of thumb- the shorter, the better.
* *Encourage dialogue*- the interview should almost appear to be a casual conversation so that both people are comfortable to share information and learn from each other.
* *Give candidates time to respond*- This often means that a candidate is thinking through the question. Resist the temptation to rush in with another question. If the silence lasts more than ten to fifteen seconds, ask the candidate if they need clarification, otherwise, use the silence to observe the candidate, however…
* *Control the conversation*- Interrupt or clip the candidate if they ramble or get philosophical- control the pace and stick to your time frame.
* *Maintain the self-esteem of the candidate*- if negative information comes up, try to redirect the interview by asking a new question.
* *Take good, selective notes*- these will serve as your “road map” and will help you remember the important details during the round table discussions. There’s no way to remember everything that is said in the interview. Your notes will help you to reconstruct the conversation, analyze it, and make better judgements about the candidate’s suitability.
* *Avoid asking leading questions.*
* *Clarify any generalizations and avoid hypothetical answers.*
* *Focus on what the candidate actually did in the past- avoid future focused statements.*

Template: Competency-based Interview Model

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Candidate Name:  |  | Date: |  |
| Interviewer:  |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Competency*** Select the competencies needed for job success. (*reference: Maine Leadership Competencies*)
* In addition, identify the specific behaviors that demonstrate the desired competencies.
 | **Interview Questions**Insert your questions that elicit information about specific attributes/behaviors associated with the particular competencies sought in the applicant. | **Evidence/Comments**Assess the degree to which the candidate demonstrates the competency.  |
|  |  | [ ] Little to no evidence[ ]  Some evidence[ ]  Strong evidence Comments: |
|  |  | [ ] Little to no evidence[ ]  Some evidence[ ]  Strong evidence Comments: |
|  |  | [ ] Little to no evidence[ ]  Some evidence[ ]  Strong evidence Comments: |
|  |  | [ ] Little to no evidence[ ]  Some evidence[ ]  Strong evidence Comments: |

Interview Rating Sheet

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Performance Area** | **Evidence** | **Comments** |
| **Little/No evidence** | **Some evidence** | **Strong evidence** |
| **Self-Directed*** Works independently with minimal supervision.
* Identifies and focuses on the most important things that need to be done
* Takes general work assignments and identifies the important elements, the proper sequence to accomplish these elements, and other parties who should be involved.
 |  |  |  |  |
| **Learning Aptitude*** Learns new tasks and information quickly and easily.
* Handles a variety of rapidly flowing information and ideas at once.
 |  |  |  |  |
| **Dependability*** Sets and accomplishes challenging job-related goals and objectives.
* Reliably keeps promises and follows through on commitments
* Takes “ownership” of personal work responsibilities
 |  |  |  |  |
| **Self-Organizational Skills*** Defines and arranges work in a logical and efficient manner.
* Independently establishes work priorities and focuses on most important and time sensitive work.
 |  |  |  |  |
| **Verbal Communications*** Discusses ideas in a clear, succinct, organized, and interesting manner.
* Correctly uses words and language.
* Demonstrates attention to and conveys understanding of the comments of others.
 |  |  |  |  |

Selection Summary

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Position:  |  | Date: |  |
| Panel Members:  |  |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **CANDIDATE A** | **CANDIDATE B** | **CANDIDATE C** |
| **Length of State****Service** |  |  |  |
| **Experience** |  |  |  |
| **Past Performance** |  |  |  |
| **Education & Training** |  |  |  |
| **Interview Results** |  |  |  |
| **Performance Testing** |  |  |  |
| **Other Comments** |  |  |  |
| **Summary** |  |  |  |

Selection Tips

Applying competencies to the entire selection process

* You need to identify what competencies you’re looking for long before the interview
* When a vacancy occurs, identify the competencies you’re looking for by asking yourself these questions.
* What are the primary responsibilities of the individual in the position?
* What outcomes would indicate excellence on the job?
* What are the challenges facing the individual in the position?
* What are the things that would cause a technically competent person to fail?
* Rewrite the job description to include the required competencies.
* Ensure that the potential candidates know what competencies are needed for the position by including them in recruitment postings and candidate communications.
* Including references to Maine’s Leadership Competencies in your recruitment advertising can also create that value proposition.
* Look for evidence of competencies when screening resumes
	+ If your competency is “Effective Communicator” evaluate the writing in the cover letter and resume.
	+ Perhaps your competency is “Creativity” Does the resume format or content demonstrate creativity?
	+ If “Coaching” or “results-Orientation” are competencies you are looking for, does the candidate have a job experience that might lend itself to having developed these competencies?
* After a selection decision is made, work with the new hire to create a professional development plan to develop or strengthen other competencies needed for the job.

Lessons from Arbitration Decisions on Non-Selection

**In State #2008-159-M, past performance was not considered for a senior employee who was not a top candidate after the interview. In her decision against the State, the arbitrator wrote:**

The question that is at the heart of this case is whether the assessment that two very different candidates are at least “equal” can be fairly made without scrutinizing the past job performance (as opposed to history) of both. … Here, the panel bypassed all assessment of either candidate’s past performance as a state employee. … the panel asked the candidates for performance evaluations but testified that they did not look at them. …the outcome was that no qualitative analysis of how either the grievant or the selected candidate performed as a state employee was made… the complete failure to scrutinize the senior candidate’s record of past performance by speaking with a supervisor, consulting a written supervisory reference, or looking at performance appraisals goes against the grain and was particularly damaging because that was exactly where Perkins’ strength lay.

**In State #2008-169-M, the arbitrator provided the following reasons for ruling against the State:**

 What is troubling about the selection process is that Romanoski and Gallant relied largely on their subjective evaluation of answers to general questions at the interviews, an improper criterion, and a highly inappropriate and one-sided reference check. Interviews have a valid place in a selection process, but they cannot be relied on to the exclusion of other relevant information. The past job evaluations while both were State employees, and rated by the same supervisor, showed them to be virtual twins. …

There is no question that Covert is a certified tower climber and Poto is not. Had the State chosen to make tower climbing certification one of the required, or even preferred, qualifications for the position, the selection of Covert would have been beyond reproach. No such requirement existed, however, and the State cannot base a selection on a criterion that is not part of the posting. …

 The most problematic aspect of the selection process was the reference check, since it reflected the predisposition to hire Covert and not conduct a fair comparison of the actual qualifications and abilities of the two applicants. …

 Romanoski had an easy option for getting balanced information on both applicants. Both Covert and Poto listed Poole as a reference. As the person who had been the direct supervisor of both men, Poole was in a unique position to provide a comparative judgment on their skills and abilities.

**In State #2011-015-M, performance appraisals were not reviewed, and the panel only checked references of the top candidate. Again, the State did not prevail. The arbitrator wrote:**

Before bypassing a senior candidate, the panel must scrutinize the ability and qualification to perform the duties of the higher classification with sufficient rigor to permit a full basis for comparison… The scrutiny of ability and qualifications must include a comparison of the candidates’ educational achievements, a comparison of the positions and job duties they have held in the past in order to compare these to the job duties of the current vacancy and an assessment of their past performance in the jobs they have previously occupied.