

A Guide to Interviewing For County Extension Councils / District Governing Bodies*

K-State Research and Extension

INTRODUCTION

These guidelines have been prepared to help interviewers conduct fair and objective interviews. An interview should provide as much information as possible about an applicant's potential to perform the duties of a particular position. The most valuable interview is objective and permits the interviewer(s) to determine the knowledge, skills and abilities of a prospective employee.

INTERVIEW DEVELOPMENT

A. Establish Criteria for Selection

The selection criteria must be consistent with the complexity and level of the job. Focus on performance factors that can be demonstrated in the selection procedure. Such criteria must be job-related and might include performance during the interview, relevant training, education and experience, etc. Example: To what extent is a job success dependent upon effective oral communication skills, on-the-spot reasoning skills, and the ability to effectively present oneself to strangers?

B. Determine Interview Strategies

In addition to questions, determine if there are any skills that could be demonstrated during the interviews, for example: applicants could be asked to proofread a document, to format a business letter, etc.

C. Develop Job Related Questions

- 1) "Nice to know" questions are not permitted. Lawsuits may result from applicants who are rejected on the basis of irrelevant questions asked by an interviewer.
- 2) When developing questions, always keep in mind that they must be job-related and appropriate for the complexity and level of the position. It is helpful to weigh the questions based on the importance of each selection criterion.
- 3) Open ended questions are the most effective questions, yield the greatest amount of information, and allow the applicant latitude in responding. Example: "What did you like about your last job?" See sample interview questions on page 3, and *Guidelines for Employment Inquiries* on page 6.

* Adapted from the K-State Division of Human Resources. See www.ksu.edu/hr.

INTERVIEW PROCESS

A. Pre-Interview

- 1) Schedule interviews so those being interviewed will not come in contact with each other as they arrive and/or depart from the interview.
- 2) Schedule interviews to allow sufficient time for post interview discussion, completion of notes, etc.
- 3) Secure an interview setting that is free from interruptions or distractions.
- 4) Review applications and resumes provided by the applicants.
- 5) Provide an accurate position description to each applicant and allow adequate time for reading before the interview begins.

B. Opening the Interview

- 1) Review the role of the local office of K-State Research and Extension.
- 2) Allow the applicant an opportunity to pose questions or seek clarification concerning the position.
- 3) Explain the interview process to the applicant.

C. Questioning

- 1) Question the applicant following the method established in the development stage.
- 2) Be consistent with all applicants.
- 3) Allow the applicant sufficient time to respond to each question.
- 4) Record any relevant information elicited from the questions.

D. Closing the Interview

- 1) Inform the applicant when the employment decision will be made and how notification will occur.
- 2) Confirm the date of the applicant's availability to begin work.
- 3) Confirm the applicant's correct address and telephone number.
- 4) Give the applicant a final opportunity to raise any questions.
- 5) Obtain all necessary information from the applicant about how to contact references.

E. Post-Interview

- 1) Review the selection criteria.
- 2) Review and complete notes.
- 3) Avoid prejudice and discussion of applicants between interviews.
- 4) Use the selection criteria established in the developing stages.
- 5) Rank the applicants based on the selection criteria.
- 6) When possible, decide upon a second and third choice in the event the first choice should decline the offer.
- 7) Contact references for the one to three applicants being considered. See *Guide to Reference Checking*.
- 8) Document the basis for the final recommendation. File in a permanent file for five years.
- 9) Notify all applicants of the results prior to announcing the selection.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

A. Communication

- 1) Give me a specific example of a time when a co-worker criticized your work in front of others. How did you respond? How has that event shaped the way you communicate with others?
- 2) How do you ensure that someone understands what you are saying?
- 3) Tell me about a time when you had to present complex information.
- 4) Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in order to get across an important point.

B. Decision Making

- 1) Give me an example of a time you had to make a difficult decision in your employment.
- 2) Describe a specific problem you solved for your employer. How did you approach the problem? What role did others play? What was the outcome?
- 3) Give me an example of when taking your time to make a decision paid off.

C. Initiative

- 1) What did you do to prepare for this interview?
- 2) Give me an example of a situation that could not have happened successfully without you being there.

D. Planning and Organization

- 1) Describe a situation when you had many projects due at the same time. What steps did you take to get them all done?
- 2) How do you determine priorities in scheduling your time? Give me an example.

E. Flexibility

- 1) Describe a time where you were faced with work-related problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.
- 2) Describe a time when you put your needs aside to help a co-worker understand a task. How did you assist them? What was the result?

F. Leadership

- 1) Tell me about a time when you influenced the outcome of a project by taking a leadership role.
- 2) Give me an example of when you involved others in making a decision.

G. Time Management

- 1) Tell me about a time when you failed to meet a deadline. What things did you fail to do? What were the repercussions? What did you learn?
- 2) Tell me about a time when you were particularly effective in prioritizing tasks and completing a project on schedule.

GUIDE TO REFERENCE CHECKING

K-State Research and Extension

Reference checking is an important part of the employment process. It is necessary to verify or confirm information from application materials and to obtain information not otherwise available.

Prior to conducting reference checks, follow these steps to get the most from the reference interview:

- < Identify data to verify.
- < Target new information to be sought which is not normally on a resume and may not be available from an interview, such as job performance level and perceived strengths and limitations.
- < Design open-ended questions.
- < Prepare questions in advance and be consistent in asking the same questions of each reference for each candidate.
- < Take notes to document the reference check interview.

Telephone Reference Checks

Follow this five step process for conducting an in-person or telephone reference check:

1. **Open the interview:** identify yourself, K-State Research and Extension, and the reason for the conversation. Confirm that the present time is a good time or inquire if there is a more convenient time to call back. **Assure the reference that information will be kept confidential.**
2. **Ask open-ended questions** that cannot be answered by a "yes," or "no." They typically begin with a phrase such as "Tell me about...," "Describe...," or "Give me some examples of..." Do not put words into a reference's mouth.
3. Take careful, accurate notes. This will be much easier if using a guide such as a reference check form that has the reference questions listed on it. **Do not ask questions "off the record" -- no answers can really be treated as such.** Written documentation will give you proof to defend every hiring decision.
4. In **closing the reference call**, always ask the reference giver if they can add anything which you might not have asked about but which might be relevant. The longer the reference giver talks, the more forthcoming they are likely to become about the applicant.

Reference Checking Questions

Following are several suggested reference checking questions. Questions can be selected from this list, questions can be adapted to meet specific needs, or new questions can be developed.

BASIC FACTS

1. How long did you work with (or know) the applicant?
2. Why did the applicant leave the company?
3. If you had an opportunity, would you re-hire this applicant?

JOB CONTENT

1. What were his or her primary responsibilities?
2. Describe how the responsibilities of the applicant might have changed or increased while he or she was in this job.

SUPERVISION

1. How would the applicant's co-workers describe his or her teamwork capabilities.

PERFORMANCE LEVEL

1. How would you compare the applicant with others in your company/business/class that had similar responsibilities?
2. What would have made the applicant more effective?
3. How would you describe the applicant's strengths/limitations?
4. If you had to use a few words that you feel would accurately summarize this applicant on the job, what would you say?

MAJOR SKILL AREAS

1. How would you evaluate the applicant's technical skills in _____?
2. How would you define the applicant's interpersonal skills?
3. How would you describe the applicant's written communication skills?
4. How would you evaluate this applicant's problem-solving ability?

PERSONAL TRAITS AND ABILITIES AFFECTING THE JOB

1. How would you evaluate this applicant's ability to:
 - a. accept responsibility
 - b. learn
 - c. take suggestions or criticism
 - d. be flexible
 - e. pay attention to detail
 - f. follow through on a job
 - g. demonstrate resourcefulness
 - h. use his or her own initiative
2. How would you describe this applicant's general attitude concerning his or her work?

OTHER

1. What haven't I asked that you might be able to tell me about this applicant which would help me better evaluate him or her for this job?

Source: Alexander Hamilton Institute, Effective Interviews for Every Situation.
Borgman Associates, Council On Education In Management, 99 Best Reference Checking Questions. A Step-by-Step Guide Legal Aspects, Best Questions to Ask, Getting Cooperation, Interpretation of Responses, ... And More!

GUIDELINES FOR EMPLOYMENT INQUIRIES

The following chart is to be used as a guide to formulate questions which will elicit the information needed to make employment decisions.

	<u>Permissible Inquiries</u>	<u>Inquiries which must be Avoided</u>
Name	Questions which will enable work and education records to be checked	Inquiry about the name which would indicate lineage, ancestry, national origin, descent, or marital status
Age	If age is a legal requirement, whether applicant meets the minimum or maximum age requirements; upon hire, proof of age can be required.	If age is not a legal requirement, any inquiry or requirement that proof of age be submitted must be avoided. NOTE: The Age Discrimination in Employment Act, as amended in 1986 prohibits discrimination against persons over age 40. The Kansas Act Against Discrimination prohibits discrimination against persons age 18 and over.
Race or Color	Race may be requested for affirmative action statistical recording purposes. Applicants must be informed that the provision of such information is voluntary.	Any inquiries which would indicate race or color.
Gender	Inquiry or restriction of employment is permissible only where a bona fide occupational qualification exists. (This BFOQ exception is interpreted very narrowly by the courts and EEOC.) The employer must prove that the BFOQ exists and that all members of the affected class are incapable of performing the job.	Any inquiry which would indicate gender.
Marital and Family Status	Whether applicant can meet specified work schedules and/or will be able to travel. (Example: This office is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Can you work during these hours?).	Any inquiry which would reveal marital status; information on applicant's children, child-care arrangements or pregnancy.

	<u>Permissible Inquiries</u>	<u>Inquiries which must be Avoided</u>
Disabilities	Under the provisions of the Kansas Act Against Discrimination, as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, applicants may be asked if they are able to perform the essential duties of the position with or without reasonable accommodation.	Whether an applicant is disabled or inquiry about the nature or severity of the disability. Inquiries about any association with or relationship to a person with a disability. NOTE - Except in cases where undue hardship can be proven, employers must make reasonable accommodations for an employee's disability. Reasonable accommodation may include making facilities accessible, job restructuring, modified work schedules, modifying examinations, training materials or policies, acquiring or modifying equipment or devices, or providing qualified readers or interpreters.
Religion	Employers may inform applicants of normal hours and days of work required by the job. NOTE - Except in cases where undue hardship can be proven, employers must make reasonable accommodations for an employee's religious practices. Reasonable accommodation may include voluntary substitutions, flexible scheduling, lateral transfer, change of job duties, or use of annual or vacation leave.	Any inquiry which would indicate applicant's religious practices and customs.
Address	Address may be requested so that the applicant can be contacted. Names of persons with whom applicant resides may be requested for compliance with nepotism policies.	Any inquiry which may indicate ethnicity or national origin.
Ancestry or National Origin	Languages applicant reads, speaks or writes and the degree of fluency if a specific language is necessary to perform the job.	Inquiries into applicant's lineage, ancestry, national origin, descent, birthplace, or native language; how applicant learned a foreign language.
Conviction & Court Records	Inquiry into convictions which relate reasonably to fitness to perform a particular job. ARREST - The employer must consider whether the alleged conduct is job-related, the likelihood that the alleged conduct was actually committed and the time that has passed since the arrest. CONVICTION - The employer must consider the nature and gravity of the offense(s), the time that has passed since the conviction and/or completion of the sentence, and whether the conduct for which the applicant was convicted is job-related. particular job.	Ask or check into a person's arrest record; ask or check into a person's court or conviction record if not substantially related to functions and responsibilities of the particular job in question.

	<u>Permissible Inquiries</u>	<u>Inquiries which must be Avoided</u>
Military Service	Type of education and experience gained as it relates to a particular job.	Type of discharge.
Birthplace & Citizenship	If United States citizenship is a legal requirement, inquiry about the citizenship of an applicant is permissible. The Employment Eligibility Verification (Form I-9) must be submitted by those who are hired to provide evidence of identity and employment eligibility.	Any inquiry which would indicate the birthplace of the applicant or any of the applicant's relatives.
Photographs	Statement that a photo may be required after hire for purposes of identification.	Any requirement or suggestion that a photo be supplied before hiring.
Education	Applicant's academic, vocational or professional education; schools attended.	Any inquiry which would indicate the nationality, racial, or religious affiliation of a school; years of attendance and dates of graduation.
Experience	Applicant's work experience, including names and addresses of previous employers, dates of employment, reasons for leaving, and salary history.	Any inquiry regarding non job-related work experience.
Financial Status	If required for business necessity, questions concerning financial stability. Examples of agencies that make inquiries into applicants' financial status are the Kansas Highway Patrol, Kansas Bureau of Investigation, and the Kansas Lottery.	If not required for business necessity, questions concerning financial stability.
Notice in case of Emergency	Name and address of person(s) to be notified in case of accident or emergency may be requested after selection is made.	Name and address of relative(s) to be notified in case of accident or emergency.
Organizations	Inquiry into the organizations to which an applicant belongs and offices held relative to the applicant's ability to perform the job sought. NOTE - An applicant should not be required to provide the name of an organization which will reveal the religious, racial, or ethnic affiliation of the organization.	A list of all organizations to which the applicant belongs.
References	Names and addresses of persons who will provide professional and/or character references for applicant.	Requirement that a reference be supplied by a particular individual.