

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE
WASHINGTON, DC

FSIS DIRECTIVE

4335.8
REVISION 1

11/4/02

INTERVIEW POLICY

I. PURPOSE

This directive provides the interview policy for the Agency.

II. CANCELLATION

This directive cancels FSIS Directive 4335.8 dated 6/29/01.

III. REASON FOR REISSUANCE

This directive is reissued to eliminate the mandatory requirement for BEI interviews at the GS-13 through GS-15 levels and the requirement to use BEI panels for GS-14 and GS-15 positions.

IV. REFERENCES

FSIS Directive 4335.1 Revision 2, Merit Promotion Plan

V. ABBREVIATIONS AND FORMS

| | |
|-----|----------------------------------|
| BEI | Behavioral Event Interview |
| GS | General Schedule |
| KSA | Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities |
| HRD | Human Resources Division |
| HRO | Human Resources Office |

VI. POLICY

It is FSIS policy to strongly encourage the use of interviews as a part of the selection process for positions filled through competitive and noncompetitive procedures (refer to FSIS Directive 4335.1). Interviewing is not mandatory; however, when interviews are conducted, the BEI methodology is required. A mix of technical, experience, and self-evaluation questions may also be included with the BEI questions. Deputy Administrators or Assistant Administrators may institute their own interview policies for their areas.

DISTRIBUTION:
All Offices

OPI:
HRD – Employment and Benefits Policy
Branch

VII. **BEI METHOD**

A. BEI is a structured interview method that requires interviewers to ask questions that are directly tied to the KSAs needed for successful performance in the position being filled.

B. The candidate describes a specific past event that is relevant to the position being filled when responding to a BEI question.

C. The BEI methodology provides objective information about each candidate's qualifications as they relate to the job requirements.

VIII. **COVERAGE**

This policy covers only non-bargaining unit positions at grades 1–15.

IX. **CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS**

Interviews are not mandatory; however, when an interview is conducted, BEI methodology is required. Interviews may be conducted using either the one-on-one or panel format.

NOTE: Panel interviews include two or more members. See Attachment 1 for more details on the types of interviews.

X. **RESPONSIBILITIES OF INTERVIEWERS**

A. **Selecting officials** normally conduct or participate in the interviews. Their direct involvement is not required, but strongly encouraged. See Attachment 2 for interviewing guidelines. **Selecting officials:**

1. At a minimum, review and concur with interview questions and consider the results in the selection decision.
2. May designate one or more persons to conduct or participate in the interviews.
3. If not participating in the interview process, at a minimum, brief the panel members regarding position requirements prior to the interviews.

B. **Designated interviewers must:**

1. Be at the same or higher grade as the position being filled.
2. Decline participation if personal knowledge of the candidate precludes a fair and objective assessment of the candidate's responses.
3. Respect the privacy rights of all candidates and not discuss the interview proceedings with others, except as required for official business.

4. Consider and evaluate only the information discussed during the interview. Do not consider information not presented in the interview.

5. Give the selecting official the interview results on all candidates to ensure that each receives full and proper consideration.

C. Interviewer(s) must not be a:

1. Candidate for the position being filled.

2. Promotion review panel member who evaluated applications for the position. Promotion panel members may not participate in the interview or selection process in any way.

D. Interview panels, when used:

1. Should be diverse to the extent possible (e.g., gender, ethnicity, or disability).

2. May include a facilitator. The facilitator:

a. Describes the interview process to the candidate(s).

b. Monitors the time allotted for each question and the entire interview.

c. Facilitates the evaluation process by guiding the panel towards a consensus rating.

d. Records the panel's consensus rating.

e. Documents justification for the rating.

f. Is helpful, but not required. A member of the interview panel or another individual in the organization who is trained in the BEI method may also serve as the facilitator.

XI. RESPONSIBILITIES OF SELECTING OFFICIALS

A. Before choosing a candidate, the selecting official:

1. May interview all, some, or none of the candidates. See Attachment 2 for interviewing guidelines. The selecting official may designate one or more appropriate persons to conduct or participate in the interviews.

2. May conduct a subsequent interview or contact one or more of the candidates for additional or clarifying information, after completing and evaluating the BEIs. When using subsequent interviews:

- a. The BEI methodology is optional.
- b. Subparagraphs X. B. and C. apply.
- c. The interviewer documents the nature of the contact and additional information obtained. The selecting official retains the documentation according to subparagraph B.

3. Considers the interview results as supplemental information on the candidate's qualifications to the written application, performance appraisal, and any supervisory references obtained.

4. Annotates the certificate if any candidate declines an interview. A candidate who declines the interview may still be considered based on the information in the application and any supervisory references obtained.

B. After a selection is made, the selecting official retains all interview and selection documentation for at least 2 years or until any grievance, complaint, or appeal is resolved, whichever is longer. **Prior to destruction, the selecting official should verify there is no pending action requiring retention.** Such documentation:

1. Includes:
 - a. The interview questions.
 - b. Notes and assessments of the candidates' responses.
 - c. Name of person selected and reasons supporting the selection.
2. May be needed to support or defend the selecting official's decision, if challenged.

XII. **BEI TIPS**

A. Tips for:

1. Selecting officials are in Attachment 3.
2. Employees are in Attachment 4.

B. Questions and answers can also be found on the HRD Intranet website:
<http://hrd.fsis.usda.gov>, under Supervisory References.



Acting Deputy Administrator
Office of Management

Attachments

- 1 Types of Interviews
- 2 Interviewing Guidelines
- 3 Tips for Selecting Officials
- 4 Tips for Employees
- 5 Frequently Asked Questions on Behavioral Event Interviewing

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

I. ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW

This method is typical for most positions. One person, normally the selecting official, conducts and evaluates the interviews.

A. **Advantages.** This method is more efficient because one person does all the interviewing and evaluating. Also, it is less intimidating to the candidate because most candidates are used to one-on-one interviews.

B. **Disadvantage.** One perspective may not be enough to accurately evaluate candidates for highly complex jobs.

II. PANEL INTERVIEW

A. **General.** A panel interview involves two or more interviewers (no more than five) where each asks the candidate one or more questions. In a modified panel interview, one member asks the questions and the others observe and take notes.

1. All panel members participate in evaluating the candidates.

2. The panel may include a facilitator who explains the interview process, introduces the panel members, clarifies any questions, monitors the time allotted, and facilitates the evaluation process.

3. The selecting official responsible for the selection decision receives the applications, interview notes, and evaluations.

B. **Usage.** Panel interviews are typically used to interview a large number of candidates and to fill multiple and complex positions.

C. **Advantage.** The panel interview enhances objectivity by providing multiple perspectives.

D. **Disadvantages.** The panel interview:

1. Can be intimidating to candidates and may adversely affect their performance during the interview.

2. Expends more in human resources and administrative costs for items such as scheduling and coordination.

INTERVIEWING GUIDELINES

I. REQUIREMENTS FOR INTERVIEWERS

If interviews are conducted, BEI questions are required. However, a mix of technical expertise and self-evaluation questions may also be asked.

II. GUIDELINES FOR INTERVIEWERS

A. Interviewers should:

1. Base questions for the interview on the KSAs for the position being filled and use the same questions for all candidates.
2. Ask the candidate to clarify or explain any information provided in the application.
3. May ask a mix of technical knowledge, experience, self-evaluation, and BEI questions.
4. Require the candidate to describe, in detail, what he or she did in a particular situation that is relevant to the position being filled.
5. Probe for specific information.
6. Take notes on the candidate's responses throughout the interview.
7. Evaluate the candidate's responses immediately following the interview. Use "Selecting for Success" evaluation criteria, if possible, because it is validated. Selecting officials receive "Selecting for Success" criteria when they take HRD's interview training course. Do not use matrixes or other numeric scoring mechanisms unless they have been previously validated.

B. Use a one-on-one or panel interview. See Attachment 1 for types.

C. Conduct interviews in person, through videoconference, or by telephone. In cases where candidates for a position are located both inside and outside the local commuting areas, it is acceptable to conduct interviews using more than one of the communication methods. **EXAMPLE:** If there are several candidates outside the local commuting area, budgetary considerations or other circumstances may not allow for all interviews to be in person. Therefore, all those outside the geographical area can be interviewed by telephone, while all those in the local commuting area can be interviewed in person.

D. Use consistent interview techniques (panel or one-on-one). When this is not possible, document the rationale for any differences.

E. Do not provide questions in advance of the interview. This may change what is being measured from an assessment of an individual's competencies to an assessment of the interviewee's ability to prepare a formal presentation. It renders the "Selecting for Success" evaluation criteria invalid.

TIPS FOR SELECTING OFFICIALS

Prepare early! You may plan the interview questions before or while the announcement is open. **EXAMPLE:** Ask your HRO specialist if BEI questions exist for the position being filled or for a similar one. If questions are available, edit them as needed to ensure they accurately reflect the KSAs for the position being filled. If the HRO has no appropriate questions on file, ask a colleague who may have recently filled the same or a similar job.

Base interview questions on the KSAs required for the job. Gather information about the job requirements by first reviewing the position description and vacancy announcement. Identify the position's major responsibilities, the tasks required, and the skills and abilities needed. You may talk with top performers about the most important or difficult tasks they perform to get their perspective on the most important job requirements. When finalizing the questions, make sure they can be tied to the position description and to the KSAs listed in the vacancy announcement.

As a refresher, review the "Selecting for Success" course materials and the tools provided in the course references (**EXAMPLES:** Sample questions and rating scale). Contact the HRO for guidance if you have not received training.

Decide on the number of interviewers. Attachment 1 describes the types of interviews. If a panel interview is planned, determine who will ask which questions. Ensure the other interviewers are trained, available, and meet the guidelines in this directive. See Paragraph X.

Contact your HRO specialist for advice or to resolve questions.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYEES

WHAT IS BEI?

A behavioral event interview (BEI) focuses on the premise that the best predictor of future performance is recent, past behavior. This approach is different from traditional interviewing which is generally unstructured, and relies on hypothetical situations or the candidate's (your) own opinion of work or skills.

Questions are based on the KSAs needed for the job.

As a candidate, describe in detail specific past experiences or events that demonstrate an ability to perform the job. These questions are much more revealing, since the answers are based in fact. Prior to the interview, think about experiences and identify key events that directly relate to position requirements. Describe situations involving both positive and negative experiences.

When responding, focus on personal roles, contributions, and actions. Do not describe accomplishments in *we* terms. If you had been part of a work group, **describe what you did**. The interviewer will not credit you for certain accomplishments unless they specifically state what you did.

WHAT SHOULD YOU EXPECT?

Questions solicit detailed accounts of specific events from your work experiences. Generally, these questions begin with phrases like these:

- "Give me an example of the last time you..."
- "Give me your best example of a time when..."
- "Describe your toughest situation where you..."

Be very specific in your answers.

The interviewer uses follow-up questions or probes that focus on:

1. **The situation (what specifically happened).** Examples include:

- What was the project?
- What were the circumstances?
- When did that happen?
- What brought this problem to your attention?
- What made the situation difficult?

2. **What you did or said.** Examples include:

Tell me exactly what you did. What did you do next?

What steps did you take in handling the situation?

What caused you to be so successful in this particular situation?

What obstacles did you encounter and how did you overcome them?

How did you implement your solution?

How did you react?

3. **The outcome or result.** Examples include:

What was the outcome?

How did the project turn out?

What feedback did you receive?

What did you do the next time that happened?

What impact did your efforts have on the situation?

How did the procedure change after that incident?

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON BEHAVIORAL EVENT INTERVIEWING

Q. In a behavioral event interview (BEI), can interviewees bring the application or notes for reference?

A. Yes. Interviewees may bring information to the interview to jog their memories and remind them of situations encountered.

Q. What does *behavior* mean exactly ?

A. When evaluating *behaviors*, interviewers are looking for *actions* taken in previous work experiences that are similar to the work to be performed by the position. Behaviors are factual and do not involve what the interviewee *might do* or *think* in a hypothetical work situation.

Q. What weight should the interview have in the selection decision?

A. The interview has no prescribed weight. The selecting official should consider all available information when making a hiring decision (such as the interview, written application, performance appraisal, and supervisory reference checks).

Most importantly, documentation must directly support the selection decision and should demonstrate how well the individual selected met the position requirements.

Q. Is it permitted for the selecting official to clarify information on an application during an interview?

A. Yes. An interview should *clarify* information in an individual's application, when needed. It may not be necessary to clarify information on all applications. If the selecting official does not participate on the interview panel, he or she may give the panel members questions to ask interviewees or may ask questions during supervisory reference checks in order to clarify information in the application.

Q. Besides BEI interview questions, can an interviewer ask questions that address technical experience?

A. Yes. An interviewer may *ask technical questions* to discover if the interviewee has particular knowledge or skills for the position. The interview can include a mix of questions: BEI, technical, and traditional. BEI training describes that up to 20 percent of interview questions may be about an interviewee's experience and personal assessments and 80 percent may be about behaviors. A mix of traditional and behavioral questions often provides added information about relevant work experience that may not be obvious in the application. The interviewer can probe further if an interviewee's answers conflict with the application. Responses can provide good background information for behavioral questions.

Behavioral questions are designed to discover how well the interviewee will perform in the position and are the most revealing of interview questions. For example, the interviewee may have excellent technical knowledge and a broad educational background, but he or she may not be the best candidate if he or she has difficulty completing work assignments within established deadlines.

Q. Do probe questions listed under the main BEI question need to be asked in the same manner and order as written?

A. No. Each BEI question has probe questions to help identify the situation, behavior, and outcome (SBO) of a particular response given. Although the question cannot be changed, the probe questions help ensure the full SBO is addressed for a particular work example and may be modified as necessary. If an interviewee is having trouble answering the main question, the interviewer may sometimes need to rephrase or ask a different a probe question. Probes do not change the main question. If the interviewee has already provided needed information on a previous probe, the interviewer does not have to ask the probe question a second time.