

Guide to Conducting Screening Interviews

The purpose of this guide is to provide tips for conducting effective screening interviews. Screening interviews are a valuable tool for gathering information on applicants and an essential part of the selection process.

By conducting screening interviews, hiring managers and search chairs are able to:

- minimize recruiting costs both in human and financial resources;
- obtain clarification on any information on the application materials;
- ask questions about the applicant's experience;
- describe the position and department;
- discuss the salary for the position and ascertain an individual's continued interest in the position; and
- determine a pool of candidates for campus interviews.

Screening interviews are frequently conducted as telephone interviews or interviews at national meetings and conferences. By contacting applicants and asking basic questions, you may be able to eliminate some applicants without taking time out of your schedule or the schedules of other search committee members. In addition, by providing additional information about the position, its responsibilities and corresponding hiring range, applicants may self-select out of the process. It is extremely beneficial to conduct screening interviews when there are applicants from out of town.

There are three steps in the screening interview process:

1. Preparing for the screening interview
2. Conducting the screening interview
3. Determining a pool of candidates based on the screening interview

Step 1: Preparing for the screening interview

Determine which applicants you want to invite for a screening interview. Review the application materials for the applicants to decide who should be contacted for a screening interview. All applicants contacted need to meet the minimum qualifications of the position.

Review the job qualifications. Make sure you have a strong understanding of the position and the department within which the vacancy exists. This will allow you to ask applicants job-related questions and to accurately describe the position to the applicants. It is helpful to have a copy of the job profile, as well as the job posting in front of you during the screening interview.

Prepare an overview of the position and of the hiring department. It is helpful to prepare a brief overview about the position and of the department that describes the structure of the department, general responsibilities of the position, current status of the opening, reporting structure, etc. A written overview will assure you are

consistently giving applicants all the relevant information about the position and about the department within which they will be working.

Review the applicant's resume. Familiarize yourself with the applicant's cover letter, resume and/or application. Look specifically for any areas that you would like additional information about or in which you have additional questions. This may include identifying any gaps in employment dates or the length of time in a position or at an organization, and any responsibilities listed on the application or resume for which you would like additional information.

Identify individuals from the search committee to participate in the screening interview. It is important to think about how many individuals you would like in the screening interview. Remember, screening interviews on the phone can be difficult with more than two or three individuals. If you have a search committee, you will want to determine if it is appropriate to include a member or two of the committee. For example, if technical skills are a critical part of the position and an area which you would like to ask about in the screening interview, it is important to have someone from the search committee who understands the technical issues participating in the screening interview.

Prepare questions. The number of questions you prepare for the screening interview will be determined by the amount of information you wish to obtain.

- It is best to have a standard set of questions for all applicants. As with any step in the recruitment and selection process, it is important to treat all candidates equally. As you create questions for the screening interview, it is important to think about who you have involved in the screening interview and the on campus interviews, as well as which questions you want to ask in the on campus interview.
- This is also an opportunity to ask for clarification on any information on the application materials. Some examples of specific questions are listed here:
 - “Your employment ended with your most recent employer a year ago. Can you tell me why you left that position and what you have been doing in the past year?”
 - “Your resume shows that you worked in your last position for 6 months, why did you leave that position?”
 - “Your resume states that you worked for ABC organization from 2001 to 2003, in what month of 2001 did you start and in what month of 2003 did you leave that position?”

Prepare answers for commonly asked questions. Typically applicants ask questions including job specifics, salary information, benefits, the interview process and the hiring timeframe. Make sure you have answers to these questions prior to the screening interview. If the applicant asks questions that you do not know the answer to, be sure to follow up with the answers in a timely manner.

Schedule an appropriate amount of time to conduct the screening interview to avoid interruptions. It is a good idea to contact the applicant to schedule a time for the screening interview. Do not assume that the applicant will be able to participate in the screening interview during your initial contact. Ask the applicant if they are interested in participating in a screening interview, and if so, schedule an appropriate time for

both of you. You may want to be prepared in case the applicant is available at that time for the actual screening interview. Give the applicant an idea of how many questions you have and the amount of time you expect the screening interview to take.

Step 2: Conducting the screening interview

Introduce yourself. Provide the candidate with a brief introduction of yourself, the department you represent within the University and state the purpose for your call. Remember, this may be the applicant's first contact with the University and first impressions are important.

Present a general overview of the open position. This is an opportunity to discuss the position and answer any questions the applicant may have. Although this is an opportunity for us to understand the applicant and determine whether or not to invite them to an on campus interview, it is also a chance for the applicant to learn about the position and whether or not they are interested in the position after speaking to you.

Be alert to non-verbals when you ask questions. In addition to listening to what the applicant says, listen to how it is said. Are there hesitations or pauses, even sighs? These are often a sign that additional questions in that area may bring further information you might not otherwise have received.

Address any inconsistencies in the applicant's answers. If the applicant answers a question that seems inconsistent or responds in a way that causes you concern, ask additional questions.

Take notes. Keep legible and complete notes of the applicant's answers and questions as they are critical when the time comes to evaluation the information and determine a pool of candidates for on campus interviews.

Take time to answer applicant's questions. Remember, this is a chance for the applicant to learn about the position and whether or not they are interested in the position after speaking to you.

Conclude the screening interview. At the end of the screening interview, explain the rest of the selection process, including the next steps and corresponding timeframe. Do not invite the applicant in for an on campus interview during this conversation. Explain that you will be in contact upon completing all screening interviews.

Do not rate the applicant while gathering information. The primary goal of the screening interview is to collect information. Rating the applicant during the screening interview may distract from other valuable information. There will be time to rate the applicant when all of the information is gathered.

Step 3: Determining a pool of candidates based on the screening interview

Review applicants and results of the screening interview with any appropriate individuals. If there is a search committee, the information should be shared, as

appropriate, to determine a pool of candidates. This step will also include discussion with the hiring manager, if he/she was not involved in the screening process.

Schedule the on campus interviews, including inviting appropriate search committee members, reserving locations on campus and scheduling any additional interviews.

Contact the candidate(s) for the on campus interviews. Invite the candidates to participate in the on campus interview and explain the process including where the interviews will take place, how many search committee members will be involved in the interview and any other interviews that are scheduled for the individual on that day and how long the interview is expected to take. You may want to consider sending information (either via email or mail) with campus maps if the candidate is not familiar with campus.