Interviewing and Candidate Selection Guidelines

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the recruitment process for open positions in your department. Your participation helps to ensure that we select the most qualified candidate for each position. We appreciate your assistance and ask that while you’re preparing to interview candidates, please take a moment to review the following search committee guidelines. These guidelines were developed with the assistance of the Office of Equal Opportunity and Access and the Office of Human Resources and will help to ensure a recruitment process that is fair and equitable to all applicants, as outlined by the University’s Non-discrimination Policy and Affirmative Action Plan.

Purpose

The Search Process is integral to Northwestern University’s commitment to Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action.

Every recruitment effort for a vacant position affords us a unique opportunity to add to our presence a sample of the array of individuality within our society. As a search committee member and as a member of our campus community, you are entrusted with the responsibility to be committed to the foundations of equal opportunity and to carry out this responsibility with diligence as you perform your other position responsibilities.

Interview and Feedback Preparation Process

As a part of the recruitment process, search committee members will be asked to participate in an interview preparation meeting prior to conducting interviews. The preparation meeting will help committee members understand the selection criteria for the position and outline the competency areas on which each interviewer should focus. Interviews will develop interview questions based on these competencies prior to interviewing.

It is important that these actions are standard in the process:

- Each candidate should be asked similar questions to ensure consistency in candidate evaluation and ensure that crucial job-related information is obtained.
- All interviews must be conducted under reasonably similar circumstances, and all candidates should be given similar opportunities to meet the same set of colleagues. If you feel like you are not able to commit to interviewing and giving feedback on every candidate for the position, please let the hiring manager or recruiter know prior to starting the interview process.
- Feedback on candidates should be related to the individual’s ability to carry out the tasks required by the position. Interviewers should focus the majority of their comments on the criteria/competency they were asked to evaluate.
- Interview questions, candidate responses, and interviewer feedback should all be documented. This documentation is helpful in determining why a candidate did or did not move forward in the selection process and will provide a record of the search.

“Northwestern University is deeply committed to student, faculty and staff diversity – the broad array of characteristics, experiences, backgrounds and perspectives that shape us as individuals and together make us a vibrant community. A diverse community is essential to achieve our mission of creating the best possible learning environment and educational experience, because only by exploring issues with people of different backgrounds and viewpoints can we challenge our assumptions, test our ideas and broaden our understanding of the world.”

- Provost Daniel Linzer, 2011
Preventing Discrimination through Interview Question Preparation

Interview preparation is crucial to the success of a candidate search. Asking great interview questions can lend quality and depth to the entire recruitment process and helps to ensure that the best candidate is selected for the position. When preparing interview questions, please keep in mind that interviewers must ask only questions that are related to the position’s qualifications and responsibilities. Keeping the interview focused on the job can prevent unintended discrimination. Below are some Dos and Don’ts to keep in mind when developing interview questions.

Don’t:
• Go into an interview unprepared.
• Ask questions that are not job related or that might disproportionately screen out members of protected categories. (See grey box to the right for a list of the protected categories.) Examples of inappropriate questions may include:
  • “Are you a U.S. Citizen?”
  • “That’s an unusual name, what does it mean?”
  • “Are you pregnant?”, “Do you have any kids?” or “What is your childcare situation?”
  • “How many sick days did you take last year?”
  • “Do you go to church?” or “What religion are you?”
  • “How old are you?” or “When did you graduate?”

Do:
• Work with the other interviewers to develop an objective way to measure each candidate’s level and quality of education, experience, knowledge and skills as they relate to the specific duties of the position.
• Prepare questions before the interview and keep interview questions focused on the position and the candidate’s qualifications and experience.
• Ask each candidate similar questions and keep the same group of interviewers for all candidates to ensure consistency in the evaluation process.
• Show enthusiasm and professionalism to each candidate, even if they are not your favorite.

What to do if the interview goes off-course?
Occasionally a candidate will volunteer personal information that should not be used in the selection process. Examples include the disclosure of medical history, family planning and/or pregnancy, religious affiliations, and sexual orientation. If this occurs, please refocus the candidate on their job-related qualifications and continue the interview.

This information should be kept confidential and should not be included as part of the candidate evaluation. If you have concerns that personal information provided by the candidate might make them less qualified for the position or if you are uncomfortable with the manner in which the information was presented, please contact the assigned recruiter directly.
Providing Criteria-Based Feedback

As an interviewer, your feedback is integral to the recruitment process – it’s why you were asked to participate! Your opinion will help determine whether a candidate is selected as a finalist. Because of this, feedback must be based on the skills and qualifications of the candidate. As with interviewing, focusing on the job-related aspects of the candidates experience will help to ensure compliance with the University’s non-discrimination and affirmative action policies.

Feedback Collection Process:

As interviews are completed, the selection committee members will receive candidate surveys via email. While writing your feedback, please expand on the qualities and experience that you think do or do not make the candidate a good fit for the position.

Dos and Don’ts of Feedback:

- **DO** include your opinion of the candidate’s relevant skills, qualifications, and experience
- **DO** include your observations of the candidate’s abilities to fulfill the competencies of the position, such as collegiality or communication skills
- **DO** comment on the candidate’s potential personality fit with the culture of the department. For example, feedback on a particularly quiet candidate could look like: “I would not recommend this candidate because they came across as very shy. We need someone with an outgoing personality as this position requires the ability to approach donors and work with large groups of alumni.”
- **DON’T** include observations that are unrelated to the candidate’s qualifications or potential fit within the organization.

Examples of acceptable and unacceptable feedback:

**Competency: Fundraising**

**Acceptable Feedback:**
“Candidate has a good track record, interesting ideas on blending the NULC team with Chicago regional efforts; talked about how we will move to ‘campaign readiness’ and has given thought to the prospect pool. Good questions about the validity of ratings in CATracks and understands what a good referral is.”

**Unacceptable Feedback:**
“Very good fundraiser.”

**Competency: Initiative**

**Acceptable Feedback:**
“In the absence of a director, this candidate ran the regional office which required a tremendous amount of initiative and focus. He rose to the occasion with drive and creativity, spearheading several programs.

**Unacceptable Feedback:**
“He is very upbeat and I think he would be a good partner.”

For questions about the recruitment process or concerning HR policy, please contact you Staffing and Human Resources Consultants respectively.