

MONTANA/DAKOTAS

INTERVIEW AND SELECTION POLICY

Current Bureau policy, which is outlined in BLM Manual 1400-335, Merit Promotion Plan, is as follows:

- A. Selecting officials will ensure that all referred applicants are treated fairly and equitably. The selecting official is responsible for ensuring that interviews are properly conducted, that all questions are job-related, and that every effort is made to obtain the same information from each candidate. Interview panels may be used at the discretion of the selecting official.
- B. Interviewers may not ask about or discuss a candidate's race or ethnic background, color, sex, age, disability, religious beliefs, marital or family status, political affiliation, sexual orientation, or labor organization affiliation or activity.
- C. Normally, if one candidate is interviewed, all other candidates must be interviewed. However, if only certain candidates are chosen to be interviewed, the choice must be based on job-related criteria and documented in the vacancy announcement file.

While the Bureau policy allows only interviewing certain candidates, it is recommended that supervisors, at a minimum, interview all candidates on the list where the final selection will most likely be made. This could be from a Merit Promotion (MP) or a Delegated Examining Unit (DEU) list. In cases of an exception to this recommendation, the supervisor must provide the following to the HR Office:

- The title, series, and grade of the position;
- The supervisor's reasons for requesting the exception, which must be based on job-related criteria;
- For district office positions, concurrence by the District Manager; for State Office positions, concurrence by the Deputy State Director or Associate State Director. Concurrence can be in the form of a signature or an email to the staffing specialist.
- Upon receipt, this documentation will be included in the vacancy announcement file.

Selecting officials must make selection decisions based on legitimate reasons that are supportable. As you go through the interview and selection process, ensure the person selected is the best qualified candidate and retain documentation to support your decision.

In an effort to assist you in conducting interviews and processing selections for positions, the following is provided:

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

1. Once the vacancy announcement closes, the Branch of Human Resources (HR) will access the automated Hiring Management system (formerly known as Quickhire). The automated system will evaluate each applicant based upon their individual responses to the questions included in the vacancy announcement. The HR specialist will review the qualification determinations made by the automated system and verify that the applicant's resume supports their responses to the questions in the vacancy announcement. If necessary, scores assigned by the automated system may be adjusted. Upon completion of the rating/ranking process, candidates are electronically referred to the selecting official (SO) for consideration. Supervisors are to be reminded that information related to the vacancy announcement (who applied, who was referred, who is being interviewed, etc.) is confidential and should not be discussed with others.
2. Upon receipt of the Candidate Referral Certificate(s), the SO makes the decision to personally conduct interviews or to establish a team to conduct the initial interviews. If the decision is made to use an interview team, the SO may identify several individuals (usually three, but the number is up to the SO) to serve on the interview team. The interview team must contain at least one subject matter expert (SME). Other members of the interview team can be BLM employees, federal employees from outside the agency, as well as individuals from outside the federal government. The purpose of the interview team is to conduct an interview with each referred candidate and to make recommendations to the SO of the top candidates (usually three to five, but the number is up to the SO) for the position being filled.
3. Interview team members must be completely familiar with the specific requirements of the position being filled and understand the interview process and procedures. The SO is responsible for briefing the interview team on the interview process and to communicate his/her expectations of the process. The HR specialist responsible for staffing the position will also be available to assist in briefing the interview team. When interviewing for law enforcement positions, the special-agent-in-charge (SAC), or his/her designated representative, must be a member of the interview panel. The SO is responsible for coordinating involvement of the SAC.
4. A list of the interview questions which highlight the expectations of the position will be prepared by the SO or the members of the interview team. Interview questions should avoid addressing basic qualifications; those items have already been reviewed by HR. Attachment 2 includes a listing of potential interview questions for your use.

Additionally, avoid questions requiring only a "yes" or "no" answer. Concentrate questions around the applicant's work and educational background, work habits, and leadership competencies, working as a team member, personal strengths and weaknesses, decision-making abilities, etc.

Interviewers should not identify hiring standards that are not job-related. The interview is not valid if the standards automatically screen out applicants whose speech, dress, hair length, social status, ethnic background, or personal lifestyle differs from the interviewer. Beware of tendencies toward stereotypical thinking. The principle of non-discrimination requires that individuals be considered on the basis of individual qualifications, skills, and experience.

5. The same questions must be asked of each candidate. Often, the response to one question will lead to another, which is a natural part of the interview process. These secondary questions do not have to be repeated to all candidates. Some interviewers provide the list of questions to candidates in advance of the interview to allow preparation time. This approach is optional.
6. Conduct the interviews with as much privacy as possible, usually in a private office or small conference room. Schedule an appointment with the applicant, taking into account the best time to call and/or conduct the interview at the applicant's convenience.
7. Candidates may be interviewed either in person or over the telephone. It is recommended that interviews, to the extent practical, be conducted in person. If some candidates are not located within the local commuting area, interviews should be conducted by telephone. As long as all candidates are asked the same questions, there is nothing wrong with interviewing some candidates in person and others over the telephone. In some cases, a candidate will ask for a personal interview. If this occurs, the candidate is responsible for any expense associated with traveling for the interview. However, if a SO makes a decision to interview a candidate in person who lives in another location, the SO is responsible for expenses associated with either traveling to meet the candidate or for bringing the candidate in for an interview.
8. Be advised that with the use of the automated Hiring Management system, the interview step has become significantly more important. Why? The automated system provides the applicant little opportunity to provide information about themselves. The amount of space for the resume is limited, and the responses to knowledges, skills, and abilities have been replaced with job-specific questions established for the particular vacancy. As a result, supervisors must take advantage of the interview process to help ensure the person they are selecting is the right person for the job. Additionally, as the supervisor, you may choose questions for the vacancy announcement that are "short or long answer" questions. Please be advised that the short or long answer questions are not scored and considered as part of the automated rating process because the computer has no way of scoring the narrative. However, this supplemental information is valuable and should be considered as you interview and review each applicant's submission.

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW/CHECKING REFERENCES

1. At a minimum, interviews should be conducted with all applicants on the list where a selection is likely to be made. If you are unable to contact an applicant (after three documented attempts), or an applicant withdraws, annotate the list and forego the interview.

If an applicant fails to appear for a pre-employment interview, he/she may be eliminated from consideration when:

- a. You sent a written notice to the eligible that he/she would be removed from further consideration for the position if he/she failed to appear for an interview; and
- b. The arrangements for the interview were reasonable.

Contact HR for specific guidance on this matter.

2. Introduce yourself or the interview team to the candidate. Give the candidate a brief explanation of the position for which you are interviewing and some general information about the city where the position is located.
3. Explain to the candidate that you have a standard set of questions and that you intend to take notes.
4. At the end of the interview, ask the applicant if he/she has any questions. Additionally, give the candidate the opportunity to add any additional information that would be useful. You may also elaborate on any items you would like to make the candidate aware of regarding the status of the position, work schedules, etc. End each interview on a positive note, and let the candidate know when and how to expect a final decision on the selection.
5. The SO and/or interview team are encouraged to contact references and/or current supervisors for each applicant who has been interviewed. However, in most cases, the SO only contacts the references of the top candidates referred by the interview team. This is an acceptable practice. The same questions should be asked of each reference, and should relate to the applicant's duties, quality of performance, and work habits. A sample contact sheet for checking references is included as Attachment 3.

MAKING A SELECTION

1. When referring the top candidates to the SO, interview teams should consider all relevant information including experience, education/training, awards, supervisory appraisals, references, and notes from the interview. Remember that this process is confidential, and should not be communicated to anyone other than the SO.

2. Additional interviews by the SO are recommended prior to final selection but are not required. The SO has the option to conduct further interviews of any or all of the candidates or to make a final selection from the recommendations of the interview team. The SO has the option of selecting any candidate referred for the position even if that individual is not one of the top candidates recommended by the interview team; however, the SO must be able to justify how the selectee is the most qualified candidate for the position.
3. Once a tentative selection is made, the SO should prepare a justification which documents why the person selected is the best person for the position. The justification should include the following information:
 - Summary of outreach conducted.
 - Method of recruitment.
 - Process utilized to interview candidates; indicate those candidates who were not interviewed and why.
 - Describe why the candidate is the best candidate for the position. Focus on specific qualifications and/or experience that make this candidate the best.
4. The SO must obtain concurrence through their immediate supervisor, to the Field Manager, District Manager, or Deputy State Director, as applicable. This individual is responsible for reviewing the selection justification and ensuring that the best qualified candidate is selected. For supervisory positions, at any grade level, the Field Manager, District Manager, or Deputy State Director must verbally contact the Associate State Director to discuss.
5. The SO then submits the package (include the justification for selection with the Deputy State Director or District Manager concurrence and a signed Candidate Referral Certificate from which a selection was made) to the HR specialist responsible for the position. Upon receipt of the package, HR will review the selection.
6. Do not make an offer of employment until HR notifies you that your selection has been authorized.

FOLLOWING SELECTION

SOs are encouraged to contact all candidates referred and inform them who was selected. You may also use this opportunity to discuss suggestions for improvement, areas of experience where a candidate was lacking, etc.

HR will notify all referred candidates for the position, via email, within 2 days of the selection approval of the candidate selected.

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