

MEMORANDUM

TO: Personnel Officers

CC: *Shakman* Special Master's Office and OEIG's Hiring and Employment Monitoring Division

FROM: Acting Assistant Director Sarah Kerley 

DATE: October 30, 2018

SUBJECT: Informed Interviews

As we strive to bring common sense reform to the State's hiring system, we continually see limitations that we have placed on ourselves over time – limitations not required by law, rule, or even policy. Please allow this memorandum to dispel two particular myths of our current interview and selection process: interviewer review of applications and follow-up questions.

Review of applications

In earlier memos, agencies were given guidance with respect to development of and implementation of pre-developed screening criteria for selection of an interview pool. See *Memos of June 20, 2018, and amendment July, 13 2018*. Per that guidance, screeners (those who review the applications for application of screening criteria) do not also conduct the interviews.

As a result, at most agencies, interviewers do not have access to and/or do not review applications prior to conducting interviews. This limits the interviewers' ability to conduct a thorough interview of a candidate's credentials.

Effective immediately, prior to the interviews, members of the interview panel shall review the application materials for each candidate who accepted an invitation to interview. Interviewers should at a minimum familiarize themselves with a candidate's work history and credentials as set forth in the application materials. The interviewers should also identify any questions raised by the application (e.g. a vague reason for

having been fired, failing to list a reason for leaving a position, an unexplained employment gap) and be prepared to ask about them in the interview.

Use of Follow-up Questions

Another myth in interview and selection is that interviewers must ask “every candidate the same questions in the same order” without any deviation. While it is certainly true that the pre-developed interview questions must be asked of all candidates, that does not mean that the interviews are prohibited from asking follow-up questions to answers.

Instead, where necessary, interviewers are encouraged to ask follow-up questions that relate to the candidates’ responses to the pre-developed interview questions. It is appropriate for interviewers to ask candidates to clarify their answers if answers are unclear or incomplete. It is also appropriate to ask candidates to elaborate on an answer or to provide an example in support of something they said in response to one of the pre-developed questions.

A few examples of appropriate follow-up questions:

- How would you answer the second part of the question?
- Tell me more ... please elaborate
- Can you give us an example?
- What were the results?
- I’m not sure I understand...please clarify your answer.
- How does that specifically relate to the duties of this position?

While not every interviewee’s answers may require follow-up questions be asked, interviewers must treat all candidates equally with the same opportunity to explain their answers and application materials.

It is also appropriate and necessary to ask candidates to explain a gap or inconsistency on their application. Similarly, it is permissible to ask candidates to clarify something they said in the interview if it contradicts information on their application.

Some additional examples of appropriate questions:

- I see from your application that you have an 18-month gap in employment in 2016-2017. Can you please explain?
- You indicated in your resume that you spent 5 years performing audits, but your application reflects only three years as an auditor. Can you please explain.

Credibility is always a reasonable criterion of assessment. If we don’t ask the questions necessary to assess credibility in the face of conflicting information, we may not end up hiring the most qualified candidate.

Remember, we are seeking to hire the candidate most qualified to perform the work of the position we're filling – not the candidate most skilled at performing in a structured interview.

After an interview sequence has been completed, Agencies should take a critical eye to questions that resulted in numerous follow-up questions. For example, if Question #2 resulted in follow-up questions for 7 of 8 candidates, the question should likely be reworked or rephrased to be clearer before being used in another hiring sequence.