# National Institutes of Health

# GS-201 Human Resources

# Behavioral Interview Guide

## Behavioral-Based Interview Overview

Behavioral-based interviews focus on discovering how a candidate performed in specific work related situations. This interview technique seeks to uncover how a potential employee actually did behave in a given situation; not on how he or she might behave in the future. The premise behind this technique is that a good predictor of future performance is how someone performed in the past in a similar situation. Behavioral-based interviews are becoming more common throughout industry and government and many candidates are familiar with this technique and are well prepared for these interviews. Candidates can and should draw on previous work related experiences as well as non-work related experiences (e.g., school projects, community involvement) that are relevant to the interview questions.

### Behavioral Interviewing Suggested Protocol

1. As much as possible, all questions should relate to experiences that have occurred in the last 2-3 years (best for recollection of behavioral details).
2. All behavioral interview questions should focus on what the interviewee did, said, felt or thought in the past. The interviewer should be looking for phrases such as “I did….”, “I said….” etc.
3. Do not ask questions about what the interviewee would do in a given situation or what they would have done differently. The focus is on what the interviewee actually did/said/thought/felt in the past. If the interviewee uses such phrases as “I would,” the interviewer should probe by saying, “What did you actually do at that time?”
4. The interviewee should focus on what he/she did, rather than what “we” did. While working as part of a team is very common and desirable, it is important to understand what the candidate’s individual role was. The interviewer should probe the interviewee if “We” is used in describing actions. For example, if the interviewee says “We implemented the new payroll system by…..”, it is the interviewer’s job to ask the interviewee what his/her role was and what he actually did (as an individual).
5. Prior to delving into the detail of each question, ask the interviewee to provide a brief (30 second) overview of the situation by highlighting the beginning, middle, and end. This helps the interviewer to keep the interview on track. For example, if you feel lost in the discussion, you can pause the conversation by asking the interviewee where you are in the story (beginning, middle, or end).

### Suggested Introduction to the Interview

* This is a behavioral interview, which may be different from interviews you have had in the past. A behavioral interview focuses on what you have done, said, felt and thought in past experiences. Please use the first person as much as possible because I am most interested in what you have done, said, thought and felt in the situations. So if you use the term “we” rather than “I”, I may interrupt you to clarify what you did in the situation versus what others did.
* I am going to ask you specific questions about your experiences and will ask that you try, as best as you can, to only discuss experiences that have occurred within the past 2 or 3 years so that you will be able to recall the details of the situations.
* I will ask follow-up questions to get as many of the details around what you were doing in the situation. Imagine that I am making a movie of what you were doing in the given situation. I am interested in everything you did, said, thought and felt.

NOTE:

The information provided above offers suggestions for conducting behavioral-based interviews. Interviewers should use this information as a tool and tailor the interview to meet the needs of the individual organization.

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| Human Resources | |
| Competency | Definition |
| **Human Resource Communication** | Acquires and applies critical financial concepts and practices, based upon a thorough understanding of the Federal Government |
| **Human Resource Consultation** | Administers grants and cooperative agreements, applying knowledge of organizational needs and deadlines |
| **Human Resource Law, Regulation and Policy Research and Analysis** | Understands Human Resource (HR) laws, regulations and policies; assesses their potential effect on NIH procedures; and ensures they are effectively applied in all human capital matters |
| **Human Resource Management Knowledge** | Understands how human resource management can impact an organization and aides it in remaining stable and productive |

## Human Resource Communication

Understands Human Resource (HR) initiatives, services and applications and communicates information to the NIH Community

### Key Behaviors:

* Maintains an understanding of own HR area and a current and accurate understanding of all organizational HR initiatives, services and applications for the purpose of creating awareness and optimizing customer service
* Identifies the key points related to organizational HR programs that should be understood by the NIH employee population
* Contributes to the knowledge and understanding that employees have relating to an organization’s HR programs
* Communicates new/changed HR programs to employees using the most effective method(s) of communication (e.g., email, briefings)
* Assists with the training or retraining of employees on organizational HR programs as required
* Partners with other organizations both inside and outside of HCG

### Interview questions:

1. In this role, you will be managing multiple assignments and HR initiatives. In the past how have you created awareness of programs and initiatives across the organization? What challenges did you face? How did you handle them?
2. What tools or methods have you utilized to disseminate information effectively to an organization? How did you select the most appropriate one to use?
3. Share an example of a time when someone came to you with a question regarding a matter outside of your scope of responsibility. How did you handle this?

### Candidate Response:

### Interview Summary:

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| **Summarize the situation, behaviors demonstrated and outcomes. Then provide an overall proficiency rating for the competency as defined in the Administrative Officer competency model.** |
| Situation: |
| Behaviors: |
| Outcome: |
| Overall Competency Proficiency Rating: 0 1 2 3 4 5 |

## Human Resource Consultation

Administers grants and cooperative agreements, applying knowledge of organizational needs and deadlines

### Key Behaviors:

* Assures that HR policy, regulatory and program issuances are properly integrated with other staff actions and are thereby fully supportive of the organization’s mission and service outcomes
* Uses HR principles and business change processes to improve efficiency and effectiveness
* Uses appropriate tools/approaches to gather and disseminate information (e.g., meetings, email, briefings, presentations, surveys)
* Maintains confidentiality of sensitive information
* Scans the environment to assess organizational needs, identifies potential options and presents to management recommended solutions, including the pros and cons of each
* Understands the added value of, and uses face-to-face interactions to engage and create understanding
* Provides recommendations and/or reports on leading HR practices and procedures
* Serves as a trusted advisor, providing management advisory assistance, problem resolution, and technical guidance in assigned program areas in a responsive and timely manner
* Transfers knowledge and coaches others, enabling them to independently address human capital issues within their organization

### Interview questions:

1. Describe a time when you had to assess organizational needs and recommend solutions to management? How did you approach this assignment? Who did you involve in the process? How did you present the options? What was the result?
2. Think of a successful relationship you have maintained with a manager you support. How did you build a rapport and obtain his/her trust? How were you able to help him/her confidently and independently address and resolve human capital issues?
3. How do you work with your customers to ensure that HR policies are successfully integrated into the organization? What steps do you take to address issues that arise?

### Candidate Response:

### Interview Summary:

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| --- |
| **Summarize the situation, behaviors demonstrated and outcomes. Then provide an overall proficiency rating for the competency as defined in the Administrative Officer competency model.** |
| Situation: |
| Behaviors: |
| Outcome: |
| Overall Competency Proficiency Rating: 0 1 2 3 4 5 |

## Human Resource Law, Regulation and Policy Research and Analysis

Understands Human Resource (HR) laws, regulations and policies; assesses their potential effect on NIH procedures; and ensures they are effectively applied in all human capital matters

### Key Behaviors:

* Possesses knowledge of HR laws, regulations and policies
* Researches, analyzes and/or interprets HR laws, and ensures they are integrated in daily operations as appropriate
* Develops and/or recommends changes to procedures resulting from new laws
* Stays abreast of current and potential future changes in HR laws, regulations, and policies and assesses the impact of these changes on the organization
* Gathers and benchmarks with other organizations, in both the public and/or private sector, to determine the best approach for integrating laws, regulations, and policies at NIH

### Interview questions:

1. Tell me about a time when you were responsible for developing procedures as a result of new laws. Who did the changes impact? How did the changes impact them? What steps did you take communicate the changes to the organization?
2. How do you stay abreast of the latest HR and employment laws and regulations? What information sources do you use?
3. Provide an example of a time when a law, regulation, or policy had a significant affect on the organization. How did you handle this situation? What was the result/outcome?
4. What is your approach for researching and analyzing HR laws for an organization?

### Candidate Response:

### Interview Summary:

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| --- |
| **Summarize the situation, behaviors demonstrated and outcomes. Then provide an overall proficiency rating for the competency as defined in the Administrative Officer competency model.** |
| Situation: |
| Behaviors: |
| Outcome: |
| Overall Competency Proficiency Rating: 0 1 2 3 4 5 |

## Human Resource Management Knowledge

Develops and monitors processes and organizes resources to achieve desired results

### Key Behaviors:

* Maintains knowledge of current practices and tools used within assigned HR specialty area (e.g., recruitment, benefits, classification, employee training, career development, evaluation, employee/labor relations, performance management, recognizing/rewarding employees, employee morale)
* Stays abreast of changes in the HR profession and anticipates and prepares for the implications of these changes on current and future HR related plans and processes at NIH
* Anticipates the impact new organizational processes may have on personnel

### Interview questions:

1. How do you stay current on HR practices and tools within human resource management? What sources of information do you use?
2. Summarize a situation where you were responsible for developing a strategy for fulfilling an HR need of an organization. What was the need? What was your approach? What was the result/outcome?

### Candidate Response:

### Interview Summary:

|  |
| --- |
| **Summarize the situation, behaviors demonstrated and outcomes. Then provide an overall proficiency rating for the competency as defined in the Administrative Officer competency model.** |
| Situation: |
| Behaviors: |
| Outcome: |
| Overall Competency Proficiency Rating: 0 1 2 3 4 5 |

## NIH Competency Proficiency Scale

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Score | Proficiency Level | Description |
| N/A | ***Not Applicable*** | You are not required to apply or demonstrate this competency. This competency is not applicable to your position. |
| 0 | ***Not Demonstrated*** | You have not demonstrated this competency and likely have not had related training or experience. |
| 1 | ***Baseline***  (theoretical knowledge) | Shows basic knowledge and understanding sufficient to handle routine tasks. Focus is on learning.   * You are training or on-the-job training; beginning to develop this competency and have completed formal * You understand and can discuss terminology, concepts, principles, and issues related to this competency; * You utilize the full range of reference and resource materials in this competency. |
| 2 | ***Progressing***  (limited practical application and experience) | Has depth/breadth of knowledge to handle non-routine situations. Begins to take initiative. Focus is on applying and enhancing knowledge or skill.   * You have applied this competency in occasional situations and still require minimal guidance to perform successfully; * You understand and can discuss the application and implications of changes to processes, policies, and procedures in this area. |
| 3 | ***Proficient***  (practical application and experience) | An expert who can handle broad organizational/professional issues; works independently; has long-term perspective; coaches, guides and empowers others.   * You have consistently provided practical/relevant ideas and perspectives on process or practice improvements which may easily be implemented; * You are capable of coaching others in the application of this competency by translating complex nuances relating to this competency into easy to understand terms; * You participate in senior level discussions regarding this competency; * You assist in the development of reference and resource materials in this competency. |
| 4 | ***Master***  (recognized thought leader)  All criteria must apply | An expert whose advice is sought out by others, from both within the NIH and from the Department or other organizations; Shapes the organization/profession; is visionary; focus is strategic; copes with the unknown.   * You have demonstrated consistent excellence in applying this competency across multiple projects and/or organizations; * You are considered the “go to” person in this area from within NIH and/or outside the OPDIV; * You create new applications for and/or lead the development of reference and resource materials for this competency; * You are able to diagram or explain the relevant process elements and issues in relation to organizational issues and trends in sufficient detail during discussions and presentations, to foster a greater understanding among internal and external colleagues and constituents. |