# National Institutes of Health

# GS-301 Immigration Specialist

# 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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| **Immigration Specialist** | |
| Competency | Definition |
| **Administrative Support** | Performs and facilitates execution of administrative activities and procedures for the operation of an office or facility. |
| **Internal Resource Management** | Identifies, prioritizes, and manages resources (e.g., people, systems, space, budgets, contracts) to foster productivity and deliver solutions. |
| **Federal and Departmental Policies and Procedures Knowledge** | Understand and applies knowledge of Federal and Departmental statutes, regulations, policies, and procedures. |
| **Project/Program Administration** | Completes procedures, documents, forms, reports and/or budgets that are essential to the day-to-day operations of a group, project, or program. |
| **Qualitative/Quantitative Analysis** | Examines and evaluates data to manage and achieve results. |
| **Collaboration** | Works cooperatively with others, inside and outside the organization, to accomplish objectives to build and maintain mutually-beneficial partnerships, leverage information, and achieve results. |
| **Communications** | Delivers clear, effective communication and takes responsibility for understanding others. |

**Administrative Support**

Performs and facilitates execution of administrative activities and procedures for the operation of an office or facility.

### Key Behaviors:

* Serves as a trusted partner providing support on administrative and business management matters/activities.
* Manages correspondence and communicates organizational information to appropriate parties as required.
* Manages office/facility repositories and record keeping systems for storage, tracking and retrieval of information and materials.
* Prepares and/or updates reports, correspondence and other documents.
* Coordinates planning and/or scheduling of meetings and events.
* Utilizes and stays current on available technology and office equipment.
* Monitors and recommends methods for improvement of office/facility procedures and functions.

### Interview questions:

1. Give an example, from either your professional or personal life, that demonstrates your ability to juggle several tasks and keep track of multiple deadlines at one time. What was your strategy? What challenges did you encounter? How did you overcome those challenges? What was the outcome?
2. Discuss a specific occasion when you had to confront someone who was not living up to their agreed upon responsibilities. How did you approach the situation? What challenges did you face and how did you handle them? Looking back, what could you have done differently that would have improved the outcome?

### 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: 1 2 3 4 5 |

**Internal Resource Management**

Identifies, prioritizes, and manages resources (e.g., people, systems, space, budgets, contracts) to foster productivity and deliver solutions.

### Key Behaviors:

* Articulates the functions and objectives of the organization and the relationship between own office and the larger organization.
* Applies knowledge of organization to define requirements and acquire resources.
* Develops realistic and manageable budgets based on organizational goals, objectives, and priorities.
* Tracks and evaluates organizational budget, inventory, space, purchasing and personnel activities.
* Optimizes processes by coordinating interactions across the organization.
* Builds and leverages networks to work across the organization and achieve results.
* Prepares and administers contracts and monitors contract performance.

### Interview questions:

1. Tell me about a time you were able to successfully deal with another person outside of your organization even when that individual was not initially cooperative. How did you motivate the individual to cooperate with you? How were you able to build a positive relationship with that individual?
2. Tell me about a time when you had to identify and recommend resources (e.g., space, people, equipment) for an organization. What were the key factors you considered? How did you research the best alternatives?
3. Describe a time when you had to track a budget for your organization? How did you go about completing this assignment? With whom did you have to coordinate? How did you monitor the money spent?
4. Discuss a time when you had multiple tasks or projects to complete that required the use of the same, resources. How did you contend with these competing efforts? How did you prioritize the tasks or projects to be completed?
5. Tell me about a time when you had inadequate resources necessary to complete an assignment. How were you able to complete the assignment?

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**Federal and Departmental Policies and Procedures Knowledge**

Understand and applies knowledge of Federal and Departmental statutes, regulations, policies, and procedures.

### Key Behaviors:

* Maintains comprehensive working knowledge of related statutes, regulations, policies, and procedures affecting assigned areas.
* Ensures work conforms to statutes, regulations, policies, and procedures and is completed within established timeframes.
* Provides advice and guidance concerning statutes, regulations, policies, and procedures.

### Interview questions:

1. Describe a time when you had to inform, advise, and educate others regarding federal government policies and procedures? What was your approach?
2. Provide an example of a time when you had to research information regarding government rules. What sources of information did you use?
3. What steps do you take to research legislation/standards/policies/procedures? Please be specific.
4. Provide an example of a time you were asked to review and analyze a law, regulation or policy, assess the impact on an organization and recommend an action plan. What resources did you use? What was your recommendation?

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**Project/Program Administration**

Completes procedures, documents, forms, reports and/or budgets that are essential to the day-to-day operations of a group, project, or program.

### Key Behaviors:

* Completes project documents and tasks.
* Adheres to policies and procedures, including timeframes, for all milestones and requirements.
* Keeps managers aware of the status of projects being managed, including timeframes and document requirements, and key operational issues through formal and informal communications (e.g., status reports, e-mails, updates at meetings).
* Recommends changes to forms, documents, procedures, policies, etc., that will increase the effectiveness of the project area.
* Answers and/or researches project-related questions.

### Interview questions:

1. Give me an example of a time when you had to report on the status of a project. What communication methods did you use?
2. Recall a time when you were assigned what you considered to be a complex project or task? What steps did you take to prepare for and finish the project tasks on time? Were you satisfied with the outcome? Why or why not?

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**Qualitative/Quantitative Analysis**

Examines and evaluates data to manage and achieve results.

### Key Behaviors:

* Analyzes data in order to make comparisons and draw conclusions.
* Uses established data analysis models and tools for analyzing qualitative or quantitative data.
* Identifies cause and effect relationships to solve complex problems for the organization.
* Gathers and interprets pertinent data from a variety of sources and identifies trends available through regular channels and alternative sources.

### Interview questions:

1. Describe a time when you used your skills in quantitative analysis to solve a problem. What impact did the data have on your decision-making process? In retrospect, was the decision correct?
2. Describe a time when you applied your skills in data analysis to make a recommendation on an issue or decision. What process did you use? What obstacles did you face?
3. Tell me about a time when you had to analyze qualitative or quantitative data to make an important decision. What was the impact of the data? What obstacles did you face? What was the outcome?
4. Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
5. Please share some of the models or tools you have used in analyzing data. How have these tools helped you make sound decisions?
6. Describe a time when an analytical problem perplexed you. What resources did you use to try to work through the problem? Were you or anyone else able to solve the problem? What would you do differently, if anything, to approach this problem?

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**Collaboration**

Works cooperatively with others, inside and outside the organization, to accomplish objectives to build and maintain mutually-beneficial partnerships, leverage information, and achieve results.

### Key Behaviors:

* Maintains positive and productive relationships.
* Serves on committees (e.g., task forces, working groups) to analyze and improve processes and procedures.
* Identifies when to seek additional outside counsel.
* Serves as a subject matter expert for other NIH staff.
* Coordinates efforts with applicable stakeholders to ensure awareness, share information, and provide updates until completion.
* Identifies, organizes, facilitates and /or sustains mutually beneficial partnerships and alliances with internal and external stakeholders.
* Works with others to share information and achieve goals.
* Works towards goals that benefit the team, which includes contributing ideas and participating in team activities appropriately.
* Fosters an environment that emphasizes knowledge sharing and group participation.
* Facilitates agreement by resolving differences of opinions.
* Resolves conflicts, confrontations, and disagreements positively and constructively.

### Interview questions:

1. It is very important to build good relationships at work but sometimes it doesn’t always work. If you can, tell about a time when you were not able to build a successful relationship with a difficult person.
2. Tell us about a time when you built rapport quickly with someone under difficult conditions.
3. What, in your opinion, are the key ingredients in guiding and maintaining successful business relationships? Give examples of how you made these work for you.

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**Communications**

Delivers clear, effective communication and takes responsibility for understanding others.

### Key Behaviors:

* Asks appropriate questions.
* Identifies and uses effective communication channels and methods (e.g., presentations, electronic dissemination, social media).
* Utilizes skill in presenting information, analysis, ideas and positions in a clear, succinct, accurate, convincing manner, as is appropriate with the audience.
* Clearly and effectively conveys information verbally.
* Organizes, expresses, and communicates ideas clearly in writing.
* Listens actively; asks clarifying questions and summarizes or paraphrases what others have said to verify understanding.
* Ensures that regular communication occurs based on the needs of the work, the individual, management or the situation.
* Uses analogies, visuals, and other techniques to tailor communications to specific audiences.

### Interview questions:

1. Describe a situation in which you were able to effectively “read” another person and guide your actions by your understanding of their individual needs or values.
2. Have you ever dealt with a situation where communications were poor? Where there was a lack of cooperation? Lack of trust? How did you handle these situations?
3. Describe a situation when you were able to strengthen a relationship by communicating effectively. What made your communication effective?
4. Describe a situation where you felt you had not communicated well. How did you correct the situation?
5. Describe the most significant written document, report or presentation which you had to complete.
6. Tell us about a recent successful experience in making a speech or presentation. How did you prepare? What obstacles did you face? How did you handle them?
7. Have you ever had to “sell” an idea to your co-workers or group? How did you do it? Did they “buy” it?
8. What kinds of communication situations cause you difficulty? Give an example.
9. Tell us about a time when you had to use your verbal communication skills in order to get a point across that was important to you.
10. Tell us about a time when your supervisor criticized your work. How did you respond?

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**NIH Competency Proficiency Scale**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Score | Proficiency Level | Description |
| **1** | **Fundamental Awareness**  (basic knowledge) | You have a common knowledge or an understanding of basic techniques and concepts.   * Focus on learning. |
| **2** | **Novice**  (limited experience) | You have the level of experience gained in a classroom and/or experimental scenarios or as a trainee on-the-job. You are expected to need help when performing this skill.   * Focus on developing through on-the-job experience; * 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. |
| **3** | **Intermediate**  (practical application) | You are able to successfully complete tasks in this competency as requested. Help from an expert may be required from time to time, but you can usually perform the skill independently.   * Focus is on applying and enhancing knowledge or skill; * You have applied this competency to situations occasionally while needing minimal guidance to perform successfully; * You understand and can discuss the application and implications of changes to processes, policies, and procedures in this area. |
| **4** | **Advanced**  (applied theory) | You can perform the actions associated with this skill without assistance. You are certainly recognized within your immediate organization as "a person to ask" when difficult questions arise regarding this skill.   * Focus is on broad organizational/professional issues; * 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. |
| **5** | **Expert**  (recognized authority) | You are known as an expert in this area. You can provide guidance, troubleshoot and answer questions related to this area of expertise and the field where the skill is used.   * Focus is strategic; * 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 within NIH and/or outside organizations; * 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. |