

Culturally Responsive Interviews

On the hiring committee's composition:

- Is the interview team racially diverse?
- Does the interview team have expertise in racial equity and culturally responsive organizational practice?
- Does the interview team understand the importance of ensuring that the workforce composition needs to reflect the community being served or the population composition in the local region (wherever diversity is greatest)?
- Does the hiring committee understand the expectations to hire a candidate skilled for the tasks they need to perform?

Two cautions are urged:

- o Finding candidates able to “hit the ground, running” are likely to favor those who already have access to the organization, usually obtained through informal channels that are likely to favor conventional candidates who already reflect the organization’s culture

- o Hiring committees need to be urged to avoid hiring candidates with the most “bells and whistles” who are seen as having “value-added” beyond the skills and experience for the position. Candidates with the most “bells and whistles” are more likely to be mainstream white candidates who have had greater employment opportunities in preceding years.

Recommended interview questions to assess cultural responsiveness of candidate

HR needs to hold the hiring committee accountable to the expectations that hiring practices will advance racial equity and eliminate racial disparities. The committee needs to be advised of this in advance of their process. Vetting your interview questions before you begin allows you to gain feedback from Human Resources and, ideally, the organization’s Equity Diversity and Inclusion Committee, about two things: (1) biases that might be embedded in the questions that the hiring committee was unable to identify, and (2) advice on how issues that are tied to the organization’s culture should be handled. Work from the assumption that the hiring committee is an important site for racial equity to be advanced and that it is simultaneously a site for mistakes and missteps to be made.

Here are sample questions for an interview:

- Provide a frank assessment of your own equity skills and challenges.
- How has your culture influenced you? (Listen to see if the candidate is aware of their cultural influences and how it has shaped their perspective.)

- How do you see yourself contributing to the organization’s effort toward cultural competency? (Listen to see if the candidate has past experiences that will add to or enhance the organization’s efforts.)
- Describe how an organization you were part of challenged racial inequities. Share its challenges and successes and describe your role in this work.
- Please describe a situation in which you worked on a project with people who were from cultural backgrounds other than your own. What was challenging for you in this work? What did you do to make your work together successful?
- Our organization is working hard to become more culturally responsive. How would you contribute to that work?
- Our organization has been on this path for a few years and some interest is lagging in a few departments. What are key steps you would take to address this slowing interest in racial equity?

Tips for Interviewing Multicultural Candidates

Advice has been collated by OHSU for attention to cultural norms and appropriate accommodations for successful hiring conditions for candidates of color. Cultural norms are reflected in some of the tips, and language challenges might also be well addressed by these tips:

- Provide a written outline of the interview process and the general topics to be covered.
- Tune in to the culture embedded in your questions. Examples might be expecting a certain approach to conflict, or anticipating one wants to move up a ladder, or expecting a certain cultural characteristic such as assertiveness to be in evidence for some position functions.
- Avoid jargon and culturally specific metaphors.
- Avoid colloquialisms and acronyms.
- Train interviewers in legal issues such as protected personal questions.
- Allow time for casual chit-chat that can help put candidates at ease.
- Learn a bit about the cultures of those you are likely to interview such as degree of formality, the appropriateness of eye contact, and how to pronounce candidates’ names.
- If accents are thick and you do not understand what was said, ask for clarification. Do not interrupt the candidate in mid-sentence.
- Ask interview questions that can be interpreted within a group context so that candidates who are not aligned with an individualist orientation to work achievements can respond fully. In cultures that are more collectively oriented, “bragging or taking credit for successes may not be perceived as appropriate.”
 - When an interview includes the development of a work product onsite, provide some of the content ahead of time so that candidates who need more preparation time do not feel the pressure to perform in a context they are unfamiliar with.
- Provide feedback for unsuccessful candidates so they can improve future interviews.

Adapted from ‘Protocol for Culturally Responsive Organizations’, Coalition of Communities of Color, 2014.