



STATE OF ILLINOIS  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
SPRINGFIELD 62706

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Governor

Administrative Order  
Number 2 (1990)  
October 1, 1990

Directive to State Agencies  
Guidelines for Interviewing Job Candidates

The following employment policies and procedures regarding the interview process are intended to provide additional guidance and clarification to state agencies with respect to the following directive taken from the Governor's Administrative Order, Number 1, dated July 17, 1990.

"1. All hiring and other personnel decisions shall be based on the merit and qualifications of the candidates. Where the selection of a candidate is made pursuant to an interview process, the agency must use uniform, job-related criteria and interview questions; the responses to such questions must be evaluated by reference to the requirements for the particular position and such evaluation must be thoroughly documented and must demonstrate the basis on which the selection was made."

This Directive contains principles which will assist agencies in assuring that their personnel policies and procedures relating to interviewing and selecting candidates for employment, promotion or other personnel transactions are in compliance with the requirements of the Rutan decision. Adherence to these principles will also result in the production of documentation necessary to defend against any claims that may arise under this ruling.

It is not the intent of this directive to mandate a single, specific set of personnel policies and procedures applicable to all agencies and all personnel transactions. Nor is it the intent of this directive to mandate agency employment decisions, but to provide a consistent, fair and objective basis to assure compliance with Rutan as well as the employment of fully qualified persons.

Other employment policies such as Veterans Appointment Preference, Affirmative Action, bargaining agreements will not be replaced by these policies and procedures. Additional screening requirements that the agency may impose prior to placing an individual on the payroll promoting, transferring, or recalling an employee (e.g., background check, drug testing, residency) or other employment policies will not be restricted so long as they are not inconsistent with the procedures described herein. In addition, these policies and procedures address only the interview process, and do not apply where other types of selection devices are used.

I. SCOPE

A. Positions for which Principles are Relevant

The employment policies and procedures described in the following sections should be followed for all positions not specifically exempted from RUIAN. A preliminary listing of those positions which, due to their policymaking or confidential nature, are clearly exempted from RUIAN, will be published within the next two weeks. There will be many more positions which are not clearly exempt or non-exempt. Cataloguing and reviewing all these positions will be a time consuming effort which is too extensive to be undertaken in the time remaining to this administration. However, agencies wishing to make a determination regarding a particular position which is not included in the initial listing of exempted positions may submit the appropriate materials to CMS. In consultation with Ernst and Young and Jenner and Block, CMS will determine whether or not such a position is exempted from the requirements of the RUIAN decision. In the absence of a determination that a position is exempted, this memorandum will apply to all positions.

B. Personnel Actions for which Principles are Relevant

The following principles apply to all employment decisions concerning individuals who are currently candidates to be interviewed for employment by the State or who are current State employees who are to be interviewed for promotion, transfer, or recall from layoff. Note that when the remainder of this document mentions "hiring" that this pertains to the interview activities involving both the hire of new employees and the promotion, transfer, or recall of current employees.

## II. OBJECTIVES

Within the framework established by the Governor's directive, the State is committed to an interview process which will:

- Base employee selection on a candidate's ability to perform effectively on the job;
- Provide equal opportunity for State employment to all qualified job candidates;
- Prohibit the basing of employment, promotion, transfer, and recall decisions on partisan affiliation or support;
- Provide the hiring agency with maximum lawful discretion in making selection decisions; and
- Adequately document all employment, promotion, transfer, and recall decisions.

## III. THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

### A. Approach

Following is a summary of minimum steps which should be part of an interview process to ensure compliance with the the principles of the Governor's aforementioned Order. A summary of these steps are explained more fully below:

- Document and file hiring criteria for each position to be filled before conducting the interview, regardless of location:
  - Define and document major position responsibilities;
  - Define required knowledge, skills, abilities and personal characteristics essential for competent performance in the job; and
  - Determine the relative weight of each hiring criteria.
- Develop a standardized interview questionnaire for each position to be filled to gather pertinent information about the candidate's knowledge, skill, abilities, and personal characteristics.

- Conduct a structured employment interview using a standardized interview questionnaire and note pertinent responses from the candidates that can be compared and evaluated in a consistent manner.
- Evaluate each candidate interviewed:
  - Rate the completed interview questionnaire;
  - Score each hiring criteria and note on an evaluation form;
  - Determine each candidate's overall score based on all hiring criteria; and
  - Rank all candidates interviewed by overall score.
- Document the interview process for all candidates interviewed.
- Document the employment decision.
- Maintain a chronological file of all interview questionnaires, evaluation and employment decision forms for each position where interviews were conducted.

B. Establish the Hiring Criteria

The reliability of a structured employment interview in screening qualified candidates is based on the identification of pre-established criteria for successful job performance which are required for entry into the position. Hiring criteria include major position responsibilities, knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics. As a general rule, the larger the number of qualified candidates, and/or additional identical positions to be filled, the higher the level of standardization required to assure the objectivity of the actual interviews.

The following approach to the development of hiring criteria assures that the criteria will be job-related, specific to the particular position, and essential to acceptable job performance. It is important to remember that hiring criteria which have not been pre-established should not be used as justification for the employment decision.

1. Define major position responsibilities. As a first step, this information should be obtained from existing job descriptions and class specifications. However, it is important to review this information with current job incumbents and/or the supervisor to assure its accuracy with respect to the specific position being filled. This step should produce up to ten major duties which serve as the primary areas of inquiry during the interview as well as the basis for identifying the knowledge, skills, abilities and personal characteristics required to perform each major duty, and the subsequent development of specific interview questions. These duties should reflect the position as it is documented by the existing position description, not how it could be changed or improved.

2. Define required knowledge, skills and abilities ("KSAs") and personal characteristics. Job-related KSAs and personal characteristics are derived from the position's major duties by focusing on such questions as "What would a candidate need to know to perform this duty?", "Can the required knowledge be obtained through formalized training or must it be learned through experience?", and "What types of behaviors are demonstrated by current incumbents who successfully perform this duty?". Once identified, the task of developing interview questions which are clearly and demonstrably job-related is greatly simplified.

To the extent that the position's major duties, required KSAs and personal characteristics are too broadly defined, the agency may have difficulty developing questions as well as differentiating, and subsequently selecting, between qualified candidates. Conversely, being too specific may cause well qualified candidates to be eliminated from consideration. In summary, the hiring authority must be actively involved in the definition of a position's hiring criteria.

3. Weight to each hiring criteria. These weights should reflect the relative importance of each criteria to acceptable job performance.
4. Document the hiring criteria on a Candidate Evaluation Form. The hiring criteria for each position must be documented prior to the conduct of any interviews.

C. Develop the Interview Questionnaire

The interview questionnaire will be used to assess all candidates who are being interviewed for a particular position. Interview questions derived from the identified KSA's and personal characteristics should also, to the extent possible, reference the position's major duties.

1. Common types of hiring criteria and the development of related interview questions are briefly summarized as follows:
  - a. Knowledge and Experience -- Assess whether the candidate has the required level of job knowledge that is both essential to job performance and constitutes the minimum which must be known prior to entering the position. Determine the extent to which the candidate has, in fact, ever performed the major duties of the position for which s/he is applying. These questions should deal with the more technical aspects of the position, or basic knowledge that is essential to enable the candidate to learn the job within the allotted probationary timeframe. Since this level of detailed information may be difficult to ascertain from the candidate's application, such questions are critical for those technically oriented positions where very specific

skill and/or experience is required. During the actual interview, it is appropriate for the interviewer to probe further, as necessary, to evaluate the candidate's quality and level of experience. Concise, detailed notes should support any subsequent reliance on prior experience as a means of differentiating between candidates who would otherwise appear to be substantially equal.

- b. Education, Training and Special Skills — Determine if the candidate has the necessary education, training, and special skills to learn and/or perform the major duties as required. Ask about any specific coursework, training programs, and special skills which are considered desirable for the position.
- c. Ability — Evaluate whether the candidate possesses the level of ability required to effectively perform the major duties. Abilities, and their relative importance, generally vary substantially based upon the nature and level of the position. The most commonly required abilities include problem-solving, oral/written communications, leadership, and interpersonal relations.
- d. Personal Characteristics — To the extent possible, the simple noting of "impressions" by the interviewer should be avoided. It is, however, appropriate to ask candidates to demonstrate their application of the required personal characteristics in terms of specific job-related behaviors.
- e. Willingness — For those positions with few or only very basic minimum requirements, as well as for jobs with some unpleasant or monotonous working conditions, the

hiring authority/ interviewer should prepare questions regarding the candidate's understanding of, and willingness to perform the major duties. The outlining and detailed disclosure of duties and working conditions in this context will serve as a realistic job preview for the candidate and may aid in self-selection.

2. Review interview questions. The following guidelines should be used in the development and evaluation of specific interview questions:
  - a. Questions should be accurate, complete and easily understood. The need to clarify questions during the interview for certain candidates reduces standardization.
  - b. Questions must be clearly and strictly job-related, and must be directly linked to the position's major duties.
  - c. Questions must focus on the KSAs and personal characteristics necessary to perform the job at entry.
  - d. Questions should reflect, as nearly as possible, the content of the specific position for which the candidate is being interviewed.
  - e. To increase job-relatedness, questions should be stated in terms of sample position duties, and should be designed to elicit information on job-related behaviors.
  - f. Questions should be geared to the appropriate complexity level of the job.
  - g. Questions must be carefully reviewed to eliminate any possible accusation of partisan affiliation or support.



D. Conduct the Interview

1. Interview Obligations. Whatever the actual design of the interview, the interviewer must not ask any questions concerning political affiliation (or any question which could be construed as such). Politically-related topics that are to be avoided includes:

- Political affiliation;
- Political contributions;
- Political sponsorship or recommendation; and

In addition, it must be made clear to the interviewer that, if the candidate volunteers non-job-related information about political topics, s/he should be interrupted and the interview should be directed toward other topics.

2. Following is a basic agenda for conducting the structured employment interview.

- a. Put the candidate at ease and build rapport.
- b. Explain the purpose of the interview.
- c. Provide a brief description of the position and important organization characteristics.
- d. Ask the pre-established interview questions contained in the questionnaire and take notes on the candidate's response to each question, allowing the applicant to organize his/her own experiences, and to speak with spontaneity to reveal relevant information. The interviewer should probe for expansion and clarification of candidate responses to obtain adequate information for the evaluation of the candidate and, ultimately, the employment decision.

- e. After you have completed the questionnaire, inform the candidate when the decision will be made, and ask whether s/he has any questions.

### X. Additional Candidate Evaluation Criteria

The hiring authority will often use other evaluation methods in addition to personal interviews. Examination of performance records for current employees and work sample tests and job or community service related references would be examples of other legitimate screening devices.

### Y. Rating the Candidate

The agency must have standardized procedures in place to rank all candidates interviewed for a particular position based upon the pre-established hiring criteria, interview questionnaire and scoring of the candidate's responses to each question. By ranking candidates agencies are provided one measure to further distinguish between equally qualified candidates.

It is important to note that there is no requirement for agencies to hire in rank order or to hire a particular candidate. It is not the intent of the preceding policies and procedures to mandate agency employment decisions, but to provide a consistent, fair, and objective basis to assure compliance with ERISA as well as the employment of fully qualified employees.

## IV. DOCUMENTATION OF EMPLOYMENT DECISIONS

Adequate documentation of employment decisions is a critical component of the ERISA compliance program. Although there is some

latitude in other aspects of the previously described employment policies and procedures, agencies must strictly adhere to their requirements for documentation of all employment decisions.

A. Documenting the Interview Process

The hiring authority is required to provide the following documentation on each candidate interviewed:

1. An interview questionnaire which briefly summarizes the candidate's responses and assigns a rating for each question.
2. A candidate evaluation form including comments reflecting the hiring authority's assessment of the candidate's qualifications against each criteria.

In some cases, it may not be necessary to evaluate the candidate against all of the hiring criteria. If, for example, prior work experience or basic skills are unacceptable, the hiring authority may decide that further evaluation of the candidate would be pointless. In such cases, documentation needs to be provided only for those criteria against which the candidate was evaluated.

B. Documenting and Filing the Employment Decision

The hiring authority must complete an employment decision form prior to the extension of the employment offer, that provides, at a minimum, the following information:

1. The candidate to be hired and the position number being filled.

2. Justification for the decision to hire the selected candidate. This justification must clearly explain the reason(s) for hiring the selected candidate and provide a general statement comparing the selected candidate with others who were interviewed. To be considered appropriate, this justification must be job-related. In addition, where the candidate selected is one who did not receive the highest score, the justification should be sufficiently well documented so as to be subject to verification and allow inferences to be drawn as to why one candidate was selected over another.
3. The date the form was completed.
4. The agency must maintain an up-to-date, chronological file of employment decision forms as well as the candidate evaluation forms and completed interview questionnaires for and all interviews conducted. In addition, a copy of the position description and major responsibilities must be included for each filled position. Each file must be labeled by the position number, title, and date of the employment decision.

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