

## INTERVIEWING APPLICANTS

### REPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Two major factors must be taken into account in the scheduling of interviews. The first is the many people who may meet each candidate one on one, in open forums, or during presentations. Most candidates for professional-level positions meet not only with the search committee but also with people with whom they would interact on campus if they filled the open position. These people include prospective peers and subordinates. Depending on the position, candidates might meet with the vice president or chief academic officer to whom they would ultimately report. Various customers or constituents might be included in interviews of department heads and administrative position holders. HR director candidates might meet with employees, students might meet with counselor and student activity candidates, professors might meet with librarian candidates, and various budget managers might meet with comptroller candidates. As a result, the interview often takes a half day to a full day, depending on the level of the position in question. For senior academic and administrative positions, a day and a half or two days may be needed. Exhibit 17 presents the activities that might occur during an interview day (see page 34).

The second major factor that must be taken into account is the potential need for the search committee to arrange or provide meals and other quasi-social events as well as transportation and lodging. The committee chair is usually the chief host but will often seek volunteers for or assign committee members to the task of hosting. As a host, a committee member may be responsible for

picking a candidate up from the airport, taking him or her on a tour of the campus, having dinner with him or her, and answering questions about the position in question and the selection process. The committee chair may ask the hiring department to assist with the many administrative and logistical requirements of arranging and holding on-site interviews.

When on-campus interviews will involve meetings with many people and various meal and other functions, the search committee should send candidates a schedule of events in advance. The schedule should note the names and titles of the individuals with whom the candidate will meet. Copies of the schedule should be given to these individuals and should identify the individuals responsible for escorting the candidate to and from meetings. This information can accompany the welcome package that should be sent to all interviewees (see Exhibit 18, page 35).

Exhibit 19 presents a checklist of preparations to be made for candidates' interviews (see page 36).

#### *Making Travel Arrangements and Accommodations*

The search committee should notify each candidate in writing of the institution's travel and accommodations policies. Candidates should know before they visit the campus which expenses the institution will reimburse. Airfare to one area airport may be reimbursable whereas airfare to another area airport may not be reimbursable. Lodging may or may not be reimbursable.

The search committee should ask the HR department or business/financial office to advise candidates about a variety of travel and lodging matters. For instance, one of these units should indicate the need to rent a car from area airports and train stations, provide taxi information, and point out sources of information on local accommodations. In

addition, it should notify candidates of any special arrangements with travel agencies, rental car companies, hotels, and restaurants. All candidates should be informed that they will be assisted by the HR department or another department with any special accommodations that they require.

#### *Providing a Benefits Synopsis*

While the search committee is screening and evaluating candidates, the candidates are screening and evaluating the institution. Because one of candidates' chief considerations in this process is benefits, the search committee should ensure that all candidates who come to campus are familiar with the institution's benefits package. The search committee should ask the HR department to provide a synopsis of the package.

The synopsis takes on added importance when the salary for the open position is lower than that expected or desired by a candidate. It should list all benefits, including all leaves (such as sabbaticals and administrative leave) in addition to sick leave and vacation time. It should note any computer purchase programs, health and gym facility access, tuition assistance for the employee and his or her family, and support of professional development activities.

#### CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

Some interviews, as noted above, are used to screen applicants. Other interviews are used to compare candidates and to determine which candidate's abilities and attributes best match the job's duties and align with the organization's culture. (The most qualified person does not always get the job. A person whose primary interest is research is unlikely to do well in a teaching-oriented institution.

Similarly, a person who is not respectful of diversity is unlikely to do well in an HR office.) Exhibit 20 presents tips on conducting interviews (see page 37).

#### *Appropriate Interview Questions*

Good interview questions will illuminate the experience of a candidate well enough to indicate the prospects for his or her success in the position (see Exhibit 21 and Exhibit 22 on pages 38-39 and 40). Bad interview questions will provide no indication of these prospects. Moreover, they could expose the institution to certain legal liabilities (see Exhibit 23 on page 41).

Generally, all questions should be related to the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to successfully carry out the duties and responsibilities of the job. Questions about basic workplace competencies are appropriate as well. Questions about work ethic, decision making, problem-solving, and interpersonal relations that indicate a person's professional character are also appropriate. Candidates should be asked the same set of questions; follow-up questions can and will vary from candidate to candidate.

Ford (1993, page 13) offers three rules of

thumb for determining which questions are acceptable: (1) ask only for information that you intend to use to make a hiring decision, (2) know how you will use the information to make that decision, and (3) recognize that the practice of seeking information that you do not use can be difficult to defend. These rules suggest that the best questions will emerge from a careful analysis of the position. Another source of good interview questions is the candidate's experiences that relate to the position requirements. The candidate's responses are yet another good source of questions. Because most applicants practice for interviews, it is important to ask pointed questions to ensure that you hire the best performer, not the best rehearsed.

#### *Types of Interview Questions*

Interview questions can be informational, situational, or behavioral. Informational questions ascertain the facts of a person's education and career. Situational questions ascertain a candidate's response to a hypothetical or real-life situation and also test a candidate's ability to analyze and solve a problem or make decisions. Behavioral questions ascertain the nature of the candidate's past behavior, which may indicate future performance. Examples of such questions are "How would you organize your work if you had more tasks than time

to do them?" and "How did you accomplish the project you described in your resume?" An effective interview technique is to frame all three types of questions in a way that a simple "yes" or "no" answer cannot be given. An example of a question framed in such an open ended fashion is "why are you interested in leaving your current position?" framed in such an open-ended fashion

#### EVALUATING THE CANDIDATE'S INTERVIEW RESPONSES

If no screening interview has been conducted, evaluation of the candidate's interview responses might focus on evaluation of the candidate's possession of the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for the job. If a screening interview has been conducted, the evaluation might focus on the candidate's work ethic, professional character, interpersonal skills, and match with the position and organization. Various evaluation forms are presented in Exhibit 24, Exhibit 25, and Exhibit 26 (see pages 42-44).

Along with information on evaluation forms, the selection committee may wish to consider feedback from individuals with whom the candidate met on campus. Some of the forms presented on subsequent pages can serve this purpose as well.