# National Institutes of Health

# GS-1101 Grants Management

# 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**

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).

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.

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?”

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).

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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| Grants Management | |
| Competency | Definition |
| **Financial Management** | Applies critical financial concepts and practices to establish and maintain realistic budgets. |
| **Grants Administration** | Administers grants and cooperative agreements, applying knowledge of organizational needs and deadlines. |
| **Federal and Departmental Policies and Procedures Knowledge** | Understand and applies knowledge of Federal and Departmental statutes, regulations, policies, and procedures. |
| **Process Management** | Develops and monitors processes and organizes resources to achieve desired results. |

## Financial Management

Applies critical financial concepts and practices to establish and maintain realistic budgets.

### Key Behaviors:

* Uses financial and other quantitative information to manage the organization.
* Understands overall financial performance of the organization.
* Analyzes financial information to evaluate strategic opportunities and options.
* Demonstrates a familiarity with Office of Management and Budget regulations and policies.
* Manages budget execution during fourth quarter closeout to ensure full utilization of resources within allocations. This includes monitoring, shifting funds, submitting timely procurement requests, and using professional judgment to identify additional or different budget requirements that arise.
* Responds to Department inquiries using appropriate formats for presenting budget/personnel information logically, consistently and accurately.
* Interprets and analyzes the meaning and implications of key financial indicators.
* Creates a variance reports between actual costs versus budgeted costs.
* Uses financial information to monitor overall financial status of operations and makes strategically based decisions.
* Draws conclusions from financial information and provides financial advice.
* Initiates necessary documentation, and coordinates routing for approval and implementation.
* Identifies and proactively raises to management: Emerging funding needs, Changes in expenditure rates relative to budgeted amounts to prevent /reduce instances of over- or under-spending and Issues with FTE utilization, such as the need for ceiling adjustments.
* Reconciles figures during budget period and identifies variances that require immediate action.
* Manages, monitors and reports to program managers on status of funds execution throughout the year for assigned unit following the flow of appropriations from apportionment to allotment to commitment to obligation to outlay or de-obligation to closeout.
* Adheres to FTE and to contractor workforce ceilings and allocations.

### Interview questions:

1. Describe an experience you have had with overseeing the use of funds, developing management control systems, or adjusting budgets to changes in anticipated funding. What was your most challenging aspect of this experience? Why?
2. Describe an experience you have had executing or monitoring a budget in which you discovered a problem that required follow-up. What was your involvement in that follow-up and what was the outcome?
3. Based on your involvement in developing or executing approved budgets, what do you feel is the biggest challenge in helping to assure resources are used within approved allocations? Why
4. You have just been given the assignment to manage a budget for a high visibility, on-going scientific project. When examining the files, you notice that the project is overspent and that there are issues with the FTE utilization. What would you do?
5. What financial indicators would you monitor if you were responsible for managing a federal budget? Why?
6. Describe a time when you had to present information and/or deliver a presentation to senior leadership. What were some of the challenges that arose when presenting to a senior leader? How did you overcome them?
7. Describe a time when you had to establish a budget for your office or organization. What was your approach? What was your strategy for resolving competing interests? What other challenges did you encounter? How did you overcome those challenges?
8. Share an example of when you used information from a financial plan or budget to make recommendations for your office or organization.  How did you approach this endeavor?  How did you gain support for this effort? What challenges did you face and how did you handle them?
9. Share an example of when you used external financial information or indicators to make strategic recommendations for your office or organization.  How did you approach this endeavor?  How did you gain support for this effort? What challenges did you face and how did you handle them?

### 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 |

## Grants Administration

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

### Key Behaviors:

* Leads activities to ensure grantee compliance with the established grant.
* Analyzes requested budgets and determines awarded budgets.
* Understands and executes the various stages of the grant lifecycle including pre-award review, grant progress monitoring, and award closure.
* Recognizes factors that influence the grants process.
* Completes steps involved in the solicitation process.
* Coordinates actions with program officials regarding administrative and programmatic issues.
* Develops guidelines for handling and/or adhering to grant changes.
* Determines when a grantee should be referred to enforcement actions.
* Communicates expectations and reinforces requirements with grantees.

### Interview questions:

1. In this job role, you will be required to demonstrate your ability to apply knowledge of organizational needs and the ability to meet set deadlines. Describe a time when you were required to seek help from an outside party to perform a certain job function within a set timeframe. How did you go about soliciting the individuals with the desired experience to perform the job? How did you evaluate their capabilities?
2. Describe a situation where you had to take adverse action against an individual or organization because of lack of compliance with established guidelines or regulations. What difficulties did you face? Looking back on the situation, what guidelines would you develop to communicate expectations and ensure compliance?
3. Describe a time that you evaluated candidates to receive a grant. What factors did you consider? How did you make your decision/recommendation?

### Candidate Response:

### Interview Summary:

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| Behaviors: |
| Outcome: |
| Overall Competency Proficiency Rating: 1 2 3 4 5 |

## 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?

### Candidate Response:

### Interview Summary:

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| Situation: |
| Behaviors: |
| Outcome: |
| Overall Competency Proficiency Rating: 1 2 3 4 5 |

**Process Management**

Develops and monitors processes and organizes resources to achieve desired results.

**Key Behaviors:**

* Evaluates efficiency and effectiveness of resources utilization and results accomplishment.
* Establishes clear, well-defined processes necessary to achieve the desired outcomes.
* Organizes people and activities to accomplish results.
* Identifies and addresses process problems promptly.
* Delineates complex processes into more simple tasks and functions.
* Analyzes business processes to identify process owners, cycle time, variations, bottlenecks, and redundancies to support streamlining and other business improvements.
* Serves customers by developing and maintaining SOPs and other policy/procedure guidelines that foster continuity of operations and organizational resilience.
* Understands the various approaches for mapping the workflow of business processes to outline steps users follow and to develop a baseline for improvements or reengineering.
* Creates an effective work flow that effectively coordinates and integrates tasks and functions.
* Identifies and takes advantage of opportunities to accomplish multiple objectives and obtain synergies through process development and management.
* Effectively communicates and coordinates with other stakeholders in the process.

**Interview questions:**

1. Describe a time when you had to identify, monitor and coordinate resources to achieve a desired result. How did you achieve the desired outcome? What would you have done differently?
2. Describe a time when you had to create/develop a workflow to accomplish a task. What was your approach? What was the result?
3. In this role, you will utilize various tools and techniques to measure, control, report, and improve processes to meet customer requirements. Describe some of the tools and techniques you have used to measure, control and improve processes.
4. You must coordinate with a number of stakeholders (i.e., persons who have interest in the process) in order to manage processes. Describe a time when you have used communications methods to manage stakeholders and accomplish multiple objectives.
5. Tell me about a time when you came up with a better, faster or more efficient way to perform a process or job.

**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 |

## 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. |