# National Institutes of Health

# GS-1102 Contracting

# 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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| Contracting |
| Competency | Definition |
| **Acquisition Management** | Manages post-award contract activities through contract close-out. |
| **Acquisition Planning** | Develops and guides program management through a comprehensive plan for fulfilling acquisition needs in a timely manner and at a reasonable cost in accordance with Federal and Departmental regulations, policies and procedures. |
| **Contracting Financial Management / Acquisition Financial Management** | Understands and applies financial management concepts and practices related to acquisition activities. |
| **Contract Negotiation and Source Selection** | Facilitates discussions between customers/partners and potential vendors to agree on contract terms and evaluates bids or proposals to make contract award decisions. |
| **Federal and Departmental Acquisition Policies and Procedures Knowledge** | Understand and applies knowledge of Federal and Departmental statutes, regulations, policies, and procedures. |
| **Solicitation** | Understands and employs methods for obtaining submission of offers or quotations to the Government from industry/vendors. |

## Acquisition Management

Manages post-award contract activities through contract close-out.

### Key Behaviors:

* Serves as primary point of contact concerning contractual matters.
* Works closely with customer/partner to ensure terms of contracts are fulfilled in compliance with the terms of the contract and applicable laws and regulations.
* Plans, directs, coordinates, and manages the various contracting functions, including administering, modifying, closing out and terminating contracts.

### 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 |

## Acquisition Planning

Develops and guides program management through a comprehensive plan for fulfilling acquisition needs in a timely manner and at a reasonable cost in accordance with Federal and Departmental regulations, policies and procedures.

### Key Behaviors:

* Provides guidance about components of the acquisition package, (e.g., the statement of work reporting requirements/deliverables, evaluation criteria, special instructions).
* Develops specifications for use in soliciting goods and services.
* Evaluates the qualifications of vendors/suppliers.
* Ensures proper receipt and documentation of financial invoicing and property information is entered into the appropriate acquisition system within 5 business days of receipt. Reviews requests, prepares paperwork, and ensures proper submission and tracking for acquisitions up to $25,000; according to federal regulations, policies and procedures.
* Identifies and prepares necessary documents according to the overall strategy for managing the acquisition.
* Advises managers and program staff on appropriate acquisition actions such as record of call, Federal Supply Schedule, GSA fedstrips, credit cards, purchase orders and contracts, and explains documentation requirements.
* Provides advice to managers on appropriate acquisition action necessary to obtain contract workers.
* Assists managers in preparing justifications for sole source and exemption from using mandatory sources, and for emergency orders and statements of work.
* Reviews, approves, and routes task orders, funding documents, and acquisition packages in an organized, thorough and methodical manner to ensure that they are in accordance with appropriate FAR regulations and HHS/NIH policies, and certifies for availability of funds.
* Analyzes and assesses acquisition needs to recommend appropriate contract type/method.
* Develops and documents the overall strategy for managing the acquisition in coordination with the customer/partner.
* Collects and analyzes relevant market research information from Government and non-government sources to facilitate development of the acquisition plan.
* Uses the appropriate sourcing approach and defines solicitation terms and conditions based on the business strategy.

### Interview questions:

1. Describe an experience where you applied your knowledge of acquisition regulations to a problem or an issue. What recommendations, conclusions and documentation did you prepare based on your findings?
2. Summarize your experience providing guidance to others regarding procurement and acquisition. What part of this guidance process did you find the most challenging to explain and why?
3. Provide an example of an occasion where you had responsibility for being a Project Manager or participated in the acquisition process and developed statements of work, cost estimates, and /or specifications used in the solicitation for goods and services.
4. Describe a situation in which you have had the opportunity to review a purchase order which required modification. Please tell us why the purchase order required modification and describe what steps you took and the end result.
5. Provide an example of a time when you prepared a sole source justification or an exemption from using mandatory sources. What were the circumstances and what was the basis for the justification?
6. Describe what sort of market research you would perform in preparation for the development of an acquisition plan.
7. You have just been given an assignment to prepare an acquisition request for a high-speed copier machine for your office. What market research would you perform and what factors would you consider? Where would you go to find the information you need? What would you do next?
8. Provide examples of how you demonstrated an analytical approach to assessing the acquisition (buying) requirements of a customer. What was your role? What challenges did you face? How did you accomplish your goal?
9. Summarize a situation where you were responsible for developing a strategy for fulfilling the acquisition needs of an organization. How did you handle this situation? What was your approach? What was the result/outcome?

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| Outcome: |
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## Contracting Financial Management / Acquisition Financial Management

Understands and applies financial management concepts and practices related to acquisition activities.

### Key Behaviors:

* Works with project officer to develop cost estimates.
* Uses financial analysis to evaluate cost and price proposals.
* Selects the appropriate contracting financing terms and /or conditions for a given contract.
* Tracks expenditures to ensure compliance with contract terms.
* Analyses and renegotiates cost/price of contract as appropriate.
* Maintains a working knowledge of financial systems utilized in acquisitions, including cost accounting and reporting systems.
* Understands and monitors the overall financial performance of the contract and draws accurate conclusions from financial information.

### Interview questions:

1. Describe how your knowledge of and experience with acquisition regulations, procedures, and methods involved in Federal Government acquisition activities would be helpful in purchasing 500 new PCs for a workforce of scientific and administrative staff supporting a scientific organization.
2. Give an example of a recent assignment you worked on that required a contract modification. What was your role in making this modification? What were the results?
3. Describe a situation in which you conducted negotiations with vendors, developed specifications for use in solicitations, and/or monitored performance of an acquisition. In retrospect, what could you have done differently to possibly have achieved a better outcome?
4. Describe steps you would take to manage the termination of a contract. What are the primary factors you must consider?
5. Describe your experience with monitoring contractor performance. What are the primary factors you consider when doing so?

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## Contract Negotiation and Source Selection

Facilitates discussions between customers/partners and potential vendors to agree on contract terms and evaluates bids or proposals to make contract award decisions.

### Key Behaviors:

* Understands customer/partner’s scientific and technical requirements.
* Gathers information to make sound decisions.
* Employs established processes and techniques (e.g., tradeoffs, lowest price technically acceptable) to make well informed source selection decisions.
* Guides customers/partners through the review, negotiation and evaluation of bids and proposals process.
* Makes award decisions that meet the mission needs of the organization.
* Maintains a working knowledge of financial systems utilized in acquisitions, including cost accounting and reporting systems.
* Works with customers/partners and vendors to craft mutually agreeable contract terms, conditions and price.
* Documents source selection decisions and drafts contracts that include the agreed upon terms, conditions, special provisions and negotiated price.
* Engages in other source selection activities where required (e.g., debriefing offerors, responding to protests).

### Interview questions:

1. Describe an instance in which you were the pivotal person to negotiate a resolution to a situation or dispute. What was your strategy for managing the conflicting priorities? What obstacles did you face? How did you overcome them?
2. Describe a situation where you have reviewed bids from outside sources to reach a favorable outcome for your agency/firm/organization. What was your strategy? What were your decision criteria? What was the outcome of the process?

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## Federal and Departmental Acquisition 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:

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## Solicitation

Understands and employs methods for obtaining submission of offers or quotations to the Government from industry/vendors.

### Key Behaviors:

* Facilitates the process of seeking and obtaining bids and proposals in compliance with applicable laws, regulations, policies and procedures.
* Facilitates exchange of information among interested parties early on, and throughout the process to improve the understanding of Government requirements and state-of-the-art private sector and academic capabilities.
* Develops and ensures distribution of proper notices and requests regarding solicitation (e.g., pre-solicitation notice, request for proposal, request for information).
* Employs various methods and tools, such as requests for information and pre-proposal conferences, to facilitate the most effective and efficient solicitation process.

### Interview questions:

1. Describe a time when you spearheaded communications among stakeholders to implement a contract/plan/proposal. How did you ensure free flowing communication? What were your challenges? What was the outcome?
2. Discuss your approach for soliciting bids/quotes from vendors to provide services. What specific methods or tools did you employ?

### Candidate Response:

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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.
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| **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.
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| **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.
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| **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.
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| **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.
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