# National Institutes of Health

# GS – 260

# Equal Employment Opportunity Specialist

# 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

1. 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).
2. 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.
3. 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?”
4. 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).
5. 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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| Equal Employment Opportunity Specialist | |
| Competency | Definition |
| **Affirmative Employment and EEOC MD-715** | Understands and utilizes the EEOC and other Federal regulations to develop, implement and monitor agency EEO programs and to periodically report agency status to management officials. |
| **Diversity Management** | Understands and applies the principles of creating a diverse and inclusive work environment where people from diverse backgrounds feel respected, recognized, and valued. |
| **EEO Complaint Procedures and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)** | Demonstrates and applies knowledge and understanding of the Federal sector EEO complaint process and the use of ADR. |
| **EEO Special Emphasis Programs** | Understands the functions of EEO Special Emphasis Programs and the application of measures to ensure that equal employment opportunity and treatment of employees exist in all occupations and at all levels of the organization. |
| **Federal and Departmental Policies and Procedures Knowledge** | Understand and applies knowledge of Federal and Departmental statutes, regulations, policies, and procedures. |

## Affirmative Employment and EEOC MD-715

Understands and utilizes the EEOC and other Federal regulations to develop, implement and monitor agency EEO programs and to periodically report agency status to management officials.

### Key Behaviors:

* Possesses knowledge of affirmative employment laws, EEOC MD-715 and HR directives to develop a results-oriented agency EEO program.
* Researches, analyzes and/or interprets EEOC and appropriate Federal directives, policies and procedures.
* Advises agency management on the integration of MD-715 program objectives in daily operations.
* Develops recommendations resulting from identified program barriers and deficiencies.
* Prepares the annual MD-715 plan/update, communicating the agency’s priorities for achieving a model EEO program.
* Benchmarks organizational practices in both the public and private sectors to determine the best approach for integrating affirmative employment laws, regulations, and policies.

### Interview questions:

1. Describe a situation that demonstrates your expertise gathering and compiling personnel information?
2. Describe how you used your knowledge and expertise to help prepare a summary report? What was your strategy for obtaining the required information? What challenges did you encounter? How did you overcome those challenges?
3. Describe a time when you had to present information to deliver a report. Who was the audience? What challenges did you encountered while presenting the information? How did you overcome them?
4. Tell me about your experience developing the MD 715 status report. Explain the process for identifying program deficiencies. Did you do barrier analysis? How were identified barriers addressed?
5. Give me an example of a time when your oral and written communication skills helped ensure the successful completion of a project. Have you presented the state of EEO to an organization? If so, what was the focus of your presentation, what were your recommendations? Describe the audience? Were you successful in getting buy-in from the managers or leaders?
6. Could you please share a best practice you identified for establishing or maintaining a model EEO program (e.g., recruitment/retention/advancement)? Did the agency adopt the practice? What metrics did you identify to support the practice? What was particularly challenging about that process? How did you successfully overcome those challenges?

### 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 |

## Diversity Management

Understands and applies the principles of creating a diverse and inclusive work environment where people from diverse backgrounds feel respected, recognized, and valued.

### Key Behaviors:

* Conducts assessments related to human relations and diversity management to determine areas of strengths and improvement.
* Builds strategies to train and develop the workforce regarding diversity management principles.
* Stays current with changes in public policy, legislation, Congressional initiatives, and law related to diversity programs and diversity workforce issues.
* Reviews organizational systems policies and practices to ensure that diversity management is integrated into the operations of the organization.
* Applies best EEO and diversity management practices and strategies to develop a results-oriented diversity program.

### Interview questions:

1. Please describe your experiences managing diversity in the workplace. In your previous positions, were you required to develop and implement diversity education and training? Explain how these programs were delivered to the organization?
2. Explain what is your approach to stay current with changes in public policy, legislation, Congressional initiatives, and law related to diversity programs and diversity workforce issues. Explain the fundamental differences between diversity management and affirmative employment?
3. Describe a situation in which you had to collect information to access the human relations status of an organization. What challenges did you face? How were you able to collect all the information you needed and produce the assessment result? What did you do with the results?
4. Discuss any benchmarking (i.e., evaluating processes against best practices) or best practices (i.e., most efficient and effective way of accomplishing a goal) projects in which you have been involved. What steps do you take to complete this type of project? What was your approach?

### Candidate Response:

### Interview Summary

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## EEO Complaint Procedures and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

Demonstrates and applies knowledge and understanding of the Federal sector EEO complaint process and the use of ADR.

### Key Behaviors:

* Interviews aggrieved individuals and advises them of their EEO rights, responsibilities, and conflict resolution options.
* Communicates allegations of discrimination to managers, supervisors, and employees and offers alternatives for resolving complaints.
* Conducts pre-complaint counseling and produces an adequate counseling report within the regulated timelines.
* Provides competent guidance and assistance on a variety of EEO matters and reports using accurate information and knowledge.
* Collects, analyzes, and prepares accurate records using complaint data related to allegations of discrimination.
* Adjudicates Federal Sector EEO complaints in accordance with Federal laws, regulations and practices.

### Interview questions:

1. Describe a time when an employee presented a problem or complaint to you for processing. What did you do to assist the employee? How did you handle the situation? What procedures did you follow? What challenges did you face? How did you overcome the challenges?
2. Explain what tools have you used in the past to research case law and regulations (for example Nexus-lexis; CyberFeds; WestLaw etc.)? What sources have you found to be the most accurate? Please discuss.
3. Describe your level of experience using automated EEO complaints tracking systems. Please discuss what specific tools have you used to assign case numbers and track timeliness.
4. Discuss your experience and knowledge of the EEO antidiscrimination statutes applicable to the Federal EEO complaint process. Give an example of when you were effective in helping resolve an issue or complaint. What made it successful?
5. Describe a time when you had to ask for extension to meet a complaint process deadline. What was your approach? What barriers did you confront? Could you describe any lessons learned from this experience?
6. Discus your previous experience preparing the Annual Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Statistical Report of Discrimination Complaints (EEOC Form 462). Based on your experiences, how can you best obtain and compile the necessary information? What difficulties did you experience completing this report? How did you overcome the difficulties?
7. Could you please describe the challenges that you have experienced in EEO case management? What is your approach to resolve issues and concerns? What have you learned from your experiences?

### Candidate Response:

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

## EEO Special Emphasis Programs

Understands the functions of EEO Special Emphasis Programs and the application of measures to ensure that equal employment opportunity and treatment of employees exist in all occupations and at all levels of the organization.

### Key Behaviors:

* Develops and implements strategies for managing Special Emphasis Programs in accordance with applicable laws, rules, and regulations.
* Conducts data analysis, surveys, and assessments to identify barriers in all major personnel areas and actions.
* Develops annual Special Emphasis Program observances and activities consistent with organizational goals and objectives.
* Monitors and facilitates efficient processing of reasonable accommodations/accessibility request in accordance with established federal disability laws, regulations and policies.
* Establishes partnerships with affinity groups, agency officials, and professional organizations to promote the outreach and recruitment efforts of the organization.

### Interview questions:

1. Describe a situation in which you gathered and evaluated personnel statistical information in order to create a plan. What barriers did you encounter? How was the plan implemented?
2. Describe your planning process for conducting Special Emphasis Program activity. What was included on the agenda? Were you required to develop a budget? How were you able to meet the program goals and objectives?
3. Describe a time when you had to present information and/or deliver a presentation to senior leadership. What were some of the challenges that you experienced when presenting to a senior leader? How did you overcome them?
4. Establishing collaborative partnerships with individuals in a different agency/department or educational institution is an effective strategy in managing a Special Emphasis Program. Have you had the opportunity to work in this type or similar endeavor? What was your strategy to build and leverage the relationships? What was the outcome?
5. Discuss a time when you created a trusting relationship with a member(s) of senior leadership to support a program or plan. What was your approach in building that relationship? What lessons did you learn from that process?

### Candidate Response:

### Interview Summary:

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| Behaviors: |
| Outcome: |
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## 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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## 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. |