

Peer Interviewing Guide

Background

What?

In a traditional interview process, a candidate would meet with a hiring manager or a recruiter. In a peer interview, the candidate also sits down with another colleague--or colleagues--of the hiring manager's team. Peer interviewing — including members of the team in the hiring process — is a vital first step to ensuring success for new colleagues.

You, as the hiring manager, can have members of your staff assist in screening candidates. As the list of candidates to be interviewed is narrowed down, you can then bring peer interviewing into the process.

Valley Health Partners (VHP) Community Health Center views peer interviewing as a very valuable tool to help you find the best candidate for your position. We encourage you to consider including peer interviewing as part of your interview process.

Why?

Candidates and teams get a better feel for team fit and can see if the candidate is the right complement to the team. No one understands a department's dynamic better than the colleagues already working on that team.

Peers can ask and respond to more specific questions because they are more familiar with the day-to-day responsibilities. They are the best resource to explain or give insight into how the work is done because they are the colleagues who are actually performing the work.

Candidates get to know the organization, get an overall view of the department, can observe the interactions of team members, and can determine if it is the right fit for them. Candidates feel more at ease – and therefore are more likely to be themselves.

The investment of time spent in peer interviewing will be a great investment in the long run. Peer interviewing can help you be successful in reducing turnover because it gives peers ownership in the decision-making process. When peers are involved in the decision-making process, they are more apt to set up the candidate for success. If they are not part of the process, they may not be as supportive in making that candidate successful.

The Process

How?

Provide comprehensive interview training. Provide refresher training before each round of interviews and check back to see if colleagues have any questions.

Create an interview structure, and be sure to impose a time limit. We would recommend approximately 45 minutes to one hour for peer interviewing.

Choose the right interviewers—those who are positive, enthusiastic, are active listeners and fully understand the duties of the open position. Consider any Colleague Ambassadors who would like to be a part of this process. Please note that including too many peers can feel overwhelming and can actually scare high-quality candidates away. We would recommend only 2 peers per candidate interview.

Make candidate requirements clear. It is very important that everyone is evaluating the same set of criteria, which are usually the most important competencies for success in the position.

The Peer Interviewer should read the job description before interviewing. We are recommending using the attached Peer Interviewing questions, but other questions specific to the open position can be added. **Note:** *All candidates should be asked the same questions prepared ahead of time.* It is also very important to review with the Peer Interviewers the questions you can and cannot ask in the **Legal Inquiries** section to ensure no illegal questions or topics are discussed.

Ensure the interviewers practice being active listeners. Active listening skills include: paying attention; showing that you are listening (body posture, facial expressions); providing feedback by summarizing the candidate's responses periodically; deferring judgment by allowing the candidate to finish their points before asking questions and responding to the candidate appropriately. Also discuss how bias can negatively impact the hiring process as per the **Avoiding Bias** section.

Establish a standardized evaluation process—use the same rating scale so there is consistency. We recommend using the evaluation form included in this toolkit.

Put peer interviews towards the end of the interview process, after the interview with the hiring manager and before an offer is made.

Let the colleagues know that their opinions will be used in the final decision-making process. However, make it clear who has the final decision.

The Process Continued

Questions

- What's the most challenging aspect of your current position?
 - Why do you consider it challenging?
 - How do you approach the challenge when you need to do so?
- What do you find to be the most rewarding responsibilities of your job? The least rewarding?
 - What is it about these responsibilities that make them rewarding to you—or not?
- Give me an example of a time that you saw a need or challenge at work and took personal responsibility for finding a solution.
 - What did you learn from that experience?
 - What do you do to hold others accountable for their work?
 - What specific steps did you take in driving the initiative to find a solution?
- Tell me about a time in which you were able to overcome differences with another person and arrive at a mutual understanding or solution.
 - What was the outcome?
 - Do you believe you were successful helping the other feel welcome and/or recognized?
 - How do you think your behavior contributed to the organization overall?
- Describe how you demonstrate to others that you care about them.
 - What implications do you think this behavior has for the workplace?
 - How does it positively impact your work experience?
 - Would you do anything differently?
- Describe a difficult team you have worked with and how you navigated that situation in order to work towards a common goal.
 - What was your role on the team? What did you contribute?
 - Was the team open to your efforts to work together? What could you have done to make them more receptive?
 - What was the result or outcome of your behavior?
- Describe a situation in which you needed to decide between following rules and procedures or taking an easier course of action.
 - Did you consult with any support--such as coworkers, leaders, or HR, for example--for help in determining the right course of action?
 - What was the outcome?
 - Would you change anything about your approach to a similar situation today?
- Tell me about a time where you had multiple demands from managers and/or staff.
 - How did you handle that situation?
 - Tell me what actions you took and what the results were.
- What attracted you to work in this position at VHP?
 - What questions do you have for us about the position and/or about VHP?

Interviewing Knowledge

Legal Inquiries

- Affiliations:
 - Do not ask about clubs, social organizations, or union membership.
 - You can ask about relevant professional associations.
- Age:
 - Do not ask a candidate their age, date of birth or when they graduated from high school.
 - You can ask if they are over age 18 if required for job.
- Culture/Natural Origin:
 - Do not ask whether applicant is a citizen of another country or about the ethnic association of their last name.
 - You may ask about language fluency if relevant to job performance.
- Disability:
 - Do not ask if applicant has a disability.
 - If apparent, do not ask of the nature or severity of the disability; if candidate has ever filed a workers' compensation claim; or of past medical problems.
 - If disability is apparent, you may ask if candidate can perform essential job-related functions.
- Marital/Family Status:
 - Do not ask questions about marital status and family status (i.e., do you have children?).
 - Do not ask questions about child-care arrangements.
 - Do not ask if candidate is pregnant or planning to have children.
- Personal:
 - Avoid questions related to appearance, home ownership, and personal financial situation.
- Race/Color:
 - Do not ask any race-related questions.
- Religion:
 - Do not ask questions about religious affiliation or religious holidays observed.
 - If Saturday or Sunday is a required work day, you may ask candidates if they will have a concern about working on those days.
- Sex:
 - Be sure not to make gender-related assumptions about job candidates.

How to Deal with Information that is Volunteered - Despite your careful preparation and question selection, some candidates will volunteer information that you would prefer not to know. The best way to handle this situation is not to pursue it nor to make note of it. You cannot erase the information from your memory, but you can eliminate it as a discussion point and selection factor.

Interviewing Knowledge Continued

Avoiding Bias

In the interview and hiring process, unconscious bias happens when you form an opinion about candidates based solely on first impressions. For example, their name, hometown or the college they graduated from could influence your opinion more than you think.

As a Peer Interviewer it is important to consider the following questions to check that you have not allowed any of these biases to impact your evaluation of the candidate.

Personal Bias

Do you have a personal bias for or against the candidate?

Leniency/Severity Effect

Are you being overly lenient or harsh in your evaluation of the candidate?

First/Last Effect

Are you focusing on one specific impression or event that was discussed by the candidate?

Similar-to-me Effect

Is your evaluation favorably biased because the candidate is a lot like you?

Halo Effect

Is one good trait of the candidate clouding your judgment about their suitability for the job?

Horn Effect

Is one negative trait of the candidate clouding your judgment about their suitability for the job?

PEER INTERVIEWING EVALUATION FORM

Candidate: _____

Evaluator: _____

Please give the candidate a numerical rating and write specific job-related comments in the space provided. The numerical rating is based on the following:

5 – *Exceptional* 4 – *Above Average* 3 – *Average* 2 – *Below Average* 1 – *Unsatisfactory*

Does the candidate have the necessary experience for this position?

5 4 3 2 1 Comments:

Did the candidate demonstrate effective communication skills during the interview?

5 4 3 2 1 Comments:

Did the candidate show enthusiasm for the position and for VHP?

5 4 3 2 1 Comments:

Did the candidate show evidence of having researched VHP prior to the interview?

5 4 3 2 1 Comments:

Did the candidate demonstrate good teambuilding and interpersonal skills?

5 4 3 2 1 Comments:

Did the candidate demonstrate a high degree of initiative?

5 4 3 2 1 Comments:

Did the candidate demonstrate good time management skills?

5 4 3 2 1 Comments:

Did the candidate demonstrate a high level of customer service skills/abilities?

5 4 3 2 1 Comments:

Overall Impression and Recommendation: Describe your overall impression of this candidate. Would you grant them a second interview and/or offer them a job? Why?

5 4 3 2 1 Comments:

NOTE: After you complete this form, please forward it to your manager.