This package was published by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA).


This is a living document, which CCSA may revise and update to reflect the latest evidence and research.

© Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, 2014

For additional copies, contact CCSA, 75 Albert St., Suite 500 Ottawa, ON K1P 5E7 Tel.: 613-235-4048 Email: competencies@ccsa.ca

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>III–1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEHAVIOURAL QUESTIONS</td>
<td>III–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEGAL CONSIDERATION IN SELECTION</td>
<td>III–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW</td>
<td>III–5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) gratefully acknowledges the significant contributions and support received from people working in the field who participated in focus groups across Canada.

CCSA especially thanks all its partners who so graciously allowed and encouraged staff to participate in the focus groups. The research means nothing if the end result is not meaningful to the people for whom it is intended and CCSA could not produce a meaningful report without the input from the focus groups.

CCSA also thanks members of the National Advisory Group on Workforce Development (comprised of representatives from key national organizations and provincial/territorial governments) and other experienced directors and managers who participated in reviews of both sets of competencies.

These documents can also be downloaded as a PDF at www.ccsa.ca

Ce document est également disponible en français sous le titre : Compétences pour les intervenants canadiens en toxicomanie
INTRODUCTION

The professionalism and success of the substance abuse field depends on the quality of the workforce—the employees and volunteers—it engages.

This guide describes a structured, behavioural approach to conducting interviews. Compared to unstructured approaches, the behavioural approach can greatly increase your chances of making the best selection decisions. A behavioural approach provides critical information about candidates’ past performance and accomplishments that you can use to predict their performance and accomplishments in the job that you are hiring for.

The primary responsibility of the interviewer is to collect behavioural information about the candidate’s experiences and accomplishments that relate to the target job so that the best selection decision can be made.

The interviewer seeks job-related information by assessing competencies. Establishing the competencies required for successful performance of the job is the first and most fundamental step in developing a good selection strategy.

A “job competency” describes any skill, knowledge, ability or other attribute that is required for successful work performance.

The skills and competencies required for effective performance will vary depending on the job and whether the position has managerial or supervisory responsibilities.

Competencies can be classified as behavioural or technical, although this differentiation is somewhat artificial. The two types of competencies can be defined as follows:

- **Technical Competencies** are the knowledge and abilities required when applying specific technical principles and information in a job function or role. Technical Competencies are usually learned in an educational environment or on the job. They are the “what” of a job. Counselling is one example of a technical competency.

- **Behavioural Competencies** are the abilities, attitudes and values required to perform effectively in a job function or role. Behavioural Competencies are typically learned and developed through life experiences. They are the “how” of performing a job and complement Technical Competencies. Effective communication is one example of a Behavioural Competency.

This interview guide focuses on assessing candidate proficiency in Behavioural Competencies only. Technical Competencies are more easily examined through knowledge tests and can be used to screen applicants, as these Competencies often relate to education and training.

The following set of 18 Behavioural Competencies has been identified by the CCSA and subject matter experts across Canada as applicable to occupations in the substance abuse field.
BEHAVIOURAL QUESTIONS

The use of behaviour-based questions has been shown to be one of the most effective structured interviewing strategies. These types of questions are based on the premise that:

- Past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour.

Past behaviour is often used to predict future behaviour in all facets of life. For instance, banks lend money more readily to people with a proven track record of paying loans back. People continue to return to shop at stores that have given them good service.

The same concept is used in the behavioural interview. The questions aim to obtain information about the candidate’s past experiences and accomplishments in order to make a reliable prediction about how the candidate is likely to perform on the job. For example:

**Can you give me an example of a time where you had to deal with a particularly difficult client?**

To effectively predict future behaviour, behavioural data does not need to come from past positions that are identical to the target position.

If the target position involves teaching students in an academic environment, the interviewer gathers information on the candidate’s teaching experience in past positions. If the target position requires handling marital disputes, the interviewer collects information on the candidate’s past experience in handling similar conflict situations.

The data gathered can include other life experiences, such as volunteer work, that provide information on the candidate’s competencies. The behavioural interview is focused on gathering examples of how candidates performed in previous positions and situations that require the same kinds of competencies as the target position.

The Goal: Behavioural Examples

Behavioural questions are designed to elicit behavioural information about the candidate’s past experience and accomplishments that relate to the competencies required in the target job. Past experience does not need to be from a job that is the same as the one being interviewed for, since Behavioural Competencies are transferrable across positions. It is preferable that the experience be work-related (including voluntary work), but personal examples can be given in the absence of work experience.

Knowing a candidate’s actions is of little use if the interviewer does not understand the circumstances surrounding the actions and the results produced by those actions. Therefore, the answers to behavioural questions need to include the following components in order for the interviewer to fully understand a candidate’s past behaviour:

- The **Situation or Task** in which the candidate was involved;
- The **Action** the candidate took to complete the task or address the situation; and
- The **Result** of the candidate’s action.

All of these components are necessary to make an informed judgement about whether the candidate displays the level and quality of behaviour required.

False Behavioural Examples

Behavioural examples may be better understood by defining what they are not. They are not:

- statements of feelings or opinions
- future-directed comments about what a candidate will do or would like to do
- vague statements that cannot be interpreted

All of these are false behavioural examples.
Theoretical or Future-oriented Statements
Theoretical or future-oriented statements provide no information about past behaviour. They indicate what a candidate thinks they would do or should do, not what has been done.

I expect to finish my degree next year, and go on to an executive position five years after that.
If I had been in charge of that situation, I would have made sure the client got all of the support he needed.

Feelings or Opinions
Feelings and opinions provide no insight into behaviour. These statements are simply an individual’s emotional reaction to a situation or event.

I am really good at teaching myself how to use new software.
I was the best executive assistant and deserved more responsibility.

Vague Statements
Vague statements are general summaries or descriptions of several past actions. They often contain descriptions of results that are reported in a very general way, as demonstrated in this example:

I always had the best interest of the customers in mind and never tried to get pushy or in an argument with anyone.

In many cases, the candidate’s role is not clearly defined, as in:

We prepared the report and submitted it to the President in record time.

When you, the interviewer, hear false behavioural examples, you must probe further.
LEGAL CONSIDERATION IN SELECTION

Governments have passed human rights laws dealing with employment discrimination. These laws reflect a commitment to provide fair workplace opportunities, as well as recognition that equal opportunity in employment has not existed in many situations in the past.

*Discrimination...means practices or attitudes that have, whether by design or impact, the effect of limiting an individual’s or a group’s right to the opportunities generally available because of attributed rather than actual characteristics.*

(Abella Report on Equality in Employment)

As used in human rights laws, discrimination means making a distinction between certain individuals or groups based on a prohibited ground such as race, national or ethnic origin, religion, sex, and physical or mental disability.

History

Human rights laws have been introduced and amended continuously to reflect developments in our understanding and interpretation of discrimination. The number and definition of the prohibited grounds for discrimination included in federal, provincial, territorial and Constitutional protection is expanding.

At a minimum, they often include:

- Race
- Colour
- National or ethnic origin
- Religion
- Age
- Sex (includes pregnancy and childbirth)
- Sexual orientation
- Marital status
- Family status
- Pardoned conviction
- Physical or mental disability

Interview Questions

An interview is conducted to learn more about the suitability of people for a particular job. However, sometimes the information sought during interviews is not relevant to the job being filled and may let discriminatory elements affect the selection process.

For example:

- a candidate’s place of birth has nothing to do with ability
- height and weight requirements are not always accurate measures of physical strength and may act to screen out women or some racial or ethnic groups that tend to be smaller in stature

For helpful guidelines on questions to avoid in an interview, consult the Canadian Human Rights Commission’s *Guide to Screening and Selection in Employment* at the following link:

http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/eng/content/guide-screening-and-selection-employment
PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Interviews have a serious purpose. Still, you need to create a friendly, comfortable atmosphere. This can make a big difference in how a candidate performs in the interview—and how he or she perceives the job and your organization. Some key factors to consider in preparing for, conducting, and evaluating the interview are described below.

You may decide to have a series of interviews or different types of interviews (such as a “fit” interview), depending on the job you are recruiting for. Ensure that you communicate to the candidate how many interviews are expected, and the purpose and estimated length of each (interviews should be no longer than one hour each).

Actual interview tools have been provided separately for several occupational clusters (job groups) within the substance abuse field. Each interview tool includes behaviour-based questions that correspond to the Behavioural Competencies commonly required for jobs within that occupational cluster (See Section IV).

Setting Up the Interview

- Schedule interviews far enough in advance to allow the candidate adequate preparation time.
- Choose the competencies to focus on during the interview.
- Determine who the interviewers will be and ensure they have all read the interview guide and questions beforehand. If you have a panel of interviewers (e.g., the manager of the position, a representative from Human Resources and sometimes a peer of the position), be sure to determine who will ask each question and in what order.
- Let candidates know in advance how long the interview will last and provide a few details on the interview process (e.g., if using multiple interviewers).
- Inform candidates of anything you would like them to bring to the interview (e.g., samples of writing, certificates/diplomas).
- Schedule enough time between interviews so that you can evaluate each candidate after his or her interview.
- Arrange an appropriate location for the interview—quiet, comfortable and free of interruptions.
- Have a separate area for those waiting to be interviewed.
- Review the candidate’s résumé in detail, in advance, and highlight any specific areas of interest to probe during the interview.

Opening the Interview

- Greet the candidate and introduce yourself, giving your name and job title.
- Offer the candidates a refreshment, as some people become “parched” or “dry-mouthed” during interviews.
- Thank the candidate for his or her interest in the job and for coming in for an interview.
- Briefly describe the job and relevant organizational characteristics to allow candidates to become comfortable in the interview setting.
- Explain the interview process in a general way. Inform the candidate that you will be taking notes throughout the process.
- Ask the candidate if he or she has any questions before beginning.

During the Interview

- Take notes on the candidate’s answers during the interview so you have an accurate record of the information to evaluate later.
- Make periodic eye contact with the candidate to show your interest.
- For each question, obtain one or more specific examples of the candidate’s experience and/or accomplishments, ensuring that the candidate describes:
  - The Situation related to the example
  - The Actions taken by the candidate to address the situation
  - The Results of the candidate’s actions
- To obtain complete descriptions, ask follow-up questions to clarify or obtain additional information on any one or more of the elements (Situation, Action, and Result).
- Provide an opportunity at the end of the interview for the candidate to ask questions or clarify the next steps in the selection process.
Evaluating the Interview
Assess the candidate's responses against the competency requirements using the rating criteria in the interview guide. If you have more than one selection board member, each member should do this individually, then members can discuss their results and reach a consensus on the candidate.

Evaluate candidate responses against the criteria or behavioural examples for each competency—avoid comparing candidate answers.

When assigning ratings, consider the behavioural examples provided by the candidate in terms of:

- **Significance**: The importance of the examples in relation to the job being filled
- **Recency**: The more recent the behaviour, the better it predicts future behaviour.

Assign a rating to each competency based on the candidate's demonstration of the relevant behaviour indicators.

Common Rating Errors
It is important to be aware of the most common types of rating errors that can occur during candidate assessment. Be aware of the following issues to ensure that your ratings are fair:

- Allowing prejudices about certain groups of people or personalities to interfere with being able to fairly evaluate a candidate's performance. Refrain from considering any non-performance-related factors when making rating decisions.
- Allowing ratings in one competency to influence ratings for other competencies. For example, allowing a high rating for Effective Communication to bias a rating for Creativity, regardless of the candidate's performance on Creativity.
- Rating all competences at the middle of the rating scale (for example, giving mostly 3's on a 5-point scale). Remember that a high rating does not indicate perfect performance; it means demonstrating more of the behaviours required for a competency than is generally exhibited. Similarly, a low rating does not mean the candidate does not possess the competency; it means the he or she did not demonstrate the required behaviours with his or her answers.
- Giving high or low ratings to all candidates, regardless of their actual performance—being too strict or too lenient.
- Giving higher than deserved ratings to candidates who appear similar to you. People have a natural tendency to prefer others who are similar in various ways to themselves. Concentrate on the responses given by the candidate rather than on the outward characteristics and personality of the candidate.

Using Occupation-specific Interview Tools
An occupation-specific interview tool has been developed for each of the seven occupational clusters identified in the substance abuse workforce. Each tool provides a selection of sample behavioural questions for the competencies and proficiency levels relevant to the seven occupational competency profiles. The tools also include procedures for conducting the interview and evaluating candidate responses.

It is important to understand that these tools are useful templates for your interview process, but they might not accurately represent the competencies required for the position for which you are interviewing.

Review each tool before use to determine if the suggested competency profile is relevant. If not, review the Behavioural Competencies to determine which competencies and/or proficiency levels you should change to give a more accurate representation. A brief overview of the steps involved in identifying the relevant competencies for a profile has been provided in the Behavioural Competencies Report (see Section I).

Keep in mind that a job competency profile should only include the critical competencies required for the job, not those that are "nice to have"—i.e., not essential to performing the job successfully. Preferably, there are no more than 12 competencies per profile.

After confirming the relevant competency profile (competencies and proficiency levels), you must then determine which competencies you will assess in the interview and which questions you will ask. Sample questions have been provided for the relevant proficiency levels for the suggested profiles. Section II contains a generic interview bank to assist you in selecting and adapting alternate questions if a different competency profile is used.
Do not expect to assess all competencies by interview. It would take much far too much time, and some competencies are better assessed through other methods (e.g., reference checks, knowledge tests or simulations). For a one-hour interview, a reasonable number of questions to ask would be five to seven.

To determine which questions to ask, consider the relative importance of a competency to the position. Also, review the competencies for overlap to determine if asking a question on one competency will provide information on another competency that can then be excluded. Overlapping competencies are identified in the Behavioural Competencies Report.

You might choose to assess the same competency using more than one method if it is very important for the position. For example, if Interpersonal Rapport/Savvy is more important than other competencies, you may wish to assess this in both the interview and through a reference check. Alternatively, you can ask two questions on this competency instead of one in the interview.

Questions can be used for reference checking by adapting the text to ask about the candidate in the third-person narrative, rather than in the second person. For example:

**Interview Question:** “Please provide an example of a time when you coordinated a large project” *(second person)*

**Reference Question:** “Please provide an example of a time when Mark coordinated a large project” *(third person)*

Ensure that all interviews are conducted in accordance with existing organizational policies and procedures.