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**Effective Interview Strategies**

For Cancer Registries

Interviewing potential candidates for a job opening in the central cancer registry is about more than the applicants’ education and work experience. The interview should be a two-way dialogue where employer and employee can determine if they are a good fit for one another. And it’s as much a chance for you to sell yourself as the ideal employer as it is for the applicant to prove themselves. Follow some simple strategies to get the most out of your interviews.

**BEFORE THE INTERVIEW**

**Select 2-3 staff to participate in a team interview for each candidate.**

They should be staff who will be working closely with the individual or who have experience performing the kinds of tasks the applicant will be expected to do in his/her new role. Include at least one high-level hiring manager on the team.

**Develop a functional job description for the vacant position.**

Official job descriptions tend to be somewhat generic and include a broad range of possible tasks. Two people with the same official job title can have very different tasks. An informal, functional job description lists the specific duties and performance measures for a particular vacancy. It helps to include a rough estimate of the percent of time that will be spent on each task.

**Describe the Ideal Candidate**

While you don’t want to lock yourself into the idea of a perfect candidate who probably doesn’t exist, make a list of the essential characteristics you think would make a successful employee. Determine which characteristics are a must and which are preferred. Look at other staff who have succeeded in your organization. To what do they or their supervisors attribute their success? If you have conducted retention or exit interviews with staff, refer to those. Develop a candidate score sheet like the one included in the NAACCR Recruitment and Retention Toolkit. The score sheet should include the essential criteria you want to evaluate.

**Prepare the Questions**

It may feel like a script, but it will help to keep the conversation on course and make sure you cover all the areas you’ve decided are important. Your interview questions should be open-ended and designed to assess the characteristics you determined will make a successful employee. Try to group questions by topic and put them in logical order. Refer to the list of sample questions included in the NAACCR Recruitment & Retention Toolkit.

**Study the Resume and Application**

Hopefully you’ve already weeded out the applications with spelling errors and other evidence of a lack of the attention to detail that is so important in the cancer registry. Now it’s time to look at that resume from an interviewer’s perspective.

**Look Your Best**

First impressions are important. This goes for the workspace as well. Does the office space look like a place you would want to work? Are there signs of employee recognition and accomplishments? Are uses of the registry data displayed prominently?

**DURING THE INTERVIEW**

**Get Situated**

Remember, the most productive interviews are conversations. Avoid the firing squad-style interview with the candidate on one side of the table and the interviewers on the other. If possible, sit around a circular or small square table. Begin by introducing the interview team and explaining how the interview will proceed. Be sure to encourage the candidate to ask questions throughout the process.

**Round Robin**

Take turns asking the candidate questions from the prepared script. The interviewer asking the question should listen attentively to the answer while the other interviewers take notes. Nothing makes an applicant more uncomfortable than looking at the top of your head while you furiously scribble down every word they say.

**Improvise**

Try to stick to the script but be flexible and be ready to improvise. If a question has already been answered throughout the conversation, it’s ok to skip it. If questions come up that aren’t in the script, go ahead and ask them – just be sure to write them down and ask them of other candidates if appropriate.

**Stay on Topic**

Yes, you want the interview to feel more like a conversation, but you also need to evaluate the candidate based on your essential characteristics for success. If a candidate (or interviewer for that matter) gets off track with a long-winded answer or anecdote, steer the conversation back with something like “Speaking of which…” or “That’s an interesting point…” followed by a question from your script or a more general transition question.

**Be Honest**

Be up front with the candidate about the job, including logistics like parking, telecommuting options (or lack thereof), work hours, etc., in addition to the job duties. You may even want to share the functional job description with the candidate or give them some real examples of the day-to-day work. The only thing worse than hiring *no* one is hiring the *wrong* one.

**AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

**Document the Results**

Immediately following the interview, review your notes while everything is fresh in your mind. Make sure they are legible so they will make sense to you later. Circle or highlight key points that stick out to you (positive or negative). Write down a few sentences of your overall impression of the candidate. This is also a good time to complete the candidate score sheet.

**Discuss**

Meet briefly with the other interviewers to discuss your impressions of each candidate. If there are any you can eliminate, let them know as soon as possible (be sure to follow your organization’s procedures). If needed, schedule second interviews with preferred candidates; include different interviewers in the second interview.

**Keep in Touch**

The hiring process can often be lengthy for central registries. Be sure to keep in regular contact with your preferred candidates. Thank them for their patience and, if possible, bring them in for a more in-depth orientation to your program’s operations.