**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

**Strategy Recommendation**

## DEI Strategy: Equity-Minded Interview Questions

## ACHRO Workgroups: Screening Criteria; Interviews; BPs/APs/Hiring Procedures

Version Date: January 20, 2021

# Issue Statement

Interviews tend to prioritize technical competence, experience, and subject area knowledge without adequately addressing the application of knowledge within a diverse workplace.

Failure to assess how well applicants will apply their technical competencies, experiences, and knowledge in a manner that advances equity and inclusion for people from diverse backgrounds results in the selection of less qualified applicants and perpetuates exclusion and equity gaps.

# Strategy Proposal

Revise policies and procedures to require interview committees to use interview questions, writing tasks, and practical/teaching demonstrations (as applicable) assessing technical competence and subject matter expertise framed by the application of knowledge with diverse communities. Throughout this recommendation, references to ‘interview questions’ includes writing tasks, practical/teaching demonstrations, and any other materials used to assess candidates during the interview process.

# Current Challenges

* Subject matter expertise is overvalued in committee participation and assessing applicants’ ability to serve people from diverse communities is undervalued.
* Currently committees may not have experience creating questions or practical/teaching demonstrations that address technical competence and equity and inclusion for diverse communities.
* Committees may be reluctant to create and use questions prioritizing the application of knowledge in an equitable and inclusive manner.
* Committees may lack knowledge of and experience with assessing equity and inclusion in the context of routine job performance.
* Committee members may resist prioritizing DEI by undervaluing diversity, equity, and inclusion when evaluating candidates and interview responses.
* Committee members may lack training on DEI-related concepts, terms, and definitions and methods for appropriately accessing and rating candidates’ ability to apply technical competence in an equitable and inclusive manner.
* Committee members may believe DEI-focused questions do not apply to their discipline, job, work unit, department, etc.
* Changes to interview question requirements may require approval through participatory governance processes which resist change.
* Committee members may not know where to find resources to gain knowledge and skills in writing DEI-focused interview questions and assessing responses.
* Committee members may claim EEO-related concerns about prioritizing DEI in interviews, such as reverse discrimination or hiring less qualified people from diverse communities to meet diversity goals.
* Districts may also have unique challenges based on their current policies, standard operating procedures, work culture, and other factors not listed above.

# Strategy Recommendations

## Training

* Training should include DEI definitions and terminology to create a common understanding and application of language and meaning in assessing candidates, deliberation, and decision-making
* Training should include examples of equity-minded competency and demonstrate the importance of student outcomes (e.g. student success metrics and correlations with exposure to district faculty, staff, and administrators with shared cultural backgrounds
* Training should include institutional demographic data highlighting current and historical employment trends based on race, ethnicity, and gender (and other categories as appropriate) within major classifications
  + Districts should present data for at least faculty, classified/confidential, and administrator classifications
  + More nuanced employee classifications should be used in larger districts where there are 30 or more employees within a classification (e.g. academic divisions)
  + Districts should present data on representation in leadership positions within participatory governance, including the Board of Trustees
  + Demographic data on student populations may be used for context and comparison, but should not be used exclusively to define a target for diversity in employment
* Training should provide tools for identifying specific DEI-related knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) most relevant for a given position, department, division, and/or the institution and incorporating those KSAs into interview questions
* Training should include exercises in drafting, evaluating, and revising equity-focused interview questions in a behavioral interview framework (see behavioral interview guide in Resources section)
* Training should include effective practices for requiring DEI-focused candidate statements in the application process, evaluating statements, identifying deficit-minded language in statements, and the impact of DEI-focused statements on decisions about candidates
* Training on effective methods of engaging in committee deliberations with an emphasis on expectations about how a candidate will engage with diverse communities within the position and managing DEI-related discussions in compliance with EEO requirements
* Define DEI Competencies to be Evaluated in Interviews
* Employees serving on selection committees will likely have a wide range of perceptions and understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion based on their cultural background, personal history, education and training on DEI, recent national and local events, political identification, and other external influences
* Training for committee members on institutional definitions of DEI competencies, evaluation of DEI-competency in application materials and interview responses, and appropriate discussion of DEI-competencies during deliberations is critical for effective implementation of DEI-focused selection methods
* Districts should adopt the Chancellor’s Office DEI Glossary of Terms or a similar locally-developed list of terms and definitions to create a common language and understanding of meaning (https://www.cccco.edu/-/media/CCCCO-Website/Files/Communications/vision-for-success/8-dei-glossary-of-terms.pdf?la=en&hash=21FCA99EAE353E6F481025115DC98272EAA36BA9)
* Districts should incorporate DEI competencies into existing candidate assessment resources with examples of desired characteristics, interview responses, and other job-specific models for determining how well a candidate demonstrated the competencies relevant to the position
* Districts should address EEO compliance concerns when evaluating DEI competencies in selection committee trainings

## Use Behavior-Focused, Equity-Minded Interview Questions

* Provide training on writing effective interview questions using a behavioral interview model
* Behavioral Interview Model
  + Questions asking candidates to demonstrate desired knowledge, skills, and abilities by describing actions they have taken in their work, education, volunteer work, and other relevant experience and the outcomes from those actions
  + Behavioral Interview Question Formula: Helpful lead-in, open-ended beginning, desired behavior

Example One:

* + - Helpful lead-in: Many of our students are 1st generation college students.
    - Open-ended beginning: Please describe a time you helped someone
    - Desired behavior: from a different cultural background understand a new process and achieve their desired outcome.

Example Two:

* + - Helpful lead-in: We teach students from diverse races, ethnicities, gender identities, ability statuses, and many other characteristics.
    - Open-ended beginning: Please tell us how you have
    - Desired behavior: successfully created curriculum engaging learners from diverse backgrounds.
* Train committee members to frame all behavioral interview questions in equity-mindedness with an emphasis on the application of technical competency in serving and working with people from diverse cultural communities
  + E.g. the interview questions should assess the application of knowledge with diverse stakeholders, not just the possession of knowledge
* Provide support for committees in drafting behavior-focused, equity-minded questions such as HR review of proposed questions, recommendations for improving questions, and assessing the quality of applicant responses
* Develop a bank of effective behavior-focused, equity-minded interview questions for committees to use as models when writing questions
* Assess interview questions for terms and language that may create barriers for diverse candidates and individuals lacking direct experience working in California Community Colleges
* E.g. faculty interview questions focused on formal teaching experience in a community college or related setting

## Assessing Responses in DEI Focused Interviews

* Provide model answers and/or a list of key points to look for in responses to all questions
* Train committees to listen for answers that exhibit a commitment to inclusionary practices
* Train committees on key terms and concepts related to DEI and deficit-minded language and indicators
* Train committees on methods to evaluate applicants’ technical competence through the application of knowledge, skills, and abilities with diverse communities
* Integrate DEI measures into current rubrics, scoring sheets, and other tools used to assess, rank, or otherwise select candidates for recommendation for the next step of application process

Review Committee Participation

* Review committee participation and work products to ensure committee members from diverse communities are not expected to do the majority of work on infusing DEI into interview questions
* Review committee participation and work products to ensure committee members are not ignoring DEI elements in interview responses or giving generic assessments of DEI-related answers (e.g. scoring all DEI-related elements the same for every applicant)
* Provide training to committee members who oppose prioritizing DEI, passively ignore DEI-related content, or otherwise fail to follow policies and procedures addressing DEI interviews
* Revise policies, through the participatory governance process, to disqualify committee members who refuse to comply with DEI-related interview requirements

# EEO and Compliance Considerations and Recommendations

* Interview questions specifically asking about a candidate’s race, ethnicity, sex, or another protected status under Title VII, FEHA, Education Code, Title V, and other applicable laws and regulations would likely be discriminatory under current EEO law
* Interview questions calling out serving and/or working with specific populations based on protected status, unless clearly job-related, may violate or give the appearance of violating current EEO law (e.g. asking about experience working with individuals with disabilities for a DSPS program position would be clearly job-related; asking applicants for a Chemistry Instructor position about teaching Black students specifically could present legal issues)
* DEI-focused interview questions should not be misunderstood or used as an attempt to reduce the likelihood of any individual being hired based on their race, ethnicity, gender, or other legally-protected status
* The goal of equity-minded interview questions is to elevate the ability to work with and serve diverse communities to a primary qualification for all positions; committees should not think the purpose of equity-minded interviews is to suggest candidates from specific protected statuses are preferred
* HR or the appropriate staff should review interview questions for legal compliance and EEO concerns before they are used by a committee

# References, Tools, and Resources

* Behavioral Interview Guide
* Committee Training on Equity-Minded Interviews Example
* Equity-Minded Interview Scoring Rubric Template

Behavioral Interview Guide

Behavioral interview questions are the most effective interview technique available. Behavioral questions request specific information about how an applicant will handle essential functions of their position. Past performance is the best predictor of future performance. Understanding how an applicant has approached work duties similar to those in our positions will provide relevant information for us to predict their success (or lack of success) in our position.

A key advantage of behavioral interview questions is their flexibility. Whether a candidate has worked in the specific job or context of the job is less important than whether they will perform key responsibilities in a manner likely to be successful. This framework emphasizes successful behaviors over characterizations of traits or qualities of a candidate, which are more susceptible to biases.

Behavioral Interview Question Construction

Behavioral interview questions can be composed following a simple formula:

*Helpful lead in – open-ended beginning – desired behavior*

1. Helpful lead-in: provides the context for the duties performed by the position we are hiring. This is critical information for the applicant to provide information relevant to our position.
2. Open-ended beginning: asks the candidate to draw on their prior work experience and describe the behaviors they have used.
3. Desired behavior: asks the candidate to discuss the specific job-related information we want to assess, related back to the context provided in the helpful lead-in.

Examples:

1. We serve a lot of 1st generation college students. Tell us about a time when you helped someone master new skills to succeed in an unfamiliar setting.
2. We provide financial aid services to students from a wide range of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Please describe your experience with helping people from a different cultural background understand a complicated technical process.
3. A critical part of our mission is preparing students to succeed in an increasingly diverse world. Please give us an example of how you ensure students from diverse cultures and non-traditional communities can fully engage in your course.

Consider example A. The helpful lead in provides the actual setting in which the job is performed, serving students, but specifically, 1st generation college students. Candidates who understand that context have the opportunity to tailor their answer to communicate work behaviors they have used to help people new to community college achieve their desired outcomes. Importantly, candidates who do not understand the meaning of “1st generation college students” are still able to demonstrate they have the desired behavior and abilities, however, because of the desired behavior portion of the question. By focusing in on a specific aspect of serving 1st generation college students – helping people succeed in an unfamiliar setting – we give the candidate an opportunity to describe how they have performed an essential part of this position, regardless of their understanding of the terminology. Whether helping someone new to processes at the DMV, completing financial aid forms, complete their taxes, buy a first home, or many other activities where they are trying to learn how the process works while actually doing it, the underlying skill set and behaviors for successful performance are generally the same.

Behavioral interview questions are particularly effective for embedding a DEI focus into virtually every question. This allows a committee to prioritize how effective a candidate will be in serving and/or working with diverse communities within the context of the technical knowledge and skills needed to perform the job. Using behavioral questions in this way can infuse DEI throughout an interview instead of using one or two EEO-focused questions.

Example: We serve a lot of 1st generation college students from diverse cultural communities. Tell us about a time you helped someone from a different cultural background master new skills to succeed in an unfamiliar setting.

To answer this question well, the candidate has to describe the desired behaviors for helping someone succeed in an unfamiliar process, but with the added context of performing those behaviors with someone from a different cultural background. Candidates able to do this well could describe how they build rapport, trust, connection, and other relational characteristics with people from diverse communities as they perform and essential job function. The combination of skill and application of skill becomes the key criteria in a successful answer, not just the possession of technical knowledge and skills.