



VIRTUAL RECRUITMENT

Top Tips for Interviewers

INTRODUCTION

During the COVID-19 lockdown, Solace have been in regular contact with our Local Government colleagues, discussing the challenges and opportunities of recruitment during unprecedented times such as these.

This is new territory for everyone and what is clear to us is that there is no 'one size fits all' solution.

Views and expectations on etiquette, preparation, engagement and technology vary greatly from one individual, and one organisation, to the next. We also need to remember that not everyone is naturally comfortable in front of a camera.

With the use of technology being a cornerstone of the 'new normal', a key success factor is ensuring that both interviewee and interviewer are as comfortable as possible in the virtual format, so that candidate performance is not affected by the change of circumstance.

Our overarching advice therefore is to plan, test and communicate, being clear in your expectations throughout.

The following guide includes some thoughts and considerations we have developed with the sector. They may not all apply in all instances, but we hope that they will provide a useful starting point when considering recruitment in an environment where the norms of yesterday no longer apply.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE VIRTUAL FORMAT

Shortlist more people for initial interview due to less time needed in a virtual setting. Keep the initial field wide, to ensure you get a broad view of the field of available candidates.

INTERNAL PREPARATION

- In order for the interview sessions to be successful the Panel will need to do more work beforehand than possibly they've done in the past. The actual process (dial-in, introductions, who speaks when, etc) needs careful planning and choreographing.
- Time is needed before each interview so that any technical hitches can be resolved before the interview begins.
- It is critical for the Chair to introduce people, set the scene and, create a professional tone for the interview.
- The Chair won't have those little visual and audio clues that tell when a colleague wants to speak or the candidate's beginning to lose their way in an answer - it may therefore be wise to separate the role of Chair of the interview panel and Host of the discussions.
- You'll also need to either rigidly stick to time, allow a clear overrun-space of at least 15 minutes between interviews, or have someone on stand-by to contact candidates and warn them not to dial-in at the expected time if things are running late. Alternatively, you can use online waiting rooms to grant access to candidates when the panel is ready.

PREPARING YOUR CANDIDATES

- You might want to include some guidance for the candidates beyond the simple dial-in details for instance who is on the interview Panel, and who to contact in the event of technical difficulties.
- Organisations are using a variety of platforms so candidates need to be given plenty of notice of the system being used so they can familiarise themselves in advance.
- Ensure there is backup technology if the original technology goes wrong, which the candidate is aware of.
- Have the candidate's number on hand, if a problem occurs and there is a need to reconnect via the backup technology.
- Ensure you send a calendar invite for the day, date and time, to the candidate, so that it is in their diary.

CONSIDERATIONS

- It can take several minutes for everyone to establish a reliable connection; it's not uncommon for people to have to logoff and login more than once to get a clear signal. This can take time, so allow plenty of time for the whole process.
- Consider using a headset, this will block out any unwanted background noise and help to ensure your voice is delivered clearly.
- If you're listening to a panelist, mute your microphone, this will help in managing the sound in the virtual space.
- There can be a lag between sound and vision; sometimes barely perceptible, sometimes significant. For instance lips and words may not synchronise, and sometimes a time lag between both parties can mean that the flow of conversation becomes disjointed.
- It can be useful to have someone from IT on hand in case there are any problems.

THE TECHNOLOGY PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

Virtual interviews, remote working and the associated technology are relatively new phenomena for many of us. Take the time to familiarise yourself with the platform you're using for interviews, and ensure you practice basic functions such as how to let people in from the waiting room, and how to mute yourself when someone else is talking.

The LGA have also put together a series of helpful tech guides for a variety of video conferencing and audio platforms which can be accessed [here](#).

"Don't attempt to conduct or do an online interview without practicing. It's not hard to hold an online dummy-interview with a friend to become familiar with the system provided. Use the same software package as the real interview to become familiar with the tools."

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

If you've found this guide helpful, please feel free to share it with friends, family, and colleagues.

For more advice and information on communicating with impact in a virtual environment, [click here](#) to watch our video series with communication specialists, TMG Training and Circling Squares.

The whole team at Solace are available to help support you, so if you do have any questions please feel free to give us a call on 0207 976 3311 or email jessica.mullinger@solace.org.uk.