

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF CHILD WELFARE STAFF COMPETENCY-BASED SCREENING DESIGN PROCESS

Competency-based screening is central to effective recruitment, screening and selection. In this area, the Maine Recruitment and Retention Project followed a careful step-by-step process to ensure that the materials were both job related and practical and that Subject Matter Experts (supervisors) were closely involved in their development. In addition, we used the following research based principles in the design process: base the process on a current job analysis, use several job related assessments, focus on specific competencies and standardize the process (Posthuma, Morgeson, & Campion, 2002; Campion, Palmer & Campion, 1997).

Job expectations:

To ensure that the materials met the standard of content validity we began by reviewing and updating existing job descriptions for caseworkers. A representative workgroup of supervisors reviewed extensive information on job expectations including existing job descriptions and the Maine child welfare practice model. We then sent out draft materials to all supervisors to request their review and comment. The Senior Manager Team reviewed and approved the final version of the job descriptions.

Entry Level Competencies:

In Maine we were fortunate to have in place a competency model for caseworkers based on a carefully designed research approach (Bernotavicz, 1994). This model had been used as the basis for the existing competency-based hiring process which was designed and implemented in 1995 (Bernotavicz & Locke, 2000). From the 39 different competencies needed to be effective, we had selected nine competencies as the focus for the screening process. These are the competencies that

- Are most likely to predict long-term success on the job;
- Make the difference between average and outstanding performance; and
- Are the most difficult to change through training and supervision.

Since 1995, the state of Maine has adopted core competencies used in the performance appraisal process for all state workers; there has been considerable research on the competencies that predict retention of child welfare staff; and the Maine child welfare program has adopted concepts related to Emotional Intelligence as part of their performance management process.

We decided that the original listing of competencies needed to be updated to reflect this new information. In addition, the new Practice Model requires a different emphasis in the skill set for caseworkers.

The listing of entry level competencies was expanded to include indicators from emotional intelligence, the research on retention, the state core competencies and competencies needed to engage in the new practice model. Fortunately, there is a great deal of commonality among all four sources. In all of them we are looking at the underlying personal characteristics that people bring to the job.

In order to make the competency listing consistent with the competencies used in the Performance Appraisal process, we utilized the headings of the state core competencies. We added a new competency (Teamwork) which is one of the state core competencies and a key competency in engaging with families and working with the community in the new child welfare practice model . The revised listing is attached as Appendix A.

Components of screening process:

The first component is the paper screen which is conducted centrally by the Division of Human Resources. Candidates are then placed on the register and eligible for further screening. Supervisors are responsible for the next four components of the screening process: the Panel Interview, Second Interview and Reference Check

Panel Interview: The panel interview is the first step that supervisors take to screen candidates. Candidates identify the district where they would like to work and are contacted to come in for a Panel Interview. Prior to the interview they are required to view the Realistic Job Preview video. A workgroup of supervisors and administrators provided oversight to the design process for the Panel Interview materials. Two graduate student interns provided staff support to the effort.

Selection Index: In designing the Panel Interview the first step was to develop a selection index of the ways in which the competencies can and will be assessed during the Panel Interview. The attached index (Appendix B) shows the three assessment tools used in the Maine approach: a Standard Interview, Fact-Finding Interview and Case Study. The design includes multiple assessments for each competency.

Standard Interview: This interview includes three types of questions: Opinion, Past Behavior and Scenarios. According to the literature (Campion, Palmer & Campion, 1997; Pulakos & Schmitt, 1995), all three types of questions are valid in terms of predicting behavior on the job. Each question is coded according the primary competencies elicited by the question and includes a Scoring Guide showing examples of Unacceptable, Average and Outstanding responses.

To develop the questions we surveyed all supervisors and asked them to submit examples of questions that they currently use in interviews that they think are particularly effective. We also conducted a comprehensive national search of screening materials from the private and public sector to identify interview questions. We then grouped questions according to the competencies they addressed and edited to eliminate redundancies. We compiled a listing of proposed questions and again surveyed all supervisors using a modified Delphi process to elicit their opinions on preferred questions. The workgroup met and made decisions on the final questions to be included as well as a listing of alternate questions that could be substituted.

Fact Finding Interview and Case Study: These two components of the Panel Interview are very closely linked. When candidates come in for the interview they are given 30 minutes to review case materials and told that they will have an opportunity to ask questions to get more information (the Fact Finding Interview) and then have time to write a summary and recommendations about the case (Case Study).

A workgroup of experienced supervisors and administrators again participated actively in the design process. They reviewed and updated the two existing case studies in light of the agency's new practice model and the forms required. Several changes were made to reflect increased involvement of the families, the use of family support and development of a safety plan. The workgroup carefully cross-checked the changes in the case materials against the information provided to the Resource Person to ensure that the two sets of information were consistent. We then sent a draft of the proposed revisions to all supervisors for their review and comment.

Scoring Guides: To increase the reliability of the screening process, we developed scoring guides for each component of the Panel Interview (Harris & Eder, 1999). Each of the existing questions includes a guide showing examples of poor, average and outstanding responses and a similar guide was developed to rate the Fact Finding Interview and the written Case Study. Because the competency of Communication Skills is shown through the process, we developed a separate Scoring Guide showing examples of how that competency can be demonstrated.

To develop the Scoring Guide for the Standard Interview questions, we used the following process:

- Generated questions that area linked to the competencies as described above;
- Identified which behaviors in the competencies are most likely to be revealed in the answer to the question;
- Brainstormed examples of poor, average and outstanding answers;
- Limited the indicators to three-four for each category; and
- Reviewed and revised the Guides using the input of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs).

Second Interview:

The second interview occurs when a supervisor has a specific opening. The purpose is to make sure that the candidate is a good fit for the specific program area and supervisory unit. While there is more discretion around the second interview and not as structured as the panel interview, it still needs to be defensible and follow the same good practice in screening and selection. To develop guidelines for the second interview, we surveyed all supervisors and asked them to provide examples of interview outlines and questions that they currently use. We edited these materials to reduce some redundancy.

Reference Check:

The reference check is the final step in the screening process and until recently was not standardized in Maine. We located a resource guide (International Personnel Management Association (IPMA), 2004) and used information from that to provide guidelines for the reference check including a waiver to release job-related information and an outline to conduct a competency-based reference check.

Training:

Training is essential for improving the reliability of structured interviewing practice (Campion, Palmer, & Campion, 1997). We developed two types of training for interviewers: the first focused on legal and policy issues in screening and selection, the second on

developing skills in assessing candidates. The first training was delivered by a HRM specialist and the EEO Directors as an informational session to all supervisors. For the second, we developed a one-day curriculum which included information about competency-based screening and selection and exercises to develop skills in interviewing and assessing candidates. The training included videotapes of mock interviews providing an opportunity for supervisors to observe and rate interviewer skills as well as rating candidate performance. We also developed resource guides that included step by step instructions for supervisors to use in conducting panel interviews, the second interview and reference checks.

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APPENDIX A

Child Welfare Caseworker Entry Level Competencies

The screening process focuses on ten competencies:

1. **Interpersonal Relations:** *Awareness of others' feelings, needs, perceptions and concerns*
 - Shows respect and tolerance for each person
 - Relates well to others
 - Demonstrates trust, sensitivity and mutual respect
 - Recognizes the contributions diversity brings to job performance and creativity
 - Demonstrates altruistic empathy – caring for others

2. **Self Awareness/Confidence:** *Knowing one's internal states, preferences, resources and limitations*
 - Accurate self-assessment: knowing ones' strengths and limits
 - Self-confidence: strong sense of self worth and capabilities (self efficacy)
 - Emotional awareness: recognizing one's emotions and their effects

3. **Analytic Thinking:** *Using data to understand patterns and develop concepts*
 - Information gathering skills
 - Use of range of sources
 - Hypothesis formation
 - Conceptual frameworks
 - Looking beyond superficial explanations
 - Decision making

4. **Adaptability:** *Flexibility in handling change*
 - Handles day-to-day challenges confidently
 - Is willing to adjust to multiple demands, shift priorities, ambiguity and rapid change
 - Shows resilience in the face of constraints, frustrations or adversity
 - Ability to adapt styles and shift gears
 - Shows evidence of coping skills
 - Innovation: comfortable with new ideas; open to new information.

5. **Observation Skills:** *Ability to describe events factually*
 - Ability to observe and identify key elements
 - Recognition of inconsistencies
 - Factual descriptions
 - Accurate observations

6. **Sense of mission:** *Commitment to the welfare of others*
 - Evidence of child welfare knowledge and/or experience
 - Clear values/beliefs about protecting children and preserving families consistent with Bureau's reform goals
 - Desire to make things better for others

7. **Communication Skills:** *Open clear communication*
 - Speaks clearly and expresses self well
 - Demonstrates attentive listening
 - Conveys information clearly and effectively through written documents

8. **Motivation:** *Emotional tendencies that guide or facilitate reaching goals*
 - Commitment: aligning with the goals of the agency or group
 - Achievement: strives to improve, drives for results and success
 - Sets high standards of performance
 - Displays a high level of effort and commitment to perseverance performing the work
 - Optimism: persistence in pursuing goals

9. **Planning and Organizing work:** *Ordering activities to achieve goals*
 - Ability to assess/reprioritize
 - Use of time management tools
 - Defines and arranges activities in a logical and efficient manner

10. **Teamwork:** *Creating group synergy in pursuing collective goals*
 - Contributes to organizational goals
 - Fosters collaboration among team members and among teams

APPENDIX B Screening Process Outline

The screening process for child welfare caseworkers consists of three components: a Standard Interview, a Fact-finding Interview, and a Written Exercise.

Preparation for Written Exercise:

Prior to the interview by the screening committee, the candidate reviews a folder of materials including intake assessments, caseworker notes, and various forms. The information found in this folder is incomplete. In order to prepare an adequate case summary, further research is required. The candidate reviews the case material and takes notes in preparation for asking further questions. *(Time = 30 minutes)*

Standard Interview:

During this first portion of the interview, the team asks questions regarding the candidate's past experience in order to screen for competencies and provides the candidate an opportunity to ask questions about the job. *(Time = 45 minutes)*

Fact-finding Interview:

The second phase of the interview provides an opportunity for the candidate to ask questions pertaining to the incomplete case materials. These questions are directed to one individual on the interview team while the other members observe and assess the process. *(Time = 15 minutes)*

Written Exercise:

Lastly, the candidate writes a case summary based on both the materials provided in the folder as well as information gathered in the fact-finding session. This case summary is then evaluated for demonstration of competencies. *(Time = 30 minutes)*

CHILD WELFARE CASEWORKER COMPETENCY TEST BATTERY

	Standard Interview	Fact-finding Interview	Written Exercise
1. Interpersonal Relations	■	■	
2. Self Awareness / Confidence	■	■	
3. Analytic Thinking	■	■	■
4. Adaptability	■	■	
5. Observation Skills		■	■
6. Sense of Mission	■		■
7. Communication Skills	■	■	■
8. Motivation	■	■	
9. Planning & Organizing		■	■
10. Teamwork	■		■