

How to Prepare for a VISTA Interview: Supervisor Worksheet

I. Identify the top 5 responsibilities the successful VISTA candidate will have to perform in the vacant project position.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

II. Identify the Project Goals and Outcomes. Specify the 3-year goals and objectives; and the goals and outcomes relevant to the current year the candidate is being recruited for.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

III. Identify the special behaviors, attitudes, skills and knowledge the candidate must possess and/or be willing to acquire to meet the responsibilities, goals/out-comes of this position.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

How to Prepare for a VISTA Interview: Supervisor Worksheet (cont.)

IV. Have you shared the project plan/VISTA Assignment Description/position overview with the interviewee prior to the interview?

_____yes _____no

If no, set a time and date to convey the information. Who will be assigned to carrying this task out?

V. Have you informed the potential candidate of the following prior to the interview?

1. Provided the candidate with a position description / project plan overview.
2. Discussed the subsistence allowance. This will allow you discuss the subject during the interview when the candidate has had time to think about his ability to manage on such a small allowance.
3. The position is full time...and it is important to know the expectation may be more than the typical 40 hours per week.
4. Provided a definition of the capacity building role she is applying for and what that means. Also, how that coordinates with the sponsoring organization's responsibility for project sustainability.
5. Shared your expectations of the time and length of the interview. If the interview is in person, where, when and with whom the interview will be held; if by phone, when and with whom the interview will be held and how much time needs to be reserved by the candidate. Also, indicate if anyone else will be on the interview.
6. Shared your expectations for the candidate to ask questions during the interview based on his review of the VAD and the project plan which should be read by the time of the interview. Also, having read it already, he should be prepared to talk about the education, experiences, and strengths he has that will support his success should he be offered the position.

Best Practices: Recruiting and Interviewing

Whether your recruitment potential is to attract many VISTA candidates or just one or two, there are some important ideas to keep in mind to find your 'best' candidate for the position. Let's review:

- Does your website page or recruitment ad tell and even 'sell' potential VISTAs about the vision, mission, values and culture of your organization?
- Do you present a message about how people are valued?
- Do you express your commitment to your employees, to quality, and to those you serve?
- Does your listing provide information that sets your organization apart from other nonprofits?
- Does your application process allow for easy application and submission of resumes for the VISTA position?
- Do you post a position description on your website; or do you have the ability to email on out immediately when a potential candidate expresses interest?
- Do you have a mini-newsletter that provides information about your organization; includes, a greeting of thanks for their interest; and provides a short description of the project they would be working on, the desired goals and outcomes, and how this position would contribute to the successful achievement of them.
- Will VISTA candidates feel part of something bigger than themselves if they join you?
- Will your organization nurture their talent and provide opportunities for challenge and professional growth?
- If you want to be the organization of choice your recruiting methods must reflect this message consistently in your communication and follow up actions. This is how your organization's reputation is built....make sure it is the reputation you desire!

Key Components of a Behavioral Interview

Behavioral interviews identify candidate's traits and characteristics necessary for success. They also compel candidates to pinpoint specific instances when they exhibited a particular behavior in the past. In the best behavioral interviews, the candidate is not aware of the behavior(s) that interest the interviewer.

In a traditional interview, a candidate is asked straightforward questions like, 'What are your strengths and weaknesses?' or 'What major challenges did you face in positions you have previously held?' or 'Describe a typical work week with your last employer.'

In a behavioral interview, the interviewer identifies and asks about the skills needed for a position. Instead of asking how someone would behave in a future situation, they will ask how someone behaved in the past. The interviewer wants to know how the interviewee handled a situation, and not what they might do in the future.

In a behavioral interview, the following four points must be included in the answers provided by the interviewee:

- 1) a specific situation;
- 2) the tasks that needed to be done;
- 3) the action(s) the individual took;
- 4) the results or what happened.

How to Conduct a Successful Behavioral Interview

- Start by identifying what you want the candidate to do in the position. *(VAD)*
- Determine the required outputs and performance success factors for the position.
- Determine the characteristics and traits of the individual you believe will succeed in the position.
- Narrow your list to the top 3–5 traits for the position, including attitudinal traits.
- Make a list of questions to ask each candidate during the behavioral interview. Be sure to ask candidates for a given position the same questions so you can make the best decision based on consistent information.
- Choose the candidates with the characteristics and traits that best match the needs of the position.
- Narrow your final candidates to those who most appear to have the behavioral characteristics, along with the attitude, skills, knowledge, experiences and education you desire.

Sample Questions: Behavioral Interview

- Give an example when you had to manage multiple tasks and how you handled the pressure of the timelines.
- Give an example of a very difficult goal you successfully achieved. What problems did you have to overcome and what strengths did you utilize to achieve your goal?
- Have you handled a difficult situation with a co-worker? How?
- Tell me how you work under pressure and give me an example from your most recent employment.
- Have you gone above and beyond the call of duty? If so, how?
- Have you ever had to convince a team to work on a project they weren't thrilled about? How did you do it?
- Describe a decision you made that was unpopular and how you handled implementing it.
- What do you do when your schedule is interrupted? Give an example of how you handle it.
- Give me a couple of examples from your work history that demonstrate you are a self-starter and possess initiative.
- Give me an example of how you used your problem-solving skills at your last employment.
- Tell me a time you failed or made mistakes at work. How did you deal with the situation and what kind of feedback did you receive from your supervisor?
- Tell me what expectations you have for this VISTA position. How do they relate to your personal and professional goals?
- What unique contribution do you believe you can make to this position and project that no one else can make quite like you can? Why?
- What in your background will help you to live on a limited budget?
- How would you characterize your past two relationships with your supervisors?
- What do you expect from the person you report to? What can they expect from you?
- What situation(s) cause you to feel anxious or nervous at work? How do you manage these situations; and what helps you to become more comfortable and relaxed with them?
- Are you a better decision-maker or problem-solver? Thinking of your recent employment, give me one example that illustrates your strengths; and one example that illustrates your limitations.
- Pretend I don't know anything about VISTA. Describe and explain it to me and what it would mean to your career and your future if you became a VISTA member.

Audio Interview Transcription

Interviewer: If you can take out your member assignment description, let's go through each of the four main tasks, the primary tasks, that this plan calls for and tell me something from either your past experience, your knowledge or your skills, that you think will support your success in completing each of these tasks. The first task is basically to establish a work group that would advise and assist with the assessment of the community services volunteer practices. Just tell me a little bit from your past that supports your ability to convene people, explain and communicate to them what it is you're asking them to do and work together at?

Applicant: Well, I have worked with, as I said before, groups of mothers and children at the shelter. That was really my first experience in working with groups, and I found it was a little difficult at first and I really needed to basically assess what each of those – just get their background before I went ahead and understood how to plan for the group. That was really helpful and I think that correlates to what we're talking about. I've had training and work with different assessment tools so I know how to look at those – I mean, different observation tools, specifically in the classroom environment. I think I've struggled in some way with group management and I've worked to understand my weaknesses, because I usually do have a really strong focus on individual work. I'm really excited about learning more about group work, and I've gained a lot of experience just this past year within that and reflecting on what I've found to be difficult.

Interviewer: I think that's really important in the experience in your past to be able to say this is more difficult or challenging, and this is what I did to manage it and to be able to successfully work through it. That particular ability is as important as feeling confident or competent in a given area. So I really do appreciate you sharing that with me. The second primary task is that you'd be developing and designing a volunteer system. What from your background, Rachel, would help me understand your ability to do something like that?

Applicant: Like I just said, working in program coordination, and working on recruiting people into the specific group, it's called the National Alliance for Family Friend and Neighbor Child Care. I've basically been corresponding throughout the day with many people via e-mail and telephone to try to create a larger group – we're having a meeting in November, and to really gather policy makers, researchers and practitioners in this specific area – family friend and neighbor care. That's been really a great experience for me just to have. I think of myself as a very – I guess I have a large desire to connect with people and to bring people together. I've kind of recognized that this year, and so I think that would support me in doing this task. I have some good experience in writing right now. I see here "to develop written volunteer position descriptions", and I've actually been doing that. I've been writing up different committee descriptions for one program surrounding family friend and neighbor care, so we're creating committees, and we're creating annual meetings. I've been doing the recruitment for the meeting and for the committees right now, so I'm pretty familiar with that.

Audio Interview Transcription (cont.)

Interviewer: The last two tasks are recruiting and training volunteers and, the fourth one, training program staff on the volunteer system. Tell me just a little bit. I see in your resume here that you have been an assistant teacher at the Trevor Day School. Tell me what else would support your working as a trainer teacher in building capacity for the volunteers and the staff at the organization.

Applicant: The training experience I was thinking about also has to do with the program that I'm working in now. It was interesting. I actually had to go away for that training experience and I found out it was a little hard because we had a very small group that we had never worked with before and it was for a limited amount of time. It was difficult to train the people that we were supposed to be training in this specific assessment tool, because we hadn't worked with them before and we only had three days. So we basically had to assess where they were beginning and acknowledge that we weren't going to really complete the task within three days. That was a real interesting experience for me, so I feel like I have an idea of what training – there has to be a fluid process but there are also some time limitations. In regards to that, is there like supervision experience that I may be able to expect from VISTA that would support that for me?

Interviewer: Yes, I'm glad you asked that question, Rachel. There would be some supervision. The supervision would be primarily at the beginning of the program and we would try to coordinate with other staff here at the organization who have been involved in training programs. And also trying to access some time where you can shadow somebody who is doing a training and get a sense of what goes into representing this project and the type of clients that we serve and the type of volunteers that we'll be trying to recruit. So you will have guidance with that, and I will also as your supervisor be available to you, on probably a weekly basis in the beginning and then every other week thereafter. I will always be available to answer any questions that you might have.

Applicant: That's really great, because as you said before, as an assistant teacher it was hard to get that guidance and find that in the school system. A lot of teachers are just bogged down and the directors are and I think that's really important to feel that support in going into a program.

Interviewer: I do want you to know that I have multiple tasks myself, and about 15-20% of my time has been identified as being dedicated to this project. So while our time may be limited, I want us to get to know each other really well so that I can meet your needs and you can be clear about my expectations so we have a good working relationship. I have a very open door policy and I appreciate when the VISTAs or anybody that I'm working with asks questions and acknowledges they need assistance or support.

Illegal Interview Questions

Various federal, state, and local laws regulate the questions a prospective employer can ask a job applicant. The sponsoring agency's questions—on the job application, in the interview (whether that be in-person, by phone or internet) or during any testing process—must be related to the position for which the applicant is applying. The focus must be on:

What do I need to know to decide whether or not this person can perform the functions of this position?

Questions should be position-related and not used to find out personal information.

The sponsoring agency should not be asking questions about a person's

- race
- gender
- religion
- marital status
- age
- disabilities
- ethnic background
- nationality
- sexual orientation
- age
- arrest record

Examples

Topic:	Age
Illegal Question:	How old are you? When did you graduate from college? What is your birthday?
Legal Question:	Are you over the age of 18?
Topic:	Nationality
Illegal Question:	Are you a U.S. citizen? Where were you/your parents born? What is your 'native tongue?'
Legal Question:	Are you authorized to work in the United States? What languages do you read, speak, or write fluently? (This question is okay as long as it is relevant to the performance of the position)

Illegal Interview Questions (cont.)

- Topic:** Marital/family status
- Illegal Question:** What is your marital status? Who do you live with? Do you plan to have a family? When? How many children do you have? What are your child care arrangements?
- Legal Question:** Would you be willing to relocate if necessary? Travel is an important part of the position. Would you be willing to travel as needed to carry out the job's responsibilities? (This question is okay as long as all applicants for the position are asked it.) The VISTA position is full time. Would you be willing and able to work longer than 8 hours a day, or weekends, if necessary? (Again, this question is okay if all applicants are asked it.)
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- Topic:** Arrest record
- Illegal Question:** Have you ever been arrested?
- Legal Question:** Have you ever been convicted of _____? (The crime should be reasonably related to the performance of the job in question.)
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- Topic:** Disabilities
- Illegal Question:** Do you have any disabilities? Please complete the following medical history? Have you had any recent or past illnesses or surgeries? If yes, list and give dates. What was the date of your last physical exam? How is your family's health? When did you lose your eyesight?
- Legal Question:** Are you able to perform the essential functions of this position with or without reasonable accommodations? (To ask this question the interviewer must have provided a job description and/or thoroughly described the job position.)

In general, the interviewee is under no obligation to answer any question that is not assignment-related. If s/he chooses not to answer an unrelated assignment question, this cannot be held against them; nor can the sponsoring agency choose not to select an applicant because they have answered the question in an undesirable way. In either case, to not select the applicant for not answering the question or because we were not satisfied with the answer is considered discriminatory.