

Phone and Virtual Interviews: Creating a Great Candidate Experience

A great candidate experience is often about more than just the process and the job. It is how we make candidates feel throughout the process. A candidate’s experience throughout the recruitment process can often give the job seeker/candidate an insight into the organizational culture as well as how the organization values its employees. There are many things a hiring manager can do to create an exceptional candidate experience.

The first step in creating that experience is ensuring that you maintain regular and transparent communication with the applicants. Job seekers/candidates are likely to be more engaged with employers that are forthcoming with important details regarding their recruitment process. However, sometimes it can be difficult to create and maintain that experience when we are practicing “social distancing” and therefore the candidate may not have an opportunity to visit the campus and meet you in person.

Please also keep in mind that our commitment to accessibility, equity, diversity and inclusion must be amplified during these uncertain times, and that under Ontario accessibility legislation, [it is required that employers / hiring managers communicate to potential candidates access to accommodations during the interview process.](#)

This guide aims to provide hiring managers with some helpful tools and tips for creating a great candidate experience using phone and virtual interviews.

Importance of Structure for the Process (both phone and virtual interviews):

Having a well-structured process is essential to creating a great candidate experience. It helps you maintain regular communication with the candidates and ensures that each stage of your recruitment builds off the previous stage.

Once you have reviewed the resumes and determined which candidates you would like to phone screen, create a schedule to keep track of the candidate’s information, and which candidates you have contacted. The recommended practice is to pre-schedule the candidate and inform them of the date and time of their interview at least three to four days prior to the interview.

Sample Schedule:

Job Title					
Name	Phone Number	Email Address	Interview Time	Confirmation	
Date of Phone Interview					
1	Candidate A	(905) xxx -xxxx	name@company.ca	9:00 - 9:20	
2	Candidate B	(416) yyy -yyyy	name@company.ca	9:25 - 9:45	
3	Candidate C	(647) zzz - zzzz	name@company.ca	9:50 - 10:10	
4	Candidate D	(613) aaa - aaaa	name@company.ca	10:15 - 10:35	

Once the schedule is created and you have pre-scheduled all the candidates, draft an email and reach out to the candidates to start your process.

Sample email to candidates:

Good Morning **NAME**,

Thank you for your interest in the **TITLE** role at McMaster University within the **DEPT/FACULTY**.

After reviewing your application, we would like to invite you to participate in a phone interview, which will be the first round in our recruitment process for this role.

The main purpose of this phone interview will not only be for us to get to know you, but for you to get to know us! In addition, this will be a great opportunity for you to help us better understand how your education, experiences and skill sets align with this role.

We would like to schedule your interview on **DATE** at **TIME**. We anticipate that this phone interview will take approximately 20 minutes.

If this option does not work for you, please let us know and we will do our best to adjust the time. If it does work, please send a confirmation via email with the best phone number at which we can reach you.

Please let me know should you need any accommodations or accessibility considerations to participate in this first round phone interview process, including the option to participate via videoconferencing software (Skype, Zoom or Teams) instead of by telephone. McMaster has a strong commitment to employment equity and in keeping with these commitments, we will do our best to support your accommodation needs.

Thank you again for your interest and please let us know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Hiring Manager

Once you have heard back from the candidate confirming the date and time, send the candidate another email confirming receipt of their email and inform the candidate which interviewers will be on the call. It is highly recommended that candidates are aware of who will be on the call--in order to ensure transparency and understanding of process. The goal is to begin to establish a relationship with the candidate and allow the candidate to know the interviewers.

Sample response:

Hi **NAME**,

Thank you for confirming, I look forward to connecting with you.

On the call will be:

- 1 – **NAME, TITLE**
- 2 – **NAME, TITLE**
- 3 – (Keep listing if need be)

We will call the number you indicated at **TIME**.

Looking forward to speaking with you and please let me know should you need any accommodations or accessibility considerations to participate in this part of the interview process.

Sincerely,

Hiring Manager

Part A: Tips on how to conduct a successful phone interview

1. Phone interviews should be no more than **20 – 30 minutes**. Remember, phone interviews are a great way to determine which candidates you would like to continue in your process. Keep it **light and informative**, be mindful that there might be **unforeseen interruptions** during the phone call, which should not be elicited by implicit bias of unprofessionalism or unpreparedness on the applicant; the next stages will allow you to dive deeper into the candidate's experiences.
2. Start all phone screens with a brief overview of the role, and some key highlights about the team/department (or faculty) culture. Remember, interviews are also an opportunity for the candidate to interview you – focus on the **value proposition** – why should the candidate want to work for you and McMaster.
3. Phone interviews are a great opportunity to ask the candidates why they are interested in the role and McMaster. This will give you insight into whether the candidate has done any preliminary research and is able to speak to their **alignment** to the role or your teams culture.
4. Try not to solely focus on their (past) experience and educational achievements, as this does not always indicate future success or suitability for the role. Instead, ask the candidates **three to four questions about the skills** they have gained throughout their career and how they believe they can utilize/transfer them to the role you are recruiting for. Note – this will give you invaluable insight into their future potential.
5. Lastly, a phone interview gives you an opportunity to have a transparent conversation with the candidate about **salary expectations**, overall recruitment process/timeline, and to give the candidate an opportunity to ask you questions about your department/faculty. It is highly recommended that you speak to the candidates about their salary expectations; some candidates may self-select out of the process if their expectations do not align with your budget.

Once you have concluded your phone interviews, update your excel schedule with an additional column called **Invite to next stage**. See below:

Job Title						
Name	Phone Number	Email Address	Time	Confirmation	Invite to next round?	
Date of Phone Interview						
1	Candidate A	(905) xxx -xxxx	name@company.ca	9:00 - 9:20	YES	YES
2	Candidate B	(416) yyy -yyyy	name@company.ca	9:25 - 9:45	YES	NO
3	Candidate C	(647) zzz - zzzz	name@company.ca	9:50 - 10:10	YES	YES
4	Candidate D	(613) aaa - aaaa	name@company.ca	10:15 - 10:35	YES	NO

Typically, at this stage of your recruitment process, you would begin to invite your preferred candidates to an in-person interview on campus. However, given the circumstances and recommendations of “social distancing”, utilizing virtual interviews is a great way to continue to recruit top talent and to ensure that you maintain a great candidate experience.

Part B: Steps for conducting a successful virtual interview

Step 1: Choose the right technology - some common virtual interviewing options are Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, and WebEx.

Step 2: **Similar to phone interviews, it is highly recommended that you communicate openly and often:** This step is especially important with using virtual interview options, as the candidates will not have an opportunity for an in-person meeting.

When candidates know what is coming next, they feel respected and valued. When you reach out to the candidate to inform them that they have successfully secured an interview, make sure the candidates know that the next stage of the recruitment process will be a virtual interview versus in-person (in-light of current circumstances). Recommended practice is to call the candidates to invite to the next round and send a follow up email. Also recognize that your candidate may still require accommodations and/or accessibility considerations to participate in this next stage interview process and so it is essential to once again communicate this to your candidate.

Sample email:

*Good Morning/Afternoon **NAME**,*

*Thank you for your continued interest in the **TITLE** role at McMaster University.*

*As noted in our conversation **REFERNCE LAST CONVERSATION**, I am please to extend an invitation to participate in the second round of interviews, which will be conducted virtually via **NAME TOOL YOU ARE USING (for example SKYPE)**. As well, attached to this email is the Job Description for your reference and review, we hope this can help in your preparation for your upcoming interview.*

Below are the pertinent details for your upcoming interview:

Where: VIRTUAL TOOL

When: DATE

Interview Panel:

1- NAME, TITLE

2- NAME, TITLE

3- NAME, TITLE

Please let me know should you need any accommodations or accessibility considerations to participate in this stage of the interview process.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you,

Step 3: When the day arises to conduct the virtual interview, ensure that you chose a clean, quiet, and well-lit space for your interviews.

Step 4: Once the panel/committee is together, send a message to the candidate two to five minutes prior to calling them, to give them advanced notice to expect your video call. It is highly recommended that once you have given the candidate the two to five-minute notice, that you then send the candidate the interview questions via email so that they can follow along. Keep in mind, it may be harder for candidates to follow multi-stage questions over video chat (versus in person).

Step 5: Virtual interviews can sometimes make it difficult to establish immediate rapport with the candidate. Therefore, it is important to remember to introduce the panel, remind the candidate that you have sent them the questions via email, maintain eye contact with the candidate (look at the video screen, not the camera) and to speak clearly and slowly so that they can follow along. It is often an unintentional delay in the audio, and therefore it may take the candidate a little longer to respond to your questions. The candidates may additionally be unfamiliar with teleconferencing technology; may be extremely uncomfortable on camera; could be experiencing disability symptoms that are heightened through the interview process; or could be experiencing additional stress / impacts resulting from the current COVID-19 pandemic that may impact their engagement with you and the panel during their interview(s).

Step 6: Once you have concluded the interview, send a quick *thank you* message via the messenger function of the application or through email, and let the candidate know that you will contact them when a decision has been made. It is recommended that you give a clear timeline if possible. Once again, at this stage update your tracking chart and identify whether another interview round is needed, or if you have collected enough data to make a hiring decision.

Part C: Tips for Assessing Teaching Excellence in Faculty Recruitment

In a virtual environment, the Selection Committee should focus more on content and delivery, and less on proficiency in the use of technology.

Teaching excellence is increasingly (or should increasingly be) inclusive of the extent to which faculty demonstrate or have the potential for adopting/adapting innovating teaching/learning practices/pedagogies – and the use of technology is certainly one component of this. However, unless explicitly requested and included in the evaluation rubric, and unless the Search Committee Chair is satisfied that all candidates being interviewed will have had the same access to resources, funding and equipment to engage these technological innovations, we may not be able to expect this from the candidates. Rather, Chairs can make a commitment to provide resources and support for incoming Faculty to develop these proficiencies once they are here.

It is recommended that the committee interrogate the inequities that may have contributed to the level of proficiency demonstrated by the candidate as a consequence of the virtual environment, and ensure the candidate is not penalized for this as long as they demonstrate an openness and willingness to engage these technologies with support and resources.

There could also be an explicit question in the screening and/or interview process to provide candidates the opportunity to discuss their interest in developing capacity to leverage technology, and their viewpoints on the value of engaging students using multiple media including online, digital and virtual learning.

Deans and Department Chairs should be engaged in any discussions around this recruitment strategy, as it could have eventual implications on measures of performance and merit in the areas of teaching excellence.

Conclusion

With McMaster's commitment to creating an exceptional candidate experience, this guideline is meant as a helpful reference tool for hiring managers in their efforts to create a great candidate experience using phone and virtual interviews. Equally as important is the institutional commitment to accessibility, equity, diversity and inclusion during the interview process as required under respective Ontario accessibility legislation.

For additional recruitment consultation, please email Human Resources Services at hr.mcmaster.ca or Faculty and Staff within Faculty of Health Sciences, please call ext. 22207.