



FSIS SUPERVISORY SUMMARIES

A series of "on target" supervisory selection guidance

TOPIC #2: THE "SCOOP" ON BEI and BEI PANELS...

Question: What is BEI?

- Behavioral Event Interviewing, or BEI, is a structured interview method. BEI requires questions that are directly tied to the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA's) needed for successful performance in the position being filled. When responding to a BEI question, the candidate describes a specific past event that is relevant to the position being filled. The BEI technique provides more objective information about each candidate's qualifications as they relate to the job requirements. It is FSIS policy to strongly encourage the use of interviews as a part of the selection process for positions filled through competitive and noncompetitives procedures (refer to FSIS Directive 4335.1, Merit Promotion Plan). Interviewing is not mandatory; however, when interviews are conducted, the BEI methodology is required. A mix of technical, experience, and self-evaluation may also be included with the BEI questions. Deputy and Assistant Administrators may institute their own interview policies for their areas. See FSIS Directive 4335.1, Revision 1, dated 11/4/02 and titled "Interview Policy" for more detailed information on our interview policy.

Question: Why is BEI a more valid interview approach to use over the traditional method?

- The traditional approach is unstructured, relies on hypothetical situations, or the candidate's opinion of their work or skills. Hypothetical or opinion questions are unreliable indicators of performance because they bear little correlation to the applicant's competence for the job. Rather, they provide the candidate with the opportunity to articulate what he/she thinks the interviewer wants to hear. We tend to assume that people are better at the things they like to do or if they agree with our philosophies, they will be good performers. This is not always true and as a result is not a valid indicator of future performance in the job.

BEI questions, on the other hand, focus on the premise that the best predictor of future performance is past behavior. Answers to BEI questions are drawn from the applicant's actual experiences. By focusing on personal experiences that directly relate to the requirements of the job, the selecting official can better assess how competently the candidate will perform in the position. In addition, with BEI, we see more defensible selection decisions because they are based on job-related criteria.

Question: What is a BEI panel? Should a panel always be used when interviewing?

- Interviews where BEI questions are asked can be conducted in a variety of formats. One-to-one interviews where one person does all the interviewing and evaluating are quick and efficient, but only offer the perspective of one person. The BEI panel is a process involving 2 or more interviewers (no more than 3 are recommended) where each interviewer asks the candidate different BEI questions. Using a panel process allows the benefit of multiple perspectives. All interviewers see/hear the same thing which, when evaluating, helps to enhance the objectivity of the process. However, because more than one person is involved, the cost is very high in terms of time and resources. In addition, in a panel interview, fewer questions are asked than if each interview is conducted separately.

“Doing a BEI” does not automatically presume a panel format must be used. BEI is a type of interview question, and BEI panel is the type of format used for the interviews. The panel interview format is not mandatory. It is the selecting official’s decision as to whether to use one-to-one or panel interviews. FSIS Directive 4335.1 contains a listing of the types of BEI interviews that can be held at Attachment 1.

Question: How does a merit promotion panel differ from a BEI panel?

- A merit promotion panel is convened to evaluate applications when more than 10 qualified applicants are competing for a job, when “traditional” application procedures are used. “Traditional” application procedures normally require applicants to complete an application and prepare a narrative response to the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA’s) listed in the vacancy announcement. Panels are not used to evaluate applications when an automated application process is used.
- The promotion panel’s job is to identify the “best qualified” candidates who will be referred for selection consideration. The panel is comprised of one or more persons who at or above the grade level of the position being filled, and familiar enough with the position to know what it takes to do the job well. The panel rates the applications of all qualified applicants by comparing their training, education and experience against a scaled set of evaluation criteria established for each Job Element or KSA (i.e. Knowledge, Skill and Ability). The total scores for all applicants are then listed from highest to lowest. The panel then determines a “cut-off” based on where there is a significant break in the list of ranked scores. Typically this is where meaningful differences in the quality of the candidates become apparent. Those applicants whose scores are above the cut-off are determined to be “best qualified” and are referred on the promotion certificate to the selecting official.
- A BEI panel is an interview format where BEI questions are asked. Interviews with a BEI panel (as well as one-to-one interviews) are held *after* the selecting official receives the promotion certificate which lists the “best qualified” applicants. The interviewers on the panel may or may not include the selecting

official. The panel members must be at the same grade as the position or higher. The interviewees are the “best qualified” candidates who have been referred to the selecting official for the final selection. The BEI is not intended to re-rate or re-rank the candidates on the “best qualified” list. However, the information provided to the selecting official may have the effect of eliminating from further consideration some candidates, but this is a result of the selecting official’s weighing the information provided rather than a direct result of the process itself.

Question: Who decides when a merit promotion panel or a BEI panel is used?

- The Human Resources Division determines when a *merit promotion panel* is needed. A panel is required when there are more than 10 qualified applicants for a position. This determination is made in accordance with the Department’s and Agency’s Merit Promotion Plan.

When interviews are planned, however, the selecting official makes the decision regarding the format to use for conducting the BEI interviews -- one-to-one or a *panel interview*.

Question: Should the selecting official participate as a member of the BEI panel?

- Yes, the selecting official should conduct or participate in the interview, although their direct involvement is not required. Some selecting officials may designate one or more persons to conduct the interview, however, it is in the selecting official’s best interest to meet and speak with the individual(s) with whom they will ultimately work. It provides opportunities for more thorough exchange of information regarding the work of the position so that there are no surprises when the selectee reports to the job. Unclear expectations up front can lead to performance issues later.

Question: Is the selecting official accountable for a selection decision if he/she has designated an individual or a BEI panel to interview and provide input on the results?

- If the selecting official is designated to make the final selection decision and *signs* the promotion certificate, then he/she is ultimately held accountable for the decision. Any challenges to the selection must be supported and defended by the selecting official. In a grievance or complaint, the interviewer(s) may be asked for their rationale for any recommendations provided, but the selecting official maintains final accountability for the decision.

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