

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE
WASHINGTON, DC

FSIS DIRECTIVE

4335.8
Revision 2

7/17/23

INTERVIEW POLICY

I. PURPOSE

This directive provides instructions on the interview policy for all positions in FSIS. FSIS is reissuing this directive in its entirety to include bargaining unit positions, require post-certificate interviews for all positions, require behavior-based (e.g. Behavioral Event Interviewing (BEI)) post-certificate panel interviews for all positions with a full performance level at or above the GS-13 (or equivalent) grade level, provide instructions for pre-certificate interviews, and provide additional flexibility on technical questions for both pre-certificate and post-certificate interviews.

II. CANCELLATION

FSIS Directive 4335.8, *Interview Policy*, Revision 1, 11/4/02

III. BACKGROUND

A. Interview policy changes are needed to reflect guidance from the Executive Office of the President. On June 26, 2020, [Executive Order \(EO\) 13932](#), *Modernizing and Reforming the Assessment and Hiring of Federal Job Candidates*, was issued. [EO 13932](#) requires expanded use of competency-based assessments. In many cases, [EO 13932](#) requires a second assessment prior to referring applicants. Conducting a set of pre-certificate interviews is one available option that meets [EO 13932](#) requirements for a second assessment.

B. Interview policy changes implement management requests to require interviews for all positions filled through selection from a competitive Certificate of Eligibles and expand the types of interviews available.

C. Some interview policy changes are minor updates to reflect process and organizational modifications.

IV. INSTRUCTIONS

A. FSIS requires the use of post-certificate job interviews as a part of the selection process for all GS-1 through GS-15 positions filled through selection from a Certificate of Eligibles, even when pre-certificate interviews have been conducted. Senior Executive Service (SES), Senior-Level (SL), and Scientific and Professional (ST) positions are not covered by this directive.

B. For positions at the full performance level of GS-1 through GS-12 (or equivalent), any type of valid interview process that meets basic requirements may be used. The [Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures](#) (UGESP) provides details on basic requirements. At these grade levels, behavior-based interviews are recommended, but not required. Any competency-based set of interview questions may be used. Regardless of the type of interview used, a set of questions is to be developed in advance and those conducting interviews are to ask the same questions during each interview.

DISTRIBUTION: Electronic

OPI: OPPD

C. A behavior-based panel interview model is mandatory for all positions with a full performance level at or above the GS-13 (or equivalent) grade level. BEI is the commonly used behavior-based interview model in FSIS. BEI is a structured interview method that requires interviewers to ask questions that are directly tied to the competencies needed for successful performance in the position being filled. This methodology provides objective information about candidates' qualifications as they relate to the job requirements. All GS-13 (or equivalent) and above BEI interviews are to be panels. A panel of three is recommended. The selecting official is not to serve on the panel at these grade levels. Interviewers are to be at or above the full performance level of the position. Panel interviews are described in more detail in [Attachment 1](#).

D. GS-12 (or equivalent) and below interviews may be one-on-one interviews or may be conducted by a panel. A panel of three is recommended. The selecting official may participate in the post-certificate interviews at these levels. Both panel interviews and one-on-one interviews are described in more detail in [Attachment 1](#).

E. BEI interviews are categorized as pre-certificate or post-certificate interviews.

1. Pre-Certificate Interviews – Pre-certificate applicant interviews are conducted before applicants are referred to the selecting official. If aligned with internal program guidance on selections, the selecting official has the option to set up pre-certificate interviews to help determine the applicants who will be referred and considered. Selecting officials have input on rating criteria, but they do not conduct the pre-certificate interviews. A panel of three is recommended. [Attachment 2](#) provides more information on pre-certificate interviews.
2. Post-Certificate Interviews – Post-certificate applicant interviews are conducted after applicants are referred to the selecting official. At the GS-12 (or equivalent) level or below, the selecting official has the option to interview applicants referred for consideration in post-certificate interviews or have other designated officials conduct the interviews. At the GS-13 (or equivalent) level and above, the selecting official is not involved in the initial post-certificate interviews. However, after the initial post-certificate interviews at any grade level, the selecting official may participate in an optional second round of interviews. [Attachment 3](#) provides more information on post-certificate interviews.

F. An interview guide is to be selected or developed by the selecting official in advance of any interviews. An interview guide consists of position information, a scripted introduction, and interview questions that are to be asked of everyone interviewed. The Human Resources (HR) specialist is available to assist the selecting official with the interview guide. Interview questions, which may have been developed from previous announcements, are to be tied to the position description and competencies listed in the current vacancy announcement. Interview questions are to be commensurate with the grade level of the position being filled.

G. Different types of interview questions may be used, depending on the situation. The three most common questions in an interview guide are BEI, technical, and self-evaluation questions.

1. BEI Questions – BEI questions ask the candidate to describe specific experiences that are relevant to the position being filled. BEI questions focus on behavior and are commonly referred to as behavior-based questions. When responding to a BEI question, the candidate describes the situation, behavior and outcome of a specific personal experience related to the vacant position.

Behavior-based questions cover identified competencies. They may focus on “soft” skills such as leadership, interpersonal skills, or flexibility. Examples of BEI questions for each of these competencies follow:

“Describe a specific workgroup/project where your leadership skills were especially valuable.”

“Please tell us about a disagreement with a coworker that took some time to resolve.”

“Tell me about a complicated situation you faced that required you to be flexible.”

Behavior-based questions may also be focused on “hard” skill technical competencies such as web design, labor law, or regulatory expertise. Examples of BEI questions for each of these competencies follow:

“Describe a time when your expertise with jQuery or a similar function was critical to webpage design.”

“Please tell us about a project or group where your proper application of labor law was key.”

“Tell me about a situation when regulatory expertise helped you resolve a complex problem.”

2. Technical Questions – Technical questions focus on specific knowledge and skills that are applied on the job. The focus is on technical competencies such as accounting principles, data science, microbiology, computer programming or cybersecurity. Examples of technical questions for each of these five competencies follow:

“What systems have you used when entering accounting data into automated systems for financial reports, and what are some features of those systems that helped ensure accuracy?”

“How would you approach a dataset that’s missing more than 30% of its values?”

“What microbial characteristics do you look for when examining microorganisms?”

“Please look at the attached code and tell us what the code does.”

“When monitoring information technology infrastructure systems, how does an organization integrate advanced forensic tools and techniques to mitigate cyber-security attacks?”

3. Self-Evaluation Questions – Self-evaluation questions are to ask the applicant to describe or evaluate personal characteristics. Self-evaluation questions are not scored. Examples of self-evaluation questions follow:

“What are some things about yourself that make you a good fit for this job?”

“Name one of your strengths and one of your weaknesses.”

H. If interview results are rated, those conducting interviews are to rate BEI questions using behavior-based rating plans. All BEI questions are evaluated when questions are scored. In some cases, technical interview questions, as defined in this directive, are also scored. A valid rating plan that meets [UGESP](#) requirements is used in the process when rating technical questions. [UGESP](#) requirements provide guidance to employers on how to ensure selection procedures are lawful. Self-evaluation questions are not to be rated.

I. In addition to guidance in this directive, selecting officials are to follow all [Departmental Regulations](#) that include instructions on interviews (e.g., [DR-4030-335-002, Merit Promotion and Internal Placement](#)).

J. When there is conflicting guidance, [Departmental Regulations](#) supersede this directive. For example, if announcing a position under Merit Promotion, [DR-4030-335-002](#) may require that a certain number of candidates are interviewed during post-certificate interviews, and this guidance supersedes the FSIS Interview Policy, which has no requirements on how many applicants are to be interviewed.

K. Interviews are to be conducted in person, by telephone, through video teleconferencing, or using another method, as appropriate. The interview method for each group of interviews is to be consistent, to the extent possible. Candidates can be required to turn on their video cameras when interviews are through video teleconferencing if the requirement is made clear in advance.

L. Program areas have the option to institute their own organizational interview procedures if they conform to applicable policy guidance. For example, assistant administrators may choose to require BEI interviews for every position filled in their program areas at all grade levels or they may choose to instruct all selecting officials to conduct panel interviews instead of one-on-one interviews. Any program area parameters established on interview options apply only to that specific program area and procedures along these lines may be changed when the program-specific guidance no longer meets their needs.

V. RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Selecting officials are to:

1. Obtain or develop and then finalize interview questions, and if responses are to be rated, a rating plan;
2. Choose one-on-one interviews, panel interviews, or both;
3. Determine the panel rating method (individual, consensus, or average) if a post-certificate panel will be rating applicants by providing individual scores first, and then also a consensus or average rating, if the consensus or average rating method is used;
4. Decide whether to personally participate in the post-certificate interviews, if GS-12 or lower;
5. Designate one or more individuals to conduct the interviews. If two interviews are conducted, pre-certificate interviewers are not to conduct post-certificate interviews;
6. Choose one or more candidates who will be interviewed for post-certificate interviews;
7. Consider post-certificate interview results, along with all other relevant considerations (work experience, education, training, special skills or credentials, references, etc.) when making selection decisions; and
8. Collect all documentation related to post-certificate interviews and safeguard it for a minimum of 3 years or until any grievance, complaint, or appeal is resolved, whichever is longer. Prior to destruction, the selecting official should verify that there is no pending action requiring retention. Such documentation includes the interview questions, names of panel members, notes and evaluations of the candidates' responses, name of the person selected, and reasons supporting the selection.

B. Designated interviewers are not to be current or likely future candidates for the position being filled and are to:

1. Be at the same or higher grade as the position being filled;

2. Be knowledgeable about the job;
3. Provide fair and unbiased evaluations of each candidate;
4. Decline participation if personal knowledge or relationship with a candidate precludes a fair and objective assessment of the candidate's responses;
5. Respect the privacy rights of all candidates and not discuss the interview proceedings with others, except as required for official business;
6. Consider and evaluate only information presented during the interview. Interviewers are not to consider any personal knowledge about an applicant that was obtained outside the selection process;
7. Have a clear understanding of the rating and ranking process if applicants are rated;
8. Follow the rating method designated by the selecting official by assigning an individual numerical rating first, and then the consensus or average rating (as applicable), if a scored rating plan is used; and
9. Give the selecting official individual and group interview results on all candidates interviewed to help ensure that each applicant receives full and proper consideration.

C. Servicing HR specialists are to:

1. Advise the selecting official and interviewers on interview policy and procedures;
2. Assist the selecting official, as needed, with question and rating plan development;
3. Facilitate panel interviews and provide general feedback to help ensure fairness and consistency in the process, as needed; and
4. Review results from pre-certificate interviews, if used, to ensure procedures were followed. Ensure that documentation related to pre-certificate interviews is properly annotated and uploaded into the automated staffing system. Based on pre-certificate interview results, and other qualification and eligibility evaluations, determine which candidates will be referred to the selecting official.

VI. QUESTIONS

Refer to [Attachment 4](#) for frequently asked questions. Refer other questions to the Office of Human Resources at 1-877-FSIS-HR1 (1-877-374-7471), option #3, or email FSISHR1@usda.gov with the subject "Interviews."

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Rachel A. Edelstein". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Assistant Administrator
Office of Policy and Program Development

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS VERSUS PANEL INTERVIEWS

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

One individual (the selecting official or a designated interviewer) conducts and evaluates post-certificate interviews, at the selecting official's discretion, at the GS-12 level or below.

Advantages

- Requires fewer FSIS resources because one person does the interviewing and evaluating.
- One-on-one interviews may be less intimidating to the candidates.

Disadvantages

- Having only one perspective may overlook important details from the interview.
- One person asks all the questions, which can be demanding during a long day of interviews.

PANEL INTERVIEWS

All GS-13 (or equivalent) and above post-certificate BEI interviews are to be panels. A panel of three is recommended. Each panel member asks one or more questions. All panel members evaluate candidates.

Advantages

- Enhances objectivity and defensibility by providing multiple perspectives.
- Panel members may be better able to remain attentive during a day of interviews.

Disadvantages

- Panel interviews are sometimes intimidating to candidates and may adversely affect performance.
- Panels require a greater investment of time and resources.

If a group rating is to be determined in addition to individual ratings, panel members independently assign individual numerical ratings first, and then the panel determines the group rating. The group ratings are to be determined by averaging individual panel member ratings or by arriving at a consensus rating. Initial independent ratings by panel members are not to be changed after the group discussion, unless a panel member believes they missed one or more important points. Regardless, both the initial rating and the amended rating are included in the official record. Initial independent ratings, amended independent ratings, and final group ratings (average or consensus), if used, are all to be part of the official record.

The panel can manage the process itself, or it has the option to include a facilitator to manage the interview process, introduce the panel members, monitor the time allotted, and oversee the evaluation process. The facilitator, typically an HR representative, does not rate applicants.

PRE-CERTIFICATE INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

On June 26, 2020, [Executive Order \(EO\) 13932](#), *Modernizing and Reforming the Assessment and Hiring of Federal Job Candidates*, was issued. [EO 13932](#) directed merit-based reforms to expand the use of competency-based assessments. In many cases, [EO 13932](#) requires a second assessment prior to referring applicants on a certificate or list of eligibles. Conducting a set of pre-certificate interviews is one available option that meets [EO 13932](#) requirements for a second assessment.

Pre-certificate interviews are not required. If a second assessment is required under [EO 13932](#), and the selecting official chooses not to set up pre-certificate interviews, other options such as a Subject Matter Expert (SME) review panel or an Office of Personnel Management (OPM) developed assessment are to be used in lieu of a pre-certificate interview. Hiring officials and HR Specialists are to refer to the online Supervisor Help - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) in the [FSIS Gateway Recordings and Resources](#) folder, the [Manual Assessment Process](#), for detailed procedures on conducting pre-certificate interviews.

An interview guide is developed by the selecting official with the assistance of the HR specialist before the job is announced, with each question focused on a different competency from the job analysis.

- BEI questions are asked in a pre-certificate interview. BEI questions may focus on a combination of “soft” and “hard” skill competencies.
- Technical interview questions may be included and rated if a valid rating plan that meets [UGESP](#) requirements is used to rate the technical questions.
- Self-evaluation questions are not included in a pre-certificate interview.

A structured rating plan corresponding to the questions in the interview guide is developed by the selecting official with the assistance of the HR specialist prior to posting the job if a rating plan is not already available. Responses to pre-certificate interview questions are always rated. The total score is used as part of the determination of who will and will not be referred to the selecting official.

When pre-certificate interviews are conducted, the HR specialist provides interviewers with instructions, the interview guide, the rating plan, and contact information of those to be included in the pre-certificate interviews. Panel members conduct interviews and rate applicants. Three panel members is recommended. All documentation from the pre-certificate interviews is returned to the HR specialist. The HR specialist ensures the interview process was conducted in compliance with applicable regulations and procedures.

The HR specialist reviews pre-certificate interview results, other assessment scores, OPM Qualification Standards, and eligibility evaluations. The HR specialist determines the candidates who will be referred to the selecting official and issues a Certificate of Eligibles.

There are two key aspects of FSIS pre-certificate interviews that are important to highlight.

- HR specialists are not to share resumes or other applicant documents with interviewers.
- Selecting official participation is limited. Selecting officials are not to conduct pre-certificate interviews. Selecting officials are not to see, discuss, or maintain pre-certificate interview results.

POST-CERTIFICATE INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

Post-certificate interviews are mandatory for all positions filled through selection from a Certificate of Eligibles, even if pre-certificate interviews have been conducted. When the full performance level of the position is at or above the GS-13 (or equivalent) grade level, BEI post-certificate panel interviews are mandatory. The selecting official may not be on the panel. At or below the GS-12 (or equivalent) grade level, the selecting official may personally conduct interviews alone or as part of a panel, or the selecting official may assign the task to one or more designated officials. At all grade levels, one or more of the competitive candidates from a Certificate of Eligibles are to be interviewed, unless applicable Departmental guidance specifies a different number is to be interviewed (e.g., [DR-4030-335-002](#)). After the post-certificate interviews, the selecting official may conduct a second round of interviews with one or more of the top candidates or contact one or more candidates for additional or clarifying information.

An interview guide (required) and rating plan (optional) are developed by the selecting official, with the assistance of the HR specialist before interviews are conducted, with each interview question focused on a different competency identified during the job analysis.

- For BEI post-certificate interviews, most questions are to be BEI questions. However, a mix of BEI, technical, and self-evaluation questions may be asked.
- If interviews are scored, responses to all BEI questions are to be rated. If technical interview questions, as defined in this directive, are also scored, a valid rating plan that meets [UGESP](#) requirements is to be used in the rating process. Self-evaluation questions are not to be scored.

When conducting BEI post-certificate interviews, interviewers are to use the following best practices:

- Use a set of questions that were not used during the pre-certificate interviews.
- Ask the same questions of every person who is interviewed.
- Request detailed descriptions of situations that are relevant to the position being filled.
- Probe for specific information. Ask clarifying questions based on information already provided.
- Take notes on the candidates' responses throughout the interviews.
- Evaluate the candidates' responses as soon as possible following the interviews.
- Use consistent interview techniques (e.g., panel or one-on-one) for each applicant.
- Allow those being interviewed to bring notes to and take notes during the interview.
- Use a valid rating plan if interview results are to be rated and ranked numerically. Numerical ratings are optional.
- Provide interview results to the selecting official without making selection recommendations.
- All documentation from the interviews is sent to the selecting official for retention.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: What is a behavioral event interview (BEI)?

A: BEI is a structured interview process. BEI questions focus on the premise that the best predictor of future performance is past behavior. Answers to the 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 each candidate.

Q: What are the key components of a BEI question?

A: BEI questions focus on situations, behaviors, and outcomes.

Q: When should I start preparing for interviews?

A: Selecting officials who plan to conduct interviews should begin preparing before a job announcement is posted.

Q: How do I prepare to conduct interviews?

A: Discuss interview options with the servicing HR specialist. Banks of interview questions may already be available for use. If not, the HR specialist can assist with question and rating plan development. Set aside time in advance to conduct interviews so that the interviews may be completed as soon as possible after applicants are referred to you.

Q: How do I start the interview?

A: At the beginning of each interview, read a structuring statement to let the applicant know what to expect. For BEI interviews, tell the individual that some questions will require them to describe a specific situation they have encountered. State that everything they share will only be discussed and considered in conjunction with the selection process, and that at the end of the interview you will allow time for questions.

Q: Do I have to ask the same questions of every interviewee?

A: Yes, obtain or develop a standard set of questions and ask those questions during each interview.

Q: In a BEI question there are often several probe questions listed under the main question. Do probes need to be asked in the same manner and order as written?

A: No. Although the main question asked is the same for each person interviewed, use of probes may vary. Probes are simply designed as a guide to assist with follow up that may be needed to gather more complete information on the situation, behavior, and outcome.

Q: Do I have to ask the same bulleted questions (probe questions) up front for everyone?

A: No. While it is acceptable to ask all probe questions up front, it is not required. In fact, it is often not necessary to ask all the bulleted follow up questions during a post-certificate interview. If more information is needed to understand the situation, the applicant's actions, and the outcome, ask clarifying questions, such as the bulleted questions, concerning an applicant's response.

Q: Can the interview questions address technical experience?

A: Yes. BEI questions, technical questions and self-evaluation questions may all be helpful when considering an applicant's technical expertise. All responses are to be considered, but only questions associated with a valid rating plan are to be rated.

Q: What type of training is available for me if I will be conducting BEI interviews?

A: To supplement the information found in this directive, BEI training opportunities are available online and other BEI training sessions are periodically made available to FSIS employees. Managers and those who will be conducting BEI interviews may wish to contact their servicing HR specialist for more information on training options.

Q: Do I need to be trained or certified in any way to conduct a BEI interview?

A: No. Training is strongly encouraged, but not required. However, it is recommended that a signed statement of responsibility be obtained to certify that those conducting interviews fully understand interview requirements. Selecting officials may choose to obtain statements of responsibilities from those conducting post-certificate interviews. HR specialists obtain statements of responsibilities from those conducting pre-certificate interviews.

Q: Is there an official format for the statement of responsibilities, and who retains it?

A: A statement of responsibilities highlights key requirements outlined in this directive. There is no mandated format for a statement of responsibilities, but sample templates may be obtained from the servicing HR specialist. On pre-certificate interviews, the HR representative retains these statements. On post-certificate interviews, the selecting official retains these statements, if used.

Q: What is in a statement of responsibility?

A: The statement includes specific steps that are taken to demonstrate the interviewer's commitment to protect applicant privacy and provide a fair evaluation, including procedures for recusal from all or part of the evaluation process, should that be necessary.

Q: Should I give out the questions to applicants ahead of time?

A: No. By providing the questions ahead of time, you may be changing what you are rating from competencies to preparedness. It also promotes canned responses.

Q: Are panel interviews required?

A: At the GS-13 level (or equivalent) and above, yes, BEI panel interviews are required, and the selecting official may not serve on the panel. However, the selecting official does have the option to personally conduct a second round of interviews after the panel interviews are completed.

At the GS-12 level (or equivalent) and below, no, they are not required. Interviews may be one-on-one or panel interviews at this level. Selecting officials may conduct the one-on-one interviews or serve on the interview panel at these lower grade levels.

Q: How many people conduct a panel interview?

A: A panel of three is recommended.

Q: How do panel members arrive at a final rating to share with the selecting official?

A: For pre-certificate interview panels, rating procedures are described in the [Manual Assessment Process](#) document found in the [FSIS Gateway Recordings and Resources](#) folder. Pre-certificate interview panel ratings are not to be shared with the selecting official, in accordance with OPM guidance. Details on pre-certificate assessments (pre-certificate interviews, pre-certificate SME panels, USA Hire scores, etc.) are not to be shared with selecting officials since these assessments are generally designed to determine who will be referred among the “best qualified.”

For post-certificate interview panels, final ratings are neither recommended nor required, but if ratings are assigned, merit-based reasons aligned with the rating plan are to be provided for each rating. Each panel member is to independently rate applicants as soon as possible after the interview, and those individual ratings are always retained.

For the *individual ratings* approach, only individual rating sheets are to be shared with the selecting official. A group rating is not required on post-certificate interview panels.

For the *average ratings* approach, individual rating sheets with the original individual ratings and a group rating sheet with the final average ratings are to be shared with the selecting official.

For the *consensus ratings* approach, the panel is to discuss ratings to reach a consensus rating for each interview question. Individual rating sheets with the original individual ratings and a group rating sheet with the final consensus ratings are to be shared with the selecting official. If panelists amend an individual rating after group consensus discussion, both the original individual rating and the amended individual rating should be recorded.

Q: What options do selecting officials have as far as participating in interviews?

A: For all pre-certificate interviews and initial post-certificate interviews at the GS-13 (or equivalent) level or higher, selecting officials do not conduct the interviews. For initial post-certificate interviews at the GS-12 (or equivalent) level or lower, selecting officials have the option to participate. In addition, if a second round of post-certificate interviews are conducted, the selecting official may participate, individually or as part of a panel, regardless of the grade level of the position.

Q. Do selecting officials serving on a panel (GS-12 level and below or during a second round of interviews) cast the “deciding” vote?

A. No, every panel member’s evaluation holds equal weight in determining interview results.

While input from each person conducting interviews is valuable, interview results are just one part of the selection decision. In addition, it is important to note that the selecting official is to make the final hiring decision and defend that hiring decision before a third party, if necessary.

Q. In an interview, may those being interviewed bring notes for reference?

A. Yes. Those being interviewed have the option to bring information to the interview to jog their memories and remind them of situations encountered.

Q: What if the candidate uses the same example more than once?

A: Candidates have that option. It may be helpful if those conducting interviews encourage the applicant to provide different examples for each question, but the applicant ultimately chooses what examples to share during the interview.

Q. May participants take notes during the interview?

A. Yes, those being interviewed have the option to take notes during the interview.

Q. Do panel members take notes during the interview?

A. Yes, interviewers are to take notes to be referenced later when evaluating candidates.

Q: Who keeps panel notes from a pre-certificate interview?

A: The HR specialist collects all notes and retains them in the job announcement case file.

Q: Who keeps panel notes from a post-certificate interview?

A: The selecting official (or representative) should collect all notes and retain them for a minimum of 3 years. The Agency may need to reference the notes in connection with an EEO complaint, grievance, or Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. If there is an outstanding complaint, grievance or FOIA request, notes are to be kept by the selecting official (or representative) until issues are resolved.

Q. May interviewers or applicants make an audio or video recording of the interview?

A. No. FSIS relies on written notes from the interview as a way of documenting proceedings.

Q: Are the benchmarks found in rating plans all inclusive?

A: No, they are not all inclusive. A rating plan should be used as a guideline. It provides benchmarks of what is typical at each level, but it does not include all possible benchmarks.

Q: Can you consider an answer given for one question when evaluating the competency for a different question during an FSIS post-certificate structured interview?

A: Yes. All responses may be considered when rating each question/competency.

Q: If a panel member has firsthand knowledge of the performance of an applicant (information not available to the other interviewers), can this be discussed with the panel?

A: No. Only discuss information shared during the interview or in the application package, if available. If firsthand knowledge is of a significant nature that precludes a fair evaluation, recusal of the panel member with the knowledge is necessary.

Q: What if the firsthand job-related knowledge of the applicant is of a serious nature with a potentially significant impact on FSIS? Can this be discussed with the panel?

A: No. However, it may be appropriate to raise concerns separately with the selecting official or HR representative outside of the panel process. The selecting official is to consider such feedback

along with other feedback obtained when checking references. The resume, interview results, educational background, quality of experience, references, and other merit factors are to be considered by the selecting official when selecting a candidate for the position.

Q: Do those conducting an interview make a recommendation to the selecting official on who should be selected?

A: No. Results from post-certificate interviews are to be shared with the selecting official, and the selecting official considers those interview results along with other relevant factors, but no recommendations are made by the panel. Results from pre-certificate interviews are not shared with the selecting official, and no recommendations are made.

Q: What weight does a post-certificate interview play in the selection decision?

A: There is no prescribed weight. The selecting official considers interview results along with the overall level of competencies as demonstrated by the resume, interview results, educational background, quality of experience, references, and other relevant merit factors.

Q: What flexibility does a selecting official have on interview methods?

A: The selecting official may choose to have interviews conducted in person, by telephone, through video teleconferencing, or using another method, as appropriate. The interview method (in person, by telephone, through video teleconferencing, etc.) is to be the same for everyone who is interviewed, unless extenuating circumstances do not allow for this. Regardless of the circumstances, all those interviewed are to be asked the same questions.

Q: Are candidates who decline the opportunity to interview removed from consideration?

A: For pre-certificate interviews, yes, candidates who decline the opportunity to interview are to be removed from consideration.

For post-certificate interviews, candidates who decline the opportunity to interview are to be removed from consideration if they specifically decline further consideration for the position or if the announcement clearly indicates that failure to appear for an interview will be considered a declination. Under other circumstances, if still interested in being considered, post-certificate interview candidates who decline the interview are to be considered based on the rest of the application package and any information obtained through references.

Q: Can selecting officials require candidates to turn on their cameras during interviews?

A: Yes. If the interview will be done with video teleconferencing, if it is a requirement for all candidates, and if mandatory use of cameras is decided upon before recruitment, selecting officials have the option to require candidates to turn on their cameras. An applicant who fails to turn on their camera, absent a reasonable accommodation or unforeseen technical difficulty found to be acceptable by those conducting the interview, is to be removed from consideration based on failure to follow instructions during the selection process.