

Preparing to Interview

Dear Reader:

The following document was created from the MTAS website ([mtas.tennessee.edu](https://www.mtas.tennessee.edu)). This website is maintained daily by MTAS staff and seeks to represent the most current information regarding issues relative to Tennessee municipal government.

We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with municipal government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other MTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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Preparing to Interview

Reference Number:
MTAS-1324

Prior to conducting interviews, there is one remaining procedure that you may wish to consider using — the pre-interview questionnaire [1].

The pre-interview questionnaire is a series of questions that are pertinent to the position for which you are recruiting. It has two purposes:

- To obtain insight into the candidate's knowledge and understanding on subjects that are important to the job and the organization
- To determine the candidate's ability to communicate in writing

Both of the above are important in evaluating candidates for managerial and professional positions.

The pre-interview questionnaire should be returned by each candidate well in advance of the interview date, so that each interviewer has an opportunity to review it and complete the pre-interview assessment form [2]. The assessment form should be completed and at hand when you interview the candidate. You may desire to audiotape or videotape the interview.

In preparing for the interview you may discover that some of the candidates you are considering have decided not to pursue the opportunity. There are a number of legitimate reasons why this may happen. Accepting another position, second thoughts about leaving the current job, or reaching a conclusion that this is just not the right move are not uncommon.

In deciding how many candidates to interview, you must be guided in part by budget and time constraints. Time and money have a way of helping make decisions. There is no magic number. Be guided by the specific situation that confronts you, and do not force the situation by striving for a particular number. Interviewing three candidates that you really feel good about is better than interviewing five against your better judgment.

You will need to decide who will be doing the interviewing for your organization. Your charter may dictate who will do the hiring for the position. For a management or professional position, it is a good idea for more than one person to participate. Sometimes a screening committee or a selection committee approach makes sense. Often it may be the governing body itself. What's important is to include some perceptive questioners and listeners. The interview is an important event leading to a big decision. You are about to do some heavy-duty comparison shopping.

It is necessary that you enter the interview with a clear plan and specific objectives. At a minimum, observe these basic principles:

- Know at the outset how the interview will be conducted and the kind of information you want to secure from each candidate
- Communicate, in general terms, with each candidate prior to the interview about the information you will be seeking
- Approach the interview as a two-way street, recognizing that the candidates also are interviewing you
- Prepare yourself psychologically to manage and control the interview
- Prepare in advance a list of basic questions that will be directed to each candidate
- Prepare in advance an evaluation form to be used by those doing the interviewing for your organization

The kinds of questions asked in the interview are important, and careful consideration should be given to the way they are worded and asked. For a professional management-level position, these are some of the areas that you should evaluate in the interview:

- Demonstrated leadership potential
- Demonstrated management potential
- Demonstrated knowledge of departmental operations
- Ability to work with people and groups
- Demonstration of good judgment and common sense
- Demonstrated ability to relate as a team player
- Demonstrated past performance
- Oral communication skills
- Extent to which the individual is goal directed
- Extent to which the individual is service oriented

These areas are general categories within which specific questions are developed and asked. All candidates should be asked the same questions. The emphasis and importance placed on each area will vary depending upon the needs and priorities of the position and the organization.

Sample Pre-Interview Questionnaire

Reference Number:
MTAS-1577

Pre-Interview Assessment Form

Reference Number:

MTAS-1580

Sample Letter to Accompany Pre-Interview Questionnaire

Reference Number:
MTAS-1579

Date

Dear Public Works Director Candidate:

Thank you for applying for the position of public works director for the city of (name), Tennessee. We have received many applications for this important position.

Of the applications we received, there are approximately (*number*) at which we would like to look closer. Your application is one of these. In order to find out more about you and your management style, we have enclosed a list of six questions we would like you to answer and return to us no later than (*date*). Based on these responses, we will select a small number of applicants whom we would like to bring to (*city name*) to interview. Simply write or type your responses in the space provided, and please feel free to call if you have any questions.

In the meantime, I want to thank you again for your interest in the position of public works director. We look forward to receiving your responses so that we can learn more about you.

Sincerely,

City Manager

Encl: Public Works Applicant Questionnaire

Links:

[1] <https://www.mtas.tennessee.edu/reference/sample-pre-interview-questionnaire>

[2] <https://www.mtas.tennessee.edu/reference/pre-interview-assessment-form>

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