

## **OHRM Staffing Initiative – Product #1**

### **Bank of Performance-Based Interview Questions**

**Purpose** - The list of Performance-Based Interview (PBI) questions presented below has been developed to assist interviewers and selecting officials who have been trained in the PBI process to conduct more effective performance-based interviews. PBI interviews have been shown to be substantially more valid in hiring successful performers than traditional means. Selecting job-related questions will help you to:

- Increase your ability to hire candidates who will be successful on the job.
- Establish the validity of your selection method (which may prove useful upon third party reviews).

**Description** - The list below contains PBI questions that have been developed from an extensive literature and Internet search and have been reviewed, revised, and enhanced by PBI subject matter experts within VA. These questions have been categorized according to their corresponding knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs). These KSAOs, in turn, have been organized according to the eight core competencies of VHA's High Performance Development Model. Please note that the questions are written in a generalized format and may need to be customized to fit a particular job situation. For more information on performance-based interviewing, you may visit the PBI web site at <http://www.va.gov/pbi/>

**Guidance** - For these questions to be valid, the KSAOs chosen must be derived from a job analysis—the initial step in the recruiting process. Accurate analysis of the job will have produced a list of the necessary KSAOs that the candidate must possess in order to be successful in the job. These KSAOs will have been derived from the job description and are likely to appear in the job vacancy announcement.

Selecting questions from this list that are not tied to job-related KSAOs could leave you open to charges of invalid hiring practices. And although we have furnished a number of commonly occurring KSAOs, please note that this is not an exhaustive list. Therefore, you will probably need to create some of your questions independently.

**Labor/Management Obligations** - If the employee being interviewed is a bargaining unit employee, supervisors should keep in mind that the employee may be entitled to certain rights under a labor/management agreement. Questions regarding rights and obligations should be directed to your HR Office.

**Comments/Questions** - Since this is a “bank” of PBI questions, we will be adding to it in the future. We encourage you to be a part of this initiative by sharing other questions that have been shown to be effective indicators of a candidate's competencies. All submitted PBI questions will be reviewed by experts in performance-based interviewing. If appropriate, submissions will be added to the list which will be maintained on the OHRM web site. If you have questions or comments about this material, please feel free to contact Joanna Hartis at (202) 273-9839, or by email to [joanna.hartis@va.gov](mailto:joanna.hartis@va.gov)

**Performance-Based Interview (PBI) Questions Categorized According to VHA's High Performance Development Model's Core Competencies and Frequently Occurring KSAOs**

**1. Personal Mastery**

- **Ability to organize work and function independently.**
  - Give me an example of an important goal which you had set in the past. What did you do to reach it? How did you measure your success in reaching that goal?
  - Tell me about a time you had to handle multiple responsibilities. How did you organize the work that you needed to do? Given that same situation, how would you organize the work differently to have achieved even greater success in handling the multiple responsibilities?
  - Tell me about a time when you accomplished something significant that wouldn't have happened if you hadn't been there to make it happen. What part did you play in making it happen? Were others involved and if so, how did you interact with them?
  - Tell us about a time when your supervisor was absent and you had to make an important decision. Specifically, what was the situation you were faced with and what was the outcome of your decision?
  - Give an example of a time you had to go above and beyond the call of duty to get a job done.
  - Tell me about a goal you set that took a long time to achieve or that you're still working towards. Why did you continue to work toward the goal? Why did it take so long?
  - Describe a time where you set a demanding goal for yourself and reached it. Did you encounter any obstacles and if so, what were they? How did you overcome those obstacles? Why did you persevere in the face of these obstacles?
  - What is the hardest you ever had to work to achieve something? What made it the hardest? What motivated you to work that hard to achieve this end?
  - Give me an example of something you started that wasn't there before you initiated it. What was your role in bringing it to completion?
  - Give an example of a major contribution that you have made to an ongoing effort. What motivated you? How was it received by those with whom you were working? What were the short term and long term outcomes?
  - What did you do in your last job to be effective in your organizing and planning? Be specific. What one thing could you have done to be even more effective?
- **Ability to plan and execute work.**
  - Tell of a time when you did not live up to your work expectations. How did you become aware and what were your reactions?
  - Tell me about a time when you successfully balanced several tasks at one time. How did you decide what to do first? In hindsight, was there a better way to have approached these tasks?
  - Describe a project or task that didn't go as well as you would have liked. What did you learn and how will you apply that as you go forward?
  - Identify three characteristics you feel you possess that make you an effective employee/leader/etc. Give an example of how each characteristic has been used effectively in your work setting.
  - Tell me about a time when it was very difficult to plan your work. What made it difficult? How did you approach those difficulties?
  - Tell me about a time that you had your work planned and then were confronted with a new priority. How did you react to having your plans disrupted? How did you adjust your plans to accommodate the new priority?

- **Ability to manage multiple priorities and respond to demands from several competing sources.**
  - Tell me about a time you had more to do than you had time to get done. How did you decide what to do first? What process did you use to prioritize the rest of the things you had to do?
  - Tell me about a time when you successfully balanced several tasks at one time. How did you decide what to do first?
  - 1) Tell me about the last time you had to “juggle” several different responsibilities when you held a job. 2) What were the responsibilities? 3) How did you decide what priority to give to each responsibility? 4) What strategies helped you cope with multiple responsibilities?
  - Give an example of how you maintain a balance between personal and work mastery? Tell of a time when the balance was lost. Explain how you became aware and how you reacted.
- **Ability to demonstrate initiative in the resolution of complex problems and contingency situations.**
  - Give me an example of a complex problem that you helped resolve. How was it resolved? What was your role?
  - With examples, explain specifically how you have identified problems, developed strategies for addressing the problems, and measured the success or failure of each strategy.
  - Tell of a time when you had to make a decision in a hurry and you lacked information. What did you do? What was the outcome?
  - We can sometimes identify a small problem and fix it before it becomes a major problem. Give an example of a time when you resolved such a problem without direction from a supervisor. What was the problem, how did you resolve it, and why didn't you wait for a supervisor to tell you to deal with it?
  - Give me an example of a time when you resolved a complicated problem at work without being told to do so by a supervisor, or coworker. What prompted you to take the action? What action did you take? What was the result of your actions?
- **Ability to meet deadlines and work effectively under pressure.**
  - Give me an example of a time when you had an important project with a short deadline. What steps did you take to ensure that you did meet the deadline? What was the biggest obstacle to meeting the deadline? How did you overcome that obstacle?
  - Tell me about a time when you had several competing deadlines. How did you decide which project you worked on first?
  - Tell me about a time that you were not able to complete several tasks with competing deadlines. How did you handle that situation? What would you do differently today?
  - What is the most pressure packed situation you have ever worked in? What did you do to cope with the pressures in that situation? How would you change what you did if confronted with that situation today?

## 2. Technical Skills

- **Ability to research, analyze, and prepare written reports, policies, and procedures.**
  - Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to gain information needed to solve a problem; then tell me how you analyzed the information, came to a decision, and produced a written report.
  - Tell me about the most difficult report you have had to research. What made it the most difficult? How did you approach obtaining the needed information?
  - Tell me about the most difficult information you have had to analyze before writing a report. What made it the most difficult? How did you analyze the information? Whose assistance did you seek to assist in the analysis? Were your conclusions accepted?
  - Tell us your experience and knowledge in developing a budget, monitoring fund control points and payment processing. Begin by telling us the size of the budget.

- Tell about your experience in developing, implementing, and managing a \_\_\_\_\_ program. What mechanism did you have for reporting the activity and cost expenditure of the program? What problems did you have with the program and how did you deal with them?
- On a scale of 0 to 10 with 0 being not competent and 10 being expert, rate yourself in the following areas: (a list of technical skills). Give a brief example to back your rating.
- Tell us about a specific time when you had to NEGOTIATE with a group of people to obtain their cooperation. Tell us specifically how you negotiated with them and what the outcome was. What did you learn from the situation?
- Describe a situation where you were required to maintain records that were subject to review by an outside regulatory agency. How did you assure that standards were met? Give us an example of the outcome in the process of accreditation.
- Tell us specifically what professional and personal activities you engaged in last year to enhance your knowledge and skills.
- Outline how you have developed a strategic plan. Give examples of what you included in the plan and how you measured outcomes.
- Give specific examples of how you have created a work environment for staff which fosters continuous learning and staff development.

### 3. Interpersonal Effectiveness

- **Ability to communicate orally.**
  - Describe a time you used verbal communication to relate a point which was important to you. What obstacles did you have to overcome in making this communication? Did the other party understand the point being made? How do you know they understood?
  - Tell me about a job experience in which you had to speak up and tell other people what you thought or felt? What did you do to prepare for this communication? What things did you consider in deciding upon the time and place for this communication? What could you have done to make this communication more effective?
  - Tell me about a time when you had to present a proposal to a person in authority and were able to do this successfully. What did you do to improve the effectiveness of this communication, to ensure it had a greater possibility of success?
  - Give an example of a time when you had to verbally present an idea for others' approval or agreement. Describe the communications strategy you used. What was the result?
  - Tell me about a time you had to communicate something that you knew the other person did not want to hear. How did you go about communicating it? How successful was the communication?
  - Tell your experience in presenting to large and small groups as a representative of your organization.
  - Give an example where you did not communicate well. What was the outcome? What did you learn from the situation and what would you do differently?
- **Ability to communicate in writing.**
  - Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in order to get an important point across. What was the most effective element in that communication? Why was it the most effective?
  - Tell your experience in writing policies and procedures for \_\_\_\_\_ program. How did you communicate the policies/procedures to others?
  - Describe the most significant written document or presentation that you've completed. What made it the most significant? What was the document intended to accomplish? Did it accomplish its intended purpose?
  - Tell me about a time when you used your written communication skills to convey an important message. What was the most difficult aspect in preparing that communication? What was the easiest aspect? How successful was the communication? What could you do to improve that communication?

- Tell me about a time when you had to present a written proposal to a person in authority and were able to do this successfully. What made the proposal successful?
- Many jobs involve a written element that is important to the job. Describe your previous experience in writing two important documents that effectively provided guidance or explanation to your team or manager. What made them effective?
- Give me an example of a time when you had to present an idea in written format for others' approval or agreement. What was the result?
- **Ability to communicate orally and in writing.**
  - Tell me about a time when you had to orally present a written proposal to a person in authority and were able to do this successfully. How did you present the information? What was the most effective portion of our presentation? What made it the most effective? How was the presentation received by the intended audience?
  - Describe the process you have used to develop and write a planning (or other type) document. Be specific. How was the plan communicated to different levels of your respective organization?
  - Give an example of a time when you had to present an idea for others' approval or agreement. What was the result?
  - Tell me about a time in which you had to use your verbal and written communication skills in order to get an important point across. How did you decide what to present orally, and what to present in writing? Which portion was more effective? Why?
- **Ability to work harmoniously with others in a team environment to accomplish goals.**
  - Describe a time in which you felt it was necessary to modify or change your actions in order to respond to the needs of another person.
  - What did you do in your last job to contribute to a team environment? Be specific.
  - Tell me about a situation in which you were able to read another person or a group effectively. How did your perception assist in directing your actions? What was the outcome?
  - Give me a specific example of something you did that helped others have more enthusiasm for the project or effort of the team.
  - Tell of the most difficult situation you ever faced in getting along with a supervisor and/or subordinate employee. How did you work through the situation and what was the outcome?
  - Tell me about a difficult situation on a team when it was desirable for you to keep a positive attitude. What did you do? What were the effects of your actions?
  - Tell us your experience in leading a multidisciplinary group of people. What was your goal with the team and how did you get others involved in meeting the goal? What was the outcome of the effort?
  - Describe your most recent group effort. What was your role in the group? What did you do to make the work of the group more effective?
  - Think about a time when you were involved in a group project or activity where the others involved were difficult to get along with. What did you do about it? Were your efforts effective? Would you do anything differently today?
  - Tell me about a time when you had to analyze a situation in order to be effective in guiding your action or decision. How did you do the analysis? What did your analysis tell you about the situation? How did modify your actions or decisions based on that analysis?
  - Give me an example of a specific situation that illustrates how you most frequently deal with conflict when working with a team.
  - Tell me about a time when you were not successfully able to deal with conflict within a group of which you were a part. What efforts did you make to resolve the conflicts? What more might have you done?
  - Tell me about the last team of which you were a member. What was your role? How did your membership affect the function of the team? Be specific.
  - Describe the worst coworker you have ever had. What made them the worst? How did you deal with him or her?
  - Let's talk about a time when you had to overcome an uncomfortable situation with others. What did you do to affect the situation?

- Give me an example to show you've been able to develop and maintain productive working relations with others, even though they have differing points of view?
- Sometimes people disagree when working in teams. Give an example of a situation where you have been in a conflict situation and shown an ability to handle it effectively and still reach the team's goal?
- Describe a situation in which you were a member of a team with a specific goal. How did you reach your goal as a team? What was your individual role?
- Tell me about a time when you were working with a diverse group of people to accomplish something. How did that diversity affect the team, positively or negatively?
- In many situations you will need to work effectively with a wide variety of team members. Give an example of a situation where you have worked effectively with a team to reach a goal? What made your efforts with this team effective?
- Give me an example of building a productive relationship and maintaining it even in a difficult situation.
- 1) Tell me about a time in which you were gathering information from a person who was being uncooperative. 2) What was the situation? 3) Why were they being uncooperative? 4) How did you feel? 5) How did you get the information you needed? 6) What was the result in this situation?
- Describe a situation where you had to tell others things they did not want to hear. What was the result of the communication? If you had to do so again, what would you change in what you communicated or how you communicated? Why would you make the changes?
- **Ability to communicate effectively with a variety of people from different backgrounds.**
  - Tell me about a time when you were working with a diverse group of people to accomplish something. What barriers to effective communication did you find? How did you overcome those barriers?
  - By providing examples, convince us you can work with a wide variety of people, situations and environments.
  - In many situations you will need to work effectively with a wide variety of team members. Give an example of a situation where you have worked effectively with a team to reach a goal? What made your efforts with this team effective?
  - Give me an example to show you've been able to develop and maintain productive working relations with others, even though they have differing points of view?
- **Ability to manage and supervise (e.g. plan, organize, delegate, control, review, and direct) the activities of subordinates.**
  - Tell me about a time when you were able to step into a situation, take charge, muster support, and bring about excellent results.
  - Tell me about a time when you had to make an unpopular decision and get others' commitment to it.
  - Please give examples of how you have exercised leadership within your medical center, at the level of the VISN, and at the national level.
  - Give an example of when you had a conflict with the leader of another service of your organization. What was the conflict about? How did you manage it and what was the outcome?
  - Give me an example of how you have assisted a subordinate to increase their motivation to perform at a higher level. What specifically did you do? How effective was that effort?
  - Give an example of how individualizing the way in which you deal with people has enabled you to supervise a difficult employee more effectively. What specifically did you do?
  - Summarize a situation where you took the initiative to get others going on an important issue, and played a leading role to achieve the results wanted. Specifically what did you do?
  - Give me an example of a time when you were able to communicate successfully with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa). What did you do to enhance the communications and make them successful?
  - As a manager, have you ever had to discipline anyone? If so, what were the circumstances, and how did you handle it? How effective was the action taken? What could you have done to make it more effective?

- Tell me about a time you had to tell someone something you knew they did not want to hear. How did you approach the communication? What was the most successful part of the communication? What was the least effective? What could you do to have improved the least effective?
- Tell me about a time when you had to coordinate the work of others. How did you approach the task? What specifically did you do?
- Tell me about a time where two of your subordinates, or two team members were in conflict. How did you deal with that situation? How successful were you? What could you have done differently to make your intervention even more effective?
- **Ability to lead or actively participate in oral discussions in which the purpose was to influence, motivate, or question persons or groups.**
  - Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way. What made your efforts successful?
  - Give me an example of a time you had to persuade other people to take action. Were you successful? What could you have done to improve the effectiveness of the persuasive effort?
  - Tell me about a time where you had to make an unpopular decision and get others' commitment to it. What did you do specifically to get that commitment?
- **Ability to accomplish work through others.**
  - Give me an example of a time you had to persuade other people to take action. What specifically did you do to persuade them? Were you successful?
  - Tell me about the most successful delegation you have ever made. What did you delegate? What made it successful?
  - Tell me about the least successful delegation you have ever made. What did you delegate? What could you have done to improve the success of the delegation?
  - Tell me about a time when you empowered staff to handle duties in specific areas. How did they know they had been empowered? How did they react to that empowerment? What did you do to empower them?
- **Leadership abilities.**
  - Describe a team project in which you took a leadership role. What specifically did you do?
  - Discuss a time when your integrity was challenged. How did you handle it?
  - Give an example of a time you had to go above or beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done. What did you do? Why did you do it?
  - Describe a situation in which you were able to positively influence the actions of others in a desired direction.
  - Give me an example of a time you had to persuade other people to take action. What, specifically, did you do? Were you successful?
  - Describe a situation in which you had an opportunity to provide leadership to a team or group without having direct management authority.
  - Give me an example of a time when you were leading and influencing the direction of a project. What was your role? How many others worked with you on this project? What specifically did you contribute?
  - Tell me about a situation where a team effort was heading for an unsuccessful conclusion and you were able to turn the impending failure into success. What did you do to change the direction of the group? What made your efforts successful?

#### 4. Customer Service

- **Ability to communicate effectively in a customer service environment.**
  - Give me an example of when you had to work with a customer who was difficult to get along with. Why was this person difficult? How did you deal with that person?

- Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).
- Tell me about a situation in the past year in which you had to deal with a very upset customer. What did you do? What was the outcome?
- Describe the most difficult customer situation you have dealt with. Tell us specifically how you worked with the customer and what the outcome of the situation was.
- Describe a time in which you felt it was necessary to modify or change your actions in order to respond to the needs of another person. What made you feel it was necessary to modify your actions? What changes did you make?
- Tell me about a situation in which you went the “extra mile” for a customer. What did you do? What prompted you to provide that level of service? What was the customers response to your efforts?
- Tell about a situation in the past year in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker. What did you do? What was the outcome?

## 5. Flexibility/Adaptability

- **Ability to demonstrate flexibility/adaptability.**
  - Tell me about a time when you had to adjust to changes on the job. What happened? How did it turn out?
  - Describe a time when you had to reinvent or redefine your job to meet the changing needs of your organization. What steps did you take to increase the output of your position?
  - Think of a situation (ex. in your role, job, or environment) that changed quickly. What did you do to adapt?
  - Tell me about a time when you had to adapt to an uncomfortable situation. How did you cope with the changes?
  - Provide us with a recent change in your organization which directly impacted areas you worked in or were responsible for. How did you personally manage the change. How did you work with others and what was the outcome?
  - Tell me about a specific occasion when you conformed to a policy even though you did not agree with it.
  - Tell me about a time when you did not conform to existing policy because you thought the situation demanded a different behavior or action? What did you do?
  - Tell me about a difficult situation when it was desirable for you to keep a positive attitude. What did you do?
  - Tell me about a time when you had to balance many competing priorities and did so successfully.
  - Give an example of a job situation in which you demonstrated an ability to tolerate ambiguity without becoming paralyzed by it.
  - Many assignments require flexibility and versatility. In what situation have you shown flexibility or versatility in working through a problem or an assignment? How did this benefit your team or organization?
- **Ability to meet deadlines and work effectively under pressure.**
  - Give an example of a time you had to make a quick decision. What was the basis for that decision? In hindsight, how could that decision have been modified to improve it?
  - Describe a time on any past job in which you were faced with problems or stressful situations that tested your coping skills. What did you do?
  - Tell me about a time when you had to balance many competing priorities and did so successfully.
  - Tell me about a time you were not able to work effectively under pressure. What have you done to improve your ability to work under pressure since that incident?



## 6. Creative Thinking

- **Demonstrated ability to problem-solve and function independently.**
  - Give me an example of a problem that you have solved that illustrates what steps you follow to study a problem before making a decision?
  - Give me an example of a time you had to make an important decision. How did you make the decision? How does it affect you today?
  - Describe a creative endeavor you can take credit for that impacted on the efficiency or effectiveness of a department or organization that you have worked for.
  - We can sometimes identify a small problem and fix it before it becomes a major problem. Give an example of how you have done this.
  - Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
  - Tell me about a recent problem that you faced in your job. What did you do to resolve it?
  - Tell me about a difficult problem you faced and how you solved it.
  - 1) What is the toughest problem that you as an individual have solved in a work setting? 2) What was the problem? 3) What was the result of your solution?
  - What is the most creative idea you have ever conceived and implemented? What made it creative?
  - Give me an example of a situation where you had to overcome major obstacles to achieve your objectives. What did you do to overcome the obstacles?
  - Give me an example of a time you had a problem and you approached it in an unusual way to solve it.
  - What is an example of a situation where you made significant improvement in a work area for which you were responsible
- **Identify and analyze problems, find alternative solutions to complex problems, and distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information to make logical judgements.**
  - Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to gain information needed to solve a problem and then tell me how you analyzed the information and came to a decision.
  - 1) Tell me about a time when you had to analyze facts quickly, define the key issues, and develop a plan which produced good results. 2) If you had to do that activity over again, how would you do it differently?
  - Tell me about a time when you had to gather data, analyze the facts, and develop an action plan based on the data.
  - Many assignments can involve deciphering complex instructions and taking appropriate action. Describe a previous work experience in which you had occasion to tackle a complex situation and analyze it, simplify it and come up with an action plan to move forward.
  - 1) Tell me about the last time you recognized a problem in an organization in which you were involved. 2) How did you recognize the problem? 3) How did you study the problem? 4) How did you determine a solution to the problem?
- **Ability to demonstrate creativity and innovation.**
  - Describe a creative/innovative idea that you produced which led to a significant contribution to the success of an activity or project.
  - Describe the most creative project at work that you've ever completed.
  - Tell me about a situation in which you were able to find a new and better way of doing something significant.
  - Think of a problem solving effort in which you were involved. What was your biggest contribution to the solution?
  - Tell me about a time when you saw something succeed and reapplied the idea in a different context to help improve something else

- Tell me about a time when you came up with a new idea that was implemented. What was the result?
- What is an example of a situation where you made significant improvement?
- Describe a significant success you had in a previous work assignment and how it positively impacted your organization.
- Describe a previous work experience in which you met with an initial failure and found a way to overcome it and reach success. What steps did you take in order to reach success?

## 7. Systems Thinking

- **Ability to analyze organizational and operational problems and develop solutions.**
  - Give me an example of how you have studied an operational problem in your organization that illustrates the steps you follow to study a problem before making a decision?
  - Describe a problem situation where you had to seek out information on the impact of a change in one area upon the entire organization, define key issues, and decide on which steps to take to get desired results.
  - Tell me about a time when you implemented a change in one portion of the organization that negatively impacted another part of the organization. How did you deal with the resulting problems? What would you do differently in implementing that change now?
  - Tell me about a time when you had to pick out the key elements in some activity and take steps to improve the success of those elements.
  - Describe a significant success you had in a previous work assignment and how it positively impacted your organization.
  - Explain the work of a committee you can take ownership for in terms of successes or outcomes.

## 8. Organizational Stewardship

- **Works to accomplish the organization's business plan.**
  - Give me an example of a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done. What did you do? Why did you put forth that extra effort?
  - Tell me about a time when others in your organization depended on you and you did not deliver. What impact did that have on the organization? What would you do differently today?
  - Tell me about a time when others in your organization depended on you and you did deliver. What impact did that have on the organization? What impact did that have on your area of responsibility?
  - Describe a significant success you had in a previous work assignment and how it positively impacted your organization.
  - If you retired today, what contribution would you be best remembered for by your organization? How did it help further the goals of the organization?