



Interviewing Immigrant Candidates

When interviewing immigrant candidates, be consistent. The interview process, questions, and format should be the same for each candidate unless accommodations are either necessary or requested. And to obtain the best responses to your questions, consider the following interview tips:

Connect questions to essential skills.

- Revisit the job posting and carefully consider the responsibilities of the role.
- List the essential skills required to complete each responsibility.
- Formulate questions and the responses that would satisfy your assessment of the skill.
- Test the questions on a colleague, preferably one in a similar role to the one you're seeking to fill.
- Revise your questions if they don't elicit the expected response.

Be intentional and specific.

- Pose one question at a time, clearly and concisely. Including several questions at once may be confusing to a candidate.
- Avoid open-ended questions that rely on an understanding of Canadian culture, which may be challenging. For example, saying, "Tell me about yourself," can elicit a response that doesn't provide the information you're seeking. Be specific by saying, "Tell me about your education and experience that relate to this role." This clearly shows what you'd like the candidate to speak about and sets the candidate up for success.
- Rephrase a question if a candidate's response seems short or inappropriate, as it may have been misinterpreted.

Avoid using metaphors in your questions.

- Refrain from using common idioms, colloquialisms, and metaphors such as, "What do you bring to the table?" as they may not be common across all cultures and may cause confusion or misunderstanding.
- Revise questions to focus on the skill you're trying to assess. For example, if you say, "Tell me about a time you had to think outside the box," are you assessing the candidate's ability to solve complex problems? If so, ask the question more directly: "Tell me about a time you were faced with a complex problem. What did you do to solve it?" Or if you were assessing the candidate's creative thinking skills, ask: "Tell me about a time you had to create a new way of doing a task."
- Avoid humour as well, as it may be difficult for the applicant to interpret.

Be mindful of non-verbal cues.

- Be aware of cultural differences in body language and self-expression.
- Interpret silence correctly. While preparing a response to a question, some candidates may become silent. If English is not their first language, they may need to mentally translate the question, so it's important to reassure them to take their time.

Add a skills-based assessment.

- Consider administering a performance-based assessment or test for specific skills or competencies that are essential to the job. This allows immigrant candidates to demonstrate their skills and allows you to assess the skill "in action."

Assemble an interview panel.

- If your organization is large enough, convene a panel of interviewers to counter any individual personal bias or misinterpretation. Carefully choose the members based on factors such as race, gender, and immigration or socioeconomic status to ensure multiple perspectives when assessing a candidate's suitability.

Want to learn more?

- Review [Developing Cross-Cultural Behaviour Based Interview Questions](#), a resource from the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) Learning.
- Check out [Hire Immigrants Ottawa](#) for further information on revising interview questions.