# Component 2: Competency Question Picklist

### Overview

### This resource provides a list of potential behavioral-based interviewing (BBI) questions for the 15 competencies most commonly sought in budget and planning staff. Each question is designed to elicit details from the candidate of an actual past experience that tested the targeted competency. To guide candidate evaluation, the tool also outlines ideal and red-flag responses for each question set.

### Instructions

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| **Attitude** |
| *Questions to Ask* |
| * Can you give an example of a time when you have received negative feedback about your job performance? How did you react?
* What frustrates you most about your current position? Can you give an example of how you have dealt with this frustration in the past?
* When was the last time you made a big mistake? What did you do?
* Have you ever taken a substantial risk that has failed? What was it? What did you learn?
* Have you ever had an experience turning a problem into a success? Tell me about it.
 |
| *Positive Answers* | *Red Flags* |
| * Accepts criticism well
* Takes accountability for actions
* Tries to rectify unpleasant situations
* Is generally positive and upbeat about work situations
 | * Overly defensive in response to criticism
* Unable to offer rational justification for actions
* Blames failures on others
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After defining role competencies using Component 1: Role Competency Selector, select appropriate BBI questions from the following lists.

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| **Communication** |
| *Questions to Ask* |
| * Give me an example of a time you had to explain a financial concept to a non-financial audience.
* Sometimes we are misunderstood by other people. Has this ever happened to you? How did you respond, and what were the results? What did you do to prevent this from happening again?
* Describe a time when you communicated some unpleasant feelings to your supervisor. What happened?
* Tell me about a specific experience that illustrates your ability to influence another person verbally. Feel free to use an example that involves changing an attitude, selling a product/idea, or being persuasive.
* Has there ever been a time when your listening skills really paid off, maybe a time when other people missed the key idea in what was being expressed? Tell me about it.
 |
| *Positive Answers* | *Red Flags* |
| * Able to communicate ideas to team members
* Has good verbal skills and ability to influence listeners
* Uses skills such as reflection, restatement, and paraphrasing
* Values humor
* Disagrees with authority when appropriate
 | * Uses slang or poor grammar
* Does not have any questions during or at the conclusion of the interview
* Offers short answers with little explanation
* Mumbles or offers incomplete answers
* Frequently misunderstands the pointof questions
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| **Conflict Resolution** |
| *Questions to Ask* |
| * Tell me about the last argument you had with a coworker. What was it about?
* Describe a situation when someone put you in the middle of on ongoing argument. What did you do?
* Tell me about a time when you disagreed with a decision by your manager or other leaders. Why did you disagree? What did you do about it?
 |
| *Positive Answers* | *Red Flags* |
| * Reasons through multiple viewpoints
* Listens to concerns from all sides
* Works to improve situation
 | * Blames others for personal difficulties
* Consistently takes sides
* Appears passive aggressive
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| **Critical Thinking** |
| *Questions to Ask* |
| * Describe an organizational goal not easily applied to your office. What have you done to work towards this goal in your office’s daily activities?
* Give me an example of a time when you developed or recognized new thinking or trends that were helpful to your organization.
* Tell me about a time when you had to plan a complex project.
* Think of a problem you have addressed by focusing on the underlying process rather than on an isolated event. Describe the approach you took.
* Tell me about one major obstacle you overcame in your last job. How did you deal with it?
 |
| *Positive Answers* | *Positive Answers* |
| * Able to transfer ideas from one problem to another
* Learns from past successes and failures to improve performance
* Can see both the bigger and smaller pictures to address problems
 | * Able to transfer ideas from one problem to another
* Learns from past successes and failures to improve performance
* Can see both the bigger and smaller pictures to address problems
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| **Customer Service** |
| *Questions to Ask* |
| * Think of a time when you had to deal with an unhappy customer. Describe the situation and how you handled it.
* Have you ever had to change your approach to accommodate the needs of a customer? What happened?
* Have you ever had an angry customer who wanted you to do something that you did not have the authority to approve? How did you handle it?
* Tell me about a time when you went above and beyond normal expectations to improve a customer’s experience.
 |
| *Positive Answers* | *Positive Answers* |
| * Can empathize with customer needs
* Recognizes importance of service excellence
* Can show evidence of restraint under a difficult situation
* Has a mature problem-solving attitude
 | * Can empathize with customer needs
* Recognizes importance of service excellence
* Can show evidence of restraint under a difficult situation
* Has a mature problem-solving attitude
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| **Decision-Making** |
| *Questions to Ask* |
| * Have you ever had to implement an unpopular decision? What steps did you take? What was the outcome?
* Have you ever been in a seemingly impossible position with resource constraints, such as lack of staff, time, or budget to complete a project? How did you handle that?
* Describe a situation that illustrates your delegation style.
* Tell me about a hard decision you had to make and how you went about making that decision.
* Tell me about a time when you took a calculated risk in a recent position. What were your considerations?
 |
| *Positive Answers* | *Red Flags* |
| * Makes decisions without undue anxiety
* Solicits appropriate input from peers or managers
* Makes decisions based on all available evidence
 | * Makes unilateral decisions without consulting supervisors
* Procrastinates decision-making
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| **Diversity Awareness** |
| *Questions to Ask* |
| * Tell me about a time when you had to adapt to work with a person from a different cultural background. What did you do and what were the results?
* Give me an example of a time when communication with a customer or coworker was difficult. How did you handle it?
* Describe a situation when you worked with a person whose personal beliefs were the opposite of yours. How did you deal with it?
* Tell me about a time when you were able to step into another person’s shoes in order to discover his or her unique perspective.
* Have you ever had a time when you felt it necessary to compromise your own immediate interests in order to fulfill another person’s needs? Tell me about it.
 |
| *Positive Answers* | *Red Flags* |
| * Is sensitive to the feelings of others
* Makes a special effort to demonstrate respect in terms of actions as well as words
* Is adaptable to customers and co-workers with different needs, values, and opinions
 | * Expresses stereotypes or biases about people different from him/herself
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| **Flexibility** |
| *Questions to Ask* |
| * Give me an example of a time when you changed an opinion or action plan after receiving new information.
* Give me an example of a time when you needed to balance your needs and concerns with the needs and concerns of another person.
* Sometimes it is necessary to work in unsettled or rapidly changing circumstances. When have you found yourself in this position? Tell me exactly what you did.
* Tell me about a time when you had way too much to do and you had deadlines to meet. How did you handle it?
 |
| *Positive Answers* | *Red Flags* |
| * Able to transfer ideas from one problem to another
* Learns from past successes and failures to improve performance
* Can see both the bigger and smaller pictures to address problems
 | * Constantly justifies own actions in spite of prevailing evidence
* Appears to be consistently “hard-headed”
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| **Integrity** |
| *Questions to Ask* |
| * Tell me about a situation in which you were called upon to keep a promise or confidence.
* Give me an example of a time when you chose to speak up for others when they were not present.
* When was the last time you “broke the rules”? Why did you do so?
* Tell me about a time when you asked forgiveness for doing something wrong.
* Share an example of a problem created for you by someone else. How did you handle it? What were the results?
* Have you ever had no control over circumstances, yet were responsible for the final outcome? What did you do? What were the results?
 |
| *Positive Answers* | *Red Flags* |
| * Takes personal responsibility for his or her actions
* Takes personal pride in professionalism
* Respects confidentiality of customers and peers
 | * Denigrates peers behind their back
* Is unable to think of situation
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| **Leadership** |
| *Questions to Ask* |
| * Describe the most striking example of staff conflict or dissent you have experienced. How did you handle it?
* Describe how you have involved staff in performance improvement initiatives and other decisions pertinent to their work.
* Give me an example of how you establish goals, responsibilities, and accountabilities for others.
* Tell me about a past experience developing and building a leadership team.
* What has been your experience in dealing with poor performance of employees? Give me an example.
* Have you ever had to implement an unpopular decision? What steps did you take? What was the outcome?
 |
| *Positive Answers* | *Red Flags* |
| * Naturally assumes a leadership role
* Solicits input from others, both superiors and subordinates
* Appropriately manages expectations for self and others
* Is proactive in seeking problems and solutions
 | * Speaks poorly of subordinates
* Communicates reasoning poorly
* Is unable to describe making a conclusive decision
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| **Mentorship** |
| *Questions to Ask* |
| * Give me an example of a time when you came up with a clever way to motivate your colleagues.
* Tell me about a time when you acknowledged or celebrated the success of yourself or others.
* Have you ever mentored a peer? Describe a situation when you worked with an employee or colleague to successfully improve his/her performance.
 |
| *Positive Answers* | *Red Flags* |
| * Works collaboratively with peers
* Has a positive and upbeat attitude
 | * Expresses no interest in teaching
* Speaks poorly of subordinates or colleagues
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| **Personal Development Drive** |
| *Questions to Ask* |
| * Have you done anything over the past year to develop yourself? What was it? How did you go about it?
* Tell me about a specific goal you set for yourself in the past. Why was it important to you? How did you achieve it, and what were the results?
* We all get negative feedback from time to time. Tell me about a time you received feedback that indicated an opportunity for you to improve your job performance. What did you do?
* Have you ever been in a situation in which you made a mistake that no one else knew about? How did you handle it?
* Give me an example of a time when you went beyond your employer’s normal job expectations in order to get a job done.
 |
| *Positive Answers* | *Red Flags* |
| * Accepts constructive criticism
* Distinguishes between own efforts and contributions made by others
* Displays openness to developing new skills
* Works extra hours to accomplish task
* Is proud of his or her commitment to get the job done
 | * Does not seek help or ask questions of co-workers or supervisors
* Offers no specific examples regarding learning new tasks on the job
* Articulates negative comments regarding training
* Implies dislike of overtime
* Implies that money is his or her primary motivator
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| **Problem-Solving** |
| *Questions to Ask* |
| * Have you ever had a time when your supervisor was away from the workplace and you had to complete a project or make a decision independently? Tell me about what happened.
* Tell me about a time when you thought it was necessary to alter procedure. What was the situation, and how did you handle it?
* We have all had projects or situations that have not worked out as they should have. Tell me about a time when this happened to you. How did you handle it?
* Walk me through the last big decision you had to make. What happened?
* Have you ever been in a situation that seemed to go “wrong” from the beginning? What did you do, and what were the results?
 |
| *Positive Answers* | *Red Flags* |
| * Able to take action based on available information
* Exhibits maturity, ability to learn, and emotional control
* Makes good decisions even under stress
 | * Paralyzed in stressful situations
* Procrastinates decision-making
* Relies heavily on input of others
* Does not incorporate all available information into decision-making process
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| **Process Improvement** |
| *Questions to Ask* |
| * Have you ever made suggestions for improving your work process? Describe what you did and how you achieved results.
* Tell me about a time when your supervisor presented you with a new process for doing something and gave you the task of implementing and evaluating that process. What did you do?
* Tell me about a time when you were faced with a situation where there was no clear policy or procedure to follow. What did you do? What were the results?
* Have there been any large changes within your current organization? Tell me about one change that affected your job. How did you react?
* Tell me about a problem that you identified and resolved by using a systematic approach.
 |
| *Positive Answers* | *Red Flags* |
| * Applies a systematic, logical, and reasonable approach to analyzing situations
* Feels confident in assuming authority
* Can function comfortably without a structured agenda
 | * Takes no responsibility for own actions
* Is unfamiliar with basic process improvement methods
* Is satisfied with the status quo
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| **Teamwork** |
| *Questions to Ask* |
| * Describe a situation in which you accomplished something as a member of a team. What was the team’s purpose? What was your role?
* Describe a time when you were able to help a co-worker solve a problem or improve his or her performance.
* What is the main strength or “natural style” that you bring to a team? Describe a specific situation and how your work style affected the team’s decision.
* Give me an example of a time when you confronted a negative attitude successfully, with the result of building teamwork and morale.
* Give me an example of an occasion when you have done something for others in the organization without being asked or told to do so.
 |
| *Positive Answers* | *Red Flags* |
| * Distinguishes between own efforts and contributions made by others
* Is proud of team accomplishments
* Maintains a positive attitude in light of disagreements
* Is able to appropriately resolve conflicts
* Shares critical information up, down, and across the organization
* Follows through on explicit/implicit promises and commitments
 | * Does not see benefits of working in a team
* Prefers to work alone
* Uses “I” responses rather than “we” when discussing teamwork
* Does not understand differing viewpoints
* Disparages teammates
* Unable to delegate
 |