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Virtual Interviews: Tips for Program Directors

Association of
American Medical Colleges

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Virtual Interviews: Tips for Program Directors

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Overview

This document provides tips for those preparing to conduct or organize virtual interviews, including how to address possible complications from transitioning to virtual interviews, without losing the effectiveness of the interview.

Factors to Consider When Selecting a Virtual Interview

There are two types of virtual interviews. Your choice of virtual interview format will depend on several factors, such as financial resources, available interviewer and staff time, and whether you want two-way interaction between the interviewer and applicant.

	Live Virtual Interviews	Asynchronous Virtual Interviews
Definition	Applicants interact with an interviewer using video conference technology in real-time.	Applicants respond to questions presented via text or prerecorded video. Responses are recorded by their device's webcam and shared with reviewers at a later time.
Type of Interaction	Two-way interaction between the applicant and interviewer.	No interaction between the applicant and the evaluator.
Types of Questions	Same as in-person interview.	Same as in-person interview, except follow-up questions are not possible.
Level of standardization	If standardization is desired, then program directors will have to work with interviewers to create standardization through the questions and scoring rubric.	Standardization is built-in; applicants all respond to the same questions, so their responses are comparable.
Setup	Similar to in-person setup; provide interviewers with a list of questions and scoring rubric, if applicable. Confirm the software has the capabilities needed (e.g., group interviews); test technology.	Must create interview forms in the vendors' system. Contract with vendor; test technology.
Technology required of applicants and interviewers	Applicants: device with internet access, camera, and microphone. Interviewers: may have to download software; may need software/app to support group chat if you want multiple interviewers to participate.	Applicants: device with internet access, camera, and microphone. Evaluators: device with access to the internet.

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	Live Virtual Interviews	Asynchronous Virtual Interviews
Scheduling, interviewer time, and evaluating the interview	<p>Must schedule applicants and interviewers based on shared availability.</p> <p>Scheduling may be challenging, especially if applicants are required to participate in multiple interviews and/or are in different time zones.</p> <p>Identify a process for securely recording interviews and sharing ratings or notes with the program director.</p>	<p>An applicant can record the interview at any time.</p> <p>Multiple evaluators can watch the interviews easily and on their own time.</p> <p>Many platforms allow evaluators to enter ratings and notes directly into their systems.</p>
Recruiting function	If permitted, applicants can ask questions.	Applicants cannot ask questions, so you will have to create a separate recruiting function (see suggestions below).
Burden for applicants	Depends on the number of interviews applicants are required to complete.	Depends on the number of interviews or interview questions applicants are required to complete.
Applicant reactions	Less positive than in-person interviews, but more positive than asynchronous (recorded) interviews.	More likely to be negative because the high degree of structure limits applicants' ability to "sell themselves" and ask questions to learn about the program.
Cost	Most are free.	Most require the organization to pay a fee to set up the system.

Setting Up the Live Virtual Interview

Once you have selected a type of virtual interview, you need to complete several steps to set up the process.

Create or Modify Existing Interview Processes

- Consider how well elements of your in-person interview may translate to a virtual environment. Most interview questions will be equally effective in a virtual context. However, while it will be tempting to mimic your in-person interview, some elements may not result in a positive or effective interview experience.

If your in-person interview day includes:	Consider this instead:
Multi-hour interview days for interviewers	Limit the time an interviewer can spend conducting consecutive virtual interviews to less than four hours.
Panel interviews	Use recorded virtual interviews rather than live virtual interviews to reduce the burden of coordinating multiple people.
Group activities	Include questions about teamwork.
Role-play activity	Include questions that assess competencies normally assessed during the role-play (e.g., empathy, communication skills) or situational questions that ask the applicant to take on a specific role.
Lunch with current medical students	Set up a virtual meetup with existing students.
Tour of the medical school	Create a short video tour of your school, with interviews of key staff, faculty, and some students

- For more information on best practices for designing and conducting interviews, please refer to the AAMC’s [Best Practices for Conducting Residency Program Interviews](#).
- Decide if you will assign applicants to an interview day and timeslot or let applicants sign up for an interview day and timeslot. Be sure to offer interview slots in multiple time zones.

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- If you schedule back-to-back interviews or interview blocks, add buffer time (e.g., 15-30 minutes) between each interview since the next applicant won't be waiting outside the door. Interviewers and applicants will need a little extra time to connect.
- Establish a process and timeline for receiving interviewer feedback about each interview. Can interviewers enter ratings and notes into an existing online system? Do you need to create a scoring sheet?

Create or Modify Supporting Materials

- Modify your program website and interview invitation to reflect your new process as soon as possible. This will help applicants prepare and know what to expect, which will reduce stress.
- Write a script that interviewers can use to welcome and orient applicants to the virtual interview. The script should acknowledge the unusual circumstances and thank the applicant for being flexible. This may be the applicant's first virtual interview, and this simple acknowledgement can help them become more comfortable.
- Create an interview schedule for each interviewer that includes each interview day and time, applicants' names, applicants' contact information (e.g., phone number and/or email) in case they are disconnected, and any needed login information.

Prepare Interviewers

- Confirm interviewers have the technology necessary to conduct the interview online (e.g., computer or tablet, microphone, camera) and the appropriate software/application in advance of the interviews.
- Provide a short tutorial on how to use the technology and/or opportunities to practice using it. The program could develop this or use a preexisting video.
- Provide supporting materials to interviewers:
 - Interview schedule.
 - Login information (if applicable).
 - Welcome script.
 - Interview questions and rating materials.
 - Contact information for your school's technology support.
 - Applicant's contact information (as a backup option).

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- Provide information to your evaluators about evaluating virtual interviews, including how to avoid being distracted by the applicants' environment and technology and minimizing unconscious bias.
 - Provide them with the AAMC's Virtual Interviews: Tips for Interviewers. *[coming soon]*
 - Encourage them to participate in the [AAMC's online training](#) about minimizing unconscious bias in selection and recruitment.

Prepare Applicants

- Think about the materials you typically provide applicants in advance of the interview or on interview day. When and how do you typically share those? Are they available on your program's website and/or via email?
- Inform applicants about the virtual interview as soon as possible. Provide information about:
 - The application or platform used for the interview, as well as information about how to download or install needed software before the interview. Encourage applicants to try the software in advance of the interview.
 - The process for signing up for interview slots or the assigned interview day and time.
 - Provide exact call-in information (e.g., who will call whom, what number should be used). Be sure to include the time zone of the interview slot.
- Share the [AAMC's Tips for Preparing for Virtual Interviews](#) with your applicants.

Setting Up the Asynchronous Virtual Interview

Once you have selected an asynchronous virtual interview and a vendor, you need to complete several steps to set it up.

Create the New Interview Processes

- Create policies and a process for registering interviewees.
 - How will applicants register for the interview? We recommend the program director send an email invitation with a link to register for the interview. This will give you an opportunity to personalize the message and describe why the interview aligns with your program’s mission and goals.
 - Decide how much time following receipt of the invitation applicants will have to complete the interview. What, if any, exceptions will you make if applicants can’t complete the interview by the deadline?
- Think about whether your current questions will translate well to an asynchronous interview. Remember, you will not be able to ask follow-up questions or ask for clarifications.
 - We have found that behavioral questions solicit more information than situational questions in this context because applicants typically provide more detailed responses.
 - Consider adding follow-up questions alongside the main question to ensure applicants provide the detail you are looking for.
 - For example, rather than asking, “Tell me about a time you worked on a difficult team,” you might ask, “Tell me about a time you worked on a difficult team. What made the team experience difficult? How will this experience affect the way you work on a team in the future?”
 - Be thoughtful and judicious with follow-up questions. The goal is to get enough information from the applicant to evaluate their qualifications without increasing the length of the interview and overwhelming the applicant.
- Set up the interview form. Depending on the platform, this may not be difficult but will take time and planning.
 - Consider making a short video welcoming the applicant to the interview and describing your program.
 - Consider including a video recording of a faculty member reading each question to accompany the question text. This may enhance applicant engagement.
 - Set a time limit for reading and responding. For most questions, we recommend 30-60 seconds to read and prepare a response and three minutes to respond. If your questions

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- are long or you include follow-up questions, you may want to increase the amount of time to prepare and respond.
- Limit interview time to about 20 minutes so applicants maintain attention and engagement in the interview. This will also help ensure evaluators are not overburdened when viewing videos. Note that you will need to adjust the number of questions you include to align with the allotted time.
 - Consider creating multiple versions of the interview.
 - Interview questions might be more likely to be released or leaked because applicants are taking the interview over a longer period of time.
 - If you create multiple versions, keep the competencies and dimensions assessed the same.
 - Note, however, that creating multiple versions will increase the complexity of the administration. You'll need to determine how to assign candidates to different versions and how to evaluate and compare applicants who received different versions.
 - For more information on best practices for designing and conducting interviews, please refer to the AAMC's [Best Practices for Conducting Residency Program Interviews](#).
 - Create a process for collecting feedback and ratings.
 - How many evaluators do you want to watch each interview? Do you want each evaluator to watch the whole interview or only a subset of questions?
 - Do you want evaluators to enter their feedback in the vendor's system or elsewhere? Some vendor systems let you download ratings and notes; how will you connect that data with your other application data?

Create or Modify Supporting Materials

- Modify your program website, ERAS® page, and interview invitation to reflect your new process as soon as possible. This will help applicants prepare and know what to expect, which will help reduce stress.
- Create instructions for registering and logging in to the software.
- Write a script for the welcome video that welcomes and orients applicants to the virtual interview. It should acknowledge the unusual circumstance and thank the applicant for being flexible. This may be the applicant's first asynchronous virtual interview, and this simple acknowledgement may help them become more comfortable. It is also an opportunity to tell applicants about your program.

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- Modify or create guidelines for evaluating responses.

Prepare Evaluators

- Confirm evaluators have the technology necessary to view and evaluate responses online (e.g., computer or tablet, speakers) and the appropriate software/application login information in advance of the interviews.
- Provide evaluators the opportunity to take a practice interview to get a better understanding of the applicant experience.
- Provide a short tutorial on how to use the technology and/or opportunities for them to enter the system and practice navigating it.
- Provide information to your evaluators about evaluating virtual interviews, including how to avoid being distracted by the applicants' environment, technology, and minimizing unconscious bias.
 - Provide them with the AAMC's Virtual Interviews: Tips for Interviewers. *[coming soon]*
 - Encourage them to participate in AAMC's online training about minimizing unconscious bias in selection and recruitment.
- Provide support materials to evaluators.
 - Login information (if applicable).
 - Contact information for your vendor's and school's technology support.
 - List of which applicants' responses they are responsible for evaluating.
 - Interview questions and rating scale(s), if applicable.
 - A way to record ratings and notes.

Prepare Applicants

- Inform applicants about the virtual interview as soon as possible. Provide information about:
 - The interview platform used for the interview, as well as information about how to download or install software before the interview. Encourage applicants to try the software in advance of the interview.
 - The process for registering for an interview slot.
 - The deadline for completing the interview.
- Share the AAMC's [Virtual Interviews: Applicant Preparation Guide](#) with your applicants.