



OFFICE OF CAREER AND LEADERSHIP MANAGEMENT

Interview Checklist**Before**

- Find out what type of interview you will be having and with whom
- Learn as much as you can about the organization, its mission, goals, work in the community, and relevant trends and current events in the field
- Review the job description carefully to develop a thorough understanding of the responsibilities and functions involved and key attributes and competencies sought (e.g., knowledge, skills, and experience with specific issues, populations, systems, settings, policies, and practices)
- Prepare a brief introduction and overview of your career trajectory and motivation for pursuing the position, organization, and field
- Prepare stories and talking points that showcase your most relevant skills, attributes, experiences, and accomplishments, and the alignment between your interests, values, and goals, and those of the organization
- Practice answering common interview questions, including using the STAR (Situation/Task, Action, Result) method to respond to behavioral questions
- Prepare questions to ask the interviewer(s) about the role, team, and organization that will allow you to gain insight beyond what can be learned online
- For phone and virtual interviews, secure a clean, quiet space that is free from distractions and clutter; download and test platforms in advance and ensure a clear and stable connection
- Gather any information or documents necessary, such as copies of your resume, employer contact information, directions to the interview location or instructions for logging in, and any materials requested
- Be prepared to discuss your availability and salary expectations, as well as anything you included in your application (NOTE: In general, it's best to discuss salary later in the interview process after they've gotten to know you)

Day of / During

- Prepare mentally and physically by eating a healthy meal, staying hydrated, and engaging in positive self-talk, deep breathing, muscle relaxation, and visualization exercises, as needed.

- For in-person interviews, arrive at least 10 minutes early, and 5 minutes for virtual; for phone, be on stand-by at least 5 minutes before
- Dress in professional attire appropriate to the organization, regardless of the format or setting; for virtual interviews, ensure you also have a professional-looking background
- Sit up straight with a slight lean forward; smile, and make natural eye contact throughout; for virtual interviews, look at the camera to simulate eye contact
- When introducing yourself, highlight the attributes you want the interviewer(s) to remember about you most
- Don't reiterate your resume, recite your entire work history, or overshare personal details and experiences; focus on key strengths you can contribute and tie them to the mission and goals of the organization
- Be sure to provide specific examples of your strengths and accomplishments, using the STAR method to frame your stories
- Keep your responses brief and to the point, providing just enough details to help the interviewer(s) understand the context of your situation, the actions you took, the impact you made, and/or what you learned from each experience
- Listen attentively and ask questions throughout, keeping in mind that interviews are two-way conversations
- Ask about the next steps and/or the timeline for the hiring process before the end of the meeting

After

- Send a personalized thank you note to the interviewer(s) reiterating your interest within 24-48 hours; include specific takeaways from the conversation
- Check your email and/or phone regularly and respond to follow-up inquiries in a timely manner
- Keep notes from your conversation and interactions for personal reference

General Tips

- Treat every communication and interaction leading up to, during, and after the meeting as part of the interview and assessment process
- Demonstrate both confidence and humility by recognizing the strengths you bring and also acknowledging areas where you may need further development
- Stay open, flexible, and enthusiastic throughout, and always put your best foot forward!

Special Tips for Social Work Practicum Interviews

- ❑ If there's no job description for the placement, learn as much as you can about the organization through its website and any additional resources provided by the Office of Practicum Learning; use the interview as a way to learn more
- ❑ Treat the meeting like any formal job interview, even if it may seem informal
- ❑ With your understanding of the placement, be prepared to discuss how your short-term and long-term goals and learning objectives connect with the service delivery of the agency
- ❑ If you're interviewing for your generalist year placement, be prepared to talk about your motivation and interest in pursuing social work and applicable experiences where you have demonstrated social work values¹ and attributes, including through internships, extracurricular/leadership activities, and volunteer work
- ❑ If you're interviewing for your specialized year placement, be prepared to talk about your generalist year placement and supervision experience, accomplishments that demonstrate social work values, attributes, and core competencies², and post-grad aspirations
- ❑ When conveying your interests and preferences, be focused but also open; being too narrow will limit your options while staying flexible will afford you exposure to a broad range of experiences that will be transferable to other settings
- ❑ Inquire about any necessary onboarding, health screenings, or training the site may require before starting the field placement
- ❑ If you have questions about stipends³, please discuss this directly with the Associate Director (AD) of Practicum Learning who manages the agency (NOTE: Placements with stipends are rare)
- ❑ If you have specific scheduling needs, confer with your assigned AD first *before* requesting arrangements that are outside of conventional hours
- ❑ Follow the interview protocols⁴ ascribed by the Practicum Learning Department, and keep them in the loop throughout the process
- ❑ Don't underestimate the value you bring—highlight your transferable skills and your eagerness to learn and grow; enthusiasm goes a long way when you're new to the field!

¹ Learn about social work values on NASW's Code of Ethics page:

<https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>

² Learn about social work attributes and CSWE core competencies in the Social Work Practicum Manual: <https://socialwork.columbia.edu/student-experience/student-services/field-education>

³ If you have financial concerns, reach out to the Office of Financial Aid to explore your options and/or review our on-campus employment guide for leads on paid opportunities on campus: https://bit.ly/CSSW_OnCampusEmployment

⁴ Refer to the Placement Process section of the Social Work Practicum Manual for more information