

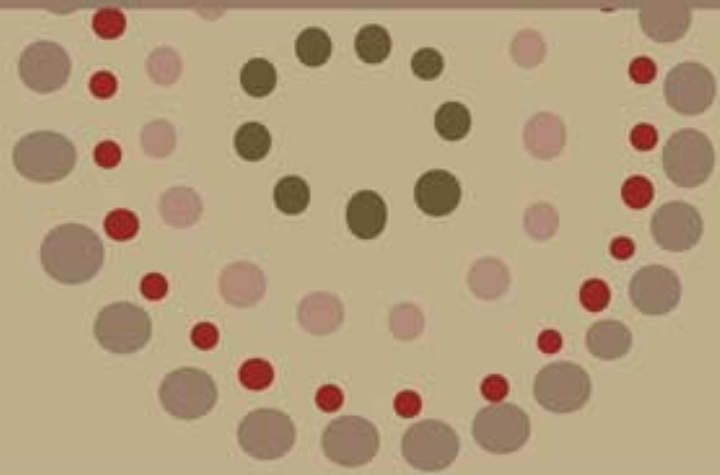


Australian Government
Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations

4

Sample interview questions

—a guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporations



HELP FOR
CORPORATIONS

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Produced by ORIC November 2010

First edition

ISBN 978-1-921542-46-6

Sample interview questions

These sample interview questions are to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporations when recruiting staff.

Using behaviourally-based questions

Past behaviour is an excellent predictor of future behaviour. A structured behavioural interview can help you to determine how someone is likely to perform in the role.

The aim of a behavioural interview is to find out what happened and the role that the individual played. What did they actually do and experience? The questions do not focus on the future, what might have happened or on hypothetical scenarios. The other important aspect of behaviourally-based questions is a focus on behaviours that will be important for the role in question.

Essentially, you want to understand to what extent the applicant has taken responsibility for their own actions and made decisions without referring to others. The aim is to work out whether the applicant has acted on their own initiative in the past.

Sample behavioural questions

These sample behaviourally-based questions provide a guide for you when coming up with the main questions for a structured behavioural interview, and/or referee check. The questions you ask should relate to the particular capabilities (selection criteria) required for the role.

A structured behavioural interview is an effective way to assess personal qualities. Examples of these are:

- flexibility
- teamwork
- initiative
- drive and commitment
- cross-cultural awareness
- coaching and developing others
- resilience.

A referee check is a more appropriate method for assessing the following skills:

- problem solving
- client service orientation
- project management skills
- decision making
- persuasion and influencing skills
- presentation skills
- leadership skills
- strategic thinking skills
- business focus
- organisational awareness
- written communication.

Recruitment selection guide: example interview questions

Written communication skills*

Selection criterion: writes in a clear, fluent and concise manner; produces written communications that are appropriate and readily understood by the intended audience; organises information in a logical sequence.

1. Give me a recent example of when you have **had to write an important document e.g. report, memo or letter** to a client or stakeholder.
What was the purpose of the document?
How did you ensure that it was clear for the reader?
What feedback did you receive about your document?
2. Describe a situation when you **chose to communicate in writing**.
What were the circumstances?
Why did you choose to write?
How effective was this as a way of getting your view across?
3. Describe an example of when you **had to adapt** a standard document **to suit a particular audience** e.g. a client or stakeholder.
What was the document about?
How did you change it?
What would you do differently next time?
4. Tell me about a written document where you **needed to organise information in a logical sequence**.
Why did it need to be in a logical sequence?
How did you check for clarity?
What was the most difficult part of producing this document?
5. Tell me about a **written document** you have **produced** which used a **style** very **different** from what you would normally use.
What were the stylistic differences?
What led you to produce the document in this style?
What was the impact of it?

* The key behavioural aspects of each question have been highlighted in **bold**.

Client service orientation*

Selection criterion: provides prompt, efficient and personalised service to clients; responds flexibly to client needs; is committed to delivering a high-quality output to clients.

1. Give me an example of a time when you have **put the needs of a client first** e.g. over your own needs.
Why was this necessary?
How well did you manage to meet their needs?
What sacrifices did you need to make to ensure that their needs were met?
2. Tell me about the last time that a **client made an unreasonable or unrealistic demand** on you.
What was it that made you think that it was unreasonable or excessive?
How much effort and time did this take?
What was the outcome?
3. What, in your view, makes it **difficult to relate well to certain clients?**
What types of people are particularly difficult to get to know?
What have you done to improve poor relationships with other people in the past?
How are those relationships now?
4. Describe a situation where you **had to deal with a particularly angry or frustrated client.**
Why were they angry or frustrated?
How did you begin to calm them down?
If you were in a similar situation again, what would you do differently?
5. Tell me about a time when you were **unable to satisfy a client's demands.**
What did they ask of you?
Why were you unable to meet their needs?
How did this make you feel?
Is there anything else you could have done differently?

* The key behavioural aspects of each question have been highlighted in **bold**.

Problem solving*

Selection criterion: seeks all relevant information for problem solving; probes for the facts; analyses issues from different perspectives; draws sound inferences from available information.

1. Tell me about a time recently when you **had to identify the key cause of a problem.**

How did you work out the cause?

How did you solve the problem?

What lessons did you learn?

2. Give me a recent example of when you **came up with several different solutions to a problem.**

What suggestions did you come up with? Why did you need several?

What did others think of your ideas?

How well did they work in practice?

3. Describe a **complex problem** which you **solved** recently for someone e.g. a stakeholder.

What made it so challenging?

How did you handle it?

What was the outcome?

4. Tell me about the last time you were **able to anticipate a problem.**

How did you know that the problem was likely to occur?

What did you do?

How effective was your action?

5. Could you give me an example of when you **analysed a problem from different perspectives.**

Did this help solve the problem?

How did you think of what perspectives to take?

How did you ensure that you covered the most important perspectives?

* The key behavioural aspects of each question have been highlighted in **bold**.

Project management*

Selection criterion: schedules activities to ensure optimal use of time and resources; consults and liaises with key stakeholders; monitors performance against objectives; produces detailed project plans where objectives are clearly defined and action steps for achieving them are clearly specified; ensures key project objectives are met.

1. Tell me about a **project** you were **responsible for that required a lot of planning**.
What aspects of the project meant that a lot of planning was required?
How did you decide on priorities?
How successful were you in achieving the objectives of the project?
2. Describe a time when you **needed to complete** a piece of work **to a specified deadline**.
Why was this activity so important?
What steps did you take to ensure that the deadline could be reached?
What would you do differently next time?
3. Tell me about a time when you **had to liaise** with a **wide variety of people** when **planning work**.
What was the work?
What feature of this project required you to liaise extensively?
How did you decide who should be involved?
4. There are always elements of project management and planning that individuals do well and less well. What would you **describe** as your particular **skills in planning**?
Describe a time when you had to use these skills?
What could you do better in terms of project planning?
Tell me about a time you made sure you did this despite it not being a strength of yours?
5. Tell me about a time when you **had to put a detailed project plan together** for other people to follow.
How did you go about producing the plan?
How did you ensure that others stuck to the deadlines and milestones you set?
What feedback did you receive on the clarity of your plan?

* The key behavioural aspects of each question have been highlighted in **bold**.

Decision making*

Selection criterion: makes rational and sound decisions after considering the facts and alternatives available; makes quick decisions where required; commits to definite courses of action.

1. Tell me about a recent **difficult decision** that you **needed to make**.
What was the situation?
What made the situation difficult?
How quickly were you able to make the decision? How did you weigh up the options?
2. We all make **incorrect decisions** from time to time. Tell me about the **last time** that this **happened to you**.
When did you realise that it was the wrong decision?
What was the impact?
What did you learn from this experience?
3. Tell me about the last time that you **needed to commit** to a **definite course of action**.
What was the situation?
Why was it important for you to commit to action?
How did you demonstrate this commitment?
4. Tell me about a **decision** you **made** that first **required significant data gathering**.
How did you gather the facts you needed?
What was it about this particular decision that led you to seek a lot of information?
Where did you seek this information from?
5. When have you **had to make a decision** on the **basis of conflicting or ambiguous information**?
What was the decision you had to make?
How did the data you have conflict?
How did you feel about this?
How did you eventually reconcile the information you had and make a decision?

*The key behavioural aspects of each question have been highlighted in **bold**.

Presentation skills*

Selection criterion: makes an immediate positive impression on others; has presence and credibility; communicates orally in a manner which is clear, fluent and which holds the audience's attention.

1. Give me an example of a situation when it was **important for you to appear confident** when talking to others.
Why was it important?
How did you feel?
What steps did you take to boost your confidence?
2. **Describe a talk or presentation** that you have **given recently**.
How did you tailor it to suit the audience?
Roughly how many people were in the audience?
How did the audience react?
3. Tell me about a time when you **found it difficult to keep someone's attention**.
Why was it so difficult?
What did you do?
How well did this work?
4. Tell me about a time where you **needed to make an immediate impression** on someone.
Why was this?
What steps did you take to maximise the impression that you conveyed?
How successful were you?
5. Give me an example of when you **had to explain something difficult** to someone.
What information did you need to get across?
What was the most difficult thing about the conversation?
How would you act differently next time?

* The key behavioural aspects of each question have been highlighted in **bold**.

Persuasion and influencing skills*

Selection criterion: creates consensus and gains agreement for proposals and ideas; stands their ground in the face of opposition; writes clearly and concisely and is readily understood by the intended audience; skilled at negotiating.

1. Tell me about the last time that you **persuaded someone** to your point of view.
How did you put across your ideas?
What kind of agreement did you reach?
On reflection, what would you do differently next time?
2. Give me an example of when you were **unable to persuade someone** around to your point of view.
What did you do?
Why didn't it work?
What feedback did you receive about your approach?
3. Give me an example of when you have **had to respond to** someone's **objections**.
What were those objections?
How did you challenge their views?
How effective were you?
4. Tell me about the last time that you **won a group of people** around to **your way of thinking**.
What was your opinion?
How did this differ from the group's original position?
What were the key things that you did to persuade the group?
5. Describe an occasion when you **had to negotiate a compromise solution**.
What did you have to compromise on?
How did you decide what you were prepared to negotiate on?
How did this affect the ongoing relationship between the groups?

* The key behavioural aspects of each question have been highlighted in **bold**.

Leadership skills*

Selection criterion: provides the team with a clear sense of direction; inspires a positive attitude to work; inspires a strong desire to succeed among team members; steers others towards successful goal and task accomplishment; promotes diversity in the team.

1. Give me an example of when you **had to lead your team** in pursuit of a **significant organisational objective**.
What did you do?
What did the project involve?
How did you know that you had been effective?
How did you ensure that the team's individual objectives were met?
2. Give me an example of when you **experienced difficulty or problems in getting a team to accept your leadership**.
What did you do to overcome this?
How were you sure that you had successfully overcome the difficulties?
What feedback did you receive from the team?
3. Give me an example of when you have **needed to motivate people** in difficult circumstances **and also keep them feeling positive?**
What did you do to ensure your team remained positive?
How did you balance the needs of the individual team members with organisational requirements?
What feedback did you receive from individuals involved?
4. Tell me about a time you **made use of the different skills** or approaches of team members.
What made you aware of the different skills in the team?
What benefits did you feel this offered you?
How did you take advantage of these benefits?
5. Give me an example of **how you implemented an organisational strategy** within your team?
What components of the overall strategy did you focus on? Why?
How did you check your team's understanding?
Is there anything that you would do differently next time?

* The key behavioural aspects of each question have been highlighted in **bold**.

Strategic thinking*

Selection criterion: thinks at a big picture level; takes a long-term view; entertains wide-ranging possibilities in developing a vision for the future.

1. Tell me about a time that you worked on something and **had to consider its longer term consequences**.
What factors did you take into account?
What was the outcome of this?
What would you do differently next time?
2. We cannot always 'keep tabs' on everything that's happening in the outside world. **When have you been surprised** and perhaps caught unawares by **something that happened outside** the organisation?
How do you usually keep abreast of outside trends?
On reflection, what might you have done to keep tabs on this and to prevent being caught unawares?
How did you react?
What was the final outcome?
3. Tell me about a time when it was **necessary** for you **to plan for several alternatives in response to changes** facing the organisation.
How did you evaluate the alternatives?
What factors did you take into consideration?
What was the outcome?
4. Tell me about a time you **had to take a broad view of a problem** rather than get stuck in the detail.
What was the problem?
How did you ensure you did not get lost in the detail?
What was the outcome of this?
5. What are the **key issues likely to affect the future of your work** or agency?
How is your role likely to change in response to these issues?
What will you need to do to meet these challenges?
What, if anything, can you do now to prepare for those changes?

* The key behavioural aspects of each question have been highlighted in **bold**.

Cross-cultural awareness*

Selection criterion: communicates well with, relates to and sees issues from the perspective of people of other cultures.

1. Tell me about a time you **had to take someone's cultural perspective into account** in dealing with them.
How did you know what their expectations would be?
How did you behave differently to meet these?
What was the outcome?
2. How would you **describe your awareness of other cultures**?
How does this compare with your peers?
How do you research other cultures and ways of doing things?
What have you learnt from this process?
3. What do you see as the **challenges of attempting to see issues from the perspective of other cultures**?
What do you take into account when doing so?
What are the benefits of doing so?
What have you learnt about yourself as a result?
4. When have you **committed a cultural mistake**?
What was the situation?
What did you do?
How were you alerted to this?

* The key behavioural aspects of each question have been highlighted in **bold**.

Organisational awareness*

Selection criterion: attuned to changing organisational dynamics; forges links with other teams and business areas; takes account of different functions in developing plans and activities.

1. Which other **teams do/did you liaise with** in your job?
How are/were they similar to and different from your own team?
What things did/do you need to take account of in cooperating with them?
How did/do you know who to liaise with?
2. It can be difficult to keep yourself fully aware of the wider organisational environment in which your team operates. When did **something you did not know about**, in another part of the organisation, **limit your ability to achieve an outcome**?
What did you learn?
How would you deal with this differently next time?
3. How do you **keep up with** your colleagues about issues in **other parts of the organisation**?
Give an example of when this was especially important.
How did you ensure you spoke to the right people?
What was the outcome?
4. How do you **find out about what is happening** in other parts of your organisation?
How would you compare your knowledge in this area to those of your colleagues?
What do they know more about than you do?
What do you know more about than they do?
5. When have you had **to consider another area's responsibilities** when working or planning work?
Why was this important?
How did you ensure their needs were addressed?
What feedback have you received on this?

* The key behavioural aspects of each question have been highlighted in **bold**.

Business focus*

Selection criterion: has knowledge of financial issues and responsibilities; focuses on knowing the business of the organisation and delivering the best outcome using the resources available; proactively seeks more efficient ways of doing things; focuses on activities and projects that will bring the best business return for the team/organisation.

1. When have you **changed a process** or system to make it more **efficient**?
How did the idea for the change come to you?
How did you go about making the change?
What was the impact of this?
2. Provide a recent example of when you have **evaluated and tracked the cost** of a particular activity.
How did this feed into future planning?
To what extent did you share this information with others?
What would you do differently next time?
3. Provide an example where you have **needed to be across financial issues** in your team?
How does your knowledge of financial issues compare to your colleagues'?
Where could your knowledge be improved?
What steps have you already taken to improve your knowledge in this area?
4. What **experience** do you have **of budgetary and cost control** in your role?
Who sets the parameters?
How do you oversee the implementation?
What feedback have you had about your skills in this area?
(For those with no direct experience: What part do you play in your team to minimise costs or overheads?)
5. **How have you** been able to **enhance your organisation's efficiency** during the past 12 months?
(Listen for sense of responsibility and awareness to work within budgets or minimise costs)
What did you do?
Why did you focus on this area?
What feedback did you get?

* The key behavioural aspects of each question have been highlighted in **bold**.

Building productive working relationships*

Selection criterion: establishes and maintains relationships with people at all levels; promotes harmony and consensus by diplomatically handling disagreements; forges useful partnerships with people across business areas, functions and organisations.

1. To what extent do you **have to meet new people** in your work? Give me an **example of when you had to do this?**
How did you build an effective relationship with them?
What were the challenges?
What would you do differently next time?
2. **With which kinds of people** have you found it **difficult to develop relationships?**
Can you tell me why?
Can you give me an example?
What steps have you taken to enhance your effectiveness in this area?
3. When have you **needed to put other people at their ease?**
Why was it important that you took the lead in doing this?
How did you do this?
How could you have made them feel even more comfortable?
4. Tell me about a time when you **had to manage conflict** between two people.
What was the conflict about?
How did you manage this?
What was the outcome?
5. Who are the **most senior and junior people you need to build relationships with?**
Tell me how you built these relationships.
In what way was your approach different, given the different seniority levels of the individuals?
What steps could you take to increase your effectiveness in this area?

* The key behavioural aspects of each question have been highlighted in **bold**.

Teamwork*

Selection criterion: cooperates and works well with others in the pursuit of team goals; shares information; supports others; shows consideration, concern and respect for others' feelings and ideas; accommodates and work well with the different working styles of others.

1. Give me an example of **when you had to support others in a team.**
Why did they require support?
How did you identify what kind of support they needed?
What was the outcome?
2. Tell me about the **last time that you worked as part of a team.**
What elements of the team environment did you most enjoy?
How did you get the team members to cooperate?
What elements of the team environment did you enjoy least? Why?
3. Tell me about a time recently when you have **had to work with people with very different styles.**
How did you accommodate for these differences?
Which style did you find it easiest to work with?
What would you do differently next time?
4. Tell me when someone has **come to you for support**, but you have been **too busy** to offer it.
Why did they come to you?
What support, if any, were you able to offer?
What was the outcome?
5. Give me an example of when you have had to **put aside personal differences to achieve** a team goal.
Why was the team goal more important?
How did you deal with the personal differences?
What impact did this have on your longer term working relationship?

* The key behavioural aspects of each question have been highlighted in **bold**.

Flexibility*

Selection criterion: adaptable; receptive to new ideas; responds and adjusts easily to changing work demands and circumstances; not bound by old ways of doing things.

1. Tell me about a time when you **needed to plan an alternative course of action** in response to a change in circumstances or demands.
How did you evaluate the alternatives?
What factors did you take into consideration?
What was the outcome?
2. It can be frustrating when the **goal posts change**. When have you been working towards a goal **when this happened?**
What did you do about it?
How did you feel?
What would you do differently next time?
3. Give me an example of when you have **needed to adapt your existing knowledge or skills** to a different situation.
(Listen for proactivity and approach to change.)
What was the situation and how was it different?
What was the outcome?
4. Tell me about a situation where your **manager suggested changes to how you do something**.
How did you feel about this? How much did you question it?
What did you do about it?
What was the outcome?
5. Tell me about the **most radical idea** or **new approach** someone has **suggested to you**.
How did you react to it?
Did you accept the idea? If not, what feedback did you give the individual who suggested it?
What did you learn from this situation?

* The key behavioural aspects of each question have been highlighted in **bold**.

Drive and commitment*

Selection criterion: demonstrates capacity for sustained effort and hard work; is enthusiastic and committed; sets high standards of performance for self and others.

1. Tell me about a **time when you had to work very hard**.
What caused this?
How did you sustain your energy and motivation?
How did you feel at the time?
2. Sometimes the **end result of work we do does not show the amount of effort** and hard work put in. **When has this happened** to you?
What happened?
How did you react?
How did you feel?
3. Tell me about a time when you **needed to maintain your and others' enthusiasm** for a challenging project.
Why was it important?
What did you do to maintain your enthusiasm?
What did you do to maintain the enthusiasm of others?
What feedback did you receive about how successful you were?
4. Provide an example which describes **how you set work standards for yourself?**
How do these compare with your colleagues?
Where would you say your standards are higher?
Where are the standards of your peers likely to be higher?
5. Provide an example which describes **how you set work standards for others?**
How does this compare with your colleagues?
Where would you say you set higher standards?
Where are the standards set by your peers higher?

* The key behavioural aspects of each question have been highlighted in **bold**.

Initiative*

Selection criterion: proactive and self-starting; seizes opportunities and acts on them; originates action and actively influences events.

1. Give me a recent example of a **time you showed initiative**.
What were the circumstances?
In what way did you show initiative?
What was the outcome?
2. Give me an example of when you **had to work without any guidance** in an unusual situation.
What kinds of decisions did you have to make?
How did you cope?
What feedback did you receive?
3. Tell me about a time when you **went to more senior people for help**.
What was the background?
Why did you need help?
To what extent do you still seek advice in this area?
4. Tell me about a time when you **took on some work outside your usual responsibilities**.
What motivated you to take on these extra tasks?
What were the consequences of this?
What feedback did you receive on this?
5. Tell me about a time you **saw an opportunity and drove it forward**.
How did you spot the opportunity?
How did you decide whether to pursue the opportunity or not?
What was the outcome?

* The key behavioural aspects of each question have been highlighted in **bold**.

Coaching and developing others*

Selection criterion: actively seeks to improve others' skills and talents by providing constructive feedback, coaching and training opportunities; effectively empowers others by investing them with the authority and latitude to accomplish tasks effectively; appropriately delegates responsibilities to further the development of others.

1. Give me an example of a time **when you have worked with someone to develop his or her skills.**
What was the situation?
How did you raise the issue?
What was the outcome?
2. Tell me about a time when you **gave someone constructive criticism.**
How did they react to this?
What motivated you to convey this message?
How did you convey the feedback to the individual?
3. When have you **had to give someone a lot of responsibility?**
How did you ensure they did not let you down?
How did you minimise the risks in delegating this level of responsibility?
4. Tell me **how you delegate tasks to others.**
Give me an example of when you were careful about who you delegated tasks to.
How did you ensure each individual's skills were best utilised?
What was the outcome?
5. Tell me about a time **you delegated** a task to someone that **they were ultimately unable to complete.**
What was the task?
Why were they unable to do it?
What would you do differently next time?

* The key behavioural aspects of each question have been highlighted in **bold**.

Resilience*

Selection criterion: perseveres to achieve goals even in the face of obstacles; copes effectively with disappointments and setbacks; remains calm and in control under pressure; accepts constructive criticism in an objective manner without becoming defensive.

1. Describe a situation in which you **needed to work under pressure** for a **long time**.
What was the cause of the pressure?
What did you do to complete the work, despite the pressure?
What would you do differently next time?
2. Tell me about a time when you **sought feedback from others**.
What was the situation?
How did you go about obtaining the feedback?
What was the outcome?
3. Tell me about a situation where you have **had to overcome considerable resistance to make something happen**.
What was the nature of the resistance?
How did you overcome this?
What was the outcome?
4. **When** have you **faced major setbacks in your work**?
What were these?
How did you deal with them?
What was the outcome?
5. Tell me about a time when **you received criticism from others**?
What was the criticism?
How did you feel?
What did you do as a result of this?

* The key behavioural aspects of each question have been highlighted in **bold**.