



State of Montana

HR Recruitment and Hiring Guidelines

June 2026

These guidelines are in addition to the State of Montana Recruitment and Selection Policy, ARM 2.21.37. The policy takes precedence over these guidelines.

Job Posting Requirements & Guidance

Overview

Qualified jobseekers are short on time and seeking easy-to-read job postings with limited application requirements. In general, do the following to attract qualified jobseekers:

- Use an upbeat and professional tone throughout the job posting;
- Use common language and avoid industry or agency-specific jargon;
- Organize postings by sections and headings to make them easy to scan;
- Emphasize the benefits; and
- Limit required applications to a resume or cover letter and resume.

Below are field-specific requirements for open-ended and text-box fields on the requisition template in the state recruiting system (SOMRS). Requirements are listed in the order in which they appear when creating a new requisition.

Working Title Requirements

The working title appears as the position's job title on the state careers site. Avoid including the following in working titles:

- Position numbers;
- Classification levels;
- Abbreviations; and
- State-specific language other than common management titles.

Application Material Requirements

- Cover letter (generally required for higher-level or professional positions).
- Resume.
- Application form.

The required application materials field no longer includes references, transcripts, writing samples, supplemental questions, or job service tests. Candidates may be asked to use a cover letter to describe their interest in the position.

Job postings shall not include specific, detailed requirements for cover letters and resumes, such as requirements to include hours worked in previous positions or instructions to answer supplemental or interview questions in a cover letter. Candidates may be asked to broadly share information about a required skill or qualification in a cover letter. For example, a job posting may request the following: *In your cover letter, share how your experience, leadership philosophy, and accomplishments connect to the*

key qualifications and responsibilities of this position. Be sure to emphasize how your strengths will elevate the quality, consistency, and impact of our services.

Additional job-related information, such as references or degree verifications, can be requested from finalists.

Salary Requirements

- Post annual salary for full-time FLSA exempt positions.
- Post hourly salary for non-exempt positions.

External and Internal Description Boxes

- Use to provide a short, positive overview of the position.
- Include a short, bulleted list of the primary job duties.
- Include a summary of benefits.
- Use descriptive, bold headings, such as job overview, job duties, and benefits.
- Use default black font and the included tool bar headings.
- Do not use red, light-colored, or highlighted font.

The following information may also be included in the description boxes:

- An agency logo or careers banner which includes the agency name at the top of description boxes;
- A short, positive agency mission statement;
- Short, neutral phrases describing primary working conditions, such as “primarily works outdoors,” “requires statewide travel,” or “works variable hours;”
- Information about first-review deadlines for open-until-filled positions; and
- A short statement about required background checks.

External and Internal Qualifications Boxes

- Use to describe minimum qualifications and required competencies.
- Use the same format as description boxes.
- Use short, bulleted statements for required skills, knowledge, and abilities.
- Use short sentences or bullets for minimum qualifications.
- Use default black font and the included tool bar headings.
- Limit required experience to five years or less.
- Avoid requiring experience with state-specific software (e.g., SABHRS) or processes.
- Focus on evaluating attributes such as strong customer-service and problem-solving skills.
- Indicate first-review deadlines and background-check requirements.

Candidate Screening & Interview Guidance

Overview

Lengthy application requirements and detailed screening and interview processes increase the position's time to fill and often emphasize easy-to-teach skills over hard-to-train competencies. The most-qualified candidates seek a professional, easy, and welcoming approach when applying for positions. These candidates may move on to other position options if a selection process is complicated or unfriendly. In general, do the following to quickly fill positions and appeal to the most-qualified candidates.

- Use a consensus-based process throughout the entire selection process.
- Conduct phone or online screening interviews to quickly narrow applicant pools.
- Use a friendly and conversational approach and update candidates throughout the process.
- Conduct behavioral-based interviews that focus on hard-to-train skills, such as relationship building, leadership, decision-making, and problem-solving skills.
- Move candidates to accurate steps and statuses in the state recruiting system (SOMRS) to track progress, ensure accurate reporting, and identify challenges with the hiring process.

Below are specific requirements for candidate screening and interviews, including requirements for tracking and documenting progress in the state recruiting system (SOMRS).

Refer to the state Recruitment and Selection policy for additional requirements, including requirements for screening criteria, consistency, and documentation.

Minimum Qualifications Screening

- Use a consensus based, non-scored process to screen candidates for minimum qualifications, unless scoring is required by a collective bargaining agreement.
- Identify and document screening criteria prior to screening applicants as required by the Recruitment and Selection policy.
- Screen candidates as they apply, or at least weekly, to expedite the screening process.
- Limit the number of employees who screen for minimum qualifications to two employees maximum, including at least one HR employee.
- Consider candidates' application forms and resumes as interchangeable documents.
- Use the request for missing information template to ask candidates for missing cover letters.

- Move all candidates meeting or exceeding the minimum qualifications to the Screening step in SOMRS.
- Leave unqualified candidates in the New step in SOMRS and place them in a Not Selected or Rejected status.
- Use the template Not Selected correspondence in SOMRS to quickly notify unqualified candidates they were not selected to move forward in the selection process.

Select Candidates for Screening Interviews

Be inclusive and broad when selecting candidates for screening interviews. Including more candidates initially may assist with finding a successful candidate who better matches the needs of the position.

Candidates who just meet minimum requirements or who have alternative combinations of experience may demonstrate strong, hard-to-teach competencies for a better job fit.

- Use a consensus-based process to select candidates for short screening interviews.
- Select the candidates who best meet the qualifications for the position.
- Document any preferred experience or competencies used to identify interview candidates.
- Move all candidates selected for screening interviews to the Interview step and Phone Screen status in SOMRS.
- Leave all minimally qualified non-selected candidates in the Screening step in SOMRS and place them in an Under Consideration, Not Selected, or Rejected status.
- Do not use pre-interview screening tests unless required by a collective bargaining agreement.
- Screeners may identify screening-interview candidates while also screening for minimum qualifications.
- The hiring committee may bypass screening interviews if fewer than 5 candidates meet the minimum qualifications.

Conduct Short Screening Interviews (Phone Screen or Online)

Use screening interviews to reduce time spent on in-person interviews and ensure that the candidates selected for in-person interviews are strong, qualified candidates.

- Conduct screening interviews via phone or use online meeting software (Teams, Zoom, etc.).

- Limit screening interviews to 4-6 job-related questions and primarily use behavioral-based interview questions (see sample interview questions).
 - Ask job-related questions and never ask questions related to information about a protected class, such as age, race, disability, or marital status.
- Do not provide screening interview questions to candidates in advance.
- Limit screening interview panel to 2-3 members, including at least one participant from HR (may use larger panels for top-level positions).
- Use a consensus-based approach to evaluate candidates on their ability to provide specific, job-related examples in response to interview questions and the required knowledge, skills, and abilities included in the job posting.
- Leave all candidates selected for interviews in the Interview step and place them in the First Interview status in SOMRS.
- Leave candidates not selected for interviews in the Interview step and place them in an Under Consideration, Not Selected, or Rejected status.
- Provide candidates with accurate timelines and follow up if the selection process is delayed.
- Call unsuccessful screening- interview candidates to notify them that they were not selected.

In-Person Interviews

Use in-person interviews to thoroughly evaluate the most-qualified candidates. Interviews also provide candidates with a first impression of what it will be like to work for an agency or work unit.

Follow a consistent process for all candidates to ensure compliance with the Recruitment and Selection policy and to allow the hiring panel to evaluate and compare applicants fairly.

- Conduct in-person or video interviews with successful screening-interview candidates.
- Use primarily behavioral-based interview questions (see sample interview questions) and do not provide questions to candidates in advance.
 - Ask job-related questions and never ask questions related to information about a protected class, such as age, race, disability, or marital status.
- Limit interview-panel participants to the extent possible and include at least one participant from HR.
- Allow at least one hour for each interview and schedule breaks between interviews.

- Use a friendly and conversational approach when interviewing candidates.
 - Make frequent eye contact and never tell a candidate you will not make eye contact.
- If necessary, designate one person to take notes to allow the other panel members to maintain a conversational approach with candidates.
- Ask job-related follow-up questions and encourage candidates to provide alternate or closely related examples if they do not have specific examples or experience for a specific question.
- Use a consensus-based approach to evaluate candidates regarding their ability to provide specific, job-related examples to interview questions and how their knowledge, skills, and abilities match with the specific needs of the position.
- Provide candidates with accurate timelines and follow up if the selection process is delayed.
- Call unsuccessful interview candidates to notify them that they were not selected.
- Place candidates in the Step and Status in SOMRS that best reflects each candidate's status in the selection process.

Additional Interviews

- Additional interviews may be appropriate to further evaluate candidates if a top candidate is not identified or to allow division administrators and/or higher-level management to evaluate finalists.
- Follow the same process as above for additional interviews.
 - The hiring committee may identify 1-2 job-related priorities to discuss in high-level management evaluations instead of using a formal or prepared interview process.
- Move candidates to the Step and Status in SOMRS that best reflects each candidate's status in the selection process.

Sample Interview Questions

- Quickly walk us through your resume. How does your previous experience relate to this position? Why did you move from one position to the next?
- Describe a time when you made a mistake at work. What was the mistake? Who found it? What happened to address the mistake?
- Please describe a specific situation or challenge that you would handle differently if you could do it over again. What would you do differently and why?
- Tell us about a time when you had to learn a new process or acquire new knowledge to complete a project at work.
- Tell us about a time when you had a difference of opinion with your boss. What was the situation and what was the outcome?
- Tell us about your philosophy of customer service. Share with us a specific example of you demonstrating that customer-service philosophy.
- Describe a time when you were confronted by an unhappy or angry customer or client. What did you do? What was the outcome?
- Tell us about a time when you developed a new policy, procedure, or process? What was the procedure? Why was it needed? What did you do to implement the new procedure?
- Describe a time when you took initiative to resolve a recurring problem or improve a work process. What did you do? What was the outcome?
- Tell us about a time when you discovered a compliance issue with a policy or regulation. What was the issue? What did you do? What was the outcome?
- Tell us about a time when you sought support for your idea for implementing change within an organization. What was the idea? How did you gather support? What was the outcome?
- Please tell us about a time when you had to build relationships with organizations, interested parties, and other stakeholders to accomplish a work goal. What was the goal? What was the outcome?
- Tell us about a time when you were able to influence someone to do something the person initially did not want to do. What did you do to gain commitment from that individual?

- Describe a time when you used a different approach to accomplish a goal after your initial approach failed. What did you do? What was the outcome?
- Describe a time when you had to deal with public criticism or conflict from a decision you made. What did you do to address the issues? What was the result?
- Please tell us about your budgeting experience, including your specific experience with public-sector budgeting.
- Why are you seeking a new career opportunity? What specifically interests you about this position?
- Your resume indicates you have more experience than this position requires. Why are you interested in changing your career path?

Management-Related Questions

(may be useful for entry-level lead or supervisory positions)

- Please describe a time when you developed and implemented a strategic vision or plan for your unit or department.
- Tell us about your philosophy of performance management. Share with us how you have used your performance-management philosophy with direct reports.
- Please describe your management style. What do you think your employees would say about your management style?
- Please tell us about a management situation you would handle differently if you could do it over again? What would you do differently and why?
- Describe a difficult performance-management challenge you addressed as a manager. What was the outcome?