A brief guide:

Providing good feedback to unsuccessful interviewed job applicants

Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this guide

Providing good feedback is arguably one of the most important and most difficult things to do during the recruitment process. It is also one of the most overlooked.

This brief guide provides advice for hiring managers and recruiters preparing to provide feedback to candidates who were unsuccessful in a recruitment process but who made it through to the final interview stages of that process.

For the purpose of this guide, the recruitment process includes recruitment actions to fill a new or existing role through employment (ongoing, temporary or term); or mobility (secondment, transfer or temporary assignment).

1.2 NSW Public Sector Recruitment and Selection Guide

Recruitment is about attracting and selecting the right person to the role, based on the capabilities required to perform the role effectively.[1] The capabilities identified in the role description, as well as the accountabilities and technical or qualification requirements, should inform all stages of the recruitment cycle, including advertising, selection, assessment **and the feedback process.**

The NSW public sector recruits employees based on merit. This means that from a field of applicants the person best suited to the requirements of the role and the needs of the public service agency in which the person is to be employed is selected.

To ensure that the recruitment process is accessible to all and managed successfully end-to-end, we recommend that this guide be read in conjunction with the NSW Public Service Commission's suite of resources in the Recruitment and Selection Guide: including:

- Effective planning for your recruitment and selection approach – to create a positive candidate experience, including promoting diversity and inclusion and preventing discrimination in your recruitment and selection process.

- A Practical guide to interviewing

- Making offers and receiving feedback

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[1] Capabilities, knowledge and experience make up the 'pre-established standards' for a role and are required to be assessed as part of a comparative or suitability assessment.

2 Why good feedback matters

There are a number of reasons why good feedback matters and central to this is the mutual benefits for all involved; the candidate benefits from information shared to improve for next time, the hiring manager has the opportunity to master their skills in providing feedback and the organisation and sector broadly benefits in terms of reputation and a future pipeline of talent.

2.1 Good candidate care

Generally the first a candidate gets to hear about their unsuccessful application is by letter or email and these tend to be both impersonal and non-specific.

Providing feedback is good candidate care; it demonstrates that you value the person, appreciate the time they have taken to participate in your recruitment process and reinforces the value of the NSW public sector.

2.2 It's the smart thing to do

Good feedback is the smart thing to do from an agency perspective as unsuccessful candidates may be suitable for future vacancies and may form an important source of future pipeline talent for your agency.

2.3 Enhance employer of choice

Good feedback can improve your agency's reputation as an employer of choice. A recent unpublished study of NSW public sector recruitment found that most applicants report not receiving feedback on their applications and are very dissatisfied with the feedback they do receive.[2]

2.4 Actionable feedback can improve career development

Good feedback can help candidates learn from their experience and improve for next time. Actionable feedback (clear and tactical information about what to do) can have a positive impact on career development. However, research suggests that the actions and specific development required to be ready for promotion for example, are rarely made clear to employees. This is particularly true for women.[3]

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[2] NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet Behavioural Insights Unit – unpublished study.

[3] Bain & Company Inc, Chief Executive Women – Advancing Women in Australia: Eliminating Bias in Feedback and Promotions, 2017

3   Diversity matters

The recruitment process relies on human decisions and evidence from behavioural science suggests that the way we make decisions can be biased in a number of ways.[4] In a similar way, the nature and impact of feedback can also unintentionally vary.

Good feedback requires us to tackle our biases. This matters if we are to leverage and benefit from the diversity of talent available and have a workforce that reflects the community we serve.

Research has identified some examples:

Women are more likely to:
- report feedback changed their likelihood to apply again in the future compared to men

- be responsive to encouraging feedback because they have been shown to undervalue their skills and experience relative to equally qualified men.

DPC Behavioural Insights Unit - unpublished study

There are substantial differences identified in the feedback provided to women and men:
- women are told more frequently than men that they need to display "more confidence" and need "more experience" to be promoted, but

- women are less likely to receive clear and actionable feedback than men.

Bain & Company Inc, Chief Executive Women

The nature of feedback provided to older job candidates can lead them to conclude that their age has been a factor in recruitment decisions. For example, using terminology such as they were not successful because they "did not fit the workplace culture"

Australian Human Rights Commission - Qualitative study of employment discrimination against older Australians, 2016

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[4] NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet Behavioural Insights Unit - <u>Behavioural Approaches to increasing Workforce diversity</u> August 2016.

4 How to provide good feedback

"All I needed was someone to take the time to tell me whether my application was good enough. That's all I needed." (Manager in a NSW Government Department)

Research suggests hiring managers perceive a number of barriers to giving good feedback:

1. Time – providing feedback is often cited as an additional pressure on hiring managers' workload.

2. Concern about what they can/can't say.

3. Concern about the emotional reactions of candidates (anger, disappointment etc).

These are a few things you can do to help manage the process.

4.1 Plan ahead and be prepared

Providing feedback to unsuccessful candidates can feel like a daunting task but it needn't be. Good feedback demands that you are well prepared for the conversation. Providing feedback shouldn't take too much of your time if you prepare ahead (15-20 minutes). These are a few things you can do:

- For bulk recruitment campaigns, consider using an electronic scheduling system or online meeting schedule so that candidates can choose a time that is suitable to them and you.

- Review your interview notes and identify the top strengths and weaknesses the candidate demonstrated in terms of their underlined capabilities and areas for development. Refer back to these notes when giving your feedback.

- Inspire the candidate by gathering and sharing information about the actionable and practical things they can do to improve the development areas you have identified.

4.2 Offer constructive and actionable feedback

From the candidate's perspective receiving feedback provides an opportunity for them to grow their career if they are provided with useful information that can help them do better next time.

When giving feedback it's a good idea to start off with the **positives** before addressing the areas where the candidate could have done better. Give **specific examples** and **encourage them** to continue to develop their strengths. Be authentic in your feedback.

Offer **realistic and objective** advice. For example, identify capabilities needing improvement and areas for development. Make sure your reasons are objective, not subjective like "*I didn't feel you would be able to cope with the workload*".

How to provide good feedback

Offer candidates **actionable** feedback so they will have something useful to take away. Let them know for example about the skills they could improve to develop their capabilities.

Use the SMARTT Principles and the Dos and Don'ts checklist in Appendices to help you prepare and provide constructive and actionable feedback.

4.3 What to do when feedback doesn't go well

Most feedback will be received positively but there may be times when candidates disagree with your feedback or even become upset. For feedback to have impact it will be important that the candidate feels they have been heard. Actively listening to what the candidate is saying is important. This can include, creating opportunities for them to respond so you have the whole story (pausing), using expanders (asking for examples), checking your understanding by paraphrasing what they have said or seeking clarification and acknowledging their feelings. Some top tips include:

- Listen to the candidate's concerns and acknowledge them

- Stay calm and be objective

- Let the candidate express their feelings (they may just want to be heard)

- Offer a follow up meeting if the candidate is too distressed

- Close the conversation while remaining respectful to their point of view by focusing on the future, for example: *"I can hear that you found the interview process really stressful, is there anything we could do to improve your experience in the future?"*

For more information on active listening follow this link

4.4 Always say thank you

Always thank candidates for the time and effort they have given to the recruitment process. Remember, they have most likely accommodated their schedules around your availability. Saying thank you shows your appreciation.

How to provide good feedback

4.5　An example feedback script

Pre phone call planning– identify the top things to share

1: Very strong examples on managing a complex procurement process with significant budgets attached.

2: Communication skills clearly demonstrated in the role play.

3: Struggled to provide an example of a project that involved complex data analysis to inform delivery of a policy initiative. Notes confirm studied statistics at University and they are passionate about data informing policy.

Planned feedback

- ***Thank you***

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the recruitment process for the job and for coming in for the interview. I appreciate that it involved a lot of work and commitment.

- ***Be positive***

I want to start off by congratulating you on progressing to the final stage of the assessment process, it was a very competitive process. During the interview we were very impressed by the knowledge you had on the procurement process and the practical examples you gave us. We were also impressed with the communication skills you demonstrated in the role play. These areas were clearly strengths.

- ***Provide constructive and actionable feedback***

As you know, two of the focus capabilities for this role are Think and Solve Problems and Project Management. These are areas you could have done better by providing an example of managing a project that required complex data analysis. In the role you applied for data analysis informs the program of work and requires advanced capabilities. From the example you gave we didn't get the sense that you had a lot of experience in this area but we could see potential and were impressed by the passion you showed for data informing evidence and the policy process. If this is an area that interests you, you could consider getting on the job exposure in your current role – it would be a great boost for you.

- ***Actively listen***

 [Pause. Give the candidate an opportunity to respond].

ABS run some great courses in data analysis in policy application – this could be something to explore too?

[Pause. Give the candidate an opportunity to respond].

- ***Be thoughtful***

Is there anything you'd like to ask me about the interview?

How to provide good feedback

- ***Finish on an encouraging note and repeat your thanks***

We really liked you and you've clearly got some great strengths. Like we've discussed, if you were keen to move into this type of role, look at building some of your project management and data analytical skills and know-how and you'd be in a better position if a future role come ups. Keep looking for opportunities to work for us as well. We have more recruitment happening in next few months, so keep an eye on Iwork for NSW. Again, thank you for your time and effort and I wish you all the best in your future career.

Use the SMARTT Principles and the Dos and Don'ts checklist in Appendices to help you prepare and provide constructive and actionable feedback.

5 Appendices

5.1 SMARTT tips for giving good feedback

The following SMARTT tips provide general principles to follow when giving feedback.

Specific	Be specific, factual and objective. Vague feedback that doesn't address a particular issue may not be easily understood.
Measureable	Suggest quantifiable attainable actions for the candidate.
Actionable	Provide actionable and tactical tips on how to develop and improve.
Realistic	Give achievable feedback that candidates can realistically work on. Pick the top two or three specific development areas.
Timely	Give feedback in a timely manner. The sooner you provide feedback, the fresher it will be in both of your minds.
Thoughtful	Consider the candidate's individual circumstances and how best to gain their understanding, acceptance and buy-in to the feedback.

Based on SMARTT tips to giving clear feedback from Bain and Company, Inc and Chief Executive Women – *Advancing Women in Australia: Eliminating Bias in Feedback and Promotions*, 2017

Appendices

5.2   The Dos and Don'ts of giving good feedback – a checklist

DO or DON'T	Description	Example constructive statements
DO **be prepared**	Review your interview notes and have them on hand. Review assessment results and other relevant documents (eg task sheets). Identify the top three things you'd like to provide feedback on. Identify some actionable and practical things the candidate can do to improve for next time.	Not applicable
DO **be timely**	Provide feedback as soon as practicable.	• *Thank you for calling yesterday about getting feedback on your interview. I've set sometime aside in my diary to give candidates feedback. Would this Wednesday suit you?*
DON'T **rush**	Plan and prepare for the session. Understand the candidate's needs and tailor your feedback accordingly. Allow enough time that is convenient for you and the candidate. Choose a quiet and private place to provide feedback so you won't be interrupted and the person knows they have your full attention.	• *I know this is important to you so let's make an appointment to discuss this. Are there any issues you'd particularly like to talk about?* • *What format of feedback works best for you – are you happy to talk on the phone?* • *We should catch up face-to-face* (candidate works in same business as you).
DO **be attentive**	Actively listen. Listen closely and check that the candidate understands. Give the candidate an opportunity to ask questions.	• *Is there anything you would like me to cover again?* • *Do you have any further questions?*
DO **be positive**	Tell the candidate what they did well so they can keep doing it and be authentic in your advice. Refer to specific focus capabilities or behaviours to be improved and make practical suggestions that the	• *In your interview your communication skills and commitment to customer service were clearly a strength. We thought you could benefit from more project management experience and could*

Appendices

DO or DON'T	Description	Example constructive statements
	candidate can advance.	*have provided more detailed examples of procurement.* • *Throughout the assessment process you demonstrated good verbal communication skills but your written communication skills were not shown to be at the required level for this role.*
DO **be objective**	Ensure that your feedback is factual and focused on the focus capabilities and behaviours displayed. Check that your feedback is not influenced by personal bias, myths or stereotypes.	• *In this role you need to display resilience and courage in responding to significant, complex and novel challenges.* • *When we asked about customer service you didn't give an example of when you dealt with difficult stakeholders to resolve a situation.* • *You could benefit by demonstrating how you took ownership of a task and persisted through challenges to deliver results.*
DON'T **disclose**	Avoid commenting on other candidates' performances (including the successful candidate). You could however speak in general terms about what 'good' looked like. Difficult questions can often be asked (eg where did I rank? what was my score? how many applied?). If you're not sure you can disclose this information or how to, check with HR and report back.	• *On this occasion, you would have been more competitive if you had demonstrated a higher commitment to customer service, in particular how you co-operated with internal and external parties to improve outcomes for customers.* • *I need to check with HR on that and I'll get back to you as soon as I can.*
DO **be customer focused**	Treat the candidate with respect, thank them for their time - they can enhance your agency's reputation as an employer of choice.	• *Do you have any suggestions as to how we can improve our recruitment practices?* • *We would welcome you applying again for other opportunities within our agency. Thank you for taking the time to reach out to us.*

Appendices

DO or DON'T	Description	Example constructive statements
DON'T **use raw test scores**	Use rating scale descriptors when giving feedback on tests or assessments. Only give feedback on cognitive ability test or personality questionnaires if you are qualified to do so.	• *I don't have the expertise to provide you with the information you have requested but I'll arrange to have someone qualified talk to you about your test results.*
DO **be encouraging**	Encourage the candidate to develop their capabilities. Encourage the candidate to think about applying for a future role in your agency or the sector. Check if they have set up job alerts and preferences to match what they are looking for. Encourage the candidate who, while not successful for this role, nonetheless met the standards required for the role and will be placed in a talent pool. Explain what a talent pool means, how long it lasts for and encourage them to disclose their talent pool status if they re-apply for a role.	• *You would benefit from more experience in procurement and contract management if you are interested in a role like this.* • *Take a look at the PSC's Capability Discovery Tool – it may help you to reflect and take action on the capability and development needs we've discussed.* • *The NSW public sector has many great career opportunities, so I encourage you to develop the capabilities we've discussed and consider applying again in the future.* • *While you weren't successful for this role, we do have encouraging news as we did assess you as meeting the standards required for the role and we'd really like to place you in our talent pool.*