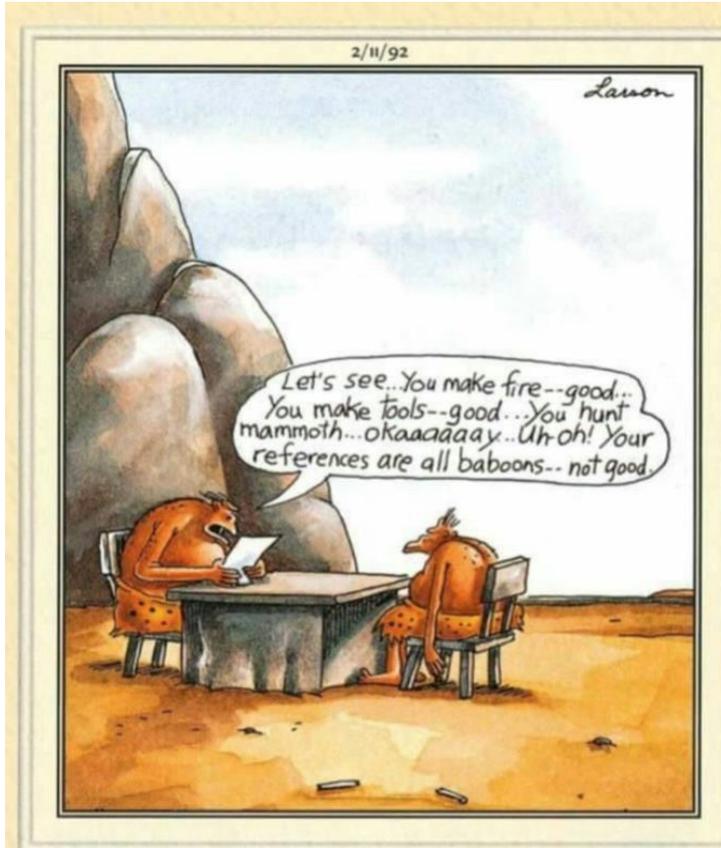


Chapter 4: Effective Interviews



It's been borne out repeatedly in NAP, as well as other apprenticeship programs: Every hour of time you spend preparing for and conducting interviews pays off. Thoughtful questions that get to the core of an applicant's motivation for applying to your position means you'll hire someone well suited to what you offer. Helping the applicant relax into the interview means you'll experience a true picture of who they are and how they'll meet your needs for the position.

The NAP process is on the long side, so it is thorough. Engage with each step, and it is unlikely you'll choose an apprentice who is unhappy with you, and unable to meet your expectations.

Resources:

- [Zoom Recording](#) from the fall 2020 NAP mentor training call
- [San Juan Ranch Applicant Score Sheet](#)
- [NAP Application Rubric Score Sheet](#)
- ["Tell me more" Questions for interviews](#)
- Email templates for communicating with applicants:
 - [Decline to Interview](#)
 - [Invitation to interview](#)
 - [Maybe awaiting further developments](#)
 - [Decline post Interview](#)
 - [Congratulations Accepted](#)
- [2021 NAP Apprenticeship First Interview sample script](#)
- [Sample Interview Questions, from the AqALN Apprenticeship Toolkit](#)
- [Details to Cover in Interview Process](#)
- [2nd Interview Fun Questions](#)

- [Questions for References that elicit more detailed information](#)

In 2020, Ana Guevara from Adams State University in Alamosa, CO hosted a Mentor Training Call on “Bias Prevention in Hiring” for NAP mentors. Here are the [slides](#) and the [Zoom recording](#). Ana provided detail on various state guidelines and regulations that are extremely useful.

Historically, NAP has a two-step interview process: a first video/phone interview with your 4-6 semi-finalists, then a site visit/work interview for your 2-3 finalists. In 2021, the site visit interview was replaced by a second video interview. Suggestions for conducting a second video interview will be noted later in this chapter.

For the 2021 apprenticeship season, applications opened November 1 and closed December 15, 2021. Interviews began in late December and concluded in late January 2021, with offers made throughout January. Most apprenticeships begin in March, and as your apprentice will need at least a few weeks to transition from their current job and housing situation, completing hiring by early February gives them (and you) ample time to prepare for the upcoming season.

Mentors are strongly encouraged to stick with the timeline NAP staff outline each year, as apprentices apply to multiple NAP sites (as well as other jobs) and you risk missing out on a top candidate if you delay your initial interviews.

For the 2021 season, this was the general schedule:

Date	Event	Notes
Nov 1 - Dec 15	Applications open and close	Read and review as they come in
Dec 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Select and contact applicants to invite to interview, decline or place on hold</i> • <i>Determine your interview schedule for 1st round</i> 	Determine your top 4-6 semi-finalists, use NAP email templates to send notice to all applicants as to their status
Jan 4	Deadline for notifying all applicants as to whether they are invited to interview, won't be invited, or are in the holding	You may contact applicants sooner to set up interviews. You must

	pattern	respond to all applicants by Jan 4.
Dec 26 - Jan 15	First round interviews- please note that some mentors may move to their 2nd round of interviews during this time period	Prepare interview script and specific questions for semi-finalists; do interviews
Jan 15 - Jan 31	Complete 2nd round interviews	Complete 2nd round interviews and make offer to your top choice

Deciding who to Interview

Hopefully you used a score sheet or matrix, or made detailed notes when you first read applications. That pays off now, as you consider your applicants and choose those you wish to interview, those you definitely will not interview, and who are you “maybe” candidates. These score sheets are in the earlier chapter, “Evaluating Written Applications” and are also here:

- [San Juan Ranch Applicant score sheet](#)
- [NAP Application Rubric Score Sheet](#)

Over the years, NAP mentors discovered that the following steps yield the most thorough and thoughtful decision:

- Review your notes. Elicit input from any employee or family member who will have regular contact or mentoring duties with the apprentice.
 - The more eyes and brains in the process the better, according to most mentors
 - Ask for input from your NAP Coordinator - they often have had personal conversations with applicants and can help you determine who is a good fit for your mentoring style and operation.
 - Encourage all members of your team to be honest and frank with concerns, priorities, and which applicants they feel are best suited. See “Evaluating Applications” for more on this
- Prepare specific questions for each candidate, based on elements in their resume/application that you want to hear more about, or things they don’t mention (check out: ["Tell me more" Questions for interviews](#))
- Really try the score sheets. Using numerical scores in categories of the score sheet helps you 1) remember everything mentioned in a resume and application; and 2) practice objectivity in assessing applicants

- It is quite easy to read an application and feel positive about the person, and forget to clearly assess their skills, aptitude and fit for your operation.
- It's normal to feel drawn to one applicant over another, but be wary of how this can cloud your judgment -- the score sheet and your team or NAP Coordinator can help you see the "blind spots" in your assessment of an applicant you instinctively like
- This can help when you need to pair down your list of potential interviewees to a reasonable number - we recommend between 4-6, 7 is usually ok, but more than that can become hard to fit into your schedule and do more than a cursory interview

Communicating with your Applicants

Once you have decided who to interview, who you won't interview, and who is a "maybe I'll interview", send the appropriate email to each applicant by the date set by the NAP staff.

- Send the "[Decline to Interview](#)" email to anyone you are sure you don't want to interview: i.e. you would rather not have an apprentice than take that person
- Send the "[Invitation to Interview](#)" email to those you will be interviewing for the first round
- Send the "[Maybe](#)" email to those who are your "B" list: people you might want to interview if your top picks end up not being a good fit.
- You will also find the post-interview email stating that the person won't be moving to the 2nd stage of interviews, and a sample Congratulations email for your top pick.
 - [Decline post Interview](#)
 - [Congratulations Accepted](#)

Preparing your Interview

NAP recommends that you create a basic script for all of your interviews. There are two good reasons for this: 1) you won't forget to ask something; and 2) it guarantees that you give everyone the same opportunity to share why they want to apprentice with you and what they have to offer.

- To date, NAP has never had any applicant file an unfair hiring claim against a mentor, and no one wants this to occur. The best protection against this is for you to have a script that you follow, so you can prove you gave everyone the same basic interview
 - Sample script: [2021 NAP Apprenticeship First Interview sample script](#)

- In addition to the basic questions you ask everyone, it is fine to add a number of questions specific to that applicant. These two documents offer some ideas:
 - ["Tell me more" Questions for interviews](#) has suggestions on how to create questions based on the applications
 - [Sample Interview Questions, from the AqALN Aq Apprenticeship Toolkit](#)
- Include a brief description of your operation-- no more than 5 minutes. You can ask them about their questions about the operation later in the interview.
- Have ready whatever note taking or score sheet you are using. Here are the 2 template NAP offers to mentors, but feel free to make your own based on what you are looking for: [San Juan Ranch Applicant Score Sheet](#), [NAP Application Rubric Score Sheet](#)
- Practice using Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts, whatever video platform you will use

What you CANT ask

Some questions **can not** be asked or implied during an interview. This is a federal regulation and NAP does ask you to abide by all laws related to bias in hiring. ***You cannot ask about age, marital status, religion, political leanings, specific health conditions (this includes mental health), or sexual orientation.*** In addition, your state may have other topics that cannot be discussed in an interview.

Because the apprenticeship is a physically demanding position requiring the ability to live and work in extreme weather and isolated areas, mentors can feel challenged to learn what they need to know to safely hire a person qualified and capable of the position. There are some legal ways to clarify the requirements of the position in order to be sure your applicant understands that they must meet these requirements.

- Be frank in your written site description on the NAP web page, and in your interview about the physical requirements of the job, exposure to allergens, distance to medical professionals. For example: "This position requires ongoing work in subzero weather: how would you manage that?" "The apprentice will be exposed to animal dander, pollen, dust, and other allergens regularly and will need to be able to work safely in these conditions."
- You can also clarify how your values influence your business and work environment: that you go to church on Sunday so the apprentice will need to do chores that day, or it is a day of rest for all; that you believe climate change is real and discuss this in your management decisions; etc.
- You can ask "is there anything we should know that would come up on a background check?"

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Interview pointers

Determine what is ***most important*** to you to learn during the interview: personality, experience, interests, passion, etc. Ask questions that will help you learn more about these things. Look at the questions in the [“Tell Me More” Questions for Interviews](#) document.

- Avoid “selling” yourself. You want the best person for you, and you need to find out if *you* are a good fit for their goals and needs. It’s like matchmaking: they are interviewing you too
- Reiterate that there are no silly questions: tell them that they can ask whatever they need to in order to find out whether your position is right for them
- Bounce back and forth between you talking, and leaving room for them to ask their questions
- You might need to prompt them for their questions, if they are nervous or shy. Prompts are included

First Interview Process

- Use Skype, Google Hangouts, or Zoom - practice in advance!
 - Send them a phone number to call you if they find they are having internet challenges on the day of the interview. This way you can proceed via phone if need be
- Plan on 45 minutes to an hour in length to do a basic evaluation regarding whether you are a good fit for them and they are good for your position. Here’s a sample interview script for a first interview: [2021 NAP Apprenticeship First Interview sample script](#)
- Things to cover:
 - Mentor: articulate what they’re looking for in an apprentice
 - Apprentice: articulate what they’re looking for in a mentor and apprenticeship
 - Basic minimum requirements: starting date/availability, any skills you need them to already have such as horsemanship skills, driving a manual transmission, etc.

- Review compensation (stipend, room and board), and other important points - a few details about your location, days off schedule, work schedule
 - Cover any deal-breaker issues or policies: no smoking, Covid restrictions on visitors, pets or working animals they want to bring, etc.
 - Ask if they have any questions about things they read in the site description. This is a better use of time than having you describe your operation for 5-10 minutes.
 - Be sure to give an accurate picture of housing, how far it is to town, etc. -- this is even more critical due to Covid impacts
 - Ask a few of the questions that are specific to that applicant, per your review of their application and resume. These will help you determine if you want to invite them for a second round: ["Tell me more" Questions for interviews](#)
 - If there's something in their application/resume that you want to know more about, to understand their level of experience or judgement.
 - Offer an opportunity for them to ask questions
 - Reiterate that there are no silly questions
 - Offer some leading questions, to gauge their curiosity
 - "You mentioned___about our operation as one reason you applied to us. Can you tell me more about your interest in this?"
 - "Do you have any questions about how we structure our business?"
 - "Do you have any questions about our land management practices?"
 - "Is there something specific in our site description that was of interest to you that you want to pursue if you come work here?"
- Be sure to let them know when they will hear from you, letting them know if they will be moving forward to the 2nd interview or not

Choose Your Finalists

- Narrow it down to ideally 2-3 candidates for 2nd round interviews
- Call references if you haven't already. Prepare some good questions. Try these [Questions for References](#) to elicit full, honest information from them.:
- Send out your invitation for the 2nd interview. You can modify the [Invitation to Interview template](#) to note specifics you want to discuss in the 2nd interview.
- If you have some things you want to ask in an email prior to that 2nd interview, that's ok

- Offer your finalists an opportunity to talk with a reference of yours: a past employee or apprentice of yours. If with past NAP apprentice, the NAP coordinator can be on the call
- Consider sending them a digital photo album of your operation: their housing is a key consideration for them, so indoor and outdoor photos of this are really important. Photos of fields, animals, weather good and nasty, etc.

Second Interview for your finalists

Site Visit Option

Historically, NAP asked mentors to host their finalists for an on-site, work day visit as the 2nd interview. Nothing can compare to meeting each other in person, sharing a meal, working together for a few hours; what you learn about the applicant and, *just as important*, what they learn about you, is the best way to learn whether you will be happy to see each other, day after day, for eight months.

Depending on how far you are from an airport or how long a drive it is for your finalist, you may need to host them overnight (which is one reason why NAP did not require this during Covid-19). NAP has a small fund to use to help offset the cost of applicant travel to mentor sites, but this usually does not cover the full cost of plane fare. Mentors have offered additional financial assistance to applicants to help with costs. With the expansion of NAP to multiple states and over 25 mentor sites, it may become impossible to financially assist with interview travel. However, if it is possible for your finalist to meet you in person, visit your ranch or farm, and get a sense of your region and isolation factor, it is worth attempting.

Here's a sample site visit schedule:

8 am	Applicant arrives for brief intro
8:30 am	Chores done with mentor, encourage them to ask questions about what you are doing and why. Explain this to them
11 am	Inside time to answer their questions about the area, weather, housing (give them a tour our apprentice housing), any other details they need to know
noon	Eat lunch together -- consider making it

	and seeing if they volunteer to help with something!
1:30 pm	Ask your final questions and answer theirs

Topics to consider covering:

- Review any ranch policies that seem to need underscoring
- Show them the housing and discuss whether utilities, internet, etc are included
- Work schedule, days off, if vacation or additional time is needed
 - Ask if they anticipate needing to be away for family matters, etc
- Share some thoughts about why you ranch/farm the way you do
- Give them a sense of how far away town is, how isolated you are or aren't
- Play a game, have a more personal or informal talk while taking a walk -- do something to help them relax so you get a sense of what they are like outside of an interview setting
- [Details to Cover in Interview Process](#)

Virtual Option

Covid-19 made it necessary for NAP to create an alternative to the in-person, site visit 2nd interview. Post-Covid, it may still make sense to use this alternative when funds or travel distance make a site visit impossible.

If your first interview was brief, we recommend allotting at least 60 minutes for the second interview. This provides time to ask and answer questions thoroughly, go into detail with elements of your apprenticeship offering, and gather details about their experience. Your goal here is to learn more about the person as well as about their experience, so finding some less formal questions and topics will help you crack through the "interview persona" and get a real sense of each other.

Things to consider including:

- Ask what elements of your operation they are most curious about
- Share some stories about long days, good days, something you really love about your life and work
- Consider a virtual tour of work spaces, outbuildings, fields where they will work
- **Clearly cover housing and board (internet access is critical for this generation, and for their NAP requirements), days off, if they can go away for a longer stretch at some point in the season, stipend, rules**

- Ask a few more of those “Tell Me More” questions -- this is your chance to find out if they are right for you or not.
- [Here are some more light-hearted questions](#). One mentor site had the applicant pick 2, the mentors picked 2, and then everyone on the interview answered each question. This was a way to have an ‘informal’ chat about a non-work related topic, to mimic the kind of conversation that happens during site visit interviews:
- Ask about conflicts they have encountered, communication style -- things to help you know where they need may be challenged and your mentoring will need to kick up
- Go through scenarios that have come up in the past, positive and challenging, with your operation or with apprentices
- Ask any deal-breaker questions
- Consider asking them if they have ever lived in a place that was remote, stretched them out of their comfort zone, or was in a new culture to them. Ask what they did to cope, and thrive, in such a situation. If they have not yet had an experience like this, ask them how they think they will be challenged and any thoughts they have on strategies to help them thrive. This gets to the issue of isolation and support systems, without asking directly if they have family or friends who function as a support system.
- Help them learn more about your mentoring style, how you organize your days, help them get a sense of the flavor of your operation. This ensures a good fit for both of you.
- [Details to Cover in Interview Process](#)

Final Thoughts

It isn’t just about experience; you’re looking for the person who will be the best fit for all you offer: what you will teach, how you mentor, where your operation is located and what you raise, and what their vision of their future is and how your operation will further that dream.