

Designing the application form

On this page

Screening

Application

Your aim is to gain as much evidence as possible about whether a candidate has the **capabilities, knowledge and experience** needed for the role using a well-designed application process.

Screening

There are two main tools in the I work for NSW e-recruitment system to help you screen for any essential requirements and, in some cases, specific focus capabilities for the role. These include:

Gross negative disqualifiers (or disqualification questions)

Gross negative disqualifiers tell candidates immediately if they do not meet an essential requirement for the role. If the candidate does not meet the requirement they cannot progress with their application. These questions should be used for essential requirements such as:

- **citizenship and residency requirements**
- **qualifications** (eg. degree for a graduate program)
- certifications (eg. first aid certificate)
- licences (eg. driver's licence, practising certificate for solicitors)
- registration (eg. registered with a board or other professional body – registered nurse)
- criteria for identified roles e.g. confirmation of Aboriginality

Agencies can **ask** for disqualification questions to be built into the I work for NSW requisition template.

Other pre-screening questions

Other questions, including **targeted questions**, can be included in the application process so hiring managers can determine if a candidate meets the essential requirements or one or more of the focus capabilities for the role.

Types of pre-screening questions that HR and hiring managers can create in the I work for NSW requisition form include:

- single response questions (e.g. yes/no, radio button, drop down list)
- multiple response questions usually ask about candidates' preferences (e.g. willingness to work in particular locations) and are particularly useful when creating a talent pool
- text responses (e.g. targeted questions, knowledge and experience questions) – it is advisable to set a maximum number of words or characters and to communicate this to candidates in the application form.

Application

The application is the information candidates provide to be considered for the role.

You have scope to tailor the application to include the following optional parts:

- a cover letter of no more than 1 to 2 pages
- a short statement against one or two **targeted questions**

Other information collected by default in the I work for NSW application form includes personal details, diversity information, work experience, education, details of referees and requests for workplace adjustment.

Note: It is not compulsory for candidates to attach a resume as a separate file. The 'work experience', 'education' and 'referee' fields can be used to capture the key aspects of a resume.

Managing requests for workplace adjustments

The **Disability Discrimination Act 1992** (Commonwealth) sets the framework for making **workplace adjustments** during the recruitment process by enabling a person with disability to have equal opportunities in seeking employment. This legislation applies to NSW public sector agencies.

To prevent discrimination you need to:

- talk to candidates about their specific needs
- have a strategy in place to manage requests for workplace adjustment
- be aware of the types of workplace adjustments your agency can make on the job
- understand the types of adjustments to assessments or opportunities for alternative assessments (or talk to your assessment service supplier to seek advice)
- put a plan in place to make workplace adjustments.

Some candidates may not disclose at the application stage that they may require adjustments at a later stage. Communicating with candidates throughout the process about individual needs will help you to accommodate any adjustments needed.

Cover letter

The cover letter gives the candidate the opportunity to:

- explain their motivation in applying for the role
- outline their achievements as they relate to the focus capabilities and other role requirements
- give a summary of their relevant qualifications and experience.

A good cover letter is generally no more than 1 to 2 pages in length and should be succinct and logically written.

It is recommended that you do not ask candidates to address **targeted questions** in the cover letter as it is easier to compare and assess these as separate responses.

Targeted questions

Targeted questions are written in a way that allows candidates to give examples of how they have demonstrated the behaviours that relate to a focus capability.

Targeted questions can be designed to assess how candidates demonstrated capabilities in a relevant context and can be situationally based, starting with phrases like:

- “Give an example of a situation where...”
- “Describe a scenario...”

Behavioural indicators can help you to develop targeted questions that relate to the **focus capabilities** you are examining. You can use or adapt the behaviours described in the **NSW Public Sector Capability Framework** or develop your own specific behaviours to the capability level for the role.

The benefits of using this approach are that:

- the question relates directly to the capability and is pitched at the right level
- you can use the behavioural indicators to help you evaluate responses
- you can also use the candidate’s written response to assess the Communicate Effectively capability if this is also a focus capability
- you can confidently screen out candidates who do not meet a focus capability.

Example – Designing a targeted question using the behavioural indicators

Capability: Commit to Customer Service – Provide customer-focused services in line with public sector and organisational objectives

Level: Adept

Behavioural indicators:

- Take responsibility for delivering high-quality customer-focused services
- Design processes and policies based on the customer's point of view and needs
- Understand and measure what is important to customers
- Use data and information to monitor and improve customer service delivery
- Find opportunities to cooperate with internal and external stakeholders to improve outcomes for customers
- Maintain relationships with key customers in area of expertise
- Connect and collaborate with relevant customers within the community

Targeted question: Give an example of a time when you identified an opportunity to improve customer delivery using data or information. What was the situation? How did you deal with it? What was the outcome?

Targeted questions on motivation

For a targeted question on motivation it is best to ask candidates about their desire to work in an agency, sector or role. For these types of questions you are looking for the candidate to show:

- their drive, enthusiasm or passion to work in this type of environment or role
- an awareness of the sector or agency
- an understanding of the role
- their values.

Examples include:

- Why do you want to work in the NSW Public Service?
- What interests you about the role?
- What are your expectations of a role within the NSW Public Service?

These types of questions can also align with the Act with Integrity capability which requires employees to be ethical and professional and to adhere to the **government sector values**.

Tip on designing the application form

Build the targeted questions into the I work for NSW application form so that responses are presented in a consistent format. You can download a report with candidates' responses, making it easier to review and compare. This approach also limits bias: evaluating sections of an application limits the risk that positive/negative evaluations from one section will carry into the next.