Virtual Interview Handbook
For Residency Programs

1. BACKGROUND AND PREAMBLE

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unique challenges for all stakeholders involved in the 2021 R1 match and a decision has been made to transition to virtual interviews.

This document provides tips for:
   a) those preparing to organize or conduct virtual interviews including how to address possible complications from transitioning to virtual interviews, without losing the effectiveness of the interview;
   b) those preparing to conduct virtual interviews including how to avoid being distracted by the applicants' environment and technology and minimizing unconscious bias.

Basics of Virtual Interviews

Definition: Applicants interact with an interviewer using video conference technology in real-time. Similar to in-person interviews with a list of questions and scoring rubric, if applicable.

Type of Questions: Similar to in-person interviews, the best way to ensure fairness is to create a respectful, consistent, structured process centered around explicitly agreed upon criteria. Establish the criteria early and build a common set of questions that you will ask of all interviewees to allow for objective comparison between them.

Level of Standardization: Similar to in-person interviews, standardization of questions and scoring rubric is recommended for all applicants. Follow-up questions can be tailored depending on the answers provided.

Setup: Similar to in-person setup, provide interviewers with a list of questions and scoring rubric, if applicable. Confirm the software has the capabilities needed (e.g., group interviews) and test technology. Schedule a trial run with interviewers to simulate the virtual interview process. Check technology and capability of using the virtual interview software in an optimal physical space.

Recording of Interviews: If recording interviews programs should -- 1) determine that they are in compliance with both their institutional privacy policies and relevant provincial regulations; 2) advise applicants that their interview will be recorded; and, 3) inform applicants regarding all policies and regulations related to the recordings.

Technology Requirements:
   Applicants: device with internet access, camera, and microphone.
   Interviewers: may have to download software.

Scheduling:
   Must schedule applicants and interviewers based on shared availability.
   Scheduling may be challenging, especially if applicants are required to participate in multiple interviews and/or are in different time zones. To minimize the burden to applicants across geographic regions, interview schedules may need to be adjusted. For example, programs may want to schedule applicants from the East during morning interview sessions so that applicants in the West do not have to interview during what is locally very early morning. It is critical that all communication about interview times and events include the time zone.

2. SETTING UP THE VIRTUAL INTERVIEW

a) Types of Platforms

Here is a list of some of the current platforms being used:
- Zoom: https://zoom.us/
- WebEx: https://www.webex.com/
- SIMIQ from EMS: https://www.simulationiq.com/
- Admit Video: https://admitvideo.com/
- VidCruiter: https://vidcruiter.com/
- Microsoft Teams: https://www.microsoft.com/en-ca/microsoft-365/microsoft-teams

☐ Technology is rapidly changing - consult with local IT services to optimize technology, check capacity of systems, confirm software has the capabilities needed (i.e. chat, multiple interviewers) and provide support as required.

b) Tips to Design Formal Virtual Interview

☐ Consider alternative strategies that have been used to assess interpersonal or communication skills, such as the multiple mini interview or group interviews, or to increase efficiency with parallel tracks of simultaneous interviews with digitally timed transitions.

☐ Apply the same strategies recommended for in-person interviews including: explicit written descriptions of the desired traits in an applicant; standardized questions to every applicant; provision of behavior-specific anchors for rating scales for interviewers; use of a scoring rubric to improve interrater and intra-rater scoring; use of multiple observers rather than a single interviewer; training of interviewers in format, scoring, and unethical and illegal question rules; and interviewer blinded to other application data to minimize bias.

☐ Build agreements about how you will ask questions, indicate that someone has a follow up question, or make space for the applicant themselves to ask questions or signal that they are ready to move on.

☐ Balance the consistency and structured approach with attending to the needs of individual applicants that require accommodation in order to be able to participate in the interviews. The person making the arrangements for interviews should provide applicants with an estimate of expected duration, schedule and components of the interview, and ask all applicants if they require any accommodations.

c) Tips to Best Engage Applicants

☐ Consider how well elements of your in-person interview may translate to a virtual environment. Most interview questions will be equally effective in a virtual context. However, while it will be tempting to mimic your in-person interview, some elements may not translate well to a positive or effective interview experience (see table below).

If your in-person interview day includes:	Consider this instead:
Multi-hour interview days for interviewers	Limit the time an interviewer can spend conducting consecutive virtual interviews to less than four hours.
Group activities	Include questions about teamwork.
Role-play activity	Include questions that assess competencies normally assessed during the role-play (e.g., empathy, communication skills) or situational questions that ask the applicant to take on a specific role.
Lunch with current residents	Set up a virtual meetup with existing residents.

☐ Engage with applicants in a warm and friendly way, however, avoid unstructured interview forms and resist the casualization that can sometimes come with video meetings.

☐ Decide if you will assign applicants to an interview day and timeslot or let applicants sign up for an interview day and timeslot. Be sure to offer interview slots in multiple time zones.

☐ If you schedule back-to-back interviews or interview blocks, add buffer time (e.g., 15-30 minutes) between each interview since the next applicant won't be waiting outside the door. Interviewers and applicants will need a little extra time to connect.

☐ Establish a process and timeline for receiving interviewer feedback about each interview. Can interviewers enter ratings and notes into an existing online system? Do you need to create a scoring sheet?

☐ Take advantage of software features that prevent applicants from inadvertently interrupting another applicant's interview. Using the "waiting room" feature, small group rooms, or unique interview links are all methods to ensure applicants receive their fair share of interviewer attention.

☐ Incorporate interviewing practices that limit bias such as standardized questions and/or interview scripts, clear time limits, and multiple interviewers per session.

d) Create or Modify Supporting Materials

☐ Modify your program website and interview invitation to reflect your new process as soon as possible. This will help applicants prepare and know what to expect, which will reduce stress.

☐ Live virtual skills/competency testing during the interview is not recommended if it can be avoided. Applicant stress may lead to decreased performance, not a true indicator of their suitability to the role.

☐ Write a script that interviewers can use to welcome and orient applicants to the virtual interview. The script should acknowledge the unusual circumstances and thank the applicant for being flexible. This may be the applicant's first virtual interview, and this simple acknowledgement can help them become more comfortable.

☐ Create an interview schedule for each interviewer that includes each interview day and time, applicants' names, applicants' contact information (e.g., phone number and/or email) in case they are disconnected, and any needed login information.

☐ Follow best practices for designing and conducting all types of interviews.

e) Prepare Interviewers

☐ Confirm interviewers have the technology necessary to conduct the interview online (e.g., computer or tablet, microphone, camera) and the appropriate software/application in advance of the interviews.

☐ Provide a short tutorial on how to use the technology and/or opportunities to practice using it. The program could develop this or use a pre-existing video.

☐ Provide supporting materials to interviewers:

- Interview schedule.
- Login information (if applicable).
- Welcome script.
- Interview questions and rating materials.
- Contact information for your program's technology support.
- Applicant's contact information (as a backup option).

☐ Provide information to your evaluators about evaluating virtual interviews, including how to avoid being distracted by the applicants' environment and technology and minimizing unconscious bias.

- Provide them with the AFMC Virtual Interview Handbook for Residency Programs
- All involved in selection should take steps to effectively mitigate implicit bias as both individuals and collectively.

f) Prepare Applicants

☐ Think about the materials you typically provide applicants in advance of the interview or on interview day. When and how do you typically share those? Are they available on your program's website and/or via email?

- If you plan to send applicants copies of informational slides immediately after the interview, inform applicants of this plan so they do not feel compelled to take prolific notes.

☐ Set applicants up for success by providing them with any instructions or resources about the virtual interview as soon as possible. Provide information about:

- The application or platform used for the interview, as well as information about how to download or install needed software before the interview. Encourage applicants to try the software in advance of the interview.
- The process for signing up for interview slots or the assigned interview day and time.
- Provide exact connection information. Be sure to include the time zone for the interview.
- **Provide information on how to obtain technical assistance and a backup plan for interview including a phone number to reach the interviewer in case technology fails.**

☐ Offer a standardized orientation to the interview (i.e. format, time limits and number of interviewers).

☐ Provide a detailed schedule including the interview and social events.

☐ Be transparent about how to apply for accommodations.

☐ Share the *AFMC Virtual Interview Handbook for Applicants*.

3. GENERAL TIPS

Here are some general tips to ensure an informative interview process:

- Directly address perceived program weaknesses. This prevents applicants from having to ask potentially uncomfortable questions and demonstrates that the program has insight into the applicant perspective. Programs may need to directly address small/large number of trainees, patient population, operative volume, clinical weaknesses, and/or reputation.
- Programs with an accreditation status of Notice of Intent to Withdraw should explicitly disclose this to applicants, along with an explanation of what it means.
- Be candid about program challenges and opportunities (e.g. call requirements, recent accreditation status, maternity/paternity leave, and access to mental health services without applicant solicitation).
- Commitment to health and wellness, diversity and inclusion and how a program ensures the success of women, minorities, LGBTQ individuals, and parents are additional topics that should be routinely communicated to all applicants.
- Involve many faculty and trainees to create representative audiovisual materials and videos that demonstrate the culture and spirit of the program. Show, don't tell.

- Accurately educate applicants about physical spaces through use of virtual video tours that include trainee lounge/workspaces, cafeteria, wards, clinics etc.
- Applicants will also be keen to understand what their lives outside the hospital would be like at a given training program. Share information regarding housing location and costs, childcare resources, and common means of transportation. Videos and images of trainee commutes, homes, and neighborhoods will all help applicants envision themselves in a new place. Highlighting a location's culture, food, and sports scenes will also assist applicants in discerning which programs fit their needs.

Here are some general tips to create inviting and informative <u>virtual social events</u>:

- Communicate in advance regarding social event attire, purpose and attendance. Applicants should be notified if the event will have faculty and current trainees, or trainees only. Additionally, applicants should receive advance notice if there will be any informational presentations as part of the social event.
- If the social event occurs during a meal or in the evening, programs should clarify for applicants if they are welcome to bring adult beverages, food, significant others, or children to the event.
- Programs may wish to solicit questions from applicants in advance so that faculty or current trainees have time to prepare answers or address topics of concern during the social event. Applicants may also submit questions using the real-time chat function of digital platforms.
- Effective social events have both large group and small group components. At the beginning of the social events, all applicants can receive a warm welcome and explanation of the mechanics of the social event, including how to obtain technical assistance.
- It is important to recognize that as opposed to an in-person interview season, a virtual one means that applicants aren't able to meet and get to know each other, and this unfamiliarity makes applicants less likely to engage in large group settings. We suggest incorporating a small group phase of the social event. Applicants may find it easier to ask questions and engage in conversation in smaller groups, and creating multiple rooms permits parallel conversations that can be tailored to the involved individuals. Creating room "themes" to cater to specific program characteristics such as research opportunities, clinical training pathways, or lifestyle concerns also permits applicants to seek and gain the information that is most pertinent to them. Applicants should have the opportunity to engage in multiple small groups across the course of the event to gain varied perspectives on the program.
- Many software programs have announcement or timer features that can warn participants that they will be switched to a new small group. These features can make transitions less awkward and sudden.
- The closing portion of a social event is also amenable to the large group format, with applicants receiving a final opportunity to ask questions and receive well wishes for the following interview as well as information on how to follow-up with social event participants if they have additional questions.
- If faculty are present at social events, it is essential that at some point they leave or that applicants have an additional opportunity to interact with current trainees without faculty presence.
- Applicants should feel free to exit social events freely, or the meeting should have a hard end time so that no applicant feels pressured to remain present in social events longer than they wish.

4. OTHER RESOURCES

This perspective is not intended to be a comprehensive list as each program will need to adapt in their own unique way, and future research may establish an evidence base for the best practices of virtual interviewing. In the meantime, both applicants and programs can take several pragmatic steps to optimize the virtual interview day in a way that permits applicants to meet their dual objectives of presenting themselves well while obtaining relevant program information.

> Best practices and guidelines to design and prepare for interviews also applies to virtual interviews.
> Please refer to your school's resources.

Here are other resources available for your consideration:

- AFMC National Web Calendar of Events (until CANPREPP is available)
- CANPREPP (link to be added when available)
- CaRMS Match Violations Policy (May 2020)
- Best Practices in Application and Selection (BPAS)
- McMaster's Phone and Virtual Interviews: Creating a Great Candidate Experience
- UBC's Equity Considerations in Virtual Interviews
- AAMC's Best Practices for Conducting Residency Program Interviews
- How to Maintain Employee Privacy in Video Interviews, Grensing-Pophal, Lin, 2020

Here are Peer-Reviewed Articles Published in Medical Journals About Virtual Interviewing:

1. Daram SR, Wu R, Tang SJ. Interview from anywhere: feasibility and utility of web-based videoconference interviews in the gastroenterology fellowship selection process. *Am J Gastroenterol*. 2014;109(2):155-159.
2. Edje L, Miller C, Kiefer J, Oram D. Using Skype as an alternative for residency selection interviews. *J Grad Med Educ*. 2013;5(3):503-505.
3. Haas MRC, He S, Sternberg K, Jordan J, Deiorio NM, Chan TM, Yarris LM. Reimagining Residency Selection: Part 1 – A Practical Guide to Recruitment in the Post-COVID-19 Era. *Journal of Graduate Medical Education.* October 2020;12(5): 539-544.
4. Pasadhika S, Altenbernd T, Ober RR, Harvey EM, Miller JM. Residency interview video conferencing. *Ophthalmology*. 2014;119(2):426-426.e5.
5. Pourmand A, Lee H, Fair M, Maloney K, Caggiula A. Feasibility and usability of tele-interview for medical residency interview. *West J Emerg Med*. 2018;*19*(1):80-86.
6. Shah SK, Arora S, Skipper B, Kalishman S, Timm TC, Smith AY. Randomized evaluation of a web-based interview process for urology resident selection. *J Urol*. 2012;187(4):1380-1384.
7. Stephenson-Famy A, Houmard BS, Oberoi S, Manyak A, Chiang S, Kim S. Use of the interview in resident candidate selection: a review of the literature. *J Grad Med Educ*. 2015;*7*(4):539-548.
8. Sternberg K, Jordan J, Haas MRC, He S, Deiorio NM, Yarris LA, Chan TM. Reimagining Residency Selection: Part 2 – A Practical Guide to Recruitment in the Post-COVID-19 Era. *Journal of Graduate Medical Education.* October 2020;12(5): 545-549.
9. Vadi MG, Malkin MR, Lenar J, et al. Comparison of web-based and face-to-face interviews for application to an anesthesiology training program: a pilot study. *Int J Med Educ*. 2016;7:102-108.
10. Williams K, Kling JM, Labonte HR, Blair JE. Videoconference interviewing: tips for success. *J Grad Med Educ*. 2015;7(3):331–333.

5. TIPS FOR INTERVIEWERS

Some information may be repeated from above, however, this section has been structured as a stand-alone section to be provided to Interviewers separately if preferred.

a) Preparing for a virtual interview

☐ Identify a Suitable Environment

- Identify a private, quiet, well-lit space where you can complete the interview by yourself. The space should be free of potential distractions and where you can speak freely. To the extent possible, make sure you have control over the background noise (e.g. pets if interviewing from home)
- Make sure enough light is available (window, lamp, etc.) so the applicant can see you clearly.
- If you're doing the interview at night, make sure there's a lamp available that can light up your face.
- Consider the backdrop you will use during your interview, and try to keep it neat and free of distractions.
- Have an outlet nearby in case you need to plug in your device.

☐ Practice Using Technology Before Conducting Interviews

- Check your microphone and camera to make sure they're working well and that both the picture and sound are good quality.
- Check your internet speed. You can do this it at SpeedTest.net. Sometimes switching from Wi-Fi to a wired ethernet connection improves your internet speed. If your home's internet connection is too slow, consider using a space at your school where you can do the interview in a private room with stable Wi-Fi.
- Note how the camera and microphone are positioned so you can recreate a setup that works when you log in to the system to complete your actual interview.
- Make a trial call to someone you know to practice using the software program you will use for the interview and collect feedback on your audio and video.

☐ Familiarize Yourself with Interview Materials

- Review any documents relevant to how you will run the interview, including an interview script, possible or required interview questions, any competency definitions, or descriptions of rating scales.
- Take steps to effectively mitigate implicit bias.
- Be sure the following materials are available to you:
    - Interview schedule.
    - Login information (if applicable).
    - Welcome script.
    - Interview questions.
    - Contact information for your school's technology support.
    - Applicant's contact information (as a backup option if you are disconnected).

b) Setting up immediately before interview begins

☐ Presentation

- Dress as you would for an in-person interview.
- Have all relevant interview materials (e.g., specific interview questions, paper for notes) in front of you for easy reference.

☐ Environment

- Briefly scan your interview space to ensure:
  - It will be quiet and free of distractions.
  - There are no sources of bright light directly behind you.
  - Your backdrop is still neat and free of distractions.
  - An outlet is nearby in case you need to plug in your device.

☐ Technology

- Connect early (approximately 15 minutes) to double-check all technology and confirm:
- Microphone and camera are working properly.
- Camera is positioned so you are looking directly at the video camera.
- All other programs on your device are shut down so no alerts, notifications, or other disruptions on your device interrupt the interview or distract you.
- Your device is fully charged, and you have a charger nearby.
- Have a backup plan in case the technology fails — this may be as simple as making sure you have the applicant's phone number.
- Mute cell phone, pager and landline phones.

☐ Create a Comfortable Atmosphere

Good video interviewing is an acquired skill and requires practice. You will need to ensure that you are coming off as open, friendly, engaged – usual body language and visual cues that applicants rely on during the interview may be muted or less visible. Be more "over the top" than normal.
- Welcome the person in a friendly manner.
- Confirm the applicant can both see and hear you.
- Introduce yourself, giving your name and title.
- Exchange phone numbers, in case technology fails.
- Acknowledge the unusual circumstance, and thank the applicant for being flexible. This may be the applicant's first virtual interview, and this simple acknowledgement may help them feel more comfortable. Be aware that virtual interviews come with a different set of challenges for candidates AND interviewers than a normal in-person interview. Increased nervousness, self-consciousness, technology issues can all play a factor.
- Remind the applicant how long the interview will take.
- If you plan to take notes during the interview, tell the applicant before you begin the interview. Explain that taking notes helps to ensure you remember responses accurately. You might also note that taking notes may limit your eye contact, but they should not interpret this as a lack of interest in their response.
- If you know you might be interrupted during the interview by a call or urgent matter, tell the applicant about that possibility before you begin the interview.

☐ Follow Typical Interview Protocol

- Ask any required questions and/or optional questions if permitted and applicable.
- Avoid inappropriate questions that may be prohibited by law. These are questions about protected groups, like any demographic information, family history, disabilities, military or criminal history, etc.
- Take notes, as necessary.
- Applicants should be afforded an opportunity to ask questions at the end of the interview or provide clarity on their answers.

☐ Close the Interview

- Thank the applicant for their time, and tell them about next steps, if appropriate.