



ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES MANUAL

SUBJECT: Employee Participation in AHQ Grading and Interview Panels (Subject Matter Experts)

1. Purpose

To strengthen hiring outcomes, improve role-specific evaluation, and support workforce development, Dane County is expanding who can serve as a Subject Matter Expert (SME) in the recruitment process.

This policy allows hiring managers to include qualified employees as Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) in the Achievement History Questionnaire (AHQ)/Supplemental Questions grading and/or interview portions of the hiring process, when appropriate.

This option is intended to add practical, job-specific expertise to candidate evaluation, expand the pool of qualified evaluators when manager availability and/or technical expertise is limited, and to provide a structured professional development opportunity for employees participating as SMEs.

2. Scope

This section applies to recruitments conducted under the “Hiring to Fill Positions” Administrative Practices Manual (APM) process, including AHQ grading and interviews.

3. Definitions

- 3.1. SME – Subject Matter Expert. As defined by the “Hiring to Fill Positions” Administrative Practices Manual (APM), employees with knowledge and experience in the field who are included in the hiring process as either graders or interview panelist. Previously these individuals were exclusively managers and assisted the hiring manager by bringing additional knowledge and experience to the hiring process.
- 3.2. SME (Grader) – A county employee invited by the Hiring Manager to evaluate and score Achievement History Questionnaire responses using County-approved benchmarks and scoring guidance.
- 3.3. SME (Interview Panelist) – A county invited by the Hiring Manager to participate in interviews, which may include asking questions, taking notes, and (when authorized) scoring candidate responses.

4. Policy

Hiring managers have the option to include non-managerial employees as Subject Matter Experts in the hiring process. Non-managerial Employee participation as Subject Matter Experts (grader or interview panelist) is solely at the discretion of the Hiring Manager. Employee participation as a subject matter expert does not abridge the hiring manager’s authority to make the final hiring decision. This new option does not modify the county’s expectation for a diverse interview panel. Non-managerial employee participation in the hiring process is not a requirement of the hiring process and should not be expected in all recruitments.

5. Guiding Principles

Employee involvement in the hiring process must be implemented in ways that maintain:

- Fairness and objectivity. Employee participation in the process must do so with safeguards to reduce bias and conflicts of interest.
- Confidentiality of applicant materials and deliberations. Employees who participate in the process must recognize that anonymity is strength of the current grading system. Maintaining this anonymity may be harder in some work units.

- The hiring manager’s responsibility to make final decisions as to who is hired.

6. Employee Eligibility and Selection

When selecting employee SMEs, hiring managers should use the following criteria:

- 6.1. Employees with demonstrated job knowledge relevant to the vacancy (e.g., current incumbents, lead workers, or employees with specialized technical expertise).
- 6.2. Employees who can maintain confidentiality and professional boundaries
- 6.3. Managers should avoid selecting employees when there is a reasonable concern that participation could blur peer relationships or create ongoing workplace tension if a preferred candidate is not selected.
- 6.4. Managers should avoid using non-managerial employees on hiring panels if there is a perception that employees are “voting” on a coworker or future peer.

7. Conflict of Interest (COI) and Recusal

- 7.1. All Subject Matter Experts must disclose potential conflicts of interest before accessing applicant materials or participating in interviews.
- 7.2. All Subject Matter Experts must note any personal relationships with the applicant
- 7.3. All Subject Matter Experts must disclose any circumstance that could reasonably call into question the neutrality of their judgement.
- 7.4. When conflict of interest exists, the employee must be removed from the grading/interview role for that recruitment, and an alternate SME should be selected.

8. Confidentiality Requirements

- 8.1. All Subject Matter Experts must sign (or electronically acknowledge) confidentiality expectations prior to participation.
- 8.2. Subject Matter Experts must not discuss applicant materials, scores, interview performance, or panel deliberations outside of the hiring process.
- 8.3. All Subject Matter Experts must ensure the secure handling of any notes and materials as directed by Employee Relations (ER).

9. Training Required

Before participating as an Employee SME Grader or Employee SME Interview Panelist, employees must complete county required training. This training will include:

- Equal Employment and fair hiring practices
- Appropriate/inappropriate interview topics
- Effective techniques for scoring applicants and unbiased evaluation expectations
- Benchmark-based scoring expectations.
- Confidentiality and ethics acknowledgements

10. Implementation Notes

This policy is intended to provide flexibility, not delay. Managers should use employee SMEs when it adds clear value and can be implemented without significantly slowing the process.

Where appropriate, managers may offer non-evaluative opportunities (e.g., a structured “day-in-the-life” Q&A with current staff) to support candidate understanding while reducing risk tied to scoring and selection decisions.