



*Evidence Summary*

**A List of Best Practices That May Improve the Use of Telephone Interviews During the Recruitment Process**

**A Review of:**

Engel, Debra, and Sarah Robbins. "Telephone Interviewing Practices within Academic Libraries." Journal of Academic Librarianship 35.2 (2009): 143-51.

**Reviewed by:**

David Herron  
Scholarly Developer  
Karolinska Institutet University Library  
Stockholm, Sweden  
Email: [david.herron@ki.se](mailto:david.herron@ki.se)

Lotta Haglund  
Head of Information and Public Relations  
Karolinska Institutet University Library  
Stockholm, Sweden  
Email: [lotta.haglund@ki.se](mailto:lotta.haglund@ki.se)

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**Objective** – To investigate the use of telephone interviews in academic libraries and identify best practices when conducting telephone interviews.

**Design** – Survey and open-ended questions.

**Setting** – Academic libraries in the United States.

**Subjects** – Academic institutional members of the Association of Research Libraries.

**Methods** – A fifteen-item survey (Appendix A, 150) concerning telephone interviewing

practice was sent to 112 institutional members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). The survey contained multiple choice-type questions as well as open-ended questions.

**Main Results** – The response rate was 66% (74 of 112 research libraries; 56 public institutions and 17 private). Of the respondents, 90% used telephone interviews to screen applicants for professional positions (ranging from occasionally to always) and only 10% never used telephone interviews. The main reason for holding telephone interviews was to “screen candidates in order to **narrow the pool of applicants** who will be invited for in-

person interviews" (146). Other reasons given included **minimizing expenses** involved in interviewing out-of-town candidates (39% respondents), **shortening the length of time** to complete the search process (27%) and **meeting library or campus hiring requirements** (3%).

On average, the majority of libraries (51%) hired between 2-4 professional positions each year. For each open professional position, the number of candidates telephone-interviewed varied from less than 3 to 9 depending on library and position.

Interviews typically lasted between 16 and 45 minutes (77% respondents) with all the search committee members (staff involved in the recruitment process) being present (75%) and taking turns to ask questions to the candidates (90%). Questions were most often the same for all candidates applying for a particular position (91%) and candidates were nearly always allowed in return to ask questions of the committee (96%).

In answer to the open-ended question, "In your opinion, what best creates a collegial and effective environment for conducting telephone interviews?", the dominating responses included: all search committee members being present and participating actively, using a script and taking notes, introducing all interview participants, and giving candidates adequate notification and documentation.

The majority of respondents "would not change anything about their institution's current (telephone interview) practice" (147). Some thought that "training and/or a need for consistency in procedure for all interviews conducted" (147) would be relevant changes in practice.

The results of the survey were compared to the findings in the library, personnel management and human resources literature.

**Conclusion** – From the survey and responses to open-ended questions, a number of best

practices when conducting telephone interviews emerged (148–150):

1. Properly train the search committee (e.g., in knowing about the position, organization and protocols for conducting interviews properly)
2. Involve the search committee throughout the recruitment process
3. Help the interviewee be prepared (e.g., by sending institutional information packages)
4. Maintain and use suitable technology (e.g., by choosing suitable conferencing facilities with the interviewee situation in mind)
5. Put the candidate at ease (e.g., by explaining who will be present, how long the interview will last and how many questions there will be)
6. Provide introductions (e.g., both in the beginning of the interview and even before individual questions)
7. Listen and take notes during the interview
8. Discuss the interviews immediately afterwards

Engel and Robbins suggest that further research could include looking into job candidate and search committee experiences of the telephone interviewing procedure.

### Commentary

The paper provides a straight-forward survey analysis concerning the use of telephone interviews during the recruitment process at research libraries in the USA. From the analysis, a list of best practices emerges which may be useful for staff involved in staff hiring and lead to improved practice.

Generally, the article is well written and informative although the many statistical analyses of the results make the Survey Findings (146-7) section somewhat difficult to follow. A more general overview of the results would have been useful.

The authors of this Evidence Summary used Lindsay Glynn's Critical Appraisal Checklist to estimate the face validity to be over 80%; therefore the research seems robust. However, it is unstated in which year the survey was carried out so it is hard to judge the actuality of the research.

The overall response rate of the survey was 66% (74 of 112 recipients) which seems reasonable. However, there is a slight mismatch in the figures later on "fifty-six...indicated they were from public institutes while the remaining seventeen...were from private institutions (i.e. a total of 73)" (146).

One possible source of bias could be that smaller libraries (<60 professional positions) are over-represented in the survey (Table 1, 146). For example, do smaller libraries tend to use telephone interviews more often? If so why? Engel and Robbins make no comment on this.

About 10% of the respondents never used telephone interviews. However, this is unlikely to have biased the results of the survey, since these libraries clearly would be unable to respond to the majority of the questions.

Engel and Robbins cite an extensive literature concerning staff recruitment, including guidelines, manuals, and contributions from individual libraries. This research provides a helicopter perspective on telephone interviewing practice in US academic libraries which is interesting. However, it remains unclear to the authors of this Evidence Summary exactly what new information has emerged from this effort.

The article would have been even more interesting if the recruitment process had been placed in the wider context of strategic library development, i.e. which kinds of competencies do we need to recruit for the future library. However, this lies outside the objectives of the research study.

The generic list of best practices suggested by Engels and Robbins seems widely applicable to all library types. Therefore, the content of the article is a good example of bridging the gap between research and practice.

### **Works Cited**

Glynn, Lindsay. A Critical Appraisal Tool for Library and Information Research. Library Hi Tech 24.3 (2006): 387-99.