



## **AAIM Guidance for Program Directors during Virtual Interview Season**

### **Overview**

As a result of the pandemic, there is a need for program directors to prepare, conduct, and organize virtual interviews without losing the effectiveness of the traditional interview. In creating a rank list, program directors consider applicant's academic metrics, experiences, and other attributes. Through the interview, other important attributes can be considered, such as professionalism, integrity, interpersonal and communications skills. It is strongly recommended that all residency programs adopt virtual platforms and eliminate in-person interviews.

### **Virtual Interview Format**

The two types of virtual interview formats are live and asynchronous (Figure 1). The virtual interview platform used will depend on financial resources, available interviewer and staff time, and interaction ability between the interviewer and applicant. Live virtual interviews have applicants interacting with interviews using video conferencing and in real time. In asynchronous virtual interviews, applicants answer questions via recorded video which is then shared with residency reviewers at a later time. It will be important for everyone involved in the interview process to have a common understanding of what the program seeks in applicants and create the ability for feedback to be shared on relevant information. It is also important to consider a structured versus unstructured interview format. The structured format has been shown to have higher level of reliability, validity, and fairness. Interview content and evaluation standardization will also decrease the impact of unconscious bias on the interview process.

### **Recommendations**

- Live virtual interviews with a structured interview format are strongly encouraged.
- Asynchronous virtual interviews are discouraged. This format restricts engagement with the applicant.
- Asynchronous sessions should be reserved for informal and voluntary non-interview day programming, as detailed in the "Special Considerations in the Virtual Residency Interview Season" guidance.
- Programs should utilize a virtual platform with the ability for two-way interaction and break-out sessions between the program/faculty interviewer and the applicant. This will increase engagement and interactivity of the virtual interview day.
- Virtual platform must guarantee the integrity and security of the interview day. This information should be fully disclosed to the applicant.
- Programs should have a back-up plan in place for connectivity issues with the virtual platform on the interview day. Back-up plans could default to telephone interviews or a different virtual platform with the applicant (e.g., Zoom as primary platform and Microsoft Teams as back-up platform)
- Prior to the first day of interviews, programs should simulate a virtual interview day to test pilot both their primary and secondary virtual platform for any IT and logistical issues.
- Programs should have a dedicated IT staff readily available on days of interview to troubleshoot any IT issues.

- Programs should provide clear guidance of the virtual interview day for both the applicants and faculty interviewers. These should include an itinerary of the interview day and “how-to” details related to virtual platform connectivity issues, etc.
- Programs should consider development of faculty training tools to prepare faculty interviewers for virtual interviews. Training could be asynchronous or synchronous in the form of online modules or live webinars.

### **Pre-Interview Communication**

A good start for the interview process will require modification of website and prompt interview invitations to applicants. The interview schedule should include applicant’s name and contact information in case the communication becomes disconnected. Applicants should be informed on the platform, sign-up process for interview slots, and call-in information. Faculty interviewers should secure in advance the appropriate technology to conduct interviews online, including computer or tablet, microphone, and camera.

### Recommendations

- Interview invitations should include explicit details regarding professional dress code for applicants, technology requirements for the interview day, and interview day start and end times.
- Programs should provide pre-interview guidance to applicants. For example, applicants should plan to interview in a private, quiet location free of distractions, wear professional dress, and have a strong and reliable wi-fi connection. Ear buds or headphones may provide better audio connection. Feel free to have with you any notes you might ordinarily have with you during an in-person interview.
- Programs should provide applicants and faculty interviewers a contact phone number in case of lost wi-fi connection during the interview day.

### **Reviewing Department of Medicine Standard Letter of Evaluation (SLOE)**

USMLE scores, clinical clerkship grades, and class quartile standings may not be available for as many applicants as in past years. The loss of standardized, objective student data will increase the need for holistic review. An improved SLOE can combine available standardized objective student data with added information on the applicant’s accountability, commitment to growth, teamwork, and communication skills. While applicants may have fewer letters of recommendation this year, the improved quality of the SLOE should prove beneficial in the evaluation of applicants. However, recommended improvements to the SLOE may take years to be fully realized.

### Recommendations

- Programs should look for added benefits from AAIM Guidelines for DOM Standardized Letters of Evaluation for current year US applicants. SLOE should provide more consistent, standardized, and objective student data for program directors to facilitate holistic review and to decrease time needed for interpretation of letters.

### **Resources**

- AAMC Best Practices on Conducting Residency Interviews:  
[https://www.aamc.org/system/files/2020-09/20-127%20Virtual%20Interview%20Tips%20for%20Program%20Directors\\_Final%209.3.pdf](https://www.aamc.org/system/files/2020-09/20-127%20Virtual%20Interview%20Tips%20for%20Program%20Directors_Final%209.3.pdf)

- AAMC Virtual Interviews. Tips for Program Directors: [https://www.aamc.org/system/files/2020-09/20-127%20Virtual%20Interview%20Tips%20for%20Program%20Directors\\_Final%209.3.pdf](https://www.aamc.org/system/files/2020-09/20-127%20Virtual%20Interview%20Tips%20for%20Program%20Directors_Final%209.3.pdf)
- AAIM Guidelines for DOM Standardized Letters of Evaluation. <https://www.im.org/resources/ume-gme-program-resources/resources-guidelines-dom-eval>
- AAIM Recommendations for the 2020-2021 Internal Medicine Application Cycle in Response to COVID 19 Pandemic: [https://www.amjmed.com/article/S0002-9343\(20\)30535-0/fulltext](https://www.amjmed.com/article/S0002-9343(20)30535-0/fulltext)
- ACP How Residencies are adapting to virtual application interviews: <https://www.acpm.org/news-publications/news/2020/how-residency-program-s-are-adapting-to-virtual-ap/>

**Figure 1: Live Virtual v. Asynchronous Virtual Interviews**

	<b>Live Virtual Interviews</b>	<b>Asynchronous Virtual Interviews</b>
Definition	Applicants interact with an interviewer using video conference technology in real-time.	Applicants respond to questions presented via text or prerecorded video. Responses are recorded by their device’s webcam and shared with reviewers at a later time.
Type of Interaction	Two-way interaction between the applicant and interviewer.	No interaction between the applicant and the evaluator.
Types of Questions	Same as in-person interview.	Same as in-person interview, except follow-up questions are not possible.
Level of standardization	If standardization is desired, then program directors will have to work with interviewers to create standardization through the questions and scoring rubric.	Standardization is built-in; applicants all respond to the same questions, so their responses are comparable.
Setup	Similar to in-person setup; provide interviewers with a list of questions and scoring rubric, if applicable. Confirm the software has the capabilities needed (e.g., group interviews); test technology.	Must create interview forms in the vendors’ system. Contract with vendor; test technology.
Technology required of applicants and interviewers	Applicants: device with internet access, camera, and microphone. Interviewers: may have to download software; may need software/app to support group chat if you want multiple interviewers to participate.	Applicants: device with internet access, camera, and microphone. Evaluators: device with access to the internet.
Scheduling, interviewer time, and evaluating the interview	Must schedule applicants and interviewers based on shared availability. Scheduling may be challenging, especially if applicants are required to participate in multiple interviews and/or are in different time zones. Identify a process for securely recording interviews and sharing ratings or notes with the program director.	An applicant can record the interview at any time. Multiple evaluators can watch the interviews easily and on their own time. Many platforms allow evaluators to enter ratings and notes directly into their systems.

Recruiting function	If permitted, applicants can ask questions.	Applicants cannot ask questions, so you will have to create a separate recruiting function (see suggestions below).
Burden for applicants	Depends on the number of interviews applicants are required to complete.	Depends on the number of interviews or interview questions applicants are required to complete.
Applicant reactions	Less positive than in-person interviews, but more positive than asynchronous (recorded) interviews.	More likely to be negative because the high degree of structure limits applicants' ability to "sell themselves" and ask questions to learn about the program.
Cost	Most are free.	Most require the organization to pay a fee to set up the system.

**Source:** Association of American Medical Colleges. Virtual Interviews: Tips for Program Directors. Online. [https://www.aamc.org/system/files/2020-09/20-127%20Virtual%20Interview%20Tips%20for%20Program%20Directors\\_Final%209.3.pdf](https://www.aamc.org/system/files/2020-09/20-127%20Virtual%20Interview%20Tips%20for%20Program%20Directors_Final%209.3.pdf)