



## Guidelines to help you apply for a position within PIRSA

This document is designed to assist you apply for a position within the Department of Primary Industries and Resources SA (PIRSA) by providing you with information about the recruitment and selection processes adopted within the department.

We encourage you to use this information in conjunction with other resources to assist you through the process of applying for a position.

### What you need to know about Recruitment and Selection in PIRSA

PIRSA has adopted a capabilities model in Recruitment and Selection practices. This means that applicants are assessed against a set of capabilities (Capabilities Profile) identified specifically for the position advertised. Capabilities, as defined by PIRSA, are the skills, knowledge, aptitudes and attitudes needed by a person to carry out a particular role. The capabilities-based approach to Recruitment and Selection processes enables PIRSA to better match people to specific roles.

When preparing your job application, you will need to demonstrate that you have the capabilities sought and are able to work within the context of the position. This information about a position is outlined in a position description, so use this as your primary reference point when applying for a position within PIRSA.

### About the Position Description

A Position Description describes a position and the capabilities required by a person for a high level of achievement within that role.

The Position Description contains three main sections:

- Context of the Position
- Results to be Achieved
- Capabilities Profile

Each section provides information to help you understand the position. The information below provides a brief summary of each section.

#### Context of the Position

The context provides information about why the position exists, the broad purpose of the position, where it fits within the agency, the associated scope and the roles and responsibilities of the position.

The information contained in the context can assist you to understand the nature of the position, how it fits within the workgroup and within PIRSA. The context can provide you with a clearer understanding of the environment in which the position operates.

*Note: You do not need to address the context specifically in a job application. Rather, use the context as a guide in selecting the most appropriate examples of Capabilities. See the following scenario.*

Scenario 1

**Using information in the Context of the Position when responding to Capabilities**

*Capability of Leading Others/Motivating where the Context of the position indicates that employees reporting to you will be geographically dispersed throughout regional South Australia.*

*Throughout your career you have managed people in various different roles, but in each case employees reporting to you were located in close proximity to you. However, in your voluntary capacity as President for the Soccer State League (under 18's), you have demonstrated the ability to lead and motivate people across long distance. This role requires that you liaise with and motivate representatives from all regional and metropolitan clubs involved with the State League matches.*

*Although this example is not drawn from your work experiences, it seems the most appropriate example to demonstrate that you have this capability given the context of the position for which you are applying.*

Results to be Achieved

This section describes the expectations about outcomes, outputs, services, tasks or products to be delivered or achieved in the position. Use the results section to gain a better understanding of the position for which you are applying.

When preparing a job application, you are not required to specifically address the Results to be Achieved, rather use this information to identify the most appropriate example when responding to the Capabilities Profile. **See the Scenario below.**

Scenario 2

**Using the Results to be Achieved when responding to Capabilities**

*Capability of Customer Orientation for a position where a key Result Area will be managing a busy reception desk involving personal contact and switchboard enquiries (over the phone). You can think of two specific examples where you have demonstrated the capability of Customer Orientation:*

- 1. Restaurant waitressing experiences*
- 2. Work at an electoral office booth during the last 5 Federal and State elections.*

*You may choose to use the second example because the results of that role are more comparable to those listed under Results to be Achieved, for example, providing face to face advice and information, liaising with other electoral booths throughout the day. While both examples demonstrate that you have the capability of Customer Orientation, the second example is perhaps more relevant when you consider the Results to be Achieved.*

## Capabilities Profile

The Capabilities Profile describes the skills, knowledge, aptitudes and attitudes that differentiate between high and poor performance in a position in view of the Context of the Position and the Results to be Achieved.

Although each position requires many different capabilities, the Capabilities Profile in a Position Description contains the 8-10 capabilities most essential for high performance in the role. For each capability listed, a definition is given and a small number of indicative behaviours are provided. These behaviours describe what you might expect to observe when a person is demonstrating the capability.

The indicative behaviours provided within the Capabilities Profile are not exhaustive; they are provided to help focus your thinking around the capabilities. Only use the behaviours as a guide when framing your examples. As a rule, you do not need to address each individual behavioural indicator in your Capabilities Statement. The only exception to this rule is when the capability listed is "Professional and Technical Expertise". In this case, you should respond to each behavioural indicator listed because this capability deals with the specific knowledge and skills required for the role.

*In summary: When considering the times when you have demonstrated the capabilities outlined in the Position Description, it is essential that you consider both the Context of the Position and the Results to be Achieved. Evidence of your capabilities can be drawn from relevant work or community experiences.*

### **Applications should contain**

1. Cover Letter expressing your interest in a particular position
2. Capabilities Statement (see below) – A written response to the capabilities listed in the Capabilities Profile of the Position Description
3. Your Curriculum Vitae or Resume, including the contact details of three current referees to whom confidential enquiries can be made.

### **Writing a Capabilities Statement**

Candidates will be short-listed for the next stage of the selection process according to how well they demonstrate in their Capabilities Statement that they have the capabilities required to carry out the position. The panel will be looking for a range of indicative behaviours, so the more concrete detail you can provide the better.

Here are some key points about writing a Capabilities Statement:

- As a guide, we recommend that you address each capability in approximately 2-3 paragraphs (no more than half a page).
- A Capabilities Statement specifically responds to the 8-10 capabilities outlined in the Capabilities Profile section of a Position Description.
- Address each capability separately, ensuring that the capability is clearly identified.
- In the Capabilities Statement you should provide evidence that you have the capabilities required for the position for which you are applying. Evidence is an example or several examples of specific times when you have demonstrated the particular capability either in work or community experiences.
- Depending on the capability in question, it might be more appropriate to describe one situation in rich detail (eg: a situation about conflict resolution), or alternatively, provide a list of ways in which you demonstrate the capability daily (for example, time management/organisational skills).
- The CARE Model (below) may be useful in structuring your example or response.

## The CARE Model

The CARE model can assist you when responding to the Capabilities Profile in either a Capabilities Statement or during Interview.

**Context** – The situation

**Actions** – What you did

**Results** – What was achieved

**Evaluation** – Summary of what you learned

### Responding to Capabilities

The following examples demonstrate how you may respond to a particular capability in a Capabilities Statement.

#### Example 1:

##### **COMMUNICATION: Presentation Skills**

***Preparing and presenting information or ideas in group situations in an articulate and confident manner using appropriate presentation skills.***

##### *Behaviours*

- *Prepares thoroughly by researching expectations and identifying the purpose of the presentation.*
- *Engages the audience; clear, articulate and confident in delivering presentations.*
- *Adjusts language and style of presentation to suit the audience*

##### **Poor Example:**

I think that the ability to communicate is important and I do it very well. I often deliver presentations to groups and I get on with a wide range of people.

Comments: This statement is simply an opinion or comment. It does not provide any specific evidence of the Capability. A better example is provided below.

##### **Good example:**

I am able to demonstrate my communication skills in a number of ways. For the last couple of years I have been a member of my local youth group and have been responsible for a membership drive over the last 18 months. This has required me to address groups of up to 50 people to explain the purpose of the youth group and what we have to offer potential members (<CONTEXT).

My process includes approaching local schools, the university and sporting clubs to request 15 minutes during regular meetings or classes to promote the benefits of joining our youth group. I present the information clearly through a Power Point presentation and by distributing brochures for people to take away with them. I always try to tailor the presentations to suit the particular audience and I have also had to meet with people one on one, prepare posters and write letters as part of the membership drive (<ACTION).

To date we've had 10 people join the group citing the membership drive as being critical to motivating them to join (<RESULTS). Looking back on the first 18 months of the membership drive I realise that the personal approach is certainly most effective and as a result we've reduced the level of content we provide so that more can be allocated to answering people's questions (<EVALUATION).

Example 1 Cont.:

Comments: This response provides sufficient detail demonstrating a number of behaviours sought for the Capability of Communication: Presentation Skills. The response is framed using the CARE approach.

Example 2:

**ACHIEVEMENT QUALITY & RESULTS: Systems and Processes**

***Systematically and thoroughly monitors moderately complex systems and processes; makes effective adjustments.***

*Behaviours*

- *Follows established system procedures*
- *Initiates and/or takes part in the development and review of existing systems and processes*
- *Explains clearly to diverse groups the use and benefits of existing and future systems*

**Poor example:**

Understanding systems and processes is a particular strength of mine. In the last 20 years I've had a lot of involvement in many different types of systems and processes.

Comments: Again, these are comments only, and no specific evidence is given. A way to improve this response would be to elaborate on the significant systems and/or processes that this candidate has alluded to, rather than mention them in passing. Further detail should serve to demonstrate that the candidate understands complex systems or processes as well as provide evidence of the ways in which they have worked within them or developed and reviewed them (if appropriate).

**Good example:**

A time when I demonstrated my system and process orientation was when I worked as a Secretary in a Private Bank. In this role I was responsible for maintaining up to date records of employee leave balances. After about three months I realised that there were major flaws with the process: Leave forms went missing, database information was not up to date and there was no single process consistently used by all staff for submitting leave forms (<CONTEXT). I realised there was the potential to substantially improve this process and I initiated a process to do this.

I met with the stakeholders involved, including colleagues submitting the forms, managers who approve the forms and other secretaries in my work group. I also met with a new employee who had worked in another company to discuss the benefits and to suggest an alternative approach to our system (<ACTION). Together we were able to identify possible solutions to the problems we had discussed.

As a result of these discussions, a hybrid system was designed to suit our business needs. Within six months, I could see that the new system had significant advantages over the older model. The benefits were that the database was maintained accurately and up to date and the process for submitting and recording leave forms was streamlined for all concerned (<RESULTS and EVALUATION).

Comments: The candidate provides specific examples illustrating both an awareness of systems and processes and an orientation of continuous improvement. The response provides specific evidence of the listed behaviours provided to indicate that the candidate has demonstrated the capability. The response is framed using the CARE approach.

Example 3:

**ACHIEVEMENT QUALITY & RESULTS: Planning & Organising**

***Develops and manages efficient work plans for complex projects/activities involving a number of elements/groups.***

*Behaviours*

- *Works flexibly and hard to meet deadlines*
- *Manages pressure associated with meeting multiple deadlines*
- *Sets priorities effectively, allocating and managing time and resources accordingly*

**Poor example:**

My work team needs to plan and organise lots of projects. There are monthly reports to submit, a number of competing priorities as well as the usual work that comes in from customer enquiries. We are a tight team and don't mind staying late to ensure the work is completed before we leave every day. We always work hard, but no more so than lately when one team member has been absent from work for over two weeks with illness.

Comments: There are several pitfalls in this response. Firstly, the applicant/candidate continually refers to the work team - "we" when responding to the capability. As a result, it is unclear whether the applicant or someone else in the team has demonstrated the capability in question. In your Statement of Capabilities check that your response clearly reflects what *you* have achieved.

Secondly, the response provides some recognition about the capability in question, but lacks detail about how the candidate demonstrates the organisational or planning skills in order to manage competing priorities and commitments.

**Good example:**

Sound planning and organisational skills have been critical in my current role as the 'lone' Human Resources Development (HRD) consultant in an agency of 730 staff. I am responsible for providing input to the XX (Agency) Strategic Plan, planning corporate training programs and planning training programs using internal and external consultants to meet the business objectives, managing the budget of \$XX and leading XX project (<CONTEXT).

In order to manage this workload with no administrative support I:

- Use Outlook Calendar that all team members have access to and a paper diary as a backup to prioritise daily tasks and track monthly goals, targets and outcomes (<ACTION & RESULTS).
- Develop and maintain electronic files and use technology as effectively as possible to maximise time. I develop templates for recurring tasks and documents to save time and so that team members can find information as required (<ACTION & RESULTS).
- Invest adequate time to plan project work by producing a plan of action and monitoring progress of the plan so that overall objectives are achieved (<ACTION & RESULTS).
- Take the time to establish project teams and to understand what motivates each team member, what level of skills they bring and how much and what kind of support to provide (<ACTION & RESULTS).

I have found that careful planning and attention to organisation is essential to ensuring I can keep abreast of the demands facing me in my current position and I constantly need to re-evaluate my work role priorities (<EVALUATION).

Comments: This high level response provides a comprehensive range of specific examples of the Capability being tested. In each dot point the candidate has provided specific actions and the results gained from these strategies.

## Useful Hints and Tips

- If Written Communication is an essential capability, remember that the application represents an ideal “work sample” and panels can be expected to look at the structure and layout for evidence of this capability.
- Carefully check your application for spelling and grammatical errors before submitting. Typing and grammatical errors detract substantially from the impact of a job application and do not create a good first impression.
- Keep your application succinct and relevant. Longer applications are not necessarily better applications.
- Have a friend or colleague proof read your application. Ask them to pay attention to whether or not you have effectively addressed each of the capabilities listed in the Capabilities Profile.
- Contact the “Contact Person” listed in job advertisements if you have any specific questions relating to the position or the agency.

## **Presenting at Interview**

If you are asked to attend an interview during a selection process, there are several features of the PIRSA approach that may assist you to prepare.

PIRSA recommends the use of Behavioural Event Questions during interviews. The basic premise underlying Behavioural Event Interviews is that past experience is the best predictor of your future performance. Therefore Behavioural Event Questions are designed to seek out examples of your previous *actual* experiences rather than ask how you might handle a hypothetical situation. For example, a Behavioural Event Question designed to address the capability of Planning and Organising might be: “Tell us about the busiest office you have ever managed. What were the challenges you faced and how did you handle them?”

You may be given a copy of the interview questions 30 minutes (or more) prior to the scheduled interview. This would enable you to consider the best example to demonstrate your capabilities, and not just the first example that comes to mind under pressure. The guidelines presented for “Writing a Capabilities Statement” can assist you to prepare for Behavioural Event Interviews because the approach is essentially the same. Remember: your response should describe previous work or community experiences demonstrating that you have the capabilities sought in the position for which you are applying. This is termed “evidence” and during the interview you may notice the panel busily making notes of the evidence you provide.

During the interview, you may be asked follow-up questions after you have given your response. These probing questions are used to gain more information, so use them as an opportunity to elaborate further on the response you have given. The panel members have been trained to ask probing questions to gain the best possible response from you.

## **What other support is available?**

This document has been designed to provide you with information specifically relating to Recruitment and Selection in PIRSA. We recommend that you use this information in conjunction with other sources of information or advice when applying for a position in PIRSA. Here are a few suggestions for other sources of assistance:

- The contact person for any specific enquiries relating to the position
- The PIRSA Internet site: [www.pir.sa.gov.au](http://www.pir.sa.gov.au)
- Relevant books and literature relating to applying for jobs and career guidance
- People who work within the field or occupy a similar position to the one for which you are applying
- Career related links on the Internet