

Project Coordinator interview questions

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What to expect

A project coordinator interview is really a test of two things: whether you have a repeatable system for keeping a schedule, budget and document set accurate, and whether you can chase people without damaging the relationships you need to keep chasing them. Interviewers are listening for concrete process, not enthusiasm.

- **Process and systems:** How you actually run the coordination rhythm week to week. Expect questions about collecting updates, verifying progress and reporting to the project manager.
- **Behavioural:** Short accounts of how you have handled a budget variance, a slipping milestone or a difficult stakeholder, usually drawn from the selection criteria.
- **Scenario and judgement:** A live problem with incomplete information, testing what you do first, when you escalate and what you communicate.
- **Technical and documentation:** Your working understanding of schedules, baselines, risk registers, purchase orders and the tools you use to maintain them.
- **Stakeholder and communication:** How you handle people who bypass the process, resist giving updates, or sit above you in the hierarchy.
- **Motivation and role fit:** Whether you understand that coordination involves repetitive follow-up, and whether you will still be doing it well in month eight.

Most processes start with a short phone or video screen with a recruiter or hiring manager covering your background, availability and notice period. The main interview is usually a panel of two or three, often the project manager you would report to plus a PMO lead or senior coordinator. Panels typically open with a walk-through of your current coordination work, then move into behavioural questions drawn from the selection criteria and one or two scenarios. Public sector panels tend to be more structured, with the same questions asked of every candidate and answers scored against the criteria, so concrete examples work better than general statements about your approach.

1. Walk me through how you keep a project schedule current when several teams are feeding you updates.

Why they ask

Employers want to see a repeatable system rather than reactive chasing. This question separates coordinators who have a rhythm from those who only update the plan when someone asks.

How to structure your answer

Walk-through. Start with the rhythm and timing of your week, then how you collect updates, how you verify what you are told, how you record it, and what the project manager receives and when. Finish with what happens when someone does not respond.

Example answer

"I work to a weekly rhythm. Every Thursday I send each workstream lead a short request for their task status, with the specific items I need in the body of the message rather than a link, because people answer the version they can see. Friday morning I update Jira, then check anything that moved against the baseline in Microsoft Project. If a date has slipped I ask the lead one question: what has to change for you to hit the original date? That tells me whether it is a resourcing problem or a genuine scope change, and those two things go to the project manager differently. By Friday afternoon the project manager has an updated schedule and a short note flagging anything that needs a decision. If a lead has not responded by the deadline I call them, and if I still have nothing by Monday the delay goes in the status report as a risk with a name against it."

2. Tell me about a time you spotted a budget line running over its allocation. What did you do?

Why they ask

This is the core behavioural test for the role. It shows whether you reconcile figures properly or just forward what the finance system tells you.

How to structure your answer

STAR. Keep the situation short, be specific about what you noticed and how you verified it, explain who you told and when, then land on the result and what changed afterwards.

Example answer

"In a previous role I was tracking a project's professional services spend against its allocation. About two thirds through the financial year I noticed the consulting line was tracking well ahead of where it should have been. I pulled the purchase orders and invoices for that line, matched them to the engagement schedule and found that two separate engagements had been approved against the same allocation. I raised it with the project manager the same day with the figures and both approval records, so it was not a vague warning. We went back to the requesting managers, confirmed which engagement could be deferred to the next quarter and adjusted the forecast. The project finished the financial year without asking for a budget increase, and we moved that line to fortnightly tracking instead of monthly."

3. A milestone is due on Friday, the team lead has not answered your last two messages, and the project manager is in a steering committee meeting. What do you do?

Why they ask

Scenario questions test judgement under pressure and, more importantly, whether you escalate at the right moment rather than too early or too late.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure. State your first check, then how you try a different approach, then your escalation threshold, then what you send the project manager and what you deliberately avoid doing.

Example answer

"First I would check what I actually know. I would look at the task history in Jira and any recent messages to work out whether the task is genuinely behind or whether the lead has just not updated the tool. Then I would try a different channel, a call or a direct Slack message rather than a third email, because two unanswered emails usually means the person is buried rather than ignoring me. I would also check whether anyone else on the team can tell me where the task stands. If I still had nothing by Thursday, I would not interrupt the steering committee meeting. I would send the project manager a concise note with one line on the milestone, one on what I had already tried, and one on the impact if it slips, so they walk out of the meeting already briefed. What I would not do is let Friday pass and mention it afterwards, because by then the project manager has lost the chance to make a call."

4. What is the difference between a risk and an issue, and how would you maintain a risk register?

Why they ask

This checks that you understand the documents you will be responsible for, rather than treating the register as an administrative chore to be updated before reporting.

How to structure your answer

Technical explanation with a worked example. Define both terms, draw the line between them, then describe how you maintain the register in practice and why it matters.

Example answer

"A risk is something that has not happened yet but might, and an issue is something that already has and needs action now. So the vendor might miss the delivery date is a risk, and the vendor has missed the delivery date is an issue. In practice I keep the register as a live document rather than something we rebuild the week a report is due. Each entry gets an owner, a likelihood and impact rating using the project's own scale, a response, and a review date. I go through it with the project manager before each status cycle, add anything new that came out of team meetings and close out entries that no longer apply. When a risk's trigger is met I convert it to an issue and log it against the schedule or budget so there is a clear trail. The point of the register is that the project manager can see what is coming, so if nobody is reading it, it is not doing its job."

5. How would you handle a stakeholder who goes straight to the project manager with requests instead of coming through you?

Why they ask

Coordinators hold a process without formal authority. This question tests whether you can protect that process while staying useful rather than territorial.

How to structure your answer

Approach question. Acknowledge the stakeholder's likely motive first, state your approach in order, give a brief example of how you have handled it before, then finish on the outcome you are protecting.

Example answer

"I would start by assuming it is not personal. Most people go straight to the project manager because they think their request is urgent, or because they do not know what I do. So I would make myself useful first. I would pick up the request, work out what it affects on the schedule or budget, and come back to them with the answer or a timeframe, while letting the project manager know it is handled. Then I would have a quiet conversation with the stakeholder about the simplest path for them, which usually means one place to send requests and a clear commitment on how quickly they will hear back. I did this with a business unit manager who kept raising changes verbally in meetings. Once I started sending him a short written confirmation of anything he raised, with what it would affect, he began coming to me first because it was faster for him. The process held because it was easier to follow than to avoid."

6. Coordinating work means a lot of chasing and follow-up. What keeps you engaged with that part of the job?

Why they ask

Interviewers ask this because the repetitive side of coordination is where people disengage. They want an honest answer, not a claim that you love every reminder email.

How to structure your answer

Honest reflection with evidence. Answer directly, name what you genuinely get out of it, back it with a short example, and be candid about how you manage the repetitive parts.

Example answer

"I like being the person who knows where everything stands. There is a real satisfaction in walking into a status meeting and being able to answer any question about the schedule or the budget without going away to check. The chasing is what makes that possible, so I do not see it as separate from the job. What helps is having a system rather than relying on memory or willpower. I keep a short list each morning of what is due and who owes me something, and I clear it before I start anything else. I also try to make the ask easy, one clear question with a deadline, because most people do want to respond and just need to know exactly what is needed. When a project lands on time and the reporting was clean the whole way through, that is the part I take home."