

# Sports Turf Manager interview questions

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## What to expect

Sports turf manager interviews usually mix technical questions about turf health and irrigation with operational questions about planning, people and safety. Employers want to see that you can read a surface, run a crew and understand the standards the venue has to meet.

- **Technical turf and irrigation:** Questions on soil health, irrigation scheduling, disease and pest management, renovation, and the tools and controllers you use day to day.
- **Operational planning:** How you build a maintenance program around a fixture list, the seasons and the resources you actually have.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of handling heavy use, weather events, staffing problems or difficult stakeholders.
- **Safety and compliance scenarios:** Judgement questions about unsafe surfaces, incidents, chemical handling and work health and safety duties.
- **People leadership:** Rostering, supervising and developing greenkeeping and grounds staff, including apprentices and casuals.
- **Commercial and budget:** Managing budgets, equipment replacement, supplier contracts and getting capital requests approved.

Expect a short phone or video screen first, then a panel interview with the venue manager, head greenkeeper or a council parks coordinator, and often a walk of the grounds where you talk through what you see and how you would treat it. Some councils add a separate values or work health and safety interview, and most finish with reference checks.

## 1. Walk me through how you would build a maintenance program for a multi use oval that hosts winter football and summer cricket.

### Why they ask

This tests whether you plan seasonally around surface use and recovery rather than reacting to problems as they appear.

### How to structure your answer

Give a walk through rather than a list. Start with what the surface has to deliver and when, map the calendar, decide the renovation windows, resource the program, then set review points.

### Example answer

*"First I would establish what the ground actually has to deliver and when. For a multi use oval that is cricket through summer and football through winter, so the calendar drives everything else. I would look at soil type and drainage, thatch and compaction levels, and the wear patterns from the previous season. Then I would set the renovation windows, one after cricket and one after football, and build the program around them: coring, topdressing, overseeding with the right species for the season, and a fertiliser plan matched to growth rather than a fixed date. Mowing heights would be set to the sporting body requirements for each code, and the irrigation schedule would follow soil moisture readings, not a fixed clock. I would check the program against the fixture list, the available staff and the equipment, write it up so the crew knows what is happening each week, and review it monthly. Conditions change, so the plan has to move with them."*

## 2. Tell me about a time you had to manage a playing surface through heavy use or a bad weather period.

### Why they ask

It shows how you make judgement calls under pressure and how you communicate with the people who want to play.

#### **How to structure your answer**

Use STAR. Set the situation briefly, state what you were responsible for, describe the actions in order, then give the result in plain terms.

#### **Example answer**

*"Situation: two winters ago I was managing a council reserve with three football grades sharing the one main oval plus a second field that did not drain well. Task: we had a run of wet weeks and the goal squares were turning to mud by the second game, and clubs were asking to play anyway. Action: I moved training sessions to the outer field and rotated matches where I could, spiked and topdressed the worst areas between rounds, and kept a moisture meter on the goal squares so I knew when we were losing shear strength. I spoke to each club early in the week about what we could and could not do, rather than letting them find out on game day. Result: we got through the season with the fixtures played and the main oval recovered in time for cricket, because the clubs knew where they stood and we were not making decisions in a panic."*

### **3. A club official tells you the surface is unsafe 45 minutes before a scheduled match. What do you do?**

#### **Why they ask**

It checks whether safety comes first when there is pressure to get a game away.

#### **How to structure your answer**

Use a decision under pressure structure: stop and assess, decide, document, communicate, then follow up.

#### **Example answer**

*"The first thing I do is stop anyone going onto the surface and go and look at what they are seeing. A club official might be pointing at a soft patch, a hole, glass or a sprinkler head, and I need to know which it is before I decide anything. If it is a genuine safety risk, I call it. I would tell the match official and the venue manager straight away, document what I found with photos and a note in the log, and follow the reporting process for the venue. If it is a localised problem, I would cordon it and repair it, or move the game to another field if that is available. What I will not do is let a club talk me into playing on a surface I believe is unsafe. It is my name on the inspection, and under work health and safety duties the venue has to provide a safe playing environment. After the game I would review what happened and whether anything needs fixing before the next fixture."*

### **4. How do you roster and supervise a grounds crew across weekends, event days and ordinary weekdays?**

#### **Why they ask**

The role combines horticulture with people leadership, so they want to hear how you keep a crew effective and fair.

#### **How to structure your answer**

Explain your system with a worked example: start from the fixture calendar, build the roster, set priorities, cross train, then check the work.

#### **Example answer**

*"I build the roster backwards from the fixture calendar. Once I know when the games and events are, I work out what has to be done the day before, the morning of and the day after, and then I place the people. Full time staff get the technical work and the machinery, and casuals cover the weekend set ups and line marking, with at least one experienced person on every event day. At the start of each day we do a short pre-start, so everyone knows the priority jobs and any safety issues, and I check the work rather than assume it is done. I cross train people so a sick day does not leave the mowers*

*sitting in the shed. Apprentices get time on the technical jobs under supervision, which keeps them interested and gives me depth. And I keep the roster visible a fortnight ahead so people can plan their lives around it."*

## **5. How do you decide when and how much to irrigate, and what data and tools do you use?**

### **Why they ask**

Irrigation management is a core technical skill, and it is where a lot of turf problems start.

### **How to structure your answer**

Explain your decision logic in layers: soil moisture data, weather, surface use, then the tools, and how you adjust when conditions change.

### **Example answer**

*"On a normal week I start with soil moisture meter readings at a few depths on the greens, tees and the main square, and I compare those against the forecast and what the surface has coming up. If a match or a heavy mowing day is close, I want the profile moist but not saturated, so I will run night cycles through Toro Lynx and check output at the sprinklers rather than trusting the schedule on the screen. In a dry spell I add hand watering to the high spots and the new turf, and I log what I applied and where so the next person is not guessing. I also watch pump pressure and filter condition, because a blocked filter will dry out a green long before the controller shows anything. If rain is coming I back off, even if the program says otherwise. The data informs the decision, it does not make it."*

## **6. How do you manage the grounds budget when major equipment needs replacing mid-season?**

### **Why they ask**

It tests commercial judgement and whether you can protect the playing surface while staying inside the allocation.

### **How to structure your answer**

Use a prioritisation framework: safety and compliance first, then fixtures, then discretionary spending, then explain how you get a decision approved.

### **Example answer**

*"I would start by working out how critical the machine is. If it is the reel mower that cuts the main oval, or anything that affects safety or the playing surface, it goes to the top of the list. Then I would look at the options: repair if the parts are available and the machine is worth keeping, hire for the short term so fixtures are not affected, or bring the replacement forward through the capital works process. I would get quotes, check them against what is left in the budget, and put the case in writing to whoever holds the purse, because councils and venue operators need the decision documented. I would also look at the service contract and operator training, since a lot of premature failures come from how equipment is used and maintained. If I have to defer something, I tell the people affected early and say when it will be done. The budget does not get to be a surprise at the end of the year."*