



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
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PERSONNEL BULLETIN NO. 20-21

SUBJECT: Requirements for Assessment Practices During the Selection Process

1. Purpose. This Personnel Bulletin (PB) provides policy on the use of assessment tools to measure job-related competencies during the assessment and selection process. This PB supersedes the provisions of 370 DM 337.1.1 and PB 17-12.

2. Authorities.

- a. 5 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 300, Employment (General)
- b. 5 CFR Part 332, Recruitment and Selection Through Competitive Examination
- c. 29 CFR Part 1607, Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures
- d. 5 United States Code (USC) Part 1104, Delegation of Authority for Personnel Management
- e. 5 USC Part 2301, Merit System Principles
- f. 5 USC Part 3301, Civil Service; Generally
- g. 5 USC Part 3318, Competitive Service; Selection from Certificates
- h. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- i. Executive Order (E.O.) 13932 on Modernizing and Reforming the Assessment and Hiring of Federal Job Candidates
- j. 2010 Presidential Memorandum – Improving the Federal Hiring Process

3. Background. 5 C.F.R. Part 300 establishes that each employment practice of the Federal Government shall be based, in part, on the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform the duties and responsibilities of the job. It also states that there shall be a relationship between performance in the position to be filled and the employment practice used. The objective of this

PB is to outline the standards and procedures required of assessment tools and processes during the employee assessment and selection process.

4. Definitions.

- (a) *Assessment tool.* Any test or procedure used to measure an individual's employment or career-related qualifications and interests (for example, ability test, structured interview, work sample).
- (b) *Assessment procedure.* A systematic approach to gathering information about individuals using assessment tools; this information is used to make employment or career-related decisions about applicants and employees.
- (c) *Reliability.* The consistency of an assessment tool. Candidates should perform similarly, if not the same, across multiple administrations of the assessment tool.
- (d) *Validity.* The job-relatedness of an assessment tool and how well it measures job-related aspects of the position. Any assessment tool should be related to the duties of the job or to the competencies required to perform those duties.
- (e) *Subject matter expert (SME).* A person with expert knowledge of a particular job, role, or subject area related therein. In this PB, "subject matter expert" refers specifically to individuals other than the selecting official who are providing this type of information. SMEs involved in the assessment process must meet any criteria established by bureaus, such as minimum grade level.
- (f) *Job-related personality test.* A class of assessment tools intended to measure work-related competencies such as accountability, attention to detail, self-management, and teamwork, or to predict work-relevant outcomes such as occupational citizenship behaviors, counterproductive work behaviors, or attrition.
- (g) *Clinical personality test.* A medical examination intended to diagnose psychiatric conditions such as personality disorders, schizophrenia, or compulsive disorders.
- (h) *Multiple hurdle assessment process.* An assessment strategy that utilizes multiple assessment tools. Applicants that meet a pre-determined cutoff score at each phase of the assessment process move on to complete the next assessment tool, allowing for assessment tools that are high quality, but also resource-intensive (e.g., simulations, structured interviews) to be used with a smaller pool of candidates.
- (i) *USA Hire.* A suite of assessments developed, maintained, and defended by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management that measures general competencies identified by Government-wide job analysis to be critical to several dozen occupational series and grade levels throughout the Federal Government.
- (j) *Self-report assessment tool.* An assessment tool that relies on applicants to self-report and self-rate their own levels of experience, training, or other qualifications for a position. Assessment tools that require applicants to describe their experience, training, competencies, or other qualifications and rely on structured evaluations of these descriptions by SMEs DO NOT fall into the category of self-report assessment tools, but instead are considered competency-based assessment tools.
- (k) *Competency-based assessment tool.* An assessment tool that objectively measures the job-related competencies of applicants by having the applicant demonstrate proficiency in particular subject area, task, or other job-related factor.

- (1) *Writing assessment.* An assessment tool used to assess a candidate's job-related competencies through evaluation of their writing. This tool can be used to assess a candidate's writing ability or other competencies or experience (e.g., technical subject matter expertise).

5. Policy.

- (a) **General Assessment Requirements.** Any assessment tool used for selection purposes must be reliable, valid, and meet the following criteria established in the [5 CFR Part 300](#) and outlined in [5 USC Part 2301](#):
- Fair and practical – Assessment and selection procedures must be practical and provide candidates a fair chance to have their job-related abilities evaluated.
 - Selection from among the best qualified candidates – Assessment and selection procedures should be successful in identifying a highly qualified, diverse pool of candidates who can perform successfully in the position.
 - Developed and used without discrimination based on any non-merit factors – Candidates for a position should not be discriminated against on the basis of any non-job-related characteristics, such as race, sex, religion, age, etc.
 - Provide candidates with the opportunity to appeal – Assessment tools and procedures should have a process in place for candidates to appeal if they believe they have been treated unfairly (*See* 5 CFR 300.103 and 5 CFR 300.104).
 - Job analysis – Any assessment tool or procedure used must be based on a job analysis that identifies the basic duties and responsibilities of the position, the competencies required to perform the duties and responsibilities, and the factors important in evaluating the competencies.
 - Relevance – A candidate's success or failure on any assessment tool or procedure should be indicative of their actual ability to perform the work of the position.
- (b) **Administrative Careers with America (ACWA) Exam Requirements.** Any two (2) grade interval administrative position filled in the competitive service at the entry level (GS-5 or GS-7) with promotion potential to the GS-9 level or higher requires the use of an assessment tool to measure candidates' job-related knowledge, skills, or abilities. This requirement can be met through utilizing the ACWA exams within the USA Staffing talent acquisition system, or alternative assessment tools from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (e.g., USA Hire), procuring an alternative assessment tool from another test vendor, or by the Department or Bureau developing and administering their own assessment tool(s), provided that the assessment tool(s) used meet(s) the criteria specified in section 5(a) of this PB.
- (c) **Selecting Official and SME Involvement.** Both the selecting official and SME(s) should be involved in the assessment and selection process but will have differing roles. Both can be involved in conducting a job analysis and identifying assessment tools for a vacancy. However, selecting officials cannot participate in the rating and

- ranking portion of the assessment process occurring prior to establishing a certificate of eligibles (e.g., rating and scoring applications or résumés, conducting and scoring candidate interviews, reviewing and scoring writing samples, etc.).
- (d) Use of Self-Report Assessment Tools.** If using a self-report assessment tool, a supplemental Competency-based assessment tool must also be used as part of the assessment procedure, prior to candidate referral. This meets the requirement for EO 13932, Section 3(b). This requirement applies to all vacancies in the competitive service, with the exception of competitive hiring actions that do not require competitive rating and ranking of candidates (e.g., when using a direct hire authority). This requirement does not apply to vacancies in the excepted service (e.g., Pathways hires, Schedule A hiring).
- (e) Self-Report Verification.** Reasonable steps may be taken to ensure the integrity of any self-report assessment tools. In the event that an applicant's response on a self-report questionnaire (i.e., occupational questionnaire) cannot be verified elsewhere within their application materials (e.g., resume, cover letter), their score on that item may be adjusted to the response level supported by their application materials. Score adjustments may only take place if all applicants have been notified in advance about the self-report verification policy. This verification policy must be listed on the job opportunity announcement or in the instructions section of the questionnaire. Bureaus must be consistent in approach to their self-report verification process and ensure score adjustments are applied consistently to all applicants.
- (f) Job-Related Personality Testing.** Job-related personality tests may be used to measure job-related knowledge, skills, abilities, or competencies during the selection process as long as they meet the standards set forth in 5 CFR Part 300 and the Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures (29 CFR Part 1607). In contrast, clinical personality tests are intended to diagnose psychiatric conditions (e.g., schizophrenia, compulsive disorders). The ADA considers any tests designed to reveal such disorders to be a "medical examination." Personality tests meeting the definition of a medical examination may not be administered prior to making an offer of employment.
- (g) Multiple Hurdle Assessment Process.** A multiple hurdle assessment process may be employed, and in some cases will be advantageous, when evaluating candidates for a position. When using a multiple hurdle assessment process for competitive examining, applicable veterans' preference rules and regulations must still be followed. Please refer to the Delegated Examining Operations Handbook for guidance on application of veterans' preference rules and regulations in a multiple hurdle process: https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/hiring-information/competitive-hiring/deo_handbook.pdf.
- (h) USA Hire.** When USA Hire is available for the occupational series and grade level at which a vacancy is to be filled and the hiring scenario meets the criteria established in the Department's USA Hire Implementation Guidance (e.g., non-supervisory

position, high volume of applicants expected, and area of consideration is applicants external to the bureau or office), USA Hire or valid alternative assessment tool(s) must be used as part of the assessment process. Any assessment tool(s) used as an alternative to USA Hire must meet the requirements of a competency-based assessment tool. USA Hire assessments can be used alone or can be paired with other assessment tools (e.g., SME panel review of writing sample, technical self-report questionnaire) in order to assess technical competencies or experience critical to success in the position. The Department's USA Hire Implementation Guidance can be found in the Assessment Practices Guide.

- (i) Confidentiality of the Assessment Process.** Individuals involved in the assessment process as SMEs, including non-Federal employees, must agree not to disclose any materials or details about the assessment process for a position that might compromise the integrity of the selection procedure or future use of an assessment tool. Additionally, any assessment tools and related materials made available by the Department's Office of Human Capital (OHC) for Department-wide use shall be used as directed in the assessment instructions. These materials will only be used for the measurement of competencies and for the occupations specified within the instructions. Assessment tools and related materials shall only be used for official assessment and selection procedures within the Department and cannot be used for any other purpose (e.g., interviewer training). Assessment tools and related materials shall not be disclosed to potential applicants or any persons outside an official staffing, recruitment, or managerial role within the Department. Failure to safeguard these materials will result in forfeiture of the materials, disqualification for use of future OHC-developed assessment tools and related materials, and potential disciplinary actions.
- (j) Writing Assessments.** Writing assessments may be used during the assessment process to evaluate candidates' job-related competencies. Per the 2010 Presidential Memorandum on Reforming Federal Hiring, writing assessments or writing samples cannot be requested from applicants prior to screening applicants for minimum qualifications. The use of writing assessments or request for a writing sample, as with any assessment process used in filling a vacancy, must be included in the "How You Will Be Evaluated" section of the job opportunity announcement.
- (k) Tracking Results.** OHC will regularly evaluate the effectiveness of assessment and selection processes and strategies utilized across the Department to verify the requirements of Section 5(a) of this PB are met. This meets the requirement for EO 13932, Section 3(c).

6. Additional Guidance. For additional guidance on the use of assessment tools in the selection process, please reference the Department's Assessment Practices Guide and additional resources located at <https://www.doi.gov/pmb/hr/assessment>.

7. Contact. Bureau human resources offices may contact the Office of Human Capital Strategic Talent Management division at doi_office_of_human_resources@ios.doi.gov for questions or additional information on this policy.

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