



OHIO ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE, INC.

6277 Riverside Drive · Dublin, Ohio 43017

Advisory Services Division

FAQ's

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT CENTER PROCESS

Advisory Services Policy Committee
Chief Thomas N. Davidson, Tipp City PD, Chairperson
Craig King, Advisory Services Director

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT CENTER PROCESS

The purpose of this document is to provide information, of a more technical nature, about Assessment Centers to agencies that are considering using an Assessment Center as part of their employment process. This document, using the question/answer format, was developed by the Advisory Services Policy Committee (ASPC).

The ASPC helps to direct and monitor the activities of the police management consultants. This committee (1) oversees the application process for interested consultants, (2) grants approval of consultants and manages the process of assigning them to particular clients, (3) provides a continuing review to ensure that the process is being conducted in an objective and professional manner, and (4) "fine tunes" the Assessment Center process based upon research and feedback from our previous clients.

Should you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact Craig King, Advisory Services Director at 614-761-0330 or craig.king@oacp.org.

QUESTION:

ANSWER:

Page

- *How is the cost of an Assessment Center determined and is this a "not to exceed" amount?* 2
- *Does Advisory Services provide other support to agencies that are involved in making employment decisions?* 2
- *How is the question of validity of Assessment Centers addressed?* 2
- *Who decides what materials are provided to the candidates prior to the testing, such as the exercises to be conducted, the type of material furnished explaining the exercises, dimensions in the evaluation, etc., and who provides it?* 2
- *Are certain exercises better suited for certain ranks?* 3
- *What differences (if any) should be built into the assessment process when assessments are being conducted for two or more positions during the same day or over several days? For example:
a. Captain/Lieutenant
b. Lieutenant/Sergeant* 3
- *A number of clients have used the Assessment Center process several times. This can raise the concern that candidates who have gone through the process previously will have an advantage over those going through the process for the first time.* 3
- *How are the exercises scored?* 3
- *What is a passing score?* 4
- *What percent or weight should be given the assessment process if it is a component of a multi-part examination process?* 4
- *What is written about strengths and areas for improvement?* 4
- *Can the assessment process be used by clients whose form of government requires that only written exams be administered for promotion?* 4
- *Do candidates have the right to inspect their examination papers and receive a copy of the test and individual scoring sheets?* 5
- *Why do the assessors ask each candidate for their confidential identifier Letter/Number and record it on paper?* 5
- *How important is the debriefing process of the candidates following the assessment process?* 5
- *Who is responsible for conducting background checks?* 5
- *What actions can be taken to safeguard the process from bias?* 5
- *What do management studies/organizational reviews conducted by the OACP involve?* 6
- *Are Assessment Center records "Public Documents" and how long are they retained?* 6

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT CENTER PROCESS

QUESTION:

How is the cost of an Assessment Center determined and is this a "not to exceed" amount?

ANSWER:

An estimate of the total cost for an Assessment Center is \$4,900 with the cost of the Pre-Assessment meeting included. The exact cost depends on the number and type of exercises used the number of candidates, travel costs of the consultants and use of a role player. As these variables become known, a "not to exceed figure" will be provided for inclusion in the contract between OACP Advisory Services and the client. A typical one day Assessment Center includes three exercises and six candidates. If the Assessment Center takes an additional day, due to the number of candidates, the cost is approximately \$2500. In all cases, the invoice for services will not be greater than "not to exceed figure" included in the contract and in most cases it will be less.

QUESTION:

Does Advisory Services provide other support to agencies that are involved in making employment decisions?

ANSWER:

Yes, Advisory Services can help with the creation of position announcements, posting such announcements on the OACP website or sending them to over 800 law enforcement officials and agencies via US mail or email, handling returned résumés or applications, ranking returned or applications and other consulting services. Cost estimates for the aforementioned help can be obtained by contacting Craig King, Advisory Services Director at 614-761-0330 or kingc@lef-oh.org.

QUESTION:

How is the question of validity of Assessment Centers addressed?

ANSWER:

Validity is defined as the ability of an instrument, test, questionnaire, interview, etc. to actually measure the quality or characteristic it was originally intended to measure. Validity can be based upon one of three possible base models: criterion, concurrent, or content validity. The Assessment Center process is designed to reflect the non-empirical "content validity" model. The "content validity" model requires a thorough knowledge of job demands based on a careful job analysis. If a formal job task analysis has not been completed by the client, a job description is obtained and comprehensive interviewing of superiors, colleagues, peers, and possibly subordinates is completed by the lead assessor during the pre-assessment site visit in order to identify critical tasks performed and requisite skills necessary to be successful in the position being assessed. Subsequently, the assessment exercises are designed with that information in mind.

This ensures the assessment process measures the aspects of the job and has content similar to the actual job content. The fact that experienced police executives and senior administrators are designing the exercises further ensures the content validity doctrine. Consequently, the Assessment Center is traditionally recognized as the most pure means to ensure content validity.

QUESTION:

Who decides what materials are provided to the candidates prior to the testing, such as the exercises to be conducted, the type of material furnished explaining the exercises, dimensions in the evaluation, etc., and who provides it?

ANSWER:

These matters are thoroughly discussed with the client during the pre-assessment site visit. The decision to inform the candidates of the type of exercises that will be conducted during the assessment process rests with the client. However, the dimensions used, details of the scoring process, and similar specifics remain confidential and are not disclosed to the candidates prior to the testing. This is essential to ensure that all candidates are provided the same information. A "level playing field" must be maintained.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT CENTER PROCESS

QUESTION:

Are certain exercises better suited for certain ranks?

ANSWER:

Yes. For example, the in-basket exercise is normally not used for first and second line supervisory positions unless administrative (command) duties compose a large percentage of that position's overall work responsibilities.

Similarly, the oral presentation exercise, when used, should be designed to reflect a realistic situation that might be encountered by the candidate.

There are five (5) types of simulations and the scenarios chosen for each type are designed to match the target position.

QUESTION:

What differences (if any) should be built into the assessment process when assessments are being conducted for two or more positions during the same day or over several days? For example:

- a. Captain/Lieutenant*
- b. Lieutenant/Sergeant*

ANSWER:

Assessment exercise content is based on an analysis of the job descriptions, job/task analysis (if available) and discussions held during the pre-assessment phase, with dimensions selected that measure the "relative capacity of the candidate to utilize those certain behavior dimensions." The specific assessment simulation exercises and scenarios are then designed based on the skills, knowledge, and abilities identified for the target position so that the desired behavior dimensions for each position can be demonstrated. They are as unique or common as each job is. In some cases, there may be little or no difference between the positions and their respective behavior dimensions, other cases, there may be significant differences between the two positions. In such instances, two sets of exercises (or parts thereof) may need to be used.

QUESTION:

A number of clients have used the Assessment Center process several times. This can raise the concern that candidates who have gone through the process previously will have an advantage over those going through the process for the first time.

ANSWER:

Theoretically, any type of competitive testing process gives some advantage to those individuals repeating the test or process. This is as true for an Assessment Center process as it is for a written test to the extent that knowledge of the process involved allows the candidate to know what to expect. However, just as the candidate does not know the specific questions on a written test, the candidate is also unaware of the specific exercise situations utilized in the assessment process.

As a result, it is especially important in such situations that those conducting the Assessment Center process be aware of the fact that an Assessment Center had been previously conducted. It would be even more helpful to know the specific exercises and scenarios utilized in the earlier process so that any similarities in the subsequent testing could be minimized.

QUESTION:

How are the exercises scored?

ANSWER:

The exercises are scored by the assessors using standardized evaluation forms. Each of the three assessors scores each exercise separately and then the total points for all exercises are combined and divided by the number of dimensions to gain a numeric score. A consensus discussion is conducted according to assessment process guidelines to confirm the consistency of the process.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT CENTER PROCESS

QUESTION:

What is a passing score?

ANSWER:

Assessors do not establish a passing score although the client may choose to do so. For our purposes there is no passing or failing score, just a numeric rank score. The Assessment Center process will provide a percentage score with 100 being the highest possible score. Candidates will be listed by assigned letter/number, followed by their combined score for all exercises. The client must inform the Lead Consultant of any pass/fail requirements.

QUESTION:

What percent or weight should be given the assessment process if it is a component of a multi-part examination process?

ANSWER:

This is a decision that lies totally with the client depending upon their own priorities and preferences. However, it is our belief that the assessment process should be given the greatest weight of all components.

QUESTION:

What is written about strengths and areas for improvement?

ANSWER:

The final report to the client typically includes an assessment of the strengths and areas for improvement displayed by each candidate during the various assessment process exercises. However, there may be times when the client, for their own reasons, may request that this component of the report not be included.

Each candidate is assessed individually and in-group settings (if applicable) to select the best qualified. This is an important aspect of the Assessment Center process and provides great benefit to the client as well as to individual candidates. Not only does the analysis of strengths and areas for improvement provide a justification for the relative ranking of the candidates, but it also provides insight and guidance for the unsuccessful candidates about skills and abilities they may choose to develop further to enhance their potential.

Because the strengths and areas for improvement portion of the final report is so important, the consultants continuously make note throughout each exercise of candidate strengths and areas for improvement. The individual notes of each consultant are then compiled in preparing the final report to the client.

QUESTION:

Can the assessment process be used by clients whose form of government requires that only written exams be administered for promotion?

ANSWER:

Those governmental agencies that were previously restricted by the Ohio Revised Code to the use of only written exams should be aware of a recent change in the ORC. Effective 10/25/95 ORC 123.23 was changed to permit a broader range of testing options. Tests may be written, oral, physical, demonstration of skill, or an evaluation of training and experiences and shall be designed to fairly test the relative capacity of the persons examined to discharge the particular duties of the position for which appointment is sought.

An Assessment Center process requires job related simulations that are both written and oral in nature. While we can provide a "written evaluation" process by modifying the design of the various exercises, it is not an Assessment Center process and should be considered an exam. In using this approach, great care must be taken to identify issues that will illustrate the strengths and areas for improvement of the candidates and exercise dimensions must be carefully reviewed when listing strengths and areas for improvement.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT CENTER PROCESS

QUESTION:

Do candidates have the right to inspect their examination papers and receive a copy of the test and individual scoring sheets?

ANSWER:

Everything provided to the client is a public record and is, therefore, open for inspection.

QUESTION:

Why do the assessors ask each candidate for their confidential identifier Letter/Number and record it on paper?

ANSWER:

This is a standard procedure in the process and helps to ensure that anonymity is maintained throughout the process. The identifier letter/number is the sole identifying indicator of the candidate and is used throughout the process for assessment, evaluation, and scoring purposes.

QUESTION:

How important is the debriefing process of the candidates following the assessment process?

ANSWER:

It is very important. The debriefing provides an opportunity for the candidates to ask any questions they may have concerning the process. This helps to clarify any misconceptions or misunderstanding of the process. At the conclusion of the assessment process, the consultants will encourage each of the candidates to be open and candid about their impressions of the process. This aspect of the de-briefing process can enhance the understanding and overall approval of the process and the OACP.

The debriefing is also important because it often provides the assessors with information that can improve their preparation and effectiveness when conducting future assessments and can identify any potential areas of biases identified by the candidates.

QUESTION:

Who is responsible for conducting background checks?

ANSWER:

The OACP contract does not provide a provision for a background investigation to be conducted by the Advisory Services consultant. Although considered an important part of the selection process, it is to be considered independent from the OACP AGREEMENT and is the responsibility of the client to have any required background checks completed.

QUESTION:

What actions can be taken to safeguard the process from bias?

ANSWER:

The prevention of bias begins with the awareness on the part of the consultant that conducting an assessment is a serious matter and must be completed as professionally as possible. Equally important is the knowledge on the part of each consultant that the perception of bias is often just as serious as actual bias. Consultants are acutely aware that special care must be exercised at all times throughout the assessment process.

Typically, many steps are taken by Advisory Services to prevent bias or the perception of bias. These include the use of consultants who are not within the immediate vicinity of the client, ensuring human diversity in assessor selection to reflect the client population and the use of letter identifiers/confidential numbers to maintain the anonymity of the individual candidates. In some instances, especially when an assessment process is conducted for a Police Chief position, the consultants assigned to the process are provided the names of the candidates so that they can excuse themselves from the panel if they know a candidate or candidates.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT CENTER PROCESS

The consultants are asked to identify potential biases or conflicts that might exist. At the same time, the client is encouraged to provide the candidates with the names and a biographical summary of the consultants so that the candidates themselves can articulate concerns they might have regarding a perceived or actual conflict of interest.

QUESTION:

What do management studies/organizational reviews conducted by the OACP involve?

ANSWER:

In addition to conducting Assessment Centers, OACP Advisory Services consultants conduct management studies when requested by the chief of police or others responsible for local government. The time and cost depends on the depth and breadth of the study requested. In conducting a management study it is essential team members demonstrate objectivity, fairness, empathy and professionalism. At the conclusion of the study, a written report recognizes areas that are operating in a satisfactory manner and provides recommendations for improvement as noted. The report becomes a "roadmap" for future strategic planning efforts in the department.

QUESTION:

Are Assessment Center records "Public Documents" and how long are they retained?

ANSWER:

All records generated in an Assessment Center that are sent to OACP or to the client are public records and copies must be made available when requested by anyone. Records are retained by OACP for 6 years.
