



# Enterprise Assessment Strategy Recommendations

For the  
Department of Defense

Presented by  
HR Strategy and Evaluation Solutions  
Assessment and Evaluation Branch  
Selection and Promotion Assessment

June 2023

## Introduction

The Department of Defense (DOD) contracted with the U.S. Office of Personnel Management Human Resources Solutions (OPM) to develop an enterprise assessment strategy. Consistent with implementation of Executive Order 13932, Modernizing and Reforming the Assessment and Hiring of Federal Job Candidates, DOD seeks to maximize use of high quality assessments across its many hiring processes. This enterprise assessment strategy will support DOD's ability to: (1) identify high quality assessments for use across DOD hiring processes and (2) lay the foundation for additional consulting and assessment work that defines specific hiring processes for specific jobs and/or job families within DOD.

## Component Meetings

OPM psychologists worked with DOD to gather relevant information related to current hiring processes across the enterprise. To begin this process, OPM and DOD identified key groups for input. These included DOD's three largest components (Air Force, Army, and Navy), as well as the Chief Digital and Artificial Intelligence Office (CDAO). OPM psychologists then identified a list of questions targeting key areas related to hiring and assessment to address with the identified groups. To fully utilize the limited time available to meet with the identified groups, DOD stakeholders added questions related to adjacent efforts. Questions used in the component meetings are listed in Appendix A. DOD then identified subject matter experts (SMEs) representing the identified key groups who could provide feedback on the established list of questions.

Between December 2022 and March 2023, OPM psychologists met with SMEs from each of the identified groups separately. The goals of the component meetings were to: (1) define the specific goals of the hiring processes, (2) determine the relative importance of different variables to DOD (e.g., cost, burden to candidates, quality of candidates, time to hire), and (3) gather feedback on any current assessment processes. Notes from the component meetings can be found in Appendices B through E. Following component meetings, OPM psychologists corresponded with DOD SMEs via email to obtain additional information where necessary. Assessment information and feedback provided in the component meetings informed the assessment strategy recommendations provided below.

## Enterprise Assessment Strategy Recommendations

The goal of enterprise assessment strategy is to provide overarching hiring principles to create consistency across the enterprise. The recommendations provided are high-level to avoid limiting smaller organizational units (e.g., components, departments, etc.) within the agency from achieving more specific hiring goals. Enterprise assessment strategy can be viewed as the core principles on which all assessment practices within the agency should be based. Smaller organizational units can build on this by adding more specific requirements that meet their individual needs.

The recommendations below are formulated to apply across all of DOD and stem from the information provided by SMEs across the enterprise. Recommendations apply to the competitive service. Hiring practices for other hiring authorities (e.g., excepted service, direct-hire authority) should follow current agency policies. The recommendations address:

- overarching assessment principles;
- broad types of competency-based assessments that do not rely on candidate self-evaluations;
- specific suggestions of off-the-shelf and custom assessments where applicable;
- training for those employees who are involved in the hiring process;
- use of a universal talent management system; and
- evaluation of the assessment strategies and practices that are ultimately implemented.

Each of these recommendations is discussed in more detail below.

## Overarching Assessment Principles

**Base all assessment content on job-related competencies.** This practice will create compliance with the job relatedness requirements of the *Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures* (43FR38290). Typically, job relatedness is established through job analysis. Job analysis is a systematic procedure for gathering, documenting, and analyzing information about the content, context, and requirements of a job. Job analysis data serves as a foundation for effective HR practices, including the use of assessments in hiring and is an important part of professional practice in the validation of personnel selection procedures, according to the *Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures* (Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 2018).

**Treat all candidates consistently.** This is accomplished by adopting a standardized assessment and decision-making process for each position. Standardizing means making the process uniform to ensure the same information is collected from each candidate for a given position and is used in a consistent manner in employment decisions. This includes administering the same assessment(s) to all candidates participating in the same selection hurdle, thereby allowing each candidate the same opportunity to showcase their abilities and helping to prevent potential unfairness.

## Use of Assessments

**Use at least one competency-based assessment that does not rely on candidate self-evaluations.** Executive Order 13932 requires agencies to utilize at least one competency-based assessment that does not rely on self-evaluations from candidates. DOD often uses an Occupational Questionnaire (OQ) as the sole assessment in the hiring process. Because the OQ relies on candidate self-evaluation, it does not meet this requirement when administered by itself. Depending on the position, different assessment types may be most appropriate to be used in lieu of, or in conjunction with, an OQ.

Viable assessments that do not rely on self-evaluation include<sup>1</sup>:

- Accomplishment Records
- Assessment Centers
- Biographical Data (Biodata) Tests
- Cognitive Ability Tests
- Integrity/Honesty Tests
- Job Knowledge Tests
- Personality Tests

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<sup>1</sup> This list is not all-inclusive, but provides examples of commonly used assessment methods.

- Physical Abilities Tests
- Situational Judgement Tests
- Structured Interviews
- USA Hire<sup>SM</sup> Standard Assessments
- USA Hire<sup>SM</sup> Premium Assessments
- USA Hire<sup>SM</sup> Custom Assessments
- Writing Assessments
- Work Samples and Simulations

**Use USA Hire<sup>SM</sup> Standard assessments where applicable.** USA Hire<sup>SM</sup> Standard assessments are online, unproctored assessments that can be included in the hiring process immediately by the HR user in a specific vacancy using USA Staffing<sup>®</sup>. USA Hire<sup>SM</sup> Standard assessments are available for 133 occupational series. DOD currently has access to USA Hire<sup>SM</sup> Standard assessments through contracting with OPM. Components should evaluate the current recruitment methods utilized and identify proper usage of USA Hire<sup>SM</sup> Standard assessments across the component to increase use and ensure consistent application. Considerations when deciding whether to use USA Hire Standard<sup>SM</sup> assessments include applicant volume, announcement type, and job location. Use of USA Hire<sup>SM</sup> Standard assessments presents DOD with a cost-effective way to comply with Executive Order 13932 for a large number of positions. Additionally, adoption of this recommendation creates consistency across the enterprise in how candidates for the same position are assessed and the skills they possess when hired.

**Explore additional off-the-shelf assessments that can be used across multiple positions.** As mentioned above, agencies must use at least one assessment that does not rely on candidate self-evaluation for each position. To gain efficiency in reaching compliance, DOD should consider obtaining access to off-the-shelf assessments that can be used across multiple positions. This approach would allow DOD to cover multiple positions not covered by USA Hire<sup>SM</sup> Standard with single assessment solutions. One such option is USA Hire<sup>SM</sup> Premium, which includes off-the-shelf assessments that can be used to measure specific competencies across occupations.

USA Hire<sup>SM</sup> Premium assessments include:

- **Automated Writing Assessment (AWA):** The AWA is an online, off-the-shelf assessment that measures the competency of Writing. The AWA can be used for all positions where Writing is a critical competency for job performance.
- **Program and Project Manager Assessment (PAPMA):** The PAPMA is an online, off-the-shelf assessment that measures program and project management competencies. The PAPMA can be used for non-supervisory GS-0340 positions or for any non-supervisory positions in occupational series where project management is a critical aspect of the position. The PAPMA is composed of three sections:
  - **In-Basket:** Candidates receive a series of emails and informative documents describing various situations. For each situation, the candidate rates the effectiveness of various response options.
  - **Branching Role Play:** Candidates view short videos focused on typical workplace situations. The videos "branch" depending on each response the candidate selects.

- Business Case Analysis: Candidates receive a variety of data for a fictitious agency. Candidates must analyze the data and rate how effective various options are for responding to each situation.
- **Federal Supervisory Assessment (FSA)**: The FSA is an online, off-the-shelf assessment that measures supervisory competencies. The FSA can be used for white-collar, non-law enforcement supervisory positions, including second-level supervisors (i.e., managers, or those who supervise supervisors). The FSA is composed of two sections:
  - Situational Inventory: Candidates are presented realistic work problems or scenarios common to supervisory positions in the Federal Government and are asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the responses.
  - Behavioral Index: Candidates are presented questions about their personal experiences and work styles as they relate to supervisor positions in the Federal Government.
- **Executive Assessments (EA)<sup>2</sup>**: The Executive Assessments are a suite of online assessments intended for use in selecting career senior executives. The suite of assessments is designed to measure the OPM Executive Core Qualifications. The suite is composed of three assessments:
  - Situational Judgment Test (SJT): Candidates are presented with realistic situations they would encounter on the job and are asked to evaluate possible options for handling the situation presented.
  - Work Styles Assessment (WSA): Candidates are presented with a mixture of personality and biographical data items that measure a candidate's preferred work styles as they relate to competencies underlying the Executive Core Qualifications.
  - Work Simulation: Candidates are presented with an engaging, integrated narrative that unfolds through related and realistic on-the-job scenarios; the assessment presents items and information through a range of stimuli including emails, videos, and documents (e.g., organizational charts, data).

**Explore custom assessments for positions that cannot be covered by off-the-shelf assessment solutions.** Custom assessments offer maximum flexibility to meet assessment needs not covered by off-the-shelf assessments. To reach full compliance with Executive Order 13932, custom assessments are recommended for positions where available off-the-shelf assessments (e.g., USA Hire Standard and USA Hire Premium) do not meet DOD hiring goals. To identify positions that may benefit from custom assessments, DOD can focus on mission critical occupations by reviewing current assessment methods and identifying occupational series that could not be covered by off-the-shelf-assessments or have unique requirements that would require custom assessment. For example, law enforcement positions within DOD may benefit from custom assessments due to their unique requirements. Feedback from component SMEs will be especially useful in identifying occupational series for custom assessment, as they are in the best position to speak to hiring goals.

**Use OQs to gather information not assessed by other assessment tools.** While OQs cannot be used as the sole assessment in a hiring process, they can help make the hiring process more holistic by

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<sup>2</sup> While Senior Executive Service (SES) positions are not covered under EO 13932, use of valid assessments for these positions is a recommended best practice to consider. Executive Order 13714, Strengthening the Senior Executive Service supports improved assessment for SES positions.

providing information on competency areas not captured by other hiring assessments. For positions that require technical competencies (i.e., skills, knowledge, and abilities gained through specialized experience or education), OQs should be utilized to assess technical competencies if no other assessment of technical competencies exists. If a different technical assessment is used for the position, it may be more appropriate to use an OQ to measure general competencies. Regardless of focus, DOD should rely on SMEs who have an intimate knowledge of the requirements of the position to develop OQ items for each position<sup>3</sup>. Currently, OQs are used for all positions within the DOD identified key groups.

## Training

**Provide bias training to all employees participating in hiring actions.** It is important for employees to be aware of individual biases as they participate in the hiring process. Each individual brings their own biases into the hiring process and increasing awareness of common pitfalls to avoid can limit their impact when evaluating candidates. Some DOD components currently provide bias training to employees. DOD should evaluate existing bias training content and develop content to make available to all employees involved in hiring actions. This will make employees aware of sources of bias and aid in limiting bias in the assessment process.

**Provide training when using assessors.** An assessor is anyone participating in the hiring process who evaluates candidate performance (e.g., HR representatives, SMEs). When employees evaluate candidate performance on an assessment (e.g., structured interviews<sup>4</sup>, resume reviews<sup>5</sup>), DOD should train assessors to accurately use the rating materials. Because human judgements are subjective, it is important that assessors understand the evaluation and scoring process to maximize consistency in how the criteria are applied. Providing assessor training reduces bias and increases consistency in how assessors evaluate applicant performance.

## Talent Management

**Use a universal talent management platform to gather and report data consistently.** Consistency in a talent management platform will allow DOD to collect and report the same HR data across the enterprise, which will enable the agency to evaluate HR processes consistently. DOD currently uses the USA Staffing<sup>®</sup> talent management platform across the identified groups. However, it is important to ensure consistent usage at all levels to collect the same data across the entire enterprise. Standardization in data collection procedures will allow for more comparable analysis of hiring data.

## Evaluation and Feedback

**Evaluate assessment practices consistently.** Regardless of specific evaluation method, DOD should evaluate assessment practices and gather feedback for positions to determine effectiveness and

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<sup>3</sup> OPM's guide to better occupational questionnaires can be a useful resource when developing OQs. The guide can be found at: <https://chcoc.gov/sites/default/files/Guide-to-Better-Occupational-Questionnaires.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Structured interview training materials are available to agencies on the OPM website at no cost. Materials can be found at: <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/assessment-and-selection/structured-interviews/>

<sup>5</sup> Resume review training is available to agencies through USA Staffing<sup>®</sup> at no cost. Instructions for registration can be found at: <https://www.chcoc.gov/content/launch-opm%E2%80%99s-structured-resume-review-training>

inform changes in strategy to meet agency goals. Each interviewed DOD component approaches evaluation and feedback on assessments differently. DOD could decide to pursue evaluation at the enterprise level in addition to more narrow evaluation conducted by smaller organizational units. For example, DOD could develop an evaluation scorecard to use across components that emphasizes tracking and evaluation on important organizational metrics.

## Conclusions

The objective of this project was to outline an assessment strategy across the DOD enterprise. The deliverables and outcomes associated with this project are the result of a highly collaborative effort between DOD and OPM. This document outlines the assessment strategy and processes taken to establish it.

With any assessment strategy, adoption and implementation are key to realizing the benefits of establishing core hiring principles. Successful adoption and implementation of the recommendations provided in this report will help create consistency across the enterprise and facilitate achievement of DOD's hiring goals.

To build upon this enterprise assessment strategy, DOD components should align their individual assessment strategies with the DOD enterprise assessment strategy. Additionally, DOD can look to identify and implement new or different assessments that meet their unique requirements.