



QUALITY COUNTS

A GUIDE TO STRENGTHENING SELECTION STRATEGIES

In the current budget-constrained environment, hiring the right people for critical positions is extremely important. However, identifying these candidates from the large number of applications that federal agencies receive can be daunting. One way that agencies can bring the best talent on board is by strengthening their selection strategies.

This guide is designed to help agencies identify top candidates by employing meaningful assessments. It provides organizations with an approach to better understand their hiring needs and processes, and offers advice on how to overcome common challenges.

By addressing these obstacles, ranging from people to processes, organizations can position themselves and their assessment approaches for both short- and long-term success. The following tips should be taken into account when responding to these issues.

Identifying and involving key stakeholders

Identifying key stakeholders and involving them appropriately in the design, implementation and evaluation of assessments is critical. These individuals will advocate for effective assessments, provide input into their development, assist with their execution and help refine them as appropriate.

While stakeholder groups will vary by agency, they typically include leadership, human resources (HR) staff and managers. It is important for agencies to establish who these individuals are and where their input or support will be most valuable, and then clearly convey these responsibilities to them. Failing to delineate and communicate roles can derail or delay selection processes unnecessarily. By engaging stakeholders in a cohesive and meaningful way throughout implementation, agencies will facilitate a smooth and consistent assessment process.

Questions to consider

- Is the hiring process centralized?
- Who is involved in the selection process? At which steps? What are their roles and responsibilities? Are there inefficiencies or bottlenecks associated with the current process?

Tips

- Create a roles and responsibilities document that identifies stakeholders' assignments, and addresses the authorities and accountabilities associated with the agency's hiring practices. This will ensure that participants share a common understanding of their responsibilities and help prevent issues stemming from role confusion during the process.
- Conduct a short training for staff, including leadership and managers, to review the agency's hiring practices, highlight changes to its selection strategies, outline their responsibilities, and provide them with a clear sense of the process as a whole and their role in facilitating its success. Not only will this help to familiarize staff with the assessments and their administration, but it will also lead to more consistent deployment and use of the tools.
- Ask leadership to communicate to the staff the importance of effectively selecting and hiring candidates by establishing the value proposition for their participation in these processes. This will demonstrate the organization's commitment to these practices, as well as hold stakeholders accountable for results.
- Provide stakeholders with regular status updates that address their information needs, and be sensitive to the frequency and methods of communication used to share these details with them. This will help maintain stakeholders' buy-in, address any challenges that arise in real-time and build enthusiasm for assessments.

IN FOCUS

Strategically Developing Selection Approaches to Build Buy-In

In today's job market, federal agencies are receiving a large number of applications for a limited number of positions. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) recognized the challenges this presents in selecting and hiring talented professionals from a sizeable pool of candidates to provide specific technical expertise, as well as manage and lead large-scale programs and teams.

In 2011, the IRS assembled representatives from both headquarters and the Modernization and Information Technology Services organization, including HR staff, managers and leadership, to help address this issue by targeting a position, determining which aspects of its selection strategy would benefit most from an assessment, identifying the appropriate instrument and testing a new hiring process.

The group chose the agency's IT Program Manager Job Family for a pilot test. This is a group of mission-critical positions that are central to the "25 Point Implementation Plan to Reform Federal Information Technology Management." The IRS elected to incorporate a project management assessment into its existing strategy in order to better evaluate candidates, winnow down its applicant pool and select the right people.

By addressing an occupational area that is important to the agency and government more broadly, as well as leveraging managers' feedback to design the assessment approach, the IRS was able to clearly set the value proposition for improving its hiring process and garner support from key stakeholders. And, in first piloting and refining this strategy with one group of jobs, the agency is building a powerful business case to apply this model to other positions in the future.

Garnering support

Effective assessment approaches are supported by networks of employees who advocate for their implementation.

To garner stakeholders' commitment to these efforts, agencies must make a clear case for strengthening their selection strategies using assessments. To some extent, this will involve identifying, acknowledging and addressing their objections, and demonstrating how these tools will meet their needs and benefit both them and the organization.

Agencies should carefully monitor and measure the impact assessments are having and connect their results to broader organizational metrics, including applicant and hiring manager satisfaction, quality of hire, and time to hire. Use this data to further develop buy-in and secure the resources needed to implement assessments for available positions now and in the future.

Questions to Consider

- Are agency leaders involved with hiring and selection issues? Are they invested in leveraging assessments to fill competency gaps and meet workforce needs?
- Are managers content with the current selection process? Are they

- satisfied with the quality of hires? If not, what are their concerns?
- Are HR staff content with the current selection process? If not, what are their concerns?

Tips

- Draw on the data collected from stakeholders to build the assessment approach. Not every aspect of a selection process will need to be fixed, and this feedback can help you determine what's working and what's not. By gathering and considering their input, you will be more likely to garner their support and invest them in the assessments' success.
- Set realistic expectations for stakeholders. While assessments can reap a number of benefits for agencies, these approaches are not "magic bullets," and even sound processes featuring valid, well-developed tests cannot solve all organizational hiring problems. You must clearly identify the issues being targeted with various selection methods, articulate what they can address and acknowledge what they cannot fix.
- Find and share success stories highlighting other agencies' work to improve their selection and hiring practices using assessments. Hearing how these approaches have assisted similar organizations will quicken stakeholders' acceptance and support for them.
- Develop short- and long-term plans to monitor, evaluate and modify selection strategies as necessary. Collecting data pre- and post-implementation will help you demonstrate assessments' impact and make the case for using them to improve the selection processes for other positions. Consider the following data points:
 - Time to hire
 - Cost per hire
 - Offer acceptance rates
 - Hiring manager satisfaction
 - Applicant satisfaction
 - Quality of hire
 - Retention rates
 - Termination rates

Making the case for assessments

Tight and uncertain budgets are a reality most agencies are grappling with in the current environment. Assessments can save agencies both time and money by streamlining hiring processes, lessening the administrative burden and improving the quality of hires.

While many agency representatives are familiar with these benefits, the belief that assessments are too time-consuming or expensive prevents them from using these instruments to update their existing selection strategies. To overcome these objections, agencies must prove assessments' return on investment by examining and understanding their current processes and articulating how these methods will reduce expenses, address pain points, increase timeliness and secure talented hires in the future.

Questions to Consider

- How long does the overall selection process take?
- How long does each step take?

- How many applications do you typically receive for a vacancy?
- How many applicants make it through each step of the process?
- What is the hiring volume?
- What is the applicant to hire ratio?
- How is your agency performing relative to the expectations of hiring reform?
- Do managers believe that newly hired employees have the knowledge and skills needed to accomplish organizational objectives at the time of hire?
- How often are certificates of eligibles cancelled because qualified candidates cannot be identified or reached?

Tips

- Identify the best selection methods for your agency. From developing custom assessments to implementing off-the-shelf approaches featuring per-test fees, there are a variety of assessments available at every price point and investment level. Examining your agency’s hiring needs, choosing the positions most appropriate for these tools and determining the selection challenges that must be addressed to hire the right candidates for them will help you ascertain where assessments will be most impactful at your agency.
- Take the “job family” approach and develop or purchase a single assessment that can be deployed for multiple jobs to reduce both costs and administrative burden.
- Pilot a new assessment tool with one job or job family in order to demonstrate its impact, address its flaws and decrease the initial investment. The model that is developed for this position(s) can then be applied to other jobs across the agency.
- Start small. You don’t have to revamp every aspect of your hiring process at once! Use the Assessment Strategy Guide (see page 8) to identify the jobs whose selection processes are most inefficient or those that represent the greatest concern to managers, and then concentrate on these positions first.
- Focus your efforts on deploying assessments to measure the competencies that are critical for candidates to possess at the time of hire. Don’t waste time and money testing for knowledge, skills and abilities that can quickly be learned on the job.

Developing sound processes

The threat of legal issues prevents many agencies from creating or updating their assessment approaches to include methods other than the questionnaire and interview. But, even these commonly used assessments are not immune to legal scrutiny.

To decrease the likelihood of successful legal challenges, agencies need to clearly link assessments to job requirements and develop sound and consistent processes, which involves determining the best way to use applicants’ scores to make final hiring decisions. While this will vary by agency and position, it is important for agencies to take into account their hiring needs, staffing expertise, environmental factors and organizational procedures when making these decisions, and to revisit them as circumstances change.

Developing a sound process does not mean foregoing innovative approaches to select the right candidates. As agencies refine their hiring processes and become more sophisticated in identifying their workforce competency gaps, they should take advantage of new assessments and scoring strategies to meet their needs.

Questions to Consider

- What are the job requirements? What knowledge, skills, abilities and experiences must candidates possess when entering the job?
- When were these qualifications determined? Are they up-to-date—meaning, were they developed in the last three to five years?
- How were these qualifications determined? Did your agency conduct a job analysis or competency modeling effort?
- What does the current selection process look like for this position? How are you assessing candidates for the job requirements outlined above? Which approaches, such as training and experience (T&E) questionnaires or interviews, are you using to measure competencies or relevant knowledge, skills, abilities and experiences? How were these assessments developed?
- How do candidates move from one step of the application process to the next? How do you make your final hiring decisions?
- How are you ensuring that your assessments are accessible to applicants with disabilities? How are you applying Veterans' Preference to the selection process?

Tips

- Educate yourself about legal issues associated with selecting and hiring talent. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Merit Systems Protection Board, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and agency attorneys specializing in employment law can all provide valuable information and guidance about the legal implications of leveraging various assessments.
- Determine your test development strategy and follow up accordingly. If you choose to design a test in-house, and you are not familiar with test development and validation, then identify individuals in your organization with this experience. If there are insufficient internal resources, find an external point of contact, such as OPM, to guide you through this process. If, on the other hand, you decide to purchase an off-the-shelf assessment, ask the vendor about its track record with legal challenges and work closely with the company to set up a testing process that adheres to legal and professional guidelines prior to requesting approval from OPM.
- Ensure that the assessments are accessible to applicants with disabilities. By building 508-compliance into the selection strategy, you will save time and money, and position your agency to hire a diverse workforce.
- Leverage data about your agency's hiring needs and the expertise of your colleagues to establish the best way to use assessment scores. Two of the most common methods are multiple hurdle and compensatory approaches.
 - **Multiple Hurdle Approach:** Applicants must meet a minimum cut-off score for each step of the selection process in order to advance. Because it maximizes resources by gradually winnowing down the

number of candidates for a position, the multiple hurdle approach is often used when there are limited resources or large applicant pools.

- **Compensatory Approach:** Applicants complete all steps of a selection process and a final hiring decision is made by combining their scores from each stage, awarding them a total score and selecting the candidate(s) who ranked highest. In this approach, a favorable score in one phase can compensate for a lower score on another component. Because it gathers additional information about candidates and creates more robust profiles of their competencies, the compensatory approach is frequently used for positions requiring unique or complex skill sets, as well as those with small applicant pools.
- Use assessment scores to make category rating decisions by clearly linking your assessments to the competencies required for the job. These should be determined by using a job analysis or competency modeling effort.
- Educate HR staff about assessment methodologies and scoring in order to facilitate consistent application.

Conclusion

As part of the broader selection and hiring practices, assessments can play a critical role in agencies' efforts to streamline hiring processes, fill competency gaps and realize the objectives of hiring reform. By taking the time to target critical jobs, identify their selection pain points, choose the appropriate assessment tools and design approaches to overcome objections, agencies will strengthen their selection strategies to hire the right talent.

OPM assessment and hiring resources

A Strategic Approach to Hiring: "A Strategic Approach to Hiring" provides a checklist of steps for the hiring process and recommendations for who should lead at each stage. http://www.opm.gov/hiringtoolkit/docs/Hiring_Process_Checklist.pdf

About Realistic Job Previews (RJP): This document describes and defines RJPs, and includes an implementation checklist. <http://apps.opm.gov/ADT/ContentFiles/RealisticJobPreviews.pdf>

Assessment Decision Guide: This directory of assessment options provides technical assessment definitions, as well as guidance about how to evaluate and implement appropriate assessment methods. <http://apps.opm.gov/ADT/Content.aspx?page=TOC>

Assessment Decision Tool: This is an interactive tool that allows hiring specialists and managers to appraise possible assessment strategies based on occupational series, competencies and other important hiring factors. <http://apps.opm.gov/ADT/ADTClientMain.aspx>

Assessment Decisions: Framework for Designing an Assessment Strategy: This guide offers a three-step process for making assessment decisions. <http://www.opm.gov/hiringtoolkit/docs/AssessmentDecisions.pdf>

Job Analysis Tools: This resource provides an overview of job analysis and links to other job analysis worksheets. <http://www.opm.gov/hiringtoolkit/docs/jobanalysis.pdf>

Key Metrics: This worksheet identifies the assessment and hiring metrics recommended by OPM. <http://www.opm.gov/hiringtoolkit/docs/keymetricworksheet.pdf>

Overview of Screening Questions: This document provides an overview of the types of available screening questions. <http://www.opm.gov/hiringtoolkit/docs/overviewscreening.pdf>

Personnel Assessment and Selection Resource Center: The main contents page provides helpful links to all available assessment tools. <http://apps.opm.gov/ADT/>

Principles of Assessment: Watch OPM's "Principles of Assessment" video, which makes the business case for assessment. http://www.opm.gov/video_library/Recruitment/Assessment/Index.asp

Reference Checking: This document suggests steps for conducting reference checks and includes sample questions. <http://apps.opm.gov/ADT/ContentFiles/ReferenceChecking.pdf>

Sample Screening Questions: This document compares poor assessment questions and better assessment questions. <http://www.opm.gov/hiringtoolkit/docs/samplescreening.pdf>

Structured Interviews: A Practical Guide: This OPM guide, which explains why hiring interviews should have structure, will help with the design, development and implementation of structured interviews. <http://apps.opm.gov/ADT/ContentFiles/SIGuide09.08.08.pdf>

Structured Interview Training: This helpful video complements "Structured Interviews: A Practical Guide." <http://www.opm.gov/MediaCenter/videos/OPM-Media-Center/Structured-Interview-Training.aspx>

ASSESSMENT STRATEGY GUIDE

ACTION ITEMS	QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	SIGNIFICANCE
Select the position.	What are your agency's short- and long-term hiring needs? What mission-critical jobs must you fill both now and in the future?	Determining which positions are best suited to new or revised selection strategies is critical to choosing the right approach, demonstrating the impact it can have on your hiring processes and laying the foundation to refine the assessments for other jobs in the future.
	For which position might you want to develop or enhance your selection strategy? Why? What aspects of the assessment process are you trying to improve? Consider the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long does the overall selection process take? • How long does each step take? • How many applications do you typically receive for a vacancy? • How many applicants make it through each step of the process? • What is the hiring volume? • What is the applicant to hire ratio? 	
Identify the job requirements.	What are the job requirements? What knowledge, skills, abilities and experiences must candidates possess when entering the job?	Identifying job requirements and updating these qualifications regularly is essential to improving the quality of hires and reducing the likelihood of successful legal challenges.
	When were these qualifications determined? Are they up-to-date—meaning, were they developed in the last three to five years?	
	How were these qualifications determined? Did your agency conduct a job analysis or competency modeling effort?	
Examine the current selection process.	What does the current selection process look like for this position? How are you assessing candidates for the job requirements outlined above? Which approaches, such as T&E questionnaires or interviews, are you using to measure competencies or relevant knowledge, skills, abilities and experiences? How were these assessments developed?	Examining the current hiring process will expose discrepancies between the job requirements and selection strategy, and pinpoint where assessments can provide the most value.
	How do candidates move from one step of the application process to the next? How do you make your final hiring decisions?	
	How are you ensuring that your assessments are accessible to applicants with disabilities? How are you applying Veterans' Preference to the selection process?	
	How is your agency performing relative to the expectations of hiring reform?	
	Do managers believe that newly hired employees have the knowledge and skills needed to accomplish organizational objectives at the time of hire?	
Recognize the stakeholders.	Is the hiring process centralized?	Knowing which stakeholders are involved with candidate selection and understanding their frustrations will help you navigate the process, determine where changes can be made, and garner support to more efficiently develop and administer assessments.
	Who is involved in the selection process? At which steps? What are their roles and responsibilities? Are there inefficiencies or bottlenecks associated with the current process?	
	Are agency leaders involved with hiring and selection issues? Are they invested in leveraging assessments to fill competency gaps and meet workforce needs?	
	Are managers content with the current selection process? Are they satisfied with the quality of hires? If not, what are their concerns?	
	Are HR staff content with the current selection process? If not, what are their concerns?	
	How often are certificates of eligibles cancelled because qualified candidates cannot be identified or reached?	