



UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
Washington, DC 20415

The Director

September 18, 2006

MEMORANDUM FOR CHIEF HUMAN CAPITAL OFFICERS

FROM: Linda M. Springer,
Director

SUBJECT: New Assessment Initiative and HR Competency Guidance

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is pleased to introduce a new initiative designed to help agencies enhance the applicant assessment process and ensure an effective Federal workforce. As a part of this initiative, OPM will be issuing guidance on a number of applicant assessment topics, including a competency assessment handbook, information on realistic job previews, how to conduct structured interviews, and an overview of current assessment practices in the Federal Government. Our goal is to provide you with current information on various assessment strategies to ensure we are selecting and retaining high-quality employees for the Federal Government. This information is to be used in conjunction with the applicant assessment information presented in OPM's **Delegated Examining Operations Handbook**.

Our first issuance under this new initiative is the attached set of frequently asked questions (FAQs) about the confirmed Human Resources (HR) competency model released by OPM on April 28, 2006 (chcoc.gov/Attachments/trans738.pdf) to support talent management efforts for the Governmentwide mission-critical HR practitioner occupation. That HR competency model identifies the competencies confirmed for selection at each grade level for the HR Management Series, 0201. In addition, the HR competency model provides proficiency level information, based on Governmentwide data, for agencies to use as a reference for training and development purposes. The attached FAQs provide additional guidance on the use of the HR competencies so agencies may fully implement the HR competency model as they recruit, hire, develop, and promote staff who will support their recruiting, staffing, and training and development functions that affect the entire agency workforce. The experience gained by applying these competencies and assessment methods to address the mission-critical HR Management occupation will support your human capital management staff as they apply such approaches to managing talent in other fields.

If you have any questions regarding OPM's assessment initiative or implementing the HR competency model, please contact Andrea Bright, Manager of the Standards, Competencies, and Assessment Development Group at (202) 606-3600, or email competency@opm.gov.

Attachment

cc: Human Resources Directors

Human Resources Management Competency Model Frequently Asked Questions

The following *Frequently Asked Questions* provide additional information about and guidance on the use of the Human Resources (HR) competency model released by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) on April 28, 2006.

What is a competency and how does it differ from traditional Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs)?

OPM defines a competency as a measurable pattern of knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and other characteristics that an individual needs to perform work roles or occupational functions successfully. Competencies are the basis for an integrated approach to recruiting, selecting, developing, and retaining a high-quality workforce.

To the extent that KSAs also express the characteristics a person needs to perform defined job tasks, they are the same as competencies. However, KSAs have often been narrowly defined and typically focus on job-specific technical requirements. In contrast, competencies are broader statements describing characteristics that may be required for a number of different jobs. They provide the foundation for whole-person assessment, balancing technical (e.g., employee relations, performance management) with non-technical (e.g., teamwork, problem solving, oral communication) competencies. Therefore, describing a job in terms of competencies encourages a broader, more integrated HR approach. For example, the competency-based approach can be used to describe common requirements for related occupations, e.g., HR Specialist and HR Assistant, in ways that illustrate possible career development paths.

How do the HR competencies provide a foundation for recruiting and selecting high quality employees?

Competencies serve an important purpose in the selection process. As stated in the Delegated Examining Operations Handbook, “An assessment tool is valid if it measures characteristics or competencies that are important for job performance.” The HR competencies reflect thorough, Governmentwide research on the competencies required for successful performance in HR occupations. Assessment tools based on the HR competencies are valid to the extent that they accurately measure those competencies.

Do agencies have to assess candidates on all the HR competencies listed for a particular grade level?

Agencies may select the competencies based on the specific requirements for the given HR Specialist, 0201, position(s). Generally, agencies should select a representative subset of the competencies for the particular position(s). A consideration in determining the number of competencies is whether they can be manageably assessed. This becomes more important at the higher grade levels where more competencies have been identified. For specialized 0201 positions, agencies will want to include the technical competencies associated with the specialty.

The flexibility of the model ensures that managers can specify the most important competencies required for the given position(s).

How should agencies assess candidates on the HR competencies?

A sound, high-quality assessment process will provide information about a person's competencies and ability to perform the job successfully. Agencies are responsible for identifying the most efficient and effective assessment tools and indicators of proficiency for any particular hiring situation. Listed below are a few of the more common assessment methods and indicators of proficiency:

ASSESSMENTS

- Assessment center
- Crediting plan
- Structured interview
- Work sample
- Test

INDICATORS OF PROFICIENCY

- Agency certification program
- Education
- Experience
- Professional activity
- Professional certification

Agencies may choose to use one or more assessment options to determine a person's ability to successfully perform a job. To use these tools properly, you must be aware of both the benefits and limitations of any particular assessment strategy. Some assessment methods require a high level of technical expertise to develop.

Why are there different assessment options?

The appropriate option(s) for a given situation will depend on a number of factors, for example:

- The competencies being assessed
- The number and level of positions to be filled
- The level of available positions
- The applicant pool
- Available funds and staff resources
- Time constraints
- Recent experience in announcing a similar position

For example, if an agency is recruiting for a large number of identical positions, it may want to use an objective test or a computer-simulated work sample. If recruiting for only one position, an agency may want to use only one assessment, or a combination of assessments, for example, a crediting plan and structured interview. Most importantly, agencies must choose reliable and valid assessment options to measure the competencies. Agencies are encouraged to consult the Delegated Examining Operations Handbook for additional information on assessment options.

What do job applicants need to know about the use of competencies?

Successful applicants will be presenting their experience and qualifications from a competency-based, whole-person perspective. Depending on the assessment method, applicants may need to tailor their resumes to the specific job announcement paying close attention to the required competencies.

How do the competencies impact OPM's existing Qualification Standard for the HR Management Series, 0201?

As part of its examining policy responsibilities, OPM has published qualification standards for most Federal occupations. These standards describe the minimum qualifications required to perform work successfully at various grade levels in an occupation or group of occupations. Agencies must use the qualification standard that covers a particular series. However, as a part of delegated examining responsibilities, agencies are encouraged to employ additional assessments *in addition to* screening applicants against the minimum qualifications. Agencies may assess applicants on Selective Factors or Quality Ranking Factors, as described in the Delegated Examining Operations Handbook. These additional requirements must be based on thorough, sound job analysis procedures. The HR competencies meet these criteria and have been provided to agencies for use in selection.

What about HR Specialist, 0201, General Schedule positions at grades GS-5 and GS-7 covered by Administrative Careers with America (ACWA)?

Many professional and administrative General Schedule positions at the GS-5 and GS-7 grade levels are covered by the Administrative Careers with America (ACWA) hiring program. The examining options provided by OPM for these positions are the ACWA written test and the ACWA rating schedule. A list of the specific occupations covered by ACWA and other hiring programs may be found in Appendix D of the Delegated Examining Operations Handbook.

Can an agency use the proficiency levels identified by OPM as required proficiency levels in the selection process?

The proficiency levels identified through our Governmentwide study are provided as *guidance* to agencies for training and development purposes *only*. To eliminate candidates who do not meet a proficiency level, an agency must demonstrate a candidate who does not possess a particular proficiency level for a competency would be unable to perform the job successfully, and possession of the required proficiency level is necessary upon entry to the occupation, and will not be acquired through training and development.