

# **Police Psychological Services Section**

## **Preemployment Psychological Evaluation Guidelines**

*2020 Revisions*

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## Preemployment Psychological Evaluation Guidelines

### 1. Purpose

1.1 The IACP Police Psychological Services Section (PPSS) developed these guidelines for use by public safety agencies, agency executives, and psychologists as well as other professionals who are charged with the responsibility of conducting, overseeing, and managing defensible preemployment psychological evaluation programs.

### 2. Limitations

2.1 These guidelines reflect the consensus-based professional practices of PPSS members and the agencies they serve when conducting preemployment psychological evaluations. As such, these guidelines are intended to balance agency and societal needs with the legal rights of candidates and the applicable professional standards of the evaluator. These guidelines are meant to establish a standard of practice, and are not intended to establish a rigid standard of practice for preemployment psychological evaluations.

2.2 The decision as to what to include in a preemployment psychological evaluation is ultimately the responsibility of each hiring agency and evaluator, provided it conforms to all pertinent local, state, and federal statutes, regulations, and case law and is consistent with the ethical standards of the evaluator's profession.

2.3 These guidelines are written to apply to agencies within the jurisdiction of the United States; however, it is recognized that there may be state and local statutes or regulations that would supersede these guidelines. Additionally, these guidelines may require modification for use by agencies in other countries.

### 3. Definitions

3.1 For the purposes of these guidelines, a preemployment psychological evaluation is a specialized examination to determine whether a public safety candidate meets the requirements for psychological suitability mandated by jurisdictional statutes and regulations, as well as any other psychologically-relevant criteria established by the hiring agency.

3.2 In most jurisdictions, the minimum requirements for psychological suitability are that the candidate be free from any psychological impairment that might adversely affect the performance of safety-based duties and responsibilities and be capable of withstanding the psychological demands inherent in the prospective position.

3.3 Under the terms of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), medical examinations—which include the assessment of mental or emotional impairment—are deferred until after a conditional offer is extended (i.e., post-offer). Therefore, it is recommended the preemployment psychological evaluation be conducted post-offer.

3.4 In accordance with the ADA, psychologists should obtain and analyze non-medical information at the pre-offer stage whenever possible. However, because the assessment of normal-range personality traits,

behaviors, and characteristics (such as judgment, stress resilience, anger management, integrity, conscientiousness, teamwork, and social competence) is an integral part of the assessment, it may be included in the psychological examination conducted at the post-offer stage.

3.5 Normal-range personality traits, behaviors, and characteristics may also be assessed at the pre-offer stage, provided the assessment is neither designed for, nor capable of, detecting or diagnosing disabilities, nor required to be administered by a health care professional.

## 4. Evaluator Qualifications

4.1 Because preemployment evaluations rely upon administration and interpretation of psychological tests, agency administrators should use a licensed, doctoral-level psychologist to conduct preemployment evaluations.

4.2 Evaluators should provide assessment services only within the boundaries of their competence based on their education, training, supervised experience, consultation, study, and professional experience. It is recommended that the evaluator have expertise in clinical assessment as well as in the assessment of normal personality characteristics and behavior patterns relevant to personnel selection.

4.3 Agencies should utilize evaluators who are trained and experienced specifically in the provision of preemployment psychological evaluations for public safety positions, and who participate in regular, ongoing continuing education and training that is specific to public safety preemployment screening.

4.4 Evaluators should base their work on established scientific and professional knowledge of the discipline and be familiar with the research literature available on psychological testing for public safety positions.

4.5 Evaluators should be familiar with employment law impacting the conduct of preemployment psychological evaluations, including but not limited to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA), Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA), Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) and other federal and state laws applicable to the practitioner's jurisdiction. Evaluators should consult with legal counsel when appropriate.

4.6 Evaluators should adhere to ethical principles and standards in their profession and jurisdiction.

4.7 Evaluators should not accept a preemployment psychological evaluation referral when personal, professional, legal, financial, or other competing interests or relationships could reasonably be expected to: (a) impair their objectivity, competence, or effectiveness in performing their functions; or (b) expose the person or agency with whom the professional relationship exists to harm or exploit (e.g., evaluating an applicant who had previously been in counseling or therapy with the evaluator, evaluating an individual with whom there has been a business or significant social relationship).

## 5. Job Analysis

5.1 Information about the required duties, responsibilities, working conditions, and other psychologically relevant job characteristics should be obtained from the hiring authority prior to

beginning the psychological evaluation. This information helps evaluators identify knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics associated with effective and counterproductive job performance.

5.2 The evaluator should be familiar with the overall hiring/selection process of the hiring agency, agency assessment standards, and procedures required by law.

5.3 The evaluator should consult with the hiring authority regarding agency-specific risk management concerns, and should seek clarification as to whether the evaluation should go beyond the identification of unsuitable candidates to include information about other specific selection criteria and/or specialized characteristics not covered in the job-analytic data referenced in 5.1.

### 6. Disclosure

6.1 Prior to the administration of any psychological instruments and interview, the evaluator and/or hiring agency should disclose information to the applicant that includes: (a) the nature and objectives of the evaluation; (b) the intended recipients; (c) a statement that the hiring agency is the client; (d) the probable uses of the evaluation and the information obtained; and (e) the limits of confidentiality.

6.2 It is recommended the disclosure be documented in writing and signed by the applicant.

### 7. Testing

7.1 It is recommended that a written psychological assessment battery relevant to the purpose of the evaluation be administered using test instruments that have documented reliability, validity, and other empirical evidence supporting the use in the preemployment evaluation of public safety applicants.

7.2 Evaluators should administer psychological test materials in a manner consistent with publishers' guidelines and professional standards.

7.3 Evaluators should generate test scores, profiles, and reports used for selection purposes with current software or scoring keys licensed by the test publisher.

7.4 Evaluators should review the results of the psychological assessment battery before the interview is conducted, and interpret results in accordance with guidelines provided in professional manuals and as warranted by the findings reported in peer-reviewed literature. It is recommended that specific cut-off scores be used only when there is adequate statistical evidence that such scores are predictive of personality, mental health concerns, and/or behavior relevant to job performance.

7.5 Psychological assessment instruments not yet validated for use in evaluating public safety applicants may be utilized to develop the requisite norms and validation evidence but should not be used for decision making during the data gathering process. Any research should be carried out in accordance with relevant ethical standards, including safeguards to protect participant confidentiality.

7.6 Evaluators are responsible for ensuring that the security and confidentiality of all testing materials (e.g., test booklets/items), psychological reports, and raw data are maintained in a manner consistent with pertinent law and standards of professional conduct. Evaluators are encouraged to reach an

agreement with the hiring agency regarding the custody of testing material and the distribution, sharing, protection, and retention of test results.

## 8. Interview

8.1 Individual face-to-face interviews with candidates, whether in person or remotely via telepsychology methods, should be conducted before a final determination of the candidate's psychological suitability is made. The purpose of the interview is to obtain relevant interpersonal and mental status information about the candidate, and to confirm and/or clarify test scores, personal history, and related information collected during the psychological evaluation.

8.2 Evaluators should conduct interviews in a consistent, comprehensive manner and should focus exclusively on the collection of information relevant to the purpose of the evaluation (Guideline 3.1) and agency-specific selection criteria (Guidelines 5.1 and 5.2). Psychologists should be aware of multicultural issues throughout the evaluation process and consider APA's Multicultural Guidelines (2017).

## 9. Technology Considerations

9.1 Evaluators who make use of electronic technology should ensure: (a) their competence with the technologies used; (b) that relevant authorizations and safeguards are in place; and (c) adherence to professional and industry standards.

## 10. Background Information

10.1 Evaluators should collect and integrate information regarding the candidate's relevant history (e.g., school, work, interpersonal, family, legal, financial, substance use, mental health) in a standardized manner.

10.2 When available, hiring agencies should share relevant information from the background investigation and methods used for the detection of with the evaluator. If background investigation findings are not provided to the evaluator in advance of the evaluation, the evaluator should communicate with designated hiring agency staff prior to making a final suitability determination in order to compare and reconcile information obtained from the applicant. Substantive discrepancies between information obtained in the psychological evaluation and other stages of the hiring process should be reviewed thoroughly with the hiring agency before a final hiring decision is made.

10.3 If relevant to psychological suitability, health records or collateral information should be obtained from treating healthcare professionals and reviewed before a final determination is made of the candidate's suitability. When such records are unavailable, evaluators should consider deferring the suitability determination until the health record can be reviewed or the basis for the concern is otherwise resolved.

## 11. Reports

11.1 The hiring agency administrators directly involved in making employment decisions may be provided with a written report of the evaluation. It is recommended the report contain, at a minimum, a

clear determination of the candidate's psychological suitability for employment based upon an analysis of all psychological assessment materials, including background information, test data, and interview results. It is recommended that any agency-specific restrictions or other requirements relevant to the format or content of the written psychological report be communicated to the evaluator in advance of the evaluation.

11.2 Evaluators should expressly link any ratings and/or recommendations for employment based upon the results of the evaluation to the job-analytic information referenced in paragraph 5.1.

11.3 Evaluators should avoid the use of clinical diagnoses or psychiatric labeling of candidates unless relevant to the evaluator's conclusion, necessary for the hiring agency to make an employment decision, and/or required by law. Evaluators should focus their reports on the individual candidate's ability to safely and effectively perform the essential functions of the position under consideration.

11.4 Evaluators should base conclusions concerning a candidate's psychological suitability on consistencies across data sources rather than a single source; and evaluators should justify exceptions to this guideline.

11.5 Hiring agencies should consider recommendations regarding a candidate's suitability for employment to be valid for no longer than one year from completion of the evaluation unless another time period is established by policy or regulation. Evaluators should clearly state in the report the period of time for which the evaluation is considered valid.

11.6 Hiring agencies should securely maintain the written report in accordance with federal, state, and professional requirements.

## 12. Use of the Evaluation

12.1 It is recommended that efforts be made to inform the hiring agency's administrators about the strengths and limitations of preemployment psychological evaluations.

12.2 Preemployment psychological evaluations should be used as one component of the overall hiring process.

12.3 It is recommended that the use of preemployment test results for purposes other than making preemployment decisions be justified by consideration of relevance, reliability, and informed consent. The hiring agency should not use the preemployment evaluation for promotional or specialized assignment evaluations.

## 13. Follow-Up

13.1 The hiring agency and evaluator should collaborate in order to continually assess the accuracy of final suitability determinations. It is recommended that follow-up data be collected in accordance with strict confidentiality provisions protecting individual candidate identities and in accordance with ethical research guidelines and the law.

13.2 The evaluator and the hiring agency should evaluate whether final suitability ratings have an adverse impact on protected classes of candidates.

13.3 Evaluators should base their findings on established scientific and professional knowledge sufficient to substantiate their procedures, conclusions, and recommendations and be prepared to defend such procedures, conclusions, and recommendations if a decision based on psychological evaluation findings is challenged.

### 14. Appeals and Second Opinions

14.1 Hiring agencies that permit second-opinion evaluations as part of an appeal process are encouraged to require these psychological evaluations to be based on the same criteria used for the initial psychological evaluation.





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