



Guidance on Use of Hiring Assessments when Utilizing Direct Hire Authority

The [Chance to Compete Act of 2024](#) (the Act) strengthens the Federal Government’s shift to skills-based, merit-based hiring by requiring agencies to evaluate applicants using validated assessments rather than self-reported qualifications. The [Merit Hiring Plan](#) (MHP) implements the Act’s reforms by directing agencies to use valid, job-related assessment tools when evaluating applicants. As a result, agencies must align assessment practices used under Direct-Hire Authority (DHA) with the Act, [Executive Order 13932, “Modernizing and Reforming the Assessment and Hiring of Federal Job Candidates”](#), [Executive Order 14170, “Reforming the Federal Hiring Process and Restoring Merit to Government Service,”](#) and [5 CFR Part 338](#) (Qualification Standards).

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) authorizes DHA when it determines that a severe shortage of candidates or a critical hiring need exists for specific occupations, grade levels, and/or geographic locations. OPM has also approved certain [governmentwide DHAs](#) for selected occupations. Under the MHP, agencies retain this hiring flexibility to expedite hiring for positions where critical needs or severe candidate shortages persist.¹

While the Act’s assessment requirements apply to competitive service hiring conducted through delegated examining, agencies retain discretion in how applicants are evaluated when using DHA authorized by Congress. Consistent with the MHP, OPM directs agencies to incorporate job-related, skills-based assessment methods into DHA to support high-quality, merit-based selection decisions. The use of assessments under DHA is not intended to replicate competitive examining requirements, but rather to provide structured, objective means for applicants to demonstrate relevant skills and competencies.

This guidance supports agency implementation of the Act’s skills-based hiring mandate by describing the appropriate use of valid, competency-based assessments when filling positions under DHA.

Assessment Policy When Using DHA

When using DHA, agencies must ensure they use appropriate assessment tools to verify that applicants meet the qualification standards for the position being filled and possess the required skills and competencies for the position.

Agencies must use assessments that:

- Are supported by a current job analysis

¹ In alignment with the Merit Hiring Plan, the Guidance on Use of Assessments when Utilizing Direct Hire Authority, applies to all DHAs whether authorized by OPM or Congress.

- Measure actual job-relevant skills and competencies required for job performance
- Provide valid evidence of an applicant's ability to perform the work
- Support and reinforce merit-based selection principles

Agencies must ensure that assessment tools used under DHA predict meaningful hiring outcomes such as quality of hire, retention, job performance, and hiring manager satisfaction.

Appropriate Assessment Tools Under DHA

While DHA allows expedited hiring, it requires verification that applicants meet qualifications using valid and defensible assessment tools. When using DHA, agencies are required to assess applicants – prior to referral to the hiring manager - to the extent that such assessments identify applicants who have the level of proficiency needed for successful job performance.

In accordance with the MHP, at least one skills-based assessment tool that does not rely on employee self-reporting should be used to evaluate applicants. Appropriate and job-related assessment tools must be identified and applied for positions filled under DHA. For example:

- USA Hire Standard and Specialized Assessments
- Technical Skills Tests (e.g., IT, cybersecurity, accounting, HR)
- Work Sample Tests (e.g., case studies, coding exercises, writing samples)
- Structured Interviews (behavioral or situational)
- Structured Resume Reviews
- Performance-Based Simulations
- Situational Judgment Tests (SJTs)

These assessments support the Act's mandate that agencies assess job-relevant skills rather than self-reported knowledge, skills or abilities, or educational accomplishments. Accordingly, agencies are reminded that using self-assessment questionnaires as the *sole* basis for determining qualifications is no longer permissible under the MHP (effective September 30, 2025). Self-assessment (e.g., occupational questionnaires) may only be used for minimum qualifications and eligibility determinations.

Questions

Agency headquarters-level human resources offices may send questions to OPM at employ@opm.gov or HX@opm.gov. For self-assessments' waiver requests, please contact assessment_information@opm.gov. Employees should contact their agency human resources offices for assistance.