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## Improved Promotion Exams for Police Superior Officers Given

*Assessments including written and oral exams intended to distinguish high performers*

The Boston Police Department (BPD) has completed the promotion examinations for Sergeants, Lieutenants and Captains using an Assessment Center testing process that is intended to differentiate officers with leadership capabilities through their responses to “real life” situations in written and oral exams. The Assessment Center process is expensive and requires extensive preparation time by the BPD, but is expected to better identify high performers and, in time, produce greater diversity in the Superior Officer ranks. The tests are finished and notices have been released to the Captain candidates and will be sent to the candidates in the other two groups by March.

In past years, Boston and other police departments relied on officers taking multiple choice written exams for promotion to the Superior Officer positions. These tests were increasingly criticized for having very little relationship to actual job performance and tended to favor “good test takers” and did little to test for the skills and abilities needed in handling the demands of these supervisory and command level jobs. Consequently, many large urban police departments have been using this process for years, and more cities are adopting the process.

### What Is an Assessment Center?

An Assessment Center is a testing process in which candidates participate in a series of systematic, on-the-job related, real-life situations while being observed and evaluated by experts in policing, supervision, and management. Through these written and oral tests, trained evaluators gain in-depth

information and insight on an individual’s strengths, weaknesses, and overall performance potential.

### The Boston Process

Working with EB Jacobs, a private human resource assessment firm with a 25-year history of supporting law enforcement agencies, the BPD began preparing for this new process two years ago. The BPD developed the written and oral scenario questions/situations and 131 officers from outside Massachusetts came to Boston to serve as Raters for the In-Basket written test and as Assessors/Panelists for the Oral Boards.

The assessment process involves three distinct tests:

- 1) Technical knowledge multiple choice written test
- 2) In-Basket written test involving job situations
- 3) Oral Board test involving an exercise about taking charge of an incident scene and one correcting subordinate performance problems

Great care is taken to ensure each officer’s anonymity by assigning each a candidate ID number different from their BPD ID which is used to identify all test materials. Success in these tests requires extensive preparation by the officers. A candidate preparation guide is made available to all candidates to help them prepare for the exam. Other commercial study guides and courses are readily available since the Assessment Center exams are utilized by more urban police departments.