



Subject Matter Expert Expectations

Merit System

The Idaho Division of Human Resources (DHR) has responsibility to oversee the state’s hiring process. This process, known as the merit system, was established by the Idaho Legislature and provides a way for applicants to be recruited, retained, and promoted into classified state jobs on the basis of merit and job performance.

The merit system is the process of hiring and promoting government employees based on their ability to perform a job (rather than based on “who they know”). The classification system is the backbone of the merit system. In order for the state to uphold the merit system, we must appropriately classify employees and determine the minimum qualifications required to perform a job.

Candidates must be reviewed without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, lawful political affiliation, disability, marital status, sex, age, or any other non-merit factor.

Purpose

All classified positions require a valid exam to verify that job applicants meet the minimum qualifications for a position. All employees and applicants for employment should receive fair and equitable treatment in the hiring process.

Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) are a vital part of the State of Idaho’s classified recruitment process and play an important role in the effectiveness of the merit system.

A SME can be used in two ways:

1. Provide the expertise necessary to ensure examinations used to screen applicants are valid and effective. This includes helping human resources develop grading criteria for the minimum an applicant would need to step into the job, as well as criteria for the “ideal candidate.”
2. Grade and measure an applicants’ qualifications for a given job. This includes giving a numerical score for each question in an exam related to the specific grading criteria.

Choosing Appropriate SMEs

SMEs should be knowledgeable about the position and able to identify rankers that would indicate a superior background. This knowledge is obtained by being in the same classification or in a higher classification in the same field.

There should not be a conflict of interest, including but not limited to being the hiring supervisor, participating in hiring and selection process, being related to the applicant, etc. If the SME has a potential conflict of interest, they must contact their HR contact.

To maintain neutrality and confidentiality, it is recommended that a SME be chosen from outside the hiring agency. DHR will assist HR staff in finding appropriate, qualified SMEs.

Confidentiality

The SME should be chosen by HR (DHR or the agency's HR) and the identity of the SME should be kept confidential and never shared with anyone outside HR. SMEs act as an important buffer in the hiring process by helping to protect the organization from any potential appearance of bias. Applicant information and content should never be shared with anyone. The SME should reach out to their HR contact if they have any questions.

Process and Grading

A designated SME will be sent the applicant exams and grading criteria through the application system. The SME reviews each application for qualification determinations based on the written materials submitted by the applicant compared against the requirements identified in the vacancy announcement and the grading criteria provided to the SME. The grading levels for minimum qualifications (MQs) will be tiered (0, 70, 85, or 100), or Pass/Fail (0/100). These tiered scores will be the only scores the SME is able to assign. A SME will be required to document rationale for qualification determinations. For example, "applicant meets the minimum requirement of one year of experience".

The SME should do their best to remain consistent and impartial. The grade an applicant will receive on any question will be based on their response and how it meets the written grading criteria. If a SME feels the applicant did not pass one of the minimum qualifications, the SME will need to fail the applicant on the entire exam and include comments on the question(s) the applicant failed. As much information as possible regarding the failed question will help in the case of a score appeal. For example, "applicant must have 2 years' experience to meet the minimum and applicant only has one year." Overall comments are also helpful in case an applicant appeals their score. For example, "Applicant failed MQ number 1 so the remainder of the exam was auto-failed since applicant must meet all MQs to obtain a passing score." Comments should be limited to explanation of scoring against grading criteria, not for personal recommendations or opinions on applicant.