

**2020 DENVER FIRE DEPARTMENT
ASSISTANT CHIEF
PROMOTIONAL PROCESS**

CANDIDATE PREPARATION GUIDE

Prepared by FirstIdea, Inc. and the Denver Civil Service Commission

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I. SCHEDULE OF THE ASSESSMENT CENTER COMPONENTS

<u>COMPONENT</u>	<u>ADMINISTRATION DATE(S)</u>
1. Writing Exercise	October 20, 2020
2. Remaining Assessment Center Exercises	October 21 - 23, 2020

II. ASSESSMENT CENTER INTRODUCTION

In accordance with the Guidelines and Ethical Considerations for Assessment Center Operations, we are obliged to make an announcement of the following information prior to the assessment center so participants will be fully informed about the process.

1. Objectives

Objectives of this assessment center include:

- a. Assessing required skills of eligible candidates for the rank of Assistant Chief for the Denver Fire Department.
- b. Providing the Denver Civil Service Commission with information to use in establishing an eligibility list of candidates for promotion to Denver Fire Assistant Chief.

2. Selection

Any individual who meets the eligibility criteria, and registers to participate in the promotional process for the rank of Assistant Chief may participate in the assessment center.

3. Choice

In order to be placed on the eligibility list for Assistant Chief, an individual must pass all phases of the assessment center. You may withdraw at any time during the process, but if you do not participate in all portions of the process, you will not be placed on the eligibility list.

4. Staff and Assessors

Denver Civil Service Commission personnel will administer the assessment center. FirstIdea staff will provide training to assessors and assist in administration. External assessors of equal or higher rank will evaluate candidates.

5. Storage of Materials

The Denver Civil Service Commission will maintain all assessment center materials.

6. Results

Assessment center results will be used to assist the Executive Director of Safety in deciding of who will be promoted to Assistant Chief. Your final score on the eligibility list will be determined using the procedure set forth by the Denver Civil Service Commission.

7. Feedback

Each candidate will receive individual feedback on his or her overall performance in the process. Strengths and recommendations for improvement will be provided to the candidates for each assessment center exercise.

8. Testing Materials

All materials needed to participate in the assessment center will be provided.

9. Access

The Denver Civil Service Commission will have access to all candidate performance information in the assessment center. For reasons of test security, assessment center exercises are exempt from disclosure to candidates.

10. Contact

The Denver Civil Service Commission will be responsible for the records stored in its office.

11. Reassessment

There is no option for reassessment under this process.

12. Dress

You must dress in either uniform or business attire. You must follow any restrictions announced by the Denver Civil Service Commission. You will have direct contact with at least one assessor.

An assessment center consists of several job relevant exercises. You will be presented with a variety of issues you might expect to encounter as an Assistant Chief in the Denver Fire Department. A panel of trained assessors who are familiar with the position, as well as with the Department's and City's particular needs and concerns, will evaluate your response to those issues.

III. ASSESSMENT CENTER EXERCISES

This assessment center will consist of three exercises: (1) Writing Exercise, (2) In-Basket, and (3) Tactical Exercise.

Writing Exercise. The first part of this exercise will require candidates to present, in writing, their qualifications for the position of Assistant Fire Chief. Candidates will then be asked to type their responses to some essay questions. Candidates will have two and one-half (2.5) hours to complete this exercise. Performance Dimensions measured by this exercise may include characteristics such as Planning and Organization, Audience Appropriateness, and Written Communication Quality.

In-Basket Exercise: This exercise requires candidates to prioritize and address a series of memos, letters, phone messages, and/or emails. Various problems and complex issues requiring decision-making and problem solving will be presented within the materials. The In-Basket exercise is designed to evaluate characteristics such as Comprehension and Judgment, Supervisory and Administrative Skills, Managerial and Organizational Talents, and Customer Service Skills.

Tactical Exercise. In this exercise, candidates will receive information regarding the beginning of an incident, such as those transmitted by dispatch. Candidates will manage the incident with the Tablet Command system. Each candidate will have a maximum of twenty (20) minutes to present in front of the assessors. Candidates will have a maximum of five (5) minutes to present their initial responses to the incident. Then an assessor will communicate a series of updates to the evolving incident (e.g., other personnel on scene, changes to the incident or to your role). Candidates will have a maximum of ten (10) minutes to respond to the updates. Finally, the assessors will have a maximum of five (5) minutes to ask follow-up questions regarding candidates' responses to the incident. The tactical exercise will be designed to measure characteristics such as Understanding of Tablet Command, Incident Tactics & Strategy, and Oral Communication.

Disclaimer: All lengths of time noted above are subject to change upon finalization of the exercise. Therefore, it is essential that you pay close attention to finalized time parameters upon registration and within any exercise instructions.

IV. ASSESSMENT CENTER STRUCTURE

This assessment center will occur over multiple days, so you are reminded that disclosing or discussing information related to the assessment center in any way can result in legal or disciplinary action being taken against you.

The writing exercise will be administered prior to the in-basket and tactical exercises. During this exercise, you will work at a computer station using Microsoft Word to compose your document. While other candidates will be working in the same room, you are to work independently. There will be an exam proctor/monitor in the room. Assessors will evaluate your final document.

On your assigned assessment center day, you should plan to be at the testing site for one-half of the day (either all morning or all afternoon). You will have one break, between the two exercises. We do our best to minimize the amount of break time.

It is essential you show up to the facility on time for registration and for each exercise. If you are late or absent to your registration time or to the preparation room, you may forfeit your opportunity to be considered for the position.

The specific amount of preparation and presentation time may vary by exercise based on the type and content of that exercise. At the commencement of exercise preparation time, you will receive instructions for the impending exercise and a set period of time to prepare for your presentation. You will not be evaluated during preparation time; however, there will be a proctor/monitor in the room. While there may be other candidates in the preparation room, you are required to work independently.

Once the preparation time has elapsed, you will be escorted to another room where you will present your response to the assessors. The escort will gather your paperwork, and then bring you to the appropriate room. Assessors will inform you of when to begin your presentation. Once your presentation time has elapsed, you will be informed by the assessors. You are expected to pace yourself and will not receive any warnings regarding time (i.e., they will not tell you X minutes remain). There are clocks in each room, and your score will not be impacted for occasional glances at your watch or timer.

Once you have concluded both exercises, complete the check-out procedures, and then leave the testing site. Again, it is essential you do not discuss any portion of the assessment center (e.g., instructions, assessor information, exercise contents, responses) with one another until after the entire process is complete for all candidates.

V. ASSESSMENT CENTER ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

- Candidates are permitted to bring regular watches (smart watches are not permitted), stopwatches, and timers to the testing site.
- Candidates may NOT bring reference materials (e.g., Department General Orders, IFSTA Manuals) to the testing site.
- Candidates are NOT permitted to bring any pre-prepared notes or resumés to the assessment center.
- The preparation room will have basic office supplies (e.g., easel paper, markers, pens, pencils, pads of paper, dictionaries) available for candidate use. Candidates may use any of these materials to assist in preparation. Any materials created and notes taken during the preparation period may be brought to the presentation room.
- Candidate notes will not be evaluated by assessors. Assessors will only evaluate information conveyed to them verbally or through actions and body language (e.g., facial expression, gestures, tone of voice).
- Candidates are permitted to write on any exercise instructions and materials provided during the assessment center.
- Administrators and assessors keep the official time throughout the process. However, candidates are responsible for monitoring their own time for pacing purposes.

VI. ASSESSMENT CENTER FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Note: Due to Covid-19, the Denver Civil Service Commission is taking all necessary measures to protect its personnel and all candidates. For this reason, one (1) Assessor for each panel will be physically present in the assessment center, and the other Assessors on the panel will be assessing virtually through Microsoft Teams.

“I HAVE HEARD SOME ASSESSMENT CENTERS USE MORE THAN ONE ASSESSOR PANEL. HOW DOES THIS WORK?”

We will use three panels of assessors for this assessment center. Each panel will specialize in one exercise, and they will evaluate all candidates in that exercise. For example, one panel will evaluate all candidates in the Tactical exercise, while another panel will evaluate all candidates in the In-Basket exercise.

“WILL THE ASSESSORS ASK THE SAME QUESTIONS OF ALL CANDIDATES?”

The short answer to this question is frequently yes, but not always. For most of our exercises, we encourage follow-up questions from the assessors. Many have been scripted for the assessors. Assessors have reviewed and discussed the follow-up questions during training, including the types of responses they may hear from candidates. Also, assessors often ask general questions such as “Why?” “How?” and “Would you please explain that further?”

There may be occasions when one candidate is asked a question another candidate is not. There are two primary conditions under which this might occur.

First, some candidates anticipate questions from the assessors and, during their initial presentation, answer a follow-up question the assessors were prepared to ask. If a candidate has already answered such a question, the assessors won’t ask it. Candidates who did not answer the intended follow-up question as part of their initial response may be asked the follow-up.

Second, our exercises are designed so candidates must make a judgment when responding to each issue presented. One candidate might head in one direction while another candidate might go in a different direction. Each candidate may, therefore, receive a different follow-up question. The follow-up question for a candidate who went in one direction might not be relevant for a candidate who went in a different direction.

The primary purpose of follow-up questions is to give assessors the opportunity to clarify information you have already presented to them. So, in many cases, the questions they ask will depend upon candidate response.

“WILL THE ASSESSORS TRY TO TRICK ME?”

This is a difficult question to answer since what one person regards as a “trick” question may not be the same as how another candidate perceives it. For example, the assessors may question candidates about their decision making. This may be to see if the candidate recognizes he or she has made a poor decision. Or, it may be to see if the candidate is willing to defend a decision. While some may regard these as “trick” questions, we view them merely as opportunities for additional insights into the candidate's thinking.

You should always assume the exercises are as they appear. For example, if the instructions state you will be in a meeting with one other person, and you will not be disturbed, you can assume such conditions will exist. If something like a fire alarm goes off or someone walks into the room during your presentation, the assessors will handle it, and you will not be evaluated on your reaction to such unlikely, but possible, interruptions. To that extent, we do not try to “trick” you during any of the exercises.

“IN SOME ASSESSMENT CENTER EXERCISES, THE INSTRUCTIONS REFER TO A FICTITIOUS ORGANIZATION WHICH RESEMBLES OUR FIRE DEPARTMENT BUT IS NOT AN EXACT DUPLICATE OF IT. WHY DO YOU USE A FICTITIOUS ORGANIZATION AND CONVERSELY, WHY NOT JUST USE OUR CITY AND DEPARTMENT?”

In some exercises, we will give you a reference point. We will place you in the Assistant Chief position and give you issues to address relevant to that position. If we were to simply select some area of Denver as the reference point, those candidates who were less familiar with that area would likely feel disadvantaged compared to candidates who currently work there.

Furthermore, changes in personnel can occur rapidly in many departments. In the time between the design of the exercises and actual administration of the assessment center, many names may have changed. As a result, we create a Fire Department (and/or an area within the Department) which resembles and is frequently identical to, the Denver Fire Department. Often, there will not be a name associated with the agency. It will just be known as “the Fire Department.” Real names will not be used.

When you encounter such a fictitious setting, you should assume the policies, protocols, procedures, rules, regulations, and related directives of the Denver Fire Department apply to the fictitious department.

For example, presume the Denver Fire Department rules and regulations require any firefighter who comes to work with liquor on his or her breath to be immediately sent home and subject to disciplinary action. Should you encounter such a situation in the fictitious setting of an exercise, follow the Denver Fire Department rules and regulations regarding sending the firefighter home and possibly subjecting him or her to disciplinary action.

“WHO ARE THE ASSESSORS AND HOW ARE THEY CHOSEN?”

The assessors are sworn fire and rescue personnel. Some assessors may be from career fire departments in Colorado. Most assessors, however, will be from national departments similar in size and structure to the Denver Fire Department. The assessors will be at the rank of Assistant Chief (or organizational equivalent) or higher.

“HOW DO I KNOW THE ASSESSORS WILL EVALUATE ME FAIRLY AND ACCORDING TO WHAT THE DENVER FIRE DEPARTMENT NEEDS?”

Assessors will complete an extensive training program, conducted immediately before the administration of the assessment center. FirstIdea and the Denver Civil Service Commission train assessors on the assessment center methodology, how to observe candidate behaviors, how to take notes, how to rate performance, and how to provide useful feedback.

The assessors will receive documentation about the Department, the position, and the environment, and the Fire Chief or a member of the Command Staff will meet with the assessors to discuss his or her expectations for the position and to provide more information about the Department. Subject matter experts from the Department will also work closely with assessors to review and practice the exercises assessors will be evaluating.

“THE ASSESSORS TAKE NOTES AND MAKE NUMERICAL RATINGS FOR EACH EXERCISE. WHAT ARE THEY NOTING AND HOW ARE THEY RATING?”

During your presentation, assessors are listening to you and observing behaviors. They will take extensive notes on the observed behaviors to inform ratings and provide relevant feedback. Generally speaking, they will use categories of behavior, known as performance dimensions, as a basis for their notes, ratings, and feedback. The performance dimensions measured within each exercise were determined both by the content of the exercises and by conducting an analysis of the job and discussing the needs of the position with the Fire Chief and subject matter experts in the Department.

Below is the list of sample performance dimensions that may be evaluated in this assessment center. This list may not be all inclusive as the exercises are still under development. Each performance dimension will not be measured within each exercise.

Audience Appropriateness

Displays the ability to identify the target audience and tailor their message to that audience as most appropriate. The manner in which specific terms or phrases are used should be in line with what would be expected for individuals who are either familiar or unfamiliar with the topic being discussed.

Incident Tactics & Strategy

Able to direct firefighting/emergency activities in a safe, effective and efficient manner. Considers and adapts to changing circumstances to minimize losses and eliminate risks. Uses proper terminology, issues clear, precise commands and takes decisive action. Displays the ability to apply information contained in Departmental and standard firefighting references to problem situations to resolve them. Is aware of the availability of resources on the fire ground (and in other situations) and is practical and resourceful in their application.

Incident Documentation Quality

Displays the ability to completely and appropriately capture the critical aspects of an event in a clear, concise, and legally defensible manner.

Incident Narration Quality

Able to articulate a linear timeline of events effectively and thoroughly.

Process Improvement Plan Quality

Displays the ability to identify areas that require growth and create a plan to best address that area. Plans should be proactive and measurable in some manner to determine effectiveness. Should also be able to consider alternative approaches should an initial plan be deemed ineffective.

Tablet Command Understanding

Ability to demonstrate effective use of on-scene technology to obtain evolving information, manage available resources, and keep track of scene progressions.

Oral Communication Clarity

Displays the ability to speak in a clear, effective manner, so listeners grasp the message. Is persuasive in explaining his/her actions. Listens to what individuals have to say and can elicit information from others. Can communicate the technical aspects of fire service work in an understandable manner. Has the ability to follow written and oral instructions. Uses proper terminology and procedures and issues clear, precise commands both in person and over the radio. Uses few distracting verbal mannerisms.

Planning and Organization

Able to coordinate tasks and assignments effectively and efficiently, can prioritize work, and demonstrates the ability to handle unanticipated events. Is able to implement a plan of action under mental, and sometimes physical and emotional stress. Is able to remain calm and can function under pressure in frustrating or stressful situations. Manages his/her time in an effective manner so that all issues are addressed. Willing to spend whatever time is necessary to get the job done.

Decision Making

Displays the ability to interpret available facts and information and can “size up” normal and/or emergency situations and determine the logical and appropriate course of action. Can sort through details to determine what is important or relevant in a situation or in a body of information. Demonstrates the ability to make judgments and choose appropriate solutions from a number of alternative choices. Is open-minded and seeks the input and participation of others in making decisions and solving problems. Demonstrates the ability to manage multiple tasks effectively. Knows available resources and utilizes them.

Recognizes when to act and what type of action is appropriate. Demonstrates a willingness to make decisions. Is willing to decide based on a limited amount of information. Displays the ability to understand the ramifications or possible impact of decisions. Appropriately delegates assignments or tasks.

Written Communication Quality

Conveys written information in a clear and effective manner. Organizes ideas in a logical format. Uses proper writing mechanics (e.g., grammar, spelling, punctuation) and appropriate writing style. Creates a document in a format suitable for the audience.

“HOW WILL THE ASSESSMENT CENTER BE SCORED?”

As mentioned previously, assessors will rate your responses on specific performance dimensions. These ratings are then used to calculate a single score for each exercise. Your scores on the exercises are combined for an overall score on the assessment center. These results will then be used to create an eligibility list for the position. The Denver Civil Service Commission is responsible for maintaining this overall rank-ordered list.

“WHO HAS ACCESS TO THE ASSESSMENT CENTER DATA, AND WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THESE RECORDS?”

We provide the information and results of the promotional process to the Denver Civil Service Commission. They are ultimately responsible for maintaining these records.

“DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER ‘WORDS OF WISDOM’ FOR A PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATE?”

First, candidates and assessors have been very consistent in their comments regarding our assessment centers, saying they are challenging, fair, and relevant. You can expect the assessment center to thoroughly examine your abilities to perform as an Assistant Chief in the Denver Fire Department.

Second, we encourage everyone to just “be themselves.” Look upon the assessment center as an opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics and learn something about yourself. Do not become discouraged should you experience difficulty in an exercise; simply focus on doing better on the next one. Also, do not try to “out-guess” the purpose of the exercises. It is important to present yourself as you are, not as you think someone wants you to be.

Finally, you will discover various issues in our assessment centers may not have clear-cut solutions, just as many real-life issues lack clear-cut solutions. As a result, it is not only the decision(s) you make that is/are critical, but also whether you understand and are prepared to handle the consequences of the choices you make.

VII. ASSESSMENT CENTER PREPARATION

We recommend taking several general steps to prepare for an assessment center. First, find out as much as you can about the position. Second, find out as much as you can about the Department's needs and concerns. Third, understand the needs and expectations of the city, community, and citizens. Fourth, learn as much as you can about the fire and rescue industry. Finally, spend some time examining your own strengths and weaknesses as they relate to the position and the Department's needs.

You need to understand the position for which you are applying. This document is too brief to go into detail about the position, but we recommend you give some thought to the types of problems likely faced by an Assistant Chief in the Denver Fire Department. Read the job description. Speak to current Fire Assistant Chiefs. As a matter of fact, we recommend you speak to as many job incumbents as you can, in as many assignments as you can, to discover both the common and the unique aspects of this particular position.

We recommend speaking with leaders in your organization. Find out as much as you can about the mission, vision, goals, priorities, challenges, and changes going on within the Department, especially as it relates to the position of Fire Assistant Chief.

We recommend you do some investigating of the environment. What are the problems facing Denver, and how will those problems impact the Denver Fire Department? What does the future hold, what are the citizens' concerns, and what is the predominant management style of the organization? We recommend you seek the answer to these and other to help you understand the expectations of this position in this particular environment.

It is helpful to understand the fire and rescue industry as a whole. Discover the trends, technologies, and relevant topics being discussed, especially as it relates to the Denver Fire Department.

Finally, after you have learned all you can about the job, the organization, the community, and the profession, you should do some self-examination. Identify your individual strengths and weaknesses. Perhaps you have excellent speaking skills when you deal with individuals in a one-on-one setting, but you have trouble speaking before groups. Maybe your supervisory skills are strong, but your tactical skills need improvement.

Once you have identified your strengths and weaknesses, work on them. If there is any "secret" to preparing for assessment centers, it is to practice those skills required for the position. The more you practice, the better you will become, and the better prepared you will be, not only for the assessment center but for the position. Remember, the assessment center will be designed to see how well you handle the demands of the Fire Assistant Chief position in the Denver Fire Department.

Candidates should also be prepared to demonstrate their ability to utilize Tablet Command during an evolving tactical scene. It would be beneficial to take advantage of various training offerings on the functionality and utility of the software. Department lead training will be made available for all candidates across varying shift responsibilities. Candidates can also visit the Tablet Command website (<http://www.tabletcommand.com/>) to watch "How-to" videos and become more familiar with the program.

VIII. ASSESSMENT CENTER CANDIDATE FEEDBACK

We believe it is vital for candidates to receive feedback on their performance in the assessment center. After completion of the assessment center, you will receive your scores on each exercise and on each measured performance dimension.

As part of the administration process, assessors provide FirstIdea with comments regarding each candidate's strengths and areas for improvement. You will also receive a document with a summary of those feedback comments for each exercise.

IF YOU HAVE A DISABILITY REQUIRING ACCOMMODATIONS FOR TESTING, YOU MUST IMMEDIATELY CONTACT THE DENVER CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION.