National Incident Management System National Qualification System Supplemental Guide for Coaches and Evaluators

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I. Introduction

The National Qualification System (NQS) establishes and promotes baseline qualifications for a national incident workforce consisting of incident management, incident support, and emergency management personnel. These personnel come from all levels of government, the faith-based community, nongovernmental organizations (NGO), and the private sector. Coaches and evaluators play vital roles in the qualification of personnel, particularly through the Position Task Book (PTB) completion process.

This National Incident Management System (NIMS) Supplemental Guide for Coaches and Evaluators is a supplemental NQS guide that defines the roles coaches and evaluators play in developing a qualified incident workforce based on consistent performance standards. The guide explains the standards that coaches and evaluators uphold and identifies the skills necessary to succeed in their work with trainees.

The audience for this guide is any Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) that is responsible for qualifying and certifying incident management, incident support, or emergency management personnel. This guide provides information for coaches and evaluators to effectively guide trainees through the PTB process. For reader convenience, this document's appendices include job aids for coaches and evaluators.

Coaching is the act of helping trainees build knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform in a specific position. The *National Incident Management System (NIMS) Guideline for the NQS*[1] defines a coach as an individual possessing specific job skills and experience who provides instructions and mentoring to help guide a trainee in applicable practices, methods, and skills that can result in PTB task completions.

Evaluation is the act of verifying that the trainee knows how to do a certain task. The *NIMS Guideline for the NQS* defines an evaluator as an individual authorized by an AHJ to observe, document, and complete evaluation records on a trainee based on a PTB. Coaches and evaluators work together to guide trainees through the qualification process.

For AHJs that already have personnel qualification processes in place, this guide does not replace established procedures. Rather, it may help the AHJ refine its coaching and evaluating processes with a view to having consistent, effective, and interoperable processes nationwide. Note that adopting the concepts described in this guide is voluntary.

[1] For information on the National Qualification System (NQS) Guide, related documents, and a full glossary of NQS definitions, visit: https://www.fema.gov/national-qualification-system

Personnel Qualification Process

Qualification is the process of enabling personnel to perform position-specific duties and documenting their proficiency in the position's required capabilities, as shown in Figure 1. During the qualification process, trainees meet the prerequisites for the position they are pursuing by completing training courses, obtaining professional or technical licenses/certifications, if appropriate, and meeting the position's physical and medical fitness requirements.

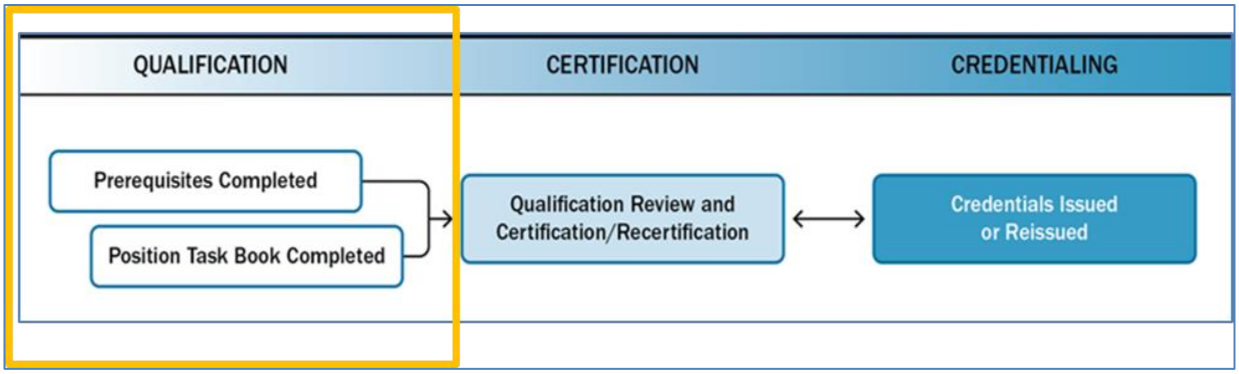

Figure 1: NQS Process Overview

Identifying Coaches and Evaluators

Qualified coaches and evaluators should be able to successfully demonstrate the competencies and behaviors associated with the tasks of the trainee. Documented certifications of performance-based duties and tasks and specific levels of training or education specified in the AHJ's qualification system can verify sufficient experience to be a coach or evaluator. Having a structure to identify coaches and evaluators promotes a clear path to standardization and the overall credentialing process.

Assigning Coaches and Evaluators

Each AHJ varies in the resources it can dedicate to coaching and evaluating Though best practices recommend that different people fulfill the roles of coach and evaluator, if resources are limited, the AHJ may combine one of the roles with a preexisting role. For example, a supervisor can also act as an evaluator.

II. Roles and Responsibilities

This section provides an overview of the roles, responsibilities, and capabilities of coaches and evaluators, outlined in Figure 2. The Coach/Evaluator Checklist (Job Aid A) provides more information for understanding and fulfilling these roles and responsibilities.

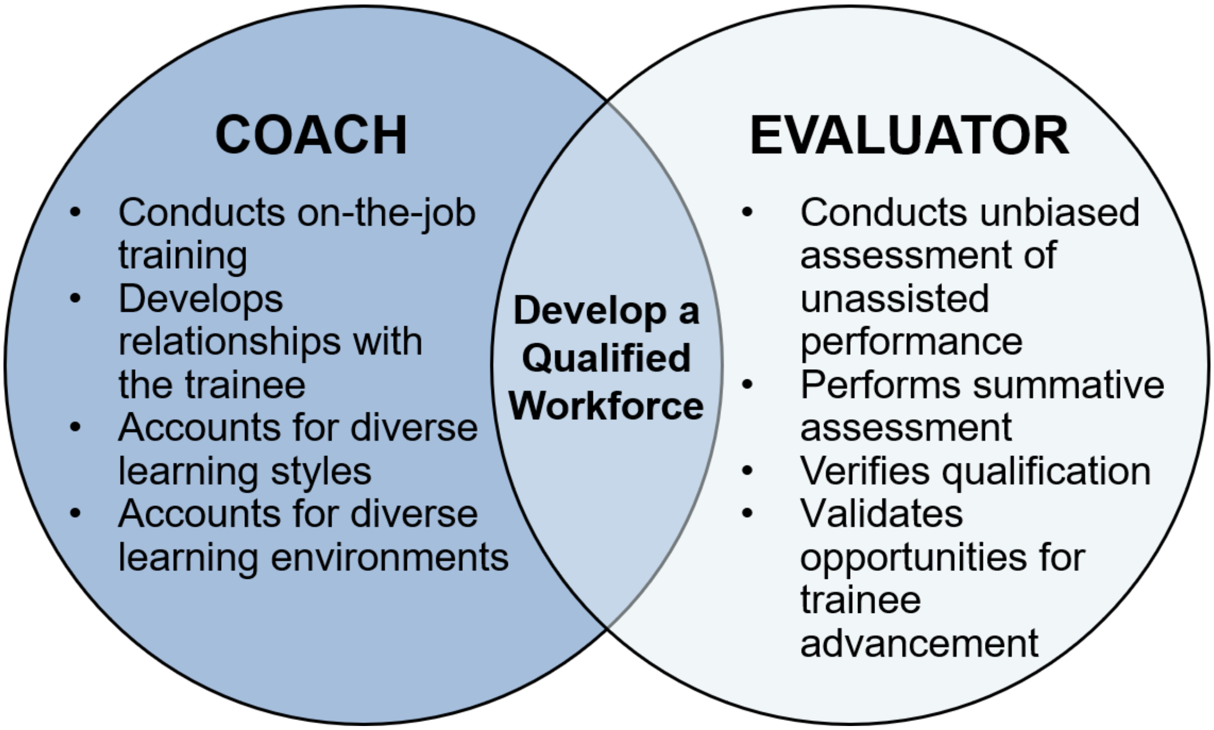

Figure 2: Coach and Evaluator Roles

Essential Coach and Evaluator Capabilities

Coaches and evaluators play different roles but require similar capabilities, as outlined below. Coaching is interactive and consists of constantly sharing information with the trainee; evaluation consists of assessing the trainee's skills and judging the trainee's capability to perform tasks. Coaches and evaluators can also communicate with each other throughout the entire process to aid in the development of the trainee. Although the following capabilities are necessary for both positions, they apply differently to each role.

Coach and Evaluator Capabilities

- Providing constructive feedback
- Observing and documenting
- Questioning
- Listening
- Note-taking
- Technical writing and analysis

Coach Roles and Responsibilities

The coach provides instructions, training, and mentoring to prepare a trainee to meet the performance qualification criteria for a given position. The process of matching a coach with a trainee can be either formal, through a mentoring program, or informal, such as when more experienced personnel take it upon themselves to guide a trainee. The number of trainees per coach varies, and AHJs generally determine the distribution of trainees to coaches during steady state.

A coach is present for the trainee's development, providing on-the-job training and helping the trainee master tasks from the PTB. After a coach describes and demonstrates tasks for the trainee, the coach assesses the trainee's demonstration of these tasks and provides feedback.

An effective coaching process includes the following elements:

1. Preliminary Meeting

Even if the coach has a previous relationship with the trainee, the coach schedules a formal preliminary meeting. This meeting includes introductions, an overview of the role the coach will play in the trainee's development, and a plan for trainee development:

- Before the preliminary meeting, the coach reviews the trainee's PTB to understand the trainee's previous relevant experience and ascertain strengths and weaknesses.
- During the preliminary meeting, the coach outlines the roles of both coach and evaluator, clearly highlighting the differences if the same person will perform both roles. For a new trainee, the coach describes conditions and expectations for completing PTB tasks.
- If the trainee has already begun the PTB, the coach reviews the tasks already completed and engages the trainee in conversation about relevant experiences.
- Using the Preliminary Meeting with Trainee form (Job Aid B), the coach learns more about the trainee and develops a realistic plan for what the trainee intends to accomplish. Establishing a timeline gives the trainee structure and specific goals. Developing the plan in coordination with the trainee enables the trainee to contribute to ongoing growth and builds transparency into the process, promoting trust.
- The coach alerts the trainee that additional training and evaluation opportunities may arise.

2. Mentoring and Teaching Tasks

The coach's role is relationship based. It is important for the trainee to trust and respect the coach. The coach answers the trainee's questions, shares relevant experiences, and provides opportunities for success. The coach is responsible for the following:

- Understanding diverse learning styles—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic—to guarantee appropriate training (see box below)
- Ensuring that the trainee can adjust to diverse learning environments and placements
- Providing formative trainee assessments by providing feedback, performance documentation, and improvement strategies to prepare the trainee for evaluation on tasks

Different Learning Styles

- **Visual** – Learns best when able to see information and visualize relationships between ideas
- **Auditory** – Learns best when able to hear information rather than reading it or seeing it displayed
- **Kinesthetic** – Learns best through hands-on, experiential learning; learns best by doing

3. Debriefing

During the qualification process, the coach debriefs the trainee at various points: after practicing tasks in preparation for evaluation, after reaching a major milestone, at the end of a deployment, and when the coach-trainee relationship terminates.

After evaluations, the coach focuses on the trainee's strengths and areas for improvement, and how to improve in preparation for the next assessment. The coach should provide positive, constructive feedback and collaborate with the trainee on ongoing skill development and improvement strategies. Debriefing is also a good time to review the timeline and goals set up in the preliminary meeting, to ensure the trainee stays on track.

The exit debrief should summarize what the trainee has completed, review the goals that remain, and reflect on the value of what the trainee has learned.

Evaluator Roles and Responsibilities

The evaluator reviews and validates successful completion of PTB tasks. Individual AHJs own the process for assigning evaluators to trainees. This process is more formal than the process for identifying coaches. An evaluator can be a trainee's supervisor. The evaluator does not have to hold qualifications in the same position as the one under consideration. As with coaches, the number of trainees per evaluator can vary, and AHJs generally determine the distribution of trainees to evaluators during steady state.

Evaluator responsibilities include conducting unbiased assessments of unassisted task completion and performance, providing summative assessments, and documenting proficiency of trainee capabilities.

Key characteristics of an effective evaluator include being observant, knowledgeable, approachable, honest, patient, and accountable. To help the trainee grow as much as possible, the evaluator uses any opportunity for correction as a path to learning.

An effective evaluation process involves the following elements:

1. Briefing

Briefing the trainee consists of a friendly introduction. The evaluator explains the evaluation process and sets expectations for performing the PTB tasks. Because a trainee could complete a full PTB during a longer incident, the evaluator should always clarify which tasks are under evaluation. AHJs may require multiple deployments or activations before a trainee is eligible for qualification, so the evaluator should ensure that the trainee understands which tasks the evaluator will observe.

2. Task Observation

Effective evaluation enables the trainee to make progress and enter the incident workforce as a competent, qualified team member. It is therefore crucial that the evaluator assess the trainee's performances thoughtfully, accurately, and honestly. Systematic observation is essential for completing an objective evaluation and identifying any necessary corrective actions. The evaluator watches, listens, and takes organized notes to collect consistent data.

Proper documentation of the trainee's performance includes records of expected actions and actual actions, and a detailed time record of observed events. This evaluation documents competency in PTB tasks and does not replace the supervisor's performance evaluations.

3. Effective Evaluation

The evaluator reviews the PTB and observes the trainee's performance of tasks. The evaluator rarely intervenes during task performance unless a safety issue arises. An evaluator's intervention typically ends the evaluation, as intervention likely indicates that the trainee is not yet competent in the observed task.

When the task involves problem-solving, part of the competency evaluation may include asking for the trainee's rationale of actions after the performance. The evaluator should ask questions for clarification only.

Examples of non-leading questions to use during the evaluation phase include the following:

- "Why is [that action] important?"
- "What were you trying to accomplish with [task]?"

Remember the following guidelines when asking a question:

- *Terminology* – Keep it task oriented
- *Tone* – Keep it professional and respectful
- *Timing* – Do not interfere with task performance or evaluation
- *Technique* – Make it appropriate to the situation

Effective evaluation involves more than observation. It also depends largely on the evaluator's ability to accurately hear and process the trainee's performance.

4. Debriefing

After an evaluation, the trainee, coach, and evaluator should all be present for debriefs. While debriefing the trainee, the evaluator does the following:

- Ensures the trainee understands necessary next steps
- Reviews the certification process with the trainee (if the trainee has completed the PTB) and attaches any relevant documentation to the PTB

If the coach and evaluator disagree on the correct way to perform PTB tasks, they should talk together and reach a resolution, so the trainee, coach, and evaluator have a common understanding of the task.

Next Steps for Trainee

When everything is complete, the trainee, coach, and evaluator work together to assemble a full application packet with all available supporting documents. Note that in addition to completing the PTB, the trainee must complete all required training listed on the qualification sheet for the position in question, including the NQS courses and any required certifications and licenses. Once the final evaluator has completed the Final Evaluator verification, it is forwarded to the QRB. The certification process varies depending on whether the position requires review by a Qualification Review Board (QRB).

Consideration for qualification must align with the AHJ's policy and guidance. Once an AHJ issues a PTB, trainees are generally required to complete the PTB within five years; however, many positions typically take significantly less time to complete.

The next step is for the AHJ to review and certify the trainee's application. The *NIMS NQS Supplemental Guide for QRBs* discusses the certification process. Even if the AHJ does not use a QRB in its certification process, the *NIMS NQS Supplemental Guide for QRBs* provides useful information about certification.

III. Analysis and Feedback

A trainee's success depends on receiving feedback on task performance from both coach and evaluator. The coach and evaluator take detailed and effective notes, carefully analyze those notes, and then give the trainee detailed, constructive feedback based on the analysis.

Effective Note-Taking

The coach and evaluator must remain attentive, closely observing the trainee and taking notes throughout the process. Effective note-taking during observations (whether for coaching or evaluation) is vital to good analysis, questions, and feedback.

Tips for Effective Note-Taking

- Keep a log of significant events
- During observations, record important facts regarding the execution
- Keep notes and comments objective, legible, and appropriate, since the trainee may request all notes
- Encourage trainees to take their own notes as a valuable record of proper steps and ways to improve

In addition to documenting the trainee's performance, coaches and evaluators observe the actions of others involved with the trainee, where applicable. They also record any relevant information in displays or documents the trainee may use.

Effective Analysis

Analysis involves using the observations, notes, collected work product, trainee answers to questions, and any other materials to make an objective judgment on task performance. For basic tasks, this analysis can occur concurrently with the observation and can be part of the coach's immediate feedback. For complex tasks, however, this analysis should take place separately, so the coach or evaluator can consider all collected data.

A coach or evaluator should assess whether the trainee:

- Adequately demonstrated completion of the task
- Deviated from the standard task completion procedure
  - If so, the coach or evaluator should determine whether the deviation was purposeful, whether the trainee understood the implications of the nonstandard actions, and whether the deviation had positive or negative effects. Deviation from standard procedures can sometimes reflect a trainee's innovation and efficiency.
- Performed actions that could have created issues
- Corrected previously unsatisfactory actions
- Knew the steps and gave a proper rationale for actions

Ultimately, an effective assessment answers the question, Can the trainee successfully perform the task without assistance? If the answer is no, the trainee returns to the coaching phase.

Feedback as Coach

Coaches should build positive relationships with their trainees to help them effectively hear, understand, and accept feedback, including constructive criticism. Ways to foster positive relationships include providing encouragement and giving positive feedback more often than negative feedback.

A coach can assess a trainee's preferred learning style, whether visual, auditory, or kinesthetic, by working consistently with the trainee. In addition, many trainees know what learning style works best for them and will tell their coach. When trainees know how they work best, they can get more out of the training experience and have a better chance at success.

Knowing a trainee's learning style can help the coach give useful feedback. For example, if the coach delivers auditory feedback to a trainee who is a visual learner, the trainee may have more difficulty comprehending the feedback. By providing feedback through multiple avenues, coaches can ensure that trainees with different learning styles fully understand their strengths and weaknesses. Using the Note-Taking Log (Job Aid C) in conjunction with a conversation with the trainee is a good way for a coach to give multiple types of feedback.

How the coach delivers feedback is also important. Coaches should avoid making subjective observations and discussing personal feelings or trainee personality traits. Feedback should be constructive and proactive. Sound feedback relies on observed trainee actions, patterns, and behaviors.

Giving feedback is an ongoing process, and coaches should give trainees feedback soon after the performed task—if not immediately, then within a day or two. Scheduling a debrief meeting prior to demobilization is an ideal opportunity to provide summative feedback.

Feedback as Evaluator

After evaluation, the evaluator may conduct a debrief meeting to provide feedback, with both the trainee and coach present. Evaluator feedback is based on observation, notes, and analysis of the trainee's performance.

Job Aid A: Coach/Evaluator Checklist

EMPLOYEE INFORMATION

Name: ______________________________ Phone: _________________________________

Position: _________________________ Supervisor: _________________________________

Position Task Book (PTB)

- ☐ Review PTB and tasks
- ☐ Review key policies
- ☐ Review percentage of training, tasks, and overall PTB completed
- ☐ Review associated behaviors and tasks

Trainee-Related Tasks

☐ Conduct introduction meeting with trainee

- Review assignment
- Provide trainee with a clear understanding of the learning process, training phases, and evaluation process
- Create training and evaluation worksheet
- Discuss PTB process
- Review status of required training
- Discuss roles and expectations
- Establish guidelines for the relationship

☐ Assess

- Assess trainees' skills, abilities, experience, and aptitudes for the assigned position
- Ask questions to gauge trainees' understanding of the task—what needs to be done, why it is necessary, and how it should look when completed
- Conduct rigorous appropriate testing assessments that demonstrate the trainee's knowledge and ability to safely and effectively perform required skills through on-the-job performance during the coaching phase

☐ Discuss

- Discuss opportunities to develop and demonstrate capabilities
- Discuss realistic goals for the established time period
- Review the observation process

☐ Develop positive mentoring relationship

- Maintain friendly, optimistic approach to developing a positive professional relationship
- Be proactive
- Have clear expectations

Training Tasks

- ☐ Discuss the skills and knowledge areas the trainee needs to develop
- ☐ Give the trainee necessary resources
- ☐ Discuss the trainee's learning and communication styles
- ☐ Ask probing questions; identify perceived or real strengths, weaknesses, or hesitations
- ☐ Interpret feedback and help trainee convert feedback into action
- ☐ Look for developmental moments and discuss these with the trainee
- ☐ Give feedback:
  - – Observations
  - – Consequences
  - – Assessments

Evaluation Tasks

- ☐ Develop task and behavior evaluation worksheet
- ☐ Evaluate trainee's performance on key performance characteristics from the PTB
- ☐ Identify performance strengths, weaknesses, and areas in need of improvement on the worksheet
- ☐ Complete the evaluation record
- ☐ Debrief the trainee

Job Aid B: Preliminary Meeting with Trainee

Preliminary Meeting Date: ________________

Remain open to new ideas, be flexible with scheduling, be available to coach, and then evaluate each task the trainee undertakes. Your job is to support the trainee's efforts to become qualified in the new position.

Coach's name: ____

Coach's position/title: ____

Coach's contact information: ____

Trainee's name: ____

Trainee's contact information: ____

Trainee's incident management, incident support, or emergency management experience:

____

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____

____

If new, trainee's previous work experience:

____

____

____

____

Discuss trainee's preferred learning style (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and so on):

____

____

Discuss tasks the trainee could master during current deployment:

____

____

Work with trainee to create a timeline for coaching and evaluating during current deployment:

____

____

Job Aid C: Sample Note-Taking Log

Note-Taking Log

(Attach additional pages as necessary)

Date: ____

Purpose (meeting, coaching, observing, evaluation): ___________________________________

Task(s) you are discussing, observing, coaching, or evaluating:

____

____

Your observations (include pictures, correspondence, and so on):

____

____

____

Feedback for trainee:

- What went well:

  ____

  ____

- Areas for improvement:

  ____

  ____

- Is task ready for signoff?

  ____

- Is another demonstration necessary?

  ____

Trainee's observations:

____

____

Next steps:

____

____

Resources

The following resources can assist AHJs in establishing qualification, certification, and credentialing processes consistent with NQS doctrine.

National Incident Management System (NIMS)

- On the NIMS website, users can find links to NIMS documents, guidelines, and operational tools, as well as training information, implementation guidance, updates, and contact information for the FEMA Regional NIMS Coordinators.
- The Resource Management section of NIMS contains details on the qualification, certification, and credentialing of incident personnel. It also defines pertinent terms to ensure common terminology among all qualification system users.
- www.fema.gov/national-incident-management-system

National Qualification System (NQS)

- The *NIMS Guideline for the NQS* describes the components of a qualification and certification system, defines a process for certifying the qualifications of incident personnel, describes how to establish and implement a peer review process, and introduces the process of credentialing personnel.
- The *NIMS NQS Supplemental Guide for Qualification Review Boards* describes the basic principles of a QRB and provides general recommendations and practices to help an AHJ establish or enhance a QRB.
- NQS also provides Job Titles/Position Qualifications and PTBs for a range of incident management, incident support, and emergency management positions.
- https://www.fema.gov/national-qualification-system

Resource Typing Library Tool (RTLT)

- The RTLT is an online catalog of NIMS resource typing definitions and NQS Job Titles/Position Qualifications.
- www.fema.gov/resource-management-mutual-aid

Incident Command System (ICS) Form 225

- ICS Form 225 provides a way for supervisors to rate incident personnel performance.
- https://training.fema.gov/icsresource/icsforms.aspx

ICS Resource Center

- The ICS Resource Center, which the Emergency Management Institute (EMI) maintains, provides information about and links to an extensive array of ICS training materials, job aids, position checklists, and forms.
- https://training.fema.gov/emiweb/is/icsresource/index.htm