

Frequently Asked Questions

Boston District Fire Chief Promotional Situational Judgment Test (SJT) Exam to be Administered May 13, 2023

These FAQs will be updated as HRD receives questions about the exam. Please check back for updates.

Which fire fighter District Fire Chief promotional exam is being administered on May 13?

On March 25, HRD administered the technical knowledge written exam component for the Boston District Fire Chief. The second component of the written exam Situational Judgment Test component will be administered on May 13.

Why has the exam changed this year?

On October 27, 2022, Judge Douglas Wilkins issued a decision in the *Tatum v. Commonwealth of Massachusetts* lawsuit that impacted the public safety exams administered by the Commonwealth's Human Resources Division (HRD). Although the *Tatum* case centered on police promotional exams, the judge's ruling has very broad implications and the judge explicitly found that many of the foundational aspects of HRD's test development operations were flawed. The decision cited numerous items, but the three main critiques include:

- How frequently HRD has updated its "job analysis" of different job titles
- HRD's heavy reliance on technical knowledge multiple choice questions for its exams
- The scoring of its exams, including weighting of different components

Additionally, the judge ruled that exam content needs to be changed by reducing the cognitive load of the questions, testing on topics important to the job, and introducing scenarios that evaluate a candidate's "soft" skills, supervisory skills, or judgment.

What is changing with the Boston District Fire Chief promotional new exam?

Historically, HRD has issued a promotional exam comprised of technical knowledge multiple choice questions that were based upon policies and procedures found in reading list materials, plus an education and experience component.

The new test will be comprised of a written exam, consisting of two components, plus education and experience information provided by the candidates.

The two components of the new written exam will consist of:

- About 70 technical knowledge (TK), multiple choice questions – administered on March 25
- About 20 situational judgment test (SJT) scenarios – to be administered on May 13

The experience and education section has been updated. The new experience/certification/training and education (ECT&E) application is available to candidates through an on-line portal and provides credit to candidates who document their experience in the fire service, prior supervisory experience, and relevant education, certifications, or licenses.

What are technical knowledge questions?

Technical knowledge (TK) questions are the traditional type of questions utilized in past exams administered by HRD. They consist of multiple-choice questions that test candidates' knowledge of information related to effective firefighting and are related to [reading list materials](#) made available to candidates.

What is situational judgment testing?

Situational judgment test (SJT) questions present test takers with a description of a critical work situation or problem related to the position they are applying for and ask them to identify how they would respond in the situation. They evaluate the candidate's behavior and skill using hypothetical situations based on real-life, work-based situations. The questions do not utilize any city- or town-specific policies or procedures, but present generic situations applicable to all civil service communities across Massachusetts to assess a candidate's judgment when presented with a scenario.

SJT's evaluate critical-thinking, judgment, and decision-making skills. They measure some inherent characteristics of an individual, but also capture an individual's general and job-specific knowledge and abilities.

SJT's measure the effectiveness of skills such as:

- Problem solving
- Conflict management
- Interpersonal skills
- Negotiation skills
- Facilitating teamwork
- Cultural awareness

The format of the SJTs presents a scenario that should feel familiar to test takers, like something they may have encountered on the job. Each scenario asks test takers several questions based upon the situation. They rate possible responses to questions such as:

- Which response is the best answer among several options?
- What would you be most likely or least likely to do to deal with the described situation effectively?

SJT questions are known in the testing field to be particularly effective at measuring supervisory and leadership skills. Studies have shown that SJT's are more valid and have less adverse impact on test takers who are not part of the predominant social group when compared to exams that are solely based on technical knowledge questions.

What is the Experience/Certification/Training and Education (ECT&E) section of the exam?

The ECT&E, formally known as E&E, section of the exam will look familiar to test takers who have taken previous promotional exams. Candidates receive points for time they have spent working for their current fire department and in a fire role outside of their current department (such as a non-civil service community). They also receive credit for non-fire department supervisory experience, education, and relevant certifications and trade licenses.

The ECT&E section was available for candidates to complete in HRD's portal from March 3 to April 1 at 11:59 pm.

Who was involved in creating the new exam?

The exams were created by HRD's testing vendor, Talogy; HRD test development staff; and numerous subject matter experts (SMEs) from the Boston Fire Department.

How will the new exam be graded?

For each title, the total score will be comprised of the three different exam components, which together constitute 100% of the score. Exam components are weighted differently for the different titles, reflecting the fact that supervisory and leadership skills become more important as a candidate progresses through the ranks.

The Boston District Fire Chief exam will have the following weights for the different sections of the exam:

- Multiple-choice, written exam: 48%
- Situational judgment test questions, written exam: 32%
- Experience, certifications, trainings, and education claim: 20%

How should test takers study for the SJT?

Candidates may access a test preparation guide through [the test-taker portal](#). The prep guide is available to registered test takers.

When and where is the new test being administered?

The technical knowledge test was administered on March 25, 2023. The SJT test will be administered on May 13. Candidates will receive an email notification that they have been assigned to a testing location and time.

What steps happen after the exam is administered?

Candidates may file fair test or multiple-choice appeals within **seven days** after exam administration, or until 11:59 p.m. on May 20, 2023. All test takers will receive an email with instructions prior to the exam administration date.

Candidates have 17 days to appeal their ECT&E score after score notices are released.