



WORKFORCE CONVERSATION GUIDE: AN AGENCY SELF-ASSESSMENT OF HIRING PRACTICES

Selecting the right employees is essential to effective child welfare practice. Every hiring decision affects the agency's capacity to protect children and support families. A strong selection process builds a competent, committed workforce aligned with the agency's goals, whereas poor hiring choices can lead to costly turnover and diminished performance. Taking time to examine the selection process can reveal opportunities to improve outcomes and ensure the right people are hired for these essential roles. To determine the best employee selection strategy for your child welfare agency, it is beneficial to review existing data and answer questions about a variety of aspects of your hiring practices. This process takes time and a dedicated group of people, but it can help your organization understand what the needs and challenges are before deciding how to solve them.

WHAT IS SELECTION?

Selection is the process of collecting and evaluating information about job candidates to determine who is most likely to succeed in a specific role and fit well in a particular position ([Schmidt & Hunter, 1998](#)). This typically involves using various assessment methods and procedures—such as application screening, interviews, reference checks, and testing—to evaluate each candidate's knowledge, skills, abilities, and other relevant characteristics (KSAOs). The goal is to make hiring decisions that align with both the position's requirements and the agency's broader needs.

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN THE AGENCY SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS?

This review should be conducted by a [workforce team](#) to ensure different perspectives are at the table. To assess the selection process, you will want people with the following roles:

- human resources (HR) managers
- recruiting and hiring managers
- child welfare agency leaders, managers, and supervisors
- training managers
- HR analytics staff
- union representatives (if applicable)



USING THE WORKFORCE CONVERSATION GUIDE

Workforce challenges are common, but it can be difficult to pinpoint which aspects of the employee lifecycle provide the greatest opportunity for improvement.

This resource is designed as a starting point to dive into your data and understand where you can strengthen your workforce. These workforce conversation guides address topics related to recruitment, performance, and well-being. Each one provides a list of questions intended to prompt your workforce team to consider what they know, what information is missing, identify possible trends, and question what the data mean.

These resources are designed to help you assess your needs. It is recommended that you work through each one, as workforce challenges are interconnected (see [Key Takeaways from Phases of the Child Welfare Employee Lifecycle](#)). For example, your retention problem may be directly linked to your recruitment sources. We encourage you to pull together a team, meet regularly to work through the questions, and ask yourselves “why” you are doing something in a particular way. The amount of time this process takes varies, but at the end of it, you should be able to identify where to invest your time and resources.

It is important to assemble a team with the appropriate expertise and access to information. There are many specific assessment questions for the team to answer in the next sections, but they generally require knowledge of hiring policies, practices, data systems, and documentation. Team members should be able to speak to how things currently work, what data are available, and how to obtain relevant information.

Because employee selection is a specialized subject area with highly technical and legal requirements, the QIC-WA strongly recommends agencies seek out an expert to support the self-assessment process. External workforce consultants can provide a specialized perspective and greater knowledge of the research related to recruitment, selection, and retention, to prompt additional questions and guide the agency in the development of solutions. There are various places in the guide where the QIC-WA recommends consultation with an expert to conduct necessary statistical analyses and ensure compliance with employment laws and agency policies.

WHAT SHOULD WE LOOK AT?

Information will be gathered from a variety of sources, including:

- records and reports related to hiring procedures
- hiring policies
- job descriptions
- hiring assessments
- decision criteria
- hiring process workflows
- union labor agreements
- data from applicant tracking systems
- performance and turnover [metrics](#)
- feedback from candidates

The team may also gather information through focus groups, interviews, or surveys of employees, supervisors, and managers. After information is gathered, the team should be thoughtful about where it is stored and how it is shared to ensure individual employee information is protected

WHAT QUESTIONS SHOULD WE EXPLORE?

Review job descriptions:

- Are job descriptions up to date, accurate, and reflective of the work? If not, how can they be improved?
- Do the job descriptions clearly define the qualifications, expectations, and competencies required? If not, what is needed to improve them?

Assess the hiring requirements:

- Are the hiring requirements based on a job analysis that has identified the most important KSAOs needed at hire? If not, what internal or external resources could be engaged to conduct a job analysis? (NOTE: The QIC-WA recommends consulting a workforce expert on conducting a job analysis and/or validating the KSAOs)
- Are the hiring requirements limited to only the KSAOs that are essential at the time of hire? Consider how to focus hiring requirements on the qualifications that new employees must already possess to be successful in the role, rather than on KSAOs that they will develop through training or on-the-job experience.

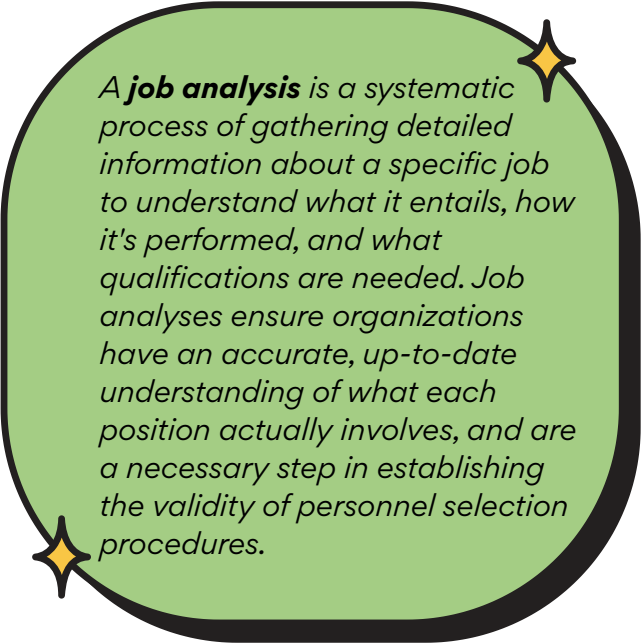
Examine the hiring process:

It is recommended that your team consults with HR, your legal department, or a workforce expert to ensure that the hiring policies and procedures comply with employment laws and regulations as part of your review of the hiring process.

- Is the application process clear and simple to follow? Is it mobile friendly? If not, how can that be improved?
- What are the steps of the hiring process (for both internal and external candidates), starting from a new vacancy? Gather information from across the agency to generate a comprehensive inventory of practices.
- Does the hiring process strike the right balance among (1) the job requirements for candidates, (2) the knowledge and skills available in the labor market, and (3) the agency's capacity to train new hires?

Consider if:

- o The agency is attracting enough qualified applicants based on current requirements
- o The agency is asking for qualifications that are unnecessary at hire
- o The agency has evaluated whether its hiring expectations are limiting the candidate pool unnecessarily
- o Adjusting job requirements could improve recruitment without compromising performance
- o The agency turns away promising candidates who could succeed with appropriate training and supports



*A **job analysis** is a systematic process of gathering detailed information about a specific job to understand what it entails, how it's performed, and what qualifications are needed. Job analyses ensure organizations have an accurate, up-to-date understanding of what each position actually involves, and are a necessary step in establishing the validity of personnel selection procedures.*

- If there are different options for meeting minimum qualifications (e.g., varied education or experience), are they considered equivalent in terms of ensuring readiness for the job? If not, are there adjustments in training, supervision, or performance expectations to address differences in preparedness?

Explore how candidates are assessed:

- Are the processes and criteria for all candidate assessments (e.g., minimum qualifications, interviews, writing samples, reference checks) clear, structured, and standardized, to promote reliable and fair decision making across candidates? (NOTE: This is another element of the agency self-assessment where the QIC-WA recommends obtaining expert consultation to develop solutions that are technically appropriate and legally defensible.)
- Are there clear standards and expectations for how interview notes, evaluations, and hiring decisions should be documented? If not, how can those be established and communicated?
- Are there rating tools to facilitate judgments? Do they include clear benchmarks to support shared understanding of expectations for each rating?

- Are efforts made to ensure that the same interviewers are used for all candidates? If not, how could the agency increase consistency without overburdening staff or delaying the process?
- Does decision making require consensus? If so, assess whether you have a structured approach that includes independent input from all participants, equitable participation in discussions, respectful examination of differing views, avoidance of undue pressure to conform or prematurely agree, and evidence-based final decisions.
- Does everyone involved in the hiring process receive training on how to properly fulfill their role? If yes, do people feel the training adequately prepares them to be effective in their role? If not, what training resources, tools, or formats (e.g., online modules, live workshops) could help close the gap?

Discuss the hiring and selection process:

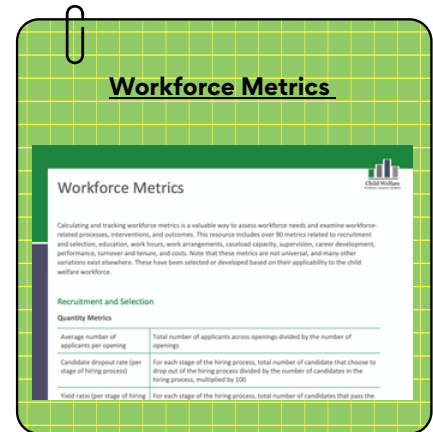
- Discuss how your agency communicates with candidates. Consider if communication with candidates is timely, transparent, and respectful from application through final offer or notification of non-selection. Are there stages of the hiring process where communication delays or gaps typically occur? What systems or tools could improve timeliness, transparency, and respectfulness (e.g., automated updates, checklists)?
- What number and percentage of candidates advance from each stage to the next?
- What is the overall selection ratio (number of people hired divided by the number of people considered for a position)?
 - o Are the yields at each stage optimal for the needs? What adjustments could improve yields at each stage while maintaining quality?
 - o Are there problematic drop-offs from one stage to the next? What changes could reduce unnecessary attrition and keep strong candidates engaged?
- What number and percentage of candidates voluntarily drop out of the process and at what points?
 - o What information is available about why this is happening?
 - o What can be done to reduce the number of qualified candidates who dropout?
- Are all hiring processes and decisions (including applications, screening results, interview notes, scoring sheets, and reference checks) consistently documented using standardized tools? Are they promptly entered into a centralized electronic system (such as a human resources information system or spreadsheet)? Are they securely maintained in that system to ensure timely access, confidentiality, compliance, and reduced reliance on paper files or informal recordkeeping? If not, what would help move toward a more reliable approach (e.g., training, updated tools, policy changes)?
- Consider time to hire:
 - o How long does it usually take to fill a position, from the creation of a vacancy or requisition to the final hire? What are the typical timeframes for each major step of the hiring process?
 - o For successful applicants, how long does it take from application to hire?
- Does the overall pace support timely hiring of top candidates? If not, what delays exist, and what strategies could help speed up the process?



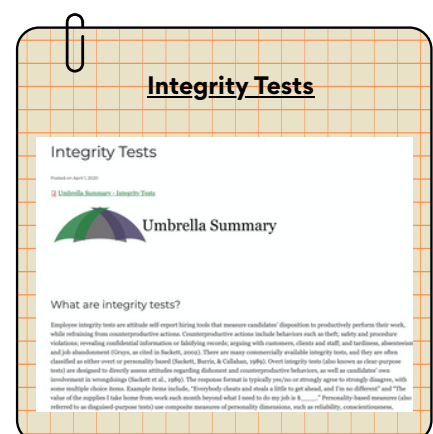
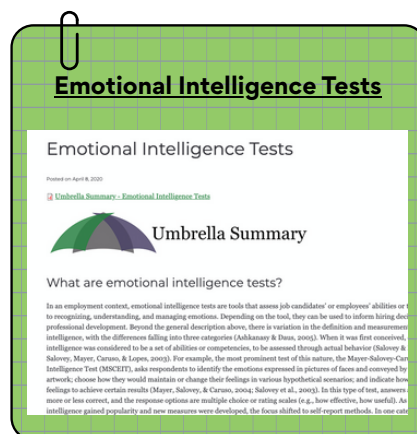
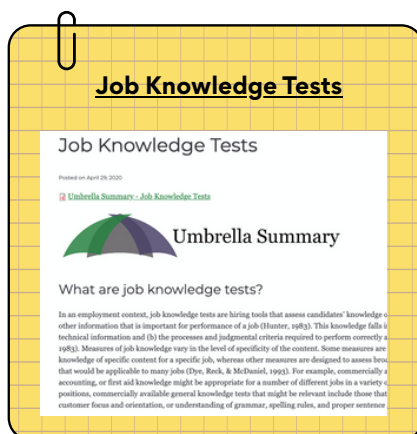
- Is there a structured process in place to gather candidate feedback on the recruitment and hiring experience, including satisfaction with application procedures, communication, timeliness, fairness, and interpersonal treatment? If so, what methods are used to collect feedback (e.g., surveys, interviews, follow-up emails)? How do candidates feel about their experience? If needed, what can be done to improve their experience?
- Is there a structured process in place to regularly gather feedback from staff involved in hiring (e.g., hiring managers, interviewers, HR representatives)? If so, what methods are used to collect feedback? How do they feel about the hiring process? Are there any improvements that can be made based on their feedback?

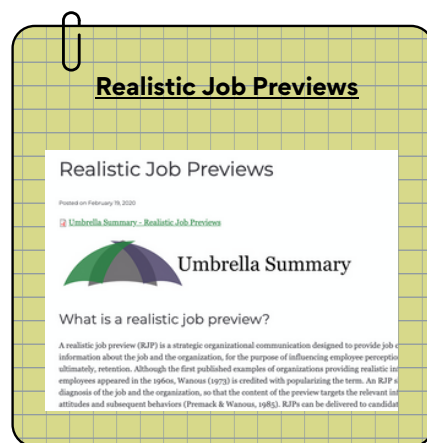
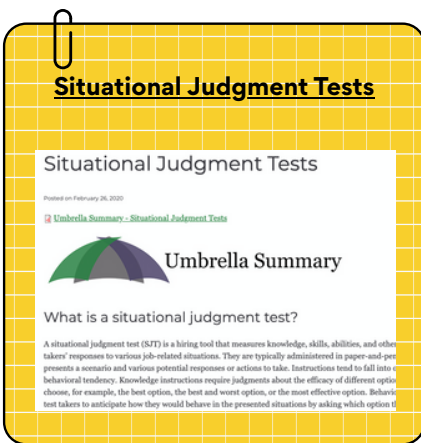
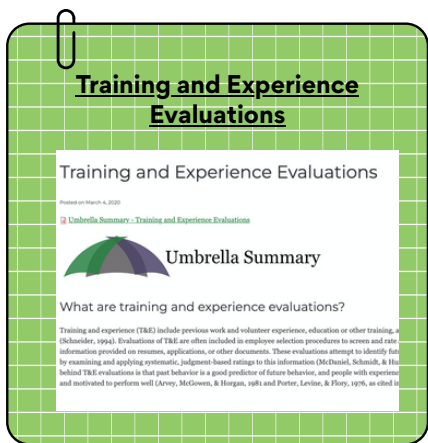
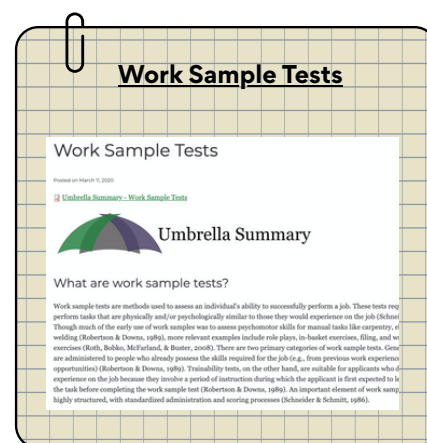
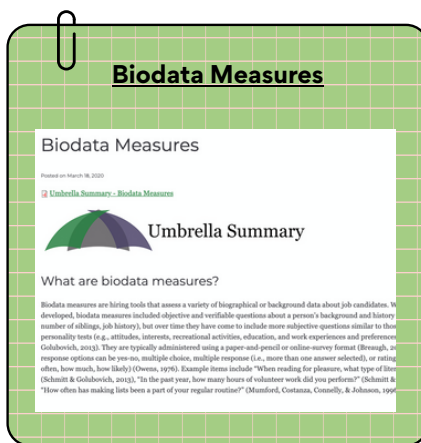
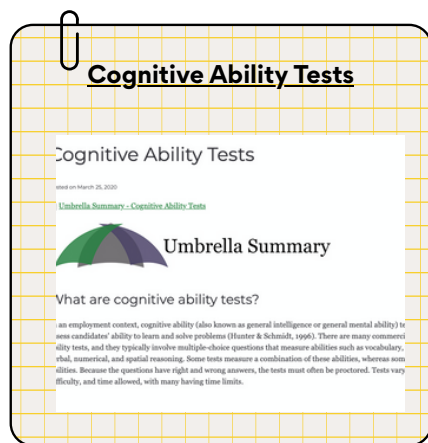
WHAT ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE?

Digging deep into your data is not a simple task. The guiding questions above will likely lead to more questions or prompt team members to want to learn more about the success of employee selection strategies. Below are a few curated resources to support your team. No team member is expected to be an expert in these workforce topics and, in fact, many topics raised in this guide will require the knowledge of an external expert.



For additional information on the research behind various selection topics, see the Umbrella Summaries (summaries of meta-analyses conducted by workforce topic) on:





WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Congratulations on examining how the various elements of the employee selection process impact your workforce. Gathering information about selection is just one step in the process of examining agency workforce information to strengthen the workforce. After you work through the questions above, you may identify a few areas for further consideration. For example, your team may realize you need to learn more about candidates who voluntarily drop out of the process. To expand the scope or dig deeper your team may more thoroughly explore which stage candidates withdraw and consider conducting follow-up surveys with the candidates to determine their reason for withdrawing. Digging deeper into this aspect of the selection process can get you to potential causes that you can address. Once you've identified key strategies to implement, consider presenting your findings to your management team for their input and feedback. Management may also need to discuss available resources (e.g., time, money, and people) before moving on to select (or create) a workforce intervention or analytics tools to help address and track the challenge.

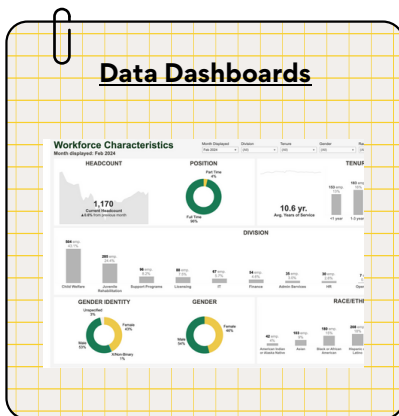
As agency needs and the broader environment shift over time, your organization must be responsive to those changes. This exercise should be repeated every few years, especially if employee selection issues arise or candidate and hiring manager surveys indicate challenges with the application and selection process.

REFERENCES

Schmidt, F. L., & Hunter, J. E. (1998). The validity and utility of selection methods in personnel psychology: Practical and theoretical implications of 85 years of research findings. *Psychological bulletin*, 124(2), 262.

RESOURCES

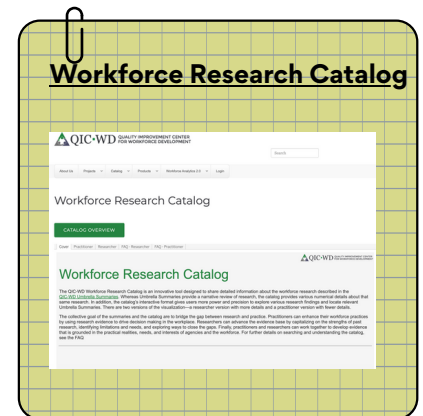
Data visualization tools, such as [dashboards](#), can help workforce teams identify trends and monitor workforce characteristics or key outcomes in real time.



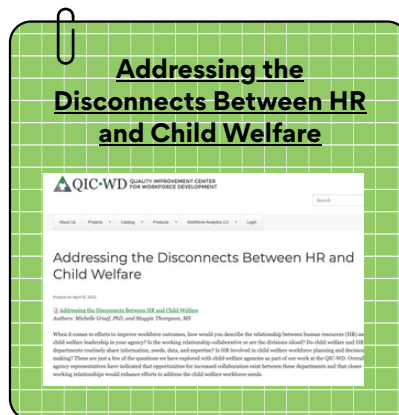
The [Workforce App](#) (embedded under the “See for Yourself” header) to input basic workforce data and see visualizations related to Turnover & Tenure, Recruitment & Selection, Work Hours, and Career Development



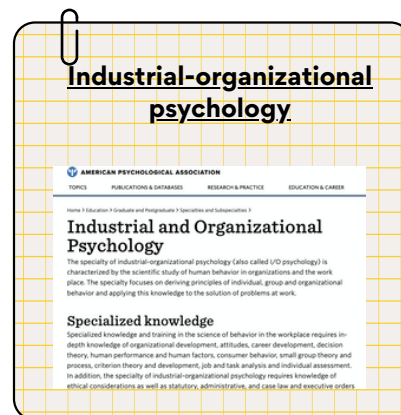
Use the Practitioner View of the [Workforce Research Catalog](#) to learn more about the association between common workforce outcomes (e.g., burnout, stress, turnover) and the variables that predict them.



Looking to build a stronger relationship with the HR professionals in your jurisdiction? This [resource](#) provides some ideas to support the development and maintenance of that relationship.



Looking for an expert in personnel selection to support your agency's self-assessment? Industrial-organizational psychologists have the necessary training and expertise to assist. Check for faculty at your local university or learn more [here](#).



The Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Analytics was supported by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the United States (U.S.) Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$1,468,634 with 100 percent funded by ACF/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACF/HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit the ACF website, Administrative and National Policy Requirements.