



National Incident Management System National Qualification System Supplemental Guide for Qualification Review Boards

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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.

The *National Incident Management System (NIMS) Guideline for the NQS*¹ defines a QRB as a panel of subject-matter experts representing the Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) that is capable of evaluating a trainee's ability to fulfill the duties of a specific position. Qualification Review Boards (QRB) validate individual qualifications, helping to ensure a qualified, shareable, and effective national incident workforce. A QRB is an essential part of a performance-based system that objectively reviews and validates trainees' worthiness for certification.

Each AHJ develops criteria and processes for appointing its own QRB members. An independent, objective QRB review helps the AHJ qualify and certify individuals with the appropriate skills and abilities to fulfill each position.

This guide describes the principles of a QRB and provides recommendations and practices to help an AHJ establish or enhance a QRB. The guide is either a primary or a supplemental tool to help an AHJ establish its own qualification process.

The audience for this QRB guide is any AHJ that is responsible for qualifying and certifying incident management, incident support, or emergency management personnel. Whether building a new QRB or working to improve an existing one, AHJs can use this guide to find information about QRBs and best practices for QRB processes and mechanics.

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

¹ For information on the National Qualification System (NQS) and related documents, visit: <https://www.fema.gov/national-qualification-system>

Personnel Certification Process

In NQS, certification is the AHJ's process of officially indicating an individual as qualified to perform in a specific position. Certification helps ensure that personnel have the minimum level of education, training, experience, physical and medical fitness, and capabilities necessary to successfully perform in a particular position. Certification is part of a continuum of NQS activities, as shown in Figure 1. For information about additional qualification processes, see the *NIMS Guideline for the NQS*.



Figure 1: NQS Process Overview

At the end of the qualification process, the trainee, coach, and evaluator work together to submit documentation to the AHJ. The AHJ, typically through a QRB, examines the individual's historical records, training, completed Position Task Book (PTB), letters of recommendation, and other performance-based evidence. If the individual meets all position requirements, the QRB validates the documents and submits them, along with the board's recommendation, to the Certifying Official (CO), who makes the ultimate decision on certification. If the CO approves, the AHJ certifies the individual as qualified. If the CO does not approve, the trainee can appeal or reverts to his or her previous status.

Figure 2 highlights the details of the QRB process. The following section presents considerations for setting up a QRB to perform this process.

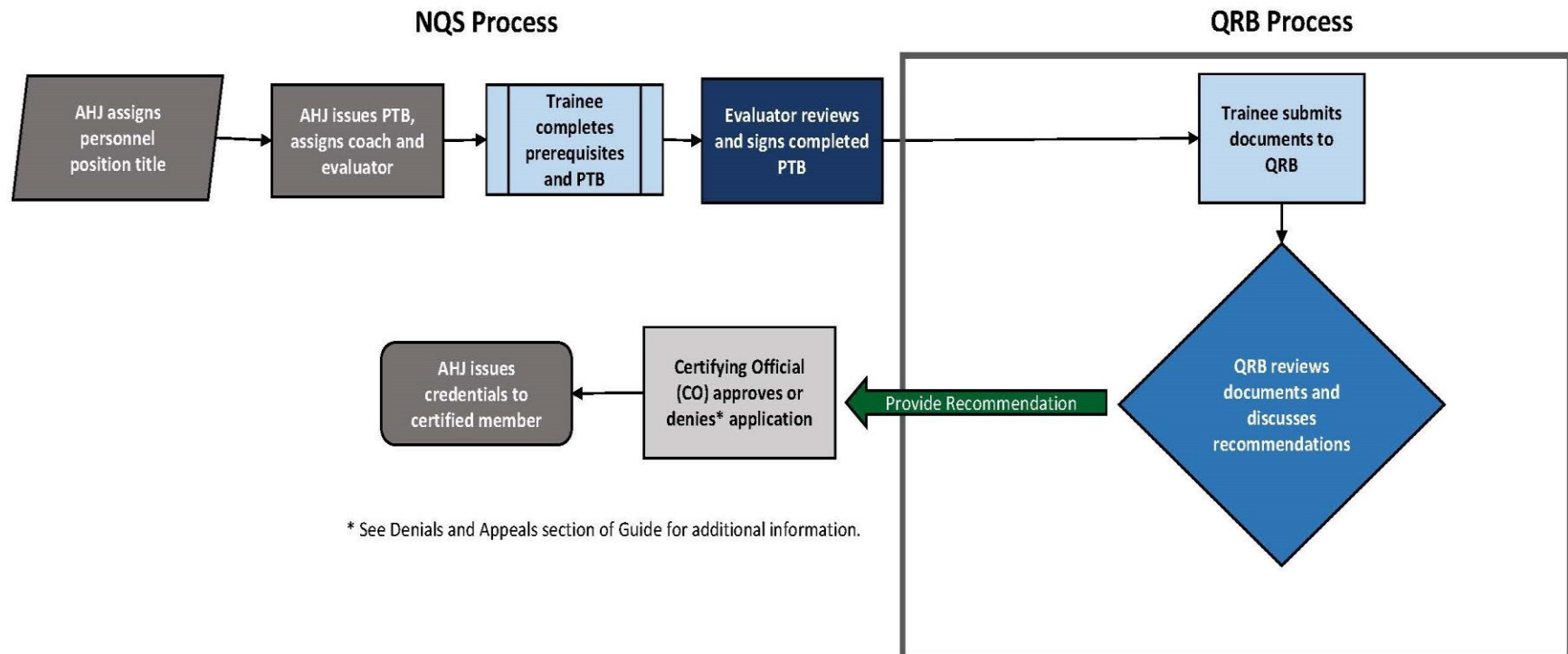


Figure 2: NQS/QRB Process

II. NQS Guidance for Establishing a QRB

This section provides suggestions for establishing and organizing a QRB. It also provides proposed QRB roles and responsibilities.

QRB Membership and Governance

An AHJ should consider the following when establishing a QRB and authorizing it to review trainee certification packages:

Membership

QRB membership includes a cross-section of relevant agencies, organizations, individuals, and disciplines. This reduces the potential for favoritism and unequal treatment of individuals during the certification process. Size and composition of a QRB varies with each AHJ. A QRB typically has three or more members representing different agencies and disciplines. For example, a QRB for a local government may include personnel from the fire department, police department, and emergency management agency. This fosters coordination, collaboration, fairness, and objectivity, as no entity dominates membership.

An AHJ may initially lack qualified members to staff a QRB. In this instance, the AHJ (requesting organization) may ask a jurisdiction that already has a QRB (assisting organization) to review the qualifications of its proposed members. Based on recommendations from the assisting QRB, the requesting AHJ can authorize newly qualified members to act as its initial QRB members.

Certifying Official (CO)

Each AHJ should authorize at least one individual to oversee the entire validation and certification process of incident management, incident support, and emergency management personnel. The CO is generally the individual in charge of the entity overseeing the certification process and employing the certified personnel. For example, the Emergency Manager of a specific county may also be the CO for that county. This CO receives the QRB's recommendations and holds the ultimate decision on personnel certification.

Governance Documents

The AHJ develops governance documents specifying how, when, and where the QRB convenes and what review processes it uses. Governance documents should include administrative guidance regarding the minimum attendance required for a quorum, as well as a general schedule for convening the QRB. Boards typically meet in person, but in some cases they may convene virtually. Many AHJs use agreements such as Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) to ensure that the various entities within the jurisdiction recognize the QRB's authority. AHJs are likely to have governance document templates on topics like these:

- How the QRB is organized;
- Roles and responsibilities;

- Term limits;
- Where authority comes from (such as a single AHJ, multiple AHJs, ordinances, or county, tribal, territorial, or state law);
- Delegation of authority;
- What the QRB is charged to do (make recommendations regarding certification to the certifying official);
- Acceptable documentation requirements (position, performance evaluation, and certification/license requirements);
- Procedures by which the QRB determines training equivalencies; and
- Levels of positions reviewed.

Governance Structure

Governance documents should include the structure of the QRB, which typically includes descriptions of the following:

- Officers and terms of service;
- Board/committee procedures;
- Meeting frequency; and
- Decision appeals process.

A QRB typically has designated officers such as chair, vice chair, and other members that the AHJ appoints. Procedures focus on processes and internal controls that ensure each application packet undergoes a standard review.

QRB Process

Once the governance structure is in place, the AHJ and QRB can begin following the established processes to review trainee application packets. See Figure 2 for a complete process flowchart. Note the following:

- Once the final evaluator has completed the Final Evaluator Verification, it is forwarded to the QRB. The final evaluator is a different person than the original evaluator.
- Coaches and evaluators can participate as members of the QRB and can evaluate their own trainees, with the AHJ's approval.
- QRB members use their collective experience to determine whether an individual has the necessary knowledge and skills to serve in a specific position. This includes reaching back to the coach and evaluator from the other AHJ, if deployed outside the AHJ.
- Once the QRB finishes its review and makes a certification recommendation, the QRB forwards the application with its recommendation to the CO for a final certification decision.
- If the CO approves the QRB's recommendation, the AHJ issues the new credentials.

QRB Roles and Responsibilities

Applying their collective expertise, QRB members should fairly and objectively assess all documents in a trainee's application packet to determine whether the trainee meets the position's performance criteria. An application packet typically includes completed PTBs, course/training records, certificates, resumes, experience documentation, and performance ratings. See Appendix A for a sample Position Qualification Application Template, PTB Checklist, and Self-Assessment and Evaluation Form Template.

The QRB's governance documents delineate its internal review process. For example:

- The initial review of a trainee application packet begins by confirming that submitted documents are complete and adequate.
- The next step is to resolve any discrepancies found during the packet review.
- The review process sets evaluation guidelines, including:
 - Minimum number of incidents, events, and exercises that count toward the applicant's experience;
 - How the QRB measures the quality of an applicant's experience; and
 - The evaluation time frame.
- The QRB has the option of inviting an applicant for an interview (see below).
- The QRB documents its process and findings for use in any review or audit it performs. If the QRB recommends approval, it submits the trainee's application packet with its recommendation to the CO for certification.
- The CO notifies the trainee of the certification decision via e-mail or letter.

Additional Considerations

Applicant Interviews

After the QRB conducts a thorough review of an application packet, the QRB may invite the applicant to an assessment interview to answer questions about his/her documentation, education, training, and experience. The interview may consist of queries from a predetermined pool of questions or questions the QRB proposes after reviewing the trainee's documents. The questions should seek to address any gaps in the qualification record. The AHJ defines how this interview occurs to ensure it is consistent with existing practices.

Decertification

AHJs are also responsible for decertification—revoking an individual's position qualifications when necessary. Personnel may lose their certification for currency reasons, by voluntarily withdrawing, or for other reasons the AHJ deems appropriate. The *NIMS Guideline for the NQS* outlines guidance for developing guidelines for revoking or decertifying personnel qualifications. See Appendix A for a sample decertification document.

Denials and Appeals

AHJs should have a well-documented process for times when applicants believe the AHJ made an error in evaluating their qualifications or documentation, or when personnel wish to dispute a

notice of impending decertification. A clearly defined re-application and appeals procedure as part of the QRB governance documents promotes an environment of trust and impartiality. Below are some suggested guidelines:

- Establish a written plan for personnel who have been denied certification to include suggested retraining and process for re-application.
- Develop a written form for personnel to use in initiating and documenting an appeal. The appeal form should request all information the AHJ needs to process the appeal, including (at minimum) a description of the circumstances leading to the appeal, the reason for the appeal, supporting documentation (which the appellant should attach), and the appellant's requested outcome. See Appendix A for a Sample Appeal Template.
- Publish time limits for the appeals process. For example, an AHJ may require individuals to submit appeals of QRB action no later than 30 days after receiving notification of a decision.
- To adjudicate the appeal, either use the existing QRB or appoint an independent review board. An independent review board may include members of the QRB.
- Clearly indicate the results of the appeals process in a form or letter for the appellant. The document should include any additional actions, documents, or experience/training the appellant must complete to achieve the desired result, certification, or resolution.

Historical Recognition

Historical recognition is an AHJ's recognition of an individual's past experience or qualifications as equivalent to qualification criteria for a position. An AHJ typically applies historical recognition in three circumstances: when first implementing a QRB process, when adding new incident-related positions to the AHJ's portfolio, and when hiring a new individual who has served in the same or a similar position elsewhere. Although each AHJ determines how long to use historical recognition, the most common interval for accepting historical recognition applications for a new QRB process is one year from the date the AHJ implements the process. After this initial period, AHJs may continue to accept historical recognition applications from newly assigned individuals.

Conflicts of Interest

Governance documents should outline the process for disclosing and remedying conflict of interest situations during the review process. QRB members should disclose potential conflicts of interest as early as possible to maintain the integrity of the review process. Examples of conflicts of interest include when a trainee's supervisor chairs the trainee's QRB or when a trainee's spouse is a member of the QRB. For the QRB process to remain fair, QRB members should keep the process open and honest, both in appearance and in practice.

Appendix A. NQS Form and Letter Templates

This appendix contains form and letter templates captured from the *NIMS Guideline for the NQS* to help AHJ and QRB organizations carry out their certification roles and responsibilities. AHJ and QRB members can tailor these templates to meet the needs of the organization or jurisdiction.

Position Qualification Application Template

[Insert Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) name]

[Insert AHJ mailing address]

[Insert AHJ phone number]

[Insert AHJ point of contact (POC) and title]

[Insert AHJ POC phone number]

[Insert AHJ POC e-mail address]

-
- ☐ QRB ASSIGNMENT
 - ☐ Operations/Coordination Center/Emergency Operations Center
 - ☐ Incident Management Team
 - ☐ OTHER
-

The QRB members review applications [*TIME FRAME*]. Applications are due to the QRB by [*DATE*] of the month prior to the next scheduled meeting. Please submit only completed applications to avoid unnecessary delays. Submit applications to the mailing address or e-mail address above.

Trainee Name:

First: Click here to enter text. **Last:** Click here to enter text. **M.I.:** Click here to enter text.

Current Agency Position or Title: Click here to enter text.

Trainee Agency: Click here to enter text.

Agency Mailing Address: Click here to enter text.

City: Click here to enter text. **State:** Click here to enter text. **Zip:** Click here to enter text.

Phone: Click here to enter text. **E-mail:** Click here to enter text.

Position for Consideration: Click here to enter text.

[Please submit your completed Position Task Book with this application]

PTB Checklist

1. Personal Data

- ☐ “PTB Assigned To” completed
- ☐ “PTB Initiated By” completed
- ☐ “Location and Date PTB Was Initiated” completed

2. Evaluation Data

- ☐ All tasks signed off
- ☐ Evaluation Record completed (back of PTB)
- ☐ “Final Evaluator’s Verification” signed

3. Training Certificates/Equivalencies

- ☐ All training certificates present
- ☐ Relevant equivalencies approved

4. Relevant experience

- ☐ Relevant job experience and time included in position or narratives
- ☐ Historical recognition documented as necessary
- ☐ Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) documented as necessary

5. Additional Documentation

- ☐ Incident Experience Narrative, Performance Rating(s) (ICS Form 225), Activity Log (ICS Form 214) included
- ☐ Incident Action Plans list name, position, and incident
- ☐ Other documents included [please list below]

Self-Assessment and Evaluation Form Template

[Insert agency logo here]

POSITION SELF-ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION FORM

[Insert Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) name]

[Insert AHJ mailing address]

[Insert AHJ phone number]

[Insert AHJ point of contact (POC) and title]

[Insert AHJ POC phone number]

[Insert AHJ POC e-mail address]

-
- ☐ QRB ASSIGNMENT
 - ☐ Operations/Coordination Center/Emergency Operations Center
 - ☐ Incident Management Team
 - ☐ OTHER
-

The QRB members review applications [*TIME FRAME*]. Applications are due to the QRB by [*DATE*] of the month prior to the next scheduled meeting. Please submit only completed applications to avoid unnecessary delays. Submit applications to the mailing address or e-mail address above.

Trainee Name:

First: Click here to enter text. **Last:** Click here to enter text. **M.I.:** Click here to enter text.

Current Agency Position or Title: Click here to enter text.

Trainee Agency: Click here to enter text.

Agency Mailing Address: Click here to enter text.

City: Click here to enter text. **State:** Click here to enter text. **Zip:** Click here to enter text.

Phone: Click here to enter text. **E-mail:** Click here to enter text.

Job Title for Consideration: Click here to enter text.

Professional Experience:

Please list significant experience related to the position you are applying for that directly supports your application.

Click here to enter text.

Significant Incident or Planned Event (Type 3 or Above) Experience:

Please attach Incident Action Plans, Incident Briefing (ICS Form 201), Performance Rating (ICS Form 225), etc., for any incidents or planned events that support your application.

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Education, Training, Professional Certification, and Licensure:

Please list related degrees, training courses, professional certificates, licenses, etc., that support your application, and include pertinent documents.

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Other Supporting Documentation:

Please attach any other documents relevant to your application that further support and record your experiences.

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Sample Decertification Letter

When an individual's certification expires or requires revocation, the AHJ should formally notify the individual and document the situation. AHJs or QRBs typically send formal letters to the individual.

The following items are standard elements of loss of qualification or decertification notification correspondence.

Date: The date of the correspondence serves as the starting date for the window for any corrective action.

Personal Information: Include the individual's name and address and the job title for the decertified position in the salutation and subject line of the document.

Position Currency Requirements: Summarize the currency requirements for the specific position for which the individual is certified.

Reason for Decertification: Explain the rationale for decertification (e.g., did not supply documentation for currency within allotted time frame, a conduct issue). Also, explain what suspension or revocation of certification means for the individual (e.g., the individual is no longer approved to respond to any incidents or events outside of his or her home jurisdiction or while supporting typical mutual aid duties).

Summary of Actions: Describe the steps, if applicable, that the individual can take to requalify or recertify, along with the time frame for the actions (e.g., provide missing documentation within a certain time frame). Indicate what will occur if the individual does not address the outstanding issues within the specified time frame. This may include any or all of the below actions:

- The individual's name will be removed from the AHJ's resource mobilization list for this specific position.
- The individual reverts to trainee status with specific requirements for how to requalify for this position within a certain period.
- The individual's credential(s) will be rescinded.
- An individual initiates a new PTB with all supporting prerequisites if he or she does not requalify within the allotted time frame.

Point of Contact: Provide the name and contact information of a person whom the individual may contact with any questions.

Sample Appeal Template

Upon decertification or denial of certification, an applicant can appeal the decision. Below is a sample template to submit an appeal.

[Insert Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) name]

[Insert AHJ mailing address]

[Insert AHJ phone number]

[Insert AHJ point of contact (POC) and title]

[Insert AHJ POC phone number]

[Insert AHJ POC e-mail address]

Trainee Name:

First: Click here to enter text. **Last:** Click here to enter text. **M.I.:** Click here to enter text.

Current Agency Position or Title: Click here to enter text.

Trainee Agency: Click here to enter text.

Agency Mailing Address: Click here to enter text.

City: Click here to enter text. **State:** Click here to enter text. **Zip:** Click here to enter text.

Phone: Click here to enter text. **E-mail:** Click here to enter text.

Position for Appeal Consideration: Click here to enter text.

Reason for Decertification/Denial of Certification: Click here to enter text.

Summary of Actions to Address Above Reasons: Click here to enter text.

Proof of Currency Requirements for Position: Click here to enter text.

Appendix B. 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, the latest 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 Coaches and Evaluators* describes the process of coaching a trainee to perform PTB tasks and evaluating trainee performance of PTB tasks as part of the qualification process. (pending publication)
- 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 (RTLTL)

- The RTLTL 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>