

Lesson 2: How FQS Works

Lesson Overview

To increase your understanding of how FQS works, this lesson explores the various components and processes of the FQS, including the function and role that Qualification Review Boards (QRBs) play in FQS.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Identify the purpose of the FEMA Position Task Books (PTBs), Position Qualification Sheets, and Qualification Progression Flowcharts.
- Describe the FQS qualification process.
- Describe the Qualification Review Board (QRB) certification process.
- Describe FEMA's process for implementing FQS for the incident management workforce.
- Identify FQS support and resources available to FEMA employees.

What Are the Components of FQS?

The three main components of FQS include Position Task Books, Position Qualification Sheets, and Qualification Progression Flowcharts.

Position Task Books (PTBs) list and define the specific performance requirements for each position. The PTBs specify performance requirements through a hierarchy of:

- Competencies
- Behaviors and activities
- Tasks

Each task within the PTB must be successfully demonstrated in the presence of a qualified evaluator to receive credit for task completion. The PTBs also contain forms and signature blocks for evaluator sign-off.

Position Qualification Sheets list the required FQS experience and required training for each position. They may also include a list of other position assignments that maintain currency in that position, and other training that supports the development of skills and knowledge applicable to the position.

Qualification Progression Flowcharts graphically demonstrate how qualification for various positions is related and which positions are qualification prerequisites.

The flowcharts also provide employees a frame of reference for career progression in emergency management.

Together, these three components clearly define the training, experience, and behaviors that an individual needs to demonstrate to become fully qualified in any specific disaster workforce position.

Who Are the Key Players in FQS?

A number of individuals and organizations play key roles in administering FQS, including Certifying Authorities, Certifying Officials, Coach-Evaluators, Regional and National Cadre Managers, Regional Training Managers, Incident Training Units, and Supervisors.

A certifying authority is the FEMA official who has direct reporting responsibility to the FEMA Administrator and has authority to certify FEMA personnel as qualified in identified positions. A certifying authority may be located in a headquarters (HQ) entity (such as an Office, Bureau, or Administration) or a Regional office. He or she is responsible for:

- Administering FQS for all employees, who have assigned disaster roles, within the certifying authority's area of responsibility
- Establishing Qualification Review Boards (QRB) to review the qualifications of employees who have been recommended for certification in a specific position
- Certifying employees as qualified for positions when the employees have met pertinent FQS standards

Certifying officials are designated at the headquarters and regional levels to manage the day-to-day operation of FQS. A Certifying Official is responsible for:

- Identifying employees to become trainees in a specific position based on the agency's force structure requirements and strategic goals
- Issuing PTBs to those identified trainees and ensuring they meet all required prerequisites
- Providing opportunities for evaluation and/or making trainees available for evaluation
- Explaining to the trainee the purpose and process of the PTB as well as the trainee's responsibilities
- Tracking the trainee's progress
- Confirming PTB completion
- Certifying the trainee for those positions falling within their certification authority as outlined in the FQS Guide for Incident Management and Incident Support Positions

Coach-evaluators are individuals certified under FQS as evaluators, who are qualified in the position(s) being evaluated, and are assigned at an incident to coach trainees and evaluate their performance.

Specifically, coach-evaluators assist trainees to:

- Demonstrate achievement of specific qualifications through coaching
- Assessing their performance against established standards.

Effective coaching and evaluation is important to the success of the trainee and to effective incident support and incident management.

Regional and National Cadre Managers coordinate to:

- Maintain deployment records for cadre personnel
- Coordinate with Certifying Official on PTB distribution
- Maintain training records for cadre personnel in collaboration with the Emergency Management Institute (EMI)
- Analyze the status and progress of all trainees within the cadre at least annually and use the results to identify training and deployment priorities
- Collaborate with Regional Training Managers to identify training needs and priorities
- Prioritize training and deployment requirements for individual cadre members in consultation with certifying authorities and certifying officials and Regional Training Managers based on existing deployment standard operating procedures and Force Structure requirements
- Maintain, and revise as necessary, the PTB technical tasks within their cadres

Regional Training Managers support FQS in their efforts to:

- Identify and communicate training needs and priorities to National and Regional Cadre Managers
- Coordinate the delivery of needed training in the Regions
- Training Units at JFOs work with National and Regional Cadre Managers to:
- Identify and prioritize training needs and requirements at their JFO
- Coordinate the delivery of training onsite at the JFO

Additionally, for situations in which an individual deploys without a PTB, and with the approval of a certifying official, the Incident Training Unit may issue the individual a PTB, when authorized by the Certifying Official.

Within the context of FQS, supervisors refer to the individual to whom you report while deployed on an incident. Supervisors work to ensure that their personnel are prepared to perform their assignments proficiently and safely. Supervisors are also responsible for supporting trainees in the completion of their PTBs, and for assessing the performance of their direct reports separately from FQS task evaluation.

What Is the FQS Qualification Process?

The FQS Qualification Process requires employees to complete three steps in order to become certified as qualified for a specific position.

- Step 1: Complete any qualifying experience for the position (if applicable)
- Step 2: Complete any mandatory training required for the position, establish any external certification, and demonstrate successful performance in the required activities (per the relevant PTB)
- Step 3: Undergo and pass the certification process including review, approval, and currency validation

FQS Qualification Process: Step 1

As a first step in the FQS Qualification Process a certifying official:

- Identifies an employee with requisite experience.
- Validates that candidate's experience against FQS requirements.
- Issues that employee a PTB.

With the issuance of the PTB, the individual becomes a trainee and is eligible for deployment in that position.

If an employee is already qualified in an FQS position, and seeks to advance to the next position in the applicable Progression Flow Chart, he or she will:

- Work with his or her Cadre Manager to determine eligibility for advancement based on force structure needs.
- Ensure he or she is qualified in all pre-requisite positions.
- Complete all required training requirements (as outlined in the position Qualification Sheet).
- Ensure he or she has a history of satisfactory performance reviews.

If the employee is selected for advancement from the pool of potential candidates able to progress, the certifying official will issue the employee a new PTB.

FQS Qualification Process: Step 2

Step 2 of the qualification process has three possible components—training, external certification, and performance—depending upon the specific position:

- Complete Mandatory Training Required for the Position
- Establish External Certification
- Demonstrate Successful Performance in the Required Activities

Complete Required Training

Specific training listed on the Position Qualification Sheet for the target position reflects the knowledge and skills a trainee must have in order to perform the tasks of the position successfully.

Complete Recurrent Training

Some positions require refresher training more frequently than others to maintain qualification. This Recurrent section only appears on Position Qualification Sheets when a position requires such training.

Establish External Certification (when applicable)

This section lists certification(s) that are essential for the performance of a position's duties, but which are awarded and governed by authorities outside of FQS. Examples include contracting officer's representative (COR) certification, contracting warrants, and professional certifications required by the target FQS position. This subsection only appears on Position Qualification Sheets when a position requires such certification. Not all positions require external certifications.

Demonstrate Successful Performance

A trainee must complete his or her PTBs before they can be considered for certification. PTBs can only be completed by successfully demonstrating PTB tasks for a FQS Coach-Evaluator while on deployment to an incident or exercise, and having that Coach-Evaluator sign off on those tasks in the trainee's PTB.

FQS Qualification Process: Step 3

Certification is the administrative process that validates, approves, and documents the fact that an employee is qualified for a specific FQS position. Qualifications are based on standards established for the position and documented in the PTB and the Position Qualification Sheet.

Successful completion of PTBs, required FQS experience, and required training do not guarantee that a trainee will be certified for a position. Certification and recertification also involve professional judgment and evaluation. Evaluators consider the variety of incidents (e.g., floods, tornados, hurricanes); their size and complexity; and the number of assignments.

A Qualification Review Board (QRB) evaluates each trainee, based on:

- Evaluations of tasks documented in the PTB.
- Performance appraisals.
- Deployment experiences (such as JFO start-up versus close out, duration of deployments, and size of disasters).

When all three steps are successfully completed, the certifying authority determines the trainee to be qualified for the target position. The trainee receives an FQS qualification letter indicating that his or her status has been changed from "trainee" to "qualified."

What Is the QRB?

The QRB:

- Evaluates employees' qualification against established standards.
- Provides recommendations for certification that are fair and consistent.
- A QRB, in accordance with their level of authority, reviews a trainee's completed certification package, and recommends what action the certifying authority should take.

How Many QRBs Are There?

There are a total of 12 QRBs—two at FEMA headquarters and one for each of the 10 Regions—that meet quarterly.

One of the headquarters QRBs reviews certification packages for all Type I positions, as well as Type II and III positions assigned to FEMA Headquarters. The other headquarters QRB reviews certification packages for non-typed positions, including:

- Division Supervisor
- Group Supervisor
- Task Force Leader
- Unit Leader
- Assistant External Affairs Officer

The Regional QRBs review certification packages for Type II and III positions, including all of the listed positions above.

Who Sits on the QRBs?

QRBs include at least five voting members, who serve 2-year terms. QRB members include qualified PFT incident management and incident support staff.

Each QRB must have among its members a qualified functional or program designee at the equivalent, or higher position level than the employee under review for qualification determination.

Who Chairs the QRBs?

The QRB is chaired by an individual with extensive disaster response and recovery experience, such as a Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO), a Regional Incident Management Assistance Team (IMAT) Team Leader, a General Staff member, Division Director, or a Branch Chief.

QRBs also include ad-hoc, non-voting advisors, such as representatives from:

- Office of Equal Rights
- Office of Chief Counsel
- Office of the Chief Component Human Capital Officer (CCHCO)
- At-Large Labor-Management Partner Council (LMPC)/Union Representative

These ad-hoc advisors are included in the QRB to ensure the rights of all employees are maintained throughout the FQS Certification Process.

What Is the QRB Certification Process?

Employee submits certification package to Cadre Manager

The employee compiles a certification package, which includes clear copies of the following:

- Completed PTB
- Records documenting completion of required training (per the FQS Qualification Sheet)
- Incident performance appraisal(s)
- Letters of recommendation (if available)
- Records documenting any training and experience as part of other ICS-based organizations (if applicable)

The employee submits this hardcopy package to his or her Cadre Manager, but should retain copies of all personal FQS records for future reference and use.

Note: The employee should retain all original copies of the documentation submitted for the certification review process.

Cadre Manager Processes the Certification Package

Upon receipt of the certification package from the employee, the Cadre Manager forwards the certification package to the certifying official and enters the certification information into FEMA's FQS information tracking database.

Certifying Official Submits Certification Package to QRB

The certifying official reviews the certification package to ensure it is complete, and then sends the package to the QRB for review and evaluation.

QRB Reviews the Package and Makes Recommendation

The QRB will review and evaluate the certification package—reviewing the overall quality of the employee experience(s), including:

- Scope of involvement in trainee position(s)
- Complexity of incidents supported
- Phase(s) of deployment(s) supported (for instance, response versus recovery)
- Documented pattern(s) of incident behavior that suggest questionable judgment or concerns of maturity which may negatively impact the operation or organization

After reviewing the entire certification package, the QRB determines a recommendation for certification for the certifying authority. The QRB then prepares and sends the decision letter, with appropriate rationale, for the certifying authority's approval and signature.

Certifying Authority Approves or Disapproves QRB Recommendation

The certifying authority reviews the QRB recommendation, decision letter, and associated rationale, and then approves or disapproves the QRB recommendation. If the certifying authority approves the recommendation, the employee, Cadre Manager, and Deployment Unit will receive copies of the qualification letter.

How Did FEMA Make the Initial FQS Qualification Evaluations?

To initially implement FQS, FEMA comprehensively and systematically evaluated the current FEMA disaster workforce against the FQS qualification requirements. FEMA only evaluated the incident management workforce, reserving the NRCC or RRCC positions to be evaluated at a later date.

Panels of subject matter experts (SMEs) convened, which were comprised of individuals selected by regional administrators, National and Regional Cadre Managers, and National IMAT representatives, as well as selected SMEs.

Each cadre had a panel, and those panels reviewed its own cadre.

What Information Did FEMA Consider in Its Initial FQS Qualification Evaluations?

To ensure consistent evaluations, panels thoroughly reviewed each employee's personnel, deployment, and training records against set criteria for each position. The evaluation criteria included:

Critical tasks in the PTB.

- Length, size, and complexity of deployments (including deployments with FEMA as well as other agencies).
- Deployment experience at the start up and close out of JFOs.
- Cadre or position-specific criteria defined by the panel, such as completion of a specific course or achievement of a certain experience required to be considered qualified in the position.

Through these evaluations, FEMA qualified each individual to the highest position possible under the new FQS standards.

What Employees Support and Resources Are Available?

As with the implementation of any new program of this magnitude, employees will have questions about the FQS process. To help answer these questions, FEMA has set up several resources for its employees:

FQS Call Center

The FQS Call Center at 1-855-377-FEMA provides referral and guidance on FQS. It does not supersede Cadre Managers, and will refer individuals to Cadre Managers for qualification determination and reconsideration questions. The FQS Call Center will track and report inquiry trends (to support effective system implementation) and also track reconsideration requests.

FQS Mailbox

As an alternative to calling into the FQS Call Center, FEMA has also set up a FQS mailbox, FEMA-FQS-Program@fema.dhs.gov, for employees to submit their questions in writing. The FQS Call Center monitors and responds to inquiries submitted to the FQS Mailbox.

FQS Web Page

The FQS Web Page, <http://www.fema.gov/information-employees/fema-qualification-system> is a publicly-available Web page with information about FQS that includes a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section, links to FEMA doctrine, and contact and referral information.

In addition to the call center, mailbox, and Web page, employees with FQS may also reach out to their Regional Incident Workforce Management Office (IWMO) Liaisons, and their Regional and National Cadre Managers.

Lesson Summary

This lesson presented the following topics:

- The purpose of the FEMA PTBs, Position Qualification Sheets, and Qualification Progression Flowcharts
- The FQS Qualification Process
- The QRB certification process
- FEMA's process for implementing FQS for the incident management workforce
- FQS support and resources available to FEMA employees, including:
 - FQS Call Center: 1-855-377-FEMA
 - FQS Mailbox: FEMA-FQS-Program@fema.dhs.gov
 - FQS Web Page: <http://www.fema.gov/fqs>

The next lesson presents a scenario for how a FEMA employee may progress from trainee to qualified status as part of the FQS process.