

*The LAPD*

# **STANDARDS BASED ASSESSMENT**

*Lieutenants & Below*

**Version 2**

*Replacing the Performance Evaluation Report*

---

Why the SBA?—Page 2

---

What the Standards Based Assessment Is—Page 2

---

How the Assessment Will Be Completed—Page 3

---

The Clear Standards for the New System—Page 5

---

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions—Page 8

---

## Why the SBA?

### The Problem

Until now, the Performance Evaluation system produced a purely subjective assessment of an employee's performance, often based solely on a single supervisor's opinion. With usually little feedback or exchange of information between supervisor and subordinate, the supervisor opinions so often resulted in inflated "halo" evaluations that it became difficult to distinguish the truly outstanding employees from those who are not. In many cases employees became so used to being rated "Outstanding" that the evaluations have had little value for the employee or the Department. Poor supervisory writing skills left some employees unrewarded for genuinely excellent work. And despite lacking objective information, these evaluations help determine Civil Service promotions and selections to advanced paygrade or bonus positions, all of which require objective information to ensure merit-based decisions.

### Version 2

Recognizing that the traditional "glowing evaluations" added little to employee development or to goal achievement, the Department created a new objective, action-based assessment. The new Stand-

ards Based Assessment (SBA) not only helped inform merit-based selections, but gave meaning to employees' actual work by comparing what they do to objective standards clearly stated on the form. Employee actions, not supervisory opinions, will define how an employee is assessed.

However, the first version of the SBA published in 2009 included a "Greatly Exceeds Standards" category. Version 2, published in 2011, eliminates the "Greatly Exceeds Standards" category because a study of how it was being used showed that supervisors and their leaders were not diligent in attaching the required evidence to justify the assessment.

***Everyone deserves to know  
how their work compares  
to the standards...***

**What Will The  
Standards Based Assessment  
Be Like?**

The SBA version 2 removes the "Greatly Exceeds Standards" category, replaces "Meets or Sometimes Exceeds Standards" category with "Meets or Exceeds Standards," removes the post-adjudication section previously required for Command Officers to use, blocks out areas to avoid unauthorized narratives, and makes minor updates to language and terms in the behavior standards. Each column is one of two assessment groupings: "Meets or Exceeds Standards," and "Needs Improvement."

When a check box is marked within the "Meets or Exceeds Standards" column,

no additional documentation is required. The assessor can just check the boxes that correspond to observations or statements of other supervisors. The assessor *may* (and should) attach performance documents like Comment Cards, Commendations, etc. written at the time of the events they describe (if they were written during the assessment period), but they are not required. Since there is nowhere for a narrative in the SBA, performance-related attachments (like Comment Cards, Commendations, etc., that were written at the time the events occurred) are a great help in conveying the kind of work the employee did throughout the year.

However, for the lower grouping of “Needs Improvement”—some kind of performance-proving documents must be attached. Whether they are Comment Cards, Notices to Correct, or other reports written at the time of the events described—or a Personnel Complaint adjudicated during the SBA assessment period—they will be compared with the marked standards to determine whether the boxes checked by the assessor are justified.

The performance-proving attachments may include subjective remarks ascribing value or worth to an employee’s actions, but the only feature of such a report that can be used to justify a “Needs Improvement” is the employee’s *actions*. Opinions or value judgments masquerading as performance reports should be not be at-

tached to an SBA: they destroy the SBA’s objectivity and defy its purpose.

The goals and objectives set by the Department, by commanding officers, and by officers-in-charge should lead employees to do the work deemed most important to their leaders. The SBA is designed to reward employees who do such work. Leaders who make goals and objectives clear to employees *throughout the year* are not only more likely to see goals

***Goals and objectives must be made clear to employees throughout the year.***

achieved, but are able to reward their people with the best SBAs. A theme that runs through many of the SBA standards is doing work deemed most important to manage-

ment. Employees who consistently do work in tight alignment with clear management goals deserve to be rewarded with accurate SBAs and performance attachments (Comment Cards, etc.) proving their achievements.

## **How Will the New Assessment Be Completed?**

A supervisor or manager should meet with an employee and discuss goals and performance objectives:

- At the beginning of the assessment period.
- Quarterly during the assessment period, particularly when improvement is needed. There is no top limit to the

number of times performance should be discussed. A supervisor should meet with employees as many times as required.

- When there is a change in supervision or a change in assignment.
- At the end of the assessment period **prior to the SBA being written**. At this point it is important to review any documentation the *employee* has completed or collected regarding his or her own performance.

The supervisor is not the only person responsible for documenting performance

reports. Both the employee and the supervisor should take the time to make a written record of specific acts of performance throughout the year. Employees should keep a journal of specific performance highlights while supervisors should create performance documents (Commendations, Comment Cards, etc.). Supervisors should consider writing at least one performance document each deployment period for each employee in their unit. They don't have to be long, but they have to be accurate, meaningful, and factual.

Department supervisors must meet with their employees often enough to engage in meaningful discussions, however brief they may be, in order to set goals, understand their employees' performance, commend or correct actions, etc.

***Using Comment Cards as "administrative parking tickets," is contrary to their purpose***

This is an essential function of supervisory oversight: it is so important that *it is one of the standards that supervisors will be assessed on in the new SBA*.

Supervisors: Responsible for *Everyone*

Merely because an employee is not assigned to you does not mean you are not responsible for when you observe their performance. A supervisor is expected to act promptly when observing an

employee's action in need of correction or commendation. The supervisor may act by notifying the employee's supervisor of the event or by writing a performance document himself. Either way, supervisors must work as a leadership team to ensure employees get recognition for their work. "He's not in *my* den" is not an acceptable supervisory answer to the question, "Why didn't you commend or correct this when you saw it?"

*Properly done* Comment Cards consistent with Department training should be written about many activities, such as:

- Actions taken during radio calls
- Self-initiated activities
- Arrests and searches
- Quality of reports

- Attendance
- Investigative quality
- Search warrants
- Reports, projects, or other written documents

Using Comment Cards as “administrative parking tickets,” however, is contrary to their purpose: Comment Cards should be used as expressions of leadership to guide and develop employees, not to just tell them they’ve failed to perform a task correctly.

Taking care of your people means observing them or their work product as often as possible and honestly reporting their actions on performance reports like Commendations, Comment Cards, etc.

*The people who get promoted or selected for special assignments will have all or almost all SBA groupings in the Meets or Exceeds Standards column.*

- NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

The standard by which performance is judged should be discussed with the employee long before the SBA is done. Employees are more likely to achieve a level of performance that meets or exceeds standards when they understand what the standards are. One way of telling an employee what the standards are is to present the SBA to the employee during

meetings with them and discuss the SBA standards and compare them with the employee’s work product. Continually meeting and discussing the SBA standards with the employee helps the employee and the supervisor determine what needs to be done to align performance to goals.

determine what needs to be done to align performance to goals.

## What Will Be the Standards for the New System?

Although all supervisors should review the SBA completion guidelines before completing an assessment, the standards for each assessment grouping are clearly stated on the SBA itself. The SBA makes it easy to see exactly what the standards are for each grouping.

The new SBA version 2 has just two assessment groupings:

- MEETS OR EXCEEDS STANDARDS

### “Meets or Exceeds Standards”

Under the SBA system, an employee who **Meets or Exceeds Standards** in all assessment groupings is a valuable person. This employee comes to work every day, does a good job, and sometimes may do a great job. This person meets the Department’s professional standards. Almost everyone will fall under this assessment grouping for most standards.

So if virtually all employees will be in the **Meets or Exceeds Standards** assessment grouping, how are employees distinguished from each other? Employees are

distinguished within the assessment groupings by the work they do. This is why performance reports like Comment Cards, Commendations, etc., are so important: what each employee *does* to meet the standards is what helps uniquely characterize each person. Since the SBA has no narrative, the facts described in the performance attachments (like Comment Cards, etc.) make a huge difference. Seeing attachments to the SBA that describe what the person did at various times in the assessment period is one way promotion and paygrade selection boards — as well as other decision makers — will know whether someone’s work indicates suitability for the job they’re being considered for.

#### “Needs Improvement”

The **Needs Improvement** assessment grouping is designed to alert an employee to specific deficiencies as sub-standard performance. This assessment may indicate an employee who is temporarily in need of remediation or self-improvement in particular skills or behaviors. The performance reports for a **Needs Improvement** assessment will typically include Notice to Correct Deficiencies or Comment Cards. Although there is no specific number of performance reports required to

assess **Needs Improvement**, there must be at least one.

Receiving a **Needs Improvement** assessment in any one category does not necessarily mean that the overall assessment will be “Unsatisfactory.” An employee could be assessed in one grouping as **Needs Improvement** yet still show an overall “Satisfactory” where there is evidence that the employee is improving at an acceptable rate towards meeting the standards for the category.

Depending on the behaviors revealed in the performance reports

(which could include actions supporting a sustained Personnel Complaint, behavior-based reduction in paygrade, behavior-based administrative transfer, or other personnel action); **Needs Improvement** in any one assessment category could justify an overall “Unsatisfactory” assessment. An employee who shows **Needs Improvement** in two or more assessment groupings should be considered “Unsatisfactory” overall.

Documents factually reporting the employee’s response to remediation or training should be attached to the SBA.

A **Needs Improvement** assessment is not necessarily career fatal. It could simply mean that an employee has not met particular standards during an assessment period and that with technical remediation or self-initiated changes in behavior,

***Needs Improvement is an opportunity for a supervisor to develop an employee who is willing and able to improve.***

the employee is expected to meet standards in a reasonable period.

However, **Needs Improvement** could also indicate an employee who cannot or will not meet one or more standards. An employee whose actions indicate an inability or unwillingness to improve to meet standards is to be assessed as “Unsatisfactory” overall. An “Unsatisfactory” based on evidence that the employee is unable or unwilling to improve at an acceptable rate beyond **Needs Improvement** can be the basis for personnel actions such as paygrade reduction, demotion, or discharge.

To determine the disposition of a **Needs Improvement** assessment, performance-reporting documents (Comment Cards, Notices To Correct, etc.) should be produced frequently enough to give both the employee and the Department the opportunity to take appropriate action.

If a Personnel Complaint is the basis for a Needs Improvement assessment, a copy of the final adjudication document (Conditional Reprimand, Admonishment, Suspension and Relief From Duty, etc.) should be attached. Do not attach the entire Complaint—just attach the one-page document finalizing the disposition.

If a paygrade reduction or transfer for the purpose of punishment was the basis for a Needs Improvement assessment, attach a copy of the Intradepartmental Correspondence 15.2 that initiated the transfer or paygrade reduction to the SBA.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Before being implemented, this SBA was presented at a number of divisions and to a variety of ranks from PO-II to Staff Officer levels. Here are some questions that have already been asked:

***I've just been given an SBA for an officer who has never worked for me. How am I supposed to complete it?***

Go to the employee's divisional file, to TEAMS-II, the employee (for his journal entries or collected documents), and wherever you can find performance reports (Comment Cards, etc.) that have been written. Look at the employee's work product (reports or projects the employee has done, etc.). The worst case scenario would be that there are no entries and the employee has no documentation. If this is the case, the employee's SBA must be assessed "Meets or Exceeds Standards". If the employee was absent for so much of the assessment period as to make assessment impractical, that should be clearly stated in the "N/A" section of each category.

***I work an administrative position, how will documentation take place on what I do?***

The SBA applies to all positions. Performance reports are just as important to employees in administrative positions with their requirements as they are for

field assignments. The standards are universal: they work for every position.

***I work in a busy Division. How can my performance be compared to someone who works in a much slower place?***

The SBA is not a productivity comparison. It is an assessment of your actions compared to the SBA standards. Working a busy division doesn't grant you a better assessment than someone who works a slow one. Meeting the SBA standards and having documented evidence of your work determines the quality of your assessment. If you want a great SBA, work to the SBA standards and make sure your work gets documented frequently on Comment Cards, Commendations, etc. Keeping a journal of your own work, with DR numbers, dates, times, and specifics (or copies of reports showing your actions) is one way to be sure you have performance reports. Telling your supervisors you want performance reports is also a way to ensure you get them.

***I don't often see the people who work for me due to the compressed work schedule. How will they have regular documentation completed on their performance?***

If you and your fellow supervisors don't operate as a team, and if you don't consistently create performance reports on each other's people, you won't have the documentation you need. You must consciously create a team of fellow supervisors who will create performance re-



ports on each other's employees. It is that simple.

Creating the supervisory team does more than just "ensure documentation." It creates the leadership opportunities that only occur when leaders are constantly engaging employees. Supervisors should be helping each other's people learn, understand the goals and the standards and how to achieve them; they should reward the employees for good work and guide where improvement is needed; and they should listen to the employees for ideas and changes the supervisors may need to make in themselves or in the Department.

For supervisors to sit in an office, go to calls, or engage subordinates with the thought that they will *not* create performance reports is to steal from the employees what they need to be honestly assessed, rewarded for their work, or guided to better performance.

***Often there is only one supervisor inside (patrol W/C) and one out. I don't have time to document performance.***

If you are the only supervisor out you should be going to as many calls as possible. That gives you even more of an opportunity to observe performance, talk with the officers, and explain the performance reports you'll be giving them later. Write a Comment Card or two when completing your log.

By saying you don't have time to create performance reports for what you see the workers do calls into question your

value as a supervisor. Assessing and responding to employee performance is exactly why supervisors exist. You should also consider the message you send to your employees when you refuse to invest time in performance reports: "I (supervisor) want you (the worker) to do your best but because I'm busy tonight, I don't have time to recognize the job you're doing." If it is important for the employee to do the work, it's important for the supervisor to reward or redirect it.

***What is the Commanding Officer's role in all this?***

Commanding Officers (C/O) need to encourage supervisors to produce frequent and useful performance reports (Comment Cards, Commendations, etc.) throughout the year. If the C/O fails to assure that supervisors are creating the performance reports their people need in order to be properly assessed, the C/O fails in an important employee development duty.

The C/O is also responsible to protect the Department and its employees from inaccurate SBAs. The C/O must carefully screen every SBA that shows a Needs Improvement entry. Every SBA with a Needs Improvement entry is to be served only after the C/O validates the entry: If the performance reports do not match the standards checked, the C/O neglects her duty if she permits that SBA to be served.

The C/O must concisely communicate the division's goals throughout the year. Many of the SBA standards are tied to the C/Os goals and are sensitive to the effec-

tiveness of the C/Os communication of clear goals. If the C/O wants to achieve goals, the SBA can help create alignment between worker activities and the C/Os goals when the goals are conveyed clearly and often.

The simpler the goals are to understand, the more likely they will be pursued. The fewer there are, the easier it is to focus on them. The greater the focus, the greater the chance for success. ■

*If you have questions about the Standards Based Assessment development, contact:*

**Lieutenant Ed Palmer**

Project originator • developer • field researcher

**Lieutenant Ron Spicer**

Project administrator • developer • researcher

**Deputy Chief Mark R. Perez**

Project sponsor • developer • policy analyst

Los Angeles Police Department  
September, 2008 (ver. 1) and  
July, 2011 (ver. 2)