Assistant Chief
California Highway Patrol

Candidate Orientation Guide

Selection Standards and Examinations Section
2026

INTRODUCTION

The Candidate Orientation Guide is designed to help you prepare for the 2026 Assistant Chief, California Highway Patrol (CHP), examination. This guide provides important information regarding the testing process that will be used during the examination. It is your responsibility to review and study this orientation guide carefully.

This orientation guide is not designed to serve as a study guide for the actual examination, but rather provides a general overview of the testing process and the procedures involved. Although it does not cover every aspect of the process, it should serve to provide you with useful information regarding the examination. How well you perform on the actual examination will be determined by your past training, experience, knowledge base, and how you present this information during the testing process.

Examination – Structured Interview and Sector Analysis

The assessment center exercises are designed to gather relevant, job-specific information pertaining to a candidate's ability to perform at the level of an Assistant Chief, CHP. Every candidate will receive the same exercises during the testing process. The examination itself will enable candidates to demonstrate possession of the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for successful job performance as an Assistant Chief, CHP.

Some of the assessment center exercises were designed to reflect real life scenarios that an Assistant Chief, CHP, may expect to encounter on the job. For these exercises, candidates should respond to examination situations as they actually would on the job as an Assistant Chief, CHP. Other exercises will assess past experience and behaviors of candidates in their current and former roles. Candidates' responses to individual examination exercises will be recorded and documented by trained examination assessors. The assessors will rate only those behaviors displayed by the candidate. Therefore, it is imperative that a candidate respond fully and comprehensively to each examination situation. Candidates must be explicit and specific in their responses and should not expect assessors to make assumptions, draw conclusions, or comprehend implied references. In other words, if a candidate does not say it, it will not be noted by the assessors.

Candidates will be evaluated according to pre-established, structured rating criteria. After the assessors have recorded the candidate's behavior on the various examination exercises, assessors will provide a final score for each of the job dimensions, which are described at the end of this orientation guide (pgs. 4-5). For each of the job dimensions within an examination exercise, the candidate will receive a score based on a 5-point rating scale, whereas a score of 1 corresponds to the lowest score and 5 represents the highest score.

Prior to the examination day, assessors will receive training on how to score candidates. The rating criteria is designed to assess a wide range of acceptable responses and behaviors. In addition to these specific rating criteria, raters are trained

to exercise a degree of judgment in making their evaluation decisions. After each candidate has completed the exercise and has been evaluated independently by the assessors, the assessor team will meet to derive a consensus score for each candidate (on each job dimension). During the consensus session, the assessors will have an opportunity to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate and the quality of the responses.

Tips for Successful Candidate Performance

Candidates should familiarize themselves with the job dimensions described at the end of this orientation guide (pgs. 4-5). Those candidates who display the behaviors described in these job dimensions will receive higher scores. It is important that candidates respond to each examination exercise as fully and comprehensively as possible. The candidate's ability to display a wide range of effective behaviors relevant to each job dimension is critical to their success on this examination.

The exercises in this assessment center were designed to simulate real-life scenarios that an Assistant Chief, CHP, may encounter on the job, and assess those behaviors already demonstrated on the job. For examination purposes, a candidate should assume they have already been promoted to the rank of Assistant Chief, CHP, and should act accordingly. To some degree, some of the exercises involved in the assessment center may seem like role playing, but remember, we are placing a candidate in these situations for the purpose of assessing how well they would perform as an Assistant Chief, CHP. If a candidate is shy or reluctant to express themselves, their final score will reflect that. The more a candidate is able to project themselves into the assumed role, the better they will perform on the examination overall.

How will the examination be administered?

The examination will consist of two exercises: a Structured Interview and a Sector Analysis. The exercises will be administered at separate stations, and each candidate will be guided from station to station according to a pre-established schedule.

Who are the assessors?

For each of the two exercises, there will be multiple assessors. Assessors were selected from a pool of internal law enforcement personnel of proven ability with a thorough understanding of the requirements and demands of the Assistant Chief, CHP, rank. All assessors will undergo a training session designed to familiarize them with the assessment center exercises and the examination process. During each exercise, the assessors will individually observe and assess the candidate's performance before convening to establish a consensus score.

What should I do and how should I act?

Assessors are not looking for a single particular approach to the examination situation. There are numerous acceptable approaches to the various exercises. In other words, be true to your own personality and leadership style. Do not try to anticipate what the

assessors are looking for or overthink the exercises. Artificial behavior tends to stand out and can be counterproductive. For exercises that rely on hypothetical situations, act naturally — just as you would in a real-life scenario. Draw from your training and experience and respond to the examination exercise in the manner and style that you are accustomed to. For Questions that ask for past career experience, be truthful and communicate your actions, your intentions, and the results achieved.

As you arrive at each exercise, be sure to carefully read all examination directions. Listen carefully to all verbal instructions. If you need the instructions repeated, please ask the assessor to do so. However, in order to provide everyone the same uniform experience, assessors will be limited in the amount of additional direction or help that they can provide. While participating in the assessment center exercises, please speak clearly. The assessors need to hear and understand you to properly evaluate you. If you have any questions as you proceed through the examination process, be sure to ask at that time.

What will the examination schedule be?

Your particular location, time, and date is printed on your Notice to Appear Letter. Each candidate should plan on being at the assessment center site for approximately three hours on your scheduled assessment day.

Please wear professional business attire (no uniforms).

What should I bring to the examination?

All materials necessary for participation in the examination will be provided for you (e.g., paper, pencils, other office supplies). Please do not bring any printed materials, cell phones, smart watch, or any other electronic devices. If you do bring materials to the examination, they will be collected by the administrator and returned at the end of the session.

JOB DIMENSIONS

I. Leadership/Management:

Knowledge of and ability to identify and apply management theories and techniques. Knowledge of the Department's strategic plan and its goals and strategies. Ability to promote a vision and generate support for directives among the entire Sector; exercise discretion, justify decisions, reason objectively and prioritize projects accordingly; determine when to delegate; devise methods for achieving Sector goals and accomplish goals through others; incorporate social, technical, economic, environmental, and political issues into the departmental planning process. Show enthusiasm and a professional demeanor; gain the confidence, cooperation, and respect of the entire Sector. Ability to effectively contribute to the CHP's Equal Employment Opportunity objectives; objectively identify strengths, weaknesses, and potential in subordinate staff; guide, counsel, and mentor subordinates and maintain discipline. Ability to identify the strengths and weaknesses within the organization and develop plans to maximize the strengths and minimize the weaknesses. Ability to develop staff to meet the strategic objectives of the CHP.

II. Problem Solving/Decision Making:

Ability to exercise sound judgment, including making decisions regarding which items to delegate, which to take action on, and which to refer to superiors; anticipate the implications of an action beyond the immediate benefit; recognize and resolve problems; objectively identify all facts and implications related to a situation before drawing conclusions. Ability to analyze written materials, data, charts, and graphs to determine overall departmental effectiveness; ensure thorough and accurate analysis of routine or emergency situations or data and take appropriate courses of action. Keep well-informed of Department policies and priorities and of internal and external factors in order to make decisions which may affect the organization, other departments, and/or outside stakeholders.

III. Interpersonal Relations:

Ability to establish effective relationships with superiors, peers, subordinates, the public, and external entities; exercise tact in interpersonal relations; act diplomatically; guide and counsel subordinates regarding problems that affect job performance; represent the Department in a professional manner. Ability to listen attentively to others and elicit/accept feedback; be open-minded and able to separate personal feelings from issues at hand. Ability to effectively communicate with subordinates in unpleasant situations and carry out action as needed; negotiate satisfactory resolutions to conflicts; recognize the needs of uniformed and nonuniformed personnel.

IV. Job Knowledge:
Knowledge of the CHP organizational structure and departmental programs and projects. Knowledge of jurisdiction and departmental policies and procedures, state and federal laws and changes in law affecting departmental operations; knowledge of current laws and proposed legislation as they affect the Division's operations; knowledge of headquarters and field organization and operations. Knowledge of operations and policies of allied agencies; knowledge of community group interests and events and regional transportation issues; knowledge of jurisdictions of various government agencies; knowledge of the local community structure and its formal and informal leaders. Knowledge of the resources available to assist in meeting goals and objectives; knowledge of the Department's strategic plan and its goals and strategies. Ability to interpret and implement complex laws and policies. Knowledge of the Governor's budget programs and the ability to manage a budget needed for resources.

V. Oral Communication:
Ability to speak in a clear, succinct, and understandable manner; present ideas and communicate effectively with a variety of individuals; speak effectively in public before a variety of audiences. Ability to summarize ideas and justify them effectively; summarize and communicate complex laws and policies to technical and non-technical staff. Adapt communication to the audience; maintain a professional approach and positive image; consider the organizational culture when developing and applying the appropriate communication style.