

NCO EVALUATION BOARDS

(First in a series of articles on NCO Evaluation Boards)

Why Change?

The Army is transitioning from convening annual enlisted centralized selection boards for Regular Army and United States Army Reserve noncommissioned officers (NCOs) in order to improve personnel readiness, professional development, leader development, and reinforce the professionalism of our Army's NCO Corps. This transition is fundamental for our Army to move from an industrial age of personnel management to the information age. Instead of the traditional "selection" boards, the Army is conducting an annual evaluation board process where SSG and above are evaluated based on their performance and potential in order to create an order of merit list (OML). These OMLs rank order board-eligible NCOs within their Career Progression MOS (CPMOS) based on individual merit. Evaluation boards are not selection boards and the OML is not a promotion selection list or a training selection list. The board results do not "select" anyone for any specific thing. The OMLs inform who will be identified for training, appointment, specialized assignments, promotions and retention, after applying eligibility and qualification criteria to them.

OBJECTIVE: Improve Personnel Readiness.

For the past fifty years, the Army created a mission for NCO selection boards to "select" NCOs for promotion based on projected requirements. Prior to the implementation of Select-Train-Educate-Promote (STEP) policy in 2016, the Army would attempt to project how many NCOs were needed to support achieving a 100% operating strength in every grade and every MOS. Projections typically look to create a selection list that would satisfy requirements about 15 months forward in time while trying to accurately capture and forecast projecting potential future authorizations and unavailable Soldiers. With

STEP, a 15 month projection was insufficient because of the time required to allow all of the promotion selects to complete their mandatory PME and qualify them for promotion. A 24 month forecast resulted in a two-year board process with the first year designed to provide for training “promotion selects” and the second year for promoting them. Concurrent with changing the promotion window a selection board was programmed to support, eligibility for promotion consideration based on remaining service was reduced by one additional year to ensure all NCOs who were ultimately selected for promotion had sufficient remaining service to meet the three-year service obligation for the follow-on grade. This two year projection could not account for variables – changes in NCO availability, force structure adjustments, and a possible downturn in an individual NCO’s performance.

Because NCO evaluation boards qualify NCOs for potential promotion by placing them on a merit-based list (OML), the requirement to project losses and future requirements is eliminated. More Soldiers are afforded consideration for placement on an OML and potential selection for promotion. The ability to man formations “as needed” is immediately addressed provided there are fully qualified NCOs in on an approved OML. The forced promotion of NCOs selected based on decisions made two years ago is completed eliminated and skill and grade imbalances caused by exhausting a promotion list is eliminated.

Beginning with the May 2021 promotion month, the Army will announce all Soldiers by name “selected” for promotion to Sergeant (SGT) through Sergeant Major (SGM). These announcements will occur not later than the 15th day of the month prior to the promotion month. Promotion points and cutoff scores will continue to inform selection for promotion pin-on to SGT and Staff Sergeant (SSG) as they do today. However, selection for promotion pin-on to SFC and through Sergeant Major (SGM) will be informed based on an NCO’s eligibility, qualifications, and placement on an approved OML.

OBJECTIVE: Improve Professional Development.

In order to support training of best qualified NCOs earlier in the process, eligibility for consideration by an NCO evaluation board allows NCOs who have completed 18 months' time in grade. This sets conditions to support a train-ahead philosophy; allowing for accelerated training opportunities to fully qualify Soldiers for promotion pin-on who were identified as best qualified by the board, based on their OML standing. The OML is then used to identify, based on merit, who will be selected to attend a PME course. Training opportunities are afforded to NCOs starting at OML #1 and so on, working down the list. This transition to a "train ahead" process ensures best qualified Soldiers are trained as early as possible; qualifying them for promotion in support of STEP policy. Training opportunities are limited to funded seats. School managers will use the OML to fill all funded PME training seats. By far, most NCOs will be found fully qualified by a board – but simply being fully qualified does not mean you will be selected for a training seat. Because selection is OML informed, best qualified NCOs will be offered training opportunities in order to further qualify them for future promotion pin-on. When NCOs cannot attend training as scheduled, the next name on the OML is given that training opportunity.

OBJECTIVE: Improve Leader Development.

All OMLs will feed (through an automation process) into HRC's Manner of Performance (MoP) tool after is approved. It will help formulate and inform a MoP score that is used by Professional Development (PD) NCOs with their role in identifying NCOs for assignment selection to key developmental positions or against strategic broadening opportunities. All NCOs are encouraged to contact their PD NCO at HRC to discuss their records and their development.

The OML standings will be conveyed directly to NCOs in the Army Career Tracker which informs each individual exactly how they stand when compared against their peers (in the same career progression MOS). This information should be used by the NCO to the maximum extent. Talk to your

mentors, PD NCO, and unit leaders. Do you have the right experiences? If not, get help in securing the right positions to get them. Do you need PME? If you do, work towards higher placements on the OML – your NCO support channel can and should help you with this.

OBJECTIVE: Improve professionalism of the NCO Corps.

Being an NCO is a profession; you are a member of a professional Corps. An NCO's board score and placement on the OML may identify individual NCOs whose potential is not to standard based on either documented indiscipline or poor performance as evidenced within their record. When this occurs, the Army will identify that NCO as not qualified for retention. This will result in the initiation of a bar to continued service. The purpose of the bar is to inform the NCO that their potential for continued service is at risk. Denial of continued service facilitates accomplishment of the Army's strategic objectives to improve readiness and sustain a workforce of trusted professionals by employing NCOs to the maximum effect. Continued service is not an entitlement; rather it is earned. All NCOs are expected to perform to standard, maintain good order and discipline and live the Army values. Failure to do so places continued service at risk. This provisions maintain the professionalism of the NCO Corps.

The transition of our NCO promotion system from a linear, time based approach to an information age, qualification approach supports our Army's efforts to further talent management in our NCO Corps. An OML generated approach sets the conditions to enhance readiness, professional development, leader development, and the professionalism of our Army's NCO Corps.