X.   Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Recognition of Prior Learning is a process that evaluates an individual's formal and non-formal learning through training and experience to determine the extent to which that individual has already acquired and performed the required competencies of an emergency response position. RPL is a more robust, performance-based evaluation and enhancement of traditional Historical Recognition processes. The RPL process measures an individual's demonstrated knowledge, skills and experience against the national standard competencies as established in the specific position task book. The measurement process focuses on evaluation of the candidate's acquisition of the skills described in the prescribed standards, rather than the manner or procedure under which the skills were acquired. For instance, skills may have been acquired in the military, growing up on a farm, or managing a bakery. A candidate will not be judged on where he/she learned to do a job, but rather on the current ability to do the job. Assessors will expect to see how the candidate performs in this position and completes the job satisfactorily.

Recognition of Prior Learning Process

1. The first step in the RPL process is a self-assessment. A candidate will be given the Self-Assessment and Portfolio Worksheet (Appendix D) for the position in which he/she is interested. The self-assessment begins with an honest appraisal, listing past training and experience to assist the candidate in evaluating whether he/she has successful performed the duties of the position desired. The appraisal is not based on "what the candidate thinks he/she can do", but rather is based on "I have already successfully performed this function".

2. The second step of the RPL process is compiling convincing evidence of the past training and experiences that documents the candidate has performed the job and completed it successfully. In brief, the portfolio or resume is a collection of certificates, letters, photographs, and other documentation the candidate can provide to support the self-assessment.

3. The third step is a comprehensive review of the self-evaluation and portfolio by the Assessors Panel. The Panel is comprised of personnel fully qualified and experienced in the position for which the candidate is applying. A person may be asked to coordinate the process, assist in facilitating any needed clarification of the documentation supplied, and arranging interviews. The Panel should have received training on the RPL process and the roles and responsibilities of panel members and the jurisdictions administrative processes. The Panel will first thoroughly review the self-evaluation and the documentation within the candidate's portfolio that has been previously submitted. If the Panel needs clarification or additional information they will then invite the candidate to an

assessment interview (in person or via conference call) where he/she will be asked questions about the portfolio and experiences that relate to performing the desired position.

4. After the interview is concluded the Assessors will confer and then make a decision about the candidate's competency. The candidate will be assessed as "competent" or "not yet competent" dependent on the information provided. If the candidate is deemed to be "competent", it is reported to the State Certifying Official that the minimum competencies to perform in that position have been met. If the candidate is deemed "not yet competent", the Assessors will make recommendations to the candidate and the sponsoring agency for training and development opportunities. Initiating a Recognition of Prior Learning Program.

Initiating a Recognition of Prior Learning Program

It is a fundamental requirement that the State train its Assessors in the skills of "Recognition of Prior Learning Assessment".

The Assessors need to have the skills of and be fully qualified in the position being assessed. The Coordinator and Assessors need to be skilled in interviewing in the RPL context. How a question is asked is important in obtaining the desired information. Competency in a position is based on the premise that the candidate has already performed the job, or performed in a position very similar to the one desired.

Evaluating competence is the process of collecting evidence and making judgments about whether a candidate has achieved the standard capabilities expected in the incident management environment.

The Assessors need to be trained in how to review a candidate's self-assessment and documentation portfolio and compare it against the competency standards for the position. If the Assessors do not gain sufficient information from the portfolio to make a judgment about the candidate's competence in a specific area, more information should be pursued during the interview. The Assessors may ask the candidate for more information, to demonstrate a skill, or provide an explanation of knowledge during the interview.

When reviewing the portfolio, the Assessors must be confident that the evidence gathered from the candidate is Valid, Current, Sufficient, and Authentic and the material or evidence provided by the candidate covers all the competencies of the qualification.

The interview may be the Assessors' most valuable tool in making a conclusion as to a candidate's competency.   During the interview, Assessors should utilize a combination of competency based evaluation methods.

RPL Administrative Guidelines [policy] needs to be developed by the certifying authority having jurisdiction that administers the qualification process in the state. The Guidelines should clearly outline the processes involved with administering a RPL qualification program.

Position Prerequisites

The primary premise behind RPL is to allow a candidate to demonstrate their knowledge, skill and experience against the national standard competencies, regardless of how or where those skills were achieved. However, there is always the possibility of required prerequisite course training. All candidates should check with their State regarding possible position requirements.

The Self- Assessment

It's possible a candidate might already be competent in the position desired as a result of prior learning (e.g. previous experience and/or training). If a candidate thinks this might be the case a self-assessment is the first step. The self-assessment begins with an honest, supportable appraisal of the candidate's abilities and experience with regard to the competencies developed for the desired position.

Using the Candidate Self-Assessment and Portfolio Worksheet (Appendix D) for the desired position, the candidate reviews the competencies and associated examples. As the candidate goes through the competencies, he/she should make notes as to how, where, and when actions were performed or knowledge attained that would account for having met the competency. If the self-assessment supports the candidate's view that he/she may meet the position competencies, the notes may be used as a guide in developing the portfolio.

The Portfolio

The candidate will need to show convincing evidence supporting the information provided on the self-assessment. This section provides examples of the types of evidence needed in the portfolio to show position competencies have been met. There are four categories of evidence used in RPL:

1. **Products -** Items that show the assessment panel to imply competence:
   - Records, documents (e.g. Incident Action Plans), or reports from incidents showing participation.
   - Records or reports of training exercises showing participation.
   - Reports, papers, published material written by the candidate that relate to the competencies the candidate is trying to document.
2. **Performance -** Completing tasks under the observation of the Assessor Panel in order to demonstrate competence:
   - This may involve the assessment panel observing actual performance at a number of actual or simulated (scenario based) incidents in a variety of conditions.

3. **Knowledge** - Answering written or oral questions posed by the Assessor Panel to demonstrate competence:

- The ability to provide thoughtful, detailed, and correct answers to questions may constitute a significant part of the overall assessment. This type of evidence helps confirm competence, particularly as it applies to the required technical knowledge and the way variable circumstances are managed and contingencies developed.

4. **Other Evidence** -Documentation of activities or statements (in written or oral format) that the candidate or others can provide to the assessor to imply competence:

- Video recordings, photographs, or After Action Report (AAR) notes can contain useful evidence.
- Written statements or testimonials from others can support a self-assessment.

Note: these statements must be provided by someone with known technical proficiency in their field; people who have worked with or supervised the candidate in a job or task that is relevant to the competency being addressed. Testimonials must address the ability to do a job, perform a task, or manage a given situation and speak to this exclusively in an objective manner. Character references are not accepted as evidence supporting competency. Such statements are useful, but it is best to rely on evidence less prone to subjectivity. While RPL acknowledges skills and competency derived from applicable "on the job" and life experiences, statements with a direct linkage to the competency standard are more useful and straightforward for assessors to judge.

- The Assessors can gather informal statements about competence from others who have seen the candidate perform the duties of the desired position.

Note: Some evidence categories are more suitable for some competencies than others. The type and the amount of evidence deemed as necessary to determine competence will vary, depending on the nature of the position being pursued as well as a candidate's depth and length of experience.

In general, Assessors will look for consistent evidence in multiple categories of those listed above. If inconsistency is noted, more evidence will be assessed until the inconsistency is resolved. For example, if statements made about performance do not reflect the self-assessment, the Assessors might spot check performance in an activity to reconcile the discrepancy.

The candidate will need to provide evidence that is:

- Valid – i.e. applicable to what is being assessed.
- Sufficient – i.e. enough to clearly show competence.

- Current – i.e. recent enough to demonstrate current competence (e.g. within the last 5 years).
- Authentic – i.e. genuine and relating to the candidate, not to someone else (original certificates should be shown during the interview and not included in the portfolio)

Falsification or forgery of documents used in the RPL process should be considered grounds for dismissal from the certification process and might result in disciplinary action.

The portfolio should be laid out to follow and support the Candidate Self- Assessment and Portfolio Worksheet. This aids the Assessor Panel in reviewing the documents that supports how the candidate meets the position competencies.

The Assessment

A three or four person Assessors Panel will make an independent judgment about whether not a candidate is competent, based on the evidence supplied.

Note: It is not the Assessors' responsibility to provide the needed evidence, but they will provide the candidate with as much guidance as is appropriate. Assessors will thoroughly review the portfolio prior to the interview and prepare questions based on the information provided.

The assessment will be conducted much like a job interview. The Panel will ask questions about experiences and discuss the documents within the portfolio. After the assessment, the panel will meet and review all evidence provided. At that time, the Panel will come to a decision to whether the candidate is "Competent" or "Not Yet Competent". Any finding of "Competent" must be unanimous. A finding of "Not Yet Competent" will be accompanied with a plan of action to attain competency.

Appeal Process

If a candidate feels the assessment was not administered properly or fairly; or some evidence of discrimination was present, the applicant has the right to file an appeal. Appeals should be filed with the State Certifying Official within 30 days of receiving notice of the assessment. The appeal must demonstrate some breach of the RPL Administrative Guidelines to be valid.

Credentialing is an administrative process for validating personnel qualifications and providing authorization to perform specific functions during an incident. RPL is a tool that evaluates a candidate's demonstrated knowledge, skills, and past experiences, against a position's minimum standards for credentialing purposes. Just as your past experiences have qualified you for this desired position, your future experiences will refine your skills and prepare you for your next position.

Appendix D: Recognition of Prior Learning Self-Assessment & Portfolio Worksheet

SECTION I: CONTACT INFORMATION:

ICS Position applying for:

Name (last, first, middle initial)	
Email address:	
Primary phone:	
Secondary phone:	
Street Address 1:	
Street Address 2:	
City, State, Zip	
Employer:	
Employer contact name:	
Employer contact phone:	
Current position/title:	

SECTION II: INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM AFFILIATION:

Are you, or have you been qualified* in any specific Incident Management Team position? *"Qualified" specifically means a recognized position-specific qualification from an established organization such as, NWCG, USCG, or another State with an active qualifying program such as AHIMTA-IIMTQS.	YES	NO
If yes, which position(s)?		
Are you currently affiliated with an established Incident Management Team?	YES	NO
If yes, indicate the team name and location:		

SECTION III: RELEVANT HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE AND DOCUMENTATION:

Below indicate your participation in any of the following: multi-operational period incidents; evaluated exercises (Functional or Full Scale) that follow HSEEP guidelines; and/or any planned events where you were assigned the specific All-Hazards position for which you are applying. You must include at minimum one actual, unplanned, emergent, multi-operational incident occurring within the last ten (10) years.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION FOR EACH INCIDENT/EVENT LISTED MUST BE INCLUDED IN YOUR APPLICATION IN THE ORDER YOU LISTED BELOW.

1. Name and Location of Incident or Event:	Specific Position Filled:	Dates of Participation (both starting and ending):
Incident Type (Hazmat, Tornado, Hurricane, Wildfire, etc.)	Number and Type of Resources Pertinent to Position you Filled	of Complexity of Incident or event (Type 4 - Type 1)
2. Name and Location of Incident or Event:	Specific Position Filled:	Dates of Participation (both starting and ending):
Incident Type (Hazmat, Tornado, Hurricane, Wildfire, etc.)	Number and Type of Resources Pertinent to Position you Filled	of Complexity of Incident or event (Type 4 - Type 1)
3. Name and Location of Incident or Event:	Specific Position Filled:	Dates of Participation (both starting and ending):
Incident Type (Hazmat, Tornado, Hurricane, Wildfire, etc.)	Number and Type of Resources Pertinent to Position you Filled	of Complexity of Incident or event (Type 4 - Type 1)
4. Name and Location of Incident or Event:	Specific Position Filled:	Dates of Participation (both starting and ending):
Incident Type (Hazmat, Tornado, Hurricane, Wildfire, etc.)	Number and Type of Resources Pertinent to Position you Filled	of Complexity of Incident or event (Type 4 - Type 1)

SECTION IV: RELEVANT TRAINING:

Include copies of certificates for any relevant training courses you have taken.

SECTION V: RECOMMENDATIONS:

List any personal references who may be contacted during the review process to help provide personal knowledge of your experience while serving within the Incident Command System during your career including, but not limited to, the following: emergent incidents; evaluated exercises (Functional or Full Scale) that follow HSEEP guidelines; and events in which you have performed in the specific position for which you are applying. Please attach letters, resumes, and any other related documentation to support this application. Ensure all information is true and correct.

NAME AND TITLE	PHONE NUMBER	EMAIL

SECTION VI: REQUIRED SIGNATURES:

I hereby CERTIFY that the information recorded on this application is true and correct. I agree that I have reviewed, and will comply with, all state requirements as identified by the Type 3 All-Hazards Incident Management System Qualifying Guide.

PRINTED NAME AND TITLE	SIGNATURE	DATE
Supervisor:		
Incident Commander: (if applicable)		
Applicant:		

Include contact information in Section IV above for all signatures other than applicant.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING APPLICATION:

SECTION I: CONTACT INFORMATION

Position Applying for: Each position requires a separate application. Use the following naming convention for the position:

Incident Commander: **ICT3-AH**	Division/Group Supervisor: **DIVS-AH**
Public Information Officer: **PIO3-AH**	Resource Unit Leader: **RESL-AH**
Safety Officer: **SOFR-AH**	Situation Unit Leader: **SITL-AH**
Liaison Officer: **LOFR-AH**	Supply Unit Leader: **SPUL-AH**
Operations Section Chief: **OSC3-AH**	Facilities Unit Leader: **FACL-AH**
Planning Section Chief: PSC3**-AH**	Communications Unit Leader: **COML-AH**
Logistics Section Chief: **LSC3-AH**	Finance/Admin Unit Leader: **FADL-AH**
Finance/Admin Section Chief: **FSC3-AH**	

Name: Please use naming convention - last, first, middle initial/name.
Contact email address: Preferred email for contact.
Primary phone number: Preferred contact phone number including area code—if there are questions regarding your application during review.
Secondary phone number: Another contact phone number including area code—if there are questions regarding your application during review.
Street Address 1: Include street address, building, suite, post office box.
Street Address 2: Additional space for street address, building, suite, post office box.
City, State, Zip: Please use 2-letter state abbreviation.
Current Employer: Employing agency or volunteer agency.
Current Employer: Contact person at agency.
Current Employer: Phone number for contact person.
Position/Title: Currently held position/designation.

SECTION II: INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM AFFILIATION

Are you or have you been qualified* in any specific Incident Management Team position? Yes/No
*"Qualified" specifically means a recognized position-specific qualification from an established organization such as; NWCG; AHIMTA, or another State with an active Qualifying program.
If yes, which position or positions were you qualified? Please specify.
What organization issued the qualification and when? Include Month/Year.
Are you currently affiliated with an established Incident Management Team? (Yes/No)
If yes, indicate the team name and location.

SECTION III: RELEVANT HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE AND DOCUMENTATION

o   *RELEVANT HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE*

List in this section your participation in any of the following: multi-operational period incidents; Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) "Functional" or "Full-Scale" exercises; and/or any planned events which you were assigned the specific All-Hazards position for which you are applying. You **must** include **at minimum one (1)** actual, unplanned, emergent, multi-operational incident occurring within the **last ten (10) years**.

All incidents, exercises, or events you wish to use as documentation in Section III: Relevant Historical Experience and Documentation must have the complete information listed**.**   Failure to list relevant experience or provide adequate documentation for the position for which you are applying will result in the incident, event, or exercise **NOT** being considered as part of your historical recognition.

Each applicant must submit:

   ✓   At least two (2) different evaluation experiences, each spanning or lasting at least two (2) operational periods and for which you served a minimum of two operational periods; and
   ✓   At least one (1) evaluation experience must be an actual incident, not an event or exercise.

o   *RELEVANT HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION*

Along with the application, include appropriate documentation that will assist the Steering and Oversight Committees in evaluating the validity of the experience you listed in the Section III: Relevant Historical Experience and Documentation. Ensure the information accurately describes your active participation in requisite meetings, the planning process, and compliance with all National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Incident Command System (ICS) principles. Applicants are strongly encouraged to use the following list to guide their submittal.

Example documentation includes, but is not limited to:
   •   Appropriate sections of an Incident Action Plan (see list below for sections you must include).
   •   ICS 225 Incident Personnel Performance Rating Form from the position you filled.
   •   Recognition letter that specifically addresses the duties and responsibilities and describes how you functioned in the position for which you are applying. Please note that general recommendation letters or certificates of participation or attendance are not acceptable documentation.
   •   Signed affidavit from the AHJ or agency head, or Incident Commander, that describes your specific position and the duties and responsibilities you filled during the incident or event.

When you submit your supporting documents - group them as listed in Section III - Relevant Historical Experience Section.

All Incident Action Plans submitted must include the Cover Sheet, ICS-202, ICS-203, and two (2) different ICS-204 forms. Your name should be listed on the ICS-203 for that operational period. The signature pages must be complete and legible.

- **Logistics Section Chief (LSC):** If no Communication Unit Leader or Medical Unit Leader were utilized add two (2) different Incident Communication Plans (ICS-205 form) and two (2) different Incident Medical Plans (ICS-206 form) that have your signature as the preparer.
- **Planning Section Chief (PSC**): Your signature should appear on the bottom as the Planning Section Chief on the forms.
- **Operations Section Chief (OSC), Division/Group Supervisor:** The two (2) ICS-204 forms should your name in it as part of the organization managing what you are stating in the application.
- **Finance/Administrative Section Chief (FSC):** Add ICS-209 form or equivalent, or finance related documents demonstrating the operability of the Finance/Admin section, incident time records, budget records, written spending authority delegation, or letter.
- **Public Information Officer (PIO):** Add two (2) different press releases that have your name as the point of contact, or that indicate you wrote the message.
- **Safety Officer (SOFR):** Add two (2) different ICS-206 forms and ICS-208 forms (Safety Messages) or ICS-215A forms with your name and signature as the approver or preparer.
- **Liaison Officer (LOFR):** Add two (2) different incident listings of the Assisting and Cooperating agencies; meeting flyer; agency contact lists; or other document demonstrating LOFR responsibilities on the incident; and a letter indicating you filled that role.
- **Incident Commander (IC):** The ICS-202 form should have your signature on the bottom as the Incident Commander.
- **Situation Unit Leader (SITL):** Add two (2) ICS-209 forms or Situation Reports that include your name as the author or preparer, or maps with an indication that you developed them.
- **Resources Unit Leader (RESL):** The ICS-204 forms should have your signature as completing the form.
- **Supply Unit Leader (SPUL):** The ICS-203 form should have you assigned to that role.
- **Communications Unit Leader (COML):** Add two (2) different ICS-205-Radio Communication Plans with your name and signature as the preparer.

SECTION IV: RELEVANT TRAINING

Attach copies (Not Originals) of training certificates pertinent to the position.

SECTION V: RECOMMENDATIONS

- List any personal references who may be contacted during the review process to help provide personal knowledge of your experience while serving within the Incident Command System during your career including, but not limited to: emergent incidents, HSEEP evaluated exercises (Functional or Full Scale), and events in which you performed in the specific position for which you are applying.
- Attach letters, resumes, and any other related documentation to support this application
- Ensure all information is true and correct.

SECTION VI: REQUIRED SIGNATURES

§ Obtain the signatures of authorities listed and include contact information for each in Section IV.