



**Information about the San Francisco Continuous Testing Program for Entry-Level Firefighters**

The City and County of San Francisco, Department of Human Resources (DHR), with approval from the Civil Service Commission, adopted a continuous testing model for entry-level firefighter exams in October of 2013. Under this model, entry-level exams are administered regularly by the National Testing Network (NTN), which uses professional, fully validated tests based on real-life job simulations. The test includes a video-based human relations test, a mechanical aptitude test, a math test, and a reading ability test.

Exams are hosted by the City at its testing center located at 1740 Cesar Chavez for the convenience of San Francisco residents. The NTN also has testing facilities in San Jose, San Mateo, and Walnut Creek, which allows applicants to schedule themselves to take the exam at their convenience. Testing is also offered virtually online as an alternate option.

Applicants pay a fee to take the exam, which is waived for financial hardship. Following testing, applicant scores are provided to DHR, and applicants who pass the exam and have a current California emergency medical technician (EMT) certificate or a CA paramedic License are placed on the eligible list.

**Following are answers to frequently asked questions about the continuous testing program:**

Q. Why did the City change from its former method of testing for entry-level firefighters?

A. The former method required thousands of hours of human resource time. Because of this, tests were only given once every four years, which restricted the applicant pool to those who could be there on the limited dates and times the City could give the test.

Q. What are the advantages of continuous testing through NTN?

A. Using the continuous testing model through NTN has many advantages:

- Self-scheduled testing provides convenience for applicants who don't have to wait for the City to administer an exam
- Those who perform better on video-based tests are more likely to be successful on the job, as they have demonstrated critical skills in decision making, judgment, human interaction, and teamwork during the exam process
- Continuous testing improves the impact of recruitment and outreach efforts by significantly reducing the time between first contact and testing
- Continuous testing meets departmental needs by ensuring the eligible list is regularly updated with quality candidates
- Exam infrastructure [including recruitment support, minimum qualifications assessment, application processing, applicant scheduling, applicant testing, professional proctors, etc.] is in place and ready for the City to use

Q. What steps does an applicant take using this new model?

A. The first step is to apply with City at <https://careers.sf.gov/?q=&department=2296860> Then go to [www.nationaltestingnetwork.com](http://www.nationaltestingnetwork.com), choose "Firefighter Jobs," and register to take the San Francisco "FireTEAM" exam. You will receive an email confirming your exam date, time and location.

Q. Is that all there is to it?

A. No, there are a few more steps to the process. Once you pass the FireTEAM exam and email your CA EMT certificate to [dhrr-publicsafety@sfgov.org](mailto:dhrr-publicsafety@sfgov.org), you will be placed on the eligible list.

Q. What if I can't afford the **\*\$55 fee** to take the exam?

A. If you can't afford the fee just let us know. Nobody has been turned away due to lack of funds! Simply fill out the [waiver request form](#) and fax or send it in. The fee waiver program is completely confidential.

Q. Can I see what the test is like?

A. An introductory video about the exam, as well as sample questions, are posted on the City's [Department of Human Resources website](#). Click the link to [Orientation video for Entry-level Firefighter exam \(H002\)](#) in the department highlights box. There are practice exams available at NTN for a fee: [www.fireteamtest.com](http://www.fireteamtest.com).

Q. What is the passing score for the exam?

A. Candidates must achieve the minimum score on each of the four components to pass the test. The minimum scores (known as the cut scores) for the four components are:

Human relations (noted as video by NTN)	75
Mechanical	60
Math	70
Reading	80

A candidate's ranking on the eligible list is based solely on the human relations exam score. The other three components (mechanical, math and reading) are strictly pass/fail.

Q. Why are the rankings based only on the human relations test?

A. All firefighters need basic reading, math and mechanical skills, but being more skilled in one of those areas doesn't necessarily make you a better firefighter. Statistics show the best firefighters are those who have great human relations skills, and that's why the score is based on the human relations test.

Q. Why can't I combine my scores for mechanical, math and reading to get a passing score?

A. The scores for reading, math and mechanical can't be combined to come up with a passing score because being a better reader will not compensate for poor math skills, etc. The cut score on each of those portions of the exam is really the basic skill level needed to be successful in the job.

Q. I passed my exam, emailed my EMT and am on the eligible list. What's next?

A. Congratulations! The eligible list is provided to the Fire Department, which will survey candidates for:

- Possession of additional certificates: Firefighter 1, Paramedic
- A degree or coursework in Fire Science/Fire Technology
- Completion of State Fire Marshal courses
- Work experience as a firefighter, paramedic or EMT
- Proficiency in a second language relevant to San Francisco communities
- Demonstrated participation/involvement in community programs

Any one or combination of the above characteristics is desirable.

To determine fitness for employment as a firefighter, candidates must pass the candidate physical ability test (CPAT). The California Fire Fighter Joint Apprenticeship Committee (CFFJAC) administers the CPAT in California.

Background investigations are also conducted for selected candidates. Candidates will submit to LiveScan fingerprinting, and areas such as driving record, employment history and criminal record will be investigated. Applicants may be

rejected for various reasons, such as felony convictions or repeated or serious violations of the law. The outcome of the background investigation determines whether the candidate will be considered further in the selection process.

Following a conditional offer of employment, candidates are required to pass a medical examination given by the Fire Department physician. Finally, candidates are vision-tested and must have visual acuity of at least 20/40 in each eye, with or without glasses or contacts.

Q. How is the eligible list going to be updated under the continuous testing model?

A. Candidates will be added to the H002 eligible list once they have passed the exam and DHR has received a copy of their California EMT certificate. Placement on the eligible list neither guarantees nor implies an offer of employment.

Q. How long will I stay on the list?

A. Duration on the list is 24 months (two years) from the date you are added to the list. If you retake the NTN test, your updated score will be reflected on the next eligible list. Your duration on the list will refresh for another 24 months.

Q. Will my rank change when the new people are added to the list I'm already on?

A. No. Your rank on the list will remain the same for the 24 months you are on the list, unless you choose to retake the exam, which is allowed after **\*\*three** months. In that case, your new score will determine rank on the list (even if it's lower)\*. The scores corresponding to each rank have been pre-determined and there will likely be multiple candidates in each rank. Therefore, when new candidates are added to the list, nobody already on the list will be displaced from his or her rank. The new candidates may achieve the same rank as those already on the list, but nobody will be "bumped" from a rank by a new candidate.

\*If your re-test score is below the cut score you will be removed from the eligible list.

\*\*Please note, the time frame to retake the exam was 6 months and is now 3 months.

Q. What happens when my two years on the list are up?

A. When your list expiration date occurs, your status in Smart Recruiters (the City's online applicant tracking system) will be updated to reflect that fact. You may re-take the exam at that time, or before your list life expires, so long as three months have passed since you last took the test.

Q. Why can't you require applicants to be "local" residents?

A. The California Constitution, Article XI, section 10(b) prohibits requiring employees or applicants to live in specific locations:

CALIFORNIA CONSTITUTION  
ARTICLE 11 LOCAL GOVERNMENT

SEC. 10. (b) A city or county, including any chartered city or chartered county, or public district, may not require that its employees be residents of such city, county, or district; except that such employees may be required to reside within a reasonable and specific distance of their place of employment or other designated location.

There are also judicial decisions making it clear that limits on place of residence need to be reasonably related to work requirements. In the case of firefighters who live in firehouses, there is no reasonable justification for requiring them to have residences nearby.