

Questions and Answers About the Model Cultural Orientation Assessment

Purpose, Design, and Use

What is the intended purpose for the Model Cultural Orientation (CO) Assessment?

- The intended purpose is to ensure that all refugees are able to demonstrate basic CO competencies by the end of the Reception and Placement (R&P) period, and to be able to identify groups of refugees that are not able to demonstrate basic competencies (if any).

What are the intended uses of the results from the Model CO Assessment?

- The intended uses of the results are to assess whether refugees have developed basic competencies, to demonstrate the effectiveness of CO in the short-term (understanding and retention of concepts), and to use differences in the average score among groups of participants to point to areas for further investigation (curriculum, serving particular populations, instructional quality, etc.).

Why does the Model CO Assessment use open-ended questions?

- The open-ended format of the questions allows participants maximal opportunities to demonstrate what they know by allowing for a wide range of correct responses. Also, this is an easy-to-understand format for participants who may be unfamiliar with Western testing practices.

What is the difference between the oral and the written version?

- An oral assessment is most appropriate for use with non-literate populations and refugees with little formal education. This format allows the assessor to ensure that the participant understood the question before marking an answer correct or incorrect. The written version rephrases some questions to be answerable without prompts, but it should be taken only by refugees who have sufficient test-taking skills (see below, Who should take the written assessment?).

How were the questions chosen from among the entire R&P Objectives and Indicators document?

- In creating the Model CO assessment, we intended to sample a broad range of CO topics and focus on competencies that are critical to survival. Additionally, some potential topics were dropped if we could not create valid questions (meaningful, non-ambiguous, and closely related to the indicator of interest) from them.

How does the assessment demonstrate that a refugee has received CO on all required topics?

- It would be impractical to design one assessment that covers every CO topic comprehensively. Additional formative assessment, such as check-in questions or skill demonstrations, should be performed during CO to ensure understanding. Additional tools such as checklists or memoranda may be useful to track concepts that have been covered and those that require further discussion with a refugee.

How does the assessment account for differences in prior knowledge and experiences?

- The Model CO Assessment is intended to ensure that participants in R&P CO can demonstrate basic competencies, but does not make a distinction between those who arrive in the U.S. with this knowledge and those who do not. The assessment would have to be given as a pre- and post-test to account for differences in prior knowledge and experiences.

How do we know that the information was learned during CO and not from other sources?

- As stated above, the Model CO Assessment was designed to capture participants' understanding of basic CO information at the end of the R&P period, so some content could be learned from other sources, including CO received from sources outside the resettlement agency. This assessment could be used as part of an impact study that would involve pre- and post-testing and monitoring of external knowledge sources in order to demonstrate to what degree CO is responsible for learning gains.

Administering the Assessment

Who should give the oral assessment?

- Any professional with sufficient knowledge of cultural orientation messages (correct and incorrect answers) may give the assessment. Agencies may create policies and procedures specific to their circumstances.

Is it a conflict of interest for CO trainers to administer the oral assessment?

- It is not a conflict of interest provided that assessors follow the guidelines regarding prompts, do not give away correct answers in their prompts or rephrasing of the questions, and only mark questions correct on the basis of responses to the assessment.

What training or assessment skills should assessors have?

- Assessors should carefully read through the assessment and the *Guidelines for Use of the Model CO Assessment* and should do a few practice assessments on volunteers before giving the assessment to a client for the first time. Assessors should also think about potential correct and incorrect responses or review agency guidelines (if any) for correct and incorrect responses. Assessors who are not CO trainers should carefully review the CO curriculum and attend CO classes (if possible) to get an idea of how concepts are taught.

Should the assessment be completed on the 90th day after arrival in the U.S., at the conclusion of CO, or anytime during R&P on an individual basis?

- The assessment should be given after CO is completed and before the end of the R&P period to comply with R&P program requirements. Agencies or affiliates should create guidelines on when the assessment is given. In order to compare scores across participants, the assessment should

be given at a similar time point (e.g., relative to the number of days after arrival or after the completion of CO).

What if clients do not attend the entire CO?

- The Model CO Assessment is intended to ensure that participants in R&P CO can demonstrate basic competencies which they may develop in CO or through other aspects of their resettlement. If they do not attend CO and do not attain basic understanding of CO concepts through other means, they may not be able to answer all questions correctly.

Can we administer the oral assessment via telephone or Skype?

- A Skype assessment should provide a similar experience as a face-to-face assessment since assessors can show pictures over video (#4 and #10) and participants can use body language and visuals to respond (which might be applicable for #2, #5, #8, and #11). We do not recommend implementing the current oral Model CO Assessment over the telephone with no visual support. In particular, incorrect responses to #2, #4, #5, and #10 on a telephone assessment could reflect the inability to see the visuals and provide visual responses rather than a lack of understanding of the concept. Additionally, phone communication is more challenging than face-to-face communication, especially when speaking in a non-native language.

Who should take the written assessment?

- The written Model CO Assessment may be given to refugees who are literate and have good language comprehension skills in the language of the assessment, have at least some formal secondary education in any country, and have demonstrated the ability to fill out forms or complete written work independently (excluding assistance with translation to English). In short, the written assessment should be given to refugees who have experience with answering assessment questions.

How long does it take to give the assessment?

- This will vary enormously based on assessor and interpreter skill and on participant characteristics such as confidence, knowledge, and wordiness. According to findings from the 2014 assessment pilot, the oral Model CO Assessment takes an average of 20 minutes to administer.

How do we administer the oral assessment after a class? Participants might have to wait a considerable time to take their turn.

- The oral assessment is intended to be given one-on-one, so if there is only one assessor/interpreter available, participants might have to wait. Consider administering the assessment at a different time, such as during a home visit, or use a different method to collect evidence of participant learning. If participants have requisite language skills and educational background, you may give the written version of the assessment.

Should the assessment be given to all individuals or only the principal applicant? Can groups of refugees or all adults in a case be given the oral assessment together?

- The assessment should be given to each adult as CO is an R&P activity required for each adult. The oral assessment was intended to be given to one person at a time. Allowing multiple participants to work together to respond to questions would not provide evidence that all individuals who attend CO can demonstrate basic competencies. In a group setting, later respondents might just parrot what they have heard other participants say or have trouble thinking of a unique response. Additionally, allowing one person to speak for a group or a family does not mean that all individuals have learned CO concepts. The written version of the assessment may be given in a group setting, but participants should not confer with each other about the answers.

Can we use the Model CO Assessment as a pre-test?

- Yes. A pre/post implementation may allow you to suggest that CO contributed to participants' increase in knowledge; however, additional controls would have to be put into place to determine to what degree other sources of information contributed as well (if you are trying to demonstrate causation).

Can clients skip CO if they pass the assessment as a pre-test?

- The Model CO Assessment was not designed for this purpose because it does not cover all of the content delivered in CO. However, it may serve as one piece of evidence that helps staff place participants in different sections of CO classes based on refugees' prior knowledge.

What should we say to participants who find the assessment too easy?

- The Model CO Assessment was intended to be given to a diverse population of refugees, therefore some refugees may be surprised or offended that they are being asked basic questions about life in the United States. Assessors may want to reassure these participants that the assessment was designed to be used with refugees from diverse backgrounds and that the same questions are asked of everyone regardless of their level of education or past experiences.

Can we add or change questions on the Model CO Assessment?

- The Model CO Assessment is just one tool that you can use to assess CO learning. See the [Frequently Asked Questions About Assessment and Evaluation](#) for more information on developing learning assessments.

Can we turn the questions on the Model CO Assessment into multiple-choice questions?

- Good multiple choice questions are difficult to write, and agencies would have to do considerable work to ensure that the assessments are valid and reliable (that participants aren't just getting the question right by guessing, which is not an issue for open-ended questions). There are many guides online to help you learn how to write good multiple choice questions, such as those from the [University of Texas](#) and [Brigham Young University](#).

How can we know if our assessment is valid and reliable?

- Locally-created or modified assessments should be reviewed by a person trained in assessment, evaluation, or measurement. Policies for approving the use of such assessments should be developed and communicated by national resettlement agencies.

If the client will not be reading the assessment, why do we need to use the translated version?

- CAL has developed versions of the Model CO Assessment in a number of languages for the convenience of CO providers so that participants can take the assessment in a language they understand. They are posted in the online [Orientation Assessment Toolkit](#). It is important to use these translated versions to ensure consistency across participants and to ensure that the translated question still has the same meaning as originally intended (in other words, to minimize errors introduced by mistranslations).

Should we write participant responses in English or in the language of the assessment?

- It depends on how the answer sheets will be used in the future. If answer sheets may be reviewed in the future by staff who do not speak clients' languages, it would be best to write the responses in the language of the assessment and then translate to English or for the assessor to translate the responses to English prior to writing them down.

Why is there a space to write down the participant's response? Can't we just note correct/incorrect and the score?

- We highly recommend writing down participants' responses to each question. This will allow you to go back and review your scores after you have administered some assessments and make any scoring corrections if you realized you mis-scored any responses. This will also allow you to compare results across assessors to ensure consistency in scoring each question. Additionally, having the responses will also provide insight into exactly what messages are getting across and how participants are interpreting CO messages in light of their personal circumstances.

Prompts, Scoring, and Use of Results

Why is prompting for an additional answer used in the Model CO Assessment?

- Prompts are a feature of the Model CO Assessment because it was designed for use in a number of contexts across the United States and with refugees from a wide variety of backgrounds, so questions could not be made overly specific. Additionally, refugees who are not used to the form of questions used in Western assessments may respond in unexpected ways based on cultural norms around answering questions. Therefore, prompts allow the assessor to rephrase questions in such a way that allow all individuals to demonstrate their knowledge of the underlying concepts.

What is the basis for determining if a prompt should be used (as opposed to marking a question incorrect)?

- Prompts are used if the participant’s response indicates that s/he misunderstood the question, the response was in the ballpark of a correct answer but too vague, or if the participant indicates the question is not applicable to them. For example, “What is one reason why it is important to learn English?” is worded in the abstract but the participant may answer from a personal point of view anyway. If the response is that s/he already speaks English, you may offer a second chance by rephrasing to something like “What is one reason why it is important for any refugee to learn English?”.

Can we give partial credit for a response?

- In most cases, responses that sound like they should receive partial credit fall into one of the above categories that indicate that a prompt should be used. It would be better to ask a prompt or ask a participant to be more specific than to give partial credit.

How should assessors be trained to give prompts without coaching or leading to the right answer?

- The prompts that are written into the assessment are worded in such a way as to avoid coaching, so it is best to use one of the suggested wordings. If using a different prompt, before you say it out loud, think about whether what you are about to ask includes any part of the answer. For example, if using a prompt for “What are three things you should do to be safe in your home?”, you could say “How could you help your family to be safe in your home?”, not “How do you supervise your children in the bathtub?”.

How do we score older adults who will only say that they rely on their family to take care of everything?

- Questions on the Model CO assessment have been worded in such a way that they ask about what refugees in general should know and do, and several questions include prompts to allow questions to be rephrased when participants state that the question does not apply to them. After the assessor has (1) ensured that the participant understands the concept of an assessment and the purpose of this particular assessment, and (2) provided specific prompts as suggested, non-responsive answers should be marked as incorrect. Stop the assessment if the participant becomes distressed. Agencies should develop policies for how to follow up with such participants.

What if the participant gives a response that we are not sure how to score?

- First, consider if the response meets one of the criteria for prompting (misunderstanding, vagueness, statement of non-applicability). If not, consider the purpose of the question and whether the answer is responsive based on the individual’s particular circumstances. Does the answer demonstrate basic competencies that would allow the participant to make good decisions, communicate effectively with English speakers, or get help when needed? If so, the answer should be given full credit.

Should refugees be told which questions they got wrong? Should scores be shared with refugees?

- Do not indicate to the participant whether responses are correct or incorrect during the administration of the assessment so that they can stay focused on answering the next question. Agencies should develop guidelines on post-assessment procedures for sharing scores, indicating incorrect responses, or answering participant questions that come up during the assessment, keeping in mind that sharing correct or incorrect answers might invalidate assessments of future participants.

If a refugee gets an answer incorrect, should they repeat that topic in CO?

- Because the Model CO Assessment is concerned with overall basic competencies, there is only one question per concept, so an incorrect response does not necessarily demonstrate that a refugee needs to repeat instruction in an entire concept area. Additional informal or formative assessment may be required to understand to what degree the participant needs additional CO about a particular topic.

If a refugee does poorly on the assessment, should they repeat CO and be re-assessed later?

- We currently do not have a suggested cut-off score for determining “good” or “poor” performance. However, if a refugee is unable to answer most of the questions on the assessment (assuming they were given sufficient opportunities to understand the questions), further help with CO concepts may be warranted. Agencies/affiliates will need to determine their ability to offer additional CO or assessments. Any score from CO during the R&P period may be used for R&P documentation purposes. For evaluation purposes where participant scores will be combined or compared, only scores from the same point in time (“after last CO class,” “90 days”) should be used.

How well do we expect participants to perform on the assessment?

- Ideally, all refugees who attend CO should be able to answer all 11 questions correctly at the end of the R&P period. It is more like a test for a driver’s license, where the best outcome is that all new drivers understand the rules of the road perfectly, than the SAT or ACT, which are meant to be hard enough to distinguish high-performing students from low-performing students. Whether or not 100% correctness is a realistic expectation is yet to be determined based on the piloting that CAL will conduct in Summer 2014 and on additional feedback from agencies.

Do we need to keep a copy of the assessment in the case file? Should we enter data electronically?

- Agencies should develop policies and procedures for data entry, maintenance, and analysis, in accordance with their overall monitoring and evaluation requirements and goals. At a minimum, CAL recommends using Microsoft Excel to record the data from the cover page of the assessment and the final score, such as in the example below:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Participant Name	Case #	Assessor Name	Date CO Completed	Date of Assessment	Notes	Score	Out of
2	Mohammed M.	US-123456	Jane Doe	5/2/2014	5/20/2014		9	11
3	Maria S.	US-123456	Jane Doe	5/2/2014	5/20/2014		10	11
4	Joseph R.	US-654321	John Smith	5/5/2014	5/30/2014	unable to finish	5	6
5	Laila P.	US-999999	Jane Doe	6/1/2014	6/1/2014		10	11

Can we use the results to evaluate the performance of individual CO trainers?

- The Model CO Assessment should not be used to evaluate the performance of individual CO trainers because although it covers important CO messages, it is not directly tied to a CO curriculum and because there are many intervening variables besides trainer quality that may affect learning outcomes. However, consistently low scores for refugees trained by one person compared to other trainers who use the same curriculum with the same population might be one indication (to be corroborated with other evidence) that the trainer could use additional professional development.