## Preparing for Your Structured Competency Assessment for Air Traffic Manager, Levels 10 - 12 Talent Pool Applicants

### Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to walk you through the process of preparing for and participating in a Structured Competency Assessment interview.

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<td>1.</td>
<td>Review the Key Competencies for Air Traffic Managers</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Document Personal Examples of Each Competency</td>
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<td>Practice Responding to Questions</td>
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Structured Competency Assessment

Introduction
A Structured Competency Assessment (SCA) is one of the elements of the Succession Planning Program talent pool application process. The SCA is a behavioral interview conducted by two panel members via telephone. The purpose of the assessment is to identify the applicants who demonstrate strong potential for success in the talent pool target job.

The goal of the SCA is to understand how an applicant has behaved in the past as an indicator of how he or she is likely to behave in the future. Past performance is typically a good predictor of future performance. Each interview question focuses on one competency and asks for specific examples of how the applicant has demonstrated the competency. You will be asked to clearly and succinctly explain situations or problems you have experienced, the challenging tasks involved, the actions you took, and the positive outcomes achieved as a result of your actions. Each question may be followed by probing questions as needed to gather more details about your experience.

This guide includes the following information:
- The competencies to be assessed in the interviews
- An explanation of behavioral interview questions
- The recommended STAR structure for responding to interview questions
- How to prepare examples for each competency
- Suggestions for preparing for the interview
Competencies

Key competencies for each talent pool’s target position have been identified based on an analysis of the job tasks and the knowledge, skills, abilities, personal characteristics, experience, and training needed to effectively perform the tasks. Six key competencies will be assessed through the behavioral interviews for the Air Traffic Manager (ATM) talent pool applicants. The remaining competencies will be assessed through the application you submitted, your manager’s input, or after entrance into the talent pool. You will notice that many of the competencies are included in the FAA Leadership Profile but how these are defined is tailored to the Air Traffic Manager role.

The competencies that will be assessed in the interview for ATM talent pool applicants are listed in the table below with a description of the components of each competency. All ATM key competencies are listed in Appendix A of this guide.

### Competencies Assessed in the Behavioral Interview

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| Building Teamwork and Cooperation       | • Delegates authority to individuals and teams needed to independently complete the assigned task or project  
• Encourages honest and frank discussions to clarify differences and identify shared objectives  
• Promptly addresses conflict and uses it productively to find the best solutions to problems  
• Builds and sustains cooperative relationships with internal and external stakeholders.  
• Actively listens to and considers input of others in resolving problems, planning, and decision-making  
• Intervenes in group dynamics as necessary to promote teamwork and cooperation |
| Developing Talent                       | • Identifies one’s own development needs and models taking responsibility for one’s own continual learning  
• Holds managers accountable for actively supporting the development of their subordinates.  
• Identifies the strengths and development needs of each direct report.  
• Prioritizes time for providing feedback and coaching to direct reports.  
• Provides and documents constructive and actionable feedback, and plan with the employee how to apply the feedback.  
• Before development activities, meets with direct reports to discuss expected learning. After development activities, meets with direct reports to plan how to apply the learning to the job.  
• Coaches direct reports to enhance on-the-job learning and performance  
• Identifies and makes assignments designed to stretch and develop each employee.  
• Identifies learning opportunities that align with employees’ development needs. |
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| Interpersonal Relations and Influence | • Builds rapport, trust, and confidence with others  
• Expresses interest in and personal concern for employees  
• Presents ideas, recommendations, etc. in a way that enlists others’ support  
• Adjusts influence techniques depending on the situation  
• Presents position without offending or alienating others  
• Manages sensitive situations with tact  
• Inspires and persuades others to voluntarily pursue and achieve goals, and adopt new positions or opinions.  
• Negotiates agreements among or between groups  
• Facilitates resolutions to workplace conflicts  
• Engages in active listening  
• Seeks to understand another person’s needs or negotiating position  
• Presents and affirms organizational decisions  
• Takes into account other person’s perspective and values in interactions |
| Leading People through Change      | • Challenges the status quo (e.g., seeks better efficiency, effectiveness).  
• Anticipates changes that will affect facility operations and procedures  
• Champions implementation of new systems, technology, and processes to improve quality and productivity.  
• Plans for workplace changes, ensuring strategies are in place for listening to and addressing employee resistance  
• Anticipates barriers and resistance to change and engages employees to seek solutions.  
• Challenges employees to take ownership and responsibility for organizational changes and their outcomes  
• Willing to engage in unexpected situations to lead employees successfully through a change process  
• Help employees to recognize and accept potential losses and gains that occur as a result of changes in the work or workplace.  
• Models creative thinking and innovation.  
• Supports and rewards individuals who take responsible risks. |
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| Organizational Savvy | • Plans and adjusts facility initiatives based on the organizational environment and culture  
                         • Considers the perspectives and agendas of FAA and ATO executives in methods used to support national programs and new initiatives  
                         • Uses knowledge of interactions and interdependencies among FAA organizations, the aviation industry, other government agencies, as well as political hot buttons to solve problems and accomplish goals.  
                         • Maintains currency on stakeholder expectations and requirements, e.g., NAS users, carriers, military, airport authorities, public citizens to ensure delivery of high quality air traffic services  
                         • Identifies issues or events as high profile, newsworthy, or politically sensitive and informs senior leaders  
                         • Understands the reasoning behind key policies, practices, and procedures, and seeks exceptions or modification at the local facility level when needed |
| Communication     | • Uses active listening to understand message content and intent of the sender  
                         • Recognizes the audience’s level of understanding  
                         • Is aware of one’s own tone and attitude and the impact it has on others  
                         • Tailors messages to the audience in terms of both relevant content and approach.  
                         • Leads meetings effectively and efficiently.  
                         • Thinks on one’s feet – can respond spontaneously to questions and challenges  
                         • Fosters open communication and exchange of ideas (within BU contract boundaries)  
                         • Matches mode of communication to the urgency of the communication  
                         • Writes clear and concise memos, email, and other documents  
                         • Speaks comfortably and effectively with large and small groups |

Note: Oral communication will be assessed in the interviews through your responses to the questions about the other five competencies. You will not be asked to provide examples of how you have communicated in a separate question. Written communication will be assessed in your written application.
Behavioral Interview Questions
The types of questions you will encounter in the interview will ask you to provide an example of a situation you experienced related to a specific competency and describe the challenges you faced, the actions you took, and the results of your actions. For example, some questions for the competency of Integrity and Courage could be:

- Tell me about a time when you stood up for a principle you believed in despite opposition from others.
- Describe a situation that required you to address and resolve a contentious or politically charged issue.
- Think about a time when you made a serious error. Explain the situation and how you handled it.
- Most managers have to make decisions that are unpopular with their employees or their senior managers or make a tough choice between two or more options. Please describe a situation in which you had to make an unpopular or difficult decision?

Responses to Questions
We recommend that you use the STAR (Situation, Task, Actions, Results) structure to respond to each question you are asked. Describe the situation, the tasks or challenges you faced, the actions you took, and the results of your actions. The STAR framework will help you organize your thoughts and provide a clear, concise response to each question while highlighting your proficiency in the competency. The table below explains how to use the STAR structure in formulating your response to the interview questions.

| Situation | • Describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past.  
|           | • Choose a situation in which you played a leading role.  
|           | • Describe the background of the situation, or problem that you faced.  
|           | • Provide enough detail on location, cost, size, number of participants, etc., for the interviewers to understand the situation. |
| Task      | • What tasks did you need to accomplish to resolve the problem or deal with the situation?  
|           | • What challenges did you face?  
|           | • Describe the obstacles that needed to be overcome |
| Action    | • Describe the actions you took in response to the problem or situation.  
|           | • Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe your role and what you personally did.  
|           | • Describe what you actually did rather than what you could have or should have done. |
| Results   | • What were the outcomes of your actions?  
|           | • What were the benefits to the organization or people involved?  
|           | • Describe the results in terms of specific benefits such as increased productivity, improved performance, reduced costs, improved safety, enhanced communication, better teamwork, etc.  
|           | • What did you learn from the experience and how would you apply this learning to other experiences? |
Example of a Behavioral Interview Question and Response

**Competency:** Customer Focus

**Question:** Describe a challenging situation in which you needed to work with an angry stakeholder. What was the situation and how did you handle it?

**Response:**

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<th>Situation</th>
<th>A community activist group, Neighbors Against Noise (NAN), was outraged at the planned expansion of our airport facilities because they believed it would increase noise and pollution in the surrounding area which, in their minds, was at already unacceptable levels. The group demanded that we withdraw the expansion plans and reduce current traffic to the airport.</th>
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Probing Questions
After you have provided an example in response to an interview question, the interviewer may ask you one or more follow-up probing questions to gain more clarity and detail about your example. Probing questions are open-ended and usually begin with words such as who, what, when, why, and how. Examples of probing questions include:

- Describe the specific issue or problem.
- Discuss the individuals and groups you worked with, and the environment in which you worked.
- What options did you consider?
- What were the specific actions you took to address the challenges?
- Describe the results of your actions. What difference did these actions make?
- What did you learn from this situation?
- Describe what you would do differently next time you are faced with a similar situation.
- Who was involved in the situation?
- Why did you handle the situation that way?
- How did you react to the obstacles you faced?
- What happened as a result?
- How did you know the result was successful?

Preparing Examples for Your Interview
Consider potential questions you may be asked for each competency. Create a list of several questions for each competency that you would ask if you were the interviewer. A sample question for each of the ATM competencies that will be assessed in the interview is listed in Appendix B.

Once you have a list of questions, write responses to the questions using actual examples of your own personal experiences. These examples should be focused on your thoughts and actions, even if you are describing a team accomplishment. Note that most situations will involve multiple competencies but when you prepare examples for each competency, choose examples that most strongly demonstrate that competency.

Practice worksheets are included in Appendix C to use for preparing your examples. Make copies of these worksheets as needed to prepare example responses for several potential questions for each competency that will be assessed in the interview.

Practice Presenting Your Examples
Practicing presenting your examples will help you remember them during the interview and also increase your confidence. You can practice by yourself, or even better, you can ask a friend or family member to play the role of the interviewer and ask you some of the questions you developed, then listen to your responses and give you feedback. The time you invest in practicing will pay off in better performance during the interviews.

The Interview Schedule
You will be called by the organization who will be conducting the interviews to schedule a one-hour appointment for your telephone interview. Be sure that you arrange for a quiet, private place for the interview at home or at your workplace. Allow 15 to 30 minutes of quiet time before the interview begins to mentally prepare yourself. You need to be sharp and focused to do your best.
During the Interview
Here are some tips to help you excel in your interview.

• Bring your prepared examples with you. You may use your notes if you wish.
• Listen carefully to the questions. If needed, ask the interviewer to repeat the question.
• Take your time and pause for thought before responding.
• Use the STAR technique when you respond to each question
• Use your tone of voice to convey your interest, confidence, and professionalism.
## Appendix A: Key Competencies for Air Traffic Managers

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| **Technical Knowledge** | - National and local ATC Orders and Directives  
- Agency/Facility Letters of Agreement  
- Facility operational and administrative Standard Operating Procedures  
- Local facility operations  
- ATO safety management system, safety programs and initiatives, safety risk management, quality assurance  
- ATO data base resources and reports, e.g., National Training Database, CEDAR, ATSAP  
- ATO and facility metrics used to assess productivity, efficiency, and safety  
- Interactions between actions and events in the National Airspace System and their impact on system safety and efficiency at the national, regional or local level |
| **Organizational Knowledge** | - FAA and ATO organizational structure (HQ, Lines of Business, Service Centers, Service Areas) and functional responsibilities  
- FAA and ATO tools and informational resources; organizational contacts who are available to provide information or assist in resolving problems  
- ATO and FAA strategic and business plans and goals, including NAS modernization strategy  
- Appropriate communication channels (e.g., chain-of-command, Public Affairs, Defense Event Network)  
- FAA forecasts of air traffic growth in area of responsibility |
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<tr>
<td>Administrative Knowledge</td>
<td>Knowledge of:</td>
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<td>• Civil Rights/EEO policies and regulations, Accountability Board and Discrimination complaint processes</td>
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<td>• Facility resource management considerations such as scheduling practices, overtime, sick leave, vacations, special events, adequate supervision</td>
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<td>• Human Resources Personnel Manual policies, e.g., hiring employment, work schedules, performance, conduct and discipline, awards and recognition, etc.</td>
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<td>• Labor law and labor relations</td>
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<td>• NATCA contract, bargaining obligations, and Executive Order 13522 (Creating Labor-Management Forums to Improve Delivery of Government Services)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• How bargaining unit contract and bargaining obligations affect facility initiatives and changes</td>
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<td>• Merit System Principles, Prohibited Personnel Practices</td>
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<td>• American Disabilities Act, Reasonable Accommodation policies and practices</td>
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<td>• Federal budget and accounting processes and practices, e.g., accounting codes, travel and purchase cards, equipment</td>
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<td>• Developing a budget and monitoring spending</td>
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<td>• Acquisition Management System, contracting</td>
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<td>• FAA/ATO ATC Hiring Plans (short, medium, and long term plans)</td>
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<td>• FAA Public Affairs policy and directives</td>
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<td>• Environmental policy</td>
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<td>• Employee Occupational Safety and Health policies and practices</td>
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<td>Managing Individual Performance</td>
<td>• Holds managers accountable for effective performance management</td>
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<td>• Sets clear performance expectations linked to achieving organizational goals</td>
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<td>• Monitors, tracks, and documents performance against performance plan/expectations</td>
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<td>• Ensures employee compliance with policies</td>
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<td>• Evaluates quality of employee’s work</td>
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<td>• Diagnoses performance problems</td>
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<td>• Coaches employees to continuously improve their performance and resolve performance problems</td>
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<td>• Provides timely formal and informal recognition of exceptional team and individual performance</td>
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<td>• Recognizes individuals and teams for results aligned with ATO values and goals</td>
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| Managing Organizational Performance | • Defines and prioritizes organizational goals and objectives  
• Communicates organizational goals and progress to employees  
• Plans and sequences actions to efficiently achieve desired results  
• Based on organizational goals, prioritizes among multiple activities and competing demands for resources  
• Monitors organizational priorities to ensure alignment of facility and organizational goals; adjusts facility goals as priorities shift over time  
• Identifies risks to achieving targets and mitigation plans for addressing the risks  
• Establishes metrics to assess facility progress and success  
• Routinely monitors progress against facility goals  
• Interprets facility metrics to identify trends, current and potential problems, and areas for improvement  
• Balances attention between achieving immediate objectives and progress on longer-term goals  
• Leverages human and financial resources to achieve goals  
• Holds individuals or teams accountable for achieving goals  
• Measures effectiveness of actions in resolving organizational performance problems  
• Celebrates organizational successes with employees |
| Organizational Savvy             | • Plans and adjusts facility initiatives based on the organizational environment and culture  
• Considers the perspectives and agendas of FAA and ATO executives in methods used to support national programs and new initiatives  
• Uses knowledge of interactions and interdependencies among FAA organizations, the aviation industry, other government agencies, as well as political hot buttons to solve problems and accomplish goals.  
• Maintains currency on stakeholder expectations and requirements, e.g., NAS users, carriers, military, airport authorities, public citizens to ensure delivery of high quality air traffic services  
• Identifies issues or events as high profile, newsworthy, or politically sensitive and informs senior leaders  
• Understands the reasoning behind key policies, practices, and procedures, and seeks exceptions or modification at the local facility level when needed. |
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| **Problem Solving**              | • Evaluates validity of data and conclusions drawn from the data  
• Solicits and integrates information from multiple sources to understand an issue  
• Analyzes complicated information to identify trends, patterns, or causal relationships  
• Identifies the need for action and the type of action to be taken  
• Determines if a metric reflects an isolated incident or systemic issue  
• Seeks out ideas and opportunities for enhancing ATO and/or facility productivity and safety |
| **Customer Focus**               | • Helps employees understand customer needs and their importance and how employee work impacts customers.  
• Reaches out to customers and stakeholders to share information.  
• Collaborates with stakeholders to solve problems and issues.  
• Adapts to changing customer needs and challenges  
• Seeks to understand customer interests, perspectives, opinions  
• Takes action to respond to customer concerns |
| **Building Teamwork and Cooperation** | • Delegates authority to individuals and teams needed to independently complete the assigned task or project  
• Encourages honest and frank discussions to clarify differences and identify shared objectives  
• Promptly addresses conflict and uses it productively to find the best solutions to problems  
• Builds and sustains cooperative relationships with internal and external stakeholders.  
• Actively listens to and considers input of others in resolving problems, planning, and decision-making  
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| Developing Talent| • Identifies one’s own development needs and models taking responsibility for one’s own continual learning  
• Holds managers accountable for actively supporting the development of their subordinates.  
• Identifies the strengths and development needs of each direct report.  
• Prioritizes time for providing feedback and coaching to direct reports.  
• Provides and documents constructive and actionable feedback, and plan with the employee how to apply the feedback.  
• Before development activities, meets with direct reports to discuss expected learning. After development activities, meets with direct reports to plan how to apply the learning to the job.  
• Coaches direct reports to enhance on-the-job learning and performance  
• Identifies and makes assignments designed to stretch and develop each employee.  
• Identifies learning opportunities that align with employees’ development needs. |
| Communication    | • Uses active listening to understand message content and intent of the sender  
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<td>Building Alliances</td>
<td>• Represents FAA and organizational positions effectively. • Builds and maintains external stakeholder trust and confidence. • Fosters networks, alliances, and other business relationships. • Develops common ground among a wide range of stakeholders (e.g. other operational units, labor, industry, public, or other government entities). • Works collaboratively to resource and achieve critical priorities (e.g., business and aerospace safety objectives). • Works effectively across functions and cultures (e.g., facility, office, organization). • Facilitates interest-based communications among stakeholders • Positively presents and supports organizational decisions despite personal opinions</td>
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<td>Interpersonal Relations and Influence</td>
<td>• Builds rapport, trust, and confidence with others • Expresses interest in and personal concern for employees • Presents ideas, recommendations, etc. in a way that enlists others’ support • Adjusts influence techniques depending on the situation • Presents position without offending or alienating others • Manages sensitive situations with tact • Inspires and persuades others to voluntarily pursue and achieve goals, and adopt new positions or opinions. • Negotiates agreements among or between groups • Facilitates resolutions to workplace conflicts • Engages in active listening • Seeks to understand another person’s needs or negotiating position • Presents and affirms organizational decisions • Takes into account other person’s perspective and values in interactions</td>
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| Integrity and Honesty   | • Takes a stand on important issues despite opposition  
• Makes and supports difficult or unpopular decisions when needed  
• Addresses difficult or uncomfortable issues in an open and sincere manner  
• Accepts responsibility for mistakes  
• Admits when he/she lacks knowledge on a topic  
• Consistently fulfills commitments  
• Demonstrates high standards of ethical behavior and inspires trust  
• Is open and honest |
| Vision and Strategy     | • Anticipates changes that will impact the mission (e.g., economic, technological, political)  
• Uses trends to determine how the organization will change in the future  
• Builds a shared vision with others across the organization.  
• Engages others in translating vision into action.  
• Translates FAA strategies into specific facility strategies  
• Communicates organizational direction and priorities clearly.  
• Articulates the connection between the efforts of employees and the mission of the agency.  
• Revises strategies and priorities in response to internal and external factors, e.g., aviation industry, budget constraints |
| Agility                 | • Works effectively under pressure  
• Handles complex or ambiguous situations effectively.  
• Recovers quickly from setbacks.  
• Quickly shifts attention between competing work activities and demands  
• Learns easily and quickly from experience  
• Maintains a positive attitude in response to stressful or challenging work situations  
• Is open to and assimilates new information that may impact a previous decision or course of action  
• Faces challenges or problems with an open mind and sense of curiosity |
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Appendix B: Sample Interview Questions for ATM Competencies

**Building Teamwork and Cooperation:** Tell us about your most successful attempt to encourage others to take action and work toward a common goal to meet a commitment to an internal or external customer.

**Developing Talent:** Describe a situation in which you coached an employee to prepare him or her for an upcoming challenge.

**Interpersonal Relations and Influence:** Please share with us a specific example of how you resolved a conflict on your team or a conflict that you were experiencing in your facility.

**Leading People through Change:** Tell us about a time when you led the implementation of a new or revised process, system, technology, or other organizational change. How did you communicate the change and influence people to adopt it?

**Organizational Savvy:** Please give us an example of a time when a problem or issue arose that warranted you reporting it to your manager. What did you do to prepare for reporting the problem and how did you report it?
Appendix C: Worksheets for Writing STAR Examples

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### Competency:

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>