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Human Resources Research Organization

Development of the Specialist in Housing Credit Management Certification Examination for the National Affordable Housing Management Association

Maggie Collins

Prepared for: National Affordable Housing Management Association
400 North Columbus Street, Suite 203
Alexandria, VA 22314

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Development of the Specialist in Housing Credit Management Certification Examination for the National Affordable Housing Management Association

Introduction

In 1995, the National Affordable Housing Management Association (NAHMA) developed a draft certification exam on IRS code, Section 42, for managers of affordable housing. Before the program was completed, NAHMA partnered with another organization to provide training and certificates to managers and the draft test was archived. In 2005, NAHMA decided to pursue its own training and certification program for managers and contracted with the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) to develop a test for them. HumRRO and NAHMA staff performed the following tasks to create the Specialist in Housing Credit Management (SHCM) Examination. The purpose of this report is to describe the activities related to the development of this test. These activities are:

1. Design a Test Blueprint.
2. Develop an Item Bank.
3. Create and Administer an Over-Length Pilot Test.
4. Analyze Pilot Test Results.
5. Identify an Appropriate Cut-Score.
6. Score and Report on Pilot Test Results.
7. Create an Operational SHCM Test Form.

The rest of this report provides a description of each activity conducted in support of the development of this examination. Supplemental materials are provided in the Appendices, as noted.

Activity 1: Design a Test Blueprint

A test blueprint specifies the content areas that are measured by a test as well as the degree to which those content areas are covered on the test. NAHMA staff met with subject matter experts (SMEs) in August to identify key areas of knowledge and important job tasks relating to the IRS code. The basis of this information is contained in training courses offered to managers prior to taking the test. This outline served as the draft test blueprint.

HumRRO reviewed and formatted the blueprint and met with a second group of SMEs to further refine the blueprint and weight the knowledge categories and knowledge statements. The full test blueprint is provided in Appendix A. Table 1 below provides the major knowledge categories and their respective weight on the test:

Knowledge Categories	Proportion of Test (%)
Program Regulations	16
Unit Eligibility	20
Applicant Eligibility	36
Certification, Documentation, Recordkeeping	10
Monitoring, Reporting Compliance	18

Activity 2: Develop an Item Bank

Item Development

An item bank contains test items and information related to the development and administration of test items. Because of NAHMA's history with this exam, they were able to provide a set of items originally drafted in 1995– approximately 150 questions – to HumRRO. HumRRO reviewed, edited, and formatted the questions. Some questions, such as true/false, were deleted as they fail to meet our standard principles for sound items.

HumRRO test developers met with a group of 3 SMEs who further reviewed and revised items and categorized them according to the blueprint. We then reviewed the remaining items against the blueprint and determined how many items were still needed. HumRRO provided NAHMA with a list of item needs by blueprint category, along with a project background, and our standard item writing guidelines (Appendix B). NAHMA staff disseminated these materials to their item writing team. Item writers developed draft items at remote locations and provided them to HumRRO.

HumRRO reviewed, revised, and formatted the draft items as necessary and provided the updated item bank (approximately 285 items) in excel format to NAHMA.

Content Validity Exercise

NAHMA staff, using content validity instructions provided by HumRRO, conducted a content validity exercise with 3 SMEs via web conference. Those SMEs were asked to provide the following information for each item:

- Does the item test knowledge that is important for successful job performance?
- Is the item testing knowledge appropriate to the test blueprint?
- Is this item ready to be pilot tested?

In addition to making content validity decisions, SMEs had the opportunity to make further revisions to the items and drop items that were too similar to other items, answered other items, or that the SMEs generally felt were not good or fair questions. As a result of this process, 91 questions were dropped and 194 items were retained in the item bank.

Activity 3: Create and Administer an Over-Length Pilot Test

Test Construction

Once items have passed the review process, they must be pilot tested. Even though an item has been reviewed and approved by multiple SMEs and professional test developers, there may be some issue that does not become apparent until a test taker actually sits down in a testing situation and tries to answer the question. Pilot testing allows the test developer to see how an item performs in a real-world test setting. Pilot items are typically not scored. However, for first time test administrations, it is common practice to have a pilot-operational test. This is an over-length test, generally one and half to two times as long as the operational test will be. The items are analyzed and those items which do not perform well are dropped from consideration. The remaining items, up to the optimum number for an operational test and reflective of the test blueprint in content and proportion, are retained and scored.

Because the operational SHCM test contains 100 items, the pilot test contained 150 items. Criteria for being pilot tested were that 1) the group of SMEs agreed the item was ready to be pilot tested as is and 2) the items as a group reflected the blueprint categories in the appropriate proportion.

Test Administration

HumRRO staff also created associated materials for the testing process. These materials included:

1. A formal Test Administration Manual, which is designed to explain the processes and procedures of each test administration, ensures standardization across locations and dates. The Manual describes the test staff and their responsibilities, the requirements for a test site, and general policies and instructions. It also includes an orientation to be read to test candidates before they take the test and a Record Form that the test administrator should complete and return with answer sheets at the end of the testing period. (The Test Administration Manual is provided in Appendix C.)

2. Evaluation forms – these forms, specific to the pilot test, allow candidates to provide comments on the test. There is a form for the testing process, asking questions about the comfort of the room, clarity of instructions, and the time allowed for taking the test. These comments are useful for determining if the administration policies and procedures should be modified when the test becomes operational. The second form provides space for the test takers to make comments about the test itself, including specific problem items and or patterns of items. These comments are helpful in determining which items are poor and should be dropped or revised. (The comments are provided in Appendix D.)

The pilot test was administered in 3 locations in October, 2005:

- Orange, CA		October 7, 2005	(32 participants)
- Boston, MA		October 11, 2005	(21 participants)
- Richmond, VA		October 13, 2005	(8 participants)

Activity 4: Analyze Pilot Test Results

HumRRO staff analyzed the item statistics from the pilot test. Based on these statistics and candidate comments, HumRRO staff conferred with NAHMA staff to drop items from the test form. Some items were deleted from the item bank altogether while other items were archived for later revision. The final form was developed from the remaining items that reflected to test blueprint in the appropriate proportion. The next step in the process was to develop a cut-score.

Activity 5: Identify an Appropriate Cut-Score

A passing score on an exam should distinguish between people who performed competently on the exam and people who did not. The assumption is that people who perform competently on the test will perform competently on the job. Therefore, people who possess the required knowledges should *pass* the exam and people who do not possess the required knowledges should *fail*. We want to avoid setting the cut-score so low that people who do not possess the required knowledges pass the exam (false positives) or setting the cut-score so high that people who possess the required knowledges fail (false negatives). These goals are important in determining the method we use to set the standard for passing a test.

The Angoff method is based on judgments about test questions. A group of six to ten subject matter experts define performance standards for the test-taking population. The performance standards should reflect the goals of certification and realistic expectations of knowledge required for the profession. Based on those performance standards, the panel members make judgments about the probability that a just sufficiently qualified test taker will correctly answer each test question. Because this process involves some judgment, we use a group of seasoned SMEs who are familiar with what competent performance on the job entails.

In order to ensure that the group of experts is conceptualizing the performance standards and linking them to the test questions consistently, each set of judgments is reviewed with the group. If there is much variability in judgments, the individual experts discuss their ratings and their reasoning. In some cases a "reality check" is provided. That is, if SMEs think an item is quite easy and estimate a high percentage (e.g., 85%) of test takers will answer it correctly, but in fact very few (30%) got it right, that information is provided. A second set of judgments is made after this discussion.

A final aspect of the cut-score setting process is examining the results of the test. Information such as pass rate, score distribution, and difficulty-level is considered in determining if any adjustments to the cut-score are needed.

On November 22nd, eight subject matter experts participated in a six-hour cut-score setting web conference. HumRRO staff facilitated the workshop and NAHMA staff attended to provide answers to any program questions. Participants were mailed the background materials, a worksheet, and the final test several days prior to the meeting so that they could review the instructions and test, and ask any questions ahead of time. The group spent the first half hour of the meeting discussing the "just sufficiently qualified test candidate" and came to the following understanding:

> *The just sufficiently qualified test candidate is someone who is just good enough to pass the test and become certified. The individual has at least two years of experience and has recently completed 12 hours of training on Section 42 of the IRS code. The individual has mastery over some areas of the content areas in the test blueprint and, where they don't have master, they know where to go to find the information quickly. In general, this individual is slightly better than average and makes few mistakes, having mastered the critical and more obvious issues but perhaps not being familiar with aspects of the code that are rare in the individual's particular setting or are usually delegated to other staff.*

For the remainder of the meeting, participants provided estimates of the likelihood that a just sufficiently qualified candidate would answer this question correctly. Participants made their first estimate on their own, and then provided it to the group. The group discussed differences in their first estimates and the HumRRO facilitator provided the group with the keyed answer to the question and the percentage of pilot test candidates who answered the question correctly. The group then made their second estimates, individually, on their worksheets. After the meeting was over, participants faxed their worksheets to HumRRO, where the information was entered into a spreadsheet and the final cut-score was computed.

The cut-score was adjusted down one point due to variability in SME's ratings. The variability of ratings reduces the reliability, or confidence we have that the cut-score is the actually point at which test candidates have demonstrated a sufficient level of knowledge to pass the exam. We typically adjust downward, rather than upward, to prevent qualified candidates from failing.

Activity 6: Score and Report on Pilot Test Results

During the cut-score workshop, SMEs identified one problematic item. The fixed this item during that meeting and provided Angoff judgments; therefore it will be included on the operational form. However, it was not scored on the pilot test and, as a result, the cut-score was calculated based on the remaining 99 items.

Of the 61 pilot participants, 29 passed and 32 failed. Test developers and SMEs discussed the results and the passrate. SMEs felt the passrate was appropriate given the level of experience and the lack of training of the pilot test participants. Results were provided to NAHMA and disseminated to participants.

Activity 7: Create an Operational SHCM Test Form

The final test form included the 99 scored items from the pilot test and the revised item. The cut-score was calculated based on all 100 items. Items that are not included on the operational form are maintained in the item bank for future use or revision. HumRRO staff provided the operational test form and a copy of the item bank to NAHMA staff.

Pilot test candidates took between 2 hours, ten minutes and 3 hours, twenty minutes to complete the pilot test (average of 2 hours, 40 minutes). That's an average of 1.07 minutes per item.

HumRRO recommends that the operational exam be reviewed and updated annually for several reasons. First, as with any profession, updates in case law, regulations, and best practices occur which may increase or change the knowledge required for the job. Second, as items are tested, they risk being "overexposed." That is, so many people have seen an item it becomes common knowledge to the population of affordable housing managers. Therefore items need to be rotated off the exam every year or after a substantial number of people have answered it. As a result, items need to be reviewed regularly to ensure that they are working properly. If not, they should be revised or dropped.

Appendix A
SHCM Certification Test Blueprint

Categories	**Proportion of Test (%)**
Program Regulations	16
Unit Eligibility	20
Applicant Eligibility	36
Certification, Documentation, Recordkeeping	10
Monitoring, Reporting Compliance	18

Category 1 - Program Regulations

Areas of Knowledge:

1. Important Time Frames - Placed in Service, Credit Period, Compliance Period, Extended Use, Recapture[1]

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2. Fractions & Credits
3. Special Considerations (Home, bonds, HUD Section 8)
4. Origins of the LIHTC Program
5. Role of IRS, State Agency, and HUD, syndicators, investors, and owners

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6. Deep Rent Skewing
7. Acquisition and REHAB credits
8. QAP

Major Tasks Requiring this Knowledge:

a. Communicating with applicants, residents, and the community simply and clearly on those occasions that call for explanations of our processes.
b. Communicating with representatives of bureaucracies, auditors, and owners in a way that demonstrates the competence and integrity of the management company.
c. Deciding when to seek guidance from supervisors - i.e. knowing enough to know what you don't know and when you need help.
d. Calculate applicable fractions

1 Line breaks among knowledge statements designate a break in importance. For example, in knowledge category 1, Program Regulations, knowledge statement one is more heavily weighted. Knowledge statements 2 through 5 are equally weighted with each other, less so than statement 1, and more so than statements 6 through 8.

Category 2 - Unit Eligibility

Areas of Knowledge:

1. Understanding of relationships with other programs (e.g., Bonds, Subsidies)
2. Knowledge of rules of unit eligibility (e.g., Unit Vacancy, Next Available Unit, Maximum rent, and Utility Rents
3. Knowledge of exceptional space, including common areas, models, resident manager unit, and security unit
4. Rent floors
5. Deep skewed rents
6. Additional set asides
7. Minimum set aside
8. Qualified basis
9. Habitability and physical inspections
10. Transiency
11. BINS
12. Knowledge of chargeable amenities

Tasks

a. Calculation of applicable fractions
b. Calculation of maximum rent
c. Utility Allowances
d. Overlaying other programs including bonds
e. Prepare for physical inspections
f. Mapping your property
g. Maintaining compliance/credits

Category 3 - Applicant Eligibility and Certification

Areas of Knowledge:

1. Inclusions & exclusions of income and assets
2. Knowledge of rules of calculation of income and rent
3. Knowledge of who qualifies as a household member
4. Knowledge of the application process
5. Knowledge of the verification process
6. Knowledge of the interview process
7. Student households
8. Income limits

Tasks

a. Calculating income and rent

Category 4 - Recertification, Documentation & Recordkeeping

Areas of Knowledge:

1. Annual and interim recertifications (e.g., timing, unit transfers, waivers, 140% rule)
2. Knowledge of program requirements for retention of 1st Year Files and other documentation
3. Knowledge of the importance and consequences of recordkeeping practices

Tasks

b. Combine recertification with other programs
c. Retain files and documentation
d. Create and manage recordkeeping systems
e. Document income limits, recertification schedules
f. Process recertification
g. Adhere to time lines set forth by regulations and laws

Category 5 - Monitoring and Reporting Compliance

Areas of Knowledge:

1. Knowledge of State Agencies required reporting (different states, different requirements i.e. monthly, quarterly, annually)
2. Knowledge of Investor / Syndicator required reporting (Also, the Investors/Syndicators require reports in addition to compliance, such as capital improvements and budgets)
3. Knowledge of fair housing requirements and laws, how they apply to your property, accessibility and reasonable modification requests, and knowledge of protected classes
4. Knowledge of the inspection process, including audits and physical inspections, and how to prepare for them.
5. Knowledge of IRS 8609 & 8823 and reporting requirements
6. Knowledge of non-compliance – penalties and corrections

Tasks

a. Review of Rent Limit calculations (monitor utility allowance revisions)
b. Monitoring the “140% Rule” (many state agencies ask for documentation to show how agents track)
c. Maintaining compliance (m/i approvals, timely recertifications, proper income calculation, proper rent and income limits, self audits, etc)
d. Handling (repairing) non-compliance
e. Prepare for audits
f. Accommodate accessibility requests

Appendix B
Item Development Guidelines

Overview

The purpose of this handbook is to provide item writers with an introduction to sound item-writing principles. Please keep this and any other material related to the content of the SHCM test secure, as your work will eventually be part of a high stakes testing program.

This manual was prepared by the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) for the National Affordable Housing Management Association (NAHMA). Any questions relating to its content should be directed to Maggie Collins of HumRRO at (703) 706-5657 or mcollins@humrro.org.

The Multiple Choice Item Anatomy

A. Stem – The premise of the item. It may be a question, direction, graphic, or incomplete statement.

The STEM should be a complete expression of the problem, missing only the essential information necessary to answer the question. After reading the premise, an informed candidate should know exactly what response is expected.

The stem may be stated in any one of a number of ways. It may be asking for a definition, the purpose of an activity, a cause, an association or similarity, recognition of an error, arrangement of steps, or a common principle.

B. Response options – All the answer choices.

Ideally, each item has four response options.

C. Key – The correct answer.

There should be only one correct answer. The most well-informed candidates should know what this will be before they read the response options. It should be clear, grammatically consistent with the stem, and unique from the other response options.

D. Distractors – The incorrect response options.

Distractors should be unique from one another and plausible enough to distract, or lure the less informed candidate from the correct answer. They should be clearly incorrect or inferior to the correct answer. It should be about the same length as the correct answer, similar in form and format, and written to the same level of generality/specificity.

Where does the President of the United States of America reside? ***(A)***

(B)

a. Mount Vernon, VA **(D)**
b. Seattle, WA **(D)**
c. Washington, DC **(C)**
d. Philadelphia, PA **(D)**

Types and Formats of Multiple Choice Items

The levels of knowledge tested in this examination are best described as recall (concrete, declarative) knowledge and applied (abstract, procedural) knowledge. These levels are defined below and illustrated through examples.

Levels of Knowledge

Knowledge Recall – requires the candidate to recognize, identify, or comprehend a simple fact or term. Recall items generally ask for definitions, common principles, arrangement of steps, or causes.

Sample Recall Question

The LIHC Program was created by:

a. the Tax Reform Act of 1985
b. the Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1989
c. the Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1993
d. Title 26, Section 42 of the Internal Revenue Code

Knowledge Application – requires the candidate to understand the reason for each step in an operation and how it relates to other steps. It requires the candidate to be able draw conclusions from a given set of information or apply it to a different situation. Application items are the "why" and "how" questions and generally ask for purposes, causes, interpretations and associations.

Sample Application Question

The original owner of a tax-credit property transfers it to a new owner during year three of the compliance period. The IRS conducts an audit in year six of the compliance period. Which entity is responsible for providing compliance information for year one of the credit period?

a. The original owner
b. The current owner
c. The management company
d. The state monitoring agency

Content Validity of Items

To ensure reliability and validity of a test, the items should reflect the purpose of the test in content, coverage, and difficulty. In order to do so, it should meet the following criteria:

The better a test item reflects the content being tested, the more confident we can be that a test is reliable and valid. We have analytical techniques for measuring reliability and validity; however, as an item writer, we depend on you to develop items that are as content valid as possible. In order to do this, keep the following things in mind when you develop and review items.

1. Each item should focus on only one topic
2. Keep the vocabulary consistent with the examinees' required level of understanding
3. Items should not be over-specific, trivial, or obscure
4. Items based on opinions should be avoided

Keep the following questions in mind when you are developing test items:

- How important is the knowledge required to answer this item for acceptable certification-level performance?
- What kind of performance problems might result from lack of the knowledge required to answer this item?

If the knowledge is at least somewhat important and performance problems are moderately damaging, the question most likely meets the criteria listed above.

Guidelines for Writing Multiple Choice Test Items

1. Make sure the stem and each following response alternative are grammatically correct and consistent with each other. (See gibberish questions #4 and #5.)

2. Make the question as simply worded and specific as possible. Avoid extraneous material. Avoid writing “teaching” questions.

3. Make each response option about equal in length. (See gibberish question #2.)

4. Be sure that only one of the response alternatives is correct. (See gibberish question #6.)

5. Try to use likely examinee mistakes as distractors (i.e., incorrect options). Always make all distractors plausible choices (not obviously wrong).

6. Make each of the distractors separate and distinct. Do not offer the same content in different forms in different distractors.

7. As a general rule, do not construct distractors that are direct opposites of the correct answer.

8. Do not use multiple response options (e.g., ANone of the above@, AAll of the above@). (See gibberish question #6.)

9. Do not give clues or hints to the correct answer within the item stem. (See gibberish question #1.)

10. Minimize the use of negatives, both in the stem and the response alternatives -- if you use negatives, underline them to draw attention to that part of the item. Negative questions, for the most part, are distracting and confusing to candidates.

11. Avoid terms like "always", "none", and "all". Conversely, avoid terms like “may” and “usually.” (See gibberish question #3.)

12. Make sure questions and answers are applicable to all settings or populations – or specify the setting or population to which the question applies.

13. If the answer is based on theory or opinion rather than fact, specify your source (e.g., “according to”) but avoid these questions if possible.

14. Avoid temperament error – for example, if the question asks what a professional should *avoid* doing, distractors should have a *negative* connotation. If the question is asking what the best approach to something is, distractors should have a positive connotation.

Writing Items

Getting Started

< Familiarize yourself with knowledges associated with your content area.
< Think about some of the issues and situations that are related to those knowledges.
< Review the existing questions in your section of the item bank to get an idea of what items look like.
< Look at the references – current laws and regulations.

When Writing Stems

< Try to write stems in such a way that the well-informed candidate has an idea of the answer before he or she looks at the distractors, for example:

> Don=t ask: Diabetes is:
> Rather, ask: Which symptoms characterize Diabetes?

< Try to Phrase the stem as a question
< Avoid compound questions – questions asking for multiple answers
< Avoid window dressing (excessive verbiage) in the stem

When Writing Response Options

< Options should be ordered numerically or logically
< Keep the option specificity similar across options
< Keep options independent; they should not overlap
< Avoid compound options if possible (e.g., red, white, blue)

When Developing Distractors

Incorporate:
< Common misunderstandings of a concept or process
< Common confusions between similar concepts, processes, or terms
< Common errors you have seen
< Using the wrong formula
< Skipping a step

Use:
< Familiar, yet incorrect phrases
< True statements that do not correctly answer the question

Item Submission

Include the following information with each item:

- Answer key

- Source Reference (Provide documentation verifying the correct answer)

- Blueprint area e.g., Category 1, Knowledge area 2

- Create only 4 response options (one key and three distractors)

Where possible, create items in MS Word or WordPerfect using the following format:

Correct answer:
Blueprint area:

Reference:

Item stem

a. response option 1
b. response option 2
c. response option 3
d. response option 4

Submit your questions to Maggie Collins at the address below. You may email your questions but please password-protect them.

Maggie Collins
HumRRO
66 Canal Center Plaza
Suite 400
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 706-5657 ph
(703) 548-7854 fax
mcollins@humrro.org

Appendix C
Test Administration Manual

INTRODUCTION

This manual is designed to orient test administration personnel to the procedures and security measures required for pilot administration of the National Affordable Housing Management's (NAHMA) Specialized Housing Credit Management (SHCM) Examination. In order to ensure that the examination is administered in an efficient and secure manner, all **administration personnel are required to read this manual and follow the instructions exactly.**

Administration personnel consist of the Test Administrator (TA) and at least one Test Proctor per 30 examinees to assist the Test Administrator. If there are less than 30 examinees, the TA will assume all test administration responsibilities. Duties of test administration personnel involve:

1. Maintaining inventory and security of all test materials;
2. Preparing for and administering the examination; and
3. Packaging and shipping all examination materials to HumRRO for processing and scoring.

The Test Administrator is solely responsible for Tasks 1 and 3 above and reads the instructions to the test candidates. The Test Proctor, if present, will provide support to the TA for making seating arrangements, registering test candidates, and distributing test materials to candidates (as part of Task 2). All administrative personnel will be responsible for maintaining security during the exam and addressing candidates' questions.

The SCHM pilot examination is a general exam of the affordable housing manager's knowledge of tax code and regulations, specifically of IRS Code, Section 42. This pilot administration is a "test of the test." While the final, operational exam will be 100 scored questions, the pilot administration contains **200 test questions.** The questions will be evaluated and the best 100 (that reflect the test blueprint proportionately) will be scored. For the Pilot administration, candidates will have <u>four hours</u> in which to complete the examination. The operational administration of the exam will be 2 or 3 hours long, depending on the results of the pilot exam.

TEST MATERIAL SECURITY

It is critical to maintain the utmost security when dealing with SHCM Certification Examination materials.

Storage

All test items, item information, test booklets, and other materials are stored in locked cabinets at HumRRO. All examination materials (e.g., test booklets, answer sheets, etc.) sent to NAHMA or other testing locations should also be stored in a locked room or cabinet until the test is administered. Only those individuals designated by NAHMA (e.g., test administrators, test proctors) will have access to those materials prior to or following the exam.

Transportation

When shipping is required, use **Federal Express** or **UPS**. They are reliable and every package is trackable. At the end of each test administration, the test administrator should transport the test materials to the UPS or the Federal Express office. If he or she cannot immediately transport the materials to the shipping agency, he or she should secure them in a locked room or file cabinet until such time as they can be transported to the shipping agency.

Test Administration

It is the administration personnel's responsibility to make sure that all booklets are returned at the end of each examination administration. All test booklets have a unique number to facilitate tracking. Each examinee will record their test booklet number on their answer sheet, facilitating the tracking of the test booklets.

SUPPLIES

For the pilot administration, HumRRO will provide NAHMA with the following materials:

- Test booklets (1 per candidate, plus extras)
- Optical scan forms (1 per candidate, plus extras)
- Test administration books (1 per test site)
- Comment forms about the test (1 per candidate, plus extras)
- Comment forms about the administration process and site (1 per candidate, plus extras)
- Fed Ex or UPS labels addressed to HumRRO

NAHMA will provide those items and the additional materials listed below, as necessary, to each of the test site(s), including:

- Stopwatch or timer
- Sharpened #2 pencils (at least two per examinee)
- Candidate Roster (with candidate's full name and identification number)
- Signs indicating the test site

Candidates will bring their own calculators.

TESTING CONDITIONS AND STANDARDS

It is important that the examination be administered in an environment that promotes optimal performance. Both the test site and the administration personnel contribute to that environment.

Test Site Specifications

The test site should be easy for candidates to locate and clearly marked with signs.

The test site should be quiet, that is, reasonably free from distracting background noises and well insulated from outside sounds. Acoustics should allow for the Test Administrator to be clearly audible in all areas of the room.

The test site should be close to restrooms and water fountains. (Caution candidates about having liquids at their seats – water damage can ruin a scannable answer sheet.)

The temperature of the test site should be comfortable and the test site should be well ventilated. Lighting should be sufficient for reading without eyestrain. There should not be burnt out light bulbs or shadows over workspaces.

The test site should be arranged to maximize the distance between candidates. Each candidate should have about 4 feet of table space, and enough room behind their chairs in order for candidates to leave during the test with minimal disruption. Working surfaces should be flat, smooth, and free from cracks.

The Test Administrator's podium/desk should be visible to all candidates and all candidates must be visible to the Test Administrator. A table for candidate check-in should be located just in- or outside the entrance to the test site.

Administrative Personnel

The Test Administrator should speak audibly and with clarity. Administrative personnel should treat all candidates courteously. It is important to remember that the mental state of the test candidates is crucial to their performance on the test.

PREPARATION

Prior to Test Administration

Read through the entire Test Administration Manual.

Practice reading the oral parts (instructions) of the Test Administration Manual out loud.

Test timer or stopwatch to make sure it is functioning properly.

Check the test materials to ensure all supplies and test booklets are available. Each box of test materials will contain an invoice recording the materials provided in the box, such as the number of test booklets and the booklet codes for that test site. Make sure all the invoiced materials were delivered, and that the same materials are returned at the conclusion of the test session. If all invoiced materials are not delivered, contact Maggie Collins *immediately* at (703) 706-5657.

On Arrival at the Test Site

The test administrator should check the test site to ensure that all the requirements for setting up the room were met. Signs should be placed on the door(s) indicating the room as a test site. There should be a sign-in table outside the testing room or right by the door inside the room. One blank answer sheet, two pencils, a comment form for the test questions, and a comment form for the test process should be set at each seat. If possible, there should be one empty seat in between each candidate.

Registering Candidates

Greet each test candidate cordially. Each candidate must show government-issued identification. Once you have verified identification, have candidates sign their names on the candidate roster.

Point out where the restrooms and drinking fountains are before test administration begins. Once they have checked in and put away all extraneous materials, the candidates should find a seat. If a candidate arrives to the test center late, to the extent possible, let them sit for the exam.

ADMINISTERING THE EXAMINATION

Protocol During the Examination Period

At the start of the exam, complete the top part of the Examination Record Form (provided at the end of this manual). This will help track time and test booklets. This can be used at the close of the test to ensure that the appropriate number of test booklets and answer sheets was returned.

Administration personnel should move frequently about the room. If there is more than one proctor, each Proctor should have a designated area that they are responsible for monitoring.

If you make eye contact with a candidate during the exam, smile at the candidate and then turn away. Do not single out candidates or hover over any candidate without cause.

Answer questions candidates have about procedures. If a candidate asks a question about the content of an item, tell them you are sorry, but you cannot answer questions about specific items.

Only allow one person to use the restroom at one time. It may help to keep a list of those needing to use the restroom to ensure that excuse the candidates in the order in which they asked.

If a candidate finishes early, collect his/her materials and make sure that he/she has filled out the answer sheets correctly and, if they have not filled out the comment forms, ask them if they would be willing to do so. Candidate comments will be incorporated into the administration process for future exams.

Candidates who have completed the exam and turned in their materials should not remain in the test room.

Problems or Issues

Late Arrivals - Late arrivals will be allowed to take the test IF they can be admitted without disturbing other examinees. In general, late arrivers will not be allowed extra time at the end of the test period to finish. However, since this is a pilot test, the test administrator may choose to allow the candidate to stay late.

Problems with Test Items or Booklets - If a problem is identified with an item or test booklet, make sure that it is an isolated case by looking at other test booklets. If it is an isolated case, collect the original test booklet and give the candidate a new one. If it is not an isolated case, make an announcement to the entire group of candidates (make sure that everyone hears the announcement). Make a note of the problem on the Examination Record Form.

Suspected Cheating - If a candidate is suspected of cheating, walk closely by him/her several times so that he/she is aware of your presence. If it continues, do not confront the candidate, but when his or her test materials are collected, make a note of the candidate's name and identification number on the Examination Report Form and sign it.

EXAMINATION RECORD FORM
SHCM Pilot examination administration

Test Date: ____________________

Test Site: ____________________

Test Administrator: ____

Number of Examinees: ___________

Begin Time: _____________

Time the first test was finished: ____________

Other times (record typical stop times for multiple test-takers, as possible):

____
____
____

Time the last test was finished: ____________

PROBLEMS AND COMMENTS:

____
____
____
____
____
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____
____
____

____
Test Administrator's signature

Appendix D
Comments from the Pilot Test

This appendix contains comments provided by pilot test participants at the end of the pilot test administration.

General comments:

Make instructor read admin manual in advance – TA didn't realize until the morning of that she needed to provide pencils.

Remind instructors to tell test takers they should bring calculators

Too many deep rent skewing questions for such an obscure topic
Too many questions on allocation

"State Monitoring Agency" could refer to Mass Housing or Spectrum – may want to specify more clearly

Comments regarding the process:

"Were the oral instructions clear?"

Yes (38)

"Was the test room comfortable?"

Yes (27)
Need more room!
More room – people were too close to each other
Was cold
Too warm (this comment is from the same locations as above)
Maybe more elbow room
It was too crowded
It was hot
Chairs weren't comfortable
Noisy from the windows and someone was chewing gum
Very warm (New location)
Traffic noise was slightly distracting
A little warm

Did you find it easy to sign in for the test?

Yes (37)

Do you feel you had adequate time to complete the test?

Yes (27)

Did you have any other problems related to the administration?

No (25)
Those finishing early should be quieter when leaving and not stand in the hallway talking.
Test was a little long
Training was very helpful
It was a fairly long test
I enjoyed the class and the test. Some of the questions were worded confusingly. Overall it was a good experience – It may have been less “nerve-wracking” if we’d had more time to study.
There was a short time given to study
More detail to prepare for questions on the test.
Too many deep rent skewing questions – nobody see’s that anymore

Comments Pertaining to the Items

Item #	Comment
5	Assets
12	Couldn’t the answer be both C and D?
18	Has more than 1 correct answer
18	Is missing “of” after which
19	Did not go over in class?
25	What type of amenity s/b listed (i.e., optional or not)
33	Qualified basis determines eligible basis which is used to determine the tax credit. Could be A or B
34	Question needs to specify FTS that isn’t a head, cohead, or souse
39	To the best of my recollection, I have never seen this before
43	wording is confusing
47	Wording is confusing. Dates are confusing.
53	Pam’s babysitting money is not listed in the question
53	No mention of Pam’s babysitting money in the scenario. However, answer c and d mention Pam’s babysitting money.
62	Confusing – should all be in file.
72	Do you mean completed as in signed? If so, it’s C
74	Doesn’t this answer depend on the state where you are located?
75	B was missing “household” at the end of the sentence.
80	Did not go over what a RD515 Loan is
80	I’ve never heard of RD515 Loan in association with the applicable income limit.
88	??
45 & 46	Absolutely no idea how to compute these. Just guessed.
91	Is the recurring gift letter a 3rd party verification?
93	Space missing between C&D
93	typing, no biggie after choice C a space was needed

Item #	Comment
99	Question should end “in the handbook”
105	Space missing between B&C
110	D – why would they have the current income limits?
110	Just don’t like the ? HUD limits
111	Multiple correct answers
113	Can’t the compliance period vary?
115	Confusing wording
117	Has 2 correct answers
117	Multiple correct answers
120	Redundant question
120	Multiple correct answers
121	Which of the following student households is eligible for an LIHTC unit
122	Choice D is an incomplete phrase
127	Confusing question
131	Redundant question
136	Who uses a [can’t read] 9 % income limits?
141	Unclear (not a good question)
142	Answer options seem inconclusive. Wouldn’t the HH be eligible for both A and B? Only that B would not require one additional cert.
143	The O’s were missing in choices B and C
145	The 2.5 1/1/ raise is it effective the December before or after the resident moves in?
145	Is full-time 40 hours?
145	There is no way to know the number of weeks that the raise is effective unless you have a calendar or photographic memory
145	The effective date of the cert is necessary. For how many months will the 2.5 increase effect income?