

Identifying and Developing High-Potentials

At first glance, identifying certain employees as high-potentials (HiPos) and providing them with tailored developmental opportunities seems like a straightforward process that could only generate positive outcomes. In practice, many organizations have found that nothing could be further from the truth. Despite the best of intentions, many HiPo programs fail to reach their own full potential.

Why is this the case? In our experience, it is because organizations often fail to consider several key questions:

- What makes our mission-critical jobs truly unique?
- How do we go beyond identifying current top performers and find people who can excel at the next level?
- What are the optimal growth-enhancing experiences, developmental tools, and feedback interventions for our HiPos?
- How do we design, implement, and evaluate the HiPo program in a way that reflects our culture and workforce?

These questions all boil down to a common concern for decision makers—how can we develop a HiPo program that works best for us? Time and time again, our custom approach to assessment development, performance management, and expert consultation has helped our clients find the answer.

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Custom HiPo Assessment

The foundational question when building a top-notch HiPo program is: “Potential for what?” The answer lies in knowing what makes leadership unique in a given firm, industry, or context. In the more than 65 years we have been in business, we have clarified the performance requirements associated with a wide range of executive jobs in both the public and private sectors, ranging from government leaders in the Senior Executive Service to Girl Scout CEOs and everything in between. We have also worked with the U.S. Secret Service to identify the performance requirements and competencies associated with five agency-wide leadership levels, which serve as the foundation for a customized Leadership Development System. This work has given us a clear appreciation for the local, contextualized nature of leadership.

Because only a select group of employees are chosen to participate, all high potential programs involve segmentation—making the HiPo designation one of the most critical decisions an organization makes. In our view, the assessments used to inform this decision must reflect the unique nature of the organization’s leadership roles as well as its strategy and values.

Recognizing the importance of high-touch assessments for evaluating HiPos, we have developed custom live assessment centers to identify candidates for the Social Security Administration’s (SSA) three-tiered leadership development program. We recently built upon this work by creating a fully virtual, rich-media simulation designed to identify HiPos for selection into SSA’s executive development program. We also created an online, interactive leadership assessment that a Fortune 500 insurance company uses to predict which applicants will succeed as franchise owners.

Along with helping organizations identify HiPos, we have built custom assessments that serve as developmental tools for individuals participating in HiPo programs. For a transportation industry client, we built an engaging online tool that simulates many challenges unique to that sector, such as balancing efficiency and safety, managing a wide set of diverse stakeholders, and working through public-private partnerships.

Support For HiPo Programs

HumRRO has also supported the operational administration of several of our clients' HiPo programs, including:

- Providing individual 360-degree feedback facilitation to HiPos through the Office of Personnel Management's Leadership 360 program.
- Managing a pool of coaches working with HiPos participating in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's Executive Development Program.
- Creating training modules to help supervisors provide HiPo employees with feedback and suggestions for development.

Expert Consulting

Designing a top-notch HiPo program is not as simple as it seems. For example, we know that:

- Identifying HiPo "stars" in a public way can trigger negative outcomes, including increased stress for the HiPos and decreased morale among other employees.
- HiPos expect consistent developmental opportunities and differential treatment, and often react negatively when these expectations are not met.

HumRRO's expert consultants can help organizations avoid these pitfalls by working with them to design a HiPo program that reflects their unique culture. Because we do not offer canned, pre-packaged solutions, we never have to force-fit what we offer to meet our clients' needs. Our independent, objective perspective also places us in an excellent position to evaluate current HiPo programs and suggest ways they can be improved. For example, we conducted a thorough evaluation of the Department of Defense's premier leadership development program for its civilian employees, including estimating ROI.

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