Tips on 2011 PMF Assessment  
(From Forest Service PMF Alums, January 2011)

From the updated official assessment guide:  

*See also the official PMF website at www.pmf.gov

The Assessment Center will take place during an 8-hour day in one of the specified locations. You will participate in three activities: an individual presentation, group exercise, and a writing exercise. You will have 25 minutes to prepare for the individual presentation. The individual oral presentation will last a total of 5 minutes. Your group exercise will last approximately 30 minutes. The writing exercise will take 45 minutes.

(* We remember about 30 participants total at the assessment. Expect the atmosphere to be cordial but competitive.)

You will complete the writing exercise on a laptop computer using a basic word processor without spelling or grammar checking features. You may bring along a pocket (paperback) dictionary for your use during the writing exercise. Due to the number of semi-finalists participating in the Assessment Center, a full day is needed to ensure all semi-finalists participate in each activity.

The Assessment Center panels will be composed of three Federal agency representatives. These panel members are trained PMF assessors. You will be evaluated on the following dimensions during the three components of the Assessment Center:

Individual Presentation:
- Oral Communication
- Problem Solving

Group Discussion:
- Interpersonal Skills
- Oral Communication
- Problem Solving

Writing Exercise:
- Written Communication
- Service Motivation

Your schedule will include sufficient time for breaks during the day, including time for lunch, while other semifinalists are working through their exercises. Although the day may include some down time for you, this scheduling is necessary to maintain test security during the course of the day, and to complete all semi-finalist assessments in time for Federal Agencies to have a list of Finalists from which to make job offers in the spring.

You may bring reading materials (school work or leisure) to occupy your time during the day. The Assessment Center will conclude in the late afternoon. You will be responsible for your travel expenses to attend the Assessment Center.
Thoughts and Observations from Forest Service PMF Alums’ Experience
(*your experience may be slightly different)

General Suggestions:

1. Be well rested. At this point, you either have what it takes or not.
2. Eat a good breakfast, and bring food and drink with you.
3. There is not a lot you can do to “prepare” for the assessment.
4. That being said, you may benefit by reading a national newspaper/website on a daily basis, leading up to the assessment, to familiarize yourself with the policy issues of the day. But by no means will you be tested on this information.
5. Familiarize yourself with the Federal Government’s Executive Core Qualifications (http://www.opm.gov/ses/recruitment/ecq.asp) These are the leadership qualities the Fed seeks in upcoming leaders.
6. Do not be shy! Let your leadership abilities shine.

Suggestions on the Assessment Exercises:

Try your best to show that you can organize, synthesize, and communicate information effectively and efficiently. You will be asked to "perform" 3 times:

1. Writing Exercise – You may be asked to write an essay along the lines of “Why I want to work for the Federal Government”
   - More is not better -- well-written and cogent gets you half-way there.
   - Be honest. Be yourself.

2. Individual Presentation – You may be asked to review a briefing paper on a relevant policy problem or issue of the day. After time for review and preparation, you may be asked to summarize and assess the issue and recommend solutions.
   - Break down the key aspects of the issue (context, players, challenges) and succinctly communicate them.
   - Suggest solutions or recommendations that address the problem at hand.
   - Be prepared to respond to a curveball question at the end of your assessment.
   - They will likely give you a limited amount of time to prepare AND give your response. It is appropriate to take a minute or two to think about your answer and then respond.
   - Do not be thrown if the assessors do not often look up and make eye contact. They may just be furiously taking notes.
3. Group Presentation – You may be asked to “advise” a high-level official on a major policy issue. The group will be given time to prepare and then recommend solutions to the panel/official. Again, you may be thrown a curve ball of new information right near the end of the presentation, and will need to adjust your advice at the last moment. Each person is expected to participate.

- The panel will assess how well you analyze the policy issue AND how well you work within a team.

- The better you work together, the better you ALL look.

- A few tricks - you can show leadership by assigning someone to be the timekeeper, making sure everyone has a chance to share their thoughts, laying out a timeline up front (something like 5 minutes to read and collect your thoughts, 10 minutes for discussion, 5 min to finalize response, and 5 min for presentation).

- Beware, one person can monopolize this meeting – If this happens, how can you handle it so you can still shine and pick up some points?

- Possible panel observations could include negotiating and influencing skills, ability to make sound decisions under pressure, leadership and communication style, presentation skills, and your ability to communicate the group's decision and rational, not just your own.

- Don't worry too much about what exactly you recommend. It is important that the panelists see that your arguments are thoughtful, you consider alternatives, consequences, etc, and that you work together.