

# Development and Validation of a Basic Ground Skills Assessment for Equine-assisted Services

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## Background

Equine-assisted services (EAS) incorporate the interaction of equines and humans into adaptive horsemanship, learning, and therapy services to benefit people. Through interactions guided by trained professionals, EAS participants can achieve recreational, physical, mental, social, and emotional outcomes.

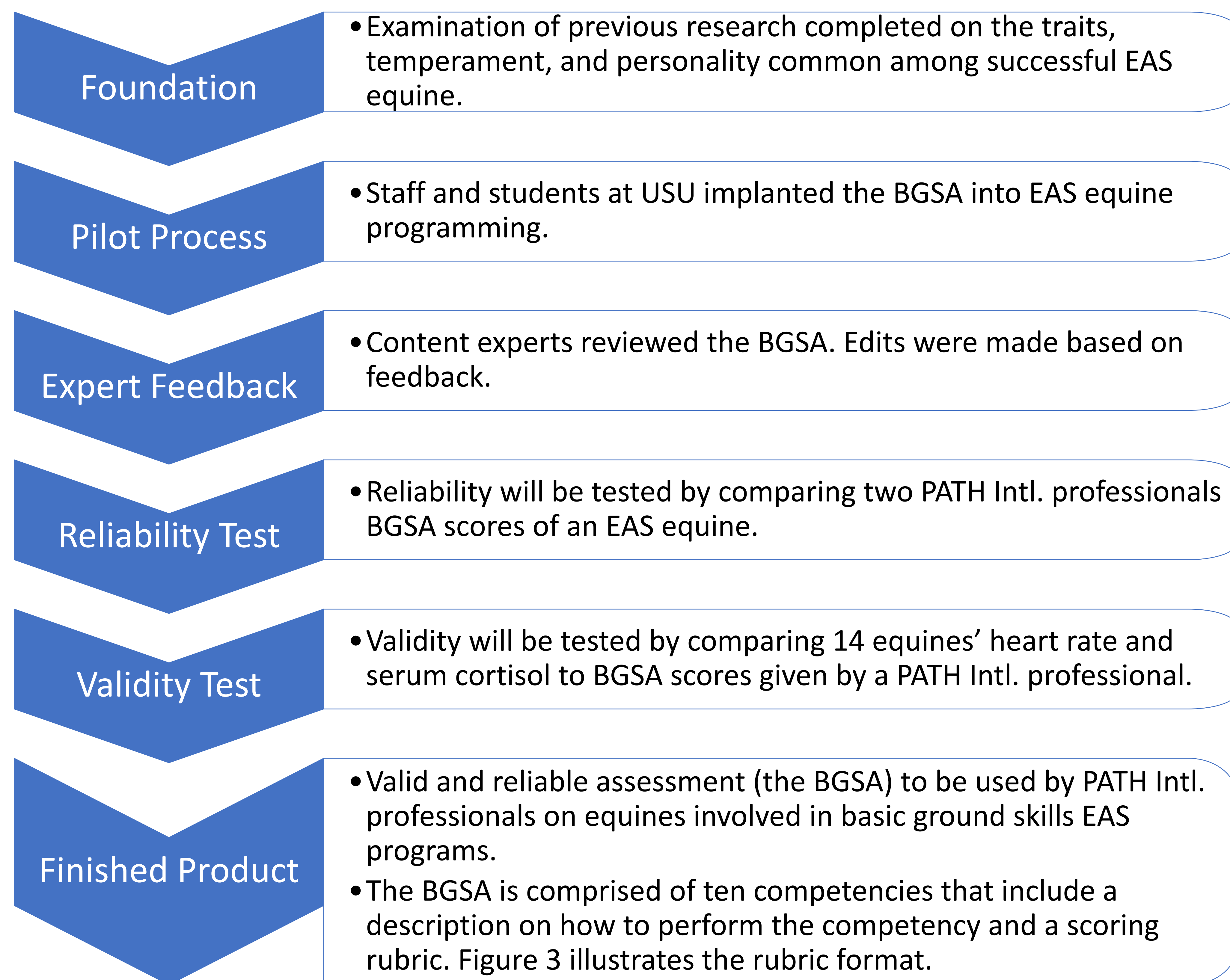
The risk of injury that may occur due to equines large size and strong flight instincts, must be managed when humans interact with equines. The Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH, Intl.), a well known EAS organization, recommends that an evaluation of equine behaviors take place prior to involvement in EAS programs. The assessment should be unbiased while testing the equine's behavior and performance on skill-based criteria. **This is our goal: Develop and validate an EAS equine assessment process.**



Figure 1: Military veteran grooming an equine in USU's EAS program.

## Assessment Development Process

Our group has developed a Basic Ground Skills Assessment (BGSA) to be used to evaluate equines on their ability to be safely engaged in EAS programs based on the following steps:



Competency	0 Automatic Failure	1 Does Not Meet Criteria	2 Meets Criteria	3 Exceeds Criteria
4. Standing Tied	Displays dangerous behavior and/or is in pain or otherwise unsound.	Does not stand still. Moves feet three or more times per minute. Paws at the ground or equipment. Vocalizes.	Moves feet no more than two times per minute. Does not paw at the ground or equipment. Does not vocalize.	Calm while standing. May shift weight but does not move feet.

Figure 3: BGSA scoring rubric competency number four.

## Next Steps

1. Complete testing to determine the BGSA's inter- and intra-reliability.
2. Determine the BGSA's validity as an assessment tool by testing if low rubric scores correlate to an equine's high stress response as seen by the physiological parameters of heart rate and serum cortisol.
3. Analyze the results of a survey distributed to PATH Intl. centers.
  - Determine the current equine evaluation procedures implemented in the industry
  - Determine if there is a trend between equine assessment procedures and human injuries.



Figure 2: Filming an equine and handler using the BGSA while gathering equine physiological data.