

PROGRAM SUPPORT CENTER EMPLOYEE APPRAISAL SYSTEM HIGHLIGHTS

- **5-Tier Rating System** - a 5-tier rating system will be used for all employees (Outstanding, Excellent, Fully Successful, Marginally Successful, Unacceptable).
- **Appraisal Year** - the annual appraisal cycle, January 1 to December 31.
- **Appraisal Period** - the minimum appraisal period is 120 days.
- **Generic Performance Standards (GPS)** - all performance plans must use the established GPS which are written at five levels.
- **Job-Specific Performance Standard (JSPS)** - JSPS is a written statement of the expectations or requirements established by management for elements based on the employee's position. If JSPS is used for any element in the employee's performance plan, all five levels of the GPS must be supplemented.
- **Mandatory Supervisory Critical Element** - must be included for all managers and supervisors incorporating customer service, leadership, management, EEO, awards, and labor/management relations.
- **Mandatory Timekeeping Element (either critical or non-critical)** - must be included for all employees who are timekeepers.
- **Minimum of Three Job Elements** - all performance plans must contain a minimum of three job elements including any required mandatory elements. At least one element must be critical.
- **Signatures for Plan Establishment** - when developing performance plans, the only signatures required are the employee and the supervisor.
- **Evaluating Elements** - written narrative is optional for Fully Successful levels and above on each individual element. Written documentation is required for each individual element for performance that is rated below the Fully Successful Level.
- **Ratings of Record** - all ratings of record at the end of the appraisal year must include a written narrative summarizing the employee's overall performance and must be signed by both the supervisor and the reviewing official.

PROGRAM SUPPORT CENTER

PERFORMANCE

APPRAISAL

GUIDELINES

for

**EMPLOYEE
APPRAISAL
SYSTEM**

JANUARY 1, 1997

PSC EMPLOYEE APPRAISAL SYSTEM GUIDELINES

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COVERAGE

These guidelines contain information and requirements that apply to General Schedule employees (including GM employees covered by Public Law 103-89, the Performance Management and Recognition System Termination Act of 1993) and all GW and prevailing rate employees in the competitive and excepted services.

The employees covered under the following categories are exempt from these guidelines:

- Employees appointed under Schedule A authorities, O, P, Q, and V whose appointments are limited to one year or less.
- Experts and consultants serving in an individual capacity and members of advisory committees.
- Members of the Senior Executive Service and Commissioned Corps.
- Other employees excluded under Department Instruction HHS-430-7 and under 5 U.S.C. 4301.

DEFINITIONS

Appraisal - the process under which performance is reviewed and evaluated against the described performance standards.

Appraisal Period - the established period of time for which performance will be reviewed. The appraisal period begins when the performance plan (elements and standards) has been approved and communicated to the employee in writing.

Appraisal System - a performance appraisal system established by an agency which provides for identification of critical and noncritical elements, establishment of performance standards, communication of elements and standards to employees, establishment of methods and procedures to appraise performance against established standards, and appropriate use of appraisal information in making personnel decisions.

Appraisal Year - the annual appraisal cycle, January 1 to December 31.

Appraising Official - the supervising official who is ordinarily the employee's immediate supervisor, who prepares the employee's performance plan and completes the rating of the employee's performance.

Element - a function of a position consisting of one or more duties and responsibilities which contribute toward accomplishing organizational goals and objectives. Specific types of elements will be described later in these guidelines.

Interim Rating - the summary appraisal of performance compared to the performance standard(s) under which an employee has had an opportunity to perform for the minimum period of 120 days.

Performance - an employee's accomplishment of assigned work as specified in the elements of the employee's position.

Performance Plan - the aggregation of all of an employee's written elements, generic performance standards, and job specific performance standards.

Performance Standard - a statement of the performance expectations or requirements established by management for an element at a particular rating level. A performance standard may include, but is not limited to, factors such as quality, quantity, timeliness, and manner of performance. Within the PSC Employee Appraisal System, the specific and generic performance standards are used as described later in these guidelines.

Progress Review - communicating with the employee about progress on performance compared to the performance standards of critical and non-critical elements. A progress review is not in itself a rating. A formal progress review must be held with the employee at least once at mid-term during the appraisal cycle.

Rating of Record - the rating normally issued at the end of the appraisal cycle which provides an evaluation of the employee's overall performance.

Reviewing Official - an official at a higher level in the organization than that of the appraising official who reviews and approves the final rating of record. This official is usually one supervisory level above the rating official.

Summary Levels - the level assigned to each element by comparing the employee's performance against the generic performance standards and/or job specific performance standards (if prepared).

BASIC RESPONSIBILITIES

The Appraising Official (Supervisor) shall:

1. Prepare, sign, and issue performance plans for employees (with employees' participation) and obtain the employees' signature. (See Exhibit A).
2. Monitor performance, conduct and document progress review(s) in order to clarify expectations, modify performance plans when appropriate and maintain whatever records are necessary;
3. Rate employee's performance in comparison to his/her performance plan;
4. Whenever a new employee transfers into the office, inquire whether a rating was received prior to his/her transfer;

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5. For Ratings of Record, take into consideration any earlier ratings issued within or outside the Department during the appraisal year;
 6. Obtain approval of employees' Ratings of Record from the higher level reviewing official;
 7. Communicate approved Ratings of Record, and any other ratings issued during the appraisal year, to employees and furnish them with signed copies;
 8. As appropriate, recommend awards or other forms of recognition based on performance of Fully Successful or better;
 9. Take action that is appropriate at any time an employee's performance is less than Fully Successful in the essential parts (critical elements) of their job, including assisting him/her in improving his/her performance and providing him/her with a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate Fully Successful performance; and
 10. Maintain records and submit relevant forms and other material as required.

The Higher Level Reviewing Official shall:

1. Review and approve Ratings of Record, documenting any changes.
2. Return final Ratings of Record to the appraising official, explaining any changes.

The Employee shall:

1. Participate in the development of his/her performance plan;
2. Perform against expectations in his/her performance plan to the best of his/her ability;
3. Advise his/her supervisor of situations that may affect performance;
4. Review his/her own performance in preparation for meetings with the supervisor to discuss progress and document performance.

ESTABLISHING PERFORMANCE PLANS

- The appraisal year is the annual appraisal cycle which is based on the calendar year January 1 to December 31.
- The appraisal period is the period of time for which an employee's performance will be reviewed. The minimum period will be no less than 120 days.
- PSC Form must be used for all employees covered under these guidelines.
- Performance plans should be written, approved, and communicated to employees between January 1 and January 31 of each appraisal year. Employees who are on extended plans from the previous appraisal year must have new plans in effect no later than 30 calendar days after receiving their rating from the extended plan. (An extended plan is an extension of the current plan when the employee, by the end of the appraisal cycle, has not served under a plan for the 120-day minimum appraisal period.
- Employees placed into a new position should have new performance plans written, approved, and communicated no later than 30 calendar days after placement.
- For details and temporary promotions within DHHS that are expected to last 120 days or longer, a separate performance plan covering the assignment must be developed and communicated to the employee as soon as possible (no later than 30 calendar days after the beginning of the assignment). The supervisor of the temporary assignment works with the supervisor of record to develop the plan. The rating for the appraisal cycle will be prepared by the supervisor of record giving full consideration to performance evaluation input from the supervisor of the detail. This is to be in the form of an interim rating. (A written evaluation is to be provided if the assignment is for less than 120 days.)
- Employees placed into a new position with less than 120 days remaining in the appraisal year and who have received Interim Rating(s) from another position(s) during the appraisal year, need not be placed on a new performance plan. The previous Interim Rating(s) or average thereof will serve as the Rating of Record for the appraisal year. If an employee who has not received a Interim Rating(s) during the appraisal year is placed into a new position with less than 120 days remaining in the appraisal year, that employee should be placed on a new performance plan. In this case, the plan must be extended beyond the end of the appraisal year (December 31) until the 120 day minimum evaluation period has been met. The employee must then be rated.
- Individual performance plans must be developed through the joint participation of the employee and the supervisor (appraising official). Employee participation may include the following:
 - employee and supervisor discuss and develop the plan together;
 - employee provides a draft plan to supervisor; or
 - with supervisor's approval, a plan is drafted by a group of employees occupying similar positions.
- The supervisor and the employee must sign and date the performance plan.
- An employee is accountable only for his or her individual performance under the elements and standards to which he/she is assigned.

CONTENTS OF THE PERFORMANCE PLAN

Elements

- **Critical Element** - a major function of a position consisting of one or more duties and responsibilities which contribute toward accomplishing organizational goals and objectives and which is of such importance that unacceptable performance on the element would result in unacceptable performance in the position.
- A mandatory critical performance element must be written for all managers and supervisors incorporating customer service, leadership, management, EEO, awards, and labor/management relations. (See Exhibit C.)
- **Non-Critical Element** - a function of an employee's position that does not meet the definition of a critical element, but is of sufficient importance to warrant written appraisal. These elements may be used in work situations where a number of employees perform identical functions within an office, i.e., payroll clerk, mail clerk, computer specialist, management analyst.
- All employees who are timekeepers must have a mandatory timekeeping performance element (either critical or non-critical) in their performance plans. (See Exhibit D.)
- **Model Job Element** (critical or non-critical) - a series of identical functions within an office, unique only to that office, and performed by several employees.
- All performance plans must contain a minimum of three job elements including any required mandatory elements. At least one element must be critical.
- More weight must be given individually and collectively to critical elements than to non-critical elements. For example, a performance plan with two critical elements, each with a weight of 35 (for a total of 70) and one non-critical element, with a weight of 30, would meet this requirement. The sum of the weights for all critical and non-critical elements must equal 100.

Standards

- **Generic Performance Standards (GPS)** - established standards written at five levels (Outstanding, Excellent, Fully Successful, Marginally Successful, and Unacceptable) which are applied to each element for all performance plans. These standards will be used to rate all employees covered under these guidelines. GPS will be applied at all five levels (outstanding, excellent, fully successful, marginally successful and unacceptable) for each element in the performance plan (See Generic Performance Standards, Exhibit B.)

The use of GPS will facilitate the development of performance plans and reinforce accurate and fair ratings of performance on individual job elements.

The GPS include specific supervisory standards which must be applied to all supervisors.

- **Job-Specific Performance Standard (JSPS)** - a written statement of the expectations or requirements established by management for elements based on the requirements of the employee's position. A job specific performance standard may include but is not limited to factors such as quality, quantity, timeliness, and manner of performance. JSPS supplements the GPS. If a JSPS is used it must supplement all five levels of the GPS.

CONDUCTION PROGRESS REVIEWS AND CHANGING PERFORMANCE PLANS

Progress Review

- Formal progress reviews must be held with the employee at least once about mid-term from the establishment of the performance plan. Progress reviews are normally conducted in June or July for employees who were placed on performance plans between January 1 and January 31.
- **Formal progress reviews must:**
 - document an assessment of progress in performance relative to the job elements and standards in the performance plan; and
 - document in the performance plan changes in work assignments or to unanticipated changes in the work situation, including those beyond the control of the employee.
- The supervisor and the employee must sign and date the progress review section on the form. Employees may make written comments regarding any documented progress reviews received.

If the employee refuses to sign, the supervisor must:

- indicate the reason(s) or ask the employee to indicate the reason(s);
- indicate that a copy was given to the employee, and
- indicate whether a discussion was held.

Requirements for Changing Performance Plans from January 1 through September 2

- **Minor Modifications** - may be made to the original elements. These changes must be initialed and dated by the supervisor and employee. A new 120 day minimum appraisal period is not required for minor changes.

- **Substantive changes** (adding or deleting elements, significant changing of existing elements, changing the point value of the weights) may be made to the original performance plan. These changes must be initialed and dated by the supervisor and employee. A new 120 day minimum appraisal period would go into effect when any of the aforementioned changes are made. A new 120 day minimum appraisal period is not required when the designation of critical and non-critical is changed.
- If the employee declines to initial the changes, the supervisor must note this on the plan and indicate when the changes have been communicated to the employee. In addition, he/she must be given a copy of the revised performance plan.
- When elements are changed, new elements are added, an element is dropped, or weights are changed, weights must be changed to reflect the new priority order. The sum must continue to total 100 and non-critical elements must individually and collectively be given less weight than critical elements.

Requirements for Changing Performance Plans from September 3 through December 31

- **Minor modifications** may be made to the original elements only if these changes do not make it more difficult for the employee to achieve the standard. The supervisor and employee must initial and date the changes. A new 120 day minimum appraisal period is not required.
- The only substantive change that may be made which will not require a new 120 day minimum appraisal period is the designation of critical and non-critical element. **New elements may be assigned to an employee's existing plan between September 1 and December 31. However, if this happens, a new 120 minimum appraisal period may be necessary. PLEASE NOTE: Appraising officials are strongly discouraged from making any substantive changes in an employee's performance plan during the second half of the performance year. If changes are made, the supervisor and the employee must initial and date the performance plan.**
- If the employee declines to initial the changes, the supervisor must note this on the plan and date when the changes were communicated to the employee. In addition, employees must be given copies of the revised performance plan.
- When elements are changed or an element is dropped, weights must be changed to reflect the new priority order. The sum must continue to total 100, and non-critical elements must individually and collectively be given less weight than critical elements.

INTERIM RATINGS AND RATINGS OF RECORD

When preparing an Interim Rating or Rating of Record, the supervisor should assemble and review all documentation on the employee's performance for the appraisal period. In this process, the supervisor should first provide the employee an opportunity to submit any additional relevant information that should be considered.

The Interim Rating and the Rating of Record are derived through a scoring procedure. The weight assigned to each element will be multiplied by the numerical value of the achievement level assigned to that element by the supervisor. When the rating for each element has been computed, the figures are added together for a total rating score. The Rating score will be compared to the Achievement Level Point Range to derive either the Interim Rating or the Rating of Record. The overall ratings will be based on where the summary level score falls within the point range. **However, an employee who is rated UNACCEPTABLE on one or more critical elements must receive an UNACCEPTABLE Rating of Record. An employee who is rated MARGINALLY SUCCESSFUL on one or more critical elements must receive a Rating of Record no higher than MARGINALLY SUCCESSFUL. THESE RATINGS MUST BE ASSIGNED REGARDLESS OF THE NUMERICAL SCORE OR THE LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE ON OTHER ELEMENTS.**

Documenting Interim Ratings

- Interim Ratings must be in writing and must be issued to employees under the following circumstances:
 1. at the time an employee permanently changes positions after having performed under a performance plan for at least 120 days from the vacated position;
 2. at the end of a detail or temporary promotion when the employee has performed under a performance plan for 120 days or longer, or
 3. at the time an employee's performance is determined to have changed significantly to result in a different Within-Grade-Increase (WIGI) determination or at the time a determination is made that the employee has demonstrated an acceptable level of competence after having been denied a WIGI. This Rating must be based on an employee's performance under a plan covering at least 120 days.
 4. when a supervisor rates the employee's performance at the end of the appraisal year on each job element in the employee's official performance plan on which the employee has had an opportunity to perform. The rating must be done by comparing the employee's performance to the GPS for the element. If the performance is determined to be at a level below "Fully Successful", a written narrative of the level of performance must describe how it compares to the relevant GPS. A description of actual performance will not be required when an element is rated at Fully Successful or higher.

Documenting Ratings of Record

- The Rating of Record is ordinarily the final rating issued at the end of the appraisal year. Generally an employee will have only one Rating of Record for an appraisal year. There may be occasions in which an employee will have more than one Rating of Record in an appraisal year.
- An employee who has not been placed on a performance plan by the end of the appraisal year (December 31), and has not received Interim Ratings during the appraisal year will not receive a Rating during the appraisal year will not receive a Rating of Record for

that year. However, an employee who has been placed on a performance plan with less than 120 days remaining in the appraisal year and who has not had a rating made earlier in the appraisal year, must have the plan extended beyond December 31 (until they reach 120 days) so that a Rating of Record may be prepared.

- In situations where an employee has not performed under a plan for at least 120 days by the end of the appraisal year (December 31), but has been issued an Interim Rating based on performance in a different position earlier in the year, the appraisal year cannot be extended. Instead the earlier interim rating becomes the Rating of Record for the employee for the year.
- All ratings of record at the end of the appraisal year must include a written narrative summarizing the employee's overall performance.
- The Rating of Record issued at the end of the appraisal year may be derived in one of two ways:
 1. The Rating issued at the end of the appraisal year becomes the Rating of Record when no other Ratings were issued throughout the appraisal cycle. In this case the supervisor records the Rating of Record in Section VI of the Appraisal Form.
 2. When more than one Interim Rating is issued during the appraisal year, all appropriate Ratings must be consolidated to derive one Total Point Score using the formula for Consolidating Interim Ratings (Section V, of the Employee Appraisal System form). This process determines the rating of record.

Required Signatures

- After placing all necessary comments and determining the rating on the performance appraisal form, the supervisor should sign and date the form in the space designated for that purpose. The supervisor should then forward this tentative rating to the reviewing official. The reviewing official must review the tentative rating, sign and date it. If the reviewing official changes any level of performance, he/she should fully explain on the rating form itself the reason for the changes. At such time as the reviewing official has affixed his signature in the appropriate space, the tentative rating becomes the Rating of Record and is now final. The final Rating is to be returned to the supervisor who will then communicate it to the employee. **The supervisor will:**
 - communicate the final rating to the employee, including an explanation of any changes made by the reviewing officials (Ratings of Record may not be communicated to employees prior to approval by the final reviewer);
 - have the employee sign and date the form;
 - provide a copy of the final rating to the employee for his/her records.

If the employee refuses to sign, the supervisor must:

- indicate the reason(s) in the "Comments" section under the supervisor's signature on the form;
- indicate that a copy was given to the employee;
- advise the employee who disagrees with their final ratings that they may:
- record the disagreement on the form itself;
- prepare a separate, written response which will be attached to the original form; and/or
- pursue other administrative procedures (e.g., file a grievance within the appropriate time frame).

USE OF RATINGS OF RECORD

As appropriate, Ratings of Record will be the basis for Within-Grade-Increase (WIGI) determinations, quality step increases, performance-related awards, comparability increases, reassignments, promotions, reductions in grade, and removals. Ratings of Record will also be used for probationary period retention determinations and service credit determinations for reduction-in-force (RIF) purposes.

MARGINALLY SUCCESSFUL OR UNACCEPTABLE PERFORMANCE

Performance evaluated below the Fully Successful level requires immediate attention. When an employee's performance is determined to be at the Marginally Successful or Unacceptable level anytime during the appraisal cycle or at the end of the appraisal year, contact the Employee and Labor Relations Division, Human Resources Service, for guidance.

MAINTENANCE AND TRANSFER OF PERFORMANCE RATINGS

The original performance ratings are maintained by the personnel office in a separate Employee Performance File (EPF). Performance ratings are retained in accordance with records retention schedules, U. S. OPM regulations, and DHHS instructions (currently retained for four years).

EPFs follow employees along with Official Personnel Folders when employees move between appointing authorities. The Personnel Office forwards the file. EPFs are sent to the National Personnel Records Center when an employee leaves the Federal Government.