



Department of the Interior  
SES Performance Management System  
Frequently Asked Questions

***Q1: Why is the Performance Agreement and Appraisal form color-coded and what do the colors mean?***

The form is color-coded to denote the different stages supervisors and executives must go through to complete the rating process. The yellow sections represent the performance planning process. The lavender section represents the progress review and the blue sections are completed by the executive, the supervisor, and the Performance Review Board at the end of the appraisal period.

***Q2: When should the performance agreement and appraisal process begin?***

Through consultation between the supervisor and the employee the performance agreement should be established no later than 60 days after the rating cycle begins on October 1 or within 30 days of an appointment, reassignment or other action that requires the development of a new plan.

***Q3: What elements are used in the performance agreement to evaluate performance?***

The SES Performance Management System and the Senior Professional Performance Management System for SL/ST employees contains two categories of performance elements: the mandatory department-wide element which is competency-based and includes the responsibilities all executives must demonstrate; and position-specific elements/commitments that are individual goals specific to each executive's position and are derived from the mission and strategic goals of the executive's organization.

***Q4: Why are there different types of elements?***

The two kinds of elements used in the Department's SES performance management system address different aspects of performance. The Mandatory Department-wide element focuses on competencies and how executives carry out their responsibilities, while the Position-specific elements/commitments focus on what the executives are expected to accomplish.

***Q5: How many position-specific elements/commitments must an executive have in the Performance Agreement and Appraisal?***

Each executive is required to have at least two, but no more than six position-specific commitments for the rating period.

***Q6: How do I link my position-specific elements section to the appropriate Strategic Plan, GPRA goals, the Program Assessment and Reporting Tool (PART), the President's Management Agenda, or other strategic planning document?***

This will vary by bureau and by executive. Goals are specific to each executive's position and are derived from the mission and strategic goals of the organization. In linking elements to organizational goals, executives and their supervisors should cite the specific Departmental, bureau, or program objectives that best encompass the individual goals to be achieved.

***Q7: What are the initial summary rating levels in the new SES performance management system?***

A five-level scale is used by a supervisor to rate an executive on the elements in a performance agreement. The five levels are Exceptional, Superior, Fully Successful, Minimally Successful and Unsatisfactory. The initial summary rating for an element is to be based on observable performance/behaviors during the rating period.

***Q8: What do the rating levels mean?***

The following benchmarks are used to define the element ratings. The benchmarks provided are not the only examples indicative of performance at this level. These examples are instead intended as a guide for consistent application of the standards in determining the level of performance exhibited during the rating period.

- ***Exceptional:*** Consistently delivered on assignments and commitments; displayed outstanding leadership in promoting the organization's strategic goals and initiatives; demonstrated the highest level of integrity and accountability in achieving program and management goals. Contributions

had an impact beyond his or her immediate purview. Employee exerted a major positive influence on management practices, operating procedures or program implementation, which contributed substantially to organizational change, growth and recognition. This employee's expertise, advice and opinions are sought and respected by peers.

- ***Superior:*** Performance is between the levels described for Exceptional and Fully Successful. Performance outcomes and results of the executive's leadership surpassed expectations by exceeding the majority of performance requirements. Effectiveness and contributions may have had an impact beyond the executive's purview and performance is well beyond what is expected or required for the position. Consistently demonstrated the highest level of integrity and accountability in achieving program and management goals. Served as a source of leadership and motivation for peers and subordinates.
- ***Fully Successful:*** Performance demonstrates the fully successful level of accomplishment through observable outcomes or achievement of or substantial progress toward agreed-upon critical actions, objectives, and/or desired results. Expectations were consistently met with solid, dependable performance. Performance reflects notable achievements and the employee regularly demonstrated the ability to meet the difficult and complex requirements inherent in SES positions, while consistently demonstrating the highest levels of integrity and accountability in achieving all program objectives and management goals; *no areas of performance are deficient.*
- ***Minimally Successful:*** Performance is between the levels described for Fully Successful and Unsatisfactory. Overall performance was marginally acceptable and occasionally less than Fully Successful. The executive had difficulties in meeting performance expectations. Actions taken by the employee were sometimes inappropriate or marginally effective. Immediate improvement in performance is essential.
- ***Unsatisfactory:*** Performance fails to demonstrate achievement of or progress toward agreed-upon critical action, objective and/or desired result to such an extent that it results in demonstrable negative consequences for the organization. Removal from the position is required.

***Q9: What if an executive has not served on a performance agreement for the full 90 days by the end of the rating period on September 30?***

If at the end of the rating period a new executive has not had at least 90 days under the performance agreement, the rating period must be extended to give the executive the full 90 days to perform. As long as the 90-day period is completed by the due date to the Department to allow for rating, review, appropriate signatures, PRB review, etc., the individual can be rated and considered for a

bonus and/or other pay adjustment. The ERB will make the final determination on ratings and recognition. However, if the executive recently received a pay increase or has only served in the position for a short time, those facts should be considered when making any bonus or pay adjustment recommendations.

***Q10: What will happen with my performance appraisal if I transfer to another organization or agency during the middle of the rating period?***

When an executive changes position by reassignment or by transfer to another organization or agency and has served under an SES performance plan in the previous position for at least 90 days, a written interim summary rating must be prepared by the rating official. The gaining organization, agency or supervisor must consider the interim summary in deriving the next summary rating of record.

***Q11: When should progress reviews be held?***

One progress review between the supervisor and the executive is required during the rating cycle usually during the middle of the rating cycle and must be documented on the Performance Agreement and Appraisal form. At a minimum, executives must be informed about how well they are performing against the position-specific elements contained in the performance agreement. However, communication about program objectives and an executive's progress toward achieving performance goals in the attainment of those objectives should be an ongoing process between supervisors and executives.

***Q12: What is my recourse if I disagree with the element ratings and initial summary rating assigned by my supervisor?***

At the time of the rating, the supervisor must advise the executive of his or her right to respond in writing and/or request a higher level review. The executive must submit any response and/or request for higher level review to the supervisor within 10 working days. Any response by the executive or any request for a higher level review may not exceed two typewritten pages including attachments (if any).