



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
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## Memorandum

To: Assistant Secretaries  
Heads of Bureaus and Offices  
Bureau/Office Human Capital Officers

From: Jennifer A. Ackerman  
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Subject: Guidance on Closing FY 2024 Performance Appraisals and Establishing FY 2025 Performance Plans for General Workforce Employees

This memorandum provides important guidance for all general workforce (non-SES/SL/ST and Schedule C employees) related to closing Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 performance appraisals and establishing FY 2025 performance plans.

In **FY 2024**, the Department transitioned from using DOI Talent to OPM's paperless performance management system, USA Performance. With limited exception, USA Performance is *mandatory* for all general workforce (non-SES/SL/ST and Schedule C employees).

### **Closing FY 2024 Performance Appraisals**

#### **Performance Evaluations**

Consistent with Departmental policy and guidance, supervisors must evaluate employee performance against the criteria established in the Employee Performance Appraisal Plan (EPAP), assign a numerical rating for each critical element, and take the average numerical score to determine the overall rating of record. With limited exception, all FY 2024 performance appraisals (paperless performance and hardcopy appraisals) ***must be completed by October 30, 2024.***

Departmental policy for general workforce employees requires that there be a clear link between individual performance and organizational results. Therefore, organizational performance should be used as one input into determining the appropriate summary performance ratings and performance recognition for each employee. Supervisors should consider the organizational achievements that they have reported to their Bureau/Office chain of command when rating their employees.

When completing performance appraisals, rating officials shall not assign employee ratings under an arbitrary distribution system (such as a bell curve or quota system). This is contrary to the intent of the appraisal system and would interfere with assigning ratings based on actual performance.

Supervisors, in consultation with their Servicing Human Resource Office (SHRO), should move quickly to address situations in which employees are not meeting performance expectations, by clarifying expectations, providing training or other resources or taking formal action to address deficiencies. Corrective actions are required for all employees who are not performing at the Fully Successful level. Appropriate corrective action may include providing training relevant to the specific deficiency, denial of a within-grade-increase; initiating formal performance-based action; or in the case of employees serving a probationary/trial period, initiation of action to remove the individual from their job.

### **Performance-Based Awards**

Awards help recognize employee performance excellence and reinforce a high-performing culture that improves organizational effectiveness. When managed carefully and responsibly, they also have an important role in recognizing and rewarding results and exceptional service to the American people, as well as supporting the retention of high-performing employees. Performance awards are intended to reward employee achievements and should be granted in a manner that differentiates between levels of performance. In other words, Bureaus/Offices should allocate awards in a manner in which higher performers receive larger awards (in terms of percentage of pay) than their peers who receive lower ratings. In accordance with Departmental policy, employees who receive Fully Successful (level 3), Exceeds Expectations (level 4) or Outstanding (level 5) ratings may receive a performance award and/or a time-off award for work performed in FY 2024. An employee must receive an Outstanding (level 5) rating to be eligible for a Quality Step Increase (QSI).

The ongoing use of awards and recognition throughout the year is particularly important as we address workforce challenges and look for opportunities to reward and recognize high performing employees and those with talent critical to mission achievement. For FY 2024 performance awards, Bureaus/Offices may spend up to **2.5%** of aggregate salaries of all non-SES/SL/ST employees at the end of the previous fiscal year (i.e., aggregate salary as of September 30, 2024) on the combination of both rating-based performance awards and individual contribution awards (e.g., STAR awards). SES/SL/ST salaries are not included in this calculation. Additional guidance on processing ratings and awards can be found in the attachment.

On August 3, 2010, the President issued a [memorandum](#) freezing discretionary awards, bonuses, and similar payments (including time-off awards) for political appointees. That freeze remains in effect for all politically appointed Federal employees, including Schedule C or equivalent appointments to GS and special pay authority. Employees in these positions may not be paid any rating-based performance awards, QSIs, individual or group contribution awards of any type, or recruitment, relocation, or retention incentives.

### **Establishing FY 2025 Performance Plans**

FY 2025 performance plans are available in USA Performance for the general workforce (non-SES/SL/ST and Schedule C employees). FY24 plans should be completed prior to establishing FY 2025 performance plans. Hardcopy appraisals, using the DI-3100 and DI-3100S are permitted only for Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) employees only.

To ensure supervisors have adequate time to close out and evaluate FY 2024 performance appraisals under the four-level performance management system and establish new FY 2025 performance plans, the following key performance dates and milestones have been established:

<b>Key Dates</b>	<b>Performance Management Activity</b>
Between October 1 - October 30	<p>Rating Officials closeout FY 2024 performance appraisals and begin initiating performance-based awards following closeout activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In USA Performance, this is Parts 3-5 - Rating phase</li><li>• For hardcopy appraisals, this is Parts C and D (hardcopy appraisals must be turned into the SHRO)</li></ul> <p>SHROs begin their quality review of appraisals (both paperless and hardcopy).</p> <p><i>Policy Tip: Annual summary ratings are to be completed and presented to the employee no later than 30 days after the completion of the annual appraisal period, or upon completion of an extension period, if applicable (Section 1.6 (G)(3) of 370 DM 430).</i></p>
Beginning Now – November 15	<p>Rating Officials should begin drafting FY 2025 performance plans and sign part 1 once FY 2024 plans are completed, if applicable.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In USA Performance, this is Part 1 - Establish Plan</li><li>• For hardcopy appraisals, this is Parts A-1 through A-4</li></ul> <p><i>Policy Tip: Performance plans must be established within 45 days of the beginning of the appraisal period (Section 1.6 (B)(2) of 370 DM 430).</i></p>
Beginning November 30 – December 31	<p>SHROs complete their quality review of performance appraisals (both paperless and hardcopy) and transmit to eOPF. Appraisals sent to eOPF will automatically have ratings of record sent to the Federal Personnel/Payroll System (FPPS). Process all performance-based awards once the ratings are in FPPS.</p> <p><i>Policy Tip: All performance-based awards should be input into FPPS no later than December 31, or 90 days from the end of the rating cycle for those on other than a fiscal year cycle (Section 9.A of PB 19-13).</i></p>

Well-developed performance plans let employees know what they need to accomplish and the standards that will be used to evaluate their performance. To ensure a more robust performance management program and to increase accountability throughout the process, performance plans must display the following characteristics:

- *Rigorous performance standards*: Government-wide regulations require, at a minimum, that a specific performance standard be established for each critical element at the Fully Successful level. Supervisors are strongly encouraged to develop standards at additional levels as well so that employees clearly understand their performance expectations. Performance standards may be more or less objective depending on the job but must be sufficiently specific to provide a firm benchmark toward which employees must aim their performance. The Fully Successful level must be written to represent what is normally expected of an employee to contribute meaningfully to an organization's success in meeting its mission and goals. The Fully Successful level should never be characterized as a low level of performance or be phrased in such a way as to define unacceptable performance.
- *Strategic Alignment*: At least one critical element, and preferably all elements, should align with and support organizational goals and targets that are established in an organization's annual performance/strategic plan and/or that have been included in the SES members' performance plans. The Department's [FY 2022 – FY 2026 Strategic Plan](#) is a helpful guide in determining appropriate strategic linkage. Alignment should be clear so that employees can see how their performance plans support achievement of organizational goals. Merely including a generic statement in performance plans that employees' performance requirements support organizational goals is not adequate for communicating alignment. Similarly, simply restating organizational goals without also including the metrics for determining performance against those goals is not adequate.
- *Results Focused*: Critical elements and standards should be written in terms of expected results. While plans may include critical elements that focus on competencies such as teamwork or customer service, at least one critical element must hold an employee accountable for **achieving a result that directly supports organizational goal achievement**.
- *Mandatory Performance Management Training*: All supervisors and employees must be provided training in performance management. USA Performance training can be found in [DOI Talent](#). Employees should be directed to this section when plans are established or throughout the process if questions arise.
- *Employee Involvement*: Employees must be engaged in the process of determining critical elements and performance standards. The EPAP requires supervisors and employees to sign the EPAP form to verify that employee involvement was solicited.

Additional resources are available on the [Performance Management](#) page of OneINTERIOR.

Requests for assistance with year-end performance management and awards procedures should be directed to SHROs.

Attachment

Guidance on Processing Performance Ratings and Awards

### **Guidance on Processing Performance Ratings and Awards**

Performance awards should be processed consistent with Departmental policy and guidance. For employees whose performance appraisal cycle ends on September 30, all ratings of record should be released to the Federal Personnel/Payroll System (FPPS) and performance awards processed by **December 31, 2024**.

#### **Important Reminders:**

- Beginning November 30, USA Performance will begin transmitting the rating of record, rating of record date, and rating pattern to FPPS for those FY 2024 appraisals which have been completed. Ratings will transmit once the appraisal is completed (part 5 - rating signatures) and sent to eOPF. For hard copy appraisals, the rating of record, rating of record date, and rating pattern must be entered manually in FPPS and uploaded to eOPF. Care must be taken to **record the rating pattern as “E” in FPPS**, as this is the only approved rating pattern for general workforce employees (non-SES/SL/ST and Schedule C employees).
- Schedule C employees are prohibited from receiving any performance awards, bonuses, and similar payments. Because we are in a Presidential election period, the prohibition extends to time-off awards.
- Performance awards can only be processed after the performance rating of record has been entered in FPPS.
- All performance-based cash awards must be processed using Nation of Action code 840 (“Individual Cash Award-Rating Based”), Award Type A1 (“Performance Award - Cash”).
- All performance-based time-off awards must be processed using Nature of Action code 846 (“Individual Time-Off Award”), Award Type A2 (“Performance Award - Time Off”).
- Quality Step Increases (QSIs) must also be processed no later than **December 31, 2024**, or 90 days after the end of the performance cycle for those on other than fiscal year cycle. When situations preclude timely processing, QSIs may be delayed past the 90 days, but cannot be delayed past the end of the next performance year. Whenever processing of a QSI is delayed for more than 90 days, a request for exception should be submitted to the respective Bureau or Office Head, through the servicing Human Resources Office and the Bureau Headquarters Human Resources Office for approval. Exception requests need not be submitted to the Office of Human Capital (OHC); however, Bureaus/Offices should keep record of all approvals should this information become necessary for OHC to examine.