



Department of the Interior SES Performance System Frequently Asked Questions

When does the performance cycle begin?

The performance cycle runs from October 1st through September 30th of each year. If an executive is appointed during the rating cycle, a performance plan should be developed within 30 days of appointment.

What elements are used in the performance agreement to evaluate performance?

The SES Performance System performance elements are based on five Executive Core Qualifications: Leading People, Leading Change, Business Acumen, Building Coalitions, and Results Driven. These elements are weighted, with significant importance placed on the Results Driven element. The first four elements contain standard language used government-wide to assess performance in those areas. Executives and rating officials collaborate to develop 3 to 5 performance requirements for the Results Driven element that are individual goals specific to each executive's position and are derived from the mission and strategic goals of the executive's organization.

How do I link performance requirements in the Results Driven element to the appropriate strategic plans, Presidential orders and initiative, mission statement, organizational goals, Budgetary priorities, 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 objective that best encompasses the individual goals to be achieved and cite what document it originated from.

What are the initial summary rating levels in the SES performance management system?

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

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.

Outstanding or Level 5: The executive demonstrates exceptional performance, fostering a climate that sustains excellence and optimizes results in the executive's organization, agency, department or government-wide. This represents the highest level of executive performance, as evidenced by the extraordinary impact on the achievement of the organization's mission. The executive is an inspirational leader and is considered a role model by agency leadership, peers, and employees. The executive continually contributes materially to or spearheads agency efforts that address or accomplish important agency goals, consistently achieves expectations at the highest level of quality possible, and consistently handles challenges, exceeds targets, and completes assignments ahead of schedule at every step along the way. Performance may be demonstrated in such ways as the following examples:

- Overcomes unanticipated barriers or intractable problems by developing creative solutions that address program concerns that could adversely affect the organization, agency, or Government.
- Through leadership by example, creates a work environment that fosters creative thinking and innovation; fosters core process re-engineering; and accomplishment of established organizational performance targets.
- Takes the initiative to identify new opportunities for program and policy development and implementation or seeks more opportunities to contribute to optimizing results; takes calculated risks to accomplish organizational objectives.
- Accomplishes objectives even under demands and time pressure beyond those typically found in the executive environment.
- Achieves results of significant value to the organization, agency, or Government.
- Achieves significant efficiencies or cost-savings in program delivery or in daily operational costs of the organization.

Exceeds Fully Successful or Level 4: The executive demonstrates a very high level of performance beyond that required for successful performance in the executive's position and scope of responsibilities. The executive is a proven, highly effective leader who builds trust and instills confidence in agency leadership, peers, and employees. The executive consistently exceeds established performance expectations, timelines, or targets, as applicable. Performance may be demonstrated in such ways as the following:

- Advances progress significantly toward achieving one or more strategic goals.
- Demonstrates unusual resourcefulness in dealing with program operations or policy challenges.
- Achieves unexpected results that advance the goals and objectives of the organization, agency, or Government.

Fully Successful or Level 3: The executive demonstrates the high level of performance expected and the executive's actions and leadership contribute positively toward the achievement of strategic goals and meaningful results. The executive is an effective, solid, and dependable leader who delivers high-quality results based on measures of quality, quantity, efficiency, and/or effectiveness within agreed upon timelines. The executive meets and often exceeds challenging performance expectations established for the position. Performance may be demonstrated in such ways as the following:

- Seizes opportunities to address issues and effects change when needed.
- Finds solutions to serious problems and champions their adoption.
- Designs strategies leading to improvements.

Minimally Satisfactory or Level 2: The executive's contributions to the organization are acceptable in the short term but do not appreciably advance the organization towards achievement of its goals and objectives. While the executive generally meets established performance expectations, timelines and targets, there are occasional lapses that impair operations and/or cause concern from management. While showing basic ability to accomplish work through others, the executive may demonstrate limited ability to inspire subordinates to give their best efforts or to marshal those efforts effectively to address problems characteristic of the organization and its work.

Unsatisfactory or Level 1: In repeated instances, the executive demonstrates performance deficiencies that detract from mission goals and objectives. The executive generally is viewed as ineffectual by agency leadership, peers, or employees. The executive does not meet established performance expectations/timelines/targets and fails to produce – or produces unacceptable – work products, services, or outcomes.

When should progress reviews be held?

One progress review between the executive and the rating official is required during the rating cycle, usually during the middle of the rating cycle. The progress review must be documented on the Executive Performance Agreement. 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 rating officials and executives.

What is my recourse if I disagree with the element ratings and initial summary rating assigned by my rating official?

At the time of the rating, the rating official 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 rating official within 10 working days. The higher level review must occur prior to submitting the rating to the Performance Review Board (PRB). The reviewing official will review the initial summary rating, the executive's written request, and any other pertinent materials. The reviewing official must prepare a separate written finding and recommendation to the PRB. The reviewing official may not change the initial summary

rating but may recommend a rating other than that assigned by the rating official. A copy of the reviewing official's finding must be provided to the senior executive, the rating official and the PRB. The PRB will consider the initial summary rating, the executive's request and the reviewing official's written findings and recommendations to ensure a full understanding of relevant issues. The PRB will provide a written recommendation to the Executive Resources Board regarding the initial summary rating.