

Understanding Performance Management

An Employee's Duties – Your supervisor should provide you with a copy of the position description for your job. Your position description is the official record of your main duties and responsibilities and is used in developing performance appraisal criteria. Take some time to read through your position description. Ask your supervisor about anything that is not clear to you. Your supervisor should review your position description with you at least once a year to ensure that it accurately reflects your main duties and responsibilities. Keep a copy of your position description and refer to it from time to time. You may want to make notes on your copy when your job changes, so that you can discuss the changes with your supervisor.

Employee Performance Appraisal Plan (EPAP) – The Employee Performance Appraisal Plan (EPAP) is the form used by the Department to evaluate the work performance of its employees under the 5-level appraisal system. When used effectively, the EPAP is a valuable communication tool for both employee development and organizational accomplishments.

Managers and supervisors are responsible for the following:

1. Complying with provisions of the U.S. Department of the Interior's Performance Appraisal Departmental Manual and Handbook (370 DM 430).
2. Establishing performance elements and performance standards that are linked to organizational goals and position descriptions.
3. Monitoring employee performance, communicating with employees about their performance and resolving performance problems.
4. Approving or reviewing ratings recommended by supervisors or rating officials.

The EPAP has several important goals:

1. Clarifying how the employee's performance requirements link to the strategic mission of their organization;
2. Increasing individual productivity by giving employees the information they need to do their jobs effectively;
3. Improving individual/organizational productivity by promoting communication between employees and supervisors about job-related matters, so that better and more efficient methods of operation can be developed; and,
4. Providing a process to recognize employees for good performance and their contributions to the organization.

Appraisal Period – The appraisal period begins October 1 and ends September 30 of each year, except where specific exceptions have been granted. The minimum period on which an appraisal may be based is 90 calendar days. During the appraisal period, your supervisor may periodically discuss your work with you and let you know how you are doing. In addition, before the end of the appraisal period, the supervisor will conduct one formal progress review with you. This progress review is another opportunity for you and your supervisor to discuss your progress, review your position description, identify any training needs or improvements, or to revise your critical performance elements and performance standards.

Performance Elements and Performance Standards – Your supervisor will explain your duties and responsibilities to you and discuss what is expected of you in order to achieve satisfactory performance. To further define your performance expectations, your supervisor will establish performance elements and performance standards for your job. Employee input into this process is required.

Performance elements tell you what work assignments and responsibilities need to be accomplished during the appraisal period. All employees must have one performance element that is linked to the strategic mission or Government Performance Results Act goals of the organization. Between one and five performance elements can be established for a position. These elements are all considered critical elements. They are of such importance to the position that unsatisfactory performance in one element alone would result in a determination that the employee's overall performance is Unsatisfactory.

Performance standards tell employees how well performance elements must be done by defining achievable rating levels for: Exceptional, Superior, Fully Successful, Minimally Successful, and Unsatisfactory performance. These five rating levels focus on results and include credible measures such as quality, quantity, timeliness, cost effectiveness, etc.

Your overall performance is evaluated by your supervisor or rating official using these performance standards. A determination that an employee's overall performance is Unsatisfactory could result in remedial action and unsatisfactory

performance may be the basis for removal or reduction in grade. Minimally Successful performance may result in the denial of a within-grade increase.

The Rating Process – At the end of the appraisal period, your supervisor will carefully review the performance elements and standards for your position. Based on your actual performance, one of five rating levels may be assigned. The rating will be presented to you during the formal performance discussion between you and your supervisor. The appraisal will be completed with your signature and a copy provided to you. This rating is documented on the EPAP form and is considered as your Rating of Record. Your rating of record is directly linked to your eligibility for certain types of pay increases and awards.

Rewarding Performance – Rewarding performance means recognizing good performance and providing incentives to employees for their work efforts and contributions to the organization. At the end of the appraisal period, your supervisor may consider you for an award based on your performance and rating of record as follows:

- Exceptional – Eligible for an individual cash award up to 5% of base pay; a Quality Step Increase; Time-Off Award; or other appropriate equivalent recognition.
- Superior – Eligible for an individual cash award up to 3% of base pay; Time-Off Award, non-monetary award, or other appropriate equivalent recognition.
- Fully Successful – Not eligible for any performance award, but may receive monetary, non-monetary, Time-off, or other appropriate incentive awards for specific accomplishments throughout the year.
- Minimally Successful and Unsatisfactory – Ineligible for any performance recognition.

How to get the most out of your Employee Performance Appraisal Plan

1. Ask for Feedback throughout the appraisal period.

How do you know if you are learning how to do your job and meeting your performance expectations? Talk to your supervisor throughout the appraisal period. Your supervisor wants you to succeed and is available to provide guidance to help you learn how to effectively do your job. Communicating regularly with your supervisor gives you the opportunity to understand the job expectations. It also lets your supervisor know what type of assistance or resources you need to perform your work, and it is a good way to get feedback.

Feedback is information that helps you know how you are progressing in learning the duties and responsibilities of your job. Employees who seek feedback from their supervisors learn their jobs more quickly and with fewer wrong turns than employees who shy away from feedback. Employees who seek feedback spend less time redoing work and turn in work with fewer mistakes. As a result, they improve their work performance.

Getting and using feedback is one of the most important keys to learning your job. As you do your work, ask for feedback from your supervisor to see if you are on track. At first you may feel uncomfortable asking for feedback. But, remember that your supervisor wants you to succeed. As you master your job and get to know your supervisor, you will soon feel more comfortable asking for and receiving feedback.

2. Preparation

a. Before your supervisor prepares your appraisal:

1. Prepare a list of key work accomplishments and give it to your supervisor for consideration in preparing your rating.
2. If you have specific issues come prepared to discuss them. Give your supervisor a "heads up" so that they can also prepare to discuss the issues.
3. Write down any key points and questions you may have.

b. During your performance discussion:

1. Don't be shy about asking for clarification, especially about your supervisor's expectations.
2. Refer to your notes, so that you don't overlook any points that are important to you.
3. Tell your supervisor how you feel things are progressing and if you need any additional information or materials.
4. Let your supervisor know what your short/long-term career goals are.
5. Ask for feedback.

If you still have questions about the Employee Performance Appraisal Plan, please consult with your supervisor.