

Appendix 1: Understanding Performance Management

Position Duties – Your rating official, normally your immediate supervisor, should provide you with a copy of the position description for your job. Your position description is the official record of your primary duties and responsibilities and is used in developing your performance plan. Take some time to read through your position description. Ask your rating official about anything that is not clear to you. Your rating official 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 rating official.

Employee Performance Appraisal Plan – The Employee Performance Appraisal Plan (EPAP) form is the authorized form used by the Department to document the work performance of its employees under the four-level appraisal system. When used effectively, the EPAP form 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 Management System policy (370 DM 430) and supplemental guidance provided in the Department's Performance Management Handbook;
2. Establishing critical elements and performance standards that are linked to organizational goals;
3. Monitoring employee performance, communicating with employees about their performance and addressing performance problems; and
4. Approving or reviewing ratings recommended by supervisors or rating officials.

The EPAP form has several important goals:

1. Clarifying how the employee's performance requirements link to the strategic goals 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 rating officials about job-related matters, so that better and more efficient methods of operation can be developed; and
4. Providing the basis for recognizing 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 rating official 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 rating official will conduct one formal progress review with you. This progress review is another opportunity for you and your rating official to discuss your progress, review your performance plan, identify any training needs or improvements, or to revise your critical elements and performance standards.

Critical Elements and Performance Standards – Your rating official 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 rating official will establish critical elements and performance standards for your job. Employees must be afforded an opportunity to provide input into the development of the critical elements and performance standards. You are encouraged to participate in this process.

Critical elements tell you what work assignments and responsibilities need to be accomplished during the appraisal period. All employees must have at least one critical element that is linked to the strategic goals of the organization. Between one and five critical elements can be established for a position. These elements are considered critical because they are of such importance to the position that Unacceptable performance in one element alone would result in a determination that the employee's overall performance is Unacceptable.

Performance standards tell employees how well critical elements must be accomplished by defining achievable rating levels for: Outstanding, Exceeds Expectations, Fully Successful, and Unacceptable. These four rating levels focus on results and include credible measures such as quality, quantity, timeliness, cost effectiveness, etc.

Your overall performance is evaluated by your rating official using these performance standards. A determination that an employee's overall performance is Unacceptable will result in remedial action and may be the basis for removal from Federal service or reduction in grade.

The Rating Process – At the end of the appraisal period, your rating official will carefully review the critical elements and performance standards for your position. Based on your actual performance, one of four rating levels may be assigned. The rating will be presented to you during the formal performance discussion between you and your rating official. 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 rating official may consider you for an award based on your performance and rating of record as follows:

- Outstanding – Must be considered for an individual cash award, a Quality Step Increase, Time-Off Award, or other appropriate equivalent recognition.
- Exceeds Expectations – Eligible for an individual cash award, Time-Off Award, or other appropriate equivalent recognition.
- Fully Successful – Eligible for an individual cash award, Time-Off Award, or other appropriate equivalent recognition.
- Unacceptable – Ineligible for any performance-based recognition.

The Department's performance-based award policy is explained in 370 DM 451.2. Bureaus/Offices may have additional guidance governing the distribution of performance-based awards.

How to Get the Most Out of the Performance Management Process

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 rating official throughout the appraisal period. Your rating official wants you to succeed and is available to provide guidance to help you learn how to effectively do your job. Communicating regularly with your rating official gives you the opportunity to understand the job expectations. It also lets your rating official 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 well you are accomplishing the duties and responsibilities of your job. Employees who seek feedback from their rating officials 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 rating official to see if you are on track. At first you may feel uncomfortable asking for feedback, but remember that your rating official wants you to succeed. As you master your job and get to know your rating official, you will soon feel more comfortable asking for and receiving feedback.

2. Preparation for the Appraisal Discussion

a. Before your rating official prepares your appraisal:

1. Prepare a list of key work accomplishments and give it to your rating official for consideration in preparing your rating.
2. If you have specific issues come prepared to discuss them. Give your rating official a "heads up" so that he/she 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 rating official's expectations.
2. Refer to your notes, so that you don't overlook any points that are important to you.
3. Tell your rating official how you feel things are progressing and if you need any additional information or materials.
4. Let your rating official know what your short/long-term career goals are.
5. Ask for feedback.

If you still have questions about the EPAP form, please consult with your rating official.