

NRCS
PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDANCE

FOR

NEW 5 LEVEL PERFORMANCE
MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION

This is an at-a-glance tool for establishing hardcopy performance plans, conducting mid-year reviews, and finalizing hardcopy ratings of record. All required forms and other useful guidance and examples are contained on the NRCS Performance Management webpage located at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/hrmd/PerformanceMgt.html>. This site contains: Downloadable forms to develop performance plans and finalize ratings of record; OPM guidance on linking performance plans to organizational goals, a list of questions and answers, a chart showing the significant differences between the Pass/Fail and the new 5 level system; a list of NRCS performance elements and standards, and an example of a completed performance plan and a summary rating of record.

Under the five level performance system, a rating of fully successful represents an employee who has met all of his or her performance requirements. The majority of employees are likely to fall within this category. While employees may have the perception that fully successful is just average, managers and supervisors need to emphasize that fully successful in fact represents totally competent employee performance. The rating categories of “superior” and “outstanding” should be reserved for employees whose performance far exceeds what is expected for competent job performance.

Managers and supervisors should carefully consider the appropriate form of recognition based upon the degree and type of employee accomplishments. The Agency’s Employee Recognition directive identifies the variety of recognition that may be appropriate. Employees whose performance is “fully successful” may merit, for example, an Extra Effort Award for a one time achievement during the performance year. The Performance Recognition directive can be accessed from the performance management webpage.

PERFORMANCE WORK PLAN

Definition: A performance work plan is defined as the written document that identifies the employee’s critical and non-critical elements and performance standards by which the employee will be rated.

Performance Elements and Standards: Performance work plans contain critical and non-critical elements. A performance work plan must contain **at least three, but no more than a total of ten elements**. Each performance plan must contain **at least one-critical and one non-critical performance element**. A performance standard should include, but is not limited to, measurement items such as quality, quantity, cost-efficiency, timeliness, and the manner of performance. (See a list of NRCS critical and non-critical performance elements and standards at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/hrmd/ElementsandStandards1.html>).

Critical Element: A component of a position consisting of one or more duties and responsibilities on which the employee is rated and which contributes toward

accomplishing the goals and objectives of the organization. This work assignment or responsibility is of such importance that unacceptable performance on the element would cause the employee's overall performance to be evaluated at less than the "Fully Successful" level.

Non-Critical Element: A component of an employee's position that does not meet the definition of a critical element but is of a sufficient importance to warrant written appraisal and the assignment of an element rating.

Performance Standard: The management approved expression of the performance threshold(s), requirement(s), or expectation(s) that must be met to be appraised at a particular level of performance. A performance standard must include, under at least the Mission Results element, a link to the agency's strategic plan for the purpose of establishing how the employee's performance ties to the agency's mission critical work. The standard must be written to show specific performance results to be achieved during the rated period. (See "Quick Reference for Developing Performance plans that Link to Organizational Goals at:

http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiiis.dll/GM/GM_360_409_D_32.pdf.

Timeframe: The normal performance appraisal period is from **October 1 through September 30 of the following year**. Establish performance workplans within **30 days** of the beginning of an appraisal period; or within 30 days of appointment, reassignment, promotion, or detail for more than the minimum appraisal period, or when the duties of the position are substantially changed during the established appraisal period.

Forms: Performance works plans are established using Forms **AD-435** (Performance Plan), **435A** (Progress Review and Appraisal Worksheet), and **435B** (Continuation Sheet).

Signatures: The employee and rating official sign and date the performance work plan indicating that it has been discussed, and the employee has had the opportunity to obtain a clear understanding of expectations.

At the time the performance plan is developed, the employee also indicates knowledge and understanding of the standards of conduct (ethics regulations) and acknowledges that questions have been answered to his/her satisfaction by initialing the appropriate block.

Refusal to sign: If the employee refuses to sign the performance work plan at the beginning of the appraisal period, the supervisor should note this in the employee's signature block. The date the plan was discussed with the employee and implemented should also be noted accordingly. Lack of the employee's signature and date on the performance work plan does not negate implementation of the plan.

Copies: The employee is provided a copy of Forms AD-435 A & B and any additional clarifying information. Where there is disagreement as to the content of performance elements and standards, the rating official's decision prevails.

PROGRESS REVIEWS

Definition: A joint discussion between the Rating Official and the employee regarding the employee's progress toward achieving performance standards. The review does not involve the issuance of a rating of record. A minimum of one progress review is required during the performance period.

Timeframe: A minimum of one progress review is required at approximately midway through the rating cycle to discuss the employee's current level of performance.

Form: Key points of the performance discussion should be documented on Form AD-435A, and employees are encouraged to provide written comments on the form or on a separate piece of paper that is then attached to the performance plan.

Signatures: Supervisor and employee initial and date item #6 on Form 435A

Copies: Give the employee a copy of Form 435A with a copy also of any additional attachments documenting the performance review.

Unacceptable Performance: At anytime during the appraisal period that one or more critical element(s) is found to be at the unacceptable level, the employee should be placed on an Opportunity to Improve (OTI) plan. The purpose of an OTI is to provide the employee with a reasonable opportunity to improve performance to the acceptable level.

The OTI form will be completed by the rating official with appropriate input from the employee and technical assistance from the Servicing Human Resources Office. It will be signed by the rating official and the employee indicating receipt and implementation of the plan. The employee's signature is not required, however, to implement the plan.

COMPLETING A RATING OF RECORD

Timeframe: Ratings of record should be completed within **30 days** of the end of the appraisal period.

A summary rating of record may not be given unless elements and standards were established and communicated to the employee, and the employee served under those elements and standards for a minimum of 90 days.

Forms: At the end of the appraisal period, the supervisor with administrative responsibility for the employee documents accomplishments on Forms AD-435, 435A, and 435B.

Documentation: Documentation is required for each element appraised at “Does not Meet Fully Successful” or “Exceeds Fully Successful” level. The documentation must show clearly and specifically how the employee’s performance exceeded or failed to meet the fully successful standard.

Documentation is not required for elements appraised at the “Meets Fully Successful” level, however it may be included if desired.

Weighting of Critical and Non-critical Performance Elements: The weighting of critical and non-critical elements is built into the Decision Table through the use of appraisal units (critical elements are assigned two appraisal units and non-critical elements are assigned one appraisal unit). The electronic version of the Form 435 automatically totals the points received. Use the Decision Table located on the bottom left of Form 435 to convert element ratings to the summary rating.

Decision Table: Use the appraisal unit totals to calculate the final rating of record based upon the decision table on Form 435.

Signatures: Ratings of record must be signed and reviewed by both the rating and reviewing officials. Ratings may not be communicated to employees prior to approval by the reviewing official. This does not preclude discussions between supervisor and employee about performance prior to the determination of the rating of record.

Copies: Provide the employee with a hardcopy of the final rating of record, and submit a hardcopy of the final rating of record to your servicing Human Resources Office.

QUICK STEPS TO DOCUMENTING A SUMMARY RATING

Complete Forms 435, 435A & 435B as shown on samples below.

Critical elements are assigned two appraisal units and non-critical elements are assigned one appraisal unit. Total is automatically calculated when you enter the weights.

Use the Decision Table to convert element ratings to a summary rating .

Supervisor, Reviewing Official, and Employee sign and date.

United States Department of Agriculture Performance Appraisal					
1 Social Security No.		2 Position Number		3 Pay Plan GS	
4 Occup. Series 457		5 Name (Last, First, Middle Initial) DOE, JOHN E.		6 Grade/Step or Pay Level 12/01	
7 Appraisal Period From 12/15/05 To 09/30/06		8 Official Position Title Soil Conservationist			
9 Organization Structure Code		10 Duty Station			
11 Funding Unit		12 Agency Use		13 NFC Use	
Instructions Blocks 1 through 10, completed by NFC, should be reviewed and, if necessary, corrected. Block 11. Enter funding unit number. Block 14. Enter brief description of performance elements. Block 15A. Check performance elements identified as critical. Blocks 15B, 15C, 15D. Rate actual performance by entering 2 for critical elements and 1 for non-critical elements in appropriate column. Blocks 15E, 15F, 15G. Enter total of each column. Block 15H. Enter total from 15E, 15F and 15G. Block 16A. Check off the correct summary rating described in decision table (16B). Blocks 17 through 22. Self-explanatory.					
14 Performance Elements		15A Critical Element (✓)	15B Exceeds Fully Successful	15C Meets Fully Successful	15D Does Not Meet Fully Successful
1) Mission Results		✓		2	
2) Communication			1		
3) Team Leadership		✓		2	
4) Customer Service				1	
5) Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights		✓		2	
6)					
7)					
8)					
9)					
10)					
16B Decision Table (check off Summary Rating in block 16A) Rating of Outstanding if 15E equals 15H. Rating of Unacceptable if any critical element is rated in 15D. Rating of Superior if no element is rated in 15D; 15F is greater than zero; and 15E is greater than 15F. Rating of Marginal if 15G is greater than 16E, and no critical element is rated in 15D. Rating of Fully Successful if none of the above apply. ☐ Un satisfactory for SES ☒ Minimally Satisfactory for SES					
		15E Exceeds 1		15F Meets 7	
				15G Does Not Meet 0	
		15H Enter total 15E + 15F + 15G = 15H		15H 8	
16A Summary Rating (See Decision Table in 16B) <input type="checkbox"/> Outstanding <input type="checkbox"/> Superior <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fully Successful <input type="checkbox"/> Marginal <input type="checkbox"/> Unacceptable <input type="checkbox"/> Un satisfactory for SES <input type="checkbox"/> Minimally Satisfactory for SES					
17 Employee (Check off appropriate box) I have a copy of USDA and Agency regulations on employee responsibilities and conduct; I have discussed them with my supervisor and questions have been answered to my satisfaction. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No					
18 Employee's Signature		Date		If employee did not sign, state reason:	
(Instructions for resolutions of disputes are on the reverse of employee copy.)					
19 Supervisor's Signature		Date		20 Reviewer's Signature	
Date		Date		Date	
21 Approving Official's or Funding Unit Manager's Signature (optional)		Date		22 FOR SES ONLY	
Date		Date		PLA to ES _____ Bonus Amount _____	

Check to indicate summary performance level based upon the decision table

