

**NB\_360\_10\_3, Performance Planning for Fiscal Year 2010**

**National Bulletin:** 360-10-3

**Date:** November 5,  
2009

**Subject:** PER - Performance Planning for Fiscal Year 2010

**Action Required By: December 15, 2009**

**Purpose.** To provide General Schedule (GS) employees with performance planning guidance for fiscal year (FY) 2010. Performance planning includes communicating FY 2010 organizational goals, setting performance expectations, and establishing individual performance objectives and plans. Performance plans for GS employees must be completed by **December 15, 2009**.

**Expiration Date.** March 31, 2010

**Background.** Performance management is the systematic process of planning work and setting expectations, continually monitoring performance, developing the capacity to perform, periodically rating performance in a summary fashion, rewarding good performance, and addressing poor performance. Performance planning means setting and communicating performance expectations and objectives to channel efforts toward achieving organizational objectives. A significant part of the planning process that leads to effective performance management is the alignment of individual measurable objectives and standards with the strategic objectives of the Agency so that day-to-day activities are consistent with the Agency's strategy.

Policy for the Performance Management System can be found in the General Manual (GM), Title 360, Part 409, Performance Management System, in the eDirectives System at <http://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/>. Highlights of the performance planning component of the performance management policy are included in this national bulletin along with changes based on USDA Departmental Regulation 4040-430 and clarification of policy contained in the GM. This national bulletin is not intended to replace Part 409 of the GM, but to provide supplemental and procedural guidance.

**Performance Plan Period**

The FY 2010 appraisal period for all employees is October 1, 2009, through September 30, 2010. All employees must have new written performance plans for FY 2010 with measurable performance objectives and standards by December 15, 2009. Rating officials should ensure plans are entered into EmpowHR, which includes obtaining the reviewing official's and employee's concurrence by the due date of December 15, 2009. Reviewing officials must review and approve all performance plans within their span of control to ensure consistency among plans established for similar positions and conformity with organizational objectives. Plans are not considered effective and final until the rating official, reviewing official, and employee have reviewed and signed-off on the plan.

**Rating Official**

The rating official is the employee's supervisor of record or acting supervisor. There is no minimum time period for the supervisor to have been in the position before becoming a rating official.

**Reviewing Official**

The reviewing official is the employee's second-level supervisor. Responsibilities of the reviewing official include reviewing and approving the performance plans for consistency, fairness, objectivity, and ensuring that plans reflect the overall needs and goals of the Agency.

**Performance Plans**

Employee performance plans must communicate, in writing, performance objectives and standards/measures to be used in evaluating the employee's performance during FY 2010. Performance plans are meant to be flexible, meaning that if NRCS priorities, higher-level organizational objectives, or direct-supervisor expectations change during the performance cycle, performance plans should be

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appropriately updated and approved by the rating official, employee, and reviewing official.

Performance plans must contain at least three, but no more than seven performance elements. Performance plans must contain at least one critical element. The use of non-critical elements is optional and at the supervisors' discretion. The supervisor should designate each performance element as either critical or non-critical. Refer to **Attachment A – Performance Elements**.

Non-supervisory performance plans **MUST** contain:

A critical element for mission-results. The mission-results element replaces the execution of duties element, therefore, if mission-results is used in the plan, the execution of duties element should not be used.

A critical element for civil rights and performance objective and standards that address civil rights awareness and interpersonal skills. The standards for civil rights may be included as a stand-alone critical element or included with another existing critical element.

Because EmpowHR automatically populates the EO/CR element for non-supervisors and headings in EmpowHR cannot be changed for levels below GS 14, the following alternative may be used to workaround the EmpowHR requirement until the system is changed. If supervisors decide not to make the EO/CR element as a stand-alone element, they should take the information from another element that is critical and enter the information under the EO/CR element. Supervisors should note the name of the element in the first line under Standards and include in parentheses that the element includes standards for EO/CR.

Performance plans for supervisors and managers **MUST** contain:

A critical element for leadership/management and/or supervision, which includes a performance standard that addresses accountability for performance management duties.

A critical element for mission-results.

A critical element for equal opportunity/civil rights (EO/CR).

Appropriate measures for employee feedback included in the leadership/management and/or supervision element. Customer/stakeholder feedback must be included in a stand-alone Customer Service element or in other relevant performance elements.

Performance plans must contain performance elements with objectives and standards that incorporate ethics, safety and health, and the protection of personally identifiable information (PII) where warranted by the employee's position.

### **Cascading Objectives and Alignment**

Effective performance management requires that employees have a direct "line of sight" between performance expectations and the Agency's mission and strategic objectives. To accomplish this alignment, employee performance objectives must be aligned with the NRCS Strategic Plan (2005 – 2010) and all relevant updates, and with the Agency's current year's priorities, which are aligned with Departmental and Agency priorities.

Individual performance objectives should cascade from objectives established for Senior Executive Service (SES) members at each level of the Agency. By linking employee performance objectives with executive performance objectives, supervisors demonstrate to employees how their performance contributes to the Agency's achievements. The SES members established their performance objectives for FY 2010 and should **immediately** begin communicating with their direct reports how these objectives should be cascaded down throughout the Agency. Alignment is only required for the mission results element. Note that this requirement is a change from previous years. There are two strategies that can be used when linking individual objectives to higher-level objectives at the next level above the employee:

- (1) Start with an employee's individual performance outcome and work upward to link them to relevant higher-level goals. **OR**
- (2) Start with higher-level objective that is relevant to an employee's job and work downward to develop an individual performance objective.

The decision about whether you should link upwards or downwards is personal preference. Some find it easier to start with something concrete and work upwards; whereas, others may find it easier to start with a broader, high-level concept and develop something concrete that relates to it. Individual objectives can be related to more than one goal at the next higher level.

### Performance Objectives and Standards/Measures

Performance objectives communicate the critically important outcomes, or end-results, the employee is expected to accomplish by the end of the appraisal period. Performance objectives may be developed using the NRCS Strategic Plan (2005 – 2010) and relevant updates, and appropriate Business Plans that align with the NRCS Strategic Plan and the Agency's priorities. The Mission Results performance element should include 2-4 performance objectives. The remaining performance elements should include only 1 performance objective. Thus, the final performance plan should include no more than 5 to 7 performance objectives. For example, a supervisor might have the following objectives in his/her performance plan:

- 3 objectives for Mission Results
- 1 objective for Leadership/Management/Supervision
- 1 objective for Civil Rights

NRCS is moving towards simplifying and focusing individual performance objectives to ensure all employees are clear about their priorities for the current year and how their accomplishments help the Agency meet its current year objectives. Thus, an individual's entire performance plan (Mission Results and other elements) should be no more than 2 to 3 typed pages. For a reference on the level of specificity and detail required, see **Attachment B – Example FY 2010 State Conservationist Performance Plan**. Once the performance plan is entered into EmpowHR, each Performance Element will print on a separate page.

To assist supervisors and employees in developing FY 2010 performance objectives, example performance objectives (outside of Mission Results) have been developed based on workshops with a variety of occupational series within NRCS. These examples should be used as a guide to assist supervisors and employees in developing tailored SMART performance objectives that are appropriate for the individual's position and work level (entry, journeyman, expert). All objectives must adhere to the SMART criteria, "Specific, Measurable, Aligned with Strategic Plans, Realistic, and Time Bound." See **Attachment C – Example Performance Objectives and Standards/Measures** for examples. Source documents such as the employee's position description; business plans, instructions, project proposals, and goals; job analysis; equal opportunity action plans; and or any other source that assigns responsibility for the accomplishment of work are also a good reference to use when developing performance objectives and standards/measures. Additionally, performance plan templates have been developed for positions in several mission critical occupational series that include example objectives and standards/measures. These will be posted to the Human Resources Web site by November 13, 2009 to serve as an additional reference.

Performance objectives are not complete unless they include performance standards that clearly define the indicators for determining the success of the objective. Performance objectives and standards must be developed at the "meets fully successful" level. At "meets fully successful" level, the employee can achieve the objective and meet the expectations set forth by the supervisor regarding the type of actions that must be accomplished and the quality/quantity/timeliness of those actions. Performance objectives and standards must include credible measures of performance that are observable, measurable, and/or demonstrable. Specific measures of quality, quantity, timeliness, cost effectiveness, and/or manner of performance require supervisors and employees to identify which measures are appropriate. Refer to **Attachment D – Instructions and Tools for Writing SMART Performance Objectives and Standards**.

Supervisors and employees in the mission-critical occupations that have performance plan templates; these are to be used as a resource, not as your FY 2010 performance plan. One of the most challenging aspects of performance planning is determining the accurate, achievable, and measurable performance standards/measures incorporated into an overall individual performance objective. The templates should provide a foundation of information for supervisors and employees to use to **develop the current year (FY 2010) individual performance objectives** that clearly align and contribute to NRCS' current year priorities.

### Employee Involvement

Communication between the supervisor and the employee is an essential element of effective performance management. The process for establishing meaningful performance plans requires participation of both the supervisor and the employee. Rating officials should communicate what their own individual performance objectives are, how they align with the Agency's objectives, and what their expectations are for their direct reports regarding how the employee will contribute to meeting those overarching objectives. Based on that information, the employee should draft a set of performance objectives and provide it to their supervisor for review and feedback. The final authority for establishing performance objectives and plans rests with the supervisor.

### **Tips for Processing Plans in EmpowHR**

Employees and supervisors are encouraged to conduct expectations and performance discussions, prepare performance plans in Microsoft Word or Excel, gain reviewing official approval, and then cut and paste the plans into EmpowHR. EmpowHR becomes the repository for the performance plans. See **Attachments E and F** for tips for creating FY 2010 performance plans in EmpowHR.

### **Individual Development Plans (IDP)**

As part of the performance planning process, each employee is encouraged to discuss short- and long-term learning and development goals with the supervisor and to develop an IDP. The IDP includes approved elective training, education, and developmental activities in which employees may engage to improve their knowledge, skills, and abilities and ultimately, job performance. Rating officials retain sole discretion to determine the extent to which an IDP may be implemented taking into consideration operational requirements and budgetary limitations.

NRCS has the ability to create and manage IDPs in AgLearn. AgLearn refers to IPDs as "My Plan" and the features are located under the Career tab. To ensure correct IDP work-flow, employees must have their current supervisor selected in their AgLearn profile. Employees can learn how to establish an IDP by completing the "AgLearn IDP Course."

### **Human Resources Tracking**

The local Human Resources Servicing Office is responsible for monitoring the status of performance plans and generating management reports beginning November 9, 2009. These reports should be provided weekly to Agency leadership to track progress.

**Contact.** If you have any questions concerning performance guidance, contact Denise Cooke, Acting Human Resources Strategy and Accountability Officer, at (202) 720-6646 or by e-mail at [denise.cooke@wdc.usda.gov](mailto:denise.cooke@wdc.usda.gov). For questions related to EmpowHR, contact your local Human Resources Servicing Office.

/s/

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Attachment A - Performance Elements  
Attachment B - Example FY 2010 State Conservationist Performance Plan  
Attachment C - Example Performance Objectives and Standards/Measures  
Attachment D - Instructions and Tools for Writing SMART Performance Objectives and Standards  
Attachment E - Tips for Creating FY 2010 Performance Plans in EmpowHR  
Attachment F - Creating FY 2010 Performance Plans In EmpowHR