

Instructions and Tools for Writing SMART Performance Objectives

Instructions

Step #1: Performance Planning Discussion between Supervisor and Employee

The first step to ensuring effective performance planning is for the supervisor and employee to discuss NRCS strategic goals, FY 2010 priorities, and the higher-level organizational objectives (Deputy Area, Division, Branch, Regional Conservationist, State Conservationist, etc.) relevant to both individuals. In situations where the employee's supervisor is in an "Acting" role or is unavailable prior to the deadline for establishing performance objectives, employees can still develop individual performance objectives based on the information and knowledge they have at the current time. Recall that performance plans can be updated in order to accurately reflect the current organizational priorities and supervisor expectations. Employees should review NRCS' Strategic Plan (2005 - 2010) and relevant updates, and appropriate Business Plans to fully understand the current year priorities.

Step #2: Utilize and Complete the Performance Objective Development Tool

The Performance Objective Development Tool is provided as a resource on the following page. This tool provides a step-by-step process with associated prompts to help brainstorm and document the information needed to develop SMART performance objectives. Both supervisors or employees can use the tool; however, it will be valuable for the employee to draft the first set of performance objectives and obtain feedback from the supervisor. The following steps should be used when completing the tool:

- 1) Determine and document the higher-level objective the employee's work is most related to.
- 2) Determine and document what the employee will do during the rating period to contribute to accomplishing the higher-level objective **OR** determine and document which portion of the higher-level objective the employee is responsible for during the rating period. This should result in identifying a few (2-4) key actions or responsibilities that will assist in achieving the higher-level objective.
- 3) Determine why these actions are so important. Document the end-result of what will occur if these actions are successfully completed. This will likely be related to the higher-level objective, but should not be the exact same end-result. This should be the specific, end-result the **employee** is specifically accountable for by the end of the performance period.
- 4) Determine and document the performance standards/measures that demonstrate the employee's success in accomplishing the objective. These can be thought of as "indicators of success" that are observable and measurable to help a supervisor and employee know the objective was met. The indicators are typically the most challenging aspect of performance objectives. Recall that these should be realistic and written at the "successful" level. The five types of standards include, quality, quantity, cost effectiveness, timeliness, and manner of performance. An additional tool called, *Commonly Used Quality Dimensions*, is presented on page 4 to assist in generating quality indicators of success. This is important because many employees' work is likely measured by quality rather than quantity.
- 5) After the tool has been used to brainstorm the appropriate information, document the final performance objective. Insert the higher-level objective(s) next to *Alignment*. (Note that the alignment only needs to be completed for Mission Results). It should be clear which NRCS priorities the objectives are aligned with. Insert the end-result next to *Outcome*. Insert the key actions, and standards/measures (indicators of success) for each, next to *Performance Standards/Measures*.
- 6) Repeat steps 1 through 5, to develop the required number of performance objectives for Mission Results and other included performance elements in the performance plan.

Step #3: Review, Obtain Feedback, and Finalize Performance Objectives

Employees and supervisors can use the tool provided on page 5 called, *SMART+ Objective Checklist*. The checklist can be used to ensure that each objective meets the SMART criteria. If the employee or supervisor can answer "Yes" to all six questions, then the objective meets the criteria. If the employee or supervisor answers "No" to one of the questions, then they know which aspect of the objective needs to be revised. Once the objectives have been reviewed and revised, they can be finalized and placed into the performance plan to be signed off on by the rating and reviewing officials.

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Performance Objective Development Tool

Performance Objective # ____	
Cascading Objectives/Goals	<i>Which of your supervisor's or higher-level organizational objectives will your work this year help to accomplish?</i>
Major Responsibilities:	<i>What are key things you can do to ensure your supervisor or organizational objective/initiative is accomplished? What major things do you seek to change, oversee, or work on?</i>
End Result:	<i>Why are these actions important? What will change, be produced, or come about as a result of your efforts?</i>
Indicators of Success:	<i>What indicates that you accomplished these actions? What tells you that you were successful in accomplishing what you wanted? What would someone else say?</i>

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Performance Objective:	<p>Alignment:</p> <p>Outcome/End Result:</p> <p>Standards/Measures: (Combine key actions with key indicators of success)</p>
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Commonly Used Quality Dimensions	
Product-based	
Conformance to Standards/Accuracy	The degree to which the product meets relevant standards and is free of errors.
Reliability/Durability	The dependability or life-expectancy of the product.
Appearance/Aesthetics	The degree to which the physical characteristics or layout of the product is appealing to the customer.
Distinctiveness	The degree to which the product is unique from other similar products.
Usefulness	The degree to which the product meets the needs of the customer.
Service-oriented	
Reliability	Consistency of performance and dependability.
Responsiveness	Willingness or readiness to provide service; timeliness of service.
Competence	Demonstrates skill and knowledge to perform the service (e.g., knowing who to contact at what time).
Access	Approachability and ease of contact (e.g., ability of customer to reach employee by phone).
Courtesy	Politeness, respect, and friendliness demonstrated.
Communication	Ability to listen to and clearly inform customers.
Understanding/Knowing the Customer	Understanding the customer's needs (e.g., learning individualized requirements and meeting them).
Credibility	Trustworthiness, believability, honesty.
Security	Ensuring the customer is free of doubt, risk, or danger (e.g., financial security, confidentiality).
Tangibles	Physical evidence of the service (e.g., cleanliness of physical facilities, receipts or statements).

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SMART+ Performance Objective Checklist

The following is a checklist with specific criteria to help you evaluate the effectiveness of your objectives. These are targeted questions meant to help you evaluate whether your objective is as good as it could be.

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1. Does the objective describe at least one important priority or goal? (A)
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2. Does the objective specify an end result, and how the end result will be achieved? (S)
-
3. Does the objective specify how success will be evaluated? (M)
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4. Does the objective specify a period of performance (i.e., is it time-bound, such as "within one month" or "by June 1st"-- if no timeframe is provided, the time frame is by the end of the review cycle-9/30/2010)? (T)
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5. Is the objective realistic and written in a way that allows you to exceed it (i.e., avoids using words like *all*, *always*, or *never*.) (R)
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6. Is the objective written in a way that avoids the use of jargon or acronyms? (+)
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Types of Evaluation:

Quality – How well the work is performed (e.g., accuracy, effectiveness, or usefulness)

Quantity – Amount produced (e.g., raw numbers, percentages, level of productivity)

Timeliness – How quickly the work is completed (e.g., a certain time period or by a certain date)

Cost Effectiveness – How efficiently the product or service was produced and/or outcomes that result in a savings of time or money (e.g., dollar amount saved by creating an efficient method of performing a duty)

Manner of Performance – How the work is performed (the demonstration of key behaviors in achieving the desired result)

