

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Farm Service Agency
Washington, DC 20250

Notice PM-2958

For: FSA and RMA Employees

Review of FY 2016 Performance Plans and Mid-Year Performance Progress Reviews

Approved by: Deputy Administrator, Management



1 Mid-Year Performance Progress Reviews

A Purpose

This notice:

- reminds FFAS rating officials to complete the FY 2016 mid-year performance reviews for all employees no later than **April 30, 2016**, or 90-calendar days after initiating a new performance plan,

Notes: The review should include evaluating progress toward achieving the Mission Area and/or Agency organizational goals, as well as any applicable Secretary's initiatives and/or Civil Rights Performance Plan.

If an employee has not been under a performance plan for a minimum of 90 calendar days on the issuance date of this notice, the supervisor should conduct and document a mid-year performance progress review after 90 calendar days have elapsed.

- reminds all supervisors, managers, and rating officials to review FY 2016 performance plans, to ensure that all required features are present on every plan, which includes the Diversity and Inclusion, Performance Management, Accountability, and Cultural Transformation (CT) standards metrics for all supervisory plans,
- provides guidance to supervisors, managers, and rating officials on EmpowHR, to make any changes and/or corrections to plans before documenting mid-year performance reviews and ensure that employees are aware of all plan modifications, and
- lists the required FY 2016 performance management training courses in AgLearn.

Disposal Date

July 1, 2016

Distribution

All FSA and RMA employees,; State Offices
relay to County Offices

1 Mid-Year Performance Progress Reviews (Continued)

B Performance Accountability

Under the Human Capital Accountability Framework, a critical success factor for the Results-Oriented Performance Culture is the effectiveness of the performance appraisal process. The effectiveness of the appraisal process relies heavily on supervisors, managers, and rating officials using performance results to:

- offer feedback,
- identify developmental needs to help improve employee performance, and
- address instances of poor performance.

Supervisor feedback **must**:

- convey how the employee's performance compares with the expectations expressed in the employee's performance plan,
- describe the impact of the employee's performance on achieving work unit, county, state, or agency goals, and
- communicate how the work unit is progressing in achieving its goals.

A supervisor's, manager's, or rating official's feedback should take into account the feedback received from internal and external customers.

Note: A 100 percent completion rate of mid-year performance progress reviews is **required** for **all** eligible employees. In addition to the long-standing mandate that supervisors, managers, or rating officials conduct mid-year performance progress reviews, there is a specific measure in the department's Cultural Transformation (CT) FY 2014 action plan that the performance plans of all SES, managers, and supervisors include standards that hold the supervisors and managers accountable for the performance management of subordinates. Full compliance with the requirements of DR-4040-430 will be a significant factor in achieving the performance standards, for both first-line supervisors and the managers to whom they report.

The updated Performance Management DR-4040-430, located at <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/document/departmental-regulation-4040-430> and effective October 1, 2013, describes the new impact to supervisors' and managers' Leadership and Supervision element rating.

Failure to meet the performance management deadlines established by the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) and/or the respective agency or staff office should, at a minimum, preclude an element rating of "Exceeds Fully Successful", and failure to meet the requirements in the Performance Management category altogether should result in an element rating of "Does Not Meet Fully Successful."

1 Mid-Year Performance Progress Reviews (Continued)

C Forum for Discussion

The mid-year performance progress review provides a forum for supervisors, managers, rating officials, and employees to:

- review and discuss performance elements and standards, and make any necessary changes,
- gauge and discuss the employee's progress in meeting the performance expectations (standards and elements) needed to achieve or surpass a "Fully Successful" level of performance, which is, "Are we achieving expected results?",
- provide an avenue for employees to understand where and how to improve performance, and
- revisit or develop Individual Development Plans.

2 Responsibilities

A Supervisors, Managers, and Rating Officials Responsibilities

Supervisors, managers, and rating officials are responsible for:

- monitoring performance during the rating period,
- providing timely feedback to employees on their performance,
- reviewing employee elements and standards and revise, if needed,
- providing training and developmental opportunities, if available,
- conducting at least one progress review at the midpoint of the appraisal cycle for each employee,
- ensuring that performance plans are established for new or transferred employees and conducting a timely progress review that allows for a minimum of 90 calendar days for performance, in cases where the plan was established months after the start of the performance cycle,
- informing the employee of his or her level of performance as it relates to their established performance plan's elements and standards,
- ensuring that every employee receives a mid-year performance progress review, and
- ensuring adherence to applicable Union Collective Bargaining Agreements.

2 Responsibilities

B Reviewing Official Responsibilities

Reviewing officials are responsible for the following:

- ensuring that supervisors, managers, and rating officials carry out their performance management responsibilities, and
- assessing the supervisor's, manager's, or rating official's performance in fulfilling these responsibilities.

C Employee Responsibilities

Employees are responsible for the following:

- participating in discussions and documentation of their progress reviews,
- ensuring there is a clear understanding of performance expectations and how performance relates to the mission of the organization, and requesting clarification if necessary,
- reviewing the mid-year performance rating in EmpowHR,
- seeking timely performance feedback from their rating official and internal and external customers, when appropriate,
- taking personal responsibility for their own training and development, and
- reviewing employee responsibilities and conduct requirements at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/hrdapp?area=home&subject=labr&topic=erc>.

3 Conducting Performance Reviews

A Mid-Year Performance Progress Reviews

Supervisors, managers, and rating officials shall prepare for the mid-year performance progress review process by preparing talking points that are applicable to each individual employee and gathering any samples or highlighting examples of work products for improvement. Individual meetings shall be scheduled with each employee to conduct mid-year performance progress review discussions. See Exhibits 2 through 4 for additional guidance for supervisors, managers, and rating officials on preparing for and conducting the mid-year performance progress reviews and offering feedback to employees.

3 Conducting Performance Reviews

A Mid-Year Performance Progress Reviews

All non-SES employee mid-year performance progress reviews shall be completed by, **April 30, 2016**.

Notes: If an employee has not been under a performance plan for the required minimum 90 calendar days on the issuance date of this notice, the supervisor, manager, or rating official must conduct and document the mid-year performance progress review after the required 90 calendar days have elapsed.

HRD will conduct audits to ensure that:

- all mid-year performance progress reviews are completed by the **April 30, 2016**, deadline,
- performance plans have required standards, and
- delinquent compliance is communicated to FFAS leadership.

B Review of FY 2016 Performance Plans

It is strongly recommended that supervisors, managers, and rating officials review FY 2016 performance plans and ensure that the following required standards are present:

- EEO/CR, Diversity and Inclusion element,
- customer service element,
- one to three additional performance elements, each with a results statement,
- cascading alignment statement, for at least one critical, that shows clear linkage to the strategic plan,
- results statement for each element,
- PII and safety and health standards,
- at least three standards for each element,
- standards established at the “Fully Successful” level, and
- inclusion of performance management accountability and CT, and employee engagement standards for all supervisors, managers, and rating officials in subparagraph C.

3 Conducting Performance Reviews (Continued)

C CT Metrics for Performance Plans

The FY 2016 Cultural Transformation Milestones and Metrics Progress Card include the following two effective measures specific to performance plans.

- Performance plans of all SES, managers, supervisors, and rating officials will include a performance element that holds them accountable for the performance management of subordinates. This includes establishing performance plans on a timely basis, conducting mid-year performance progress reviews, and completing an annual evaluation within the established timeframes for all eligible employees.
- Performance plans of all SES, managers, supervisors, and rating officials will include CT initiatives (for example, CT milestones and metrics) and ensure the same for applicable employees within that organization to include how employees will be evaluated on those measurements.

Managers should ensure that all non-SES/SL/ST managerial and supervisory performance plans cover the requirements for both CT measures.

D Engagement Standard for Supervisory Performance Plans

Engagement is a standard created and required by the Department. Supervisors will be evaluated and rated on the following:

- actively creates an environment that promotes staff engagement, integration, and collaboration
- identifies both strengths and challenges related to employee engagement, development, and satisfaction, based on employee feedback and the data collected with the most recent Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey and County Employee Viewpoint Survey
- works proactively and inclusively with staff members to develop and implement strategies to maintain areas of strength and improve engagement and satisfaction in the organizational unit
- promotes open, candid, and ongoing dialogue with and among the staff to develop more comprehensive and innovative insights to manage obstacles to engagement.

Note: Supervisors must be able to document the actions taken to meet these standards.

E Special Note About Changes to Performance Plans

If a manager, supervisor, or rating official is going to make any changes to a FY 2016 performance plan, the changes **must** be made to the performance plan in EmpowHR **before** initiating the midyear review in EmpowHR.

3 Conducting Performance Reviews (Continued)

E Special Note About Changes to Performance Plans (Continued)

After a mid-year performance review is entered for the FY 2016 performance plan, the manager, supervisor, or rating official will not be able to add or subtract elements for the FY 2016 performance plan. Performance plans in EmpowHR become “locked” after any type of review (progress or summary rating) is approved and concurred. Therefore, make all required revisions to the FY 2016 Performance Plans before saving a mid-year performance progress review in EmpowHR.

A mid-year performance progress review should be conducted for any elements and standards that are currently in place and have not changed or were not added within the past 90 calendar days. If a manager, supervisor, or rating official makes changes to the performance objectives or corresponding standards within an element, employees must be given the opportunity to perform under the modified standards for at least 90 calendar days before being rated against the modification. The 90 calendar day period does not apply if changes were made in alignment and linkage to enhance the existing performance plan and with no changes to the existing performance elements. Changes can be made to the performance standards for this performance appraisal period until **June 30, 2016**, for employees to receive their summary rating for the performance appraisal period ending **September 30, 2016**. The employee **must** be informed of all revisions to their performance plan.

F Other Special Circumstances

If there has been a change in manager, supervisor, or rating official since the performance plan was established, the new manager, supervisor, or rating official shall not conduct the performance review until at least 90 calendar days have passed. If there has been no rating official for at least 90 calendar days, the reviewing official shall conduct the review.

Supervisors or managers changing positions or leaving the agency shall conduct a mid-year performance progress review for all of their eligible employees and must document the mid-year performance progress reviews in EmpowHR before departing the agency.

New supervisors or managers shall conduct an additional performance review for eligible employees after the employee has been under their supervision for 90 calendar days. This additional mid-year performance progress review shall be documented using paper **only**. EmpowHR does **not** allow or permit documenting two mid-year performance progress reviews for an employee. The new supervisor or manager shall retain a hard copy of the new mid-year performance progress review.

3 Conducting Performance Reviews (Continued)

F Other Special Circumstances (Continued)


Employees changing a position should receive a departure rating, which is an appraisal that is completed when an employee has served on a performance plan for at least 90 calendar days and is leaving one permanent position for another. The departing rating may be provided in hard copy to the new supervisor. This is **not** a formal rating of record and is **only** to be considered by the rating official when determining the annual rating of record.

G Documenting Mid-Year Performance Progress Reviews in EmpowHR

Managers, supervisors, or rating officials **must** document in EmpowHR that the FY 2016 mid-year performance progress review was conducted for each employee. Progress reviews are only to be conducted and entered into EmpowHR 90 calendar days after the creation of the performance plan. Although, at the present time, the EmpowHR System will allow managers, supervisors, or rating officials to finalize a plan and then enter a progress review, this sequence should only be followed in instances when a hard copy performance plan has already been established and is in place for the required 90-calendar-day period and the action is being taken to data load the established plan into EmpowHR.

Note: RMA supervisors who created draft plans in EmpowHR and printed out a hard copy for employees to sign as the official copy should now finalize the draft that has been in place for the required 90 calendar days, and enter the final plan and the progress review in the EmpowHR system.

Managers, supervisors, and rating officials shall follow these steps to enter mid-year performance progress reviews into EmpowHR.

Step	Action
1	<p>Sign into EmpowHR and select:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Manager Self Service”, • “Tasks”, • “Performance”, or • “Progress Review”. <p>The names of all the managers, supervisor’s, or rating official’s employees will be displayed.</p>
2	CLICK “New Review” next to the employee’s name to enter the FY 2016 mid-year performance review.
3	CLICK “  ” next to the “Review Period From” box to select a value. After selecting the beginning date of the current rating period, CLICK “Add.” The employee’s “Progress Review” tab will be displayed.

3 Conducting Performance Reviews (Continued)

G Documenting Mid-Year Performance Progress Reviews in EmpowHR (Continued)

Step	Action
4	<p>Select the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Elements and Standards”, • “View All”, to review all elements, or • “Progress Review”.
5	Enter comments in the “Reviewer Comments” box and CLICK “Save”.

Managers, supervisors, or rating officials may view the step-by-step process on documenting the mid-year performance progress reviews in EmpowHR at http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/supmidyrreview.ppt

Scroll down to “Performance Mid-Year Review” for an example of how to document a mid-year performance progress review in EmpowHR.

Reminder: After a mid-year performance progress review is entered against the FY 2016 performance plan, managers, supervisors, and rating officials will **not** be able to revise the FY 2016 performance plan. Performance plans in EmpowHR become “locked” after any type of review (progress or summary rating) is approved and concurred. Therefore, all required revisions to the FY 2016 performance plans must be completed **before** saving in EmpowHR.

If there are problems with EmpowHR, contact the EmpowHR help desk at 816-823-3996.

H Periodic Optional Performance Reviews

Even though only a mid-year performance progress review is required, it is in the best interest of managers, supervisors, rating officials, and employees to periodically hold performance discussions. An employee may request a meeting for this review. Periodic performance reviews with the employee will:

- provide regular feedback,
- keep the channels of communication open,
- assist in identifying strengths and weaknesses, and
- help avoid an unexpected performance rating at the end of the appraisal period.

Note: Periodic performance reviews are **not** recorded in EmpowHR, but should be documented using AD-435A, which is generated from EmpowHR.

4 Poor Performance and Resources for Supervisors and Managers

A Below Fully Successful Level (or Does Not Meet) Mid-Year Performance Progress Reviews

The mid-year performance progress review provides an opportunity for managers, supervisors, and rating officials to heighten employees' awareness of the process and procedures for addressing poor performance, to convey feedback, and have necessary discussions with an employee whose performance is determined to be less than fully successful or at a "Does Not Meet" level of performance. Managers, supervisors, and rating officials are encouraged to consult with their servicing Employee/Labor Relations and Benefits Branch (ELRBB) specialist immediately upon such a determination, particularly if the element is critical. The assistance and guidance provided by the ELRBB specialist will be timely and useful in helping to navigate the process of dealing with a poor performer. If the employee is performing at the "Does Not Meet" level in a critical element, the rating official **must** contact their ELRBB specialist for guidance.

B Addressing Marginal or Unacceptable Performance

Any actions taken to address marginal or unacceptable performance **must** be conducted in consultation with servicing personnel offices (SPO) and/or State Office Administrative Officers.

5 Additional Information and Contacts

A Additional Information

Additional performance management information can be found on the HRD performance management web site at

http://fsaintranet.dev.sc.egov.usda.gov/fsa/operations/hrd/workforce_succession/Performance%20Management1/Performance_Management1.htm.

5 Additional Information and Contacts (Continued)

B Performance Management Training

The following courses will be added to supervisors' and/or non-supervisors' AgLearn "To-Do List" as indicated. These courses can be accessed at <http://www.aglearn.usda.gov/>, and must be completed by **July 30, 2016**.

- **Monitoring and Improving Performance**

For Supervisors - This course:

- provides guidance on monitoring and improving employee performance using a four-step process that covers setting targets, collecting the necessary information, analyzing that information, and responding to performance gaps that appear
- provides steps for identifying appropriate targets and standards against which performance can be measured
- introduces different ways of analyzing data to decide on appropriate action.
- presents a technique for dealing with underperformers in a positive and collaborative way.

- **Performance Management Overview**

For Supervisors - The performance management overview provides an overview of the performance management cycle, describes the importance of open communication between managers and/or supervisors and employees during the cycle, and provides, leader, manager and/or supervisor and employee responsibilities. The course also identifies the performance management modules that will help with each responsibility.

- **Performance Management for Non - Supervisors**

May also be used by RMA - Over the past few years, FSA has been enhancing its performance management system. As an integral part of this process, performance management training has been available for supervisors and managers. This online training course has been designed and developed specifically for non-supervisory employees to help develop a better understanding of the components of the performance management system at FSA, the purpose, how performance management impacts employees, your role in the system, and the roles of others.

- **Performance Management in USDA**

This course is optional for supervisors and non-supervisors.

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5 Additional Information and Contacts (Continued)

C Contacts

If there are any questions about mid-year performance progress reviews, then managers, supervisors, rating officials, and employees shall contact one of the following.

IF located in...	THEN contact HRD, Policy and Accountability Branch by any of the following...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• FSA APFO• FSA Kansas City or St. Louis• FSA Washington, DC• RMA	Michael Braswell by: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• telephone at:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 202-401-0392• 202-205-9057 (TTY), or• e-mail at michael.braswell@wdc.usda.gov.
FSA state or county office	State Office Administrative Officer.

Note: If there are problems with the EmpowHR System, contact the EmpowHR Help Desk at 816-823-3996.

Steps for Preparing Mid-Year Performance Reviews

1. Review documentation you have about the employee's performance.

Maintain a record of good performance documentation (such as work samples, logs, records, customer praises or complaints, and other documentation) throughout the performance period. Review the documentation to assess how the employee is performing and meeting expectations. Follow these simple guidelines:

- keep observations of performance objective (focused on behavior), and not subjective,
- have concrete examples to support assessments, and
- do not hold the employee accountable for factors beyond their control; for example, changes in workload, priorities, duties, and opportunities may affect employee performance.

2. Compare current performance with expectations.

Compare your observations about the employee's current performance with the measurable standards in their performance plan. Identify areas of success and areas of concern.

3. Assess developmental opportunities.

Has the employee completed developmental opportunities that have affected performance? Determine whether additional opportunities are needed.

4. Help the employee prepare for the meeting.

- agree on a specific time and place for the discussion
- explain the purpose of the meeting and what will be discussed
- make sure the employee has a copy of their performance plan
- suggest that the employee bring additional work samples that highlight his or her performance
- ask the employee to think about their areas of strength and areas for development.

5. Document the employee's accomplishments in a written narrative.

The narrative should describe the employee's accomplishments for each element. The narrative should be brief and specific and address the breadth, score, and/or impact of their achievements.

Steps for Conducting Mid-Year Progress Reviews**1. Open the meeting.**

- establish a relaxed, nonthreatening environment in which the employee feels secure and respected
- hold the meeting in “neutral territory” and provide a comfortable environment
- eliminate distractions, such as ringing phones, e-mail, pagers, etc.
- establish a positive tone when you greet the employee and welcome them to the discussion
- review the meeting’s goal what will be discussed.

2. Discuss accomplishments and expectations.

- provide a general summary of the employee’s performance
- discuss areas of success and areas of concern, according to expectations
- suggest further developmental opportunities
- identify any changes to the performance plan.

3. Close the meeting.

- summarize what has been discussed and agreed on and ask the employee for input
- confirm any follow-up actions
- express commitment to the employee’s growth and success
- ensure that all the employee’s concerns have been addressed
- ask the employee to acknowledge in EmpowHR that the mid-year review discussion occurred.

4. Complete any follow-up activities.

Tips for Giving Effective Feedback

Effective feedback meets the following four characteristics:

- Descriptive - Feedback should be specific, not general, and provide measurable and observable details
- Objective - Feedback should be based on facts, not your beliefs, assumptions, or hearsay. It should be provided according to a known standard, criterion, or performance expectation
- Timely - Feedback should be given as close to the performance as possible so that it is meaningful and can be integrated into future performance
- Professionally Delivered - Feedback should be delivered in a manner where both the words you say and the way you say them (tone of voice, body language) are professional.

Involve the employee in the feedback process and ask the employee to prepare a list of accomplishments.

- √ Request feedback from the employee's customers, coworkers, colleagues, or other managers.
- √ Feedback should be a combination of both positive and constructive feedback. Start the conversation stating something the employee does well.
 - Positive feedback involves telling your employee about good performance. Be descriptive and objective in describing the behavior. Tell the employee why you liked it and why it is important. When possible, tie the performance to the agency's goals. Example: "You solved that database migration problem very quickly this morning. That really prevented disruptions to the system's operations."
 - Constructive feedback alerts an employee to an area in which their performance could improve. When providing constructive feedback, be sure to describe the following:
 - Situation - Describe the situation in which the performance occurred. Give your perspective on where and when the performance occurred. Example: "This morning at the meeting when we were discussing the new project..."
 - Behavior - Describe the behavior that you observed or heard. Focus on the employee's actions, not the person. Example: "This morning at the meeting when we were discussing the new project, you may not have realized it, but you interrupted me several times..."

Tips for Giving Effective Feedback (Continued)

- **Impact** - Describe the impact the performance had on you, others, and/or the agency. Be specific and objective about the impact by providing your actual observations. Link the impact of the employee's performance to expected standards. Example: "This morning at the meeting when we were discussing the new project, you may not have realized it, but you interrupted me several times. These interruptions confused the staff and required numerous clarifications that took away time slated to address additional key items of concern".
 - **Next Steps** - Describe specific changes in behavior that you expect in a specific period of time and follow up as scheduled. Ask the employee's help in solving the problem. Example: "While your participation is important, I'd like for you to refrain from interrupting speakers. When others are speaking, you should indicate to the speaker that you have something to say and wait until the speaker acknowledges you. Let's schedule a time to get back together next Tuesday to see how this process works".
- √ Check to make sure the employee understands by asking a question or observing changed behavior.
- √ End the meeting on a positive note.