

October 01, 2009

For: FAS Employees

FAS Performance Management Program

Approved by: Michael V. Michener
Administrator



1 Overview

A Background

The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 set the foundation for strategic planning and performance measurement in the Federal government. In 2002, the President's Management Agenda focused on improving government performance and integrating performance with the budget. Congress also passed the Chief Human Capital Officer's Act, which required the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to develop the Human Capital Assessment and Accountability Framework (HCAAF) to assess the effectiveness of Federal agencies in managing their human resources. One of the key implementing systems of HCAAF is a results-oriented performance culture which requires a performance management program that differentiates between high and low performance and ensures employee performance plans are aligned with the organizational goals. In 2005, all employees, beginning with senior managers, developed and implemented performance plans that aligned with and supported the Agency's organizational goals. Since then, FAS further improved its performance management program with specific requisites aimed at improving agency performance, program effectiveness and accountability.

For 2009, new supervisory standards were added to the Customer and Employee Perspective Standard (page 10, Para. 8F); and the Employee Responsibilities and Conduct standard was added to the Administrative Requirements Standards for Supervisory (page 11, Para. 8H) and Nonsupervisory Employees (page 14, Para. 9F).

For 2010, security controls for sensitive and classified materials was added, a requirement to document the results of the midyear performance review was added, and supervisory elements were revised.

B Purpose

This notice announces the FY 2010 FAS Performance Management Program.

C Authorities

The FAS Performance Management Program is based on the following:

- 5 U.S.C. Chapter 43
- 5 CFR Part 430
- USDA Performance Management Departmental Regulation 4040-430

D Coverage

The FAS Performance Management Program applies to all FAS employees (including Schedule B employees and re-employed annuitants), except for:

- individuals in the Senior Executive Service (SES) and Senior Foreign Service (SFS)
- individuals in the Foreign Service
- individuals for which employment is not reasonably expected to exceed the minimum appraisal period (90 days) in a consecutive 12 month period
- individuals excluded from coverage by statute or by OPM regulation.

Note: Contractors are not covered.

E Effective Date

The FY 2010 FAS Performance Management Program is effective October 1, 2009.

F Action

All supervisors shall ensure that all of their employees' performance plans comply with the provisions of this notice. Any changes that need to be made to bring an employee's performance plan into compliance with this notice shall be completed no later than October 30, 2009.

2 Responsibilities

A Administrator Responsibilities

The Administrator is responsible for the following:

- monitoring program compliance with applicable laws and regulations, Department policies, and collective bargaining agreements
- ensuring program compliance with policy and program direction and administration
- developing and communicating the Agency mission, strategic goals, and objectives to assist supervisors and managers in developing employee performance plans.

B Rating Official Responsibilities

Rating officials are responsible for the following:

- determining and communicating the appropriate FAS and USDA mission, goals, objectives, priorities, and relative performance standards and measures to employees
- communicating performance expectations clearly and holding employees responsible by establishing individual performance plans and creating a performance culture and environment that promotes a high performing work unit
- engaging the employee in the process of establishing and documenting performance plans and providing a written copy of the performance plan at the beginning of each rating period or no later than 30 days after the beginning of each rating period or assignment of an employee to a position, or when performance plans are revised during the rating period
- ensuring that each employee's performance plan has at least 1 critical element that is aligned to the mission, goals, and outcomes of FAS and USDA
- monitoring performance during the rating period, including completing and documenting a midyear performance review that notes any areas for improvement over the remainder of the rating period;
- providing feedback to employees on their performance, supporting the development of employees, and conducting one or more progress reviews as provided for in this notice
- preparing performance ratings in a timely manner, making meaningful distinctions among employees based on performance, and fostering and rewarding excellent performance and addressing poor performance.

C Reviewing Official Responsibilities

Reviewing officials are responsible for the following:

- managing individual and organizational performance and creating a work culture and environment that promotes a high-performing work unit
- implementing the principles, policies, procedures, and requirements of the performance management program within their span of control
- ensuring that rating officials carry out their performance management responsibilities and assessing the rating official's performance in fulfilling these

responsibilities

- reviewing and approving the performance plans and ratings of their subordinate rating officials for consistency, fairness, objectivity, and completeness and ensuring the plans reflect the larger organization's overall needs and goals
- ensuring transparency, fairness, and consistency in consideration for awards within their organization
- resolving disagreements between the rating officials and employees.

Note: In all discussions, the reviewing official shall make the final decision.

D Employee Responsibilities

Employees are responsible for the following:

- participating in discussions with their rating official concerning the development of performance elements, standards and measures; individual development plan; progress reviews; summary ratings; and documenting their performance plan
- ensuring that they have a clear understanding of their performance expectations and how performance relates to the mission of the organization, and requesting clarification if necessary
- taking responsibility to continuously improve performance, identify and agree with the rating official on appropriate professional development activities, support team endeavors, develop professionally, and perform at their full potential
- identifying work problems and cooperating with rating officials to resolve them
- seeking performance feedback from their rating official and internal and external customers, as appropriate.

E Director, Human Resources Division (HRD), FSA Responsibilities

Director, HRD, FSA is responsible for the following:

- overseeing the performance management program and its results
- periodically evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of the performance management program.

F HRD, FSA

HRD, FSA is responsible for the following:

- providing technical and operational support and advice to the rating and reviewing officials in administering the performance management program in a manner consistent with applicable laws, rules, and regulations
- ensuring that performance plans and ratings of record are maintained in HRD according to 5 CFR Parts 293 and 297
- providing training on the performance management program to all employees.

3 Establishing Performance Plans

A Rating Period and Documentation

The rating period starts October 1 of each year and ends September 30 of the following year.

Performance plans should be:

- established within 30 calendar days of the start of the rating period or of an employee's assignment to a position
- reviewed and, if necessary, amended, each time a work assignment changes significantly, up to 90 days before the end of the rating period.

Employees must be informed of and participate in any changes made to their performance plan. Any changes should be initialed on the performance plan by the supervisor and employee.

Performance plans are documented on AD-435A and AD-435B.

Note: AD-435A and AD-435B are available from the FFAS Employee Forms Online web site at <http://165.221.16.90/dam/ffasforms/currentforms.asp>.

B Employee Participation

Employee participation is required in establishing or revising a performance plan. This can be accomplished by whatever method works best for the parties concerned. For example, the supervisor could ask the employee to develop a draft plan for discussion or the supervisor could develop a draft plan for discussion. Where there are differences between the employee and the supervisor, however, the final decision shall be made by the reviewing official.

4 Cascading Alignment

Performance plan alignment is an ongoing process and offices must continue this process into FY 2010 and beyond. Supervisors must develop performance plans for their employees that include at least 1 critical element with standards that identify

clear and measurable tasks and results that are aligned to organizational goals.

Supervisors and employees are encouraged to align more than one element, where possible. Alignment should be clear and transparent so that employees can see how their performance plans support organizational goal achievement. Merely including a generic statement in performance plans that employees support organizational goals is not adequate for communicating alignment. Simply restating organizational goals without also including the metrics for determining performance against those goals is not adequate. It should be possible to map the responsibility for specific organizational goals through the performance plans of the chain of responsibility (SES/SFS member, to manager, to supervisor) to the front-line employee.

In developing the performance plan, supervisors shall:

- ensure that all employees are aware of the Agency's and USDA's current Strategic Plan or organizational goals

Note: FAS' Strategic Plan can be found at
<http://www.fas.usda.gov/admin/stratplan.asp>.

USDA's Strategic Plan can be found at
<http://www.ocfo.usda.gov/usdasp/usdasp.htm>.

- communicate how organizational goals are linked and cascaded to individual performance, and how the employee's accomplishments support organizational goals within their organizations, through:
 - staff meetings
 - individual or team meetings
 - electronic and internal correspondence
- Include at least 1 critical element with standards that identify clear and measurable (quality, quantity, cost, and/or timely) tasks and expected results that are aligned to organizational goals.

Aligned standards should be preceded by a version of the following paragraph, depending on which part of the strategic plan is being addressed.

- "The following results-focused measures align with USDA Strategic Goal (), "(title of goal)", Strategic Objective (), "(title of objective)" in the USDA Strategic Plan, and with FAS Strategic Goal (), "(title of goal)", Strategic Objective (), "(title of objective)" in the FAS Strategic Plan:".

5 Results

Each element in a performance plan must include language that holds the employee accountable for achieving expected results. This must be shown by explaining the

results gained by the employee achieving their standards.

Example: “Review 90% to 100% of SPS/TBT notifications to ensure foreign regulations comply with WTO agreements and, if appropriate, coordinate official U.S. comments within prescribed timeframe. The result is U. S. producers, exporters, and consumers receive the full economic benefit of international trade agreements and rules.”

Results must be appropriate to the employee’s level of responsibility.

6 Balanced, Credible Measures

All performance plans must include balanced, credible measures.

In addition to measuring expected results, the performance plans must include appropriate measures, such as:

- quality, quantity, timeliness, and/or cost-effectiveness
- indicators of competencies.

To be credible, performance expectations must be:

- based on job analysis
- clear, specific, and understandable
- reasonable and attainable
- measurable, observable, or verifiable
- communicated in a timely manner
- and foster continual improvement in productivity.

7 Individual Development Plans (IDP)

As part of the performance planning process, employees are responsible for discussing their short- and long-term learning and developmental goals with their supervisor and developing an IDP. IDP’s contain elective training, education, and developmental activities in which employees may engage to acquire the competencies to meet IDP goals. Rating officials retain sole discretion to determine the extent of implementation for IDP’s and will do so after considering operational requirements and budgetary limitations.

8 Elements and Standards for Supervisory Employees

A Elements

The basis for elements is the requirements of the employee’s position. Applicable sources for developing elements include position descriptions, work plans, organizational goals and objectives, and any other source that assigns or fixes responsibility for accomplishing work.

Supervisors shall establish at least 3 but no more than 7 elements. See Exhibit 1 for a menu of elements from which the 3 to 7 elements may be selected. Other job specific elements may be created, if necessary, in addition to those elements listed in Exhibit 1.

Supervisors shall determine what elements shall be critical and noncritical. At least 1 element must be critical and 1 element must be noncritical. Critical elements cover duties that are essential to the successful performance of the position. On the summary rating:

- critical elements will be scored as 2 rating “points”
- noncritical elements will be scored as 1 rating “point”.

B Required Elements

The following elements are mandatory for all supervisory employees (see Exhibit 1 for the descriptions associated with these elements):

- the “Aligned” element (must be critical)
- the “Supervision” element (must be critical)
- the “Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights” element (must critical) (see paragraph 8 G below for required standards)
- the “Administrative Requirements” element.

C Customer Service (CS) Element

A separate CS element is not required for supervisory employees. The element may be separate or built into another critical element. If the supervisor decides that there will not be a separate CS element, the following CS language must be built into the element description (Block 7 of the Form AD-435A/B) of another critical element:

“Routinely displays courteous and tactful behavior. Projects a positive and professional image of USDA. Demonstrates FAS Core Values. Provides advice that is timely, responsive and accurate. Maintains appropriate rapport with internal and external customers. Develops and establishes working relationships with external organizations as required. Keeps supervisor and/or team leader informed of difficult and/or controversial issues and unique problems. Takes action to effectively solve problems before they have an adverse impact on the organization or other employees.”

Supervisors will choose the appropriate element in which to place the above CS descriptive language and will develop at least 1 standard (of the mandatory 3 standards per element) to address the CS component.

Note: If the CS element is kept separate, it must be critical.

D Standards

For each element, there must be at least 3 written standards for measuring performance of the element. Standards must be observable, measurable, and attainable by the employee. Standards need only be written at the "Meets Fully Successful" level in the performance plan. However, rating officials should be prepared to explain performance at the "Does Not Meet Fully Successful" and "Exceeds Fully Successful" levels. Do not include phrases like "other duties as assigned". Standards are placed in Block 8 of the Form AD-435A/B.

E Performance Management Standard

All supervisory performance plans shall contain the following standard in the "Supervision" element (Block 8 of the Form AD-435A/B):

"Effectively manages and administers the human and fiscal resources put under his/her direction, giving due attention to the need for internal controls, applicable U.S. and foreign laws and regulations, and Departmental and FAS management policies. Completes accurate and timely reports in all budget and administrative areas. Effectively responds to end-user requirements. Develops knowledge of currently available software and manages information effectively and securely, including providing oversight of all public reports completed by his/her staff. Employee performance plans focus on results achieved, contain at least one element that is aligned with FAS and USDA mission, goals, and objectives, and are in place within 30 calendar days of the beginning of the rating period. Mid-year reviews are documented and conducted according to Agency guidelines. Ratings are accurate and issued within 30 calendar days of the end of the rating period. Individual Development Plans are completed for each employee."

F Customer and Employee Perspective Standard

Performance plans for supervisory employees must take into consideration customer and employee perspective; therefore, all performance plans for supervisory employees will incorporate each of the following standards into a critical element:

- "Seeks employee feedback to identify needs and expectations and considers employee perspective when making decisions affecting employees to develop a well-informed staff who are effective and efficient implementers of management decisions."
- "Feedback from staff indicates that they understand the agency's direction, the goals and their role in achieving these goals; understand what is expected of them; were involved in developing their performance plans; understand how well they are performing and where they need to improve; have performance plans that accurately reflect their performance measures; have the necessary tools and resources to accomplish their work; where they do not have what

they need, they understand why; have the skills and knowledge they need to do their jobs, or a plan to obtain them; are acknowledged and appreciated for good performance."

- "Internal and external stakeholder needs and expectations are considered in making decisions, devising solutions, and resolving conflicts. Those consistent with corporate priorities are included in plans and commitments, and are monitored for success in achieving satisfactory results."
- "Feedback from customers indicates satisfaction with the quality of service delivered, including that the service was provided in a collaborative manner and met the customers' needs; and the quantity and quality of information delivered, including that the information provided increased the customers' understanding of the agency's programs."

G Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights (EO/CR) Standards

All supervisory performance plans shall contain the following EO/CR standards (Block 8 of the Form AD-435A/B):

"To be rated fully successful, the individual must achieve 4 or 5 of the 6 following standards:

1. provides EO/CR/Sexual Harassment/Diversity information (USDA material) to employees through information sessions, staff meetings, etc., at least 2 times a year.
2. ensures that employees receive required EO, CR, and Sexual Harassment training within established timeframes.
3. reviews the USDA's civil rights policy with employees at least 2 times a year to ensure that customers and employees are treated in accordance with the policy.
4. encourages employees to attend training to increase interpersonal skills such as cross-cultural communication, negotiation, dispute resolution, problem solving, active listening, etc.
5. meets USDA-established EO/CR goals for recruitment, selection, promotion, training, awards, and other personnel activities.
6. models appropriate behavior by treating employees, peers, supervisors, and customers with respect, fairness, and politeness."

H Administrative Requirements Standard

All supervisory performance plans shall contain the following administrative requirements standards (Block 8 of the Form AD-435A/B):

- “Adheres to Departmental Regulation (DR-4070-735-001), Employee Responsibilities and Conduct, in the normal course of duty.
- “Fully complies with applicable security procedures and controls, including sensitive and classified materials. Encourages diligent adherence to security controls and establishment of applicable procedures within the wider office environment.”
- “Completes administrative requirements and training by the assigned due dates. Ensures completion of administrative requirements and training for staff members by the assigned due dates. These include, but are not limited to, ethics, security awareness, information security, EEO/CR training, and annual financial disclosure reports (OGE-45), where required.”
- “Adheres to Safety and Occupational Health practices and procedures in order to promote and maintain a safe and healthful work environment for all employees. Upon report of unsafe/unhealthful condition, notifies appropriate office within 48 hours, and follows up and/or takes appropriate action until condition is resolved.”
- “Demonstrates an understanding of the Privacy Act and applies the Act correctly when exercising controls and safeguards to preserve the integrity and confidentiality of materials containing Personally Identifiable Information (PII). Ensures PII is protected at all times, including when being transferred, in accordance with agency policy. In addition, ensures all employees supervised comply with this standard; and reports any violations to supervisor within 4 hours of becoming aware of a problem.”

9 Elements and Standards for Nonsupervisory Employees

A Elements

The basis for elements is the requirements of the employee’s position. Applicable sources for developing elements include position descriptions, work plans, organizational goals and objectives, and any other source that assigns or fixes responsibility for accomplishing work.

Supervisors shall establish at least 3 but no more than 7 elements. See Exhibit 1 for a menu of elements from which the 3 to 7 elements may be selected. Other job specific elements may be created, if necessary, in addition to those elements listed in Exhibit 1.

Supervisors shall determine what elements shall be critical and noncritical. At least 1 element must be critical and 1 element must be noncritical. Critical elements cover

duties that are essential to the successful performance of the position. On the summary rating:

- critical elements will be scored as 2 rating “points”
- noncritical elements will be scored as 1 rating “point”.

B Required Elements

The following elements are mandatory for all nonsupervisory employees:

- the “aligned” element (must be critical)
- the “Customer Service” element (must be critical)
- the “Administrative Requirements” element

C Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights (EO/CR) Element

A separate EO/CR element is not required for nonsupervisors. The element may be separate or built into another critical element. If the supervisor decides that there will not be a separate EO/CR element, the following EO/CR language must be built into the element description (Block 7 of the AD-435A/B) of another critical element:

“Performs all duties in a manner which consistently demonstrates FAS Core Values as well as fairness, cooperation, and respect toward coworkers, office visitors, and all others in The performance of official business. Demonstrates an awareness of EO/CR policies and responsibilities of Agency and Departmental goals of valuing a diverse, yet unified workforce.”

Supervisors will choose the appropriate element in which to place the above EO/CR descriptive language. See paragraph 9 E below for required EO/CR standards.

Note: If the EO/CR element is kept separate, it must be critical.

D Standards

For each element, there must be at least 3 written standards for measuring performance of the element. Standards must be observable, measurable, and attainable by the employee. Standards need only be written at the “Meets Fully Successful” level in the performance plan. However, rating officials should be prepared to explain performance at the “Does Not Meet Fully Successful” and “Exceeds Fully Successful” levels. Do not include phrases like “other duties as assigned”. Standards are placed in Block 8 of the Form AD-435A/B.

E Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights (EO/CR) Standards

All nonsupervisory performance plans shall contain the following EO/CR standards:

“To be rated fully successful, the individual must achieve 3 or 4 of the

following standards:

1. consistently treats coworkers with respect, fairness, and politeness including females and persons with disabilities; relates well to people from various backgrounds and situations.
2. consistently treats customers and others with respect, fairness, and politeness including females and persons with disabilities.
3. brings discriminatory issues or actions to the attention of the supervisor or other appropriate official as soon as possible but within 48 hours after occurrence.
4. participates in available training or other EO/CR/Diversity-related activities at least 2 times a year.
5. attends optional EO/CR/Diversity information sessions provided/scheduled by supervisor at least 2 times.”

F Administrative Requirements Standards

All nonsupervisory performance plans shall contain the following administrative requirements standards (Block 8 of the Form AD-435A/B):

- “Adheres to Departmental Regulation (DR-4070-735-001), Employee Responsibilities and Conduct, in the normal course of duty. “Fully complies with applicable security procedures and controls, including sensitive and classified materials. Encourages diligent adherence to security controls and establishment of applicable procedures within the wider office environment.”
- “Completes administrative requirements and training by the assigned due dates. These include, but are not limited to, ethics, security awareness, information security, EEO/CR training, and annual financial disclosure reports (OGE-45), where required.”
- “Demonstrates a basic understanding of the Agency’s Safety and Health Program. Complies with safety and health rules and regulations that apply to all employees. Ensures all reports of unsafe and unhealthful conditions are reported to supervisor or designated official within 48 hours.”
- “Demonstrates an understanding of the Privacy Act and applies the Act correctly when exercising controls and safeguards to preserve the integrity and confidentiality of materials containing Personally Identifiable Information (PII). Ensures PII is protected at all times, including when being transferred, in accordance with agency policy. Reports any violations to supervisor within 4 hours of becoming aware of a problem.”

10 Processing Performance Plans Responsibilities

A Rating Official Responsibilities

Rating officials shall process AD-435A's and AD-435B's according to the following.

Step	Action
1	Establish employees' performance plans using AD-435A and AD-435B. For each element, there must be at least 3 standards for measuring performance.
2	Review AD-435A and AD-435B for accuracy.
3	Give AD-435A and AD-435B to reviewing official for signature.
4	Sign and date AD-435A.
5	<p>Give AD-435A and AD-435B to the employee.</p> <p>After discussing the elements and standards with the employee, request that the employee sign and date AD-435A.</p> <p>Note: Rating officials should attempt to resolve concerns the employee may have about their performance plan. If the employee refuses to sign their performance plan, the employee shall be advised that they will still be placed under the plan and be held accountable for the elements and standards, as described in it. If the employee refuses to sign AD-435A, annotate AD-435A as follows.</p> <p>"The performance plan was presented to, and discussed with, the employee. The employee refused to sign it".</p>
6	Give a copy of the performance plan, signed or unsigned, to the employee.

B Reviewing Official Responsibilities

Reviewing officials shall process AD-435A's and AD-435B's according to the following.

Step	Action
1	<p>Review employee's elements and standards, as submitted by the rating official, to ensure the performance plan is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in conformance with FAS policy and guidelines • consistent with other performance plans in the work unit.
2	Sign and date AD-435A.

C Employee Responsibilities

Employees shall process AD-435A's and AD-435B's according to the following.

Step	Action
1	Review presented AD-435A and AD-435B with rating official.

2	Discuss elements and standards needing clarification.
3	<p>Sign and date AD-435A. The employee's signature certifies that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a discussion took place with the supervisor about the performance plan • the employee has seen AD-435A and AD-435B • the employee has reviewed the standards of conduct and has had any questions answered to their satisfaction. <p>Note: If the employee refuses to sign AD-435A, the employee will still be held accountable for the elements and standards on AD-435A and AD-435B.</p>

11 Performance Reviews

A Mandatory Performance Reviews

The rating official shall:

- conduct at least 1 performance review between the 5th and 8th month of the 12-month rating period
- inform the employee verbally and in writing of their level of performance as it relates to their performance elements and standards, including any areas for improvement for the remainder of the rating period
- within 30 days of the performance review, document on the employee's performance plan that the performance review took place, and include in the employee's file the results of the midyear review

B Periodic Optional Performance Reviews

Even though only one mid-year performance review is required, the rating official and employee should periodically hold performance discussions. Periodic performance reviews with the employee will:

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

12 Documenting Performance

A Rating of Record

The rating of record is the performance appraisal that is issued at the end of the rating period and becomes part of the employee's performance file. Rating officials and reviewing officials will be held accountable for rating appropriately against the standards in the employee's performance plan and making distinctions in levels of performance. The rating shall be based only on actual employee accomplishments. Presumptive ratings (that is, ratings that are not based on actual accomplishments) are

prohibited.

Artificial targets for performance appraisals, such as quotas, should never be used to evaluate employee performance. Performance appraisals must be based on the individual accomplishments of the employee being rated.

B Reduction-in-Force (RIF)

For Federal employees, annual Ratings of Record are used to establish service credit and retention standing in the event of a RIF.

C Minimum Rating Period

To rate an employee:

- a performance plan must have been established on AD-435A and AD-435B.
- the employee must be under a performance plan for at least 90 calendar days.

Note: If it has not been 90 calendar days by the end of the rating period, the period may be extended to allow for a rating to be given. If no plan has been put into place by the end of the rating period or an employee is new to the agency then no rating can be given until the new rating cycle.

D Appraising Elements

The rating official will evaluate each performance element and determine which 1 of the following 3 rating levels is most appropriate when comparing the employee's performance with the "Fully Successful" performance standard established for that element.

- **"Exceeds Fully Successful"**. This level generally describes performance that exceeds the "Fully Successful" standard for the element being evaluated. Employees performing at this level may display initiative, ownership, and/or unusual independence.
- **"Meets Fully Successful"**. This level generally describes performance of the solid, effective employee whose work meets normal expectations in terms of quality, quantity, and timelines, as outlined in the "Fully Successful" standard.
- **"Does Not Meet Fully Successful"**. This level describes performance that has failed to fulfill the basic expectation for the work.

Note: With assistance from Employee and Labor Relations Branch (ELRB), HRD, the rating official must prepare a comprehensive written statement describing the employee's deficiencies for all elements rated at this level. Early identification and correction of poor performance is strongly recommended.

E Summary Ratings

A 5-level summary rating system summarizes the employee's overall performance and is calculated using the description on AD-435. The following are the 5 summary levels.

- **“Outstanding”**. All elements are rated “Exceeds Fully Successful”.
- **“Superior”**. No element is rated “Does Not Meet Fully Successful”. At least one element is rated “Meets Fully Successful”. There are more rating “points” in the “Exceeds Fully Successful” column than there are in the “Meets Fully Successful” column.
- **“Fully Successful”**. There are as many or more rating “points” in the “Meets Fully Successful” column as there are in the “Exceeds Fully Successful” column.
- **“Marginal”**. There are more rating “points” in the “Does Not Meet Fully Successful” column than there are in the “Exceeds Fully Successful” column. No critical element is rated “Does Not Meet Fully Successful”.
- **“Unacceptable”**. One or more critical elements are rated “Does Not Meet Fully Successful”.

Note: If the “Unacceptable” level occurs, the rating official shall contact the ELRB, HRD, for guidance.

F Due Date

AD-435's, AD-435A's, and AD-435B's shall be completed and distributed:

- by October 30
- according to subparagraph 15.

G Marginal Performance

If the employee's summary rating is “Marginal”, the rating official must contact ELRB, HRD for guidance. The rating official shall:

- inform the employee as soon as the less than “Fully Successful” performance is apparent and give the employee a chance to demonstrate “Fully Successful” performance
- assist the employee in improving less than “Fully Successful” performance in a noncritical element by:
 - determining if training is needed

- providing closer supervisory review of work
- holding discussions and providing correction of work products
- advising the employee when they have achieved “Fully Successful” performance.

A “Marginal” rating will result in the denial of a Within-Grade Increase and promotion, if applicable.

H Unacceptable Performance

If the employee’s summary rating is “Unacceptable”, the rating official must contact ELRB, HRD for guidance. Rating officials shall:

- inform the employee in writing as soon as the less than “Fully Successful” performance is apparent and give a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate “Fully Successful” performance through an Opportunity To Improve (OTI).
- assist employee in improving less than “Fully Successful” performance in a critical element

OTI:

- provides formal notice to the employee that performance is unacceptable and provides the employee the opportunity to demonstrate “Fully Successful” performance
- may include activities like developmental assignments, structured employee assistance or counseling, formal or on-the-job training, and mentoring.

Careful records must be kept of the assistance offered and results achieved under the OTI. Rating officials should provide the following:

- notification of elements in which performance is unacceptable
- specific examples of the unacceptable performance
- performance requirements or standards that must be attained to demonstrate “Fully Successful” performance
- a reasonable opportunity period, usually at least 90 calendar days, to demonstrate “Fully Successful” performance on the elements at issue
- notice that the employee must improve to the “Fully Successful” level by the conclusion of the opportunity period and must sustain that level of performance for at least 1 year from the start of the OTI.

Should an employee’s performance again become unacceptable in 1 or more of these

critical elements, a performance-based adverse action or other alternative action may be proposed without the benefit of an additional OTI.

An “Unacceptable” rating will result in the denial of Within-Grade Increase and promotion, if applicable.

I Prior Administrative Actions

Administrative actions initiated against employees whose performance is “Unacceptable” under 5 U.S.C. 4303 or 5 U.S.C. 752 involving a performance management program in existence before the effective date of this program, shall continue to be processed consistent with that pre-established set of procedures and requirements.

13 Appraising Performance

A Rating Official Responsibilities

Rating officials shall appraise the performance of their employees according to the following:

Step	Action
1	Compare the employee’s performance of each element with the standards established on AD-435A and AD-435B.
2	Document the employee’s accomplishments on AD-435A, item 10 and AD-435B, item 10 or supplemental attachments to these forms.
3	If necessary, obtain interim ratings from the employee’s prior supervisors.
4	Check the appropriate rating level for each element on AD-435A and AD-435B.
5	<p>Complete AD-435 by transferring the performance elements and appropriate rating level information from AD-435A and AD-435B.</p> <p>AD-435 is available from the FASTNET. Use Microsoft Word versions of AD-435. Complete AD-435 according to the instructions on the form.</p> <p>Note: Rating officials shall ensure that the AD-435:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contains all elements • designates critical and noncritical elements • assigns points properly, that is 2 rating “points” for critical elements and 1 rating “point” for noncritical elements • contains totals that are added correctly • designates proper summary rating

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has item 17 checked “Yes” or “No” by the employee • contains the required signatures.
6	Obtain the reviewing official’s approval on AD-435.
7	Discuss the approved rating and basis for the rating with the employee.
8	<p>Have the employee sign and date.</p> <p>Note: If the employee refuses to sign/accept the rating, rating officials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shall indicate the refusal on AD-435, item 18 • forward the rating to HRD according to subparagraph 15.
9	Sign and date AD-435, item 19.
10	Forward AD-435, AD-435A, and AD-435B to HRD according to subparagraph 15.

B Reviewing Official Responsibilities

Reviewing officials shall process ratings according to the following:

Step	Action
1	Review the performance and rating of employees with rating officials.
2	Discuss and modify the ratings, if appropriate.
3	Sign and date AD-435, item 20 certifying approval of original or revised ratings.
4	Return rating to the rating official for distribution according to subparagraph 15.

C Employee Responsibilities

Employees shall:

Step	Action
1	Complete AD-435, item 17.
2	Sign and date AD-435, item 18.

14 Multiple Appraisals

The following provides instructions for performance plans for employees detailed or temporarily promoted.

IF the employee...	THEN...
is detailed or has a temporary promotion to other positions in	performance plans shall be established. The supervisor responsible for the detail or temporary promotion shall prepare the performance

FAS or USDA for 120 calendar days or more	<p>plan and communicate it in writing to the employee within 30 calendar days of the start of the assignment. At the end of the assignment, an interim rating shall be prepared detailing the employee's accomplishments, and forwarded to the supervisor of record. This interim rating shall be considered in deriving the employee's annual rating of record.</p> <p>Note: When employees are detailed outside USDA, the employing agency must make a reasonable effort to obtain information on the employee's accomplishments from the outside organization.</p>
is detailed or has a temporary promotion to another position in FAS or USDA for less than 90 calendar days	<p>performance plans are not required. However, a brief narrative¹ shall be prepared detailing the employee's accomplishments and forwarded to the supervisor of record. This shall be considered in deriving the employee's annual rating of record.</p> <p>Note: When employees are detailed outside USDA, the employing agency must make a reasonable effort to obtain information on the employee's accomplishments from the outside organization.</p>
has a change in supervisors during the rating period including while on detail	<p>each supervisor of 90 calendar days or more shall prepare an interim assessment¹ detailing the employee's accomplishments and forward to the supervisor of record. The interim assessment (s)¹ shall be considered in deriving the employee's annual rating of record.</p>
has position changes during the rating period and has served for 90 calendar days or more in the position	<p>the supervisor shall prepare an interim assessment¹ detailing the employee's accomplishments. This shall be considered in deriving the employee's annual rating of record.</p>
transfers (moves to another agency or Department) and has served for 90 calendar days or more in the former position	<p>the supervisor shall prepare an interim assessment¹ detailing the employee's accomplishments. This shall be sent to the gaining organization to be considered in deriving the employee's annual rating of record.</p>

¹ An "interim assessment" and "a brief narrative ... detailing the employee's accomplishments" are the same in substance. They are both ways to capture performance occurring over a specific period in the rating cycle. An "interim assessment" is simply the formal name given to a document of performance when the employee has been under a performance plan for 90 days or more.

15 Distributing Appraisals

The completed performance plan and appraisal shall be forwarded to the Employee Programs Branch (EPB), HRD, by October 30. Supervisors shall distribute the completed AD-435 forms according to the following.

Step	Action
1	Forward the original, completed AD-435, AD-435A, and AD-435B to EPB by October 30.
2	Provide the employee with 1 copy of AD-435, AD-435A and AD-435B.
3	Retain 1 copy of AD-435, AD-435A and AD-435B for the supervisor's files.

16 Performance

A Organizational Performance Assessment

Organizational unit performance will be assessed and communicated throughout the organization. Rating officials will be provided guidance on how unit performance should be considered when deciding ratings and awards.

B Performance Management Program Training

Each year supervisors, managers, and employees will receive mandatory training and retraining on the requirements and operation of the performance management program. All supervisors, managers, and employees must know how the performance management program operates.

C Performance Management Accountability

In accordance with paragraphs 5 and 12, managers and supervisors will be held accountable for the performance management of their subordinates and must communicate with their employees continuously from the beginning to the end of the rating cycle, not just at certain times within it. At the end of the rating cycle, they must accurately rate their employee's performance. Corrective action will be taken against supervisors who fail to address performance deficiencies.

17 Evaluation and Additional Information

A Evaluation of the Performance Management Program

The Performance Management Program will be evaluated for its effectiveness on an annual basis within 90 calendar days of the end of each rating period. This evaluation will include such issues as the correlation between the Performance Management Program and any improvement of organizational performance, and employee/managerial satisfaction with the Performance Management Program.

B Additional Information

If there are any questions about rating employees, supervisors may contact the EPB, HRD, at 202-401-0679, 202-401-0694, or TTY at 202-205-9057.

Possible Elements

The following performance elements may be selected and included in an employee’s performance plan. Supervisors shall designate which elements are critical and noncritical. At least 3 performance standards must be developed for all elements and included in Block 8 of the performance plan.

Elements	Description (place in Block 7 of Form AD-435A/B)
Communications	Oral and written communications are clear, correct, timely, and presented in an understandable manner. Supervisor and coworkers are informed of issues and problems when necessary.
Supervision Important: Mandatory for all supervisors and managers.	Effectively manages and administers the human and fiscal resources put under his/her direction, giving due attention to the need for internal controls, applicable U.S. and foreign laws and regulations, and Departmental and FAS management policies. Completes accurate and timely reports in all budget and administrative areas. Effectively responds to end-user requirements. Develops knowledge of currently available software and manages information effectively and securely, including providing oversight of all public reports completed by his/her staff. Assigns work in a fair and effective manner. Technical guidance to subordinate staff is given in a timely manner. Performance management is implemented in accordance with procedure. Issues, concerns, or problems are handled promptly and fairly. To the extent possible, staff is properly trained and complies with occupational health and safety programs. Management decisions are supported and implemented within appropriate time-frames.
Team Leadership	Routinely leads individuals and team members toward specific goals and accomplishments. Provides encouragement, guidance, and direction as needed. Adjusts style to fit situation. Delegates appropriate authority in an effective manner. Coordinates functions of the team members. Demonstrates a sincere interest in employees' activities, abilities, etc.
Program Management	Manages program(s), resolving issues and problems within the employee's control. Monitors all aspects of program(s) for quality, effectiveness, and consistency. Program plans and guidance are responsive to objectives and requirements of the Agency. Policy instructions are appropriately issued and are accurate. Evaluates effectiveness of work and adjusts plans accordingly.
Special Projects	Special projects are regularly completed on time in a competent, accurate, and thorough manner. Completed projects comply with regulations and procedures. Special projects are completed independently, or reflect research and collaboration with others as required.
Research and Analysis	Thoroughly and accurately researches issues in a timely manner, using available reference sources (e.g., USDA manuals, or applicable law or regulations. Makes reasonable recommendations or decisions based on available guidance.
Customer Service	Routinely displays courteous and tactful behavior. Projects a positive and professional image of USDA. Provides advice that is timely,

<p>Important: Mandatory for nonsupervisors.</p>	<p>responsive and accurate. Maintains appropriate rapport with internal and external customers. Develops and establishes working relationships with external organizations as required. Keeps supervisor and/or team leader informed of difficult and/or controversial issues and unique problems. Takes action to effectively solve problems before they have an adverse impact on the organization or other employees.</p>
<p>Supervisory Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights</p> <p>Important: Mandatory for all supervisors and managers.</p>	<p>Performs all duties in a manner which consistently demonstrates fairness, cooperation, and respect toward coworkers, office visitors, and all others in the performance of official business. Demonstrates an awareness of EO/CR policies and responsibilities of Agency and Departmental goals of working to employ and develop a diverse, yet unified workforce.</p>
<p>Nonsupervisory Equal Opportunity & Civil Rights</p>	<p>Performs all duties in a manner which consistently demonstrates fairness, cooperation, and respect toward coworkers, office visitors, and all others in the performance of official business. Demonstrates an awareness of EO/CR policies and responsibilities of Agency and Departmental goals of valuing a diverse, yet unified workforce.</p>
<p>Resource Management</p>	<p>Monitors allocated funds and maintains complete and accurate records of expenditures. Routinely utilizes resources in an efficient and effective manner. Ensures that funds, property and other resources are guarded against waste, loss, unauthorized use, and misappropriation.</p>
<p>Leading Change</p>	<p>Provides leadership in garnering support for the agency's vision and strategic goals among work groups; communicates change in a positive and effective manner; engages staff in discussion of new strategic priorities and metrics to ensure an understanding of their role in supporting key objectives; supports flexible organizational structures to address policy issues.</p>
<p>Individual Contributions to the Team</p>	<p>Ordinarily displays dependability and reliability. Promotes open communication. Contributes creative ideas and actively participates in team meetings resulting in added value to the team's products and services. When problems arise, explore causes and assists in resolving them. Works with team members to appropriately implement decisions. Is usually open-minded to new ideas and approaches in implementing the team's goals. Willingly accepts and acts on constructive criticism.</p>