UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Farm Service Agency
Washington, DC 20250

Notice PM-2821

For: FSA Employees

Closing Out FY 2011 Performance Management

Approved by: Associate Administrator for Operations and Management

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1 Overview

A Background

The FY 2011 performance cycle ends September 30, 2011. Therefore, FSA is preparing for closing out the FY 2011 performance appraisal period.

B Purpose

This notice:

- highlights key issues (due dates, responsibilities, FY 2011 changes, and training) related to closing out the FY 2011 performance appraisal period
- reminds raters of the mandatory inclusion of the Cultural Transformation and Diversity Roadmap standard in the FY 2011 performance plan for **all** supervisors and managers
- reminds raters of the inclusion of the Enhanced Customer Service performance element and standards that were optional in existing or newly created FY 2011 performance plans for supervisory and nonsupervisory employees at the Federal and county level
- obsoletes Notice PM-2777.

C Accessing 5-PM

5-PM:

- provides performance management policy and procedure
- may be accessed at **http://intra3.fsa.usda.gov/dam/handbooks/handbooks.asp**
- will be amended to reflect policy changes presented in this notice.

Disposal Date	Distribution
November 1, 2012	All FSA employees; State Offices relay to County Offices

2 Closing Out the FY 2011 Performance Appraisal Period

A Due Dates

The FY 2011 appraisal period ended **September 30, 2011**.

Performance appraisals should be completed within 30 calendar days of the end of the appraisal period; however, because of the delay in issuing guidance the due date is extended to allow 30 calendar days. EmpowHR processing should be completed by COB **November 7, 2011**.

B Performance Appraisal Requirements

To rate an employee:

- a performance plan **must** have been established
- the employee **must** have been under that performance plan for at least 90 calendar days.

Note: If it has **not** been 90 calendar days by the end of the appraisal period, the period may be extended to allow for an appraisal to be given.

C Properly Rating Employees

An employee's performance appraisal **must** be based on documented accomplishments that align with the expectations established in the employee's performance plan. Rating officials and reviewing officials **must**:

- rate appropriately with the standards in the employee's performance plan

- make distinctions in levels of performance (see Exhibit 1, "Distinguishing Levels of Performance"

- document/record prove-up; documentation of accomplishments is **required**, if employee is rated at the "exceeds" level for an element.

Rating 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.

Artificial targets (such as quotas or preset rating distributions) for performance appraisals should **never** be used to evaluate employee performance. Performance appraisals **must** be based on the individual accomplishments of the employee being rated (see Exhibit 2, "Common Rating Errors Supervisors Should Avoid"

Before any documentation begins in EmpowHR, the performance appraisal **must** be discussed by the rating official and the reviewing official, and by the rating official and the employee. It is strongly recommended that these discussions be done face-to-face.

3 Performance Standards Introduced for Managers and Supervisors During FY 2011

A Performance Standards

To garner commitment and support for the initiative and related action strategies introduced by USDA, performance standards were established for all USDA senior executives for FY 2011. In FSA, these performance standards are **mandatory** and cascade into the FY 2011 performance plans for **all** FSA supervisors and managers under the "Mission Results" critical performance element. These standards are provided in subparagraphs B-D.

B FY 2011 Definition of Cultural Transformation Standard

The cultural transformation standard supports the Secretary's initiative for cultural transformation through continuous examination and survey of the workforce, customer service, training, and leadership; creates an environment of inclusion, exceptional performance, and effective leadership; and works to eliminate any barriers to operational and service excellence. Actively engages in the transformation of FSA and USDA by supporting process improvements in the organization.

C Diversity Roadmap Standard

The diversity roadmap standard supports the Secretary's initiative for USDA Diversity Recruitment Roadmap by expanding on mission-specific activities and timelines to ensure diversity recruitment program success and leadership accountability.

D New Elements for Supervisors and Managers on Hiring Reform Initiatives

The new USDA mandates related to the Hiring Reform Initiatives required that all employees with supervisory authority have specific accountability standards related to performance management aligned under the critical performance element for "Supervision" in FY 2011 performance plans. Similarly, all supervisors and managers with hiring authority **were required to have** specific performance standards related to Recruitment, and Hiring, and Retention and Succession Planning aligned the critical performance element for "Supervision".

4 Implemented New, Enhanced Customer Service Standards for FY 2011

A Customer Focus and Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is 1 of the measures used to gauge customer service success and effectiveness. At FSA, our customers include members of the public; that is, landowners, farmers, ranchers, Congress, State and local organizations, other Federal Agencies, and internal co-workers and colleagues within FSA and USDA. During FY 2011, FSA introduced an enhanced performance element on customer service containing new standards. These enhanced customer service standards embrace the spirit, strategy, and objectives of the customer focus and community outreach component of the initiative. Under this component of transformation, USDA agencies were tasked with several action items, among which included establishing benchmarks for customer service, developing and evaluating customer feedback mechanisms, reviewing business processes for areas to improve and ensure high-quality customer service, and analyzing marketing/communication channels and strategies to best reach the FSA customer base and increase program participation.

B Enhancing Customer Service

The enhanced customer service standards place greater emphasis on customer "inclusion" by setting the expectation of proactive customer engagement and involvement in planning and reviewing work to deliver quality products and services. "Consulting and Services" and "Customer Relations Management" are 2 aspects of customer service emphasized in the new standards that are vital to achieving overall customer satisfaction. A separate set of standards were developed for supervisors and nonsupervisors. Raters were given the option to use the enhanced customer standards instead of the standards currently prescribed in 5-PM for supervisory and nonsupervisory employees for the FY 2011 performance cycle.

C Exceptional Customer Service Defined

Exceptional customer service includes, but is **not** limited to, developing innovative practices, techniques, or systems resulting in significant quality improvements in services (for example, reduction in paperwork, processing time), or greater cost effectiveness, or consistently performing exceptionally in delivering superior service to a variety of customers.

D Exceeding Customer Service Standards

An employee's performance accomplishments **must** "prove up" in both components of the Customer Service element (that is, Customer Relations Management and Consulting and Service) to receive an "exceeds" element rating. See Exhibit 1 for example of "prove up" accomplishments.

5 Enhanced Customer Service Performance Element and Standards for Supervisors for FY 2011

A Customer Service Performance Element Defined

The customer service performance element is defined as follows:

> "Conducts on-going reviews and monitors organizational performance to achieve effective customer service results. Actively gathers feedback from customers to identify their needs and expectations. Ensures staff provides responses to organizational leadership, the public, internal and external customers that are prompt, professional, reliable, and address the individual customer's circumstances. Ensures the delivery of high-quality products, services, and solutions. Delegates issues when appropriate, and ensures a final response or completion for the customer. Follows up with customers on solutions, products, and services to provide quality service. Recommends ways to improve performance using available customer satisfaction or trend data. Demonstrates the importance of customer service as a critical component of the Agency's mission."

B Customer Service Standards for Supervisory Employees (Critical Element)

Customer service standards for supervisory employees are as follows.

- **Consulting and Services:**

  - Provides leadership to staff and ensures timely response to assigned inquiries. Fosters solid customer relationships with managers and field staff. Ensures staff responses to customers adhere to expected response timeframes. Responds to e-mails, telephone calls, and voice mails within 24 hours of receipt. The requirement to respond within 24 hours does not mean that the request must be fulfilled within 24 hours, but rather what is required is an acknowledgement that the message was received and expected response date/time are established.

  - Recognizes when follow-up with customer is warranted and initiates prompt contact with customer to ensure that customer is informed of the status of the deliverable/service or that the service provided has been completed to the satisfaction of customer.

  - Provides timely responses to written inquiries, correspondence, reporting and data requests from internal and external customers by established due dates or agreed upon deadlines. Written communication products and materials are, clear, concise, and understandable. Deliverable is accurate and complete to the satisfaction of the customer.

  - Seeks and encourages customer feedback and discussion in program/implementation and evaluations for assigned work responsibility and initiatives. Shows evidence of proactive customer outreach to determine satisfaction levels for programs and services provided.

5 Enhanced Customer Service Performance Element and Standards for Supervisors for FY 2011 (Continued)

B Customer Service Standards for Supervisory Employees (Continued)

- **Customer Relation Management:**

  - Understands the internal and external customers' points of view and uses this understanding to prevent and solve problems, and provide quality services and solutions. Solicits internal and external customers' interests and adjusts priorities to meet changing customer needs. Anticipates and meets the needs of customers by delivering and continuously improving quality services. Monitor customer service data. Actively diffuses customer complaints.

  - Reduces number of legitimate complaints by providing timely and reliable technical advice and assistance to internal and external customers on all assigned matters. Advice is based on good knowledge and proper application of Federal and Agency regulations, precedent cases, and relationships among interested parties.

  - Monitors customer service data quarterly and considers options for improvement, if necessary.

  - Evaluate employee recommendations for improved customer relations to determine viability related to cost, efficiency, or quality.

6 Enhanced Customer Service Performance Element and Standards for Nonsupervisory Employees (Non-Critical Element)

A Customer Service Performance Element Defined

The customer service performance element is defined as follows:

> "Actively gathers feedback from customers to identify their needs and expectations. Provides responses to the customer that are prompt, consistent, professional, and address the individual customer's circumstances. Exercising sound judgment; identifies information to be shared with customers. Refers issues when appropriate, and ensures a final response or completion for the customer. Follows up with customers on products and services to provide quality service. Recommends ways to improve performance using available customer satisfaction or trend data. Demonstrates the importance of customer service as a critical component of the Agency's mission."

6 Enhanced Customer Service Performance Element and Standards for Nonsupervisory Employees (Continued)

B Nonsupervisory Standards for Customer Service

Customer service standards for nonsupervisory employees are as follows.

- **Consulting and Services:**

  - Fosters solid customer relationships with managers and field staff. Responds timely to assigned inquiries.

  - Responds to e-mails and voice mails within 24 hours of receipt. The requirement to respond within 24 hours does not mean that the request must be fulfilled within 24 hours, but rather what is required is an acknowledgement that the message was received and expected response date/time are established.

  - Recognizes when follow-up with customer is warranted and initiates prompt contact with customer to ensure that customer is informed of the status of the deliverable/service. Ensures that service provided has been completed to the satisfaction of customer.

  - Provides timely responses to written inquiries, correspondence, reporting and data requests from internal and external customers by established due dates or agreed on deadlines. Written communication products and materials are, clear, concise, and understandable. Deliverable is accurate and complete to the satisfaction of the customer.

  - Seeks and encourages customer feedback and discussion in program/implementation and evaluations for assigned work responsibility and initiatives. Show evidence of proactive customer outreach to determine satisfaction levels for programs and services provided.

- **Customer Relations Management:**

  - Understands the internal and external customers' points of view and uses this understanding to prevent and solve problems, and provide quality services and solutions. Solicits internal and external customer's interests and adjusts priorities to meet changing customer needs. Anticipates and meets the needs of customers by delivering and continuously improving quality services. Monitors customer service data; actively addresses customer concerns.

6 Enhanced Customer Service Performance Element and Standards for Nonsupervisory Employees (Continued)

B Nonsupervisory Standards for Customer Service (Continued)

- **Customer Relations Management: (Continued)**

  - Reduces number of legitimate complaints by providing timely and reliable technical advice and assistance to internal and external customers on all assigned matters. Advice is based on good knowledge and proper application of Federal and Agency regulations, precedent cases, and relationships among interested parties.

  - Monitors customer service data quarterly and makes individual adjustments, if necessary or develops recommendation for improved performance for effective customer service.

C Appraising Elements and Preparing the Summary Rating

For details on appraising elements and preparing the summary rating, see Exhibit 1 and 5-PM, Part 5.

D Recognizing Performance

Rating Based Performance Awards

Because of FSA budgetary constraints, monetary awards will not be provided for the FY 2011 rating-based awards, including quality step increases. Instead, FSA will grant time-off awards for employees who have received “Outstanding” and Superior” performance ratings during FY 2011.

7 Additional Information

A The FY 2012 Performance Appraisal Period

Additional guidance will be issued addressing preparation for the 2012 Performance Appraisal period.

B Other Resources, Guidance, and Tools on Performance Management

For distinguishing levels of performance, see Exhibit 1.

5-PM will be updated to include all previously issued performance management guidance and policy changes.

7 Additional Information (Continued)

B Other Resources, Guidance, and Tools on Performance Management (Continued)

For additional guidance on:

- common rating errors and how avoid them, see Exhibit 2
- writing accomplishments, see Exhibit 3
- supervisor checklist for employee review, see Exhibit 4

C Performance Management Training

Training is critical to an effective performance management program. Each year, supervisors and nonsupervisors should receive training and retraining on the requirements and operation of the program. All supervisors, managers, and employees **must** know how the performance management program operates.

Training courses are available for both supervisory and nonsupervisory employees in AgLearn.

DD's shall ensure that each COC chairperson receives a hard copy of each of the supervisory Performance Management Desk Guides. DD's and CED's shall continue to educate and involve COC in discussions involving the performance appraisal and in performance plan development.

The following recommended performance management training courses for managers/supervisors and nonsupervisory employees are available in AgLearn:

- managers courses:
  - "FSA Performance Management for Supervisors"
  - "Advance Performance Management"
- nonsupervisory course, "Performance Management For Non-Supervisors"
- additional AgLearn training courses:
  - "Light the Fire Leverage Appraisals for Maximum Performance"
  - "CyberFeds-Employee Performance in the Federal Workplace-Performance Evaluation"
  - "CyberFeds-Employee Performance in the Federal Workplace-Performance Management"
  - "CyberFeds-Employee Performance in Federal Workplace-Performance Problems".

7 Additional Information (Continued)

C Performance Management Training (Continued)

For more information on the many performance management training courses available, access AgLearn at **http://www.aglearn.usda.gov**.

Additional training resources are available on HRD's web site located at **www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/hrdapp?area=home&subject=erpm&topic=prm**.

D Contact Information

If there are any questions about this notice, contact Michael Braswell at 202-401-0392. Supervisors may contact the appropriate SPO as follows.

IF question is…	**THEN contact…**
is about any of the following for the Washington, DC, National Office: • awards and processing • performance management processing • servicing personnel specialist	Kedra Watts in HRD by telephone at 202-401-0678 or 202-205-9057 (TTY).
from a branch at any of the following locations: • Kansas City, Missouri • St. Louis, Missouri • Salt Lake City, Utah	either of the following: • Patricia Gepford, HRD, by telephone at 816-926-6259 • Dana Candler, HRD, by telephone at 816-926-6117 or 800-735-2966 (TTY).
about performance management consultation for any location	Catherine Baker by telephone at 202-401-0687.
about EmpowHR assistance for any location	EmpowHR helpdesk at 816-823-3996.
from State or County Office	State Office administrative officer.

Distinguishing Levels of Performance

Performance standards for each performance element must be written to describe behaviors at the "fully successful" level of performance for the specific job position and grade level (knowledge and skills required by the position).

Performance standards written at the "fully successful" level requires the employee to consistently and reliably perform all the duties of the position with no greater level of supervision than described by the position description. This is important because it sets the baseline for the employee's overall rating and helps all parties (manager/supervisor and employee) gauge whether the employee's performance fell above or beneath established line. Differentiating levels of performance is important because it signals to your workforce the value placed on a job well done.

Fully Successful: Reliably performs duties and responsibilities. Work is of good quality. Fulfills position requirements, established goals and expectations are met. Solid performance results in valuable contributions to unit goals.

Exceeds Fully Successful: Works consistently at a superior level in most aspects of position, consistently exceeds goals and expectations. Employees performing at this level consistently displays initiative, ownership and/or unusual independence. Employee makes an exceptional or distinctive contribution to the unit/department.

Distinguishing Levels of Performance for the Summary Rating

Examples of behaviors that employees should exhibit at the five performance summary levels are listed on the following pages. These behaviors are not exhaustive, but are intended to provide you, the supervisor/manager, with a good idea of what to look for and should serve as a gauge against which you can evaluate the accuracy of the assignment of performance element ratings and, ultimately the accuracy of the employee's final summary rating.

Benchmark Employee Performance Summary Rating

Outstanding (Rated "Exceeds" in all elements):

Employee: The employee demonstrates particularly excellent performance that is of such high quality that organizational goals have been achieved that would not have been otherwise. The employee demonstrates mastery of technical skills and a thorough understanding of the mission of the organization and has a fundamental impact on the completion of program objectives. The employee exerts a major positive influence on management practices, operating procedures and/or program implementation, which contribute substantially to organizational growth and recognition. The employee plans for the unexpected and uses alternate ways of reaching goals.

Difficult assignments are handled intelligently and effectively. The employee has produced an exceptional quantity of work, often ahead of established schedules and with little supervision. The employee's oral and written communications are exceptionally clear and effective. He/she improves cooperation among participants in the workplace and prevents misunderstandings. Complicated or controversial subjects are presented or explained effectively to a variety of audiences so that desired outcomes are achieved.

Distinguishing Levels of Performance (Continued)

Superior (Rated "Exceeds" on majority of elements, but not all):

Employee: Employee demonstrates unusually good performance that exceeds expectations in critical areas and exhibits a sustained support of organizational goals. The employee shows a comprehensive understanding of the objectives of the job and the procedures for meeting them.

Effective planning by the employee improves the quality of management practices, operating procedures, task assignments and/or program activities. The employee develops and/or implements workable and cost-effective approaches to meeting organizational goals.

The employee demonstrates an ability to get the job done well in more than one way while handling difficult and unpredicted problems. The employee produces a high quantity of work, often ahead of established schedules with less than normal supervision.

The employee writes and speaks clearly on difficult subjects to a wide range of audiences and works effectively with others to accomplish organizational objectives.

Fully Successful (Rated "Successful" on a majority of elements):

Employee: The employee demonstrates good, sound performance that meets organizational goals. All critical activities are generally completed in a timely manner and supervisor is kept informed of work issues, alterations, and status. The employee effectively applies technical skills and organizational knowledge to get the job done. The employee successfully carries out regular duties while also handling any difficult special assignments. The employee plans and performs work according to organizational priorities and schedules. The employee communicates clearly and effectively.

<u>Benchmark Supervisory Employee Performance Summary Rating</u>

Outstanding:

Supervisory: The Supervisory employee demonstrates excellent leadership skills and with only rare exceptions develops effective working relationships with others; immediately handles difficult situations with subordinates with professionalism and effectiveness, and demonstrates foresight in correcting situations that may cause future problems before they arise; encourages independence and risk-taking among subordinates, yet takes responsibility for their actions; is open to and solicits the views of others, and promotes cooperation among peers and subordinates, while guiding, motivating and stimulating positive responses.

Distinguishing Levels of Performance (Continued)

The employee demonstrates a strong commitment to fair treatment, equal opportunity and the affirmative action objectives of the organization, and has a significant positive impact on achievement of goals in this area. In addition, the employee demonstrates innovation and specific positive achievements in meeting other management obligations such as safety, internal management controls, merit systems principles, performance management, and management of ethics, conduct and discipline issues. The employee systematically monitors quality, delivery, and customer satisfaction levels and makes adjustments accordingly; and works with staff to proactively implement solutions to prevent problems and avoid gaps in customer expectations.

Effective Performance Management: Uses employee preferences and performance information to identify both immediate and long-term developmental needs, helps staff to identify their own developmental needs and provides challenging assignments to address those needs; promotes cooperation among peers and subordinates, while guiding, motivating and stimulating positive responses to accomplishments; and provides continuing constructive performance feedback, working with employees to identify ways to improve their strengths.

Superior:

Supervisory: The Supervisory employee demonstrates good leadership skills and establishes sound working relationships; almost always handles difficult situations with subordinates with professionalism and effectiveness; shows good judgment in dealing with others and considering their views; has a strong sense of mission and seeks out responsibility; demonstrates a commitment to fair treatment, equal opportunity and the affirmative action objectives of the organization, and has a positive impact on achievement of goals in this area. In addition, the employee promotes a safe working environment and solutions to problems encountered in meeting other management obligations including internal management controls, merit systems obligations, managing performance, and management of ethics, conduct and discipline issues; and anticipates customer needs and resolves or avoids potential problems, resulting in high customer satisfaction. Supervisory employee tailors methods of reward and recognition to the individual to the extent possible, resulting in increased motivation in staff; and solicits employee input and takes initiative to seek out and arrange for a variety of developmental opportunities beyond standard training.

Effective Performance Management: Using effective planning works with employees to exceed expectations in critical areas and shows sustained support of organizational goals; establishes sound working relationships with subordinates and shows good judgment in dealing with them, considering their views; works with employees to develop plans and timeframes to improve performance.

Distinguishing Levels of Performance (Continued)

Fully Successful:

Supervisory: The Supervisory employee is a capable leader who works successfully with others and listens to suggestions. The employee generally handles difficult situations with subordinates with professionalism and effectiveness. The employee also works well as a team member, supporting the group's efforts and showing an ability to handle a variety of interpersonal situations. The employee's work with others shows an understanding of the importance of fair treatment and equal opportunity and meets all management commitments related to providing a safe working environment, merit systems obligations, performance management, and internal controls, and management of ethics, conduct and discipline issues. The employee maintains contact with customers (internal and/or external), and is effective in understanding their needs and using feedback to address customer requirements. Provides timely, flexible, and responsive products and/or services to customers, resulting in valued products and services. Solicits employee input to improve work products and/or services and to develop employee skills. Recognizes and rewards employee contributions in a fair and consistent manner.

Effective Performance Management: The employee identifies and ensures alignment of unit goals with agency goals, seeks input of employees in the development of performance criteria, effectively translates and communicates project or work unit goals into concrete work assignments for staff; provides feedback and conducts reviews according to established timeframes; ensures performance distinctions are made among individuals and awards are reflective of employee contributions toward organizational performance; and addresses poor performance in a fair and timely manner.

Examples of Characteristic Behaviors at Summary Rating Levels for All Employees

Outstanding

This rating level is appropriate when the employee:

- Significantly and consistently exceeds expectation(s) by producing a high quality and quantity of work.
- Undertakes additional job functions/duties, through their own initiative, that further the goals of and make significant contributions to the branch, Division, Agency or Department.
- Is dependable, highly reliable and follows through on all provided or otherwise undertaken assignments and effective in a variety of settings including one on one communication, writing skills, correspondence, and public situations.
- Demonstrates exceptional in-depth knowledge of their job functions/duties and are highly recognized by others within their area of expertise as an authority in their area of work.
- Exhibits model behavior that exemplifies the values and qualities of the organization and are worthy of emulation by supervisors/staff members.
- Skillfully and in a highly reliable manner handles multiple and varied types of tasks with competing priorities.

Distinguishing Levels of Performance (Continued)

- Skillfully resolves conflict in the midst of differing opinions by creatively developing a compromise within competing interests.
- Exhibits teamwork or is a team player in varied settings and influences others to work collaboratively to bring about a positive impact while furthering the goals of the department, division and organization.
- Demonstrates unusually high initiative and autonomy.
- Is a technical pioneer.
- Produces results that are exceptionally accurate and precise.
- Is viewed as the preeminent authority in the field.
- Delivers work products that are superior/breakthrough in critical mission areas.
- Demonstrates an exceptionally high degree of originality, innovation and creativity.
- Is frequently sought out for opinions by peers and/or industry.
- Is highly regarded for expertise.
- Is widely recognized for achievements.
- Builds strong and lasting collaborative relationships both internal and external to the Agency/Department.
- Excels in written and oral communication of management expectations and/or strategic direction.
- Consistently completes quality work ahead of schedules and deadlines by adapting to rapid changes by adjusting priorities.
- Is a risk taker.
- Develops and implements highly successful solutions to complex problems or situations.
- Excels in cost containment while maintaining exceptional quality.
- Excels in obtaining additional funding when costs exceed original estimates and approvals.

Superior

This rating level is appropriate when the employee:

- Consistently delivers thorough, high quality work products.
- Completes work in accordance with prescribed deadlines and does not require major, substantive changes.
- Seeks new ideas and approaches to develop creative solutions to challenging problems or situations.
- Demonstrates a high level of expertise in the field.

Distinguishing Levels of Performance (Continued)

Fully Successful

This rating level is appropriate when the employee:

- Completes work as instructed, in accordance with prescribed guidelines and timeframes.
- Competently performs job functions/duties on a day-to-day basis and regularly meets expectations and job description requirements with some tasks performed beyond expectations; may exceed some performance requirements but not enough to meet the "Exceeds" level.
- Possess full knowledge of their job functions/duties.
- Actively participates in meetings and projects.
- Communicates effectively with superiors, peers subordinates and customers.
- Perceived by peers, colleagues and/or customers as collaborative, skilled and dependable.
- Regularly interacts effectively with peers, managers and others.
- Exhibits teamwork or is a team player in varied settings and collaborates with others.

Marginal

This rating level is appropriate when the employee:

- Delivers products that occasionally require extensive revision.
- Occasionally misses deadlines that impact but are not detrimental to the assignment, project or program.
- Does not always work at the appropriate level of autonomy expected for his/her pay grade.
- Sometimes needs help working on assignments.
- Sometimes completes their assignments/tasks in an incompetent manner or frequently requires clarification or time extensions.
- Inconsistently performs their job functions/duties or responsibilities.
- Demonstrates minimal initiative.
- Requires supervision due to low performance or skill level.
- Engages in less effective or less than positive interactions with peers, colleagues, management, or customers.

Unacceptable

This rating level is appropriate when the employee:

- Frequently misses deadlines without clear or valid reasons.
- Generally delivers products that do not meet expectations.
- Seems to be ill-suited for the job.
- Performance is subpar.

Distinguishing Levels of Performance (Continued)

Supervision (Mandatory for All Supervisors and Managers): Work is assigned in a fair and effective manner. Technical guidance to subordinate staff is given timely. 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 timeframes.	
FULLY SUCCESSFUL	**EXCEEDS**
Addresses situations/problems in an effective manner as they come to his/her attention.	1. Proactively addresses situations/problems; takes measures to prevent problems.
Involves employees in planning. Encourages collaboration and accountability.	2. Open to the views of others, promotes cooperation among peers and subordinates, while guiding, motivating, and stimulating positive responses.
• Creates plans that are thorough without being cumbersome. • Establishes plans that are realistic and workable.	3. Is equally skilled at long-term and short-term planning.
Provides employees with the tools and guidance they need to succeed.	4. Provides employees with the tools and guidance needed to succeed and develops high-performing teams.
Posses coaching skills and coaches employees.	5. Has A-level coaching skills and coaches effectively. Uses innovative coaching strategies to generate measurable improvement in employee performance.
Treats employees equitably.	6. Has the highest standards of fairness.
Carefully monitors the progress of employees to be sure that deadlines are met.	7. Plans and organizes to beat deadlines, rather than just meet them.
Effectively plans unit work load to meet deadlines.	8. Is typically well ahead of plan when it comes to progress and performance.
Conducts performance reviews timely.	9. Conducts performance reviews timely and works with employees on an individual and group basis to build skills and performance.
Monitors employees' compliance with AgLearn and IDP's.	10. Encourages employees to seek out additional training and education.
1. **Recruitment and Hiring** ***(Required Standard by DEPT)*** *Recruits and selects new employees based on organizational goals, budget considerations, and staffing needs. When filling a position, the supervisor engages and collaborates with HR to ensure skills required for the job are identified, posting of the job vacancy is accurate, and assists in indentifying contacts for diverse locations or organizations for recruiting purposes. Participates as needed with HR in the proper screening of applications, and appropriate categorization of applicants based on qualifications." "Utilizes flexible hiring authorities when filling a vacancy (e.g., targeted disabilities, student employment, direct hire, appointing veterans, etc.) to ensure diversity in recruitment and hiring."*	

Distinguishing Levels of Performance (Continued)

2. **Retention and Succession Planning** ***(Required Standard by DEPT)***
Successfully transitions new hires into the position by promptly providing an orientation into the workforce and establishing performance elements and standards. Supervisor provides ongoing feedback and coaching, and makes appropriate use of the probationary period to assess the new hire's ability to perform in the position." "Implements retention strategies that focus on key internal processes (e.g., work environment, employee orientation, executing Individual Development Plans for all employees--subject to bargaining obligations, coaching, development, and mentoring, etc.) that promotes employee growth, supports the health of the workforce and drive the future success of the organization's people and infrastructure." "Assesses current workforce plans to ensure they are up-to-date in order to meet Program/Agency goals and objectives. Works with senior management officials and HR to comply with the workforce planning process as described in the Department's position management policy."
3. **Performance Management Standard** ***(Required Standard by DEPT)***
The supervisor establishes subordinate employee performance plans within established timeframes and that align with Agency and Departmental goals and objectives. Communicates to employees how their work supports the Agency mission and strategic plan/initiatives. Employee performance plans contain clear, results-focused measures and the supervisor provides accurate and timely feedback to determine progress and success in meeting expectations:
   - *"The supervisor completes performance plans, progress reviews, and appraisals of subordinate employees by the due dates established by the Department or Agency. Performance plans for each employee must include at least one critical element that is traceable to the agency's goals and objectives (e.g., Mission Results critical performance element)."*
   - *"Provides ongoing feedback and coaching as demonstrated through performance feedback sessions as evidenced by 100% of employees receiving at least one feedback session at the midpoint of the rating period."*
   - *"Ensures appropriate action is taken to address performance problems in a manner that supports organizational goals and objectives."*
   - *"Ensures subordinate managers and supervisors adhere to the Agency performance management policy with regard to performance appraisal and employee recognition."*
   - *Performance and employee feedback data is used as an indicator of compliance and general satisfaction or needed improvement with regard to the planning, developing, monitoring, rating and rewarding of performance.*

These listed behaviors are by no means exhaustive but broad examples and guidelines to assist you in distinguishing levels of performance. The attainment, documentation or the attempt to attain one or more of the behaviors on the list does not constitute or assure a rating at the "exceeds" level for an element. Determination of element rating and summary rating is decided by the manager/supervisor based on actual results achieved during the performance period.

Distinguishing Levels of Performance (Continued)

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.	
Corresponding Validated Competency: *Team building.*	
FULLY SUCCESSFUL	**EXCEEDS**
Emphasizes the importance of teamwork in the department and company at large.	1. Demonstrates outstanding team-building skills.
Promotes a team approach to solving work problems.	2. Takes a marginally functional department and converts it into a team.
Fosters the participation, involvement, and commitment of team members.	3. Develops high performing teams.
Recognizes and rewards team oriented behaviors and action.	4. Has an extraordinary ability to turn a group in to a team.
Generates positive measurable outcomes as a result of teamwork.	5. Consistently generates positive measurable outcomes as a result of teamwork.
Structures projects and assignments to further strengthen teamwork among employees.	6. Structures projects and assignments to strengthen teamwork and produce products of superior quality.
Uses a team approach to develop and utilize the unique talents of each employee.	7. Knows and utilizes the special skills and talents of each employee. Motivates team to back up each other in the absence of supervisor.
These listed behaviors are by no means exhaustive but broad examples and guidelines to assist you in distinguishing levels of performance. The attainment, documentation or the attempt to attain one or more of the behaviors on the list does not constitute or assure a rating at the "exceeds" level for an element. Determination of element rating and summary rating is decided by the manager/supervisor based on actual results achieved during the performance period.	

Distinguishing Levels of Performance (Continued)

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.	
Corresponding Validated Competency: *N/A*	
FULLY SUCCESSFUL	**EXCEEDS**
Utilizes techniques and methods to identify problems.	1. Utilizes a variety of techniques and methods to identify problems and develop clear, concise and accurate resolutions to the applicable problems.
Demonstrates an adequate method to disseminate recommendations.	2. Demonstrates a thorough cooperative and resourceful process to disseminate the appropriate recommendations, which positively impacts the customer or work environment.
Analyzes problems and recommends solutions.	3. Identifies, analyzes and evaluates reoccurring problems and initiates, recommends and presents problem solving solutions.
Ensures that payment amounts are accurate, necessary supporting documents are up to date and on file, and applications are complete.	4. Has exceptional track record of ensuring that payment amounts are accurate, necessary supporting documents are consistently up to date and on file, and applications are complete.
Ensures compliance checks are made and reported.	5. Proactively ensures compliance checks are made and reported.
Ensures that staff is fully trained in the program areas for which each employee is responsible.	6. Consistently trains and or coaches program staff.
Manages within the established budget/allocation for program, function or work assigned, notifies appropriate individual of potential budget short falls.	7. Consistently manages within the established budget/allocation for program, function or work assigned, notifies appropriate individual of potential budget shortfalls. Anticipates budget overruns and takes corrective actions.
Good program management skills and successfully monitors all programs/ projects in his/her area of responsibility.	8. Program plans and guidance are consistently responsive to Agency goals, objectives and requirements; policy instructions are issued timely and are consistently accurate.
Successfully resolves problems and issues.	9. Anticipates problems/issues and resolves in a timely manner.
These listed behaviors are by no means exhaustive but broad examples and guidelines to assist you in distinguishing levels of performance. The attainment, documentation or the attempt to attain one or more of the behaviors on the list does not constitute or assure a rating at the "exceeds" level for an element. Determination of element rating and summary rating is decided by the manager/supervisor based on actual results achieved during the performance period.	

Distinguishing Levels of Performance (Continued)

Research and Analysis: Thoroughly and accurately researches issues timely, using available reference sources (e.g., USDA manuals, or applicable law or regulations. Makes reasonable recommendations or decisions based on available guidance.	
Corresponding Validated Competency: *N/A*	
FULLY SUCCESSFUL	**EXCEEDS**
Researches issues and which lead to the production of a good product/service.	1. Thoroughly researches issues before acting which leads to a thorough product/service of good quality.
Generally uses appropriate analytical techniques to perform assigned tasks that usually result in solid recommendations/actions.	2. Independently utilizes appropriate analytical techniques, skills and judgment to perform assigned tasks which consistently result in sound proactive recommendations or actions.
Utilizes standard research or analytical techniques.	3. Utilizes innovative research or analytical techniques that result in process improvements.
Utilizes resources (including colleagues) and skills to design, administer, and interpret surveys.	4. Utilizes resources and/or state -of -the art skills in designing, administering and interpreting surveys.
Generates usable data from readily available sources.	5. Generates reliable data from the best sources and resources.
Uses adequate statistical measurements and tests.	6. Uses a broad range of appropriate statistical measurements and tests.
Produces research reports that are well reasoned, well written and well received.	7. Consistently produces thorough research reports that are well reasoned, well written and well received.
Research and analysis deadlines are usually met.	8. Research and analysis deadlines are met consistently.
Produces standardized reports by retrieving data from various systems or data sources.	9. Develops sophisticated technological solutions or methods to troubleshoot and resolve retrieval and reporting requirements.
Performs initial, preliminary analyses of straightforward information to be used in reports.	10. Develops new and customized queries to create reports that are used by others within and across areas of responsibility.
Analyzes data to identify weaknesses, patterns and trends and communicates to supervisor.	11. Consistently and reliably analyzes data to identify weaknesses, new patterns and trends and communicates to supervisor.
These listed behaviors are by no means exhaustive but broad examples and guidelines to assist you in distinguishing levels of performance. The attainment, documentation or the attempt to attain one or more of the behaviors on the list does not constitute or assure a rating at the "exceeds" level for an element. Determination of element rating and summary rating is decided by the manager/supervisor based on actual results achieved during the performance period.	

Distinguishing Levels of Performance (Continued)

Resource Management: 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.	
Corresponding Validated Competency: *N/A*	
FULLY SUCCESSFUL	**EXCEEDS**
• Avoids wasting money materials or resources. • Operates with in the budget.	1. Employee's planning skills result in significant cost-savings to the government.
Clearly communicates cost- related issues to employees.	2. Consistently communicates cost-related issues to employees and encourages and rewards cost-saving suggestions from employees.
Carefully monitors and controls costs, resources and encourages employee to do the same.	3. Consistently monitors costs/resources and creates and implements highly productive cost-saving practices, policies and programs.
Accurately analyzes costs.	4. Is financially astute; shares knowledge with employees.
Understands and implements solid financial planning and or resource management.	5. Understands solid financial planning and or resource management and takes a wide range of actions to cut wasteful expenditures.
Maintains good financial controls.	6. Creates highly effective systems and processes to monitor and control costs.
Clearly communicates cost-related issues to employees.	7. Consistently communicates cost-related issues to employees and develops a high degree of cost consciousness among employees.
Understands sources of budget data, such as NFC, Congress, OPM, OHRM.	8. Utilizes Knowledge of resource management to make sound recommendations to supervisors and management.
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Distinguishing Levels of Performance (Continued)

Individual Contributions to the Team: 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, explores 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.	
Corresponding Validated Competency: *Contributing to Team Success*	
FULLY SUCCESSFUL	**EXCEEDS**
Participates in identifying workgroup issues	1. Proactively identifies workgroup issues and works with the team to see issues resolved.
Participates in activities that maintain workgroup efficiencies.	2. Consistently participates in activities that maintain or improve workgroup efficiencies.
Provides suggestions to team to team/unit work group.	3. Provides guidance and suggestions to the team/unit/work group; shares new approaches, innovations and best practices across the work groups.
Contributes to the effectiveness of the work group	4. Contributes proactively to the overall effectiveness of the work group.
Assists team members by contributing ideas.	5. Helps others implement decisions as a team.
Regularly cooperates with co workers and others in meeting commitments and accomplishing assigned work on time.	6. Assists team members and takes on added responsibility without hesitation**.**
Performs assigned work within program area. Trouble shoots and resolves problems that arise.	7. Troubleshoots within assigned program areas and cross trains in other program areas to become knowledgeable in order to assist other team members.
Generally participates during discussion and or team/staff meetings.	8. Projects a positive attitude during discussions and or team/staff meetings; encourages other team members by offering constructive comments, explanations, contributions, etc.
Demonstrates collaborative efforts between farm programs and farm loan programs by sharing information and providing other support.	9. Consistently demonstrates collaborative efforts between farm programs and farm loan programs by regularly sharing information and providing other support.
Accepts constructive criticism in a positive manner.	10. Uses constructive criticism to change and improve his/her role as a team player.
Is open and communicative with others.	11. Is communicative and utilizes team member's ideas to strategize; is consultative and innovative. Where there are obstacles collaborates with team to eliminate barriers to success.
Is usually dependable and reliable.	12. Consistently dependable. Does not cancel meetings or fail to attend scheduled meetings.
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Distinguishing Levels of Performance (Continued)

Execution of Duties/Technical Knowledge and Skill: Demonstrates technical competence and/or knowledge of his/her work. Work assignments are routinely performed in a timely manner, assuring a quality of work that meets the needs of the organization with the appropriate level of supervision. Appropriate work methods are selected for the development of work products. Work products do not require substantive revisions. Assignments are completed in accordance with applicable agency guidelines.	
Corresponding Validated Competency: *Technical Knowledge and Skill*	
FULLY SUCCESSFUL	**EXCEEDS**
Completes work assignments that demonstrate good planning organization, coordination, and consultation.	1. Completes thorough work assignments that demonstrate appropriate planning, organization, coordination, consultation and scheduling and makes suggestions for improvement that should be considered in relationship to the big picture items related to those assignments.
Generally completes tasks that demonstrate appropriate application of technical and subject matter knowledge within the program area.	2. Consistently completes tasks that demonstrate appropriate application of technical and subject matter knowledge within the program area.
Completes work assignments and products that are accurate, timely, and of good quality.	3. Completes thorough work assignments and products that are accurate, timely, of excellent quality, and rarely require revision or supervisor followup.
Employs established methods and approaches in order to meet customer's expectations and objectives.	4. Employs innovative methods and approaches in order to exceed customers' expectations and objectives.
Effectively manages workload.	5. Effectively manages work load and demonstrates superior flexibility and ability in managing that workload.
Handles problems and adapts to priorities and changes in procedures without losing sight of the purpose of the work.	6. Proactively develops contingency plans to handle potential problems and adapts quickly to new priorities and changes in procedures and programs without losing sight of the long term purpose of the work.
Work is well organized and submissions timely.	7. Work is well organized, submissions timely and organization of work is used as a model for others; work is clearly superior.
Utilizes adequate techniques and methods to identify problems and develops workable solutions.	8. Utilizes a variety of techniques and methods to proactively identify problems and develop clear, concise and accurate resolutions.
Possess good understanding of prevailing technical and subject matter knowledge.	9. Consistently demonstrates superior or mastery level of prevailing technical and subject matter knowledge.

Distinguishing Levels of Performance (Continued)

Generally researches issues to produce a product/serve of good quality.	10. Thoroughly researches issues before acting which leads to an accurate and quality product /service.
Identifies obstacles to the execution of duties and recommends procedures to enhance work products and/or processes.	11. Regularly identifies obstacles to execution of duties and recommends sound procedures to streamline and or/enhance work products and/or processes.
Generally provides staff/colleagues with information, resources and/or training that contribute to key deliverables.	12. Consistently and proactively provides staff/colleagues with information, resources and /or training that advance the quality and/or timeliness of key deliverables.
Demonstrates innovation in the development and submission of core deliverables.	13. Consistently demonstrates outstanding tenacity and/or innovation in the development and submission of core deliverables when confronted by exceptional challenges and obstacles.
Provides good oversight and/or execution of the development and submission of core deliverables within agreed upon timelines, in accordance with Agency/Departmental guidance.	14. Consistently provides effective oversight and/or execution of the development and submission of core deliverables within agreed upon timelines, in accordance with Agency/Departmental guidance.
Completes tasks that demonstrate appropriate application of technical and subject matter knowledge within the assigned area.	15. Consistently completes tasks that clearly demonstrate appropriate application of technical and advanced subject matter knowledge within the assigned area.
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Distinguishing Levels of Performance (Continued)

Customer Service (Supervisory): Conducts on-going reviews and monitors organizational performance to achieve effective customer service results. Actively gathers feedback from customers to identify their needs and expectations. Ensures staff provides responses to organizational leadership, the public, internal and external customers that are prompt, professional, reliable, and address the individual customer's circumstances. Ensures the delivery of high quality products, services, and solutions. Delegates issues when appropriate, and ensures a final response or completion for the customer. Follows up with customers on solutions, products, and services to provide quality service. Recommends ways to improve performance using available customer satisfaction or trend data. Demonstrates the importance of customer service as a critical component of the Agency's mission.	
Corresponding Validated Competency: *Customer Service*	
FULLY SUCCESSFUL	**EXCEEDS**
Contributes to workable solutions to projects/problems.	1. Contributes and leads innovation and workable solutions to project/problems.
Maintains good rapport with external and internal customers, and maintains established working relationships with several external organizations. Employee reviews customer feedback to enhance the delivery of good quality customer service by planning, implementing and training the office staff in the importance of customer relations.	2. Consistently maintains an excellent rapport with external and internal customers, and has initiated and established working relationships with several external organizations. Employee reviews customer feedback to continuously enhance the delivery of high quality customer service by planning, implementing and training the office staff in the importance of customer relations.
Identifies obstacles to communication and recommends processes to enhance organizational communications and implements processes and procedures to prevent reoccurrence.	3. Consistently identifies obstacles to communication and recommends processes to streamline and/or enhance organizational communications and implements processes and procedures to prevent reoccurrence.
Generally, provides staff and colleagues with resources and/or training to better convey information. Usually conveys a clear message tailored to the intended audience. Communications seldom require more than minimal rework or editing. Provides supervisor and coworkers with resources and/or training to improve conveyance of information to prevent problems.	4. Proactively provides staff and colleagues with resources and/or training to better convey information. Consistently conveys a clear message tailored to the intended audience. Communications seldom require more than minimal rework or editing. Proactively provides supervisor and coworkers with resources and/or training to improve conveyance of information to prevent problems.
Responds to other agencies (RNCS, RMS, Conservation Districts, Extension Services, etc.) regarding shared programs.	5. Established exceptional working relationships with other agencies regarding shared programs.
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Distinguishing Levels of Performance (Continued)

Customer Service (Non Supervisory): Actively gathers feedback from customers to identify their needs and expectations. Provides responses to the customer that are prompt, consistent, professional, and address the individual customer's circumstances. Exercising sound judgment; identifies information to be shared with customers. Refers issues when appropriate, and ensures a final response or completion for the customer. Follows up with customers on products and services to provide quality service. Recommends ways to improve performance using available customer satisfaction or trend data. Demonstrates the importance of customer service as a critical component of the Agency's mission.	
Corresponding Validated Competency: *Customer Service*	
FULLY SUCCESSFUL	**EXCEEDS**
• Exhibits positive behavior that promotes and influences cooperation from others. • Promotes cooperation with external and internal customers. Employee demonstrates the importance of customer in a variety of ways. • Seeks /implements improvements in customer relationships; helps remove barriers to excellent customer service.	1. Consistently exhibits positive behavior that promotes and influences cooperation with external and internal customers. Employee constantly demonstrates the importance of customer service by the development of plans to dissolve (remove) barriers that prevent external/internal customer relations.
Employee effectively communicates with customer base.	2. Routinely Identifies obstacles to communication and recommends processes to streamline and/or enhance organizational communications.
Articulates in a manner that is understood by colleagues; writing is generally free of errors and of good quality.	3. Ensures delivery of clear, concise, comprehensive, organized, and grammatically correct products in all forms of communication. Expresses complex ideas and information clearly, logically, and accurately.
Identifies appropriate resources/training. Communicates clearly orally and in writing.	4. Proactively provides staff and colleagues with resources and/or training to better convey information. Always conveys a clear message tailored to the intended audience. Communications seldom require more than minimal rework or editing. Proactively provides supervisor and coworkers with resources and/or training to improve conveyance of information to prevent problems
Cooperates with other departments/divisions, etc. to meet customer's needs. Collaborates effectively with colleagues and working teams.	5. Seeks input from colleagues and staff members and promotes sharing of ideas. Contributes to and/or conducts team activities/ discussions that encourage open communication and build trust. Is proactive and takes practical steps to identify and address any areas needing attention.
Builds a positive respectful relationship with customers; meets their needs and requests.	6. Consistently works to develop a positive relationship with customers and fellow employees by respecting their needs and requests. Response to customers is always timely

Distinguishing Levels of Performance (Continued)

Actively seeks customer feedback; seeks to understand customer needs.	7. Exhibits thorough understanding of customer requirements as demonstrated in most forms of communications and follows through in a timely manner until issues are resolved.
• Addresses customers' requirements and issues. • Readily adapts to needs of diverse customers.	8. Understands customer culture (mindset) and history- Often anticipating their needs. Recommends ways to improve serving diverse audiences.
• Addresses customers' requirements and issues; and with respectable attitude. • Seeks information about the underlying needs of the customer to get at the cause of problems.	9. Consistently displays a thorough understanding of customer requirements on issues.
• Provides appropriate products and services to customers.	10. Routinely identifies ways to improve products/services and ensures appropriate product/service is provided.
• Addresses customer needs in a consistent manner showing courtesy and phone etiquette. • Corrects customer problems promptly without becoming defensive. • Is accessible.	11. Demonstrates patience, superb telephone etiquette; is frequently sought to handle problem calls; regularly updates and shares pertinent information.
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Distinguishing Levels of Performance (Continued)

Civil Rights, Equal Employment Opportunity, and Diversity and Inclusion (Supervisory): Fosters an inclusive workplace where diversity and individual differences are valued and leveraged to achieve the vision and mission of the organization through both personal leadership and appropriate managerial action. Performs in a nondiscriminatory manner that demonstrates behaviors that conform to civil rights and EEO laws, regulations, and policies, including fairness, cooperation, and respect towards employees and customers. **(DEPT)** MANDATORY	
FULLY SUCCESSFUL	**EXCEEDS (Created by DEPT)**
Demonstrates an understanding of diversity and inclusion, Civil Rights and equal opportunity goals by enhancing outreach programs designed to attract and retain minorities, women and persons with disabilities.	1. Demonstrates increase over time of the representation of women, minorities, or individuals with disabilities in the workforce.
Assures culturally competent customer service. Sets the tone for creating a welcoming environment, assures that service delivery is provided in a culturally competent way; assures that printed materials are available in alternate formats and in different languages as requested, and facilities are accessible for all customers.	2. Demonstrates increase in the participation of women, minorities, or individuals with disabilities in USDA programs.
Encourages a fair and equitable work environment by encouraging the use of, and when appropriate, utilizing problem solving and dispute resolution processes by addressing EEO complaints and employee issues in a timely and effective manner.	3. Demonstrates reduction over time of the number of unresolved EEO or other administrative complaints through the use of alternative dispute resolution.
Promotes awareness and understanding of the disabled.	4. Implements projects that increase the accessibility of facilities or workplace to individuals with disabilities or for customers with limited English proficiency.
Utilizes diversity within the workforce by incorporating the diverse perspectives into business decisions. The manager routinely seeks out the perspectives of all employees. The manager uses a variety of methods for ensuring that employee suggestions are elicited acknowledged and utilized.	5. Provides examples of improving the integration of civil rights, EEO, and diversity and inclusion into program planning and program implementation.
Demonstrates an understanding of career development, training, recognition and advancement opportunities for employees at all levels by providing equitable training and career development opportunities and performance awards for all grade levels.	6. Regularly promotes and utilizes Special Emphasis Programs, which result in improved representation and utilization of minorities, women, and individuals with disabilities. When progress or program participation is limited due to budgetary consideration or other constraints, develops alternative strategies and long-term plans or initiates other actions, which demonstrate commitment to EEO/Civil Rights.

Distinguishing Levels of Performance (Continued)

Effectively recruits, hires, promotes, and maintains a diverse workforce. Works with Human Resources and other networks as appropriate to assist in the recruitment process and expand the diversity of the applicant pool. Ensures that interview panels are diverse and trained in cross-cultural interviewing techniques, supports the use of special programs designed to attract and utilize minorities, women and persons with disabilities to the workforce,	7. Makes significant contributions to the development and implementation of the Agency's Affirmative Employment Plan for Individuals with Disabilities and Disabled Veterans, and the Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Plan.
Provides EEO/Civil Rights/Sexual Harassment/Diversity information (USDA material) to employees through information sessions, staff meetings, etc., at least two times a year.	8. Solicits advice or assistance from Agency Civil Rights Officials and initiates action to achieve EEO/Civil Rights goals and objectives
Provides proactive assistance to employees to help with problem solving and resolving conflicts. Positive outcomes based on employee skills training in related topics.	9. Actively pursues or implements new ideas to improve the work environment and/or enhance progress toward achieving workforce diversity.
Provides opportunities for and encourages employees to attend training to increase interpersonal skills, e.g., cross-cultural communication, negotiation, dispute resolution, problem solving, active listening, etc. For example, gives all employees equitable consideration for appropriate training and /or developmental opportunities. Shows evidence of counseling employees in the development of Individual Development Plans.	10. Volunteers to serve as a mentor or establishes mentoring relationships, which results in positive feedback concerning assistance provided by the supervisor.
Integrates diversity development into performance planning and evaluation. The manager holds staff accountable for participating in activities that support these efforts. The manager holds staff accountable for behaviors that are exclusionary and offensive.	11. Proactively develops and implements initiatives and programs that are consistent with civil rights performance and strategic plans within specified timeframes.

Distinguishing Levels of Performance (Continued)

	12. Actively seeks assistance from Human Resources and Civil Rights Divisions in locating minorities, women and individuals with disabilities as applicants. Establishes recruitment contact with schools (e.g., 1890 Land Grant colleges/Universities, vocational schools) with significant minority and female enrollment. Outreach activities with 1890 Land Grant Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, 1994 Tribal Colleges and Universities, and other institutions with a high enrollment of minorities, females and individuals with disabilities result in the implementation of research projects, the hiring of students, or the implementation of partnerships (e.g., Adopt a School) in order to achieve long-term EEO objectives.
	13. Consistently contributes to EEO/Civil Rights efforts through the implementation of effective ideas/employee suggestions.
	14. Is recognized as a positive influence in the furtherance of EEO/Civil Rights based on noticeable results or changes within the organization supervised. Ideas are accepted and utilized by other organizations.
	15. Consistently provides leadership by motivating employees to contribute to meeting the goals and objectives in the civil rights performance and strategic plans.
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Distinguishing Levels of Performance (Continued)

Civil Rights, Equal Employment Opportunity, and Diversity and Inclusion (Nonsupervisory): Performs assignments in a manner that demonstrates fairness, cooperation, and respect toward employees and customers. Fosters an inclusive workplace where diversity and individual differences are valued. Leverages diversity to achieve the vision and mission of the organization. Supports and maintains an environment that is free of unlawful discrimination and reprisal. **(DEPT)** MANDATORY	
FULLY SUCCESSFUL	**EXCEEDS**
Understands the importance of diversity. Performance is demonstrated when employees exhibit behaviors that encourage acceptance in a culturally diverse environment.	1. Demonstrates a commitment to the implementation of the civil rights, EEO, and diversity programs through effective ideas or activities.
Maintains fair and impartial delivery of programs, activities, and services.	2. Obtains approval for an employee suggestion which promotes or improves the effectiveness of the civil rights, EEO, and diversity programs.
Actively pursues knowledge and understanding of different perspectives and ideas.	3. Makes a presentation on a relevant civil rights, EEO, or diversity topics during staff or work unit meetings.
Demonstrates an understanding and knowledge of cross-cultural issues, cultural differences, non verbal cues, feelings and emotions when dealing with and resolving complaints.	4. Actively assists new employees in their adjustment to the workplace and consistently contributes to team efforts in carrying out assignments.
Demonstrates a belief in the concept of treating all others with consideration, respect and fairness and openly, consistently challenging bias, intolerance and incivility.	5. Suggests or actively supports new ideas that improve the work environment and/or enhance progress toward achieving workforce diversity.
Effectively works with customers, peers and stakeholders from all backgrounds.	6. Is recognized as a positive influence in the furtherance of diversity based on noticeable results/changes within assigned area of responsibility.
Supports a workplace culture that welcomes and values new thoughts, different perspectives, and nonconventional approaches.	7. Actively plans, conducts or participates on inter-office projects which promote the program. Recommends or plans activities which bring individuals of diverse backgrounds together for the opportunity to share concerns and interests.
Demonstrates a basic knowledge and understanding of individual and cultural differences.	8. Is openly recognized as one who consistently meets and deals with others in a nondiscriminatory manner.
Demonstrates prevention of complaints and actively pursues resolution of complaints.	9. Participation on task groups results in significant EEO/Civil Rights contributions.
Demonstrates support for diversity strategies that strengthen service delivery for a diverse customer base.	10. Assists in the recruitment of individuals either directly or through the referral of others, which contribute to workforce diversity.
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Distinguishing Levels of Performance (Continued)

Mission Results (Supervisory): Demonstrates support for agency strategic goals and initiatives within own organizational unit and contributes to the achievement of overall agency initiatives. Stresses accountability and continuous improvement to employees/team members, makes timely and effective decisions, and produces results through strategic thinking and decisive action. Ensures a high degree of responsiveness to management, the public, and internal and external customers. Continually reviews, monitors, and strives to improve organizational performance to achieve agency mission results. MANDATORY

FULLY SUCCESSFUL	EXCEEDS
Decisions and actions demonstrate organizational awareness including knowledge of mission, function, policies, technological systems, and culture.	1. Decisions and actions are exemplary and demonstrate organizational awareness including knowledge of mission, function, policies, technological systems, and culture;
Demonstrates ethical behavior, practices and integrity and accountability in achieving Agency goals.	2. Consistently demonstrates the highest level of ethics, integrity and accountability in achieving Agency goals.
	3. Innovation, improvements, and contributions to management, administrative, technical, or other functional areas that impact outside the work unit and facilitate organizational recognition.
Fully supports and work to fulfill the Agency's mission.	4. Takes a wide range of actions that help support and fulfill the Agency's mission.
Encourages employees to focus on the Agency's mission.	5. Takes a wide range of actions that encourages other employees to focus more clearly on the Agency's mission

1. **Cultural Transformation *(Required Standard by DEPT)***
   Supports the Secretary's initiative for Cultural Transformation through continuous examination and survey of the workforce, customer service, training, and leadership; creates an environment of inclusion, exceptional performance, and effective leadership; and works to eliminate any barriers to operational and service excellence. Actively engages in the transformation of FSA and USDA by supporting process improvements in the organization.
2. **Diversity Roadmap *(Required Standard by DEPT)***
   Supports the Secretary's initiative for USDA Diversity Recruitment Roadmap by expanding on mission-specific activities and timelines to ensure diversity recruitment program success and leadership accountability.

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Common Rating Errors Supervisors Should Avoid

Common Rating Errors	How to Avoid the Error
Halo - ratings based on an "overall impression (either positive or negative of the individual rather than on an individual's performance relative to each performance element.	Evaluate performance of each element independently from other objectives/elements.
Primacy - ratings based only on positive or negative performance **early i**n the performance cycle rather than on performance exhibited throughout the cycle. **Regency** - ratings based only on positive or negative performance toward the **end** of the performance cycle rather than on performance exhibited throughout ht cycle.	Keep notes on individual's performance throughout the cycle so that you can recall a particular individual's full performance more easily at the end of the cycle.
Overemphasis on positive or negative performance - relying too heavily on either the positive or negative aspects of an individual's performance when assigning ratings rather than considering both aspects equally.	Be sure to consider both positive and negative performance during the entire performance cycle because all of an individual's actions on the job are important.
Similar/different from me - assigning higher or lower ratings for an individual based on certain qualities or characteristics which are similar to those of the rater.	Make a conscious effort to ignore any similarities or differences you may have with particular individuals. Don't rate people who resemble you more highly that you rate others. Suzie, a single mother, had worked hard and been promoted to supervisor. She unconsciously rated several women who were also single parents higher than their performance warranted. Do respect differences in talents among your staff.
Stereotyping - basing ratings on an individual's group membership (e.g., ethnicity, gender, religion) rather than on his/ her performance.	Be aware of the stereotypes that you hold about different groups, and make a conscious effort to ignore these stereotypes when assigning performance ratings.
Contrast - basing ratings on a comparison of the individual to others previously rated rather than on the performance objectives/elements.	Don't evaluate people in comparison with others. "No, he doesn't really deserve an 'Outstanding' rating, but compared to the other employees, he really stands out." Interpret and apply performance elements specifically and consistently to ensure that differences in ratings reflect difference in performance.
Central tendency - giving average ratings to all individuals, despite differences in their performance. **Severity** - giving low ratings to all individuals, despite differences in their performance. **Leniency** - giving high ratings to all individuals, despite differences in their performance.	Since the purpose of conducting performance appraisals is to accurately reflect and differentiate an individual's performance through ratings, you should strive and make every effort to provide fair and accurate assessments.

Writing Your Accomplishments

Make Sure your Voice is Heard and Your Achievements are Recognized.

What is the Write Up?

The write up is an employee's narrative description of accomplishments related to the job objectives (elements) identified on the employee's performance plan. Although writing your accomplishments takes some effort, it does not have to be lengthy or burdensome; however, it should clearly remind the supervisor of your significant achievements, and provides an opportunity for further discussion about performance. It gives the supervisor your perspective of your own contribution and performance.

Your write up of accomplishments is not an exercise in good writing. Rather, it is an opportunity for you to describe major contributions and how the work meets or exceeds the supervisor's performance expectations (standards) as outlined on your performance plan. Your write-up is not intended to nor does it relieve your supervisor of the responsibility for writing an assessment of your contributions.

Documenting everything you achieve during the appraisal cycle is not expected. You are encouraged to keep a journal (notes, documentation, examples, etc) throughout the appraisal period to record significant activities as they occur. The journal makes the write up of accomplishments activity easier to complete and keeps the write up specific and relevant to job objectives.

Employee Guidelines for Writing up Accomplishments

When writing accomplishments, the following guidelines may help:

- **Restate objectives.** Paraphrasing job objectives gives managers/supervisors a clear picture of how well the employee understood performance expectations.

- **Highlight most significant achievements for the rating cycle.** The write-up does not need to be lengthy. The employee should **highlight what mattered most** during the rating period.

- **Make the connection between what was done and why it matters to the agency.** Highlight how the agency is better off because of the achievement or contribution by describing the tangible benefit (i.e., a cost savings to the organization or a solution that enabled employees to better perform their jobs).

- **Cite instances where employee actions or conduct exemplified elements and or standards (CR/EEO, customer Service, Cultural Transformation).** Employee conduct relative to these can influence the performance rating. Be sure to highlight specific instances where your behavior made a positive difference in the outcome of a job objective.

Note challenges faced and how you fared. Overcoming challenges is often an important part of the overall performance rating. Challenges may be technical or interpersonal in nature. They may also involve the ability to succeed despite limited resources or difficult circumstances.

Writing Your Accomplishments (Continued)

Create a System to Record Accomplishments

You can use hard copy or electronic, depending on what works best for you. Some suggestions include:

- E-mail Folder (keep separate folder for performance related items)
- Word Document, updated as needed
- Notes on Planner or Calendar
- File Folder(s) to maintain copies of documents.

Establish a process for reviewing and recording your accomplishments on a regular basis, e.g., once a week. Make a note of significant items or put a copy into your file. Identify the objective (element) which is linked to the accomplishment.

What are Significant Accomplishments?

The following are characteristics of significant assignments:

- Difficult
- Controversial
- First Time or One-of-a-Kind
- High Visibility
- Large Volume of Work
- Short Deadlines
- Competing Priorities
- Require Innovation
- Significant Scope and Impact.

Supervisor's Checklist for Preparing for Employee Performance Reviews

Holding successful mid–year and end–of–year performance appraisal discussions requires preparation. For example, developing a comprehensive written appraisal narrative can be extremely helpful when preparing for the face–to–face appraisal review. Appraising officials can use the following checklist as a tool to help them prepare for employee appraisal reviews.

- **Gather the Material**
- **Review and Write**
- **Schedule the Interview**

Gather the Material Have all the necessary tools close at hand before starting to write the appraisal narrative, including all of the following.

- A copy of the employee's performance plan.
- Notes of previous meetings with the employee (remember what was discussed with the employee during previous meetings).
- Employee self-evaluation documents, which could include a list of completed projects and accomplishments prepared by the employee.
- Written or recorded feedback on employee performance from other sources (these can include letters of appreciation, customer feedback, etc.).
- Appraisal program instructions that describe the performance appraisal process and procedures.

Review and Write. Become familiar with the appraisal form and review how to derive the summary rating (e.g., numerical formula, percentages, numerical weights). Take the time to review the employee's elements and standards, knowing which elements are critical, non-critical, and additional, and how to measure employee performance. Finally, review all the documentation. When writing the narrative, consider these points:

Responsibilities and Duties. Review employee responsibilities/

- Have the employee's work responsibilities changed? If so, how?
- Has the employee been assigned additional responsibilities which were not included in the performance plan? If so, consider acknowledging these additional responsibilities in the narrative and the performance interview. Also, consider whether to include the new responsibilities in next year's performance plan.

Supervisor's Checklist for Preparing for Employee Performance Reviews (Continued)

Performance. Include performance data for the entire appraisal period, not just the most recent information. The appraisal narrative should address all of the following.

- How well the employee performed the assigned responsibilities and the quality and/or timeliness of the employee's accomplishments;
- Whether and how well the employee met performance goals.
- Areas of performance that improved over the appraisal period.
- Areas of performance that might need improvement.

Review Developmental Needs. In addition to the information in the narrative, prepare to talk to the employee about developmental needs. Identify skills and competencies that may enhance or improve the employee's performance. Look into a variety of ways of improving skills, such as classroom or on-line training, professional conferences and workshops, details to other work units or to positions with higher responsibilities, or on-the-job training. Enter the appraisal review with this information on hand, but during the review, be sure to ask the employee for input on development needs. If employees participate in creating their own development plans, those plans likely will be more successful.

Schedule the Interview. The final preparation step is to set aside a time and a place to meet with the employee. When scheduling the appraisal interview, make sure to do the following.

- Schedule a time that is convenient for you and the employee. This should be uninterrupted time so that you and the employee can concentrate on the appraisal.
- Give the employee a copy of the performance appraisal with its narrative before the meeting so that he or she can have time to prepare for the appraisal interview.

When the supervisor takes time to prepare, conducting the appraisal interview can be less complicated, less stressful, and more successful at providing the employee valuable feedback on performance.