

September 5, 2008

SUBJECT: Guidance for Establishing Performance Plans for the Fiscal Year 2009
Performance Cycle

TO: Administrator's Council
Deputy Area Directors
AFM Division Directors
Area Personnel Assistants

FROM: Kit Hoyle
Chief, REE Services Branch
Human Resources Division

This memorandum provides guidance for establishing employee Performance Plans for the Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 cycle, October 1, 2008 – September 30, 2009. This guidance applies to all non-SES ARS employees and incorporates new Department of Agriculture requirements issued during the past year. Attached is a “Checklist for Preparing Performance Plans” that identifies new and previously existing requirements that we hope will aid supervisors and managers in the process.

The first step of any performance cycle is to establish expectations for employees in the form of a Performance Plan. Plans should be established as early in the rating cycle as possible to ensure that employees are clear about expectations. Plans should normally be provided to employees within 30 days of the beginning of the performance cycle. However, due to the significant challenges of our transition to an FY cycle, additional time may be necessary. Strive to establish plans within 60 days of the beginning of the performance cycle.

Beginning with the FY 2009 cycle, the Plans for all ‘official’ supervisors and managers must contain the new “Supervision and Human Capital Management” performance element and standard. ‘Official’ supervisors and managers are those with ‘Supervisory’, ‘Director’, or ‘Officer’ in their titles. They must also contain language that allows for incorporating customer and/or stakeholder perspectives. The memorandum communicating these new requirements, dated July 21, 2008, is attached.

Also beginning with the FY 2009 cycle, Plans must be established using official Performance Plan, Progress Review and Appraisal Worksheets (Forms AD-435A and B). These forms are available in ‘e-Forms’. Attached to this email, you will also find a ‘Word’ version of these forms which you may find easier to work with.

One final new requirement beginning with FY 2009 is that Plans contain no more than seven (7) performance elements. As has been the case in previous years, three (3) is the minimum number of elements and at least one element must be designated as ‘non-critical’.

Performance Plans are considered established when the Rating and Reviewing Officials have signed and dated the Plan; the expectations have been communicated to the employee; the

employee has signed and dated the Plan, and a copy has been provided to the employee. The original Plan should be retained by supervisor.

As a reminder, the Rating and Reviewing Officials may not be the same person; the Reviewing Official should be at a higher organizational level, normally the Rating Official's supervisor. Additionally, obtaining the employee's signature on the Plan does not mean the employee necessarily agrees with the expectations or goals in the Plan, only that performance expectations have been communicated to him/her. If an employee chooses not to sign the Plan, a note should be written in the employee signature box stating, "Discussion of the Performance Plan was held on (date) and the employee declined to sign the Plan."

Employee Listings, which identify the employees of various supervisors and managers, will be provided to Area Personnel Assistants no later than one month from the date of this memorandum. The Listings should be forwarded to supervisors and managers to certify that Performance Plans were established for employees. The supervisor or manager will notate the Listing with the date the Plan was established. Additionally, if no Plan was established, the supervisor will document the reason on the listing. Should an employee not be reflected on the Listing, please add his/her name and the date the Plan was established. Completed Listings are due to HRD **no later than December 31, 2008** and may be faxed or mailed to Theresa Bailey. Theresa's fax is (301) 504-4435 and her mailing address is: USDA/ARS/Human Resources Division, Performance and Awards Staff, 5601 Sunnyside Avenue, Room 3-1282D, Beltsville, MD 20705-5107. The Listings will be provided both as 'Word' documents and as Excel spreadsheets.

Should you have any questions regarding the guidance in this memorandum, please contact Theresa Bailey at (301) 504-1452 or your servicing Human Resources Specialist.

Attachments

cc:

AC Secretaries

DADs Secretaries

AFM Division Director Secretaries

CHECKLIST FOR PREPARING PERFORMANCE PLANS

The following are some reminders for establishing a performance plan.

- 1. Check the employee's position description for accuracy; the major duties in the position description should be included in the performance plan as critical elements. Accomplishment of organizational objectives and goals can be included in Performance Plans.
- 2. Employee participation in developing the Plan is desirable. However, the Rating and Reviewing Officials have the final authority for establishing the Performance Plan.
- 3. All Plans must be documented, in writing, on Forms AD435A, Performance Plan, Progress Review and Appraisal Worksheet.
NEW
- 4. The plan must align with Agency and/or organizational goals. At least one performance element must link to the strategic goals and objectives of the organization.
- 5. Include results-focused performance measures for each performance element. Elements and standards should be accurate, objective, measurable, attainable, and understandable.
- 6. The plan should be comprised of a minimum of three and not more than seven performance elements. There should be at least one non-critical element in the plan.
NEW
- 7. Performance Plans for non-supervisory employees must include in at least one of the critical elements the responsibility for demonstrating a commitment to EO/CR.
- 8. Performance Plans must contain a critical performance element for safety and health, when warranted by the employee's position.
- 9. Performance Plans may contain generic elements and standards for similar occupations.
- 10. An employee officially designated as "Supervisory", "Officer", or "Director" must have a separate critical performance element that addresses accountability for performance management duties.
NEW
- 11. An employee officially designated as "Supervisory", "Officer", or "Director" must contain customer/stakeholder perspectives in their Performance Plans.
NEW
- 12. An employee officially designated as "Supervisory", "Officer", or "Director" must have a separate critical performance element that addresses Equal Opportunity/Civil Rights.
- 13. The performance plan must be signed by the supervisor, Reviewing Official (normally the second-level supervisor) and employee. The employee should then receive a copy of the approved plan.