

**Performance
Management
and
Accountability**

**Best Practices and Strategies to
Enable Successful Program
Implementation, Oversight, and
Assessment**



U.S. Office of
Personnel Management

Foreword

Performance management is a key strategic tool in establishing and maintaining a high-performance workplace culture where excellent performance is celebrated and rewarded, and low performance is appropriately, and time addressed. The development and implementation of governmentwide standards for performance management, awards programs, and resolving poor performance serves to improve organizational effectiveness in the accomplishment of agency mission and goals, and the ability to advance the needs, policies, and goals of the United States.

Performance management programs not only provide the basis for communicating and clarifying organizational goals, identifying individual accountability for accomplishing those goals, and assessing performance and identifying developmental needs, but they also form a basis for rewarding excellence in employee performance and reinforcing a high-performing culture that will help improve organizational effectiveness.

The objective of this playbook is to **establish a comprehensive framework for managing employee performance** in the Federal government that fosters growth and accountability, ensures continuous improvement, supports mission delivery, and promotes employee engagement and development. This playbook also provides tools that effectively support agencies in preparing managers and supervisors to serve and lead as future executives.

Performance Framework

The [Government Performance and Results Act \(GPRA\) Modernization Act of 2010](#) provides the foundation by which Federal agencies are held accountable for establishing organizational routines and management processes for setting performance goals and objectives that deliver results for the American taxpayer.

- Designed to **help focus agencies on their highest priorities** and create a culture where data and empirical evidence plays a greater role in policy, budget, and management decisions, the law also created transparent roles and responsibilities for ensuring leadership engagement—a critical component of any effective performance management system.
- The Act codified and strengthened existing resources for performance management, including the creation of the **Chief Operating Officer (COO)** and **Performance Improvement Officers (PIO)** within the Federal agencies, and the establishment of the interagency **Performance Improvement Council (PIC)** to facilitate the sharing of leading practices across Federal agencies.
- The Federal performance framework rests on a few **proven management practices**:
 - Engaging senior managers,
 - Defining success through strategic planning and priority goal setting,
 - Focusing on a limited number of priority goals,
 - Regular, data-driven performance reviews that incorporate a broad range of qualitative and quantitative indicators and evidence, and
 - Strengthening agency management capabilities, collaboration, coordination, and knowledge for managing programs more effectively and efficiently.
 - Being transparent about results and communicating performance information clearly.

Key Leaders and Responsibilities

Senior Leaders

- Setting strategic direction and priority goals aligned with Presidential policies and priorities
- Champions of performance accountability

Performance Improvement Officers (PIO) and Chief Human Capital Officers

- Set agency priorities focus and translate agency-wide strategic goals into team and individual performance objectives
- Cascade goals through organizations via performance planning sessions
- Partner to create and drive a culture where performance management is normalized

Performance Management Officer (PMO - NEW Recommended)

- Serve as agency oversight official for performance management
- Collaborate with PIO and CHCO to develop and implement strategies to promote high-performance culture
- Conduct periodic comprehensive evaluation to assess effectiveness in driving a motivated, high-performing workforce that supports the agency's mission
- Develop annual process and procedures for review of performance plans to ensure meaningful objectives and alignment to agency mission
- Monitor compliance with policy timelines and procedural requirements

Note: Agencies may consider designating PMOs in large sub-components and organizations.

Performance Management Officer

Serves as the official responsible for **overseeing and supporting the implementation of performance management systems** and ensuring alignment between employee performance and agency goals.

Why the Role Matters

- Promotes a culture of performance excellence
- Ensures fairness and consistency in evaluations
- Supports employee development and engagement
- Links performance outcomes to mission success

Key Responsibilities

- Develop and maintain performance management policies and track performance to help manage/improve at all levels of the organization.
- Advise supervisors and managers on:
 - Performance plans
 - Appraisals
 - Performance improvement plans (PIPs) (in collaboration with human resources and general counsel)
- Monitor compliance and track actions taken to address less than fully successful performance
- Analyze performance data to identify trends and gaps
- Support training and communication on performance management processes

Performance Management Officer (Cont'd)

Strategic Functions

- Align individual and organizational performance with mission and strategic goals
- Facilitate continuous feedback and coaching culture
- Drive organizational accountability
- Contribute to workforce planning and talent development

Core Competencies

- Knowledge of federal regulations, agency authority, and performance management systems (e.g., agency performance system, USAP, OPM guidelines)
- Strong analytical and data interpretation skills
- Communication and interpersonal skills
- Change management and leadership capability
- Policy interpretation and development

Policy, Compliance and Oversight

Proper oversight is essential for accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement.

- Distribute **policies and guidance** to the employee level
 - Timelines for planning, feedback, and assessing
 - Roles and responsibilities
- Conduct **biennial update of performance policies** in accordance with OPM and regulatory requirements
 - Conduct regular compliance reviews
 - Use automated alerts for performance cycle deadlines
 - Track and respond to audit and evaluation recommendations
- **Performance Improvement Officer** and **Performance Management Officer** lead agency-wide efforts
 - Defined roles for Chief Data Officers, Evaluation Officers, and Program Managers
- Strengthen Internal Controls and Data Quality
- Integrate oversight into agency risk management framework
- Foster a culture of **continuous improvement**

Goal Setting and Strategic Alignment

Translate and cascade **agency-wide strategic goals and priorities** to assist managers in aligning employee performance.

- [Cross-Agency Priority Goals](#): Long-term Presidential priorities which require interagency coordination
- [Agency Priority Goals](#): 3 to 4 goals set by agency heads that reflect the top near-term, implementation-focused priorities to be achieved over the next two years.
- [Strategic Objectives](#): Long-term objectives, outcomes, and impacts an agency plans to accomplish throughout the term of the Administration.

Ensure **managers are familiar** with:

- The GPRA Modernization Act policies and guidance (found in [OMB Circular A-11, Part 6.](#))
- [Employee Performance Handbook](#)
- [Performance Management + Course](#)
- Performance Plan Checklist

Planning

Goal: Establish **clear, measurable expectations** at the start of the performance cycle.

Strategies and Actions

- Ensure performance plans:
 - Are **aligned with strategic and organizational goals** and contain clearly defined performance elements and standards
 - Supervisors must explain to employees the difference between critical and non-critical elements
 - Contain credible measures of performance such as **quality, quantity, timeliness**, and/or **cost-effectiveness** that are observable, measurable, and/or demonstrable
- Engage employees in co-creating their plans to increase buy-in
- Integrate development planning by utilizing **Individual Development Plans (IDPs)** to map future career trajectories and training plans
- Require performance plan sign-off within the first 30 -45 days of the cycle
- Implement **digital tracking** via systems such as USA Performance or ePerformance

Monitoring and Developing

Goal: Monitoring - Promote real-time performance management through frequent communication. **Developing** - Develop internal talent and prepare high-potential employees to broaden competencies, build expertise, and prepare aspiring future leaders.

Strategies and Actions

- Normalize **frequent check-ins** between supervisors and employees
 - Hold bi-weekly check-ins to assess progress on goals, address challenges, and offer support.
 - Incorporate feedback from peers, subordinates, and other stakeholders to get a well-rounded view of employee performance.
 - Give immediate, actionable feedback when employees complete tasks, especially if something went wrong or exceeded expectations.
- **Train supervisors** in effective coaching and feedback delivery
- Recognize both behaviors and outcomes in feedback
- Evaluate progress and **adjust plans** as needed
 - Use the “Start, Stop, Continue” model during feedback conversations
 - "**Start**" (new actions to begin), "**Stop**" (actions to discontinue), and "**Continue**" (actions to maintain).
- Document key discussion points for transparency

Assessing and Rewarding

Goal: Reinforce **high performance** and **increase motivation** through meaningful recognition

Strategies and Actions

- Use a **standardized format** for performance reviews that covers key areas such as job knowledge, skill application, behavior, and outcomes.
- Allow employees to assess their own performance before the review. This opens the door for constructive conversations about strengths and areas for growth.
- **Gather input** from other team members, clients, and cross-functional collaborators to ensure a holistic evaluation.
- Ensure rewards are directly tied to measurable results, behaviors, or goal achievements.
- Don't wait until annual reviews to give recognition.
 - Use spot awards or real-time recognition to reinforce behaviors quickly.
- Encourage **peer-to-peer recognition** as well as top-down.

Performance Improvement & Accountability

Goal: Address poor performance **early and constructively** while supporting improvement.

Strategies and Actions

- Consult **human resources** to address early indications of poor performance.
- Provide training and mentorship to support struggling employees or identify reassignment opportunities that better align with struggling employees' abilities.
- Agencies should not pass around struggling employees from job-to-job.
- Document all steps and communications carefully.
- Use **Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs)** to improve unacceptable performance on one or more critical elements of a performance plan.
 - Partner with human resources to develop and provide sample PIP templates and coaching support to supervisors.
- Take **appropriate administrative action** where employees fail a PIP or otherwise demonstrate unacceptable performance on work assignments or other requirements.
- Make full use of probationary and trial periods for new employees.
 - Conduct a thorough, timely assessment of a new employee's performance during the probationary period to determine whether the employee is fit for continued Federal service.

Mentoring and Coaching

- Serve as valuable tools in performance management, fostering employee growth and development, and ultimately improving organizational performance.
- Involve a collaborative relationship **focused on improvement**
 - Coaching typically focuses on immediate performance issues and skill development
 - Mentoring provides broader guidance and support for long-term career growth.
- Benefits
 - **Improved Individual Performance:** Both coaching and mentoring contribute to improved skills, knowledge, and overall performance.
 - **Enhanced Employee Engagement:** Employees feel valued and supported, leading to increased engagement and motivation.
 - **Stronger Company Culture:** A culture of coaching and mentoring fosters a positive and supportive environment, promoting growth and development.
 - **Increased Retention:** Employees who feel invested in and see opportunities for growth are more likely to stay with the organization.
 - **Effective Succession Planning:** Mentoring helps identify and develop future leaders within the organization.

Acting on Poor Performance

Both agency leaders and supervisors are responsible for ensuring swift action is taken to address poor performance.

Agencies

- Establish **specific procedures** and requirements
- Train managers and supervisors on performance management, employee accountability, and labor relations

Supervisors

- Understand the differences between “**Performance-Based Reduction in Grade and Removal Actions**” and “**Adverse Action**”
- Determine when most efficient and effective to proceed under Adverse Actions
- Utilize OPM recommended **three-step process**
 - Communicate expectations and performance problems
 - Provide opportunity to improve
 - Take action
- Utilize checklists to effectively track required steps

Awards and Recognition

Awards, both **monetary and non-monetary**, support a culture in which individuals who have demonstrated genuinely exceptional performance and contributions to the agency receive the largest performance awards, pay adjustments, and rates of pay adjustments.

Organizational and Team Level Award

- [Group Incentive Program](#)
 - Delivers awards to groups of employees who meet or exceed pre-established levels of organizational performance
 - Awards may be in the form of cash payments, time-off, and/or informal recognition
 - Can cover groups as large as the entire agency or as small as a work unit or team
- [Gainsharing and Goalsharing](#)
 - Gainsharing allows employees to share in an award based on productivity gains or savings beyond a predetermined baseline
 - Gainsharing programs are self-funding vs Goalsharing which is funded through an agency's award budget

Awards and Recognition (Cont'd)

Individual Awards

- Agency-level Awards (All Career Employees)
 - Rewards individual and team accomplishments identified by the agency's senior leader
 - Fosters agency-wide culture of rewarding goal achievement and outstanding performance
- Special Act Awards (All Career Employees)
 - Individual contribution award that should be awarded in real time throughout the year
 - Agencies are highly encouraged to reward employees who identify actionable opportunities for the Government to increase its operational efficiency
- Presidential Rank Awards (Career Senior Executive Service (SES) and Senior Professionals (SP) Employees)
 - Annual award given by the President to the top-performing career SES and SP employees
 - Two categories: Distinguished and Meritorious
 - OPM releases a call to agencies for nominations

Incentivizing High Performance

Awarding and recognizing employees strategically support efforts in creating a **high-performance workplace culture** where outstanding employee efforts are celebrated and rewarded.

Performance-Based Awards (All Career Employees)

- Agencies should set aside at least 60% of their SES, SP, and non-SES/SP bonus pools to **Level 4 and Level 5** performers
- For non-SES/SP employees rated at Level 3, performance-based awards should not exceed 1% of salary

Performance-Based Pay Adjustments (Career SES and SP Employees)

- Agencies should only provide performance-based pay adjustments to employees who achieve either a **Level 4 or Level 5** rating

Time-Off Awards (All Employees)

- Federal employees serving under a political appointment are eligible

Quality Step Increases

- Recognizes and rewards career GS employees who display **outstanding performance**
- Schedule C and Schedule G employees are **NOT** eligible

Key Evaluating Criteria in Performance Management

Evaluation of performance management is essential to building a **performance-driven culture**. Data-informed practices improve fairness, accountability, and outcomes. A **well-evaluated system** supports better talent decisions, engagement, and mission success

- **Alignment:** Are performance plans tied to mission and strategic goals?
- **Consistency:** Are standards applied fairly across the agency?
- **Effectiveness:** Are ratings credible and based on documented results?
- **Engagement:** Do employees understand and contribute to performance expectations?
- **Accountability:** Are underperformance and excellence addressed appropriately?

Data and Key Metrics

- **Identify** the right metrics
 - Customer satisfaction scores
 - Process efficiency/error rates
 - Timelines
- Gauge **employee satisfaction** with performance management process
- Ensure data integrity by **leveraging tools and technology**
- Sample **Key Metrics** for PIO and PMO
 - Percentage of employees with performance plans (and those completed on time)
 - Percentage of supervisors trained in past 24 months
 - Percentage of employees receiving quarterly feedback
 - Percentage of performance ratings completed by deadline
 - Distribution of ratings
 - Number and resolution of performance-based actions (e.g., PIPs)

Tools and Resources

- [Performance Management Toolkit](#) (September 11, 2025)
- [Guidance on Awards for Federal Employees](#) (August 11, 2025)
- [Updated Guidance on President Trump's Executive Order Strengthening Probationary Periods in Federal Service](#) (August 7, 2025)
- [Performance Management for Federal Employees](#) (June 17, 2025)